

Statement 1991

From 1962 to 1978 my work had less to do with the mainstream of modern art than it had to do with the spirit of humankind, (man and woman, woman and man).

These paintings, sculptures and collages were not “abstract”, whatever that term may imply. They had begun as figurative, surrealist, classical and expressionistic statements of the human condition. Indeed, there was a great deal of social comment, which possibly reflected an existential nihilistic futility — or just plain inner anger. These works had come about by a gradual, yet constant discipline that continued into 1966, at which time my work attained a certain figurative quality.

In the middle of 1967, I abandoned the so called figure — or let us say I fused figurative elements into what I called the “shape”. This “shape” continued until 1969 to be the prime element in my painting, recurring in a series of work called “icons” (wooden gold-leafed cruciforms with monsters screaming out of a mythical consciousness). The “shape” then wandered through my paintings, if not always an integral part of the work, at least somehow integrated into it. The shape was really a self — portrait and an expression of man. In a sense they were the dawn of an awakening, that period in our infancy when we look around us and cannot distinguish a human form or even relate to it.

Yet this was the way I perceived of our concept of the universe, not bearded gods we related to in the Judeo-Christian or pantheistic past — gods created in man’s image. They were not the lunar-landing screams of ego, of asserted isolation, or revolts from “mother earth” — but were with joy and a maternal emotion, the return to the earth breast, as to the womb, all infants still.

During the course of 1979 my work became involved with an exploration of two archetypes, namely the arch and the female figure, executed in various media: wood, canvas, pen and ink, watercolour and mixed media.

The assimilation of a combination of architectonic forms with the nude and the archetypal shape, together with design explorations that were executed over the previous eleven years, did, I think, manifest itself in a more complete humanistic form of expression.

For example, the arch became a double archetypal image, suggesting on the one hand cave, womb, warmth, entrance, security; and on the other hand, gate shut out, rejection, “do not enter”. These images were to be combined with the equally dualistic aspects of the female nude, containing both benevolent and malefic images: virgin — harlot, witch — saint, Eve — Helen of Troy, Virgin Mary — Athena.

The culmination of these forms and images coalesced to become a more expressive albeit more empirical statement in the creative process.

Shortly thereafter an opportunity to produce a small suite of lithographic prints came about at the request of Mr. Don Philips and Ms. Geraldine Davis of Sword Street Press. During the production of this suite, I incorporated the lithographic process into mixed media explorations on paper — and there developed both a diachronic and synchronic aspects to the figurative elements in these works. I believe this development to be a kind of dialectical process in which two or more aspects of the figure process, through the clashes of contradictory forms (i.e. figure in flux = profane; figure in stasis = sacred), along with the three dimensional pictorial concepts of the 20th century, created for me a new creative vision or synthesis, from which there seems to emerge a “higher unity”.

For example;

linear, sequential + image, repetition + poetic, intuitive expression + analytic, form = pictorial synthesis.

My paintings are an attempt to portray this age-old symmetrical concept in its proper asymmetrical universe, with all its concomitant aberrations.

A major work from this collection was commissioned by the Harbourfront Art Gallery for their God’s show. (December 1980)

In April 1981 I was in the process of carrying these figurative concepts one step further in a body of work entitled the “Utopia — Distopia” series. I used the Latin prefix “dis” as opposed to the Greek “dys” for two reasons:

More’s Utopia was written in Latin and the rule is the Latin prefix properly goes with words of Latin origin and conversely Greek with Greek.

The Latin “dis” implies “two ways” — in a different directions, or reversal of action- as opposed to the more pathological connotation of the Greek “dys”.

The initial works were executed on Arches paper and mounted on acid free board with the resulting iconography spilling over onto the matte board.

These works were thanks to a short term Canada Council grant.

From 1982 to 1988 my work on canvas dealt with an ambidextrous world with mirror symmetry and asymmetry and with the figure in mirror and painting within a painting. These concepts seem to carry the former visual synthesis (1979 — 1980) one step further. Other Utopia — Distopia series concepts;

mirror and nude: Venus myth

age of narcissism, referring to feelings of pride experienced when ego identifies with the ideals of superego.

Mirror imagery

spirit of aloneness (outside looking in, inside looking out)

we live not in an age of Utopia, nor as the prophets of doom would have it in the age of Distopia, but rather in both, and for some time to come we will have to come to grips with this reality and do our best not to create a pathological “Dystopia”, or even the mythological Armageddon.

These paintings were an attempt to portray this age old symmetrical concept in its proper asymmetrical universe with all its concomitant aberrations.

From 1989 to the present (1991), my work I feel, achieved a certain synthesis that I can only describe as everything and nothing. My purpose in art, in finding that edge, that point or that line, between abstraction and realism, between reality and non reality, between being and nothingness, where things perceived are ultimately not what they seem to be.

We live in an age of rapid historical change, of deconstruction, revisionism, decentralization, where values held one day are considered anachronistic and are eradicated the next. For me, this means that a painting can no longer be about “one thing, or one moment in time” — it has to be about everything or nothing. Perhaps not unlike the Zen masters of old we must find the void.