

# Chapter 8 - AN ART STUDENT'S OBSERVATIONS

by Bob Galaher (1919 – 1974)

When he was attending art school at the Portland Art Museum, Bob Galaher became a friend of C. S. Price. He kept notes of conversations with Price and we quote some of them here.

These quotations give us a rare look into the personality of Price as revealed by his verbal communications with a friend and fellow artist.

"My way of painting was from black and white sketches of landscape or from memory. Now these memory things are an accumulation of so many things that I had seen in different places - a synthesis of all that had gone through the mill of my mind and had come out a composite compromise."

"Shucks! I'm not an artist, I just like to paint!"

"No matter how small the painting each stroke should feel as if it was going to be as broad as the room."

"I never was one much for booze, Bob, but I couldn't pass up a poker game. When the guy who staked me out (financed me) for a year at St. Louis gave me the money he said, 'Your know, once I gave a fella some money like this and he blew it all in' ... He didn't have to say that to me I thought, but that year I quit gambling and lived cheaper than any other student."

"Propaganda for a small group or idea can bog down an artist. Bob, you've got to have the big feeling for not just a group but for all humanity. Just go ahead and paint what you feel."

"This feller asked me to teach him how to paint. I said, shucks, I can't show you anything but how to wreck 'em!"

"My father was disappointed in me. He could look at a steer and tell how much it weighed and

what it was worth at Chicago just as it stood there on the hill -- but I used to look at the way the sunlight hit and think how beautiful it was. Guess I was a disappointment."

"I'm a sort of mystic myself, Bob. When I was a young feller I read a lot about Buddha and there was a lot I liked."

"You know with the teachings of Jesus Christ, so many faiths have formed around that focus that it is pretty hard to get the big idea of the thing."

"The Northwest is developing some real artists. New York is too near Paris, the Southwest is under the Mexican influence and the Midwest is pretty regional but out here there is a feeling for the Orient that has brought out the best in us."

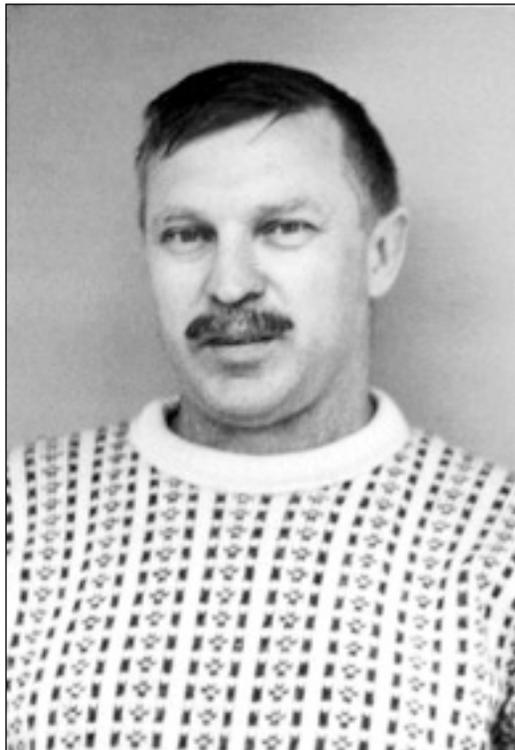
"Maybe it's not right to paint dead birds, Bob, but down at Monterey I used to walk on the beach after a storm and I'd find sea gulls and cormorants

washed up on the beach. I used to feel awfully bad about them."

Discussing Blake brought up about Job not living in himself.

"I've lived alone all these years, but I've decided that you have to meet life every day. You've got to meet and live with society."

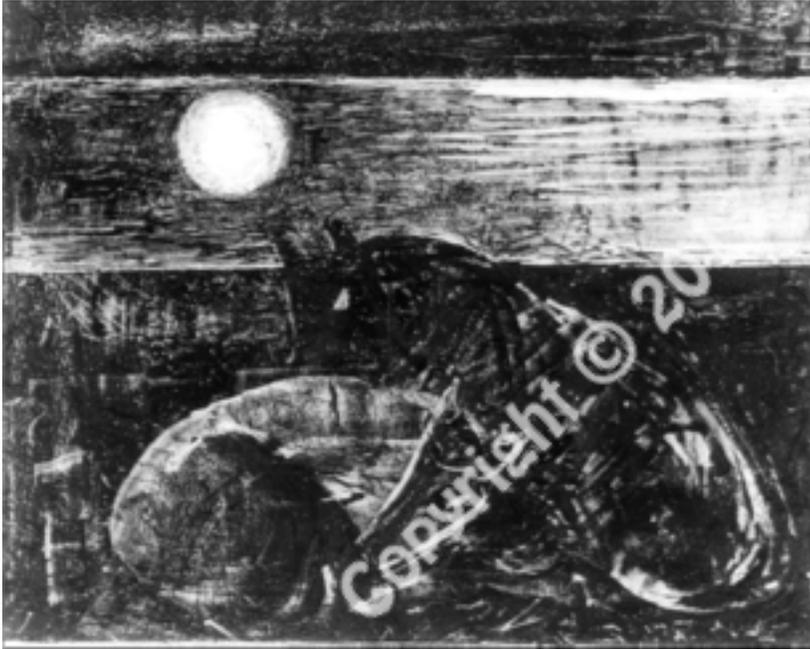
"Never think when you're painting, Bob, think in between times. When you're painting it comes from here (heart). Intellectualize all you want to afterwards."



Bob Galaher

"I never went much to school after I was 10. I got to reading a little bit though." (Philosophy, religion, art, etc.)

"I do three paintings and paint out two but that puts me one ahead!"



*Untitled*, nd, Photo from Portland Art Museum Library, Oregon, private collection, PAML SL 057

"Gosh I wish it was morning. I got to tear into that big one."

Paintings frequently patched due to holes torn in them in excitement of painting. Also, palette knife has a steel handle he had made after boughten ones proved too frail. "Let it dry to preserve textures."

"Blake was right when he said, 'We see nature not with the eye but through the eye.'"

"I feel Blake maybe made a mistake in trying to show God in Man's image. Maybe it would have been better as an abstract thing."

"I illustrated for a magazine here about 40 years ago. It was when the Yukon expansion was on. That's where they got that 15 years in the book. I never illustrated that long."

"Down in Monterey we went through the Monet business of reflected lights etc. and it was a long time before we began to see as Cezanne did that we were giving up validity and form. I got to having my doubts about it and one day I thought ... It's all about light! Everything's light! Cezanne

saw that the improvements were painting lights and shadow. He painted a haystack 8 times in one day disregarding shadow. Painted right through the rain and tried to get the feeling of that time of day in each one."

"Look at children's work. They see things so simply - just a light against a dark. No fooling around. Wish I could get back that freshness of vision."

Price told me no one had encouraged him to experiment. He had just decided that he wasn't getting enough of what he wanted in the literal painting he was doing. Piazzoni encouraged him, however, to continue in his new line.

Once Price had some paintings left with a dealer in N. Y. (Valentine Dudensing). The dealer was closing down for awhile so Price, thinking there were only 4 or 5 canvases left, wrote to the dealer and told him he could have whatever number were left for \$300! The dealer immediately wrote back accepting the offer and not-

ing that there were 11 paintings! Later he said to me, "Some people told me I shouldn't deal with him because he (the dealer) was a crook but, shucks, he was always square with me." There was no hint of sarcasm in that statement. Obviously he considered it entirely his fault for not finding out what he had in N. Y. He judges people by two standards. The one for himself is terribly stringent. For others he makes all kinds of allowances and justifications.

While showing me a painting that was just laid in in the design, he told me what it was to be. I said the design was very suggestive. I can even see a different result. He thought it over and gave up his idea and took mine. As Heaney says, "What other painter would take that kind of criticism or advice from a student?" He thus again demonstrated his complete and real humility.

When the squeeze was put on at the Kramer Building, Price could have easily gotten permission to stay on by a word to McNaughton but he said to Heaney, "Certainly not! This is a democracy. If others have to go - I go."

"I'm like an injun about having my picture taken Bob, but when Doug and the others went to all that work to get my show for me I just felt I had to at least do that. Actually Heaney says he feels that it is a type of conceit to have his picture taken."

Price recognizes the value of his work. He is not insensible to the fact that he is doing fine work. He still paints out a work though if he has any doubt of its worth. In speaking of his interest in Blake, he feels that the basic principles of all Buddhism, Christ's teachings, etc. are basically the same. Heaney says, "Lots of people have principles and beliefs but Price lives his."

[Bob Galaher's observation]

He painted a picture of some bones in the desert. A poet from Reed wrote a poem about it. Many people liked the painting but they did not see it as he wanted them to. He told me, "I didn't want it to be morbid or depressing Bob, so I painted it out." This brought about a discussion on the painting which ended with the observation that after the animals die during a hard winter, "Bob, where those animals died, as soon as there is a little moisture in the Spring, flowers come up - so you see there is no death but simply a transfer of life. We weren't born to die but born to live."

I don't think the old man is afraid of death but he is afraid of another stroke which would make it impossible to paint. A couple of times he said to me, "I don't know what I'd do if this thing (pointing at his leg and arm) were to come back. I've just got to paint!"

When I brought back the photo of him (Price) taken in 1905, Heaney and I had gone up for coffee. Heaney laughed and said, "Friend of yours, Price? No, he has no friends. I've been trying to get the better of him for a long time!" (More than meets the ear to that.)

Paid for "Steer" in full. Down payment on "Mission". Argued about money. Kept trying to up amount on "Mission" to \$300. He said, "No. If

when you finish paying \$200 and I'm broke you can add \$50. If not, we'll be square."

Vallentine Dudensing took half of price for each painting. Also, Val was dealer who got 11 for \$300. S.O.B. Hope he deals with Willard. He shows little interest in N. Y. show outside of desire to oblige (do a favor). (He seems to feel that if a dealer wants his work he (Price) is in debt to them.) He is also going to exhibit with Oregon Artists as a favor to them, "because they were nice to me years ago!" What other man around here who has any repute would do that?

Took "Young Steer" down to M & F's for Oregon Artists exhibit. It was hung next to a door where it was hard to see with people crossing in front of you all the time. The bastards don't really feel any desire to have his painting there except for his name. I made the frame for the "Steer". He seemed to like it.

Price really admitted the possibility of another attack when he told me the other day that if any-



*Horses and Trees*, nd, Graphite on paper, 8 7/8 x 12 in., Portland Art Museum, Oregon, Gift of Mr. Maurice A. Price, PAM 51.89

thing happened to him that I got the "Mission" and that I tell people the arrangements! I felt rather sorry to hear him say that for I know it has been on his mind a lot. The other day he painted on two of my things that I brought up to show him! I don't think he has done that for anyone in a