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A Demanding Grace

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knowledge. From it we draw a subtlety of nuance and intonation to bestow upon the images that surround us.

To render an exterior seeming, that which impinges literally upon the senses, is an early stage in the apprenticeship to art. Increasingly one learns to see what one paints or carves, to understand what one writes, to hear what one composes. A distortion that one learns to see as one acquires mastery over the making of it becomes an image of understanding which the visual intellect, turning away from the canvas, is now trained to detect in the appearance of real things. The faces, the hands, the human bodies everywhere around us, betray nuances of character and of human condition which a Giotto, a Rembrandt, or a Picasso have taught us to perceive. A mind touched by Cézanne, Constable, Monet, Corot, sees trees and rain and rock in a special syntax which the grammar of no other kind of experience can entirely convey.

It is a pity that this must sound so precious, so much a stance of sensibility. But a mind governed solely by the formal mechanisms of meaning is simply shut out from the rich potentials that lie within the images of common experience.



Photo by Ellen Jaffe

Mary Beth Ross received her Ph.D. from Syracuse University and currently teaches in the S.U. English Department. She has published poetry, fiction, criticism, and a variety of other articles. In 1977 Dr. Ross was listed in "Outstanding Young Women in America."

A Demanding Grace

It winds up being almost effortless
But not easy. The avid clench of bud
Might be a balance of petals we should
See as the rose's highest happiness;
Perhaps that discipline's its fondest care,
And it's with resignation, not relief,
It finally surrenders a single leaf
Upon the savage fecklessness of air.
But flower it must, and you and I too,
At high, sheer places in our clumsy hearts:
The brink and the breach where poise seems mere chance,
And there's absolutely nothing to do
But scramble up from our crouch and then start
To reel arrogant and headlong into dance.

—*Mary Beth Ross*