

Jerry Carniglia
Artist Statement

Existentialism is dead. Dead is that self-referential world where we reach deep within and choose our own essential meaning. For the last 70 years Abstract Expressionism has been the visual manifestation of existentialism. Though it too should be dead, having spawned a seemingly endless succession of subjectless, meaningless works, AE's prodigies live on in search of new meaning.

My work, of course, is greatly indebted to this movement. These are my people and they have, in fact, shown me a way to meaning.

A word about *Meaning*, which has had a rough ride since mid-century abstraction displaced regional subject-centered painting on its mission to save the spirit of western man. That aspiration set the scene for ridicule. Cynicism, and its big brother Nihilism, have become the only reliable way *to be* in the world. These seem to be the only positions that can be trusted in a world so alone since the death of God and the loss of divine order. If Nietzsche thought that nihilism was a great joy, because it frees us to live anyway we choose, What have we chosen life to mean?

Meaning has been on the defensive from the beginning. Gorgias (485–380 BCE) in *Non-Extent* declared nothing exists, and even if it did it would be of no use. Lucretius set the stage for existential thinkers: *there is only time, space, and atoms. All else is abstract and bodiless*. In our own time, life's meaning was pounded to pigment by Derrida's brilliant post-structural '*obscurant terrorisme*'. Society has been left adrift in an age without a dominant organizing principle. The result has been a casting about in the safe confines of parody, irony, and satire, which survives at its best with the aloof cool of Duchampian wit.

I survive. I survive in this seemingly meaningless space, because, as it turns out, the meaningless space that I occupy and that occupies me is filled with unseen forces. It may be that many of these forces have been taken to market by charlatans, but nonetheless, unseen forces have formal structure and demands upon my time. Some are measurable: gravity, electromagnetic transmission, photosynthesis. Some are not: thoughts, beauty, social interdependence. All are tools for meaning-making in art; they are extremely useful in an abstract painting that recognizes rather than rejects their assistance.

My response: Slide into the nihilistic abyss to enact the shameless return to the quest for authenticity. I paint in sequence: action with full transparency, without self-reflection. The process compounds, transposes, and eventually recognizes and preserves an image. I have no expectation of transcendental insight.

My objective: Revelation of natural phenomena, revelation of phenomena unseen by other means. Time and process will occasionally produce an interacting pictorial drama. My aim is the active creation of something of meaning that none of us have seen yet many of us will recognize en route to our common destination. The subject my current work concerns a recognition and a choice, carving a way through many essential meanings, painting by painting.