



Mohsen Janatpour: Symvisio V, Zero Hour, in five Unfoldments, Oil on Canvas, 48" x 220", 2003

SYMVISIO

Symvisio (I have made up the term from the Latin prefix sym--together and visio--viewing) is a multi-dimensional visual composition which attempts to incorporate into painting what is natural in other art forms such as music and film – the time element. For this purpose, a symvisio in two-dimensional art is usually composed of three to five panels. (I have called each panel an “unfoldment,” since each panel brings a new scene into one’s view—an unfoldment is to a symvisio as a movement is to a symphony.) While the number of panels is not rigidly constrained, I believe that, based on the average size of a canvas, too many panels expand too far and are a hindrance to viewing together. Too few lack variety and sufficient duration for the experience. Although each unfoldment possesses its own unity, a symvisio achieves a higher level of unity and variety through the interaction of unfoldments. This intensifies the aesthetic experience and aids visual thinking.

In each symvisio, every panel is a completely unified composition that stands on its own. Yet, when the panels are *viewed together* in a certain order and separation, the message of the composition is carried through a unity upon a greater variety. To achieve the above task, all unfoldments of a symvisio are composed in the same color key or the same value key or the similarity of shapes. The most restricted composition has the same color and value keys as well as variations of the same basic shapes for each unfoldment. However, one can compose a symvisio in which, for example, only the similarity of shapes is carried through each unfoldment.

The composition of a symvisio is directional, with the introductory unfoldment (first panel) pointing to the second unfoldment, the second one to the third one, and so on until the concluding unfoldment (last panel) halting the direction. (Individuals with a different training or cultural background may have a different sense of visual directions. The directions of my symvisio compositions, so far, have been from left to right, which is, in general, consistent with the western culture’s scanning of visual fields.) The introductory panel sets the theme and the key(s) of the composition that will be developed in the following unfoldments, with the final unfoldment as the recapitulation.

What is most important in a symvisio is its emotional impact; and for me nature is the ultimate source of my artistic emotions. Thus, I use natural forms in my symvisios to express the emotions I feel when I sit by a seaside, walk through a field of sunflowers, or stare at a beautiful seashell.

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