

ANDERSON'S TECHNIQUE AND PROCESS

The remarkable discovery of John R. Anderson's oeuvre in 2017 by 73 Art Agency has generated profound fascination within the art community and general public. Anderson's pure lyrical abstract paintings are a work in progress since the 1960's. Although Lyrical Abstraction is a critical artistic movement that has been largely overlooked within the post-Abstract Expressionist era, the uncovering of Anderson's work has provided a significant opportunity to re-initiate the dialogue. In 2018, 73 Art Agency presented fifty-one lyrical abstract acrylic paintings in the exhibition *Uncovered*, revealing the hidden artwork for the first time and placing it within the art historical context. *Explored*, featuring an additional fifty-one paintings, offers a deeper investigation of Anderson's artistic technique and process.



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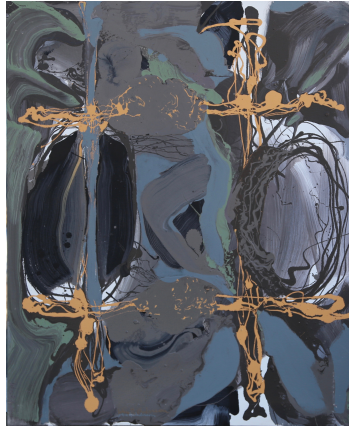
The Gift

Anderson painted with oils in his earlier works, such as in *2* and *The Gift*. In the late 1960s, he transitioned to acrylics, a synthetic medium made of pigments suspended in acrylic polymer emulsion. Acrylics, which create a matte waterproof film and show little color change when dried, provide unique characteristics including versatility, immediacy, and durability. Having the properties of both oils and watercolors, acrylic

paint can be thinned with water and used to create a transparent glaze, or built into layers to create a dense opaque impasto. Anderson capitalizes on the ability to modify the consistency of acrylics, applying thin hues as well as thick colors, building both soft and hard textured elements. All of his paintings include the strong colors, the sharp strokes, and the quality lines that acrylic paint offers. "It had to be acrylic," the artist affirms.



289



226



248

Anderson's lyrical abstract technique involves first layer, flow, simplification, and shaping; these elements, however, are not always present. He places the canvas on the floor to achieve the flow effect and works on an easel or against a wall for first layer, simplification, and shaping. When working on the floor, Anderson pours the paint directly onto the canvas, a technique known as "accidental painting." The artist spills layers of different colors, allowing the paint to coalesce into unexpected patterns, such as in 289. Anderson also drips pigments, such as in 226, or smears layers of paint across the surface of the canvas with a cloth, such as in 248. Anderson seriously begins to explore flow in the 1990s, after deciding to forgo acrylic tubes for tubs, as demonstrated in 276. "Everything changed when I started buying gallons of paint," Anderson explains, "I lay the canvas on the floor and poured, and one thing lead to another. I'd lift one end and let it flow, lift another end and let it flow." He rotates the canvas and changes the direction of a painting over time, playing with movement.



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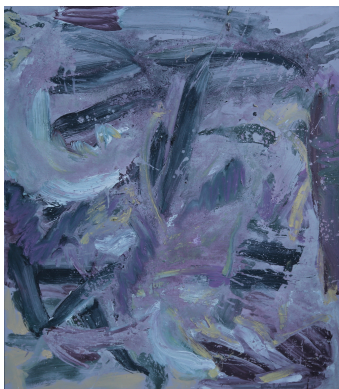


39



59.1

When working on the easel or against a wall, Anderson dilutes the acrylic paint with water and uses a brush to create washes such as in 39. He also sets thick layers of paint directly from the tube to build impastos such as in 59.1. "You see," says Anderson as he points to *The Enemy is Us*, "brush has its place. It's amazing some of the effects." He uses brushwork for an initial layer, as well as to both simplify and shape his work. Simplification, according to Anderson, consists of "toning down" the painting with white or muted earth tones, such as in 104. "I often go in with the white to illuminate [the image] and accentuate the good movement... with a small brush and a lot of patience," Anderson describes, "I go in on the wall and simplify it [...] I leave the strong elements and make them stand out." Conversely, for shaping, Anderson applies accents of bold

*The Enemy is Us*

104



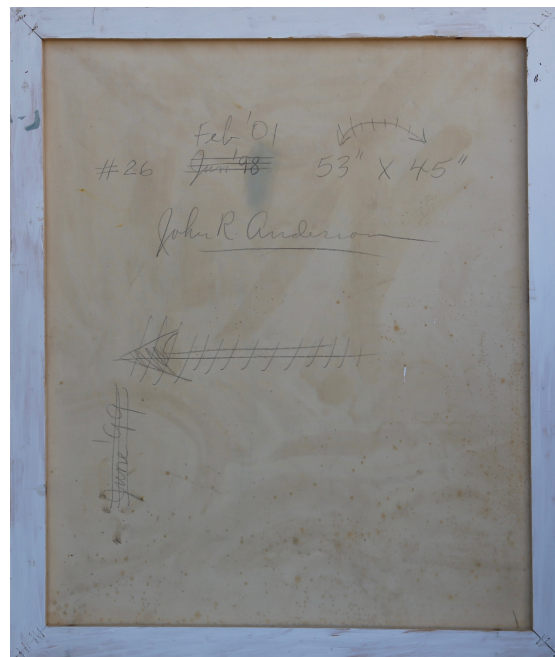
160

pigments and strokes onto the surface of the canvas such as in *160*. "I add bright colors and change the shapes to build contrast and to give [the painting] a subtle zing" he says. Through the juxtaposition of simplification and shaping, Anderson explores a Lyrical Abstract paradox. "The colors are muted and subtle, then...zing, there's brightness and intensity," the artist reveals, "it's tamed, but it's wild."

With the unique characteristics of acrylic paint and the use of various techniques, the actual process becomes more present and relevant. As a Lyrical Abstractionist, Anderson works with color, form, and texture to build a visual rhythm through personal movement, expression, and freedom. The contrasting values and lines of Anderson's painting are powerfully and dynamically produced, much like the varying tones and keys of a piano concerto. The artist does not start a painting in any particular way nor does he follow a specific procedure. "It all comes from working with it and how I feel. It has to come from within," the artist explains, "and sometimes I really go wild, and I don't know why I do particular things. I just feel that it has to be done." Anderson's creative process is a conflicting combination of structured rational applications and emotional unexplainable actions. "My job is to build and make sensible decisions over time, and



26



26 (back view)

coming to a point of control is a long learning process with lots of trial and error. I work and rework. It's a real progression" he says. The numerous dates recorded on the back of his canvases attest to this approach, as seen on the back of 26. Anderson takes several years to reach a desired expression. "But there also comes a point of over-painting, and knowing when to stop is essential. [...] It's especially important not to over-think."

Anderson is most pleased with his work when he is able to explore new processes, the paintings "are strong because I've gone into new territory. I took a new approach that was successful. [...] When I enter new ground...the color, the space, the movement...you know, Bam Bam! Slam Bam! And it works! [...] there's an aura. It just lives." Anderson describes that the mood changes from painting to painting depending on pigments, texture, design, as well as the viewer. Indeed, no two paintings look or feel alike, and no two viewers will have the same reaction or interpretation. Anderson, who numbers his paintings, is adamant about allowing his audience to make up their own mind about the art. "I don't like to put words in your mouth," he says. "All of these paintings are unique, and my personal feelings for one painting against another varies, and that is no sign that one is better than the other. You just have to go with your experience and your own likes and dislikes. It's all up to you!"

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