



George Morrison Papers

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First I would want to mention again to most of you some of the approaches I use, to get students, beginners and advanced, acquainted with painting and drawing (I use these together because they are important and belong together.) Then, some of the problems I have been faced with in art schools I have taught in,-- 3 midwest schools and perhaps comparing them in connection with the contemporary art scene and New York City. And, also, to show some examples of beginning students work in this relation, after which there can be some questions asked to exchange some ideas.

Although I am a so-called abstract painter, I don't want to teach it, per se, - and, I say so-called mostly for identification; most painters would want to be called just "painters" and would want anyone to have such an intelligent assumption. A painter today works in many idioms and shouldn't be an oddity because he happens to be painting in an abstract manner---it should be high time that people know something about it. The first abstraction was painted over 50 years ago.

Wish I was asked -

I've had an academic background in my own training and towards the end of my art school days, I was veering off in an expressionist manner, then slowly evolving towards the abstract manner of the past few years. It is this "in between" the so-called realism and abstraction that I would like to see students begin. I always say an academic background is so much for the better, but that it is not necessary today. It takes too long, furthermore, the individual and expression has become more important. So with the student not knowing how to draw in the usual sense, I get him to be aware of shapes, movement, color and application of pigment, and even employing the crudity and naive quality of his figure or image. The influences I like to see him start with are the impressionists as Monet, Sisley, or Seurat; the Fauves like Matisse and Derain; the Cubists like Picasso; the German expressionism of Marc or Klee; and later Kokoschka and Beckman leading up to the avant-garde of today.

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So it is not painting the conventional picture to hang on the mantel or "to give to your Mother-in-law" -- nor is it to paint an "abstraction" for the sake of an "abstraction" -- for a conversation piece, or again for the mantel and the "mother-in-law" -- but employing some of the sound rudiments of working towards a more "vital" and more "individual" painting. I would like them to use these means and keep searching for themselves, and to keep in mind art in the fullest sense of the word--that today there are newer concepts of living and thinking--hence expression, and that the student should be aware of this and to be living and doing today.

In the 3 art schools I have taught in the last few years, The Minneapolis School of Art, Dayton Art Institute in Ohio, and here, one of the main difficulties was to get students away from the "literal image" or "concept" - this is revealed most in figure drawing where they would confine themselves to the careful outline on the center of the paper, trying to record, like a camera, the exact image of what was before them. It is like still wanting to remain in the womb--afraid to escape. The same thing happened with still life objects and landscape, where more liberties can be taken with shapes, exaggeration, or movement. One example, I suggest to avoid this is to approach the figure or object from the outside and work in, gradually making the image appear. This treatment of drawing in and out of the image or object also helped in the construction of the painting. On the other hand-- I knew a student in Mpls. who was doing large imitations of Kline. He was not my student but I wondered why he was doing it, and I thought that I wouldn't allow it myself, if possible. Later, a 4th year student in Dayton was doing large black swashes on canvass but confining them in a swift circular fashion and remaining within the vortex of the picture edge in canvass after canvass, the same idea as being confined with the literal image again. I suggested he cut thru the canvas a la Kline, to avert this circular repetition, which he did, and he ended up painting imitation Klines. In both cases, they did what they wanted to do, perhaps

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eventually getting it out of their systems.

I like the literal image giving way to more imaginary image, thru exaggeration, shape, movement, etc. Almost losing it, but yet retaining it--or even a fragment of it; this gives way toward a more abstract idea depending on how he wants it to be. Mpls. remains a better setup because it is bigger school in a bigger city, and speciallizes as an art school - sort of an academy, with more varied programs, more various types of painter-instructors, the city having other stimuli as the university with its programs, the Walker Art Center, the Mpls. Symphony, etc. All of this leads to more of an atmosphere of art. There would also be again a great comparison of the three to New York City which is the top art center in the world today. Nowhere else could be found this 'awareness' in art. It is there first hand in every sense. But more and more, art centers, colleges, ^{and} universities are broadening their programs thru lectures, artists, films and collections, to bring an ever widening knowledge to those who want to learn and do.

Before we get to some questions, I want to show some pictures by students who have never painted before, but are now on a good start with a better art attitude.