STRUCTURE AND SYMBOLISM

by

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A SUPPORTING DOCUMENT FOR THESIS EXHIBITION

submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirement for the degree

MASTER OF FINE ART

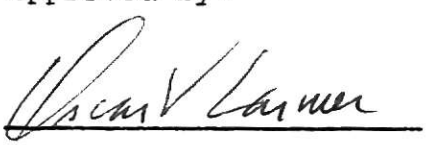
Department of Art

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1981

Approved by:



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SLIDE PORTFOLIO

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PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERN

Art work results in an evolution of feelings, the sum of which comprises a mood. Great art invests emotion, creates emotional process in which an atmosphere is created and a relationship is established between the artist and the viewer. To reach and touch the viewer through the art work, I must have courage to grow through my art in the ever evolving process of fresh artistic creation. I must also have courage to change known forms if necessary, and to establish my own values in the creation of my own particular artistic identity.

In 1956, Jackson Pollock said "Painting is self-discovery."[1] Self-discovery presupposes self-expression. I can find myself from the result of self-expression. Self-expression in my work serves as an affirmation of my existence. Painting is one of the possible creative ways through which self-discovery can be achieved. Forms, colors, subject matter, and visual sensations in my painting are the vehicles through which I externalize and disclose my emotion and personality. My painting has a special meaning as a tool for me to understand myself.

1. Gottlieb, Carla, Beyond Modern Art, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., New York 1976, P. 18.

ART HISTORICAL CONCERN

The history of visual arts during the past quarter of a century after World War II has been the story of various and diverse movements. "Abstract Expressionism was succeeded by Assemblage, Pop Art, Op Art, Kinetic Art, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, and Environmental Art..... Those movements represent a resifting and re-evatuation of ideas which were already known before the World War. Abstract Expressionism is rooted in Surrealism; Assemblage and Pop Art reached back beyond Surrealism to Dada; Op Art and kinetic Art are founded upon experiments made at Bauhaus; Minimal Art combines both Dada idea and Bauhaus influence"[2]

The diversity, violence and rapidity of those artistic movements represent the tendency toward extremity, and this extremity is discussed in terms of Minimal Art in Clement Greenberg's statement. "The Minimalists appear to have realized, finally, that the farout as an end in itself, and that means the furthest-out and nothing short of that. They appear also to have realized that the most original and furthest-out in the past hundred years always arrived looking as though it had parted company with everything previously known as art. In other words, the furthest-out usually lay on the borderline between art and non-art."[3]

2. Lucie-Smith, Edward, Late Modern, Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, New York 1970, P. 11.
3. Greenberg, Clement, "Recentness of Sculpture" (in Minimal Art, Critical Anthology, E. D. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York 1968), P. 182.

As opposed to a material or intuitive method, the Minimal artists use a rational and conceptional procedure, and they do not allow the automatism of the artist's hand to interfere with the rationalism. So, the composition is derived mathematically and based on the systematic repetition of geometric elements to create the active interaction between physical shape of support and depicted shapes. The major formal character in Minimalist painting is the overall effect and it's literalness. "What is minimal about Minimal Art, or appears to be when contrasted with Abstract Expressionism or Pop Art, is the means, not the end."[4]

Among the major artistic movements after World War II, I have been particularly influenced by Minimal Art. But I do not want to define myself in terms of a certain style or movement of art, because I am searching for my own way and I want to be free to do. My painting can be defined partially in terms of Minimalist attitudes.

ANALYSIS OF MY PAINTING

Minimal Art stakes everything on shape as a given property of objects, if not, indeed, as a kind of object in its own right. It aspires, not to be defeated or suspended its own objecthood,

4. Perreault, John, "Minimal Abstract" (in Minimal Art), P. 260.

but on the contrary to discover and project objecthood as such. The projection of objecthood as such means that the basic physical properties of the object impose their laws upon the work of art instead of being subservient to it. I have been working primarily on this basis in my painting. This kind of sensibility has been predominant not only in my hard-edge paintings done between 1968 and 1977 but also in my recent dripped paintings despite the formal and technical differences between those two.

I look at a certain given shape of support, listen to what it says to me, and then I start to construct my work accordingly. I start from the physical shape of canvas. I receive the shape of the support actively, and so, even an ordinary rectangular shape of canvas has its own meaning to me. For instance, I recently employed parallelogram shapes as supports, and I repeated color stripes in two different directions which run exactly parallel to both the edges of the canvas so that each stripe echoes the edge. Thus the shape of canvas inspires my work and the physical world informs the aesthetic world. In other words, the edge, the physical limits of space, is one of the major problems in my painting. The main reason why I use systematic and symmetric structures is to solve the problem between literal shape of support and depicted shape. Consequently, my painting can be characterized by its sense of symmetry and systemic orders, which is also found in Minimalist painting.

In my painting, the systematic and structural regularity is

substituted for balance as the principle ordering of composition. I usually do not put frames on the sides of canvas because the edge of canvas becomes more noticeable. The edge can be seen as an end, as well as a part of a shape. It can be said that I construct paintings rather than paint pictures. I am working with a rational and conceptional method as the Minimalists do. But my painting does not show the tendency toward extremity which is the Minimalist attitude, because I am moving toward more symbolic and illusionistic tendencies which appear to be parallel to the literalist sensibility of Minimal artists.

It might be said that symbolism can be achieved only by a representational style of painting, because symbolism flourished in Christian Art and Surrealism, and traditional symbolism employed figurative images to translate religious or dogmatic ideas in expression of metaphysical or philosophical truth. But contemporary art opened a new road for the translation of symbolic thinking into visual terms by employing non-objective images. And these can be said to be confined to conveyance of universal concepts, and life and death, youth and old age, eternity and time, etc. and can be included in universal concepts.

I have been working with abstract forms, and which serve in two ways; as a vehicle to convey visual sensations and as symbolic forms. I do not want to separate the formal aspect from emotional aspect, because they are correlated and interact with each other

in the whole painting. I am currently involved with dripped pattern. I paint horizontal stripes in thin paint and the wet paint drips down by itself due to gravity. The repetition of this accidental kind of vertical pattern establishes an overall grid structure together with the horizontal stripes. This overall grid structure symbolizes a sense of equivalization and democratization. There is no predominent feature and every part of painting is equivalent. That is the reason why I prefer overall structure to hierarchic composition.

The concept of time is important in my painting. The metamorphosis of the dripped pattern suggests passing time as well as spatial flowing. The dripped pattern is supposed to be vertical due to gravity, but it might appear horizontal or upward depending upon the way I hang the painting on the wall. That sort of freedom from gravity also implies some kind of irony. The formal vocabulary in my painting is influenced by my symbolic thinking so that the works progress toward a formal goal attuned to my symbolic content.

The color is also an important element that plays a decisive role not only in building up the overall visual sensation but also in a symbolic sense. I do not consciously want to represent a certain nationality in my painting, but I was just impressed by the subtle color harmony and the sublime overall

color sensibility of decorations in the traditional architectures of Korea. I usally use intensive colors such as red and blue underneath the muted colors so that the relatively brighter colors jump out through the dull colors. This type of juxtaposition of colors enables me to achieve the subtle color sensibility which is inherent in the Korean architecture.

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned, the two major concerns in my painting are the structural aspect and non-objective symbolism. There are similarities between the structural aspect of my painting and literalist sensibility in Minimal painting. But there are obvious differences between the two, because the literalness in Minimal artist does not allow any subsidiary effects, associations, automatism, and visual illusion. But in my painting, there are visual illusions like the feeling of space and depth, for instance. My hard-edge paintings showed a literalist attitude and the tendency toward extremity, but now I am gradually moving toward more illusionistic and symbolic tendencies. But the illusionism and symbolism in my recent paintings are correlated with the systematic and overall structures. The integration of those two factors is the important concern in my painting.

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LIST OF SLIDES

NO.	TITLE	MEDIUM	SIZE	DATE
1	Figure Drawing	Charcoal	25" x 19"	1977 Fall
2	Figure Drawing	Charcoal	25" x 19"	1977 Fall
3	Figure Drawing	Charcoal	25" x 19"	1978 Spring
4	No Title	Oil on Canvas	60" x 60"	1972 Spring
5	Allegory I	Acrylics on Canvas	48" x 48"	1977 Fall
6	Allegory II	"	52" x 52"	1978 Spring
7	Kansas Landscape	"	72" x 48"	1978 Fall
8	Kansas Evening	"	60" x 48"	1978 Fall
9	No Title	"	48" x 48"	1981 Spring
10	No Title	"	60" x 30"	"
11	No Title	"	60" x 48"	"
12	No Title	"	72" x 30"	"
13	Kansas Spring I	"	72" x 48"	"
14	Kansas Spring II	"	"	"
15	Kansas Spring III	"	"	"
16	Kansas Spring IV	"	"	"