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# An Attempt to Unify Two Divergent Currents in the Art of the Twentieth Century

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AN ATTEMPT TO UNIFY TWO DIVERGENT CURRENTS

IN THE ART OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by
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Bachelor of Arts, St. Cloud State College 1968

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of

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This Thesis submitted by Robert J. Hromyak in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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# ABSTRACT

The problem was to unify the apparently conflicting themes of hard edge painting and figurative subject matter.

There are historical precidents for both styles in the twentieth century in the work of Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian on the side of abstract geometric form, and Tom Wesselmann on the side of figurative painting.

Presented as evidence of the possibilities of such an approach are ten acrylic paintings and ten serigraphs.

# INTRODUCTION

Artists are variously affected by history. For some, the influence is real, immediate, and conscious. For others, a more subtle relationship exists which could be best described as subconscious, or at least subliminal. No artist who has ever been thoughtful and reflective about his own work would deny the existance of influences, while at the same time, few artists ever allow themselves to be slavish in imitation. Most often perhaps, the artist's consciousness of what is to him painting's pre-history comes after work has begun, or been finished. The contact with techniques and styles that might be related to one's own work is frequently accidental and usually results in analysis of one's work, not to locate similarities, but to assure the artist that he is in fact different and his own man after all.

In searching for relationships between the work presented here and painting's recent past, I have discovered two main currents in the art of the Twentieth Century which have some bearing on the problems I have set for myself. One of these currents is a figurative one which, by richness of form and associations of shapes with the visually familiar, evokes a response based at least in part on recognition. This is a concept in use since the

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Renaissance.[1] The other is a particularly Twentieth Century phenomenon in which all subject matter in the traditional sense is eliminated in favor of pure painting. While this in itself is not unknown before the Twentieth Century, what is new is the evolution of this idea from the elimination of subject matter to the elimination of all reference to the actions of the artist, thereby arriving at a state of machine-made art.[2] The groups and concepts most closely related to my work by what they eliminate are best represented by the Suprematists, De Stijl, and more importantly, the Minimalists. The figurative paintings most closely related to my work by subject matter and emotional tone are those of certain Pop artists.

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[1]Prior to the Renaissance, the paintings of the Middle Ages could be characterized as symbolic rather than literal. The Renaissance reinstated the observable world as subject matter much as it had been known in the classical period of the Greeks and Romans.

[2]History records a number of cultures and periods in which abstraction was important, although for different reasons than those developing in the Twentieth Century. Examples would be Islamic art, Persian metal work, and the designs of some American Indians, among others.

CHAPTER I

In 1913, the Russian artist Kasimir Malevich for-
mulated Suprematism.  He did so via Cubism and Fauvism.
Before 1913 he painted geometric forms abstracted from
natural objects in a manner similar to Picasso and Leger.
Gradually he was becoming dissatisfied and disturbed with
this method because, to him, the formal construction was
still hidden by the representational form.

Malevich wanted to remove the subject matter
barrier between the painting and the viewer.  He accom-
plished this by simply removing all recognizable natural
objects such as faces, and still lifes, or any object that
would force the viewer to relate to it by past experience
with that object rather than by pure color and form, or
the artistic feeling with which it was painted.  To Malevich,
the viewer had to feel the non-objectivity of the painting--
the feeling the artist wanted from the painting:  loud, sad,
happy--without subjects such as drums playing, or people
crying or laughing.  In using such devices, he felt that
it was not the painting that made the viewer respond, but
the subject matter.  By using flat, geometric forms and
placing them in dynamic designs, Malevich thought the empathy
would, at last, be to the painting.

In 1913 Malevich said, "Trying desperately to
liberate art from the ballast of the representational world,
I sought refuge in the form of a square."[1]  The first of
his Suprematist paintings was a simple black square on a
white background.  Malevich's paintings were, as he put it,
"the experience of pure non-objectivity."[2]  This harkens
back to the Suprematist theory that painting up until then
did not demonstrate true feeling.  "If it were possible to
extract from the works of the great masters the feeling
expressed in them---the actual artistic value, that is---and
hide it away, the public, along with the critics and art
scholars would never miss it."[3]  The black square on the
white background was the external form of the actual artis-
tic value to Malevich.  When he exhibited this painting,
the public and critics cried, "Everything which we loved is
lost. we are in a desert."[4]  To Malevich, the desert of the
white background was real; one could only feel in a desert
like that.  Human emotions always take on external forms
and must find outlets.  "It was nothing other than a

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[1]Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century,
(New York and Washington:  Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers,
1965), Vol. I, p. 194.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Kasimir Malevich, The Non-Objective World, trans.
by Howard Dearstyne (Chicago:  Paul Theobald and Company,
1959), p. 74.

[4]Ibid.

yearning for speed . . . for flight . . . which, seeking
an outward shape, brought about the birth of the airplane."[1]
To the Suprematist the black square was feeling, the white
background, the space beyond the feeling. The feeling had
assumed an external form. The Suprematist was showing a
direct form of the representation of feeling, rather than
a copy of the objects that are around us every day. "Non-
objective art stands--the expression of pure feeling, seeking
no practical values, on ideas, no promised land."[2]

From 1914 to 1916, Malevich continued to paint
simple geometric forms, expanding from squares to include
trapezoids and diagonals in his compositions. However, by
1917 he started to work in an abstract linear style of
architecture, and painting became subordinate. In style,
his work was similar to that of Mondrian and De Stijl,
artists who were working quite independently about the same
time.

Mondrian was the French counterpart of Malevich.
He too developed his non-objective forms from a background
of Cubism. By 1913 he had broken his picture plane into
horizontal and vertical black lines. Like Malevich, Mondrian
was trying to suggest emotion, but with a far greater non-

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 76

objectivity. Mondrian believed that a rectangle on the picture plane still suggested form and illusion of depth. To cancel this sensation, he surrounded his rectangles of pure primary colors with black vertical and horizontal lines, thus flattening and dividing the picture plane even more. His only concern was the balanced harmony of forms and colors. Mondrian believed the object got in the way of a balanced harmony. "The emotion of beauty is always obstructed by the appearance of the object; therefore, the object must be eliminated from the picture."[1] Mondrian was moving toward a concrete painting, a concrete reality. The painting stood by itself as a pure artistic statement.

Mondrian admitted at one point that he was still not achieving the vitality he wanted.[2] The black horizontal and vertical was becoming too static. He broke away from it for a time and in 1942 painted Broadway Boogie Woogie. Mondrian still limited himself to straight lines, but he said that the straight line was a curve brought to maximum tension. All of these ideas and more were brought out by Mondrian and the De Stijl group. Painters and architects, also sculptors, were working toward an art object that is totally dependent on itself. "The less obvious the artist's hand the more

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[1] Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century, p. 201.

[2] Kim Levin, "Kiesler and Mondrian, art into life," Arts Magazine, LXIII, No. 3 (1967), p. 40.

objective the work will be," wrote Mondrian. "This fact
leads to a preference for a more or less mechanical execu-
tion or to the employment of materials produced by industry
. . . If these materials and their colors were more perfect,
and if a technique existed by which the artist could easily
cut them up in order to compose his work as he conceives it,
an art more real and more objective in relation to life than
painting would arise."[1]

Such was the articulated potential of the concepts
and aims of Mondrian. A generation would pass before these
seeds took root in the artistic soil of the United States.
Perhaps if Mondrian had perceived the potential direction
this would take, he would have tempered his statement with
the admonision that the artist's hand should never be com-
pletely lost in the search for "an art more real".[2] Tech-
nically, Mondrian's work doesn't, in light of what we have
experienced in the past six years, appear to be either
machined or purely objective because his hand is there. He
was a painter. As such, he was unwilling to relinquish
completely his brush marks, and naturally flawed edges. In
the 1960's however, we have become accustomed to objects of
art executed in such a triumph of technology that no man's

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 50.

hand is discernable.  Minimal Art, arriving on the scene
in 1966, is the first expression of both Malevich's and
Mondrian's principles carried to their next logical point
of development.

There is much of technology in Minimal Art.
Materials, techniques, and the forms themselves are those
of industry.  The Minimal composition is often mathematical,
modular, geometric, and repeatable.  Minimal Art is "com-
pletely conceptual and not dictated by the demands of the
material or the actual process of execution."[1]  Most Mini-
malists are actually removed from the execution of their
work by the simple device of having someone else make it
according to specifications.  Thus, the "automatism" of the
artist's hand cannot interfere with the result.  Consequently,
in all of Minimal Art the end product is known beforehand.
All the trial and error is made in the planning stages.  "No
accidents or automatism; everything, where to begin and
where to end, should be worked out in the mind beforehand."[2]

One visual result of this approach to the making of
art is the consistent occurrence of the hard edge.  The
phrase, "hard edge", coined in 1959 by the critic Jules

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[1]John Perreault, "A Minimal Future," Arts Magazine,
LXIII, No. 3, (1967), p. 29.

[2]Lawrence Alloway, "Systemic Painting," in Minimal
Art:  A Critical Anthology, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New
York:  E. P. Dutton and Company, 1968), p. 48.

Langsner, refers to a preciseness of edge on a painted
surface which tends to flatten the color area and to create
those areas as a solid, unmodeled and absolutely non-
illusionistic.[1]  The preciseness and clarity of such a line
is a natural and necessary part of the Minimalist approach,
but it can and has been used by artists whose subject
matter does not permit their inclusion in this group.  The
Minimalist painter, such as Frank Stella, explores geometry
and pattern with his large, colorful canvases.  Whether
based on straight lines or curves, the Minimal painting is
always totally non-objective.

But the principle of the hard edge has its appli-
cations elsewhere.  In the early paintings of Warhol, for
example, the rendering of the Campbell Soup Cans conforms
to most of the requirements set down above for Minimal Art.
It is modular, often repeated, quite geometric, and certainly
industrial in its tone.  The differences are too important,
however, to ignore.  First of all, there is an object so
familiar that it instantly recalls data so mundane as to be
impossible to elevate to the status of insights.  Secondly,
and more importantly from the point of view of this study,
the actual technique and execution is on close observation
so lacking in precision when compared to Minimal work as
to be sloppy.  The non-Minimalist's use of the hard edge

[1] Ibid., p. 42.

technique has in the past had quite a distinct purpose which may be only accidentally related to the Minimalist.

J. A. Abramson refers to Tom Wesselmann's creation of woman as "emblem"[1]. One of the single most important factors in the creation of such a visual result, along with some distortion of form toward the cartoon, is the use of the hard edge. The figure ceases to be real, becomes a flattened pattern, a shorthand statement, a symbol. But his primary concern is not with the creation of an object that seems to be the offspring of a computer. He is still a painter who models when it will work to good effect, who sees in terms of collage and is concerned with the integrity of the object, not the painting.[2] The use of hard edge on a familiarly volumetric object such as a figure does impose something of the tool and dye makers' craft on the product, and does so without being machine perfect. The orientation of such an artist is usually not so far toward the mechanized that the actual edge must be machine perfect. Such is, however, the orientation of the Minimalist.

In response to the suggestion by an interviewer that in his work he was actually denying the artist's presence in the painting, Frank Stella opined that the whole of Twentieth

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[1]J. A. Abramson, "Tom Wesselmann and the Gates of Horn," Arts Magazine, XL, No. 7, (1966), p. 45.

[2]Ibid., p. 47.

Century painting had been basically drawing with paint. "It's like handwriting. And I found that I just didn't have anything to say in those terms. I didn't want to make variations; I didn't want to record a path. I wanted to get the paint out of the can and onto the canvas."[1]

Concurrent with the development of these ideas throughout the course of the twentieth century has been the continuing exploration by artists of the figure as subject matter. While Malevich and Mondrian felt imprisoned by the object, Picasso, Matisse, and others continued to explore, extend and enrich the potential of the figure as subject matter. To attempt to list all of the factors in the development of the nude form as an art form is outside the scope of this paper. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that the single most evocative system of shapes in the visual world to one human being is another human being. We are primarily interested in ourselves. For this reason, perhaps the very one that sent Malevich and Mondrian, and others, in quite another direction, anything that suggests the human figure on a canvas, however distorted, commands perhaps the single most intense recognition level on the part of the largest number of viewers. In Madison Avenue terms, this is what sells. At the same time that the viewer is recognizing,

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[1] Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," in Battcock, ed., Minimal Art, p. 157.

however, he is catagorizing according to his past expe-
riences and associations. There is a great deal of the
unpredictable in a response so based. When those who
sought to free themselves from the burdens of the object
felt that an objective painting could never be responded
to purely as a painting, others seemed to be rejoicing in
exactly that factor. In the figurative painting, the artist,
they seemed to be saying, is surest of his ability to evoke
a response, to control that response, to direct it, perhaps
to extend it.

The two artists of the Sixties whose work most
clearly relates to the problem set for this paper are
Tom Wesselmann and Mel Ramos. They are pertinent for
several reasons. In Wesselmann's case the most obvious
tie is technical, but as in most obvious relationships,
that is a very superficial one and, in fact, not quite
accurate. Perhaps in both cases the relationship is most
clearly and correctly drawn in terms of subject matter.

Tom Wesselmann began his Great American Nude series
in the middle of 1961. "I began with a simple enough idea
. . . I was interested in collage, applying it to strictly
realistic situations; so a figurative piece of collage be-
came a tree, a piece of wallpaper became a wall, and so on."[1]

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[1]Abramson, "Tom Wesselmann," p. 47.

From the outset, Wesselmann's greatest interest has been
perhaps in the collage element in this series and the visual
puns suggested by the relationship of real items with the
unreal, stylized, painted nudes. The fact that this is one
of the prime objectives in this series becomes even clearer
in the paintings created in 1964-65. They began to increase
in size and as they did so, the collage material became more
unconventional--radios, refrigerators, working television
sets, and radiators. At the same time he began to turn
more to the hard edge. "Colors became flatter, cleaner,
brighter; edges became harder, clearer . . . I felt the
need to lock up my paintings so tightly nothing could move."[1]
All of this takes place during a major shift of thinking on
Wesselmann's part, in which he begins to care less and less
about the painting as a vehicle for expression and more and
more about the expressive capabilities of the objects them-
selves as their own spokesmen. " . . . the integrity of
the painting didn't matter any more; now it is the integrity
of the image."[2] Next to these objects, the nude, cartoon-
like, flattened, seemed indeed to be an emblem.

For the problem at hand, however, it is not the

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[1]Lucy R. Lippard, Pop Art, (New York:   Frederick A.
Praeger, Publishers, 1966), p. 111.

[2]Abramson, "Tom Wesselmann," p. 47.

collage treatment of these paintings that makes them sig-
nificant. It is the treatment of the nude female form
itself, related more closely to the profane than the sacred
aspects of the classical concept. Wesselmann's nudes are
faceless, stylized contours with collaged billboard lips
and plastic nurser-type nipples. They are usually volup-
tuously and even erotically posed. Wesselmann is "inter-
ested in pornography and certain aspects of my work are
pornographic . . . and certain aspects of my intentions
are pornographic. But pornography is one part of life, and
that's one part of my work. To say that that characterizes
my work would be going much too far . . . ."[1] Indeed, the
implication is that the viewer is solely responsible for
bringing his prejudices with him to the work, since the
flattening of the form by the hard edge technique and the
lack of modeling, together with the cartoonist's emphasis
on the obvious combine to make these figures distillates of
sexiness rather than truely pornographic.

It should be noted that the use of the word
"pornography" in all cases in this paper is loose and more
colloquial than it is legalistic. The United States Court
of Appeals for the First Circuit has held that the mere
depiction of a nude female torso "without more" cannot be

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[1]_Ibid._

considered pornographic.[1]  The implication of the definition
suggests that there is in the figure itself nothing purient
and/or distasteful and that it is rather the juxtaposing of
the figure with the other elements that creates a situation
that might be pornographic.  In her essay on erotic art,
Lucy Lippard has pointed out that sexual behavior, arousal,
and sensation are sequential in nature (in a painting there
is only one image), and subject to endless variation in
personal taste.[2]  In other words, works that contain nudes
may or may not be sexually stimulating, depending on the
viewer.

Somewhere at the other end of the Pop art spectrum
from Wesselmann is Mel Ramos, whose work is by nature and
design closer to the classical in pornography, if there is
such a thing.  The forms of his nudes are three dimensional
and rendered volumetrically with light and dark areas on
the body.  Ramos is still using the Pop culture images, but
in a way they are quite different.  Ramos takes his imagery
from the same sources as the early Andy Warhols, familiar
brand name products, and then places the nude on or around
them.  The name of the product becomes the name of the nude.

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[1]Hunt v. Keriakos, 428 F. 2d (1st. Cir.), cert.
denied, 400 U.S. 929 (1970).

[2]Lucy Lippard, "Eros Presumptive," in Battcock, ed.,
Minimal Art, pp. 209-211, passim.

For example, _Val Veeta_ is a painting of a beautiful blond on a carton of Kraft Velveeta Cheese Spread. Ramos' figures are in the best tradition of garage calendars and girlie posters. They are stereotypes, voluptuous and provocative. They are testimony to the continuing faith Madison Avenue places in the pretty girl as a device to sell anything.

As will be seen in succeeding chapters, elements of all of the movements, attitudes and techniques discussed here are to be found in some measure in the paintings executed for this thesis. Probably the single most significant factor to be kept in mind is that such a blending was initially a subconscious one and not a matter of imitation. The research done here had the effect of crystalizing concepts that were already part and parcel of my work.

## CHAPTER II

The conflict which is expressed in the two currents
of figurative and Minimal Art discussed in the previous
chapter may never be totally resolved.  The figure is a
very emotive subject, drawing much of the quality of the
response out of the viewer's personal psyche.  The square,
the circle, the rectangle, the pure geometric form contrives
to elicit more intellectual and less emotional reactions
from the viewer.  I strove to blend both in my paintings.
To do this, I attempted to "cool the figure down," that is,
make it less emotional, by making it a flat, solid, mono-
chromatic form and by further surrounding it with a back-
ground divided into simple color areas.  In the terms
established by Malevich and Mondrian, these paintings can
never be perceived simply for the essence of their compo-
sitions.  Reactions to subject matter cannot be entirely
erased as long as the human figure is a recognizable element,
but in my work I believe they have "cooled" considerably.
A perception of those elements of painting so important to
Malevich, (i.e. the composition and color relationships),
is made easier by the conscious treatment of the surface as
a flat plane.  The figure is used to break up the picture
plane.  I sense it as a matter of balance, a device to

introduce and control diagonals, curves, and color areas.

The evocative quality of the figure is simultaneously enhanced and "played down." The postures and paraphenalia attached to it are derived from cultural stereotypes of sexuality. This, in turn, is minimized by the lack of local color and modeling. My figures are, for the most part, faceless. Facial features add a dimension with which I am not presently concerned. In addition, the facelessness adds to the visual concept of the sexual stereotype. I have included facial details in only two of the thesis paintings. Neither face is fully described. The presence of such detail is kept subtle by using the simplest lines and shapes.

The figures recall sensual images, but so many elements have been changed or left out that these paintings cannot be considered as pornographic. The unnatural color, the cropping and arrangement of the figures on the canvas for reasons of composition rather than sexual excitation, and the near perfect lack of modeling all work towards "cooling" such a response. Tom Wesselmann's nudes are sexless in much the same way, though more distorted and cartoon-like. He is also much more concerned with the figure's surrounding environment. My own backgrounds are done using a minimal concept of stripes, squares, and curves that suggest familiar objects.

The simultaneous use of the hard edge and the
figure evolved in my work over a long period of time. I
have been painting in the hard edge manner since 1967. The
first works were done with the typical solid color areas,
but displayed an edge achieved by hand rather than with
tape. Since the brush must have a heavy load of paint, the
edge is left with a thick ridge. I used that type of edge
because I was involved in food imagery at the time, and the
organic feeling of the ridge of paint seemed complimentary
to the forms of food and particularly the sandwich.

The subject matter eventually changed enough to
necessitate a change of technique. Instead of putting
lettuce and tomatoes between slices of bread or in the roll,
I began to replace them with machine parts and machined
objects such as motorcycle engines, rifle mechanisms,
and hand grenades. These objects demanded a crisper edge.
It was at this time that I began using masking tape and
developing the technique which I currently employ.

Shortly thereafter, I dropped the sandwich motif.
The objects which I was using as sandwich filling had begun
to take on a social significance for me. I found I was
getting involved with "message" and becoming less aware of
the formal qualities of the paintings. I personally find
"message" pieces of equivocal value. It is almost
impossible, in my opinion, to add anything new to the

concepts involved and the works become, as someone once
put it, minor statements about major issues.

In searching for new imagery, I returned to my old
sketchbooks and rediscovered the figure drawing. Studying
these nudes, I found that what interested me most was the
solidity of the body, the body as a whole form, as opposed
to individual elements such as arms, hands, legs etc.. At
this time I finalized one painting which can be called
transitional. I retreated to the safety of the sandwich
motif, but this time placed a nude inside. The bun was
elaborately designed with the more political motifs of the
earlier work, stars and stripes, but the nude inside was
a simple, stylized, white form. She was as solid as a
Josef Albers square, but was to me more interesting. From
this painting I learned that the nude could be treated as
a solid form, surrounded by a machine-like edge, and
suggestive of a modified minimal effect.

While leafing through those old sketchbooks, I
also made some decisions about the kind of nudes I would
use. There is a certain flavor about life drawing class
poses, a conscious contrivance that makes them easily
distinguishable from drawings that seek to represent real
life. I am not suggesting that the postures typical of
Playboy and other such periodicals are any closer to real
life, but, for the artist, they have the virtue of being

clearly distinguishable from classical drawing studies. Positions of models in life classes are never explicitly "sexy". I began painting the nude partially clothed with bras, panties, and garter belts.

At this point in my work it was impossible to separate whether the dynamic break up of space resulted from the evocative postures of the figures, or whether the reverse was true. In any case, this is what the figure really is to me---a device to combine organic and hard edged forms. It is not my basic intent to create a conflict in the viewer between the superficial "sexiness" of the positions and the lack of modeling and natural color. That may be a by-product. As I have previously suggested, pornography is in the eye of the beholder, it is not (in the opinion of the courts and such critics as Lucy Lippard and John Canaday) in the power of a painting to be truly pornographic when it involves a single form and cannot create a sense of rhythm.

Certainly the single most potent factor in keeping these images in the realm of artistic investigation is the machine--like hard edge. Problems of basic techniques are only pertinent if they impose so strong a pattern on the end product that they cannot be ignored. This is the case here. In this case, the problem was to unite the working technique and attitude of a Minimalist with the subject

matter of a figurative artist. Consequently, technique in
detail is important.

Of first importance is the proper preparation of the
canvas. The surface must be as smooth as possible to
facilitate creating a solid color area, free of brush
strokes. Therefore, after the canvas has been stretched,
I gesso it three times, sanding in between each coat with
a fine grade of sandpaper. It is then ready to be drawn
on. All drawing for the painting is done directly on the
canvas. When the pencil drawing is completed, it is
essentially the painting, minus the color. That is to say,
that once begun, the direction of the painting is fixed.
All questions of designing in terms of both form and color
have been answered. The canvas contains simply a contour
drawing waiting to become solid color areas. Before
beginning to apply paint, I generally experiment with color
strips, mixing and changing until I find the color or colors
I want. When the right hue has been achieved, I mix enough
for the whole painting and store it in glass jars. Such
a procedure is necessary even when using colors unmixed,
straight from the jar, since there are slight variations
in color batches which are visible on close observation.
It is very important that the color areas be completely
uniform and flat, with as little discernable variation of
tone or brush stroke as possible. The paint used throughout

this project is exclusively acrylic.  It has several virtues
which make it the most logical choice for such a strictly
controlled technique.  First, it dries quickly, permitting
continuous work with a minimum of time wasted for drying.
Second, it can be mixed to such a consistency that it flows
easily and smooths out the tracks of the brush.  Third, the
finished painting is impurvious to most destructive agents
and can be washed if necessary.

These factors far outweigh the disadvantages,
although in the course of exploring this technique, I have
discovered some problems which most painters in acrylic may
never notice.  For example, a paint once mixed and stored
in the jar, will actually cure or age if left to the point
where it will be discernably different if used to touch up
an area.  The result of this flaw is an increased need for
care while painting so as to avoid splashes and drips, and
careful storage of the work when it is finished.

Once the drawing has been finished and the paint
mixed, the next task is a confining of the areas to be
painted with masking tape.  I have been using Minnesota
Mining and Manufacturing masking tape.  The taping must
be done with great care, for the forms defined by the
tape are those of the painting and are not subject to change.
Every line, every ridge, and every edge is significant; an
integral part of the work.  It is therefore not possible

to paint out and begin again.

Curved forms are masked off by applying thin strips of masking tape around the contours. These strips vary from 1/8 to 1/4 inch in thickness. Of first concern is the precise contour. After the thin strip has defined it, larger ones are overlapped to give a certain amount of freedom for brush strokes. In areas too small to mask off by this method, I simply cover the whole shape and cut out the edges with a single-edged razor blade. When the whole form has been defined, matte medium[1] is used to seal the tape to the canvas and thereby prevent any paint from seeping under and blurring the edges.

The color areas are usually covered by two to four coats of paint since acrylic tends to be transparent. This insures the densest, flattest color possible. I discovered that it is best to remove the tape while the last coat is still wet. This prevents the other layers of paint built up up on the tape from loosening and remaining on the canvas as a rough edge. After the tape is removed, the area is allowed to dry and taping begins on the next areas. Adjoining areas are slightly overlapped to make sure that

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[1]Matte medium is a clear polymer used to extend acrylic paint. I prefer Grumbacher paints and medium.

there is continuity.

     In many respects the process just outlined does
not differ materially from that of many hard edge painters.
There is one technique, however, that I believe distin-
guishes my work from that of other artists.  One of the
most characteristic things about hard edged paintings
in acrylic that have been done with tape is the actual
dimension of the edge.  The paint layers build up a
discernible depth.  This is a fact that I believe has been
generally ignored or taken for granted.  Edges thus created
are most often not seen as an integral part of the painting,
but as happy accidents.  In my recent work I have sought to
use this natural by-product to full advantage.

     At some point I examined the visual effect that a
taped line makes, and saw that it could be used to define
an interior contour; that is, to define a form without
changing color.  The effects of such a line are subtle but
tangible enough to be seen from a distance of several feet.
The first painting in this series which employs this device
is <u>Couch</u>.  In this painting I experimented with the form of
the figure by trying to render it as a flat surface, a
dynamic break up of the space, and simultaneously to define
such contours of the body as the line of the breast and the
arm which were not in actual profile.  The end result of
this discovery is a figure which from a distance of more

than five or six feet is a silhouette and which, on closer examination, also has contours of definition.

The technical process by which I arrive at this result is more complex than simply taping and painting a line that will also define a color change. Most important to keep in mind is the actuality of the dimension of the edge. It is a real and physical thing; it has depth and so, logically, the overlapping must be true. For example, if a hand is to overlap an arm, the arm would be painted first so that the edge of the hand will be on top. Thus, all areas of the painting must be carefully and completely thought out before work is begun.

Both the technical process and the subject matter have been subjected to an evolution culminating in this project. At this point it will be helpful to discuss the paintings in chronological order to develop and describe the actual visual pattern which has emerged.

CHAPTER III

When the human figure is enlarged and made to fill
the picture plane to the extent that some of it is, of
necessity, left out, the result is a new visual image.
The partial figure so enlarged, becomes, if it is treated
with only a few colors, extremely abstract. If such treat-
ment is carried far enough, the picture can be made almost
totally non-objective, and perception of the figure becomes
very difficult. This is the visual effect of the first of
my thesis paintings, Black and White, Figure 1. In this
painting the subject is a buttocks and thigh. The white
area is the figure and the black is the background with
silver enamel used to separate the anatomic details. The
shape used is a large one, almost filling the canvas, and
is viewed from an unusual angle. This fact, together with
stark, unnatural colors and contour lines of silver work
to make the object a flat pattern of bold shapes.

Working in such a manner (enlarging a shape until
it becomes abstract) has been so popular in the twentieth
century that it is almost a commonplace. In my second
thesis painting, Torso, Figure 2, I wanted to reverse the
process if possible. I wanted the image to be very objective

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Figure 1.--BLACK AND WHITE
Acrylic Painting 2' X 3'

Figure 2.--TORSO

Acrylic Painting 20" X 22"

at first glance and then mature into a pattern of non-objective shapes. In the Torso I broke up the areas which would normally be modelled into separate colors. There is no particular value relationship between these patterns and the shadows which might naturally fall on such a figure. If these separate shapes could be pulled apart, they would look like an abstract puzzle, but when linked together they form a section of a human torso. It was in this painting that I became intrigued with the build up of paint on the hard edge. This edge had happened before, but because the Torso was small and had many shapes, the edges were very obvious for the first time. In the next painting I set out to pursue this edge.

The Couch, Figure 3, was only the first step in the exploration of the hard edge line of paint to define shapes within a solid color area. Such a line is used in the white areas of the body to define both the right breast and the contours of the arm and leg. It was a tentative experiment to determine if the line had enough character to define forms suggested by no other means. I also experimented with the use of clothing by using two values of yellow to suggest wrinkles in the cloth of the panties. To complete the trial and error nature of this painting I also used a series of shapes in the background to suggest an environment for the figure. Because of the two blues

Figure 3.--COUCH

Acrylic Painting 30" 'X 40"

which curve across the picture plane, the maroon becomes
wall-like and seems to recede behind what might be a couch
on which the figure reclines.  The result of all of these
experimental features was personally very important.  In
one work I had learned to control the hard edge line and
had suggested to myself a number of possibilities to be
explored in the future.  In addition, there was the satis-
faction of having developed a signature, a personal style.

In Bath, Figure 4, the line appears everywhere, in
both the figures and the background.  It was during the
execution of this work that I discovered that the over-
lapping of the edges had to be true for the line to be
most effective.  For example, the left hand of the female
figure overlaps the body of the male.  To be true, the edge
of her hand must overlap both actually and visually.  As a
result, I found that it was necessary to pre-plan more
carefully than usual the order in which the work would be
completed.

Because I wanted to discover what the limitations
were with a taping procedure, I included many areas in which
the only definition of form was made by lines.  Not only
the figures contain such contour lines, but also the back-
ground of the tiled wall and the surfaces of the bathtub.
Relatively speaking, there are more colors used in the Bath
than in the later works.

Figure 4.--BATH

Acrylic Painting 4' X 4'

In the painting Bed, Figure 5, the color scheme is almost monochromatic. I wanted to emphasize the line even more and, by keeping the colors to a minimum, it is naturally accented. I therefore chose to work in variations of beige for both figures and the background. Experimentation also continued in this painting with such detailing as the woman's face and the moustache on the man. The primary reason for doing this was to see if it could work artistically and what it would do to the concept of the painting. Technically I knew it could be accomplished. The reason for some doubt was simply that I was still unsure of the process of taping such small and detailed areas. There are also complexities introduced by including a line which does not completely surround a shape, but ends in the middle of a color field. Having proven to myself that it could be done, I never applied this to another facial feature, preferring instead to allow the face to go blank and to rather indulge in more complex taping jobs in other areas of the body.

At this point the evolution of these works becomes less clear. Any attempt to relate their chronological order to some new phenomenon would be far-fetched if not untrue. In the Beach, Figure 6, Chauvanist, Figure 7, and Pillow, Figures 8 and 9, I continued to paint and to develop the technique with emphasis on variety of subject matter. In the Shift, Figure 10, I wanted to experiment more with the

Figure 5.--BED

Acrylic Painting 4' X 4'

Figure 6.--BEACH

Acrylic Painting 3' X 6'

Figure 7.--CHAUVANIST

Acrylic Painting 3' X 6'

Figure 8.--PILLOW

Acrylic Painting 3' X 4'
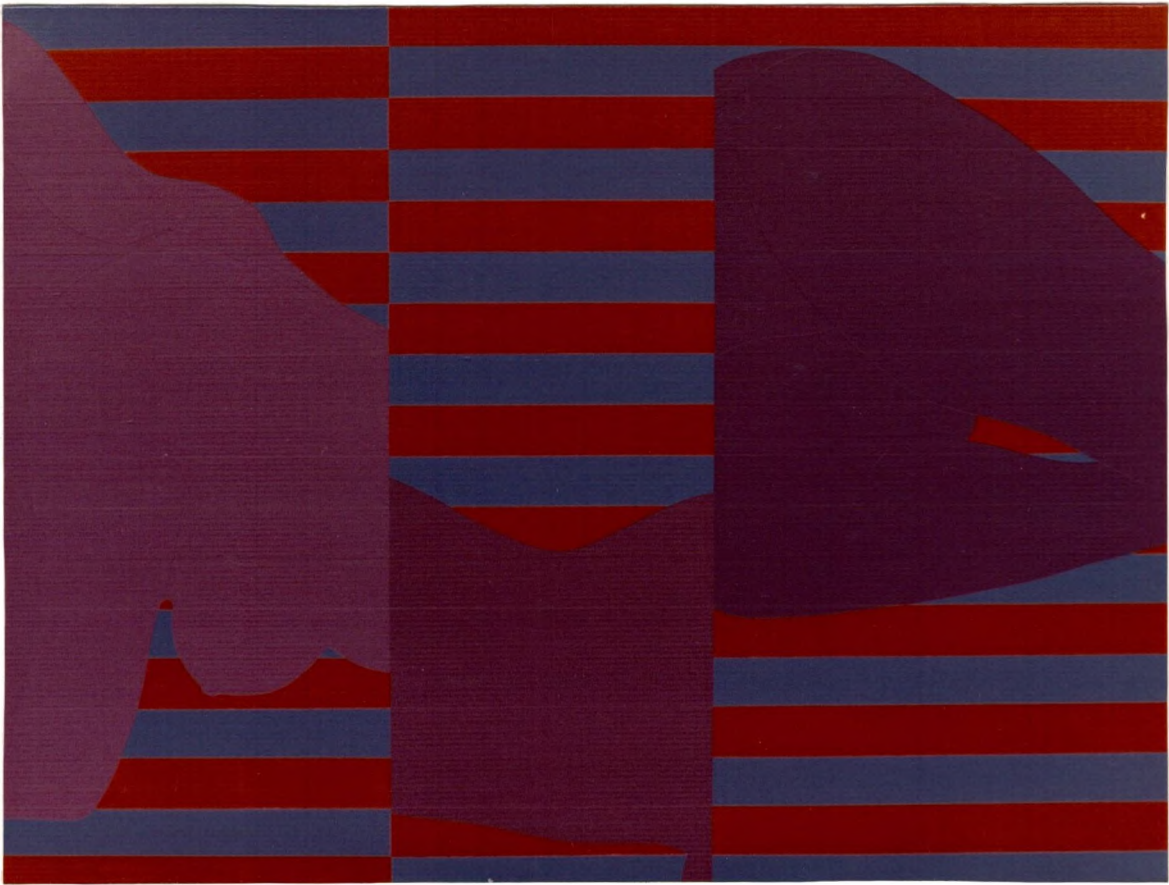
Figure 9.--PILLOW

(Detail)

Figure 10.--SHIFT

Acrylic Painting 3' X 4'

figure as an abstract pattern and decided to fuse the background stripes with the figure and to split her into three parts. She also has contour lines defining body parts as does the rest of the figure.

As a culmination of the whole process begun with Couch and the logical extension of this technique to its ultimate point, I decided to do a painting that was totally monochromatic. This painting is Raspberry, Figure 11, the title of which identifies the color. There is no variation in either hue, value, or intensity. The only means for distinguishing form is the hard edge line. At this point the discovery period for this manner of working can be considered complete and other considerations will now become of more importance. Such is the case in the series of serigraphs being done concurrent with the work on the paintings. Because of the differences in technique, these works seem to have evolved at a pace and in a direction of their own.

During the time that I was working on the painting series, I found myself most anxious to see them complete and in color, but because the solutions had to be reasonably certain before work was even begun, much of the unknown was gone. The work of taping became simply tedious after awhile, particularly in more complex areas. Taping often took two hours, while the actual painting and "fill in" of the same
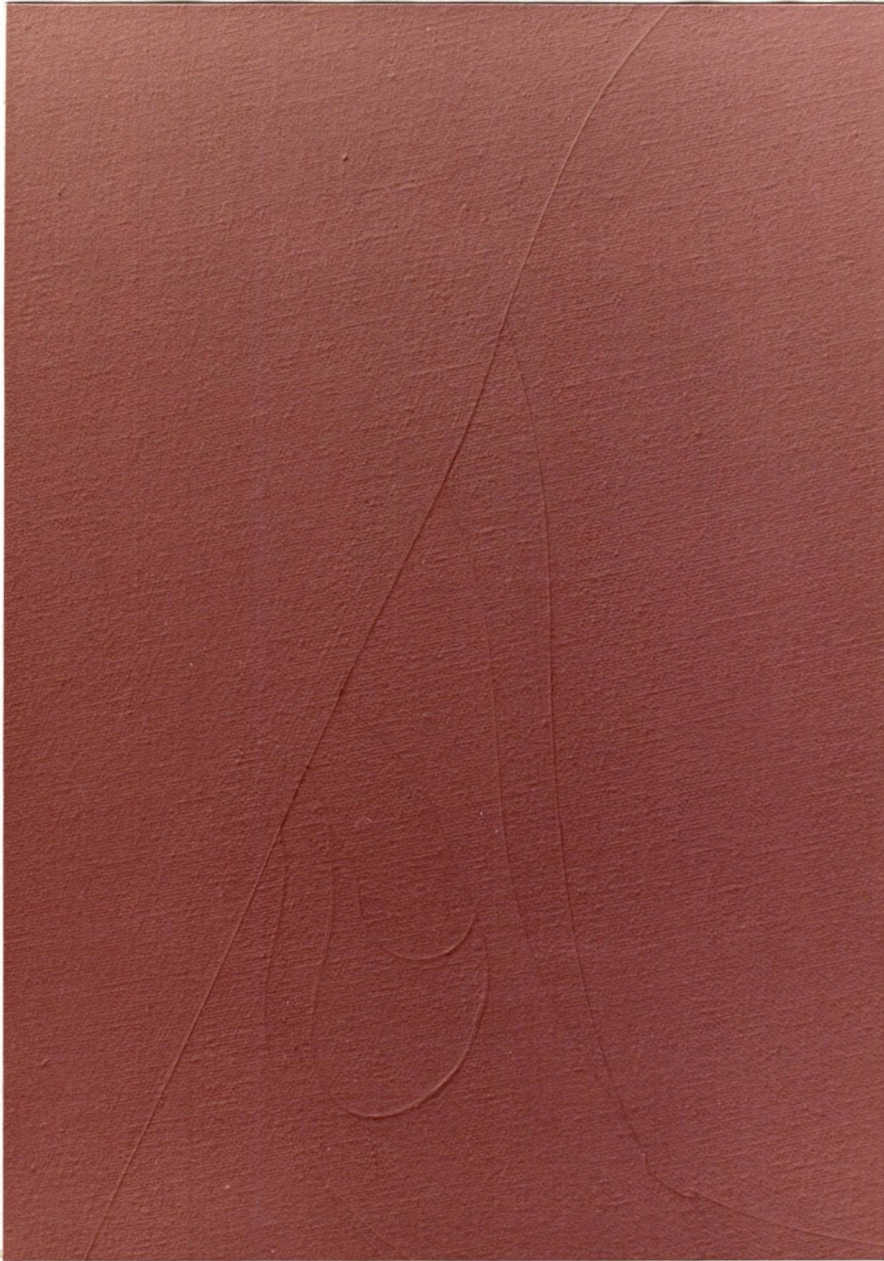
Figure 11.--RASPBERRY (Detail)

Acrylic Painting 4' X 4'

area was done in ten minutes. Partly as a relief from
painting and partly as a means to explore my subject matter
faster, I turned to the serigraph.

When I first began to learn serigraphy, the range
of possible effects made me want to try to learn everything
at once. I soon discovered that there was as much dis-
cipline involved in the making of these images as in my
paintings, but the change was a good one. My first prints
are two and three color works done with paper stencils.
Blue Torso, Figure 12, is the first of the prints done for
the thesis project. This print is based on the painting,
Torso. In fact, they were produced with near simultane-
ousness. I stopped work on the painting when I reached a
point at which I could not solve the problem I had set for
myself. I turned instead to the silk screen and worked
out the figure in three values of blue, using three dif-
ferent stencils. This was the solution that kept intruding
itself on the painting, but which I wished to avoid in
favor of a more experimental color scheme. Once the print
was done, I could return to the painting with a freer
spirit. With regard to the print itself, it demonstrates
the effects of my painting technique on my thinking very
clearly. I was conditioned to think in terms of flat, solid
color areas. I was not prepared to think in terms of
transparencies at this point and as a consequence, did not

Figure 12.--BLUE TORSO

Serigraph 18" X 20"

realize the potential for saving effort by making two colors read as three. _Blue Torso_ is therefore much more in keeping with the painted segment of this project than are the later serigraphs.

The second print, _The Vot_, Figure 13, is the first attempt to make two colors work as three by the overlapping of stencils and the use of much transparent base mixed with the colors. This overlapping is less obvious than it could have been for a number of reasons, most important of which is the fact that there are two different kinds of ink used. The first color put down was a lacquer-based maroon. Over this I used flourescent pink which is an oil-base ink. If both inks had been of the same type, they would have "processed" and resulted in a more distinctly different third color in the areas where they overlapped. "Processing" is the term given to what happens when a fresh layer of ink is screened over a dry layer. The new layer will loosen the first layer and blend with it if they are both oil-base or both lacquer-base inks. This, of course, cannot take place when they are chemically different. I chose the flourescent ink in spite of this difference because of the electric quality of the color, particularly where it is surrounded by white areas. It seemed to suggest a figure reclining in the sun, and, for this print, seemed more appropriate than a more normal, less dazzling hue.

Figure 13.--THE VOT

Serigraph 18" X 20"

Realizing that I had not used the potential of "processing" to its fullest extent, I decided to design a print in which I would try to explore this further. Seated Nude Times Six, Figure 14, is the product of this experiment. Because the image that I had in mind would require a stencil with small areas which would have to be as closely registered as possible, I decided to work with hand-cut film instead of paper. The film was Ulano Number Thirty-three, Lacquer-proof Green. Hand-cut films permit greater detail and complexity than paper stencils and have the added virtue of being able to withstand cleaning. Paper stencils are destroyed in the cleaning process.[1]

This particular type of film is simply a layer of soft acetate on a sheet of acetate backing. The artist cuts into the green layer without cutting into the backing and removes those areas that he wishes to print. The acetate backing holds all of the block out "islands" in place and makes it possible to adhere them in perfect register. To adhere a lacquer-proof film to the silkscreen, acetone is

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[1] Two silkscreen texts useful to me were: Jules Heller, Printmaking Today (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1958), and Albert Kosloff, Photographic Screen Process Printing (Cincinnati: Signs of the Times Publishing Company, 1962).
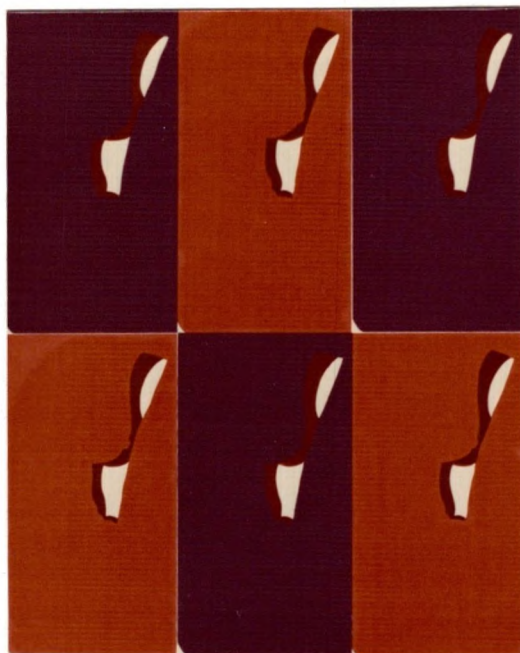
Figure 14.--SEATED NUDE TIMES SIX

Serigraph 13" X 16"

applied lightly and rubbed off almost immediately. This
process dissolves enough of the film of acetate to make it
sticky and it thus bonds with the silk. After the whole
stencil has been adhered in this manner, the backing is
peeled off and the screen is ready to use. This stencil
is impervious to the solvents used to clean the oil-base
or lacquer-base inks from the screen and therefore can be
used to print more than one color. In Seated Nude Times Six
there are only two colors and two stencils used, but the
visual effect is actually of a four-color print. Purple was
the first color printed. The full body of the nude figure
was printed in three of the areas and the shadow areas of
the body in the other three. The second stencil for the red
color was exactly the same, but the order was reversed. In
those areas where only the shadow was printed the first
time, now the whole figure was put down, and vice versa. In
all cases the shadow areas are made by printing transparent
red over purple. These areas appear to be more red when
they are surrounded by the purple figure and more blue when
surrounded by the red. As a consequence, there is the
illusion of four distinct color areas. This is an appli-
cation of the principles discussed by Josef Albers in his
book, The Interaction of Color. Another optical illusion
that operated in this print is the result of the small areas
of white space that divide the torso from the leg of the

figure. It is very easy to assume that these areas are positive space and not background, and therefore be unable to see the six seated figures.

At this point I began to work with a stencil achieved by the photo-silkscreen process. Very simply, this process differs from the others only in the manner in which the artist makes the stencil. He photographs the image he wants and gets a negative exactly the size that the image is to be on the screen. This is the first of the possible limitations that can be placed on this process. In my work I could enlarge up to eleven inches by fourteen inches. This negative is used to expose a piece of light-sensitive film. After exposure, water removes all of the areas not hardened by the light, and the stencil is applied to the screen immediately and allowed to dry. This stencil is resistant to any ink except water based ones.

One of the simple but confusing aspects of this type of serigraph was the source of inspiration for the Self-Image, Figure 15, print. Normally, the process is to start with a positive photograph or drawing which you want to print the same way on paper, say black ink on white. To get the stencil on the screen to print a positive image, the steps are these: (1) A negative is made from a positive image. (2) Another piece of film is contact printed from this negative (this is again a positive). (3) This is
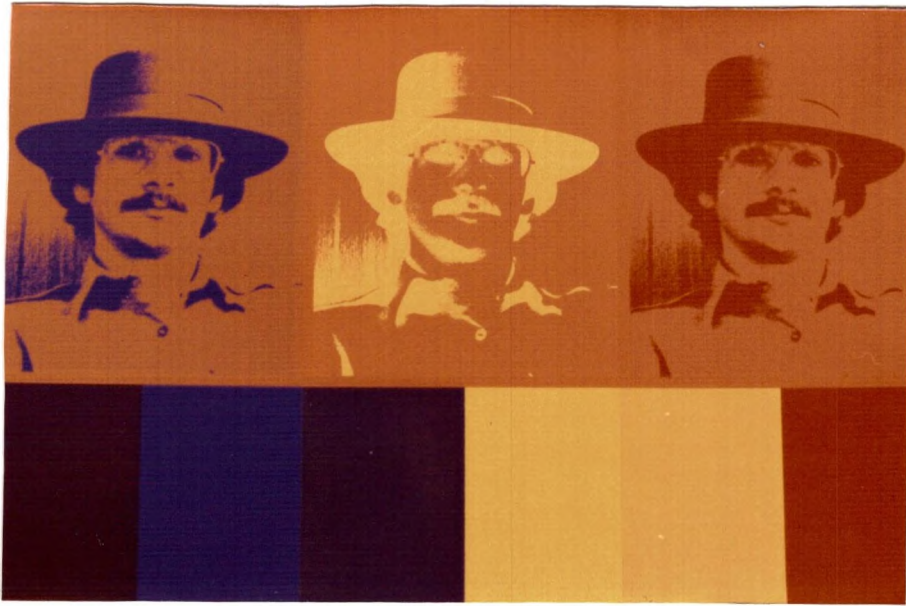
Figure 15.--SELF-IMAGE

Serigraph 22" X 33"

the film used to expose the sheet of light-sensitive stencil film which will be placed on the screen (the stencil is then negative). (4) When printed with black ink on white paper, the image will then be positive, or exactly like the original. If the artist eliminates step two, the stencil would be positive and the image printed on the paper, negative. This fact is what started me thinking in the lines which led to the Self-Image print. First I simply screened large color areas of blue, red, and yellow, over-lapping some of them in small squares at the bottom of the print. Next I made a stencil by the photo-process outline above, eliminating step number two. I then had a stencil which would print a negative image, that is, all of the background around the head and the high-light areas of the face. By picking a color which value was such that it would look light over the blue and red, and dark over the yellow, I was able to arrive at one negative and two positive images and with the same stencil.

At this point, as with the paintings, it is diffi-cult to isolate new phenomena occurring in each print. It was necessary to combine processes and techniques differ-ently to develop the image that I desired in each print (see Figures 16, 17, 18, 19). In two of the last prints done in this series, I did include a process not normally associated with serigraphy; rayon flocking. This method of giving
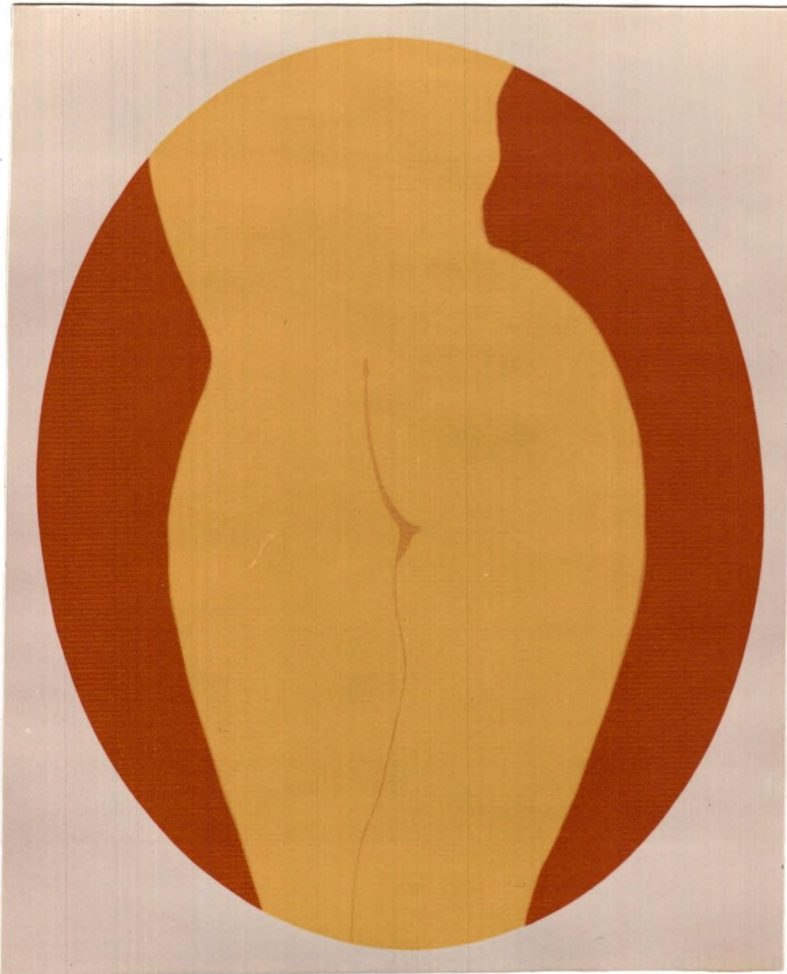
Figure 16.--ORANGE AND YELLOW
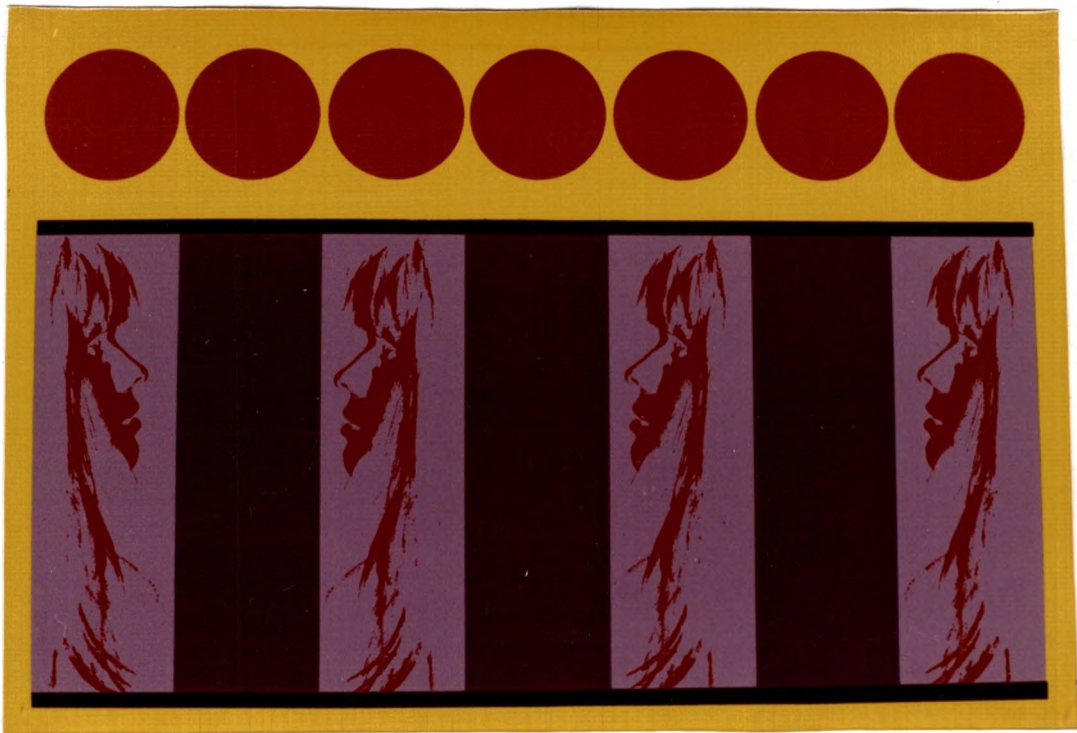
Serigraph 25" X 30"

Figure 17.--FACE FOUR

Serigraph 13" X 16"

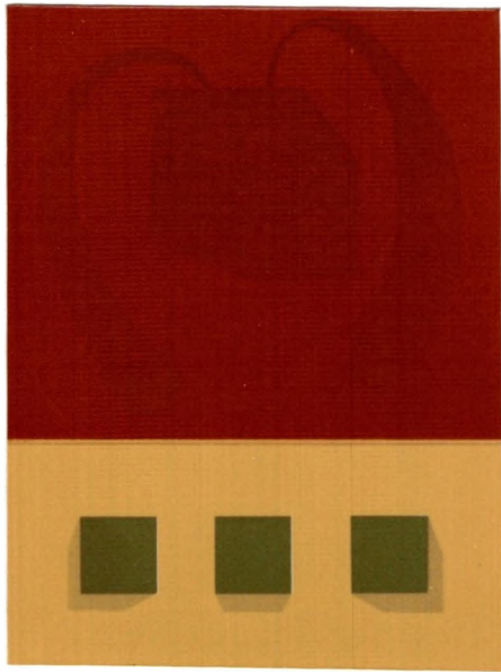Figure 18.--ORANGE BIKINI SKY

Serigraph 22" X 30"

Figure 19.--TIT BOX

Serigraph 13" X 16"

texture to what is normally a flat surface is very common in industrial silkscreen printing. Fuzzy Christmas cards are an example. In the _Cosmetic Mirror_, Figure 20, and _Green Suede Shoe_, Figure 21, however, I used flocking to give an added dimension to an artist's serigraph. _Cosmetic Mirror_ involves a color problem not unlike the focus of some of my paintings. I printed red over red with almost no difference in the values of the two colors and applied flocking to the last color. In _Green Suede Shoe_ I did use a wider variety of colors and again applied flocking over the last color printed. Flocking can be sprinkled over the wet print by hand or be dusted on with a hand pump. I discovered that coating it by hand was more efficient and left a richer coating of flocking on the print.

At this point in my work the directions indicated by serigraphy seem to offer the widest range of possibilities and this may supply a new focus to my work.
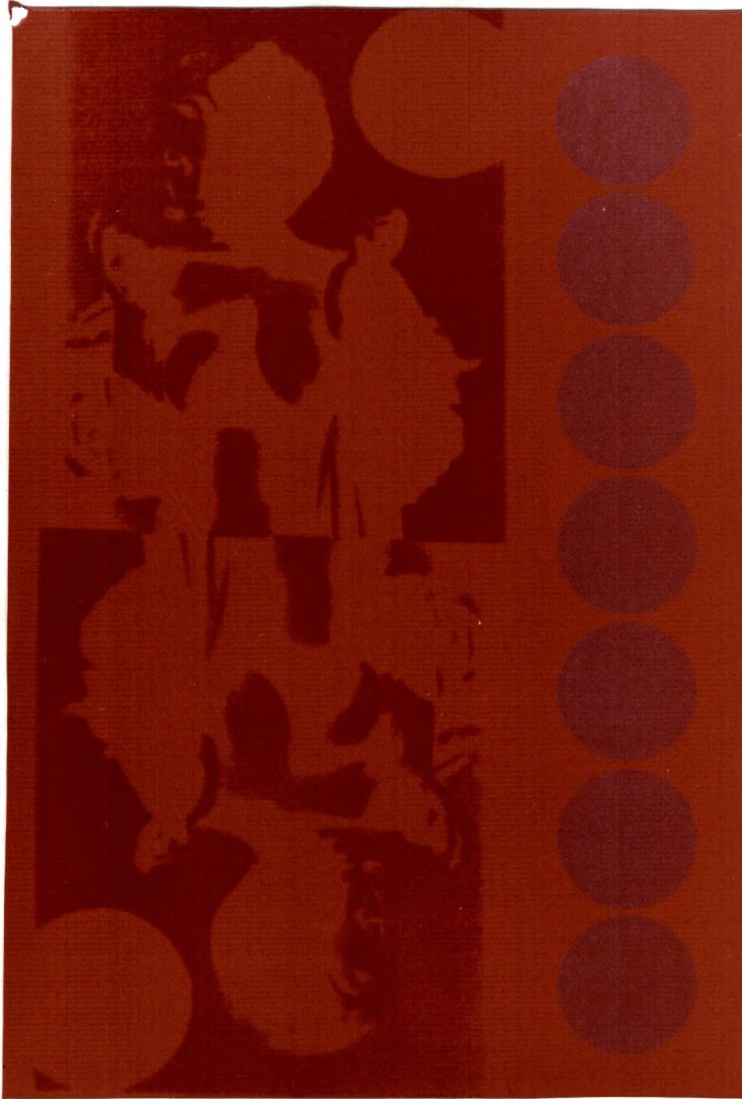
Figure 20.---COSMETIC MIRROR

Serigraph 13" X 16"

Figure 21.--GREEN SUEDE SHOE

Serigraph 13" X 16"

# CONCLUSION

Hard edge painting (as a technique and an aesthetic) has usually been applied to non-objective subject matter. These works are usually solid geometric forms of color whose basic character is more cerebral than visceral. I suggest that the same hard edge technique can be used with a highly emotive and suggestive subject matter; the nude.

I have also sought to extend the use of the hard edge line for its own sake rather than an event that happens between color areas. Personally, I am well satisfied with the results of this experimentation.

Using the reactions that I have noted in some of my viewers as a guide, I can say that the most common reaction to these works is to color and form first, and to subject matter second. These reactions seem to be as I wished them to be. As the artist, I am more subjective about my work than others can be, but I hope that some communication (not necessarily narratively) takes place between what I have set down on canvas and those who come to see it.

I have solved the problems that I set for myself and am now at a point where other concepts will take over. I want to explore all of the possibilities that silkscreen

can offer, and I plan to continue research in this area.
I do not consider the point at which this study terminates
to be final.

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