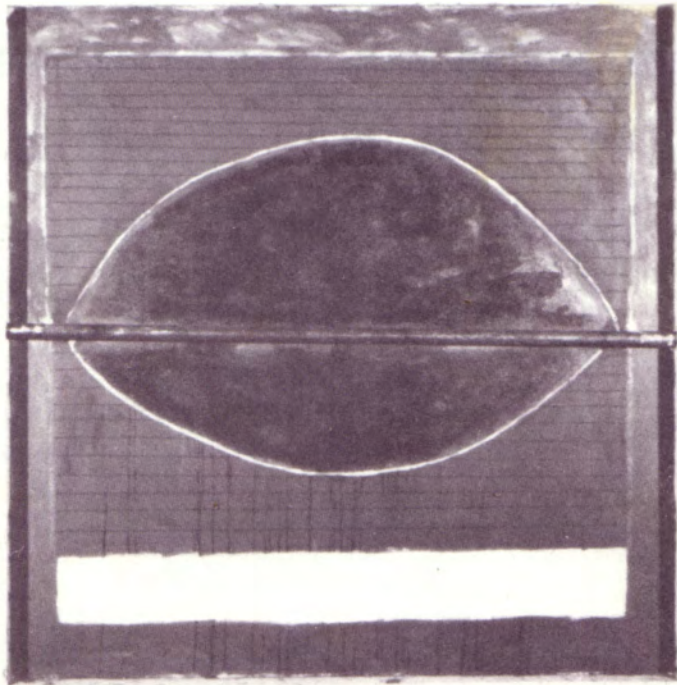


DUANE NICKERSON
Paintings and Assemblages



Untitled, 1987

July 3 to August 7, 1988

DUANE NICKERSON
Paintings and Assemblages

The Art Centre
The University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, N. B.

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Artist's Statement

We often think that when we have completed our study of one, we know all about two, because "two is one and one." We forget that we still have to make a study of "and".

Sir Arthur Eddington

The following is a list of things that served as motivating factors behind most of the paintings in this exhibit:

The process of constructing a work serves to activate those chance encounters that lead to possibilities. Attention to process also allows me to focus on that which is outside of me and my preconceived design.

I believe in an essential order. My work is an attempt to come to terms with this order through colour, shape, space, texture and juxtaposition.

Ritual is a phenomenon based on unquestioning belief. My paintings are records that attest to my faith in the ritual of making; such a perspective allows me to produce, and to accept the fact of the product.

Visual form as meaning is a possibility that interests me.

Duane Nickerson, 1988

FOR THE EXPERIENCE

Duane Nickerson graduated from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design this year, in Spring 1988. The early years of an artist's career are often weighted by the reputation of the institution they have studied at. This weighting takes the form of interpreting the artist's work in terms of the reputation of the school, and of attributing connotations to the art which surface from knowledge of the history of the school's place within art practice. This approach to understanding a recent graduate's work is often misleading.

NSCAD has enjoyed successive reputations for different styles of art, including minimalist, conceptual and political art. Often a school's reputation is based on exhibitions of former students, but it is not unusual for a three or four year hiatus to elapse between graduation and serious critical attention. This means that by the time an artist's work is being discussed, and the reputation of a school is being shaped, the concerns being questioned may have changed. When an institution is as responsive to current concerns and ideas as NSCAD is, its reputation often outlives actual conditions by five or more years.

Another factor which should be considered is that a reputation is often formed around the work of a small core of dominant artists, and at any given time a broad variety of styles and approaches to art practice may be being nurtured. Even though particular concerns may recede in prominence they do not necessarily die out. Their effects can be felt in the continuing influence of faculty members who develop and refine their own art practice, even as their tenure outlasts a 4-year student turnover.

I do not know if Duane Nickerson's painting is representative of current concerns at NSCAD. I do know that his spiritual approach to artmaking would not have received much sympathy there in the early 80s, when the political thrust of exploration demanded that all aspects of artmaking conform to a democratic criteria based on socialist principles. At that time the optimistic spiritual faith which shapes Nickerson's abstract art would have been considered suspect and naive.

The work "abstract" when used in relation to painting should not be understood in the same way as it applies to literature, i.e. as a summary or a reduction of the whole; but rather in the sense that music is said to be an abstract form. Properly speaking, abstract art stands in contradistinction to mimetic, or imitative, art. Figurative art is symbolic of the real world. Its images, through mimicry, act as signs, and we must go through the step of analyzing the significance of these signs, mediating however subconsciously, in order to know what the painting is about. A picture of a landscape, or a portrait or a still-life, always stands in for, or refers to, some real thing which it can never be.

Abstraction in art is an attempt to eliminate the need for this intellectual, interpretive stage of looking at art, and to be the direct experience in and of itself without mediation through some system of signs which refers to things outside the painting for meaning. When Aristotle advised seekers after 'truth' to join the army and avoid art because art dealt with illusion, he was recognizing that signs can be misleading and, more importantly, that mimetic art can cause one to accept the simulacrum for the real and to become separated from that spiritual understanding which is only gained from direct experience with nature.

Even though the fact of this essay may contradict me, the act of trying to interpret abstract art can work to remove one from the experience of the work.

Duane Nickerson is not an avant garde artist; he is not trying to be 'strange' or get his message across by shock value. He makes careful and conscious use of established visual language, known actions, colours, forms, shapes and interactions. At first look it seems familiar, as if we have seen this before. Nickerson gives full acknowledgement to his predecessors, and this exhibit represents his re-working of the elements of Twentieth Century Abstract Art, elements which he has united with the implications of the 'found object' and mechanical constructions.

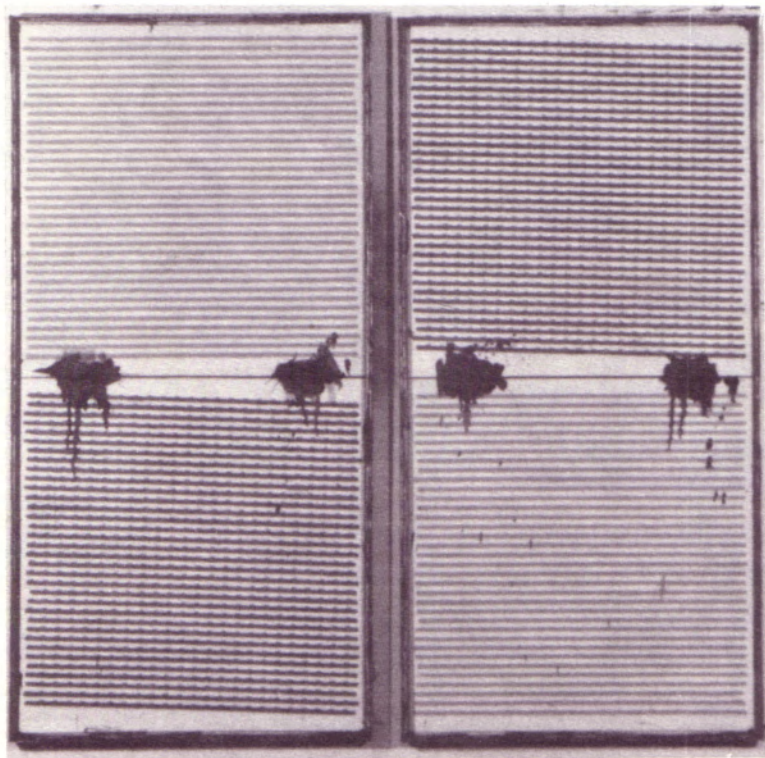
As a devout Christian mysticism fueled Kasimir Malevich's utilization of the square as a "Basic Suprematist Element" when he was striving to make pure feeling

the supreme aspect of creative art, so Nickerson has a deep and abiding faith in a reality which is not expressed in newspapers or TV news. For him the act of making is an affirmation, and the process is a search for understanding. Repetition is a meditative act. He learned from Agnes Martin, and from Buddhist wall art which consists of the same image repeated countless times, that mundane acts can be engaged in with passion. Repeating lines or marks was Martin's way of referring to our search for perfection while recognizing it as an unattainable but desirable human condition. Nickerson has the benefit of knowing the life's work of other artists who have been engaged in similar quests. Often they have taken one simple element and spent years refining and developing it to achieve a work of clarified simplicity. Mark Rothko's floating colour shapes involve the viewer in a sensuous experience of colour. Ellsworth Kelly, with a more hard-edged painting technique, floated irregular ovoid shapes on a rectangular field before moving on to shaped canvases and assemblies. Any figurative element in their work would have detracted from the pure expression of the experience they sought to give viewers.

Chance is something Nickerson allows, but he does not let that overtake the work. A heightened awareness of incidental occurrences often opens lines of thought which pure logic would bypass. He paints because he must do something, and painting makes him passionate. When he feels compelled to create, he will use the materials which chance to be available. Radios, iron pipes and electric motors can be used to introduce sound and motion to tactile and visual creative experiences.

That accident has placed him in a time and place and circumstance to make this work is something Nickerson appreciates. His painting testifies his faith in pure existence, and a spiritual quickening informs the work, allowing it the power to be another place. Your experience of this work is what it is about.

Michael C. Lawlor
Curator
June 1988.



Untitled, 1987

LIST OF WORKS

Queen II
graphite, metal, glass, canvas, electric motor
60 x 100"

Untitled
oil on canvas 36 x 48"

Man
oil on canvas 36 x 86"

Isreal
oil on canvas 48 x 30"

Untitled.
metal, oil, wood, canvas 48 x 48"

Untitled (mandela)
oil on canvas 48 x 48"

Verging on Black and White
varnish, gesso, thread, wood, canvas 49 x 49"

String Quartet
oil, wood, string, canvas 84 x 48"

Untitled
oil, brass hinges, wood, canvas 60 x 60"

Foramen Magnum
acrylic, graphite, metal, canvas 84 x 56"

Untitled
oil, mirror, stove pipe, canvas,
aluminum window frames 72 x 72"

Fire Dance
oil on plywood 96 x 96"

Fire Dance II
oil, canvas, metal 106 x 25"

Desert Time
canvas, wood, metal, mirrors, sand, charcoal
96 x 36"

Untitled
varnish, rosin, radio, speaker, plexiglass, bolts
30 x 48"

Fertility
7 works on watercolour paper each 11 x 17"

BIOGRAPHY

Duane Nickerson was born in Fredericton in 1965. He attended Mount Allison University in 1983, and then went to Halifax where he studied for three years at The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1988. He has travelled extensively, by bicycle through Europe, and in Central India.

EXHIBITS

1984 group: Christmas Choice, UNB Art Centre
1985 solo: Spanish Lounge, UNB
1988 solo: Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax
1988 solo: UNB Art Centre. catalogue

AWARDS

1983 Fredericton Foundation Art Prize
1983 New Brunswick Arts Awards Bursary
1987 Centennial Scholarship, NSCAD
1988 Endowment Fund Scholarship, NSCAD

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