

Life at a Half Bubble Off Plumb: Rethinking Truth, Beauty, and Jumbo Shrimp

Gregory J. Huebner

The 29th LaFollette Lecture
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The Charles D. LaFollette Lecture Series

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EXCERPT

At this point, those first thoughts of form, gesture, line, and color become engulfed in other responses and layers of other relationships, so now I am responding completely to what is happening on the surface rather than to any pre-planned composition. Painting for me, as well as for many abstract painters, is much more an intuitive reaction to what I have just done and its consequences within the composition, than following some pre-planned composition. My canvas is a stage upon which my actors—color, line, texture, shape, space, and gesture—act without a script, constantly improvising with each other until the second act, when the director, who would be me, directs them into relationships that begin to reveal clarity and focus for the common good.

The LaFollette Lecture Series was established by the Wabash College Board of Trustees to honor Charles D. LaFollette, their longtime colleague on the Board. The lecture is given each year by a Wabash College Faculty member who is charged to address the relation of his or her special discipline to the humanities broadly conceived.

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The Charles D. LaFollette Lecture Series

Life at a Half Bubble Off Plumb: Rethinking Truth, Beauty, and Jumbo Shrimp

Gregory J. Huebner
Department of Art

Any work of art is the sum of an artist's life experiences, ability, and craft up to the point of the work's creation. Therefore, whenever a student asks me how long it took me to complete a particular painting, I always respond, "My entire life!"

Mr. LaFollette, Mrs. LaFollette, I want to thank you and your family for your long and generous support of this college and this lecture series. It is my sincere hope that my presentation here this afternoon does not encourage you to discontinue your long and generous support of this college. President White, Dean Phillips, esteemed colleagues, trustees, alumni, staff, family, friends, and, most of all, students, I want to thank all of you for the honor of your presence here this afternoon. This presentation requires an introduction, so please bear with me.

It was May 10, 2007, I was sitting in my office doing a little "Lehman Brothers Bookkeeping," trying to work a departmental Mercedes into the art budget, when I received an email from my long-time friend and colleague, and LaFollette Distinguished Professor in the Humanities, Bill Placher. It read, "Greg, I hope you will think about the possibility of giving the LaFollette lecture in the fall of 2008." I stopped reading right there. My first thought was, "Everyone else said no." My second thought was, "Has Bill taken leave from his senses? I don't do scholarly papers. I'm an artist. My paintings are my means of expression. Artists are blue-color scholars. We get dirty!" Then I read on and, as expected, Bill was way out in front of me for his very next line read, "I do understand that your most natural method of communicating is through painting, but I'd be fascinated to hear you talk about how what you do, and what you help our students do, fits in to what other people around here do. I would be glad to talk with you about this in any way that would help you make a decision."

This certainly seemed like a fair request and a great honor, but I had serious reservations about me presenting the LaFollette lecture. Of the previous 28 LaFollette lectures, I have attended all but three. From the second LaFollette lecture, "Margins of Knowledge," presented by the late, great, Dr. Robert Petty, scientist, humanist, poet, to last year's wonderful LaFollette lecture, "On Self-delusion and Unimaginable Beauty: A Mathematician's Reveries from the Margins," where Professor J. D. Phillips made it perfectly clear to all in attendance why Greg Huebner is an artist. I have admired many first-rate presentations by my colleagues over the years. To help explain why I still had serious doubts about me presenting the 29th LaFollette lecture, I must digress for a moment. While I do, I ask that you keep this quote in mind and, hopefully, all of this will make sense by the conclusion of this presentation.

In 1982, Mary and I lived in an old two-story house on West Main Street. This house had an enclosed porch with an air-conditioner. I always thought it was strange that the porch was enclosed and that it was the only room in the house that was air-conditioned. Because it was the only room in the house with air-conditioning, I kept a drawing table there and it was my custom to work on drawings there on summer evenings while listening to my beloved Chicago White Sox on the radio. During the summer of 1982, I was working on a design for a home Mary and I were going to build two years later, in the woods, about a mile north of town. Although it was a large house, I was designing it to be very energy efficient. The house included an 800 sq. ft. studio with a ceiling height of 17 feet. With this vast space, I was concerned that the energy I saved throughout the house would become lost in the studio if I didn't plan properly for the HVAC and power needs of the studio. I consulted with several people in the building trades, including my friend and electrician Gerry Coffenberry. I asked Gerry if he could stop by my place and review the power needs for my studio.

While Gerry and I resolved the studio's power issues, in the background the White Sox were doing something they seldom did in those years. They were beating the Yankees. I thought this was a perfect time to share with Gerry my theory on "Why God is a White Sox fan." Well, considering their record over the last century, God is not a great White Sox fan, but God certainly isn't a Cubs fan. And when you are a White Sox fan, that is all that really matters. Yahweh did come through for us in 2005, so I can now die a happy man. I now shared with Gerry my theory of "Why God is a White Sox fan." It is the perfect liberal arts presentation covering philosophy, history, economics, psychology, physics, classical architecture, and witchcraft. When I have finished, Gary looks at me and, using the metaphor of a carpenter's level, he says, "Huebs, you're about a half bubble off plumb, aren't you?"

It is the finest description of myself I have ever heard. I want it on my tombstone. "Gregory Huebner, artist, teacher, and about a half bubble off plumb." I even want the text off level, leaning down to the left slightly because, as we know, all truly good people lean left.

Knowing that anything I would do for the LaFollette lecture would be "about a half bubble off plumb" from what is usually presented, I thought I would meet with Professor Placher to make sure what I was planning would be acceptable for such an august audience as this. Well, some of you are august. I know most of you. So I met with Bill to discuss what I was considering for the LaFollette lecture. Bill was deep in thought while I described my intentions. When I finished, he lifted his hands and said "Perfect!" Just like that—"Perfect!" When you get a perfect from Bill Placher, you're in. I thanked Bill for his time and headed across campus to the Fine Arts Center.

As I walked down the hallway of the art wing, I began to see the image of Bill Placher as an orant figure on an early Christian sarcophagus.



The orant figure was an early Christian appropriation from Roman visual culture. Where the Romans would employ the figure to represent Roman citizens praising the conquests of a famous general or Emperor, or mourning the death of such luminaries, the early Christians assigned a different iconography to the orant figure. In early Christian visual culture, the orant figure, such as these on this 4th century catacomb fresco, represented the members of the church praying for salvation.



On an early Christian sarcophagus, an orant figure would represent Christians praying for the soul of the departed to enter the kingdom of heaven. Well, suddenly, I have this image of Bill Placher as an orant figure and instead of saying "Perfect," he's saying "Oh God, why did I ask Huebner to give the LaFollette lecture?"



If this isn't bad enough, on the sarcophagus appear the words "*Gregorius est Caro Mortua.*" I shall translate. "Greggie is dead meat!"

Now I am having a major crisis of confidence. I stumble to my office and collapse in my chair. I am about to reach for my phone and call Bill Placher to tell him I don't think I should present the LaFollette lecture when the image of the man who has helped me through so many crises of confidence since I was an adolescent suddenly appears in my mind. Who is this talisman of mine you ask? He is none other than Sherman Lollar! Only the most diehard baseball fan or a White Sox fan born by 1950 would know of Sherman Lollar. Anyone? Sherman Lollar was the catcher for the Chicago White Sox from 1952 to 1962. He played for the Sox when they were known as the Go Go White Sox. The Sox were known as this because during those years the Sox had tremendous speed, great pitching, and outstanding defense. A typical score for a Sox victory back then was 1 to 0, 2 to 1, if the Sox scored 3 runs in a game it was considered a slugfest. They were also known as the "hitless wonders."

The irony here is that Sherman Lollar was unquestionably the slowest man in major league baseball during his playing days. He was one of the Sox' few homerun hitters and he is considered one of the ten greatest catchers of all time in the history of baseball, so he always played. But when Sherm was on the base paths, the game suddenly became much more exciting than any Sox fan hoped for. One particular game will never be forgotten. It is the second game of the 1959 World Series between the White Sox and the Los Angeles Dodgers. It is at Comiskey Park in Chicago, and L.A. is up 4 to 2 in the eighth inning. The Sox start the inning with back-to-back singles by first baseman Ted Kluszewski and Sherm Lollar. The next batter, outfielder Al Smith, drives a deep double off the left field fence and Sherm takes off. Think of the movie *Chariots of Fire* with those beautiful images of the runners in slow motion. That's Sherm flat out. The lead runner, Kluszewski, scores easily, but Sherm Lollar, who broke with the pitch, was thrown out at the plate

with yards to spare. We lost that game 4 to 3 and the series in six games. I cursed Sherman Lollar that day. Of course, I was at St. Alexis Grade School so I cursed very quietly. But over the years when I would recall that game or the many other times I saw Sherm tagged out, I began to admire Sherm Lollar for the tremendous self-confidence he must have had. He never quit trying to get that extra base even though he always was thrown out trying to get that extra base.

So, here I am in my office, in crisis, and I begin my mantra—Sherman Lollar, Sherman Lollar, Sherman Lollar, Sherman Lollar—and suddenly “*Gregorius est Caro Mortua*” and Bill Placher as an orant figure begin to fade away. I take a deep breath, I put down the phone, and my confidence is restored.

Later that evening over dinner, Mary asks me if I decided to present the LaFollette lecture. I told Mary I am going to give it a go. “Great,” she says. “Have you thought about what you are going to do?” I told her I intend to show the production of a painting from blank canvas to completion and discuss what I think about while I’m painting. Then I got “the look.” The look is the visual version of “hummm.” There are two basic types of “the look.” There is the scrunchie face look and the more subtle bite-lower-lip-and-raise-eyebrow look. The latter is most often employed in the Huebner home. Seeing “the look” I respond, “What?” Then Mary says in her sweet voice, “Well, Honey, I know how you think. Are you certain you wish to share that with the Wabash community?” Say mantra—Sherman Lollar, Sherman Lollar, Sherman Lollar. Mary is a very wise woman and I value her counsel. It gave me pause. I had to reconsider my audience.

Most of my colleagues tolerate me and they are gracious enough to sit through almost anything as long as it doesn’t cut into the cocktail hour. I get along well with my students and they will be thrilled with the fact that I’m up here sweating rather than them for a change. I have always had a good relationship with the trustees and I have been here so long that I have known several of them since their student days. The friends, alumni, and staff in attendance are all dear to me, and besides, I have so many stories about them that they wouldn’t dare walk out on my presentation. President White—he has been here a little over two years, but he needs to be on the road a lot. He’s not on to me yet. Dean Phillips—I have worked with Gary on a number of programs during his two years here. He is definitely on to me. Dean Phillips could be the Achilles heel of this presentation. Oh heck, what can he do, take away my ENORMOUS merit raise?

After we cleared the table, Mary moves into the other room and says, “I’m sure you will do just fine, honey.” Just fine? Just fine? “I got a “perfect” from Bill Placher!” (arms raised)

So here I am, presenting the 29th LaFollette lecture. But, with the permission of the LaFollette family and this wonderful audience, I would feel much more comfortable if, for the next 50 minutes, you could suspend the thought of it being the 29th LaFollette lecture and instead think of it as the first LaFollette performance art.



My present studio is about seven blocks from my home in Suite D360 of the Stutz Business Center at 10th and Capitol Streets, downtown Indianapolis. Built in 1912 for the production of the Stutz automobile, it is a perfect building for artists' studios.



Here is Mary in my studio doing her best Vanna White. I asked Mary if she would stand before the canvas so you can get some sense of the scale of the work. This canvas is 5 feet by 7 feet, and at that size it provides certain hurdles for me to keep the entire composition in focus, [Image 8] especially when you are constantly going up and down a ladder while painting.



One of my heroes, the great New York School abstract painter Robert Motherwell, once said, “The real game is between myself and that virgin canvas to end up with a canvas that is no less beautiful than the empty canvas was to begin with.” After all these years of painting, it can still be somewhat daunting—after spending days milling the wood and building the stretcher, stretching the canvas and preparing the surface with several coats of primer—to place that first load of pigment on that beautiful white surface. If I was a conceptual artist, I could just title it “White Horse in Snow Storm” and I would be finished.

As the abstract expressionist painter Willem de Kooning once said, “What you do when you paint is, you take a brush full of paint, you get paint on the picture, and you have faith.” This white surface, and hundreds more before it, is my arena where my life’s thoughts and feelings are made visible. The painting you are about to see materialize over the next 50 minutes was begun on June 9 and completed on July 20, 2008. Over those 42 days, only three days passed when I did not work on the painting.

When I begin a painting, I have a vague notion of a basic sense of movement, rhythm, gesture, and color. For this particular painting, all I knew was that I wanted it to be very balanced so the final result would read more like a color-field than a painting consisting of several larger color and form areas contrasting with each other. I also wanted the field to be made up of hundreds of small gestures and color areas.



I begin by blocking in the colors I have chosen for the painting.



Sometimes the original colors I have chosen remain through the execution of the painting and sometimes they change drastically as the painting progresses.



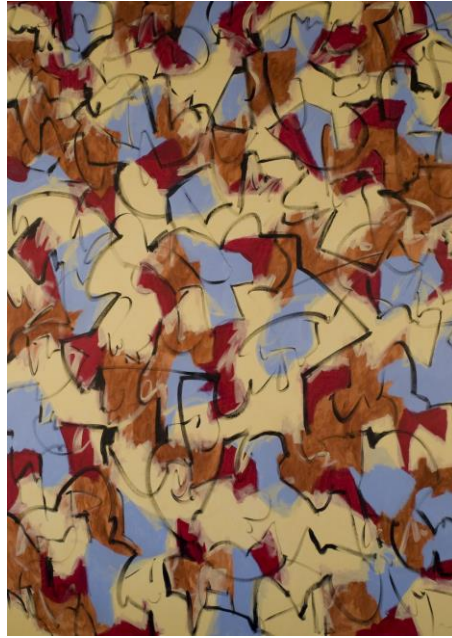
At this stage, I am trying to get the base colors distributed somewhat evenly throughout the canvas.



I begin to introduce line to the composition; in some areas, I might follow the individual color's border, but most often I am trying to contrast the line movement with the color shapes. What I am paying particular attention to at this stage is to develop as great a variety of line, shape, movement, and density as possible. I have a general idea of the direction and perhaps the density of the line I would like, but the line is affected by the speed of the stroke, the amount of paint the brush carries, the distance the paint is carried, and the amount of pressure I apply.



I try to vary these attributes as much as possible to achieve the greatest variety of line possible.



I strengthen some of the lines with more paint and add some small black gesture areas throughout the painting to provide brief rests for the eye as the eye is led rapidly through the linear movement.



I introduce white to add a second linear movement, while at the same time further splitting the color areas and adding a more subtle way to break up some of the heavy black lines.



Here I begin to use white to over-paint areas and create new forms that contrast with the existing color forms.



It also allows me to cover color areas that are too large in scale, as well as alter surrounding forms.

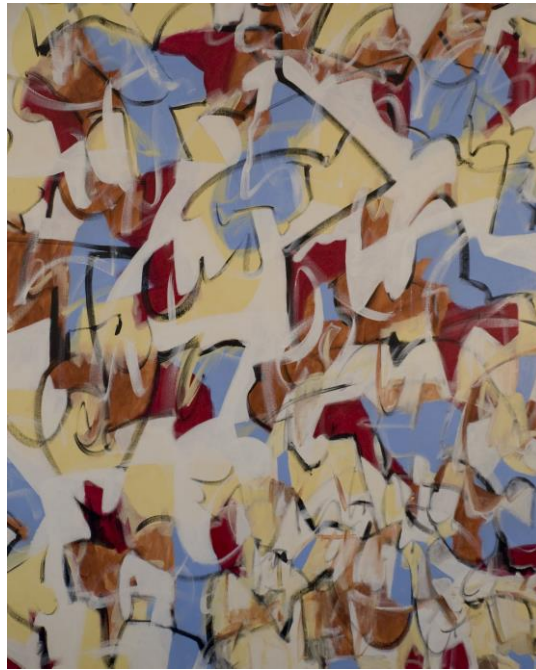


If an area has too many organic shapes, I introduce geometric forms to provide greater variety. If there are too many geometric forms in one area, it allows me to adjust it to a better balance of organic and geometric forms.



At this point, those first thoughts of form, gesture, line, and color become engulfed in other

responses and layers of other relationships, so now I am responding completely to what is happening on the surface rather than to any pre-planned composition. Painting for me, as well as for many abstract painters, is much more an intuitive reaction to what I have just done and its consequences within the composition, than following some pre-planned composition. My canvas is a stage upon which my actors—color, line, texture, shape, space, and gesture—act without a script, constantly improvising with each other until the second act, when the director, who would be me, directs them into relationships that begin to reveal clarity and focus for the common good.



I now begin a part of the process that demands more focus. It is at this stage that I go into small areas and rework the basic under-painting by constantly improvising with color, shape, line, and value modulation. I focus on a two-foot-square area at a time, but even though I am working on a small scale, I must constantly step back from the canvas to consider that small area in the context of the entire composition. I have at times worked on a small area for an entire day only to totally rework it after I painted an adjacent area the following day.



From this point on, painting is a constant evaluation of what I just did and assessing it in terms of its surroundings on the micro and macro level. As adjacent areas develop, previous painted areas may remain or require complete reworking until the elements of the composition begin to create unity and balance.



As several small areas begin to become larger units of the composition, I continue to review the entire painting, looking for areas needing to be highlighted or diffused. I realize at this stage I need to add a bit more snap in some places and, therefore, I begin to add yellow oxide throughout the recently painted areas.



I also notice that some of the early burnt sienna areas need to be replaced with red and that there are other places where I must add red to intensify the contrast of the most complete areas of the painting.

I paint a great deal by correction and editing. Abstraction comes from the Latin word *abstractus*—to take away from, to remove, or sever. An organizing principal of mine and many other abstract painters is to subtract and rework the surface until we arrive at the essence of what interests us.



No matter how spontaneous one may try to be, all good paintings are eventually composed by the artist. You cannot avoid it.



By this stage of my career and having made more than 500 paintings since I first began to take my painting seriously at age 19, I have made literally thousands of compositional decisions.



You may try to allow the sub-conscious to reign supreme in the creation of a painting, but it will always be tempered and eventually given form through composed relationships that are the result of all the artist's experience and the mastery of their concept and craft.



I now need to break up the forms at the upper half of the painting to bring their scale closer to the forms at the lower half of the painting. I do this by introducing a very gestural, linear, over drawing in black.

I'm getting hungry! Man, what I wouldn't give right now for an order of linguini and clams from Maria Pia's on West 51st Street in Manhattan. The concierge at the Novotel in Times Square sure steered Mary and me right that night we returned from Ireland.

Concierge! I love to say the word "concierge!" I don't think there is a more fun word to say in any language than "concierge!" The dictionary defines concierge as "hotel staff member who handles luggage and mail, makes reservations, and arranges tours for the guests." This is just too lame a definition for such a wonderful sounding word. It should read "exhilaration, joy, eureka, orgasmic!" I promise you, if every morning after waking you look in the mirror and shout "CONCIERGE!" it will put a smile on your face and you would have a wonderful day. If I could leave a legacy here at Wabash College, it would be for the graduating seniors at Commencement to toss their mortarboards in the air yelling "CONCIERGE!" as President White rings out the class. I can imagine twenty years from now no one will know why the students yell "CONCIERGE!" while they toss their mortarboards in the air, but it will be another honored Wabash tradition.

Sitting here enjoying my lunch and staring at the painting up to this point, I can't help but wonder, "Why would anyone want to be an artist, especially a painter?" The necessary materials and tools of your trade are expensive, and require large capital investment without any guarantee of earning an income in return for the effort and capital expended. In a mass-media culture such as ours where a greater value is placed on sports than the arts, you set yourself up for ridicule—or worse, you are totally ignored. If you are an abstract painter like myself, you can expect a lifetime

of comments such as, “My three-year-old child can do that!” And that is just from my brother Frank.

When one of my students tells me he wishes to major in art, this proclamation is usually followed by the comment, “Do you have any suggestions how I should break the news to my parents?” The student’s expression when asking this question is that of someone who has learned they are terminally ill and are searching for the appropriate means to tell the family the sad news. I’m pretty certain my colleagues in departments outside the fine arts have seldom encountered this request to smooth the parental response to the student’s choice of major. Several of our art majors double major in response to the parents’ request to “have something to fall back on.”

The truth of the matter is, the artist has absolutely no choice in the matter. You create and make art. It is who you are and what you must do. And it begins at a very young age.

Growing up, I was constantly making things and looking for new materials to create things. I didn’t look at these constructions and assemblages as art, but rather as things I had fun making. At age four or five, if I had access to an empty shoebox, oatmeal box, paper, some watercolors and crayons, string, paperclips, glue, or wire, I was good for the day. My favorite store-bought toys were the type that required assembly, such as model cars and planes, erector sets, tinker toys, Lincoln logs, etc., but none of these were as valuable as a discarded appliance, broken tools, or motors. If a broken appliance or other machinery came into my possession and I could do whatever I wanted with this jewel, it would not be long before I would be in the garage of our home taking it apart. My interest in disassembling it was not to discern how it was made or how it worked, but rather to spread out all the parts and then discover what new object I could make from the assorted pieces. These objects often took on the shapes of animals, figures, birds, and futuristic vehicles. Small wonder I enjoy my colleague Doug Calisch’s art so much.

It was a habit of mine as a youngster to cruise our neighborhood of about 25 homes on my bike the night before trash collection day looking for treasures. I would never look in people’s garbage cans, for this would have sent my very proper mother into coronary arrest. Instead, I would check out items that may have been placed next to the trashcans. Every so often, I might find a discarded sculpted arm or leg from a once elegant chair, a toaster, vacuum cleaner, lamp, parts of a chandelier, cooking utensils, broken power tools, or plumbing parts and fixtures. I did learn at an early age that not all plumbing cast-offs are treasures. These items would make their way back to our garage where, on an old bench from my father’s first dental office, I would conduct my surgery. Everything interesting was kept in old cigar boxes donated by my grandfather, jars of various sizes, and my Davey Crocket lunch box from first grade, which I still have to this day.

We had several very old tools in the garage that I believe my father received from his father, grandfather, and uncles. All were hand tools. My father was an excellent dentist, but when it came to the use of household tools or machinery of any sort, he was totally out of his element. Because of this, there was not one power tool in our house.

My father had a great aversion to household maintenance of any sort. "Yard work," he would say, "is an excellent reason to have children." Such tasks fell to my older brother Frank and me. My brother, who is five years my senior, discovered he could make much more money maintaining our neighbors' yards than working for Dad, and did so. Therefore, the task of maintaining our lawn and hedges, gutters, trim painting, and basic house repair fell to me by age nine.

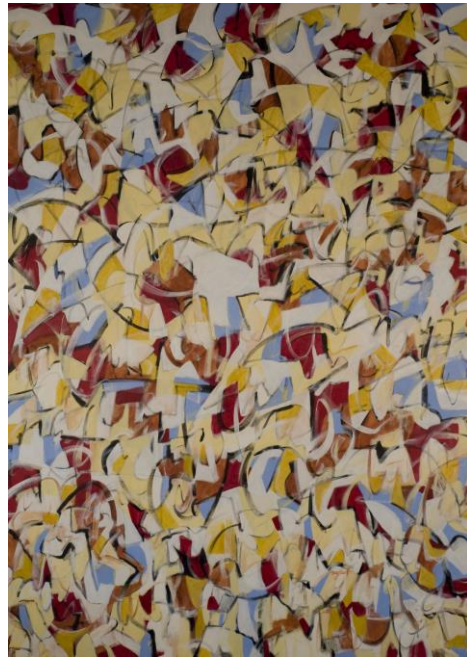
I must say I never enjoyed mowing the yard. We had an acre-and-a-half lot and Dad purchased the least expensive push-power mower he could find. It did not have any propulsion assistance whatsoever. You pushed, it cut, that's it. It took about six hours to mow our lawn with this mower because it only had one 18-inch blade. Every year, I would beg Dad to purchase a small riding mower and every year he would respond with "Do I take that out of your high school tuition or your college tuition?" The great irony of this mower issue is that I was the one who maintained the stupid mower. I would change the oil, clean the air filter, gap the plug, adjust the carburetor, and drain the fuel for winter storage. If I just chose to skip these duties for a year, I might be on my way to a riding mower. But I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I don't think it was due to some noble sense of responsibility on my part. Rather, I believe my sense of duty was forged by the enormous sense of guilt the good sisters of Saint Alexis Grade School heaped on us daily.

When I left for college my father finally purchased a riding mower. I came home for Thanksgiving break my freshman year and there, in the garage, was the most basic riding mower you could purchase. When I asked Dad why he finally broke down and got a riding mower, he said, "You don't expect your mother to cut this lawn pushing that old mower do you?"

My father was a very intelligent man who loved learning. Education was everything to him. He worked tirelessly to provide his four children the best education he could afford, for which I am forever grateful. But, when it came to actually working on domestic chores, he wasn't much help.

As much as I dreaded mowing our yard, I truly enjoyed repairing items around the house. It was also very empowering to be an eleven-year-old and have your father bring you a household appliance and ask, "You can fix this can't you?" I would work on these items for hours and sometimes I would actually fix them. When I could not figure it out, I would bring whatever needed repair to our wonderful neighbor, Mr. Hohaus. Dave Hohaus was a machinist early in his career, and by this stage of life Mr. Hohaus was a salesman who sold huge machines that made other huge machines. He always remained a machinist at heart and his garage was a wonderland for a boy like me. Every piece of machinery you could think of using on any household job was in his garage. By sixth grade, Dave Hohaus taught me how to use a lathe, drill press, band saw, planer, and every type of hand power tool you can think of. He was like a second father to me and we spent hundreds of hours in his garage working on his projects and my own.

Often, the items I was asked to fix were repaired with parts I took out of the appliances I found in people's trash. But when nothing more could be done for a broken item, it became part of my treasure of assorted junk. As time passed, I found myself more interested in drawing the objects I assembled than actually making them. From age twelve on my interest in art making was entirely drawing and painting.



Return to the painting. Blue, being a cool color, which will recede in a composition, was working too much like a background and I wanted it to be more integrated with the other colors on the surface.



So I began reducing the scale of all blue forms so that they might become more oriented to the surface. For this first coat, I just reduce the blue areas with white and I will decide the final colors as the composition progresses.

Abstract painting is such a personal journey. To quote painter Robert Motherwell once again, “The process of painting is constantly a self-criticism—is this the truth or not? Truth is beauty and beauty is truth. I have made many pictures that are failures, but very few that are lies.” He goes on to say, “If my paintings have any beauty, it is the implacability of insisting that each mark, each area, the rhythm, the somberness, the joy, whatever, is authentic.”

Art historian Jack Flan, in an essay on American painting, states that the issue of truth and authenticity is at the root of American painting. “Up to the 1940s, American painting was the subject of everyday life. The abstract expressionist painters sought deeper values and a grander and nobler sense of reality. Underlying the sense of truth is the notion of authenticity. That somehow or other the artist, instead of being a skilled craftsman, is someone who is inspired. He or she is a kind of seer, and even though we don’t necessarily know the language of an abstract painting, when we see it we recognize it and we understand its authenticity.”

Mark Rothko, another artist hero of mine, has said, “It is a dream come true to paint what one sees and feels, one’s own sense of truth. To paint truth as one feels it is the goal of the artist.”

Abstract painting is about love, birth, death, and all the great ecstatic experiences of being human. It is like those first wild marks we make as a child, which announce to the world, “I am here!” You don’t have to paint a figure to express human feelings. When I paint, I am organizing moments of feelings and these moments of feelings become issues of color, light, shape, airiness, weight, lyricism, violence, etc.

Returning now to the painting. After all the color forms are broken up into smaller painted gesture forms, I begin to look for areas where I need to add thicker black directional lines. These help structure the composition, while at the same time they direct the eye throughout the painting.



Oops! Focus, Greg. Focus.



I had always loved to draw as a child, and art was the only subject in which I ever received an A during my eight interminable years of grade school. In 1959, I asked my fifth-grade teacher, Sister Ramona, if my parents would allow me to bring our portable TV from home, would she let the class watch some of the White Sox and Dodgers in the World Series. In those days, the World Series was played during daylight hours. Sister Ramona thought about it for a while and said, “Mr. Huebner, I will let the class watch some of the World Series if you do the art for my bulletin boards for the remainder of the year.” The remainder of the year! It was only the beginning of October.

It was tough growing up in Chicago. Everybody had an agenda, even the nuns. But the thought of missing my White Sox in the first two games of the series was too much to bear, so I sold my soul to Sister Ramona. I actually enjoyed the task and I always received nice comments from my fellow students when we would change bulletin boards with the seasons or holy days.

The Catholic Church has a long history of patronage for the arts and Sister Ramona was my first patron. I was her Michelangelo and she was my Pope Julius II. And, just as Michelangelo and Julius had an occasional difference of opinion, Sister Ramona and I had our moments. I remember a particular occasion when my pleas for artistic license fell on deaf ears. It was getting close to Easter and Sister Ramona wanted an image appropriate for such an important season in the Catholic Church. I thought it would be great if I drew Christ driving a 1957 Chevy convertible up to heaven and waving to everyone. It looked great and I was so proud of the job I did on the '57 Chevy, but it was met with stern rejection from Sister Ramona. “Tradition, Mr. Huebner,

tradition. We can't have our Savior flying around the heavens in a Chevy." It was my first encounter with a negative critic, but like we were so often told by the good Sisters, "Our suffering here on earth was temporary." Sister Ramona kept the drawing "so no one will see such an image of Christ." As she said this to me, it looked like she was trying very hard not to smile. I always felt that if I could ever get into the convent next to our school, I would find my "Ascending Christ in Chevy" on the wall of Sister Ramona's room.

In June, 1963, at the State occasion of my eighth grade graduation, my eight-year sentence at St. Alexis Grade School came to an end. I never looked back. I attended St. Francis High School, which was in Wheaton, Illinois, 17 miles from our home. St. Francis was a Christian Brothers College Preparatory High School.

Any of you who are familiar with the Christian Brothers know that they were all business. From the moment you walked through the front door, it was perfectly clear that your only means of survival was to work hard and learn. Although I did not always appreciate them at the time, the Brothers were amazing men. The Christian Brothers could take the roughest, most disrespectful, disinterested thug Chicago could produce and in four years he would be a stand-up citizen on his way to college. They were outstanding, committed teachers and this school changed my life. It was here that I began to truly love learning.

The ironic thing about my high school in those days is that it did not have any art courses. The Brothers did not feel art was necessary to get into a good college. So once I received my driver's license the summer after my sophomore year, I began to take summer classes at the Art Institute of Chicago around my lawn and maintenance jobs. This was a wonderful experience. For the first time, I had actual artists teaching me and I was surrounded by other students my age who were seriously interested in art. It was during the summer of my sixteenth year that I began to think of the possibility of pursuing art as a profession. My consideration of a career in art was assisted by the fact that my class at the Art Institute that summer consisted of myself, an Italian guy from Melrose Park, and nine beautiful Jewish girls from Skokie.

When I returned to St. Francis for my junior year, I realized that if I was to pursue my interest in art, I needed to seek instruction elsewhere. I began taking classes Thursday evenings from 8-11 PM at the Village Academy of Art in Oak Park, Illinois. My eldest sister, Karen, took the classes with me for which I was grateful, because some evenings I was too tired to drive home. The teacher was an excellent realist artist but, unlike my Art Institute classes, this class consisted of me, my sister Karen, and six women in their late fifties. Concentrating on my art was not the problem it was the previous summer at the Art Institute. As I assessed the time, effort, and money I was spending on art, it became clear to me that I was to be an artist.

By the time I was selecting a college, I only had two requirements. It must be a liberal arts college and, unlike my high school, it must have an art department. I enjoyed my studies throughout the curriculum of my high school too much to attend the Art Institute of Chicago, where three-fourths of my classes would be in art. So I followed my brother to St. Benedict's College in Atchison, Kansas. It is interesting to note that at the very beginning of the women's movement, I am

attending a college in the town that was the birthplace of the renowned woman aviator, Amelia Earhart. St. Benedict's was a good fit for me. I had visited my brother there a few times and felt comfortable with the size of the college and its art department. St. Ben's was a men's college of 1,100 students when I arrived there in August, 1967. The Benedictine monks had the good sense in the 1880s to build a college for women in the same town, a wise practice not followed by all nineteenth-century men's colleges. My sister Christine attended the women's college, as did my wife Mary.

The monks were wonderful teachers and great friends. Due to the fact that they had no spouse or children, as far as we knew, they were always accessible. One of Mary's and my dear friends on the faculty, Professor of Music Fr. Blaine Schultz, officiated at our marriage. My closest and most valued member of the faculty was the chair of the art department, Professor Dennis McCarthy. Mac was my teacher, mentor, and life-long friend. He lost his long battle with cancer two years ago, but he is always with me when I am teaching. We spent many hours together outside of class, building studio facilities and equipment, and scrounging supplies for the art classes and sharing dinners at his home. My early years of scoping my neighbors' trash came in quite handy in my college career as Mac's student assistant. And later, it also served me very well with building an art department at Wabash College.



Back to the painting. I now begin to over-paint the entire composition, covering portions with just enough paint to allow some of the previous layers to vaguely come through, and in other sections, I totally repaint it to achieve a more atmospheric surface with less clearly defined forms.



I spend a great deal of time going back and forth, strengthening some of the black lines and then eliminating some and adding others.



These lines are the directional skeleton of the painting and they will continue to change and adjust until the composition is finished.



I am not getting enough separation from the light soft yellow I used and the white areas.



It is also evident that I need to introduce a bit more intensity to the pallet I have been using, so I over-paint the soft yellow areas with a bit more intense cadmium yellow medium.



Once I reviewed what I have done, it was obvious to me that the cadmium yellow was now too intense and raw. I knew I had to darken the base under-painting of the yellow area so that another yellow over it would not be so intense.



This is corrected with the use of a very thin glaze of burnt sienna over most of the cadmium yellow areas, leaving some small sections of these areas to show through as accents.



Once this is accomplished, I mix yellow oxide into the cadmium yellow to darken it and to remove the raw intensity from the color.



Now I repaint the burnt sienna areas with the new yellow.

Since my days as an undergraduate, I have always felt that a liberal arts education was the perfect environment for educating artists. As the famous Dadaist/Surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp stated,

“The idea or concept is the art, not the craft or technical proficiency of the artist.” There is no finer environment for the consideration of ideas from all areas of the curriculum than the liberal arts, and no area speaks with greater voice to the artist than the Humanities.

So often, I have seen paintings that are technically superb, but totally boring because they lack any conceptual engagement for the viewer. In these works, there is nothing to challenge any thought deeper than the surface of the paint. On the other hand, I have been most challenged by works that have required me to engage the idea the artist has set forth in the work before me. These works are oftentimes rough and simple in execution, but profound in intent. Art does not rise out of the physical material of art. Rather, art is the result of the artist’s body and mind responding to the ideas and feelings of what is most authentic in an artist’s life at a particular time and place. As I mentioned earlier, the blank canvas is my arena where my life’s thoughts and feelings are made visible. Notice I did not say, “The arena where I try to perfect the techniques of painting.” Art springs from a keen observation of the world around us, and the Humanities presents unlimited sources to help the artist understand what he or she is observing.

For example—reading J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* or Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* or Claude Brown’s *Manchild in the Promised Land* may provide a greater understanding of the colors of the human condition than spending many hours preparing color value and intensity scales. Reading Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Campbell, N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko will illustrate the vast and profound questions of our spirituality in greater visionary terms than will hours of drawing exercises. Likewise, reading Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* will provide far greater understanding of the complexity and magic of nature than hours spent on site with watercolor in hand.

My point here is that art comes from deep within our mind and soul, from the meeting place of the reasoned, the felt, and the observed, where knowledge becomes true understanding. A place where thought and feeling ferments, sometimes for years, turning concepts and our felt response to them into something that must be released and made visible.

All great art is concept-driven, and the goal of teaching art is to help students develop their concepts and to understand the expressive nature of their thoughts and feelings. Once this is accessible to the students, we can help them select the proper form for the expression of their ideas. Study in the Humanities enables our students to more clearly define their artistic intentions and to express those intentions with compassion, sympathy, and consideration—the cornerstones of what it means to live humanely. Picasso didn’t decide to paint *Guernica* because he had an overabundance of black, white, and gray paint. Rather, he wanted to express his hatred of fascism and the horrors of war waged on innocent civilians of his country. He then decided that the colorless somber monochrome of black, gray, and white was the best means through which to communicate his thoughts and feelings.

By the very nature of an art major in a liberal arts curriculum, we have no choice but to expect the student to be responsible for acquiring a good amount of the necessary foundation-level knowledge independently. And they usually rise to the occasion.

For example, a few years back, one of our finest, most creative art majors—who is a true artist—was taking advanced painting from me. This student could never remember the names of the pigments. I expect this skill to be completed by the middle of beginning painting, but here we are in advanced painting and he still could not identify all the pigments. Early into the semester, he is working on a painting and says to me, “I think it needs yellow.” Frustrated with this far too general statement, I look at him and say, “Yellow, which yellow? Yellow Light Hansa, Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow Medium, Naples Yellow, Yellow Medium Azo, Yellow Oxide, Indian Yellow, Bronze Yellow, Turner’s Yellow, Yellow Light Hue? Considering there are 11 discernible levels of value and intensity for each hue, you have 242 possible yellows to choose from. Which yellow do you think your painting needs?”

The lad had that deer-in-the-headlights look that some of our seniors have when they sit for their senior oral comprehensive exam. He looked at me, then back at his canvas, then back to me, then again at the canvas, and in a voice devoid of all confidence he says, “Orange?” As I fought not to laugh, I began again, “Cadmium Orange, Indo Orange Red, Yellow Orange Azo, Vivid Red Orange, Pyrrole Orange?”

About a week later this student comes to me and says, “I’m not sure if I should use a tint of Cadmium Red Deep Hue in this area of my painting or a tint of Naphthol Crimson.” As I smiled from ear to ear, I told him, “If you have limited your options down to those two colors, I am certain you will make the correct choice.” He made the correct choice and we were both very pleased with the effort he put into his color studies since our conversation the previous week. Wabash students don’t always do it right, but they almost always make it right.

Teaching moments like the one I just described continue to jolt me back to my years as an undergraduate when I, too, was searching for my artistic voice while attempting to develop the skills necessary to make that voice visible.

I will admit that due to the limited number of courses our curriculum allows in the major, our art majors leave Wabash with less technical ability than art students attending a University or art institute BFA program. But I do feel they are stronger conceptually due to their required contact with the many disciplines throughout the liberal arts curriculum. I feel most of our senior art major exhibitions substantiate this claim.

St. Alexis Grade School, St. Francis High School, St. Benedict’s College—are you beginning to see a pattern here? My parents are very devout Catholics and, as such, it was their wish to raise their children in the church. By fall of my sophomore year, I decided that Mother Church and I were going to go our separate ways. I announced this decision to my parents over Thanksgiving break 1968. My father surprised me with his admirable response. “I’m disappointed,” he said, “but I did not provide you a good education for me to do your thinking for you. You must make your own decisions in such matters.” My mother looked at me and said, “I will pray each day that you return to the church, dear.” My mother tells me each time I see her that she gets on her knees each night and prays that I will return to the church. Mother celebrated her 90th birthday last Friday. I tell

her she can thank me for her longevity because of the self-imposed exercise program my absence from the Church has provided her.

For many like myself who lived through 1968, or should I say, survived 1968, it will forever be one of the most memorable years of our lives. The Vietnam War raged on with no end in sight, and the Tet offensive on January 30th of that year increased the need for additional troops. Governor George Wallace of Alabama, entered the Presidential race, and along with him came a platform for racism in America. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4 and Senator Robert Kennedy was shot June 5th and died June 6th, three days after my 19th birthday. Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were not just my heroes; as far as I was concerned, they were the only two leaders left in our country at the time. For the first time in my life, I was feeling hopeless. To make matters worse, about a week after Bobby Kennedy's assassination, I contracted bacterial endocarditis and wound up in the hospital flat on my back for five weeks. Bacterial endocarditis is an infection of the heart's valves and chambers and it can be fatal. When you are 19, you don't think much about death until a serious illness such as this gets your attention. To place as little strain on the heart as possible, it was required that I move as little as possible. For my first four weeks in the hospital, I was never allowed to leave the bed.

For an active 19-year-old, this was excruciating. Other than being weak, I did not feel terribly ill and I wasn't in too much pain, so after a week I decided one evening to use the bathroom in my room rather than wait for the cursed bedpan. I got no farther than a few steps when the nurse entered my room and, with an expression I had previously only seen on my parents when I was caught in some transgression, she says, "You get back in that bed this instant and stay there or I will have the orderly tie you to your bed. Do you have any idea how critical your illness is?" Obviously I didn't, but the next day the internist who put me in the hospital, Dr. McKay, came to my room to check my progress. Without mentioning that he had spoken with the nurse about my break for freedom the previous evening, he says, without taking his eyes off the chart, "Greg, you have two choices while you are with us. You can do everything we tell you to do and, hopefully, in a month or so, you can call you folks to come and take you home. Or you can do whatever you want to do and in a month or so we can call the morgue to come get you." I thought to myself, Dr. McKay must have learned his bedside manner from Sister Ramona. He then looks at me with the same expression I received from the nurse the previous evening and says, "Do I make myself clear?" "Perfectly," I replied as he left the room.

This was one of the most sobering conversations I had ever had up to that point in my life. Suddenly, the thought of being an artist, graduating from college, going to graduate school, getting married, were not the expectations I carried with me since high school. I was already depressed from the disasters that struck our nation just prior to entering the hospital, and now I have Dr. Sunshine laying me low with his prognosis. The next few weeks were difficult.

Events such as these can refocus one, as they did me. As I lie on my back, hoping the antibiotics take hold and prevent the destruction of my heart's valves and chambers, I began to consider the preciousness of time. I was just 19 and I pledged to myself that I would squeeze every possible

moment out of whatever time I am allowed. Six years later, I was appointed to the Wabash faculty and Wabash College has been squeezing every possible moment out of me ever since.

Now back to the painting.



I feel there is too much yellow in the composition, so I begin to paint over several of the yellow areas with white to break up the yellow forms and try to unite them to a greater degree with the white forms.



I over-paint these yellow areas with a gestural application, which allows me to have some yellow break through the top white coat, and also to introduce some white strokes to balance the many black strokes throughout the composition.



I now have begun to paint over the more intense cadmium yellow with the whitened yellow oxide to cut down the heat that I added a few days earlier, which brings the painting back into balance.

Wabash College—what a fascinating little college. My students are hardworking and fun to be with, and I would be hard-pressed to find a finer, more committed faculty. It is an environment that sustains one's passion to teach. As I look around at this wonderful facility and think of where the fine arts were when I first arrived on campus in the summer of 1974, it gives me chills. All present students and about 75% of present faculty only know the Fine Arts at Wabash College as it is today. But there are a few faculty remaining, and some alumni and staff in this audience, who remember a very different presence of the fine arts at this college. The day I interviewed for the position of Assistant Professor of Art and Chair of the Art Department on June 3, 1974, it was my 25th birthday. Dean Victor Powell told me, "Greg, we will be handing you a lemon and expect you to make lemonade." As I toured the facilities in then Yandes Hall, today's remodeled Detchon Center, I could not even call the facilities basic. "Prehistoric" is the only word that accurately described the Wabash Art Department. It is interesting to note that one of the goals of this LaFollette Lecture is for a member of the Wabash faculty to address the relationship of his or her academic discipline to "the humanities broadly conceived." As you can tell by this presentation thus far, I am a big fan of "broadly conceived." Strangely enough, my first few years here it was made clear to me that some of my colleagues did not understand the value of studio art, nor did they feel it had any place in a liberal arts curriculum.

I remember one particular event during my second year when I was trying to get a ceramics class approved by the Academic Policy Committee. A week before I was to bring my petition to the APC, I had a conversation with a very important senior member of the faculty who was also a division chair. During our conversation he said to me, "I can appreciate the role of art history at a liberal arts college, but I believe studio art to be vocational, and vocational programs have no place in a liberal arts college." Sitting there, a 26-year-old junior faculty who had just had his entire education and profession called into question, I had to take a moment to catch my breath. When I found my voice, I responded, "Well, without artists, art historians don't have much to do." As I left that exchange, I thought it would be a good time for me to update my resume.

Thank God, those days are gone forever. I want to take this moment to thank those colleagues, division chairs, deans, presidents, trustees, alumni, and friends of the college who have supported not only the art department, but all of the fine arts faculty over the years. Your support has not only allowed this wonderful facility to be possible, but has also made the fine arts an important part of the lives of our Wabash students.

About a year ago, I was reading about the late 19th-century linguist Karl Abel, who argued that in ancient languages, opposite meanings could in fact be ascribed to the same words, such as old-young, far-near, bind-separate, outside-inside. If you don't think Wabash College is a college of ancient traditions, just consider our nickname, the "Little Giants." We could have just as easily been named the Jumbo Shrimp! I can hear the announcer now, "Coach Raeburn and the crustaceans take the field." "Coach Petty and the Prawns are on the court." "Jumbo Shrimp Always Fight!" By now, you probably understand Mary's reservations concerning me sharing what I think about while I paint.

To view my work of the past 40 years, it is hard to believe that at one time I was a strict realist painter. Returning to college in the fall of 1968 after what I experienced since April that year, I felt I had much more to say in my painting than I had the previous year. Now, my brother Frank was in his final months of training before leaving for Vietnam, and the closer I got to graduation, the closer I was to going to Nam myself. I had protested the war since senior year in high school and it was just a matter of time until it entered my paintings.

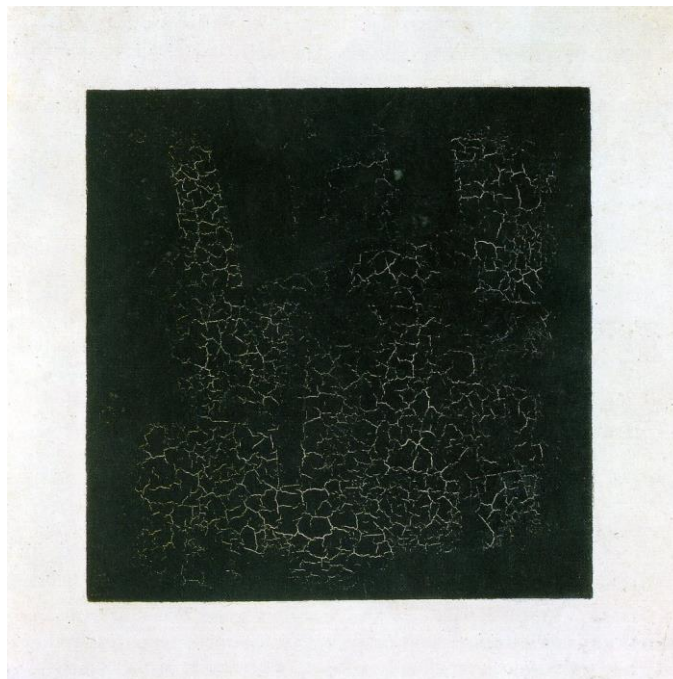


Because of the events of the time, my painting style turned to social realism.



This was painted that September, six months after Dr. King's assassination. During those months, I felt his dream was crumbling.

In January of 1969, I took my first modern art history class, and the day the class was introduced to Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist painting "Black Square," 1914-1915, my paintings were forever changed.



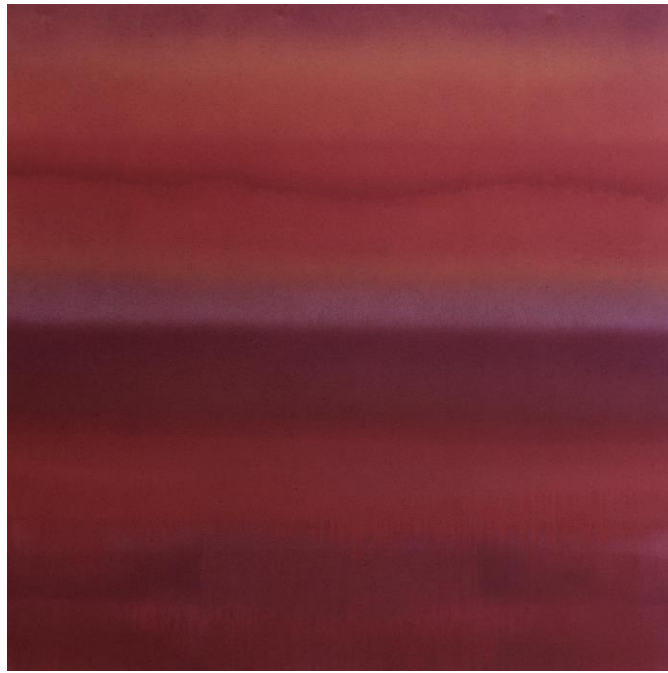
The painting is a black square on a white ground. Malevich repainted the piece six years later with a paint that would not adhere properly to the first layer, which is the reason for the disintegrating surface we see today. This work is probably the very first absolutely abstract painting ever produced. At this stage of my art education, this was the first painting I had encountered that seemed to reference nothing but itself. We can use our imagination in such a work because it is totally absent of any reference to the natural world. We can think of it as a void, a vast empty space, or we can think of it as a black into which all is gathered. It is not a painting of an object or objects, but rather, it is an object. It demands an active response from the viewer's imagination rather than the passive response of recognizing an object.

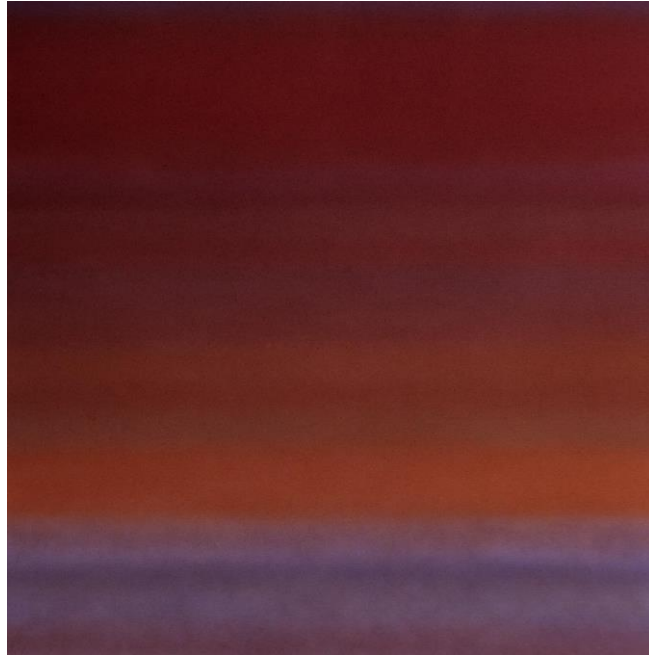
Author Mel Gooding, in his book *Abstract Art*, acknowledges Malevich's contribution in the following passage. "In an astonishing moment of intuition, Malevich had seen in that image the energetic origin for a wholly new way of painting. He had realized its mythic potential as a painted sign for a new beginning, the signifying progenitor of any number of created forms whose dynamic relations would take place in the imagined space of the painting rather than the imaginary space of the picture." Gooding goes on to say: "Denying the pictorial illusion of three dimensions, he at once banished from his paintings the recessive space and modeled forms of post-Renaissance representation, the naturalistic light and color of Impressionism, and the Cubists' fleeting glimpses of the objective world. It was what could not be seen that mattered: the energy within things, that higher order of connectivity between phenomena, invisible but ever-present in the perceptible world, the abstract spiritual energy that animates the universe, independent of the objects through which it moves."

Gooding also notes that another great influence on Malevich was the Russian mystic-mathematician P. D. Ouspensky. Gooding states that Ouspensky wrote of a fourth dimension beyond the three dimensions to which our ordinary senses have access. In his book *Tertium Organum*, published in 1912, Ouspensky states: "There is no aspect of life that does not reveal to us an infinity of the new and the unexpected if we approach it with the knowledge that it is not exhausted by its visible aspect, that behind the visible there lies a whole world of the invisible, a world of comprehensible forces and relations beyond our present comprehension." You have all just witnessed history being made. This was the first time in my life I have ever quoted a mathematician.

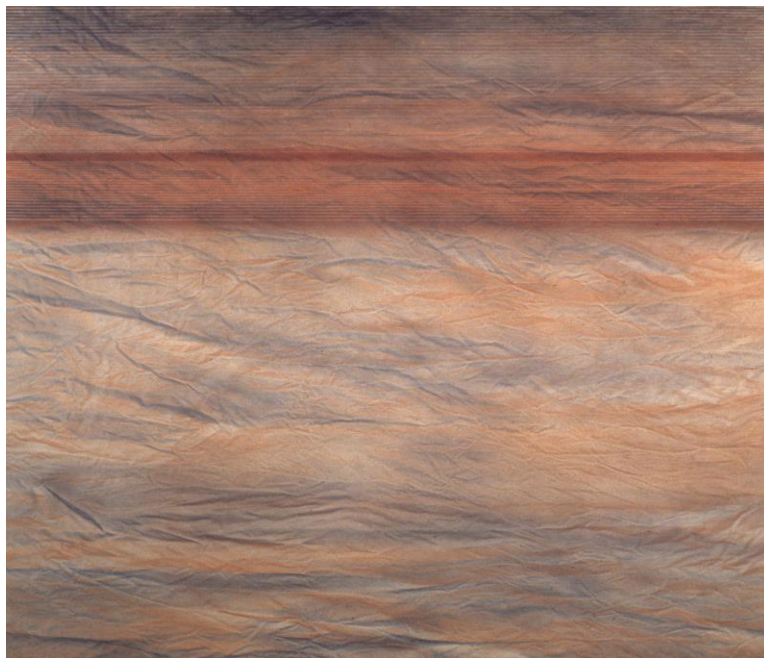
Although this work was created in 1914 and my first exposure to Kazimir Malevich was in 1969, it was a revelation to me at age 20. From my first contact with the work of Malevich and his theories on painting, I moved steadily towards non-objective abstraction. It was through non-objective abstraction that I was able to find my own voice. It is through non-objective abstraction that I am able to make visible the concepts and issues that are most authentic in my life. Objects are objects, one can paint them as they are; however, I was, and still am, much more interested in issues concerning the dynamic relationships between objects, and to visualize this in my paintings, I required a non-objective, abstract visual language. To re-quote Mel Gooding, "It was what could not be seen that mattered," it was "the abstract spiritual energy that animates the universe, independent of the objects through which it moves."

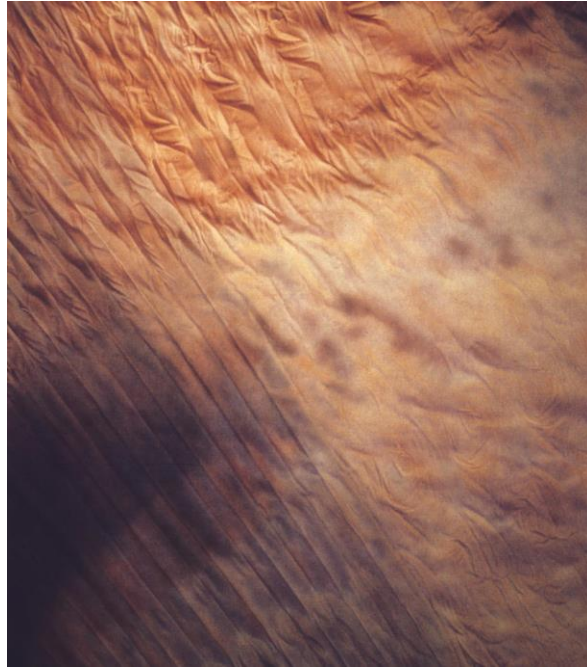
The work I produced for my Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition illustrates this point. I have always been captivated by nature, but other than for a few early undergraduate studies, I have not felt the need to draw or paint landscapes or seascapes. What connects me to nature is its cycles, its power, and all the forces that provide birth, growth, and death. To visualize the mysteries of one's place in nature and our deeper spiritual responses to such forces is what I am concerned with, beginning with my Terra Series from 1972–1973. [Images below]





This same theme continued with my Amplexo series from 1974-1980. [Images below]





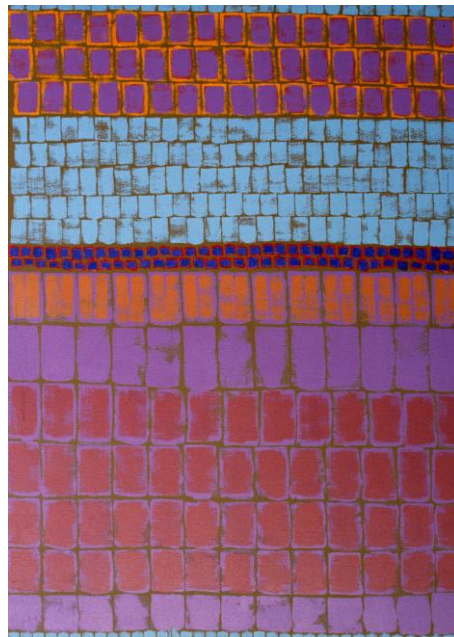
By the time of my first sabbatical in 1981, I had been spraying and air brushing paint on canvas for eight years and I wanted to get back to the brush and the wonderful joy of pushing paint on the surface with a brush. I have always loved the plasticity of paint and I have missed its various tactile qualities while making large sprayed canvases for almost a decade.

This first sabbatical allowed not only uninterrupted time to paint; more importantly, it allowed more time to reflect on what I was to paint. Within this new space of peace and quiet, I began to reflect on my upbringing and the role the Catholic Church played in my youth. I was not

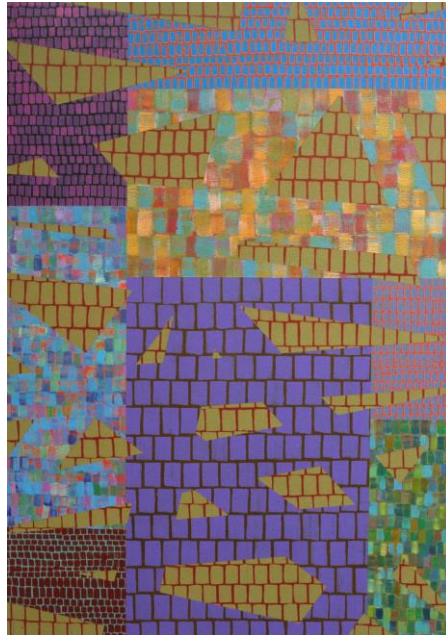
concerned with the dogma of the church, but rather all the church's rituals and sacred environments I experienced during my participation in the church. Environments designed by western civilization to allow the faithful to engage their spiritual self always fascinated me. My reflection on such environments led me to a new series of paintings dealing with the rituals that, in the words of mythologist Joseph Campbell, allow us to "pitch us out of ourselves to connect with a higher consciousness."



The decorative elements of these environments are what influenced my abstractions.



The memory of glass and marble mosaics, stained glass, and decorative textiles all contributed to the Litany series of 1980–82.



From 1982 to 1988, I experimented with several themes and approaches to painting, including an exploration of neo-expressionist figurative works dedicated to the victims of this world.



The series was a brief one, but the expressive brushwork I developed for these paintings was an important development for series to come.



By 1988, I had been conducting extensive research into Native American art and spirituality for a freshman tutorial, which I was later to develop into an art history course.



While researching the patterns on Native American pottery, I began to notice the beautiful abstract compositions that could be found when isolating small sections of these patterns on the pots.



The small isolated sections became the basis for compositions on top of which I would then improvise with gesture and color.



As my studies took me further into Native American visual culture and spirituality, it naturally became a tremendous influence on my painting. There are numerous different social structures and specific geographic religious beliefs defining the many Native Peoples of North America. However, almost all of the traditional native people I have studied, from the Inuit in Alaska and Canada to the Hopi in Arizona, display a basic need to harmonize what it is to be human in the natural world. Traditional native people believe all revelation comes to us in opposites such as

male/female, good/evil, pain/pleasure, joy/sorrow, light/darkness, life/death. We cannot disregard one extreme or the other, and to understand one, we must respect the other. Happiness is only understood if we have experienced sorrow, and life is only respected if we have known death. The goal of life then is to live in the middle and maintain a balance and harmony among the many opposing forces of revelation.

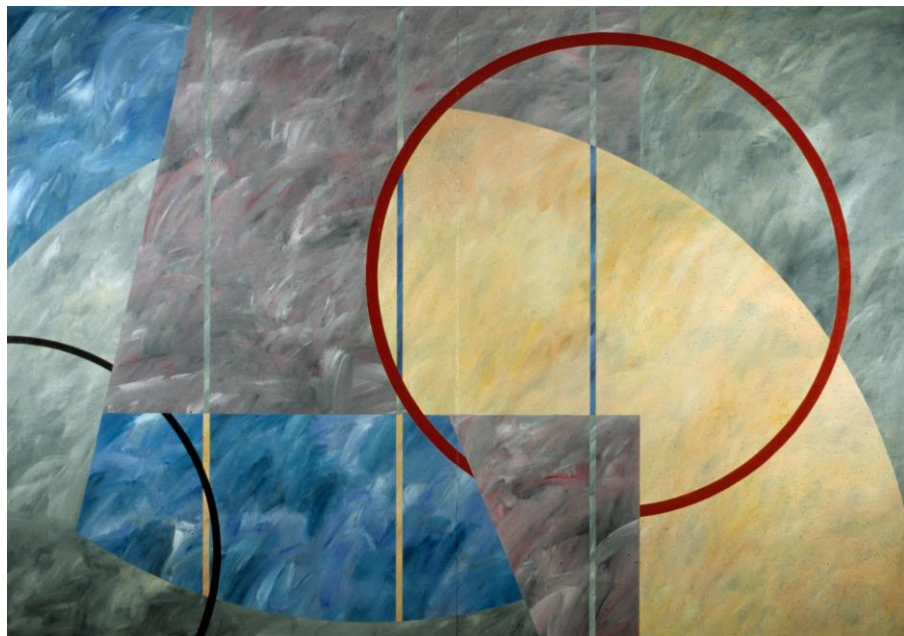


From 1990 to the present, I have viewed my own painting as a visualization of my spiritual self, seeking harmony and balance in a difficult world.



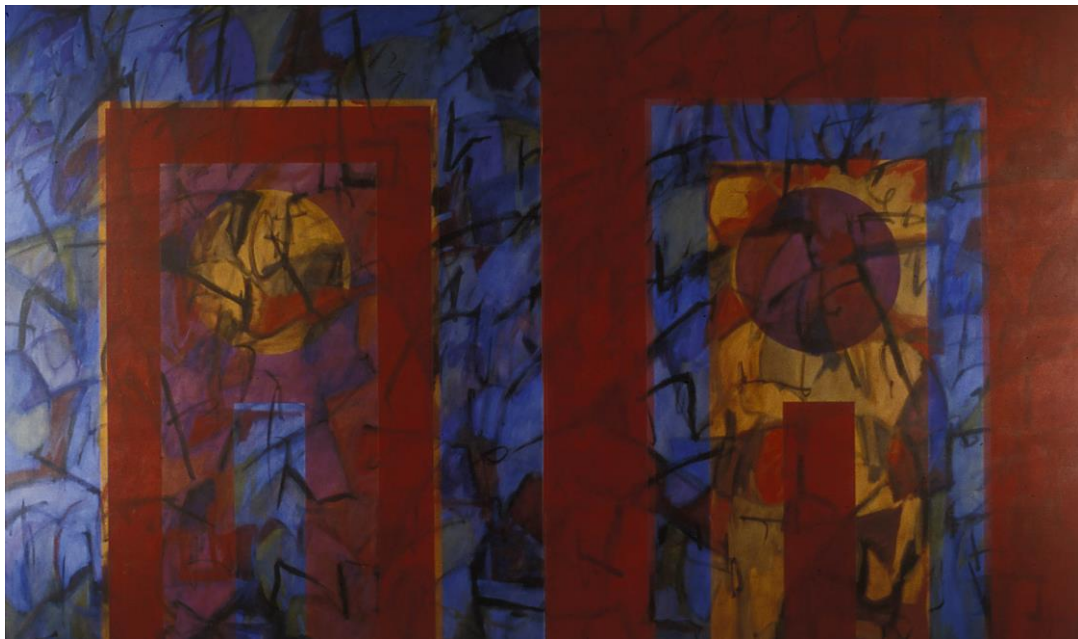


My paintings of the 1990s were compositions that, be they aggressive or contemplative, dealt with harmonizing very divergent structural opposites such as cool vs. warm and light vs. dark colors, right angle vs. curved, and geometric vs. organic forms and illusionistic gestural application versus the flat opaque plane.





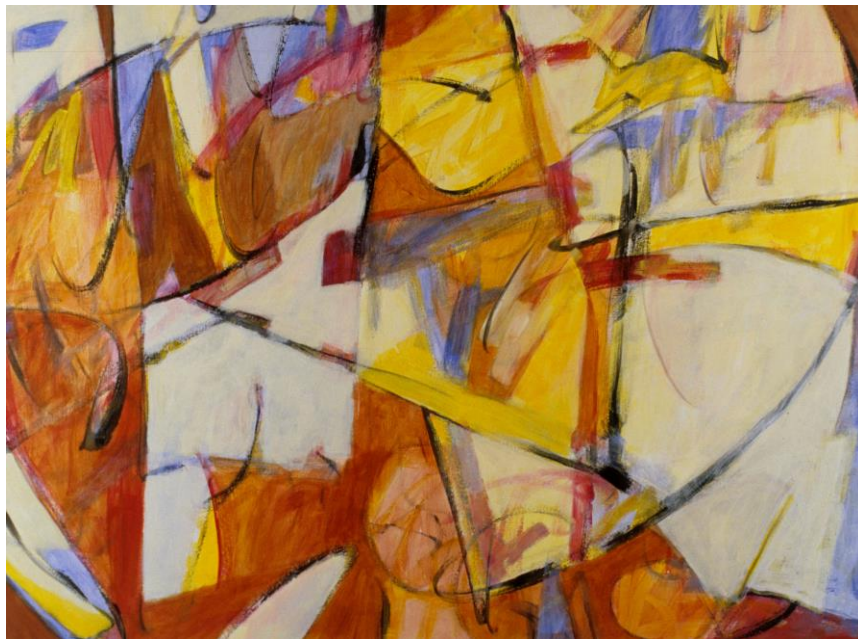
The opposing visual elements are symbolic representations of the contrasting forces we face in life.







Even during the 2000–2002 Bass Lines series when I was producing paintings based on jazz compositions, I found the search for harmony and balance in my visual response to the compositions of jazz greats to be an almost shamanistic experience.



It became a journey where one must travel to other worlds to understand the true meaning of their music.



By the time my sabbatical ended and I exhibited the results of my investigation here at Wabash in September 2002, I felt my soul was inhabited by Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, and John Coltrane. This provided for some fascinating internal conversations concerning art, music, and the meaning of life.



The search for a spiritual harmony and balance through the act of painting continues in my work to this day and I expect it forever will.



I may have left the Catholic Church at age 19, but my fascination with the spiritual aspect of being human and how the many peoples of this world maintain that spiritual self in their lives is still at the heart of my paintings.



Now back to the painting.



I have begun to add small patches of blue to open some of the areas that have become too dense with yellow and white. I vary the size, shape, and direction of the blue depending on how I want the viewer's eye to move through the composition.



In these final stages of the painting, I look for areas where I need to strengthen the blacks or add a new black line.

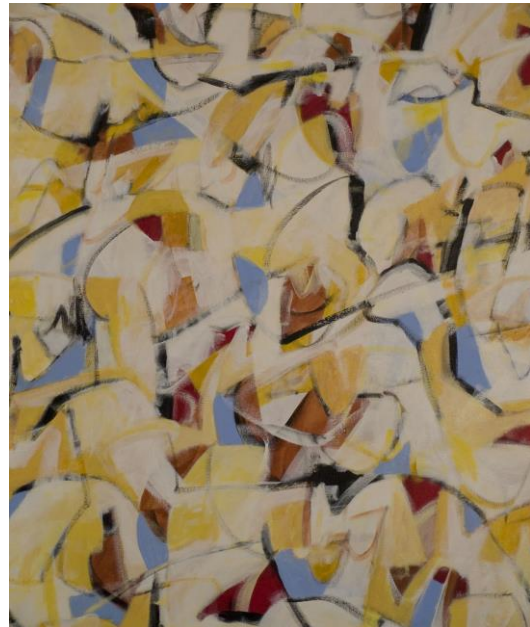


Then I touch up some whites and, lastly, strengthen the bright cadmium yellow medium where needed to add some intensity in areas that have become too subtle.





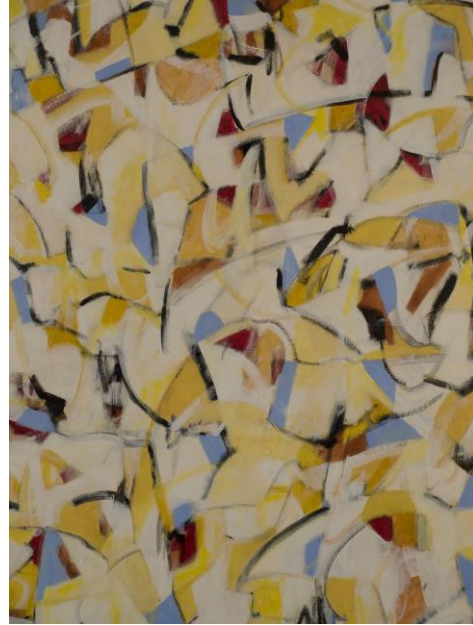
Over the next day or two, I will examine every inch of the painting section by section to make certain the composition is balanced, unified, and, most importantly, that it “makes visible the unseen” as I had hoped it would 42 days earlier.





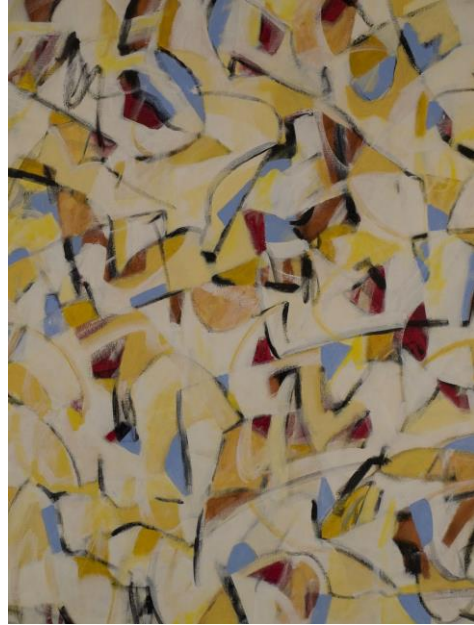
Last summer, I was watching a PBS special on one of my favorite R&B/Soul singers, the late Marvin Gaye.



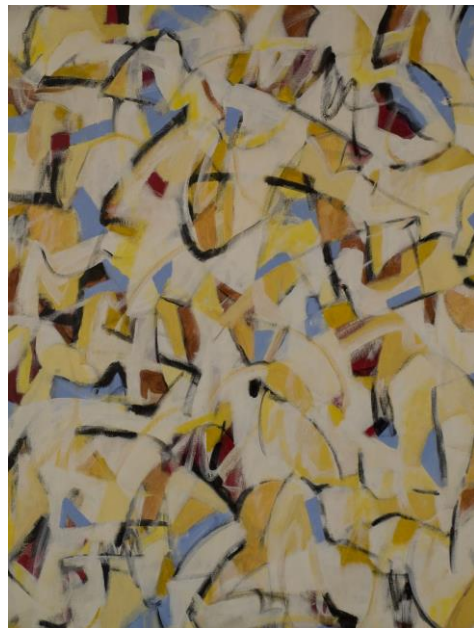


During the program, there was a taped interview from the 1970s where Marvin said, “My music is my story. I don’t know if it is an important story or a valuable story, but it is my story.”





The same can be said of my paintings.



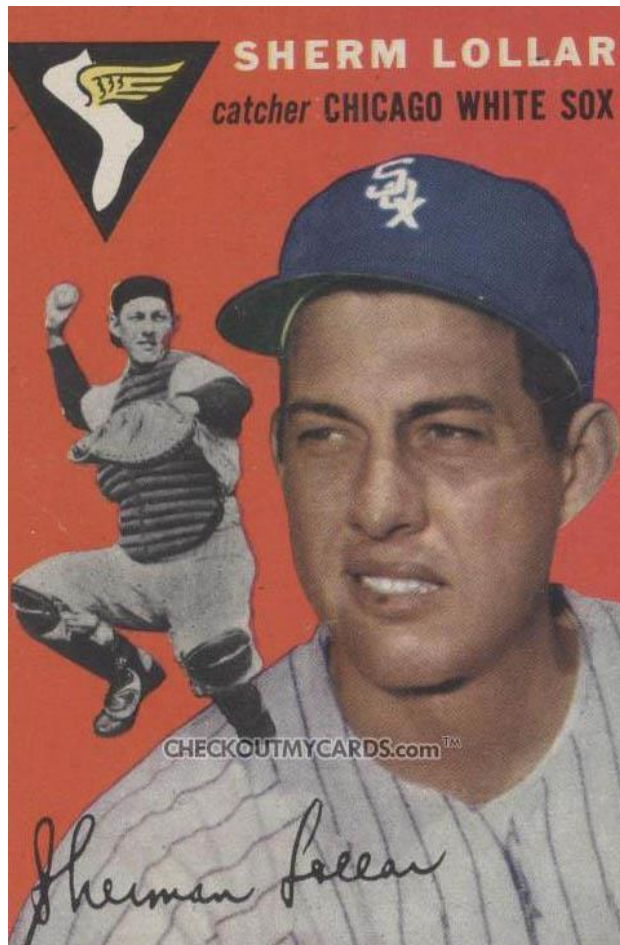
The Humanities helps us tell our stories.



It is truth and truth is beauty. It makes me want to shout “CONCIERGE!”

Thank you for your attention.

I exit in slow motion to “Chariots of Fire”



Dedicated to the memory of Sherman Lollar.
Hero to all whose self-confidence exceeds their ability.

Is God truly a White Sox fan?
Consider the following.
Hillary Rodham Clinton: Northsider, Cubs fan
Barack Obama: Southsider, Sox fan
Da Sox!