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**THE NATURE OF TWENTY PAINTINGS**

by

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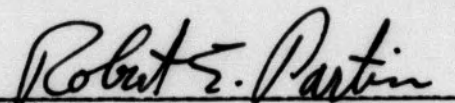
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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the paintings it accompanies in order to assist me and the observer in their evaluation. My paper in the first chapter will deal with first the impulse and then the procedure by which my paintings came into being. It will be important to know from the moment at which I say to myself, "I will paint a picture," the step by step procedure. Chapter Two will be a discussion of my painting in general. Comments on each of the twenty paintings make up Chapter Three.

LIST OF PAINTINGS

CASEINS:

King and Queen

Two Figures on the Beach

The Factory

My Friend

The Man With The Limp Brown Flag

Beach Man

A Figure

The Red Headed Man Hoisting His Trousers

Panic

One Green Eye

Landscape With Figures

The Flying Hair

Black and White

OILS:

Strolling

The Beach

Landscape

Redstruck

Water Images

Inland

The Child

## CHAPTER ONE

The very foundation of man is his philosophy of life and this begins with his concept of himself. While there are certainly other contributing factors to man's inability to find himself today, it is my belief that machine efficiency and specialization have contributed largely to a world of impersonal relationships. What he believes himself to be is not only important in social relationships but how he relates himself to everything in this world; his possessions for example. Virtually everything man uses is produced by a machine; if he identifies with any of his possessions, he ultimately identifies with a machine. The need for the personal, the individually produced product is evidenced by the re-awakened emphasis of the craftsman that we have today. Mechanization and specialization have reduced the individuality of man. His relationships have become as impersonal as might be those of a machine. This individuality of man is vital to him—he must be recognized for himself as an individual and not just as one among a group functioning as a group. However, it seems in most cases, he is one among a group functioning as a group, and consequently he can have no real concept of himself as an individual, (primary for personal relationships). The balance of impersonal to personal must be restored. This imbalance is the basis of mankind's sickness today. My answer to the question of how to restore this balance is an art rooted in the self—completely personal—completely subjective.

All paintings are, to a degree, subjective in as much as all bear the stamp of the artist upon them, but all do not have a mysterious

quality about them that speaks far and beyond the artist himself. This quality of mystery results, I believe, from painting subjectively--for along with the artist's statement of himself comes an involuntary statement, an obscure revelation of what matters most in our world; and, as Jacques Maritain writes:

. . . when art primarily intent on the artist's Self succeeds in revealing creative subjectivity, it does also reveal obscurely Things and their hidden aspects and meanings--and with greater power of penetration indeed, I mean into the depths of this Corporeal Being itself and this Nature that our hands touch. While endeavoring to disclose and manifest the artist's Self, the poetic perception which animates art catches and manifests at the same time what matters most in Things, the transparent reality and secret significance on which they live.<sup>1</sup>

So the particular process I have chosen is in reality no choice but an imposition on myself from within but beyond my control. It is a need--a need to restore the balance of personal to impersonal. At the same time, if I can not only help correct the imbalance but offer something far greater than just my reaction to life by somehow indicating in my paintings what Jacques Maritain writes of, then it would seem I would have achieved something of real value.

The particular process by which I fill this need is the unpremeditated. (By unpremeditated I mean the type of expression which is produced on the final canvas without a preconceived composition either a mental picture or preliminary drawings.) The subject was unpremeditated in all of the twenty paintings. It was the initial application of paint to canvas or paper which guided me. This means that at

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 29.

no time did I visualize the completed work. (Some of the paintings, however, I did approach with a vague idea of a shape to be used or a color. These paintings will be indicated later in the paper.) No matter how small the initial stroke or spot made on the canvas or paper, immediately after the space was broken various relationships were evident. Where there was no idea to begin with, as the painting was built, one emerged more and more urgently. Only when I was carried away without resisting was the thing hoped for realized. In such instances the composition was rendered through perceptual evaluation.

It is my belief that the artist's whole life is a preparation for this kind of activity. Previously, the fundamentals of art or design are studied and at first very consciously applied. Slowly, sufficient understanding is achieved and these same fundamentals are manifest as an integral part of every painting--just as the knowledge and understanding of them is a part of the painter. Applying these fundamentals is no longer wholly a conscious act for the painter. It is partially subconscious. The success of the painting depends on developed relationships. To achieve this, conscious as well as subconscious composing comes into action.

I believe the subconscious to be a storehouse of all impressions derived from the painter's experience. After the actual event, or series of events is forgotten, stored within the painter is the impression; then when a painter is possessed, so to speak, by the act of creating, it is just this sort of mystery,—imaginative constructions from subconscious impressions, "unexpressed significance, unexpressed

meanings unconsciously putting pressure on the mind,"<sup>2</sup> the feeling of becoming—that creeps in and shapes the ultimate content of the painting giving validity to the subject for the painter and, hopefully, for others.

To create in the manner I have just described makes it necessary to complete a painting within one creative effort in order to grasp and maintain a continuity of feeling. This is accomplished only through a single response. Upon completion of this response in which all the creative forces within the painter have been at work, the painting has a life of its own, divorced from that of the painter. To go back at this point and to try consciously to perfect any portion of this world involves a new feeling, one out of tune with the original one, and the painting becomes another world. I do not wish to rule out all possibilities of correcting or perfecting but merely to make known that I believe there is a line of distinction between maintaining "what was there" and a new painting.

For the painter to feel this complete absorption in and identification with his work presupposes a self discipline, a capacity for intense feelings, perception, and complete honesty to interpret what has been seen, felt, and understood. This creative discipline generates a detachment from the conformities and practicalities of society; a discipline which is necessary in order for the artist to create with all his inherent capabilities. I believe the artist must remove himself from the world, become completely self contained, rely on and trust his

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 8.



subconscious--for it is by virtue of this very detachment from the world that he can speak best, in terms of paint, of and about the world. The artist has an intuitive sensitivity to relationships (which affirms again the work of the subconscious). He is aware of and able to manipulate all the factors contributing to the completion of the work of art, including the mastery of materials and techniques.

It seems to me to be the intention of the artist to communicate. Communication, however, is not a word happily applied to painting today from the average spectator's point of view. Nevertheless, in painting as in all other forms of communication, specialization is more and more apparent. In television, for example, there are various programs addressed to different groups of people--divisions ranging from the lower forms of melodrama to the more mentally stimulating programs. This is not to say the programs of a different nature do not appeal to any one person, but that they are primarily addressed to a specific group. Such is the case with painting.

Since painting has become more abstract and has reduced its representational function, it is not easily deciphered by the uninitiated. It is not addressed to the relatively indifferent and impersonal receiver but to those who exhibit sensitivity, a habit of discrimination, an appreciation for the quality of things, and a response to new forms and ideas in order to derive as much as possible from the paintings.

## CHAPTER TWO

These paintings are an outgrowth of past experiences--places, people and events stored within my subconscious. It is I think because these images were stored within the subconscious that the paintings are somewhat a mystery to me, making it doubly difficult to find words for them.

Man and nature are painted as one. They are apart, different, but they interpenetrate one another.

My whole life has been spent close to the water, my life filled with activities around the water, so it is reasonable that this type of environment would be a great part of me and thus part of my paintings. Most of the paintings have a feeling of water or beach to me, and in all are figures--one, two, or three figures; some just standing and others doing rather ridiculous things. It is the people and their actions appearing in the paintings that are difficult to explain.

Today innumerable pressures are brought to bear upon us. We are forced to make countless choices or decisions every day, but everything changes so rapidly that by the time we have satisfied ourselves by one decision we have made, the circumstances have so changed as to call for a re-evaluation and another decision. If we are forced to live in the city, there are physical pressures such as noise and close living conditions. Moral values have changed; (accounting for the fact that what we say and what we do are often quite different), and relative importance of our institutions have

changed. However, within this rapidly changing world, essentially man and nature remain constant. Man still requires certain things to exist and certain emotional needs to live. These things have not changed since the beginning of time.

The trouble seems to begin with the fulfillment of these needs. How can man have self esteem when he has little realization of himself as an individual? How can he have emotional ties in an impersonal world? A change of pace he has in abundance--a group feeling also. So here again is the imbalance of personal to impersonal.

It seems to me man only needs to satisfy his basic requirements: physical and emotional. While his physical needs can be satisfied, this is not true of his emotional needs in this impersonal world. I find this ludicrous and, at the same time, tragic. In as much as I see man relatively unchanged basically, the "modern trappings," so to speak, can appear absurdly incongruous at times. The sophisticated facade becomes more elaborate to hide the constant foibles of man. It is not to be understood that I exclude myself from the plight of man; on the contrary, I am a part of it and this manifests itself in my paintings.

The being "caught unawares" moment that happens to everyone is offered in partial explanation for the attitudes assumed by some of my painted people; for I believe that mainly through these moments man reveals himself regardless of the facade.

What was done with the paint was, in part, an outgrowth of the emerging subject matter during the creative process. In most cases I

deliberately avoided "completeness" in the paintings because I feel physical completeness and perfection is a denial of the world as we know it. Where a painting is thinly painted it is because the picture was developed quickly. As the paintings are painted during one creative response, this would determine, to some extent, how the paint is applied. Because I did wish to avoid completeness and because it was painted during one time span, I could not and did not want to take great pains with paint application; consequently, the paint is brushed onto the canvas or paper freely in movements natural to me.

The figure in his back was painted during the same period. It was developed quickly. There is something about the painting, but I feel that it is that the lack of these qualities that perhaps give it a certain amount of interest. The two figures—old and young, black and white, married and wife, mother and child—could be any of those two in the life of two people, the basis of all human relationships.

The painting is done in the style of the old, as it is done by the hand in the window. The background is made up of small and great with white in sharp contrast, creating a white, stark appearance. Even the yellow and red colors are dark in the background. The two figures are not only seen in the background, but also in shape. This painting could be done in any style by the painter's choice. The figures on the left are white, and the figures on the right are black, attitudes according to the theme of the work. In the window I often

### CHAPTER THREE

The painting titled King and Queen was done in a cheerful mood. In this painting I wished to work with a large red area. Red simply because of its appeal for me. Everything else in the painting was painted in response to the red. The crown on the king's head was deliberately painted in the way it was even though I felt it to be against "good painting practices." There is a somewhat natural inclination in most, children in particular, to rebel when told something they should do. The Queen, although not painted as forcefully as the King, asserts herself insidiously.

Two Figures on the Beach came entirely through the creative process. It was developed quickly. There is nothing exciting or daring about the painting, but I feel that it is just the total absence of these qualities that perhaps gives it a certain amount of intrigue. The two figures--man and woman, father and son, husband and wife, mother and child--it could be any of these but it is the idea of two people, the basis of all personal relationships.

The Factory is either as the title implies, or it could be the beach in the winter. The background is made up of cold blue greens with white in sharp contrast rendering a rather ghostly appearance. Even the yellows are not convincingly warm in the foreground. The two figures are not only apart in physical proximity, but also in shape. This painting could be viewed in relation to the previous painting, Two Figures on the Beach--the implication being the change in personal attitudes according to the season of the year. In the summer I relax

and am more likely to form more intimate emotional ties. In the winter I am more concerned with my work.

My Friend became a portrait. Through the delicate color, the sentiment with which the friend is thought of is obvious. The colors, pale and tender, closely related, embody the sentiment.

The Man With the Limp Brown Flag depicts a man with the upper portion of his head sliced off (he has lost his mind), one hand to chin contemplating the other out-stretched hand holding a limp brown flag. The reds give an importance to the painting that the actual subject does not imply. It is this incongruity that is the painting.

The same may be said for the painting titled Beach Man. This is man at the beach laden with all of his beach equipment, including his big red nose and red legs that he had not intended to be red. This is another instance of man "caught unawares." I sense that he feels rather disgusted with the whole situation--his immediate situation and circumstances that forced him to be in it.

A Figure developed from the wish to have an image restricted to the outer part of the painted surface. The wish was a rebellion against "good painting practices" again. I wanted to see if I could restrict the image and still make the painting work. The thin black line cutting across the open space developed naturally as part of the whole idea. The line is the arm and hand of the figure. The idea of outer space seems to be taken casually here (because of the self-importance I sense about the figure), but with a certain amount of importance, in as much as he has his hand in it.

All sorts of symbolism could be read into The Red Headed Man Hoisting His Trousers. Nothing much was implied, however. It became what it is and that is about all.

The emotion in Panic is in sharp contrast to most of the other paintings. The figure is shown as a part of his environment, but the arms and hands stand out from the rest of the painting. The hands themselves are more claws than anything else. Perhaps the symbolism lies in the fact that the hands, or claws, are pictured against the space in the upper portion of the painting. Quest of the infinite or the spiritual.

One Green Eye is again a figure in a beach setting. This one seems to be a bit more at home in his surroundings. The earth colors declare that he is of the earth.

In the painting, Landscape With Figures, the figures' heads are the buildings in the background. The bodies become a part of the water in the foreground. The symbolism is that the brain is divided according to the particular function it fulfills--so is a house or building. Also one's personality has facets like a building has rooms. The bodies being a part of the water probably comes from the fact that I associate myself with water.

The Flying Hair represents two figures on the beach. Man and woman, the woman with an abundance of hair blowing in the wind. The hair and some other parts of the picture were painted in with the fingers. This type of procedure came about because the white paint was too dry to be painted in with a brush and I had to go on and finish the picture.

Strolling was developed quickly. To me it is a close up of a family of three walking down a very bright beach strip. Mother is predominant. It is only the lower half of the figures that is shown, with the exception of the little boy--only the upper part of his head is cut off. In as much as the lower half of the body is furthest from the mind the symbolism should be evident.

The Beach is just as the title implies. It has a rather sallow faced figure in the lower left foreground. The black showing through the gray gives an ominous feeling that is true of the water. The gray gives the water a feeling of movement in that the brush strokes are sweeping ones in character. Within the water are indications of figure fragments.

Black and White is the most abstract of the group. It has an imagery that is foreign to me, and it is with great vagueness that I say--here is a mystery--a spiritual mystery perhaps--a feeling of becoming.

Landscape. Once again the figure is part of the landscape. This is more of an inland picture. This painting occurred at a more relaxed and almost trance-like state for me during the actual painting of the picture; it has a greater amount of detail.

Redstruck embodies two figures. There is a frantic quality about it, because I think of my response to the bright red and black over the cobalt blue.

Water Images shows three figures.

Inland has a figure with a green body because he is inland, and not by the water which is blue.



The Child with his black head and green rim might indicate the void present in the mind at a young age but with implication of what is to come.

## CONCLUSION

I have made an attempt to explain my thesis paintings through an expression of my need to paint in the manner in which I do paint and through the procedure which I find necessary to use (the unpremeditated). While the medium and technique is inseparable from the final expression of the canvas, it plays an automatic part in my painting--that is to say, that I am not primarily interested in experimenting with techniques. It is the final expressed significance of the paintings themselves in which I am most interested. Finally my hope is that the paintings say all I have been unable to say.



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