

INTRODUCTION TO THE PAINTINGS OF
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This group of paintings in my M.F.A. exhibition represents a culmination of my painting concerns over the last seven or eight years. Ideas as to surface, colour, paint application and subject matter were present in my B.F.A. exhibition (in 1983) but in retrospect they now seem very tentative. However tentative these concerns were, they formed the basis of my artistic personality which I have developed, expanded and have made more confident, assertive and expressive.

A physical approach to making paintings has always been a concern for me. A group of dark paintings (exhibited in a two-person exhibition at the Gordon Snelgrove Gallery in 1984) showed my interest in paint application. Paint sat on the surface giving a high relief effect. This group of paintings was exciting for me because it was the first time I indulged in the physical properties of paint. The way the paint felt as it was applied to the canvas contributed a great deal to the end result. This attraction to the physical side of painting followed me (or led me) through various series or groups of paintings. A later exhibition of paintings and sculptures at the Gordon Snelgrove Gallery in the summer of 1987 was more varied and looser in paint application. Paint was dripped, poured, flooded, scraped, squeezed and thrown onto bright coloured grounds and also onto three-dimensional wood structures. These sculptures displayed the paint's physicality. The irregular

contours of the wood acted as dykes controlling the flow of paint, drawing the viewer's attention to the lava-like characteristics of the paint. The sculptures had a raw feel from the rough wood combined with the thick paint. The structures were often reminiscent of tee-pees or birdhouses with paint poured over them. The tee-pee structure was arrived at because of its ability to hold paint, not because of its image or association. The structure was not complete in itself and needed the paint to make a satisfying conclusion. These three-dimensional works were started in 1987 and continued (along with other paintings) for a couple of years. They became a point of departure for the most recent series of paintings - some of which are exhibited in my M.F.A. exhibition.

Over the early summer of 1989 I was searching in my paintings not sure of which direction to take. As is common after a painting series has come to an end I experiment trying to come up with new ideas and break old habits. Sometimes I try painting in a different colour range, or use different sizes, or even use different layouts to start the pictures. For example I had painted one painting (First Base - not in exhibition) by pouring and scraping vertical stripes down the canvas. By accident I had cut the canvas too long and there was an extra foot or two left at the end of my painting board. The painting was painted on a board that was propped up at one end

with a trough placed at the bottom to catch the excess paint as it ran off the canvas. When the painting was finished I was unhappy with it. It had five or six vertical stripes and a heavy dark line at the bottom (caused by the accumulated paint on the extra foot of canvas in the trough). My assumption was that I would cut off the dark line and have a painting that would consist of only vertical stripes. I put the painting away and continued experimenting, painting in different layouts, size and colours.

One or two months later, when looking over my summer's work with an artist friend, we came across this painting. My friend drew my attention to the dark base with the vertical stripes resting on it and to the painting's sculptural association. This painting became the start of the series I am still working on.

The sculptural association was of interest to me because of my involvement with painted structures. Earlier works were in an area somewhere between painting and sculpture. They were a new combination of the two. The new paintings gave my sculptural concerns a fresh twist. Instead of being painted sculpture these new pictures became sculptural paintings. They had an illusionistic reference that had not occurred before in my work.

Once I had realized the potential in that first painting I began the new paintings by intentionally setting up with a trough and extra canvas. Instead of an extra foot I can now leave three

or four feet (see Spanish Base). In the most recent paintings the trough mark is repeated at the top of the painting or at each side.

There are a wide range of influences on my paintings both in terms of the 'look' as well as my approach. Painters that I admire range from American abstractionists Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski and Lawrence Poon to Canadian abstractionists Joseph Drapell, Harold Feist, Robert Christie and William Perehudoff. But I also enjoy and respect a number of contemporary Canadian Landscape painters such as Dorothy Knowles and Greg Hardy and historical artists such as the Cubists, the Impressionists, as well as the Baroque and Renaissance artists.

The 'look' of my recent paintings is most reminiscent of Morris Louis' veils and stripes. However, a more important aspect of influence is how particular artists have influenced my approach to making paintings both in the attitude behind the paintings and the process used to make the paintings. Early American abstractionist Jackson Pollock as well as 'colour-field' painters Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland have had a large effect on me through their active involvement with materials and the expressive possibilities that entailed. What interested me was the expressive way the paint was applied and the different kinds of paint techniques

used. For example the pouring process Morris Louis used in his veil series is relevant to my current series. He poured stain over stain to create dramatic paintings whose image was a direct result of the paint application and not a pre-conceived idea. Louis' thinking here is important to me. While applying the paint he thought about how the paint poured, flowed and bled, and how to use these paint qualities rather than concerning himself with conventional image concerns such as nature, social issues etc. My paintings are started in a similar way. I flood the canvas with paint creating overlapping stains. This effect creates colour relationships which I concentrate on and which can change the course and end result of the painting.

This recent group of paintings were almost all painted with the canvas stapled to a board, tilted at an angle, with a trough at the bottom. Paintings like Grey Flow were started by loosely applying some stains in the centre of the canvas, then applying the thicker elements at the sides. The paintings were then tilted in the opposite direction and stains were repeatedly poured over the central area. I took the approach of trying to let the paintings become more about what they had previously only hinted at. My concern was to exaggerate and make more emphatic a detail that was present in other paintings - that detail being the central stain. The layout was set up so as not to interfere with the central

stain but simply to accent it. As the painting was flooded with colour, care was taken to let the stain do what stain does best - flow, bleed, show transparent colour which creates atmosphere and subtle textures. I tried not to pre-determine what the painting should look like but instead let the painting guide me in how to proceed, finding the inherent personality of that particular painting and finding ways of displaying it.

In other paintings different characteristics emerged. The base on Club-Foot became very heavy which combined with the very stick-like quality of the stripes gave the painting a sculptural personality. The painting Image of Ambiguity took on a rougher, less elegant surface and became more a wall of surface rather than having any sculptural illusion. The surface texture was played up and became the main focus and to emphasize this I toned down the colour, limiting myself to soft greys and browns.

In the last two paintings, (Double Door and Burgundy Stretch), I have expanded the use of the trough, using it at both the bottom and the top (and both sides). The approach in these two paintings is to let the painterly results from using the trough be seen and become an active ingredient in the painting. Expanding the use of the trough and the resulting painterly stains is my most recent concern. I am still exploring and will hopefully find new ways for expanding this method.

The interest and concerns I have as a painter have been present in my work for eight years and I have developed them and expanded on these elements as they arose in my work. Using the materials of painting as a starting point for making art has been a constant, and the connection and dialogue between my paintings and sculptures has also been an on-going concern. My paintings emerge out of a number of artists such as Pollock, Louis, Noland, Olitski, Perehudoff, Christie and others. These artists as a group have had a strong influence on my work over the years, however, I feel they have served as a springboard as well as an inspiration to me. At present, in my thinking, I do not see myself as imitating these artists but instead feel liberated by their influence and as a result able to express my own artistic personality and concerns.

This paper has focused on my painting process describing how paintings were made but it is important to acknowledge that the painting process is not an end in itself but that the painting process is the medium through which I express myself. It is this self expression that gives 'quality' to the paintings and takes them from being examples of paint manipulation to being expressive visual objects. The painting process is easy to describe but self-expression, because it is so vague and elusive, and presented in a visual form, is hard for me to verbalize. I am increasingly

aware of the need to push my paintings beyond paint manipulation and known solutions and I am placing more and more value on self-expression.