



George Morrison Papers

Copyright Notice:

This material may be protected by copyright law (U.S. Code, Title 17). Researchers are liable for any infringement. For more information, visit www.mnhs.org/copyright.

QUESTIONS

Could we begin by speaking of the past? What are the major transitions towards these paintings?

Do you seek a structure through struggle, or does it simply appear?

There is a quality of meditation in these works, along with the surface? Agreed?

Do you meditate?

Will you speak about this?

What have been some of the art sources for your work over the years?

art?
liturgy?

What quality in art do you prefer? Mystery? Magic?

Have you been confident of your abilities as an artist?

whittling
childhood

What do you think it has taken to continue?

In painting as a communicative act, what do you hope that your work might achieve?

Does the making of an image change you?

Do you see a "moral tone" in the paintings?

What have you come to understand through the work?

GEORGE MORRISON

ELIZABETH ERICKSON

March 8, 1987

(OVERVIEW OF QUESTIONS)

Now those for me are very interesting questions. They come from like a poet as well as a critic and they are ones that I haven't dealt with before in terms of going into the work. And that's good. I will have to give myself some time to dig into them, too, in order to answer those questions. And I will ask for your help in that.

SO BACK TO THE BEGINNING. COULD WE BEGIN BY SPEAKING OF THE PAST? WHAT ARE THE MAJOR TRANSITIONS TOWARD THESE PAINTINGS?

Now that's two questions. You mean the transitions from the past. I have often thought of my childhood in terms of how it related to the present, but I haven't put it down in any kind of a sense that might relate to the work as it is now, only that I think I was always sensitive to materials working with my hands and when you mentioned also about the whittling.

As early as I can remember I always able to draw. In school and also at home to work with wood in terms of using the kitchen knives in the house, to wittle or carve objects like toys, like the bow and arrow, that was used in playing, as I recall now. And also as I grew up to fashion objects that could be sold like bird houses or making what we called Indian curios to sell to tourists and I was fashioning a rock to a stick to make an assembly kind of a tomahawk object that could be sold to tourist. That was when I was in my adolescent years and utilizing my hands to earn some money.

I did this in school also, to copy things out of books and this is my first recollection with coming in contact with books because I don't remember any at home, and that projected the ideas of words and illustrations and images that were in books and copying those and utilizing my sense of copying things, whether they were out of cartoons or illustrations of textbooks in early school room, and those are my earliest recollections of that kind of thing where the art that relates now, making marks on the canvas or applying color, using color crayons from school, that might relate to the color of pigments today, or mixed mediums, and the wood whittling is related to the wood collages that I did in my later life.

YOU DID WOOD WORKING AS A TEENAGER?

Yes, that led up to being able to use my sensibilities and abilities with my tools and skills with my hands, to be able to do my carpenter work, too, in school and also as a means for making money as I grew up.

DID YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS AN ARTIST?

Not in any kind of broad terms. I suppose at that age I didn't really know what art meant or an artist really meant. I was only seeing it in terms of my own self as to what I could do and that physical sense of using my hands, or trying. And I didn't try to relate it to art. It was only towards high school that I thought of art school as a means of going school in order to study commercial art in order to make a living. Not in the broad sense of being a painter. It was more or less in a more commercial sense that I saw myself doing the art, making the marks, making the posters at school, or designing the sets for a high school play, or all of the things that are art related now.

DID YOU DO THAT, DID YOU DESIGN THE SETS IN HIGH SCHOOL?

Well, not designed really, but they were probably suggested and I had to do some of the physical work.

THEN YOU DECIDED TO GO TO THE MINNEAPOLIS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN?

Yes, it was at that time the Minneapolis School of Art, and primarily to study commercial art as a means of making a living.

TELL WHAT HAPPENED THERE.

At the early part of my studies at school, I went there to enroll in the school and then we had the basic studies of drawing, composition, and color, and modelling. All of the basic things that were at that time toward any kind of art, commercial or fine art. And then the drawing and then the advertising art a little later or design. That was part of the basics also, to pave the road toward a commercial course in art, my first two years at the Minneapolis School of Art.

THEN AS YOU CONTINUED HOW DID YOUR IDEA OF YOURSELF AS AN ARTIST DEVELOP?

That is the time that you asked me before of my art, looking at it in a broad sense. Being in an art school and being in that environment and being around the actual setting of art with other students, looking at what painting students did, and then also some of my close friends at the art school at that time were sculptors. Then I got into the more broader meaning of art and for the last two years of my art school I gradually switched over toward painting and drawing strictly related to fine arts. It was at that time that I realized myself in the role of an artist for the first time.

HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK YOUR MENTOR, THE PORTRAIT PAINTER, WAS?

I had teachers, too, who were instrumental and encouraged me. One was Frances Greenman. She was a portrait painter in the manner of John Singer Sargeant. She was a humanist, too, in a way, and that was a good thing for me in realizing that camaraderie of dealing with older teachers and realizing that I maybe had an importance as a student and an artist to look at art from that point of view. And that was good for me, I think that she encouraged that kind of fraternization of students.

WELL, SHE DID.

Yes, and that was good. Other teachers were more apart. They were more distant and strictly business like in their approach. Taking to the task of painting at hand.

BUT SHE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE STUDENTS WITH EACH OTHER. WHAT DID SHE SAY ABOUT ART?

Art was talking about art history and the art of what was going on at hand, still life painting. We had people pose for portraits too, which was her thing, we also had still life with her and it was that kind of art, the immediate art at hand, the doing of art and the basics of art and the techniques of art. But always in between was the art history of talking about Rubins or or Giotto, or however, related to what we were doing and that was part of the learning.

And that was always brought up in a good way, and about Matisse, of course, and some of the great names in art, past and present, and that was good. And having little parties together and that fraternization and the sociability of art was a nice thing for me. I felt very good about it because I never had that kind of exposure at home. It was the first time in my life and I think it was very good for me.

ONE OF THE THINGS I ALWAYS GOT FROM YOU ABOUT HER IS THAT SHE CONNECTED ART AND LIFE FOR YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME. IT GIVES A CERTAIN KIND OF ENERGY TO THE WORK AND TO YOUR LIFE AS AN ARTIST. THAT ENERGY IS IMPORTANT. IT'S LIKE I TELL MY STUDENTS, REMEMBER ALL THE GREAT ART MOVEMENTS STARTED WITH A GROUP OF FRIENDS TALKING TOGETHER.

Before we go off of teachers, there was another, a man in this case, named Alexander Masely. There was another kind of thing from him that was more of an intellectual thing. He was a teacher in some of the design classes and he himself studied at the Institute of Design in Chicago; which one of the first schools in America that taught some of the Bauhaus principles in this country in the 1920's, and he was a student there and was regarded as somewhat of an avante garde teacher in Minneapolis at the time which was fairly academic in their teaching and studies.

He employed some of the Bauhaus principles in our advertising and design class and these I looked upon too as a part of recent art history and as an art thing in itself because of studying certain people like Herbert Bair, Mahalinagi, and some of the top designers in the world at that time and those were the kind of principles that were studying in advertising which was a very advanced thing for me as well as other students at school in learning some advanced principles in art. And I looked at them in terms of art, too, as advertising and design.

And Mr. Masley was also a painter and I took some painting classes from him at night as an extra thing and he was employing some more radical ideas at that time for Minneapolis School of Art, some of the principles of Matissee and some of the cubist ideas of Braque, and Picasso, that were beginning to creep in to certain students, including myself, that I think were instrumental in getting deeper into fine arts.

AND THEN WHEN YOU GRADUATED FROM THE COLLEGE, WHAT DID YOU DO NEXT?

Well I was very fortunate in getting one of the big scholarships, the Vanderlip scholarship from the school, to enable me to travel and study elsewhere. And I got a one way ticket to New York. I always dreamed of New York as the mecca, in this country especially. I always dreamed of going to the Art Students League, which was the big school at that time, and studying there because I had heard of it, and maybe living in Greenwich Village. It was a romantic idea. It was part of going further in that sense of seeking further avenues of art. So that's what happened when I graduated from the Minneapolis School of Art. That fall I bought a one way ticket to New York and it was an entirely different world.

SO YOU ARRIVED IN NEW YORK, AND DID YOU STUDY AT THE ART STUDENTS LEAGUE?

Sure, for three years. The scholarship allowed me to get a start there, tuition, and then I got further scholarships and that contributed to going to school. The Minneapolis School of Art opened up the art world to me. The world of art in New York was forever changing my life in a more deeper way. So it was a complete change. The Minneapolis Society of Art was good. I don't regret the academic training. It was very good and the basic kind of training I had was very good, and I continued in New York. Then I had the exposure of some of the best artists country at that time who were teaching at the Art Students League. And that opened up further the art thing for me.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO MENTION ANY OF THEM?

The people who were teaching at the league at that time were more the regionalists who were well known in that day. Reginal Marsh, Cuniochi, John Corvino. They ranged from very realistic painters to people who were experimenting with the beginnings of

expressionism. My teacher was Morris Kanter who was a very liberal man who taught at Cooper Union, a good teacher, well known in New York City, and I chose to study with him because he fit the thing I was looking for as a jump from Minneapolis.

I think other things were happening but they were happening outside the league. That happened a little later, the Hans Hoffman influence, or some of the other surrealists who were coming were coming from Europe and living in a certain obscurity in New York. All this kind of influence was happening for other people who were a generation or older than myself, like Franz Kline, or Anshile Gorky who were absorbing some of the influences from Europe and then developing the so called American School which was beininning to happen in the far east and I think in an indirect way was influening younger people like myself who were gradually absorbing the general influences of New York.

SO YOU CHOSE TO STAY IN NEW YORK?

I chose to stay in New York.

AND YOU WERE IN THE ART STUDENTS LEAGUE FOR THREE YEARS AND THEN, HOW DID IT GO?

Well I was on my way towards a career in art and I realized some of the hardships one would have to take in this course. I began to by getting menial jobs and I was always handy with my hands and at that time I had a good job in a frame shop which I worked at several years, part time and full time. So that was what kept me going. During those first years out of school, and then continuing my painting whenever I could and entering shows, too. And that was good. Entering big shows like the Whitney Annual and the Pennsylvania Academy and the Corporate Biannual. And I was fortunate enough to do some stronger paintings as a student and enter these shows and being admitted to these shows and that was to my credit, going as a young artist in New York City, being a very competitive situation with art in the big city.

WHEN DID YOU BEGIN TO SHOW AT THE GRAND CENTRAL MODERNS?

That was a little later after 1946 when I finished at the Art Students Leage. That was around 1948. Grand Central was a very conservative gallery that showed a lot-of the protraits and the landscape painting of the representational schools at the time. But they decided to found a branch of so called modern branch of their gallery and they called it the Grand Central Moderns which was a separate gallery from their big galleries in Grand Central Station on Vanderbilt Avenue where they were located. So that was my beginning professional affiliation in the New York art world in belonging to a gallery with artists who were young and some were a little older than myself but whom I regarded as in the same name in terms of the kind of work that was being done. They leaned towards a kind of expressionism of exaggeration and the influence of surrealism that was prevelant and fit itself into some of the more advanced art of the time.

DID YOU STAY THERE LONG AT GRAND CENTRAL MODERN?

Yes, I was with them for twelve years.

SO THAT WAS A GOOD SPOT.

It was a good middle of the road gallery and it was good in the sense that I got into many museum collections as the result of the gallery. You see curators from all over the country visiting New York and visiting galleries and choosing, perhaps, middle of the road kind of art, too, for their own collections and I got into many collections all over the country as the result of being in that gallery. I never sold much but enough for my subsistence, so that was very good.

AND YOU STAYED IN NEW YORK UNTIL...?

Until 1964.

WHAT AM I NOT ASKING ABOUT THAT PERIOD?

In between there was always development. I got into many collections, but I also had one man shows, once every two years and that was good.

IN THE IMAGES AT THIS PERIOD, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WAS YOUR PRIMARY CONCERN? SO WE ARE MAKING A HISTORY OF THE IMAGES. WHAT WERE YOUR CONCERNS IN THE IMAGES 1948-55?

Yes, I mentioned a little while back about the kinds of things I was doing that was leaning towards expressionism. My art was representation to the degree that one could recognize certain subject matter in the paintings. The subject matter was exaggerated, and I think I was also beginning to also observe influences of surrealist kinds of ideas and perhaps the abstract was also creeping in because of the advent of a strong avant-garde at that time that was beginning to be seen in New York by Americans as well as Europeans. That was beginning to be an influence on me. I think indirectly.

So I think my art was absorbing, perhaps in my head too, absorbing a lot of that kind of influence and perhaps intuitive kinds of techniques that were creeping into the work, that was probably the surrealists, in the forage idea of marks on the canvas or the paper and then working almost subconsciously into that kind of marks and incorporating those kinds of marks into the kind of image that would emerge from the paper or the canvas. And so a lot of things that I was beginning to do, instead of working from a model, that I did at the Art Students League or at the Minneapolis School of Art, was that I was working imaginatively with subject matter than came from my personal life, symbolic and my own relationship with people.

As I recall, a lot of it was very subconscious and began to come out by itself so that the subject matter was like the

interpretation of a dream, very subconscious as from the actual mark began to emerge on canvas into a natural kind of painting. I gave one painting a title called "Confirmation," which dealing with two people. It had to do with a universal kind of subject matter than a more specific, literal kind of interpretation. It had very vague and ambiguous kinds of backgrounds that made it more mysterious.

Maybe that relates it to the kind of mystery we were talking about in those technical terms. I wasn't specifically trying to make that image from the beginning when I started the painting, but I was beginning to put two figures together and gradually apply the paint and then the idea would begin to emerge. So that was a kind of a process during that time of making art, or making paintings, or drawings.

WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SUB CONSCIOUS, JUST WORKING AND LETTING IT COME OUT, DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE QUESTION ELIZABETH WAS ASKING ABOUT TRANCE OR MEDITATION?

No. That, as I think about it, isn't meditation in any strict sense. I would call it more day dreaming than anything.

IS THIS THE TIME YOU WERE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS?

No, that came later. It was also during the war period. I remember there was one painting I called "Fear of Calamity," from a drawing that I did of a woman figure and that was also symbolic of a relationship, a single figure enlarged and superimposed on a landscape with buildings and organic material in and out of these images that related to explosions.

I didn't have a specific idea that be that thing, but it came off by itself, so I named it that because it suggested that kind of thing. It related to the atomic bomb and it was done around 1945. So that kind of artist dealing with Naziism in Europe or even the more social conscious artists in the regionists in this country were dealing with specific issues at that time.

DO YOU SEEK A STRUCTURE THROUGH STRUGGLE OR DOES IT SIMPLY APPEAR?

Well, it seems to me now that both kind of apply there in my case because I think there is a constant struggle in many ways. The idea of struggling, not only physically but mentally and for the image, the thought. It does appear and it comes almost by itself. That idea of the art being there and continuing, it's always there and begins to appear by itself by doing.

THERE IS A QUALITY OF MEDITATION IN THESE WORKS ALONG WITH THE EXUBERANT SURFACE. DO YOU MEDITATE?

Not like I've taken meditation in a strict sense like the transcendental meditation. I don't do that in connection with the art. If the question is do I meditate while I am painting,

perhaps no, not in that strict sense. I do a lot of day dreaming or just a lot of random thoughts or I listen to music or a lot of things are happening in my head when I'm painting. But a lot of times there might be periods of working where there might be a trance or there might be things that happen that you don't know when you did that particular part of the painting. As I look at it later that it almost sometimes wants to happen by itself.

So if that relates to any kind of meditation, it's like a process of working where you don't know sometimes what you are doing but you are just automatically working and it happens and then you look at it later and wonder how you did it or when you did it, but it's there. And it happens, how I can't really say. Whether it is in a meditative state or a kind of a dream state or in a conscious state, I can't really say. But I think really, I might see a combination of that kind of mind that would be in this process.

BUT I AM TRYING TO GET AT SOMETHING THAT I THINK IS PARTICULAR TO THIS WORK. TWO WORDS CAME UP...MYSTERY AND MAGIC. THE QUESTION THAT I FORMED PREVIOUS TO HEARING THOSE TWO WORDS WAS THIS: WHAT QUALITY IN ART DO YOU MOST PREFER?

Now that questions strays since you mentioned mentioned magic and mystery and say what quality do I prefer. Is that related to magic and mystery? Or how?

I WANTED TO INTRODUCE THOSE TWO WORDS BECAUSE IN AN EARLIER TAPE THOSE HAD BEEN MENTIONED AS TWO WORDS THAT INTEREST YOU. AND SO I JUST WANTED TO BRING THEM UP, BUT MY QUESTION WAS. WHAT QUALITY IN ART DO YOU MOST PREFER?

Well, I suppose, in an indirect sense I would certainly like a magical quality, but I'm not thinking about that off hand, specifically when I'm doing painting. In this particular series, I'm doing a series based on the horizon which has been an obsession with me now for perhaps most of my art life. And that in itself has a particular magic that maybe I'm trying to interpret, and not in a literal way, because I think therein lies the magic of the artist that he is interpreting or giving his own interpretation of the idea conveyed, in this case, the horizon, and the locale of where these particular paintings are originating. That is on the North Shore of Lake Superior.

I call them all "Lake Superior Landscapes" as a subtitle. But they relate also to the locale of Red Rock which is where we have a studio and looking out the studio at this particular area is the rocks and the beach and the parts of the trees that are near the lake and the lake itself and the water which is constantly changing. Which is a magic in itself. The magic of nature, change. The water is constantly changing, plus the noise, the sound of the water which is also another kind of a magic. As if one would regard them as an inanimate object, but they are not. It's a living thing. And the rocks, too, which I began to regard in my later life as a presence of its own that has a life of its

own. The rock has a presence and it has a magic of its own and water has a life of its own and living force, it's moving and changing. So therefore, it's a presence again. Like it's living and moving. Now the same for the sky. It is constantly changing as part of the phenomena of nature that relate to something that we can't even see, which is the wind that has sound and has a presence of its own.

So, therefore, all of these things have a magic to start with and I suppose that's the thing I am trying to get, although I'm not specifically starting out with that very idea, but that I am trying to interpret in some way that then relate to the magic of the artist. Every artist has his own magic and looking at nature and interpreting it in his own magic. And basically in the techniques of art which I call expressionism and humanism and surrealism, there is always that exaggeration and fragmentation of a lot of these ideas from nature. The water, interpreting the water, or the rocks, in terms of color and form. It is always manipulated in such a way as to gain something that is ambiguous and always the end result that is very surprising.

So that therefore, what I am conscious of too is always variation. I don't want to become monotonous. But there is always a constant change based on my own experience and techniques of art so that one may be quiet, one may be more violent, one may be more soft, one may be more hard, one may be more harsh in color, one might be not.

DOES REACHING LIKE THAT KEEP YOU IN TOUCH WITH YOUR OWN MAGIC?

Well I suppose one could put it that way. I can't say that I am in control of my own magic. As I say, I'm not specifically in that very word, "in touch." But, I'm always trying to make the better thing. I suppose that's what artists do. They are always seeking the inevitable in doing the ultimate painting. Seeking the unknown, is one way to put it, too. Seeking something that is not there, or is there, but you're trying to bring it out and that you can't, but you are trying to. See, I can't say specifically again that I'm trying, that I'm getting it. One doesn't know.

PAINTING IS A COMMUNICATIVE ACT. WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT YOUR WORK MIGHT ACHIEVE?

First, I suppose, it is what appeals to me, the end result of a particular painting that appeals to me and I'm trying to seek some things and it appeals to me in a certain way and maybe arriving at a certain thing, what I'm trying to achieve, and that I can some times come close to what I want, but I'm always seeking a better thing.

That's like, as I said, approaching the unknown, trying to bring it out and achieving it. Also that it's for me primarily, and then it is for others, too. And this is one of the reasons for painting, too, is that other people might have some satisfaction

of looking at the paintings and getting something out of them. They would be on display or someone would have them at some time and look at them and they would seek the same thing that's inside the painting.

If that wasn't done, I couldn't be a hermit it working in a cave all by myself, and sastingfying myself. But that's not true. Or for it's for exposure, too. It's like when you say a communicative thing, then it's like an association with other beings besides myself who are going to see the paintings and maybe get something out of the painting.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING SPECIFIC IN MIND THAT YOU WANT THEM TO GET FROM YOUR PAINTINGS?

Well, I did mention satisfaction. And I suppose that's the thing about creating a great work and one always looks at a great work and we experience that looking at Pirandello Francesco and consider one of the paintings that was ever done in the Western world of his crucifixion. In that sense, now, of making a Christ figure appear that he is actually arising from the dead. In actuality one can look at it and imagine that Christ figure is actually coming out of the tomb. So that when I was looking at that painting, too, I was trying to get that same kind of feeling, and maybe it was what it was said before, that it was a great painting, so you think it is a great painting. But I still regard him as one of the really great painters, so I like his work.

WHAT IS THAT SATISFACTION?

Well, who can say? You have to seek the world beyond us. It's like reading words, too, that are coming out of no where, a manipulated form through words, manipulating words in such a way that they might be appealing to someone and they get some satisfaction from reading that group of words or listening to music which is a group of sounds that are appealing and that one can gain some kind of grace and beauty, I suppose, in that sense, to the sound.

Paintings are, through their color and form, related to beauty that the artist is interpreting mature in terms of color and form and that same kind of form then is transformed into the viewers mind and he is gaining some sort of sastingfiation looking at that and, as we always say, the better the painting is, the more satisfaction one can gain from that particular work of art.

DOES THE MAKING OF AN IMAGE CHANGE YOU?

I can't say that it changes me outright. I suppose it changes your thinking in terms of what you want to do and that one image can lead to another and that you are constantly seeking an image or images that can relate to your own thinking and that you want to expand that image and it does, by the process of doing.

IT'S LIKE YOU YOU BECOME WATER, OR AS THE WATER CHANGES, AND THE LIGHT CHANGES, AND THE CHANGE IN NATURE, AND YOU BECOME PART OF THAT PROCESS BECAUSE IN DOING YOU CHANGE.

Well, I can't say that I'm becoming water or a rock. I could't say that specifically. Perhaps underneath that's part of it.

WHAT HAVE YOU COME TO UNDERSTAND THROUGH THE WORK?

Well, that relates a little bit to the last question in the sense that you come to understand in the whole broad process of art that it relates to what you have learned intellectually about art in general. That process of art, the transformation of art, or the transmutation of art, in terms of your own need, and in this case the painting, that it becomes, in one sense more difficult and complex in that are seeking the answers of the whole mystery of it, I suppose, in trying to make it better for yourself. It is there for transforming you in the sense of broadening yourself and mind and spirit and to deal with that complexity of art even though it comes from a simple thing like nature.

NOW I AM GOING TO ASK TWO QUESTIONS THAT ARE RELATED. HAVE YOU BEEN CONFIDENT OF YOUR ABILITIES AS AN ARTIST? AND WHAT DO YOU THINK IT HAS TAKEN TO CONTINUE?

Well, I've been confident right down the line since I started because I knew I had the ability. I was surprised in my own abilities in art even in starting school. Maybe I didn't realize it before school, but I found out in that competitive world, even with the student body, I found out I was doing better than a lot of students. Then I began to realize my ability and I could maintain a confidence within myself that I was able to do it.

And I think that was persistence right down the line, because I think I was a top student when I left the Minneapolis School of Art. And I became a top student at the Art Student's League by getting more scholarships and entering national competitions and being in big shows and exhibiting with other groups, young people, artists, and getting to be in the competitive world of art, and I was able to make it and be above others.

Therefore, it is all part of the ego to, that is part of art, of a person as an artist, that one can have that confidence and ability to do it. As I said, I had it right along, and I still do, I still have the possibility of doing more and bigger and better all the time. And that's part of the process.

GEORGE, WHAT YOU'VE JUST DESCRIBED IS AFFIRMATION FROM THE EXTERNAL WORLD. BUT WHEN YOU SAID YOU WERE SURPRISED AT YOUR OWN ABILITY, THAT CAME FROM WITHIN, THAT SEEMS MORE INTERESTING TO ME.

Well, I'm sort of a dreamer. I've always been a dreamer. There one realizes certain dreams are coming true then you have more confidence from the inner self.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IT HAS TAKEN TO CONTINUE? YOU HAVE BEEN PAINTING A LONG TIME.

Well, there's a certain amount of success that is there that I have had from the beginning. That's getting help from other sources like scholarships and winning prizes in school or mentions in a national exhibition.

BUT YOU CAN GIVE FAITH THAT THIS WAS AS VERY IMPORTANT THING TO DO.

Well, then I suppose it becomes a part of the inner self. You are dealing with certain basics of creative ability in putting down marks in terms of drawing and painting or making sculptural objects. That becomes part of the process of the fiscal part of art. But the inner part, I suppose is another thing that relates to an environment, or a thing, now that I have analyzed myself, that is close to nature in terms of water and land and rocks and trees and all of those things of nature that they become part of the inner self. And I suppose I have grown with that and it becomes a part of what you do in your art. And, it always comes out. There is the basic thing is a landscape idea and it relates to the universe in terms of that which belongs to the earth. Therefore, it is land, water, and sky.

YOU ARE VISITING THE EARTH IN YOUR PAINTING, A CONSTANT REVISITATION.

Now I suppose that becomes a part of the inner thing that is coming out in the art. It's coming out almost by itself. It is a flowing out and it's never ending and it is endless material for concrete ideas again which relate to the earth that are there and that are proudly a part of me.

DO YOU SEE A MORAL TONE IN YOUR PAINTINGS?

I'm not sure of what you mean by moral tone. Well, one way I see it is there is a goodness in art, so therefore it is very moral. I can connect that word with "goodness" and I think everyone should take up art. I always say to students and other people that they should have art in some form or another even if it is keeping a journal or some writing words or personal expression like sketching or drawing. Something that becomes a part of them, a personal thing that can be a part of them that can be preserved, or for their own satisfaction, looking at it, like looking at a sketch book or a diary that becomes something for their own satisfaction as well as perhaps for others.

Also, but in this case I am talking more about personal satisfaction, it is absolutely moral in a sense that it can become almost like a religion. Although I don't connect morality with religion, I think that it becomes a part of one's own religion, if one can make any connection with morality and religion.

HOW?

I really don't know. I've never really thought of it in any broad terms. But that it becomes part of your inner self to relate that to a personal thing that can relate to religion in terms of God or morality that relates to God or that it can become maybe it can be your own personal self, or your own personal God. Or that God can be your own personal self. If that can be related to morality in a direct way. Therefore, I feel that art is that important for mankind. I see it in a very broad sense. It can be, in a broad sense, the salvation of the world if one wants to look at it in a humanitarian sense.

HOW, GEORGE?

That relates, maybe, directly to morality and the idea of the humanities or the salvation of what I see of the goodness of art and the beauty of art of the transformation of humanities and nature into a beauty that can maintain or stabilize mankind along with religion. I heard this one great philosopher said that man needs religion and art in order to survive, and I believe in that. So, therefore, they are needed, religion and art, and in my mind they are interconnected. I see them together, whereas religion, in many ways, is a separate entity in terms of religion maybe being superficial in itself with the exclusion of art. That's a prevalent thing which I see today in our world. But they should be together. I think that people who are in religion should know more about art and vice versa.

I'M GOING TO ASK YOU THREE QUESTIONS NOW, SO I'LL READ THEM ALL. AND THEN WE CAN MOVE AROUND INSIDE THESE QUESTIONS. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE EAGLE? DO YOU FIND THE EAGLE IN YOUR WORK? YOU HAVE BEEN A TEACHER. IS THE EAGLE IN YOUR TEACHING?

I never thought of that specifically, of the eagle being a symbol. With primitive peoples, particularly the American Indian, the eagle is a symbol of valor and bravery, and maybe deeper meanings. With the modern poet it has more than that as a symbol, but I never thought of it specifically in my work or otherwise. But looking at it as a symbol I respect it and I think it has a great kind of a meaning.

If it were applied in any way to my work, I would certainly like to see that in my work, that idea of the valor or the idea of the strength of this bird. It is a powerful symbol. I have received Indian feathers from friends and artists. To me they are symbols of friendship and good deeds and good luck and power and I respect that. The power, to me represents the power I see in myself and also in my work and I'm trying to read into it a little more as you were bringing it up.

About my being a teacher and how the eagle relates to teaching, I haven't ever thought of that.

THE ONE THING I THINK ABOUT A GOOD NUMBER OF THESE LATEST IMAGES IS A VAST SPACE AND THE IMAGE ITSELF SEEMS TO ME TO BE INVITATIONAL. I AM INVITED INTO IT. I CAN MOVE WITH GREAT SPEED TO THE HORIZON AND BEYOND IT. THAT SCALE OF MOVEMENT, IN PART, IS SOMETHING I ASSOCIATE WITH THE EAGLE. BUT IT IS ALSO A CHARACTER OF BEING A WORLD VIEW THAT IS LARGE.

Well, I certainly like to think of that too and symbolism, not specifically in the eagle, or if you want to use that symbol of distance, like the eagle that can soar aloft or far distances, but you also want to see it going further, if that's possible for the eagle or any one else in metaphorical terms, the artist or poet seeing beyond. I like the idea of going beyond.

It brings of the literal idea of space in the painting, of looking at the horizon because I always see the horizon as the edge of the world. And then you go beyond that and then you see the phenomenon of the sky and that goes beyond also, so therefore I always imagine that in a certain surrealist world that I am there, that I would like to imagine for myself that it is real.

I also deal with a certain amount of astronomical thinking when I'm looking at the stars at night or the constellations which have a certain symbolic meaning of their own, that I would like this to be a reality for me. That I am there in reality and I can see three planets at the same time on the edge of the horizon and they have a real meaning and they are going are beyond the edge of the world, that they have that poetic meaning to me.

TWO OTHER THINGS OCCUR TO ME. ONE IS THAT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT EVEN IN THE PAINTINGS THAT ARE VERY DARK IN TONE THERE'S A STRONG AFFIRMATIVE QUALITY IN THIS WORK.

Always an interesting word there, affirmative.

AFFIRMATIVE. IN THE SENSE THAT THE EARTH SUPPORTS YOU. LTHE SKY, THE HORIZON, AND THE EARTH ALL SEEM LIKE PHENOMENA THAT ARE WONDERFUL, THAT SUPPORT YOUR LIFE.

I would certainly hope so.

AND THAT TONE IS IN THIS WORK.

Oh, that's good, I'm glad you think that. I suppose, the subject matter is, as I said along the way, is dealing with phenomena that are there that are dealing with the earth and the water and the sky. They are all living and they have a certain affirmation of their own. I want to be a part of that affirmation to make them as potent as possible, I suppose. Then it is done in terms of basic art, the texture of the paint. The phenomenon of paint can be mentioned here transforming that kind of phenomena on to the paper or on to the canvas in terms of phenomenon of paint. That can evoke a certain kind of affirmation to me. The movement, or the movement of texture.

Someone mentioned the haunting quality of the texture. Then hidden underneath the pigment is some kind of magic that one can't describe that is part of magic of the artist trying to bring out the quality of nature in more potent terms.

NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU TWO QUESTIONS SO I WILL READ THEM BOTH. AS YOU WORK SLOWLY, CRAFTING DEATILS, DO YOU FALL INTO A TRANCE? DO YOU EXPERIENCE WHAT WE MIGHT CALL VISIONS?

Not specifically. But we touched on that a little bit before. I'm trying to dig deep in my head about certain kinds of feelings that I have about painting. Usually, as I said, it is a sort of day dreaming kind of thing. Just going along. I suppose there are times when you are doing that that you don't quite know what you are doing but you are just doing it automatically, coming out almost magically and this certainty is there and it comes out and you look at it later and you are surprised at what is there. And you know when you did it or how. So that's part of the magic.

BUT YOU TRUST IT?

But you trust it and I suppose you hope that it is going to turn out. And usually it turns out and paintings are always satisfying to certain degrees, and in this case I have a certain body of works on the horizon I see in each and every one of them something that want to depict, in this case that obsession I have with nature, in this case the horizon line, and in and around that subject.

YOU KNOW I AM CALLING THE HORIZON LINE A DRUMBEAT AND A HEARTBEAT.

Now that's interesting because a lot of musicians and composers say this to me, that the percussion instruments, too, are drumbeats and heartbeats. Not only the human heart but the life beat of nature itself and it is kind of reverberating, monotonous, over and over and over again. That's interesting. Diferent kinds of percussions, drums, chanting.

AND IT IS VERY STEADYING, LIKE THE HORIZON LINE IS. VERY STEADYING, ORIENTING.

I FIND OUR CONVERSATION LIKE YOUR WORK. THERE IS SOMETHING ALLUSIVE AND IS SOMETHING CONCRETE.

That sounds good to me it is good bringing it up because it is forcing me to dig deep and find the right words to express this. It is going in depth with some of the material we are dealing with. Dig underneath it rather than on the surface.

YOU HAVE ALWAYS FELT VERY CONFIDENT OF YOUR HANDS AND WHAT YOUR HANDS CAN DO AND YET YOU HAVE BEEN A DAYDREAMER.

Yes, and is there any connections?

IT IS LIKE THE CONCRETE AND THE ALLUSIVE. IN THESE PIECES I FEEL A VERY STRONG FOCUS BUT IT'S NOT AS IF IT IS FOCUSED ON SOMETHING THAT I COULD DESCRIBE EASILY. IT'S NOT LIKE IT IS FOCUSED ON A PEN OR ON A CUP. THE FOCUS ITSELF IS VERY CONCRETE, BUT WHAT IT IS FOCUSED ON IS ALLUSIVE. IT'S LIKE IT IS FOCUSED ON A QUALITY OF CHANGE ITSELF. AND SINCE THAT IS THE TRUEST THING ABOUT US, THAT WE CHANGE, IT IS FOCUSED ON SOMETHING VERY SPECIFIC AND VERY SPECIFIC TO MY EXPERIENCE OF LIFE. AND SO TO HAVE THAT KIND OF PRESENCE WHICH I DO THINK HAS COME FROM YOUR HISTORY, FROM HAVING DONE IT FOR SO LONG, AND YOU BRING THAT KIND OF FOCUS TO THIS PHENOMENON, IT PUTS ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MYSELF.

What you are always seeking is something inevitable. It is also like all people say, the minute one is born, one starts to die. So maybe one is seeking death. So there you go. It's the cycle again. I have been dealing with physical illness the last several years so one becomes more conscious of a kind of relation to a legacy, to what one does.

WILL YOU TALK ABOUT DEATH?

I don't know if I can in any specific terms. I realize that one has to die. You don't expect it. I'm trying to make comparisons in certain artistic terms. In terms of the legacy of man, of interpreting bigger ideas one is dealing with. We were talking about a phenomenon of beyond. So that deals with something that relates to the so called death wish and I think most humans are dealing with it all of the time. That it is there and it is inevitable. Like seeking the unknown, people seek it. I don't know how that relates to the work specifically.

WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW THE DRUMBEAT THE HEARTBEAT, THE HORIZON LINE ORIENTS US, AND I'VE THOUGHT IN MY LIFE THAT THE IDEA OF DEATH, BECAUSE I KNOW IT IS INEVITABLE, IS ALSO AN ORIENTING IDEA. AND YOU SAID WE SEEK THE INEVITABLE.

SO THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT DEATH. WE SEEK, I THINK TO SPEAK OF IT SOMEHOW, AND YOU SPEAK OF THAT BEYOND.

WE HAVE COME TO THE END OF THE QUESTIONS AND I WONDER IF THERE IS ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THIS TIME AROUND.

At this particular time I can't think of anything more we could mention, but you were good in posing your questions, and reading them to me so that one could be a little bit prepared in trying to get out some of those tough questions and to digging into the insight of the artist and also into the insight of the world. Like you say there is something more allusive there.

Well, that's maybe part of the thing too, that there is the magic of an art work that it isn't literal but it is something that is more serious and has something that goes beyond the surface.

GEORGE, YOU TALKED BEAUTIFULLY ABOUT MAGIC. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT.

I'm surprised that I did. If I answered some questions that's good.

NO YOU WERE VERY, VERY CLEAR. WELL, GEORGE MORRISON, THANK YOU.

Well, thank you, I'm glad we got in to some of those things.

EE/JH