Fernando de Szyszlo was born in Lima, 1925, son of a Polish geographer and a Peruvian mother of Spanish-Indian descent. Szyszlo belonged to that small group of artists who first did abstract art on the South American continent after World War II, and he was the first abstract painter in Peru at a time when abstract painting was not well regarded. He remembers his art being attacked by the newspapers and magazines, "the more common adjectives applied to my work then, were "decadent", "un-Peruvian", "immoral" and the like".

Szyszlo feels that Peru, with its incredible mountains, deserts, and colors and its fabulously rich cultural heritage, has been a basic stimulus to his painting. Speaking of the pre-Columbian heritage that surrounds him, he says, "I have never thought of taking anything directly out of that art. To be in contact with it is an important artistic experience, but you need to forget it and let it become a part of your blood."

In his absorption with the pre-Columbian, he sometimes visits the reconstructed Inca palace, Puruchuco, near Lima. "The thing I love most there," he says, "is the solid, perennial, earthy quality it has. The adobe has this strange quality. It seems that people, are made of it. It is tender, fragile, and yet time-and death-defeating."

Szyszlo's small, secret studio faces the sky and the sea. He paints undisturbed, to the music of Bach and Vivaldi and of moderns like Mahler, Schoenberg, and Berg. It takes him three weeks to complete a painting because he is working with transparent colors over opaque ones and must wait for the latter to dry. He works on several canvases at the same time.

The well known Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas Llosa, has described Szyszlo's painting as a process of stages. First, he makes an outlined drawing or skeleton of a spectral figure, then fleshing it in with bright colors. At this stage Llosa observes, "the painting constitutes an exhibitionistic display of form and color,...keeping no secrets from the viewer". The next stage, dissimulation, the painting is covered with additional coats of pigment; covering and at the same time blending with the original colors. The composition acquires an elegance and reserve, dimming the precision and outline. This air of elusiveness, deliberately submerges the surface, producing a gap the viewer can never bridge. Szyszlo then, wipes these last layers until the painting's content is censored, adding the final constant in his art, according to Llosa, the mystery, which arouses our imagination.

The material quoted from:

Photographs by Angel Hurtado.

253 A  INKARRI  1968
       Acrylic on wood
       59 x 59
       Collection of Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery
       University of Texas at Austin

253 B  EL INNOMBRABLE XLV  1980
       That Which Cannot Be Named XLV
       Acrylic on canvas
       46 x 46

253 C  EL INNOMBRABLE  1981
       That Which Cannot Be Named
       Acrylic on canvas
       70 x 78

253 D  VIENTO DE OTOÑO IX  1982
       Autumn Wind IX
       Acrylic on canvas
       71 x 79
       Collection of the Banco Nacional S.A. (of Brazil)
       Miami, Florida

253 E  PUNCHAO  1982
       Acrylic on canvas
       70 x 78

253 F  ANABASE VIII  1982
       (Through the quick-lime door one sees the things of the plains;
living things, oh fine things........) (Grisaille)
       Acrylic on canvas
       58 x 58

253 G  EL CANTO DE LA TIERRA II  1983
       The Song of the Earth II
       Acrylic on canvas
       70 x 78
253 H  DETAIL OF 253 G.

253 I  ANABASE  1982
ANABASIS
(Those that know the sources are with us in this exile)
Acrylic on canvas
58 x 58

253 J  EL CANTO DE LA NOCHE  1984
The Song of the Night
(Tryptic)
Acrylic on canvas
74 x 54, 74 x 54, 74 x 54.