

Concerning My Painting
by Dane Rudhyar

My creative activity as a painter is intimately associated with life-situations and interpersonal relationships that developed in New Mexico and Colorado. The momentum that started during the summers of 1938 and 1939 in Santa Fe was kept alive in a very limited way during crucially difficult months passed in La Crescenta and Hollywood. For example, I made the cover design for the booklet, "Seeds of Plenitude," which Eya put together by selecting what to her were significant sequences and paragraphs from my just completed book, **The Age of Plenitude**, along with some inspirational articles that had been published in *Horoscope* magazine.(1)

My most mature paintings, however, were done after the breakup of my marriage to Eya Fechin Rudhyar Branham, in Colorado Springs, Colorado (1946) and at Nambe, New Mexico (from 1947 to the fall 1949). Some were done with water-color (which I used more like tempera, with hardly any water), others with oil paint. Later on, especially when my life-circumstances made oil painting more difficult, I produced mostly black-and-whites, using ink with a brush and/or pen.

If I had been able to pursue my musical activities and if performances of my compositions had been possible, I most likely would not have started to paint. But I soon recognized that behind this new creative activity was a twofold purpose of destiny, though at first I was not aware of it. The first purpose was that I had to experience artistic creativity in two basically different ways, each of which had definite psychological connotations and values in the plenary development of my consciousness through experiences polarized at two different levels of self-revelation: music, which operated for me at the level of **time**-sequence, that is, in terms of a **subjective** psychic dimension; and painting, an expression of forms and symbols **objectively** realized in **space**.(2) The second purpose of destiny led to a more inclusive realization of what this Rudhyar person and destiny presumably constituted.

In my individual case the, creative music-experience had a nearly exclusive time-quality because the process of composition is for me essentially actional rather than intellectual. I compose at the piano, largely through the action of my hands, much more than by visualizing a musical score containing notes organized according to traditional sequences of relationships and classical forms. For me music has always been essentially a complex **tone-experience** occurring irreversibly in what the philosopher, Bergson, meant by "duration" the flow of feelings and psychic states or emotional changes. A particular theme or musical development may be remembered, but my musical consciousness is based neither on memory nor on the analysis of repeated patterns of notes whose reappearance and modification according to traditional forms produce in the hearer's mind an essentially formalistic and structurally identifiable meaning. Moreover, at the time I started to paint, my music was almost never performed by anyone other than myself at the piano, and I had no phonograph records of it (there were no tape recorders then). For me to experience what was inside my music I had to play it myself, and this involved muscular activity and, often, fatigue. I had to exert myself and, as it were, flow with the music while I performed; then the experience ended, leaving only an impression. I never had an immediate and complete experience of the whole of a musical work I had created. The music did not really exist as a reality independent of the process of my playing it.

A true musical tone-experience is subjective. It is above all an experience of unceasing change. The change may be cyclic — the omega-end restating, hopefully with a more inclusive meaning, the alpha-beginning. Nevertheless, every moment flows into the next — unless the hearer is a trained musician who has been made to listen with his or her mind's eye, looking for patterns and thematic developments. A painting, on the other hand, is an objective entity which can be experienced — seized by the consciousness — as a whole, in one act of perception. When a work is done it remains there. The experience of viewing it is effortless, non-muscular (except for small eye-movements if the mind tries to compare, to appreciate one section, one form or one color in relation to others).

After I was able to paint works which I felt were relatively adequate exteriorizations of what, within and through me, had sought to manifest concretely in actual substance, I was

able to contemplate, quietly and at length, a definite entity — an object, a painting — which had emerged out of my psychic depths. This entity was confronting my consciousness with something that was of me — but a rather mysterious "me." It was both "I" and a stranger I had to learn to know and, deeper still, to understand. What did this silent stranger reveal as it faced my eyes and my conscious self — this ego that had learned to deal with earth-materials and everyday circumstances? What secret feeling was the painting meant to evoke, to communicate in the symbolic language of color and form? I could sit in front of it and look at it intently for a long time, hoping that a meaning, some truth or reality would be communicated that existed just beyond the threshold of my awareness.

I nearly always gave titles to my paintings (and also to my musical works) **after** I contemplated the finished work, or perhaps as, in the process of painting (or composing), a sudden intuition of what was being exteriorized rose in my mind. In some cases, particularly with the oil painting, **Power at the Crossroads**, when I contemplated what I had done and what now seemed to be a complete, independent entity, I have felt that underneath, behind or beyond what I could see and interpret, a deep mystery was still unapprehended and perhaps unformulatable.

Strictly representational painting (landscape, portraits and still-lives) reduces to two-dimensional space the physical reality of objects and persons our senses and mind interpret as three-dimensional, using the principle of perspective and the direction of light and shadows to produce the appearance of concreteness. But as Kandinsky, the great Russian painter of the early 20th century, well understood, this appearance is only an "illusion." Thus, he said, representative paintings are in fact "abstractions." This is why he spoke of his non-representative painting as "concrete art." Such an art does not try to mirror on a flat surface what we experience normally in depth; concrete art simply produces concrete objects — paintings — which do not pretend to exist in anything other than two-dimensional space. They are truly creations, not merely interpretations.

I soon became aware that the proper term to characterize my paintings was **transcrete** art, because they were not objects having meaning in themselves as much as forms translucent to the light of meaning. The word "transcrete" is made of the Latin roots **trans** (through) and **crescere** (to grow). Meaning grows out of the transcrete form as a plant grows out of a seed. The term, diaphanous, could also be used, because the forms in my paintings are (or at least purport to be) revelations of a transcendent quality or archetype of being.(3) Being is relatedness in perpetual cyclic motion. Love is relatedness in rhythmic action; bodies move in relationship to one another. Most of these relationships are engendered by unconscious and compelling instincts or collective sociocultural patterns. They are crossings of lines of events, the dancing of entities who as partners are but superficially linked for a moment. These temporarily related beings are usually not aware of either the patterns being produced or of the patterns' relevance to a karmic structure rooted in transcendent archetypal realities. But (at the human level) there are relationships that catalyze in at least one of the partners a process of form-evocation that can be translated into words, dramas, art-forms or tone-poems, if one or both of the partners is able to let their hands describe a diaphanous dance on the material substance which nature or a particular culture has made available. Out of this dance may arise forms, color (or character), interplays, chords and melodies which perpetuate for a while the karmic implications of the relationship, and perhaps, beyond its particularity, an archetypal structure revealing at least a small vista of human evolution.

In October 1947, when Raymond Jonson organized an exhibition of all my best paintings — 35 of them — at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque where he was teaching, the following statement was typed and posted in the room where my works were shown. It was printed nearly thirty years later in the programs for two 'Rudhyar Festivals,' at the University of California at Long Beach (1976) and at the University of Minnesota (1977), where lectures, recitals of my music and an orchestral performance in St. Paul

occurred while a number of my paintings were exhibited. I am reprinting the statement here to show how I saw my artistic endeavors:

Art as Evocation

My aim in the arts is essentially to bring to an objective focus, and to release through significant forms some aspects of the creative process of human evolution which are radically transforming our society and our civilization. We are everywhere in the midst of a metamorphosis of human consciousness, whose frontiers are gradually extended in an attempt to include men of all races and cultures. The frontiers of the arts must likewise be pushed into deeper as well as higher regions, so that forms (and tones or gestures) may be produced that will make concrete and visible the very core of this transforming and renewing activity of the human spirit.

If mankind can avoid wholesale destruction during the next decades, a global civilization will arise, not in uniformity but in harmonic diversity. The emergence of such a future civilization postulates a deep-seated renewal of the typically European or even Western way of seeing, perceiving, thinking, feeling, evaluating which, in the main, are no longer convincing or creative, in spite of all attempts at neoclassicism and neo-everything. A new sense of order is required; an order far more inclusive than the old medieval or classical traditions have known, because man's experience is today (potentially at least) also far more inclusive. New forms are needed to **incorporate** the challenges of a new social and psychological environment, and the answers of creative men to these challenges.

Art, seen from such a point of view, can no longer be merely the expression or flowering of a cultural tradition. It must instead, if true to its higher responsibility, release in concrete and significant forms **the power that creates a culture**. It must project the "prime symbols," seed-foundations for a new global society. It must **evoke** new vistas in understanding, a new sense of reality (physical psychological and spiritual), a new vision of man's essential purposes. By "significant forms," therefore, I do not mean form as the solution of merely esthetical problems of organization of lines, patterns, colors, spaces. Form as an end in itself, and art for art's sake, refers to the realm of **decorative** art. To me, great and vital art, instead, is always **evocative** art.

This distinction between evocative and decorative art depends primarily on what the creative artist, consciously or unconsciously, puts into his creation (i.e., their inherent human worth and meaning, but not any so-called "literary" contents); it is much less concerned with whether it uses natural forms or geometrical patterns as a foundation. In my works, I seek to release effectively emotional power and mental vision, far more than to give esthetical pleasure or a feeling of technical problems overcome. I seek to participate in the creation of a new civilization, by evoking through form, color and rhythm such ideas, feeling and vistas of inner reality as may contribute to a renewal of human values and human perceptions on the basis of a fuller realization of spirit, in me and in all men.

The problem one faces in dealing with such an approach to creativity deals with the part which the mind and the personal ego of the artist plays in the creative process: Does the process begin with the artist's emotional reactions or desire for success, etc., or has it its source at a deeper level transcending the personality? As creative activity deals with materials (brushes, paint, pencils, canvas, paper, etc.), the ego, having learned to deal with earth-materials and everyday circumstances — for this is its function — is needed to watch over and guide what is taking place between the hand and the materials. It also should have acquired certain consciously accepted principles of balance and cyclic structure which can, and in most cases should, be guiding elements which, for example, may suggest when the development can best be concluded or how a certain emphasis could be made stronger by a compensating factor. But the ego should not **cause** the creative act to happen. If it starts the process — for one reason or another of its own (and the ego has so many "reasons" and often rationalizations!) — it may find itself eventually pushed aside and "the real thing" beginning, entirely changing what it thought it had started. If the ego is not pushed aside, then this "real thing" does not happen. The art-work may still be "interesting," but it lacks the **power of evocation** which is, to me, the essential requisite of true art.

It does not seem important to me that people seeing my paintings should know what **I** felt, why and how **I** produced them. The essential thing is the viewers' response — what the paintings **do to them**, what arises in them as a result of their seeing the paintings, of their **relationship** with the painting. It is, I believe, a matter of relationship: "something" in the painting meets "something" in the spectator; what is important is the character and quality of this meeting.

At least thirty-five years after I painted my most significant paintings, a new generation has responded with the warmest feelings to my writings and (when it has been so far only rarely performed) to my music. These youths are also often greatly impressed by my paintings, yet at the same time they are puzzled by them. I am repeatedly asked what the paintings

mean, how the evident symbols in them are to be understood. The onlooker's mind today is often conversant with the precise, intellectually formulated and listed meanings given to specific symbols, either in Freudian or Jungian psychologies or in the clearly catalogued teachings of Asian, Kabbalistic or Sufi philosophies whose basic purpose is to lead the seeker for self-transformation (even more than for knowledge) on the path to higher states of existence.

When facing my paintings, a person's reaction is often that I must have used such geometrical or biologically suggestive symbols deliberately, knowing exactly why I used them. People frequently are shocked when I tell them that I did not have precise intentions and did not think of traditional meanings. Then they often want to speak of "the Unconscious" — my personal unconscious or the 'collective Unconscious' with its Jungian archetypes — guiding my hand in a psychological sense. If the onlookers are painters interested in occult symbolism or metaphysics, the interpretations they give in most instances seem strange to me. The interpreters seem not to see what in several of my paintings or drawings is rather clearly an archetypal structure based on the interplay of forces within the human body. This has been the case when the paintings, **Creative Man**, **Meditation on Power**, or one of my first drawings (with subdued colors), **Avatar**, have been written about.(4)

In my large pencil drawing, **The Alchemist**, centers and currents of energy are clearly evoked by curving lines and geometrical forms. But persons familiar with the places and symbolical shapes of the **chakras** in the Tantric occultism of India and Tibet have been puzzled by what I have drawn, because the lines and forms are not in their traditional places in what is clearly a person in profile sitting with a raised knee and holding an alchemical lamp. They are even more puzzled if I tell them that they should forget the traditional system of knowledge and simply try **to experience** the drawing and allow it to speak to them and communicate a "mystery" which perhaps transcends or has meaning besides the traditional knowledge.

Nearly twenty years ago while in Paris, I attended meetings and lectures at a well-publicized **Congrès du symbolisme** in the elegant and ultramodern UNESCO Building. At the close of the sessions I vividly realized that the lecturers always spoke of symbols **in the past**, referring almost exclusively to ancient cultural epochs and traditions. A very intelligent woman I had met who was enthusiastic about all that had taken place asked about my reaction to the Congress. I expressed my deep interest in the proceedings, but added that I felt the talks had been almost entirely, about the past. She looked at me with a puzzled expression and said, "But the past is all we know. We do not know the future!" To which I replied, "Of course we do not **know** the future, but we are **creating** it!" The lady gave me a strange look; she could not grasp the meaning of what I had said, and our conversation ended very soon.

In all my writings I have spoken of processes leading to a new beginning. A seed is evidently the end of the process whereby a plant grows and matures. But it is an end pregnant with a new beginning. It is the **omega** of a cycle already in travail of rebirth. The end of the cycle is synchronous with the formation of a new set of potentialities, even if this formation takes place in a realm of being transcending the level at which the disintegration of the plant takes place. This transcendent realm is the "world of formation" about which all esoteric traditions speak — the realm of Archetypes. The contents of this realm can be experienced only under the revealing masks of symbols.

Every culture is based on a set of great symbols and myths which give form, meaning and purpose to the collectivity of human beings inspired as well as integrated by the culture. A time always comes, however, when these ancient symbols lose their vitality and become empty of meaning. A new type of symbol is then needed to give direction and structural consistency to the as yet subconscious urge for collective rebirth of the most sensitive people. All my life, since 1911, I have been aware of this deep need for new forms and new

symbols. In my 1938 book, **New Mansions for New Men**, I tried to evoke the power of such a need through poetic rhythms and imagery.(5) In the last chapter of **The Planetarization of Consciousness** (1969) I have dealt the same need more logically and discursively. New symbols are for me Annunciations of futurity, the artist the ever-virgin 'Mary' in expectation of a Christ yet to emerge out of her creative, image-making womb — the artist's transcendental mind.

It is true, I believe, that there are symbols and Principles of formation that are universal and at least relatively constant in terms of the human species; and that these are operative within the mind-depths of creative individuals — what I have called the **generic** unconscious to differentiate it from Jung's **collective** Unconscious which only refers to **a particular culture**. These structural principles sound, as it were, the fundamental tone of **homo sapiens**, and even of our habitat, the earth's biosphere. But each great period of history draws from these fundamentals a new series of overtones which define the tone-quality (or timbre) of new communities, mixtures of racial traits and eventually cultures. The really creative artist is a Promethean, not an Epimethean being. The future creates through him or her what the evolution of humanity demands. Through the creative artist's works he or she dies into a pan-human future transcending the particularity of his or her creations. In periods of great transformation and impending death-rebirth all truly creative acts are dawns.

At the beginning of these remarks concerning my paintings I spoke of this new creative activity in my life as having a twofold purpose of destiny. The second aspect of this purpose was, I believe, to make more definite in a new way the realization that this Rudhyar person and destiny presumably constituted, if not a conclusive, at least a synthesizing phase of what could be called, for lack of better terms, a series of human embodiments related to a common spiritual source — a 'spiritual Quality' of being, as I define such a term in my books, **The Planetarization of Consciousness** and **The Rhythm of Wholeness**. Such an idea began to form in my mind in 1920-21 during the months following a particularly revealing experience with my friend Aryel Darma.

I had felt, and in an unformulatable way **sensed**, that the obviously innate, certainly not genetically inherited capacity I spontaneously had developed for music and piano playing was only one aspect of a fundamental creative power to which several ancient sources logically should be attributed. My ability to write, instinctively, as it were, without any study or effort, rhythmic, image-filled prose and poetry was just as difficult to explain on the basis of biological or even psychological family inheritance. In my early twenties I also briefly had contemplated and formulated mathematical concepts which greatly interested a young mathematician and physicist, Carl Eckhart, whose wife was a friend of my friend, Grace, and who became head of the La Jolla Oceanographic Institute during the Second world War and, later, president of the University of California in San Diego. My ability to paint canvasses which immediately elicited the puzzled admiration of my painter-friends and which now are increasingly appreciated by artists and art-dealers — but not for sale! — was also unaccountable. It soon led to a peculiar experience.

In August 1938 when I was just beginning to draw and paint, I gave a recital of my music in the beautiful chapel of the Santa Fe Museum. Someone I was close to at the time attended the recital. After the concert, the young woman, herself a-painter, took me aside, saying that she had had a strange experience. While I was playing she heard insistently within her mind the name of a Japanese painter who lived centuries ago, spent a number of years in China and established a connection between the arts of the two countries. She felt sure, in a way she could not explain, that the name somehow referred to me. This was interesting to me because, unbeknown to her, I had had a strong impression when dealing with the members of the Transcendental Painting Group that some had "belonged" to the art of China while others seemed to radiate an essentially Japanese quality. I could not make any definite associations between painters of past centuries and present individuals, and I did

not try to do so. But the feeling of a group-connection remained, and my friend's experience seemed to validate it. Later on, at a crucial time in my and my second wife's life, she and the man who was to become her second husband were in Chicago for a weekend, where they visited an art museum. On their return to where we were living, the young man gave me a postcard reproduction of a drawing by a Japanese artist which had attracted his attention; he had felt impelled to buy it for me. The drawing was by the same Japanese painter to whom my friend had referred some fifteen years before.

Evidently this could be interpreted as a mere "coincidence," but at that crucial time it occurred I could not help feeling that it gave a special significance to a vivid and dramatic scene my wife had seen in dreams shortly before our marriage became inevitable. The dream depicted a scene in old Japan in which she, I and other persons were the actors. Of course, even an apparently most revealing dream and/or coincidence can never be called "conclusive evidence" of what one interprets them to suggest. Such happenings can be evaluated only in terms of the deep and persistent feeling-intuitions they arouse, and in some instances by the way they clarify the meaning of immediately preceding or subsequent events. Such revelations' may be called symbolic, but **meaning** can be revealed to the conscious self only through symbols — whether they be personal dream-symbols or collectively significant symbols formulated by art-works and the basic images of a culture and its folklore. The important point, however, is that the most meaningful symbolic revelations always come at the beginning — or just before the actual beginning — of a new process, a new phase in one's life. They occur most validly when a new interpersonal relationship is being formed. Something in at least one of the participants seems to try to evoke for his or her conscious ego the karmic seed of what is about to come to manifestation. Some psychologists would speak of a "warning" in such a case, and perhaps in some instances one is able to heed such a warning. In most cases I believe that by the time such symbols are presented to the consciousness the karmic seed is already germinating into a new series of events. What is important then is to learn to meet and interpret them in terms of a superpersonal, or rather, transpersonal reality — a reality which includes not only two or more then-living persons once more drawn together by karmic pressure, but which is made of the complex interweaving of past, present and future.

The awareness of such a reality, not in any sensational manner, and certainly not for intellectual curiosity or for the development of either pride or guilt, may be a very valuable factor in the life of an at least relatively mature and emotionally steady individual. Some people may seek such experiences in deep meditation or, unfortunately today, in drug-induced or semi-hypnotic processes; but, as I see it, it is in most cases wiser and safer simply to allow the experience to happen if the time has come and the experiencer is ready. To be ready means to be able to assimilate the revelation and to interpret the symbolic imagery in a manner that casts more light upon and strengthens the attunement of the person to his or her destiny.

1. The drawing was later reproduced on the cover of the phonograph album of Michael Sellers' performance of my piano music (Orion Records 7285). Its title was "St. Christopher," the saint who, asked by a child to carry him 'across the stream' (separating the two great realms of being) found himself bearing on his shoulder as he crossed the river the Christ-child and the weight of all human destiny (symbolized by the down-pointing triangles).

2. The astrologically-oriented reader may be interested to know that when I began to paint, "progressed Mercury" was "stationary" and turning "direct" — thus changing from a symbol of mental subjectivity to one of increasing objectivity in the use of the mind.

3. "Diaphanous" comes from the Greek roots **dia** (through) and **phanein** (to show or reveal). Likewise, a hierophant (**hieros**, sacred, and **phanein**, to show) is a person who reveals the sacred.

4. **Avatar** was reproduced in black and white in the remarkable collection of inspirational works, **Cosmic Art** (New York: 1975). The material in the book was gathered from many nations by Raymond Piper and edited after his death by Ingo Swann.

5. "Today is a new birthday for ancient gods. New men call for new symbols. Their cry rises, beyond their logical intellects ashamed of mystical longings, for new gods to worship and to use in order to integrate their harrowing mental confusion and to stabilize their uprooted souls: young gods, fresh and radiant with the sunshine of a new dawn, glorified with the 'golden light' of a new Sun of Power' ecstatic with virgin potentialities after the banishment of ancient nightmares; gods whose urge for living springs from a deeper well of being than of old, whose compassion is vibrant and clear, whose energies burn free in skies wondrous with vistas of total and inescapable wholeness; gods whose abodes are no longer confined to heavenly realms but whose hearts beat in unison with every human heart and whose minds illumine the consciousness of all men; gods made human with the divinity of our inextinguishable quest."

— **New Mansions for New Men**, p. xv.