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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

AN EXHIBITION OF ORIGINAL PAINTING IN TEMPERA

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ART

AN EXHIBITION OF ORIGINAL PAINTING IN TEMPERA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN ART

BY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my appreciation to the faculty of the
School of Art; special thanks for assistance and criticism are due
to Mr. John O'Neill, major professor and advisor.

BY



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The art of the Indian has been misinterpreted in the past. It was utilitarian, both religious and secular, but through pure esthetics it was formalized, stylized and symbolized; thus causing the art to remain static it suffered from lack of individuality in expression. The aboriginal art, however, embodied unaltered exploration in all phases of creative expression, having been affiliated with

AN EXHIBITION OF ORIGINAL PAINTING IN TEMPERA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To paint with direct imagination in close association with the sub-conscious is more rewarding than working with the familiar visual perception. At least it is more conducive to concentration (that might result in originality and intellectual or emotional inspiration) than mere recording. Painting, from a personal point of view, is a statement of conception rather than perception.

The artist is the medium of conveyance between reality and intellectual insight of expression. The intellectual approach is a natural, uninhibited way to a solid abstract quality. Psychological use of catharsis as a means to realize individuality renders a clearer and more definite expression, thus circumventing superficial insight in painting.

The art of the Indian has been misinterpreted in the past. It was utilitarian, both religious and secular, but through pure esthetics it was formalized, stylized and symbolized; thus causing the art to remain static: it suffered from lack of individuality in expression. The aboriginal art, however, embodied unlimited exploration in all phases of creative expression, having been affiliated with

nature and man. The Indian was in close harmony with nature; his philosophy, religion and physical existence evolved from it. He made use of his environment, from a simple relationship with nature, to a highly complex one; so nature became an integral part of the Indian's life.

The technique of the Sioux Indian ceremonial skin painters was a two-dimensional drawing; later, with the non-ceremonial painters, it was a semi-flat technique.

The paintings in this series are basically Indian in technique but a trend away from the indigenous art: the use of simple linearity and flat patterns expresses the third dimension. The straight and broken lines derive from quill work and also from an old Indian belief that "a straight line symbolizes unrelenting truth or righteousness". In quill work design only straight, horizontal and vertical lines are employed.

The use of opaque water color is helpful in retaining the original colors of the first expression and the power of the lines, as these are pictorially essential. This medium reduces the tendency to over work a painting.

CHAPTER II

MOURNERS

This painting is traditional in technique but original in composition. The introduction of a painted background is a trend away from the convention of two-dimensional Indian painting. The meticulous detail work is observational in purpose: the painting may be seen from a distance for a general impression or it may be observed closely for study of its parts.

The ceremony for mourners consists of the burial and the preparation for mourning time. Mourners dress in tattered clothes for humility and seek spiritual guidance from the Great Spirit. Self-sacrifice is generally practiced. In the painting, two are preparing themselves to undergo the self-sacrifice of tying buffalo skulls to their backs, with thongs from the skulls for attachment to the skin. The painted buffalo skull commemorates the dead.

The design of the large mass is used to give solidity of form and express movement within the mass. A buffalo symbol (symbol for life) denotes spirit life as apart from the physical and affirms an old Indian belief that the spirit of the dead remains near the living.



of the blankets. This shows the solidity of man as likened to the solid forms of nature.

CHAPTER III

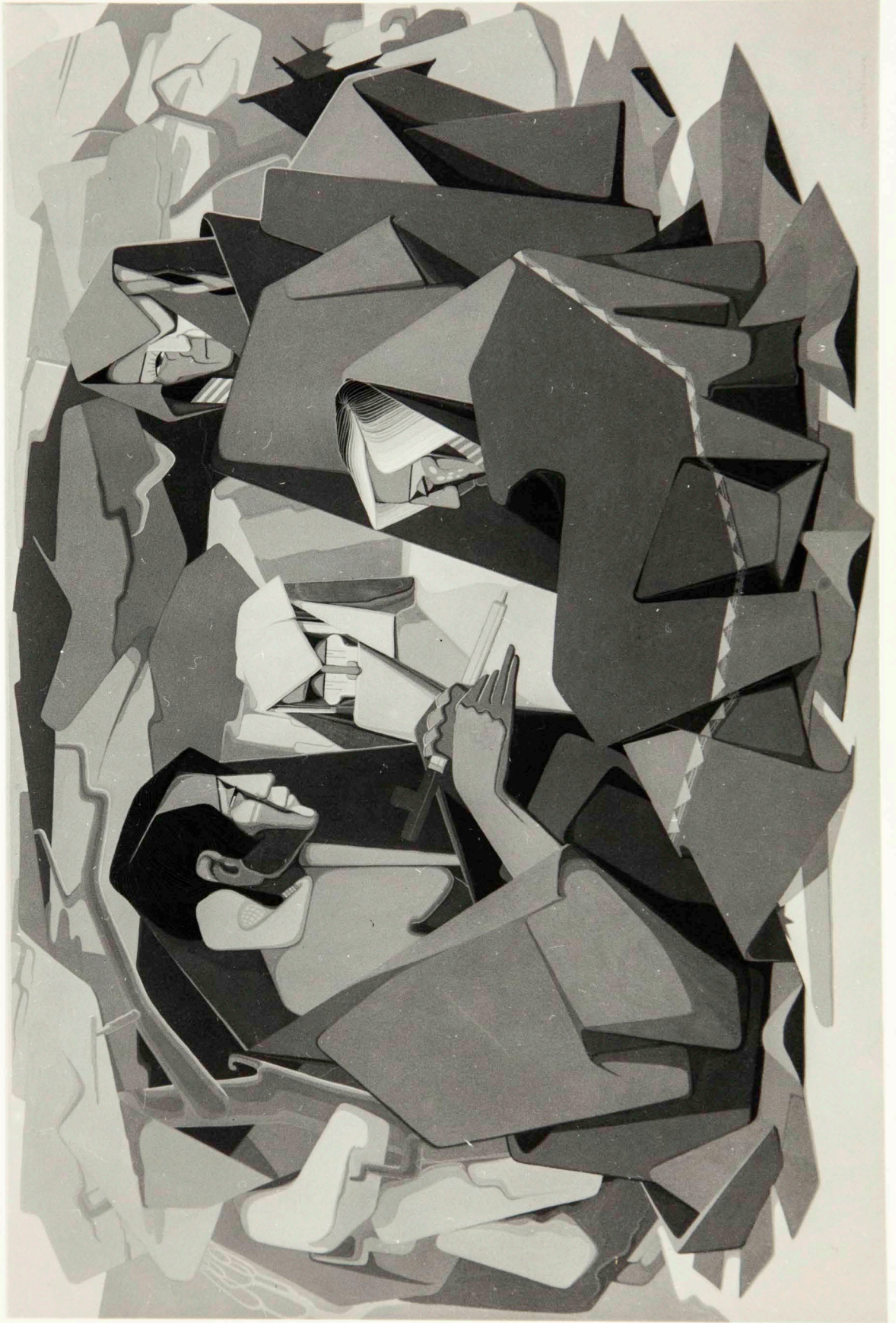
COUNCIL

At the present time, the straight line construction is a personal concept of expression to gain individuality. The technique idea comes from quill work and the Indian belief that "a straight line means truth or righteousness". The ideational quality of exact representation of the Indian at council is stressed to reflect the true identity of man as an intellectual being. A refined conception of man's perceptive qualities is conducive to intellectual insight and the abstraction of true realism, realism meaning beauty in the "ugly".

The idea of the painting is to relate foreground with background in composition as well as in meaning of cosmic expression. The symbol for time is the crescent moon. It is used as the basic design for the composition. The nature objects form one large linear crescent (symbolizing the time of man with nature) and a smaller curve of figures forms the other crescent to fit within the first. This combination reveals the form of a cradle of nature for the group: philosophically the Indian is within the environment of nature.

The rhythmic and orderly patterns in color are expressive of the Indian's poetic and religious concepts of nature. Close harmony with nature is emphasized by formal abstraction as delineated by folds

of the blankets. This shows the solidity of man as likened to the solid forms of nature.



CHAPTER IV

RIDERS

This work was made from the idea of ancient Indian ceremonial painting, a method which dealt with a simple technique and composition.

The struggle shown within the mass depicts the Indian's struggle in a white man's world. Realistic and abstract forms also conflict in the painting. The art principles constitute both the Indian and the white man's philosophy of esthetics. However, validity of their use lies in their compositional unity as a whole to express an abstract ideology. The unreal handling of colors is not wholly original, but the coloring in its entirety is original in content and also free in expression in its abstract ideational quality. Indian ceremonial use of some colors, such as ritual yellow, is for purposes of depth in painting, of form as well as of thought. It is used in the background, together with pure streaks of white for the flight of arrows, to break the monotony of yellow, and to pattern the area surrounding the riders. Blue was used for the painted horses, natural earth color for man (in order to relate him to nature). The remainder of the colors were intended to be an abstraction of their realistic value.



CHAPTER V

DANCE OF THE DOUBLE WOMAN

A painting of a ceremony: the spirit of the Double Woman (mythological being) is made visible by the one who dreams of the Double Woman. He begins the ceremony by singing about his adopted spirit. The Double Woman, who appears as two women, takes part in the ceremony by acting out her work. She is supposed to have made the strange carvings on rocks which foretold future events; her other work involved a moral. Being very beautiful she had the power to lure wilful men. She would lure them away from the camp to lose them or leave them unconscious. The moral is that a man should have perfect control over his emotions, even in the presence of sheer beauty.

The basic design is a circle (symbolizing unity) of figures and is also in accord with the mythology that the spiritual, psychological and physical aspects of nature in unison should complete the cycle of life. The formal background symbolizes ceremony; a combination of straight and curve lines was employed.



CHAPTER VI

KINI (RESURRECTION)

From straight lines patterns evolve, the patterns which, though painted flat, still give a feeling of form or roundness. The altered edges of areas account for the feeling of solidity.

An Indian convert is shown on a burial scaffold. The portrayal of a heathen and his resurrection reveals an ancient Indian belief that between nature and man lies religion. Emotional stress is in the abstraction as a result of the realistic ideation of death and its effect on an Indian. The composure of mental serenity, restraint of emotions, peace of mind and soul are attributes of the Indian which as represented here account for the quieter mood of the painting. The Indian, in his true sense of nature, remains silent, though inwardly enjoying the spiritual satisfaction attained through his god, the Great Spirit (a divine power) and thereby elevates himself intellectually.

The color yellow in this instance means religion; red earth, man. Reflected shadows cast on tones of red symbolize the ceremonial envelopment of the figure, similar to the presentation of a sacred object on a red blanket, an object too holy to touch with the hands. The aerial view suggests the super-imposition of man against sky, sky being part of nature and the Great Spirit.



The crescent forms of women and hut reflect the sky's curvature, and in working balance the composition, as well as the cosmic order, is accord with the Indian's philosophy of life.

CHAPTER VII

THREE WOMEN

Simplicity of line and form is used to paint the daily life of the Indian. The foreground shows three women, one beading, one washing her hair and another combing her hair. A hut is behind the group.

Flat technique is used as a mode of expression. The crescent form, or animal track symbol, is the essence of the compositional design. The symbol as a motif is used functionally in design for delineation of man's integration into the pattern of nature. The symbol is also used to associate animal with man and nature and its integral part played in the life of man. Therefore, the use of tracks to depict objects is original, as it is in agreement with the simple Indian ideology.

The painting can be understood either as a series of objects, or as a series of symbols. A somber background of multiple horizontal and angular crescents depict the sky. A broken cloud effect is the reflection or mirage of the terrain of rolling plains or hills. The map-like pattern depicts the sky without its naturalistic beauty, interpreted as a mystical dwelling place for mythical birds, containing an esoteric meaning for the Indian.

The crescent forms of women and hut reflect the sky's curvature, and in meaning balance the composition, as well as the cosmic order, in accord with the Indian's philosophy of life.

