

An Analysis of Deborah Jencsik's *Now What*
Written by Melissa D'Amico

Now What, a 40 x 30 oil painting by Deborah Jencsik, entralls the viewers by the strikingly textured thick application of earthly colored paint. The title *Now What*, engages people to have his/her own interpretation of the work. It reminds one of Adam and Eve in the moment before Adam ate the apple. The painting is somewhat primitive, child-like, and is pleasing to the eye. On the other hand, the work of art expresses the artist's knowledge and inspiration by using a variety of styles. It also conveys that the artist is aware of the periods in art history.

This work is compelling because it is a fusion of styles and gives a sense of texture. All the formal elements in this painting are arranged in ways that further achieves balance. Laurie Schneider Adams states in her book, *The Methodologies of Art*, that the design consists of formal elements, which create balance and order. The artist's choice in natural colors gives an immediate feeling that the painting is set in nature. The white cloud on the top right corner, the two trees on the sides of the painting, and the rectangular color fields, support this notion.

The hues of this large painting blend into each other and appear to be layered on top of other coats of paint. The work is divided into a series of rectangular blocks of paint at the top of the work. Then as the viewer's eye moves to the center the blocks get smaller, which helps to create a sense of perspective. The lilac colored section suggests that there is a river, which is present in the story of Adam and Eve. While focusing on the center of the painting, the eye is targeted by the human figures, a male and a female. The hair of both figures are a shade of bright red and the faces seems to have some dots of paint that may represent eyes, nose, and a

mouth. The nude colors on the bodies of both figures suggest that they are naked. The figures are in the foreground of the painting and appear to be standing in a field. The beige and green blended paint support this thought. After viewing the elements of this large work of art, the content of the work is open for interpretation.

The subject matter of this painting is pretty distinctive according to the human figures. The title of the work possibly indicates that the male and female are Adam and Eve in the moment before they were cast out from paradise, The Garden of Eden. It could be imagery of Adam and Eve because of the previous iconographic images. Schneider- Adams mentions in her book that there are levels of reading images in an iconographic way. *Now What* is an example of the first level in iconographic reading, which is pre-iconographic, the level of “primary, or natural, subject matter.” This is a common theme in art because it is the beginning of Christian thought.

The sex of Adam and Eve are clearly represented due to the female’s circular breasts and long hair. Height also plays a factor. The male figure is slightly taller than the female and more elongated. Since Adam created Eve out of his own body, the colors of the two bodies implemented by the artist are similar.

The tree represented on the left has some red blotches of paint that could be apples. This is the tree of evil and the one without the red brushstrokes is the tree of life, or the good. This scene gives a feeling of serenity. It can be implied to be the *Institution of Marriage* from the book of Genesis. The Old Testament states, “And they were both naked, Adam and his wife: and were not ashamed.” The scene is the last peaceful moment before their tragedy. This idea was the inspiration for the

artist's choice in representation.

The background of the painting, or perhaps paradise, is divided into a series of color fields. It is reminiscent of the abstract expressionist, Mark Rothko's stylistic approach with his famous big blocks of color. Rothko was aiming at his viewers to pause and absorb what they were seeing. Jencsik's painting does the same thing except that she titles her work, which Rothko rarely did. The child-like nature of this painting is similar to the style of the Graffiti and Pop artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. Basquiat was inspired by African primitive art as well as African-American art and Jencsik's work of art suggests some influence in style. The contour of lines of the center of the painting also can make the viewer think of Louis Comfort Tiffany's early stained glass work. The two trees also support this idea. The *Magnolias and Irises* window panel is quite similar to the composition of Jencsik's painting. The diagonal composition also reminds the viewer of the post-impressionist artist Cezanne. Cezanne's painting of *The Bathers* is a prime example of the use of diagonal composition and is quite similar to *Now What* in this manner.

The subject matter is also a reminder of the Renaissance period in art history. An example would be the early Renaissance fresco painting of *Adam and Eve* by Masaccio. However, Masaccio's moment was not of peace but of suffering. Since perspective was of focus during the Renaissance, the use of linear perspective in Jencsik's work suggests that she was influenced by the style of Renaissance artists. These acknowledgements of famous artists convey that Jencsik is aware of different artistic approaches through the evolution of art history.

Deborah Jencsik creates a balance in this work of art. The blending of natural

colors, the subject matter involving Adam and Eve, and the different stylistic approaches that relate to periods in art history exemplify this notion. A balance is created especially by the abstract yet figural representation. It gives a sense of something in between, or a still moment, or a moment of peace for Adam and Eve before the unknown happens. The artist uses her inspirations to develop her own style for her viewers to interpret. *Now What* invites the audience to be in the still moment of the painting and have his/her own ideas about it. Jencsik presents this in most of her work. In titling this painting, one is engaged to think of the next event. Graffiti and Pop artist Keith Haring once suggested that art... "should be something that liberates the soul, provokes the imagination and provokes people to go further." *Now What* is a great example that supports this statement. It pushes the audience to think ahead while viewing this moment of peace.

Bibliography

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