

# ILEANA SONNABEND

AMBASSADOR FOR THE NEW





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Ann Temkin and Claire Lehmann

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

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Andy Warhol. *Ileana Sonnabend*. 1973  
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, two panels, each 40 × 40" (101.6 x 101.6 cm)  
The Sonnabend Collection

It is an honor to present the exhibition *Ileana Sonnabend: Ambassador for the New* at The Museum of Modern Art and to add this catalogue to the body of publications that explore Sonnabend's key role in the history of American and European art during the second half of the twentieth century. Sonnabend was known for being hard to know, and this project cannot explain the mystery of her uncanny ability to spot artistic talent or her faith in the public's appetite for the fruits of that talent despite strong evidence to the contrary. But from those who did know her well, most notably the artists to whose work she dedicated her tireless efforts, it is clear that a fundamental given was Sonnabend's genuine love of art and the people who make it. Her translation of that love into a decades-long enterprise as a gallerist and collector in Paris and New York made an indelible mark on the artistic landscape of our time.

This project had its genesis in the acquisition of a work of art that Sonnabend prized for nearly fifty years and which was made by the artist widely agreed to have been closest to her heart. Robert Rauschenberg's *Canyon* came to The Museum of Modern Art from the Sonnabend family in 2012, five years after Sonnabend's death, and for this splendid gift we express deepest appreciation to Nina Sundell, Antonio Homem, Margaret Sundell, Marianne Sundell, David Sundell, and Phokion Potamianos. Gifts of such historic dimension occur only rarely in a museum director's tenure, and this one has brought immense joy and excitement to the Museum's Trustees, staff, mem-

bers, and visitors. We also are grateful to Nina, Antonio, and Margaret for their warm support of this exhibition and their generous help during the course of its preparation.

Ann Temkin, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, has proceeded with her characteristic thoughtfulness in the difficult task of distilling a remarkable story into an exhibition and publication of reasonable scale. Claire Lehmann, her collaborator, contributed to the research, writing, and management of the project with brilliance and flair on an impossibly speedy schedule. Leslie Camhi has provided a lively catalogue essay that conveys the unique spirit of Sonnabend's enterprise. I extend special thanks to the many artists who worked closely with Ann and Claire in thinking through the checklist and providing insightful recollections of Sonnabend and events at her gallery.

Finally, we owe our warm gratitude to the many private and museum lenders to this exhibition. Ann and Claire took painstaking care in creating a presentation that could at least begin to convey the marvel of Sonnabend's prescience and the groundbreaking nature of the works that she introduced to the public. The highly distinguished roster of international collections at which the objects in this exhibition have found permanent homes is itself a testament to the extraordinary legacy that Ileana Sonnabend has left us.

GLENN D. LOWRY  
Director

Ileana Sonnabend was above all a person who loved art and loved artists. She devoted her life to that love, and in the process exercised a profound influence on the course that art took during the latter half of the twentieth century. At her galleries in Paris and New York, Sonnabend provided the settings for any number of now-legendary moments in the story of the art of our time. This publication and the exhibition it accompanies salute the discernment that kept her activities vital throughout a period of constant artistic change.

We have assembled for this project about forty works of art that were part of landmark occasions in Sonnabend's galleries in New York and Paris. In some cases, we chose works that represent an artist's first opportunity to exhibit in a commercial gallery; in others, the work exemplifies Sonnabend's ambassadorial role in introducing European audiences to new American artists, and vice-versa. We must emphasize that this exhibition could not attempt to include all the artists who made the gallery what it was, and for whom Sonnabend's support was pivotal. Space constraints have compelled a necessarily incomplete selection that nonetheless demonstrates the astonishing range of Sonnabend's commitment.

A retrospective telling of any groundbreaking career cannot fully convey the risk-taking element inherent within it, because we already know the happy ending. It is easy to forget that Sonnabend championed artists who are today household names at a time when their work was virtually unsalable. Fortunately, as she was finding her way, Sonnabend was blessed



Hiroshi Sugimoto. *Ileana Sonnabend*. 2004  
Gelatin silver print, 24 × 20" (61 × 51.8 cm)

with a convenient indifference to others' opinions. By no means trained as a businesswoman, and by no means motivated even to learn what that might imply in conventional terms, she created and sustained a viable enterprise by force of her own belief in the value of its cause. Her convictions sprang not from any schooling as an art historian or as an artist, but instead from intuitive wisdom that she nurtured and trusted. The gift of that intuition she owed to the luck of birth and upbringing. The use she made of it speaks solely to her courage, determination, and hard work.

While we celebrate Sonnabend for the uniqueness of her achievements, it is important to realize that she epitomizes an essential figure within the history of modern art: the woman art dealer. It takes away nothing from Sonnabend's own inestimable contribution to point out that she occupies a place in a distinguished New York tradition stretching from pioneers such as Edith

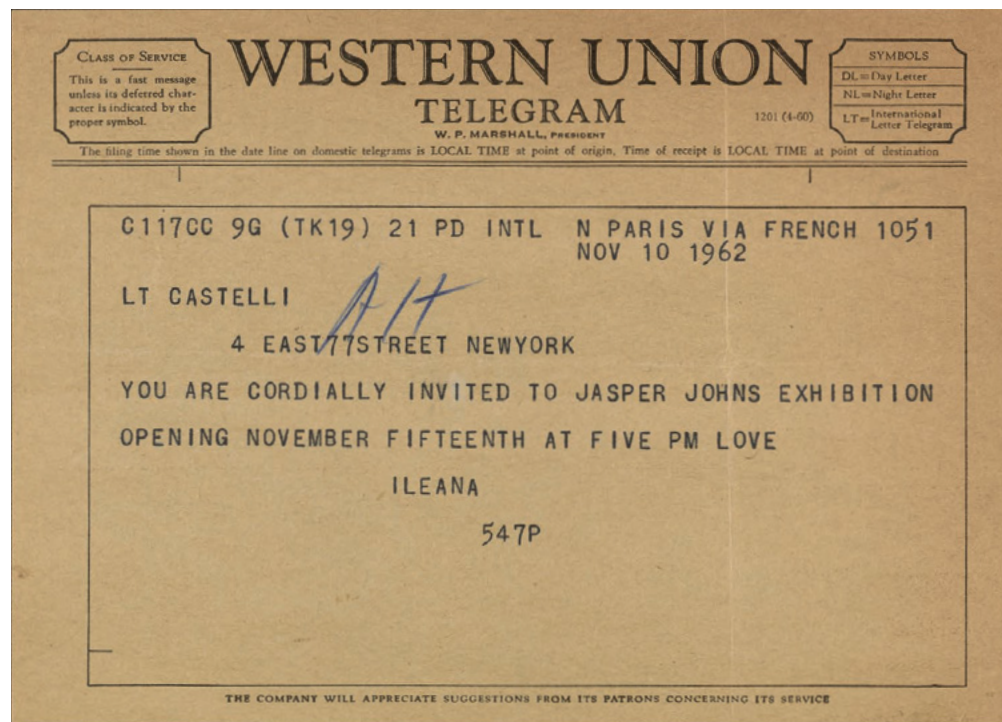
Halpert, Peggy Guggenheim, Betty Parsons, and Eleanor Ward before her to an array of influential peers and successors. In postwar Paris, similarly, women such as Denise René and Iris Clert played key roles in introducing the public to radical changes in contemporary art. At a point when the decision makers at art institutions were primarily men, the role of the dealer offered a rare opportunity for a woman who wanted to use her creative intelligence to make a mark. The profession offered an escape from the dilemma of having to behave as a woman was expected to behave despite the fact that such behavior effectively precluded the possibility of getting ahead in an institutional setting.

Colorful personalities—from the flamboyantly extroverted Peggy Guggenheim to the enigmatically discreet Ileana Sonnabend—fill the elite ranks of women art dealers. Running a gallery, a woman could compose her own script and invent her environment. The gallery could be organized around her particular eccentricities and in many cases provided the center of what constituted an alternative family. Not that the process was painless: Sonnabend herself acknowledged that prejudicial attitudes toward women—even more pronounced in Paris than in New York—made it necessary to toughen her personality. It is no coincidence that “nice” is not a word that springs to mind to describe any of these midcentury women gallerists. Nor, paradoxically, is “feminist,”

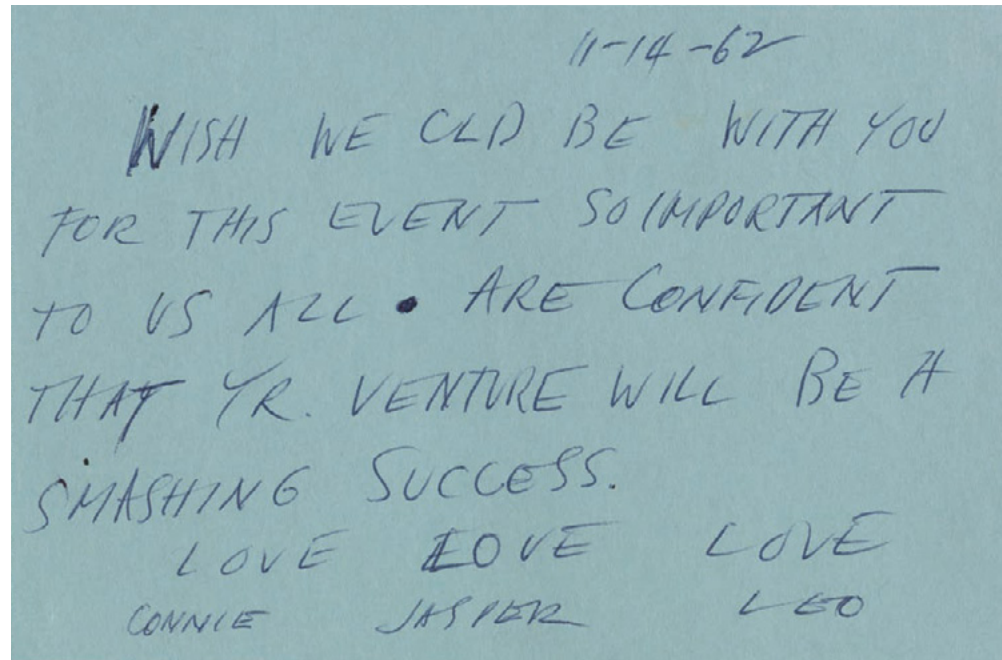
in any sense beyond that of their own example: Sonnabend is representative of her time in that her adventurousness did not extend to making a point of promoting the work of women artists. For that major leap, she was born some years too early.

This publication is intended as a tribute rather than a scholarly study but nonetheless suggests that the work of the gallerist is a fertile field for modern art research. With the exception of a few notable biographies and exhibition catalogues, the role of the art dealer (regardless of gender) has been greatly downplayed in the history of art as it is usually told. There are many explanations for this, including the romantic desire to pretend that art exists independently of a commercial context and the readiness of curators and collectors to take full credit for their artistic choices.

In Sonnabend's case, her own wish to avoid the spotlight has encouraged the tendency to overlook the crucial significance of a dealer's decisions and commitments. However, the histories of commercial galleries and the people who run them are vital to a true understanding of the complex forces that shape the course of artists' careers, and therefore of art history. When the subject is as fascinating a character as Ileana Sonnabend, and the art as important as that which she championed, the spotlight is both deserved and necessary.



**PLATES**



Top: telegram from Ileana Sonnabend inviting Leo Castelli to the opening of the Jasper Johns exhibition at her gallery in Paris, November 10, 1962. Above: draft of a telegram to Ileana Sonnabend from Leo Castelli, Jasper Johns, and Castelli's assistant Connie Trimble, November 14, 1962

The texts on the pages that follow are by Claire Lehmann (C.L.), Frances Jacobus-Parker (F.J.-P.), Paulina Pobocho (P.P.), Nancy Lim (N.L.), Ann Temkin (A.T.), and by the artists.



“He manipulates paint strokes like cards in a patience game,”<sup>1</sup> Fairfield Porter once wrote of his fellow artist Jasper Johns. Indeed, Johns’s brushstrokes are often layered in neat stacks, seemingly accumulated according to chance and method in equal measure. But the marks in Johns’s paintings of the mid-1950s, unlike those of his New York School forebears, do not cohere into abstract, self-reflexive surfaces; instead, they combine to form representations of familiar items like the American flag, bulls-eye targets, and numerals. These commonplace signs, which, as the critic Harold Rosenberg noted, “spanned all intellectual and cultural differences in the art public,” thus “replaced the private signs of the Abstract Expressionists”<sup>2</sup> in what would ultimately be an epochal artistic shift, ushering in the flood of everyday images that subsequently filled Pop art’s canvases. Of course, flags, numerals, and targets are first and foremost symbols—ideal notions that can take various material forms—so though this body of work is broadly representational, the paintings slyly depict abstract ideas through widely accessible motifs.

Johns rendered these two-dimensional designs in a highly material way, often using encaustic paint to build up lushly textured surfaces. Soon, the tools he used to create these surfaces became part of his compositions. Plotting the concentric bands of his targets required a compass, and in 1959, Johns made *Device Circle*, a painting that leaves the target pattern behind and features a circle incised in a multicolored field, the titular device deployed as a compass arm left attached to the canvas at the fulcrum point. This mechanical circling motion later becomes its own aesthetic end: the 1962 painting *Device* features two twelve-inch wooden rulers (each attached at one end to the right and left edges of the upper third of the painting), that have been dragged across the wet paint



Jasper Johns. *Device*. 1962  
Oil on canvas with objects, 40 × 30" (101.6 × 76.2 cm)  
The Baltimore Museum of Art. Purchase with funds  
provided by The Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., Trustee Corporation Fund,  
and by Edith Ferry Hooper

## JOHNS

to produce two smeared, dark-gray semicircles in a kind of literal ruler-and-compass demonstration. These rulers—which appear to have been cut from a yardstick, as the left-hand length is marked to thirty-six inches—flank a length of raw lumber attached vertically to the center of the canvas, the overall effect recalling both a carpenter’s workbench and a classroom chalkboard. The word “gray” appears on the upper third of the center plank, while the title *DEVICE* is stenciled on the lower right-hand corner of the canvas. At the bottom of the work, a strip of the canvas remains partially bare, the swishes of paint and drips spilling onto the narrow white margin.

*Device* was included in the solo exhibition of Johns’s work that inaugurated Galerie Ileana Sonnabend in Paris. The show featured a group of flag paintings, a target, and numerals that had been part of the *Four Americans* exhibition organized by the curator Pontus Hultén at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet, plus several new works sent from New York. Among the latter was *Device*, which Sonnabend had mentioned specifically in a cable to Leo Castelli a week before the opening: “SHOW BEAUTIFUL BUT RETROSPECTIVE WHERE IS DEVICE PAINTING . . . LOVE ILEANA.”<sup>3</sup> Sonnabend was determined to present Johns in the best light at her fledgling gallery, and that meant including his latest paintings. As she wrote to Castelli, “People are ready for a good controversy and they should be able to see the best.” The show was indeed a “great success,” she later reported, noting that at the opening, some visitors “said it was the first time they saw Jap [Jasper] this way, i.e. could follow his development.”<sup>4</sup> C.L.

1. Fairfield Porter, “The Education of Jasper Johns,” *Artnews*, June 1964, p. 44.

2. Harold Rosenberg, “Jasper Johns: ‘Things the Mind Already Knows,’” *Vogue*, February 1, 1964, p. 175.

3. Cable dated November 8, 1962, Leo Castelli Gallery records, circa 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of

American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Box 20, Folder 17.

4. Letter dated November 18, 1962, Leo Castelli Gallery records, circa 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Box 20, Folder 17.



Jasper Johns exhibition, Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, 1962

*Ileana was wonderful. She was bright, mysterious, and curious, enjoying ideas and objects. She loved art and she loved artists, even when she thought them crazy. I don't know why she found them so interesting.*

*I met her in the spring of 1957 in Bob Rauschenberg's Pearl Street studio, just before she and Leo visited mine, which was downstairs from Bob's. Weeks later, we all attended a party given by Ilse Getz, who was working for Leo. I ran into Ileana on the stairs leading to a roof terrace, and she whipped out a check for a hundred dollars, made out to me, saying, "I am buying the white number painting!" It was my small Figure 1, in white.*

*We met frequently before the time of her divorce from Leo and until her marriage to Michael. They were going to Europe and invited me to live in Michael's West Side apartment, which was stuffed with their things. There were tons of books and fancy French furniture in run-down condition. One day I was looking through one of their books and found a John Cage score in it, "Haiku for Willem de Kooning." I took it, because I felt that otherwise it never would see the light of day again. Divine justice: I put it in a book too, and now I have no idea where it is!* J.J.



Robert Rauschenberg studied under Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in the late 1940s after serving in the Marines and studying pharmacology for a brief time in his home state of Texas. When he moved to New York in the early 1950s, he embarked on his first mature series of paintings—monochromes, produced in successive series of white, black, and red, created by applying a single color to surfaces layered with strips of paper or by incising marks into the still-wet paint. In 1954, Rauschenberg began the series that he called Combines, hybrid works incorporating painting, collage, and found objects. Recalling the tactics of Kurt Schwitters, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Duchamp, these works welcomed the detritus of life into the space of art, creating “a pictorial surface that let the world in again,” as the critic Leo Steinberg observed.<sup>1</sup> Rauschenberg was well situated to salvage such debris for his work: compelled by financial constraints to travel on foot, he regularly chanced upon discarded treasures in the streets of New York. He once remarked that he could collect for his artistic purposes “whatever the day would lay out.”<sup>2</sup>

In *Canyon* (1959), Rauschenberg combined scraps of printed matter, fabric, a wrung-out tube of oil paint, photographs, and one of the more startling objets trouvés to appear in his Combines: a stuffed bald eagle given to him by the artist Sari Dienes, who rescued it from the trash bins in her apartment building.<sup>3</sup> The eagle, situated on the lower third of the painting, perches atop an open cardboard box that is placed on a horizontal length of worn timber. From this same shelf-like element, a striped pillow dangles below the frame of the painting. *Canyon* has been interpreted to be rich in visual references to Rembrandt’s 1635 painting *The Rape of Ganymede*, which depicts Zeus disguised as an eagle carrying off the young shepherd in his claws, the boy’s naked bottom shining luminously in the dark sky.<sup>4</sup> The hanging pillow in *Canyon*, cinched in the middle by the



Robert Rauschenberg. *Canyon*. 1959  
Oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas,  
buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube,  
and other materials, 6' 9 3/8" × 70" × 24" (207.6 × 177.8 × 61 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the family of Ileana Sonnabend





## RAUSCHENBERG

length of fraying fabric that suspends it (the resulting twin bulbous volumes brightened by scumbled white paint), echoes Ganymede's exposed posterior, and a photograph of Rauschenberg's young son Christopher affixed to the left-hand side of the canvas is also thematically allusive. But Rauschenberg desired the interpretations of his works to remain open. He once commented that "people keep shuffling up to [a] picture with everything that has happened to them and turning to their neighbor and telling them that this is what the picture is about. But any two people and any one painting would show that couldn't possibly be the case."<sup>5</sup> For Rauschenberg, the so-called meaning of his work was in fact "the direct creation of the viewer," a subjective experience that happens through the act of looking.<sup>6</sup>

*Canyon* is one of several Combines that include preserved, stuffed creatures: a pheasant, a hen, a rooster, and even a goat adorn other works. The stuffed goat of *Monogram* (1955–59) stands on the work's horizontal surface—the painting is more platform than picture plane. In an earlier version, the work hung on the wall, and the goat was presented in profile, perched on a shelf jutting out from the canvas. Rauschenberg ultimately removed the goat, reduced the height of the canvas, and titled the new work *Rhyme* (1956). The composition includes a necktie printed with a pastoral farming scene, strips of shirt fabric, a length of machine-knit lace, a tiny collaged image of the Empire State Building, and empty screw-holes and faint pencil lines tracing the bracket hardware that once secured the shelf. Most compelling, however, is a wild tangle of colored paint in the center of the canvas. Both squirted from the tube and scribbled with a brush, it forms a thick knot of overlapping coils of color. Above it, in serene counterpoint, a burst of red spray paint on a yellow rectangle is paired with the flowery scrap of lace—a dark sun shining over the craggy landscape of paint below. In the



Robert Rauschenberg. *Rhyme*. 1956  
Fabrics, necktie, paper, oil, enamel, pencil, and synthetic  
polymer paint on canvas, 48 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 41 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (122.6 × 101.9 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fractional and promised gift of  
Agnes Gund in honor of Richard E. Oldenburg

## RAUSCHENBERG

skins of color in *Rhyme* and the empty paint tube affixed to *Canyon*, Rauschenberg seems to remind us explicitly that paint itself is only one possible addition to the canvas.

Rauschenberg's work was presented in early 1963 as the second exhibition at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend. The two-part solo show featured, in the first part, Combines completed between 1954 and 1961, including *Rhyme* and *Monogram* (but not *Canyon*, which Sonnabend had purchased some years earlier and remained in the US), and in the second, silkscreened and painted works from 1962 and 1963. Rauschenberg had previously exhibited elsewhere in Paris, but as the poet John Ashbery (then in Paris, writing occasionally on art) noted, the "large, important, juicy works" of the Sonnabend exhibition "give a more satisfactory account of him." Ashbery described the opening as "particularly crowded and lively" and the show as nothing less than "a news letter from the capital. . . . Most of the works . . . were from a period when few artists here suspected that anything was going on in New York."<sup>7</sup> It was Sonnabend who had helped discover Rauschenberg back in New York, and their relationship remained extremely close: Rauschenberg once said that he had "never finished a painting without wondering what Ileana would think of it."<sup>8</sup> C.L.



Second installment of Robert Rauschenberg's two-part exhibition at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, 1963

1. Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 90.

2. D. G. Seckler, "The Artist Speaks: Robert Rauschenberg," *Art in America*, May/June 1966, p. 76.

3. Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg: An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), p. 61.

4. Kenneth Bendiner in conversation with Rauschenberg at ICA Boston, October 30, 1981, as cited in Paul Schimmel, ed., *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), p. 226.

5. Robert Rauschenberg, "Art of Assemblage Symposium," Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19, 1961. Typescript in The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

6. From a statement for the exhibition "Scatole e Feticci Personali" at Galleria dell'Obelisco, Rome, March 3–10, 1953. Reproduced in facsimile in Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: The Menil Collection/Houston Fine Arts Press, 1991), p. 232.

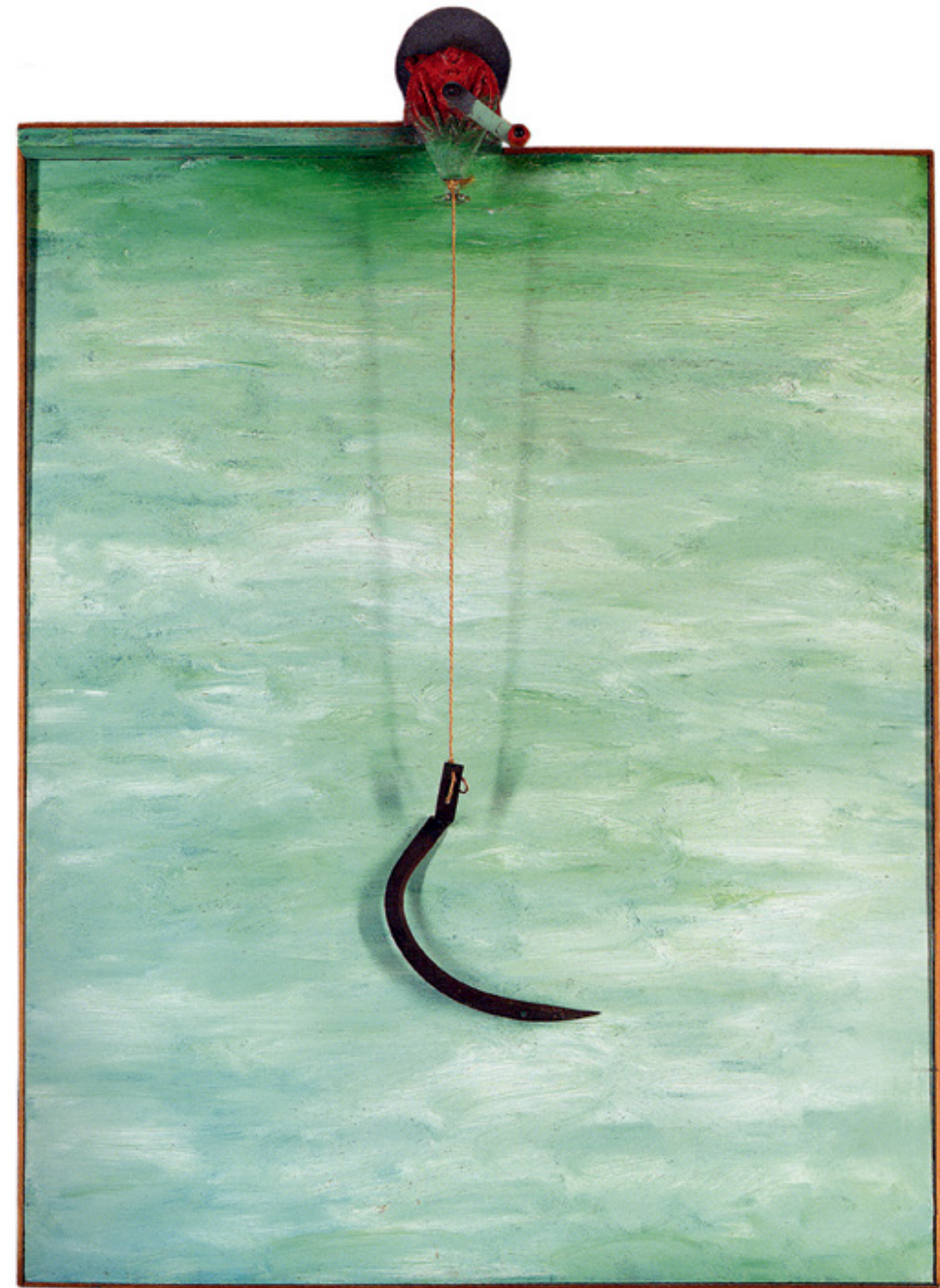
7. John Ashbery, "Paris Notes," *Art International*, February 25, 1963, p. 76.

8. Calvin Tomkins, "An Eye for the New," *New Yorker*, January 17, 2000, p. 56.



For Jim Dine, a visit to the hardware store is a “sensuous experience.” The artist once remarked that for him, it was like being “a child . . . let loose in a candy store,” filling him with awe for the history and evolution of tools.<sup>1</sup> This fascination dates back to Dine’s childhood in Ohio, where he drew inspiration from his family’s own hardware store. In the early 1960s, Dine began a series of paintings in which he attached actual tools to the canvases. This tactic was not meant simply to conjoin the categories of life and art, as was the case for many other neo-Dada and Pop artists integrating everyday objects into their work, but was a highly personal move. He described the Tool paintings as self-portraits:<sup>2</sup> whether featuring a hammer, a handsaw, a clamp, or a shovel, each work had a particular psychological resonance for him. While this investment in personal narrative may have set Dine apart from other artists in his cohort, he nonetheless considered Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Claes Oldenburg to be “the greatest artists at that time in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Dine’s first exhibition in New York was a dual show with Oldenburg in the basement of the Judson Gallery in early 1960; the artist’s visceral engagement with materials was apparent not only in the installation, titled *The House*, but also in the performances that he staged during the course of the show. In one of these Happenings, *The Smiling Workman*, Dine, wearing a smock, stood onstage with buckets of paint before him and a stretched canvas behind; he scrawled a message on the canvas (I LOVE WHAT I’M DOING), drank a bucket of red paint (really tomato juice), dumped paint over his head, and then jumped through the canvas itself—a tour de force of exuberance.

Dine’s paintings are no less animated. One vibrant example from the Tool series is *Sickle*, which features the eponymous implement hanging by a piece of twine tied to a pulley wheel affixed to



Jim Dine. *Sickle*. 1962  
Oil on canvas in artist’s frame, steel, wood, stone, and string  
51<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 40<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 3<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (130.5 × 104 × 10 cm)  
Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Florence Scott Libbey, by exchange



Jim Dine exhibition at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, 1963

the top edge of the painting. Dine once noted that for the works in the Tool series, “the canvas was a stage”<sup>4</sup> for the implements that were placed in front of them. Here, the canvas behind the hanging sickle has been brushed with pale green and blue, creating an atmospheric, sky-like background that transforms the sickle into what the art critic Nicolas Calas described as a “waxing and waning moon.”<sup>5</sup> Dine first exhibited his early Tool paintings in a solo show at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend in Paris in 1963, after having received visits from the Sonnabends to his New York studio over the course of several years. He was profoundly influenced by Ileana’s support, and particularly by her confidence in his ability to explore any medium. She once told him, “You know, you can do whatever you want.”<sup>6</sup> During another visit, she confided that she had grand plans for Paris: “I’ve got this idea. I want to take American art to Europe”<sup>7</sup>—a scheme in which Dine’s work would play a compelling part.     c.l.

1. “Walking Memory: A Conversation with Jim Dine, Clare Bell, and Germano Celant,” in *Jim Dine: Walking Memory, 1959–1969*, ed. Germano Celant (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1999), p. 132.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

3. “Dine on Dine,” in *Jim Dine: Painting What One Is*, ed. David Schapiro (New York: Abrams, 1981), p. 207.

4. Celant, *Walking Memory*, p. 133.

5. In *Jim Dine* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1963), n.p.

6. Jim Dine, interview with the author, May 2, 2013.

7. Celant, *Walking Memory*, p. 141.

*I met Ileana and Michael around 1960. I think Jasper [Johns] or Bob [Rauschenberg] brought them to my house. Ileana was flirtatious, little-girlish, and very, very smart. And she was absolutely clear about me, about how my work struck her. She gave me carte blanche as an artist. To be told, “You can do it all!” by this woman, a force—that was something to hear.*

*Ileana was smarter than everyone else, and she had a better eye. So many things interested her. She was an autodidact and an intuitive person; she had real backbone and conviction. As somebody once said of her, she had a whim of iron. She was very whimsical: her interest was in having a new sensation all the time. Whether it was Lalique glass or Acconci masturbating, new sensations were important to keep her alive. She had an almost ingenue quality; she could get away with a lot of giggling, and then she really socked it to you! She was very tough.*

*She lived a kind of Arte Povera life. She was always transient. I never saw her cook a meal—at her apartment in Venice, Michael would go to the local cut-rate supermarket and come back with canned tomato sauce and pasta and cook it, and that was it! There was always a cast of characters around. It was lunch and dinner and a lot of fun; it was a great scene. It was always about art—art and a little bit of gossip. I met wonderful collectors in Europe through her, people who cared about art. She was amazing—there’s not been a dealer since that can even come near. Although I never viewed her as a dealer: I thought she was more of a connoisseur, an eye, a discoverer of new talent.*

*I could never conceive of my life without her, until I was without her. Maybe I wouldn’t have left the gallery today, in hindsight, because the moment I walked out, I missed her. She was so friendly to me as the years went on. There was never any rancor. When I had my first show at Pace after leaving her six months before, she and Michael were the first people there at the opening! Arne Glimcher said, “That was a big thing for her to do,” but that’s exactly what she would have done. When I had a show at the Guggenheim, I made her stand up at the dinner. “I wouldn’t be here without you,” I said. She started everything for me. I loved her. I just miss her.     J.D.*



In Roy Lichtenstein's *Little Aloha*, a young woman poses against an inky night sky, a white hibiscus bloom tucked in her hair. She frames her face with an upraised, bent arm, tilting her chin forward as she smiles; her black hair is thrown into glossy relief by a skein of graphic highlights. Every aspect of her mien indicates a knowing seduction of the viewer. Even the placement of the flower on the right side of her head—a traditional signal of romantic availability in Hawaii—signals a calculated come-on. Although *Little Aloha* perhaps alludes to the art-historical trope of the odalisque, Lichtenstein's seductress comes not from the annals of painting but from the pages of mass-market printed matter. Starting in 1961, Lichtenstein based his paintings on images copied from comic books and printed advertisements. He would appropriate and alter a composition—often from a little-known, one-off comic book<sup>1</sup>—then project and trace it onto the canvas, painting in the outlines meticulously to achieve his aesthetic goal: “I want my painting to look as if it had been programmed.”<sup>2</sup> In the process, he discovered that he could make surprisingly innovative paintings from images that were, in his words, “completely unoriginal.”

The stark power of *Little Aloha* comes in part from Lichtenstein's limited palette: the artist reduced his color choices drastically, using what he termed a typical “purplish-blue” and “medium-standard red” in addition to black and white.<sup>3</sup> Lichtenstein also notably reproduced the source image's Benday dots (grids of tiny circles that supply halftone colors in cheap reproductions), which lend the girl's skin its flesh tone. These markers of the printing process—the limited palette, graphic outlines, and halftone screens—recur in Lichtenstein's paintings, making the technologies of representation as much the subject of his work as the “ready-made” mass-market image itself. Unlike Andy Warhol, who began painting images from



Roy Lichtenstein. *Little Aloha*. 1962  
Acrylic on canvas, 44 $\frac{1}{6}$  × 42 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (111.9 × 107 cm)  
The Sonnabend Collection



## LICHTENSTEIN

newspapers and circulars at around the same time as Lichtenstein but soon switched to silkscreen reproduction, Lichtenstein persisted in working by hand, valorizing the act of painting while allowing what the art historian Robert Rosenblum called “the intrusion of vulgar content”<sup>4</sup> to dispel the lingering mystique of the Pop painters’ Abstract Expressionist forebears.

In 1963, Sonnabend featured *Little Aloha* in Lichtenstein’s first solo show in Paris, which caused quite a sensation. Writing about the exhibition in a letter to Leo Castelli, Sonnabend happily reported that “Roy’s opening was almost as crowded as Bob [Rauschenberg]’s. People stayed for hours and discussed the paintings heatedly. Some people phoned to bring more people and others left and came back with friends. The opening was crowded from 6 to 10. Many congratulated us about our whole activity.”<sup>5</sup> As Sonnabend indicated in her letter to Castelli, the work of Lichtenstein and her other American Pop artists was riling the old guard of Paris, much to her delight: “There is an accumulative effect which by now has made a deep stir in the art world. The most *invraisemblable* conservative critics have come in to shake their canes at us! We’re in for a marvelous massacre!”<sup>6</sup> C.L.

1. Ellen H. Johnson, “The Image Duplicators—Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg and Warhol,” *Canadian Art*, January 1966, p. 15.

2. John Coplans, “Talking with Roy Lichtenstein,” *Artforum*, May 1967, reprinted in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1977), p. 198.

3. Ibid.

4. Robert Rosenblum, “Roy Lichtenstein and the Realist Revolt,” *Metro*, April 1963, reprinted in Madoff, p. 190.

5. Letter dated June 6, 1963. Leo Castelli Records, circa 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Box 20, Folder 18.

6. Ibid.



Ileana Sonnabend (center) at the opening of Roy Lichtenstein’s exhibition, Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, 1963

Nestled tranquilly in the collapsed hood of a car, a young woman lies in quiet repose. Her lipstick appears freshly applied; her white gloves are immaculate; barely a hair seems out of place. She has just jumped to her death from eighty-six stories above: her left foot is bare, her shoe likely lost during the plunge. Warhol made *1947 White* (1963), a silkscreen painting from his Death and Disaster series, for his inaugural European solo exhibition, held at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend in Paris in early 1964.<sup>1</sup> As the artist told an interviewer, he decided to embark on the theme after seeing “the big plane crash picture, the front page of a newspaper: 129 DIE. I was also painting the Marilyns. I realized that everything I was doing must have been Death.”<sup>2</sup>

Warhol had shown several of his Marilyns the year before in the gallery’s group show *Pop Art Américain*. The landlady who had rented the gallery to Michael and Ileana Sonnabend happened to be present during preparations for that exhibition and, appalled by the sight of the proliferating heads of the recently deceased actress, ordered them not to show such morbid work (naturally, to no avail).<sup>3</sup> Here, rather than presenting a world-famous star, Warhol turns his eye toward a more obscure victim; as art historian Hal Foster has noted, “Warhol evoked the mass subject in two opposite ways: through iconic celebrity and abstract anonymity.”<sup>4</sup> The suicide victim in *1947 White* attained a sort of posthumous fame: Warhol found his source photograph in an old copy of *Life* magazine, dated May 12, 1947, when it was the “picture of the week.” Twenty-three-year-old Evelyn McHale, who had jumped from the observation deck of the Empire State Building, was photographed moments later by photography student Robert Wiles.

Warhol’s childhood history makes his interest in misfortune and mortality perhaps not surprising: rheumatic fever confined him to his bedroom for two months when he was eight (he kept busy by



Andy Warhol. *1947 White*. 1963  
Silkscreen ink and pencil on linen, 10' 1" × 6' 6" (307.3 × 198.1 cm)  
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Founding Collection,  
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## WARHOL

making tracings and sketches), and his father died when he was a teenager. Warhol became a talented draftsman during his college years at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. His subsequent rise in the New York advertising world of the 1950s has been well chronicled—a professional experience that certainly acquainted him with the power of mass reproduction of imagery, which would figure in his work in the following decade.

In *1947 White*, one of several silkscreen paintings Warhol made using this photograph, seventeen prints of the same image are arranged in four unevenly spaced rows on the white canvas. The repetition gets particularly frenetic in the final row, where five overlapping impressions squeeze together in a tight space. The repeating prints recall the look of negatives produced by a camera whose faulty advancing mechanism causes the frames to stutter and reinscribe exposures one on top of the other. Such recurrence is key in Warhol's *Disasters*: the silkscreen process employed to reproduce a single image, both across different works and on the same canvas, reminds us how easily our empathy can dull through exposure. Warhol's own thoughts on this matter varied. He chose the suicide image, he said, because he felt that "people should think about them sometimes"<sup>5</sup> (that is, the unknown people who have suffered catastrophe); on another occasion, he noted, "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect"<sup>6</sup>—a melancholy truth that Warhol exploited forcefully. c.l.



Andy Warhol exhibition at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, 1964

1. When the painting arrived, it was discovered to be too tall for the gallery. Sonnabend sent it on to a show at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

2. Gene Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters," *Art News*, November 1963, p. 62.

3. Michel Bourel, "Les galeries d'Ileana Sonnabend," in *Collection Sonnabend: 25 années de choix et d'activités*

*d'Ileana et Michael Sonnabend* (Bordeaux: CAPC Musée d'art contemporain, 1988), p. 19.

4. Hal Foster, "Death in America," *October 75* (Winter 1996): 80.

5. Gretchen Berg, "Andy Warhol: My True Story," *The East Village Other*, November 1, 1966.

6. Swenson, p. 60.



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See page 8

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**ILEANA SONNABEND: AMBASSADOR FOR THE NEW**

During a career spanning half a century, Ileana Sonnabend (1914–2007) helped shape the course of postwar art in Europe and North America. A legendary gallerist and collector, Sonnabend was renowned for her ambassadorial role in bringing new art across the Atlantic and was instrumental in introducing American Pop art and Minimalism to Europe and Italian Arte Povera to the United States. She also sought out and supported some of the most challenging Conceptual, new-media, and performance-based art of the 1970s. The book includes works by forty-one artists, including Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Mel Bochner, Jasper Johns, Jeff Koons, Mario Merz, Robert Morris, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol. *Ileana Sonnabend: Ambassador for the New* reveals the astounding scope of Sonnabend's taste and salutes her commitment to introducing groundbreaking art to the public.

