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Commentary preceding slides:
My painting yields more to qualities than ideas, more to matter than its naming. The work undertakes to celebrate ërichesseí ñ a marveling rush of wonder at the sheer multiplicity and differentiation of stuffs. Surfaces of heightened materiality of encrusted and layered imprinting are generated to entangle attention, delay cognition, andóin that slowed gaze ñ to open out interstitial reconfiguring such that other projective extensions of sense may be loosed into the reaches of the mind

My childhood was direct, straightforward, naive; open to California Delta life and Pacific coast beaches. Two great gifts in those Depression years were the WPA program Artists-in-Schools and the founding of the Haggin Museum, with its special commitment to children is art. My hometown of Stockton was an inland port, and after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 we pulled our blinds in fear. Schools sent students into the fields to harvest San Joaquin valley is onion, tomato, and peach crops.

My years at the University of California immediately following upon the atomic bombings that concluded World War II in August 1945 were permeated with a heady excitement for the sciences along with the global hope of peace and reconciliation which arose with the opening sessions of the United Nations Assembly, help that June in San Francisco Opera House. At that time the University expected that students upon graduation would be able to stand with some orientation toward any enterprise that humanity had undertaken. Particularly serious were the GI Bill students: older, traveled knowing of life and death. The questions who is man? And what must he do? Had acquired urgency beyond academic query.

Sake

As an art major I studied anthropology, paleontology, psychology, and physics. Recurrent emphases in all my classes were the primary, the elemental, the intrinsic. In the Art Department this was exemplified in the worth Ryder's course, ìThe Architecture of Painting,î the text for which was Albert Barnesí The Art of Painting (1926). The proto formalist Barnes wrote of painting in terms of ì the rhythmic organization of color, line, space, pattern, planesî (p.424):

what have come to be called the formal elements of visual art. As befit the inventor of Argyrol, he made frequent comparisons with science, as in this observation: ". . .reference to the real world does not disappear from the art as forms cease to be those of actually existing things, any more than objectivity depears from science when it ceases to talk in terms of earth, air, fire, and water, and substitutes for these the less easily recognizable ëhydrogení, ëoxygení, ínitrogení, and ëcarboní.î (p.36)


Surfacing Round

I do not remember the introductory course Art 2A as such. Perhaps it was not so clearly formulated when I came to Berkeley in 1945. I recall no particulars of assignments or commentaries in classes with John Haley, Gelnn Wessels, or Erle Loran. It seemed that terms by which to consider visual particulars and events had not reached a level comparable to that of literary criticism. My love of specific terminology came to me through the exactitudes of Gordon McKenzie's critical literature course.


Ribbon of Breath

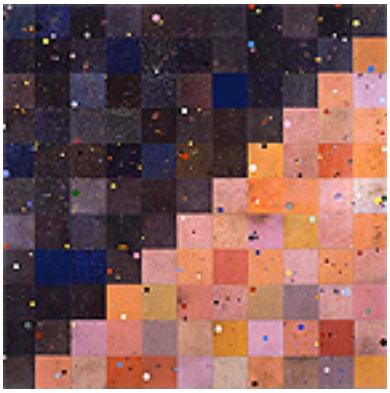

Into the Garden

It was, however, Professor Margaret Peterson O'Hagan who set out for me what it was to enter the art enterprise. Peterson, a Berkeley graduate, a painter who began teaching at the University in 1926, studied with Hofmann and Lhote in Europe and Vytlacil in New York. She was astonishing in her black striped pink satin shirt, plunging neckline above a tight gray skirt, very high-heeled sandals, Chinese blue smockóand great blue eyes. Peterson strode up and down between our slant-topped tables as we worked the color problems. Her unrelenting, magisterial, monologues ranging through philosophy, history, and aesthetics far exceeded my frames of reference. I cried after every class. Yet I knew that I must steer into the thick of this thought. And she taught empiricism; in this case, the empiricism of color usage: this color to that color; which relationship induces what consequence. It was visual plasticity centered upon the element

of color. I would later describe plasticity as the inherent malleability of each formal element to behave as aspect of every other such component. The unending discernment of properties and qualities abounding in each element permits linkages, kinships, link-in-kind tensions that coalesce toward a new entity, which is form.

Arriving

For me Worth Ryder was the central figure in the Berkeley art Department. I owe whatever early conceptual framework I formed to the construction of his classes. His survey class covered Prehistory to Picasso. As he pointed to images on the screen, it was as if he were announcing: ìThis is art: herein lies that inexplicable occurrence: quality.î His Architecture of Painting course was presented (or so I took it) as an array of usages. It seemed, as if we were enjoined to take on these means to achieve our statement. Issues of style and the succession of are movements were noted, but it was this nature of visuality that came through: sensations heightened to formal concentrates of texture, space, color, line, chiaroscuro. I might note that this framework is congruent with the parcellations in the brain presently identified by neurophysiologists.



Situation

Now regarding Hans Hofmann: in my years at the University there was no sense of a Hofmann hegemony of thought in the Department. That seems to have occurred later. I recall that the Art Department meetings, because of the intensity of discord among faculty members, were chaired by the philosopher Stephen Pepper. I remember a sit-in in the Deansí office protesting the non-renewal of the contract of Henry Schaeffer-Simmern; the dismissal might have been a form of editing toward a future unity. Schaeffer-Simmern taught one of the 2A sections and was writing The Unfolding of Artistic Activity. His theory, as he expressed it, "ìencouraged the natural unfolding of artistic activity as an inherent quality of man" ñ a position that reminds me of Noam Chomsky's attribution of language development to innate deep structures in the brain. It is true

that over time Hofmann'ís ideas were taught everywhere: such emphases as the spatial behavior of format, stressing the literal two-dimensionality of surface/shape. Wessels, Peterson, Ryder, and Haley all had studied with him before his arrival at Berkeley in 1930.


Where It Goes

On the East coast, among others Clement Greenberg in his 1945 review of a Hans Hofmann exhibition acknowledged, "as a writer, my initial illumination came from Hofmann lectures, more than from any other source." (Clement Greenberg, Collected Essays and Criticism, vol.2, 1945-49 p.18) I as a student at Berkeley, however, was unaware of Hofmannís work and concepts. I was introduced to his push-pull formula at the Art Institute of Chicago in the summer of 1947 by another former Hofmann student, Elizabeth McKinnon. I now see Hofmann's teaching as a hinge between similar theoretical efforts at Berkeley and in New York to employ and account for the power of visuality. This effort, identified with the East coast, became pejoratively labeled Formalism.

Further regarding Berkeley's Art Department and its theoretical underpinnings: I am aware of efforts to collect and collate material from earlier in the twentieth century that might lead us to understand the establishment in 1923 of an art department within the University's College of Letters and Sciences. This was an extraordinary achievement considering that as late as 1970ís many colleges were still perplexed as to how to situate art as a study within the humanities. Harvard in the 1990's was still making adjustments as to the place of sculpture and painting in its visual studies program.

Also I am most curious about what I see as the development of a distinctly West coast formalism ñ that is, Berkeley's melding of empirical practices with the aesthetics of sensation, distilling a discourse on the nature of visual form. Within the play and rigor of an intellectual community, these artists/teachers were able to pursue their investigations free from pressures experienced on the East coast, or the shaping forces of the New York art market. I have wondered what supported the Berkeley focus on for not subject matter, no ton the transmission of techniques by which to manipulate media, but rather closely attending the workings of visual thought.

Prior to Hofmann, prior to the escalation of the scientific climate in World War II, what circle of personalities, what confluence of influences may have predisposed the Art faculty to this

conceptual position? I fastened to Ryder's choice of the 1926 Barnes book as text with its introduction by John Dewey ñ Dewey, who was an occasional visitor to Berkeley. It was Barnes who bought Matisse paintings in 1914 from Leo Stein, who had bought th4em from the artist in 1908; Stein, who was mentored by Bernard Berenson at I Tatti in 1900, and whose brother and sister-in-law Michael and Sarah brought their Matisses back to Oakland in the mid-ë30's. And I might note that in 1947 it was the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art that mounted an exhibition of Matisse, Picasso, and Gris paintings to mark the death of Gertrude Stein the previous year. What I mean to suggest is the movement of thought from mind to mind, such as is explicitly expressed by Dewey in his introduction to his own book, Art as Experience, published in 1931:


Inherence

My greatest indebtedness is to Dr. A. C. BarnesÖ. I have had the benefit of conversations with him through a period of years, many of which occurred in the presence of the unrivaled collection of pictures he has assembled. The influence of these conversations, tighter with that of his books, has been a chief factor in shaping my own thinking about the philosophy of esthetics. (Preface, viii)


Come Around

Finally, but prior to the previous circle of citations, is George Santayanaís book. The Sense of Beauty, his Harvard lectures published in 1896, and assigned as text in Stephen Pepper's Aesthetics course. Santayana and his colleague Denman Ross strike a deeper vein into what Frances Spalding in her biography of the English critic roger Fry has called "the American's abstract reasoning." She was alluding to Ross, but might have spoken of Santayana as well. I

want to quote two paragraphs from The Sense of Beauty which serve as ground for the speculation I have set out concerning a distinctive Berkeley formalism. First he writes:
The synthesis which constitutes form is an activity of the mind; the unity . . .is an insight into the relation of sensible elements separately perceived.. (p.74)

Apportioning Here

And further on with great specificity is this example of response attendant to sensation:
The aesthetic effect of extensiveness is also entirely different from that of particular shapes. . . . [the] effect of surface is not necessarily an effect of material or colour; the evenness, monotony and vastness of a great curtain of color produce an effect which is that of the extreme of uniformity in the extreme of multiplicity; the eye wanders over a fluid infinity of unrecognizable positions, and the sense of their numberlessness and continuity is precisely the source e of the emotion of extent. (1936 ed., pp 75-76)

Web Site.
www.zabriskiegallery.com/main.htm