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An Investigation of "Revelation" in Contemporary Art

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28

AN INVESTIGATION OF "REVELATION" IN CONTEMPORARY ART

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington State College

Ellensburg, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Art

by

John Brian Skoor

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AN INVESTIGATION OF "REVELATION" IN CONTEMPORARY ART

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

This research is based on the hypothesis that basic to any work of art, or religious organization, is the concept of revelation. The majority of lay individuals tend to deemphasize this "spiritual force" and to label those who claim to have experienced it as "mystics"; certain visual artists, poets, musicians, and others, however, consider this concept vital to the life of their creative works. In essence, this research is being proposed for the purpose of showing that basic to the form of a work of art, as well as a religious organization, is the content. This writer will attempt to emphasize the great significance of revelation in a universe experiencing continual creation.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It is the purpose of this study (1) to investigate various examples of paintings and sculptures in which the artist claimed to have revealed himself or to have had a spiritual experience in the creation of the work; (2) to present several select statements by artists and theologians who claim revelation is

the dynamic, sustaining force in all creation; (3) to correlate art and religion, emphasizing that the common thread which underlies them both is revelation.

Importance of the study. Most observers, whether in an art gallery or a church, tend to see only the form of the object under consideration, and fail to see the abstract, intangible content of the work. This study attempts to emphasize the importance of becoming sensitive to that certain force which soars above and beyond the form. This writer believes that this force is revelation and may be expressed in the artist's work as a part of a universe undergoing continual creation.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Revelation. The act of revealing or disclosing to others (38:725). The dynamic force which is basic to all creative activity.

Self-Revelation. The disclosure of an individual's unique insights, and vision, in his creative work. The reflection of one's inner self in an outward, visual manifestation.

Revelation of God. God's disclosure or manifestation of Himself or of His will to man, as through some

act, oracular words, signs or laws (38:725); that which is revealed by God to man. This study accepts as a limitation the idea of "God" as professed generally in the Christian dogma; it strongly emphasizes the concept of continued revelation. God's revelation is not bound in a book, such as the Bible, but is a continuous occurrence in the lives of men. This writer believes that the Bible contains the revelation of God; however, he does not believe that revelation ceased when the scriptures were canonized.

Form. The outward, physical appearance of an object. In art this would involve the arrangement of the elements of line, color, texture, shape, and space. In religion this would involve the organizational structure, including the physical appearance as well as the liturgy.

Content. The dynamic force underlying the form. The force which gives the form life. This writer considers "revelation" to be the basic power of content.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Revelation as a concept is not new. Throughout the ages, man has attempted to discover himself and his relationship with a "God," or a force or power beyond the self. This research will deal with the artist's concept of revelation in his creative expression. In order to understand the meaning of revelation, it is necessary to present some contemporary thought in regard to the concept of revelation as related to The Creator. The following will be a brief review of contemporary thought relating to the revelation of God. In conclusion, a presentation of various artists' comments on revelation will be given. This discussion will involve revelation in the narrow sense as related to the Christian church, as well as the broader sense, the revelation of God in His creation.

I. REVELATION IN A UNIVERSE UNDER CONTINUAL CREATION

The pattern of the creative mind, an external idea, manifested in material form by an unresting energy, with an outpouring of power that at once inspires, judges, and communicates the work; all these three being one and the same in the mind and one and the same in the work (30-23).

This, Dorothy Sayers emphasizes in her book, The Mind of The Maker, is the pattern laid down by the theologians,

as the pattern of the "Being of God."

She goes on to say that if this is true, then the mind of the maker and the Mind of The Maker are formed on the same pattern, and all their works are made in their own image (30-213). The theme of her writings deals with the evercreating God, the living author whose span of activity extends infinite beyond our racial memory in both directions. We never see his great work finished. . . . There is indeed a school of thought which imagines that God having created His Universe . . . left his work to get on with itself. . . . We simply do not know of any creation which goes on creating itself in variety when the creator has withdrawn from it (30:58).

Sayer suggests that it is the nature of the word to reveal itself and to incarnate itself. The word assumes material form. She compares it to a book which, she says, has a three-fold being: (1) As thought, which is an idea existing in the creators; (2) the book as written, being the energy or word incarnate; (3) the book as read, which is the power of its effect upon the responsive mind (30:113-115).

Martin Buber, an Existentialist theologian, says that in the Bible, life is a constant dialogue between the above and the below. Then he goes on to ask the question: "Does this still apply to our present day life?" Believers

and unbelievers deny it. A common belief today is that though everything contained in the scriptures is literally true, though God did certainly speak to men chosen by Him, yet, since then, the Holy Spirit has been taken from us, heaven is silent to us, and only through books of the written and oral tradition is God's will made known to us as to what we shall or shall not do. Certainly even today, the worshiper stands immediately before his creator; but how could he dare, like the psalmist, report words of personal reply as spoken immediately to him (8:194-195).

Buber goes on to say that a faithful unprepossessed reader of scripture must endorse the view he has learned from it: What happened once happens now and always, and the fact of its happening to us is a guarantee of its having happened.

Kierkegaard once remarked: ". . . to say that the eternal God, conceived as absolute perfection, revealed Himself in His fullness in one specimen of the temporal world is indeed a thought which is the downfall of reason." (35:6).

Gabriel Moran, a "progressive" Roman Catholic, reappraises the idea of revelation in his book, Theology of Revelation. He regards revelation as ". . . a personal union in a revelational history of a community." (3:590).

In response to the question, "Does the Bible contain the whole of revelation?", Moran says, "If revelation is personal communion, it cannot be formally contained in written pages. There is no doubt a sense in which the whole Bible reflects the entire faith of the church, but the same may be said of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist." (3:591).

Moran comments on the so-called, "closing of the deposit," by saying, ". . . revelation reaches its unsurpassable fullness in the human consciousness of Christ, but, only in His risen life did Christ achieve full consciousness of His mission and message, an important point which many have neglected. Since, moreover, the risen Christ remains in vital communion with His church, there is a sense in which revelation still goes on. In fact, God continues to reveal Himself in new and unpredictable ways through the events of history and the interior leading of His spirit. It is not easy to see how this can be reconciled with the immutability of the deposit (3:592).

Moran maintains that God through his eternal world is truly in communion with all peoples. His study makes it undeniable that revelation is, above all else, an ineffable personal communion between God and His elect people, a communion which consists indeed in knowledge, but is not

fully reducible to objective statements of a factual or doctrinal kind (3:592). His writings emphasize the fact that revelation must be a present, personal, social happening if it is to mean anything to our world.

E. Schillebeekx, O.P., says basically the same thing in his book, Revelation and Theology:

. . . It is generally the case that truth is not to be found above all and formally--I say explicitly, formally--in a book, but in the consciousness of a living human community, insofar as this community is directed toward reality, which ultimately is the truth. . . . The living reality is always richer than the written expression of this reality (32:14).

Daniel Callahan in writing on post Biblical Christianity states that the scriptures will, should, and must continue to have a special place, but its privileges will not be exclusive. It will be a part of a larger inter-play--"tension" might be a better word, among the privileges of individual reason, communal consensus, tradition, authority, contemporary experience, and the unforeseeable promptings of the Holy Spirit (1:293).

Vincent P. McCorry, S.J., stated the following in regard to revelation: ". . . it is both Hebrew and Christian conviction that almighty God reveals Himself to men in a particular way: in and through events. At successive moments and always with supreme freedom, God intervenes in history to make Himself, and His truth known.

Revelation itself has, therefore, a history. . . . Revelation is first a matter of fact, then a matter of doctrine (18:718).

. . . It often surfaces in a new outburst of artistic interest and power of expression. It has taken the form of a redirection of scientific enterprise. But whatever the primary vehicle of address, whether through individual experience, institutional structures, or the dynamics of social process, this revelatory event is an encounter with the reality of the ultimacy in and through the structures of a world in which everything is relative (35:5-6).

The preceding statements were made by men in recent times, emphasizing that above and beyond the form is the revelation of The Creator in His work. These men have seen the great need for the constant interplay of The Creator with His creation.

In considering the revelation of the artist in his work, this writer felt it was necessary to discuss the spiritual aspect of the word, revelation. As The Creator continues to create and reveal Himself in His work, so the creator continues to create and reveal himself in his work. Man is created in the image of God, and as Joseph Smith, the prophet of the restoration movement recorded:

By these things we know that there is a God in Heaven who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth and all things which are in them, and that He created man, male, and female; after His own image and in His own likeness created He them (29:41).

The difference between the artist as creator and God is only of quality and degree.

II. REVELATION: A REVEALING OF SELF THROUGH ONE'S OWN UNIQUE, INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION

The true artist is one who reveals not only himself, but even transcends the limitations of his personality and culture. He's one who striving to develop his potential, soon discovers himself to be an instrument of a higher force (21:29).

The following selections are taken from the writings of various artists who claim their works to be a revelation of self.

The artist as a unique creator does reveal himself in his work, and as Ivan Albright observed:

My work is strictly the interpretation of myself, and that's as far as I want to go. . . . Art is a book exposing only the artist himself, who he is, what he is, what he thinks. Art is his psychoanalysis and he is his own psychiatrist, his life experience the theme he works with (16:28).

The great abstract expressionist painter, Hans Hofmann, emphasizes very strongly the idea of self-revelation in his paintings:

My paintings are always images of my psychic make-up. You cannot deny yourself. You ask, am I painting for myself? I'd be a swindler if I did otherwise. I'd be denying my existence as an artist. I've also been asked, what do you want to convey? And I say, nothing but my own nature. How can one paint anything else? My aim in painting as in art in general is to create pulsating, luminous, and open surfaces that emanate a mystic light, determined exclusively

through painterly development, and in accordance with my deepest insight into the experience of life and nature (16:121-122).

In his book, The Shape of Content, the artist, Ben Shahn, discusses the necessity of becoming sensitive to the dynamic content of a creative work. In talking about painting, he says:

So I feel that painting is by no means a limited medium, neither limited to idea alone, nor to paint alone. I feel that painting is able to contain whatever one thinks and all that he is. The images which may be drawn out of colored materials may have depth, a luminosity measured by the artist's own power to recognize and respond to such qualities and develop them. . . . It is not a spoken idea alone, nor a legend, nor a simple use or intention that forms what I have called the biography of a painting. It is rather the wholeness of thinking and feeling within an individual; it is partly his time and place; it is partly his childhood or even his adult fears and pleasures, and it is very greatly his thinking what he wants to think (33:59-60).

Ben L. Culwell states:

The general nature of the use I try to make of the art of painting is, I hope, apparent; that is, to express the sum relationships which is a total human being. With art, as with atomic physics, the big problem in the world today is to bring the human being abreast of the techniques and inventions of his material culture, to achieve modern spiritual integrity (19:15).

Naum Gabo is convinced that art is not just a pleasure; it is a mental activity of the human consciousness from which all spiritual creation derives (16:7).

Jacques Lipchitz claimed art is always a revelation and a clarification because life appears chaotic. . . . Art

must illuminate life, must clarify it like a decanting process (16:7).

But, the far-reaching artist, the one who has reached a level of sensitivity to revelation, is often frustrated because once he has a vision, his attempts to capture it, to arrest it, often fall so far short.

. . . Although the symbol rises out of the creative convulsion of the artist, it does not necessarily conform perfectly to the vision which called it forth. Indeed this is the reason why most artists view life through haggard eyes of frustration; after the birthing, the progeny are so painfully inadequate to the original vision (25:4).

Richard Stankiewicz says:

Things may be objectively present without having the affective power that we call "presence" It is the ultimate realism, this presence, having nothing to do with resemblances to "nature". . . . and these beings of presence that we try to make-- they are models of a never quite credible existence (20:70).

It is interesting to note that in the previous statements the key word, "spiritual," is in evidence. These men consider their works to be much more than physical manifestations of color, line, texture, and form. They see their works as statements of a greater reality. They feel that their works contain more than their limited vision.

The artist must somehow communicate a vision of reality greater than the sum of all his partial insights. The ability to fuse all details into an absorbing structure, a new unity which is made up of all the minute parts, but which in turn gives to those parts a new glow of meaning (25:29).

In discussing the works of C. S. Price, the reviewer said the following:

. . . his concern is with the truth that hides behind the appearance. This "felt nature of things" is the ultimate goal of the artist, and he believes that it can be reached by study. Finally one reaches something behind the form. The experiments are all efforts in that direction, sometimes successful, sometimes not, but always they reflect the authenticity of the search (20:54).

The realistic reproduction of the visual world is no longer the artist's ultimate goal. The visual world serves as his point of departure in the revelation of that which is within him. He is an individual who views the external world in his own unique way. He then responds to all the forces, both internally and externally, and using the elements at his disposal gives shape and form to this vision.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF CREATIVE WORKS

The following five works of contemporary artists are presented for the purpose of illustrating the concept of revelation in art. These men were selected because their work quite vividly reflects the spirit of the creator as a unique individual.

There is no attempt to give a detailed, historical review of each artist. Only a brief discussion of the particular influences which have played upon each artist, thus effecting the external manifestation of his work, is presented.

The artists presented are Marc Chagall, Naum Gabo, Vincent van Gogh, Jacques Lipchitz, and Wassily Kandinsky.

MARC CHAGALL

The transformation of the real world, into a dream-like fantasy, reflecting the artist's inner life, was the goal of the great colorist, Marc Chagall.

Chagall's paintings reflect the remembered visions of boyhood. In his autobiography he tells us that he wandered in the streets of Vitebsk, praying: "Lord who art hidden in the clouds and behind the cobbler's house, grant me that my soul reveal itself, the aching soul

of a stammering boy, reveal my path to me. I do not want to be like all the others, I want to see a new world."

(11:154-156).

. . . There are two kinds of visionaries; one who sees everything in terms of his own mystic conceptions, and the other who responds sensitively to all changes in his environment. Chagall belongs to this second type, whom one might call objective, and whose vision is the superior gift of reality (17:13-14).

What were the internal and external influences which played upon Marc Chagall, thus unfolding a new vision of our world? A vision revealed in a rich panorama of color through the magical lyricism of Marc Chagall.

. . . The visible world teeters and turns upside down in Chagall, sliding into his own inner depths. "Time is a river without banks," he has written. And yet the river of life flows between the banks of reality, but at the same time we make them convey the very movements of our inner nature." Art seems to me primarily a state of mind," as Chagall himself put it (11:156-157).

Due to the poverty of his family, the things of the world played a secondary role in the life of Chagall. His was a life in which constant communion between God and man was emphasized. He lived in Vitebsk in White Russia at a time when the religious movement known as Hassidism was an important formative influence in the minds of Russian Jews. It taught that the essence of religion is a confident, joyful submission to the divine will. It condemned esceticism,

sadness and sorrow as darkening the soul and impeding communion with God (37:13-14).

In order to begin to understand Chagall's "obsession," it is necessary to consider what it meant to be a Jew in Czarist Russia. Chagall knew humiliation, threat, and heartache. His hypersensitive mind feeds on memories of his parents, of the houses and streets of his native town, the long, haunted nights, the sounds that conjured up ghosts in the darkness. To elude them, he pictures himself on the roof or imagines he is flying through the air (37:13-14).

Chagall's natural outlook is one of optimism, nevertheless he is never quite free from the apprehensions of disaster; hence the melancholy that "dogs" him throughout his life and the satanic element lurking even in his most blissful pictures. . . . It has never occurred to him to draw a distinction between the physical and spiritual. . . . Painting with him is the personification of the physical and spiritual in terms of forms and colors. . . . In his early works, form was simply a means of emphasizing color effects and had no value or virtue in itself (37:14).

This writer has selected an example from Chagall's Jerusalem windows. The essence of these works lie in his use of color, in his magical ability to animate material and transform it into light.

Upon the completion of these stained glass windows for the new Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center just outside Jerusalem, Chagall said:

There is the light of the sky in these windows, and the participation of the good Lord. They have completely transformed my vision. They gave me a great shock, made me reflect. . . . I don't know how I shall paint from now on, but I believe something is taking place. I can't say much more because I am still under their influence. . . . The material is the material of nature, and all that is of nature is religious. For a cathedral or a synagogue it is the same phenomenon, a mysticism passing through a window (17:44).

In painting, Chagall has explained, the painter confronts only two artificial and rebellious elements, the canvas and the pigments, into which his talents and his spiritual powers have to breathe life. . . . If he is to achieve the celestial, having passed through hell-fire, he must possess a natural simplicity that is the reward of age and of religious soul at peace with the world (17:18).

The Jerusalem windows symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel who were blessed by Jacob and Moses in the celebrated lyric verses which conclude Genesis and Deuteronomy (17:18).

As both physical and metaphysical light, the window is a sacred vessel, a cosmic vehicle, carrying infinite significance. The supernatural art of Chagall finds there, in the magnificence of age, a rare opportunity of accomplishment whose influence is echoed in the development of his current painting (17:22).

Committed to other things, contemporary art has abandoned this traditional source of inspiration and no longer dares to draw upon it. . . . By accomplishing a task that seemed either of no interest to our times or outside their scope, Chagall has transcended the limits of his century (17:15-16).

Despite its very exceptional subject and purpose, this great work is a fitting climax to Chagall's art, restating spiritual values that have been consistent within his complex and continuous development (17:12).

ILLUSTRATION NO. 1

Marc Chagall, Jacob Wrestling With The Angel, stained glass, 1962.



NAUM GABO

Naum Gabo, an artist who used the constructivist style, (relief constructions, abstract in concept and using a variety of materials, including wire, glass, and sheet metal) was constantly searching for that ultimate reality. It is evident that he felt that a man discovered this reality as he taps the creative potential within himself, as he seeks to create order out of chaos.

In the following statements, Gabo relates how he discovered the path to the ultimate truth:

. . . I found that which I had sought so long in vain. . . . I found my own corner; it was there, under the piles of our own chips and shavings, that I found that tiny, dusty, yet sparkling revelation--wisdom it was not; it was so small that the whole of it could be contained in the thimble on my mother's finger. . . . It revealed to me that he who wants to find the ultimate wisdom has to soar above all heights and cease to be. I found that the man I was so eagerly searching for does not look for ultimate truths--he creates them. . . . It revealed to me something more; that the image of man is like the spectrum of a sunbeam, hiding its presence within its rays, yet ever ready to unfold its full radiance the moment we open the prism of ourselves for him to pass through our gates (5:14-15).

Gabo stated that the function of art is of much higher value and on a much broader plane than mere painting, sculpture, music, or poetry:

Art has a supreme vitality, second only to the supremacy of life itself, and that it therefore reigns over all man's creations (5:28).

In referring specifically to his own constructions, Gabo (5:28) states, "I maintain that these consciously constructed images are the very essence of the reality of the world which we are searching for."

. . . "Abstract" is not the core of the constructive idea I profess. The idea means more to me. It involves the whole complex of human relations to life. . . . Anything or action which enhances life, propels it and adds to it something in the direction of growth, expansion, and development is constructive (2:21).

Gabo's brother, Alexei Pevsner, recorded certain events in the life of Gabo, events which give one some insight into the influences which played a part in molding Gabo's philosophy:

I remember certain episodes in our childhood that are characteristic of Naum's (Gabo) early years. We lived under rural conditions. Our toys were homemade. When we wanted to go skating in winter we made our own skates, that is Naum made them. He would take a boot-last, plane it down to a triangular shape, and fix a builder's cramp-iron to the edge--this was the size of a man's foot and none too easy to obtain, although Naum always managed to get one (26:introduction).

Gabo lived with his brother in Norway throughout the first world war, and according to his brother's writings, it was here that Gabo began to develop the style for which he was to become famous:

. . . It was here in Norway that the real Gabo was born, the Gabo who expressed so much of himself in his completely new constructions. . . . at this time he would return again and again to questions of space and time and to a search for means of expressing them. Subsequently Gabo wrote in his realistic manifesto: "Look at our real space. What is it, if not continuous depth?" (26:13).

Pevsner believed that Gabo's ideas were evoked in him by the depth that he saw around him in the Norwegian fjords. He endeavored to represent this depth in the things around us and frequently had recourse to effect obtained by applying the methods of reverse perspective.

Gabo felt that the function of line in sculpture was not to delimit the boundaries of things but to show the trends of hidden rhythms and forces in them. Space and time, the infinity of the universe, the entire starry cosmos that surrounds us--these were the things that constantly excited him (21:13).

After the war, Gabo and his brother returned to their home in Russia. During the years immediately following the war, the emphasis on art in Russia was on academic realism. Art was also viewed as a craft, something which served a functional purpose.

In his writings, Pevsner records Gabo's reaction to this philosophy:

. . . It was against this ideology that Gabo revolted so decisively. His own ideology and conception of aims of art were diametrically counter to this trend. . . . At many gatherings he warned his companions that if they destroyed the significance of art in human life, if they ignored the basic function . . . the old academism would inevitably triumph and take possession of the consciousness of the masses (26:24).

History bears out the fact that Gabo's prediction was true. His feelings at that time were so intense that he wrote a manifesto which illuminated the basic message and purpose of art. In this manifesto Gabo made the following statement:

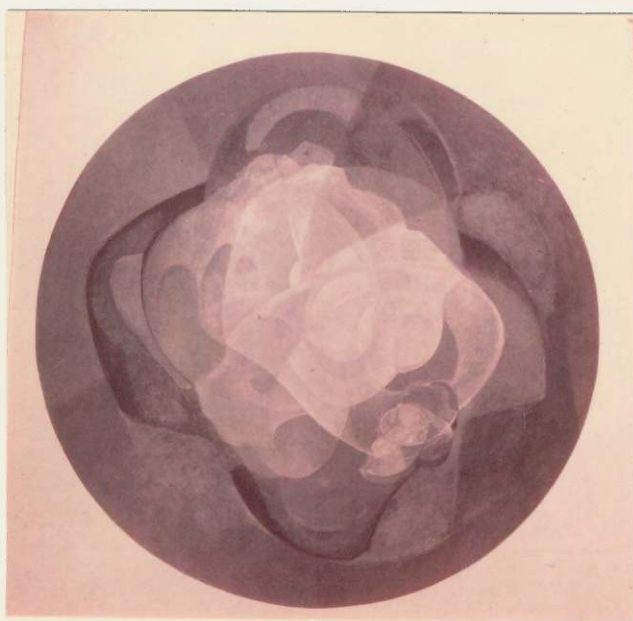
Art will always be alive as one of the indispensable expressions of human experience and as a means of communications (28:209).

Gabo felt that all the areas of human expression, such as science, mathematics, philosophy, and so forth, are but arts disguised in the specific forms of their peculiar disciplines. The form is simply the physical manifestation of the spirit of man.

Quoting Theophilus, Gabo said, "Man was made in God's likeness; the devil deceived him and deprived him of Paradise, yet not of this inborn capacity to learn diverse arts." (5:7).

ILLUSTRATION NO. 2

Naum Gabo, Blue Kinetic Painting, 1945-54, oil on wood panel.



VINCENT VAN GOGH

The master of "expressionism," Vincent van Gogh, brought a life into his paintings that few painters have matched. What was the magic that was Van Gogh's?

. . . Light and colour were to him what they had been to the Gothic artists, a form of divine revelation, and he knew that by setting certain colours against each other he could achieve an almost supernatural sonority (24:47).

"When I am painting," he wrote, "I want to express something consoling, like music, and I want to catch the fleeting glance of eternity in a face—the inner fire, formerly symbolized by the halo, and of which we now try to paint the essence." (10:36).

There is a close connection between Van Gogh's life and his work. This writer has selected a few statements by the artist himself which give some insight into the complex nature of his genius:

In discussing the creative mind of an artist, Van Gogh said, "They don't paint things as they are, but as they see them." He then goes on to say in regard to his own work, ". . . so that my untruth becomes more truthful than the literal truth." (7:139).

"Instead of trying to produce exactly what is before my eyes, I use color more arbitrarily so as to express myself more forcefully." (22:111-112).

"Paintings have a life of their own that derives entirely from the painter's soul." (11:11).

". . . I prefer painting the eyes of a human being to an imposing cathedral; the spirit of man, even in the eyes of a poor beggar or a street girl, interests me far more." (10:16).

"I do not know a better definition of the word, art, than this: Art is man added to nature. Nature, reality, truth--but with a significance, a conception, a character, which the artist draws out and to which he gives expression, which he disengages, disentangles, releases, illuminates." (4:4).

In reference to his masterpiece, The Potato Eaters, he said:

. . . I think you will see from it that I have my own way of looking at things, but that there is some conformity with others, certain Belgians, . . . I have painted this from memory on the picture itself. In the picture I give free scope to my own head in the sense of thought or imagination (36:344).

"Theo, what a great thing tone and color are! And whoever does not learn to have a feeling for them, how far from real life he stands!" (36:81).

The life of Vincent van Gogh was one of deep personal tragedy. He failed in his great ambition to become a minister, and was sadly rejected in love on a couple occasions. Volumes have been written in regard to his gradual physical and mental breakdown. It is not the purpose of this study

to present a detailed discussion of the development of Van Gogh's condition. He was a man with intense personal conflicts, a highly sensitive nature, and a sincere longing for friendship. His sensitive and disturbed personality generally prevented him from finding this and left him isolated in life, yet he always kept this deep desire for somebody with whom he could live and work. One of the most dramatic events in his life was his effort to establish this relationship with the overbearing, demanding painter, Paul Gauguin. The association between the two artists lasted for only a brief period, and when the friendship was severed, Van Gogh withdrew even more within himself.

Van Rappard wrote: "Whoever has witnessed this wrestling, struggling, and sorrowful existence could not but feel sympathy for the man who demanded so much of himself that it ruined body and mind. He belonged to the race that produces great artists." (7:xiv-xv).

Vincent was incensed with the desire to reveal the innermost spirit of both man and nature. He continually sought to express that hidden reality which he knew existed.

Van Gogh made painting the vehicle of emotion, developing techniques so forceful and passionately expressive that the emotion and its meaning . . . instantly communicates itself to the spectator. . . . In the paintings of this artist . . . there is unquenchable life (22:115).

Huyghe (11:59) has stated . . . Van Gogh's unrestrained flamboyant style reflects traits of his inner nature. . . . on the pathological plane to the drawings of the insane, with its profusion of signs, its mounting frenzy, its feverish ascending movement. . . . If we penetrate deeper into his style . . . we nonetheless discover . . . that Van Gogh succeeded in transcribing the individual portion of his nature, the very hallmark of his uniqueness. . . . If we study other aspects of his art, we find in them the same deep meaning, which the artist lived. . . . The existence of something on high. . . . Aspirations were toward the infinite.

Van Gogh's closest friend was his brother, Theo, who supported and encouraged him throughout his turbulent career. A study of the numerous letters which passed between these two devoted brothers, unravels the complex nature of this master artist. In one of his letters, written while in an asylum at Arles, Vincent reveals the great inner struggle which was his:

. . . I am at the end--at the end of my patience, my dear brother. I can't stand anymore--I must move. . . . My surroundings here begin to weigh on me more than I can express--my word, I have had patience for more than a year--I need air; I feel overwhelmed with boredom and depression. I assure you it is something to resign yourself to living under surveillance, even supposing it were sympathetic, to sacrifice your liberty, keep yourself out of society (36:557).

It was only a few short weeks after leaving the asylum, that Van Gogh created the masterpiece used in this thesis. In reference to "The Starry Night," his brother, Theo, had said: "I find the choice of style detracts from the true sentiment of the subject." (7:258)

It is evident that in this work, the hidden reality of the scene far overshadows the superficial reality.

Here Van Gogh records his reaction to the world outside the protecting walls of the asylum. . . . he was faced once more with nature, uncontrolled, rampant; everything was larger than life. . . . he saw growth, fertility, a riotous exuberance of life. . . . He no longer saw immobile earth from which the sun drew movement; he saw the earth itself heaving with life as the bosom of a woman rises and falls. . . . Driven by emotion as before. . . . his brush moved in a series of curves; his earth writhed in an orgy of reproduction, his cypresses speared up like living tongues of black flame flickering ever higher, his olives were licked in silent struggle, his clouds, spiraling across the sky, reflected the movement below, the sun glared down, a vast hot disc, moon and stars disturbed the darkness with silvery lusts and longings. . . . the peaceful cypress, the serene olive, the virginal moonlight are not here: How could they be to a man who saw life begetting life in every rustle of the wind through leaves, every sway of the ranked corn, every green shoot and every warm color (7:257-258).

Vincent van Gogh left on record his vision of truth as he saw it. Truth which he tried to discover in himself, his fellow men, and in God.

The one critic, Albert Aurier, who perceived something of his greatness, wrote of him one month prior to his death, "In his insolent desire to look at the sun face to

face, in the passion of his drawing and his color, there is revealed a powerful one . . . an illumined soul. . . ."

(22:112).

"Oh!" was his final cry, "If I could have worked without this accursed malady, what things I could have done!" (7:271).



Vincent van Gogh, The Starry Night, oil painting.

WASSILY KANDINSKY

Kandinsky was the first artist to divorce himself completely from reality; he might be called the father of "non-objective art." He believed that there exists a psychic or spiritual reality that can only be apprehended and communicated by means of a visual language, the elements of which are non-figurative plastic symbols.

. . . Works like Kandinsky's are more spiritual and dematerialized, less and less tied to the world of matter (22:247).

Sir Michael Sadler wrote, "Kandinsky is painting music . . . he has broken down the barrier between music and painting and has isolated the pure emotion." (23:152).

. . . likening his art to music and developing the theory that by abandoning all imitation of visual nature and material reality, painting could come nearer to expressing the inner reality of the soul (23:152).

The following is Kandinsky's definition of a work of art:

The work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artist; this emotion has the capacity to evoke a similar emotion in the observer. . . . The inner element, i. e. the emotion, must exist; otherwise the work of art is a sham. The inner element determines the form of the work of art. . . . forms and colors in themselves constitute the elements of a language adequate to express emotion; that just as a musical sound acts directly on the soul, so do form and colour. . . . Form itself is the expression of inner meaning, intense in the degree that it is presented in harmonic relations of colour (28:171).

The following are a few select statements on art by Kandinsky:

. . . The observer must learn to look at the picture as a graphic representation of a mood and not as a representation of objects (22-250).

. . . This art creates along side the real world a new world which has nothing to do externally with reality. It is subordinate internally to cosmic laws (13:10).

. . . To each spiritual epoch corresponds a new spiritual content, which that epoch expresses by forms that are new, unexpected, surprising, and in this way aggressive (13:11).

. . . Consciously or unconsciously they are obeying Socrates' advice: "Know thyself." Consciously or unconsciously, artists are studying and investigating their material, weighing the spiritual value of these elements with which it is their privilege to work (13:39).

. . . Spectators are too accustomed to looking for a "meaning" in a picture, i. e., having some external relation among its various elements. Our materialist age has produced a kind of spectator, a "connoisseur," who is not content to place himself in front of a picture and let it speak for itself. He does not search for the internal feeling of the picture directly for himself, he worries himself into looking for "closeness to nature," or "temperament," or "handling," or "tonality," or "perspective," and so on. His eye does not probe the external expression to arrive at the internal significance (13:70).

The following is a brief summary of the influences which effected the final development of Kandinsky's style.

Herbert Read (28:166) has stated that Kandinsky's first intention was to be a musician. . . . But at the age of twenty he went to Moscow University to study law and

economics, and during this period made his first contact with the ancient art of Russia. He used to insist that the profound impression made on him by the medieval icons of Russia influenced the whole of his artistic development. Another early influence was the folk art of Russia.

In his twenty-ninth year he saw for the first time an exhibition of the French Impressionists, and that experience was decisive. He abandoned his legal career and the next year went to Munich to study painting (28:166).

Kandinsky went through several stylistic phases in his early years of development. From the academicism, through the successive degrees of eclecticism (folk art, impressionism, post impressionism). (28:166).

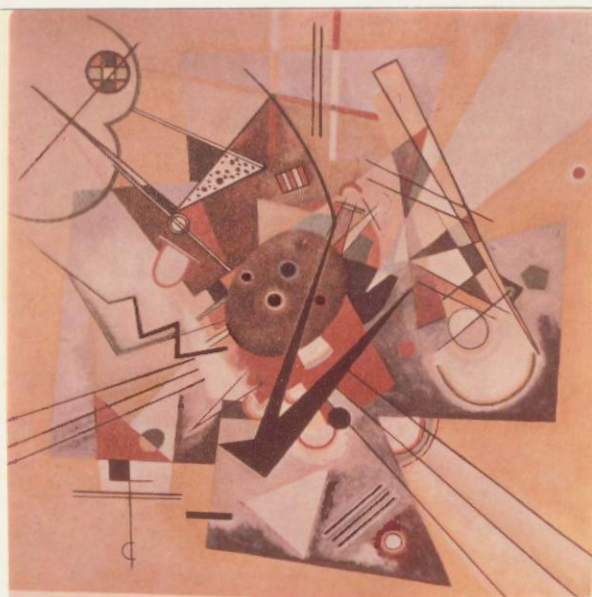
Then, . . . there occurred a sudden break-through to non-objective painting, that is to say, to an art emancipated from the motif (28:170). Kandinsky claimed he was influenced in two ways, one was by the variegated colored spots of a woman's dress which suggested the esthetic possibilities of color alone creating form without help from any realistic shapes. It was about this time that he was astonished by a canvas that had no recognizable shapes leaning against his bedroom wall. He discovered later that it was a scene he had painted that had been laid upside down against the wall. It was beautiful in color and form alone (23:152).

In his book, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Kandinsky states three different sources of inspiration: (1) A direct impression of outward nature. (2) A largely unconscious, spontaneous expression of inner character, of non-material (i.e. spiritual) nature. (3) An expression of a slowly formed inner feeling. . . . In this, reason, consciousness, and purpose play an overwhelming part (13:77).

Painting to Kandinsky was like a thunderous clash of different worlds, whose struggle results in the creation of a new world termed the work. He likened his work to the cosmos which is born out of catastrophes but creates in the end a symphony that is called the music of the spheres. There really is something cosmic about his works; they carry one off up above the earth into the realm of the planets.

. . . but he was more than a painter--he was a philosopher and even a visionary (28:165).

ILLUSTRATION NO. 4



Wassily Kandinsky, *Yellow Accompaniment*, 1924, oil on canvas.

JACQUES LIPCHITZ

Jacques Lipchitz claimed to be a realist. He felt that "non-objective" art would lead only to a "dead end," and that only through "nature" could man's inner spirit be revealed.

Using the human figure as his most common "motif" Lipchitz succeeded in soaring above and beyond the form in his powerful sculptures. His style was basically cubistic, and though he freed himself from the style, he has always claimed to be a cubist.

In the following statements by the artist, one gains some insight into his basic philosophy of art and life:

. . . Our generation felt one must look for the elements of art in one's own imagination. . . . I don't think the Cubists were influenced by Negro Art as so many people claim. . . . but the real cubists worked with elements from their imaginations. . . . for Cubism was a point of view about life, about the universe. . . . so we conclude that the real life we seek is not here, and thus art seems to teach us to leave the earth and ascend to the sky--the body just doesn't exit (15:73).

I've been influenced by everybody who has lived before me; but the painters I particularly love are El Greco and Cezanne. . . . At heart I'm moved by Cezanne's kind of spiritual majesty (15:73).

. . . from a death mask I did two portrait sketches of Gericault. . . . From his death mask came the features and bone structure--the rest is my admiration, my enthusiasm for him (15:73).

. . . After all, I'm a partisan of my own generation, a generation that believes representation is one of the important elements in a work of art. But still I'm a very religious man who believes in our Lord. . . . But I also enjoy mythological subjects. I try to bring mythology up-to-date to make it reflect our own lives. As a matter of fact, I do this with much of my work (15:49).

Lipchitz claimed that the motivation for his work derives from the hidden inner world of the subconscious.

In reference to his work, Cathy S. Silver says, "The sculptor as modeler is constantly in evidence; concerned mainly with stylized form in his early cubist period, much of Lipchitz's work since then embodies such themes as his faith in man and human spirit--often engaged in monumental (literally and figuratively) struggle (34:28).

Henry R. Hope (9:8) has stated:

Perhaps his sculpture is more effectively described in terms of poetry than in the vague language of art criticism. In a broad sense, Lipchitz is a poet employing images no less for symbolic and associational values than for the beauty of their forms. . . . His sculpture reaches its deepest significance in its capacity to move us with reverence to the life of the spirit, beyond the ephemeral glitter of pure form. . . . Every sculpture he ever made, he claims was conceived in the spirit of optimism.

Lipchitz experienced a sudden revelation while attending a lecture at the Sorbonne, which was to be his escape from Cubism. After numerous trials at the foundry, he succeeded in creating the Pierrot which is simply a flat little manikin. Others followed with larger openings, grids,

and ribbons of metal. . . . "I soar with this heavier-than-air which is sculpture," wrote Lipchitz (9:12).

. . . As he began to conceive of cubist aims in three-dimensional terms and later invented the transparent, his language grew more and more personal. Simultaneously his ego was aroused by a desire for self-expression. When this happened, the line of separation between form and content began to disappear--they tended to become one, each influencing the other. . . . In 1928 one of the transparents led the way to further development. Lipchitz has described the vivid impression made on him by the harps at the Salle Pleyel (. . . "And invariably the music contributing--the peculiar shapes of the harps, their strings vibrating in the light, veritable columns binding earth to heaven, transported me into a world from which I, in turn, had to make my way back.") Thanks to the transparent (sculpture can be seen and effects the observer from all sides at once) he had discovered a way of transmitting his vision directly into sculpture, without being aware of the intervening discipline of Cubism: in *The Harp Player* (9:14-15).

Lipchitz has had more than his share of tragedy, but as he himself constantly claims, he is basically an idealist and an optimist. In the face of adversity, he deliberately seeks happiness and joy in his life and in his sculpture.

In the writings of Irene Pataie. . . . One gets a vivid impression of the village life in a small Jewish community of Lithuania, and of the inner forces, familial, spiritual, almost magical which impressed themselves on the child's memory, later to emerge as great themes in his sculpture: *The Mother and Child*, *The Bird Woman*, *The Embrace*, and numerous others (39:58).

ILLUSTRATION NO. 5



Jacques Lipchitz, Mother and Child, bronze sculpture.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

"The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection." Michelangelo.

It was stated in the proposal of this study that a close similarity exists between art and religion since they both contain an inner, dynamic force above and beyond the visible form. The writer considers that this force is revelation and may be expressed in the artist's work as a part of a universe in which continual creation occurs.

Religion and art are both means of seeking ultimate truth. A sincere art is one which stirs within the individual a quest for this truth.

The five artists studied in this research were all men who felt very deeply about art as a tool toward conveying this truth as they each interpreted it, each in his own unique way.

There is a common thread which runs throughout their works, which gives to each that added dimension, that power which soars above and beyond the form. Each artist felt that the basic function of his art was to act upon man's spiritual life and to draw man to a higher level of awareness. Lipchitz's work could be described in terms of poetry, and Van Gogh's color as a form of divine revelation;

therefore, their works could be considered more spiritual than material. Each of these artists was bound to that which is physical in the manifestation of that which is spiritual; each seemed to feel that he stood in the image of a "creator" or God as he breathed life into the material form which was his to shape. Kandinsky considered his work to be more spiritual than material; Naum Gabo sought to contain the infinity of the universe, the entire starry cosmos in his constructions, and Marc Chagall's work has a supernatural quality. Thus, in using the plastic elements as his "tangible" tool, each presented to the world a new and unique vision.

The five artists discussed were essentially religious men in the sense that each in his own way was sensitive to that driving force, that divine revelation, i.e., they were seeking that ultimate reality, that ultimate truth. Each was a step beyond the technician or scientist; for where the scientist builds on established laws, the artist soars above and beyond them; he sees, and interprets his world in a unique way and then transmits this vision to the observer. He is not bound by that which has been done, but is free to reveal. This revelation of the artist cannot be proven, it cannot be empirically dissected and analyzed. It must be sensed and experienced. It can only be seen as the viewer sees the work as a whole, and realizes that the immediate

visual manifestation is only a part of the total experience of the whole. That "presence" which each artist attempts to capture awaits the viewer's sensitive eye.

The emphasis throughout this study has been on the content of the visual arts as revealed in painting and sculpture, which the writer considers to be the manifestation of revelation. The purpose has not been to separate form and content, but rather to emphasize that the observer become sensitive enough in his observations to see that the form is merely a vehicle for the transmitting of the unique revelation of the artist. The average observer usually sees the form and stops there; he does not go deeper. As Vincent van Gogh stated, "Art is man added to nature," it is the individual observing his world and then attempting to relate that vision through a unique form of human expression. One must look for that "inner vision" which lies within the form. Ben Shahn in his book, The Shape of Content, observed the following in regard to form and content:

To me, they are inseparable. Form is formulative, the turning of content into a material entity, rendering content accessible to others, giving it permanence, willing it to the race. Form is as varied as are the accidental meetings of nature. Form in art is as varied as idea itself (33:62).

The poet, Henry Vaughn, in his poem, "The World," seems to convey the vastness of the artist's task:

I saw eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright;
And round beneath it, time, in hours, days and years
Driven by the spheres,
Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world
And all her train were hurled. (6:37)

The revelatory experience which each of these artists claimed to have had is within the range of each man's vision. The writer believes that by becoming sensitive to the work of each artist it might be assumed that one can attain a more enriched experience.

Each of the artists discussed came from various religious and cultural backgrounds. Chagall, for example, is of the Jewish faith, whereas Van Gogh embraced the Christian philosophy; each emphasized an awareness of something greater than himself.

In conclusion, this thesis has attempted to present the following points:

1. The form in art expression can be the outward physical manifestation of one man's inner vision.
2. The terms, content and revelation, have been used interchangeably. They both refer to the spiritual aspect of the work.
3. The elements of line, color, texture, form, and space are simply tools through which the artist conveys this inner vision.
4. Form and content are inseparable; but where the form is seen with the physical eye, the content must be sensed and felt with the inner eye.
5. Art has the capacity of being essentially religious in that it is a search for the ultimate reality.

6. Art and religion are similar in that basic to the form of both is the inner, dynamic force, which this writer has called revelation.
7. Each artist has his own unique way of revealing his inner vision.
8. All areas of human expression are but arts expressed in the specific forms of their disciplines.

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