

Alan Clark and the Creative Process

Springing from a deeply spiritual and intuitive place, Alan Clark's vibrant paintings glow with pure, transparent color and pulsate with a jazz-like rhythm. While each work can be enjoyed on a purely visual level, they are further enlivened by a referential aspect that adds to the full experience of his work. His wide-ranging vocabulary of signs and symbols presents a fascinating intellectual challenge that speaks of a life spent sifting and processing an abundance of experiences and influences. Rendered in his own unique blend of abstraction and realism, these paintings literally teem with life.

The relatively small size of Clark's paintings in this exhibition belies their communicative power - the myriad associations and alliterations dazzle the mind and the eye. In these gem-like works with their cosmic perspective, Clark alludes repeatedly to the changeable nature of things - the earth with its constant movement of tectonic plates, the thrust of mountains, the inferno raging beneath a fragile crust; water coursing through a network of oceans, rivers and streams; the push and pull of the sun, moon, and planets.

Clark celebrates the human being as creature and creator, finding in each a miracle, a little God. In a series of figure studies he presents the human form as a subcutaneous landscape in images like *Immersed*, and *Body of Obsession*, revealing blood, bone, and organs, the internal workings that run the machine. In a painting like *Of the Nerves*, the view is microscopic. Reviewing an exhibition of Clark's work, Alan Crichton said: "...Clark goes beyond the literal by approaching the world in the animist tradition of artists like Paul Klee or Americans like Albert Pinkham Ryder, Arthur Dove, John Marin, or Charlies Burchfield."

Mexico, with its twin legacies of darkness and light, has been enormously influential in this series of paintings. The country has become both a physical and spiritual home for Clark. Since 1991, he has spent a part of almost every year there, in the Caribbean state of Quintana Roo, Yucatan, and Mexico City. His absorption of the ancient culture of the Maya, with its mysticism, its beliefs in the spirit world, its awe inspiring stone monuments, masks and heroic architecture is evident in paintings like *Blood and Stone*, *Via Olmeca*, and *The Wizard*. While not the exclusive domain and determinant of the paintings in this exhibition, Mexico certainly loom large.

Helen Ashton Fisher, Curator

Farnsworth Art Museum

for *Blood and Stone: Paintings by Alan Clark*

For an exhibition at Galeria 103, Mexico City

To speak about Alan Clark is to speak about a multidisciplinary artist. To define him is not an easy thing. Painter, sculptor, printmaker, poet. We speak of these many different things, but in reality they are all facets of one profound need of expression.

The same spirit is to be found in all his work. He creates and recreates worlds that are full of color, where human passions are depicted through plastic means. Lines definite and at the same time sinuous, wrested from the hand of the artist, yet always present in spite of the explosions of color that would have them disappear, lines invading the space, dissolving, but not quite, in color.

He often uses everyday elements that can become sometimes vaguely threatening, mysterious: a figure becoming a shaman, an insect, a totem. A flower in its origin at the beginning of all things. His goal is to make what is interior and hidden, visible, a glimpse of the soul, vibrating nerves with their maddened synapses.

It is poetry become tangible. Clark paints his graphic forms as signs of a personal grammar. It is demanding work that forces one to pay attention even more so because of the often intimate format.

To contemplate these works of art gives on the sensation of being a voyeur who looks through the keyhole of a lock into a private and almost forbidden universe.

Ma. Cristina Gonzalez Tejada

Mexico City

Review of an exhibition at The Center for Maine Contemporary Arts:

In his own manner, Clark transforms the familiar into connotative systems of marks and signs which, like all effective visual art, tell specifically spatial stories that float on the edge of time. His improvised graphic systems often have a handwritten quality. This scale of marks to paper, so close to the relation of words to a page, reflects the fact that Clark is also a writer of poetry.

In each discipline, the artist takes combinations of signs and associations and, through juxtaposition and displacement, intuition and energy, makes images which resound or vibrate amongst each other. The attempt is to create a new reality which goes beyond the visual or verbal vehicle and comes into being as a solid phenomenon of the imagination, as real as any object in the world, as long as the poem or painting exists.

A particular conception of blood figures strongly in Clark's work. He says that our literal blood is a river connecting us immediately to all of our human ancestors. It is us, as we are today and as the furthest removed human, and even further back - as the sub-atomic microcosm of energy of which we are made and which Clark sees as being inextricable from spirit. Through the endless couplings of generations, this unbroken line of blood energy is the stream binding all life: "The vigor of our blood legacy is extravagance bequeathed to us with each heartbeat ... our tell-tale blood, its salt sovereignty in a born equilibrium and honor to our origins ... the river of our lives is the energy we accept and succumb to, like lovers..." Clark says.

In almost all the paintings, we look inside things like primitives who understand an animal visually only by conceiving it viscerally, from the inside out.

The space feels a little dangerous, consciously out of control, explosive: streams and fires, a waterfall, maybe the full moon. These collide with clouds, highways, salmon pink sparks, a Greek column, a black chair. Separated sections impinge on each other. They are contained, but within each picture, a kind of madness burns, forms falling through precipitous drops into the underworld and bursting out again. Each painting is a potent world in process, tattooed with the past, inventing a present.

Full of mountains, teardrops, scarifications, hearts, ribs, and eyes, these are paintings that set things loose at the window. Somehow it seems a natural way to be.

Alan Crichton

Founder of Waterfall Arts