

“Art Is...”
Business of Art Center January 27, 2001

Art is... an action, not an object. It may offer insight through the contemplation of a single flower_ or be a lively celebration of life, so full of such vibrant colors and gala sounds it makes you dance within... or move you to tears - its beauty so full of grace and love. For you see, art is an act of sharing life and giving the abest of one's self - enriching the artist and hopefully the receiver as well. Art becomes a whole way of living life. C.H.R.

I would be honored to have you come to my exhibit “Art Is...” The doors of the Business of Art Center will open: January 27, 2001 3:00-4:30 pm BAC Members and Reserve List Patrons Preview 4:30-8:00pm Opening Reception 6:00-9:00pm The Adams Mountain Cafe will provide an afterglow of wine, music and hors d'oeuvres amid 30 fantasy illustrations completing the exhibit. Since the work shown spans 50 years, it varies widely in style material and technique. My hope is this variety will not be a distraction but rather, show evidence of a pervasive underlying character availing itself to you. The exhibition continues thru March 7th.

I was asked how I got into art... I'm convinced it all started in the womb. That place of belonging, and a sense of being loved. I was linked with something outside myself that was my source of nourishment. The need to have a natural and sustained connection with the outside world has been with me ever since. It was nature that first strengthened my kinship with the outside world. As a boy, I was fascinated with trees, rocks, and dirt. I'd use nature as my project material. Trees were for climbing and making boy-ed nests in. I even suspended rope bridges high up between trees so I wouldn't touch ground for hours. Dirt, was my sculpting medium. I'd turn a pile of dirt into mountain roads, tunnels and bridges. One summer, in a vacant lot next door, I built an under-ground fort. I dug a trench, double wide in two spots, and covered it with some real estate signs that had mysteriously 'fallen over'. I camouflaged the top with dirt and weeds. At the entrance, I placed my “machine gun” - a primitive contraption made of junk finds; a stick tripod, an old bike wheel and a playing card. For its sound effects, I'd crank the spokes to rat-a-tat-tat against the playing card. My head gear was an old helmet liner with pasted on leaves turning me invisible.

There I sat, defending my fort and eating my peanut butter sandwich 'rations'. At that same moment, about a half mile across the field, there was a platoon of men from Lowry Army Air Force Base practicing ground maneuvers. They were dressed in combat gear, but used simulated wood-en rifles (the real ones were being used in the war). Each squad would advance in turn coming over a rise in the field. One squad leader spotted me and my fort. He signaled to the others, “Attack!” Imagine my thrill when a platoon of real life grown up soldiers came charging into my fantasy! I fired! Moaning and groaning, some 30 men fell to the ground in dramatic spins and tumbles. The field was strewn with bodies. Finally, I was overrun and forced to surrender. The platoon leader himself negotiated my release. “Okay, soldier hand over part of your sandwich and you're a free man.” What a revelation for a young mind - having one's own inside world being linked to outside reality. In my 7th grade

year, the family moved to the mountains to a place just outside of Evergreen. It was there that nature became more than my building material. It became my first teacher, showing me art is more than visual. I became more sensitive and appreciative of nature. I was awed by its end-less variety, its power, its grace. I'd walk through it as though I were in an art gallery full of three dimensional paintings done by the master of masters. One 'painting' was a secret spot about a mile from our house. It had a beaver pond, rock cliffs, even a cave. I could walk in this 'painting' and become a part of it — experiencing it first hand. I'd get naked and swim in the pond. The beaver accepted me with barely a look. Art work by mortals also offers the viewer to enter in and experience it, to share much the same involvement the artist had in creating it. It may sound like I had a childhood with nothing but play. Actually, I was working when I was big enough to push a lawn mower. In 7th grade, I was 'janitor assistant' sweeping the elementary school classrooms. In high school, I was milkman, trash collector and rock mason apprentice. Though my father taught me that a solid work ethic and independence were mandatory, I really think I wanted to work. It was a challenge, a chance to learn, and an opportunity to con-jure up more artistic ways of doing things. While I was mowing, I'd make curving paths, giving the yard a subtle liveliness. The rock mason, Brooke, was also a musician. When he did a rock wall or fireplace, he was an artist at it.

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He taught me how to chisel rock to bring out its beauty. He showed me how important the joints (the space for mortar between the rocks) were to capture the movement and feel of the total work. The boss would come by in his pickup and say, "I ain't paying you no overtime for his job, Brooke! You're on your own." Brooke would just nod his head and keep working. I would too. I was learning that doing anything well, with pride and artistry had a priority over money. Being an outsider in high school brought about its share of hardships. I was a city kid trying to fit in to a small country school where the boys already had 5 o'clock shadows and could rig a team to plow the wheat field in 10 minutes. I was teased and ridiculed relentlessly. They'd throw the ball at me as hard as they could, laugh at the answers I gave in class, throw me down and cut off my hair. My mother would try to console me. "You are learning how to find strength and perseverance while their thoughtlessness holds them back." Bless her, her advice kept me going. And later, in art, I realized the importance of compassion and stick-to-it-ivness. By the 3rd year, my tormenters and I became good buddies. The class of '50 just had its half-century reunion. We connected again as friends, and each signed the other's annual that I had illustrated 50 years before. My grades in school were not always up to par. I had trouble comprehending many of the concepts expected of me. But, if I utilized the assets given me, combined with a little ingenuity, I could restore my pride and self worth. For example, I could visualize. My finest hour came when the hardest test of the most difficult class of my senior year was at hand. I studied the teacher's favorite solid geometry problems and memorized them by visualizing - giving them concrete depictions. I handed in my test, fully illustrated! And every solution was

right. Out of 100 possible points, the teacher gave me 150, making my grade for the semester an “A”. My father’s pressuring me to become a career naval officer, the draft, and the college lifestyle, all challenged my connection and what I had to offer it. I did serve for two years, but after being discharged, I got on the path of refining my art with formal instruction. I enrolled at The Art Institute of Chicago. The distance between my inner world and the outside quickly shortened and intensified. School made me exhilaratingly alive. I loved it! But, even in this environment, there were challenges to the connection. I saw some students formalize their art to a point where their art became isolated and no longer a constant factor in their daily living. Some contrived their art work to appear expressive, when, in reality, they had nothing to say. And the most insidious distraction: that of having clientele wanting to buy a work done in school. The student would succumb to the temptation to reproduce over and over that same exact work, negating any further learning. The lure of fortune and fame, to this day, leads some artist astray, killing uniqueness and the creative process. This is not only a let down for the artist, but the art work as well. Without the risks and challenges - without the artist’s life energy, heart, joy or tears, the art work ceases to offer the receiver any significant experience. Ultimately, all suffer. All in all, though, school offered great experiences that solidified my connection through art. I didn’t graduate until 12 years after I started my higher education. But, to this day, I am still learning, and have the desire to take more classes. Art will forever excite me, and there’s so much room to do better and create more experiential works.

I really stepped into the outside world in the next phase of my life -marriage, four children, eight to five job, insurance, credit cards etc. I focused my art on making our home into a middle earth environment inside and out. I carved figures holding up the ceiling beams, and made throne chairs for toilets, fashioned built in bunk beds, stained glass windows, and carved dutch doors. Handmade ‘Tiffany’ lamp shades illuminated our home. Our yard, too, was a fantasy land. A cobble-stone path wound its way back to our hand sculpted waterfall complete with a mermaid and toad stools for sitting. We planted Aspen trees, an apple tree and made a tree house tree. A rich blend of contributions from all six individuals created an environment we all enjoyed. Then tragedy struck. The divorce was final. The home was bulldozed. The only home I had now was in myself. And it was a dark and lonely place. Continuing to teach art after the marriage break-up helped me. It was my only link with the outside. I put all my energies into figuring ways to reach my Jr. high students and help them link up too. I would begin with sure-fire success projects any student could perform. This would introduce everyone to artistry rather than isolate those who did not consider themselves “artists.” We’d all bask in their feelings of accomplishment. And slowly,

I’d bring in more challenging projects to show the accompanying increase of experiential reward. I wrote rationales for instruction and explained the reasons for art itself. I would begin: “A.R.T. ‘A’ is you the artist. The ‘T’ is the thing, or art piece, and the ‘R’ is the relationship between the two. The stronger the ‘R’ the more valuable the ‘T’. The more you input, the more expression the ‘T’ offers back out. Developing the Relationship ‘R’ - features four levels in the process of artistry that we will be developing.” Each of these four levels has its own

qualities. (which actually break down into 64). Level 1 is Awareness (including such qualities as openness, focus, detail, concentration, flexibility, imagination...) Level 2 is Understanding (experimentation & invention, study Sr research, confidence (Sr criticism, the use of knowledge...) Level 3 is Relativity (involvement, style Sr technique, continuity, purpose...) and Level 4 is Total Expression (visualization & ideation, drama Sr exaggeration, expression, and savory afterglow...)

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These note sketches show the path towards artistry and the pitfalls of not using all four levels.

Student “Numby” is unavailable to the 4 Levels. Experiences bounce off or go straight through. Numby’s canvas is blank,

I. Awareness without Understanding. This student - “Zappo” is open to and takes in all available stimuli but doesn’t interpret the stimuli.

II. Understanding without Relating. “Webster” has tons of information but can’t put the pieces together, resulting in particles of unrelated data.

III. Relativity without Sharing. “Scrimpy” sees relationships and the value in experiences but aril seem to express or share them.

IV. Total Expression. This student -”Mimi”composes with all levels and creates a total sharing of experiences.

I would tell my students, “For each of the desired attributes in artistry there is a negative ‘gremlin’ wanting to clog that attribute. If you’re trying to be open minded the gremlin will cause you to be biased. If you want to have your own style, he will make fun of it and cause you to copy someone else’s. So, as well as learning what to do, artists need to learn what not to do.”

Fig. 20 Ego Ugly Clog

Fig. 21 Seeing the artist in the artwork.

Finally I’d state: “Being artistic is a basic life skill. It’s a tool for problem solving -gaining a respect for, and a knowing of the self.... “It is a way of communicating in a universal language.... “It is significant to life... and the list goes on... “Anyone can be an artist, be you a bus driver, musician, or bank robber. The qualities of artistry can be applicable in any endeavor. When done artistically, all that you do will be more successful and enriched.”

My daughter, Hannah, wrote a paper about an art-work of mine. The art work spoke in first person saying, “[The

artist] breathed his life into me. His personality is my expression. While, at first, the casual onlooker will say that I am a painting, the person who looks closely will know I am more; I am the artist's time, his efforts and his gift to you. I am the reason for his living, his song, his life." (Fig. 3) So do what you do artistically, you are

you see, when you doing your art. Since my life's endeavor is visual art, I had to choose between realism, abstraction, and non objective art as a way of expression. I had a tough time deciding. So, I did them all. Realism helped me to master perspective, color, technique, and all the elements necessary for visual accuracy. But, it left little room for self expression. Non-objective offered design, composition and a chance to express my inner self with its own language - but, it was less intelligible to others. Ultimately, I chose abstraction. With this middle ground, I could tap into my inner being and, at the same time, communicate with a language understood by the outside world. My art now comes in three forms and degrees of abstraction: landscape, double imagery and fantasy. Landscapes are painted on site. This makes the connection intimate, sincere and direct. Manitou is such a delight to paint, with its winding up and down roads, homes all nestled in, and the natural environment of rock cliffs and shady streams. I don't paint right way. First, I listen to what the scene tells me. The breeze, smells, sounds and movement all get me involved. Soon, I'm so engrossed, the brush seems to paint on its own. And I am unaware of the cold coming in or the hours passing. I did a painting of an artist friend as he was working on his own landscape. I didn't notice until later that the image of him on my canvas had blended right in with the surroundings. The artist literally became part of the scene !

Fig. 22 A non-objective Photofilm print... or does it have a subject?

Fig. 23 Manitou - Shaded Lane

Fig. 24 Exploding Fall

Figure 25 Disappearing Artist

Fig. 26 From a single gnarled stick these inhabitants appeared.

Fig. 27 Here's the Church

Double imageries are more like exercises in problem solving (focusing more on a Level 2 endeavor) than artistic expressions. They stimulate inventiveness and at the same time develop skills in rendering. As in Figs. 17, 27 & 28 where two or more realities are imposed as one image. These call for a bit of illusionary magic. They are fun to do and the receiver/ viewer may enjoy discovery of the trick.

Fantasy keeps the child in me alive. It is the way I journey to exotic places filled with idealistic romance and grand adventure, visual delight and stories with happy endings. Through exaggeration, I can express more.

(Fig.33) Fantasies can become more real than literal work as long as I treat them as if they are real in every detail, naturally, and with visual conviction. Through this believability, the fantasies come alive.

Fig. 30 I Just Had to Put in a Nymph.

Drawing out visions can also reveal hidden concerns of the self, like Rorschach ink blot tests. (Fig. 31 & 34) There are some works in the show done during my divorce that are dark and dreary surrealism. Doing them helped me release some negativity from my system. You may want to make your own 'ink blots' from randomly patterned paper. Just outline what you see. You may be surprised.

Fig. 31 Gitchy Gitchy Coo

. . . and that is how I got into art.

I'm not sure where my art goes from here. I'll let my arts' desire guide me. I know I'm still reaching for a more pure total expression that's full of life. Another Fig. 32 Rocky Hillside 50 years should get me close. I know there is that source of nourishment, inspiration and grace swirling about us. I call it the "flow". I've tapped into it a few times, and it is wonderful. But when I totally succumb to its grace, when I open myself to it completely, my heart sings, adding soul to my song.

Fig. 34 Sarah and Me

My daughter, Sarah Catherine, a very special child of God, is a part of that flow. At first, her death devastated me. Now, I sense her presence. Her love is greater than ever. As part of the flow, she adds to my life's richness and influences my art. I pray my art shares the love I feel, completing the cycle of art that connects us all, one to another. This show is dedicated to all my children; Ivan, Noah, Sarah and Hannah. May my art be a continuing reminder that I love them and will always and forever. May we all be open to receive and be enriched by this illuminary grace in following our own bliss . - CHR

Fig. 28 Whompy Imp

Fig. 29 Journey to Romance