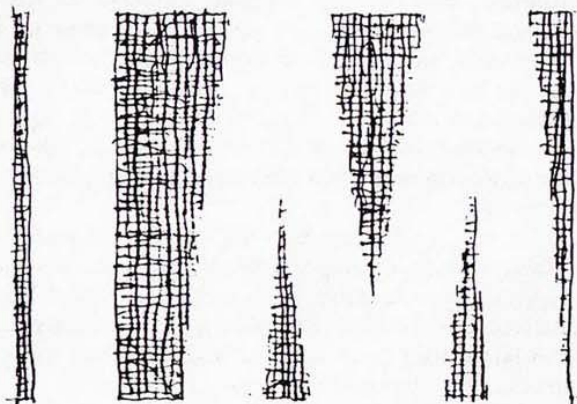


IRVING MARCUS

COLORIST



JOHN NATSOULAS GALLERY
DAVIS, CALIFORNIA
28 AUGUST - 24 OCTOBER 1993

Everything I do is about people. There's no story. They're just people occupying the same space.

A lot of them have a sort of opera theme--a lot of drama.

They're not completely rational. I get pretty vague.

The work has to do with seeing paintings in the clouds.

I let the brush do it.

The last thing to come is a title.

This one is a sort of St. Francis painting too. I didn't think of it until we were talking about it.

I realize they're not completely resolved. But it confuses me that people struggle with them as much as they do. I lose the ones who want pure abstraction. And I lose the ones who want representation.

The work's been stabilizing over the last few years. It's taken a long time to get from there to here.

* * *

I want to do what I am doing. I love painting.

I work from 9 to noon, then from 4 to 5:30, and a couple of hours in the evening. It takes a lot of time. I can spend a morning just mixing the color. I like to work into it wet, sort of like fresco. If I miss a day, it's like starting over. A big painting takes four to five weeks, seven days a week. Drawings are done more in spurts.

It seems such a antiquated thing to do these days--to make a painting--an anachronism. But then, I'm not sure there has ever been a massive audience out there. Most paintings throughout history have been made to go into some Baron's castle.

I'm quite content with my lot--being able to paint pictures and make a living at it.

IRVING MARCUS: COLORIST

Color is king in painting. And Irving Marcus agrees that, for him, color is what painting is all about. Historically, for artists and in developing group art styles, black and white or monochrome is the simplest, the most ready way to handle idea or inspiration. Color sense, more challenging yet more free, is ordinarily a last artistic faculty to develop. Color contributes a whole new dimension to feeling and knowing. In comparison with monochrome, color is shocking, more emotional, basically less controlled. Rorschach recognized and used this understanding when he inserted the color card among the black ink blots in his famous projective test for psychological states.

Marcus's paintings and drawings generally immerse the senses in vivid baths of chroma, hue, and intensity. They are skyrocketed of color on the retina and mind as well as on the white canvas or paper. They are also textbook introductions to the judicious uses of color for the artist, in terms of understanding the color wheel--the plays of complements, adjacents, tints, saturation, and tone that are products of abstraction and art for art's own sake. Such present-day concerns were first developed in academies of art and science during the last century.

In preparing a new work, Marcus makes a series of small color sketches with abstract, Kandinsky-like juxtapositions of spots and swatches of pure color, testing for an appropriate ensemble, in large part intuitively recognized. The chosen color pattern is thereafter meticulously, painstakingly translated over many weeks into larger and more detailed studies before it is painted on canvas. The process of refining and enlarging his color compositions can, and do, distort the subjects and objects he represents. For him, this seems to be neither a problem nor a goal.

Often the hide-and-seek game of finding continuities or the gestalt of a figure or thing (as opposed to an equally active field or space) can be a quizzical, merry, rollicking trip through erupting changes in chroma and shape, where forms and contours can be shared or hidden by more than one subject. The effect is expressionistic distortion, recalling emotive representations in Fauve, Intimist, German Expressionist, and even Post-Impressionist painting, which flourished at the beginning of this century.

Marcus studied masters of Expressionist traditions, from Gauguin and Van Gogh to Matisse and Nolde, when a boy in Minneapolis, at the Fine Art Museum. His color sense was sharpened by training under the New York Abstract Expressionist colorist Ray Parker, while a graduate student in the

well-known art studio program at the University of Iowa. His preoccupation with matters of color persists, and continues to grow. There is no more sophisticated colorist around.

Almost all of Marcus's works are figure studies, "about people." The enigmatic relations between the actors are as complex and intuitive as are the color choices. Often scenes or parts of the composition are based upon snippets from everyday newspaper illustration, greatly transformed into opera-like dramas and further altered for the sake of "artistic" considerations of composition, shape, contour, and, of course, color. The artist's approach is, again, intuitive, incoherent. The subjects change and vary as the work grows, taking on multiple facets of meaning, often shared, like the contours and colors themselves. Basically, the subjects belong to the humanist tradition. They document and comment upon the human condition, its struggles and realizations, as does all mimetic, representational art, from Apelles and Giotto to Rembrandt and Picasso...but here, of course, with a contemporary Valley, as well as idiosyncratically dramatic and operatic, point of view. One senses a vividly engaged yet incomprehensible lyricism--rather like that of Chagall and other mystics.

Marcus's work as a whole involves a risk-taking poetic leap, engaging an affective realm of lyric association in the realm of what Freud called primary material, which is understood, like color, on a preverbal, a painterly, emotive level. His paintings reveal a simmering and incendiary sensualist who is audacious and subtle, a visual dancer and dreamer, working under strictly self-enforced professional constraints. His work is a feast and an education in his calling. He provides a free and controlled, a hot and cool, a gorgeous journey into the self as well as into himself as an artist and the worlds we share.

Seymour Howard
Davis, August 1993

Gleanings from the Artist

Color is the most interesting reason to be a painter.

Nothing fouls up easier than color.

I used to prepare in black and white, but now I work directly in color.

* * *