

AI on Art – Some Timely Thoughts

Mid September already!! Where did the summer go? Already I am back to work juggling priorities, the students will be back to school any day now and, are-you-sitting-down, Costco actually already has some Christmas decorations out!!

Mind you, that is not to say that I have not had a terrific and productive summer. I actually did a LOT of painting. But, time did fly by. Remember when a school year seemed like an eternity and even a long afternoon visit with a boring adult seemed interminable? This is no longer the case as holidays seem to become ever closer and there is never enough time to do what one hopes to do. That's where art comes in for me. I find that being engaged in creating art makes time stop, that it makes the sun move slower as I concentrate on the scene in front of me and become totally engaged in the activity of painting. In fact, most of us see and experience more when we slow down to paint and sketch. While this is often the effect of the act of *creating* a visual image, it is not necessarily the case when *viewing* visual images.

We are exposed on a daily basis to a host of fixed visual images in the form of newspaper and magazine photographs as well as vacation or family snapshots. We are well aware that these depict but very brief time periods of the life continuum: scenes captured in a glimpse, or a fixed moment in time, a blink of an eye. And if, as is commonly the case in many photographs, a single point of view is used, the time element represented is very brief and appears as though seen through the unblinking eye of a frozen person. With photography one can readily freeze motion in mid action, foiling gravity or even stopping a speeding bullet. Time is stopped dead in its tracks. This of course is not how we really see the world since most of us are blessed with binocular vision and our eyes and head are constantly moving and scanning, sensing movement and elapsed time.

But what about the issue of time when considering painting? Most painting, even photo-realistic ones, seems to capture a longer time frame than a photograph of the same scene. Perhaps this is because most of us are conscious of the fact that the painting was created over time and that this time factor is somehow captured in the painting as it tells its visual story. In other words the story not only includes the visual content but also the artist's effort over time to create it.

Then does a painting capture more time if it is painterly, with more obvious evidence of the artist's hand in the creation of the work such as visible brush strokes, line work, drips, splashes, incomplete transitions? If so, then one could say that impressionist and expressionist works clearly contain more time than say Warhol's PoP Art Campbell's soup cans. I am reminded of Willem deKoonig's predilection for using parts of drawings to create a new whole while referring to

the seams as "a blink of an eye". Yes the knife cut on paper is the "fastest" line possible, connoting a nanosecond of time, but deKoonig contrasted this with all sorts of evidence of his presence and involvement in the creation of the painting. Then there is Cubism, which is ultimately the depiction of glimpses of the same subject from any number of views. Surely Picasso's works contributed significantly to an increase in the amount of time a single painting can depict.

Can photographs be constructed so as to capture more time? I believe this depends entirely on the awareness of the viewer. Cindy Sherman for example builds elaborate sets and subjects herself to hours of make-up, costumes and carefully staged lighting to create her photographs. If the viewer is aware of this when viewing the photograph, then yes, the longer element is exposed. Otherwise it appears as another snapshot of a fragmentary moment in time.

David Hockney extended the time frame in photography when he created a cubistic experience through his photographic collages, particularly in his early works using Polaroid film where the white edges around each photo creates a grid-like effect. The photo-collages or "joiners" as he called them, fascinate precisely because they capture the artist's movement in creating the work and elapsed time. In turn viewers move around the collage and take time to view the individual photographs (which any of them could have taken) as well as the collective whole. He would often start with the subject's face, depicting the normal head movements and eye glances by including a number of overlapping images. Ultimately his photographic work had a significant impact on his painting as he applied the lessons of movement and elapsed time to his images of Mullholland Drive and Nichols Canyon. In these popular images he covers the entire Drive and Canyon respectively from end to end, capturing movement and time through the creative use of the image, color and texture.

Ultimately time can also be captured through viewing multiple works, created over time, by the same artist. Perhaps that is one of the reasons seeing a body of an artist's work seems to add a new dimension. Certainly one is highly conscious of time as a factor in Milford Zornes' current show, entitled "An International Retrospective" at the Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut CA (until October 10, 2002). The show covers paintings made over a fifty+ year time span and is a visual collage of his versatility and artistic achievement. It is well worth the time and effort to see it.

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