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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

ON LEARNING TO BE AN ARTIST

An investigation into the nature and ways of
pictorial representation.

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THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

"Mastery over the image is the prerequisite to the artist's mission, the elevation of the human race." (1)

I could be accused of narrowmindedness and over simplification as this paper is like skimming stones over the surface of 'art'. I have chosen primarily to be a painter, to make pictures, so I have a great curiosity as to what the nature and ways of this activity are. I have attempted to formulate some ideas on this which concern me and I make references to my own situation and work, which may explain the relevance of my holding these opinions.

This is one person's view of many, who is starting out hoping to make this activity their everyday occupation, their job. I am learning the pleasures and difficulties of making pictures, both in theory and in practice and hopefully will always continue to.

This you could say is an exploratory paper into how and why one might make pictures, their relevance, and consequently why anyone does, for I don't confirm to the notion that artists are specially gifted people and the mistaken belief that artists are rarified beings who have no easily definable place in our society. In fact, I fear it.

FOOTNOTES

1. From a speech by by Jack Levine titled In Praise of Knowledge which was delivered in the Hall of the Synod at the Vatican, July 1976.

CHAPTER I

ARTISTS ONLY? A QUESTION OF CREATIVITY.

It is untrue that "the people we call artists have special gifts of perception, thought, imagination and skill which enable them to create". (1)

It is true that an artist may be gifted in a sense and I do believe art to be special, but he or she does not automatically have special gifts of perception, thought, imagination and skill. These things must be learned. Ernst Gombrich, author of the great book *Art and Illusion* in an interview with Jonathan Miller, stated that "painting or drawing has to be taught. Nobody who hasn't learnt it can produce a naturalistic image, a portrait or a topographical view, even though this is infinitely easier for us to-day than it once was, because we can look at photographs all around us". (2)

To depict something naturalistically may seem to be easier to some of us than others and this may be because some people have a greater tendency to use the right side of their brain. The right side of the brain concerns itself with spatial, global processing, the left with verbal, analytic. We all have a left and a right hemisphere to our brains and are capable of using both. This theory is the basis of Betty Edwards book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*.

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It is untrue that "the people we call artists have special gifts of perception, thought, imagination and skill which enable them to create new and original things of high quality". (1) This notion only goes to further the western attitude whereby art is elitist and that something we all have the potential to create has become confined to the sphere of the artist. It fosters the mistaken belief that artists are rarified beings who have no easily definable place in our society.

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To depict something naturalistically may seem to be easier to some of us than others and this may be because some people have a greater tendency to use the right side of their brain. The right side of the brain concerns itself with spatial, global processing, the left with verbal, analytic. We all have a left and a right hemisphere to our brains and are capable of using both. This theory is the basis of Betty Edwards book Drawing on

the Right Side of the Brain. Why some people should not use the right side of their brain as much as, or less than the left, may be related to the fact that since we enter school as children the emphasis is placed on numerics and linguistics.

According to Francis Pratt, most people are born with similar perceptual potentials. "People who become skillful depictees do so primarily because they learn to realise these potentials appropriately, not because they are born with superior ones. Nevertheless, the nature of the potentials determines what can be learnt and therefore any theory of depiction must take into account the structure of the processing mechanisms that provide them". (3) Betty Edwards believes that students of normal intelligence who have sufficient eye-hand co-ordination to thread a needle or bat a baseball can be taught sufficient visual skills to enable them to draw the figure well enough to prevent the rejection of art as a self-expressive activity. (4) She has compared learning to draw with learning to ride a bicycle. You have to try and get used to it and get better with practice. "Drawing has got a lot to do with the principle that causes a son to walk like his father". (5)

The problem is compounded, Edwards believes, by the concept of 'talent'. Whereas bicycle riding is considered to be a skill available to nearly everyone, skill in drawing seems to be linked to a somewhat mysterious talent which is not inherent in everyone. Talent is a natural Capacity for success in some

department of mental or physical activity, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary - but talent alone does not produce results. Hard work does. Samuel Beckett and Jack Yeats believed that if one had talent they should dedicate themselves to using it.

Creativity has been studied at great length by Psychologists and Philosophers, but has not been scientifically defined as most of the definitions are ambiguous and have examined creativity as a loose term. Various popular meanings of creativity have been put forward. The most popular way of looking at creativity has been to emphasise the making of something 'new' and 'different' or 'unique', but it may even refer to the attitude which may persist even when nothing new is created. I opt for the notion that something is made; for an idea exists only as an idea until it is realised. John Dewey wrote, "a very humble experience is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory or intellectual content, but a theory apart from experience cannot be grasped even as a theory". (6)

Despite changes in the theories of art and creativity there are some universal underlying principles which have been formulated. The creative process is generated by emotional and intuitive feelings which we all have. These feelings are modified and structured by intellectual analysis and eventually given physical form, manifested through manual skill. This proposition, that the creative process is energised by the harmonious interplay of the three aspects of man's makeup is the hypothesis of Richard

Guyatts lecture 'Head, Heart and Hand' (7). Guyatt claimed that emotions are the mainspring of creation and this I firmly believe. This may explain somehow what Betty Edwards meant by "Mysterious Talent". Francis Bacon in an interview with David Sylvester says

"...I don't think one can explain it. It would be like trying to explain the unconscious. It's always hopeless talking about painting - one never does anything but talk around it - because if you could explain your painting, you would be exploring your instincts". (8)

The Russian Philosopher, P.D. Ouspensky in his book, Tertium Organum, noted that the emotions are instruments of knowledge. He says "in no case are emotions merely organs of feeling for feelings sake; they are all organs of knowledge. In every emotion man knows something that we would not know without its aid - something that he could only know by no other emotion - by no effort of the intellect. Emotions serve knowledge. There are things and relations which can be known only emotionally - and only through a given emotion". (9) By this we can realise that if a person had intellect only and no emotions, if they could only reason, then they would understand very little. Shamshad Hussain noted that curiosity is the root of all knowledge. Curiosity is instinctive and related to emotions. "Emperical evidence shows that creativity and curiosity are highly related and a high level of curiosity is necessary for creativity". (10)

Emotions, the mainspring of creativity, are followed by intellect and manual skill, both which we can develop. Intellect, the ability to reason, to plan and to organise, is the faculty without which we would be unable to translate what we understand emotionally into a picture. In a sense we have to rationalise our emotions. This admixture of reason to the emotions gives coherence and stability to our perceptions. But however strongly we feel, however keenly we think, we are still quite impotent if we have no manual skill at our disposal. Our skill, our technique, must be of such an order that it can perform accurately the tasks set it by the emotions and the intellect. Richard Guyatt says,

"....in great art it plays the role of the intelligent servant."

(11)

Picture making, I believe, is very much a therapeutic activity, but this will be affected by the level of intellectual input and demands on the meaning of the work. In other words, realising what it is the artist is trying to say by making a picture. This demand on the picture may make it problematic and the making of the picture will become a struggle. As a result the therapeutic value in doing it may be overruled. "The physical act of drawing and the creation of the image can be pleasurable in themselves and this is indeed recognised in some therapeutic uses of drawing. But for the artist both the image and the making of it are difficult." (12)

So the greatness in making pictures lies in its content or what

its creator wants to say. What he wants to say he finds or learns in his heart, or the situations around him, maybe his own backyard or "that half a rood of rock", that Patrick Kavanagh wrote about in his poem Epic. He realised that our own situations may be the most important to us.

EPIC

I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided: who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.
I heard the Duffys shouting "Damn your soul"
And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen
Step the plot defying blue cast-steel -
"Here is the march along these iron stones."
That was the year of the Munich bother. Which
Was most important? I inclined
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind.
He said : I made the Iliad from such
A local row. Gods make their own importance.

I believe that there is a very close connection between poetry and picture making in so far as how the image or poem is arrived at and then understood. It has to do with that way of describing and then interpreting which calls on our senses to interpret or understand without necessarily being rational. It is as Francis Bacon described "that something illustrational is understood through intelligence and something non-illustrational is understood upon sensation and then slowly leaks back into Fact".

(13)

The only qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness. It is primarily a natural gift related to

creative talent, yet not the same thing. Like talent it may be heightened by experience or reduced by adverse agencies. Since it is intuitive, it cannot be taught, but the free exercise of artistic intuition often depends on clearing the mind of intellectual prejudices and false conceptions that inhibit peoples natural responsiveness.

I hope to make pictures everyday. That would be my job, but it is important to recognise that the fulfillment of art must lie, not in some art ghetto of specialist practices, but in a society where it is taken for granted that as Amanda Coomaraswamy put it "the artist is not a special kind of person but every person is a special kind of artist". (14)

FOOTNOTES

1. Donald Richardson, Introducing Art p.1
2. Jonathan Miller, States of Mind p.215
3. N.H. Freeman & M.V. Cox, Visual Order p.35
4. Betty Edwards, Anxiety and Drawing p.81
5. Brett Whiteley, Drawings, Brett Whiteley 1950/85, p.3
6. Rhoda Kellogg, Analyzing Childrens Art, p.226
7. Head, Heart and Hand was the title of Richard Guyatts inaugural lecture given at the Royal Society of Arts in 1950 - two years after his appointment to the Chair of Graphic Design at the Royal College of Art.
8. David Sylvester, Francis Bacon, p.100
9. Richard Guyatt, Two Lectures, p.2
10. Shamshad Hussain Creativity, p.8
11. Richard Guyatt, p.2
12. Mark Francis, Hayward Annual 1982: British Drawing, p.15
13. David Sylvester, p.56
14. Nick Stewart, Art-Ecology: A Talk by Nick Stewart, p.7

FOOTNOTES

1. Ronald Richardson, *Introducing Art*.
2. Jonathan Miller, *States of Mind*.
3. M.H. Freeman & H.V. Cox, *Visual Arts*.
4. Henry Edwards, *Art and Drawing*.
5. Victor Whiteley, *Drawings, Briefs, etc.*
6. Rhoda Kellogg, *Analyzing Children's*.
7. *Hand, Head and Heart* was the title of a famous historical lecture given at the Society of Arts in 1889 - two years after the appointment to the Chair of Design at the Royal College of Art.
8. David Sylvester, *Francis Bacon*.
9. Richard Gwyll, *The Lectures*, p. 1.
10. *Spencerian Pencil*, *Creativity*, p. 1.
11. Richard Gwyll, p. 1.
12. Mark Francis, *Howard Annual 1982*, p. 1.
13. David Sylvester, p. 1.
14. Nick Stacey, *Art-Review: A Talk*.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS. WHY DO WE MAKE PICTURES?

It is interesting that if you compare the drawings of very young children from different countries all over the world you will find that they are extraordinarily similar. Drawings from the Rhoda Kellogg Child Art Collection illustrate this without a doubt. In every country throughout the world children produce the same lines and shapes in their drawing. What is also interesting is that primitive art, designs and other line formations on exposed rocks and caves that date to paleolithic times, are also extraordinarily similar. "Prominent in the art of prehistoric man are the abstract and early pictorial motifs commonly found in child art to-day". (1)

This similarity can be found in the markings and images of primitive man from not just one culture, place or time but from the beginning of cultures all over the world throughout time. From American Indians, India, China, Egypt, Peru, Europe, Ireland, Greece, Australia, Japan. From nations and cultures all over the world.

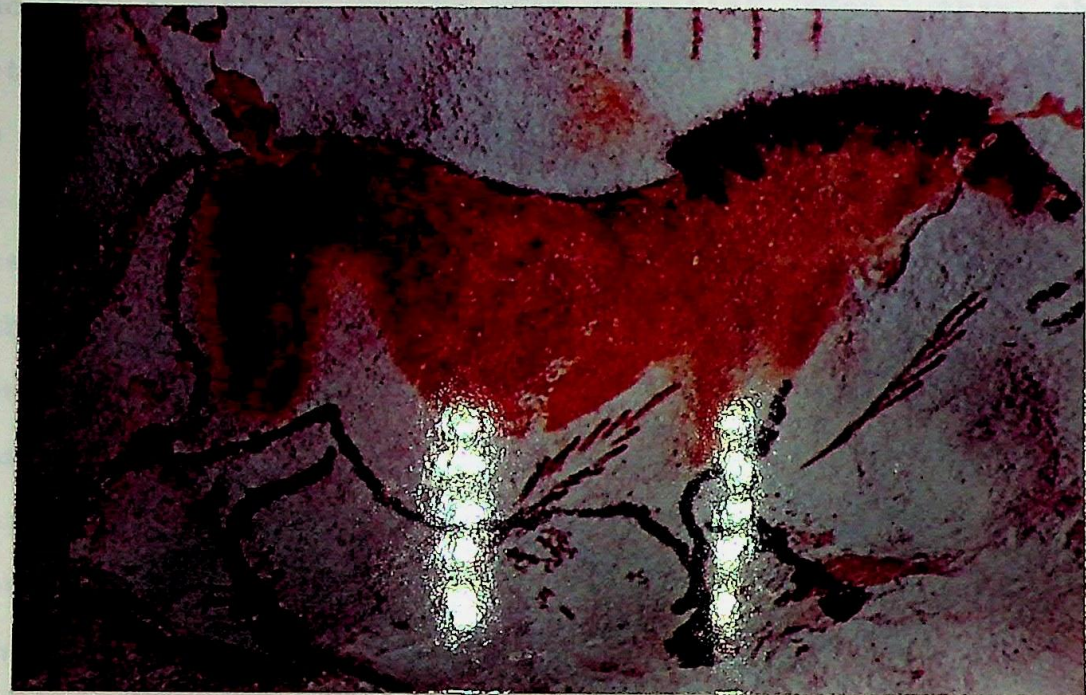
Why did primitive people scratch and paint pictures of bison, mammoth or reindeer on the walls and ceilings of caves? Certainly they were hunters and this is what they knew and was very important to them. Their survival relied on this. "The most likely explanation of these finds is still that they are the oldest relics of that universal belief in the power of picture-making; in other words, that these primitive hunters thought that if they only made a picture of their prey, perhaps

belaboured it with their spears or stone axes - the real animals would succumb to their power". (2)

So we can see that pictures represent something. Primitive man may have imitated the attacking of an animal on their drawing in the hope that in reality they would succumb to their power. We don't hunt to survive anymore. We farm and have an organised system whereby our meat is acquired for us. Some people disagree with this. Still, the value we place on images of things that are important to us may not be dissimilar from primitive man. To consciously damage the image of something or someone that is important to us would be disturbing. It would represent bad fortune, hatred, disregard or even death to that person or thing. We value the image of something not because of the image but because of what it stands for. A national flag is a prime example. A national flag is never supposed to touch the ground. In some countries it is illegal. At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago last year great controversy was caused by an art work involving the United States flag being placed on the ground where it could be stood on. The school did not intervene and several patrons to the school withdrew their support as a result. In times of war or political unrest flags are often burnt or trampled on as a statement against that country or what it stands for. In this sense the power of the image is as relevant to us as it was to primitive man.

Ted Jacobs suggests that drawing is "marks on a surface,

representing something". But, he questions, "do marks need to represent something in order to be qualified as drawing?" (3) Drawing is never a matter of merely recording the outside world. It is a major imaginative act but every mark has a source whether consciously or unconsciously, trivial or important. The fact that a drawing may represent something does not mean that it cannot be perceived as a drawing in its own right.



1. HORSE From the cave of LASCAUX

For whatever reason we value a picture, whether it be from a conceptual point of view or an aesthetic point of view, it remains that it is a representation of something; even the most abstract work. The universality of images made by children and primitive man throughout the world has to do with the use of symbols or motifs used to represent things. It seems logical that children should use symbols. Children draw what they know and not what they see. This makes sense of primitive man's

representing something". But, he questions, "do marks need to represent something in order to be qualified as drawing?" (3) Drawing is never a matter of merely recording the outside world. It is a major imaginative act but every mark has a source whether consciously or unconsciously, trivial or important. The fact that a drawing may represent something does not mean that it cannot be perceived as a drawing in its own right.



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pictures also. It is unlikely that they had animals brought into the caves to pose for them. These drawings from caves, notably the cave of Lascaux in the South of France, are in fact rather advanced in the methods of using symbols. (Pl.1)

If drawing is what I have sometimes thought it to be; to describe something in the most essential form, then children certainly do this and do it well. According to Picasso, "from the point of view of art there are no concrete or abstract forms, but only forms which are more or less convincing lies. That those lies are necessary to our mental selves is beyond any doubt, as it is through them that we form our esthetic point of view of life". (4) Children's pictures are no less realistic than the pictures we term 'realistic', where the illusion is a convincing version of reality; sometimes referred to as photographic. All marks are mere symbols of what is seen or has been seen. We use lines to describe forms but in reality there are no lines. There are edges, surfaces or planes, in contrast to one another. This may be how some people decide what a drawing is as opposed to a painting. When we use a stylus, lines and contours of shapes are made, but when we use a brush, by the nature of the kind of mark it makes, we are forced to look at planes or surfaces.

Children's drawings are sometimes described as economical in the way they have been executed, yet in a different sense they are not at all. They are often over inclusive, depicting many

features of a scene, whether it be imagined or real, which may in fact be present but are not visible from the artists viewing point. This is what Piag called "A melody of view points" or what Light and Macintosh defined as "array-specific representation" as opposed to "view-specific representation." Charles Crook argues that "childrens drawings look the way they do because of a considerable coceptualising ability and not necessarily an indication of how children prefer their drawings to be" (5) This may also have been true of primitive man. Ernst Gombrich writes of primitive people; "We call these people primitive not because they are simpler than we are - their processes of thought are often more complicated than ours, but because they are closer to the state from which all mankind once emerged." (6)

It is shocking to realise how far our way of life, particularly in the western world, has come from the way of life of primitive man. We live in a systemised world where job security is emphasised, we are always wanting, there is consumerism and wealth, the classes divide further apart and there is crime and poverty. More systems are set up. An example: Art schools and Galleries, factories and shops where art is made, bought and sold as part of consumerism. With primitive man and in some parts of the East, there is no understanding of art as we know it. 'Art' is a western terminology. Among the primitives there is no difference between building and imagemaking as far as usefulness is concerned. "Their huts are there to shelter them from rain,

wind and sunshine and the spirits which produce them; images are made to protect them against other powers which are, to them as real as the forces of nature." (7)

The relationship between children's art and that of primitive man is important if we are to realise what it is that prompts us to make pictures in the first place. The point of this relationship is that I believe our personalities are formed as children and affects our outlook on the world as we grow older. We all need a sense of order in our worlds, as primitive man, as children, as adults; an affirmation of our existence. "From the earliest stage it is quite clear that all children use drawing as a way of ordering their world, of making it intelligible." (8)

We all need a sense of order in the world if we want to avoid chaos and maintain our sanity. Rhoda Kellogg writes "that every educated adult has some highly developed patterns of thought that help him to deal with the preoccupations and responsibilities of his mental life". (9) To make pictures from this highly developed pattern of thought makes sense of it by the fact that it becomes realised. By doing this, I believe, it reconfirms our existence in the world. This to me is the most reassuring thing.

My pictures are, without having realised it, a way of ordering my world, of making it intelligible.

FOOTNOTES

LEARNING TO MAKE PICTURES.

1. Rhoda Kellogg, Analyzing Children's Art p.208
2. Ernst Gombrich, The Story of Art p.22
3. Ted Seth Jacobs, Drawing with an Open Mind p.10
4. Alfred H. Barr, Jnr, Picasso:
Fifty years of his Art p.270
5. N.H. Freeman and M.V. Cox, Visual Order p.248
6. Ernst Gombrich, p.20
7. Ibid.
8. Philip Rawson, Seeing through Drawing. p.7
9. Rhoda Kellogg, p.11

CHAPTER III

LEARNING TO MAKE PICTURES.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rhoda Kellogg, *Analysing Children's Art*.
2. Ernest Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, p. 27.
3. Ted Seth Jacobs, *Drawing with an Open Mind*.
4. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Elisabeth*, fifty years of his Art.
5. N.H. Freeman and M.V. Cox, *Visual Order*.
6. Ernest Gombrich, p. 29.
7. Ibid.
8. Philip Rawson, *Seeing Through Drawing*.
9. Rhoda Kellogg, p. 11.

In the Degree Painting Class students show slides of their work from time to time so as to cause discussion and become familiar with each others work. This I think is essential and very useful. It is not necessary for one who looks at a painting to know anything about the painter, although I'm sure it must be interesting for them. However it will be very useful for anyone who makes paintings to share the ideas and methods of their process with others involved in the same or similar activity. This interaction, in my estimation, is what art school is about. whether it fails or succeeds will depend on how much one participates in it.

I recently gave a slide/talk of my work for the class, painting and drawings mostly. I didn't want it to be so much a show off of what I can do, but instead a questioning of how ~~does~~ one make pictures or rather how do I do this as I have found this often problematic. Each new painting is often a new problem for me. Brett Whiteley writes "some drawings are made in order for me to see something, some are made to show something, some are made to show off". (1)

Through my time in College I have had the feeling that once I had found a system or method in how to execute a piece of work and used it, then it would have to be abandoned. To repeat a method of making a piece of work would be limiting myself from learning something new. This is not necessarily true and of course, I use previously learned methods in making each new picture. These

learned processes are essential. They are the ingredients affecting the fluency of my language of art making, my 'head' and my 'hand' "the intelligent servant" as Richard Guyatt calls it.

My purpose in not wanting to recognise previously learned techniques was because I wanted to be fresh, to trigger astonishment even if only for myself. In fact, I surprise myself sometimes in the making of an image because I'm creating an illusion. "Looking at a great Velazquez, Kenneth Clark wanted to observe what went on when the brush strokes and dabs of pigment on the canvas transformed themselves into a vision of transfigured reality as he stepped back. But try as he might, stepping back and forward he could never hold both visions at the same time and therefore the answer to his problem of how it was done always seemed to elude him" (2) I am always curious about this.

Noel Sheridan gave a lecture entitled Abstraction versus Representation, in 1987. He suggested that abstraction was marks meaning to be marks whereas representation was marks pretending to be something else. "Abstraction is the faculty of cultivating surprise, of capitalising upon mistakes, so that the unexpected becomes logic; and when two or three wants can't be reconciled the image becomes an equation...the more unbalanced, the more exciting. Doubt gets so certain!" (3)

"We live in a three-dimensional world, we move quite effortlessly around in the world, we have two eyes, we see the world in three dimensions. The problem of transposing this experience - this visual experience of our world, - on to a flat piece of paper or canvas is much more formidable than earlier students of art may have realised; and that is perhaps the reason why they spoke so glibly about primitive art not being able to represent the world as we see it. You simply can't represent the world as you see it, because the world is three-dimensional and you see it as three-dimensional. What you have to perform is a reduction of a very complex character". (4)

My notion of trying to find a new method of working with each new picture is not so much a reluctance to repeat myself but rather an exploring the many ways in which images can be described, hopefully increasing my vocabulary and skill at image making. There are other reasons for this also. I don't find making pictures easy but there is the point that this retrieving is a conscious effort to disrupt an image. This is true in the case of Francis Bacon. He says, "Half my painting activity is disrupting what I can do with ease." (5)

I have never been bothered too much about knowing what to paint, but rather how to paint it. When I gave a slide/talk to the class I showed slides of squiggly drawings from note books; marks made in brief moments to document thoughts and possible ideas for paintings. But these doodling marks are too often

inadequate to describe what I had in mind, nevertheless, paintings have been made from these. Some of them have been lucky pictures perhaps or maybe the drawings have been more successful than their struggling paintings. Time is the only real critic. I showed paintings half finished and paintings that were abandoned and paintings that I considered finished.

What I was trying to do was enquire into how we arrive at painted images from what are initially images in our heads, an idea, dream or memory. Francis Bacon when interviewed by David Sylvester spoke of slides being dropped into his head of possible paintings, but despite these 'pre-views' as I call them, the actual paintings never came close to them. (6) When I try to create these 'pre-views', I can only vaguely recall the whole and never the parts of the image. Of course this can be used as a starting point, but it is necessary to go back to observation and relevant reference material to have any success at coming close to the 'pre-view'. It may not be anything at all like it but I may find myself with an interesting image and the unpredictable accident which makes this whole activity terribly exciting.

"Inspiration comes to these who are at work" (7)

My work is autobiographical. It is derived from my own environment. I try to convey the condition in which I live and a sense of presence about the places I inhabit. The imagery is derived from emotional responses and actual events that have happened. The scenes are often taken from my own home and from flats around the city. They are pictograms of the world and

situations I live in. I suppose they are narrative. The reason my images have been from my own environment so far is because this is the visual information which is most accessible to me. It is what I know best and what I can bring most understanding to. It is also where my heart lies. (Pl.2)



2. Oliver Comerford, It's getting dark at the back of my house.

I have come across students who wonder what they should be doing or what their world should be about. I will always maintain that one has only to go as far as one's own back yard, this being meant both literally or metaphorically. This is what Patrick Kavanagh is saying in his poem Epic. Samuel Beckett's book Molloy is centred on a person's journey around a backyard. The 'Kitchen sink' painters from the fifties, notably John Bratby, concerned themselves with their most immediate surroundings. Carel Weight has used his own garden as the scene for many of his paintings. He says "many pictures are set in my garden in Battersea, which seems to be an unending source of inspiration. I have imagined

murders, rapes, surprises and all sorts of wonders there...." (8)



3. Carel Weight, The Silence

Cecily Brennan has worked from a back garden. Many have done so and indirectly also. Barbra Kruger did a series of photo-text works for billboards. She worked with a magazine for several years. You could say that this was her back yard. In all this work the subject matter is something the artist has close knowledge of or association with. It is work of this nature that, I believe, is usually the most convincing.

I am not a naive painter and have been warned so by Michiko Itatani, a Japanese painter working in Chicago. "You know too

much", she says, "now all you can do is learn more." So even having a subject matter how do you translate it into a painted image? There is a compromise between idea and what you're capable of doing, between form and content. I have said that these doodleing makrs from sketch books are too often inadequate to describe what I have in mind because of their lack of information and observation. Observation informs an image. To be uninformed in the making of an image I am lost, bankrupt, and the subject I am depicting may not be described with understanding or in harmony with the whole picture. Neither do I want to be overly architectural or illustrative or as Francis Pratt defined as "intellectually realistic". (9) Of course to work from memory after observation is a great way of editing and helps get over the problem of details becoming more important than the whole. To have a reference is necessary I believe. It can be used and abandoned as is needed.

Most painters don't make pictures up out of their heads. In fact, references through photographs and other artist's aids and strategies are more commonly used than may be supposed. There are basically two forms of visual references as noted by Francis Pratt in his essay A Perspective on Traditional Artistic Practices. (10) They are 'Primary Model' and 'Secondary Model'. 'Primary Model' is any subject in three dimensions, 'Secondary Model', any subject in two dimensions which might be arrived at through a perspective frame, mirror, camera obscura, epidiascope, slide projectors, photographs, drawings or any two dimensional

image whether they be found, created, invented, begged for, borrowed or stolen.

All these secondary models display severely limited visual information as compared to 'real' three dimensional scenes by the fact that they are 'view-specific' as opposed to 'array specific' points of view. Despite this, they are usually the most versatile and handiest way of gaining reference material. Through experience and our constant ability to look and observe in a three-dimensional world, we can overcome these limitations with knowledge and by working both with 'primary model' and 'secondary model' accordingly. I work a great deal with photographs but work from observation alongside this to fully inform an image and maintain an awareness of space.

When artists prepare to make depictions, they make several decisions that will affect the nature of the visual information available to them. These decisions deal with such things as scale, format, composition, source of light, colour, etc. These things are related to traditional art practices. Not much has changed, and I am learning more and more to have great faith in this. It is better to know all these things and disregard them if necessary or as Brett Whiteley wrote "its better to have drawn and lost than never to have drawn at all". (11)

Having a reference is important but how is it described?

Painting I have come to realise is about light and how we use marks and colours to describe things. A subject may be described

in many different ways. One could take a cardboard box or a flower and paint it all year long in many different ways. Each one saying something different about it and the artist. But how a picture is made beyond these basic considerations is dependent on the artist's perception of the world and their language of making marks. The quality and result of their efforts can only be equated by themselves; their own standards, needs and aspirations of the work.

In making a picture we do not have an innocent eye that produces the image, which we then merely copy on to a surface in representing the appearance of things. The artist does not simply trace an outline of their visual contours, but prepares instead a hypothetical construction to be matched and then modified in the light of further experience. This is what Gombrich calls 'Schemata', 'Schema and correction' or 'making and matching'. A picture is not so much invented as it is discovered through a process of trial and error. Gombrich explained this in his book Art and Illusion.

To make an image you start with a kind of minimal model of what you want to represent incorporating the most distinctive features. You then go and correct or modify this minimal model till you approximate what you want to represent or what you see in front of you. In this way making the model comes before matching it with reality. This matching process goes beyond observing one's subject. In an interview with Jonathan Miller,

Gombrich says "I believe that just as the scientist tests his hypothesis, the artist tests his own picture by looking at it. It isn't that he looks at the model or out into the world and learns how to paint, it is that he looks at his paintings and learns to paint by improving them, by finding that they do not yet pass the test he has set for himself." (12).

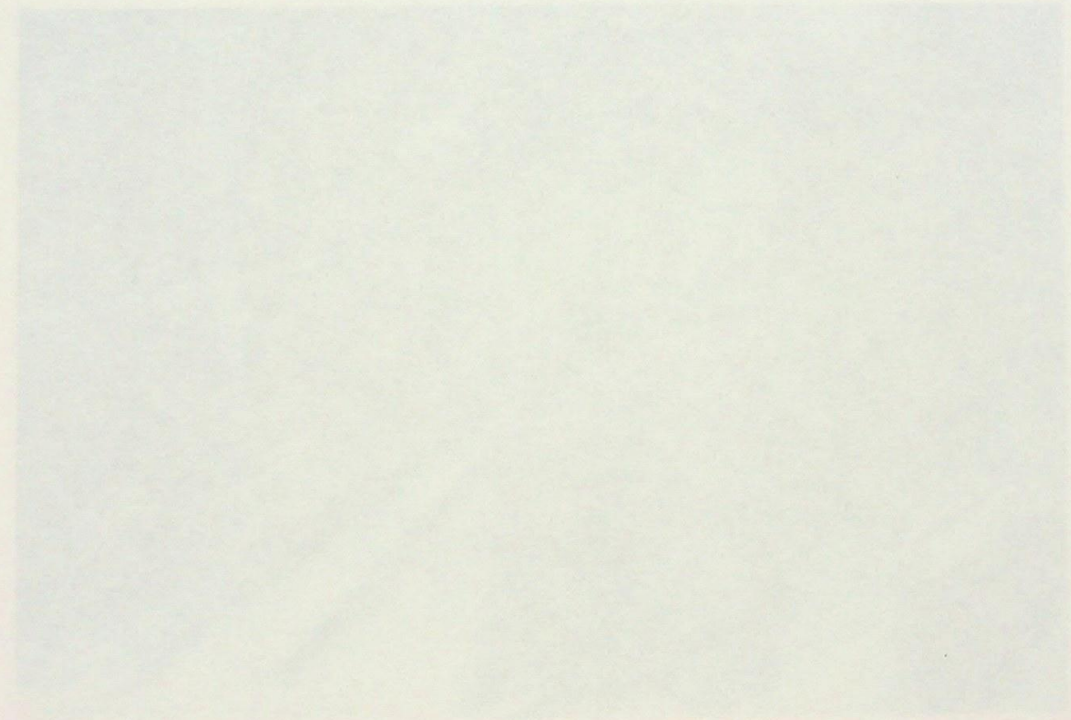
Anyone who makes pictures will realise that it is first and foremost about looking. How one uses this will be learned and decided by oneself as well as through the great art that has gone before us. "The schemata we use as stepping stones towards representation are thieved and borrowed from our friends and our colleagues and of course from tradition". (13)

FOOTNOTES

1. Brett Whiteley, Drawings, Brett Whiteley 1950-85. p.3
- 2., Ernst Gombrich. Art and Illusion. p.5
3. Brett Whiteley, p.3
4. Jonathan Miller, States of Mind p.221
5. David Sylvester, Francis Bacon p.91
6. Ibid, p.134
7. James White, Brian Bourke p.11
8. Mervyn Levy, Carel Weight p.19
9. N.H. Freeman and M.V. Cox, Visual Order p.41
10. Ibid, p.41-44
11. Brett Whiteley. p.3
12. Jonathan Miller. p.224
13. Ibid. p.222

CHAPTER IV

THE WORLD AS WE DEPICT IT.



Picture making reconfirms our existence in the world. If we draw an object it reconfirms its existence and by that ours also. I believe this to be very true and it explains for me part of the reason why I draw an endless amount of feet, (my own feet), and self portraits, drawings of reflections in the train or bus windows going home and the interiors which I inhabit, the cups and saucers, plates and teapots which I eat and drink from and all the other personal props that surround me. (Pl.4) Gwen Hardie



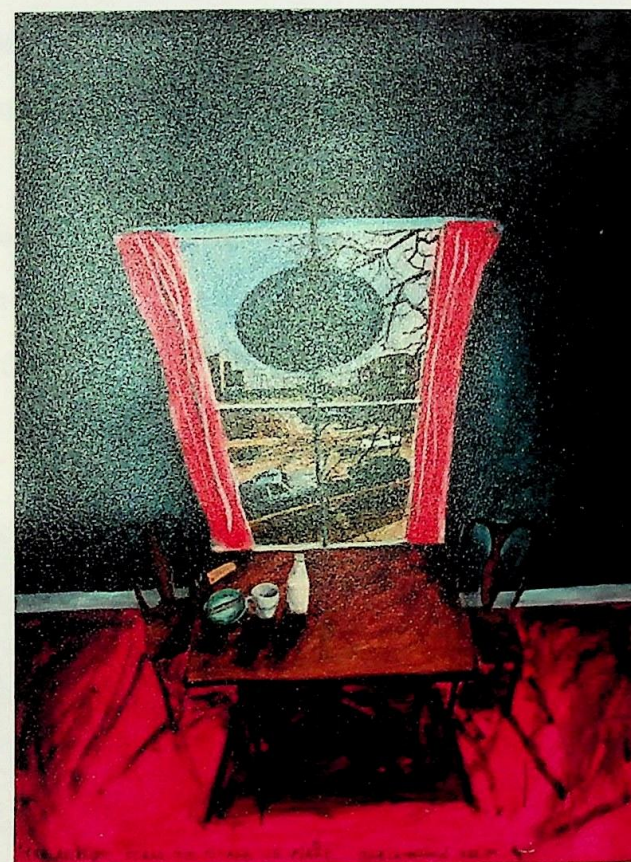
4. Oliver Comerford, Chicago Apartment

says, "I'm fascinated by the figure - not in a representational, realistic way, but because I want to uncover all its metaphoric layers and discover different aspects of it. For me the most intense thing is the fact that you're alive and you walk on two feet. I'm quite amazed at existence" (1). I'm sure many of us must feel this way. I certainly do but I want to acknowledge it. Picture making is that acknowledgement and reassurance and to see other work with that same quality about it is often the most stimulating thing for me.

Roland Barthes writes in his essay 'The Wisdom of Art' that the desire wells up in the spectator to share the experience of the artist: "Thus, this morning of 31 December 1978, it is still dark, it is raining, all is silent when I set down again at my worktable. I look at Twombly's Herodiade and I have really nothing to say about it except the same platitude: that I like it {que ca me plait!}. But suddenly there arises something new, a desire: that of doing the same thing; of going to another worktable (no longer that for writing), to choose colours, to paint and draw" .(2)

I've often thought that my drawings look childish up to a certain stage in their making. I work them further and they look more naturalistic. I believe that to make something look naturalistic is only another step forward from a child's drawing. I don't believe I was particularly good at drawing in the realistic sense

when I was young but I have been so overwhelmed by my own presence and the environment around me that I've been compelled to represent it. By doing this I've gained a greater realisation about myself in my environment. Picture making by its nature forces one to look and to look closely. By doing this we realise more about what it is that we depict and about ourselves in relation to it.



5. Oliver Comerford. The Atlantic Oceans to share us apart

Everything has a sense of presence and it is this which creates an atmosphere in the environment. We in turn respond to that environment and realise our own sense of presence, a reconfirmation at our own existence. This idea of a sense of presence comes from the fact that we are always looking. Looking is a voluntary activity and what we look at is our choice which in turn will affect what we choose to make an image of. A child is more likely to draw the mat on the floor than the books on a high shelf. We never actually look at just one thing. It has been scientifically proven that our eyes are continuously moving, scanning everything in our visual field. In fact the only reason we ever see things correctly as a whole is because our eyes are moving at such a high speed that the image is made up. As we do this we are looking at the relation between what we see and ourselves. "Our vision is continuously moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are" (3). (Pl.6)



6. John Bratby, Window, self-portrait, Jean and hands

There is the theory that a child draws what he knows and not what he sees. Young children don't draw directly from observation but rather from memory. How we see things is affected by what we know or have been taught about them and what we expect them to look like or be. This is one of the ways in which stereotype images, ideas and attitudes will probably never cease to exist. "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world. We explain that world with words but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled." (4)

We may think that an artist has succeeded in representing things the way they look. This may not be so. Each artist's solution is drawn from his or her particular nature. Every artist creates his recognizable world. We should not assume that our representation is the same as the way things appear to our eyes.

It seems similar because our attention is very selective. We could also say that we look at the world only as it would appear in our pictures and therefore assume our pictures look like the world we notice. Gombrich says, to the annoyance of some of his philosopher friends, "the method works not because the world ever looks like a picture but because a picture can be made to look like the world". (5)

FOOTNOTES

1. Judith Higgins, The New British Painting. pp 104-105
2. Mark Francis, Hayward Annual 1983: British Drawing p.17
3. John Berger, Ways of Seeing. p.9
4. Ibid, p.7
5. Jonathan Miller, States of Mind p.225

CHAPTER V

ART AND EDUCATION

ART AND EDUCATION

I have said that the only qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness, that it may be heightened by experience or reduced by adverse agencies. Everybody is born with creative faculties. We can all make pictures. Education can kill or encourage creativity, and because of this it has a vital responsibility to the children concerned and consequently to the whole of society.

The child needs to know just how much of a role art plays in society. It is only through identifying the child's own creative work with that of the artist that an awareness of cultural heritage is aroused, and even before cultural heritage, our own immediate surroundings, our own back yards, "that half a rood of rock". One of the most damaging factors of human life can be 'mental conformity'. The creative process, the harmonious interplay of the 'head', the 'heart' and the 'hand', stimulates the problem-solving faculties of the human mind enabling a person as a result of it to deal creatively with his life, job and fellow human beings. Art activity generates creativity and is as such vital in the school curricula.

The world we live in, see and understand from the day we are born is three-dimensional. To represent it in two dimensions, to make pictures from it, is a reduction of a very complex character. We do this using marks, but all marks are mere symbols for what is seen or has been seen. To interpret this reduction, these symbols correctly, and with understanding relies on being educated to do so. Visual education is necessary.

Any understood response to visual information is clearly dependant on an understanding of visual language, just as response to the written or spoken word is dependent on the literacy of the reader or listener. Both society and schools have long established traditions of literacy. Parents are concerned if children cannot read or write and a general anxiety is shown if these skills are not mastered. We also have numeracy as a major educational foundation, with similar concern if success is not evident in students. Much importance is placed on these skills but most parents, children or teachers are not over anxious if the child leaves school totally lacking in visual literacy.

Picture or image making is a language and requires a certain level of comprehension to give it meaning if a communication is going to take place. This is why visual education is so important. Without it we are like strangers in a foreign land and don't speak the language. We would get by but we would miss out on quite a lot and may even be cheated, (i.e. advertising, a constant deception to peoples freedom to choose what they want, if they do, when, where and at what cost?). Art demands an effort of attention on the part of the spectator. Casual interest may well be caught by the superficial qualities of a painting or an advertisement but its content will not reveal itself unless one makes a further effort of appreciation. This even applies to those with faculties and sensibilities educated in the appreciation of art. But no matter what our occupation is

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we need to be able to comprehend and understand the visual world around us, whether we want to make pictures or not.

As young children, it is socially accepted that it is a good thing that we draw and we may be encouraged to do so. This is unusual because as we get older it is regarded with less importance and as literacy and numeracy are emphasised some students have been ridiculed for drawing. Children often abandon art as an expressive activity for this unfortunate reason. Betty Edwards noted that "sadly, children often blame the drawing for causing the hurt, rather than the careless critic. Therefore to protect the ego from further damage children react defensively and understandably so: they seldom ever attempt to draw again."

(1) This is not to say that children's art should not be criticised but that if it is it should be done so constructively.

An attitude may exist whereby older children are discouraged from pursuing their artistic potential, as it is believed that a career in art does not often promise wealth and property and should be avoided. "They might be putting their time to better use". This furthers the isolation of the artist and keeps art a specialist activity to be enjoyed by a select few. It furthers the notion that something we all have the potential to create is confined to the sphere of the artist only.

The purpose of education is to train and strengthen the powers of the mind or body. It is the systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young (and by extension to adults) in preparation for the work of life. Some of us are given the

opportunity to go on to further our education in a specialist field at third level, but whether we do or not, educating ourselves never stops. We are always learning.

The purpose of art in secondary education is not especially to produce artists, just as maths is not especially to produce mathematicians or science, scientists or English, writers. Despite the need for specialists in the many fields of work and study it results in a 'mind gap'. We are all born with many potentials and to single out one would be to kill off large parts of ourselves. Rather, I recognise that we have many talents and should develop these to equip ourselves as resourceful and versatile human beings. Because I believe our personalities are formed as children and affects our outlook on the world as we grow older, to be deprived of a proper visual education as children hinders us in this task.

To be visually educated, along with all the other departments of learning is a necessary part of equipping ourselves for the work of life. Art schools may produce artists, but the underlying value in their function, I believe, is not so direct. The process of learning is to come to grips with one's own true talents and to discover whatever they are. I subscribe to the platonic view that the teacher only plays the role of the midwife in this process of self-discovery. John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote in his prose essay The Value of a University Training that "A university training is the great ordinary means to a great but

ordinary end." (2). His idea of a university was not primarily a place where students merely went to lectures and passed and failed exams he believed that education should be a moral training in the widest sense, and not just an instruction in a particular branch of knowledge. He attached great importance to the less purely academic aspects of university life. "The contact of young minds with one another, their daily intercourse and exchange of ideas, their coming into touch with the special learning, maturing of intellect, and greater experience of their tutors and professors, as encountered outside rather than inside the lecture rooms." (3) For him education was a preparation for life. "If then a practical end must be assigned to a university course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world." (4)

So what has all this got to do with making pictures? "Pictures, Yeats believed, came from life itself and were part of life and the way to enjoy pictures and life is the same: the true painter must be part of the land and life he paints." (5) Nick Stewart explains; "What I understand by art can not be separated from what I understand by life. That is not to say that they are the same thing. It is simply to recognise that the act of separating things - of not relating aspects of life - is at the root of our problems. The ecological world view implies that art must become dynamically interconnected to every conceivable aspect of life. I believe that the highest arts are, or should be, the arts of

living with ourselves, with other people and with nature. This is as it was in many non-western cultures, where art was a function of the social order rather than an ambition. The Balinese, for example say, "we do not have any art we do everything as well as possible; we do all things properly." (6)

If then, the society we live in to-day could ever retrieve itself from all the unresolved, spiritual, social and environmental problems, born of an almost unshakeable faith in unlimited progress, my job as an artist, making pictures everyday, could truly be considered a function of social order, rather than a specialist activity consumed by a multi-million pound international business that has made it almost indistinguishable from the rest of society.

This is unlikely, but if the value of the artist and his or her pictures are to be taken for granted, as I believe they should, it can only come about through education.

FOOTNOTES

1. Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain. p.65.
2. J.H. Newman, The Value of a University Training. p.177
3. J.J. Carey, New Senior Prose. p.509.
4. J.H. Newman, p.177
5. Hilary Pyle, Jack B. Yeats, A Biography. p.104
6. Nick Stewart, Art-Ecology : A Talk by Nick Stewart. p.7

FOOTNOTES

1. Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, p. 101.
2. J.H. Newman, The Value of a University Education, p. 101.
3. J.L. Carey, New Scientist, p. 101.
4. J.H. Newman, p. 101.
5. Hilary Pyle, Jack E. Yeats: A Biography, p. 101.
6. Nick Stewart, Art-Exposure: A Talk by Nick Stewart, p. 101.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We all have the potential to create. Most people are born with similar perceptual potentials. People who become skillful depictees do so because they learn to realise these potentials, not because they are specially gifted. They are not. The creative process is energised by the harmonious interplay and balance of the three aspects of man's make up - 'head', 'heart' and 'hand'. Emotions we all have, intellect and skill we can develop.

To depict a three dimensional world in two dimensions is a complex task. Nobody who hasn't learnt can produce a naturalistic image. We learn to do this through a process of trial and error, schemata and from tradition. "The method works not because the world ever looks like a picture but because a picture can be made to look like the world". (1) Art, like science, is cumulative in the sense that one generation learns from the other but corrects what the previous generation has done. This applies to the so called genius as it does to the amateur learning trying to learn from an art instruction book.

The greatness in art, I believe, lies in the situations around us. "Gods make their own importance". (2) The subjects which we can bring most understanding to, and which are probably the most meaningful to us and hopefully as a result others, are those which we have close knowledge of or association with. This has

been so in primitive art, children's art, my own work and in the work of many of the artists I admire. Making pictures is a way of ordering our world, of making it intelligible. To make a picture from the situations around us reconfirms our existence in the world.

Looking is a voluntary activity. What we look at is our choice. Our attention is very selective. This affects what we choose to depict. But how and what we look at is affected by our education. Art reacts to the conditions in which it grows. The soil and climate determine its fruits, and the soil and climate of art is the society it grows in.

Our society, or more broadly speaking western civilisation, is one whose main love and interest is science and technology; its achievements lie in this direction. It is a civilisation which is engrossed in its material needs and the production drive in the myth of unlimited progress. This production drive has needed a vast number of specialists to help it in its head long journey. It results in a vast no-man's land separating one profession from another - a "mind gap". I believe we should use our education to equip ourselves as resourceful and versatile human beings. Visual education must play a part in this.

So how does the artist continue, in the predicament in which the western world has placed him, without being a contradiction to himself? Man's art is not just an imitative procedure but it is a result of his interaction between what he sees, feels and does.

Jack Levine commenting on his painting Street Scene No. 1 in 1939 wrote, "I find my approach to painting inseparable from my approach to the world. Justice is more important than good looks. The artist must sit in judgement and intelligently evaluate the case of the world as he deals with. The validity of of his work will rest on the humanity of his decision. A painting is good for the same reason that anything in this world is good."(3) (Pl.7)



7. Jack Levine. Street Scene No. 1.

We must ask ourselves: What can art serve here and now? Then criticise our pictures according to whether they do this or not. Of course they may never do so directly and this is why an effort of attention is needed on the part of the spectator. John Berger says "if you answer your initial question with

historical logic and justice, you will be helping to bring about the future from which people will be able to judge the art of your time with ease." (4)

Berger suggests we ask ourselves: "Does this work help or encourage men to know and claim their social rights?" (5) This does not mean that we ought to be painting pictures of protest. Any picture which says something about the human condition can do this. It might be a still life or a narrative painting. "After we have responded to a work of art, we leave it, carrying away in our consciousness something which we didn't have before.....What we take away with us - on the most profound level - is the memory of the artist's way of looking at the world....this offers us the chance of relating the artist's way of looking to our own ... it increases our awareness of our potentiality....The important point is that a valid work of art promises in some way or another the possibility of an increase, an improvement." (6)

The artist sets out to improve the world - not in the way a reformer or a revolutionary does - but in his own way by extending what he believes to be the truth, and by expressing the range and depth of human hopes.

If then a rule of thumb or criteria be set for how we value or judge a picture let it be as Van Gogh said "The cart one draws must be useful to people whom one does not know". (7)

FOOTNOTES

1. Jonathan Miller, States of Mind, p.225
2. From Patrick Kavanagh's poem Epic quoted in Chapter I
3. Jack Levine, Jack Levine, p.26
4. John Berger, Permanent Red, p.15
5. Ibid
6. Ibid, p.16
7. Ibid, p.34

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