

FIRST ANNUAL FINE ARTS FESTIVAL

presents-

- OILS
- WATERCOLORS
- DRAWINGS
- AND
- PRINTS

BY •

LINDSLEY •

HARPUR COLLEGE CAFETERIA
MAY 13 • 26 1956

As the final exhibition of the year the Gallery Committee takes pleasure in presenting the works of Joseph H. Lindsley. This is the second presentation of the works of a local artist.

Gallery Committee

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

by

William Glasser

An interesting inquiry into any artist's life is to determine just why he paints. What causes him to work in this medium; choose a particular subject matter; present it in a particular style? Why does he desire to paint? Interviewing Joseph Lindsley brought forth interesting and unique answers.

Lindsley had prepared for the interview two typewritten sheets of paper presenting the "facts" of his life: Born July 16, 1920, in Hawleyton, New York; studied three years of art in Montrose, Penn. High School; in the Army from August 1942 to December 1945; graduated 1949 from School for Art Studies in New York City; taught art at Police Athletic League; instructed several private adult pupils--all facts that could pertain to almost any person interested in art. What, then, differentiates this particular individual?

Surely there was nothing unique about the crude drawings Lindsley began scratching out at the age of four. They showed no promise of any particular talent. And yet, although receiving no encouragement, he continued to draw, with a growing desire for perfection. When he entered high school he realized that he was developing a talent. It was an interesting development, but there was no obvious reason. Why did he persist in drawing?

During high school he spent five days a week in art class, instructed by Miss Charlotte Wohlheiter whom he considers the first person to influence him as an artist. She encouraged him to paint as a hobby. And yet at the same time she told him never to consider painting seriously as a career. But this criticism had no effect on Lindsley, for it was not a question of what others thought of his work in this period of his

life. He simply felt the need to paint. It had become for him the only medium of self-expression, although he was still not aware of the cause.

The first interruption in his painting came after an accident which put his father out of work. Lindsley left high school to help his family. But working nights and sleeping days left no time to paint. It even sublimated, apparently, his need to paint. It was not until he entered the Army that he once again found many hours of free time. Man feels his inner tensions most acutely when he has nothing to do to occupy his time. Lindsley felt the need to renew his painting. Was it, then, some inner tension that caused him to paint?

In August 1952, after another interruption in painting again caused by working to help his family, he began again and has been painting up to date. At that time, three years ago, he found three cans of enamel in his house and, having seen reproductions of enamel drippings, began, almost as a joke, to attempt one. In fifteen minutes he became completely involved in the problems presented by this new mode of expression. He did a series of drip paintings. These mark the beginning of his interested in abstract art. Lindsley feels that artistic problems are sharpened in this medium for it limits the painter to the work of composition: one color or one form against another. Was it, then, a desire to solve the problems of composition that caused him to paint?

Lindsley has worked in oils, watercolors, pen and ink, monotype, pastels, and in sculpture. In the future he would like to attempt woodcuts. He paints in a variety of styles, feeling it gives him a fresher quality. In his words, "Every subject matter requires its own approach...the finished product solves the problem of that style." He says that he begins painting with a "spontaneous" drive that causes him to work steadily for a few hours. Then, when he has completed his beginning, he sees before him a problem in composition upon which he re-

flects for many days until he can return to his work with a possible solution. If he is satisfied with the solution on canvas, then his work is completed. His final judgment of his works rests in the self-satisfaction they give him.

Here, then, is the cause of Joseph Lindsley's need to paint. Like any individual, he feels within himself the tensions of life. But it is his reaction to these tensions which makes him unique. He does not search his mind for the underlying motives or meanings of his feelings. His first desire is to express these feelings in his painting. Working two to three hours, completely oblivious to time, he achieves this expression. He has actually "painted his inner tensions" on canvas. It is only after this expression that his mind begins to strive for a solution. At this point, he sees before him a problem in composition. After weeks of thought, the solution to the problem is also reached on canvas. And with this compositional problem resolved in a completed work of art, there comes the realization that the problem solved in front of him is also solved within him. He achieves a self-satisfaction. The artistic works of Joseph Lindsley are the "completed sublimations" of a creative mind.

THE ART OF JOSEPH H. LINDSLEY

The present exhibit displays a bewildering diversity of style, a random handling of various modes of visual expression, a collection of unrelated paintings rather than the work of one artist, or so it seems at first. A more detailed study of the exhibition will reveal the inaccuracy of this first impression. One painting does refer to another. There is a relationship between Lindsley's figurative and non-figurative oils, between his oils and his watercolors, and, to a lesser degree, between these two media and his drawings.

Frequently a painter develops one predominant visual or technical pre-occupation which he explores over an extended period of time and through a number of consecutive canvases. As a result, when he holds a one-man show, there will be an obvious consistency in his work, an apparent personal style.

Lindsley's work does not have this obvious consistency of style because his approach to the problem of painting is quite different. At one time he concentrated solely on the technique of dripping enamel on the canvas. Within a period of less than a year, he completed more than 23 dripped paintings. He was able to express himself powerfully through this medium for a time, as the three enamel drip paintings in the present show prove, but eventually he found his work becoming glib. He gave up the technique and has never returned to it. He now shifts from one facet of his work to another in consecutive canvases to keep from going stale.

A Shifting Approach

The constantly shifting approach is no doubt easier for him than it would be for many painters, since his drive to express himself in paint is so all encompassing. Certainly a single style can be used to express varied emotions. The festive Season in the Sun, the violent Non-objective #6, and the intimately personal The Choreography of Chaos are stylistic

triplets, but emotionally they are miles apart.

However, it is not merely his wide ranging visual and formal interests that make his shifting approach personally appropriate. Style does affect content, and Lindsley's need of emotional expression is wide ranging enough to require wide ranging excursions in style. He sees the harshness of the Maine coast in Coast of Maine #1 and the soft, mysterious quality of the sea off the same coast in Coast of Maine #2. He wants to express both of these experiences, and he alters his style somewhat in the process of doing it. He is attracted to the classic dignity and restraint that shines from the Study in Green; but he also feels the bitterly emotional In Search of a Name; and the passionate happiness of Mosaic. He approaches each of these expressions in a different way.

I do not intend to imply that this is an entirely conscious choice. In the early stages of a painting especially, Lindsley is a highly intuitive painter, and it is probably as much a subconscious need for a particular expression that determines the style, as it is any conscious decision on his part.

Visual Preoccupations

Lindsley's approach to painting differs from that of the hypothetical painter described above in that he does not concentrate on one predominant visual or technical preoccupation. He does not lack visual or formal preoccupations in his work, but since the period of the drip paintings, no one of them has dominated a consecutive series of paintings.

One might say of the hypothetical painter that he finds a vein of ore and mines it until it is exhausted. A better figure for Lindsley would be that he weaves the threads of his visual preoccupations into one canvas after another, sometimes emphasizing one, sometimes another, frequently dropping a thread to be picked up several paintings later, almost never attempting to weave all of his threads into one canvas.

The Gallery Committee has happily chosen a large enough selection of his works so that we can follow several of these threads through various stages of development, and see a few of the relationships which exist among these seemingly unrelated paintings.

Lindsley has been intrigued by calligraphy since his first contact with oriental art in 1946. A suggestion of it is discernible in the rocks in the 1949 water color, Hudson River. A somewhat stronger calligraphic suggestion appears in the black and white figures in The Choreography of Chaos, and in the similar yellow, gold and black figures in Non-Objective #6. Last year the Roberson Memorial Center presented an exhibit of Abstract Japanese Calligraphy, and Lindsley spent a great deal of time studying it. The first result of this stimulus was the oil, Calligraphy. Several months later he completed a series of calligraphic ink and brush drawings, of which Black and Turquoise is the one example in the present show. Calligraphy appears again in the otherwise highly representational Pinnacle Rock, Bailey Island, Maine, and in the very recent January Night Time View.

The use of long, narrow bars of color is another of Lindsley's recurrent formal interests. The form appears in the 1953-55 Untitled, and was in the painting in its original, 1953 version. A variant of the form appears in the foreground cabbage fields of Tully Hills in 1954. Lindsley was much excited by the vigorous paintings of Robert Gates and Joe Summerford which he saw in Washington, D.C. in December 1954. He came home and painted the water color, Line Storm, under their influence. In translating what had attracted him in their work to his own personal statement, he returned to those long narrow bars of color. That same spring he used the form again, though only in black, in the water color and wax resist, Untitled. Coast of Maine #1 makes strong use of it, and January Night Time View employs it in a less obvious way.

In the present show the 1953-55 Untitled is the best example of the use of these long narrow bars in connection with another of Lindsley's pre-occupations, an interest in geometric form. This interest receives its purest statement in Portrait of a Woman, Study in Green and the pastel, Construction #87, and its most complex in the Epigram for Modern Man. It is used for abstracting from the representational in Tully Hills, Still Life with Fruit and Leaves, Fear, and, to an extreme degree, in The Artist's Studio.

The texture of the paint surface is one thread of interest which Lindsley almost never drops. Thick paint and carefully worked texture are stylistic elements that run through most of his oils. He usually applies the pigment with a palette knife. He confesses that the act of painting is, for him, a highly sensual experience. I do not intend to force the connection, but I believe that this feeling is directly linked to the great interest he takes in texture. Certainly he has achieved some of his most notable effects as a result of his skill in this direction. The brilliant handling of the sky in Tully Hills and the fascination of the gray and burnt sienna inferno behind the window-like forms in Epigram for Modern Man are largely due to his concern with and skill in handling texture. Mosaic is almost purely a study in color and textured paint application. It should be viewed almost nose to canvas, for the variety in application that he has achieved in this small canvas is astounding and needs close inspection.

Use of Color

Lindsley's use of color in his oils presents almost no difficulty in relationships. His palette varies greatly from painting to painting, but yellow, black and white are almost always present. However, color seems to be the area where he is most definitely in transition at the present time. With the exception of the drip paintings, almost all of his earlier work shows a predilection for large areas of pure color. More

recently he has been using more mixed color, and when he does use pure color, it is in smaller areas.

This change in his approach to color is partly a result of his extended exploration of texture, as Mosaic, Epigram for Modern Man and the background of In Search of a Name reveal. But it is more directly a result of another thread of preoccupation, his studies in color itself, represented in this show by Study in Green. It would require a much larger exhibition than this very generous one to document completely Lindsley's method of parallel explorations. A brief account of his studies in color will serve to illustrate this point, and will, at the same time, show more precisely how he weaves his various threads of preoccupation into the varying combinations which give his collected work such a diverse appearance.

The immediate stimulus for the painting of Study in Green was the Josef Albers lecture last year before the Binghamton Society of Fine Arts, but the earlier Primary Maze, a study in gray not included in the present exhibit, was the actual beginning of Lindsley's monochromatic canvases. Study in Green has been followed by studies in red, blue and brown. In each case Lindsley has undertaken several paintings which offer him different problems and challenges before he has started a new canvas in the color series. Moreover, of these other color studies, only Study in Red employs the thickly applied geometric planes of pigment used in Study in Green. Primary Maze is geometric, but with an emphasis on textures similar to those in Epigram for Modern Man. The study in blue also pursues his interest in geometric form, but in a quite different manner and with an element of calligraphy added. The study in brown, still unfinished as of this writing, is totally calligraphic.

Figurative and Non-figurative

Although it would take a much larger exhibit than is here possible to document completely, this interweaving of visual and formal preoccupations,

the present show does give an adequate idea of Lindsley's work, with one exception. The ratio of twelve non-figurative oils to three figurative suggests that a much higher percentage of his work in oils is non-figurative than is actually the case. He shifts between figurative and non-figurative in much the same way that he shifts between his various formal preoccupations. His landscapes suggest new formal and compositional possibilities for his non-figurative work; his non-figurative paintings suggest new color and compositional possibilities for his landscapes. He has produced more non-figurative than figurative work in oils, but not to the extent the show would indicate. He is equally serious about each group of paintings.

In speaking of Lindsley's figurative oils in the previous paragraph I referred to his landscapes specifically, because In Search of a Name is a rarity among his oils. I have only seen one other finished oil in which he portrayed a human being. The central figure in a group of three in that painting was a court jester, a face from Lindsley's imagination.

While he was still in art school, Lindsley painted a brutal portrait of a prostitute which haunted him to the point that he could not finish it. He destroyed the canvas. Previous to that he had had so much trouble with the art school's models objecting to what he saw and put on canvas, that he had developed the habit of refusing to let them see his work. He is still afraid of portraiture, feeling that he lays bare too much.

Fear, the rather strange drawing of an artist cringing before his canvas, has always puzzled Lindsley. He does not know what it means, or why he drew it. The fear it depicts is, I believe, quite specifically his fear of portraiture. The drawing makes clear why the one human depicted in oil in the present show is an anonymous clown from Lindsley's imagination, a man in search of a name.

Break Between Drawings and Oils

Humans are slightly more common in Lindsley's water colors. We have Arabesque and the two small figures in Monastery Walls in this show. The drawings, on the other hand, are predominantly concerned with the human face and figure. This matter of the presence or lack of humans is where the drawings break sharply with the oils and water colors. In both the oils and water colors, humans frequently are implied when they are not depicted. There are boats in Hudson River From the Palisades and Pinnacle Rock, the city in Hudson River and January Night Time View, and a farm in Tully Hills; but the concentration on the human occurs only in the drawings.

Lindsley considers drawing a more intimate, informal medium and apparently his fear of portraiture does not arise when he works in it. Noting the stark reporting of Woman with Ring, the sardonic comment on The Monk and the amazing sense of weight in the lightly sketched Fat Man, one can only hope that he will overcome this fear of portraiture in time.

The title of Portrait of a Woman may have led some to question my not including it among the figurative oils, since an abstracted human figure is discernible in the painting. The figure is even more apparent when the painting is placed next to a representational drawing of a female nude which Lindsley completed some time previous to the painting. Some of the forms in the two works are almost identical, but Lindsley was unaware of this until some time after the oil was completed.

The title was given the oil when a visitor to his studio pointed out the resemblance. Since he had believed he was painting a non-figurative oil, and since the art world is in a state of confusion about the precise meaning of such terms as non-figurative, I prefer to ignore Lindsley's subconscious in this case and refer to Portrait of a Woman as a non-figurative oil.

Use of the Subconscious

It is not an uncommon thing for an artist to create something of which he has been unaware at the time of its creation. I have already mentioned Lindsley's failure to understand his drawing, Fear. He feels the same way about The Stump. He does not know what it means, or why he drew it.

I suspect all truly creative artists in any branch of the arts discover new meanings in their work after the period of its creation. Certainly Lindsley does, and this is especially true of the non-figurative oils. The reason is not hard to find. Early in this essay I referred to Lindsley as an intuitive artist, and so he is. But his reliance on intuition, or his subconscious, is confined to the early stages of the painting and to its emotional expressive content. In formal matters such as composition, color harmony and color balance he is highly conscious of what he does. I suspect that the subconscious emotional content comes through so powerfully in much of his work simply because his conscious mind is so completely absorbed by the formal problem.

This concern for formal values in his work also affects Lindsley's landscapes. He will probably never paint exactly what he sees, for his interest is in painting, not in the exact reproduction of a scene. He is well aware, for instance, that the South Side lights one sees from Memorial Bridge extend out to either side of the canvas in his January Night Time View, but he also knows that painting them in would weaken the composition of this picture. Failing to put them in has an interesting effect; it tends to push further back the hills and the lights that are there. The lights seem those of a complete city on the far bank of a river much wider than the Susquehanna. Perhaps that is the feeling he wished to convey about the South Side. I don't know. I am sure, however, that the compositional problem was the one uppermost in his mind.

Influence at Work

I have mentioned several influences on Lindsley's art in the course of this discussion. Many young artists today would be upset at such mention, for their greatest fear is of being considered unoriginal. That is not one of Lindsley's concerns. Mosaic, the most recent oil to be included in the show, was directly inspired by the brilliant reproduction of Lansky's For Weekdays in the March issue of Arts Magazine. There are similarities in the two works, but Mosaic is no copy of For Weekdays. Lindsley has learned from Lansky and used what he learned for his own purposes.

The drip paintings were executed in a technique originated by Jackson Pollock, but Lindsley's drip paintings do not look like Jackson Pollock's, nor do they say the same things. What he has learned from these artists, he has absorbed into his own personal and powerful expressions.

Line Storm provides the clearest example I know of how this influence operates in Lindsley's work. I have already mentioned that the vigor of its expression was directly inspired by the work of Gates and Summerford in Washington, D.C. On the same trip Lindsley spent about twenty minutes analyzing, for my benefit, the composition of the Cezanne Mont Ste. Victoire in the Phillips Gallery.

Although he didn't realize it until the water color was completed, Lindsley solved his compositional problem in Line Storm in the same way that Cezanne had handled the Mont Ste. Victoire. Is Line Storm unoriginal, a copy of Cezanne, Gates or Summerford? It has the Mont Ste. Victoire composition, but that is its only similarity to Cezanne. It has similar vigor to the Gates and Summerford oils, but it is an expressive similarity, and not one of technique. Is Line Storm unoriginal? On the contrary, it is one of Lindsley's most original watercolors.

One final influence deserves mention here, an influence of quite a different sort, but one also highly important to an artist. The decision of the members of the Harpur College Gallery Committee and of their advisor, Dr. Lindsay, to honor Lindsley with a one-man show has spurred him on to his greatest period of productivity since he first started painting. This has not been a matter of just getting enough paintings ready for the show; the work for the show was selected several weeks ago. He is painting happily in the knowledge that people are interested in his work. For Joe, and for myself, as his friend, may I say thank you.

John F. Kellogg

LIST OF WORKS

OILS

- 1 Season in the Sun, enamel on masonite, 12 x 14, 1953. \$20
- 2 The Choreography of Chaos, enamel on canvas, 16 x 24, 1953.
Collection John F. Kellogg
- 3 Non-objective No. 6, enamel on canvas, 14 x 20, 1953. \$45
- 4 Genesis, oil on masonite, 18 x 24, 1953.
Collection Carmen Savoca
- 5 Untitled, oil on canvas, 30 x 16, 1953.
Collection George and Alice White
- 6 Untitled, oil on canvas, 24 x 18, 1953-55. \$40 ✓
- 7 Tully Hills, oil on canvas, 16 x 20, 1954. \$50
- 8 Calligraphy, oil on canvas, 20 x 10, April-May 1955. \$30
- 9 Study in Green, oil on canvas, 16 x 20, May 1955.
Collection Kenneth and Christine Lindsay
- 10 Portrait of a Woman, oil on canvas, 40 x 24, December 1955. \$75
- 11 Night Life, oil on canvas, 30 x 12, March, 1956. \$35
- 12 In Search of a Name, oil on masonite, 24 x 16, April 1956. \$60
- 13 Epigram for Modern Man, oil on canvas, 30 x 18, April 1956. \$75
- 14 January Night-Time View of the South Side of Binghamton from Memorial Bridge Showing the Red Robin Diner and Various Other Business Establishments which Advertise with Neon, oil on canvas, 20 x 30, April 1956. Not for sale.
- 15 Mosaic, oil on canvas, 20 x 8, April 1956. \$35

WATERCOLORS

16 Hudson River from the Palisades, Fort Lee, New Jersey, water color and ink, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 8$, 1949. \$4

17 Hudson River, water color and ink, $11 \times 15\frac{1}{4}$, 1949.

Collection Ray and Edith Iroman

18 Monastery Walls, water color and ink, $7\frac{1}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$, 1952. \$7.50

19 Line Storm, $19\frac{1}{2} \times 27\frac{1}{2}$, January 1955.

Collection Sam and Esther Finklestein

20 Desert Scene, water color and ink, $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$, Spring, 1955.

Collection Roy and Margaret Hasenpflug

21 Untitled, water color and wax resist, $10\frac{1}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$, Spring 1955. \$15

22 Landscape, $6 \frac{3}{4} \times 8$, Spring 1955. \$4

23 The Artist's Studio, water color and wax resist, $11\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$, July 1955. \$7.50

24 Pinnacle Rock, Bailey Island, Maine, $13 \frac{3}{4} \times 18 \frac{3}{4}$, August 1955. \$12

25 Coast of Maine No. 1, $13\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$, August 1955. \$15

26 Coast of Maine No. 2, $13 \frac{1}{2} \times 18 \frac{3}{4}$, August 1955.

Collection Kenneth and Christine Lindsay

27 Arabesque, 12×9 , December 1955. \$10

DRAWINGS

28 Nude, pen and ink, 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{8}$, 1949. \$3

29 Self Portrait, pen and ink, 10 x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$, 1954.

Collection Sam and Esther Finklestein

30 Reclining Nude, monotype, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7, 1954. \$3

31 Construction No. 87, pastel, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$, Fall 1954.

Collection Willis and Dorothy Hull

32 The Stump, pen and ink, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$, Fall 1954. \$4

33 The Fat Man, pen and ink, 8 x 7, Fall 1954.

Collection Emil and Herta Ekstein

34 Woman with Ring, pen and ink, 8 x 5, Fall 1954. \$5

35 Nude Male, pen and ink wash, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$, Fall 1954. \$3

36 Still Life with Fruit and Leaves, pastel, 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$,
Fall 1954.

Collection Mrs. J.W. Kellogg

37 Fear, pen and ink, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$, Fall 1954. \$4

38 Young Girl, pen and ink, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$, Fall 1954. \$5

39 The Monk, carbon pencil, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$, January 1955. \$3

40 From the Ingraham Hill, conte pencil and wash, 13 x 16, May 1955.
\$10

41 Black and Turquoise, ink and brush, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$, August 1955. \$4

42 Man in an Overcoat, pencil, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$, December 1955. \$2
