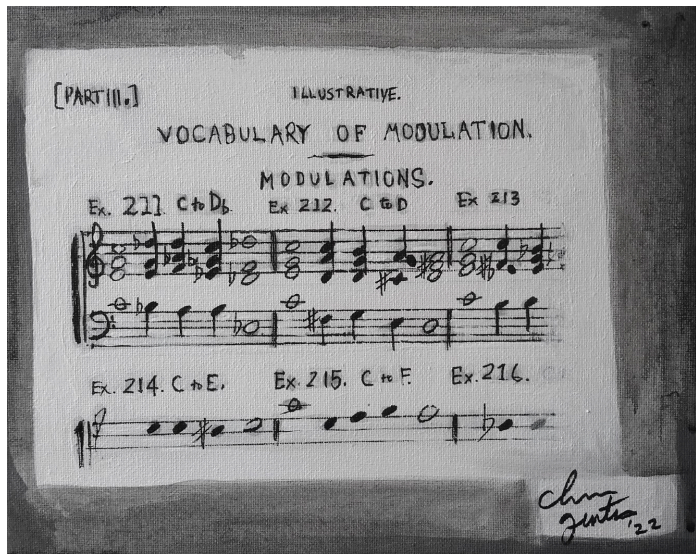


# Birds of Mars Digest

## Number Twelve

March—April 2022



The 8 by 10 Series [62-74]

Paintings and comments by Chris Gentes

## **Summary**

In early March I didn't feel much like painting and was thinking of taking a long break from it.

But after a week went by I remembered that I had solved the one hour painting goal, so it seemed as if I should be engaged in making more paintings since I had finally figured that out. So I continued.

By April I was bogged down with three so-so portraits and failed lettering experiments. I felt like quitting again.

But toward the end of the month I had a commission for five paintings of Cruella, and I had started making music notation paintings, and had developed some packaging to make the 8 by 10 paintings seem more like gifts. All of this reinvigorated me. The paintings from March & April 2022 are included in this volume.

Chris Gentes  
Northampton, Massachusetts  
May 2022

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## **The 8 by 10 Series [62-74]**

All paintings are acrylic on stretched canvas except as otherwise notated in the main text. Size is either 8x10” or 10x8” depending on whether the painting is in vertical or horizontal orientation.

### **March 2022 Paintings**

062 Sternum Boxes *completed in April*

063 Modulations

064 Modulations 2

### **April 2022 Paintings**

065 Poe

066 Hemingway

067 Poe 2

068 Cruella 1 *In Progress*

069 Novelette

070 Cruella 2 *In Progress*

071 Harmony

072 A Semitone

073 Allegro con Brio

074 Cruella 3 *In Progress*

### **Index for earlier paintings from “The 8 by 10 Series”**

1—24: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Seven* (Apr.—Oct. 2021)

19, 25—32: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Eight* (Nov. 2021)

33—40: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Nine* (Dec. 2021)

41—49: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Ten* (Jan. 2022)

50—61 “Colorcubes”: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Eleven* (Feb. 2022)

## **The 8 by 10 Series [62-74]**

### **Comments by Chris Gentes**

After I had finished the last of the colorcube paintings I felt drained and didn't want to think about painting ever again. But after a few days I got the idea of adding little people to the paintings of the colorcubes. Little figures painting the cubes or something funny like that. (I still hope to eventually do that one day.)

So I looked through my art books to find the proportions of the human body so I could make some studies. I found a really good diagram and description in a master anatomy instruction book by Robert Hale. I based **62 Sternum Boxes** on that diagram. To the right is the finished painting.

The sternum is the bone that goes from the base of the throat down to bottom of the front of the rib cage. That length is known as a 'sternum length', and a box that has those lengths for its sides is known as a sternum box.

Sizes of other parts of the body can be determined with this length as a guide. For example, the width of the ball of the head is a sternum length. So are five eye widths.

The base of the nose to the pit of the neck is a sternum length. The base of the sternum to the bottom most rib is another sternum length. This painting is a painting of a diagram, and this type of artwork is something I explored further with musical notation paintings, starting with two of modulations.



62 Sternum Boxes. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas. Private Collection.

I got the idea for **63 Modulations** suddenly. I was looking at a music book from the 1800s. I'm always perusing old books looking for any new kind of musical information that I can find. I found a page of modulations. It felt like a good idea for painting so I decided to make a painting. I decided on the composition and got started.

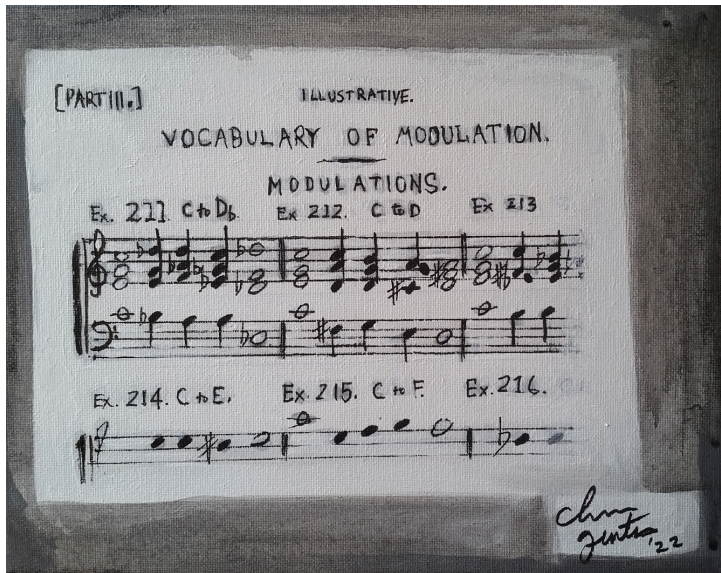
I knew that I could now make a painting in an hour. That was the whole purpose of the colorcubes. Now that I knew how to do it I just needed to continue doing it in a similar manner with new paintings.

I stuck with the process. I gridded off an 8x10 inch canvas with one inch squares. Then I decided where the 5x7 inch image would go within that grid. It is off-centered using this method, part of the plan.

I started with a very light gray [6] and blocked in areas where there would eventually be something. Things like letters and notes. I blocked that all in and started the background as well. I could see that I would have to use a small brush or an acrylic marker eventually since the letters and notes on the musical staff were so small.

Then I used a light gray [5] and blocked in more detail. With this shade as a guide I added the notes and isolated areas for the letters. I continued working on the background as well. Then I glazed over everything with white to dampen it. I worked on the background some more. I thought about how I might add color. I realized that for the notes I would have to use a small brush. That seemed to go against my new process of only using larger

brushes, but I could see that this was for a very specific purpose and would be ok. I also remembered that I should use a larger brush if I wanted to paint a larger area. I looked at it for a few days trying to decide what to do next. I eventually decided to use acrylic markers for the words and notes. Then I saw that the background was too dark in some spots so I added light gray here and there to lighten it up.



63 Modulations. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas. Private Collection

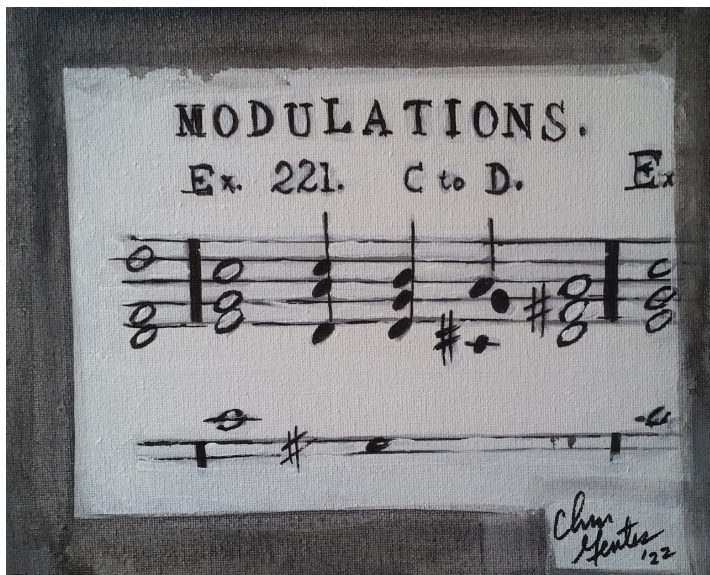
**64 Modulations 2** was started while 63 Modulations was still in progress. I realized that the notes and letters on that other painting would be very small; I wanted to make a painting in which they were slightly larger to see what that would be like. So I started this one and did the same process as described for that other painting up until the first glaze of white paint. Also, when I glazed over with the white paint there were some spots where there was blank canvas, so I applied the paint in a thicker manner there. Wherever I saw the pencil grid on the blank canvas I painted some white paint in a thicker manner to try to cover these lines. But I didn't try too hard to do this, because I like leaving signs of the process in the art. Then I let it sit for a day.

It seemed like the next step was to paint the letters with a dark paint. The form was there. The locations for the letters were all blocked in with the two shades of light gray. Where the lines on the musical staff would go was blocked in. I would just need to use a thin brush to apply them. The same for the lettering. Everything was ready to go. I just had to paint it in. I decided to use an acrylic marker to make the notes and the letters. It would look more accurate. Maybe it wouldn't technically be considered a painting any more, but it was still me making the marks. So then I just kind of neatened everything up and it was finished.

This painting kind of encapsulates a lot of different elements which I personally like in art. I like that it is a diagram of something else. That is interesting to me.



Whatever the art itself means, there is also the meaning of the information contained within the diagram. In this case it is the specific notes which comprise the modulation. That concept interests me. Then there is the form of the information. Text and notes. A musical staff. One way to look at those shapes is as pure areas of paint, and not the information that they portray.



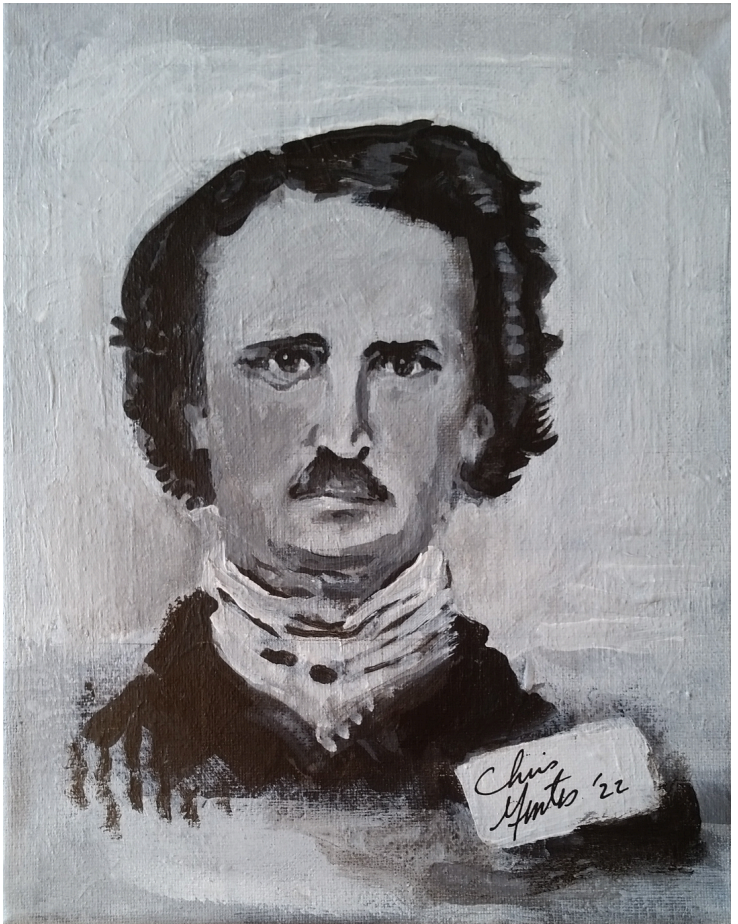
64 Modulations 2. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas. Private Collection

Since I had realized that it would be a shame if I didn't actually make some paintings now that I had figured out how to paint one in an hour, I decided to make a few portraits of writers in grayscale to see how it went. I decided to paint **65 Poe** because a friend of mine mentioned that he is their favorite writer. And I also thought I'd return to making a painting of Ernest Hemingway to test my one hour painting process.

So I started this painting and everything went really well. Within thirty minutes I had pretty good basic painting. A little rough here and there, but a good likeness. My process was good. The concept was in place.

Then I looked at the painting for a few days and thought about what I could do in thirty minutes to complete it. Should I add color? Should I just paint more detail. Should I add words—text of something he had written or his name somewhere as part of the design? I thought about how I could add flesh color to the image. I could glaze a transparent layer. I could paint opaquely where there is a specific flesh tonal value and chroma. Let it dry and then glaze over these areas into the gray to blend. I tried to think of other things I could do. Most of it I would have to just do. Keep it simple I reminded myself.

What happened was anything but simple. It involved making a dozen versions of this painting, some with quotes of Poe. That all got painted over and this became the final painting.



65 Poe. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

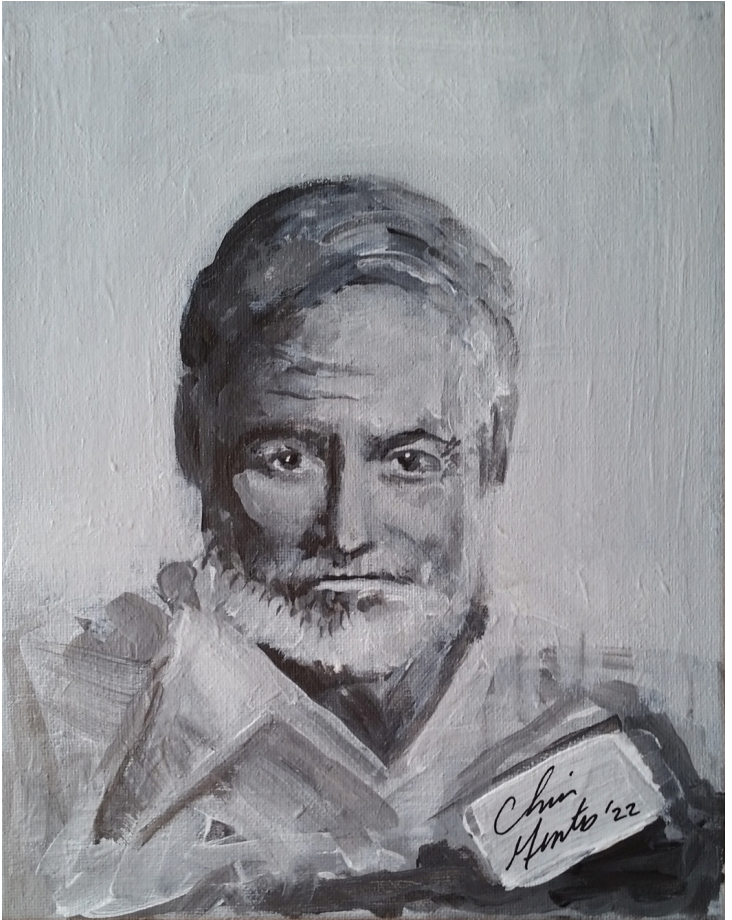
**66 Hemingway** is another one of the writer portraits that I made to test the one hour painting process. The modulation paintings weren't quite done yet, but I wanted to work on the portraits.

The beauty of making a painting in an hour is that an unfinished painting will always take less than an hour to finish. That is part of the beauty of it.

So I worked on this one and at first it seemed like it was going to take longer than an hour, but then after 45 minutes it looked pretty good. I had fifteen minutes left to finish it. I waited until I had a good idea of what that would actually entail. I was wondering if I should add color or just add more details and define the tonal values better.

Then, as mentioned, I got sidetracked by words. Letters. Adding words and text and quotes. How to do that. I researched a bunch of Hemingway quotes and thought of which ones would be good as part of a painting. Then I counted letters and worked out where they would be and how to make them look. I made about ten versions of that—now all painted over. Eventually I made this portrait in about an hour or so on top of all those other versions.

I should mention that the reason I was thinking of words and letters is because I have a commission for five Cruella paintings, which are to include quotes along with images of Cruella. I was using these paintings to develop some of the ideas and processes for those paintings, which will be in a future edition of *The Birds of Mars Digest*.



66 Hemingway. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

The two previous portrait paintings had a lot of small details in them. That was fine, but part of the plan of making a painting in an hour is to avoid having to paint a lot of detail. This can be accomplished by using bigger brushes. Another way to overcome this ‘detail dilemma’ is to use acrylic markers—but this had to be done towards the end since sometimes glazing over these marker spots with another paint will loosen the paint and cause blending. Sometimes this is something that is good to know about, and can be specifically used while creating a painting.

Another way to avoid of all that detail is to choose a subject matter that doesn’t have a lot of detail. So I decided with **67 Poe 2** to enlarge his image so that there wasn’t as many small areas to contend with. I could use larger size brushes to paint these areas. Less time. More of the gesture of the brushwork could be seen if I wanted it to be. I could paint more opaquely. I could look for those parts of the painting where there were light spots and areas—highlights—and build up those areas with paint so that these spots were enhanced by actual reflection of light. An illusion. An artist’s trick to add realism. The glint of sunlight off of a cheekbone or forehead would be actual reflected light, not just a lighter value of pigment.

Then I got distracted by all the text and quotes versions, before eventually making this painting in about an hour. I will mention here that I also figured out how to arrange my gray paints to better work with them while painting. That is one of my ‘art secrets.’



67 Poe 2. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

Finally I had finished the three portraits. I returned to the idea of the musical notation paintings. **69 Novelette** was one I made to solidify the process.

One day I was looking through some old music books from the 1800s and I found the beginning of Schumann's Novelette Opus 21. I liked how it looked—aesthetically. Then I spent a few weeks (maybe less) working on this one. As mentioned, I was mostly sidetracked with working on exploring painting lettering for the Poe and Hemingway portraits.

I listened to a recording of this composition. I also eventually listened to a lecture about Brahms and the Schumanns. I'm still learning about them. It was somewhat sad, as the lives of artists usually are. Schumann himself ended up in a mental institution.

This painting is important to me for a lot of reasons. First of all, it helped solidify in my mind that there is a way to make a nice original painting in about an hour. The importance of this has been written about elsewhere.

One thing I like about how this painting looks is that it looks like a sheet of paper somewhat. There is the straight edge on the left which looks like the edge of a piece of paper. I like how that looks. I also like how to the right of this there is a slightly darker side of gray and then a light gray. I like that gradation. Meanwhile on the other side of the canvas there are dark grays balancing out the composition. But these grays aren't isolated, which would create an effect, but are linked into the area where the signature is.



One aspect of these music paintings that I have thought about in passing is how they have a ‘form’—elements which comprise them that are similar from painting to painting. Yet each is unique. This is similar to how there are musical forms which are similar from composition to composition, but each piece is still unique.

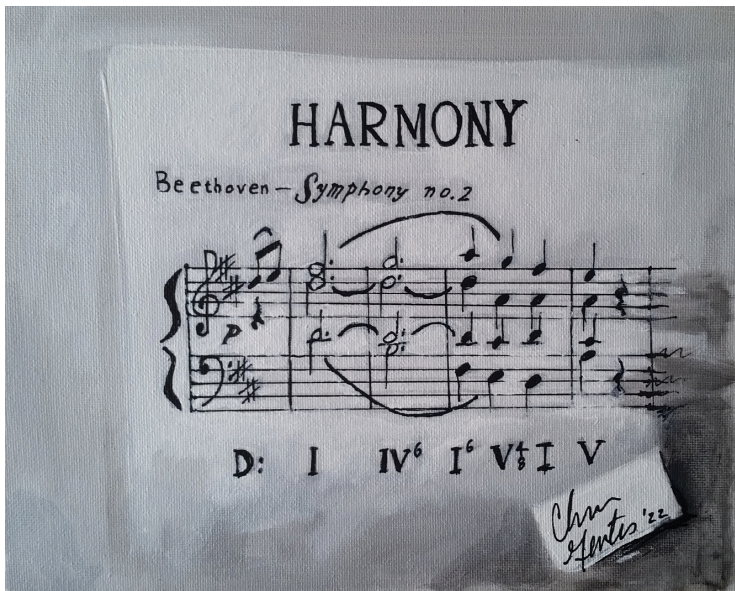
That similarity is not lost on me. In some respects these are improvisations within that form. A performance.



69 Novelette. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

**71 Harmony** is a painting that I really enjoyed working on. It feels nicely balanced to me. All of the parts balance out. It is based on a composition by Beethoven.

I found an old book online that had anecdotes about Beethoven, as well as documentation of his funeral. On the following page are some stanzas read over the grave of Beethoven.



71 Harmony. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

# STANZAS READ OVER THE GRAVE OF BEEETHOVEN,

March 29. 1827.

by Francis, Baron SCHLECHTA.

Forth from a rock a fountain broke, and rife  
With quick'ning power spread o'er the thirsty plain;  
Where'er it flowed it left the seeds of life,  
And turn'd old nature into youth again: —  
All throng'd around th' enchanted spot, to crave  
A bountiful refreshment from the wave.

A few there be, of deeper-searching mind,  
Who drink delighted of that wondrous stream;  
Others admire to see it gently wind,  
And Sol's bright rays upon its surface gleam;  
Others a common rill the fount declare,  
Less marvellous than some, and far less fair!

The fountain sank! then first the giddy throng  
With shame and grief its tardy homage paid;  
And zealous Art, with emulative song,  
Pour'd in the praise long earn'd and long delay'd: —  
Alas, no sigh, no tender-plaintive lay  
Can bring the vanish'd fountain back to day!

Thou, lost One, from thy mortal fetters freed,  
Thou wert the fountain, and its power thine own;  
Thine was the magic volume few could read,  
And less could understand; now thou art known,  
Now every tongue its high-wrought praise would give  
Exulting — and thou must have died, to live!

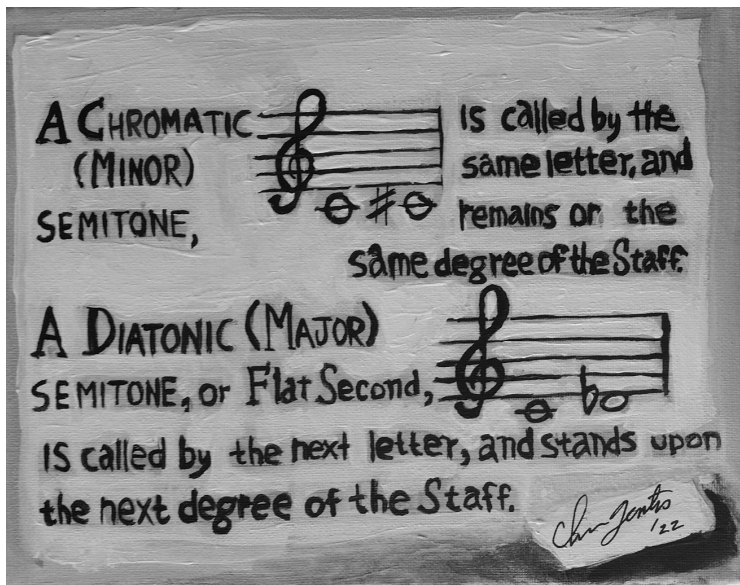
**72 A Semitone** was a strange painting to make. I liked how this image looked in a book and I thought it would make a nice painting. After making a grid I painted the letters. Later I painted over all of this with a white wash, but it erased a lot of the paint of the letters.

So I redid the whole thing with an acrylic marker. It didn't look good. Maybe it was taking up too much of the space on the canvas. The other music paintings had images that were 5x7 and I then painted in the background around that. This one had a full 8x10 image, and maybe the reason why it didn't look good was because there wasn't enough room for it to breathe.

The lettering didn't look that good either. I had already put in 45 minutes and it didn't seem like it would be an hour painting. I had to think of how to fix it. I painted over parts that were there on the top and renamed it. Previously it was a chapter title—"Introduction". I changed that to A Semitone. I didn't like how the lettering looked. I think it had to do with the size of the acrylic pen and the kind of letters. If I used a larger nib I could vary parts of the letters easier. But the letters would have to be larger. There is a related correspondence between the size of the mark maker, the size of the letters, and how the letters look.

I decided to redo all the lettering. This time I did it with an acrylic marker. But that looked bad. So then I painted over that with some black acrylic paint. Each letter became larger, but it looked ok. Then I added a lot of white to spots. I realized that by making the grid for an

8x10 image size I had created problems for myself. It had seemed like it wouldn't have, but it did. But I recognized this quickly this time. I kind of fixed everything to make it fit into the way the other ones in the new style are looking. But realizing that error made me optimistic about future paintings because I would not do that again. This one kind of looks like a cake to me. The paint looks like frosting.



72 A Semitone. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

**73 Allegro con brio** is a perfect example of the kind of painting that I want to be creating for this series. This one took an hour—right in the time frame I am shooting for. It was informative to me. I learned a lot making it that I can apply to future paintings. I got ideas for future paintings making this. I don't feel like I need to do anything more with this one. There are always future paintings. For example, I got the idea that this might look good with some blue around the edges. I almost tried that. But I didn't. It might mess it up. Then I would be in a feedback loop, having to continually work on fixing the same painting.

So I decided to leave it as it is.

This one was made all with paint. No markers for this one. I went back a few times and painted in white areas and then I painted in black areas. And I tried to fix it here and there as I went—to make it look better. This one and the previous one were started together one day and then mostly finished the next day. While making these two I also worked on an info card to include with the packaging of the artwork. This is something new related to this series that I am doing as part of each painting. I am making packaging for it. I found some plastic sleeves that I had in storage and the paintings fit in those perfectly. So I made a design for an info card and cut a little stencil. I can make one for each painting by hand. It isn't really any trouble to do that. I wish I had thought of this earlier on. It doesn't really matter when I thought of it. I am just glad I am able to have some packaging which makes these paintings

seem more like gifts. In a few shops that they are in and when I show them to people on the street or give them to people who bought them there is always seems to be a little disappointment because they don't seem special enough. But it seems that with the packaging they will seem more important, like a gift. And there will also be a little bit of mystique or glamour associated with what is purposefully made art. Like a Joseph Cornell box.



73 Allegro con brio. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

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## **Comments on Drawings**

The ‘drawings’ are on 8.5x11 inch copy paper, regular weight. I started this process a few years ago in lieu of sketch pads/journals. If I have an idea for something I want to document, work on, draw, sketch, design, write about, study, archive or for whatever reason, then I will write the date, title and index number on the bottom right area of a sheet of paper and proceed to ‘draw’. Then I keep each month’s sheets in a separate folder. I scan them into digital format eventually. Everything is neat and organized and I have an index for all of it for referencing. One day it could be a book.