

## AI on Art – Heart in Art

St. Valentine's Day will bring us pink hearts, little cupids, candy and flowers, all symbols of love which we express in unison on this given day. No matter that a heart-shape bears no resemblance to a real human heart, which is configured more like a skewed hazel nut. But the symbol is well known to us here and internationally. This got me to pondering about whether all cultures all over the world would recognize this heart-shape as our symbol for love. Certainly it must be of fairly recent origin, for there are none in King Tut's tomb, nor even amongst the ancient Greeks. At some time, some person created this little graphic image whose meaning we all so readily understand.



Our current day experience is rife with graphic symbols, although they seem to be getting increasingly enigmatic, so as to be viewed as “cool” symbols. Take for instance those large, brightly colored billboards with the words “iPod” on them. Someone “cool” had to tell me what that was. Perhaps a frontal view of an eye was a cool symbol in ancient Egypt. My recent visit to Arizona reviewed that the Anasazi thought the mirror image of a swastika was a cool symbol, which one can still find on cliff walls. These markings meant something to somebody, and had great meaning for the person who created them. I watched Gerald Burbank, a six foot two inch Navajo, with jet black hair, and skin the color of raw sienna. He carefully scratched little symbols on a piece of sandstone, using the tip of a pair of bull-nosed pliers. Gerald was creating a work of art, using symbols that had great meaning to him - those of his ancestors. A circle with a dot in the center connoted the sun sign, whereas a zigzag line connoted thunder, or the ups and downs of daily life. These personal markings, seen throughout the ages, on Etruscan vases, Inca temples and Aboriginal drawings are distinctive and sufficiently unique that even a casual observer can readily discern their origins.

And what of your own work? If it were to be examined a hundred years from now, would it show discernible personal markings? Would those markings be your own creative signature or would they be generic uses of common symbols? So often we paint things without paying attention to the underlying emotions, nor to the abstract, cerebral symbols. Perhaps, if you took it as your next challenge, the notion of painting sensations from your other four senses, for example you could try painting “noise”, or the feeling of a cat's fur, or the sound of running water. Or you could paint emotions—anger, grief, joy, sadness. You will find that to do this you will need to develop your own personal symbols, e.g. decide for yourself what color connotes harmony, how a line might connote anger, etc. It will be necessary to be creative and to ascribe certain personal meanings to those symbols.

Many artists before you have done this. Piet Mondrian, who loved dancing, attempted to capture the lively precision of the Boogie Woogie in his paintings. Kandinsky in turn, tried to represent, visually, his response to classical music pieces. Sometimes the symbology completely escapes the viewer, as in the case of noted watercolorist, and past NWS president, university professor Keith Crown who paints in New Mexico. I came to view Mr. Crown's signature style as being represented by his unique use of multiple horizon lines in a landscape, i.e. there would be a band of foreground, a band of middle ground, and a band of mountains in the distance. But this would be followed by another band of foreground, middle ground, and background. I read recently that Mr. Crown had experimented with this format based on his impressions of John Marin's work, as well as Arthur Dove's. Yet, there was more there than met the eye in these paintings, as Keith slyly indicated, "*My work is rife with sexual symbols, phallic palm trees exploding across the page and distant mountains in the shape of a vagina*".

I'm not suggesting your symbols need be bizarre, but if you pay attention to creating personal marks in your paintings, you will give them more meaning and make them more personal.

Copyright 2008

Albert Setton

All rights reserved

No image from this site can be reproduced without the express permission of the author.