

History of Art Thesis (1976)

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27



CONTENTS.

1. Introduction.
2. Some characteristic trends in Artistic movements.
3. Abstract Expressionism.
4. Europe.
5. Post painterly Abstraction.
6. Pop Art.
7. Conclusions.
8. Summary.
9. List of authors quoted.

Introduction.

As a consequence of the present state of arrested development in the field of painting, I think that it is not unnatural to wonder if maby painting has outgrown its usefullness as a creative medium worthy of further invéstigation by artists. I do not mean this essay to read as another of those gloomy 'Art is dead' cries that are heard with monotonous regularity. All I wish to suggest is that the focus of artistic endeavour has moved on, and that it is to be found in some broader sphere. (I will confine my remarks to painting in this essay, although I believe that sculpture is in much the same predicament) Painting has become something of a fetish. Some people are not prepared to concede even the possibility that it might be capable of loosing any of its impetus. I maintain that it is no-longer a significant force in modern art.(Whatever that might be now) In taking this standpoint, I have been accused of dismissing the achievement of twentieth century art out of hand. Before the reader feels tempted to make the same accusation, let me state that this essay is in no way ment as a slight against Modern Painting. My seemingly negative emphasis, and preoccupation with the ends of movements, rather than their climax, should not be seen as a condemnation of these movements. I recognize the fantastic achievement of Art in this Century, but still feel compeled to ask, whether or not it is still a vital force. If it is not, as I suspect, why are there so many Artists still painting pictures, so obviously influenced by past movements. And why are they apparently making no headway.

A logical extension of this question would be; Why do fine art departments in Art colleges still encourage the painting of pictures? An Art college, one would imagine, would be concerned with fostering the development of Artists, rather than the practitioners of an impotent trade. I do feel that Art colleges, no matter how liberal they are, are living in the past

(introduction continued)

I will begin this essay by looking at some of the characteristic trends to be seen running through artistic movements. I will then look at four of the main movements in modern painting with the aid of my findings. I will finally try to draw some conclusions from what I find, and examine the consequences of these conclusions for artists and students of art today.

Some characteristic trends in Artistic Movements.

The history of Art stretches across a vast period of time. It is a continuing thing, an ever moving wave, which is spreading and conquers new territory in every age. It forms an organic unit, even if at points, certain movements seem to abut rather uneasily.

This long tradition, when examined closely, shows itself to be composed of small cells of activity, in which the accepted concepts of a previous time come in for close scrutiny, and criticism. This self doubting nature of Art is the nerve impulse, the stimulating force that drives it on, and which ultimately results in new, and unimagined triumphs.

Artistic movements are not immortal. They have their beginnings; usually they rise out of a movement that immediately preceded them, or reach back to an even remoter time, in search of roots. Usually they pick on one particular aspect of that movement that they feel deserves special attention, and promises to yeald a degree of development, of whoes magnitude they cannot be certain at the time.

More often than not, an Artist is attracted to a particular medium before any particular interest develops with which to use the medium. It may be that the person feels that he has an innate talent which will find fullest development within the expressive vocabulary of that chosen medium. A period of experimentation is usual before the artist finds his way. Matisse played around with all the prevailing styles of his time before developing his own distinctive style. On finding his own ground, his development as an Artist was relatively consistent.

The methods used by Artists to push foreward the development of their work, their themeatic idea, can be broken down into two main categories.

There is the Artist whoes work is characterized by one main line of development. His preoccupations are fairly limited, and can be encompassed by one style.

His work is of a specialized nature. Abstract Expression-
is an example of a movement composed of such artists.

On the other hand, there are Artists who explore an
area for a relatively brief period, and then abruptly
change to a new, but allied line of development;

- (1) " Pop culture consumed ideas at an enormous rate, for its
very rhythm seemed to require that no idea be much
developed. It was easier to drop one notion and replace
it with another.....The dynamism of contemporary
art, its quick turnover of styles, matched the pace of
a culture which based itself on obsolescence."

There is a compromise position also. One can develop
along one line until its potential seems to be exhausted
and then, only then, change to a new line of attack.

Picasso is an example of such an Artist;

- (2) " Picasso, with his various styles or periods, each
marked by a break in style, and a new beginning, had
already canonized the idea that the Artist should
take a single theme or idea, press it to a conclusion
then choose a new path."

Post painterly abstraction showed certain character-
istics similar to this, but they did not change their
style as such, but only the Motif within which their
technique was exercised.

For each concerted phase of development, no matter
how short, a narrowing of the artists angle of focus
is necessary. In Abstract Expressionism the focal beam
is never shifted. They know their aims, and dedication
to their realization is complete.

With Picasso the concentration is not so extreme.
He permits himself the liberty of changing the object
of his attention at will.

Pop Art is altogether more capricious. The attention
roams erratically in all directions, not remaining fixed
in any one place for very long.

To adopt the specialized approach of one consistent
line of development, is to invite an inevitable collision
with sterility and annihilation. Specialization begets
further specialization. Certain possible branches of
study have to be selected, to the exclusion of other
potentially fruitful areas. Choices become fewer, and
the commitment to the line taken becomes more and more
irrevocable.

The Abstract Expressionists, whether consciously or not, took this road.

Abstract painting was largely concerned with the possibilities inherent in the medium of paint itself. This is a quite narrow base to start from. And with further whittling down, through the processes of experimentation, and rejection of those areas not of legitimate interest, the individual artists found themselves following relatively inflexible paths. We will see later in this essay the consequences of this dilemma.

The other movements; Even some pop artists, as that movement was drawing to a close, or developing away in directions not concerned with two-dimensional pictorial images, found themselves in a similar impasse.

The purpose of the following sections, which deal briefly with some of the key movements, is to show that the ground these movements set out to cover, they succeeded in covering very thoroughly.

Abstract Expressionism, with its artists following independent rigid lines of exploration, covered its area in a parallel fashion; one artist taking a particular aspect to its conclusion, but the group, collectively taking the larger overriding theme to its logical denouement at the same time.

Pop covered its ground in a scanning motion, often with considerable overlap. They achieved what they set out to do, their preoccupations were exhaustively, and comprehensively realized.

The point in stressing that these areas received such comprehensive coverage is to provide some ground for questioning the worth of the work currently being done by painters, and the importance of the role of the Art College, which produces a new crop of painters annually.

The final section of the essay will concern itself with the problem in more detail.

Abstract Expressionism.

The roots of this movement can be traced back to Surrealism. Surrealism had succeeded Dada before the War. The movement was defined by Andre Breton in the Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 as;

- (3) " Pure psychic automatism, by which an attempt is made to express, either verbally or in writing, or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought..... Surrealism rests on the belief in the higher reality of certain neglected forms of association, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to destroy the other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in the solution of lifes principal problems."

By the time the war came, Surrealism was in decline. At the outbreak of the war, the Surrealists went almost en bloc to New York. Breton, Max Ernst, Roberto Matta, Salvador Dali, and Andre Masson, were among the exiles. This group was to have a decisive and stimulating effect on the American artists.

Arshile Gorkey became the most important link between Surrealism and what was to follow. Gorkey took up the biomorphic style of artists such as Miro, and Tanguy. He was especially influenced by the Chilean-born painter Roberto Matta.

- (4) " The major influence on these American painters in the early forties was Picasso, but the most omnipresent and pervasive, though in generalized form was surrealism mostly Miro, secondarily Masson and Matta, and marginally Ernst, and Arp (the illusionistic side of surrealist painting, as exemplified by Dali, and Magritte, had no influence at all on these artists) But transcending the works of the surrealist painters were certain surrealist ideas relating picture making to unconscious impulses and fantasies through the methods of automatism ; these ideas, never fully realized in surrealist painting itself, were very much in the air in the middle forties. Gorkey was by no means the first to come in contact with them; as early as 1940 Motherwell was exploring ideas like these in discussions with Matta, with whom he was quite friendly, and the former soon brought them to the attention of Pollock. Within a few years such diverse painters as Still, Rothko, Gottlieb, Baziotas, and Newman were working in a manner that might well be termed quasi-surrealist. None were members of the surrealist group, but the morphology of their work, its Freudianized mythological symbolism, and flirtation with automatism, all seemed related to surrealism. These were just the qualities(with the exception of automatism) which tended to be purged by the end of the decade."

Gorkey outstripped his surrealist masters in the boldness of his technique and the freedom with which he used his materials.

His free dynamic approach influenced Pollock. According to Willem de Kooning; "it was Jackson Pollock who broke the ice".

- (5) "The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter."

The movement as it developed, became more and more concerned with paint and all it could be made to do, all other considerations were put aside. It was a movement which grew to depend largely upon technical devices.

- (6) "The consciousness of the personal and spontaneous in the painting and sculpture stimulates the artist to invent devices of handling, processing, surfacing, which confer to the utmost degree the aspect of the freely made. Hence the great importance of the mark, the stroke, the brush, the drip, the quality of the substance of the paint itself, and the surface of the canvas as a texture and field of operation - all signs of the artists active presence. The work of art is an ordered world of its own kind in which we are aware, at every point, of its becoming."

- (7) Abstract Expressionism...."aims at a coherent style. What I am describing rather are qualities which make up the expressiveness of this art; its physiognomic, so to speak. We see excited movements, scattered spots and dashes, fervent streaking, an explosive release. The strokes of paint exist for themselves on the strongly marked plane of the canvas as tangible elements of decided texture and relief; sometimes they appear as distinct touches, sometimes they form dense complex crusts of interwoven, built up layers, sometimes they are drawn out as filaments, entangled over the entire surface.

But all this describes only one single kind of painting the one that catches the eye soonest and provokes the greatest astonishment or exasperation. (to it corresponds by the way, a method of sculpture in which wires, rods and small bits of metal are welded or soldered together in intricate, open forms.) One can point also to an opposite approach of the painter Mark Rothko, who builds large canvases of a few big areas of colour in solemn contrast; his bands or rectangles are finely softened at the edges and have the air of filmy spectres, or after effects of colour; generally three or four tones make up the scheme of the whole, so that beside the restless complexity of Pollock or de Kooning, Rothkos painting seems inert and bare."

The extracts cited so far testify to the specialized and narrow preoccupations of the movement, this acute angle of focus was to begin with, the movements great strength, but it was ultimately to be the cause of its undoing.

Take Pollock for example; His technique can be described in terms such as; dripping and smearing paint on to the canvas. He is also interested in 'ambiguous' space. The devices he used provided room enough for development, but ultimately led him to an evolutionary dead-end.

Rothko suffered a similar fate;

(8) " Gradually his work grew simpler, and by 1950 he had reached the point where the figurative element had been discarded. A few rectangles of space are placed on a coloured ground. Their edges are not defined, and their spatial position is therefore ambiguous. They float towards us, or away, in a shallow space of the kind that we also find in Pollock - it derives, ultimately, from the spatial experiments of the cubists. In Rothko's paintings the colour relationships, as they interact within the rectangle and within this space, set up a gentle rhythmic pulsation. The painting becomes both a focus for the spectators meditations and a screen before a mystery. The weakness of Rothko's work (just as the subtlety of colour is its strength) is to be found in the rigidity and monotony of the compositional formula. The bold central image has become one of the trademarks of the new American painting - One of the things that differentiates it from European art. Rothko is an artist of real brilliance imprisoned in a straight-jacket; he exemplifies the narrowness of focus which many modern artists have imposed upon themselves."

(9) The same author again, this time on Franz Kline;

" Kline, like Rothko, is an artist who runs to rather sterile extremes, and he is speeded on his way to them by abstract expressionist doctrine. Unlike Rothko, his work is gestural, and his technical affiliations are with Pollock. What he most frequently did was to create on the canvas something which looked like a Chinese character, or part of one enormously magnified. These strong, harsh ideograms relied for their effect on the harsh contrast of black strokes on a white ground. Paint seems to be used only for reasons of breadth and scale: there is little in most of the paintings that could not have been said with Indian ink and Paper. When in the last years of Kline's life colour began to play a more important part in his work, the results were not usually happy because we are never made to feel that the colour is essential to the statement already being made by the design. Its purposes are purely cosmetic."

All the members of the Abstract Expressionist movement finally fell victim of their own limited formulae for picture construction and execution.

Europe.

(IO) " The European artists found it difficult to use Abstract Expressionism as a starting-point, because the American statement had a completeness of its own." Picasso never adopted a fully abstract style of painting. He was however, a strong influence on the artists of the new American movement. By the time abstraction became a force in Europe, Picasso was in decline as a leading figure.

(II) " In general, the work which Picasso has done since the war has grown increasingly drier and more mannered. His Arcadian visions of nymphs and fauns, and his occasional propaganda pictures, such as Massacre in Korea, which was painted at the time of the Korean War, have shown a tendency towards arid stylization."

Technique seems to have taken over from invention;

(I2) " As the artist draws, using special inks and semi-transparent paper, restlessly transforming one image into another, it more and more begins to seem that he is the prisoner of his own skill."

The younger painters turned to abstraction, but never achieved the same breadth and forcefulness as their American counterparts.

One of the European pioneers was a German artist called Wols. Wols was fascinated with the actual substance of which the picture is made, the thick impasto which can be scratched and carved.

The work of Georges Mathieu has affinities with that of Jackson Pollock, although his development was quite independent:

(I3) " There is in Mathieu's work little real feeling for space, even for the shallow, flattened version of it that Pollock uses. Mathieu writes on the canvas in a series of bravura scribbles. These scribbles do not blend with the ground; they dominate it. Rhythmical as they are, they express little beyond a delight in their own ease and dash. Mathieu seems very much the virtuoso, satisfied with his own tricks."

In the mid fifties Hans Hartung became quite prominent. but had a rather limited formula for picture-making, which becomes apparent on seeing a number of his works.

The French-Canadian Jean-Paul Riopelle, too, had an effective but limited formula. His work is an attempt to marry the spontaneity of informal abstract painting

to the rich texture and colour which are to be obtained from a heavy impasto. Here as in Hartungs paintings there is a vigour of a rather obvious sort. The bright colour emphasizes the mechanical roughness of the surface, but the two elements do not quite coalesce.

The new abstraction was taken up in Spain and Italy. The Spanish painter Antonio Tapies in his work shows a fascination with surfaces, textures, and substances which link him closely to the French matter painters such as Fautrier, who directly influenced him.

The Italian artist Alberto Burri is rather similar in some respects to Tapies. His best works are made of sacking and old rags; his reasons for using these materials was that they reminded him of the blood-soaked bandages he had seen in wartime. He also used charred wood, plastic foil burned and melted with a blow-lamp, and battered tin plates, What strikes one about many of his works is their remarkable good taste;

(14) " The long standing European tradition of the painting as a beautiful luxurious object, a bed of delight for the senses - stood in the way of radicalism."

To return to the quotation with ^{which} I started this section;

(10) " The American statement had a completeness of its own." Abstraction in Europe never reached the heights that it reached in America.

Post-Painterly Abstraction

This is the title given to the style that directly succeeded Abstract Expressionism, and indeed owed something to the latter, although its main roots are to be found in European art of the Nineteen-twenties, and thirties.

Hard edge abstraction is another term applied to this school of painting. Hard-edge, that is, as opposed to the soft edge favoured by artists like Mark Rothko.

In this type of painting the hues are flat, and hence another commonly used term;- colour field painting. The American critic Barbra Rose notes, in connection with this movement;-

- (15) " In the process of self-definition, an art form will tend toward the elimination of all the elements which are not in keeping with its essential nature. According to this argument visual art will be stripped of all extravisual meaning, whether literary or symbolic, and painting will reject all that is not pictorial."

Here is my earlier point on specialization, and the narrowing of focus, put in another way.

The two painters who can be thought of as its real originators are Morris Louis, and the veteran abstract expressionist, Barnett Newman. Newman wanted to -

- (16) " articulate the surface of the painting as a field rather than a composition." The rectangle of the canvas was allowed to determine the pictorial structure. The canvas is divided either horizontally, or vertically, by a band, or bands. The fields between these divisions are usually of intense colour, with small variations of hue from one area to another.

With Newman we still get the sense of pigment applied to a surface. With Morris Louis the impression is somewhat different. He is a stainer rather than a painter. The colour becomes an integral part of the canvas itself;

- (17) Louis spills his paint on un-sized and unprimed cotton duck canvas, leaving the pigment almost everywhere thin enough, no matter how many different veils of it are superimposed, for the eye to sense the threadéness of the wovenness of the fabric underneath. But underneath is the wrong word, the fabric, being soaked in paint

rather than merely covered by it, becomes paint in itself, colour in itself, like dyed cloth; the threadedness and wovenness are in the colour."

(15) Louis did not paint even in Pollocks sense, but poured flooded, and scrubbed the colour into the canvas. The staining process meant the abolition of calculated shape, light and dark (tone), in favour of pure colour. Even the shallow space of the Abstract Expressionists was henceforth avoided. ("the elimination of all elements which are not in keeping with its essential nature") We see here, many of the things upon which abstract expressionism depended for its existence going by the board; a further narrowing of the frame of reference.

Kenneth Noland, like Louis, adopted the new technique of staining rather than painting the canvas, and like Louis he tends to paint in series, using a single motif until he feels that he has exhausted its possibilities.

(18) Another painter, Jules Olitski, has been experimenting with what could be called "a critique of Abstract Expressionism." Olitski covers huge areas of canvas with tender stainings, often contrasted with a passage at the edge of the canvas in thick impasto. The paradox in Olitskis work is the hugeness of scale compared with (19) the limited content. "The pictures hint at an aesthetic position in order to deny it."

In Britain and America, Post-Painterly Abstraction now enjoys the status of an orthodoxy.

(20) "Where partisans of abstract expressionism already spoke of it as an ultimate, a point beyond which art could not hope to progress, post-painterly abstraction seems yet more final. It has begun to be noticeable that artists who wish to find their way forward are now inclined to abandon the idea of painting as a vehicle for what they want to do or say".

Pop art.

Pop art was largely a reaction against Abstract Expressionism. While abstract art had its roots in surrealism, Pop looked back to Dada as its source. This reaction against abstract expressionism was mainly due to a growing awareness that abstract art was beginning to exhaust its impetus. The bold experiments with materials which led to abstract expressionism and post-painterly abstraction, if they were to be continued, demanded the introduction (or re-introduction) of a fresh medium, or idiom. This medium was collage.

In collage the image components were not created by the artist, but were selected 'ready made' for use. The idea of the ready-made was one borrowed from Dada. It had been one of Marcel Duchamp's main innovations. Collage in the hands of the pop artists now became known as the 'art of assemblage'.

- (21) " The current wave of assemblage...marks a change from a subjective, fluidly abstract art towards a revised association with environment. The method of juxtaposition is an appropriate vehicle for feelings of disenchantment with the slick international idiom that loosely articulated abstraction has tended to become, and the social values that this situation reflects."

Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were two early exponents of the new Pop idiom in America.

Rauschenberg developed 'combine painting', where a painted surface is combined with various objects which are affixed to the surface. Sometimes the paintings develop into free-standing three-dimensional objects.

- (22) Unlike Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns is chiefly known for his use of single, banal images; a set of numbers, a target, a map of the United States, the American flag. "the point about these images is largely their lack of point". The spectator looks for a specific meaning, while the artist is preoccupied with creating a surface. He is interested in the idea of the painting as an object rather than a representation.

- (23) " It is clear from this description of the activities of these two artists that they represent a move away from 'pure' painting. Even to Johns, for all his virtuosity, painting is no more than a means of achieving a certain result, which might possibly be achieved some other way. Rauschenberg has for years been associated with the Merce Cunningham dance company; he performs with them as well as devising props and

scenery, and clearly this forms as important and central a part of his activity as painting does".

Pop art, in its narrowest definition, was started in England, by a group known as the 'Independent Group'.

- (24) " The group were fascinated by the new urban popular culture, and particularly by its manifestations in America. Partly this was a delayed effect of the war, when America, to those in England, had seemed an Eldorado of all good things, from nylons to new motor-cars".

In 1956, Richard Hamilton exhibited a collage entitled; " Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?" With this work many of the conventions of pop art were created, including the use of borrowed imagery. The qualities he was looking for were; Popularity transience, expendability, wit, sexiness, gimmickry, and glamour. It must be low cost, mass produced, young, and Big Business.

- (25) David Hockney was another artist to gain a reputation as a leading exponent of Pop art. "his life-style was instantly famous; his dyed blond hair, owlsh glasses, and gold lame jacket created - or contributed to - a persona which appealed even to who were not vitally interested in painting."

- (26) " Some of his recent paintings of the Californian landscape - ranch-style houses with the sprinklers making great arcs on the lawns, swimming-pools with carefully stylized art-nouveau ripples - are disconcertingly dull when compared to his previous work."

The later work of another British artist, Allen Jones, seems to suffer the same erosion of content, as Hockneys.

- (27) " Jones resembles Hockney rather less happily because he too seems to be having trouble in deepening and developing his work. It has had a tendency to grow increasingly harder and more strident; the colour seems to be leaving the comfortable 'fine art' tradition of the fauves. This shows up the extreme thinness of content. The artist insists that the subject-matter of his work has always been of secondary interest to him, but one becomes more and more aware of its insistent banality, a banality that does not seem to have been adopted with any doctrinaire purpose in mind."

Harold Rosenberg had this to say about the new style;

- (28) " Certainly Pop earned the right to be called a movement through the number of its adherents, its imaginative pressure, the quantity of talk it generated. Yet if Abstract Expressionism had too much staying power, Pop was likely to have too little. Its congenital superficiality, while having the advantage of permitting the artist an almost limitless range of familiar subjects to exploit (anything from dollies to dining-club cards), resulted in a qualitative monotony that could cause interest in still another gag of this kind to vanish overnight."

Andy Warhol is an artist whose activities go far beyond the conventional boundaries of painting. He has made numerous films. Like Hockney, Warhol as a personality is possibly more widely known than the work he has done. At an exhibition in Philadelphia in 1965 the crush at the private view was so great - " It was clearly the artist himself, and not his products, whom the visitors wished to see."

In an introduction to the same exhibition, Samuel Adams Green remarks of Warhol;

" His pictorial language consists of stereotypes. Not until our time has culture known so many commodities which are absolutely impersonal, machine-made, and untouched by human hands. Warhol's art uses the visual strength and vitality which are the time-tested skills of the world of advertising that cares more for the container than the thing contained. Warhol accepts rather than questions our popular habits and heroes. By accepting their inevitability they are easier to deal with than if they are opposed."

The real attraction of advertisements, signs, comic strips, and the rest, seems to be that the imagery is given, is gratuitously there, so that there is no need to confuse the issue by creating it afresh.

Towards the end of the Pop phase, a new movement in painting began to come into its own, this was the Neo, or New-realist movement. This group painted pictures of photographic exactitude, whose content had the banality of the family snapshot. This complete turning of the tables, back to realist painting is I think, further evidence in support of my main premise, that painting has nothing more to say.

Conclusions.

Not all artists possess the same degree of talent. There is the handful, who make the breakthroughs and forge ahead, expanding the frontiers of art.

On a level below them, are the very gifted artists who are in tune with what is 'in the air' as it were, and consolidate, and elaborate on what the innovators uncover, and possibly give birth to minor innovations themselves.

Below them again there is another stratum; the disciples and adherents of the new movement, whose work is not a significant contribution to the advancement of the movement, but who recognise its worth, and spread its influence down the lines.

There are many further grades below this point, the further down the scale we go however, the less in tune are the followers. A new movement more than likely, will not have adherents this far down the hierarchy. Those working on this level usually look to an older movement for inspiration. It takes time for them to catch up on developments. Sometimes a very long time.

It is my belief that those highly gifted individuals who would in the past have been the leaders of great movements in painting, are now working in different fields.

This produces a gap at the top of the hierarchy, as a consequence of which new ideas are not flowing down the branches to the lower levels. Those artists still working in paint today are, I believe members of the lower strata who take time to catch up, or indeed never catch up, the people who look back rather than up or forward.

If this is the case we can expect painting to be practised for a long time to come, but on an uninspired and uninspiring level. Can painting, under these circumstances be regarded as an important art form?. Surely not.

This drying up of the well of ideas has led in recent years to a hitherto unknown shallowness and dryness in the work of these lower echelons in the creative hierarchy. The degree of stereotyping is more extreme than ever before. These artists find themselves on an abandoned and rudderless ship, which is spinning in ever tighter convolutions.

They are victims of a situation to which they seem to be insensible. They take up the principles of a movement which has long lost its impetus, and pursue them as if they were new ones.

This situation serves only to mislead the public at large, and prospective art students into believing that all is well. It will be the task of Art Education in the future to remedy the situation.

However, at the present moment the Art college is as much at sea as the rest of the Art Establishment. As long as students continue to be tutored, or supervised by painters, or people who believe in the infinite longevity of painting as a creative medium, the situation will just continue as it is for many more years to come. I am not laying the blame totally with the College Authorities, (although they must bear a large amount of the responsibility) the students are just as much at fault.

It will not be easy to break the cycle. It will take a monumental feat of creative effort to undo the whole muddle.

This effort does not seem to be forthcoming at the at the present moment.

Summary.

Abstract Expressionism, as a movement, finally broke down under the strain of its specialized principles, and the limited formulae for picture construction which it employed.

Post-Painterly Abstraction took up where Abstract Expressionism left off, but was based on even narrower principles and devices. It too was ultimately destined to loose its impetus.

Pop art was a reaction against abstract painting. It flourished for a time, finally developing into non pictorial areas, or turning back to realist painting.

Between them these movements have covered a fantastic range of creative possibilities, and I maintain, used to the fullest degree the technical and pictorial resources of paint.

If this be so, what is the position of the painter in the Art arena today?

The field of artistic endeavour is composed of many layers or strata of creative ability. At the top are the leaders, the innovators. Extending down from the top are layers of diminishing creativity. A movement tends to grow downwards from the top. Below a certain point in the hierarchy, the members of the artistic society are not in touch with what is happening at the top, regarding the latest innovations. The lower level looks back to the evolutionary predecessor of the movement which is currently making the breakthroughs. It takes time for the lowest levels to catch up with developments. By the time they have assimilated the 'new school' it is out of date and something ^{new} is going on of which they are unaware.

In painting today, it is the lowest levels of the hierarchy that survive. They are just catching up with the culminating achievements of twentieth century painting. Bring low down in the creative hierarchy, these artists are of minor importance, if any. Coming late on the scene, they take the old ideas for new ones, and so a particular style drags on longer than it should. Nothing new is achieved by covering the same ground twice, three times.....ad infinitum.

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