Teaching Myself To See
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Joining Up Fragments

What if I am a selectively visual person? What if I am seeing and yet I am not seeing you standing in front?

But I may see a bit of your shirt-collar and I may not see what you look like, because I can’t escape looking at the shadow of your collar on your shirt. And then my eyes may try to look at your shoes, whether they are new and black. I prefer wearing black shoes. But to look at you, the all of you, your details, I need you to turn into a picture with a definite boundary, reduced in size. So give me your photograph and I will see you. The map is easier to handle than the wide spreadsheet of space.

If I have to make a list of what I see and what I don’t see, there may be a pile of random things that may take up space here and I wouldn’t have any explanation. To explain everything, one may risk making my “Autism” bright enough to see. Let the fog continue and let the search remain. But this is an essay on seeing pictures and understanding how to see.

I at least can see the details in a photograph! And I do see details of paintings or picture books on paintings as long as I can recognize the components that are painted. In fact, paintings help me modify my perception. I appreciate the concept of art to qualify myself in the world
where art played an important role in the growth of human civilization. I appreciate the artist’s eye, if the artist can explain how he is perceiving.

As far as I understand, artists can see more details that miss my eyes. When they paint those details, we all can find out what we missed in a real world.

There is this mist — its upward rise
Shapes, outlines crumble quietly as
Phantom details follow the eyes.

The artists create those spectacular shapes, sun over mountains, to let us explore every detail of the shadows that will linger on the painted foothills forever. And artists paint layers — color upon color, a hundred words of interpretation can grow out from those colors, spilling out narratives through frame and glass. Sometimes they would evolve in our heads as a poetry.

A painting can dig into the brain when understanding grows deep.
A painting can make a mystery that begins a terrific story.
A painting can scream with a voice. I can “hear” Edvard Munch’s painting screaming out of the glass and frame. Edvard Munch punched the bones of being in his painting called The Scream. I learned that he painted it around the year 1893. The painting creates the orb of sound through the waves of black and orange, haunting the eyes. Today, when screaming is just a part of traffic and television sounds, road rage and politicians arguing, that solitary mask-like face in the painting screams out into modern times. Because you fail to understand why your eyes can hear the waves from the waving orange and the wobbling image of the terrified being of the painting, you wonder who can be the person whose orange black
scream has intrigued the eyes through time. Because you wouldn’t know, it can disturb your consciousness almost making you feel hopeless and guilty that there was the scream and no way to guess how the story ended. The painted scream evolves many possible stories.

*Shattering the mist — was that a scream,*  
*A cluttered language like a blasphemed story, batting out from a guttered extreme?*

The way I understand art is by heavily relying on the similarity of shape and color — either closer to the real shape or allowing some strategic alteration leading me towards the open door of hyperreality. Salvador Dalí’s hyperreal clocks explode or crumble and hyperreal elephants walk on stilts on the canvas without being strands and patches of unreal vibes and throbs of whim. I can exist as one of his painted beings in the canvas and never be worried about the next security screening at the airport.

The way an artist sees the detailed lines of an apple, a subtle yellow line here and a faded red over there; the way he looks for the twinkle of light reflecting in a wee corner; the way the apple-bulge grows in the middle and narrows towards the base and the way all of that can be organized into the totality of a fruit would be represented on his canvas. That perfection which nature made a shape called apple turns into the immortal Apple-art by Mark Zelmer or Michelle Calkins. I can smell the apples in their paintings, feel their fresh and crunchy pulp. Yet some artists would want to distort the apple like patches of apple-like circles.

There will be a residual appleness in those paintings. I would conclude they are apples I am looking at through a thickened glazed glass. There would be a seventy percent chance of apple-like quality in those red patches.
My visual experience would have a delayed sensory feel; crunchy pulp would leave my mouth.

How far can the artist’s take distort without destroying? I avoid going to modern art exhibits. If all the nuts and screws and bodies melt in a cauldron of a canvas how will I recognize a body? Even my selective vision can expect a head located above your shirt collar but there must at least be a head. I can expect your two eyes dropping their looks down at me. The temperature in those looks will let me know how abstract of an artwork I am! I can feel my curved image on your retina! But give me your photograph, if you want me to see how you look.

Modern art makes me feel foolish — especially when I stand staring at blurred red colors, dark red now, scarlet over there, a battlefield of color like exposed intestines, stating an abstract definition or representing an idea. Colors fly around in a space without bounded shape within the boundary of the canvas, and I am supposed to look at the caption *Summer Afternoon*, smoke fuming from fire in my brain from the caption. There is nothing to feel but see the smoke dissipate out of the chimney of my eyes. Holding on to the caption I search for the afternoon sky, my eyes suspended somewhere in the spaces of the painting.

And why wouldn’t I hold on to the caption when all around me real colors throb in a blurred shapeless zone of red and green, blue or white, giving me no warning what their caption ought to be. And there could be your erased head talking through the sky.

Shapeless colors will escape like wild horses as I will hear the vibration of your voice; my vision will be a harness that lies idle in my head. Those trembling colors will wobble like an unknown fuming sea; my understanding,
a confused compass. I will have no clue what to look at other than to catch hold of a caption. As if there is never a sun and never a shadow, just the caption.

How far can I pretend to understand?