

The following "is a quick compilation of information about my mono-maniacal lifelong search for myself in a paint tube. It has been an engrossing search, leaving me little time for anything else. It seems like a painfully small accumulation of evidence for so many years of effort but, aside from a few paltry frustrations such as poverty and neglect, it represents an intensely satisfying life. I have lived, as I decided many years ago, as an artist. I have done what I wanted to do. The best part of it is that the elusive goal is still viable just ahead beckoning from the labyrinth of the future."

WILLIAM SNYDER
Narrative Account

Dimitri Grachis, started an art gallery called the Spatsa Gallery on Filbert street in San Francisco, and many artists had their first shows there. The "gallery" was located in a garage and, incredibly, our Firehouse Gang had a group show there in 1959. We were all painting large-format paintings then but we managed to get a fairly representative collection of our work together, anyway. The members of our group included Mel Hanson, Jim Muhs, Terry Saint John, Jack Farley and me. Dimitri closed his gallery shortly thereafter but Ellen Kernaghan, a secretary at BOAC, opened a gallery just around the corner of Fillmore, Off Union. The Green Gallery stayed in business for quite awhile, even though it was open only on weekends and in the evening. Ellen had to continue working at BOAC to support the gallery. Art sales, as might be expected, were minimal. Many artists who later became notable art figures had their first exposure at the Spatsa and Green Galleries. I had yearly shows at the Green Gallery from 1961 to 1966.

It has most natural for me, after so many years of childhood adherence to realism, to continue painting figuratively. However, the Abstract painting, particularly Abstract Expressionism, swept the art world like a tornado from the late forties to the early sixties, and it was difficult to make a significant statement that differed from the almost paralyzing hold abstraction had on the aesthetic psyche of the art world. My paintings, between 1955 and 1960, generally reflected the ambivalence of objective verses non-objective concerns. Nonetheless, as uncomfortable as it was, I occasionally tried to paint in various Abstract modes. Strangely, however, I won several first prizes and purchase awards in modest regional exhibitions utilizing thoroughly Abstract Expressionistic techniques. By the time I tried to paint along with the rest of the Modernism crowd there was little I could think of that hadn't been exhaustively explored....or at least so it seemed to me.

In 1993, I received an Adolph and Esther Gottleib grant of \$5,000. In 1994 I received a Pollack/Krasner grant for \$20,000.

Until 1965, my pictures had always been so varied in technique and content that a one-man show of mine looked like a group shows. By 1965, however, I began to evolve a linear series of "theme" paintings. I worked with, among other things, vacuum-formed and cast plastics, acrylics, oils, watercolors, encaustic combined with etching, stone lithography and airbrush. In a personal search for non-derivative

excellence, I employed a shotgun approach, hoping something would be originally valid. I had an instinctive need not to conform with popular modes, to go my own way.

In 1971, the opportunity arose for a sabbatical leave from Laney College, and I went to Europe. The experience was so overwhelming that it somehow fused all my energy into one direction. As I stood transfixed, dumbfounded in front of Rembrandt's "Nightwatch", it became obvious to me that an artist has to do what he wants to do above all else, win, lose or draw. He should paint for himself first and let the other reasons fall in line behind that personal aesthetic imperative.

The question is, what is it he really wants to do? If he wants money, that's as good a reason as any, I suppose. If it's fame, that's o.k., too. But he must figure out what it is he really and honestly wants and then be as true to that goal as possible. I realized that I wanted to paint with the simple childlike need I had in the beginning, to be as realistic and accomplished a painter as anyone and to use any subject that called out to me.

In homage to and admiration for Rembrandt I recapitulated his master work in my own "Nightwatch." I used my own characters, and it seemed then, as it does now, that the most logical and reasonable models I could use were my friends at home and Disneyland. I'm still on that path of realism and fantasy and have changed my cast somewhat.

But the rationale for what I paint remains the same: to find out what you (or I) really want to do, and to go for it as hard, as honestly and as energetically as is humanly, and maybe more than humanly, possible.