



Pecoraro: A Peninsula Artist Thriving on Conflict

By Gwenda Klein

What does a college art instructor do on his sabbatical year? Paint!

Such is the case for De Anza College instructor and artist Salvatore Pecoraro. He has been spending 12 hours a day painting in the garage-turned-studio in his Cupertino home. At De Anza, Sal teaches classes in etching and lithography, drawing and painting and has worked seriously in each medium, plus casting resin sculpture. Painting has been with him the longest.

Pecoraro's work is contemporary; no doubt about it. His work over the last ten years parallels some trends in the modern art world and exemplifies an artist who has grown along with his artwork, incorporating ideas from the world around him.

Ten years ago Sal's paintings were hard line compositions that juxtaposed landscape and sky images with figure images; for example, a woman's face encased in an oval shape with the outline of mountains in the background. The faces were taken from magazine photos, and the intent was to contrast the super-real with the abstract. (Remember the Pop Art of the '60's?)

The pretty ladies' faces didn't maintain the artist's interest, and, he says, "I never had a feeling for the figure." But the sky, the endless landscape held fascinations as well as problems for Pecoraro to resolve aesthetically.

For six years, he let it take him in different directions. The first major direction was a change to airbrush technique. With the soft texture achieved by spraying paint he could more accurately portray the ethereal nature of the clouds and sky.

In 1970 Pecoraro completed a major piece titled "365 Days." It is seven feet high and 52 feet long and is composed of 365 one-foot-square panels. Each panel is one image of the sky (actually taken from photos of the sky every day of the year). Seen together as a massive wall piece, the variations of weather, time of day and smog level (yes, that despicable haze is there) are apparent as never before, a sort of calendar of the sky. Pecoraro has just finished making a poster from a four-month section of the piece.

As his work continued, Pecoraro expanded the sky images into additional forms. He attached styrene "pillow" forms to the canvas and thereby added the third dimension of depth. Other paintings include a thin light strip cut out and illuminated from behind. His interest in illusions of light and depth on the flat surface of the canvas led to the next development: setting up a mirror, a prism and a piece of plexiglass as reflective surfaces. His paint-



Sal Pecoraro looks to the sky for his images.

ings study the visual effects of these interactions.

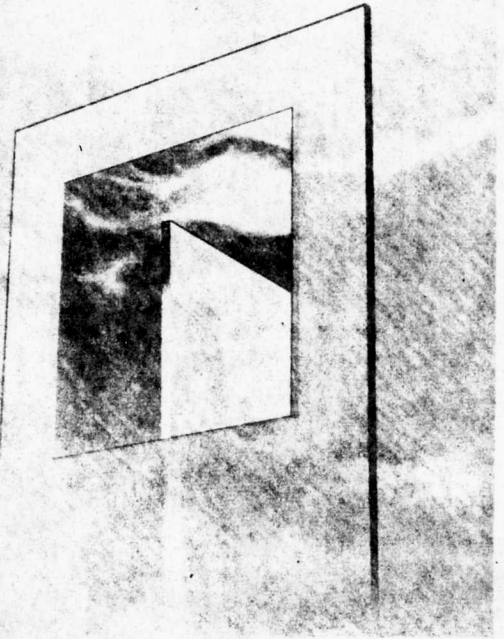
Sal drove throughout the Peninsula in his van searching for the appropriate backdrop for his experiments. He would set up his props, study the reflections, the angles, the perspective and take slides of them. Then he converted the slides into paintings.

The advent of the sabbatical year — time taken off from teaching — has given him time to develop a new perspective, a refinement of his previous art experience.

"I could've kept on with the sky forever if I wanted to be a dilettante about it," he concedes. But an artist thrives on conflict. The challenge of new, ambiguous ideas provides a confrontation from which an artist can create. New problems provoked Pecoraro to explore a new imagery.

He turned to constructions made up of a painted canvas and a shelf projecting out at a 90° angle; with light shining on them from a prism. On the shelf rest two painted squares, placed there to interfere with the light. The result is a rainbow of interaction with light, color, and space. Pecoraro also makes paintings of these relationships, thereby converting the set-up onto a flat canvas surface. As with the sky paintings, the spectrum paintings are taking him into many directions. He is finding that their range is as exciting, and as limitless.

The imagery in Pecoraro's paintings has changed through the years, but the elements of light, plane, shape and space are constant. They are the artists' vo-



cabulary, transferred into a visual communication for the viewer to perceive. An artist's integrity and the intellectual decisiveness with which he formulates and communicates his ideas are the requisite components of artwork. Their inclusion marks the difference between a painting that is a work of art and one that merely represents an object. Their distinctions are measures of greatness.

Many artists today are relentless in their pursuit of creating a valuable art experience. They take it to task to propose visual imagery never before seen. Pecoraro paints images that have not previously been isolated at such. Their beauty lies in the newness and freshness of approach.

There is no general formula for creating a "good" painting; it must come from the artist's own experience. When teaching, Pecoraro insists that his students find their own answers, their own method of painting. "Why give answers," he says, "it's more fun to give questions." Answers come in the doing, the process.

For viewers, learning comes the same way, through discovery and observation. Some local shows of contemporary art worthy of observation include:

Keith Boyle Drawing Retrospective at the Stanford Gallery.

Contemporary Works at Rubicon Gallery, Los Altos.

Jere Predika and Andrea Coles at Los Robles Gallery, Palo Alto.

Frank Lobdell Monotypes at Gallery Smith-Andersen, Palo Alto.