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Robert Goodnough  
'Symphony 1986'

Busy, loud, frantic, messy, geometric, angry, dark, black, dark right/light left, don't like, triangles/lots of triangles, what is it?, one circle, yellow circle, heavy, right side busier than left, some triangles appear 3D. These were some of my first thoughts when viewing this large canvas. My mind was racing and it was hard to pin down which thoughts came first. The piece demands your attention immediately, even if you don't like it. And I didn't like it. For this reason, I chose 'Symphony 1986' by Robert Goodnough.

I thought it would be a good idea for me to research and find out more about the work; the artist, the style, the way in which it was created, as well as the story behind it. Of course I was looking for the answer to "what is it?"

To begin my journey for the "what" I started with my formal qualities observations (see the attached aesthetic scanning worksheet for complete observation). The most important 'parts' of the piece to me are the irregular triangle shapes. They are repeated throughout the work in numerous colors and sizes. There seems to be a balance in the number of large vs. small triangles but an imbalance on where they are placed on the canvas. This makes the piece asymmetrical in that the right side is visually heavier. The fact that the majority of the triangles on this side are also the color black, helps to add to this heavy feel. This black really stands out in contrast to the other colors in the work, especially the white. I find it interesting that the 2<sup>nd</sup> most predominant shape in the piece is a trapezoid, or a cut off triangle. Why the triangle? Yet, another question to answer along my journey.

This piece definitely evokes big feelings and movement, as abstract expressionism is supposed to do. The color and placement of triangles are key; as they draw your eye not only to the canvas but from left to right in a hurried fashion. You can't help but stare at the heavy parts and you must force yourself to look at the lighter areas, especially to the top of the canvas.

Next, I read the label and immediately tried to put the image within the context of the title. Aha, music! The right side now appears to be the music stands of the musicians in the symphony with the left side as the audience. You can almost pick out the conductor with a little fleshy color and a large vertical trapezoid shape. Or, the black triangles are music notes being blown out of an instrument. They seem like they are being forced or blown across the canvas. Or better yet, representative of a musical crescendo of quiet to loud or fast to slow. Well, better get on to the research where I know I will find what the artist meant this to be.

Robert Goodnough the enigma. Library research, internet research, book research and none found much information on this "hermit" of the art world. I could find very limited information about the artist, only descriptive information about his works, and nothing about the piece here at the KIA.

Goodnough is from upstate New York and still resides there. He was classically trained and holds several BA degrees and a Masters. He studied under Amedee Ozenfant and Hans Hofmann and was influenced greatly by cubism. He is considered an abstract expressionist, but when looking at some of his works, one could argue he is also a minimalist. Some critics have commented on his work being a combination of cubism and abstract expressionism. Over the years he has worked in many media including sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking and collage. He is married to Miko Goodnough, a collage artist (see attached bio for more information).

The difficulty in finding information on Goodnough is due to his lack of a public persona. As early in his career as the 1950's he was known for not attending his own show's opening receptions and this hasn't changed. The few he has attended he came late after all the "important people" had left. He didn't 'do' the New York art scene of his time; parties, politics and publicity. Perhaps this is why he is far less famous than his contemporaries Pollock, de Kooning, Frankenthaler, etc.

It is prophetic that I could not find the answer to my questions, as I am (or have been) one of those people who looks at abstract expressionism and wants to know what "it" is. If I can't tell by looking at the work then I definitely want to know the why behind it. This process has definitely given me the opportunity to enjoy this work truly for what it is, "art for arts sake."