

Thoughts About

A&S TRiNC T Paintings

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It wasn't long ago that abstract paintings made me angry; Angry because "any monkey" could paint one. (Oh, sure!)

It also wasn't long ago that I realized that I just didn't understand abstract paintings. And that is probably what made me angry. I had tried it a few times and realized that there weren't any monkeys that I knew of that could paint one. Moreover, I knew then my 6th grade daughter (like so many people thought) couldn't paint one either.

***Where? At what angle?
How light or how dark?
What will that be
compared to in the
painting?***

At a recent showing of my art, a woman stood in front of an abstracted piece and loudly asked "What is this supposed to be?" "I don't see it!"

Another person asked, "Why is abstract art so darned obtuse? I can never get what the artist is trying to say."

Another person turned to me and asked, "Could you explain this to me, please?"

If you are a painter, you probably know of similar questions and exclamations. They may even have come from you.

Here is my answer to you and all the people who have made and will make such comments. (This discussion is derived from the hard won lessons of experience, I can assure you!)

*****Abstract, non representational or non objective painting is THE most difficult and the most advanced form of creative painting!***** (in my opinion)

Allow me to explain that statement

First of all, most artists use some sort of model, be it a landscape, a person, a still life, a portrait or *some thing* to copy or to use as a guide. That means that what ever subject with which they are working, they have it to refer to for suggestions of what shape it might take, or how lights and darks are distributed, or colors to use etc. In fact, most artists learn by copying. (The word copying is

used loosely here) The copy or the painting may not be exact, but, nevertheless, the painting will resemble that subject. There are other things that matter when 'copying,' such as how the whole painting will be composed. That is how will the main subject be placed on the canvas? Where? At what angle? How light or how dark? What will that be compared to in the painting? And what feeling or mood does the artist wish to project?

Making my point more specific about painting non representational abstracts, but not necessarily succinct, every shape must be created out of thin air. Every aspect of those a shapes must be thought out in terms of their orientation to the edges of the canvas or paper; if they have direction; if they are big or small enough in relation to the other shapes; if they lead or stop the eye; if they are surprising or predictable or boring . . . and if they are in harmony with the other shapes in the piece. One cannot simply throw down a bunch of different shapes and expect them to unify the painting unless a substantial majority of them have similar character. And now that it has been mentioned, were you aware that size comparisons are just as important as the shapes themselves?

Given two separate shapes, if they are exactly equal in size (area covered) then there is an argument between them or confusion for the viewer about which one to look at. Scale, or comparative measure, is very important to creating certain feelings in the viewer. Should one be 95 and the other be 5 comparatively? What is best? The painter must decide and create this ratio directly from his or her mind . . . or intuition.

These are decisions the painter is faced with in every shape he or she paints. The answers are not always obvious.

Once the shapes are defined, the artist must assure that they do not inadvertently look like 'something.' There can be no unintentional resemblances in such painting . . . it spoils the intention and usually distracts from the whole piece.

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Wait! There is more! I was only speaking of shape and size and direction (to a minor extent). What about Value, or darks and lights? On a scale of 1 to 9, 1 being white and 9 being absolute black, there is a scale of 1 to 3 as lights, 4 to 6 as mediums and 7 to 9 as darks. How much area should the lights occupy? Or the Darks or Mediums? (We are still talking about size, but in relation to Values.) Now . . . among the shapes, which are light, dark or medium? Can those shapes be subdivided into other values? Did you know there must be some sort of value *progression or transition* from light to dark or dark to light? And, as for Value, what mood does the arrangement you chose strike? Is it the intended mood? What sort of ratio should there be between light and dark? Thought about it? The painter must have the answers to these questions

in mind as he or she executes the artwork. These decisions determine the success (or not) of the piece.

Oh, by the way, most realistic painters don't acknowledge it, but they need to be thinking also about these things to reach the best possible results. And, frankly, these decisions often challenge the skills of the painter. Mastering the manipulation of these things is what painting wizardry is all about.

Did you know there must be some sort of value progression or transition from light to dark or dark to light?

Oops!! We almost neglected color!! Now there is another big, big source of painting confusion! Most amateur painters think in terms of red, green, blue, purple etc. A more expert painter is concerned with harmonies of color and his/her concerns would be seated in color saturation, temperature, value and hue. Putting tints, tones, shades, hues, black and gray together in some sensible order of unity is a major undertaking . . .and not one to be just thrown off the sleeve, either. Color dominance and color contrasts must be considered and chosen as one moves into the execution of the work in order to achieve a harmonic, unified work.

Textures come into play in every painting and they must be enhanced, controlled and balanced to bring the most excitement to the surface of the painting without calling attention away from color, value or shape. Every square inch of the painting should hold

tiny little, exciting paintings that could stand alone. That is a big, tall order, when one thinks about that.

Management of the textures and values and colors also throws a painting into or out of balance with just the slightest of inadvertent lack of concentrated focus. Paintings don't just happen! They are steered ever so carefully as the painting nears a final phase of finish. A painting out of balance is a failed painting. So, balance, transitions and variations must be uppermost in the mind of the painter all the while in development of shapes, values, colors and textures.

In the world of reality, much of this stuff is handed to the artist with only minor effort to control it all. Each step of the painting process is built upon the suggestion or outright reality offered by the model (thing being painted, or subject). Abstract, non representational painting, on the other hand, is ALL CREATED FROM NOTHING! The artist has to make it all up then take all of the elements and fit them together. It may take many long days before a successful, non- representational painting materializes. In fact, weeks might well elapse before that happens . . .and that comes with daily effortand missteps and failures . . .and little tiny successes until the painting all settles to a complete, unified whole.

So, the next time you see 'an abstract,' take a few minutes to look carefully at the aspect of *creation*. Size it up from the standpoint of "is it pleasant to look at?" or "did it confront me and move me emotionally?" Just because it doesn't look like something doesn't mean that it isn't a work which should be held in high esteem

Assess the clarity of the work and how well it was executed. Look at edges. Evaluate the shapes. Consider the value chords and transitions. Look at the composition and how it fits on the page or canvass. How did the artist accomplish the complexity of it all? Look again! It was no monkey that

painted these paintings and no elementary school child! It, no doubt, was a very advanced painter who worked very hard to please YOU! It takes years and years of solid painting experience and skill to deliver such work. Give it the attention it deserves.