THE PAINTED ARCH

by

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A Creative Thesis

presented to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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June 1961

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To the members of the Department of Art
of the University of Delaware I am deeply
indebted, for without their patience and
thoughtful guidance over the years this
thesis would not have been possible.

PREFACE

Although I have chosen to do a creative thesis in an age-old, traditional type of medium, that of oil painting, I feel that the opportunities to evolve a personal form of expression are as limitless as the possible color combinations and compositional variations, and that the result will in time become unique like the personality endowment of the artist. The approach I have taken has been an intellectual one, reaching with my paintings beyond that point where verbal poetry ends and a different kind of poetry begins.

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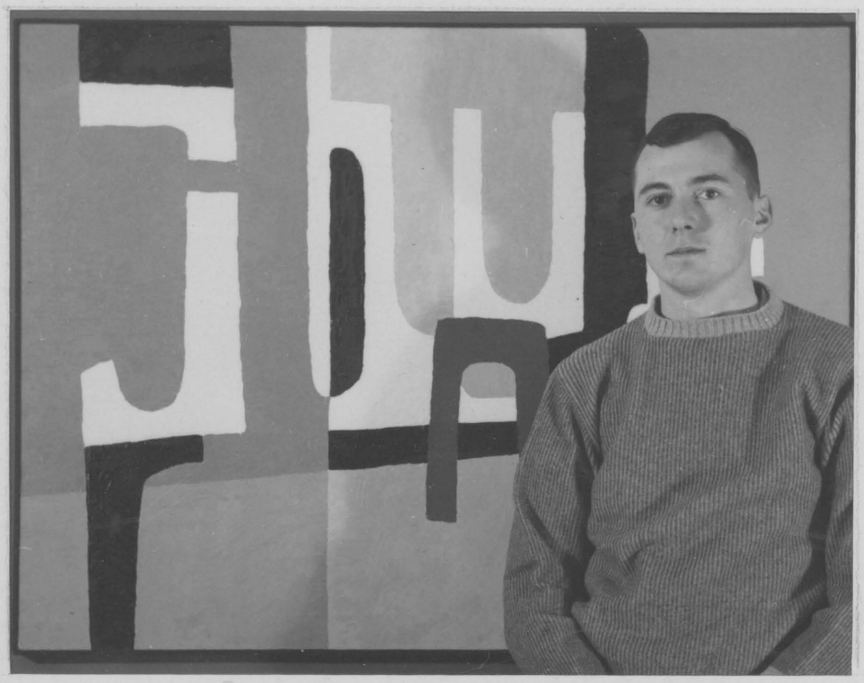


Arches reaching skyward,
too soon bend back earthward.

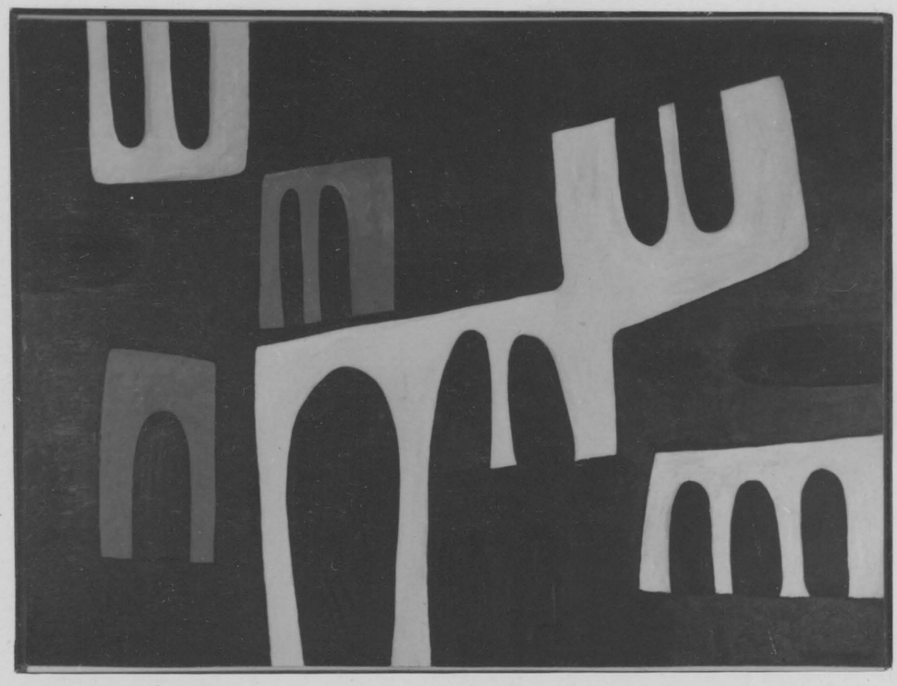
Openings,
intrigue filled
and haloed,
shimmer with surrealistic array;
outstretching across
expanses of fertile plains.

Exploit the realm beyond,
Oh noble adventurer.

Painter look beyond my open facade
and give vent to your creative impulses.

Bring alive my splendor,
my insolvable mystery.
Keep afresh my sculptured soul,
in this world beset by clamoring,
uncultured automation:

For through my golden gates
lie chalices and grails.



INTRODUCTION

When cutting across the diversified stream of modern painting, both the casual observer and the serious student encounter certain recurring symbols apart from the artists' distinguishing styles, or modes of expression. In the work of Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee these signs become almost too numerous to mention. In the paintings of Marc Chagall symbolic forms take on the appearance of ceremonious fish and ethereal mules. Henri Matisse repeats unusual "gold fish" in his paintings and manifold familiar objects earmark his compositions. Under the glib sheen of Salvador Dali's meticulously executed canvases, symbols of all descriptions lurk and recur time and time again, manipulated by the wand of this vain virtuoso into a sordid side-show of melting watches, partially dissected and decaying cadavers, and a variety of immaculately rendered "licked" forms. From the laboratory-studio of Jean Arp come a fanciful collection of organic shapes, stylized bow ties, and symbolic navels. The collage-compositions of Braque and Gris reveal a recurring, ordered hodgepodge of "etudes," utilising dismembered violins, sheet music, wall paper, compotes, and fruit. Oval, faceless heads and nostalgic arcades diminishing into infinite space typify the erstwhile symbols of Giorgio de Chirico.

The tracing of these recurring symbols could go on indefinitely, for they highlight the work of nearly every

artist. In my own limited painting experience I can already see patterns of symbols and forms developing. For the purposes of this thesis I have focused my attention on the latest of these, namely the arch form, since it has assumed such an interesting role in my thinking. I have taken this singular form as the main stream of my thesis. The other considerations of style, content, and technique have been influenced by this central theme. The arch has proven to be a convenient point around which to organise my thinking and to present in critical examination and explanation the body of my thesis.

PART I

ON THE ETERNAL ALLUREMENT OF THE ARCH-FORM

The strong allurement of the arch-form is universal. In painting this fact is attested to by its frequent recurrences throughout history, both as a symbolic form and as a pure compositional element. In my own work it is no different, for I use the arch often and sometimes it occurs in a painting without any conscious forethought on my part. I have recently focused my attention on the arch, and now it occupies the position of a dominant motif in my latest paintings. Arches appear in varying stages of recognisability and each one holds a particular fascination for me. It might be helpful to the reader at this point, for me to refer briefly to the photographs included in part two of the thesis to see more clearly, at the outset, the many variations on the arch theme that appear in these paintings.

The arch can evoke in the viewer a complete range of moods and feelings. In the questful mind of philosophers, an arch image may be taken as an eternal symbol or as a symbolic agent to simplify many of the mysteries of life and the universe. With the eloquent pen of poets, "golden arches" have been glorified and allegorised, and given the ethereal status of rainbows and pearly gates. In the inspired mind and inventive hands of a painter the arch can assume all this and more, both as a pure visual statement, and as a labyrinth of

imagery for the inquiring mind and eye--thereby extending its enchantment beyond that point where the oftentimes inadequate poetry of words ends.

THE ARCH AS A COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENT

As a compositional motif, the arch can be a most aesthetically engaging shape, alone or in combination with other arches. The strong rhythmic movement of the curved openings must be carefully held in check, however, to insure the most satisfactory internal harmony and balance. To accomplish this I often contain the openings inside a rectilinear box, and gently vary the widths of the legs of the enclosure to heighten the interest. By conforming to the laws of nature rather than to the laws of architecture, these arches hold more appeal as organic forms repeated in nature than as precisely calculated "lifeless" impersonal structures (see illustration, Plate II).

Stripped down to its very skeleton in this way, the arch becomes ostensibly a universal shape and symbol, though not as revered as its counterpart the "dome." Like other "basic" shapes, the arch (known to both East and West) occupies a universally appreciated position--bearing with it a kind of culture-free distinction. Its effect is not reduced by localized symbolism, as the silhouettes of the Empire State Building,

The Eiffel Tower, or onion domes would be. Stripped of these connotations, the arch transmits infinitely more pleasure in the purely aesthetic realm of beauty. In this universal capacity, seldom would the arch evoke unintended associations.

Nearly all symbolic forms, however, despite their obvious familiarity, always run the risk of misinterpretation, and the arch is no exception. Let us suppose, for example, that the viewer strongly associates the free-standing arch with a yoke of suppression, and not with the intended weight-bearing role, or sees only the utility in the engineering of a viaduct to the exclusion of its simple, bold, functional beauty; then the orientation toward the symbol-meaning may become confused and greatly distorted. It then becomes the duty of the painter to clarify his statements and if possible avoid leaving his symbols open to ambiguous interpretation, except when he desires the imagination of the viewer to run freely the gamut of associations. The composition alone should always arouse in the viewer some emotional enjoyment apart from the symbolic content. And, of course, the best work results when these two considerations are wedded into a harmonious synthesis and complement each other ... and when one accepts the belief that ideas transmitted from the imagination of one person (the painter), if they are to be appreciated must be met with an equal amount of imagination by the second person (the viewer).

Though it often appears singly, the arch has fascinating possibilities linked up with other arches in unusual groupings and in artistically arranged arcades; all of which lend themselves to an unlimited variety of richly diverse interpretations. Here the painter is not hampered by architectural conventions, orders, and principles, and has complete artistic license to build archways to the skies if he so desires--always keenly accentuating the aesthetic and exploiting the most pleasing and interesting variations possible.
(see "Moon-Washed Arches," Frontispiece)

AN ANALYSIS OF MY APPROACH TO PAINTING: A CREDO

My approach to painting has been a cerebral, rather than an emotional one. I rely on the conscious powers of the mind, not on a nebulous set of intuitive feelings conjured up from a dream-like, fantasy-filled stream of pre or sub consciousness. To the question, "With what do you mix your paint?" like Opie, I too could answer, "With my brains, Sir," and to this add my heart and my hands. I am in partial agreement with the beliefs of Josef Albers with respect to this vital ingredient in painting, and hold with his statement:

> I believe that thinking is necessary in art as everywhere else and that a clear head is never in the way of genuine feeling.[1]

In my compositions I try to be above all deliberate, creating a clear-cut boldness in my presentations. I try to

be direct and objective, and to eliminate all the extraneous matter that would impede or obstruct this directness until I arrive at an "essential" expression of my forms. Unlike Julio Acuna, in the Art Department of the University of Delaware, who is searching for new forms of expression, I am seeking new expression for form. Neither end in this case determines the validity of the approach, but like a religion, it is rather the conviction with which one goes about achieving this objective that makes it meaningful.

In the creation of virgin forms, inspiration often comes from combinations in nature, and from the imagination. These ideas are then transplanted into reality through a series of sketches and are kept in control by the powers of aesthetic reason and "plastic mathematics."[2] From the sketches I proceed to lay out the composition, and at the same time work out some probable color combinations. As the painting emerges from this indirect approach, the process takes on a sensitive, almost instinctive nature, allowing the dictates of the medium and the blown-up proportions of the design to be felt, and with the mind helping to guide the hand. The ways in which these turns of the design take place seem almost unbelievable, and can be met only with a measure of intelligence, and mastered with a great deal of patience, flexibility, and imaginative resourcefulness. I insist on control at

every point in my paintings, and try to show the viewer at every opportunity that there has been some mastery of mind over medium. There should never be any doubt as to the origin and manipulation of form in my work. The composing has never been left to the laws of chance,[3] and never will the viewer be perplexed as to whether the elements have been hurled together or stumbled upon accidentally.

To eliminate the temptation to lean toward a glib, licked surface with offensive sharp edges, I work almost exclusively with either a stiff-bristled brush or a palette knife. Less refined edges can be managed in this way and it helps to keep each statement bold, and to maintain a direct clarity. The knife further adds a textural quality, impossible to achieve with a brush. This technique does not differ very much from that of "icing" a cake. A smoothed-over surface may be laid on first, over which may be built up a rich textural topography in heavier pigment, or, on a shallow plane capitalizing only on the thin shadows cast by the knife-ridge, a surface pattern not unlike coarse weaving may be produced. I prefer primed masonite panels for a painting surface, but I enjoy the springiness of stretched canvas as well, with the lively bounce and friendly give-and-take properties, when I am working with a brush. Though I often return to canvas for a change of pace, nearly all the paintings completed for the thesis have been done on masonite.

I have a deep respect for the "revered first reality" and never torture or penetrate my working surface with illusionary space or blind alleys and false avenues. In my paintings a high regard for this surface has been demonstrated by the use of heavy impasto, which creates its own dimension and not an illusion, and by the use of overlapped masonite panels to produce a slight thickness, or raised portion. A further attitude is prevalent in my painting, that of the integrity to the medium itself. I am certain my oils look like the oils they are and no attempt has been made to have them look like anything else. I have also incorporated 1/4" strips of wood to act as dividers containing the geometric spaces in "Archway to Piet's Place," producing a grill effect in "Persistence of Squares," and creating a sense of verticality in an otherwise perfectly square panel (4'x4') in "Allegorical Arches." These raised strips give valid depth and strength to the compositions. They have their own visual thickness, and do not depend on an illusion to achieve their effect (see details, Plate XV).

These same thin "lattice" strips I have used exclusively in the framing of my panels. Their simplicity prevents their detracting from the painting, and they contain the composition without drawing undue attention. The strips are attached to the back edges of the masonite panels very easily, and they create a clean-cut, finished appearance.

Of interest to the reader at this point might be my method of "simultaneous painting," something that arose naturally in the course of my work. Using prodigious quantities of pigment to cover the sometimes 20 square feet of panel, I found it necessary to mix an excess to insure complete coverage. Also, since I like to first build up a heavy surface of under-painting, the idea struck me of working on two or three paintings at a time. In this way I could always be assured of at least one dry panel to work on, and none of the excess paint would be wasted. I generally spend the greatest portion of my time and attention on a large "major" panel; then, nearby, I work on the smaller "experimental" panels at random. Besides affording the opportunity to try out new painting combinations and ideas, these panels also afford me some relief from the more intense and demanding major work. Both approaches have been equally important in my painting, for the invaluable discoveries made on the smaller panels may be later adapted on a larger scale, and sometimes they have been quite successful on their own. These usually result in a freer, more "expressionistic" type of handling, but the prime mover of order has still been present. Typical of these side products are "Two Suns are Better than One" and "Ondine" (see Plates VII and VIII).

The content of my thesis paintings, as the titles should indicate, has been intangible. There are no secure grasps, nothing specific or concrete in which to root familiar things;

for in an ordered way they depend on the fantastic and curious for their subjective effectiveness, and on an intellect coupled with imagination for their appreciation. Take, for instance, "Two Suns are Better than One," and the otherworldliness implied by the title. Who has seen an "Apparatus for the Extraction of Wisdom" or the "Wisdom" after it has been extracted, or "Cosmic Hens" - not to mention the eggs that they lay, and so on? Enigmatic as they may seem, the key to these titles really lies in how much they stimulate the mind to further investigation and provide a refreshing vent for the imagination. On first inspection many of the titles may seem to have been applied in a jocular spirit, and there should be room for occasional humor in painting.[4] Upon deeper investigation, however, humor on the surface often reveals a more profound and sober intention. The inquiring mind seeks out these deeper meanings and toys with the new associations.

Caught up in the demanding tempo of twentieth century living, man must take time out of his madness to occasionally enjoy the things around him, and nowhere has there been provided a better means for this than in painting, in the form of rapt "detached contemplation". When a viewer has been allowed to totally involve himself in the process of "seeing," instead of merely looking, undistracted, he not only sees the work for its own sake, but he may also gain a new insight into himself.

"The Wiseman Travels only with His Imagination" typifies

this departure. (see Plate XIII) Here is a purely intellectual journey, taking place solely in the mind. There are no pictorial objects on which to "lean" and the composition must on its own intrinsic merits as a work of art demonstrate valid reason for its being. This becomes art for the intellects and the imagination's sake. In a painting there is not, as in a poem, expectation, a climax to be reached, or ending to be waited for. The painting is there to be judged in an instant - all the laborious hours to reach the precise moment are either accepted or rejected in one supreme, detached, contemplative instant.

Removed from the visual world of recognizable objects, I have chosen to work completely in the non-figurative abstract, except for the arch image, or symbol, and this has been an intellectual problem, pure and simple. Any semblance of subject matter in these paintings would result from an arbitrary deduction on the part of the viewer. The subject has been completely absorbed into a formal simplification of abstract forms into a universal arrangement. Arches are not just arches in this scheme. They become a part of the universal geometry that makes up our whole immediate reality.[5] The finite arch becomes a part of the infinite and sets up within itself a kind of cosmic pulsing that pervades us all, and all art work of this type. How often has one heard it said that for an artistic endeavor to be great and enduring

it must possess a fragment of the eternal! It is that fragment which I seek, and only time will tell if I have been at all successful. I feel that my work has become a kind of abstract symbolism, painting that has been universal in scope, but personal in conception.

Being primarily an intellectual venture, my paintings have been designed to meet a dual level of comprehension, the more obvious detached, emotional responses on the one hand, and the more deeply penetrating, association-producing cerebrations on the other. Neither has been wholly de-emphasised at the sacrifice of the other, and both have been designed to work hand in hand in a controlled harmony to enhance the pleasure of the viewer. This insures an emotional response tempered with reason, a relationship that should be paramount in all forms of painting and the arts.

My statements in the paintings have been set forth with flat two-dimensional frankness, and with the clarity of bold type. Extraneous detail has been culled out in favor of concentration on the essentials of the composition. In mathematics 4-3-2-1=10, but so does 6-4 and 7-3 more directly and with more interest than 5-5. So it has been with my painting, and shall continue to be.

Lastly in my thesis paintings I have attempted to maintain a high level of consistency in my style. There has been

a definite continuity in the content, based on the many variations of the arch theme, and in the manner of application of paint on masonite panels which have been of two general sizes, 3'x4' and 4'x4'. I have kept my compositions within a framework of "styling" that further serves to identify each painting as a part of the overall group.

I have devoted the second part of the thesis to a critical examination and discussion of each of the paintings executed for the thesis and some related paintings included for the purpose of continuity. Each one is handled separately in detail, and with as much detached objectivity as possible. Naturally, every painting has been permeated in some degree with "subjective sentiment" and consequently this type of discussion by the painter himself becomes a highly personal matter, and one very close to his heart. The commentaries are accompanied by photographs, which will help clarify many of the points made in the text. These paintings also represent the body of work to be contained in a one-man show in conjunction with my thesis requirements, to be held in the Student Center of the University of Delaware in June.

PART II

A COMMENTARY ON THE BODY OF INDIVIDUAL PAINTINGS EXECUTED FOR THE THESIS, INCLUDING SOME RELATED WORK

The arch first appeared in my painting four years ago, in 1957, a time when I was struggling with myself and my beliefs. I was striving to render in oils an awesome crucifix. The result was to some eyes grotesque (see Plate I), almost blasphemous and sacrilegious. The death-like mask with the integral "sgraffitoed" crown of thorns (applied with palette knife and made jagged with the sharp end of the blade), and the deep-set eyes (drawn out by the intense red of the frame) represented for me the acute physical suffering and mental anguish the Savior must have endured on the cross--really an external agony that belied the spiritual tranquility within, a quality so characteristic of the Son of God.

This Crucifixion was meant to be unorthodox and a personal interpretation of this great Christian event, from the irregular white area symbolizing the purity of Christ and the blood-red stains in His face to the stakelike cross with the unbalanced members. The arch I depicted in two different styles, Gothic on the right and Romanesque on the left, still further maintaining the consistent heterodoxy that marks the whole painting. The arches contrast strength with aspiration, the mundane with the ethereal. And, too, the cross has been

planted in space, on the threshold of a strange archway suggesting ascent into heaven. The effect is further accented by the strong vertical proportions of the canvas, 18"x48", as well as by the slender vertical sides of the arches themselves. Could these same arches be said to mirror the skeptically arched eyebrows of the observer?

This example has been included to show the reader my early adaptation of the arch, contrasted with the prominent position it holds in my painting today, perhaps best exemplified by "Moon-Washed Arches."

MOON-WASHED ARCHES

The actual completion of "Moon-Washed Arches" came toward the end of the thesis series. However, I am making it my first thesis painting since I used it as a frontispiece and since it embodies so many of the principles traced in this written discourse. In this painting I have reduced the arch forms to a plane of only slight depth, almost two-dimensional, and have given them what I call a "living bone" anatomy, one that is more plastic than the bleached, brittle, weathered bones associated with steers' skulls along a desert, or with an O'Keefe. To heighten the dramatic effect I have made the arch bridge abide by no architectural principles, but instead climb diagonally through a velvet-like Prussian

blue-green sky, and reach out in cantilevered fashion to the distant heavens.

Internal harmonies have been made apparent, since the whole composition has been balanced within the frame through a thoughtful placement of the aspiring arcade and through the use of negative spaces (always as vital to a composition as the positive spaces). The thin white lattice strip that has been introduced between the outside frame and the panel helps to contain the arch network within the 3'x4' composition, and provides it with a delicate internal balance by giving the white arches something with which to relate external to the design itself.

As the title implies, the arches seem to be bathed in cool moon-light, kept even cooler by the deep blue-green that signifies as well a dark, mysterious night. These arches built into the evening blue show no visible signs of attachment to anything earthbound, and this gives them a very unmundane, ethereal status wholly in keeping with the theme of the thesis.

EMBLEMATIC BLACK AND YELLOW

The arch has not always been shown with such pictorial reality as in "Moon-Washed Arches." In "Emblematic Black and Yellow" the arch form becomes less an arch and more an integral part of a totally abstract composition. Two

opposing arch forms are discernable, nevertheless, when the viewer consciously seeks them out, a pointed one intruding from the left, and a blunt, more rounded one entering from the right. Placed top to top, or head to head, as they are, they set up within the composition opposing tensions which are further emphasized by the angular black shape. The internal rhythm energizes an otherwise static design and serves to bring it to life. Boldness of contrasting colors and the elemental simplicity of the composition also present some interesting positive-negative illusions. The yellow may appear as two intruding bodies on a black space, or the black may be beheld as a separate element apart from the yellow, which in this instance would merely be acting as background for the black. In view of the severely limiting conditions of the design, I feel that the composition has been reasonably successful.

EGGS LAID BY THE COSMIC HEN

In terms of time spent, "Eggs Laid by the Cosmic Hen" was a long painting. It extended over many stages of development and was not finished until recently. The already complicated problem was made more complex by the triple consideration of the Triptych. Each panel had to be organized so as to be complete and self contained, and at the same time be related to the neighboring panel and become an integral part of the overall horizontal sequence.

In the flat background areas a consistent unity has been achieved through an overlapping of shapes alike in color and continued in the adjacent panels with the same positive-negative spatial relationships. In the more active "overlay" laid on afterward with a brush, a unity and rhythmic harmony has been accomplished through related orange and white line directors that swirl thread-like through the composition, helping to interrelate all the panels. The two end panels, which are slightly smaller than the center panel, are held in an almost kinetic balance by the trails which emanate from the strong central egg that seems like an oval nucleus exposing some of its life-containing yolk.

In this painting the arch form has been subdued, yet it still has the power to shore up the overall design and to bolster the panels with a forceful, undulating rhythm over which the lyrical swirls play fancifully about in counterpoint. The more somber values of the black and gold, much lower in key than the overlay, help to set off the more lively strains and keep the total 2'x5' panel from becoming too static and disarticulated. The whole theme has been in keeping with the universality of form of the series and again subscribes to the thesis specifications.

APPARATUS FOR THE EXTRACTION OF WISDOM

The cerulean blue arch bridging the gap in "Apparatus" holds a prominent position, both in the design and in the solution to the enigmatic proposition. By virtue of its centralized position and strong color, this arch stands out from the intricately interconnected background (made up of a network of arches). The whole panel is divided into areas of cool grays, each of a slightly different shade, and counter divided by the "arms" of the apparatus. Arches have been pointed upward, downward, and from side to side, necessitating a strong linkage, which in this case takes the form of the blue keystone arch joining the two sides. In the compositional balance, as well as in the over-all relatedness of the parts, its role has been an important one. The strong movements of the legs of each arch set up a complex of inner tensions, and a balance has been achieved through a cancelling out of thrusts and opposing pushes and pulls. The blue arch pulls the three thrusting arches toward it and holds them in a state of balance, insuring the vortex of the composition strong support.

Like "Moon-Washed Arches," "Apparatus For The Extraction Of Wisdom" is one of the most architectonic paintings of my thesis series. Together they are the most obvious examples of order and conscious organization in my painting. Every element in their designs has been essential for the effect-

iveness of the painting. Not a single portion could be removed without destroying some relationship and impairing the unity of the entire composition. The over-all effectiveness of every painting depends on this relationship, and the essentials become as important as the links in a chain.

WISDOM EXTRACTED

Any apparatus for such a noble purpose as extracting wisdom must naturally be followed by an end product, which in this case has been the sequel, "Wisdom Extracted," panel two in the series. "Wisdom" provides the companion piece for "Apparatus" when they are hung together. The viewer is immediately confronted with a complement in colors, blues to oranges. However, in the warm grays and cool grays there has been more common ground permitted, as with the strong black-and-white relationships, and in the identical sizes of the two panels, (3'x4'). The strong resemblance to teeth really makes the whole theme seem humorous, as do the plier and vise-like appearances in "Apparatus"; nevertheless, they set some thinking into motion, and that is the important thing.

Composition-wise, the elements in "Wisdom Extracted" produce a kind of "patterning" in their placement and in their flattish appearance, which seems to imbue the entire design with a dramatic vitality, a very "unstill" quality as

I prefer to call it, compared to the carefully related elements in "Apparatus." All this, of course, further acts to make the two panels visual complements in nearly every respect. The strong alternating bands of gray, yellow, and orange do provide some attachment for the black and white shapes (a kind of mooring) so that they cannot be completely carried off into the stream of the composition. A cork repeat has been added to the design, in the same general shape, for some slight elevation and additional textural appeal in the focal area, and greatly heightens the interest of the whole painting (see Plate XV). The elements of painting are still the dominant forces in the work, and not enough foreign materials have been introduced for it to be considered a collage in the true sense of the word. A double framing of black and white has also been employed here, and this helps to relate the inner areas and to pull the whites through the composition.

TWO SUNS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

"Two Suns are Better than One" on first glance has somewhat the sweeping rhythms and heavy impasto of a blown-up detail of a Van Gogh "Starry Night." Laid on in thick swirls with painting-knife strokes, the strong yellow suns produce a kind of aureole that radiates from the cores, thereby helping to relate the circular forms to the shimmering, flecked-white background. These shapes have been repeated in two

brilliant white, secondary suns, which serve to offset the stronger yellow ones--like two reflections. Further activity has been generated by the broken red comet-like trail that courses through the composition in a quasi-figure-eight path. The painting has been carried out high in key, as would befit such a celestial setting.

Apart from the visual interplay and chromatic melody, the title suggests something of a riddle. In fact, are two suns better than one? Is the earth that cold? Why doesn't one suffice, or why not three for that matter? Is the universe figuratively burning her candle at both ends, and in the middle too? The wheels turn, yet are ever at rest. With these possibilities I leave the reader, and with these beautiful lines:

> My candle burns at both ends;
> It will not last the night;
>
> But, ah, my foes, and oh, my friends-
> It gives a lovely light.
>
> Edna St. Vincent Millay
> ("Figs from Thickets")

ONDINE

"Ondine" (from the French "onde," meaning wave or water), sweeps the viewer into a swirling maelstrom, where deep inside the whirling vortex an imaginative scene has been set for a water spirit to receive her human soul by wedding

a mortal. This is but one of the interpretations which can be conjured from this scene of pure fantasy.

"Ondine's" circular movement was etched -- almost dug through the pigment when it had dried to the consistancy of chilled butter, and represents another example of the exclusive palette-knife technique. The red accents were applied later after the background had dried and a need became apparent for some life-giving addition to this small 20" x 24" panel. A certain amount of liveliness was achieved in the variegated background suggesting a kind of watery, almost engulfing, resurgence of whites, greens, and blues flecked with oranges and yellows.

In terms of time, "Ondine," along with "Two Suns," was a fast painting, requiring only hours to complete, as compared to the days and weeks required for the other paintings. Even at my most rapid and most "expressionistic" I believe the intellect of the painter should be felt and apparent, if not obvious, somewhere. Otherwise, how does the beholder distinguish between the work performed by a daubster and that executed by a thoughtful, organized, discerning artist?

ARCHWAY TO PIET'S PLACE

In "Archway to Piet's Place" a definite clue has been provided for the viewer. Piet, obviously Piet Mondrian, on

whose primordial experimentations with geometric simplicity and primary coloration the composition has been based, is the key here.[6] The variation on the Mondrian theme has been given a personal adaptation in the handling of the elements, in the use of color, in the inclusion of the arch-form, and in the use of raised devices to enclose the areas, some of which are themselves raised. Still the title reveals my respect for the master of the pure and geometric.

The composition has been made up completely of rectilinear shapes with the exception of the arches, upon which the viewer's attention has been focused--by virtue of their centralized position and deviation from the geometric plan. Intense oranges and yellows contrast sharply with the stark blacks and whites, and charge the already bold composition with greater forcefulness. The scale of the elements (over 3' x 4') demands a spacious setting, for the painting is too overpowering to be hung in a small room, and its "volume" is too great for it to be placed near a weaker piece. Once again the theme of the thesis has been maintained, this time with even greater impact owing to the bold and straightforward handling of the composition.

ALLEGORICAL ARCHES

"Allegorical Arches," although similar in style to the preceding paintings, delivers an entirely different type of message. As should be readily apparent, the forms are not

arches at all, but rather exploded, almost animated, mushrooms (forms that have been derived directly from nature's curious realm). These gigantic mushrooms are unique in size and shape alone, for they are by most standards monumental, and further, with the Miro-like eyes, they have quite an overwhelming appearance. These compelling circles seem to have a very disarming effect on the viewers. In a confined setting the painting is overpowering; however, in a proper gallery setting the scale takes its place quite naturally. The 4'x4' dimensions of the panel give the mushroom shapes an alarming height, and a good subtitle might be "Revolt of the Mushrooms." Another appropriate compositional title might have been simply, "Positive Mushrooms and Negative Spaces," which would clearly show the important role of the negative shapes; however, for the purpose of the thesis I felt "Allegorical Arches" was much more fitting.

Lattice strips 1/4" in size have been incorporated in this design also. These raised strips give a vertical accent to the forms along the stem lines, as well as to the overall "feel" of the panel. The two-dimensionality was destroyed by their addition, and an entirely different set of color values had to be worked out to retain the original "flatness" and satisfy the needs of the composition. The change of values helped to balance the design internally, and an overall harmony was greatly enhanced by the use of a common-denominator color in the background spaces, which in this case was blue.

It would be advisable for the reader to trace these various aspects of the composition carefully, to fully appreciate the solution I reached. Again, great artistic liberty has been exercised; nevertheless, a strong thesis semblance has been preserved.

ENIGMATIC ARCHES

"Enigmatic Arches" began as a simultaneous painting, then, because of its increasing complexity, became a separate and demanding venture of itself. As the painting continued to grow, so did my enthusiasm for it, until I became as involved with it as I had been previously with the companion piece, "Allegorical Arches." Although smaller in scale, its proportions still present a "large" appearance, and the strange interplays of the linear enclosures (almost a bold calligraphy) hold the entire composition together with much the same effect as the heavy mullions in a stained-glass window.

Painted on the horizontal, with severe rectangularity, the 2'x4' composition has been broken up into distinct areas, this time enclosed by the thickness of the ridges of paint. The web of color which divides the background up so as to give a radial cross-like effect, helps relate the broader areas to the linear overpainting. Additional texture has been added with a "sgraffito" technique in the Prussian-blue areas, and this contrasts the vertical movement with the horizontal axis of the painting. The enigmatic arches have been

intertwined throughout the design, but have not been made too elusive, and can be recognized with a searching eye. The overall style of the painting departs very little from that of the thesis, as a careful examination of the components will reveal, even though at first blush it seems to deviate from it quite a bit.

PERSISTENCE OF SQUARES

"Persistence of Squares," largest of the thesis paintings (measuring 4'x5') deviates slightly from the arch theme, but retains the overall character or "feel" of the body of work as a whole. It is perhaps closest in style, approach, and organization to "Archway to Piet's Place," even though it grew out of an entirely different set of conditions. This painting was done expressly to be hung in a school, the Lora Little Elementary School where I have been employed as a Teacher of Art. Unlike an easel painting, which leaves the painter freer to exercise his will, this type of work must be made to fit into a particular type of setting, complement it, and at the same time become a harmonious part of it. To achieve this wedding of painting with setting, I have embodied some of the architectural principles used in the construction of the school, namely the split-level rectangularity, and the Mondrian-like stained-glass block work in the entrance way (see photograph, Plate XVI). The color, too, has been handled so as to be compatible with the primaries used

throughout the school.

Besides having the design of the painting meet the above architectural considerations, I have also satisfied some of my own personal drives, and have managed to keep the work within the framework of my own evolving style. Strips have been employed here too, and form a kind of grill-work, not unlike the geometry of a cross-word puzzle, where color has been used in place of words, establishing an artistic set of checks and balances (see detail, Plate XV).

The construction features of this painting were relatively simple. The strips were press-laminated to a backed masonite panel and then primed by brush with flat off-white house paint. The colored areas were then "filled in" by palette-knife, the choice of color having been determined beforehand by a series of interchangeable construction-paper squares and a balsa-wood working model. A final visual juggling was necessary, however, since the relationships changed so drastically when the proportions of the design were exploded to about ten times their original size. The primaries have been used in combinations of three, three squares of each hue only, to carry out the fundamental theme.

Do the squares represent the related areas of the school curriculum, an aerial view of education? Like learning, will they persist, or like the limp watches of Dali's "Persistence of Memory" will they melt away into oblivion? These are but a

few of the questions I have been asked, and ask myself.

Despite the many words used in these commentaries, they have by no means been intended to completely "describe" the paintings, for how does one describe a poem without words? My interpretative remarks have merely been directed at the reader with the hope that they will be helpful in a fuller understanding and a more meaningful appreciation of the work contained here.

CONCLUSION

With an ever-expanding emotional regard for the arch, I still look ahead to further exploitation of its great creative potential. Throughout the course of my painting, I have evolved a complex set of meanings for the arch-form, both as a symbolic reference and as a compositional image. Of course, the arch will not have the same meaning for some that it will have for others, and certainly I do not expect everyone to find it as appealing as I have. With this thesis I have merely attempted to acquaint the reader with some of these painted possibilities and to open up some new avenues for his thinking regarding the arch, apart from its traditional function.

It has not been my intention to mislead the reader into believing that I would like the "Arch and I" to become known as synonymously as "Navels and Arp" or "Melting forms and Dali." The arch has been presented here as representative of a stage in my growth as a painter. It has been neither a beginning

nor an end. When I have exhausted the creative potential in this theme, or have satisfied my impulses for it (whichever comes first), I shall find myself on the threshold of another challenging archway, with another whole realm of untapped resources waiting to be given immortality in a painting.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS CONTAINED IN THE THESIS

A photograph can never fully capture the color and vitality inherent in an oil painting. Invariably the liveliness is either totally lost or gravely distorted, and the color, in most cases, either washed out or unfaithfully reproduced. In many of the photographs included in this section, the paintings have been reduced to perhaps one twenty-fifth their original size. A photograph is at best a substitute, for to transmit its fullest impact, a painting must be viewed in its natural state and not on celluloid. The black and whites should be helpful to the reader in following the compositional references made in the text. However, color being the thing to see, one should look at the color reproductions with reservations, remembering that paintings are the least photogenic of subjects.

FOOTNOTES

1 Josef Albers, "Think!," Time Magazine, June 18, 1956, p.80.

2 The plastic mathematics referred to here represent a personal variation on the surrealistic theory, whereby a methodical pattern pervades the painting process, from the point of view of the creator who always keeps his work in check with a reliable set of mental reins.

3 Not to be confused with the faultless "laws of chance" that govern the creations of Jean Arp, those nearly perfect pearls, his "fruits born of man," that seem to conform to his own controlled laws of beauty, but never to pure chance.

4 The kind of humor in the arts Leonard Bernstein refers to as the "fountain head" or "touch stone." This is another of the devices in painting as in music which, along with the organization, preserve sanity and which act much like the comic relief in literature.

5 As opposed to the hereafter: the ultimate reality.

6 The realm of painting Mondrian preferred to label "Nieuve Beelding" or "Neo Plasticism."

PLATE I

PLATE II

RECTILINEAR ENCLOSURE

GRADUALLY TAPERING CURVES
CONFORM MORE TO THE LAWS
OF NATURE THAN TO THE
PRINCIPLES OF ARCHITECTURE

A SET OF AESTHETICALLY IDEALIZED PROPORTIONS FOR THE ARCH

PLATE III

PLATE IV

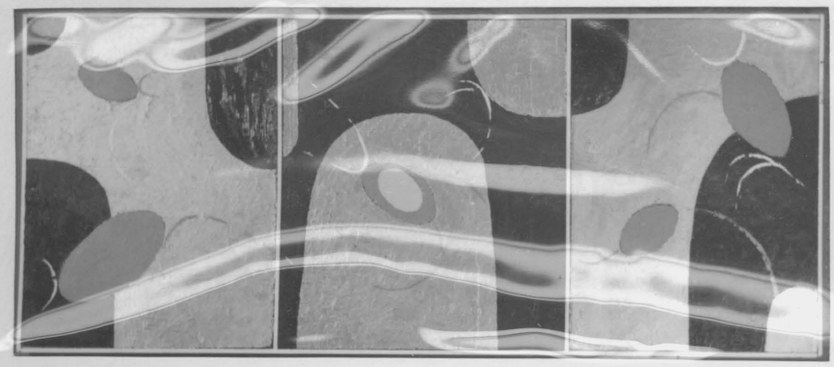
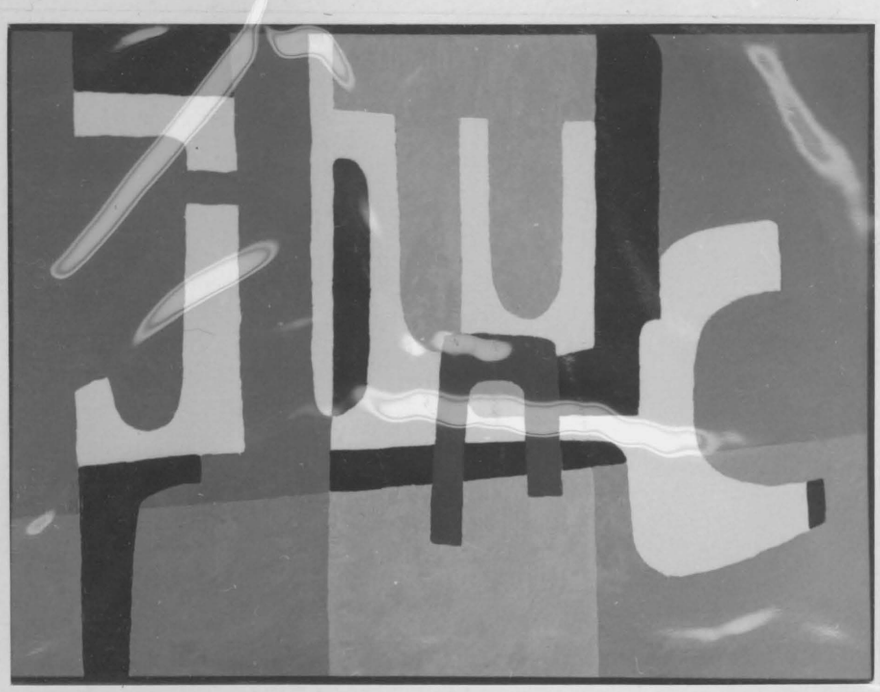


PLATE V



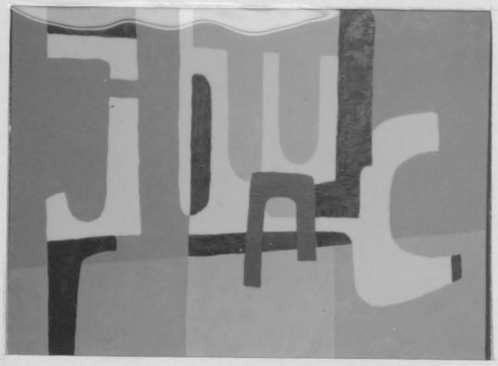
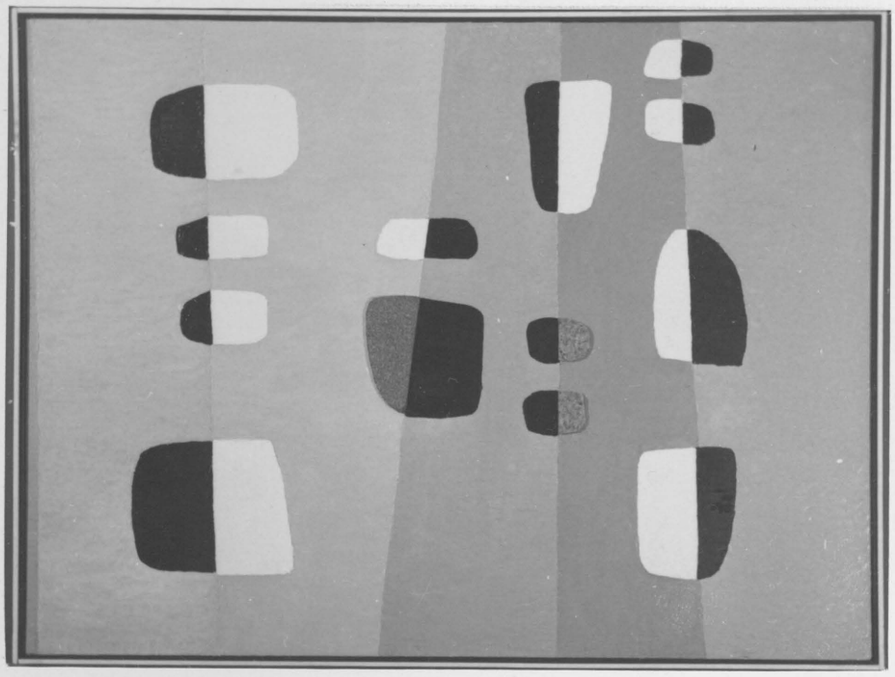


PLATE VI



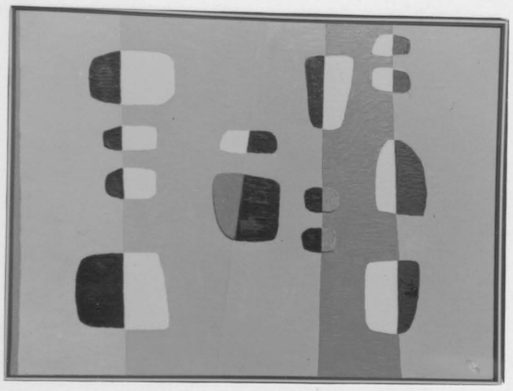
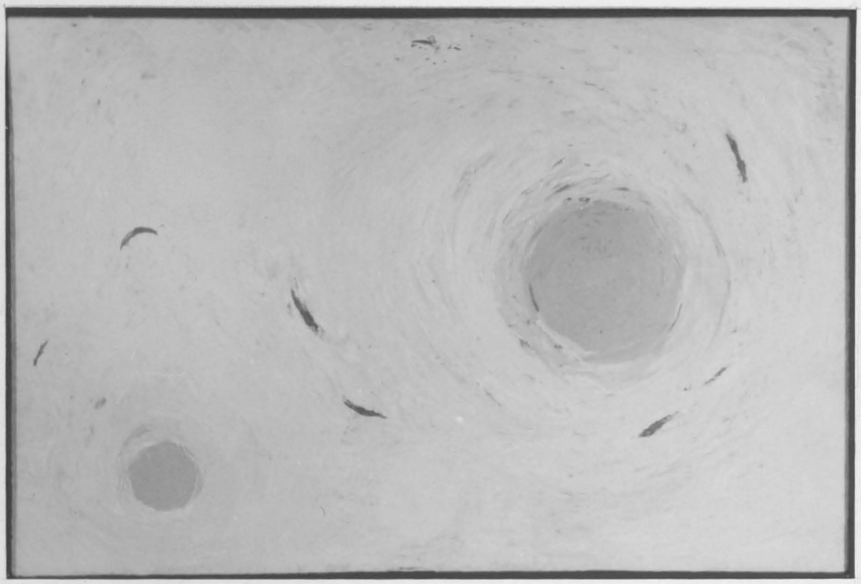


PLATE VII



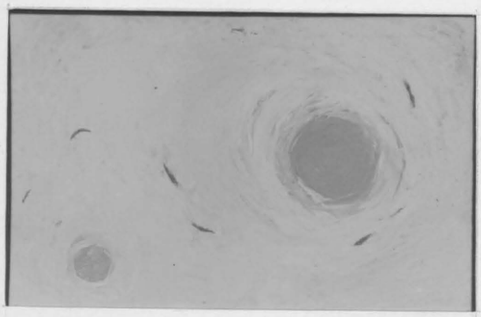
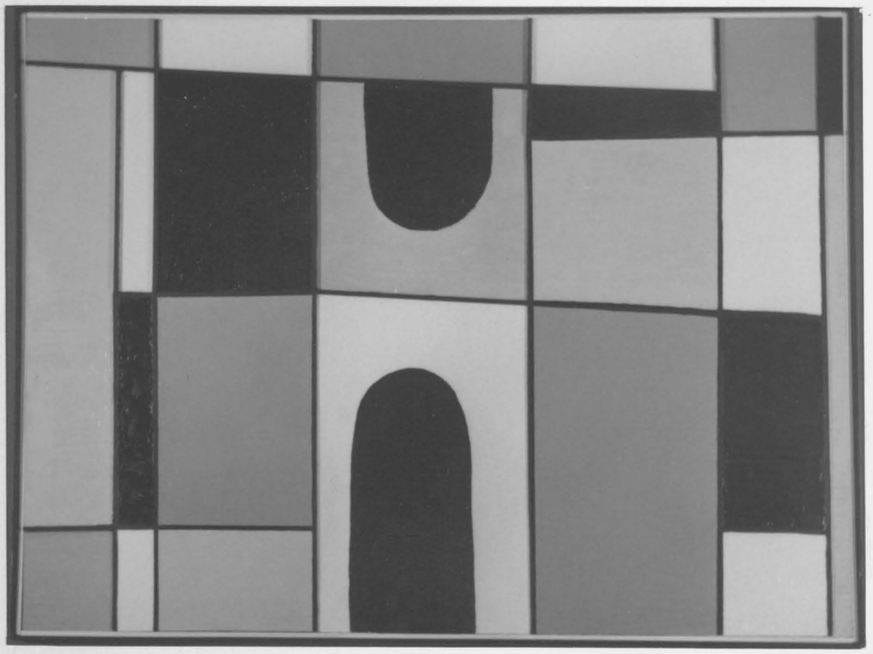


PLATE VIII

PLATE IX



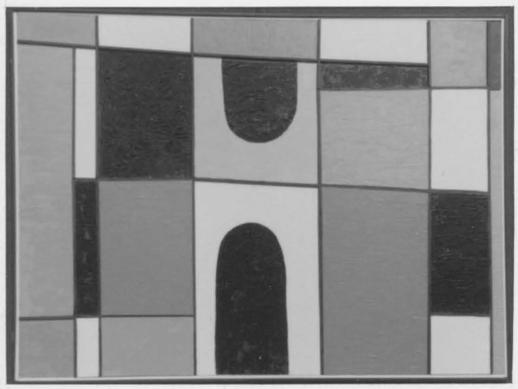


PLATE X

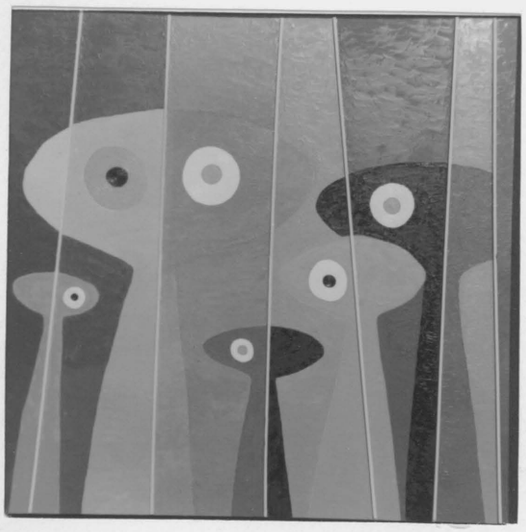


PLATE XI

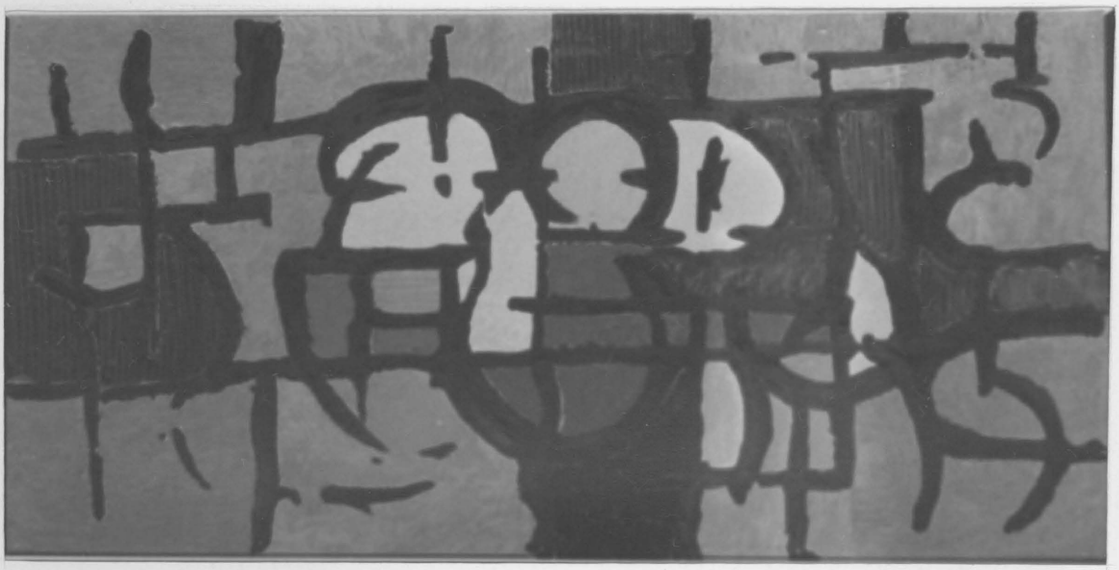


PLATE XII

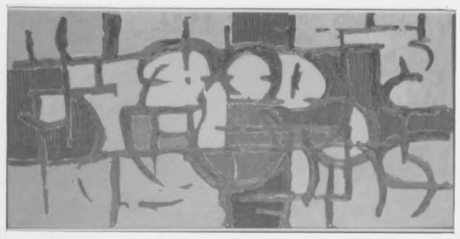
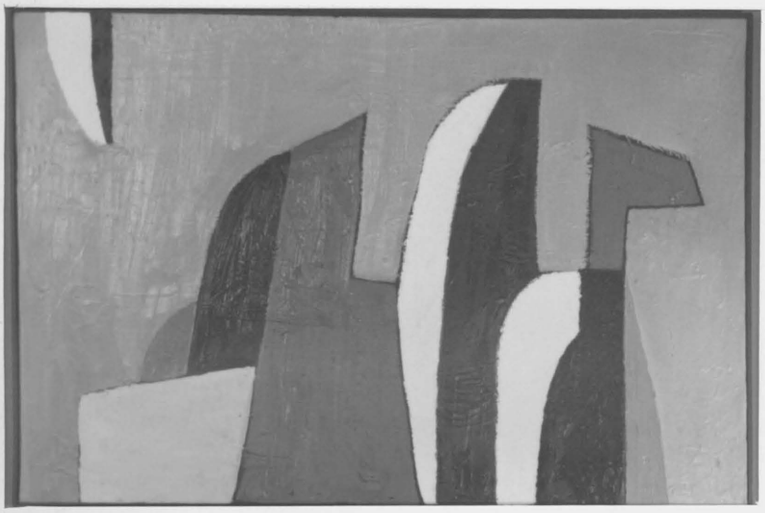


PLATE XIII



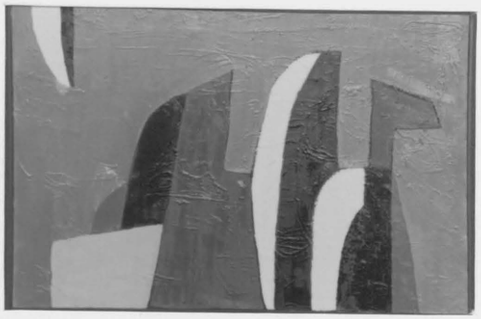
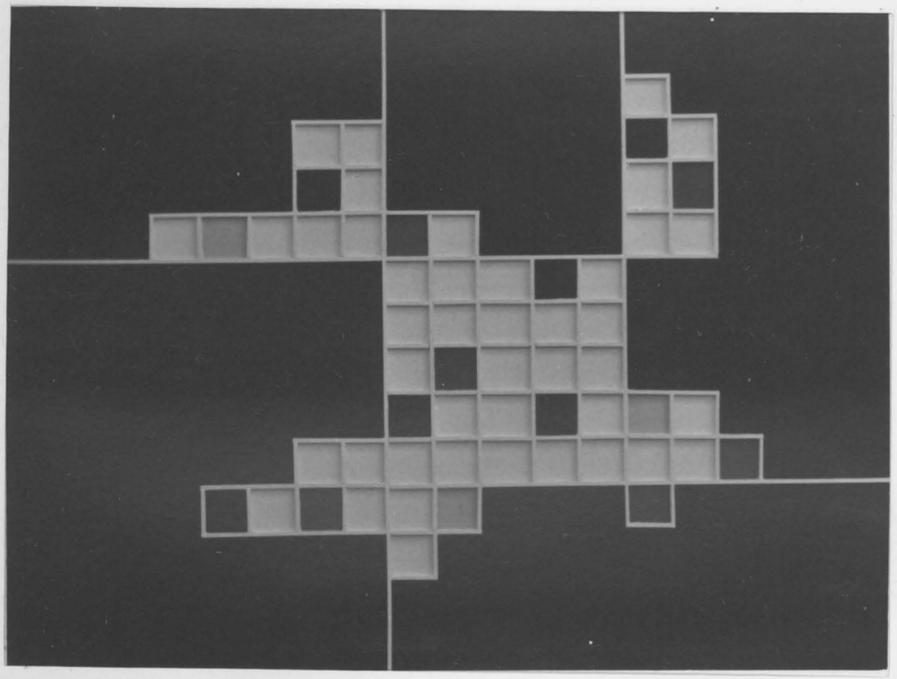


PLATE XIV



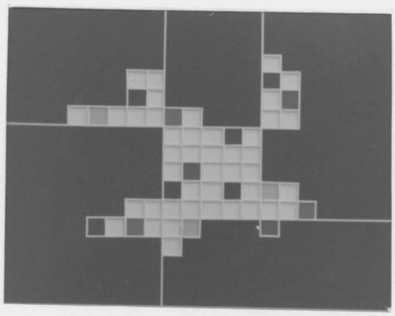
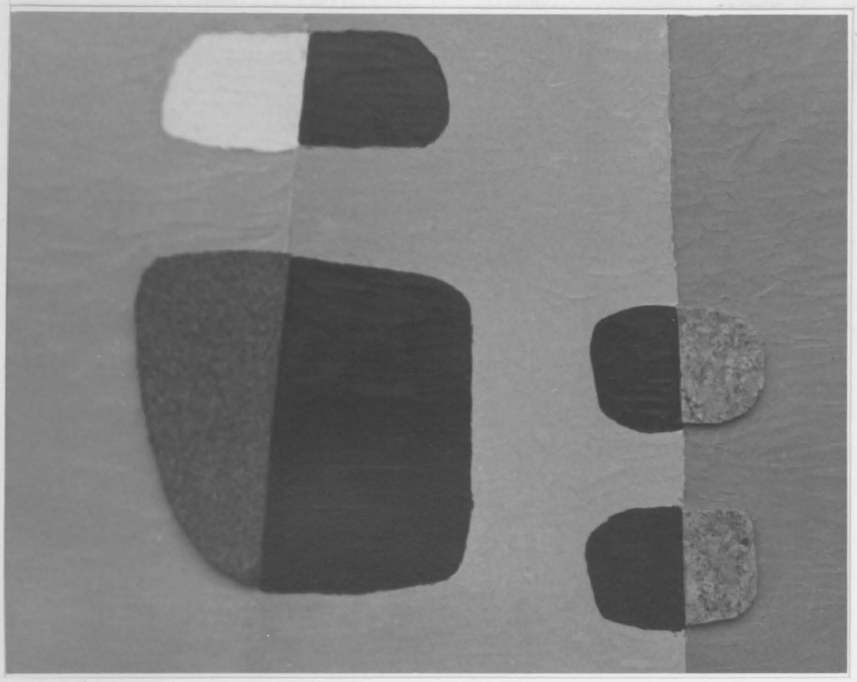


PLATE XV



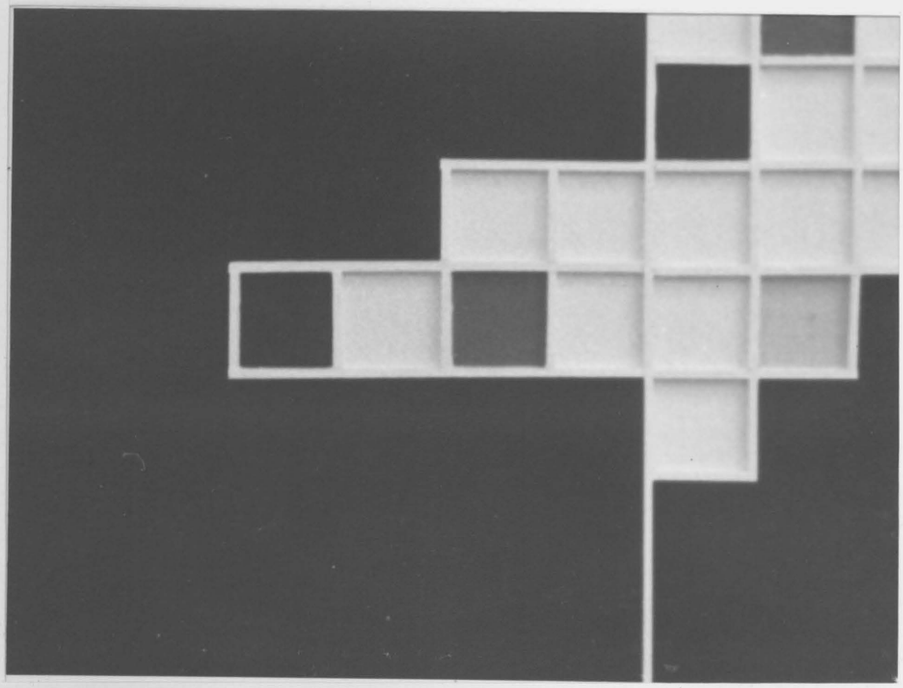


PLATE XVI