

THESIS

PAINTINGS THAT EVOKE MYSTERY

Submitted by
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Art Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR
SUPERVISION BY SCOTT ERVIN CHRISTENSEN ENTITLED PAINTINGS
THAT EVOKE MYSTERY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

Adviser

Department Head

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

PAINTINGS THAT EVOKE MYSTERY

My paintings are primarily personal, and they retain significant privacy. In turn, the paintings evoke mystery -- a visual riddle with clues represented by compositional imagery. This mystery is directly related to basic human experience, and it is my intention that it be symbolic, metaphorical, and metaphysical in content. A meaningful experience is offered through my paintings relative to the viewer's desire to explore these intriguing manifestations.

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Carol, and our daughter, Kaia.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
THESIS STATEMENT.	1
PLATES.	4

LIST OF PLATES

<u>Plate</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Baby Talk - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 90" . .	5
2	Christmas Carol - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84"	6
3	Blue Cadillac - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84"	7
4	K. C. and the Fish Dish - acrylic, paper and plastic on canvas - 66" x 84"	8
5	Games - acrylic and film on canvas - 66" x 84"	9
6	One Black Wall - acrylic and plastic on canvas - 66" x 84"	10
7	You Don't See My Feet - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84"	11
8	Bing, Bam, Boom - acrylic and plastic on canvas - 66" x 84"	12
9	Interview - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84" . .	13
10	Any Act Read by Her - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 90"	14

Any passing moment in life may offer the inspiration to make a painting. I strive to make paintings that capture the essence of a moment whether it be past, present, or both. My paintings are primarily personal retaining significant privacy. In turn, the paintings evoke mystery -- a visual riddle with clues represented by compositional imagery. The intrigue, as it manifests itself within the mystery, is directly related to basic human experiences. As such, the intrigue refers back to the "inspiring" moment or "felt" idea.

My paintings contain possibilities for changing the focus of the eye and mind through their visual elements. There are images easily recognized such as a bird (Plate 1) or flower (Plate 2). Also, many subtle images more difficult to interpret are present, examples being a word or number (Plate 3). The mind may change its focus of thought from a fish to a landscape (Plate 4) or from an upside-down fire engine to a ladder (Plate 5).

Every aspect of life offers something to see and feel. These paintings have some similar possibilities. Generally, life is dynamic and my paintings hold concern for the way I feel about this activity. However, these paintings do not

lend themselves simply to story-telling; they are not narrative in this sense. Neither are my paintings merely expressing emotions, for there is a balance of rational thought which I retain that is relative to being more objective about my feelings. My paintings are intended to be symbolic, metaphorical, and metaphysical in content. I am affirming and celebrating life through these paintings. The paintings are meant to be uplifting and fresh, not debasing or banal. With each new painting, I continue to search for a deeper, clearer perception of life.

Before a viewer comes into contact with my paintings, there has been significant nonverbal communication between the painting and myself. This is an intransitive, asymmetrical communication ranging from simple trivia to metaphysical exaltation. During this creative process I react with the painting on physical, visual, intellectual, and emotional levels. There are conscious and unconscious responses that occur throughout this time of interaction. Dramatic changes occur. I make formal alterations, intuitively and/or rationally, that cause some of the initial imagery to be subdued later or even obliterated. Ultimately, the changes enhance the character and mystery of the work.

I think the success of a composition depends on the artist's ability to coordinate techniques and ideas to perform in a cohesive manner. I have generally used acrylic

paint and modeling paste on canvas. In some instances I have also used collage materials that adhere to the canvas in a manner that is parallel to the picture plane. Examples of these materials are sheets of plastic, paper, or film. Relative to ideas, my choices of imagery are largely intrinsic such as a heart (Plate 6) or legs (Plate 7). Sometimes, however, a methodological approach is also necessary as in the arrangement of words and the resultant context of poetry (Plate 8). I have a general fascination for the idea I perceive as being man's desire to learn "why?" This involves the countless ways mankind interprets and labels tangible phenomenon or tries to define ineffable concepts in order to deal with them. An example is that of a representational image of a bird which can also be a symbol for freedom (Plate 9). Another example is a ladder as a symbol of the ascent to heaven (Plate 10).

I am painting a visual statement that arouses curiosity about the interaction of images in a unique situation and the metaphors through which they are perceived. These paintings give the viewer an opportunity to grapple with a mystery mentally as they perceive it to be and to have their own nonverbal dialogue with the work. The viewer's interest will be heightened by the intrigue within these formally provocative compositions. Ultimately, the paintings offer the viewer a meaningful experience relative to the viewer's desire to explore my symbolic and metaphysical intentions.

PLATES



Plate 1. Baby Talk - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 90".



Plate 2. Christmas Carol - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84".

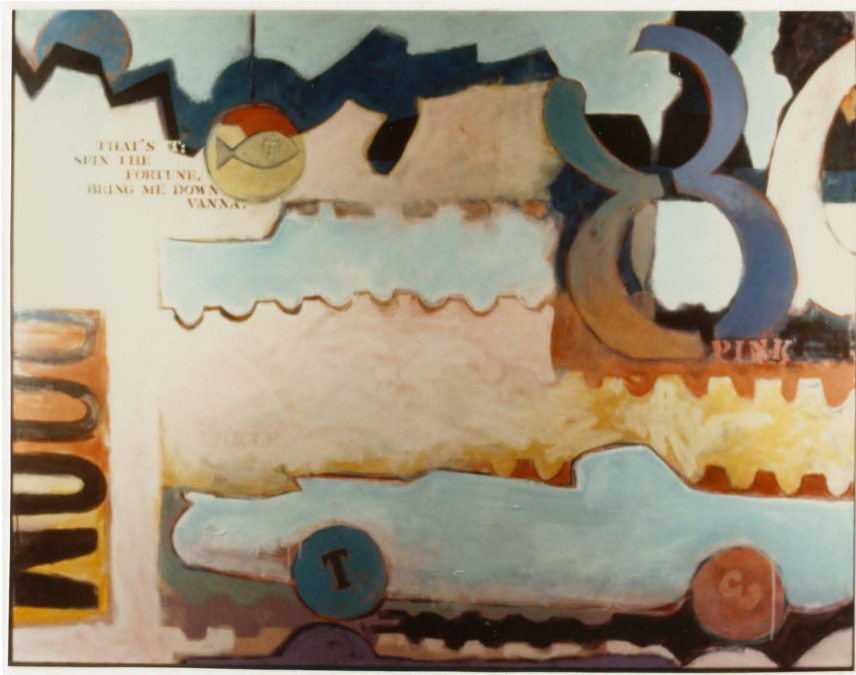


Plate 3. Blue Cadillac - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84".



Plate 4. K. C. and the Fish Dish - acrylic, paper, and plastic on canvas - 66" x 84".



Plate 5. Games - acrylic and film on canvas - 66" x 84".

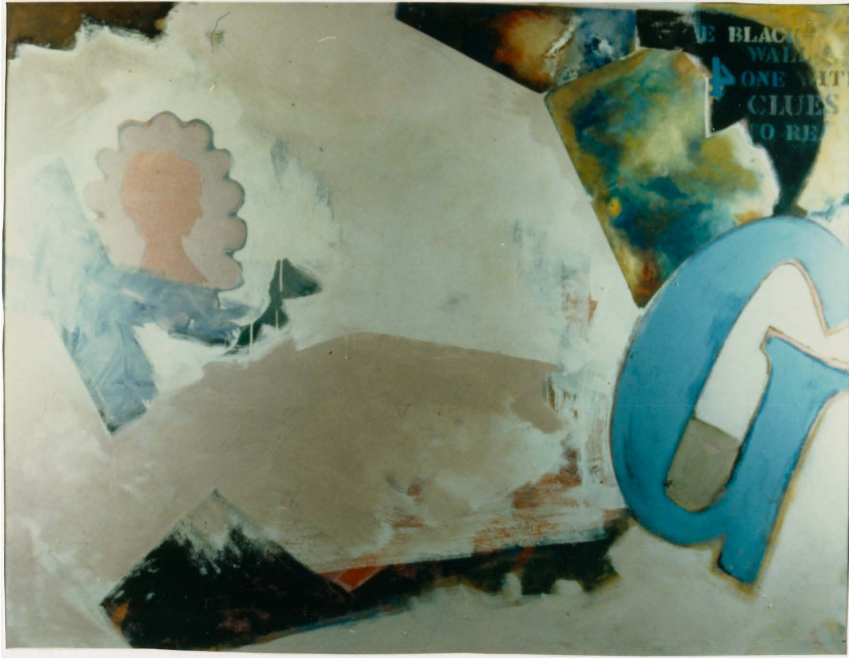


Plate 6. One Black Wall - acrylic and plastic on canvas -
66" x 84".



Plate 7. You Don't See My Feet - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84".



Plate 8. Bing, Bam, Boom - acrylic and plastic on canvas - 66" x 84".



Plate 9. Interview - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 84".

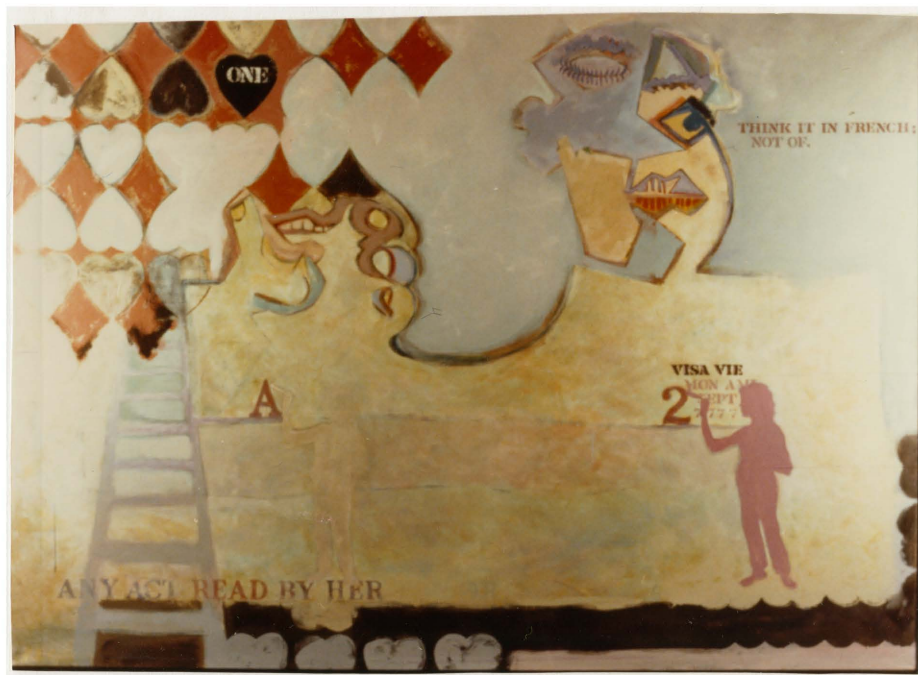


Plate 10. Any Act Read by Her - acrylic on canvas - 66" x 90".