

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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TWENTY-SIX PAINTINGS BY JESS ON VIEW AT MUSEUM

Projects: Translations by Jess, on view from October 28 through December 8 at The Museum of Modern Art, consists of a series of 26 oil paintings, each with an accompanying text, made between 1959 and 1971.

The subject matter is derived from magazine images, snapshots, book illustrations and other sources. Among these are 19th-century engravings from Scientific American, a bubble-gum trading card photo of the Beatles, a University of Montana yearbook photograph of a soccer game, illustrations from The Nonsense Book (1900) by Gelett Burgess, a photograph of a pumpkin field from the U.S. Agricultural Yearbook (1909) and a reproduction from a 1905 Swedish art book of the painting "The Lament for Icarus" by Herbert James Draper. Each painting is accompanied by a text, also chosen from a variety of sources -- Thomas Hardy, Socrates, Lewis Carroll, Gertrude Stein, Edward Sapir, Kandinsky, Edward Lear, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to name a few.

The images and texts, displaced from their original contexts, combine into a new, mysterious, often suggestive and hermetic whole quite different in meaning from any of the constituent elements. Jess's paintings differ from most recent figurative work not only because of their literary connotations but also because the surfaces are so thickly impastoed with oil paints that the actual physicality of the paintings creates its own dialogue with the images.

Jess's use of color also sets his work apart from other recent painting. In an essay on the Translations, poet Robert Duncan quotes the artist on his use of color: "Every point of color is autonomous, but still it is within the total relationship, the total network of color.... in most contemporary color, intensity is what they aim at. I am concerned not with the intensity but with the identity of the color in the total; it may be intense, but it may be dim or ambiguous, seeming to change in relationships with different other points of color."

(more)

Of the series as a whole, Duncan has written: "The set of Translations and their Imagist Texts as they are presented in this show in this complex game of associations, in which the paintings are cards, the arcana of an individual, Tarot, a game of initiations, of evocations, speculations, exorcisms, may be related to the field of dream and magic in art which we inherit in the tradition of the Surrealists. A play at once sinister and rightful, like Lewis Carroll's play with words, but here, a play with the properties of paints and picturing."

Jess was born in 1923 in Long Beach, California. Trained and employed as a radio-chemist, he studied with, among others, Clyfford Still, Hassel Smith and David Park at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, and began showing his paste-ups, paintings and junk assemblies in the San Francisco area in the early 1950s. Jess's work has appeared in gallery and museum shows around the country, including two at The Museum of Modern Art-- "The Art of Assemblage" (1961) and "American Collages" (1965).

While Jess's paste-ups have been shown widely, the paintings in the Translations series are being shown together for the first time in this, the artist's first solo exhibition in a museum. The paintings have been obtained from the following lenders: Kenneth Anger, Mr. and Mrs. Scott Beach, Mrs. Brooke Blake, Mr. and Mrs. David Kerr Burton, Robert Duncan, Frances G. Herndon, Ida Hodes, Mrs. Barbara Joseph, R. B. Kitaj, Mr. and Mrs. John Martin, Mr. Mario Tazzoli, Mr. and Mrs. A. Charles Wilson, the Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art, Odyssea Gallery, the San Francisco Museum of Art and the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Projects: Translations by Jess is directed by Kynaston McShine, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture. The Museum of Modern Art gratefully acknowledges the support of its exhibition program by the New York State Council on the Arts.

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. (212) 956-7501, -7296.