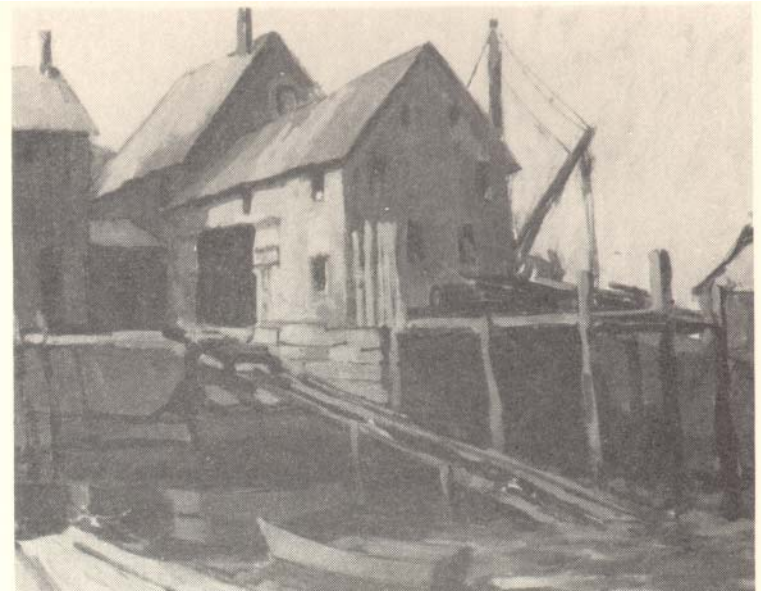

In for Repairs at Marblehead by Robert F . Bales

Explorations in Art and Psychology

An exhibition of painting and writings
by Robert F. Bales

The Walters Art Gallery
Regis College • 235 Wellesley Street
Weston, Massachusetts

Opening of Exhibit and Reception
Sunday, October 6, 1991 • 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Open Monday through Friday,
October 7 - 25, 1991 • 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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Introductory Notes

Light defines the shape of any form we see. But each surface at a given angle on the form is made up of even more little surfaces and tiny points. Each tiny point acts as both a prism and as a mirror which reflects to the eye only a selected part of the full spectrum of color. This part combines with the local color of the object - for example, the orange color of an orange. Thus the color tonality as we see it on a rounded form changes, in a rather mysterious way, as the light passes around the form and dies toward the shadow.

This is only a theory. Just how and why the color tonality changes systematically as it seems to do is still not completely clear to me. But it is an endlessly fascinating puzzle. I have found scraps of the answer in various books, and much by direct observation, but the whole answer still eludes me. Both art and psychology are always present in my mind, each helping my understanding of the other.

An 18th century French court painter, Francois Boucher, maligned and repudiated after the Revolution, but now on his way back to his deserved reputation, has perhaps been my best teacher in painting. His best pictures seem to me to be luminous, full of light and beautiful color.

How did Boucher do it? How much did he know in a theoretical way about the way he used color? The particular beauties of his color in his best pictures were recognized as unique by major critics of the times, such as Diderot, but it is not clear just what advances he had made over the knowledge of the time. How much about color was known to painters of the French Academy? Was knowledge lost in the Revolution that has still not been completely regained?

In spite of the beauties of the French Impressionist painters, such as Monet, their theories of light and color, modeled after the science of their time, were mistaken in a number of important ways. Much of what Boucher understood, at least intuitively, seems to have been lost to them.

My studies of Boucher, illustrated in the present exhibition by large copies of two of his best pictures, under the title *Homage to Francois Boucher* have extended over a period of 40 years, and I have still not solved the puzzle to my complete satisfaction.

Cezanne was fascinated with the use of *color modulation* as he called it, to define form. I admire very much his self portrait which I have copied and called *Cezanne's color*. I like the color in this portrait very much (especially on the hat!) although I am not sure it was the best illustration of Cezanne's theories. I suspect he forgot about his theories as he painted it. But anyway, his theory was not quite right. At least that is what I think.

The principle Cezanne often applied was that warm colors, such as yellow, orange, and red, appear to advance, while cool colors, such as green and blue, tend to recede.

This theory formulates what happens to the apparent colors in a landscape as the objects are seen further and further in the distance, through a thicker and thicker

curtain of air, just as Leonardo da Vinci said. The fact of recession toward blue in the distance of a landscape was well understood and utilized by the impressionist painters of Cezanne's time.

But this simple theory doesn't work so well as a way of modeling the surface planes of changing color reflected from the rounding surface of objects seen close up, for example, on the surface of an apple in a still life. Cezanne tried hard to use the theory in this way.

Take an apple as an example—one of Cezanne's favorite subjects. What is the painter to do if the red part of the apple on the table of his still life is toward the back of the apple, and the green part is toward the front, closer to the viewer's eye?

Is the painter best advised to turn the apple around before he starts to paint it, so that the red part faces the painter (and the viewer) and the green part recedes around behind, in order to make the painted apple look right? Will the color look wrong if the artist doesn't turn the apple around before he begins?

There must be a better answer than turning the apple around. Nature doesn't turn the apple on a tree around so that the red side always faces the viewer. But nature's apples still look right. Surely you have to be able to accept the local colors wherever nature places them, but then you need to be able to modify the local color, red, green, or whatever it may be, in a more subtle way to make it look like it is rounding the form.

One of the small sketches on view in this exhibition is called *An orange in the sun.* Probably it won't be very impressive to you. But to me it gives a feeling of delight and inspiration. The color seems to me to be *absolutely*

right. The orange changes over the rounded surface of the form just the way it should! It really looks round to me. And it really looks as if it had been painted in the sun.

The orange in this case was a real one, and it was indeed painted in the sun. When I painted it (around 1955) as a brief exercise, I was not particularly trying to test a theory of the way color tonality changes as it rounds a form in space, although even then I was trying to find a good theory. But when I found that this little color sketch, simple as it was, continued to give me delight—and still does—I had to try to figure out why.

Was it an accident that a few years after, in 1964, during a sabbatical in the sun on the French Riviera, I realized that an orange with toothpicks stuck into it at various right angles was exactly the model I needed to represent the *space of human* values-the social psychological problem that preoccupied me at the time?

That was a time of tremendous intellectual excitement for me. I felt that I had discovered something with implications so far reaching that I could hardly bear even to lose the time I spent to sleep at night. I spent day after day standing and writing behind an old deserted stone bar in the garden of the little Hotel de Flores, overlooking the blue Mediterranean.

The book that revealed the vision I felt I had finally seen, *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior***,** took a few years of very hard work after that. It was published in 1970.

The book made almost no impression on anybody at the time. I watched impatiently, month after month, then year after year, for a review that indicated that somebody thought it was a vision as grand as I thought it was. One reviewer, it is true, reported that it was a *masterpiece; that* it had captured his interest to such an extent that he took it along on a

camping trip! But neither he nor any other reviewer really dealt with the content as I understood it.

Human values vary from one person to another, one group to another, one philosophy to another. But the theory implies that variations in the most important values are limited in number, and that the smaller variations grade continuously over a spherical surface of a three dimensional globe (much like the color *tonalities* of light on form). Variations in values can be measured and described as locations in a single three dimensional spherical space, just as on a world globe.

From any place on the world globe, one can plot a course to any other place, however distant. If this is true, it also suggests that there may be no chasms between value systems and differing value positions that cannot be bridged, no oceans or mountain ranges that cannot be crossed! At least in theory, one can always plot a course of continuous change along the spectrum of interconnections.

Does this not have implications for improving human relations—on the feasibility of conflict resolution, mediation, for finding and learning better ways? It seems to imply that there are possibilities of value changes for the better in almost any situation, and that one might be able to plot the shortest course from one location to another.

The eventual result of these preoccupations is a theory and a method for the improvement of leadership and teamwork. This is explained in my 1979 book (*SYMLOG—a System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups*). A consulting company given over to the improvement of leadership and teamwork (SYMLOG Consulting Group) has been built around this theory by my younger colleagues. Its outreach is now international.