Springtime in Minnesota

BY

Kasarian Dane

“The reason you tell lies about a wonderful place is that you believe if you get every detail right, absolutely right … that if you get it absolutely perfect, you will be lifted up out of this life and you will be set down in that wonderful place you’ve told lies about and all your lies will become true. See, what you don’t realize, so many of you, is that not only is Lake Wobegon made up, but Minnesota is made up too … there is no such state.”
—Garrison Keillor

“I lost a couple of teeth, but hey, that’s playoff hockey … I said, ‘Get me back out there’.”
—Pierre Turgeon, Center, St. Louis Blues, Stanley Cup Playoffs 2001

Springtime in Minnesota is the ideal place and time to live and be alive. Springtime is when the 5-plus month winter that you thought may never end finally comes to a close. Flowers poke up through once frozen ground. Fresh green shoots of budding leaves abound. The (outdoor) ice melts and the temperature rises. Not only is winter ending and spring coming to life, but just as exciting, the National Hockey League (NHL) playoffs are starting.

The NHL playoffs are often referred to as the “second season”. There’s no more boring “we have to be here to get paid” hockey games that often occur in the regular 82 game season. The second season is playoff time, and it’s not about money. Pro hockey players do not get bonus pay for the playoffs. They have one desire: to win the Stanley Cup. In the 2001 NHL playoffs, Bob Hartley, coach of the Stanley Cup Champion Colorado Avalanche, asked only one thing of his team: that they “Live for the Cup”.

The Stanley Cup is often referred to as the “Holy Grail” of sports trophies. It represents not only the crowning achievement in becoming the top NHL team of the year, but much more than that, it means permanently becoming part of hockey history and legend. The name of each player on the winning team is engraved on the silver trophy. Whether you are the team’s star player or have only a minor supporting role on the team, when your name becomes engraved on the Cup, you gain “immortality” in the world of hockey. Like the legend of the Holy Grail, the Stanley Cup offers immortality to the players who hoist it after winning the NHL championship at the end of the playoffs in June.
In addition to watching hockey in the springtime, the spring is also the ideal time to play hockey. In Minnesota, plenty of ice-time is available year round. Since almost all hockey now is played indoors on artificial ice, there is no difference in playing a hockey game in the winter, spring, summer, or fall. The difference in the springtime is after the game. There are no more post-game outings into below zero temperatures that freeze your wet hair and run a chill up your spine. In the springtime, you leave the game in shorts and sandals. The humid night air welcomes you like a warm blanket. You can literally feel Minnesota’s “10,000 lakes” in the air. Minnesota’s plentiful artificial ice makes playing a winter sport in the springtime weather, the ideal situation, easily accessible.

An ideal situation that is not so easily accessible is winning the Stanley Cup. Many pro hockey players think that if they win the Stanley Cup, they will experience an exuberance that is magical and ideal: a state of perfection, if only for one brief moment in their lives. Thus, the players bear all kinds of physical pain and numerous injuries in order to reach this ultimate goal. Similar to the desires of these hockey players, Yves Klein thought that if he painted the perfect monochrome in his copyrighted “International Klein Blue”, he would transcend his physical limitations and exist in an ideal state of perfection, no longer inhibited by physical limitations. In his performance “Leap into the Void” (pictured to the right), he broke his ankle jumping out of his dealers window and “into the Void”. Klein was literally attempting to fly and experience a state of transcendent being, leaping skyward into the blue. Despite his injured ankle, Klein was forced to leap several times in order capture his moment of perfect flight in a photograph, and like today’s NHL players, he performed despite his physical pain in pursuit of his goal.

Similar to the aspirations of Yves Klein, abstract painting, in particular minimal and monochromatic painting, for me has always been about representing something ideal: finding the ideal color; the ideal shape; the ideal proportion. It is an attempt to represent the ideal place or the ideal state of being.

It is Garrison Keillor’s “Lake Wobegon”, Yves Klein’s “Blue Void”, and the National Hockey League’s Stanley Cup. Abstract painting is the search for the representation of perfection, like springtime in Minnesota.

Minnesota: The Mall of America, Jesse Ventura, Kevin Garnett, Randy Moss, …and now the new NHL expansion team, the Minnesota Wild. Watching hockey, playing hockey, springtime, warm weather … some painting in between…what could be better? As Keillor would conclude, “That’s the news from Lake Wobegon, Minnesota: Where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average.”

Kasarian Dane was born in Duluth, MN and has lived 23 of his 29 years in various parts of Minnesota. Artist, goaltender, and visiting assistant professor of art at Lawrence University, he now resides in Appleton, WI.

Written in Spring.
Copyright Kasarian Dane 2001