Exhibition of Water-Oils

By

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How Water Oils Are Made

I call them Water Oils, because they are made by floating thinned oil colors upon a surface of water and then transferred to paper by laying the paper down upon this floated design, when the under side of the paper immediately absorbs the oil colors.

In the beginning, the designs created were flat designs like wall papers and in color were tonal and grey, for while I used pure colors, these colors mingled at once upon the water surface.

The patterns or designs so made were governed entirely by what we usually call “accident” or “chance.” I prefer to call it a natural law that governs the design. These designs were always beautiful in line and color, but, as I have said, were flat patterns, tonal in color.

After some experimenting I discovered a way of creating a feeling of forms which had body, depth and distance and I could pass one form behind another, then, with further experiments, I discovered how to keep the color pure, that is, keeping an area of pure red next to an area of pure green with edges touching, but without the two opposing colors mixing.

These were beautiful to me and I could read into them an infinite number of emotions, but I found that, aside from a few fellow artists, I had no audience. Lay people admired the design and color but never got beyond the surface, so I superimposed in water color some object or objects which they might recognize as familiar and found that these seemed to open the door to their imaginations and they then got some of the thrills which the papers had given me.

However, these superimposed objects—trees, figures, animals—looked just what they were, an added thought, and were obviously
different in technique and handling from the original, so for months
I tried our various means to produce these objects on the water
itself, and was finally able to do so. I do not mean by this that a
finished figure came upon the paper after its first floating, but a
figure or object came in the position, pose or color I had determined
upon.

The paper is then mounted upon a compressed panel and de-
veloped in water colors to any extent I wish, or am capable of
developing. These designs have more and more led me into a new
world of my imagination, not one ruled by my knowledge or experi-
ence, or even of enforced journeys into imagination, but one very
spontaneous and, it seems to me, very personal.

They seem to me, to be nearer to music than I have ever come
before. The musician plays to himself, searching for something
with which to express a vague yearning. When something new and
interesting comes out he pins it down on paper and adds to it bit
by bit, but can anyone say where it came from, or why it came?
Great music is not produced by rote; it is a rare thing achieved in
countless moments. Painting is not simply a technical training, a pro-
curiosity in handling color, or drawing with which to make an
imitation of natural objects which shall remind the onlooker of that
thing in Nature, but it should be a means of expressing an emotion,
of something which wells up within our hearts or minds and craves
expression. Fortunate are they who can occasionally carry the rest
of us into that world of beauty beyond the pigment and the brush
stroke.

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