The disciples of light: a way of seeing and the educational transfer of ideas linking spirituality and art among southern painters in the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition

Barbara Naron Faulkner

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THE DISCIPLES OF LIGHT:
A WAY OF SEEING AND THE EDUCATIONAL TRANSFER OF
IDEAS LINKING SPIRITUALITY AND ART
AMONG SOUTHERN PAINTERS
IN THE HENSCHE-HAWTHORNE TRADITION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice

by
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of artistic education in shaping artistic beliefs and personal philosophy. Its central focus is the origins of a common belief among artists that artmaking or aesthetic response to art can be a form of spiritual activity or experience leading to spiritual insight. The primary data for this study is a series of in-depth oral history interviews with seven painters who studied with Henry Hensche at The Cape School of Art in Provincetown, MA, a school of American *plein air* painting that is linked with Impressionism. Charles W. Hawthorne, a painter who was a protégé of American Impressionist William Merritt Chase, founded the school in 1899. Each painter provided a life narrative of artistic education and development, discussed personal philosophy of art, shared views on the role of the artist in society, and related personal experiences of understanding and creating art. Spirituality in art is examined from perspectives of social and cultural traditions, personal spiritual orientations, and artistic education and practices.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

Albert Einstein

Beliefs, especially one’s own, are elusive. Lighter and more invisible than lenses, they are the devices through which one views the world. Seldom aware of them, I have peered through mine for most of my life. It is not simply that they seem to make the world appear as it should to me; rather, they make it difficult for me to conceive that others may not see the world as I do. Pragmatism recognizes experience as the basis for belief, and belief as the basis for action. For the first time in my life during my doctoral studies, I was called on to “unpack” the taken-for-granted notions that comprise my personal belief system and to examine their origins. This study represents my quest to better understand a belief I share with many other artists. It is this: A fair number of artists, as well as many others who simply enjoy art, believe that art can be experienced as “spiritual,” or believe that experiences of art can act as a pathway to spiritual knowledge of a larger life and universe. Since I first began making art in college, I had counted myself among this group, without ever stopping to wonder why. Neither did I give much thought to whether other artists that I knew viewed their experiences of art in this way or not. Still, the more that I studied about art and viewed it, the more convinced I became that some artwork and artists pointed toward ideas that might be interpreted as spiritual.

From the beginning of my earliest studies of art in college, what I now identify as my own spiritual experience of art was powerfully tied to the practice of making art: to drawing, painting, working in clay, carving wood. Materials seemed to suggest forms to me, and the recursive synthesis of perception, form, and materials in the creative cycle forged what became, at times, a hypnotic chain of focused energy. Often I would lose my self in this work to the extent that time and physical discomfort could seem temporarily suspended for hours, and the material world outside of the work would recede into a distant insignificance. I would emerge from these sessions with the sense of having experienced profound insights beyond articulation, and I felt capable of perceiving the world around me with unusual clarity. In retrospect, it is clear to me that this was an emotionally and intellectually satisfying experience that I began to actively seek. I have since come to believe that such intensely focused experiences of artmaking play a key role in the formation of artistic identity for many artists.

In his exploration of the formation of the identity of “self,” Perinbanayagam (2000) distinguished a range of human experience ranging from dull, repetitive boredom to the complex emotional resonance of ecstasy: “Ecstasies are the processes of stepping out of the routine states of being, of leaving our current selves for a time and entering another such state or phase of the self” (p. 226). I believe that for me, as well as for others, the practice of making art may create a sort of transitional gap, an ecstasy that acts as a temporary opening into an alternate state or phase of the self. The painter Robert Henri (1984) writing in his book, The Art Spirit, originally published in 1923, seemed to refer to this very state when he offered the following ideas about why an artist paints a picture and why we may later value it:

The object of painting a picture is not to make a picture, however unreasonable this may sound. The picture, if a picture results, is a by-product and may be useful, valuable, interesting as a sign of what has passed. The object, which is back of every true work of art, is the attainment of a state of being, (emphasis in original) a state of high functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence. In
such moments activity is inevitable, and whether this activity is with brush, pen, chisel, or tongue, its result is but a by-product of the state, a trace, the footprint of the state.

These results, however crude, become dear to the artist who made them because they are records of states of being which he has enjoyed and which he would regain. They are likewise interesting to others because they are to some extent readable and reveal the possibilities of greater existence. (p. 159)

This “more than ordinary moment of existence” Henri described seems to suggest passing through aesthetic awareness into a “greater existence” of spiritual awareness and realization. I later found that in interpreting my experiences with art in this way, I was not alone. Writing for the magazine *Possibilities* in 1947, the abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko also saw his work as a vehicle of transition into a greater spiritual awareness:

I think of my pictures as dramas.... Ideas and plans that existed in the mind at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur.... The presentation of this drama in the familiar world was never possible, unless everyday acts belonged to a ritual accepted as referring to a transcendental realm. (quoted in Lipsey, p. 312)

Henri’s and Rothko’s concepts of artmaking as sources of spiritual experience or spiritual insight for the artist were situated within the modernist celebration of individualism, which drew upon romantic ideals of creativity and self-expression. Kandinsky’s (1947) *Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular*, originally published in 1911, also located the primary spiritual experience of art with the artist. It must be noted that such distinctly personal takes on the artist’s individual experience of spirituality differ from pre-modern concepts that saw religious art as a form of spiritual education directed to a broad audience and that acknowledged a potentially spiritual experience in viewing art. It also differs from views of art in many non-Western cultures that recognize art as a traditional expression of shared spiritual beliefs.

For me, the ability to “visit” an elevated state of being at will provided its own ample motivation for continued artmaking. As my own interests and involvement in art expanded, I sought out and studied the work of other artists. In addition, I was exposed to notions of truth, beauty, and goodness in art through courses in studio art, art history, and philosophy. The more I learned about design, form, and art history, the more tuned my perceptions became, the more rewarding art became for me. In addition to artmaking, the aesthetic experience of looking at artwork by other artists, which I had always enjoyed, also became a growing source of spiritual enrichment and insight. In my doctoral studies which I began in 2001 and in the process of defining a dissertation topic, I identified the intersection of art and spirituality as an area for further study. Specifically, I was interested in better understanding the origins of the belief in art as spiritual that was claimed as significant by many artists.

As I sampled and reviewed resources that focused upon the intersection of spirituality and art, I developed a set of preliminary hypotheses in the form of questions to consider in investigating the origins of such beliefs among artists. As I continued to review materials and to think about the problem, I kept in mind the following questions:

Was the belief in art as spiritual

(1) **influenced by social and cultural traditions?**

In Western cultures, certain views of creative activity may be interpreted as suggesting that art or creative ability have a spiritual element. For example, art may be seen as (a) both the
source and the product of inspiration, (b) a focus for meditation or reflection, (c) as revealing "truth" or a unified view of being, (d) as capable of transforming consciousness, and (e) as fostering states of heightened sensitivity or awareness. In our culture, as well as many others, creative ability also is viewed as a special “gift,” perhaps divinely bestowed, that must be nurtured and honored. For example, it is commonly believed that a person is simply born with the ability to draw realistically. By logical extension, many also believe that if one is not so “gifted,” then it is futile to attempt to master the skill. An individual who has some natural ability in drawing, thus, may be singled out by teachers and peers for special attention or training. Moreover, as a result of such recognition, the individual may come to think of her or himself as fitting into the category of “artist.”

(2) **a result of an artist’s personal orientation to seek spiritual insight or knowledge?**

Individuals differ. While spiritual insight or experience could be a matter of vital importance to one person, it might be of little or no interest to another. Acknowledging these personal differences, in 2002, Gardner began the process of investigating the possible existence of a “spiritual intelligence” for inclusion in his Theory of Multiple Intelligences. It also can be argued that, due to circumstances or developmental changes, there may be certain periods in an individual’s life when he or she is more prone to ponder existential questions. A further important factor to consider is how the individual conceives and defines spirituality, which may largely determine where he or she will seek knowledge of it. For example, the individual who confines her or his concepts of spirituality to religion may not be inclined to look for spiritual experience or meaning in other areas, or conversely, may interpret a whole range of experiences in primarily religious terms. There is not yet any evidence that artists are more likely than other groups to desire spiritual insight or experience; however, this suggests an area for further study.

(3) **a product of the solitary, self-reflective nature of the artist’s work?**

Reflective thought and the time to engage in art are necessary ingredients in developing a personal philosophy. Particularly within the modern era, artists often spent a great deal of time working alone and thinking about the nature and the meaning of the relationships they represented in their work. However, if this is an important factor for artists, then one might expect to also find a corresponding spiritual or philosophical bent among other individuals, who also work in solitary, self-reflective professions.

(4) **learned through artistic education?**

There is abundant literature profiling the beliefs and philosophies of individual artists who have achieved recognition. While such profiles may adequately represent that individual’s mature personal views at the time of the profile, usually less attention was given to how he or she arrived at those views and what role artistic education played in that process. Was the artist exposed to a system of ideas that emphasized certain ideals or perpetuated socio-cultural notions of the artists’ role in society? Was the influence of a mentor or other like-minded individuals a significant factor? What artistic “heroes” served as models for behavior? What artistic goals were identified and at what point in the artist’s development did they emerge? Was the individual in any way rebelling against an opposing system of thought?

(5) **Or were there additional factors not anticipated at work?**
Were there other factors such as religious beliefs, age, gender, race, family, environment, personality, or personal values that were significant?

In my research, I found extensive writings on spirituality and art; aesthetic experience and response; creativity in art; and the cognitive, psychological, and physiological experiences of making and viewing art. I also discovered significant discourse that explored notions of spirituality in education and in art education. My primary challenge was not in finding resources; instead, it was in winnowing out significant ideas that were relevant to the study. Yet, while there was a great deal of material that focused upon a range of experiences of art, I found that there had been comparatively little research on the role of artistic education in shaping artistic philosophy and belief. From my own experiences, I was aware of two broad views of art as spiritual that might overlap in the artist: One centered on the artist’s creative/expressive practice of artmaking, while the second emerged from audience response to an existing artwork. Either or both dynamics might inform an artist’s belief system, but to what extent were such ideas acquired within the context of artistic education? It was a gap that suggested a need for further research. I decided to focus my study on the role of artistic education while staying alert for additional factors that also could be at work.

**Rationale for the Study**

Thomas Kuhn’s (1962) simple but profound insight in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was that scientists unconsciously absorb certain values and perspectives within the course of their education and apprenticeships. The power of “hidden, unstudied, or null curricula” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubmann, 1995/1996, p. 27) to covertly convey an “implicit curriculum” (Eisner, 2002) of social expectations and attitudes within the school environment also has been explored by a number of theorists (e.g., Michael Apple, Robert Dreeben, Philip Jackson, Peter McLaren, and Seymour Sarason). The notion of a hidden or implicit curriculum within the specialized education of the artist led me to consider the possibility that certain ideas or beliefs—including the belief in a spiritual dimension to art—that are not addressed directly through an overt curriculum nonetheless might be covertly conveyed or acquired.

As a subject for study, the artist’s belief in a connection between art and spiritual experience appears widespread both over time and across cultures; thus, much has been written about the perceived link between art and spirituality. Moreover, the idea is accepted as having a degree of validity both among artists and a significant portion of the general population. Even so, little is understood about how the belief is conveyed or acquired among artists, what it means to artists’ practices of artmaking and other engagement with art, and how such belief might effect the learning or the teaching of art. However, previous research and my own speculations could take me only so far. My next problem was to determine a method for studying the transmission of ideas and beliefs in art.

A 2002 graduate seminar in oral history theory and methodology, EDCI 5880, convinced me that if one’s objective was to understand how and why individuals think or believe certain ideas, then the most direct way to study such beliefs was to ask them. The personal narrative of an oral life history not only can reveal the significant people, events, and ideas that influenced an individual, but it may also reveal how that individual came to interpret those life experiences and the meanings that he or she constructed for them. In my experience with interviewing artists in conjunction with the McKinley High School Oral History Project in the summer of 2002, I found
that much could be learned about an artist’s perspective, attitudes, and beliefs from even a single interview. I also learned that often what is left unsaid might hold as much significance as what is said. I wished to hear the “story” of how artists had become artists, and the ideas and beliefs that they had acquired in the process, including any belief that art was in some way spiritual.

Therefore, I chose the oral history methodology as the primary source of data for my study.

In selecting a study group, I decided to focus on artists who shared a common educational background and who had been exposed to similar ideas within the course of that education. In doing so, I was aware that the ways in which those ideas had been differently absorbed, changed, rejected, or reflected might vary. I provide a thorough discussion of the study group and research design in chapter three. Because of my own undergraduate studies with Sammy Britt, a painter who taught a very specific and structured approach to realistic painting from nature, I knew of other students who had studied with this same teacher and with his teacher, Henry Hensche. Several who had also studied with Hensche had gone on to become professional painters. As it happened, all of these artists were male although I remembered an approximately equal number of females from my own student days with Britt. I also knew that there were materials documenting my teacher’s mentor and his predecessors in a school of American *plein air* painting that was linked with Impressionism and that dated back to the late 19th century. A review of historical background would give me the opportunity to study not just individual beliefs, but a system of thought that had evolved over a period of time and had been passed down through several individuals. I knew that Britt, and a least one of the other painters that I wished to study believed that artmaking was in some way a spiritual endeavor or experience; I also had a hunch that Henry Hensche, the mentor of both, had harbored a similar belief.

**Purpose and Significance of Study**

The purpose of my study was to add to understanding about the nature of the experiences that are significant in the process of becoming an artist and in the formation of foundational beliefs and philosophies among artists. As previously noted, I had especially hoped to better understand the belief in art as spiritual experience. But doing so first required viewing “belief” within the broader content of artists’ lives with special attention to artistic education and other factors that contributed to the process of artistic development.

A second aim of my study was to construct a multi-dimensional portrait of key figures, ideas, and events that comprise what I believe is a significant but little-documented approach to realistic painting from nature that is directly descended from the American Impressionism of William Merritt Chase. Chase, one of the foremost art educators of the late nineteenth century, was a member of “The Ten,” a group of American Impressionist painters that included Edmund Tarbell, J. Alden Weir, Willard Metcalf, John Twachman, Childe Hassam, Thomas Dewing, Edward Simmons, Robert Reid, Joseph De Camp, and Frank Benson. Chase’s Shinnecock Summer School of Painting became the model for his protégé, Charles W. Hawthorne’s Cape Cod School of Art that was continued as the Cape School of Art by Henry Hensche. This study also has sought to better understand the subtle ways in which artist’s personal beliefs may be acquired, embodied, expressed, conveyed, or rejected.

If ideas about art as spiritual practice or experience are, indeed, part of a prevalent belief system among artists that is conveyed through a hidden or covert curriculum, then it may be time for these ideas to be subjected to further examination within mainstream art education discourse. It is my hope that this study has provided an opening for further study of such pedagogy and for
exploring the implications and feasibility of bringing these teachings into the mainstream of art education discourse.

The Research Questions

It is undisputed that a significant number of artists believe that art is a source of spiritual knowledge. Perhaps even more significantly, as Lee (1948) pointed out, this belief appears to be unrelated to religious conviction since it can be commonly found even among those who are atheistic or agnostic (p. 515). What is less clear—and of significant to art education—is how and when artists come to believe this, and why, contrary to a prevailing techno-rationalist climate in education and what is often a largely formalist approach to art education, many persist in their beliefs. After reflecting upon my working hypotheses (i.e., was belief in art as spiritual subject to: social and cultural traditions; personal orientation; solitary or self-reflective practices of artmaking; learned through artistic education, or; impacted by other factors?), I discovered that questions generated more questions. Many of them, I quickly realized, were beyond the scope of my study to answer definitively or even partially. I narrowed my task to learning as much as I could within the boundaries of the problem and the study group I had defined and using the methods that I had selected as appropriate. The research questions that I formulated were aimed toward understanding the life experiences of each artist. The following research questions were used to guide the study and to establish protocol for the interviews (see Appendix A).

The questions and some of the sub-questions that I aimed toward answering were:

(1) What was each painter’s lived experiences of artmaking and becoming an artist?
    When did the individual first recognize his ability or interest in art? When/how did he make the decision to become an artist? What experiences in this process stood out as significant or memorable? What does it feel like to be deeply engaged with art? What are the difficulties or rewards of being an artist?

(2) What were the ideas and experiences that each artist identified as significant in forming his belief system?
    What ideas, subjects, models, and approaches to art were encountered? To what extent were these ideas present in the artist’s formative environment and has the artist come to share or reject these views?

(3) What role, if any, did the artist’s education play in inculcating and shaping foundational beliefs?
    How closely does the artist’s present practice resemble the principles, practices, and goals that he encountered in his artistic education? How has the artist’s practice changed or evolved over time, and why?

(4) If, and in what ways, each artist defined and experienced art as “spiritual”?
    What elements can be identified in each artist’s practice that might encourage or foster the artist’s development of greater spiritual awareness? What experiences, ideas, or models did the artist encounter that are remembered as significant? Were such ideas articulated verbally, modeled through behaviors, or "just understood"? Were these ideas shared and discussed with others artists or teachers? Were there other ideas or views that the artist rejected, and if
so, why? Does the artist believe that the practice of art has contributed to her or his spiritual awareness and, if so, in what ways?

(5) How do each artist’s beliefs effect his experience, practice, and teaching of art? What are the concepts, philosophy, and worldview that each artist now holds? In the case of those who teach, what do they hope to convey to their own students? To what extent do these parallel the views of the artists’ primary teacher and role mode?

Summary of Chapter One

Chapter One introduced the focus of my research, the origins of the artist’s belief that artmaking and art can be experienced as spiritual. This particular view of art and spirituality was situated within Western modernism’s celebration of individualism that drew upon romantic ideals of creativity and self-expression. There is a significant documentation of artists who have claimed to experience art as spiritual.

Next, I developed a set of working hypotheses to use in investigating artists’ beliefs in art as spiritual. The hypotheses consider (a) social and cultural influences, (b) personal orientations toward spiritual inquiry, (c) the often solitary, self-reflective nature of artmaking, (d) the influence of artistic education, and (e) additional factors such as religious beliefs, age, gender, race, family, environment, personality, and personal values. I narrowed the focus of my research to investigating the influence of artistic education in shaping artists’ beliefs and conceived a study that would look at artistic education in a small group of artists who studied painting with the same mentor. A set of research questions was developed to guide the investigation (see above, p. 13).

Outline and Summary of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview
The research problem with working hypothesis is introduced, rationale for the study is defined, purpose and significance of the study are discussed, research questions are listed, and a list of key terms is defined.

Chapter Two: A Review of Perspectives on Spirituality
Diverse perspectives on concepts of spirituality are examined. This chapter includes discussion and review of concepts and traditions connecting spirituality and art; spirituality in education and art education; and the role of aesthetic experience, imagination and creativity in artistic practice.

Chapter Three: Methodology
Chapter three discusses the research design and methods, theoretical framework, ethical considerations, interview protocol, and the analysis of interview data.

Chapter Four: The Hensche-Hawthorne Tradition
Research into the Chase-Hawthorne-Hensche lineage of painting instruction examines the artistic ideas and historical contexts that influenced each painter’s education and belief system. This information establishes background and context for better understanding the educational tradition influencing the seven painters who were interviewed.
Chapter Five: The Interviews with the Artists

Chapter five focuses on discussion and analysis of the artists’ accounts of artistic education and development as well as their present beliefs and practices.

Chapter Six: Concluding Analyses

Chapter six contains concluding analyses, interpretation of the data, and implications for education.

Definition of Key Terms

Alla prima—Literally “at the first,” a painting technique in which the artist paints using color directly from the tube and mixing it on the canvas. Also called premier coup meaning “first strike.”

Art Education—The field of education devoted to teaching the disciplinary aspects of the theory and practice of art.

Artistic education—Those experiences, formal and informal, that an individual identifies as significant in his/her training and initiation into the culture, traditions, and practices of becoming an artist and that contribute to the formation of artistic practice and philosophy.

Halation—A subtle halo of reflected light that will appear to emanate from the silhouette of a subject seen in sunlight.

Mystical experience—A perception of union or direct communion with ultimate reality.

Plein air—A French term meaning “open air” used to describe a type of painting done out of doors under natural light that emerged during the mid-late 19th century with Impressionism.

Religion—A system of doctrines, principles, and codified practices acknowledging shared spiritual belief within a group or a community.

Spirituality—The personal search for meaning and purpose in existence beyond the material and temporal.

Spiritual inquiry—The search for spiritual knowledge or experience. Modes of spiritual inquiry may include intuitive, non-discursive, and meditative practices.

Spiritual orientation—An individual's need, readiness, or desire for spiritual knowledge or experience.

Transcendence—A concept of mystical spiritual relationship to the timeless and infinite. For American transcendentalists, contemplation of Nature was a primary means for attaining knowledge of the universal mind, and thereby, gaining knowledge of the divine.
CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUALITY

Towards Defining Spirituality

It will be useful to begin by examining the term *spiritual*. Although each of us likely has some notion of what it might mean, it is a term that has been so broadly applied within so many contexts that, at times, it is seemingly used to refer to any quality or experience that may have been alternately termed mystical, transcendent, supernatural, religious, magical, enchanted, ecstatic. Spirit is derived from the Latin word that means "breath" or "wind"; thus, it is conceived as an invisible force that animates life itself. Yet, to hear of soaking in a hot tub or eating a Godiva® chocolate described as a spiritual experience is enough to make one pause to wonder if the term has not been entirely bankrupted. Beyond such frivolous uses of the word, however, spiritual also suggests the search for personal meaning in existence that is an attempt to solve the basic mysteries of living, a way to discover "one's relationship with the Infinite" (Willis, 2000, p. 173). Noddings (1993) reminded us that the persistent human desire to find purpose and meaning in life begins, even in children, with the search to answer existential questions that ask, in effect, *Why am I here?* and *What is here?* and *Is there anything more?* When Dwayne Huebner (1999) wrote of the “moreness” of human existence, he was searching for the term that described this precise human yearning to discover the answers to such questions, our desires to experience the transcendent and the mysterious, and to understand ways of knowing and being beyond material existence.

The search for spiritual meaning is thought to lead to a form of knowledge construction through "largely unconscious and symbolic processes" (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, p 2) that Wilber (1996) maintains are continually evolving at both individual and cultural levels. In contrast to notions of a linear progression in spiritual growth, Wilber's model conceives of spiritual development as "consciousness unfolding" in a "dynamic spiral" which draws from and builds upon previous growth in overlapping stages. Over time, Tisdell and Tolliver (2002) have suggested that spiritual development can be manifest in affective, cognitive, and social changes in the individual. A number of writers (English, 2000; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002) further suggest that spiritual insight and growth appear to play a significant role in identity formation, especially in young adults.

Most who have written about spirituality have commented on the difficulties of defining a concept that is, at once, so broad and yet, elusive. In this respect, I find helpful King’s (1998) distinction among the religious, occult, and transcendent aspects of the larger whole of spirituality. Although the word spiritual in our culture is most often reserved for discussing a particular type of experience that is associated with religious belief, religion and spirituality are not the same. Religion is a system of doctrines, principles, and codified practices acknowledging shared spiritual belief within a group or a community. Parks (2000) contrasted the intimate and profoundly personal nature of spirituality with the more formal and public face of religion. Thus, according to King (1998); religious spirituality conveys the traditional, organized, public expressions of religious conviction; occult spirituality is concerned with notions of the paranormal such as clairvoyance and the existence of invisible spirits or ghosts; and reference to the spirituality of transcendence implies a mystical relationship to the timeless and infinite. While each is an enormous category in-and-of-itself and each concept conveys belief in a dimension of experience beyond our perceptual and sensory limitations, it is important to be aware that individuals may have very different and specific notions about what comprises
spirituality. Most writers concede that for many individuals there may be considerable overlap between religion and other forms of spirituality. Based upon these distinctions, I conceive of spirituality as the infinite ground of relation to being upon which all forms of religious belief as well as diverse personal experiences of transcendence and mysticism can occur. Figure 1 (below) illustrates my concept of the process of individual construction of meanings and beliefs about the spiritual.

The concepts of spirituality and religion may be sometimes confused or used interchangeably because forms of either may encompass the belief in a plane of knowledge or in a divine intelligence beyond rational or perceptual boundaries. And whether that unseen force is conceived as a god or gods in a Christian or a Hindu heaven, as the limitless field of energy and creative potentiality envisioned by Taoists, or as a collective, immanent life-force, attempts to grasp it rationally invariably fail. Religious doctrine teaches that we know the world through living, but the spiritual we can know only through faith. One thus approaches spiritual knowledge through intuitive, reflective, and non-discursive modes of inquiry that may include disciplines of "contemplation, centeredness, silence, and solitude" (Willis, 2000, p. 174). These, however, are not the only pathways.

In Flanders’ (1977) analysis of spiritual experience, he distinguished two general categories: (a) experiences that were "purely physical…whose meaning [lay] in the nature of the experience itself—[for example] sex, drugs, communion with nature," and (b) spiritual experience "mediated by symbols" (p. 30). This second, and in Flanders’ assessment, more
satisfying type of spiritual experience, which may encompass such disciplines such as "mathematics, psychoanalysis, games, art, and religion," (p. 30) is based not only on the form of the activity itself, but also upon an individual's personal investment in an entire constellation of ideas to which these symbols are linked. Of these symbolic disciplines, Flanders, an Episcopal minister, singled out religion and art as containing "an extraordinary degree of joy and awe of the unexpressed and the unexpressable that are present but unexamined in the lives we lead from day to day" (p. 30). The circular questions of whether faith leads to spiritual experience or spiritual experience produces faith thus serves to illustrate how elusive, varied, and personal the many pathways to spiritual knowledge can be.

Yet, however diligently one may engage in spiritual discipline and inquiry, a number of writers (Flanders, 1977; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002) insist that one cannot simply choose to have a spiritual experience; rather, in a happy accident or an unexpected moment, the spiritual experience, in effect, has us. Eastern thought richly illustrates the elusive nature of spiritual experience through tales of spiritual seekers, including the Buddha himself, who underwent long years of rigorous meditation, solitude, and ascetic privation before finally achieving spiritual enlightenment in an unanticipated flash of insight. To this notion, I will add my own belief that what I will henceforth call the spiritual orientation of an individual will strongly mediate the persistence and intensity with which s/he pursues spiritual inquiry. Spiritual orientation I will define as an individual's need, readiness, and desire for spiritual knowledge.

The psychologist and philosopher William James (1985/1902), in his extensive investigations of religious and mystical spiritual experiences, acknowledged both spirituality guided through religious doctrine as well as through what he called the transcendental "Emersonian religion" founded in an idealist belief in immanent divinity expressed through "the essentially spiritual structure of the universe" (p. 32). James also acknowledged mystical experience, including religious mysticism, distinguishing it from the more commonplace spirituality of religion. He noted that spiritual experience centered in religion most often produced a sense of peace, harmony and well-being, a sense of "perceiving truths not known before" (p. 248), and to the person who had undergone the experience, it seemed to profoundly change even the objective appearance of the world itself, so that "newness beautifies every object" (p. 248).

With scientific rationalism already firmly established in Western thought, it is not surprising that even in James' time the term mystic could be used as a pejorative of dismissal for those who believed they might actually converse with the spirit world. The parallels that James identified between religious spirituality and so-called "mystical experience" was in its intense emotional impact on the individual and in their unshakeable certainty that the experience was, in fact, "real." In determining whether a subject was relating an experience that was mystical in nature, James' most useful criteria was its ineffability, that is, the subject insisted that the experience defied description. As Anthony Palmer (1995) characterized a typical attempt to convey the ineffable nature of the spiritual, "I cannot easily explain spirituality [emphasis in original] but I know when I have experienced it" (p. 103). A second of James' characteristics of mystical experience was the individual's perception of having achieved important insights that were perhaps beyond articulation, but no less significant for it. To these he also added the less defined qualities of transience and passivity; that is, the intensity of mystical experience was rarely sustainable for more than a couple of hours, and individuals often reported a sense that the experience seemed to occur beyond their will. It is still true, as James found at the time of his study, that, for many, spiritual experience is primarily associated with religious faith. But as
Flanders' (1977) analysis added, spiritual insight may also emerge from a range of activities and experiences of being-in-the-world; from relationships with nature or with others, as well as from modes of meditation or reflective awareness.

Evelyn Underhill (1915), an English writer and mystic of the early twentieth century, in her book *Practical Mysticism*, defined mysticism as the art of union with Reality. Reality, as Underhill conceived it, exceeds our limited abilities to perceive or conceive the universe, being, and ourselves. Willis (2000), drawing upon Underwood, defined the mystic as a person who has attained a degree of union with Reality or who aims at and believes in such attainment (p. 173).

In *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*, Roger Lipsey (1988) has characterized spiritual experience in art as a "transient experience of intensity, of a larger world and a larger self" (p. 16), a description not incompatible with James' or Underhill's concepts of mystical experience.

The life of spirit is frequently partitioned off as separate from the world of intellect and its celebration of rational function. Jung (1953/1974) viewed the "spiritual principle" as a sui generis instinct that was both specific and necessary to the function of the psyche (p. 262). In Jung's theory, the modern West had been thrown into disequilibrium by an alienation from the unconscious that "exclud[ed] the irrational possibilities of life" (p. 256). He argued that the intellect does indeed do harm to the soul when it dares to possess itself of the heritage of the spirit. It is in no way fitted to do this, for spirit is something higher than intellect since it embraces the latter and includes the feelings as well. It is a guiding principle of life that strives towards superhuman, shining heights. (p. 255)

It is clear to me that Jung did not conceive of spirit as simply a form of pure emotion; rather, he saw the "spiritual principle" as an active facilitator between conscious rational thought and the irrational affective unconscious in much the same way that German Idealist philosophers had conceived of aesthetic judgment as the mediator between the sensual and the rational aspects of human nature.

In Western thought, this separation between rational material knowledge and the irrational world of spirit has roots in Plato's concept that placed original forms of "pure" being in "a transcendent realm of Ideas" (Kearney, 1988, p. 88). Plato conceived the material world, the only world that one can know directly, as filled with "shadows" that are the imperfect imitations of those Ideas. Although the world of Ideas cannot be known directly, Plato theorized it was possible to access it through Reason. Imagination and other forms of imitation, notably including poetry, painting and other of the "imitative" arts, he condemned as dangerously misleading. It is ironic that the perfection and goodness Plato envisioned in the realm of Ideas bears such similarity to many constructions of the world of spirit: The Sun was his metaphor for the all-penetrating brilliance of pure form as Idea that was, in Plato's model, the highest form of Good, whereas in later Western religions, the Sun symbolized the divine. Yet, Plato identified Reason, not Faith, as the vehicle that would take humankind to this higher plane.

The valorization of Reason in Western thought continued throughout the Enlightenment, gradually elevating reason to the single valid means for gaining knowledge of the material world, and thus, by inference, to access to pure Ideas representing the abstract ideals of Truth and Goodness. At the same time, a parallel idealization of the unseen realm of spirit seemed to move in an opposite direction: intuition, emotion, and faith, not rational thought, became recognized as the pathways to spiritual insight. John Dewey (1934a), writing in *A Common Faith*, also noted certain value judgments emerging from the curious way in which the spiritual and the material worlds had been separated from one another in Western thought: “For many persons an aura of
mingled awe and unreality encompasses the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘ideal’ while “matter” has become by contrast a term of depreciation, something to be explained away or apologized for.” (p. 6)

In Western thought, the material and spiritual worlds were increasingly separated into body and soul, earthly and divine, rational and emotional, sensuous and ethereal, with material knowledge relegated to the domain of Reason and spiritual knowledge and experience assigned to the affective realm of Faith. In one sense, the West has been engaged in a struggle to reconcile the schism between material existence and spiritual being ever since the time of Plato.

Lauzon (1998) theorized that the West’s previously dominate form of meaning-making which he terms "rational-logic" is currently being replaced through a worldwide paradigm shift in fundamental human consciousness to "vision-logic." Vision-logic conceives humans as being active "constructors of knowledge" rather than "discoverers of knowledge" (p. 320). It is a distinctly postmodern perspective that acknowledges ambiguity, multiple truths and realities, and knowledge as situated and transitory. Lauzon views the cultural shift to vision-logic as a movement toward deepening spirituality and away from materiality, consumption, and the denial of affective and intuitive modes of cognition. Vision-logic is a perspective that seeks to unite art, religion, and science.

Theoretical physicist David Bohm (1992) characterized Western culture’s dualistic attempts to understand relation to being through two separate and seemingly contradictory paradigms—the scientific and the spiritual—as “a lack of coherence” (p. 3) which begged for resolution. Evidence of a growing impulse to integrate more holistic thinking into scientific perspectives appears to be challenging the previously mechanistic view of the universe that conceived it as an enormous complex clockwork to be manipulated by humans. This “clockwork universe” perspective is giving way to views which acknowledge the inherent interrelatedness of matter and life through scientific concepts in areas as diverse as quantum mechanics and string theory in physics, chaos theory in mathematics, and ecological perspectives in the biological sciences.

If popular culture can be taken as an indicator of the shifting tides of collective consciousness, then the proliferation of bookstore titles related to spirituality (Tisdell, 2001)—including Western and Eastern philosophy and religion, yoga and meditation, and new-age philosophies—points not only toward a renewal of interest in traditional expressions of spirituality, but also toward a rapidly expanding horizon for spiritual inquiry in contemporary culture. The present Dalai Lama (1999), himself a best-selling author on spirituality, has called for a “spiritual revolution” in the new millennium which would require a "radical reorientation" away from material values and preoccupation with self and toward the well-being and happiness of the wider community (p. 23).

A Growing Discourse on Spirituality in Education and Art Education

A growing recognition among educators that spirituality matters has led to debate about the role of education in addressing it. A number of educators (Huebner, 1999; Noddings, 1993; Willis, 2000) have argued that the impulse toward spiritual experience, religious or otherwise, is in some form, primary for most people, and that education has a moral responsibility to address those questions that matter to people. Clifford Mayes (2001) wrote:

Spiritual commitments matter. They infuse much of our social and political life. They help shape the conceptual and emotional landscapes of our (sub)cultures. For many of us,
they are the rock upon which our very lives rest. As such, spirituality is inevitably a vital part of education. (p. 18)

In recent years, a number of educational researchers (hooks, 2000; Noddings, 1993; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Willis, 2000; Zinn, 1997) have identified personal spirituality as a significant area for knowledge construction, meaning-making, and development of identity and self-awareness. Other researchers (Greene, 2001; Hamad, 2001; Klassen, 2000; London, 1991; Walsh, 2002) have proposed the arts as a means for reintroducing discourse on spirituality into schools. Tisdell and Tolliver (2002) suggested that spiritual development can lead to affective, cognitive, and social changes in adults. A number of writers (English, 2000; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002) further suggested that spiritual insight and growth appear to play a significant role in identity formation, especially in young adults.

In his extensive study of spirituality in children, Coles (1990) reported that even young children show curiosity and have ideas about the nature of the spiritual. Nel Noddings (1993) has reminded us that the persistent human desire to find purpose and meaning in life begins, even in children, with the search to answer existential questions that ask, in effect, Why am I here? and What is here? and Is there anything more? Huebner (1999) has further asserted his belief that the search for spiritual meaning in existence is a human imperative that education has the moral responsibility to address. For education, difficulties arise in finding the time and means for addressing such questions within the curriculum and in educating teachers that can offer sensitive guidance to students in such inquiry.

Within the history of art education, the notion of a link between spirituality and art has been acknowledged and perhaps perpetuated through a number of different perspectives. Art educator Peter Smith (1982) noted the persistent influence of Germanic philosophy and pedagogy in American art education. Romanticism, with its reverence for the beauty of nature, drew upon ideas from German Idealist philosophers who conceived and valorized aesthetic sensibility and judgment as valuable and uniquely human experiences. Through imagination and intuition one might contemplate an unseen world of ideals beyond sensory perception: Art was the perfect vehicle for pointing toward the unseen. A notable Victorian era argument for arts in the curriculum was the belief that the spiritually enriching qualities of Truth and Beauty, thought to be inherent in great art, was capable of fostering moral goodness in students (Stankiewicz, 1984). This idea found widespread expression in the picture study and school-room decoration movements around the turn of the century. As the progressive education and child study movements sought to better understand the development of the whole child, instrumental arguments for art in the curriculum turned to art’s physical and cognitive benefits. Human creativity driven by imagination emerged as the modern era’s vehicle for reaching a utopian future. From the1950s onward in art education, emphasis on creativity would take the form of an art education for self-expression advocated by Viktor Lowenfeld (1949) in his landmark text, *Creative and Mental Growth*.

The substance of art teaching as it is currently addressed in schools most often focuses upon art as a discipline: that is, upon the areas of art-making in studio practice, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. Art educator Peter London (1991) contrasted the primarily object-centered Western concepts of art with diverse cultural traditions that recognize the unique power of creative endeavors as a force for transformative human experience. Arguing that the object-centered Western model is in some ways limited and “shallow,” London proposed reconceptualizing art education to once again recognize art’s ancient cultural role and its potential for powerfully transforming the very quality of life. To do so would require a radical
shift away from conceiving art as entertainment, decoration, or objects and toward understanding it as discovery, empowerment, and celebration. Within current art education, aspects of a spiritual dimension of art have been proposed or explored by a number of other investigators (Beittel, 1989; Campbell, 2003; Maddenfort, 1981; Thayer, 2003; Zurmuehlen, 1984). The key findings that appear to emerge from these investigations is that, for some individuals, the practice of making art and aesthetic experiences related both to artmaking and art-viewing can be a source of spiritual enrichment or insight. These are views consistent with London’s call for viewing art as a transformative process.

Laurel Campbell’s (2003) study of three art teachers investigated their qualities of "aesthetic spirituality," which she defined as "a strong spirituality at the core of one's self" along with "a developed sense of connection between the inner self and the person's philosophy of creating and teaching art” (p. 9). Campbell’s results supported a connection between aesthetic and spiritual experiences as well as revealing common elements in the artists' development. More significantly, the “artist-teachers” in Campbell’s study manifested their beliefs in their teaching of art and in their relationships with their students.

McKean’s (1999/2000) study of six elementary and middle grade art teachers indicated their “overarching belief in the power of the arts to express a unique and critical part of what is within each child” (p. 188). Mayes (2001) asserted that the nineteenth century view of teachers as spiritually committed “moral agents” persists in many present-day teachers (p. 9). In the aftermath of 9-11, the governmental lobbying group, Americans for the Arts, proposed various ways that the “power” of the arts might be employed to help in “healing” the recent national trauma (Knight, 2001). In light of such views, it is not surprising to find a pervasive assumption that art and art teachers are somehow capable of cultivating those unique inner qualities of self that will unlock individual potentials. It also offers evidence of a tacit belief—held by both art teachers and the public they serve—that art teachers have a special role in nourishing individual “goodness” in students, and it, thus, situates art teachers as dispensers of “good.” How a personal concept of spirituality may affect one’s teaching practice is an important topic that Palmer (1997) argued deserves further examination and which needs to be more visible in the literature on teacher reflectivity.

Greene (1987) has called for education to foster states of “wide-awakeness” and active engagement in contrast to “blankness and passivity” (p. 15). She believes that arts education is the best means to attain it. Hamblen and Galanes (1991) have noted “It is believed that aesthetic sensitivity is a by-product or natural outcome of making art and of exploring art’s physical properties” (p. 21). Present-day visual art education arguably includes a number of perspectives and ideas that seek to go beyond formal or technical concerns to probe at issues of relationship, compassion, justice, and personal responsibility (Bordiuk, 2001) that are often intertwined with spiritual commitment and growth. Ideas central to multiculturalism and feminist theory challenge traditional Western anthropocentrism and patriarchal “dominator” models (Gablik, 2001) of art creation. Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) examines images beyond art per se, and representation, as a site of ideological struggle. Approaches to integrating environmental perspectives into art education focus on complex understandings of place and a deeply caring relationship with one’s own community. The process of discovering hidden relationships that reveal the interconnectedness, impermanence, and fragility of all life speaks to those “big” questions that spiritual and philosophical inquiry repeatedly ask and that each individual must consider in constructing personal meaning in life. Many educators appear to believe that
fostering aesthetic awareness and response in students can encourage them to examine their own inner relationship to life and through it discover personal spiritual meaning.

Spirituality in Art: A Brief Survey

Artists from Western and non-Western cultures alike have often claimed the experience of making and/or appreciating art as spiritual in nature. Within Western culture, written statements by well-known twentieth century artists such as Kandinsky and Rothko, and lesser-known figures such as Robert Henri, have variously described these experiences in terms of attaining “a more than ordinary state of existence” (Henri, 1923, p. 159), of art-making as a means for accessing “a transcendent realm” (Rothko as cited in Lipsky, 1988), and a belief in the capacity of "true works of art" to "nourish the spirit" (Kandinsky, 1947).

It is important to distinguish between two separate ideas about art and the spiritual that, at times, may be misunderstood or conflated. The artist’s experience of artmaking as spiritual is individual and apart from the notion of artwork intended to point beyond itself toward some unseen realm or artwork made perform a spiritual function or to instruct an audience about notions of the spiritual. The artist who experiences artmaking as spiritual may or may not have the intention of communicating some spiritual idea to a viewer. Conversely, a viewer may experience an artwork as conveying a spiritual idea when the artist’s goal was simply to solve a painting problem. While I provide an overview of diverse perspectives that link art with spirituality in this chapter, my research is primarily focused upon the experiences of the artist in artmaking and whether the artist interprets those experiences as spiritual experience.

The influence of ideas of spirituality that have been absorbed, reflected, or reinterpreted within art have been adopted and blended from multiple sources and perspectives. Because of this, I believe that attempts to analyze such ideas are best addressed as a broad survey of influences rather than an attempt to pinpoint specific causal chains. These influences might include sources as diverse as nineteenth century Romanticism’s reverence for the sublime in nature; the mysticism of Rudoph Steiner’s anthroposophy; Theosophy; American transcendentalism; Eastern thought and Zen Buddhism; recurring drug and music counterculture movements; and UFO cargo cults. What these diverse perspectives have in common is that each seeks, in some way, to explain human relation to being, the question that is at the core of spirituality. Art, with its requisite components of creativity and imagination, more often than not has proven willing to entertain sometimes fanciful ideas about the nature of this relationship that fall beyond the boundaries of everyday experience.

Attempts to explain belief in a spiritual dimension of art in psychological, neurological, evolutionary, cultural or sociological terms are abundant, but any single analysis invariably fails to satisfactorily account for the belief's scope and persistence through time and across cultures. One has simply to trace a brief general history of ideas about artistic practices as they relate to spiritual experience to recognize the vast prevalence of these ideas. Numerous artists have offered views on this relationship. Artist Van James (2001) has gone so far as to assert that "the history of art is nothing less than a description of the spiritual development of humanity in the form of a pictorial record" (p. xi). The artist Cecil Collins wrote in 1989 of his belief of the artist's role in relationship to the spiritual:

Beneath our technological civilization, there still flows the living river of human consciousness within which is concentrated in continuity the life of the kingdom of animals, planet, stars, the earth and the sea, and the life of our ancestors, the flowing
generations of men and women: the sensitive and the solitary ones, the secret inarticulate longing before the mystery of life. The artist is the vehicle of the continuity of that life and his [her] instrument is the myth and the archetypal image…. Art is concerned with the transformation of consciousness. (as quoted in Tucker, 1992)

David Abrams’ (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous* reminds us that people once viewed even rocks and trees in the natural world as animated by invisible forces intimately interconnected with human well-being. The contemporary movement to bring about what Suzi Gablik (2002) has termed a "re-enchantment of art" draws upon re-imagined and re-invented elements borrowed from ancient ritual, myth, and shamanic practices combined with perspectives shaped by contemporary ecological and social awareness. It is aimed not toward magically altering the material world but toward reconnecting human consciousness to spiritual awareness of the interconnectedness of being.

The reemergence of these ideas in our time appears to challenge the predominant analyses and critiques of modern and postmodern art which cite the materialist commodification of art as evidence of an apparent absence of spiritual intent or values (Danto, 1997; Koppman, 1999; Perlmutter, 1999). A 1966 article by Tom Wolfe offered the thesis that “Culture” had emerged as a form of secular religion among the educated classes and that cultural centers such as New York’s Lincoln Center had become “the holy temples of Culture” (p. 10).

Although other writers (Austin, 1996; Gablik, 2002) attribute the present cultural turn toward spirituality to a generalized reaction to twentieth century materialism, the artist’s entwinement with ideas of spirituality can be observed throughout the entire history of art (James, 2001). It is easy to imagine that artistic attempts to connect to an unseen world of spirit extends back even beyond the prehistorical cave paintings at Lascaux 15-25 thousand years ago. In surveying the relationships between art and spirituality, it is apparent that art in the service of the sacred co-evolved along with religion.

For the religious icon painter of the Middle Ages, the exacting task of externalizing the spiritual reality of Orthodox faith demanded more than mere technical skill: In order for the work to allow the beholder to enter into the unseen realm of spirit, it was believed that the artist had to paint while simultaneously engaged in a state of "pure prayer" (Baggley, 1987, p. 55). It was a perspective that linked the process of artmaking with the artist’s spiritual state. Well before the Renaissance shift to perspective-dominated realism and the Enlightenment's celebration of humanism, the role of the shaman, and later, the medieval artist as a conduit for sacred images that were mediated by religious authority was already well established.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Romantic Idealists on both sides of the Atlantic regarded art that revealed nature as the sublime manifestation of God's immanence as a pathway to spiritual understanding. Under the broad umbrella of Romanticism, the nineteenth century saw a number of painting movements whose primary intent arguably was not merely to represent the forms of the physical world so much as it was to reveal the spiritual essence, ideals, complexity, and mystery that were embodied in its forms. German Idealist painters, such as Caspar David Friedrich, conjured stark polar landscapes or ruined abbeys overgrown with vines that evoked the incomprehensible and terrifying beauty in nature that Kant called the sublime. Friedrich believed that “The artist should paint not only what he sees before him, but also what he sees within him. If however, he sees nothing within him, then he should cease painting what he sees outside” (as quoted in Gamwell, 2002, p. 16). Thus, the visible forms the artist represented were viewed as the embodiments of the inner spiritual realizations that those forms elicited in the artist.
The Visionary Symbolists in Europe and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in Great Britain aimed at expressing the essence of spiritual values such as love, loyalty, heroism, compassion, mystery through allegorical and archetypal imagery in paintings. To the contemporary eye, these works, which may now appear quaint or mannered, stood in their own time as bold attempts to capture and convey elusive spiritual truths.

In the USA, landscape painters of the Hudson River School, who were deeply immersed in Protestant notions of redemption from an inherently sinful human condition, viewed the role of the artist as that of a teacher who was obliged to convey evidence of the moral truth and high spiritual order present in nature to other spiritual seekers (Veith, 2001). In this sense, the artist was regarded as one gifted with an extraordinary sight that perceived not only the outer aspects of material form but also its inner truths. As Taylor (1984) characterized it, "The artist was one who could see spirituality" (p. 101). Because of this gift, it was believed that artists were called—much as a minister might be called to the pulpit—to paint their apprehensions of the divine truth in nature for the spiritual betterment of all (Veith, 2001). As was typical of this view, the Victorian writer and art critic John Ruskin pronounced the "penetrative sight" of great artists as the means for distilling and clarifying the high spiritual order believed to be present in nature so that all might see it more clearly (Landow, 1971, p. 65). In this larger sense, the unique "view" of an inner world as seen through the eyes of the artist, a world that might be otherwise unavailable to the ordinary individual, is still regarded as a primary reason why many find viewing art so rewarding.

Protestant theologians of the period, in spite of their rejection of the Enlightenment's celebration of subjective humanism, nevertheless embraced the Romantic belief that art had the capacity to "elevate the soul" to moral goodness (Veith, 2001, p. 32). They further likened the creative act of the artist to the divine creative impulse, both ennobling artwork and the role of the artist, and at the same time, circumventing doctrinal fears that artists might be creating idolatrous images.

The dawn of the twentieth century saw an explosion of art styles and movements demanded by Modernism's voracious appetite for newness. The creative momentum of new ideas, images, inventions, and perspectives were what would propel history forward into the utopian future. A key idea embraced by the Modern age was the concept of the unconscious mind sparked by scientific investigations of trance-like states and nervous disorders beginning in the 1770's (Gamwell, 2002). With the dawn of the twentieth century, psychoanalytical theory presented artists with a new lens through which they could examine interior life, a lens that revealed not only inner light and goodness but also darkness and pain. It was a process that was once thought of as spiritual work re-defined in the scientific terms of Modernism. Artists applied Freud's psychoanalytical notions of the unconscious in expressionist, surrealist, and dada works that made visible their personal searches to come to terms with questions of meaning, purpose, and relationship to being.

Examples of artworks by artists whose spirituality is tied to some form of religion are numerous, but expressions of spirituality among artists are not confined to those operating within the boundaries of conventional Western religions. The1950s in the USA saw a surge of interest in Eastern thought among artists, especially in Zen Buddhism, which fueled a quest for spiritually resonant forms in abstract expressionist art (Lipsky, 1988; Westgeest, 1996). Diverse threads of artistic mysticism and Western interpretations of Eastern thought re-emerged in the counterculture movements of the sixties and seventies that experimented with altering consciousness through drugs, art and music, and meditation. Its influences may be noted in the
work of such diverse present-day artists as Alex Grey (2001) and Abraham Rattner (Henkes, 1998).

Cross-cultural examples of perspectives that connect nature and art through the spiritual intervention of the artist are also plentiful. In 12th century Taoist landscape art, the act of painting was regarded as a form of spiritual meditation through which the painter attained a heightened awareness of the interrelatedness of being. Traditional Chinese painting, grounded in nature mysticism, seeks to convey the mood and spirit of its subject as expressive of the unity of heaven, earth, and human beings. The symbolic representations of mythic origins in Australian aboriginal art are believed to both define and strengthen human bonds to overlapping spiritual and natural forces. Mandelas found in Tibetan and Native American sand painting are engaged as ritual-artistic practices that are meant to create a sacred space in which the interpenetrating material and spiritual worlds may temporarily become one. Islamic art, which forbids all representations of the human image as idolatrous, has produced intricate calligraphic forms intended as objects of focus for prayer and meditation. Because art is almost always concerned with conveying more than simply the objective appearance of its subjects, it frequently employs metaphoric forms that allude to “something more” and contribute to notions of the spiritual power and resonance of art to be found in cultures around the world.

However, since individual and cultural definitions of spirituality in art vary, again, a distinction should be noted between (a) art intentionally created to point beyond itself toward notions of some unseen reality and (b) any sense of personal spiritual awareness attained by the artist through the processes of creating art. While Dewey (1934a) noted that aesthetic experience could derive from both the creation of and response to an artwork, he did not otherwise distinguish between the two experiences, adding that they shared “an element of reverie, of approach to a dream state” (p. 275). Whether or not there are differences between the experiences of an artist in creating art and the experiences of the non-artist in viewing and responding to it is a question that suggests further study. While aesthetic response to artwork by the artist or a non-artist viewer remains a crucial element in linking art with spirituality, my research is concerned with the experiences of the artist as an art-maker. It is clear that artists may move back and forth freely between creative and responsive modes of aesthetic sensibility.

Tolstoy (1960) articulated a theory of art that proposed that great art captured the emotions experienced by the artist in the process of creating the work, then in turn, transmitted those emotions to a viewer who re-experienced them. Art was subsequently judged as “great” by how well it managed to accomplish this task. Stated in these terms, Tolstoy’s extreme expressivist theory of the function and purpose of art now seems curious and its critiques are obvious. However, I am convinced that variants of these ideas still enjoy surprising, if somewhat subtle, currency among some artists and the general public. A postmodern view of art holds that meaning does not reside in the art object itself; rather it is the product of the dialogue that is created among the formal elements of the work and the responses of the individual artist/viewer. It is upon this necessarily internal/external dialogue and the experiences and meanings that emerge from it for the artist where my study will focus.

For the individual artist and for the purposes of my study, ultimately it is the act of self-identifying one’s own experiences of art as “spiritual” in nature—recognizing that individuals may conceive or define spirituality differently—that is most significant. In the past, the difficulty in investigating notions of spirituality lay partially in the lack of measurable or observable evidence that could be brought to bear upon it. A further difficulty becomes apparent in considering the very particularized and individual nature of spiritual experience that makes
defining it so elusive. However, if William James’ pragmatic approach to investigating religious and spiritual experience through the reports of individuals can serve as a model, then collecting and studying reported experiences may yield insights into the nature and origins of spiritual experience among artists.

Aesthetic Experience, Imagination, and Creativity in Artistic Practice

Descriptions of aesthetic experience and mystical/spiritual experiences appear to have certain characteristics in common that also should be considered in investigating proposed connections between art and spirituality. When John Dewey (1934b) writing in *A Common Faith* noted “the mysticism of intense aesthetic experience independent of any theological or metaphysical interpretation” (p. 36), it was apparent that he recognized the phenomenological similarities in reports of the two experiences (see Figure 2, p. 23). Greer (1984) has defined the aesthetic experience of art as “the perception, understanding, and appreciation of objects, which move or please us in ways that cannot be accounted for by studying their literal meaning” (p. 117). Joseph Campbell (1991) has gone further to describe the aesthetic experience of art as a state “in which self-loss and elevation are the same. Such an impact is ‘beyond words;’ for it is not such as can be explained by a reference to anything else” (p. 251). Note how his description parallels the following statement when James (1902/1982) quotes a young man describing his own religious/spiritual experience: “What I felt on these occasions was a temporary loss of my own identity, accompanied by an illumination which revealed to me a deeper significance than I had been wont to attach to life” (p. 70). Campbell’s description immediately suggests the ineffable character of James’ criteria for mystical/spiritual experience, but in addition, his elements of “self-loss and elevation” in aesthetic experience compare closely with James’ subject’s religious/spiritual experience of “loss of identity” and “illumination.” Both descriptions suggest a uniquely altered state of awareness that is arguably comparable with Underhill’s (1915) notion of mystical union with Reality.

Dewey (1934) devoted extensive thought and energy to interrogating what constituted experience, first rejecting narrowly modernist concepts of experience that conceived a passive sedimentation of knowledge, events, memory, sequence, and subjectivity that would simply “happen” to the spectator/subject. Instead, he reconceptualized experience as “a matter of simultaneous doings and sufferings” wherein one must undergo “the consequences of [ones] own actions” (quoted in West, 1989, p. 88). In *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1934) began to parse out the exacting dimensions of aesthetic experience within his transactive model.

Art, he defined as both the process of “doing and making” and its product. Regarding the experience of art, “The word ‘esthetic’ refers... to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying” (1934a, p. 47). The aesthetic experience of art stood out sharply from the humdrum or everyday, but it could not be easily separated from intellectual experience. Both aesthetic and intellectual experiences were marked by elements of completeness or unity and a resolution in fulfillment that was seemingly bracketed out from the haphazard and continuous chain of events that we swim in daily. Completed experiences of this type he termed “an experience.” The most significant quality of the aesthetic experience he identified was emotion “that rounds out an experience into completeness and unity” (p. 41). He also noted “an element of passion in all esthetic perception” (p. 49) as well as the “feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with esthetic intensity” (p. 195). By choosing to enter into an emotional interactive dynamic in the “doing and making,” or through reflective
contemplation of an artwork, we are “introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live our ordinary experiences” (p. 195).

Most accounts suggest that aesthetic experience is characterized by a uniquely focused perceptual awareness—Greene (2001) calls it a “certain sort of noticing”—producing feelings ranging from simple pleasure to intense exhilaration. As Dewey pointed out, aesthetic experience is a sensory perception that provokes an emotional response, and even contains an element of passion. Langer (1953) characterized it as intuitive rather than discursive, noting, “The exhilaration of a direct aesthetic experience...has the force of revelation, and inspires a feeling of deep intellectual satisfaction” (p. 397). And, while aesthetic experience is triggered by response to specific objects, phenomena, or activity, like spiritual experience, which is not thought of as object-specific, ultimately, it may lead to a transformed sense of, or even, a temporary loss of self.

It is impossible to discuss artistic practice without also mentioning the vital elements of imagination and creativity. Without a doubt, imagination is the faculty that makes envisioning an unseen dimension possible, and it is also the faculty that enables creativity. Religious music composer Patricia Van Ness has wondered if engagement of the imagination and the sense of creative freedom resulting from it may act as a catalyst to spiritual experience (Austin, 1996). Studies of creativity in artistic process invariably note intense affective elements of “excitement” and even “exhilaration” that are recurrent in artistic problem-finding and problem-solving (Das, 2004; Langer, 1953; Lee, 1947; Mace, 1997), suggesting a state that may provide its own ample emotional motivation and rewards for creative activity. The state of "creative flow," that is, total involvement with the creative process, is associated with a sense of temporal suspension in which hours may seem to pass in a matter of minutes, physical discomfort or fatigue disappear, and the artist may experience the sense of witnessing, but not controlling an artwork's creation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Thayer’s (2003) hermeneutic-phenomenological investigation of creative practice and spiritual practice maintains that they share similarities in “an experience of the interplay of intention/reception, the experience of relationship, and the experience of shifts in one’s sense of self/life/world” (p. 127). Thayer’s research proposes that creative activity, which seeks to explore and unify sometimes hidden connections, relationships, or meanings, for many artists, may act as a bridge into spiritual experience. The phenomenological similarities of aesthetic experience and spiritual experience, catalyzed through creative activity, may cause some artists to begin thinking of artistic practice as spiritual. Yet, it is art’s ability to spark imagination and to point toward ideas and ideals of unseen relationships and meanings that produces its more enduring impact, and that may lead some into the habit of spiritual inquiry.

There are an abundance of ideas linking art with spirituality; some of these influenced the perspectives of the seven artists I interviewed for this study, and their mentor, Henry Hensche. In chapter four, I will trace the development of key ideas in the foundational philosophy of William Merritt Chase, Charles W. Hawthorne, and Henry Hensche, the three founding figures of the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition.

Summary of Chapter Two

I have defined spirituality as the personal search for meaning and purpose in existence beyond the material and the temporal. One’s personal motivation to engage in spiritual inquiry
depends upon individual spiritual orientation, that is, one’s need, readiness, and desire for spiritual knowledge or experience.

I conceive of diverse perspectives about spirituality as emerging from two general sources: (a) concepts that locate some spiritual essence or force outside of the self, and (b) a range of individual experiences mediated through the inner self (see Figure 2, below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual essence outside of self</th>
<th>Spiritual mediated by inner self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>—Religious belief centered on concepts of a separate all-powerful god</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Nature</td>
<td>—Physical experiences (Flanders’ examples of sex, drugs, communion with nature; chocolate/sensual pleasures).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Scientific perspectives that identify systems of hidden order in the universe as evidence of an organizing principle (chaos theory in mathematics, string theory and quantum mechanics in physics, ecological perspectives in biology, theory of intelligent design)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Taoist concept of [non]being as a limitless field of energy and creative potentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—A collective lifeforce or consciousness</td>
<td>—Conceptual/mental (for example: the aesthetic experience of art; intellectual investment in ideals such as truth, justice, beauty, goodness and their symbolic or metaphoric expressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Invisible ghosts, spirits, the occult</td>
<td>—Emotional, intuitive, empathetic, and expressive modes of human cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>—Psychological: self-knowledge, self-expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>—Social: community, family, commonality of human experiences (joy, grief, desire, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Sources of Spiritual Concepts

The two categories are not exclusive of each other; in fact, they are interactive. Spiritual experience mediated through the inner self may originate in a concept or concepts that locate a spiritual essence outside of the self, while individual investment in a concept of the spiritual located outside the self is subject to change through inner mediation.

The inner self may mediate the practice of artmaking as a spiritual experience. Artmaking and its product can simultaneously touch on the physical, conceptual, emotional, social, and psychological aspects of interior life as well as pointing toward exterior concepts of spirituality. As a result, art and artmaking offer a broad range of experiences that may be individually perceived or interpreted as being spiritual in nature; however, whether or not these experiences are interpreted as spiritual will depend upon an individual’s spiritual orientation. Of the many possible sources and types of spiritual experience, there are a number of types that I believe to be associated with spiritual experience in artists:

1. **Sensory**: sensual and aesthetic experiences of beauty associated with nature and/or art
2. **Ideational**: conceptual, symbolic, or metaphoric expressions of ideals that point toward “something more.” Examples might include religious belief in an all-powerful god or investment in humanistic ideals such as truth, goodness, or justice.
3. **Empathetic**: empathetic, emotional, or intuitive perceptions of some “inner essence” of a subject; empathetic identification with a subject accompanied by a “loss of self.” The empathetic approach to subject matter is an intrinsic element in Eastern art.
4. **Transcending**: experiences of transcendence associated with contemplating the sublime vastness of nature or the universe, a notion associated with 18th century Romanticism.
(5) **Introspective:** self-awareness, self-knowledge, emotional self-expression. These concepts emerged with modern attempts to understand human psychology. An artist often may share the characteristics of one or more of the “types” described above. In addition, the phenomenon of “creative flow,” which the artist may or may not interpret as a spiritual state, can occur simultaneously with any of the above types.

Within the area of art education, a number of researchers (Beittel, 1989; Campbell, 2003; London, 1991; Maddenfort, 1981; McKeen, 1999-2000; Thayer, 2003; Zurmuehlen, 1984) have noted a link between art and spirituality. Campbell’s (2003) research suggested that “artist-teachers” who were spirituality-oriented in their practice of art manifested their beliefs in their teaching of art and in their relationships with students. McKeen’s (1999-2000) study of six elementary art teachers revealed the belief that the teaching of art can somehow unlock the creative and expressive potentials of each student: The notion is not far removed from the Victorian belief that exposure to the truth and beauty inherent in great art could cultivate moral goodness in students.

The aesthetic experience, described by Dewey (1934), J. Campbell (1991), and Langer (1953), and the artist’s experience of “creative flow” in artmaking investigated by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) bear a marked resemblance to William James (1902/1982) descriptions of mystical-spiritual experiences (see Figure 3, below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Aesthetic/Creative Flow Experience</strong> &lt;br&gt; (Dewey, J. Campbell, Langer, Csikszentmihalyi)</th>
<th><strong>Mystical/Spiritual Experience</strong> &lt;br&gt; (William James)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— An experience of “sensuous immediacy”</td>
<td>— Experience of “connection with the infinite”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Singular, beyond words</td>
<td>— Ineffable, defies description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Sense of “self-loss”</td>
<td>— Loss of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Suspension of time and/or physical discomfort</td>
<td>— Suspension of time and/or physical discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Limited to periods of engagement with art</td>
<td>— Transient, not sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Sense of witnessing but not controlling creative activities</td>
<td>— Passivity; experience occurs beyond one’s will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Emotional elevation, passion</td>
<td>— Feelings of “illumination,” emotional intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Feeling of achieving important insights</td>
<td>— Achieving insights of a deep significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— A sense of seeing the world differently or with greater clarity.</td>
<td>— A sense of seeing the world as new, more beautiful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Comparison of Aesthetic and Creative Flow Experiences with Mystical Spiritual Experience
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The central focus of my study is on the origins of a common belief among some artists that artmaking and often other aesthetic engagement with art can be a form of spiritual activity or experience (see for example, Azara, 2002; Cameron, 1992; Campbell, 2003; Franck, 1973; Thayer, 2003; Wuthnow, 2001). The primary data for this study was derived from a series of loosely structured, in-depth interviews with seven painters, in which each painter provided an oral life history of his education and development as an artist. The purpose of the oral interviews was to better understand: (a) each painter’s lived experiences of art making and becoming an artist; (b) the nature of the ideas and experiences that each artist identified as significant in forming his belief system; (c) if and in what ways each artist defined and experienced art as “spiritual;” (d) what role, if any, the artist’s education played in inculcating and shaping his foundational beliefs, and; (e) the ways in which each artist’s beliefs effect his experience, practice, and teaching of art.

Oral history, the methodology selected for this study, shares with constructivist and interpretivist perspectives in qualitative research the goal of “understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live in it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). In the past, the oral history interview method has most often been directed toward recording the “voices” of marginalized groups, workers, and ordinary citizens. Arguably, there is enormous value in what can be learned from the careful examination and analysis of even one person’s experiences and how that person remembers and makes sense of them (Thompson, 1988). Oral history’s aim is to provide an already large picture, such as the picture of artistic education, with detail, and to view it from alternate perspectives and distances that may rectify gaps or reveal omissions. The widespread acknowledgement of many artists’ belief that spirituality and art are somehow connected when juxtaposed with the question of how such belief is acquired or conveyed reveals one such gap. Although the focus of oral history is on individual subjective experience and how each individual understands her/his experiences, a great deal of information about the people, institutions, and environments that contributed to individual narratives is also portrayed in oral history. Because this study analyzed multiple data sources in addition to the oral interviews, it also, in effect, constructed a multi-dimensional portrait of the Cape School of Art, the principle figures, and the teachings that impacted the seven painters.

For the purpose of my study, I defined artistic education as those experiences, formal and informal, that an individual identifies as significant in his/her training and initiation into the culture, traditions, and practices of becoming an artist. Such educational influences may include, but are not limited to: mentors, artistic “heroes,” colleagues and friends, environments, concepts and philosophies, encounters with artworks or other visual or written materials.

To focus my study, I established criteria for selecting a study group. The criteria limited the study group to painters who (a) had studied directly with Hensche in Provincetown, MA, (b) were from the Southern states, and (c) were still painting according to the principles established by Hensche. Oral history methodology is an interactive exchange between the researcher and the study participant: It was my intention to use face-to-face oral interviews to gather data from the study participants. In addition, practical considerations dictated that I interview artists who lived no more than a few hours drive from my home in Vicksburg, Mississippi. While I knew that Hensche had many women as students in his long teaching career, I was not able to locate any that met all criteria who also lived within a reasonable driving distance. The seven artists selected for my study were: Sammy Britt, Charlie Miller, Richard Kelso, George T. Thurmond,
Gerald Deloach, John Robichaux, and Chris Diket. As the study took shape, I found that one participant (i.e., Deloach) objected to being audio-taped, while a second one (i.e., Britt) declined further audio-taping after his first interview. Had I realized before I began that I would end up conducting one interview and a portion of a second through email, I would have looked further for female painters who might have agreed to participate through some alternate format.

The seven painters I selected for study all have painted for thirty years or longer and claim the same mentor, Henry Hensche, as a primary influence. Four of the seven (i.e., Britt, Kelso, Robichaux, Diket) are, or at one time have been, teachers in secondary or higher education. Due to both inclination and training, all of the seven are primarily plein aire (open air) landscape and still life painters whose work aims at analyzing and representing form through light and color with the intention of rendering these elements “true to nature.” In this sense, nature in the form of light that makes seeing everything in the world possible, can be said to be their primary subject matter. Four painters are from Mississippi (Britt, Kelso, Thurmond, and Deloach), one is from Tennessee (Miller), and two are from Louisiana (Robichaux and Diket). The painters from Mississippi and Tennessee have been friends and professional associates for thirty years or more. The other two from Louisiana are also longtime friends and professional colleagues.

Henry Hensche, their teacher, taught a specific, structured approach to plein aire painting exclusively for over 60 years, and was himself, the heir to this tradition in a school of American neo-impressionist plein aire painting dating back to about 1891. Hensche’s direct predecessors were Charles W. Hawthorne and William Merritt Chase (see Appendix C for the lineage of painters associated with the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition). Multiple sources documenting Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche in this school of painting attest to strong traditions of a scientific approach to the visual analysis of color and light, an emphasis on mastering technical skill in painting, and a rigorous work ethic. Critical analysis of a painting by each artist (see Appendix D) and documentary research into the traditions of the school provided background and context for framing and interpreting the data obtained from oral interviews.

Questions on topics of artistic experience, development, and values leading to discussion of the belief in a spiritual dimension to art have been directed to a number of artists, and it has been shown that the resulting data contribute valuable perspectives to better understanding each artist’s experiences and belief system (see for example, Campbell, 2003; Thayer, 2003; Wuthnow, 2001). In a study of any group of artists, individual artists will harbor certain cultural beliefs about art and about being an artist that are absorbed primarily through intellectual and social interactions as well as more private beliefs that were arrived at largely through individual experience and reflection (Wuthnow, 2001). Additionally, creativity and aesthetic response are modes of artistic activity that a number of writers (see Dewey, 1934; Langer, 1953; Lee, 1947; Thayer, 2002) have linked with artist’s perceptions of a spiritual dimension in art. Campbell’s (2003) study of the spiritual lives of three artist/teachers investigated the characteristics and qualities of their beliefs and the ways that these influenced each individual’s art making, personal growth and development, and her/his relationship with students. Her findings suggested that teachers who believe that art and spirituality are connected communicate this belief to their students. My study was designed to view this dynamic from its opposite end, i.e., from the perspective of the artist as student.

My rationale for selecting artists who share a common educational background was based on this reasoning: In a study of respondents with very different educational and developmental backgrounds, it may not be possible to determine with any degree of certainty which ideas or experiences identified by a respondent as key educational influences were private, idiosyncratic
responses to an unusual circumstance or experience and which may have been part of a common
system of instruction that conveyed a similar significance to many students. For example,
without a basis for comparison, it would be impossible to know if the catalytic impact of a
remark that an artist/respondent recalled her teacher conveyed about form in relation to light also
resonated with other students to a similar degree. Since a key aspect of my inquiry questions
whether an artist’s ideas connecting spirituality and art are, in some part, acquired through
artistic education, the study of artists with a shared educational background in an established
"school" of art comprise an optimal study group. Moreover, the maturity of the selected group
makes it more likely that each painter has had ample opportunity to reflect upon and articulate
his views on art, artmaking, and personal experiences of being an artist. Additionally, because
Hawthorne’s Cape Cod School and Hensche’s Cape School represent the teachings of but a
single artist/mentor in any given period, the task of identifying concepts, values, and assumptions
passed from teacher to student may be traced with some degree of confidence.

Individual differences are always present even in a group that shares common
background and interests. The seven artists in my study did not all study with Hensche
exclusively or all at the same time, but did so sporadically over a period of about 30 summers.
Since Hensche died in 1992, some of each artist’s memories of his teachings may have faded or
shifted over time. However, rather than regarding subjective memory’s “selective, synthetic,
generalizing nature” (Frisch, 1998, p. 37) as an obstacle to accurately portraying what Hensche’s
students may have learned through his teaching, it also may be understood as a mechanism that
filters, distills, and clarifies experience permitting individuals to construct personal meanings
from it (Portelli, 1991). According to Portelli, because memory is continually reconstructed in
ways that allow individuals to make sense of it in present terms, while oral sources can be
factually inaccurate, they are “credible but with a different (emphasis in original) credibility” (p.
51). As a result, the subjective meanings that each artist constructed from his past experiences
emerged in the interviews along with memories of activities, discussions, events, and persons
that were a part of the school’s environment. A study of artists with the same primary mentor
was the research design that I believed was most likely to reveal patterns of learned concepts,
themes, assumptions, and values that underlie each of the seven artist's foundational ideas and
beliefs about art. Additionally, selecting artists with a shared background and concerns for this
study (a) provided multiple perspectives and memories of Hensche’s Cape School through which
the study established a richer and more meaningful “portrait” of their primary mentor and the
total educational environment and instruction the artists received; and (b) it suggests the ways in
which exposure to common ideas and influences from the mentor and educational environments
and instruction have been differently absorbed and reflected by the seven artists.

Data for this study was acquired from three sources: (a) through in-depth interviews with
the seven artists who each provided an oral or written history of his own artistic education and
development, (b) through the researcher’s visual assessment and analysis of a selected painting
by each artist (see Appendix D), and (c) research into document sources and texts which offer
supplemental accounts of the school’s practices, principles, and key figures. The use of multiple
data sources contributed to a fuller understanding of the experiences of these artists as well as the
school and mentor that influenced them.

Firm precedent was established for the use of oral history interviews in documenting the
lived experiences of artists with the inception of the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of
American Art Oral History Program in 1954. The collection, which documents the oral
narratives of visual artists, art dealers, teachers, and collectors, presently contains more than
2,000 interviews, with many available online or through interlibrary loan. The artists interviewed through the Smithsonian project included students of Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche, as well as a 1971 interview with Hensche and his wife, the painter Ada Raynor. The Archives of American Art project is a broad compilation of narratives from across the United States; its goal was to capture diverse perspectives on art.

My own oral history research is closely focused upon a selected group of Southern painters associated with Henry Hensche’s Cape School of Art. Moreover, in my research, I ask specific questions of the data about the nature of artistic experience, especially with regard to the artist’s spiritual experience of artmaking. To garner additional contextual details for my study, I reviewed, and when appropriate, referenced relevant oral history interviews from the Archives collection.

Additionally, this research drew upon Denzin’s (1989) notion of “interpretive interactionism,” a particular type of phenomenological framework that explores “those interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person” (p. 15). As a result, the research focused on the “existential moments in people's lives, producing richer and more meaningful data” (Fontana & Frey, 1998, p. 63). Tisdell’s (2003) work on spiritual development in adults proposed that spiritual development is intimately connected to the ongoing development of identity, a process mediated by many factors, including “gender, race, class, culture, national origin, and sexual orientation,” as well as an individual’s discovery of her/his “life purpose” (p. 131). The desire/decision to become an artist and the pivotal experiences it mobilizes arguably qualifies as one sort of transformational turning point in life. Art educator Peter London (1991) suggested that learning about art and artmaking can function as both an actual and a metaphoric catalyst capable of transforming “the quality of our lives” (p. 11). Tisdell’s (2003) work further suggested that adults in midlife often are especially focused upon unraveling the puzzle of “life purpose” with the goal of living a more authentic and meaningful life (p. 132).

Structure and Strategies for the Interviews

Interview types may span a continuum from carefully structured formats where questions are always asked in precisely the same way and same order to interviews that are unstructured in which a respondent is encouraged to respond freely to open-ended questions on topics or themes initiated by the interviewer (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) asserted that the goal of unstructured interviewing is understanding, rather than explaining. The format for this study was a series of loosely structured audio-taped interviews (with the previously noted exceptions of G. DeLoach and the change of format for S. Britt) organized around open-ended questions that addressed the artist’s education and development and each artist’s personal philosophies and experiences of art. The setting for these interviews, whenever possible, was the studio of each artist. The exception to this case was Diket, who for logistical reasons was interviewed at Robichaux’s home and studio. These interviews followed a free-flowing, loosely structured model in which the respondent was first asked to address questions about general background and interests in art, before moving on to explore topics related to the education and experiences of becoming an artist. Although the interview protocol I prepared contained a detailed list of specific questions (see Appendix A), the questions were organized under broad categories and intended for use as prompters rather than as a rigid checklist. Depending upon the individual artist, a single question often prompted the participant to talk at length answering a
number of other questions in the process. In general, as the interviewer I avoided interrupting or redirecting question responses except to ask for clarification or elaboration. To encourage the respondent to speak freely and to provide reflective and detailed answers, the researcher should engage in attentive behaviors including nodding, eye contact, voice cues, and facial expressions that signal interest (Bogden and Biklen, 1998). Because I was genuinely interested in each artist’s memories and views, these responses were entirely sincere.

Each of the seven artists, except Miller and Deloach, were interviewed for the first time during the month of January 2005, and I attempted to maintain an approximate one month gap between interviews (see Study Timeline, Appendix G). Questions for subsequent interviews were formulated based upon the content of prior interviews and on questions from Appendix A that were not previously addressed. While I anticipated that the topic of spirituality in art could arise from preliminary questions in the interviews, the questions in category VII of Appendix A were designed specifically to address this topic. After each interview, I requested that each respondent make a written notation of any subsequent thoughts, memories, or observations about the topics that they might wish to convey to me in future. In practice, I found that only one participant, Thurmond, actually prepared any notes, and only between the first and second interviews. I conducted three interviews with artists Thurmond, Kelso, Robichaux, and Diket, each approximately 90 minutes in length. For Gerald Deloach, the artist who wished to respond to questions in written form, questions were submitted to him via email, a few at a time, and he responded as he could find time to address them. His responses span a nine-month period from late January 2005 until October of 2005. The entire text of his emails is documented in Appendix F. I conducted only two interviews with Miller, but both of his interviews ran longer than ninety minutes so I obtained roughly as much data from his two interviews as from the other painters’ three. As previously noted, after the first 90-minute taped interview, Sammy Britt declined further audio-taping, but he offered to respond to questions in a written format.

In the interview process, I believe that the investigator’s most valuable strategy is to listen well; that is, to be there in the present moment attending to the narrative and to the extent that it is ever possible to suspend preconception and judgment. Bogden and Biklen (1998) characterize this as “deep listening” (p. 96), which differs from conversational listening in a number of important ways: the listener gives the respondent her full attention focusing intensely on what the respondent is saying without thinking ahead to responses, mentally criticizing, or comparing what is said to her own life experiences. In contrast to casual conversation in which one or both parties may feel distracted or bored, the oral interview is a format in which the researcher must be intensely focused upon deep listening as well as noting and recording body language, demeanor, tone, or other subtle nuances of communication that might not be adequately conveyed through the audio recording or its subsequent transcript. Field notes addressing my preliminary impressions and insights from the interview were recorded in a research journal during and directly after each session.

Visual Analysis of Selected Paintings

The close reading and critical analysis of an artist’s work can reveal much about her/his aesthetic worldview. A painting expresses, in visual terms, the artist’s ideas about what may be subject matter for a painting, a telling area for analysis in itself. But equally importantly, the work contains a multitude of that individual’s ideas, both technical and conceptual, about how that chosen subject may be represented on a flat surface with paint. While numerous problems
that a painter engages may be formal or technical in nature, what moves the painter to undertake a visual representation in the first place is often her/his desire to first understand and then to capture individual perceptions of some essence of a chosen subject (mimetic theory). That essence may be conceived as a physical or conceptual construction, thus the mimetic impulse in art is no predictor of either a naturalistic or an abstract approach to subject matter. The painter may also wish to convey her or his emotional/sensual responses to a subject (expressive theory), to explore the relationships among art’s element (formal theory), or to express universal ideals and moral law that point toward ideas of transcendence (intuition theory) (Lanier, 1991; Weitz, 1962).

Numerous frameworks for the critical analysis of artwork have been employed or proposed. Hamblen (1986) identified sixteen distinct approaches, including the two most familiar and commonly cited within art education: Feldman’s (1970) four-step model and Broudy’s (1972) process of aesthetic scanning. More recent approaches proposed within art education include explorations of historical and cultural context and approaches to analyzing art in terms of personal context and personal relevance that place a lesser emphasis on formal relationships.

Most analytical frameworks begin with a descriptive, visual inventory of the physical characteristics of the work that describe subject matter, setting, size, materials, and an inventory of the formal elements: It is a process analogous to Geertz’ (1973) use of “thick description” in cultural ethnography. The aim is to focus attention on those elements present in the work that can be apprehended through sensory means—materials, physical qualities, elements of color, shape, line, texture, value, space, principles of organization—by paying close attention to physical appearance. From this initial survey, the viewer then progresses to formal analysis. This phase involves looking at how elements relate to each other and contribute to the unified effect of the whole in the compositional arrangement of the work. The viewer also may note areas of emphasis as well as overall qualities that may dominate the picture space. Dewey (1934) described this as identifying the “pervasive quality” of a work.

In Feldman’s four-step approach, the initial descriptive inventory is followed by an analysis of the relationships among the artwork’s formal elements and how these are utilized within the picture space. These steps are followed by an interpretation based on the viewer’s cumulative understandings of the work’s physical forms and relationships as they contribute to its conceptual and expressive content. Lastly, the viewer renders a judgment or evaluation of the work’s effectiveness and significance. Since the 1970s, Feldman’s framework has been faulted for being overly analytical, formalistic, and lacking in context. While Feldman’s approach succeeds in establishing an aesthetic focus needed for close analysis, its insistent attention to formal qualities can exclude contextual data that may add to the total understanding of an artwork. Moreover, formalism is only one theory among several that seek to explain artistic creation. Also, it is important to note that any objective analysis of artwork is never possible, but even if it was, such an approach could well miss the point. Aesthetic response, as Dewey (1934) noted, necessarily contains an affective element.

The artist is a second valuable source of insight into the work that must not be overlooked. From experience I have found that often artists are more than willing to discuss not only their body of work, but specific works and the problems they may have confronted in the execution of those works. Because most of the interviews were conducted in the artist’s studios or in adjacent spaces where their paintings hung (with the noted exception of Diket), these interviews provided a natural opportunity to inquire about the works. Also, I obtained permission from each artist to photograph some artwork for later reference and analysis.
The visual similarities that many observers have noted in the paintings of artists working in the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition results from the painters’ common concerns with accurately portraying natural light conditions and the three-dimensional illusion of form through color. Because of this and a traditional approach to landscape and still life subjects, the differences in their works tend to be subtle and related to style. I selected the Feldman approach to art criticism because I found it to be a useful method for establishing a baseline inventory of formal qualities. In order to achieve a more complete understanding of the works, I discuss the artwork within the context of what I have learned about theory and practice within the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition, and about each artist’s approach to his chosen subject matter in painting.

Data Processing, Analysis and Interpretation

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed, marked with subject, date, time, place, line numbers, and page numbers. Tapes were copied through LSU’s T. Harry Williams Oral History Center, which retain the original tape on file along with the transcript. The tape’s transcript then was thoroughly reread, analyzed, and coded to determine patterns, identify common themes, and discover relationships. Hatch (2002) characterized the process of analysis and interpretation as the researcher’s “asking questions of the data” (p. 151). Analysis and interpretation was ongoing and recursive throughout the interview process with data from first interviews informing questions in later sessions. The preliminary analysis of the interviews was subjected to an inductive framework in which the data was coded and organized into categories and domains that emerged from repeated re-readings and comparisons of each artist’s memories of education and artistic development. From the questions that were formulated to guide the interviews, I envisioned that these categories might include such topics as views on color and light in painting, beauty, seeing, the notion of visual “truth,” the role of the artist in society, nature, what is an artist, Hensche as an artist, teacher, person, the decision to become an artist, major turning points, experiences of painting. Although I anticipated many of the major theme categories, I expected that repeated reading and reflection on the raw data of the interviews would also reveal individual differences among these artists. The preliminary descriptive and analytic transformations of the data provided the foundation for the interpretive analysis that followed.

Hatch (2002) drawing on others (e.g., Denzin, 1989, 1994; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Patton, 1990) characterized interpretation as “giving meaning to data” through processes of “making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons” (p. 180). Interpretation is also recognized as the “artistic, creative side of qualitative work” (p. 180) in which “whatever impressions are formed throughout the analytic process are considered within the context of the overall data set” (p. 181). Operations useful in the interpretation process include reading and rereading the data, reviewing impressions previously noted in research journals, and creating memos, that is, notes to the self in which the researcher elaborates on emerging understandings, connections, and voices hunches that potentially make sense of the data.

The Pilot Study

A telephone conversation with John Robichaux provided me with a number of potential candidates for a pilot study. Because Henry Hensche conducted painting classes during the
winter months in Gray, LA near Thibodaux from about 1974 until he grew unable to teach in the late 1980s, many painters in the Thibodaux area had the opportunity to study with him over the years. Robichaux’s first recommendation, Chris Diket, was unavailable for the pilot study but a telephone conversation with Diket convinced me that he was an excellent candidate for the main study group. A subsequent conversation with Sammy Britt led me to contact and recruit Charlie Miller, a Memphis, TN, painter who studied with Hensche for seven years. After encountering one dead end followed by telephone conversations with two more candidates, I found Jane Block, a portrait painter who had studied with Hensche in Gray from the early 80’s onward. Block also had studied with Dotty Billiu, a local painter who studied with Hensche in Provincetown, MA, and who eventually became his second wife after his first, Ada Raynor, died in 1985. Block, who is also vice-president of the board of the Henry Hensche Foundation, agreed to an interview which was conducted at her home in Thibodaux on Nov. 30, 2004 beginning at 10:30 am. The interview with Jane Block, which constituted my pilot study, afforded me her insights about Hensche as a person and as a teacher, helped me to test the clarity of my interview questions, and it alerted me to the protective reverence that Hensche’s students often carry for his memory.

Prior to the interview, I instructed Mrs. Block that I would ask open-ended questions about becoming an artist, study with Hensche, and experiences of artmaking. I assured her that there were no “correct” answers to the questions I would pose, but that her memories and insights would be valuable to me in shaping and refining questions about topics that I would be addressing later in the main study. I also requested that she be prepared to critique my questions for clarity and relevance after the interview. After first finding distractions for Block’s two-year old granddaughter, Cloe, followed by some difficulties with the handheld recorder (no other recorder was available to me at the time of the interview), we began. I first noted the interviewee’s name, and the time and place on the tape, but forgot to verbally note the date. I then asked Block to “tell me about her background.” She told me about early exposure to art “touring around the art museums” with her mother and grandmother as a child in New York and her fascination with portraiture, which she called “magic.” She recalled that Hensche began visiting south Louisiana to escape the “cold” and “dreary-ugly” winters in Provincetown, MA, at the invitation of her own painting teacher, Dotty Billiu. She had heard about Hensche and his approach to color from Billiu and was “excited” at the prospect of meeting and studying with him.

The interview with Jane Block provided me with a number of insights, impressions, and observations that foreshadowed some of the themes I encountered in the later interviews:

1. Hensche’s guidance in helping students to “see” color was a key element in his approach to teaching painting.
2. Hensche’s emphasis on “the block studies” was also significant in this process. Students at all levels did them, including Hensche himself.
3. Hensche’s commitment to growth as a painter and his rigorous work ethic were a model for many of his students.
4. Block described Hensche’s personal demeanor as “very self-absorbed” and “detached from people” and “never warm and friendly,” qualities that she believed were necessary for his total concentration upon his work. Others, however, later described him in nearly opposite terms.
5. Hensche was out-of-step with the arts establishment, which was dominated by abstract expressionism and other modern movements during most of his career.
6. Hensche had told her once that he had never known what it was to feel love or to be in love, a statement that struck her as curious since he had married twice. She speculated that painting filled that space in his life. Others have indicated a belief that painting was the single most important thing in Hensche’s life.

7. Hensche possessed remarkable physical endurance which allowed him to “stand all day in heat or cold” painting, even in his 80s.

8. Hensche’s work in his last decade of life declined in quality along with his health, eyesight, and endurance.

9. Hensche could become annoyed with students when there “was a lack of comprehension of what he was trying to teach or they [his students] were unable to see the color.” Also, “some people” she observed in Dotty Billui’s classes “were very afraid of him.”

10. Block described her experience of being in the flow of painting as a feeling both exhilarating and addictive that she would “float in.” Losing track of time when painting or witnessing but not controlling the act of painting was a commonly described experience.

Block seemed somewhat cautious in her discussion of Hensche when she touched on areas of his personality that could be interpreted negatively, such as in her accounts of his occasional irritability with students or his criticisms of other artists or other approaches to art, insisting that his reactions “were never unreasonable.” Undoubtedly, one factor mediating her representation was her enormous admiration for Hensche and his accomplishments, while another was her position as vice-president of the Hensche Foundation, a role that established her as one of the keepers of his legacy. I also found that John Robichaux, who is the organization’s president, and the caretaker of Hensche’s works and papers as well as the author of a book on Hensche, displayed similar protective impulses. Without exception, each of his former students spoke of Hensche and his work with fondness, respect, and even reverence. To a certain extent, each of these artists has a personal investment in Hensche’s teachings as a key component in his own artistic identity. With this in mind, I approached inquiries about Hensche with great sensitivity.

Another area where Block exercised care in her representation of Hensche was in her discussion of any connection between spirituality and art. When I inquired of Block if Hensche had ever spoken with her of art as in some way spiritual, she responded “not to me he didn’t.” As I noted in Chapter One, individual concepts and definitions of spirituality may vary considerably, as does individual willingness to talk about one’s views of spirituality. Even more problematic is being asked to speculate and comment upon another person’s spirituality. As a result, I decided that the topic of spirituality in art should not be addressed in the form of a direct question in the first interview, but to delay introducing the topic until the second or third interviews when the artists had had time to become more comfortable with me and with the interview process. As it happened, in a number of the interviews, the topic of spirituality did emerge in the course of addressing preliminary questions.

The open-ended questions and my initial assurances that anything she could remember might be valuable to me seemed to encourage Block to speak freely; therefore, only a few of the detailed prompter questions I had prepared were actually used. She later commented that this open format allowed her to talk about memories as they occurred to her rather than having to wait and come back to them later. Although her almost-2-year-old granddaughter was with us the entire time and a children’s show was playing on the nearby television, there were relatively few
interruptions from this during the interview. However, because I was using a voice-activated handheld recorder, I later found some unfortunate distortions in the tape from its pause function, especially near the end of the tape. I was reminded that there is no substitute for being thoroughly familiar with the recording equipment prior to the interview. The field notes that I wrote in my research journal afterward recorded impressions from the interview and helped me in bridging some of these small gaps in the tape.

In evaluating the questions and responses in the pilot interview later, I realized that I had no questions about the artist’s views of nature, nature as subject matter, or Hensche’s perspectives on nature, omissions that I subsequently corrected. As a result of the pilot study, I also reexamined the prompter questions to make sure that all, including those that ask about Hensche and his teachings, are directed toward the artist’s experiences of these topics. Also, upon reevaluation, I revised several questions, that appeared to be leading questions.

Ethical Questions Considered in the Study

The oral interview is the joint product of two people, the interviewer and the respondent. The process is a face-to-face exchange between two participants entering into an act of trust by mutual agreement. Because the very nature of the oral interview implies a moral contract extending beyond any release form interviewees are asked to sign, the researcher must consider carefully her ethical responsibilities to the study participants and take care to observe ethical codes governing research with human participants. The ethical issues and implications of the relationship between researcher and participants have been debated extensively, especially in the area of qualitative studies. I carefully considered many of the concerns these debates raised with reference to this study.

A number of authorities on qualitative research (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) agree on the core ethical obligations of the researcher in dealing with human subjects: to obtain informed consent from the participants and to protect them from harm. A further consideration in the case of research that may be intended for publication is assuring the study participant’s rights of dignity, privacy, and confidentiality.

At the time the seven artists were invited to participate, they were informed that these would be a series of three audio-taped interviews on topics associated with their “artistic education and development, experiences of being an artist, and their personal philosophy and worldview of art.” In describing the study this general way, it was not my intention to in any way mislead the participants about the ultimate objectives of my research. Rather, I purposely kept the description of the interview topics very general and open-ended to avoid limiting the topics that might be covered and also to prevent planting preconceived notions of the interview questions in the artists’ minds. I proposed three interviews with each painter to provide opportunities for elaboration, reflection, and follow up that are not afforded by a single interview format.

The artists were further told that their participation would be entirely voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. One participant, Gerald Deloach, was uncomfortable with the proposed oral interview format; however, he offered to respond to questions in written form via email. To respect his wish and to avoid losing his voice in the study, I accepted his terms. During the course of my research, I twice visited and talked with Deloach at his home and studio, although these informal visits were not audio-taped. In compliance with LSU’s academic regulations governing research with human subjects, an
application was filed with LSU’s Institutional Review Board for Research with Human Subjects. Each artist signed a consent form (Appendix F), which described the study prior to the first interview. In addition, study participants signed a release form (Appendix F) after each interview permitting the tape to be placed on file with LSU’s T. Harry Williams Oral History Center.

It is my belief that the ethical responsibility to “protect subjects from harm”—especially in research employing interview protocols in which participants may be asked questions that cause them to examine their innermost thoughts and feelings—goes beyond protecting them from physical or psychological harm. It extends to every aspect of the researcher’s care in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. What is data to the researcher is, after all, the story of the respondent’s lived experiences, exposed and vulnerable to misuse. A number of sources (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Stacey, 1991) warn of the sometimes intrusive and potentially exploitive nature of the research relationship that is capable of creating ethical dilemmas for the researcher as well as obstacles to achieving a sense of authenticity or equality in communication. Sangster (1991) has stated the respondent’s insights are available through the researcher, thus presumably, these are also subject to the researcher's biases and blind spots. As the caretaker of the respondent’s words and insights, the researcher is ethically obliged to strive to comprehend the subject’s viewpoint and, to the extent that it is ever possible, to reflect on and to take measures to account for her own biases. Not least among the researcher’s ethical obligation to respondents is to faithfully represent the thoughts and ideas that they were trying to convey.

This raises the question of whether and to what extent participants may be afforded opportunities to review and respond to the researcher’s analysis and interpretation of the data, also an ethical decision. Certainly, the researcher’s commitment to accurately portraying the respondent’s thoughts, ideas, and memories makes collaborative interpretation appear to provide a safeguard for that goal. However, Borland’s (1991) account of her interview with her grandmother, and of her grandmother’s negative response to its subsequent interpretation, illustrated that two people who may appear to share many ideas in common may still interpret the same events very differently. Munro’s (1993) account of her study of women teacher’s lives found that her participants interpretations of their own experiences, circumstances, and choices not only differed considerably from her own, but that her respondents had no desire to collaborate in her process of interpretation. While I agreed with Borland (1991) that often a subject may provide valuable perspectives and insights in response to the transcript, in the end, it is the researcher who is responsible for its interpretations. I have much respect for the intelligence and abilities of my study participants, and thus it was my intention to permit the seven artists to review and comment upon the transcripts of their own interviews. To this end, each artist was provided with an audiotape copy and transcript of each interview promptly after his first interview. My intention in doing this was to make the process as transparent as possible and to thereby establish trust. Unfortunately, one unanticipated result of my initial efficiency was that several of the artists seemed distressed with the mannerisms, fragmentation, and recursive speech patterns that are scarcely noticed in spoken language, but that become all too painfully apparent in an accurate written transcript. Even more unfortunately, as a result of this, Sammy Britt declined further taped interviews. Fortunately he did not decide to withdraw from the study altogether and offered to answer questions in written form via email. Also, he provided me with access to written materials among his personal papers, including his MFA thesis as well as newspaper and magazine interviews. While I valued the comments and observations of these artists, I made a decision not to invite their collaboration in the process of interpretation.
Another potential source of ethical dilemma that confronted me in this study was the biases that might potentially stem from my previous relationship with some of the artists that were interviewed. While the problem of establishing rapport, in some cases, were bypassed, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) warned of the ethical hazards of conducting research “in your own backyard” (p. 21). They cautioned the researcher that expectations or assumptions on either side of the research relationship potentially may interfere with effective data collection or interpretation. My closest relationship among the participants was with Sammy Britt who was my teacher in drawing and painting when I was an undergraduate art major at Delta State University in Mississippi. I took a number of courses with him, and although I eventually elected to major in sculpture rather than painting, over the years, I have maintained enormous respect and admiration for him as an artist and as a teacher. Painters George T. (Tommy) Thurmond and Gerald Deloach were also Britt's students, who graduated a couple of years ahead of me, but remained in the university area. I also knew Thurmond and his family during a period when my family and I lived in Starkville, Mississippi from 1979-1986. Because Deloach, Thurmond, and I maintained a relationship of mutual respect as artists, and we knew many of the same people in the arts community, I have always regarded them as "casual friends." I knew Richard Kelso only slightly, and the two painters in Louisiana, Robichaux and Diket, and the one in Tennessee, Miller, I had never met prior to beginning the interviews. I reviewed questions and protocol to minimize any temptations to make assumptions or to draw premature conclusions based upon my past relationship with some of the respondents. My own awareness of a potential for bias along with the continual reexamination of my data collection methods and interpretive procedures served as my primary method of safeguard from bias.

As an “art insider” I enjoyed the advantage of speaking the language of my study group; however, at the same time, I remained wary of making assumptions based on my own “taken-for-granted” understandings of artistic motivations, decision-making, and values. In spite of the common experiences in the study group, each artist represented a complex mix of dreams, hopes, and lived experiences that were unique to that individual and that I sought to understand from that individual’s perspective.

Summary of Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, I discussed the research design and methodology. The role of education in shaping the artist’s personal philosophy of art and belief system, including belief in art as spiritual, was investigated through three sources: (a) a series of oral history interviews with seven painters; (b) documentary sources on their mentor, Henry Hensche, Hensche’s teacher, Charles W. Hawthorne, and Hawthorne’s teacher, William Merritt Chase; and, (c) the visual analysis of a painting by each artist interviewed. All artists in the selected group studied painting with Henry Hensche at his summer art school, The Cape School of Art in Provincetown, MA, and each claimed Hensche as a mentor and significant influence.

A pilot study was conducted in late November, 2005, and information from it indicated themes and topics that might emerge in the interviews, areas where sensitivity was required, and questions that were unclear. Although a detailed list of questions was prepared prior to the interviews, these were used primarily as “prompters.” Three interviews each were conducted with Kelso, Thurmond, Robichaux, and Diket; Miller was interviewed twice; and Britt was interviewed one time. Deloach was interviewed by email. Britt and Thurmond each provided me with some of their past writings on art. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and coded to
identify patterns and themes. Field notes were written during and after the interviews; “memos” were generated about emerging relationships as the data coding and interpretation progressed. The investigator followed ethical guidelines and Louisiana State University’s Institutional Review Board requirements for research involving human subjects.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE HENSCHE-HAWTHORNE TRADITION

Each person descends from a succession of ancestors from whom they inherit physical characteristics, mental and personal dispositions, and even certain ways of viewing the world. So also, the painter is heir to an enormous array of ideas, attitudes, techniques, and worldviews through a lineage of artistic ancestors. The painter lays claim to this ancestry by seeking, selecting, absorbing, and, finally, growing to embody those traits of artistic worldview and practice that dovetail with her or his own personality, aspirations, and beliefs as an artist. In the long pursuit of expertise, the painter may seek knowledge from any of a number of sources: higher education, trade schools, private instruction, workshops, books and videos, colleagues. For hundreds of years, however, the time-honored pathway for an artist to learn the skills of her or his trade was through the rigors of apprenticeship.

The traditional progression of a painter from apprentice through journeyman to master is a lengthy and demanding process. It begins with what Roger Lipsey (1988) has termed “the ecstasy of apprenticeship” (p. 182). In this stage, the principle quality that the neophyte artist is expected to bring to the relationship is unconditional willingness to surrender to the master’s guidance. The master’s demands, however mysterious or irrelevant they may seem, must be embraced as an opportunity to learn and be honored promptly with eager, earnest efforts. To the apprentice, the master’s “every word, every gesture has meaning” to the extent that “learning itself is redefined as an assimilation not only of external methods and intellectual concepts but also of attitudes, customs, history, sensibility” (p. 182). In return, the apprentice is afforded access to an entire world of learning and thus becomes “a part of a discourse tradition… and a participant in a community of discourse that creates its own collective meaning” (Porter, 1986, p. 35). Because the apprentice, in effect, chooses to place her or his life under the control of another, it can be also argued that apprenticeship requires a certain state of mind. As a result, I believe that the decision of an artist to enter into the peculiar dynamics demanded by the apprentice-master relationship should be interpreted as evidence of a high order of resolve to pursue the calling of artist, or in the case of this research, that of painter. It is my further belief that to individually different degrees and for different lengths of time, each of the painters in my study, including the founding figures of Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche, willingly entered into the “ecstasy” of apprenticeship.

Just as any child is expected to learn the names of her own parents and grandparents, as a beginning painting student one of the first things I was taught was the succession of painters that had preceded Sammy Britt, my own teacher. These were, of course, Henry Hensche, Charles Webster Hawthorne, and William Merritt Chase, in this order. The seven painters in my study, who had also been taught to recite this lineage, generally referred to “the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition” to identify both the tradition’s most recent leaders and the set of principles and teachings which form the foundation of their practice as painters. However, as it is with any tradition, its scope is far broader and deeper than what is suggested by its name. Three of the five stated goals of my study were to investigate (2) the nature of the ideas and experiences that each artist identified as significant in forming his belief system; (3) if and in what ways each artist defines and experiences art as “spiritual,” and (4) what role the artist’s education played in inculcating and shaping his foundational beliefs (see Chapter 1, p. 13-14).

Salman Rushdie (1980), in his novel *Midnight’s Children*, tells the reader that in order to understand a single person one must “swallow a world” (p. 458). Therefore, to establish perspectives for better understanding the individual oral or written histories collected from the seven painters, it was first necessary to acquire a contextual overview of the periods, ideas, and
other artists that had influenced the three founding figures in this lineage, and that, thereby, played a part in shaping the “world” of the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition. Toward accomplishing this goal, I researched Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche, along with their historical contexts to determine something of the ideas, attitudes, techniques, and worldviews that influenced and guided them as painters. My goal in doing so was to probe beyond analyzing any superficial similarities or differences of appearance that might exist in the works of these three painters and to arrive at some understanding of the deeper ideas and philosophies that guided them.

William Merritt Chase

While the name William Merritt Chase has not faded into complete obscurity in the history of painting, during the twentieth century his reputation as a painter is somewhat less well-known than that of his contemporaries, such as John Singer Sargent or James Abbott McNeill Whistler, the American expatriate painters who were his friends, colleagues, and artistic equals. Because Chase has received comparatively slight recognition in painting history to date, it may be surprising to learn that during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was no figure in American art and art education more prominent, respected, or influential. As a painter, Chase was energetic, disciplined, technically brilliant, and committed to both personal and professional growth. The range of his painting ambition matched his energy: He painted the figure in contemporary genre scenes as well as painting formal portraits, still life, and landscape. Never satisfied with simply furthering his own reputation and career, Chase proved to be a tireless lifelong champion for an “American art” that was not merely an imitation of European styles, but one that would reflect the vitality, temperament, and optimism of the American people (Bryant, 1991).

William Merritt Chase (b. 1849) was the first of five children born to a small-town merchant and his wife in Nineveh, Indiana. Information about his early life depicts a typical if spirited boyhood: neighbors variously described him as outgoing, mischievous, likeable, and energetic. One of his schoolteachers taught drawing outside of the regular sessions, and young “Merritt” showed an immediate affinity for it. After an unhappy stint as a teenager selling shoes in his father’s shop, young Chase persuaded his father to allow him to study art. He began his formal artistic education at eighteen under the tutelage of an Indianapolis artist, Barton S. Hays (Bryant, 1991). Two years later in 1869, he was studying at the National Academy of Design in New York, moving on to St. Louis in 1871 to set up his own painting studio and support himself by painting still life.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, European study, if at all possible, was needed for “a finished and proper education in art” (Pisano, 1983, p. 171). Of the many centers for artistic education on the Continent, both Paris and Munich with their ready access to fine museums and numerous painting studios attracted many American students. Among numerous American painters, however, teaching at Munich’s Royal Academy was thought to be more progressive and less doctrinaire than that of the Parisian academies, and so, perhaps on the advice of colleagues, Munich was where Chase chose to go. In 1872, with the financial backing of a group of patrons, Chase set out for Munich to begin his studies at the Royal Academy (Bryant, 1991).

In Munich, Chase learned an approach to painting that emphasized “alla prima” (at the first; also called “premier coup,” first strike) painting with strong color in oils, loose “bravura” brushwork, and an adherence to the ideal of “artistic truth.” Alla prima painting was a wet-on-
wet approach that bypassed preliminary drawing and underpainting in favor of a direct, rapid, and spontaneous response to subject matter. The alla prima technique, combined with coarse paint-laden brushwork, often caused critics to attack painting from the Munich school as appearing “unfinished” (Bryant, 1991, p. 26), a charge that Chase was to hear throughout his life regarding his own work.

The strong color, subtle lighting, and the typically brown-tinted glaze that marked work from the Munich school fit perfectly with Chase’s youthful desire to paint like the old masters. In Munich, Chase studied with Karl Von Piloty, but he was also much influenced by the ideas of another Royal Academy teacher, Wilhelm Liebl. Liebl’s notion was that it was not what one paints but how one paints that resulted in fine painting (Bryant, 1991). This was an idea that Chase often would repeat to his own students throughout his career. As an example, he would cite Rembrandt’s small still life Beef in the Louvre to illustrate the point. Consistent with Liebl’s principles, Chase believed in art-for-art’s-sake and rejected any notions of sentimental or romantic treatments of subject matter.

While in Munich, Chase made good use of his access to the museums with their collections of old masters, especially singling out for study the work of Franz Hals with its dashing brushwork, as well as the psychologically intense figures of Diego Velasquez, after whom he later named his fourth daughter, Helen Velasquez. As a part of his study, he was encouraged to copy old master’s work, a task that he did not enjoy at first, but grew to appreciate. The exacting process of copying a master’s work is a means of minutely observing elements of structure, technique, and style; its purpose is to arrive at a more intimate and comprehensive understanding of the work than is usually achieved through viewing alone. Chase did numerous copies after Velasquez and Hals that hung in his 10th Street studio in New York for many years. As was the practice in virtually every painting school at that time, landscape painting as well as traditional still life and figure painting from life at the Royal Academy were done indoors under subtle, muted lighting.

Liebl’s concept of “artistic truth” in painting was another principle that Chase would embrace throughout his career. According to Liebl, it was not contrived drama, false sentiment, or other devices used to beautify or enhance the painter’s subject that would result in artistic truth: Artistic truth was the sole result of the technical excellence the painter brought to bear upon the subject matter (Bryant, 1991; Pisano, 1983). Chase told his students, “truth is the practical ideal that the art of painting insists upon” (Bryant, p. 128) and that “when the outside is rightly seen, the thing that lies under the surface will be found upon your canvas” (Pisano, p. 28). No inner truth could be captured without faithful attention to representing the outward truth of a subject. The complex chain of processes between the artist’s initial response to viewing her or his subject and the finished canvas was dependent upon the artist’s skill in truthfully capturing and translating an intuitive response into visual terms. Because of this, Chase cautioned students that, “The truth of a picture is its art integrity, its character, its distinction from the vagrant, the barren, the sensational, the false glare of art” (Pisano, 1991, p. 89). Still, mere fidelity to nature not animated by the “feeling” of the artist could result in a painting that was sterile, empty, or dull. Chase’s view was that “Art transcends nature. One must paint what is behind the eye of the artist” (Bryant, 1991, p. 119). Chase believed that color was the area where the painter’s ability to perceive and convey artistic truth was especially evident: “One becomes in time so sensitive to color harmony that the instant one puts on a false spot of color it hurts, like the wrong note in music” (quoted in Pisano, 1979, p. 38). He frequently used metaphors of music to describe or explain the use of color in painting.
Chase also told students that “the greatness of a work of art depended on the greatness of the soul of the artist who produced it” (Bryant, 1991, p. 54). It was an idea that seemed to echo John Ruskin’s often-repeated nineteenth century romantic theory that linked great art with moral goodness. Chase’s ideas about the source of greatness in art also recalls Tolstoy’s (1960) aesthetic theory of the transfer of emotion from the painter to a viewer, as well as Collingwood’s (1938) thesis that the imaginative activity of art produced an emotional consciousness that could be interpreted by the intellect. Collingwood’s theory recognized expression in art as a language through which the artist gained access to her or his own emotions, attained self-knowledge, and, at times, expressed the emotional temper of her or his community. As the result, a viewer might share in this emotional consciousness and better understand her or his own experiences. Chase embraced an ideal of artistic truth that was linked to the artist’s moral character, sensitivity, and her or his emotional or empathetic investment in a chosen subject.

After six years of study and after turning down Von Piloty’s offer of a teaching position at the Royal Academy, Chase returned to New York in 1878. In 1879 he began to teach at the Art Students’ League, a progressive, independent art school newly established only four years earlier. Chase would return to Europe, frequently with groups of students in tow, on numerous occasions over the next 35 years. At the League, he approached teaching with the same energy that he brought to his professional practice, insisting upon excellent craftsmanship and diligence from students, having no patience with laziness or arrogance. Chase loved the role of artist and played it with a dramatic flair. With sincere enthusiasm he admonished students that as an artist he was “a member of the most magnificent profession that the world knows” (Bryant, 1991, p. 57). Ronald Pisano (1983), Chase’s foremost biographer, has described him as “charismatic… forceful, inspiring, articulate, and entertaining—the perfect teacher” (p. 87). Over his lifetime, Chase’s public lectures, exhibitions, and spirited advocacy of art did much to shape public perception of art’s value and high purpose and to increase the status of the artist within American society.

With his teaching income from the Art Students’ League, Chase rented a two-story studio space on New York’s 10th Street that had once housed the huge romantic landscapes of Hudson River painter Albert Bierstadt. In this studio Chase painted, entertained patrons, taught private lessons, and displayed his remarkable collections of art and decorative curios from around the world. The vast studio, with its profusion of colors, textures, and oddities provided the backdrop and props for many of his paintings (Bryant, 1991). At the Art Students’ League, Chase taught in much the same way that he had been taught. Edwin Dickinson, who studied there with Chase in 1911, in a 1962 oral history for the Archives of American Art remembered painting “premier coup” still life in the studio daily, producing six or seven each week. From Dickinson’s viewpoint, the premier coup approach had the advantage of forcing the student to focus upon the whole to rapidly select and set down large essential elements of color and shape, avoiding the common pitfall of becoming fixated upon minor details at the expense of the whole. Canvases were scraped down and reused from week to week; few were saved. In addition to offering individual comments to students at their easels, Chase would also conduct a class critique session on Fridays reviewing each student’s work for the entire week. Always a consummate showman, Chase was known on occasion to do his painting demonstrations wearing formal coat and tails with white gloves instead of his trademark white flannel suit.

While Chase’s students were held to a high standard of performance, he was keenly in sympathy with any student who displayed sincere desire and honest effort to improve. The demonstration painting that Chase would do for his painting class each week was a highly prized reward that was often given to a student who had modeled for the demonstration or who had
displayed improvement or innovation in their work. When one student expressed the opinion that Chase was too generous in giving away such fine paintings, he responded that when one gave a gift, it should be one’s best (Bryant, 1991). Accounts of Chase’s kindness, generosity, and sincere concern for his students’ well-being were numerous. Often, when a student was experiencing financial difficulty, Chase would help out by purchasing a drawing or painting from her or him, arranging a scholarship or loan or finding the student employment as a model or as a studio monitor (assistant). He also supported his students with letters of recommendation and introduction, and he exercised his considerable influence to see that promising newcomers were included in prestigious juried exhibitions.

In his 35 years as an artist and educator, Chase would influence innumerable artists through his teaching at the Art Students’ League, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Brooklyn School of Art, and the school he would found in 1896, the Chase School of Art in New York (later renamed the New York School of Art in 1907). Most significantly for this study, Chase would be instrumental in establishing the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Painting on New York’s Long Island in 1891. The Shinnecock summer school represented a new form of artistic education in the United States and would become the inspiration and model for many summer painting schools to follow (Bryant, 1991), including the one that Charles W. Hawthorne would found in Provincetown, MA only eight years later. The summer painting school and art colony movement in the USA, in part, was drawn from European models that had sprung up in the wake of Impressionism to teach the newly-popular plein aire (open air) painting techniques. Shinnecock, isolated at the eastern end of Long Island, was in the midst of sand dunes with a view of the Atlantic Ocean, but only a few hours away from New York City. Since that time, many art teachers as well as amateur and professional artists have continued to look to the intensive environments of summer painting studios such as Shinnecock as a source of artist growth and creative renewal.

A number of writers (see Bryant, 1991; Mühlberger, 1999; Pisano, 1983) have noted Chase’s pragmatic streak and labeled him an eclectic for his habit of freely borrowing whatever elements he found best in any style or technique. What is certain is that Chase was keenly aware of contemporary trends in painting, and he was boldly progressive in his thinking. He traveled to Paris to see exhibitions in each of the six years that he was in Munich, he spent time in Brussels and Holland, and talked frequently with many of the leading professional painters of the day. By the time he returned to the United States from Munich in 1878, the impact of impressionist painting was already creating ripples on both sides of the Atlantic. In the mid-1880s, his series of paintings set in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park and another in New York’s Central Park reveal that Chase, like a number of other progressive painters who would form the core of American Impressionism, was experimenting with a lighter palette, painting out doors, and striving to realistically capture the fleeting moment in simple genre scenes.

It was a concurrent development in technology that had made Impressionist experiments with color possible. Just prior to the 1880s, breakthroughs in paint chemistry with formulating new, brighter pigments had made it possible to represent light and color combinations that had been beyond the palette range of earlier painters (Bryant, 1991; Hensche, 1988). This development combined with the portability of paint in tubes made painting outdoors directly from nature possible and resulted in bold new expressions that broke with centuries of painting tradition. From today’s perspective it requires a stretch of one’s imagination to appreciate just how revolutionary, possibly how intimidating, and perhaps for some, how liberating the notion of painting outdoors directly from nature might have been to artists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until that point, tradition had dictated that while the artist might roam afield
to absorb the essence of nature through drawing and study, the studio was where she or he would render from memory and sketches something that was like nature but nature improved through the artistry of the painter (Mühlberger, 1999).

Art historians are now in general agreement that the impressionist’s new approach to painting directly from nature marked the beginning of the modern era. Impressionist use of broken color shattered form and proclaimed the separate reality of the picture plane; post-impressionists appropriated its vivid color for expressive purposes rather than descriptive ones; Cezanne’s fragmented geometric analyses of solid masses as planes inspired cubist experiments that shattered both form and space. Impressionism ignited a paradigm shift within painting as a whole that would open the floodgate to the dramatic changes that would sweep through Western art during the twentieth century.

American painters of the Hudson River School prior to the mid-nineteenth century had grappled with the problem of portraying the all-important element of light in landscape. For these painters, light was not merely the means of illuminating the huge, sublime vistas of a virgin country; it was also an allusion to spiritual transcendence or immanence and a metaphor for divine truth (Veith, 2001). For the French Impressionists, especially Claude Monet, light itself and its effect upon color, became the primary subject matter of painting (Wildenstein, 1999): Light is, in fact, color. While the American Impressionists adopted certain aspects of French Impressionism—a lighter palette, painting outdoors, close observation of light and color, and capturing the fleeting moment—they rejected the French use of broken color, which conveyed the notion of light as an atmospheric effect, but that tended to dissolve the solidity of form (Bryant, 1991). Light, while of incalculable importance, never took precedent over form among the American Impressionists, and light alone was never their primary subject matter. These principles are evident in Chase’s work from the mid-1880s onward and also can be seen in the work of his students, such as Mississippi painter Kate Freeman Clark who studied with Chase at the Art Students’ League and at Shinnecock for six consecutive summers, 1896-1901 (Jenkins, 1996).

In his long, colorful career as an internationally respected painter and the most prominent art teacher of his generation, William Merritt Chase did much to establish and embody precisely the sort of American art that he had long encouraged other painters to seek. Just as Chase had been influenced by the ideas and achievements of artists who had preceded him, he was in turn a mentor and an influence to many distinguished artists who followed: Rockwell Kent, Charles Demuth, Georgia O’Keefe, Joseph Stella, Edwin Dickinson, Reynolds and Gifford Beal, Charles W. Hawthorne, Lydia Field Emmet, Annie T. Lang, Katherine Budd, Rosina Emmet Sherwood (Bryant, 1991). It was Charles W. Hawthorne, however, whom most Chase scholars (see Bryant and Pisaro) have identified as the student who emerged as the heir apparent to Chase’s legacy of teaching.

Charles Webster Hawthorne

The apocryphal story that Bryant (1991) tells of Hawthorne’s first encounter with Chase at Shinnecock contains elements of drama and foreshadowing that could neatly fit into fictional literature. According to Bryant, in the summer of 1896, Hawthorne had gone to the beach at Southampton to paint on his own in an area frequented by Shinnecock students when Chase happened by. Believing that Hawthorne was one of his many students, Chase reviewed Hawthorne’s efforts and demanded to know why he had failed to attend the regular Monday criticism sessions. At something of a loss, Hawthorne did not reply, so Chase dismissed him with
the demand that he attend the next session. Hawthorne did so, submitting a single sketch and waiting modestly in the rear of the studio for his sketch to be placed on the easel for Chase to critique. When Chase saw it, he pointed to Hawthorne proclaiming, “Young man, you’ll be a painter” (pp. 159-60). Whether or not the story is entirely true hardly matters; it conveys the notion that Hawthorne had received the master’s blessing, that Chase had bestowed the proverbial kiss of faith that both predicted and sealed his future. In any case, Hawthorne would go on to become Chase’s student, then his assistant, and eventually he would achieve recognition as one of Chase’s most notable students and a respected painter and teacher in his own right.

Charles W. Hawthorne was born in 1872 in the Midwest, but grew up in the seaport town of Richmond, Maine. His father was an ice farmer and the captain of a trading ship that plied the New England coast. Details about Hawthorne’s boyhood are scarce; he grew up without luxuries, accustomed to hard physical work cutting ice from the nearby river; he loved music, playing the coronet in the town band. Later, as an adult, he learned to play the cello and regularly played chamber music in a string quartet or trio. In a detail recalled from a 1930 newspaper obituary cited by Mühlberger (1999), it was noted that as a boy Hawthorne had done drawings of a steam ship, The Star of the Sea, and of circus billboards. At eighteen, with his parent’s permission, young Hawthorne left home for New York to study art, first finding work at the docks, then later with a stained-glass manufacturer. It took three years of frugal living for him to save enough to enroll in night classes at the Art Students’ League while continuing to work days. At the League, Hawthorne studied first with Frank Vincent Dumond in 1893, and then in 1894-95, with George de Forest Brush and Henry Siddons Mowbray, but not with Chase. During this same period, he was also enrolled in drawing classes at the National Academy of Design.

After their initial encounter at Shinnecock in 1896, Chase was apparently sufficiently impressed with Hawthorne to ask the young man to stay on to help with work in organizing the Chase School of Art for its opening by the end of the year. The following summer, while living in a shack on the beach that fishermen used to store equipment, Hawthorne worked as Chase’s teaching assistant at Shinnecock (J. Hawthorne, 1938). However, any hope that Hawthorne may have entertained of continuing at the Chase School was ended when Chase suddenly sold it in 1898. Perhaps on the advice of Chase, who advocated European study and had visited Holland to paint and study in 1894, Hawthorne departed for Zandvoort in the Netherlands. While he was there, Hawthorne was exposed to the work of painters from the Hague School, a group who found their inspiration in the commonplace lives of the local villagers and fishermen. Also, for the first time, Hawthorne came face to face with the work of Chase’s hero, Frans Hals. Although Hawthorne had undoubtedly seen reproductions of Hals’ work and also knew of Chase’s admiration for Hal’s stylish brushwork, actually seeing original work in the Frans Hals Museum in nearby Haarlem profoundly affected him. Hawthorne reported experiencing an immediate influence on his painting style (Mühlberger, 1999). Perhaps what is most revealing about Hawthorne’s character regarding his self-awareness of Hals’ seductive influence was his subsequent reaction; very shortly afterward Hawthorne chose to forego use of the brush to work exclusively with the palette knife for a time. Compared with the brush, the palette knife is an austere tool that limits the amount of detail or drawing that can be attempted and thereby forces the painter to concentrate upon the fundamentals of shape and color. Although Hawthorne shared Chase’s admiration for Velasquez, Hals, and Rembrandt, and during subsequent visits to Europe, acquired a deep appreciation for Titian and Tintoretto, it is clear that he had set an agenda for himself that included more than merely imitating the styles of old masters.

After his return from the Netherlands, Hawthorne rented a studio in New York and hosted a successful showing and most likely a sale of his “Holländische” paintings (Mühlberger,
Even before his return to the United States, Hawthorne had likely formulated the plan to establish his own school of painting. He was solidly confident of his abilities, and his experiences teaching under the direction of Chase at Shinnecock must have agreed with him. Chase had encouraged his better students toward teaching, allowing that while it was not always possible to make a good living creating art, one could get by quite well by teaching it (Bryant, 1991). In 1899 Hawthorne found his way to Provincetown, MA, a hamlet of about 4500 inhabitants at the extreme end of the 70-mile long Cape Cod peninsula. By ferry or by land, it was only a few hours from Boston and within a day’s travel of New York.

At the turn of the century Provincetown was an isolated fishing village populated by a few Yankee settlers and Portuguese immigrants. With its proximity to major urban centers and its unique quality of clear light reflected from the surrounding Atlantic Ocean, Provincetown was in many ways remarkably similar to Shinnecock. Still, other factors that likely made Provincetown attractive to Hawthorne were the easy availability of affordable accommodations for art students and his own maritime heritage; he had grown up around sea-going people. Although there were a few artists already living in Provincetown, Hawthorne was the first to establish a summer school for painters. Within a few years, the schools of Ambrose Webster, George Elmer Brown, and others would follow, but Hawthorne’s Cape Cod School of Art would remain Provincetown’s premier institution for painters throughout Hawthorne’s lifetime. In the 31 years that Hawthorne would teach his approach to color in painting, thousands of students would make the pilgrimage to Provincetown. Hawthorne’s practice of visiting art schools to conduct workshops and demonstrations during the winter months attracted many students, but his growing capital as a painter along with word-of-mouth recommendations from those who had studied with him were equally effective. The location of Hawthorne’s school in Provincetown and its success in drawing a hundred or more students each summer helped to change Provincetown from a fishing village into an art colony, a mecca for galleries, and eventually, into a tourist destination for those interested in art of all types (Kuchta and Seckler, 1977).

Hawthorne married Ethel Marion Campbell, also a painter, whom he had met at Shinnecock, and he set to work painting, teaching, and carving out a reputation for himself. For his subjects, Hawthorne chose to paint the rugged Portuguese fishermen and ordinary townspeople he found in Provincetown. Whereas Chase had divided his time equally among painting the figure, landscape, and still life, during his lifetime Hawthorne was primarily known as a figure and portrait painter. The figures that inhabit his paintings often appear grave, gazing directly at the viewer in moments of thought or self-awareness that hint at the unspoken dimensions of their inner life. In a way, they are like Hawthorne himself has been described: large, solid, dignified, and deeply private. Hawthorne painted these ordinary subjects without idealization or sentimentality, causing one critic to call the paintings “brutal” (Mühlberger, 1999). Similar criticisms had also been leveled at the social realism of the so-called Ashcan painters (also known as “The Eight”), several members of which were active in teaching at the Art Students’ League when Hawthorne studied there. However, although Hawthorne had emerged from the same tradition of American naturalism that had influenced Chase as well as The Eight, his painting did not advance the sort of aggressive social critique embraced by the Ashcan painters. Instead, Hawthorne’s work with the figure was about the resilience and depth of the human spirit, and it was solidly grounded in the sort of painterly technique that Chase had always championed (Flint, 1983). By 1915, when Hawthorne was just past forty, his works were represented in fourteen major public collections. His paintings had garnered numerous prestigious awards, and he was receiving $4,000 each for commissioned portraits (McCausland, 1947).
Although the work that publicly established Hawthorne’s reputation was figurative, there was a second lesser-known body of watercolor landscapes painted primarily in the 1920s, most of which were not shown until many years after his death in 1930. Although these watercolors have been characterized as “‘quick studies, done perhaps… for relaxation and pleasure’” (E.P. Richardson as quoted in Flint, 1983, p. 10), it is in them that one can most clearly see the astute observations of light and color that Hawthorne sought to instill in his summer students. Changes in lighting and its resulting effects upon color that may be seen out of doors can only be captured through rapid, practiced, direct observation in painting. Hawthorne (1938) told his students, “It is no small thing in a painting to make people see what kind of day it is. I have seen things so sensitive that you could tell whether it was morning or afternoon…. I once painted a canvas and someone said, ‘That looks like Sunday morning!’ I don’t know why, but it did, and it was [emphasis in original] painted Sunday morning. (p. 59) It was up to the painter to discover if there were limits to what color could describe about light and form and where those boundaries lay.

Besides teaching at his own school in the summers, Hawthorne also taught at the Art Students’ League and the National Academy of Design, escaping the often brutal Provincetown winters for New York, Bermuda, or Europe (McCausland, 1947). Edwin Dickinson, a Hawthorne student and assistant who had also studied with Chase, called Hawthorne, “the best teacher I ever knew, better than Chase, who was a very good teacher” (quoted in Richardson, 1961, p. 12). Dickinson’s daughter, Helen Dickinson Baldwin, recalled that Hawthorne “certainly was the teacher my father held in deepest admiration…. He always spoke of him as a teacher scarcely without peer” (personal communication, July 14, 2005). Thanks to the little book Notes on Hawthorne, compiled by Mrs. Hawthorne from student notes of his class critiques and published in 1938 after his death in 1930, a great deal is known about Hawthorne’s teachings and the ideas that he emphasized. Color, not drawing, was its foundation. It was Hawthorne’s reputation as an exceptional colorist that drew students to the Cape Cod School to study that single aspect of painting. Hawthorne reasoned that students received ample instruction in composition and drawing in their usual studies, but learning to manage color was where many faltered, so his teaching focused upon this crucial aspect of painting.

At the heart of his teaching was the profoundly simple notion that painting was a matter of “the beauty of one spot of color coming against another” (Hawthorne, 1938, p. 18). If the painter could correctly see and record these “notes” of color—Hawthorne, like Chase before him, frequently used metaphors of music to illustrate the idea of color harmonies—then they would find that “The right spots of color will tell much more about the appearance, the likeness of a person, than features or good drawing” (p. 26). That was Hawthorne’s revolutionary insight: that color alone would create form. It was the monolithic concept that Cezanne had struggled to master with only partial success throughout his painting career. According to Hawthorne, the key to finding these relationships of color was in the experience of the painter in seeing.

Still, Hawthorne strenuously cautioned students against intentionally setting out to capture the “prettiness” (p. 51) of a subject or being “so precious” (p. 27) in their approach. Instead, the beauty in a painting was regarded as the logical by-product of that process of accurate, analytical seeing and placing one spot of color against another. Nathan Halper (1980) in an oral history interview for the Archives of American Art said that Hawthorne would start off his first class by asking if anyone wished to become a painter to make money. Invariably, when a few hands were raised, Hawthorne—a financially successful artist by every standard of the time—would tell these students, “you may leave.” Thus, the integrity of painting itself was linked to the integrity and high ideals of the artist who produced it. A related idea central to
Hawthorne’s philosophy was his view that beauty did not reside in the subject of the painting so much as it did in the painter’s perception of it and her or his rendering of the subject. “This stove is painted with a soul,” he told one student.

There is as much beauty and religion in the painting of this black iron stove as in any of your so-called religious paintings. That is sacred—you have put your heart in it. One of the greatest things in the world is to train ourselves to see beauty in the commonplace (my emphasis). Out of consideration of ugly tones grows a real beauty—a freight car or a wash line of clothes may be as handsome as a sunset. Discover beauty where others have not found it. (Hawthorne, 1938, p. 49)

Hawthorne’s mantra of finding beauty in the commonplace resonates closely with Chase’s Liebl-inspired viewpoint that it was not what one painted but how that resulted in fine painting. Like Chase, Hawthorne also emphasized the notion that becoming a painter was a lifelong enterprise that required diligent study, hard work, and tireless commitment to workmanship. It was the painter’s duty always to seek continuous growth and discovery and to avoid falling into painting from formula or a “fixed habit of mind” (p. 30).

Becoming a painter was the ultimate exercise in self-culture, requiring the sacrifice of a boundless spirit and an open heart: “We must all teach ourselves to be fine, to be poets. Spend a lifetime in hard work with a humble mind. In his attempt to develop the beauty he sees, the artist develops himself” (Hawthorne, 1938, p. 33). Like Chase, Hawthorne seemed to link fine painting with strong moral character, telling students that “the more humble, the greater the personality of the artist, the finer the work” (pp. 18-19). Character and commitment in a painter were essential qualities because of the painter’s special role in society: “Our job is to be an artist, which is to be a poet, a preacher if you will, to be of some use in the world by adding to the sum total of beauty in it” (p. 17). The artist was charged with a sacred responsibility to help others of lesser vision to see and to “believe in the beauty and the glory of human existence” (p. 17). Hawthorne’s idea closely paralleled that of Collingwood (1958/1938) that what the artist saw and expressed through painted language apprehended our common world, then returned it to viewers in a form that could help them to become emotionally and intellectually conscious of the remarkable nature of their own experiences. Thus the decision to pursue the calling of painter was never casual or frivolous, but a commitment of the utmost gravity to undertake what would be a lifelong process of self-transformation in service of society.

In practice, Hawthorne’s summer students would paint alla prima studies outdoors, usually of a model on the beach silhouetted against the water or the sky under the brilliant Provincetown sun. Because almost nothing could be seen of the model’s hat-or parasol-shaded features under such blinding light, these came to be called the “mudheads.” Another device he used to discourage students from drawing or dwelling on minor details was the same remedy he had once used on himself, even more rigorously applied: He banished brushes. Students in the beginner class were sent to the hardware store to purchase a putty knife for painting. A putty knife is a far clumsier instrument than even the palette knife and suitable only for applying broad general shapes of color without detail or finesse. It was an effective means of guiding the student to understand and organize form in painting in terms of the large masses of color they perceived in light or in shadow. The students were encouraged to make many starts, producing up to four studies each day, and never to “work one minute after” they had “stopped seeing logically” (Hawthorne, 1938, p.27). By “seeing logically,” Hawthorne meant the process of analyzing relationships of spots of color, not drawing an outline and filling it in. Hawthorne exhorted them to, “See brilliant color, then paint it a little more brilliant than you see it” (p. 24). Many art teachers have made the simple observation that very often novices try to represent what they
know conceptually rather than what they actually see visually. The remedy for this, according to Hawthorne, was to be found in working out-of-doors as it was “the most direct way of learning to see color” and thus “shaking off the shackles of [one’s] mind” (p. 24). He told students, “Do what you see, not what you know” (p. 39).

The notion of learning to see deserves some examination here. We conceive of sight as a natural physiological phenomenon that—assuming one has relatively “normal” vision—humans commonly experience and learn to describe in more or less the same ways. When I say, “I saw a red ball resting on a blue tabletop,” one is able to picture a simple mental image of what I described. Yet, the description, verbal shorthand for what was perceived, comes nowhere near the complex visual reality of that actual experience: the subtle color harmonies that the eye conveys to the mind that makes one recognize the red ball as a sphere rather than a disc and to understand its distance from one in space; how those harmonies interact with color reflected off the blue surface supporting the ball and how that blue is in turn altered by colored reflections from the red ball; the shadow that is cast by the ball, its color harmonies, and what all of these factors together reveal about the strength, quality, and direction of the light, and the atmosphere that enfolds it. If even a skilled artist were asked to paint a picture from the simple verbal description—or to make a better argument, from an even more lengthy and precise verbal description—she or he might conceivably produce a convincing facsimile, but the particularity of that red ball on that blue tabletop in that moment of light would be entirely lost. Conceptually understanding the idea of a red ball resting on a blue tabletop is distinctly different from seeing it in all of its fleeting visual complexity. Yet, acting according to one’s generalized concepts about objects, so long as they more or less agree with the concepts of others, is arguably the most efficacious way of dealing with one’s daily business. It is, in fact, how most of us usually function in the world (Pinker, 1997). However, the concept “red ball” can lead one to habitually view the real red ball as only a representative of its category and thus to overlook the particularity of its many color harmonies and their subtle variations at a single moment in time and space. It is this habit of looking at objects through one’s preconceived ideas about them and their attributes that is the obstacle to real seeing, and it is this that the painter who strives to paint directly from nature must overcome.

The purpose of learning to see was that the painter might discover and represent “truth.” Truth in painting was the highest ideal of Hawthorne’s teaching, and it was the most worthwhile quality that painters could achieve in their work. While Chase’s Liebel-inspired notion of “artistic truth” was dependent upon the technical skill of the painter and the artist’s “feeling” in interpreting a subject, Hawthorne’s “truth” went even further; it included masterful technique, but technique alone was meaningless without the painter’s deeper ability to see and thus to represent truth:

Do a bit of truth. When you meet a spot of real truth in a painting you forgive—oh! So much. We walk past miles of canvas, being able to find no technical fault with any, until suddenly we are halted by one, perhaps ugly in its choice of subject, but which is immortalized by its expression of truth. (Hawthorne, 1938, p. 82)

The apparent tension between the notion of an objective seeable truth and truth as it was apprehended through intuitive, empathetic, or emotional consciousness was neatly resolved: In Hawthorne’s construction, the inner resonance produced when the artist witnessed visual truth in a painting was what verified it as true. Outer truth was a visual experience but inner truth could be apprehended only through one’s spirit. Thus, the inner and outer aspects of truth never conflicted with one another, but were understood as interdependent. Glib prettiness might come from technical expertise, but Hawthorne’s “solemn note” (p. 51) of beauty required the depth of
inner truth. Laziness or insincerity could produce bad, shallow, or “untrue” paintings, but skill alone without the inner ability to see truth was no guarantee of success in painting. Paradoxically, Hawthorne told students “If you have to lie, make your lie convincing” (p. 37), a statement that suggested inner truth would trump mere visual accuracy. Hawthorne also would tell his students, “There is something elevating in the painting of a side of beef so it can hang beside the Madonnas in the Louvre and hold its own through the centuries (p. 42).” In this statement, of course, he was referring to the Rembrandt still life that Chase was so fond of citing. His point was that there was no subject so humble or so unlikely that one could not discover beauty and truth in it.

Hawthorne’s class structure was straightforward: for eight weeks students painted from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. then from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. out on the beach, or they could choose to paint still life in the studio; a teaching assistant came on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and on Fridays, Hawthorne did a demonstration painting for the class. His classes were comprised of men and women in about equal numbers; during WWI, 1914-1918, women were in the majority. Like Chase, Hawthorne also conducted a weekly critique reviewing all of each student’s output for the week. Peggy Bacon (1973), who studied at the Cape Cod School in “1915 or 1916,” recalled that promptly at 8 a.m. on Saturday Hawthorne would appear “dressed like a high priest in a white linen suit.” His little dog was by his side and a long pointer was in his hand. Majorie Halper (1980), a student in 1926 or 1927, recalled that when Hawthorne entered, he would bow and everyone would clap. Phillip Malicoat (1975), a class monitor for Hawthorne in 1930 when Henry Hensche was the assistant, remembered that there had been large classes of “up to 125-130 people” with some students having as many as “20 pieces” to show at the end of a week. With so many students producing such a large volume of work, the Saturday criticism had turned into something of a marathon requiring four hours or more to complete. Bacon (1973) recalled that the studio often was “hideously hot” and that “Every single Saturday one or two women would faint and they would be carried outdoors.” A two-sided A-shaped screen with shelves to hold multiple paintings on both its front and back was specially constructed for the critiques. Monitors would change out the paintings on the back while Hawthorne discussed the work on the front, reversing the screen as Hawthorne finished with each group of paintings. At the end of the week, the painting boards would be scraped down and given another coat of whitewash to be reused the next week. Malicoat (1975) also recalled that while Hawthorne was usually quite succinct in his comments, “He was a very keen observer and most of the students came out [of the critique] with a lot of energy to get back to painting.”

Charles W. Hawthorne was a well-respected figure within early twentieth century American art, yet within the Provincetown community itself his stature rose to something very near royalty. Nathan Halper (1980), a gallery owner and longtime resident of Provincetown, remembered that the townspeople always referred to him respectfully as “Mr. Hawthorne,” never simply as “Hawthorne.” Even Henry Hensche would always refer to him as “Mr. Hawthorne” throughout his entire life. That a hundred or more people at a time would come to Provincetown to learn from Hawthorne was impressive enough, but to the townspeople, Hawthorne also conveyed an air of genteel authority in his dress, his manner, and in his home where everyone dressed for dinner (J. Hawthorne, 1961). The home on Miller Hill only a short walk from the downtown area was admired for Marion Hawthorne’s discretely tasteful decoration and for the extensive flower and vegetables gardens that were developed around it over the years. Hawthorne was also a founding member of the Beachcomber’s, a social club that provided a meeting place for chess and conversation for many of Provincetown’s male artists. At first, the Hawthornes spent only the summers in Provincetown, but gradually expanded their residency to
six months a year (McCausland, 1947). Like Chase before him, and befitting his position as an artist, Hawthorne was always elegantly dressed: For his painting demonstrations, he wore a white suit and must have presented a dazzling image under the brilliant Cape Cod sun. His assistants would attend to laying out his brushes and enormous palette, lighting his pipe, and setting the stage for a ritual performance that Marjorie Halper (1980) described as “virtuoso” and appearing “effortless.” The crowd of onlookers often included curious tourists and townspeople as well as his students. As Nathan Halper (1980) summarized it, “These people (the Hawthornes) were gentry…. That was the artist in those days. Not what like you have now.”

The sea changes in the art world that would produce the chasm between “those days” and “now,” were in progress even in Chase’s era with Impressionist and Post-Impressionist experimentation. The painting of the American Impressionists and the social realism of The Eight had fired warning shots, but with the New York Armory Show in 1913, the surge of modernism in the United States began in earnest. The Armory Show, which exhibited some 1300 modernist works by both European and American artists, ignited a passionate reconceptualization of the goals, purposes, and forms in American art. Had Hawthorne not died unexpectedly in his prime at 58 in 1930, he would have seen changes over the next two decades that would transform not only Provincetown, but the whole of western art. In that transformed world, realistic painting in the tradition of American naturalism would be all but swept away on the incoming tides of modernism.

Henry Hensche

In his later years, Henry Hensche would say that he would be content to spend eternity washing the brushes of Mr. Hawthorne (Robichaux, 1997). Such was his admiration for his mentor. With Hawthorne’s death in 1930, Hensche, his student and assistant, faced a difficult choice; he could devote himself to building his own expertise and career as a painter, or he could divide his energies between teaching others the principles of creating form through color while he continued working to develop himself as a painter. Had Hensche not chosen what I believe was the more difficult path—the same path that Chase and Hawthorne had chosen—it is certain that the subject of my dissertation and possibly some of my own beliefs regarding art and artists would be different. Even more significantly, the seven painters in my study and countless other Hensche students might paint differently, or not paint at all. However, to indulge in such speculation is to get too far ahead of the story.

The world and the state of painting that Hensche inherited in 1930 was one that was changing rapidly. The brief gap of time between WWI and WWII had seen the economic collapse of the stock markets in 1929 and the hardships of the depression era. The steady surge of artists with modernist ideas escaping European turmoil that had begun prior to WWI continued through WWII. In 1934, Hans Hofmann, a German painter who had founded the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts in New York City in 1932, arrived in Provincetown to open what was to become an enormously successful summer school for modern abstract painters. Through the forties and fifties modernists, such as Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, Marsden Hartley, Milton Avery, Charles Demuth, Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper, Jack Tworkov, Karl Knaths, Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, and dozens of others of lesser renown, would spend time painting in the Provincetown area in the summers (Kuchta and Seckler, 1977). Art critics from New York and Boston would regularly review shows in some of the many of the galleries that had grown up in Provincetown. Even prior to this time, the summer students that flocked
there no longer came only to paint realistically from nature or to learn Hawthorne’s approach to color and light.

When Hensche talked about his early years and his journey towards becoming a painter in a 1971 oral history interview for the Archives of American Art, he was probably 73 years old, considerably older than Hawthorne was when he died, and with another twenty years ahead. Various sources cite Hensche’s birth year from 1899 through 1902. Without doubt, Hensche’s uncertain birth date is the result of his own willful obfuscation, but his reasons for this remain unclear. Ellis Island immigration records show Heinrich Hensche, age 11, arriving in the USA from Gelsenkirchen, Germany with his father, Fritz (later called Fred), and 9-year-old sister, Erna on March 3, 1909. Calculating his age from this record would place his birth in 1899, or conceivably even 1898. John Robichaux, who has Hensche’s personal papers, is confident that Hensche’s 1917-1918 Chicago Art Institute registration form, which lists—in Hensche’s own handwriting—1899 as his birth year, is correct. George T. Thurmond and John Robichaux have each speculated that Hensche may have initially claimed a later birth year to avoid the WWI draft registrations of 1917-18 (Personal communications, July, 2005). Although only those men between the ages of 21 and 30 were required to register, many that were older or younger did so voluntarily, including German immigrants. Had Hensche registered and been drafted, he could have faced military service against the country of his birth.

Young Hensche (1971), his first name Americanized to Henry, with his father and sister settled in Chicago where he attended Wakefield High School and Coliet High School in south Chicago. Hensche remembered receiving encouragement from his high school art teachers, and at this early date he hoped to eventually study architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright. He applied and was accepted into the Art Institute of Chicago, working in the stockyards to pay the tuition. Through the Art Institute, Hensche was exposed to exhibitions and collections that included a remarkable range of works from old masters through the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. It was here that he acquired his initial admiration for Rembrandt and other of the old masters, but he was also “drawn to those bright, savage colors” (p. 2) of Impressionism. Hensche was struck with the dramatic differences in color usage displayed in the different types of painting, and he worked to make sense of it. At the same time, Hensche met three fellow students, Saul Coleman, Frank Swartz, and Gertrude Strunk, who had studied with Hawthorne in the summers at Provincetown. In their work he saw an approach to color that was different from the traditional tonal painting that was being taught at the Art Institute at that time and something that was more closely akin to the vibrant color that he saw in Impressionist painting.

The traditional approach to color in realistic painting is based upon a tonal system. In tonal painting, the play of lights against darks is what creates an illusion of three-dimensional form and contributes to an illusion of spatial depth. When painting an object—for example, our red ball—the local color of red is mixed with white, lightening it to approximate the areas where light strikes the ball, and this same red pigment is darkened with black or a neutral gray to represent areas in shadow. Rationally, it makes sense that since we conceptually know that the whole ball is a uniform red, then it would follow logically that every part of its painted representation should be based upon lighter or darker values of that single hue. Within the context of the limited pigments that were available to painters prior to the 1880s, it was a system that worked quite well for representing three-dimensional forms on a two-dimensional surface, and little more was possible. Monet’s revelation was that the colors that a painter can see are not simply lighter or darker values of a single local color, but that distinctly different hues may be observed within our red ball. Even more remarkably, Monet observed that these hues change radically depending upon the time of day and weather conditions, that is, the sort of light in
which they are seen. For example, the same red ball may appear quite different depending on whether it was observed on a cloudy day or a sunny one, morning, noon, or afternoon. However, as many a painter has since discovered, although light and color cannot be separated, and color in natural light cannot be reduced to the formulas of a tonal scale, seeing it and actually translating it into opaque paint are quite another thing.

Reading between the lines of his 1971 interview, I can imagine Hensche as an intense, restless, inquisitive, and perhaps, an impatient student. Moreover, he was a passionate student consumed with solving the problems of light and color that are at the very heart of painting. He quickly became dissatisfied with the conservative tonal approach to realistic painting at the Art Institute that was taught “downstairs… where the Illinois railroad tracks went by and… darkened the dirty window, and we painted in nice tones, values” (p. 2). As much as he admired Rembrandt and the genius of painting’s old masters, it was the future of a different type of realistic painting that most interested him. The chain of history in Western painting that had led to the revolutionary progress of Impressionism pointed toward ever more utopian possibilities that were there for those with the insight and courage to pursue them. In this respect, young Henry Hensche was entirely modern in his thinking. Along with Coleman, Swartz, and Strunk, Hensche left the Art Institute to experiment with color painting away from the conservative conventions of traditional teaching. Coleman, who knew Miss Jane Addams and her generosity, secured for them “a studio to live in and to paint in” (p. 6) at Addams’ settlement house, Hull House on South Halston Street in Chicago. Altogether, about 15 students who had left the Art Institute shared the space until the spring of 1919 when Hensche along with two friends left for New York and the Art Students’ League.

At the League, Hensche studied first with Frank Vincent Dumond, one of Hawthorne’s teachers, then joined the class of George Bellows, a member of The Eight. Still grappling with Hawthorne’s approach to color painting that he had been studying secondhand from Swartz, Hensche took encouragement from Bellows response to his approach. Contrary to negative predictions from his classmates, Hensche recalled that Bellows was intrigued with his application of ideas about color that were so different from his own stark, somber palette and urged Hensche to continue with it. Given Hensche’s unremitting focus on the problems of color in painting, it was inevitable that when the summer of 1919 arrived, he headed for Provincetown: In effect, Hensche had been Hawthorne’s student for over a year before actually going to study with him directly.

Henry Hensche’s search for a teacher who could initiate him into the secrets of Impressionist color led him to Provincetown and Charles W. Hawthorne. Although strictly speaking, Hawthorne was not an Impressionist, Hensche found in Hawthorne’s approach to creating form with color something revolutionary, thrilling in scope, and limitless in its potential. He had found the problem that would engage him, mind and heart, for the rest of his life.

Hawthorne, who had had his own struggles as a poor art student, was known to be generous with students that were serious about learning. Joseph Hawthorne (1961), his son, recalled that his father gave a large number of scholarships each summer to talented students who would act as monitors for his classes. The “most favored” among these students would care for Hawthorne’s own studio, “washing the brushes and cleaning the palette at night” (p. 8). At times, poor art students would sleep surreptitiously in the loft of Hawthorne’s Pearl Street studio. Nathan Halper (1980) believed that Hawthorne, much in sympathy with the students, “closed his eyes to it, he knew it but he pretended he didn’t know.” Hensche, talented but penniless, immediately became a monitor for Hawthorne’s classes, and in 1928 became his final teaching assistant.
At first, Hensche moved back to New York during the winters to continue studies at the Art Students’ League, to maintain contacts with galleries, and to cultivate a relationship with the National Academy, but by the time of Hawthorne’s death in 1930 he was living and painting year-round in Provincetown. As Hawthorne’s teaching assistant, Hensche met with students on Tuesdays and Thursdays to offer unsupervised instruction and criticism (Malicoat, 1975), but was left with ample time to pursue his own painting.

Hensche had far more time under Hawthorne’s tutelage than Hawthorne had spent with Chase or even Chase had with any of his Munich mentors. As one of Hawthorne’s favored monitors and assistants, Hensche was there for virtually every class critique, demonstration, or comment on painting that Hawthorne made over an eleven-year period. It is also certain that he had access to private criticism and comments from Hawthorne, and that Hawthorne offered valuable professional advice and support to the young painter. Hensche came to regard Hawthorne as not only a mentor but as a trusted friend. Given their close working relationship of eleven years and Hensche’s near-reverence for Hawthorne’s work and his ideas, it is not surprising that Hensche came to absorb and reflect Hawthorne’s artistic philosophy so thoroughly. However, one would be mistaken to conclude that because of this Hensche became a mere replica of Hawthorne: Hensche also brought his own insights, perspectives, interpretations, refinements, and passions to bear upon Hawthorne’s framework.

Throughout his career Hensche unfailingly praised Hawthorne’s contribution in finding a way to teach the logic of form and color. But Hensche, with his eye always toward the future, in one sense must have seen Hawthorne’s work as he apparently came to see his own: as a stepping-stone rather than a pinnacle. Hawthorne’s ethos of self-culture as a painter pointed toward one sacred charge: It was the responsibility of the student to strive to go beyond the master. It was a goal that Hensche took it to heart, and, in turn, he was to challenge his best students with it. Eventually, Hensche’s knowledge of color and light and his use of it in his mature still life and landscape work would be capable of conveying to a viewer the time, the season, and type of day with a precision scarcely even imagined by Hawthorne.

Hawthorne encouraged Hensche to seek recognition for his work through exhibitions and competitions and sponsored his successful candidacy for a scholarship to study abroad at Paris’ Ecole d’Beaux Arts for a year in 1921. Hensche became a member of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, showing in their annual exhibitions beginning in 1922, and he also joined the Boston Guild of Artists and the Grand Central Gallery in New York City. Hensche's awards included the Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship in 1921 and the prestigious Hallgarten Prize in 1929, both at the National Academy of Art in New York. He exhibited at the Pittsburgh International, National Academy of Design Annual, Chicago Art Institute Annual, the Philadelphia Annual and the Corcoran Biennial. Altogether, Hensche appeared to be headed for a successful and rewarding career. Had it been thirty years earlier—about the time Hawthorne had begun his own rise to success and recognition—Hensche’s future surely would have been paved with the same palm leaves and accolades that Hawthorne enjoyed. However, it was a different world by 1930, and without realizing it, realistic painters were embarking on a long journey through obscurity.

Hawthorne died at the end of October, shortly after the conclusion of the 1930 summer session. I don’t believe that it was only practical considerations that led Hensche to decide to soldier on alone with Hawthorne’s school. Certainly, by that time he had had ample experience in teaching and his growth as a painter was impressive. He was comfortable, respected, and established in Provincetown, but these factors would have hardly been compelling had he not also felt a deep sense of responsibility for passing along the ideas about color and light in
painting that he had come to believe in so passionately. With meager financial resources and the looming economic depression, the logistics of continuing Hawthorne’s enterprise at the very least must have been difficult for Hensche. He arranged to purchase Hawthorne’s Pearl Street studio from the estate, but the five hundred dollars that Mrs. Hawthorne had asked for the school’s registered name and its student list was an amount that Hensche was either unable or unwilling to negotiate. Instead, Hensche continued to teach for the next four summers with no name for the school, relying upon returning students and word-of-mouth recommendations. In 1935, he renamed the school “The Cape School of Art” dropping “Cod” from its name to avoid copyright liability. Like Hawthorne, he also accepted private portrait commissions and traveled to various art schools to do workshops and demonstrations recruiting students during the winter months. In 1936, he married Ada Rayner, an English-born painter who would become known for her paintings of flowers. Rayner, a versatile and capable woman, designed and even physically built parts of their Provincetown home, which was modeled after an English cottage. Together they cultivated flower and vegetable gardens on their surrounding property.

A 1935 photograph in the Provincetown Art Association collection shows Hensche posing in the studio with perhaps 40 students. Joseph Hirsch (1970) who studied with Hensche in the mid-1930s remembered painting “mudheads” at the beach using a palette knife; “you learned what one color does to its neighbor, and how colors affect each other, and what air and light do to color.” It is uncertain for how long Hensche followed the model of instruction developed by Hawthorne; none of the painters that I interviewed had studied with Hensche before the 1960s, and in the 30 years since Hawthorne had died, Hensche had introduced several changes and refinements in his approach. Putty knives were replaced with palette knives, critiques were conducted on an individual basis rather than before the entire class, but the problem remained unchanged: To create form with color alone. Also, by the 1960s classes no longer painted from models on the beach; Hensche had replaced this practice with the color block studies. The color block studies were still life problems that required students to analyze color relationships among simple geometric forms such as cubes and cylinders that were painted bright primary colors. These blocks were studied under a range of natural light both in and outdoors. Hensche wanted to find a way to help student to see the dramatic transformations of color that occur in what he had come to call the different light keys. To accomplish this he developed a systematic approach that permitted students to focus on problems of color and light in a precise, analytical manner. Several of Hensche’s students that I interviewed (e.g., Britt, Robichaux, Thurmond) remembered that Hensche told them that the idea of studying the colored blocks had been first suggested by a student from Philadelphia. However, Hensche was quick to recognize the idea as the pedagogical tool that he had been seeking to teach students to see and paint relationships of color within a light key. John Robichaux (1997) called Hensche’s color blocks “the poor man’s Grain Stacks” (p. 4), comparing them to the series of farmer’s grain stacks that Monet had painted again and again in different seasons, times of day, and weather. Hensche’s blocks were color study distilled to its most basic elements.

Light key was the overarching principle that determined color relationships. Monet’s observations of the “envelope,” the shifting, atmospheric vibrations of light (Wildenstein, 1999, p. 249) enfolding and revealing all of material existence had revolutionized color painting, and it was at the heart of Hensche’s development of color theory. It was light that even made seeing color possible, and light key was the absolute arbiter of color: “you cannot see anything except as it exists in the light in which it is seen” (Hensche, 1988, p. 16). The principle of light key also was Hensche’s basis for “visual truth” in painting: “Nothing can escape the truth that all things are different in different [emphasis in original] light schemes” (Hensche quoted in Robichaux,
However, to represent truthfully all color relationships within any single light key appears an all-but-impossible task. Light key changes from dawn through dusk by minute degrees determined by the density of the atmosphere that the sun must penetrate at any given position or angle as it travels in its course through the day and the seasons. Atmospheric moisture, dust, pollen, and even gases, the molecular components of air, all subtly distort and diffuse light, and these too are always changing. For Hensche, the impressionist ideal of capturing the elusive fleeting moment meant capturing the fleeting moments of light. Natural light’s transitory effects had led Monet to cease working on a canvas or to begin a new canvas whenever he could perceive a change in the light, often within the hour (Wildenstein, 1999).

Another obstacle to capturing the truth of light and color, even with the expanded palette of the newer cadmium pigments, was the limitations of paint itself. The truth of color relationships in a light key was something that Hensche believed the painter could learn to see, but he pragmatically allowed that, “You can’t really paint what you see. God has a better palette. You have to paint with the colors you have in the relationship you see” (in Robichaux, 1997, p. 79). This was what Hawthorne was talking about when he spoke of the painter’s need to create “a convincing lie.” The painter’s exacting task was to represent the relationships among luminous color with opaque pigments. Thus representing truth in the relationships of colors within a light key complicated by the physical limitations of paint itself required all of the skill, experience, ingenuity, and vision that a painter could muster. However great the technical skills of the painter might be, this alone was not equal to the demands of representing truth without the accompanying vision to perceive it.

Hensche’s realization that we see what we are taught to see was an insight with dual implications; the preconceptions that limit visual awareness had to be overcome for the painter to learn to see and to paint color with fresh eyes, but Hensche conceived of seeing as a teachable skill. Because the realistic painter cannot paint what she or he cannot see, learning to see color accurately in the light key was the necessary first step. It was not an ability that could be acquired all at once, but only in incremental stages at the pace of each individual student. In his 1971 Archives of American Art interview, Hensche offered a simple analogy for his concept of the growth of visual perception:

You walk in a direction to get to a hill. Only the person that makes the walk and gets up on that hill can see a further vista, and beyond it new vistas. The mind of man is capable of much greater growth than he’s given a chance to grow. And we have never reached a limit of color sensations. (Hensche, 1971, p. 22)

The raw beginner at first might struggle with analyzing the broad differences in colors seen on a sunny day and a cloudy one. However, diligent, logical study of the colored blocks outdoors where changes and differences were more dramatic and easily observed would lead the painter, over time, to states of increasingly “finer visual perception” (Hensche, 1988, p.25). Greater visual awareness enabled the painter to perceive the shifting nuances of color within the light key that define three-dimensional form where “every plane change is a color change” (p. 37). While refining visual perception was a process roughly analogous to building physical strength by lifting successively heavier weights, any ultimate perfected state was never achievable. The painter was in a perpetual state of becoming, thus as much as she or he could ever achieve was incrementally more elevated degrees of seeing. Still, for all the analytical rigor of Hensche’s color study method, it was foremost about painting and “a painter studying the visual aspects of light” not about “a scientist studying light rays” (p. 19).

Hensche conceived and spoke of his approach to color study in terms of teaching students “the language of painting” or “the art of seeing” (as in the title of his 1988 book) as opposed to
the notion of his teaching the “art of painting.” His reasons for such a careful distinction are perhaps best illustrated in a story that Hensche often told his students about meeting and talking with Robert Frost about art in a visit to Kenyon College in Ohio. It was a story he told in his 1971 interview for the Archives of American Art as well as in his 1988 book, The Art of Seeing and Painting. When they met, Frost asked Hensche what he did and Hensche replied that he taught painting. “Don’t you teach art?” Frost inquired. “No,” Hensche insisted, “I teach people how to paint, that is color description, and its relationship to drawing, and… ideas that can be painted in a pictorial language.” This led Frost to ask Hensche what he thought art was, to which Hensche replied that he believed that “art is the arrangement of truth.” As the conversation progressed, Hensche in turn asked Frost about teaching poetry. Frost responded that he didn’t think that students could learn to become poets in colleges and universities. In essence, he agreed with Hensche that while it was possible to teach the language and forms of poetry or of painting, the elusive quality that made a work rise to the level of art—one might call it the arrangement of truth—came from the individual and that could not be taught (in Hensche, 1971, p. 12-13).

A second story that Hensche often told students was one that Frost had told to him in that same visit. Frost recounted that he had run into an old friend that he had not seen for perhaps 20 years. As young men, each had sworn to spend his life pursuing his most passionate interest; Frost, poetry, and his friend, music. Frost asked how his friend’s musical career was going and his friend replied that, unfortunately, he had had to give it up “in order to work to live.” Frost inquired of his friend, “Did you live?” Hensche’s view was that “it isn’t a question of whether you have to live, it’s a question of what you want to live for” (p. 16). His point was that choosing to maintain one’s artistic integrity and commitment to art was likely to require sacrifices. For a painter to hold fast to her or his ideals in the face of life’s hardships and disappointments required no less than “moral courage” (Hensche, 1988, p. 62).

Hensche (1988) also believed that “Without an historical perspective it is impossible to evaluate the worth of an idea” (p. 2). The view led him to become a thorough and critical student of painting’s history and philosophy; he read extensively, talked with other painters, viewed exhibitions, and studied all types of painting. His study supported his contention that states of elevated visual perception were a triumph of cultural and evolutionary human progress. For Hensche, the march of history in Western painting from the walls of caves to the ceilings of the Vatican to the canvases of the Impressionists and Charles Hawthorne was evidence that increasingly finer states of visual perception had been achieved: ultimately, perceptual evolution would result in painters that were capable of seeing visual truth and representing it. He compared the efforts of the Impressionists to the work of the Wright brothers in building the first airplane (Hensche, 1971); as magnificent as it was, it held the promise of unimaginably greater things that one day might be achieved in realistic color painting. Through his study, Hensche constructed compelling arguments for his theory about the progressive growth of human visual perception and how it was achieved. Often he would give students a spontaneous discourse on his own interpretations of painting history to give them some sense of what he believed was their own place in its progressive developments. However, the ultimate purpose of achieving finer states of visual perception was not simply to paint more accurately, but to paint more beautifully (Hensche, 1988, p. 25).

The painter’s responsibility to grow in perception and skill was that she or he might help others to “learn to see the world as it [is] in all its variety and beauty (p. 24).” It was an aim very much in accord with Hawthorne’s (1938) belief that the role of the artist was to help others to see and to “believe in the beauty and the glory of human existence” (p. 17). In Hensche’s (1988) view,
Every generation must state the fundamental truths for their age. To some this is boring but art is not a question of fashion, but deals with spiritual truths that reach deep into the conscience of men and must be kept alive by restating it in new ways. Painting, as all the other arts, is no exception to this. (p. 19)

Hensche’s firm belief in art’s humanistic purposes are also evident in his frequent practice of quoting to students the famous lines from romantic poet John Keats’ *Ode to a Grecian Urn* that tell the reader, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Another passage Hensche often quoted to students that seemed to summarize for him the ultimate challenge faced by the painter was from Joseph Conrad’s preface to his 1897 novel, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*:

To arrest for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of different goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form color, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile—such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve. But sometimes, by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished – behold! – all truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile – and the return to eternal rest (as quoted in Hensche, 1988, *The Art of Seeing and Painting*, p. 58).

In his later years, Hensche, with seemingly sincere humility, confessed at different times to a number of his students (e.g., Britt, Thurmond, Robichaux, Miller) his belief that he had produced only “four or five” of what he regarded as completely successful paintings during over seventy years of effort. I can only speculate that by this comment Hensche might have meant paintings in which he felt that he had somehow managed to capture “all truth of life” within the forms of light and color represented on his canvas.

Color, the most emotional, relative, and subjective of all the elements at the painter’s command, was most often used for expressive or formal purposes rather than descriptive ones by modernists of every stripe. Hensche (1988) often had harsh words for what he regarded as the arbitrary or distorted color and form used by these painters, criticizing their works as “inhuman” or “degrading,” “freakish” (p. 20), “deformed, ugly, vulgar and brutal” (p. 57). As he saw it, these modern works were the result of “the cult of individualism” (p. 62) motivated by a “craving for something, anything that is new which disregards the truth” (p. 10). He argued that “One of the proofs that establish the lack of worth of modern art is the rapidity with which one movement follows another” (p. 56). In Hensche’s view, enduring beauty, not novelty, was the evidence of worth in art. The modernists had betrayed the truth and beauty of color and light and had abandoned the utopian promises of finer visual perception to pursue commercial success and fame through what was fashionable, popular, and easy. The institutions and misguided collectors that supported the “gigantic hoax” (p. 64) of modern painting also shared in the blame.

He was no less critical of the way that art was taught, especially in colleges and universities where he believed that a lack of structure and vision left students to waste time, squander their potentials, and flounder in the aesthetic relativism of self-expression without the technical skills or direction to lend it substance. Most realistic painting, when it was taught at all, was taught as a tonalist approach that was mired in conventions of the past. It was as if modern painters, completely misreading the implications of Impressionism, Monet, and Cezanne, had taken a sharp left turn into chaotic and dangerous terrain while Hensche, with his small band of followers, continued inching forward into realistic painting’s utopian future on a path that was steep, straight, and true.
When I proposed analyzing the ideas and philosophies underlying the teachings of Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche in relation to the work of the seven painters in my study, I was uncertain of what I would discover. Visually, the works of the three founding figures are distinctive and appear more different from each other than similar. Chase’s American Impressionist works, such as his “Beach at Shinnecock,” are charming, genre pieces that encapsulate his desire to fix a fleeting moment under natural light. By contrast, Hawthorne’s best-known works (e.g., “Nina”) are portraits executed in a studio. Hensche painted a range of works in and outdoors from still life through landscape to portraits. What remains consistent among the three is their concern for light as it describes form and color as the function of that light.

Were works by these artists simply expressive of the periods and skill that had produced them or were they linked in other ways? Would I be able to discover and trace persistent or recurring ideas? Would I find evidence of ideas linking art with the painter’s spiritual beliefs? If there were significant ideas and ideals linking these works, how had they evolved, how were they communicated to students, did they influence the seven painters in my study, and if so, in what ways? As my analysis of Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche progressed, the relationship of their ideas to their practices and teachings emerged, and I was struck with a number of common themes, ideas, details, both large and small, threading through the entire tradition.

In my analysis, I first found it was not a useful approach to attempt to understand the artistic goals, ideals, and aspirations of these painters apart from the practical issues of technique and materials or historical and social context. Each area informed and expressed the other, and from seemingly minor details of technical approach, I found I could postulate a great deal about the painter’s artistic worldview. For example, take the idea that I was to hear again and again in my artists’ interviews that in the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition of painting, “drawing is last.” For hundreds of years two threads of realistic painting, the classical and the expressive, had alternately asserted dominance over mainstream painting. Underlying them are foundationally different ideas about how painters apprehend and respond to visual phenomena. Although I have no wish to oversimplify the foundational tenets of either camp, I contrast certain key differences between them for the sake of illustration. The reader should keep in mind that in practice these differences more often are a matter of degree than of extremes, and that in any given period, one approach would be dominant over the other. The compositions of “classical” painters (for example, see Ingres or David) are based upon carefully rationalized linear drawing plotted out and underpainted on the canvas. Working in this way, line can be the painter’s means for refining, clarifying, and perfecting raw beauty found in the world-as-it-is, and the precisely modeled forms in the finished paintings retain distinctly linear elements. The intermediary step of drawing inserted between perception and painting results in a reasoned if detached view of the world and how the painter intellectually engages it. In the expressive thread of realism (e.g., Delacroix or Titian) the painter’s attack is more direct and spontaneous, the appearance is often more robust or sensual, although at times less elegant. The impression of the subject is developed as a whole with particularizing details of appearance—the drawing—added last. The expressive approach is associated with the painter’s direct emotional response to a subject.

The alla prima approach to painting that Chase was introduced to in the Munich school was a logical corollary of the expressive thread. Those who utilized this approach regarded drawing and painting as distinctly different activities; drawing was more abstract in that it was concerned with reducing form to elements of line and value while direct painting expressed the
immediate perception of color shapes. Such an approach was “closer to the way we actually see” according to most of the painters I interviewed. I believe that the alla prima approach to painting, therefore, should be interpreted as the technical expression of a painter’s intention to capture not only the natural appearance of the subject, but at the same time, to express her or his own emotional response to its perception. When the alla prima approach is freed from the tonal system of representing color and linked with the idea of elevated visual perception in changing outdoor light, the importance of the painter’s immediate response is further magnified.

Chase emphasized the notion that cultivating technical excellence was a painter’s best means of seizing a finer expression of immediate visual experience. With Hawthorne, advocacy for technical mastery was undiminished, but additional criteria were added. The idea of the painter’s special perceptual skill, that is, the ability to see beauty in the commonplace was articulated, as was the painter’s purpose in society, to make this experience of beauty available to others. Hensche further refined the notion of learning to see with his concept of states of elevated vision. In addition, he added a compelling historical perspective linked to his thoroughly modernist theories about the evolution and growth of human color visual perception. Embedded within the ideas of each person is the overarching notion that experiencing beauty in nature or in art is among the most worthwhile of human pursuits and that the artist occupied a pivotal place within that ongoing dynamic. Hawthorne believed that the artist’s relationship with society was one in which the artist assumed

the guise of the high priest. He must show people more… than they already see, and he must show them with so much human sympathy and understanding that they will recognize it as if they themselves had seen the beauty and the glory. (Hawthorne, 1938)

Sentimental or romantic interpretations of commonplace beauty were not only unnecessary, they were a rejection or distortion of the truth that was inherent in it. This ideal of truth indivisible from beauty in the Hensche-Hawthorne lexicon placed a further demand on the artist for tireless self-culture, self-sacrifice, and commitment to a code of artistic excellence and integrity. Moral goodness also was understood as inseparable from the ability to see and represent beauty/truth, and it provided further support of the artist’s high purpose in society. It would appear that at the core of their ideas is the belief that truth exists not only as an absolute conceptual ideal, but also as a knowable aspect of the visual world. Truth was discoverable through beauty, and if it was not knowable in its entirety, it was at least incrementally knowable. Truth was there in the fleeting moment of light and could be recognized on the rare occasions when it was fixed upon a canvas. Seeking, experiencing, and representing beauty and truth was both the proof and the purpose of a painter, but it was not a prize that was guaranteed. It was available only to a “fortunate few” who were prepared to dedicate a lifetime to seeking it. Perhaps most important in regard to a central question of my inquiry, the quest for beauty and truth was defined as an experience that transformed the painter as surely as light transformed color. Throughout their lives, both Hawthorne and Hensche spoke of this transformative journey in ways that suggested they each believed that such experience was of some spiritual significance.

The analytical rigor that Hawthorne and Hensche brought to bear upon the notion of “one spot of color coming against another” was a key factor that supported the claims of truth for their approach to creating form with color. Within the modernist paradigm, reason was the means for discovering truth; however, it was a view not incompatible with the mystic element of “poetic” feeling that called the painter to render a subject or the viewer to recognize the resulting “beauty and glory” in the commonplace. Without poetic feeling, there was no inner spark that drove the painter in her or his rational quest. Further, proof of the rational truth of the approach was that
“seeing logically” was a skill that could be taught and then honed to increasingly higher states of elevated vision. It was the means by which the painter developed himself or herself, and, as a result, contributed to elevating all of human visual perception.

Still, what gave these ideas substance and meaning was that each painter in his own way lived the creed of becoming a compelling model of artistic behavior, aspiration, and integrity to his students. Each of the founding figures in his time also generously encouraged and supported aspiring young painters. Those students who chose to enter into the willing state of mind demanded by apprenticeship studied and absorbed every nuance of the master’s philosophy and practice, then in turn, reflected aspects of it back through her or his own personality.

One detail that stood out in suggesting that ideas within the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition were passed down with a high degree of fidelity is the remarkable consistency with which artistic heroes and examples were cited. Chase’s enthusiasm for Hals, Rembrandt, and Velázquez was also seen in Hawthorne, then in Hensche. Chase’s example of Rembrandt’s small still life of a side of beef was again cited by Hawthorne (1938, p. 42), then in turn mentioned by Hensche in his interviews for John Robichaux’s book (1997, p. 75). When two of the artists that I interviewed (e.g., Robichaux and Diket) without any prompting from myself also mentioned the Rembrandt work as an example, I was struck with a detail that appeared to exceed mere coincidence. If such minor and seemingly peripheral ideas were passed along and absorbed so faithfully, then were not many of the larger ideas about beauty, goodness, and the spiritual experience of visual truth perhaps also conveyed? What of Hawthorne and Hensche’s ideas about art’s role in nourishing the human spirit? How would these ideas which had changed and evolved in each stage of the tradition be represented or changed within the seven currently practicing painters that I interviewed? Moreover, how were these teachings experienced from the perspective of the student? In Chapters Five and Six, which follow, I will analyze and interpret the interviews with these painters.

Summary of Chapter Four

In Chapter Four, I examined the artistic practices and philosophies of William Merritt Chase, Charles W. Hawthorne, and Henry Hensche, especially with regard to their ideas about “truth” in art. For each of the three painters, truth in art was a concept that implied both the accurate rendering of outward appearance and the artist’s corresponding response to a subject’s inner essence.

Chase believed that “artistic truth” in painting resulted from the combination of technical excellence and the painter’s emotional or empathetic investment in a subject. Chase also linked fine painting with good moral character. For Hawthorne (1938), truth in art was similarly a function of the artist’s integrity and character, but it also depended upon her or his ability to “see beauty in the commonplace” (p. 49). Seeing was the physical phenomenon of vision but also the inner responses of the artist to what was seen; both types of seeing had to be present for a painting to succeed. Hawthorne viewed self-development as a social responsibility demanded by the artist’s special role in society. That role was to help others to see and to “believe in the beauty and the glory of human existence” (p. 17). Hensche’s concept of capturing “visual truth” in painting hinged upon the artist learning to see the subtle relationships of color that convey the appearance of form. Hensche conceived of artistic seeing as a teachable skill, and he devised a systematic approach to it: Students learned to see color relationships by painting colored blocks under various natural lighting conditions. Hensche argued that the evolution of seeing could be traced through the history of art and that its limits had never been reached. Both Hawthorne and
Hensche emphasized the use of logic in comparing one note of color against another. Statements by each artist indicated a belief that the role of painter was a high calling and that seeing, experiencing, and representing beauty was a lifelong enterprise of some spiritual significance.
CHAPTER 5: THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE ARTISTS

In Chapter Four, I traced the influences, artistic educations, and careers of William Merrit Chase, Charles W. Hawthorne, and Henry Hensche, the three founding figures in the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition of painting. I examined their artistic practices, philosophies, and beliefs, with special attention those ideas that might be interpreted as pointing toward a spiritual view of art. Their ideas about painting and about beauty, truth, moral goodness, artistic integrity, and the role of the artist in society are notions that the seven artists I interviewed surely would have encountered in their studies with Henry Hensche. Yet, they comprise only a portion of each painter’s artistic education, because academic study and self-study, interchange with other artistic colleagues, and the lengthy process of constructing individual meanings for these experiences have also contributed to each painter’s artistic worldview. Each of these artists have read, and in some cases (e.g., Thurmond and Miller), carefully studied Hawthorne’s “little book,” which is perhaps the most eloquent and inspirational articulation of the tradition’s foundational philosophy. Furthermore, each painter has differently absorbed, interpreted, and reflected aspects of a range of ideas in the Hawthorne-Hensche tradition. Even so, assumptions as to how, or indeed, if, these ideas or others contributed to the painters’ individual concepts of spirituality or notions of a spiritual dimension to art cannot be made.

As I expected in the artist interviews, many common perspectives and memories existed, but individual interpretations of these varied. Even in the matter of Henry Hensche’s teachings, the presence of diverse interpretations is perhaps best illustrated through the various accounts by Miller, Thurmond, and Britt of the memorial reunion that was held several years after Henry Hensche’s 1992 death. About 40 former students, including Britt, Kelso, Thurmond, Deloach, Diket, Robichaux, and Miller gathered at Studio One in Gray, Louisiana near Thibodaux where Hensche had spent his last years with his second wife, Dotty Billiu. While the intention of the event was to honor Hensche’s memory, discussion naturally turned to his ideas about painting. As Miller remembered it, the discussion grew contentious with a number of painters asserting that her or his interpretation of Hensche’s ideas was the correct one. Miller (2005a) compared the scene to the story of the blind men and the elephant where each person touching on a single part interpreted the whole quite differently. Britt, Thurmond, and Robichaux similarly recalled disputes about the “correct” interpretations of Hensche’s ideas at that gathering and within other contexts.

In examining the interviews with the seven painters and in analyzing their works (see Appendix D), I am seeking to arrive at a deeper understanding of the research questions posed in Chapter 1: (a) what was each painter’s lived experiences of art making and becoming an artist; (b) what is the nature of the ideas and experiences that each artist identified as significant in forming his belief system; (c) if and in what ways does each artist define or experience art as “spiritual;” (d) what role, if any, did the artist’s education play in inculcating and shaping his foundational beliefs, and; (e) in what ways do the artist’s beliefs affect his experience, practice, and teaching of art.

A Review of the Methodology

Before delving into the individual painter’s interviews, let us first review the methodology of this study. My research design proposed to address the key research questions above through three approaches: (a) documentation of the ideas, beliefs, and philosophies central to the Hawthorne-Hensche tradition as articulated by Chase, Hawthorne, and Hensche, its three founders (see Chapter Four); (b) conducting oral history interviews with seven painters who
studied with Hensche and are currently practicing in this tradition (see Chapter Five); and (c) analysis of the visual qualities of a painting by each painter (see Appendix D). The first approach reviewed those ideas and events that comprised the foundations of the tradition to determine ideas the seven painters would have likely encountered and to determine the continuity of ideas in the tradition. In the case of Hawthorne and Hensche, I referred mainly to primary materials written by each painter that discussed his ideas about painting. For an understanding of Chase, I consulted research by two premier Chase scholars, Ronald Pisano and Keith Bryant, Jr., who each have done extensive work with primary sources on Chase. The purpose of the third approach was to examine a visual source of information that might reveal additional non-verbal data about the painter’s artistic philosophy and practice.

The centerpiece of my study was the oral history interviews. The intention of the interviews was to establish individual perspectives on artistic education and practice within the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition, especially as they contributed to the artists’ views of art as spiritual. In the interviews, my objective was to understand how each painter interpreted his experiences of becoming and being a painter and the personal meanings that he had constructed for his life narrative. To direct the painter’s narrative toward addressing key research questions, I developed a set of guiding questions (see Appendix A). The oral interviews were conducted between January 7th and May 19th of 2005 in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Prior to this, I filed an IRB application waiver to conduct research with human subjects with LSU’s Institutional Review Board and obtained a signed consent form from each artist agreeing to participate in the study. In addition, each artist signed a separate form after each interview to release the audio-tape to LSU’s T. Harry Williams Oral History Center. My plan called for interviewing the six participating painters three times each in ninety-minute sessions over an approximate three-month period. Scheduling interviews around dates convenient to these participants extended the interview period from three months to about four. Britt, Kelso, Thurmond, Miller, and Robichaux were interviewed at their studios or home-studio combinations. Diket was interviewed at Robichaux’s home. Deloach answered questions via email; however, I twice made informal visits and talked with him at his home and studio during this period.

I used a professional grade Sony cassette recorder borrowed from LSU’s T. Harry Williams Oral History Center for the duration of the interviews. As a backup precaution, each session was recorded simultaneously with a handheld mini-cassette recorder. Consistent with my training in oral history methodology, during the interviews I encouraged the painters to talk about their memories and experiences at length and in no particular order, just as the thoughts occurred to them. As much as possible, I engaged in deep listening and avoided interrupting or redirecting the participant except to ask for clarifications. I transcribed each interview in its entirety and reviewed it prior to the next interview to help in formulating further questions. The interview transcripts were placed on file with LSU’s T. Harry Williams Oral History Center. My initial impressions of the painters and the interviews also were recorded in field notes during and after the interviews.

My analysis and interpretation of the interviews was an ongoing and recursive process that began with transcription. Although it was somewhat tedious, doing my own transcriptions was a valuable process because it required me to listen to each audio-tape multiple times. When I later began to read and repeatedly reread the transcripts to code themes, it was as if I could hear each painter’s voice, rhythms, and inflections in my mind. Transcription was completed in June and coding continued through August. During the coding process I generated “memos” to myself on my emerging understandings of pervasive themes among the painters and the ways that I
thought they were connected. I attained additional insights and discovered further connections among ideas during the process of writing about the individual interviews.

Learning more about the link between artistic and spiritual experience and its educational origins was the primary focus of my research. However, I sometimes paused to remind myself that the goal of my research was to understand the lived experiences of the seven painters, regardless of whether or not that understanding confirmed my hypothesis that artistic education was linked to a spiritual view of art.

My analysis of a painting by each artist proved valuable in the sense that it visually confirmed each painter’s adherence to basic tenets of the Hensche-Hawthorne principles as well as gave me some sense of each painter’s style and individual orientation to subject matter. However, no new, unexpected, or contradictory data were revealed in these painting analyses, so I elected to place these in Appendix D rather than devoting an additional chapter to them.

Let us now turn to the individual interviews to learn in what ways each painter has been shaped by the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition, influenced by the teachings of Henry Hensche, and how these ideas have been preserved, rejected, or changed within their practice and worldview of painting. In Chapter Four, I discussed ideas about “truth” in art within the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition and how the founders viewed the development of the artist and the artist’s role in society as a journey charged with some spiritual significance. Each painter that I interviewed claimed Hensche as a primary influence, thus, each was familiar with Hensche’s views on painting. Every painter’s memories provided an individual perspective on Hensche, his teachings, and the nature of the education and experiences that contributed to shaping the painter’s artistic worldview (see Appendix C). Common ideas and differences that emerged in these interviews are discussed in Chapter 6, my conclusions.

How the Army of the South Came to Provincetown: Sammy Britt and Charlie Miller

Sammy Britt is a key figure in establishing a Southern contingent of painters following the Hensche-Hawthorne principles. It was Britt’s influence that led Kelso, Thurmond, Deloach, and other painters to study with Hensche in Provincetown. Through his 35 years of teaching this approach to painting in higher education, he influenced many young painters. I was interested in knowing “the story” of how this had all come about. In our initial phone conversations to schedule the interview, Britt recommended that I also contact Charlie Miller, another painter who had studied with Hensche at the same time as Britt, beginning in 1963. I contacted Miller in Memphis, Tennessee, and he agreed to participate in my study. The following account of their all-important first visit to Provincetown is constructed from the separate interviews of Britt and Miller. Their memories of the trip are generally consistent with each other although each remembered individually separate details that contribute to a more complete understanding of the circumstances surrounding the trip. After this introductory narrative, I move on to consider key ideas in each painter’s individual oral narratives. When a comment or detail from another painter’s interview is especially relevant, I include these.

I arranged to interview Britt on January 10, 2005 at his painting studio, a modest wood-frame shack like so many others that were once common for housing tenant farm workers throughout the Mississippi Delta. It is his “new” studio, replacing the one that I remembered from my undergraduate days, which was out by the old Ruleville, Mississippi cemetery. That studio had been destroyed by fire back in 1975. Britt told me that a few years back, with the help of friends, he renovated this studio removing the dropped ceilings to create more overhead space and paneling the interior walls with weathered rough-sawn wood. He greeted me on the front porch and pointed out the arrangement of colored wooden blocks affixed to the wall just above
the front door. The studio is situated in an area along Bayou Road just north of Cleveland that still retains much of the rural character of the farm it had once been. I observed that Britt had developed the landscaping around the studio to provide areas for outdoor painting. In the garden on the south side of the studio, there were flowerbeds, a reflecting ball, and a classical stone statue of a nude female torso, elements that appear in some of his paintings. To the north, there were various trees he had planted, including a pillar-like Lombardy poplar, a species common in Europe that I recalled was painted by Monet, Van Gogh, and others. The interior walls of the studio were lined with paintings, studies, and still life objects. Britt pointed out studies lining the walls that had been done by other Hensche students, including Miller and John Hamrick (deceased 1998). An easel holding a nearly finished painting stood in the main room in front of a still life arrangement that included a colored glass vase and an Oriental figurine. At age 64, Britt still retains much of the youthful buoyancy and irreverent playfulness that caused me to mistake him for a student when I first entered his Introduction to Art class at Delta State College in 1969.

We chatted informally while I set up the recording equipment. I began the interview by asking Britt to tell me about his early memories of growing up and becoming a painter. Britt (2005) recalled a boyhood growing up close to nature in tiny Ruleville in the heart of the Mississippi Delta: “I grew up literally on the bayou and in the woods and nature was very important to me” (p. 25). He also recalled being an indifferent student who “hated school” and was more interested in art and athletics than in academic subjects. Ruleville, a town with only a single stoplight and a population and economy that was dependent on the local cotton farming industry, is located about 10 miles from Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi where Britt would eventually spend his entire 35-year teaching career. It seemed of little importance to Britt that there were no art classes in the Ruleville public schools or other formal institutions for encouraging artistic interest or development. Britt recalled that the local sign painter, Robert Ellis Coleman, was the sole proof that a person could make a living based on artistic skill. Britt, who simply said that he had always liked to draw, remembered his early drawings were of cartoon characters and cowboys. He received encouragement from his mother and a few of his teachers and in high school served as the art editor for the school newspaper. While there were few early indications that he would go on to find a career as a respected painter and teacher, Britt recalled that he had decided in his early teens to become an artist, and he never wavered from that decision (personal communication, November 7, 2005).

Charlie Miller had been a friend of Britt’s since they met at the Memphis Art Academy in 1961. I arranged interviews with him on March 2 and May 19 of 2005. As I had with Britt, I began by asking Miller to tell me what he remembered of growing up and becoming interested in art. He told me that he was born and grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, and had been educated in the Memphis public schools. Like Britt, he also told me that he recalled an early love of drawing and that he had no doubts about becoming an artist. In his teens, he attended a vocational high school that had a commercial art department that offered instruction in drawing, lettering, layout, silk screening, and other techniques that provided him with solid technical skills in art. His teacher, George Piaggio, encouraged his interests and, upon his graduation, urged him to look into the Memphis Art Academy (became the Memphis College of Art in 1985). With his parents’ support, Miller entered the Academy in 1961, the same year as Britt, and they became a part of the first class in its newly built facility in Memphis’ Overton Park. Miller recalled that at that time, the Art Academy faculty was comprised of both working professional artists who taught part-time and full-time university-trained academics.

Britt and Miller were second-year students at the Memphis Art Academy in the 1962-63 school term when now-renowned portrait painter Nelson Shanks taught a portrait class as a visiting artist. There was high interest in what Shanks taught. Britt recalled that although he was
not enrolled in the class, he and other students monitored many sessions and a number of his friends, including Miller, took the class. Miller (2005a) explained this interest, telling me that “at that time, there were quite a few young artists who were disillusioned with the whole modern movement and we were all looking for someone who could teach us to paint realistically” (p. 1). What captured Britt’s (2005) interest was that “Shanks kept talking about this man in Provincetown, Massachusetts who painted like Monet and was a… great colorist” (p. 2). Miller said that although Shanks’ basic approach to realistic painting was tonal, he recommended Hensche as an authority on color and contacted him on behalf of the students to confirm that a group from Memphis wished to study with him. In early June, immediately after the conclusion of the spring semester, Britt and Miller along with three other students from the Academy, Howard McKenzie, Freddie Wagner, and Jerry Feinberg, drove to Provincetown, stopping at many art museums along the way.

For Britt, the journey represented not just adventure, but sacrifice: After one quarter of college at the University of Southern Mississippi with no art classes, he had dropped out to work, saving money to go to summer school at the Academy. By 1963 at age 23, he was already married with a wife and baby; thus he had to resolve issues of financial feasibility and personal responsibility before making a commitment to go. Britt (2005) believed that it was “either blind faith or stupidity on my part to go” (p. 23), but he also gratefully acknowledged that his wife, Linda, encouraged his journey and continued to support his study in the ensuing years. Except for stopping at museums along the way and one overnight stop in Salsbury, Maryland, at Howard McKenzie’s parents’ home, the group drove straight through to Provincetown arriving in the predawn hours. After napping in a public park, they set out to find Hensche’s home as soon as there was enough light to see. Although the home had been described as being “directly across from the A & P grocery” (Miller 2005a, p. 4), Miller recalled that it could not be seen from the road, and the group had difficulty in locating it. Miller also remembered that although Shanks had warned them not to disturb Hensche at home, the eager group found the place about dawn, waking Hensche and his wife, Ada Rayner, who, despite Shanks’ warning, greeted them graciously. Miller (2005a) described walking up to the rustic cottage surrounded by flower and vegetable gardens as being “like walking back into time” and “into a wonderland” (p. 4). Indeed, it must have seemed a world apart from the deep South. With a hint of self-irony, Britt (2005) commented about this first meeting that, to the young men, Hensche, who was then in his early 60s, about the same age as Britt is today, seemed to be about “500 years old” (p. 3).

Hensche put the young men in touch with Nathan Roach, whose family had formerly worked for Hawthorne. Roach rented a low-cost two-room cabin to them for the summer. The five students painted in the vicinity of the cabin for a few weeks until the summer term officially began in July. Hensche came by the cabin daily to talk, to offer criticism and, occasionally, to demonstrate technique. One day before the summer term began, Miller (2000a) remembered Hensche doing a small demonstration at the cabin using the same pigments that the students were using. He recalled that the result was impressive: “I guess that was the first lesson; it’s not the colors you have, it’s the combination of colors. We couldn’t believe that he was able to get the colors out of the [same] palette that we had” (p. 5). As soon as classes began, they moved to the small yard of the Pearl Street studio that had formerly belonged to Hawthorne to paint color block studies. Miller (2005a) remembered initial feelings of frustration with the work among the students: “At the end of the day, we’d have contests to see who could throw their studies the farthest” (p. 4).

From the accounts of several Hensche students (e.g., Britt, Miller, Deloach, Diket), it was apparent that the Pearl Street studio still resonated with the presence of Hawthorne. A number of his paintings were still hanging there, including a portrait of a woman with her face scratched.
out, which some students romantically imagined was the result of the jealousy of Hawthorne’s wife. Miller (2005a) also recalled that Hawthorne’s little book, *Hawthorne on Painting*, “was like our bible… we had all memorized every line from that little book” (p. 6). With such romantic mystique surrounding the studio, it is hardly surprising that a number of the artists recalled being awe-struck with being in the place where Hawthorne had painted. Miller (and also Diket) described the studio as divided into two large rooms; on one side was the room that was used by Hensche and his students, and the other side, its mirror image, was rented out to a succession of painters over the years. Miller (2005a) told me that when he and Britt first studied with Hensche, the Boston painter R. H. Ives Gammell (1893-1981), who had studied with William McGregor Paxton, worked there. Through further research, I learned that Gammell, who had his own small following of students, produced meticulous renderings of imaginative allegorical, historical, and literary scenes and was another artist out of step with painting’s modern mainstream. Broadly speaking, one could classify both Hensche and Gammell as painters of realistic subject matter, yet, Gammell’s linear, tonal approach was rooted in a tradition and lineage that could be traced back to French classical painting and Jean-Leon Gérôme. Gammell authored a book published in 1947 with the gloomy title of *Twilight of Painting: An Analysis of Recent Trends to Serve in a Period of Reconstruction*, and his teachings would become an important link leading to the present-day school of classical realism. Except for a realistic approach to subject matter, Gammell’s work was distinct from Hensche’s impressionistic alla prima approach to analyzing color shapes in sunlight. However, in the summer of 1963, when abstract modernism still reigned supreme, I could imagine the expressive and the classical traditions in realistic painting both struggling for survival, isolated in the metaphoric tide pool that had collected in Hawthorne’s old studio.

Britt and Miller each recalled that as the summer progressed, they settled into the routine of painting color studies all day and drawing or talking about painting at night. When he wasn’t painting, Hensche would talk freely on his ideas about light, color, painting, and the history of art, as well as such other recurring topics of socialism, and diet and exercise. Once a week on a Friday or Saturday morning, Hensche did a formal painting demonstration for the class. He talked with students individually about their progress as they worked at their easels, and at times, his instruction extended to taking over a student’s knife and palette to adjust the color notes in her or his study. Miller also recalled that Hensche would pose questions aimed at helping students discover for themselves the relationships among color shapes. Hensche’s individualized approach to instruction and critique allowed each student to progress at her or his own pace, and he insisted that students master one level before moving to the next. Britt (2005) told me that Hensche gave special attention to the beginners to start them off correctly, but in his last years of teaching, advanced students were permitted to help the less experienced ones. Gerald Deloach remembered a sign next to the studio door that said simply, “help each other” (personal communication, June 2005).

When the summer had passed, it was time to head south again to Memphis and the Art Academy. The students selected a few studies to take back with them, but Britt (2005), shaking his head at the memory told me, “we took truck loads of them to the city dump” (p. 4). On the trip south, they again stopped at museums along the way, and Britt (2005) reflected, “It’s interesting how differently we saw the museums and the paintings on the way back from Provincetown than we [had going up in June]” (p. 4). It appeared that the process of “learning to see” was working its changes. Britt and Miller would return to Provincetown numerous times in the years ahead, bringing with them others to join in what Miller (2005b) told me Hensche began to call his “Army of the South” (p. 46).
Once back at the Art Academy, Britt (2005) remembered that he and Miller were eager to share with other students both their experiences and what they had learned about the Hensche approach to realistic color painting, but at the same time, were discrete in doing so. As previously noted, abstract modernism dominated academia and both students feared that Hensche’s misunderstood ideas about realistic painting of nature based on observation might be dismissed as irrelevant or viewed as subversive and met with outright hostility by some faculty members. Even after 40 years, I sensed that Britt still felt frustrated talking about it. He believed that Hensche’s teachings about color and light were, and still remain “threatening” to both the traditional tonal painter and to modern abstract expressionists because of their lack of understanding of the approach. However, much as Hensche had when he encountered Hawthorne’s notions of color and light, Britt saw them as unlike anything that he had encountered before, potentially revolutionary for painting, and incredibly demanding of the painter. He explained to me:

Preconceptions won’t help you, knowledge of art history won’t help you, knowledge of traditional drawing won’t help. Nothing that you’ve learned in the past is going to help you. It strips you of everything, and you’re standing there, almost like you’re nude….

What people miss in the beginning is you’re not painting blocks, you’re not trying to use your drawing skills, you’re trying to learn to see. (Britt, 2005, p. 17)

Britt and Miller graduated from the Art Academy in 1964 and in the Fall enrolled in graduate studies at The University of Mississippi in Oxford. Miller (2005b) stayed for a month, then decided “I didn’t want to be a teacher, that I wanted to paint” (p. 25). Miller headed to Whittier in southern California where he lived for the next eight or nine months. During that time, he did little but paint and read books suggested by Hensche. He remembered that at the end of that year was “when I pretty well decided that’s what I was going to do” (p. 25).

While he was at the Art Academy, Britt (2005) decided that he wanted to teach painting. He told me his reasoning was that it seemed like a good career choice for him because he “enjoyed helping people” (p. 6), and with a family to support it would be difficult to rely upon painting alone to make a living. He also laughed, pointing out the irony that someone who hated school as much as he did became a teacher. Britt discussed a possible teaching position at Delta State College with Art Department Chairman, Malcolm Norwood, and he moved forward into his graduate studies at The University of Mississippi eager to use the ideas and approach to color that he had been learning through Hensche. With traces of a lingering frustration Britt (2005) told me that the initial proposal for his thesis, which centered on realistic still life painting, met with disappointing resistance from his committee and was dismissed with criticisms such as “it’s old hat, it’s been done before” (p. 6). Britt told me adamantly, “No, it’s never been done like this before” (p. 6). Britt’s mood seemed to darken as he remembered his recurring “trouble” with the art faculty who failed to understand his interests and goals. His second proposal to work with landscape painting was accepted

In his MFA thesis on landscape painting originally written around 1965 and recently revised after 2003, Britt outlined his understandings of Hensche’s teachings about light and color. In the thesis, he also articulated an artistic philosophy much in accord with the ideas of Hensche and Hawthorne, but colored with his own Christian beliefs about the purposes and responsibilities of an individual blessed with “God’s gift” of artistic talent. Like his predecessors, Britt (1965/2003) asserted that the artist strives to develop her/his abilities to reveal “the beauty to be found in the common place things” (p. 1) through creativity, which Britt believes “is an extension of God’s creativity” (p. 3). Linking artistic creativity with divine creativity was an idea
that was commonly repeated by Protestant theologians and in philosophies of art during the
nineteenth century (Veith, 2001). In a brief undated statement titled “The color visualist” written
prior to 1992, Britt stated his beliefs regarding the life purpose and personal responsibilities of
the painter that echo idealist non-materialist views of Hensche’s and Hawthorne’s code of artistic
integrity:

Painting should be about growing in your mind, heart, and soul; and sharing that
excitement of eternal discoveries with others. If we seek the superficial things in life:
titles, fame, and fortune; the hunger for beauty and truth dies. The pure joy of painting
and the spirit of learning will allow us to know we are still in love with the truth. (no
date, p. 2)

Also in his MFA thesis, Britt (1965/2003) cited the biblical parable of the sower,
comparing the sower to a teacher sowing seeds of truth that could only germinate and bear fruit
when they fell on fertile ground. Britt’s view was that it was up to the painter to prepare such
fertile ground within herself or himself to receive these seeds of truth. As a part of this
preparation, the painter bore responsibility for honestly assessing and accepting his or her own
limitations and willingly committing to the lengthy “discipline of learning to see” (p. 2). This
required the painter to learn to, “Look at everything as if it were the first time you ever saw it.
Develop an analytical mind. Learning to paint begins with learning to see” (p. 5). In the thesis,
Britt (1965/2003) also explained his understandings of the relationships of knowledge and
feeling with learning to see:

We are taught everything except how to see with an unprejudiced vision… . Only by
learning the language of light and color can we understand the visual truth. [However],
learning to see, and understanding what we see is not all there is to know about painting.
We must learn to feel as well as see the beauty in nature. The capacity for feeling can be
developed as we develop our visual perception. Our understanding of the truth allows our
expressions to become more poetic and spontaneous…. Knowledge should precede
feeling and direct it; on the other hand, knowledge without feeling is without soul. Faith
in an idea is not enough, but faith through understanding and experience supported by
endless labor in pursuit of truth will serve as the foundation for all good and honest
endeavors. (p. 4)

Britt’s statement seems to echo Chase’s notion that technical skill that is not animated by the
artist’s feeling or “greatness of soul” is somehow sterile or incomplete. It also evokes
Hawthorne’s call for students to become “poets” and “preachers” of beauty through their vision
and skill in painting and Hensche’s framing of painting as a quest for visual truth.

In a June 2003 interview with Julia Gravois for The Hensche Foundation Newsletter,
Britt recalled that in 1992 a few months before Hensche’s death, he had once more asked his
mentor for guidance: “I asked him, what he thought I should have worked on in my painting. He
advised, that I needed to become more poetic and spiritual” (p. 2). The rigorous logic of
analyzing color relationships within a light key that Britt had struggled to master for over 30
years was merely “language” for conveying the painter’s inner responses to the beauty of nature
in the visual world. Reflecting upon Hensche’s final advice, Britt told Gravois that,

I would like to become more individual, expressive and poetic in my works. It does not
change the concept of seeing and painting that I stand for. But I have to think now, what
do I really want to say with this beautiful language? What is inside of me that I want the
world to see through it? (in Gravois, 2003, p. 2)

Britt has taken Hensche’s final advice to heart, and he continues to grapple with this final
challenge by his mentor of expressing a “poetic and spiritual” dimension in his paintings.
Britt told me that he had joined the Delta State College art faculty in the Fall of 1966 just a few weeks shy of his 26th birthday. My research shows that Hensche also had other students who taught painting, most through private classes: Betty Warren in Albany, New York; Cedric and Joannette Egeli in Maryland; Dick Getz in Oklahoma City; William Draper at the Art Students’ League in New York; Dotty Billiu in Thibodaux, Louisiana. In his interview, Britt emphasized that he was the only one of Hensche’s students who taught painting in a state institution of higher learning. As a college painting instructor, Britt adopted Hensche’s approach to “the art of seeing and painting” as the foundation for his own teachings. From my own experiences, I remembered painting studies of colored blocks, bricks, and discarded pots and pans outdoors or in a well-lit studio. I also remembered Britt giving regular painting demonstrations. Hensche’s approach was the staple of Britt’s painting classes. The other painting instructor at Delta State in the 1960s, Stanley Topol, was an abstract modernist, offering students a distinctly different approach to painting. As one might expect in a small art department, most students invariably would take classes with both instructors, as I myself had done. Like his mentor, Britt offered students individualized instruction and critiques, and also like Hensche, at times he would take up the student’s brush or knife and palette to demonstrate a point by adjusting the color notes in a study. Although Britt advocated the use of the painting knife over the brush for beginners, I remembered that those like me who were stubborn about wanting to use a brush were permitted to do so. Britt told me that he was required to teach five days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., so making time for his own painting was sometimes difficult. Faced with the financial responsibility for a growing family, Britt supplemented his modest teacher’s salary by conducting drawing and painting workshops at any place within a 50-mile range of Cleveland, Mississippi. He laughed telling me that this once included a workshop at a pool hall in his hometown of Ruleville, Mississippi.

Britt (2005) recalled that in his years of teaching he had “quite a few good students” (p. 9) and mentioned the names of Richard Kelso, John Hamrick (deceased 1998), Johnny Sue Cleveland (Hamrick’s first wife), Pat Marberry, Ed Towles, Jerry “Duff” Dorrough, Duncan Baird, Gerald Deloach, and George T. Thurmond. Britt encouraged his more dedicated and promising students to seek out Hensche and the Provincetown experience. Inspired by the missionary zeal of Britt’s stories of the master who knew all about painting light and color, many of these students would find their way to Provincetown in the summers ahead. Through his work ethic, personal discipline, and steadfast devotion to this single approach to painting from nature, Britt became a model for the Hensche-Hawthorne ethos of artistic integrity and dedication for those students who wished to paint realistically. In his 35 years of teaching, some of his students would travel to Provincetown, but many others would be exposed to the Hensche-Hawthorne approach to color and light in painting and its ideas about truth and beauty in art through Britt alone.

The Impressionist’s bold quest to capture the effects of light on color in a fleeting moment of time revolutionized painting, and it was a necessary catalyst to the development of the Hensche-Hawthorne approach. However, for all of its similarities to Impressionism, the Hensche-Hawthorne approach also had some important differences. It was about the effects of light on color, but color as it describes form not the broken color or disembodied atmospheric light of impressionism where form is incidental. It combined Monet’s insights about light and color with Cezanne’s analysis of form. It was about applying an elevated perception of color to the modeling of solid 3-dimensional forms that the best traditional painters had so masterfully described with values through a tonal system. Every plane change, every “spot of color” described solid form within the transitory light key that enfolded it. Light and form were inseparable and, because of this, the approach demanded more logical analysis and more
precision of execution than Impressionism. These differences led Hensche to reject the label of impressionist in his later years, and to describe himself as a color realist. It led Britt to coin a new term, color visualism, to describe the new approach. In his interview for this study, Britt (2005) emphasized, “I’m not an impressionist, nor was Henry Hensche. We’re connected with the Impressionist movement… but Mr. Hensche took this idea further than Impressionism” (p. 5). Britt (2005) believes that “the most important thing I learned [from Hensche] is devotion and dedication to an idea” that was “totally different than what was going on in the realistic world of art” (p. 11).

Even today, after more than 40 years as a painter, Britt, who in accord with the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition regards himself as a lifelong student, is reluctant to claim expertise or to think of himself as a master. Britt (2005) explained to me, “I don’t think of myself as an artist” because like Hensche and others who were “involved with pursuing… the visual truth of what they were doing” he knows that he is “nowhere near” what he wishes to achieve with his life and his art (p. 28). Lifelong growth, not mastery, is a goal to which a painter can reasonably aspire. Anything further remains for others to decide in the course of time.

Charlie Miller: Seeing with One’s Own Eyes and Finding an Individual Path

Miller now lives and paints in the home he inherited from his mother in a working-class neighborhood in east Memphis. At our first meeting, I knew that as a contemporary of Britt, Miller must be in his early to mid-sixties, but he still wore the blue jeans and long hair that he probably wore as an art student. We sat at a small table in Miller’s kitchen dining area next to a window that looked out into his backyard. In the next room, adjacent to the kitchen, I could see numerous paintings were leaned against the wall. Miller smoked cigarette after cigarette as he slowly and thoughtfully talked about his memories and considered the questions I asked. He seemed pleased when he told me that except for about two years when he held “a regular job” at an arts alliance in Birmingham, Alabama, he had always managed to make a living with his artistic skills (Miller, 2005a, p. 62). His diverse commercial enterprises have included charcoal street portraits, painting commissions for hotel chains, murals and paintings of Memphis landmarks, and lettering and sign painting jobs. Miller (2005a) stated a pragmatic belief that “artists have always survived through their commission work” (p. 62) and that as long as he is using the tools of his craft, he is learning and improving his artistic skills. He said, “I always thought of my painting as a career that I could work on… much like an actor” (p. 64). His occasional commercial work pays the bills and leaves him with time to pursue his interests in fine art painting, his still life, figure, and landscape work.

Charlie Miller (2005a) told me that when he first began to study with Hensche, he observed that the very best students seemed to study for about seven years; therefore, Miller resolved to study for even longer. I interpreted his statement as one measure of his resolve to become a painter. He did, in fact, study for seven straight summers in a period between 1963 and 1973 in addition to other occasional visits to Provincetown. After returning from California in 1965, Miller told me that he spent several years in the late 1960s sharing winter quarters with other working painters who also were studying with Hensche. Learning to paint was not confined to summers but was his entire focus year round. Drawn together by mutual interests and limited funds, the groups of Hensche students—usually six or eight at a time—would rent a large old house with ample room for both communal living and a studio for painting. These communal spaces were most often in Memphs, but Miller spent one winter with a group in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Over the winters, the students would paint indoors and engage in collective study and shared research on painters and specific painting problems that Hensche had posed to them.
during the summers: establishing focal points, the recession of planes, aerial perspective, and human anatomy. Periodically, one student or another would receive a letter from Hensche and the group would work together to decipher his terrible handwriting and collectively read it. Miller (2005a) said, “he would write each one of us individually. And that was a big thing, any time we got a letter from Henry” (p. 52).

The primary advantage of wintering in the South was that it was possible to paint outdoors later in the fall and earlier in the spring than one could in the colder northern climate. The students would begin painting outdoors in early spring to heighten their color perception—Miller (2005a) termed it “get[ting] our color up” (p. 12)—prior to heading for Provincetown in June. Miller recalled that, “Henry always liked that because we were prepared when we got there” (p. 12). He also recalled that the atmosphere generated by the students’ energy and enthusiasm seemed infectious:

We had a very strong group of students. And to me, it was like Hensche was the captain of this old ship, this old studio, where whenever he would get a good crew together, then he would really take off with his teaching. We put a roof on the studio, we all dug a trench and put in water pipes…it reminded me…of preparing this old ship for another voyage. (p. 11)

Miller (2005a) told me he believed that when Hensche perceived a high level of commitment in his students, “he taught more” (p. 11). The notion of milder winters and a longer outdoor painting season apparently also appealed to Hensche to the extent that he inquired about the possibility of teaching at the Memphis Art Academy. According to Miller, he even went so far as to send 10 of his paintings to Memphis with Miller one winter to show to faculty at the Academy. Although his inquiry met with a cool response at the Academy, Miller told me that having Hensche’s paintings before him to study all winter was a real benefit to him. Miller (2000b) believed that Art Academy faculty was not interested in Hensche because they were “scared to death of his ability. They just did not want somebody that knew what they were doing around [the Art Academy]” (p. 47).

As it had been many times before, Hensche’s painting, out-of-step with dominant trends, was dismissed as the past, not the future of painting. Miller and a number of his others students (e.g., Britt, Robichaux, Thurmond, Diket) believed that Hensche occasionally must have felt a degree of disappointment or frustration with responses to his ideas in the art world, yet his faith in his own ideas was unshakeable. As a keen observer of painting movements, he was well aware of the critics and pundits who proclaimed that realistic painting was dead, and he was used to their regarding him as an anachronism. But I must speculate that Hensche, an ardent student of art history, had a broad platform from which he could view the progress, trends, and the timeliness of ideas in painting. If the pendulum had reached the apogee of its arc with abstract expressionism, it was only a matter of time before it would again swing back toward realism. When it did, Hensche and his followers were ready to show the art world what the future of realistic painting could look like. Whether or not each student entirely believed Hensche’s perspective on modern art and his predictions for painting’s future was not important: he was relentless, even dogmatic about his ideas, and he repeated them at every opportunity. Students could embrace his utopian vision or not as they chose, but while they were around him, they could not escape hearing about it.

Although there was some 40 years difference in their ages Miller (2005a), like a number of other students, came to think of Hensche as his friend as well as his teacher. Miller told me that it was not uncommon for Hensche to drop by his cabin late in the evening following a lecture or gallery reception and the two would talk far into the night. Hensche believed that the artist existed as an integral part of a community and, like a cobbler or other skilled craftsman,
provided it with necessary services, some mundane, some sublime. In return, the community supported the artist. As a result, Miller remembered that Hensche was delighted to learn that he had commercial skills with which he could support himself without relying on gallery sales of his paintings. Once Hensche showed Miller a little plaque with the image of a fisherman and “Provincetown, Mass” written on it, a tourist souvenir that he had made and sold for pocket money in his early days in Provincetown. On occasion, Hensche also joined students in drawing charcoal portraits at night for tourists on Commercial Street. Miller (2005a) believed it was, “to show that he was not above that type of thing” (p. 39). Hensche also told Miller that after Hawthorne’s death, he had helped Marion Hawthorne to sort through hundreds of paintings discarding some and painting Hawthorne’s signature onto others. It is likely that is when the faces on non-typical, substandard, or unfinished portraits were scratched out. Miller also recalled another time that Hensche told him he had repainted the mouth on Hawthorne’s 1920 portrait of Max Bolm because of some damage. From Miller’s account, it seemed to me that Hensche may have been an incurable idealist in his vision for painting, but like other local tradesmen, his approach to business was founded in old-fashioned Yankee pragmatism. Miller told me that consistent with his ideas about socialism, Hensche believed that fine art should be available to all, not just to the elite in a society. As a result, he would sometimes give away work to students that he otherwise might have sold for a good price, and he would set the price on work according to what he judged a buyer could afford. Students were also charged for instruction on a sliding scale according to their ability to pay: Hensche always found a place for anyone who sincerely wished to learn from him.

Ultimately, any serious painter reaches a point where she or he must cease being the master’s pupil seeing the world through the master’s eyes and begin to see the world through their own eyes. Over the years, I had heard a recurring criticism that the work of Hensche’s students all looked alike, and I wondered what Miller thought about the charge. Dogmatic as Hensche was about his own ideas and visions for painting, Miller (2005a) recalled that he disliked imitation, and Miller believed that Hensche wanted each student to find her or his own path. For several years after he had finished his studies with Hensche, Miller (2005b) went back to using a limited palette that included muted earth colors and fewer of the bright colors in Hensche’s “full palette” (p. 31). Intrigued by how great paintings of the past had been done, the problem that Miller had set for himself was to see how far he could go in describing his subjects through a different and more limited range of colors. Miller (2005b) was also interested in the psychological insights that could be revealed through portraiture beyond using a head or figure as a foil for light and color, or attempting a mere photographic likeness. Miller’s portrait of Bill Frost, a homeless man in Memphis, sought to express the harsh uncertainty of Frost’s physical existence in contrast to his peaceful, buoyant spirit. In its gravity and solidly modeled color, the portrait reminded me of Hawthorne’s work.

I was curious about Miller’s understanding of Hensche’s notion of “visual truth” in art. When I asked him what he thought that Hensche meant by “visual truth,” I found that he was somewhat cautious in interpreting it, rejecting any idea of ultimate or absolute truth “hidden out there under the trees that all at once you come across” (Miller, 2005a, p. 21). Instead, Miller saw visual truth, like color, as relative to its context and to the perceptual capacity and skill of the painter confronting it. I believe that Hensche (1988), who had contended that “The truth lies in man’s visual perceptual growth” (p. 65), would not have disagreed, although he had far more to say on the subject. His beloved Keatsonian equation of truth equals beauty suggested that for the purposes of the painter, perception was not merely important; it was everything. Just as an object cannot be seen except in the light key surrounding it, perceptual growth was the light that made it possible for the painter to apprehend and paint increasingly finer degrees of beauty and truth.
Miller (2005a) was equally cautious when I asked him about ideas connecting art with spirituality and whether he knew anything of Hensche’s views on this. He was willing to acknowledge his own perception of Hensche as being a spiritual person only in the sense that he “cared for other people,” but “not in the sense of being any kind of guru” (p. 32). Miller also offered his own theory that perhaps one reason some had attributed a spiritual dimension to Hensche and his paintings was because of his ability to see and paint “halations,” the subtle, diffuse glow of light that will appear to emanate from a subject or object seen in sunlight. Halations are a physical phenomenon, but one that those not closely attuned to analyzing light and color might easily miss. Miller believed that some people that observed Hensche painting the halation of a subject misinterpreted it as a mystical aura and, as a result, took Hensche for a spiritual seer.

For Miller, reconciling the gap between the purity of youthful ideals and practical applications in painting has taken time. For example, the dictum that a painter must look at a subject or object as if it were the first time s/he had ever seen it was a key notion that several other painters (e.g., Britt, 1965, p. 5; Kelso, 2005b, p. 3; Thurmond, 2005b, p. 24) in the study also discussed, attributing its origin to Monet. Hensche (1988) instructed students to develop “the habit of searching for each color as though that was the first time man had seen it and it had no name” (p. 36). In fact, according to Gombrich (1960), the notion of the “innocent eye,” which is frequently associated with Monet in reference to painting, was first proposed by the Victorian art critic John Ruskin in a footnote to The Elements of Drawing originally published in 1857. The notion draws on the speculation by British empiricist philosophers John Locke and George Berkeley about the experience of visual perception in a theoretical scenario in which a man born blind is then restored to sight in adulthood. That is, was “pure” visual perception unaided by experience and unclouded by preconceptions even possible? Miller (2005a), who subscribed to the notion as an inspirational ideal, had come to a contradictory realization that “you paint what you know, not just what you see. What you see is based on what you know” (p. 54). Hensche (1988) himself had once told a student, “no one is a visual virgin” (p. 13). Yet, the notion of the painter “learning to see” called for discarding visual preconceptions in favor of a systematic relational analysis of color as well as “the habit of searching for each color as though that was the first time man had seen it” (Hensche, 1988, p. 36). In his second interview, Kelso (2005b) remarked on the paradox of a painter needing both an innocent eye and cultivated knowledge and experience.

In his early years of painting, an equally insoluble problem for Miller was that of trying to wrest a particular moment of “visual truth” out of a flowing stream of change. He told me, “There was a time when I’d set up a still life… and we wouldn’t dare change that onion because its got a particular color to it. And sometimes we’d work on it so long that onion would start growing” (Miller, 2005a, p. 54). The problem was compounded by the vexing challenge of making peace with continuous changes in light key. A rigid purist, paralyzed by ideals, might never finish a single painting or be driven to give up painting altogether if such ideals could not be balanced with practical, do-able applications. Miller admitted that with experience, he has become more relaxed and pragmatic in his approach to painting.

Several of the study participants emphasized that logical study, the process that was necessary for perceptual growth, was an indispensable tool that demanded continual revisiting for any serious student. Robichaux (1998) in his book on Hensche had observed, “Even in his artistic maturity [Hensche] painted blocks” (p. 5). When I asked Miller to help me understand the differences between study and actual painting, Miller (2005b) explained that study is the identification and attempt to solve a specific problem in painting, such as the relationship of certain colors within a light key or the modeling of a particular form. He equated study with a
musician or a dancer practicing certain difficult passages or techniques, whereas painting he
compared to performance, the moment and place “where you put together all the things that
you’ve been studying or practicing” (p. 15). In an earlier interview on March 11, Thurmond
(2005b) had explained to me that the painter studies to expand her or his capacity for expression,
but that performance was needed “in order to have a clear understanding of where you are in
your studies” (p. 26). Thus, the painter studies in order to paint with greater clarity, authority,
and ultimately, to discover and reveal greater visual truths.

Miller believes that the challenge of solving self-defined problems in painting and
engagement with the creative process remains as fresh today as it was for him 40 years ago.
Miller (2005b) described his present experience of painting in terms consistent with states of
“creative flow” investigated by Csikszentmihalyi (1990): “It’s a lot like meditation. A lot of
times now when I paint, it’s like I’m turning something on and just watching it. I just watch my
hand do it” (p. 16). While this state of creative flow seemingly provides him with ample
emotional pleasure and intellectual stimulation to justify continued painting, Miller did not claim
his experience as being, in any way, a spiritual one. Rather, his personal concept of spirituality
seemed to view it as a state apart from and perhaps even at odds with the rational analytical
process demanded by the Hawthorne-Hensche approach to color.

Richard Kelso: Poetry, Paradox, and the Solitary Pursuits of Golf and Painting

Dick Kelso has no computer, no email, no cell phone, no answering machine, no heat in
his studio, and no job other than painting. His dealer at the gallery where I had gone to view
Kelso’s most recent work in December of 2004 told me, “he paints and he runs. As far as I know,
that’s all he does.” The dealer helpfully instructed me that in order to contact Kelso, I should call
him at home between four and five p.m. In our first telephone conversation, Kelso laughingly
described himself as “Spartan.” I arranged to interview him at his studio, located above Hal and
Mal’s, a popular restaurant and bar in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. Hal and Mal’s is in an old
former warehouse building that appears to have been modified very little to accommodate its
most recent function. To get to Kelso’s studio, one must walk through the foyer of the restaurant,
then ride an old-fashioned freight elevator up to the second floor. A huge portion of the second
floor is used for the restaurant’s storage, but there are a few smaller rooms adjoining the larger
space. A photographer rents one, and Kelso, another. The main room in Kelso’s studio struck me
as fairly small, approximately 12 by 24 feet, but with a soaring ceiling. At one end, a doorway
opened into a much smaller room that Kelso used for storage. Two windows, which constitute
Kelso’s primary means of temperature control and lighting, look out over the restaurant’s
parking lot toward State Street. The walls were lined with studies, paintings, still life objects,
quotations, and sundry tools of the painter’s trade. Canvases and frames hung from the dark
timbers in the vast overhead space. The studio was as tidy and as tightly organized as the interior
of a submarine. It was very cold in the studio, but the pungent scent of oil paint and mineral
spirits hung in the air.

In our first interview, I asked Kelso to tell me about his memories of growing up and
developing an interest in art. A native of Cleveland, Mississippi, the home of Delta State
University, Kelso (2005a) remembered frequently drawing and “doodling” in school and at home
from early boyhood onward. Like Miller, he would sometimes copy images or lettering found in
ads, and he realized as early as elementary school that his emerging skills and interest were
beyond the level of most of his classmates. There were no art classes offered at Cleveland High
School, but Kelso had little doubt about what he wanted to do: He declared art as his major when
he entered Delta State College as a freshman in 1966. Kelso said that Sammy Britt, who had
started teaching at Delta State in the same year, introduced him to drawing with charcoal, then to
painting with oils. Britt (2005) remembered that he had immediately identified Kelso and
transfer students John Hamrick and Johnny Sue Cleveland as “extremely talented” students with
a strong work ethic (p. 9).

Aside from painting, Kelso told me his other passions were golf and running, which he
apparently pursued with equal intensity and seriousness. Like painting, golf and running are
solitary activities that seem to suit his temperament. Although he no longer plays golf, at the time
of our first interview on January 17, 2005, he was reading a biography about his hero, golfing
great Ben Hogan. His interview was animated with the many parallels he had discovered
between golf and painting when they are practiced at their highest levels and the paradoxes that
they have in common. Kelso (2005a) equated seeing Hensche’s painting demonstrations with a
time when he was able to privately observe Hogan practicing for a tournament in Memphis,
Tennessee: It was the thrill of watching a master perform with consummate focus and skill.
Kelso said he could recall little about Hensche’s famously rambling discourses, which as a
teenager he had found “incoherent” (p. 19). More than any other single factor, Kelso attributed
Hensche’s influence on him to the masterful power of his demonstrations. His reaction is
reminiscent of an account in Wildenstein (1999) of Monet’s epiphany in watching a
demonstration by his first master, Eugéne Boudin: “I watched more attentively, and then, it was
as if a veil had been torn aside….I grasped what painting could be” (p. 18).

Kelso (2005a) identified 1968 as “the year that historians are still trying to sort out
because so much happened” (p. 17). It was marked by national uncertainty and impending
change driven by the ongoing civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the assassinations of
Martin Luther King, Jr. in April and Robert Kennedy in June of that year. Britt encouraged
Kelso, Hamrick, and Cleveland to travel to Provincetown to study with Hensche that summer.
Kelso (2005a), who was then in his second year of college, had never been far from home. He
remembered that he was, at age 19, more interested in playing golf and spending time with his
girl friend than he was in painting. A letter from Charlie Miller, whom he had never met, and
that had been written at Britt’s request, urged Kelso to go. Even so, to this day Kelso says he
remains surprised that he did so, saying that he had little money or reason to, but he still recalls
the day that he made the decision. He also remembered many details of that single, but pivotal
visit that sealed his determination to become a painter.

Kelso (2005a) told me how he, Hamrick, and Cleveland had followed Charlie Miller’s
tailights through the dark, dense Cape Cod fog to arrive in Provincetown and sleep on the cold
floor of Miller’s rented cabin. The “bohemian atmosphere” (p. 2) of Provincetown was a magnet
for painters, actors, writers, homosexuals, and eccentrics of every description, and Kelso
remembered that it was an exotic place for a straitlaced teenager from small-town Mississippi to
find himself. The next day, the group paid a call on Hensche at his home where, Kelso recalled,
the painters viewed and discussed Hensche’s studio work from the past winter, and to Kelso’s
astonishment, drank warm beer from six-packs that they never bothered to refrigerate. Kelso was
given summer quarters sleeping in the loft of the Pearl Street studio that had been inhabited by so
many penniless painters before him. After a couple of weeks of eating nothing but peanut butter
and banana sandwiches, Kelso was grateful to find an evening job as a dishwasher at a local
restaurant for the remainder of the summer.

Kelso (2005a) believes that the Delta State students of Sammy Britt that came to
Provincetown to study with Hensche were well prepared in the fundamentals of analyzing color
and light. He recalled that because of Hensche’s practice of gearing his teachings to the
individual student, “if you were doing pretty good he left you alone. If you were doing
something kind of stupid or counterproductive… then he would say something…. Some people
would get a lot of comments, other people would get virtually none” (p. 20). Kelso did not recall receiving many comments from Hensche. Still, he said the problem of “seeing for yourself and actually knowing what you’re looking at” (p. 21) took time to absorb, and it took even longer to attain the skill needed to execute it. Kelso (2005a) pointed out to me that a beginning student would try to see as many different colors as possible in order to learn. The problems that later confront a more advanced painter, however, are different. A more skilled painter, who is concerned with creating her/his “own poetry,” needs judgment and experience to make choices about what to select or omit, where to simplify, what to emphasize. Using the metaphor of art as language expressed by both Hensche and Britt, Kelso compared it to the difference between being able to spell and form sentences and being able “to write an epic poem or short story” (p. 25), that is, the degree of individual fluency in art’s “language.” When I asked Kelso how perception and technical skill related to the notion of “visual truth,” he said that he believes that skill or fluency alone is not enough. The painter also must keep in mind that

The thing itself and what you’ve got on the canvas, they’re two different things…. Sometimes we get a bit too committed to reproducing what’s in front of us and…. miss the art part of it. And you’re not transforming anything (2005b, p. 33).

Kelso (2005b) stated his belief that making a painting “live” requires going beyond the mere observable facts and “total obedience” to them (p. 29). The painter must simultaneously represent both the material world and his inner responses to it. Thus it would seem, for Kelso, the act of painting is an act of transformation: “There’s some kind of transformation that’s got to take place between the raw material and… the poetry” (p. 35).

The notion of transforming personal perception into visual poetry evokes Hawthorne’s call for painters to be “poets” and “preachers” of beauty. It also recalls Hensche’s discussion with Robert Frost about what it was that made a work rise to the status of “art.” Kelso (2005b), who told me that he makes a habit of memorizing Shakespearean sonnets both for pleasure and as a form of mental discipline, recognizes that an idea or an image gains power through articulation and embodiment. Still, why certain images and problems in painting demand his attention and a poetic response is unfathomable to him. Images that suggest complexity or unseen dimensions of ordinary experience and images that hint at mystery seem to speak to the poetic impulse in Kelso. I asked him what had inspired his series of Nocturnes—paintings done when light is nearly absent and color perceptions limited. These are confined to an austere palette and are nearly minimalist in form. Admitting to a romantic impulse, Kelso (2005b) allowed that, there is “a lot of poetry in that time of day” (p. 38), and said that one of his favorite times to paint is in early morning before the sun rises. Kelso believes that poetic impulse should not be ignored nor should the painter attempt to overly rationalize it. A fragment from the Burmese proverbs, one among many quotations tacked to his studio wall, summarizes the value of poetic passion for Kelso: “the verse will halt if the tongue is too true” (p. 35). As a parallel, he also quoted Thoreau’s advice to, “write with fury and correct the phlegm later” (p. 35). High on one wall in lettering that I could read from across the room was a quote from Shakespeare, “the readiness is all,” which he said was his pragmatic reminder that “you’re just going to have to put in your time and your hours before some of these things work” (p. 10).

Perhaps partly as the result of his view of painting as transformation, Kelso (2005a), like Miller, was cautious in offering his ideas about what constituted “visual truth” in painting when it was based on the subjective perceptions of the painter. He stated his belief that, “Nobody’s got a monopoly on [the truth], nobody’s going to actually encompass all of it” (p. 29). Instead Kelso (2005a) cited an idea about truth that he remembered nearly verbatim from Hawthorne on Painting (1938), “you don’t know exactly why something works, but you know when it doesn’t work” (p. 39; Kelso, 2005a, p. 32). Thus, according to Kelso, the painter is accountable for the
“truth” and integrity of only her or his own perceptions and responses to certain images, not for grasping the whole of some ideal or objective notion of truth. Moreover, I believe that his view of painting as a personal act of transformation is evident in his present method of sometimes working in the studio from rough color sketches, notes, and memories of a visual encounter rather than onsite directly from visual perception. It is a practice that he acknowledged would be regarded as heresy by some Hensche followers. Still, while he feels that direct visual encounter with his subject and acting on it while “the impression is still fresh and strong” (p. 27) is essential to his process, he also relies on the “coherence” of memory (2005b, p. 28) to retain what was “whole and complete and unchanged” (p. 29) about the experience. In the personal process Kelso described to me, memory is an active filter that preserves what was moving, engaging, or otherwise significant about his original encounter. He believes that, paradoxically, “in some ways, that one [memory] is more reliable than actually facing the subject and it changing day after day after day after day” (2005b, p. 29).

Both painting and golf are solitary pursuits requiring skill, imagination, strategy, keen perception, and intuitive responses to a unique set of circumstances that are never entirely duplicated no matter how often one engages them. Kelso believes that painting, also like golf, is rift with paradoxes. It requires maintaining a state of focus that is simultaneously “excited but calm”—Kelso (2005c) calls it a state of “equipoise” (p. 7)—wherein the painter must “have control, but also… relinquish control” (p. 5), being at once spontaneous and deliberate, reckless and careful (2005b, p. 7). Visual perception and technical skill must be integrated marrow-deep within the painter’s mental and physical being to the point that they become “muscle-memory” (p. 4). That is, painting must become an instinctive response that is like the golfer’s swing, which in an instant controls distance, direction, velocity, and trajectory while unconsciously factoring in obstacles, wind speed and direction, and ground pitch and hardness. A painting that seems to materialize on the canvas “fresh and wonderful and full of vitality” (2005a, p. 33) might be the painter’s equivalent of a hole-in-one in golf: not unheard of, but fairly rare. Kelso believes that the only way to attain such a level of mastery with any consistency is through a lifetime of sustained study and effort. The notion evokes Hawthorne’s (1938) wry observation that a good watercolor was a happy accident, but that great artists seemed to have such accidents with greater frequency (p. 83).

Kelso (2005c) described the state of creative flow that he experiences when drawing and painting in this way:

I can get in a state when I’m drawing…. It’s almost like dreaming. Something is happening but you’re out of the way. And when you stop drawing, you realize that you have had no sense of time passing, that you just kind of became one with the subject and you just let the eye and the brain tell you how to move the pencil…. You’re oblivious to everything else…. It’s a beautiful state to be in. Really active, really alive, all of your senses are up to a kind of a fevered pitch, but they’re under control. You kind of walk behind it and watch it happen. It almost tends to happen without your trying. (pp. 7-8)

Kelso (2005b) told me that he also believes that for most painters the practice of observing the visual world in terms of drawing or painting becomes an automatic, almost compulsive activity: I think every painter does it. Mentally, they’re always painting…. Even if they’re sitting having lunch in a café…. You’re talking to somebody, you’re looking beyond them half the time and mentally you’re drawing this person sitting at the other table. You notice the big light and shadow planes, the way the eye socket is on this person, the gesture of this person. And mentally you’re always doing it, it just never stops. It just never stops (p. 30).
The well-known anecdote of Monet’s obsessive impulse to capture the delicate blue tint on the lips of his dying wife, Camille (in Wildenstein, 1999, p. 146) was a story referenced by both Miller (2005a, p. 57) and Robichaux (1997, p. 10). Chase himself had referred to this same impulse when he said, “There is hardly a portrait painter who lives who does not paint in his mind every person whom he meets” (in Pisano, 1979, p. 50).

After college, Kelso served a four-year stint in the Air Force, then found a job teaching at a small community college in northern Mississippi. He taught for five years before deciding that he wanted to focus on his painting alone. Repeating an idea also expressed by Britt (2005, p. 35), Kelso (2005b) believes that the lifelong “learning curve” (p. 14) of the painter means that every day the painter gets out of bed knowing “they’re going to get whipped that day” (p. 15). For him, the daunting prospect of daily failure is balanced by hoping and imagining “that one day you’re going to be able to [paint] well” (Kelso, 2005c, p. 16). Still, Kelso believes that the final paradox of painting is that the painter never achieves true mastery, only “a deeper understanding of the problem” wherein “20, 30, 40 years later, the same problem is still there but it’s grown enormously” (p. 15). As a result, Kelso has found that painting “doesn’t get simpler, it gets more complex and more confusing and more mysterious the longer you do it” (p. 15). However, regardless of the frustrations and many uncertainties that go with the life of the painter, Kelso (2005b) said that, “There’s a great feeling in knowing that deep down you’re doing the thing that you were meant to do” (p. 15). When I asked him if his feeling of purpose or calling was in any way a spiritually satisfying one, Kelso replied, “This whole thing is a spiritual endeavor in one way because we’re dealing with beauty and expression and those intangible things that make life worth living. They get you out of bed in the morning” (p. 16). When I asked him what was the role of the artist in society Kelso said that he had never thought about it, joking that it was “beyond my paygrade” (p. 18). However, he is certain that regardless of whether or not he had an audience to view his work, he still would be a painter.

A further quotation that inspires Kelso (2005c) is from the early 19th century British landscape painter, John Constable, who wrote that his goal in painting was “To give one brief moment caught from fleeting time a lasting and sober existence” (p. 34). In many ways, it seems similar to and yet perhaps a more modest goal than that set by Hensche’s inspirational quote from Joseph Conrad that suggested the elusive possibility of capturing “all truth of life” in “a moment of vision” (see Chapter 4, p. 117). Even so, it is enough to occupy a lifetime of painting.

George T. Thurmond: Zen and the Art of Being the Tree

I drove to Starkville, Mississippi on January 15, 2005 looking forward to my first interview with George T. “Tommy” Thurmond. I had seen Tommy only once in the past 20 years at John Hamrick’s funeral, but I owned two of his paintings and knew him well enough to hope for a lively interview. Starkville, the home of Mississippi State University, lies in red clay hills in the northeastern corner of the state. My family and I had once lived there from 1979-1986 and a few times while we were there we drove out into the country to visit Thurmond and his wife, Laura, and daughter, Elizabeth. As I drove through Starkville and headed toward Thurmond’s place, I quickly realized that the city had grown outward to wrap itself around his once remote little house in the country. Reed Road used to be a rural blacktop flanked by cow pastures, but now upscale homes have sprung up on both sides of it. I remembered that Thurmond’s house was abandoned and being used for hay storage when he bought it and began renovating it in the mid-1970s. As I parked out on the road, I could see that the house looked abandoned once again. Bushes, trees, and weeds nearly hid its unpainted exterior and the windows facing the road were boarded over. I followed a path around to the back of the house and banged on the back porch
door. A hackberry tree had grown up next to it and was beginning to displace the porch and the back wall of the house. Thurmond greeted me warmly, invited me in, and we exchanged small talk about getting older, gaining weight, and the rapid passage of time. Inside, the illusion of abandonment evaporated; the place was warm, comfortable, and neatly organized. We settled into a small sitting room next to his studio where I set up my recording equipment. The walls were lined with many of his more recent landscape paintings. Their vivid, glowing color marked them as products of the Hensche-Hawthorne school, but their strength and boldness was Thurmond’s own. In poring over Thurmond’s first interview and two subsequent ones on March 11 and May 5, I kept coming back to a recent project that seemed to capture the scope of his goals and ambitions for painting. Therefore, I will begin with a description and discussion of this project.

The project was a series of 40 paintings. In our second interview, Thurmond showed me about half of them that were not already packed away or shipped to the single collector who had purchased the entire series. Each one was a study of the same tree at the edge of a pond from the same viewpoint at different times of day and in different seasons. It was a project that Hensche—or Monet—would have understood, but others might have thought a little crazy. Thurmond told me that he had divided each day into segments that spanned as little as 10 to 15 minutes for those “windows” that occurred in the fleeting light of early morning or late afternoon, and longer periods of up one and one half-hours for those nearer to the more stable light of mid-day. A study that was started on an overcast or sunny day was held until those conditions occurred again before it was continued. Spring and autumn, the seasons of most rapid change, were limited to a brief two to three week span. Summer and winter studies were done over a four to six week period: 10 paintings in each season for a total of 40 done over a period of four years (personal communication, Jul. 3, 2005).

I was intrigued: 40 paintings were created to study the quicksilver changes of light and color from early morning through dusk in each season. Seen individually, a single painting in the series may contain lovely, subtle, or luminous passages that convey the beauty of the painter’s extraordinary encounter with an ordinary moment before nature. But when they are viewed as a group, the paintings become a treatise, a manifesto that reaffirms Thurmond’s deep commitment to the Hensche-Hawthorne approach to painting light and color and his belief in the painter’s role as an instrument for revealing beauty and truth. The paintings also exemplify what Thurmond (2005b) believes that Hensche taught him about “going deeper” on “one road, on one path” (p. 30) causing “the eye and the mind and the perception to be led deeper and deeper and deeper into the visual truths” (p. 4). What Thurmond has found is that, “The deeper the truth that’s discovered, the more mysterious it is and the more beautiful it is. That’s something that Henry talked about, that truth and beauty are not separate things” (p. 4) just as “light and color are not two separate things” (2005c, p. 43). However, Thurmond (2005c) also remembered that Hensche’s advice about learning this approach to painting came with a warning that Thurmond should not start it unless you’re willing to pursue it all the way to the end. He said, if you go in a little ways and learn a little bit, it’s not going to help you one damned bit. You’ve got to go in all the way, you’ve got to penetrate it all the way and come out the other end of whatever it is this is going to teach you. (p. 24)

Thurmond (2005c) compared Hensche’s warning with that of the Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche when he admonished novice monks that to start and then to abandon the spiritual path would leave one haunted for life.

Thurmond seems fueled with the energy of an idealism that is undiminished in over 30 years of painting He conceived and completed the series as an exercise in seeing. It is a view in
the 5-acre plot that is his “backyard.” Thurmond is also an amateur botanist and, like Hensche before him, he grows an extensive garden of vegetables, herbs, flowers, trees, and other plants that appear in some of his landscape and still life paintings. Thurmond told me that he began studying Eastern thought in 1973 after reading *The Wisdom of China and India* by Lin Yutang and taking a class in Transcendental Meditation (personal communication, Feb. 19, 2006). Since 1995 he has been practicing Zen meditation with a local Zen monk and working toward being ordained as a Zen monk and priest himself. In the artist’s statement that accompanied his series’ 2004 exhibition at Mississippi State University, Thurmond (2004) wrote that his project was “created for the sole purpose of educating the painter’s eye and mind through the acquisition of visual knowledge”; however, it was also, “to make the painting student aware that it is possible to acquire that knowledge for themselves” (p. 1). I wanted to know how Thurmond had acquired that knowledge.

Thurmond (2005c) described himself to me as “a little fat cherry bomb” (p. 15) for his ability to provoke and exasperate fellow artists with his unyielding views about painting. I know that he has a reputation among his peers for his tireless energy and for occasional lengthy discourses on topics that interest him: painting, Hensche, Zen philosophy, gardening. In looking back on his life, Thurmond seemed to marvel at the unlikely chain of events that first led him to Hensche: an art scholarship to Delta State, Britt’s relationship with Hensche. Thurmond (2005a) told me about his first visit to Provincetown in our first interview. He had just recovered from a near-fatal motorcycle injury in 1967, when he and painter Gerald Deloach rode motorcycles the 1500 miles to Provincetown in August of 1969. Exposure to Hensche and his ideas, directly and through Britt and others, played a key role in the development of both painters. On that first visit, Thurmond (2005c) recalled that he spent most of his time listening, watching people, and asking questions rather than painting. Along with Britt, he credited Hensche students John Hamrick, George Copelin, and Charlie Miller, who he called Hensche’s finest pupil, as early influences. Still, he remembered that it was the direct impact of viewing Hensche’s work for the first time that he found most memorable. Hensche showed the class a group of his paintings from the previous winter, and Thurmond (2005a) recalled,

[The paintings] were phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. The most complexly beautiful things you could imagine. They were as complex as nature, but different…. Perceptually you recognized…. that there was a level of beauty and a level of poetry and a level of spirituality about what Henry did that was not what you would see in other people’s work. And even as a dumbass 19-year old, it registered with me. (p. 8)

It was here that Thurmond (2005a) told me that he was struck with the realization that, in spite of his love of pottery and drawing, he had decided to become a painter. It was “not to paint like [Hensche]… but to have that level of perception that causes you to be able to see beyond the mundane and the ordinary and the common” (p. 11).

He found a job busing tables at the Lobster Pot restaurant to earn funds for the return trip, but talking with other Hensche students and seeing first-hand Hensche’s painting demonstrations and finished work was the experience he took home to Mississippi. Following that first brief trip, Thurmond (2005c) began corresponding with Hensche. Thurmond would return to Provincetown again in 1970, 1971, 1973, 1985, 1986, and 1988, but because of the expense, most of his early visits were for only a week or two at a time. Traveling south less than two weeks later, Thurmond told me that he and Deloach, who were apparently oblivious to events outside of the world of painting, ran into the enormous traffic jam at New York’s Tappen Zee bridge that was generated by people leaving the legendary 1969 Woodstock music festival. Once he was home, Thurmond (2005c) immediately started to work on 13 studies, one for each hour of the day. It
would be another 30 years before Thurmond would attain the necessary vision and skills to carry it through successfully.

Painting is an expression of Thurmond’s lifelong relationship with nature and the beauty that he finds in it. Nature’s beauty and, therefore, its truth, which is before the painter and within the painter, are revealed through light, nature’s most dynamic and mysterious aspect. Light has been used as a metaphor for higher knowledge since ancient times, and Thurmond speaks of it in dual terms that may be alternately literal or metaphoric. In a self-published monograph from 1987, Thurmond wrote:

Of all the aspects of nature that a painter might choose to study, light is the most fascinating and spiritually fulfilling. Some have from childhood had a close even primal relationship with nature. I have found through painting studies of nature’s light a means to express that relationship. This same path of study can lead to revealing of the inner self. The truth is that one is continuously finding the inner self being spontaneously revealed in that vast mystery we label nature. (p. 5)

Thurmond (2005b) tells me that the painter is capable of grasping “the immediate truth of the moment… right now and right here” (p. 6) when she or he suspends conventional preconceptions and opinions that can cloud the innocent eye and prevent the painter from “seeing” the “reality that hovers around us, that presses in on us… [that] we refuse to see” (p. 30). It is the Zen notion of becoming an “empty vessel” (p. 13) open to realization. Thurmond also believes that the search for visual truth must be approached like “the blind man all of a sudden having his vision returned to him” (p. 24) whereas imposing a concept onto a subject is the painter’s equivalent of choosing to go blind. Thurmond’s (2005a) uncompromising view is that the painter who works from preconceived concepts or formulas rather than grappling with clear immediate perceptions produces “pictorial” decorative paintings that reflect “no struggle… no honesty… no integrity” (p. 28). Worse still, he believes that the practice of formulaic picture-making promotes stagnation and stymies the growth of the painter’s visual perception. Thurmond believes that it is a loss of idealism that causes painters to abandon a search for visual truth and to settle for common picture-making. By contrast, Thurmond maintained that, “Henry was an absolute idealist to the day he died” (p. 35).

The notion of revealing or discovering one’s self appears to have evolved in Thurmond’s philosophy over the past 20 years to reflect his study of Buddhism and Zen philosophy, which reject the notion of the separate and independent core of being that Western thought conceives as the self. Hensche’s notion of the progressive growth of vision is a something Thurmond (2005a) believes the painter can attain through a Zen-like suspension of self that opens up perception (p. 29). Elevated perception leads the painter always nearer to the oneness of outer and inner truths. Ego or self can block these perceptions, but in spite of it Thurmond (2005b) believes that,

Nature, the universe, is always offering us these gifts, but if the door’s closed, if the windows of perception are closed, they can be bumping up against it, knocking on it, ringing the doorbell and we still won’t see them, hear them, or have any experience of that thing. (p. 16)

However, as Thurmond (2005b) puts it, there is no “end game” (p. 7), no final point of arrival at some ultimate perfected vision or monolithic truth. He believes that truth is “absolute, but it’s fluid…. Tomorrow that truth will be of a different sort and possibly more profound. But it’s not a different truth, it’s a deeper realization of that fundamental truth on the part of the individual” (p. 36). The fact that any ultimate truth or perfected vision is unattainable “doesn’t make it less real” (2005a, p. 17). Painting can be a means for attaining deeper realizations that Thurmond (2005b) compared to the Buddhist “vehicles” (p. 29), the range of philosophical traditions, practices and doctrines that comprise the foundations of Buddhist thought and that are believed to open the
pathways to enlightenment. Framed in this context, observing and painting nature is not a materialist exercise in gathering isolated facts and “small truths,” rather it is a means for the painter to expand awareness so that the “larger” visual truth can be apprehended not in isolation but within the broadest context of being.

Thurmond (2005a) believes that because there can be no separation between “who you are and what you do” (p. 9), the painter must never conceive of his subject as a thing apart or separate from himself. In order to paint the tree, “you are the tree, and unless you are the tree, you have no perception of what it is” (p. 10). Thurmond cited Cezanne’s notion that the painter’s “perceptual mind must be in such a state and sensitive to the subject to such a degree that… the painter can be an echo of their subject” (p. 10). D.T. Suzuki, who has written extensively on Far Eastern philosophies for Western readers, teaches us that, contrary to Western concepts, the primary purpose of activities such as flower-arrangement, calligraphy, and the martial arts in Eastern cultures are not utilitarian or aesthetic, but to train the mind (in his introduction to Herrigel, 1953). Suzuki could as easily have been writing about Thurmond’s view of the painter’s act of painting when he wrote about Zen archery:

In the case of archery, the hitter and the hit are no longer two opposing objects, but are one reality. The archer ceases to be conscious of himself as the one who is engaged in hitting the bull’s-eye which confronts him. This state of unconsciousness is realized only when, completely empty and rid of the self, he becomes one with the perfecting of his technical skill. (p. viii)

For the painter to attain the order of luminous intensity that appears at one with nature such as that found in Hensche’s mature work, Thurmond (2005b) maintains that painters must put themselves in “the position of being struck by lightning” (p. 31). By this Thurmond means that it is up to the painter to immerse herself or himself in an environment where the discipline of painting can be practiced with the same mental and physical perseverance as that demanded by meditation. If the painter faithfully attends to simple elements of right practice and study, Thurmond (2005b) maintains that, “At some point, it all breaks open in and of its self” (p. 31). However, rather than “sit[ting] around and wait[ing] for inspiration,” Thurmond told me that it was well known among Hensche’s more dedicated students that “Hensche’s secret shortcut” to attaining perceptual growth and progress as a painter was “to work your ass off” (p. 17). He said that in the painter’s mind-body training, the hand learns where to reach for colors on the palette, how to mix, where to apply them “so that it doesn’t have to be thought about anymore” thus leaving “the perceptual faculties open to receive this revelation from nature” (p. 16). The dedication, self-discipline and hard work that are required in the process of becoming a painter turn into habit that Thurmond (2005b) believes eventually becomes “the reality of how a person lives” (p. 14). Even now, when Thurmond (2005a) paints, he says that he can almost hear Hensche “whispering” in his ear: “I think to me that’s what a good teacher is is somebody that ingrains [an idea] in you so deeply that you can’t escape it—you can never escape it, it becomes your conscience” (p. 42).

When I asked about the role of the artist in society, Thurmond (2005b) agreed with Hensche—and thus, with Hawthorne—that it is the duty of the painter to act as a conduit for conveying the truth of beauty to those of lesser visual perception (p. 32). The painter’s representations of the commonplace in which beauty is revealed satisfies what Thurmond believes is a basic human hunger to discover “the truth of reality” (p. 33). Thurmond (2005c) reminded me that Hensche believed that humans were hardwired with an innate capacity to recognize beauty (p. 29). From my own readings, I know that Hensche also believed in the power of beauty to elevate the human spirit. The way that the experience of poetic beauty in a
painting affects a person, according to Thurmond (2005c), registers with the emotions before the intellect. In this way, he says that the painting
draws us in, it suspends our mind, we react to it, we give ourselves to it completely to the point that there’s no self left. [While] we are suspended for that moment… that painting has caused us to recognize our deepest spiritual qualities. (p. 31-32)

Therefore, as Thurmond describes it, ideally, a painting can become that limitless spiritual ground “where the mind and the universe meet” (p. 32). And like the emotionally rich aesthetic experience of art, there is no way to account for it in purely rational terms.

It is Thurmond’s (2005b) belief that “Hensche was called to be a painter. That was his spiritual path in life” (p. 14). He also believes and states that other Hensche followers like him have experienced the study of light and color in painting as a spiritual pathway. Still, Thurmond (2005c) said that whether or not this is so depends upon the individual: “The idea of colored masses creating light keys can be as shallow and irrelevant and commercial as this individual’s personality and temperament or have the depth and profundity of the greatest spiritual thing that has ever occurred” (p. 28). Although Thurmond conceded that other Hensche followers might disagree with him and that even Hensche himself might argue otherwise, he believes that Hensche “was a Zen guy” (p. 44) and also “a very spiritual person” (p. 45). Thurmond’s (2005c) realizations about the potentially spiritual nature of Hensche’s teachings appear to circle back to the element of light:

What the old man taught us from the beginning is the absolute truth; there’s nothing that is not light…. Enlightenment is seeing or… being at one with the light: The luminous quality of knowledge, the luminous quality of being. And when form and light key and color and drawing and composition and design all converge at some point way off down there after all these years, it is one thing only; color. Luminosity that is interpreted by… this eye and this mind, as colorations that we see. (p. 25)

In our final interview, Thurmond (2005c) told me that Hensche gave him one piece of advice that was not about painting: He advised him not to teach. Hensche felt that his own development as a painter had been slowed and limited by the demands and distractions of teaching, and he warned Thurmond that teaching would waste valuable painting time. But Thurmond had also remembered that Hensche insisted that each of his students bore a responsibility to help others who might wish to know more about his approach to painting light and color. For the most part, Thurmond said he has followed Hensche’s advice. Except for two months that he spent teaching at Delta State University as a temporary replacement for Sammy Britt in 1996, Thurmond has avoided claiming the formal status of teacher. Young painters who are interested in Hensche’s approach will sometimes seek him out and stay to paint with him for a week or more at a time, but Thurmond refuses to take any payment for helping them. As he sees it, the teacher is a dispenser of knowledge, and her or his relationship with students is most often an unequal one. Thurmond prefers to view the help, encouragement and support that he offers to fledgling painters as simply one struggling novice extending help to another one.

Gerald Deloach: Learning to See and Avoiding Expectations

Gerald Deloach’s interview was conducted via email from January through October 2005 and a follow up question was answered in February 2006. Direct quotations and specific information from the emails are noted according to the date the email was received. The complete texts of the emails are compiled in Appendix F. During 2005, I visited Deloach at his rural home and studio in the spring and then again in late summer. His home is several miles down a straight rural blacktop east of Alligator, Mississippi on Highway 61. There are few
houses along the road, and they look like they have been there for many years. From a distance, Deloach’s place looks like an oasis, an island of green trees rising up out of flat, cultivated earth. The walls of his home are filled with his paintings, common objects and ordinary vistas made extraordinary by his rendering of light and color. Like other artists I know, Deloach has his hand in many projects when he is not painting: raising the ceiling in his living room, building a chicken coop as a birthday present for his wife, constructing an arched bridge over a ditch on one side of the yard, making a replacement wheel for his lawnmower because he thought the one at the hardware store was priced too high. We walked across his bridge into an adjacent field that was once cultivated for soybeans or cotton but is now planted in hardwood saplings. He led me along a path that followed a small bayou to point out some of his favorite vistas for landscape painting. Deloach seems to have changed little from our Delta State days. His hair has thinned and grayed a bit, but he is still thin, lanky, easy-going, and quick witted. The following narrative is written from Deloach’s email responses to a series of questions I posed to him as well as details that I learned during my visits.

Gerald Deloach grew up in the small rural community of New Africa not far from Clarksdale in the Mississippi Delta. It is about an hour’s drive north of Cleveland, Mississippi, where Delta State University is located. His parents ran a small country store out their home and farmed cotton. Deloach and his wife now live on the family land, and one of his brothers lives nearby. The only pictures that Deloach remembered seeing in his family home were photos of relatives, calendars, pictures in magazines, and the engraved illustrations in his grandmother’s bible. He also remembered comic book art and “being truly frightened” by horror comics. In the post-WWII era of his elementary school days, he drew battleships, planes, and tanks and remembered doing “some criminally bad watercolor copies of photographs.” In high school, his interest led him to take art and join the art club. Though he enjoyed drawing, he felt that he lacked the draftsmanship skills to ever consider it as a career or a serious field of study (personal communication, January 24, 2005).

When Deloach entered Delta State College in 1966, his family encouraged him toward a “practical” field of study. Like one of his older brothers, he chose business and accounting because he had discovered in high school that he had an aptitude for bookkeeping. As others have found, aptitude is a hollow substitute for genuine passion, and by his fourth semester, Deloach had discovered a more satisfying talent for problem solving in design through a required art elective. Stan Topol, who taught basic design, was an abstract expressionist who organized the elements and principles of art into specific design problems. Topol offered him encouragement and suggested that Deloach had a good intuitive sense of design. As a result, he decided to change his major to art. Skill in drawing realistically was not needed to succeed in the area of design, and as another bonus, Deloach found that he enjoyed the lively company of other art students. He also remembered that “there was a smell of Freedom in the air” during the freewheeling 1960s when all things seemed possible (personal communication, January 24, 2005).

The two opposing camps in the Delta State Art Department, the modernists and the traditionalists, emphasized different concerns. Expressions of individually, originality of concepts, and experimentation with media where “craft was learned on the fly” were aspects of the modernist camp that attracted Deloach. However, although he had “a great deal of respect for the innovative pioneers of modernism,” he had none for their imitators. The lack of foundational skills and often “disgracefully distracting” lack of craftsmanship in the modernist camp left Deloach with the uncomfortable feeling that “there was some concrete knowledge that I needed to learn... like how to draw and paint realistically” (personal communication, February 1, 2005). Sammy Britt, leading the traditionalist camp, emphasized developing control of media and a
vocabulary of color through practicing drawing and painting from life. Deloach felt that the foundational skills he desired, which seemed "unattainable through pure experimentation," could be learned with Britt who guided students to observe relationships of color and to produce unfinished studies that were not based in drawing. After his initial exposure to Britt’s teachings and his paintings, and to seeing slides of Hensche’s work, “I started noticing colors in nature that were unavailable to my conscious mind before being exposed to this approach to painting.” (personal communication, February 1, 2005). As his sensitivity to color increased, he found that object consciousness dissolves into color shape consciousness. I became fully engaged in solving this puzzle of color shapes describing 3-D forms buried in volumes of light, atmosphere, reflections, and glows. I began to see a previously unknown world of perception. I asked myself, “If this was invisible to me before, what else still is?” Mucho grande. (personal communication, February 1, 2005)

The first piece in solving the puzzle of color was in learning to observe colors without reference to the object’s local color; that is, the general color name used to describe it (e.g., the ball is red). For example, Hensche's teachings pointed out that, in a red object, the visually observed colors might be yellow, orange and purple, yet the mind might still identify it as a "red object." Deloach recalled that “the realization that I had been led to observe color in a different way opened the question of what else have I overlooked?” (personal communication, May 31, 2005). Through painting from nature, Deloach has found that direct color perception can offer surprises that seem to contradict reason. For example, looking at a cobalt blue vase, I see red violet in the light plane…hmmm, using red to express blue. I would never have considered that possibility solely from painting from memory or imagination. (personal communication, July 17, 2005)

As Hawthorne (1938) observed, “there is nothing so surprising as truth” in a painting (p. 72). Deloach learned that exaggerating elements of pure color resulted in paintings that “expressed the vitality of things observed in sunlight.” Still, he also realized that “If you look for some particular color pattern, well, heck, you will find it” (personal communication, July 1, 2005). One result of the Hensche preference for using strong, saturated color was that “one begins seeing nature in that way” (personal communication, July 17, 2005). Expectations affect what one sees, thus for the painter “it is a struggle to be vigilant of one’s expectations while painting and to overcome them for the sake of true observation… to abandon formula for the honest observation” (personal communication, July 17, 2005).

Like other students of Sammy Britt, Deloach was prepared not only in the basics of the Hensche-Hawthorne approach to painting light and color, but he was also thoroughly schooled in the lore of the tradition by the time that he made his first visit to Provincetown in 1969. Deloach was initially impressed with Hensche’s enormous physical energy. Hensche, a small, sparsely built man who was then about 70 years old, walked everywhere he went and moved like a man in his twenties. He was alert, quick-witted, and he could talk for hours about painting, socialism and the ideal society, being Hawthorne’s assistant, and proper diet. Hensche was a devout follower of the Hay diet, a food-combining regimen, and his only apparent vice was that he would occasionally drink to excess with his students. Deloach was introduced to Hensche’s ideas about the artist’s role in the evolution of human visual perception, which Hensche felt “had been derailed by the modernist movement” (personal communication, June 23, 2005). Deloach believes that,

During a time when the academic institutions were encouraging freedom from the “anachronistic” confines of realism, Hensche was pushing the envelope of understanding visual perception via painting tabletop still lifes that he arranged in his back yard. (personal communication, June 18, 2005).
Deloach further confirms that Hensche “felt that what he was doing in his own work was on the cutting edge of the real evolution of art” (personal communication, June 23, 2005).

Other ideas that Hensche hammered on regularly included commitment to discipline and craft, “the historical quest to understand Beauty, the development of a selective eye,” and Painter’s Hell where Picasso was sure to end up (personal communication, May 31, 2005). Hensche would watch new students carefully to determine their level of visual development. As Hensche came to know each student’s level of development better, “his instructions would become more individually specific” (personal communication, May 31, 2005). Sometimes when Hensche was instructing one student, other students would drift closer to listen. Much like the Zen master that Thurmond believed Hensche was, “he would admonish the listeners that what he was telling a student was meant for him or her only and for [others] not to attempt to apply it to their own situation” (personal communication, May 31, 2005).

The logical beauty of Hensche’s approach to color analysis was that colors were always judged in relation to surrounding colors: warmer or cooler, lighter or darker, saturated or neutral. Deloach called it a process of “coming to terms with a discipline of accuracy” (personal communication, July 14, 2005). The beginner was told to always start with the most easily seen, most obvious color mass and to state it boldly, exaggerating the purity of the color note. Then the student proceeded to each adjacent color note in turn while leaving a bit of the white board showing around each mass. Once a color note had been established for every mass in the composition—no more than about half a dozen in all—the painter would step back to reconsider the relationships of light and shadow, spatial placement, and color that expressed the light key. The masses were then refined and improved for a second or even a third time before the painter could begin to model the variations of color within a mass that describe its 3-dimensional form. If at any time the student could not see or mix a color, or became puzzled about relationships, it was time to abandon the study, set up another still life and start over: “A beginning student was taught to make countless starts” (personal communication, June 20, 2005). “Being truthful with one’s own understanding” (personal communication, June 28, 2005) was essential to progress. Only when a student was capable of making consistently strong starts was s/he encouraged to move on to modeling the masses. Even then, the rule was still “Keep to the masses” (personal communication, June 20, 2005). This meant that the logic of the light key that had been established with the first color notes must not be abandoned or destroyed in modeling. Once the student could “successfully model a block, and was able to paint a white block in sunlight in a colored manner and have it create the illusion of a white block in sunlight” (personal communication, June 20, 2005), she or he finally could attempt the problem of modeling rounded objects.

As it was with the other painters I interviewed, the Saturday morning painting demonstration was Deloach’s most convincing evidence that Hensche’s way of seeing and analyzing color within a light key really worked. Deloach recalled that,

Sometimes the sun would go behind the clouds and Henry would step back and look at the sky, and decide what was about to happen. If he thought it was going to stay behind the clouds, he would go back and change it to a gray day scheme. He would paint for three hours and it was impressive how much he could get done in those three hours. (personal communication, June 18, 2005)

Hensche expected his students to be serious about learning and diligent in their efforts. One way that they could demonstrate their commitment was to follow his instructions. However, Hensche would offer students a specific correction only twice; if they failed to follow his direction after the second time he mentioned a point, he would never bring it up again.
The students that Deloach met at The Cape School of Art were from “Yale, Harvard, California, Florida, all with a story of how they had managed to arrive in Provincetown in search of some real knowledge of the practical matters of painting” (personal communication, May 31, 2005). Levels of commitment among these students varied. There were those who were there to enjoy casual summer study in a picturesque New England fishing village, but the ones that Deloach remembered best were those “who were fighting tooth and nail to understand how to use color in the manner that Henry taught” (personal communication, June 22, 2005). The most committed students would be in the yard by 7 o’clock each morning to claim a still life table with sunlight on it, and “they would be found reading about art if they weren’t making it” (personal communication, June 22, 2005). Deloach remembered “riding in a car with [painter Peter Guest], and we were trying to note the difference in the perceived color of the yellow center line, near and far” (personal communication, June 22, 2005). John Hamrick and Charlie Miller, who were by then enthusiastic veterans of the Army of the South, offered encouragement and inspiration. Deloach felt that “It was a tremendous experience being around so much directed energy” (personal communication, June 22, 2005).

Sooner or later, the practical question that every painter must confront is that of selection and interpretation. The painter’s earlier struggles to see color and cultivate a finer perceptual awareness give way to questions of what to do with this heightened ability. Like other painters in this study, Deloach has gone through periods where he has experimented with painting “every little color variation I could see or imagine” only to find that “the strength of the painting is lost in busyness” (personal communication, June 22, 2005). Over time he has found that in his own paintings, vitality and poetic expression are more likely to result from “a few carefully chosen colors and shapes [that] capture an essence” (personal communication, June 22, 2005). In this respect, he believes that the painter’s “intuitive senses are educated by our conscious experiential doings” thus “the happy accident” is no accident at all: “We learn to be intuitively selective from our personal history of study and learning in addition to our genetic inclinations” (personal communication, June 22, 2005). Painting from nature “what is out there in front of my eyes offers a great mystery from which so much else proceeds” (personal communication, July 14, 2005). To the extent that Deloach feels his painting is “guided by something outside of rational/conscious thought process” he is willing to characterize his pursuit as a spiritual one (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Most recently, Deloach’s awareness that concepts of what one is supposed to see can subtly alter perception, and his exposure to the work of painter Russell Chatham has led him to again reflect upon the relationship of expectation and vision. Chatham’s approach to color in painting might be described as antithetical to Hensche’s. Chatham, a landscape painter from Montana, uses an extremely limited palette of only nine colors that include no red-violets or violets. Chatham’s use of limited color results in compositions that are “very quiet and unified” and yet that “manage to capture the emotional essence of certain light keys” (personal communication, July 1, 2005). The paintings appear muted, often saturated with earth colors; yet they establish a powerful sense of light in atmospheric space. The “shockingly different viewpoint” presented by Chatham that seemed “true in its quality” challenged Deloach’s most basic beliefs about the ways of seeing and painting color and light in nature that he had learned from Hensche. Deloach wrote, “After seeing [Chatham’s] work, I began to realize the ways in which the Hensche approach to painting also acted as a filter and thus, at some level, censored true vision. That is not to say the approach is flawed” (personal communication, October 15, 2005).

Deloach went on to elaborate that the heightened color resulting from Hensche’s “process of pushing for strong color differences across the picture plane/motif leads the painter into
expectations [italics added] of an appearance that is sometimes incongruent with the physical visual reality” (personal communication, February 28, 2005). Having been taught to see color in nature in this particular way, the painter may be “psychologically inhibited from bringing these strong colors down to a more neutral accuracy and ends up with an unrealistic over-colored painting, which is a formulaic interpretation” (personal communication, February 28, 2005). As a result of his reflections, Deloach has come to believe that the Hensche approach to painting color and light “is a beautiful way of seeing color, albeit that it may be somewhat contrived or conforming to a recipe of seeing” (personal communication, July 1, 2005). In other words, Hensche was right; we do see what we are taught to see. However, learning to see in one way also can limit one’s ability to see in other ways. As a personal reflection on his own perceptions of color, Deloach offered,

I have noticed that, after a day of painting, I am acutely aware of the color. It appears to be clear and definite, as opposed to a day that I am taking care of the mundane business of life; then the colors seem drab in comparison. I think the truth of color is probably that it is always has to be a subjective interpretation. (personal communication, July 1, 2005).

Provincetown Moves South: John Robichaux and Chris Diket in Thibodaux, Louisiana

How Hensche’s Provincetown Cape School of Art ended up nearly 1700 miles south in Gray, Louisiana is the result of another chain of chance events. Since 1930, students had come from all over the country to study with Hensche in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Dotty Billiu, who taught private painting classes at her own Studio One in Gray, Louisiana near Thibodaux, began to study with Hensche at the Cape School of Art in the mid-1970s. According to John Robichaux (personal communication March 6, 2006), it is likely that she knew of Hensche through Martha Ambrose, a friend who taught painting in New Orleans and who had studied with Hensche in the late 1940s. In 1972, Billiu took a summer painting workshop with Wallace Bassford in Connecticut but decided to take a day off to drive out to the Cape to meet Hensche and see his work. The following summer in 1973, Hensche was invited to come to Louisiana to teach workshops for one week each at the studios of Ambrose in New Orleans, Billiu in Gray, and Millie McKnight in Broussard. Impressed with the influence of Hensche’s teaching on the work of other painters she knew, Billiu then decided to go to Provincetown to study with Hensche directly for several summers beginning in the mid 1970s. Shortly after that first visit, Hensche began coming to south Louisiana in the winters to teach workshops, and he would stay for several months at a time. A romance blossomed between Billiu and Hensche, and the two were married in 1986.

I first learned of John Robichaux in the course of my research through his 1997 book, Hensche on Painting: A Student’s Notebook, which was based on audio-taped interviews with Hensche in the late 1980s. Like its model, Hawthorne on Painting (1938), it is a small book, but it offers valuable insights into the painter. When first I contacted Robichaux about participating in my study, I found that he was willing to do so and also very helpful in suggesting possible subjects for a pilot study. Through Robichaux, I learned of Chris Diket, who was unavailable for the pilot but who agreed to participate in the main study, and portrait artist Jane Block, who I interviewed in the pilot study. For the convenience of both Robichaux and Diket, I agreed to conduct the interviews at Robichaux’s home.

Thibodaux, Louisiana is located a little over an hour’s drive southeast of Baton Rouge and an hour southwest of New Orleans deep in bayou country. Highway 308 follows the Bayou Lafourche for miles through tiny towns and flat, green fields. Robichaux’s home is about a block
It was a Friday, January 7, 2005 and Robichaux and Diket, both teachers, were back in school after the Christmas holiday. Robichaux had told me what time I could expect them back at his house. The two subsequent interviews on February 4 and March 13 were also scheduled on Friday afternoons to accommodate their teaching schedules. Arriving a few minutes early, I sat in Robichaux’s driveway making notes until he and Diket got there. Robichaux, a stocky balding man, welcomed me with a sonorous voice and confident, genial manner that I could imagine dominating a classroom. By contrast, although he was just as congenial as Robichaux, Diket, a small, youthful-looking man, seemed boyish and a bit shy. We entered the house through the garage and the kitchen door. Since the death of Dotty Billiu and the closing of Studio One in 2002, John Robichaux’s Thibodaux home has been turned into what amounts to a private museum filled with Hensche’s paintings, drawings, letters, and personal artifacts. Robichaux is Board Chairman of the Hensche Foundation, an organization that was formed after Hensche’s 1992 death to protect and preserve his work and to educate the public about his contributions to American painting. Robichaux teaches high school history and civics, humanities, and fine arts survey courses at Thibodaux’s Edward Douglas White Catholic High School, and Diket teaches art there. Robichaux has a small studio in his backyard where he paints and teaches painting to private students. He has also taught summer painting workshops at Studio One and in New Mexico.

Before the interview, Robichaux took Diket and me on a tour of the collection. I was eager to see Hensche’s work first-hand, and Robichaux was enthusiastic about showing it to me. Diket, who had seen all of it many times, was eager to see it again, too. Robichaux told me that some of the work is part of his personal collection, but much of it belongs to the Hensche Foundation. The work occupied much of the wall space throughout the home, even in the bathrooms. Hensche’s self portrait as a young man that is on the cover of Robichaux’s book and Hawthorne’s profile portrait of Hensche that is on the cover of Hensche’s 1988 book hung in a hallway along with other works. There was a marvelously precise little pencil drawing of Ada Rayner by Hensche after the style of Hans Holbein. Robichaux told me that when Hensche was “courting” Ada, who revered Holbein, he drew it to impress her. Robichaux also showed me a closet that was filled with paintings, books, and the personal papers of Hensche and Ada Rayner, who died in 1985. I could scarcely believe the wealth of materials that were warehoused there.

Robichaux suggested the dining room as a good place to conduct the interviews, and I agreed. More Hensche work, including a sunlit portrait study of Robichaux’s wife, Sandra, filled the walls. As I set up the recording equipment, Robichaux joked that he was “a little bit of a nut about all things Hensche” and that he might talk for hours on the subject. I laughed and told him, that was fine.
Christmas and registered him for lessons with Billiu at Studio One. About a year later when Hensche arrived to teach his first workshop at Studio One, Robichaux was unable to attend, although he says he was intensely interested in learning from Hensche. However, in subsequent years, as Hensche returned to Louisiana for longer stays, Robichaux arranged for lessons and critiques with him. Then, in 1981, Hensche invited Robichaux to join him in Provincetown to study for the summer. Although by then Robichaux had a two-year son, his high school teaching job left him with time in the summers to pursue his passion for painting, and he could not resist the opportunity to study with a master. Robichaux spent three months in Provincetown that summer, painting with Hensche and quartering in the loft of the Pearl Street studio. As the result of his study with Hensche, Robichaux (2005a) stated unequivocally, “it changed my view of everything that I looked at from that time on” (p. 5-6). Since that time, he has never studied with another painter, and he has become the self-appointed guardian of Hensche’s legacy. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that Robichaux, as he had warned me, liked talking about his most passionate interests, Hensche and art history, far more than he liked to talk about himself.

The story that Robichaux (2005a) best likes to tell of Hensche is one that illustrates the depth of Hensche’s unflinching devotion to his lifelong quest to solve the problems of light and color at the heart of painting. In his last years, Hensche was in a nursing home, bedridden and debilitated by Parkinson’s disease and strokes that had left him unable to speak clearly. One time when Robichaux went to visit him, he remembered that Hensche held up five fingers spread in front of his face in an insistent gesture. Robichaux said he knew what Hensche was trying to say because he had heard it from him many times before: “If I just had five more years, maybe I could figure it out” (p. 9). Even Hensche must have known that it was an impossible wish. As Robichaux pointed out, “his whole goal was the elevation of vision. That means that you never do arrive…. Painting is not about arriving, painting is… all about the journey and becoming, never about the final place” (p. 10). Hensche had followed a single idea with unswerving devotion for his entire adult life, yet in the end, the journey still beckoned. As Thurmond (2005a) had put it, “Henry was hungry to the very last minute” (p. 19).

More than anything, Robichaux (2005a) seemed to admire the logical rigor of Hensche’s approach to analyzing color and light: It was neither a “how-to” approach nor was it about making “pretty pictures.” It was based on observation rather than imagination, and unlike creativity, Hensche’s approach to seeing and painting was a teachable skill. It was also revolutionary in its simplicity. According to Hensche (1988), the way that we visually perceive the world is first through colors, then shapes, and finally edges. The conventional approach to realistic painting has been exactly opposite: It began with drawing the edges as lines, letting lines define the shapes, and the color was filled in last. Robichaux thinks that the genius of Hensche and Hawthorne was that they devised a way to teach realistic painting based on the way that we actually see the natural world. However, Robichaux also believes that most casual followers of Hensche have it wrong: Hensche’s approach was not only about representing light, it was also about form. It combined Monet’s insights about light’s effects on color with Cezanne’s analysis of color that changes with every plane change in a solid form. It recognized the multiple realities of color that is affected by changes in light, form, and distance. It prepared the student to use a vocabulary of color that existed under a range of natural lighting conditions and to solve, rationally, the problems of color relationship in painting. It was a means for the painter to attain lifelong perceptual growth and progress by learning to teach himself or herself. In Robichaux’s (2005a) assessment, “in the entire twentieth century there’s been only one painter who has elevated visual understanding…. Hensche bridged the gap between Monet and Cezanne” (p. 31).
Robichaux (2005a) told me he has no doubts that Hensche’s single goal every time he stood before an easel was to solve a problem of visual logic. It was never to create visual poetry or to capture beauty; those qualities were incidental, only by-products of the painter’s visual perception and her or his search for visual truth. Neither was Hensche’s purpose “to satisfy some emotional need” (2005c, p. 10) for self-expression. In Robichaux’s (2005c) analysis, the paintings often are beautiful “because light is beautiful” but not because Hensche intended for them to be beautiful (p. 12). It was the logic and rationality of Hensche’s analysis of color and light that produced their beautiful truths. If truth and beauty were indeed the same thing, then truth was enough; if it was true then it could not help but to be beautiful. Thus, Robichaux always tried to begin his own paintings in the same way, not to create beauty, but as an exercise in rational problem solving, and this is also what he emphasized to his own students.

Nor did Robichaux (2005a) believe that Hensche was attracted to nature’s beauty as such, but only to the infinite variety of visual problems it could present to him. Robichaux offered me evidence that one time he and his wife Sandra had taken Hensche for a ride to view a beautiful swamp in the early spring, but said he “never really looked at it because Henry didn’t really care about a pretty scene” (p. 22). Hensche embraced Hawthorne’s notion of “seeing beauty in the commonplace.” This meant that beauty entirely depended upon the painter’s capacity to see and thus to represent its truth. An old shoe or a pile of rubble was as good as a bouquet of fresh flowers. Yet, I cannot help noting that the objects in Hensche’s finished still life paintings, besides acting as foils for light and color, are beautiful objects in their own right: colored glass vases, delicate Chinese figurines, lustrous copper vessels.

Nonetheless, many of the amateur painters that took lessons with Billiu at Studio One did wish to produce “pretty pictures.” Thus, Robichaux recalled, it took some effort to convince them that painting endless studies of colored blocks was the way to achieve it. Some wished to learn tricks or shortcuts that would help them to paint still life and landscapes as complex as those that Hensche painted, while others were content to continue enjoying painting as a leisurely pastime. However, those students who were serious about learning his approach were held to a higher standard. Robichaux (2005b) told me of one time when Hensche admonished him for attempting and failing to paint a landscape before he had mastered the blocks. Elevated vision was needed before a painting had a chance of succeeding, but as Robichaux told me, the vision could not arise unless one did the paintings, and only when they were done in a logical sequence of study.

As he had in Provincetown, Hensche continued to accept local commissions for portraits, but like Hawthorne, he did not especially enjoy commission work. Clients could be fussy about their own notions of how a portrait should look; thus, the painter was not working to solve complex visual problems so much as he was working to please the client. One time, a client returned a finished portrait to Hensche with very specific instructions regarding the adjustments he desired. Robichaux (2005b) said he was surprised when Hensche conceded to the client’s demands and made the changes, although “under his breath he cussed mightily” (p. 32).

Robichaux remembered that another change that Hensche was forced to make in his move to Louisiana was adjusting to a different quality of light. Provincetown was known for its unique quality of clear, even light, and Hensche had painted in it for over 60 years. The diffuse, ever-changing light of Louisiana sometimes baffled him. Differences in temperature and humidity produced a denser, more volatile atmosphere that profoundly effect ed color, especially over distance. At one point, the “difficult” light of southern Louisiana led Hensche to comment to Robichaux (2005b), “I now see why Louisiana didn’t ever produce a good landscape painter. Your light down here is so confusing” (p. 42). He had made a similar remark to Diket. Robichaux
(2005b) told me that comment was a significant reason that he decided to accompany Hensche to Provincetown to study in the summer of 1981 (p. 43).

In view of Robichaux’s deep admiration for the rationality of Hensche’s approach, I wondered what he thought about ideas that connected art with spirituality. In fact, the word “spiritual” was used only one time in his book in a direct quotation, although Hensche’s 1988 book had liberally used the term. Robichaux (2005c) seemed reluctant to connect art with the notion of spirituality, which he seems to associate primarily with religious belief. However, he did reflect that painting can be a type of “out of body experience” that is “probably as close to perfect meditation as you can come” (p. 20). He said he thought it was because deep engagement in painting has the ability to suspend time and physical discomfort for the painter, and “because part of spirituality is that the body is the only thing that transports the spirit while it’s here.” Although Robichaux was able to understand how some might view painting as “almost a spiritual exercise,” he qualified the thought saying, “I think of [the act of] painting as being spiritual, but I don’t think of a painting as being spiritual…. I’ll always think that it’s the exercise in doing that is always the important thing” (p. 21). Robichaux was unwilling to speculate on whether Hensche experienced painting in any way that was spiritual; however, he did offer, “I know that it is a journey, a very intense journey that [Hensche] made” (p. 30).

Robichaux also believes that “what you get out of a painting is what you bring to it” (p. 12). In other words, according to Robichaux, viewers that find poetic or spiritual content in paintings are interpreting the paintings according to their own need for this type of meaning.

Chris Diket: A Great Time of Life

Chris Diket has been teaching art to children in schools for 25 years, and in many ways, he seems as youthful, mentally and physically as the students he sees daily. Like Robichaux, he also teaches at Thibodaux’s E.D. White Catholic High School, and like Hensche was, he is a follower of the Hay Diet. When I asked about his early background, Diket (2005a) told me that he grew up in an arts-oriented family with a father who had once studied acting and a mother who had several relatives who were visual artists. He recalled that in elementary school his drawings stood out from his classmates to the extent that several of them had accused him of tracing the images. Although the accusation disturbed him at the time, he laughed telling me about it, recognizing that it was an unintended compliment. His parents encouraged his early interest in drawing, and at age 11, when his family was living in North Carolina, he began to take painting lessons with a neighborhood artist, Mary Crostway. In 1968, his family moved to Thibodaux to be closer to his grandmother in New Orleans, who was ill. With no art classes offered in the schools at that time, Diket continued to work on his own as he could, drawing and painting after school and on weekends.

Diket (2005a) had wanted to major in art in college, but after one drawing class at Nichols State University in Thibodaux that dealt with abstract and nonobjective concerns almost exclusively, he said he changed his major to pre-law. He would later change his major back to art in his junior year. In the meantime, beginning when he was about 18, Diket had started taking lessons from Billiu at Studio One. It was there that he met Hensche, who immediately suggested that Diket come to the Cape School to paint in the summers. Although he knew virtually nothing about Hensche or his work, Diket took a chance and he went. He is uncertain of the year, but he said that it was likely 1973 or 1974, and he returned for three or four consecutive summers after the first one. As he did with other students who had never encountered his ideas about painting light and color, Diket said Hensche first showed him two paintings side-by-side, one a gray day study and the other, a sunny day. Hensche asked him if he could see a difference, and Diket
replied “not really” (p. 3). Hensche assured him that by summer’s end, he would see it. As the summer progressed, Diket (2005c) told me he realized that Hensche was right: “My vision had been changed, and the more my vision was changed, the more I realized he was telling the truth” (p. 40).

Diket (2005a) remembered the summers he spent in Provincetown as “one of the best times” of his life (p. 11). One could watch the sun rise from one side of the narrow Cape and walk two miles to other side to see it set. He was young, energetic, surrounded by other students who like him shared a passion for realistic painting, and best of all, he was studying in a place where painting had long been regarded as serious work. Living and painting in the place where Hawthorne and other great artists before him had lived and worked was intoxicating. The sense of camaraderie among the students who encouraged and helped each other stood in stark contrast to the sense of isolation that he had experienced while working on his own during his high school years. Many students would come and go during the course of the summer, but Diket (2005a) recalled that there was usually a dedicated core of 10-15 students “that were really interested” (p. 11) in what Hensche was teaching. However, Diket recalled that the expense of living in Provincetown, by then a wealthy tourist destination, meant that many students could afford to stay for only a week or two.

By his second summer, Hensche had made Diket an assistant and permitted him to stay in the loft at the Pearl Street studio. The open loft, which looked down into the main part of the studio, contained three sleeping cots and a camp stove. There was a toilet downstairs, but no shower, so the studio dwellers were always on the lookout for friendly students who would permit them to bathe in their apartments. Diket recalled that the resourceful students would also regularly retrieve and consume useable produce from the dumpster behind the A & P grocery. Hensche kept his young assistants busy, if not with painting, then with maintaining his property; they dug trenches and laid water pipes (Miller 2005a), re-roofed his home and studio and cut back poison ivy in the yard. Diket (2005a) recalled that in the community the young Hensche followers had been dubbed “the scrape school of art” (p. 15) for their practice of scraping paint onto masonite boards with palette knives.

As an art teacher, Diket (2005b) said he has observed that students will often undergo a tremendous surge in artistic growth between the ages of 18 and 21, the age that he was during his summers in Provincetown. The premise for Hensche’s approach was a simple one, but it could not be absorbed all at once and the perceptual gains of “learning to see” for most were slow and gradual. The difficulty in moving forward was that a student had to master each stage of seeing before her or his perception was keen enough to attempt the next. For example, Diket said that once Hensche determined that a student was capable of observing the glow of a halation around an object in sunlight, he would point it out and demonstrate painting it. But because growing color perception hinged on awareness of certain visual relationships and phenomena, until a student actually experienced an “ah-ha” moment of visual recognition, concepts and language had only limited ability to accelerate the process. Total immersion in an intensive environment where attaining a more elevated visual perception was the primary goal did much to focus concentration. However, those who were there for only short periods, who were easily frustrated or who lacked the necessary internal discipline or resolve to study in a systematic manner, were at a disadvantage compared with those who could stay for the entire two-month term.

In his own teaching of high school students, Diket (2005b) told me he focuses on foundational concepts and technical skills in art, believing that “you can’t teach creativity” (p. 29). He also tries to convey the idea that becoming an artist is a “process of discovery” (2005c, p. 1) to which there is no end. Consistent with Lowenfeld’s (1949) developmental theory of child art, Diket has found that the majority of art students in high school wish to master realistic
drawing and painting. However, he believes that the slow and difficult learning curve of the Hensche-Hawthorne approach to color can be especially “cruel” and “frustrating” for young students, leading them to believe that they are not progressing at all. Although he said he discusses in general terms Hensche’s approach to color in his classes, it is only one among many aspects of art upon which he touches. The logistic challenges of taking a class of 20-30 students and the required materials outside to paint for a scant hour a day also makes the approach impractical for high school art. In the classroom, Diket (2005b) agrees with Hensche’s approach of conducting individual critiques because he believes that group critiques can be “very demeaning, and it puts people on the spot” (p. 24), which can be especially devastating to teens who are sensitive to peer opinions.

One point that all the painters I interviewed, including Diket, agreed on was that Hensche could tell the perceptual level of a student simply by watching her/him paint. He would teach to that individual’s level, but he let each student know that there were no limits to what might be achieved over time. Diket (2005a) remembered a day that he was working in the studio because it was raining outside, and he felt that he was painting better than he ever had before. Hensche looked at his study and teased, “Well, I guess you’ve painted your masterpiece” (p. 16). Diket said that simple remark made him realize that Hensche was telling him, “It’s just a beginning, you’re better now than you were two weeks ago, but you’ve got a long way to go, kid” (p. 16).

Another time, a student that Diket described as “a troubled person” who had “cut marks on his wrists” (p. 18) had come to class and began painting while wearing sunglasses. Diket watched to see how Hensche would react; instead of exploding, he spoke quietly and kindly with the student and “he tried to help that student improve according to what he thought that student needed” (p. 18). Although Hensche might rant and cuss about the state of politics, modern art, and many other things, he could also exhibit patience and delicacy with the individual needs of students who wanted to learn about color.

Diket (2005a) emphasized his perception that Hensche was “fiercely self-confident about what he was doing” (p. 20). He said that Hensche believed that artists should be independent of institutions that promoted one school of thought over another one (2005b). Diket (2005b) recalled Hensche telling of a student art competition that he had visited where he had disagreed with the judges’ awards. Hensche and a couple of friends went through the gallery and redistributed the ribbons according their assessment of the work. Another time, an abstract painter who had his own school not far from Hensche’s approached him about organizing a joint exhibition of student’s work. Hensche, the tireless champion of realism, adamantly refused the offer, denouncing abstract art, and those who were taken in by it. Diket (2005a; 2005c), who witnessed the exchange, remembered that Hensche, “told the guy in so many words never. Never…. [Hensche] would talk about how cruel the abstract guys could be way back in the old days when abstract painting was the vogue” (p. 39). This was something that Diket (2005b) could understand from his own experiences: “You were laughed at, you were discouraged from doing any realism at all” (p. 36). He remembered one professor at Nichols State who had tried to convince him that he would have a better painting career if he abandoned realism. As a cautionary tale, the professor told Diket about a student that he knew of at The San Francisco Art Institute who, like Diket, had been determined to pursue realism. That student was told plainly by his professors that his grades could be no higher than a “C.”

Although Diket (2005b) believes that Hensche was “upset” and even “angry” about what he understood as an academic suppression of realism and about not receiving the recognition that he felt was his due, he was not bitter. One reason for this is that Diket believes that Hensche had a firm concept of his own place in art history, and that he felt an obligation to it. As a part of an idea bigger than himself, Hensche had made it his mission to see that the Hensche-Hawthorne
approach survived so that the next evolutionary stages of realism in color painting, whatever they might be, could develop. One way to ensure the survival of these ideas was to expose as many painters as possible to them through his teachings and to instill in his followers a sense of responsibility for helping others to understand the ideas.

Although he was miles ahead of his students, Hensche never claimed to have reached the limits of color perception, which must have been both daunting and humbling to students. It was about Hensche’s idealistic vision that Diket (2005b) said, “That is a beautiful thing about Henry, I think that’s one of the things that attracted students to him… Students understood that [sic] idea that this is a lifelong pursuit…. It’s a labor of love; it’s something that you never achieve; therefore, you always progress” (p. 18). Diket (2005b) also remembered the story that Hensche often would tell about Robert Frost meeting an old friend who had abandoned his dreams of a career in music in order to make a living. Hensche also told Diket that one of his teachers at the Chicago Art Institute once had told him “that he’d never be an artist.” To Diket, Hensche’s message that one must “never give up” (p. 40) on one’s dream was a strong spiritual message that he conveyed to students. Although Hensche was not spiritual in a religious way, Diket (2005c) was struck with the memory that he “talked about painting light and truth” and “about wanting to paint goodness” rather than making his paintings about what he saw as “the degrading part of mankind” (p. 20). These are ideas that resonate very closely with Diket’s own beliefs about the spiritual purposes of painting. In Diket’s opinion, “Henry was after… a universal truth… and that universal truth was the light. Painting the light. So for me, it is a spiritual journey. It really is” (p. 21). As a result of his study with Hensche, Diket (2005a) said, “it changed me for life” by changing his “vision of the world” (p. 28) and the way that he sees color.

Summary of Key Themes and Ideas Found in the Artists’ Interviews

In Appendix E, the reader will find a summary outline of themes and ideas as they relate to key questions. All points listed in Appendix E may not apply to each painter; however, these themes and ideas were expressed in some form by one or more of the interviewees. Although distinct differences of perspective existed among the seven painters, a number of key themes and ideas emerged from their individual narratives. The majority of these ideas can be linked to similar or identical ideas articulated by Hensche, Hawthorne, and Chase that were explored in Chapter Four. I will provide further analysis and discussion of areas of commonality, individual differences of perspective, and relationships to the ideas of Hensche, Hawthorne, and Chase in my conclusions in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING ANALYSES

My study began with the simple question of why many artists believe that art is in some way spiritual. Although I didn’t know its source, it was an idea that I also had believed in for a long time, in fact, from my earliest days as a beginning art student. A great deal of it likely began with my own experiences of “creative flow” in artmaking, but I was also exposed to notions of truth, beauty, and goodness in art through classes with Sammy Britt at Delta State University. In those early years before I settled on art as a field of study, I also took courses in philosophy and had considered majoring in it, so I have long been curious about how the ideas and beliefs through which one views the world and life fit together or collide and, thus, evolve. In my search for a dissertation topic, I came back to the relationship of art and spirituality and wondered if such ideas were: (a) absorbed from social and cultural traditions; (b) if they grew out of the artist’s personal orientation to seek spiritual insight; (c) if it was a product of the solitary, self-reflective nature of the artist’s work; or (d) if it was in some way learned through artistic education. Or were other factors I had not yet imagined at work?

I believe that my study, which examined the beliefs and ideas of seven painters in a school of painting, supports the notion that artistic education does indeed play a role in inculcating and shaping the artist’s belief system, including beliefs, in this case, about a relationship between art and spirituality. Not surprisingly, the study further suggests that the strength of the teacher-student bond is also significant a factor in conveying belief. However, I also found that all of these elements—sociocultural traditions, the self-reflective nature of artmaking, personal spiritual orientation, and artistic education—as well as personal values and a sense of calling or purpose in life influenced the formation of artistic beliefs. As I look back on my study, I have concluded that the emergence of a belief in art as spiritual, although common, is individual, and largely unpredictable. In this final chapter, I conclude my discussion of the factors that I believe influenced these painters’ worldviews.

Many of the ideas expressed by the seven artists will not fit neatly within a single category, but may be applied to two or three questions. For example, the ideas and experiences that were significant in forming their beliefs systems were often a part of their artistic education. For this reason, I have organized the following discussion into three sections that apply to my initial five key questions: Section one deals with (1) each painter’s lived experiences of artmaking and becoming an artist; section two discusses (2) the nature of the ideas and experiences that each artist identified as significant in forming his belief system, and (4) what role, if any, the artist’s education played in inculcating and shaping his foundational beliefs; section three discusses (3) if and in what ways each artist defines and experiences art as “spiritual,” and (5) the ways in which each artist’s beliefs effect his experience, practice, and teaching of art.

The reader may wish to refer to the summary outline of my findings (Appendix E) as they relate to these questions.

The Painter’s Lived Experiences of Artmaking and Becoming an Artist

A major theme expressed in various ways by each of the artists I interviewed was that of becoming an artist as a type of metaphorical journey. The decision to begin the journey toward becoming an artist like other life choices that may be difficult to justify in purely rational or practical terms was experienced by each as his calling. In addition, I believe that individual life
narratives, which are filtered through “the selective, synthetic, generalizing nature of historical memory” (Frisch, 1998, p. 37), may be unconsciously influenced by cultural models of narrative structure. The familiar forms of stories and myths that center on a hero faced with a conflict or challenge comprise a mythic model that may subtly influence the shaping of an individual’s life history narrative (Samuel & Thompson, 1990), as well as subsequent interpretations of personal life events and their meanings. That is, I believe that the way that one tells about her or his life both reflects and influences the ways that one thinks about it. Therefore, I will begin this analysis by examining the notion of life’s calling in relation to a structure of mythic themes expressed in each painter’s story.

The notion of answering to one’s life’s calling evokes a convergence of factors forming an inescapable pathway that many have called “destiny.” The single caveat to this perspective is that the process of tracing all of the unlikely and unexpected but uniquely significant threads that run through a life can only be done with any confidence backwards. That is, by reflecting upon an individual’s past with its complicated and seemingly serendipitous mix of personal qualities, people, circumstances, events, and experiences that resulted in a life becoming whatever it became. However, unlike James Stewart in the film, It’s a Wonderful Life, one can never know with any certainty what seemingly minor events shaped one’s life course. Nonetheless, it is hard to resist speculating. Of course, viewed from this backward perspective individual tales of triumph or of disaster can appear equally inevitable. Also, it has been commonly observed that an individual’s desire to understand and discover meaning in her or his own life often becomes more pronounced with advancing age (Thayer, 2003), and most older adults have had ample time to engage in reflection on the course of events in their lifetimes. In the interviews, each painter in telling the story of his life’s journey seemed to take a special satisfaction from recalling details of the idiosyncratic chain of events that led him to Provincetown and Henry Hensche.

Even so, understanding and acknowledging a life’s calling is more than a simple matter of constructing an equation of A + B – E = X that accounts for experiences and how they produced personal trajectory. It is more than analyzing experience in terms of Dewey’s concept of “simultaneous doings and sufferings” wherein one must undergo “the consequences of [ones] own actions” (quoted in West, p. 88), a view that provides ample room for the machinations of desire and personal agency. At its core, the concept of a life’s calling implies that the dynamic potential for all future experiences and even personal desires are in some way hardwired into an individual through the unique set of abilities and limitations that are present at birth. More importantly, it implies that these attributes must not be ignored. Ultimately, it is the sense that the individual comes to recognize and embrace these innate qualities of self and, as the result, goes on to do or become that which she or he was “meant” to do or become in life. To answer to one’s life’s calling is to discover one’s deepest purpose in life.

Often at an early age, children gain some sense of the unique qualities they possess that will lead to their later decision to become artists. Overwhelmingly, most of the artists that I interviewed remembered an ability to draw better than other children of their own age along with the pleasure they derived from the activity. Indeed, such precocious ability is, in many cultures including our own, regarded as a “gift”—a special skill thought to be divinely bestowed—that should be thus honored and cultivated. Hensche (1971) pronounced the view that “evidently the good Lord gave some people extraordinary native gifts” (p. 26) while Britt (2005), a devout lifelong Christian, openly acknowledged his sense of being “guided” in his life (p. 12). In view of such commonly held beliefs about artistic ability, it is not surprising that each of the artists I interviewed remembered details about his early exposure to art, however limited it may have
been, as significant, satisfying, special, or perhaps even then an unrecognized portent of things to come. Both Robichaux and Diket each gratefully acknowledged parents who recognized their abilities when they were children and arranged for them to take private art lessons with local neighborhood artists. Miller (2005a) remembered that a school friend looked at one of his drawings in the fifth grade and told him, “Charlie, you’re an artist,” (p. 36) leading him for the first time to begin thinking of himself in the same way. Deloach, who did not profess to being especially adept at drawing as a boy, nonetheless recalled poring through the visual narratives of comic books and drawing on the stiff white cardboard that the laundry put inside Sunday dress shirts. Both activities provided him with hours of pleasure and imaginative diversion. In the case of Britt, both art and athletics were equally intense interests all the way through high school; however, he decided to study art well before he entered college. Kelso, who was also an athlete, faced choosing between pursuing interests in professional golf or art. Thurmond’s (2005a) earliest memories were of hours spent copying the Sunday comics with his babysitter-cousin. He also recalled a high school art teacher who encouraged him to seek the college art scholarship that helped make it possible for him to become the first in his family to attend college. Deloach and Diket each experimented with other economically more practical majors when they entered college, but within a few semesters abandoned studies in accounting and law to follow their deeper interests in art. Hensche (1971) had originally intended to study architecture before he was seduced by painting. Such is the nature of a calling. One doesn’t choose; rather, one is helpless to choose otherwise.

Joseph Campbell (1968) has pointed to universal themes in the many cultural myths associated with journeys undertaken in quest of one’s perceived destiny. Always at the beginning, the hero or heroine of such a tale is presented as an ordinary individual that is, because of accident or birth, charged with overcoming extraordinary challenges. As the tale unfolds, she or he is revealed to possess certain innate if untested qualities of nerve, wit, talent, or resolve that are uniquely suited to negotiating a difficult rite of passage and achieving ultimate transfiguration. For example, it is not difficult to see that Jack, who was something of a dolt before his climb up the beanstalk, acted with cleverness and courage to fool the giant and steal the giant’s fortune. While it is also clear that luck—and a lack of scruples—played no small part in Jack’s triumph, luck is most readily available to those with the courage to act. In the end, we see that the Jack who came back down the beanstalk was, in a sense, a different Jack, a Jack powerfully transformed through the experience of daring to grasp his inner potentials.

It is said that nascent talent is meaningless without the will or the opportunity to act upon it. Without action mere talent is relegated to the uncertain purgatory of possibility. Thus it is here where each painter’s story of answering to his life’s calling begins to take on mythic momentum. The many accidents of circumstance, temperament, choice, and timing that had to occur for each of these painters ever to hear of Henry Hensche much less to act to seek him out and devote years of study to his teachings are important. But more important was the sense each artist expressed that had he never encountered Henry Hensche and his teachings, had he never chosen to make that first decisive journey to Provincetown, his life would be something quite different: a speculative blank that not even imagination could manage to fill. Kelso (2005a), who made but a single visit to study with Hensche in Provincetown in 1968, wondered if he would have chosen to become a painter at all.

A second key component often found in tales of mythic quests is the seeker’s encounter with a guide or a mentor. Depending upon the details of the story, the mentor may take various forms: a wizard, a hermit in a mountain cave, a magical animal, a mysterious stranger.
Regardless of form the mentor is always a source of wisdom and guidance. Each individual artist recalled in detail that first journey to Provincetown to seek out “the old German painter” (Miller, 2005a, p. 2) who supposedly knew all about color and the secrets of Impressionist painting. The scenario also evokes the earlier quests of Hensche, Hawthorne, and Chase. In each story the vividly remembered journey is consistent with the basic format for a quest: a green youth sets out from home with high expectations. For all practical purposes, he is on his own in the world for the first time determined to travel a great distance seeking adventure and wisdom. Each painter’s narrative was, on one level, a spirited coming-of-age tale, but on another, it was also the story of an act of faith that would lead to a lifetime of willing sacrifice. Only those who faithfully submitted to the rigorous discipline of learning to see could hope for the distant rewards of elevated vision. What each of the painters I interviewed found in Provincetown was a mentor who could seemingly see and paint the elusive effects of light on color and form. More importantly, they found a painter who was also willing and able to teach them what he knew and who could inspire them with an ideal of what a painter and painting could become.

A number of the interviewees half-humorously described their earliest impressions of Hensche as a mentor as an experience tinged with an almost mystical significance. Kelso (2005a), who remembered witnessing his first Hensche painting demonstration in Provincetown, described him as a “Svengali” whose virtuosity mesmerized the crowd of watching students. Miller (2005a) recalled that when Hensche took up his brush to paint, the clouds would seem to part and the sun would appear as if on cue. Thurmond (2005a) described his own impulse to genuflect before Hensche and the profound silence that accompanied Friday morning demonstrations when all that could be heard was the “swish, swish, swish” of Hensche’s brush. He also recalled a time when one watching student, awe-struck with Hensche’s display of virtuosity, inadvertently broke this silence by blurting out, “Damn, he can paint!” causing the other students to laugh because, Thurmond believed, it was what everyone was thinking. Of course, the painting demonstration was also an important teaching method that inspired a similar awe in students of Hawthorne and Chase.

That the summer study experience proved so pivotal to each of the artists I interviewed does not mean that there weren’t many, many more students who went to Hensche in Provincetown over the years and found his teachings to be marginally useful but not compelling. Indeed, a 1970 oral history interview with Joseph Hirsch, a Hensche student for a brief two or three weeks in the 1930s, shows that while Hirsch found Hensche’s teachings about color to be of some value, he did not adopt them as the cornerstone of his practice as a painter. This is also true of students who may have casually studied with Hawthorne or Chase (for example, Peggy Bacon) or who had formed philosophically different ideas regarding the purposes, forms, or goals of painting (for example, Edwin Dickinson). The fact that these seven painters found Hensche to be a charismatic and inspiring mentor does not mean that there weren’t others who perhaps found him to be abrasive or tedious or his ideas incongruous with their goals for painting.

Ideas and Experiences That the Artists Identified as Significant in Forming Their Belief Systems; The Role of the Artist’s Education in Inculcating and Shaping Foundational Beliefs

The reasons that each of the painters in my study became so completely devoted to Hensche and his ideas were both individually and collectively found. It is important to emphasize first that each of these painters made the trip to Provincetown actively seeking what
Hensche had to teach: a way to see and paint color as the Impressionists had in an atmosphere of structured teaching about realistic painting. Despite the romantic elements of high adventure, each painter’s reasons for going were thoroughly grounded in a practical desire to acquire tangible skills as a painter. However spontaneous the individual decisions to go may have been, each artist expressed the belief that they could not have learned the same things in the same way anywhere else or from anyone else. Both Britt and Miller reported frustrations with modern art’s tyranny in academia in the early 1960s, a period when realistic painting in Western art was regarded as outdated, simplistic, or hopelessly naive. Like Britt and Miller, Diket remembered his personal frustrations with the way painting was taught in higher education at that time. He recalled studio painting classes at Nichols State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana in the 1970s in which students were given a list of supplies with which they were expected to experiment with self-expression in order to see what emerged. Technical considerations and foundational skills regarding what Deloach called “the practical matters of painting” were seldom addressed. What was even more frustrating was that these painters were interested in learning to paint realistically, a virtual painting taboo at that time in the early 1970s when abstraction was still dominant and Pop Art was emerging. In his 1964 book, Art in Narrow Streets, Ross Moffett, a Hawthorne monitor when Hensche was an assistant, traced the history of the Provincetown Art Association from its founding in 1914 through about 1947. In it, he shows that the tension between opposing schools of thought in art was as much a source of recurring negotiation and debate among local Art Association members as it was within the larger venue of society.

Also important to each painter’s education was the abundance of focused artistic passions along with the company of diverse artists that were available in Provincetown. I can imagine that in Provincetown, an established art colony where conversation about painting was a daily affair, colliding viewpoints forced a painter very early on to define and defend his or her views and personal philosophy in art; the confused, uncommitted, or lackadaisical were left behind or worse, dismissed as hobbyists. Several painters expressed their sense of awe with being in the very studio where Hawthorne had painted and being in a town where painting was historically regarded so seriously. Hawthorne’s little book, Hawthorne on Painting, was virtually required reading, and it served as an important source of inspiration and foundational philosophy. Each painter had fond memories of the sense of camaraderie and the atmosphere of intense commitment; students painted, looked at paintings, talked or read about painting every waking moment. In this environment, Hensche’s influence was powerful, but these students also influenced one another with an exchange of ideas, mutual support, and encouragement in the long periods away from Hensche and Provincetown, and in later years after Provincetown.

To followers swimming against the currents of popular trends in painting, Hensche’s focus on painting light and color from direct observation of nature offered students both a refuge from abstract modernism’s hegemony and a persuasive vision for the future of realistic painting. In one sense, the students that gathered around Hensche at the Cape School were all refugees from oppression, which created a ready-made bond of solidarity. In this environment, it is likely that Hensche’s unapologetic condemnations of abstract modernism were a welcome vindication of the students’ desires to paint realistically. Still, Hensche’s vision for the future of painting was based on the modernist premise of unending human progress; yet, while Hensche’s underlying premise was the same as that of the abstract modernists, the Utopian future that Hensche projected from that premise was quite different.

The logical outcome of Hensche’s theory of the progressive development of human visual perception pointed towards a future filled with realistic paintings that were visually truer
and more beautiful than any works that had ever been painted. Implicit in his reasoning was that keener visual perception, which made such paintings possible, was irrelevant and meaningless within the context of abstract modernism where imagination and invention ruled. For this reason alone, Hensche could not help but view abstract painting and most “isms” of the modern era as, at best, misguided and, at worst, a willful corruption and mockery of art: Within the context of his theory, painting had to be realistic painting. Hensche had even envisioned finer color perception leading to the development of a type of visual Esperanto, an international language of painting that could unify humankind. Hensche, like Hawthorne before him, conceived of painting as more than the sum of the painter’s considerable skills and experience: The ultimate purpose of painting was to feed the human spirit with truth and beauty.

Hensche’s convictions and lofty ideals were a match for the youthful dreams and ideals of the students who traveled to Provincetown to study with him, and as Diket and Thurmond have suggested, many responded to his idealism. While all of the interviewees deeply believe in Hensche’s ideas about learning to see, none have shouldered his Utopian dream for a future of painting transformed through elevated vision. Rather, the more pragmatic idea embraced by each was that it is the painter’s primary job to develop himself or herself on a personal, professional level: Everything else follows from that. Chase and Hawthorne also had emphasized the ideal of self-culture as a painter’s primary responsibility.

Hensche’s simple but compelling premise that learning to see was the key to learning to paint resonated with students at all levels. More importantly, students had convincing proof that it worked right before their eyes. They could see the changes in their own work and the changes in the paintings of other students. They could see the luminous depth and solidity of form that was “as complex as nature” in Hensche’s masterful paintings. They could witness the almost magical manifestation of form and light through color in his weekly painting demonstrations. They began to see the world as Hensche taught them to see it. The main difficulty that novices faced was in learning to see with an “innocent eye,” setting aside preconceptions or expectations. The seven painters were split on the question of whether it was even possible to see “like a blind man who had just recovered his vision.” Britt, Thurmond, and Robichaux embraced the notion, whereas the other painters valued the ideal as inspiration and tried to practice it, but conceded that seeing is a complex act that is never wholly free from the influences of memory, expectation, or knowledge.

Learning to see was the way that a painter might discover for himself or herself what Thurmond (2005b) had called “the truth of reality” (p. 33). Prior to Hensche’s framing of “visual truth,” Hawthorne and Chase had emphasized the power of “truth” in painting to reveal the beauty in commonplace subjects and had identified it as the highest virtue and the ultimate aim of the painter’s art. The ability to see and paint “visual truth” was viewed as an almost superhuman power, and yet, Hensche taught that it was available to anyone who was willing to persevere in cultivating elevated vision. For Hensche, Hawthorne, and Chase, truth writ large was an absolute revealed through the relentless searching and honest struggles of the painter. Truth was an uncompromising but often surprising quality that the painter might discover in the particular, in the fleeting moment, and in the humble or commonplace subject. For these three

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1. The modern abstract painter, Piet Mondrian, also envisioned the eventual creation of a universal visual language.
2. Lipsey’s (1997) book, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*, offers evidence that abstract modernists had remarkably similar aims for art. Beauty may have been redefined but the concern for truth was undiminished.
painters, truth in the commonplace—and its inherent beauty—spoke to an ideal of Universal Truth, with its accompanying claim that all of humankind could witness and verify it.

Among the present generation of painters, however, Kelso, Miller, Deloach, and Diket were cautious about trying to define “truth” or about making any claims that extended any personal notions of truth into a claim for Universal Truth. While their more postmodern concepts of truth seemed to view it as personally situated, transitory, and fluid, it is a view still compatible with the notions of beauty-truth in the particular and in the fleeting moment. The views of Britt, Thurmond, and Robichaux seemed to embrace a larger and more unified concept of truth underlying individual perceptions when these are based on: (a) clarity of perception (Britt), (b) selfless awareness (Thurmond), or (c) rational analysis (Robichaux). The common factor that seemingly underpins the views of “truth” among all seven painters, even those who conceive it in postmodern terms as situated and transitory (e.g., Kelso, Miller, Deloach, Diket), is their seeming belief that it is one’s intuitive or empathetic inner responses to the truth in a subject that verifies it as true. Truth is not only what you see, but what you feel. Most abstract modern painters would have agreed with this idea.

For some Hensche students outside of this group, the ideal of unending growth in visual perception became difficult to maintain in its purest form as they matured in their painting. Lifelong growth meant that no mastery was ever possible. Of the seven painters, Britt, Thurmond, and Robichaux appear to most wholeheartedly believe in Hensche’s ideal of lifelong growth in visual perception, and Robichaux especially has lamented those painters who later strayed from Hensche’s teachings. Even among these three, each has interpreted Hensche’s ideal from a distinct perspective. Britt’s Christian viewpoint links the artist’s creative renderings of natural beauty with divine purpose: the painter as an instrument for celebrating and revealing the beauty of God’s creation. The painter must do his work faithfully and with humility, but visual growth and progress are merely evidence of God’s grace. Thurmond’s mystical Zen Buddhist perspective views visual growth as a function of the expanded awareness that becomes available to the painter when ego-driven concepts of self are eliminated. Within this context, there is no limit to how deep the painter can go in perceiving and painting the visual truth. To Robichaux, it was the progressive, verifiable logic of Hensche’s approach to analyzing light and color that propelled the painter toward ever-finer visual growth.

The other four painters, Miller, Kelso, Deloach, and Diket, have come to terms with more pragmatic views of Hensche’s teachings, each according to his personal goals for painting. All continue to paint much in the way that Hensche taught, but Miller, Kelso, and Deloach do not always adhere to strict doctrine regarding direct observation and response. Kelso is interested in representing his own intellectual and emotional responses to subject matter that strikes a “poetic” chord with him. These three also share the practical realization that a painting must function as a parallel reality to the subject matter it represents, rather than being a copy of it. Truth is not only in the verifiable appearance of a subject, but it must be reconciled with painter’s honest inner responses to it. As a result, these three painters are more relaxed about “rules” of direct observation and the use of notes, sketches, photographs, and memory. Diket, whose preferred medium is now watercolor, stated that he is still committed to seeing and painting “as many colors as possible,” but he is no longer interested in traditional still life or landscape forms.

Deloach, who has always enjoyed experimenting with new forms, stands alone among the seven in his recent conclusions that Hensche’s approach to representing light and color contains some inherent limitations. As noted earlier, after much reflection on alternate approaches to painting light and color, Deloach now believes that Hensche’s systematic approach to “seeing”
heightened color may act “as a filter” that “censored true vision” and resulted in “an unrealistic over-colored painting, which is a formulaic interpretation” (personal communication, February 28, 2005). Nonetheless, Deloach continues in his effort to see accurately and intuitively in his painting.

Although it can be argued that any approach to painting may be reduced to superficial principles and rote manipulations that produce formulaic pictures, it is ironic that Hensche’s approach, which was so opposed to formulaic solutions, has been accused of this very flaw by many outside of the group. Predictably, insiders defend it with equal vigor. When an idea is pushed to the logical extremes of its underlying premises it can lose its fluidity and become trapped in rigid ideology. In the final analysis, Hensche’s insight that one might teach the language and the forms of painting but not the art of it suggested that he believed that heightened visual perception by itself was not enough. For those Hensche followers who earnestly believed that seeing more colors would ultimately fix beauty-truth upon their canvases, the obvious strategy was to do more of the same. However, Hensche had plainly said it: The art part of it could not be taught; it had to come from within the painter.

If there was a flaw in the Hensche-Hawthorne ideas, it was not so much in the systematic approach to painting light and color as it was in the failure of its followers to allow for the development of other systems of thought and other pathways for arriving at views of truth and beauty. Miller and Diket had both pointed out that Hensche, in spite of his fundamental opposition to abstraction, respected honest efforts by other painters to arrive at new forms and solutions. In Hensche’s 1988 book in the chapter envisioning The Ideal Art School (pp. 75-86), a foundational precept was the exploration of ideas in painting. As Hensche saw it, progress came from those who were willing to push beyond the limits of what had already been done and it grew from a community of mutual exchange, not one of isolation or individuality. However, Hensche’s insistence that visual perception was the key to painting excluded approaches not based in observation and created a conundrum of sorts; his modernist concept of unending progress toward Utopian levels of perceptual acuity cut off avenues of exploration that might have led to other types of progress and other approaches to truth and beauty. In Hensche’s construct, there was only one path, and few could follow it as far as it led.

The concept of learning to see was aimed at growing visual perception and yet it implied far more: Vision is our primary sense for learning about the world. It is a way to grasp and, thus, master visual reality, which is central to human experience. It was a way to apprehend truth for one’s self. However, in the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition, learning to see also implied the artist’s inner responses to the visual mystery of beauty-truth. The painter’s inner response was what resulted in the “more poetic and more spiritual” practice of painting that Hensche advised Britt to pursue. The awesome power of elevated vision was only useful when the painter’s interest was in representing light and color as it revealed realistic subject matter. In part because Hensche’s teaching was set in a period when mainstream painters were more concerned with originality, expression, or formal structure, many outside of his group perceived its goals as rigid, limited, and old-fashioned. Another factor was that Hensche’s powerful personality, strong opinions, and systematic approach to teaching color attracted some students but repelled others. Only those who could wholeheartedly devote themselves to learning to see and paint in his manner stayed with him. Thurmond (2005a) remembered that these factors led some critics to comment that Hensche did not have students, he had disciples.

It is important to note that in choosing to follow Hensche’s teachings, students were assured of no easy solutions or pat formulas for success as painters. With a humility that would
rival any medieval monk, all of the painters in this study viewed Hensche’s approach to seeing and painting with color as so demanding that a lifetime of discipline, dedication, and study was required to gain what they considered even a modest level of accomplishment. In an article published on the Hensche Foundation website, George T. Thurmond (1999) quoted a statement from John Ruskin’s 1847 book, *The Elements of Drawing*, which summarized for him the magnitude of the undertaking: “You may in the time that other vocations leave at your disposal, produce finished, beautiful and masterly drawings in light and shade. But to colour well requires your life. It cannot be done cheaper” (Ruskin, 1971, p. 133). As a result of color painting’s lengthy learning curve, Britt and Thurmond especially believed that the majority of students who studied with Hensche over the years simply took general or superficial principles from his teachings without making a commitment to study it in any depth. The few who did commit to following the principles of Hensche’s teachings, including the seven artists I interviewed, frequently found themselves misunderstood and out of step with the dominant trends in painting through a significant portion of their careers. In fact, only in the last two decades or so has realistic painting from nature has begun to regain critical approval within the more diverse climate of postmodern art. Each of these seven painter has devoted 30 years or more of his life to the Hensche-Hawthorne approach to painting light and color; thus it is not surprising that each one in his own way is deeply invested in its claims of truth.

For his part, Hensche modeled artistic behaviors and ideals to his students. Also, he schooled his students in the lore of the tradition and emphasized the direct lineage of painting instruction that had been passed down from his teacher, Charles W. Hawthorne, and from Hawthorne’s teacher, William Merritt Chase, drawing on influences from Monet, Cezanne, Hals, Velasquez, Rembranrd, Chardin, Titian, Turner, Constable, and others. A man of strong opinions, Hensche’s frequent spontaneous lectures on the history of painting, the techniques of the old masters, the revolutionary implications of Impressionism, technological advances in paint chemistry and chroma, the future of realistic painting, and the role of the artist in society all contributed to a positive view of his teaching’s connection to tradition and history and to the distinguished line of painters who had preceded him. As a result, Miller (2005a) said that “Henry made us feel like we were part of this brotherhood of painters that we could trace back… all the way to Franz Hals” (p. 60). Adding credibility to this perception, Hensche was a charismatic figure who not only could “talk the talk” but “walk the walk” of painting. It was Hensche’s (1988) often-quoted anti-academic opinion that, “We must get rid of the talking painters (those who talk but do not paint) who teach in our art schools and replace them by practising [sic] painters who have proved by their work that they have something to teach” (p. 58). The verbal rationale for Hensche’s approach to color and his theories about learning to see were constructed with compelling logic. However, without praxis, that is, without his masterful displays of skill through both his work and his demonstrations, I believe it is unlikely that the painters in my study (and other students) would have followed him for so long and with such devotion.

The seven painters internalized the Hensche-Hawthorne ethos of lifelong growth, non-materialistic values, and artistic integrity that rejected any notions of painting to gain recognition or financial rewards. The simple fact that they wished to paint realistically in a period when realism was either ridiculed or overlooked was evidence that they cared little about material rewards from the beginning. Hensche conveyed the notion that painting was a high calling, not a pastime or an amusement. If one was not prepared for hard work, repeated disappointments, rejection, and outright failure, then it was best not to begin. The moral courage and stubborn determination that Hensche’s approach to painting required may not have been apparent to
novices first reveling in the “ecstasy of apprenticeship,” but Hensche’s long struggle was there for anyone to read. What none of them could know was that 30 years later mastery of painting would still be hovering beyond the horizon.

Ways the Artist’s Beliefs Affect His Experience, Practice, and Teaching of Art; Ways That the Artists Defined and Experienced Art as “Spiritual”

Whether or not these seven painters claimed their experiences of painting as having a spiritual dimension, it is apparent that painting is at the center of everything they do. Like Hensche, painting engages them in both mind and heart; it is not just what they do, rather it is what they are. The sense of calling or purpose that led each one to become a painter was an overarching theme that seemed to hold a spiritual significance. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, the idea of a calling was linked with ideas that artistic or creative ability was a “gift”; failure to nurture and develop that gift was to dishonor it and its source. Kelso (2005b) echoed the sentiment of several other participants when he expressed his continuing sense of spiritual satisfaction that he felt that he was “doing what he was meant to do in life” (p. 15) by being a painter and by “dealing with beauty and expression and those intangible things that make life worth living” (p. 16). His sense of spiritual purpose and meaning is reinforced by the pleasurable states of “creative flow” that he experiences when painting and by his empathetic, poetic responses to the commonplace beauty he finds around him.

Britt (2005), who felt that his life was divinely “guided,” wondered, “How else would a person from Ruleville, Mississippi who… was not a very good a student” (p. 11) could have developed into a painter and a teacher. Britt’s Christian belief is central to his spiritual experience of art, but his love of nature and art are no less important. For Britt, the beauty of nature and his “natural” artistic ability is evidence of Divine grace; both point toward “something more.” Painting is the perfect expression of the unity of these concepts within Britt’s worldview. One should note that Hensche’s concept of elevated vision was also an ideal that pointed toward “something more,” not only for Britt, but for all seven of the painters. Britt still strives to become, as Hensche had advised him, “more poetic and more spiritual” in his painting.

Of the seven, Thurmond was the most open about his ideas about his own spirituality and his ideas about the link between art and spirituality. For him, painting is a part of the larger spiritual journey that is his life. Thurmond shares Britt’s deep love of nature, but his Zen Buddhist orientation has influenced the fundamental way that he approaches his subject matter for painting. In his painting, he engages in an empathetic identification with his subject (i.e., “be the tree”) with an accompanying “loss of self” that is in accord with Zen philosophy, but that is also a marker for states of creative flow and mystical spirituality. Thurmond also perceives light as a metaphor for the spiritual immanence of nature.

Hensche viewed teaching as both a sacrifice and a responsibility. For the painter, who was responsible for developing to her or his fullest potential, the demands and distractions of teaching were a burden. However, the painter’s responsibility to truth and beauty took precedence and meant that the painter was also responsible for spreading the ideals of elevated vision. Those who teach or who once taught (i.e., Britt, Kelso, Diket, Robichaux, and Thurmond) use many elements of Hensche’s approach to teaching: emphasis on direct observation from nature and the rational analysis of form and color, individual student critiques, teaching to the individual needs of the student, and painting demonstrations as a teaching method. They also convey to students notions of artistic integrity, emphasizing that artistic growth may be slow or
gradual, but it cannot occur without hard work, commitment, and staying true to one’s ideals. Britt and Thurmond include ideas about beauty and truth in painting, while Robichaux focuses on rational analysis, and Diket, who teaches high school students, characterizes art as a journey of discovery.

As I stated in chapter two, spirituality is a broad topic about which individuals may have differing and specific notions and definitions. Also, spiritual orientation, which I defined as an individual's need, readiness, and desire for spiritual knowledge, played a significant role in how each painter interpreted and constructed meanings for his own experiences of painting. One should note that these raw experiences of painting as they were described by each painter were strikingly similar: a) a frequent, almost compulsive desire to paint or draw; b) the total integration of mind and body; c) thinking about or imagining painting even when engaged in other activities; d) a heightened level of perceptual awareness; and e) pleasurable states of creative flow with temporal suspension that resulted from deep engagement with painting. Even with these experiences in common, the artist’s individual interpretations of them were quite different and seemed to depend, in part, upon what the individual valued the most. Robichaux (2005c) pronounced painting a nearly perfect meditative state that one might experience as spiritual; however, this was of little interest to him. It was the rational analysis and logical problem solving in Hensche’s approach that he most admired and valued. Robichaux wondered if perhaps “the ultimate in spirituality is the whole cosmos…. That whole purpose of many sciences is to figure out the ultimate question is how did this all start?” (p. 23). Thus, for Robichaux, understanding the structures of reality and existence in a verifiable scientific way was what he valued most, and this was what he saw as most important in Hensche’s approach to painting. By contrast, Thurmond, who also valued Hensche’s logic, saw in this same meditative state in painting a pathway to perceptual states that could permit one to attain mystical knowledge of a larger life and universe, a way to reconcile inner and outer truths. In Hensche, he found the perfect Zen master who challenged him to “go deeper and deeper” on one path toward spiritual knowledge.

Attaining an intuitive understanding of the mysteries of life was a theme that also emerged with many of the other painters, and it seemed to hold some spiritual significance for several. Nature was where life’s mystery seemed manifest most clearly, and in nature, it was displayed through the all-encompassing elements of light and color. Kelso’s (2005b) poetic impulse was a response to the ineffable mixture of beauty and mystery in nature that he found even in something as austere as a flat, barren winter field under a leaden sky. His notion of the many paradoxes of painting, and painting as transformation, also acknowledge a concept of mystery that only could be approached through intuition. For Deloach, heightened perceptual awareness led him toward more unanswered questions about the complexities of visual reality that were still hidden from his perception. Intuitive knowledge developed through experience offered a way to explore the visual, “a great mystery from which so much else proceeds” (personal communication July 14, 2005). Diket (2005c) perceived in Hensche’s approach, a way to probe the ultimate mystery of Universal Truth that was manifest through light, a quest that is for him a deeply spiritual one. As previously noted, Britt’s spiritual concepts about painting are bound to his Christian beliefs about the painter as an instrument for revealing the beauty of God’s creation. Within this context, it was light, God’s first creation that made nature and seeing possible. However, finding spiritual meaning in painting was not the case for all. Miller, the most pragmatic and down-to-earth of the seven, seemed to feel no need or desire to attach any spiritual
significance whatsoever to painting. For him, painting was what it was: marvelously creative, engaging, and potentially limitless without bothering to label it as a “spiritual” experience.

Some of his students perceived Hensche as a deeply spiritual individual, while others viewed him in almost opposite terms. Again, I believe that such perceptions, in part, reflect individual spiritual orientation and personal definitions of what is spiritual. Significantly, each painter also seemed to project those qualities that they most valued onto Hensche. To Robichaux, Hensche was the genius of rationality who had bridged the gap between Monet and Cezanne; for Britt, Hensche held the secrets of the Impressionists and the old masters; for Thurmond, he was a mystical Zen master; for all, he was a sublime painter. For those who defined spirituality in primarily religious or moral terms, it was apparent that Hensche was not committed to any single doctrine of faith, yet, this hardly mattered. Robichaux (2005c), who said that many in Thibodaux regarded Hensche as “a near godless man” (p. 20) because he did not go to church expressed his opinion that Hensche was a Deist; he believed in God, but subscribed to no organized religion. Britt also believed that Hensche had faith in God in spite of his seeming aversion to all religions, a trait that Britt thought was rooted in Hensche’s negative childhood experiences with the Lutheran church. Hensche might point to “the Beauty of God’s creation” at one moment, while at other times, as Deloach wryly observed, “Henry did mention God… sometimes directly preceding the word damn” (personal communication, June 21, 2005).

Some students, like Thurmond, who was inclined to view spirituality in mystical terms, or Kelso and Diket, who hold humanistic views, found inspiration in the beauty and depth of Hensche’s work, in his Utopian ideal of the evolution of human visual perception, and in his notion of art’s place in easing the inherent human hunger for truth and beauty. This seemingly was the case not only among several painters in my study, but it was also common among other Hensche students. Painter John Ebersberger (2001), who became a Hensche student beginning in the late seventies, wrote of his impression of Hensche on the Hensche Foundation website,

Henry was, to me, essentially a spiritual painter. And by that I mean that at his finest, his paintings provide an entrance point to a deep experience of the universe. Of reality.
Beauty takes us to this place—a plateau of awareness unencumbered by ideologies or systems of thought.

Hensche was an inspirational idealist with a charismatic vision for the future, but as an individual, he could also be stubborn, tedious, abrasive, petty, or insensitive; a flawed human being while a flawless painter. His personal life, as is the case for many people, was at times miserable, messy, or sadly dysfunctional, yet as a painter, his house was always in order. It was the painter not the man that symbolized for his students, the integrity, commitment, and devotion to high ideals that went with the calling of being a painter. And in this sense, it can be said that Hensche embodied for his students the spiritual ideal of what a painter could and should be just as Hawthorne had embodied that ideal for young Hensche. Each of the present generation of painters has struggled to remain true to the rigorous code of integrity set forth by Hensche that was passed down from Hawthorne and from Chase. Each, in his own way, has come to embody at least some of the traits that he found so remarkable and so admirable in Hensche. Even in small ways, his students continue to model Hensche’s example. It may be coincidental, but a number of his students have even adopted some minor aspect of Hensche’s personal life that seems to match his own inclinations: Thurmond is devoted to gardening as Hensche was (and Hawthorne before him); Diket teaches art and follows the Hay diet; for 35 years Britt taught painting as Hensche did, and even now, always refers to his mentor as “Mr. Hensche,” with the same deference that Hensche accorded to Hawthorne; Robichaux has become an avid student of
art history and has his own small following of students; Deloach remains ever wary of formulaic solutions.

All of them continue to paint: They are painters.

The Implications for Art Education

At various points within the history of art education, the field has seemingly embraced—or at least, nodded to—the notion of a link between art and the spiritual. In the Victorian era, educators saw art as a vehicle for moral enhancement and instruction that would strengthen society as a whole. Progressive educators in the early twentieth century saw it as a means for nurturing the holistic development of the child. By mid-century, educators identified individual creativity as a powerful expression of the child’s inner self: Art was often seen as the instrument for encouraging that creativity. Throughout history and in numerous cultures, there have been recurring ideas that linked art with spirituality: the notion of artistic ability as a “gift;” art as a source of inspiration and the product of it; art as revealing "truth" or a unified view of being; art as fostering sensitivity and perceptual awareness; art as capable of transforming consciousness.

Within art education, there is also evidence (e.g., Campbell, 2003; McKean, 1999-2000) of a pervasive assumption among art teachers that art is capable of somehow unlocking the individual potential of children, allowing them to flourish. Moreover, Campbell’s (2003) study indicated that art teachers who believe that there is a spiritual dimension to their own practice of art, manifest their beliefs in their teaching of art and in their caring relationships with students. My own recent study offers evidence that ideas linking art with the spiritual may be passed from teacher to student.

Within education as a whole, there is a small but active group who acknowledge that “spirituality matters” (e.g., Huebner, 1999; Mayes, 2001; Noddings, 1993; Palmer, 1995; Willis, 2000) and that education has a responsibility to address those things that matter in a society. In view of a renewed interest in spirituality within education, it is not surprising that once again educators look toward the arts. However, the call for educators—or for that matter, for art educators—to address spirituality always returns to some difficult questions: Is spirituality something that can be taught? Who is qualified to teach it? And if so, how might it be taught?

The obstacles embedded in those three questions comprise the educational equivalent of a nest of snakes. Before ever considering if spirituality can be taught, the first obstacle is that of definition. As noted in chapter two, personal definitions of spirituality can vary widely. When ideas about spirituality are conceived, as they are by many, as religious spirituality, then proposals to add teachings about spirituality to the curriculum may meet with concerns about infringement on a personal freedom that is protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Moreover, who would define spirituality and who would choose what definition to adopt? Talk of teaching about spirituality in schools may be perceived among those who are atheist or agnostic or who hold non-religious views of spirituality as aimed toward some form of religious indoctrination. Lastly, what about those who are simply not interested in ideas about spirituality, religious or otherwise? These problems and others regarding definition are entwined with personal freedom as well as the closely related matter of personal privacy, which also enjoys some legal protection in our country. In addition, there are the matters of selecting and educating teachers who could lead students in spiritual inquiry, and that of assessment.
However, rather than continuing with this laundry list of obstacles, I will state that I don’t believe that spirituality can be taught any more than Henry Hensche believed that art could be taught. However, I believe that what can be taught are approaches to spiritual inquiry: What are the questions that people in the past have asked about the nature and meaning and purposes of being human? What questions does the student wonder about now? How have these questions been explored in history, literature, philosophy, and art? If one notes that this approach resembles philosophical inquiry, I can only agree. Noddings (1998) advocated educating for religious and spiritual literacy beginning at the elementary level—a proposal that Coles’ (1990) study of spirituality in children suggested may be appropriate. What art and the practice of artmaking can do is to give students an opportunity to explore in visual language aspects of the recurring existential questions that ask, Why am I here? and What is here? and Is there anything more?

Walker’s (2004) investigation of reflective practices in artmaking identified the conceptual anchor of “big ideas” as a significant factor for driving artistic meaning-making for many professional artists. Big ideas were defined as those themes, issues, or questions that engaged the artist over an extended period of time. For many students, the self-reflexive nature of art, which is a way to explore big ideas, can be a pathway to learning about the self and one’s place in the world, an arguably spiritual enterprise. One way to approach such an exploration is through metaphor. Willis (2000) has noted that the power of metaphor in art provides a means for the artist to indirectly express the ineffable, those concepts that defy precise representation. Spirituality, however it is expressed, is personal and must be explored from a personal perspective. A pedagogy concerned with spiritual inquiry would necessarily examine the existential questions asked by those seeking spiritual and philosophical knowledge in the past and in diverse cultures. Also, it surely would compare perspectives on spirituality from a range of sources to determine areas of commonality and difference. However, beyond these foundational explorations, the dialogue that such viewpoints might provoke when juxtaposed with individual student reflections on purpose and meaning in existence might be manifest in any number of forms: through meditation techniques and practices, reflective writings, expressions in paint or clay, music or dance, or even through deeper explorations of the structures of the universe in science.

In the course of their artistic educations, the seven painters in my study were exposed to ideas that linked art with spirituality along with values that emphasized personal and artistic integrity and hard work. They encountered these ideas within the intensive environment of a historic summer painting school, and in it, these seven painters were subject to the considerable influence of a strong teacher and mentor. More importantly, these painters, who felt a sense of calling to become artists, actively sought the instruction that was offered at The Cape School and wholeheartedly committed themselves to learning to see and paint as Hensche saw and painted. Would such learning have affected these students so profoundly had any of these elements been absent? There is no way of knowing with any certainty. Still, I am able to call to mind teachers that I personally know—high school art teachers—who convey in their teaching a sense of purpose, passion, and the deep connection to big ideas that can make learning about art the “journey of discovery” that Diket likes to call it. Such teachers are exceptional, but within the limitations of the high school art room, removed from the ideal environment of the intensive summer workshop, and with students who were often less willing or engaged, they managed to convey an idea that art could be about “something more.” As with Hensche’s teaching, not every student was profoundly affected, but each was afforded the opportunity to explore his or her own
big questions in ways that were personally meaningful. What these teachers had in common was
mature self-knowledge, depth and breadth in their content knowledge, and a conviction that
learning about art can touch on the entire world. They believed that it was a way to probe the
mysteries of life itself. For those students who may have been oriented toward spiritual inquiry,
these teachers offered a means for engaging it.

Hensche’s spiritual ideas were humanistic ones about beauty and truth and goodness. I do
not believe that it was necessarily Hensche’s intention to convey spiritual ideas to his students
while he taught them about painting, but that is what occurred. I believe that my study shows that
ideas about spirituality may, under certain circumstances, be acquired within the course of
artistic education, and further, certain specific ideas about the spiritual may be passed from
teacher to student. Research has shown that schools and teachers can convey many covert or
implied ideas, so ideas about spirituality might well be included in these. Without a doubt, more
research into how spiritual ideas are passed from teachers to students is indicated.

I realize that the implications of these findings may be exciting for some and troublesome
for others. My study was not an easy one to define, to conduct, or to interpret. Thus it would be
inappropriate, in these concluding statements, to offer easy answers. Socrates’ bold statement
that “the unexamined life is not worth living” urges each of us to inquire and to inquire deeply
into the nature and meaning and purposes of our own existence. What I am more certain of than
ever is the possibility that education, especially in art, can be as deep, rich, and meaningful as the
well-examined life. And I remain convinced that Einstein was right: The mysterious is the most
beautiful thing we can experience.
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APPENDIX A: PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions were intended for use as prompters. They are grouped into general categories that were introduced to the respondent as an open-ended invitation to “Tell me about…”

I. Tell me about your general background…
What is your name?
Where do you live?
What is your occupation?
How long have you been a(n) ________?
Can you tell me some about your childhood and your education through high school?

II. Tell me about becoming an artist…
Can you think back to when you remember first being exposed to art and becoming interested in it? Were there certain experiences, persons, or ideas that influenced or encouraged your interest?
How was it that art began to assume more importance in your life?
Tell me about when you first begin to think of yourself as an artist.
When did your friends/family start to refer to you as an artist? (before/after self?)
How did they characterize your ability?
Students are sometimes warned not to become professional artists because it is difficult to earn a living. Tell me about your decision to become a painter…
What made it seem like the right decision for you?
What types of painting were you interested in doing?
What sorts of things did you want to paint?
Can you talk about what these things meant to you?
What ideas, artworks, or other artists have influenced your work?
In your view, what is an artist?

III. Tell me about your first trip to Provincetown…
Prompt with variations on "tell me more about…" to encourage elaboration in the following areas:
How did you hear about Provincetown?
What made you decide to go there?
How long were you there? How many summers did you study there?
What did you expect to find/learn there?
Can you remember any of the other students? What were they like?
What was a typical day there like?
What sorts of activities were emphasized?
What was significant about ________? (followup prompter)
What ideas about painting and art did you carry home with you?
Did you think about art or painting any differently after that first summer?
Did you think about yourself in any way differently?
(If so) in what ways?
IV. Tell me about Henry Hensche…
Tell me about Henry Hensche…
Prompt with variations on "tell me more about…" to encourage elaboration in the following areas:

What were your first impressions of him?
Can you describe for me HH, the artist
Would you describe your relationship with Henry Hensche?
What was it about Henry (traits, qualities) that you responded to?
What do you believe Henry expected of you as a student?

See if you can remember back to your first day in Henry's class. What things did he talk about regarding art and painting and what he believed was important?

How did you respond to these ideas?
Were their other students who expressed different ideas? What were they?
(If so, how were their ideas received?)
Were there any ideas that HH conveyed to you that he didn't talk about, but which were more or less "just understood?"

Did HH talk about his ideas of the role of the artist in society with you?
Can you take me back to when you were first becoming aware of the importance of light and color key in painting? What was there about it that seemed significant to you?

What was HH’s view of nature?
What were HH’s views on other approaches to painting? (For example, abstract or imaginative approaches…)
What do you believe was the most valuable thing HH gave his students?
Are there other important things that you learned from HH that I've failed to ask you about? (If so, how did he convey these ideas?)

V. Tell me about how your work has developed over the years…
Tell me about your work.
Has your painting changed over the years? (If so, in what ways?)
Is there any experience or event that you would describe as a major turning point in your development as an artist?
As an artist, what do you believe is your role in society?
What ideas or philosophy of art have you tried to convey to your own students?
What key advice might you give those students who have decided to become painters?
What is it that makes you keep painting?

VI. Tell me about your experiences of painting…
Describe what is like when you are deeply involved in painting.

Can you talk about what this felt like to you, your thoughts, any details you can remember about the experience?

Have you ever had any other experiences that you might describe as "unusual" when painting?
The painter, Robert Henri, wrote that the purpose of painting was not to make a painting but for the artist to achieve a "more than ordinary state of existence." What do think he meant by this?
Can you talk about light as an element in your painting?
Can you talk about when you first began to see color in the way that Hensche taught?
What was this experience like for you?
Tell me about what it's like when everything is going well, when you're really in the flow of making a painting.

Some artists have reported that for them, the process of art making and sometimes looking at works of art can be a type of “spiritual” experience. What is your take on this?

Was this anything that HH ever talked about?
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM/RELEASE FORM  
(Nonclinical)

1. Study Title: The Disciples of Light: A Way of Seeing and the Educational Transfer of Ideas Linking Spirituality and Art Among Southern Painters in the Hensche-Hawthorne Tradition

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30p.m.
   Dr. Karen Hamblen 225-578-2339
   Barbara Faulkner 601-638-0713

4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to determine what artistic beliefs, philosophy, and worldview, including the belief in a spiritual dimension to art, may be acquired through artistic education.

5. Subject Inclusion: Individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 who do not report psychological or neurological conditions.

6. Number of subjects: 7

7. Study Procedures: The study will be a series of approximately three oral interviews with each of the seven subjects in which each will provide an audio-taped oral history of memories about artistic development and education, and personal philosophy and views on art.

8. Benefits: Subjects will not be compensated for the study.

9. Risks: There are no foreseeable risks posed to the subjects through the proposed interviews.

10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

12. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject _________________________________ Date____________
INTERVIEWEE RELEASE FORM

Tapes and Transcripts

I, ________________________________, do hereby give to the T. Harry Williams Center at LSU all right, title or interest in the tape-recorded interviews conducted by ________________________________ on ________________________________.

Name of interviewer(s)                                           Date(s)

I understand that these interviews will be protected by copyright and deposited in the LSU Libraries for the use of future scholars. I also understand that the tapes and transcripts may be used in public presentations including but not limited to audio or video documentaries, CD-ROMs, Internet publications, slide-tape presentations, or exhibits. This gift does not preclude any use that I myself may want to make of the information in these recordings.

CHECK ONE:

Tapes and transcripts may be used without restriction     ______.

Tapes and transcripts are subject to the attached restrictions. ______

_________________________  _______________________
Signature of Interviewee             Date

_________________________
Address

_________________________
Telephone Number
APPENDIX C: LINEAGE OF HENSCHE-HAWTHORNE SCHOOL

William Merritt Chase
b. 1849- d. 1916
Founded: Chase School of Art
(became Parsons School of Design)
Founded: Shinnecock Summer School of Painting, Long Island/ NY
1891-1902

Students:
Georgia O’Keefe
Edward Hopper
Rockwell Kent

Students:
Joseph Stella
Charles Sheeler

Charles Webster Hawthorne
b. 1872 – d. 1930
Founded: Cape Cod School of Art
Provincetown, MA
1899-1930

Students:
Edwin Dickinson
John Noble

Students:
Richard Miller
Max Bohm

Henry Hensche
b. 1899 -d. 1992
Cape School of Art
Provincetown, MA, 1935-1985
Studio One, Gray, LA
1974-1992

Students:
Franz Kline
Hans Hoffmann

Students:
William Draper
Nelson Shanks

Charlie Miller
Memphis, TN
March-May 2005

Sammy Britt
Cleveland, MS
Jan. 2005

George Thurmond
Starkville, MS
Jan.-May 2005

Gerald DeLoach
Clarksdale, MS
Jan.-Oct. 2005

Richard Kelso
Jackson, MS
Jan.-May 2005

Barbara Faulkner
Vicksburg, MS

John Robichaux
Thibodaux, LA
Jan.-May 2005

Chris Diket
Thibodaux, LA
Jan.-May 2005

Jane Block
Thibodaux, LA
Pilot study 11-30-04
APPENDIX D: ANALYSIS OF PAINTINGS

1. Sammy Britt, Cleveland, Mississippi.

*Figure with dishpan*, Sammy Britt, (date uncertain)

**Description:** An arrangement of still life objects is shown in outdoor sunlight. A miniature replica of classical statuary of a nude woman with missing arms stands in a contraposto position centered before a white enamel dishpan that has been turned on its edge to form a round backdrop for the white figurine. These forms are slightly to the left of center and occupy the upper two-thirds of the composition. To the left of the figure is a green glass wine bottle, and to the figure’s right a few inches nearer to the viewer is another white object, an enamel pitcher with a dark handle. In the foreground are four blocks: a red brick and three smaller blocks painted yellow, blue, and white. The three colored blocks rest on a surface slightly lower than the tabletop where the figure stands. The white block is at the edge of the tabletop to the right and in front of the pitcher. Four
very small round objects that look like beads are placed among the larger objects. The object’s cast shadows indicate a light source that is to the right and slightly behind the objects and suggest a time of early to mid-morning. Dark foliage is seen behind the arrangement, and a few leaf shadows are seen on the tabletop.

**Analysis:** Placement of objects within the composition follows a gentle “S” curve beginning with the brick, the nearest foreground object, and ending with the top edge of the enamel dishpan curving back into the top of the pitcher. The compositional “S” curve echoes the smaller “S” of the figure’s contraposto posture. The object placement leads the viewer’s eye from the foreground back to the central white-on-white objects. Reinforcing this movement are the four small round beads that follow the same path and help to emphasize a focal area in the white figure. Colors are rich yet subtle, particularly within the four white objects. These contain a range of blues, violets, yellows, greens, and pinks to create an illusion of solid 3-dimensional forms receding in the limited space. The central white objects are framed by the contrasting dark, indistinct suggestion of foliage behind. The edges of many objects glow with “halations,” the subtle halo of light that appears to emanate from the edges of objects seen in sunlight.

**Interpretation:** White is often thought of as the absence of color, yet the variations of color among white objects in this still life refutes that assumption. Instead, the viewer is shown strong, distinct notes of color that describe the 3-dimensional white forms in mid-morning light. Remarkably, all four of the white forms touch and overlap at some point, and yet do not blend or disappear into one another. Painters in the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition study the special problems presented by using pure color to paint a white object in sunlight; it represents a level of difficulty that, once mastered, signals that the painter has attained an advanced level of “seeing.” To paint not one or two, but four overlapping white objects successfully must be recognized as a tour d’force in seeing and painting within this tradition. Britt often paints common objects—he is especially fond of enamel pots and pans, bricks, and discarded bottles—yet these are transformed into objects of beauty through the painter’s “seeing” of light and color. The central figurine appears to reference the ideal of classical beauty in ancient Greek sculpture, connecting the everyday objects scattered around it to what has been celebrated as a pinnacle of achievement in the history of western art. The classical nude female figure framed against the round shape of the dishpan also recalls Botticelli’s Renaissance masterpiece, *The Birth of Venus*. The three colored blocks in the extreme foreground at first seem out of context, yet they connect Hensche’s approach to “seeing and painting” with classical tradition, as if announcing the next evolutionary stage of western art: It is a meeting of ancient and contemporary, classical and common.
Description: The urban landscape shows a building, cars, and signs along a city street. In front of the building stands a prominent sign topped with a smiling cartoon pig wearing a chef’s hat. The lettering underneath the pig identifies the place as “Berretta’s Bar-B-Q.” Part of a second building is seen on the left side of the picture. The viewer sees a parking area in front of and on one side of Beretta’s that is occupied by five parked vehicles. Two cars on the right side of the picture are seen frontally in deep shadow under a shelter with open sides. A 1950s-era red Cadillac convertible is parked in the shadow of the building’s front. Two more cars, a light-colored sedan and a yellow Volkswagen van are parked in the sun on the adjacent side of the building. The scene is viewed from a vantage point diagonally across the street from Beretta’s looking directly toward an open door at the building’s corner. Vibrant, saturated reds, yellows, and oranges dominate the lower two-thirds of the picture space along with dark blues and violets in the shadow shapes. A brilliant blue sky occupies the upper third of the picture, lighter where it meets the urban horizon. A telephone line curves through the sky from post to post. Numerous linear elements criss-cross the space; traffic stripes on the street, telephone poles and wires, edges and corners of the square flat-topped buildings, and even the long diagonal cast shadows.

Analysis: The lengthy shadows and saturated color suggest the golden tint of late afternoon light. Deep violets in the shadows contrast sharply with masses of red and orange. There is a clean, precise quality to the rendering of the predominantly rectilinear shapes. The repetition of linear elements, especially the many horizontals, lends a sense of stability and restfulness to the composition that contrasts sharply with its jarring colors. The rhythmical movement of the curving telephone line against the sky seems to tie it all together. The composition is vertically bisected in the exact center by the
telephone pole that stands next to the sign. These are the two tallest elements in the landscape towering above the flat-topped buildings and street and they create a major focal area in the composition. In the foreground, diagonal lines formed by shadows and road stripes create an “X” that is centered at the bottom of the telephone pole and sign reinforcing the focal area. In spite of the parked cars and the open door, no people can be seen. The only evidence of activity is a plume of smoke venting from a flue on the rooftop of the next building.

**Interpretation:** Beretta’s Bar-B-Q was a Memphis landmark that was popular from the fifties through the seventies. There is a persistent sense of nostalgia in this painting that is reinforced by a number of elements: the fleeting afternoon light that implies the fleeting of time, the 1950s Cadillac convertible that was a romantic icon of that bygone era, the lonely absence of human activity, and the perfection of rendering and color that makes the view of Beretta’s seem more like the memory of an idyllic past rather than an actual place. Even the subtle compositional “X” seems to tell the viewer, “look here, pay attention, this place is significant.” What any casual eye might take for a commonplace if trashy urban vista jammed with colors and signs shouting for attention is transformed into a scene of surpassing beauty and order through the artist’s vision and skill. The painting’s long shadows and its sense of stillness and waiting recalls that of Edward Hopper’s 1930 masterpiece, *Early Sunday Morning*. It also brings to mind the endless block studies Hensche students painted to learn about the effects of light on color, and how together, these describe form. The effect of the sky color lightening nearer to the horizon seems to create a dreamlike halo over Berretta’s again calling the viewer’s attention to the special qualities of the place.
Richard Kelso, Jackson, Mississippi

![Image of a painting showing a view of the interior of a small room with an open window in the upper left and the partially cropped figure of a man facing the right edge of the picture space. The small room holds a profusion of objects: the viewer can see the corner of a neatly made bed, a chair with a blue shirt draped on its back, several small tables, a white bust, a small throw rug, paintings on the walls. The small desk near the window holds what may be pictures, letters, and drawing or writing materials. The man is dressed in blue jeans and a camouflage shirt and he is intently looking and reaching toward something beyond the right edge of the picture space. His tanned face is darker than his silver hair. In front of him, the viewer sees the edge of a palette and a palette stand with a red rag hanging from its side. Notes of blue, green and violet are seen in the fore and middleground near to the viewer but darker, more subdued neutral tones are seen on the far side of the room. A sunny vista with foliage and blue sky is seen through the window, the lightest color notes in the composition.](Britt-painting-in-his-studio, Richard-Kelso,-after-2002)

**Description:** The painting shows a view of the interior of a small room with an open window in the upper left and the partially cropped figure of a man facing the right edge of the picture space. The small room holds a profusion of objects: the viewer can see the corner of a neatly made bed, a chair with a blue shirt draped on its back, several small tables, a white bust, a small throw rug, paintings on the walls. The small desk near the window holds what may be pictures, letters, and drawing or writing materials. The man is dressed in blue jeans and a camouflage shirt and he is intently looking and reaching toward something beyond the right edge of the picture space. His tanned face is darker than his silver hair. In front of him, the viewer sees the edge of a palette and a palette stand with a red rag hanging from its side. Notes of blue, green and violet are seen in the fore and middleground near to the viewer but darker, more subdued neutral tones are seen on the far side of the room. A sunny vista with foliage and blue sky is seen through the window, the lightest color notes in the composition.

**Analysis:** The contrast between the cool, dark interior of the room and the brilliance of sunlight outside the window are visually striking. The indirect natural light from the window appears to be the only source of light within the room, reflecting off the bust, bed, tables, and the soft luster of the wooden floor. The colors the indirect light reveals to us are rich, deep notes. The interior is crowded, but orderly with every object conveying a
sense of quiet purpose and meaning. The white bust evokes classical traditions, but it also refers to the Hensche-Hawthorne study of color within white objects. Textures The viewer may have never before seen Britt at work painting, but his solid relaxed stance, active gesture, and focused gaze convey intense and total involvement with his work. The composition of the painting is complex and unusual. The figure facing the edge of the picture space purposefully breaks a guideline of composition to direct the viewer’s attention outside of the picture space toward what we cannot see: Britt’s painting. There is a diagonal movement through the picture from near to far toward the view out the window directing the viewer’s gaze to the light and deep space.

**Interpretation:** The artist’s studio is an intimate space that might be regarded as an extension of her or his personality, interests, and personal philosophy of painting: A view of the artist’s studio is no less a portrait of the artist than the image of Britt working at his easel. Kelso told me that he often visits and paints with his mentor at his studio when he travels to Cleveland, Mississippi to visit his mother, so he has had ample opportunity to observe Britt at work both in his studio and outside of it. This small painting was painted in winter when it was too cold to work outdoors, but it is packed with big ideas: it hints at the contrast between natural and man-made spaces; it offers Kelso’s comment on the question of **what is a painter?** but it is also a homage to his mentor and friend; and finally, of course, it is about **seeing** how light and color reveal form. By showing the viewer Britt at work but not the result of that work, Kelso seems to allude to the mysterious quality that drives the painter to repeatedly confront and interpret the visual world in terms of paint.
4. George T. Thurmond, Starkville, Mississippi

*Autumn Landscape*, George T. Thurmond, (1999-2001)

**Description:** The scene shows a pathway leading away from the viewer curving from right to left past an open field, pond, and a grouping of trees in the center until it disappears behind the trees. Rich, saturated oranges, yellows, and reds are predominate colors, with touches of blue, green, deep red, and violet in the shadow areas. The long shadows sweep diagonally across the path and the picture space. Trees in the distance fade in intensity to pale red-violets. Where the sky meets the trees, it lightens and the color shifts towards red-violet. The rounded masses of foliage in the trees are solidly modeled and repeated with organic variations in color and shape. Their irregular shapes contrast with the more regular, rectilinear patches of color on the path.

**Analysis:** The entire scene seems bathed in the intense glow of early morning or late afternoon light, which is confirmed by the lengthy shadows. The leaves have not yet fallen from the trees, but their warm colors suggest that the green of summer is nearly gone. Except for two lighter streaks in the sky that may be jet trails, the path is the viewer’s only sign of human impact on nature, and it is deserted. The diminishing path and the trees receding into the distance to meet the sky create a sense of deep space. The muddy pond to the right of the path is still as glass and reflects the red-violet notes in a sky that seems to show the haze of late summer. The sweeping diagonal shadows are a dynamic element that creates movement across the picture plane and organizes the composition into areas of light and dark.
**Interpretation:** The viewer is reminded that infinite variety and beauty of nature is present even in an ordinary vista on a country road. Light, which is the essence of nature, enfolds the organic and the manmade alike, revealing an abundance of surprising colors and rhythmical forms. The viewer is a part of nature and can partake of its timeless beauty and grandeur by taking the time to stop and become of aware of it. Hawthorne’s notion of “one spot of color coming against another” is the painter’s way to see and represent nature, and yet, the painter has gone beyond mere recording here into the expressive terrain of the poetic.
5. Gerald Deloach, Clarksdale, Mississippi

Description: The scene describes a view in what is likely a backyard. In the foreground on the right side, a white lawn chair stands next to a group of trees facing a small table in the lower left corner of the picture space. The table supports a slender yellow vase and a round blue pot. Beyond the group of trees, one can see a sunny open field, and beyond that, a tree line fades in the distance. The light comes from the left and behind the trees creating long shadows. The picture space is square with dark shadow areas across the top, down the left side, and at the bottom framing the lighter area in the center. Dark tree trunks in varying sizes are silhouetted against bright greens, yellows, and pale pink-blue. The trees are so dark they appear almost black as they rise vertically into the dark canopy overhead. Sun filters through the leaves creating patches of light on the lawn, and leaf patterns dot the foliage. A red flowering bush, partly in sun, is next to the table, which is in shadow.

Analysis: The use of intense contrast between light and dark in the areas of sun and shade is this painting’s most dramatic feature. It creates the sense of deep, cool shade in an early morning of what may be later be a bright, hot, summer day. The long shadows confirm that it is early and the lush foliage indicates that it is probably late spring or summer. The chair is empty, but seems to invite the viewer to imagine resting there. The compositional frame formed by the dark foliage around three edges of the picture space makes the center an area of visual focus. Within this area, the repetition of tree trunks and leaf patterns establish a pleasing visual rhythm. Three horizontal bands of color in green,
yellow, and pale pink-blue behind the silhouetted trees create a recession of space toward the distant horizon and sky. The foreground is broken into patches of light and dark. Surprisingly, the white chair in the foreground is not the lightest element of color in the composition; instead, the sky and the sun-washed field behind the trees are brighter, adding to the feeling of early-morning coolness in the dense shade.

**Interpretation:** Again, this painting represents a subject in which the painter discovers “beauty in the commonplace.” Nature is all around us, even in our backyards, and this invites us to rest in it and enjoy it for a while. The glimpses of open space beyond the yard places the scene within the larger world of nature, but the space shown in this painting is intimate, private, and sheltered. It is a place for meditation and reflection, a cool, comfortable place for simply “being” in the midst of nature, but on a personal scale. The little table with the pots on it is probably where the painter arranges still lifes for outdoor painting and the chair facing it may be where he rests when away from the easel. Thus, this painting also becomes an oblique view into the painter’s work and his everyday world.
Description: The square-format painting depicts a view in what is perhaps another backyard. In the center between two larger trees, stand an arbor that forms three arches. The light comes from high in the sky on the left side creating dense shadows. The bushy top of the arbor is mid-way between the top and bottom edges of the picture space at about the viewer’s eye-level, and it is slightly right of center. Behind the arbor, the viewer can see indications of more distant trees and foliage. Reds and violets dominate the palette, with the tree canopies appearing as red-orange masses with rich violets in shadow areas. A hazy blue sky with a few clouds is overhead, but it shifts to magenta and violet nearer to the horizon.

Analysis: The central subject of the composition is the arbor with its masses of foliage and vines covering a manmade framework. The painting’s most striking visual feature, however, is its color. The saturated reds, magentas, and violets convey a sense of intense summer heat and atmospheric density that blankets every form. It is heat that can be physically felt and visually seen. The composition’s calm balanced approximate symmetry contrasts with its searing color. The rhythmic flow of the arbor’s arched segments rendered with loose brushwork both interrupts and frames the forms suggested in the distance behind it.

Interpretation: Solving a problem of describing color in the light key presented by what Hensche called “the difficult light” of southern Louisiana is the real subject of this painting. The commonplace subjects of the arbor and trees in a backyard are convenient foils for the light and color, but the heightened color conveys much more than that. One can nearly breathe the warm, dense, humid atmosphere that alters light and color so dramatically. In this place, nature is subject to the light key just as the arbor is subject to the structure that supports it.
7. Chris Diket, Thibodaux, Louisiana

*Still Life with Vase and Dish*, Chris Diket, (date uncertain)

**Description:** The still life shows a faceted white vase holding a single crepe myrtle blossom and stem. The vase is decorated with what looks like painted cherry blossoms. It rests on a tabletop, and scattered around it the viewer sees another blossom and a few petals and leaves. Behind this arrangement is a plate tilted on its edge serving as a backdrop. The plate is decorated with painted leaves and vines around its outer edge. The light source is to the right and slightly behind the objects and it appears to be the indirect, interior light of a studio. Warm reds and oranges predominate, but cooler blue and violet hues describe the faceted form of the white vase and the plate behind it.

**Analysis:** Cleanly rendered forms and edges describe each change in plane, angle, and depth among the objects with jewel-like precision. These announce the painter’s intention to show the selected objects as “true to nature” and to create an illusion of three-dimensional solidity. Moreover, his selection of objects seems as intentional as his rendering of them; not a plain vase and plate, but ones with painted decorative flowers and leaves that are shown along side a “real” flower and leaves. The distance from the surface of the picture plane to the narrow suggestion of space behind the plate is a matter
of only inches, but within these inches is a rich and carefully seen space. Warm, subtle hues contrast with cooler notes in the vase and plate.

**Interpretation:** A still life is a small, but eloquent world on a tabletop. It is a microcosm of the painter’s knowledge, skills, beliefs, and aspirations for painting. The painter selects and arranges its elements with the aim of studying relationships among inanimate objects that may resonate with meanings beyond those objects. Surprising notes of color such as the green tones in the vase’s shadow present the space as both lush and mysterious. The petals and leaves that have fallen on the table around the vase contrast the fragility of actual natural beauty with that of the painted natural beauty: The painter paints flowers next to paintings of painted flowers, perhaps commenting on layers of reality and the complexities of representing it.
APPENDIX E: SUMMARY OUTLINE OF THEMES AND IDEAS
AS THEY RELATE TO KEY QUESTIONS

I. What was the painter’s lived experiences of art making and becoming an artist?
A. Each painter expressed a perception that painting was his “life’s calling.”
B. All had an early interest in drawing; many identified some “natural ability” for it
C. All had a desire to learn how to paint realistically during a period when realism was not the dominant trend in art.
D. Each painter experienced pleasurable states of “creative flow” in art making that include suspension of physical discomfort and sense of time passing.
E. Each described a frequent desire to engage in art making activities
F. Experience painting as total integration of mind and body
G. For each, the most intense period of art learning took place in early adulthood.
H. Each actively sought experiences and guidance that would expand knowledge
I. Each experienced keener visual perceptions of color under Hensche’s instruction
J. Each was schooled in the lore of the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition
K. Expressed the belief that they could not have learned this type of realistic painting anywhere else or from any other teacher than Hensche
L. Most perceive the visual world in terms of artistic expression; think about or imagine painting while engaged in other activities
M. Most expressed some notion of becoming a painter as a type of “journey” and view becoming a painter as a lifelong process

II. What were the nature of the ideas and experiences that the artists identified as significant in forming their belief systems?
A. Learning to see was identified as the most important step in becoming a painter
   1. Seeing without preconceptions/expectations (The Innocent Eye)
   2. Seeing was a way to discover visual truth for oneself.
   3. Seeing was an exercise in rational analysis of visual relationships
   4. Seeing was a progressive, learnable skill achieved by small increments
   5. Seeing in painting reflects human evolutionary progress
   6. Seeing was the key to artistic growth
   7. Belief that the human capacity for finer seeing is unlimited
B. Commitment to a code of Artistic Integrity that includes:
   1. Self-culture: Hard work, dedication, and self-discipline were required to progress. The painter is responsible for his own development.
   2. Non-materialistic goals: no painting to gain material rewards or recognition
   3. Willingness to make personal sacrifices to remain true to one’s ideals
   4. Avoiding formulaic methods and artistic stagnation
   5. Never claiming to have reached the limits of mastery
C. Beauty and Truth in painting
   1. Truth and beauty are indivisible
   2. Truth and beauty can be seen by artists through elevated visual perception
   3. Visual truth was Hensche’s highest ideal for painting
   4. Hawthorne also emphasized an ideal of “truth” in painting; Chase, influenced by Liebl’s concept, emphasized “artistic truth.”
5. Human beings yearn for beauty and truth; it can be found in the commonplace, the particular, the fleeting moment
6. The artist is an instrument for delivering beauty/truth to society
7. Truth is the highest virtue of the painter’s art
8. The continuing search for truth is evidence of artistic integrity

D. Ideas about Artistic Facility (natural ability, technical skills, expressive capacity)
   1. Excellent technical skills and fluency were essential for poetic expression in painting to succeed
   2. “Natural talent” cannot be developed without motivation and hard work
   3. Technical skills and formal mastery are the “language” of painting: What makes a painting “art” comes from within the painter
   4. Painting is an activity that integrates mind and body
   5. Creativity cannot be taught / creativity cannot compensate for poor technical skills or laziness
   6. No ultimate state of painting mastery is possible

E. Additional ideas/beliefs expressed by the interviewees:
   1. Realistic painters operated outside of the dominant paradigm of abstract modernism in the 1960-70s.
   2. Experienced repression because of desire to paint realistically.
   3. The intellectual exchange and camaraderie of the Provincetown experience was a significant motivator
   4. Painting from direct observation yields verifiable results
   5. Hensche was a genius, a visionary who deserved more recognition than he received/Hensche was the model of what a painter could and should be
   6. The Hensche-Hawthorne approach combines the insights of Monet about color and light with Cezanne’s analysis of form/ it was NOT impressionism

III. In what ways did the artists define and experience art as “spiritual”?
    A. Responding to the mystery that is life; poetic impulses
    A. A belief in creativity/artistic ability as a divinely bestowed “gift”
    B. Painting as a “calling”
    C. Staying true to one’s self and one’s ideals
    D. Responding to experiences of beauty/truth, especially in nature
    E. Through intuition as a form of knowledge
    F. Through painting as a way of understanding the structures of reality
    G. Painting as expression/unification of inner and outer realities
    H. Through personal interpretations of the state of “creative flow”
    I. Painting/drawing fosters meditative states leading to greater perceptual awareness
    J. Responding to the universal truths of light and color
    K. Painting as an act of transformation
    L. The concept of “elevated vision” as a nearly mystical power

IV. What role did the artist’s education play in inculcating and shaping his foundational beliefs?
    A. Less than half of the interviewees had school art or private art lessons while in
elementary or secondary school / became intensely focused on painting in teens or early adulthood.

B. All claimed Hensche as a primary mentor and his work as a major influence
C. Hensche’s demonstrations were the most important element of his teaching
D. All sought out “the Provincetown experience” and the company of like-minded artists
E. All have read and/or studied Hawthorne’s “little book”
F. The three painters who studied with Britt received additional encouragement
G. The two Louisiana painters had winter access to Hensche’s teaching/criticism from the mid-70s onward
H. All have sought out and studied the work of other landscape, figure, and still life painters that they have identified and claimed as personal heroes or influences
I. All are well-versed in the lore of the Hensche-Hawthorne tradition, the general history of painting, impressionist history, and color theory
J. All can describe the Hensche-Hawthorne approach to light and color and can contrast it with traditional approaches to tonal painting

V. In what ways do the artist’s beliefs effect his experience, practice, and teaching of art?
A. The works of each artist seek to represent light, color, and form in a realistic manner
B. Their work is based largely upon direct observation of nature
C. Their works share a similar palette and sensibility for color
D. Alla prima or premier coup approach to painting; Drawing is last
E. Each conveyed confidence/assurance about his approach to painting
F. Teaching others to paint in this manner was both a responsibility and a sacrifice
G. Those who teach art employ some of Hensche’s ideas and approaches in the form of:
   1. Individual student critiques
   2. An emphasis on direct observation from nature
   3. An emphasis on the rational analysis of form and color
   4. Teaching to the individual needs of the student
   5. Using painting demonstrations as a central teaching tool
   6. Communicate notions of beauty/truth in painting
   7. Emphasize the importance of hard work, artistic integrity, and staying true to one’s ideals
APPENDIX F: EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH GERALD DELOACH

RECEIVED: 1-24-05:

BF: The first questions in the oral interviews touch on your background (family, where you’re from, early interests), early influences and experiences of becoming an artist

I was born in Clarksdale in 1948. My Father Governor Marshall Deloach and My Mother, Clara Gray Inman Deloach lived 12 miles south of Clarksdale in the New Africa community. They ran a small country store in the front part of our home as well as a small cotton farm. I have two older brothers.

My first introduction to art was probably crayons in Sunday school. There wasn’t any art in our home except maybe the photographs at the top of the calendars, and the engraved illustrations in my grandmother’s family bible, pictures in various magazines. I remember the illustrations from Post magazine, and I remember the comic book art from early years… being truly frightened by those tales of horror comics. (No television until the 7th grade)

I always enjoyed what little art we were given in elementary school. I used to draw on the stiff cardboard that came back from the laundry in the white dress shirts that we wore to church every Sunday. In school I spent a lot of time drawing battle ships, planes and tanks and having battles in that the era of post-war patriotic- kill the Nazis and Japs fervor. I had developed a few stereotypical drawing formulas, and did some criminally bad watercolor copies of photographs before leaving elementary school.

In high school, I took art and was a member of the art club, but I never took art that seriously as a field of study, or a career choice. I knew that I wasn't that good of a draftsman, and although we were exposed to a lot of different mediums and crafts in high school, draftsmanship wasn't really taught.

When I decided to attend college, I was encouraged to make "practical " choices as to what I studied... I chose to major in accounting because I had a brother who was a CPA, and bookkeeping had been easy for me in high school. It turned out, that the fourth semester of business and accounting was all I could stand..

What made me decide to change my major field of study to art was a course in design that I had taken to fulfill a requirement. The teacher, Stan Topol, was an abstract expressionist fresh out of graduate school and full of enthusiasm. He broke the problem of design into its elements. Light/dark, line / shape, static/ movement...etc. I did the projects without really understanding what I was doing... sort of like solving a puzzle...

Stan offered encouragement. He suggested that I had a good intuitive sense for design. Based on my experiences in his class I decided to change my field of study to art. I decided to study art because of the following reasons:

1. I didn't want to be an accountant.
2. It wasn't a prerequisite to be able to draw realistically to study art.
3. I had been told I had some talent in design.
4. It was fun to do.
5. I enjoyed the company of some students I met who were studying art.
6. There was the smell of Freedom in the air (1968)

Ok. More later... if you have questions rising from the above.... ask. :>)}
Here’s a little more... you wouldn't believe me when I tell you about computer hell. I downloaded mozilla browser, which ate my operating system. so I just finished getting it back together.  

When I changed my major to art at Delta State, it was a decision based on wanting to do what I enjoyed doing. I had no great understanding of what it meant to be an artist. I had no special talents, and I made my decisions based on the encouragement of one instructor. I had made friends with a few students who were majoring in art. I understood an artist to be one who creates art... Exactly what qualified as art was an item open for much debate, which we students did on a regular basis.  

There were two camps at the Art department... the modernist camp put emphasis on the expression of individuality, in this camp, craft was learned on the fly, i.e. the idea came first, then the student would scrap up the knowledge required to pull it off. Sometimes the lack of craftsmanship would be disgracefully distracting in this camp, as Some of the students had no basic knowledge of drawing or painting. Being in this camp was a lot of fun in some ways, I have always enjoyed experimenting with art materials, Found objects etc. Making new arrangements and so forth. What happens if... sort of thing. I entered the art department because I felt comfortable doing this type of work. I did however feel that there was some concrete knowledge that I needed to learn.. A basic thing like how to draw and paint realistically... While I had a great deal of respect for the innovative pioneers of modernism, I had little respect for their imitators. For example, I believe it took a great deal of courage to be the original Jackson Pollack, but it took absolutely nothing copy his device or method....  

In the other camp at the art department, was Sammy Britt. Sammy believed that one must develop a foundation and understanding of drawing and painting by practicing drawing and painting from life. He believed that one must develop a sense of control of the medium and a vocabulary of color. When the student develops control, he uses it to make art. Although I had entered the art department on the strength of my abstract design, I became attuned to my personal need to develop drawing and painting... skills that seemed unattainable through pure experimentation. I took notice of what was going on in Sammy’s classes. I noticed that his students weren’t asked to create finished paintings, but used painting as a means of study. They were studying color relationships based on observation. After seeing some of Sammy’s paintings, as well as slides of his teachers paintings (H. Hensche) I started noticing colors in nature that were unavailable to my conscious mind before being exposed to this approach to painting. My first painting experiences in SB’s class was painfully difficult. Just learning to spread paint on a board with a palette knife was hard enough. You could forget any sense of drawing.. and the color... what a mystery! In a way the problem was reduced to considering how observed colors relate to each other... warmer or cooler, lighter or darker, more red, or more yellow, or more blue. Saturated or neutral. Starting with broad generalization and working it toward very specific nuance was the way a painting progressed for beginner as well as the experienced. Large shapes of color created by the patterns of light and shadow. Object consciousness dissolves into color...
shape consciousness. I became fully engaged in solving this puzzle of color shapes describing 3-D forms buried in volumes of light, atmosphere, reflections, and glows. I began to see a previously unknown world of perception. I asked myself.. “If this was invisible to me before, what else still is?” Mucho Grande.

1. Describe your first impressions of Henry Hensche and his school in Provincetown. Can you recall those things/events made the most lasting impressions on you?

REPLY RECEIVED: 5-31-05:

My first impressions of Henry Hensche came long before I actually met him.. Sammy Britt showed us slides of his work and talked about the significance of his school a couple of years before G. Tommy Thurmond and myself went up there in 1969. Sammy gave us the impression that Hensche was probably the only person who was actually teaching students how to perceive color as the impressionists. Sammy talked about how it was Hawthorne who had originally developed the technique of teaching this, and Henry had been class assistant when Hawthorne died in 1930. Henry inherited the school from Hawthorne, and continued to hold classes from then on. It was also the enthusiasm of two of his students, John Hamrick, and Charlie Miller who inspired me to pursue painting.

When I met Henry what impressed me most was the amount of physical energy that this man had. He was a small-framed thin guy who moved around like he was in his twenties. Very alert and quick witted. He never drove a car in his life (that I know of) and walked everywhere he went. He would show up at the school around 9:30 in the mornings, and go around to each student painting and comment on their work.. Sometimes it would be just a few words, sometimes he would stop at a students easel and talk for two hours. When this happened, the other students would drift over to hear what he had to say. Sometimes Henrys discussion would drift away from painting into other areas of interest. Lots of discussions evolved into diatribes about socialism and the ideal society. Proper diet was another subject which Henry would expound upon. The school itself was also impressive for the remnants of its history that hung on its walls. there were studies from years back, that were chosen by Henry of students work that were exemplary of a properly done study. There was a beautiful sunlit portrait that Henry had done of Ada, his wife. There was also a formal portrait of a lady painted by Hawthorne which had had the face scratched out, supposedly by Hawthorne’s wife, in a jealous rage. These paintings, and the many shelves full of still life objects as well as the smell of oil paint, created quite an ambiance. Henry would tell stories of how he would work as Hawthorne’s assistant, how he would lay out his palette, and oil in his paintings. His descriptions added to the lore of the place. Then it was the students themselves, mostly young people from all over the country. Art students from Yale, Harvard, California, Florida, all with a story of how they had managed to arrive in Provincetown in search of some real knowledge of the practical matters of painting.

2. What was it that attracted you to the type of painting that Henry Hensche taught?

REPLY RECEIVED: 5-31-05:
Been to the desert lately? I grew up in a family that only had pictures of relatives on the wall. Art was a storybook. I saw in Henry's work an organized presentation, an impact of the possibilities that I didn't know existed.

Hensche was about something retained from another era… Before the dominance of photography and abstraction. His lessons represented a cutting edge of perceptual knowledge. He spoke of the linear progression from the cave paintings to Cezanne . . . How our visual collective consciousness evolved, and the role of the artist in bringing it about. The linear transition from flat symbols to 3-d colored expressions of space, form, depth, time of day and whatever else you could think of to include, such as the personality of the painter.

I didn't necessarily understand it at the time, but in awe I followed these offerings of a greater knowledge.

3. What did Hensche expect of his students?

REPLY RECEIVED: 5-31-05:

I think that he expected his students to follow his instructions. To study color relationships via still life. It was a very set procedure that, in its execution, was also revealing of the individual's state of perception. Thus, Henry got to know his students rapidly, and his instructions would become more individually specific. Sometimes he would admonish the listeners that what he was telling a student was meant for him/her only, and for them not to attempt to apply it to their own situation.

Henry was keenly aware of his individual student's particular predicament, and he expected a student to respond to his suggestions, if not, there was no further discussion.

4. Can you further discuss your own experiences of learning to see color?

REPLY RECEIVED: 5-31-05:

I have always seen color. My memory of seeing color was at first relative to an object and function consciousness. The tomato is red therefore it is ripe. My skin is red therefore I am sunburned sort of thing. What Hensche's teaching pointed out was that, for example: here is a red object, yet the observed colors are yellow orange and purple yet my mind says it a "red object" the realization that I had been led to observe color in a different way opened the question of what else have I overlooked? Hensche's method was to lead students to exaggerate the purity of the color notes. I came to recognize this as a healthy bias at first. This approach gave us a system to interpolate the difference between similar colors. The resulting paintings expressed vitality of things observed in sunlight. At the same time I began to notice that the exaggeration of the color differences led to dissolution of the unity of the motif. Ever notice that if you decide you want to buy a new car that you begin to notice cars? Perception is like that. If you look for some particular color pattern, well, heck, you will find it. This is where I reside: With the knowledge that my expectations affect what I see, how can I eliminate expectations and observe with a clean slate?

FOLLOWUP TO QUESTION FOUR ABOVE (received 2-28-06):

Well, I guess what I am saying is that the process pushing for strong color differences across the picture plane/motif, leads the painter into expectations of an appearance that is sometimes
incongruent with the physical visual reality. Hensche’s instructions to "look for the strength of
the note" changes the way we interpret the incoming information (from looking at the motif) into
something that doesn't match the physical reality, but is an interpretation. The data is passed
through a mental filter that interpolates it to the nearest pure color. Then, when the painter goes
back to refine his first statements, [s/he] is psychologically inhibited from bringing these strong
colors down to a more neutral accuracy and ends up with an unrealistic over colored painting,
which is a formulaic interpretation.

I just got an email from Ken Massey who mentioned that he has been painting some winter
landscapes (in New Mexico) that are full of colored neutrals. He expressed that it was a good
exercise for getting away from over colored paintings, but then goes on to complain that he can't
seem to get enough difference between the notes of color. This in my opinion is an example of
what I am trying to express. His Expectation is based on something Henry told him as a
neophyte, probably in front of a sunlit tabletop study! As a result his paintings become
expression of something that is contradictory to a quiet winter landscape.

5. What qualities in Henry Hensche do you believe his students responded to?

REPLY RECEIVED: 6-18-05:

Henry showed us new way to consider what is perceived visually. His way was an
analytical ordered study of the particular. A structured process of responding to form and color
from a generality to the specific color and shape, as needed to express one's intent. We were
encouraged by his enthusiastic lectures to make an honest color study. His school was an oasis
for those seeking refinement of vision and proportion and scale, and foundation.

During a time when the academic institutions were encouraging freedom from the
"anachronistic" confines of realism, Hensche was pushing the envelope of understanding visual
perception via painting tabletop still lifes that he arranged in his back yard.

Some were drawn to the revolutionary way of teaching of the combined ideas of Cezanne
and Monet. How to express the light and form together without sacrifice. How to express
intensity and maintain the illusion of 3-D depth.

He advocated progress built on sound principles, idealistic goodness, a utopian vision.
He taught how proceed past paint by number mentality. Into something always evolving, a total
lifestyle (politics, diet, exercise). Maybe it was his comical rantings about Painters Hell, where
Picasso was going! Maybe some stayed to study because of the fear of going to "Painters Hell".
But most of all, it had to be those Saturday morning
painting demonstrations. Sometimes the sun would go behind the clouds and Henry would step
back and look at the sky, and decide what was about to happen. If he thought it was going to stay
behind the clouds, he would go back and change it to a gray day scheme. He would paint for
three hours, and it was impressive how much he could get done in those three hours.

6. Why do you think that HH taught?

REPLY RECEIVED: 6-20-05:

Henry, having been an assistant to Hawthorne, inherited a teaching technique that was in
danger of being lost. The other teachers that taught figurative painting at the time, proceeded
from a tonal basis. That is, the line and value drawing was done first, then color was added last.
Hawthorne’s approach was to go directly for the color first, using it to describe the form and light. Henry thought this was a revolutionary idea worth saving, something he saw as in danger of being lost in light of what was going on in the art world. Henry also loved to talk. He loved the socialization that came from holding class, and getting to know such a diverse gathering of students, young and old. He also said that he learned from his students. Their struggles with problems revealed solutions that were useful to him in his own painting.

7. Can you describe HH’s teaching practices?

REPLY RECEIVED: 6-20-05:

When a student arrived at the Cape School, he/she would go by Henry's home, and introduce himself to Henry and Ada, his wife. Henry would learn about how the student learned about the Cape School. Usually it was from one of his former students whom Henry would most likely know and remember. Sometimes when a student arrived at the School Yard, one of the advanced students would help the student get started, informing him of what colors to put out, how to set up a simple block study, an arrangement of colored blocks in the sunlight. The student would be told to wear a cap or hat, dark or neutral colored shirt (to keep colored reflections off of the board. The student was told to turn his easel away from the sun, so it wouldn't shine directly on the board. If the student had already been initiated into this form of study before he arrived at the school, then he would begin painting in the yard. Henry would usually arrive in the painting Yard around 9-10 a.m., after most students had already begun. He would watch the new students working procedure to seen how much they had already learned. If the student was new to the idea, Henry would do a quick demonstration on the student’s board. He would quickly mix a color for each of the large masses of light and shade in the still life motif… within about 15 -25 minutes, he would have a color for each mass. He would tell the student not to spread the color to the edges of the shapes, but to leave a little white of the board showing around the shape. The reason for this was so that the student could mix back into each shape on the board, without getting into the adjoining colors. Also, by leaving the borders white, the student learned to judge the accuracy of his study by the color relationships only. When beginning a study the student was told to begin with the most obvious color mass, the one easiest to see. He was told to then choose an adjoining color mass to mix next, not to skip haphazardly around the board, but to work the adjoining colors, making mental comparisons of how the colors relate to each other in the motif.

After the student had made a color for each shape/mass, he was told to step back and consider his study, asking himself a few questions:

1. Is there a strong color difference between what is in light and what is in shadow?
2. Have you used the same color to express different shapes. (If you have go back and find the difference by observing the motif, and push the difference in the study)?
3. Do the color shapes hold their proper place within the picture plane... (do any appear to jump out of the relationship, or appear to be dark holes)?

After these considerations, the student would restate the masses, improving them toward what he perceived. If the student cannot see a color, or cannot mix a color in his study, then it was time to abandon it, and set up another still life and start over. A beginning student was taught to make countless starts... abandoning them whenever they became puzzled about a color instead of “stumbling about searching for it”.
After a student could make a strong start in this manner, he was to pick out one of the objects in the arrangement and look for the obvious divisions in the mass shape. These divisions were kept in strict geometrical shapes of a single color in each.* They should appear to hold their position in the picture plane as well as be descriptive of the 3-d quality of the object. If the colors failed, then the student would go back and restate the mass notes and perhaps try to model it again, or abandon it for a new study.

After the student was able to successfully model a block, and was able to paint a white block in sunlight in a colored manner and have it to create the illusion of a white block in sunlight, then he would begin the problem of working with rounded objects. The student would choose simple rounded objects that were not highly reflective, so that the surface was easier to discern. We would leave wine bottles sitting near the brick chimney in the studio so that the brick dust would settle and reveal the bottle’s surface... dusters were forbidden.

After a student was capable of painting a coherent still life in sunlight, he began developing color memory by painting the same still life in different light conditions. First he would get the difference between sunlight and the gray day. Next he would get the difference between early morning light, and late afternoon. When the student could model a bit successfully he was encouraged to do a simple landscape or a portrait head.

He was told to approach the landscape or portrait in the same manner as one would approach the still life. One of the main principles that was always upheld was, "Keep to the masses" Ie. Make the masses as accurately as possible before beginning to model.

*This was the order of progression that was encouraged while I was studying there in the 1971, 72. Later Henry became a bit slack about these strict geometric shapes, or only emphasized it to the students who had the focus to achieve it.

8. What do you recall of HH’s views on what he called “visual truth”?

**REPLY RECEIVED: 6-21-05:**

Henry viewed the history of visual expression in terms of an evolution toward visual truth. He talked about how it had evolved from the flat symbolic cave painting through the innovation of a full-range color palette (permanent violets were added last I believe). This allowed the painter to paint directly from observation using color to express the 3-D quality and volumic form, as well as express the changing keys of light..

Yet, Henry acknowledged that the feat of the greatest painter was to be able to tell the most convincing lie; as all painting is an interpretation of the truth and thus a "lie".

9. Some students have described Hensche as a deeply spiritual individual while others have characterized him in almost opposite terms. Why do you think this is so?

**REPLY RECEIVED: 6-21-05:**

I think it is that way because of the different views that people hold of spirituality. A fundamentalist Christian might consider him to be [de]void of the Christian faith and thus [de]void of true spirituality, whereas a humanitarian might see that Hensche was deeply concerned about the quality of mankind’s life and culture and thus think him highly spiritual.

Definitions of spirituality in relation to Hensche:
1. Of the spirit or the soul, often in a religious or moral aspect, as distinguished from the body. Hensche wasn't much on that until in his later years after hooking up with that Dottie Billiu, who identified with fundamentalism.

2. Of, from or concerned with the intellect, or what is often thought of as the better or higher part of the mind. Hensche was definitely spiritual in this sense, very much so. This of course would be in contradiction to those of the fundamentalist persuasion who think that the intellect is the playground of the devil.

3. Of, or consisting of spirit; not corporeal. You probably wouldn't find Hensche at a seance.

4. Characterized by the ascendancy of the spirit; showing much refinement of thought and feeling. Hensche's expression of intellect was mostly about art, society (he was a socialist), health (a devout follower of the Hay diet), in that order. On a personal level, he was capable of holding a grudge for years and verbally abusing his wife in front of the class while fortified with alcohol. Not very spiritual.

5. Of religion or the church; sacred, devotional. Henry did mention God on occasion... sometimes directly preceding the word damn.

10. What makes an expression in painting poetic? Is this a quality that can be achieved intentionally or does it occur accidentally in a painting? Do you recall that HH ever talked about this?

REPLY RECEIVED: 6-22-05:

As in literary poetry where a few well chosen words can evoke a powerful emotional response, the same is true of a poetic expression in paint: a few carefully chosen colors and shapes capture an essence without describing the totality of the motif. It captures the strength of the subject.

Is this a quality that can be achieved intentionally or does it occur accidentally in a painting?

I believe it can occur both ways, but just as in writing, the writer with the best working knowledge of the language has the potential for greater expression than the novice. Yet the expert can become bound by his own preferred devices as a limitation just as the novice can be limited by his lack of understanding of the literary devices and language. Personally, I have gone through phases where I have chosen to put in every little color variation I could see or imagine only to find that the strength of the painting is lost in busyness. Other paintings consisting of a few well-chosen colors have much more impact. I had to prove to myself that I could paint that many variations, but while it may sometimes be necessary, most often, it is true that "less is more."

I think that "accidental" may be the wrong word. The wisdom of the "happy accident" is that of recognizing it when it happens and saving it. Or was it really not an accident at all, but intuitive? I feel that our intuitive senses are educated by our conscious experiential doings. We learn to be intuitively selective from our personal history of study and learning in addition to our genetic inclinations.

Henry admonished me for modeling every square inch of a study. He suggested that modeling should be saved for the focal points and as a device to lead the eye via the transitions. In his own paintings, it is obvious that he progressed well past the mere literal description into pushing his colors the direction that captured the essence of the effect.
11. What do you recall about other students who studied with HH while you did?

**REPLY RECEIVED: 6-22-05:**
I think I remember that there were several levels of commitment to the idea. The students I remember the most, were the ones who were fighting tooth and nail to understand how to use color in the manner that Henry taught. These were the ones who would be at the school at 7:00 in the morning to find a still life table with sunlight on it before anybody else got it. These students would be found reading about art if they weren't making it. It was their total focus, and it showed in their work. These students were there to push the limit of their understanding. John Hamrick I met at Delta State, his enthusiasm was contagious, and his was a major influence on my life. Charlie Miller, I met on my first visit to Provincetown [in]1969, has incredible ability to see the nuance and design of modeling, also a great knowledge of history of European art. Glen Graffham, was a mentor the first year that I painted in Provincetown. His suggestions helped greatly. Peter Guest was there for his second year, my first year. I remember riding in a car with him and we were trying to note the difference in the perceived color of the yellow center line, near and far. It was a tremendous experience being around so much directed energy.

12. How did Hensche see himself and his students in relation to the history of art and the contemporary practice of painting?

**REPLY RECEIVED: 6-23-05:**
Hensche felt that Hawthorne had devised a method of teaching the innovation brought about by the French impressionists, Monet and Cezanne. Monet, who used color to capture and express the color differences of different times of day and atmospheric conditions, and Cezanne, who used color to describe the solidity and three-dimensional aspects of form. "For every plane change a color change, for every time change a color change, for every change in distance, a color change." He viewed this as the next logical step in the progression of mankind's visual expression, which he saw as being a linear evolution beginning with the cave paintings (flat linear no background) and developing as man learned more and more about the mechanics of linear perspective, aerial perspective, tone modeling to color modeling.

He felt that this progression had been derailed by the modernist movement, with so many academic institutions favoring the edification of individualistic and primitive expression over the teaching of basic skills and handling of materials in painting, drawing, composition. He was not opposed to the experimental in art, but he felt that the maker of art should develop his skill of perception and control over his medium first. He saw that this was not being taught in many of the American institutions, and when it was, it was done so in an outdated tonal and formulaic manner. He encouraged his students to teach others in the same manner that they had been taught by him. He felt that what he was doing in his own work was on the cutting edge of the real evolution of art.

13. Do you recall HH discussing his views on beauty, truth, goodness or other ideal concepts?

**REPLY RECEIVED: 6-28-05:**
Henry’s concept of the artist’s role was for the elevation of man’s awareness and the refinement of his perception. He spoke of the historical quest to understand Beauty… the development of a selective eye. Being truthful with one’s own understanding was built into his approach to teaching. I feel that he was careful to avoid talking too specifically about his student’s choice of subject matter, except in regards to choosing items that are conducive for solving particular color study problems.

His teaching revolved around the idea of helping the student to develop a color vocabulary with which he could express his individual calling. Henry did cover the bases of basic ideas of composition, variety, ideas about leading the eye through the composition. He did this based on the individual student’s needs.

I remember once Henry spoke of having been in his garden asleep, or with eyes Closed—I can’t remember for sure—but he said he opened his eyes and saw the colors in a heighten way. I think he used the words “perfected vision.” I think he meant that he saw purely, without objectivity (object conscious) or subjectivity (conceptual consciousness). He said that he wished to achieve that in his painting because the intensity, pure harmony and beauty. (jpeg of this HH painting was sent in email)
barbara,

thanks for the compliments, it is beautiful to me. It is in fact, a Hensche still life I happened to have in my computer. I thought that his actual work was the best example of what he had to say about beauty, truth, goodness.

Question about the previous entry:
I'm curious... is HH's idea of "perfect vision" what you aim for when you're painting? Do you think it's possible to achieve such a state?

REPLY RECEIVED: 7-1-05:
It is not what I aim for. I aim to accurately describe what I observe, and what I observe is effected by what I expect to see. So it is a struggle to be vigilant of ones expectations while painting and to overcome them for the sake of true observation...to abandon formula for the honest observation. Of course, this intent can rarely be achieved, especially in landscape painting. Landscape painting requires a painter choose the predominate color that best represents the desired description. For instance, looking at foliage, one sees that every area observed is made of myriad colors. The painter must mix a single color that best expresses this. It is possible that the single color used may not even exist in the area, but still works to represent it. I find myself vacillating on this issue. Lately, I have been working with broken color in landscape as a means to recreate the dynamics of what I observe.

Now back to "perfected vision"; like I said before how we see color depends upon the attitude with which we look... the Hensche approach in seeking to express the shock of sunlight, urges one to see the saturated color as a preference and to see the separation of colors. Thus one begins to see nature in that way. This vision of nature is what I think of as the "perfected vision." It is a beautiful way of seeing color, albeit that it may be somewhat contrived or conforming to a recipe of seeing. I have only arrived at this viewpoint in very recent years, after having seen Russell Chatham's paintings. Russell Chathams viewpoint was shockingly different from the way Hensche taught, yet the integrity of his work, his vision of nature seems true in its quality. He uses a very limited palette for one thing. No violets or red violets, nine colors I believe. So his color is very quiet and unified. He doesn't seem to be concerned with the 3-d quality, but he manages to capture the emotional essence of certain light keys.

I have noticed that, after a day of painting, I am acutely aware of the color. It appears to be clear and definite, as opposed to a day that I am taking care of the mundane business of life; Then the colors seem drab in comparison. I think the truth of color is probably that it is always has to be a subjective interpretation.

14. What were his views on sentimental or romantic content in painting? What about narrative content?

REPLY RECEIVED: 7-1-05:
I never remember him really addressing sentimental or romantic content. I have heard others describe his work as romantic. I suppose they were referring to, as in the definition of romanticism as in reference to the romantic movement:

"now often used in a derogatory sense, with implications of unrestrained sensuousness, lack of logical precision, escape from the realities of life, etc."
I think people who view his work in this manner are the ones who think that the color photograph is a true definition of how we see. I think that most people are trained to see reality the same way that a camera sees. Hypnotized into believing that the color photograph is the gospel truth. To them Henry’s work is unrestrained sensuousness, and it is sensuousness, but it is a very sophisticated sensuousness, based on the PRESENCE of logical precision. I don't recall any discussion of narrative content.

I feel that he chose his arrangements in landscapes based totally on the composition of the colors. In his still life, he chose objects that were beautiful in their coloration and design and made pleasing arrangements that are balanced and appearing naturally arranged, yet precisely so. I think of his work as an expression of the sensuous quality of colors in relation to each other. He was a hell of a lot closer to Rothko than Rockwell.

15. Can you discuss the reasons an artist may wish to capture a so-called “fleeting moment” in painting?

REPLY RECEIVED: 7-1-05:

People climb mountains for the experience of doing it and the challenge. That is reason enough, to study the fleeting moment. I do, however, think that curiosity and a search for knowledge of the nature of mind and perception might be a starting point. Or it could be like solving a crossword puzzle…

Here are a couple of approaches to capturing the fleeting moment: One is the idea of using memory to discover the difference between different times of day, conditions etc. by remembering how it appeared before now, and seeing how it is different, and *Pushing* the difference. This comes from the basic Hensche approach expanded to include memory. I think this requires a sort of indirect incremental thinking in which everything is categorized into concepts and solutions are made to conform to them. This approach leads to a more poetic expression, a derivative expressing the strength of the moment extrapolated and reduced to its essentials.

The other approach, to make accurate notation of what one observes, and limiting the time that one works on the painting to the time when the light is the same. With memory totally ignored, the painter relies on his faith in accurate and refined observation. This type of refinement of definition depends not only on the hue, but also upon correct proportion and shape of the notes (this was pointed out almost scientifically by Josef Albers). And thus... drawing becomes important on another level (an often misunderstood concept in Henschedom). Ah, the fidelity of pure observation and the elimination of convention in favor of discovery. Is it art? Who cares?

16. Why do you choose to paint from nature?

REPLY RECEIVED: 7-14-05:

I do not limit myself to painting directly from nature, but I do choose to paint from nature. What is out there in front of my eyes offers a great mystery from which so much else proceeds. There is a great deal of definition that can be seen. The mind works in mysterious ways. The eyes, if one stares at something brightly lit, it changes rapidly, the eye generates colors to compensate for the overwhelming contrast. It is interesting to consider how perception...
works. It offers surprises that seem to contradict reason. For example: looking at a cobalt blue vase, I see a red violet in the light plane… hmmm, using red to express blue. I would never have considered that possibility solely from painting from memory or imagination. Painting from nature, for me, is a consideration of the extremes that nature has to offer. A process of comparing extreme contrast, for example, the glare effect. Light reflected off of water, how it changes the coloration of everything else. A sunset, when the sun is in your eyes, how everything has a reddish tint, compared to a sunset, when the sun is not in your eyes, totally different. It is about coming to terms with a discipline of accuracy.

17. **In your opinion, what is the role of the artist in society?**

**REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:**

I am not sure that I know what that means anymore, but I’ll attempt to answer anyway.

Art is a big little word. I will try to break it down as I understand it.

As I witness the world going by I see that Art can be several things:

Art can be an expression of exploration. Viewers are able to see how different artists express what fate has led them to.

Art can be an interpretation of what the maker thinks art is.

Art can be an interpretation of what the maker thinks will appeal to the consumer.

All of the above influence society.
The explorer discovers something.
The interpreter reproduces the experiments to give examples of it.
The commercial artist reproduces the successes and the striking discoveries of the explorer.

I also think that art appeals to the base connectedness among members of a society. In that case Art expresses the unity of man and man and nature and Man and his environment. Art serves to illuminate the common ground. Art serves to illuminate the diversity of the mind. In this way it serves society.

18. **What other artists/books/ideas have influenced your thinking about art in general and painting specifically?**

**REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:**

Russell Chatham had a rather profound influence. I saw the book of his paintings “100 Paintings” and realized that he saw nature in an entirely different way than I had considered. It led me to realize that our expectations play a major role in the actual perception. Sort of like our concepts about what we are “supposed” to see act as a filter and tint our vision. After seeing his work, I began to realize the ways in which the Hensche approach to painting also acted as a filter, and thus, at some level, censored true vision. That is not to say the
approach is flawed, HH’s approach is mostly an organizational device for arranging a color mosaic. It does align with a bias toward exaggeration of differences in color contrasts.

Salvador Dali “Fifty Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship”
In this book Dali describes the level of sensitivity to materials and observation that he considers to be the “secrets” of good painting.

Lucian Freud’s paintings reveal the potential of someone being able to paint as if they were writing. He reveals a pure fluidity and the value of mud in painting.

Andrew Wyeth, for his restraint in the use of color.

Jay Hambridge and his explanation of the golden mean.


Carlo Castaneda for the consideration that it is all alive... and talking back.

Every Work of art I have seen that offered up something to behold, something that grabbed my attention, something that left an imprint.

19. Describe what the experience of painting is like for you.

REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:
It has changed over the years. Now it is done with an acknowledgement that all is impermanent. The canvas is a testing ground and I test the colors that get mixed on my pallette. If I am painting from nature, I respond to what is needed to complete the thought. If I am Painting from reflection, I don’t have to have a reason, just an urge. When I am painting, I have an internal dialogue that is dancing around what I am doing with my hand. I try focus on what I am seeing and what needs to be done to complete the visual thought. My internal dialogue is posing questions: what would happen if?? Am I certifiable yet? I think about everything that comes across the mindscreen while I am painting. I watch what the hand does. I respond to what needs to be done. IMHO.

20. What is your view on where the quality that has been variously called “life” or “soul” or “vitality” in a painting comes from?

REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:
I believe that it comes from a true connection and response to ones art. Lack of vitality comes from “going through the motions” or following a “recipe”. Vitality and “soul” comes from a struggle with an immediate response, not compliance with a predetermined outcome.

21. What makes you keep on painting?
what a mystery. It is so embedded in what I am. what I am makes me keep on considering the mystery of what I am. What you is? I’m is. I am making a contribution to what I am. ha ha ha. yes!

22. Would you characterize your own pursuit of painting as in any way spiritual?

REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:
If being guided by something outside of rational/conscious thought process counts as “spiritual” then the answer would be yes.

What is “my work”?

Is it just the physical product, or is it the whole enchilada?

Spirituality remains in the realm of things that I can’t really grasp.

Does the emperor really have anything suitable to wear?

23. What role do memory and imagination play in the kind of painting you do?

REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:
I paint from memory, and I also paint from life. The Hensche tradition is about painting from life. Memory plays an important part in the act of comparison. In the most immediate sense, one looks at one color spot and compares it to another. One holds a mental image of the first color while perceiving the second, and judges the difference between the two. The observer sees and remembers what he categorizes into something that can be regurgitated. A painter develops a system of categorizing his information. When I paint from a motif, imagination is not a big factor. It is a consideration in respect to being vigilant of the urge to make what we observe conform to our “concept of reality... our urge to objectify, to make the facts fit. Imagination is a broad subject.

24. Do you have any personal slogan/motto/credo that relates to your practice of painting?

REPLY RECEIVED: 10-15-05:
"Roy G. Biv can kiss my ass." (just kidding).

How about: “ Mix twice, paint once”?

Sincerely, the only credo that comes to mind, tonight,.. is: avoiding the: “That’ll do attitude”, but at some point it seems that I must yield to it.
# APPENDIX G: TIMELINE FOR ORAL INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview date</th>
<th>Artist interviewed</th>
<th>Location of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 2005</td>
<td>John Robichaux</td>
<td>Artist’s home and studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200 Audubon Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thibodaux, Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>same location as Robichaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 2005</td>
<td>Chris Diket</td>
<td>Artist’s studio, Bayou Rd., Cleveland, Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 10, 2005</td>
<td>Sammy Britt</td>
<td>Artist’s studio, Bayou Rd., Cleveland, Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 15, 2005</td>
<td>George T. Thurmond</td>
<td>Artist’s home and studio</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1039 Reed Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Starkville, Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 17, 2005</td>
<td>Richard Kelso</td>
<td>Artist’s studio above Hal and Mal’s Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson, Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 4, 2005</td>
<td>John Robichaux</td>
<td>Artist’s home and studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 4, 2005</td>
<td>Chris Diket</td>
<td>same location as Robichaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2, 2005</td>
<td>Charlie Miller</td>
<td>Artist’s home and studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7, 2005</td>
<td>Richard Kelso</td>
<td>Artist’s studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11, 2005</td>
<td>George T. Thurmond</td>
<td>Artist’s home and studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 13, 2005</td>
<td>John Robichaux</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 13, 2005</td>
<td>Chris Diket</td>
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<td>May 5, 2005</td>
<td>George T. Thurmond</td>
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<td>May 9, 2005</td>
<td>Richard Kelso</td>
<td>Artist’s studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 19, 2005</td>
<td>Charlie Miller</td>
<td>Artist’s home and studio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The author, Barbara Naron Faulkner, was born in 1949 in Greenville, Mississippi, and was the second of three children of Lamar Edward Naron, Sr., and Lydia Edna McBride Naron. In 1953, her father returned to military service as an officer in the United States Air Force and the family moved to Germany. Her later elementary school years were spent in northern Maine at Loring AFB and in Zaragoza, Spain. During her middle school years, the family lived at Air Force bases in Texas and Louisiana, and then moved to Howard Air Force Base in the Panama Canal Zone, where she graduated from Balboa High School. The family returned to Mississippi in 1966. After a brief period at Mississippi University for Women, she traveled to San Francisco, California, where she lived and worked for the next year. In 1969, once again, she returned to Mississippi where she attended Delta State University and took her first courses in art, studying with Sammy Britt and Floyd Shaman. She graduated with a Batchelor of Fine Arts in sculpture in 1976. In 1970, she married Samuel P. Faulkner, and their daughter, Mara Jill, was born in 1971. Two more children, the twins, Michael Patrick and Alison Avery, would follow in 1978. In 1986, Faulkner earned the Master of Fine Arts in sculpture at LSU under the direction of sculptor Michael Daugherty. 1986-2000 were spent working in the graphic arts and teaching art in high school and a community college. In 2001, Faulkner returned to LSU to pursue a doctorate in art education under the direction of Dr. Karen A. Hamblen. She was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy in LSU’s Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice in May 2007. Since 2005, Dr. Faulkner has taught art education and studio courses as the Art Education Program Director at Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia.