

AN ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION OF FORM IN THE DISCIPLINE
OF EASEL PAINTING

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A Dissertation and Documentation of Paintings submitted to
the Faculty of Fine Art and Architecture of the University
of Cape Town for the Degree of Master of Fine Art.

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D E C L A R A T I O N

I declare that this document is of my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Master of Fine Art Degree in the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

VIVIAN HUBERT VAN DER MERWE

13 May 1984.

In memory of my father
Hubert Vivian van der Merwe
1925-1977

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P R E F A C E

The text of this volume is intended to introduce the reader to the cycle of paintings submitted for the Master of Fine Art degree.

The very nature of form imposes severe limitations on any kind of semantic or linguistic recourse to the visual form of painting, and this has been the cardinal difficulty in drawing together the verbal and visual elements of my research. At best, the text and reproduction of the works can be seen in juxtaposition.

The first two chapters, "The Genesis of Form" and "Form and Silence" constitute the conceptual background to the field of enquiry. The third chapter "The Work" deals with the specific concerns and categories of form which pertain to the cycle of paintings. This is followed by "The Conclusion" which serves as a brief and personal appraisal of the work.

The text and illustrations have been separated to permit undivided perusal of the paintings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Stanley Pinker, an exceptional painter and teacher, supervisor of this undertaking and my painting lecturer for six years. Also to Peggy Delpont for her assistance and supervision I owe much.

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And finally I thank "Gillie" and Mr Jack Weich for their respective sacrifices in preparing the text and the visual documentation of this book.

NOTE TO THE READER

Asterisks denote footnotes.

Numeric referēnces (1, 2, 3, etc) refer to source notes and translations which appear at the end of Chapters I and II

For best results the reader is advised to view the transparencies against indirect natural light.

I. THE GENESIS OF FORM

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form.." 1.

Form* is a precept of ancient philosophical and theological provenance and a term situated in the midst of diverse terminologies of modern thought.

The meaning of the word comes from a tradition of archaic Greek origins which has assumed almost mythical remoteness in the critical literature of modernity. And thus the need to affirm by way of introduction the fundamentals:

Evidence of Pre-Socratic history is unreliable and it is difficult to establish temporal relationships that hold among the thinkers and chroniclers of the period, and yet it is this period which yields the earliest fragments containing fairly consistent references to "form" (εἶδος) **

ἀλλ' ἄγε, τῶνδ' ὀάρων προτέρων ἐπιμάρτυρα δέρκευ, 2.

εἴ τι καὶ ἐν προτέροισι λιπόξυλον ἔπλετο μορφῆν
ἐν δε Κότῳ διάμορφα καὶ ἄνδιχα πάντα πέλονται, 3.
σὺν δ' ἔβη ἐν φιλότῃ καὶ ἀλλήλοισι ποθεῖται.

ἐκ τῶν εἶδεα πᾶσιν ἀλύγκια προσύνοισι 4.

φύσεως ὧν ἀρχὴ ἦδε· " ἂ φύσις δ' ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ
ἀρμόχθη ἐξ ἀπέριων τε καὶ περαινόντων καὶ ὅλος ὁ
κόσμος καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα." 5.

καὶ ἂ ἐκλείπει αὖ ἂ γεωμετρία, καὶ ἀποδείξις ἂ
λογιστικὰ ἐπιτελεῖ καὶ ὁμῶς, εἰ μὲν εἰδέων τε ἂ 6.
πραγματεία, καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῖς εἶδεσιν ...

* Where form appears as a proper noun it refers to the concept of classical philosophy, and where it appears as a common noun it refers to the common usage.

** Two obvious omissions in the present analysis need justifying. My omission of Homer is not the product of ignorance. The Empedoclean use of the concept of εἶδος is adequately Homeric but unlike Homeric language it is of certain attribution. Secondly, I hesitate to make etymological assumptions about the Sanskrit precedents to εἶδος as these remain obscure and without context.

The texts; conspicuously Pythagorean in spirit, contain the germinal elements of *εἶδος* which informed the foundation of Platonic and Aristotelean philosophy, and consequently of Western philosophy. *μορφήι, διάμρφα, εἶδεα, περαίνουτων, εἶδεων* and *εἶδεσίν* are related to central terms of Pythagorean thought: The transliterations and translations are respectively as follows:
εἶδος - *eidos* - form, *μορφή* - *morphai* - shape and *περαίνουτων* - *peparasmenon* - limited. These are the three fundamental terms which collectively define the structural principle of the Pythagorean *κόσμος* or *kosmos*, a word which has no English equivalent, "universe" being a somewhat inadequate approximation.

The Pythagorean conception of *κόσμος* emerged from the belief that matter in its primary state consisted of an undifferentiated, indistinguishable mass of infinite extent called *apeiron*. Although this first state of matter appeared indistinct it embodied "the elements" in a latent or potential form. *Apeiron*, a word which means "without boundaries", was in later Greek used in two main senses: firstly to describe that which was not bounded externally, in other words spatially infinite, and secondly, to describe that which was without internal boundaries or within which no distinctions of separate parts or elements could be observed. Within this matrix, it was held, were the antagonistic elements of which an order would emerge. The complex theories of harmony, normally founded upon remarkable insights into natural harmonics and material and physical structures in nature revealed an order which appeared to be pre-eminent in the universe. The cyclical aspect of seasons, lunar patterns, the classes and categories of natural objects, organic growth processes, astronomical phenomena and geological structure variously served to confirm the Pre-Socratic conviction.

It was the Pythagorean spirit of analytical observation which formed the basis for systematic reasoning and

conscious structural activity of Western man and provided Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy with certain imperative premises.

Platonic and Aristotelian writings contain a refinement and modification of the concept of form (*εἶδος*) so that it is expressed with unequivocal certitude. The brevity of the following texts are the result of extensive research and elimination.

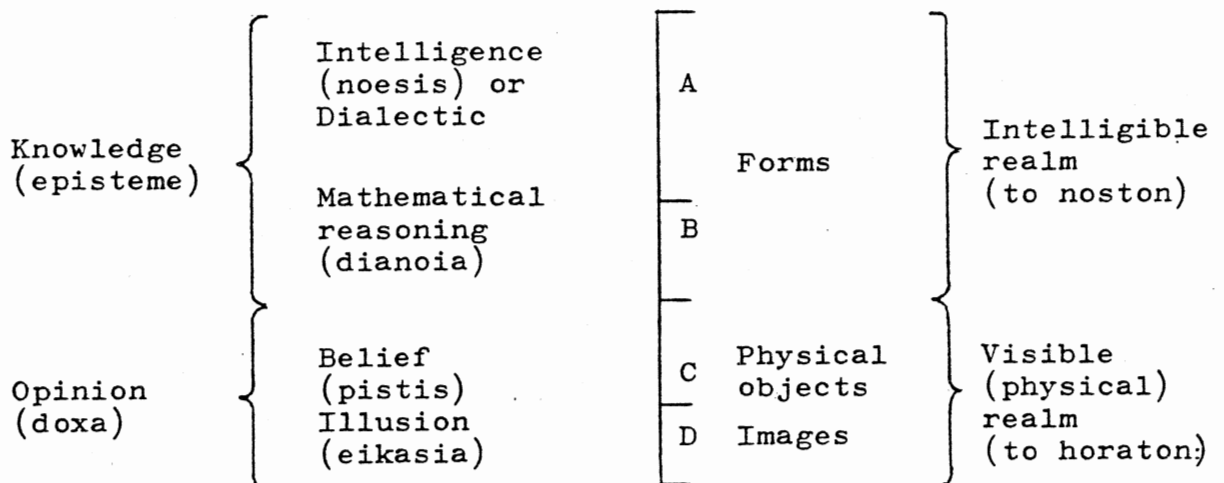
περιέχεται γὰρ ὡς ἡ ὕλη ἐντὸς καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον, περιέχει δε τὸ εἶδος 7.

αἰσθητῶ παντάπασιν οὐδενὶ προσχρῶμενος, ἀλλ' εἶδεσιν αὐτοῖς δι' αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτά, καὶ τελευτᾷ εἰς εἶδη. 8.

The Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of form have a Pythagorean foundation in common. Unlike the Pre-Socratic writings the disciplinary certitude and documentary context of these writings spell out the philosophic meaning of form without much ambiguity.

The Platonic "Analogy to the Divided Line"; to which the cited quotation is the conclusion, proposes a systematic hierarchy which affirms the structure of intelligent perception - a proposition which has generated many centuries of conjecture and to the end of twentieth century remains close to the centre of the Structuralist schools in Europe and America.

Schematically, the Divided Line, expounded in Book Six of The Republic⁹, may be represented thus:



A comprehension of the Platonic conception of Form cannot be ignorant of the Analogy of the Divided Line, for if the root of the word "form" is "eidos" then it would not be incorrect to assume similarity of meaning for Form and Idea. The correlation of meaning between these two words is fundamental to this thesis. It is in this linguistic nuance that we begin to find the true meaning of the word Form.

The common and appropriate illustration of the Platonic Formal principle is the circle. The particular object which represents or embodies the specific qualities of circularity may be termed "a circle" and yet such a circle is not the true or ideal circle. The "true" circle is the paradigmatic archetype according to which all circles in the universe are identified and determined-- a proposition which leads straight into an area of diverse speculation. The basic conjecture is this: which has precedence, the Ideal circle according to which the class of all particular circles is defined, or did the particular circles suggest the differential category or class called "the circle"? It is with regard to this question that dialectical enquiry has provided some of the most meaningful speculation. The discoveries of modern biochemistry and physics have provided some fairly interesting, and at times idiosyncratic insights into this epistemological area but the debates and arguments continue. It is not within the scope of this essay to resolve such interdisciplinary questions.

The underlying implication of Platonic thought suggests that it is through Ideas (εἰδέα) that the true and immutable Forms (εἰδέα) of things is affirmed whereas the individual perceptions of data or phenomena constitute an impression of the world which is transient and mutable. The callistic and qualitative ramifications of the Platonic realisation are confirmed in the "Analogy of the Divided Line", and the corresponding similes in The Republic: Form is the highest order of human consciousness.

The Aristotelian principle of Form completes our appraisal of the genesis of *Eidos*. By contrast to the Platonic vision of Ideal Form which engenders the notion of absolute Forms, Aristotle regards the question of change and motion as central to a definition of Form. From Aristotelian speculation emerged the model for hylemorphism.

Aristotle's three basic elements of the concept of change are discussed at the beginning of The Physics¹⁰. - they are the substrate which persists through change, the absence of a particular form, and the form which appears through change. The form is the definite aspect of matter which becomes distinct, when something "becomes" formally what it is rather than what it was (which cannot be known). Something can only be perceived when it is form, when it has material dimension and can therefore be distinguished from all else or all other objects, or to use Aristotelian idiom: when it has number or can be differentiated intrinsically and extrinsically.

The relationship of form to number suggests a process of differential linguistic logic* - an issue which lay dormant for nearly two thousand years until Saussure proposed that differential logic may be the very means by which language functions.

In essence, Aristotle proposes a Formal principle which is governed by and determined through change - Form is the consequence of a dynamic first principle. Plato proposes an order in which absolute Form is the first cause, and in which material changes are secondary.

Neither Plato nor Aristotle venture far beyond the philosophical terms of their Formal enquiries and through the disciplinary certitude of classical philosophy the concept of Form passed irrevocably into the creed of Western philosophy. Thus the genesis of Form.

* The Saussurian proposition is that the meaning of a word is defined by its phonetic and syntagmatic difference from all other words, rather than by any inherent significance contained within that word.

This foregoing appraisal of ancient thoughts is not an exercise in nostalgia - it is the reaffirmation of a philosophical principle which survived the Medieval, Industrial, and Post-Industrial revolutions of Western consciousness, and presently engages, in one way or another, the most progressive thinkers of contemporary philosophy.

It is this principle which provides academic qualification for the hypothesis which forms the theoretical foundation to my work:

Form is the means by which all significance is identified.

.....

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. Genesis, Chapter I, verse 1, The Holy Bible. King James version, London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1933.
2. Empedocles frg. 21 from Diels, H. Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, Griechische und Deutsch, 4th ed. Berlin: Weideman, 1922
Translated the fragment reads thus: "But come, observe the following witness to my previous discourse, lest in my former statements there was any substance of which the form was missing".
3. Ibid., frg 21
Translated the fragment reads thus: "But in Wrath they are all different in form and separate while in Love they come together and long for one another".
4. Ibid., frg 23.
Translated the fragment reads thus: "... create from them forms like to all things".
5. Ibid., Philolaos frg 1.
Translated the fragment reads thus: "... the kosmos is blended from the limitless and limit".
6. Ibid., Archytas frg 4.
Translated the fragment reads thus: "... and a thing in which geometry fails arithmetic adds proofs, and at the same time, of the problems concerns forms; that is numerical first principles, arithmetic treats of the forms also".
7. Aristotle. The Physics, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1935, p.207b.
Translated the passage reads thus: "For the matter and the infinite are contained inside what contains them, while it is the form which contains".
8. Plato. The Republic, compiled by Jowett, B. and Campbell, L., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894. p. 511c.
Translated the passage reads thus: "The whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world, but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms".
9. Plato. The Republic, translated by Lee, D., 2nd ed., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974. pp. 312-316.
10. Aristotle. The Physics, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1935

II. FORM AND SILENCE

In 1789 the social contract of European civilization was reconstituted irrevocably. Thus the Age of Reason had yielded its revolution and spun its Cartesian web.

The Encyclopédie, the compendium of enlightenment, along with the other magna-opera of the risorgimento* invested the word with a disciplinary rigour and didactic certitude which spelt out the dawn of "modernity". That the works of Diderot (1713 - 1784), d'Alembert (1717 - 1783), Kant (1724 - 1804), Hegel (1671 - 1741) and Winckelmann (1717 - 1768) are the products of a particular historical moment is no coincidence. Through the literary activity of the period were generated ideas which severed man's past from his future - time became measurable. The darkness of Medieval Feudalism and the shadow of superstition's damnations lifted from the brain and with the emergence of popular social and economic responsibility came the tide of universal literacy. At this point European history assumes a cohesive and dynamic quality.

Although this is no place for historical discourse, the significance of this period brings it to the centre of our present conjecture, for it is my belief that during the latter half of the eighteenth century certain ideas were generated and assimilated in Europe - ideas which constituted one of the most radical revolutions of Western consciousness. The initiation of new values had repercussions on every social stratum, in every branch of academic discipline, in every sphere of significant thought and activity, and ultimately on the moral and philosophical temper of humanity. Of the nature of this cultural revolution we shall examine three pertinent areas of consequence - areas which constitute the tradition of modern painting.

* The risorgimento of the philosophes in eighteenth century France is not to be confused with the Italian Risorgimento.

The name which is of Copernican significance to the meaning of modern painting is that of Immanuel Kant. The force and intricacy with which The Critique of Judgement 11. promulgated the discipline of Aesthetics from its incongruous emergence in 1735 into the creed of the theory of art were indicative of the reactions to the mystical imperfections of the Renaissance heritage with its ashen "divinus furor" and attendant genius. The Critique of Judgement was an implement of logic by which the logical criteria which determined aesthetic judgements could be affirmed and defined, an implement which brought to an end the tradition of the mimetic dependence of descriptive criticism and delineated a theory and terminology of Fine Art which was logical and universal. It is the recognition of the value of logic in criticism which is Kant's significant accomplishment and perhaps it is ironical that the consequences of Kant's labour is best gauged in the terms of philosophy and aesthetics and not in those of art criticism.

The eighteenth century transition from mimetic criticism to expressive criticism is our second issue of concern. The precise causes and nature of this change remain a matter of historical complexity and at best one can only speculate - but the implications and consequences are crucial and unambiguous. A figure such as Winckelmann is representative of the emergence of expressive criticism and coeval eclipse of the ancient primacy of visual form.

Previously the critical vantage point had been one of subservience; Vasari was a chronicler, willingly dependent on the particular or given work of art, the critic accepted the fact that his vocation existed by the grace of artistic form. Critical work can assume literary value and become art, but not by virtue of the object of criticism - such critical works can exist as independent literature and are uncommon to the English language.*

* The work of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are such exceptions.

As the critic loses sight of his mimetic humility, criticism becomes increasingly expressive of independent speculation, and thus the successors of Winckelmann began proposing theories which became laws from which emerged an inverted tradition; absent of formal criteria, which forms the sinecurian protocol of contemporary criticism. It is this prescriptive trend which is at the root of the disintegration of consistent criteria of judgement of contemporary art. The most incongruous result of such prescriptive criticism is the commanding eminence with which the critic has contrived a situation of autonomy through which his personal persuasions become publicity, fabricating trends and more recently even whole styles "which art must obey". The absence of formal first principles, hence the absence of the critical paradigm, created a void which is filled with interdisciplinary exegesis and it is not unusual to find a painting being judged, publicly, according to socio-economic, psychological, or even linguistic criteria. The result of such undisciplined violation of reason is a generation of eclectic dilettanti. The prevailing critical insolvency is the result of affected autonomy. It is not uncommon to find the student of art or the interested person consulting a critical essay about a painting before having established any intelligent or critical engagement with that painting.

The current sense of critical disorder and depression is symptomatic of the conspicuous absence of criteria of judgement and when terms such as "interesting", "meaningful" or "relevant" are applied as qualifications of judgement the true nerve of the condition is touched. The arena of criticism has disintegrated its own premises and its own unique parameters to the point where Western culture has no coherent critique of art.

Finally, let us consider the "semantic option". The capitulation of the Crown of Louis XVI in 1789 is a moment charged with evolutionary precedent, with a sense of historical inevitability, and it is not difficult to accept the proposition that it was a period which witnessed political, social and economic revolution greater than any since the fall of the empires of antiquity, and yet the full extent of the consequences is less easy to ascribe clear terms to - even the most perceptive scholars are unprepared to define the momentum of Modernity.

One of the decisive implications of the period was the subjugation of Patristic and Scholastic authority and patronage, as the didactic and communicative agency of civilization was transferred from the altar of preponderance to the rationality and reciprocity of language. The claim that articulate language should be the virtue dividing man from the diverse substrata of zoology and botany, that the word distinguished man's realised eminence in a universe of organic and inorganic matter expresses the affirmation of the age. It is in accordance with the very nature of the risorgimento that the artist lost his familiar patron, and visual art, and particularly painting, was divorced of its mediative function. Before a man could claim any situation in the new world he had to know literacy.

To reiterate: the advent of popular social and economic responsibility initiated the universal currency of the word. Confined privileges of literacy became the institutional obligation of humanity.

The Encyclopédie, under the editorship of Diderot and d'Alembert, symbolised an amalgam and literal dissemination of occidental knowledge, availing a comparatively sophisticated analysis of things to all men, an analysis which was concise, logical and secular.

Attitudes of rationality and enlightenment prepared the foundations for a new epistemology by which the museum and library were to become public institutions, adorned with the objects and subjects of learning, while the emergent church was bare and devoid of the graven images both environments reflecting the prevalence of the reasonable word. Those who set sail to America, Africa and Asia were not kings and magi; they were educated men and Protestants.

That the social, political and economic aspirations of the late eighteenth century were the germinal moments of European Romanticism and aspirations which formed the foundation of the Industrial Revolution are facts which have become historical creed. Historical roots of the major symptoms which characterise the present condition of culture emanated from the years immediately following 1789 and it is those years which constitute the background against which the evolution of semantic consciousness must be seen.

The linguistic orientation of contemporary culture signifies a realisation of the eighteenth century heritage that not even d'Alembert with his remarkable perception could have foretold. The word has achieved undeniable primacy and has become the paradigm of intelligent mediation - a factor which has determined the directions and momenta of contemporary painting, where the artist has unwittingly and at times consciously adopted semantic primacy as an axiomatic truth. Semantic assumption and inference were implicit qualities of the so-called Conceptualist tendency in visual art of the past two decades - one of the major consequences were that the dominance of the semantic concept implied (by virtue of the nature of linguistic structure) the indeterminacy of visual forms, by which the disciplines of visual art are delineated. The criteria which define visual form in painting do not obey the rules of linguistic structure. The visual forms

of Conceptual painting have come no closer to linguistic Structuralism than being inadequate analogies suspended and confused somewhere between the synchronic and diachronic potentialities of language.

Contemporary Structuralism follows two general courses: Linguistic Structuralism appears to reflect Wittgensteinian terms whereas a secondary school of Structuralist thinkers who are not distinctly united, appear to have inherited the terms of Structural Anthropology. It is the former school which is of greater relevance to the Conceptualist in visual art. Recently there have been many arguments which attempt to draw the threads of language, cognition and creativity together. The assertion that language and visual forms derive their rules of functioning from a common principle which is codified in the mysterious depths of the D.N.A. molecule has become popular - but this remains an issue obscure with speculation and interdisciplinary contention.* Where the last vestiges of the avant-garde still remain the characteristic "reaction" against the so-called "semantic option" is discernable, thus perpetuating the trend of historicism which, ironically, is in itself considered to be one of the inhibiting ills of the semantic critique of visual art. Styles such as Neo-Expressionism seem to reflect an almost desperate reaction against the intervention of linguistic order in painting. The pendulum which first polarised Neo-classicism and Romanticism presently oscillates less steadily and more phrenetically between reason and intuition.

The tendency to postulate semantic structure and non-semantic structure as incommensurable options represents the radical inclination of an emergent school of aesthetics which has come fairly close to recognising the critical importance of visual form in painting. The few theorists working in this area currently remain divided, unresolved and subjective.

* Similarly, as gestalt psychology (which must once have seemed a promising alternative to the constraints of semantics) advances, it moves closer to the sensibility and terms of neurology and leaves the expressive forms of painting unexplained.

Finally, we examine the most extensive manifestation of the word. The phenomenon of semantic consciousness, borne through the mass mediation of image and idea, is crucial to the structure of late twentieth century society.

The universal currency and omnipresence of mediated culture faces the artist as never before. One of the major symptoms of this condition is the awesome subjection of the contemporary sensibility to imagery and ideology - printed, televised and broadcast. The cause is less obvious. One thing is clear: the imagery and ideology of the mass media is almost without exception persuasive of some or other premeditated concept. Where visual forms appear through the media they merely illustrate, thereby reinforcing a social stance, a political ideology, or simply a commercial product. Unless the imagery of the media obeys and serves the communicative function of the semantic orientation of the mass media it becomes culturally redundant or "useless" - the pecuniary norms of our age decide what is profitable and what is not. The repeated failure of "sub-culture" and "alternative culture" in Europe and particularly in America confirms the gravity and efficiency of the mediated language of contemporary culture.

Of the complex form of semantic mediation there are two aspects which pertain to the present analysis.

Of specific relevance is the genre of the art journal. The art journal has flourished amidst the cultural disintegration and diversification expressed in the trends of current visual art. The disintegration of catholic criteria of judgement in contemporary painting, the ubiquity of the mass media and the proliferation of art journalism are all symptoms related to a common cause which need not be dealt with here. The publicity of art criticism has long been overtaken by the popularity of art journalism.

The detection of a style or trend in contemporary art is the motivation underlying the incredible volume of journalistic and "critical" prognostications of the bookmakers of modern art. The tendency to confine the visual forms of human creativity to the mediated expectation of journalism affords us little or no recourse to any measure of true critical appraisal. The art journalist has become a sort of visionary. This point is illustrated with a common example: we are all familiar with the bold newspaper or journal headline with its sensational connotations and the countless editorial commentaries with their infinite shades of urgency often verging on the melodrama and premeditated sensationalism of third-rate fiction. Journalism thrives, in fact, depends upon a kind of pseudo-apocalyptic vision for its perpetuation.

The notion of "newness" goes hand in hand with the sense of mediated expectation.

In the absence of a critical norm a discipline has no discernable parameters and thus lacks reasonable integrity. Without reasonable integrity a discipline can have no criteria of judgement or definite characteristics. The primary feature of a critical norm is its irreducibility and singularity. When such a norm is spurious, for any reason, then it lacks its primary feature: irreducibility, and becomes a multiple substitute for a true norm. And thus qualitative criteria which may be deduced from the true norm are substituted; in the case of the spurious norm, with quantitative criteria which can, at best, cope with permutations. A given permutation permits unlimited exponential proliferation - which is the most efficient method of arriving at new factors. If the occurrence of such factors are measured in frequency, and frequency is a measure of time, the resultant effect is twofold:

a feeling of hastening tempo is coupled with a sense of progressive proliferation. I suspect that it is this ignorant logic which plays an important role in the terminology of the art journal. In the contemporary institution of art the essential differences which distinguish the critique of painting from art journalism have become vague - the art journal having become an almost indispensable medium of didacticism. Expressions such as "new art", "new directions" and "new style" threaten to overshadow the timeless precepts of a formal critique. The prefixes "Post" and "Neo" and the suffix "ism" have associations of academic erudition and certitude, sounding less subjective and transient than the "New", but can readily be applied to the same end.

Such institutional language, by claiming didactic responsibility, has risen to an unassailable vantage without any true critical faculties. The libraries of art are monuments, without precedent, to a genre of literacy which speaks of the verbal sensibility of Western civilization.

This is not intended to disparage the word as there is no need to ignore or deny the value of contemporary literacy or of literature, but to confuse art theory, journalism and criticism with the expressive form of literature is an act of ignorance.

Literacy and language have, since the eighteenth century, afforded mankind more and more insights into the very maze of its own destiny and consciousness. The chroniclers and poets leave no stone unturned, taking the word to the limits of comprehension and possibility, discovering and forging new terminologies, perceiving avenues into the labyrinth of the universe.

Returning to art: when the persistence of the printed word is excessive, when mediated language and divergent terminologies of criticism are in sustained contention the result is that of confusion - conceptual and verbal confusion is of incoherent and cacophonous character, and where such cacophony resoundingly infringes upon the privacy and provenance of individual perception; subjugating the critical prerogative of the individual, the result is that of aphony. In the case of visual form such silence has two extremes of possibility; it can be the dormant silence of cecity or else it can be the perfect silence where the crystalline logic of personal identity and critical perception is reaffirmed.

A related metaphor which appears in George Steiner's essay, "The Pythagorean Genre"¹². expresses a related truth about the art of literature: "Wherever it reaches out to the limits of expressive form, literature comes to the shores of silence."

The word "literature" might easily be substituted with "the word" and not destroy the significance of the implications.

By way of conclusion, I must express the conviction that it is at these "shores" where disciplines such as mathematics, physics and painting begin, and the conditioned perspectives of history, styles and semantic lineage are transcended and sloughed away. It is in these moments of "crystalline" silence that Form is rediscovered.

Such silence is the primary condition
which governed my activity at the easel.

The subject matter, medium and technique which delineate the discipline by which the cycle of paintings were realised are deliberately conservative and conventional, and ironically not without poetic analogy (or "content") - although where the possibility of poetic inference is evident in particular paintings it remains of secondary importance to the central concerns of this enquiry. One of the cardinal prerequisites of my enquiry into Form was clarity of operative and referential parameters; in other words, working within a clearly defined discipline. The need for such certitude is reinforced by the knowledge that man cannot create "ex nihilo".

It is a fact of tradition that the subjects of the genre of "still-life" are inanimate and still. Still-life painting from the home of Julia Felix in Pompeii¹³. of the first century B.C. and still-life composition by Paul Cezanne¹⁴. have much in common.

The apparent constraints of the genre of still-life painting belie the actual resources which embrace, structurally, the formal resources of most other types of subject matter and yet are independent of the practical problems posed by the transient phenomena of nature and the ubiquitous nuance of psychic abstraction. It is precisely the passivity and stillness of the parochial object which may provide the artist with unrhetorical recourse to his own sensibility and reflexive form - a clear but wordless dialogue. The objects of still-life bring - literally and figuratively - the diverse range of formal problems and possibility within reach of the painter.

The object, once chosen, becomes the subject, and although there is nothing strange in this (choice is subjective), we are led straight to problems concerning the nature of artistic perception. An important factor in my

investigation has been the recognition of the mimetic condition of the creative expression of man - mimetic capability being the only means of reflexive perception. Dealing with the nature of human perception leads to unresolvable confusion - and yet we are compelled to recognise, even if by way of brief digression, the primary question regarding the nature of human perception: Which is the first cause, the moment of cognition, or the object of cognition? - a question which will remain unanswered and burning in the minds of intelligent and wise men. The fact that man's creative potential can only find incarnation through his mimetic faculty deserves reiteration. But perhaps such abstract speculation is best put into perspective by clarifying the intention of the practical enquiry which is the object of this dissertation.

The analysis of the still-life model commences with an interest in the visual forms which exist in the "silence" beyond semantic structure and linguistic one-dimensionality. The given model is analysed and its visual qualities are abstracted and reconstituted or formalized according to the discipline of painting. The formal analysis should not be mistaken as an attempt to explain or justify the Platonic model of Form. Philosophical discourse and language would do this much more successfully than painting. However, the analytical process does refer to the Platonic model of Form insofar as it abstracts the forms of the given sense data and transposes them into the immutable terms of the painting.

Thus I have chosen to reconstitute the objects of still-life in order to reaffirm the elements of form.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II.

11. Kant, I. The Critique of Judgement; translated by Meredith, J.C., Oxford: Blackwell, 1948.
The Critique of Judgement made its seminal appearance in 1790.
12. Steiner, G. Language and Silence. 3rd ed., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969. p. 114, par. 3.
13. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.
14. Most of Cézanne's late still-life paintings exemplify this comparison.

III. THE WORK

Having presented a brief and speculative dissemination of the persuasions which constitute the conceptual and critical background to this field of enquiry, we now turn to the main part of the book which serves as an elucidation of the practical body of work.

In keeping with the character of the M.F.A. Course of study the explanatory text is kept brief, giving prominence to the practical orientation of the research.

The documentary composition of this chapter has been determined as accurately as possible according to the chronological development of the body of work and falls into three general categories respectively described as -

- Series 1 : General Analysis
- Series 2 : Specific Analysis
- Series 3 : Conclusive Exposition

Within each of the above series there are smaller groupings of related paintings referred to as "sub-series".



1. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm) March 1981

Series 1 : GENERAL ANALYSISIllustration 1.

This still-life painting; although executed in 1981, is representative of the general style and character of work completed late in 1980, which is the period immediately preceding the assumption of this course of study. This painting is a useful inclusion as it provides an idea of the precursory visual concerns from which the present field of enquiry evolved and should be taken as a visual introduction rather than an integral part of the first series.

Superficially the composition suggests an aspect of realism; the subjective convention of perceptual fidelity, by which illusionist representation of the subject matter appears to assume aesthetic primacy. The general composition and relationships of forms demonstrates a regard for linear perspective, the perspectival quadrilaterals, volumes and ellipses of the objects implying an unambiguous viewpoint. The shadows cast by the objects, tonal and chromatic diffusion and interaction suggest a uniform light source and observed atmospheric effects.

But the composition also manifests underlying distortions of illusionist norms of representation. Exact relationships between the planes of the cubic form, the incidence of the intersecting white lines, the elimination and metamorphosis of shadows are among the more obvious deviations from the empiricism of perspectival diminution and logic of the physical properties of light. It is my belief that the analysis, distortion or abstraction of the objective world requires a perceptual comprehension of the given object or objects which is accurate, thorough and articulate. However precursory, such distortions represent a germinal and conscious departure from the principles by which the phenomena and objects of perceptual realism are depicted, and yet in relation to the general consistency of perceptual verisimilitude the above-mentioned distortions appear almost idiosyncratic; the overall impression still reminiscent of a realistic idiom.

Of equal relevance to the subsequent work is the apparent limitation of means; restraint in scale, subject matter and discipline. Such limitations constitute a quality of formal conservatism which governs the entire period of analysis and exposition.

24.



2. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm) March 1981

Illustration 2.

This painting forms part of the first sub-series (Illustrations 2 - 7) which refer to the same arrangement of still-life objects.

The given objects of the sense datum are not denied their formal significance, but the implied singularity of viewpoint and the impression of matter observed during a given moment (these being pictorial values defined by their spatio-temporal orientation which previously suggested a type of narrative orthodoxy) are here deliberately revoked. By "narrative orthodoxy" I refer to a convention by which the artistic object; in this case a painting, functions as a simple mimetic representation of existing objects and phenomena (which become the subject) and which therefore, like a narrative, can recall in a semantic and reflexive manner (irrespective of the continuing existence of the objects of the initial sense data) the moment and act of perception of those objects and phenomena.

One of the important factors of Series 1 is a considerable allowance for intuition in the analysis of the forms derived from a process of concentrated observation of the objects.

The disintegration of empirical and illusionist perspective also represents a conscious attempt to negate the psychological and conceptual convention by which the picture plane has window-like implications which negate the objective value of the objective form of the painting itself.

Composite forms are presented in varying degrees of displacement and tilting: the bottle examined according to its side elevation and the rectangular newspaper cutting (containing the letters DE) reminiscent of its plan view refer to two-dimensional norms of representation. The two different aspects are consciously contained in the same composition. The diagonals of the newspaper cutting do not obey the norms of perspectival diminution. They are divested of their illusionist purpose and invest the form with a dynamic two-dimensional potential.

Tonal, chromatic and plastic values are confined to a harmonious scale and thus sustain the cohesion of pictorial space.



3. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm) April 1981

Illustration 3.

The disintegration of the linear finity and rationale of the rectangularity of the table causes the common plane (the host plane or ground plane of the table top) to become extensive within the format and co-extensive with the objective space of the picture plane. The orthogonal relationship of the form of the table and the shape of the format introduces a concern which remains pertinent throughout the later Series.

Dominant and corresponding chromatic and tonal values (red, green, black-brown and white) establish a relational configuration between complementary shapes - shapes which also develop the perspectival contention introduced in the preceding work. The four primary factors which inhibit this dominant configuration - or complex figure from completely disintegrating from the rest of the composition have a significant bearing on the general composition :

The uniformity of plastic values imparts a quality of surface cohesion.

The discontinuous and fractured silhouettes of figures establish a complex and dynamic relationship of positive and negative shapes and areas.

The subdominant relationship between forms of intermediate tonal and chromatic value constitutes a configuration or complex figure which intermediates between the extremely high keyed and low keyed values, thus integrating such values.

The use of independent line is intended to link the forms to the pictorial surface.



4. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm) April 1981

Illustration 4.

Rid of the prescriptive linear enclosure of the table, and the coincident realization of the objective value of the pictorial plane, this painting signifies further developments in the general analysis of pictorial space.

The introduction of the sfumato technique affirms the luminiferous and effulgent nuance of the spatial context of the objects; an effect which also admits a visual and spatial paradox which reappears throughout the body of work: the exceptionally low oil content of the technique; much less than is customary for sfumato, imparts a chalky and non-reflective surface of definite tactile and sensual character and yet the technique retains its graphic evocation of atmospheric ambivalence. Where the technique is applied to definite forms (such as the two-dimensional projection of the rectangular shadow behind the upper part of the bottle, and the adjoining shadow immediately to the right of the former, or the bottle label and the newspaper cutting) visual and spatial progressions or passage occurs. Such passage creates powerful visual transitions without divesting the shapes of their morphological presence. *

The superabundant use of oil in confined areas of the bottle represents an eccentric but assertive definition of the pictorial surface - increase of oil content is the conventional means of smoothing and decreasing the tactile identity of the surface.

The small longitudinal rectangle at top right marginal corner of the format reappears in several paintings; exposing the chromatic and tonal quality of the underpainting, and is the result of the underlayers of paint having been masked from successive layers and glazes of paint by the clips which attached the board to the easel. Generally such rectangles have been eliminated but where such form is kept it serves to retain the shape and colour of the intrusive clip which, during the working process, assumed a conscious and subconscious formal and aesthetic presence.

The conceptual ramifications of such a "device" are interesting but go beyond the scope of this analysis.

*Morphological is used in the general sense.
morphai (shape) - logos (logic).



5. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm) April 1981

Illustration 5.

The analysis of pictorial values introduces formal developments which are crucial and of considerable relevance to all subsequent work.

The aesthetic transposition of the material qualities of the object or datum, in this case the bottle being the dominant example, dislocates the depicted object from its physical and temporal context on the most basic level - that of matter and substance. This moment of disengagement, perceptually informed, invests the depicted object with profound formal value.

The application of collage represents an absolute resolution of the progressive tendency (sequentially evident in the preceding paintings) toward the definition and articulation of the objective plane or surface of the painting. The bottle (previously presented in subjective relation to the normative convention of the picture plane) has broken the normative surface tension of two-dimensionality, thereby assuming objective form. The bottle is no longer represented as an image occupying an "illusory" space behind the picture plane, nor is it represented as a figure co-extensive with the two-dimensionality of the pictorial surface but it becomes form; in front of the picture plane and pictorial surface, engaging actual space, the three-dimensional space occupied by the artist and spectator.

The use of canvas as the collage material is determined primarily by factors such as its material compatibility and the linear properties of the fractured edge - gained by tearing the material or cutting at variance with the warp or woof but also the canvas admits a conceptual eccentricity which, although it is completely personal, may be of interest to the reader: the format made of paper composition board (paper "applied onto canvas" being a traditional mode of collage) and the material of the bottle-form is canvas - a conscious reversal of procedure which has the anecdotal implication of the picture being seen from behind.

The aesthetic protrusion and independence of the raised form of the bottle produces an element of negative perspective which is consciously diminished by the graphic displacement of its shape - the chromatic and tonal definition of the shape of the bottle does not coincide with its physical relief shape

The bottle's aesthetic independence is further diminished by its intersection with adjacent objects and by the disintegration of its own composite structure. The label which serves as one of the positive focal points of the composition is depressed and of negative relief value in relation to the raised surface of the bottle. As a positive focal figure it corresponds in shape and tonality to the figure of the newspaper cutting.

The unity of the general chromatic scale of the composition produces a spatial unity which counteracts the disintegrated appearance of shapes and the eccentric displacement and orientation of rectilinear objects.



6. Still-life. Oil on board (38 x 33 cm) April 1981

Illustration 6.

Dialectical tensions between subjective and objective space remains important as contrasting qualities of the forms are progressively analysed and diversified.

The aesthetic synthesis of an encaustic wax and oil painting technique infuses the form of the bottle with an extremely sensual value - the product of the plastic appeal of modulated wax and the chromatic resonance characteristic of the iron-oxide related pigments. The physical assertiveness of the bottle and the visual quiescence of the related upper third of the composition introduces a complementary tension which is progressively diminished towards the foreground, remaining intentionally unresolved. Directional articulation of gestural brushstrokes in areas such as the foreground and the form of the parcel, express an increasing interest in surface cohesion and extension.

Use of positive line to describe the serpentine fold of the parcel; use of negative line - describing the displaced form of the vase, and the use of expressive incidental line along the edges of the shape of the bottle and newspaper cutting together evince an increasingly diverse analysis of line.

The fusion of adjacent shapes and objects such as that of the bottle, its orthogonally projected shadow, the figure of the vase, and the lateral oval of shadows indicate a concern with collective structural relationships. Composite shapes and forms which together constitute relational complexes or structural amalgams become as significant as the individual forms of separate objects.

Curvilinear and non-geometric shapes such as the dark oval configuration of composite shadows are reintroduced in Series 2.



7. Still-life. Oil on board (50 x 45 cm) May 1981

Illustration 7.

The last composition of the first sub-series continues the process of analysis of the relative spatial values of form.

Assimilating the procedure of serial analysis this painting manifests an inherent sequential or progressive method of defining form - a method governed by a developmental discretion which spans the entire series of paintings. Perhaps this is best illustrated through an appraisal of the process.

The initial surface consists of a gesso or chalk ground of uniform thickness which through conventional sculptural method has been chiseled away leaving the positive shapes which are evident; the bottle and part of the table plane, thus constituting an inversion of the additive or positive techniques applied in the preceding works. Formerly, the use of collage and relief techniques were confined to an accumulative or constructive process; positively applying material to a given surface or plane. Conversely, this latter process involves the active physical and material negation of the initial or primary plane to achieve formal definition.

Subsequent stages of execution include multiple layers of underpainting and glazes in conjunction with the application of scored lines which reveal the different substrata of paint or penetrate through the paint and into the ground - the "ground" in this case being the positive raised "figure" of the bottle.

In addition to reaffirming the objective value of the painting as an independent form the technique of analysis has invested the pictorial and spatial values of form with further complexity.

The tactile and chromatic character of the intervening surface evoke a quality which may be described as a bland sensuality devoid of the emotive persuasion of colour.

The objects depicted apart from each other in a composition of separated shapes establish a configuration of relative chromatic and tonal focal points which in relation to the extensions of complex and intervening spatial forms and planes, constitute a simple symmetrical composition. Increasing interest in intervening space assumes progressive importance in subsequent work.



8. Still-life. Oil on board. (33 x 38 cm) June 1981

Illustration 8.

With the introduction of a horizontal format and different arrangement of still-life objects the painting departs from the familiarity of the subject matter and composition of the preceding sub-series.

The central two-dimensional division of the pictorial plane, the restrained use of colour and plastic values and the quadrilateral configuration of focal points reduce the expressive aspects of the composition and medium. The objects are represented apart from each other and indicate a revived interest in the relationships between separate figures.

The pigment is used with oil of turpentine and is applied on a half-chalk ground which also contains relatively small volume of oil. By contrast to previous paintings which asserted the two-dimensional nature of pictorial form by disintegrating the autonomy of the picture plane with three-dimensional relief and collage structure, this painting employs an abstract ground which draws the pigment into the surface.

The physical unity and continuity of the two-dimensional plane is restored to the composition but with the objective understanding gained through the preceding paintings.



9. Still-life. Oil on board (27 x 25 cm) June 1981

Illustration 9.

Many earlier works of the series displayed a recurrent tendency to fracture objective pictorial space and to dis-integrate the shapes of the objects.

The reduction of the objective scale of the format and relative decrease in the scale of the individual shapes of objects facilitates the objective value of formal contiguity - the composite structural relationships of the objects becoming more important than the independent object.

The eccentric or "anti-classical" shift of the table plane assumes a gravitational function previously confined to the gravitational asymmetry of separate shapes of the objects or minor figures. The increased tactile quality and physical evidence of chromatic modulation; employing an alla prima technique, afford the table plane a visual mass and two-dimensional gravity which intentionally restrain the graphic implications of the "tilt".

The objects defined by primary colours constitute a dynamic chromatic structure which sustains an unresolved sense of visual displacement interrupted only by the tonal focus of the porcelain bowl.

The location of the objects in the format disrupts the symmetrical centrality of preceding compositions, re-introducing qualities of the instantaneousness and transitory aspect of focal displacement and yet the exact placement of the objects is the product of extensive contemplation.

Thus, in spite of the apparent simplification of composition, new areas of form are being analysed - this development signifying the beginning of the transition to the next major Series.



10. Still-life. Oil on board. (59 x 50 cm) July 1981

Illustration 10.

Concluding Series 1, this painting denotes the resolution to the analysis of general two-dimensional structure of pictorial space and form and also contains transitional elements which prefigure many aspects of the problems which are to be analysed in Series 2.

The form of the table; divorced from the illusionary obliqueness of its temporal circumstance and represented orthogonally as a definite two-dimensional plane, refers also to an important pattern or paradigm which is an elementary condition of the format: objective rectangularity. Such structuralist sympathy alludes to what might be called an "archetypal geometry" of form - which goes well beyond the scope of this enquiry and yet remains a conceptual undercurrent throughout the three Series - 1, 2 and 3. But returning to the painting: the chromatic and gestural modulation of the table seeks to give increased expression to the transmission of light across the table surface. The perceived form of indirect natural light on a uniform surface; such as that of the table with the objects, manifests tonal and chromatic effects which are the complex product of atmospheric diffusion, primary shadows resulting from the primary light source such as the studio window, secondary and tertiary shadows resulting from indirect light reflected from adjacent planes such as studio walls and ceiling, chromatic shadows reflected by the colours of objects and subsidiary effects such as optical displacement and after-image. The form of the table; not intended as an impressionist response to ephemeral phenomena of a finite perceptual moment, is the product of several months' observation of the table plane in constant and pervasive light. The form of the table is concerned with confirming a factor which has become increasingly evident in the Series: transience is one of the cogent forms of the lit surface. Relative densities of perceived light and shadow are articulated by corresponding densities and masses of colour, tonality and material with respect to the two-dimensional nature of the pictorial surface, giving form to the quality of transience.

The admission of drips of paint on the upper left corner of the table manifests the evidence of actual gravity acting upon matter, thus revealing the material nature of the process in contrast to the volition of directional and gestural brushwork.

The universal and yet covert presence of iron oxide related pigments provide contrasts between blue and orange values with an underlying unity. Chromatic unity is also achieved by successive layers of premeditated underpainting. Strong earth related colours underlying a form such as that of the parcel give the white an aesthetic mass which cannot be achieved by the alla prima application of the white titanium on a white ground.

Such concerns indicate an increased assimilation of the two-dimensional function of the form of the table and a resolution of the spatial ambiguities which occurred in the intermediate spaces of earlier compositions. The figures of the objects refer to a less abstract degree of pictorial form.

The objects are presented in varying degrees of perspectival negation with an object such as the bowl referring to definite multiple viewpoints. Line defines the extrinsic shape of the jug and the complex progressions of two-dimensional typography and the decorative figures on the tea tin. Gestural configurations of brushstrokes defining the objects add directional and linear complexity to the composition.

The composition regarded as the conclusion to the first major Series has reached a degree of complexity where it becomes necessary to distinguish between specific areas of formal concern.

Series 2 : SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

Series 1 involved the dissemination and analysis of the general conditions of pictorial structure and the latter paintings of the Series suggested the need to isolate specific formal problems to avoid analytical complications.

Series 2 consists of groupings or sub-series of works which are intended to analyse specific areas of formal concern. As a whole, Series 2 continues to develop sequentially.



11. Still-life. Oil on board. (33 x 38 cm) July 1981



12. Still-life. Oil on board. (25 x 27 cm) August 1981

Illustrations 11 - 12.

This minor grouping of paintings serves to introduce and analyse the formal function and relative autonomy of a dominant chromatic key.

The formal means of colour are often impeded by the subjectivity of colour perception - the psychological and emotive qualities of chromatic association tending to function simultaneously with, but independently of form. Of the primary colours, red and blue respectively are charged with associations such as those of fire, blood, passion, danger and heat, and sky, sub-marine space and coolness. The use of the particular yellow was determined by the fact that of the three primaries, yellow appears to be the least prejudiced by semantic association and this appears to be the "purest" or most abstract chromatic option, and secondly because of an atonal quality and vibrant lightness of the cadmium sulfide group of yellow pigments.

Reaffirming the appearance of visual passage and the dynamic interaction of light and colour which in the previous painting (Illustration 10) was confined to the rectangular shape within the format, the gestural modulations extend across the surface of the format (See Illustration 11), breaking the planar constraints of shape and thus transferring formal and aesthetic agency from shape to colour.

The spatial ambivalence of yellow (Illustration 11) is consciously limited by integrating it with the pictorial surface by the admission of the white ground between the brushstrokes, by retaining the ground which remains visible through areas of translucently applied medium and by the graphic definition of the physical action of the brushstrokes. The small white rectangles left by the masking effect of the easel clips again testify to the objective ground and process. The objects (Illustration 11) derive their chromatic values from the primary roots of red and blue, transposed from latent red and blue values perceptible in the actual objects, and collectively constitute a dominant triangular figure produced between the three large objects which cast shadows, and which is diagonally intersected by the transversal progression of the three red figures. The rational geometry of such a structure is formed by axial relationships between chromatic focal points.

The tactile definition of the table plane (Illustration 12) infuses the gestural modulation of yellow pigment with material objectivity and defines complex linear, directional and rhythmical passages which impart a dynamic sense of surface cohesion. Corresponding increases of tonal and chromatic scale infuse the forms of objects with greater spatial cohesion and focal autonomy.

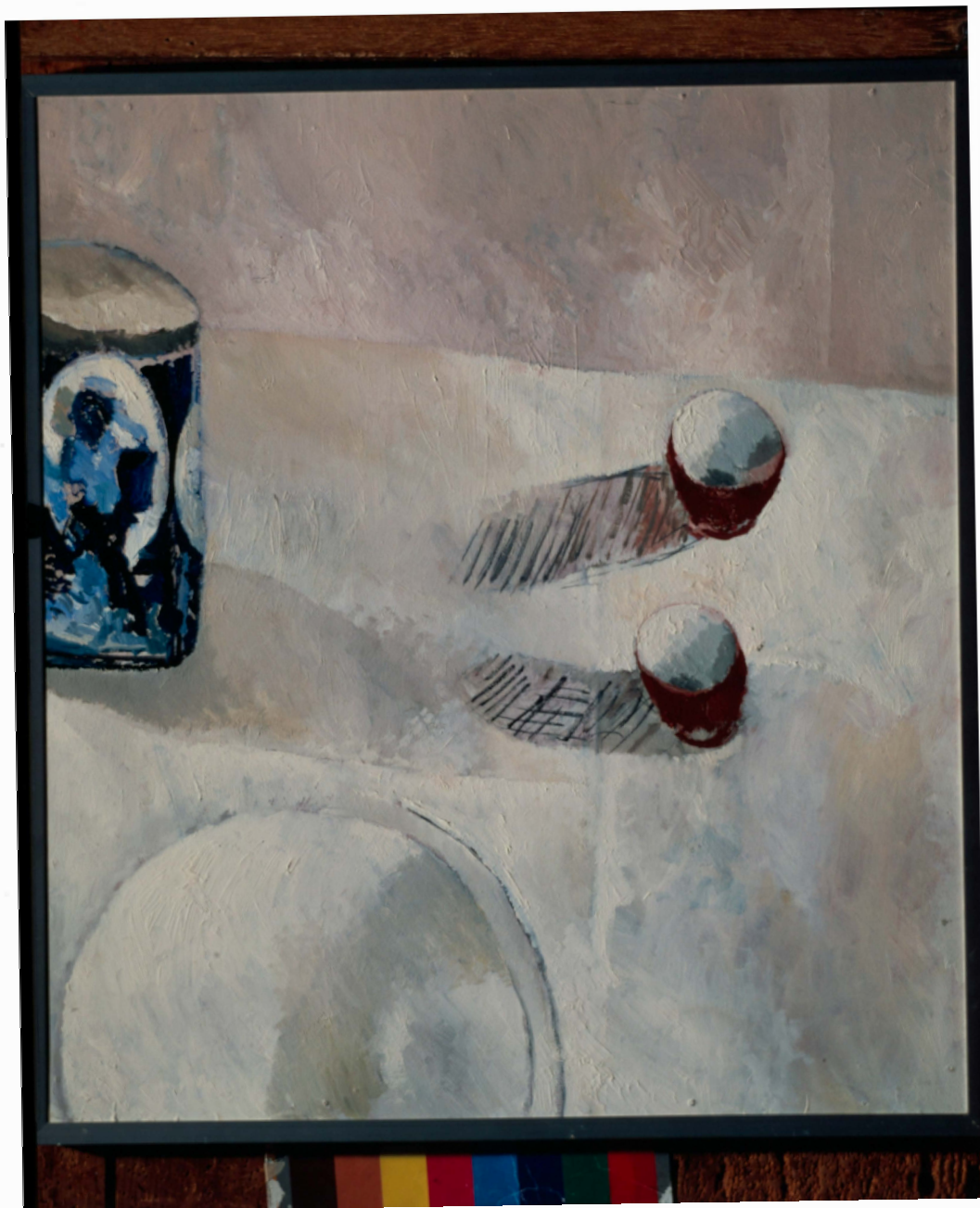
Both paintings suggest that colour derives much of its formal logic through physical elements such as area, shape and texture.



13. Still-life. Oil on board. (35 x 30 cm) August 1981



14. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm) August 1981



15. Still-life. Oil on board. (50 x 45 cm) September 1981

Illustrations 13 - 15

Thus far, with few exceptions, the forms of the objects have constituted composite focal structures within the compositions and where the objects have intersected the perimeter of the picture plane such intersections have been secondary to the composite focal structures. Where the shape of the table has been contained within the format or conversely, excluded from the composition, such developments have been burdened with personal, conceptual interpretations of, and reactions to pictorial convention. Such factors have inhibited the perceptual and visual recourse to independent space.

Essentially this sub-series of paintings is preoccupied with the analytical affirmation of the form of spatial interval and concomitant decentralization of composite focal structures of the objects. The first work of the group (Illustration 13) may be regarded in relation to the preceding work (Illustration 12) as a transitional or intermediate painting by virtue of its tactile and gestural definition of chromatic modulations which are derived from a primary chromatic scale; which in this case is very muted. The observed still-life comprised four objects namely the blue tea tin, the white porcelain bowl and two oriental tea bowls. The exclusion of the porcelain bowl is the result of an exclusive view of part of the still-life arrangement - the bowl remained on the table during the execution of the painting and by means of lateral focal displacement it "shifted" out of the composition as it were. The exclusion of part of the tea tin and the amount of "empty" incidental space occupying the conventional focal and aesthetic centre of the format engenders an empathetic sense of shift or displacement.

If the actual data of the still-life as described by the painting were being seen objectively through some sort of mechanical viewfinder, one would instinctively want to adjust or move the focus of attention; even if momentarily to the left, to perceive the extent of the tea tin. It is this empathetic "want" which plays a significant role in sustaining the eccentric focal function of the objects.

Technically and aesthetically the second and third paintings (Illustrations 13 and 14) represent a more complex articulation of negative planes which are the product of multiple glazes of paint over chromatic modulations and the subsequent layers are mixed from a range of potent primary, secondary and tertiary pigments and muted with white titanium pigment. This generates powerful and yet restrained spatial passage which has a superficial appearance of monotonous and neutral continuity but is inherently complex and dynamic.

The cropped objects (Illustration 14) by associative projection refer to spatial extensions and to a composite relationship of objects at the periphery of the composition and beyond. The most definite structures are those of the shadows; particularly that of the porcelain bowl, and the rectilinear crease formed by the canvas table cloth. The uninterrupted extensions of space and restrained chromatic and tonal modulation express a sense of stillness actively sustained by underlying modulations of the tonal and chromatic scale and the directional complexity of brushwork.

The formal refinement of spatial intervals in the last painting of the sub-series (Illustration 15) is progressively asserted by the relative increase in scale of the format. The prevailing quality of formal quiescence admits visual disturbances such as that of the axial variations of the two tea bowls and multiple angles of view of the objects.

Elements of repetition such as that of the elliptical motif describing objects, the simultaneity of the red tea bowls and the parallel configurations of brushstrokes which describe their shadows, the painterly analysis of the tea tin and the independence of line describing the rim of the porcelain bowl introduce concerns which refer to the next sub-series of work.

The coextensive passage of space and light, analytically observed and contemplated, interrupted only by the presence of four objects and their shadows, positioned with extreme discretion, affirms the contemplative and "silent" value of the form of space.

52.



16. Still-life. Oil on board. (22 x 11 cm) September 1981



17. Still-life. Oil on board. (33 x 38 cm) March 1982



18. Still-life. Oil on board. (33 x 30 cm) April 1982



19. Still-life. Oil on board. (33 x 38 cm) May 1982



20. Still-life. Oil on board. (33 x 38 cm) July 1982

Illustrations 16 - 20.

This grouping of work is specifically concerned with the analysis, diversification and development of the function of the linear values of form.

The preceding paintings have demonstrated an increasing tendency to disengage line from its specific descriptive function, but generally line has remained derivative of the shapes and volumes of the objects, serving as outline or contour line. The occurrence of truly independent linear form has thus far been fairly sporadic. In this sub-series (Illustrations 16 - 20) the progressive linear analysis of an object such as the blue tea tin consciously avoids the hierarchical distinction between the configurations of pattern printed on the tin and the particular shape or outline of the tin - and consequently two aspects of the form of the tin are rendered with equal significance.

A reluctance to distinguish hierarchically between the characteristic configurations adorning the object and the object itself arises from the increasing awareness; borne out in many of the preceding paintings, that the specific shapes of the objects were merely particular variations of a normative shape or Ideal Form and that this correspondence in itself was an exposition of the concept of pattern.*

The initial analysis (Illustration 16) is confined to the autonomous object of the tea tin and divests the image of a woman in a tea plantation enclosed in an ornamental oval of its particular semantic and decorative function by defining through a painterly process the underlying chromatic, tonal and linear structure of the image, and by contrast the planar forms of the table surface and the rear wall retain their abstract rectangularity and luminiferous presence.

The subsequent composition (Illustration 17) serves as an analysis and exposition of the diverse application of line, exploiting the tonal, chromatic, negative and positive, gestural, expressive and mimetic modes of linear form. The ground has been given absolutely negative value, thus requiring line to be articulated as positive form and where line does appear as negative form in an area such as the perimeter of the table plane, it is the result of refraining to cover the under-painting or linear negation of the additive process of painting.

* "Pattern" means a prototype or archetypal form according to which relative or sequential forms are modelled or made intelligible, the word pattern being a derivation of the Latin "Pater" which means father or the prime figure in a hierarchical order.

The following composition (Illustration 18) is of greater unity, excluding the unadorned or plain objects to facilitate the integration of definite linear pattern derivative of the decorative pattern of the objects and the inherent rhythmical properties of gesture. The complex form of the serpentine progressions gains increasing significance and independence. Shapes such as the shadows and the three objects depend on the gestural and curvilinear use of line for their formal cohesion and in spite of the fact that the shapes are relatively closed and self-contained the linear development imparts a sense of dynamism; entailing geometric complexity in the reflexive and curvilinear progressions of the tea tin, and imparting directional dynamism in the parallel configurations of marks employed in shadows on the table plane.

The distortion of the rear edge of the table plane produces a dominant curvilinear progression which functions as an element of the composite relationships constituted by the pattern along the top of the tea tin, the extreme dynamism of the diagonal inclination of the dark lettering, the circle and bisected oval on the tea tin and other less dominant curvilinear elements.

The large rectangle dominating the upper third of the composition (a board protruding from behind the table) reaffirms the rectilinear condition of the format.

The following painting (Illustration 19) again confined to the single object which dominates the composition. The analysis and schematic reconstitution of the forms of the tin in the form of an amalgam of planar figures and chromatic values which is symmetrical and harmonious and which thus provides an underlying stability for the expressive dynamism of curvilinear progressions and sequences. The typographic figures become a means of expressing the qualities of negative and positive shape, spatial interval, sequential directionality and gestural abstraction, and are completely divested of their original semantic function. A personal allusion to musical form is introduced in the rhythmical progression of linear motifs and is reaffirmed in the horizontal sequence of reflex curves which extend along the rim of the lid and the relative geometrical refinement of the greater curves which extend to the right margin of the format. The evidence of the smaller curves having been incised by manual action into the umber paint inhibit qualities of decorative superficiality or incidental superfluity characteristically associated with pattern. The white floral figure which intersects the white rectangle and the indigo area beneath the oval pre-figures the gestural interest in independent pattern which occurs in later work.

An increased awareness of the formal value of line and pattern governs the whole still-life (Illustration 20) inclusive of all the objects. The use of line in an object such as the tin has transcended the singular limitations of its simple mimetic function. Now describing itself purely as line painted, and yet retaining its mimetic function, it continues to describe gesture, rhythmical pattern and shapes but is no longer confined to the finite description of closed shapes. Thus as line gains greater autonomy of form, it becomes increasingly integrated with the discipline of painting without ignorance of the forms of the still-life objects. The two tea bowls represent a personal affirmation of this development.

Concluding this sub-series, this painting reintroduces the greater spatial situation of the objects whilst defining the articulate form of line, pattern and gesture.



21. Still-life. Oil on board. (38 x 33 cm). August 1982

61.



22. Still-life. Oil on canvas. (67 x 61 cm) November 1982

Illustrations 21 - 22

These are two of a large sub-series of paintings, the remainder of which have been omitted from this thesis. The sub-series was concerned with the analysis of chromatic values and the concurrent development of linear and gestural rhythm. Most of the works which employed a high-keyed chromatic scale reached beyond the parameters of this enquiry into an area of intuitive experiment.

The two selected paintings (Illustrations 21 and 22) manifest a distinction between two independent scales of colour. The first painting (Illustration 21) defines areas of saturated yellow and red which remain independent from the overall tonal and chromatic structure of the composition. The remainder of the forms are relatively unified but the overall composition remains unintegrated.

The following painting (Illustration 22) establishes the conscious superimposition of two separate chromatic scales. Areas of saturated red and green applied to the tea tin, tea bowls and porcelain bowl introduce a complementary relationship which appears quite distinct from the subtle interaction of the muted colours. This simultaneous use of two separate chromatic scales or keys raised the problem concerning the theoretical identification and defining of relationships which remain unaffected by the intrinsic qualities of form.

The transitional value of these two paintings is apparent in the manifest need for a greater spatial unity and coherence and in this sense relate to the following Series.



23. Still-life. Oil on board. (60 x 75 cm) March 1983



24. Still-life. Oil on board. (75 x 60 cm) May 1983

Illustrations 23 - 24.

This sub-series ends Series 2 and reflects the developmental character of enquiry, bringing together the concerns of specific analysis and reinstating the synthetic value of pictorial form.

The former painting (Illustration 23) contains fairly categorical references to the various issues of analysis dealt with in Series 2. The extensive use of curvilinear sequences of pattern, correspondences between non-geometrical shapes, gestural modulation of chromatic areas, the dismantling of component shapes and forms in objects, and extensive passages of intervening space suggests a diversification of sensitivity and interests. Perspectival variance of the objects and tilted planes suggests multiple or shifting viewpoints which, referring to the temporal condition of the still-life, imply cinematic perception of the objects which contributes a kinetic disturbance to the composition. Although this development is not new to Series 2, it emphasizes a diversity of interests, but the painting lacks the formal homogeneity of much earlier work.

In the subsequent painting (Illustration 24) the limited chromatic key, minimal use of expressive gesture, the relative negation of perspectival artifice, the reinstatement of rectilinear figures and the physical reaffirmation, by means of relief structure, of the objective condition of the painting indicate a significant development of the form of the still-life. Perceptually the forms are derived from the same model as those of the preceding painting but are concerned with greater unity. In many respects the composition recalls early works from the first Series but having gained the critical vantage of the second Series it synthesises colour, tone, line, material, pattern and shape in a structure which is free of spatial disunity.

The retrospective analytical character of the former painting (Illustration 23) summarizes the past Series and the progressive synthesis of the latter (Illustration 24) signifies the end of the Series and anticipates the next.

The value of Series 2 cannot be gauged by any particular sub-series. Ultimately the whole Series was concerned with differential criteria of form rather than with the essence of form itself.

The distinguishing elements were regarded as:

- Shape
- Line
- Colour
- Tone
- Space
- Pattern
- Material

Series 3 : CONCLUSIVE EXPOSITION

Having considered specific and limited aspects of the still-life in Series 2, Series 3 is a synthesis of the analysis and concludes the enquiry.



25. Still-life. Oil on canvas. (76 x 58 cm) August 1983

Illustration 25.

The composition refers to a still-life arrangement consisting of a decorated cloth draped over a sheet of hard-board, secured between the back of the table and the wall, a metronome, an oriental tea bowl and a blue brochure which are set on the table cloth of canvas. The depicted view includes the foremost edge of the table, two of the table legs and the floor beneath the table. In some respects this may be seen as the precursor to the next painting (Illustration 26).

As a spatial system the composition has much less of the intuitive and fragmentary modulations of colour, tonality and material which gave earlier work (particularly those represented in Illustrations 2 - 7) its character of disintegrative analysis. In these earlier works the negative spaces, especially background areas, employed intuitive and fragmentary manipulations of space. This created a sense of spatial ambiguity which in turn imparted and sustained a sense of visual interest which unintentionally concealed the overall spatial discontinuity and weakness of these paintings.

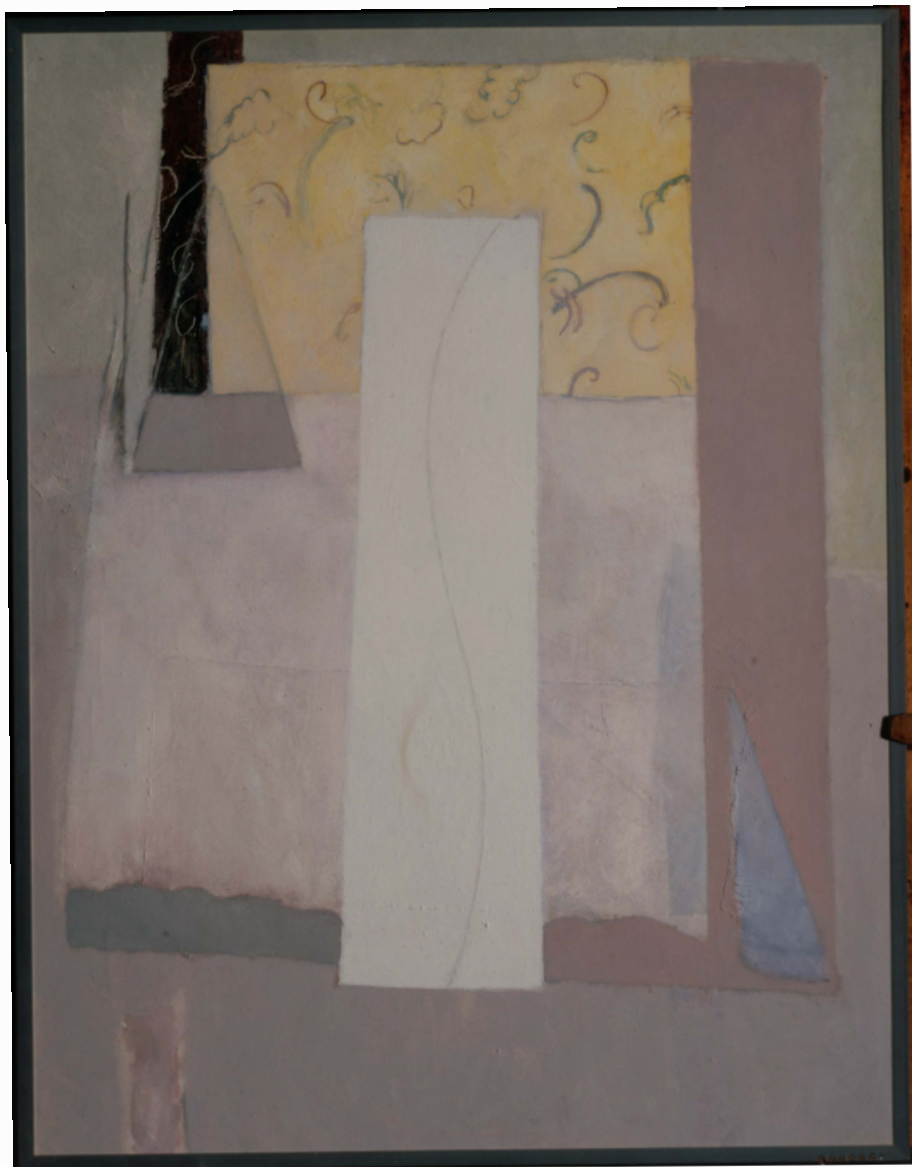
Having achieved a greater measure of spatial cohesion and granted the analytical hindsight gained through Series 2 this painting, and series of paintings, functions as a constructive exposition of the visual form of the given still-life.

Derived from the perceptual understanding and study of the sense data, the objects are reconstituted according to their visual forms and transcend the spatio-temporal condition of the sense data.*

The axial orientation of lines and geometrical shapes, corresponding and complementary areas of colour which establish focal relationships between figures, rectilinear relationships of planes, correspondences of shapes, contrasting functions of descriptive and independent line, decorative and typographic pattern represent the synthesis and refinement of preceding areas of analysis. Harmonious proportions, colours and tonality constitute an overall balance which is opposed to the visual dissonances caused by tilting and displaced figures.

* Linguistic or musical structure contains the notation of time. A sonnet or sonata are rendered intelligible by their sequential logic and sequential occupation of time. This logic of syntactical and melodic cognition is best exemplified by music: as we perceive melodic notes (or linguistic syllables) they pass time from an "unrealized" future tense through the objective present tense (the moment of cognition) into the silence of the past tense. Thus such forms are time-bound. The objective forms of painting and pictorial structure are physically unchanging and immutable.

The objects are less descriptive of their temporal model and more descriptive of their aesthetic and formal condition; the latter consisting of the "timeless" or abstract elements of visual form which are universal to all objects and yet distinguish all objects, and which are expressed through terms such as harmony, balance, proportion and scale and manifested in the elements of shape, line, colour, tone, space, pattern and materiality.



26. Still-life. Oil on canvas. (76 x 58 cm) August 1983

Illustration 26.

The tea bowl and brochure have been removed and replaced with a pewter vase.

The composition shows an increasing interest in symmetry and re-introduces a dominant central figure which is reminiscent of the function of the bottle in the early paintings of Series 1 and which suggests that the course of enquiry has completed a full cycle. But the important differences between an early composition (e.g. Illustration 7) and the present work signify a more constructive approach to form in this last series. In the earlier works the dominance of a central figure often had the secondary function of counteracting spatial disunity and served to structure the work.

The dominant central rectangle is the product of extensive analytical study and refinement of the characteristic orientation and curvilinear structure or pattern of the pewter vase. By virtue of its formal reconstitution the object refers to its objective relationship with the format and to its synthetic and constructive relationship to the other forms within the composition, thus functioning as a kind of dialectical or synthetic exposition of form.*

The figures almost completely disengaged from their associative relationship with the observed model become objects of visual harmony, balance, proportion and relative scale, affirming the departure from simple mimesis.

The overall composition amalgamates the ideal or abstract forms which characterize the specific objects with the formal elements of pictorial structure and establishes a dialectical oscillation between the particular and the ideal conditions of form - conceptually functioning as a mirror reflecting at once the transient world of perceived phenomena and the abstract condition of Form.

* The word "exposition" is employed with full consciousness of the implications of the exposition in the sonata form in music.



27. Still-life. Oil on board. (75 x 60 cm) November 1983

Illustration 27.

The last painting represents a further development of concerns expressed in the previous two works. As a conclusive work it is intended to reaffirm the objective quality of visual form.

The technique incorporates a sequential process which starts with a uniform chalk ground which covers the wooden support and the rectangular canvas figure. The hardened ground is subtracted by chiseling and filing according to the shapes, planes and tactile values of the forms. The ground contains a large volume of gluesize which gives it exceptional adhesion to the support and a hardness similar to that of the support. The support and the resultant forms which include the canvas are technically homogeneous and constitute a material whole. The minimal use of linseed oil causes the colour to retain the chalky tactile character of the surface. Reaffirming the concept of material transposition of earlier works (Illustrations 5 - 7) the painting ceases to serve as a mimetic representation of the physical condition of the observed objects but becomes an independent physical fact.

The vertical symmetrical figure is derived from a large enamel milk jug and an old bottle which is discoloured, chipped, cracked and extremely weathered. The figure develops the theme of centrality which occurred in the preceding paintings (Illustrations 25 and 26). The qualities of the two objects are synthesized to form one dominant geometrical shape which in relation to the preceding paintings (Illustrations 25 and 26) becomes increasingly vertical and central. Underlying the rational and classical structure of this figure are tactile and expressive qualities of the fractured relief structure. This dialectical relationship of intellectual and sensual values refers to two currents which recur throughout the course of enquiry. The symmetrical dominance of the central figure is asserted by its combined geometrical and sensual reconstitution.

The central prominence of the rectangle is complemented by its reference to the format. Its orientation, proportions and physical quality refer to the rectangular and physical condition of the format. The two mutually reinforce each other.

By the process of analytical abstraction the objects have transcended the mimetic limits of realism and contain no recognizable reference to the data. Divested of its subjective and descriptive references to the external data and reinforced by its own physical and objective condition the painting becomes a real object "hosting" objective shapes and contiguous structures. The painting no longer serves as a mimetic description but becomes the reconstituted object.

The painting resolves the process of abstraction which follows through Series 3 and which reflects the developmental nature of the whole body of work. The degree of abstraction manifested in this painting is reminiscent of earlier paintings in Series 1 and confirms the cyclical nature of the course of enquiry, but the painting is distinguished from such earlier work by an important factor: it is concerned with the conscious constructive exposition of visual form whereas its early counterparts in Series 1 were concerned with the analysis of the objects.

The abstract symmetry of the form expresses a quality of stillness and balance which sustains an underlying sense of dynamism which is imparted through tactile qualities and spatial passage. It is the dominance of the static and balanced structure and the absence of expressive high keyed colours which reinforce the icon-like centrality of the composition.

Pictorial form transcends the constraints of illusion and assumes objective primacy.

CONCLUSION

The practical analysis and exposition of form may be summed up according to the three general categories which emerged during the working process.

The initial investigation of the still-life model dealt with form on an intuitive level and was concerned with the analysis of the general condition of pictorial space. Series 1 demonstrates an attempt to break the pre-scriptive convention of realistic illusionism in order to discover the objective form of two-dimensional pictorial space. The forms of the objects were seen in relation to this general condition.

The generalised interest of the initial investigation gave rise to the need to analyse specific aspects of the forms which follows in Series 2. In Series 2 the analysis is focused on the specific attributes of form and emphasises non-semantic aspects of form. These were seen as shape, line, colour, tone, space, pattern and material. The significant areas of difficulty occurred where the intellectual distinction of the elements of form led to stylistic inconsistencies in the developmental process. Series 2 contributed to a diversified understanding of form which eventually suggested the need for consolidation.

Series 3 departs from the categorical aspects of pictorial form and reaffirms the general manifestation of the forms. The major difference between Series 1 and Series 3 may be summed up as follows: Series 1 was characterised by an analytical perception of the given objects whereas Series 3 represents a constructive exposition of reconstituted forms.

The interest in intervening spaces, perspectival distortion, the use of multiple viewpoints and collage, the analysis of pattern and the relief structure of the surfaces respectively refer to the stylistic precedents of Edgar Degas, Paul Cézanne, Cubism, Henri Matisse and Ben Nicholson. An interest in the objective definition of pictorial space corresponds to the reductionist concerns which governed schools of Modernist painting in America. Elements of symmetry and relative asymmetry which appear in certain works allude to a personal affinity felt for Byzantine aesthetics. Such influences are subsidiary and the analytical process attempts to reach beyond the one-dimensionality of semantic logic - the logic which governs disciplines such as history. However, in retrospect, the work does admit and reflect stylistic precedents and these are eclectic and remain of marginal significance to the perceptual orientation of the research. The positive historical character of the work may be summed up as follows: the body of work indicates a conservative reaffirmation of the formal interests of the above-mentioned stylistic sources.

The essential value of the research is manifest in the perceptual character of the work.

The practical analysis of form affirms for me that visual form is the pre-eminent condition of the discipline of painting. Form is the means by which the significance of painting is identified.

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