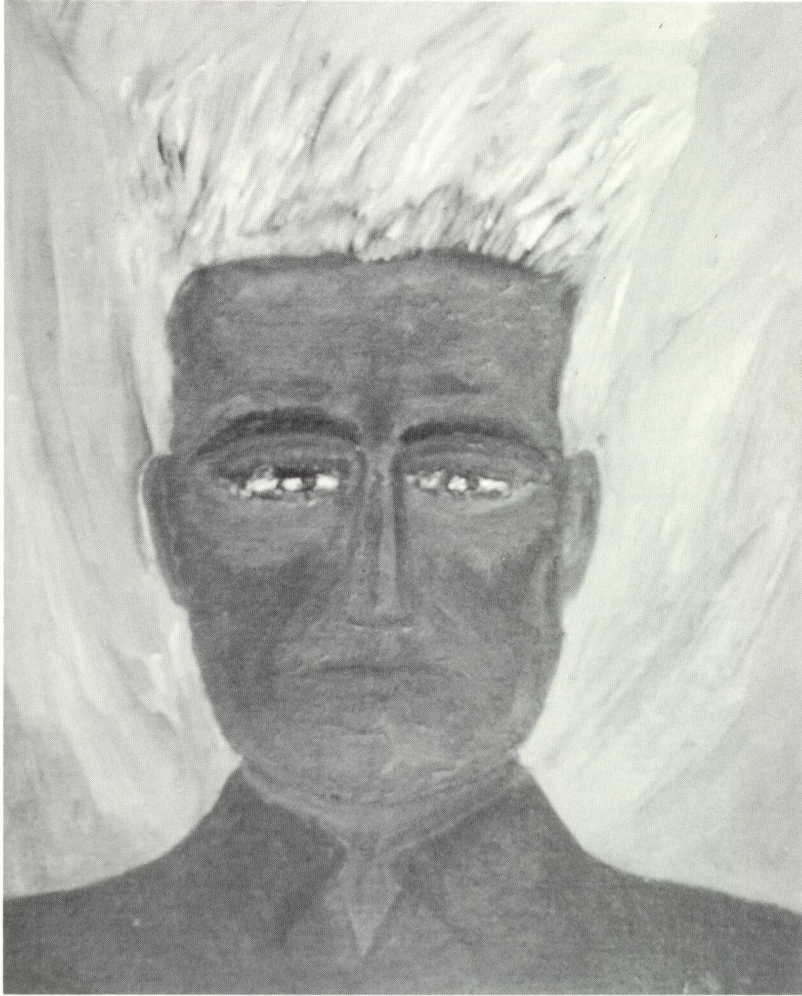


Wilhelm Reich



OPENING RECEPTION

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 3, 1988

4 — 7 p.m.

Gallery 400

400 South Peoria

(Peoria and Van Buren, two blocks west of Halsted)

For information, call 996-6114

Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) the artist would be classified as a naive painter and a self-taught artist. The notion of "Sunday painter" often carries pejorative overtones, but Reich pursued his "hobby" with a dedication that more than compensated for his lack of formal art training. Reich realized that the concept, or rather the thought and the feeling that go into the creative process are more important than stylish production. Through painting, Reich was able to explore and express his interest in the wonder of orgone energy on a direct, visual level. He noted in his journal on Feb. 8, 1951, "Eyes and hand, especially fingers, unite and 'it forms' from them while I paint. Somehow, memories of landscapes seen and traveled through long ago are still alive with a special sharpness. These images emerge with formation of shape and harmonic integration of color. I am, of course, no learned artist, but feel I *can* do it Painting of orgone phenomena will, if I acquire the technical skill, save me a lot of writing."

While still a medical student at the University of Vienna, Reich became a member of the newly formed Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and was one of the younger and more active members of Sigmund Freud's inner circle. Reich believed that societal repression of the sexual drive is the cause of neurosis and that to prevent neurosis involved the restructuring of society. Freud, who placed the origin of neurosis in sexual suppression, believed that a certain amount of repression was necessary in a "civilized" culture. Reich and Freud differed in their views on how the societal implication of Freud's original clinical discoveries should be implemented. During this same time Hitler assumed power. The turbulent political atmosphere of prewar Europe intensified, and Reich was forced to flee Germany in 1933.

Because of the controversial nature of his research, Reich continued to experience political and bureaucratic harassment. He lived in five countries in Europe and Scandinavia before moving to America in 1939 under the auspices of the new School of Social Research in New York. Reich eventually settled in Maine where he built the laboratory/observatory in Rangeley, Maine that today houses the Wilhelm Reich Museum.

Reich is best known for his discovery and work on a demonstrable physical energy he named "orgone." His investigations into the manifestations of this energy led to the development of the orgone energy accumulator. This instrument was based on Reich's discovery that through a certain arrangement of nonmetallic and metallic materials it was possible to accumulate and concentrate the energy. Furthermore, he began investigating a means of diminishing the harmful effects of nuclear radiation through orgone energy functions. He called this project "Oranur" for Orgone Anti Nuclear. These studies led to the development of methods for the practical utilization of

orgone in the study of natural phenomena and the treatment of biological functioning disorders. Through his inquiry into the accumulation and concentration of energy, he found that he could affect the concentration of said energy in the atmosphere to form and dissipate clouds of water vapor, thereby influencing rain production and weather conditions. The machine used for these purposes was called the "cloudbuster." A similar instrument named the "DOR-buster" was used to effect the stagnation of biological orgone energy in people.

Unfortunately, Reich did not escape persecution by moving to the United States. In 1954, the Federal Food and Drug Administration filed a complaint for an injunction against Reich and sought to ban his books and the interstate shipment of his energy accumulators. Reich initially offered to cooperate with the FDA in a scientific investigation of orgone energy and his accumulators, but his offer was refused. Reich in turn refused to appear in Court and answer the complaint because to do so would have acknowledged that a governmental agency had the power to judge basic scientific research on nonscientific grounds. The Court rejected Reich's written "Response" and on March 19, 1954 issued an injunction by default without ever hearing any factual evidence. Many of his writings were subsequently banned and/or burned under the supervision of the FDA in 1956 and later in 1960. Nonetheless, Reich refused to abandon his research. While away conducting an experiment, one of Reich's students transported some of his orgone energy accumulators from Maine to New York. Done without Reich's knowledge, this action was considered a violation of the injunction and Reich was charged with criminal contempt. He was sentenced to two years in prison where he died in his cell at the Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA on November 3, 1957 of a heart attack.

Reich's daughter, Eva, gave him paints and brushes for Christmas in 1950 and soon after he began to paint. He had completed 45 canvases and one sculpture at the time of his death. It has been my pleasure in working with the Wilhelm Reich Museum (Rangeley, Maine) to document and expose these exceptional works in Reich's first retrospective exhibition. While it might be convenient to characterize these paintings as naive, Reich himself was one of the world's most creative and original thinkers in both the psychiatric and physical science fields. Although many of these canvases are small, Reich's dramatic use of bright color and expressionistic brushwork produced forceful images. Some of his paintings reflect his knowledge of "man's inhumanity to man" while many illustrate his love of the unifying processes of nature. In 1950 he wrote in his journal, "the scientist and the artist are no longer keepers of disparate unmixable worlds."