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Cafe guest

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Ries has said ..good words here

remembers lovingly ..many edgy artists
even more run-of-the-millers ..just as lovingly
cool people (all) to hang out with ..living
largely beneath the radar ..when dead
mostly lost to history ..their story
eventually ..forgotten

unless ..intimate powerful art ..remains behind

Ries is ..absolutely right ..about
what he says concerning ..West Coast Funk and Bill Ritchie
and ..absolutely wrong too

West Coast Funk and ..Alden Mason

UW prof. Alden Mason is one of the earliest practitioners of West Coast Funk and
a ..Tom Robbins favorite in the early-60s
(Robbins ..Seattle art critic ..later novelist living in Skagit Valley)

the work is colorful and goofy ..nothing like the NW School's dour devotionals
like watching ..Warner Bros. "Looney Tunes" thru a glass of Alkaseltzer
to Robbins ..urban and hip like ..NY Pop in
its ..rejection of the 1940-50s NY School's Abstract Expressionist daydreams of the "sublime"
Mason's funk ..too humorous ("what have you been smoking?") to ever be considered ..unduly
sincere
but unlike NY's Pop alternative ..his funk proves too voluptuously comic to find itself accused of
harboring ..any kind of distancing "irony"
Mason's art was smart ..bold ..in your face ..but
friendly ..ready to chat

West Coast Funk at its best ..a
healthy style
spontaneous and evanescent ..free of hang-ups
made for the 60s

Ries is correct ..many funksters followed in Mason's wake ..most filtering thru the University of Washington ..where the style was broadly influential ..particularly amongst ceramicists (Patti Warashina ..its exemplar)

Ries too is correct ..looking back to Graves and Tobey of the late-40s thru 50s the barely skilled ..irksome tetchiness of their technique where ..in Mason's wash-style landscapes of that period ..there is a remarkably deft touch to his brushwork ..painting richer and more complexly ..human in its emotional outlook ..(as was Boyer Gonzales' painting from this era) ..when compared to the ..NW Mystics' narrower emotional reach and ..obsessive stylistics

what Ries ..got wrong with Graves and Tobey ..is they nailed their ..highly original and ..(then) very powerful style in the early-40s (during WWII) ..not later (late-40s thru 50s) when ..that edge of 'power' was already slipping away ..as the NY-School came into artworld ascendancy (stressing a ..sublime 'bigness' where the ..earlier power of Graves and Tobey arose from their paintings' ..compacted 'intimacy') the emotional ..'power' of Abstract Expressionism seeming ..(falsely) so much more compelling

NY's Action Painters sought ..'big' (sublime .."larger than life") emotion when NY Pop arose to challenged AE ..they challenged it with ..'big' irony

Alden Mason's funk never ..went 'big' a sociability imbedded in his paintwork that ..bordered on 'intimacy' a ..quality to his paintwork that Mason ..never lost when he did go ..abstract and big in the early-mid-70s ..big though ..never sublime ..never "larger than life"

this 70s period produced Mason's ..least typical but ..best work rich with natural processes ..these funk-ed-up abstract oils ..gush like an evolving ecosystem ..a cell dividing ..a river jumping its main channel for a new one a marriage ..a conservative social institution finally taking the leap and reforming itself paintwork liquid and chaotic but ..with direction and force addressing the onlooker ..volubly but ..neither threatening nor indifferent an ..excited kid inside a grown man ..private moment slipping out ..an intimacy and ..it's the abstraction that sells it ..that lends these paintings their 'power'

Mason later ..quit oil paint for health reasons ..to never quite find ..that 'power' again ..in his return (in acrylic) to ..figurative funk

two 'qualities' ..tie Mason to Graves and Tobey 'intimacy' 'power'

a ..different kind of 'intimacy' ..a
different kind of 'power'
but these are ..precisely the 'qualities' ..when combined
which ..define every NW artist who pushed an edge ..who
will be remembered ..not
"lovingly" (like Ries does) because they are ..interesting characters ..but
for their art
and ..their art alone

the intimacy it projects
the power it uncovers

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