

## A Few Thoughts on Art

You may have noticed some colorful paintings hanging in the Vestry of late. I did these last winter and spring and thought you might be interested in how they came about. This project started with a goal to use up a remnant of canvas and some paints which had been collecting dust for a couple years in a corner of my home office/studio/Lego area/piano room. I had in mind the idea of creating something non-representational that explored color to create an uplifting feeling, kind of like an antidote to bleakness. I began this first painting in late winter 2019 at a time when the world outside alternated between gray and white, depending on the form of recent precipitation, and a time when the news from the outside world seemed particularly bleak.

For me, when I look at representational art, I get caught up in a flood of judgments having to do with the painting's proximity to reality or the symbols represented in the painting. For instance, I have a print of that famous Winslow Homer painting of the fisherman and his recently caught halibut, rowing his dory toward his ship on the stormy horizon. When I look at this painting I have a million thoughts and questions. Do those fish even exist anymore? How does he make those waves look so real? and thoughts of more esoteric topics like "the risks and rewards of seeking things just beyond our reach." I have trouble looking at paintings of familiar Maine seascapes without criticizing the artist's representation of the scene or thinking of how in my grandfather's time a small cottage next door to that scene would be affordable and how now it's owned by a multinational tycoon. I guess this is baggage. For me non-representational art can sometimes strip away this baggage and allow for an experience outside of my reality. Which leads to the question; "What is reality?"

I digressed. As I mentioned, the series now hanging in the Vestry started as a single painting. However, this painting was preceded by an extensive study of intersecting shapes and colors originally inspired by a series of pictures of fall leaves on the forest floor I had taken in the fall of 2018.



I explored color combinations and kept asking "what kind of feeling do I get when these three colors are grouped together?" For instance, will a blue – green – yellow combination produce a different emotion than blue – yellow- green or blue-orange-yellow? I even did a 64 permutation study on these questions.



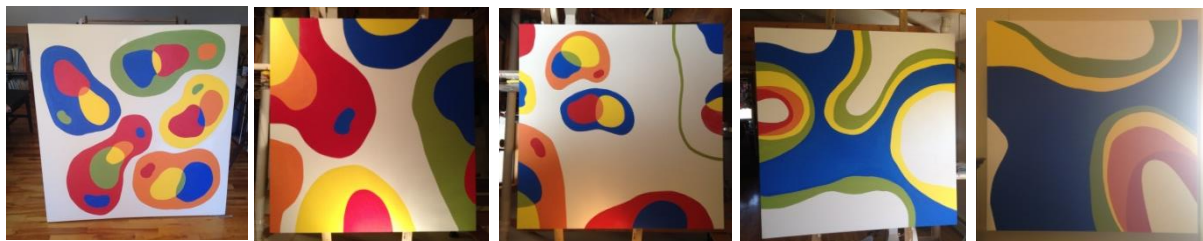
As I did these color studies (and took breaks by banging on the piano) I also thought about music and chords and how notes within a major chord, such as C-E-G, could be represented by blue-green-yellow (green being a combination of blue and yellow). Could a diminished cord be represented by a series of colors that don't fit so well together, like blue-orange-green? Some people with perfect pitch actually see colors when notes are played. What does a major chord look like to them? How about a diminished chord? Can color combinations elicit feelings similar to musical note combinations? Somewhere, someplace, someone has done a scientific study on these ideas.

In the end I used the shape and color combinations I liked the best. This first painting took quite a while to finish, something like 6 weeks, as I experimented with different techniques to get the feelings I wanted from the image. When I was close to feeling satisfied with it (some people call this "done"), I came up with the cozy title of "Harmonic Shape Combinations" and described the painting as follows. "With this painting I wanted to incorporate many different ideas, some of my own and some borrowed from favorite artists Alexander Calder, Friedensreich Hundertwasser and Norval Morrisseau. I especially like Hundertwasser's statement "there are no straight lines in nature." My goal was to create a fun, joyful, enjoyable piece. The intersecting shapes are inspired by overlapping leaves on the forest floor. The colors and their combinations are inspired by music, major chords, as well as more dissonant combinations like diminished, augmented and 7th chords. I'd like to think the shapes and colors come together kind of like the dramatic organ pieces we hear so often in this church."



One thoughtful person said they saw community in this painting. I like that. That comment made me think how each group of shapes was sort of like an individual person and the whole painting was like a family portrait or team picture. Maybe I had this in mind all along.

As I was painting I kept having other ideas, most of which sounded like “I wonder what \_\_\_\_\_ would look like?” When I finished this painting I kept going and did a whole series based on these questions. You may have seen a few of them hanging in the Vestry. Here they are all in a row...



I especially like the blue wave-like paintings (the two on the right). The basis for these was actually the negative space created by the non-painted white areas in the second piece from the left.

I hope you like them. Thanks for the opportunity to share.

--Jonathan Dawson