

Art & Feelings

Van Hart "On Art" Newsletter Issue 3 October 2008

Dear Friends,

Some people say the best art enables you to feel the emotions of the artist as he or she was creating that piece of art. That's the topic of this latest newsletter, below.

Coming from an ex-engineer (which I am), this seems like a very touchy-feely subject. But now that I am an artist and no longer in high-tech, I can write about these things. How fun!

Happy reading,
Holly

Art & Feelings

The 21st century art world says that one of the most important things an artist can do is *give tangible form to emotions*. The purpose of this newsletter is to explore this topic. I'll show some examples from art history, and then (humbly putting my work next to the others) one of my recent paintings.

If you make the time to look at an original painting (to *really* look at it, letting go of your to-do list and your shopping list and the incoming text message and whatever other things might be on your mind), and if you start to feel what you think the artist felt when he or she created the painting, then the artist has succeeded. And you have succeeded too, because in the mad rush of daily living, it's not easy to let go of all those things to really look at a piece of art and allow yourself to connect with the artist.

Let's look at four examples.

Example #1: Does this painting capture the feelings of young children?



"Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child" by Mary Cassatt, 1880

For me, this painting by Mary Cassatt captures *exactly* how a young child feels in his or her mother's arms . . . the security, trust, love, and peace. The emotion this painting evokes resonates deep within us, as all of us have been children and many of us are parents. Were this painting affordable, I think it would be a great painting to own and to hang in my home.

Example #2: How did Picasso feel about war?



"Guernica" by Pablo Picasso, 1937, 11'H x 25'W

The Spanish government commissioned Pablo Picasso to paint a large mural for the 1937 World's Fair. In that year, an aerial attack on the Basque town of Guernica caused widespread destruction and civilian deaths. Within 15 days of the attack, Pablo Picasso began painting this mural, "Guernica".

"Guernica" epitomizes the tragedies of war and the suffering it inflicts upon people. This painting transcends the bounds of a single time and place. It's a great painting. This doesn't mean I'd like to hang it in my living room, though.

Example #3: What did Mark Rothko feel while painting "White Center"?



"White Center" by Mark Rothko, 1950

This one's not so easy to answer. Rather than try to interpret this painting myself, I'll quote the artist Mark Rothko directly. He said his paintings are "surfaces are expansive and push outward in all directions, or their surfaces contract and rush inward in all directions. Between these two poles you can find everything I want to say."

Rothko said his interest was "only in expressing basic human emotions — tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on. And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I can communicate those basic human emotions . . . The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationship, then you miss the point."

Hmmm. I like this painting, and would even like to hang it in my house, were it affordable. Unfortunately it's not. In 2007 this painting broke the record selling price for any post-war painting in public auction. It sold for \$73 million dollars. Someone out there obviously considers this a great painting.

Example #4: How did this artist (me) feel while painting this piece?



"Having Fun" by Holly Van Hart, 2008

The title of this piece, "Having Fun", gives away the answer. I could have also called it "Happy". Unlike the other paintings in this newsletter, this painting *is* affordable. And it's hanging in my home.

Since this is a newsletter, I hope you don't mind if I share two pieces of good news . . . I learned today that I won a prize for "[The Kiss](#)" in the Menlo Art League's 2008 Annual Exhibit. Also, my watercolor "[Two Left Hands](#)" was a finalist in the recent 2008 University Art Open competition. As other artists have said before me, when you work alone in your studio so much of the time, it's refreshing to get some outside recognition for your work.

In closing, whatever your taste in art, I hope you can make the time to seek out at least one piece of great original art (in person), and put aside the to-do lists and text messages, and see, really see, and hopefully really feel, what the artist has to offer. Please let me know how it goes!

All the best,
Holly

Related links: [Mary Cassatt](#), [Pablo Picasso](#), [Mark Rothko](#), [Paintings by Holly Van Hart](#), [My Blog](#)

Quote of the Day: "A picture lives by companionship, expanding and quickening in the eyes of the sensitive observer. It dies by the same token." Mark Rothko

Holiday Gift Idea: High quality note cards based on my paintings make a unique gift. The cards are hand assembled using glossy photo images. Each set of 8 cards comes with matching envelopes. The set comes in a clear resealable envelope, and is wrapped with a pretty bow. [Click here](#) for details and examples.

Please spread the word . . . if you have friends or family who might be interested in this newsletter, feel free to forward it to them.

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