

An article about Carl Köhler

The enthusiasts of traditional art often undervalue the conceptions of artists who venture to dare themselves to the new heights of creativeness. The opinion of many traditionalists is that abstracted art has only a minor position in art history. They maintain that abstract art holds little value especially if the work of art cannot be immediately recognized. Many believe that it is only possible to develop one's art through step by step study and that without a methodical approach achievement as an artist is not likely attainable.

The response is chiefly psychological in that if one is not able to readily identify a subject that we are not depicting them as realistic. However, with the abstractionist their quest often goes far beyond the optical into a deeper level of psyche often involving spiritual aspects of human existence which has fascinated humankind for centuries: their joys, fears, sufferings, triumphs and failures. The principle objective of such creative artists is to connect deeper with the soul of the subject.

Today we are witnessing a refreshing renaissance toward this approach to portraiture. Portrait art in North America was shaped on the foundations of traditional European art however; it has almost always had direct competition with photography which could reproduce a likeness quicker and in more cases than not exacting. Since given the choice since the mid 1800's art enthusiasts would chose the cheaper and more avant garde form of having a portrait created. Creativity was rarely considered.

Swedish artist Carl Kohler (1919-2006) a Neo-Modernist/Abstract portraitist; art was born from his own exceptional artistic practices based on personal knowledge and awareness. Kohler's exuberant lust for life can be felt as much today as it could be when he first created his works. In his art and his unique versatility as a painter, sculptor and designer he was a master. However, of all of the varied arts he endeavored to experiment and practice in he devoted his attention to the challenging discipline of portraiture. He was not merely satisfied to create an image as others wanted to see it. He strived to maintain independence in thinking, conveying a freshness of individuality, depth with meaning and often a splash of surprise!

Kohler wanted to create his own personality into his art by infusing it with the personality of his subjects - some he knew, most of them he did not but grew to understand them through their writings. He created new forms to convey the energy and force of the importance and the impact these subjects had on his life whether they be poet, writer or musician. More often than not he created portraits that tempt the general public to penetrate themselves into the works and untangle the many meanings hidden within, bringing about a new or even renewed awareness of the authors themselves. Most of his portraits are not for the faint of mind.

Kohler's knowledge of writers was immense and he was compelled to document his interpretations of each subject in his own unique and intelligent way. He left us with the vibrant and sometimes haunting images of the likes of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Joyce Carol Oates to name a few - literary icons imbedded in the annals of time through the eyes of a celebrated Swedish portrait artist who had the vision to remind us all that these legends of the 'word' are still relevant in the 21st century.

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