

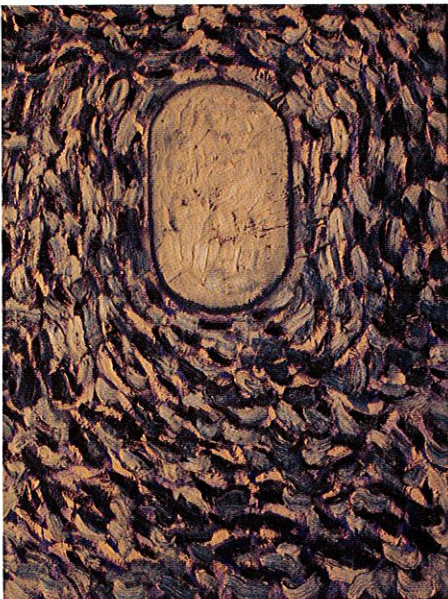
ERNEST KLINGER: *Night Paintings*

Working alone in his studio at night – in and from a place of hushed solitude located physically, temporally and emotionally outside and opposite the cacophonous and claustrophobic *sturm und drang*¹ of urban existence – Ernest Klinger paints/searches, not only reactively transforming paint and canvas into image but, in the process, likewise asserting/freeing the intuitive self from its substantial body.

Numerous and small, Klinger's paintings differ little one to the next, except for their subtly changing graduations of muted melancholic colors. Throughout them all, a dominant though de-centralized lozenge shape is surrounded by a richly luminous field of thick small brushstrokes of paint. Neither responding to known objects or to places experienced, these images deny the recognizable world rather than re-iterate it. Liberating himself from painting's burdensome traditional preconditions of representation or of responding to preconceptions about the final image, Klinger adds layers of paint and color to his canvases building up the painted surface physically while simultaneously manifesting a visual illusion that takes its own direction, its own life.

Neither representational nor didactic, Klinger's images de-mobilize rationalism as a process for making paintings and logic as an ideology, arriving somehow at some sort of *felt* meaning. Here, giving permission to the emotional self, the phenomenal world is left behind via a journey into the abstract – into image beyond recognition, indefinable by language. Working "from the bottom up rather than the top down", Klinger's painterly paintings trace then their own making – and their own meaning.

Indeed, approaching painting as a willfull an act of disassociation, Klinger seeks consciously to retreat from or oppose rationalism and the impersonality of contemporary culture. On a personal and social level, he understands both to generate burdensome negative emotional consequences. He says: "As the paintings build up, I empty out the chaos and detritus of daily life."

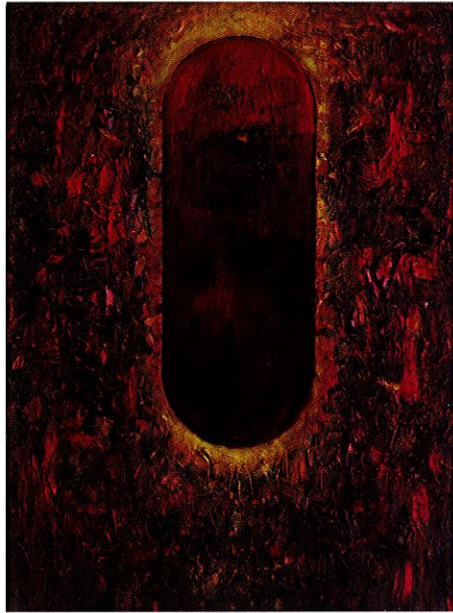


"Untitled", oil on canvas, 18 x 24"

But does that make Klinger's paintings some form of mere therapy then? Or an escape from 'reality'? In a sense, the answer is both yes and no. When considered as calm-inducing meditative acts aimed at slowing down the fleet beat of contemporary life, Klinger's paintings are a shedding of stress and conflict, of external rhythms, of the skin of the world. But they offer up something else instead – an immaterial imagistic elsewhere and otherwise, an alternate time and space, which clearly challenges the finite realities of the everyday. Here, as Klinger searches for what he describes as "something beyond the everyday that we aspire to but cannot apprehend with the five senses something that we yearn for", the post-chaos spirituality of Abstract Expressionism overcomes the materiality of Minimalism.

Klinger permits himself to paint without visually or conceptually delimiting either the dominant form or the ambiguous

space it appears to occupy. Reawakening – or returning to – independence in these paintings, he states that his work “is a search for the personal, and its affirmation.” Clearly reigniting the ideologies of inward-turned Romanticism of the late eighteenth century – characterized by the then search for the natural self understood to have been assaulted and even lost due to both the urbanizing Industrial Revolution and the rationalist Enlightenment – his quiet, considered paintings poetically turn away from the external toward the internal. Indeed, the frame and canvas here may be considered the containing ‘body’; the painted surface as surface ‘skin’ and the image itself as the hidden sub-cutaneous interior. In this way, the curious lozenge form metaphorically suggests – though does not literally represent – a kind of fingerprint, an assertion of self.



"Untitled", oil on canvas, 18 x 24"

While it would be tempting to try to concretize the lozenge form and to assign it with symbolic meaning, it is clearly outside of recognition, being no more – and no less – than a template, a visual starting place, a key opening the door... Indeed, like a mandala – a traditional Asian visual device that prompts contemplation of the non-material when meditated upon, these images not only propel Klinger on a transcending interior journey into unknowing but, he hopes, the viewer as well. Haloed by backlight and thus separated from its background in some paintings but barely indistinguishable from it in others, Klinger’s habitual form – a form indefinable yet evidently un-mutable from painting to painting – equivocates from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic.

Positing the indefinite, each painting here is a stillness, a momentary breath. But it must be remembered that Klinger’s paintings sit opposite not only hard rationalism but, as discussed above, the materialism of clamorous consumerism – of hierarchical capitalist democracies. Together then they must also be considered an extended sigh. Given that they do not represent but challenge our day-to-day lives, these beautiful even humble works must also be understood to be a stinging rebuke – a critique of industrial economies whose classist laws, social rules, unfair labor practices and de-humanizing means of production not only fail to enrich our lives in any meaningful way but even separate us from our better selves.

Although Klinger states, “We reify overwork, even to the point of exhaustion. We demand ever higher levels of production, from ourselves and others. We suffer...”, optimism sits alongside pessimism in this work. Privileging human values over economic values, the private over the public, grace over law, light over darkness, Klinger’s is redemptive work, hinting at both social and spiritual utopias.

– Jack Anderson
January 2005

¹ *Sturm und drang* is a German term literally meaning ‘Storm and Stress’. It is usually associated with a movement in German literature that flourished in the late 1800s – most notably represented by the writings of Goethe – that stressed subjectivity and the unease of man in contemporary society.

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ROSEMONT



GALLERY

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Ernest Klinger graduated from the University of Regina with a BFA degree in 1989. He has been maintaining a studio and exhibiting his work in Regina, Saskatchewan for the past sixteen years.

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