Parallel development

Leonard Robert Stach

The University of Montana

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PARALLEL DEVELOPMENT

by

LEONARD ROBERT STACH

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Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

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INTRODUCTION

It is the intent of this artist to establish a parallel development in his painting, sculpture, and pottery through the conscious application of the influences of abstract expressionism and hard edge.

The illustrations are evidence of this parallel development and are presented as the thesis.

This position is substantiated by the following statements by Naum Gabo, noted sculptor and writer, and Ben Shahn, recognized painter and teacher. Gabo says:

We know only what we do, what we make, what we construct; and all that we make, all that we construct, are realities, I call them images, not in Plato's sense (namely, that they are only reflections of reality), but I hold that these images are the reality itself and that there is no reality beyond this reality except when in our own creative process we change the image; then we have created new realities.¹

Closely related is this statement by Ben Shahn:

All such probing and testing of reality and creating new realities may result from different kinds of educational means . . . a capacity to integrate all this material into creative acts and images.²


INFLUENCE OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Two characteristics of abstract expressionism are physical gesture and smeared color. The term action painting has been used in reference to abstract expressionism, and uses the characteristic of physical gesture as its source, inferring a spontaneous, violent, and vigorous image. The term abstract expressionism will be used hereafter in regard to this influence. Other important aspects of this influence are qualities of accident, chance, and intuition. Through the use of these qualities, the abstract expressionist maintains a physical association with the image, which becomes his personal "trade mark" or identification.

In this artist's painting, a reference to this influence is realized through the specific use of dripped and splashed paint, established conventions of abstract expressionism. Emphasis is placed on creation of a loose and spontaneous image, as illustrated by Figures 1 and 2.

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The application of the influence of abstract expressionism to sculpture and pottery is necessarily extended, because of the addition of the third dimension. "Pottery, of course has always served as a vehicle for painting so this in itself is nothing new." To be sure, glaze is handled in a loose manner and the clay shaped very freely. But it is the spirit and attitude of abstract expressionism rather than its superficial characteristics that effects the image of sculpture and pottery for this artist. The intent is to present an individual image possessing a quality of spontaneity, as illustrated by Figures 3, 4, and 5. This is accomplished through the accentuation of form, paralleling painting, the result of which is abstract expressionist sculpture and pottery.

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INFLUENCE OF HARD EDGE

At the present time there is a trend among abstract expressionists toward a simplification of forms and a use of larger areas of color. Evident in hard edge painting is an atmosphere of anonymous execution. It is anonymous in the sense that the painting appears to be the proof of a pre-conceived image, which has been completed in the mind of the painter, who wishes for intellectual rather than physical identity with the image. This hard edge approach would imply a discipline committing painting to basically a mental process. The hard edge image is dependent on sharp definition of form.

For this artist, the concern of painting under the influence of hard edge is an interest in the formal relationship of definite given forms; Figure 6 illustrates this position. This particular painting implies a space beyond the given canvas, suggesting an incompleteness. Enlargement of this concern for the relationship of form led to the isolation of form, growing out of a desire for an absolute visual impact, as illustrated by Figure 7. A

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complete statement is made, the image is limited to the canvas. Characteristic of hard edge painting is a precise and clean image.

As in hard edge painting, hard edge sculpture and pottery is a presentation of direct form. Sculpture and pottery already exist as tangible forms, supplying a natural vehicle for hard edge expression. Form is isolated itself and forms are isolated within the piece, as illustrated by Figures 8, 9, 10, and 11. This isolation of form dominates the image, which is rigid, static, and severe.
A SYNTHESIS OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM AND HARD EDGE

In a search for a more satisfactory means of expression, an examination of past works led to a fusion rather than a rejection of previous influences. No intention is inferred to indicate a discontentment with abstract expressionism or hard edge as means of expression. Nor is this synthesis intended to imply a compromise between the two; on the contrary, a natural development is suggested. The synthesis is a reciprocal action of the thoughts associated with the influences of abstract expressionism and hard edge. Working only within the influence of abstract expressionism or hard edge limited this artist's desire for complete expression.

Characteristic of synthesis painting is a sense of control, greater control than abstract expressionism and less control than hard edge (Figure 12). An element of abstract expressionism, the splash of paint, is used to indicate a fresh spontaneous appearance (Figure 13).

Synthesis sculpture and pottery follows the direction of synthesis painting in the presentation of an unforced image. This image possesses a directness of form that is natural and restrained, as illustrated by Figures 14, 15, 16, and 17. Synthesis sculpture and pottery exhibit a stability and conviction of intent.
ILLUSTRATIONS
Figure 5
Figure 12


HUNTER, SAM. "PAINTING BY ANOTHER NAME," ART IN AMERICA. AUGUST, 1963.


