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## Abstracting the Familiar

Michael T. Lysenko

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ABSTRACTING THE FAMILIAR

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The University of North Dakota, 1978

Faculty Advisor: Professor Brian O. Paulsen

The ideas presented in this Artist's Statement give some insights into the background and early development of the painted and drawn works illustrated by the accompanying slides.

ABSTRACTING THE FAMILIAR

by

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Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours, University of Manitoba, 1976

Artist's Statement

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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This Artist Statement submitted by Michael Treble Lysenko in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee.

Brian O. Paulsen  
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TITLE Abstracting the Familiar

DEPARTMENT Visual Arts Department

DEGREE Master of Fine Arts

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Signature

July 15<sup>th</sup> 1978  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the love and comradeship of my wife, Beverly Dancho, this work could not have been done.

Special thanks to all the friendly people of the Art Department who have given of themselves so happily.

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## ABSTRACT

The ideas presented in this Artist's Statement give some insights into the background and early development of the painted and drawn works illustrated by the accompanying slides.



## ABSTRACTING THE FAMILIAR

My interest in applying paint to a surface is dominated by a desire to know and share my understanding with others. My works are aggregates formed out of a continuing life experience. Although many of my works possess images that relate to things the viewer will have seen such as a child's toy or an automobile tire, the painted image is always itself rather than a reasonable facsimile of another object. For the most part the imagery in my paintings arises like the shapes formed by a cloud. The paintings undergo many changes through resource drawings done from memory or nature and through the process of applying paint eventually arriving at a state of rest.

What I have done in this statement is to outline some of the problems and changes that have occurred in my paintings over the past two years.

While working here in Grand Forks I began to realize in myself a desire to present a painted image that was a unique composition of the abstract visual qualities of color, shape and line, while at the same time relating to the world of experience around me.

The combination of these two ideas presented me with a conflict because of my knowledge of the early development of abstract art in the twentieth century, particularly that of Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky proclaimed that we must "break the bonds that bind us to nature because art and nature are essentially and organically different".<sup>1</sup> Since I admired the work of

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<sup>1</sup>Wassily Kandinsky, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular" Documents of Modern Art, Vol. V (New York: G. W. Wittenborn, 1976), P. 21.

Kandinsky so much it was difficult to realize that I didn't agree with his dualism regarding art and nature. Kandinsky's early work before 1915 contained obvious references to horses, towers, and many other real objects. However, later works in an effort to remove connections with nature became cold and barren, substituting supposedly man-made geometries for the direct environmental contacts he had used before. It seems a mistake to me that Kandinsky assumed that man's discovery of geometric forms was outside the realm of nature. I feel that man and all of his works, good or bad, are completely bound up in nature. How can a human being who breathes the air and eats food from the earth think that his art is separate from the source of his own being?

From past experience visible in early works such as Map: Grand Forks and Dog on Porch I knew it was easy enough to make an abstract picture from sources that were of interest to me; that is, from maps, photos and drawings. This process of abstraction involved a number of possibilities such as the simplification of source material, the elimination of the sense of depth, and the establishment of an all-over design element or pattern that would bind the image to a flat visual surface. With these methods I could deal with my interest in color and composition as well as objects and feelings. The only thing that was missing, I slowly began to realize, was the idea of a more direct communication with the viewer. This lack of communication was caused by the elimination of the sources in nature of the artist's idea. I decided to try and paint in such a way that the more abstract elements of harmony, weight, density and shape were less concerned with esoteric design and more concerned with a clear communication of my ideas.

In the painting Backstop (slide #9) a striped piece of lumber is for me a pattern sequence of warm, rich colors arrived at via the overlay of

two colors. For another viewer it may simply be an odd piece of wood. This dual interpretation satisfies both my desire for communication with the viewer and my interest in the abstract qualities of color.

The process through which I make a painting or drawing has changed along with my ideological struggle. In the months before and shortly after my arrival in Grand Forks I was involved in trying many experiments with new materials. At the time I was under the impression that art should be concerned with new approaches to media. Although this was an interesting period it was also frustrating because the content of the work was always secondary to an interest in technical manipulations. To prevent being overly concerned with media and technique a decision was made to move to a more balanced means of working which would permit the method to exercise it's function of expressing an idea. The method of making a painting cannot be separated from the idea it expresses. For example, I do not make paintings for the sake of perfecting technique. Conversely, if expression of ideas was my only concern I would simply write them down. It is the ineffable quality of the sensual act of painting and the expression of idea together that is so exciting to me.

Through my interest in Paleolithic art I found a connection between my art instincts and those of ancient people. In these art works which date back twenty-thousand years I have seen the results of man's desire to express an understanding of his environment. The connection I feel with these ancient artists confirms my realization that humanity is not different and set apart from the natural universal processes that create and renew it. In fact, man has certain essential qualities such as his art-making instinct that seem to be unchanging. Discovering this has helped me to see my art as being part of a living continuous flow of human expression.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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New York: G. W. Wittenborn, 1976.

Lysenko, T. 1976-77  
Center Books Track  
Acrylic on Paper  
28" x 31"



Lysenko, T. 35" x 36"  
Playground  
Acrylic on Canvas



Lysenko, T.  
Fordyard Anglo  
16" x 20" Acry. on Can.



Lysenko T.  
Yard Items and Kay  
9" x 11 1/2"



Acrylic on Canvas

Lysenko, T.  
Floatcake  
9" x 11" Acrylic on  
Masonite



Lysenko, T. 1976-77  
Dog on Porch  
Acrylic on Paper



Lysenko, T.  
Dog on Porch  
22" x 28"

Lysenko, T. 1976  
Red Stick, Green  
Sheet Oil on Paper



Lysenko, T. 1976  
Red Stick, Green  
Sheet 20x24"

Lysenko, T.  
Lawnview Turnaround  
18" x 20" Acry. on Canva



Lysenko, T. Situation  
Durward's Oak Plywd.  
Acrylic on Oak Plywd.



7" x 8 1/2"

Lysenko, T.  
The Barn  
11 x 14" Acrylic /



The Barn  
Acrylic on Canvas  
board

Lysenko, T. 1976  
Map: Grand Forks  
Acrylic on Canvas



Lysenko, T. 1976  
Map: Grand Forks  
19" x 24"

Lysenko, T. 1977  
Sticks Puck  
30 1/2 x 31" Acrylic



Acrylic on Paper

Lysenko, T.  
Backstop 44" x 46"  
Acrylic on Canvas



Lysenko, T.  
Mini Series:  
Rural Grouping 8 x 11



Acrylic on Canvas

Lysenko, T.  
Jogging on Swarthmore  
more 11 x 14" Acrylic  
paper on Canvas Board



Lysenko, T. 1976  
Minus X & Y 16" x 20"  
Acrylic on Canvas



Lysenko, T. 1976-77  
Horse Rock (Wisc.)  
16" x 20" Acrylic on



Acrylic on Paper

Lysenko, T.  
Opening: Self Portrait  
18" x 26" Acrylic on  
Canvas



Lysenko, T. 1977-78  
Salter Trees 54 x 60"  
Acrylic on Canvas



Lysenko, T. Kendal Av.  
From 1925 Acrylic on  
7" x 8" Canvas

