ART STRUCTURES

a sabbatical report

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FRANCE
the burden of history and bureaucracy

When I visited Paris for the first time in 1959 I attended a party given for young aspiring artists and writers. I recall feeling very self-conscious: after all, I was not only a stranger to the group--I was a foreigner. Someone asked me a quite ordinary question about my reaction to the Louvre Museum, and I felt stunned not merely because of my fractured French, but because I had strong reservations about the Louvre. I knew the Louvre was the grandest of all the grand monuments of French culture, and I wanted to be polite; but unfortunately, I didn't know enough French to be oblique. I said that I liked the Louvre, but it tired me because it seemed to epitomize the historical burden of the past. I had expected to be written off as another American barbarian, but there were nods of approval; I had inadvertantly changed the course of conversation and opened the floodgates to the subject of governmental control of culture and its suffocating presence in education.

The American view of France is that she is unstable politically, and this is true; but it is also true that political instability has strengthened state control. The French state controls the essentials of society: all of higher education, most of secondary and elementary education, radio and television, urban planning, and "official" culture.

Since the beginning of the Fifth Republic the French government has considered taste and style to fall within its jurisdiction, and has firmly

linked culture to the preservation of national values by creating a new government department, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which has control over the construction of art and architecture schools, scholarships, subsidies, and personnel: teachers, administrators, directors, and architects. Something new was added when former Minister of Cultural Affairs, Andre Malraux, created the "Houses of Culture" so aptly described by Sanche de Gramont in his book, The French:

> Malraux's method for bringing culture to the French provinces is to build Houses of Culture, miniature Lincoln Centers. But, what he is actually doing is perpetuating French elitist culture. France is a country in which a tiny intellectual elite fosters the illusion that the general population enjoys a high cultural level, whereas, in fact, as a 1966 survey showed, France is one of the three countries in both Western and Eastern Europe in which the fewest books are read. The Houses of Culture make no compromise with the workers and peasants they are trying to reach; they cater mainly to students and pensioners. The smell of KULTURKAMF with their will to impose the classics on the forty million Frenchmen outside of Paris who inhabit the cultural desert. The programs are administered and the budgets are made up in Paris, in exactly the same manner as the French cultural program for its former colonies.

In May 1968 the students of Paris revolted against government control of education and culture. They took to the streets of the left bank student quarter, set up barricades, occupied the Sorbonne[1], and fought daily battles with the riot police. Although the revolt lasted several weeks and fierce fighting took place, no guns were used, and no one was killed. It is difficult to conceive of rioting in the streets as constituting a "revolt". Even though it was well planned with aid stations served by medical students and a communications system, it seemed like gorilla

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[1] The Liberal Arts School of the University of Paris

theater gone amuck; in the article, "The Artist and Society", author/ critic, Michel Ragon, notes with seeming enthusiastic chauvinism:

> It is undoubtedly no coincidence that the man who introduced happenings to France, Jean-Jacques Lebel, and who now calls himself an "ex-painter", was the protagonist at the "capture of the Odeon"[2]. The "Capture of the Odeon" was Jean-Jacques Lebel's great answer to the American happenings which he had been accused of weakly imitating. In one evening he did something better, bigger, and greater. He created a veritable event.

By such means, among others, the students hoped to bring about change. They didn't expect to win a revolution; they hoped to win the right to dialogue. Many of their complaints were well-founded: it is true that contemporary art is hardly mentioned in the school system, that the student-teacher ratio is too high, that many courses of instruction were no longer relevant, and that many of their teachers who had been educated within a system that surpressed them should be removed.

Now, some five years after the revolt, the issues remain essentially the same: the government continues to control education and culture, the student-teacher ratio is too high, and so on. Even so, minor changes have occurred.

In some instances the students at the university level have won a say about the relevance of the curriculum and the selection of new courses. The Sorbonne has begun a program to prepare art teachers that includes instruction in the applied arts, long a monopoly of the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts. The "art teachers" program at the Sorbonne aims at

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[2]The National Theater of France

providing teachers for the lycee (high school through two years of college) who will eventually replace the traditional drawing class with a studio of expression and the drawing master with a supervisor of art education who would be trained both in applied art and in art history--especially contemporary art. The supervisor of art education would provide for the development of skills and sensitization to the various means of expression. Lycee art majors would have audio-visual aids available, along with a visiting artists program, and pertinent extra-curricular activities. The Sorbonne's new program is old history in the United States, harking back to the time of philosopher John Dewey's influence at N.Y.U. and Columbia University during the 1930s and '40s, and on into the artist-teacher concept that developed in the 1950s.

University level instruction (the Beaux Arts or the Sorbonne) in the applied arts is very much like our own -- a combination of class projects and individualized instruction--but there are important distinctions: the new disciplines of contemporary art are rarely taught; the creative process is a thing apart; and students are free to do as they like until exam time, a virtual day of judgement, when the student must conform--or fail to pass.

The May 1968 student revolt is well documented and well remembered by the participants and the "capture of the Odeon" is history, but the issues remain unresolved--item from the International Herald Tribune, January 23, 1974:

> A group of senior students at the famous Voltaire Lycee in Paris has this week taken out of the educational authorities' hands an experiment designed to bring the school curriculum nearer to real life....

THE AMERICAN CENTER
jean-jacques lebel's happening finds a home

At the main entrance to the American Center for Students and Artists stands a manned gatehouse, a change brought about by the May 1968 revolt, and the presence of too many transient teenagers. To enter the Center one must show the gateman a proper membership card or pass a lengthy interrogation. I passed the interrogation and was finally admitted to the office of John Rounds, director of the Center. I inquired about the whereabouts of an old friend and former teacher at the Center, and was told that after the May 1968 revolt he had hung on for awhile, and then like the rest of the staff, he resigned. The Center had obviously gone through some changes since the revolt. The American students at the Center had occupied the building much as their French counterparts had at the Sorbonne; the the academic structures were abolished, committees organized, and discussions regarding the operation and goals of the Center were begun. It all seemed to be going well enough, so the story goes, when the student treasurer suddenly left for Spain, and took all the money with him. After that the students seemed to lose interest, and power gradually shifted back to the director and the faculty, but the Center would never be the same again; there was no money, drug problems were growing, and the student body grew increasingly transient. As time passed the Center became a gathering place for "street people" who caused so much disruption that Rounds was forced to build the gatehouse as a security measure. Much of the pre-May 1968 curriculum had to be scrapped because there were too few full-time students. Rounds began experimenting with short-term courses designed

to meet the needs of the students who happened to be around at the time. This approach increased enrollment and put the Center back in the black. I made one more visit to the Center and one more to the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and that was it--I'd had it. There was too much talk, too much political romanticism, and too many unresolved issues at both schools. The student revolt may have been great street theater, but at the Beaux Arts authority and conformity clearly held the field, while at the Center, where the students are content and doing their own thing, the counter-culture has taken over and Jean Jacques Lebel's "happening" at the Odeon has found a home.

ROCHEFORT-EN-YVELINES
the provincial life

During our three and one-half months of residency in France my family and I lived in Rochefort-en-Yvelines, a village with a population of some 400, located forty-five kilometers to the southwest of Paris. Rochefort, like many rural French towns, is quite unlike Paris--life is tranquil, the people polite, cheerful, and even friendly. The region is composed of heavily wooded rolling hills, farms and grazing land.

We chose to live in Rochefort for the same reason we had decided to live in a barrio on the outskirts of the town of Sitges (near Barcelona) when we were in Spain (and would later choose another similar situation in Greece) because the provincial life is less expensive than living in the cities. Always short of funds, we discovered that we could not live the tourist life-style; we became immigrants with transient status. We learned how to take care of our daily needs within the structure of local customs and languages.

Our social life in Rochefort was almost nil except for our relationship with Dr. Richard Carrott, Professor of Art History at U.C.R. Carrott, who is the owner of considerable property in Rochefort, was our landlord, advisor, and indefatigable teacher who lectured us at length regarding local customs and history. At his home we had the pleasure of meeting a good number of expatriots and tourists, an assortment of teachers, artists, writers and students. Most interesting among these was Maxine, the Paris-based editor of the American owned Paris Review, a literary journal and

monument to the past, that was founded during the 1920s and '30s when twentieth century French art was in its golden age. But now, the "golden age" is past, as is the brief period of recovery that followed World War II and the Paris office of the Review, unable to find enough fresh literary material for its readers, was closing shop.

We were most fortunate to meet the family of an old friend, Mt. San Antonio College French Instructor, Marguerite McIntosh, whose septegenarian mother, Madame Jeanne Loyau, is a Beaux Arts graduate and a retired drawing master. Madame Loyau's deceased husband was a well-known commission sculptor who designed Chicago's famous Buckingham Fountains. Of the sons, one is a studio sculptor who refuses to teach, while the other is a practicing architect and Professor of Architecture at the Beaux Arts where they had all studied and received their certificates. True to the family tradition, at least two of Madame's grandchildren are aspiring art students. This gracious and candid family whose experience of art education, the art market, and French culture spans more than half a century, provided me with personal insights and considerable information.

With the exception of Dr. Carrott's milieu and the Loyau family, we were quite alone and content with provincial life. Since we had no television or stereo we developed our interests in the simple rituals of daily life. Cooking took a fresh importance and became "la cuisine", a daily source of speculation, family effort and considerable pleasure. There was time for reading, drawing, walks miles long in the forests, visits to the bistros, handmade Christmas decorations, midnight mass at Chartres Cathredral, and time to be with our new son who was two weeks old when

we arrived in Rochefort; and there were so many good things, and so much more, that it is time to end this reminiscing or it will be as it was then--when life was too good for me to want to go back to Paris and get on with the work.

PARIS
the art market

If a few changes and adjustments have occurred in French art education since the revolt of May 1968, the other head of the twin-headed monster the students sought to slay has not changed its methods nor lost its power.

The structure of the art market in Paris is essentially the same as those of New York City, Los Angeles, London, or Amsterdam or any other city where there is enough high quality merchandise and enough money to insure success. The participants who maintain the structure are the artists, dealers (those who operate art galleries), critics, publishers, museum directors, speculators, collectors, and the public. Questions regarding the equality of participation are a constant factor in the conversations of initiates. The power, control, and often success itself, rest in the hands of those with the most prestige. The situation is one of politics within a communal infrastructure and the goal is status. The achievement of status may be the product of a combination of merit, struggle, luck and complicity. Of these factors, complicity is the most dynamic, and is politely known as finagling. Complicity implies seeking and maintaining status by forming partnerships.

The participants who have the least status are the artists (few have prestige that reaches beyond the celebrity level) and the disinterested, passive public who are either led to the galleries and museums by guides or by an interest in scandal and mythic personalities.

The artists' need for an intermediary was recognized in Paris at the turn of the century and the art gallery was created to fill the need. It was a marvelous invention that circumvented the power of the official saloon while at the same time opening a whole new territory for speculation. The artist is either discovered by the dealer or he must make the rounds of the galleries until he finds one that will accept his work. At the present time there are about one hundred galleries in Paris, of which perhaps fewer than twenty-five exhibit works of museum quality. Competition among artists who want to exhibit their work in one of these top galleries is keen, to say the least, because it means success: reviews, sales, status, and enough money to sustain life and keep working.

Complicity begins in the art gallery where partnerships essential to promotion are most formative. The most vulnerable of the participants (setting aside the artist) is the amateur buyer whose choice is dependent upon the dealer's advice, the critic's verbiage, the products of publishers, and so forth.

The differences that exist between one art market and another are matters of variation, style, national prestige, the power of the moment, and the folklore window dressing so dear to the hearts of the media.

In New York and Paris, both of which are the national art centers of their respective countries, the rules of the game and the players are the same and both are protective of their prestige, although New York is more international--more willing to open the market to foreign artists. It is true, however, that some important differences do exist on the national level:

art education in the United States is more open and contemporary (the French themselves recognize this); the public is better prepared and more interested (but not by much); and finally, there is greater diversity in the United States than in France because culture is more decentralized--France has no counterparts for Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, Chicago, or Boston.

AMSTERDAM
conversations with van elk

Our visit to Amsterdam in late January lasted a brief five days--time enough to visit the State Academy of Fine Arts, the major museums, a few art galleries, and time to talk with Dutch artist Ger Van Elk, who had a one-man show at Mt. San Antonio College in 1970. Van Elk will be the sole artist to represent the Netherlands at the Venice Biennale (perhaps the most prestigious international exhibition) in 1975.

I enjoyed the museums, but I was disappointed by the low pressure work shown in the galleries, and by the Academy of Fine Arts, which seemed to me to be the Beaux Arts of Paris all over again--without the graffiti. It was Van Elk who saved the day with his witty and bone honest opinions about the Academy of Fine Arts (which he abhors), the burden of Europe's past artistic glories on the young artist (which he respects but nullifies in his own work), government financial aid to individual artists in the Netherlands (which he feels is beneficial), art education (which he feels must stress the experimental and the theoretical), and about the art market (where he agrees with his role), his own recent success (which he feels may be fleeting because of ever quickening stylistic changes).

What most impressed me about Van Elk was his success story. The scenario is representative of many a twentieth century artist but especially so of the artists of his generation, where his thirty-one years would seem a fair median. Van Elk is not a country boy; he is educated, worldly, ambitious, and passionately participates in life, yet he expresses himself in the seemingly neutral vocabulary of the "cool" metre.

LONDON
the favorite adjective in "international"

The London art scene was much like the February weather we experienced during our three week visit--variable but mostly sunny. When English writers and critics refer to the London scene the favorite adjective is "international", which means that trends imported from the United States are predominent and French influences are fading. But, this is only what we see on the surface--the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface is the rest of the iceberg, some of which is exposed to our view when the moon causes the tide to subside for a moment, and suddenly there it is--"British" painting.

Since the teens of the twentieth century when the voices of critic John Ruskin and the champions of the British Academy were stilled by the French impressionist and cubist aesthetic takeover, there remained and remains a large group of figurative painters, mostly realists. The differences among these painters are primarily matters of subject. While the "Euston Road School" achieved distinction because of its romanticism as opposed to the singular banality of the "Kitchen Sink School", there are few "outsiders" like Sigmund Freud's son, Lucian (a British citizen), who pursues a relentless microscopic realism in frozen lifeless images. The common element among these painters is that they are not painters at all; they are draftsmen whose pursuit of realism limits their aesthetic sense.

I went to the British Fine Arts Society and requested assistance in arranging an interview with the director of the Slade School, long the center

for the study of the fine arts for all of the British Empire. The gentleman to whom I made my request promptly telephoned the Slade and asked for Sir William Coldstream and made arrangements for 9:00 a.m. on the following morning. I felt hesitant about the appointment, because Sir William, whose dreary paintings had nearly driven me from the Tate Gallery in 1965, was at one time the recognized leader of British realism and now had gained the directorship of the Slade.

Next morning, at the Slade, I was told that Sir William was ill; but I was especially fortunate to have as my guide a young teaching assistant and former Slade student. I discovered the Slade to be a labyrinth of classrooms and studios--many of them make-shift affairs. The tone of the school seemed so positive and open that I wanted to be a part of it--to take off my coat and get to work.

What most impressed me was that Sir William had not inflicted his style of painting on the students or the faculty; the student work was an eclectic "international" blend. Life drawing is still the trademark of the Slade where it is viewed as an opportunity to refine one's sensibilities.

It was interesting to note that while the British have no government plan for the support of artists, the London Fine Arts Council has an effective program that assists artists, nationals and foreigners alike, in securing inexpensive studio space.

CRETE
unconsecrated ground

We arrived in Greece in early March and rented a small house in the coastal resort of Glyfada, some twenty minutes from Athens. Our stay of three months was delightful, but our plans went awry. Although I qualified for the Greek government program that provides free housing on the island of Myconos for foreign artists, I discovered that I could not take my family with me. Then too, with the cost of gasoline at $2.50 per gallon, we had to confine our travels to Attica, the area in which we lived. My plan to visit the excavations of the 3,500 year-old civilization on the island of Santorini had to be scrapped because of expenses and the island hopping was limited to Crete. Fortunately, some of the fresco paintings found during the digging on Santorini had been moved to the National Museum in Athens for public viewing. The paintings were remarkably facile and covered a wide range of subject matter, ranging from pastoral scenes to athletic contests. Graceful as the paintings were, they represented a decorative courtly art, far removed from my experience.

An amateur painter and a neighbor, Leon Nickolaidis, became an almost daily guest at our house. Together we visited the ruins of classical Greece throughout Attica, as well as his friends among the artists and art dealers in Athens.

Early in April my eldest son, Walter, and I took the car ferry to Crete, where we stayed eight days. Our ship, the Candia, arrived in Iraklion at 7:00 a.m. Less than an hour later we had disembarked and driven to

the plateau where the grave of the Greek writer, Nikos Kazantzakis, overlooks the harbour. Kazantzakis, a once controversial figure, now buried in unconsecrated ground, has become a tourist attraction. Since he is famous--or infamous--throughout Greece, my knowledge of his work and life caused considerable interest and opened a few doors. It was still early morning when we arrived at Knossos. On the first pass I failed to notice the entrance and we had driven into the surrounding hills when we suddenly saw the ruins below us. The view, thanks to the work of English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, was one of organized desolation. Even though admission was free that day, there were few visitors. We split up and roamed the ruins for several hours trying to make some sense of it all. Walter was delighted with the labyrinthian complexity, and I with the magnificent setting of lush rolling hills so near the sea. The richly colored fresco paintings made the existing small tight rock chambers come to life again, even though they were facsimilies. But I couldn't get a sense of the place; the stylized images in the frescoes were just so much color to me. It was aesthetic; but it was too far away in time and living reality, quite unlike the Acropolis, surrounded as it is by the vast swarm of Athens and still very much a part of the modern Greek mind.

During our sojourn we visited two other Minoan settlements (where there was little reconstruction) at Malia and Festos--mostly stones on the ground and stairways to nowhere.

If the scattered ruins of Minoan civilization were disappointing, they may also have been overrated; but this is not so of Crete itself. We traveled

most of the length of the island along the north and south coasts and traversed the mountainous girth four times, traveling through magnificent landscapes, towns and villages that never disappointed us. The major cities, of which there are two, Chania and Iraklion, were bombed heavily during World War II but still retain a poverty-strained charm.

In Chania I set about locating the studio of a Cretan sculptor, Stelios Stratoudakis, whose polychrome clay scuplture has long interested me because of the technical simplicity and low cost. He was not listed in the telephone book so, armed with his name and a photograph, we drove to the main square and I asked a group of taxi drivers for their help. Twenty minutes and two dollars later I found Stratoudakis at his home, surrounded by protective relatives. He had suffered a stroke the year before and closed his studio. Because he was a popular folk artist whose works were often commissioned, we saw only the few fine works he had made for himself and his family. We were the first foreigners to enter his home and he marvelled again and again that we had come all the way from California.

THE DORDOGNE
the venus of laussel

In late May we returned again to France, this time to see the caves of prehistory in the Vezere Valley of the Dordogne. We visited the caves at Pech-Merle (Cabrerets), Font de Gaume, and Cougnac.

Before going to the caves we viewed the exhibits at the French National Museum of Prehistoric Art at nearby Eyzies. On the terrace of the museum stands a statue of "Primitive Man", studiously based on archaeological study, but sculpted in the academic monumental style of the World War II memorials found at cemeteries and battle fields. Inside the museum are the more satisfying and authentic images that primitive man created in his own time, out of his own need. The image of the "Venus of Laussel", carved in low relief, is horrific: pendulous breasts, splayed hips, faceless, the left hand pressed to the abdomen, and the right hand aloft holding a crescent form--a timeless image of mankind's persistence. But the myths of courtly love combined with academic nonsense have contrived to hide the meaning of this image with the absurd reference to "Venus", the Roman goddess of beauty, love and sensuality.

Among the caves we visited the most memorable is Cabrerets with some fifty paintings and low reliefs of bison, mammoths and horses; but unexpectedly, in one section, scattered outline forms of hands appear enigmatically in a field of horses. The effect of the caves on one's sensibilities is awesome, especially if one notes that the images were painted and engraved on uneven surfaces by the smoking and flickering

light of wood fires and fat-burning lamps and then viewed as an integral part of daily life, by more or less the same lighting, for who knows how many generations.

BASLE
a museum for sale

Our visit to the caves ended my sabbatical research on an exhilarating note. We drove on to Paris for a one-week stay, spending our time enjoying the city and saying goodbey to friends. At this point my wife and our two youngest sons returned to the United States. Our eldest son and I drove on to Switzerland for a two-week stay in Zurich. We stopped briefly in Basle to see some of the fifth annual art fair held in that city. But we encountered an enterprise so vast that we could have spent days adjusting to the scale alone; about three hundred art galleries, from what seemed two dozen countries, were exhibiting their wares. I counted between thirty and forty one-man shows. Thousands of art works jangled my eyes. Twenty-five or more galleries carried the blue chip works of Picasso, Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, and Marc Chagall. United States abstract impressionists, pop artists, and minimalists made a strong showing. The effect was that of a noisy, cheerful, slightly crazy museum for sale. I had to laugh about my study of the art market in Paris; I could have waited a few months and just gone to Basle, where it had all come together, but the scale was so colossal and mind-boggling that I was glad I had arrived on the last day.

CLAREMONT
summing-up

When I look back over my sabbatical year and re-read this report, I have mixed emotions. The report seems incomplete because the richness of the experience, the humane element, is understated. Although I included the section about life in Rochefort, I decided that personal experience, outside the immediate scope of the research paper, had to be omitted.

Then too, the social and political background data used to place art education in France and the Paris art market in context represents only a fragment of the information I gathered regarding the social, historical, and philosophical variations that exist between and within the cultures of France, England, Spain and Greece. I view my personal experiences and the background data I have accumulated as notes in the margin of the research paper that can be used, as needed, to help me communicate to a wider audience than my specialized research would permit, by changing the context or the emphasis to fit the variety of interests and disciplines of students, faculty and other members of the college community.

The purpose of my sabbatical leave project was to seek out information of a practical nature to pass on to my students to help them balance the disciplines of a humane profession with the practical interests and necessities of civilization. In my sabbatical application I noted:

> Much of the social disorganization among students and others as well, relates to the seemingly eternal conflict between the humane and the practical. In a letter to Henry Miller, written in 1936, author Laurence Durrell put it this way, "The tragedy of the Elizabethan Age was that it taught its young the humanities

> but showed them none." It seems to me that this situation exists in our time with a degree of complexity many times compounded since the age of Elizabeth.

Which is to say that in the humanities we teach our students the benevolent refinements of civilization; but when the students leave the campus, they find that "back in the world," as the Vietnam Vets put it, civilization is not always benevolent and humane interests are of little or no consequence as they seek to sustain themselves.

As an artist/teacher I am firmly committed to the humanities, but it seems to me that not enough has been done to help the students relate their need for creative expression to the conflicting enigmas of civilization. I hope to use the information gathered during my sabbatical to more vitally engage my students with the realities that await them "back in the world" by calling their attention to the following:

1. the dynamics and potential of the structures that compose the art world
2. the variety of roles to be played
3. the preparation needed for participation
4. the alternative solutions to the dilemma of being an artist and making a living.

The studio work I planned as a follow-up to my visits to the pre-historic caves of the Dordogne has not yet begun because the lease to my studio was not renewed, but the experience and the slides I brought back should prove helpful in my drawing classes.

During this school year I plan to begin a dialogue with my colleagues in the art department regarding the direction of my research paper and other

related subjects, including:

1. the need to re-examine the curriculum for the purpose of developing a professionally oriented crafts program and expanding the commercial arts

2. the need to re-evaluate the artist/teacher concept.

Finally, I must say that my sabbatical leave was one of the most difficult and, at the same time, memorable years of my life. The sabbatical leave program is a remarkable example of humane enlightenment and public trust that has no counterpart in Europe.

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