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4

The Club - Ab-ex scene - "Irascible Eighteen" - Peggy Guggenheim - Pollock + de Kooning

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"The Triumph of American Painting" - Irving Sandler

The term "Abstract Expressionism": was applied to Kandinsky's early improvisations in 1929, by Alfred Barr. In 1946, Robert Coates used it in New Yorker. Term was popularized in panel discussions at the Club in 1952.

Two main trends - gesture painting and color-field painting.

Background: In the 1930s most American artists worked in socially oriented styles. Regionalists such as Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry; Social Realists such as William Gropper and Ben Shahn. Younger artists got work in Depression under Federal Art Project, which paid them to paint (Gorky, Pollock, deKooning, Baziotes, Rothko, Gottlieb, Guston, Brooks). Holger Cahill, director of the Project, said its aim was "to work toward an integration of the arts with the daily life of the community." WPA thus helped to create an art community for the first time.

Reaction against Social Realism began in thirties. Gorky called it "a poor art for poor people." Moscow trials of 1936-38 and Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in 1939 undercut support for Communism. Imitations of Mexican muralists also began to pall. MOMA exhibitions showing advanced European work had great effect, and Hans Hofmann's teachings furthered this - Hofmann started teaching here in 1932 (NY).

But MOMA interested mainly in Europeans (Cubism and Abstract Art show in 1936). In 1936 the American Abstract Artists group came into being, and held first show in spring of 1937 (39 artists). Mondrian the strongest influence (Neoplasticism) with its system of rules for making a modern picture). AAA's decline came about because of its derivitaveness. None of the Ab-Ex painters belonged to AAA.

Hans Hofmann based his teaching on Picasso's method of composing, and Matisse's color. Influenced all the founders of Ab-Ex, also leading critics. (p.20)

John Graham another influence - interest in Freud and Jung - introduced Gorky to idea of unconscious mind, also Rothko, Gottlieb, Pollock. Got them to experiment with automatic writing. But Graham disliked the literary aspect of Surrealism.

As a result of the AAA, Hofmann, Graham, Milton Avery and other figures, the vanguard in NY became very knowledgable. Clem Greenberg wrote in 1940 that NY had caught up with Paris, and that "a group of relatively obscure American artists already possessed the fullest painting culture of their time." (p.25)

The War led the Americans to turn against Neoplasticism, Constructivism, Bauhaus styles as they had earlier against Regionalism and Social Realism. Motherwell 1942 attack on Mondrian for "loss of contact with historical reality." (30). Fundamental Romantic impulse re-asserted as "a crisis in subject matter." What to paint rather than how to paint.

Re-evaluation of Surrealism came with arrival of European refugees: Breton, Chagall, Dali, Ernst, Leger, Lipchitz, Masson, Matta, Mondrian, Ozenfant, Seligmann, Tanguy, Tchelitchew, Zadkine. Americans impressed by the Europeans' confidence in the place of art -- and with their arrival NY became the center. Surrealists had highly developed sense of group identity, and a flair for promotion. "First Papers of Surrealism" show in fall of 1942, at Reid mansion on Madison Ave., was organized by Breton and installed by Duchamp (16 miles of white string). At same time, Peggy Guggenheim opened her "Art of This Century," with interior designed by Frederick Kiesler - it became focal point for emigres. Peggy's assistant from 1942-1944, Howard Putzel*, sought out young American artists who were working in biomorphic abstract style, and this led to first one man shows for Pollock, Baziotes, Hofmann, Motherwell, Rothko, Still, and Pousette-Dart.

Few Americans became intimate with Surrealists - Motherwell, David Hare, Baziotes, Gorky. Too tight a clique. Breton refused to learn English. And the Americans were resistant to Breton's brand of Surrealism, with its emphasis on symbols, verbal and visual, and on figurative "hand-painted dream photographs" (Dali).

* See note, p. 42

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What the New Yorkers did find interesting was abstract automatism, the largely unexplored direction in Surrealist painting. Matta an influence here, altho Gorky, Pollock, Baziotes had experimented along these lines before. (see p.38) But Matta's anti-esthetic bias and his authoritarian manner put them off.

Surrealist movement really hostile to modern art. Sought to revolutionize man and society. Americans admired Miro and, to lesser degree, Masson. But what they really tried to do was achieve synthesis of Cubism and abstract Surrealism - as shown in career of Gorky (pp. 44-60).

Gorky
DeKooning called him a "Geiger counter of art." Frank imitator of Picasso in thirties (see Rosenberg anecdote, p. 47). Kandinsky and Matta pointed the way toward a more spontaneous abstraction. Became close friend of Matta and Breton, and was accepted into Surrealist brotherhood. Really a transitional figure rather than an innovator of Ab-Ex.

Gottlieb, Rothko, Pollock, Motherwell, and Baziotes also started to re-evaluate Surrealism and experiment with automatic techniques around 1941 or 1942. But unlike Surrealists, most of them were concerned with primitive myths and symbols as new subject matter. (Influence of Jung, Picasso, MOMA shows). Pollock was in Jungian analysis, and gave ~~xxxxxx~~ pictures in his first two shows titles like "Guardians of the Secret," "Totem Lesson," "Night Ceremony." Clyfford Still, working independently, also ventured into mythic realms. Newman and others interested in paintings and objects of Northwest Coast Indians (1946 show he organized at Parsons praised work as having "flourished without benefit of European history.")

After 1943, the New York painters became increasingly aware of one another. They showed together at Peggy's and later at Howard Putzel's 67 Gallery which opened in winter of 1944 (p.79). A few writers took them seriously -- Sweeney, Janis, Kootz, abd Clem Greenberg in Partisan Review and The Nation, Manny Farber in The New Republic. Sweeney wrote preface to catalog for first Pollock show, in 1943. That same year Greenberg praised two Pollock canvases as "among the strongest abstract paintings I have seen yet by an American" (79). Two years later Greenberg called him "the strongest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miro." (79). Coates' New Yorker article in 1945 described new style as neither Abstract nor Surrealist, and sais some new name would have to be found for it. Putzel then mounted a show called "A Problem for Critics" (spring 1945) - Arp, Gorky, Gottlieb, Hofmann, Masson, Miro, Picasso, Pollock, Rothko -- and invited critics to invent name for this "new metamorphism." Greenberg praised the show with reservations - he was still insisting on "purity" in the arts (84), in sense of acceptance of inherent limitations of each medium (painting as flat, etc). Greenberg hostile to Surrealism, favored pure abstraction; but as he became increasingly critical of AAA work and ~~xx~~ Cubist abstraction, he had to ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ re-evaluate Surrealism, too, and by 1944 he was endorsing automatic writing. He was highly ambivalent for years on this issue -- see p. 85/-- but was nevertheless among the first to champion Ab-Ex.

Gesture Painters

"...it was not until after 1947 that the Abstract Expressionists began to arrive at independent, mature styles that could no longer be subsumed under existing categories." The over-all field painting in contrast to Synthetic Cubism with its distinct planes. Pollock's first drip pictures date from 1947/ -- his need to "literally be <u>in</u> the painting." (93)

Painting as an emotional adventure (Motherwell quote, 96). Emphasis on decision-making, opposed to Surrealist practice. Artist's personality as unifying core. Profound influence of French existentialist thinking (98), replacing Freudian or Jungian dogma: "alienation and estrangement." Also of Kandinsky's improvisations.

Pollock -- see cards.

De Kooning "

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Color-Field Painters

Major innovators: Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman. After 1947, they focused increasingly on expressive possibilities of color. Elimination of all factors extraneous to their purpose led to create "unified field." Controversy as to who initiated color-field abstraction, but probably Still who first exhibited such in 1947 (but they remained close friends until 1952, so mutual influences). (Sandler, 148).

Like gestural painters they stressed the primacy of content. During early and mid-forties they all three painted myth-inspired semi-abstractions. But wanted to achieve a more universal and immediate impact . In 1947 Newman organized "The Ideographic Picture" show at Parsons (included Newman, Still, Hofmann, Reinhardt, Rothko, Stamos). Attempt (like Putzel's) to identify and name a new direction (Sandler, 148). Art of "pure idea" to supplant art of "purist illusion." Aiming at "the sublime" which incompatible with beauty (Sandler, 149). "In sum, the intentions of the color-field painters were visionary; they aimed to create an abstract art suggestive of the sublime, of transcendence, or revelation." Single, overwhelming emotional effect the goal.

Still, Rothko and Newman began around1950 to work on a monumental scale. Not with museums in mind - they wanted their huge pictures to be seen in small rooms so viewer could be "in" them, as environments. They became careful about how their work was shown and seen, refused to be in group shows, at times refrained from exhibiting at all.

They sought to suppress all sense of autobiography, unlike gesture painters. The artist as oracle, reaching for suprepersonal absolute. Until 1948 or so they were not seen as being in different direction, were discussed as Ab-Ex.

Motherwell quote on house-painter's brush as one of great Ab-Ex images - implying sense of great scale (Sandler, 156).

Ab-Ex Coming to Power (History)

By end of WWII, Surrealists had virtually ceased organized activities here. Not really at home in US. (Max Ernst quote, Sandler, 211). Most returned to Europe as soon as they could. Peggy G. closed her gallery in 1947.

1946 and 1947 a sort of "incubation period"for Ab-Ex. Ignored by the art journals, mass media, and museums, they met often but did not organize. Main activities were their shows at Parsons, Kootz, and Egan, which became the vanguard.

After 1947, new magazines began to run statements and illustrationsof their work: The Tiger's Eye, Possibilities I, Modern Artists in America. (Sandler, 211). Articles by Harold Rosenberg and John Cage. Clement Greenberg had been writing favorably in The Nation and Partisan Review, and James Johnson Sweeney and Robert Goldwater had also contributed in Partisan Review. Art News ignored them until Thomas B. Hess became managing editor in Jan., 1948(during the fifties, AN became main organ). First monograph on Ab-Ex artists was on Hofmann, in 1948, for retrospective at Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, Mass(first major one-man show given by a museum to an Ab-Ex.)

Late forties and early fifties -- museums began to take notice. First was MOMA, in Dorothy Miller's 1946 "Fourteen Americans." (Gorky and Motherwell).

Oct. 11, 1948 - Life runs roundtable on modern art, with section on "Young American Extremists" - mainly unfavorable, but serious.

Flap over name-change of Institute of Modern Art in Boston leads to protest meeting at MOMA in May, 1948. Two years later 18 Ab-Ex's abd 10 sculptors send open letter to Roland Redmond protesting Met's five juries as "notoriously hostile to advanced art" -- NYT carries story frontpage, and picture of "Irascibles" hits cover of Life. All help to spread the word.

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The Club - Fall of 1948, Baziotes, David Hare, Motherwell and Rothko found school at 35 East Eighty Street called "Subjects of the Artist." Faculty all showed at Peggy G.'s (except Newman) between 1944-46, and all were at Parsons or Kootz. Motherwell, later helped by Newman, organized Friday evening lectures by advanced artists, including Cage, Huelsenbeck, Arp, DeKooning, Fritz Glarner, Julien Levy, Gottlieb, Reinhardt, etc. School a financial failure, closed spring 1949. Following fall, three professors from NYU School of Art Education took over the loft for studio and exhibition space for their students, and continued Fri eve lectures there (at "Studio 35) until spring 1950.

In fall of 1949, The Club (The Eighth Street Club) started, by charter members who had attended Fri eve lectures. Focal point for Ab-Ex activities thru 1950s. Independent of both school and Studio 35. See Sandler, p. 214 ff.

Also in fall of 1949, Harold Rosenberg and Kootz organized group show called "The Intrasubjectives," taking title from Ortega y Gasset: "The guiding law of the great variations in painting is one of disturbing simplicity. First, things are painted; then sensations; finally, ideas." (Sandler, 216).

Greenberg's ambivalence -- Sandler, 217 ff.

New York chauvinism - see Mathieu quote, Sandler, p. 219.

As late as 1950, tho, deKooning was saying "we have no position in the world -- absolutely no position except that we just insist on being around."

Ninth Street Show in 1951 confirmed Ab-Ex painters' own conviction that they were the best around, and their work was of historical significance. Sixty-one paintings and sculptures by 61 artists. Attracted a lot of attention. Was followed by Motherwell's "The School of New York" show, also 1951, which helped establish a pantheon.

But sense of fellowship soon soured by success. Leaders and followers. Suspicions of art-climbing, cabals and conspiracies, led to feuds and hatreds. In May 1952 a meeting at The Club was devoted to topic of disbanding because it had outlived its usefulness (actually it lasted several more years, until 1960).

Rosenberg's widely influential "The American Action Painters" appeared in Art News late in 1952. (see quote, Sandler, 270).

By this time Greenberg was becoming dissatisfied with painterly painting (see Sandler, p. 272), changing his mind yet again. In 1955 his "American-Type Painting" article shifted emphasis to color-field work.

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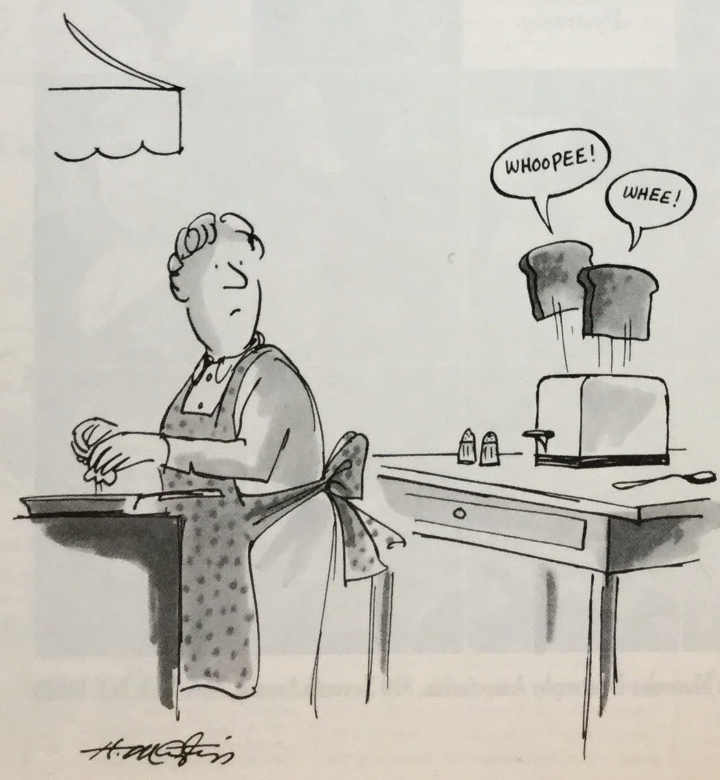
THE ART WORLD

Purifying Art

DURING his lifetime, Ad Reinhardt, celebrated for his square black paintings, badgered his contemporaries with what was to him the paramount issue in American art: "corruption." Most artists of the past twenty years have been acutely conscious that the art world is not a sanctuary for the righteous; suspicions of behind-the-scenes rigging of reputations and prices hover in the studios like a layer of pollution. Compared to Reinhardt, however, his colleagues were mere dilettantes of suspicion. In him, delinquency in art found its Grand Inquisitor. Not only was he the most persistent attacker of the "public profiteers" in the galleries; his indictments went beyond dealers, collectors, museum curators and trustees, critics, and art historians to include artists, and even art itself. For Reinhardt, practicing "our overcrowded, ignoble profession" was like spending one's life in a plague spot; survival was possible only through constant bathing in antiseptics. "Someone," he wrote, "is always asking you to betray yourself as an artist."

Reinhardt's assaults on his fellow-artists, which kept expanding and gaining in intensity until his sudden death, in 1967, were highly unusual. As in fraternities and professions generally, derogatory opinions in the art press and at meetings and lectures tend to be kept within limits set by the presence of outsiders—Reinhardt himself in heated moments at the Artists Club used to call out, "No names, please!" It may have been this rule of reticence that induced him to make exposing the depravity of other artists a matter of principle. "The first word of an artist is against artists," he reiterated. The "public profiteer" is only the "second enemy": the corruption of the art world stems primarily from the careerism and intellectual self-indulgence of artists. It is the kind of pictures they paint that brings into being their degraded social environment. "Now, what is corrupt then, what's rotten?" Reinhardt cried at the Club during a panel that he had turned into a kind of grand-jury investigation. "It's been easy to say that the institutions are at fault, the critics are at fault, the collectors, curators, or the managers or the middlemen are at fault, and I think I would attack"—he had—"however, I think that the artists are responsible. If there is anything rotten or corrupt, it is the artists' fault."



In the present period of scandals and disillusionment, Reinhardt's absorption with corruption lends special interest to his writings collected in a volume of the Documents of Twentieth-Century Art series entitled "Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt" (Viking). The black paintings of his last period, and his interest in the Far East, are seen from his texts to owe at least as much to his search for an antidote to the art of his time and for a counter-statement to its artists as to aesthetic admiration for Oriental art or metaphysical insight into it. The effect of his repeated denunciations is more obsessive than the repeated image of his black paintings, which when shown together are rarely examined one after another. The success of American art in the fifties appears to have produced in Reinhardt a sense of isolation—"I've had the idea for a long time now," he complained the year before his death, "that I was the only unacceptable abstract painter"—which he attributed to the meretricious elements in advanced art that appealed to the public, "the pop art, the plaster hamburgers and everything else." In his view, the primal defect was one of outlook: the tendency in modernism to confuse art and life. The academy had rigorously separated art from non-art, paintings from mere pictures. It had erected canons to which every artist was obliged to conform. In art since the war, all standards had been swept away by "expressionist debauchery and neo-surrealist delinquency." Artists were played up as "heroes" and aspired to the glamorous lives of movie stars. In the resulting chaos of values, anything could be art and anyone could be an artist. Following Plato, Reinhardt found the cause of moral collapse in a deficient aesthetic. The very vocabulary of values had been undermined. "Selling out," which formerly denoted the shameful abandonment of standards for the sake of money, now signified the triumph of having one's exhibition of paintings entirely bought up by collectors.

To the prevailing degeneracy Reinhardt proposed the antidote of "pure" painting, or art-as-art-and-nothing-but-art. Moral health required reinstating the gulf that had divided art from everything else. If elevating art to a realm of its own implies restoring the academy, so be it. "Artists come from artists, art forms come from art forms, painting comes from painting." "Art-as-Art" contains four selections on the

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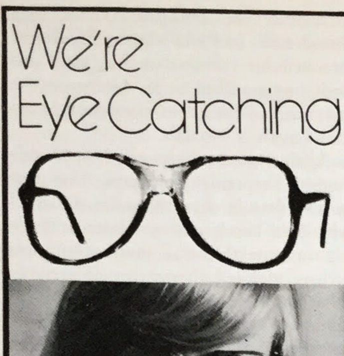

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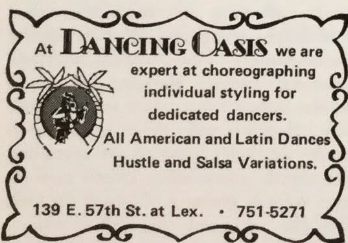

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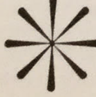

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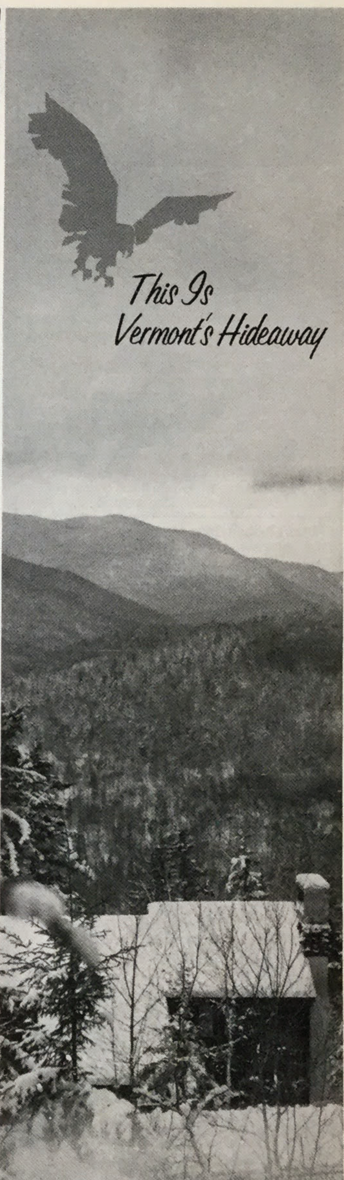
need for a new academy—essays that seemed intellectual oddities when they originally appeared in art magazines but that reveal their full meaning in the context of Reinhardt's attacks on "corruption." Far more removed from reality than the old academy, in that it favors an art that is totally abstract, Reinhardt's academy derives its substance largely from what it opposes—its intellectual content consists of Reinhardt's exhaustive list of what art is not. Foremost among the anathematized influences are the "hyphenated abstract schools," such as Abstract Expressionism and Abstract Impressionism, and Action painting, which provided the dynamics that placed the new American art in the leadership of the world during the postwar decades. Reinhardt's "Twelve Rules for a New Academy" bans every currently practiced mode, from Realism to Constructivism, and every method and formal device, from brushwork to large canvases. In the last analysis, Reinhardt's theory of an academy is a way of celebrating his own all-black paintings as morally superior, in their absence of seductiveness, to all other paintings and sculptures of our time. In their negation, they represent for Reinhardt the aesthetic culmination of truly abstract art. To describe this art cleansed of all associations he does not hesitate to adopt as virtues the terms of denunciation applied to abstract art by "humanist" critics. His rules require that art should be useless, changeless, monotonous, invisible (unostentatious), and, above all, "meaningless" (though in his early days he had made the usual defense of abstract art that it is "a challenge to disorder and disintegration").

"I finally made a program out of boredom." Reinhardt liked to repeat that "interest is of no interest in art." In his writings, however, he strives for humor and verbal virtuosity, heavily salted with puns, against a background of aggressive earnestness. In a typical list he enumerates the tricks of the painter's trade to be avoided: "brushworking, panhandling, backscratching, palette-knifing, waxing, buncombing, texturing, wheedling, tooling, sponging, carping, blobbing, beefing, staining, straining, scheming, striping, stripping, bowing, scraping, hacking, poaching, subliming, *shpritzing*, softsoaping, piddling, puddling, imaging, visioning, etc. The soft sell on the clean hard edge by the new artists was as much of a sellout as the hard sell on the soft edge was by the dirty old artists." As a writer, Reinhardt's "expressionist" temperament is unmistakable. In medi-



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tative notes taken from unpublished documents, he skirts the borders of inexpressible feelings and mixes quotations, random thoughts, unfinished phrases, dissociated words in incantatory sequences:

"Archaic" man, abolish time "live in continual present"
Abolishing guilt, abolish time, defense mechanism of denial
Archaic economy, gift-giving, share guilt, cyclical time
Magic use of objects instead of own body, share guilt
Guilt into aggression, guilt is time, city time, ownership

and so on.

Reinhardt's humor, and the fact that his paintings seemed obviously affiliated with Mondrian and the neo-Plasticists, though they share the aura of individual mystery characteristic of American Abstract Expressionism, created the impression during his lifetime that his moral denunciations were not to be taken seriously. His background as a cartoonist on art themes for *PM* during the forties, and the engaging "trees" from whose branches he suspended painters, sculptors, schools, and critics as clusters of leaves, reinforced his reputation as a comedian, while his very outspokenness and the absence of shading in his gibes at the "Bauhaus bacchuses and housebroken samurai" recalled the ancient privilege of the clown. There was, too, the appeal of his postcards, written in a peculiar kind of lettering, in which he presented himself to his numerous correspondents as a modest, neglected person asking simply for common fairness. A postcard to Bernard Karpel, chief librarian of the Museum of Modern Art, that is reproduced in "Art-as-Art" begins by inquiring, "You remember me?," reminds Karpel that the Museum has "documented pretty much everything, except me," suggests that Reinhardt, too, be added to the files, "not only Motherwell" (reputed to be the Museum's most documented subject), and offers to supply "a picture of me next to my easel or something like that." It is difficult to think of the author of this cute but slightly whining note as the Savonarola of anti-success. Indeed, Reinhardt made no attempt to hide his maneuvering to obtain notice and arrange exhibitions and retrospectives of his work—in 1965 he managed to have three shows covering different phases of his paintings running simultaneously. With few exceptions, his contemporaries thus saw Reinhardt as an artist like most others, and considered his speeches and writings, no matter how bellicose, to be part of an effort to capture the spotlight. When, at a round table in Philadelphia, Reinhardt attacked his fellow-panelists, they unhesitatingly rallied to his defense as the organizer of the event attempted to respond in their behalf.

Against this background, Reinhardt's "empty" repetitive paintings, "five feet by five feet by five thousand dollars," with their barely perceptible cross floating underneath the all-black textureless surface, defined themselves objectively (that is, in terms of their relation to other art rather than to the stated intentions of their creator) as a species of neo-Dada provocation, not too distant in negative substance from the erased de Kooning on which Rauschenberg founded his fame. Late in Reinhardt's life, an interviewer questioned him on the relation of the black paintings to the "negative acts" of the Dadaists; Reinhardt replied that they were "the exact opposite." But the opposite to Dadaist anti-art ceases to be opposite when, in the same interview, Reinhardt claims that he has succeeded in getting rid of everything in painting, that "I'm merely making the last painting which anyone can make," and that artists following him would do well to adopt his formula and make their own paintings by copying his. He and his disciples, if any, either could go on reproducing the same painting or could quit—art was finished in any case.

FOR all its instances of levity, "Art-as-Art" lacks sufficient lightness to offset page after page of aggression against artists and the reiterated listing of qualities of which art ought to be purged. Especially since it omits his art comics and satires (a volume of these, edited by Thomas B. Hess, has just appeared), the collection of writings leaves no doubt that Reinhardt was in deadly earnest, and this is confirmed by the thinning of his humor in his later years, allowing his morality-inspired irascibility—sharpened by the lagging of his fame ("The Museum of Modern Art got to showing me about twelve years after they showed Still and Rothko and those guys")—to come through. Jokes or no jokes, for Reinhardt every other artist's credentials were in question. Toward the end, he also dropped his "No names, please!" and hammered away at artists who had "made it."

Plainly, Reinhardt's thrusts against his generation have a genuine basis in what has happened in American art during the past twenty years, though "demoralization" might be a better word than "corruption" to describe the

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condition of some too rapidly successful artists. Reinhardt's notion, however, that ambition and vanity arise out of the prevalence of a faulty aesthetic can only be taken as a joke—by this reasoning, Pollock and de Kooning are also responsible for Richard Nixon. And to believe that "pure" art represents cleansing in more than its name is to be taken in by a pun. Reducing painting to zero actually tends in our culture (whatever the "doctrine of great emptiness" may have produced among the ancient Chinese) to augment, rather than repel, art-world corruption, since the work can be made attractive only through promotion and market status.

Granted that art comes from art, as Reinhardt kept insisting, the art of the past from which it comes is as varied as the world. At least since the Renaissance, the appeal of art, including religious art, has rested on the sensuousness of experience; de Kooning, toward whom Reinhardt displayed a particular antipathy, contends that oil paint was invented in order to represent flesh. "Pure" painting comes not from painting but from an idea of painting, from an aspect of it that has been theoretically isolated as its essence. Reinhardt's art-as-art is an effort to detach art from its cultural surroundings in order to deal with it as a thing in itself. In less extreme forms, this approach is widely accepted by American artists, art critics, and historians. Art-as-art is not, as Reinhardt imagined, a dissent; most conservative opinion in the art world is based on this view, however reluctant it might be to conclude with Reinhardt that art is "meaningless."

Much has been made of Reinhardt's Orientalism; Barbara Rose, editor of "Art-as-Art," sees his black paintings as nothing less than "a synthesis of the polarities of Eastern and Western art." Reinhardt was drawn to the paintings, sculptures, and architecture of the Far East and Asia Minor, took two trips to these regions, and snapped innumerable photographs, which he subsequently presented in lectures. The aesthetic ideals of his later years—repetition, stillness, void, withdrawal from the senses, "worldlilessness"—appear to have been strengthened by his readings in Buddhist literature. His enthusiasm for the civilizations of Asia is comparable to Rothko's for ancient Greece, or Gottlieb's for African and American Indian symbolism. The absorption of bits of alien cultures into the informal style of modernist thinking—for example, Reinhardt's "Action arts speak

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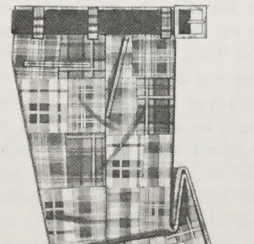

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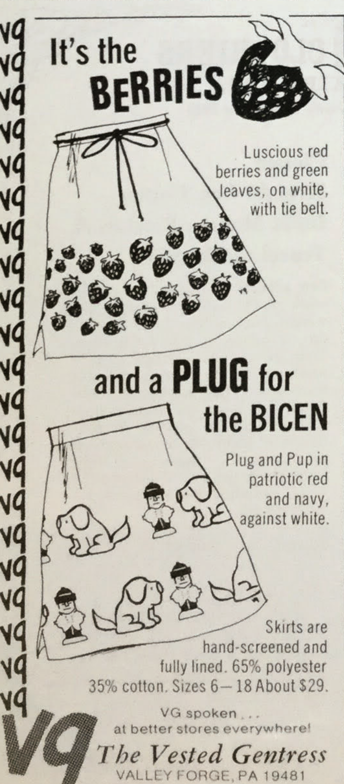

louder than voids"—together with the repudiation of the Western aesthetic tradition, has been a continuing factor in the cultural dislocation of our epoch. "Pure" art compounds the confusion instead of diminishing it. Reinhardt's aesthetic absolutism did not, as he expected, act as a wall dividing him from the art world. His pictures have not been "unmarketable," "unphotographable," "unreproducible," "inexplicable." They have been sold, photographed, reproduced, explained. Despite his assertion that "I never say anything about my paintings," "Art-as-Art" is a protracted explanation and defense of them. They have accommodated themselves as fully as any paintings of the time to the "corruption" of art.

The current weakness in American art is in large part the result of too much feeding on art, to the exclusion of experience. In the thirties, when Reinhardt began his career, abstract art was a counterweight of the mind to excessive "reality." Today, abstraction tends to exist through adapting what has already been done. Corruption in art cannot be eliminated by a virtuous style, since no style is inherently virtuous or capable of keeping its qualities unchanged. Reinhardt's concern about the moral situation of art was well founded. Yet his unremitting one-against-all polemics damaged the solidarity among artists which is their chief basis for resistance to alien influences. In a late document in "Art-as-Art," Reinhardt appears to grasp the connection between the rise in "corruption" and the fading of friendship among the New York painters. "There isn't anything that doesn't go now," he remarks in tones of nostalgia. "The artist community is completely dissolved and artists aren't even talking to each other. They're all geared to the public, at least intellectually." Reinhardt seems touched by this alienation, to which he had made the maximum contribution. But he goes on to blame the loss of communion on the pop artists, and follows this by denouncing Pollock and de Kooning for their ways of life. Perhaps he did not intend to be taken seriously after all. —Harold Rosenberg

•

> The Phoenicians, whose country was a narrow strip of the Syrian coast 20 miles wide and 200 miles long, had to make their living from or by the Mediterranean sea. oh the gmvitnan sea.
> —*Milwaukee Journal.*

That's the way the Phoenicians felt about it.

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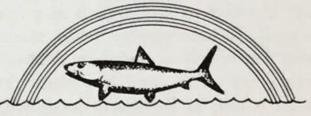

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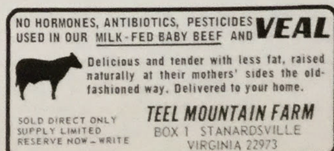

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(Castelli file)

Cage and The Club

Motherwell had asked Cage to be editor of a new magazine called Possibilities. Harold Rosenberg, Rothko, Motherwell and Cage met frequently at the Boza to work out the details. Only one issue was published, but this cemented Cage's connection with the avant garde art world -- he had always been interested in painting and kept up with the new work.

Motherwell had a kind of atelier-school, composed of other artists who liked working together, in his studio. He invited people in the evenings for lectures. Out of this emerged The Club, which started in his studio and later moved down the street (8th Street) to a large loft rented for this purpose. It also overflowed to the Cedar. Cage gave his Lecture on Nothing at Motherwell's studio, following his practice in lectures of providing not information but an example of his way of working -- it was written in rhythmic structure.

Cage's Lecture on Something was given at The Club on 8th Street - it was about Morton Feldman. Both that and Lecture on Nothing were great events.

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"The Party's Over Now" - by John Gruen

Cedar Tavern - p/ 32

Hansa Gallery - p. 33

"The fifties were a time of individual self-examination in every area. It doesn't seem to exist today." - Ned Rorem, p. 82

Larry Rivers on John Myers - p. 134

Frank O'Hara on Larry Rivers - p. 140, 142

More on O'Hara - p.151ff

John Ashbery on John Cage - p. 158

Harold Rosenberg - p. 172 ff

The fifties a very social period among artists - p. 175

Clem Greenberg invu - p. 180 ff

Helen Frankenthaler invu - p. 187 ff

Motherwell on David Smith - p. 191 (good)

DeKooning and the twins, at Cedar - p. 208

Elaine deKooning - p. 214 ff

De Kooning - p. 225

Pollock - p. 229

Adolph Gottlieb - p. 258

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Pollock

Leaves Parsons 1952, joins Janis.
8 ptgs in Dorothy Miller's "15 Americans" show
1953 - major works explore new styles - abandons drip technique, starts using brush - anatomical abstractions such Easter & the Totem & The Deep. {Portrait & a Dream
1954-56 - Heavy drinking
1956 - Death
Prices skyrocket: Olsen sells Blue Poles to Heller for 32,000; Met buys Autumn Rhythm for $30,000 (had turned it down at $10,000 year before).

Blue Poles, O'Hara quote - see Friedman, p. 202
Still's bitter note - " - p. 224
P at Cedar, final years - " " p. 229-232

"Fifteen Americans" (1952) - Friedman, p. 193. (Still's blast in catalog)
Pollock's few major sales - F. p. 198
Greenberg's defection - F. p. 208
Met's purchase of Autumn Rhythm - F. 243

Pollock's 2 psychiatrists sell drawings he made in therapy

Dealers - F. 260

Blue Poles sold for more than 2 m. in 1973 to Natl. Gall. of Australia

Lavender Mist (1950) sold to Natl. Gall of Art in DC. for more than

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Ab-Ex (late)

Club largely dissipated by 1954... (Tworkov mm) - careerism

Olson's concept of poem as "open field of energy" (Sandler)

New Galleries - see Sandler

1956 breakthrough year (Sandler, p. 177)

New stirrings: Stella; Happenings (prepare for)

Greenberg's switch

Reinhardt - (see cards) - emptying art of all extraneous; poking fun at ab-ex rhetoric.

New American Ptg. show - reactions in Europe (see card)
(see rhetorical statements by artists)

Rothko - MoMA resists hanging, Goodyear resigns (card)

Art Market - Cards

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Ads
Pollock's late style
New galleries (Sandler, p. 36 ff); changing market (164 ff)
MOMA shows (15 Americans (1952) - 8 Pollocks)
~~Rhetoric (?)~~
~~abstract sublime~~

~~Club's decay~~

~~Rothko~~, b. 1899
Newman, b. 1905
Kline b. 1910
Reinhardt, b. 1913

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Dorothy Miller

Went from Smith College to work in first apprentice class at Newark Museum, under John Cotton Dana. 5 yrs there, then 1½ at Montclair Mus. cataloguing Indian art coll. Came to MoMA summer of 1932 to work for Holger Cahill, acting dir. in Barr's absence — $1 an hour.

Stephen Clark, interim pres of MoMA board, was the man who fired Barr (1943). Museum run by 5-person Coordination Committee until 1949, when d'Harnoncourt took over. Horrible dissension in meanwhile - man trying to bec. dir. who was just awful (?). (Barr meanwhile wrote his Matisse book)

"Stephen Clark left the (acquisitions) committee because he didn't like Giacometti... Conger Goodyear left the committee because of Rothko." Clark didn't give anything from his coll. to MoMA — all went to Yale or the Met

Romany Marie's - on south side of Wash. Sq.; then on Christopher St for years, but when Miller first knew it, early 1930s, it was on West 8th St., next to 8th St. Playhouse. No liquor license — only beer. Toby had his first show there. Real social center. Noguchi, Gorky, Zorach. "Marie was this incredibly warm, loving human. Really this was her huge family." Now & then there would be music, & pretty Paula Mann would dance — a model from ASL; people would tickle her as she came by. After 8th St she moved to 13th west 9th, a nice big basement. Sometimes she couldn't

1970 - moves NY studio to 2-floor former carriage house (F. says firehouse) at 117½ East 83rd Street.

BRose quotes: Her "atmospheric illusionism...intimately tied to nature and human emotions."

"Kandinsky's theory that the artist improvises form out of his own feelings, memories and associations."

Exposure to Gorky retrospective in 1951 crucial - a broader, more fluid way of working than Kandinsky. Later that year she was overwhelmed by Pollock show at Parsons (Number One, Autumn Rhythm), recalls feeling as if she were "in the center ring at Madison Square Garden." "I wanted to live in this land; I had to live there, and master the language."

"Despite her great admiration for de Kooning...she felt that (with de Kooning, you could assimilate and copy; and that Pollock instead opened up what one's own inventiveness could take off from.'"

Began working with canvas on the floor, but no drips, which she considered "a kind of boring accident." Pouring and spilling paint directly onto unsized and unprimed raw (duck) canvas. Thinning her medium so it sank into and soaked through the canvas, an extension of Pollock's method, to create a stain image that was really not on top of the support but in it. Identification of image with support allowed her to avoid any illusion of real space.

"Cubism stressed the mastery and domination of materials and forms; its approach was fundamentally a priori and intellectual. Through Surrealism (via Pollock) Frankenthaler learned how to reinforce her ties to nature...by imitating the processes of nature -- by allowing an image to spontaneously grow and evolve from the materials andprocesses of its creation."

Cotton duck - untreated canvas used for sailcloth bought at Boyle's, a commercial sailcloth maker — was preferred by many painters because of its cheapness and its availability in widths greater than the imported linen. Rough texture called

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serve anything but people came anyway. Her nephew, Robt Schulman, is writing a book abt her (ask Russell Lynes).

MoMA bought its first Pollock, She Wolf, from Peggy G's gallery in 1944. But Dorothy didn't put Pollock in her "Fourteen Americans" in 1946, altho she did include Motherwell & Gorky. "That was the end of me as far as Peggy was concerned."

The Club -
Barr, Dorothy, Cahill, Soby went regularly. Still pulled out immediately

Canaday wrote, in a letter to a member of MoMA staff, re DM's (1959) "Sixteen Americans" show: "For my money these are the sixteen artists most slated for oblivion." Included Nevelson, Johns, Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly. Look up his Sept 1959 blast, first article for Times, against Ab-Ex as charlatans.

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Helen Frankenthaler

(from BRose text)

Born 1928, NYC. Father a NY State Supreme Court Justice, mother a Lowenstein. Graduated Dalton 1945 (after Horace Mann, Brearley) - studied at Dalton with Rufino Tamayo. Bennington College, studied with Paul Feeley; also with Kenneth Burke, Erich Fromm, W.H. Auden, Stanley Edgar Hyman, Ralpf Ellison. Grad. School of Fine Arts at Columbia, art history with Meyer Schapiro (to please parents who were not happy about her becoming an artist).

1950 - meets Greenberg, David Smith, Pollocks, de Koonings, Kline, Charles Egan, Adolph Gottlieb et al. Studies with Hans Hofmann in Provincetown summers, and with in NYC. Visits Black Mountain College. Rents David Hare's studio on East 10th Street.

1951 - associated with John E. Myers' Tibor de Nagy, along with Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, Alfred Leslie. Visits Smith in Bolton Landing, Pollocks in Springs. First one-man show at Tibor. Youngest exhibitor in 9th Street Show.

1953 - Noland and Louis visit her studio, see stain technique (Mountains and Sea). She later vists them in Washington DC.

1954 - continuing studies of old masters, Italy.

1955 - moves studio-apartment to 94th St. and West End Ave.

1958 - marries Motherwell. Moves NY studio to vacant store on 94th and 3rd Ave.

1960 - retrospective at Jewish Museum, directed by Frank O'Hara.

1969 - retrospective at Whitney, which later goes to London, Hanover, Berlin.

1970 - moves NY studio to 2-floor former carriage house (F. says firehouse) at 117½ East 83rd Street.

BRose quotes: Her "atmospheric illusionism...intimately tied to nature and human emotions."

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Frankenthaler (cont)

attention to the weave.

Staining technique first developed in 1952 Mountains and Sea, based on sketches and watercolors made during summer trip to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton "...dissociating for the first time the painterly from the loaded brush." Pollock's black and white series of 1951 had sunk Duco enamel into raw canvas, but his medium was thicker and shinier. "Frankenthaler added light and color to Pollock's technical breakthrough."

Noland called it a "one-shot image."

CT invu, 2/27/77

She had just come from MOMA where she saw last day of the Swiss Masterpieces show. Seeing a great Cezanne (of Mont St. Victoire) on wall nexto a Braque, she said, made the continuing historical tradition very clear -- after Cezanne, Cubism was inevitable; you could see how it had to develop. She feels that she and a few others are very much part of this same tradition. That "staring" at Kandinsky and Gorky, as she did, and at Pollock, led directly to doing what she did -- "If Pollock did that, why can't you do this?"

"I think I know what art is. It's what I do, and what the others painters I admire are doing -- Poons, Olitsky, a few others."

She lived with Clem Greenberg for five years. They studied the old masters together, etc. She says his authority and his influence comes from his absolute, stripped-to-the-bone truthfulness, the way he got to the core of his feelings about work. He has made mistakes, of course, but when it comes down to judging the quality of a work, "Clem is a lord. He's not really a critic in the sense that Tom Hess is, he's more a philosopher."

Coming to NY from Bennington, F. felt almost immediately part of the important underground. It was very much an underground in feeling, and a very small world. A few artists, a very few critics, one magazine like Partisan Review and Nation, almost no collectors, a couple of dealers. Once she had a party in her one-room apartment on 23rd Street, and had the entire art world to it; crowded, but nobody was left out.

She shared a studio at first with Friedl Dzubas. One day she started pouring thinned pigment directly onto unsized duck, and made Mountains and Sea. She felt right away that it was something new, and got up on a ladder to look at it (it was unstretched, on the floor). She was aware of Pollock's way of working, had been to his studio and seen the marks on the floor, the Namuth photos etc. She called Dzubas over to look, and he said he didn't know, but it looked new to him, too. She called Clem and had him come look. He didn't express an opinion, either, but he too thought it was new, and with Clem and the others then thefeeling was if something looked new, you kept looking at it, "staring," and maybe it would turn out to be important. (But F. makes it clear that Clem never wrote about her or promoted her in any way, "Thank God." He did not make her reputation).

F. has been interested in getting away from drawing, letting shape form the line. Pollock always more involved with webs, linking them together etc -- with drawing.

Paul Feeley, her old teacher, saw Mountains and Sea in her Tibor show that year and called it a "paint rag" -- couldn't accept it at all. Sheowns it today because nobody would buy it, for $150. Now the Met wants to buy it, but she wouldn't sell.

F. feels that Pop and much of the sixties stuff is not art. It's interesting, it sells, it's amusing, but it's something else, not part of the continuing tradition. She loves Oldenburg's stuff, nearly died laughing at his Green Gallery show with the big hamburger, is all for his doing what he does. And she concedes that a lot of her friends disagree with her about it's not being art. We'll just have to wait and see, she says.

Real art in her estimation has in a sense gone back to being underground, which is all to the good.

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Ad Reinhardt, "The Artist In Search of An Academy", Part Two: Who Are the Artists?" - read at a symposium ~~at the~~ at Woodstock, NY in August 1953, reprinted in College Art Journal, Summer 1954:

Re modern artist categories, number three: "the cafe-and-club-primitive and neo-Zen-bohemian, the Vogue-magazine-cold-water-flat-fauve and Harpers-Bazaar-bum, the Eighth-Street-existentialist and Easthampton-aesthete, the Modern-Museum-pauper and international-set-sufferer, the abstract 'Expressionist' and Katzenjammer-Kid-Jungian, the Romantic-human-'action'-actor - (Cavallon, Crampton, deKooning, Gottlieb, Hayter, Hofmann, Kiesler, Lewis, McNeil, Pollock, Rothko, Still, Tobey, etc.)

"Fourth, the latest up-to-date popular image of the early fifties, the artist-professor and travelling-design-salesman, the Art-Digest-philosopher-poet and Bauhaus-exerciser, the avant-garde-huckster-handicraftsman and educational-shop-keeper, the holy-roller-explainer-entertainer-in-residence - (Albers, Bolotowsky, Chermayeff, Diller, Ferren, Greene, Holtzman, Holty, Morris, Motherwell, Newman, Wolff, Vytlacil etc.)"

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It Is

First issue Spring 1958. Pavia the guiding force ("Editor + Collector")
Hubert Crehan article "Recent Attacks On Abstract Art"
says a new breed of collectors has appeared – young (35-50),
educated, travelled, wealthy – whose "collecting is strictly
personal and often passionate... When they buy art, these
collectors often want to meet the artist."

Issues 1 – 6 (Spring 1958 to Autumn 1965) have no reproductions of Johns' work,
and only one of Rauschenberg (misspelled "Rauchenberg"),
Collage, 1959, "Octave". (But Oldenburg is
featured in a panel discussion, and Segal in photos)

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Note: Check quotes with him pls.

Jack Tworkov - 4/19/78

On Rauschenberg
"I think I was instrumental two times in Bob's career" -- with Egan and with Stable Gallery. "It took a lot of persuading" to induce Charlie Egan to show Bob (1954-55). Tworkov had joined Egan in 1947, and when Egan closed he went to the Stable.

Tworkov met Bob a couple of years before they were at Black Mountain together. Used to visit him when he was married to Sue Weil.

"I was very much interested in what he was doing at Black Mountain. Of course everything he did had been done before -- collage, the use of new materials, everything --, it was simply his extraordinary energy. He could get into the work without inhibitions of any kind, without any handicaps."

Older artists sometimes considered his work a joke, but they liked Bob.
Note: How first wave of younger artists were all native Americans, unlike elders.

Rothko and Newman
Newman was not a painter when Jack first knew him. Once Jack asked Barney's old friend Aaron Siskind whether Barney had painted before, and Siskind said not that he could remember. So that when Barney spent a summer fixing up a storefront studio on 19th street and stretching canvases, it was almost a joke. He'd done one picture before that Jack recalls, a black painting with a white line that ran straight down and then did a zig, which he called "Mondrian Negated." But after that summer he had a show almost immediately, at Parsons in the fall. Jack once went to Barney's house, for a party, and found Barney improvising on the piano, as tho he wanted to give the impression he was a composer. Jack asked him what he really was, and Barney said, "I'm primarily a writer."

When Clem Greenberg took up Newman as the great painter of the group, it really infuriated Rothko and Still. After that a lot of younger artists converted from painterly to non-painterly work, with Newman as guru. "There's no question in my mind that Rothko really suffered from that."

Still and Newman also had a big fight.

The Club
It was formed primarily around de Kooning. Even Cage then was close to de Kooning.

The Ninth Street Show was organized around the Club. Pavia was the patron, the one who ran things; he and Castelli selected the artists, although a good many of the younger people just came uninvited and hung their work Al Leslie came in a hung a huge picture. The critics gave the show very little play at first (Greenberg did however). But a year later artists looked back on it as an historic event.

The Stable took over the same group of people and did series of annuals. Nick Carone worked for Eleanor Ward as her assistant, and may have persuaded her. Soon after the Ninth Street show Jack began to see Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller at Club discussions on Friday nites.

The Club artists really wanted to break away from the kind of European influence that still dominated the American Abstract Artists. "It was a force without any theory or intellectual attitude."

Pollock -deKooning rivalry was really between DeKooning and Greenberg. DeK's work had changed quite a bit under the influence of Pollock's. "I think de Kooning

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also felt he was being discriminated against because he was foreign-born. Greenberg saw Pollock as being completely indigenous...

"The Club was largely dissipated by 1954. Hardly anybody came any more. The Cedar continued for a little while but not too long. I stopped going in 1954 anyway. I felt it had completely lost what it had been originally. In the late forties, after the war, there was really a wonderful period. Artists had gotten off the Project, and they began to recognize things in each other's work. For a little while there was a real flowing together in terms of friendship and ideas. It existed before the ambitions connected with a career became manifested. By 1953 or 1954 this had changed completely, everything had become career-connected; going to the Club was a way for younger artists to make the right contacts. It wasn't any longer a group of friends.

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Eugene V. Thaw - 5/31/78

Thaw went to St. Johns College, then took three years of art history at Columbia under Meyer Schapiro, leaving without a PhD. No money. Started his first bookshop-and-gallery in the Algonquin Hotel, second floor space above restaurant, in winter of 1949-50, showing the only work he could afford to show which was contemporary (he rather fancied himself then as another Bernard Berenson, specializing in trecento Madonnas). Gave Joan Mitchell her first show. Also got into second market in abstract expressionists. But sold mostly prints and drawings -- no market for contemporary American paintings.

In those days, early fifties, the Louis Carre Gallery had a branch in New York that sold School of Paris contemporaries -- Manessier, Hartung, etc. For a while this looked like the big thing, and rich American collectors were buying it. MOMA wasn't a bit interested in Pollock and Co. -- they even gave a show of Bernard Buffet!

Pollock's death in 1956 was a real watershed. Thaw and Clare, who had been married a couple of years before, were renting Leo Castelli's former house in East Hampton that summer (Kiesler drove up in a jeep one day and said he wanted his regular room). They were sort of on the fringe of the art world and the EH scene then, didn't know Pollock(although he had come twice to the gallery). But they saw cars drive up to Barney Rosset's house across the way (Barney was very much a figure in the art world; he'd been married to Joan Mitchell), and felt that artists were congregating all over to assess what seemed a momentous and terrible event. Soon after Pollock's death, the Met's Robert Hale persuaded his trustees to buy a major Pollock for $30,000, a price that seemed immense at the time (the Met didn't pay that much; it gave back a smaller Pollock that Lee still owns). This was the start of the rise in prices, and reputations, for the whole school. (Note: Ask Jeffrey Potter about Pollock's death and aftermath?)

Thaw moved from Algonquin after three years, first to a space above the Mayhew Shop on Madison at 58th (ck), then further uptown to east 78th Street where Ira Spanierman is now (doctor's office). He continued to sell second market ab-ex, but more and more got into European masters, modern and then older. In 1959 he became a private dealer and moved to Park Ave. He doesn't specialize in any field, handles everything from Picasso and later back to trecento madonnas. And does about twice as much annual business as Pace, the most successful contemporary gallery. Last year he did $14 million, and expects to do better this year.

Another big boost to contemporary American art was deKooning's winning the prize at the Chicago (?) Exhibition, first time one of ab-ex had won a prize.

All the ab-ex people in the early fifties cultivated a proletarian, tough-guy manner, and to move in their company you had to do likewise. Charlie Egan managed it perfectly, talking in a dumb sort of way with lots of "you knows" thrown in. Milton Resnick became a total deKooning groupie, even adopting a phony Dutch accent; some of his pictures then could have been sold as deKs. (Egan had another side that few knew; he was a real crook, dealing in fakes of all kinds. He backed the man who sold Walter Chrysler most of his fakes).

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Betty Parsons -- what her artists objected to also was the unprofessionalism of the gallery, the social side. She would show Pollock in the front room and someone like Buffie Johnson in the back. Sidney Janis was much shrewder and tougher, and he showed Europen masters as well.

Herbert Ferber (real name:) was Thaw's dentist, and used to give him lots of advice. (Note: Eleanor Ward's saying that all the painters got the same dentist as soon as they started making money, and all appeared suddenly with full sets of teeth, which was a shock).

The Market Today - since the recession it's been a highly selective market. Major works by Picasso, Pollock, and other important artists will continue to bring huge prices, but minor ones will not, and artists like Gottlieb may have trouble selling at all in auctions.

Rauschenberg - thinks he's the best graphic artist of our time, the current George Grosz, but not a major painter. His work is tied so closely to the times that it will date rapidly, and he is not a major artist. At the same time, he is enormously important as a figure. Bob is a real star, much more so than Warhol. He really pioneered the new role of the artist in American society, the artist as a performer and setter of new styles and attitudes. The real end of the Renaissance tradition, of the easel painting. (Thaw is sending me copy of a piece he wrote for Apollo (?) about the RR retrospective, which they didn't publish because it was antiRauschenberg).

The main thing about Bob is the way he lays out a picture -- pure graphic design, with an ab-ex overlayer. Facile and decorative.

Johns, by contrast, is a major artist, as mysterious as Odilon Redon.

Johns and RR totally destroyed the market for the second generation ab-ex painters -- James Brooks, Cavallon, et al. They're understandably bitter to this day, mainly at Leo.

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Possibilities I - An Occasional Review (Winter 1947/8)
Editors: Robert Motherwell, art
Harold Rosenberg, writing
Pierre Chareau, architecture
John Cage, music

Contains Pollock's famous statement on "My Painting." Also: Arp (poem); Baziotes (statement); Paul Goodman ("The Emperor of China"), Chas. R. Hulbeck ("En Avant Dada"); Miró (interview by Frances Lee); Oscar Niemeyer (photos of new church in Brazil); Rothko (statement, "The Romantics Were Prompted"); David Smith (statement); etc

Intro. statement by Motherwell + Rosenberg: .."The question of what will emerge is left open. One functions in an attitude of expectancy. As Juan Gris said: you are lost the instant you know what the result will be."

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Eleven Europeans In America (MOMA Bulletin XIII, 1946)

"...The backbone of the surrealist attitude is 'Beware of the visual sensation.' For the surrealists appearance is an illusion..."
— Andre Masson

"We Europeans all began our stay here with complaints against the severity of the climate and the hectic life in Manhattan. But eventually we all found the climate good for us, especially from the point of view of work."
— Kurt Seligmann

"For me the contrast in the United States between the mechanical and the natural is one of great anti-melodic intensity. But bad taste is also one of the valuable raw materials for the country... I always hate to see 'good taste' come to the people. For painters like me who are robust it is very dangerous to frequent the beau monde, ballet and the like. French 'taste' is a pitfall for the creative artist."
— Fernand Leger

"During my first months in New York there were many Paris painters here. At first the surrealist groups seemed to have a real strength; but little by little they began to break up. It was hard to see one another in New York. The cafe life was lacking. In Paris at six o'clock any evening you knew on what cafe terrace you could find Giacometti or Eluard. Here you would have to ~~make~~ 'phone and make an appt in advance. And the pleasure of a meeting had worn off before it took place.

"As a result in New York we had artists but no art. Art is not produced by one artist but by several. It is to a great degree a product of their exchange of ideas one with another."
— Max Ernst

"Duchamp is another Parisian perfectly contented. Nothing seems to ruffle him."
— Max Ernst

DUCHAMP statement:

"The great trouble with art in this country at present, and apparently in France also, is that there is no spirit of revolt — no new ideas appearing among the younger artists...

"Art is produced by a succession of individuals expressing themselves; it is not a question of progress.

(looks in Marchand du Sel).

"To move the picture into our surroundings and give it real existence, has been my ideal since I came to abstract painting."
— Piet Mondrian

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Lee Krasner (Archives intvu, 7/31/66, by B Rose)

WPA Project – kept artists alive & let them meet. Aesthetic discussions always centered on School of Paris," leading force and vitality of the time." No one thought in terms of rivaling Picasso or Matisse.

NY avant-garde began to surface with opening of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century — completely underground before.

Art divorced from politics: see Rosenberg/Motherwell statement in Possibilities.

Hans Hofmann School – (8th Street)

Students never saw HH's ptgs. until he showed them in 1944. Classes very orderly: you drew from a model mornings, still life afternoons, and twice a week HH would come in and criticize every student. For a while he lectured, rudiments of Cubism. What she got mainly: "his enthusiasm for ptg and his seriousness and commitment to it."

On critics: "... there was so little written that we read every word written on the subject." Until Hess became ed. of Art News there was no art mag. taken seriously.

Galleries: Julien Levi, Valentine Dudensing, Peggy G. Pierre Matisse showed Europeans only. Later Egan, Kootz, Parsons.

Lee's studio was on 9th bet. University & Bway. Pollock was on 8th, same block. DeKooning →

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shelled out a whopping $2 million to acquire "Blue Poles," reportedly the last wall-size Pollock canvas that remained in private hands. It required a transaction on that scale to convince much of the skeptical public that recent American art had, in fact, contributed something of value to the world. Since Abstract Expressionism was the first American art style to have international significance, it is ironic that during this Bicentennial year there is only one major Pollock painting on public view in New York City. That is the wall-size canvas, more than eight feet high and 17 feet wide, known as "One" (1950), on view at the Museum of Modern Art. (Ordinarily, its peer, "Autumn Rhythm," is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But "Autumn Rhythm" is temporarily concealed by a false wall to make room for a Bicentennial show. It will be exhibited again sometime next January.) Like many of his drip paintings, it evokes an almost cosmic spectacle, a galaxy of energetic, interlocking, swirling lines. The predominating rivulets of shiny black enamel and pigment seem to unravel before our eyes, rapidly crisscrossing the raw canvas in such a density that the spectator finds no peripheral points at which to rest. All the lines virtually pulsate with energy as they suddenly thin, then thicken, puddling over here, then thinning again over there, with a good deal of splattering thrown in for good measure. The speeding lines intersect and paraphrase each other, but they don't run off the edge. "One" is definitely a closed universe. The skein thins out at the edges and the lines skirt the perimeter to double back on themselves, leading the spectator's eyes back, pell-mell, into the maelstrom.

* * *

The demons that drove Pollock to his moments of exhilarating brilliance and long periods of despair vanished with him, making it unlikely that anyone will ever unravel the man from his myth. Pollock, the youngest of five sons, was born in Cody, Wyoming, in 1912; that same year, his parents moved the family to Southern California, where Pollock seems to have had a relatively conventional childhood. Coming of age in Depression America, Pollock moved to New York in 1930 and began to study art with Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League. During the '30s, Pollock lived in the Village—on West 14th, Carmine, East 8th, and West Houston streets; he was often on relief and occasionally stole food from pushcarts. In 1935 he joined the easel division of the WPA, which gave him a degree of financial security until the WPA Art Program was terminated in 1943. Meanwhile, Peggy Guggenheim opened a 57th Street showcase for avant-garde art, called Art of This Century; she was so taken by Pollock's talents that she gave him a year's contract, guaranteeing him $150 a month. Pollock married painter Lee Krasner in 1945 and that same year they moved to Springs, Long Island.

Pollock's grave, East Hampton, Long Island

Pollock's most debilitating problem was his alcoholism, which began at an early age. He was 25 when he first sought psychiatric treatment for the disease and he was only a year older when he committed himself to a hospital for treatment. In 1939, he reentered psychoanalysis, this time with a Jungian. Pollock was "on the wagon" from 1948 through most of 1950 (the period in which he painted nearly all of his best works), then spent the remaining years of his life on more booze, more treatment, and more analysis.

Pollock's boisterous machismo made him a Hemingwayesque hero to the art crowd at the old Cedar Tavern in the Village, the setting for such legendary scenes as Pollock tearing the door off the men's room. Critic Thomas B. Hess related with relish some of the sexist horseplay that occurred there: "Pollock would stride into the Cedar bar, plunk his money on the counter, and set them up for the house. He would wrestle, playfully—with smaller artists; once he threw a lady painter across the barroom onto a table; to another lady painter he announced grandly, 'You may be a great lay, but you can't paint worth a damn.' "

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Pollock's drip paintings initially looked so radical as to signal a complete rupture with art of the past. Even now, it is often difficult to comprehend how his mature work evolved. He was, by nature, an expressionist who was generally attracted to all masters of expressionist figuration, from late Michelangelo and El Greco to Alfred Ryder. Pollock also looked long and hard at Picasso and Miro. Thomas Hart Benton was a continuing source of encouragement, even as Pollock's art became antithetical to the older artist's American-scene paintings. Pol-

...four sides, and literally be in the painting. . . . 'When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get-acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through."

Pollock continues to be a household name, usually signifying the anarchic confusion of modern art, even though his work has all but disappeared from public view. The last Pollock retrospective was mounted by the Museum of Modern Art in 1967, but there are tentative plans for a traveling European show of Pollock's work on paper. The artist's widow has withdrawn the Pollock estate from the Marlborough Gallery and is apparently in no hurry to release any more work. The *catalogue raisonne* of Pollock's work, coedited by Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw, will be published next year by Yale University Press; since it will reproduce every known painting and provide documentation galore, perhaps it will prompt a few exhibitions that focus on particular aspects of Pollock's achievement, such as his use of Jungian imagery in the early '40s.

Until the Museum of Modern Art finds room to hang a few more of its choice Pollocks, New Yorkers will continue to be deprived of the opportunity to see a representative sampling of work by an artist who is widely regarded as the most important American painter of this century.

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was in a loft on 22nd street. never went around as a group, but might occasionally meet for beer at the Jumble Shop. Once Gorky called a meeting in deK's studio (1938 or 1939) and made pronouncement, "we must admit we were defeated," hence should collaborate to do a great ptg.

Meeting Pollock – John Graham invited Lee to be in group show at McMillen Gallery, with Matisse, Braque, Picasso and two other Americans, de K. + Pollock. She knew deK, had never heard of P. "I thought I knew everybody in NYC who was painting abstractly." Got P's address from someone at an opening, found he lived next block. "Something got into me and I just went up and introduced myself." ... "Then I took him to meet deK.."

Lee says Pollock's 1943 show at Peggy's was turning pt., first real challenge to Paris.

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~~Pollock~~ Surrealists In New York

~~And Surrealism~~ "Pollock...was already deeply immersed in Jungian analysis in 1937 and had shown marked interest in the surrealist work of Miró and Picasso." (Dore Ashton, "The New York School").

View magazine appeared in NY in Sept. 1940, picking up right where Minotaure in Paris had left off. V.V.V., the other organ of the wartime surrealist activity, was largely supported by Mr & Mrs Bernard Reis.

Peggy Guggenheim's gallery "drew the press as no gallery exhibitions ever had. Reviewers were astounded by a surrealist gallery with curved walls, with paintings mounted on baseball bats that could be tilted at any angle..." (ibid)

"John Graham had organized an international exhibition at the McMillin Gallery in January 1942, in which, among others, he juxtaposed Braque, Bonnard, Matisse, and Modigliani with Pollock, Lee Krasner, Stuart Davis, and, for the first time, de Kooning..." (ibid)

Prevalent interest in myth reflected surrealist leanings. Rothko was preoccupied with Oedipus myth, Pollock with Jungian interpretation of the psyche.

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Matta (Roberto Sebastian Antonio Matta Echaurren)

Born in Chile. Both parents Basque, one French, one Spanish. Trained as architect. Came to Paris in mid-30s and worked 3 years in studio of Le Corbusier. A reproduction of Duchamp's Passage in 1935 issue of Minotaure helped turn him from architecture to painting. Joined Paris Surrealists 1937. Set out to paint "the moment of change."

Fascinated by discoveries in the physical sciences, also by contemporary philosophy.

Came to US 1939, settled with wife in NY where he met group of younger US artists. He was approximately their age, spoke fluent English (unlike Breton and Ernst). "I found they were absolutely ignorant of European ideas. They knew nothing about Rimbaud or Apollinaire, and they were just copying the outward forms of Picasso and Miro. I started to invite them in to my place onde a week to talk about the ideas behind modern painting." (his studio was on 9th St. - visitors included Baziotes, Pollock, Motherwell, Gorky, Duchamp).

Matta claims he took Peggy G. to Pollock's studio.

He left NY 1948.

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The ... Hess'

"A

John Graham was the first to describe Pollock as one of the greatest painters produced in America, acc. to Lee Krasner Archives invu. He had also mentioned de Kooning in his book, pub. 1937.

"post-studio art"

See also my Bearden notes, p.32

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The sudden decline of School of Paris painting after WWII -- see Tom Hess' "A Tale of Two Cities" in Location, Summer 1964.

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ART

Jackson Pollock in Repose Stands Tall

BY DAVID BOURDON

Jackson Pollock, who died 20 years ago this month, is still the subject of considerable controversy—concerning the originality and beauty of his paintings, the complexity of his tormented personality, and the meaning of his achievement for younger artists. He was already a controversial public figure during the last decade of his life, almost as notorious for his stormy temperament as for his violent-looking "drip" paintings—the innovative Abstract Expressionist canvases that are covered with seemingly arbitrary skeins of poured and dribbled paint. Pollock's stature is a good deal shorter than that of the European giants of modernism—artists with long and varied careers, like Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and Miro. But before Pollock died, at age 44, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he and a few of his contemporaries, such as Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still, had helped change the nature of painting.

Not surprisingly, Pollock appears to be a more pervasive influence in today's art than at any time in the past. Aspects of his "allover" compositional style played a key role in the development of Lyrical Abstraction, "antiform" sculpture, and other movements in which the art-making process is evident in the final image. His ritualistic way of making art—Pollock's "rite of painting"—was an antecedent for certain types of Happenings and "performance" art.

Three years have gone by since the National Gallery of Australia shelled out a whopping $2 million to acquire "Blue Poles," reportedly the last wall-size Pollock canvas that remained in private hands. It required a transaction on that scale to convince much of the skeptical public that recent American art had, in fact, contributed something of value to the world. Since Abstract Expressionism was the first American art style to have international significance, it is ironic that during this Bicentennial year there is only one major Pollock painting on public view in New York City. That is the wall-size canvas, more than eight feet high and 17 feet wide, known as "One" (1950), on view at the Museum of Modern Art. (Ordinarily, its peer, "Autumn Rhythm," is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But "Autumn Rhythm" is temporarily concealed by a false wall to make room for a Bicentennial show. It will be exhibited again sometime next January.) Like many of his drip paintings, it [illegible] an almost cosmic spectacle, a galaxy of energetic, interweaving lines. The predominating [illegible] of shiny black enamel and [illegible] pigment seem to unravel [illegible] our eyes, rapidly crisscrossing the raw canvas in such a [illegible] that the spectator finds no [illegible] points at which to rest. All the lines virtually pulsate with energy [illegible] suddenly thin, then thick[illegible] puddling over here, then thin[illegible] again over there, with a good [illegible] of splattering thrown in for [illegible] measure. The speeding lines [illegible] and paraphrase each [illegible], but they don't run off the [illegible] edge. "One" is definitely a closed universe. The skein thins out at the edges and the lines skirt the perimeter to double back on themselves, leading the spectator's eyes back, pell-mell, into the maelstrom.

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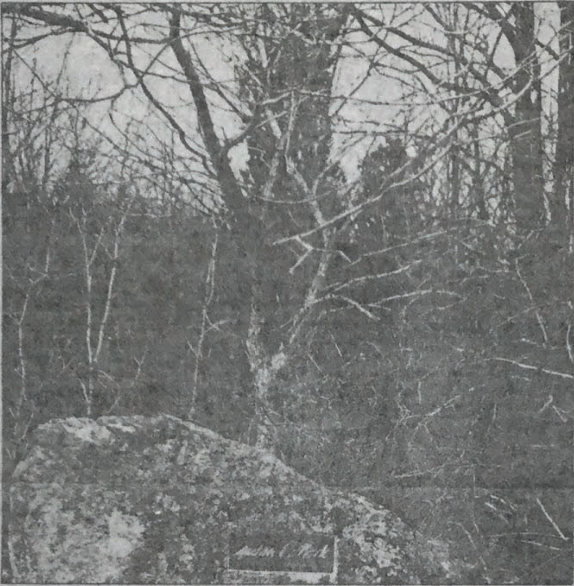

Pollock's grave, East Hampton, Long Island

The demons that drove Pollock to his moments of exhilarating brilliance and long periods of despair vanished with him, making it unlikely that anyone will ever unravel the man from his myth. Pollock, the youngest of five sons, was born in Cody, Wyoming, in 1912; that same year, his parents moved the family to Southern California, where Pollock seems to have had a relatively conventional childhood. Coming of age in Depression America, Pollock moved to New York in 1930 and began to study art with Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League. During the '30s, Pollock lived in the Village—on West 14th, Carmine, East 8th, and West Houston streets; he was often on relief and occasionally stole food from pushcarts. In 1935 he joined the easel division of the WPA, which gave him a degree of financial security until the WPA Art Program was terminated in 1943. Meanwhile, Peggy Guggenheim opened a 57th Street showcase for avant-garde art, called Art of This Century; she was so taken by Pollock's talents that she gave him a year's contract, guaranteeing him $150 a month. Pollock married painter Lee Krasner in 1945 and that same year they moved to Springs, Long Island.

Pollock's most debilitating problem was his alcoholism, which began at an early age. He was 25 when he first sought psychiatric treatment for the disease and he was only a year older when he committed himself to a hospital for treatment. In 1939, he reentered psychoanalysis, this time with a Jungian. Pollock was "on the wagon" from 1948 through most of 1950 (the period in which he painted nearly all of his best works), then spent the remaining years of his life on more booze, more treatment, and more analysis.

Pollock's boisterous machismo made him a Hemingwayesque hero to the art crowd at the old Cedar Tavern in the Village, the setting for such legendary scenes as Pollock tearing the door off the men's room. Critic Thomas B. Hess related with relish some of the sexist horseplay that occurred there: "Pollock would stride into the Cedar bar, plunk his money on the counter, and set them up for the house. He would wrestle, playfully—with smaller artists; once he threw a lady painter across the barroom onto a table; to another lady painter he announced grandly, 'You may be a great lay, but you can't paint worth a damn.' "

On August 11, 1956, while his wife was away in Europe, Pollock stayed home and entertained one of his Cedar bar acquaintances, Ruth Kligman, whom some regard as the preeminent art groupie of her day. That evening Pollock, who had been drinking all day, decided to drive Kligman and her young woman friend to a gathering in East Hampton. He was speeding, and the car skidded into a clump of trees. Kligman was the only survivor.

* * *

After Pollock's death, prices for all the leading Abstract Expressionists catapulted. Pollock's last dealer, Sidney Janis, sold "Autumn Rhythm" to the Metropolitan for $30,000. "With this price established," Janis said, "we had a little less trouble selling a de Kooning for $10,000 than we had a month earlier trying to sell one for $5,000. I think the artists sort of, if you'll accept the homely expression, rode in on the shirttails of dead Pollock."

Pollock's drip paintings initially looked so radical as to signal a complete rupture with art of the past. Even now, it is often difficult to comprehend how his mature work evolved. He was, by nature, an expressionist who was generally attracted to all masters of expressionist figuration, from late Michelangelo and El Greco to Alfred Ryder. Pollock also looked long and hard at Picasso and Miro. Thomas Hart Benton was a continuing source of encouragement, even as Pollock's art became antithetical to the older artist's American-scene paintings. Pollock's keen interest in the Mexican muralists, Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros, probably lead him toward the wall-size picture and his use of unorthodox materials and techniques.

When the European Surrealists emigrated to the United States during World War II, Pollock found himself in tune with their notion that the source of all art was the unconscious. The Surrealists' technique of automatic writing—for instance, letting the hand draw freely across the sheet of paper—proved to be what liberated Pollock from figuration. The Surrealists believed that automatism released unconscious images. Andre Masson practiced automatism constantly, yet somehow ended up imposing predictable images. As innovative as Masson was, he nonetheless failed to realize the implications of his method. Pollock's half dozen or so great drip paintings surpass Masson's best automatist works—their large scale is more effective, the skeins are more fluid and painterly, and the labyrinthian lines are totally abstract. But, judge for yourself. MOMA's Masson retrospective is on view through August 17.

Pollock used gravity to help form his abstract images. His technique was to tack the canvas to the floor and to drip, dribble, and spatter paint from above, either pouring it directly from a can or using a paintbrush as a stick. Through experience, he knew how to articulate the lines by controlling the flow of paint. And he preferred to work on the floor. "I feel nearer, more a part of the painting," he said, "since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides, and literally be in the painting. . . . When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get-acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through."

Pollock continues to be a household name, usually signifying the anarchic confusion of modern art, even though his work has all but disappeared from public view. The last Pollock retrospective was mounted by the Museum of Modern Art in 1967, but there are tentative plans for a traveling European show of Pollock's work on paper. The artist's widow has withdrawn the Pollock estate from the Marlborough Gallery and is apparently in no hurry to release any more work. The *catalogue raisonne* of Pollock's work, coedited by Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw, will be published next year by Yale University Press; since it will reproduce every known painting and provide documentation galore, perhaps it will prompt a few exhibitions that focus on particular aspects of Pollock's achievement, such as his use of Jungian imagery in the early '40s.

Until the Museum of Modern Art finds room to hang a few more of its choice Pollocks, New Yorkers will continue to be deprived of the opportunity to see a representative sampling of work by an artist who is widely regarded as the most important American painter of this century. □

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"The Bunch of Grapes,

Art: Lege

3/13/72

By JOHN RUSSELL

Of all the European artists who came to this country during World War II it was Fernand Léger who adapted most easily. He was also (with Max Ernst) the painter who most relished the particularity of the American scene. "American bad taste," he once said, "is a treasure for American artists, if only they knew how to use it."

In saying this, he was distinctly the same Fernand Léger who before 1914 had told his countrymen in France that there was nothing intrinsically ugly about a billboard in a plowed field. They didn't agree then, and even today there are people who think that Léger painted with hands that were all thumbs. But what thumbs, in that case! The Léger exhibition at the Perls Galleries, 1016 Madison Avenue, reminds us all over again that Léger was one of this century's great picture-builders.

In a painting like "Architecture" (1923), for instance, he took color and form and got them to lock together in such a way that the architecture in question is not so much a particular building as the very act of making the picture. But he could also build with disparate objects that he strung together almost in frieze fashion, with bluff alterations of unrelated color and a power of sardonic generalization peculiar to him. ("The Bunch of Grapes" is a good example of this.)

We see from this show how Léger as late as the 1950's was still reworking the classic materials of Cubist still-life. But he was also ready at any moment to tackle a completely new motif; in the "Jeune Indienne" of 1944, for example, he took a subject that had fascinated Europeans since before the days of Chateaubriand and Delacroix: the brick-red American girl silhouetted against an orange land. But he was no less attentive to the look of American airports and the expressive potential of their apparatus. He was a man who took life with both hands, as did and does his friend Alexander Calder, and the Perls show has the weight and the quality to do him justice. It's there through April 10.

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THE ART WORLD

Ideal and Real

THE twenty-eight-foot blowup of Hiram Powers' "The Greek Slave" that is bolted to the canopy above the entrance to the Whitney Museum as the emblem of its "Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture" exhibition recalls the high point in the popularity of sculpture in the United States. As an advertisement for the Bicentennial survey, Powers' neo-classical nude enters the order of cigar-store Indians and other shop signs—tilted forward a few degrees, she could serve as a figurehead for the Ship of Art, sister to Colonel Charles A. L. Sampson's rather heavily garbed "Belle of Oregon" on display inside. The public success of "Slave" in the mid-nineteenth century was due to her combination of exposed nakedness and lofty moral sentiment—a formula that often worked to win acclaim for academic compositions of the period. Sent on tour throughout the United States, "Slave" allayed the moral qualms of her beholders by arousing their sympathy for her plight as a modest Christian put on the block by lecherous Turks, to be delivered, for obvious purposes, to the highest bidder. "The subject," one promotional announcement declared, "is a Grecian maiden, made captive by the Turks, and exposed for sale in the Bazaar of Constantinople." "Slave" stood for a woman in the most urgent need of liberation, and this was sufficient to overcome the uneasy pleasure aroused by meeting her stripped barer by her captors than Duchamp's bride by her bachelors.

Powers' statue, regarded by the Whitney as a "key work" in the history of American sculpture, invokes an ideal—that of freedom. It is this idealism that makes "Slave" typical of the sculpture of its century: the heroic Washingtons and Franklins, the allegorical Proserpines, the equestrian statues, the figures of Justice and Truth, the portrait busts and reliefs of generals, statesmen, and preachers. In the transition from the awkward forthrightness of self-taught carvers of the early Republic to the Italian-inspired neo-classicism of Horatio Greenough, Powers, and Thomas Crawford, and to the various naturalisms of Henry Kirke Brown, Daniel Chester French, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the late nineteenth century, elevation of mood was a constant goal. The busts of the notables are all noble-looking, as is the head of every one of Saint-Gaudens's black foot soldiers. (One suspects that the bust is a genre that in itself confers nobility.) The folk carvings—which the Whitney deserves praise for including on equal terms in a "fine"-art survey—are similarly imbued with high moral or religious content, and Charles M. Russell's and Frederic Remington's cowpunchers, and even the animal sculptures of the first quarter of this century, reaffirm in their physical dignity that striving for an uplifted tone, or sublimation, which gives American sculpture from the Revolution through the Second World War its coherence, regardless of differences in style or aesthetic concept. In an introductory essay (one of seven) in the catalogue of "Two Hundred Years," Daniel Robbins notes that throughout the nineteenth century sculpture remained a public art dedicated to "the values that American society wished to enshrine." Among sculptors of the early years of this century, moral seriousness was present in the social realism of Saul Baizerman, Mahonri Young, and Abastenia St. Leger Eberle, or was replaced by the new European-inspired aestheticism and formal ideals of such artists as Paul Manship, Alexander Archipenko, Robert Laurent, and Elie Nadelman.

Modernism is, among other things, a repudiation of moral idealism in art and of the exalted sentiments of the middle class. In its appeal to mid-nineteenth-century Americans, "The Greek Slave" exemplifies typically dubious aspects of academic loftiness. Foremost among these is a lack of concreteness. Created in the eighteen-forties, at the height of the anti-slavery agitation, "Slave" calls attention to the bondage of white marble girls with classical profiles but not to that of black human ones. As an act of the imagination, the work owes more to Greek sculpture than to participation in contemporary anguish, whether in Greece or in Ala-

"Things aren't so simple anymore, Alston. The ethical high road may be more practical now than the practical low road."

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Sutler, a merchant and a member of the General's entourage, whose seduction of the girl—fly-by-night though it proves to be—is more than welcome to her. (John Glover and Deborah Offner make an attractive pair.) By the time the play is over, the house is still standing, an old rebel sword has been returned to Mrs. Law (played with dignity and authority by Leora Dana), the clergyman has been freed, and all the inhabitants are intact (in a manner of speaking). Only a house slave (Deloris Gaskins) is left onstage, speaking in quietly eloquent soliloquy about the wonder of her new freedom and what may lie in store for her.

"Rebel Women" is never boring, yet it is not especially dramatic or gripping, either. Episode follows episode, but Mr. Babe's plan of action escapes me. We are overinformed about even subsidiary characters. A Major Strong, General Sherman's aide, spends the night in the arms of a lieutenant; next morning, having turned against the war (and against the poor, nice lieutenant), he is so insolent to the General that he is stripped of his rank and dismissed. Why? What has his popping out of the closet got to do with anything, or why do we have to know that he went to Harvard? A final quibble: the casual, offhand use of four-letter words, whether historically justified or not, in every instance snapped me out of the eighteen-sixties and into the nineteen-seventies. One more actor I enjoyed: David Dean, in the bit part of a local civilian forced unwillingly to get provisions for the Union troops. Setting by John Lee Beatty, costumes by Carrie F. Robbins, lighting by Neil Peter Jampolis—all commendable. Jack Hofsiss directed.

—EDITH OLIVER

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bama. Its remoteness saved "Slave" from controversy of the kind that enveloped Miss Eberle's underworld-flavored plaster "White Slave" when it was displayed at the Armory Show of 1913. This remoteness extends to the physical modelling of "Slave" as a nude, with its resigned expression of a museum cast—not a naked woman suffering humiliation. Transcendence of sex is built into her style in much the same way that sublimated lewdness was to become the style of the heroic child-bearing Valkyrie of Nazi sculpture of the nineteen-thirties. Though billed in its circuslike showings as the triumph of "the genius of our own American artist, Powers," "Slave" and its creator had little relation to American life, either in subject or in manner. Once he left the United States to pursue his career in Florence, Powers remained an expatriate for the rest of his life. In terms of fact, "The Greek Slave" is a piece of Italian sculpture fashioned by an ex-American, sold to an Englishman, and promoted as a sensational spectacle in somewhat the same way as the publicizing of a shady tableau by Edward Kienholz.

The modernist outlook, first absorbed by Americans in the late nineteenth century, and reinforced by the Armory Show, had the dual effect of bringing American sculpture (as it did painting) closer to daily life, on the one hand, and to exclusively formal and decorative aims, on the other. Both tendencies turned sculpture away from popularly accepted moral, patriotic, and religious concepts. Fictional and historical personages ceased to be taken as credible embodiments of abstract ideals. One might say that the emotions of artists overflowed particulars of the common life and, no longer responding to Diana or an Admiral Farragut as ready-made signs, sought to generate their own mythical and semimythical personifications. Lachaise's "Standing Woman," a nameless contemporary goddess, celebrating sex by her grandiose female forms, represents the antithesis of the transcendence of Eros in "The Greek Slave."

Gradually shedding its symbols of unfocussed generalizations—the Liberty, Wisdom, Columbia of the academicians as well as the regional and class stereotypes of the nineteen-thirties social realists—American sculpture in the period following the Second World War reached toward a new, nonfigurative grandeur, in which significant emotions would be conveyed not by cultural or physical references (the chains on the wrists of "Slave") but

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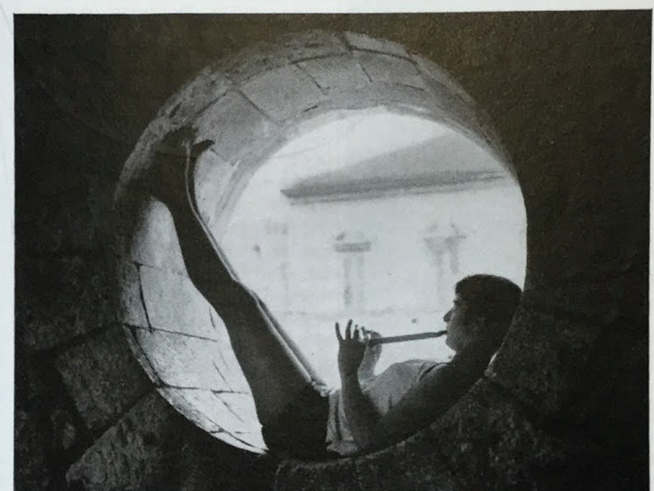

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solely by the visual elements of which the work was composed. The ambition to translate the profoundest feelings into psychological equivalents inherent in art materials was first realized in the canvases of de Kooning, Pollock, Hofmann, Kline, Rothko, and other Action painters and Abstract Expressionists. Barnett Newman's invocation of "the Sublime" as the essential content of art can be seen as an extension of the earlier idealism of American painting and sculpture—purged of literary, mythological, and ideological associations, and hence abstract in the most extreme degree possible. This salvaging of metaphysical feelings from the wreckage of religious, philosophical, and political credulity through a vocabulary of sensual fact potentially present in words, paint, quantities of sound constitutes the fundamental heritage of modernism in the tradition extending from Poe and Baudelaire to Klee and the Surrealists. It took shape in American sculpture in the myth-oriented early metal weldings of David Smith (which are well represented at the Whitney) and in the related creations of Lipton, Hare, Ferber, Chamberlain, Ibram Lassaw (the last unfortunately restricted at the Whitney to uncharacteristic pieces of the nineteen-forties).

The drive toward concreteness of twentieth-century art has encouraged withholding from works any concepts or metaphors not realizable in the works' material components. But the limiting of art to what is actually there can be subject to a wide range of interpretations: it can include both sensitivity to intangible presences and the most stubborn literalism. One who denies that truth combatting ignorance is anywhere to be seen in John Storrs' nude male with a serpent coiled around his right leg may in the name of an uncompromising vanguardism also reject the manifestation of force in a di Suvero construction of heavy beams and chains. That the emotion conveyed by a Smith or a Rothko is indefinable save in terms of the work itself means that this emotion is present solely as an aura of the visible forms, and thus its existence is as impossible to prove as that of Hamlet's ghost. To a leading earthworks artist of the sixties, the metaphysical aims of Abstract Expressionist painting and sculpture were a hangover of the "myth of the Renaissance" in the form of "mushy humanistic content," while to the public the psychic action in a Pollock or a Smith was translatable into therapy, self-expression, or theatricalism—superfluous and irrelevant to painting and sculpture, however decisive the artist's formal innovations.

If one had to choose the single outstanding feature of the art of the nineteen-sixties, it would be the attitude, varying from indifference to soured ideological hostility, taken toward the metaphysical feelings and exalted psychological states of the Abstract Expressionist generation of painters and sculptors. Artists such as Rothko, Gottlieb, Reinhardt found themselves to be virtual exiles among their formal and technical disciples. Pollock's mystical "contact" with the canvas, Newman's sublimity and awe, Hofmann's élan were negated in how-to formulas derived from technical aspects of these artists' creations. Pollock was recast as the master of "overall" painting, Newman as the father of color-area compositions, Hofmann as the synthesizer of Cubist geometry and Expressionist brushwork. The new, anti-metaphysical aesthetic may have been a reassertion in art of American know-nothingism, corresponding to the support by the majority for the Vietnam war. Or it may have sprung from the search for simplistic definitions by the proliferating university art departments.

THE movement toward literal tangibility is carried to various logical conclusions in the sculpture displayed on the fourth floor of the Whitney. In the portion of the "Two Hundred Years" survey labelled "1950-1976," the revolt against the ideal, as it appears in changing aspects on the two lower floors, has been consummated. Everything is as specific as a shovel and proved by the smoking pistol. From Carl Andre's patterns of copper squares laid out on the floor to Robert Rauschenberg's arrangement of two logs and a piece of a torn tire, nothing is anything but what it is. No ideas are to be discerned except ideas of what sculpture can be, and once it has been relieved of its "mushy humanistic content" sculpture can be anything that is not painting—that is not a flat surface, which now includes unpainted canvases.

In terms of the Whitney's fourth floor, Powers' "The Greek Slave" remains a "key work" if attention is transferred from the original marble carving inside the museum to the giant

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"Slave" on the canopy, which was produced on paper by computer-controlled spray guns and mounted on an armature of plywood and steel. In another essay in the exhibition catalogue, Marcia Tucker, a curator of the Whitney, provides a suggestive analogy. "Andre," she writes, "has succinctly described the evolution of contemporary art." "There was a time," she quotes him as saying, "when people were interested in the bronze sheath of the Statue of Liberty, modelled in the studio. And then there came a time when artists were not really concerned with the bronze sheath but were interested in Eiffel's iron interior structure, supporting the statue. Now artists are interested in Bedloe's Island." To be genuinely contemporary, the Grecian maiden on the canopy needs only to be undressed of her body in order to reveal the infrastructure of industrial materials in relation to the building to which she is affixed. So reduced, she would qualify as art within the limits of Miss Tucker's admonition that "present-day sculpture has generally rejected anthropomorphic, transcendental, nostalgic, and metaphysical content."

What is sculpture without these infusions of meaning? On the Whitney's fourth floor, the separation between art objects and other objects has been brought to an end. In sculpture, the prime symbol of the elimination of this barrier is the absence of the pedestal or base, which as late as Smith's "Voltri" series and Newman's "Here I" set the work apart from furniture or the landscape. At the Whitney, things sit on the floor, or ground, like rocks, stick out of it like trees, or are supported from the ceiling like vines. Not that the show is completely consistent; it yields to the seduction of fashionable reputations, for instance, in including Nancy Graves' camel. An exception to the no-separation principle is the interior by Kienholz, which, framed by its setting, is out of place in the survey of this "evolution," since it thus becomes a tableau, or three-dimensional picture, instead of occupying humanly habitable space. Out of place for similar reasons are a boat and shark fins in a glass case by H. C. Westermann. The late Robert Smithson's "Non-Site" (a fourth-floor piece, but located below the lobby), which consists of stones in a painted metal box with three parallel openings, is an anomaly: the horizontal slits give the work the effect of stripes painted on a naturalistic backdrop.

The core of the fourth-floor display is its man-made enclosures (tunnels, corridors, mazes, into which spectators

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are invited) and its intrusions into habitable space by solids, sounds, and lights. Things added to the environment include geometrical structures and modules, by Andre, Sol LeWitt, and Donald Judd, and random scatterings of odd materials and machine parts, by Barry Le Va and Michael Heizer. At the extremes of rationality and accident are Barry Le Va and Larry Bell (whose names taken together seem to belong to a word game). Photographs of outdoor constructions by Smithson, Walter De Maria, and Heizer emphasize the identification of art and nature, and of the artist and the building contractor. Equally emphasized, except in the borrowings of techniques and forms, is the dismissal of the art of the past and of the kinds of experience on which that art was founded. With the disappearance of the pedestal or base, sculpture achieves its effects not as visual shape, icon, or sign but by usurping the floor (Andre), or confining the spectator (Bruce Nauman, Bell), or threatening him (De Maria). Art becomes an ecological problem, as in the recent suit brought by California environmentalists to prevent Christo (unaccountably omitted from the Whitney exhibition) from building his running fence. In the works on the fourth floor, the drive toward de-idealization has reached its goal, in theory and in practice. With the exclusion of abstract morality, formal beauty, and metaphysical realities, nothing is left to be cancelled. Art has hit bedrock in the irrelevance of how things in an exhibition look, what they mean, and what they leave in the spectator's mind. It seems unlikely that negation has any further possibilities.

That "Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture" terminates in a dead end of values is at least in part owing to the distorted time perspective of the organizers of the show. One-third of the three-floor exhibition space is assigned to one-eighth of the total two hundred years: the period from 1950 to 1976. Aside from this disproportionate attention to the present, the artists shown in the section do not actually represent the past twenty-six years. Smith, Louise Nevelson, Herbert Ferber, Lassaw, Newman, George Rickey, Len Lye, all of them important postwar sculptors, have been relegated to the weirdly conceived "1930-1950" segment of art history, on the third floor, while many others—Kenneth Snelson, Gabriel Kohn, James Rosati, Peter Agostini, Raoul Hague, William King, Chryssa, David Weinrib, Willem de Kooning, to name

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the first that come to mind—have been omitted. Actually, much of the work shown on the third floor was executed after 1950, and some of it even after 1960. With similar inaccuracy, or misrepresentation, the majority of the "1950-1976" exhibits were completed after 1960 (I could find only three that were done before that date) and before 1970—many featured in the show are reproduced in Wayne Andersen's "American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970," and those that were conceived in the past six years are extensions of earlier concepts. In sum, at the Whitney, 1950 to 1976 consists of less than ten years, the products of which are made to outweigh all other developments, values, and possibilities in American sculpture. In its fixation on art-world fashion and the logic of avant-garde innovation, the Whitney has stretched the now largely exhausted aesthetic reductionism of the latter half of the nineteen-sixties—founded upon a particularly disagreeable and disheartening interlude in American social history—to give the impression of a continuing dominant trend.

In a statement introducing "Two Hundred Years," Mr. David Rockefeller, chairman of the board of Chase Manhattan Bank, which is a sponsor of the exhibition, observes that the show "provides a unique insight into the history of the United States." One wonders whether the decline in morality, idealism, and character revealed in the passage from the anti-slavery content of "The Greek Slave," however mild and remote, to the "loose and indeterminate arrangements"—the willlessness—of the "scatter" pieces representing the Now at the Whitney is the historical phenomenon that Mr. Rockefeller wanted spectators to discover.

—HAROLD ROSENBERG

•

DEAR SOS: The Chocolate Sauerkraut Cake that appeared last year was great. Would you mind repeating it?

LYNNE

DEAR LYNNE: With pleasure.

KRAUT SURPRISE
CAKE

⅔ cup butter or margarine

—*Los Angeles Times.*

Thank you.

•

"Good fences do good neighbors make," wrote Robert Frost. I will second that.—*D. F. Beckham, Jr., in the Times.*

Something there is that doesn't like this quote.

The sporting life

Four sporting offers make this the perfect summer to vacation where millionaires vacation every winter.

Our *Family Plan, Golf Week, Tennis Week* and *Dorado Beach Honeymoon* give you a terrific break, based on our much lower summer rates (now to Oct. 20). Enjoy our expansive, luxurious resort, our two Robert Trent Jones golf courses, two miles of beaches, superb tennis. (Now run, with videotape instruction, by Sports Illustrated Tennis Centers.) All just 20 miles from San Juan on Puerto Rico's beautiful north shore. See your travel agent or call any Loews Reservations Office. In New York (212) 586-4459.

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U.S. JOURNAL: WASHINGTON, D.C.

SCOUTING SLEEPERS

ABOUT a year ago, I decided to become a book scout for Marcia Carter and Larry McMurtry, because they made it sound so easy. They are partners in a Georgetown rare-book shop called Booked Up—a name whose origins I have, as a gesture of friendship, not investigated. A scout in the rare-book business is what the antique trade would call a picker. Looking for books that he can sell to a dealer, a scout will work over the shelf at, say, the St. Joseph's Ladies' Auxiliary Thrift Shop, confident that what the other browsers take to be a dusty old industrial pamphlet he will recognize as the first published book of Thomas Wolfe. A book scout will scout garage sales and antique stores and charity book sales. He may even scout rare-book shops; it is axiomatic in the trade that nobody can know everything about books, and a dealer with an awesome knowledge of poetry and Americana might be harboring an enormously valuable nautical work that he had been planning to include in the next batch of books donated to the local Veterans Administration hospital. I had never thought of becoming an antique picker. It's a perfectly legitimate way of making a living, but the word suggests a small, gnarled man poking through rubbish heaps. Being a scout sounds adventurous; McMurtry regards it as "a form of sport." It occurred to me that someone who travels as much as I do could be a book scout on the side, in the way an anthropologist who studies Indians may work up a small sideline in silver jewelry. McMurtry used to make his living as a book scout. He has been known to say that he is the best book scout in the country; he once tried to arrange a sort of *mano a mano* with a West Coast scout at a charity book sale in Des Moines. For a number of years, of course, he has made his living as a writer—mostly a writer of novels set in Texas, where he grew up. A book scout would consider him a successful novelist, since a mint-condition first edition of his first novel, "Horseman, Pass By," would fetch about a hundred and twenty-five dollars. McMurtry, to his mild displeasure, once even ran across a stack of his own letters for sale at a stiff price. When I heard the story, my displeasure was acute: I realized that after answering the only letter I could remember receiving from McMurtry—a nicely typed, unstained document containing a discussion of Midwestern barbecue which a certain sort of literary critic might find of interest—I threw it away.

Writers are not ordinarily book collectors. I know a few writers who have large libraries of what people in the rare-book trade would call, with some condescension, "reading copies"—books that are of sufficiently modest value to be read without fear that the odd coffee stain might drastically reduce the owner's net assets—but McMurtry is the only American writer I know of who has developed a professional interest in rare books. McMurtry says that when he first began collecting books, as a student at North Texas State College, in the fifties, he must have done so on the assumption that anyone who was apt to go back to a home town like Archer City, Texas—the town used for filming McMurtry's novel "The Last Picture Show"—had better own any book he might ever want to read. These days, after having accumulated and sold two or three libraries, McMurtry owns mostly reading copies himself, except for some small and eccentric collections like books on the Yellow Peril and books on Siberian travel. Owning a bookshop, he says, "cools the fever" of collecting. Owning a bookshop has also drastically cut down on McMurtry's scouting—book dealers like to stay in their shops, on the theory that, as they often say, "anything might walk through the door"—but his scouting fever has not cooled. He compares book scouting to cowboying, acknowledging in the process that he was a fairly miserable cowboy. His father, McMurtry says, could spot a cow he wanted and return the next day to cut it out of a herd of two thousand; to Larry all cows looked alike. Not books. Larry knows which shade of blue cover on a copy of "Native Son" indicates a first printing and which one doesn't; he knows the precise value of poetry books by Robert Lowell that Robert Lowell may now have forgotten writing. Dealers normally do not show up at the

"Gee, you mean that's it? 'Go, and sin no more'?"

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FACTS ABOUT THE NEW YORK SCHOOL*

Thomas B. Hess
Art Historian, Critic

"The New York School" is a shorthand phrase to denote the extraordinary surge of talents and works that appeared around 1945 in the City and that have been proliferating ever since, to the dismay of conventional culture-watchers who annually predict the demise of modern painting and sculpture. The impact of the artists on current history was such that, by around 1950, the intellectual center of gravity of international modernist art switched from Paris (where it had been located since around 1790; prior to that, Rome was the capital), across the Atlantic, to the whitewashed studio lofts, the flyblown cafeterias, the many bars and few commercial galleries, of Manhattan. The financial center stayed in Paris for almost a generation. Europe was where Americans went to buy their decorations. The brains were in New York. Museums and collectors, except for a happy few, didn't catch on until around 1960.

There was no movement, no "Ism," as in the European experience (which rejoiced in such heraldic passwords as Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, et al.). "Abstract-Expressionism" was used by several early commentators, including this writer, as a convenient handle; otherwise you would have to keep repeating lists of names—Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Clyfford Still, Franz Kline, and the others. Instead of a common label there were strong social ties (many of them made during the bleak Depression days, on the federal arts projects). Artists who knew and admired one another met frequently for interminable conversations and mutual support. A "café life," for the first time, appeared in America, even though there were no true cafés in the elegantly bohemian sense. Almost everyone was broke. That's one reason why automats were so popular—and downtown lofts. There was precious little support from society outside the art-world stockades. It was tough to be an artist in America in those days; as Stuart Davis said, "Everybody thought you were nuts."

Still, there was no "Ism," no single style. If de Kooning, Pollock, Still and Kline froze grand gestures in the roiled surfaces of their paintings, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, and others created expansive, intensely colored images across which the paint was moved with silken tact. They gloried in an American visage—in the new-found-land aspect of their idioms. Arshile Gorky and Hans Hofmann, on the other hand, and, later, Robert Motherwell, kept in close contact with the best Paris had to offer—especially the brilliant chroma of the late Matisse, although Motherwell and Gorky also were interested in the dream-writing automatism of the Surrealists. Many other individuals took part in the heroic efforts of the late 1940s and early 1950s—including Philip Guston, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Jack Tworkov, James Brooks, Esteban Vicente and others, who sought a new lyricism of the touch, as well as Alexander Liberman and Ellsworth Kelly, whose "Hard-Edge" abstractions broke through the ultimate equilibriums of the Bauhaus and of De Stijl.

Several other tendencies evolved out of this ardent movement. Color-Field abstractions emerged from the experiences of Pollock and Newman, through the intercession of Helen Frankenthaler, in the paintings of Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski. Pop Art, when it first appeared (ca. 1960), seemed more of a confrontation than an extension of the immediate past. Still, it's now evident that the Pop artists shared many attitudes and assumptions with the Abstract-Expressionists. From Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, through Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, the energy of Pollock's flung gauntlet can be sensed as a living presence. And, finally, there were the more direct exfoliations of Abstract-Expressionism in the paintings of Milton Resnick, Joan Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning, and their numerous colleagues.

In all of these works, two characteristics are remarkably consistent. There is the tendency to a large, monumental scale. And there is a sensation—an immanence—that's been called "New York light."

The big-painting format was established by 1949-50 in such works as Pollock's Number One, 1948, de Kooning's Excavation, and Newman's Vir Heroicus Sublimis. Unlike European precedents, an intimate rather than a hieratic or grandiose, presence was emphasized. The spectator is urged to step up close to the canvas and to let forms and colors surround him. There is an intense one-to-one relationship between viewer's eye and artist's icon. Even in later works, when images became more unified, glittering, hard-boiled—as in the aggressive jangles of Frank Stella's 1976 painted reliefs—New York painting is eminently approachable.

As for "New York light," it remains a still undefined essence—the shared, unarticulated denominator of the best painting and sculpture at mid-century. Probably it only can be characterized from direct experience—from seeing the work at its brightest, at full impact. In the Albany exhibition, in the new State museum, 40,000 square feet of raw space provides a perfect resonating background to elicit the quality, the intensity. It is hoped that you will be able to glimpse the quicksilver spirit of history, as it's been articulated by some of the best minds of this time and this place.

*excerpted from exhibition catalog

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Peggy Guggenheim and "Art of This Century"

Bio: PG descended from two fortunes, Guggenheim and Seligman. In late 1930s she opened an avant garde gallery in London as a diversion, advised by Duchamp. "Guggenheim Jeune" showed first one-man Kandinsky show in England, also Yves Tanguy. In 1939 she decided to open a modern museum in London, enlisted aid of Herbert Read as director. That winter she shopped in Paris as Germans approached, buying a picture a day with advice of Duchamp, Howard Putzel, and Nellie van Doesburg. War ended idea, but she got collection out in 1941, to US. Married Laurence Vail, Max Ernst; mistress of Tanguy, John Holms, various others. "But then I have always found husbands much more satisfactory after marriage than during." (Auto., p.41)

In 1941 when still living in Grenoble, PG got wire from Kay Sage, Tanguy's new wife, in US. Wanted her to pay passage over for Breton, his wife and child, Max Ernst, and Dr. Mabille, the Surrealist doctor. Eventually got Max to Lisbon and then to US, arriving July 14, 1941. Max detained at Ellis Island (auto., p. 86). Married Ernst soon after Pearl Harbor, "as I did not want to live in sin with an enemy alien." Took large apartment on Beekman Place, gathering place for Surrealists in exile.

Breton and Ernst loved the Heye Foundation museum - bought through Carlebach. Ernst selling well in US, with Peggy's aid and Putzel's, and didn't contribute a penny to household or income tax. Breton, Ernst and others helped with the catalog to her collection, which she published under title "Art of This Century."

Found space on top floor of building on West 57th Street for gallery-museum, which she also called "Art of This Century." Kiesler designed interior - very theatrical, with curved walls, paintings mounted on baseball bats that stuck out a foot, each picture had its own spotlight. Two walls were formed by ultramarine canvas curtain attached to ceiling and floor by strings. Some paintings hung fron ceiling on strings. Sculptures were on triangular shelves that made them appear to float in space. Kiesler had designed a chair that served seven purposes (see p. 100). Opening was October 20, 1942. PG wore white dress and one earring by Tanguy, the other by Calder, to show impartiality between Surrealist and abstract art.

Third show was works of 31 woman artists, judged by Ernst, Breton, JJSweeney, James Soby, Jimmy Ernst and PG. One of those chosen was Dorothea Tanning, "a pretty girl from the Middle West" who "imitated Max's painting, which flattered him immensely... Soon they became more and more friendly and I realized that I should only have had thirty women in the show."

Spring salon show in 1943 (idea had been suggested by Herbert Read in 1939) included Pollock, Motherwell, Baziotes -- all of whom had previously shown collages there. Later came first one-man shows of Pollock,Motherwell, Baxiotes, Hans Hofmann, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, David Hare. Group shows included Adolph Gottlieb, Hedda Sterne, Ad Reinhardt. Europeans one-man shows: de Chirico, Arp, Giacometti, Helion, Hans Richter, Hirshfield, van Doesburg, Pegeen, Laurence Vail, I. Rice Pereira.

After first spring salon PG started giving Pollock $150 a month so he could quit working as carpenter at her uncle Solomon's museum. There would be settlement at end of year: if she sold more than $2700 worth, allowing 1/3 for gallery commission, Pollock would get rest; if she sold less, she would get pictures in return. Pollock then became center of gallery, from 1943 on. Several of the others left as result, went to Kootz. She also commissioned Pollock to do mural for her apartment, 23' by 6' - now at Univ of Iowa.

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Barr bought "She Wolf" ~~from~~ Nov. 1943 show for MOMA. San Francisco Museum bought "Guardians of the Secret." Didn't sell many, but in 1945 she raised his contract to $300 a month in exchange for all his works. She also ~~gave~~ loaned Lee Krasner $2000 to buy house in The Springs.

Never sold a Pollock for more than $1,000, and when she left US in 1947 "not one gallery would take over my contract"on him. In the end Betty Parsons said she'd give him a show, for which Pollock paid expenses "out of one painting Bill Davis bought." All the rest of his pictures (18 in all) were sent to PG in Venice, according to contract - after Lee had pick of her one painting a year. PG gave most of them away to various museums, now has only two left of this period (altho also has nine earlier ones) - has been kicking herself ever since.

"In my struggles for Pollock I also had to contend with such things as Dorothy Miller absolutely refusing to include him in an exhibition of twelve young American artists -- artists who were obviously what she considered the best we had -- which she did in 1946, as a travelling show for the Museum of Modern Art. I complained to Alfred Barr, but he said it was Dorothy Miller's show and nothing could be done about it." (p.109)

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John Graham (from Allentuck compilation)

His "Systems and Dialectics In Art" first printed in Paris in 1937, and same year in US (limited ed.) Graham "brought the excitement of the French art world to us," acc. to Dorothy Dehner in Foreword. He was the first to recognize and encourage David Smith. "It was at the Graham apartment in the late twenties that we saw his marvelous collection of African sculpture, which he spoke of informedly and handled lovingly." (Had been buying it for coll. of Frank Crowninshield. Graham and wife Elinor spent two summers at Bolton Landing in the thirties.

His life in the Czar's Guards, his horsemanship - Foreword, xvi.

Third wife was Constance Wellman. Fourth was Mariane Strate (

Graham born in Kiev in . Died June 1961 in London, aged 80, of leukemia. He was son of retired career officer and judge. PP. 1-8.

Involvement with Madame Blavatsky - 8.

Served as cavalry officer with Archduke Michael's "Wild Brigade" during WWI, received St. George Cross for valor.

Came to US in early twenties and eventually became citizen. Yearly trips to Paris. Enrolled in Art Students League, studied with John Sloan. Became an abstract painter - a personal variant of synthetic cubism.

Organized a show of "French and American Painters at McMillen Gallery, 1942, that showed Pollock, De Kooning and others along with Picasso, Braque. (See deKooning invu, p. 22-23). Graham's writings in SDA prefigured Ab-Ex (see # 88 and # 108).

Greatly admired Picasso. But also Graham was moving in direction he called "Minimalism" (see p. 24,). "Minimalist painting is purely realistic -- the subject being the painting itself." "Minimalism is the reducing of painting to the minimum ingredients for the sake of discovering the ultimate, logical destination of painting in the process of abstracting."

Graham's personal force, his ability to see "the phenomena of nature as forms charged with potency," had impact on art scene of 1920s and 1930s. The essential problem of ab-ex in the forties was "the tension between feeling and form and the necessity of integrating the two in 'pure'works of art."

His interest in occult studies gradually became obsession. Hatha Yoga, numerology, alchemy, astrology, the cabala, Pico della Mirandola, Aleister Crowley, etc. His friend Hedda Sterne emphasizes that he was not superstitious, but " a clear cold mind in love with the occult." (61)

Complete turnabout in early forties led him to repudiate abstract art. He came to prefer "a bad academic painting" to a "good abstraction." Soviet purges, WWII had an effect. Hatred of 20th cent (p.64). He focused his enmity on Picasso, and took up an art based on Renaissance. In his last interview, in Newsweek, he said "Art is now a racket. Picasso is the world's best caricaturist, the best of the international art crooks. But he is cynical, he is not divine. "

He revised the text of SDA, deleting mention of US artists he'd liked before and altering references to Picasso.

SDA Text
#23 - difference between art and craft

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#29 - Art & Religion :"...Art is individual expression of social phenomena, religion was the social expression of individual phenomena."

#28 - aim of modern art: "...to discover new lands"

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Kermit Lansner - lunch 11/9/76

The fifties was his period. He and Fay went to the Club, met everyone. The Club was crucial. You had to be brought by a member. There would be whisky in paper cups, and it always got noisy and messy towards the end -- dancing and some brawling. Srong women were involved -- Elaine de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Pat Pavia. The talk wad all about esthetics and what they were trying to do. Very little politics except indirectly.

All the vanguard musicians came -- Cage, Feldman, etc. A real intersection of two worlds. Few writers - Frank O'Hara, who else? The atmosphere then wad anything but homosexual, as it later became. But oddly enough it was much more spiritual and idealistic than it became in the sixties. The artists really had a sense of mission, art as a mission, that was lost completely by the next generation.

Look up files of It Is , Art News, other mags of the period. Ask Pearl Moeller for ~~xxx~~ unpublished monographs -- maybe somebodg has interviewed Pavia at enormous length (also look up oral histories in Archives).

Importance of Hans Hofmann and his school - the transference of European ideals, Mondrian, etc. His studio was on 8th street.

~~Look up little book by John E. Myers - "The Party s Over" or something like that.~~

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(Geldzahler)

Rosalind Constable - lunch 2/19/71

She had worked for several years on the abortive Time Inc highbrow mag, which never did get off the ground. Her area was the little magazines, literary and otherwise. She had hundreds of them around her office. One day a Time v-p came in and saw them, and told Harry Luce it might be a good idea to have someome cover the avant-garde -- as they had coverage of Washington, Press, Sports etc. Luce agreed, and Constable began writing weekly reports. She branched out into visual arts when same v-p asked her to explain just what the hell Pollock was all about, or "what's good about Pollock."

The Life Rountable on Modern Art, in 1948 (check) was a great revelation. Meyer Schapiro, from Columbia, got up and talked for a while about Picasso's <u>Girl Before a Mirror</u>, and really got through to some of the editors, Constable included. She thinks there was even applause when he finished. A masterly performance.

<u>Time</u> used to pick up some of Constable's efforts and report sneeringly on them -- Happenings, etc. This attitude began to change about the time of the 1964 Biennale. But that same year, Rauschenberg was commissioned to do a cover, and it ended in disaster. He did what she calls a "typical Rauschenberg," only outrageous part of which was that the logo was reversed. When Constable went up to the art dept to see it, she says most of the editors were furious -- "who does he think he is, anyway?" Says it wasn't used (check with Leo).

<u>Greenberg</u> - she did several long interviews with him for piece that Life did not take - Constable says because they wanted a less favorable piece. He used to say to her, if I'm supposed to be the great power behind the throne, how come nobody paid any attention to these painters until just recently? From 1960 on he had shown them at the gallery of French & Co., which had hired him to put on exhibitions of modern art. Noland, Olitski, Louis, etc. Nobody even noticed.

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Max Kozloff, "An Interview with Matta", Artforum, September 1965

Matta arrived in New York from Paris in October or November 1939. He had been trained as an architect, but turned to painting to express what he called psychic morphology of desire. His definition of morphology is to follow a form through a certain evolution, like from a seed to a tree.

Matta had a studio on 9th Street- held court there. Visitors included Baziotes, Pollack, Motherwell, Gorky & Duchamp. (Matta does not cite Duchamp's influence on his paintings in this interview)

Matta claims that he took Peggy Guggenheim to Pollack's studio.

He said that there was not too much contact with Masson at the time, for Masson lived in Connecticut and didn't come to NYC very often. Also, he did not learn the language.

Matta left New York in 1948- he claims that things were getting too "painting"

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US Govt and Art

Truman publicly derided the "ham and eggs" school of painting. *

The State Dept. withdrew an exhibition called "Advancing American Art" from its prospective European tour, ~~in 1947,~~ and turned over the paintings to the War Assets Administration for sale as surplus property in 1947 (or 1946?)

By 1949 Rep. Dondero was in full cry against advanced American art, which he said was "shackled to communism."

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*"I don't pretend to be an artist or a juge of art, but I am of the opinion that so-called modern art is merely the vaporings of half-baked, lazy people. An artistic production is one which shows infinite ability for taking pains, and if any of these so-called modern paintings show any such ability, I am very much mistaken."

- Truman, in discussing exhibition of 79 paintings by Americans sent on tour by State Dept in 1946, then withdrawn because of Cingressional complaint.

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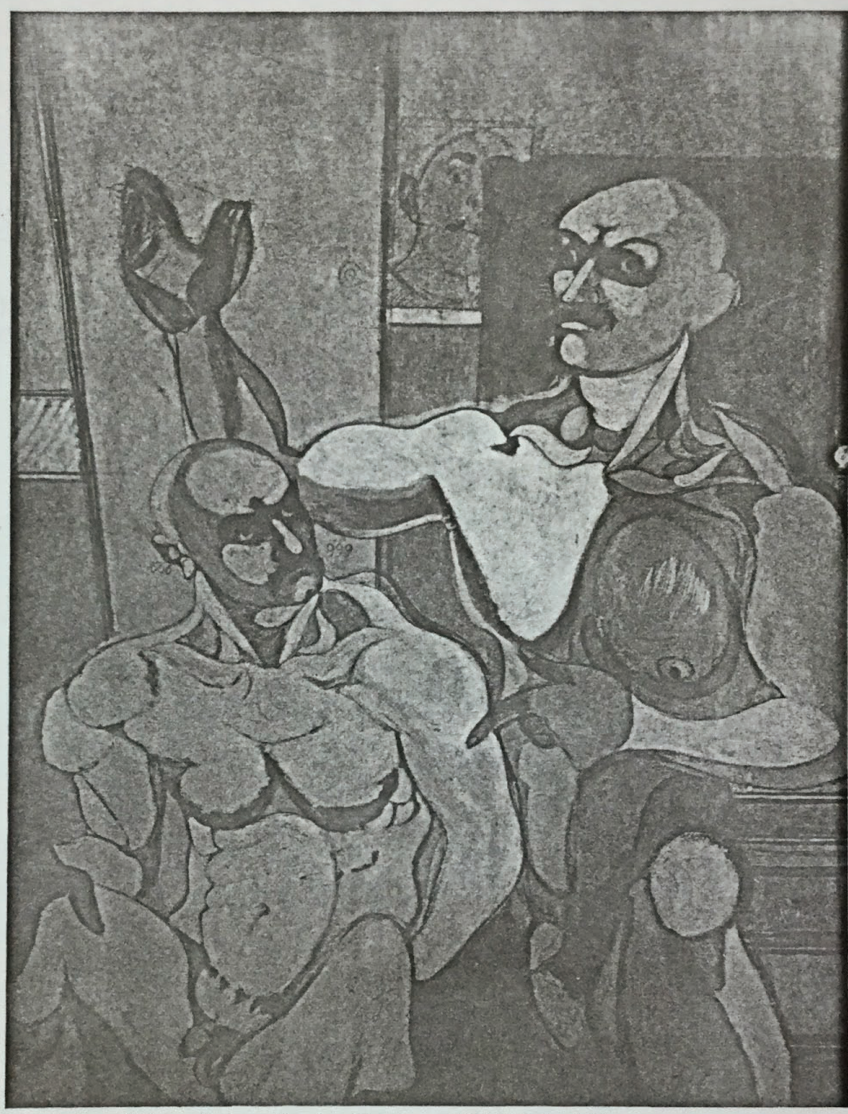

John Graham: Self-portrait themes based on Poussin, ca. 1950, 60 inches high.
Mayer Gallery

John Graham, 1881-1961

A key figure in American vanguard art of the 1930s and '40s, John Graham died this June at the age of eighty in London. Aristocrat, painter, dandy, polemicist, cosmopolite, *marchand-d'amateur*, he had been "in" modern art as a painter since the mid-1920s when he emigrated to New York and became, at first, a favorite student of John Sloan's. But he was aware of the movement since before World War I, from frequent visits to the extraordinary Morosov and Shchoukine collections in St. Petersburg. It was there that as young Ivan Dabrovski, aide-de-camp to the staff of czar Nicholas II, he fell in love with Picasso, and proclaimed him "infinitely greater than the rest of them" for his "structure, furies, audacity, imagination and knowledge"—a one-man cause Graham fought for with violent enthusiasm until, with equal energy, in the 1940s, he turned against Picasso for "grinding out merchandise" instead of "trying to educate himself." He was devoted to the convictions of his insight, no matter how criss-crossed they might be by the antinomies that characterized his way of life and his methods of thinking.

His career as a Russian officer in World War I brought him three awards of the St. George Cross for Valor, and after escaping from the Revolutionary prisons (through the intercession of the poet Maiakovski who, the legend goes, thus repaid his former patron), [Continued on page 51]

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Real dreams of Persia continued from page 39

a new home in Turfan after fleeing Persia because of severe religious persecution. The miniatures, although few and fragmentary, are of greatest importance as they are the oldest surviving Persian book paintings. They alone remain to give us an idea of the painting done before the Mongol conquest of Iran.

Even of the great monuments of early Muslim days little has come down to us. That little, however, may serve as an indication of what once must have been abundant: great wall paintings of battle scenes and court life, and illuminated books with the histories and poetry of ancient Persian tradition. While nothing of these illuminated books has survived, wall paintings of this kind have been found in the recently discovered palace of the Ghaznavid rulers of Lashkar i-Bazaar on the Helmand River in Afghanistan, and in Nishapur, the leading city of Khurasan.

All these paintings clearly indicate the strong ties that existed between early Muslim and Sassanian painting, and one should not be surprised to find Sassanian elements of form and color treatment in later Muslim Persian painting. It is astonishing, however, to see that the Sassanian tradition, apparently so strongly alive in early Islamic days, has not continued to exert its influence in later times, and that in fact great Muslim painting appears in Persia only after the coming of the Mongols. In this profound and concise study Basil Gray (the distinguished Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities in the British Museum) says the contact with Chinese painting was "the agent which seems to have freed the Persian genius from its subordination to the other arts of the book by a mysterious catalysis."

It was then in the illuminated codices that Persian painters achieved their most magnificent creations. Though these miniature paintings of Muslim Persia are the true subject of the author's study, he nevertheless gives an account of the earlier paintings of which we know. He discusses the question of the Persian character of Iraqian painting referring to Samarra, the 9th-century capital of the Abbasid caliphs; the paintings of Turfan, of Lashkar i-Bazaar and Nishapur; and even of the earliest known pre-Mongol, manuscript, the *Varka va Gulshah*, a romantic poem illustrated in the early 13th century. Regrettably, however, he could not illustrate any of these paintings. His series of illustrations starts only with the paintings in a manuscript of the very end of the 13th century, the Morgan Library's *Manafi al-Hayawan*, a kind of zoological handbook and compendium on animal life.

The miniatures of this manuscript are indeed the first great monument of Muslim Persian painting, having been executed after the conquest of the Iranian plateau by the Mongols. However devastating this conquest was, at the same time it opened Persia to the world of Asia that soon was to become of paramount importance in her further cultural development. While in other parts of the Muslim empire Greco-Roman tradition was the foundation of the new art of Islam, in Persia, although the initial impetus came from her immediate Sassanian past, it was the art and culture of Asia that initiated the greatest cultural development Persia had ever seen. Hardly any other period of painting has seen a more successful marriage of foreign influences and local traditions. Persian painters, open to the diverse stimuli of Asia and Europe alike, have always maintained their own forms of expression. Foreign influence for the Persian artist was never more than an experience upon which to react, and in his reaction he had always been independent and freely creative. Persian painters have therefore never been eclectic.

Basil Gray quite necessarily follows the historical line. He defines in clear terms the various stages through which Persian painting has gone and describes the various schools and their peculiarities, illustrating them by a selection of masterpieces from public and private collections in Europe, America and the Near East. He has, as mentioned above, not included anything earlier than the Mongol period and concludes with the last great masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leaving out the painting of the Kajars.

There is little, if anything, to be argued about his lucid and concise presentation of the subject, and although the colors of the numerous illustrations are not always very accurate, as we are by now a bit weary of remarking, they nevertheless suggest the possible experience of an actual confrontation with the originals. The text is excellently suited to lead one to an appreciation of Persian painting, and even the scholar will find it interesting and stimulating.

Persian painting of the highest quality can be studied and appreciated particularly in New York in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, the Pierpont Morgan Library, and the Spencer Collection in the New York Public Library, and there are other important American collections that are amply represented in this book. As America is fortunate enough to have such collections, this book should be particularly welcome in this country, drawing general attention to an art that only too rarely is noticed.

Pacific Basin continued from page 10

National Gallery, Brisbane, Australia. The main objective was to bring together work from all four regions in order to see whether the Pacific provided some common characteristic. Both in abstract and in realistic canvases from Japan, the national preoccupation with nature was definitely expressed, as was found to be the case likewise in New Zealand, whose lush volcanic landscape is not dissimilar to that of Japan. For Australia, the most representative painting being done by the younger artists appears to search the horizons of the mind rather than of the land, though remaining local in feeling. For America's West Coast, the Oriental influence is more directly evident in the Northwest, in the work of Tobey, Graves and Callahan; while Southern California has provided pioneers of the modern movement more directly related to Europe, such as MacDonald-Wright and Lorser Feitelson.

Will Barnet, well-known teacher, painter and printmaker whose work has trended consistently toward purer and simpler forms, is the subject of a full-length retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston [to Sept. 17]. His early figurative work documents a path toward abstraction through a painful process of simplification. In his most recent abstractions, a few massive forms are essentially organic, and avoid going into pure geometry by retaining equivalences of emotional impact and content.

John Graham continued from page 46

devoted himself to painting—a profession that, Graham wrote, would have been "unthinkable" in the noble Polish milieu of his birth.

Graham brought to the New York "provinces" a sophistication and original turn of mind that was sadly missing from that scene. He knew everyone and did everything. He was a friend of such then-unknown artists as Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, David Smith, Barnett Newman and was a bridge for them to the Paris art-world, where Graham exhibited with Zborowski (the gallery in which Soutine and Modigliani had been launched), and where monographs were published about his work by the critics of the moment—André Salmon and Waldemar George. He himself wrote a book (in 1937) which, if extravagant in spots, was also a rarely prophetic critique, giving for the first time an international context to the American art scene.

Graham was famous among artists for his "eye"; it was said that he could walk into any junk-shop and find a beautiful object for fifty cents. (This talent won public recognition when Graham was given the responsibility of forming Frank Crowninshield's collection of African art.) He knew Renaissance bronzes and Egyptian vases, Flemish tapestries and Baroque town-plans—and the best talent of his own time. From these observations and experiences, he deduced certain arcane systematizations, alchemical schemata that might approach the fundamentally religious mystery of art. But if he enjoyed the medieval color of such intellectual gestures, his assumptions always retained the pure ethical quality of his insight. He was a truly dedicated, cultivated man.

In the last decades of his life, he abandoned a Picassoesque style for a different, realist kind of painting and drawing—allegorical, symbolic, ritualistic, heavily romantic. A sharp, hard pencil line meticulously travels over and over the faces of women; wounds like whimpering lips open on their necks; coiffures twisted into lobsters and armorial jewels set off blunt eyes slightly crossed with passion or pain, their archaic smiles making both interpretations possible. Having helped to clear the way for the mainstream of vanguard American art, it was perhaps logical for this Russian manichean to create

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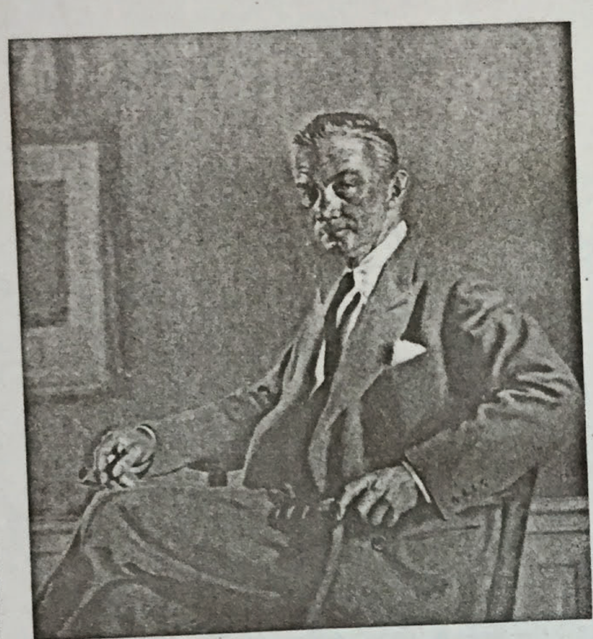

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some of its most eccentric, introverted, peripheral images. Indeed there is a perverse logic to his whole long career. Always obsessed by blood, he died of leukemia—in Wellington Hospital, London, on June 27, 1961, a date he had predicted accurately in a letter to the American Embassy. Contradictions also obsessed him and he lived with them. Graham kept the pictures of three Nicholases by his bedside: an icon of the saint, a picture of his Tsar and the third of Lenin.

Obsessed by art, he helped a whole new school come into existence, only to renounce it for the very qualities his prescience had identified: spontaneity, talent, adventureousness, originality. But in turning back to his beloved Greek and Renaissance models, late in life, he found new sources of power in the discipline, control, empiricism and cruelty that had made him a distinguished and brave cavalry officer in Grand Duke Michael's "Wild Brigade." Graham became a kind of metaphysical Repin and probably the best Russian artist—in the Russian tradition of draftsmanship and elegant narration—of his time. In culminating this tradition, he lived out his ultimate paradox.

On pages 47-48 of this issue appear excerpts from a long, unfinished manuscript that Graham was still working on when he died. If there is madness in it, and self-destruction, there is also the poetry and wisdom these turn-of-the century passions could evoke. T.B.H.

People in the art news

Charles Jacques Sterling, curator of paintings at the Louvre, has accepted a professorship at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, effective February, 1962. He will resign his administrative functions at the Louvre but will continue to direct the compiling of a new catalogue of its paintings.

Richard McLanathan is leaving his post as Director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute's community arts program because of "a fundamental difference of opinion between the Trustees and himself as to the scope of the program."

Editorial continued from page 23

for stolen art, there are no fences, ransoms are practically impossible to procure. In most countries (including the U.S.A.), the buyer of a stolen work never gets title to it; in a few places (including Switzerland), twenty years' possession *plus* proof of *bona fides* purchase establishes ownership.

Even if a few suckers in Kuwait or Venezuela, Japan or Goa, could be found to pay for a picture they cannot claim to own or exhibit, they would have to be especially naïve and larcenous. It would be far easier to sell *them* genuine fakes purporting to be hot paintings than run the dangers of breaking and entering and smuggling. (The notion, evidently conceived by an organ called *The Insiders Newsletter*, that stolen pictures are going to "wealthy Communist leaders who prefer art to liquid assets . . ." was perhaps the silliest bit of ignorant speculation of the summer; typically enough, it was given credence by such otherwise hard-headed opinion-makers as *The New York Times* and Sylvia Porter. This is a piece of daydreaming in the pure *Izvestia* tradition: when anything goes wrong, blame the hyena capitalists, or the evil-men-in-the-Kremlin, depending on which camp is in trouble.)

The idea of a thieves market for paintings is only a little less ridiculous than that of the Hollywood Mad Scientist's cousin, the Crazy Billionaire, who has a secret paneled room, and when he is alone, the panels slide down noiselessly to reveal . . . The Goya *Wellington* stolen from the National Gallery, the Louvre's Cézanne *Card Players*; and perhaps the Uffizi's missing Pollaiuolo. The next suggestion probably will be that all the stolen paintings are in Havana.

One can only hope that the thieves soon will realize that they are caught up in a fad as useless to them as airplane hijacking or hula hoops. As to the owners of paintings that have been stolen, our sympathies go with them. Perhaps from their examples, more stringent, safer and methodical custodial and security measures will be initiated. And, perhaps, this ludicrous business of thefts of valuable objects which turn valueless in the hands of the thieves, may tend to change the direction of international public gossip about art, from its value in currency towards some of its other values. Not that we hope collectors will start talking about esthetics or museum trustees about radiance or dealers about sublimity. Heaven forbid! But the self-evident facts remain, for the owner as well as for the thief: A

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ART News
Dec. 1962

By Harold Rosenberg

Action painting: A decade of distortion

"In Greece philosophizing was a mode of action"—Kierkegaard

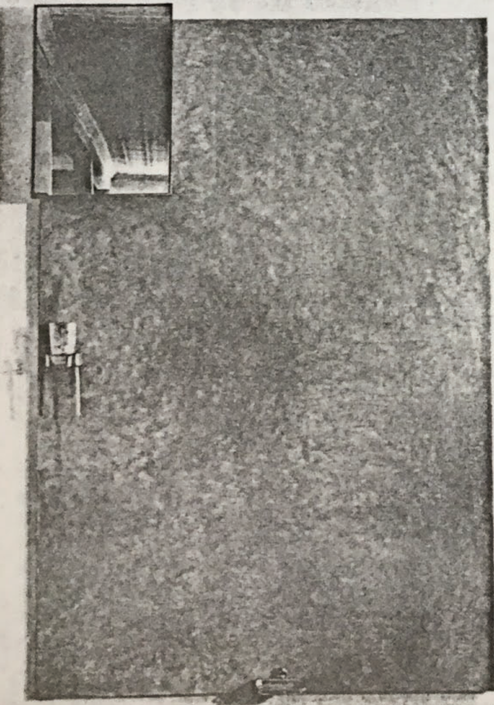
Action Painting solved no problems. On the contrary, at its best it remained faithful to the conviction in which it had originated that the worst thing about the continuing crisis of art and society were the proposals for solving it. In the thirties art had become *active*, having gratefully accepted from politics an assignment in changing the world. Its role was to participate in "the education of the masses." Painting and sculpture were to overcome at last their Bohemian isolation and gain an audience of non-sophisticated folk in the classical manner. An enticing outlook—except that practice was to disclose that to educate the masses the educator must himself take on the essential characteristic of the masses, their anonymity. For a contemporary mind no prospect holds a deeper dread. The rationalizing art of the social message found itself shuffling feebly between the ideal of the action-inspiring poster and the ideal of personal style.

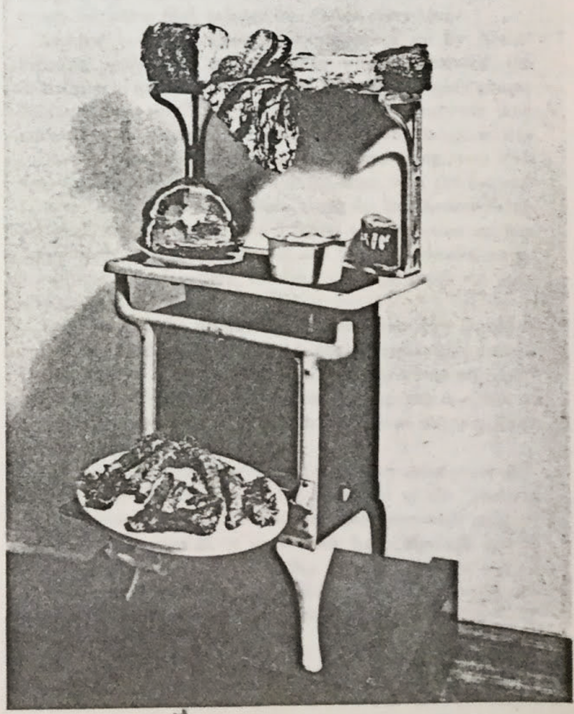
The War and the collapse of the Left dissolved the drama of The Final Conflict—the only kind, whether in religion, love or politics, for which the conflicts of creation may be put aside. The crisis was to have no closing date and had to be accepted as the condition of the era. If it ever did end, nothing would be left as it was now. Thus art consisted only of the will to paint and the memory of paintings, and society of the man who stood in front of the canvas.

The achievement of Action Painting lay in stating the issue with creative force. Art has acquired the habit of *doing* (a decade ago it was still normal for leaders of the new art to stage a demonstration on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum). Only the blank canvas, however, offered the opportunity for a doing that would not be seized upon in mid-motion by the depersonalizing machine of capitalist society, or of the depersonalizing machine of the world-wide opposition to that society. The American painter found a new function for art as the action that belonged to himself.

The artist's struggle for identity took hold of the crisis directly, without ideological mediation. In thus engaging art in the life of the times *as the life of the artist*, American Action Painting gave expression to a universal wish. Where

"The current revival of illusionism in art"—Jim Dine's *Pink Bathroom* [left] and Claes Oldenburg's *The Stove*. Both were among the Janis gallery's "New Realists."





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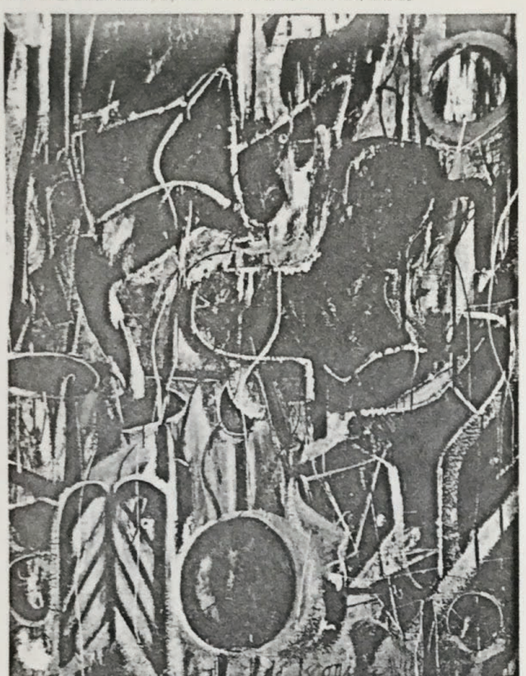
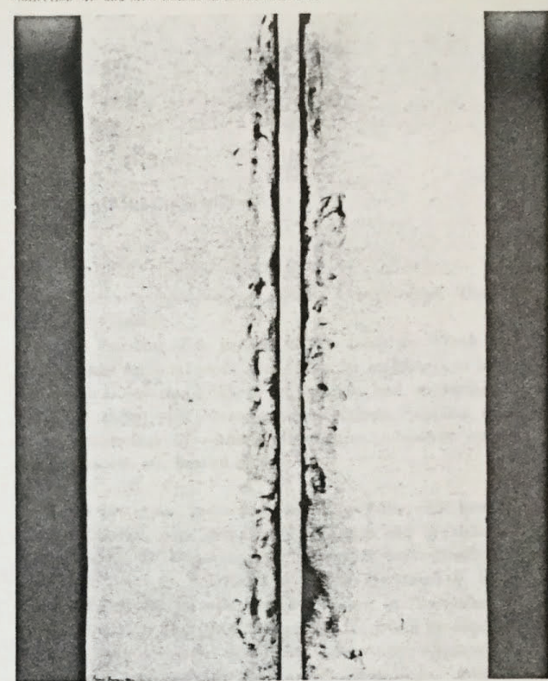
Lent to the Stone Gallery by Mrs. W. W. Dixon, Scottsdale, Arizona



Collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull, New York



Black and white paintings by two pioneers of the New York School: Willem de Kooning's *Light in August*, 1949, (55 inches high) and Barnett Newman's *White Fire, 2*, 1960 (96 inches high).

else but in this crisis would any living individual ever live? Throughout the world, works from New York reached to individuals within the mass as possibilities for each. Paintings produced painters—a development greeted with jeers by shallow minds. Painting became the means of confronting in daily practice the problematic nature of modern individuality. In this way Action Painting restored metaphysical point to art.

There was not in Action Painting as in earlier art movements a stated vanguard concept, but there were the traditional assumptions of a vanguard. Devoid of radical subject matter—except for occasional echoes of prisons, the Spanish Civil War, Pennsylvania coal towns, in the titles of paintings and sculptures—Action Painting never doubted the radicalism of its intentions or its substance. Certain ruptures were taken for granted. Foremost among these was the rupture between the artist and the middle class. Commercialism, careerism, were spoken of disdainfully as a matter of course. If the struggle against conventional values had been shifted inward, from, say, the group manifesto to dialogues between husbands and wives, the self-segregation of the artist from the "community" was still the rule. Indeed, the first gesture of the new painting had been to disengage itself from the crumbling Liberal-Left which had supplied the intellectual environment of the preceding generation of artists.

The rejection of society remained unexpressed. This may have deprived Action Painting of a certain moral coherence and reduced its capacity to resist dilution. Its silence on social matters is not, however, decisive either as to its meaning or its public status. Anti-social motifs in art are of doubtful consequence—society calmly takes them in its stride and extends its rewards to the rebels who painted them. This has been the case with Dada, Expressionism, Surrealism, even Social Realism. To explain the success of Action Painting as the pay-off for an opportunistic turning away from the issues of the day requires a blend of malice and ignorance. A rich Action Painter stoically enduring the crisis of society in his imported sports car makes a good comical stereotype—no serious idea is without its Coney Island underside—but the loudest guffaws come from materialistic cynics for whom high sales prices decide everything.

Another vanguard assumption was taken up by Action Painting with full intensity—that which demanded the demolition of existing values in art. The revolutionary phrase "doing away with" was heard with the frequency and authority of a slogan. The elimination of subject matter was carried out in a series of moves—then came doing away with drawing, composition, color, texture; later, with the flat surface, art materials. (Somewhere along the line Action Painting itself was eliminated.) In a fervor of subtraction art was taken apart element by element and the parts thrown away. As with diamond cutters, knowing where to make the split was the primary insight.

Each step in the dismantling widened the area in which the artist could set in motion his critical-creative processes, the irreducible human residue in a situation where all superstructures are shaky. It had become appropriate to speak of the canvas as an arena (at length the canvas was put aside to produce "happenings").

On the "white expanse" a succession of champions performed feats of negation for the liberation of all. "Jackson broke the ice for us," de Kooning has generously said of Pollock. It is possible, to paraphrase Lady Macbeth, not to stand on this order of the breaking. Be that as it may, behind Pollock came a veritable flotilla of icebreakers. As art dwindled the freedom of the artist increased, and with it the

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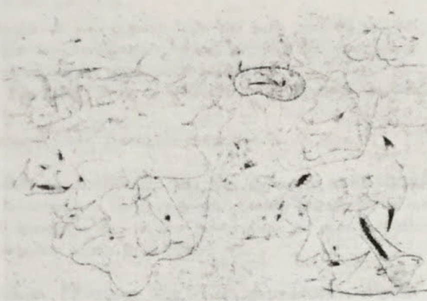
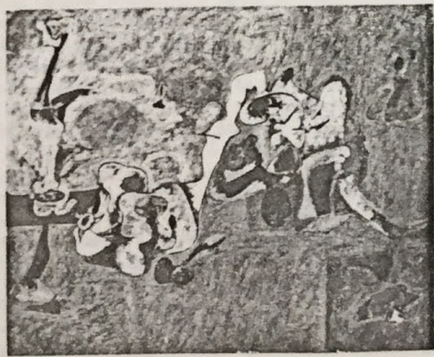


Gorky: *Study for the Plow and the Song*, pencil, 1944.
Lent to the Modern Museum by the Oberlin College museum

The Plow and the Song, 1946, 52 inches high.
Lent to the Modern Museum by Stanley J. Wolf, New York

The Plow and the Song, 1947, 50 inches high.
Lent by the Oberlin College museum



The Plow and the Song, 1947, 52 inches high.
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Milton A. Gordon, New York

Action painting continued

insignificance of gestures of merely formal revolt. Content became everything.

Action Painting also pressed to the limit the break with national and regional traditions which, by an historical irony, the political internationalism of the '30s had strengthened. As noted above, the crisis-nature of Action Painting made it the vocabulary of esthetic disaffection wherever experimental art was not barred by force.

To forget the crisis, individual, social, esthetic, that brought Action Painting into being, or to bury it out of sight (it cannot really be forgotten), is to distort fantastically the reality of postwar American art. This distortion is being practiced daily by all who have an interest in "normalizing" vanguard art, so that they may enjoy its fruits in comfort: these include dealers, collectors, educators, directors of government cultural programs, art historians, museum officials, critics, artists—in sum, the "art world."

The root theory of the distortion is the academic concept of art as art—whatever the situation or state of the artist, the only thing that "counts" is the painting and the painting itself counts only as line, color, form. How "responsible" it seems to the young academician or to the old salesman to think of painting as painting, rather than as politics, sociology, psychology, metaphysics. No doubt bad sociology and bad psychology are bad and have nothing to do with art, as they have nothing to do with social or psychic fact. And about any painting it is true, as Franz Kline once said, that it was painted with paint. But the net effect of deleting from art the artist's situation, his conclusions about it and his enactment of it in his work is to substitute for the crisis-dynamics of contemporary painting and sculpture an arid professionalism that is a caricature of the estheticism of half a century ago. The history of radical confrontation, impasse, purging, is soaked up into paeans about technical variations on pre-Depression schools and masters. The chasm between art and society is bridged by official contacts with artists and by adult-education and public relations programs. Artificial analogies are drawn between features of Action Painting and prestigious cultural enterprises, such as experiments in atomic laboratories, space exploration, skyscraper architecture, new design, existential theology, psychotherapy. An art that had radically detached itself from social objectives is recaptured as a social resource. In turn society is deprived of the self-awareness made possible by this major focus of imaginative discontent.

As silencing the uneasy consciousness of contemporary painting and sculpture falsifies the [Continued on page 62]

The Museum of Modern Art this month opens an exhibition of paintings, sketches and drawings by Arshile Gorky, arranged, like the reproductions on these pages, to emphasize the artist's creative processes, from first notations to highly finished oils. The show will thereafter travel to Chicago and the Washington, D.C. Gallery of Modern Art.

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Awards and prizes

The **C. Olivetti & Co.** firm of Italy has been granted the $20,000 Kaufmann International Design Award for 1962, for outstanding use of design throughout its commercial activities.

The Five Jury Merit Awards to works in the Walker Art Center's 1962 Biennial of Painting and Sculpture have gone to: **Cameron Booth,** Minneapolis, Minn.; **Ted Hegley,** Madison, Wis.; **Robert Meadows,** Hibbing, Minn.; **Richard Randell,** St. Paul, Minn.; and **John Rood,** Minneapolis, Minn.

New names this month continued from page 21

the nonchalant tiger evidently has less to worry about than the maharajah "returning to his four wives." Closely examined, the works are colored drawings; but as one moves away he sees the painting take on a cohesive unity. $175-$450. S.C.

Jean Davidson [Waverly; Dec. 7-23] determinedly reworks the bleak roof-top view from her 17th Street studio as a charmed fairyland. Her most ambitious canvases are her best where breadth of subject allows her peculiar aura full play. A realization of nothingness confronts the sitter in her figure pieces. Prices unquoted. T.A.S.

Nelson Howe [Preston; to Dec. 8] is a recent graduate of the University of Michigan whose assemblages seem drawn from the world of the dry-goods store: printed calicos, buttons, dress patterns, even a little painted hooked rug. These old-fashioned materials are combined in a tastefully modern way on surfaces with active irregular shapes and contrasts of tone. $200-$800. S.C.F.

Insho [Thibaut; to Dec. 15], a Japanese painter with a long career in his own country, presents the odd and characteristic phenomenon of an artist who, a master in his own tradition, combines it with those trends in Western art which seem to have an affinity with the Oriental, and yet the result is strangely awkward and uncomfortable. Using sumi ink on paper, he makes looping patterns in which the modeling capacity of the tonal ink is not sufficiently forgotten, so that the effect is of crudely attempted three-dimensional coils. A kind of cloudiness obscures the verve and dash of stroke essential to this kind of spontaneous painting. More successful is a large folding screen painted in tempera, where the paint is bright and flat enough to be self-consistent: yet here too the shining gold of the traditional silken ground is in ambiguous contrast to the deliberate primitiveness of the painting. Prices unquoted. S.C.F.

Kenneth Ewers [Erje] studied at the Chicago Art Institute and in Italy. Ewers splits the center away from two sides of a cataclysm of wild wet brush strokes and leaves an empty hole for them to fall into. One of his earliest and largest canvases loses this split center and blows strokes around like a autumn wind. This abandon is later regularized into a frantic hardness of falling strokes around a fold or split or middle like a Rörschach. Prices unquoted. V.P.

Marty Washburn [Judson; to Dec. 6] uses soaked-up color on far-flung shapes and trailing tails and bits of line in Kandinsky-esque still-lifes and portraits. His drawings are composites of almost anything and, when unencumbered, are quite lyric. $35-$250. V.P.

A. Maxwell Leland, Bernard Lennon [Burr; Dec. 2-15] show together. The latter offers traditional subjects handled with skill that come off best in landscapes. Leland devouts himself to seascapes, moody collections of wave, rock, foam and mist. Prices unquoted. J.H.B.

Action painting continued from page 44

relation between art and society, it also inverts the relation between the artist and art. The exclusion of subject matter and the reduction to the vanishing point of traditional esthetic elements are conceived not as effects of the loss by art of its social functions and the artist's sentiment of distance from the art of the past, but as a victorious climb up a ladder of technical transcendence. The tension of the painter's lonely and perilous balance on the rim of absurdity is dissolved into the popular melodrama of technical breakthrough, comparable to the invention of the transistor. Sophistries of stylistic comparison establish shallow amalgams which incorporate contemporary art into the sum total of the art of the centuries. By transferring attention from the artist's statement to the inherited vocabulary, modern works are legitimized as art to the degree that they are robbed of sense. The longing which Eisenhower recently expressed for art that did not remind him of contemporary life is shared by the functionaries of the art world, who, however, are prepared to transfer into another realm any work regardless of its date. The will to naturalize contemporary painting and sculpture into the domain of art-as-art favors the "experts" who purvey to the bewildered. "I fail to see anything essential in it [the new abstract art]," writes Clement Greenberg, a tipster on masterpieces, current and future, "that cannot be shown to have evolved [presumably through the germ cells in the paint] out of either Cubism or Impressionism, just as I fail to see anything essential in Cubism or Impressionism whose development could not be traced back to Giotto and Masaccio and Giorgione and Titian." In this burlesque of art history, artists vanish, and paintings spring from one another with no more need for substance than the critic's theories. Nothing real is "anything essential"—including, for example, the influence on Impressionism of the invention of the camera, the importation of Japanese prints, the science of optics, above all, the artist's changed attitude toward form and tradition. In regard to historical differences the critic's sole qualification is his repeated "I fail to see," while name-dropping of the masters supplies a guarantee of value beyond discussion. Yet grotesque as this is, to a collector being urged to invest in a canvas he can neither respond to nor comprehend, it must be reassuring to be told that it has a pedigree only a couple of jumps from Giotto.

Anything can "be traced back" to anything, especially by one who has elected himself First Cause. The creator, however, has not before him a thing, "traceable" or otherwise—to bring one into being he must cope with the possibilities and necessities of his time as they exist within him. The content of Action Painting is the artist's drama of creation within the blind alley of an epoch that has identified its issues but allowed them to grow unmanageable. In this situation it has been the rule for creative performance to be a phase in a rhythm of confusion, misery, letting go, even self-destruction—as the formula of Thomas Mann had it, of sickness, at once moral and physical. The lives of many, perhaps a majority, of the leading Action Painters have followed this disastrous rhythm from which creation is too often inseparable. Who would suspect this inception of their work from the immaculately conceived biographies and catalogue notes, in which personalities have been "objectified" to satisfy the prudery of next of kin and the prejudices of mass education.

The suppression of the crisis-content of Action Painting is also the basis of a counter public-relations which denounces this art as historically inconsequential and as gratuitously subversive of esthetic and human values. The ideological assault against Action Painting reaches the same pitch on the Right and on the Left. The former refuses to acknowledge that its standards are empty abstractions, the latter that its notions of the future have proven groundless. The fiction that the art of our time is a fulfillment of art thus finds itself at war with the fiction that our time could find a fulfillment—a conflict of echoes in a vacuum. Art criticism is probably the only remaining intellectual activity, not excluding theology, in which pre-Darwinian minds continue to affirm value systems dissociated from any observable phenomena.

The crisis that brought Action Painting into being has in no wise abated. On the contrary, all indications are that it has deepened—in regard to society, the individual artist, art itself. What has changed in the past ten years is that consciousness of the crisis has been further dulled—the increasing difficulty of dealing with it has probably furthered the spirit of abandonment. With the historical situation driven underground, the will to act has weakened and the inability to do so become less disturbing. I am describing the inner reality of the much-advertised success of vanguard art.

In the United States, the observation of Wallace Stevens which I quoted a decade ago in these pages has become the final judgment of all but the tiniest handful of artists: "The American will is easily satisfied in its effort to realize itself in knowing itself."

The future of Action Painting, relieved of its original stress, is not difficult to predict. Indeed, it was already visible a decade ago, before its acquisition of a name propelled it in the direction of a

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... produced by a few ... juxtaposition of colors and shapes purposely brought to the verge of bad taste in the manner of Park Avenue shop windows are sufficient cataclysms in many of these happy overthrows of Art. . . Since there is nothing to be 'communicated,' a unique signature comes to seem the equivalent of a new plastic language . . . etc." With the crisis-sentiment displaced by the joys of professionalism, it remained only to make labels of Anguish and Spontaneity. I do not wish to infer, of course, that artists have any greater obligation to be troubled or in doubt than other people.

The idea of this "trans-formal" art was never a simple one, nor would it be wise, as is often proposed, to attempt a very close description of it. An action that eventuates on a canvas, rather than in the physical world or in society, is inherently ambiguous. As Thomas Hess has mentioned, art history lies in wait for the Action Painting at its beginning, its middle and its end (what lies in wait for art history?). To come into being such a painting draws on the methods and vocabulary of existing art; in its process of production it invokes, positively and negatively, choices and references of painting; upon completion it is prized within the category of painting values and "hangs on the wall." In sum its being a work of art contradicts its being an action.

To literal minds the presence of a contradiction invalidates either the description or the object described. Yet it is precisely its contradictions, shared with other forms of action (since all action takes place in a context by which its purpose may be reversed) that make Action Painting appropriate to the epoch of crisis. It retains its vigor only as long as it supports its dilemmas: if it slips over into action ("life") there is no painting; if it is satisfied with itself as painting it turns into "apocalyptic wallpaper."

I have said that Action Painting transferred into the artist's self the crisis of society and of art. It was its subjectivity that related it to the art of the past, most immediately to that of another desperate decade, the Germany of the 'twenties, from which it drew a misnomer, "Expressionism."

There is also a non-subjective way of reacting to a crisis—perhaps this way belongs to a later phase in which hope and will have been put aside. I refer to the impassive reflection of the absurdities which become the accepted realities of daily life, as well as the emblems of its disorder. The projection of these absurdities according to their own logic produces an art of impenetrable farce—farce being the final form, as Marx noted in one of his Hegelian moments, of a situation that has become untenable. It is thus that I interpret the current revival of illusionism in art through techniques of physical incorporation of street debris and the wooden-faced mimicry of senseless items of mass communication. Here again, however, the crisis-content of the work is already being camouflaged in how-to-do-it interpretations which amalgamate the new slapstick art with an earlier esthetic of found materials.

In that it dared to be subjective, to affirm the artist as an active self, Action Painting was the last serious "moment" in art. The painters in this current have kept the human being intact as the ultimate subject of painting. All art movements are movements toward mediocrity for those who are content to ride them. The premises of Action Painting, however, are still valid.

Crisis in vanguard art continued from page 51

communication breakdown between the vital centers of art: Paris, Moscow, Berlin, Milan, New York. It was partly the free flow of ideas, artists, paintings and photographs that accounted for the stimulation and recontamination that kept the years 1906-14 alive and hectic not only with Cubism, but Futurism, Suprematism, Orphism, Synchronism, Rayonism and the others. With the war the artistic communities became isolated and hermetic.

It is interesting that the only movement of great vitality to emerge at the end of the war (and during it for that matter) was Dada—a movement that continued the sense of vitality and excitement of the prewar years, but abandoned its formal means. The formal means as the excitement itself seems to have been played out. It was as an anti-formal militancy that Dada had its vitality and its meaning. What was formal in the art of the late 'teens and early 'twenties was orderly and calm; what was anti-formal, Dada, was vital and exciting.

The issues discussed here were first raised by Meyer Schapiro in a brilliant article in 1952, "Rebellion in Art." Of the years 1910-13 he wrote, "It was then that the basic types of the art of the next forty years were created" and goes on to say, "Within a few years the creators of Cubism returned to representation, and Expressionism

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(Dominique de Menil
College Art Journal, Spring '71

THE ROTHKO CHAPEL

In Houston, on February 28th, an unassuming brick building, within walking distance of two universities and the medical center, will open its doors to the public. The evening before, prayers will be said in common by dignitaries of the Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant faiths, and the building will be dedicated as an ecumenical center.

This center, this "house of celebration", will probably be known the world over, as the Rothko Chapel, just as the conventual Chapel of the Dominican sisters of Vence, the Chapel of the Rosary, is known the world over as the Matisse Chapel.

Prevented by ill health to be present at the dedication, Matisse wrote to the officiating bishop a letter which was read at the ceremony. The Chapel, he said "took four years of exclusive and assiduous work and was the result of (his) whole active life". He considered it, "in spite of its imperfections, as (his) masterpiece".

Rothko left no letter to be read at the dedication ceremonies. Yet, those who approached him during the last crucial years know that, for him too, his last work was the result of his whole active life and that he considered it his masterpiece.

* * * *

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Rothko created a religious environment with fourteen large canvasses, distributed around the walls of an almost octagonal structure. Though each painting is impressive in itself, each derives full impact from its association with the others to which it is subtly related.

The floor plan, designed by Philip Johnson, was originally meant for a Catholic chapel. An octagonal shape seemed appropriate. It facilitated the participation of the audience, encouraged since Vatican II; it pleased Rothko, who had a special liking for the Torcello baptistry and church. The embryonic apse which breaks the regularity of the whole octagon was meant to provide space for a tabernacle. A narthex and two vestries completed the shape of the outside structure. This original floor plan was never altered.

The conflict which arose between the architect and the artist centered about the lighting of the paintings. Johnson had planned to cap the building with a truncated pyramid. It was to function as a kind of reversed funnel, diffusing the light on the walls. Rothko opposed the pyramid with quiet obstinancy. He wanted a skylight similar to the one he had in his studio. The paintings, he felt, should be seen in the same light in which they had been painted. His love for familiar surroundings was such that he wanted also to have the same cement floor, and the same kind of walls. The

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mere suggestion of white walls threw him into a panic. He had an abhorrence for pure white, which he equated to hospital sterilization. He liked irregularities, accidents. He liked ancient buildings with odd shapes, grown from "the weaknesses and follies of men".

It soon became obvious that the creativity of the artist and the creativity of the architects were working at cross-purposes. The great architect bowed out to the great artist. Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubry took over the completion of the Chapel. Howard Barnstone spent hours with Rothko, listening to him, trying to understand his formulated and unformulated desires and to interpret them in architectural terms.

Rothko had been approached to do the Chapel in the early spring of 1964. He responded enthusiastically, as if he had been waiting for such an opportunity ever since he had refused to deliver the paintings done for the Four Seasons restaurant.

As soon as plans had been drawn, Rothko set to work. By the end of the year he had rented a large studio on East 69th Street in Manhattan and had a full scale model of a segment of the Chapel. By late 1965 the general composition had been decided upon and some of the paintings were done, according to Roy Edwards who went to

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work for Rothko in January 1966. By June 1966, when Rothko left for Europe with his family, the canvasses were painted. In his ensuing work, Rothko adjusted, corrected and perfected the paintings in their relationship to one another.

The size of the canvasses created an immediate problem. The largest are slightly over eleven feet wide and fifteen feet in height. Rothko had some difficulty finding cotton duck wide enough.

Rothko decided on fourteen panels. He painted eighteen, for alternate possibilities. The four extra panels do not seem actually to fit in the scheme and it is difficult to know exactly what Rothko had in mind.

The panels are distributed symmetrically. In the apse: A triptych of monochrome paintings fifteen fight high. Right and left: two triptychs eleven feet high with black fields. All the other paintings are again fifteen feet high. The four paintings on the four small sides of the octagon are monochromes, and eleven feet wide. The one at the entrance, only nine feet wide, has again a black field.

Well advanced in his work, he decided to shorten by two and a half inches the two paintings right and left of the apse. He

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had discovered that they looked lower than the paintings in the apse and he had corrected the visual illusion.

* * * *

The basic color is achieved by a mixture of alizarin crimson and black, with small additions of raw umber, sienna and sometimes a tinge of blue pigments. It varies from a deep maroon to a slightly more purplish and lighter maroon. Half of the paintings have a black field. These fields were outlined by Rothko in charcoal directly on the painting. Roy Edwards, his assistant, reports that Rothko could work a whole month experimenting on half an inch.

Within the severe limitations he had set for himself, Rothko worked relentlessly. A careful look at any of the black fields reveals successive stages. At first, the field occupied only the central part - an opening in a wall into the night. Step by step the field was enlarged, leaving only a narrow margin of color. The night had invaded the wall.

Indeed, as Rothko progressed in his work, his paintings became darker. The Chapel venture, which conjured his heart, soul and total energies, evokes the pursuit of mystics, entering into "silent darkness". It is away from the support of words and images

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that God can be approached. Fulfillment rewards renunciation. Rothko did try "more" and discovered it was "less" - he said - and so he resolutely affronted the less.

A secondary scheme modulates this trend toward transcendental abstraction. The two axial paintings, at the entrance and in the apse, are as dialectically opposed as the mosaics in Torcello's church, the Last Judgment and the celestial vision of the Madonna and Child. These powerful images hovered in Rothko's mind and consciously he recreated the same tension. A hanging black field, like an impending doom, at the entrance, is cancelled out by the central panel of the apse, painted in a warmer tone - a more vibrant purple.

Rarely did Rothko comment on his paintings. Words were unnecessary. As one sat with him in his studio one knew he was up against a supreme challenge. Here he fought alone an agonizing battle, here he enjoyed victory as he watched the reactions of the first onlookers. Here he dreamed, worked and died.

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Pollock's 'Lavender Mist' Sold To National Gallery in Capital

Jackson Pollock's "Lavender Mist" is 7 feet 3 inches by 9 feet 10 inches
One of the key works of the artist's classic period

By GRACE GLUECK

The National Gallery of Art in Washington is buying one of the last major Jackson Pollock paintings in private hands, "Lavender Mist," done in 1950. Gallery officials would not comment on the price yesterday, but trade sources said it was at least equal to and possibly more than the $2 million announced for Pollock's "Blue Poles," sold in 1973 to the National Gallery of Australia.

The painting was sold by the artist Alfonso Ossorio, of East Hampton, L. I., who bought it for about $1,500—in monthly installments — in 1950 from a Pollock show at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York City.

Yesterday, Mr. Ossorio would not comment on the sale, transacted, it was learned, through Thomas Gibson, a London dealer.

"I'm delighted that it's coming to us—it's a splendid picture," said Charles Parkhurst, assistant director of the National Gallery, yesterday. Speaking in the absence of Carter Brown, the gallery's director, he said the gallery had been "interested" in the painting since at least 1971, and had held a number of discussions with Mr. Ossorio before "hard bargaining" took place recently. Several years ago, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, to which Mr. Ossorio had offered it for less than $1 million, turned it down.

'Year by Year' Increase

Trade sources suggested that Mr. Ossorio had used the sale of "Blue Poles," by the dealer Ben Heller in 1973, as a guideline in the sale of "Lavender Mist." Mr. Parkhurst refused to confirm that yesterday, noting only that the price of "Lavender Mist" had increased "year by year," and that the "Blue Poles" sale had "undoubtedly been a factor in the rising Pollock market."

Asked to comment yesterday, Mr. Heller laughed and said, "I think I should get a commission."

Painted two years before "Blue Poles," "Lavender Mist" is considered one of the key works of the artist's classic period, when he rhythmically built up the surfaces of his pictures by dripping commercial paint on to canvas to form a sensuous, overall image that gives the appearance of a vastly complicated web.

Low-keyed in color, the painting, which measures 7 feet 3 inches by 9 feet 10 inches, is somewhat smaller than "Blue Poles," and lacks its thrusting vertical lines.

Shares Top of Oeuvre

But, in the opinion of some critics, it is a finer painting than the later work. Speaking in his capacity as an independent writer on the work of the artist, William Rubin, chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, said yesterday, "'Lavender Mist' shares with 'Autumn Rhythm,' [owned by the Metropolitan Museum] and 'One' [owned by the Museum of Modern Art] a position right at the top of Pollock's oeuvre."

Art observers had awaited the sale of the painting to an institution for many years, and the disclosure that it will go to an American, rather than a foreign museum, brought favorable comment.

Of particular interest is its sale to the National Gallery, because Washington has had no major Pollock work until now. Indeed, the only two works by the artist in Washington museums at all are two small collages—a medium untypical of Pollock—in the Phillips Collection and in the Hirshhorn Museum.

The National Gallery, which has only recently committed itself to the purchase of modern art, is assembling a collection of masterworks in the field for its East Building, now under construction and expected to open in March 1978.

"There was no high pressure in the sale—we had continued to express interest in the work to Mr. Ossorio," explained Mr. Parkhurst, "and indicated to him that we'd like to find a donor for it. We had been back and forth on price. But no hard bargaining took place because we didn't think he was actually going to sell. We were very surprised recently when he gave us the word to get in touch with his London dealer."

Far Above Previous Prices

Only three very large "wall-size" works of Pollock's "classic" period exist: "One" and "Autumn Rhythm" in New York, and "#32," a black painting, owned by a German museum. "Lavender Mist," somewhat smaller than the other three, was considered the last sizable work of the "pure" classic period available for sale.

Dealers in New York, who agree the Australian sale ad—as one put it—"completely remade the market," recalled that in 1968, when the Museum of Modern Art acquired "One," the $350,000 it had paid seemed a huge price. Even today, the auction record for an American painting is $315,000, paid last June for James Peale's "Washington and His Generals," and for an Abstract Expressionist painting, the record is $190,000, paid in May for Mark Rothko's "Sienna, Orange and Black on Dark Brown."

'Illustrious Corpses' Is a Disappointing Movie

ILLUSTRIOUS CORPSES (Cadaveri Eccellenti), directed by Francesco Rosi; screenplay (Italian with English subtitles) by Mr. Rosi, Tonino Guerra and Lino Januzzi, based on the novel, "The Context," by Leonardo Sciascia; executive producer, Alberto Grimaldi; director of photography, Pasquale De Santis; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; music, Piero Piccioni and Astor Piazzolla; a co-production of Produzioni

to effect a plot involving the fate of the nation.

"Illustrious Corpses" is full [illegible] individually arresting details, su[illegible] as a sequence shot in an ancie[illegible] catacomb and a scene in wh[illegible]

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Monday

Dear C. Great letters have crossed in the mail, once again. Dorothy Dehner's phone: OR4-8720. She's on lower Fifth Avenue and in the phone book.

A new character has come into my life and radio program: her name is Nona Squash, an unassimilated Brooklyn Jewish Indian with adenoid problems. She has an incurable predilection for art gossip, recently achieving notoriety with her volume of poetry Famous Men Who Have Breathed On Me. Am in <u>love</u> with Nona. Nona has no respect.

I guess I'll hear from you soon. I'm game for going back up North or entertaining you down here, whatever is more comfortable. Am delighted about all your news, and awestruck about the Princess amok.

A bientot

C.

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The Magee Carpet Company, Fifth Avenue, New York

picture, the artist also drags into it doubts about art, uneasiness about his identity, conflict with the environment, traditional bohemian ambiguity and defiance, even the crisis of contemporary society. The paintings of Gottlieb are impeccably organized, with every relationship between hues calculated with microscopic finesse, yet to Gottlieb these lucid, calm surfaces have signified cosmic cataclysm, as in the recent series entitled "Blast!" In a "Post-Expressionist" adaptation of Gottlieb's style, paintings like his would lose their ominous overtones and be named "Painting" or "Lavender and Blue."

Besides reminding the proud possessor, or the still prouder critical enthusiast, of the world that he and the artist share, Expressionist painting also reminds him of the distance between the artist and the art appreciator—a distance of pathos, since in our epoch the rule has been for the rhythm of creation to be a phase in a rhythm of confusion, misery, letting go, and even self-destruction. Expressionist painters have failed to live in a manner conducive to the peaceful enjoyment by society of the fruits of their labors. Their canvases and they themselves have been a nuisance both to the aesthete who wishes to react to the work of art exclusively as a pleasure-inducing object and to the history-conscious art expert and collector who seeks an objective trend with which he can identify himself and earn a place in the chronicle of contemporary art.

Thus, the turn against Abstract Expressionism by proponents of vanguard art has been motivated less by impa-

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"Americans 1963," at the Museum of Modern Art, is the coolest show in town in any medium, except for the "Toward a New Abstraction" exhibition, at the Jewish Museum, where the paintings themselves add awnings and pistachio ice cream. (I should mention that the Jewish Museum starts a two-week vacation on Friday, June 14th.) My colleague in the Talk of the Town department inhaled the spirit of reconciliation behind the façade of the "premeditatedly outrageous" at the Museum of Modern Art and, like the dying Falstaff, "a' babbled of green fields," but he left to these columns the unkindly task of critical elaboration. In this assembly of art works there is not an Expressionist stroke or shape, except for two wood carvers, Gabriel Kohn and Michael Lekakis—plus, to confound the doctrinaires, Claes Oldenburg, leader of the "pop" artists, who says that he is for an art that "accumulates and spits and drips," and proves it by the surfaces and the draftsmanship of his enamelled hamburgers, his sewing machines, and his 7-Up lettering. Lekakis's dancing wood whorls and Kohn's leaning and interlocked free forms in laminated wood remind us that at the moment a vigorous surge of Abstract Expressionism is occurring in sculpture. Its fate in painting has, however, been sealed, at

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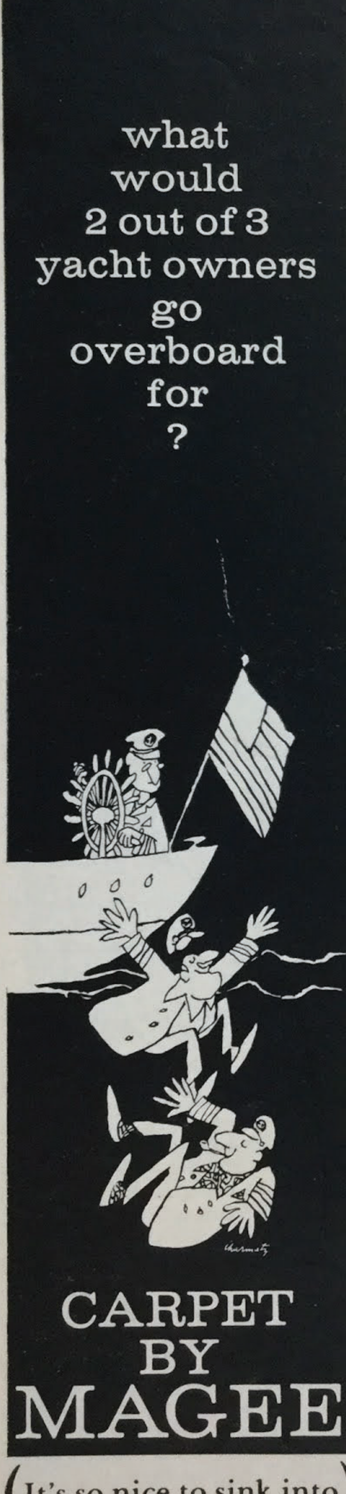

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The Magee Carpet Company, Fifth Avenue, New York

THE ART GALLERIES

Black and Pistachio

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM may not be as dead as we keep being told it is, but there is no denying the will to see it dead. For professionals of the art world—dealers, museum directors, critics, contemporary historians—the largest flaw in the success achieved by American painting during the past dozen years has been the overemphatic presence of the artist and his personality in the work. In the most popular sense of the term, American painting has been excessively "Expressionist." Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, Guston have invested their canvases with too much freedom, too much angst. Rothko, Still, Gottlieb, Newman have brought to theirs too much of the arbitrary and the absolute. In thrusting himself or his idea into the picture, the artist also drags into it doubts about art, uneasiness about his identity, conflict with the environment, traditional bohemian ambiguity and defiance, even the crisis of contemporary society. The paintings of Gottlieb are impeccably organized, with every relationship between hues calculated with microscopic finesse, yet to Gottlieb these lucid, calm surfaces have signified cosmic cataclysm, as in the recent series entitled "Blast!" In a "Post-Expressionist" adaptation of Gottlieb's style, paintings like his would lose their ominous overtones and be named "Painting" or "Lavender and Blue."

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Thus, the turn against Abstract Expressionism by proponents of vanguard art has been motivated less by impatience for something new than by a will to reject what has been done—a rejection that had previously manifested itself in the systematic nibbling away of the meanings of Abstract Expressionist works through translating them into purely aesthetic terms. The initiative for the turn has come less from painters and sculptors than from the art press and other powers in the art world. The major objective has been to displace the artist, with his maladies of creation, in favor of a new kind of aesthetically sophisticated craftsman, satisfied to exhibit his skill in manipulating subject matter or some painting idea. Institutional support for this goal is by now practically unanimous in New York; *Art News* is the only organ that stands against it. Official sponsorship this season has gone overwhelmingly to the deadpan extracts from the daily scene known as "pop" art and to depersonalized abstraction and emblem-making. Exhibitions have been cleaned up, have become what one might term *mahler-frei*, or artist-free.

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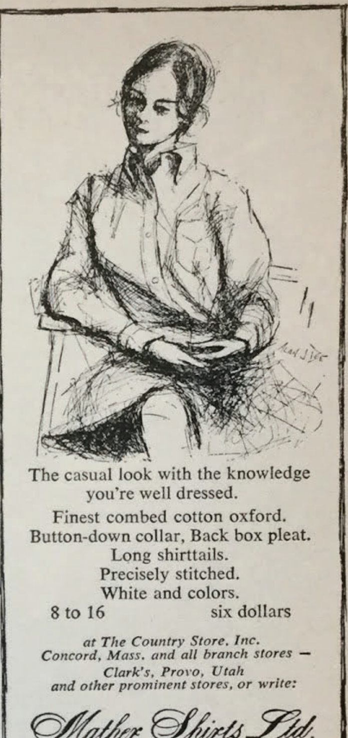
the Museum of Modern Art show as elsewhere; otherwise, it would be hard to explain why half a dozen artists (among them such leading painters as Esteban Vicente and Jack Tworkov) who have never been included in the "Americans" exhibitions at the Museum should not have replaced artists in it.

The pictures first met on the gallery floor are exercises in eye-shifting dispositions of crosses, rectangles, and circles in variations of color value and size. The statement by the artist, Richard Anuszkiewicz, in the Museum catalogue helps put the spectator in the proper tiled-laboratory mood: "My work is of an experimental nature and has centered on an investigation into the effects of complementary colors of full intensity when juxtaposed and the optical changes that occur as a result," and so on. This mood will not be disrupted in the cubicle of Sally Hazelet Drummond, whose careful over-all diffusions of colored dots that drift toward centers of density bear such titles as "Bluebird," "Hummingbird," and "Drone," and who believes that "all great art is an attempt to reveal the structured, infinite, and beautiful order that lies deep within all existence." David Simpson's paintings are composed of horizontal bands of color with occasional blottings, and he is equally concerned with the beautiful, while being, of course, mindful of the new. Robert Indiana, an adapter of signs and stencil markings; Chryssa, a more resourceful sign-maker and manipulator of patterns, imprints, and lettering; James Rosenquist, with his collage effects of advertisements, which here tend toward an undisturbing Surrealism; Jason Seley, a sculptor who "adds" and "subtracts" auto bumpers into constructions often endowed with art-historical titles; Marisol, whose painted-wood-and-plaster cutouts can give the Mona Lisa and George Washington a family likeness to Buster Keaton—all these give predominance in the show to the idea man and to an art in which there is no one in the picture, or, if there is, someone who is keeping mum. Lee Bontecou's erotically menacing protrusions of steel, wire, and canvas, with their sixteen-inch-gun apertures and smoky crevices, are the only non-neat items in the exhibition. (The enamelled surfaces of the Oldenburgs give his "spit" a sanitary look.) Yet a reverse effect is created by her drawings, which have the mechanical precision of the art of the early part of the century. In this art of revivals—for actually there is nothing new either in this show or in the one at the Jewish Museum—Bontecou's reliefs return



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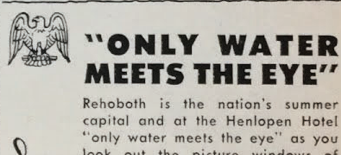

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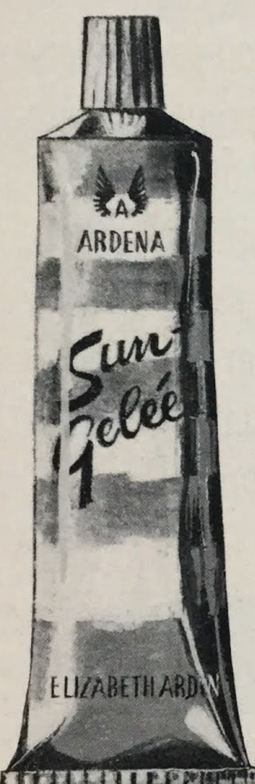

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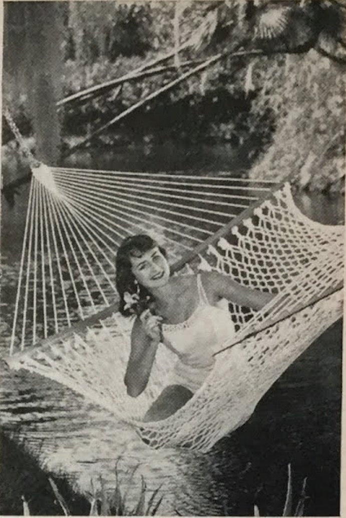
legitimately to Duchamp and Dada; like Kohn, Lekakis, and Oldenburg, she escapes neo-aesthetic blandness. On the other hand, Edward Higgins' welded-steel-and-painted-plaster sculptures are emblems in three dimensions, and might seem at first glance to belong with the other contrived images in the exhibition, yet they do not quite meld into the cold décor, for Higgins' conceptions have hallucinatory overtones and suggest—particularly the piece called "Untitled"—that they owe more to imagination than to calculation. Another imaginative artist, Richard Lindner—a well-known Surrealist, whose work is represented by an excellent selection—has been growing bolder and sexier. It is interesting to note in the context of this show, of which, in the main, art is the sole ideal, that both Lindner and Higgins state in the catalogue that they rarely think about art and have doubts about its importance.

There are no doubts in the mind of Ad Reinhardt. He knows exactly what art is, and even more exactly what it is not. Reinhardt, who descends to us from the dogma-ridden thirties, is the neo-aesthete par excellence. He has combined historical inevitability ("The one direction in fine or abstract art today is in the painting of the same form over and over again") with aesthetic objectives purified of all content or reference ("The one subject of a hundred years of modern art is that awareness of art of itself, of art preoccupied with its own process and means, with its own identity and distinction"). His statement in the Museum catalogue, five or six times the length of any other, lays down the law that "art-as-art is nothing but art" and the dictum "No Expressionism or Surrealism. 'The laying bare of oneself,' autobiographically or socially, 'is obscene.' " (Reinhardt's quotations are attributed in a footnote to "the ancients;" their application to contemporary painting is, of course, his own.) In my opinion, Reinhardt is the intellectual pivot of the new art that is offered as a replacement for Abstract Expressionism. This painter of evenly tinted all-black, all-square canvases of identical size is the link between prewar ideological painting and the current purist products presented at both the Museum of Modern Art and the Jewish Museum. He is also a theoretical focus of "pop" art by way of his war of nerves against contemporary creation, the drive of his own painting toward zero, and his paralleling of the Orientalism of John Cage, the mentor of the "pops." The "new" abstraction is derived from a historical self-consciousness about be-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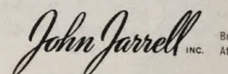

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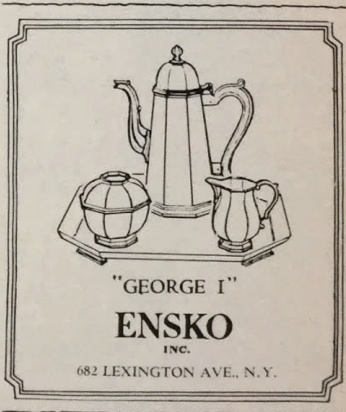
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ing new and radical, combined with the flight-from-politics impulse of the past fifteen years to deny all content or values in painting except those of art. Like Rothko and Newman, Reinhardt conceives of an art of one idea, which may be repeated with minuscule variations from painting to painting. (To get rid of all visible variations took only one more logical step.) In this respect, he is an Abstract Expressionist, and his work has been appreciated in the Abstract Expressionist context. Yet no one has pursued with more fanatical persistence a program of exorcising the artist from his work and destroying the social and intellectual communion among artists. That his services as the would-be executioner of Abstract Expressionism have awakened not a flicker of appreciation from other enemies of this movement is one of the ironies of his end-of-the-line situation as an Abstract Expressionist. The "black monk" of the Abstract Expressionist crusade, Reinhardt represents the domination of art by ideology to the most extreme degree. He calls for a type of painting utterly ruled by concept and executed according to recipe. Of all ideas in contemporary art, Reinhardt's idea is the most powerful, since it seeks not to oppose other ideas or insights but to obliterate them. He is the disciple in art of the Lenin who in 1907 characterized his attacks on other Socialists as follows: "That tone, that formulation, is not designed to convince but to break ranks, not to correct a mistake of the opponent but to annihilate him, to wipe him off the face of the earth." All painting is to sink into Reinhardt's black, square trapdoor. "The one thing to say about art," he writes, "is its breathlessness, lifelessness, deathlessness, contentlessness, formlessness, spacelessness, and timelessness. This is always the end of art." On a page of the catalogue following this credo, a profile photograph of Reinhardt brooding in shadowy silhouette at the end of a wooden bench against a square window of his studio reinforces his poetry of grand negation at the same time that it contradicts it by setting the artist in the foreground of his characteristic square composition.

In the happy galleries of the Museum of Modern Art show, Reinhardt's works had to be roped off, as if they might bite. His paintings, a guard told me, had stimulated more hostility than any works since Dubuffet's. I suggested that the Dubuffets looked more aggressive. "These are aggressive enough in their own way," he replied. He was right, of course. Yet there is a difference. Dubuffet bites the art public,

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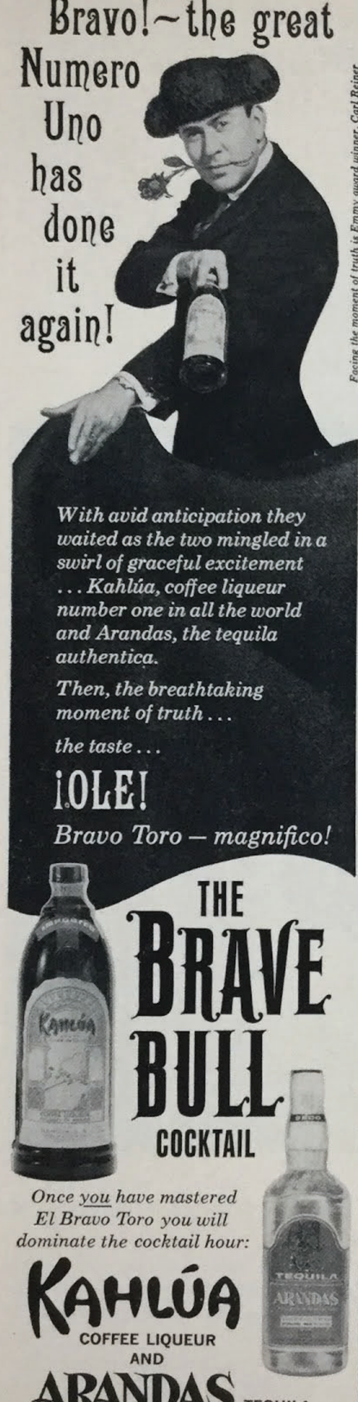

Reinhardt other artists. "The one struggle in art is the struggle of artists against artists, of artist against artist, of the artist-as-artist within and against the artist-as-man, -animal, or -vegetable," he writes. Or, as the Leninist slogan of the thirties put it, "The main enemy is at home."

THE Museum of Modern Art exhibition is a fair reflection of official concepts of what is new in art in 1963; apart from the effects of its presentation, it makes no attempt to intrude any philosophy or program into what is being done. Quite different in intention is the "Toward a New Abstraction" exhibition at the Jewish Museum—as scandalous a piece of steam-rollering as has appeared even in these days of planned hero-making. Never has mere decoration been presented with more pretentiousness and yet remained mere decoration. If the Museum of Modern Art selections combine the mind-crushing dogma of Reinhardt with eye-catching froth, the connection between dogma and taste inspiration is exposed in the stage setting of the nine painters at the institution on Fifth Avenue. Each artist has a critic to back him up—no mere statement by the artist, as in the Museum of Modern Art catalogue. Among the lenders to the show are other critics and art historians. In compensation, and to further certify the cementing of unity between the artist and his audience, the introduction to the catalogue was written by a prominent collector of contemporary art who was once devoted to Abstract Expressionism but who now, in bellicose tones, characterizes current art history as a fortunate liberation from the influence of Willem de Kooning. "What was taken to be a revolutionary style in the late forties was, in reality, the logical extension, final flowering, and summation of an era: the post-Cubist art of Europe," he writes. Having thus disposed of the kind of painting that put American art on the first plane of interest throughout the world (I am told that Europeans are marvelling at the present sabotage in New York of the painting that made it a global art capital), our collector-prognosticator speaks of "true inheritors and implementors of our new abstract traditions." (I trust that in using the self-contradictory term "new traditions" the author of the introduction was not misled by the phrase "the tradition of the new.") The work of these heirs is, we are told, "revolutionary," but "the attitude toward the work is non-expressionist; it is ordered, constructed. It is painting of a careful

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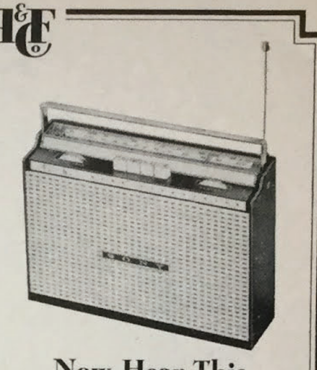

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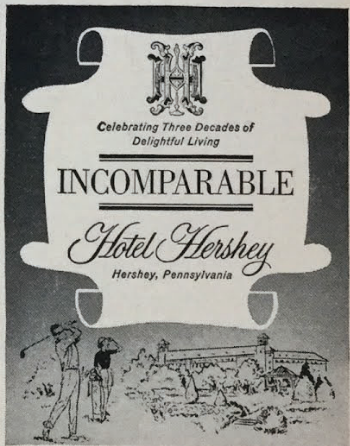

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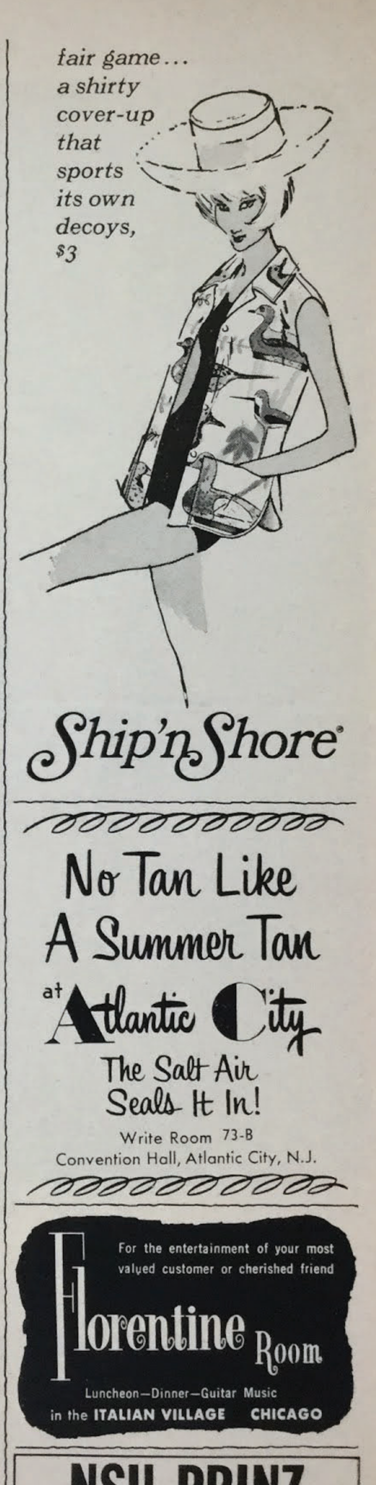
and visibly wrought balance. . . . The painting appears as a preconceived idea and . . . the stress is on the finished work." The ideological and craft essence of the new art apparently made it possible for "those of us who have planned and discussed this exhibition [to find] it relatively simple to delineate who belonged, who didn't, and who was on the borderline and why." The crux of the new revolutionary, conceptual, orderly, constructed, and balanced paintings that so readily revealed their secrets to the man with the checkbook is that "there is no longer that total sense of identification [of the artist] with the work; rather there is a sense of discretion, of removal which says, 'I am no longer the painting and it me. It is there, and it is what I say, but it is not all of me, for I have something left outside of it with which I control it and the rest of my life.' "

This first bourgeois manifesto in the history of art, with its call for mental and social security in painting, cannot, of course, be laid at the door of any artist. Yet some of the artists in the show would appear to have had a hand in composing it, and, as at the Museum of Modern Art, most are living up to its program. The paintings of Miriam Schapiro feature a central panel within a field of gray, like the band in a Newman, though it is wide enough to contain a series of symbolic objects set in compartments, in the manner of early Gottliebs, but one above another, and realistically painted. Since Miss Schapiro's favorite symbols are the egg and the golden arch, and since only three or four years ago she was an Abstract Expressionist of the wilder sort, her new borrowings and mythmaking kept casting into my mind thoughts of the goose that laid the golden egg. Another converted Abstract Expressionist overtaken by "discretion" is Kenneth Noland, who shares with Raymond Parker a huge, square room, its magnificent unbroken walls hung with gigantic paintings. From a decorator's point of view, the effect is stunning. As paintings, however, the only satisfactory works in the room are Parker's "Painting" dated 1958 and his "Painting" dated 1963. Noland's work is neither more nor less feeble and inhibited than it was before his abstractions became "new." He composes targets with a systematic blotting of the paint upon raw canvas, leaving a ghostly edge, as of run-off turpentine. His most recent paintings in the group abandon the target for arrangements of mathematical shapes inside one another. "Lebron," of 1961-62, a gray circle within a blue oblong within a yellow



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oval within a white circle within the gray square of the canvas, suggests by its attractive forms and savory pastel shades an enlarged season pass to some expensive club. (Perhaps that's what it is.) In "Spread," of 1958, the outer circle of the target flies outward and spreads, by blotting. This painting invites comparison with the more dynamic Expressionist poster in the New School for Social Research exhibition of German political art, which uses the same motif. "Lake," of 1959, is a diffused blot in the manner of Helen Frankenthaler, who, I suppose, did not "belong" in the show because she is too well known or because she has been too closely identified with spontaneity and chance in painting. In any case, her kind of paint blotting is characteristic of another exhibitor, the late Morris Louis, whose parallel stripes are vertical and diagonal, rather than circular, as in Noland's targets, and whose "Green by Gold" is the only entry of his that approaches a composition issuing from the experience of painting, as opposed to the execution of a design concept. Another composer of stripes with absorbed edges, Frank Stella, produces geometrical compositions resembling those of Anuszkiewicz, and also resembling, unfortunately, a ceiling ventilator installed almost directly above his canvases. With Noland, Louis, and Stella, the new abstraction reduces itself to the consistency of the paint, since in other respects their work adds nothing to that of abstractionists who have been with us for twenty-five years, such as Charmion von Wiegand, Burgoyne Diller, George L. K. Morris, and Richard Poussette-Dart, or newer "purists," like Ludwig Sander and Leon Polk Smith.

Ellsworth Kelly's entries are good old "hard-edge" painting, out of Albers and Glarner, very competently achieving electrical retinal results with blues, greens, and reds, or with blues alone. In the bold dimensions of his forms, Kelly is more interesting than Anuszkiewicz, who tends toward similar color effects. "Blue Tablet," of 1962, cleverly produces an illusionistic Newman by recessing half the canvas, thus creating a band of shadow that varies with the position of the spectator. George Ortman inlays his surfaces with arrows, crosses, circles, and hearts enclosed in diamonds and squares, often backed by stripes. All have a more or less specifically totemic intention, but while the holes in "Circle," of 1958, evoke a ball-rolling game at a fair, "New York City Totem," of 1962, is a diagram of sex

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that is more typical of his recent work. Ortman's blues, whites, purples, and yellows are strong, simple, and pleasing, and his puzzles invite speculation.

Besides Raymond Parker, the only painter in the show whose paint handling contains emotional quality is Al Held. Speaking of "belonging," Held, Parker, Ortman, and Kelly are the best painters in the show and do not belong in it. Held, especially, is a full-fledged Tenth Street Expressionist (his work has interesting affiliations with that of Nicholas Krushenick), who paints huge, heavily loaded, knobby-surfaced canvases in which the size is not merely an overexposing showcase for an unimpressive image, as with Noland, but the means of conveying an expansive and enveloping—including self-enveloping—emotion. Compare Held's "The Big A" with Stella's "Pagosa Springs"—a cutout of an "H" done in white and bronze parallel lines, like a radiator cover—and the difference between creative painting and what the introduction calls "a sense of discretion, of removal" will become clear.

In the last and most discreet artist, Paul Brach, the spirit of Reinhardt that reigns over this "New Abstraction" exhibition is, appropriately, brought fully to the surface. Brach paints squares, rectangles, and circles that disappear into a background of the same hue. His three largest canvases are all square, but he lacks the extremism of character or conviction to make them exactly alike. Brach, also an ex-Abstract Expressionist—none of the artists at the Jewish Museum is very young—has in the past few years become an artist of "invisibility," "voids," "subtraction." All in all, he has adopted the idea of one idea. But it is into a field of *blue* that his arrangements disappear, not into the black extinction of Reinhardt. The incantation that the latter has pronounced against Abstract Expressionism has had the effect not of precipitating a holocaust of painting but of turning some painters back toward craft practice, through which they are prepared to please the tastes of the emerging vanguard audience.

—HAROLD ROSENBERG

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[*From the Lincoln Bulletin, Lincoln School, Providence, R.I.*]

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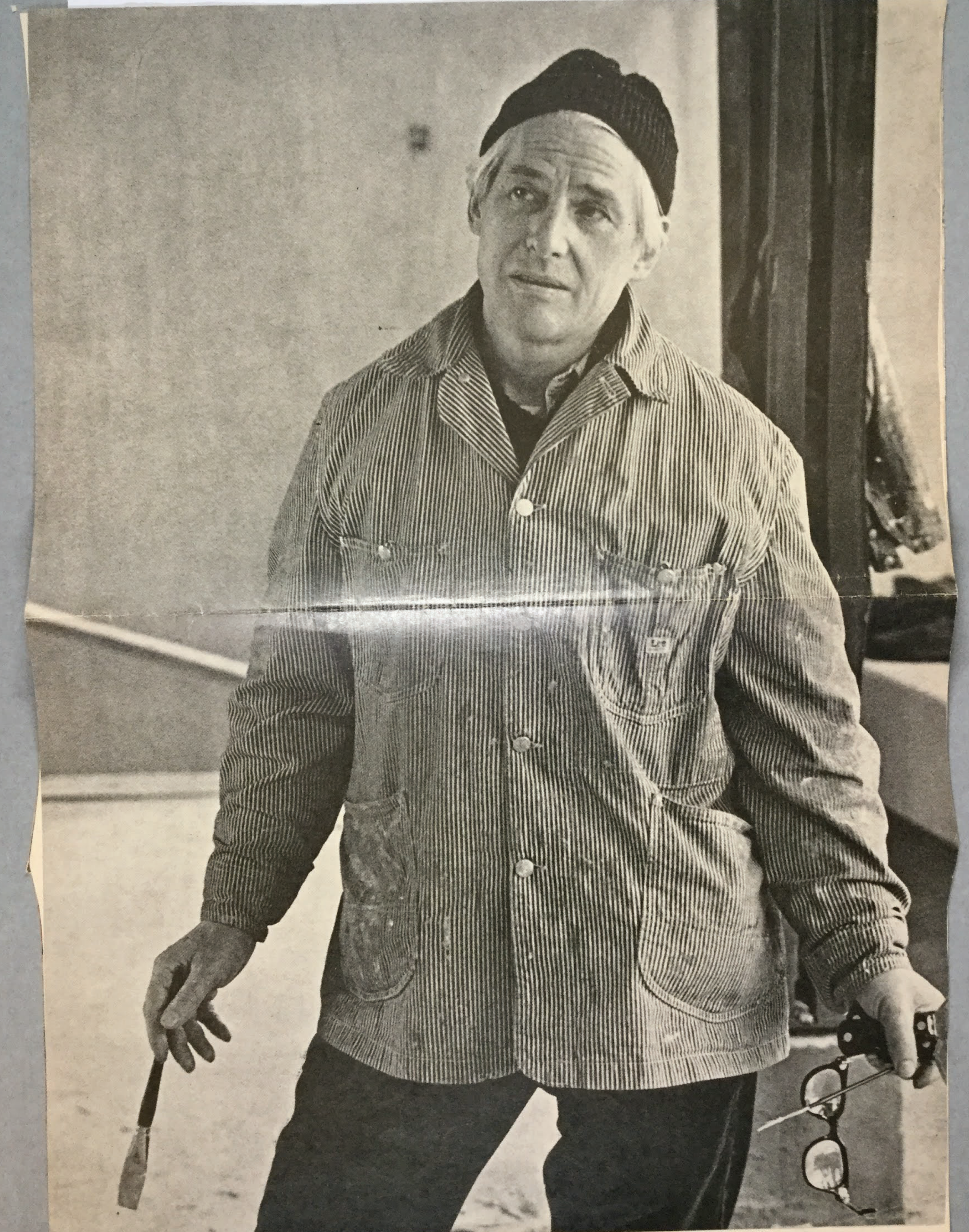

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DE KOONING

A GREAT ABSTRACTIONIST IN ACTION, A MAN WHOSE "DRAMATIC CHANGES OF MANNER HAVE BEEN DELIBERATE NOSE-THUMBINGS AT THE KNOWING"

Like Western civilization, like humanity itself, Willem de Kooning is constantly declared by critics to be in a state of decline, if not finished for good. Behind the current De Kooning there is always a better one who has faded into the past. In the 1940's the accepted verdict was that though he had shown great promise before the war, and was an important "artists' artist" he was too perfectionist (or neurotic) ever to produce a significant body of work. When within a few years, De Kooning's wavering effort had made him the dominant influence in the new American abstract art, he had, alas, already "betrayed" abstraction by devoting the next half a decade to his *Women* series. At first all but unsaleable, the *Women* were at length established only to call attention to the fact that De Kooning had petered out by returning to abstraction in a mode different from that of his "classical" period. The new enormously simplified "rural landscapes" emerging after 1957 were considered disappointingly empty by admirers of both the *Women* and of earlier crowded abstractions based on the city. More recently, women have been manifesting themselves in the landscapes, but instead of the imposing idols of ten years ago they are, alas again, light little girlies with rouged lips. In any case, they arrived too late to count. De Kooning, we are told once more, belongs to the past: last autumn, a new York critic-curator, riding what he hoped was the latest bandwagon, announced that the Abstract Expressionism of De Kooning had "lasted until 1959 or 1960." Buried as usual, De Kooning is today busy contriving new evidences of how bad he is compared with yesterday.

A maker of art objects is represented by his product, which can be placed with more or less stability in the art of his time. With De Kooning, in contrast, art is a performance which, like an event in history, is enlarged in retrospect. Nor has the attitude of the public toward his work been a matter of indifference to De Kooning; many of his dramatic changes of manner have been deliberate nose-thumbings at the knowing. In staging himself before his contemporaries he has exploited the showman's resource of surprise. Going along with or challenging prevailing values in art, he has, however, avoided the easier devices of attention-getting; for example, that of repeating the same image or employing spectacular materials or techniques. He has not, like most of his contemporaries, sought to create a personal emblem by which his canvases could be spotted at a glance. Nor has he consented to type himself, as his friend Gorky did in assuming the traditional guise and attitudes of the International Bohemian.

De Kooning has preferred to court the undefined, to keep his art and his identity in flux—perhaps the eagerness to dispose of him would be lessened were he more ready to confine himself to a category. Rejecting any external definition of himself or preconception as to the direction of his work, he has made his sole concern the maintenance of keeping in touch with himself as he is—an enterprise which, in this epoch so dis- (Continued on next page)

WILLEM DE KOONING, *opposite*, that consistent maverick among the abstractionists, is a bluntly handsome, grey-haired, fifty-nine-year-old painter who is not only one of the greatest of the Abstract Expressionists, but has also been counted out innumerable times. (He is shown here in his enormous new studio at The Springs, Long Island, which he designed to fit his own dreaming desires.) At twenty-one, De Kooning came to this country from Holland where he had had some training at the Academy of Rotterdam with spells of work for a company of interior designers. In Hoboken he varied his painting by using his brushes on houses. Later he painted murals for speakeasies and in 1939 worked for The World's Fair. Although his abstract paintings had appeared first in 1936, it was not until the middle of the 1940's that he became a known painter, an emerging figure of importance. By now wherever American art has a foot, the foot is usually De Kooning's. This photograph will be included in the book, *The American Masters*, by Brian O'Doherty and Hans Namuth. The article here is from the new Harold Rosenberg book, *The Anxious Object*, to be published in October. A moody man, De Kooning, long an American citizen, has a complete set of idiosyncrasies—among them, a reluctance to answer the telephone and a feeling of pleasure, said a friend, "in paying his income tax."

HANS NAMUTH

BY HAROLD ROSENBERG

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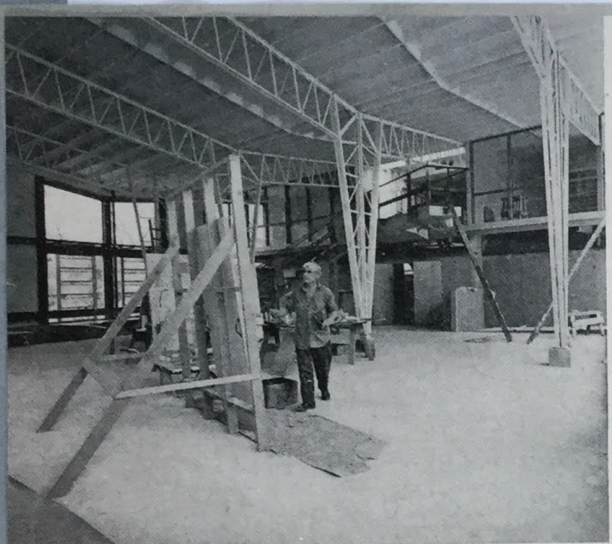

DE KOONING
IN HIS NEW STUDIO

turbed by fear of anonymity, has demanded the deepest insight as well as genuine moral independence.

Painting for De Kooning is not only a performance before an audience; it is a real action, comparable to crossing an ocean or fighting a battle. It is executed in silence, allowing a minimum of exchange with other minds; at times it even divides the artist's own mind, making what he is doing incomprehensible to him. Like prayer, his action of the spirit and intellect evokes extreme states; a succession of psychic tensions passes over into the self, affecting the artist's personality and behaviour. He is in a condition of constant heightening, depletion, transformation.

The logic of De Kooning's work lies not in its rational consistency but in the artist's unending struggle with painting and its possibilities. Each confrontation of the drawing board or canvas is a singular situation calling for a new act—and the act and the artist are one. The web of energies he has woven between his painting and his living precludes the formation of any terminal idea. No one could be more remote either from the "pure" artist, who paints what he conceives to be the essence of painting, or from the correct artist, who produces what is demanded by the history of art or by society. Throughout his career De Kooning has resisted every species of ideology—aesthetic, social, and philosophical. Picking up Kierkegaard's book, *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing*, his response to the title was, "The idea makes me sick." His own unexpressed standard is the standard of the mountain climber or the boxer, that is, a trained sense of immediate rightness. In the situation that keeps arising on the canvas, the artist-actor must be governed not by rule, nor even by aesthetic principle, but by tact. What satisfies this sense in one set of circumstances will fail to do so in another—few of De Kooning's paintings have escaped disappointing him (him, too!) when he looked at them later.

Except in the artifices of the theatre or the historian, an act has no beginning and no end. Contemporary painters are much concerned about how to start a work and how to recognize when it is completed. De Kooning breaks in anywhere, and gets out when he has to. He may commence a painting with a stroke of colour, by writing the letter "o" on the canvas, by sketching a nude. Most of the compositions for which he is famous are powerful middles, without beginnings or ends. A concept can be pushed to a logical conclusion; an act can only be abandoned. To be forced to abandon a painting used to plunge De Kooning into despair—often he would destroy this trace of his inability to reach a resolution. The build-up of energy would send him rushing agitatedly through the streets. In recent years he makes his exit from a painting more calmly: "I just stop," he explained in an interview.

In De Kooning's *oeuvre* there are long paintings and short paintings, in terms not of size but of the time they took to paint. His key works have tended to be the long ones: *Excavation*, finished in the spring of 1950; *Woman I*, begun almost immediately thereafter, on which De Kooning worked almost two years. These protracted acts, like the scores of hurried ones executed on small cardboards in 1957, took place at critical stages of De Kooning's development and produced dramatic alterations both in the artist and in American art. It is remarkable that in De Kooning tenacity is matched by a mastery of the rapidly executed, almost instantaneous, gesture; in many of the landscape-figure-abstractions of the last few years he has achieved through speed a lightning clarity and briskness unattainable in his more pressured compositions. One of De Kooning's outstanding qualities (compared, for instance, to Pollock or Kline) is the variety of tempo he has been able to introduce into his action without destroying its continuity. The least bit of a De Kooning partakes of his complex sensibility—in his case the high value placed on a sketch or even a scribble is justified by intrinsic qualities.

In action the mind seizes upon whatever lies ready at hand both within itself and in the visible world. As against what might be called the slimming tendency in contemporary art, the effort to produce masterpieces by the minimum means (a square on a square, one-colour paintings), a De Kooning canvas is as unrestricted as Union Square. His compositions devour everyday sights, odd thoughts, moods, theories old and new, paintings and sculptures of the past. He has the hungry multifariousness of the Renaissance Humanists, the "vul- (Continued on page 186)

"CLAMDIGGERS," OIL ON PAPER, ONE OF THE LATEST DE KOONING PAINTINGS

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DE KOONING

(Continued from page 148)

garity" of Rabelais and Cervantes. His abstractions and female figures are no less accumulations than if they had been put together out of newsprint, rags, and rubbish (some De Koonings do incorporate strips of tabloids, cut-outs of magazine advertisements, sections of discarded canvases). Ready-made materials are, however, too clumsy a medium to carry the "slipping glimpses" of De Kooning's insight. The constant interchange of image and symbol, direct impression and analytical generalization, can be seized only through the action of the brush. *Woman I* is a girl in a yellow dress whom De Kooning spotted on Fourteenth Street then forgot but who returned to life in the course of the painting, until she vanished forever in the cement-mixer of the De Kooning painting process. *Woman I* contains also mothers passed on East Side park benches, a madonna studied in a reproduction, E—or M—made love to, and the "grin," De Kooning tells us, "of Mesopotamian idols." Such a creation could not be the result of a mere combination of displaced elements, as in collage or Pop Art. Transformation had to be total, that is, to take place simultaneously in the psyche of the artist and on the canvas. Artists who boast of getting beyond De Kooning technically ought to ask themselves if they comprehend the difference in the objectives of his techniques and theirs.

Through the action of De Kooning's brush, things, persons, scenes, feelings are recorded in shifting forms that rerecord themselves in the eye of the spectator as on a strip of film; one looking at a De Kooning never sees the same image twice (recent paintings composed of pictures repeated in series parody this De Kooning effect). The gestures that brought the painting into being subsist in it not only through vestiges of energy—swipes of paint, splashes, smears—but through the constant forcing together of the visual ingredients of the painting.

For De Kooning problems of painting (how to draw the *Woman's* knees, how to keep the pigment from drying too fast) do not exist in isolation; they arise inside the moving mass of the painter's experience. Hence there is no final goal which a painting may reach ("I never was interested in how to make a good painting"), as there is no ultimate fact of which it can be the equivalent. One event makes another possible, whether or not it itself is perfectly executed. Designing a studio-dwelling for himself De Kooning completes a set of plans that fulfills all of his desires. The plans are ingenious and handsome, but no sooner are they finished than he starts a new set. The act of formulating the first conception has given rise to new possibilities, new problems. Any solution is but a point to be passed through on the way to another approximation. Perhaps the next gesture will bring the artist closer to his true self, that is, to something in him he did not know was there. But "closer" has only a symbolic meaning; for whether closer or less close to some presumed self of the artist, the work has been lived and is therefore the actual substance of his existence. "In the end," said De Kooning of his *Woman*, "I failed. But it didn't bother me. . . . I felt it was really an accomplishment." Failure or success, he can claim with Jaques of *As You Like It*, "I have gain'd my experience."

De Kooning's performance is also an "act" in the arena of art history, a display of skill and imagination put on before an imaginary gallery of the great masters. In painting the *Woman*, he has said, he wanted to see how long he could "stay on the stage" under the scrutiny of that immortal company. What saves him from presumptuousness is that he does not expect Michelangelo or Rubens to keep their seats until the curtain.

The intimate presence in his mind of the geniuses of Western painting is the secret of what is often referred to as De Kooning's ambitiousness. His consciousness of the art of the past as the context of his action belies the concept of self-effusion popularly associated with Abstract

(Continued on page 187)

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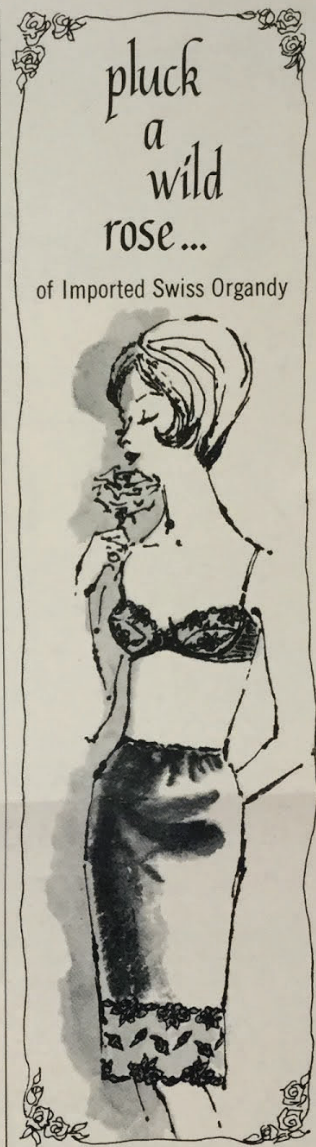
(Continued from page 186)

Expressionists. An art whose effort toward individual statement is keyed to complex judgments of the nature and history of painting has nothing in common with the daubs of children or chimpanzees. As a decorator's apprentice and Academy student in Rotterdam, De Kooning grew up with art as his trade and the masters of other centuries as his teachers and artisan-competitors. It was in New York's Greenwich Village that painting was transformed for him from a way of earning a living into what he has termed "a way of living." But De Kooning has never altogether shed his craftsman's attitude toward art and his feeling of matching skills with illustrious predecessors. His practice of painting as a traditional trade, on the one hand, and as a laboratory for investigating reality, on the other, has given his work a magnitude unsurpassed in his generation. It has also involved him in intense contradictions, often immensely fruitful but leading to unbearable confusions.

Among the intellectual advantages of his craft orientation has been his continuing skepticism toward vanguardist dogmas. Accepting the fact that our time has put every value of art in doubt, De Kooning, empowered by his sense of the traditional, has felt free to doubt also the doubt. It may be absurd for artists to continue painting the human figure—it is even more absurd to make a rule against painting it. Has "modernism" obliged the painter to take a position against women in painting? Against grass being green, snow white? "Forms," replies De Kooning, "ought to have the emotion of a concrete experience. For instance, I am very happy that grass is green." A line across a sheet of paper, if one puts a tiny mark in front of it, becomes the horizon approached by a ship. What is gained, De Kooning asks himself, by omitting that mark in order to make art "non-objective"?

Not some concept of what art ought to be but the range of the artist's experience, including of course his experience of art, is the source of value in contemporary painting. De Kooning is aware to an unexcelled degree how superficial it is to separate the natural world from the world of human artifice. Most art movements come into being through finding a new way of exaggerating this separation; they pit the natural (e.g., primitivism, self-expression) against the man-made (e.g., Pop Art, Neo-Abstraction) at the expense of the inherent synthesis of actual experience. By the measure of such movements De Kooning is not a "modernist." In over thirty-five years of creating art in New York, modernism after modernism has washed over his head, always affecting him yet without throwing him off his course.

At present, as noted above, De Kooning is again painting women, this time not eternal icons but today's cuties. His largest and most characteristic current creation is, however, the dwelling-studio in The Springs, Long Island, that has finally materialized out of those plans drawn by him over the years. Here grand ambition and galloping contradiction (the house as a self-extending "action" which the artist must execute through strangers) have once more brought into being the unfinished masterpiece. The vast, many-planed building of concrete, steel, wood, and glass concentrates the dramatic strains of De Kooning's art in flaunts of arbitrary platforms, staircases, balconies, recesses, whose only precedents are De Kooning's swooping paint strokes. It is a setting like the stage of an opera house in which the sole performance is the act of constructing the studio—whoever sits or stands in it seems about to burst into a declamation for or against the enterprise. It requires no great insight to predict that when the work on this creation stops—as usual the only meaning of "finish" with a De Kooning—persons from every sector of the art world will visit it and discuss the latest decline it represents in De Kooning.



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Delta – "Mondrian and de Kooning"
(under Mondrian)

N Yorker – Feb. 16, 1963 (Rosenberg)

DeK won top prize at Natl. show 1951 – which?

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Art: de Kooning Of East Hampton

Willem de Kooning's "Clam Diggers" (1964) at the Guggenheim Museum
The subject looks as if it were being devoured by the pigment that defines it

By HILTON KRAMER

SPEAKING of his predilection for "late art"—for the work that certain artists produce in their later years — Thomas Hardy once remarked: "I prefer late Wagner, as I prefer late Turner . . . the idiosyncracies of each master being more strongly shown in these strains. When a man not contented with the grounds of his success goes on and on, and tries to achieve the impossible, then he gets profoundly interesting to me."

For aficionados of such late art, this has already been a festive art season, with spectacular shows of late Matisse and late Cézanne. Now, with the exhibition called "Willem de Kooning in East Hampton," opening today at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (through April 23), we are offered yet another major survey of the late work of an artist universally acclaimed as a master—only in this case, of course, we are seeing the late, or at least the latest, paintings, drawings and sculpture by a living artist still working in a high tide of energy and aspiration.

Mr. de Kooning was 59 when he left New York in 1963 to live and work in East Hampton on Long Island. He is now 73. Except for two paintings that date from 1962, the nearly 100 works that have been assembled here by Dianne Waldman, the curator of exhibitions at the Guggenheim, were all produced in this period of residence on Long Island.

•

The first question that naturally comes to mind about this work is: What, if any, difference has geographical change brought to Mr. de Kooning's art? The short answer to this question is that the change in locale confirmed, even though it did not initiate, an interest in "landscape" as the area of the painter's primary esthetic focus.

But even this must be immediately modified. Mr. de Kooning has continued to be much occupied with the figure since his move to East Hampton. It still turns up in his paintings, espe-

1964)—the subject looks as if it were being devoured by the pigment that defines it, so in the "landscape" abstractions, the land, sea and sky disappear into the high-spirited disorderly gyrations of paint applied and reapplied with great speed and determination to the canvas surface.

To these paintings Mr. de Kooning brings an extraordinary energy and confidence, and a sensibility that is obviously deeply in love with the sheer painterliness of his medium, and very knowing about the delectable effects that this painterliness is capable of achieving. Whether he is evoking the figure or his memories of a landscape, or the memories of other paintings (which one suspects is often the case), there is a visual quality in his work that is arresting and seductive. We are never in doubt that we are in the presence of a superior artist.

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Why, then, do I find so much of this large exhibition so dispiriting? The color often sings, the pigment retains its fresh and succulent look, and the characteristic rhythms charm the eye with an appealing kinetic power. In the presence of so much that pleases, and is obviously meant to please, what can be wrong?

Perhaps the answer is to be found in those delectable painterly surfaces, which begin by seducing the eye and end—for this observer, at least—in a suffocating surfeit of sweetness and charm. There is a certain invertebrate quality to Mr. de Kooning's late work that turns soft and mushy under examination, as if it were an organism consisting of flesh without bones.

It is not that the paintings lack structure, but that the structure is often so slack and loose, so utterly feckless in the face of the demands of the painterly energy it is called upon to support, that it seems almost to amount to a failure of will. The surface dances with undiminished energy, but beneath its sensuous charms one senses a kind of esthetic accidier, an intellectual sloth, that yearns to cede everything in the picture-making process to sensual gratification.

It is characteristic of the late work

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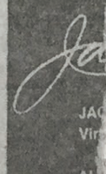

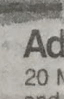
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But even this must be immediately modified. Mr. de Kooning has continued to be much occupied with the figure since his move to East Hampton. It still turns up in his paintings, especially in the 1960's, and all of the drawings in the current show are figure drawings. When the artist turned to sculpture during these years, producing his first bronzes, it was again to depict the figure.

Then too, the concept of "landscape" in Mr. de Kooning's painting is rather special. It has little or nothing to do with the literal representation of what the eye sees in the world "out there," but everything to do with what the artist feels about what he has seen in the landscape when he returns to the studio to face the canvas. Memories of space, light and color are distilled in the abstract gestures traced by a swift-paced, heavily loaded brush. In certain pictures, the observer may discern (or only imagine?) the blue-white "memory" of a swirling sea—as in "Screams of Children Come From Seagulls" (1975)—or a brilliant yellow-red "memory" of a sunset—as in the untitled painting, numbered "III" (1976)—but the result, in any case, is resolutely abstract.

The East Hampton "landscapes" are indeed the most orthodox examples of Abstract Expressionist painting that Mr. de Kooning has ever produced. In writing of the artist's earlier work, Mrs. Waldman observes that "Color, shape, space and tactility as they function in relation to the picture plane are his central concerns," and this remains true of the East Hampton paintings too. Just as in the figure paintings of this period—"Clam Diggers," for example, or "Woman, Sag Harbor" (both

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It is characteristic of the late work of certain masters that it represents both a summation of the past and a leap into a new realm of vision. But in Mr. de Kooning's late paintings, the summation tends only to be a reprise of all those surface qualities that so delight the eye, and the leap forward is toward something less serious and weighty.

What this means, in terms of pictorial style, is that Mr. de Kooning's painting has never quite recovered from its attempt to banish Cubism as a governing force. From the balance that was once struck between Cubism and Expressionism in the paintings that earned the artist his first renown in the 1940's, he has moved more and more into a realm where Expressionism dominates. With the loss of a Cubist imperative, a certain element of pictorial "conscience" has also been lost.

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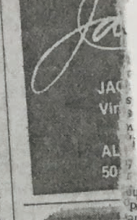
Of course, it goes without saying—or ought to—that Willem de Kooning remains one of our best painters, and this is an exhibition that everyone with an interest in modern painting will want to see. But artists of this stature demand to be judged—indeed, to be experienced—in the company of the masters. Any other standard is an implicit denial of the very accomplishment they are said to have achieved. And by that standard, it looks as if Mr. de Kooning's East Hampton period—or this much of it, at least—is not going to enter the annals of the greatest "late art" produced in modern times.



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MARCH 31, 1965.

DE KOONING SUES HIS ART GALLERY

Janis Filing a Counterclaim in Dispute With Artist

By MILTON ESTEROW

A dispute between two major figures in the art world, Willem de Kooning and Sidney Janis, broke open yesterday when the artist filed a $150,000 court suit against the gallery owner. In turn, Mr. Janis, the dealer, plans to file a $203,000 suit against Mr. de Kooning this morning.

Some part of the controversy are not clear. Mr. de Kooning's attorney, Lee V. Eastman, of 39 West 54th Street, said that the artist had begun proceedings on March 16 and that the Janis claim was a countersuit that started two days later.

Mr. Janis's attorney, Robert G. Kurzman, of 30 East 42d Street, painted a different picture. He said that the dealer's suit had been instituted on March 10 and that the de Kooning claim was a countersuit, having been started on March 18.

In his action filed in State Supreme Court yesterday, Mr. de Kooning, the 61-year-old abstract expressionist, charged that Mr. Janis, who is considered to be one of the leading American dealers, had not paid all the money due him. He asked for a full accounting of the gallery's sales of de Kooning works.

Charges Detailed

The painter also said that he had informed the gallery that it was no longer to sell his art and he demanded the return of many unsold works. He charged that the gallery had made a number of sales to itself and had "capriciously set more favorable prices for itself or those whom it favored for its own benefit and account, all to my damage and injury."

In his complaint, according to Mr. Kurzman, Mr. Janis charges that Mr. de Kooning "breached an exclusive contract with Mr. Janis by selling $450,000 of his works himself, on which Mr. Janis is entitled to $150,000 in commissions."

Mr. Janis also charges that the painter owes him $50,000 on a bank note ("Janis guaranteed the money when de Kooning said he needed $50,000 to finish his studio in East Hampton, L.I."). "Janis also advanced him $75,000 on which a balance is due $3,948.60," Mr. Kurzman said.

Interviewed in his gallery at 15 East 57th Street yesterday, Mr. Janis, a gray-haired, soft-spoken man, said: "So many people are beating at de Kooning's door that he feels a dealer is no longer necessary. He is selling the paintings himself."

Mr. de Kooning could not be reached. But his attorney, Mr. Eastman, said: "That's not true. De Kooning feels that dealers are most essential. He intends always to sell through dealers."

Contract Called Verbal

"Our contract with de Kooning goes back about 13 years," Mr. Janis declared. Like our contracts with all our artists, it's a verbal one. The gallery pays the expense of storage, delivery, of exhibitions, of catalagues and receives one-third commission.

He continued:

"Since 1961 de Kooning has sold a number of paintings himself. We don't go around with an adding machine but the art world is small and word gets around."

Mr. de Kooning, in his suit, said he did not know how much money was due him or the exact number of works he had submitted to the gallery. Mr. Janis said that about 30 to 40 de Kooning drawings, watercolors and oils were on hand at the gallery.

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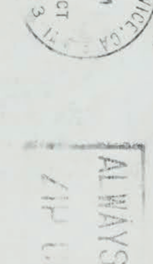

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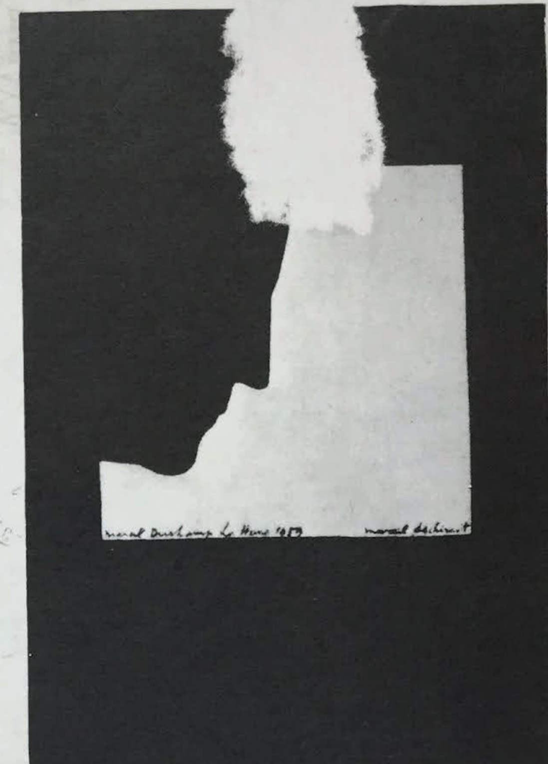

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DeKooning

The word "abstract" comes from the light-tower of the philosophers, and it seems to be one of their spotlights that they have particularly focused on "Art." So the artist is always lighted up by it. As soon as it—I mean the "abstract"—comes into painting, it ceases to be what it is as it is written. It changes into a feeling which could be explained by some other words, probably. But one day, some painter used "Abstraction" as a title for one of his paintings.

The aesthetics of painting were always in a state of development parallel to the development of painting itself. They influenced each other and vice versa. But all of a sudden, in that famous turn of the century, a few people thought they could take the bull by the horns and invent an aesthetic beforehand. After immediately disagreeing with each other, they began to form all kinds of groups, each with the idea of freeing art, and each demanding that you should obey them. Most of these theories have finally dwindled away into politics or strange forms of spiritualism. The question, as they saw it, was not so much what you could paint but rather what you could not paint. You could not paint a house or a tree or a mountain. It was then that subject matter came into existence as something you ought not to have.

From then on the idea of abstraction became something extra. Immediately it gave some people the idea that they could free art from itself. Until then, Art meant everything that was in it—not what you could take out of it. There was only one thing you could take out of it sometime when you were in the right mood—that abstract and indefinable sensation, the aesthetic part—and still leave it where it was.

Spiritually I am wherever my spirit allows me to be, and that is not necessarily in the future. I have no nostalgia, however. If I am confronted with one of those small Mesopotamian figures, I have no nostalgia for it but, instead, I may get into a state of anxiety. Art never seems to make me peaceful or pure. I always seem to be wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity. I do not think of inside or outside—or of art in general—as a situation of comfort. I know there is a terrific idea there somewhere, but whenever I want to get into it, I get a feeling of apathy and want to lie down and go to sleep. Some painters including myself, do not care what chair they are sitting on. It does not even have to be a comfortable one. They are too nervous to find out where they ought to sit. They do not want to "sit in style." Rather, they have found that painting—any kind of painting, any style of painting—to be painting at all, in fact—is a way of living today, a style of living, so to speak. That is where the form of it lies. It is exactly in its uselessness that it is free. Those artists do not want to conform. They only want to be inspired.

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If I do paint abstract art, that's what abstract art means to me. I frankly do not understand the question. About twenty-four years ago, I knew a man in Hoboken, a German who used to visit us in the Dutch Seamen's Home. As far as he could remember, he was always hungry in Europe. He found a place in Hoboken where bread was sold a few days old—all kinds of bread: French bread, German bread, Italian bread, Dutch bread, Greek bread, American bread and particularly Russian black bread. He bought big stacks of it for very little money, and let it get good and hard and then he crumpled it and spread it on the floor in his flat and walked on it as on a soft carpet. I lost sight of him, but found out many years later that one of the other fellows met him again around 86th street. He had become some kind of a Jugend Bund leader and took boys and girls to Bear Mountain on Sundays. He is still alive but quite old and is now a Communist. I could never figure him out, but now when I think of him, all that I can remember is that he had a very abstract look on his face.

Spiritually I am wherever my spirit allows me to be, and that is not necessarily in the future. I have no nostalgia, however. If I am confronted with one of those small Mesopotamian figures, I have no nostalgia for it but, instead, I may get into a state of anxiety. Art never seems to make me peaceful or pure. I always seem to be wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity. I do not think of inside or outside—or of art in general—as a situation of comfort. I know there is a terrific idea there somewhere, but whenever I want to get into it, I get a feeling of apathy and want to lie down and go to sleep. Some painters including myself, do not care what chair they are sitting on. It does not even have to be a comfortable one. They are too nervous to find out where they ought to sit. They do not want to "sit in style." Rather, they have found that painting—any kind of painting, any style of painting—to be painting at all, in fact—is a way of living today, a style of living, so to speak. That is where the form of it lies. It is exactly in its uselessness that it is free. Those artists do not want to conform. They only want to be inspired.

From the statement by Willem de Kooning in What Abstract Art Means to Me/The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, Volume XVIII, No. 3 Spring 1951. All rights reserved by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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Oriental art like jiujitsu is the art of the interval.

In THE BOOK OF TEA we read

In leaving something unsaid the beholder is given a chance to complete the idea and thus a great masterpiece irristibly rivits your attention until you seem to become actually a part of it.

MARSHALL MC LUHAN

Anne Averill is a young artist who has not shown publicly prior to this exhibit. The prime reason she was chosen to be presented at the R. Mutt Galeries is that her work caught the eye and pleases the aesthetic concerns of the gallery director.

The artist does not fit into any particular mode or style of painting. Her work is best described as variations upon a theme using color and sometimes plastic to change the intensity and reflective qualities of the paintings.

These works are echoes of the artist's personality and temperament. Being for the most-part warm and friendly; sincere and totally without pretense. She offers no mystical, metaphysical, psychological or poetic explanations for her work. It simply exists. Created solely for the visual enjoyment of the artist and her audience.

RICHARD MUTT

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ART

PAINTING

Upstaging History

Not even Hollywood's greatest epics of gore can hold a candle to those monumental battle paintings of yore. Every schoolboy knows General Wolfe breathing his last on the Plains of Abraham, the redcoats storming up Bunker Hill, or Washington crossing the Delaware. For a majestic instant in oils, the deadly carnage by grapeshot and musketry is stilled, and the course of history is reversed by a great man. Last week one of the finest U.S. battle tableaux, unseen for 75 years, went on view at the University of California's Berkeley campus.

The painting was Emanuel Leutze's 1854 work, *Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth*, which since 1892 has lain rolled up in a redwood chest in the basement of Berkeley's Hearst Gymnasium for Women. Larger than its companion piece, the unforgettable 22-ft. by 12-ft. *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), the oil portrays a bigger than life-size scene of a crucial moment. On a scorching June day in 1778, Major General Charles Lee had ordered the Continental army to retreat before the redcoats. Then, in the nick of time, Washington, accompanied by a cockaded Alexander Hamilton and a bareheaded Marquis de Lafayette, gallops up to rally the troops and confound the crestfallen poltroon Lee,* slumping in his saddle. History records a piqued Washington demanding in Olympian tones: "I desire to know, sir, what is the reason, whence arises this disorder and confusion?"

Click! went Leutze, a German-born artist, who actually executed the painting in Düsseldorf, using all the American tourists he could find in town for their facial characteristics. In the Napoleonic tradition of Baron Gros and Géricault, disorder and confusion are hardly apparent. The balanced composition centers around a middle-ground bridge built by the unrealistic posture of Washington's war horse. The dog, which shares the foreground pool of water with parched troops, helps to tranquilize the hustle of hoofs.

However stilted, the painting conjures up the ideal of a bygone age, giving to history a heroic sense rather than data processing it. Leutze even persuaded his exacting student Albert Bierstadt, then 24 (later to become one of the chief chroniclers of the Rocky Mountain landscape), to climb a ladder and touch up the bright sky on the left. There was precious little tranquillity that he could add to the blood-and-thunder turbulence of gun smoke.

* Subsequently convicted by court-martial, the English-born Lee died in disgrace and degradation four years later. He was no kin to the Revolutionary hero "Light Horse Harry" and the other famous Lees of Virginia.

Prisoner of the Seraglio

Women enchanted the brush of Botticelli. Da Vinci is famous for one female smile, Whistler for his mother. Degas captured girlishness from gawky grace to the glamorous fall from it. "So why is it unusual that I paint women?" asks Willem de Kooning, at 60 the foremost U.S. artist still working vigorously in the abstract expressionist idiom.

Women they are, but none of De Kooning's Venuses are ever likely to be zephyred toward shore on a half shell, though it is just possible some of them might have been pushed off a 40-story building. When De Kooning discovered Marilyn Monroe as a subject in the mid-1950s, and long before pop artists cottoned to her contours, he painted her as half Lilith, half man-eater, with a pneumatic maw worthy of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction. His newest women are even more tulip-pink tarts, slathering in sensuality and seductive danger (*see opposite*), and yet they have brought collectors to his doorstep, checkbook in hand.

Building His Dream House. The price De Kooning commands is not negligible. Last month one of his works reached an alltime high auction price of $40,000. With his peers in the abstract expressionist movement either dead, like Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline, or caught in a price slump, De Kooning finds his reputation still ascending. Last year he became the second painter (after Andrew Wyeth) to receive the President's Medal of Freedom, and presently finds dealers on both coasts bidding and jockeying for the honor of giving him a one-man show.

For all this, De Kooning himself is still not convinced that he is even a good painter. "Art," he likes to point out, "is the thing you cannot make." He still finds it nearly impossible to know when one of his own works is finished. Only when a friend, Painter Philip Guston, cried, "That's it! That's it!" did he stop endlessly revising one large nude. He has carried over the same element of creative indecision—which makes viewers often feel that his moment of supreme victory has been painted over, or else is yet to come—into the dream house that he has been constructing for the past five years near Pollock's old studio at The Springs on the tip of Long Island.

Agape Anatomy. De Kooning's trial-and-error approach to building has so far cost him, by his neighbors' estimate, upwards of $150,000, and he still finds it hard to complete. The askew Y-shaped plan, butterfly roofline and fleshy colors inside echo his predilections in paint. The rhomboid, glass-sided studio reminds him of a loft; his large professional kitchen reminds him of the cafeterias that he ate in most of his life. "Sometimes I think I'm nuts to have started this house," he says. "I'll die before it's finished, maybe. But I like it. Why not?"

De Kooning's house is a tangible way to re-create familiarity around himself. Limited by his own reticence and the lack of a driver's license (like a good Hollander, he bikes everywhere), he has cropped the borders of his world down to introspection. Into that personal space, De Kooning's women intrude like evanescent Eves. He calls them "cousins" of billboard bunnies and film frails, but they also will remind him of a girl who passed by in the street. Where his women of the 1950s were jangling, somber mammas, his new women are harem-scarum voluptuaries, awelter with rouge and agape anatomy. As "action" paintings, they are products of De Kooning's encounter with the sensuous nature of oils. As forms caressed within the bear-hug space of the painter, they seem to be violent valentines, icons to love's agony.

LEUTZE'S "WASHINGTON RALLYING THE TROOPS AT MONMOUTH"
Click! The hoofs are halted, the carnage stilled.

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sioned by Prime Minister Nehru before his death; and in Havana, a mural for a university science building to commemorate Castro soldiers killed during the Revolution. He hopes to set up teams of student aides so he can shuttle from wall to wall—"after all, I have to catch up with 4 years of work that I've lost."

(pho- res") red r.

GUEST

Painter Willem de Kooning, recently awarded a Freedom medal by President Johnson, will confront Smith College art students during the week of April 5. He has been named lecturer for the third annual Louise Lindner Eastman memorial lecture series, established by New York lawyer Lee V. Eastman as a memorial for his wife, a Smith alumnus. At the same time, the college will hold a big (and rare) deKooning retrospective of 35 important works.

"I'm not a lecturer so I'll just hold impromptu talks," says deKooning, who has taught at Yale and Black Mountain College. "I've done it before. Sometimes they come out fine and sometimes they fall flat. Whatever the girls want to discuss, we'll talk about—except me."

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By Barnett Newman
Interviewed by Neil A. Levine

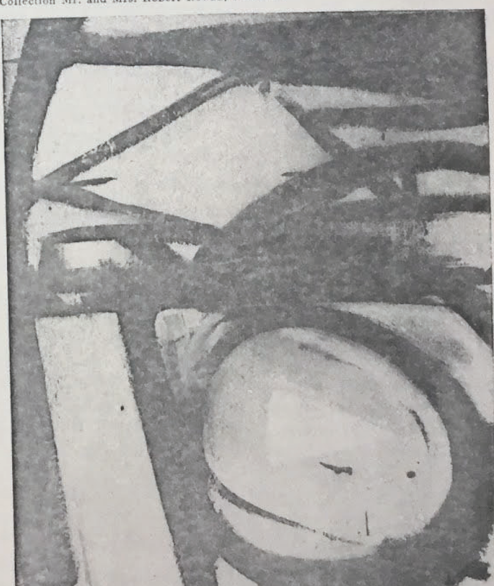
The New York School Question

The first big homemade exhibition in the hugely successful new Los Angeles Museum was its "New York School, First Generation" anthology. We asked our critic Neil Levine to find out how one of the 15 painters chosen to be in the show feels about the whole situation

Newman: Tell me, what is the purpose of this interview?
Levine: It is not so much to review the show. A review by you would no doubt praise the show and I am certain you feel that praise is justified. But I do not think praise would tackle the real problem, namely the issue of history—the attempt to reveal sources—the results of which are the subjects for a different kind of criticism.
Newman: As I understand it, you want us to discuss the show not only as an exhibition of important paintings, but that we should also talk about its subject and the big, ambitious catalogue that records that theme.
Levine: You have been deeply involved with the period in question. You can certainly help clarify the situation. In fact, it is odd that you and the others represented in the show were not asked to tell what you know of the story. Historians are always bemoaning the passage of time, their inability to find out the facts once a man is dead. Yet maybe that is the way they really want it.
Newman: I agree. It seems to me that the attitude towards the show by those who organized it is as if we were all dead. That is why it is particularly strange that the paintings included in this exhibition by Mr. Still are paintings that were never shown in New York, either during the time he exhibited here or since. With the exception of this work, I know every painting in this exhibition. I have also known all the artists involved and was part of what you seem to like to call that "period."
Levine: What do you feel about the show?
Newman: The exhibition is impressive. There is no question that this kind of a project has been very much need-

Arshile Gorky: *Betrothal, 1*, 1947, 51½ inches high.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Taft Schreiber, Beverly Hills

Franz Kline: *Clockface*, 1950, 36 inches high.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rowan, Pasadena



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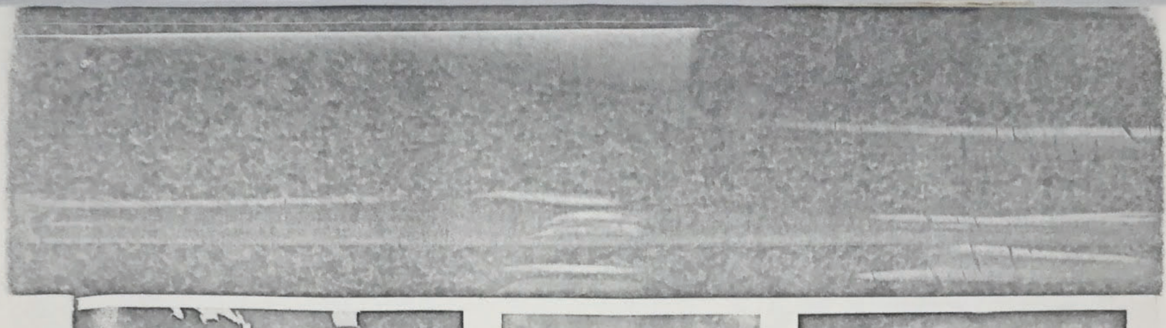
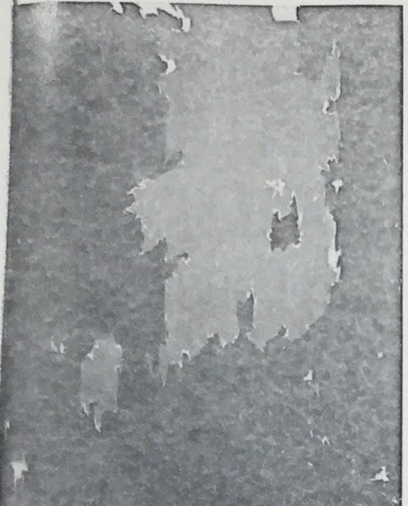
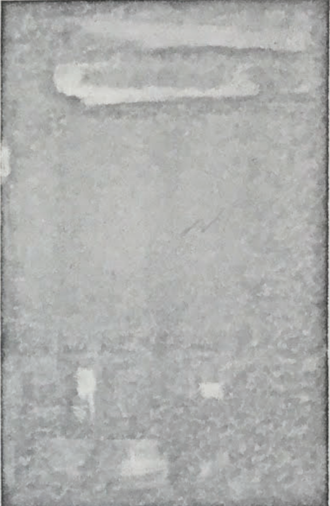




rd Still: *1950-A, 2*, 1950,
ches high.
the artist

William Baziotes: *Toys in the Sun*, 1951, 50 inches high.
Los Angeles County Museum



Mark Rothko: *Number 24, 1949*, 1949, 88½ inches high.
Collection Joseph H. Hirshhorn, New York

ed. There are some great paintings in it—not only as paintings in themselves, but as historical events. I have advocated this kind of show for years because there is the impression that these works are known, that the whole story has been told. I feel that a great opportunity was lost in Los Angeles to show and tell the story in full and with clarity.

Levine: How do you mean, lost?

Newman: The story, which by the way is still continuing, has never been properly told. I think, for example, more important even than your idea that the artists could have been brought into the situation, is that certain things could have been done that would have laid down a groundwork for a truly historical presentation. A basis could have been established that would have made possible the critical examination of the paintings. As you said, this is the value of history. For example, the first thing would be to have avoided the role of tendentious criticism attached to calling the show the "New York School." When I first heard that was going to be the title, I wrote a letter to the Los Angeles Museum protesting its use. Second, an accurate presentation would have shown the paintings historically, each work in its chronological history, so that everyone would know what was visible when and where. I also wrote asking for this. The response I got was, in fact, an admission of the abdication of scholarship—the claim that it was "impossible." And third, instead of so broad a time span, 20 years, very significantly ending in 1959, as if there is nothing in the '60s—which is an act of criticism—it seems to me that there should have been a specific emphasis or focus on a specific time, say 1949-50 or 1948-51. Then the world could see what the artists themselves saw at one specific, particular moment.

Levine: Perhaps we can get reproductions to illustrate this point [see pp 38-41]. As a living documentation of the dialogue that existed in those decisive years, this would have been more instructive.

Newman: Yes, but what I am talking about is the visual dialogue in regard to those paintings that were seen in studios as well as galleries. These paintings were done in almost solitude. They now should be examined by critics in relation to the true nature and degree of how much solitude. Who were the artists who were most personal, most original, most effective and when? The private moment should be re-evoked. After all, the visual dialogue that went on had to do with the question of passion. It is this that has to be examined.

Levine: You speak of a critical moment, a focal point. In your view, what is the value of such a theme?

Newman: Purely as a scholarly device to create an arbitrary point in time which presents what the artists looked like and what they saw in relation to the visual dialogue, a point from which criticism can then move backward and forward in time and horizontally across the board. This would have created a fulcrum on which distinctions could be made not only between the first and second generations, which is easy to do, but among the various members of the first generation. The exhibition considers the first generation a cohesive bloc, which is pure art-fiction. Just as in talking about any period in history, a groundwork is needed if the moment is to be re-evoked so that a discussion can take place in relation to the event. You should be able to distinguish between those artists who move toward the event with strength, those who move toward the event with timidity, those who move on the periphery, those who move in terms of being influenced by certain formal aspects and those who move as eclectics.

Levine: Does the title, "New York School," justify a broader critical position?

Newman: The "New York School," I find, exists only in California. It is curious that the only shows so titled have taken place there. The first one was in 1951, arranged by Robert Motherwell. Now we have another. Don't those who use this label realize that, by doing so, they succeed in seceding from America? Actually New York had nothing to do with it. In my own case, if by New York

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Hans Hofmann: *Magenta and Blue*, 1950, 48 inches high.
Whitney Museum, New York

is meant its institutions, it did not do that much for me. It is really the other way around. I helped make New York a place, as did Pollock, de Kooning and the others. It is even more curious that in this very extensive catalogue, there are no *curricula vitae*. The dates of birth but not the birth places are listed. Do you think that because, of all the painters, only Gottlieb and myself are native New Yorkers and everyone else comes from someplace else, they are trying to hide it, to make New York a label that really sticks? It is even more curious that in regard to the notion of a New York School, Mr. Still and Reinhardt, who are on record more than once as being anti-New York School, have offered the work they own themselves to become new members. Have they recanted? If this show truly represents the New York School, it is surprising to find them in and to find artists missing such as Brooks, Stamos, Cavallon, Marca-Relli, Tworkov, Ossorio, Vicente, Glarner, Sander, etc., and the ladies, Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Hedda Sterne. All were active in New York during those important years.

Levine: But does not the term New York School refer to a style more than to a specific group of artists?

Newman: The history of these works can best be approached if one considers that they have never been successfully pigeonholed. We have been attacked as and labeled Abstract-Expressionism, Abstract-Impressionism, Action Painting, Informel, Tachisme, Field Painting, Color Painting, and now New York School. None can stick the way Pop and Op have because the meaningful work of the artists in this show is so powerfully personal that stylistic slogans at best can only apply to individuals. This was never a movement in the conventional sense of a "style," but a collection of individual voices. That is why to talk of the movement as being dead is ridiculous. With us, only the individual artist can die or continue to grow and live. Only a true scholarly presentation of the "individuals" involved can be the beginning necessary for any attempt at criticism. An attempt must be made to show what really happened before anything else is done. So far, the new crop of scholars has not faced up to its task. All they do is repeat each other's version of a myth. The only common ground we all had is in the creation of a new, free, plastic language. Some of the voices in this language are strong, some hollow, some thin. Before this can be truly discussed, the event has to be accurately re-created so that everyone will know what everyone else is talking about.

Levine: Does not the catalogue do this?

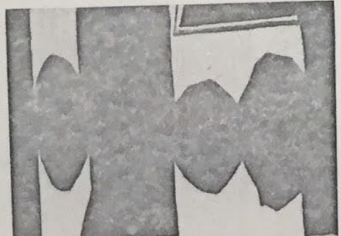
Newman: How can the catalogue do this if the introduction consists of ten half-lines describing the exhibition as presenting "a sample of the work." Obviously the show is not taken very seriously if the work is described as samples. I wonder how the lenders to the exhibition, how Frederick R. Weisman feels; how they, who spent tremendous energy and very sizable sums acquiring these works, which by the way are now not easy to come by, I wonder how they feel to hear these works described as samples. Gorky's *Betrothal* or his *Plumage Landscape*, or de Kooning's *Dark Pond*, Pollock's *Number 1, 1949* and the many others—are they samples, or is it treasure? I think I have some very important works there, too. Are these samples? Either the Museum's attitude is wrong or they do not know what they have.

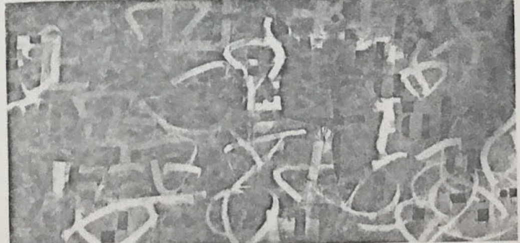
The rest of the catalogue is also curious. For example, the collection of critical writing is misleading. The impression given is that there was a great deal of writing being published.

Levine: And most of the critical writing in the catalogue is from after 1959.

Newman: That is not the issue. There is nothing wrong with the fact that Rubin's piece is dated 1963. There was

Robert Motherwell: *5 O'Clock in the Afternoon*, 1950, 36 inches high.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Wright Morris, Mill Valley, Cal.





Bradley Walker Tomlin: *In Praise of Gertrude Stein*, 1950, 49 inches high.
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Adolph Gottlieb: *The Seer*, 1950, 60 inches high.
Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

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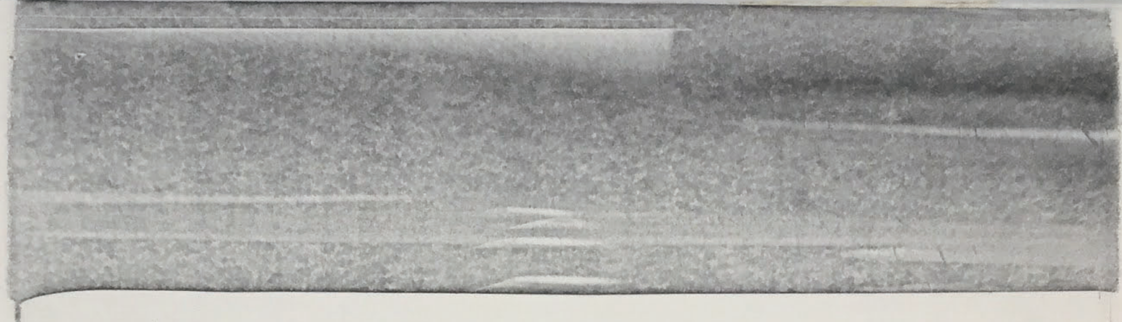
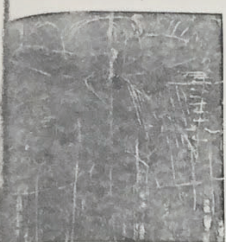
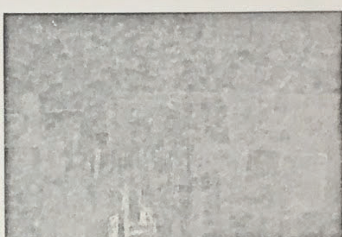




...hard Pousette-Dart: *Night World*,
...8, 55½ inches high.
...by the artist

Ad Reinhardt: *Abstract Painting, Blue-Green*,
1949, 76 inches high.
Lent by the artist



Philip Guston: *Review*, 1948-49,
39⅜ inches high.
Lent by the artist

little critical writing during the 1940s and '50s. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why there is so much by the artists—yet there is no explanation given. The only writers who were writing during the '40s and '50s were Clement Greenberg and Thomas B. Hess. Then there was the article by Harold Rosenberg. There was one article by Sam Hunter and several by Nicolas Calas. The book by Hess was the first written on the subject, yet nothing from it was included in the section of "Writings by Critics." Nothing of Greenberg's from *The Nation* is quoted. The excerpt used from his essay, "American-Type Painting," is dated 1961, the date of its re-publication, but it was published in 1955. This is important, even though 1955 is not an early date. The same thing is true in regard to the excerpt from Rosenberg's "Action Painting" article, which is dated 1959 in the catalogue but which was first published in 1952. Hunter's book, which appeared in 1959, is not quoted. That was the second book on American painting. It is impossible to tell from the excerpt quoted from Meyer Schapiro's talk that it was the first defense made abroad of American painting by an American scholar. There is nothing of Calas' quoted in the catalogue. The piece by Alloway is from an article published in London at the time of the "New American Painting" show, when it was being attacked there in 1959. His was the first literary voice defending American painting in Europe. From the catalogue, one would never know that he had ever been to London.

Levine: By avoiding explanatory notes, the catalogue puts forth everything out of context.

Newman: Yes, it is a sort of scrap book, a preliminary check list, incomplete, a compilation of only certain materials with important matters left out—a collection of materials without distinctions.

Levine: Is the bibliography a service?

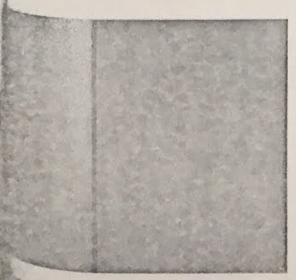
Newman: It is impressive, mostly because it is so complicated—all those cross-references! I noticed that there are some significant omissions. There is a listing in my own bibliography of a letter published in *Art Digest* which refers to a review in *The New York Times* by Aline Louchheim of my show in 1950, but the item to which it refers is not listed. Rothko's foreword to Still's show at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery is not listed. No references to *MFR's Art Outlook* are included. There are several unpublished items listed. Obviously some artists were consulted in relation to their bibliographies, others were not.

Levine: Are these matters of omission or commission?

Newman: I do not know. The impression is that here is an attempt to make a document and those who made the catalogue, by removing themselves from it, tried to give the impression that the document is objective. It is not, but it would be wrong to make any charges. But it would also be wrong to excuse it. It certainly does not contribute to clarity, nor does it give a true picture of history. It is not possible for me to say that an abdication of scholarship was committed, but if scholars do not practice scholarship, if they do not explain their data, the results are the same.

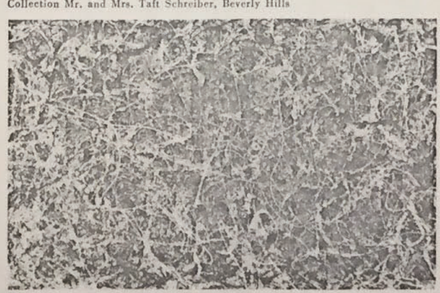
Levine: What do you mean by abdication?

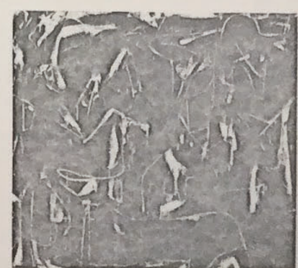
Newman: In trying to avoid the dilemma of commentary, the museum got involved in the problem of text, but text is a very serious matter. The text has to be accurate; the material, relevant and true. It is much more complicated than [Continued on page 55]



...ett Newman: *Tundra*, 1950,
...ches high.
...Mr. and Mrs. Robert Scull, New York

Jackson Pollock: *Number 1*, 1949,
63 inches high.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Taft Schreiber, Beverly Hills





Willem de Kooning: *Dark Pond*,
1948, 46½ inches high.
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Frederick R. Weisman

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style coalesced that Youngerman saw the work of a group of artists who were, for him, "a total revelation." To one for whom art history tends to read like a printer's error in bold faced type it is, moreover, easy to imagine this particular revelation being especially evocative. In the summer of 1953, towards the end of his sojourn abroad (during which he traveled in the Near East, as well as in France), he visited the caves at Lascaux. The Lascaux paintings are of course flat in approach and spontaneous in attack (the cave-painter's airbrush-like technique is one which Youngerman laughingly points out as "a bit excessively 'modern' for me."). The forms themselves—the large, open shapes of bison, cow, bird or man, executed in two or three colors (often black, or red-orange—those most frequently present in Youngerman's own work) seem to be reflected in many of the paintings and drawings completed after that summer. The positive-negative, figure and ground exchanges which are the most invariable occurrence in Youngerman's work, are embodied in some of the most celebrated of all cave work, the stenciled renderings which the artists made of their own hands.

The connection may be deeper. The massive, winged, antlered, charging animal forms, sometimes juxtaposed with similar forms apparently extracted from a herd, seem to carry in them some very central, perhaps desperate ideas of resistance to exploration of nature. One imagines that the naturalistic shadow-shapes which sometimes in a halo of overtones resolve from Youngerman's fields of abstract forms, may carry within them the most radical ideas of terror as well as elegance.

The New York School continued from page 41

making commentaries. In connection with this, calling the text the "New York School," in itself is commentary. By leaving out painters who are relevant, that is bad text. By including painters who are immaterial, that is bad commentary. In relation to which, not being involved in commentary themselves, they included commentaries by critics and writers and presented them as if these were the texts. To have a truthful text, it is not enough to have paintings that are representative. It is important to have paintings that are documented and that existed in relation to the subject. The whole thing shows a lack of seriousness. There is a tremendous contrast between the indifferent attitude on the part of the museum toward these works as against the very serious attitude on the part of the collectors. If the museum finds that the problem of text and commentary is complicated, it must define what is text and it must involve itself in explanations, definitions and distinctions. Not to do so gives the impression that one has produced a document, but all it is is an art index that leads to confusion. Essentially it is not a true catalogue. Designating the show as a sample is the best evidence that it is not being taken seriously. The doctors of art history are not so much doctoring history as they are hoping that the patient will disappear. The drama of the events has been not so much minimized as overlooked.

Levine: As far as I can gather, you would not want this show to be thought of as definitive. Does it appear to you as an epitaph?

Newman: I do not think the show is definitive and I hope that the catalogue does not succeed in giving that impression, although there is no question that this is what it is trying to do. After all, one does not do a catalogue of 253 pages on "samples" just for fun. As for the epitaph, it is only natural that those who are trying to put the label on the bottle will also try to ram the cork in, too. But I do not think they will succeed. I know that the work, and to be personal about it, I mean my work and the work in this show by those men I respect, cannot be wiped off that easily. From the reports I have received, the exhibition in Los Angeles is having tremendous attendance and it is making a great impact. I realize that attendance in itself may indicate only curiosity on the part of the public, but from the reports I have received the actual paintings themselves are still challenging and mysterious to the young artists and to others who did not see the work as it developed during those years. If the attempt is to make an epitaph, it is obviously unsuccessful, particularly since some of us are embarked on the best work of our lives. If art moves constantly in relation to what has happened, the responsibility of the museum in any show of this kind must be toward the young artists in particular because there is no longer any question that the young artists today willy-nilly cannot function outside the burden of our presence. For

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the first time in America, the new young artist has to work knowing that there is the weight of a tradition here.

Levine: Is it not the role of the art historians to search out and describe the true nature of that tradition?

Newman: This really is the depressing condition of our times. The greatest change in recent years is not so much in the kind of art that is developing and that so many advocates are trying to instigate a squabble over esthetic terminology, but the emergence of a new kind of art historian, who has given up as a scholar and is not involved in the search for truth in the tradition of Meyer Schapiro or Paul Sachs. Instead the new art historian has taken on a new role—a role that is transforming art history from a search for truth into a new professionalism—the running of the new immense culture establishment.

If the present direction continues, it will not be long before one will have to be an art historian to do anything in the arts. The whole enterprise, being an art dealer, photographing and framing paintings, let alone writing about them—will be managed by art historians. What is happening is that the new art historians have become the enthusiastic audience. They applaud. They boo. They flash their degrees like press cards. And the esthetic talk and scholarly discussions sound like press releases. Some of them are now even concerned with making the art of the future. They no longer care about the art of the present, let alone the art of the past. Some of the art historians have abdicated completely and have joined forces with those artists who enjoy the role of glamorizing themselves. Whereas traditionally, the art historian acted as a brake against this onrush of confusion. This is particularly depressing now in relation to the so-called first generation because it is here that the work of the scholars is most needed. Of all the periods in modern history, this period is the least documented, the most obscure, because we were all underground. As I said before, there was hardly any writing accompanying us. Very little work was reproduced at the time it was done. Things were not as they are today, when a young artist appears on the scene with his own personal art historian. I do not think the archive societies will be of much help because I suspect there is going to be a rash of discovery, not only of unknown paintings, but also of false journals, letters to oneself, stacks of cryptic postcards, etc.

Levine: Do you believe that the situation will change, that some devoted persons will grasp the nature of the problems you face?

Newman: I hope you are right. I myself am not that optimistic. All that I have been able to see is a growing confusion. I do not see from where the clarity can emerge. It certainly cannot come from the new art history professions. If, as you say, it will come, it will have to come not from the new art historians, but from a real historian.

Horrors at Berkeley continued from page 33

that almost inevitably his work emerges as faceless and impersonal as the committees themselves. Regional pressures also contribute to the generally low level of architecture at Berkeley. Had President Kerr appointed Mies or Le Corbusier, let alone Philip Johnson or Yamasaki, there would undoubtedly have been an uproar from local interests; and it would seem to be more than coincidental that none of the new buildings at Berkeley has been designed by an architect outside of the San Francisco Bay area.

What amounts to an architectural scandal is, however, but a natural result of administrative policy at the University of California. A president who looks upon his task as primarily that of peace-maker will naturally encourage the employment of architects near at hand, for in that way he will maintain decorum. Thus a small group of architects with self-protective instincts have benefited from the fatal permissiveness of the multiversity concept.

As long ago as 1886, Frederick Law Olmsted said that the buildings at Berkeley were "cheap and nasty" and "that the disposition of them and of all the grounds and offices about them betrays heedlessness of the requirements of convenience and comfort under the conditions of the situation and climate." So Berkeley seems to have been doomed from the start. One solution may be derived from the words of a song by the folk singers Peter, Paul and Mary: "If I had my way in this wicked world, I'd tear them buildings down." But such a cure seems unlikely; one can only regret the spoilation of so magnificent a site.

Still, Berkeley may serve as an object lesson, for there seems to be no lessening of the need to provide educational and research facilities. Perhaps in the future—in the various new branches of the University of California as elsewhere—a somewhat different method of architectural appointment will be adopted. If, instead of the present permissiveness, a definite policy in search of excellence were adopted, then the educational structures of the future may more frequently follow educational ideals than they have done at Berkeley. It would be hard to improve on Whitney Griswold's formula, which was simply "to trust the creative spirit and impulse of the greatest architects of our generation."

London continued from page 51

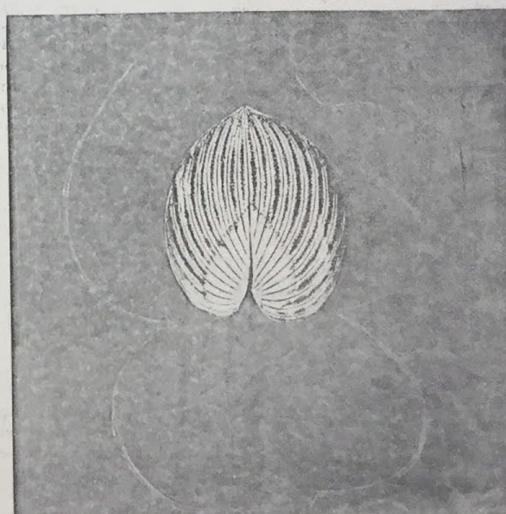
big enough, in the full-scale piece, for a man to walk through. The challenge of the subject could have been avoided by making what would have been, in effect, primarily a new sculpture by Moore and only coincidentally a memorial; and it could have been met by a complex of melodramatic allusion. What Moore has done is to produce something that works as a three-dimensional form and has just that nuance of allusion which will remind the visitor of where he is.

Richards, group shows

A great deal of "younger English painting" has to do these days with the arrangement and re-arrangement of a small number of standardized emblems. The results are flat, unambiguous, firmly non-referential: good examples by Derek Boshier (at Robert Fraser's) and John Howlin (at Kasmin) diversify the late summer season. To older painters this does, of course, seem an unnecessarily restricted activity, and the retrospective of Ceri Richards at the Marlborough offered an opportunity of seeing what there was to be said on the other side. Ambiguous quasi-referential form was the mainstay of British painting and sculpture in the late 1940s and '50s, and now that it has been chased out of sculpture as firmly as it has been chased out of painting, Richards is one of the few who can argue convincingly for its retention. (Jung himself, after all, was once fired to write Richards a fan-letter).

Richards has been affected by the general course of painting to the extent of adopting for the rearground of many of his pictures a series of flat broad bands of pure color. But he is as fertile as ever in the re-invention of forms which owe something to terrestrial botany, something to the sea-bed and something to male and female pudenda. The difference now is that instead of the jungly, overgrown environment which would once have been mandatory for such forms in the context of British painting, he can lay them flat, as in last year's big *Cycle of Nature, Arabesque,* and let the pure color pull as hard as it pulls in paintings by people thirty years younger. That painting should appeal at many levels is one of the beliefs implicit in his work, and it is one that never goes quite out of season.

On the Noland-Louis-Olitski front, London has been thoroughly spoiled this summer, and the three shows in question made a deep



Ceri Richards: *Leaf Mould, 1,* in his retrospective at Marlborough, London.

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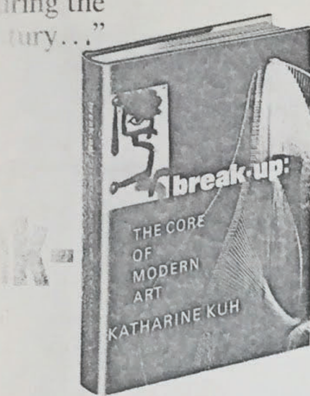

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Editor's Letters

SIR: YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR PUBLISHING THE ARTICLE TITLED THE HORRORS AT BERKELEY. MANY OF US WHO LIVE HERE IN CALIFORNIA HAVE FOR TOO LONG PRIVATELY SHARED MR. MACSHANE'S FEELINGS.

IRVING BLUM
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

Sir:
Insomuch as ARTNEWS values its contents as a magazine of record, the following facts should be of interest in regard to the review by Barnett Newman [Sept. '65] of the exhibition titled "New York School" shown in the Los Angeles County Museum.

In contradiction to Mr. Newman's statement, "that the paintings included by Mr. Still are paintings that were never shown in New York, either during the time he exhibited here or since":

1. Clyfford Still's painting *1950-1* was exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art's "Fifteen Americans" exhibition, April-July, 1952 in New York City.

2. His painting *1947-R, Number 2* was seen by Mr. Newman and many others in Mr. Still's studio, but because of size, the study for it was shown in the same Museum of Modern Art exhibition in 1952 in New York City.

3. The painting *1950-A, Number 1* was hung in the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York City, January-February 1951—incidentally, the largest and most conspicuous in this one-man exhibition. The second version of this painting, but scarcely distinguishable from it in size, image and color, was selected for the present Los Angeles exhibition, as the *Number 1* version had been injured in successive travels.

In fact, all of the paintings selected for the exhibition in Los Angeles were shown to a great many people (artists included) in New York City and East Hampton in Mr. Still's studios there, or in private homes. Mr. Newman was a frequent visitor and student.

Whether Mr. Newman's fantastic statement was due to a sudden loss of memory or was calculated, its main thesis is apparent throughout the article and will be dealt with by Mr. Still at a time of his choosing. It was in the hope of forestalling this kind of typical political maneuver that he felt constrained to permit his pictures to be shown in this exhibition in spite of what he considered a debatable title.

Meanwhile, Mr. Still's files contain the photographs and documentary evidence confirming the above listed facts, also, no doubt, retained at the Museum of Modern Art and the Parsons Gallery.

Mrs. Clyfford Still
Westminster, Maryland

Mr. Newman answers: It is an unpleasant task to have to silence another man's wife in public, but if that is how the man wants it, chivalry will have to wait.

1. There is no painting of this size listed in the Museum of M… ern Art's catalogue for the "Fif… Americans" show. The only p… ing close in size is 2 inches … and 1½ inches wider than … painting. It was only natur… view of Mr. Still's reputation … making copies that I would con… the Los Angeles painting a r… I have examined the photograph… the Museum of Modern Art pai… very carefully and in … judg… there are sufficient d…erence … me still so to consider … How… if it is the same, tha… all t… good.

2. Mrs. Still is ver… mistak… never saw this 9-foo… painting … Mr. Still's studio or … any … place in New York. … first … I saw it was February 1962, in … home of Mr. Weisman in Be… Hills. What I did see in New Y… was a similar painting, but m… smaller, only 5 feet 9 inches … 5 feet 5 inches, which was in … "Fifteen Americans" show at … Museum and which is now c… a "study." A 9-foot painting in … by anyone in New York would … been very conspicuous.

3. This speaks for itself. How… I might add that the largest p… ing in the 1951 exhibition, accor… to the records of the Parsons … lery, was half a foot smaller.

I am afraid that Mrs. Still mi… the point. It does not matter t… how Mr. Still paints. He may, a… does, work from sketches, make … stitutes, make facsimiles and … many copies of his own work a… likes. The point I made in my … terview was that in an exhib… purporting to recreate an histo… event and in a catalogue servin… a document, scholarship dem… that there be no ringers and … those paintings that are later … ants be so designated so that e… one will know what was and … was not seen at the time. E… painting should have positive, ch… ological identification.

The other point I made conc… Mr. Still's acceptance of the … York School label. Coming aft… the name-calling he has indulge… after all the threats of fire … brimstone, that he now "felt … strained"—puts a strain on all … old-time, moral-indignation-rhe… including his present threat. Ex… ency has many masks.

In calling me his student, … only suggest that Mrs. Still, … the good wife that she is, is … ging. I seldom visited Mr. St… his studio since he had n… and was difficult to reach. … never once visited his studio i… Hampton.

On the contrary, Mr. Still … constant visitor of mine wh… was in New York and it wa… ous to *my* wife that Mr. S… really *my* student. Rememberin… he stood in front of my unfi… *Cathedra* in the fall of 1951, … fore he did his own large … painting, I would say that it … be difficult to disprove her.

IMPOR…

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ARTnews
March 1976

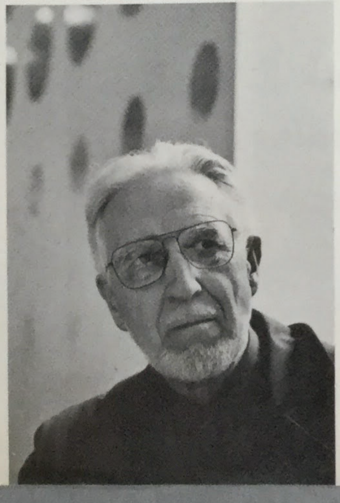
The pioneer Abstract Expressionist talks about the legends that have grown up around him, his battles with the art establishment, the early days of the New York School, and his gift of 28 paintings to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

A conversation with Clyfford Still

by Thomas Albright

People have generally found almost anything easier to deal with than the stark confrontation with a work of art on the terms which governed its creation. They rather surround art with interpretation, analysis and a host of other elaborations which have become part of a gigantic verbal superstructure designed to make art more comfortable—and profitable. Within the framework of this superstructure, Clyfford Still's painting has been generally misunderstood and his attitude has been considered arrogant. Still's resolute refusal to "explain" his work, for example, has frequently been interpreted as uncommunicativeness, although it could be argued that no other artist in recent times has been more concerned about communication; one need only look at Still's recent and important gift of 28 paintings, spanning 40 years of his career, to the newly redesignated San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Together with two works that already belong to the museum and three on loan from the artist, the paintings were unveiled in a landmark exhibition that opened the new year; they will later be transferred to a permanent installation in a specially redesigned museum gallery.

Rudy Bender



As with his donation of 31 paintings to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo 12 years ago, the San Francisco gift carries the stipulation that the group of paintings must be kept intact. Still's insistence upon controlling the exact circumstances under which his work is shown, coupled with the exhaustive documentation of each work's exhibition history, would suggest that he regards the presentation of his paintings as an integral extension of the creative process. (A full color catalogue also includes more biographical material on—and by—Still than has heretofore been published.)

The legends that have grown up around Clyfford Still—his mysterious appearance one fall day in 1946 at the California School of Fine Arts "wearing a long black overcoat" (the story sounds more like the Annunciation with each retelling); his image among former students as "black angel," Zen priest or messianic prophet, depending on whom you talk to; his rare public statements as well as his silences—all contribute to a persona that seems, in many ways, to be inexplicable. Much of the mystery, however, resolves into perfect sense if one draws a proper distinction between the "art world," with its commercialism, politicking and rat-race competition for prestige and glory, and the organic process of growth and development that is fundamental to art itself. Still's notorious "demands," his legendary aloofness and attacks on critical exegises of his work—even the most favorable—are really nothing more nor less than an attempt to assert that the "art world" must revolve around art and the artist, rather than the other way around, and to reaffirm the primacy of the visual experience over the verbal. As one views the results of this lifelong commitment of Still's ranged around the walls of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, one can only agree that the effort has been magnificently rewarded.

If former students remember Still as a "black monk," others recall that he used to enjoy polishing the chrome on a sleek silver Jaguar and going to baseball games. Thus it was not the voice of some Old Testament prophet at the other end of the telephone, recently, at precisely 3 p.m., the hour Still had agreed to call to arrange a meeting. The figure who sat across the table with his wife at lunch the following day seemed impressively fit. At 71, Still continues to project a quiet strength and vigor from his towering frame, and his features—graced by a trim beard and flowing white hair—retain a youthful handsomeness. A certain formality marked the introductions, but it quickly gave way to an easy, conversational candor—dignified, gracious, straightforward, warm without being overly familiar and, unexpectedly, sparked by flashes of wry humor. Sometimes this humor has a slightly caustic edge, but for the most part it is gentle and accepting, and he does not spare himself as an occasional target ("It's been said that whenever Still writes anything, it's a manifesto"). Still frequently refers to his art as "this instrument," but he will also casually call his paintings "pictures." A vein of warm sentiment is bared as he speaks of his two daughters (one lives with her family in San Francisco, the other is a semi-professional photographer in New York), recalls his fondness for Jackson Pollock or talks about a portrait of his wife that he drew last year—his first "realistic" work in almost two decades ("I thought I might have lost my touch, but

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Clyfford Still. *Untitled-1954*, oil on canvas, 115 by 104 inches. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

it turned out stronger than ever.")

If he is not a demigod, neither does Still conform to the pattern of suffering and early death which seemed to plague the New York painters with whom he was associated during the early flowering of Abstract Expressionism.

"You have to live a long time," said Still, whose first one-man show (at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1943) did not occur until he was almost 39 years old. "If Turner had died when he was 40, he would have been just another respectable British painter.

"Art is a force for life, not death," he added. "It is a matter of joy."

Still has by no means mellowed in his lifelong battle against the forces of the art establishment. He spoke of rejecting a recent offer by one museum to give him a major one-man show ("They weren't willing to demonstrate a real commitment"), and of refusing the repeated overtures of a major publishing house that professed interest in doing a book on his work ("They demanded a picture before they would proceed"). He wanted no notes taken of his conversation, which is reconstructed here from vivid recollection, and he remained silent about those aspects of his art which can only properly be seen.

"People should look at the work itself and determine its meaning to them," Still said, adding: "I prefer the innocent reaction of those who might think they see cloud shapes in my paintings to what Clement Greenberg says that he sees in them."

But he seemed to welcome the opportunity to clarify the many myths that have grown up around his life ("Reality is much more interesting"), stating that his major obstacle is a virtually total recall that makes it difficult to edit his reminiscences.

"It was cold that day," he shrugged in reference to that fabled "long black

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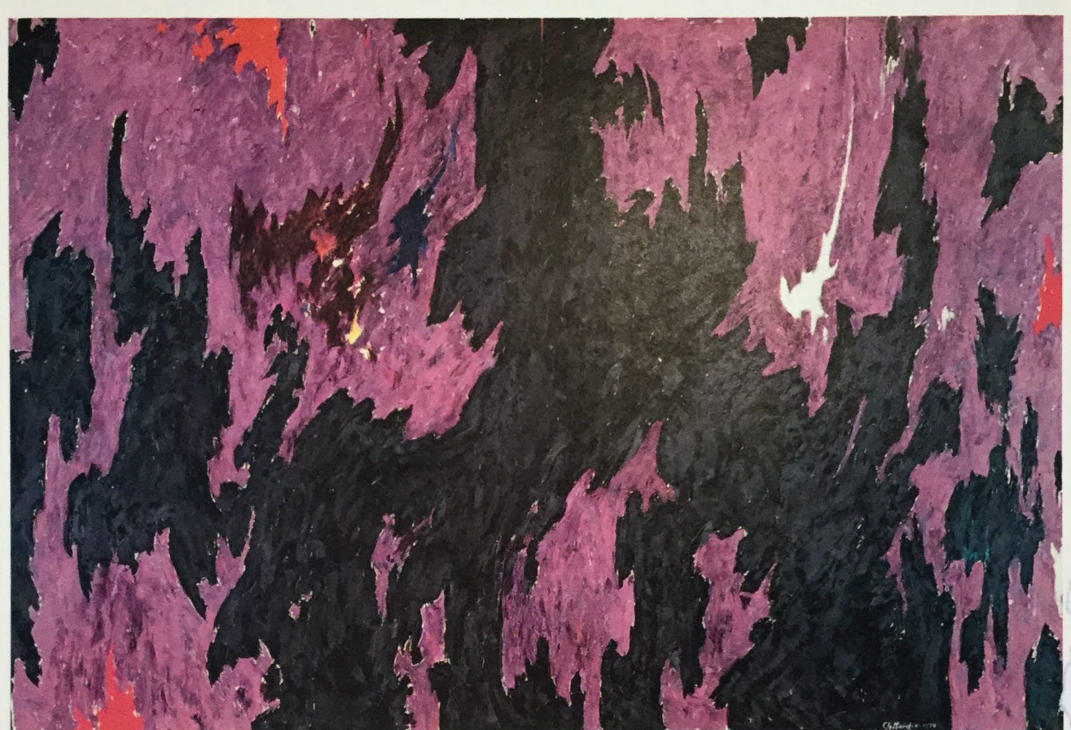

Clyfford Still, *Untitled*, 1974, oil on canvas, 114 by 172 inches. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

overcoat." Actually, Still explained, he came to the California School of Fine Arts to see the late Douglas McAgy, who had recently been appointed director of the school. Still had a letter of introduction from Robert Neuhaus, who was just leaving his post as chief curator at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor and who had been a friend since Still's residence in the Bay Area during the early '40s. It was six weeks into the semester, and McAgy told Still that no openings were available. Shortly afterward, McAgy visited New York and attended a William Baziotes show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery. Still later learned from Baziotes that McAgy, impressed, had offered Baziotes a job in San Francisco. He replied, "You've got Still out there, haven't you?" "Still? Oh yes," McAgy responded, and on his return he called the artist in to teach—"a small commercial art class made up of students who hadn't been able to get into other classes," as Still now characterizes it.

Still had already had his first one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's earlier that year, (in February-March, 1946), but had sold only a single work—to Peggy Guggenheim. His return to the West Coast that fall was dictated primarily, he said, by "financial survival," although he had not fared very well in trying to find teaching work when he had first landed in San Francisco ("It was the nearest big city") in 1941, following eight years of state college teaching in Washington. At that time, he had applied for a job at CSFA, to be told by "a very haughty girl at the desk" that only artists who were "well known" were hired. "That was all right with me. I'd had it with teaching," said Still, who instead worked in ship and aircraft yards. ("I've spent a lot of my life around machinery," he said, referring to his youth on a farm in the Alberta prairies. "There's a very practical side to my nature which has been very helpful to me. It's kept me from falling into some traps.") He developed his abstract painting and also did numerous portraits; both aspects of his work were included in his first show in 1943 at the San Francisco Museum. Following the show, Still left for the East Coast to teach in Richmond, Virginia, between 1943 and 1945, and later moved to New York and settled in the city in 1945.

Still had met Mark Rothko at a mutual friend's in Berkeley during the early '40s; in New York, he encountered him again. As Still describes it, Rothko persisted in asking to see Still's work; Still kept saying he would drop by and visit Rothko instead. Eventually, he did so. They walked together to a nearby park, shook hands and parted—"I thought forever." But a couple of weeks later, Rothko was knocking at Still's door. When Rothko saw Still's paintings, he insisted that Peggy Guggenheim must take a look. She came by, was unable to choose among four paintings that she saw, and took all of them to install in a space that she reserved for "trial balloons" amid her stable of established 20th-century masters: Léger, Braque and Picasso. The display created "a kind of sensation, also a resentment, almost from the start," Still said. "At the time, the Bauhaus and Surrealism—in their broadest senses—were the only accepted schools. Anything contrary to them was looked upon with the deepest suspicion and hostility." Nevertheless, Still's first New York show at the Art of This Century—for which Rothko wrote a catalogue introduction—grew out of this initial exposure. "I didn't see any reason not to show; I had the paintings,

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and there were no restrictions," he said, emphasizing that neither then nor later has he ever signed a contract with any gallery.

Still has frequently been credited with single-handedly introducing Abstract Expressionism to the Bay Area when he taught at the California School of Fine Arts between 1946 and 1950, but he tended to play down the importance of his influence, and to speak of his teaching job as an economic cushion that helped him advance his own art.

"They were totally mired in the 20th century," he said of the students at the school, most of whom were World War II veterans attending on the GI Bill. "They knew about everything that was happening in New York and Europe. Five minutes after it happened, it would be reproduced in the art magazines. About half were trained artists, and a few were full-fledged professionals. Most had been through the war, and they'd seen more than I had. How could a stick like me teach them anything?"

Many San Francisco students tended to imitate the more superficial aspects of his style, Still added. "For various reasons—lack of maturity, perhaps, or lack of seriousness on the part of the students—my influence here was less important than it has been in New York." He emphasized that the story of influences was complex—and often reciprocal. "Half a dozen major painters of the New York School have expressed their indebtedness to each other. They have thanked me, and I have thanked them."

Still continued to spend his summers in New York during the years he taught at CSFA, and when the school's progressive administration came to an abrupt halt with McAgy's resignation in 1950, Still returned to Manhattan ("New York is my home"). He spent most of the next decade there, interspersed with periodic trips cross-country, before moving to his present home in rural Maryland.

"I did what had to be done to survive," he said of the celebrated battles that frequently erupted with dealers, museum administrators and critics during those years. But the stakes involved in survival became clear as Still spoke of his associations with other New York artists, particularly Rothko and Pollock.

"We were all quite different. There was no cabal, no gang, no real movement, although we shared certain basic attitudes, a basic vocabulary. These were strong people. They had their hands on a strong thing. I think I may have been the only one who fully realized how strong this thing was. When you have a tiger by the tail, you don't deal with it lightly."

Clyfford Still, *1945-H*, oil on canvas, 90 by 69 inches. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Still characterized the New York art world of the '40s and early '50s as being strongly colored by the attitude of the European emigrés who arrived there just before and during World War II. "They brought with them the idea of the artist as a social man. They painted for the art world, and made overtures to dealers and critics. Each was trying to corner his own publicity man."

Rothko he portrayed as a more or less willing victim of this system, alternately making overtures to the art world and withdrawing his work from exhibitions, unable to pull up stakes from New York. ("He once said ruefully, 'Clyff, you're so much more mobile than I,'" Still recalled.) As for Pollock, Still recounted a visit made to that artist's East Hampton home one night when Pollock was roaring drunk. Still, about to make a trip to Spokane, tried to talk Pollock into coming west with him, driving his own car but meeting regularly at points along the way. Their first meeting place was to have been in Pennsylvania, but Pollock failed to show; a few days later, stopping in Wisconsin to meet his wife, Still saw Pollock's obituary in the newspaper.

"If he'd have come, he might still be alive today," Still said. "He could have had a fresh start. He was trying to, but forcing it . . . they had him all in knots. It can't be forced, it has to come naturally.

"I'd always warned him about that car," he added. "It was an old Chrysler that Peggy Guggenheim had given him in exchange for a picture. It wasn't balanced right, it couldn't handle the curves."

Still seems to speak of these battles primarily in the past tense now—they are, after all, struggles in which he has prevailed and triumphed. Yet, apparently unaware of the inspiration that his integrity and uncompromising attitude have exerted on a generation of younger artists, he frequently voiced

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misgivings that his conduct would be interpreted in terms of "bitterness, self-pity or iconoclasm." He expressed surprise and humility toward accolades that he received from Allan Kaprow, Richard Serra and others at a recent gathering in New York (Still said he continues to visit the city about once a month).

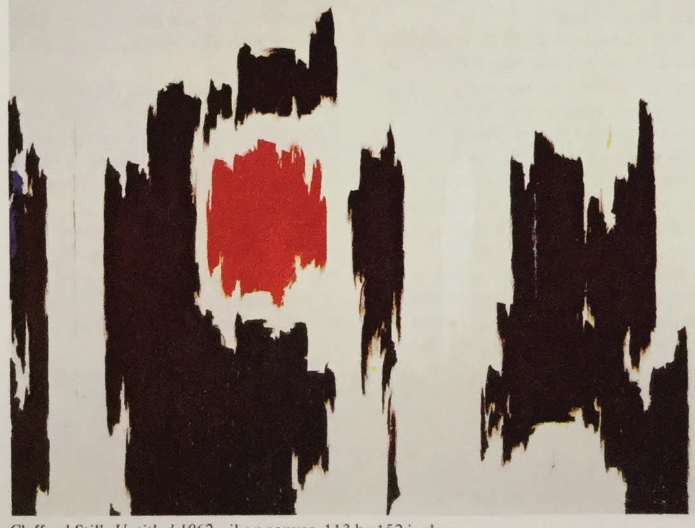
He makes clear, however, that his role has been that of a fighter rather than a "drop out." "I know that many artists pictured me sitting in my studio feeling angry and bitter," he said in recounting a much publicized battle with a dealer. "But I was having the time of my life.

"I assure you that I never intended to be a moral force for younger artists," he added. "When I die, people will say—they are saying it already—that I acted ruthlessly and amorally, with ingratitude to those toward whom I should be grateful. And they will be correct. At the same time, I can think of no other way for a serious artist to achieve his ends than by doing what I did. . . . I set about to show that this instrument—the limited means of paint on canvas—was important." He spoke of the continuing inspiration he found in the independence achieved by Turner in his mature work, and by Rembrandt in his last years. ("The portraits with just a turban around his head, and his face suggesting he'd had a little too much schnaps. The early art was a joke, but you have to take into account the people he painted for.")

As for his gift to the San Francisco Museum, Still compared his attempt to present a cross-section of his work to a recent Sviatoslav Richter concert he had attended—an all-Beethoven program, not the usual fare but "beautifully chosen to represent the fullness of Beethoven's art.

"The individual paintings are important, but the most important thing is a man's life work," said Still. "It's the idea behind them that counts. These paintings form only a fragment, but it's enough, I hope, that this idea will emerge from them."

Still has clearly selected the 28 works with meticulous concern for illuminating the main lines of his development, and they emphasize a number of significant points. By far the most important one is that Still is still steadfastly painting—and not at all in the manner of an artist who has passed the peak of his career. Indeed, a monumental canvas that dates from 1974 is one of the most sweeping, powerful paintings he has ever done, with a richness of color and texture that links it to the work Still was doing in the early '50s. The collection also belies the impression that Still's painting has progressively "thinned out" during the past two decades; in fact, it shows that he has alternated between thick, richly troweled surfaces and more thinly applied pigments, surrounded by large expanses of bare canvas, throughout much of his career. It is clear that Still is as obstinately resistant to settling into a comfortable manner, or formula, as ever.



Clyfford Still, *Untitled-1962,* oil on canvas, 113 by 152 inches.

The earliest of these 28 paintings was done in 1934. Its subject is a striding male figure, painted in austere, earthen colors and in a broad, sharply chiseled Expressionistic style which has remote resemblances to Soutine, but which also looks ahead (somewhat uncannily) to the Bay Region figurative style that grew up in the early '50s as a reaction against Still's influence. In this painting, Still states the theme that he has continued to develop more and more metaphorically and abstractly in his art, and which he has pursued with unyielding singlemindedness in the conduct of his life: The lone individual moving with towering self-confidence through a neutral environment which becomes whatever one chooses to make of it.

Distinct lines of continuity link this painting to the more abstract works of the late '30s, in which human forms give way to massive, bonelike shapes in dramatically contrasting colors. One can detect certain analogies in these paintings, too—to Marsden Hartley, Orozco and Picasso—but, as the museum's director, Henry Hopkins has observed the history of Still's "influences" is almost entirely a story of successive rejections of influences. (A concurrent museum show of drawings and small paintings by Arshile Gorky provided a graphic reminder of the nature of the influences that prevailed, and the strength of their hold on American artists, during those years.)

By 1942, only a geometric shape recalling the stylized motifs of Northwest Indian art (in a painting done on blue denim) remains as a figurative reference point, combined with a jagged line that slices through an austere color ground like a raw nerve. Still has referred to this linear force, which assumes increasing importance in later paintings, as a "life-line," the only symbolic reference that he will volunteer about his work.

Certain tenuous allusions to figure or landscape lingered in Still's painting until he began teaching in San Francisco in 1946. Some paintings from those years seem to indicate that Still was exploring vaguely mythical ideas. This aspect of his art was emphasized in Rothko's catalogue introduction to Still's first New York show at Peggy Guggenheim's: "It is significant that Still, working out West and alone, has arrived at pictorial conclusions so allied to those of the small band of Myth Makers who have emerged here during the war. The fact that his is a completely new facet of this idea, using un-

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precedented forms and completely personal methods, attests further to the vitality of this movement . . . . Still expresses the tragic-religious drama which is generic to all Myths, at all times, no matter where they occur."

For all practical purposes, however, Still's paintings of the early '40s are overwhelmingly abstract. Working in almost total isolation, first in New York State, later in Oakland, California, Still had arrived, by 1943, at a style that was more radical in its abstraction, and more sweeping in scale, than the work of any New York School artist at that time.

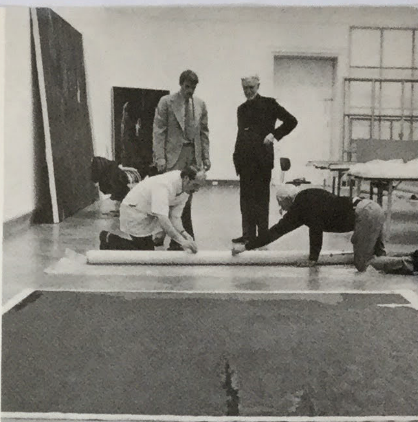
The niceties of drawing, the decorative graces of color, the dynamics of composition—all rapidly vanished from Still's painting of the '40s. They were supplanted by a new esthetic wherein traditional concepts of "beauty" and "ugliness" were replaced by the grandeur of a raw and elemental Thereness, anscendent in its implications. It is a *presence* of jagged, shredded, opaque forms, of scabrous or sodden colors and rfaces which are, paradoxically, agited and convulsive in their internal ovements, and awesomely still in their tality.

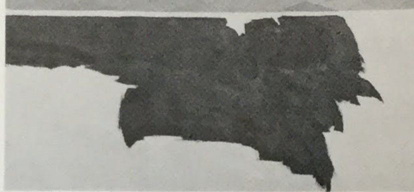
This, at least, is so of his more densely textured work. The evolution of Still's art during the following years by no means follows a straight line, but charts a zigzag course which, within the boundaries of his already totally individual and identifiable style, seems to oscillate, as it simultaneously advances and clarifies itself between polarities of expression. Frequently, Still seems to work backward and forward in time, returning to earlier concepts and themes, and developing them into the future; as Hopkins notes in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, a strong component of Still's stylistic evolution "consists of looking back to earlier works for sustenance, especially when he feels that he is reaching into an area beyond his knowledge of himself."

Still himself hints at an underlying polarity in a note from his diary (February 11, 1956) which the catalogue reprints: "A great free joy surges through me when I work . . . . With tense slashes and a few thrusts the beautiful white fields receive their color and the work is finished in a few minutes. (Like Belmonte weaving the pattern of his being by twisting the powerful bulls around him, I seem to achieve a comparable ecstasy in bringing forth the flaming life through these large responsive areas of canvas. And as the blues or reds or blacks leap and quiver in their tenuous ambience or rise in austere thrusts to carry their power infinitely beyond the bounds of the limiting field, I move with them and find a resurrection from the moribund oppressions that held me only hours ago.) Only they are complete too soon, and I must quickly move on to another to keep the spirit alive and unburdened by the labor my Puritan reflexes tell me must be the cost of any joy."

While the paintings of the early '50s achieve an unparalleled richness of color, built up in great, unyielding vertical walls that suggest infinite extension, he was at the same time creating works of such audacious austerity as *1950-K-No. 1*, an immense square of bare canvas galvanically activated by three crucial elements—a smallish blue area, a smaller bit of red and a tiny yellow daub. The obdurate immobility of *1956-D* appeared in the same year as the clangorous, precariously balanced *PH-393*. The Spartan economy of *1950-51-No. 2* is counterweighted by the lush, vivid colors and dramatic contrasts of *PH-968*, done in 1951-52. The power with which Still forges combinations of dissonant, seemingly incompatible hues; his control over more "appealing" harmonies so that they never cross over into decoration; the manner in which his huge, asymmetrical compositions are kept in place solely by a thin, ragged edge or the tiniest shape in one corner; all challenge the old "laws" of color and design. Perhaps there are precedents in oriental painting, but as one contemplates Still's work, it is primarily music that comes to mind: the complex orchestrations of color and texture, the dynamic choreography of his shapes, the manner in which a narrow edge of yellow elicits optical afterimages that suffuse and irradiate an otherwise somber blue field with the magical force of harmonic overtones. Like music, these paintings suggest expansion into infinite time as well as space, and, as music is pure sound, these paintings are pure vision.

The three large paintings dating from 1974 seem to constitute Still's counterpart to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: dizzying in the tumultuous, diagonal movement of their gestural, but highly controlled shapes—in contrast to the solidity and verticality of the works immediately preceeding; harboring an inner serenity transcending both calm and conflict; achieving a jubilant exultation.





Still with museum director Henry Hopkins and staff, during installation.

For all their individual magnificence, however, no one of these paintings eclipses any other; the huge, exhilaratingly spacious canvases of recent years cast their radiance over the blunt and earthbound quality of the very earliest paintings; this, in turn, resonates throughout Still's mature work with a persistent undertone of epic heroism. So much, however, for words. "My work is in the paintings," Still has written. "There I function and there alone would I be understood."

Still's painting has sometimes been likened to such natural phenomena as the Grand Canyon; while it is naive to suppose that his forms or surfaces have literal parallels with nature, the analogy seems apt in a poetic sense. His works have the overriding presence of natural elements or living organisms, governed solely by the law of inevitability—what Still has called "the organic lesson" and Kandinsky, "inner necessity." The would-be critic is like a tour guide who recites geological data and points out anthropomorphic formations in the cliff faces.

Each of Still's paintings is clearly a unique way-point along a path that leads deeper and deeper into the recesses of his own being. The "subject" of his work is, ultimately, art—not art history, which is the concern of so much other recent art—but the continuing creative journey, the work that Harold Rosenberg has described as a process of "engagement," by which, through constant gnawing and hacking, "a mind is created." ■