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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I trace the development of my painting from my fourth year as a student of Fine Arts at the University of Calgary to my third year in the Master of Arts programme at the University of Saskatchewan. During this time, from 1977 to 1981, my painting has gradually changed from being abstract to its present state of expressionistic naturalism. I describe my paintings chronologically, explaining the subject matter and form of each major series of work that I did. I discuss my approach to my paintings at various times in terms of what I actually put down on the canvas and what I thought the work expressed. I analyse the development of my work, from one series to the next, by explaining where the forms originated and how certain forms and ideas grew out of my earlier paintings or were conceived according to my experiences. Finally, I share my thoughts, in retrospect, about my former paintings and compare my present ideas about my art work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Warren Peterson, for his support and encouragement. I am also thankful to Professor Mina Forsyth and Professor Paul Hamilton for their help and concern. I am grateful to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for the graduate scholarships they granted me.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II MY PAINTING, 1977 - 1978</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV SUMMATION OF MY DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1. Ascendent Dispersement ....................... 5
2. Stratum Soundings ............................. 6
3. Interstellar Tangle ............................. 13
4. Snow Symbolscape ............................... 14
5. Bars Camouflage ................................. 16
6. Floating ........................................ 17
7. Coriolus Force .................................... 18
8. Swells ........................................... 19
9. Persian Carpet ................................... 21
10. Trilithon Group .................................. 22
11. Standing Stones and Wind-Whipped Fronds .... 23
12. Feathered Monoliths .............................. 25
13. Palm Trees ....................................... 26
14. Standing Stone, Orange Plain .................. 27
15. Raindance ........................................ 30
16. Rocky Mountain Junglescape .................... 32
17. Jester Palms ..................................... 34
18. Lightning Storm ................................... 35
19. Mountain Evening ................................. 36
20. Chinook Wind .................................... 37
21. Trees, Wind, and Mountain ...................... 40
22. Self-Portrait in Studio # One .................. 43
23. Self-Portrait in Studio # Two .................. 44
24. Fruit in Ceramic Bowl ............................ 48
25. Plum Tree ....................................... 49
26. Self-Portrait in Dark Studio .................... 50
I INTRODUCTION

During the past four years my painting has changed from being abstract and broad in its scope to being relatively naturalistic and quite specific in its focus. My concern in this paper is to document the stages of this development.

The origins of an artist's work are complex and elusive. As Emily Carr comments,

I think that one's art is a growth inside one. I do not think one can explain growth. It is silent and subtle. One does not keep digging up a plant to see how it grew. Who could explain its blossom? It can only explain itself in smell and colour and form. It touches you with these and the thing is said. These critics with their rules and influences make me very tired. It is listening; it is hunting with the heart. How can one explain these things?

On the whole, I agree with Carr, but I think that it is possible, in retrospect, to see inter-relationships, to trace and to connect the developments between one's paintings. I will do so by illustrating each major phase of my painting from 1977 to 1981.

In 1977, I was in my final year of the Bachelor of Fine Arts programme at the University of Calgary. I was most interested in experimenting with paint on canvas and in learning to use the acrylic medium in a variety of ways. I saw painting as an activity that I did, using different tools, and not as a way of expressing anything specific. I was intrigued by the different surfaces that I could produce. I strove to utilize many techniques of paint application, such as thin washes, layered transparencies and textures. I used a palette knife, sponge and squeegee to apply paint, and gel medium and modelling paste to achieve different textures. I was exploring the acrylic paint medium and my canvases were my test sites. I would set out to use certain techniques in a painting; in so doing I would manipulate abstract shapes in active configurations. I was dealing mainly with formal concerns, with surface, with the balanced, yet dynamic arrangements of shapes, with colour and activity; I had no concrete subject matter that I wanted to paint. I did have some quite elaborate concepts, however, which I will describe later. My exploration in technique and my growing personal aesthetic taste shaped my work more than the meanings I assigned to the shapes and the concepts that I believed they dramatized.
I had developed a personal mark system composed of calligraphic, linear shapes. These spontaneous, gestural marks were my "characters", appearing in almost every painting. I used these calligraphic marks because they could be made in a single, spontaneous stroke and were useful as elements in space. They could either activate or contain space; they could interlock and have rigid, geometric strength; or they could be fluid, moving particles. The marks were usually dashed on quite randomly (as in Stratum Soundings, figure 2). I used lines or straight bars as structural elements to balance the amorphous, chaotic scramble of marks. The lines gave direction and defined planes that the marks moved between, behind, and on top of.

Ascendent Dispersement and Stratum Soundings illustrate this process. In Ascendent Dispersement, I began by defining the main direction of the composition. This was done by painting diagonal lines leading vertically up the tall canvas. I balanced these with some horizontal lines. I applied short, broad multi-coloured strokes all over the canvas, trying to suggest an upward, active, dispersing movement of these elements in space. Lastly, I painted around and over top of some of the marks with very thick paint, using dull tones to offset the active, colourful marks.

In Stratum Soundings I covered the raw canvas with multi-coloured, overlapping stains, leaving the centre untouched. Over this I painted a layer of translucent grey and beige. I masked out some rough square and pentagon shapes which allowed the underlayer to show through where the masking tape lines were. I also rubbed away the grey and brown paint in
the shape of my calligraphic marks, again to reveal the colourful, stained layer. I painted some marks on top of the second layer, to add to the under-over, negative-positive conundrum.
Figure 1

ASCENDENT DISPERSEMENT

5' x 3' October 1977

acrylic on canvas
Figure 2

STRATUM SOUNDINGS

6' x 6' February, 1978

acrylic on canvas
I have described how I did these paintings; now I shall explain the subjective view that I had of this stage of my work. In the paintings I did in 1977-1978, the forms, textures, colours, and surface constituted the primary subject matter. I realized this but also saw my paintings as expressive of some broad, philosophic ideas that I had about life. I saw the complex mesh of paint layers, of forms, colours, and textures as corresponding to my impression of the rich, complex nature of experience. I felt a kinship with the works of Suzanne Langer, who wrote that visual forms, which operate as non-discursive symbolism, have the primary function of "conceptualizing the flux of sensations". I remember rejecting writing as a form of expression because I felt that to deal with words within the limits of a defined vocabulary was too ordered and dry. I liked the relative freedom and wide potential offered by painting. Ken Friedman says in his book, The Aesthetics,

the word brings order (creation) out of chaos (raw energy) but at the same time creates a stasis which, in effect, stops that flow of raw energy which is the absolute fundament of creation.

In my paintings I tried to express my appreciation for the chaos or raw energy of life. In Stratum Soundings, for example, the qualities that corresponded to "that raw energy" were the dense, activated, multicoloured marks and the bright, staccato, coloured parts that show through the sombre overlayer. I liked to retain an element of chaos in my work, for it is an element essential to my nature and my concepts


My concern was with the conflict between order and chaos and with the presence of different layers of reality. These large, abstract concerns I related to life in general, to my nature and to earth's nature. I felt that in art, and in life in general, the balance between formal structure and sensuous, unfettered expression is paramount. I strove to achieve a dynamic tension and balance between the order and chaos in my paintings. I juxtaposed the formal structure of static, relatively logical, linear elements against amorphous, random areas of restless, colourful activity in the form of calligraphic marks or strokes. I contrasted mundane, low-chroma tones against richer, intense hues. I conceived an idea of the existence of layers of reality. I saw a superficial, formal, outer layer, largely imposed by civilization, beneath which lay a deeper, unfathomed, relatively confusing, or chaotic level of reality. I felt that this relatively irrational, colourful, profound pool of reality underlies and sometimes directs our activities but that we only realize this rich source through flashes and glimpses. These glimpses are made more attractive (attractive to me, although often frightening to some) by their contrast to the grey, familiar, logical structure of our everyday life.
As people need to structure their experience, yet find that their individual, creative selves resist the imposition of a limiting structure, so I found that I preferred the liberating character of the spontaneous, energetic areas of my paintings, but that these areas needed a compositional framework to define them. I can remember finding reinforcement for my propensity towards busy, active paintings (i.e., lots of brush work, colours and shapes) in the words of Jasper Johns: "Generally, I am opposed to painting which is concerned with conceptions of simplicity. Everything looks very busy to me." ⁴

I approached my art work at this time with a mixture of formal, emotional, and intellectual concerns. The formal concern was with creating a dynamic composition, relating colours and forms, and producing a rich surface. The emotional aspect was my need to express feelings of seething energy, barely-restrained chaos, and of sensuousness, which are all echoed in the formal aspects just mentioned. I was intellectually concerned with creating a painterly equivalent of my ideas about the layers of reality. I approached each painting with the determination to juggle these elements, to paint a canvas that would express all of these concerns. As the form of the work developed, the painting would become more of a purely aesthetic problem to be solved. My emotional and intellectual prerogatives would not consciously be employed; I would rely upon my visual sense of "what looks right" to bring the painting to a conclusion. I would follow my aesthetic intuition, believing, as Gottlieb and Rothko did, that "art is an adventure into an unknown world...This world of the imagination is...violently opposed to common sense". ⁵

I took pride in the often confusing, obdurate nature of my work, avoiding, above all, pretty effects. I believed that a puzzling, conventionally unattractive painting was a better invitation to reflection, admirably balking an easy access to its content. I preferred to receive a curious, critical, puzzled observation of my paintings than to have a spectator pass them off smugly as "pretty pictures" of this or that. I regretted, as John Dewey put it, that in our own impatient society, "Resistance is treated as an obstruction to be beaten down, not as an invitation to reflection". 6

I strongly adhered to abstraction, but I was concerned with the lack of understanding of, and appreciation for, abstract art, outside of the small, specialized, fine-art circle, and with the preference, if not demand, for immediately pleasing, conventionally tasteful and comprehensible paintings. I found such work superficial, lacking the essential ingredients of honest commitment to the subject. With these principles in mind, I tried to be true to my own developing aesthetic sense, accepting and expressing my preference for active, crowded surfaces, heavy earth tones interrupted by sharp, bright colours, to name a few, and I accepted the often complex, incomprehensible results. I agreed with the painter in Dutourd's novel, Pluche, or the Love of Art, who felt that most people "detest art insofar as it is an accurate transcription of life and like it only when it debases itself and indulges in cant". 7


I thought that my paintings were abstract transcriptions of life, true to my own ideas and to my personal aesthetics. I realized that my interpretations were highly personal, indirect, and often confusing, but they accurately reflected my broad, half-formed outlook. I found justification for the confusing nature of my paintings in another statement of Pluche's:

The bad painting pleases the bourgeoisie to the extent to which it lies, that is to say, presents a false and hence simple and reassuring view of the world. Conversely, the good painting displeases because it offers a true and hence complex and disturbing view of the world. 8

By emphasizing my faith in the appropriateness of abstract painting for me at this time, I do not want to infer that I arrogantly discounted the fact that the paintings were hard to understand. I was bothered by the lack of translation, by the fact that the viewer could not share in the ideas that I connected with the form of my paintings. I realized that the finished works often had little to do with the generalized ideas that had inspired them. I was most interested in combining techniques, shapes and colours; I had certain expectations and tastes that I tried to meet by manipulating the paint on the canvas. This approach was suited to my situation, for I was still learning to handle the acrylic paint medium. I wanted to experiment in order to find a way of painting most suited to me. I was looking for a personal direction.

I was drawn to Jasper Johns' rich surfaces, his bold colour sensibility, and strong brushwork. I liked how he mixes an abstract, strictly formal treatment of objects, such as a

target or a flag, with an obvious conceptual intention to play with the associations and meanings that people bring to the object.

I looked at Johns' work in reproduction and also saw a retrospective of his paintings in Paris in June, 1978. The qualities that I most admired and, to an extent, emulated, were his expansive, bold, often crude paint application, the sensuous, thick paint surface, and his eccentric use of colour, for example, his use of greys along with exotically jangled, primary, colours in his painting, *Lands End* (1963).
Figure 3

INTERSTELLAR TANGLE

20" x 26" October, 1978
Figure 4

SNOW SYMBOLSCAPE

8' x 4' January, 1979

acrylic on canvas
When I began painting as a graduate student in September, 1978, I was more conscious than I had been before of the meanings I had associated with the shapes I had developed. I wanted my paintings to tell a story, to symbolize some action. The calligraphic marks were the free, active, organic characters, whereas the straight-edged bars or lines symbolized order, stability, authority, and restriction. As I assigned definite qualities to my shapes, I found that I was associating the shapes with real objects that corresponded to their character. These associations at first occurred subconsciously, as I worked with the forms.

I began to use shapes to set up "mindscapes", separating the forms and placing them in dramatic configurations, or painterly stage sets. The lines or bars became upright posts that formed a fence-like structure, acting as elevating supports at the bottom of my vertical paintings. The calligraphic marks were separated from the usual tangle of spontaneous gestures to stand out individually as curvilinear, moving shapes suspended above the upright bars, dancing free from their rigid order. Bars Camouflage is an early example of this format. In progressive examples, the calligraphic marks took on more definite, associative shapes. In Floating, Swells, and Coriolus Force, they are reminiscent of birds and quarter-moons. At this time, July, 1979, I introduced wavy lines that intertwined in the air above the pillars. Similar lines had appeared in the Persian Carpet serigraph, as hanging
Figure 5

BARS CAMOUFLAGE

8' x 5' March, 1979

acrylic and latex on canvas
Figure 6

FLOATING

7' x 5' July, 1979
Figure 7

CORIOLUS FORCE

8' x 4½' July, 1979

acrylic and oilpaint stick on canvas
Figure 8

SWELLS

8' x 5' July, 1979

acrylic on canvas
threads. This print was inspired by my love of oriental carpets and my interest in weaving. While drawing the photo stencils for this print, I became most interested in the flow and intertwining of the fringe of threads. I went on to use similar, flowing lines in the paintings done at the Banff School of Fine Arts in July, 1979. I used the lines as linking elements, as lines that introduced movement between and above the static pillars or acted as a web beyond which the floating shapes danced.

These tube-shaped lines assumed a more definite character in the monolith series that followed. In these paintings I saw the lines as gay ribbons that frolicked around the sober stones, suggesting the presence of gusting winds and providing an active contrast to the solid, brooding monoliths, as they do in Trilithon Group.

The monoliths grew out of the bar shapes. As I began to alter the shapes of the bars, to give each of them a more individual presence, they began to remind me of the standing stones I had seen in Wales and England, of Druid circles and of Stonehenge. I had been impressed with the strong character and brooding presence of ancient stone circles. The atmosphere created by a group of monoliths is powerful and mysterious. Initially, I was surprised to find them standing starkly on barren hills, but soon they made me feel like the intruder. Having come upon Druid circles while hiking in Wales, the previous summer, I was glad to be able to bring these experiences to my painting. I did not strive to replicate the actual look and feel of a group of monoliths, but I was able to treat the forms personally and imbue them with a sense of individual character that the bars had lacked.
Figure 9

PERSIAN CARPET

22" x 30" April, 1979

serigraph and acrylic paint
Figure 10

TRILITHON GROUP

8' x 5' October, 1979

acrylic on canvas
Figure 11

STANDING STONES AND WIND-WHIPPED FRONDS

7' x 5' November, 1979
acrylic on canvas
At the same time as the development of the monoliths, in the fall and winter of 1979, I simplified the calligraphic shapes into half-moon forms that soon began to look like big leaves, feathers, or fronds. In Feathered Monoliths they were used humorously to offset the serious, colourless stones. At this time I began to paint slender, intertwining palm trees with scallop shapes as fronds.

The palm tree image was conceived quite unexpectedly. I was driving home on the highway one winter night, listening to a reading on the radio from a book about the Amazon. I was struck by the graphic description of the palm trees on the river's edge and, as soon as I got home, I drew a fast sketch of the interwoven trees. The next day I did a silkscreen print based on this drawing and continued to use this form. The simple, stylized form of the palm tree was very similar to my previous vocabulary of sinuous lines and scalloped fronds.

I may have been unconsciously influenced by David Hockney's lyrical, extremely personalized drawings of palm trees. I looked at his work after beginning to paint palm trees, remembering that he had drawn them. I especially like the way he draws and paints palm trees, whether gracefully, or as stumpy pillars brimming with banana-like petals. I admire the literal, whimsical content of his work, and, above all, the accompanying direct, honest way he paints or draws his subjects. In the catalogue documenting Hockney's show Travels with Pen, Pencil and Ink, Edmund Pillsbury calls Hockney "A Modern Romantic," and in the article with the same heading says,

If eclecticism, exoticism, complexity, variety and investigation are qualities that modernist criticism has placed in disfavour, they represent positive virtues in Hockney's art--elements which he cherishes and has tried to develop over the last two decades.9

Figure 12

FEATHERED MONOLITHS

40" x 30" January, 1980
Figure 13

PALM TREES

20" x 26" January, 1980

India ink and tracing paper
(photo stencil for serigraph)
Figure 14

STANDING STONE, ORANGE PLAIN

44" x 30" February, 1980

pastel and acrylic on paper
For example, the palm trees and fronds were attractive to me because of the exotic, warm, colourful, jungle associations that these images brought to me in the midst of a Saskatchewan winter. I could use the bright colours I love, contained in the fronds. I painted some jungle details with swirling palm fronds, curving lines that were vine-ropes in my imagination, and humid, jangled colours that invoked the chaotic background of screeches and teeming activity that I associated with jungles. Such flights of fancy were only partly transmitted through the paintings, but others did see the jungle reference in the images and many people commented on the southern, exotic feel of these works. Most important, though, was the personal satisfaction and inspiration that these associations provided. I felt much more responsible for, and aware of, the mood, imagery, and subject of my paintings, and able to share these with the spectator.

Beginning with the monolith series, I began to discover and to develop more personal, meaningful forms that allowed me to express some experiences and fantasies through my paintings. I was still just as concerned with formal aspects, such as the strength of the composition, just where the monolith should stand in relation to the ground, the placement of the criss-crossed palm trees, the exact bend of each tree trunk that would best direct the motion of the whole palm grove, and countless considerations of colour in terms of its depth, modulation, intensity, contrast, and hue.

In the earlier open-ended abstract, surface paintings such as *Stratum Soundings* and *Snow Symbolscape*, there was an overall paint treatment with few pronounced differences
in the character of individual elements. I often had no particular feeling or set of associations behind a painting. In the monoliths I was happy to find a source of personal, meaningful images that had grown out of the abstract shapes that I had previously used more arbitrarily. As Emily Carr wrote:

I feel that there is much in abstraction but it must be abstraction with a reason, that is, there must be an underlying truth -- something -- the pith or kernel, the inner essence of the thing to be expressed. 10

My paintings of monoliths, palm trees, and jungles were still largely abstract or abstractions of natural forms, but I had a definite idea of expressing the character and mood of each.

During the winter and spring of 1979 and 1980, I painted coiled, curvilinear snakes and snakebirds, richly patterned and colourful. The palm trees and jungle interiors led me to think of snakes. Their sinuous form followed naturally the undulating lines I had used in Swells and the ribbons that often wreathed the monoliths. I used the snake image not only for the sake of its curvilinear form and patterned skin, but also for its expressiveness as a symbol. A snake, for me, has a silent, intense presence. In a painting a snake introduces arrested motion, as it poses coiled and slides silently on the ground. Snakes in my paintings vary from decorative motifs to mysterious onlookers reacting to the scene, as in Raindance where the snake rises above the waves, pointing up at the lightning bolt and the rain.

10 Emily Carr, Hundreds and Thousands, p. 23.
Figure 15

RAINDANCE

22" x 30" October, 1980

pencil crayon, pastel and acrylic on paper
In all my paintings about landscape and weather (which I discuss shortly) I wanted to express the power of the forces of nature, such as rain, that act upon the land. Snakes, for me, emphasize that power in the way they instinctually react to the forces in my paintings. Another possible explanation for my use of snakes is that when I was about ten years old I would stalk and catch garter snakes that were numerous in the woods near our home in Fredericton. I have always liked the way that snakes can twist gracefully and thereby move in one fast, fluid motion, how they hug the ground, the various coiled configurations their bodies can assume, the beauty of their patterned skins and their silent wariness.

After painting imaginary, exotic images such as snakes, snakebirds (bird-headed, bird-breasted, and snake-tailed beasts) and palm trees all spring, I went again to the Banff School of Fine Arts in the summer. I continued to paint palm trees and introduced simple, pyramidal mountain shapes. Another new element were flame-like or claw-like shapes which usually entered the picture-plane from the top, pointing and grasping downwards. In some instances they were more definitely flame shapes leaping up from behind the mountains and trees. This aggressive element came from the experience of having a fire in my studio a month before going to Banff. In the Banff paintings I began to see the flame-claws as symbolic of weather forces that came down from the sky and threatened the mountains and trees. They do this in the painting Rocky Mountain Junglescape. Here the flame form is fire red, the trees are singed snags, and the mountain top is cinder black where one would expect a snow cap.
Figure 16

ROCKY MOUNTAIN JUNGLESCAPE

8' x 5' July, 1980

acrylic on canvas
In *Jester Palms* the palm tree image is predominant, with the flame shapes resembling the palm fronds of earlier work. In this painting the flame shapes are largely decorative, looking like a jester's collar above the palm trunks. In *Lightning Storm*, they have changed to ominous weather claws; the force of the storm.

*Lightning Storm* was the first painting I did that was directly inspired by an event I had witnessed the night before. It was also the first in a series of paintings about weather. In this work, the mountains form simple, pyramidal shapes that divide the picture plane into flat, decorative, interlocking triangles. The palm trees define an arc of light and colour, lit by the lightning bolts and bent by the powerful storm winds. A glow of light outlines the dark mountains; I had seen this phenomenon during the storm and found it to be a useful device to provide contrast and highlighting in a painting.

I used the lightning bolt in other works as well (such as *Raindance*), for its direct impact, as a force line, and to add energy and tension to the sky. I also used snow or star-like dots and rain dashes to activate sky spaces. In *Mountain Evening* the sky is speckled with snow or star-dots surrounded and sometimes obscured by a silver metallic wash. The claw form is patterned and shaped like two snakes' tails that curve down from above like tentacles. The group of palm trees that bend up against the mountain in the foreground are lit by a silver-grey glow, reflecting the sky. My vocabulary of personal, stylized forms grew in this way.

*Chinook Wind* was inspired by a tumultuous gale that engulfed the Bow Valley in December, 1980. It came hurtling through
Figure 17

JESTER PALMS

8' x 6' July, 1980

acrylic on canvas
Figure 18

LIGHTNING STORM

8' x 5' August, 1980

acrylic on canvas
Figure 19

MOUNTAIN EVENING

3½' x 1½' September, 1980

crystal on canvas
Figure 20

CHINOOK WIND

8' x 5' December, 1980

acrylic on canvas
from the west, blowing and buffeting for a full five days, snapping slender young spruce and old gnarled trees alike. The chinook's spring warmth and tremendous, insistent force inspired the bright colours of the painting, the sweeping wind lines, the bowed-over trees, and the stormy sky with ragged, fleeting clouds. I sought to translate the exciting power of the wind. This painting was exciting to execute, carried along as I was by the experience I had had of the wind, seeing it snap trees and hearing it slam up against the studio windows.

I feel both fortunate and confident when I start a painting that is inspired by a single event, such as a lightning storm or a strong wind. This gives a central focus to the work; a subject that I have experienced and that I know, whose meaning can carry me and the viewer through the painting. As Emily Carr writes in her journals:

"It's no good putting down a stroke until something speaks, then get busy. Form is fine, and colour and design and subject matter, but that which does not speak to the heart is worthless. It is the intensity of feeling you have about a thing that counts."

I believe this statement strongly, for I experienced, with the Banff paintings, how it felt to paint a subject that I felt intensely about, an event that had moved me. The feeling is one of purpose, of confident knowledge of the subject, of a direct rapport with the painting on all levels--that of form, subject matter, and content. Before moving to Banff I had painted subjects that I had strong feelings about, but that were indirect--imagined scenes and abstract arrangements of

11 Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, p. 148
forms that had distant, rather than immediate, associations for me. In Banff, struck by the landscape and weather forces around me, I was able to make more direct statements, although the paintings still had some imagined, associative, and purely formal elements, such as the palm trees. This made the paintings more personal, and I hope, more expressive. I define expressionism as John Willett does: "A quality of expressive emphasis and distortion which may be found in works of art of any people or period". 12

Working in a studio that overlooked the Bow valley, and spending two days a week hiking or skiing far into the mountains, I found that the mountain and tree forms took on greater importance. I continued to paint expressionistic scenes of the mountains. It was a great energy and power that I felt and saw in the landscape that I wanted to express. The mountains, to me, are great, monumental spires, thrust up from the solid earth and remaining as stark, mute observers. The trees, in contrast, are pliable, vulnerable, responsive and often noisy, although they too aspire upwards and have a pyramidal form.

The painting Trees, Wind, and Mountain features these characters and a wind-swirled, riotous sky. By this time, early 1981, I had grown away from my reliance upon a set of personal symbol-shapes and was painting more directly from my everyday experience. I was introducing new forms and subject matter. For example, the trees in Trees, Wind, and Mountain are no longer the stylized palm trees, but are derived from the evergreen trees I saw around me. Each tree is given

Figure 21

TREES, WIND, AND MOUNTAIN

8' x 5\(\frac{1}{2}\)' January, 1981

acrylic on canvas
a separate character and form. I thought of Emily Carr's lively, personalized trees when I painted this painting. I love the expressiveness of her forms, the energetic, sweeping, swirling trees and the character she gives to fresh, young pines that jostle each other in the front row of forests or straight, solemn giants that push upwards against vulnerable, thin, blue skies. I also admire her rich, earthy colours and broad, open brushwork. I recalled Emily Carr's paintings when I began to paint according to my feeling for the landscape.

I also began to associate my approach to paintings with that of Paul Gauguin's. I admire the quality of powerful, yet pictorially static, energy which Gauguin expresses through his treatment of figures and of the primal elements of ocean and forest. His shapes and colours breathe a celebration and respect for nature's power. His paintings have a pervading mood of both intense energy and of silent calm. The people are relaxed; their sensuous, sculptural forms integrated with their environment; yet the ocean or the forest around them is powerfully depicted. I also feel an affinity with, and respect for, Carr and Gauguin because they chose to remain outside of the main-stream of artistic society, to go to a richer source of inspiration—Carr to the west coast forests, beaches and Indian villages, and Gauguin to the warm, colour-ful, south sea islands.

In the spring of 1981, when I was unable to make trips into the mountains, I turned to self-portraits. Since I did not have that strong source of inspiration, I found myself more interested in the studio environment that I had created and
the sculptures and paintings around me. I felt introspective, so I pulled up a mirror, stared into it, and painted my face and the paintings around me. I was unconcerned with achieving a careful likeness, for I was more interested in the painting as a whole, and also, I see myself differently each time I look in a mirror. I felt free to paint myself in whatever manner I chose. I surrounded my image with parts of my paintings, with my forms and colours. I tried to orchestrate the colours in such a way as to lead the eye all around the painting and not have it stop on the figure as the central subject. I painted a series of self-portraits in the studio.

Considering that my work was becoming more concerned with expressing actual things and events, becoming more direct about its subject matter, and as a result, becoming more concrete and less abstract, I feel that it was suitable to my development to do some straightforward self-portraits. I seemed to want to confront the growing naturalism of my work. Although it was still largely expressionistic, it had definitely turned towards naturalism. Therefore, the direct confrontation of myself, looking at myself, amidst my paintings was necessary.
Figure 22

SELF-PORTRAIT IN STUDIO # ONE

22" x 30" March, 1981

acrylic on paper
Figure 23

SELF-PORTRAIT IN STUDIO # TWO

2' x 4'  April, 1981

acrylic on canvas
IV SUMMATION OF MY DEVELOPMENT

In the past four years my art has gradually changed from totally abstract paintings to my present concern for objective reality. This is the reverse of the major trend of early twentieth century art.

I began painting at a time when artists had already abstracted painting down to the bleak aspects of minimalism and had gone on to eliminate the traditional forms by creating land art and conceptual art, until some artists rejected painting, sculpture or printmaking entirely. I started out, in 1977, feeling closest to the earlier, abstract expressionist style. I liked the sensuous, active manipulation of paint (displayed in the work of Johns and DeKooning), the mystical hints at significant symbols or personal talismen and hieroglyphs in the work of Toby and Gottlieb, and the bold freedom and large canvases of abstract expressionists. I was intrigued with learning to use the formal qualities which artists before me had fought to have the right to deal with exclusively; the formal properties that had been championed and brazenly aggrandized by artists from Turner to Mondrian, to Albers, and to Olitski. It was easy to take up the legacy of these artists, and I did so studiously at first. I soon felt the need for a more personally meaningful approach. I could not create one arbitrarily, but I listened to my own aesthetic dictates and began to shape my paintings in accordance with my own ideas instead of being influenced by the abstract style of art that during my early training was most emphasized and most interested me.
I have described how I gradually focused upon expressing more directly my interests and how I began to paint definite things instead of vague, illusive concepts translated in abstract terms.

In the nineteen-eighties there is no need to champion painting's right to abstraction or formal purity. I think that, in the context of our present time, it is increasingly important to counteract growing nihilism and alienating complexity with art work that expresses an individual's ideals and ideas, which simply and directly expresses joy in various aspects of life. I also feel that it is important to celebrate nature at a time when society in general is separated from nature, and exploitation is perhaps more prevalent than appreciation of our natural environment. I want to express the things that I find important, such as the power and joy in nature, or the simple beauty of a fruit. I want to express the significance of our everyday reality, or simple, close-to-home views and objects. The paintings I have done since April, 1981, have focused on the intense colour and sensuous form of various fruits, on the graphic outline of trees I see out my window, on changing views out my window, and on self-portraits. By only painting things I know, such as the mountains, and recently, my face, I have freed myself from having any vague, irresolute ideas about the subject and how it should be expressed.

I think now that my earlier abstract paintings were pretentious, with their hint of hidden meaning yet their resistance to translation. The philosophical correspondences I made with the formal aspects of my paintings were only known to myself.
I can remember wanting somehow to express my everyday experiences and thoughts. At the time, though, I only knew how to deal with painting abstractly. I had gradually to learn to deal with actual subject matter in a personal manner, to risk being very specific. It is easier to hide behind vague abstractions that utilize sophisticated paint manipulations and hint at hidden import, than it is honestly to express my experience of the shapes of some mountains or my face.

The force, the conviction, and the honesty of a painting are, to me, its most important qualities, those that I most respect. I know that technical mastery is a learned craft that is, in itself, meaningless. My former, overriding interest in technique has been replaced by a desire to put down paint in a fresh, direct manner in order to relate an experience or to depict forms which impress me. My focus on subject matter has narrowed from its once broad, fuzzy scope of large concerns, such as the balance between order and chaos in life, to its present concern with personal experiences and expressive forms around me, such as the wild, blowing, exhilarating energy of the chinook wind that hurtled through the valley below my studio at Banff.
Figure 24

FRUIT IN CERAMIC BOWL

20" x 26" December, 1981

acrylic on paper
Figure 25

PLUM TREE

28" x 36" December, 1981

acrylic on canvas
Figure 26

SELF—PORTRAIT IN DARK STUDIO

20" x 26" January, 1982

acrylic on paper
LIST OF REFERENCES

BOOKS


NEwSPAPERS
