

❖ ' Autumn Rhythm ' : By Jackson Pollock



Commentary on 'Autumn Rhythm' (From the website of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) :

Pollock had created his first "drip" painting in 1947, the product of a radical new approach to paint handling. With Autumn Rhythm, made in October of 1950, the artist is at the height of his powers. In this nonrepresentational picture, thinned paint was applied to unprimed, unstretched canvas that lay flat on the floor rather than propped on an easel. Poured, dripped, dribbled, scumbled, flicked, and splattered, the pigment was applied in the most unorthodox means. The artist also used sticks, trowels, knives—in short, anything but the traditional painter's implements—to build up dense, lyrical compositions comprised of intricate skeins of line. There's no central point of focus, no hierarchy of elements in this all-over composition in which every bit of the surface is equally significant. The artist worked with the canvas flat on the floor, constantly moving all around it while applying the paint and working from all four sides.

Size is significant: Autumn Rhythm is 207 inches wide. It assumes the scale of an environment, enveloping both for the artist as he created it and for viewers who confront it. The work is a record of its process of coming-into-being. Its dynamic visual rhythms and sensations—buoyant, heavy, graceful, arcing, swirling, pooling lines of color—are direct evidence of the very physical choreography of applying the paint with the artist's new methods. Spontaneity was a critical element. But lack of premeditation should not be confused with ceding control; as Pollock stated, "I can control the flow of paint: there is no accident."

For Pollock, as for the Abstract Expressionists in general, art had to convey significant or revelatory content. He had arrived at abstraction having studied with Thomas Hart Benton, worked briefly with the Mexican muralists, confronted the methods and philosophy of the Surrealists, and immersed himself in a study of myth, archetype, and ancient and "primitive" art. And the divide between abstraction and figuration was more nuanced—there was a back-and-forth at various moments in his career. Toward the end of his life (he died in a car accident in 1956), he said, "I'm very representational some of the time, and a little all of the time. But when you're working out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge. ... Painting is a state of being. ... Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."

❖ ‘ My kind of bird-watching ’ : Blog post by Aasheesh Pittie

(Aasheesh Pittie is one of the best known bird watchers in India – this post captures the true essence of the magic of wilderness. At one level, the post is about bird watching, but scratch a little below the surface, and)

In recent years I have often heard a refrain that one sees the same species of birds on field trips. Initially I would get cross at such an observation, which was remiss of me, for everyone does not think the way I do, and that’s okay. Later I was bemused, for how could new species be ordered up for a birder? Now I am concerned, for I think this is a symptom of a deeper malady.

I have been birding for a little over three decades, and never have I been put off by the prospect of seeing the same common species on a birding outing. When something new turned up during outings or a rare bird was sighted, we were ecstatic. The excitement ignited a sense of awe in the entire group. But I cannot recall even one instance of a birder complaining about the lack of species novelty. So this lament is new to my ears.

I feel that it is a symptom of a syndrome often called boredom, which is particularly prevalent in the digital generation for whom the predilection to channel-surf through life’s situations is an overpowering need, and this gives them a false sense of control over their lives, of the desire to change a situation at the mere press of a button. The downside of this is an ever-decreasing attention span. If this phenomenon begins to seep into one’s very nature, then activities that are not considered ‘essential’ in the life of a person, say leisure, inevitably fall prey to a ceaseless, futile hunger for novelty in whatever one does. Given such a bent of mind, and with the mind-bending peer pressures rampant today, how long will it take, I often ask myself, before this malady leaches into the more essential areas of the fabric of one’s life? I see signs of it daily in traffic snarls. Tempers flare at the avoidable inconvenience, but people do not hesitate to slip out of their lane on spotting a chance for a quick exit. If everyone stuck to traffic rules, the flow would, undoubtedly, be smoother.

Leisure activity, as I was saying, is the first victim of such aberrant behaviour. I am of the firm belief that the constant desire to spot at least one species never seen before, and the paradoxical moaning that follows the no-show of a new species is a symptom of the channel-surfing mindset. I am concerned about such an overpowering desire for novelty, when a dynamic activity like birding, becomes suspect of being mired in stagnation, and the disgruntled birder actually begins to wonder whether it would be worth the while to spend another mundane morning tramping through the countryside, chasing the same old birds!

Bird watching is not an eternal quest for rarity, though no birder denies the thrill of sighting one. It is not about racing all over the landscape and tallying a century of birds before lunch, though no birder will deny the special joy of such a ‘ton.’ It is not twitching for the most number of species seen, though there have been many that have basked in the sunshine of that self-indulgent high-life (they truly miss the woods for the trees).

Bird watching, in its essence, is the fine art of becoming invisible; of merging into the surroundings in such a manner that the breath which Nature has held back upon your entry into Her parlour, is joyfully exhaled, and normal respiration restored; in such a way that the frozen statues of animate wildlife, interrupted by your brashness, are coaxed into resuming their activities; in such a way that your aural and visual senses are drenched with the buoyancy of life; in such a way that you get outside yourself and become a part of the pageant around you.

This does require the cultivation of a patience that slows down your pace to that of the elemental cycles dominating the flow of life in an immaculate world run entirely without human help. It requires the marshalling and re-aligning of vision, and a new focus of hearing so that you absorb every single sound and identify its source, and gradually its nuances, its cadenzas. It demands the preoccupation with stillness.

What are the rewards of this exercise? I can think of at least two that will last you a lifetime. One, you would have begun to notice things about your surroundings that you never knew existed, bringing you immediate, immeasurable joy. Two, you would have wound down your restless inner dynamo to such an extent that you would discover a quietude, a stillness within you; a fount for a fresh view of your surroundings, a new approach to life, based on re-energised sensitivities. But first you must do this.

Then suddenly a new world opens its doors to your mind's eye. You remain standing in front of a fruiting neem, while the large group of birders moves on, having identified one or two species. You inhale the aroma of its foliage. A fluty whistle from its canopy leads your eye to the lora (*a relatively common garden bird, found in many Indian cities*). He is dressed in breeding regalia—jet cap and coat, deep canary shirt, white epaulettes. He courts a hen iora with song, he postures, he patrols; his aria persuades her and dissuades rivals from his territory. You do not exist in his scheme of things, just in your own sensory world, as a witness. You stay with him as he perambulates the leafy canopy, lifting his warbling beak skyward, fluffing his velvet beret, vibrating his dark tail, standing on tiptoe in the fervour of his operatic song. You are trapped by its intensity. You are mesmerised by its elemental simplicity, by the realisation that the lora's entire world, in that moment, is its song, and that he has enmeshed you in it, albeit momentarily, till your focus expands to take in the larger picture, the shining curved leaves of the neem, the soft yellow fruit-pods, the darkened bark, damp from last night's rain, the tangled undergrowth.

A movement you spy, from the corner of your eye, and realise it is an Ashy Prinia that's flown into the lora's neem, and you stay with it. As your senses expand, your absorption of the drama around you becomes acute and before you are aware of it, you are invisible to yourself, a part of the very landscape you've come to partake, all eyes and ears, inhaling its scents, feeling it on your skin. If you become aware of yourself, the spell is broken and the pageant melts away into simple, mundane, two-dimensionality. The trick is to be yourself invisible, but completely present in your surroundings. Now you are on the path to my kind of birding.

❖ 'The worldwide web of belief and ritual' : Talk by ethnographer Wade Davis

http://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_on_the_worldwide_web_of_belief_and_ritual.html

Wade Davis is an Explorer-in-Residence at the National Geographic Society. Named by the NGS as one of the Explorers for the Millennium, he has been described as “a rare combination of scientist, scholar, poet and passionate defender of all of life’s diversity.” In recent years his work has taken him to East Africa, Borneo, Nepal, Peru, Polynesia, Tibet, Mali, Benin, Togo, New Guinea, Australia, Colombia, Vanuatu, Mongolia and the high Arctic of Nunuvut and Greenland. An ethnographer, writer, photographer, and filmmaker, Davis holds degrees in anthropology and biology and received his Ph.D. in ethnobotany, all from Harvard University. Mostly through the Harvard Botanical Museum, he spent over three years in the Amazon and Andes as a plant explorer, living among fifteen indigenous groups in eight Latin American nations while making some 6000 botanical collections. **In this talk , he makes his important argument that each of the diverse cultures on the earth is an unique answer to the fundamental question : What does it mean to be human ?**

❖ A few of the all-time favorite quotes

- **What if the question is not why am I so infrequently the person I really want to be, but why do I so infrequently want to be the person I really am? : Oriah Mountain Dreamer**
- **Talent develops in tranquility, character in the full current of human life : Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**
- **Art washes away from the soul , the dust of everyday life : Pablo Picasso**
- **The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created--created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination : John Schaar**

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About 'Treasures'

It's a compilation that I put together every once in a while, of things that I have found to be beautiful and meaningful.

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