

Remember how to think about your art, an analytic mode for artists—

Critics have their ways of thinking about art (and everyone is a critic, even too often the artist is); and artists can have their ways of thinking that are different from the ways that critics think. Even though artists and critics might use the same words to ask the same questions, the difference is that when the artists ask the questions, they already know the answers that came in their experience of making. Critics surmise through their critical apparatus; artists know through the memory of their actions.

And so when as an artist I turn to critical analysis of my work (I do not know what “critical means” except as judgment) I use objective terms to place in the world my subjective experience of the event of making. And the terms I have learned to use that seem to fit my experience are.

1. Source and Goal
2. Medium, Method and Outcome
3. Subject, Form and Content

The following discusses my 1981 large watercolors in terms of the first two series. For subject, form and content, however, readers and viewers will have to look at the paintings and draw their own conclusions

The source of the 1981 large watercolors was that I had become tired of making the smaller 40 x 30 inch watercolors of 1978, had become tired of making the Tarot prints of 1979-80, and had determined yet again that if the big boys could make big things and be great, I could make things as big as theirs (well, not quite) and be great also. Just like when I had read in 1967 that the

greatness of American art lay in part in its majestic size and had thereupon begun the large acrylics of 1967-70, so once again to the battle.

I had become tired of making the 40 x 30 inch watercolors. After all, when I had first shown them and in the heat of inspiration and making, I had sold none and the only critical remark I received—the only response of any kind—was that Henry Hopkins (then Director of the SFMOMA) had said they were “over framed.” Hopkins’ remark had been especially galling to me because I had designed the frames so carefully to reflect a restrained opulence... thin gold metal frames, with wide, warm mats for paintings intentionally rich and complex in color and form and subject. I had seen when I was just out of school a print of a painting by Vuillard... it was several women in a room at night, the lamps had silk shades, and there was a glass case with ancient Chinese artifacts on the table and beautiful old paintings on the walls. It was a room where cultured women lived and I wanted my paintings to be right for such a room. I did not think about nor care if my work might look wrong in a modern museum with too large and too white walls; I wanted old culture, the culture of generations rather than the new culture of the striving new rich that Henry Hopkins had to interest in his museum each day of his life.

No, I did not think about the character of modern taste—I thought these works of mine might form it to their character—but when I heard what Henry Hopkins thought, I realized I did care and for that reason as well as that I seemed to have come to the end of the creative rush of them, I soon stopped the 1978

watercolors and began the 1978-80 Tarot series of drawings, prints, paintings, collages.

But then, after a couple of years and all the Tarot images that my method for making them could produce, I tired of the Tarot work (and my show of them in 1981 was mentioned by no one in no way, not even the frames were worth a comment) and so in early March of 1981 the power of ambition once again seized me and I began to paint big.

So, the source of this work? I think Freud put it “fame and the love of women.” I had the love of a woman, but I needed fame to justify myself in the world. So make it big—use the small medium of watercolor to make the biggest watercolors in America and so become the most famous artist in America.

We live by dreams. The dreams are foolish and embarrassing and never come true. But they drive us.

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The source of the large watercolors was, then, the desire for fame, and the goal (to the extent that source and goal are different) was to have fame. I did not get any. There was a show of the large watercolors in spring 1982, I gave a gallery talk about the paintings and how they were made and what they meant. Several rich collectors came, smiled and went. An artist who had been badly injured in an automobile accident and had just received a large compensation check came to the talk and bought one of the paintings afterward. That was that. There was no review and I did not get famous.

But, there’s sometimes another source for works of art, that source too easily invoked and as easily faked, the source that is the core of the self. And that—the search for the core of the self as the ever flowing spring of life as the source and goal of making art—leads to the medium and method and outcome of the making of these large watercolors in 1981. As I said, I gave a gallery talk about it when the work was shown in Palo Alto in 1982. The talk and its slides have been lost for years, but I remember it went like this:

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How I make my paintings... To start the talk, there was a slide of the studio. The door was open and inside you could see the first of the 1981 large watercolors (March 2, 1981 below). I had taken the slide right after making the painting because I had been so happy to have made the breakthrough into it and what I felt would be a very productive time to follow.

Then there were slides of the interior of the studio, how the peak of the roof comes down too low on the side walls to make space to hang work but how that same high peaked roof and low walls makes a floor space definitely longer than wide and how the floor boards emphasize that direction to make a flow of space like the polarization of a magnetic field... and that this flow of space was the first element of my work in the large watercolors.

The next slides showed how I set my painting—the blank paper stretched on a 72 x 48 inch drawing board—on boxes so that it was about 18 inches off the floor... floating in the studio space the

way a compass needle floats in the magnetic field of the earth.

The next slides showed how I smeared some water on the paper, how I put my thumb partly over the open mouth of a bottle of ink, (I had made special ink that was mostly non-water soluble India ink mixed with a water soluble ink so that if the ink got wet after it dried a halo of the soluble color would develop around the jet black of the India ink) and threw the ink onto the paper...

And then the slides showed how I made a few massive calligraphic strokes with a large Chinese brush... a few strokes because Stephen Pepper had said in the aesthetics course I took at Berkeley so long ago that we could perceive no more than five marks as individuals before they start to coalesce into some larger whole—or just mud.

And then the slides showed how I took up the drawing board while everything was still wet and lifted it side after side each of the four sides up and then down until everything that could run had run in each of the four directions... and how close to my body the painting was as it ran in each direction and how much that tipping and tilting and running in the painting was also in me.

Then the slides showed how I sprayed color from a little mouth atomizer into various parts of the painting, joining my breath to the tilting and dripping of the four directions of space, and how also I would mark and smear and paint with gouache what seemed to appear in the tangling of the dripping and spraying and staining...

And the next slide showed how when that first frenzy (yes, it was a frenzy) of activity had passed, I would sit at the bottom of the painting as it now lay back down on the boxes and floated visually above the floor, how I would sit at the bottom of the painting, open my legs and take the painting's image into myself and put myself into its image as it slowly dried over the next half hour or so.

Then there was the next few hours or the next day after the painting was dry—what to do with this thing now that the thrill of making was over and the depth of color had died away in the drying in the way that watercolors do. What to do to bring life back to what had been so glorious only a short time before. I told the audience of my gallery talk that what I do is “follow feeling,” and to illustrate this had made three slides, the first showing a piece of paper with the words “Follow Feeling” lettered on it in blue tempera. The second slide showed the paper sinking into a dark pool of water and the words “Follow Feeling” already running and dissolving; the third slide showed the paper lifted out of the pool as the blue of the words ran down the paper to drip and be lost in the pool's dark water.

And so the following slides showed how I followed feeling and worked into the painting, using whatever skills of painting and sophistications of aesthetic knowledge I had to follow feeling wherever it might lead... either to some aesthetic and (what was the term? the core of the self?) personal content that could satisfy me, or to failure—no matter how smart I might be, there might be only dead mud at the end.

And the painting that I had made as a demonstration of all this was very near to dead mud at the end. Yes, I had found my body as a tree that was also somehow a stag, and had found near the base of the tree and the feet of the stag a vial of silver water that was marked with a slash of red for life... but most of the image was dull mud and I had been mostly forcing and faking “the source that is the core of the self.”

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And that—“the search for the core of the self as the ever flowing spring of life as the source and goal of making art,” yes, that was what I wanted my audience to learn of the medium and method and outcome of the making of the large watercolors that were all around them in the gallery as I gave my talk. But I am afraid that my talk was more an entertainment than a revelation; and so I too had simply faked the making of my work for an hour as they had nodded in appreciation and faked their understanding of this medium, method, outcome and goal of a work of which they had not the slightest idea.

That talk was more than twenty years ago. I have learned a lot since then about falsity and truth, about entertainment and revelation. And have learned also that these paintings of which I was and am so proud are yet many of them for me more entertainment (“professional art”) than truth (“the core of the self”). Yet, yet, when someone sees one of these paintings and is moved, who am I in the midst of my pride to denigrate their true feeling in front of a work of mine of which I may be not so sure my own feeling was true?

These questions came too forcibly to mind a few months ago as I set out to photograph all of this particular body of work (64 paintings) for my retrospective at the Oakland Museum. After photographing some thirty or forty of the paintings I began to feel that in the making of the them I had been too often “cranking them out” for fame and one upmanship, and that too much of the content of the paintings was infected with what might be called the “disease of professionalism.” “Professional” with all that implies: talent, technique, sophistication and respect from peers and public; able to do whatever necessary whenever necessary. There’s only one necessary that the professional might not notice and that is the core of life. And the “disease” of professionalism, to paraphrase Tolstoy in his *What is Art*: “Art is the infection of feeling from one person to another; but since artists must make a living, they have learned how to imitate feeling when they don’t have any.”

Not long after I had made the 1981 large watercolors, the core of life arose like a terror and a glory and a loss and a mourning that would take the next ten years to live through.

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And another note about “professional”—why can’t I let go of this?—whatever we do in both our public and our silent, private lives, we lay it out in the world with all our passion and soul. True or only a sham, nonetheless and either way, we are—truly—out there. And that is the truth of life and of art.

Thinking about these 1981 paintings and my denigration of them, they had all the

passion of life that I had learned until the time right after I had made them. That too often in order to reach the power that I sought, I had to use such worn out signs as the phallus and vagina I did and still regret. But I knew no other way. That I would in a few months learn other and more powerful ways of the representation of the passions of life and the core of the self I did not know. Do not blame me now for my ignorance then.

Yes, I already said in the paragraphs above what these last two paragraphs have said again. When we have a sore that does not heal because it itches and we keep picking at it, we know it will not heal because it is not healed. Some artists keep itching and picking. I am one. No itching sore, no picking and no work (professional or not). And, certainly for such artists as I am, the

irreconcilables of personal truth and professional achievement are an itching sore sometimes but only temporarily scabbed over. Just now, in writing this in November 2002 more than twenty years after the time of the paintings of which I write, I have torn the scab and the itch remains.

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Now that I have finished denigrating my 1981 large watercolors as being perhaps more “professional” than “true” (are these mutually exclusive?) here is a selection of those—diseased or not—I liked best then and still do now. Works of art should “speak for themselves.” It happens, however, that as I made these paintings I kept notes about what the paintings were saying to me. The notes are given below with the paintings.

The following notes to the 1981 Large Paintings were transcribed (with minor editing for intelligibility) from my Studio Notes written in the process of making the paintings. I have added a few comments and explanations in italics.



February 16, 1981 A dream in the night, and another dream in the morning:

In the night—I dreamed of a painting almost like a table with raised, dark edges, square, pointed toward me. The surface was dirty white, reticulated in dirty black with a dark, blackish smear/lump hole near the center.

In the early morning—We were at the shore of the bay, shallow with sand bars, the water very, very blue in the morning light. We were crossing from the west side toward the east and the morning sun. We had to pay 35cents, but I only had a quarter. I thought I could borrow the money from the young people back in the car (the car was not new...10, 20 years old). As I put the money on the table, I noticed the table was round, bright in the dawn pink light, and the shadows were bright, too, with blue. And the toll taker was counting the money, spread out on the round, rough wooden table... and when I awoke, I wondered

if he were the ferryman.

And in 2002 looking at the painting dated February 25, 1981—it is the first of the 1981 large watercolors—I see in it the round rough wooden table of the toll taker/ferry man and the symbols scattered around on the surface are the coins I gave him for passage to the east and dawn.



March 2, 1981. Start on the large watercolors. Why am I trying to make these big paintings? Because I want to make things like my buddies, and, the world expects it. Is that a good enough reason? Well, it all depends on how the paintings come out...

But, when I look at the blank paper, I can see four or five different paintings; and also I get tired just thinking about all the filler it takes to get from point A to point B.

March 3, 1981. And so this morning I made a meditation:

The role of spirit in my work is I don't know; but earth is my mother, and these are its parts.

March 4, 1981. Make the Gate of All Life.

"You don't need more than that to call the..."

"More than that" means I don't need more than the simple, direct, statement. I don't need the big, technically complex, time consuming painting, the large scale "Earth Sign."

March 7, 1981. After deciding not to work any more on March 4 large watercolor, I worked on it this morning. Found that it was the Red Square. Now, at least while it is wet, it fulfills my needs for luminosity—and is now, truly, Earth Sign.

...Maybe the March 2-3-4 watercolor has now resolved, arrived... "come" at what it was always supposed to be. Maybe it was the red circle that was causing the trouble., and the general entrapment in the composition and ideas of the fall 1979 color circles... and the large watercolors of fall-winter 1977. Maybe the German Expressionist show with Nolde and the others showing the way to accept the straight simplicity of what one is, maybe that broke the barrier.

Title for now: *Red Square: Earth Sign.*



March 17, 1981. The Green Man—old, that was it (the little object of yesterday’s dream)—“old, and permanent” was the phrase.

The post in the springtime, and also that painting made several years ago of the Green Gnome [*now, 2002, in the Ren Ming collection*].

The old Grandfather: The little idol that came down out of the Middle Ages—they had hid it in the basement, in crevices in the walls, in the backs of chests and closets, behind a loose brick in the fireplace for hundreds and hundreds of years... generation after generation as it came down into the Middle Ages from pagan times... the Earth Father, the harvest father, the sowing father of spring... consort of Earth Mother (how she has now been trivialized).

Question: “How did Grandfather change from being a little boy into an old man?” He changed from a new moon to an old man because he became fire (was sacrificed to the flame of the house) year after year.

This picture is that post that I would be in extreme old age marking the place of the house by the sea.

March 18, 1981. Besides Grandfather, I can also see Grandmother here, the old mountain with cleft—and the well in the top of the mountain too.

In fact, I can see: The Fool and the Pope (the original sights), The Queen and the Popess (also there), and the Big Cock and Cunt

And of course the Earth Urn, and the Pope’s scepter of round vegetable surmounted by geometric shapes (here in the painting, they are stars)

And the more I list things like that, the more I see that the reality of the picture transcends any list, any story and word way of saying it.

I think, at this point, I have become fixed in the larger scale.

“Person, place or thing?” This one is person and thing. Soon, make places again.

We must be able to open our thoughts...to the world long gone. When we see an object, we must open our thoughts to the world from which it came. Not a dead world. Only, one that is not here anymore, like the twilight in the Sonoma fields, orchards and forests of my childhood. And when we paint an object, we must make that place from which it came—and you know, that place is a woman; the world in which we work and build is a woman.

And the reason why this image I have painted of the Green Man is so ambi-sexual, so either/or male or female both in its major shape and shapes and details, is because it is pre-sexual... it is vegetable... not “vegetating” but growing like all plant life in spring. And I suppose that one of the active, sensory associations in making the painting was that of the saxifrage leaves on the plants last Saturday, as I took them out of their uprooted pile, cleaned and replanted them—and since have watched their slow uncurling from the dark earth into the light.



April 3-4, 1981. Set out to make a series of the seasons in Grandfather Land

NO SIGNS

No signs in the evening air, no little talismans.

No signs in the evening air—except for the sun,

The sun as a ring in the depths.

Put on the ring.



April 6-7, 1981. If there are going to be (if I am going to make) a “Seasons in the Coast Range,” the painting of April 3-4 is winter. This one is autumn... and Grandfather’s woods.

I look at these paintings as if they were landscapes.

April 3-4, “Winter,” is the shore; and April 6-7, “Autumn” is the woods.



April 15, 1981. A painting of “Spring” for the Seasons in Grandfather Land

This painting is an adequate response to working and being in the gardens of Green Gates in the spring.

And in every way except scale and, I suppose depth (whatever that is) and esthetic/technical sophistication, this painting and its recent companions are exactly in the family of my work in the summer of 1947 when I first discovered nature in Redwood Park and in the hills west of the San Leandro Reservoir. And the painting of April 3-4 certainly belongs to the winter of that year and walking in the afternoon at Land’s End and on Bolinas Reef.

June 1, 1981. *In June, I wrote a set of principles for this work.*

To dwell on a feeling or phrase, A gesture or sense of motion; And then at some point neither soon nor late, To walk into the interstices of this space and moment, There to dance suddenly, blindly, briefly with the Other as it reveals itself in the traces time and accident have left upon the surface.

And what the traces show is what the Other reveals of the figure in the dwelling that is the work of art.

And that these works only take a moment—Well, how long does it take to conceive a child? When did labor’s length become guarantee of truth? Only when certain people stopped believing their eyes. And, if you want development, you’ve a long time to look while the image reveals itself.



July 6-7, 1981. Painting the Grandfather Springs... The white diamond that was to be entwined in the top center turns out to be an irrelevant crowd pleaser. So I will not put it in, nor all the little prismatic circles I had been considering.

And it is the full face of an old man with long, curling hair; and it is that bird with widespread wings that bends down over all, and there is, rising up bottom center, a phallus just like mine as I looked in the mirror in the late afternoon sun just before I started the painting.

So that is Grandfather Springs: the face of an old man, a dark bird, a phallus: ALL ME.

The diamond has become a clear, white circle rising like a new moon behind the heap of stuff that is the rest of the painting

See what the moon called forth: Listen to the night wind blowing.

Final title: *Grandfather Springs*.



July 10, 1981. Each painting must be resolved in its own terms. And when you get to the bottom, what there is, is a Black Hole. We call it fate. That which makes me, me; him, him; her, her. It is the darkest mystery of all. Out of it comes destiny, the things that I and she and he will do in our lives and the particular ends to which we will each come. It is open at that one place because it is also the womb.

Final title: *Mirror*.



July 12, 1981. “This is all ye know, and all ye need to know”—Perfect union.

I saw the image this morning, just after sex.

Final title: *The Sexual Connoisseur*.

July 13, 1981. Yes, these two paintings (July 10, *Mirror* and July 12, *Connoisseur*) are very sexual. I’ve put them both—the *Mirror* and the *Connoisseur*—up on the wall in front of me. Sitting here, the right action is to spread my legs, show my stuff and take them in. The *Mirror* painting shows Earth Fred, brown, flying to and holding up Venus’ *Mirror*, black; and the *Connoisseur*, is, as I wrote in my notes as the painting was coming to conclusion, the image of sexual climax.

The river is flowing strongly into the future; what I must do is keep up an adequate supply of paper, paint, etc., and just follow.

“Follow feeling”... be open to the winds.

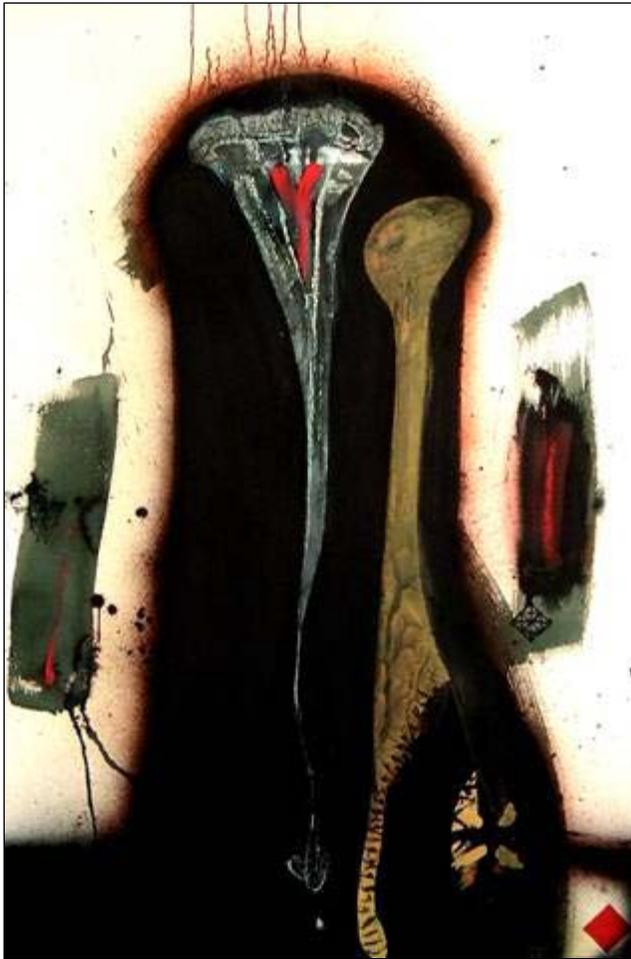
And the little paintings/notes I worked on today? Well, they’re just not the way.

Maybe they were the way (although a throwback to the way of the mid 70's and the "36/52" set of acrylics). [Click here to see for yourself](#)



July 27-28, 1981. In the beginning it was me, and the blue diamond was at the base of my crotch. But now that it's over, all that feeling of a blue jewel in my groin has turned into—the whole painting has turned into—a woman with an ocean in her womb.

Final title: *Woman.*



July 30, 1981. A man. I don't use music anymore to help establish a mood to work in. Much more, just my body, and an image. For the man, now, my body and the image/feel of the front hedge as I cleaned out the accumulated debris around the roots yesterday. And so I made the painting as I felt and looked at my phallus, felt my thighs, belly, chest and nipples; and thought yesterday's words: "Follow, follow feeling, right down into the depths."

OK, so it's two phalli, one bulbous, green, filled with sperm; the other long, red, filled with blood light. And one gives a bluish-grayish sperm, the other black, and the two sperms surround the golden pyramid.

And now, two hours later, it has developed completely beyond any such "symbolical allegorical"

descriptions and become also sharper, clearer, simpler and more complex in color and shape relations... by painting out the "garbage" and allowing a vagina to appear in its proper place at the crown and allowing a heart to appear in it.

Next day And beyond, also, any simply categorized, limited, "sexual desire." It has become after working most of yesterday and this morning, a "Dawn."

Anyway, this was the end of the line.



August 22, 1981. A long, slow, warm, sleepy summer afternoon. And my shoes are too tight, and my clothes bind, here and there. And like the old afternoons with Pan among the nymphs and fauns and shepherds in Arcady, I want to take off my clothes and go swimming...

...plunge into the painting, into the red square in the cool, blue water.

Next day (August 23) The very most important thing is to be absolutely true to my own experience, the feeling at the very bottom of my own bones, my own flesh. To the extent I plunge in those summer pools, to plunge into the ones I feel in me, to the extent Pan presides there and that I am satyr, faun, to be true to those images in me... not as shaped 2000 years ago in classical imagery.

So, though I may make Pan, that is not his name; though I may make

and be Satyr, Faun, Priapus, that is not his name. Because, his name (their names) whatever they are, are mine, whatever that is. And their places, too, are mine, carried in the deeps of my body, wherever I am, wherever I go.

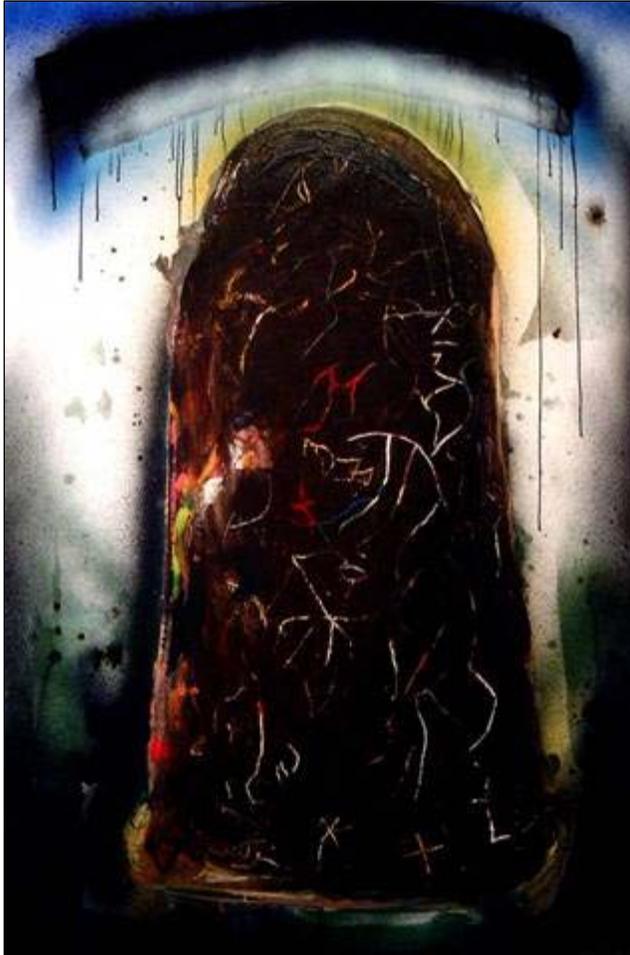
What I was trying to say was to distinguish between the signifier (the name Pan) and the signified (the being of Pan), and that the name might be Pan but the being is Fred.

And when the painting was over, it was the river in the evening.

Later. Either, I am not Priapus, no matter how much I like sex, because invariably when I go down inside myself to be him, I find something else, like this river (of generation, of life); or, Priapus is not in truth like he has come down to us, the rutting stud... twisted out of the sweet flowing stream of grain and sperm into that Victorian devil person, creation of the frustrations and repressions of the Christian era.

I suppose those negatives were necessary at the end of the Roman Empire to eradicate the habit of insatiable lust that seemed to be the cultural norm...but in the process, the negative seemed to destroy all the sweetness of life in the flesh: this whole river of sweet, pure water. River, spring, waterfall and moon... "moonriver" with setting sun.

August 24, 1981 So I put in the setting sun, forced, finally to use opaque yellow ochre and to paint the sun engraved as a circle, flowing away lower right.



August 26, 1981. Morning. Study the inner lineaments of your body, in the solitude. Alone with the ticking of time.

In the rays of the sun—Every time I start a painting now, the temptation—the desire, the need—to take off my clothes and begin it nude in order to achieve maximum body contact-unity with the origin of the painting—with the stuff of it—grows stronger.

Noon. And what I got was a tree stump luminous with life, with a cunt in the roots at the bottom, and a leaf budding within the moon at the top.

Late afternoon. Well, I worked on it, smearing it every way with my fingers with every color of acrylic that I had, and then dripping long white-ish strokes down and across it... and then looking at my cock in

the bright sun, as it got hard and huge and came, so that I would know what this painting should look like...

Evening. I worked on it some more, and rubbed it all over with the earth brown while spraying in the shadows... and then I scratched into it everywhere, like a little child with the crayons covered over with ink, to see what I would find.. I found the Old Log, and the shining worms swarming all over it. It has a halo, because the sun is breaking through somewhere in its core.

And when I read all this through after it was over, the astonishing thing was how exactly the first three lines written in the morning had predicted/prescribed the pattern of the day. (And the dark piece across the top is supposed to rain light and water down on the log, to fertilize all that grows in it.)



August 27. Looking at the August 26 painting today, observe that

1. Aesthetically, it is quite satisfactory. And that is all there is to that.

During all the years since painting the August 26 painting, I have thought it was not aesthetically satisfactory—but not such a failure as to destroy it.

2. The image is only partly the old log; it is also partly the image of March 17 and March 24, and it is also partly the “Omphalos” at Delphi. Curiously, the March 17 and March 24 also arose at time, on days of, extreme sexuality. [*The March 24 painting has not survived.*]

And then, later in the day on August 27, I made another painting. Looking at both August 26 and 27 together in 2002, they are the perfect opposites of male and female.



September 10,1981. I am a painter, and this is my Sephirotic Tree, vintage 1981.

What's going on? Well, I'll tell you.

She wrapped her legs around me and took my cock into her vagina. Then she embraced me, her arms all the way around me, and laid the palm of her hand that was full of star dust against the back of my head.

Title: *The Embrace.*

October, 1981. In the latter part of September and through mid October I was invited to 3EP Press in Palo Alto to make a series of monoprints (the specialty of the firm). The only condition was that I make a self-portrait as a gift for H.A., who had given 3EP the very large etching press on which the monoprints would be made. I had been invited to press the year before to make monoprints, but had instead made the Tarot of California portfolio of etchings. So, this time it was to make monoprints, and the aspect that interested me was the self-portrait—I imagined myself laid out on the bed of the press, and my own body being the ink of the print squeezed onto the paper.

Not planning to die in the pressure of an etching press however, I decided to make a monotype drawn from my self-image as it had been developing in the large watercolors of the previous months.

Note: A monoprint is made by painting on a smooth metal plate (any smooth non-absorbent surface can be used) and then running it through the press. A monotype is made by etching or engraving an image on the plate before painting on it. The etched or engraved image remains through all the subsequent images, no matter how the painting is done.

3EP did not want to spend the money on a life-size plate for the portrait (then why did they have such a big press?) and so I bought a large sheet of Plexiglas to use, first to engrave my portrait on, and then to ink for the monotype process.

I began with the idea that there would be my body image with text all over it and the background telling what I am. I wrote the text (it follows) and then made the plate.

For a Portrait of the Artist at the Age of 54. I am the old post, silver with age, stuck in the sands by the shore. The tangle of my nerves is the chronicle of my years; I am Be Beggar, I beg endlessly to Be. And when I wake, a world arises, and when I sleep, another takes its place. Through all these worlds, I am. I have lain in the gutters of the world; I shine everywhere in dusty tenement windows. I am in the fire of those who lust, I am in the souls of those who dream. I am the herm at the center of the four fields; I am the Hesper Tree in autumn, I seed the earth with the storied richness of my year. Spring and autumn, summer and winter, my names are the seasons. My breath is day and night. I have never seen my face. Venus was my mother, Dionysus was my father. I take after both sides of the family: I am Priapus. And I am the autumnal fruit and the blue mountains above it. I dwell in old cities, my veins are clogged with ruin and my mouth with dust. My days are the leaves of a great tree in autumn, they fall in golden torrents. I am a statue among the trees in an old park. My life follows the spiral, I live by its line. I am a bone in the sand; I last long, but then I will be gone. With every surge, the sea pours through me. I am a bird perched upon the high cornices of the world. I am the whispering in the mind, the murmuring in the blood, the fleeting images in the dreams of Everyman. And I will die, my body will be dispersed to the four quarters of the globe. It will never return. With Caesar, I will be a bit of clay to stop a hole to keep the wind away. And I will be also in the blood, the memory and the sperm of generations yet unborn. I am of the river of the fathers; I am of the womb of the mothers.



When I looked at the plate with all the text, I did not like it at all. I bought another sheet of plex and made a version of the image but without the text. Soon enough, I took it to 3EP to print, working with Ikuru, the master printer there. We printed the first one and Ikuru said that M. —one of the Three Equal Partners (and the one whose husband had given the very large press)— “would not like this.” (The image was of myself as a statue, a headless herm with broken wings, a sunburst in my belly tangled with a heart just above, and with an erect phallus wound with a ribbon.) Pretty soon P. —the one of the Three Equal Partners who managed the press— appeared to look at the first print we had pulled. She went away and came back a few minutes later to say that they could not publish the print—but she would love to have one for her personal collection. By that time I think we had pulled four prints. I gave P. one of them and we stopped production.



November 9, 1981. *The day after making this painting, I wrote:*

Q: What is the relationship between this work and the general public?

A: The same as the relationship between the branches of a tree, the leaves fallen on the earth and the clouds in the sky and the general public.

Q.: What is the story, the moral, the lesson of this work?

A.: The same as seeing the branches of a tree, the leaves fallen on the earth, the clouds in the sky.

Q.: If there is no story, no moral, no lesson to this work, for what should the public look?

A.: The public should look at this work as it does the branches, the leaves, the clouds.

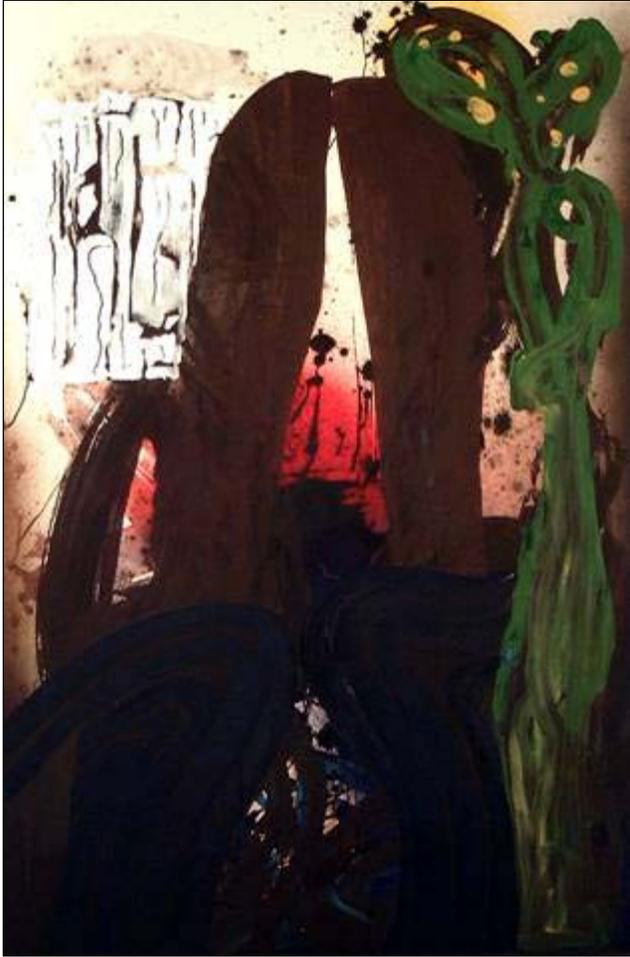
Q.: What is the “istoria” of this work?

A: The “istoria” of this work is the “istoria” of looking at branches, leaves, clouds. That is, the act of intercourse with the other.

Q.: Is there an “archetype” in this work?

A.: The archetype of this work is the archetype of a November morning.

I have studied the tea leaves, I have cast the yarrow stalks, I have spread the Tarot, I have consulted the ephemeris, I have scattered the paint... there is nothing to read into this work because the morning of November 10, 1981, from 8:30-9:15, is.



December 14, 1981. The Road to Grandmother Springs... no, not the road, it's the spring itself.

Simply take the Sign from the moment in Time.

“Let us gather by the River, the beautiful, the beautiful River.”

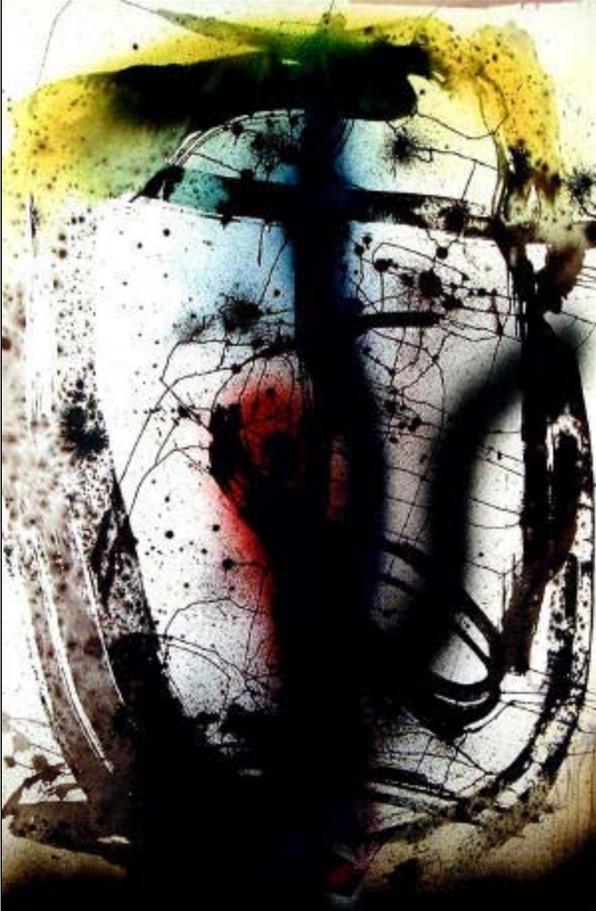


December 29, 1981. I just can't think about these things the way New Yorkers can, and I give thanks to Hilton Kramer for having made that so clear. And if, Hilton, you tell me that my thought is any less authentic than yours because my thought is different, I will have to beg to differ. And if you say my thought is less good, of less value than yours, then I will have to say that you are wrong.

You have made a virtue out of being with your pack, and you have made a mastery out of leading it.

You have made a highest good out of leading your pack, and you have made it a virtue for us to join. I am too far way to join, and too different to lead. We'll just have to go the different directions we always have, except that you've now shown me mine, I need not feel ashamed.

On the 29 December I also tried some small paintings again (like I had in July) to reconfirm (maybe) that I had not been making a great mistake for the past twelve months. [Click here to see the small paintings.](#)



January 2, 1982. The small paintings only lasted for a day. I quickly returned to the by then habitual 60 x 40 inch size. I notice, however, that after the first of January the Studio Notes grow brief or in many cases are not at all. I guess it's beginning here that the paintings may actually speak for themselves.

As is by now so abundantly clear, the large watercolors are not "aesthetic" no matter what their outward appearance. Most of them are sexual and those that were not in their inception became so in their conclusion. In this respect, the first painting in January--this one of January 2--was begun and concluded as a self portrait. As I said in the Studio Notes:

"A portrait from crotch to crown"
And that's all the notes there were.



January 4, 1982. But the Studio notes indicate that the second painting of January was driven by the weather...

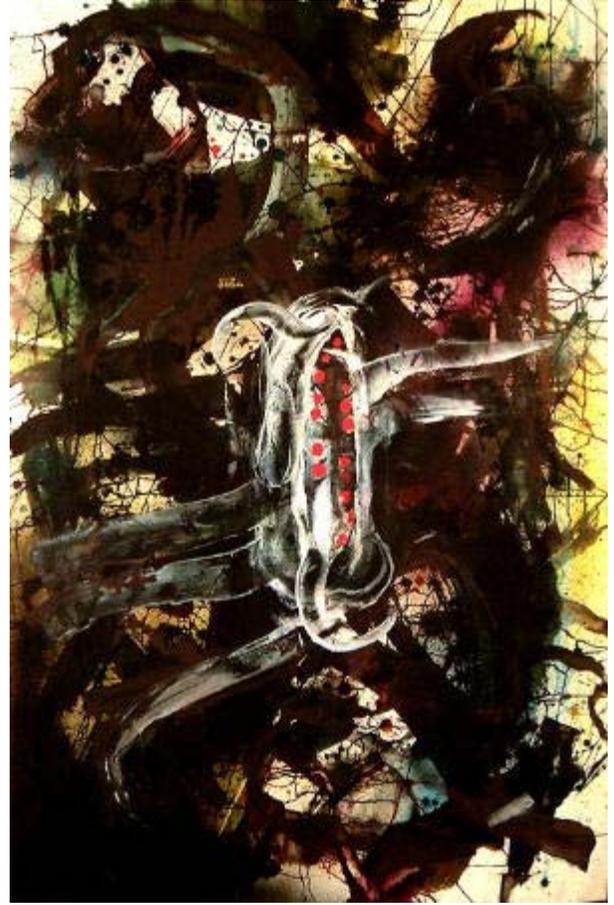
The Stairway to the Stars that turned into a Rain Picture. The set of the world—the oncoming weather, the time of day, what not, are much stronger in these paintings than I had thought. If I leave them in the first stages, they often show it. It's the later stages that turn personal.

The note was driven by the observation that I had begun the painting on a clear and quiet day, but the next days had turned violent and stormy beyond anyone's expectations

And after this painting, well, "what you see is what you get..."



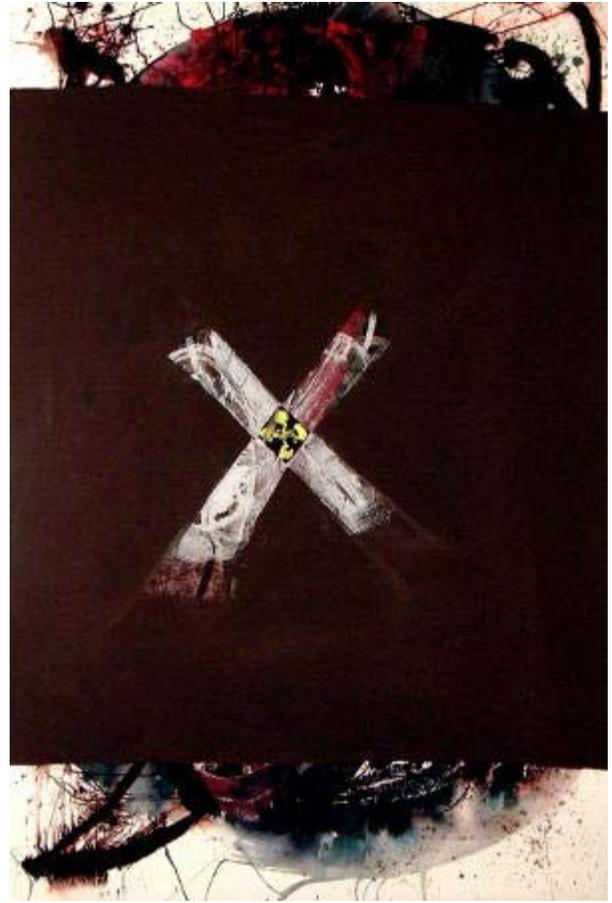
January 13, 1982



January 16, 1982



February 9, 1982



April 10, 1982



March 30a, 1982



March 30b, 1982



May 3, 1982



June 30, 1982
The last of the large watercolors until 1984

To recap:

Source and goal... The source of this work was my desire for fame.

See the first entry about that source in the Studio Notes:

“March 2, 1981. “Start on the large watercolors. “... Why am I trying to make these big paintings? Because I want to make things like my buddies, and the world expects it. Is that a good enough reason? Well, it all depends on how the paintings come out...

"How the paintings came out was that I had a show, sold one painting, did not get a review and did not look at the paintings again for twenty years. I did not get famous.

The goal was not attained.

But there was so soon another source—an “origin” that drove all others until the abrupt end of the series at the end of June 1982. That source was the origin that came out when I made the painting about :“Source and Goal” twenty years later, that source being “It was my body was all I ever drew.” And as the studio notes reveal in case it does it not hit the viewer in the face anyway, the goal of drawing my body was achieved. No, no fame; but yes, my body in all its passion and grandeur—and not only mine but the body of Everyman, his source in sexuality and its goal in procreation—out of the past, through the present and into the future. As in—

“August 23, 1981. “Either, I am not Priapus, no matter how much I like sex, because invariably when I go down inside myself to be him, I find something else, like this river (of generation, of life); or, Priapus is not in truth like he has come down to us, the rutting stud... twisted out of the sweet flowing stream of grain and sperm into that Victorian devil person, creation of the frustrations and repressions of the Christian era. “I suppose those negatives were necessary at the end of the Roman Empire to eradicate the habit of insatiable lust that seemed to be the cultural norm...but in the process, they seemed to destroy all the sweetness of life in the flesh: this whole river of sweet, pure water.

“River, spring, waterfall and moon... “moon river” with setting sun.

And, from October 1981: And I will die, my body will be dispersed to the four quarters of the globe. It will never return. With Caesar, I will be a bit of clay to stop a hole to keep the wind away. And I will be also in the blood, the memory and the sperm of generations yet unborn. I am of the river of the fathers; I am of the womb of the mothers.

*

Medium, method, and outcome... The medium was transparent watercolor, ink and gouache, and I used those media because their response was immediate—they spoke to me and I to them in a conversation more like a dance than a method of painting. The outcome of medium and method was these large watercolors which did not make me famous but which did objectify in the physical world the life energy pounding in my body and mind.

*

Subject, form and content... The apparent but only momentary subject of most of this work was mere splashes on the paper; but the subject which usually and quickly appeared was various symbols of the sexual organs. The form was abstract expressionist—the form which had arisen naturally early in my work (1947) before I had any contact with any established form of the style, and before the style itself had been invented in the critical discourse of the avant garde New York art world. The content of the work was the roaring power of the sexuality coursing through my body, the life force streaming in me and in the world.

*

The series of works ended with the end of June 1982. During the spring of 1982 I had the show which did not make me famous, and by May I felt I was beginning to repeat myself. I made a series of squares about the “Cultural History of the Earth” for a graduate seminar—and then my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. The thought of making things to make me famous disappeared in a day. I made no paintings for several months, and when I began again the work was not so much the passion of life in its dance, but the war of life against death in the public silence but very intense private prayer of the heart.