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FOX, JOHN BENJAMIN. The Attitudinal and Physical Relationships of Man to the Motorcycle as a Problem in Painting. (1970) Directed by: Mr. Andrew Martin.

pp.6

The problem of my thesis is relating the physiological and attitudinal aspects of man to the motorcycle through painting with India ink on a canvas surface primed with gesso.

Drawings were made of the male physique and of the structural elements of the motorcycle while relating the drawings as to attitude and/or physical similarities or mood. These were developed into simplified value scale problems using a maximum of six values of grey. The drawings were executed as paintings by applying pre-determined India ink solutions to a canvas surface which had been primed with gesso.

The results of this were six paintings consisting of two panels each for the thesis problem. The paintings retained the texture and the flatness of the canvas surface.

APPROVAL SHEET

THE ATTITUDINAL AND PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIPS  
OF MAN TO THE MOTORCYCLE AS A  
PROBLEM IN PAINTING

by

John Benjamin Fox

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts  
in Painting

Greensboro  
May, 1970

Approved by

Andrew Martin  
Thesis Advisor

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I was an essential part of the work of Andrew Martin, who as my thesis advisor, provided me with criticism which helped me to reach my research goals meaningfully.

Thesis Advisor Andrew Martin

Oral Examination  
Committee Members

Andrew Martin

Joan Gregory

Joe Steeler

Wam Abbey

July 16, 1970  
Date of Examination

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I should like to express my appreciation for the time and concern afforded my thesis work by the faculty and staff of the Graduate Art Department of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I owe an especial debt of gratitude to Mister Andrew Martin, who as my thesis advisor, gave me the advice and criticism which helped to keep my vision clear and my goals meaningful.

I am presenting in my paintings the figurative elements of man and motorcycle as a series of juxtapositions. Each painting is composed of two panels: one depicting some aspect of man; the other providing some view of the machine.

I have examined man and motorcycle with an eye for those qualities which I felt best related them in attitude or physical similarities. They are not to be necessarily related to each other in function, as wheel to leg or foot or handlebar to hand, but quite frequently to depict unrelated functional configurations. Concern for what either subject is doing has no place in my painting. The subjects are merely "things" to be inspected as one might do with museum articles whose functions are unknown or unimportant; but which might have physical qualities which produce an element of interest.

The motorcycles of the paintings are not "working models"; you are not to read them as such. You would be hard put to identify precisely the mechanical aspects of the machine found in the paintings, because a precise blueprint of this was not my intention at all.

The man subject has also been stripped of many of those elements or physical attributes which would identify this man as "human", with a soul, a consciousness and an awareness of the world about him.



I believe that everyone has experienced "persistence of vision" especially in the viewing of motion pictures. Our eyes are able to "see" a residual image of something we have been focusing upon, even though we have looked away, or it has changed positions and moved on. If we move a hand quickly before our eyes, we see what appears to be many hands, fading and blurring into each other. This persistence of vision plays an integral part in my choosing to use the diptych approach in presenting the two subjects, man and motorcycle. I expect that momentary carry-over of the image from one panel to the next. By placing the two panels so close to each other, I feel I am provoking a visual interlacing of the two images, regardless of how momentary it may be.

Then, in gallery or museum situations, there is the tendency of an individual to make some judgement of comparison, however simple or complex, of the piece of work he is presently viewing to that work which precedes or follows it. He may prefer the color of one painting over another; he may choose a landscape over a still-life; and he may seek out the motives of two artists and compare or contrast these aspects. The two panel concept of my paintings is intended to evoke similar and different considerations. The panels are in such close proximity that it makes it difficult for one not to make some comparisons.

For me, my paintings possess two levels of understand-

ing: that of the painting itself - its surface; the subject matter; its design and composition; its basic physical qualities; and that level of understanding into which the viewer passes, through his own involvement with the paintings. I feel that by setting the two subjects into separate panels and by placing them in juxtaposition, that the viewer is forced into involvement with the aforementioned persistence of vision and comparison.

The surface of the canvas is extremely important to me in that the qualities it contributes are an essential and integral part of the total effect of the work. The canvas is the essence of my painting. To attempt to disguise its innate properties would be an insensitive use of the medium.

To accomplish the surface I wanted for my paintings, I finally arrived at the use of India ink on a gesso surface. The gesso was applied with a roller to a cotton duck canvas. The surface quality of the cotton duck made it possible to attain a slightly irridescent appearance. The ink seeks out the low areas of the weave and allows the raised, gessoed threads to show white above the ink covered spaces. I found it necessary to use the roller in applying the gesso to keep the gesso from developing heavy areas of concentration. An uneven application, applied with a brush, proved unsatisfactory since it brought about an uneven ink distribution and caused a value change and texture within the shapes on the canvas that was unwanted. The use of the roller helped me to arrive



at my purpose of a controlled modulation of the surface.

India ink was found to be more easily controlled than oil or acrylic pigments and was selected for use for this reason. And since color in its traditional sense was essentially unimportant to me for the subject I was painting, the ink allowed me to develop a light-modulating solution which would determine the light value of the canvas surface, by controlling the amount of light which would be reflected from its surface. The ink is essentially a screen which filters the light passing onto the gesso surface and outward from it. The concentration of carbon in the ink I could control by the addition of water to the solution. The ink is a commercially produced type by the A.W. Faber-Castill Higgins Company.

The solutions I prepared in advance using the following mixtures which gave me a scale of six values:

- Value I: One part ink to 100 parts water
- Value II: One part ink to 50 parts water
- Value III: One part ink to 25 parts water
- Value IV: Two parts ink to 25 parts water
- Value V: Three parts ink to 25 parts water
- Value VI: Four parts ink to 25 parts water

My drawings had been developed into simplified value shapes which composed the images of the figure and of the motorcycle. To these shapes I assigned a definite value number corresponding to the ink solutions I had prepared.

The results of these assigned values I could only judge after the application had been made to the canvas surface. This at times meant that I must repaint an entire panel or panels before arriving at a satisfactory surface quality. This meant beginning with a fresh canvas surface, since re-gessoing a used surface delivered a build-up of gesso and ink that produced an undesirable appearance to the final product, usually in the form of a smooth surface which had lost all or much of the texture of the canvas.

I wanted very much to keep the awareness that the painting is a flat surface and not to disguise the texture and flatness of the canvas. The edge of the painting is left unpainted for this purpose. The ink solution has been kept thin enough to allow the texture of the canvas to come through and actually enhance its surface quality.

Man as a painter is no less a man. Not to deny the greatness or value of other subjects or content for his creative work, man can do worse than to look to himself, at all his simplicity and complexity, to find motivation and reason for his creative efforts.

I have made it my intent not to paint about man or around man, but to paint man as I know and see him to be. I see man as an object to be closely inspected, much in the same way that man must look upon many objects and situations found within his world.

I have placed man on no pedestal; I have made no moral

judgements about him, I have simply placed man on the plane of speculation of one of the objects of his own speculation, the motorcycle; and in doing so I have intended to establish some relationship of the two, whether it be in attitude or physical similarities or both.