

Appreciating and Purchasing Abstract Art

One of the effects of art can be to awaken us to a larger dimension of being and feeling, when we fully engage with the work. What is required is to completely immerse oneself. The painting is an experience, a journey, and adventure. Only by taking the time to be with it fully will the mysteries be revealed.

Most people have been taught that art needs to have some kind of subject matter, but with abstraction, especially abstract expressionism, it is the viewing experience that is paramount. If one looks for familiar objects in order to relate to this kind of painting, there is bound to be confusion.

Every painting has an optimal viewing distance, so find that for yourself. Step back to get a larger view, and then slowly move closer in order to see the details, noting colors, shapes, textures, and strokes.

Be aware of thoughts and feelings that arise, but do not get attached to them. Then ask why you may be having these. What attracts, or repulses, you? Is it something the painting is mirroring? Is it challenging your ideas about art, or life? Is a particular color appealing, or appalling? How are you affected by the textures and sense of movement?

In this way, the full power of the work can be experienced, beyond likes and dislikes. Feelings, thoughts, and sensations convey meaning, and this will be different for each person.

Choosing a painting for purchase adds a few other factors. Keep in mind that photographs are but pale shadows of the originals, especially large ones. But it is still possible to get a sense of overall structure, composition, colors, and energy, and one's responses. Viewing the images fullscreen on a large monitor offers greater perspective.

Try to visualize how it might look hanging on a wall of your home or apartment. Is the size right for a particular location? Are the colors harmonious and pleasing? Is the piece engaging, something you will want to look at every day? Does it have depth that can be explored and revealed over time?

So to appreciate abstract art, take time to allow the painting to work on all levels of consciousness, noting feelings, responses, and thoughts that arise. Only then can the full impact of a particular piece be realized. As Mark Rothko said, "A painting is not *about* an experience; it *is* an experience."