

THESIS

THE EXORCISM OF ART

Submitted by  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts  
Colorado State University  
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR  
SUPERVISION BY ROBERT J. WORK ENTITLED "THE EXORCISM OF ART"  
BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

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Advisor  
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Department Head  
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS  
THE EXORCISM OF ART

My thesis is based on my connections with primitive art. The significant form in primitive art is addressed by Clive Bell. His writings have supported my own belief that early humans derived their art from a fear-based reverence for nature.

The energy that has been perceived by viewers in my work is a result of the panic I experienced in approaching the surface and subject. This has been true whether the works are seen as abstract, nonrepresentational, or narrative. This is why I see my work as an exorcism--an exorcism of the feared forces of the unknown.

I respond to my immediate environment and those in it intuitively, realizing that we are a part of nature rather than apart from it. My art is quest seeking my own origin. It is a quest to a creator that may not recognize his creation.

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I believe that significant form is derived from two factors in art: the reason behind the creation, and the process involved in creating. In “The Aesthetic Hypothesis,” Clive Bell said, “in primitive art. . . you will find only significant form.”<sup>1</sup>

I believe that the reasons behind the creations that early humankind made and the process they used to create provided them with direct access to significant form.

Early humans’ reasons for creating imagery were to explain, control, or at least appease the supernatural powers that governed their world. Early humankind, up to the Enlightenment, believed that physical survival was dependent upon the creation of art. A fear-based reverence for nature was the reason behind their art. To balance the intensity of the reason, early humans would induce trance upon the person creating the imagery by ritualistic dancing and audio-driving (the use of clapping or other rhythmic pulsation), pushing the artist into intense concentration. This trance was the process of explanation, control, and appeasement.

The reasons I create also stem from fear-based reverence for the natural world. In figure 1, for example, the energy that has been perceived by viewers is a result of the panic I experienced in approaching the surface and the subject. I feel that fear is a connection between my creative process and that of primitive man.

Whether my graduate thesis drawings are seen as non-representational, abstract, or narrative, they are all thematically identical with regard to the reasons behind them and the process by which they were created.

Akin to the primitive first humans who saw their art as literally essential to their day-to-day existence, I seek to appease feared forces of the unknown by responding intuitively to my immediate environment and those in it.

Prior to attending college, my drawing was a means of storytelling, with the drawing itself dictating the narrative. Later, within the university setting, I became lost in expressing myself through the figure. I was reminded by those closest to me that the narrative element of my work was sorely missed.

As I progressed through the university's undergraduate art curriculum, I discovered (or rediscovered) a narrative element for my work. It is the theme that there is sheer terror in realizing that we are a part of nature rather than apart from it.

Intellectually and spiritually, the concept that we are at the whim of nature and that humankind is another dangerous part of the whole frightens me. Today, organized religion's dogmatic rejection of new discoveries and scientific deconstruction perpetuate rather than alleviate these fears.

I believe primitive humans understood this same fear, and the way they lived and the art they created seem to strike closer to my own fear-based reverence for the natural world.

All of my work is tied to this fear. And whether or not the narration of "literalness" of this trepidation is clear to others, it is clear to me.

For myself, each piece, no matter how non-representational it seems, is thematically involved with a quest, the completion of which I dread.

No matter how far we look into the universe, either spiritually or intellectually, we will still be confronted by the infinite. And if we should arrive at our own origin, who is to say our creator would recognize us?

As the millennium approaches, a sense of apocalyptic terror echoes throughout the world. I turn to my art as the primitives did, as if my physical survival is dependent upon it. Just before I begin to create, a disturbing anxiety comes over me. Here is where all the conceptual issues fade. As the initial stroke strikes the surface before me, an explosion of nervous energy and gut-wrenching primal angst takes over.

Narratively, my pieces are about wandering through life searching for my origin and then being rejected by the power that created me.

Nonrepresentationally, they are about my response to my past, immediate, and future environments. By using marks, colors, and textures I feel closer to the collective whole.

My works have these specific thematic elements that bind them into a spiritual focus for me. I do not wish to sound like a prophet capable of shaping a better world--or a less fearful one--or like the taunting thirteen-year old boy who dances heroic epics in the back of my head. I stretch my hand to the surface before me, and upon my touching it the world goes gray, nonexistent, as I attempt to exorcise the fears that consume me.

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<sup>1</sup> Clive Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," in C. Harrison and P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory, 1900-1990, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. (Oxford: Blackwood Publishers, Ltd., 1992) p.114.



Figure 1. Untitled.



Figure 2. Untitled.



Figure 3. Untitled.



Figure 4. Untitled.



Figure 5. Untitled.



Figure 6. Untitled.



Figure 7. Untitled.

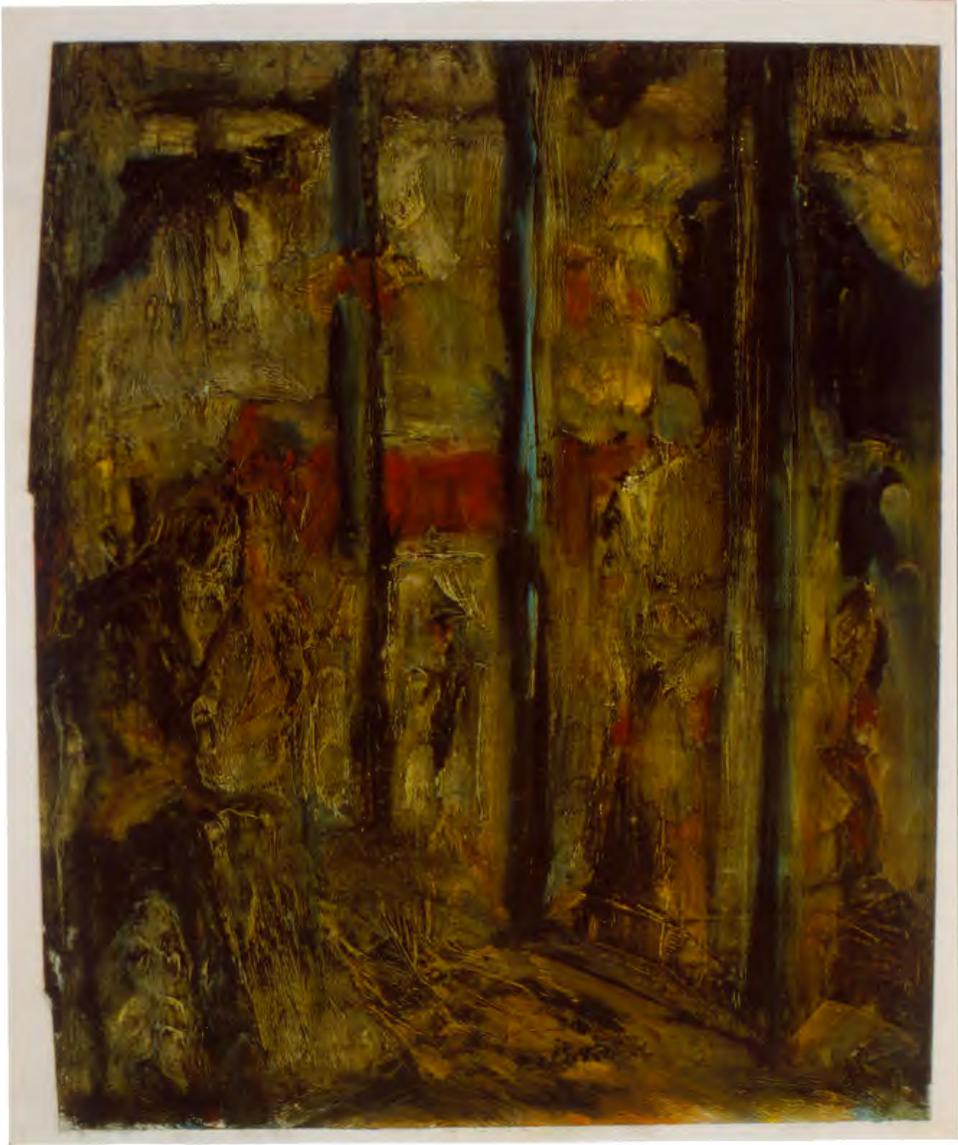


Figure 8. Untitled.



Figure 9. Untitled.

Description of figures.

Figure 1: Untitled. Oil-bar. 55" x 48".

Figure 2: Untitled. Oil-bar. 42" x 40".

Figure 3: Untitled. Oil-bar. 53" x 42".

Figure 4: Untitled. Oil-bar. 42" x 48".

Figure 5: Untitled. Oil-bar. 21" x 21".

Figure 6: Untitled. Oil-bar. 41" x 15".

Figure 7: Untitled. Oil-bar. 41" x 15".

Figure 8. Untitled. Oil-bar. 16" x 19".

Figure 9: Untitled. Oil-bar. 39" x 19".