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Palabras y Pintura

Rita Saad

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

March 2000

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ABSTRACT

Palabras y Pintura

Rita Saad

This study Palabras y Pintura is a self reflective studio inquiry. Its autobiographical content is based on my own journal writing, sketches, and paintings produced throughout my graduate as well as undergraduate degree in Art Education at Concordia University. Between 1992 and 1999, I attended numerous studio classes in which critiques were held regularly. I became increasingly interested in the notion of critiques as they were held in university studio classes. Once someone asked me whether I felt the manner in which we had critiques was in any way helpful to me. My answer was an evasive 'not really, but I found it interesting to hear different responses to my work.' Afterwards I thought about what I had said. Was it true that the feedback of others did not affect my work at all? Of course not. I began with the question: how did what others say about my work affect me or my painting process? I examined my journal notes and the notes I took during critiques in order to answer my question. In doing so, I came to the realization that I had addressed the notion of critiques quite a bit in my journals. In this study, I gathered a number of paintings and journal entries as well as notes taken during the critiques of those particular paintings in order to examine how words have affected my work. This thesis is a personal reflection about how language, either through critiques or through writing, impacts my work. I revisited the art/writing journals I have kept for the past eight years in order to see what, if anything, I have stated about my own art making process. I also looked at the infinite notes I have taken during the critiques of various studio classes, between 1994 and 1996, in order to document what has been said about my art work by different people. I chose ten paintings to focus on, based on the amount of written information I had on each.

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Background

From as far back as I can remember, I have been evasive about explaining my work to others. When I was twelve, I took clay classes twice a week in a wonderful studio/house. Anna, the teacher, had an amazing house in a huge garden and a big atelier where she gave pottery workshops twice a week. Anna was an artist/teacher who made clay pottery of monumental sizes; her garden was full of her works. The class was a group of about twelve, where every one worked on their own individual project and Anna would go around helping people as was needed. If not needed, she'd be busy with her own work. I remember the first time I made something that was not a coil pot or ash tray. I had a smooth slab of fresh clay in front of me that I had just cut with the metal wire. It fascinated me how nicely a piece of wire could cut through clay. I took a tool that had a metal loop at the end, and I dug into my slab of clay, making grooves into the smooth surface. Every long groove I made gave me a long piece of clay that was the same size as the groove I just made. I remember thinking/imagining that this is how roads and bridges and intertwined highways could be made. I figured that every groove I made in the land had to be used as a bridge elsewhere, that way there would be no waste of the land. So I would take the clay I got out of the groove and use it for a bridge. The process was a game I created for myself, and I became completely involved in making a landscape of roads and corresponding bridges.

As can be expected, in the midst of my enjoyment, the question popped up: "What are you doing?" A student in the class who had probably been watching me and wondering for a while, was curious enough to ask. I said I didn't know. But I did know. When Anna asked me what it was, I told her it was simple, the grooves are roads and the loops above them are the bridges/highways. She laughed... maybe she thought I was joking. I laughed too, but I still really liked my clay piece, and it was still a landscape with roads and bridges.

In university, my explanation capabilities did not evolve much. I remember once in my Art 200 class, I had just finished a big drawing of a figure who was falling... it looked as

though she had slipped. Half her body was on one piece of paper and the other half on another. Together the drawing was 4ft. by 4ft. I remember being nervous about the critique... what on earth was I going to say about this drawing? When the teacher asked me about it, I said something about how I loved the way the figure's eyes seemed to be fixed on her feet, the culprits to her fall. That was what I particularly liked about the drawing, besides the colours. He seemed more confused by my comment than anything else, and said something to the effect that I seemed to be the type of person who would keep doing whatever I wanted no matter what anyone said. He was right...but I'm not sure what that had to do with my drawing.



From Journal, 1993 (Figure 1)

Method

This thesis is a personal reflection about how language, either through critiques or through writing, impacts my work. I revisited the art/writing journals I have kept for the past eight years in order to see what, if anything, I have stated about my own art making process. I also looked at the infinite notes I have taken during the critiques of various studio classes, between 1994 and 1996, in order to document what has been said about my art work by different people. I chose the ten paintings to focus on, based on the amount of written information which I had on each.

Since I became increasingly intrigued by the notion of critique during this time period, I have a significant number of journal entries addressing the critique process. The written accounts on my work vary tremendously in length and detail. For some paintings I have extensive journal entries prior to the critique, while for others I have none. With other works, I have more written during the critique or after it. The thesis includes excerpts from my journal writings, comments made about my work during critiques (the names of the people who made these comments will remain anonymous as I will be using pseudonyms), and examples of the work being discussed which were exhibited at the Centre Communautaire de Ville St. Laurent.

The thesis itself takes the form of an art work: a weaving together of my paintings, journals, the comments on critiques, and my reflections on all of them. The chapter in which I discuss the ten paintings will for the most part follow the following format:

- the name and date of the painting,
- a picture of that painting and a sketch (if ever there was one)
- journal entries prior to the critique, (if ever there were any)
- comments made during the critique,
- journal entries or reflections after the critique (if ever there were any).

There are a significant amount of excerpts written in Spanish. Many of my journal writings are either in Spanish or a strange mixture of English and Spanish. I feel certain things are better expressed in different languages, and so I naturally switch from one to another. Where I do write in Spanish, I will consequently provide the English translation.

Also, I have included some quotes from a book, Paula, written by Isabel Allende in 1994. This book was written over approximately a nine month period in which her daughter, Paula, was in a coma, in a hospital in Spain. The book is essentially a self reflection on the author's own life and travels. Isabel Allende was exiled from Chile in 1973 during the military coup. Living outside of Chile provided her with lots of time to reflect on her country. Having lived in and loved Chile myself, made this book really significant to me. I found the book on a train and from the moment I picked it up it was as though I had found a long lost friend. I could relate to her life as well as the manner in which she wrote about it so well, rendering this book considerably influential to me.

The direct excerpts from my journal are under the sub-heading **Journal: date (prior/after the critique)**. Where I include excerpts from my journal that are not under that heading, I mention it beforehand by stating the following: In my journal I wrote. The comments stated during critiques will be under the sub-heading: **During the critique**. and when I am internally responding to what I am hearing during the critique, I state it within brackets directly following someone's quote. For example, after my classmate made the following comment, I wrote what I thought in brackets following what he said:

-figure is slightly differently made...(that amazed me how he said it because it is true...it was in the previous ugly painting which I transformed entirely except for the figure...)

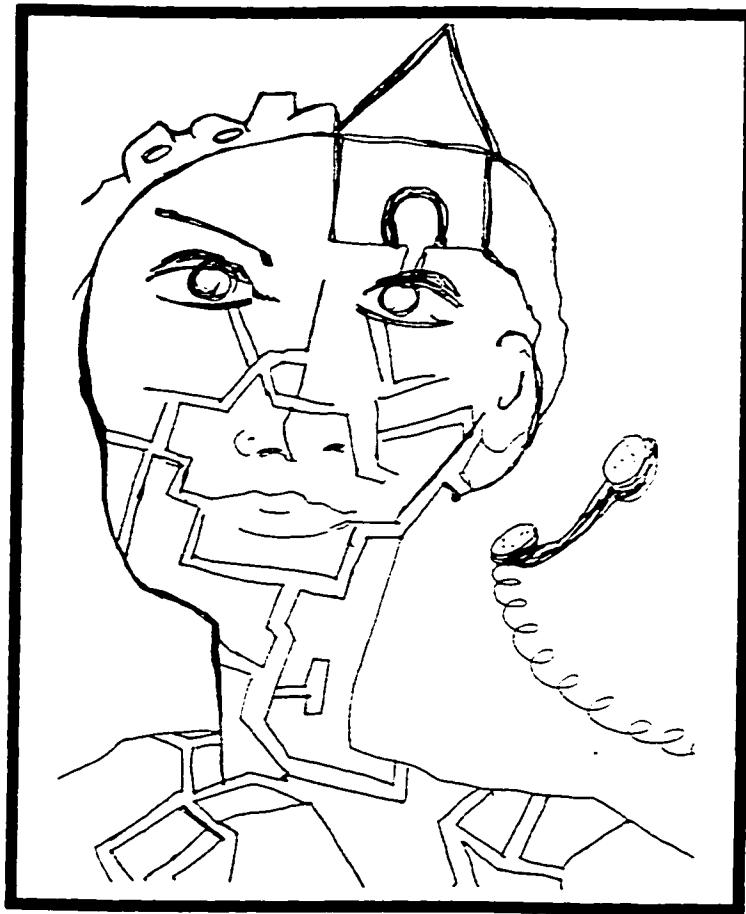
Through this self reflection, I am questioning the practice of critique from a personal point of view, as an artist. This self reflection will inevitably lead to learning which will inform my teaching in the future.

Un fresco multiple y variable

Though university art programs differ, their core curriculum is usually based on art production classes (Hobbs, 1983, 1993). While pursuing my undergraduate and part of my graduate degree in art education, I took a significant number of studio classes. Group critiques more often than not form a fundamental aspect of these studio classes. A group critique involves the teacher and the student members of a particular class looking at a student's art work and offering feedback. I have experienced critiques where I could not wait to show my work, and critiques where the stress of showing my work made me want to skip class altogether. While the teacher usually sets the general tone, the nature of a given critique often depends on the dynamics of the group, that is, how the members/participants of the class interact, communicate, and respond to one another's work.

During the critiques in my studio classes, I would listen attentively to what was said about my work. Then I would play a kind of game with the words stated: how many responses related on some level with what I had intended or remembered from my process with that particular painting. When it was my turn to talk, I had a couple of choices: say nothing (if the teacher didn't mind), restate a combination of what my classmates had already stated, or say something brief about my work. Most of the time, I would force myself to say something because it was the expected thing for me to do. The experience felt somewhat incomplete and consequently frustrating. I enjoyed listening to the comments of others, but when it was time to talk about my own work I was almost always at a loss, and what's worse is I often regretted whatever I said. It never felt right, almost as though I was telling a secret that I wasn't supposed to tell.

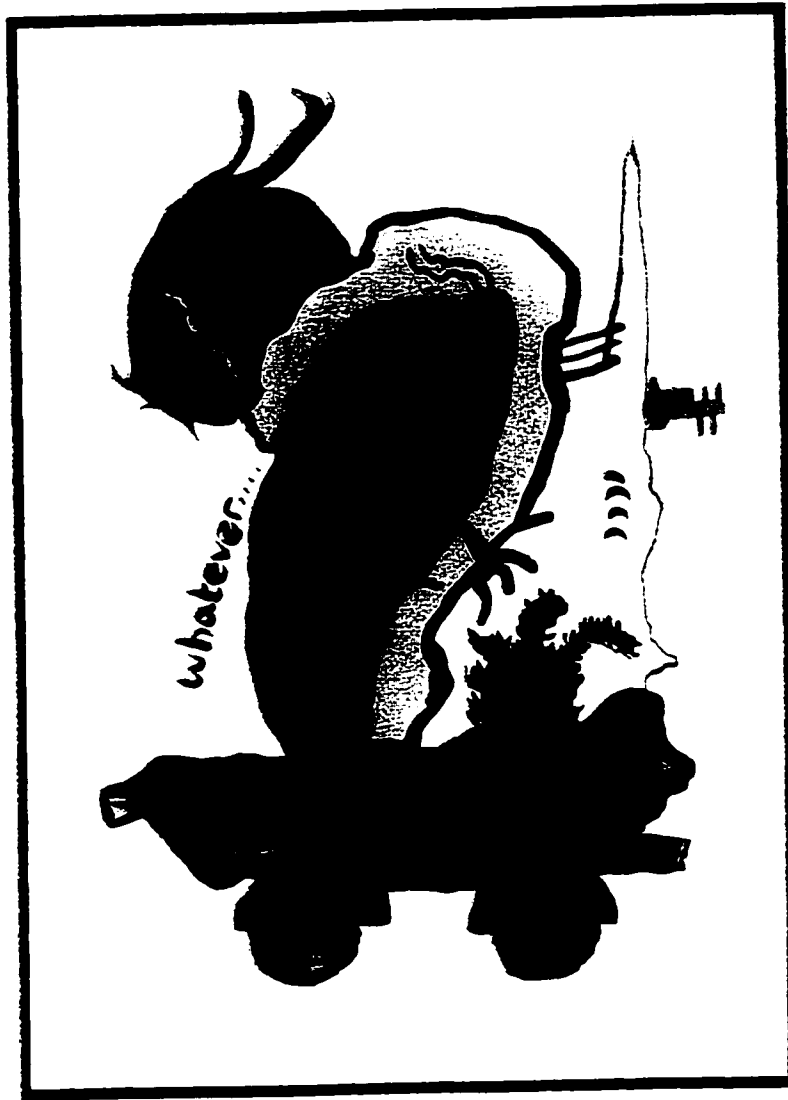
Asi es mi vida, un fresco mutiple y variable que solo yo puedo decifrar y que me pertenece como un secreto (Allende, p33, 1992)
(translation: this is how my life is, a multiple fresco that only I can figure out and that belongs to me like secret)



From Journal, 1994 (Figure 2)

On reflection, I think the main reason for my critique experiences unfolding in this manner is no matter what I would say, I felt my words could never do justice to the process the painting had been through. My paintings usually go through a complex process where thoughts continuously evolve. I was uncomfortable telling anyone about why or what story inspired me to paint that picture, because even if I did, that was just a part of the story...and not necessarily the whole or most important part, so why state it?

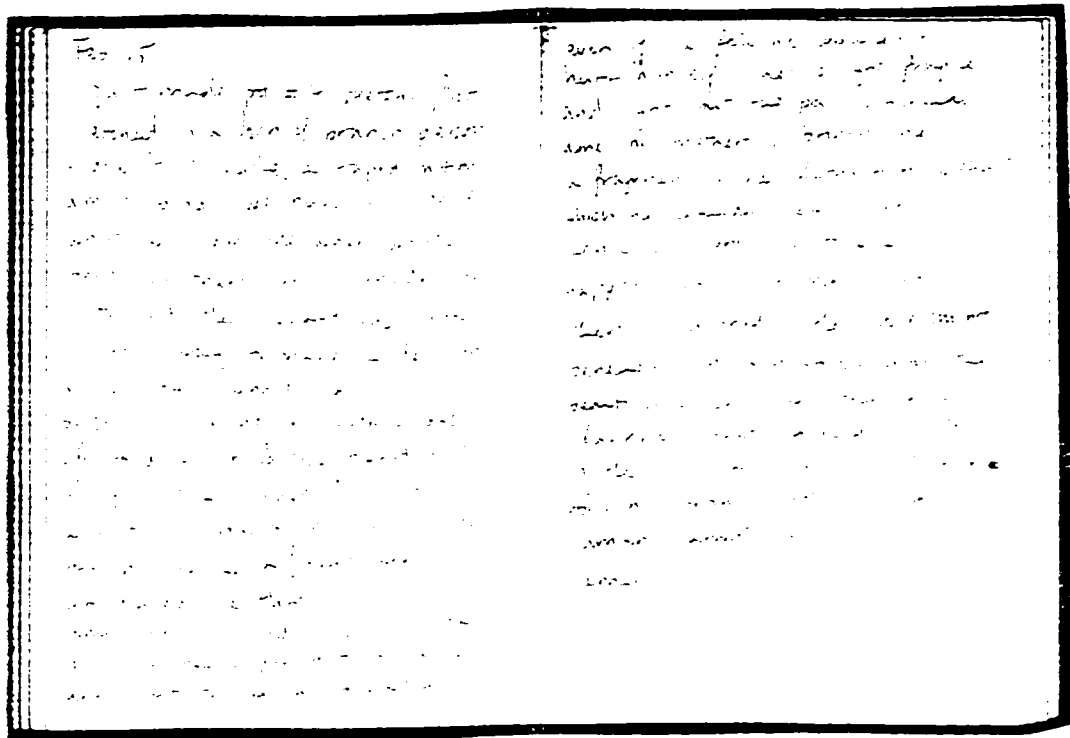
After I finish a work, unless I have written documentation of its process (and this is rare) all the thoughts that went into it are there in essence, but not labeled neatly with words. That is, the thoughts/energy/dreams/realities which influenced a painting's creation are always a part of that painting, but are not always easy or necessary to identify via the spoken or written word.



From journal, 1992 (Figure 3)

Once I tried to keep a written record of my thought processes as I made two different paintings. Taking Antoinette Herivel's approach (1997) to researching her own studio practice, I wrote down what I thought was relevant to what I was doing while I engaged in the process of creating a painting. Herivel's objective "was to discover what it meant to experience the process of being immersed in the discipline of art making." (Herivel, p.55) Once her body of work was finished, she read through her diary writing and made thematic groups out of the concepts she encountered. For instance, memory, influences, time, space, etc. Like Herivel, I wanted to see what kinds of thought processes went into my studio production in the hopes of maybe being able to articulate what my mind did when I painted. I created a form of autobiographical documentation of my process for these two works. The results fascinated me in the sense that although I thought I could not talk about my process, I could definitely write about it. Commenting on the limitations of only using dialogue to talk about art and the artistic process, Stout (1995) states that "speaking in a classroom setting is extemporaneous... the student is on the spot, with little opportunity to edit, revise, or explain in detail... students are overly influenced by the ideas of others and do not engage in independent thought." (Stout, p.58) My writing gave me a new understanding, in a sense, of what actually went on in the creation of these two works. I could see how and by what factors my thoughts were influenced when creating the works. Yet now when I look back at the writing... it is only relevant to me. Would I need to articulate all that in a critique?

Uncertain of what was appropriate to say about my work in a critique, I would keep my comments short and somewhat vague. I did not want my work branded as anything in specific. The painting had to be free from words that would make its meaning concrete and official. How can you confine something so free, or at least wants to be? I am still to this day, unclear as to why I felt it had to be that way, but I certainly did. Maybe it has to do with the fact that I felt undefined, so how could anyone define anything I made? As a justification for not saying too much, I often said I did not want to influence the viewer's interpretation of my work.



From Journal, 1994. (Figure 4)



YUVIOYELO 1994 (Figure 5)

I was never able to say: “words have little or nothing to do with the painting you have in front of you.” Maybe because it is not entirely true that words have nothing to do with my work. And maybe its just that...nothing is always true when it comes to talking about my work. Or maybe its the fact you can’t possibly say the whole truth with words, yet the whole truth is present within the actual work.

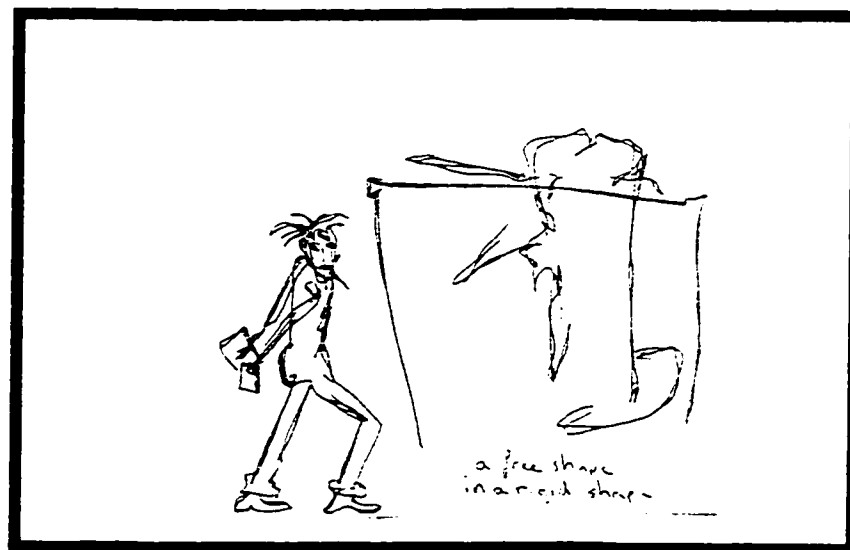
Verbalizing about one’s own art work, or that of others, within the time constraints of a critique and the atmosphere of the group setting it takes place in, can fall short of true relevance and meaning. The group critique “sets up an ‘interpretive reality’ in which professors, students, their art work, and their talk about the work and themselves, are situated in a particular time and space.” (Jeffers, 1995) Within this time and space, many factors can affect the talk that surrounds student’s work.

Since critiques often form an essential component of a studio class, it is presumed they have an educational value. In fact, according to Barrett, “students may well be more influenced by their participation in studio critiques than by reading about criticism in art education texts or occasionally practicing criticism in art education courses, or perhaps even taking a course in criticism” (Barret, 1988). While the critique process can make a significant impact upon art students (and potential art educators), their meanings, purposes, and benefits are not standard; people interpret critiques differently as critiques tend to mean different things to different people.

It is fair to say that “art teachers, like all teachers, tend to teach as they were taught” (Hobbs, 1993). Taking this factor into account, in 1995 for a course called *Recurring Issues in Art Education (Arte 611)*, I conducted a pilot study in which I interviewed various art students about their experiences with critiques. I thought it was important to inquire into the nature of the teaching/learning environment within these settings. How do university art students interpret critiques? How do critiques affect their art making process? What do possible future art educators believe is the purpose of a critique, and how might they conduct critiques when they become teachers? I ended up with a vast

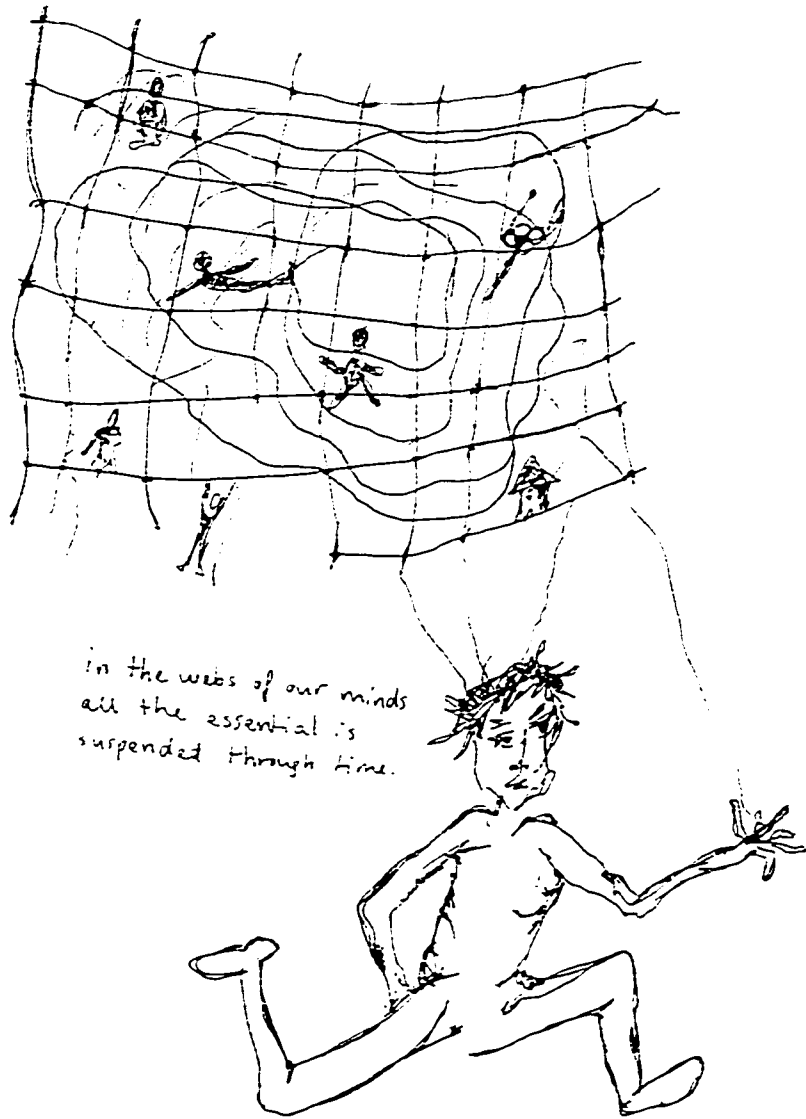
array of student opinions concerning various aspects of critiques. Although, my pilot study was incredibly interesting, I did not have a clear concept of what critiques meant to me. How did words affect my paintings?

In 1995 in my journal I wrote: for the end of classes this year I don't know what to say nor how to present myself nor my paintings. words undo my work. but sometimes words are necessary. when they talk about my painting I write. but you see that I don't write everything. partly because I can't and partly because I don't have the time. anyway, what do these words do? what would I do without these words...surely when I am working and I move back, I see lots of things... but the power of the colours and shapes also take me over and I am lost in between literal and not. that is why my works show a shift between this and that. of things that are recognizable and things that cannot be labeled. the works which touch me the most are those that have or transmit a sincere emotion and I know when a work does it or not. critiques are surely important, but... well, I don't know... either way it's interesting to hear what others say... how critiques have influenced their work.



From Journal, 1994, (figure 6)

Oct. 9



From Journal, 1994 (Figure 7)

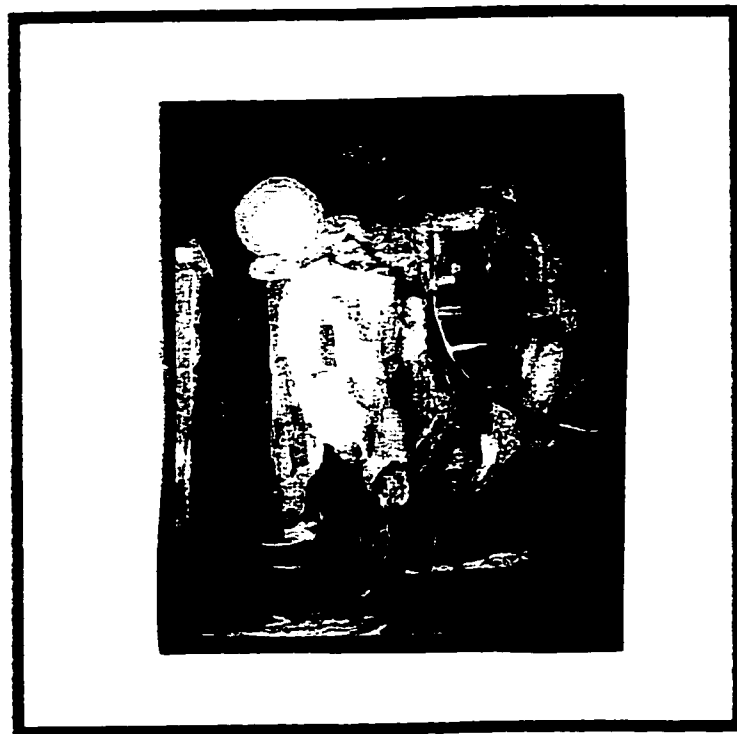
10 paintings, their critiques, and my journal entries

Once, after a critique, someone asked me whether I felt that the manner in which we had critiques was in anyway helpful to me. In my journal, March 11, 1996, I wrote: "...even though we were in a small group of five people, (including the person who asked the question) she directed her question to me specifically. I was quite surprised at first and so I asked her: *'you mean my art work... whether the critiques are helpful to me?'* she rephrased her question by saying *'How do these discussions help you become a better painter? Do these comments help you at all?'* At first I did not say a word... could I tell them that their comments did not help me become a better painter? The truth is that I had never really thought about it that way... well my initial answer was no... and then after an uncomfortable silent pause... I proceeded to say that in general, critiques have never been helpful to me or affected my work at all, but that I found it interesting to hear different responses to my work. I am not surprised that she was unsatisfied with my evasive reply, but what can I do... that's what came out at the moment... she looked annoyed and said *'... what, critiques don't help you at all... so what is all this (referring to the critique we just had) just plain fun for you?... a game?'* I just shrugged my shoulders... I didn't really know what to say... just like when I have to talk about a painting. I guess I feel that my art work is out of the context of the people I am presenting it to... when I paint I do in fact paint for myself. I am essentially the intended viewer in my work... and then I also feel in a sense that I am a universal viewer... and that anyone can read into my work as they please... my process of painting is extremely complex... sometimes I begin with no intention, and other times I have one but as I begin putting it down, my intentions become reinterpreted and redefined... its a constant struggle between the love of painting, the beauty of its creation, and expressing my mental storm... I never could talk much about my work... I have real problems defining my constructions... so when I try and speak about them, I never do them any justice... I speak briefly and abruptly about something so rich and full of depth... this is frustrating... its even more frustrating than hearing things like *'I see an ice cream cone'* when the painting had absolutely no such intention... but that should not bug me because

its the viewer's external construction of my internal construction... what's important is the genuine inner construction and its dialogue with the tecnic of colour and form... the dialogue of its creation... I am confused... but that is al right... I paint until I feel it is finished... my final brush stroke tells me so! I love to paint and whether others read it correctly or not is not of my concern as much as if I can read what I intended... that is if what I intended resolves itself or redefines itself as something else and solves itself its fine... whatever... my brain hurts... I feel like only I can relate to my work... well that's not true... there are others....to get back to what that person who asked me about critiques and how they affect me... well I just feel like if I begin to explain my mental process... it just won't make any sense... I think my imagery is strong enough to stand by itself... I guess I really believe that... and when I go to define it, it stands less... is that true?... can a teacher answer that objectively?... is their answer relevant or genuine?... you have to paint for yourself and I do... I just hate talking about it...

VAMONOS A CASA September 1994

I made this painting based on a sketch in my sketch book which I found particularly strong. It was a simple subject...two people on their way home...somewhere in Montreal in the middle of the night. I love the fancy rooftops on many of the apartment buildings downtown. This painting was mere enjoyment as opposed to the numerous layers of failed paintings beneath it. I painted over at least seven paintings before finally painting this one without getting the uncontrollable urge to paint over it. It remains as one of my favourite works.



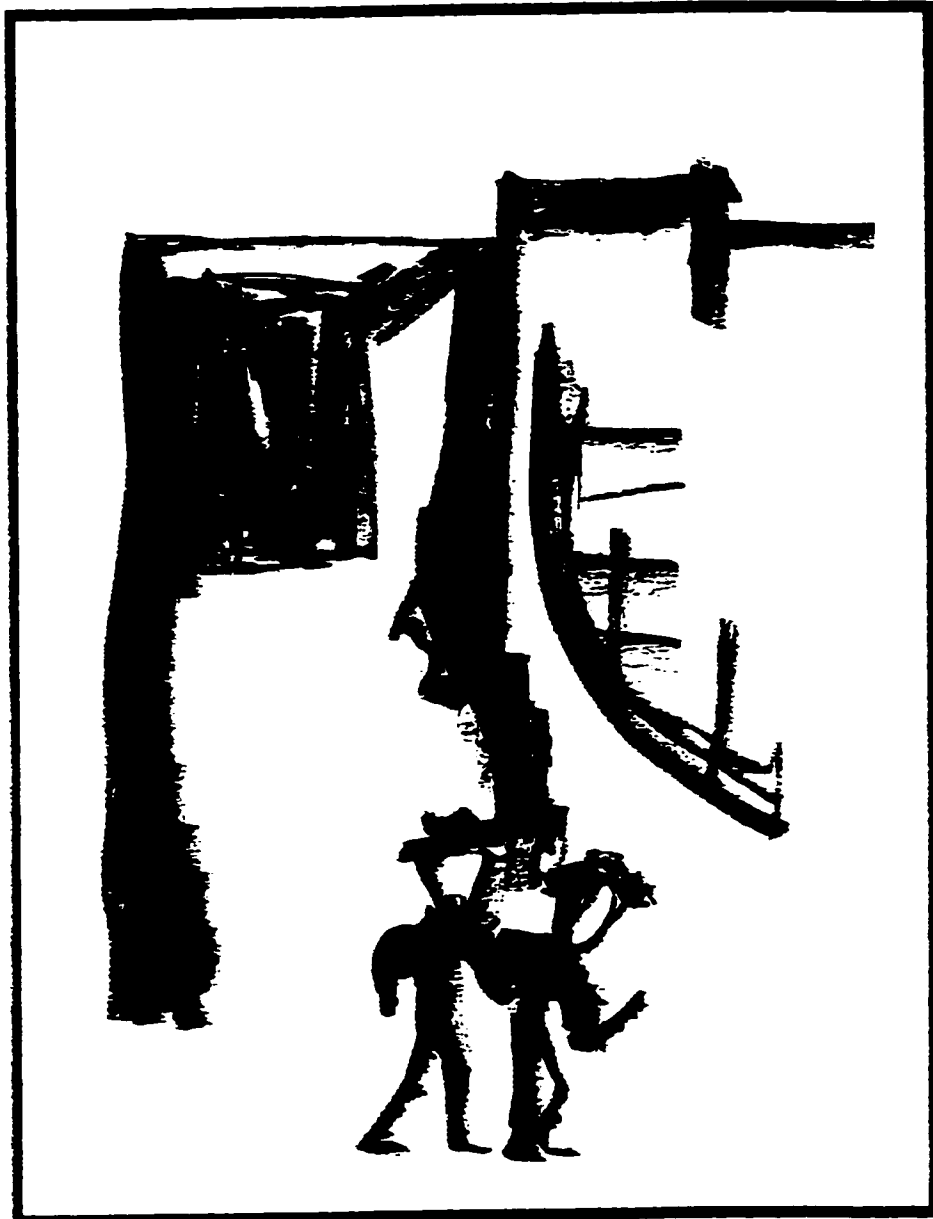
VAMONOS A CASA

(Figure 8)

acrylic on masonite

60 × 42 cm.

1994



VAMONOS A CASA sketch. From Journal, 1994 (Figure 9)

During the critique

Tristan

-colours are so rich

Maggie

-it looks like a fresh box of smarties

Lori

-kids having a blast on a Friday night... maybe on vacation... FUN... not a worry in their minds..talking about their evening etc..beautiful and refreshing...

Tristan

-seems like a battle between abstraction and figuration... from far... figuration... from close its more ambiguous... from close its abstraction!!!it reminds me of a French hat (my roof top!) there is a lot of luminous colour... lots of light coming out... there's a kind of dialogue between colours and shapes and rhythm and wind.....if it were bigger I would feel more involved.

Colette

-I don't want to look at it too much... I don't want to be in that world (someone asked WHY?)... because of darkness and confusion... its a bit scary... then again the colours are so rich... its attractive and frightening at the same time

Lori

-to me its a hot summer night... two kids hanging out... cheerful... even the buildings are alive... its extreme climate that's so alive... its vibrant and full of energy.... what is frightening?

Colette

-I'm not sure yet... mmmm

Sam

-sees a hot summer night... back alley with two kids... etc... trying to get home before night... the buildings have absorbed the heat of the day and absorbed colours.... summer moon...

Naje

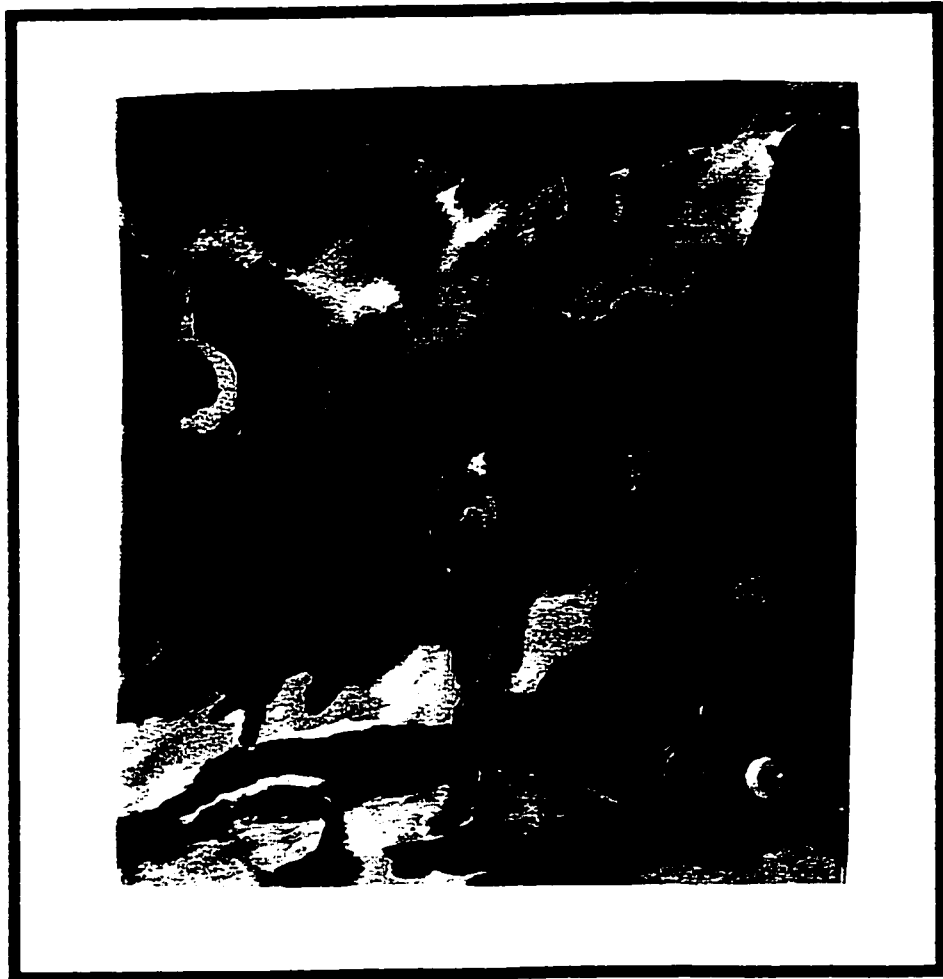
-last one to respond... no comment for a while....

-response to richness of colour... dark and mysterious... toy world... after dark... when toys are all playing... I am let down by figures...

After the critique

I did not know what to say after all these comments about my simple painting. I was very confused by the person who found that my painting depicted a scary place... a world that the person did not want to be in. I told the group that they were all right, it was two people on their way home. I learned however that something about the painting made almost everyone feel like it was summer, and that the two figures appeared to be kids... something which I had not even thought about. I wonder if they are right... did I subconsciously want it to be summer in this painting?

TWISTED February 1995



TWISTED
(Figure 10)
acrylic on canvas
40 x 36 cm.
1995

Journal: February 18, 1995 (prior to critique)

I knew when I finished this painting that I would have nothing to say about it in the critique...yet it was one of those works that I immediately liked... in my journal I wrote: este pobre personaje en conflicto...verde con su enfermedad... aqui llego y se pego... es el dolor que siente que lo tiene asi....aunque el auto esta alli no se puede ir... porque? La respuesta no esta clara y nunca esta clara...asi es la vida....the moon is smiling but its reflection is sad and buried in the ground....yo lo veo... pero seguro que los demas no lo van a ver... y no me importa porque asi es la vida anonymous....en mi pintura ese mundo y esta vida estan juntos y rotos en mil pedazos....pedazos de un rompe cabezas... de repente este pobre personaje quiere reconstruir su realidad...pero lo lograra? No lo se pero si acaso quiere escaparse...alli le puse auto!

(translation: this poor character in conflict...green in his illness...got here and got stuck...its the pain that got him this way...even though the car is there she can't go... why? The answer is not clear and it never is...that's life... the moon is smiling but its reflection is sad and buried in the ground...I see it...but surely the others won't see it...I don't care because that's how anonymous life is... in my painting this world and this life are together and broken in a thousand pieces... puzzle pieces... maybe this poor character wants to reconstruct his reality... but will he be able? I don't know but in case he wants to escape... I put him a car!)

During the Critique

David

-it looks very different to your other paintings... the figure is not detailed again... but its facing us for the first time instead of being sideways.... everything in such turmoil compared to others...

Lori

-says she has an undecided reaction... it has a puzzled effect

Naje

-the background is very different... it doesn't seem so determined... everything is on the edge

David

-the only hope is the little car... its the only way out.... if it weren't for the little car it would feel negative...

Naje

-there is so much conflict... it feels handicapped... maybe because I only see one arm... and even that one is attached to something.... the figure is not free... even the legs...

Tristan

-there is a tension between a surrealistic world... I like it... its more abstract than usual... I like the person....

Colette

-I am enjoying this one a lot... except inside the figure... the figure is in too much conflict... why isn't it free like everything else?

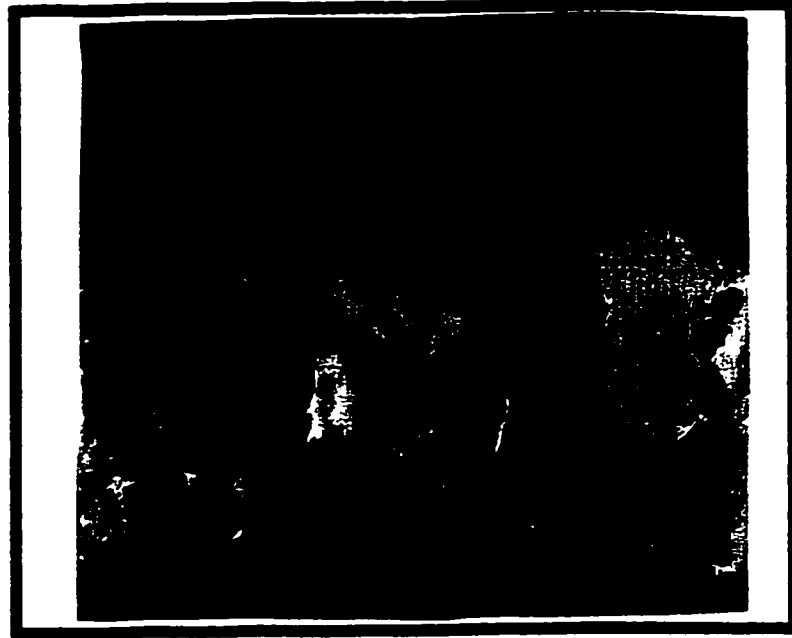
Pam

-such intensity... there are so many possibilities yet the figure seems somewhat stuck... it is almost synical...

Journal: February 23, 1995 (after the critique)

I decided not to say anything about this painting during the critique... I was satisfied with my own thoughts and the fact that the conflict of my character as well as the 'escape' car were seen, to a certain degree. In my journal I wrote:....maybe Naje is right... the person is handicapped... the person is attached to the fragmented landscape... maybe trying to make sense of it all and it is the person's own stubbornness that creates her inability to escape....one arm attached and the other one twisted...in her stomach...because its a gut feeling... here I go again...making stories up with my subconscious doings and the comments of others... and as for the car being an escape....well as much of an escape as it is... its the vehicle that brought this person into this mess in the first place!

JETONTONPAS February, 1995



JETONTONPAS
(Figure 11)
acrylic on wood
30 x 30 cm.
1995



JETONTONPAS sketch. From Journal, 1995 (Figure 12)

Journal: February 13, 1995 (prior to critique)

In English this painting would be called 'I can't hear you' but that seems like such a boring title so I tried in Spanish and Arabic and finally its a weird French with a Spanish accent that made the title...je ne t'entend pas = jetontonpas! I don't know whether I will tell them the title or not. I did not intend for the painting to look the way it ended up looking but I like it a lot...there's a person's head on the far left and he's wearing a hat and he's looking down, seemingly oblivious to the two figures in his ear. On the far right there is a big ear which although it is open...and probably listening...is of no concern to the two figures in between....I'm not sure what exactly I meant by creating this work but to me, it represents some form of miscommunication....

During the critique

I didn't know whether to tell them the title or not...so at first whilst they looked, I didn't say anything....I figured I would tell them later....then just before anyone spoke, I told them...

Tristan

-it is very musical...he likes the tension between the figures and the environment.
-sees it as inside a forest...like the strokes leading the composition (???) the strokes and the environment have a relation...very dynamic and apex effect. (I must say he lost me entirely)

Lori

-figures look like they are on water...maybe because of the movement...she likes the abstract mysterious face on the left (right on she saw the face!!)
-the characters blend in even though they are in the centre of the painting...

Colette

-likes the shape on the right immediately
-figures seem more integrated...usually you change how you paint when it comes to the figure...you paint a figure...says that the painting changes in different areas

Pam

- sees a Gauguin devil like aspect
- figures are in a traditional stance...one stands and one sits... there is an affectionate yet cool atmosphere between figures...
- there is a very warm idealized feeling....

-When they were finished commenting I mentioned how it was about miscommunication and that Lori was right about the face on the left and how the shape that Colette liked was in fact a big ear...

Journal: February 13, 1995 (after the critique)

I imagine that they were a bit confused and I don't really blame them... since I can't really explain... how can they understand... or should I explain or should they understand... no one mentioned colour today... that's a change... I am not sure whether telling them the title was good or bad... I don't know... I hate talking about my work... it ruins it... it takes away the magic... even for me... next time I won't say anything I don't think... but then again you never know... I just might...

CONOZCO UN LUGAR SECRETO Match 1995



CONOZCO UN LUGAR SECRETO

(Figure 13)

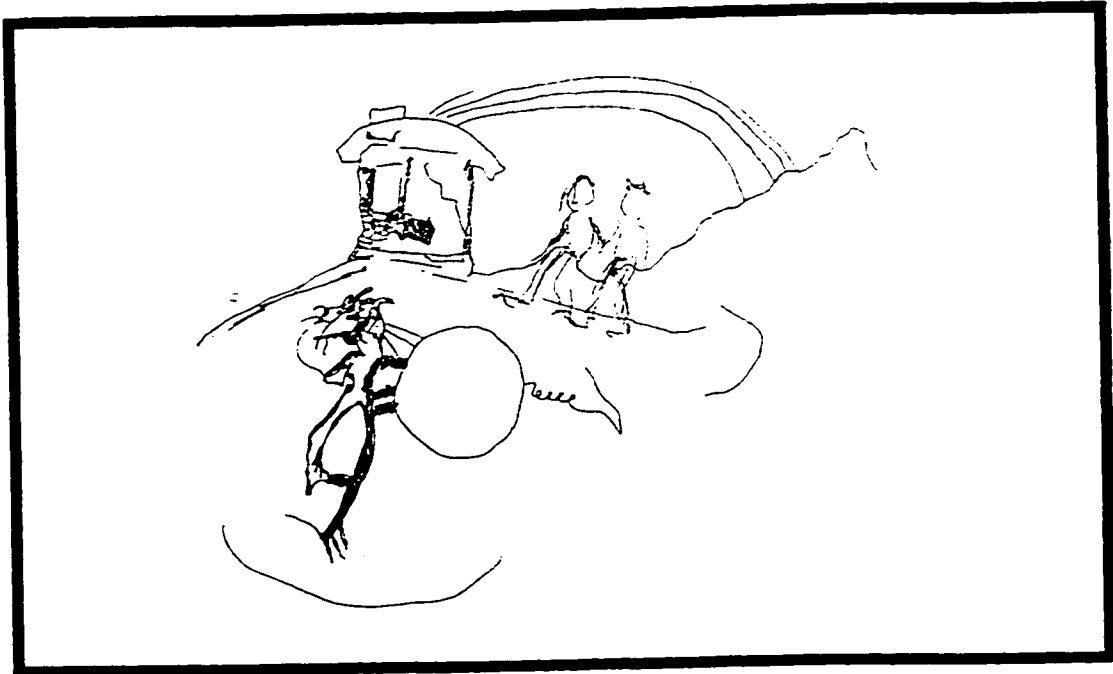
acrylic on wood

120 × 95 cm.

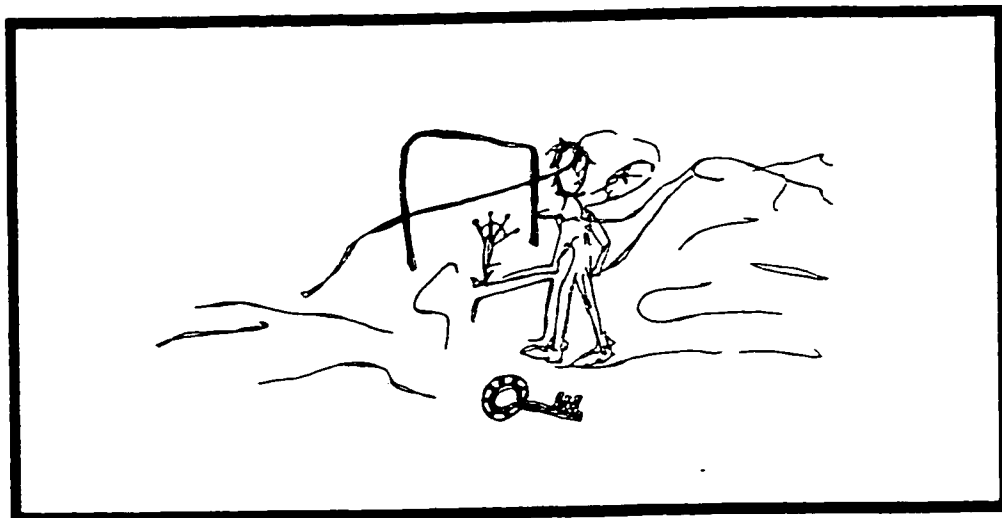
1995

I have lived in Costa Rica, Greece, Spain, Chile, and Canada. Moving from one country to another as I grew up was an overwhelming experience. This experience manifests itself as a recurring theme in many of my sketches and paintings. Every time we moved, everything (e.g. people, language, school, geography, temperature) changed. I remember an aspect of getting familiar with my new surroundings. I would look for a secret place where I could be on my own. Somewhere that was my own because I had discovered it for myself. So I would get on my bike and go to places where I shouldn't be, for example, construction sites once the workers were gone. I liked and felt the need to get away.

In my paintings there are often strange houses or fragments of house forms, and a figure or two related to them. These figures and houses exist in peculiar landscapes which often are made up of mysterious elements. This painting is a classic culmination of a number of sketches related to this theme.



From Journal, 1995 (Figure 14)



From Journal, 1994 (Figure 15)

During the critique

Naje

-likes it...it reminds me of a fairy tale but I'm not sure which...Hansel and Gretel I think...yeah that's...I think its the colours in that house...you could eat it up...and the way the two figures are holding hands...its as if one is showing the other the way or something...

Tristan

-likes the size of this work...what a beautiful landscape...it could be earth and sky even ocean except they're walking...the house looks a bit like its on the edge...it looks like it might fall...its almost like an illusion of a house...it could just drop off into the background because its so much on the edge of the land...

Colette

-looks very pensive...says there is something she does like...this shoe (she went up to the painting and pointed out the shoe on the right foot of the figure on the right... whatever?)

Sam

-there is usually an element of tension in your work which I don't see here...it has to have a purpose, it must be saying something or telling of something...is it heaven, is it hell...and tell of it...if not it becomes decoration...so be careful

Colette

-worries about these two figures...they look like they might crack...even the house looks very fragile...wonders why...

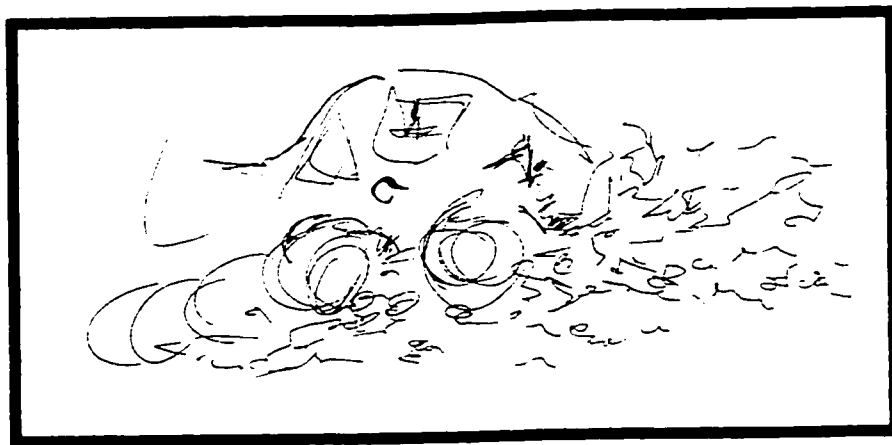
Lori

-really likes this painting...the colours, the size...she is intrigued by the yellow beneath the figures feet...it is like a cave, but what are these two vertical lines?...they are so rigid in such a free landscape...even the house is less rigid

-when it was my turn to talk I didn't say much...I didn't tell them the title, or what the work was about. But I did tell Lori that the yellow area was a type of secret cave and that one of the figures had discovered it and that the blue and green lines were placed there to keep the entrance open...I had put them there so that the opening wouldn't collapse.

Journal March 24 (after the critique)

today... a day that started so nice and blue... turned to gray... dark out... its like a painting when I ruined it... ha... but tomorrow it'll fix... and I might not even have to touch it... I never say much during the critique... I don't know why... my paintings are very personal in the sense that they are about me. my life and how I feel it... lately there are often cars in my paintings and houses with windows and anyway... once in class someone said that the little car in the bottom of my painting seemed to offer hope to the turmoil the person in my painting had to deal with or something... yesterday I looked up Cuban artists because I wanted to find out more about them and the only book on Cuban artists was called outside Cuba and it was about exiled artists... two of them mentioned cars in their work having to do with immigrating and never really having a home... stuff like that... it made me think of the houses and cars in my work... they must reflect moving and changing land and shifting and mixing customs and comparing beliefs... and now I am off on a tangent... anyway... but its true... all those mixed up houses in my paintings... and I paint them almost subconsciously... they've become a kind of symbol for me... oh whatever... its interesting to see how artists write about their work and how and why they make art and who of those teach... it was also interesting to see how many of the artists from Cuba referred to their teachers as artists who inspired them...



Sketch from journal, 1995 (Figure 16)

UNDERCURRENTS September 1995



UNDERCURRENTS

(Figure 17)

acrylic on canvas

46 x 36 cm.

1995

We went to Cuba for summer vacation that year and I had been craving the ocean for a while. I love the ocean and I miss it strongly when I am away from it for too long. It had been a long and tedious year, full of changes and hard work. I enjoyed the ocean and let it drown all the stuff I wanted it to drown. When I came back... I wanted to make a painting encompassing the feelings I had while swimming underwater.

Journal: September 1995 (prior to critique)

I haven't painted since April 10th 1995. The whole summer and then some... about 5 months. Often I had a tremendous urge to paint and yet I never got around to it. My first painting seemed effortless at first, then the struggling began... then I hated it... then not... etc etc etc.... A very familiar process for me.... the incredible emptiness and yet massiveness of the ocean... the layers of depth over and under me as I swam... pushing the water with my arms and legs, and underneath me, my shadow curving with the sand below... when I went in the water and pushed away with my arms, I felt like I was pushing away all those things which burden my being in the hustle and bustle of everyday life... I felt like I was underneath the world, submerged in water and safely protected from any harm.... the ocean all around me as empty and endless as the sky above it.... certainly there are clouds in the sky, but just as cloudy as the shifts of currents can make the ocean.... the vigor of the natural elements overwhelmed my starved for nature self. I felt like I belonged right away. I felt connected to a part of my past... the water part... the sand... anyway... back to my painting....

During the critique

Tristan

-it looks like something that she could look at for hours and she sees other things that could be enhanced.

-water-ocean

-she sees a branch in the upper left corner.... says she's not sure if its a branch, but it seems to be the only thing that is not moving or shifting, it's a solid thing and it seems that the figure let go of it and fell into this... swirling... everything is swirling

Maggie

-reminds her of a film... a chaotic film where the clouds and the ocean looked similar... said that I picked that up in my painting... (but I never saw the film?... now I want to)

Lori

-somewhere she'd like to be...the sky and the water look so similar...the waves and the clouds...

-there seems to be a lot of unrest yet but it's peaceful...

Pam

mystical thing...the figure looks like Marilyn Monroe...at least the bathing suit reminds me of....(bathing suit???)

When it was my turn to say something about my work I said something brief about swimming under water...and how if you open your eyes in the water and look straight ahead...it is a vast turquoise...and it felt like it was calling me to swim and well there you have it...I couldn't verbalize that feeling of pushing with my arms and legs and gliding...going far into nowhere...a most incredible feeling...and the group did not quite know how to react to my words...there were a few comprehensive smiles...

Journal: September 1995 (After the critique)

I was very pleased with my painting. It was me under the water happily swimming towards the sun, at one with the elements about me. I was proud to show it and thought I had lots to say about it, yet as usual when it came to the critique situation, I watched and listened to the groups responses and took some notes...after the critique I wrote: today I was amazed that my painting evoked the responses that it did...practically every little phrase that was said was an intentional part of my painting process...for instance, (this girl) remembered a film she had seen which impacted her with the ephemeral nature of the water and the sky with the clouds and the currents shifting in and out of one another! This was something which I felt and intentionally pronounced in my painting...(someone else) "that branch in the upper left corner...I'm not sure if its a branch, but it seems to be the only thing that is not moving or shifting, it's a solid thing and it seems that the figure let go of it and fell into this..." well its funny because it started off being an aeroplane...going in the opposite direction of everything else...then I really didn't like the plane and sort of tried getting rid of it by piling up more sky elements over it...needless to say...I was unable to get rid of it because for some reason...it needed to stay there...and it did...that's how I got there (to Cuba) and partly that's why I'm not still kicking away water...I had to come back here.

THE ESCAPE January 1996



THE ESCAPE
(Figure 18)
acrylic on masonite
120 x 60 cm.
1996

I made this painting based on a sketch I had drawn a couple of years earlier. The sketch is of someone walking or running up some sort of path. It is someone escaping, but leaving traces behind.



THE ESCAPE sketch, 1995 (Figure 19)

Journal, January 23,1996 (prior to critique)

In my journal I wrote: echoes of the person's effort are in the lines behind...like a slow motion picture where you see the ghost of where the person was seconds before... the figure's back is bent...tired yet persistent...looking forward and sideways at once... this person has no choice...the path is set and its up hill...I showed this painting to Dina and Layla (my sisters) and they both saw a bird...I can't for the life of me see a bird...I guess because I never painted a bird! They didn't see the figure until I pointed it out to them and even then...barely. Oh well...so the figure escaping became a bird...birds can escape because they fly...who cares...its the essence that counts and the essence of flight or escape is there!

During the critique

Colette

-I see a bird (just like Dina and Layla saw!)

Jane

-it looks more like a dragon... look at the bumps on the tail... or its a prehistoric bird...also sees a shoe in the bottom left corner and a blue fish right next to it

Colette

-bird, dragon... whatever it is keeps pulling her eyes towards it and she is not sure why this happens... there seems to be a lot of confusion

Tristan

-gets the same feeling of eyes being drawn to that bird like figure... thinks it is the yellow being surrounded by dark colours that causes that tension...

Pam

-anticipated flight... that is what causes the tension... something wants to get away (I wonder if she thinks so because the others have seen a bird?)

Tristan

-finds elements being the objects and the background at the same time... different areas come out and then go back into the background... especially the shapes in the darkness... loves the dark red area and finds many points of interest... there is a rhythm in those circular shapes along the bottom... although they are not placed symmetrically, there is something which makes your eyes jump from one to another... enjoys doing that...

Jane

-says its like a panorama of contrast, (very formal talk and now she's lost me)... there is a tension and something afraid... it is an imaginary dreamscape

-when it was my turn to talk I pointed out the figure that no one had seen. I explained that the figure was escaping from something and that for some reason he was leaving traces of movement. I explained that the shoe was one such trace and that the bubble shapes along the bottom were the figure's predetermined path. I also pointed out how I thought it was interesting that people had seen a bird although I never intended for there to be one... I said that maybe the element of escape had come out subconsciously in some other form... a bird instead of a figure. I felt incoherent as I spoke... but it came out anyway.

Journal, January 25, 1996 (after the critique)

This time I talked more about my painting than usual... afterward I felt strange... should I have to explain all that? And even though I had shown my intentions... did they get it? Could they see the figure once I pointed it out? I am not sure... after all it took Dina and Layla a while before they could see it. Did I ruin it for them when I showed them what it really was or did I just leave them with more questions? I am not sure. I wish I could talk about my work better... so as I made some sense... or better... not have to say anything... anyway... why is the figure escaping... its my subconscious which I haven't even figured out entirely... maybe that's why I don't want to say anything... the figure is me running along my destiny... the predetermined path is my destiny... so there... and we all leave traces behind...

WHILE I WAS SLEEPING February 1996



WHILE I WAS SLEEPING

(Figure 20)

acrylic on masonite

120 × 60 cm.

1996

When I finished this painting I knew that no one would be able to see anything for sure in it. It was one of the first times I had abstracted everything to the point that only I knew for sure what was there. At some point while I was working on this painting I saw what looked like a figure lying down in a comfortable sleeping position... behind this figure everything looked so busy, noisy ... I decided it was me sleeping through much of my childhood as we moved from one country to another... and I continued the painting with all that in mind.

Journal: February 21, 1996 (prior to critique)

She is in a curled up sleeping on her side position...so rested that she'll never wake to see what is happening behind her...so many places...which is which, when did we get there, why, how...how old was I...you get one place, unpack, live, go away again...a little more clutter to shove in the memory section of your head...and I was a kid...in a way it all happened while I was sleeping...you forget what you don't want to remember...how can you remember an earthquake if you slept right through it?

During the critique

Tristan

-sees much more turmoil... maybe its all those purples and blacks...there is the feeling of unrest... I don't know... maybe it the way the paint is handled... or both...

Jane

-is there a figure?... I feel like I am looking for something... she doesn't see the turmoil that Tristan sees... she less explosions and more order... can't stop looking for things...

Colette

-she feels the intensity of this work and feels like she can't get close to it (good maybe she shouldn't anyway... I'm sleeping)... she feels the same tension that Tristan sees and says something about clutter and the same feeling of being overwhelmed by unorganized clutter... like when her studio in the country gets messy... also looking for something... thinks she sees a wolf... (where???)

Pam

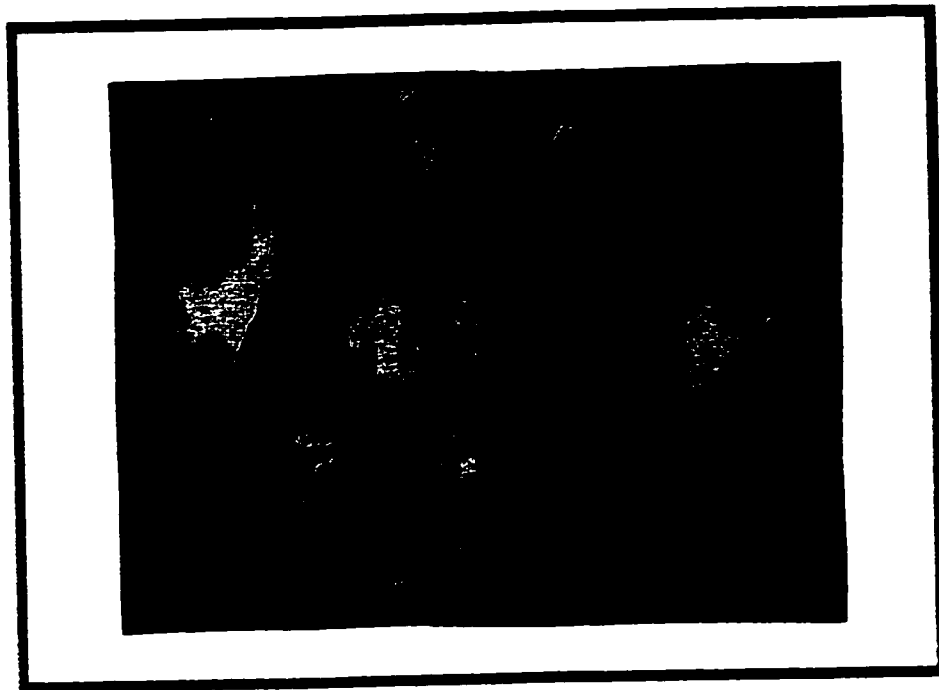
-its full of possibilities... the shapes are very suggestive but you can't say for sure what anything is... likes that... the tension gives the painting an overwhelming strength... the yellow... its like looking at the sun even though you know you shouldn't look right at it... loves the colours....

-after the last person spoke they all looked at me and I was once again at a loss for words... I never said anything.

Journal: February 26, 1996 (after the critique)

Although I knew no one would have seen what my painting was about I never explained it. It was like my own secret and it didn't feel right to reveal it. But it didn't feel right not to talk about it either. In my journal I wrote: alguien esta viendo mas orden y menos explosions whereas otros ven mucho turmoil... supongo que depiende quien lo esta mirando (someone is seeing more order and less explosions whereas others see much turmoil...I suppose it depends who is looking)... either way some people felt the emotion although I don't think anyone saw what it really was...I'm not sure if that is good or bad...no dije nada (I didn't say anything)... why should I?

NEVER LOOK BACK March, 1996



NEVER LOOK BACK

(Figure 21)

acrylic and oil stick on canvas

77 × 65 cm.

1996

When I went back to Chile after a couple of years... a lot had changed. Somehow, things in general were not as I had remembered them. People, buildings, parties, streets... everything seemed somewhat shifted. This painting evoked the insecurity I felt with this aspect of my life which had grown all too familiar to me. The insecurity of the familiar turning into less familiar, a reality that I grew up with as we moved from country to country

Journal: March 11, 1996 (prior to critique)

In my last studio class I showed my painting with magic mushrooms... in my little notebook I wrote down my thoughts while everyone was looking at it. I wrote: me pregunto que me van a preguntar porque yo no estoy segura que pensaba cuando hice esta pintura... (I wonder what they are going to ask me because I am not sure what I was thinking when I made this painting)... then I wrote... things are ephemeral... just when you thought what you thought was something... its changed into possibly something else... and I decided to call it *never look back*. This happened within minutes prior to anyone responding to my work... I decided on a name and a 'purpose' so as that if I were asked to explain it... well there it was. And it is true... that is what the painting is about, in a little less than a few words.

During the critique:

Jane

-was the first to respond... she noticed the looking back... fantasy area... not as bright colours (as usual) therefore not clear of what is to be seen there... questions... then she noticed the figure of a hand (which was a hand once I had finished the work) up above... the strength of that hand...

-everyone else said: "I thought it was something else"

-Joanne feels its a master or something but not sure what's represented by that hand...

-the painting represents an insecure undecided feeling... background feels dark... therefore insecure... not knowing what to do next.

David

-sees the figure interacting more with the environment and sees a lot of activity... she got a feeling of whimsical, fantasy, and mythology... she saw many animals and for her... that hand was a giraffe... (when that was said I saw it too and loved it much more than the hand... well... God could take many forms... why not a giraffe... to fit in)

to her there is no threat to figure

-interesting to see how Joanne saw a threat and she did not... different people find different things threatening...

-likes the gesture in the figure and feels its moving through the space....

Tristan

- everything is kind of moving... the figure does seem stuck... maybe catching his breath... sees many animals too... especially in bright colours, but dark colours are more atmospheric...
- he feels its like a walk in the park when it is early evening and there's light yet there's no light... light is coming from the objects not from the sun...
- he also saw hand as giraffe...
- figure is slightly differently made... (that amazed me how he said it because it is true... it was in the previous ugly painting which I transformed entirely except for the figure...)
- if it (the figure) were like the other shapes then it would blend and not stick out as much...

Colette

- her eyes go to very specific parts which she finds very beautiful and interesting ...she's thrilled... brings up that she works with children and she'd like to take them (my paintings) to her class and put them up...
- everything is magic... figure she is disappointed by... feels like she wants to help figure or something... figure bugs her quite a bit

Lori

- no comment
- (I wonder if its because I didn't comment on her work since I'm quite sick of responding to the same images on different paper.... I don't know what else to say...)

Tristan

there seems to be a different use of complementaries... electrifying... cobalt blue with orange..and underneath of feet ...strong complementaries...

Jane

- loves these little explosion of energy shapes... but sees that they also create a problem... confusion...
- that's the thing with painting there's a freedom to see it the way you want to see it she said that my paintings are getting more background... more depth in background... more than ever...

Pam

- figure being a tone darker and more somber with bent knees... reminds me of Mozart's magic flute
- gets a theatrical feeling... many layers... not like others with motions... pensive quality adds a psychological level to me...
- fatalistic apparition above... and fantastical atmosphere
- he feels less free and more controlled by elements... not being part or identifies with environment
- muddier tones create the psychological feeling.

-after everyone had given their response, it was my turn to talk. I said something about the figure walking from one place to another and how looking back on things... nothing is the same... the ephemeral quality of life as this figure feels it.

Journal: March 11, 1996 (after the critique)

My internal response to Joanne is "right on" it was a hand...it is by some super power (God like/destiny)... figure is a bit stuck and frightened and insecure and undecided... it is somewhat threatened by her surroundings which are sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly and sometimes a sick mixture of both....the darkness is a moody feeling which I'm not sure I created on purpose, but it amazes me how my state of being comes through or can come through in a painting.

LEVELS OF EXISTENCE March 1996



LEVELS OF EXISTENCE

(Figure 22)

acrylic on masonite

60 × 60 cm.

1996

Journal: March 20, 1996 (prior to critique)

I haven't painted in a long time and I've finally begun again. I remember once a teacher of mine told me how stopping to create art work for a period of time was all right... and another teacher who said that a painter should paint at least an hour a day... that sounded funny, as though it was exercise... but in the end I suppose it is sort of like that... either way... it's been about a while since I've seriously painted. So now, rusty as ever, I began a painting which stemmed from a photograph into an existential concern with the

existence of human beings at different levels... in some ways levels that the same person goes through within a life time, and in another, the way different people live within different class systems, habits, cultures... maybe level is the wrong word but until now, the title and that photograph have been my only firm and stable kick off point.... I have many twisted lines which started off as horizontal lines before... but straightness can only go so far with me and they almost immediately turned.... the colours of blue and yellow ochre came from the photograph which was taken during a sunset on a wonderful beach..... the sun tainted with ephemeral clouds is broken up and the three figures are standing within different lines representing those levels... of course this is what the painting means to me and most probably has little or nothing to do with how someone else might see it.... that is fine by me.

Journal: March 22, 1996 (prior to critique)

I have been making an extra effort not to get carried away using all the colours that I usually use.. maybe its because I want there to be a difference... after all, it has been a while since I've painted right?

I stop every now and again to look at it.... its like a love/hate relationship which either ends in love or hate in the end. I don't have any work which is a finished work that is still in that love/hate condition with me! O.K.... I'm lying... there is nothing absolute about me I think. I can't really say I've always been one way or another because I'd be lying... there are always exceptions. There are works which stay in that weird push/pull state with my emotions... but for the most part I try to solve that feeling and that is my struggle which is my process..... Like I said... I am trying not to get carried away with my colour... but I have this incredible urge to use green... and black too... so why don't I? It's stronger than me and has no verbal explanation... the green is going in!

OK... I put in the green... but I don't really like it at all. I feel like my painting is too scattered and broken... I should leave it alone... I am working outside in the beautiful sun... my inspiration to live! It is a little cool... but nothing like that crippling winter. The sun in this painting is the witness as it is in life... in this work it actually looks like a

big eye in the sky... and as I was putting green into the area which belongs to the eye, I wondered why and then said: cataracts... its a sickness of the eye... the sun is so disgusted with what it sees that it has developed a sickness... of course no one needs to know that but its interesting to document how my brain works as I paint.

During the Critique

Lori

-beautiful colours again... I love the way you use colour... you have no fear...

David

-wonders about the relationship between these three figures... their placement is intriguing... says that they seem happily stuck into the landscape... (why happily?... who is ever happily stuck?)... three figures... like a fairy tale... one figure is bigger than the other two... looks like their leader... maybe teacher... maybe the other two are children... either way her eye keeps moving from one figure to the next...

Naje

-the sun looks like an eye... an eye in the sky....

Tristan

-thinks that what Naje thought was an eye is an atmospheric wheel which is spinning... its there and its not there... although it is very fragmented... its presence is strong... even the land is like that... atmospheric... it is airy and somewhat unstable yet like you say (pointing at David)... figures are fixed... comfortably fixed...

Lori

-thinks that it is the colours and their application that creates that airy atmospheric quality...

Colette

-it bothers her that the figures have no faces (my figures hardly ever have faces... they are anonymous to you)
-reminds her of a game... musical chairs when the music stops and the people freeze...

Journal: March 22, 1996 (after the critique)

I chose not to say anything at all during the critique of levels of existence...ya sabia que no iban a cachar mi cuento...menos mal que no dije nada...a veces hay que cayarse...(I knew no one would pick up on my story...just as well that I didn't say anything...sometimes you just have to keep quiet) what was I gonna say anyway...my whole process story??? No way! I prefer, when my work is complicated like this, to listen to what others get out of it...its always interesting...I liked to hear all the responses...except musical chairs??? Where on earth was that coming from??? And the 'comfortably fixed' or 'happily stuck' comments...well maybe those do have some truth to them..you do get somewhat stuck/fixed into your existence and whether or not you are comfortable with it or not...well who knows...these people are comfortable with their existence....according to the critique of course!

HOW DO YOU FIT IN YOUR HOUSE? April 1996



HOW DO YOU FIT IN YOUR HOUSE?

(figure 23)

acrylic on masonite

60× 60 cm.

1996

Journal: April 1, 1996 (prior to critique)

I made another painting when I got sick of the previous one and I think it stemmed out of frustration with the previous one. I attacked the masonite board with colour and shapes in the same manner I used to...going with my instinct...I did start off with an idea which as usual became less and less apparent. I wanted three house forms and three figures. One huge house, one medium and one small... the big house has a tiny person living in it.

the medium one a medium person, and the small one a way too big person... the idea being that often people are too big or too small for their dwellings....it could be read in the context of rich and poor, having too much space vs. not enough....

I wanted darkness all around and bright light in the middle... so I began with a dark bright yellow to make my bright middle... a circular motion and I made the sun with continuous movement... then I dabbed in the figures and the house forms and then the darkness all around, seeping into the light... almost immediately I realized how much I despised the figures, except one, and I began getting rid of them to the richness of the houses and the mysterious darkness creeping in....the only figure that survived was the big one next to the small house... so if I had to psycho-analyze myself (because no one else would ever know about the existence of the other two figures and their proportions to the other houses) I could say... this figure has survived because he is big for his house.....he is poor and his house is small... he can pick up the house and treat it like a toy... he can throw it away or he can carry it and bring it safely wherever he pleases... the others... well....too small for the big rich house, the rockefeller disappeared... the medium person should have survived, maybe a little consideration for the middle class who work so damn hard ...just in order to live moderately... but...they work so hard that they are never home and alas the medium figure's vanishing....how much is your home really your home if you are never there? And back again to our humble yet proud survivor... maybe unable to have a huge house, but his house truly belongs to him...

I feel like my painting is unfinished yet I have an incredible appeal to it... maybe it is finished but at the moment it is at an untouchable stage....I wonder what this work will do in the critique... probably create the typical sensation of uncertainty... funny how I never have anything to say yet in reality there is so much... I remember once I told the story of one of my works... of course I didn't give it the time that it deserved, but I did it anyway... I felt like at least after all that physical, mental work and emotional drainage, my audience should have an explanation of what the work went through....the comments after were not very elaborate... for some I'm sure it destroyed what they had just seen into it and for that I was sorry... but I'm sure it was interesting anyway.....either way... at this

moment I am still uncertain as to whether or not I will say anything during the critique... goodnight!

During the critique

Naje

-seems very playful yet serious at the same time... the figure's stance feels somewhat carefree... but the surrounding darkness I think is what makes it serious...

David

-the figure looks like it is going one way yet looking the other way

Naje

-he (the figure) looks like he's pushing this little house shape away... maybe he wants a bigger house? hahaha

Lori

-there's other houses or house forms or parts of houses in the background...(seems to be offering a solution to Naje's funny comment)

Colette

-the figure doesn't fit in this picture... its too stick-figure like... is that a bat up there? (where on earth does she see a bat... you never know Colette... it just might be a bat!)
-why is the figure so alone

Tristan

-intrigued by the darkness outside and the brightness inside... loves brushstrokes and way I've handled the paints... colours and shapes... complementaries... purples and yellows...

Pam

-feels like there is a story-like quality... wants to know story and so plays with the elements... its like a fantasy world where you can construct your own reality... loves to explore and feels free to do so.....

Naje

-likes the apple core quality (apple core???... oh ok I get it)of colours on top of one another.... it makes a fantastic effect... you do that a lot in your work

Conclusion

Looking back over my journal entries, it is clear critiques were important to me. If not, I would not have so much written information on them. Although I was never too preoccupied with what others saw in my work, I took notes of even the silliest comments they made about my paintings during critiques.

For example:

- its like a fresh box of smarties
- I see an ice cream cone
- there is something I do like... this shoe

As Barret says, “most people who have degrees in art and art education have likely been influenced by those critiques.” (Barret, 1988)) It would be wrong to deny an influence...but what exactly did influence me during critiques? Clearly something did because the echoes of that influence are still in my journals. Although I haven't been in a studio class for about four years, my writing still shows the wonder of how words articulate the paths of my mind, as well as how others may view my work, and the clash of these two notions. For example, September 27, 1999, in my journal I wrote:
I saw this nun from the eclectic group of nuns that I always pass...they have breaks... I wonder what they do when they are not on their breaks because when they are not inside they are walking and sometimes singing and clapping...but the nun I saw today was on a swing in the park and she was kicking so hard that she was swinging real high... its funny but the first thing I thought was that she really wanted to get close to God... either way... this is what seemed to be her last effort to connect with someone/something up there! It was funny but this other lady stopped walking and watched for a while in slight disbelief and she said: “mon dieu...elle va decole...” anyway in my painting this nun would be swinging up high...oblivious though she seemed...stuck on earth no matter how hard she kicked...and surely my painting would transform...I wonder if I would lose the nun. But if I did...I would have a reason for it...and sometimes the image is gone but its essence is there... for me...and that's why its my story and if I try telling someone

about this nun and what seem to be futile kicks in the air and what became of her...they will look at the painting then at me...nod in a seemingly comprehensive manner...but whatever they saw in the work is now gone...and my whole painting may come across as a futile effort to paint a nun on a swing...swinging between good and evil... God & Devil...ha....and that's what I want to paint....

Looking back over the paintings I chose to discuss, something becomes almost immediately clear. I practically always had a resistance to speaking about my work during critiques. Even when I thought I had a lot to say, when it came time to say it...I would freeze. For example, after the critique of Undercurrents, (p.33), I wrote:

When it was my turn to say something about my work I said something brief about swimming under water....and how if you open your eyes in the water and look straight ahead...it is a vast turquoise...and it felt like it was calling me to swim and well there you have it... I couldn't verbalize that feeling of pushing with my arms and legs and gliding... going far into nowhere... a most incredible feeling...and the group did not quite know how to react to my words... there were a few comprehensive smiles...

Another notion that becomes clear when I look over my writing in general, is the wish to remain anonymous. The desire to lack concrete definition. I remember how moving from country to country always provided me with that luxury. The luxury of being free from labels. No one knew what I was like, what my friends were like, how I used to dress, behave, do at school...etc. This was like a short lived security blanket. If no one knows, you can't be branded. For example, January 25, 1995, in my journal I wrote:

por eso mis trabajos muestran un shift de eso al otro... de cosas que se reconocen a cosas que no se pueden label (that is why my works show a shift from this to that... from recognizable things to things that can't be labeled)

Considering critiques in relation to the nature of my work, I sense the same resistance to clarity... why should things be so clear. Life is so full of unclear, contradictory and unreasonable situations, if art reflects life (as it does for me) should it not be full of all these elements?

In his book Talking about Student Art, Barret says, “artists are not generally available to answer questions about their artwork; therefore, if an artist is present, he or she best serves the students by listening and remaining silent, putting the sole responsibility on the viewers to decipher the work of art.” (Barret, 1997, p.50) I realize in the end, the critiques I enjoyed most, and those where I felt I learned something are the ones in which I never explained, but rather listened to what the group had to say about my work. I figured I had done my job as an artist/learner by first of all making the work, and secondly, listening to the comments of others.

Critiques, as they are generally held at the university level, put you in the situation where you feel you are supposed to verbally explain your work. As a student/artist in a studio class, I felt uncomfortable talking about my paintings. It was as though I had to protect the process I had been through in creating the work. As a teacher I think I would have student/artists keep journals documenting whatever they felt was relevant to their artwork during their art making process as well as during critiques. I would give student/artists the option of protecting their process by remaining silent and simply taking notes of what others said.

The critiques for which I have written notes are amongst the most memorable. This study gave me the opportunity to recognize that my journal writings froze a lot of information that I had for the most part forgotten. Had all that writing not existed, all I would have are some vague memories of what I went through in creating certain works and what happened to these works in a critique situation. I am glad that I wrote down my thought processes related to my art making, whether it was prior, during, and/or after critiques. It is there where I made the most connections and where the truly memorable and meaningful events of my art making process are engraved.

Mi vida se hace al contarla y mi memoria se fija con la escritura; lo que no pongo en palabras sobre papel, lo borra el tiempo (Allende, p.52, 1992)
(My life makes itself as it is told and my memory is fixed with writing; what I don't put in words on paper, is erased by time.)

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