

THE ART EXPERIENCE - 1992

BUSINESS OF ART CENTER EXHIBITION

Yes, this is an invitation to an exhibit of my work of some 200 pieces done in a variety of materials and techniques. All the work falls under one of the three different approaches to art; impressions, problem solving, and illustration. These approaches are used respectively in landscapes, visual puzzles (I call double imagery), and fantasies.

Does this wide range of subject and technique mean you are adequately artistic in a variety of areas and master of none?

I'll let you decide that. I feel that the act of creativity is highest when each endeavor is a new challenge, the unique solution having to be sought after. Variety initiates and maintain the involvement. It's the kick for uniqueness.

I notice this invitation is `different`:

In addition to inviting you, I use it to discuss the art work you will see, and also to present a way of experiencing the art that could enhance your enjoyment of the show. An artist desires you, as a viewer, to become a participant because your involvement fulfills the reason for art.

It is an experiential cycle; the artist, in the creative process, experiences the art work, the work holds and reflects that experience, the viewer, then, becomes the artist in a sense by re-experiencing the creative process. The exhibited work becomes like so many events waiting to be received and reoccur.

So art is a two way street?

That is the artist's hope. Santiago Perez, a fellow artist said of my landscapes, "...Rockey's paintings ask the viewer to enjoy what he has enjoyed in nature; to stop and look and see and listen, and feel what Rockey has seen and heard and felt!" The strength of the art work lies in the connection between the artist, art work, and viewer. I must pull my whole self into my art with full concentration and full spirit. For I believe whatever the artist brings to the experience and puts into the art work will be there to be re-experienced. If I bring joy to the connection, it will be in the art work. If I am distracted, the art work will convey that. The art work `takes on` that experience. The full connection is not realized however until the viewer/re-ceiver allows it to happen. There is a method that facilitates and validates the depth of that connection called phenomenology which is the study of...

Wait, I don't mind a little art appreciation methodology, but can't your art speak for itself?

In a way, yes. But often there is more expression under the surface that many viewers don't attend to. Quick first impressions may cut short the art experience. I'd rather have you totally see and feel just one piece than to have you merely look at twenty.

The Phenomenon of the art experience occurs in four cumulative depths of expression.

They are offered to you as:

- 1 . The Sensuous Surface dealing with the elements and principles of art such as color, line shape, movement and pattern. This level is the emotional untutored expression.
2. The Representational Level where those colors, lines and movements represent identifiable objects and subject matter. This is the level of identification and clarification.
3. The Symbolic Level processing purpose and story significance. This level is highly cognitive for it takes into account the messages of expression.
4. The Total Expression is the relationship of the first 3 levels, how they work together to mold the essence of the work. This is the level, then, that brings feeling, understanding, and the relativity together to complete the art experience.

Won't all this analysis get in the way of my enjoyment of the show, or my simply liking or disliking of your art?

Good points. It could deter or even negate the potential experience if the analysis is left dormant. This method only works if during the analysis you contribute to the experience all of your relevant feelings, under standing, insights and empathetic responses. Done this way, your analysis will enrich the art experience. The art work, then, asks that you hold off on the opinions of like and dislike until you have fully experienced all of the levels of analysis. The clear mind sees better and promises a truer and often richer experience.

So it will help my enjoyment of the show. But if you create by using systematic levels, your work is surely linear and tight.

The phenomenological method requires the artist's attention to all the factors available. Aspects like emotions, instincts and looseness are a part of it. Though Van Gogh painted with passion, he used his intelligence and experience as well, utilizing every source within him—total energy with every stroke!

My efforts must be total. I use all the levels appropriate to the art experience at hand. When doing landscapes, all four levels are relevant. First, to insure the connection with the subject, I paint on site to tune into the immediate atmosphere and maintain emotional directness. Bugs, hot sun, cold to the bone, wind blowing over the canvas—it's all a part of the experience. I relish the first stage. It's gut level art, unburdened by self criticism; it's almost like just watching while the brush strokes of color and rhythm do their thing.

I calm down some for the representative stage. Patience and discipline take over to map out the scene. Painting Manitou is an extra challenge because the town is put together in such an unpredictable way, yet testing my eye awareness in capturing this complexity is fun.

Thoughtful editing begins the symbolic expression of Manitou. I take out wires and some signs that distract as non-counts. I add roundness to structures, and undulating lines for aliveness, and for the personality of Manitou to take shape. The variety of architecture, structures stacked one atop another, winding roads, terraced lawns, twisting trees, rock walls and stairs all over, build toward the essence of Manitou. Somehow, this variety is harmonious and gives a feeling of a close knit community in its total expression. It is Manitou as a storybook village of shops, family homes, and warmth. Each person in it is a character from a storybook, identifying with the town. I celebrate my living here by painting it.

Obviously, you paint your landscapes in earnest. What about the other works in the show?

The double-imageries are problem solving exercises to keep my creative senses alert. This series was initiated when, for my art students, I did a double-take drawing of azaleas with a hidden nymph in the negative spaces. This was done to illustrate the importance of seeing beyond just the outstanding features of an art work to find the subtle qualities for the full experience.

In order for the double imagery to work, it is necessary to render each image with some degree of photographic realism so the images can be identified. I am, however, becoming more abstract in my landscape and portrait painting, heading away from realism with its illusionary appearances, and seeing, instead, the reality of the subject that is its real and deep nature, its character and its essence. In Cezanne's still life paintings, the fruit is rendered with color and shape and form, not copying what they look like, but capturing what they are. He paints them more real than realism could show. This is what I want to achieve.

Do you find any reality in your fantasy series?

Yes, I call it believability. It is an important aspect of illustrating character from the world of fantasy. From his imagination, Walt Kelly created 'Pogo' who has a definite existence, personality and reality for me. I can get into the strip because of Pogo's believability. Since a major portion of my fantasies are commentaries on human interactions and our relationship with earth, the creatures I use need to be believable to deliver the message which is an of this series. If the symbolism is too obscure, the message will be purpose for the expression is

Another art work has most heavily levels remain inactive, consequently one lessened form of my fantasy is surrealism. Though all its total expression, surrealistic art work relies on this concluding stage because its other mysterious and unreadable. The buffet sculpture is an example. The sensuous surface has undulating forms weaving in and out to create rhythms movement. The representative level has recognizable, but seemingly unrelated faces, hands and figures. Though there are suggestions of symbolic references, this level remains unclear. Only in the relationship and aura of all three levels, then, does its concluding expression take its shape. Mystery becomes a quality of the experience, defining it as abstract: its mood surreal, its style baroque primitive.

How do you evaluate an art work? By its beauty? Its popularity?

It has to do with its success in evoking responses. As Rodin, the sculptor, said, "The Beauty of an art work is not in the work itself, rather it's in the experience the viewer has with the art work." I agree. The value can be determined by how successfully the experience is accomplished. Its effectiveness and affectiveness. In this sense you are a factor in the art work's value.

Its timeless quality is also important to me. Being popular or being created just to be different are temporary values, soon to lose relativity with the viewer/receiver.

Another factor of success is its after glow...the 'so what' of the experience. Art that has lasting effects on the receiver and stays warm in the inner being massaging the aesthetic spirit has real value. My daughter, Hannah, wrote a paper about an art work of mine, with the art work speaking in first person. "[The artist] breathed his life in to me...his personality is my expression. While at first a general onlooker will say I am a painting, the person who looks closely will know I am more. I am [the artist's] time, his efforts and his gift to you. I am his reason for living, his story, his life."

Influences:

Though past artists have inspired me; Da Vinci and his creativity, Pissarro with his perseverance, Van Gogh's total giving of self, making his art a labor of love, Arthur Rackham's experimental freedom; Mother Nature stands as the greatest inspiration. Her use of color, movement, aliveness, imagination, variety, rhythm, and relativity fill me with awe. I chose her as my first teacher; my first studio was outside. The material was dirt for sculpting roads and tunnels, trees to build houses in, and snow for sled runs. Connecting with her was as easy as breathing.

Schools then took over for half a century. Public school taught me humility, survival tactics, and how to derive good from extremely traumatic events. Art was often the saving grace. The seven years at The Art Institute of Chicago, 2 at the University of Colorado, and graduate 1 1/2 years with Ohio State solidified my connection with art and give me insights into the art experience; that art work does not dwell in the rare subjective atmosphere for a select few, or where likes and dislikes run the show. Art is there potentially for all to fully experience and artistry can be a learned process applicable to any endeavor. For twenty-five years, this was my theme for teaching young students

how to be artistic in following one's bliss and making "one's light so shine..'" The village Manitou itself is an inspiration to me with its unique houses and buildings, castles like the Miramont, and its setting with richly textured mountainsides, delightful stream, trees and gardens. Local artists like Ken and Tina Riesterer, continue to inspire and teach me. Manitou is full of inspirational people and groups, the BAC and Commonwheel., I owe them all. And my children...such caring, supporting fans. And my mother, to whom I dedicate this show. Her gentle love is still a profound source of enrichment and light for me. I commit my art to passing this on.

