

TUSSLE

Terry Rosenberg *Painting Duration*

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by Saul Ostrow, June 23, 2024



Given our habits of mind to viewing things cognitively and how we have been conditioned to read abstract painting over the last 60+ years, in which the immediate default is Abstract Expressionism and its derivatives – e.g. Color Field one would never suspect that Terry Rosenberg's gestural paintings are symbolically rooted in the historical discourses concerning the nature of time and space and whether they are independent entities or intrinsically intertwined. Though we imagine that this dilemma has been empirically resolved as we move through time and space in our everyday lives, seemingly it has not been philosophically or theoretically. In actuality, time and space remain intuited entities even though we imagine events taking place sequentially or concurrently in time and space. Despite such perceptions, such interpretations and representations of time and space are conceptual and not actual. In the case of Rosenberg's paintings, we may do better to consider them to be analogies, in which the ethereal quality of Rosenberg's translucent layers and hazy smears of color and line are the embodiment of such abstract concepts as speed and fluidity.

In the context of Time and space, Rosenberg's paintings can be understood as representations of his intuition of duration and its intimate link to a self-reflective consciousness, where perception devoid of cognition unfolds as a continuous stream of sense data in which past, present, and future interpenetrate, merge, and diverge.

According to the critic Harold Rosenberg's theory of Action Painting, the act of painting itself is an act of pure instinct. The finished painting is the residue or manifestation of its creation. In this context, the gestural marks surface in Terry Rosenberg's paintings which emanate from a central vortex (the artist) may be seen as conveying a sense of disintegration and re-formation of perception itself.

Though not immediately apparent, Rosenberg's gestural paintings are the by-product of his direct observation of human bodies in motion. Yet, we must also move beyond the idea that these works are his attempt to freeze such phenomena. Instead, Rosenberg's formless, fleshy, and skin-like textures that seem to expand outward are aligned with the idea that the perceiving self and its objects are not fixed entities but are caught in a continuous, evolving flow of interaction. The resulting ethereal quality of his paintings echoes the philosophical view that reality, shaped by our senses, results in an abstract representation of the real, which is in constant flux, and that our experiences are fleeting, partial, and impermanent, in which memories fill the gaps. Such a view challenges the traditional conceptions of time as a series of discrete instants and that space is a fixed container.

What Rosenberg's paintings propose is that time is a continuous, qualitative flow of sensations intimately linked to human consciousness and perception. In this, Rosenberg draws on such artistic movements as Cubism and Futurism that sought to convey the fluidity of perception and the interpenetration of different temporal moments. Subsequently, Rosenberg's paintings can, like those of these artists, be understood as representing not only the flow of time and space but also the dynamic nature of movement, where different elements interact and respond to each other. Rosenberg's dynamic composition of swirling, organic forms in hazy blues and pinks conveys the fluidity of perception and the interpenetration of temporal moments. Their evocative, fleshy, skin-like textures suggest a sense of a corporeal presence that expands outward, its boundaries blurring and merging the temporal and spatial. This visual representation of expansion and transformation reflects the notion that the self is not a fixed, unchanging object but continuously evolving.

Just as the forms in Rosenberg's paintings seem to morph and transform, the self is constantly in flux, shaped by experiences, interactions, and the passage of time. These works do not seek to capture a static moment but rather to evoke a sense of movement and energy, mirroring the ever-changing nature of the self and its reality. Using the human body in motion as a starting point for his observations, Rosenberg taps into the fundamental essence of human experience – the constant state of becoming. His use of dancers as bodies in motion has a significant influence on the dynamic and kinetic nature of his paintings. Their blurred boundaries and merging of forms evoke expansion and transformation, reflecting the notion of the self as continuously evolving rather than fixed.

What the paintings capture is the rhythm of Rosenberg's body as he responds to the dancers' spontaneous, unrehearsed movements and gestures in real-time, as they unfold around him. He aims to "stay in the present" and capture the "constant change" happening in front of him rather than working from memory. In essence, this allows him to directly engage with and respond to the kinetic energy, spontaneity, and continuous flux of forms in motion. The act of creating becomes a dynamic, unfolding process that mirrors the fluidity of experience; their partialness blurs the boundaries between different states, reflecting the interconnected and ever-changing nature of experience, ensuring that his work is rooted in the present tense. This flow is not about change or sequence but rather about motion and the stretching of time itself. On an aesthetic level, Rosenberg's paintings are not mere representations but explorations of the self as a dynamic, ever-evolving entity. He aims to stimulate a sense of movement and fluidity in the viewer, ensuring his work is rooted in the present tense. As such, his paintings are not mere representations of the physical form but rather explorations of the self as a dynamic, ever-responding entity.