



Photos by
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Forrestall explores the reality of surface

by Stuart Smith

What is the function of the frame around a painting? Does the normal rectangular shape you expect have some special merits? Is it a requirement of art?

The purpose of the frame is to mark the transition from the created space of the artist and the space in which you walk and breathe. Since the Renaissance the picture surface has been considered not to be a flat hard two-dimensional surface but in fact to be a window through which the viewer examines the world. Since that time painters have used almost every shape known to man to define the limits of their particular window.

The shape of the painting has no divine necessity. It is a choice of the artist, determined in the end by his will and the purpose of the image he creates.

In the case of Tom Forrestall we have an artist who for several years has produced works with a deliberately complex and uncommon format. These have been welcomed by some viewers and treated with great suspicion by others. Since they are the work of a serious and gifted artist they deserve more than an immedi-

ate response, they deserve some careful consideration.

If you accept that there is no divinely directed shape for works of art then we must look to inner necessity for the answer to the question of what shape they should take.

Forrestall's work explores the reality of surface. He concerns himself with visual appearance, with contrasts, with similarities, with feelings that grow out of the experience of seeing. Out of any scene that appears accidentally before our eyes there are significant or important things and unimportant ones. Like the package of breakfast cereal there is a little food and a lot of inert material. The function of the artist is to select those things which are significant and record them in a way that is meaningful to the viewer. In doing this he normally used the technique of selective focus or relative definition. Some parts of the picture will be highly detailed others will be just suggested. This is the technique you normally use yourself to keep from being bewildered by the rush of life.

In Forrestall's world all things have a claim

to attention and it is difficult for the viewer to distill the important from the not so important when all are sharply defined. This is where the shaped canvas comes in.

A visit to a farmers yard may result in a variety of sights and scenes that are both interesting in themselves and together make some overall statement about the quality of life or values held by the owners. If all these parts are assembled in one canvas they would lose their individual impact and probably mar the totality. Two elements might be enough to make a telling statement and yet defy normal compositional techniques. McMonagle's Moose is the result. A stack of oil drums, kept because they might be useful, seen in the open air inert, rusting, lifeless, and beside them the carcass of a moose, inert, lifeless, seen in the gloom of a barn interior. The artist has seen, he has selected, he has recorded and he has done it in such a way that he achieves maximum impact on all counts.

The other works illustrated here arise from the same thought process and techniques and all demand the same thoughtful observation.