Achieving spiritual synthesis [slide]
by Delia Mastrojanni Smith

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
Montana State University
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Abstract:
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Master of Fine Arts

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Delia Mastrojanni Smith

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

5-20-88
Date
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CONCEPT PROCESS

The human figure and the landscape are the sources of inspiration for my work. Shape and color are my main concerns.

As an artist I view nature from a metaphysical standpoint, and I use my visual experience to synthesize matter, space, and color. The creation in my work, therefore, is not the reproduction of observed facts, but the plastic interpretation of a spiritual experience inspired by nature. I define the spiritual as the ability to rationally or intuitively synthesize the emotional and intellectual response to the relationships one perceives in nature. The spiritual is meant in an artistic sense, not to be confused with religious affiliation.

The visual experience is not based on feelings or perception alone. I maintain a consciousness of the experience as I work, which I try to develop and enlarge emotionally through the expression of the medium. My faculty of empathy enables me to transform my visual experience into plastic form. Art for me is the combination of my subconscious intuitive abilities and how well I can consciously manipulate the medium. It is also a world in itself which reflects my senses and my emotions.
The work goes through many phases of development. Elimination and simplification are determined by what I think is essential, namely shape and color. Shape and color are very important to me because they enable me to reveal things which I could not say any other way. I identify more specifically those shapes and colors to which I respond psychologically and emotionally in order to focus and create a new body of work.

An example of this is found in the earlier work which belongs to my Black and White Period (slides attached). The purpose of this work was to identify and develop a vocabulary which would help me move from the general to the specific. During this process my work became more abstract than it had been in the past, though my concerns still remained the same. I also have discovered that those shapes with a suggestive life-carrying vocabulary are the most recurring in my work. This has provided me with a new language for the preparation of a new body of work. Birth Series I and II are the result of this exploration, and the title of the series was inspired by the life-carrying shapes.

In my desire to experiment with color my palette became more aggressive, as opposed to my earlier use of color which was more subtle. Birth Series I reflects this use of color more than Birth Series II, but I consider it
only another manner of expression. My palette has since returned to more subtle colors which I find more conducive to achieving my purpose. However, the real challenge for me remains in the ability to manipulate the elements to the point of achieving spiritual synthesis.

EXPRESSION PROCESS.

In Birth Series I and II I invite the viewer to participate in the contemplation of some aspects of the mystery of birth. It is important to bear in mind that the Birth Series deals with the theme of birth in universal terms. The theme of birth is developed also with experimentation in mind by integrating new shapes with traditionally symbolic ones in an arrangement which is very often highly personal, ambiguously playful, and still manipulated and orchestrated with enough interest, I feel, to allow the viewer to engage in a personal discourse with the work regardless of what my specific intentions behind each piece were at the time of conception.

Some of the work, for instance, deals with my personal vision of the human figure in the landscape, and the landscape as a metaphor for the human figure, carrier of life, as in Birth Series Nos. 3, 4, 20, and 11. It deals also with the observation of metamorphoses which occur during the life forming process in nature, and which reveal
themselves in terms of changing shapes and colors. Some of the images are linked to natural things ("seed", "water") as in Birth Series Nos. 7, 11, 13, and 15 as well as to visual-linguistic forms ("lozenge", "circles"), as in Birth Series Nos. 9 and 10. My creative expression evolves with images and compositional dynamics the way blues lyrics evolve in vivid objective correlatives. As in blues and later forms of jazz, I am concerned with rendition (mimesis) and experimentation. Shapes are like musical, poetic verses to me. One form inspires a whole trend of thoughts, thoughts based on what I am, what I know, and what I believe in.

Why the subject of birth?

The subject of birth has fascinated mankind in all its manifestations since the beginning of the world. In spite of geographical and cultural barriers, a common symbolism exists among mankind not only in terms of life-carrying symbols, ("figure", "water", "egg", "snake"), but also in terms of perceiving these images as good luck, prosperity, and fertility symbols.

During the process of focusing on a theme, I discovered that I had been fascinated with shapes observed in nature since a very early age. The paintings were born from a personal necessity to give form to a long standing psychological and emotional communion with nature.
CONCLUSION

My deep awareness of the gift of life - which I see in opposition to the forces of destruction in the world - has been the strong motivating force behind the development of this body of work.

Birth Series is my homage to the miracle of birth, and the scale of the work only a humble monument to it.
LIST OF SLIDES
BLACK AND WHITE PERIOD

1. "Evolution"
   "30"x42" Pastel, 1986

2. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986

3. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986

4. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986

5. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986

6. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986

7. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986

8. "Study of Form"
   16"x12" Oil on Masonite, 1986
LIST OF SLIDES

BIRTH SERIES

1. Birth Series I "Embrace"
   30"x42" Pastel on Paper, 1986

2. Birth Series II "The Birth of Venus"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

3. Birth Series II "Achieving Spiritual Synthesis"
   6'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1987

4. Birth Series I "With Love"
   6'x4' Oil on Canvas, 1987

5. Birth Series I "Self Portrait"
   30"x42" Oil on Canvas, 1986

6. Birth Series I "Self Portrait"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1987

7. Birth Series I "From Water"
   6'x4' Oil on Canvas, 1987

8. Birth Series I "Language"
   6'x4' Oil on Canvas, 1986

9. Birth Series I "Birth"
   6'x4' Oil on Canvas, 1987

10. Birth Series I "Meditation"
    6'x4' Oil on Canvas, 1987

11. Birth Series II "From a Seed No.1"
    7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

12. Birth Series II "Detail from No.1"
    7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

13. Birth Series II "From a Seed No.2"
    7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

14. Birth Series II "Ouroboros"
    7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988
15. Birth Series II "From a Seed No. 3"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

16. Birth Series II "Detail from No. 3"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

17. Birth Series II "From a Seed No. 4"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

18. Birth Series II "From a Seed No. 5"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988

   6'x4' Oil on Canvas, 1987

20. Birth Series II "Mother-Nature"
   7'x5' Oil on Canvas, 1988