

THE ARTIST

Prologue

December 17, 1964

Life is an acute and painful question that demands solution before man begins living. His earliest experiences teach him that life is an eternal Pro and Con.

My sensitivity makes me unusually aware of the con, of my own misery and the worlds'. All my faculties are exerted in a search for the Pro, for instinctive, absolute Yes - saying. Like most artists, I have moments when I seem to be in complete accord with the universe. I feel that the universe and I are of the same nature, then all life seems to have purpose, and my own misery, purpose. The rest of the time is a struggle to regain that insight. If there is an order in the universe, if I can sometimes perceive that order and feel myself completely in accord with it, then it must be seeable, touchable, so that it could be regained by some discipline. Art is only one form of such a discipline.

Unfortunately, the problem is complicated by quite irrelevant human needs that claim the attention: for companionship and understanding, for a feeling of participation in the social life of humanity. And of course, for a roof over one's head, and food and drink. The artist tries to give attention to these, but it is difficult when there are much more important things to think about. It is all made more difficult by the hostility of other people who, every day arouse the question, "could it be that I'm wrong?" Sometimes the strain makes the artist think of suicide, but before he gets to that point, the universe is suddenly making sense again, and he has a glimpse of purpose. Moreover, that sense of accord is not the warm, vague harmony of a sleeping baby, but a blazing of all the senses, and a realization of a condition of consciousness unknown to the ordinary man.



We are moved only by the souls that have suffered and the hearts that know: and so all art that endures is a living quivering cross-section of life.

Elbert Hubbard



Life for me had reached its time --- to become, my soul wished to speak.
The beginning --- authentic --- a life long journey.
The darkness dispelled.



Work your grief up into Art, and it is gone.

Our first and last demand of Art is that it shall give us the artist's best. Art is the mintage of the soul. All the whim, foible and rank personality are blown away on the winds of time - the good remains.

Elbert Hubbard



Florida

1965 - 1973

Immediately after this final discharge from the hospital. I returned to Orlando, Florida and my position with Jordan Marsh. I was good at my work and they were happy to have me back. I found an apartment in Winter Park, a community near Orlando.

Because of my skills as an artist, the director of the display department soon put this ability to use. The men and women's fashion windows were changed monthly. Each of these display windows had 6 foot by 10 foot background panel. Monthly, I would paint a thematic scene on ten of these panels. These display windows became quite popular, as each of the background panels were original paintings. Over a period of time, they were saved and reused. It was not fine art, but I was working and very happy with my \$50.00 a week salary.

Several months after my return, I discovered a small cottage for rent north of Orlando, in the tiny community of Altamonte Springs. This cottage was perfect, located on an acre of land, surrounded by great spreading oak trees. The owner told me no one had lived in it for a number of years. If I chose to rent the cottage, it would be on an as-is basis, for \$50.00 a month. It had so much character, built of old brick, with a very large fireplace and screened-in porch on the back, a real fixer-upper. I saw all kinds of potential and happily agreed to rent the cottage.

Within the first year, I cleaned, painted, landscaped, and furnished it. This wonderful little house was more than a place to live. It gave me a sense of stability and roots. It was my home. As a result, I was stable, working, and paying the bills. My life was on an even keel. According to Dr. Walls, all prerequisites to responsibility and maturity. The fates were indeed being good to me. Except, there was one thing missing. I was not painting. I had not put brush to canvas since I left St. Augustine, the year before. As a matter of fact, I didn't miss it. I was doing exactly what Dr. Walls had instructed me to do.

It seems the fates had other plans for me. I became physically ill, a full-blown case of mononucleosis. I could not go to work. The doctor instructed me to have lots of bed rest, and at work, they thought I might be contagious. Weeks went by as I began to improve. I was bored. In order to help pass away the time, I pulled out my paint box and on the back porch, began to paint. There was no pressure. I even wondered if I still had that creative drive. Maybe, because I was so stable, I remembered asking Dr. Walls if I was "cured" through the therapy, would I ever want to paint again. Well, I did paint again. Within a short time, I had produced five or six canvases. Most were my remembrances/impressions of Conk Island and the dunes.

As a result of not being able to return to work at Jordan Marsh, my cash flow was running short. Coincidentally, I had been told that in a few days there was going to be an art show/competition held just a few blocks away from my home at a small shopping mall. This clothes line art show was open to anyone who showed up.

I had never submitted my work to a competition or ever entered an art show of this nature. I just thought maybe peddling a painting or two would help the financial situation.

My brother, who still lived in Orlando with his family came over and helped me move the paintings to the shopping mall. We strung a heavy wire between two poles and hung the paintings like hanging out the wash. All I had to do was sit and wait, hopefully someone would purchase a paintings. I did wander around looking at all the other artists' works that were on display. My paintings by comparison, appeared to be very different, almost abstract to the very realistic work of the other artists. I thought, "I must have an odd way of painting, of seeing my visual world." I did not feel encouraged. There were lots of lookers, but none were interested in purchasing my work. By afternoon, the judging was to take place. There were three awards, with a blue ribbon and a gold pin for best in show.

I won! --- A painting entitled “Dunes I”¹ won Best in Show. There was much excitement as all the other artists came over to congratulate me. The next day I sold a painting for \$30.00. In addition, a number of the artists present told me there were many sidewalk art shows of this nature all over the east coast of Florida, almost one or two monthly. They persuaded me to enter these other shows. And so I did. The following weekend at the Daytona Beach sidewalk art festival, I sold three paintings. The next weekend at the New Smyrna Beach sidewalk art festival, “Dunes II”² won first prize, another blue ribbon and one hundred dollars cash.

I found myself faced with having to make a decision that could potentially affect the rest of my life. I was now well enough to return to the stability and security of a \$50.00 dollar a week paycheck. “Don’t rock the boat. You are stable and doing just fine with your job at Jordan Marsh. Your painting should be just a hobby. Be a Sunday painter.” I know Dr. Walls would have told me this.

Would it be an irresponsible act on my part to quit my job and become a full time artist? Even now, as I describe that moment in time, I feel the anxiety, the insecurity of not knowing. To follow the dictates of my heart and take a chance, to invite the lack of security back into my life.

The choice was made. A definition given, a commitment to explore beyond my human boundaries, to take chances, to become vulnerable. In time this choice would be the instrument that would lead to exposing the very image of my soul. My identity was found, both internally and externally. Perhaps that day, that precise moment in time is where this autobiography should begin. It was a beginning, a fresh start in life.

My subconscious mind had sorted through those early years and chose what to remember. The darkness that was my beginning became dormant, hidden within the deep shadows of my mind. The truth of those early years was justified away externally, all resulting in an outward image of myself that appeared to be whole. My conscious mind did not know of that void, that “great empty pit,” my soul knew. Decades would pass before the truth would surface.

Now I will tell this story as others saw me, as I projected who I thought I was. It is all true, but the one profound truth of this journey was the voice of my soul, which wanted to speak through my art, searching to fill the void.

October 1966

Dear Dr. Ashbury,

This letter, I can see, is going to be a challenge. I want very much to bring you up to date on my painting and what I have been doing with my life. Please forgive me if I talk about myself, I think it would be beneficial for me to hash out on paper just what I have been trying to accomplish.

First, I want to thank you for your letter, it came as a pleasant surprise, and I must say it was quite timely. I am flattered that you took time from your busy schedule at the hospital to give thought and interpretation to my painting “The Apple.” I have often thought of you and Dr. Walls and the profound influence you have had in my life. Had it not been for you and the hospital, I honestly believe I could not have matured enough to reach this present point in my life.

Secondly, I would like to give you a quick sketch of what has happened since leaving the hospital. As I recall, I left sometime in January of ‘65 for a job in Orlando with Jordan Marsh, a large department store. I worked in the display department, building and designing props for the store interior and windows. I was also doing all the art work for the department such as window backgrounds, etc.

¹ Plate - 11

² Plate - 12

During this time, while employed at Jordan Marsh, I became obsessed with the idea of being on my own two feet and meeting the responsibilities of everyday life. I wanted to settle down and put out some kind of roots. As Dr. Walls would say, “pay the milk bill.” This is what I have done.

I had a lesson in life to learn. I put forth all I had in me in order not to slip back to the old symptoms. I had my ups and downs but this makes me no different from any other normal human. As I look back now, it is not nearly as hard as I thought it was at the time.

During my employment with Jordan Marsh, I did not do any painting of my own. As a matter of fact, I wondered many times if I would ever go back to painting. Last March, I was taken quite ill, and was confined to bed for about six weeks. When I was able to move around, and while recuperating, I had lots of idle hours. I decided to do a little painting to pass the time away. Well, with a lot of encouragement from a few close friends, I started to produce more and more, and got back to a way of thinking that I had almost forgotten. It wasn't long before I started making a name for myself in this locale and started to create a demand for my work in conjunction with teaching classes at the local art institute. I now have my own studio and am doing freelance displays. I did not return to Jordan Marsh after recovering from my illness. With the moral support of many wonderful people, who had many times expressed confidence in me and my work, I hope to continue making a living from teaching and painting. Perhaps the day will come when I can finish school and teach on a college level.

I think I once told you that I did not seem to fit into society, that society was wrong or abnormal. But not saying that I was right. It was like trying to put a square peg into a round hole. This may still be true, but the two can live side by side. What I am trying to say is that I've learned to accept my position in life (with room for improvement) and that every man is entitled to his own position of beliefs. He cannot force them on his fellow man. Society has set up certain rules that we all must live by, whether right or wrong, but in order to live, we must play by these rules. When I speak of society, I am not referring to Johnson's Great Society or the present political chaos of the world. I am referring to a much higher law, that of civilized humanity and the natural order of things. I know I must sound kind of idealistic, but it is difficult to put down on paper a feeling that lies deep within one's soul. To quote the artist Rockwell Kent, “It is a kind of peace, not the peace of complacency, but a by-product of one's enthusiasm for life. Not the peace of knowing that all is well or self-contentment, but an ever moving turmoil of a dominant interest to be life. I have recognized that life, as the senses apprehended it, is one great composite experience, and that every principle of beauty that I may employ in my work is derived from life itself.” Dr. Ashbury, I don't want you to think that I am just looking at life through rose colored glasses. There will always be times when life can look grim. This merely gives one a stronger sense of purpose. We may not be aware of it at times, but without the grim side of life we could not compare. You don't know cold until you know heat or the degrees of each.

This brings me to my next point. A few lines back. I mentioned the principles of beauty. Most people, when admiring something, look upon it as a thing which is pleasant or comfortable. It might be the icing on a cake. How many people stop and admire a fungus on a rock or the cell structure of an amoeba. Why can't the “ugly” things, as we have been taught, in life be beautiful?

This is what I am trying to capture in my paintings. In the past, most of my paintings have had a coat of icing over them. They were sweet, predigested and comfortable to look at. Most traditional paintings done today have incorporated the techniques of perspective, color and light in such a manner as to make the subject matter easily recognized by the viewer. This is pure academics. Any well trained technician can produce a work of this nature. The painting is dry and cold. It is impossible for me to imagine nature as being this static.

About two months ago I started using colors I did not particularly like, working with what

might be called gray or mud colors. Instead of painting subjects that were pleasant, I started looking for material which many people could not see or would turn their backs on and call grotesque. The results you would probably imagine as being a big mess or something from a sick mind. Quite to the contrary, although not sweet, they became a distillation of life. The paintings are like a microscopic view of nature. They are not comfortable to look at. Why? The viewer cannot readily explain them. In present day terminology they would be called nonobjective. To me they are more representational than representational art, because they are derived from reality. A painting is a miracle, a creation, like a flower or a cloud. Again, do we try to understand them?

A Note to the Reader

September 26, 1995

Trying to describe the following events, for me is very difficult. These events were filled with joy and accomplishments. What makes it difficult is how does one describe personal achievements without sounding boastful? I had seriously considered, as an alternative, asking another person to write this portion of the book. For me to describe my artistic achievements, aside from the merits of the work itself, is very much against my basic nature. Perhaps this basic nature has come with age. I don't feel as if I have to prove myself or my work anymore. As a young man in his late 20's, I was highly motivated to achieve in those beginning Florida years, which is in contrast to who I am today. Perhaps one motivation for me to now write/describe those events is my own curiosity, through researching the documentation, that is, old newspaper and magazine articles, letters and my own memory, in order to reconstruct the genesis of my public art career. I don't want to confuse this genesis with the fact that I have always been creative. The genesis I speak of is when this creativity was welcomed and applauded by a regional art community. This recognition did grow in time. Beginning in central Florida, and in time to the southeastern states and then beyond.



From April 19, 1965, when my painting won that first award, the career of this artist escalated at a rate almost beyond belief. These sidewalk art shows were for many aspiring artists, an important means to have ones' art work exposed to the public, museum curators and commercial gallery owners. Gallery owners used these art shows as a means to find artists, who they would in turn invite to become members of their galleries stable of artists.

June 17, 1966, just three short months after winning that initial award. The first public showing of my work through a commercial gallery opened. Webb Gallery was a new and provocative gallery handling all the major artists from the entire state of Florida. This one-person show was the first significant indorsement of the work. For me a validation of it's worthiness. In all honesty I was humbled and honored to have my work hanging with such an auspicious stable of artists. The exhibition was even reviewed by the art critic with the Orlando Sentinel. With the headline, "*He's best when he's different.*" July 10th, 1966, another one-person show opened with another gallery, This exhibition established the beginning of an association with the Salty Dag Art Gallery in Cocoa Beach and its owner, Kit Young. Kit became a close personal friend and in time became my agent. From the very beginning she believed in my work and me, always encouraging, coaxing and advocating both professionally and personally. If I were to credit one person for nourishing the establishment of my career, it is Kit.

Kit came to my studio once a month. I would show her all the new works I had completed. She would make a number of selections, take the new paintings back to her gallery and immediately put them on display. There seemed to be an enormous interest in my work growing in the space coast region. Generally, by her next visit, all the paintings she had picked up the previous month had been sold. After several of these visits, Kit suggested that she would be willing to purchase all the monthly works from me outright. What this did mean for me? I did not have to wait for the works to be sold before I would be paid, it became the security of a steady monthly income.

November 5th, 1966, Encouraged by kit, I entered one of the major art shows for the state of Florida, the Cocoa Beach Art Festival. One of the paintings I described in the letter to Dr. Ashbury, entitled "Evolution" won first prize in the category "Modern Oil."

The list of shows and awards would grow. In just four years, my works won 22 major awards, including 12 best of shows. In just one show, the 1968 Daytona Beach Art Festival, the work won two first-place, a second, Judges Choice and two honorable mentions. Every painting I had on display won an award.

The judges for these art shows were exemplary. They ranged from nationally recognized museum directors to curators and critics. Dr. Lester Cook, [at the time the curator of American painting at the Smithsonian Institutes' National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.]. On three separate occasions Dr. Cook gave my work the highest award. Apparently, Dr. Cook felt the work was strong. "I am very impressed with Robert Singleton's work. He is obviously a mature, serious, and a sensitive artist." Dr. Cook also wanted to help further my career by making a number of opportunities available to me. On one occasion, on behalf of the United States State Department, he invited me to go to Vietnam as an artist war correspondent. I thanked him for the offer, but refused.

Winning all these awards was certainly a boost for my self-esteem. However, what was most significant was the caliber of the judges and their endorsement of my work by selecting it for the top awards. Listed below are just a few of the judges with a brief statement which appeared either in the press or in personal letters to me:

James Johnson Sweeney, former director, Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art, and The Houston Museum of Fine Arts. "Knowledgeable, competent and sensitive, also extremely assured in its handling."

Dr. David W. Scott, Director of Fine Arts of the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. "I was impressed by his breadth and largeness of concept, and by the combination of control and vigor. The works conveying a sense of authority, which made them outstanding."

August C. Freundlich, Director, Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, University of Miami, Miami Florida. "I personally find his work fresh and exciting, and worthy of serious consideration. I look forward to hearing more from this artist."

Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr., former Director, Addison Gallery of American Art. "I find in his work, an abstract feeling for nature itself as we understand it in our present century. Its quality seems so obvious that it hardly needs words to fortify it."

Cleve K. Scarborough, Director, Mint Museum of Art. "Mr. Robert Singleton recently had three prints accepted into the Mint Museum's annual Piedmont Graphics Competition. Two of the prints received purchase awards. The prints were extremely unique, especially in technique. The subtle modulation of the ink on the metallic-like surface was a most unusual effect. The abstract forms seemed to float without the existence of a ground. We were very anxious to have one of Mr. Singleton's prints in our permanent collection."

As my work became more widely known, it seemed opportunities were coming at me right and left. I was deeply flattered, but many I could not accept. For example the Dean of the Art School of the University of Hawaii invited me, with all expenses paid plus salary, to the University campus as Artist in Residence for an indefinite period. NASA, along with a number of nationally known artists, invited me to come to Cape Kennedy to witness the launches of the Apollo moon missions. Though I did not attend I did witness the Apollo 17 night launch by the invitation of the Mayor of Orlando as part of Vice President Spiro Agnew's party.

I was nominated and awarded a Ford Foundation Grant to attend the Tamarind Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Tamarind had been established to encourage or assist recognized artists in the creation of lithographs.

In March of 1967, and the two following years, I entered my work in perhaps the largest and most

prestigious art show in the Southeastern United States, the Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival, Winter Park, Florida. This show represented five to six hundred, preselected, artists from the entire country. Over a period of three days, three hundred thousand of the art loving public would attend this show. In 1967, a painting entitled “Double Entendre”³ won the First and Second awards in painting. This special award resulted from the two judges refusing to concede on their choice for First Place. As a compromise, First and Second Place was combined, this was split between another artist and myself.

As with many artists, I began to explore other creative mediums of expression. In my case, I started working in sculpture and print making. In 1968, at the Winter Park show, I won best of show in graphics. In 1969, I won best of show in sculpture.⁴

I recall jokingly saying, I had a Michelangelo syndrome, I was being recognized for sculpture and print making, when my passion was in my painting. Michelangelo’s passion was sculpture, but he was forced to make a living painting ceilings.

Suddenly, there was always food on the table. As Kit would say, metaphorically, “I went from flour pancakes to smoked oysters.” This was such a long way from painting in that room in the Seattle YMCA, a long way from that starving artist eating peanuts and Coca-Colas and hustling his wares in bars. Such a long way from what Dr. Walls wanted me to aspire to be.

It is time to slow down and backtrack. My career had taken off like a rocket. Also, within that first year, 1966, I started teaching with the Lock Haven Art Center. My teaching skills grew as did my work. Within just a few years, I was teaching almost full time, as many as three, three-hour studio classes daily. Teaching every subject from beginning drawing and painting to master critique classes. There was always a waiting list of students wanting to attend these classes. Sometime in the early 70’s when the art center went through a significant remodeling and expansion, the Lock Haven Art Center became the Orlando Museum of Fine Arts, a major museum and art school.

One of my other skills was happily put to use, that of exhibit designer. On the occasion of the gala grand opening of the new museum, I designed and installed all the new exhibitions. I continued to design and install all the major exhibitions throughout my tenure with the museum.

Enough, this is beginning to sound like a resume. Fortunately, adjacent to my little cottage was a small two room building. This building had been constructed as a wood-working hobby shop by a retired doctor. As the doctor became too old to pursue his hobby, all the tools were sold and the building emptied. This was the state in which I found it, when I first rented my home. I contacted the doctor’s wife and she agreed to let me rent the building. My first studio! What a luxury, a space devoted exclusively to my work. I later purchased this building and created, between the cottage and studio, a walled-in courtyard.

What was I producing in this studio? I was very prolific. Every single image created on either canvas or paper originated from my imagination. On very few occasions have I used my photography as a reference. The subject matter of these early paintings was almost exclusively of nature and my memory of it, that is, in generic terms, land and sea-scapes. The specific images were my many remembered impressions of Conk Island and of course of that Midwest horizon line⁵. As in music many times the works were, themes and variations. I now feel it was not just that I was so prolific, but foremost, I was constantly searching, pushing and exploring my creating boundaries, always reaching beyond, growing beyond the previous painting.

From 1966 to 1970, through this constant searching, the work passed through a major metamorphoses. It was a transformation from impressionistic studies of nature to very large canvases which were totally

³ Plate - 18

⁴ Plate - 28

⁵ Plates - 13,14.

nonobjective (no recognizable subject), as I described in the letter to Dr. Ashbury.

At the end of 1970 I made an important decision, I stopped entering all art competitions, side walk art shows etc. This decision was based on competitive presser. I, my work, had an unbroken record of winning the top awards. It was uncanny what happened. Because of my “perfect score”, I was told, that when a number of artists made application to enter these competitions, they would want to know if “Singleton” was going to be in the show. If the answer was to the affirmative, they would say, “Why bother?” and not enter. This both embarrassed me and put more undue pressure on me. There was a second reason, which I recall expressing the following way, “It was like being the fastest gun in the west. Sooner or later some one was going to shoot me down.” And so I quit while I was ahead. As soon as the word circulated around that I was no longer participating and competing, I was invited back as a juror.

Influences

Mini Art Lesson I

At this point, my work had been greatly influenced by my interpretation of the visual world I had been exposed to. Probably more than any one element of this work was the Horizon line of the Midwest, and the Atlantic Ocean. As I have stated, this line spoke to me on a very personal and emotional level. I soon added another compositional element to the work, a circle. On a trip to the farm lands of Pennsylvania, I had taken a number of 35mm slides. When I took these pictures, I was standing in a large field looking west, just as the sun had dropped behind a distant mountain. The overall light was dim. I made what I thought was a compensation with the camera for the low light. In doing so, I opened the aperture of the camera all the way.

Back in Florida, when I looked at these slides, I discovered that a few of the slides appeared to be flawed. There was a halo, or circle, superimposed over the landscape. At first, I thought the slides were ruined. But after studying them for some time a revelation of sight occurred to me. The slides of the field with the dark mountain ridge beyond was light-struck, a diffused halo circling it. I realized these slides were a portrayal of the reality of the way we see. I became aware that our vision, in terms of focusing on a specific object, is very limited. First, our entire peripheral vision is contained within a circle. Second, when you “look” at an object, the eye automatically focuses down to almost a pinpoint. For example, if you were to “look” at an apple sitting on a book and the book is on a table, all the objects are within your peripheral vision. However, if you were to “look” at just the apple, the apple is the only object that is in sharp focus. Your entire peripheral vision, however, becomes blurred.

Aside from this visual phenomenon, with time, I became more infatuated with the circle itself.⁶ I began to put all the subject matter of a painting inside a large circle. I would pick a point inside the circle to focus on and painted the subject with sharpness, *in focus*. As the eye moves from that focal point, across the canvas, the painted image would diffuse. The further the eye moved from that focal point, the more abstract the painting would become, only a mere suggestion of the actual subject.

When I first discovered the Midwest horizon, I described it as the division line between the sky and the earth. The circle became, for me, the symbol of infinity, a never ending line and at the same time all that was within the circle was contained. Like life, the soul is contained, yet infinite. A contradiction in terms?

The horizontal line and the circle became part of my visual vocabulary, a vocabulary of image components put on canvas. Artists sometimes refer to this individual vocabulary as the signature of the artist’s work, a recognizable style, resulting from the artist’s subjective interpretation of subject, color, and light combined with application through brushwork, etc. These are a just a few of the components which, when combined, create a visual image on canvas. The subjective or individual, use of these components creates the

⁶ Plates - 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.

individual artist's style or signature. This signature is easily recognizable. Once you have seen a Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Warhol, a Jasper Johns, and recognize the artist's visual vocabulary, from that point on, you instantly recognize these artists' works. A rose or a Van Gogh by any other name is still a rose or a Van Gogh.

What all of this is leading to, is the definition of certain terms that are both spoken and visual. These terms are part of this visual vocabulary.

One can say that *all visual art* is divided into two basic categories. The imagery is either Organic or Geometric. Of course, the two can be combined, although they remain separate elements within the work.

Organic means the subject matter is living or has lived. This could range from a portrait to a landscape, from lichen on a rock to the cell structure of an amoeba. Non-living subjects, such as a river rock or tidal sandbars are also organic. What all these organic subjects have in common is shape, *organic shapes*. They are natural, flowing, spontaneous and random. Have you ever stood on a river bank and looked at the polished pebbles under your feet? No two will be exactly the same, yet they all have in common this *organic shape*. There is a universal truth to these shapes, all appearing to be random. No two humans, except for twins, appear exactly the same, no two trees or rocks, yet we recognize them in the broad sense as being the same.

Geometric is the opposite. Man-made objects such as a house, a telephone pole, a fence, a car or an entire city are geometric. Curiously, all these geometric shapes are made by man with manmade tools. To draw a straight line, you use a ruler, to draw a perfect circle, you use a compass. Manmade tools can perfectly reproduce or duplicate a geometric shape, as a result never random or spontaneous. The opposite of a drawn square is the natural, yet universal shape of a river rock.

The combination of *organic* and *geometric shapes* in a painting might be a landscape with a row of telephone poles, or a farmhouse in the middle of a pasture. Another combination could be a portrait of a person sitting in a chair with a window in the background.

What I have been describing in writing is part of the visual language of the artist. Simply put, giving universal terms to the visual images in a painting.

On a number of occasions, while teaching, I challenged my students, "If you can discover a third element beyond organic and geometric, you will make the most profound contribution to the visual arts, ever."

I am certain in the world of the microcosm, the two will cross over. That is, you will find a perfect geometric shape in organic material. Also, architects have attempted to design buildings that appear organic in shape.

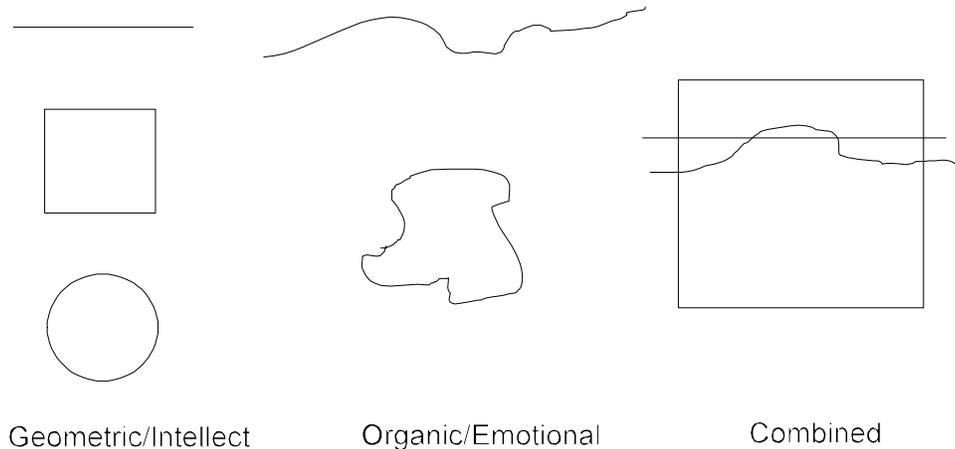
Now I would like to take this language of visual images one step further. In this language there is a correlation of terms and images used to translate *organic* and *geometric* into *emotional* and *intellectual*.

Emotion and intellect are part of the human psyche. They are two key ingredients that separate us from the natural world. Within the psyche the two work side by side. A conscious decision, intellect, can be based in the emotions. When you are angry, emotion, you may intellectually say things you don't mean. Your emotional response to a beautiful sunset may be the inspiration for the intellect to write a sonnet. Psychology teaches that one should not make important decisions while wrought with emotion.

I am of a mind to think that the emotional portion of the human psyche is part of our natural state. We are born with five natural emotions: The first is Fear, fear of falling, fear of a loud noise. Any fear beyond these two is learned through the intellect. The other four natural emotions are: Love, Grief, Anger and Jealousy.

In 1968, while teaching at the Lock Haven Art Center, I saw Stanley Kubrick's film, 2001: A Space Odyssey, for the first time. The very next day, I requested that all my students to see this film.

Allow me to describe my reaction and interpretation of the first 20 minutes of this film. At the opening, the entire landscape and life forms present were purely natural/organic. This portion of the film was subtitled "The Dawn of Man." There was a marked absence of intelligence. With what-life forms were present, a higher form of apes, there was a marked presence of emotions, primarily fear of predators. As this opening sequence



of the film reached its climax, intelligence in an almost mystical way, made its presence known in the form of a giant monolith. When this monolith appeared, it was in stark contrast to the total environment. The monolith's lines and textures were flawless in contrast to the rough rocky terrain. My response, and the apes, was that this monolith was a mystical presence. The monolith, without question, was intelligence, knowledge, perhaps even God. I felt, it was that moment in prehistoric time when, through the monolith, the apes stood erect and received the ability to reason, thus becoming, according to evolutionists, the ancestors of all human-kind. Human-kind was created when it received intellect.

Purely for the sake of this discussion, I will equate organic images with the emotions. A painting of a sunset, which is organic, may cause a viewer's emotional response to write a sonnet about the painting. The artist, when witnessing the actual sunset had an emotional response and in turn, painted the picture as his emotional interpretation.

Now we will discuss the intellect. Organic is the opposite of geometric and following that logic, emotion is the opposite of intellect. Organic and emotion are interchangeable. Geometric and intellect are also interchangeable. I stated that a geometric image could be a house. What created the design for the house and brought that design into reality? A human and his intellect.

Let me reduce all this terminology to simple images. If one were to draw a straight line with a ruler on one side of a piece of paper and on the other side draw a wafted line freehand, which would be the organic/emotional statement? Which would be the geometric/intellect statement?

The answer is obvious: Natural as opposed to engineered.

However, when the two are combined, a third element is introduced. When a natural image, organic/emotional, is placed in juxtaposition to an engineered, geometric/intellectual shape, by virtue of their innate differences a contrast is created. Each emphasizes the other because of their differences. A tension is created, resulting from opposites. Yet, they complement each other by making the hard-edge straight line more rigid when placed next to the natural, wafted line. The natural line appears more natural when placed next to the hard edge of the straight line. The intellect contrasted with the emotional and vice versa.

How odd, this very principle can apply to life, By virtue of our differences, we complement each other. By virtue of contrast, we help the other to shine. When we are different from each other and we stand side by side, we each shine more through the contrast. We are individuals, not clones. There is no judgment made of one or the other being better, more important. One does not outshine the other. As a result, a balance is created, a harmony between contrasting differences, creating a whole, as a unit, we shine brighter than when we stand alone.

Perhaps what I have just been describing is the ideal. Even within the human psyche, many times, there is a conflict between the intellect and the emotions. Depending upon the circumstances, one will overpower the other, creating discord and confusion, other times tension, one-sidedness and the feeling of being out of control. Artists recognize this balance and tension in both the natural world and the realm of human behavior. They also recognize this balance and tension within themselves. In a painting, there must be a balance between tension and contrast creating harmony in order for it to speak as a whole.

In order to defuse any one-sidedness in this discussion, I would like to offer briefly, the two sides of the philosophical coin, intellect versus emotion.

Descartes, Rene' {1596-1650} French philosopher and mathematician.

Went up into a cabin on a mountain top to establish *a priori* knowledge, "How do we know that we exist?" He came up with the Latin phrase: "**Cogito ergo sum.**" "I think, therefore, I am!" It was concluded from this that all real knowledge, or truth, comes from the intellect. The physical senses pass information on to reason and the intellect interprets.

Pascal, Blaise [1623-1662] French mathematician and philosopher.

He read Descartes and in a sense, said nonsense! For him, humans were the superior beings of creation and what separated them from the rest of creation was their ability to *feel* and be aware of that. *Passion* was the real authority over reason. We *felt* first, then we developed the reason to support that passion.

Note: The above are mere thumbnail sketches by an amateur who is indeed biased in favor of Pascal. Pascal also said, "The heart has reasons that Reason does not know."

Intellect: Rigid, governed by rules, left-brained, calculated, knowledgeable.

Emotion: Free, spontaneous, right-brained, natural, intuitive.

This understanding of the geometric/intellect and the organic/emotion would become the key to all my work, the hidden code to my visual vocabulary.⁷ As in life, and on the canvas, there was always a struggle to maintain a balance between the emotions and the intellect. On canvas I would try to push these two elements to their extreme. I consciously sought the ultimate statement of the intellect and of the emotions, always by putting the two in juxtaposition with each other. Throughout my early and mid-painting years, I always remembered the challenge I put to my students, "If you discover a third component, aside from the organic and geometric, you will make a profound contribution to art."

The answer to this riddle had always been inside of me. I will try and put it as simply as possible. The organic world is the natural world of nature. We humans, as flesh, are part of that world, transient from generation to generation, equally affected by the natural world. We are governed by the laws of this natural world. In that sense, we are no different from an oak tree, subject to disease and age, subject to the changing seasons, subject to the natural cycles of life.

As far as the emotions are concerned, I cannot say that the great oak tree does not feel the warmth of the spring sun, that a deer does not know fear or that a doe does not love her fawn. This hypothesis is beyond my knowledge. Although, I personally think the natural world of nature does have emotions. I do know, without question, that the dogs I have shared my life with loved me as I loved them.

In the human, there is the intellect and all the components that make up that intellect, one of which is reason or free will. With the human intellect comes knowledge and power. We are the superior beings of this planet. That sounds arrogant. We are arrogant because of the power we have over the natural world, to destroy it or to be its caretaker.

To the casual observer, the human essence, aside from being biological, is intellect with emotions or emotions with intellect. From this essence comes the knowledge to create. Man has eternally sought the answer to the riddle: "Are we more than biological flesh, with a mind that can think, reason and make choices?"

⁷ Plates - 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 29.

If you look to the arts, you may find an answer. Do not all the arts speak of and to the human spirit? Here is the answer to the riddle, the third component of existence. Through the act of creation, the voice of the Creator's spirit speaks to the spirit of all humankind. This voice can speak of and to the emotions and intellect, communication of an intangible component of life, an intangible component of art. It is intangible in so far as that communication cannot be held or touched with the hand. But, it is recognized by the soul.

The Macdowell Colony

Teaching and painting, attending art shows, newspaper and television interviews, my life was very full, maybe a little one-sided. A good friend offered some advice, maybe I should slow down and find a diversion, something to add a little balance to my life. Something I could enjoy when not being so consumed by my art.

That advice made a lot of sense. But what? I did not have to think on this long. Music, my first love. Could I? Would I? Yes, I purchased a new ebony Yamaha grand piano. Yes, I could afford it.

For the first time ever, I had my own piano. It was so large. It took up almost half of the living room of my little cottage. But, oh the sound. I told myself that this piano and my playing was strictly for rest and relaxation. I believed, with a little practice, I would be able to play well enough to satisfy that end. Not so. With my good ear, I knew what the music should sound like. My fumbling over the keyboard was not acceptable to my ears. Not unlike that young boy, I began to practice daily, hours at a time. I was determined to improve my reading skills. I found a piano teacher and started taking lessons. Before I knew it, the piano was consuming me day and night. I stopped painting. I had learned a sad truth. I could not have my cake and eat it too. It had to be one or the other. Quietly, one day I closed the lid and locked the cover to the keyboard and went into the studio and began to paint.

Every time I walked past the closed and locked piano, I felt guilty. That beautiful instrument was just sitting there, not being played. I could not allow this instrument to become a piece of furniture. Painfully, I sold it, and finally closed the book on ever playing the piano again.

There was still a need to find some kind of diversion from my work. A second suggestion. Perhaps I needed a change in geographical location, that is, to temporarily change the environment where I worked. This second piece of advice resulted from my complaining that I was in a rut with painting. The paintings appeared to be variations on a theme. A change in my working environment seemed to be a logical solution. Change is the key word. I had learned, from past experiences, that if I were to rock the boat, somehow create a radical change in my environment, I would grow. Complacency is a dangerous place to be with my work. Creativity ceases to be a challenge with no resistance. As I said the work becomes a variation of a theme. In the past, one of the greatest stimulus for, pardon the pun, opening new horizons was the trip through the Midwest. That was a radical change from the eastern environment I was so accustomed to. That visual experience provided enough stimulus to last a lifetime. At this point in time I had been working in my studio, in Florida, for five years, drawing from the cumulative past. I know that I have always been immediately affected by the natural environment in which I am working. As a visual person, the light, color environment, the linear and seasonal environment, all affect change in the work. I was told about the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire.

Edward MacDowell was the first American composer of serious music, to be recognized internationally. MacDowell became a popular virtuoso and famous teacher before he was 20. After many years in Europe, MacDowell returned to Boston in 1890 and later purchased a farm near Peterborough, New Hampshire, where he could rest, relax and compose. Finding the music room too accessible to interruption, a cabin was built in the woods a short distance from the main house. Here much of his composing was done and the concept of the MacDowell Colony took form.

MacDowell helped to establish a truly American "school" of classical music. Pioneering the American scene as he did, he concentrated primarily on piano compositions because of the very limited symphony performance opportunities available in this country at that time. He did however, compose a dozen or so

symphonic tone poems and other major symphonic works.

Founding the MacDowell Colony as a haven for creative talents was Edward MacDowell's great dream. In the period from his death in 1908, at the age of 46, to the end of her own life in 1956, Mrs. MacDowell worked tirelessly to fulfill that dream.

She spent her summers in developing the present Colony's 40 buildings, most of them studio cottages on more than 400 acres of beautiful New Hampshire farmland. In the winter she toured the United States giving concerts of her husband's music, telling audiences about the MacDowell Colony and urging their active help in its development and support.

Each year the Colony provides some 150 creative artists of proven talent with relief from the mechanics of daily living and an opportunity at no cost to those with limited financial resources, to push forward their projects in isolated studios, where neither friends nor neighbors can intrude.

Frequently, the Colony's help comes at a time in an artist's career when the chance to put in long periods of uninterrupted work may have critical import. To many, the opportunity for Colony residence means at least a doubling of normal creative output.

By the time of my first residency in October of 1970, there had been thirty-seven Pulitzer Prize winning recipients that had been residents at the Colony. A large part, but not all, of the prize winning works were created at the Colony.

Thornton Wilder lived at the Colony for an extended period. During his residency he wrote the play "Our Town," which in fact, is about the little neighboring village of Peterborough. Stephen Vincent Benet, for "John Browns Body", Edwin Arlington Robinson, John Gould Fletcher, Douglas Moore, Stanley Kunitz and Aaron Copland to name just a few of the Colonist who won a Pulitzer.

Aaron Copland has called it a memorial that keeps on giving. Charles Wakefield Cadman left parts of his ASCAP royalties to it in gratitude. Leonard Bernstein, hard pressed, sought it out when he was long overdue with a commission for a major orchestral work.

In the spring of 1970, I applied for a residency at the Colony. The application process involved 35mm slides of my work, a list of exhibitions, publications, collections etc. Basically, enough material to show that I was an established artists. This application was reviewed by a panel of recognized artist, critics and art historians.

A short time later I received in the mail the following.

May 1, 1970

I am happy to tell you that the Admissions Committee has granted your request for residence at the MacDowell Colony and is reserving a place for you from October 1 to October 31.

One can imagine my excitement. I felt genuinely honored that a panel of peers would accept my request for residency on the merits of my work. Because of the quagmire I thought my work was in, an opportunity to travel to New England and work at the MacDowell Colony was a timely gift.

The timing for my residency could not have been better. [From April, 1965, at that first side walk art show where I was an unknown artist] I had received an invitation to be honored with a one-person exhibition at the Orlando Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition was scheduled to open December 18, 1970, just a month and a half after my return from MacDowell. This exhibition was to be both a retrospective and current works. There was no problem finding works for the retrospective, they were all over central Florida. However, for the current works, I naturally wanted to select works that represented my best efforts.

So in the fall of 1970, I drove north, with a great sense of adventure and change, my car loaded with art supplies. I stopped in New York City for a pilgrimage to Leo Castelli's Gallery to see what my idols, Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg were up to.

Upon arriving at the Colony, knowing what great musical, literary and artistic masters had walked

those grounds, I had a sense of reverence. I was warmly greeted and given a tour of Colony Hall, the main community building. Here, breakfast and dinner were shared with the other residents. Lunch, on the other hand had a long tradition behind it. The mid-day meal was brought to your studio in a picnic basket and “quietly” left on your door step. The same was done for MacDowell, years before, when he was composing in his log cabin studio. This tradition emphasizes the importance of uninterrupted work. There were only two rules; “Please don’t smoke in the woods” and “Please do not visit studios without invitation.” This last rule, again, to protect the Colony’s working atmosphere. No distractions to interrupt ones concentration.

I was given a room in the men’s guest house. This room was primarily for a private space away from your studio and of course, for sleeping. I was then taken to my studio. In no way was I prepared, nor can I now find words to describe how overwhelmed I was. Upon exiting one of the main roads that runs through the Colony, we entered a long lane which was the entrance to “Alexander,” each studio having been named.

The inspiration and design for “Alexander” came from Mrs. MacDowell. On a trip to Europe, Mrs. MacDowell had stumbled across a medieval chapel in rural Spain. She was so taken by this chapel, thinking it would be a wonderful creative studio for the Colony. She had an architect copy the original and a replica was constructed at MacDowell. Built with granite walls and floor, high ceilings, a very large fireplace at one end and almost the entire north wall of glass, a true north window, this was my studio.

Besides being in this magnificent studio, it was fall in New England. If I was seeking change, this was a radical change from the sameness of the seasons of Florida.

Once I was settled in, I began to work on large, oversize canvases, that had been assembled and crated in Florida then shipped to me at MacDowell. The finished works were returned the same way. At this time the work was involved in the abstract combination of hard-edge lines and blocks set against the emotional, spontaneous fields of the canvas. I had been working in this direction for some time in Florida. However, now there was a new freshness. There was an immediate change in my palette, reds, yellows and orange. This was a direct result of what I was seeing daily, the brilliant fall colors of New Hampshire. As the leaves fell and after the first snow fall, the colors changed to blue gray and white. I felt this new work was all I aspired for in preparation for the exhibition just two months away.⁸

When reminiscing about the MacDowell experience as a creative high, which it certainly was, there was another part of that experience which is endearing. The close friendships that evolved with certain of my fellow colonists. There was a social life among the residents. This usually happened just before and during the evening meal. I made many new and lasting friends during my stay. But there was one who I was charmed by. A lovely woman in her eighties. Our mutual attraction had to do with her life and my first love, music. Her name was Louise Varèse, the widow of Edgard Varèse. Louise was at the colony working on the first of two books, her memoir. *Varèse - A Looking-Glass Diary*. I believe we were drawn together because we spoke the same language, music that is. She would invite me to her studio in the afternoon, for Dubenet on ice with a twist of lime.

Perhaps on my first visit, we were talking about Varèse when I timidly offered an observation about one particular composition I was familiar with, *Deserts*. Louise encouraged me to tell her my feelings. I said, “The music has a sense of isolation, lost, loneliness.” I stopped, Louise’s eyes had filled with tears. I was a little embarrassed. I had upset her. She said, “Then you know Varèse. What you said was Varèse the man.” From that moment on we became good friends and over many afternoons and glasses of Dubenet we talked about music. To be more honest, I asked a lot of questions and listened intently as Louise shared with me many stories about the people and life in Paris during the 1920’s. To hear about a candle-light dinner at Igor and Madam Stravinsky’s, about Debussy being a mentor of Varèse, the dark side of Varèse and how, as a young man he lived with Rodin, this was Art and Music, my two passions revealed through the life of this grand

⁸ Plates - 31, 32, 33.

woman. Through Louise I could connect with Richard Strauss, Saint-Saens and Satie.

November 7, 1970

Portion of letter to The MacDowell Colony

Dear Sirs:

I find it difficult to put into words my feelings of gratitude for what Mrs. MacDowell started. I am certain it would be redundant in saying that the MacDowell experience is one of the most profound any creative person could ever hope for. Through the understanding staff and the extraordinary facilities, I managed to accomplish twice as much work as I had anticipated.

While at the Colony I had an idea of creating a photographic essay on the Colony [I also work in photography]. I took approximately 200 35mm slides of Colonists, the grounds, studios and surrounding area.

I have had in the past and will have in the future many speaking engagements and seminars throughout Florida. I was so impressed by the function and goals of the Colony that I am in the process, now, of putting together a lecture with slides about the Colony. I have done this in hopes of promoting your work.

I hope I can interest local people in starting a MacDowell Club. I do have scheduled two speaking engagements in January, one of which is the Smith College Alumni Club here in Orlando. When they contacted me, they requested that I speak on the contemporary forms of painting. In my reply I gave them a brief history and stated the purposes of the MacDowell Colony. They expressed great interest in having a program about the Colony.

I don't want you to think that I am going and soliciting funds. My primary purpose is to promote interest in the MacDowell Colony and then hopefully, as a by-product, the monetary aid would come naturally. I hope that this, in some way, will help the Colony to further its goals and gain the recognition of people it might not directly involve.

Orlando Sentinel

November 8, 1970

By Susan Harb

A Leader Of A Lonely Life

“ Being creative is a very, very lonely business.” “It has to be,” says Robert Singleton, a quiet, solitary artist.

“There are moments when I seem to be in complete accord with the universe and myself . . . The rest of the time is a struggle to regain that insight .”

An idealist, Singleton finds the “petty” business details of everyday life disturbing and often pictures a cabin in the wilderness as his home and studio.

The picture intensified after his recent visit to the MacDowell Colony in the hills of New Hampshire. The colony, established as a retreat for writers, composers, painters and sculptors, caters to the artist's privacy and comfort.

The “freedom” at MacDowell enabled Singleton to obtain “a stream of consciousness never experienced before” and sent his paintings in a new direction.

He no longer attends his showings because . . . “I don't need that anymore.” Public acclaim was important in the beginning for “a sense of security.” He knows now his own value as artist and the “I” is out of his paintings . . . “they must stand on their own personality.”

And they have. Recently three works were accepted by the Mint Museum, Charlotte, N.C. for its permanent collection.

He has been honored with numerous one-man exhibitions and recently closed at the Ludwig Katzenstein Gallery, Baltimore.

Orlando Sentinel

December 15, 1970

Portion of article by Susan Harb

Singleton Aficionados Are A Real Who's Who Listing

The preview reception for the Robert Singleton exhibition, at the Loch Haven Art Center, [The name was changed to, The Orlando Museum of Fine Arts] will read like a Who's Who of Central Florida.

The black tie event Friday will be attended by approximately 200 Loch Haven members and prominent area citizens, who are owners of Singleton's works.

IT IS SINGLETON'S first major exhibit and many of the pieces are on loan from private collections. The display is also the initial showing of eight works completed during his recent stay at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire.

Singleton expressed extreme delight over this collection of 39 works, which represent the "various phases of growth and critical periods" in the artist's career.

"Midwest Barns," owned by Mr. and Mrs. Roy Meadows, and "Midwest Farm House," owned by N. A. Singleton Jr., are the result of a trip Singleton took through the Nebraska wheat lands in 1963.

"The horizon line had a profound influence on me," said the artist. "What a great place. You can turn 360 degrees and see nothing."

"Focus," owned by James G. Shepp was termed by the artist a "very, very, important point in my career." The subject is a traditional view of the Pennsylvania hills and wheat fields, but once again the use of color is an abstract factor. The painting has won three best in show awards.

"Prairie" the 1969 gift to PASO [PASO was a major and annual fund raising event for the arts in Central Florida. I always donated my best work] is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Watson Dyer. The picture consists of a center of traditional painting surrounded by abstract forms.

This year's painting for PASO, "Waning Movement," purchased by Florida Gas Co., won an award in the 1969 Winter Park Art Festival and many others throughout the South.

"It was the beginning of a philosophical approach to painting," said Singleton. "I consider it one of my finest works and a major point in my career."

The two sculptures in the exhibit, "Aluminum Casting I," owned by Schweizer Associates, and "Aluminum Casting II," owned by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Fratt, are three dimensional representations of the same philosophy involved in "Waning Movement."

SINGLETON describes his work at MacDowell as "a personal striving for an honest statement of art."

"The paintings are purely unaffected by many of the present precedents in contemporary form and painting," said the artist. "There was an attempt to make the paintings an extension of myself."

Orlando Sentinel
December 19, 1970
Portion of article by Bettie Stopinski

Artist Robert Singleton Honored At Loch Haven

Artist Robert Singleton, who says being creative is a “very lonely business,” was far from lonely Friday night as more than 200 persons attended an exhibit preview of the Altamonte Springs resident’s work at Loch Haven Art Center.

Singleton, noted for his painting, sculptures and graphics, is frequently referred to by critics as “one of America’s most promising young artist.”

The guest list seemed to be compiled from membership rolls of PESO, Opera Gala Guild, Florida Symphony Society -- every cultural-minded group of Very Important Persons in Central Florida.

THE LIST DID indeed include all members of Loch Haven, their guest, owners of Singleton’s works which will be displayed at the art center until Jan. 17, friends and students.

By 8 p.m. Loch Haven’s gallery number one and the expansive foyer were filling with art lovers. Thirty-nine Singleton’s, many on loan from private owners, are displayed in these areas and viewers circled the room, moving to the downbeat of piped-in organ music.

ONE VIEWER, Bobby Green, personal friend of the artist, said, “This is the first time I’ve seen all of Robert’s works together. I am intrigued by the transition from 1956 when he did ‘Crucifixion,’ ”

Mr. and Mrs. Gene Godbold were enjoying a cup of punch in the lobby before beginning a leisurely tour of the gallery.

“I told Santa I wanted a Singleton for Christmas,” Mrs. Godbold confided, eyeing her husband. “Way back in August, I told Santa that.”

Godbold said, “If you can find Santa here tonight, you might just get one.”

James G. Shepp who owns 11 Singletons and loaned “Focus,” a 1968 work, for the showing. “I am most impressed with Robert’s recent work, the breadth of his brush strokes and the life he has breathed into the canvas ... The progression on display here is terribly stimulating.”

Arriving not so promptly at 8:30 p.m. with parents Mr. and Mrs. N. A. Singleton of Eau Gallie, mustachioed Robert greeted guest with a strong warm handshake and, for lucky girls, a soft kiss.

LOCH HAVEN Director David Reese also was excited about the evening, saying, “This party was motivated by the exhibition, we felt Robert was mature enough in his work to do a one-man show. We are thrilled to display the Singletons.”

Printed program for the preview reception featured a pensive Singleton and this quote, “I feel a love of nature and a sorrow for man. The sorrow for men who may never see or feel the splendor of nature, a sorrow for civilization caught up in time. Man has become complex. He cannot stop to see the great beauty of simplicities.”

In the fall of 1971, I was again in residence at MacDowell. Once again working in my favorite studio, "Alexander." Once again, I was working with great fervor, pushing and pushing my limits, specifically, the hard edged blocks in juxtaposition to the spontaneous, almost frantic emotional portions of the canvas.

Unexpectedly, I stopped painting. I became dry. It was not that I did not know what to paint. I began to question in myself whether I wanted to continue with the direction my work had been moving. In truth, for me, I had exhausted the interaction between the intellectual and emotional combination.

I had pushed them to their conclusion. I began to question whether this work was of my own origin, if it was honest, as in totally originating from my personal vision. Or, was this work, based on someone else's precedents I began to cumulatively recognize that I had reached a dead end. I had literally painted myself into a corner with nowhere to go.

I agonized and paced the floor for days. I wanted to work, but what? My mind and gut were being pulled apart. I began to withdraw from the social life of other residents at the colony. I took all my meals alone. I ended up not leaving my studio for a number of days. I was sleeping a lot in order to escape, on a cot in the studio. I do not know if it was artistic agony or my old villain, depression. Whatever was happening to me, it was deep and profound.

One afternoon, after the few days that I had isolated myself in the studio, I awoke from one of my many retreating naps. I sat on the side of the cot and looked out that great north window of the studio. I could see the brilliant azure blue sky and the tops of the trees aflame with fall colors. I thought, I need to get out of this studio, "Go for a walk in the woods." Almost in a state of non-thinking, I put on a warm coat and with Smokey, my faithful companion, a black Cocker Spaniel, left the studio and began to wander aimlessly through the woods. Smokey loved it. I intentionally stayed off the paths, as I did not want to see anyone. Perhaps 30 minutes into this walk, we came upon a small clearing deep in the woods, circular in shape. I walked to the center of the clearing. The air was calm, and the warmth of the sun's light beamed down on me. I sat down and became drowsy. I laid down on the leaves, Smokey laid beside me. My mind was at peace as I closed my eyes and drifted off into the world of slumber.

I do not know how long I slept, but when I awoke, I felt the heavy darkness that had been over me was gone. As Smokey and I made our way back to the studio, only one thought was in my head,

"Are you painting what you want to, are you truly expressing yourself?" Then, "Is your work just a statement to cater to the art critics?" Then, "What do you want to paint?" A simple question, but the answer to myself was even simpler. "Clouds."

Little did I know, at the time, the significance of that mental dialogue and the agony that preceded it. I cannot explain what happened to me in that sunlit clearing. After I awoke from that sleep, on the walk back to the studio, I was very aware of a great peace in my soul. The anxiety and depression were almost magically and completely gone.

When I reached the studio, I immediately started to work on a new canvas. This painting was completely out of context from the body of work I had just completed. This painting had a great sense of symmetrical balance and of visual order as opposed to the almost chaotic spontaneity of the last painting completed before I fell into that depression. This new painting seemed to be almost overtly mystical, an element that had never appeared in my work before. The composition was minimal. Reappearing was my old friend the horizon line, very low across the canvas. The entire space above the horizon was a solid field of deep indigo blue, almost as if deep space. Did I paint clouds? Yes, just above the horizon, way off in the distance, the suggestion of a loose body of clouds. These were not the literal clouds of the everyday world, but more like primeval gases rising from the distant horizon into the deep dark depths of space. These primal gases/clouds were illuminated by a non-detectable light source, thus the feeling of mystery.

Up until this event there had been many visual experiences/influences that had a direct correlation with

my work, the horizon and circle, for example. However, this experience was different, it had a depth of message. The experience spoke to my core or, my core spoke to my conscious mind. The influence was coming from deep inside my being, not a visual representation of an image, but perhaps my soul articulating with definition its language. Perhaps this is the true definition of inspiration. I also recognize the events of that day as a profound gift.

A Personal Reflection

I had been entrusted with a gift, that being the ability to communicate to many people in a visual way, and the skills necessary to be a recognized artist and teacher. With this gift, and of equal importance, comes a responsibility. First, to develop those skills to their fullest. Second, to what end those skills will be used.

At a very young age, I recognized these skills and knew, in a very real way, they would carry me through life. Against many obstacles, as a young man I made a total commitment to develop those skills to the fullest. For years I worked endlessly exploring those skills and developing my craft. At the time, I did not understand the how or why this was happening. I was compelled to continue on. In the classic tradition, I was literally the starving artist living in a garret. In a naive way, I was oblivious to my physical needs, if anything they were an unnecessary burden. I remember saying there were two things I wished I could do without - food and sleep. They required money which I did not have. What little money I did earn selling my work and odd jobs, I needed for art supplies. I never complained, although many times my stomach did. I had my freedom, and most important I had my work. This work became my greatest teacher, a dedication to find truth, a means of discovering the world in me, around me and beyond. I was a true romantic absolutely bursting with enthusiasm for life. The sweet dreams of youth! I had not yet been burned by life.

After many years of unwavering dedication, my work was beginning to be noticed. What is more important, people were willing to pay good money for it. Suddenly, there was always food on the table. Metaphorically, instead of flour pancakes, it became smoked oysters. I was developing an appetite for creature comforts, success and money. I became highly motivated to become "known." I was using this talent to my own end. Caught up in the momentum of what was happening to my work, the exchange of money for a product I had created, my priorities had reversed - What this product could buy!

The "recognition" began to come at an accelerating rate, as did my appetites. My life seemed to be out of control, moving too fast, caught up in the values of a complex society and my own ego. Being, in part, a product of this materialistic culture, I performed by its standards for acceptance. So much of my life's energies were exerted to secure approval by society and my peers, the visible, tangible signs of success, to allow, symbolically, the material possessions to become my essence.

In retrospect, how empty I had become, feeling very unfulfilled, unhappy, a long way from that romantic in the garret. I had been burned and lost my innocence.

In the fall of 1971, at the MacDowell Colony, I discovered that my work and I had come to a dead end. *I had painted myself into a corner.* Not knowing where to go, either as a person or with my work, having no direction, full of self-doubt and unable to work, the creative process had just stopped.

Just the day before, while in the midst of depression, I wrote the following prayer in my sketch book.

I have spent my whole life developing and using Your most precious gifts.

Do I love the gift more than the giver?

Is this to truly be my life's work?

I must know because of the pain that comes with it.

Please give me a sign.

If this be so, then I will never waver from the faith that I am doing your will.

(Fall, 1971)

His loving hand had touched me. The gift became twofold, not only skills, but now knowing what to do with them. One with such a given gift has the responsibility to reinvest that gift in others.

"Human action has no value other than the intention which directs it."

The sign He gave me was direction. My work began to reflect the interior person. "An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." As a result, that very day, years ago, the work literally took on a whole new direction and meaning. That direction prepared me for the many events which would be my life in the successive years.



My Surrogate Family

Friends, I wish there were a stronger word.
A true friend transcends the fleeting
With shared respect the unconditional is celebrated

Come with me now, it's time to go up on that hill.

As we stood before each of the small head stones, I revealed to George my connection with those whose remains had been put to rest on that remote mountain, under a spreading Hickory tree. I was introducing him to living inhabitants of this earthly journey.

Allow me to move back and forth in time,
as I weave in and out, through my mind
with threads of memories,
creating a fabric of light.

It has been said that if you can count on one hand the number of true friends in your life, you are indeed fortunate. At any one given point in time we may have many acquaintances, but few friends. This is not meant as a reflection of a personal defect, because one only has a few friends. I believe you are fortunate if know you have one friend. True friendship is a treasured and rare luxury of life. A friend becomes more than a relative. "You choose your friends, not your relatives."

How fortunate I have been, my life has been abundant with friends, my chosen family. How fortunate I have been to be part of a friend's chosen family. I can now say, "Life long friends." Together we have withstood the many trials of life, the test of time.

I believe this close bonding is unique amongst Gays and other sub-culture groups. My peers had grown up much the same way I had. Experiencing the same ridicule and prejudice. We were very much in the closet, not to each other, but to family and society. There was an immediate unspoken, understanding, a recognized kinship.

The origin of this chosen family began shortly I moved to Florida in 1965. Just in that first year I met three people who became the heart of this expanding family.

While I was still working at Jordan Marsh and had found my little cottage in the country, I met John Haunch.

It was one of those chance meetings at Gay bar in downtown Orlando. As I have said, I don't often frequent these bars as I am very intimidated by the sometimes overt behavior of many Gays. However, going to such a bar was the only way to meet a kindred soul. To the every day world of people outside of the Gay community I had to hide my true identity. This was the case of most Gays of that time. There was no way I could be identified by another Gay in this every day world, as I was constantly on guard not to be identified. The only public place a Gay could be them self and let that guard down was at a Gay bar or at a private gathering.

I had no social life. The only people I knew were the people I worked with. As a result I was not invited to private parties. All was stable in my life, except for the lack of friends.

John confessed to me that he had just recently come out of the closet to himself and he too was not very comfortable being in a Gay bar. We were both there for the same reason, to find a friend.

John was an architect-designer and a few years older than me. We were both creative, thus having a lot in common. I must confess that within a short time, for the first time, I fell genuinely head over heels in love. I was elated when I was with him and heartsick when we were apart. He explained to me his job required traveling during the week and that we could spend only the weekends together.

Some months after we met a great tragedy took place in John's life. He had not been completely honest with me, disclosing that he was not the person I believed him to be. Over the telephone he told me that he was married and had two daughters. Then through a sobbing voice he vocalized the painful truth, his youngest daughter had been killed in an automobile accident the week before. He believed being gay had somehow caused his daughters death and realized he could no longer continue a relationship with me. I was devastated, my heart ached for John, his wife, losing there young child and my loss of John.

Just a few weeks after that sorrowful phone call, John called again sharing with me what had taken place since we last spoke. He had attempted suicide, and had painfully told his wife he was homosexual and about me. He said he and his wife had agreed to continue to live together for their daughter, but in the bedroom it would no longer be as man and wife. He eventually invited me to his home for dinner and to meet his wife. It was very awkward for all, but as the evening passed John's wife and I became more at ease with each other and it was apparent she was comfortable with the arrangement she and John had agreed to. As a matter of fact over the years I continued to visit their home. The relationship between John and me was resolved, becoming close platonic friends, although occasionally, I reminded him that he was the first man to ever break my heart. As friends, we worked though the grief of his young daughter's death and to stop blaming his sexuality for her death.

As the years of our lives passed we become even closer in ways we never thought possible. The threads of our independent lives became ever more entwined. Such is a friend.



If ever I had a soul brother it is Jack Hepworth. The one person in my life that was a constant.

Have you ever met someone for the first time and there was an immediate recognition? You did not have to waste a lot of time with small talk while in the process of getting to know each other. Jack and I were that way. We were always comfortable with each other, even when there was no dialogue between us. We were comfortable with the mutual silence. We understood each other.

We met through a mutual acquaintance at about the same time John and I were redefining our relationship. An attractive man a number of years my senior, soft spoken and gentle. Yet, Jack knew how to live life with great gusto, very much a man. Jack too was married, with five children, four girls and a son. At the time we met, Jack was in the process of moving his family to Orlando from upstate New York. His employer had transferred him to Florida to work in the Citrus Industry. He had to be in the Orlando area for a number of weeks alone before his family could move. We somehow adopted each other. He was very comfortable visiting my little cottage. Many times he would just show up with groceries and fix dinner for the two of us. Sunday mornings he would arrive early with the New York Times, bagels and cream cheese. I would make a large pot of hot tea and we would spend the day on the back porch talking and getting a little tipsy because we both liked to lace our tea with Cognac. We talked about every conceivable subject from politics to Wagner. Our common ground was music. Jack was a formally trained pianist and at one point in his life he worked as a part time church organist.

We were not drawn to each other physically, jokingly saying that would be incestuous. We were brothers, we even looked alike. Once, some years later, when we had gone out to eat, the waitress said, "OK, I know you are brothers, but are you twins?"

Jack was also somewhat of an enigma to me. Unlike John, he was not out to his family at all. To use his words, "I'm bi-sexual. I have the best of two worlds." He said that he had known this about himself for years. He could somehow live a double life. Yet, he was a loving and caring husband and father.

Shortly after his family moved to Central Florida and settled in to there new home, Jack invited me for Sunday dinner in order to meet his large family. This is one of my favorite Hepworth stories as it demonstrates his life style and love of family.

As I walked to the front door of a large, Florida Ranch style home, the front door was wide open. Tina, their St. Bernard, was sprawled on her back across the door opening, taking a siesta. From inside I could

hear lots of kids laughing, two pianos being played from different parts of the house and classical music coming from the sound system. "Hello, . . . hello. . . is anybody there." No one came to the door. No wonder, I could not be heard. I stepped over Tina and walked into the house making my way to what ended up to be the kitchen. There was Lynn, Jack's wife, preparing dinner. I introduced myself. "Oh, Robert, I know all about you. How nice to finally meet you." She was charming and warm, as she made me immediately feel at home with a big hug. "Jack is in the living room with the other guest, just go on in." As I walked in to the living room, Jack greeted me with a big smile and introduced me to the other guest. It was like a three ring circus, one of his kids playing on the grand piano in the living room, Beethoven was coming from the sound system and I could hear another piano being played in another part of the house. Music, music. . . laughter and lots of children. . . every where. This was a very happy household. I was welcomed by his entire family and was always welcomed. There was no disguise needed, I was who I was. I was their husband and father's "best friend." As the decades passed that definition became indelible.



Robert "Butch" Baird . . . outrageous, funny and ahead of his time, that is how I describe Butch. We met when he was but a child, ten years younger than I, a mere eighteen. Butch was completely open about his sexuality. He was of the new generation of gays. At that young age he had not experienced prejudice or harassment. He was completely open about his sexual orientation to his mother, father, sister and brother. His entire family was thoroughly accepting. This acceptance was not without humor. Butch told me that once when his mother, at a social gathering, was asked how many children she had, she answered, "I have three, one of each." His wit was boundless, poking fun at himself and other gays. His perception of his sexual orientation was as a gift, not a curse. If ever there is an understanding of the contemporary term "GAY," it originated with Butch. He loved life, the bar scene and drag shows, always finding buffoonery in "Drag Queens" the more outrageous, the more he loved it.

Our relationship was platonic, based on "opposites attract." He loved to shock me with his humor and sometimes outrageous behavior. Many times referring to me and my home as "Mis Roberta's Finishing School." The first time he came for a visit, with a mutual acquaintance, I served wine in stem ware with cheese and the house was lit by candles. His only comment, "This sure ain't Stake and Shake." Butch taught me not to take life so seriously and how to laugh at myself.



Jack, John and I were somewhat in the same age group, as a result we connected on many subjects. There was, however a curious dynamic among the four of us. The admiration was not always mutual. Jack did not particularly care for Butch, "too flamboyant," but tolerated him because Butch and I were so close. John and Jack were close as they were both married with children.

I was the common denominator. I had in fact introduced all three to each other as my little cottage became a welcomed home away from home for all. Butch used me and my home as a safe haven whenever he needed to escape the many disagreements with his multiple loves. He arrived many times in the middle of the night having just had a lovers quarrel, resulting in a fit of anger or was thrown out. So I became according to Butch, "Mis Roberta's home for wayward boys," his way of saying I was his friend.

All three of my dear friends appreciated and supported my work with great respect, helping in the studio, transporting work and installing exhibitions. They were my emotional support while waiting for the judges decision at art shows/competitions. The anticipation of the decision was a time filled with tension and a lot of nervous pacing for me. After all I was the "fastest gun in the west." A perfect score at these competitions. There they would be, pacing with me, always reassuring with confidence. When the winner was announced, they grabbed me with hugs of pride as we celebrated together another "Blue Ribbon."

As the years passed, our individual lives took us in many different directions and to other regions of the country. But, there was a bond among all of us with established roots that kept us close.

Resulting from a failed business, Jack and his family moved to Heartsdale, New York. He started

working for Merrill Lynch as the Cotton-Citrus consultant for the entire country, with his office in the Merrill Lynch building in Manhattan.

Jack and Lynn eventually divorced, a heart wenching event for his entire family. He “came out” to them and wanted his freedom as a gay man. He moved to Brooklyn to live with his first lover/pardner.

John Haunch also had divorced, moving to Atlanta joining a design firm. He too wanted his freedom to live his life as a gay individual.

Butch moved to Gainesville Florida after probably fifteen divorces. He was working as a freelance window display designer and lived with Edger his pardner in work and life.

As for me, ever since that indelible experience at MacDowell I had been unsettled. A wanting . . . I had been searching for change, but in Florida. With the confidants of walking form one room to another, I was set on a path that would lead me to “dropout,” literally overnight. My life, with all that encompassed as a successful artist and teacher in Florida, abruptly ended. The fall of 1973 marked the end of an era. I put my home on the market, resigned my teaching position, and moved to the Smokey Mountains of north Georgia.

I say, my soul wished to speak.
Are artist spiritual creatures?
Do I believe I have a soul,
the container of love.

It was filled with self-importance,
malignant to the soul.

There was no overnight enlightenment as I was still hanging onto the superficial trappings of success. I took all my material possessions and purchased a very large house on top of a remote mountain. Yet, I had a yearning for something my cognitive mind did not understand.

Screamer Mountain

1973 - 1978

I lived in Clayton, Georgia on Screamer Mountain off War Woman Road in the Horney House. That is how I would describe my address.

The house, an oversize, modified A-frame was built by a man named J. Horney. At the time in elevation, sitting 4000 feet above the clouds and hanging over a rock bluff it was the highest privately owned home in the state of Georgia. From the deck one would be the last to witness the day’s sunset, long after anyone in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi. Anything you did in this house, you did higher than anyone in these states.

After remodeling, the house had five bed rooms, three sitting rooms, bathrooms, kitchen, a large deck, a room called “The Pod” and lastly, a large studio referred to as, “The Pit.” All was appropriately furnished with many extras, “a state of the art sound system,” theatrical stage lighting, strobe lights, all to convert the “The Pit” into a theater or Disco Club. Materialistic? Yes, almost decadently so.

And there was more. This house soon became filled with people, overflowing with people, at times literally more than a hundred at one time. State and national politicians, movie makers and stars, musicians, journalist, writers, artist, friends, acquaintances and many people I never even met, all were guests in this house. From being used as the background for a “Playboy Center Fold” photo shoot to strategy meetings for the Jimmy Carter presidential campaign. After the election, campaign workers and Cabinet members used this house as a retreat.

What I thought would be found in the mountains became something entirely different, but welcomed. Instead of slowing down, my life accelerated, becoming caught up in the fast lane of the 70’s, free, open,

uninhabited, sex, drugs and Pink Floyd. I was in my mid-thirty's, very much in my prime, willing to try *almost* anything that culture had to offer.

Yet, through all this decadence, creatively, I was very productive, growing in my work and prominence as a recognized artist . . . with all my friends invited to come along for the ride.

My home on the side of the mountain was geographically central, making it easily accessed for all my friends as they spent a lot of time there with me.

To digress for a moment, the first spring I was on Screamer, before all the madness started. I met a few local people who told me about a new phenomenon/business that was about to start that spring. This was a direct result of the film "Deliverance" being made in that county. Just seven miles from my home and Clayton is the Chattooga river, the actual river used in the movie. I call it a phenomenon, as result of the film, a vast interest in White Water sports was generated. Three new White Water rafting companies were about to start commercial rafting trips down the Chattooga river that spring.

Arriving from all over the entire country were young men and woman prepared to spend the summer working as raft guides and staff for these fledgling companies.

Southeastern Expeditions was in its infant stage and for its staff a small dilapidated building with no running water was used as a bunk house. The accommodations also included an outhouse with five holes, leading to the organization being known as the *Five Hole Gang* along with *River Rats*. These *River Rats* became the origin of the many happenings up on Screamer Mountain.

I met by chance the first two raft guides to arrive for Southeastern, Robert Harrison and a colleague. As I had spent the previous winter alone in that big house and desperate for company, I invited them as welcomed-guest to my home for the evening. Within a week the entire staff had arrived at Southeastern and my home. I had what they wanted, hot water showers and a wine cellar, in that order. By early summer all tree rafting companies knew first hand about this artist who lived on top of a mountain with hot water and a wine cellar. And so the parties began, almost every night.

Robert Harrison was a founding member of the group that gathered at the "Screamer Hilton." He had dropped out of Georgia Tech that spring with bad grades, coming to the mountains to work part time for Southeastern. He was a mess and somewhat baffling to the rest of the rafting community. He was living in an old chicken house with no floor, not very articulate, at times speaking with a stutter. He rarely bathed or changed the bib coveralls he wore all the time. He became the butt of many jokes and kidding. "When Robert takes off his coveralls, they are so potent they keep standing." He was given a nick name, "The village idiot." Robert would even laugh along with the crowd at himself. I confess I also poked fun and laughed at him.

One afternoon Robert called and wanted to know if he could come up to see me. He said he wanted to talk to me. I said come on up and gave it no more thought.

When he arrived, he began in his usual awkward way, searching for words. "I know a lot of people make fun of me . . . and I laugh along with them. But, but did you know it kinda hurts . . . deep down in side." I had no idea. "I've been making fun of you also. I never thought you might feel this way. Robert, I'm sorry I've hurt you feelings with my stupidity." His long face began to lighten with favor. "Do really mean that." "Of course, I would never knowingly want to hurt you . . . just call me insensitive."

We spent the rest of the afternoon talking and getting to know each other. From that day on I became an ardent defender of Robert, explaining to others my insensitive mistake. As the summer past we became good friends and on his 21 birthday I threw a big celebration for him with the entire river community invited. I also gave him for his birthday, a new pair of bib coveralls. At summers end Robert moved in with me. Don't get the wrong idea, and it's not what you think. When the summer rafting season ended the many people involved left, in most cases to return to school. Robert had no place to return. But something else, rather extraordinary, was happening. Robert stopped stuttering and *cleaned* up his act. Furthermore our friendship became rather remarkable.

Robert had taken a great personal interest in my work, wanting to know all the in and out's of the work

and its creator. He was like a sponge, talking with me for hours about every conceivable subject. He became my right hand, working with me in the studio, on the road and became a spokesperson for my work.

The first year we did get to know each on many levels. All, but for one, my sexuality, it was concealed, although I am certain everyone either new or suspected. That first year I never acted on or spoke of it with the *river rats*. In time and with me stuttering, I did open up to Robert. The news was not a surprise nor did he feel threatened. He accepted me as his friend and to quote him, his mentor.

The next spring, Southeastern was gearing up for the new season. The owner had selected Robert to be the new Head Guide, the top position on the river. The first staff meeting of the season was held with Robert's promotion announced to the rest of the crew. When he returned home from the meeting, he was very down, heart sick. I asked what was wrong. "I was black balled off the river." When the news of Robert's promotion was announced, the entire staff of guides refused to work if Robert was in charge. Robert resigned. I do not know if the reaction was based on Robert's reputation from the previous season or not, but Robert's life as a river guide was over.

His love of the river had always gone far beyond working as guide. His reputation as a skilled white water canoeist, open boat, was known and respected throughout the river community. He eventually won the elite honor as *National Open Boat Champion*. Although many times he was reckless, taking life threatening chances to prove his skills, earning another name, "Mayonnaise Brains."

The day he resigned as chef guide closed a door, but opened another. We spent the rest of that day trying to figure out an alternative way he could make a living on the river. After much barnstorming, examining every conceivable possibility, I suggested. "You know, this whole experience of going down the river for the passenger/customer is a real ego trip." I had witnessed these trips with people in rafts, crashing through white water, appearing perilous and courageous. "What if you could photograph the customers at several points on their trip down the river. They would then have visual proof, to show friends, of this harrowing adventure . . . Like I said, a real ego trip."

We discussed this possibility even more, and it should work except for one essential detail. Robert said, "I don't own a camera or even know how to use one." I said, "You can use mine and I'll teach you to use it."

Not to overuse the cliché, but the rest is history. The idea worked and grew and grew. A new business associated with white water was launched and became known as *Wet Stone Photography*. Eventually his business encompassed a number of white water rivers and Robert's skills as a photographer took him all over the globe.



That first winter, with Robert in residence, I competed the first of what became an ongoing series of paintings produced during my tenure on Screamer Mountain. This first painting and its name resulted in a prophesy of a quest beginning, *First Light*.

Call it synergies, the influences of the past with the mystery of mountain top experiences came together in this painting and all succeeding work.

"Mountains are symbols, like pyramids, of man's attempt to know god. Mountains are symbolic meeting places between the mundane and the spiritual world."

Alan Hovhaness

Yes, life on Screamer ranged from the absurd to the sublime. The magnificence of wonder, seeing what appeared to be all of creation from that mountain top, the scale of human life eclipsed by the proportion of creation, automatically drawn into a state of contemplation, humbled by the marvel witnessed.

The seeds of direction were planted at MacDowell three years before. But, it takes time to grow. It was in this environment on Screamer Mountain that the work passed through another metamorphose. From

eclectic spontaneity to mystical meditations, there was a pronounced presence of balance, order and light in the new work. The mystical substance, an illusion, being the unknown source of light within the painting.

By 1976 there were nine of these oversized works I had withheld from any gallery showing. They were shown in the studio to the many guests who frequented that mountain top. Robert and I had actually developed a presentation in order to show these works, but very much in a theatrical way. The exhibition developed into a multimedia presentation and became known as a "Light Show."

In all honesty, I did not recognize the significance of what we were doing. It was just a way to show the work and keep the troops entertained. It would take the objectivity of an old friend to point out the revolutionary manner in which we were viewing the art.

Richard Vesley, we had been house mates and friends from the Williamsburg days. When he left Williamsburg, it was to attend Pratt Institute in New York city where he graduated with a degree in Industrial Design. Over the years Richard and I stayed in touch, but rarely saw each other. I knew Richard to be very knowledgeable about the contemporary art scene. Wondering what he would think of this new work, I called him and invited him to the mountains and to view the paintings. He agreed to come for a visit.

Robert and I showed Richard the nine paintings using the music and changing lights. He was mesmerized, "I have never experienced anything like this. Do you have any idea what you have introduced here? It's an entirely new way of viewing art."

We spent the rest of that evening and the next day talking about the paintings and the method of showing them. His conclusion was that the public should see the collection of paintings and use this innovative presentation to show the work.

After Richard returned home, he began pulling together his many resources to facilitate a public or private showing of the *Light Show* in Washington, D.C.

There then began a stream of phone calls and correspondence. In Richard's first letter to me he said, "I hadn't been able to sleep very well after seeing the paintings and talking about how to proceed. I feel so strongly about their merit and am anxious that they get proper exposure. I would love to manage the whole thing and then I could rest easy . . . Anyway, what we'll just have to do is take it a step at a time."

Fortunately he did take control and was able to make an extraordinary contact through a friend, Jillian Pool, the Director of Development for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C.. The understanding was that the work needed to be "Show Cased" before one particular individual who could, if he chose, launch an artist career into the major leagues. Through Jillian's confidence in Richard's judgement concerning the paintings, she contacted such a person. Gene Baro, he was a nationally known exhibition organizer and consultant. He lectured at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Guggenheim Museum, Detroit Institute of Art and the Smithsonian Institution. A true heavy weight in the contemporary art world. With this man's indorsement, to quote Richard, "The art world would be at your feet."

It would seem that after this contact was made, all focused on Baro seeing the work. When, where and how. Everything and everyone would have to indulge this man and his scheduling. After weeks of exploration, negotiations and conferences, Richard was able to arrange a showing for Baro and a small group of invited guests in a private home in Georgetown. The wheels went into motion preparing for this event. Baro canceled. Everything stopped and Richard started over renegotiating, when, where and how with Baro.

A new date and place were agreed upon, August 19, 1976, in the Atrium of the Kennedy Center in Washington. By the time the new date and place had been scheduled, Richard and Jillian had put together a new guest list, including Baro, but reaching into the very upper crust of the art and social macrocosm of our Nations Capital. The list of dignitaries included Curators and Directors from The National Portrait Gallery, The Corcoran Gallery, The Renwick Gallery and the National Gallery. Also, included were Board members, collectors, writers and representatives from the State Department.

Let me take a moment to try and describe what all the fuss was about, the *Light Show*.

Robert and I over sometime had well tuned this presentation, but only for ourselves and the guest at

Screamer. In a controlled environment I wanted to completely determine what and how the viewer saw and heard. A sound track of electronic music was created to take care of the hearing. But, to control what you saw first required total darkness. Second, through the use of adjustable theatrical lighting instruments and with a captive audience in total darkness, I could control what you saw. Adding dimmers controlled how you saw. The studio on Screamer met all these requirements.

Now add the oversize paintings, most were 68" X 120", easily viewed, even from some distance, but what about the contents of the paintings?

I say they were mystical. This all began at MacDowell with that one work, the deep dark space with an unidentified light source illuminating primal gases rising up from a distant horizon.

Years before that experience I had been exposed to the writings of Carl Jung. I was intrigued by the concept of the *archetype*. We know that all human life carries with it specific genetic inheritances, two eyes, one nose, one mouth etcetera. All living organisms evolved carrying forth inherited genetic codes. What Jung declares is we also inherit cumulative knowledge, the *collective unconscious*, *archetypes*, passed down from the beginning of time. For instance and applicable here, the color black has almost universally a bias attached to it. Black is representative of death, mystery, the unknown and fear to name a few influences this color delivers in many cultures. This bias was inherited the same as and along with our genetics, not culturally learned.

My speculation about the color black goes back to that beginning, the dawn of man. Since that point all humankind has experienced night. Early man was the most vulnerable at night. He could not see or understand why, he was frightened of the dark. Death came with the dark. He could not see to defend himself from predatory beasts. With each new generation this bias continued to perpetuate. There are still primitive tribes whose culture and religions are not too far removed from our common ancestry. I am certain today among these primitives there would be an immediate acknowledgment of fear or a mystical presence associated with the color black or anyone wearing black. My friends we are not too far removed from that inclination. We rationalize away for children their innate fear of the dark.

According to Jung, these *archetypes* stay very close to conscious thinking. However, the more educated or sophisticated a culture the more repressed this cumulative knowledge becomes. Yet, it is still intact and present in the psyche.

Oddly enough, black is not a color at all, but the absence of color, drawing in all light, reflecting nothing. On the other hand white is all color reflected. When working on these paintings, I began with a solid black background, actually Indigo blue. It was in this dark milieu that the light sensitive (using white) images were painted suspended. The illusion created is based on the fundamental laws of the physics of color and light. However, I don't believe a technical explanation is really necessary only the resulting illusion.

The presentation begins in total darkness, that should tell you something right away. Out of this nothingness the apparition begins for the viewer. At the beginning, almost with squinted eyes, you search for and find the slightest suggestion of light emerging out this blackness, the mind trying to make sense out of this unknowing. Then the ears hear, ever so softly and far away, as the light increases the images slowly evolve as does the sound. The image before you is suspended in deep space, becoming fluid, changing, building to a crescendo of light and sound, then fading back to nothingness.

I believe the experience triggers in the subconscious mind a fundamental *archetype*, thus communicating a sense of mystery, ranging from awe to even fear by some viewers. It is not just the painted images that evoke this response, but the totality of the presentation.

(Plate - 46) In *First Light*, across the bottom is a distant horizon, instead of primal gases rising, there are fully matured clouds nestled above the horizon. The source of light that is illuminating the bank of clouds is above and made up of many horizontal pin lines, a literal spectrum of color contained in each thin line, all evolving from pure white in the center, gradually changing from color to color to deep blue, like in a rainbow. These images are floating in the deep Indigo illusion of nothingness.

The titles of some of the paintings may help: Primordium, Oecumenicous, External Forces, Continuum and Cosmic Suspension.

Mean while, back at the "Screamer Hilton," Robert and I were in high gear preparing to transport this *Light Show* to Washington.

I had to devise a way to maintain the control I had in the studio on Screamer when giving the presentation, at the same time making it portable. A 12' X12' black screen was built to display the paintings on, one at a time. Two large black boxes were built to hide the lighting instruments. We used my sound system. When all was readied and the date of the show arrived, a large truck was rented, Robert and I pack it with all the equipment, the paintings and left for Washington.

Richard in the mean time had been very busy coordinating the many details surrounding the event. The guest list was expanded, a caterer to provide the bar - buffet service and housing for Robert and I. Jack Hepworth and Jerry, with great pride, arrived from New York. Jack had sent me a note, *Robert, my love: This note carries my faith that you are about to break through into a world few of us even aspire to. Jack.*

Coincidentally, a few months before this day, my friend Kit Young from Florida had written for a national publication, a feature article about my work. The day we arrived in Washington, the new issue of *American Artist* with the article had just been released and was on the news stands.

Robert and I had a very short window of time to install the show. The presentation was scheduled to begin at 7:15 the evening of the nineteenth. We had only five hours to install the entire show. Fortunately Jack and Jerry arrived early and volunteered to help.

There had been no time for a dress rehearsal or to really test the set up. Robert and I were still working when the first guests started arriving, but were rushed off to a near by motel to shower and dress. When we arrived back at the Kennedy Center, the Atrium was filled with people wearing everything from coat and tie to formal dress.

Richard and I had prepared a written statement that was given to the guest describing what was about to take place.

To the degree that the manner of looking at the paintings we are about to see is unusual, we ask your indulgence. We believe we are taking a significant step in creating an alternative to the viewing of paintings in the fixed and static confines of the standard "museum presentation".

Scientific knowledge, education, technology. . . literature, theater, music, life itself, are all in a state of flux. Dynamic changes are expanding our levels of perception. In art, what we look at has changed, but how we look at it is the same today as it has been for centuries.

Tonight, because it is in keeping with the nature of nature and therefore in keeping with the forces that have shaped and influenced my work from the beginning, we are going to look at these canvases in a varying light, literally.

An artist lives and works and looks at his paintings under differing light conditions of course, this alone would validate your viewing them under similar conditions also, but the works tonight have a much deeper relationship to the light. The lives of many artists, my life, my work, has been a struggle to transcend the applied and superficial aspects of a society prone to label rather than explore, prone to intellectualize rather than respond. I seek a means of involving another human being, all

human beings, not as viewers, but as participants in the ageless impact of the creative emergence. A means of uncovering the core of our intuitive understanding and cumulative experience ingrained and transmitted through generations since the dawn of time. . . . these paintings document my search for our shared universal awareness.

At 7:15 the presentation began, with Robert, Jack and Jerry handling the paintings. I ran the sound and the lighting dimmers. The show ran perhaps thirty minutes and when it was over . . . there was a standing ovation.

Was the presentation a success? The single most important reason for this showing was to expose the work to Gene Brao. While Robert and I were away dressing, word had been received that Brao would not be there. That's right, at the last minute, he canceled. How rude. My friend Richard must have been devastated, after all the work he had put into making this meeting with Brao possible.

Still, there was a lot of shaking of hands and congratulations, but I do not believe any of us knew that night what if any thing would come from the showing.

There was a comment made to me by one of the guest that has remand with me over the years. This woman had been portrayed to me as the *Grand Dame* for the elite Washington social scene, Mrs. Francis Humphery Howard, sister to Senator Hubert Humphery. After the presentation, she walked up to me with her hand extended, almost chattering with enthusiasm. "Oh Mr. Singleton, I can see it now, a whole new religion will grow out of these paintings. I mean they are so spiritual." There was some more talk about the paintings when she said, "I think you have missed your calling, you would make a wonderful funeral director."

Technically, as far as I was concerned, it was a disaster. The controlled environment required to have the full impact fell considerably short of what was needed. The walls of the Atrium were white marble, reflecting light. There was no way to achieve total darkness. The air conditioner for the entire building was located above the Atrium, resulting in a noise level drowning out most of the sound track.

There were no repercussions, and the art world was not *at my feet* the next day. The paintings were either mediocre or ahead of their time. The latter would prove to be true.

Mediocrity, is a curious and touchy phenomenon in the arts. I say touchy because I'm speaking of an individual's taste or judgment. Starting with, *I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like*. Or, *Art is all in the eye of the beholder*. Touchy is the beholder if you challenge their taste. Yet, there is a common inferring in the arts that popular denotes mediocrity or vice versa. There is an unspoken gauge among the aristocracy of the arts; if an artist's work is popular across a large cross section of the populous then it must be commonplace, not worthy of the walls of a great museum.

Conversely, many of the contemporary works hanging on these hallowed walls are not commonplace nor popular, but to an exclusive handful, used as a means of class distinction, inaccessible both financially and interpretation to the general population.

I recall having a conversation with a museum director, who was also a painter, about how he could evaluate his work and the direction he was working. He said he knew exactly what his secretary's tastes were. "I would bring in a painting I was working on and show it to her. If she liked it, I would paint it out."

The more obscure the work the less accessible it becomes, a criterion of merit to the critic and motivation for the artist.

By definition the work shown that night was:

To transcend the applied and superficial aspects of a society prone to label rather than explore, prone to intellectualize rather than respond. I seek a means of involving another human being, all human beings, not as viewers, but as participants in the ageless impact of the creative emergence

At best the Kennedy Center experience was a nice perk to add to my résumé, but I will be eternally grateful to Richard for his belief in the merit of the work and the exemplary effort he put forth.

I have the gravest suspicion of sophistication. I have never discovered it in nature; it is the evidence rather of ignorance. It is the triumph of shallowness and sterility. The real trouble with a sophisticated person is not that he knows too much, but that he knows too little.

Elbert Hubbert



In May of 1977 I had been invited by Herb Barks, the headmaster of Baylor School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to be a visiting artist. Herb and his students had come to my home many times, up on Screamer, as part of a wilderness outing rafting trip down the Chatooga River. He wanted his students to see the *Light Show*.

As visiting artist, Herb wanted me to bring the *Light Show* to Chattanooga in order for more students and the general public to see it.

I had learned an important lesson in the Atrium of the Kennedy Center. No more blind dates. I wanted to see first hand, before any agreed showing of the work, the facility and space where the work was to be exhibited. Herb had made arrangements with the Director of the *Hunter Museum of Art* in Chattanooga to be the site of the *Light Show* and a separate expedition of pastels. Robert and I made a trip to the Hunter Museum and found a wonderful small theater in the museum. No windows, no white walls, sound proof, perfect for the installation.

When the date arrived for the showing, we were well prepared. There was a crew of six including a professional stage light technician and three days to install and fully rehearse the presentation. In addition the program was given a name: *First Light - An Encounter with Universal Awareness*. There were press releases saying in part - *Robert Singleton has struggled for years to surmount the communication barrier confronting contemporary art. He has searched for a common denominator and found man's innate spirituality - a language shared and understood by all.*

The presentation worked exceedingly well as we gave three performances daily for two days. The entire student body of Baylor saw the presentation, but unfortunately, because of a mixup with the press releases, the general public did not know about the showing until the last evening. However, the *Pastel Show* did stay on exhibit for six weeks, resulting in a large attendance by the public.

Cleve Scarbrough, the Director of the museum later wrote:

Mr. Singleton and his crew are extremely competent, working on their own requiring very little assistance from the museum staff. They have an elaborate electronic set up which works beautifully under the controlled conditions which they create. Although sound and light is not a completely new ideal when it comes to the visual arts, the program created by Singleton is definitely unique in that it presents an exhibition of paintings in a very new environment, one which is exciting and is designed to entertain as well as provoke the audience.

The pastels which we have presented in the galleries in the traditional manner have been very well received. The works combine in a subtle way realism and abstract images with an exquisite blending of color which everyone recognizes as fine works of art.

A week after the *Light Show* had been dismantled and our return to Screamer, I received a phone call from Mr. Scarbrough. He had with him in his office someone who wished to speak to me . . .

I have to stop here and add a little insight. For all those whose life revolves around creativity, artist, actors and musicians, New York City is Mecca. It houses some of the world's finest art, the home of one of

the worlds greatest symphonic orchestras, schools and galleries. For me a trip to New York was like a pilgrimage, always going to concerts, museums and visiting commercial galleries to see what the contemporary masters were doing. High amongst these galleries and a must for me to visit was Leo Castelli. He was responsible for discovering and handing the cream of the art scene. Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and Roy Lichtenstein to name just a very few. Without question Leo Castelli was the most formidable figure in the contemporary art world.

Okey, back to the telephone call, the gentleman that wanted to speak to me was the agent for Andy Warhol and Andrew Wyeth. He said, "I have seen the *Pastel Show* and think your work is exceptional and if you are trying to make it as an artist in the south, where all that sells are water colors of fruit baskets, you won't make it." I thanked him for his kind words. Then he said, "I have a close associate and friend in New York I believe could help you further your carrier." I said, "Who." He answered, "Leo Castelli." I have told this story many times and it's the truth when he said Leo Castelli, I literally fell out of my chair.

He then asked if I would be willing to bring some of the work to New York in order to meet with and show it to Castelli. Three guesses what my answer was and the first two don't count. He concluded the conversation saying I would be getting a letter with all the particulars after he spoke to Castelli.

I couldn't wait for Robert to get home to tell him the great news. I called Jack Hepworth in New York to share the good news with my best friend and my most ardent supporter. He was thrilled, an understatement, he insisted, which he did not have to do, that we stay with him in Brooklyn. When I told Robert about the phone call he was equally astonished and saw an occasion for a celebration. It was really good that Robert was with me, someone to share the joy with. For an artist I would equate this forth coming meeting with Leo Castelli as going to the moon and back, the ultimate trip.

The letter did come and Castelli was happy to have a meeting and see the work. The date set was June 7, 1977, less than a year after the Kennedy Center miscarriage.

The appointment was scheduled for 10:00 a.m.. Robert, the art work and I arrived at nine in order to have the work in the gallery and ready for viewing by Mr. Castelli when he arrived. To the rear of the main exhibition room was a private show room and offices. We were instructed to bring the work to this space. I asked if there was a place to hang the paintings, one at a time, to facilitate showing the work. An assistant said, "Certainly, how about here." He was pointing to a place on the wall where a large Rauschenberg was hanging. "We'll just take it down and you can hang yours there." . . . One of my paintings is hanging where a Rauschenberg was hanging in Leo Castelli's gallery in New York City. My mind was reeling with disbelief and expectation as I nervously watched the door, waiting and thinking. What I'm I going to say to this man? If you were granted an interview with God what would you say? . . . dua . . . dumb struck.

There was not a lot of conversation between Robert and me as we waited. Thank God he was with me, I needed a familiar face, a good friend next to me. I'm certain he understood the significance of what was about to happen. Nor did I know what to expect from this meeting. However, I did know in advance that Castelli could not include my work in his gallery . . . In terms of genre there was no way to compare my work with his stable of artists.

In strolled this very dapper middle-aged man, he stepped over to one of the staff seated in the office area. "Good morning Mr. Castelli, you have a number of phone calls that need your attention." He took the messages, sat down and as Robert and I listened, Mr. Castelli made a number of calls conversing in French, Italian and then German. When he had finished, the staff person said, "Mr. Singleton and his assistant are here to see you." He looked in our direction and smiled. We introduced our selves and the three of us sat on a large couch facing the art work. "Mr. Castelli, I can't thank you enough for taking the time to look at my work." "Oh, please call me Leo, your work came very highly recommended. I'm delighted to be of some assistance." He was charming and warm, putting my nervousness at ease. "Well now, let's see what you have brought."

Robert and I proceeded to hang and take down each of the paintings one at a time, then lined up the pastels against the walls. "You're very much a romantic, aren't you. I can also tell you must live in the

country. Your work reminds me of the lyricism of Rothko.” Without another word to me, he turned to one of his staff and said, “It’s good work and needs to be shown. What’s the name of that new curator at the Whitney? I need to have him come here to look at Mr. Singleton’s work.” The staff person said, “Do you mean Patterson Sims?” “Yes, please get him on the phone.”

A few moments later Castelli was speaking to this curator at the Whitney. “I have an artist here, Robert Singleton, with some of his work. His work is very good and I’m intrigued by it. I would like it very much if you would take the time to look at it, perhaps you could come here today?” He hesitated, then, “Well, if you can’t come here may Mr. Singleton bring his work to the Whitney and you can view it there . . . good.”

This generous man was going out on a limb and endorsing the work to the top of the latter, a curator at the Whitney Museum.

Mr. Castelli made an appointment for me to show the work to Sims at the Whitney that afternoon. Robert and I packed the paintings back in the truck and were about to leave when Castelli said, “Come back and let me know what happens.”

The Art Game

The insanity of it all, the merit of the work was important, but it had little to nothing to do with a New York art carrier, motivated by a commodity market of greed, who you know, egos and the politics of favors. I did not know this, but was soon to learn a few important lessons.

We were instructed to park the truck at the service entrance of the Museum. I made my way to the main entrance and had Mr. Sims paged. When he arrived, I saw a young man who was very distracted and not at all pleased to see me. After we introduced our selves, he immediately said, “Why me, why did Leo Castelli call me? It’s just not done this way.” I did not know what he was talking about. Then he said, “I have better things to do than look at some unknown’s pictures.” We walked outside the building, to the service entrance and the truck. The entire time he was complaining and saying, “Why did Leo Castlli call me.” When we arrived at the truck, I asked if we were to bring the work inside the service entrance. Sims answered with a loud and angry, “No.” Looking at Robert he announced, “Take it out of the truck and put it here on the sidewalk.” Robert and I started unloading the truck, lining up the paintings along the sidewalk of a busy Manhattan street. When we had unloaded half of the work Sims said, “That’s enough” and took a few moments to look at the work with me standing next to him. “That one’s okey.” Then turning to Robert, “You, you can put the work back in the truck.” Then to me, “You come with me.” I followed him back into the Museum and to his office. Again he complained the entire way. This was not a happy man.

In his office he commenced to lecture me on the right and wrong way to have ones work shown in New York City. “You don’t just arrive one day from no where and expect to be welcomed by the art community. It’s just not done that way. You have to have a studio here and work here. Work your way up, start making a reputation, then you can invite someone from a gallery to see your work. If you’re lucky and the gallery starts handling your work, you have made it up the first run of the latter. Only then do you invite a museum curator to see your work. This does not happen overnight.” I interrupted. “I understand, but what would it take for my work to be shown at the Whitney.” His eyes opened wide with indignity. “Me . . . and I don’t like your work.” I answered, “That sounds very subjective. I would think that a curator would have to be objective . . . Subjectively, I don’t particularly care for Warhol, but objectively I recognize the value, the contributions of his work. He answered, “It’s still up to me and I don’t like your work.”

I began to understand what was happening. It was a question of egos and power, starting with the telephone call from Castlli. Sims was not about to come down off his throne at the Whitney and bow to the request of an artist agent, even Leo Castlli. Nevertheless, he was upset and intimidated that Castlli singled him out. I could have been Rembrandt reincarnated. This man through his sovereignty as a museum curator was not about to yield to Castlli, the work or me.

With Sims sitting on one side and me on the other side of his desk, I asked if I could use his telephone

and then called Leo Castlli. Immediately Castlli wanted to know how it went. “Well Mr. Sims did look at the work, but he told me he did not like it.” I looked up at Sims and saw him turning beet red. Castlli told me to come back to his gallery the following day and he would keep working on getting the work shown.

When I hung up the telephone, Sims suddenly had a change of heart. This man was so unnerved by the name Leo Castlli and the power it denoted. As a matter of fact so was I, except Castlli was on my side.

Sims with a calm voice, “Listen, you are going about this the wrong way, but there is perhaps one alternative. Sometimes a well-established artist, living and having his studio here in the city, will sponsor a out of town artist. These New York artists will endorse, by allowing a showing in their New York studio, the work of this unknown. Then a critic or museum curator will be invited and might come. I know such an artist, and he has sponsored unknown artists in the past.”

Sims then called this nationally known artist and explained the circumstances. He made an appointment for Robert and me to bring the paintings to the home/studio of this artist the following morning.

Coincidentally, that month the new issue of *Architectural Digest* had a feature article about this artist’s Manhattan home and studio. Weeks before, I had seen the article and now I was curious to see first hand, this beautiful home and meet its creator.

I will not mention this artist by name, but will refer to him as Mr. Jacuzzi.

Robert and I arrived the next morning for the appointment and were met by Jacuzzi’s assistant. We were instructed to bring the paintings into a room just inside the service entrance and told to wait.

In a few minutes Mr. Jacuzzi appeared and greeted us. I thanked him for this opportunity and complimented him on the *Architectural Digest* article. He said, “Oh, would you boys like to see the house.” I remarked, “Of course, it was such a wonderful article, it would be nice to see the real thing.”

Mr. Jacuzzi and his “assistant” began a detailed tour of the house. I could not help but notice that Mr. Jacuzzi was very effeminate, at times flipping his wrists and making unusually long eye contact. When the tour reached a particular room, I remarked, “I remember the photograph of this room, but was confused as to its purpose.” It was a large room with thick carpet, no furniture, only a large massage table and a Jacuzzi sunk in the middle of the room. Almost indignity Jacuzzi answered, “It’s the bathroom and well . . . “ Walking to the side of the Jacuzzi and making eye contact with me, he said to his assistant. “Turn it on. We may need it shortly.” Robert and I knowingly looked at each other, but said nothing, nor did we acknowledge to Jacuzzi in any way what was said or those looks.

Then I remembered hearing one side of the conversation Sims had with this person the day before. “There will be two . . . nice looking . . . probably so.” I’m certain Mr. Jacuzzi presumed Robert and I were a twosome and he was looking for a foursome. It was conspicuously clear what was going on.

I was offended by the innuendoes, but did not disclose any reaction to this game as I was totally focused on the business of getting my work exposed.

Mr. Jacuzzi began to exhibit displeasure with us and became testy by the time we returned to the paintings. To this point he had not looked at them. After examining a few of the works he bluntly announced, “It is apparent to me that your work is not compatible with mine. If it were . . . I could work something out, but it doesn’t look like we could function together.”

At that he left the room, Robert and I reloaded the truck and left lesson number two. Mr. Jacuzzi was wanting sexual favors in the Jacuzzi in exchange for his support. I believe Robert and I were set up by Sims. “Listen, you are going about this the wrong way, but there is perhaps one alternative.”

Jack was thrilled that Robert and I were staying with him and his new companion Sten. Jack had been to Screamer many times and loved it, but now it was his turn to entertain his friend on his own home turf. As part of group, Jack and Sten had rented a house on Fire Island for the summer. Jack wanted Robert and me to spend a weekend on the Island with him and Sten.

In a letter to Jack a few years later I described to him what was going on in my head during this trip to New York and a curious dynamic between Robert and me.

Here is a portion of that letter.

At about this time my career was escalating at a pace I was not prepared to handle alone. What was happening? The importance Richard Vesely put on the Kennedy Center Show and the trip to New York to meet with Leo Castlli. As a result I became very insecure about my work.

Until this time Robert Harrison had been dependent on me, yet, his companionship gave me strength. The stress I was under caused me to depend on him for even more support. I don't think I was unreasonably needy. However, he could not handle it at all and started pulling away from me at the very time I needed him the most.

The trip to New York - Did you know what I was going through? My entire life's work was put on the line. I was intimidated by the New York art scene.

1. Being in an environment that has always been totally alien to me, the big city.
2. The meeting with Castlli, which to this day I consider the most important event of my career.
3. The total humiliation when going to Galleries trying to sell myself (my work) and the incredible rudeness I was met with. You do know what New York means to the artist, it is Mecca.

There were such mixed signals and feelings, the pat on the back from Castlli, the rejection from the Whitney and that sordid morning with ----- (The implication that sexual favors have a lot to do with ones success in the art world.) If ever I needed Robert's shoulder, I needed it then.

That was not the end of it. The trip to Fire Island. If you recall I did not want to go, but went because Robert wanted to, prompted by your sales job.

You more than anyone know I have never felt at home in a totally gay environment. I find it very threatening. I do not agree with the contemporary social mores of this culture, gay or straight, specifically - sexual freedom or impersonal sex. In the strongest sense I am monogamous which automatically makes me a misfit. Because of my deep-rooted sense of morality and respect for my fellow man (as a person, not an object) I cannot force myself on another in order to satisfy a one-sided need. It pains me to see people used as objects for selfish gratification, treating sex no differently than the urge to go the john.

By the time we reached the Island the pressure on Robert from me was having its toll. I did not want to go out and do what was expected. You accused me of *blackmail* because I did not want Robert to go out. I needed him with me. Yes, to hold my hand. However you encouraged him to go and even made arrangements for him to go to a party. Everyone left. When you and Sten returned, I was miserable. We talked for sometime, trying to sort out my feelings, thinking I had been selfish to Robert. I was so wired that night I could not sleep. I asked Sten if he might have something to help me sleep. He gave me some kind of speed. Needless to say that was not a good night for me. When Robert came in, sometime in the early morning he went to bed across from me. I laid there and listened to his sounds feeling completely alone in that alien environment.

After the weekend on Fire Island, Robert and I returned to Castllis. By this time it was if we were old friends, feeling comfortable and at home with Leo and his staff. It was if they all had taken us under their wing.

After Leo had made a number of fruitless phone calls in my behalf, he came to the conclusion that the timing was all wrong. He told me it was summer in New York, the off season. As a result all the consequential people he wanted to speak with were out of the city for the summer.

I truly felt Mr. Castlli had done enough in my behalf. He had been very generous with his name and time. Although he was continuing to want to help, in every way I was satisfied with his personal acceptance

of the work and me as an artist. That was enough. The pat on the back from this giant in the art world provided self confidence, belief that the years of struggle and work were worth it.

One of the staff suggested we go look at a few of the local galleries there in SoHo. This was one area Castelli could not help me. What Castelli wanted was to have the work “show cased” in a major museum, then the commercial galleries would follow.

I was told to look for galleries where the work exhibited might be in the same genera as mine. This would be evidence of the gallery potentially being interested in my work. Leo said, “Give it a try,” and we were welcome to use his name.

I did have a portfolio with me which contained a lot of transparencies of the work. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Lesson number three: Never walk into a gallery off the street and identify yourself as an artist looking to be represented by that gallery.

For two days Robert and I walked the streets of SoHo, inspecting many galleries and the work hanging on their walls. If we found one compatible with my work, I would introduce myself as an artist and start to open a conversation, but would be rudely cut off mid-sentence with, “No,” “No thank you,” “No, we’re not looking and there’s the door.” As soon as I was identified as an artist, there were dirty looks, no acknowledgment at all or at times the person just turned and walked away, not even out of curiosity interested in looking at the slides of the work.

I do understand, with New York being the center of the art world, artists just like me, from all over the country, were making pilgrimages to SoHo in hopes of being discovered and represented by a major commercial gallery. The staffs of these galleries were inundated daily with artist walking on off the street.

Near the end of the second day of this rejection, I was angry, exhausted and did not ever want to speak to another gallery person. We were standing across the street from Castelli’s, when Robert convinced me to try just one more. I turned around and in front of us was a gallery at street level with a number of large show rooms. We went inside and asked if the gallery manager was available. “Yes, just a moment and I will get him for you.” Well that was the foot in the door. When the manager appeared I introduced myself and asked if he would take a moment to look at the slides. He was cautious and thoughtfully looked at all the slides. He said, “Your work is very good and you are in luck, the owner is in town and I will recommend that he look at your work.”

The manager explained it was the owner’s policy to at least look at slides because, “You never know who will walk in.”

We were asked to return the next morning to meet the owner and to bring the paintings and pastels.

Robert and I were there the next morning and met Muldoon Elder the owner of Vorpall Gallery. He too thoughtfully examined the art and said, “I would very much like to handle your work. As a matter of fact we have a group show opening in two weeks and I would like to include our work in that show.”

Hallelujah . . . the first gallery that even bothered to speak to us much less look at the slides, snatched up the work and immediately included it as part of their next opening show. We ended up leaving all the pastels with the gallery and were later told at the opening reception for that group show, the actor Richard Chamberlain purchased one of these pastels. He later returned and purchased a second.

In just a month’s time Vorpall wanted more work.

“Your work has received magnificent response from the public and my staff thinks your pieces are great. I realize that you feel that they (the pastels) are minor works, but I hope that in the future Vorpall will see many more Singleton’s.”

A few month’s later:

“At this time we would be interested in showing more of your work, particularly some of your paintings. Based on our previous selection you have some idea what our tastes and needs are here in New York and therefore if possible would you please send us four painting and or drawings/studies as soon as you

can. Please let us know if you would be interested in intensifying your exhibiting in this gallery in the near future.”

This marked the beginning of a New York career and an affiliation with four Vorpall galleries. The New York gallery, along with others located in Chicago, San Francisco and Laguna Beach were showing the work. The paintings and pastels were going into private and corporate collections in New York, across the country and as far away as Japan, Australia and France.

Not only was there a demand for work in New York, but also in Florida. After the move to Screamer, I continued many of the relationships with galleries in central Florida, primarily *Galleries International* in Winter Park and its owner Louise Peterson.

While I was still living in Florida, Louise and I became close friends and as my work grew so did her gallery. Eventually *Galleries International* became the most significant gallery in Central Florida.

After my move to the mountains, Louise always honored my work with a one person show each year. Opening nights were unimaginable with guests making a grand entrance, arriving in rented Limousines. The gallery would be absolutely mobbed with hundreds of people, overflowing on to the street outside. Press and Television crews were there to record the event for the evening news.



A note to the reader:

Well my friends, we did it.

I aspired, I achieved, I had attained.

Beginning as a twelve-year-old, severely abused child, through three suicide attempts as a teenager, as a result being put into a state mental hospital. Throughout there was my art. Finally, in 1965, the career of this artist escalated at a rate almost beyond belief. From top awards at sidewalk art shows to being honored with museum shows. From painting and living in a 12' X 12' room in Seattle to the personal endorsement of Leo Castelli and New York shows. To quote a friend, “It’s the making of an artist” and perhaps in that regard this would be a place to end the telling of this story. The following article well sums up this extraordinary voyage.

Sun Herald
December 15, 1977
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 flower, 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 spacial 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, that 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.

I can recognize at this point in my career and the years of struggle it took to reach, I unknowingly began to reverse the process. Equal to the slow climb up the latter to succeed, I slowly began to let it go.

My life on Screamer and all that embraced, ended as abruptly as it started. No more living high above the clouds. No more crowds gathering filled with admiration. No more illusions of light.

I was 40 years of age, just beginning an authentic exploration into life. Having little to do with art or an art career, it was time to find authenticity. The anguish of encountering self. It would take only a few months for the precipitating causes to play them selves out.



The Death of my Brother

March 6, 1978

My oldest brother, Norwood unexpectedly died on the operating table from a failed heart bypass surgery. I was not prepared for the news as the family understood the surgery to be routine. But, it happened and I immediately went to Florida where he had lived, in the same town as my mother and father. I had in fact been waiting for this news, but in regards to my father. He was nearing the end of a four-year battle with cancer.

The only first hand knowledge I had of death was when my grandparents passed away. Other than the grief of losing a kinsman and some explanation of a hereafter, I did not dwell on the subject. However, the death of a sibling occurring in my immediate family, unleashed heartfelt grief and a deeper scene of loss. Perhaps what made my brother's death so bitter was witnessing my parent's pain . . . My father was stoic, perhaps trying to fathom his own inevitable fate through the loss of his eldest son. Mother, was understandably overwrought with visible anguish. For them to lose a son disrupted all that is inherent in the natural course of human life.

The only council I had about death came from my father at the time of his mother's funeral. He was about to be escorted, along with the rest of the family, to view an open coffin with his mother in it. I heard him say as he turned his head away. "I do not want to see her this way. I want to remember her the way she was when she was alive." This insight came to mind when I too was invited to view my brother. I refused to go into the viewing room, giving the same reason. However, after much coaxing from other family, I reluctantly and even a bit fearful, walked up to the open coffin and looked at my brother. I say, *looked at my brother*, that is what I was expecting to do, but he was not there, only the packaging he once lived in. At the time this was a revelation of the highest order.

The Death of my Father

June 1, 1978

Forty-one days after my brother passed away, that final phone call came, it was my one surviving brother, Thomas. He said he had just spoken to our aunt in Florida. "We had better get to Florida, Dad is not going to last much longer." Perhaps you have had such a call. It's the calling together of the family to the death bed of a loved one. The calling together in order to be present, in love, when that person leaves this life. And then to participate in the rituals of the funeral. To say goodbye.

For me this milestone marked the most significant pivotal point of my entire life, leading me down a path I did not consciously choose, but prepared my soul for the events of my future life and . . . perhaps end.

On the plane to Florida, I had many thoughts, as I stared fixed, looking out the window, above the clouds. Thoughts of pain, life with my father, of how mother was going to handle dad's death. They had been together 50 years. And, of course, my own fear of death itself. Not fear of my death, but how I would handle my father's death. Would I cry when it happened? What would I feel from the loss? One thought was quite clear, I knew I wanted to be alone with him. I truly did not know why, was it something I wanted to say to him? Or, was it a rerun of a death scene from some movie where the son was sitting alone with his father, holding his hand when death came? There was a vision of this in my head. It was almost a mission, something I must do, but not knowing why.

When I arrived in Florida, I took a cab and went straight to the hospital. My brother had arrived earlier the same day. When I entered my father's room, it was filled with family. My mother, her sister and husband, a sister-in law, and my brother, Thomas. On seeing me, mother began to cry. She looked exhausted. She had spent the last 21 days and nights by my father's side, sleeping on a cot next to his bed. She would go home just long enough to bathe and change clothes. ,

My father was asleep, at least it appeared that way. I knew he was on heavy medication for pain. As the afternoon moved by, the vigil began. I also began to wonder if he knew if I was there. He had shown no

signs of life other than the slow up and down movement of his chest. His breathing was almost hypnotic to all present, eyes would fix on his chest. I found myself breathing in unison with him, wondering, fearfully, if the movement might stop.

The family would take turns going to eat in the hospital cafeteria, making a point that someone was in the room with my father all the time. That first day, there were always two or more people present.

As evening approached, my brother and I convinced mother to spend the night at home in her own bed. She so needed the rest. I said I wanted to spend the night in the room with my father, remembering my mission of wanting to be alone with him. However, my plan was foiled. My sister-in-law offered to stay in order to keep me company. It was a long night, but uneventful. At no time had my father acknowledged my presence. I also had not touched him. To be truthful, I was afraid to. His body was almost skeletal. His skin was withered with large black spots resulting from chemotherapy and overall deterioration, not physically the man I had known as my father.

The next morning, Mother and Thomas arrived to take over the next shift. I left, went to their home, took a shower and went to bed. I returned about three that afternoon. All were present and nothing had changed. My brother had made an appointment to take mother to see a doctor. She had a very bad sty in one eye and needed attention. And so, they left. My aunt and uncle decided to go to the cafeteria to get something to eat, and my sister-in-law needed to run some errands. Suddenly, the room was empty. OK, this is what you wanted.

The rest of this story was almost scripted as if I was being directed from moment to moment, thought to thought, but not knowing at all the next thought or moment. I walked to the side of the bed and looked down, moving my eyes slowly, examining all that was there. I found my earlier fear was slowly leaving. I looked into his face. His eyes were closed. I could see his face square on as the head of the bed was raised.

My thoughts and feelings seemed to mesh together. I was well and he was not. I was in control, and he was not. I was not intimidated by him, which had always been the case throughout life with my father. I felt a sense of strength, yet calm. After a lifetime of fear of my father, it was gone.

I reached out and put his hand in mine and gently squeezed, the whole time staring at his face. His eyes opened, clear, lucid and tender. They met mine, we looked at each other as if to our very souls. My thoughts and emotions seemed to be as one, but suddenly out of control. From millisecond to millisecond, I did not know what was happening. And then, a voice in my head said, "Dad please forgive me for anything I have done that has hurt you. --- I also forgive you for anything you have done that has hurt me." --- At this moment I felt, this is not right, how could I forgive him, he who was always right? I was the bad person. This feeling was at my very core. I, alone, should ask for his forgiveness. Yet, there was a greater power at work, passing my very thoughts on. My own conscience, my controlled thinking said, "How strange, you are forgiving him." It was almost disrespectful, not our roles through life. I was always the one who was "bad." Who am I to forgive him? "Peace, peace, --- let us be at peace," interrupted my negative thinking. My thinking was being controlled again. I remember consciously trying to fight or hold back my own anticipated thoughts, not knowing what would be next. I was fearful of what I might think next. Trying to hold back, but instinctively knowing. "No, no, I don't want to think that, NO!" I could not hold back what was next, "All right, I give up control." Through all this, our eyes were connected as when speaking, but this dialogue was nonverbal, yet we were communicating. I submitted to the moment. "Dad, . . . you can go now." Instantly the tension in my head was gone. I saw two large tears well up in his eyes. I held my breath. . . His head slowly rolled to the side. I saw the tears fall from his cheeks onto the pillow making a stain. I thought, "My God, what have I done? I have willed my own father's death. . . No." He slowly brought his head around to face me again, eye to eye. However, this time he was not seeing me. He was looking right through me. Without question, he was seeing, he was looking, at what I did not know. As I stared in amazement, I watched the pupils of his eyes contract as if looking into a bright light. Then, our contact was gone, our minds no longer locked together. I was back in control of my own thinking. My eyes immediately moved to his chest to look for movement. It did rise once

more, and then fell, not to move again. My father was gone. I was overwhelmed with grief and guilt, not understanding what had just taken place.

I would soon come to understand the significance of those milliseconds in time. Later that evening at my parents home, their Minister came by to see my mother and the family. This was to offer counsel at this time of loss. He was indeed a wise man. I had an opportunity, alone, to express to him this story, specifically that nonverbal dialogue with my father. I told him I felt very bad because I thought in some strange way I had willed my father's death. With great wisdom he said, "No Robert, you have it all wrong. You have just been blessed with a great honor. One, to be present at the moment of the passing of your father. But, most important, to release him." I had never heard of such a thing.

The more we talked the more I understood that my father's soul was ready to depart this life. My mother had been holding on, telling him every day that he would get better and be able to go home. He was in need of being released. Perhaps by all that is right and fair, mother should have been the one to be with him in his last moments. How ironic, that it was the son who was the most troublesome, the one who rebelled and sought, in his eyes, life without him. The black sheep, they used to say.

What a loving gift he gave me. To choose me to be the one to release him, to share that moment so intimately, to forgive and to seek my forgiveness.

He allowed me to share with him, perhaps for a millisecond, a glimpse of his vision, literally. Our souls were in complete harmony, locked together as one. I saw him see.

This event would haunt me for some time. In the months to follow the grieving process would take place and in time healing. However, the one thing I could not let go of was, "What did he see?" I talked about it, dreamt about it, and finally, turned to my art.

One afternoon, just two weeks after the funeral, I sat in my studio with sketch pad and pencil trying to articulate with my craft, his vision. I began to imagine myself the size of a cell, as an observer in the back of my father's eye, catching only a glimpse of what he was seeing at the very moment of death. I sensed there was pain. He suffered a great deal. How do I draw pain, sharp piercing lines? Then, there was the warmth of living, body heat, then there was cooling, as the physical body was waning. These were all physical sensations. But, what did he see? All was dark except for a distant light, dim, just enough light to still make out the interior of the eye to still feel in touch with the living.

As the light intensified, the colors changed from warm ruby red to violet, to blue-white. This light was emerging from a distant circular opening. The opening seemed to move closer, becoming larger and brighter. The sensation changed. Instead of the light moving toward him, he began to move toward the light and in doing so, the physical sensations of life began to diminish, to fade.

I began to draw a circle with a smaller circle in the center. I envisioned standing under a great dome looking straight up to a small circular opening at the top of the dome. Light was coming from outside through the small opening, another world outside the dark interior of the dome, another world of light, the dome being the interior of the eye. It is said that the eye is the window to the soul. What more appropriate place for light to enter the soul, than through the eye.

How incredibly ironic, the philosophy and the entire sequence of images in the *Light Show* paintings, of the previous five years, served as the very foundation for this new work. Going all the way back to MacDowell, where the seeds were planted and then grew to bring me to this very moment. If the direction of the work had not changed I could not have even begun to articulate with brush this vision of *The Light*.

It was never my intention that death and beyond be the subject of the work, but that is where my soul and its reflected language journeyed.

I immediately started to paint, transposing the drawings and imaginings to canvas. It was perhaps the most intense painting I have ever experienced. From July to September of 1978 I painted non-stop day and night. Completing three large canvases with a fourth underway. It was not my intention, but the four canvases ended up being very closely related, almost an animation from one canvas to the next of just a moment in time.

Trying to articulate with the best of my abilities what took place in those last few seconds of my father life. I wanted to see . . . what I saw him see.

There was an unidentified sense of urgency to complete these paintings, as unbeknownst to me these were the last works in the series of "Light Painting" begun when I moved to Screamer. They would also be the last works created in my studio on Screamer Mountain.

The Silver Cross

It began on a bright sunny day early in October of 1978. I had just sold my home in the Smoky Mountains having put it on the market a year before. But, it was not until this October that the realtor brought the first client to see the house. The client immediately agreed to purchase the house and wanted to move in as soon as possible. The purchaser and I agreed that he could take possession of the house in thirty days. Within those thirty days, I had previously committed myself and artwork to an exhibition in Washington, D.C. I had to meet that commitment. I did not seem to be too concerned about where I ended up at the end of the thirty days. I had no place to go as it was one of those events where I say providence was guiding me. Perhaps, unconsciously knowing it was time for change and with that change would come great personal growth. I was open to the four winds, taking me wherever.

On to Washington. The show was installed and a reception held. I discovered that for the entire day following the opening of the exhibition, I had no commitments. I was free to do as I pleased.

That morning I was considering how to spend my day off. I knew almost right away what my first priority would be. I wanted to go to the Washington Cathedral. I had a long history with that magnificent building, from Sunday school field trips as a child, to concerts and services as an adult. Many fond memories. I arrived at the Cathedral early in the day and went inside. First, I just walked around and looked at the stained glass windows. Then feeling meditative, I wanted to be quiet and still. I sat about mid-way of the main nave, just looking and listening.

My mind began to wander. In the past months, my oldest brother had died unexpectedly, then, the death of my father followed just a few weeks later. I sat quietly and pondered the significance of those last moments of my father's life. Why was I the one to be with him? The most unlikely candidate. I thought he somehow choose me. Perhaps through some kind of a mystical gift, we were able to forgive each other and find peace. I say mystical, because I no longer was angry with my father. I must have sat there for an hour and a half, a lot to think about.

I had just a few weeks to vacate my home and find a place to move to. My life was on the verge of a radical change. Yet, I was very calm, not the least bit anxious over not knowing where I was going to end up. I was very open to what end that would come to.

While sitting there, I remembered there was a gift shop on the lower level. I got up and went to the gift shop. In one of the show cases there was a collection of silver, handmade crosses. As I looked, I was drawn to one I thought unusual. It was modest and unadorned, attached to a thin silver chain. It was just a small rectangular piece of silver with an elongated cross cut through the metal, making the cross visible from both sides. I bought it, and headed for the car. After getting in I sat there for a moment looking at the cross. It was a clear day causing the bright sunlight to reflect off the cross as I held it in my hand. Little did I know when I placed it around my neck, for the first time, it would become an important thread in the tapestry of life and most profoundly, death. A tangible, symbolic connecting link between others, God, and me.

After I put the cross on I began thinking, "What are you going to do? You have to move and you have no idea where to go." As I was thinking, I remembered the western part of the state of Virginia. I had driven up and down Interstate 81 many times, traveling from my home in the Smokes to New York City. I remembered the Shenandoah Valley. If my memory was right, it was a beautiful part of the state.

I pulled out a road map and found I-81. I ran my finger north on the line stopping on Winchester, Virginia. It was in the northern part of the Shenandoah Valley. I could see from the map that Winchester was

not to far from Washington. I left the Cathedral and headed west. When I was nearing Winchester, in my head I was placing myself in that locale, thinking could I live here. I did not like what I saw. The area was very developed. I wanted something more isolated, more remote.

When I arrived in Winchester, I went to the first realtor I could find. I explained what I was looking for. They tried to interest me in what was available, but the prices were way out of my league. The Realtor then said, "Why don't you go over to West Virginia. There is a lot of land available and it's inexpensive." They sent me to a little town about 30 miles over the state line, Romney, West Virginia. I did the same thing there, talking to the first realtor I found, telling them what I was looking for. They knew just the place, I agreed to go. They called ahead to the little town of Baker and spoke to the postmaster who also was a realtor.

It took about 45 minutes to reach Baker. I found the postmaster and off we went into the mountains. He showed me one tract of land which I liked. He then suggested I look at one more. It was a tract of 150 acres. I said that was more than I could afford. He kept insisting and I finally agreed. It was just a short drive to the base of the mountain. "The land is up there, on top. We can drive on this old logging road to get there."

From the top, the view was beautiful, but I was concerned about the 150 acres. As I panned the panorama, I could see a small clearing on the next ridge. I asked if that clearing was part of the 150 acres. He said he did not know. I was really drawn to this little clearing. I asked if we might hike over and look at it. He was agreeable.

It was indeed one of those clear Fall days where the trees are a blaze of color against a royal blue sky. As we approached the clearing, we frightened off a dozen or so deer. The clearing was located on the crest of a ridge. When I walked to the center of the clearing and turned around, I knew in an instant, this is the place. I stood on the very spot where my life's dream would come to be built, my home and studio.

I say providence brought me here. This all happened in the context of one day, from the magnificence of a man-made Cathedral in the morning to a clearing in the wilderness by afternoon. At the beginning of this day I did not know where my life was going to go. By days end my life's journey finally brought me to the place I had been yearning for and yes . . . to "that hill."

