

PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS
AND
THE CRITICAL ANALYSES OF THEM

9/8

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Master of Arts

by
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PART I

COMPOSITION AS THE BASIC ELEMENT

During a year and a half of graduate work at The Kansas State Teachers College, my drawing and painting has undergone a process of evolution. It is the purpose of this paper to analyze critically this change.

In approaching an analysis of this sort, the first essential was to find the one basic, unifying characteristic which underlies the entire body of my art work. The fact that I found this "constant" to be composition, followed more or less as a matter of course, indicates that the entire painting process is dependent upon this factor. The term "composition" is used to mean the structural relationship of the most primary forms as they relate to the whole frame of reference. The manipulation of massive forms one against another, as they relate to the whole two-dimensional area, defines the limits of my painting. This ability to arrange is the dominant means of achieving consistency in my work.

In my early paintings, "Symmetrical Grace" (pl. I) and "Poetic Landscape" (pl. II), the frame of reference appears predetermined or pre-described through the overly consistent horizontal composition which gives the feeling of a landscape

motif. Shortly afterwards there was more concern with solidity of composition, as in "Bathers" (pl. III), where a structurally drastic change of "space" has taken place.¹ This change lies in the compositional layout and the more varied use of pattern relationships. The primary structure is forced into a paradoxical sense of space which does not allow the suggested figures to rely upon a "natural" three-dimensional placement. The primary structure of the "Bathers" is forced to carry the whole idea; the strength and appeal of the work must come from its composition.

As my painting progressed during this year and a half, the basic compositional dominance does not really alter, but instead starts to become submerged or hidden in a sort of kinesthetic handling of paint in an abstract manner. The "abstraction" is related to this evolving sense of a new ambiguous space--a space which is not just atmospheric, but is also flat. What was done with the compositional space of later works (pls. IV, V, VI, and VIII) depends upon this structural pattern which is directed toward a subtle or more closely fused flat pattern. This kind of pattern is more readily comprehended through subtlety and thus the work becomes more "tasteful." This tastefulness is achieved not

¹By space, I mean the illusion of a third dimension depicted on a two-dimensional surface.

only through closely related form patterns but also through subtle color relationships which draw these form patterns together.²

However, this underlying pattern becomes increasingly obscured by the kinesthetic manipulation of surface effects which gives the impression of looseness. Two of the latest works of this series, "Synchrony No. I" (pl. XII) and "Dynamic Involvement" (pl. XIII), reveal an even greater feeling of spontaneity which changes this tasteful pattern of spacial illusion. The increased spontaneity makes it more difficult to comprehend a structural pattern within the later works. Nevertheless, this new element was added in order to increase the feeling of surface movement in my painting. The slashing of line and abrupt application of shape has to do with a more immediate empathy on my part with the "whole" idea of the painting. This apparent ease in performance shows in the three later paintings, "Lyrical Exuberance," "Synchrony No. I," and "Dynamic Involvement" (pls. VIII, XII, XIII). The facility gives rise to what appeared as a more varied integration and synthesis of form.

When this spontaneous action becomes too dominant, the underlying structure or composition of my work, as in

²By subtle or tasteful relationships of color, I mean hues which are harmonic, such as the red-blue (violet) range; or hues using a similar value transition, such as the tint range merging with the shade range (achieved by "greying" the colors).

"Synchrony No. I" (pl. XII), appears to be almost annihilated by the abrupt surface appearance. In this painting, the surface movement dominates so much that it tends to obscure any compositional structure. Thus it may easily be overlooked esthetically because of the extremely emotional appeal of the surface. The subtle inflections or changes that do take place in the work become lost in an immediate emotional response which may keep one from realizing how essential the composition is to the painting as a whole.

However, there is evidence that it is possible to achieve an effect of integration and balance through the use of these two elements (spontaneous overpainting and underlying structure). "Lyrical Exuberance" and "Dynamic Involvement" have a feeling of being both superficial (or easy to identify with) and structurally dynamic.

During the past year, a redundancy of composition became apparent in my paintings. When compositions become too similar the subtle relationships of form cannot correct this deficiency. For example, "Visual Field" (pl. VII) is not effective because it has lost the subtle relationship between color and form. The force of the structural composition does not really work because of the influence of rigid diamond shapes from an earlier under-painting to control the later composition. This diamond motif predicts the linear structure and as a process does not allow the painting to change.

Recently, I turned to the use of the photo-transfer technique as a means of expanding the compositional possibilities of my work. Initially, the use of this technique resulted in a breakdown of composition, as "Resemblance" (pl. XI) reveals. In another instance, "Negative Contingency" (pl. IX) remained similar in structure to "Baile del Fuego" (pl. V) despite the use of this additional technique. The very late drawings, "Regret" and "Hide and Seek" (pls. XIV and XV) use this process to achieve more exciting compositional effects which will influence and extend the variety of composition in my future paintings.

PART II

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONTENT TO COMPOSITION

The content of my work may be thought of as a spacial quality dependent upon a visual concern for form; the content is of such a nature as to evolve out of the form. The form of the work is my major concern.

If identifiable elements are evident, as in "Bathers" (pl. III) and "Nude" (pl. VI), they are a secondary or nearly unconscious consideration. Here the "subject" connotation seems only suggested when compared to the vivid literal imagery of photographs apparent in "Negative Contingency" (pl. IX) and "Resemblance" (pl. XI). "Resemblance", more obviously than "Negative Contingency", reveals a breakdown in composition because of the failure to integrate the literal imagery into the whole frame of reference. This contrast between the two paintings supports my basic belief that "content" is secondary to form in my work and that only when I begin to incorporate the imagery with the primary structure does the composition become forceful (pl. IX). Further support for this belief appears in "Regret" and "Hide and Seek" (pls. XIV and XV) where there is an even greater degree of synthesis between the photo image and compositional considerations.

PART III

SUMMARY

As I review this series of drawings and paintings, composition (form) appears to be my major concern; the content evolves out of this composition. This concern for form results in a subtle pattern termed tasteful. At times this pattern becomes obscured by my kinesthetic handling of paint. However, through the manipulation of form my later works give rise to a more varied integration and synthesis of form which will extend the scope of visual imagery in my future paintings.

This critical analysis has been a difficult task because it was done in retrospect and not during the process of creating. However, the crystallization of thought which this paper demanded has been invaluable in revealing both the strengths and shortcomings of my work. The experience should prove particularly helpful as I continue to mature as an artist and to work more independently.

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APPENDIX
Photo-Reproductions

"Symmetrical Grace," Summer '67
35" by 45"

PLATE I



PLATE II

"Poetic Landscape," Summer '67

38" by 48"



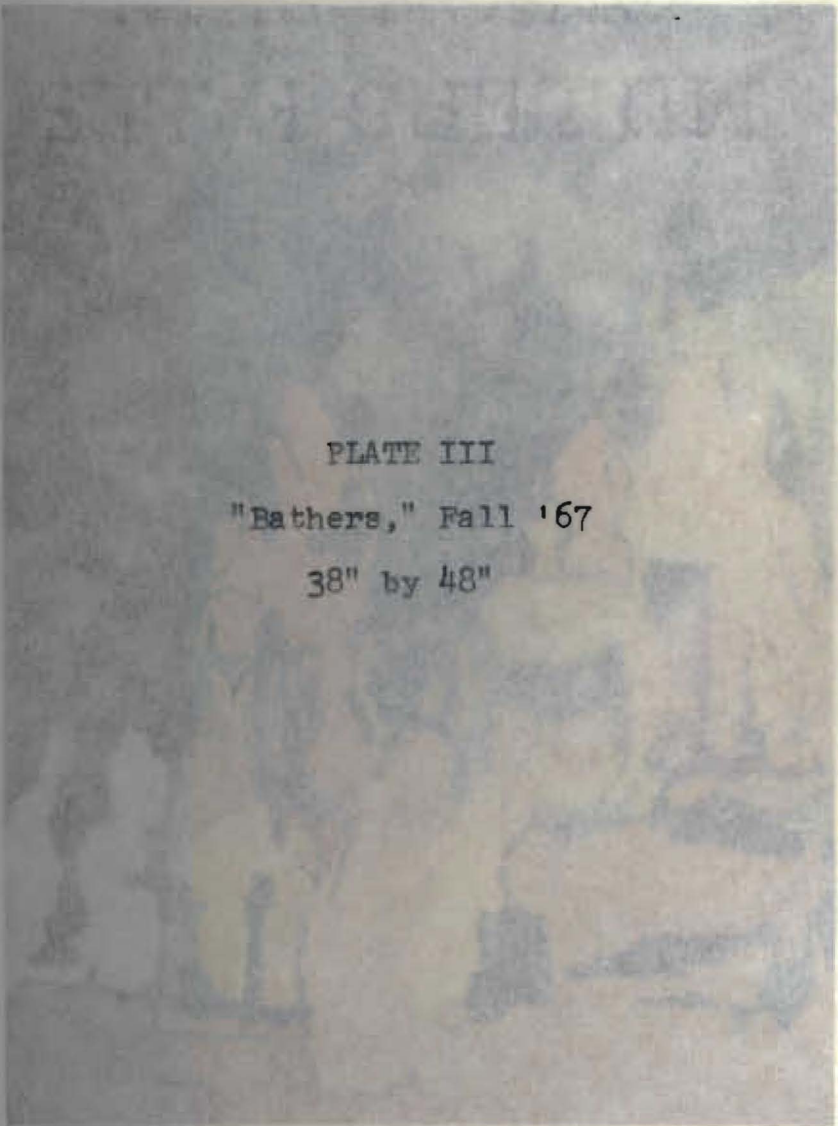


PLATE III

"Bathers," Fall '67

38" by 48"



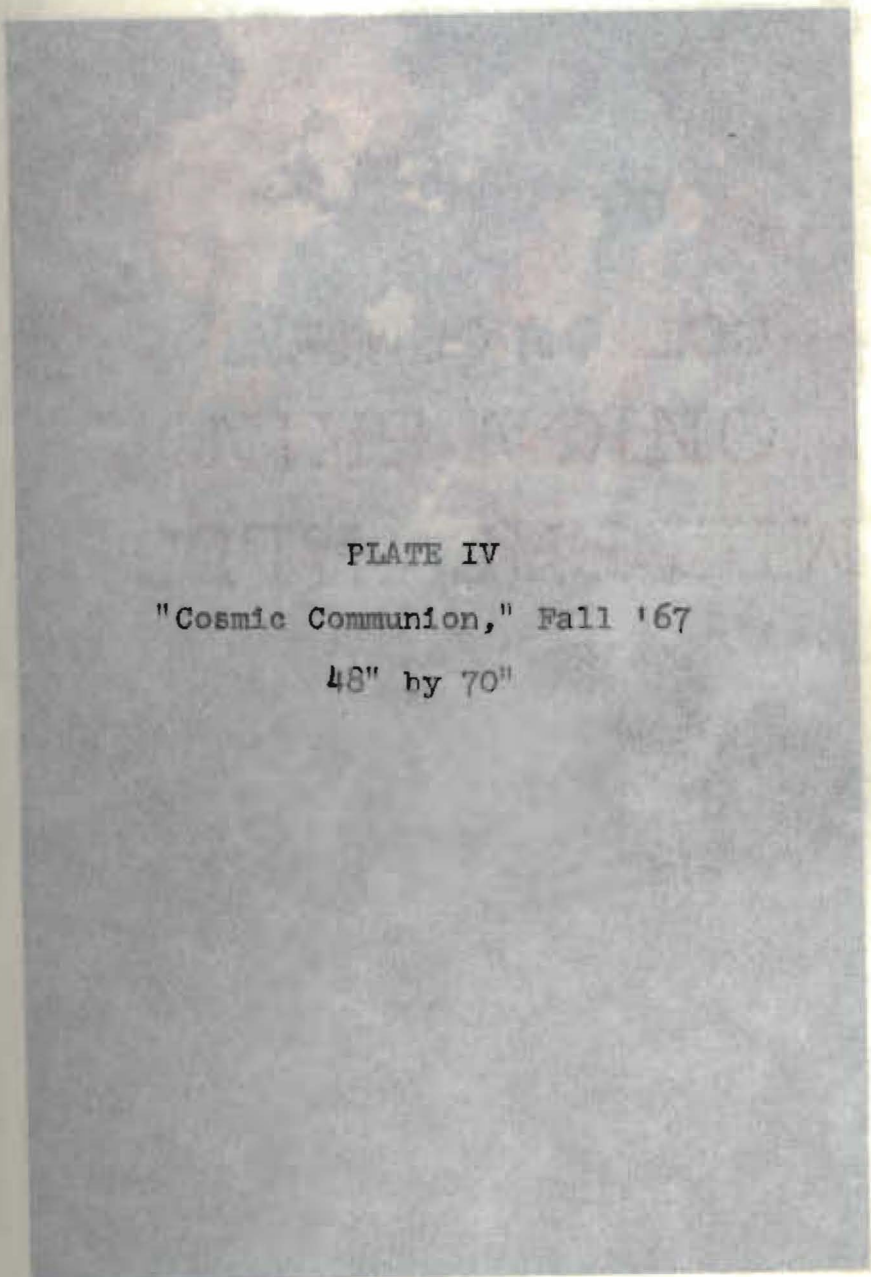


PLATE IV

"Cosmic Communion," Fall '67

48" by 70"



PLATE V

"Baile del Feugo," Winter '67

48" by 58"



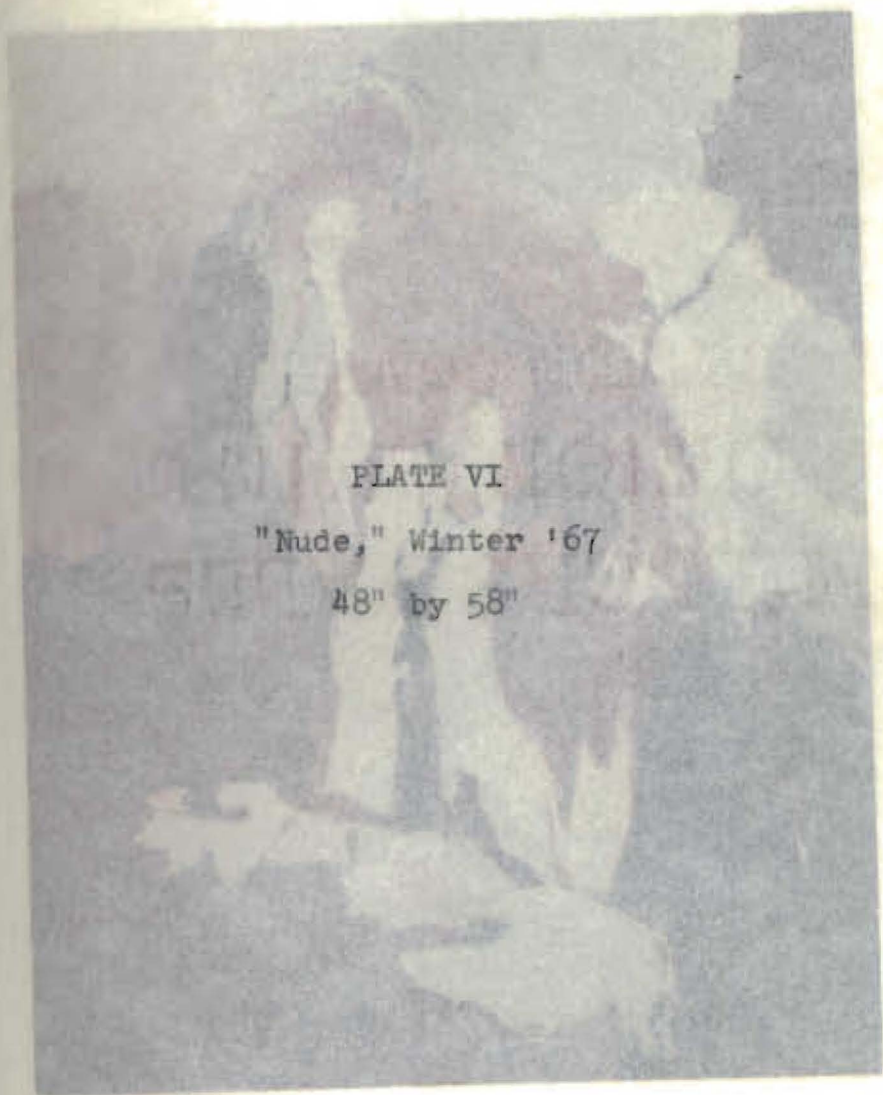




PLATE VII

"Visual Field," Winter '68

48" by 70"



PLATE VIII

"Lyrical Exuberance," Spring '68

98" by 134"





PLATE IX
"Negative Contingency," Spring '68
48" by 60"



PLATE X

"Composition," Summer '67

34" by 48"

PLATE XI

"Resemblance," Spring '68

40" by 40"



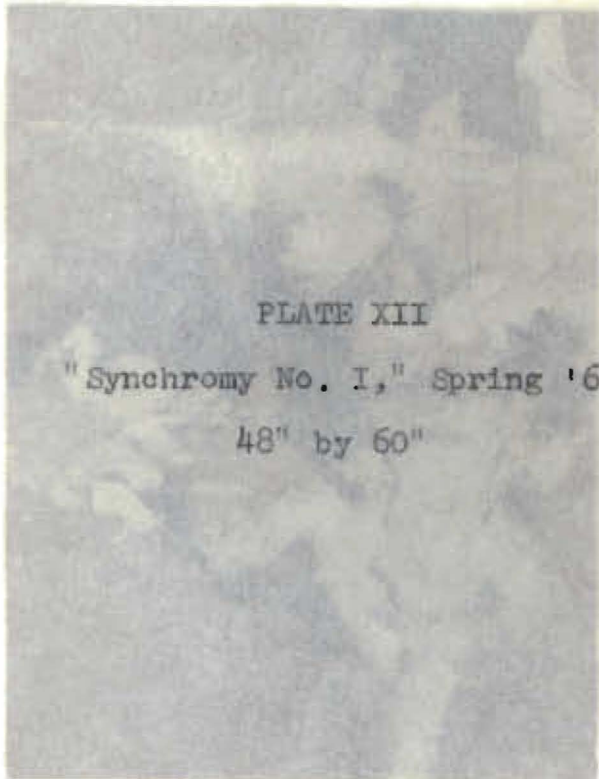


PLATE XII

"Synchrony No. I," Spring '68

48" by 60"



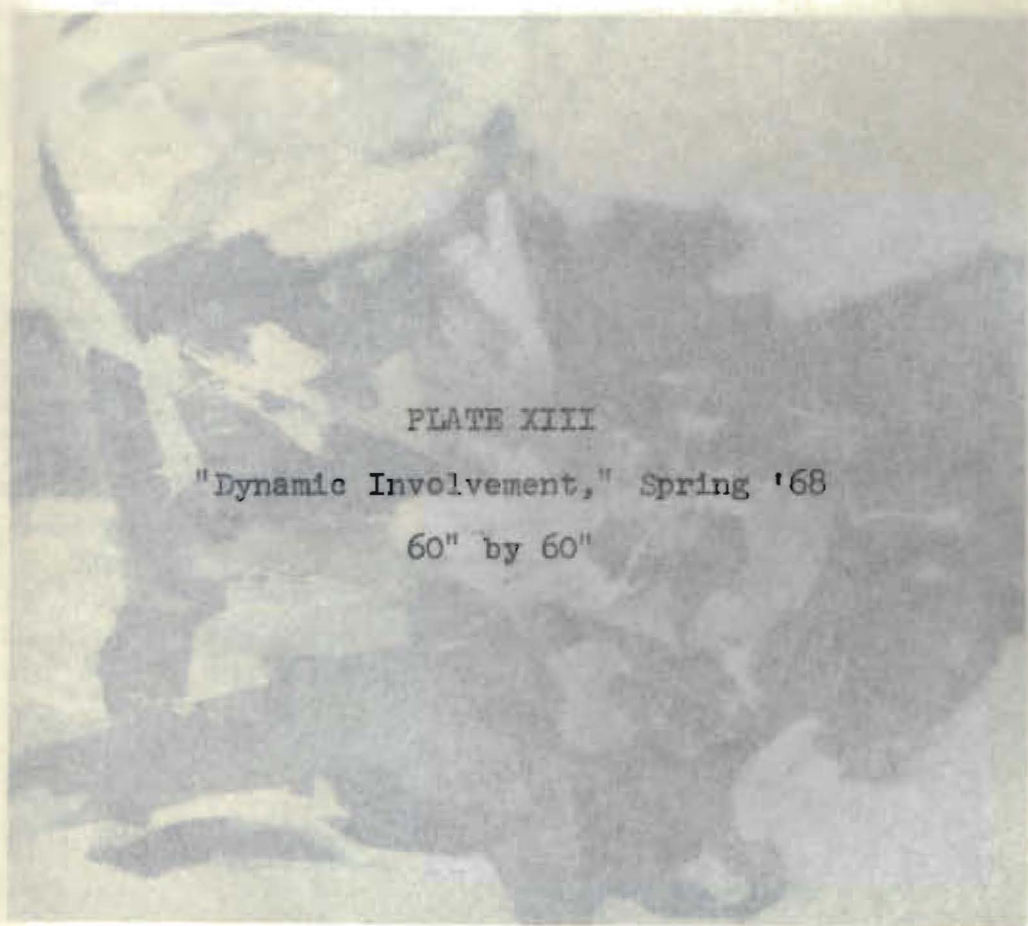


PLATE XIII

"Dynamic Involvement," Spring '68

60" by 60"





PLATE XIV

"Regret," Spring '68

22" by 28"



PLATE XV

"Hide and Seek," Spring '68

22" by 28"

