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## ***When I draw***

### **Arnulf Rainer**

When I draw I am very excited, I talk to myself, I am full of rage and anger (as drunks are). I hate the whole world, I curse people. I am full of discontent and that applies to myself as well.

In a critical mood, in a state of hostility to everyone and everything: that's when I work best at correcting or overpainting. Only then do I dare to destroy, because then something better comes out of it. Obsessive but indistinct notions fill my mind; they differentiate themselves and become concrete only during the process of drawing, and then they transform themselves into new ones.

After an hour or two of this I begin to tire. The corrections I am making are now no more than modifications or recollections. I am no longer getting ideas that go beyond what has already been done.

Mildly fatigued, I stop work and make an embarrassed attempt to remember and imitate the rules of the social game. As unobtrusively as I can, lying low, in fear of arrest, I kill time. I must wait and wait until I am strong enough to work again. Ordinary life gives me nothing and does not interest me. I am all too aware of the vast gulf that separates it from the intensity of my productive moments of self-absorption, and this cripples me.

Just occasionally, when I am deprived of the opportunity to draw, it happens that the intensity of my inner discourse is channelled into attitudes instead of products: attitudes to myself, attitudes to other people. It is beginning to dawn on me that my obsession with productive excitement might find an outlet here as well.

1970.

## ***One Sunday in the summer of 1973 the time was ripe*** **Gestural hand-painting**

### **Arnulf Rainer**

Once when I was overpainting the cheeks of a photographic blowup, in the frenzy of the moment my brush broke. In my haste I tried to carry on with my bare hands; I smacked the cheek, whacked it, and got fascinated with the idea of face-slapping, the marks of my blows. I decided to make separate use of this.

As I work in series, there was soon a problem: the force of the repeated blows left my hand raw. Blood mingled with the paint. Insulation with rubber gloves was out of the question, so I switched

from rough canvas to smooth cardboard, to eliminate friction, and used red paint to keep any undesired bloodstains from showing up. One Sunday in the summer of 1973 the time was ripe. With the aid of certain tricks I got myself into a state of concentrated fury and determined elation. The slapping could begin. An assistant handed me one painting-surface after another. I took aim, at first with one hand, then with the other, and slapped away. The idea that these hard, snow-white pieces of card were cheeks soon receded, however. Instead, the smearmarks fascinated me, and I identified them as imprints of traumatic gestures, unconsciously demanded by my organism: centripetal, vertical, diagonal strokes, side-to-side movements, diverging curves, gropings, etc. Soon they began to repeat themselves, and the palms of my hands began to hurt dreadfully. After about thirty tries I had to give up. My studio was full of piles of wet boards. A number of them had splashes of paint from each other.

I was exhausted for days after that, and tried to put all these excesses out of my mind. I set the now dry objects aside without looking at them. It was not until four weeks later that I plucked up courage to have a look. Half of them seemed to me to be more concentrated than I was myself. The others I prepared for another bout of hand-painting frenzy. My fingers had now healed. I mixed some oil in with the paint, to reduce friction, because this time I was no longer working on smooth white surfaces but on rough, unfinished paintings.

There were only a few on which I was able and willing to repeat and intensify the former gesture. The others demanded modification by contrast, with new tones of colour; by this point I was painting in the normal way, and the individual gesture was submerged in a pictorial structure. Once more I saved only about half of the works. What was I to do with the rest?

After another attempt at correcting the works, in the autumn of that year, they started to slither in the direction of my monochrome overpaintings. Dark tones came to the fore. The gesture was completely concealed. And yet, ever since that experiment with hand and finger painting, I have constantly found myself dropping the brush, dipping my hands in paint and tracing forms with two or three fingers, or smearing them on with my whole hand. This has happened mainly with old, fragmentary paintings with which I have been making no progress. I had now discovered a method within myself - I had found a psychological level within myself - that gave me the strength to go all out, to throw everything I had into turning an old, halfway-good painting into a better new one through an aggressive act of renewal and destruction.

As for the pure recording of gesture - making a painting with one stroke, one touch, one movement - just now I don't feel capable of the requisite concentration. By next summer, I hope, I shall be sufficiently recharged with energy to boil and bubble, to foam and quake, and with one lightning gesture (or even with one blow) to force a painting into existence.

1974.