

Sample Paper #3

[Student Name]

[Assignment Name]

[Date]

[Instructor's Name]

Your Turn (2002) by Katherine A. Strause
Approximately 6' x 4'
Oil, Silkscreen, Mixed Media on Canvas

“Katherine A. Strause: American Trees in Summer”
at University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Gallery 1

The artwork, which is vertical in its organization, is made up of six strips of color and floral fabric running in a vertical direction. On the left three squares, each with a different subject, line up again in a vertical fashion each with a different background color which are (in descending order) orange, green and red. The orange square contains a revolver/gun, the green square contains a sporting event scene, and the red contains a rose, all of which are line drawings in black. Overlapping the lower portion of the orange square is a smaller square canvas representing what looks like a still life of lemons and other fruit with a pink background. On the green square Strause has again placed a smaller canvas with a fruit-like composition, this one with a blue background. Above the orange square appear four red circles beginning at the top and extending horizontally stopping at the mid-point. Taking up the entire right side of the work is a still life of a flower arrangement sitting on a stool. Throughout the piece, Strause has used a wide range of bright colors.

In the flower arrangement, Strause has used an intense blue line which outlines the flowers and the stool, perhaps this use of color in the line is intended to push the subject

forward on the two-dimensional space, making it stand out. The line looks to have been made with a pastel medium, with its less than solid appearance. The flowers themselves are depicted using organic shapes to give the illusion of an iris and other flowers. The overall use of color and shape is simplistic, yet true to the nature of each particular flower. The flowers seem to reach out past the squares at the left, which seem to be on the top of the flowers since one just sees the stems on the other side. Mass doesn't seem to be important to Strause, as she has used the indication of three-dimensionality only sparingly with a hint of highlight on a few flowers and on the clear glass vase holding them. Another effect used to show three-dimensionality is the shadow left by the arrangement, green in color, and the stools legs receding by being higher than the legs in the foreground. Again, the attempt seems to be a crude one, as though a naturalistic portrayal was not important. The large vertical panel of the floral fabric gives a sense of texture to the background of the flower arrangement, as does the energetic application of the paint in both the fruit and the flowers. Balance is achieved, although asymmetrical, by the large flower arrangement on the right and the squares on the left. Although the left side of the artwork has more geometric shapes and the right side has more organic shapes, indicating variety, Strause has achieved a sense of unity with her use of color. The orange, green and red of the squares are utilized in the colors of the flowers and also the shadow of the vase. This use of a wide range of colors is another sign of variety in the piece. The focal point in the work is the flower arrangement, which is quite large on the canvas and is "pushed" forward in space by the use of the intense blue line emphasizing the contours of shapes of the flowers, vase and the stool.

There is a wide range of media used in this artwork, including: oil paint, silk screen, fabric, and pastel. This shows the adeptness of the artist in a variety of media. The subjects inside the squares on the left of the painting are applied using a silkscreen method. The use of line here appears more carefully planned, showing the precision of the artist. The backgrounds of both the red and green squares are more carefully applied, in that the boxes are filled by the color, than that of the orange square with its unfinished appearance. The four red circles arranged horizontally across the tops of the left side of the painting are also painted as if left unfinished. The silk screen shows Strause's accuracy in drawing, while truthfully creating the likeness of a rose. Her technique in applying the oil paint varies in the artwork. At times, the paint is carefully applied leaving no spaces, such as within the red and green squares. In other cases, Strause's application of the paint seems more erratic and quick such as the orange square and the flowers. This gives a feeling of action and enthusiasm, unlike the feeling of easiness in carefully applied paint.

As I sit and stare at Strause's work of art, I ponder the title: *Your Turn*. Looking at the colors used in the square panels on the left (red, green, orange), I notice that these colors are like the colors of a stoplight. The orange being seemingly unfinished suggests quickness in the paint's application, perhaps implying the quickness at which people speed through an orange light. Also, the color orange is synonymous with "caution" and inside the orange square is a gun. This combination is a powerful suggestion of warning. In the green square, there is a scene of men running with a ball, which exemplifies motion. Both the green color and the action of the scene suggest "go". The red square

contains a rose, of which most people associate with the color red. Where Strause has used items in the previous squares that go along with the stoplight theory, the rose seems to be a different matter. It doesn't overtly suggest "stop" as would the red of a stoplight. However, red is also symbolic of "love", which could mean a stopping point in the search for love or red symbolizes blood which when lost in great quantities could mean the stopping of life. The four red circles at the top left arranged horizontally stopping at the middle, can also go along with the stop light theory. The circles seem to be a representation of blinking lights, which is another type of stoplight. The vertical stripes in the background could possibly convey roadways. All of this traffic signal symbolization leads us back to the title of the piece—*Your Turn*. At stoplights, people take turns moving across the intersection perhaps that is the reason for the title. However, the flower arrangement, colossal in size, takes up most of the space and seems to be the most important subject of the piece. The blue line used to outline the shapes appears neon-like forcing the arrangement to move forward in space and to gain the attention of the viewer. These two aspects alone imply that it is the focus of the artist's intent.

All said, I believe that Strause is conveying her concept of life. She shows us the "traffic signals" and "highway" verticals as a way of portraying the fast paced life most of us lead. As life is being represented in the squares, Strause is suggesting that this life we lead does indeed produce a product (i.e. the fruits of our labors) in the fruit laid on top of the underlying squares. The intense flower arrangement is what she is really trying to convey as a thought, with its immense size and bright colors. It is, perhaps, her way of

saying that we should stop and smell the flowers making sure we are enjoying life as we journey through existence.