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By Nancy Long

### Singleton - On Art, Archetypes, Communication

Robert Singleton is one of the favored contemporary artists of serious Central Florida collectors.

Five years ago he “escaped the urban blight” of Altamonte Springs and moved to Clayton, Ga., population 2,500 where he’s “one of the local yokels” and happily walks down Main Street able to “speak to a dozen people I know.” His works today are in major museums and corporate collections and are sold at Vorpall Gallery in New York City’s art Mecca, the So-Ho district. Actor Richard Chamberlain recently bought a



pastel from the Vorpall show, which is similar in theme to the present show at Galleries International in Winter Park.

Leading art agent Leo Castelli calls the pastels “lyrical” and Singleton says, somewhat incredulously, that the pastels he does “that are so much closer to the surface than oils” have received “an unbelievable response.”

The pastels are done quickly compared to his emotionally exhausting oils. In his studio “thrusting out into the elements” overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains, he is so influenced by the elements that he says, “if you put them in a chronological order, the pastels would probably document the weather—the blues and grays on rainy days and the yellows on sunny days.

Singleton, who recently was selected as one of 20 American landscape painters for the book, *20 Landscape Painters And How They Work*, says he has no need to hobnob with artists in the metropolitan art centers. In fact, he prefers not to and enjoys friendships of the local folk of Clayton.

But, if the artist’s preference is for small town isolation and tranquility—the simple life—what’s going on in his studio reflects the complexities of the man and his approach to his art.

He explains here “where I’m at now” in painting for his most recent major show, *First Light/ An Encounter with Universal Awareness*.

He placed a sugar-free Mr. Pibb precisely on the table in front of him, along with the cigarettes, and relaxed into the director’s chair patiently waiting for whatever questions would come.

Robert Singleton was on home ground in the upper gallery of Galleries International, here for the grand opening of his show of pastels.

They hung on the walls around him, the exquisite expressions of his moods and

his love affair with the environment of Screamer Mountain, his studio-home in north Georgia overlooking the Blue Ridge.

The Mr. Pibb was evidence of Singleton's new life style—"10 days and I'll be 40 and I'm glad all the hell-raising is behind me"—a style that keeps him "constantly charged."

No sugar in the diet, no white flour, no white bread. No drinking.

"I get up at 6 a.m. and I can work in the studio all day long without getting tired."

The softly accented, casual talk doesn't hide the "charge." Never mind the unassuming exterior. Idle talk fades and the electricity in Singleton's creative starts.

He opens up easily, with out ego interfering, something he explains later.

He says the driving force in his oil painting today is to communicate. To communicate his search for universal truths to everyone, not just to those with sophisticated art tastes.

That has to do with his intrigue with the philosophy of Carl Jung, he explains... the arousing of the response of archetypes.

The conversation plunges into more searching topics and he takes a breather, slows down a minute to redress -- 15 years of teaching has left it's mark. He doesn't want to lose the meaning he's trying to convey.

Often his probing explanations of his work end with the hopefully intense question, "Do you follow me?"

Singleton's work through various stages of abstract expressionism to the recent geometrical work dealing with spacial concepts is well known in Central Florida.

Those who have followed him—and he does have an almost fanatical following—know his works always have progressed like a novel, with one chapter developing the plot or "theme" into another.

This evolutionary process in Singleton's work gives it a well thought out integrity.

A quick grasp of the method can be gained by looking at the pastel show at Galleries International. The progression of works in a style and color frame is obvious.

One abstract landscape of melancholy blues or grays follows along to another like the pages of a book. So also do the joyous mid-day yellows that fairly vibrate and glow.

Singleton's mastery of technique and color is at a high in his pastels, which he says he can do two of three in a day as "therapy"

When he uses the word, Singleton draws quotes in the air, indicating you're not to take it too literally.

"Pastels, I like to switch to when I want something lighter. They require only a little effort. And I do them on a day-to-day basis."

The fact that the pastels take so little of Singleton's "psychic energy" is an indication of just how far the artist's technique has developed. In contrast, pastels in the hands of many artists tend to melt into saccharine interpretations.

Singleton's mastery of technique in several mediums reflects his analytical assessment of his work.

He says he considers himself an instrument . . . that some years ago he realized what a commitment to his work would mean. It would mean erasing the ego.

“You must have technique down so well that you don’t have to think about it. Then you spend all of your energy in the creative process.”

Singleton was fortunate as a young artist to have arrived at that mature philosophy before frustration set in.

After he studied at Richmond Professional Institute in Richmond, Virginia and with Teresa Pollock, a student of the great abstract expressionist Hans Hoffman, Singleton learned Hoffman’s style without having explored what was behind it.

He saw fellow art students go out into the world, more as abstract expressionism copyists than leaders. It became a creative dead-end for them.

“I decided to drop everything I had learned. To drop somebody else’s precedents and go looking for my own. I went back to what I was comfortable with, to realism.”

“Eventually I understood,” says Singleton. “I understood what I was doing.” At that point in his career, Singleton’s abstract paintings of exploding, emotional colors rank high in the Hoffman genre.

Although he knew he had arrived in abstract expressionism, Singleton says now it was during that time he developed a defensive attitude.

“I kept hearing the old clichés, ‘What is it supposed to be?’ or, ‘My child could do that.’ I began to feel I was not really communicating.”

He had been reading Carl Jung and grasped the idea of communication with everybody “by bringing archetypes to the surface.”

The archetype, explains Singleton, is something that is deeper than what we’ve learned. A basic inherent response like to the color black, the response of fear, night, death.

The more sophisticated the society, the more repressed are archetypes.

But they’re still there in everyone, says Singleton, and the special oil paintings he’s doing now are all on indigo backgrounds for that reason—the purpose of calling up in the viewer a basic, rudimentary response.

He has done a thorough study of the psychological impact of color, and colors and combinations in his oil paintings reflect his findings.

“I’m not trying to put the fear of God in anybody, but through space and spirituality and the mystiques of life, I hope to touch on archetypes...”

These are the paintings, sometimes including prisms of colors breaking in the center into intense white light, which recently showed at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington and the Hunter Museum in Chattanooga, Tenn.

First Light, An Encounter with Universal Awareness is a show of huge canvases priced up to \$10,000. Singleton says the paintings, which he calls spiritual and cerebral, may baffle some, but he hasn’t heard the comments that turned him defensive during the abstract expressionist period. The “what is it?” questions. He believes he’s communicating.

For the Hunter show, he explains, he also wrote a musical score that goes with the paintings, “But that’s another whole trip in itself.”

Another trip for the creative impulses of a major contemporary American artist and for the viewer-listener if he can follow.

Singleton hopes he can. His 24-hour work days on the side of a mountain in north Georgia these days are devoted to universal communication.