

joe andoe

Klaus Ottmann: You said before that your paintings are about yourself.

Joe Andoe: Well, maybe about life and death. I like the idea of them being not about time and sort of common. Maybe they're about the human soul.

I heard someone say that the survival instinct was God in you as well as love. For me that's very poignant, the caribou crossing, the ducks in their schools ... I just paint, and things are unavoidable. I think about Picasso's last paintings, when he went back to his childhood and painted himself as a musketeer.

I think it's poetic. Dealing with what's real with you is what makes you different. It gives you place.

It's amazing to find that the more personal you get the more universal you become.

Ottmann: That's what distinguishes the Greek tragedies and Shakespeare's plays because they deal with universal truths that are meaningful for any culture or individual.

Andoe: I like the blueprints. The best seems to be done early: Charlie Parker ... Jackson Pollock ... Duchamp ... It's shooting sitting ducks, and everything else is like an embellishment afterward, decoration, backing off.

Ottmann: Your recent paintings of wild life seem to have less to do with Christian iconography than your previous body of work.

Andoe: I did a lot with the Christian iconography and the plants. It served the purpose of something that's nonchanging. I see the same thing in a landscape, not necessarily something that's been anointed by a group of writers from the Bible.

Ottmann: Let's talk about the time you came to New York. The first time I saw your work, at White Columns, it was very different from the work you're doing now.

Andoe: When I came to New York from Oklahoma in 1982, a lot of what was showing was figurative. I had done these landscape paintings – basically the same paintings that I do now – that meant a whole lot to me, but when I would take them around to show them to people, they would say, “Where are the figures?” Nobody cared. Nobody wanted landscape paintings in 1982.

I went back to my studio and for five years experimented. The work you saw was already heading this way. Those paintings were about the Indians and being from Oklahoma – I’m probably 1/35th Indian – I grew up with Indians around me. The early Indians, for the most part, didn’t believe in digging holes or pulling leaves off trees. They believed that all round things were related. That’s anything that’s not man-made, that’s not a box. From that I got further into my own upbringing: Christianity, fundamentalism, the economy of the protestant church. The church I grew up in didn’t believe in organ music. It was all very quiet, just voices singing. And the churches were new. A lot of them were built in the fifties. They had no ornamentation, and everything was about the new, about renewal; they didn’t even believe in the Old Testament.

I went back to that. I rented a small studio and started making small paintings that were very personal, and my friends said, “You’re really going to alienate yourself now.” But it worked out. I just paint what I feel and what I see.

Ottmann: Is the landscape in your paintings still Oklahoma?

Andoe: Well, yeah, it’s sort of universal. Every planet has that line; it’s this continuous thing. It’s a device for me to get further in. I never learned to paint the landscape the correct way; in art school we were all more influenced by Robert Mangold and Brice Marden and Jasper Johns. Modern art was really about logic. Why the Renaissance space when you can just draw a line across?

Ottmann: Did the monochrome style develop more recently or is that something you’ve been doing all along?

Andoe: I’ve always liked that. It’s sort of the big pool, a clear space.

Ottmann: You also seem to limit yourself to certain colors – brown, red, and green in particular.

Andoe: It’s like the decision to wear one thing and not another. I can’t explain why. Talking about my work is for me the most difficult thing I can think of. It’s like I freeze this stuff once and to talk about it is like freezing it again. I just barely touch it.

Ottmann: Do you get inspiration from other artists?

Andoe: Yeah. I like Twombly and I always enjoy Schnabel for the same reason I enjoy Picasso. They’re all so full of themselves. Clemente

is probably one of the best living artists because he's so in touch and so detached. It's like gravity has nothing to do with him. It's a complete high wire act, like Polke. Just as Schnabel is a high wire act with a pole and a net, Polke and Clemente are almost weightless.

Ottmann: That's an interesting metaphor.

Andoe: It's about being plain and not being nostalgic, sort of like being unmodern. You skip it. It's not an issue. Rather, it's about something generic.

Ottmann: Some people see you as romantic landscape painter.

Andoe: I don't like many landscape paintings. I'd rather be thought of as a plain painter. Just plain, like ...

Ottmann: ... van Gogh?

Andoe: Yeah. What would van Gogh's work look like if he had grown up in Oklahoma?

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