

feelings will differ too. As we have already seen, Abstract Expressionist painting depends on the power of images that affect each viewer in particular ways. Shapes, colours, lines, spaces, and their relationships to each other are the only means an Abstract Expressionist has to make suggestions. But we the viewers must reach out to meet him, trying to overcome the distance between his mind and ours, and trusting that he is leading us into a new and valuable experience.

What are the clues Meredith gives us in his painting to help understand it? First there is its title, *Ulysses*, which is the Roman name for the Greek hero Odysseus. In the *Odyssey*, an ancient poem by Homer, Odysseus (Ulysses) travels through the world, facing many trials and adventures on his voyage home. Though the *Odyssey* is an exciting story, it is also an allegory for a man's personal trials in the world.

Meredith's title, then, gives us a clue that this painting can be seen as a man's journey outwards from his own little world into an outer world, and finally into the spaces of the universe. The titles of other works by Meredith show his concern with the idea of man's search for himself and the meaning of life. Two of his works are entitled *Journey and Seeker*, while another, entitled *Atlantis*, recalls the mythical land lost under the sea and sought for thousands of years.

But after the artist offers us his title, he leaves us to explore the painting and make our own connections. Sometimes his works have no title, and then we are left entirely alone with his forms, his colours, and his very personal use of line.

Many of Meredith's paintings are based on circles, a symbol of unity and eternity in many Eastern religions. We know that Meredith is very interested in Eastern thought, and particularly the idea of union between man and the universe.

Ribbon- or flame-like shapes are another favourite design of Meredith's, and he uses sharp V-shaped angles and waving, rippling forms to contrast with each other. But the most characteristic feature of his style is a distinctive 'nervous' line. Sometimes almost shaky, other times like lightning flashing across the canvas, it is energetic and imaginative, though seldom quiet and soothing. In his later works his lines have become textured, with little hairy fibres bristling off them, so that they occupy space and depth instead of remaining flat.

Meredith's colour is often rich and usually used to strengthen the meaning of his forms. Here, for example, the blue suggests the colour of the sea and sky on Ulysses' journey home. But whatever colours Meredith chooses for his themes, he intends them to assist the meaning, and not to be used as accepted artistic rules.

John Meredith's actual surname is Smith. But he and his brother, William Ronald, another well-known Canadian artist, chose to use only their given names professionally. The Smith family was not wealthy, but the father, being talented in drawing himself, encouraged his sons with their art.

Meredith was born in Fergus, Ontario, and at the age of eighteen he enrolled in the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. There he studied under Carl Schaefer and Jock Macdonald. Macdonald, an Abstract Expressionist, encouraged Meredith to develop his own individual style. Indirectly, Borduas and *Les Automatistes* had a similar influence upon him.

Of all artists painting in Canada today, John Meredith is one of the most unusual. He is a loner in his life and in his art. His world is a private one, and the greatest compliment we can pay him is to allow his paintings to speak for themselves.