

From a dialogue with Philippe Maillot, a French painter

My friend asked me, “Knox, why were you trembling and exclaiming so loudly in expletives and groaning and gesticulating alarmingly in front of the Velazquez Infanta in that silver and black dress here in the Louvre? I have known you for some time through life and death situations, strife and great experience of all kinds and have never seen you so affected. Can you please tell me some of this perception and its pyrotechnics on the quick of you?” Aye, my friend! I was wracked, put into orbit, shattered, desperate at what came together in the Velazquez painting. We were walking, talking about the Raft of Medusa (Gericault), the big Veronese Last Supper, we left the main gallery and turned the corner – there the Velazquez! All presented in that instant everything I ever wanted to know about painting. To be awakened beyond reservation. All great work made its appearance: the poems, sculpture, paintings, music – all were presented crystal clear and the nonessentials fell away. There were no question or answers in short revelation of the absolute. Said my friend: “Knox, I do not see this. I see you and I am inspired by your simple yet alarming response and have a sense that could I pay my dues, I too may approximate the perception. But Sir, is this singular? What is it in your painting that reciprocates such perfection? Do you act on this thing?” No, it is not singular. We have met in the sleeve of a Frans Hals painting, in a still life by Cezanne, a drawing by Matisse. I have hammered out with all I have the total love of art and taken from the matrix elements that bring one home to revelation. All of what I do in art has encoded in its fabric the above.

As these Black and White paintings are an uninterrupted series derived from the impact of Guernica (Picasso) and the Black and White 1949 paintings of de Kooning, which I make myself heir to, the configurations in my current Black and White paintings are connected to a summary I made in the 60’s in a painting bought by N.Y.U. and hung in the Loeb Student Center called Crucifixion and Homage to Antonin Artaud. (An interesting aside: recent critical theory says esthetics are over! It is the idea that is paramount today! Tee hee! Don’t you know that ideas are always old! Creation is something else!) These Black and Whites are about creation and, for the most part, women and flowers. Under the new science, woman is cousin to plants; women are mobile plants. Cezanne, writing about Tintoretto: He worked in black and white and red. I know what that is. Colors are painful.

I asked Philippe – Have you made any sense of a painter’s passion? “Thank you, Sir! If I can read this with close attention it would be a key to your art. Whatever you have accrued, let it drop so that you may have me.” Ah, one thing! – I said. You don’t need a key to my work for it is self-evident. Thank you!”

-Knox Martin (2001)