Jackson Pollock : new approaches

Edited by Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel

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Jackson Pollock *New Approaches*

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Introduction: Pollock and The Museum of Modern Art

Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel

In the forty-odd years since Jackson Pollock's death, in 1956, several generations of critics, historians, and artists have confirmed his importance in twentieth-century art. All the while, though, these analysts and creators have been changing our sense of *why* Pollock is such a crucial figure. The ongoing life of that process, and the often passionate debates that today surround Pollock and his legacy, are vividly evident in the nine essays that make up this book. Art historian T. J. Clark focuses on issues of scale and size in Pollock's work, and links the work's formal characteristics to new understandings of energy in the first era of the atomic bomb. Robert Storr and Pepe Karmel, curators at The Museum of Modern Art, rethink Pollock's origins and formation, Storr examining his often slighted debts to José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, Karmel shedding new light on the more celebrated confrontation with Pablo Picasso. Supported by X rays of key paintings and a fresh investigation of Pollock's materials, conservators James Coddington and Carol C. Mancusi-Ungaro provide unprecedented insight into the artist's working process, and belie popular notions of his practices as chaotic. Art historian and critic Rosalind E. Krauss concentrates on Pollock's legacy among artists of the 1960s and '70s, with an emphasis on the implications of horizontality in his most radical paintings. Still within the arena of Pollock's impact on subsequent art, but with a focus on issues of gender, art historian Anne M. Wagner offers new thinking about Helen Frankenthaler's historic response to Pollock. The artist's ambivalent reception in Europe, amid a broader debate about American culture and commerce, is newly documented and analyzed by Jeremy Lewison of the Tate Gallery, London, while Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture of The Museum of Modern Art, reconsiders the relationship between Pollock's biography and his development as an artist, and opposes the traditional assessment of "expressionism" in his art.

These essays were originally presented at a symposium held on January 23–24, 1999, at The Museum of Modern Art, near the conclusion of the Museum's Pollock retrospective. From the outset, this symposium volume was con-

ceived in tandem with the major publication that accompanied the exhibition: *Jackson Pollock*, by Kirk Varnedoe with Pepe Karmel. That book's large-format color illustrations of Pollock's work were intended to offer a comprehensive pictorial overview of his development. Its introductory essays were written in the understanding that the Museum would include more diverse scholarly voices, and a fuller complement of bibliography and exhibition history, in subsequent publications. This symposium volume is one of those publications, and its format—in contrast to that of the earlier book—has been designed to emphasize text. For this reason, and to keep this volume modestly priced, we have depended on smaller illustrations, and ultimately on the reader's ability to refer to the previous book for a more lavish visual documentation.[1] *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches* is accompanied by *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, a matching volume that anthologizes important older texts by or about Pollock that have become harder to find today. And finally the comprehensive Pollock bibliography and exhibition history compiled by the Museum's researchers has been made available on the Museum's Website: http://www.moma.org.[2]

This broad program of publications reflects the Museum's long-standing engagement with Pollock's work. Dating back to his early career, this engagement has taken the form of numerous acquisitions, exhibitions, and books—all reflecting the belief that Pollock is one of the critical figures who has marked, and continues to shape, the course of modern art. The Museum's great Pollock paintings are as a rule on view, and certain landmark acquisitions and exhibitions are familiar to scholars. But the fuller history of the Museum's relation to Pollock has been only imperfectly understood, and it seems appropriate to review that history here.

As is well known, Pollock's formative years as an artist—his late twenties and early thirties—were strongly affected by his visits to The Museum of Modern Art. The landmark Picasso retrospective of 1939 organized by the Museum's founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., played a crucial role in awakening the young Pollock to European modernism; René d'Harnoncourt's 1941 exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* reinforced Pollock's interest in tribal art, and allowed him to witness Native American artists "painting" a picture by pouring sand onto the floor. The Museum's Joan Miró retrospective of 1943 offered in-depth exposure to the other European artist (besides Picasso) Pollock said he most admired.

Pollock was especially affected by three Picasso paintings in the Museum's collection. The first of these, *Girl before a Mirror*, entered the collection in 1938. After *Guernica* was first exhibited in New York, in 1939, it was left on long-term loan at the Museum, so Pollock was able to study it—and the violent preparatory drawings for it—at leisure. Picasso's seminal work of 1907, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, was purchased by the Museum in 1937 and went on view in early 1939.[3]

According to the critic Clement Greenberg, Pollock was among the first New York artists to "discover" this work. Greenberg also said Pollock had told him that the great 1944 painting *Gothic* was made under the influence of the *Demoiselles*.[4]

When Pollock began to exhibit, staff and patrons of the institution responded to him actively. The jury for the 1943 Spring Salon at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery included three Museum figures: Barr; the critic and collector James Thrall Soby, then Chair of the Acquisitions Committee of the Museum's Advisory Committee; and the critic and collector James Johnson Sweeney, the Committee's Vice-Chair, and later the director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture. Swayed by the advocacy of the painter Piet Mondrian, who described the painting Pollock submitted as "the most interesting work I've seen so far in America," the jury voted to accept it.[5] (Nearly forty years later, this breakthrough canvas, *Stenographic Figure*, joined the Museum's collection.) Soon thereafter, Guggenheim signed Pollock for her gallery, and that November he became the first American to mount a solo exhibition there. When that exhibition opened, it was Sweeney who wrote the brochure. Soby visited the show, and put *The She-Wolf* on reserve, to be considered for acquisition by the Museum's Advisory Committee.[6] After some debate, the purchase (for $600) was approved. This was the first of Pollock's works to be acquired by any museum.[7]

Barr seems not to have been fully persuaded by Pollock's work, and resisted suggestions that the Museum acquire pictures from his later exhibitions at Art of This Century.[8] The Museum did, however, include Pollock's 1943 *Mural* in the exhibition *Large Scale Modern Paintings* (1947), where it appeared alongside works such as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Henri Matisse's 1916–17 *Women at a Spring*, Fernand Léger's 1935–39 *Composition with Two Parrots*, and Max Beckmann's 1945 *Blindman's Buff*. The Museum's next acquisition occurred only after a change in Pollock's style: in January 1950, it acquired *Number 1A, 1948*, becoming the first institution to buy a work made by the pouring or "drip" method that Pollock had initiated in 1947.[9] The purchase was a milestone for Pollock and his wife, Lee Krasner, helping them raise the money to install heating in their Long Island home.[10] Barr included this canvas (along with two other Pollocks) in his selections for the XXV Venice Biennale in the summer of 1950.

In the interim, Guggenheim had closed Art of This Century and returned to Europe, taking part of her collection with her and distributing the rest among American museums and educational institutions. In 1952, she gave MoMA another splendid example of Pollock's poured style, *Full Fathom Five*, of 1947. In April of that year, Pollock was featured in the *15 Americans* exhibition at the Museum,[11] and in May 1956, he was selected to inaugurate a new series of exhibitions intended to feature artists in mid-career. That exhibition, sadly, would be hastily transformed into a posthumous retrospective, after Pollock's death in a car crash on August 11. Selected by Sam Hunter, then a MoMA curator, this show

opened in December 1956, barely four months after Pollock's death. The next year, Frank O'Hara, a curator at the Museum as well as an influential poet, selected a comprehensive Pollock exhibition to be sent to the São Paulo Bienal under the auspices of the Museum's International Council.[12] O'Hara's show then toured to Rome, Basel, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, London, and Paris. The exhibition exercised a decisive effect on European estimations of Pollock.

In the meantime, The Museum of Modern Art reached for and missed an opportunity to acquire one of Pollock's monumental poured paintings of 1950. In the first half of 1956, as the Museum prepared to mount its first Pollock retrospective, Barr asked Sidney Janis, then Pollock's dealer, to put a reserve on *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950*. Janis later recalled that the agreed-upon price was $6,000, but Barr never exercised his option, and after Pollock's death Krasner increased the price dramatically: in 1957, Janis told Barr the same painting would cost $30,000.[13] Barr balked, and *Autumn Rhythm* was acquired instead by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The need to acquire one of Pollock's large paintings remained evident, though; and another opportunity seemed to present itself in 1958, when William Rubin, then a noted art history professor and collector, who would later join the Museum as curator of the collection, proposed to buy *Number 32, 1950* from the artist's estate, and make it a promised gift to the Museum. Krasner had wanted the Museum to purchase Pollock's large *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, when its original owner had moved to sell it. (The eventual purchaser was Ben Heller.) But she felt unable to devote much time to the proposed sale of *Number 32*, since she was busy with an important commission.[14] Negotiations extended well into January 1959. Rubin was willing to pay $35,000, which would have been a record price for Pollock.[15] He even devised a complex arrangement by which he would have purchased *Blue Poles* from Heller, then exchanged it with Krasner for *Number 32*.[16] Nothing availed, and Rubin and the Museum finally gave up hope. It would be almost a decade before Rubin and Janis, playing dramatically different roles, finally solved the dilemma of acquiring a monumental Pollock for the Museum.

The year of 1967 was a crucial one for the crystallization of Pollock's stature among postwar American artists, for the spread of his influence on younger artists, and for his presence in the Museum's collection. In April, William Lieberman (then a MoMA curator) organized the most thorough retrospective until then of Pollock's work. As Rosalind Krauss discusses elsewhere in this volume, the exhibition helped inspire a radical shift in contemporary art toward an aesthetic of horizontality and "anti-form." This was also a crucial year for Pollock studies: even before the exhibition opened, Rubin began publishing "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," a seminal series of articles in *Artforum*. Among other things, Rubin's argument for the artist's roots in European modernism forcefully refuted the myth of Pollock as a naïve, "cowboy" artist. Then,

when the exhibition catalogue appeared, its chronology by Francis V. O'Connor for the first time established a solid foundation for the study of Pollock's life.

It was also in 1967 that Rubin formally joined the Museum's curatorial ranks. As one of his first endeavors, he suggested to Sidney and Harriet Janis that they donate to the Museum their extraordinary collection—over 100 works—of modern art. The Janises' gift included one small poured Pollock, *Free Form* of 1946, and one late canvas, *White Light* (1954),[17] but Rubin, more eager than ever for the Museum to acquire one of the monumental works of 1950, had his sights set higher: he persuaded a more-than-willing Sidney Janis to agree to sell up to four of the eight Mondrians and Légers in his collection in order to finance the purchase for the Museum, in 1968, of *One: Number 31, 1950* (which was owned, like *Blue Poles*, by Heller). In the end, happily, two Mondrians more than sufficed.[18]

With this master stroke in 1968 as his starting salvo, Rubin then set out to build a systematic representation of Pollock's career, in the context of a major upgrading of its holdings in Abstract Expressionism. The small but telling transitional canvas *Shimmering Substance* of 1946 was bought the same year, and arguably the greatest of Pollock's 1951 black pourings, *Echo (Number 25, 1951)*, was purchased in 1969. In April of 1980, after a decade of negotiations with Krasner, Rubin and the Museum announced that seven key paintings would be acquired from Pollock's estate. Four of these—*The Flame* (c. 1934–38), *Mask* (c. 1941), *Stenographic Figure* (c. 1942), and *There Were Seven in Eight* (c. 1945)—were purchases; three—*Circle* (c. 1938–41), *Bird* (c. 1938–1941), and the key late picture *Easter and the Totem* (1953)—were gifts from Krasner, in memory of Pollock. Given first choice of the works remaining in the estate,[19] Rubin had targeted pictures that allowed the Museum to represent the whole of the artist's career, virtually year by year, from his earliest mature ventures to his last resolved efforts. As part of the same agreement, Krasner also made a promised gift of *Gothic*, which eventually became the property of the Museum in 1984. When Rubin retired as director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, in 1988, he had been responsible for the arrival of thirteen Pollocks in the Museum. This unrivaled collection provided the foundation on which the recent retrospective was built.

This exhibition, and the books accompanying it, are thus the direct product of a prolonged and intense institutional engagement with Jackson Pollock. The exhibition allowed the Museum to fulfill its historic role, not just as a repository but as a resource for modern art. We were deeply gratified to see how many young artists came here to confront Pollock, as Pollock himself had confronted Picasso here sixty years before. We hope that these books will play a comparable role in provoking creative work by scholars, critics, and artists.

Notes

1. In order to keep this book to a modest size and price, we have had to omit the lively discussions that followed the original presentation of each paper. Audiotapes and transcripts of these discussions may be consulted in the Museum Archives.
2. From the Museum's home page, go to "Research Resources," then to "DADABASE" (the Museum library), then to "Search the Catalog." Run a "Basic" search on "Pollock, Jackson." The bibliography should appear under its own heading in the "Results" screen. The procedure to follow may change over time, but the Museum will make every effort to ensure that the bibliography remains easily available.
3. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was exhibited at the Jacques Seligmann gallery, New York, in 1937, from which it was purchased by The Museum of Modern Art. The Museum, however, was constructing its 53rd Street building, and did not exhibit the painting until 1939. See Judith Cousins and Hélène Seckel, "Chronology of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907 to 1939," in William Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins, *Studies in Modern Art 3: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), pp. 196–202.
4. In 1981, Charles Cooper and Francis Frascina, who were making a film on the *Demoiselles*, told Cousins (then a researcher at the Museum) that in their interview with Clement Greenberg the critic had insisted that the *Demoiselles* had at first been less noticed by New York artists than *Girl before a Mirror* and *Guernica*. Greenberg had apparently insisted that Pollock was among the first to "discover" the painting, and that the evidence of this engagement was clearest in *Gothic*. Matthew Rohn told Cousins of a similar conversation in which, according to Greenberg, Pollock remarked that *Gothic* was painted "under the inspiration of the *Demoiselles*." Cousins, memo in the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, June 26, 1981.
5. See Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life: A Memoir by Jimmy Ernst* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984), pp. 241–42.
6. In a memo of November 9, 1943, to Agnes Rindge, a Vassar College art history professor and a member of the Acquisitions Committee, James Thrall Soby wrote, "Agnes: I took the liberty of reserving the picture in Peggy Guggenheim's show by Pollock, *She-Wolf*. If the Advisory Committee is not interested in buying it perhaps we can get it for the Museum through other funds. The price to the Museum is $650. Could you go and look at it soon. You may like another Pollok [*sic*] better. But I honestly believe, though it is not my business, that a Pollok would be a fine thing for us to have from the Advisory Committee." In the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.
7. The acquisition was supported by the art historian Meyer Schapiro and by Sidney Janis, then a collector and writer, later a leading dealer. It was resisted by Rindge, and by Stephen Clark and A. Conger Goodyear, two important trustees. Rindge's response is recorded in a memo of November 27, 1943, to Janis and Schapiro; Clark's and Goodyear's in a letter of March 7, 1971, by Soby, in the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture. Janis discusses the acquisition in Rubin, "Introduction," *Three Generations of Twentieth-Century Art: The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. xiv.
8. The lukewarm response of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to Pollock's 1945 exhibition, and his reluctance to acquire additional work at that time, is recorded in a memo of April 6, 1946, in the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture. But Monroe Wheeler, later the Museum's director of publications, purchased *Painting* (c. 1944) from the 1945 show, and gave the picture to the Museum in 1958.
9. The acquisition of *Number 1A, 1948* was actually preceded by the purchase, in January 1949, of *Number 4, 1948: Gray and Red*, a drip painting on paper, shown in Pollock's second exhibition at Betty Parsons. A year later, this small work was traded as part of the purchase price for the larger painting.
10. Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, in *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989), pp. 624–25, suggest that approximately $1,500 of Pollock's $6,500 income in 1949–50 derived from the sale to the Modern. This was the year in which Pollock and Lee Krasner were able to afford to install central heating and hot water.
11. Pollock wrote to the curator of *15 Americans*, Dorothy Miller, thanking her for the "wonderful" installation and commenting, "There was probably extra work for you (or was there?) in my staying away. At any rate I think it was wise of me." Photocopy of handwritten letter dated April 14, 1952, the Museum Archives, Dorothy C. Miller Papers. Pollock also makes a comment of technical interest, writing, "I wish I could give No 7 a coat of glue sizing—it would take some of the wrinkles out of it. Perhaps when I'm in next time I can do it after museum hours. It wouldn't take more than ten minutes."
12. A memo from Helen Franc to "Mrs. Shaw and Department," dated April 4, 1967, in the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, details the differences between the 1956 show and the traveling show of 1957; although they were similar in size, they shared only nineteen paintings in common. The catalogues in different languages that accompanied the traveling exhibition, however, contained versions of Sam Hunter's introduction to the 1956 New York show.
13. Janis, interviewed by Paul Cummings, Part II, August 1, 1972, pp. 374–75, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Janis's recollections are confirmed by a letter of March 22, 1957, from Janis to Barr, in which "Autumn Rhythms" is offered at a price of $30,000. In the James Thrall Soby papers, Box 50, III (1957), the Museum Archives.
14. Barr, letter to Rubin, November 7, 1958, and Miller, letter to Rubin, November 17, 1958. In the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.
15. In a memo to Barr on December 10, 1958, Miller reported that Rubin "agreed that if it should suddenly seem more to our advantage to try to purchase the picture ourselves he would of course relinquish his claim to priority." In a later memo to Barr, of January 30, 1959, Miller wrote, "Bill Rubin phoned me on January 26th with news that he has been forced to relinquish his hopes of buying from Lee Pollock the painting by Jackson Pollock *Number 32, 1950*." In the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.
16. Rubin recalled this last gambit in conversation with Kirk Varnedoe in November 1998.
17. See *Three Generations of Twentieth-Century Art*, pp. 118–19.
18. See *Three Generations of Twentieth-Century Art*, p. 206. This information has been supplemented by discussions with Rubin. On the Heller collection, see William Seitz, *The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961).
19. "Major Pollock Acquisitions Announced by The Museum of Modern Art," press release, April 1980, in the Museum Archives.

Pollock's Smallness

T. J. Clark

Or, la question se pose, de savoir si le modèle réduit . . . n'offre pas, toujours et partout, le type même de l'oeuvre d'art. Car il semble bien que tout modèle réduit ait vocation esthétique—et d'où tirerait-il cette vertu constante, sinon de ses dimensions mêmes?—inversement, l'immense majorité des oeuvres d'art sont aussi des modèles réduits. . . . D'autre part, on peut se demander si l'effet esthétique, disons d'une statue équestre plus grande que nature, provient de ce qu'elle agrandit un homme aux dimensions d'un rocher, et non de ce qu'elle ramène ce qui est d'abord, de loin, perçu comme un rocher, aux proportions d'un homme.

[So the question arises, whether the "reduced version" is not the very model of the work of art, whenever and wherever we encounter it. For surely it seems that all reduced versions of things have an aesthetic purpose, or effect; and what is it that produces this effect, if not simply the version's size? Conversely, the immense majority of works of art are reduced versions of things. . . . One might wonder if the aesthetic effect even of an equestrian statue, larger than lifesize, comes not from its blowing up a man to the dimensions of a rock, but rather, from its reducing what looked, from a distance, to *be* a rock to the proportions of a man.]

—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage*, 1962[1]

My subject is the size and scale of Pollock's paintings, and the size and scale of the events taking place inside them. This is a central modernist issue—meaning it is a technical and formal one, but for that reason expressive and metaphorical. It needs saying straightaway that size and scale are different. Normally speaking, size is literal—a matter of actual, physical intuition. It involves grasping how big or small a certain object really is, most likely in relation to the size of the grasper's upright body or outspread arms. Of course this assessment is relational, which is to say, metaphorical; but equally obviously, the relating of everything to body size and reach of the hand is primordial, part of our evolutionary inheritance. Size is experienced as immediate, as given in the nature of things. And the loss of just that immediacy and self-evidence—the feeling that in conditions of modernity things no longer have sizes of their own, but only virtual and

manipulable scales—is one nightmare of modern life, from which modernist art sometimes tries to shake us free. Scale, on the other hand, is unabashedly metaphorical, and accepts size as a mere effect of representation. The size of a map is a literal matter; the scale of a map is its literal size put in relation to some other signified size, literal or imaginary—it does not matter which.

Some modernist art, as I said, wished to lay hold of the true size of things again. Some—certainly not all. Picasso accepted the size of a painting as a convenience, art-world-conventional through and through—all the way down, as they say in the trade. The actual physical dimensions of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* are irrelevant, except as support to the virtual, metaphorical scale of the bodies inside it. (I put on one side the *Demoiselles*'s general proclamation of masterpiece grandeur, which certainly is relevant, not to say essential. But this is an assertion of scale, not size. It is Picasso's way of making it clear to everyone that this is the same kind of picture as Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* or Courbet's *Demoiselles de la Seine*.) Whereas Matisse's *Music*, for example, is consumed with the idea of its own empirical dimensions. Every mark is intended to iterate—to make apprehensible—how large (in this case how ludicrously large, given the paucity of incident in the scene on show) the colored canvas literally is. When people talk about Matisse's color as expansive, they are surely not wrong.[2] But I would say that in a truly successful Matisse, color expands exactly to the edge of the frame—it is given enough velocity and inner turbulence to make the actual bigness of the canvas apprehensible, and to shock us with the fact of how much and how little is needed, pictorially, for that to take place. In order for size to *occur* to a viewer under modern conditions, great (or at least unusual) feats of painting are necessary. Size is a truly difficult subject; if it is tackled, painting may discover resources and dimensions in itself that it never knew it had.

There is, to repeat, a difference of opinion within modernism (maybe at the heart of modernism) concerning this whole set of assumptions. Mondrian is an artist of scale, Malevich an artist of sizes. This is to pass no aesthetic judgement on either, just to suggest that making modernist art (particularly modernist abstraction) seems to involve opting for one idea of largeness and smallness over another.

Pollock, I believe, was an artist of sizes. He had an idea of painting retrieving, and dramatizing, its own dimensions, and therefore gaining access to a new range of (more effective) metaphors. This was naive of him, I guess; but the naïveté drove his best work. And if one wants a suitably eloquent (and naive) modernist voice to sound the same note verbally, then I would opt for Wallace Stevens, in his beautiful poem from the late 1940s, "Large Red Man Reading."[3]

In the poem, ghosts return to earth to hear the large red man reading, aloud, from great blue (or maybe purple) tabulae. The ghosts are us—ordinary, disembodied modern subjects, always on the lookout for someone to read reality over again to us and put us in mind of what it is like. And the large red man is

the modernist—not Pollock specifically (Stevens at the time was freshly enthusiastic for Dubuffet, the proud new owner of a painting by René Pierre Tal Coat, and drafting a catalogue essay for an exhibition by Marcel Gromaire; for an old man touching seventy, French allegiances were precious), but enough like Pollock to be imagined as such, fifty years on. The large red man is reading, I like to think, from Pollock's beloved D'Arcy Thompson, the book called *On Growth and Form*—maybe the chapter entitled "On Magnitude." The ghosts are a little skeptical. We moderns always want more from art than it can offer. But the poem, even in spelling out the ghosts' impossible wishes, of course has the words themselves, in their cadence and purity of diction, grant those wishes nonetheless:

> They were those from the wilderness of stars that had expected more.
>
> There were those that returned to hear him read from the poem of life,
> Of the pans above the stove, the pots on the table, the tulips among them.
> They were those that would have wept to step barefoot into reality,
>
> That would have wept and been happy, have shivered in the frost
> And cried out to feel it again, have run fingers over leaves
> And against the most coiled thorn, have seized on what was ugly
>
> And laughed, as he sat there reading, from out the purple tabulae,
> The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law:
> *Poesis, poesis*, the literal characters, the vatic lines,
>
> Which in those ears and in those thin, those spended hearts,
> Took on color, took on shape and the size of things as they are
> And spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked.

I suppose it is particularly the phrases in the last four lines that seem to conjure up Pollock, rather than Dubuffet or Tal Coat: the idea of lines being literal as well as vatic, and the way that therefore, for the ghosts, the lines "took on color, took on shape and the size of things as they are / And spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked."

"The size of things as they are." Let me repeat that this dream of literalness is naive, and no doubt can drive a painter who takes it seriously to distraction. Because in painting of any complexity, the "real" size of the painting, and the actual size of marks within it, do inevitably become virtual—subject to interpretation, to reworking in the mind. And therefore a painting, like Pollock's, that thinks it cannot attain to a genuine complexity without somehow hanging onto, or rearticulating, the "real" that the virtual obscures, is in a fearsome double bind. This was the bind, I believe, that finally dictated Pollock's move to colossal

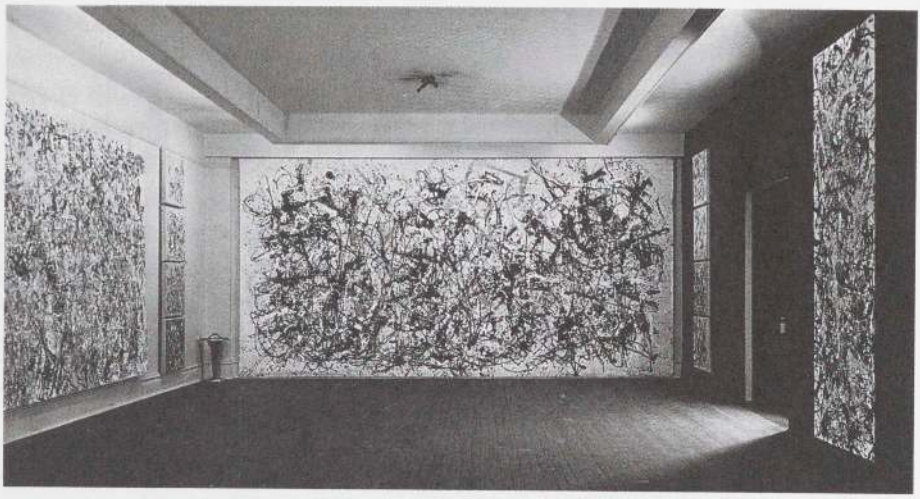

Fig. 1. Pollock's 1950 exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, viewed facing *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950.* **Photograph by Hans Namuth**

dimensions—in terms of the physical conditions of his studio, and the opportunities he knew would be offered by the space of the Betty Parsons Gallery (fig. 1), one might almost say to monstrous dimensions—in the paintings of 1950. As if Pollock believed (again, wonderfully and naively) that there might be a point, if you got a painting big enough, where the sheer size of the field, and the number of painterly incidents within it, would overwhelm metaphor and put the world in its place. This might even be the frame of reference within which to think, as we still need to, about why Pollock's version of abstraction came so abruptly to an end at the moment of its triumph.

All this amounts to saying (certainly not for the first time) that abstraction for Pollock was a kind of literalness, a return to the world—or might potentially be, if paintings could be big enough or small enough. I think both dimensions counted. We should remember that the big paintings of 1950 were accompanied by a series of preternaturally little ones—paintings consumed by their own littleness, and as determined to articulate that nuclear concentration as *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* (plate 5) and *Number 32, 1950* (plate 3) were on stating and restating their superhuman expansiveness. There is a whole other side to Pollock's production in 1950, that is to say, which runs deliberately contrary to the one we normally concentrate on. We should enter into the record fifteen or so square paintings, twenty-two by twenty-two inches roughly, done in the course of the year in oil and sometimes enamel or aluminum, thrown on Masonite or composition board, or occasionally on the Masonite's coarse-grained back side. Apparently the little squares of Masonite may have been "found objects," made available to Pollock for free.[4] But whether the size was chosen or accepted,

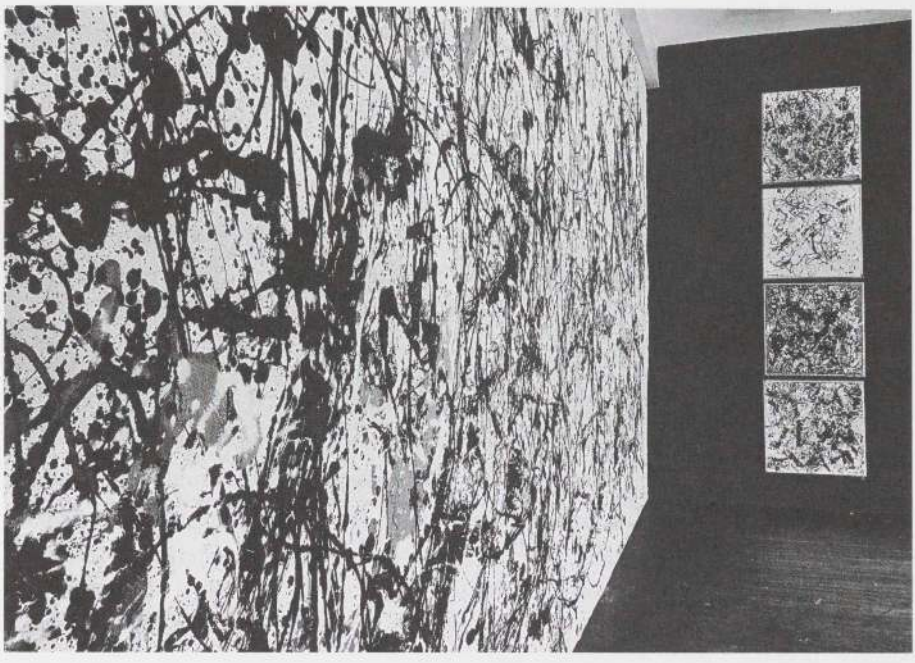

Fig. 2. Pollock's 1950 exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, with *Autumn Rhythm* on the left. Photograph by Hans Namuth

Fig. 3. Jackson Pollock. *Number 15, 1950*. 1950. Oil on Masonite, 22 x 22 in. (55.8 x 55.8 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Purchase Award

what matters is the fierceness and seriousness of Pollock's engagement with it, as part of what he was doing at a key moment in his work.

Thirteen of these paintings were hung alongside—or rather, I would say, stacked in ironic juxtaposition to—*Autumn Rhythm* and company in the crucial show at Betty Parsons in November–December 1950. You will notice two columns of four of these paintings hung to either side of *Autumn Rhythm*, and there is another installation photo that makes the collision of sizes even more dramatic (fig. 2). The latter photo is clear enough for it to be possible to tell which small paintings are which. The one next to the bottom, for instance, is *Number 15, 1950* (fig. 3), now in the Los Angeles County Museum—a work representative, I think, of the pictures visible in the two main stacks, but not necessarily of the small paintings at

Fig. 4. Jackson Pollock. *Number 22, 1950.* **1950. Enamel on composition board, 22⅝ x 22⅝ in. (56.4 x 56.4 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Albert M. Greenfield and Elizabeth M. Greenfield Collection**

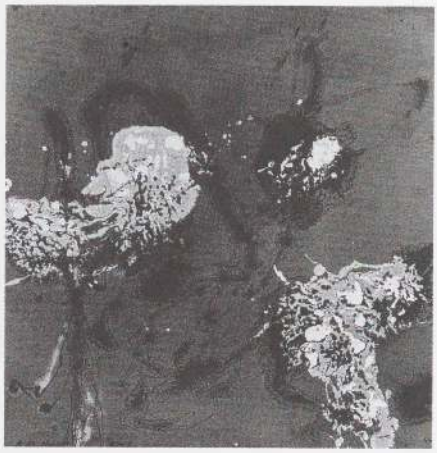

Fig. 5. Jackson Pollock. *Number 19, 1950.* **1950. Oil on Masonite, 23½ x 23 in. (59.7 x 58.4 cm). Destroyed**

Parsons as a whole. I count, from the record, at least thirteen twenty-two-by-twenty-two-inch paintings in the show, and actually I am inclined to think that the catalogue raisonné undercounts by one.[5] The paintings are diverse. Some are luminous and intricate, like *Number 15, 1950*. (The Masonite here was covered with a careful, consistent gray ground; then with pours of white, blue, and brown; then green, followed by a gray-white; then black, with pink and yellow swirled on top of it; then black again, and brown; an all-but-final scattering of red; and lastly a throw or two more of the pink.) Some pictures are a touch heavier and more explosive (fig. 4). One or two—for instance *Number 19, 1950*, which we know was hung at Parsons (fig. 5)—are as instant and impatient as Pollock ever got.

No one is saying that all the small paintings of 1950 are unqualified successes. A reviewer at the time, in the little magazine *The Compass*, dismissed them as "chic refinements of [Pollock's] own more vigorous style. These panels are tame copies," says the reviewer, "seemingly designed to beguile less daring buyers. Here Pollock is at his weakest and less sincere. Significantly more and more silver and metallic paint substitutes for true color decoration."[6] I deeply disagree with this as a verdict on the best of the small paintings, and certainly as a verdict on their purpose and effect in the show. But they are a strange and heterogeneous group. I understand why the selectors of the current retrospective opted to leave them out altogether, preferring a few of their slightly larger and more vertical brethren done in 1949.

Nonetheless, I believe that the absence of the 1950 miniatures skews our sense of Pollock's ambitions for modernism, at the moment when his painting reached most confidently for "the size of things as they are." Again, the Parsons

installation photographs tell the story. We should not assume, as too much of the writing on Pollock (including my own) has been prone to, that enormity was all there was to Pollock's abstraction in its last phase, and that the abstraction ended because enormity could not save it. Bigness too was relational, as the Parsons hanging was at pains to spell out. Bigness needed smallness in order to register as such. But the hope seems to me to have been that the two opposite terms—the cosmologically large and the critically, atomically compressed—would confirm one another in their literalness and cancel out the middle space between them, the space of virtuality and mere scale. Cancel out the space, in other words, where most painting had operated most of the time—including a lot of Pollock's painting in 1948 and 1949.

Here is the point to draw breath. For some readers must have been wondering, over the last page or so, how my stress on Pollock as an artist of literal, absolute largeness and smallness can possibly tally with the actual flexibility of the painter's formats, and with his often deeply metaphorical sense of the kind of extension and spatiality he wished his painting to conjure up. "There was a reviewer a while back who wrote that my pictures didn't have any beginning or any end. He didn't mean it as a compliment, but it was."[7] How on earth does that remark square with a notion of literal size? "My concern is with the rhythms of nature . . . the way the ocean moves . . . the Ocean's what the expanse of the West was for me."[8] "Energy and motion made visible," as the famous page in Pollock's papers has it.[9] There is maybe something of literalness to this formulation, though having motion and energy be visible in a still trace is already dangerously counterfactual. And in any case Pollock immediately runs on to "human needs and motives," and "memories arrested in space," which last is a mind-twisting metaphor if ever there was one. This page, as I understand it, shows us Pollock enumerating the things he believes his reduced versions are really *of*.

And I agree with him. I agree with him even about the illusion of endlessness and oceanic expansiveness, and of past time somehow being crystallized and frozen into a kind of spatiality. Of course Pollock's paintings survive, and become more compelling, because the years shuck off their incidental extremism and lay bare their essential, human content—which is desolate and indomitable at the same time. "I just can't stand reality." "I saw a landscape the likes of which no human being could have seen." "There is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end."[10] "The greatest poverty," to quote Wallace Stevens again, "is not to live / In a physical world, to feel that one's desire / Is too difficult to tell from despair."[11] That, sadly, could be Pollock's motto. Or maybe this, from Parker Tyler:

> Jackson Pollock has put the . . . labyrinth at an infinite and unreachable distance, a distance beyond the stars—a non-human distance. . . . If one felt vertigo before Pollock's differentiations of space, then truly one would be lost in the abyss of an endless definition of being. One would be enclosed, trapped by the labyrinth of the picture-space. But we are safely looking at it, seeing it steadily and seeing it whole, from a point outside. Only man, in his paradoxical role of the superman, can achieve such a feat of absolute contemplation: the sight of an image of space *in which he does not exist.*[12]

Which is to say (I am sure correctly) that Pollock's art is one that aims constantly at a radical, incommensurable, truly elating scale—at infinite extension or intension, preposterous depth or complexity, *absolute* elevation. It is Nietzschean, as Tyler insists. In other words, deeply, intransigently metaphorical—aiming for a painting in which all identities are shattered and transfigured. Be aware that even the image of Ocean in Pollock's notebook entry is double-edged: "My concern is with the rhythms of nature . . . the way the ocean moves." Yet the ocean is partly to be understood as a figure of otherness and incommensurability, of something whose dimensions and movements are ultimately impervious to the mind. The sea is "inhuman," to use Stevens's word for it in "The Idea of Order at Key West": "The sea was not a mask."[13] Art "concerns" itself with the ocean's rhythms (how modest and formal is Pollock's choice of noun here) not in order to imitate an aspect of nature but to get to the point where the physical world might appear in a painting, indeed inhumanly, "like a body wholly body, fluttering its empty sleeves."[14] Remember also that Tyler's clinching word "superman" would have rhymed horribly in late 1950 with the new coinage "superbomb," which Truman had ordered built in January, and which Teller and Sakharov were racing, so the papers regularly told their readers, to make real and deliverable. Of course this is right. Pollock's paintings are steeped in metaphor. Zarathustra and Oppenheimer are their gods—as well as Claus Fuchs, whose principled treason was another fact of the year. (Bear in mind Pollock's stubborn Stalinism.) All I would say further is that Pollock believed, in my view, that in order to arrive at metaphors adequate to the time, and make those metaphors pictorial, pictures had to attain to a state of absolute literalness—of overtness and articulacy—about the dimensions they possessed. And this is the Pollock effect. True scale—true elation and terror and endlessness (the scale of experience in 1950)—is reached through the medium of true size.

An obvious problem follows. What is going to happen *within* the picture to sustain or enforce this literalness? What kind of handling or linear rhythm or part-to-whole relation will enable a level of complexity—of true metaphorical surprise—without that complexity drawing the eye and mind away from physical

fact? By "iterating" literal size, Pollock did not mean merely repeating it, or filling it with as little as possible. His painting was cram-full of incident, and meant to be. The crowding was part of the point.[15] But what kind of crowding? What kind of incident?

Answers to these questions exist, of course, almost from the beginning of Pollock criticism. Tyler was partly trying to provide one. The best answers turn on the notion of "all-overness," as stated first, unforgettably, by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. What I have to say on the subject does not contradict their classic argument, it seems to me, but tries slightly to shift its terms. I do not think, to put it baldly, that the discussion of all-overness in modernist writing quite grasps the special character of the relation between incident and totality, or crowding and uniformity, in Pollock. This is what I shall try to do now.

Let us put the word "all-over" aside. Let us conceive of Pollock's originality in terms of the relation between part and whole, and particularly smallness and largeness. The large, in Pollock, is made up of an accumulation of the small, but of a kind in which the small does not cede existence, somewhere along the way to making the large, to a realm of intermediate, or "human-size," or "figural" shapes. Maybe the word I am looking for here is Gestalt. Largeness in Pollock is made out of an unregenerate, unsublated smallness. No wonder it made Rudolph Arnheim squirm.

The purpose of the picture-maker is to find a state in which largeness and smallness confront one another again as real, perceivable dimensions to experience; and that, it turns out, involves the annihilation of the middle ranges (the mediations, the figures) of scale. I believe the hanging of the Parsons show in 1950, with its tiny stacks of implosions next to its paintings as big as the gallery space would allow, was meant partly as a key to what happened to largeness and smallness within each painting, not just between *Autumn Rhythm* and its immediate neighbors.

Of course I am not saying that largeness and smallness are the only dimensions of experience Pollock was interested in, or thought painting should return to. I take it we agree that the paintings he did from 1947 to 1950 are (wonderfully) various in their ambitions, and in the materials for those ambitions. There are paintings, like *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* (plate 6), bent on coloristic evenness and openness (*Lavender Mist* managing, God knows how, to be fragile and vaporous but at the same time hard as a rock); others, like the 1947 *Alchemy*, on doom-laden dark and congestion; others, like *Number 32, 1950*, on uncontrollable spasm and discontinuity, as if wanting to signify some new absoluteness—some true ne plus ultra—of non-location and velocity. There are others again, like the sublime *Number 5, 1948*, given over to the notion of radical vertical or lateral extension that Pollock hints at in his remarks about painting's having no beginning and ending—paintings whose space reaches out for the

Fig. 6. Jackson Pollock. *Number 27, 1950*. **1950. Oil on canvas, 49 in. x 8 ft. 10 in. (124.5 x 269.2 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase. The painting is usually hung horizontally; it was shown vertically, as here, in the 1950 exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery**

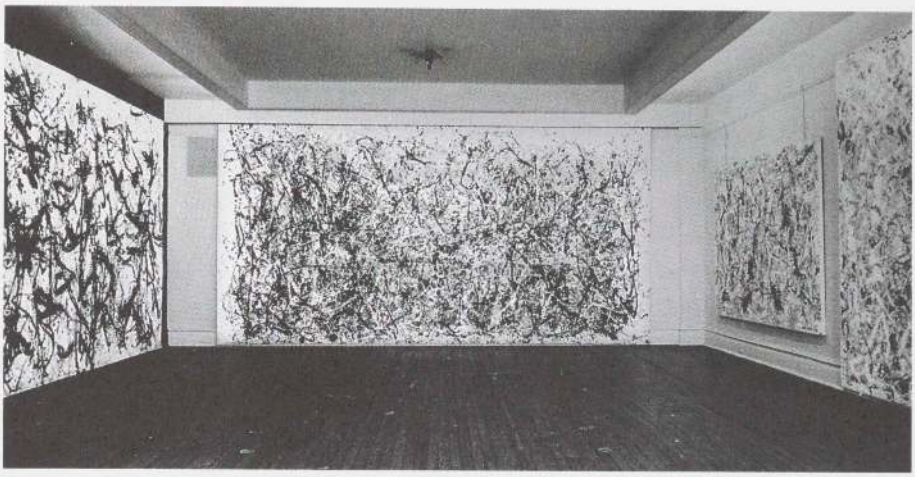

Fig. 7. Pollock's 1950 exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, with *Number 27, 1950* on the far right. Photograph by Hans Namuth

inhuman, or the extraterrestrial, "fluttering its empty sleeves." "The sight of an image of space" (I agree with Parker Tyler) in which the mere viewer does not exist.

All these descriptions apply. The word "fluttering" is good for one main kind of Pollock linear rhythm. We are still at the start of describing Pollock's pictures' specific aesthetic effects, and escaping at last from the singular "Pollock" and his equally singular "drip paintings." But I think, to apply a previous point now more specifically to these paintings' internal organization, that largeness and smallness are the *conditions* of this aesthetic variety. Painting, as Pollock conceived it, would not find any new and interesting kinds of color, or configurations of space, or expressiveness of handling, unless it put the large and small in unmediated relation to one another. It is this relation which releases the possibility of the aesthetic.

Of course Pollock was aware of the enormity of this proposition, or practice. Why was it, after all, that painting could now generate adequate accounts of experience only if it positively eliminated mediate, "human-size" dimension? Was that not to deny painting the very realm in which it normally reveled, and discovered new orders? "You've got to deny, ignore, destroy a hell of a lot to get at truth," as Pollock put it to himself in 1955.[16] These questions presently come into focus, I think, in and around *Number 27, 1950* (fig. 6). (I reproduce the painting, incidentally, hung the way up we know Pollock settled for in the Parsons show [fig. 7]. It is visible on the far right in the installation shot. Whether it was hung vertically in order to save space is a matter for debate, but even if it were, that would still speak to its intrinsic character. At the level of architecture—at the level of belonging to a possible public life—I am sure Pollock's paintings were meant to be pragmatic objects, adaptable to contingencies.) *Number*

27, 1950 has become central to our understanding of Pollock because it is now easy to see Namuth's extraordinary black and white film of the work in progress; and no other Pollock document, I feel, gives half such a vivid impression of what denying, ignoring, and destroying actually meant, in technical terms. The movie is a revelation. And what it shows us most poignantly is the sheer relish, the nostalgic demonstrativeness, with which Pollock begins—begins exactly with mediate, human-size configuration. He revels in the slow exquisiteness of controlled accident when hand and stick are operating at this scale, as if the picture's ontogeny depended on its recapitulating the whole phylogeny of modernist mark-making—only the better to paint it out. To deny and destroy it quite literally. It is this last move (which of course the movie does not show) that is truly the challenge to interpretation. What the movie does show is the explicitness with which the last move was prepared, as if the fine-tuned intermediateness of everything in the early states of *Number 27, 1950*—the intermediacy not only of scale but of figurative suggestion, shapes hovering in the space between pattern and configuration, or figure and trace—had to be there in order for it to be clear what non-mediacy, or immediacy, was. When it came. When it obliterated.

Like most great modernists, Pollock had the equivocal down. His line could equivocate in its sleep. But unlike most modernists, he wanted to destroy that capacity in himself, and thereby maybe in modern painting as a whole. The future of modernism as he conceived it lay in escaping the equivocal (which had become a comfortable, essentially *arty* margin) and entering a genuinely plural, polyphonic space. Not to equivocate in drawing, but to proliferate.

I should enter a qualification here. Not all Pollock drip paintings, obviously, are like *Number 27, 1950*. I do not personally take the picture to be one of Pollock's greatest triumphs (though it looked a lot better in the retrospective, hung next to the similarly sized *Number 3, 1950*, than I expected it to). Not all final stages of a Pollock drip painting involve the literal elimination of middle-scale, cursive or even roughly "figurative" line-shapes. In fact the real triumphs often come—in *Number 1, 1949*, for prime example, or *Number 28, 1950*, or even a picture like *Number 17A, 1948*—at the point where a last layer of whiplash tracery seals down the small-piece continuum, but in such a way as not visually to register as a contradiction of it, still less as a move back, at the last moment, to piece-by-piece, human-scale drawing. The velocity of the final tracery seems to preclude such a reading. The traces are seemingly moving too fast—they are too much inflected by the interference of the field below them—for them to bring back the ghosts of demarcation or uprightness or separable organism. That is, all the ghosts that we see Pollock conjuring, truly like a shaman dribbling sand, in the first layer of *Number 27, 1950*—but ghosts that are conjured, I am saying, the better to be exorcised.

Maybe we could go farther. Perhaps we should understand the peculiar tri-

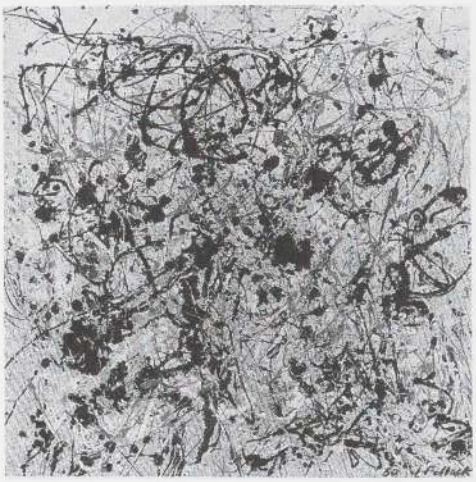

Fig. 8. Jackson Pollock. *Number 20, 1950.* **1950. Oil on Masonite, 22¼ x 22¼ in. (56.5 x 56.5 cm). University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson. Gift of Edward J. Gallagher, Jr.**

umph of the works I am singling out as turning on an intuition that here, in these pictures, a superhuman or non-human space and time have been established so firmly that the ghosts of the original (familiar) scale and duration could be reintroduced, in a last act of bravura—but precisely as shapes without substance now, afterimages, memories. . . . Is this ultimately how we should understand even the cryptic notation "memories arrested in space"? The memory is that of intermediate scale. And the space that arrests it is the space of the small and the large face to face.

This leads me back to the small paintings of 1950, and their presence in the Parsons exhibit. For surely a further question occurs, and I believe occurred to Pollock in practice. How could this strange dialectic of sizes work (or could it work?) without a certain literal largeness as one of its poles? That is, could painting work—could it generate the kind of radical relation between part and whole on which Pollock thought painting now depended—when mere smallness ruled, when somehow it seemed visually to consume largeness and intermediacy both? When, to adopt and modify Fried's intuition about Courbet, a painting was made out of the mere *morceau*, the immediate *jet*? Turn back, for example, to *Number 19, 1950* (fig. 5). The point of several such paintings from 1950 is exactly their illusion of the punctual, the thrown-off-in-a-single-gesture. They are painting as ejaculation—the word meant grammatically more than physiologically. Though again I do not want to give the impression that the small paintings all conceived of their smallness in these protozoic terms, or even that their overall logic led necessarily in this direction. Some of them certainly reflect the belief that the big could be included in the little—maybe concentrated and epitomized. I shall go out on a limb and say that *Number 20, 1950* (fig. 8), which is now in the University of Arizona Museum in Tucson, is the canvas next to the top of the stack to *Autumn Rhythm*'s left. Certainly there were pictures of much the same kind in the show. And the kind is counterposed, I would say quite deliberately, to *Number 19, 1950*'s barbaric yawp. We are back, as so often with Pollock, in the realm of mastery, not infancy—performance, not spasm. The first movements in the black and white movie are still showing through.

Fig. 9. Jackson Pollock. *Number 6, 1950 (Autumn Landscape).* **1950. Oil on canvas, 35 x 36 in. (88.9 x 91.4 cm). University of California, Berkeley Art Museum. Anonymous gift**

Fig. 10. Hans Hofmann. *Fantasia.* **c. 1943. Oil, Duco, and casein on plywood, 51½ x 36⅝ in. (130.9 x 93 cm). University of California, Berkeley Art Museum. Gift of the artist**

Smallness is various. It dictates no one kind of handwriting. But the script, I am saying, is ultimately the same. These paintings are looking for ways to make their own size irrefutable—to make each painting occupy its twenty-two by twenty-two inches for ever and ever, endlessly, like an angel jockeying for position on the head of a pin. I should mention that the idea for the present line of argument first occurred when, a year or so back, I hung a small exhibition in

Berkeley of Hans Hofmann and the New York School. This allowed me to put our own museum's *Number 6, 1950* (fig. 9)—at thirty-five by thirty-six inches it is significantly bigger than the Parsons panels, but still, I think, engaged in the same wager—alongside Hofmann's poured painting *Fantasia* (fig. 10), from 1943, and (stretching my brief a little, but staying in period) a tremendous late-40s Dubuffet. I was not prepared for how small the Pollock looked—and was meant to look, I thought. It was instinct with its own littleness. It wanted to create the illusion of molecular compression, of course on the verge of turning into its opposite—explosive, destructive force. (Not exploding, but reaching critical mass.) Pollock's paintings are profoundly of their time. Serge Guilbaut was right to intuit in them a truly horrifying, truly horrified sense of fusion and fission, small and large, nucleus and particle scatter.[17] What was new to the cold war sense of space was the notion—a commonplace notion, leaking uncontrollably from Los Alamos to *The New Yorker*—of small and large as instantly convertible, as terrible immediate transforms of each other. This is the smallest painting I have ever seen, I remember exclaiming in front of *Number 6, 1950*. And then I looked again at the Parsons installation photos. I realized I had seen nothing yet.

This gets part of the way, I think, toward an understanding of Pollock's purposes as he painted out the underlayers of *Number 27, 1950*: he was looking for the moment at which the small *became* the large, indeed as it did when the voice over the microphone intoned the final three-two-one-zero. He was looking for a way to make that monstrosity beautiful. A way to imagine—to enact—small and large overtaking the human and discriminate. He wanted, of course, to make the idea fully and only pictorial. The least hint of anecdote, and painting would be back again in the realm of the therapeutic.

This gets us part of the way. I am not saying that it is the only, or even the main, sense I take Pollock's small and large to have. I turn to the paintings Pollock did at this time with a long horizontal format, almost like unwound scrolls; and I go back and back to the sequences of Namuth's color movie (including the movie's outtakes) that show the actual rhythm of their making. Pollock's movements are repetitive and mechanical—done with the abstracted, monotonous neatness of the obsessive compulsive. Two steps, squat down, stick in can, stick out of can, throw and twist. . . . Two steps, squat down, stick in can. . . . And on it goes, quickly, stiffly, joylessly. (I know this impression is abetted by the speeded-up nature of Namuth's footage, but the speed-up seems in the end to tell the truth of the action.) Pollock moves up and down his canvas like a proletarian keeping pace with an assembly line, or a lunatic pacing his cell. He is working for Ford, or doing his best for Violet de Laszlo. His version of "automatism" looks finally more like robotics than shamanism. He is going through the motions, not breaking through to the Blue Unconscious. His muse is H. C. Earwicker,

not Lautréamont or Isadora Duncan. His paintings are deeply about beauty made in the face of surveillance and de-skilling. Namuth eventually bore the brunt of Pollock's anger and panic because at one level he was the foreman, the quality controller—watching another human being wrest the possibility of order and depth from working conditions designed to make order and depth unavailable. Pollock's metaphors are multilayered. His large and small may be partly nuclear, partly addressed to the world of Fermi and Teller; but they are also, deeply, about what it means to make things under ordinary modern conditions, according to the dictates of a certain (in its way equally monstrous) division of labor. Small into large may obey the logic of criticality, but, just as much, the logic of Adam Smith.

But this too, I realize, is not the place to end. I do not want to dwell finally on the process but on the product. And I do not want the reader's space to be filled with alternative, or even multiple, metaphors, but with everything in Pollock's pictures, and in the way they were hung at Parsons, that finally eludes metaphorical framing—or, rather, stands back from such a framing, at a distance, outside us, inhumanly, fluttering its empty sleeves. The room at Parsons is emptied of viewers. Large and small, the pictures do the emptying. They stand there implacably, in a space (to borrow Tyler's idea) in which we mere subjects do not exist. They are as much mere objects as pictures can be and still be pictures at all.

Of course that last is a real qualification. It is the crucial qualification, on which any coming to terms with Pollock turns. "And still be pictures at all. . . ." How do we speak about these pictures' literalness, in other words, *and* about that literalness being somehow charged with meaning? How can language possibly prevent this "somehow" from being pulled back again into the field of metaphor? That is, of specific meanings being played with and opened to uncertainty, rather than the opposite movement (which I think is the one that applies) of deep indeterminacy being opened to the possibility of meaning, but always only to the possibility—to a possibility appearing against the flow or the odds. "Inhumanly" is one way of putting it. "Literally" and "implacably" are two others. But they are all metaphors. "Literally" is the wildest metaphor of all. And pictures call for metaphors, no doubt: it is part of their counting *as* pictures that they call forth this human and humanizing activity. But the room at Parsons absorbs whatever words we speak in it. It is cork-lined. It calls for an endless minute of silence. It asks us to recognize, again to quote Stevens, "that one's desire / Is too difficult to tell from despair"—that any to and fro of affect now ends with its key terms, in their very extremity, unrecognizable and unwritable. Therefore the best that art can now do is to stay with the difficulty, and give it appropriate sizes.

Notes

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), p. 34.
2. See, for example, Yve-Alain Bois, "On Matisse: The Blinding," *October* 68 (Spring 1994): especially pp. 96–99, 105–12.
3. Wallace Stevens, "Large Red Man Reading," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1955), pp. 423–24. © 1950 by Wallace Stevens. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. The poem was first published in *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950). For Stevens's interests in painting in the late 1940s, see Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923–1955* (New York: William Morrow, 1988).
4. My thanks to Helen Harrison, director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, for pointing this out at the Museum of Modern Art symposium. Two of the pictures listed in the catalogue raisonné as part of the Parsons show are described as painted on composition board, not Masonite. Does this register a real difference of support, or just different owners' conventions of description? If the former, then it seems that Pollock made further twenty-two-inch squares of his own, using another support, perhaps looking for new relations between thrown paint and ground (both the "composition board" squares feature enamel paint prominently, whereas most of the Masonite works are in oil alone). For details on the small paintings and their exhibition history, see Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978; hereafter referred to as OT), vol. 2, pp. 100–4, 108–10, 112–13, 126.
5. I do mean "inclined." The painting at the bottom of the left stack in fig. 1 seems to have a darker ground than the rest, and might just be Untitled [*Green and White Square*] (OT 2, p. 103), which the catalogue raisonné does not list as shown at Parsons. But of course the visual evidence is elusive, not to say will-o'-the-wisp.
6. Anon., in *The Compass*, December 3, 1950. Quoted in O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), p. 57.
7. Jackson Pollock, quoted in [Berton Roueché], "Unframed Space," *The New Yorker*, August 5, 1950, p. 16.
8. Pollock, notebook, c. 1955. Quoted in B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 228.
9. Pollock, poem-manifesto, in OT 4, p. 253.
10. Pollock, as reported by his homeopath, Elizabeth Hubbard, in OT 4, p. 275; as reported by Lee Krasner, in Friedman, "Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," *Jackson Pollock: Black and White*, exh. cat. (New York: Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, 1969), p. 9; and on the soundtrack of Hans Namuth's film *Jackson Pollock*, 1950, quoted in OT 4, p. 262.
11. Stevens, "Esthétique du Mal," *Collected Poems*, p. 325.
12. Parker Tyler, unedited typescript of "Jackson Pollock: The Infinite Labyrinth," in Archives of American Art, Pollock Papers 3048:548–49, partly published in *Magazine of Art*, March 1950. For further discussion see Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940's* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 315–16, 368–69.
13. Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," *Collected Poems*, p. 128.
14. Ibid.
15. Compare the discussion of Pollock's "intensity" in Michael Fried, "Optical Allusions," *Artforum* 37 no. 8 (April 1999): 97–101, 143, 146.
16. Pollock, notebook, c. 1955, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, p. 229.
17. See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1983), especially pp. 96–97. Guilbaut risks a more literal connection than I do between the 1946 paintings *Shimmering Substance* and *Eyes in the Heat* and the imagery, and imaginary, of the first Bikini tests. Horrifying as the suggestion may be to a certain version of formalism, it still attaches to *Eyes in the Heat* in a way I find impossible to shrug off. My emphasis here is on 1950, not 1946; and I am saying that Pollock's response to the "nuclear" had by that time been transposed into more exclusively pictorial (practical, technical) terms; but that does not mean, in my view, that Pollock's reimagining of the small and the large, and the immediate, uncontainable nature of the conversion of one into the other, was any the less deeply a response to the specific horror of an epoch. I am happy, in other words, to join Guilbaut in the rogues' gallery of historicism.

A Piece of the Action

Robert Storr

Jackson Pollock's work is a reef on which theories crack. How many art writers embarking on the summary essay or code-breaking research paper have been turned back by the magnitude of his accomplishment. And how many others, at the point of completion, have come to grief by misjudging the strangeness of that achievement's fitful and unfinished evolution.

The desire to "explain" Pollock is treacherous in exact proportion to the relative paucity of reliable information about him, and the conflicting nature of what we have. No other artist of his generation has been second-guessed more often or from more points of view. Pollock's reticence, combined with the ventriloquistic quality of so many of his published statements and attributed remarks, have provided an open invitation for interpretations ascribing motives that can never satisfactorily be confirmed or denied.[1] Pollock's anomalousness, and his corresponding availability as a standard-bearer for causes or a test case for "critique," keeps the waters around his work roiling. As Willem de Kooning was quick to recognize, "Every so often a painter has to destroy painting. Cézanne did it. Picasso did it with cubism. Then Pollock did it. He busted our idea of the picture all to hell."[2] Since then, countless would-be heirs to this fractured legacy have tried to pick up the pieces and claim Pollock for their own, but, too often, they have oversimplified the complexity that makes him such a polyvalent cultural symbol.

First in line were those who, with the artist's ambivalent cooperation, created Pollock "the American original." The sophisticated version of this persona was advanced in stages by Harold Rosenberg: phase one was the painter as rusticated coonskinner, ambushing the redcoat armies of European cultural colonialism from behind the rocks and trees of his native sensibility; phase two was the "action painter" who abandoned traditional studio routines and went to the easel with nothing more than a material in his hand and the inchoate aim of doing something "to that other piece of material in front of him."[3] The unsophisticated, often antagonistic, but hugely popular incarnation of this view—

widely disseminated by *Life* magazine and recycled by art world insiders—was that of the know-nothing man-child from no-place-special who beat Picasso at his own game.

Determined to rescue Pollock from this caricature, and also to reengineer the art-historical foundations of the monument erected to the painter's genius by more discerning advocates, William Rubin refuted the idea of Pollock's "meteoric" rise to fame in a series of articles published in 1967. Rubin argued for a more focused but also more far-reaching account of Pollock's aesthetic origins: "To reduce history to a formula in which everything comes out of everything else is to parody the discipline. But to properly consider the sources of a style is to help understand and characterize it. Sometimes an artist is able to meld stylistic conceptions and components held antithetical in earlier art into a viable and richer whole."[4]

The fact is that Pollock's "originality" has nothing to do with either aesthetic "virginity" or clear, paradigm-sorting foresight. Pollock neither leapfrogged over his contemporaries with prescient naïveté nor systematically worked through art history as Arshile Gorky, de Kooning, or Philip Guston did. Desperately, often clumsily, he grappled with whatever options were within his reach, regardless of the established logic of styles, hoping to open up the initially narrow scope of his visual culture and technical range. Fighting for his life as an artist from first to last, he tried anything that he responded to emotionally and that he thought he could use. A synthetic painter, Pollock was not radical by virtue of inventiveness—precedents can be named for almost every aspect of his work. He was, however, radical in his unanticipated applications of things he had learned during his catch-as-catch-can process of appropriation and imperfect assimilation.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard warns against the tendency to "explain the flower by the fertilizer."[5] The disquieting marvel of Pollock's fully realized work brings home the truth of this. No truly comprehensive account of its genesis is possible, since too many fragments are missing, and the dimensions that remain accessible are, like the figurative substrata of his abstract paintings, so skillfully veiled that we may speak about them only with caution.

Sifting this evidence reminds us that the stakes are high, since our selection of things we can say with some certainty, and the emphasis we place on those things, make every difference in the partial reckoning we must settle for before confronting the work. In such reckonings, inclusion or omission of apparently incidental details, or the relative weight given to essential facts, is of vital importance. For it is these value-laden choices that afford the leverage with which different members of the vast family of Pollock students have tried to pull the covers to their side of the bed. The context in which Pollock is portrayed, and the company he is thought to keep, become a litmus test of scholarship, critical scruples, and changes in ideological and historical perspective. No issue cuts closer

to the root of "the Pollock problem" in this regard than that of the place accorded the Mexican muralists.

The importance of Thomas Hart Benton to Pollock is beyond dispute, since Pollock made it so. Had the younger painter been less openly beholden to his mentor, Benton's centrality to the Pollock story might have been considerably diminished by those who found his reactionary ideas, Buckeye themes, and grandiose cartooning embarrassments best left in Depression-era obscurity. But Pollock insisted on thanking Benton. In a 1950 *New Yorker* interview he stated his reasons in terms that any struggling artist could appreciate: Benton, he said, "gave me the only formal instruction I ever had, he introduced me to Renaissance art, and he got me a job in the League cafeteria. I'm damn grateful to Tom."[6] Such frank indebtedness was palatable to the modernists who supported Pollock's work only because of his equally forthright rejection of Benton's aesthetics. Thus, in the same interview, Pollock added that Benton "drove his kind of realism at me so hard I bounced right into nonobjective painting."[7] Pollock's best explanation of this dynamic came earlier, in 1944: "My work with Benton was important as something against which to react very strongly, later on; in this, it was better to have worked with him than with a less resistant personality who would have provided a much less strong opposition."[8]

Pollock's farewell salute to his teacher not only honorably excused him from any further association with Benton's backward-looking attitudes, it supplied the evolving narrative of postwar American art with a dramatic turning point in which the crisis between the chauvinist fathers and the internationalist sons was resolved decisively in favor of the sons, but without oedipal rancor. Benton's reciprocal respect for his protégé sealed the truce.

No comparable acknowledgment of José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera can be found in Pollock's public statements. Virtually everything we know about his response to these artists comes from private letters or conversations recalled by family and friends. In general when the Mexican muralists have been discussed in relation to Pollock, their artistic impact has been minimized in terms not dissimilar from those used for Benton. In the shorthand of most versions, their brand of modern—or, as some argue, antimodernist—art was a phase Pollock went through before he became himself, something he had to work out of his system before true modernist painting was possible for him.

Granted, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, writers such as Frank O'Hara, Sam Hunter, Bryan Robertson, Rosenberg, and Lawrence Alloway did acknowledge the influence of the muralists,[9] but in weighing or overlooking their importance with regard to the Pollock we have inherited, three commentators occupying interconnected positions are principally responsible: Clement Greenberg,

Lee Krasner, and Rubin. While their observations differ in detail, the primary thrust is the same: to prepare a place for Pollock at the high table of modernism and to downplay anything that might call his right to such a position into question, including anything—and here the trouble starts—that might reveal the full extent or implications of the false starts, detours, and inconvenient but enduring affinities that marked his ascent.

Greenberg comes first in every way. His review, in *The Nation*, of Pollock's debut exhibition of 1943 heralded the advent of an important American talent—"the most powerful painter in contemporary America and the only one who promises to be a major one," he would write four years later[10]—and set down the basic hierarchies that Greenberg would henceforth employ in his campaign to establish the artist and control the interpretation of his work. In it he credited Pollock with "having got something positive from the muddiness of color that so profoundly characterizes a great deal of American painting,"[11] then drew a connection to the mural (while clearly favoring Pollock's smaller pictures), and concluded by placing Pollock in the context of recent art—"Pollock has gone through the influences of Miró, Picasso, Mexican painting and what not"—while also declaring the artist his own man.[12]

Thereafter Greenberg's agenda was consistent in its logic but varied in its emphasis. The striking change was that "Mexican painting" disappeared from the lineup.[13] Picasso and Joan Miró, incidentally supported by Vasily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Georges Braque, and the Surrealists, became Pollock's antecedents, although the Surrealists soon ceded their place (due to Greenberg's distaste for "literary" or "illusionistic" painting) and Cubism became Pollock's only important jumping-off point, with Miró rechristened a late or post-Cubist for consistency's sake. "Pollock's 1946–50 manner really took up Analytic Cubism from the point at which Picasso and Braque had left it,"[14] Greenberg wrote on one occasion, and, on another, that *Cathedral* (1947) reminded him "of one of Picasso and Braque's masterpieces of the 1912–1915 phase of Cubism."[15] In yet another article he used this lineage to segue into his Hans Hofmann–derived theory of the picture plane: "Pollock's strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, which it is his concern to maintain and intensify in all that thick, fuliginous flatness which began—but only began—to be the strong point of late Cubism."[16] In making these correlations Greenberg disregarded the fact that Pollock was the least involved in Cubism of all the Abstract Expressionists. The artist Steve Wheeler remembered that he "had no interest in the nature of Cubism as such. He didn't want to talk about it," and Harold Lehman, another associate of Pollock's early years, says much the same thing.[17] Nor was there any sustained Cubist phase in his work. The Picasso who attracted him was the Picasso of the mid-1920s and the late 1930s.

Greenberg's early and insistent reference to mural painting is skewed in

much the same way. In 1943, he chided Pollock for "zigzagging between the intensity of the easel picture and the blandness of the mural."[18] Just a month or so later, however, Pollock produced *Mural* for Peggy Guggenheim (plate 1), and from that time on, Greenberg was urging Pollock to make the move toward the wall. Once again, though, the paradigm he cited was post-Cubist. "Since Mondrian, no one has driven the easel picture quite so far away from itself [as Pollock has]," [19] he wrote, expunging with a typically sweeping generalization the entire Mexican mural movement.

Greenberg was not all wrong. His correlation between Pollock's skeined expanses (filled with right-angled fragments and tonal modulations) and Analytic Cubism was a provocative leap of the imagination. There is, however, a difference between theories or inferences of causality and the analysis of correspondences between entities with partially or entirely distinct genealogies. The erasure of the Mexicans after 1943 not only falsified the historical record, it made it impossible for Greenberg fully to appreciate what Pollock was struggling with before, during, and after the great "drip" paintings of 1947–50; and in the decades since it has seriously distorted the vision of those who have seen Pollock through his eyes.

Krasner didn't buy Greenberg's description of Pollock as a "late Cubist"—and it was she, after all, who had taught Greenberg much of what he knew on the subject—but in other respects her taste and motives coincided with the critic's. Both championed Pollock as the preeminent painter of his day, and Picasso's heir; both bit their tongue about Pollock's pre-Picassoid past. In fairness, Krasner didn't meet Pollock until 1942, and so lacked firsthand knowledge of his activities before his conversion to European modernism under her tutelage and that of John Graham. Neither did she have much sympathy for his former passions: a student of Hofmann's, she was a disciple of the School of Paris from the outset, and an enemy of Benton and all he stood for. Politically motivated painting was a particular bête noire: "My experience with Leftist movements in the late 1930s made me move as far away from them as possible because they were emphasizing the most banal, provincial art. They weren't interested in independent or experimental art. . . . To me, and to the painters I associated with, the more important thing was French painting."[20] Yet, when asked whether she had anticipated Pollock's return to the figure in 1951, she answered that old sketches in his studio had helped her to grasp it: "Well, of course, I had one advantage that very few others had—I was familiar with his notebooks and drawings, a great body of work that most people didn't see until years later, after Jackson's death. I'm not talking about the drawings he did as a student of Benton, but just after that, when he began to break free, about the mid-thirties. *For me all of Jackson's work grows from this period; I see no more sharp breaks, but rather a continuing development of the same themes and obsessions* [italics added]."[21] This extraordinary assertion is made all the more so by the failure to describe what, exactly,

Pollock was up to in that all-determining interval. In fact it was the period of his greatest engagement with Siqueiros and Orozco.

Other points of Krasner's show similar lapses. Asked about Pollock's decision to paint horizontally rather than vertically, Krasner replied, "I don't have the remotest idea of why he wanted to work on the floor. . . . The only thing I remember hearing was that he had seen the Indian sand painters working on the ground."[22] Of course Pollock himself had talked about sand painting in response to similar inquiries, but he knew, as she knew, that in 1936, five years before seeing Navajo sand painters at The Museum of Modern Art, he had taken part in Siqueiros's Experimental Workshop, where paints were poured, dripped, and splattered on horizontal boards. Siqueiros had also preached the gospel of the new synthetic paints, and Krasner, in the same interview in which she mentioned the Navajo, went into considerable detail about Pollock's interest in new paints and thinners, the technical books in his library, and his efforts to persuade the DuPont company to mix pigments that would flow more freely than the commercial brands. But of Siqueiros Krasner spoke not a word.

"Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," the series of four articles penned by Rubin in 1967, modified but consolidated the Greenberg-Krasner view of Pollock. Even more so than they, Rubin strove not merely to assert Pollock's hegemony but to establish his unimpeachable modernist bloodlines. As the title and exhaustive argumentation of Rubin's articles make clear, his goal was to rescue Pollock from romantic or nationalist rhetoric and to put an end to any suggestion that the painter had been born on the wrong side of the modernist bed. "At its core," he wrote, "Pollock's art is *not* primitive or provincial. It is phenomenally complex, subtle and sophisticated, and it developed amid, and reflected, the rhythms, fluxes, convergences and confrontations of a metropolitan urban environment. It was, like all other serious painting of our time, firmly rooted in the European traditions."[23]

In debunking Pollock's sui generis status, Rubin departed from Greenberg's logic by restoring Surrealism to Pollock's heritage while adding late Monet to the list of artists from whom Pollock had wittingly or unwittingly extrapolated.[24] Rubin also distanced himself from Krasner by gently suggesting that her perpetuation of the sand-painter story was unhelpful in securing for Pollock the mantle of the School of Paris. "Not a little of what has been written about Pollock," he remarked, "reflects the 'meteor' myth in which he comes to his crucial role from virtually nowhere—certainly from outside the main tradition of modern painting. To be sure, this view sometimes allows for the importance of the Mexican muralists, Picasso and the literary side of Surrealism *in Pollock's pre-1947 (i.e., his pre-drip) painting* [italics added]. But as to antecedents of the all-over drip Pollocks we hear of virtually nothing but the Navajo sand painters. Impressionism, Cubism and Surrealist automatism go unmentioned."[25]

Whether or not one accepts all the correspondences Rubin proceeds to enumerate, the underlying problem remains the extent to which Pollock's encounters with European tradition were, from the outset, filtered through peculiarly American interpretations of that tradition—first Benton's and then those of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros, all of whom were steeped in a rich painting culture based on European models, all of whom, to a greater or lesser extent, had dealt with Cubism and its consequences, and two of whom powerfully informed Pollock's expressionism before he encountered similar qualities in Kandinsky or Picasso. (Even the case for Parisian modernism subsequently made to Pollock by the Polish immigrant Graham was qualified by the latter's often exotic autodidacticism.) Put another way, Pollock learned the modernist lingua franca not from native speakers but from teachers with pronounced regional accents, which, combined with his own provincial inflections, he never entirely shook off.

When tracing the precedents for Pollock's drip technique, meanwhile, Rubin focused almost exclusively on the history of Surrealist automatism, beginning with Francis Picabia's spilled-ink drawings of 1917, Miró's and André Masson's aleatory experiments of the mid-1920s, and so on down through Gordon Onslow-Ford's and Wolfgang Paalen's pourings of 1938–39. He also hastened to mention Hans Hofmann and Max Ernst, both of whom turned to a drip technique in 1942–43, or at roughly the same time Pollock did, as well as the work of the amateur painter Janet Sobel (the only "influence" outside the canon given Rubin's full attention), who was brought to Pollock's notice by Greenberg in 1946. Only briefly, however, did Rubin touch on Pollock's experience in the Siqueiros workshop, implicitly privileging the importance of things the artist saw—or might have seen—in magazines and galleries over a studio practice in which he actually engaged.[26]

What, then, remains to be said about Pollock and the Mexicans? A great deal.

First one must dispense with a collective noun. Talk of "the Mexican muralists" as if Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros represented the same thing is the origin of many of the errors that plague discussion of these artists. Other than the shared opportunity to paint walls, a belief in the existence of a public for public art, and the conviction that the language required to address that public was figurative, "*los Tres Grandes*"—the Big Three—agreed on little and acted, for the most part, independently of one another, even at cross-purposes. The details matter.

During the teens and '20s of this century, a political revolution in Mexico coincided with an artistic one. This conflation of a social avant-garde and an aesthetic one is the stuff of modernist legend, and it occurred in one other place at much the same time—the Soviet Union. As different as the art of these two countries was, their experiments were close in several ways. In both instances an intellectual near the seat of revolutionary power secured state patronage for

artists eager to participate in and propagandize social change: in Mexico it was José Vasconcelos, in Russia Anatoly Lunacharsky. In both cases artists in direct contact with Western European avant-gardes returned to their homeland and attempted to apply the models they had learned, though in Mexico those models were subsequently jettisoned or absorbed into styles based on a revival of Renaissance mural design. In both countries extraordinary resources were put at the disposal of artists for a brief time, after which they were forced to emigrate or to accommodate to a conservative retrenchment. The full backing of the Mexican government lasted a scant three years, 1923 to 1926, after which the support for the most radical painters, Orozco and Siqueiros, was withdrawn.

By 1927, Orozco was in New York. In 1929 the city's Art Students League exhibited 113 works by the artist, while others were on more or less permanent display at the nearby Delphic Studios, and his prints could just as easily be seen at the Weyhe Gallery. For much of that time Orozco made New York his base, traveling from there to paint his *Prometheus* at Pomona College, California, in 1930, and to Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, to paint a fresco cycle in 1934. Closer to home, he painted murals at the New School in Manhattan in 1930, and the portable *Dive Bomber and Tank* for The Museum of Modern Art in 1940 (fig. 1).

Meanwhile Rivera went to San Francisco, where he painted a mural in 1930. In 1932 he was among the first contemporary artists to be given a one-person exhibition at the three-year old Museum of Modern Art—only Henri Matisse and Charles Burchfield preceded him.[27] In 1932–33, Rivera painted other much-publicized murals for The Detroit Institute of Arts and, in 1933 in New York, for the New Workers School and for Rockefeller Center, a work infamously destroyed just after its completion.

Siqueiros, the youngest of the three, had only one major commission in Mexico before he left the country, in 1932. Arriving that same year in Los Angeles, he quickly made up for missed opportunity and organized a so-called Block of Mural Painters with which he collaborated on a large exterior mural, *The Workers' Meeting*. That same year he was given an exhibition at the Stendhal Ambassador Galleries in Los Angeles, covering work he had done while in political exile in Taxco two years earlier, and he completed two more exterior murals, *Tropical America* and *Portrait of Present-Day Mexico*. In 1936, Siqueiros visited New York, and stayed in the city to establish the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop.

This recitation of well-known facts is intended to remind readers of something easily forgotten, or easily taken for granted on the excuse that the facts are known: the broad American impact of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros for most of the period between the world wars. The Big Three were not just news (because of the scale and topicality of their work, say), nor were they merely creatures of the committed Left. Leading art institutions, galleries, and patrons devoted attention to them, and saw them as a serious avant-garde. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., for one,

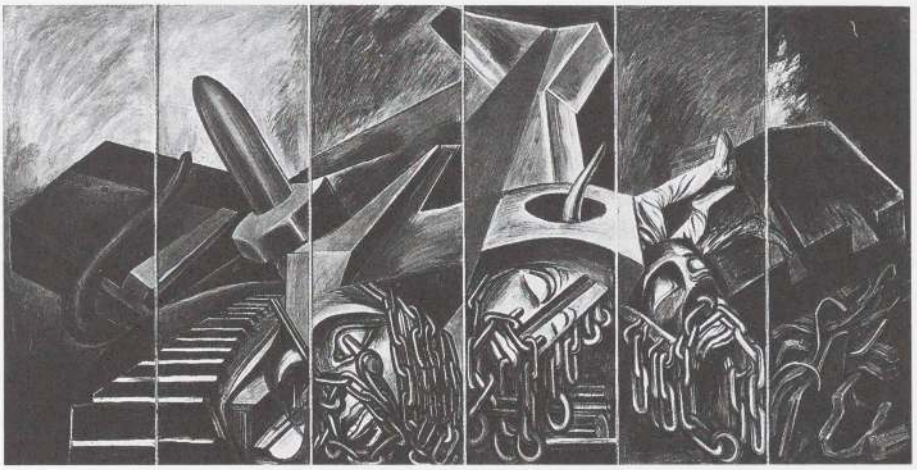

Fig. 1. José Clemente Orozco. *Dive Bomber and Tank*. **1940. Fresco, 9 x 18 ft. (275 x 550 cm), on six panels, each panel 9 x 3 ft. (275 x 91.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Commissioned through the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund**

consecrated large parts of the program of The Museum of Modern Art to Latin American art in general, and in his famous "torpedo" diagram, describing the forward thrust of modern art, as he revised it in 1941, he gave Mexican art a status equal to American and in advance of European, in the torpedo's head. The Museum's acquisition of works by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco—including the commission of *Dive Bomber and Tank*—not only promoted those artists among the modernist elite, it also ensured that their work was regularly on public view.

Then as now, the divisions among the Big Three were often overlooked. Some of these divisions were matters of personal or professional rivalry, but their artistic differences were of greater consequence. A naturally facile stylist, Rivera had lived in Paris and had painted in both a vaguely symbolist and a Cubist manner. His synthesis of these tendencies was a form of neoclassicism that recast the European "return to order" of the 1920s in heroic revolutionary guise. Orozco traveled only briefly in Europe, studying the Italian Renaissance and Spanish Baroque masters for the most part from afar, while also delving into Mexico's vernacular pictorial traditions. The idiosyncratic result was an angry expressionism at war with an austere proto-classicism, as if El Greco and José Guadalupe Posada were observing the ruins of Giotto. Siqueiros for his part started out mimicking Spanish art nouveau, jumped to decorative grandiosity in his murals at the National Preparatory School in 1922–23, retreated into hard, quasi-primitive easel pictures that recall both the Mexican *retablo* tradition and the sinister synthesis of Cubism and neoclassicism affected by the fascist painter Mario Sironi, and then returned to a full-bodied Baroque manner, with an emphasis on violent motion that directly incorporated elements of Italian Futurism.

Rivera's painting is measured, structured, decorative, eclectic, and illustrative. Orozco's is disjunctive in its composition and seemingly abrupt in its execution; his graphic strokes lacerate, their accumulation squeezes volume out of mass, and the accretion of such masses or husks of masses overwhelms the pictorial space. Both artists looked back to Renaissance paradigms, Rivera to remake them in his own image, Orozco to see how much of the intensity of contemporary experience they could convey, and how much stress they could take. Siqueiros's work is contrastingly expansive. Always harnessed to complex perspectival armatures, his forms are orderly, exaggerated, geometricized, and general. Alone among the Big Three, Siqueiros actively followed the experiments made in other media by other avant-gardes. Through the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, whom he met in Mexico in 1931, he learned about montage and about extreme pictorial angles, and by 1933 was applying those lessons to the spatial problems of modern muralism. Later, collaborating with the Spanish designer Josep Renau and looking to the example of the German photomontagist John Heartfield, Siqueiros refined these graphic strategies and deepened his exploration of the use of mechanical-reproduction techniques in the environmental paintings he envisioned. He also embraced new paints, in particular the Duco enamel and other nitrocellulose mediums that were developed in the early 1930s.

Neither consistently "revolutionary" in its politics nor consistently "conservative" in its aesthetics, the example set by the Big Three boxed the compass of Pollock's own contradictory impulses and aspirations, answering to his simultaneous needs to strike out in expressive frustration and to seek security in apprenticeship, to be avant-garde and to find a way into tradition.

Until recently the accounts of Pollock's work that recognized his involvement with the muralists have tended to underestimate its extent and to deal superficially with its specifics. Lack of information about Pollock's contacts with Orozco, Siqueiros, and Rivera or with their work, and about the general context in which those contacts took place, explains some of these lacunae, but lack of curiosity sometimes explains that scarcity of facts. Neglect in this regard concerns not just things known yet left unspoken, but research never undertaken, or undertaken too late. Unfortunately most of those who shared Pollock's early years have passed from the scene without being extensively questioned. Of his close associates of the 1930s and '40s, only Harold Lehman is still living. For the rest we must rely on the statements of Axel Horn, Pollock-family correspondence, parts of existing interviews, the art-historical investigations of Francis V. O'Connor, Stephen Polcari, Laurance Hurlburt, Irene Herner, Ellen Landau, Lisa Mintz Messinger, and Jürgen Harten, and the biographies by B. H. Friedman, Landau, Jeffrey Potter, and Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith. Even so, the facts add up to more than has been made of them.

Pollock was introduced to Mexican muralism when he was still in his mid-teens. A 1929 letter from his brother Charles is the first reference to them in the record: "Are you familiar with the work of Rivera and Orozco in Mexico City? This is the finest painting that has been done, I think, since the sixteenth century. . . . Here are men with imagination and intelligence recognizing the implements of the modern world and ready to employ them."[28] Charles's excitement immediately affected Jackson, who shortly replied that he would like to go to Mexico "if there is any means of making a livelihood there."[29] Locating an article on Rivera in *Creative Art*, urged on him by Charles, Jackson found in the same issue a piece by Orozco declaring that "the highest, the most logical, the purest strongest form of painting is the mural."[30] In a letter to Charles, Jackson wrote, "I became acquainted with Rivera's work through a number of Communist meetings I attended after being ousted from school last year. He has a painting in the Museum now. Perhaps you have seen it, Dia de Flores. I found the Creative Art January 1929 on Rivera. I certainly admire his work."[31]

Although Pollock's friends Lehman and Guston paid visits to the Arensberg collection, rich in Cubism and de Chirico, he himself never made the pilgrimage, concentrating instead on the old masters. "He talked about Tintoretto, El Greco," Lehman remembers; "he was not looking at modern art. Modern art for him was Diego Rivera."[32] In June of 1930 Charles visited Los Angeles. A local exhibition confirmed his interest in Mexican painting, and a trip with Jackson to see Orozco's recently finished *Prometheus* at Pomona College completed their conversion. Years later Jackson would call *Prometheus* "the greatest painting done in modern times," and until at least the late 1930s he kept a reproduction on his studio wall.[33]

In September of 1930, Pollock moved to New York and signed up for classes with Benton, who was hostile to Picasso but endorsed Orozco. (Both Benton and Orozco took El Greco as a model, as would Pollock.) During the awkward but headlong art-world immersion of Pollock's first fall in New York, he witnessed Orozco painting the New School murals, and on at least one occasion met the Mexican artist at Benton's apartment. His initial enthusiasm for "public art" can be gauged from a 1933 letter to his father Roy, claiming that Benton had "lifted art from the stuffy studio into the world and happenings about him, which has a common meaning to the masses."[34] The political language was untypical of Jackson, and may have been a gesture to Roy Pollock's social radicalism more than an expression of his own, but the fervor of his remarks bespeaks a discovery basic to his artistic awakening.

Jackson's brother Sande and friends Lehman and Reuben Kadish were all in Los Angeles in 1932 to help Siqueiros paint *Tropical America* on Olvera Street—a work involving the innovative use of sprayed, pigmented cement. Lehman and Guston also assisted Siqueiros in the creation of portable mural panels (destroyed

during a "red squad" police raid before they could be exhibited). Kadish later recalled that "Siqueiros coming to L.A. meant as much then as the Surrealists coming to New York in the '40s."[35] From New York, Jackson wrote Sande, "The experience with Siqueiros must have been great,—am anxious to see the job."[36] During a short visit to Los Angeles, Jackson finally saw *The Workers' Meeting* and met Siqueiros, though he had mixed feelings about the man and his approach.

Back in New York in 1933, Pollock watched Rivera work on his ill-fated walls for Rockefeller Center, and shortly after saw him paint portable murals for the New Workers School on West 14th Street. But his aesthetic loyalties were already fixed: "Orozco is the *real* artist," he had told Kadish the year before.[37] Mural painting was by this time an established practice among Pollock's friends: in 1933, Kadish, Guston, and Lehman collaborated on a mural for the Workers' Cultural Center in Los Angeles, and then in 1934, with Siqueiros's patronage, Guston and Kadish painted a huge wall in the palace of Maximilian in Morelia, Mexico. Pollock took Benton's mural class at the League, then, in 1935, passed to the Mural Division of the newly created Works Progress Administration, although he soon transferred to the Easel Division. The flurry of stylistically varied paintings that he produced that year included a "lewd" Orozcoesque mural on the wall of his Houston Street loft, conceivably inspired by the luridly eschatological *Catharsis* that Orozco painted that year at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. Also in 1935, Guston and Kadish stayed in Jackson's studio after a trip to Mexico, where they had seen many of the major site-specific works of the Big Three; they spoke with Pollock excitedly about Orozco and Siqueiros.

By 1936 the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop had opened its doors. Its goal was to be "a laboratory of traditional and modern techniques in art, the purpose being to find the proper technical methods to correspond with the industrial life of the U.S. . . . because we firmly believe that so-called modern techniques in art are in reality archaic—consequently anachronistic."[38] Siqueiros proposed to teach the uses of the spray gun, new industrial paints, photography, and film. The workshop's activity included creating floats and heroic pictures for Communist Party and Popular Front gatherings, testing Siqueiros's menu of painterly novelties, and watching or helping him produce his own easel paintings for patrons like George Gershwin and for the trade.

Brought to the workshop by Sande, Jackson this time hit it off with Siqueiros. "They had a great rapport," Kadish recalled.[39] But as Lehman remembers it, "Jack at the workshop, simply helped out. He did mainly construction and fill-in painting. Thematic concept and development, applied to painting, was simply not his thing. Neither was the handling of forms in a solid 3-dimensional manner—realistic yet savagely expressionistic as well." Still, "He was a real valuable member nonetheless and there was real affection and respect for him from everyone. S[iqueiros]. considered him extremely 'simpatico.' Though he

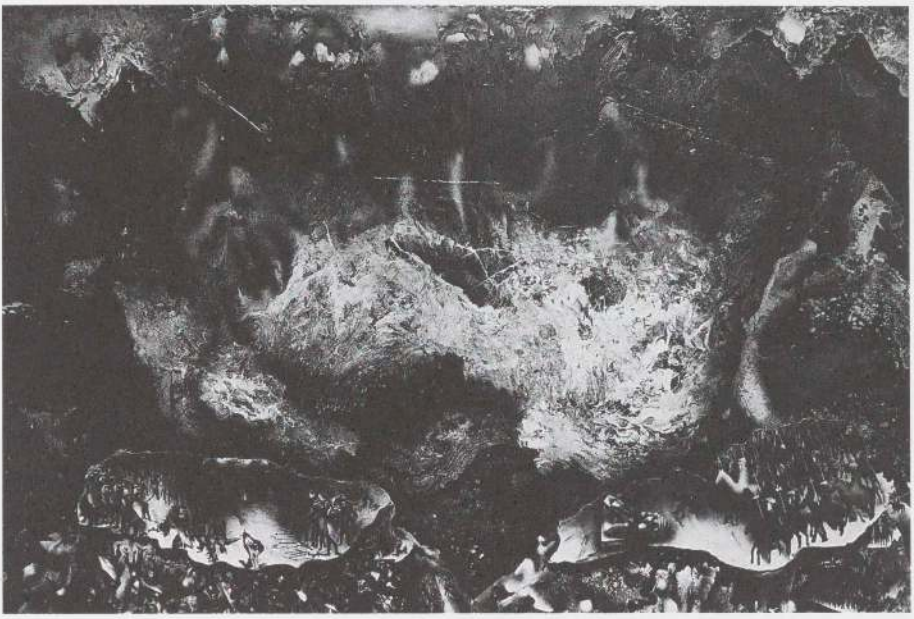

Fig. 2. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Collective Suicide*. **1936. Enamel on wood with applied sections, 49 in. x 6 ft. (124.5 x 182.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Dr. Gregory Zilboorg**

rarely spoke up in discussions, and never took the lead in collective work, it is obvious that he did observe." And what he observed, Lehman believes, was "the use of sand, assorted objects and materials, textures and etc: above all the exploitation of accidental effects produced by the action of solvents on lacquers, pouring, spattering, spraying . . . and perhaps not least—was our habit of placing the panels flat on the floor during the preliminary phase of painting."[40]

Siqueiros's many ways of preparing panels for figurative images included punching a hole in a paint can and letting it swing, simply spilling the pigment out so it would marble, and jigsaw-cutting wood or fiberboard forms on which to spread the paint. It is also likely that Pollock witnessed the use of a spray gun and stencils to silhouette the figures in the most important demonstration piece of Siqueiros's New York sojourn, *Collective Suicide* (1936; fig. 2). Pollock certainly saw one other significant technique, used for a float on which he worked with Lehman: "A feature of this project was our hand prints, representing the protesting victims of fascism, and applied to the surface throughout the design. These came through a mass of banners, signs, etc. which were in turn superimposed on streams of paint thrown every which way in long skeins, the whole reflecting violent rhythm and movement—from one end of the float to the other."[41]

Horn, another Benton-student-turned-Siqueiros-assistant, concurs with Lehman, but his account is more evocative of the heady atmosphere on Union

Square: "We were going to put out to pasture the 'stick with hairs on its end,' as Siqueiros called the brush. Spurred on by Siqueiros, whose energy and torrential flow of ideas and new projects stimulated us all to a high pitch of activity, everything became material for our investigation. . . . We sprayed through stencils and friskets, embedded wood, metal and paper. We used thin glazes or built up thick globs. We poured [lacquer], dripped it, spattered it, hurled it at the picture surface. . . . What emerged was an endless variety of accidental effects. Siqueiros soon constructed a theory and a system of 'controlled accidents.'"[42]

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in late 1936 ended Siqueiros's participation in the workshop. Without his ingenuity and ambition, its only function remained the production of propaganda, and Pollock drifted away. Increasingly at the mercy of his drinking while also increasingly invested in his own work, he ended his involvement with collective projects of this sort. Still, the summer after his stint at Siqueiros's workshop, Pollock visited Dartmouth to see Orozco's *Epic of American Civilization* (1932–34), images from which soon began to show up in his drawings—sometimes grafted onto borrowings from Picasso, whom he would finally discover after seeing *Guernica* and the Picasso retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in 1939. Henceforth Picasso would become increasingly important to Pollock. Even so, in 1940 he went to the Museum to watch Orozco paint *Dive Bomber and Tank*. With *Guernica* fresh in his memory from the previous year, the dialogue between the mural-scale work of Orozco and that of Picasso was in a sense direct.

In late 1939 or early 1940, William Baziotes conducted a paint-dripping experiment in the studio of Gerard Kamrowski in an attempt to prove to Pollock that Surrealist automatism superceded Siqueiros's techniques. Pollock held back. "Kamrowski felt Baziotes had 'made his point,'" write Naifeh and Smith, "but Jackson was still 'puzzling it out.'"[43] Around the same time, Pollock tried squeezing whole tubes of paint directly onto a canvas at the workshop of printer Theodore Wahl. By 1943, when he made his first purely abstract use of dripped or squeezed pigments, he was no longer "puzzling it out."

Far from being an incidental or immature interest, Pollock's engagement with the Mexican muralists lasted over a decade, from his brother's letter of 1929 through his last encounter with Orozco in 1940. Given his truncated education and eclectic enthusiasms, no other formative experience was of equal duration, and few were of comparable intensity. In this connection it is worth repeating Krasner's verdict on the drawings of the mid- to late 1930s: "For me all of Jackson's work grows from this period; I see no more sharp breaks, but rather a continuing development of the same themes and obsessions."[44]

In that same interview, Friedman asked Krasner whether Pollock's "black paintings" of 1951 owed a debt to *Guernica*. "If so," Krasner replied, "it was an

Fig. 3. José Clemente Orozco. *Man of Fire*. **1938–39. Fresco, 127 square meters. Instituto Cultural Cabañas, Guadalajara**

Fig. 4. Jackson Pollock. Untitled. c. 1939. Enamel on Limoges porcelain bowl, diameter 11⅛ in., depth 5 in. (diameter 28.3 cm, depth 12.7 cm). Location unknown

awfully slow burn."[45] Yet such "slow burns" are as typical of Pollock's assimilation process as are his more forthright imitations—of Benton, say, or of Picasso or Miró. Although *Prometheus* struck Pollock as "the greatest painting done in modern times" when he saw it in 1930, his work most obviously influenced by Orozco did not appear until 1938. Little of Pollock's work from his first years in New York survives, but judging from what does, the earliest picture to evidence the "Orozco effect" is *The Flame* (c. 1934–38), a generalized approximation of Orozco's imagery and style that strangely anticipates the Mexican artist's grand and much reproduced *Man of Fire* fresco of 1938–39 (fig. 3). A minor work possibly inspired by the same painting is a porcelain bowl that Pollock made around 1939 (fig. 4). Orozco's Dartmouth cycle meanwhile

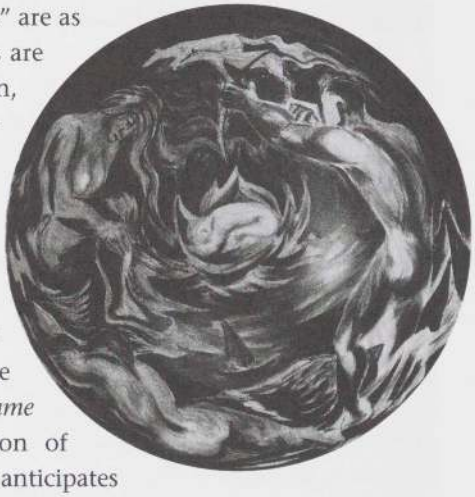

Fig. 5 (left). José Clemente Orozco. *Cortés*. 1938–39. Fresco, 45 square meters. Instituto Cultural Cabañas, Guadalajara

Fig. 6 (below). Jackson Pollock. Untitled. c. 1938–41. Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 14¼ x 10 in. (36.2 x 25.4 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, anonymous gift, 1990

Fig. 7 (opposite top). Jackson Pollock. *Bald Woman with Skeleton*. c. 1938–41. Oil on the smooth side of fiberboard attached to stretcher, 20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 60.9 cm.). Courtesy Joan T. Washburn Gallery, New York

provides iconographic material for many of Pollock's sketchbook drawings, as well as for the so-called "psychoanalytic drawings" he made in 1939. These later doodles work out a synthesis of Orozco and Picasso that is never completely undone, and recurs strikingly in the "black paintings" of 1951, linking one "slow burn" to another.

For the rest—and there is much more—one may turn to the work of scholars who have identified Pollock's specific borrowings from Orozco: heavy crosses and crucifixions; machinelike body parts, derived from Orozco's transformation of Cortés in armor into a symbol of the industrial age (figs. 5 and 6);

serpents reminiscent of Quetzalcoatl; skulls; horses; bulls; predatory bird heads; phalanxes of riotous stick figures; piled corpselike figures; quasi-religious compositions that recall Renaissance depositions; eroticized violenceand anatomical contortions; piled-up fractured volumes; a frenzied bundling of brush or graphic strokes; a compulsive reiteration of contours that implodes volumes; an elision of contours that fuses shapes, making it impossible to separate one mass from another; and a dark earth-tone palette of harsh greens, reds, yellows, and blacks—the slash-and-burn colors of Orozco.[46]

Some of Pollock's compositions may be traced to a single source. The central figure in *Bald Woman with Skeleton* (c. 1938–41; fig. 7) is plainly modeled on the skeleton in the *Gods of the Modern World* panel from Orozco's *Epic of American*

Fig. 8. José Clemente Orozco. *Gods of the Modern World (The Epic of American Civilization,* panel 17)**. 1932–34. Fresco, 10 ft. x c. 14 ft. 7 in. (304.8 x 444.5 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H. Commissioned by the Trustees of Dartmouth College**

Fig. 9. Jackson Pollock. Untitled. c. 1938–41. Gouache on paper, 22¾ x 17¼ in. (57.8 x 45.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Lee Krasner Pollock, 1982

Civilization (1932–34; fig. 8). *Untitled [Naked Man with Knife]* (c. 1938–40), like several red conté sketchbook drawings, a gouache of c. 1938–41 (fig. 9), and the later *Black and White Painting III* (c. 1951; fig 17) evoke Orozco's *Barricade* (1931; fig. 10); the head of a woman in profile in *Composition with a Woman* (c. 1938–41) closely resembles that of the main figure in Orozco's *Allegory of Mexico* (1940). *Untitled [Composition with Donkey Head]* (fig. 11) and *Composition with Ritual Scene* (both c. 1938–41) call to mind aspects of the horizontal compositions of Orozco's frescoes at the New School, at Dartmouth, at the Supreme Court in Mexico City, and at the Hospicio Cabañas in Guadalajara (fig. 12).

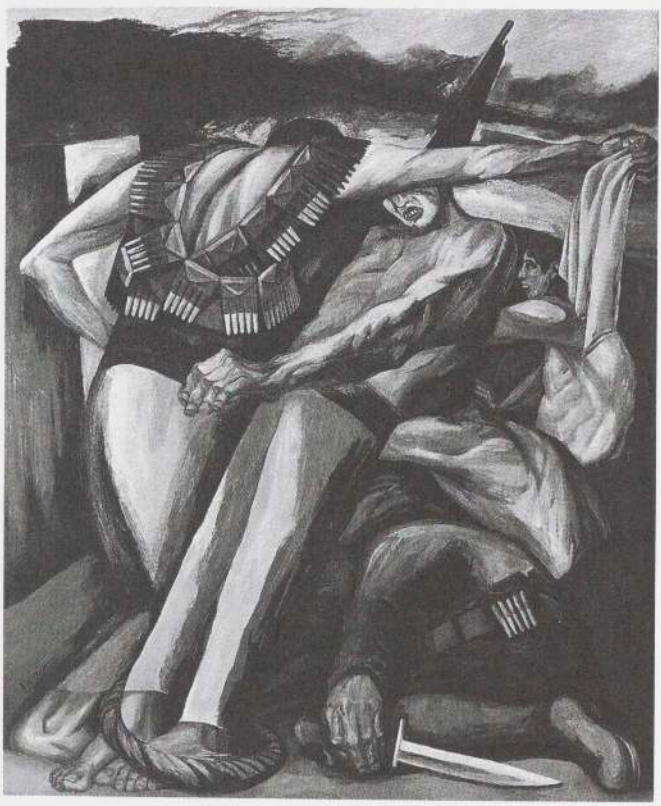

Fig. 10. José Clemente Orozco. *Barricade*. 1931. Oil on canvas, 55 x 45 in. (139.7 x 114.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously

Fig. 11. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled [Composition with Donkey Head]*. **c. 1938–41. Oil on canvas, 21¼ x 50 in. (55.6 x 127 cm.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. Major Acquisitions Centennial Fund; Estate of Florene Schoenborn; through prior acquisitions of Mary and Leigh Block, Mr. and Mrs. Carter H. Harrison, Marguerita S. Ritman, and Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Borland**

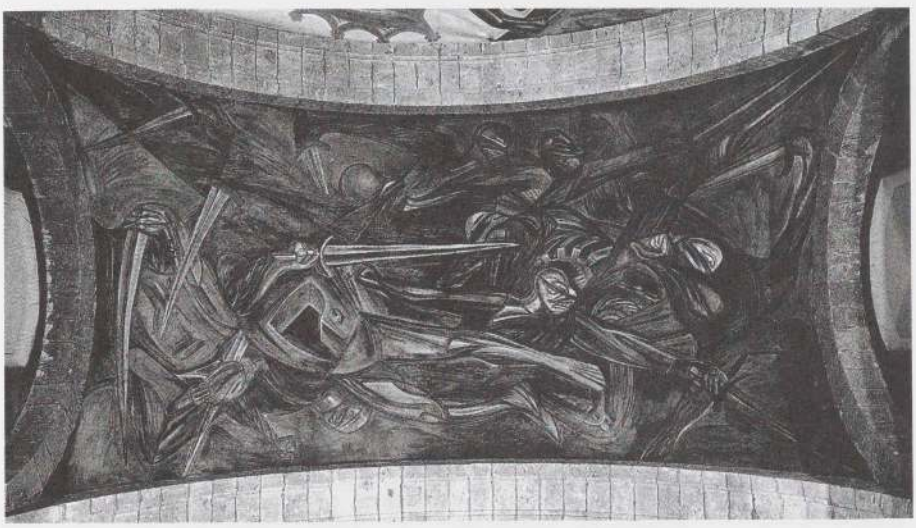

Fig. 12. José Clemente Orozco. *La Belicosidad (The Spanish Conquest: War Scene)*. **1938–39. Fresco, 45 square meters. Instituto Cultural Cabañas, Guadalajara**

More correspondences of this kind exist, and others will no doubt be brought to light. But the iconographic details matter less than the general attitudes Orozco's work encouraged, and the vocabulary of form construction and destruction it made available. Orozco's inner fury matched Pollock's volcanic anxiety, but, more significant from an aesthetic perspective, his disregard for balanced design and measured gesture, his tendency to overload paintings until they came apart at the seams, and his "un-French" aggressiveness of affect were more important, setting a standard that lay within both Pollock's own emotional range and, no less significant, his technical grasp.

"Benton taught Pollock about ideals of beauty," Pollock's friend Peter Busa told Friedman; "these Mexicans taught him that art could be 'ugly.'"[47] While this is true, it is more true of Orozco than of Siqueiros, whose painting did not use ugliness as a deliberate expressive means so much as it courted vulgarity in a drive to overpower the spectator and modernize the Baroque. Pollock's interest in Siqueiros mirrored his attraction to Benton, and reflected his always frustrated desire for structure and system. Orozco answered to his deepest creative impulses.

Horn recalls, "The Mexicans . . . provided us with a direction away from the parochialism in which most of us had been caught. Being mural-minded, or wall-eyed as someone once said, Jack . . . was deeply stirred by the Mexican artists' ability to combine social revolutionary themes with a widespread public usage of their talents to create a new artistic language. . . . the possibilities inherent in the experimentation at the Siqueiros workshop offered [Pollock] a way out of his lack of technical facility."[48] But Pollock hesitated before taking that "way out." Not only is the timing of his most concentrated dialogue with Orozco out of sync with his initial infatuation with the artist, it follows ironically close on the heels of his experience in the Siqueiros workshop. It is as if the young American had spun out from his encounter with the latter into the orbit of the former, ready at long last to experiment with the language of his long-standing hero. With minor or qualified exceptions there were no immediate signs of Siqueiros's influence on Pollock's painting. Conceivably the maelstrom of waves, poles, and flags in Pollock's *Untitled [Composition with Figures and Banners]* (c. 1934–38) was a response to Siqueiros's *Stop the War* and *Birth of Fascism* (first version; fig. 13), both of 1936. It is also possible that the Whore of Babylon figure in the *Birth of Fascism* was a model for the monstrous mother in Pollock's *Untitled (Woman)* of c. 1935–38 (fig. 14). The spray gun–retouched lithographs *Untitled [Landscape with Steer]* (c. 1936–37) and *Figures in a Landscape* (1937) represent the only known examples of Pollock's immediate use of the experimental techniques taught by Siqueiros during the 1930s, though evidence of sprayed paints appears later in *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* (plates 17 and 18).[49]

Pollock's reluctance to apply Siqueiros's lessons is noteworthy. There was no other precedent in his experience for allover treatment of the sort found in several of his own early works. But when he chose to do something resembling the muralist's preparatory surfacing, he stuck to traditional tools; and this remained true for years after he took part in Siqueiros's team. Once again, the standard chronologies of his work make the exact sequence of events a guessing game. *Untitled [Overall Composition]* (c. 1934–38) is the first instance in which Pollock covered an entire canvas with marks and colors of equal vibrancy. It is hard to imagine that the work represents anything other than the first step in a technique adapted from Siqueiros, which, however, he for some reason chose not to carry forward to the point of superimposing an image upon this prepared

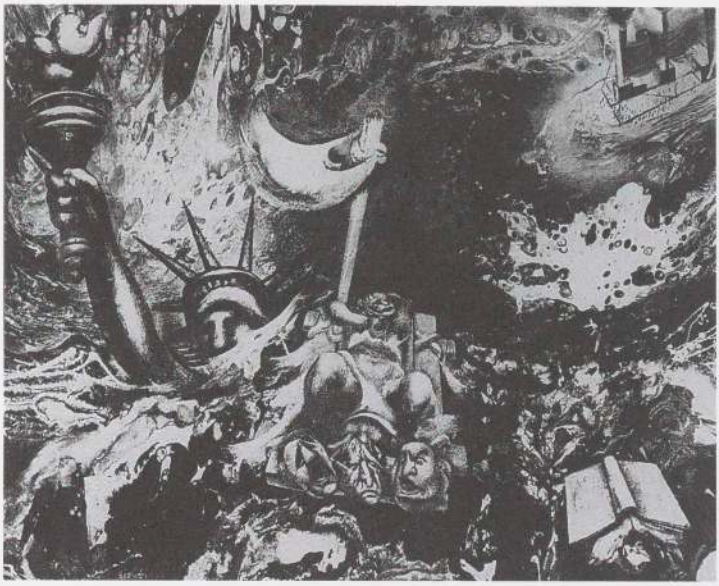

Fig. 13 (above). David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Birth of Fascism* **(first version). 1936. Pyroxylin on masonite, 24 x 29¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. (61 x 76 cm). Sala de Arte Público David Alfaro Siqueiros–Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes–Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (CONACULTA-INBA)**

Fig. 14 (left). Jackson Pollock. *Untitled (Woman)*. **c. 1935–38? Oil on fiberboard, 14⅛ x 10½ in. (35.8 x 26.6 cm). Nagashima Museum, Kagoshima City**

ground. *The She-Wolf* (1943; plates 25 and 26) shows Pollock pursuing Siqueiros's course all the way, but in a personal idiom. Reading down through the layers, it would seem that the painting was begun with washes of dilute pigment daubed and spattered in a modulated patchwork of blues, greens, reds, yellows, and grays that the artist subsequently cropped and brushed over with opaque paint to delineate the picture's animal form.

The She-Wolf accords with Siqueiros's model procedurally but not stylistically, which explains why it has been so easy to ignore or make little of that aspect of its origins. But Pollock's separation of formal strategies from formal solutions is instructive. In this respect, the basic conservativism of his ideas

Fig. 15. David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*. **1939–40. Pyroxylin on cement, 100 square meters. In the stairway of the Sindicato Mexicano de Electristas, Mexico City. Sala de Arte Público David Alfaro Siqueiros–Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes–Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (CONACULTA-INBA)**

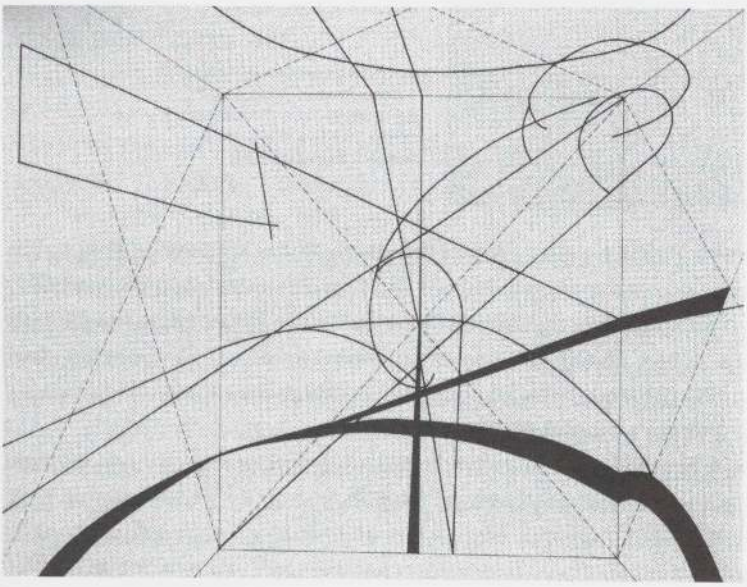

Fig. 16. Diagram of Siqueiros's composition for *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, **Mexico City, by Dolores Valdivia Hurlburt**

about painting at this time can never be underestimated. Siqueiros's teaching broke too many conventions all at once for Pollock to accept in a single stroke. As exciting as the Mexican's innovations were, and as essential to Pollock's breakthrough canvases of the later 1940s as they would ultimately be, Pollock took them on one at a time, translating the first in the series—allover composition—back into the language of brush and palette before moving on to try dripping *on top of* rather than under brush-and-palette pictures later in 1943.

Furthermore, Siqueiros's style raised some of the same obstacles Pollock had faced in Benton and would face again in Picasso: whereas Orozco crushed perspective and reduced volumes to simple contrasts of light and dark, Siqueiros's intricate perspectival puzzles and full-bodied figures required spatial organization that Pollock was simply incapable of mastering. There are no Siqueiros-type paintings in Pollock's production because, after his failure to learn the rudiments of classical modeling and Renaissance mise-en-scène from Benton, he was acutely aware that much of what Siqueiros did was inaccessible to him. It was as if he suffered a kind of pictorial dyslexia in his ability to coordinate three-dimensional geometries. But remove volume from the elliptical constellations in schematic drawings of Siqueiros's *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie* (figs. 15 and 16), spreading them flat across a rectangular plan, and Pollock's looping, pyrotechnic gesture maps over them with intriguing congruence. The issue is less a matter of sources than of sympathetic chords resonating between two very different bodies of work. "Jack did not have a logical mind," according to Benton, "but he did catch on to the contrapuntal logic of accidental form construction quite quickly. In his analytic work he got things out of proportion but found the essential rhythm."[50] Unable to paint Siqueiros's way and disinclined to paint for Siqueiros's reasons, Pollock nevertheless gradually absorbed the Mexican artist's techniques while responding to his essential, space-spinning rhythm.

Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence"—according to which the poet/son creatively misreads the work of the poet/father—has become a critical commonplace.[51] The notion that the "repressed" always reasserts itself, in forms altered by previous denial, is likewise a Freudian staple. The compound effects of such imaginative misprision and of conscious or unconscious repression require that we assess the transmission of artistic ideas not only by resemblances but by attenuations and distortions, not only by what is said but by what is left unsaid or never quite said. Evasions of this order easily blur with tactical reticence; no less an artist than Richard Serra once told a friend, "You are only as good as the obscurity of your sources."[52] Pollock seemingly arrived at a similar conclusion.

Pollock never spoke of Orozco or Siqueiros in public; in private he occasionally tipped his hand. Writing to Alfonso Ossorio, in 1951, about works in progress, Pollock noted that "some of my early images [are] coming thru."[53]

Fig. 17. Jackson Pollock. *Black and White Painting III*. **c. 1951. Enamel on canvas, 35 x 31 in. (89 x 79 cm.). Private collection**

Around the same time, Krasner remembered watching him paint "heads, parts of bodies, fantastic creatures," then covering them with webs of pigment. "Once I asked Jackson why he didn't stop painting when a given image was exposed. He said, 'I choose to veil the imagery.'"[54] These are the mechanisms of repression in operation. But we know that during this same period, Pollock's friend Tony Smith—who would later paint a sculpture, *Eighty-One More* (1970), a deep "Orozco" red, and whose brother, Joseph, had contributed to Orozco's Dartmouth mural—was actively encouraging a renewal of Pollock's interest in their by-then-unfashionable hero. Pictures confirm the connection: *Black and White Painting III* (fig. 17), for example, recalls not only earlier Orozco-like crucifixion imagery but Orozco's *Barricade* (fig. 10), in The Museum of Modern Art since 1937, while *Number 11, 1951* and *Number 14, 1951* (fig. 18) reprise crammed, horizontal paintings of Pollock's such as *Untitled [Composition with Donkey Head]* (fig. 11), *Man, Bull, Bird*, and *Reclining Figure*, all from c. 1938–41, when Pollock was most under Orozco's influence.

Pollock's debt to Siqueiros was more deeply submerged, and more closely tied to technique. Absent direct graphic or thematic borrowings, one looks to methodology, while listening to the undertones of Pollock's rhetoric for clues to

his ulterior promptings. His remark of 1947 in Rosenberg's magazine *Possibilities*, for example—"I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as the easel, palette, brushes, etc."[55]—is not just a statement of fact, it is a delayed echo of Siqueiros's campaign against "the stick with hairs on its end." At around the same time, declaring his intent to "paint large movable pictures which will function between the easel and mural" in his application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, Pollock conjures the portable murals made in Siqueiros's Los Angeles workshop by Lehman and Guston, as well as Orozco's frescoes at The Museum of Modern Art.[56]

Unlike Pollock's Rosenberg-edited comments in *Possibilities* or Greenberg-coached Guggenheim application, the artist's 1950 interview with William Wright was spontaneous. There the voice of an earlier mentor is unmistakable, and Pollock's attempts at disguising its source are revealingly obvious. A question from Wright about why he paints as he does elicits this: "I paint on the floor and this isn't unusual—the Orientals did that."[57] In *Possibilities* three years before, the precedent for working on the floor had been Native American sand painting, as it would be again in Krasner's account; Siqueiros is conspicuous in his absence, apparent though unnamed. Probed about his control over dripped or poured pigments, Pollock replies, "With experience—it seems to be possible to control the flow of the paint, to a great extent, and I don't use—I don't use the accident—'cause I deny the accident."[58] On one level this is a straightforward rejoinder to the popular belief that his method was mad or haphazard; on another the emphatic "I deny the accident" is directed to art-world contemporaries

Fig. 18. Jackson Pollock. *Number 14, 1951*. **1951. Enamel on canvas, 57⅞ in. x 8 ft. 10 in. (146.4 x 269.2 cm). Tate Gallery, London. Purchased with assistance from the American Fellows of the Tate Gallery Foundation, 1988**

acquainted with Siqueiros's doctrine of "controlled accident," and to Siqueiros himself. Pollock was cutting his ties with the unacknowledged past, yet acknowledging those ties in denying them.

Pollock's pairing of artistic technique and industrial technology in his remarks to Wright also echoes Siqueiros, and is atypical of his statements or conversation elsewhere. "My opinion," he says, "is that new needs need new techniques. And the modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements. It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own technique." And, "The modern artist is living in a mechanical age and we have a mechanical means of representing objects in nature such as the camera and the photograph. The modern artist, it seems to me, is working and expressing an inner world—in other words—expressing the energy, the motion, and other inner forces."[59] Compare these observations to Siqueiros's 1934 manifesto "Toward a Transformation of the Plastic Arts," a prototype for Siqueiros's program in New York: "*Art movements should always develop in accordance with the technical possibilities of their age.* Modern technique and mechanics have made such enormous progress that they can enrich our creative capacities beyond our wildest imagination."[60] Paraphrasing Siqueiros in this way, Pollock left the door open for later critics to propose a correspondence between his own atomization of pictorial form and field and the dawn of the nuclear age.[61] In fact, though, his interests were not at all forward-looking in this sense; his basic orientation both psychologically and culturally was retrospective or archaeological, a matter of unearthing archetypes—and then reburying them—rather than creating metaphors for revolutionary science. Pollock's statement has a different significance than its literal meaning: his choice of words and their futuristic ring are undigested rhetorical remnants of his involvement with Siqueiros.

By 1950, Pollock was remaking from the inside out what he had taken from the Mexican artist. His contribution went beyond just treating the aleatory effects arrived at by dripping as an abstract image (rather than as a set-up for figuration, as Siqueiros had);[62] he pulled a new pictorial continent out of Siqueiros's grab bag of studio tricks. Where Siqueiros tended to condense mottled colors in opaque masses, Pollock put underpainted areas into play with applied lines, allowing an interpenetration of spatial layers. He gave himself a mesh that was almost infinitely flexible, infinitely adjustable, in the tightness or openness of its weave. The result was painting that optically receded and advanced yet remained intensely tactile and unequivocally of the surface. Siqueiros had diluted paint with thinners to create explosive or miasmic details; Pollock refined this novel variant on wet-into-wet painting to the point where he could control the peripheral "blooming" of his enamel filaments, drawing with the graying or silvering

that he anticipated in his primary lines as solvents bit into them. Paintings such as *Number 11A, 1948 (Black, White and Gray)* (p. 148, fig. 7) and the X ray–like *Untitled (White on Black I)* (c. 1948) display this virtuosity, while the use of turpentine- or benzine-diluted washes results in the stains and bleeds of *Enchanted Forest* (1947; plate 36). Where Siqueiros added sand, glass, jigsaw-cut relief elements, and so on, to texture his pictures or give them sculptural body, Pollock allowed the detritus that found its way into his paintings to objectify the entire painting process, such that the paint-tube caps, cigarettes, and other flotsam in *Full Fathom Five* (1947; p. 104, fig. 2) underscore the "realism" of every painterly mark in their vicinity. And where Siqueiros sometimes chipped away his quick-drying, brittle nitrocellulose paints to rough up a passage or erase an unsatisfactory result, Pollock chiseled and scraped away the "negative" forms in *Out of the Web: Number 7, 1949* to expose the mid-stratum of the fiberboard as a color, leaving scored and skinned patches of the original paint inside the contours of these excavated arabesques as a kind of shading or modeling of the otherwise flat shapes. Furthermore, Pollock's practice of slicing figures out of paintings such as *Untitled (Shadows: Number 2, 1948)*, *Untitled (Cut-Out)* (c. 1948–50), and *Untitled (Cut-Out Figure)* (1948), and of using both the positive, excised form and the negative, mask or template form as the basis for new images, recalls the stencil-cutting methods used by Siqueiros, but applied to a different, collage-related purpose. Finally, recalling Lehman's description of the May Day float Pollock saw at the Siqueiros workshop, the handprints in *Number 1A, 1948* (plate 2) may in part be traced back to techniques used there.

Painting on the floor was standard in the Siqueiros workshop. Pollock adopted the procedure, but eventually realized possibilities never imagined by his predecessor. The transformation of the vertical easel painting into an expansive horizontal has given rise to much exegesis. Tony Smith was among the first to assign metaphoric content to it; thinking like the architect and sculptor he was, while also evoking Pollock's attachment to the fields around his Long Island house, Smith said, "[Pollock's] feeling for the land had something to do with his painting canvases on the floor . . . it seemed that the [canvas] was the earth, that he was distributing flowers over it."[63] This pastoral vision, however, reintroduces into the picture an implicit horizon line that Pollock's method was intended to eliminate.

Other interpretations associate Pollock's spillage of paint on the floor with physical debasement and bodily fluids. Once again, Smith spoke first: in the drunken state in which he and Pollock jointly made the first forays onto the unblemished canvas of *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, Smith said of the violently splotched painting, "It looks like vomit."[64] Pollock biographers Naifeh and Smith link Pollock's drip technique to childhood memories of his father pissing on a rock, and so to masculine display generally.[65] In the same vein, Rosalind Krauss

has compared Pollock's drip pictures to Andy Warhol's Oxidation Paintings, in effect ratifying the Naifeh and Smith reading and treating Warhol's retrospectively competitive joke as evidence that Pollock's work was the invitation to a general "pissing contest" in American art.[66]

But these imposed narratives fall away like excess baggage in the face of the paintings themselves. The unburdened, untethered nature of Pollock's work demands it. When it came in 1947—and even Krasner is unsure of the precise moment—Pollock's resort to the floor was purely instrumental. You can't "drip" on vertical canvas; you can only apply paint and let it drip after the painterly gesture is complete. That was de Kooning's way from 1944 onward. Pollock had another idea: unrolling canvas on the floor gave him room to maneuver. Yet this prosaic decision made in cramped quarters had immense poetic consequences. Although Pollock crawled out onto his canvas and stepped into it, the painterly zone that determined the strange levitational gestalt of his most abstract works was not the floor itself so much as the interval between his arm and the picture plane. Pollock referred to the great drip paintings as "memories arrested in space,"[67] but Krasner aligned that metaphor with his way of working: "He is not drawing on the canvas so much as in the air above it."[68] In short, the floor caught the residue of moves made independently of it.

Pollock did something else to release his pictures from the Vitruvian axis conventionally projected onto painting. Though he sometimes executed paintings from one side only, he had access to all sides, and his interventions often came from multiple angles, destroying the usual sense of an a priori top and bottom, left and right. De Kooning achieved this compass-spinning effect by rotating his canvases on the easel; Pollock did so by circling them on the floor. Thus Pollock exploited gravity to summon an antigravitational reality that for all its visual and tangible immediacy—its opticality *and* physicality—was neither vertical nor horizontal in any mimetic or metaphoric sense, but always unto itself, and, whether laid flat, hung high, or, like some works in the 1950 show at Betty Parsons, abutted to the meeting place of floor and wall, always conditional in its relation to either plane.

Pollock certainly knew Orozco's description of the mural as the "highest, the most logical, the purest and strongest form of painting," for it appeared in the issue of *Creative Art* that he discussed with his brother Charles in 1929. He would also have known that Siqueiros, by 1933, had repudiated easel painting altogether (although the artist continued to make small-format pictures throughout his life). Against this background, and the background of Pollock's association with "wall-eyed" artists of his own generation (Guston, Kadish, his brother Sande), Pollock was abidingly ambivalent toward muralism. The dilemma he addressed in his Guggenheim statement underscores this. Looking for a middle

term "between the easel and mural," Pollock seemed to be looking ahead to the latter as the future and back on the former as, in his own words, "a dying form." In fact the opposite was true.

The question of painting's site was not a new or incidental issue to Pollock's contemporaries after the war. "Architectonics" was a central concern for the Mexicans, as a result of their public commissions, and of the challenge of integrating modern art into heavy colonial structures. All of the Big Three spoke or wrote about the problem, and anticipated the day when it might be possible to collaborate with architects in creating buildings where murals were a structurally determining component rather than an afterthought. An echo of this preoccupation can be heard in Charles Pollock's 1929 letter to Jackson: "My interest in mural painting definitely related to architecture has lead me lately to think of returning to Los Angeles if I could get work with Wright."[69]

Pollock never made the same "definite" connection between mural painting and architecture. Lacking substantial commissions and largely indifferent to the public ideals of Depression-era mural painting, he had little external motive for thinking along these lines. Even when he undertook his mural-scale work for Peggy Guggenheim, he seems not to have considered the formal aspects of the problem, nor was he encouraged to. To help Pollock past the block that had delayed his work on the painting, Peter Busa told him, "Look, Jack, this isn't the Project [i.e., the Works Progress Administration]. You don't have to get the plan approved by a committee. Treat it like an easel picture, just bigger."[70] And that is exactly what *Mural* is—an easel picture, just bigger. The cavalcade of stick figures that animates the painting's expanse—figures strongly reminiscent of Orozco's depictions of masses of people in motion, as in *The Dictators* (1936–39)—almost diagrams the formal possibilities inherent in the lateral scanning of the image by an ambulatory spectator, but Pollock did not fully exploit those possibilities in *Mural*, nor did he pursue them in later paintings. Siqueiros's *Plastic Exercise* of 1934 and his *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie* of 1939–40 were designed with just such a spectator in mind, and the lessons he drew from the first of these two experiments in compound perspectives, shifting scale, extreme foreshortening, and multiple vantage points were the topic of lectures given at the New School and must have been in the air at the Union Square workshop.

Although Pollock painted numerous big pictures, comparatively few are of mural proportions, and with the exception of friezelike canvases such as *Lucifer* (1947), *Number 7A, 1948*, *White Cockatoo: Number 24A, 1948*, and *Number 2, 1949*, he made no works with obvious "architectural" implications until the summer of 1950, when in rapid succession he completed *Number 32, 1950* (plate 3), *One: Number 31, 1950* (plate 4), and *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* (plate 5). Afterward, only *Number 11, 1951*, *Convergence: Number 10, 1952*, *Portrait and a Dream* (1953), and *Blue Poles* approach the same grandeur.

That said, the mural was intermittently a central concern of Pollock's, from his most productive years on through to the very end. From the early 1950s until the painter's death, Tony Smith kept insisting that "great art demands an appropriate scale,"[71] and his prolonged but ultimately unsuccessful bid to design a church around an ensemble of Pollock's painting was conceived in support of this belief. Pollock's efforts to secure mural commissions linked aesthetic ambition to economic survival, but resulted in only one project, for the Geller House in 1950—another instance of "an easel picture, just bigger." Parallel to Smith's church was the architect Peter Blake's plan to build an "Ideal Museum" in which Pollock's paintings would be suspended "between earth and sky," and mirrors reflecting them would infinitely extend their imagery.[72] The architecture curator Arthur Drexler of The Museum of Modern Art discussed Blake's model in these terms: "In the treatment of the paintings as walls, the design recalls an entirely different kind of pictorial art; that of the Renaissance fresco. The project suggests a reintegration of painting and architecture wherein painting is architecture, but this time without message or content. Its sole purpose is to heighten our experience of space."[73]

Theoretically we have come full circle—from the frescoes of the Mexican muralists, which were directly inspired by Renaissance painting, to holistic spaces that translate the Renaissance idea of the unity of painting and architecture into the language of modernist abstraction. But despite his on-again, off-again interest in the ideas put before him by Smith and Blake—ideas reinforced but also qualified by his experiences of the 1930s—Pollock never really came to terms with the fundamental aesthetic challenges inherent in these proposals. The settings for or relations among pictures seem to have interested him only when prompted; they were never decisive factors in how he conceived or executed his work. There are no groups of his paintings that cohere as a series or whose sum is greater than its parts, and he left the placement of individual canvases or panels to others.

The cul-de-sac in which Pollock found himself in the early 1950s was not simply a matter of booze and fame, or of the conflict between abstraction and figuration. Nor, to the extent that he struggled to vary his painterly attack so long as he painted at all, was it even an issue of repeating himself. Implicit in all that Pollock had achieved by that time was the problem of painting's situation. Confronting that problem head-on was the unfinished business of his career, and his failure to do so sealed his fate as surely as any of the other contingencies that closed in around him.

Published just two years after the artist's death, Allan Kaprow's article "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" raised this question squarely, but answered it at painting's expense. Pollock's method had been exhausted, Kaprow argued: "The act of painting, the new space, the personal mark that builds its own form and mean-

ing, the endless tangle, the great scale, the new materials are by now clichés of college art departments." The space that Pollock had opened up remained—"some of the implications inherent in these new values are not as futile as we all began to believe. . . . Not all the roads of this modern art lead to ideas of finality"—but Pollock himself "was unable because of illness or for other reasons to do anything about this. He created some magnificent paintings, but he also destroyed painting."[74] His example, then, pointed beyond the medium of painting. "Pollock ignored the confines of the rectangular field in favor of a continuum going in all directions simultaneously, beyond the literal dimensions of any work. . . . In an older work, the edge was a far more precise caesura: here ended the world of the artists; beyond began the world of the spectator and reality."[75] Thanks to Rosenberg's portrait of the "action painter" and Hans Namuth's widely circulated films and photographs of Pollock at work, that limitless space was soon crowded with salvaged "reality" and bodies in motion that brought artists and spectators together in performative collaboration.

Even before Pollock's death, members of the Gutai group in Japan had made this aesthetic leap, and soon after it European artists followed suit. In 1960, the Austrian Günter Brus covered the walls of his studio with paper and painted a total gestural environment, but by 1962 he was writing in his diary, "Pollock talks of the endless picture—he wants (as far as I can understand it) the picture to be part of the universe . . . I find this way of thinking out of date. Yes, I want to see paintings in the same way (and thus, really, to do away with paintings and make them into a section cut out of the world)—but this world should . . . contain not just the marks I've made, but rhythms, screams, sleep, bean soup, long-haired dachshunds, typhoons, ceaseless melodies, etc, etc, etc."[76] Around the world, artists and critics thus began to view Pollock's truncated career as emblematic of the "destruction" of painting from within, leaving neo-Dada and its cargo of found objects, intellectual conceits, and riddling gestures to fill the void. But in jumping to these conclusions, avant-garde art bypassed the hurdle in front of which Pollock had balked.

Discussing the "Ideal Museum" with Blake, Pollock once complained to the architect that "the trouble is you think I am a decorator."[77] This contempt for decoration was shared by many of his contemporaries, and grew more acute as the market for Abstract Expressionism took off in the mid-1950s: the risk of co-optation was keenly felt. Rosenberg, in his double-edged characterization of the Pollock-like "action painter," had warned against "apocalyptic wallpaper"—art with the aura of existential struggle but the function of ornament.[78] The alternative was for artists to control the circumstances in which paintings found themselves, to make paintings for a place in which they were the raison d'être rather than the backdrop.

This was the option that both Blake and Tony Smith explored on Pollock's

behalf. Smith's church project was an outgrowth of discussions among patrons eager to sponsor a modern chapel like the one Matisse was then creating at Vence, France.[79] But Matisse's Epicurean approach to the "decorative" was at odds with Pollock's defiantly antibourgeois attitudes. Conceivably Greenberg or Krasner might have interceded to unsnarl this socio-aesthetic knot and clarify the promise of Matisse's advances beyond easel painting, but it seems they did not. Meanwhile, situational painting of the kind indicated by Pollock's work fell outside the scope of Picasso, the other deity of Pollock's circle. As influential as the mural-scale *Guernica* had been on Pollock, it was an exception in Picasso's oeuvre, and stood apart from the space it occupied as a self-contained work of art.

Since Pollock's death, other painters have responded to the challenge his work posed but did not meet. Yves Klein's 1957–59 sponge murals for Gelsenkirchen are one example, Barnett Newman's Stations of the Cross works are another, as are Mark Rothko's groups of canvases for the restaurant at the Four Seasons in New York, for the de Menil Chapel in Houston (both of these designed by Philip Johnson), and for Harvard University. In the 1970s, David Novros painted true frescoes in the Manhattan loft of Donald Judd, among other places, and in the 1980s Robert Ryman made a suite of paintings for a single room for the collector Gerald Elliot. Ellsworth Kelly has recently embarked on several public commissions, and Robert Mangold has experimented with architectonic anomalies in serial works, though he has yet to execute such a series for a specific location. Frank Stella has labored on numerous architectural and quasi-architectural projects aimed at giving painting added dimensions within spaces expressly designed or redesigned for it, and Sol LeWitt, though not a painter, has conceived many integrated interiors. The fact remains, however, that the prospects Pollock's work identified for painting (as distinct from performance or installation) but did not follow through on are still largely unexploited.

At this point, to ask, once again, "What was the relationship between Pollock and the Mexican muralists?" may seem anachronistic or simply perverse. The purpose, however, is not to address more gaps and errors in the critical literature, but to benefit from an unexpected perspective on a historical turning point and the impasse it created for painting. Looking back on Pollock's predicament in the 1950s, one wonders whether the "best" point of departure he could have chosen at this point was the least rather than the most likely one—Siqueiros rather than Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, or any other European modernist. Though this was the moment when Orozco partially reclaimed his loyalty, Siqueiros's notion of an *all-encompassing* painting was potentially the more open-ended formal match for Pollock's total but already problematic command of the *allover* painting. Moreover, Siqueiros's inability or unwillingness to reject ideology for the sake of the aesthetic possibilities he had discovered left the way clear for Pollock to assert himself without constraint. Like Benton, Siqueiros rep-

resented "something against which to react very strongly, later on." Pollock did push off from Siqueiros in his refinement of the drip technique, but he did not take the next step, and amnesia or antipathy toward Siqueiros within his New York cohort ensured that no complex analysis of what muralism in its fully evolved state could mean for abstract painting was ever developed. Site-specific painting was the road not taken.

Pollock's genius was his dividedness, his attraction to antithetical ideas. Gestural painting bound such opposites together for a while. Then they fell out of solution.

The last five years of Pollock's career saw an inversion of an artist's usual development. Whereas most painters work through influences and provisional manners toward a signature style that they then try to extend, Pollock spent his last years fitfully cultivating the several different types of painting that constituted the precipitated elements of his once-synthesized allover pictures. Although he produced individual works of merit, he could not sustain the effort. Unlike de Kooning, Pollock could not find enough in painterly nuance alone to satisfy his larger aesthetic needs.

As Al Held once said of de Kooning, Picasso had given artists of the 1940s and '50s "a language you could write your own sentences with."[80] Many did just that. Pollock, though, had invented a language of his own—but failed to understand how far it could take him. "It seems obvious that here was a man who was stuck in syntax and wanted to get out," the poet Ann Lauterbach remarked on leaving the recent retrospective.[81] Having gotten out, he remained trapped by a limited sense of the formal constructs his syntax-free "sentences" might fill. Unable to paint his way out of the corner, Pollock was at the same time incapable of freeing himself conceptually from the tenacious conventions of the "easel" picture, which continued to haunt his floor-painted works. The bitter irony is that within his own experience a paradigm for what might be attempted already existed.

Although cracks in the Pollock myth have widened, and scholars are now pursuing lines of inquiry previously discouraged by mainstream critics and historians, a tendency to clean up Pollock's act persists. Greenberg once said that Pollock's "culture as a painter" made him especially sensitive to the medium's true nature.[82] It was precisely the breadth of Pollock's painting culture and the extremes between which it positioned him that made him an exception among his peers, but his efforts to reconcile these extremes taxes the imagination of those uncomfortable with contradictions and prone to linear thinking. In reality, artistic accomplishment is seldom represented by the progress from A to Z in roughly alphabetical order, but more closely resembles the round-about movement from A to B and from there, perhaps, to C, by way of Q, Z, H, and D.[83] Pollock followed just such an unpredictable course. To describe his evolution as

logically sequential and roughly parallel to the general thrust of modernism does violence to the facts and obscures the reasons for and limitations upon his singular importance.

The riddle that must be addressed but will never be completely solved was best described by one of Pollock's contemporaries, George McNeil, one of the many artists of their generation who looked to Paris in the certainty that Matisse and Picasso pointed the way ahead. McNeil's rueful admiration for Pollock speaks volumes to those who, unwilling to cope with the detours their hero took, prefer to minimize the confusion still surrounding his life and art in order to make him the standard-bearer of their modernist teleologies. "What was interesting about Pollock," for McNeil, "is that he came from very bad influences like Benton and the Mexican muralists and other antipainterly influences, and yet somehow, in a kind of alchemy, he took all the negatives and made them into a positive. It's a mystery. The rest of us were following the right path and therefore the magic didn't issue."[84]

McNeil's puzzlement has been widely shared for half a century. But while the mystery of Pollock will never be exhausted, the dynamic polarities of his art were always there to be reckoned with. Taking full account of them is the test of seriousness. When American criticism concedes that Pollock's engagement with influences that offended mid-century formalist thinking is in the final analysis central rather than peripheral to his art, it will at long last have overcome its myopia and outgrown the provincialism of which that myopia was a symptom.

Notes

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Finally I would like to acknowledge my debt to David Alfaro Siqueiros. In 1971, having been through the events in France of May 1968 and subsequent upheavals in America, I was convinced that art and politics could somehow be brought together in a unified practice. Based on that hope I contacted Siqueiros (through the expatriate American artist Elizabeth Catlett) and was invited by him to join the team working on his last major project, the Polyforum Cultural in Mexico City. I could not have been less well prepared either artistically or politically for the reality I discovered. Nevertheless, Siqueiros received me graciously, gave me the opportunity to work both on the Polyforum and at his studio in Cuernavaca, welcomed me into his house, and spent hours explaining his ideas, his work, and his actions—including his perspective on the attack on Leon Trotsky, which Joseph Losey came to Mexico to discuss with him in preparation for a film while I was there. Siqueiros seemed to me in every way the energizing force that he appears in the memory of Reuben Kadish, Axel Horn, Harold Lehman, and others. While in Mexico I made a concerted effort to see all of the murals by him and his generation that I could, and, in a later-day version, I witnessed some of the harsh social and political circumstances that gave rise to the mural movement. In the end, the experience was more disillusioning than inspiring, but I came away from it with an abiding respect for what the muralists attempted, a conviction that Orozco was an important artist deserving of far greater recognition, and a renewed appreciation of how ideology clouds judgment. This essay is based in large part on what I learned at that time, with the last lesson being applied not only to the "naive" political aspirations of the 1930s and after, but to "sophisticated" aesthetic position-taking of the 1950s onward.

1. Of course an artist's work is never wholly dictated by his or her intentions, and may indeed run counter to them. But whether such intentions are fulfilled or contradicted, they are, to the degree to which they can be ascertained, significant.

2. Willem de Kooning, quoted in Rudi Blesh, *Modern Art USA: Men, Rebellion, Conquest, 1990–1956* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 253–54.

3. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Artnews* 51 no. 8 (December 1952). Collected in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), p. 25.

4. William S. Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," *Artforum* 5 no. 6 (February 1967): 15.

5. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xxvi.

6. Jackson Pollock, quoted in [Berton Roueché], "Unframed Space," *The New Yorker* 26 no. 24 (August 5, 1950): 16.

7. Ibid.

8. Pollock, in "Jackson Pollock: A Questionnaire," *Arts & Architecture* 61 no. 2 (February 1944): 14.

9. The Chronology of Sam Hunter's catalogue for the Pollock exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in 1956 notes "at least one call" by Pollock on Siqueiros's New York workshop, and briefly mentions José Clemente Orozco. "Even when responding sympathetically to Mexican painting," Hunter wrote, "Pollock's interests were being diverted to Picasso and the fresher formal viewpoints of Paris." This is the art-historical equivalent of cutting to the chase. Hunter, "Jackson Pollock," *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* XXIV no. 2 (1956–57): 8. The short chapter headed "The Mexicans" in Frank O'Hara's 1959 monograph on Pollock talks mostly about Diego Rivera but acknowledges Pollock's preference for Siqueiros and Orozco, if in a qualified way: "The drawings and paintings done during this period of Pollock's interest in Orozco and Siqueiros, however, seem to me to be studies of their unabashedly dramatic treatment of subject—it is not art which interested him here, but their convictions. American 'social content' paintings in the 1930s and early 1940s seem very tentative by comparison." Nothing is said about the impact of these two painters on Pollock's formal or technical approach. O'Hara, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), pp. 14–15.

10. Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," 1947, in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, vol. 2 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: at the University Press, 1986), p. 166.

11. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Marc Chagall, Lyonel Feininger, and Jackson Pollock," 1943, in *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, vol. 1 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays*, p. 165.

12. Ibid, p. 166.

13. In his essay "'American-Type' Painting," *Partisan Review*, Spring 1955, Greenberg wrote that Pollock "compounded hints from Picasso's calligraphy in the early '30s with suggestions from [Hans] Hofmann, [André] Masson, and Mexican painting, especially Siqueiros." But this brief mention of muralism was the only exception, and prompted no further analysis of the issue.

14. Greenberg, quoted in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc, Publishers, 1989), p. 535.

15. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Worden Day, Carl Holty, and Jackson Pollock," in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, p. 202.

16. Greenberg, "The Present prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," p. 166.

17. Steve Wheeler, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 358; Harold Lehman, conversations with the author, 1998.

18. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibi-

tions of Marc Chagall, Lyonel Feininger, and Jackson Pollock," p. 165.
19. Greenberg, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 556.
20. Lee Krasner, quoted in Bruce Glaser, "Jackson Pollock: An Interview with Lee Krasner," *Arts* 41 no. 6 (April 1967): 37.
21. Krasner, quoted in B. H. Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," *Jackson Pollock: Black and White*, exh. cat. (New York: Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, 1969), p. 7.
22. Krasner, quoted in Barbara Rose, "Jackson Pollock at Work: An Interview with Lee Krasner," *Partisan Review* 47 no. 1 (1980): 85.
23. Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," p. 14.
24. There is no record of Pollock's interest in or response to Claude Monet, much less to Monet's late, "allover" water lily paintings in particular. This is not surprising since Pollock never visited Europe, where these works could be seen at Giverny in the early 1950s—as Ellsworth Kelly did—nor were examples to be found in the permanent collections of the major New York museums. The Museum of Modern Art acquired its *Water Lilies* (c. 1920) three years after Pollock's death, and mounted its Monet exhibition a year after that. Rather than Pollock's learning about alloverness from Monet—or somehow extrapolating from Monet's example without being fully conscious of it—Americans learned to appreciate that quality in Monet from Pollock. Rubin's argument retroactively reverses that dynamic of affinities. The "Monet effect" on American painting of the period can be found instead in the work of Milton Resnick and Joan Mitchell, both "second generation" Abstract Expressionists (or "Abstract Impressionists" as the generally prejorative label was applied) belonging to the Europe-oriented, de Kooning faction of the Tenth Street community. See Irving Sandler, "The Influence of Impressionism on Jackson Pollock and His Contemporaries," *Arts* 53 no. 7 (March 1979): 110–11.
25. Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," pp. 14–15.
26. Rubin's description of Pollock's involvement with Siqueiros is based on comments in a letter written by Charles Pollock, who, unlike his brothers Sande and Jackson, had no active involvement with the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop. When "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition" was written, at least three participants in the Workshop were still alive and accessible: New York–area artists Lehman and Claire Moore (formerly Claire Mahl), and Axel Horn (formerly Axel Horr), who published his article "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump" (*The Carleton Miscellany* 7 no. 3 [Summer 1966]: 80–87) the summer before Rubin's series began to appear. Siqueiros too was alive and accessible, in Mexico; he died in 1974.
27. The Museum's founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., met Rivera in Moscow in 1929, on the same trip that put him in contact with Aleksandr Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and Vladimir Tatlin.
28. Charles Pollock, letter to his brother Jackson Pollock, in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 143.
29. Jackson Pollock, letter to his brother Charles Pollock, in Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978; hereafter referred to as OT), 4:207.
30. José Clemente Orozco, "New World, New Races and New Art," *Creative Art* 4 no.1 (January 1929): 44–46.
31. Jackson Pollock, letter to Charles Pollock, in OT 4:208.
32. Lehman, conversation with the author, 1998.
33. See Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 298.
34. Jackson Pollock, letter to his father Leroy Pollock, dated February 3, 1933. In OT 4:214.
35. Kadish, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), p. 11.
36. Jackson Pollock, letter to his mother Stella and brother Sande Pollock, 1932. In OT 4:216.
37. Kadish, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 219. In the conversation Kadish is remembering here, Pollock was comparing Orozco with Siqueiros. Apparently around three years later, Pollock was still telling Kadish, "Orozco is the *real* man"; see Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral History of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1985), p. 49.
38. Lehman and Siqueiros, "The Siqueiros Experimental Workshop," draft prospectus in Lehman's archives.
39. Kadish, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 285.
40. Lehman, notes for a lecture on Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros, delivered at The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1986. In Lehman's archives.
41. Ibid.
42. Horn, "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump," pp. 85–86.
43. Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 415.
44. Krasner, quoted in Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," p. 7.
45. Ibid.
46. Writers who have drawn specific iconographic correspondences between Orozco's work and Pollock's include O'Connor, Stephen Polcari, Ellen Landau, and Lisa Mintz Messinger, in texts cited in the first paragraph and elsewhere in these notes.
47. Peter Busa, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, p. 29.
48. Horn, "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump," p. 86, and in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 288.
49. These lithographs were in all likelihood made at the print studio of Leonard Bogdanoff, just around the corner from Siqueiros's workshop. Pollock's *Coal Miners* (1936)—probably also printed in Bogdanoff's studio—is pure Orozco in its architectural masses and angular figuration. Bogdanoff went on to develop and market synthetic paints such as acrylics and Magna under the name Leonard Bocour, pursuing on his own some of the changes in paint technology anticipated by Siqueiros and José Gutierrez when they were working around the corner from him in 1936. On the use of the spray in *Lavender Mist*, see James Coddington's essay in the present volume.
50. Thomas Hart Benton, quoted in O'Connor, "The Genesis of Jackson Pollock: 1912 to 1943," *Artforum* 5 no. 9 (May 1967): 17.
51. Landau, Pepe Karmel, and Rosalind Krauss all cite Harold Bloom in texts on Pollock. See Landau, "Jackson Pollock und die Mexikaner," *Siqueiros/Pollock–Pollock/Siqueiros*, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1995), vol. 2, *Essays/Dokumentation*, pp. 38–54, and Karmel and Krauss in their essays in the present volume. For their source see Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
52. Richard Serra, quoted by Chuck Close, in conversation with the author.
53. Pollock, letter to Alfonso Ossorio, dated June 7, 1951. In OT 4:261.
54. Krasner, quoted in Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," p. 7.

55. Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* no. 1 (Winter 1947–48): 79.
56. Pollock, application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, 1947. In OT 4:238.
57. Pollock, in William Wright, "An Interview with Jackson Pollock," broadcast on radio station WERI, Westerly, R.I., 1951. Published in Hans Namuth, Rose, Krauss, et al., *Pollock Painting*, ed. Rose (New York: Agrinde Publishers Ltd., 1980), n.p.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid. See also a Pollock holograph statement of 1950, in the artist's archive, and published in OT 4:253: "Technic is the result of a need——— new needs demand new technics——— total control——— denial of the accident——— ."
60. Lehman's descriptions of the aims of the Union Square Workshop echo Siqueiros's language in much the same way as Pollock's words do here. The terms and slogans used in the workshop would seem to have been deeply inscribed in the memories of Siqueiros's assistants.
61. See, for example, Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: at the University Press, 1983), p. 97, and T. J. Clark's essay in the present volume.
62. Siqueiros's experiments with poured, dripped, and spattered paint are quite unlike the exercises in automatism attempted by Francis Picabia, Joan Miró, Masson, and others of their circle. His use of industrial or commercial enamels inflected his abstract grounds with a materialism utterly different in facture and perceptual impact from the dreamy ethers and Rorschach mindscapes of Surrealism. Pollock plainly responded to the poetry of the latter group, but opted for the physicality of Siqueiros, and vastly expanded its technical and expressive range.
63. Tony Smith, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 541. I have followed Naifeh and Smith's example in substituting the word "canvas" for "glass" in the original quotation (in Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock?," *Art in America* 55 no. 3 [May–June 1967]: 52), since Smith's views here do not restrict the metaphor to Pollock's brief experience of painting on glass, in reference to which Smith's statement was made.
64. Tony Smith, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 6.
65. Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 541.
66. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 270, 276–77.
67. Pollock, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 540.
68. Krasner, quoted in Rose, "Jackson Pollock at Work: An Interview with Lee Krasner," p. 90.
69. Charles Pollock, letter to his brother Jackson Pollock, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 143.
70. Busa, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 467.
71. Tony Smith, quoted in ibid., p. 613.
72. Peter Blake, *No Place like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. 110.
73. Arthur Drexler, quoted in ibid., pp. 112–13.
74. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Artnews* 57 no. 6 (October 1958): 55.
75. Ibid., p. 56.
76. Günter Brus, in *From Action Painting to Actionism: Vienna 1960–1965. Günter Brus*, exh. cat. (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag, 1988), pp. 126–27.
77. Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, p. 113.
78. Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," in *The Tradition of the New*, p. 34.
79, In an undated letter to Ossorio from 1951, Pollock wrote, "Have you seen the Mattisse [*sic*] Church and design or is it terribly far from Paris?" In OT 4: 258. Pollock was certainly curious about the project, then, although he appears to have made no further comment on it.
80. Al Held, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 714.
81. Ann Lauterbach, conversation with the author, 1998.
82. Greenberg, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 556.
83. I owe this metaphor to Peter Schjeldahl, who used it in conversation with me.
84. George McNeil, quoted in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 338.

A Sum of Destructions

Pepe Karmel

If strong artists deal with the anxiety of influence (to borrow Harold Bloom's indispensable term) not by avoiding it but by incorporating and transforming the work of their precursors, Pollock's artistic evolution can be understood as the story of his changing response to, and eventual transcendence of, his European sources. Above all, it is the story of his long wrestling match with Picasso—a wrestling match conducted at long distance. Some of Picasso's most important works Pollock could have known only in reproduction. Others he would have absorbed secondhand, through paintings and drawings by other artists who had been influenced by Picasso at an earlier date. When Freud died, in 1939, W. H. Auden wrote that he had become "a climate of opinion." So too, in the 1930s and '40s, Picasso's ideas and innovations were so widely diffused that no artist could completely escape them.[1] Lee Krasner recounted that when she and Pollock were still living in New York, she once heard something fall in his studio and then Pollock yelling, "God damn it, that guy missed nothing!" She went in to see what had happened. "Jackson was sitting, staring, and on the floor was a book of Picasso's work."[2]

Pollock's relationship to Picasso is hardly news: scholars have often noted his reworkings of motifs from paintings such as *Girl before a Mirror* (1932) or *Guernica* (1937). Even more important than these individual borrowings, however, are the different structural models offered by Picasso's pictures. Of these, the most often discussed is the example of "allover" composition that Pollock supposedly found in Analytic Cubism. Several critics have echoed Clement Greenberg's statement that "by means of his interlaced trickles and spatters, Pollock created an oscillation between an emphatic surface . . . and an illusion of indeterminate but somehow definitely shallow depth that reminds me of what Picasso and Braque arrived at thirty-odd years before, with the facet-planes of their Analytical Cubism. . . . Pollock's 1946–1950 manner really took up Analytical Cubism from the point at which Picasso and Braque had left it."[3] The problem is that the "interlaced trickles and spatters" that create the oscillation between surface and depth in Pollock look nothing like the straight lines and

Fig. 1. Pablo Picasso. *Painter and Model.* **1926. Oil on canvas, 54⅛ in. x 8 ft. 5⅛ in. (137.5 x 257 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris**

shaded facets that produce a similar effect in Analytic Cubist paintings.[4] Greenberg's argument requires us to believe that Pollock jumped in a single bound from the rectilinear grid of 1910–12 Cubism to the looping web of his own mature work, without any of the intermediary studies that allow us to follow his absorption of *Guernica*, for instance. In fact, Pollock absorbed not one but several of Picasso's styles, and in most of these cases we can trace the process of diffusion and absorption virtually step-by-step.

Much of Picasso's evolution was visible to artists in New York, thanks to a series of exhibitions held by the Valentine and Seligmann galleries in the late 1930s, and followed by the great Picasso retrospective of 1939 at The Museum of Modern Art. Aspects of his work not represented in these exhibitions could be studied in the pages of *Cahiers d'Art*, which published numerous studies and drawings as well as finished paintings.

From the late 1930s through the end of his career, Pollock responded to many aspects of Picasso's oeuvre. But the most important antecedent for his work is a group of pictures that have received curiously little attention from either Pollock or Picasso scholars: Picasso's interlace paintings of 1926, such as *Painter and Model* (fig. 1). These works rephrased the allover field of Analytic Cubism in a language of curves instead of straight lines, pointing a way beyond the orthodoxy of contemporary abstraction. As the critic Carl Einstein com-

mented, "The curve returned after the war, and with it the possibility of a painting of feeling."[5] The interlacing curves of Picasso's new style of 1926 seemed to liberate his pictures from the constraints of the rectilinear grid without relapsing into naturalism, and what Alfred H. Barr, Jr., called the "curvilinear Cubism" of these pictures gave rise in his work to a style known as "free form."[6]

In *Painter and Model*, lines flow without a break from figure to figure and from figure to ground, imbuing the composition with a sense of perpetual motion.[7] The contours of the figures are recognizable as such but wildly distorted. Denser groupings of line reveal themselves as heads, fingers, or feet; examined individually, they separate from the curvilinear field, but merge back into it as soon as the viewer looks elsewhere. Overall, the character of the field is graphic and conceptual. The alternation of light and dark tones in the background, however, suggests actual optical experience, and the picture seems to open onto a stagelike space behind the scrim of interlacing lines.

By 1927, Picasso's web had begun to loosen, so that individual figures were easier to distinguish. In works like *Seated Woman* of that year, the interlace pattern tends to function only within the contours of the figures, while the backgrounds are indicated with a kind of rectilinear shorthand.[8] The culmination of this style arrived in *Girl before a Mirror*, where, however, the unity of the interlaced composition is deliberately disrupted by abrupt changes of color and pattern that set off one figure from the other and both from the background.[9] Acquired by The Museum of Modern Art in 1938, this picture had a major impact on artists in New York.

Although Picasso's allover interlace paintings remained in his studio, unexhibited and unreproduced, the idea of drawing with interlacing loops and curves was disseminated in works by other artists as diverse as Max Ernst, Paul Klee, André Masson, and Georges Braque. The figure in Ernst's 1927 canvas *The Kiss*, for instance, is remarkably similar to that in Picasso's *Seated Woman*. And in 1942, when Peggy Guggenheim opened her New York gallery, Art of This Century, Ernst's picture was displayed as the centerpiece of the collection.[10] Other versions of the

Fig. 2. André Masson. *Antilles.* **1943. Oil, sand, and tempera on canvas, 51¼ x 31⅛ in. (128 x 84 cm). Musée Cantini, Marseilles**

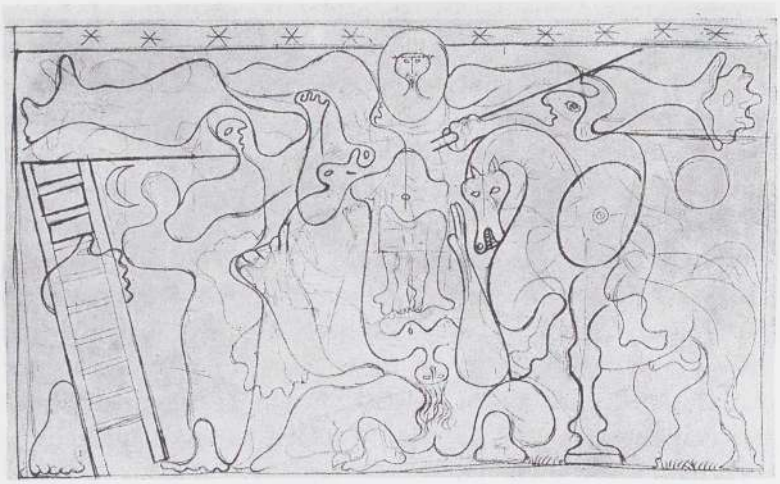


Fig. 3. Pablo Picasso. *La Crucifixion.* **1927. Drawing. Published in** *Cahiers d'Art* **2, 1927**

interlace style appeared in the work of Masson, who, like Ernst, spent the war years in New York. His work of these years is often close to Pollock's work of the time, while his drawings and paintings of the mid-1920s closely anticipate the allover interlace of Pollock's drip paintings.[11] Ironically, though, Masson's own skill as an academic draftsman subverted his transgressive ambitions: behind the web of meandering lines, the viewer almost always senses the presence of a conventionally modeled figure (fig. 2).

The interlace style proved attractive to printmakers like Stanley William Hayter, who played an important role in its diffusion. After working with Picasso and the Surrealists in Paris from 1927 to 1940, Hayter moved to New York, where his Atelier 17 print shop acted as an informal classroom for young American artists interested in Surrealism.[12] For Hayter and his circle, the loops and swirls of the interlace style seemed the natural language of Surrealist automatism. But the style could serve equally well as a vehicle for classical imagery, and Picasso, as usual, led the way, with a series of 1927 drawings devoted to the distinctly unmodern motif of the Crucifixion (fig. 3).[13] Braque adopted a version of this style in his illustrations for Hesiod's *Theogony*, commissioned in 1930.

The interlace style was an important thread in Picasso's development during the years 1926–32, but his other inventions of these years were equally influential. In one series of pictures, including *The Swimmer* (1929; fig. 4), Picasso extracted his curvilinear figures from the web, reducing them to freely distorted outlines, and positioned them like heraldic emblems on blank backgrounds of an infinite depth or flatness. Several of these emblematic figures were included in Picasso's 1939 retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art. Picasso identified

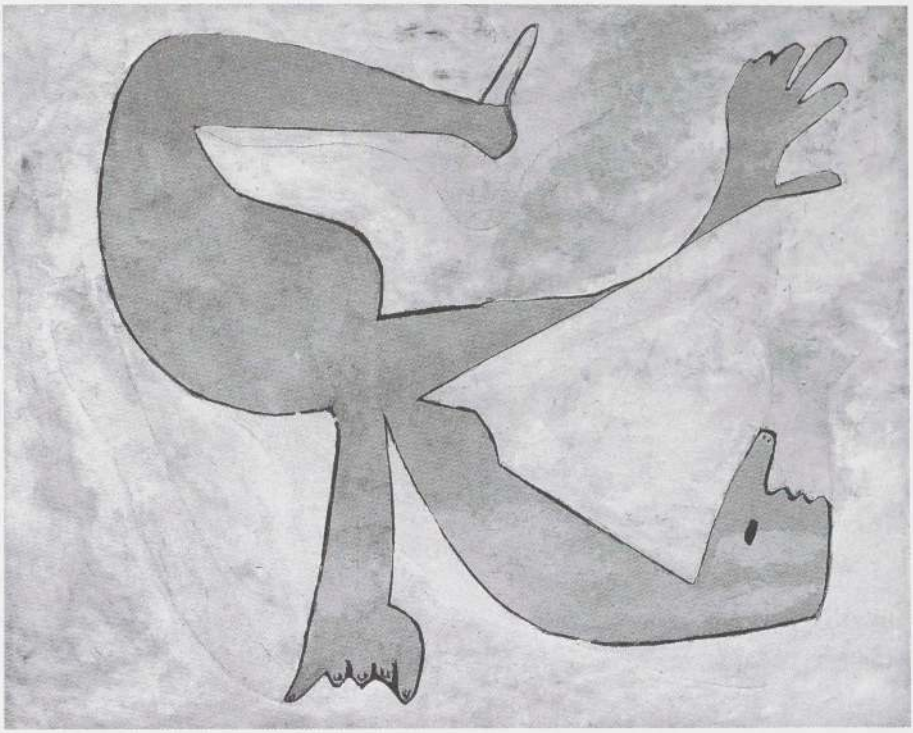


Fig. 4. Pablo Picasso. *The Swimmer*. **1929. Oil on canvas, 51¼ x 63⅝ in. (130 x 162 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris**

them as swimmers and acrobats—athletes who had freed themselves momentarily from the constraints of gravity, and who therefore had no fixed "up" or "down." Accordingly, Barr noted in the catalogue that *The Swimmer* was composed so that it could be hung "with any edge up."[14] Earlier artists and critics, from Joshua Reynolds through Vasily Kandinsky, had suggested the evaluation of a painting by turning it upside-down, rendering the subject matter unrecognizable and thereby forcing the viewer to concentrate on the work's formal structure.[15] Picasso literalized this idea by making pictures that could be rotated from one orientation to another as the owner wished.

The linked ideas of weightlessness and rotation also made appearances in New York exhibitions by other Paris painters. In the spring of 1939, the Passedoit Gallery showed several of Amédée Ozenfant's pictures of flattened, weightless bathers from 1929–30—evidently painted in response to Picasso (fig. 5).[16] Fernand Léger, exiled in New York by the war, executed a series of similar compositions representing divers, and showed one of them, *Circular Divers* (1942), in Sidney Janis's exhibition *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, of 1944.[17] In his statement for the catalogue, Léger expressed his interest in rotating forms "like birds and clouds," and explained that his picture might be "hung on any one of

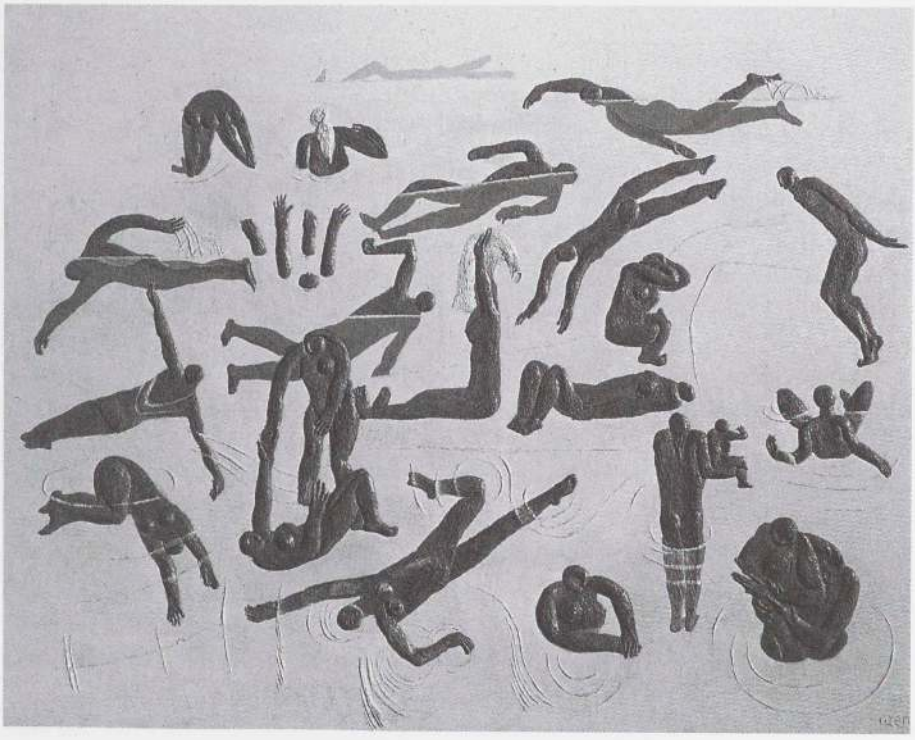
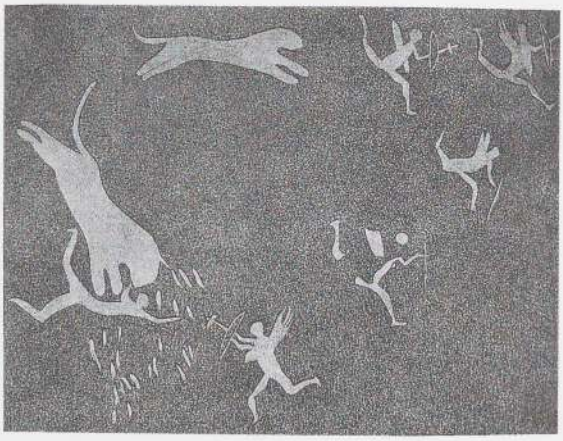


Fig. 5. Amédée Ozenfant. *La Belle Vie* (detail). **1929. Oil and mixed mediums on canvas, 51¼ x 38⅛ in. (130 x 97 cm). Collection Larock Granoff, Paris**

Fig. 6. "Lion Hunt. South African Bushman rock painting." From Eckart von Sydow, *Die Kunst der Naturvölker und der Vorzeit* **(Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1932), p. 203**

its four sides." The theme of divers, he said, enabled him "to realize a new deep space without the aid of traditional perspective," which would have required the inclusion of a vanishing point and a horizon line.[18]

The indefinite space of these pictures, and their simple but evocative figuration, suggests a connection to cave painting (fig. 6), a subject of great critical interest in these years.[19] Reviewing Ozenfant's 1939 exhibition for *Art News*, Doris Brian described his clay-red figures as "consciously reminiscent of African cave drawings."[20] Similarly, in his 1937 article "Primitive Art and



Picasso," artist-critic John Graham insisted on a link between primitive art in general and Picasso's "arbitrary contortions of features in two-dimensional arrangements."[21]

For Graham, *Girl before a Mirror* represented the essential Picasso. Its influence on Pollock in the years 1938–41 is evident in paintings like *Masqued Image* (c. 1938–41)[22] and *Birth* (c. 1941), the latter the canvas Graham selected for the 1942 exhibition that first put Pollock on the map (*American and French Paintings*, at McMillen Inc., New York). But Pollock was equally fascinated by the mural-sized *Guernica*, which seemed to confirm Picasso's status as the preeminent mythological painter of the century, simultaneously modern and primitive. Exhibited at the Valentine Gallery in the spring of 1939 and then again that fall at The Museum of Modern Art, *Guernica* deployed Picasso's pictorial discoveries of the previous decade in the service of an insistent narrative. If the results had something in common with the metamorphic anatomies of Hollywood cartoons,[23] that only meant the picture would reach a broader audience.

The veteran critic Henry McBride, writing in the *New York Sun*, marveled at the "revolutionary forms" of Picasso's canvas, and predicted that "all the lesser artists" would soon be using this "new language."[24] Indeed numerous American artists would respond to *Guernica*, not least among them Pollock, whose "psychoanalytic" drawings of 1939–40 contain numerous quotations from the painting. But Pollock's slavish initial response was replaced, within a few years, by a profound rethinking of Picasso's style. This depended, in large part, on the American artist's attention to more abstract—and hence less "primitive"—aspects of Picasso's work from the 1920s.

Two groups of works were particularly important. One was a series of drawings executed in a vocabulary of lines punctuated with dots (fig. 7). Suggested, Picasso said, by "astronomical charts" showing the constellations as outlines connecting stars, this dot-and-line style was explored in notebook sketches he did in the summer of 1924.[25] He showed these sketches to a few of his Surrealist friends, but they remained relatively unknown until 1931, when they were published as wood-engraved illustrations in Ambroise Vollard's edition of Balzac's story *Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu*. Numerous artists then began to adopt elements of the style, whose apparent abstraction made it seem particularly advanced. Chief among them was Joan Miró, who responded with a 1931 series of paintings adapting Picasso's linear vocabulary to the more open style of his own compositions.[26] Miró returned to the dot-and-line style in his Constellations series of 1941, which were exhibited in New York four years later, to considerable acclaim. One of them, *The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers* (fig. 8), was acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, and was also reproduced in *Art News*, where the anonymous reviewer commented that Miró's "all-over patterns" looked like chemists' diagrams of "atomic structure . . . all woven together in taut relationship and tied by thin electric lines."[27] The evenly distributed

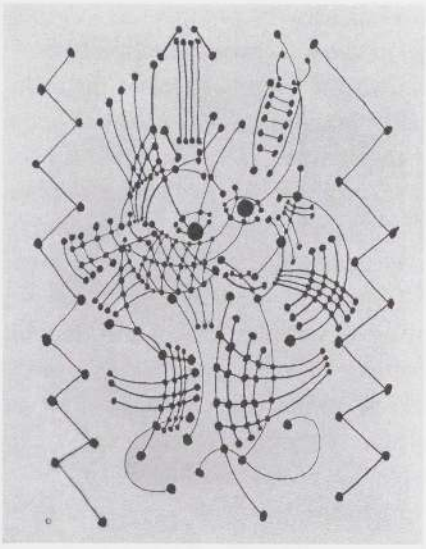


Fig. 7. Pablo Picasso. Dot and line drawing. 1924. Wood engraving after drawing for *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, **by Honoré de Balzac. Paris: Ambroise Vollard, 1931. Page: 13 x 10 in. (33 x 25.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Louis E. Stern Collection**

Fig. 8. Joan Miró. *The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers.* **1941. Gouache and oil wash on paper, 18 x 15 in. (45.7 x 38.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest**

lines and forms of Miró's Constellations have often been cited as a precedent for Pollock's allover compositions of 1947–50. Miró's heavy black circles and triangular marks—his version of Picasso's dots—were also important for Pollock, and their role will be examined subsequently.

As Pollock overcame his infatuation with *Guernica* and began looking for a more abstract style, he turned to earlier examples—not *Painter and Model* itself (which he may never have seen, even in reproduction) but the 1927–28 Picassos in which the studio motif of that painting was translated into rectilinear terms. Here the curving organic figures of 1926 often became geometric outlines, positioned like stage flats in front of a backdrop of squares and rectangles. These rectilinear studio pictures of 1928 were well-known in New York: there was one in Peggy Guggenheim's collection, the Modern owned another, and a third, *Two Women in front of a Window* (fig. 9), was in the collection of the influential critic and curator James Thrall Soby.[28] The last, with its densely layered rectangles and triangles, offered a textbook illustration of Hans Hofmann's theory that a picture should be constructed around a series of overlapping planes,[29] and close paraphrases of it were painted by artists such as Judith Rothschild (a Hofmann student) and William Baziotes.[30]

Pollock himself was clearly interested in the Soby picture, but not in its example of construction by overlapping. In *Male and Female in Search of a Symbol*—a painting included in his first solo exhibition, at Art of This Century in

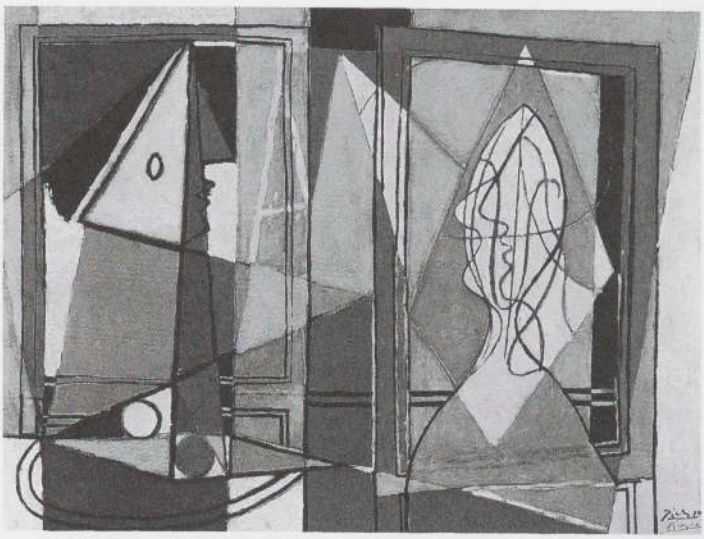


Fig. 9. Pablo Picasso. *Two Women in front of a Window.* **1927. Oil on canvas, 38½ x 51½ in. (97.8 x 130.8 cm). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore N. Law**

Fig. 10. Jackson Pollock. *Male and Female in Search of a Symbol.* **1943. Oil on canvas, 43 x 67 in. (109.2 x 170.1 cm). Private collection**

November 1943[31]—he disassembled Picasso's composition into a series of separate shapes, lying side by side in the picture plane instead of overlapping (fig. 10). Vertical figures appear at either side of the composition, and the space between them is framed by straight lines forming a roughly trapezoidal shape that suggests the end of a table seen in perspective. Partly canceling out the implied sense of recession, the trapezoidal form is open at the top, so that it merges here into the pink background. Nonetheless, the space remains strikingly

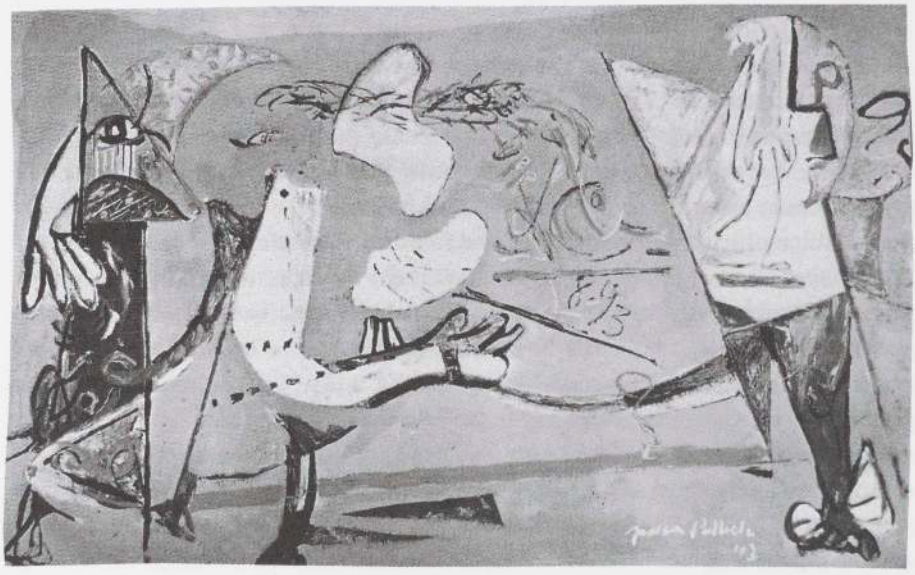


Fig. 11. Jackson Pollock. *Stenographic Figure.* **c. 1942. Oil on linen, 40 x 56 in. (101.6 x 142.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss Fund**

theatrical, with an opening in the middle flanked by stage-flat-like figures at either side. This was a favorite format for Pollock from 1942 through 1946, used in pictures such as *Guardians of the Secret* (1943), *Pasiphaë* (c. 1943), *The Tea Cup* (1946), and *The Key* (1946). It is equally evident in *Stenographic Figure* (c. 1942; fig. 11), in which a figure with a triangular head appears at the left of the composition, stretching out an arm toward its counterpart on the right.[32] Here the table between the two figures is more tangible, divided into areas of gray, red, and white that set it off from the blue, yellow, and black of the background. The two figures appear to be playing some kind of game.

Calligraphic scribbles had appeared in one area of *Male and Female in Search of a Symbol*; in *Stenographic Figure* they cover the surface of the picture, forming a kind of scrim that veils the space behind them. Formally these scribbles function much like the interlacing lines, floating in front of broader areas of light and dark, in Picasso's *Painter and Model*, or the linear scaffolding, set against a field of colors, that is often found in Klee. In Picasso and Klee, line carries the chief burden of representation. In *Stenographic Figure*, however, the forms are defined primarily by color, while the lines seem more like the cryptic inscriptions found in Miró.[33] Other lines revise or elaborate the original painted forms, adding a pair of circular breasts to the left-hand figure, for instance.

Pollock carried this process of revision much farther in *Untitled (Composition with Pouring I)*, of 1943, one of his earliest experiments with dripped paint. Here, even before applying the drips, Pollock heavily overpainted the original composition with broad brushstrokes of red and yellow paint mixed with sand, but in the interstices of these strokes there can still be seen several triangular forms suggesting heads, as well as an outstretched gray arm resembling the red arm on the left of *Stenographic Figure*.[34] The strokes of red and yellow seem mostly to have been applied along the contours of the original composition, so that the rhythms of these contours remained even as their representational meaning was obscured. Then, in a third and fourth campaign, Pollock dripped skeins of white and black across the composition, setting up a kind of responsive counterpoint to the rhythms of the earlier forms. Although the reworked canvas seems to approach pure abstraction, the relationship between the dark lines in the foreground and the field of lighter colors in the background recalls the stagelike space of *Stenographic Figure*, and of Picasso's studio pictures. This vestige of representational space is even more evident in *Untitled [Black Pouring over Color]*, of 1946 (fig. 12), where the relationship between poured line and colored background is similar but the overall composition is simpler and more legible.[35] We seem to see a pair of loosely drawn figures running or dancing in an open setting of ocean and sky.

The dripped technique of the 1946 picture is distinctively Pollockian, but the contrast between the linear figures in the foreground and the flat colors of the background is a splendid example of period style—the sort of thing that might have been come up with by any competent artist attuned to European modernism. Indeed an almost exact counterpart to Pollock's picture appears in the 1946 canvas *Chessplayers* (fig. 13) by Hans Moller, a German émigré artist active in New York in the 1940s.[36] Though Moller's figures are far more conventional than Pollock's, the two artists use remarkably similar loose interlacing lines, and Moller breaks up the unity of his figures by filling in adjacent loops with different colors, just as Pollock does. In both cases the figures float against an open field of color, though the field in Moller's picture is more monochromatic.

For Emily Genauer, critic at the New York *World Telegram*, *Chessplayers* was one of the best pictures of the 1946–47 season.[37] But the decorative color and stagelike space of both this picture and Pollock's *Untitled [Black Pouring over Color]* make it evident, by contrast, how much Pollock achieved in more substantive paintings like *The Key*. The loose, looping outlines of this picture seem as spontaneous as those in *Untitled [Black Pouring over Color]*, though painted with a brush instead of dripped. What is completely different is the use of color, which is inserted between the drawn lines, instead of forming a continuous field behind them. Working in the upstairs bedroom of his and Krasner's house in The Springs, Pollock laid the canvas on the floor and spread the paint with a knife,

Fig. 12. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled [Black Pouring over Color].* **1946. Oil on specially prepared canvas on panel, 20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 61 cm). Private collection, courtesy Jason McCoy Gallery, New York**

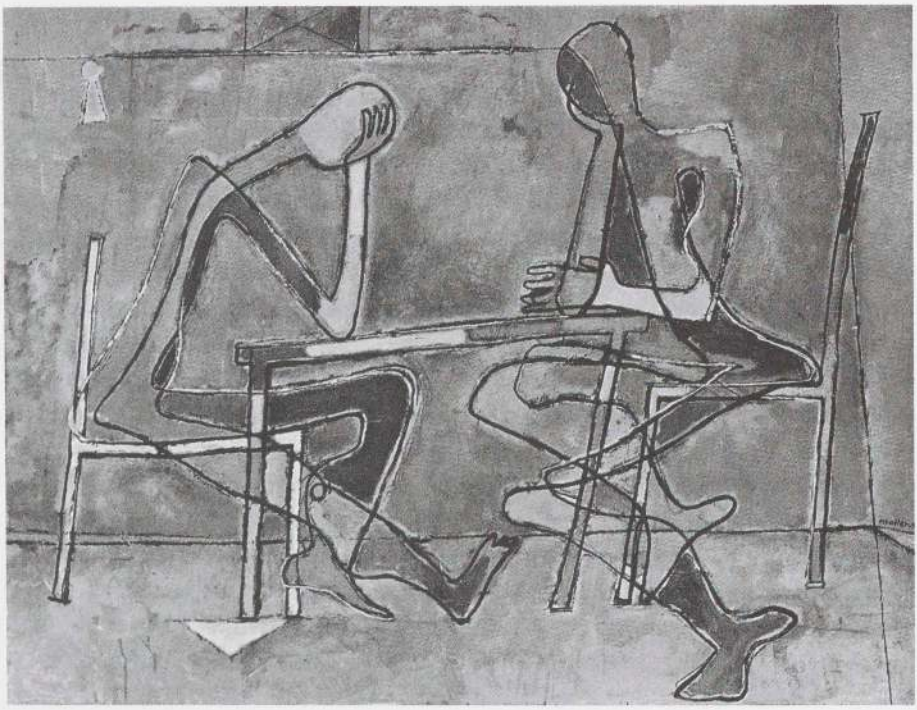


Fig. 13. Hans Moller. *Chessplayers.* **1946. Medium and dimensions unknown. Location unknown**

pushing down against the floorboards so that it was simultaneously pressed on and scraped off, like butter on a piece of toast. The result is that the colors seem to occupy the same plane as the lines, or perhaps even to move in front of them. In many areas the weave of the white canvas gleams through the paint, while horizontal lines of thicker pigment mark places where the canvas sank into the crevices between floorboards, eluding the scraping action of the knife. The drawing of the composition—with one figure at the right and another, holding what seems to be a palette, at the left—repeats the "studio" format of Picasso's that Pollock had already explored in *Male and Female in Search of a Symbol* and *Stenographic Figure*. But the rapid alternation of color from one area to the next breaks up the coherence of the drawn figures, so that the picture reads as an "abstraction" despite its figurative origins.

The linear pattern of *The Key*, extending to the edges of the composition, recalls the allover patterning of some of the engravings that Pollock executed in Hayter's workshop in 1944–45 (fig. 14). Here too we find dark and light shapes interwoven, flanked by figures at right and left. Pollock's use of a curvilinear interlace may reflect the influence of Hayter, and of the printmaking process more generally. Working with a burin, Pollock would have had to rotate the copper plate repeatedly in order to draw the curves of his composition.[38] The swimmers and acrobats of Picasso, Ozenfant, and Léger had demonstrated that a successful "abstract" composition could be seen from any of its four sides; the experience of printmaking now demonstrated the value of *working* on a picture from all four sides—as Pollock probably did in scraping on the colors of *The Key*.

Even before Pollock participated in Atelier 17, a contemporary observer noted the resemblance between his work and Hayter's.[39] But comparison with one of Hayter's prints immediately reveals radical differences in their approach to composition (fig. 15). Although Hayter uses an interlace pattern to bind together his figures, they occupy a more boxlike stage than Pollock would use; as another reviewer noted, Hayter's "two-dimensional linear abstractions exist within deep space."[40] Pollock's more allover use of the interlace brings him closer to the example of Picasso's *Painter and Model*, a kind of composition very much in the air in the New York of the mid-1940s.[41] His engraving finds a close counterpart, for instance, in Walter Quirt's 1943 painting *The Crucified* (fig. 16), which seems in turn to be a more densely woven version of Picasso's earlier Crucifixion studies (fig. 3). Quirt may be virtually forgotten today, but in 1944 he and Pollock seemed like promising young artists of comparable importance, and *The Crucified* faces Pollock's *She-Wolf* (1943) across a page spread of Janis's 1944 volume *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*.[42] As in Pollock's print, Quirt's figures merge into an interlacing web. But when an individual figure is recognized, it separates from the field and seems to take up a stance in a more conventional stagelike space.

Fig. 14. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled.* **1944–45 (printed posthumously 1967). Engraving and drypoint, 14 11/16 x 17 7/8 in. (37.3 x 45.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Lee Krasner Pollock**

Interlace patterns were also common in the work of younger artists associated with the Art Students League and Kenneth Beaudoin's Galerie Neuf. In addition to Picasso and Miró, another source for this imagery was the Native American art of the Pacific Northwest—hence the application of the term "Indian Space" to some of this work. Beaudoin's short-lived magazine *Iconograph* published reproductions of paintings by not only Pollock and Rothko but also Peter Busa, Gertrude Barrer, Seong Moy, and other artists associated with his gallery.[43] Busa, a close friend of Pollock's since their student days under Thomas Hart Benton, shared his interests in Surrealism and in Native American art, and exhibited, as he did, at Art of This Century. There is an obvious affinity between Busa's pictures from this era and works by Pollock, even when, as in Busa's *Thing in the Present* (1945; fig. 17) and Pollock's *Totem Lesson 1* (1944) and *Totem Lesson 2* (1945), both artists set interlacing aside in order to create flat figures with heavy outlines and an accumulation of decorative marks. The flat outlines of the figures in all three of these paintings recall Picasso's emblematic swimmers and acrobats of the late 1920s (fig. 4), while the intense colors and patterns seem to come both from Native American sources, especially the art of the Northwest Indians, and from other Picassos, such as *Girl before a Mirror*.[44] Picasso is a particularly strong presence in *Totem Lesson 2*, where the original accumulation of marks was followed by a second stage in which Pollock pared down the complexity of the picture by painting over large areas of it with gray paint. Pollock's paint handling in general seems cruder and more direct than Busa's.

It is impossible to understand Pollock without understanding the impact that the two *Totem Lesson* works had on their original audience. In April 1945, when Greenberg first proclaimed that Pollock was "the strongest painter of his

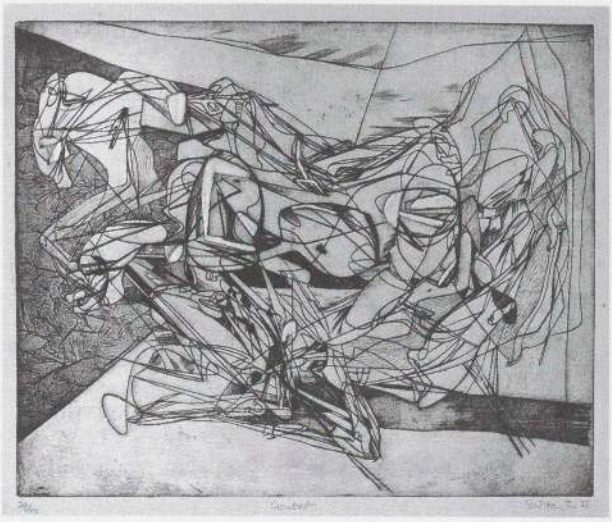


Fig. 15. Stanley William Hayter. *Combat.* **1936. Engraving and soft ground etching, on copper, printed in black. Plate: 15¾ x 19⅞ in. (40 x 49.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously**

Fig. 16. Walter Quirt. *The Crucified.* **1943. Oil on linen, 30¼ x 50 in. (76.8 x 127 cm). Collection the Quirt Family**

generation and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miro," he singled out these works as pictures "for which I cannot find strong enough words of praise."[45] Similarly, an *Art News* reviewer wrote in May 1946 that Pollock had to some extent left behind his "swirling webs of pigment" in favor of a newer, "simplified" manner: "Larger, more representational shapes are placed against flat, monochrome backgrounds; clarity increases at the expense of motion."[46] Evidently, Pollock seemed at this moment to be moving away from, not toward, a style

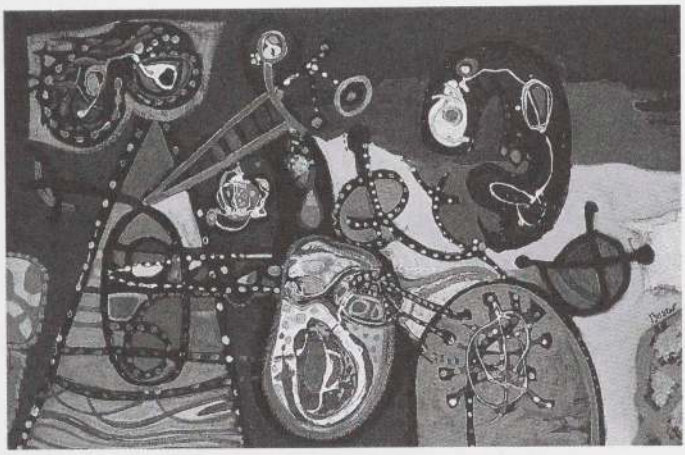


Fig. 17. Peter Busa. *The Thing in the Present.* **1945. Oil on canvas, 19¾ x 30¼ in. (50.2 x 76.8 cm). Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York**

based on rhythmic interlace. He would have to sacrifice this style—a successful one—when he returned to the interlace in 1947.

It was paintings of 1944–46—the two *Totem Lessons* and the Accabonac Creek Series (*Eyes in the Heat*, *The Key*, *The Tea Cup*, and *Yellow Triangle*)—that were published in *Possibilities* in the winter of 1947–48, even though Pollock had by then been working in the drip style for the better part of a year, and would exhibit a group of drip paintings at Betty Parsons that January.[47] Pollock's statement accompanying these pictures is in fact more a description of his earlier methods than of his new drip technique: "My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting."[48] These lines inevitably recall Hans Namuth's later photographs of Pollock dripping paint onto horizontal canvases. But the reference to "the resistance of a hard surface," for instance, clearly applies to canvases like *The Key*, where the scraped-on colors bear the traces of the floor on which it was made. In the drip paintings, on the other hand, "resistance" was a moot point, since there was no physical contact between the tool releasing the paint and the canvas receiving it.

The earlier pictures also bear witness to another impulse documented in *Possibilities*, Pollock's desire "to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added."[49] "Dripping paint," here, seems to allude to Pollock's new work, but he had in fact employed this technique since 1943, sometimes for figuration but usually for decorative texture. The use of trowels, knives, and heavy impasto is

evident in 1946 pictures like *The Key* and *Eyes in the Heat*, and also in pictures from 1947 like *Full Fathom Five*, which was not illustrated in *Possibilities*.

The most often-quoted part of Pollock's statement, however, is his remark, "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." In August 1949, when Dorothy Seiberling profiled Pollock for *Life* magazine, she cited this statement to explain his drip technique.[50] Robert Goodnough's 1951 article "Pollock Paints a Picture," illustrated with Namuth's dramatic photographs, reinforced the impression that Pollock worked in a kind of shamanistic trance, weaving lines of paint across the surface without conscious intention.[51] Taking this conclusion as a given, later critics linked Pollock's working method to Surrealist automatism and the existential *acte gratuit*.

What is obscured by this easy identification between automatism and the drip technique is that Pollock's approach to painting was already seen as "automatic" before he began the drip paintings. In May 1946, for instance, a reviewer for *Art News*, describing him as "one of the most influential young abstractionists," noted that he used "an automatic technique, pushing totemic and metaphorical shapes into swirling webs of pigment."[52] Automatism had been in the air for years, even before the Surrealists arrived in New York to provide a personal demonstration. By the mid-1930s, accounts of Picasso's working process often stressed his claim to be an unconscious observer of his own creativity. Herbert Read's 1934 book *Art Now* quoted Picasso saying, "I don't know in advance what I am going to put on the canvas . . . whilst I work, I take no stock of what I am painting on the canvas. . . . It is only later that I begin to evaluate more exactly the result of my work."[53] And Barr's catalogue for the Picasso retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in 1939 gave prominent place to the artist's 1935 statement that "a picture used to be a sum of additions. In my case, a picture is a sum of destructions. I do a picture—then I destroy it. . . . A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand. While it is being done it changes as one's thoughts change."[54] Articles and essays about Miró also stressed the role of unconscious discovery and revision in his working process.[55]

By 1946, this approach to composition was common among New York's avant-garde painters. Moller, for instance, gave a similar account of his working method to Emily Genauer, who wrote,

> When Hans Moller starts a picture he has not the slightest idea of what its subject, not to mention its shape, will turn out to be. He begins with a mood. . . . The mood soon determines the character of the line. The character of the line determines the subject. . . . "Chessplayers" . . . started with a drawing—little more than a doodle, really—of what Moller calls "soft" (for curved) and "hard" (for angular) lines. Presently they suggested to him two persons seated at a table, and as he drew and his

> imagination became unloosed with the unfolding coils of his line, it occurred to him that his seated people might easily be playing chess.[56]

Moller's initial technique was quite as "automatic" as Pollock's, but they differed in their use of its results. Moller looked to his abstract doodles for the suggestion of a figurative motif; Pollock did the opposite. As Seiberling wrote in *Life*, "Once in a while a lifelike image appears in the painting by mistake. But Pollock cheerfully rubs it out because the picture must retain 'a life of its own.'"[57] Similarly, the text accompanying Namuth's photographs of Pollock on their first publication, in 1951, stated, "The conscious part of his mind, he says, plays no part in the creation of his work. It is relegated to the duties of a watchdog; when the unconscious sinfully produces a representational image, the conscience cries alarm and Pollock wrenches himself back to reality and obliterates the offending form."[58] Automatism, here, is seen as a means of arriving at "abstract" form; recognizable imagery is merely an incidental by-product, to be discarded or suppressed.

Discussing this process of obliteration in a 1967 interview, Robert Motherwell commented that when Pollock found his own paintings too similar to the Picassos that had inspired them, "he would violently cross out his Picasso images. . . . [Then,] at a certain moment . . . he realized he didn't have to make the Picasso thing at all, but could *directly* do the crossing out or dipping, or what have you."[59] Ironically, in doing so, Pollock embraced an idea of painting as a "sum of destructions" that was itself derived from Picasso.

Pollock now returned to the interlace as one means (among others) of reworking and obscuring an image. This process can be followed in a number of drawings from 1945–46, and from these drawings to what we now think of as the "classic" drip style it is only a short step.[60] According to Greenberg, Pollock's first picture in the drip style was a small canvas from 1946 (probably late in the year). Ironically, the work's title—*Free Form*, a name suggested by the dealer and collector who acquired it, Sidney Janis—stressed the picture's resemblance to Picasso's work of the 1920s and '30s.[61] The most notable new feature here is the fact that the painting is executed exclusively with dripped paint. The drip technique is not the source of the interlace per se; similar compositions are visible in Pollock's drawings, paintings, and prints of 1945. Nor is the technique responsible for his adoption of an "automatic" approach to composition—he had already proven himself capable of painting "automatically" with a brush. The new practice may have encouraged a form of automatism, however, by eliminating the resistance of the canvas (the resistance Pollock would nevertheless claim to need in the *Possibilities* statement a year later) and allowing him to paint more rapidly. The chief advantage of the drip technique, in fact, was a gain in pictorial energy. Gradually or abruptly swelling, shrinking, or changing course, Pollock's line seems infused with a new sense of motion. Compared with a drawn or brushed

line, which tends to maintain an even width throughout its course, the dripped line imparts a sense of constantly changing velocity, as though the variations in width corresponded to variations in the speed of the hand that formed it.[62]

The dripped line could be employed in many different ways—even to draw a relatively conventional figurative image, as in the head on the right of the 1953 canvas *Portrait and a Dream*. It is for the most part associated with the abstract phase of Pollock's career, from 1947 through 1950, but it is not clear that abstraction and figuration are mutually exclusive in these paintings. Computer-assisted reconstructions of the early states of several canvases from 1950—*Number 27, 1950*, *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950*, and *One: Number 31, 1950*—suggest that each of these compositions began with some kind of figurative imagery, and that this imagery may even have been reiterated at later stages of the work.[63] Yet the effect of the finished paintings is unquestionably abstract, as Pollock himself insisted.[64]

Evidently there are several factors at work here. One is the extreme simplicity of the figuration Pollock employed during these years. This may reflect his interest in ancient cave art, which, as we have seen, was a frequent topic of discussion in both the Paris and the New York avant-gardes.[65] As writers on the subject often noted, the cave artists made highly realistic drawings of animals, but almost invariably treated human bodies as mere stick figures. These figures might in turn be reduced to seemingly abstract symbols, of the sort found engraved on Paleolithic pebbles (fig. 18). Twenty years earlier, Miró had turned for inspiration to the same prehistoric drawings.[66] But even without this shared source, it would have seemed obvious that there was a parallel between the "abstraction" of the figure in cave art and in modern art.

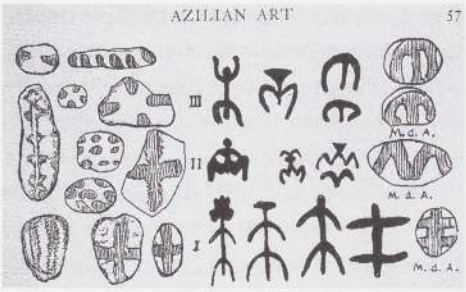


Fig. 18. "Painted Pebbles from Mas D'Azil" and "Degradation of natural forms to the marks on Azilian Pebbles." Figs. 20 and 21 from C. Baldwin Brown, *The Art of the Cave Dweller* (New York: R. V. Coleman, 1931)

Fig. 19. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled*. c. 1939–42. India ink on paper, 18 x 13¾ in. (45.7 x 35.2 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase, with funds from the Julia B. Engel Purchase Fund and the Drawing Committee

Pollock experimented with stick figures in the early 1940s, sometimes drawing them on the same sheet with sketches inspired by Picasso's flattened, emblematic figures of the late 1920s (fig. 19). He was hardly alone in this interest; indeed more literal quotations from cave painting appear in work by other New York painters of the period.[67] The stick figures of cave art demonstrated that the body could be evoked with a crude, incantatory sign instead of a naturalistic representation, opening a possibility that a number of artists began to explore. But cave art also demonstrated a distinctive pictorial space, different from the deep space of academic painting or even the shallow space of Cubist-influenced art.[68] The spatial relationships in a typical hunting scene are purely local (fig. 6). One area may show the relationship between a lion and the hunters he chases, another might have a second lion pouncing on a falling man, but there is no attempt to coordinate these two scenes within a unified, three-dimensional space. The composition is an arrangement of independent signs on a plane surface, a disjunctive, graphic space instead of a unified, scenic one.

Ozenfant and other painters had taken cave art as a model for a kind of weightless space in which depth was indicated by height: figures were arranged one above the other, instead of one in front of the other (fig. 5). Pollock does not seem to have been attracted to this arrangement: his stick figures are usually disposed in a single horizontal row, as in the friezelike composition of his 1943 *Mural* (plate 1), or in several drawings of 1946 (e.g., *Untitled*, c. 1946; fig. 20).[69] We find in these drawings the exact prototype for figures in the later drip paintings: the human body is evoked by a long, sticklike axis surmounted by open curves representing head and arms. The axis forks at the bottom to indicate legs,[70] or an upward-pointing angle may suggest a raised knee.

It should be noted that the space in these drawings is not flat. The streaks or patches of color that crisscross the image seem to recede into a shallow depth, as does a fine spray of black dots. The black lines defining the figures lie clearly in front of these elements; and in front of the black lines, and therefore seeming to advance in front of the figures, a number of broad black splotches are scattered here and there across the composition. The white paper is treated as an indefinite graphic space capable of contraction or expansion. Within this space there seem to be definable relationships between adjacent figures; but the figures do not occupy an enclosed stage-space that would allow us to gauge the relative depths of figures that are *not* adjacent.

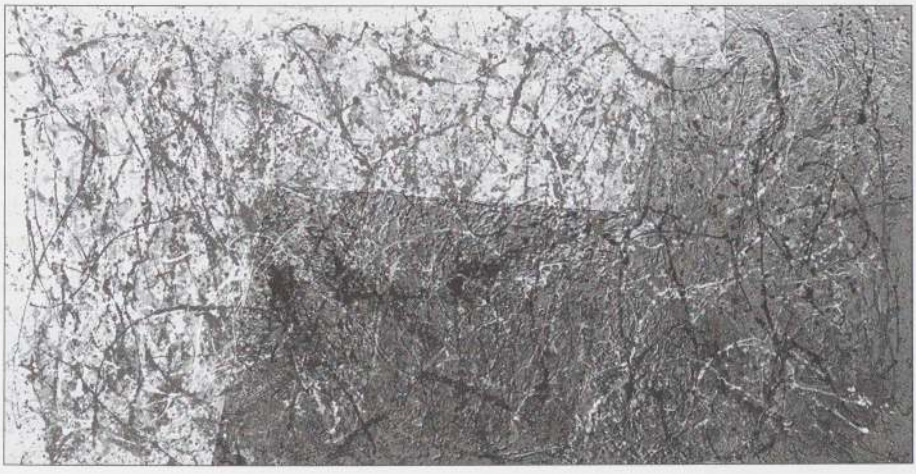
A computer analysis of *One*, isolating the lines in a single layer of the painting, reveals figures similar to those in the drawing of c. 1946 (fig. 21). The canvas seems to be covered with a series of vertical lines that are traversed by horizontal curves at the level of head or shoulders, and that divide into legs at their bases. There is also a kind of family resemblance between the drawing of c. 1946 and *Number 32, 1950* (plate 3), in which the dancing black lines seem to form

Fig. 20. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled.* **c. 1946. Ink, pastel, and gouache on paper, 19 x 26 in. (48.3 x 66 cm). Collection Denise and Andrew Saul**

Fig. 21. Pollock's *One: Number 31, 1950,* **highlighting features added to the painting between the last stage documented in Hans Namuth's photographs and the finished canvas**

three or four distinct configurations that may have figural undertones. The vertical line at the center, for instance, is topped by an oval, emphasized with horizontal strokes; and the base of this vertical is joined to an upward-pointing angle, recalling the raised knee of the central figure in the 1946 drawing.[71]

The reappearance of these stick figures—or simply of a consistent vocabulary of linear marks—casts new light on Pollock's assertion that he did not plan his compositions ahead of time, and specifically that he did not work from sketches.[72] This may be true, but it does not necessarily mean that he had no idea what he intended to do, or that his compositions emerged at random. Instead he seems to have developed a consistent repertory of figures and marks, which



he employed first at the small scale of his 1946 drawings, then at the traditional scale of his 1947–48 paintings, and finally, in 1950, at the mural scale of *Number 32, 1950*, *Autumn Rhythm* (plate 5), and *One* (plate 4). Pollock did not need to preplan the compositions of these enormous works because he knew their elements by heart. Like a practiced tennis player moving automatically into the posture for a serve, a forehand, or a backhand shot, he had only to decide on his general intentions and his hand and arm would do the rest. Or it might be more accurate to compare him to a jazz musician, constructing a "new" solo from a repertory of familiar riffs. As these activities demonstrate, there is no sharp line here between conscious and unconscious action, between the planned and the automatic.[73] Most of our lives, indeed, are lived half-consciously and half-automatically; and part of the power of Pollock's painting is that it exemplifies this familiar but elusive quality of everyday experience.

What is important is not the presence or absence of figuration in the paintings of these years. If any stick figures played a preliminary role in the composition of *Number 32*, they have dissolved completely into the weave of the endlessly interlacing lines that surround them, and this process of "veiling" has completely restructured the pictorial space. The interlacing web of *Number 32* may recall Picasso's *Painter and Model* of 1926, but it does not evoke the three-dimensional, stagelike space of Picasso's picture. Instead, space is suggested by variations in density, as it is in Pollock's drawing of c. 1946.

These variations can best be understood in light of the more precise understanding of Pollock's working process that has emerged from the study of Namuth's photographs and films. If the making of *Number 32* followed the pattern visible in Namuth's documentation of *Number 27, 1950* and *Autumn Rhythm*, Pollock began work on it by defining several independent configurations drawn with a line of uniform medium width. He then unified the different elements of the picture by the addition of interlacing lines extending from one configuration to the next. Some of these lines would have been thinner than the original lines; others would have been the same width. Meanwhile, Pollock also selectively overscored and thickened various elements of the composition, defining a new pictorial rhythm of heavier accents unrelated to the original figuration.[74]

One model for this deliberate interruption of a linear outline would have been Miró's Constellation drawings (exhibited in New York in 1945), in which narrow contours outlining surreal heads and mythical beasts are interrupted by black circles and triangular marks recalling ax heads (fig. 8).[75] As we have seen, Miró had first experimented with this type of composition after seeing reproductions of the Picasso drawings of 1924 based on "astronomical charts" (fig. 7). The dot-and-line style was thus consistently linked with the idea of stars in the night sky, an example Pollock may have had in mind when he chose (or at least acceded to) the titles of 1947 paintings like *Galaxy* and *Reflection of the Big Dipper*.

But where the lines of an astronomical chart make it easier to see the mythical creatures projected onto the night sky, the "stars" or accents of both Miró's and Pollock's pictures make it *harder* to see any linear figures. Instead of following the original outlines, the viewer's eye jumps from one accent to another. (In effect, it mimics the saccadic movements of ordinary vision.)

The imposition of heavier (and lighter) marks also transforms the spatial organization of the image. The original, mid-weight lines in *Number 32, 1950* had defined a series of configurations arranged in graphic space. That is, there were lateral relationships among adjacent configurations, but no spatial relationships, since they all remained on a single visual plane. The additional marks create a definite sense of movement in space—the broader, denser accents seem to come forward while the narrower, interlacing lines recede—but because these marks are interspersed more or less evenly across the canvas, they still do not create spatial relationships among larger entities. No one configuration seems to lie in front of another. Rather, different elements within each configuration move forward and backward, implying that the configuration is neither a plane nor a solid but an array of points in three-dimensional space.

To put it another way, the distribution of differently weighted lines and accents suggests that the painting consists of a series of superimposed layers, each one covering the entire area of the canvas.[76] Opaque in some areas, transparent in others, these layers create the impression of a kind of pocketed space, containing many volumes instead of a single large one. This, I think, is the specific quality that distinguishes the alloverness of Pollock's work from the different kinds of alloverness found in Monet, say, or Mondrian. The laminar arrangement of superimposed layers is radically different from the flat, decorative panels of the Indian Space painters, and also from the unified stage space that persists, behind the scrim of the interlace, in Picasso's *Painter and Model*, and in the countless works deriving from it.[77]

Pollock's laminar space, in tandem with his use of the drip technique, created the impression that his paintings were random and uncomposed. In 1950, *Time* quoted the Italian critic Bruno Alfieri's remark that Pollock's paintings were distinguished by "chaos" and by a "complete lack of structural organization,"[78] but it was not alloverness per se that was shocking; no one was shocked by Mark Tobey. It was, rather, Pollock's refusal to locate his calligraphic forms either on a single plane (as Tobey did) or in a coherent unified space (as Hayter did). Since Cubism, viewers had become accustomed to the breakup of the object. But Pollock proposed an unprecedented fragmentation of space.

This innovation marked a decisive advance beyond Picasso and the School of Paris. In another passage (not quoted by *Time*), Alfieri called Pollock "the modern painter who sits at the extreme apex of the most advanced and unprejudiced avant-garde. . . . Compared to Pollock, Picasso . . . becomes a quiet conformist,

Fig. 22. Robert Rauschenberg. *Rebus*. **1955. Oil, pencil, paper, and fabric on canvas, 8 ft. x 10 ft. 10½ in. (243.8 x 331.5 cm). Private collection**

a painter of the past."[79] Recalling how Pollock had once thrown down a book of Picasso's work because, "God damn it, that guy missed nothing," one can imagine how deeply gratifying Alfieri's remark must have been to him.

Artists are the most important critics, and it is worth taking a moment to see what later artists made of Pollock's discovery. A few aped his style; others, in the 1960s, found ways to translate the process of "action painting" into three dimensions, imitating his process without making work that looked imitative.[80] But perhaps the most important response occurred in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, a leader in the generation that followed Pollock. Combining Pollock's drip with the grid of Analytic Cubism, Rauschenberg retroactively created the connection proposed in Greenberg's writings of the same years.[81]

The abstract painters of the 1930s had conventionalized Cubism by setting its floating planes in a traditional stage space. Rauschenberg liberated Cubism from this convention, rendering it usable again as a source for new art. But he could not have done so without Pollock, who demonstrated the pictorial impact of a shallow, densely layered space. Pollock's example is crucial to works like *Rebus* (1955; fig. 22), where dripped and smeared paint serves as a kind of visual glue to bind together a varied assemblage. As in Pollock, the space is honeycombed with unsuspected apertures, expanding and contracting at every point, containing not just different images but also different *types* of images: photographs, reproductions, text, bric-a-brac, and even other artworks. (*Rebus* contains a drawing by Cy Twombly.[82]) Combine paintings like *Monogram* (1959) returned the canvas to the floor, where Pollock had placed it,[83] and later, in his Hoarfrost series of 1974–75, Rauschenberg literalized the idea of laminar space by making pictures from overlapping layers of fabric. With a thousand variations, these devices have become the lingua franca of contemporary art.

Notes

1. For a contemporary survey of Picasso's influence, see James Thrall Soby, *After Picasso* (Hartford: Edwin Valentine Mitchell, and New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1935). A more recent study appears in Adam D. Weinberg and Michael C. Fitzgerald, *Picassoid*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995). Pollock's relation to Picasso and to European modernism more generally is explored in depth in William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," parts I–IV, *Artforum* 5 nos. 6 (February 1967): 14–22, 7 (March 1967): 28–37, 8 (April 1967): 18–31, and 9 (May 1967): 28–33, respectively; and throughout Ellen G. Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989). Jonathan Weinberg's "Pollock and Picasso: The Rivalry and the 'Escape,'" *Arts* 61 no. 10 (Summer 1987): 42–48, also cites Harold Bloom in exploring Pollock's relationship to Picasso, but proposes a different resolution than is offered here.

2. Lee Krasner, quoted in B. H. Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," in Hans Namuth, Barbara Rose, Rosalind Krauss, et al., *Pollock Painting*, ed. Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications Ltd., 1980), n.p. Originally published as *L'Atelier de Jackson Pollock* (Paris: Macula, 1978).

3. Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 218. It should be noted that this influential passage was inserted in "'American-Type' Painting" (first published in 1955) only when it was republished, in 1961.

4. The closest Pollock gets to Analytic Cubism, it seems to me, is the small oval *Untitled (Interior with Figures)* of c. 1938–41—no. 76 in Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978; hereafter referred to as OT). This work recalls Picasso works of 1911–12 like *Violin and Grapes* (Daix 482, The Museum of Modern Art) or *The Architect's Table* (Daix 456, The Museum of Modern Art), but without the *passage* of open-ended planes that contributes to the "allover" quality of the Analytic style. See the thoughtful discussion of this issue in Landau, *Jackson Pollock*, p. 71.

5. Carl Einstein, "Tableaux récents de Georges Braque," *Documents* 1 no. 6 (November 1929): 296.

6. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), pp. 132–33.

7. This style of interlacing lines was anticipated by Picasso's works from the period just *before* Analytic Cubism, key among them *Three Women* (1908), in which the figures are broken up into a series of elliptical lozenges, their contours forming interlaced curves. In formal terms, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) is a kind of first draft for *Three Women*. It is therefore interesting to note Greenberg's remark that Pollock painted *Gothic* (1944) "under the inspiration" of the *Demoiselles*, and that this was the first instance, as far as he knew, of an American artist "discovering" this painting. See Judith Cousins, memo of June 26, 1981, in the M.C. files of The Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

The interlaced style of *Three Women*, however, would also have reached Pollock via Thomas Hart Benton, who had visited Paris as a student. (See Benton, *An Artist in America* [New York: Robert M. McBridge & Co., 1937], pp. 34–37, and the exhibition catalogue *Thomas Hart Benton: Synchromist Paintings, 1915–1920, from a Private Collection* [New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1982]. These "synchromist" Bentons had in fact been in the collection of Charles Pollock, Jackson's older brother.) Though Benton later disavowed any interest in Cubism, the explanatory diagrams in his 1926 article "Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting" (*The Arts* X no. 5 [November 1926]) reveal the influence of *Three Women* (especially his figs. 22 and 23), and Benton himself later pointed out the influence of these diagrams on Pollock. *Three Women* also affected other Americans in Paris, such as Max Weber; see Leo Steinberg, "Resisting Cézanne: Picasso's 'Three Women,'" *Art in America* 66 no. 6 (November/December 1978): 115.

8. *Seated Woman* is reproduced in black and white in Christian Zervos, *Pablo Picasso*, 33 vols. (Paris: Cahiers d'art, 1932–78), VII: 77, and in color in William Rubin, *Picasso in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 125.

9. *Girl before a Mirror* is reproduced in black and white in Zervos VII, 379, and in color in Rubin, *Picasso in the Collection*, p. 139, and Rubin, *Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 291.

10. See Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), no. 52, plate 247. A photograph of *The Kiss* installed at Art of This Century is the frontispiece in Siobhán M. Conaty, *Art of This Century: The Women* (East Hampton, N.Y.: Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, 1997). It should be noted that Max Ernst's experiments with dripping paint from a can hanging on a string, sometimes cited as a precedent for Pollock's dripping, resembled the kind of interlace composition that Ernst was already creating freehand.

11. See Rubin, "Notes on Masson and Pollock," *Arts* 34 no. 2 (November 1959): 36–43. On the period when both André Masson and Pollock were working at Stanley William Hayter's print workshop, Atelier 17, see Bernice Rose, *Jackson Pollock: Works on Paper*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1969), p. 18.

12. See Jeffrey Wechsler, *Surrealism and American Art, 1931–1947*, exh. cat. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1976), pp. 51–52, and Lois Fichner-Rathus, "Pollock at Atelier 17," *Print Collector's Newsletter* 13 no. 5 (November–December 1982): 162–65. Andrew Kagan identifies Paul Klee as the principal influence in the adoption of the interlace style not only by Hayter but by Pollock; Klee showed regularly at the Nierendorf Gallery and had a retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in 1941. See Kagan, "Paul Klee's Influence on American Painting: New York School," *Arts* 49 no. 10 (June 1975): 54–59.

13. Picasso's Crucifixion drawings were reprised in 1928 and 1929, culminating in a small painting of 1930, exhibited in New York in 1939 (and reproduced in Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, p. 167). As Barr notes, Picasso returned to the subject in 1932, starting a new series of drawings inspired by Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece. The link between the 1927 drawings and *Painter and Model* (1926) is underscored in Zervos VII, 29 and 30.

14. Barr, *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1939), p. 150. Indeed Barr here reproduced the picture with the head at the bottom; when he revised the book seven years later, he showed the picture with the head at the right (*Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, p. 164).

15. On Joshua Reynolds see G. Baldwin Brown, *The Art of the Cave Dweller* (New York: R. V. Coleman, 1931), p. 26. Pollock owned a copy of this

book; see OT, 4:188. Vasily Kandinsky famously explained that the experience of seeing one of his landscapes upside-down, and not recognizing it, had been a turning point on his road to abstraction. See Kandinsky, "Reminiscences," trans. in Robert L. Herbert, ed., *Modern Artists on Art* (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 32.

16. Informed New Yorkers could have seen these works reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art* 5 (1930): no 1, p. 23, and no. 10, p. 540. Amédée Ozenfant himself lived in New York from 1939 through 1955, but his new work was quite different from his bathers of 1929–30. See Françoise Ducros, *Amédée Ozenfant*, exh. cat. (Saint-Quentin: Musée Antoine Lécuyer, 1985), pp. 70–72.

17. Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, exh. cat. (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), no. 89. Other works from this series were exhibited in October 1942 at Buchholz, where Léger showed regularly. See also the drawing reproduced on an invitation to the opening of the exhibition *Picasso–Léger: The Collection of Mrs. Meric Callery* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, January 9, 1945).

18. Léger, statement in ibid.

19. As previously noted, Pollock owned a copy of Baldwin Brown's book *The Art of the Cave Dweller*. In addition, *Cahiers d'Art* had published consistently on the subject; in 1930 alone (vol. 5), the journal ran Hans Mühlestein's "Des Origines de l'art et de la culture" (pp. 57–68), Henri Breuil's "L'Art oriental de l'Espagne" (pp. 136–38) and "L'Afrique préhistorique" (pp. 449–52), and Leo Frobenius's "L'Art africain" (pp. 395–407). The exhibition *Prehistoric Rock Pictures in Europe and America*, at The Museum of Modern Art in 1937, was based on Frobenius's research.

20. Doris Brian, "Introduction to America of a Noted French Theorist, Ozenfant," *Art News* 37 no. 23 (March 4, 1939): 12.

21. John Graham, "Primitive Art and Picasso," *Magazine of Art* 30 no. 4 (April 1937): 238. On Pollock and Graham see Stephen Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989), pp. 346–57, and Elizabeth Longhorne, "The Magus and the Alchemist: John Graham and Jackson Pollock," *American Art* 12 no. 3 (Fall 1998): 47–67.

22. *Masqued Image* is reproduced in, for example, Landau, *Jackson Pollock*, p. 61.

23. See Norman M. Klein, *7 Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 64–67.

24. Henry McBride, "Picasso's Guernica," *New York Sun*, May 6, 1939. Reprinted in McBride, *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*, ed. Daniel Catton Rich (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975), p. 368.

25. The genesis of this style seems to lie in Picasso's set designs for the ballet *Mercure*, of 1924. Picasso refers to the role of "astronomical charts" in "A Letter on Art," *Creative Art* 6 no. 6 (June 1930): 383. The authenticity of this text (originally published in 1926 in the Russian review *Ogoniok*) has been questioned—see the note in the bibliography of Barr's *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, item 2, p. 200 (item 1a, p. 286, in the 1946 edition, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*)—but the statement generally accords with Picasso's others of the period.

26. See "Joan Miró," *Cahiers d'Art* 6 (1931): n.p. [424–26]. One of these pictures is also reproduced in James Johnson Sweeney, *Joan Miró*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1941), p. 52.

27. *Art News* 43 (January 15, 1945): 27. Miró had shown regularly in New York in the 1930s (at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, the same gallery that showed the Constellations in 1945). Like Klee, he was also the subject of a 1941 retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art.

28. The Picasso studio painting acquired by Peggy Guggenheim is catalogued in Zervos VII, 136, and in Rudenstine, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection*, no. 139 (reproduced in color on p. 397). A telling comparison between this work and Pollock's *Male and Female* (c. 1942) appears in Landau, *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 108–9, 112. The Museum of Modern Art was given its 1927–28 *Studio* (Zervos VII, 142) by Walter P. Chrysler in 1935; it is reproduced in color in Rubin, *Picasso in the Collection*, p. 129, and in Rubin, *Picasso: A Retrospective*, p. 268.

29. Despite Hans Hofmann's vast influence, his teachings have remained somewhat obscure, because he never published his most important theoretical treatise, *Creation in Form and Color*. Fortunately, Cynthia Jennifer Goodman's dissertation ("The Hans Hofmann School and Hofmann's Transmission of European Modernist Aesthetics to America," 1982) provides a detailed summary of his ideas; on the topic of overlapping planes, see pp. 72–79, plate 27. This element of Hofmann's instruction is not well documented in the standard collection of his writings and teachings, *Search for the Real* (Andover: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1948, reprint ed. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1967). His essential ideas on pictorial construction, however, were published in Sheldon Cheney, *Expressionism in Art* (New York: Tudor, 1934, rev. ed. 1948), pp. 175–81.

30. Compare Judith Rothschild's *Mechanical Personages III* (c. 1947) and William Baziotes's *The Boudoir* (c. 1944).

31. According to the entry for OT 89, *Male and Female in Search of a Symbol* (also known as *Search for a Symbol*) was added to the exhibition after the catalogue was printed. O'Connor and Thaw suggest that the painting was done in 1942 or early 1943, before *Stenographic Figure* (c. 1942) and *Guardians of the Secret* (1943). But Krasner later recalled that Pollock, furious that Sweeney had called him "undisciplined" in the catalogue for the exhibition, painted *Search for a Symbol* after the show opened, "just to show how disciplined he was. . . . He brought the wet painting to the gallery where he was meeting Jim Sweeney and said, 'I want you to see a really disciplined picture.'" Krasner, quoted in Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock?," *Art in America* 55 no. 3 (May–June 1967): 51. This account would seem to be supported by a contemporary reviewer's reference to an untitled pink picture "he brought in, still wet with new birth." See Maude Riley, "Explosive First Show," *The Art Digest* 18 no. 4 (November 15, 1943): 18.

32. The title *Stenographic Figure* may have been suggested by a passage in Wilhelm Worringer's *Form in Gothic* (1912, Eng. trans. 1927, rev. ed. New York: Schocken, 1957), p. 18, that speaks of primitive man trying to extract fixed images from the flux of perception, and thus arriving at artistic types that are "stenographic" and "abstract" (p. 18).

33. This kind of inscription-as-scrim was not uncommon in Surrealist work of the early 1940s. See, for instance, the frontispiece to Masson's book *Anatomy of My Universe*, published in New York in 1943.

34. Compare the triangular forms at the upper left and lower right of *Untitled (Composition with Pouring I)* to the triangular heads in an untitled 1946 drawing from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection (plate 92, p. 201, in Kirk Varnedoe with Pepe Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998]). A long blue tadpole or

spermatozoa shape at the upper right of *Untitled (Composition with Pouring I)* also resembles the yellow spermatozoa at the upper left of *Guardians of the Secret* (see detail in ibid., p. 176).

35. Dated to c. 1952 in OT 366, this work was redated to 1946 in O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works. Supplement Number One* (New York: The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc., 1995), p. 80. The new dating is based on comparison to *Untitled (Yellow Collage)* (no. 25 in the *Supplement*), which is inscribed "Jackson Pollock / 46" and was first purchased in the summer of 1947. *Untitled (Yellow Collage)* also exemplifies the figure/ground relationship found in *Untitled (Black Pouring over Color)* and *Untitled (Composition with Pouring I)*.

36. Hans Moller seems to have specialized in adapting European styles for an American audience. His interlace-style drawing of a Roman charioteer, done for a 1944 advertisement, seems to have been modeled on a drawing by Braque that had recently been reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art* 15 (1940–44): 3. Moller had previously absorbed another version of the interlace style, from Klee; indeed his paintings had been criticized as virtual copies of Klee's. See "Hans Moller," *Art News* 42 no. 13 (November 15, 1943): 23. The following year, Moller's charioteer advertisement was discussed favorably in the same journal; see Rosamund Frost, "Advertising Art Improved," *Art News* 43 no. 11 (September 1944): 10.

37. Emily Genauer, *Best of Art* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948), plate 38, pp. 119–20; and see "Confessions of a Critic," *Art News* 46 no. 12 (February 1948): 37.

38. In *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 12 no. 1 (August 1944), devoted to "Hayter and Studio 17," Hayter notes that in engraving, the direction of the line is "controlled by rotating the plate rather than by movement of the hand" (p. 6). In his book *New Ways of Gravure* (New York: Pantheon, 1949), p. 56, he writes more specifically that "curves are produced by rotating the plate, the burin hand moving very slightly." I am grateful to Bernice Rose for mentioning Hayter's influence in this respect at the Pollock symposium, January 23, 1999. Another colleague, Elizabeth Levine, points out that Pollock was exposed to this kind of multidirectionality even earlier, in his high school art classes with Frederick John de St. Vrain Schwankovsky, where students poured colors onto a sheet of glass that was then rotated on a wheel to make "crazed-looking" patterns (Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 123).

39. Reviewing *American and French Paintings*, the exhibition that Graham organized at McMillen in 1942, James Lane wrote that "Pollack [*sic*] resembles Hayter in general whirling figures." *Art News* 40 (January 15, 1942): 29. Pollock's work in this show, *Birth*, may have been painted as a horizontal before he decided to exhibit it as a vertical.

40. "William Stanley Hayter," *Art News* 43 (January 15, 1945): 30.

41. In the mid-1940s, the most immediately accessible example of a Picasso interlace pattern would have been the trivial pair of decorations published in *Cahiers d'Art* 16–19 (1940–44): 80–82.

42. Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, pp. 112–13.

43. See Ann Gibson's important early article "Painting outside the Paradigm: Indian Space," *Arts* 57 no. 9 (February 1983): 98–104; Sandra Kraskin and Barbara Hollister, *The Indian Space Painters: Native American Sources for American Abstract Art*, exh. cat. (New York: The Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, 1991); and Kraskin, *Life Colors Art: Fifty Years of Painting by Peter Busa*, exh. cat. (Provincetown: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1992). See also Gail Stavitsky's introduction to *Steve Wheeler: The Oracle Visiting the 20th Century*, exh. cat. (Montclair, N.J.: The Montclair Art Museum, 1998), especially pp. 6 and 15.

44. The closest antecedent for *Totem Lesson 1* is Picasso's *Embrace* of 1925, but it seems unlikely that Pollock ever saw this work, even in reproduction.

45. Greenberg, "Art," *The Nation*, April 7, 1945. Reprinted in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, vol. 2 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: at the University Press, 1986), pp. 16–17.

46. "Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 45 no. 3 (May 1946): 63. The move toward "larger . . . shapes . . . placed against flat, monochrome backgrounds" does not seem to have been limited to Pollock; it is also evident in works like Felix Ruvolo's *Duel of the Entomologist* (c. 1946), reproduced in Genauer, *Best of Art*, plate 51.

47. We don't know whether the illustrations in *Possibilities* were selected by Pollock or by Robert Motherwell, the journal's editor. In either case, it may have been on Greenberg's advice that the new work was omitted, since Greenberg seems to have had reservations about it. When *Galaxy*, one of Pollock's first "mature" drip paintings, was shown in the Whitney Annual of December 1947, Greenberg condemned it as "a rather unsatisfactory painting . . . merely a fragment" ("Art," *The Nation*, January 10, 1948, p. 52; reprinted in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, p. 198.) In January 1948, Betty Parsons exhibited a critical mass of the new drip pictures. Greenberg praised two paintings (*Cathedral* and *Enchanted Forest*), opined that the quality of two others (*Sea Change* and *Full Fathom Five*) was still "to be decided," and warned that Pollock's use of aluminum paint brought him "startlingly close to prettiness" ("Art," *The Nation*, January 24, 1948, p. 108; reprinted in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, p. 202). He also warned that the new pictures would be compared to "wallpaper patterns" (as indeed Harold Rosenberg would in "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51 no. 8 [December 1952]: 49, with its notorious reference to "apocalyptic wallpaper"). Conversely, Robert Coates, in *The New Yorker* (January 17, 1948, p. 57), admired the "poetic suggestion" of *Sea Change*, *Full Fathom Five*, and *Enchanted Forest*, but condemned *Cathedral* and several other pictures as "mere unorganized explosions of random energy."

48. Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* no. 1 (Winter 1947–48): 79.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., and [Dorothy Seiberling], "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," *Life* 27 no. 6 (August 8, 1949): 45.

51. Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," *Art News* 50 no. 3 (May 1951): 38–41, 60–61.

52. "Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 45 no. 3 (May 1946): 63.

53. Picasso, quoted in an interview with Zervos, *Cahiers d'Art* 7 nos. 3–5 (1932). Trans. in Herbert Read, *Art Now: An Introduction to the Theory of Modern Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1934), p. 123.

54. Picasso, quoted in Zervos, "Conversation avec Picasso," *Cahiers d'Art* 10 no. 10 (1935): 173–78. Trans. in Barr, *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, pp. 13–15, and Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, pp. 272–84. Later in the interview, Picasso says, "There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterward you remove all traces of reality. There's

no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the object will have left an indelible mark."

What Picasso meant could be garnered by poring over old issues of *Cahiers d'Art*, as Pollock and his friends did: the transformations of *Interior with Girl Drawing* were documented in a suite of drawings and photographs in *Cahiers d'Art* 10 (1935): 247–59, and two years later the evolution of *Guernica* was traced in the article "Histoire d'un tableau de Picasso," *Cahiers d'Art* 12 (1937): 105–6. It seems likely that Pollock studied these documents closely. In December 1998 I asked Harold Lehman, a close friend of Pollock's in the 1930s and early '40s, whether they had looked at *Cahiers d'Art*: "It was our Bible!" he replied. Even without photographic documentation, however, it would have been obvious that many of Picasso's paintings of the 1920s and '30s had been heavily reworked. Ridges in their impasto often reveal the presence of buried forms, and earlier colors show through gaps in the paint surface. Picasso did not advance toward a predetermined image; rather, each stage of his picture served as a jumping-off point for the next.

55. Sweeney described how Miró had "elicited suggestions from his unconscious mind . . . by spilling a little color on the paper . . . then as his brush moved over the surface, the image would gradually take shape without any conscious direction." In *Joan Miró*, p. 53, citing Zervos, "Joan Miró," *Cahiers d'Art* 9 nos. 1–4 (1934): 14. Greenberg paraphrased this description in his book *Joan Miró* (New York: Quadrangle, 1948), writing that the artist "would begin pictures by letting his brush wander haphazardly over the canvas, only afterwards applying himself consciously to their formal organization and to the working-up of chance resemblances he had come across" (p. 26). As Sidra Stich and Christopher Green have argued, Miró was influenced by theorists like Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Georges Luquet, who equated cave art with the art of children. Luquet in particular had attracted the attention of the Surrealists by arguing that the procedure of discovering a resemblance in a form created by chance lay at the origins of neolithic art. See Stich, *Joan Miró: The Development of a Sign Language*, exh. cat. (Saint Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1980), especially pp. 12–13 and 27, and Green, "The Infant in the Adult: Joan Miró and the Infantile Image," in Jonathan Fineberg, ed., *Discovering Child Art: Essays and Childhood, Primitivism, and Modernism* (Princeton: at the University Press, 1998), pp. 210–34.

56. Genauer, *Best of Art*, p. 119. Despite the widespread denial of the importance of subject matter in Pollock's work, it seems worth noting that Moller's chessplayers find a counterpart in Pollock's *Tea Cup* (1946), which also depicts two figures at either side of a game board.

57. [Seiberling], "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," p. 45.

58. "Jackson Pollock," *Portfolio: The Annual of the Graphic Arts* 2 no. 1 (1951): n.p.

59. Motherwell, quoted in Sidney Simon, "Concerning the Beginnings of the New York School: 1939–1943," *Art International* 11 no. 6 (Summer 1967): 23. Motherwell suggests that Pollock was especially influenced by Picasso works from the 1930s in the collection of Mary (Meric) Callery, in particular *Girl with a Cock* (1938), which does seem to be a source for Pollocks like *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle* (c. 1943).

60. One drawing of c. 1945 (plate 102, p. 208, in Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*), for example, seems to have begun as a horizontal image of a ramlike creature, its narrow snout flanked by hornlike spirals enclosing long-lashed eyes. At left, a narrow paw and leg supported the creature's rump. But this image was obscured first by interlacing curves and then by long straight lines that literally crossed it out. Contained forms were divided while separate forms were joined together. Somewhere in the process, Pollock rotated the composition 90 degrees counterclockwise. The cumulative effect was to retain the rhythmic energy of the original mythic creature but to make it virtually unrecognizable.

61. Greenberg, letter to Sidney Janis, April 19, 1961. Quoted in Grace Stevens, memo on dating of *Free Form* (notes for Janis book), August 1967, in the files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

62. Actually the correlation between the changing widths of Pollock's dripped lines and the speed of his execution can be misleading: see Karmel, "Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth," in Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 129–30.

63. See ibid., pp. 105–32.

64. In 1950, Berton Roueché quoted Pollock as insisting, "Abstract painting is abstract." "Unframed Space," *The New Yorker* 26 no. 24 (August 5, 1950): 16. In the summer of the same year, an interviewer remarked to Pollock that "deliberately looking for any known meaning or object [in Pollock's abstract art] would distract you immediately from ever appreciating it as you should," and Pollock responded, "I think it should be enjoyed just as music is enjoyed." William Wright, "An Interview with Jackson Pollock," 1950, an interview broadcast on radio station WERI, Westerly, R.I., 1951. Published in Namuth et al., *Pollock Painting*, n.p.

65. See note 19 above.

66. See Stich, *Joan Miró: The Development of a Sign Language*, pp. 12–13 and 27.

67. Compare, for instance, Peter Miller's *Incantation*, exhibited by Julien Levy and reproduced in *Art News* 44 no. 13 (October 15, 1945): 30, or Jackson McLow's drawings in *Iconograph* no. 3 (Fall 1946): cover and p. 9, or Walter Quirt's *Very Great Lion Hunters* (1939), reproduced in *Walter Quirt: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1979), no. 19.

68. My argument here is anticipated by Stich, who, comparing Miró's paintings to prehistoric art, notes that they "present isolated beings within a common field rather than cohesive units in a coordinated composition. The individual parts are dispersed in space without concern for a logical ordering of scale, shape or positioning." *Joan Miró: The Development of a Sign Language*, p. 32. I am indebted to O'Connor for bringing Stich's work to my attention.

69. If Pollock was not attracted to the cave-painting model of a weightless space, his willingness to consider different orientations for his works recalls the indefinite space of Picasso's and Léger's divers (also open to different orientations, as discussed above). Krasner said, "Sometimes he'd ask, 'Should I cut it here? Should this be the bottom? . . . Working around the canvas—in 'the arena' as he called it—there really was no absolute top or bottom." Quoted in Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," n.p. Krasner was discussing the black paintings of 1951, where discernible figures are often upside-down or sideways in relation to the bottom edge (as indicated by the signature). But Pollock seems occasionally to have rotated earlier works as well; see Karmel, "Pollock at Work," pp. 128–31. Willem de Kooning too seems to have responded to this idea of multiple orientations. In his later decades,

and perhaps also earlier, he routinely rotated his pictures as he worked on them, deciding on their permanent orientation only at the very end of this process. See Robert Storr, "At Last Light," in Gary Garrels and Storr, *Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995), p. 50.

70. The depiction of a long linear torso atop short, forking legs may have been suggested by Navajo drawings that Pollock would have known from several sources, including The Museum of Modern Art's 1941 exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* (see for example fig. 45, p. 134, in the catalogue for that exhibition). For an overview of this topic, see W. Jackson Rushing, "Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), pp. 273–95. Pollock may also have seen Maud Oakes's paintings after Navajo designs, shown at the Willard Gallery in May 1943 and reviewed in *Art News* 43 no. 7 (May 15, 1944): 21. Oakes's paintings were also reproduced in Jeff King, Oakes, and Joseph Campbell, *Where the Two Came to Their Father: A Navaho War Ceremonial* (New York: Pantheon, 1943). Oakes's work as an anthropologist could have been a common interest for Pollock and for Namuth, who provided the photographs for Oakes's second book, *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos: Survivals of Mayan Religious Ritual* (New York: Pantheon, 1951).

71. Digital analysis of the third mural-scale painting of 1950, *Autumn Rhythm*, reveals a different kind of underdrawing (see Karmel, "Pollock at Work," pp. 118–24), closer to the loose interlace of Braque's and Moller's "classical" illustrations and to the Picasso Crucifixion drawings of 1927.

72. In 1950, Pollock said, "I approach painting in the same sense as one approaches drawing; that is, it's direct. I don't work from drawings, I don't make sketching and drawings and color sketches into a final painting. Painting, I think, today—the more immediate, the more direct—the greater the possibilities of making a direct—of making a statement." Quoted in Wright, "An Interview with Jackson Pollock" transcribed in Namuth, *Pollock Painting*, n.p. In a manuscript note dated to 1950, Pollock writes, "*No Sketches / acceptance of / what I do—*" (reproduced in OT 4:253). Rosenberg reiterated this idea in "The American Action Painters," where an anonymous "leader of this mode" is quoted dismissing another artist as "not modern. . . . He works from sketches. That makes him Renaissance" (p. 22).

73. "When we are learning to walk, to ride, to swim, skate, fence, write, play, or sing, we interrupt ourselves at every step by unnecessary movements and false notes. When we are proficients, on the contrary, the results . . . follow from a single instantaneous 'cue.' The marksman sees the bird, and, before he knows it, he has aimed and shot. . . . A glance at the musical hieroglyphics, and the pianist's fingers have rippled through a cataract of notes." William James, "Habit," in *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890 (rev. ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 119.

74. Karmel, "Pollock at Work," pp. 107–11 and 118–24. Close study of *Number 32* reveals the strategy necessary to achieve the effect of spontaneity. In several places, for instance, the black paint seems to spatter into a series of narrow lines emerging forcefully from one side of a large dark area. In smaller pictures, Pollock could produce this dramatic effect simply by throwing paint sideways onto the canvas. At the scale of *Number 32*, however, this technique was not feasible, and Pollock instead dripped a series of thin parallel lines to one side of a denser splotch laid down *without* spatters. Instead of being dripped from a stick or brush, these fine lines were poured from a small paint can with a punctured lid. (Pollock can be seen using this technique in Namuth's film of him painting on glass.)

75. On the importance of Miró's Constellations as a model for Pollock's allover compositions, see Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part III," pp. 26–27.

76. Pollock's pictures thus correspond to Baudelaire's assertion that "a harmoniously-conducted picture consists of a series of pictures superimposed on one another." In "The Salon of 1859," *Art in Paris: 1845–1862*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965, reprint ed. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 161.

77. It might even be argued that Mondrian's work perpetuates a version of this stage space. His pictures, as Greenberg wrote in "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" (*Arrogant Purpose*, p. 223), are "the flattest of all easel painting," but the canvas "still presents itself as the *scene* of forms rather than as one single, indivisible piece of texture."

78. Bruno Alfieri, "Piccolo discorso sui quadri di Jackson Pollock (con testimonianza dell'artista)," as quoted in *Time*, November 20, 1950.

79. Alfieri, "Piccolo discorso sui quadri di Jackson Pollock," *L'Arte Moderna*, June 8, 1950. Uncredited translation in the Archives of The Museum of Modern Art.

80. See Rosalind Krauss's essay in the present volume.

81. As discussed above, Greenberg first compared Pollock's drip style to Analytic Cubism in "'American-Type' Painting," published in 1955—the year Robert Rauschenberg painted *Rebus*. The comparison is made more specific in the rewritten version of the essay that Greenberg published in *Art and Culture* in 1961, by which time Greenberg would unquestionably have been aware of Rauschenberg's work.

82. For a superb analysis of the materials and metaphors of *Rebus*, see Roni Feinstein, "Rauschenberg," in Fitzgerald, ed., *A Life of Collecting: Victor and Sally Ganz* (New York: Christie's, 1997), p. 146.

83. In his seminal lecture "Other Criteria," Steinberg argued that the defining characteristic of much advanced art of the 1960s was what he called "the flatbed picture plane"—one in which the top of the picture no longer mirrored the erect position of the human head, nor the lower edge our feet. It was Rauschenberg, Steinberg argued, who first abandoned this "correspondence with human posture," his "flatbed" pictures corresponding instead to "tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which information may be received, printed, impressed." "Other Criteria," 1968, reprinted in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 82–84. Steinberg specifically excludes Pollock from this category, but if Pollock's figurative markings qualify as "information" impressed on the "receptor surface" of the canvas, perhaps he should be included. The concept of the flatbed picture plane, with its refusal of anthropomorphic erectness, seems to me to anticipate Krauss's idea of "horizontality as medium," discussed elsewhere in this volume, although Krauss purifies her version of horizontality by excluding figuration.

At the outset of this project, it seemed we were embarking on an exercise in stating the obvious. We were charged with investigating the materials and techniques of an artist whose innovative method was thought to be well understood through the photographs of Hans Namuth, Martha Holmes, and Arnold Newman, and especially through Namuth's films. Numerous studies had already noted Pollock's inventive use of industrial materials, and his preference for working with the canvas on the floor was legendary. There seemed to be little more to say.

We decided to set aside this prior knowledge and approach the topic in essentially the same way that conservators and scholars would in the case of a more traditional artist. Our first efforts focused on our own critical assessment of Pollock's technique through a careful study of the photographs and films. We then made simulations of specific methods and typical marks, less to duplicate the appearance of Pollock's paintings than to elucidate the behavior of his materials.

The essence of this study, of course, was to look at the artworks themselves. We examined the paintings in natural light in various locations. Then, when the works came to New York, we intensified the examination with viewing by means of ultraviolet light, infrared reflectography, x-radiography, and microscopy. Specific works from The Museum of Modern Art's collection were chosen for material analyses conducted through polarized light microscopy, gas chromatography, scanning electron microscopy, and Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy. Meanwhile, we combed the Archives of American Art, among other sources, and studied archival photographs for technical information often overlooked by other scholars. We also interviewed purveyors of materials and services involved in the production of Pollock's art. We did not dwell on the condition or conservation treatments of specific paintings, but in the course of our study we did come to appreciate the remarkably stable state of most of the paintings we examined.

At an early stage, our investigation rather naturally separated into two principal threads—one elucidating the classic pour technique, the other addressing the early and late work. Over time, these two threads came to resemble the warp and weft of a textile, interwoven and integral to the structure of the whole. We repeatedly saw evidence of Pollock's consummate control of materials and his focused, meticulous reengagement with particular works. Although our papers are presented separately, they flow from a constant dialogue between us. Together they support our conclusion that Pollock demonstrated an uncommon command of materials and techniques that enabled him to create paintings of genius.

JAMES CODDINGTON AND CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO

No Chaos Damn It

James Coddington

In 1950, *Time* magazine printed parts of an essay by Bruno Alfieri, previously published in Italy, which used the word "chaos" to describe the paintings of Jackson Pollock. Unable to let the criticism pass, Pollock sent *Time* a telegram that began, "NO CHAOS DAMN IT."[1] In fact Alfieri had associated Pollock's paintings with "chaos / absolute lack of harmony / complete lack of structural organization / total absence of technique, however rudimentary / once again, chaos,"[2] and whatever the merits of the rest of his analysis, there is plentiful evidence that he was wrong on every one of these counts. Pollock understood much about traditional methods of painting, and incorporated this into his style. He had technique, and it was anything but rudimentary; he had structure, and it was often exceedingly complex. He as much as any artist willed order from and gave voice to the dumb colored muds that we call paint. He was remarkably consistent in his strategies throughout his career, despite the apparent variations in his images and methods. That he was able to stretch his methods to allow such variation, and to apply them to new materials as these became available to him, is another measure of his creativity.

Close examination of selected paintings will be the principal means for presenting this argument. In some instances this examination has included X-radiographs and both infrared and ultraviolet light, as well as technical analysis of media and pigments.[3] Although it is difficult and sometimes impossible, of course, to deconstruct the layers of the paintings systematically, close examination gives us the chance to try to place Pollock's painting decisions within a pictorial logic. The consistency of this logic leads in the end to a finer appreciation of the variation in Pollock's oeuvre.

The pour technique is undoubtedly Pollock's signature method.[4] Although dripped or splattered paint had made its way into earlier works, the technique reached maturity in 1947, when Pollock started to see that it could carry a painting on its own. *Lucifer* (plate 7), from that year, is an excellent example of the artist beginning to work confidently in this way. Pollock began with the brush, laying in two grays, one light and cool, the other darker. Next he applied strands

of brightly colored oil by poking a small hole in a paint tube, then squeezing the tube quite forcefully, extending staccato shots of yellow, blue, and orange paint—long shards of vivid, palpable line—across the surface. Pollock's friend Peter Busa confirms the artist's familiarity with this technique: "During the last days of the WPA [in the early 1940s] even Pollock was squeezing tubes of tempera color directly onto the canvas without using brushes."[5]

Pollock then began to pour black enamel, directing it with either a brush or a stick.[6] In a general way he repeated the forms created by the dark gray brushwork, as if he still needed to prove to himself that he could control his new technique and paint with it as readily as he could with a brush. By the time he had finished, his confidence must have been quite high, as his final act was to thrust on the green paint. At this point the canvas was probably already stretched and hanging on the wall, or else unstretched and simply pinned up—in any case it was certainly either upright or was immediately placed upright, for the green worked its way down the painting, nudging the sides of the already-squeezed-on colors like a rush of water pushing to the edge of the riverbed as it seeks its level. (The canvas was at this point oriented vertically; Pollock eventually hung *Lucifer* as a horizontal composition.) It is worth noting that if the canvas was indeed stretched when Pollock applied the green paint, that suggests he had thought the work complete—yet he returned to it to make this extraordinarily bold mark. One can only imagine the sureness of purpose that Pollock already commanded to be able to countenance the cataclysm that might have resulted if the green had not worked, or if its trails had been somehow miscalculated.

In 1948, Pollock created several works in which he put down a layer of white paint, then poured black paint on top of it, as for example in *Number 14, 1948* (fig. 1). The black is a long extended pour, more likely achieved by pouring directly from a can than by dripping from one of the brushes or sticks we see in Hans Namuth's later photographs. This was a means of applying paint to which Pollock returned, for in Namuth's color film of 1950 we see him pouring paint from a can.[7] In that instance he is using the paint to make objects adhere to the glass support of *Number 29, 1950*. In the group that includes *Number 14, 1948*, on the other hand, he is using the solvent in the black to bite into the white ground—the two paints merge, softening the line and yielding some of his most beautiful and understated works.

This is another example of how thoroughly Pollock considered the construction of his works and the implications of every choice, even preparatory ones such as whether or not to apply a ground, and, if so, how it would interact with the succeeding layers of paint.[8] He often did put down a ground, but by no means universally; and whether he did or not, it was a calculated move. Pollock began to use colored grounds early on, a procedure he may have learned as a student under Thomas Hart Benton. Certainly his interest in artists like

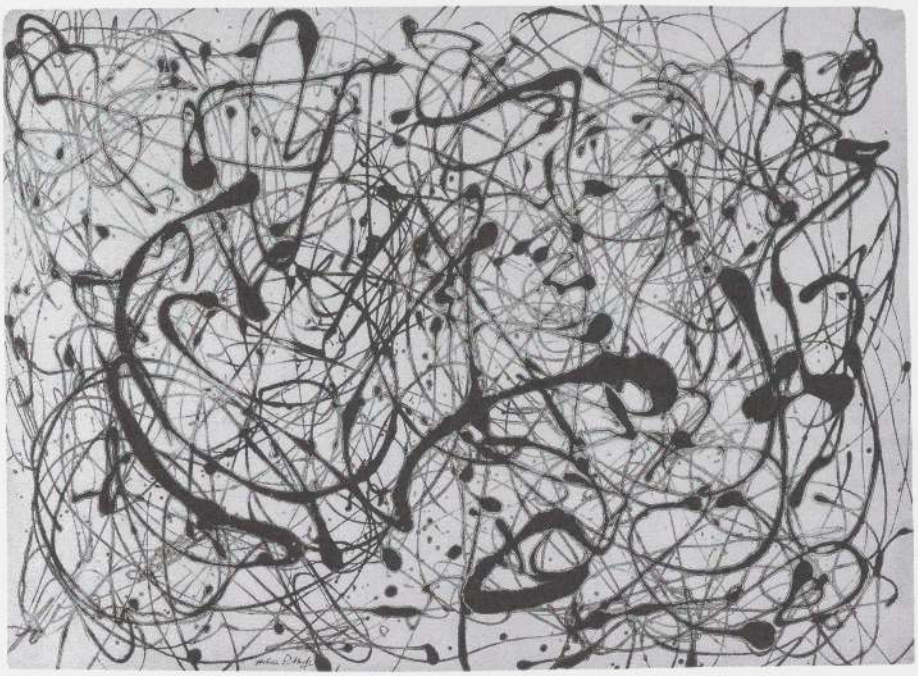


Fig. 1. Jackson Pollock. *Number 14, 1948.* **1948. Enamel on gesso on paper, 22¾ x 31 in. (57.8 x 78.8 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. The Katharine Ordway Collection**

Tintoretto and El Greco, as evidenced by his early sketchbooks, would have shown him examples of the practice, and suggested possibilities for his own work.[9] In *Number 13A, 1948: Arabesque* and *Number 2, 1949*, the sienna red of the fabric, which Pollock purchased that way (it was not a color he added), functions essentially like a colored ground. A critical visual consequence of this choice of canvas color is that it flips the values, pushing the whites forward and the blacks back—the opposite of the relationships in the works on natural-colored canvas.[10]

Pepe Karmel has argued persuasively that the figure, if in hieroglyphic form, was a crucial element in Pollock's compositional strategies, with even a work like *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* (plate 5) being built on a figurative armature.[11] Three years earlier, *Full Fathom Five* (1947; fig. 2) found Pollock piling impastoed paint to create a rough figure that he later covered over, but that remains perceptible in an X-ray photograph (fig. 3; the X rays pick up the figure because the paint Pollock used for it is loaded with white lead). The nails, tacks, buttons, key, etc., that he also incorporated are placed in direct response to and elaboration of this shape. The key in particular falls unmistakably right at the crotch, and the final paint application, of white and orange in the upper right corner, follows a similar logic: even though the figure had by now been covered

Fig. 2. Jackson Pollock. *Full Fathom Five*. **1947. Oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, key, coins, cigarettes, matches, etc., 50⅞ x 30⅛ in. (129.2 x 76.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Miss Peggy Guggenheim**

over in green and black paint, Pollock's last additions of color were placed directly in respect to it, leading out of the ostensible shoulder. Arguably, then, these quick slashes of paint are marks for a head. *Phosphorescence* (1947; fig. 4) also reveals an initial figural laying-in, of two or three stick figures, that remain visible through X rays (fig. 5). Pollock hid these forms under a coat of aluminum paint, but he apparently remained somehow concerned or obliged to reiterate some element of them, principally the long verticals that articulate their torsos.[12] He did so with final squeezes of paint straight from the tube, covering the surface in an otherwise seemingly random web of white lines. Such finishing touches in both of these 1947 canvases lead us on to *One: Number 31, 1950* (plate 4), of which Karmel observes that some of the final pours delineate figures, perhaps to confirm for Pollock the underlying structure.[13]

Fig. 3. Pollock's *Full Fathom Five*, **in an X-ray photograph**

Any discussion of Pollock's technique must take account of *Autumn Rhythm* and of the other great pour paintings of 1950. In certain respects *Autumn Rhythm* recalls works such as *Full Fathom Five*, not just in the use of initial figures to which Pollock then responded (as Karmel argues) but in the placement of supplementary material. Pollock used enamel paints that dried quite quickly, not just on the canvas but in the cans, which he seems rarely to have kept covered; and *Autumn Rhythm* contains a number of the skins that congealed in these open paint cans, placed and even formed to supply both a collage element and a hard surface that would take later applications of paint differently from the areas around it (plate 8).[14] In the end these inclusions are of the same family as the tacks, sand, pebbles, and so forth in other works. They provide texture and a low relief pushing out from the canvas plane; they also provide a surface on which

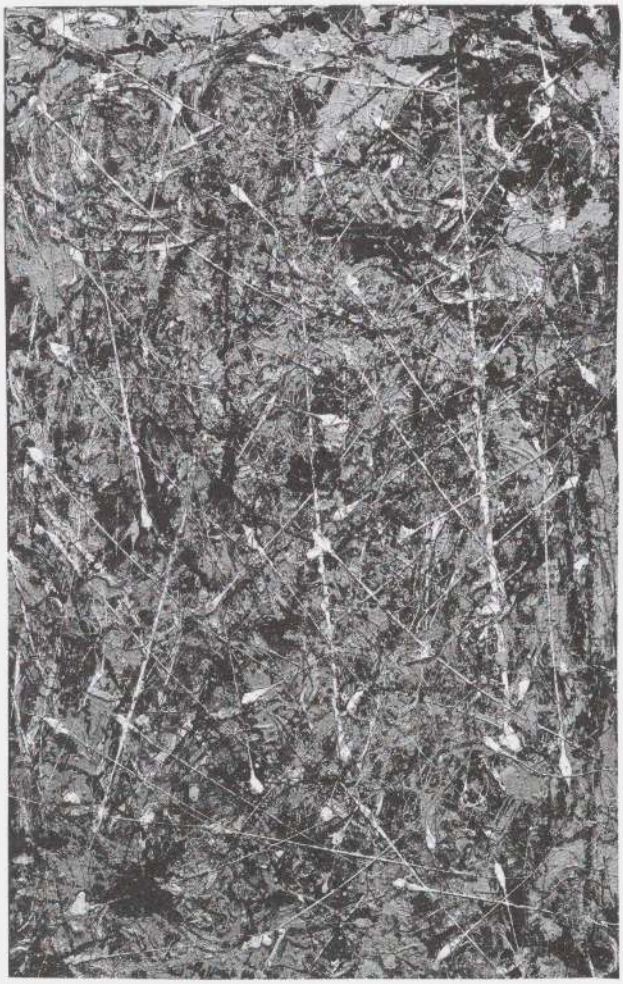


Fig. 4. Jackson Pollock. *Phosphorescence*. **1947. Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas, 44 x 28 in. (111.8 x 71.1 cm). Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Gift of Mrs. Peggy Guggenheim**

succeeding layers of paint will sit, distinguished from the work's other pours, which are softened by the more absorbent canvas. Contrast this with *Number 32, 1950*, in which repeated applications of paint create hard glossy patches, actual puddles of inky-black enamel that seem to sink deeply into the compositional space (plate 9).

These enamel paints, of course, are the most distinctive material feature of the pour paintings. It states the obvious to say that they were an essential precursor to Pollock's creative demands. It has often been assumed that he used nitrocellulose-based enamel paints, but in fact, in the works analyzed, the enamels have proven to be almost exclusively oil-modified alkyd paints.[15]

With *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* (plate 6) Pollock brought the pour technique to a high pitch of refinement, varying every facet of the work—thinning

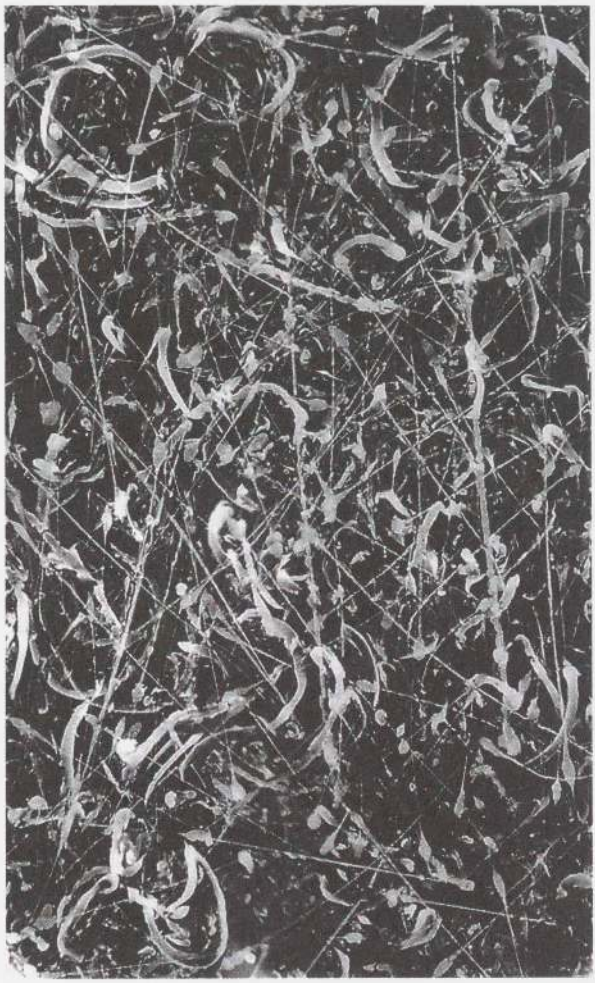


Fig. 5. Pollock's *Phosphorescence*, **in an X-ray photograph**

the paint, pressing into it, pulling at it, always breaking the surface into smaller and smaller bits to achieve an atmospheric, atomized quality. The canvas itself is different from that of the larger paintings from the same year, in that Pollock used its full width for the final composition: there is no original material pulled around and behind the stretcher, and blue selvage threads appear at both sides of the cloth. In fact the only way this painting could be exhibited without the addition of canvas to the edges would be by tacking it directly to a stretcher or to the wall. The presence of tack holes penetrating the design layers along all four edges confirms that at least for a while this was the way the painting was shown.

Pollock started *Lavender Mist* by applying a layer of thin white paint as a ground. The few places where this ground layer remains visible, especially along the top edge, show raised, Hershey's Kiss–like points that suggest the use of a

roller. Pollock continued by working in direct contact with the canvas, using not only a brush but his hands, much as he had in *Number 1A, 1948* (plate 2).[16] He also returned to applying paint directly by squeezing it from the tube, as he had done regularly in 1947–48, but now he modified the lines he made this way: the pattern that many of them follow, with one edge sharp and the other spreading thin tendrils out into the painting (plate 10), suggests that he first applied the paint, then flattened it somehow, perhaps with a board. The tendrils were presumably created as he pulled the board from the surface, leaving the opposite edge of the line still straight. That he was flattening these squeezes after applying them is proven by the way some of them regain their rounded tube forms as they trail off—clearly Pollock did not compress them along their full length.

That Pollock was shaping the paint by applying objects to it is further evidenced by a passage in the center of the work, where one can make out a pattern—the imprint of a piece of canvas pressed into the surface (plate 11). Pollock repeated the move in a black passage perpendicular to this area. These marks are too specific to be the results of random or accidental impressions made, say, when the canvas was rolled for transport, or when it was lined. About a foot lower and to the right of the first imprint, in fact, one can see a line of brownish black, where it is clear that Pollock moved the piece of fabric and used the residual paint already clinging to it to make it adhere again (plate 12). He may have been using the fabric to apply a color to leaven the blacks; or perhaps he was testing a color application without actually committing to it, much as another artist might temporarily pin collage elements to a support while developing a composition.

What is clear, though, is that Pollock worked this canvas with a specificity and closeness not evident in the other great pour paintings of 1950. In applying the squeezes from the tube, for example, he used two different whites, which, although virtually indistinguishable to the naked eye, separate quite clearly under ultraviolet light (plates 13 and 14).[17] Once we know what to look for, we can see that these two whites absorb other paints differently, and that Pollock took advantage of this difference—perhaps unconsciously but in the end quite visibly. The white that he pushed and pulled with the board is generally thinner than the other, and at the same time more absorbent of succeeding paint layers, which again and again we see bleeding readily into it while sitting more boldly on the surface of the other white.

Lavender Mist also contains very thin—uniquely thin—washes of black and blue paint, which pool and puddle numerously on a comparatively microscopic scale compared to other canvases from 1950. The method of application is hard to identify, but these coats are in any case poured very locally. They are so thin, and tend to flow in so many directions, that it is hard to think they were applied as line; almost glazelike in quality, they function fundamentally as inky stains

rather than muscular thrusts of paint. In fact they are a means to temper the painting's longer throws (plate 15), creating small points of color throughout the work that paradoxically both unify the composition and break it into ever-smaller units.

As *Lavender Mist* became more complex, erasures were necessary (as in other works of this period), but erasing for Pollock often meant adding.[18] One of the first instances of this subtraction by addition appears in *Croaking Movement* (1946), where Pollock pushed lines of white straight from the tube into previous layers of color, creating the impression that he had scraped these lines out. Reinforcing this impression is the fine network of lines in the more thinly painted passages of the work, which Pollock did in fact scrape out, seemingly with the butt end of the brush, at an earlier stage of the composition (plate 16); but the much bolder and more extended lines of white, which can be read as scrapes into the layer beneath them, are actually new paint. This device gave Pollock yet another way of inviting the eye to move forward and back in the picture plane—not to mention, as it were, in the temporal process of painting itself. In *Lavender Mist* he prompted this movement by adding beige tones throughout, using a dry, matte paint, a visual counterpoint to the more heavily painted and generally more glossy areas. This beige also presented an absorbent base for later applications of paint, which would sink into it visually and in some instances physically as well. The result is the creation of a shallow space, moving forward from the canvas and beige paint, and then back, again and again throughout the painting.

It should be evident that Pollock sought a more delicate surface and image in *Lavender Mist* than in virtually any other work. Surprisingly, for example, he seems to have applied a spray of varnish or some similar very thin medium at points throughout the painting. The evidence for this is considerable, yet the effect is so subtle it is hard to believe he would pursue it. Pollock was familiar with spray equipment; he had used it in David Siqueiros's experimental workshop, in 1936.[19] Spray effects also appear in works such as the lithograph *Landscape with Steer* (1935–37) and in *Painting* (c.1944). The sprayed passages in *Lavender Mist* appear to be pigmented, but only lightly—they are certainly more rich in varnish or a related medium (plates 17 and 18). To what end are they here, though? They were not the final marks Pollock made on the work; succeeding layers went over them. It is in fact plausible that he applied the varnish to provide some tooth for later applications of paint, or simply as a glaze or tone. Yet it cannot be overlooked that the sprays were a palpable *mist*, a fusion of the fluid and the particulate—perhaps exactly the effect he was seeking.[20] Every move he made on this painting, after all, every adjustment of prior technique, broke the image into smaller and smaller segments until it was reconstituted as an organic whole. The use of sprays, radical and counterintuitive as they are to our received understanding of Pollock's technique, can be seen as the logical end of this process.

In *Number 28, 1950* we see Pollock developing yet another, fairly overt strategy to achieve a unity of composition. The last major application of paint here was evidently that of the uppermost skeins of black. Left untouched, these passages would have appeared to stand even more independently from the rest of the colors than they do now, but almost immediately he had poured them, Pollock went back in with a brush and physically mixed them into the underlying whites in places, so that they seem to weave in and out of those prior layers (plate 19). Two observations are worthwhile here: first, Pollock had very little time to ponder this decisive act, for enamel paint dries quickly. He probably had no more than a half hour or so to consider his options. Second, it seems to have been the exception rather than the rule for Pollock not to be literally in touch, at some point in the painting process, with the canvas, even in poured works like *Number 13A, 1948: Arabesque*, *Autumn Rhythm*, and *One*. That Pollock was in physical contact with the canvas in *Number 28, 1950* is evidenced by the presence of brushmarks within the mixed passages described above. The effect is readily differentiable from the wet-into-wet marbling one sees in, for instance, *Autumn Rhythm*.

The black pour paintings of 1951 have been identified as a departure from Pollock's prior work, and this is certainly true in regard to his materials and methods. Aside from the reduced palette, Pollock made some fundamental changes in technique. He introduced a new tool, the turkey baster.[21] He also moved back toward more-consistent direct contact with the canvas, applying some of his initial marks with a brush. *Echo: Number 25, 1951* demonstrates many of his basic techniques in these works: he did indeed brush some passages on, but the bulk of the paint he either poured or more likely worked with the baster, which he used almost like a big fountain pen. For a large, dramatic discharge, he could squeeze the bulb; or he could hold the paint in the device's tube and draw extended lines (plate 20).

According to Lee Krasner, Pollock would start the black pours with a sizing of Rivit glue.[22] It should be clear by now that he was very sensitive to the implications of preparing a canvas or board, in terms both of underlying color and of the way the next layer of paint would be absorbed; choosing whether or not to use a size would have given him a way to control the bleeding of the paint into the canvas. In *Number 22, 1951*, for example, the paint in places bleeds quite readily, blending with the fabric in much the same way it blends with the ground in works on paper from 1948 (plate 21). In *Echo*, on the other hand, although there is variation in the quality of the line from center to edge (hard and glossy in the center, soft toward the edge, as the nap of the fabric reasserts itself), there is nothing that could be called a bleeding of the paint into the canvas. This might suggest a sizing with Rivit glue—yet there is no such coating in *Echo*.[23] Technical analysis suggests that in this case Pollock may have used a more

sophisticated technique to control the bleed, and that was the mixing of two different paints, an oil and an alkyd enamel. Indeed, although the paint in *Echo* is apparently pure black, close examination shows occasional swirls of red, presumably due to a mixing of different paints to yield a warm black or near brown.[24]

Rivit, Krasner remembered, made a second appearance at a later stage of Pollock's process in the black pours: it was applied as a finishing coat once the actual painting was done.[25] This was another fundamental departure in Pollock's studio practice, and since it is hard to see why he would suddenly have been converted to the "protective" function of such a coating, it is logical to seek an aesthetic function. Pollock did in fact mention the practice in a letter to the curator Dorothy Miller dated April 14, 1952. After complimenting her installation of his work in the show *Fifteen Americans* at The Museum of Modern Art, he went on, "I wish I could give no 7 a coat of glue sizing—it would take some of the wrinkles out of it. Perhaps when I'm in next time I can do it after museum hours. It wouldn't take more than ten minutes."[26] Perhaps this was his only reason for putting on a final layer of glue—to remove wrinkles and draws. Another possible purpose, however, or at least a likely result of this procedure, would have been to compress variation across the surface—to give the work a consistent sheen, so that the eye would focus on color differences rather than on differences of both color and gloss. *Number 14, 1951* shows the results of a final clear coating, which analysis shows to be the expected (poly)vinyl acetate.[27] Viewing the work in a specular light, one can see a measure of gloss in the areas of bare canvas, minimizing their difference from the gloss of the black paint, and generally flattening the space.

After the departures represented by the black pours, *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, painted the following year, seems to return to the pour technique of 1947–50. Actually, however, it is new in essential ways. For all its busily, even hectically worked surface, the structure of its layers is in fact quite spare. Pollock began with a gray ground, then applied paint, working in direct contact with the canvas. Interestingly, this paint was a blend of blue and yellow that he appears to have mixed not on the canvas but on a palette or in the can. It is difficult to tell if these initial marks bear any resemblance to the final composition, but the mixing of color in this way heralds a tactic that Pollock would use again. (In *Untitled (Scent)* [c. 1953–55], *Ocean Greyness* [1953], and *White Light* [1954], the overt premixing of paint for heavy impastoed passages is unmistakable.) In another departure from the earlier pour technique, Pollock applied color quite discretely in *Blue Poles*; that is, all of the orange was applied in a single campaign, all of the yellow in another, and so on. (In the classic pours, on the other hand, the colors were applied in the course of many campaigns.) Perhaps this literal paint application accounts for the work's less lyrical quality, which is supplanted by a more aggressive palette. *Blue Poles* also contains an instance of the illusion

of complex layering, whether or not such layering is present, that we saw in *Number 28, 1950*: the midsection of the second pole from the right appears to slip under a substantial pour of white, but was actually never painted in (plate 22). Yet our eye readily connects the upper and lower blue lines, making them consonant with the other pole structures.

Around 1952, the same year he painted *Blue Poles*, Pollock made another departure in materials: he seems to have begun to work in some measure with the new synthetic paints. The evidence is currently somewhat circumstantial, but Leonard Bocour, one of the creators of the acrylic paint Magna, says he gave these new paints to Pollock,[28] and there are still Magna colors in the artist's studio in The Springs. (They could have been Krasner's, but they are untouched.) Boxes of what appear to be Magna can also be seen in the background of some of the photographs that Tony Vaccaro took in Pollock's studio in August of 1953. More concretely, works like *Convergence: Number 10, 1952* contain a smooth, fluid paint that behaves rather differently from the medium of Pollock's earlier works. The mixing that occurs on the canvas is unlike that in paintings from a few years previous, yielding an almost marbled-paper-like effect. Another evident difference is the speed with which this fairly full-bodied paint has dried, leaving traces in the form of heavy, molten-looking drips (plate 23). Since the nature of the pours is quite familiar, there is no reason to think that these changes came because Pollock was applying paint with a new, unidentified tool. Rather it was the performance of the paint itself that produced different results. Because technical analysis was not done on this painting, the evidence for Pollock's use of synthetic paint remains deductive and visual. Yet it would be completely in keeping with Pollock's willingness to experiment.

Another case of paint being applied in a familiar way yet appearing fundamentally different occurs in *White Light*. The tube squeezes of white in this work are similar in form to squeezes in works like *Number 1A, 1948* and *Phosphorescence*, among others, but they are also noticeably glossier, and their smoothness suggests a more fluid medium than the stiff, brush-applied oil paint in other passages of the work (plate 24). Analysis of this glossy paint, however, reveals that it is in fact an oil paint—but one that appears to have damar varnish added.[29] This is unexpected, for if it is a commercial formulation it is highly unusual. If it is something Pollock was mixing himself, or having made for him, its presence underlines his ceaseless quest for the right material, the most expressive paint. Yet the mode of application, squeezed from a tube or other container, is familiar. Pollock may have been recycling strategies and techniques here, but this was something he did throughout his career.

Pollock's methods have often been the subject of condescension or scorn, and even as stout a champion of his work as Clement Greenberg found time to belittle his craft, writing, "Pollock demonstrates that something related to skill

is likewise unessential to the creation of aesthetic quality."[30] These pages present evidence as to just how skilled Pollock was. As mentioned earlier, he was familiar with traditional painting techniques from a number of sources, including Benton; the only book on the subject in his library, however (according to the catalogue raisonné), was Frederic Taubes's *Technique of Oil Painting*. Books by Max Doerner and Ralph Mayer were a good deal more popular at the time, but it was Taubes's book that Pollock owned, a book on a particular topic: how to reconstruct the techniques of old master painting. In the introduction to the volume, Taubes writes, "A technique is an outgrowth of an esthetic outlook and not merely a term pertaining to mechanical manipulation. Esthetic reasons govern the use of this or the other technique, and these reasons are dictated by the character of the epoch in which a painter lives."[31]

It is immediately evident how such a statement might have appealed to Pollock. It would have been all the more attractive in a book about the old masters, for it certainly created room for him, his aesthetic, and his methods to be considered on equal terms with them and with their art. That Pollock himself welcomed and sought such comparison is noted often in the many biographies of him; and I would in fact argue that the boldness of his achievement is of necessity rooted in the same mastery of materials that the old masters attained. I have also argued that the works themselves, aesthetically and materially, are the irreducible measure of all discussions of Pollock, as they are of any artist. The line that followed "NO CHAOS DAMN IT" in Pollock's telegram to *Time* magazine was "DAMNED BUSY PAINTING." To understand what he was doing when he was busy painting is to understand something essential to Pollock, and that is the vocabulary and language in which he speaks most eloquently.

Notes

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1. See Stephen Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989), p. 650.

2. Bruno Alfieri, "Piccolo discorso sui quadri di Jackson Pollock (con testimonianza dell'artista)," quoted in ibid., p. 605.

3. This analysis of media and pigments was done by Susan Lake, of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., and by Eugena Ordonez. Lake and Ordonez are in the midst of a more comprehensive technical survey of Jackson Pollock's paints, which when it appears will be an essential reference for future studies and especially for technical connoisseurship. The data used here are drawn from reports prepared by Lake and Ordonez that are now in the files of the Conservation Department of The Museum of Modern Art.

4. Pepe Karmel views "drip" as a more accurate description of Pollock's mode of application in these paintings, an observation with which I agree. Since much of the prior literature has called them pour paintings, however, I will stick with that nomenclature here. See Karmel, "Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth," in Kirk Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), note 87, p. 137; and Karmel, "Introduction," in Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock: Key Interviews, Articles, and Reviews, 1943–1993* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999, note 1, p. 13. See also Francis V. O'Connor's extended discussion of this subject in his review of the Pollock retrospective on his Web page, at http://members.aol.com/FVOC/reviews.html.

5. Peter Busa, quoted in Sidney Simon, "Concerning the Beginnings of the New York School: 1939–1943," *Art International* 11 no. 6 (Summer 1967): 17.

6. These thoughts on Pollock's methods are drawn from close observation of the paintings, to discern marks such as brushstrokes; from Pollock's and Lee Krasner's statements about his technique; from the photographs of Hans Namuth, Arnold Newman, and others; and from efforts to reproduce the marks themselves. Much of the secondary material appears in Namuth, Barbara Rose, Rosalind Krauss, et al., *Pollock Painting*, ed. Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications Ltd., 1980); originally published as *L'Atelier de Jackson Pollock* (Paris: Macula, 1978). In every instance my conclusions are the result of close collaboration with Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, whose own paper on this subject appears elsewhere in this book.

7. Namuth, *Jackson Pollock*, 1950.

8. Ordonez's analysis of *There Were Seven in Eight* (c. 1945) indicates two applications of a ground, both probably applied by the artist (they are virtually indistinguishable materially)—additional evidence of Pollock's careful consideration of absorbency, opacity, color, etc., at this literally fundamental stage of the painting's development.

9. See, for example, Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 564. See also Varnedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," *Jackson Pollock*, p. 24.

10. William Rubin points out that the colored grounds "'close off' the back of the space," preventing a deep-space reading. But if Pollock chose the colored canvas to create a shallower space, the deeper-space reading in the natural-canvas or light-colored-ground paintings must also have been his choice. It seems more logical, then, to assume that Pollock was interested in both kinds of space in his work, rather than just one. See Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part III," *Artforum* 5 no. 8 (April 1967): note 20, p. 31.

It is critical to note that as the natural-colored canvases have aged, they have darkened to varying degrees, diminishing the contrast between them and the darker paint they bear, and simultaneously accentuating the contrast between them and the lighter paint. This phenomenon is unfortunately difficult to quantify, but it clearly has significant implications for our reading of space in these paintings.

11. See Karmel, "Pollock at Work," pp. 86–137.

12. The aluminum paint in many of Pollock's works has probably dulled over the years, losing its intensity and reflectiveness. This seems to be due to migration of excess medium to the surface, where it discolors, and to the accumulation of dirt and grime. In works where conservators have surface-cleaned such passages, they have noted a marked increase in the gloss and overall presence of the aluminum paint.

13. Karmel, "Pollock at Work," pp. 125–27.

14. Elsewhere in this publication Carol Mancusi-Ungaro cites the irresistible instance of Pollock using a paint skin to create an illusionistic dress, in *The Debutante* (1946).

15. Lake and Ordonez.

16. Rubin and E. A. Carmean have noted this as well. See Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition [Part I]," *Artforum* 5 no. 6 (February 1967): 19, and Carmean, "Jackson Pollock: Classic Paintings of 1950," *American Art at Mid-Century—The Subjects of the Artist*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1978), p. 130.

17. Ultraviolet-light examinations of works of art take advantage of the fact that different materials absorb this energy differently, then, depending on the degree of the absorption, reemit some of it in the visible spectrum, creating varying qualities of fluorescence that we can observe and interpret. X-ray images of paintings make use of the fact that the heavy metals, such as lead, that some pigments contain are comparatively opaque to X rays, which, passing through a painting to strike film on the other side, produce white in the

places where paint has absorbed them, black where there is no such paint, and varying grays where there are varying densities of absorbent and nonabsorbent paints. Infrared images similarly take advantage of different materials' varying absorption and transmission of the infrared part of the electromagnetic spectrum. Paints and drawing materials containing carbon absorb infrared radiation most dramatically. What is important in all these cases is that material differences invisible to the naked eye are rendered visible, to offer new information on the choices the artist made in constructing the work.

18. As Rubin notes in "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition [Part I]," the incorporation of "accident" is critical to Pollock's technique, certain accidents in the development of the composition being preserved and adopted to his intentions. Extending this idea further, it may be useful to observe that almost all of the paintings that can be made out in the photographs of Pollock's studio taken between 1949 and 1954 are known, suggesting that Pollock rarely did "lose contact" with a painting (his phrase, from his statement in *Possibilities* in 1947–48), and that when he did it was just a stage in a process—that ultimately he could reestablish contact and create an image he considered successful. One is reminded of Hans Namuth's story of his initial photo session with Pollock, who said that he had just finished a picture (*One: Number 31, 1950*) but then started to paint on the canvas again, and for a rather extended period. In this case Pollock did not say he had lost contact, yet he still felt moved to readdress a canvas nominally finished. At a fundamental level, it seems, Pollock's creative process involved a response to an existing image.

19. In his book *From Fresco to Plastics: New Materials for Easel and Mural Paintings* (Philadelphia, 1952, rev. ed. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1959), José Gutierrez, another student in David Alfaro Siqueiros's workshop, discusses materials and techniques such as the use of enamels, the inclusion of other materials in the paint, and the use of sprays—all of which had also been adopted by Pollock. That these materials and methods gestated in Pollock's mind for a number of years is confirmed by his brother Charles, quoted in Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part IV," *Artforum* 5 no. 9 (May 1967): 31.

20. This was not the only time Pollock worked to near-invisible effect. *Number 28, 1950*, for example, shows a gray wash applied locally with a brush; most evident on some of the whites, this wash is still only discernible on close examination.

21. See Krasner, quoted in B. H. Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," in Namuth et al., *Pollock Painting*, n.p.

22. Ibid. Rivit was manufactured by Behlen's, a company that has since been absorbed by larger corporations. The current company, Mohawk Industries, after a cursory search, found no record of the glue's formula in the early 1950s, but the evidence points to it being a (poly)vinyl acetate emulsion, a white glue similar to Elmer's.

23. Lake and Ordonez.

24. Ibid.

25. Krasner, quoted in Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," n.p.

26. Pollock, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, April 14, 1952. In the curatorial files of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

27. This and the analysis of a number of other works in the collection of the Tate Gallery, London, was done by Tom Learner of that institution, for which I am most grateful.

28. Leonard Bocour, in an interview on February 7, 1985, in the Morris Louis and Morris Louis Estate Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

29. Lake and Ordonez.

30. Clement Greenberg, "Jackson Pollock: Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision," *Vogue*, April 1, 1967. Perhaps this was simply an April fool's joke on Greenberg's part, but I can only echo Rubin's strong and impassioned response in his "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part IV," pp. 32–33.

31. Frederic Taubes, *The Technique of Oil Painting* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1941), p. xv.

Jackson Pollock: Response as Dialogue

Carol C. Mancusi-Ungaro

A blank page should not be used as a starting-point, otherwise you will only project what you know upon it. If you start with stains, if you read them by the automatic, hallucinatory method, you will see things in them arising out of hidden desire.[1]

So reads a page from the journal of Roberto Matta, the Chilean Surrealist who emigrated to New York in 1939. Throughout the autumn and winter months of 1942, Matta regularly invited young artists to his studio for discussions about painting. Among them was Jackson Pollock. The conversation ranged from critiques of each other's work to discussions on the power of imagination, but the crucial insight for Pollock, and one that would shape a manner of working throughout his career, was the notion that an artist could best achieve a personal statement by responding to what he had already put on the canvas.

Pollock was clearly an artist who courted risk not only in his infamous life but also in his art. He respected few boundaries in terms of technical experimentation, yet he understood that technique was not merely mechanical method but was integral to aesthetic expression itself. "The method of painting is the natural growth out of a need," he once said. "I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them."[2] To come to terms with Pollock's method is to appreciate his choices—what he tried, what he rejected, and what he continued to explore. "Pollock had the most articulate understanding of his means," recalled Peter Busa. "While lavish and extravagant in spirit, he utilized the most economic means of color to get at a special kind of lyricism. He once said to me, 'Go ahead, make a mess. You might find yourself by destroying yourself and by working your way out of it.'"[3] Such a "working out" following possible "messes" is just the sort of response to what is already on the canvas that characterizes Pollock's work.

In 1943, Pollock painted *Mural* (plate 1), the large canvas, commissioned for the entrance hall of Peggy Guggenheim's New York townhouse, that Robert Motherwell would herald as "probably the catalytic moment in [Pollock's] art."[4] There are conflicting stories about the work's creation and installation. Eyewit-

nesses claim that Pollock, cloistered in his studio with a blank canvas that he had stretched the previous July, made the painting in one fifteen-hour session in the first week of January 1944. However, as Kirk Varnedoe notes in his essay in *Jackson Pollock*, the catalogue for the present retrospective, Pollock sent a postcard to his brother Frank, dated January 15, that states, "I painted quite a large painting for Miss Guggenheim's house during the summer. 8 feet x 20 feet, it was grand fun."[5] This comment clearly contradicts the other account. Furthermore, the topography of the surface, with its swathes of flat color applied over previously hardened brushstrokes and dried drips, suggests that there were several campaigns of painting in oil. Although isolated instances of drying crackle in the darks affirm that fresh paint was applied before the underlayers were completely dry, enough drying time elapsed between campaigns of painting—certainly more than several hours—to prevent the multilayers from becoming smeared.[6] Another legend states that *Mural* was too big for the wall and had to be trimmed by eight inches in order to fit, but the presence of all four unpainted tacking edges on the canvas confirm that the fabric was precisely stretched and never trimmed.[7]

Justifiably proud of his accomplishment, Pollock allowed *Mural* to be photographed in his studio (figs. 1–3). The painting also appears in a photograph taken three years later, this time with him standing in front of it, in the lobby of Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery (fig. 4). In the interim Pollock had reinforced some forms with a dark blue paint, while constructing other shapes and filling in blank spaces with a lighter blue tone. Already visible in a photograph of Pollock and Guggenheim with the painting in her townhouse (*Jackson Pollock*, p. 320), this final reworking, which may represent yet another campaign, surely must have occurred before the painting left his studio.

It is interesting to compare this reworking to three paintings Pollock com-

Figs. 1–3. Jackson Pollock. *Mural.* **1943–44 (dated "1943"). Oil on canvas, 7 ft. 11¾ in. x 19 ft. 9½ in. (243.2 x 603.2 cm). The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim. Seen here in Pollock's studio, after the canvas was completed but before it was slightly reworked**

pleted around the same time. Drips in the bottom-right quadrant of *Pasiphaë* attest that the work was painted upright, and the strokes delineated by the hairs of the brush confirm the use of viscous oil paint from a tube. Tube oil paint is also brushmarked throughout *Guardians of the Secret*, and drips of thinned paint, again in the bottom-right quadrant, confirm that this picture too was painted with the canvas upright. Although created in the same month (August 1943), *The She-Wolf* seems to differ from *Guardians of the Secret* in that Pollock initially splattered thin paint onto a white-primed canvas, revealed in the body of the animal and in the upper-left-hand corner (plate 25). Presumably the painting was horizontal, on a table or on the floor, when he applied these "stains," as Matta would have called them. In response to the splattered support, he then positioned the canvas upright and delineated the form in oil paint that again held the marks of the brush. He also incorporated a granular filler, probably sand.[8]

In terms of process, what unites these three paintings is a deliberate masking out of some of the imagery, a filling in of space with gray paint. Although in *Pasiphaë* Pollock appears to have used oil paint for this erasure, in both *The She-Wolf* and *Guardians of the Secret* he experimented with a shinier, more fluid paint that unlike oil dried in a smooth, even plane—signature properties of industrial paint, such as floor paint. Pollock boldly applied this nontraditional material with a brush to fill in space around a form, as along the perimeter, and to reinforce particular shapes, as in the geometric forms at the bottom center of *The She-Wolf* (plate 26). Interestingly, he paid the same sort of attention to formal elements in his final reworking of *Mural* before it left his studio. Thus it seems likely that the techniques Pollock explored in the making of these smaller works of 1943 informed the later reworking of *Mural*.[9]

Pollock would continue to favor such masking throughout the 1940s. He

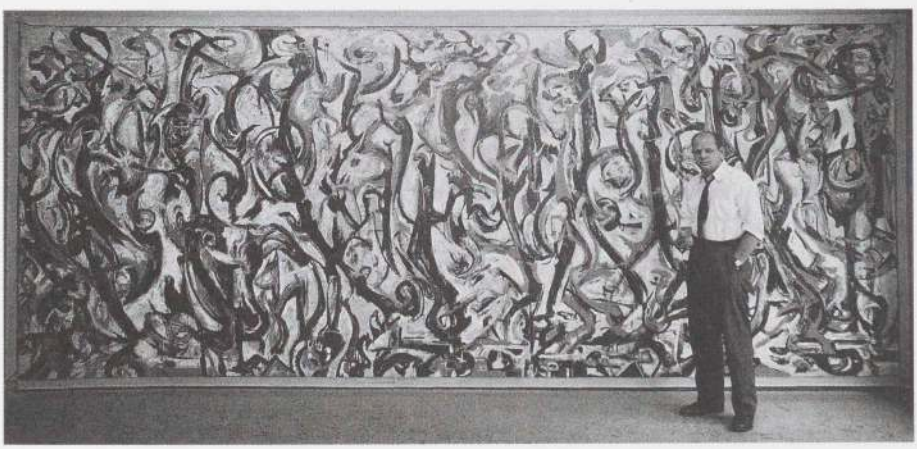


Fig. 4. Pollock with *Mural* in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, 1947

might choose to suppress one color with another, as in *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle* (c. 1943), where voids in a field of blue establish shapes on an otherwise red painting. Remnants of the red field remain visible along the left tacking edge (plate 27), and three superimposed signatures in red, green, and black offer an unusual testament to the process. Or, as in *Totem Lesson 2* (1945), Pollock might return to gray paint both to obliterate what is below it and to emphasize and isolate the new imagery forming the painting (plate 28).

Experimenting with industrial aluminum paint, which certainly shared an affinity with the neutral gray color he had previously favored, Pollock continued to mask former figuration as he launched into his so-called drip paintings of 1947. As Pepe Karmel notes in his catalogue essay, *Galaxy* of that year is a reworking of an earlier painting, *The Little King*, which is known to us only through one extant photograph (*Jackson Pollock*, fig. 27, p. 104).[10] Comparison of the two paintings sheds light on the process of Pollock's interactive response. With *The Little King* upright, he brushed aluminum paint onto the surface in order to isolate forms as he broke up the visual whole. Then, laying the canvas flat, he poured aluminum paint, infused with sand, and other pure colors over strategically placed particulate matter to create *Galaxy*. He left enough of *The Little King* visible to show us how he had integrated the underlying structure, and confirmed the process by leaving exposed a part of the "k" from his original signature. In other reworkings of 1947, however, such as *Sea Change*, he created paint layers so dense with opaque materials that we have been unable to identify, through X-radiography among other means, what paintings lie beneath.[11]

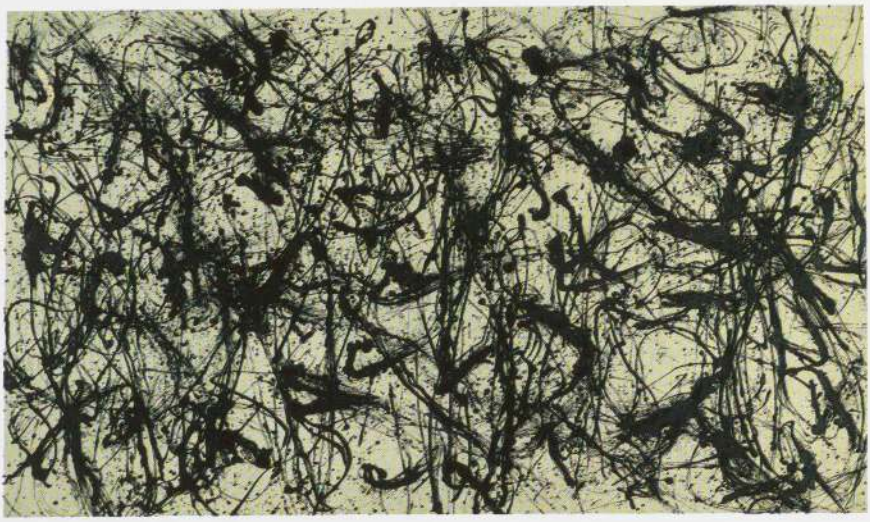
Masking for Pollock remained more a response to what he had already painted than a simple erasure, whether he was first making and then burying a figure, as in *Full Fathom Five* (1947; see pp. 104–5, figs. 2–3), or readdressing a finished work of an earlier type, as in *Convergence: Number 10, 1952* (plate 23), a black pour painting transformed by the addition of color—a melding of two types, as the title suggests. The reengagement could be as simple as black pours over an aged paint film, as in *Water Birds* (1943); or more complex, as in *Sea Change*, where remnants of a former work are barely visible; or somewhere in between, as in *Croaking Movement* (1946; plate 16), which seems on close inspection to be an embellishment of colorful underpainting reminiscent of the Accabonac Creek Series of the same year, for example *The Key*.

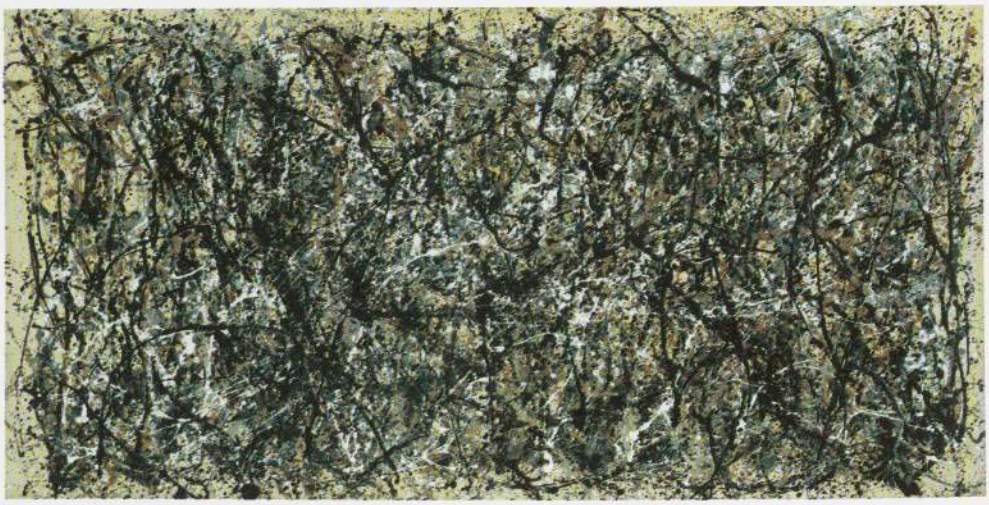
A testament to the relationships among the paint layers in these works is provided by Alfonso Ossorio, an artist, close friend of Pollock's, and the purchaser of *Number 5, 1948* from the Betty Parsons Gallery. Upon receipt of the painting, Ossorio noticed that a six-by-nine-inch portion of the paint—the skin from the top of an opened paint can—had slid, leaving a "nondescript smear amidst the surrounding linear clarity."[12] Pollock offered to restore Ossorio's painting in his studio, where a photograph shows the painting partially hidden

Plates

1. Jackson Pollock
Mural. 1943–44 (dated "1943")
Oil on canvas
7 ft. 11¾ in. × 19 ft. 9½ in. (243.2 × 603.2 cm)
The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City.
Gift of Peggy Guggenheim. OT 102

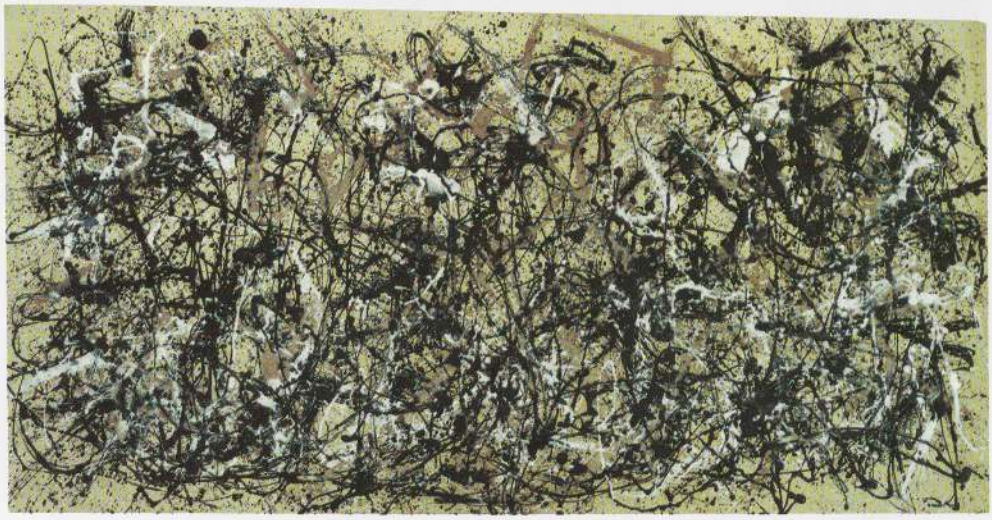
2. Jackson Pollock
Number 1A, 1948. 1948
Oil and enamel on canvas
68 in. × 8 ft. 8 in. (172.7 × 264.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase. OT 186

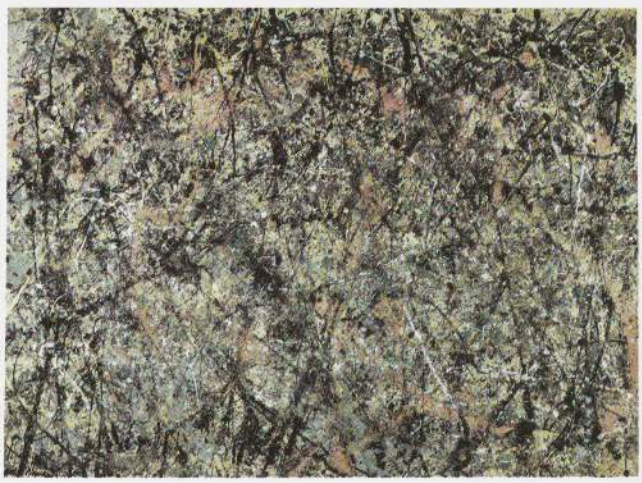




3. Jackson Pollock
Number 32, 1950. 1950
Enamel on canvas
8 ft. 10 in. × 15 ft. (269 × 457.5 cm)
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. OT 274

4. Jackson Pollock
One: Number 31, 1950. 1950
Oil and enamel paint on canvas
8 ft. 10 in. × 17 ft. 5⅞ in. (269.5 × 530.8 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection Fund (by exchange). OT 283





5. Jackson Pollock
Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950. 1950
Oil on canvas
8 ft. 9 in. × 17 ft. 3 in. (266.7 × 525.8 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
George A. Hearn Fund, 1957. OT 297

6. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950. 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

7. Jackson Pollock
Lucifer (detail). 1947
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
41 in. × 8 ft. 9½ in. (104.1 × 267.9 cm)
Collection Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson.
OT 185

8. Jackson Pollock
Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil on canvas
8 ft. 9 in. × 17 ft. 3 in. (266.7 × 525.8 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
George A. Hearn Fund, 1957. OT 297

9. Jackson Pollock
Number 32, 1950 (detail). 1950
Enamel on canvas
8 ft. 10 in. × 15 ft. (269 × 457.5 cm)
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. OT 274

10. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

11. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

12. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

13. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

14. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail, shot under ultraviolet light). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

15. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

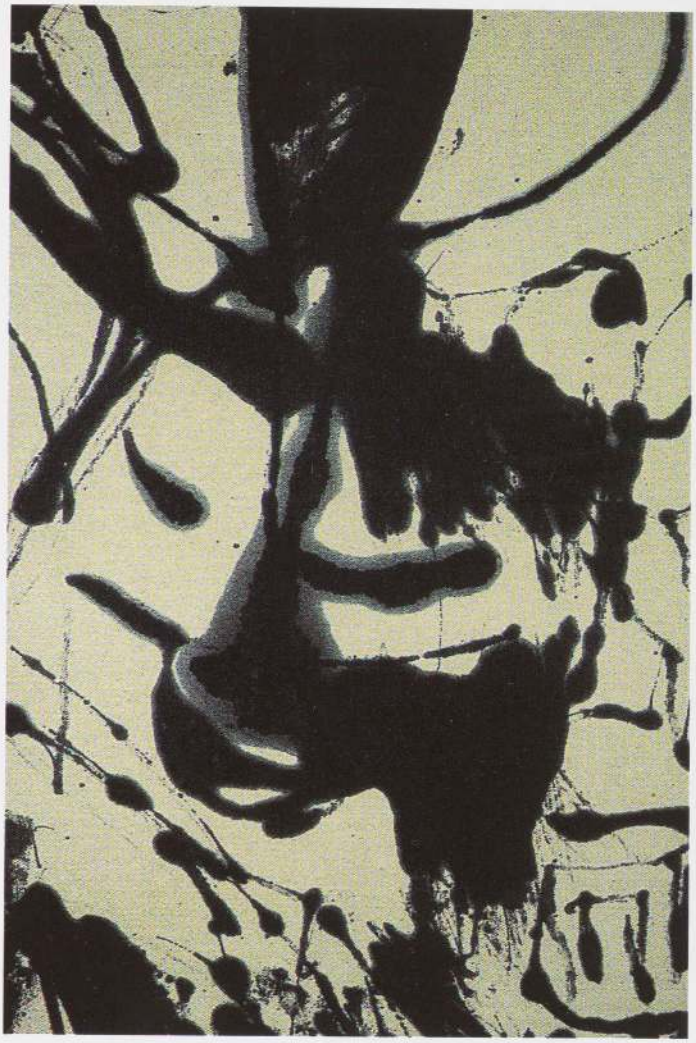
16. Jackson Pollock
Croaking Movement (Sounds in the Grass Series) (detail). 1946
Oil on canvas
54 × 44⅛ in. (137 × 112.1 cm)
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. OT 161

17. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

18. Jackson Pollock
Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950 (detail, shot under ultraviolet light). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
7 ft. 3 in. × 9 ft. 10 in. (221 × 299.7 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. OT 264

19. Jackson Pollock
Number 28, 1950 (detail). 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
68 in. × 8 ft. 9 in. (172.7 × 266.7 cm)
Collection Muriel Kallis Newman, Chicago.
OT 260

20. Jackson Pollock
Echo: Number 25, 1951 (detail). 1951
Enamel on canvas
7 ft. 7⅞ in. × 7 ft. 2 in. (233.4 × 218.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest and the Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller Fund. OT 345



21. Jackson Pollock
Number 22, 1951 (detail). 1951
Oil and enamel on canvas
58⅛ × 45⅛ in. (147.6 × 114.6 cm)
Collection Denise and Andrew Saul. OT 344

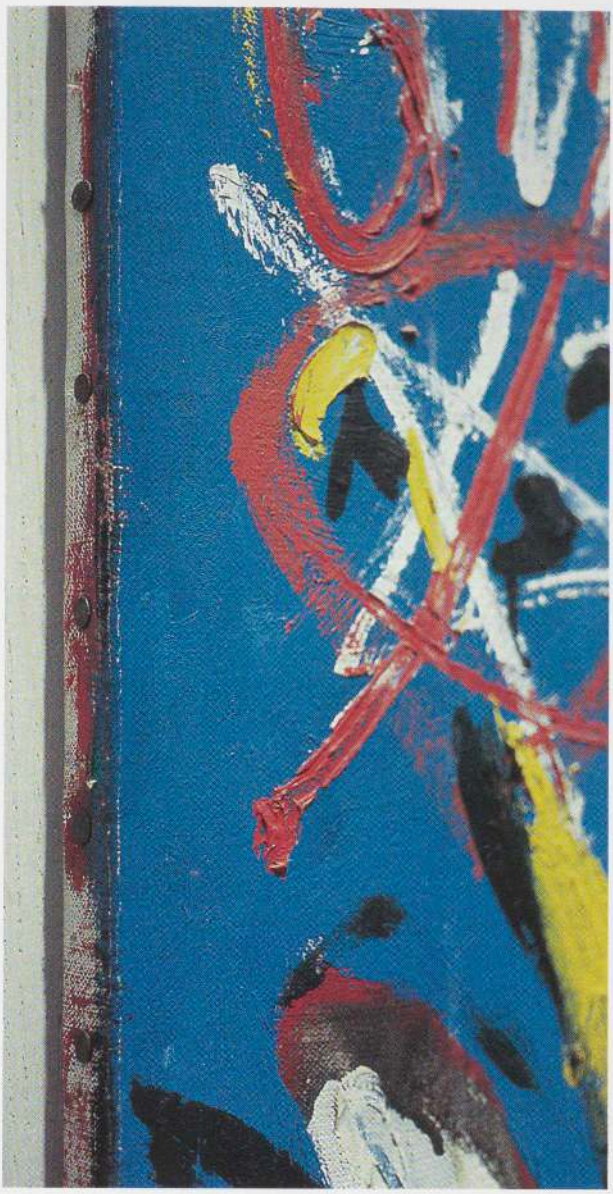
22. Jackson Pollock
Blue Poles: Number II, 1952 (detail). 1952
Enamel and aluminum paint with glass on canvas
6 ft. 10⅞ in. × 15 ft. 11⅝ in. (210 × 486.8 cm)
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. OT 367

23. Jackson Pollock
Convergence: Number 10, 1952 (detail). 1952
Oil and enamel on canvas
7 ft. 9½ in. × 12 ft. 11 in. (237.4 × 393.7 cm)
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.
Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1956. OT 363

24. Jackson Pollock
White Light (detail). 1954
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
48¼ × 38¼ in. (122.4 × 96.9 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The
Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection. OT 380

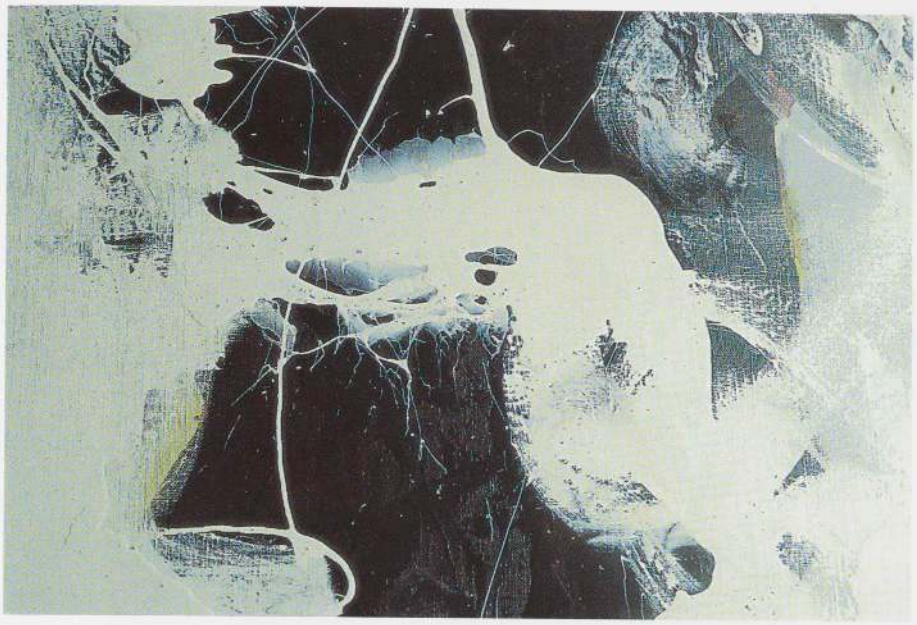
25. Jackson Pollock
The She-Wolf (detail). 1943
Oil, gouache, and plaster on canvas
41⅞ × 67 in. (106.4 × 170.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase. OT 98

26. Jackson Pollock
The She-Wolf (detail). 1943
Oil, gouache, and plaster on canvas
41⅞ × 67 in. (106.4 × 170.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase. OT 98



27. Jackson Pollock
The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle (detail). c. 1943
Oil on canvas
43⅛ × 40¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. (109.5 × 104 cm)
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de Création Industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Donated by Frank K. Lloyd, Paris, 1979. OT 90

28. Jackson Pollock
Totem Lesson 2 (detail). 1945
Oil on canvas
6 ft. × 60 in. (182.8 × 152.4 cm)
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
OT 122



29. Jackson Pollock
The Deep (detail). 1953
Oil and enamel on canvas
7 ft. 2¾ in. × 59⅛ in. (220.4 × 150.2 cm)
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de Création Industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Donated by The Menil Foundation, Houston, 1975. OT 372

30. Jackson Pollock
Ocean Greyness (detail). 1953
Oil on canvas
57¾ in. × 7 ft. 6⅛ in. (146.7 × 229 cm)
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. OT 369

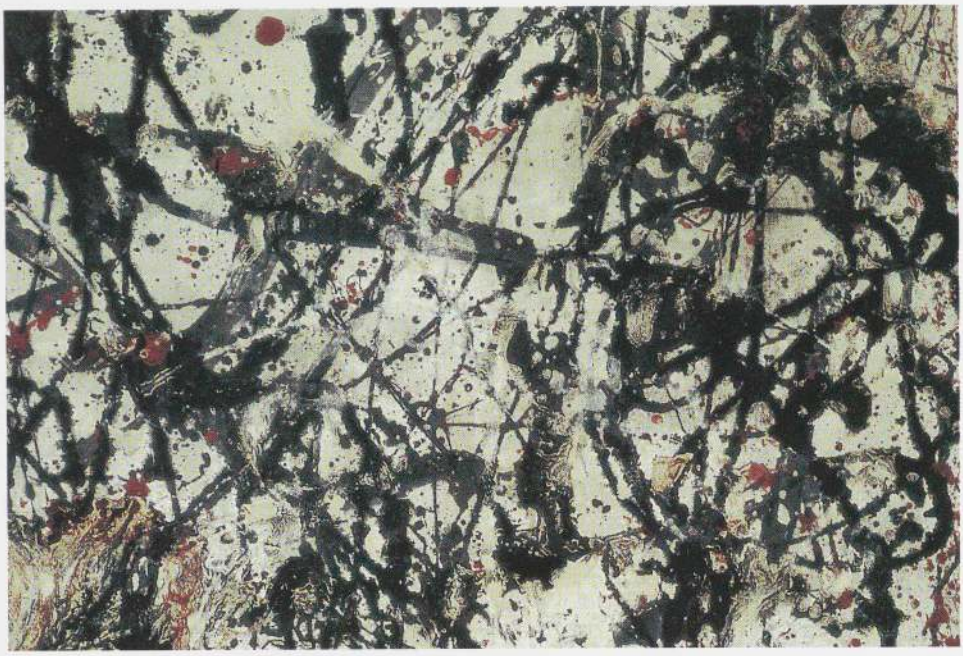
31. Jackson Pollock
Shimmering Substance (Sounds in the Grass Series) (detail). 1946
Oil on canvas
30⅛ × 24¼ in. (76.3 × 61.6 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Albert Lewin and Mrs. Sam A. Lewisohn Funds. OT 164

32. Jackson Pollock
Ritual (detail). 1953
Oil on canvas
7 ft. 6½ in. × 42½ in. (229.9 × 108 cm)
Collection Robert and Jane Meyerhoff,
Phoenix, Maryland. OT 376

33. Helen Frankenthaler
Mountains and Sea. 1952
Oil on canvas
7 ft. 2⅝ in. × 9 ft. 9¼ in. (220 × 297.8 cm)
Collection the artist. On extended loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

34. Helen Frankenthaler
Before the Caves. 1958
Oil on canvas
8 ft. 6⅜ in. × 8 ft. 8⅛ in. (260 × 265.1 cm)
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum. Anonymous gift

35. Helen Frankenthaler
Seven Types of Ambiguity. 1957
Oil on canvas
7 ft. 11½ in. × 70⅛ in. (242.6 × 178 cm)
Private collection



36. Jackson Pollock
Enchanted Forest (detail). 1947
Oil on canvas
7 ft. 3⅛ in. × 45⅛ in. (221.3 × 114.6 cm)
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. OT 173

37. Jackson Pollock
Number 20, 1948 (detail). 1948
Enamel on paper
20½ × 26 in. (52 × 66 cm)
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute Museum of Art, Utica, New York. Edward W. Root Bequest. OT 191

Fig. 5. Pollock and Lee Krasner with *Number 5, 1948*, **in his studio in The Springs, Long Island**

behind Pollock and his wife, Lee Krasner (fig. 5). When the owner saw it again, three weeks later, he was struck by the work's "new qualities of richness and depth . . . a result of a thorough but subtle overpainting. The original concept remained unmistakably present, but affirmed and fulfilled by a new complexity and depth of linear interplay. It was, and still is," he concluded, "a masterful display of control and disciplined vision."[13] Ossorio once described *Number 5* as "a wonderful example of an artist having a second chance."[14] Perhaps it was an example not so much of a second chance to rethink a picture as of Pollock allowing a second painting to evolve out of his material process. As Motherwell aptly concluded, "Since painting is his thought's medium, the resolution must grow out of the process of his painting itself."[15]

Pollock sometimes employed the unconventional practice of placing hardened paint skins in his paintings, as for example in *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30,*

1950 (plate 5). He seemed to appreciate both the receptivity of the dried upper crust to subsequent layering and the attraction of the viscous underside to what lay beneath. He also responded to the curious beauty of these skins, as a whimsical work on paper of c. 1946 called *The Debutante* confirms (fig. 6): the paint skin is folded in a way that humorously suggests an elaborate "coming out" gown, and is placed on a magazine advertisement for "Debutante and Misses coats in Seal Skin Satin," which Pollock has embellished strategically in black. Again we see him responding to imagery with another layer of paint, although here it is to the given imagery of a found object. The rebellious overtones of *The Debutante* are clear: in a context of high fashion, Pollock confronts the viewer with a crass paint skin, which could be a symbol of his own iconoclastic use of materials, many of them making their own debut in the context of fine art.

Fig. 6. Jackson Pollock. *The Debutante*. **c. 1946. Ink and collage of partially dried enamel "skin" from paint can on magazine page, page: 13½ x 11½ in. (34.2 x 29.2 cm). Private collection**

One such material was fiberboard, which Pollock used as a support over twenty-five times between the early 1930s and 1950, working alternately on the smooth and the rough sides of the material.[16] (This preference is not surprising given his comment of 1947, "I need the resistance of a hard surface."[17]) Although he may first have been attracted to fiberboard by its durability and availability, he also appears to have appreciated its color, since he made brown grounds the prevailing characteristic of a number of works on other supports, among them at least four paintings of this period on commercial brown fabric.[18] Traditionally, artists have used colored grounds to tone down or otherwise affect the colors of the design layer. Pollock, however, used paints that were not particularly translucent, so his use of a dark ground may perhaps be better explained by a passage from Frederic Taubes's book *The Technique of Oil Painting*, which was in the Pollock-Krasner library: "The imprimatura [or a tone glazed over a white ground] performs the task of relieving the eye from the monotony of the white ground—and it unifies the tonality of the painting."[19] In other words, Pollock may have appreciated the immediate presence of a color, a manufactured filling-in, of sorts, that was inherent to the support material and spared him the confrontation with a white surface.

Pollock's deliberate experimentation with interactive grounds is evident in *Enchanted Forest* (1947; plate 36). In its scale and its dark-colored support, this painting recalls *Number 5*. There, however, the colors sit up on the hard fiberboard support, whereas in *Enchanted Forest* they bleed into the unprimed fabric, creating an elusive image. Close examination of the tacking edges suggests that the initial application of paint occurred on what is now the reverse of the fabric. Although the back of the painting was subsequently covered by an auxiliary cloth (applied by a conservator), a shadow of the original paint layer can still be discerned through this unattached lining. Evidently Pollock applied paint on one side, turned the canvas over, and then created *Enchanted Forest* in response to the bleed-through from the other side.

Apparently abandoning this technique for further development on canvas,[20] Pollock returned to it in 1951 when he allowed colored inks to penetrate a stack of thin Japanese papers, then proceeded to create new works in response to the bleed-throughs. As Bernice Rose has written, "The paper formed an absorbent membrane through which the ink bled onto the sheets below, leaving less substantial traces for the same marks as they were absorbed by underlying sheets. Pollock would then remove the first sheet, sometimes modify that, then modify the second sheet, sometimes reversing it back to front to form a mirror image (the image could be seen on both sides of the sheet because the paper was absorbent), and work further on that." Produced in such a series, the works on paper offered Pollock an extended opportunity to work in response to initial markings, creating, Rose concludes, "an ambiguity of presence and identity . . . among the works themselves—a dialogue between possibility and choice."[21]

A year after the breakthrough drip paintings of 1947, Pollock progressed to a series of black and white pours, on paper and canvas, that include *Number 11A, 1948 (Black, White and Gray)* (fig. 7) and *Untitled (White on Black I)*. These visually complex works represent another departure for Pollock, in which he began to play with the viscosity and variable drying rates of enamel paint. In effect he increased the challenge of his method by pouring paint not onto the oxidized substrates of earlier paintings, or the hardened skins of dried enamel, but into wet paint that would respond physically to the line as it dried. On top of a standard gesso ground, the artist coated the canvas with a base layer of either white or black enamel paint. Then he poured lines of the opposite color of the same medium on top, allowing the undercolor to swell up and move into the line.

The effect is as beautiful as it is difficult to accomplish. It took several attempts to reproduce it, and in the process we learned that both the base layer and the line must be of the same medium. In the left quadrant of our simulation of the process (fig. 8), black enamel paint is poured onto water-based gesso; there is no interaction. In the other quadrants, black enamel paint is poured onto white enamel. The quality of the lines varies according to the viscosity of the

Fig. 7. Jackson Pollock. *Number 11A, 1948 (Black, White and Gray)*. **1948. Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas, 66 x 33 in. (167.6 x 83.8 cm). Private collection**

underlying paint and the drying time between applications. Perhaps the most dramatic visualization of the process appears in the upper central quadrant of the simulation. Following the black line off the white enamel underlayer and onto the gesso ground at the farthest right reach, we note that it does not react once it leaves the white enamel underlayer.

The possibilities explored by this technically diverse body of work informed Pollock's full exploration of line in the classic pours of 1950 and the black pours of 1951. Still working in response to an initial figurative device, or to underlying skeins of paint, Pollock used whatever method he needed to achieve the effects he desired, and expertly manipulated the differently absorptive properties of bare and sized canvas. In *Number 1, 1952*, he stapled a toned commercial fabric (judging from its narrow width) to a solid support, then applied an initial black pour that provided an underlying structure for the subsequent application of paint. Following the practice established in the 1951 black pours, he next gave the painting a clear coat, presumably of Rivit glue. Eventually he embellished the design layer with white and colored paint applied both with a brush and directly from the tube; then, lying the painting flat, he applied the final black pour. Scrutiny of the exposed areas of uncoated fabric (those once protected by the original staples along the top and bottom, as well as a tacking edge now overstretched along the work's left side) confirms the evolution of a process wherein the artist responded with textured color and poured black to an earlier state of a painting characterized by a black pour on a toned canvas.

Similarly, *Yellow Islands* of the same year is a synthesis of earlier techniques, including the initial construction of poured black forms on unprimed canvas, the application of tube oil paint with a brush on the upright support, sequential pours and brushing with white, and the defining black pour in enamel. Throughout Pollock alternated the orientation of the canvas from flat to vertical and back again to enable a particular technique to achieve a specific effect. At the last moment, with the painting upright, he flung a splash of black paint on the picture. This finishing touch took a great risk with the surface of an all-but-com-

pleted painting, and has the air of defiance that we noticed in *The Debutante*. Contradicting the more careful manipulation of the material underneath, the spontaneous action asserted that no matter how much control Pollock had achieved, he abandoned neither passion nor instinctive response: "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."[22]

In 1952, Pollock apparently launched into yet another technical departure with the introduction of a synthetic polymer paint that James Coddington describes more fully in his essay for this symposium. During that summer in East Hampton, Willem de Kooning introduced Pollock to Leonard Bocour, who had developed a paint called Magna Color. Often credited with supplying Morris Louis with this versatile resin, Bocour did claim on more than one occasion that Pollock used Magna Color for "all the late paintings." "He'd buy a gallon of this and a gallon of that. Seven or eight colors would come to three or four hundred dollars. But he never seemed to be concerned about the cost," remembers Bocour.[23] Using the new medium, Pollock could pour and mix colors directly on the canvas in a way he could not previously, as a comparison of the fluid color in *Convergence* and the enamel on linen in *Enchanted Forest* demonstrates. Yet despite the introduction of a new material, the method of the work of 1953–55 synthesizes what had come before.

Tony Vaccaro, who took several photographs of Pollock in his studio in August of 1953, well remembers the horizontal painting seen at the right of fig. 9. Pollock had said it was unfinished, but even so its fields of brilliant blue, red, and yellow left a lasting impression on the photographer.[24] A few months later, in a

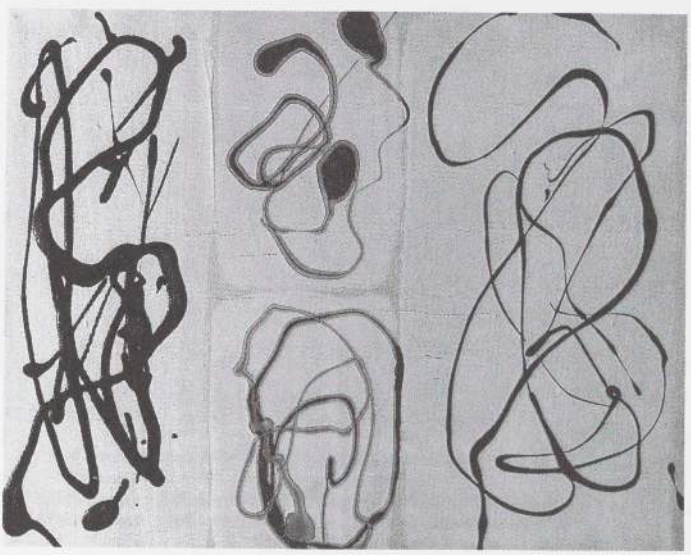


Fig. 8. Conservators' simulation of Pollock's technique in the black and white pours of 1948

letter to Sidney Janis, Pollock confided that "the painting (red-blue-yellow) you saw here this summer, I've destroyed. If the image was mine it will come back—at any rate it had me stuck and I felt it necessary to break it up."[25] Among other criteria, the size of this painting relative to *Ritual* (1953)—the work at its left in Vaccaro's photograph—led us to suspect that the unidentified work, reminiscent of Clyfford Still, was an original state of *The Deep* (1953). This theory was confirmed by examination with an infrared-sensitive camera that allowed us to see the composition beneath the visible surface (fig. 10).

Pollock began *The Deep* by stretching a white preprimed canvas, then brushed in forms with the canvas in an upright position, much as he had in the early-to-mid-1940s work. After a period of assessment, he changed the orientation of the canvas from a horizontal to a vertical format, then proceeded to brush selectively over the earlier forms with gray, as he had in *Totem Lesson 2*. As in that painting, he left something of the original conception visible. Subsequently he brushed on black, then, laying the canvas flat, poured on more black. Returning the stretcher to an upright position, he closed in the space with white paint, applied with such vigor that broken hairs from the brush remain caught in the

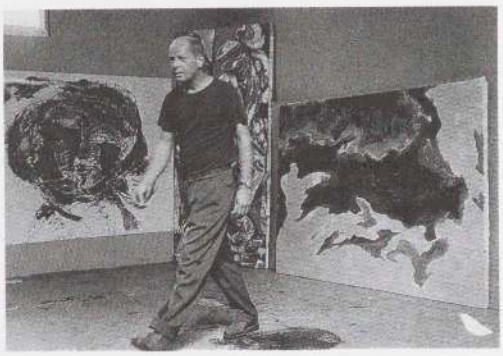


Fig. 9. Pollock in his studio in 1953. The horizontal canvas at the right is an original state of *The Deep* (1953). Photograph: Tony Vaccaro

Fig. 10. Jackson Pollock. *The Deep* (shot under infrared light). 1953. Oil and enamel on canvas, 7 ft. 2¾ in. x 59⅛ in. (220.4 x 150.2 cm). Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de Création Industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Donated by The Menil Foundation, Houston, 1975

medium. Changing pace, he again laid the canvas down flat, then lavishly poured liquid white paint, which crosses an abyss delineated by the brushwork. In former reworkings, each part of the picture plane had received practically equal treatment; in *The Deep*, however, the focus of the painting is a narrow window onto underlying layers of paint (plate 29). Texturally the surface imparts a haunting stillness and clarity that are unusual for Pollock.

Although perhaps reminiscent in imagery of *Head* (c. 1938–41) and of *Eyes in the Heat* (1946; p. 240, fig. 8), *Ocean Greyness*, painted the same year as *The Deep*, differs substantially in its construction from the earlier works. Pollock began with a thin, fluid, vibrantly colored paint that saturated the canvas and presumably provided formal elements to which he could respond. Recalling his experience with the 1951 black pours, he then seems to have covered this initial paint layer with Rivit glue, much as he had in *Number 1, 1952*. Pollock then delineated form with traditional oil paint, producing ridges of impasto with a brush. These he selectively covered with black enamel, applied with the canvas in various orientations, judging from drips that run in opposite directions. Finally he used a familiar gray paint, thickened with particulate matter in a fashion reminiscent of *The She-Wolf*. These layers he further embellished with squeezes from tubes of oil paint. The specific techniques are familiar; the conglomerate is not.

One of the vortexlike eyes in the upper left quadrant of *Ocean Greyness* is actually a gap that reveals the initial paint layer (plate 30). This is not the only painting in which Pollock reserved a bit of the initial paint or ground as a sort of reference point; isolated from surrounding layers of paint, these eyes into his process may be found in *Troubled Queen* (c. 1945), *Shimmering Substance* (1946; plate 31), *Eyes in the Heat*, *The Key*, *Easter and the Totem* (1953; p. 239, fig. 6), and *Ritual* (plate 32), among other paintings. While these eyes function on a compositional level, they also make a statement about process. By including earlier paint layers in the final design, Pollock reminds us that these underlayers do not simply represent discarded versions of the painting. Rather, they are crucial stages in the dialogue of creation and response from which each work evolved.

Pollock's experimentation with multiple layers signals an artist who is driven by material process and who is always conscious of what came before. Whether he responds to stains on a ground, to the imagery of a former painting or found object, to the physical properties of a wet or crusty underlayer, or to the topography of overlapping skeins of paint, Pollock integrates what comes before into what he creates anew. Just as the manipulation of materials for visual effect engages him, so does an instinctively exploratory manner of working. Pollock said himself, "Painting is self discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."[26] In so doing, Pollock does not conceal the history of his creations but leaves it visible as part of the works' ongoing dialogue.

Notes

1. Roberto Matta, Notebook No. 1, 1936–44, published in *Entretiens Morphologiques*, ed. G. Ferrari (London: Sistan Limited, 1987), p. 232.
2. "Narration Spoken by Jackson Pollock in Film by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg 1951," in Hans Namuth, Barbara Rose, Rosalind Krauss, et al., *Pollock Painting*, ed. Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications Ltd., 1980), n.p. Originally published as *L'Atelier de Jackson Pollock* (Paris: Macula, 1978).
3. Peter Busa, quoted in Sidney Simon, "Concerning the Beginnings of the New York School: 1939–1943," *Art International* 11 no. 6 (Summer 1967): 20.
4. Robert Motherwell, quoted in B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), p. 63.
5. See Kirk Varnedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," in Varnedoe with Pepe Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), note 81, p. 81, and Elizabeth Levine and Anna Indych, "Chronology," in ibid., note 17, p. 329.
6. The contradictory statements regarding Pollock's painting of *Mural* defy inclusion in one reasonable scenario. The prevailing view, held by Lee Krasner and John Little among others, is that it was painted in one fifteen-hour session the night before it was installed in Peggy Guggenheim's townhouse, in mid-January, 1944. See Stephen Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1989), p. 468. Leaving aside conclusive evidence provided by the topography of the painting, it is highly unlikely that the painting could have been unstretched, rolled, transported, and then restretched within hours of its completion. The oil paint would not have dried sufficiently to allow such handling without significant smearing of the paint—a consequence ruled out by the current state of *Mural*. Furthermore, enough time evidently elapsed between the completion of the painting and its removal from the studio for the arrangement of a photo session (see figs. 1–3), and also for Pollock's subsequent reworking of the painting, registered in a photograph of him and Peggy Guggenheim with *Mural* in her townhouse (see Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, p. 320). Perhaps the all-night session did occur as Krasner and Little remember; but subsequently Pollock probably continued to work on the canvas over several days, as reported by Harold Lehman (see Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 866), during which time the work was documented and finished.

Similarly, a contradiction remains between Krasner's summary of events and Pollock's statement in the card to his brother Frank. Clearly Pollock had planned to paint *Mural* during the summer; he wrote to his brother Charles that he had stretched the canvas in July (see ibid., p. 864). In writing to Frank, however, who by Jackson's own admission was worried about his younger brother's painting (see ibid., p. 462), perhaps Pollock neglected to describe the delayed realization of the work, choosing instead to emphasize his satisfaction in creating such a large painting, especially now that it was done.
7. See Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, pp. 468–69.
8. In some earlier works, such as *Bird* (c. 1938–41) and *The Magic Mirror* (1941; reproduced in, for example, Ellen G. Landau, *Jackson Pollock* [New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989], p. 68), Pollock made sand a distinctive feature of the paint, but in *The She-Wolf* he used it more for a controlled emphasis of line and expression.
9. In *The She-Wolf* and *Guardians of the Secret* Pollock prominently signed and dated the works on the paint surface with both the month and the year of execution: 8.43 and 8-43 respectively. Although Pollock commonly signed and dated his works on the front, back, and/or on the stretcher bars, in only nine paintings did he note the month as well as the year. Of those nine paintings, only *The She-Wolf*, *Guardians of the Secret*, and *Totem Lesson 1* (1944) have the full inscription incorporated into the design layer. Clearly these paintings held a particular significance for the artist, who apparently wanted to remember precisely when he had painted them. Perhaps Pollock regarded his use of industrial paint in the 1943 works as a breakthrough, and perhaps he found the filling in of spaces around forms to emphasize and in other instances to create shapes equally significant.
10. See Pepe Karmel, "Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth," in Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, note 62, p. 136.
11. Following the suggestion of Francis V. O'Connor, in *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works. Supplement Number One* (New York: The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc, 1995), p. 78, we explored the notion that *Sea Change* is a reworking of the unidentified framed painting photographed in Pollock's studio by Wilfrid Zogbaum (see Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, p. 322). The size of *Sea Change* certainly seemed appropriate, and its title, presumably taken from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (act 1, scene 2), suited the idea of a re-creation. An X-radiograph made in New York proved inconclusive, however, in part because of the nature of the paint layers and in part because the painting had been subsequently lined onto a solid support. Fortunately, the Seattle Museum of Art had a photograph of the reverse of the canvas before the original stretcher was removed. Comparison of that archival photo with the Zogbaum photograph indicates that *Sea Change* was probably the vertical painting seen in reverse at the right of the photograph rather than the framed work. We thank Trevor Fairbrother of the Seattle Museum of Art for agreeing to our investigation of *Sea Change* and for providing important documentary information.
12. Alfonso Ossorio, lecture given at Yale University, November 1978. See the Ossorio papers in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Reel 3888.
13. Ibid.
14. Ossorio, quoted in Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1985, and reprint ed. Wainscott, N.Y.: Pushcart Press, 1987), p. 106.
15. Motherwell, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, p. 62.
16. The catalogue raisonné reports these supports as "masonite." Since we have been unable to determine when a board was manufactured by the Masonite Corporation and when it was not, we have used the term "fiberboard" to describe supports of this type.
17. Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* no. 1 (Winter 1947–48): 79.
18. Those works were *The Wooden Horse: Number 10A, 1948*; *Number 13A, 1948: Arabesque*; *White Cockatoo: Number 24A, 1948*; and *Number 2, 1949*.
19. Frederic Taubes, *The Technique of Oil Painting* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1941), p. 49.
20. It would be uncharacteristic of

Pollock to experiment with only one painting of any type. Although James Coddington and I have not examined *Number 26A, 1948: Black and White* (catalogue raisonné number 187), the work's size and character, as seen in reproduction, make it a possible candidate for further investigation.

21. Bernice Rose, *Jackson Pollock: Drawing into Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 21.

22. Pollock, "My Painting," p. 79.

23. Leonard Bocour, in an interview of February 7, 1985, in the Morris Louis and Morris Louis Estate Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. I would like to thank Jan Marontate, Department of Sociology, Acadia University, Nova Scotia, for her invaluable help in documenting Pollock's use of Bocour's Magna Color. Likewise, Tony Vaccaro enlarged sections of his photographs in an effort to identify the boxes of paint in Pollock's studio, and Michael Skalka at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., provided photo-documentation of the packaging of Magna Color. I thank them for their interest and cooperation.

24. Vaccaro, conversation with the author, James Coddington, and Anna Indych, November 17, 1998. We are indebted to Vaccaro for providing us with his photographs, and to O'Connor for bringing them to our attention.

25. Pollock, letter to Sidney Janis, [1953], published in O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 4:271.

26. Pollock, quoted in Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1957), p. 82.

The Crisis of the Easel Picture

Rosalind E. Krauss

I remember the expression on Lee Krasner's face that afternoon in her apart-ment. It was late spring of 1982. We were meeting over our shared consternation at E. A. Carmean's efforts to link Jackson Pollock's black paintings not just circumstantially but thematically—liturgically—to an abortive church project by Tony Smith. Carmean's essay, published in French in the catalogue of the big Pollock exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, was now to appear in *Art in America*, and the magazine's editor, Betsy Baker, aware of Lee's as well as my own vigorous objections, had asked me to write an accompanying reply.[1]

As we settled into our chairs Lee exploded. "First it was Carl Jung and now, and now," she said, "it's Jesus!" The opening syllable of that name was given as a protracted moan; but the second snapped the word shut: *Je-e-e-zus*. It was not Jewish rage that sounded behind her pronunciation—although there was some of that—but high modernist exasperation. As with so many other artists and intellectuals who had developed in the 1930s, modernism was for her a creed, a belief, a deepest form of commitment. It was both a politics and a religion; and Lee, in the closeness of her relationship with Clement Greenberg from those days, would have agreed with the kind of thing he was expressing when he wrote, "The alternative to Picasso is not Michelangelo, but kitsch," with the result that "today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture"—by which he meant avant-garde culture—"we have right now."[2]

That scene returns to me as I puzzle over The Museum of Modern Art's Pollock exhibition, in all its gorgeousness, its generosity, and its perversity. I imagine Lee's response: "First it was Jung, then it was Jesus, but now it's . . . " who shall we say? Leonardo? Michelangelo? Raphael?

The climax of Pepe Karmel's essay in the catalogue makes the connection, and the claim, in its barest form. Having tracked Pollock's working process by means of digitized composites built up out of Hans Namuth's complete inventory of still and cinematic photography (figs. 1–4), and having shown the occurrence of vertical, figurelike constellations at various levels of the work (both at the beginning, where Pollock is marking bare canvas, and at intermediary stages,

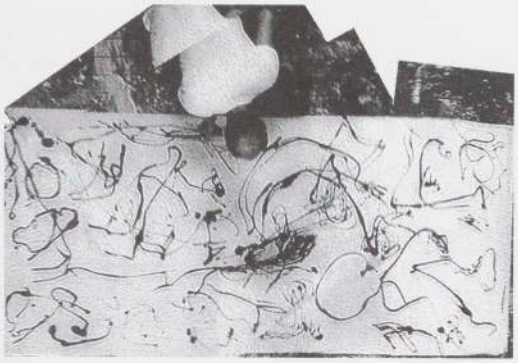


Fig. 1. Jackson Pollock completing the first layer of *Number 27, 1950*. **Composite of frames from the black and white film by Hans Namuth**

Fig. 2. Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* **in an early state, after the completion of the original configurations at right and center. Composite from photographs by Hans Namuth**

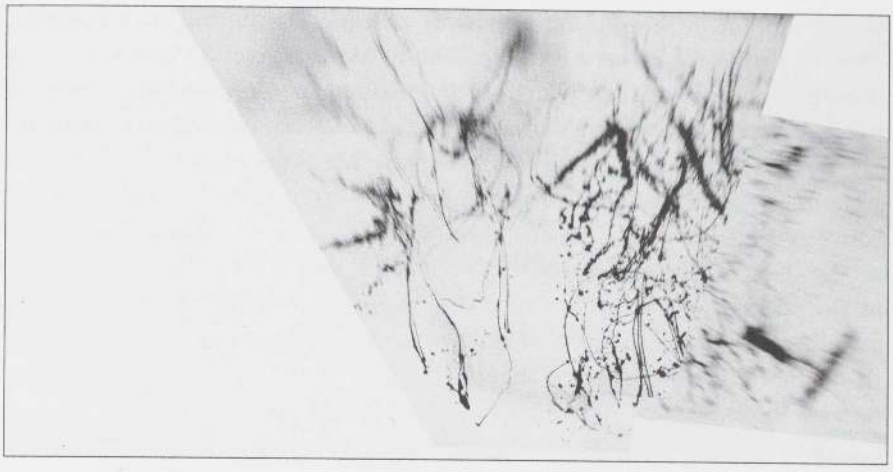
Fig. 3. Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* **in an intermediate state, after the completion of the configuration at the left end. Composite from photographs by Hans Namuth**

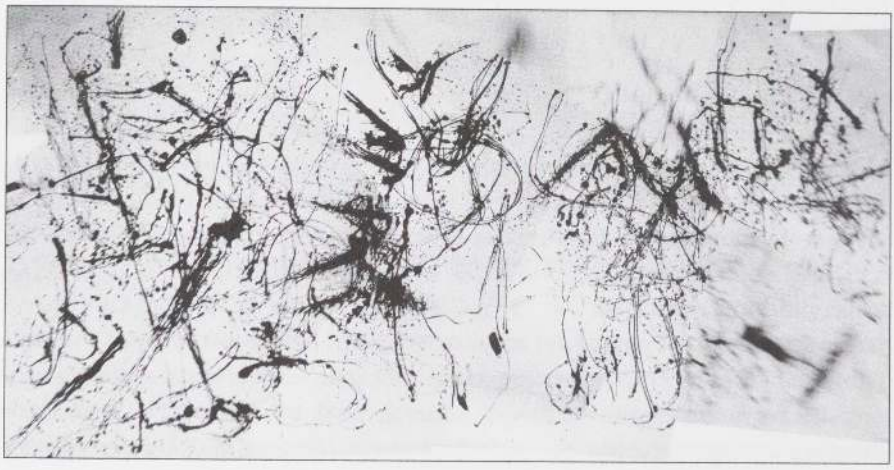
Fig. 4. Pollock's *One: Number 31, 1950*, **highlighting features added to the painting between the last stage documented in Hans Namuth's photographs and the finished canvas**

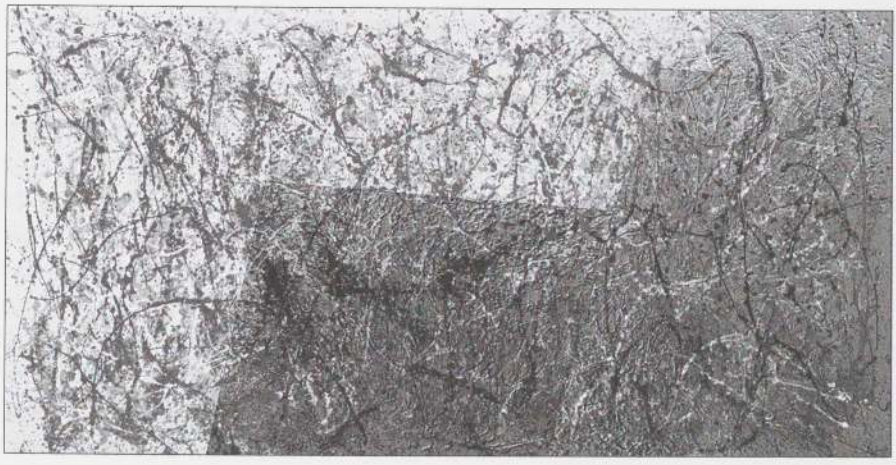
where they are superimposed over the developing web), Karmel freely identifies these vertical bundles as a form of human figuration and characterizes the line with which Pollock executed them as "a controlled and deliberate" mode of drawing. And from this presentation of Pollock as a draftsman, with the necessary control and deliberation that drawing's access to the representation of the figure requires, Karmel slips over into the domain of the Renaissance. Quoting William Rubin's remark that "Pollock's drawing derives from a tradition in which space is not thought of as an autonomous void but in reciprocity with solids," and further that Pollock's lines still carry "the connotations of dissolved sculptural conceptions," Karmel asks triumphantly, "Need it be said that the kind of space that exists 'in reciprocity with solids' is precisely the illusionistic space of Renaissance art?"[3]

Karmel does not of course just leave this characterization—in all its counterintuitive strangeness—at that. The notion that Pollock's space is nothing but another version of Renaissance illusionism would certainly play havoc with the idea of his work as revolutionary, or as having broken through to some new level of cultural experience. So the last three paragraphs of Karmel's essay hedge this a bit, reshaping this space according to something akin to late Monet or early Cubism. "Up close," he says, "each line reasserts itself as a potential contour, or a sculptural shape in its own right," yet as our eyes move over the surface, "new contours emerge as old ones merge back into the web."[4]

Now, although Greenberg also sometimes used Analytic Cubism as a metaphor for what was happening in Pollock's work, from 1947 on he consistently saw Pollock's importance as pointing "a way beyond the easel, beyond the mobile, framed picture, to the mural, perhaps."[5] This idea of escaping the tradition of the easel painting not only became Greenberg's central critical model for explaining Pollock's radicality in the years between 1947 and 1950, but would







be the support for everything he saw as valuable in painting after Pollock. In 1948 he linked the attack on the framed, illusionistic picture to a kind of "all-over, polyphonic" address which, in its "hallucinated uniformity," went even beyond Arnold Schoenberg's notion of compositional equivalence.[6] This is to say, he focused his critique on what he saw as the conventions arising from the scale of the easel picture, its portability seeming to call for a choreography between centers of interest inside the field and the frame that bound or enclosed it. The allover picture dispersed those centers, just as it suggested the dissolution of the specific medium of easel painting into a larger category that would include architectural friezes and oriental scrolls or carpets.[7] It was not just the shared flatness of these objects that he found satisfying but the openness of their surfaces to inspection—what he called their "positivity."[8]

By 1955, however, Greenberg had refined this idea of the repetitiveness or polyphony of the allover picture to what he had begun to see as the deep source of its transgressiveness, which was the elimination of value contrast: the abrogation of that linear armature of dark against light that had formed the structure of easel painting from the Renaissance onward. Saying that Cubism's parody of shading had nonetheless sustained the importance of light and shadow, Greenberg saw in the total suppression of value contrast "a new kind of flatness, one that breathes and pulsates," one in which lines might divide "but do not enclose or bound," and, further, one that creates "an environment" more than a picture. Pollock's great works of 1950, he said, had participated in just this radical condition. Looking back in 1955, Greenberg wrote, "In *One* and *Lavender Mist* Jackson Pollock had pulverized value contrasts in a vaporous dust of interfused lights and darks in which every suggestion of a sculptural effect was obliterated."[9]

If I am going over this all-too-familiar ground, it is to underscore the stakes involved in promoting the idea of Pollock as a draftsman, of deciding to read his line as contour rather than its dissolution, of tying Pollock back into traditional practice through any one of the number of strategies that one finds in the context of this exhibition.

One of these strategies occurred in the placement of the three drawing cabinets within the exhibition, the middle one grouping work from a three-year period, from 1944 to 1946, and presenting it as though it were a sketchlike prelude to the onset of the classic drip pictures of 1947. Indeed this foregrounding of the sketch—with all its connotations of the possibility of exploration and variation, as an idea is moved through the successive phases of its development (fig. 5, and p. 91, fig. 20)—is central to the picture of the traditional artist's deliberation and control, which is to say the picture of the artist as an intentional being. That Pollock would have produced variations on essentially the same sketchlike armature—with changes rung on what is limited to its stylistic decor, now more of André Masson, now of Wols—implies just such a picture. It is only

Fig. 5. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled*. **1944. Black and color ink on paper, 18⅞ x 24⅞ in. (48 x 63.2 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago. Ada Turnbull Hertle Fund and gifts of Mrs. Leigh B. Block, Margaret Fisher, William H. Hartmann, and Joseph R. Shapiro**

when we ask what it means that this same armature recurs periodically over three or more years, rather than in a single run of work, that it begins to feel more like a rote formula to which he had recourse, even unconscious recourse; like the repeated looping constellations that had, by 1943, become so automatic a formal pattern for him that he could paint the twenty-foot-long Peggy Guggenheim mural during a furious one-night stand of work (plate 1).[10]

The emphasis on drawing not as this kind of device but as a form of controlled variation, as the very vehicle of intentionality, is carried in the exhibition to the curious display of a group of conservators' failed attempts to imitate Pollock's line. In the catalogue it is to be found in the repeated illustration of sumptuous life-sized details of the drip pictures, as though in the very gamut that the building up of the web can run, we will encounter—now displaced to the technique of depositing the paint itself—the controlled variability that drawing brings to a given conception. Thus through the twelve details of the drip pictures (there are only two for work after 1950 and only four for what precedes 1947), we are invited to explore at leisure the brushed scumbles of wet-into-wet, the high-sitting ropes of tube-squeezed paint, the scabbing and lifting of pockets of coagulation, the pulled surface of aluminum deposit, the tarry pocketing

within the matte graphics of pigment seeping into its ground, the rivulets and spatters, the blurring, the marbleizing, the staining, the running, the bleeding (plates 7 and 9).

It would be churlish not to be grateful for details such as these; but it would be naive not to understand their gravitational pull. For the way they work, along with the arguments in the catalogue texts and everything else to which I've alluded, is to present Pollock as a draftsman, beginning—as one could claim is true for the whole tradition of Western art—with line as the foundation of expression and representation, indeed, of art's very claim to seriousness.

But Greenberg had lodged Pollock's claim to seriousness in negating this tradition, or rather in transcending the oppositions on which it was founded. If he spoke of Pollock's line as *malerische*—invoking Heinrich Wölfflin's word, which went beyond the "painterly" to encompass the idea of "color"[11]—it was because he saw this line not just paradoxically turning against itself but dialectically sublating itself, becoming one with its opposite in a way that moved both line and color beyond the physicality of their material substance and into that particular phenomenological condition—or mode of address—he would call first "hallucinated," then "optical."[12]

Two other major lines of attack on the idea of Pollock as a draftsman followed Greenberg's. One was produced by the action painting model, which continued into the choreographic or "Happenings" idea of Pollock's legacy promoted by Allan Kaprow, among others (fig. 6).[13] Since in this model the work is acting between art and life, it relegates line to nothing but the residue of an activity of marking real space, rendering the whole question of drawing simply irrelevant.

The other line of attack was the "anti-form" or *informe* interpretation first laid out by Robert Morris in the 1960s[14] and further theorized by myself and Yve-Alain Bois in the 1990s.[15] Since this position has been reductively and misleadingly presented in the Pollock catalogue—as in the critical literature generated by the exhibition—and since it will form the basis of what I have to say here, it is (alas) necessary to summarize it. Briefly, it is the idea that Pollock's line, in undoing the traditional job of drawing (which is to create contour and bound form, thereby allowing for the distinction between figure and ground),

Fig. 6. Allan Kaprow. *Yard*. **1961. Photograph: Ken Heyman**

struck not only against drawing's object—which is form—but against form's matrix, which is verticality. Pollock's line produced the unheard-of condition of burrowing itself into the domain of the horizontal. That the import of the work should be this newly vectored horizontal dimension was testified to by what we could call a series of strong misreadings that developed in the ten years following Pollock's death. The "strong misreading"—the concept of the critic Harold Bloom—is not a *misunderstanding* on the part of a younger artist in his or her relation to a powerful older one, but rather something more like a perverse, but very canny, *deep* understanding, which liberates from within the target work a *potential* (often anarchic or transgressive) that had been hidden or obscured by the official, even self-professed, idea of the older artist's meaning.[16] In accordance with this, one could notice that artists as seemingly different as Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, and Morris were drawing the same interpretive conclusion, based on the singularity of Pollock's stroke and the way this stroke testifies to its own conditions of production: that Pollock's importance was lodged in an axial rotation of painting out of the vertical domain of the visual field and onto the horizontal vector of what I began to call (with one eye riveted on the stunning analyses of Georges Bataille) formlessness.

Thus, though the particularities of the interpretive connection to Pollock might differ—Twombly reading the aggressiveness of Pollock's stroke as graffiti; Warhol recoding its liquidity as peeing; Morris understanding its performative implications as unmaking or cutting—and though the mediums used to instantiate these readings might range from painting to sculpture, all three comprehend the horizontal itself as the condition of defeating form.

As Twombly develops the graffiti mark—from a mid-1950s expression of it as violence done to the creamy body of the pictorial surface by scoring and lacerating this physical ground, to a late-1950s implication of it as a scatter of genital organs, to the early-1960s production of it as the scatological result of the *corps morcelé* (fig. 7)—the attack that graffiti consistently performs is on the bodily gestalt: its visuality, its verticality, and its *Prägnanz* (or hanging-togetherness).[17] It is the failure of this unity that allows for the axis of instinctual behavior—a horizontal axis—to preside over the body, now reconsidered as the domain of the part object.

For Warhol, on the other hand, the testimony of the liquid puddles and stains on Pollock's canvases (combined of course with the commentary of Hans Namuth's photographs) renders these surfaces horizontal from the very beginning, redoubling the implications of Pollock's process as choreographic (as it is so often described in the critical literature). Further, his assumption that the horizontal simply *is* the scatological (an assumption expressed in the 1961 "piss painting" and the later *Oxidation* series, 1977–78; fig. 8) liberates a different form of violence from within this vector. Freud, in "Civilization and Its Discontents,"

Fig. 7. Cy Twombly. *The Italians*. **1961. Oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 6 ft. 6⅝ in. x 8 ft. 6¼ in. (199.5 x 259.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Blanchette Rockefeller Fund**

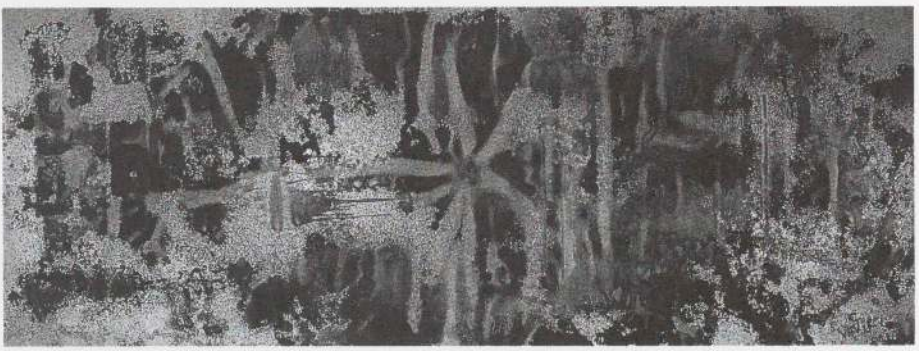


Fig. 8. Andy Warhol. *Oxidation Painting*. **1978. Mixed media on copper metallic, 6 ft. 6 in. x 17 ft. ½ in. (198 x 519.5 cm). Daros Collection, Switzerland**

Fig. 9. Robert Morris. *Untitled*. **1968. Felt, asphalt, mirrors, wood, copper tubing, steel cable, and lead, 21½ in. x 21 ft. 11 in. x 16 ft. 9 in. (54.6 x 668 x 510.5 cm), variable. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson**

describes this kind of violence as homoerotic rivalry enacted by peeing on the fire, in an unfettered instinctual drive that will subsequently be sublimated into the cultural obligation to protect the fire—the verticality of its flames now mirroring the erect posture of the civilized being.[18]

In Morris's case the nature of Pollock's stroke connected the "phenomenology of [its] making" to the pull of gravity, a force that produced the condition of the horizontal simultaneously with the scatter of formlessness. Morris himself baptized this mode "anti-form." His own way of miming its operations was to follow the steps of Pollock's process by laying great rolls of felt on the floor of his studio and veining their surfaces with an organized pattern of cuts (fig. 10). Greenberg had explained that the brilliance of Pollock's line was its avoidance of the hard edges that cut into space, thereby separating figure from ground. Morris, by taking the idea of line-as-cutting right to the limit, pushed it past the possibility of figuration,

Fig. 10. Robert Morris. *Untitled (Tangle)*. **1967. Felt, 1 in. (2.5 cm) thick; dimensions variable; Museum installation 9 ft. 8 in. x 8 ft. 10 in. x 58 in. (296.7 x 269.3 x 147.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson**

since as he lifted the felt from the floor, gravity wrenched apart the very continuum of the vertical field within which the gestalt could cohere, thereby cutting into the fabric of form.

The characterizations that have greeted this discussion have been, as I said, reductive and caricatural, isolating the Warhol example as a way of inoculating the entire analysis against its possible aesthetic relevance. Recoded as an interpretation literalized around "abjection," "bodily excretion," and "defilement," the complex structural issues of horizontality and the formless have been read out simply as an argument for "anti-art."[19]

Rather than complaining, however, what I propose to do here is to make theoretical use of this reductiveness by tying it to another, parallel reflex that has played an extremely important—and, I might say, increasingly destructive—role in the development of the art of the last thirty years. This was the decision to produce the most hypostatized possible reading of the outcome of what Greenberg called the "crisis of the easel picture" by understanding the modernist idea of medium specificity as the radical contraction of specificity itself into a physical characteristic (flatness) that would coincide with a material object: the painting, which could now be seen as equivalent either to a sculpture—Donald Judd's term was "specific object"—or to a readymade (Joseph Kosuth's reading of the monochrome).[20] This literalized understanding emptied out the idea of an aesthetic medium by simply making that medium synonymous with its material support.

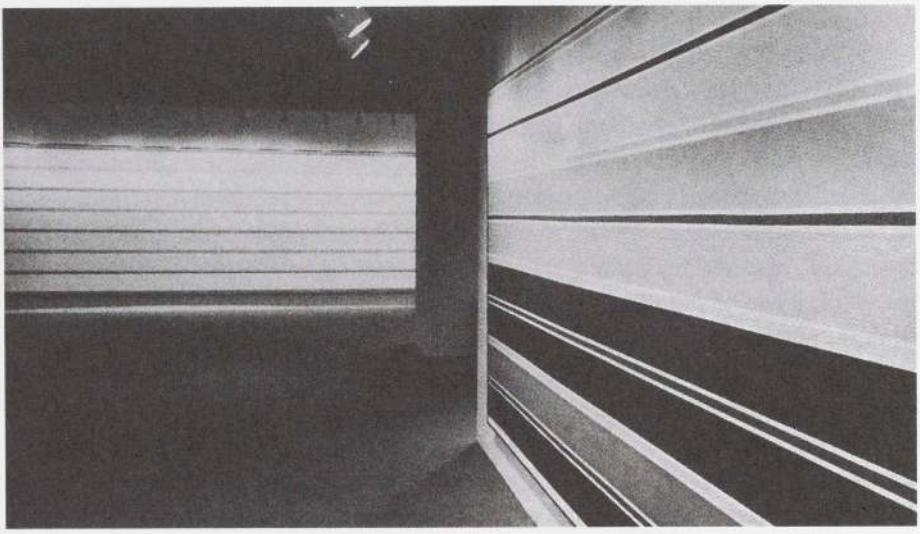
The outcome of this understanding has been double. Either the very idea of the medium is cashiered, since, contracted to the condition of a real object in real space, the objectified work becomes the locus for operations on that space in the mixture of mediums that defines the nature of the real world itself—Judd's specific object now turned into the international practice of installation art. Or—in another way of declaring our current inhabitation of what I would call a postmedium condition—the exploded concept of the medium is simply folded into the fact of *media*, which is to say the complex vehicles of broadcast, communications, and information technology.[21] The result of this semantic slippage between *medium* and *media* is that the loss of specificity is presented as a natural outcome (after all the media, in the sense of "communications media," are already "mixed," the inevitable combination of word and image); which means that the slide from the physical resistance of the aesthetic medium to the virtuality of the image world of media somehow goes without saying.[22]

That this reductive reading of the idea of a medium—of painting's specificity as a medium—was done in Greenberg's name is particularly ironic. Because at the very moment when he was seeing that the modernist logic had led to the point where "the observance of merely the two [constitutive conventions or norms of painting—flatness and the delimitation of flatness] is enough to create

an object which can be experienced as a picture,"[23] he had dissolved that object in the fluid of what he was sometimes calling "openness," at others "opticality," and ultimately, though perhaps least satisfactorily, "color field." Which is to say that no sooner had Greenberg seemed to isolate the essence of painting in flatness than he swung the axis of the field 90 degrees to the actual picture surface to place all the import of painting on the vector that connects viewer and object. In this he seemed to shift from the first norm (flatness) to the second (the delimitation of flatness), and to give this latter a reading which was not that of the bounding edge of the physical object but rather the projective resonance of the optical field itself—what in "Modernist Painting" he had called the "optical third dimension" created by "the very first mark on a canvas [which] destroys its literal and utter flatness."[24] This was the resonance he imputed to the effulgence of pure color, which he spoke of not only as disembodied and therefore purely optical, but also "as a thing that opens and expands the picture plane."[25]

Four things are to be observed in this axial rotation organized under the rubric of "opticality." The first is that there is a shift from the object to the subject, as the emphasis is displaced from a material surface to a mode of address, namely viewing. The second is that the phenomenology of this mode of address becomes the matrix out of which might be generated a new set of conventions or norms, based not on the properties of the object but on the categories of the subject—such as Michael Fried's notion of a "primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld."[26] The third is that insofar as opticality is a visual vector, it is always subtended by a sense of verticality; that is, the transcendental object it intends is something like the condition of possibility of form, or of the gestalt, and thus a kind of abstract matrix that is always organized as "frontoparallel" to its viewer, the verticality of the field that receives the gaze mirroring the posture of the upright subject.[27]

The fourth and last feature of this rotation is that, historically, it was meant to sustain a continuation of painting not only beyond the crisis of the easel picture but beyond the grip of the specific object. It was meant to allow something "powerful enough"—as Fried once put it—"to generate new conventions, a new art."[28] And this would mean that opticality was not simply a *feature* of art, but had become a *medium* of art. It was, one could say, a supportive matrix, the internal logic of which could be seen to generate its own expressive possibilities or conventions. That neither Greenberg nor Fried explored the optical as a new medium, but instead concentrated on color field painting as something like a new possibility for abstraction, meant that a variety of these expressive conditions were never theorized.[29] The seriality uniformly resorted to by the color field painters is a case in point. Another is the sense of the oblique generated by fields that seemed always to be rotating away from the plane of the wall and into depth, such that a perspectival rush in their surfaces caused critics like Leo



Steinberg to speak of their sense of speed: what he called the visual efficiency of the man in a hurry (figs. 11 and 12).[30] I will return to these issues later on.

At this point, however, I want to look at Pollock's own reaction to the crisis of the easel picture, something that is possible to gauge from the two different statements to which he was the signatory in the fall of 1947. Although both of these located his work in relation to such a "crisis," they imagined this situation in diametrically opposite terms. This opposition underscores the difficulty of seeing one person as the author of both declarations, and leads to the locution about Pollock's merely being their "signatory." But then, at the various junctures where he made any pronouncement about his work—including these two—Pollock functioned as a kind of ventriloquist's dummy for the opinions of others.

In the two cases—Pollock's application for a Guggenheim grant in 1947 and his statement for the magazine *Possibilities* in 1947–48—the ventriloquists in question were Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. The former is clearly responsible for Pollock's announcement to the Guggenheim Foundation that he intended "to paint large movable pictures which will function between the easel and mural," as well as for his stated belief that "the easel picture [is] a dying form and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural."[31] The latter, Rosenberg, acted as the goad to a quite different description of what a rejection of easel painting might entail; for in *Possibilities*, Pollock's declaration is stripped of the earlier statement's sense of art-historical imperative and located more in the domain of process. In separating his work from the easel, Pollock speaks of tacking his unstretched lengths of canvas on the floor, where he can

Fig. 11. Kenneth Noland. Installation of stripe paintings at the André Emmerich Gallery, New York, showing *Coarse Shadow* **and** *Stria*, **1967**

Fig. 12. Kenneth Noland. *Thaw*. **1966. Acrylic on canvas, 19¼ in. x 8 ft. 4⅛ in. (48.9 x 255.6 cm). Location unknown**

work on them from all sides. Concluding that "this is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West," he strikes out into an entirely different—what shall we call it?—dimension? modality? vector? from Greenberg's verticalized notion of the wall picture.[32] Instead he declares a connection to the horizontal, which Rosenberg would famously go on five years later to elaborate as the arena of "action painting" but which the critic was already groping his way toward in the late 1940s in relation to Existentialism's analysis of acts themselves.

So the difference between the two statements could just be chalked up to the effect of Greenberg and Rosenberg arguing with one another over the back, or out of the mouth, of Jackson Pollock, were it not for two additional things. First there is the echo in the *Possibilities* statement—where Pollock announces his distance from "the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes," stating instead his preference for "sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added"—of quite a different attack on the status of easel painting, this one aligning the easel picture with class interests and locating alternatives to it in relation to labor practice. The source for this vein of analysis is David Siqueiros, with his famous slogans "Death to easel painting" and "Out with the stick with the hairs on its end." It was Siqueiros, that is, who first made the connection in Pollock's mind between easel painting as an elitist medium and the floor as the locus of a practice that would defeat that medium.[33]

The second is that the example of Indian sand painting names as a medium something as distinct from the easel picture as one can imagine producing at

that moment; and that this new medium, to which Pollock fully oriented himself beginning in January of 1947, is horizontal. Nothing about what Pollock went on to do in his four-year-long campaign of working on the floor, pushing to engage with ever larger formats that would strain all customary forms of address to something like an easel picture both during the time of the works' making and, by extension, over the course of their viewing, has much to do—needless to say—with the precision and figurative character of Indian sand painting. It is only the phenomenology of the axis of address that links the one practice with the other. In fact Pollock would code horizontality into his surfaces as the sand painters would never do. In constituting this code, the puddling and scabbing that both result from and register the fact that the canvases were prone on the floor announce their difference from the celebrated liquid runoffs that marked the other Abstract Expressionists' surfaces with an index of their pictures' assumption of verticality, in process as well as in viewing. Pollock's decision to throw trash onto the surfaces of some of the works, most famously *Full Fathom Five* (1947), is another declaration of horizontality, as are the palm prints of *Number 1A, 1948* (plate 2). Ironically these palm prints have encouraged many recent Pollock scholars to reinstate his work's relation to the figurative (itself always conducted within the vertical field of the visual and of the gestalt), some projecting standing figures underneath the picture's web, the palm prints the visible evidence of their need to escape.[34] But the strong misreading here was undoubtedly Jasper Johns's, as he expresses the body registered in *Number 1A, 1948* via the response he himself makes in the drawing *Diver* (1963; fig. 13), insisting thus on the falling body, the body submerging itself within a medium that is horizontal.[35]

But can the horizontal itself *be* a medium, or are there insuperable difficulties in referring to the horizontal axis in these terms? To speak of the horizontality of *Diver*'s medium is, of course, to enter the domain of metaphor and to re-create the material surface over which Johns's hands passed as a horizontal plane that is obdurately figurative in nature, transmuting the ashen velvet of its charcoal into the transparency and flow of water. Does this mean that to admit this is to find ourselves in the position where *either* the horizontal is simply a metaphor (which is to say just another form of figuration) nestled within the vertical axis of another medium, such as painting (which would be the position T. J. Clark takes in the discussion following his original presentation of "Pollock's Abstraction"[36]), *or*—as a function of Bataille's formless or Morris's anti-form—the horizontal is so dedicated to the annihilation of all categories and all structures that it cannot be linked to the redemptive aspirations of a medium? Further, does a medium not have to have a technical, material support, such as canvas in the case of painting?

The point of thinking about two of the interpretive models of Pollock's art

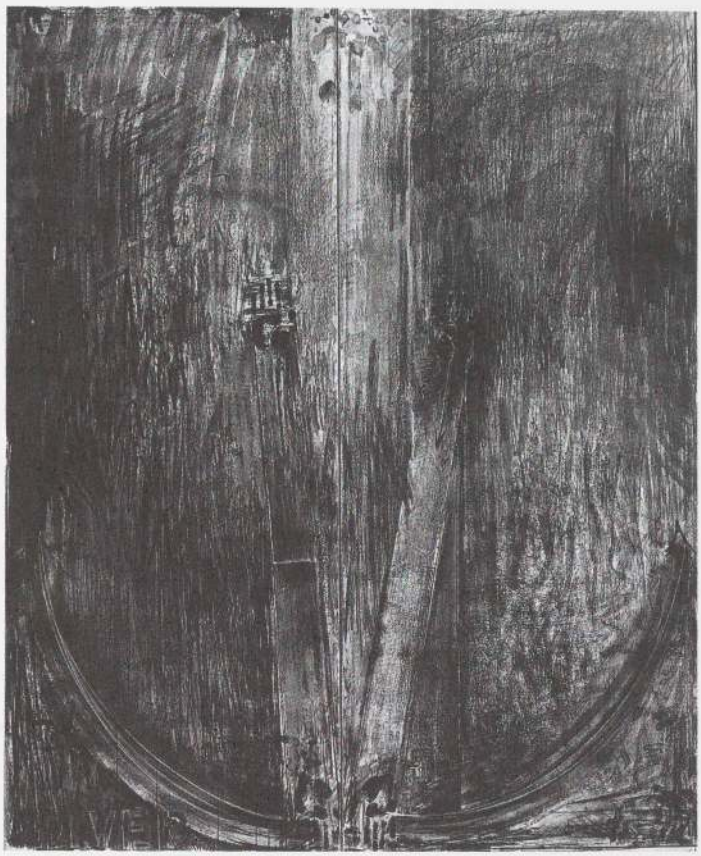


Fig. 13. Jasper Johns. *Diver.* **1963. Charcoal, pastel, and watercolor (?) on paper mounted on canvas (two panels), 7 ft. 2½ in. x 71¾ in. (219.7 x 182.2 cm). Private collection**

in tandem—that of color field or opticality and that of formlessness or the horizontal—becomes clear in relation to these questions. Just as opticality dislodges the idea of the medium from a set of physical conditions and relocates it within a phenomenological mode of address that can itself function as the support for the medium, horizontality becomes such a phenomenological vector once it articulates itself as a condition of the gravitational field, which is to say, once its address can be felt to engage a distinct dimension of bodily experience and thus a specific form of intentionality. It is only from within this dimension that the horizontal, as a medium, can be disengaged from other horizontalized practices (like the flatbed picture plane, or the written field of inscription) that nonetheless continue to base themselves within the figurative. Similarly, only from within the phenomenological assumption that bodily vectors are horizons of meaning will the horizontal-as-medium differentiate itself from practices that assume the

horizontal as real space, and thus as the field within which to declare the suspension of the medium altogether—practices such as installation art, but not, as we will see in relation to the early work of Richard Serra (below), earth or process art.

When I thought about horizontality as a medium in writing about Pollock in the context of *The Optical Unconscious*, I saw it as something like a newly isolated phenomenological vector that supported or enabled practice—not only the practice of those 1960s artists who rang extraordinary changes on the idea of horizontality by their own creative "misreadings" of Pollock's art, but (moving into the tricky business of trying to determine Pollock's elusive intentions) of Pollock as well. This, alas, was more of a negative demonstration than in the cases of Twombly, Warhol, or Morris, since it turned on showing that when Pollock lost touch with the import of the medium that had sustained him for three and a half years, he utterly lost contact with his own ambitions as an artist, entering a state of near paralysis.

My argument was that a horizontality that managed to escape the field not only of the figurative but of the cultural—a horizontality that was in this sense *below* culture—came to be associated for Pollock with the unconscious. If Pollock saw himself over the course of the drip period working this field as no one else could do, not even Picasso; if its elaboration meant that the figurative could surge up within the oceanic pull of the skein only to be obliterated by the powerful undertow of the formlessness that would wash over it in successive waves; if it meant that in the end, attacking *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* (plate 5), Pollock had no recourse to lifting the work up during its execution—no need for the famous "get acquainted" periods in which the painting would be viewed vertically, hanging on the studio wall (since on this occasion he was content to leave the work attached to the heavy roll of canvas from which its length had been unfurled)—all of this was because horizontality had become the medium through which he could experience the unconscious as an attack on form. After whatever happened to Pollock on November 28, 1950 (the day he finished making his second film with Namuth, and suddenly started to drink again), he not only lost touch with his medium but explicitly declared that the medium he had now entered, or to which he had returned, was drawing. Writing to Alfonso Ossorio in January of 1951, he characterized his work on the Japanese paper Tony Smith had given him as "drawings," and again in June he spoke of his black paintings as "drawing on canvas." That such drawing now promoted his "early images coming thru" meant that he now understood his field as vertical.[37] The result of this was that when he tried to return to the import of the drip technique his access was resolutely blocked. The verticality within which he now thought and worked is attested to both by the runoff that appears everywhere in *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952* and by the figurative insistence of the poles themselves (plate 22), or again by the figurative nature of the web that overlays the

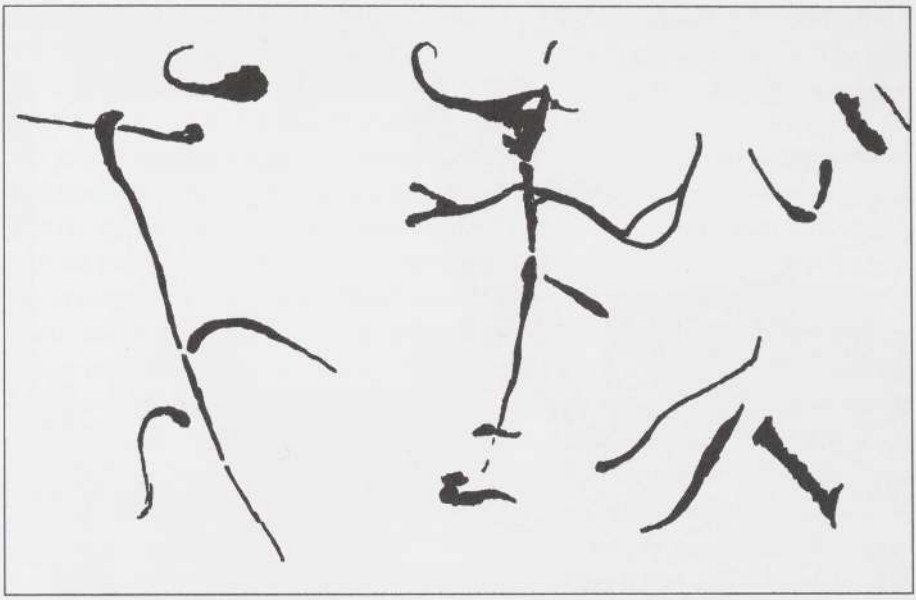


Fig. 14. Diagram for Pollock's *Convergence: Number 10, 1952*. **From Matthew L. Rohn,** *Visual Dynamics in Jackson Pollock's Abstractions* **(Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 48. Courtesy Matthew L. Rohn**

black and white ground of *Convergence: Number 10, 1952*, a frieze of rudimentary stick figures that Matthew Rohn's gestaltist analysis of Pollock had pounced on some years ago (fig. 14), intuiting—without the need of a computer—the pictogrammatic sign for the human figure that Karmel is now asking us to see as the import of the drip paintings themselves from the classic period of 1947–50.[38]

Insofar as horizontality enabled Pollock, sustaining and compelling his greatest work, it functioned—I am arguing—as a medium. And "medium" is meant here not in some kind of reductive sense in which medium and physical support are collapsed into one another such that the medium of painting is read baldly as flatness, or horizontality-as-a-medium is understood simply as the real space of the floor. Rather, if a medium is taken as meaning a support for practice, then it is a sustaining matrix generative of a set of conventions, some of which, in assuming the medium itself as their subject, will be wholly "specific" to it, thus producing an experience of their own necessity.

It was Richard Serra, in the midst of his own creative misreading of Pollock and his own exploration of horizontality, who first and most directly stated those conventions. They are given in the list he drew up in 1967–68 in which he understood the new medium in which he found himself working to be articulated in the form of predicates rather than substantives—which is to say of verb forms rather than objects or their attributes. Further, his list attaches those predicates (or predicate events) to the idea of series, not only through repetition—

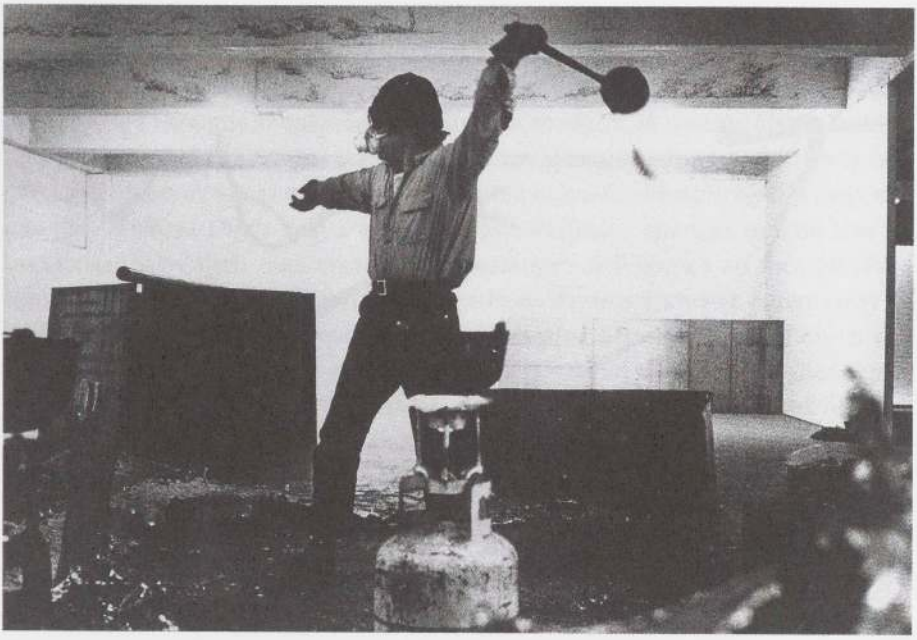


Fig. 15. Richard Serra throwing molten lead at the Castelli Warehouse, New York, 1969. Photograph: Gianfranco Gorgoni, New York

underscored by the recurrence of the grammatical prefix "to" ("to roll, to crease, to fold," etc.)—but through an assembly of references to conditions of perpetual modulation or periodic flux, as when he writes, "of waves, of tides, of electromagnetic, of ionization," and so forth.

Thus as Serra extends Pollock's gesture of throwing paint onto floor-born canvas into one of throwing molten lead against the crease between floor and wall (in *Casting*, 1969; figs. 15 and 16), he repeats the material conditions of the medium: the horizontality of the field, with its gravitational pull; the literal fact that matter will settle onto that field as the residue of an event; the residue itself taking the form of an index or trace, the physical clue to its having happened. These material conditions, however, are not in themselves enough to make something into a medium or expressive form. The tire tracks a car leaves on a snowy road are certainly an index of its passage, but they are not thereby organized into a work of art.

The conceptual artist would say that to so organize them it is enough merely to frame them in any one of the number of ways that have become fully available within the course of modernist practice. They could be photographed, for example, or stanchioned off in some way that would fold them into one of art's institutional spaces. Whatever one did would be tantamount to supplying them with the enunciative label: "This is a work of art." And this strategy of the ready-

made would be enough to inaugurate the one convention that turns anything whatever into an object of another order of experience.

The option of the frame, however, is not the one Serra is taking, since that would be to defeat the pull of gravity and to reorganize the index as an image, the picture or metaphor of an event rather than its resistant, literal occurrence, a picture that, needless to say, would align itself with the vertical field of the gestalt. Rather, for the horizontal conditions to stay in place, for gravity to maintain its hold on the index such that it continues to operate as the mark of an event rather than its picture, the work must find the syntax internal to the event itself, and this is the syntax that it will then formalize. Such is the syntax registered both in Serra's verb list and in a piece such as *Casting*, where it is to be located not only in the transformation of the object produced by the gesture into a form of serialization but in the understanding of series itself as wavelike or periodic. The event, of which the cast is the index, Serra seems to be saying, belongs to the logic of the series, which is not that of stamping out identical objects, as in industrial production. Rather it is the series (or series of series) in which the lead is heated to its molten state, in which the propulsion of the sling around the body of the standing artist assumes an elliptical orbit, in which falling metal is shaped by the barrier of wall and floor as it cools, and, most important, in which all of these different series are seen as converging toward the specific point of the event. Thus it is in repetition itself that the event's internal frame is discovered, and the index that marks that event is exfoliated as series.

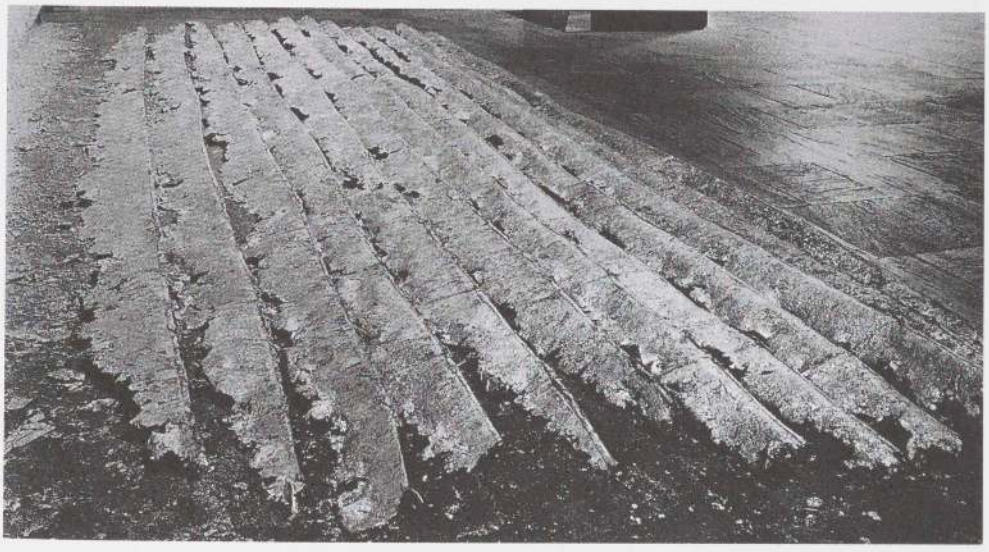


Fig. 16. Richard Serra. *Casting*. **1969. Lead, 4 in. x 25 ft. x 15 ft. (10 x 762 x 457 cm). Installed at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1969. Destroyed**

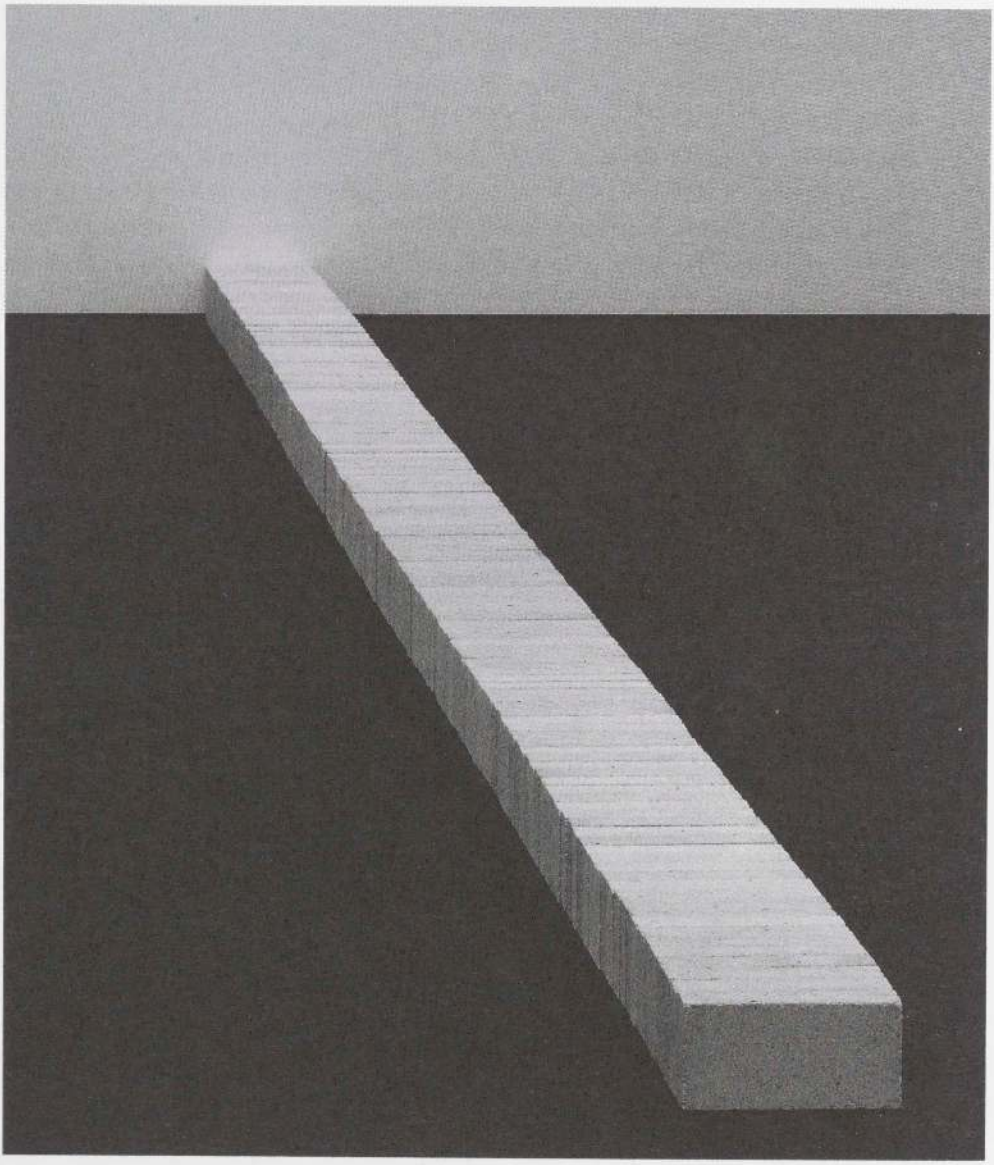


Fig. 17. Carl Andre. *Lever*. **1966. 137 firebricks, 4½ in. x 8¼ in. x 29 ft. (11.4 x 22.5 x 883.9 cm). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa**

In a piece like *Casting*, I am claiming, Serra is reading the horizontalized field of Pollock's work as a network of traces, each the index of an event, the internal logic of which is serial or repetitive: wave after wave of looping falls of paint. Further, he is expressing that logic as *gerundive*, or wholly unfolding in the present tense, a quality captured by his own title, *Casting*, but echoed as well in the lexicon consistently applied by critics to Pollock's line—as in Greenberg's "whipping," "trickling," "dribbling," "blotching," and "staining," or Rubin's "pouring," "spattering," "criss-crossing," and "puddling." That the gerund form is not just a present tense but a present progressive, one that actively connects past to present and opens present to future, once again displays the resistance of this form to enclosure, to the completion of a frame. The index framed is the index as the picture of an event, which is distanced from itself by having entered the condition of representation. It is only unframed that its openness to the variation of the series continues to be in play. The gerund thus expresses a perspective on the series from the moment of the present, since the series, parabolic in nature, is part of a continuing flux.[39]

If seriality and repetition are the syntax with which to formalize the event within the field of the object, the gerund's perspectival nature, its character as an axis or point of view onto the series, becomes the formal expression of the subject's relation to variation. Theorizing the concept of the event, Gilles Deleuze points to the fact that "a needed relation exists between variation and point of view," which means that there is "not only variety in points of view but every point of view is a point of view on variation." Arguing that "this is not relativism as a variation of truth according to the subject," Deleuze says, "rather it is the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject."[40]

This, then, is the importance of the shift that occurs generally in the aftermath of the "crisis of the easel picture" as, whether in the practice of color field painting or in that of process, the medium within which artists understand themselves to be working becomes a phenomenological dimension, an axis onto a field, rather than the physical limits of the field itself. In opticality, that dimension involves the upright body, yet it also unleashes a relationship between perceiver and canvas which seems to call for the illusion that the pictorial field is turning, receding, speeding away, is in a relation to its viewer that reinforces the perspectivalism of the viewer's relation to it. In process art, such as Serra's or Carl Andre's (fig. 17) or much of Eva Hesse's, the dimension is the horizontal, which these artists continue to reinforce and work as a medium, even when, as in Serra's prop pieces, they activate gravity in relation to standing elements (fig. 18). But more than anything else Serra's cutting pieces demonstrate that the new medium he was inhabiting must also be recognized as one of an utterly reorganized sense of drawing, drawing not as the boundary of a form but as the expression of an event, a predicate, a serial variation (fig. 19).

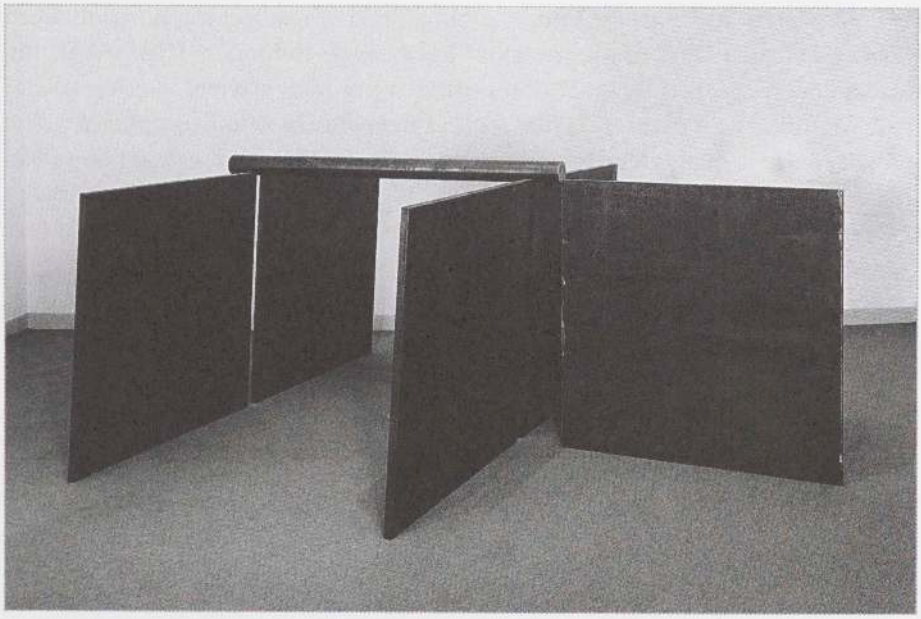


Fig. 18. Richard Serra. *2-2-1: To Dickie and Tina*. **1969. Lead antimony, five plates, each 48 x 48 in. (122 x 122 cm); pole, 7 ft. (213 cm) long; overall, 52 in. x 8 ft. 2 in. x 11 ft. (132 x 249 x 335 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.**

Fig. 19. Richard Serra. *Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure*. **1969. Lead, wood, stone, and steel, overall, 12 in. x 18 ft. x 15 ft. 7¼ in. (30.5 x 549 x 498 cm), variable. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson**

So the issue of drawing is indeed at stake in our present understanding of Jackson Pollock, just as it was at stake, I am arguing, in his own felt relationship to his work. To recode the import of Pollock's drawing as having been oriented all along to some notion of the figure, and to disqualify other characterizations of it as merely "abject" or "anti-art," is not only to lose touch with the inner logic of Pollock's medium, as it first sustained and then withdrew from him, but is seriously to denigrate the work of all those whose achievement it was to engage with Pollock's greatness in the dimension within which they experienced its impact for art.

Notes

1. E. A. Carmean, Jr., "The Church Project: Pollock's Passion Themes," *Art in America* 70 no. 6 (Summer 1982): 110–22; Rosalind Krauss, "Contra Carmean: The Abstract Pollock," in ibid., pp. 123–31.
2. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 1939, reprinted in *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, vol. 1 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 14, 22.
3. Pepe Karmel, "Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth," in Kirk Varnedoe with Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 131.
4. Ibid.
5. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Jean Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock," February 1947, reprinted in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, vol. 2 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, p. 125.
6. Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," April 1948, reprinted in ibid., p. 224.
7. See, for example, Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, reprinted in *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, vol. 3 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, p. 235.
8. Greenberg, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting," 1949, reprinted in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, pp. 273–74.
9. Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 221, 226, 228. In the version of the essay edited for *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956* Greenberg excised these sentences.
10. In her essay in this book, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro demonstrates the impossibility of Pollock's having painted the Guggenheim mural with the desperate speed claimed by the artist and reported by his friends (p. 118). But Pollock's own sense of semiautomatism as he drove himself to make this very large work is registered in that claim, no matter how mythically and at variance from actual fact.
11. In his review of Pollock in 1949, Greenberg characterizes *No. 1 (1948)* (now usually called *Number 1A, 1948*) as "baroque" (*Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, p. 285). This idea of the baroque is something Greenberg associates with the notion of painterliness, or *malerische* (as used by Heinrich Wölfflin), in "After Abstract-Expressionism," 1962, reprinted in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays*, p. 123.
12. In "Contribution to a Symposium," 1953 (reprinted in *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, p. 156), Greenberg links the new openness of color in some Abstract Expressionist painting to "optical illusions difficult to specify"; in "Sculpture in Our Time," 1958 (reprinted in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, p. 60), opticality is given its earliest full-blown theorization; in "Louis and Noland," 1960 (reprinted in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, p. 97), the notion of optical color is further developed; and finally in "Modernist Painting," 1960 (reprinted in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, p. 90), the idea of opticality is fully in place.
13. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 57 no. 6 (October 1958): 24–25, 55–57.
14. Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," 1968, and "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," 1970, both reprinted in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, and New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1993), pp. 41–49, 71–93.
15. See chapter 6 of my *Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 243–329, and Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, exh. cat. (New York: Zone Books, 1997).
16. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 30.
17. Cy Twombly's exploitation of graffiti was, from the outset, focused on what the semiologist would call its expressive form—namely that it is a defiling of a surface of inscription (by cutting, smearing, spraying, or any other form of marking). His interest was therefore in its violence rather than its image content. Thus although graffiti is often marked onto vertical walls, and although its figuration is often representational, this content of the image was not what Twombly initially used. Rather he was drawing a parallel between Pollock's gesture, or mode of marking, and the violence of the graffiti gesture, its "criminal" overtones, so to speak. See my discussion in *The Optical Unconscious*, pp. 256–60.
18. Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," 1930, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1953–73), 21: 90.
19. Varnedoe speaks of the analysis of formlessness in art as "associated, psychically, with bodily excretion," going on to say, "Krauss and Bois see the drip paintings as generating a scatological lineage of staining, as in Andy Warhol's 'oxidation' paintings, made by urinating onto a metallic-paint ground" (*Jackson Pollock*, pp. 54–55); Adam Gopnik links my position with Harold Rosenberg's as a call for "anti-art" and speaks of my "praise of Pollock's art as 'abject'" ("Poured Over," *The New Yorker* LXXIV [October 19, 1998]: 76, 80).
20. Thierry de Duve gives an account of this process in "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas." See de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 199–279.
21. I began to speak of a postmedium condition in "And Then Turn Away? An Essay on James Coleman," *October* no. 81 (Summer 1997): 5–33.
22. See my "Welcome to the Cultural Revolution," *October* no. 77 (Summer 1996): 83–96.
23. Greenberg, "After Abstract-Expressionism," p. 131.
24. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," p. 90.
25. Greenberg, "Louis and Noland," 1960, reprinted in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, p. 97.
26. See Michael Fried's discussion of this in "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 48.
27. See my *Optical Unconscious*, pp. 246–47, 324. In discussing color field painting, Stanley Cavell expresses his own assumption that the axis called for in the transaction between the viewer and this kind of art is verticality: "For example, a painting may acknowledge its frontedness, or its finitude, or its specific thereness—that is, its presentness; and your accepting it will accordingly mean acknowledging *your* frontedness, or directionality, or verticality toward its world, or any world." Cavell, *The World Viewed* (New York: Viking, 1971), p. 110.
28. Fried, "Shape as Form," *Art and Objecthood*, p. 88.
29. It is not that nothing was addressed to the question of the medium; rather, the medium continued to be organized in the field of the object. For example, in ibid., p. 77, Fried raises the question of a medium, tying it to the relationship between literal and depicted shape in Frank Stella's irregular polygon

paintings of 1966: "By *shape as such* I mean not merely the silhouette of the support (which I shall call literal shape), not merely that of the outlines of elements in a given picture (which I shall call depicted shape), but shape as a medium within which choices about both literal and depicted shapes are made, and made mutually responsive."

In the context of the exchanges between Fried and Cavell in the mid-1960s, Cavell addresses color field painting by arguing for an idea of the medium that is closer to something like a phenomenological axis. Claiming that what a given color field painter is inventing is a new automatism (Morris Louis's "pours" being modeled here on the example of Pollock's automatized dripped lines), he understands these automatisms as supplying not just new instances of art but new mediums of art. See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 104–8.

30. Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 79. Fried too speaks of the speed of Kenneth Noland's striped pictures: "Approached from the side (their length makes this inviting) what is striking is not their rectangularity but the speed with which that rectangle—or rather, the speed with which the colored bands—appear to diminish in perspective recession." "Shape as Form," p. 83.

31. The Guggenheim application is published in Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, eds., *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 4:238.

32. Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* no. 1 (Winter 1947–48): 79.

33. Pollock worked in David Siqueiros's Manhattan studio/"laboratory" in 1936. His use of gray enamel in works of the early 1940s, like *The She-Wolf*, to mask around shapes, thereby producing figures as the effect of a kind of stenciling, may be an adaptation of a technique of poster-making that was employed in Siqueiros's studio, where stencils and spray paint were applied to lengths of paper laid on the floor.

34. See Charles F. Stuckey, "Another Side of Jackson Pollock," *Art in America* 65 no. 6 (November–December 1977): 81–91, and Bernice Rose, *Jackson Pollock: Drawing into Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 9.

35. In the discussion following the presentation of this paper, it was objected that Pollock's palm prints in *Number 1A, 1948* might have been applied to the canvas once it was vertical rather than during its making, so that they would register the upright body rather than the falling one. This seems counterintuitive since the prints appear under passages of white dripped skein, and thus would most likely have been applied while the canvas was on the floor. It was also objected that Jasper Johns's *Diver*, referring to Hart Crane's suicide (by jumping overboard during an ocean voyage), is about a falling body that is therefore oriented vertically, even though inverted head-to-foot. This seems a perverse reading of Johns's space, in which the plunging body is rendered vertiginous precisely because it is precipitating itself into a watery medium that is itself horizontal and toward which the body must project a downward fall. Further, it ignores the point that since Johns's field is in any case metaphoric, its charcoal surface constituting the image of, the illusion of, water, the work ultimately relocates itself within the terms of the easel picture, or vertical medium.

36. T. J. Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in Serge Guilbaut, ed., *Reconsidering Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 241–42.

37. O'Connor and Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 4: D94, p. 257, and D99, p. 261.

38. Matthew L. Rohn, *Visual Dynamics in Jackson Pollock's Abstractions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 48.

39. Gilles Deleuze formulates the connections between the predicate event, series, variation, and point of view in his discussion of Leibniz's and Whitehead's concept of the event, to which I am indebted here. See Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Ton Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

40. Ibid., pp. 19–20.

Pollock's Nature, Frankenthaler's Culture

Anne M. Wagner

Does my title demand an immediate disclaimer? I imagine so; let me begin, there-fore, by saying what I *don't* aim to do in this paper. My purpose is above all not to renovate a pair of big categories, a handy and familiar dualism within which Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler can find their appointed slots—can find them, that is, once the assumptions about gender that normally govern my key binary have been given the requisite revisionist (read feminist) twist. The adjustment would shift "culture" and "nature" a full 180 degrees, inverting their rigid and hoary associations with male and female respectively to turn the old oppressive formula on its head.[1] This is not to deny that such a reversal presents its temptations: after all, didn't Pollock declare that he *was* nature? And isn't Frankenthaler, with her privileged background and Bennington education, someone to whom "culture" was fed with a silver spoon? It is Frankenthaler, certainly, whom critics are prepared to call "erudite," Frankenthaler who comes across as a haunter of museums herself haunted in turn by the grand tradition as an inescapable inheritance, masterpieces to internalize and explode.[2] For Pollock, by contrast, learning was ad hoc and arbitrary, a sometime thing. He never went to Europe, and took painting as he found it—often, he found it in books. And rather than aligning itself with tradition, whether aggressively or otherwise, his work has made its own.

The problem of course is that although this quick list of instances may confound certain assumptions and stereotypes on a case-by-case basis, it reinstates others. Nor is there anything yet to suggest, as my title may seem to, that the Frankenthaler/Pollock connection can be understood as signaling some real or substantive about-face in cultural priorities and authority. Even less guarantees that terming Pollock's work "nature" and Frankenthaler's "culture" will speak helpfully to the imagery of these artists—to how we might see and use it, love and hate it, for the complexity and unexpectedness of the experiences it intends to convey. If my terms end up having some utility in this highly local context of paintings and their resonance, it will be because they help us say what Frankenthaler's art makes of Pollock's, and why. The answer I will give is, I hope, unexpected: for

while Frankenthaler's response to Pollock is now customarily accepted (and dismissed) as (mere) catalyst fueling the development of a future for painting as an art of pure opticality, what she saw in Pollock was neither pure nor optical. And in making her work she looked anywhere but forward: for "anywhere," read both back and downward, and even within.

We do need some way to structure an understanding of the links between Frankenthaler and Pollock; as we do, for that matter, in order to come to grips with most artists of consequence in the last thirty years, so large does Pollock loom in their work.[3] I don't think the standard quasi-fiscal vocabulary—the balance sheet of debts and borrowings and obligations with which we art historians often content ourselves—even begins to do the job, let alone takes us to the bottom line. Just how much or how little did Frankenthaler learn from Pollock? Why bother keeping the books? They won't add up anyway if, as so often, they fail fully to inventory issues of gendered identity and performance—as they have both for Pollock and for Frankenthaler herself. For I take it as axiomatic that gender has always somehow been a factor in how her work has been valued, as well as in the shaping of the larger history in which her work has been given a place.

Sometimes, in fact, gender has visibly tinted the language of assessment, if not quite in the ways that Lisa Saltzman, in attending to the florid feminizing pejoratives that hypersaturate some criticism, would have us believe.[4] By these lights stain painting bleeds into the body, into the artist's bodily seepages above all. What, we might well ask, are we then to make of imagery that goes against the grain of gender stereotype—or at least reverses the vectors along which it is usually applied? Think of the carefully blotted bodily Rorschachs that are Pollock's red paintings of c. 1950 (the blottings both tidy and mess things up), or of the explosive intensities of Frankenthaler's 1950s procedures as exemplified, for example, in paintings like *Holocaust* (figs. 1 and 2). Or, to choose an example where interpretation may seem less subjective, less open to contestation, what are we to do with the vocabulary of Parker Tyler, whose surprising verdict on Frankenthaler was also the first to pair her with Pollock?

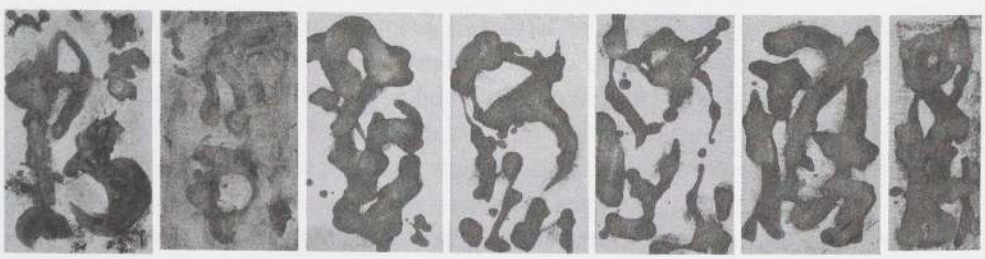


Fig. 1. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled [Red Painting 1–7]*. **c. 1950. Oil on canvas, smallest 20 x 8 in. (50.8 x 20.3 cm), largest 21 x 13 in. (53.3 x 33 cm). Private collection, Berlin**

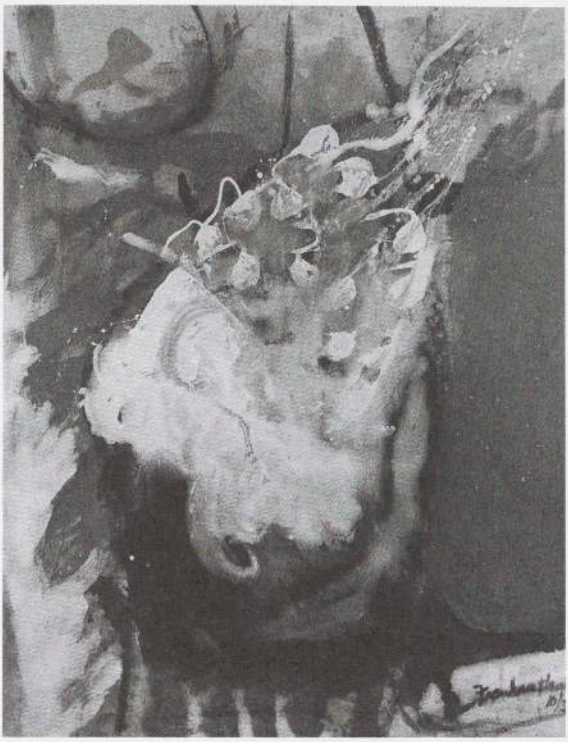


Fig. 2. Helen Frankenthaler. *Holocaust.* **1955. Oil on canvas, 60 x 54 in. (172.7 x 137.2 cm). Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. Albert Pilavin Collection of Twentieth-Century American Art**

The link happened, belatedly, in 1956, in the context of Tyler's reading of what was by then Frankenthaler's fourth one-person show. The artist was still not yet thirty, but her so-called invention of stain painting, in the great and consequential *Mountains and Sea*, was already four years past. Nor was staining the main issue for Tyler; like the other 1950s critics, he didn't use the term. What mattered was not a technique but its rhetoric. In it he saw likeness, not difference—how much, that is, Frankenthaler was like Pollock. "Her courage is worth a double-take," Tyler declared with characteristic vehemence. And he continued, with equally characteristic innuendo, "She can make the paint-mass spurt like a leak in a dike and yet control it till it laps the canvas like a spent wave. She has as free a curve and spontaneous a thrust as Pollock, and a stretch of outsize canvas is like a dare to her."[5] There are few passages of writing from this period more at ease with Frankenthaler's sheer painterly vehemence; few more confident, moreover, in making those effects masculine—all spurts and spendings, thrust and dare.[6] Even the reservations Tyler registers—he worries, for example, that "her works excite without quite satisfying because she seems concerned more with means than ends"—recast all difficulties or dissatisfactions, painter's or critic's, as versions of similarly onanistic frustration: orgasms that don't quite come off.

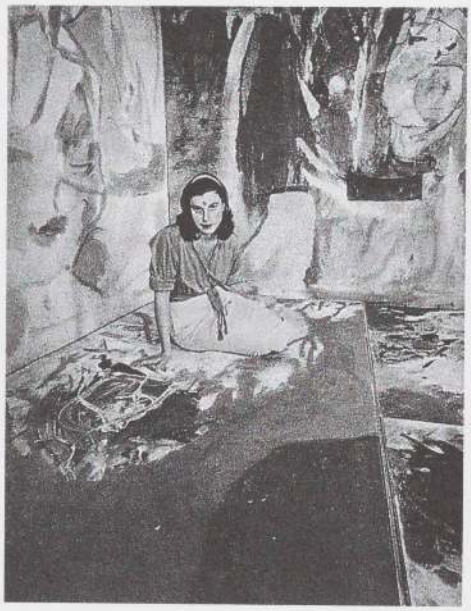


Fig. 3. Helen Frankenthaler in her studio. From "Women Artists in Ascendance: Young Group Reflects Lively Virtues of U.S. Painting," *Life* 42 no. 19 (May 13, 1957): 74. Photograph: Gordon Parks, *Life* Magazine. © Time, Inc.

Fig. 4. Helen Frankenthaler. *Blue Territory*. 1955. Oil on canvas, 9 ft. 5 in. x 58 in. (287 x 147.3 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Ejaculation or menstruation? Neither formulation will do in every instance, maybe *any* instance, however much credit goes to Saltzman for venturing to propose that descriptive language matters for the Frankenthaler we have inherited—the one that criticism has tried to produce. If we were to emend Saltzman's thesis, it would be to resupply to criticism its indecisive history, its deep discomfort with the very idea of Frankenthaler's work as occupying or claiming some stably gendered voice and position, while still being successful as art. The critics' quandary, that is to say, involved squaring this painting's heterodox methods and procedures, its big ambitions and art-world successes, with her womanhood, and accommodating both to some paradigm or other of who and what an artist is.

The problem has proved intractable. More often than not it has been left strictly and severely to one side (this, I think, has been the strategy of Barbara Rose and John Elderfield, the painter's strongest and most interested supporters[7]), as if merely to name Frankenthaler as a woman could somehow prejudice any sense of the value and seriousness of her art. And of course Rose and Elderfield had plenty of prejudices to counter. The early years of Frankenthaler's

career coincided with and only partly managed to resist postwar mass culture's eager commodification of artists as specially exotic and appetizing characters; "women artists" were even more rarefied goods. Send the photographer from *Life* or *Time* to document this new and unfamiliar quantity, the young and photogenic female painter. Just be sure to dispatch another sort of dauber as well—the makeup artist—to harmonize the photographic palette and tie together artworks, blusher, and clothes. For the particular candy-colored production I am thinking of, an illustration in *Life*'s notorious 1957 photo essay "Women Artists in Ascendance," paintings were deployed like stage flats, and *Blue Territory* (1955), though already finished and exhibited, was demoted: sent back to the floor of its maker's studio, it lay there passively, its once wild expanse doing domestic service as a rug (figs. 3 and 4).[8] Must a woman's art be so insisted on as more "natural"—her lair or habitat—than "cultural," the product of her hand and brain? Certainly this is the way the evident anomalies and discomforts that surfaced along with the category "woman artist" reached their uneasy resolution in these years.

Rose's 1970 study in particular followed in the wake of some specially malign examples of "life-styles" prattle, the middlebrow gossip into which critical discussion increasingly mutated in the 1960s so as to satisfy the mass market of the day. This is what both Rose and Elderfield implicitly aim to resist. "In Manhattan," we learn in *Time* magazine's response to Frankenthaler's 1969 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, "nearly everybody knows Helen Frankenthaler as a charmer, a hostess, and a presence. Back in the 1950's, she was the brash, aggressive girlfriend of Clement Greenberg . . . for the past eleven years she has been the wife of Robert Motherwell, and in a sense, Helen always seemed in the artistic shadow of her husband and other 'first-generation' abstract expressionists. Thus it came as something of a discovery to learn that Helen can really paint."[9] This is bad enough; one might as well be reading about "tribal customs" among the Abstract Expressionists—think of Claude Lévi-Strauss on "Woman as Sign." But read on: "Helen Frankenthaler's work deals outspokenly with emotion. It bubbles forth with irresistible elation, and could have been used long ago to show that abstract painting can have a heart." I'm not making this up. Such drivel, I reckon, could make almost anyone a formalist; think formalism, in other words, as an antidote to bilge.

But we cannot, alas, see formalism as quite able, even when willing, to speak of Frankenthaler's work in terms that would successfully keep her paintings consequential for a current audience. Can they be made to matter again? Doing so, I am convinced, would involve starting again with the question of her relation to Pollock: it means asking how her work uses, refuses, and contradicts the example his painting provides. For of his successors, she may well be his most important respondent, at least among the painters who have cared about

his art—important, I think, because she both admires and resists it, and lets the struggle show. And she sees things there that other viewers have permitted themselves to ignore.

Go back to the scene of the encounter; place it, as she has, at the first of Pollock's exhibitions she attended, at the Betty Parsons Gallery in November and December of 1950.[10] Of course these coals have been endlessly raked over, not least because they continue to glow. They give off the heat her later recollections have lent them: this is the exhibition to which Frankenthaler was taken by Greenberg, who "threw her into the room," as she later put it, "and seemed to say swim."[11] The metaphor is oceanic, though not without undertow: *sink*, or swim. And other analogies she has used have been equally boundless in scale: Pollock as sublimely sovereign nation, Pollock as his own native tongue. Nation, Native, Nature: the moves are familiar, and tempting.

But here is Frankenthaler herself, again letting difficulties seep in: "It was as if I suddenly went to a foreign country but didn't know the language, but had read enough and had a passionate interest, and was eager to live there. I wanted to live in this land; I *had to* live there, and master this language."[12] Don't let's make the mistake of taking such eagerness as merely automatic, a pledge of allegiance dutifully recited to open the clubhouse door. Who else cared quite so much—so much about Pollock as a painter, I mean?[13] Who else would admit it? Listen to Kenneth Noland, speaking to a journalist in 1961 about his and Morris Louis's first stalemated response: "We were interested in Pollock but could gain no lead from him. He was too personal."[14] It seems fair to hear Noland's tone as both quizzical and distant, distant enough to keep Pollock at a real remove. Now turn back to Frankenthaler: "It hit me and had magic but didn't puzzle me to the point of stopping my feelings."[15] Remember, in light of this comment, that according to Greenberg—at least he used the phrase as the title for a 1952 essay on contemporary painting—"feeling is all."

The lead Noland and Louis took, of course, they got from Frankenthaler. Hence Noland continued in the conversation I've just cited, "[But] Frankenthaler showed us a way—a way to think about, and use, color." At this juncture in the interview—the moment is legendary—Louis chimed in with his brilliant summation, "She was the bridge between Pollock and what was possible."[16] The formulation is so brilliant, of course, because it leaves so much behind: bafflement and dependency become mere way stations en route to the would-be finality of one's own work—finality as vast possibility, that is to say, rather than forced compromise. And although Frankenthaler's painting is the agent of the transformation, this formula efficiently restricts its possible significance and interest to its role as mere utilitarian cause.

One reason this genealogy is so often cited—to locate not only Frankenthaler's work but Noland's and Louis's—is that it came to underpin the

logic of painting as Greenberg and Michael Fried discerned that art unfolding in the late 1950s and early 1960s. (Another may be that it so efficiently subordinates Frankenthaler's own artistic project to that logic, a claim to which I will return.) The new paradigm led to an emphasis on opticality, certainly—to opticality as a specially open, nontactile, and disembodied value generated through the homogenizing qualities of the stain. To quote Greenberg directly, speaking in 1960 of staining as Louis practiced it: "The effect conveys a sense not only of color as somehow disembodied, and therefore more purely optical, but also of color as a thing which opens and expands the picture plane."[17] This verdict takes hostage many of Greenberg's earlier opinions and criteria—his validation of feeling and embodiment among them—while already mobilizing the terms and issues that would matter to Fried in 1967, when he tried to plot the route from Pollock to Frankenthaler to Louis one more time. He found this difficult to do, not least, I think, because opticality and disembodiment are such troublesome claims, at least where Pollock and Frankenthaler are concerned. And so, for Fried, was Frankenthaler's apparently decisive role.

Fried's argument concedes to these difficulties tactically, by reintroducing drawing as a key concern: drawing now rid of its history and tradition, to say nothing of its descriptive urgency; drawing dematerialized so as to invoke "figuration," not the human figure; drawing redefined through pouring and staining so as to achieve its effects without reliance on contour and edge. In this account, two Pollock works act as linchpins: *Out of the Web: Number 7, 1949* and *Number 3, 1951*. They can play this role because Fried aims to move past the merely figurative to a more general principle or essence of "figuration"; in so doing he sidesteps "feeling" as well as metaphor.[18] The move is strategic, undertaken in aid of a notion of figuration as a phenomenon of vision and perception more than the result of any particular technique; it is above all the agent of an increasingly autonomous sight. In this schema Louis's painting is the perfected catalyst of such vision, his colored stainings credited with the ability to grip and activate the eye past the very limits of the tactile, let alone the particular constraints of touch. And Frankenthaler? To cite Fried once again, "What is less clear is how that bridging relationship ought to be described."[19] Exactly: Fried solves the problem by recourse to this same elusive quantity, figuration. Frankenthaler's work, by these lights, is merely figurative—drawn, hence relentlessly tactile, punctual, embodied, and constrained, even though her use of stained color was the "revelation" able to open the door to Louis's art. Yet one notable quality of revelations is that they cannot really be explained, nor is Fried long detained by an effort to do so. What he sees more vividly than any similarity or relationship are the "fundamental differences" between Louis and Frankenthaler, just as what matters most is the "depth" of Louis's relation to Pollock. Does it go without saying that one main reason for detailing these long-ago judgments is that I myself

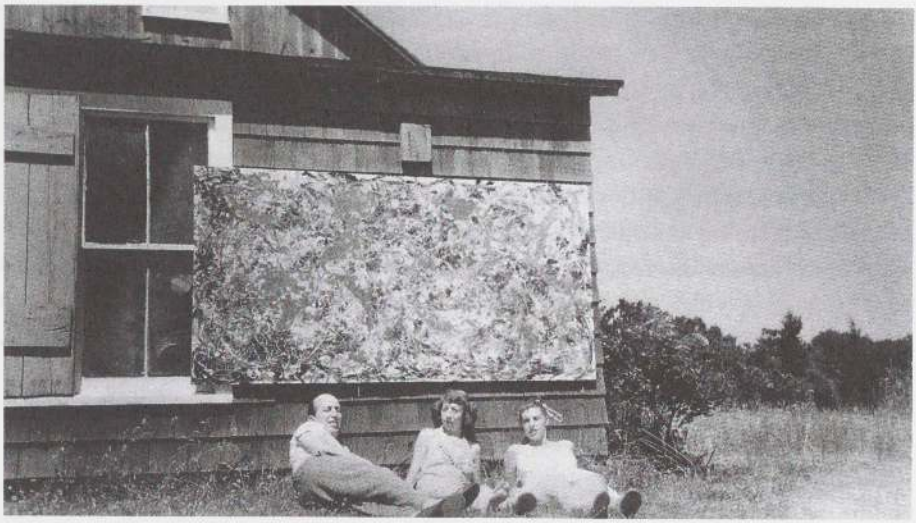


Fig. 5. Clement Greenberg, Lee Krasner, and Frankenthaler outside Pollock's studio, The Springs, Long Island, 1952

think depth and differences are still at issue, albeit in other terms?

The time has come to stop on the bridge.[20] Imagine looking from Frankenthaler's vantage point in the 1950s, before Louis and Noland could be said to have remapped the lay of the land. Think of Pollock as she saw him: he was the foreground, not some safely distant shore. He loomed there in flesh and blood—someone to be visited as well as studied, someone whose work acted as both backdrop and centerpiece to weekends at The Springs. If there is a point to recalling and illustrating such immediate encounters—looking back, for example, to Pollock's own 1952 snapshot of one such party gathered on the grass beneath *Out of the Web* (fig. 5)—it is to emphasize the direct and physical presence that Pollock's work had for Frankenthaler, the avenues of access that made it unmistakably, practically real. Seeing *Out of the Web* bathed in sunlight—its role that of an object displayed for discussion, one apparently still relevant, though three years old—makes it clear, moreover, that in this process, issues of depth and the figurative (if not necessarily Fried's notion of *figuration*) were very much in play. Remember, to emphasize the point still further, that Frankenthaler owned one of Pollock's Japanese paper drawings of 1951 (fig. 6), a sheet not unlike the one he gave and inscribed to Greenberg that same year. What the two drawings share is the sheer immediacy of their blotches and strokes, black, brick red, and yellow interwoven and overlaid. Such effects conjure a wild calligraphy, but they are simultaneously given depth by a choreography that summons a sense of figures and objects in space. The drawings are *both* graphic and spatial, in other words, with the simultaneity of these effects only emphasized by what is open and provisional about Pollock's use of paper and ink.[21] Nor should we imagine that

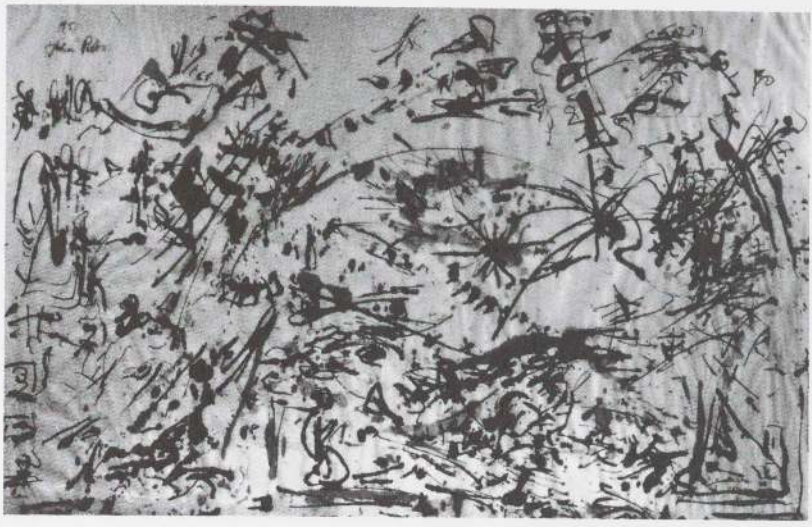


Fig. 6. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled*. **1951. Mixed media on paper, 24 x 38½ in. (60.9 x 97.7 cm). Location unknown**

Frankenthaler's contact with Pollock's art ended at some fixed or discernible moment, with the termination of her relationship with Greenberg, for example, or once *Mountains and Sea* had been painted and the technique of staining had consequently come to light—at a moment, in other words, that would coincide conveniently with the genealogical narrative in which Frankenthaler is assigned her role as secondary and disposable agent of change.

I think it worth emphasizing that Frankenthaler used a range of encounters—from experiences in Pollock's exhibitions to contacts with particular drawings and paintings—to plot her route out of Pollock's art. Yet this claim alone does not adequately define the question of her choices, not least because his work accumulates and proffers such contradictory experiences and procedures: only think of the meditation on whole and particular, depth and surface, additive and subtractive, full and empty, large and small, figurative and abstract, horizontal and vertical, that motivates *Out of the Web*. Sometimes these effects are resolved in Pollock's art—or at least held in tense opposition—but increasingly after 1950, he sought opposition as much as or more than resolution. Surely one thing Noland was asserting about Frankenthaler, then, is that she could grasp something of the sheer range and volatility of these hard-to-handle qualities. Let us further say, as Noland does not quite assert, that this same range and volatility also constitute what is personal about Pollock's art—as well as what was *not* possible for either Noland or Louis to emulate. What else might be seen in these terms? The answer I want to outline aims to bring what is paradoxically personal about Frankenthaler's own way of painting—what concerns feelings and their problematic expression—more clearly into view. The path may seem convoluted,

and certainly bears little resemblance to Louis's brisk thoroughfare, but I think it makes more sense.

Start with Frankenthaler's great intuition: that her work, like Pollock's, should take place on the floor. Of course this is only one aspect of her technique of painting, in itself nothing to exaggerate or overdo. Pollock himself, remember, was careful to limit the role of procedure in the scheme of things: "Technique is just a means of arriving at a statement";[22] "Method is, it seems to me, a natural growth out of a need."[23] If Pollock downplayed his methods, it was to emphasize that technique serves both statement and need. This is good policy—let us use it to ask, once again, why a painter should work on the floor. My answer makes motivation a question of space and scale, body and, yes, feeling: the four come together to shape a geography at once psychically large yet as compacted and local as place can be. According to Pollock, this precinct had its own special ethos: "I enjoy working big . . . I'm just more at ease in a big area." Or again, "I feel more at home in a big area."[24] What emerges from these statements is a special notion of topography: a canvas laid down flat in three dimensions makes a place both big and small enough to inhabit, where for once he could be (almost) "at home."

Enter Frankenthaler. I mean the phrase quite literally. When she began to operate on a horizontal canvas, I think she had some such understanding of Pollock's own investment in surface and horizontality—above all, she understood its rightness. The question was how to utilize that conception herself; how, even *if*, she herself might feel at home. The answer, I think, was yes and no. For while Frankenthaler gives "feeling"—for which read her pursuit of space, and of (her own) place in painting—a topography she shaped on the canvas as moments and incidents, sometimes even fields of color, a topography plotted with utter immediacy there and then, she at the same time seems compelled to find her own bearings, declare her own presence, on and in the new terrain.[25] In this she is like a diver who swims deep, yet periodically takes soundings, even comes to the surface to see how far she's come. The first great example of this procedure (one that sheds light on why it was necessary) is *Mountains and Sea* (plate 33). For although the painting is a remembered landscape (the circumstances of its production, in the aftermath of a fall trip to Nova Scotia with Greenberg, have been often repeated), it also remembers "landscape" as a genre at the moment it leaves that category forever behind.[26] Its traces are registered in the one descriptive passage the image presents and departs from: I am speaking of the pale green shards and polyps that sit at right in an azure bay.[27] The rest of the image pulls loose from this landscape mooring to coalesce, swirl free, then regroup on and as the picture surface; the forms are vivid rivals to the depth and flatness of empty cotton duck. For the most part drawing gives color its directions, and not in some stage whisper: it speaks them aloud.[28] Or writes them: the

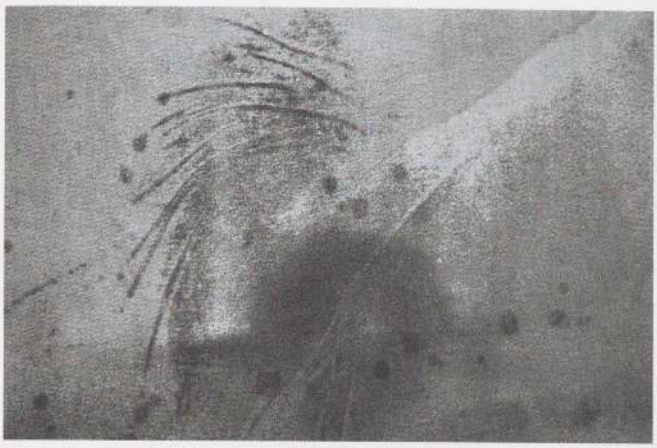


Fig. 7. Helen Frankenthaler. *Mountains and Sea* **(detail). 1951. Oil and charcoal on unprimed canvas, 7 ft. 2⅝ in. x 9 ft. 9¼ in. (220 x 297.8 cm). Collection the artist. On loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.**

Fig. 8. Helen Frankenthaler. *Mountains and Sea* **(detail). 1951. Oil and charcoal on unprimed canvas, 7 ft. 2⅝ in. x 9 ft. 9¼ in. (220 x 297.8 cm). Collection the artist. On extended loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.**

lines in this painting are moments of inscription and self-inscription; they act like a signature, gestures that both make the work and ensure that it provides the viewer (like the maker) with an experience of the canvas as a "place of its own."

All this is very Pollock, certainly, without looking like Pollock at all. But what is particularly like-and-not-like Pollock is one last passage or incident in the picture: the most direct artifact of its manufacture on the floor. It is a body print—we could call it a sitzmark—that blooms on the surface like a lopsided paint flower pressed from fabric folds (fig. 7). (It is joined, by the way, by the imprints of two paint cans that hover faintly along the right edge; fig. 8.) While the whole credo of this picture—its allegiance to spontaneity—requires that such interruptions be tolerated, the same necessity does not mean that this impress was made integral to the image. It is just *there*, quite separate from lines and billows, or any landscape effect. Think back at this juncture to Pollock, by way of precedent and contrast, weaving his handprints into *Number 1A, 1948* (plate 1)—weaving them, however marginally, into the whole. Or remember him saying, "I don't use the accident—'cause I deny the accident."[29] Which of course is tantamount to saying that all

accidents are merely grist for the painter's mill—including handprints, it is safe to say. Now look back at *Mountains and Sea*: how deliberately unrhetorical this accidental presence seems. Like a colophon, the print stays separate; there is no integration, no weaving here. Yet it doesn't claim authorship—"I Helen made this"—so much as suggest that "Helen was here."

This special license issued to mark and field and image—this apparent willingness to declare the origins of these terms in separate moments, then let each make its own separate way—is, I think, what is personal about Frankenthaler's work: what, to be more precise, her art both grasps and refuses from Pollock's. Frankenthaler, I am claiming, sees the accumulation and disjunctiveness implicit in the components of Pollock's paintings, as well as the spell he casts to make them "one." For her, however, disenchantment is the rule. The same roster of painterly elements accumulates in her work, only to drift—even sometimes hurtle—apart. These effects of separation—they amount to a kind of undoing—are, I think, somehow bound up in what Louis and Noland meant about Frankenthaler's special grasp on Pollock's art. And certainly those same effects are implicit in their selective reading of her art. What they shied away from, however, is the complex whole of the lesson: the complex whole, in other words, that she claimed painting to be. In Frankenthaler's hands painting moves farther toward its redefinition as a practice that is both arbitrary and intended as well as both figurative and abstract, produced of moves and gestures whose effects are as decisive as their motives are hard to specify. This is a way of proceeding, moreover, that almost didactically disturbs the already improbable and uneasy peace that Pollock sometimes forged between mark and image, drawing and color, figure and ground, and so on; Frankenthaler disrupted that peace almost every chance she got. This is what Noland and Louis were unable to grasp: what Pollock would sometimes integrate and keep in balance when "at home" in his canvas, Frankenthaler insists on prizing apart.

Look at what happens in two very different paintings, *Europa* and *Jacob's*

Fig. 9 (opposite). Helen Frankenthaler. *Europa*. **1957. Oil on unprimed canvas, 70¼ x 54¼ in. (179.1 x 137.8 cm). Private collection**

Fig. 10. Helen Frankenthaler. *Jacob's Ladder*. **1957. Oil on unprimed canvas, 9 ft. 5⅓ in. x 69¾ in. (287.9 x 177.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Hyman N. Glickstein**

Ladder (both 1957; figs. 9 and 10). Both are floor-made pictures, both aggressive in their approach to the conventions and traditions of figuration and landscape—what is attacked and ironized in *Europa* hovers somewhere between comedy and transcendence in *Jacob's Ladder*—but both works have moments where Frankenthaler makes her mark, leaves a trace. And she again does so as a kind of signature that will not quite be integrated or made part of some whole. In *Europa*, the disruptions comprise a whole repertoire of splashes and stripes, even a carefully limned circle—think of Giotto's magically virtuosic perfect 0.[30] They are staged in the face of a lurid nude victim, Titian's heroine, here decked out clownishly, with a splatter for a rubbery nose. Individual marks in *Jacob's Ladder* are less assertive but still figurative, though elusively: when I look at the pours that float in the pale upper third of the picture, I think inevitably of someone making angels in the snow. And these marks are likewise more spatial than those

in *Europa*; along with stains and splashes there are four quick circles (they are more mundane than magical) that again seem to delimit sites or moments in the picture's expanse. They also interrupt it. I see such incidents, in their separateness, as having more to do with mark and place than with field or image. Think of these canvases laid horizontal, and their maker pacing and tracing on them as if they were another country, one in which she was prepared to dwell.

To see Frankenthaler "finding herself" in her pictures, then, is to register how often bodily echoes and mimicries—specters of the painter painting and remembering paintings, or sometimes merely marking, or simply being—are at play in their structures.[31] Without quite pursuing disjunctiveness as an all-out goal, the works admit that it is part of their process. As a result, Frankenthaler seems to pull process itself away from image—farther, I think, than Pollock himself could allow—even while she examines just what an image might be. Her questions seem fundamental: how and where does painting sit within its history? From what resources might it now be made? What in its repertoire of effects and subjects might still be viable? Where is the painter herself? I think that many of the artist's impulses—including that toward self-assertion and self-registry—answer to some such baseline inquisition. So does her interest in painterly traditions and genres—in the long tradition of figuration above all. Think of the insistently mythic and historical implications of her stock of titles in the mid-1950s: *Lorelei*, *Eden*, *Trojan Gates*, *Mount Sinai*, *Holocaust*, *Western Dream*, *Hommage à Chardin*, *Other Generations*, *Cave Memory*, *Hotel Cro Magnon*—and this is just a partial list. (Though my favorite title of all is *Woman's Decision*—this, ironically, is one of the few Frankenthalers now considered "lost.") In the context of the last two titles, *Cave Memory* and *Hotel Cro Magnon*, we should recall that the most splendidly gestural of Frankenthaler's 1950s paintings—the great *Before the Caves* of 1958—uses its title to frame its painterly vehemence as a specially exigent version of primitivism, and stages it in an explosion of now definitively nonfigurative marks (plate 34). Troutlike speckles, feathery brush strokes, a few intense pours: only once in this wildly diverse field of color and gesture does anything surface against the grain. Up in the right-hand corner are two sets of numbers, both reading 173.[32]

Yet the numbers are hardly disruptive, at least according to my earlier efforts to describe such graphic accumulations, and thus it might be tempting to see *Before the Caves* as signaling some new departure or advancement, in its attitude toward color above all. Surely now the bridge is approaching the Louis-and-Noland shore. (Remember Noland: "Frankenthaler showed us a way—a way to think about, and use, color.") By these lights, *Before the Caves* presumably teaches that color and drawing—color and mark-making—could now be one and the same. And so the way is cleared for Veils and Unfurleds—for the brilliant and energetic quietude of Louis's later art. But what gets left behind? The "personal"?

Perhaps—yet now the word seems muted and much too well behaved. Read *Art News* for contrast, where Lawrence Campbell reviewed the 1959 exhibition in which *Before the Caves* was shown: "They are frightening, but they leave a strong impression. They all look as though they were meant to be looked down on from above rather than at customary eye level—water reflecting an image, oneself, instead of a looking glass. . . . They are crazy looking paintings."[33] They are crazy, let me emphasize, in the eyes of a critic sensitized to questions of making and viewing first framed by Pollock's practice, where they were registered as somehow concerning the self, and disorienting the viewer's vision in their wake.

Yet Campbell's verdict also points us once more to Frankenthaler's geography of self-encounter. Looking down, she paints a surface whose directness and distortions inscribe and reflect a self—her own. That these effects reach such intensity when mark and color work closest together takes my mind back to an observation we owe to Sigmund Freud, who wrote to Wilhelm Fliess, "We cannot do justice to the characteristic of the mind by linear outlines like those in a drawing or in a primitive painting, but rather by areas of color melting into one another as they are represented by modern artists. After making the separation [he means not only between line and color but between the mind's overall outlines and nuances] we must allow what we have separated to merge once more."[34] If mind means line *and* color or mark *and* image in Frankenthaler's painting, it can only do so when her art is allowed some of the subtlety Freud's imagery intends. He does not think of psychic boundaries and delimitations as either necessarily distinct or seamlessly related. A cognate sense of shift and overlap and interrelationship is sometimes performed in Frankenthaler's work; at other moments, effects and layers within its topography are jarringly forced apart. All these are the registers of the painter's mind.

My citing Freud does not mean that I am claiming some diagnostic or therapeutic aspect in Frankenthaler's purposes as a painter. Instead I have argued that they are the product of the Pollockian project she set herself, a project that led as much to irony and pessimism about the modes of painting and their integration as it did to therapy. Resolution is not her mode. In aid of this final proposal, look at one more image—the work she entitled, with thanks to the critic William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (plate 35). Think again of a canvas lying stapled to the floor. Think of it being painted, then repainted, with one incident after another eventually clouded in a dense miasma of gray. The artist kept score; she eliminated types one through six. At some point she drew a circle; at another, red outlines; at the top (perhaps thus making it the top), a long stroke of green. When, I wonder, did the footprints appear? (They intrude along the bottom left edge.) Do they remember Pollock, perhaps perform him? Is this effect overlaid on the artist's own performance, herself? Might these marks now stand for figuration? How do they differ from the red specters—splashed dove

and floating figure—that hover above? What exactly is these marks' tone? "The seventh type of ambiguity," writes Empson, "occurs when the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the author's mind."[35] For Empson, moreover, the idea of opposition is Freudian; he ties it to the analysis of dreams. In this context a Freudian opposite "marks dissatisfaction; the notion of what you want involves the idea that you have not got it, and this again involves the 'opposite defined by your context,' which is what you have and cannot avoid."[36]

The definition is helpful if it points us to what is placed in tension by Frankenthaler's art, not least by virtue of the ambiguities of the position from and within which she paints. The tensions of class and gender provide one such ambiguity. They force us to wonder how we might value and reinterpret the contradictory means and allegiances her art invokes and juxtaposes. Color versus line, solid versus void, depth versus surface, stroke versus stain, innovation versus tradition, past versus present—this list could go on and on. Will it circle back to nature versus culture? Of course: only now we grasp that Frankenthaler's culture—her nature—forces us to admit the utter ambiguity of those terms. Frankenthaler's art nourishes itself on such fundamental divisions—opposite values, opposite meanings; their taste is both bitter and sweet.

Nature and culture: one way of seeing Frankenthaler's painting in this provided framework is to find it between these two poles. There as bridge, but also as threshold. It leads, I think, to a space worth exploring—one where the painter's meditation on her procedures and history, her identity and her inheritance, is spelled out as thick and conflicted description, in a visual topography where pleasures and frustrations need not be tidied away. Instead they accumulate as passion and triviality, error and success: such contradictions are these paintings' honesty. Shall we call this space feminine? Why not? As long as we grant that its ambiguities—this particular amalgam of desire, disempowerment, and contingent responsiveness—have shaped other inhabitants. On occasion we'll find Pollock there. Of course I am speaking of what we might call "Pollock's femininity"—what in his art might be thought of as descriptive, layered, unsynthesized, "too personal," contradictory, aiming at boundlessness, relentlessly tactile: sometimes all of these things. These, at any rate, are aspects of his painting to which artists who are women have most responded. Nature, culture, masculine, feminine: in looking at Pollock and Frankenthaler, and from them to other artists—Lynda Benglis, certainly, and of course Eva Hesse is on the list—it is possible to hope that the jig may be up for these cherished binaries, once works and artists and critics begin to revalue and evade their terms. At the very least, the time is past when they can be deployed with the same blind insistence, as if they described, rather than merely bolstered, some deep-seated and powerful truth.

Notes

I am pleased to acknowledge the assistance of Lucia Tripodes in assembling a dossier of critical responses to Helen Frankenthaler's paintings, as well as her helpful responses to the lecture version of this paper.

1. Sherry B. Ortner has explored the implications, for female oppression, of the symbolic location of women in relation to nature; see her "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture," in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford: at the University Press, 1974), pp. 67–87. Ortner's analysis aims to forward a future in which "both men and women can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women be seen as aligned with culture, in culture's ongoing dialectic with nature" (p. 87). Dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir, Ortner's commentary derives its categories, "with all due respect," from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss—a circumstance relevant to the present analysis insofar as it provides a useful historical reference point for the personalities and paintings I am describing. Note, therefore, that both Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler were painting in New York when Lévi-Strauss wrote *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which he published in France in 1949, though not until 1969 in English translation. The book begins with a chapter entitled "Nature and Culture"—not so much to refute these categories, despite, Lévi-Strauss says, the "confident repudiation" to which they had long fallen heir, but to locate the principles that motivate and distinguish them in the incest taboo. Further feminist commentary on the nature/culture binary appears in C. P. MacCormack and M. Strathern, eds., *Nature, Culture and Society* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1980).

2. It is Frank O'Hara who calls the artist "erudite," in his catalogue introduction for her retrospective at The Jewish Museum, New York, in 1960; in his mind erudition chastens the risk-taking her painting also involves. The key sentence reads, "One of her strengths is this very ability to risk everything on inspiration, but one feels that the work is judged afterwards by a very keen and even erudite intelligence." O'Hara, "Helen Frankenthaler," *An Exhibition of Oil Paintings by Frankenthaler*, exh. cat. (New York: The Jewish Museum of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), p. 5.

3. Although artists have been negotiating Pollock's work since the late 1940s, the 1967 retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art occasioned a new encounter with it, and a reevaluation of its meaning for a new audience. The show functioned, moreover, as an occasion to distinguish critical incomprehension of Pollock (for many, Hilton Kramer's review "Art: Looking Back at Jackson Pollock," in the *New York Times* of April 5, 1967, served as the exemplum of such blindness) from artistic fascination with Pollock's work. To quote Dore Ashton, "They used to say Pollock was an artists' artist. Quite rightly, I think, since artists were the ones who called attention to his existence and who have persistently risen to his defense. Even now, many young artists of totally different formation recognize in his work a vital, secret thrust into their lives where critics recognize only weaknesses of a technical or formal order. . . . They recognize the unsullied impulse to continue to make art even when making art seems a trivial or hopeless ambition" ("New York," *Studio International* 174 [July 1967]: 47–48). I want to set these terms—as Ashton herself does—against more familiar, and more deadening, "historical" moves.

4. Lisa Saltzman, "Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender, Identity, and New York School Painting," in *Friedel Dzubas: Critical Painting*, exh. cat. (Medford, Mass.: Tufts University Gallery, 1998), pp. 9–24. In an unpublished paper, Alison Rowley, a doctoral candidate at the University of Leeds, has brought critical scrutiny to bear on the key story of origins within the Frankenthaler literature, the account that the painter gives of how *Mountains and Sea*—and with it the staining technique—came about. I am grateful to Rowley for the opportunity to read her work.

5. Parker Tyler, "Helen Frankenthaler," *Artnews* 54 no. 10 (February 1956): 49.

6. The topic of Frankenthaler's painterly "courage" surfaces among the earliest responses to her work. See for example Paul Brach, "Helen Frankenthaler," *Art Digest* 26 no. 5 (December 1, 1951): 18–19.

7. See Barbara Rose, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1970), and John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989).

8. "Women Artists in Ascendance: Young Group Reflects Lively Virtues of U.S. Painting," *Life* 42 no. 19 (May 13, 1957): 74. *Blue Territory* was shown in Frankenthaler's exhibition at Tibor de Nagy, New York, in 1956, and was illustrated, with the caption "her sensuous empire," in Tyler, "Helen Frankenthaler." The calculations of the *Life* photographer are further evident not only in the inclusion of the colorful *Mountains and Sea* but also in the way a third painting was moved in to crop *Blue Territory* just where its colors begin to change. Note also that the particular photographic effects I remark on here—the staging, and the manipulation of the range of color—are equally characteristic of the portraits of the other women artists in the *Life* article: Grace Hartigan, Nell Blaine, Joan Mitchell, and Jane Wilson. None is shown painting.

9. "Heiress to a New Tradition," *Time*, March 28, 1969, p. 64.

10. There is a certain confusion in the Frankenthaler literature about when she first saw Pollock's paintings. It stems from the artist's own recollections as communicated to Henry Geldzahler, and published by him as "An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," *Artforum* 4 no. 2 (October 1965): 36–38, where she dates her first visit to a Pollock show to "September or October, 1951." Rose repeats Frankenthaler's dating. Actually Pollock showed at Parsons in late November–early December of that year, but in any case the modest size of the works in Pollock's 1951 show—these were the black-and-white paintings—doesn't quite square with Frankenthaler's characterization of her first response: "It was staggering. I really felt surrounded." The remark seems more appropriate as a memory of Pollock's show at Parsons in November–December 1950. This interpretation is supported by Karen Wilkin, who names the works Frankenthaler identifies as her favorites from her first Pollock show—*Lavender Mist* and *Autumn Rhythm*, both from 1950. See Wilkin, *Frankenthaler, Works on Paper, 1949–84*, exh. cat. (New York: George Braziller, in association with International Exhibitions Foundation, 1984), p. 32. For a reading of Pollock's installation practices c. 1950, see T. J. Clark, "Pollock's Smallness," in the present volume.

11. Frankenthaler, quoted in Geldzahler, "An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," p. 37.

12. Frankenthaler, quoted in Rose, *Frankenthaler*, p. 29. Rose also quotes Frankenthaler, apropos of this exhibition, using a more pugilistic metaphor: "She recalls feeling as if she were 'in the center ring of Madison Square Garden'" (p. 29).

13. This phrase is meant as a disqual-

ification of the kinds of interest in Pollock evidenced by Allan Kaprow. However important his influence and articulate his statement, what mattered to Kaprow was less Pollock's paintings themselves than the postures and behaviors they licensed.
14. Kenneth Noland, quoted in James McC. Truitt, "Art—Arid D. C. Harbors Touted 'New' Painters," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1961, p. 20. Most citations of this passage pick it up from Gerald Nordland, *The Washington Color Painters*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1965), p. 12.
15. Frankenthaler, quoted in Geldzahler, "An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," p. 37.
16. Morris Louis, quoted in ibid.
17. Clement Greenberg, "Louis and Noland," 1960, in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: at the University Press, 1993), p. 97. This equation of opticality with "disembodiment" asks to be contrasted with Greenberg's earlier account of Pollock's black-and-white paintings; speaking to their visual density, he had written in 1952, "This is not an affair of packing and crowding, but of embodiment; every square inch of the canvas receives a maximum of charge at the cost of a minimum of physical means." Greenberg, "Feeling Is All," 1952, in *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, vol. 3 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. O'Brian, p. 105. The sentence I quote in the text has recently been cited by Michael Fried in the course of his own efforts to explicate and limit the notion of opticality at work in Greenberg's writings of the 1960s, so as 1) to distinguish between its global and particular valences in Greenberg's thought; 2) to claim that opticality was a way station, in Greenberg's writing, en route to a larger value, that of openness, which is simultaneously literal, two-dimensional, and intensely identified with the embrace of color; 3) to demonstrate Greenberg's own indecision about how sweeping the application and implications of "opticality" should be. See Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: at the University Press, 1998), pp. 20–21.
18. In aid of this argument, Fried distinguishes what he sees as "figuration" in *Number 3, 1951* from what Pollock himself might have seen there, namely an "allusion to the human figure." For Fried, "figuration" is an elusive quality, one that partakes of both blindness and sight: when it appears in *Out of the Web*, for example, it is "not seen as an object in the world or shape on a flat surface; it is not seen as the presence of anything, but rather, one might say, as the absence of portions of one's visual field. . . . In the end the relation between the figuration and the painted field virtually defeats description: it is as though the figuration is situated *within one's eyes*, as strange as this may sound." Fried, "Morris Louis," 1966, revised 1971, and reprinted in *Art and Objecthood*, p. 107. Michael Leja, in *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 304–5, has already called attention to some characteristics of Fried's account of figuration in Pollock.
19. Fried, "Morris Louis," p. 108.
20. To date it is Elderfield who has voiced the most articulate objection to treating *Mountains and Sea* as a merely transitional work: "To treat it as a bridge, however, is to invite it to be passed over: if not neglected, then viewed from the opposite side." *Frankenthaler*, p. 65.
21. Frankenthaler's Pollock was also a gift of the artist. See Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), vol. III, no. 828. Greenberg's Pollock drawing is reproduced in the same volume, no. 813, as well as in color in Kirk Varnedoe with Pepe Karmel, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), plate 202, p. 289. The sheet Pollock gave Frankenthaler is simultaneously more gestural and more calligraphic than the one he presented to Greenberg, though both exhibit an interior orderliness—a rhythm of repeated gestures and accumulated forms that I see as similar, and that distinguishes them from other drawings of the same year using larger, wetter blotches and stains. In 1958, Frankenthaler posed with other objects in her collection—notably a David Smith sculpture and an African mask—for a photograph used to illustrate André Emmerich, "The Artist as Collector," *Art in America* 46 no. 2 (Summer 1958): 28.
22. Pollock, quoted in William Wright, "An Interview with Jackson Pollock," 1950, an interview broadcast on radio station WERI, Westerly, R.I., in 1951, and first published in O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), p. 81.
23. Ibid., p. 80.
24. Ibid.
25. Part of the special charge I allot to horizontality is derived from the "horizontal" idea of time advanced by Melanie Klein. To quote Juliet Mitchell on this topic, "Infancy is a perpetual present. This could be linked with the small child's extraordinary memory—which is not memory, but a continuous actuality. So too because of the Oedipus and castration complexes, only humans have yesterdays. As far as we can tell, neither animals nor pre-Oedipal human infants divide time into future, past and present. Time for them would seem to be nearer to spatial relationships: here, there; come, gone; horizontal, punctuated duration rather than an historical, vertical temporal perspective." Mitchell, "Introduction," *The Selected Melanie Klein* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 26. My argument below involves the implicit claim that Frankenthaler's work on the horizontal canvas is characterized by affective moments we might see as both "horizontal" and "vertical" in the Kleinian sense.
26. Rowley offers a revisionist account of those circumstances, and of their implications for *Mountains and Sea*, in the unpublished essay mentioned in note 4.
27. It seems right to think of both shards and polyps as involving memories of the scraped brown shapes that pull against the surface of *Out of the Web*.
28. It is striking that although this painting is given "seminal" status, it is seldom well described. The persistence of drawing in its execution, as well as the visible role of drawing in the final image, are often elided, discounted, or, worse, seen as the work's limitation. In my argument, Frankenthaler's use of drawing is one aspect of her revision of Pollock's painting—a revision that aims to keep the surface active as a palimpsest or history of marks.
29. Pollock, quoted in Wright, "An Interview with Jackson Pollock," p. 80.
30. See E. Kris and O. Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 96–97.
31. I derive this sentence, with thanks, from a helpful exchange with Brigid Doherty.
32. Rose reads these numbers as

figuring in Robert Motherwell's address (*Frankenthaler*, p. 90). That Frankenthaler would inscribe them, regardless of their disconnection with the overall look and content of the painting, only underscores how much she imagined her paintings as palimpsests or accumulations of mark and activity—including those accidental in kind. In this regard, note that the surface of *Before the Caves* bears striations, horizontal traces of the floorboards of her studio, marking the pressure of the canvas against that surface. Karmel, in both his contibution to the retrospective catalogue and his essay in the present volume, has called attention to similar effects in Pollock's paintings.

33. Lawrence Campbell, "Helen Frankenthaler," *Artnews* 58 no. 4 (May 1959): 14. A few other critics register similarly extreme reactions to Frankenthaler's work; in 1960, for example, Anne Seelye disposed of it as evidence of a "hysterical temperament" (*Artnews* 59 [March 1960]: 57), a judgment scathing enough to summon a collection of letters written in the artist's defense (*Artnews* 59 no. 3 [May 1960]: 6). O'Hara was writing of the extremism of the psychological content of Frankenthaler's work as early as 1954; to cite one key phrase, "She does not hesitate to deal with her subject with a frankness approaching sordidness, for the power of their impact is that of natural violence evoked in a lofty immaculate tone—the compacted sordidness of one of those 'unspeakable' characters in Henry James." *Artnews* 53 no. 8 (December 1954): 53. What O'Hara seems to me to get right, by means of this comparison, is the fraught disjunctions in tone and content rife in Frankenthaler's work.

34. Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works, Standard Edition*, XII: 79, as quoted in Mitchell, *The Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 30.

35. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1947), p. 192. Empson goes on to speak to the kinds of assumptions such a word can encounter, namely, "You might think that such a case could never occur, and if it occurred, could not be poetry." Such assumptions, I have been arguing, have had their impact on the reception of Frankenthaler's work.

36. Ibid., p. 193.

Jackson Pollock and the Americanization of Europe

Jeremy Lewison

It has long been argued that the exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism circulating in Europe in the 1950s were part of a cultural initiative during the Cold War to depict the United States of America as a benign superpower and a model of democratic freedom. As early as 1950, the American cultural commentator and translator of French literature Lewis Galantière indicated the need for such a strategy: "When a nation attains to world leadership, it preserves that rank only as long as its culture . . . commands respect. . . . Without [respect], wealth and might lead only to hatred, conspiracy and revolt against the physically dominant power."[1] The promotion of high art was but one aspect of the pursuit of this goal; Europe simultaneously witnessed an influx of American products, financial aid, and life-style. This context conditioned the reception of Abstract Expressionism and of Jackson Pollock.

The European responses to exhibitions of American art differed from nation to nation, and it would be beyond the scope of this article to deal with them all. The focus of this essay is on Pollock's reception in England, France, and Italy.

The Response in England

In a perceptive review of the American Pavilion at the 1950 Venice Biennale, published in the *New York Times*, Aline B. Louchheim identified the dominant European attitude toward the United States:

> Habit is hard to break, and for a long, long time it has been the habit of Europeans to think of Americans as cultural barbarians. It is a way of thinking once grounded in fact and one which we—whether out of necessity or embarrassment or defensiveness—have fostered. The flight of intellectuals to Paris; the Babbitts and Dodsworths who represented us both in embassy buildings and Ritz Hotels; our smug materialism; and, above all, the real paucity of our past creation as compared to that of Europeans, nourished the legend. Even if nothing else had happened, this attitude would have persisted legitimately. The fiasco of our State Department art show, our "cocacolaisms," Congress' attitude towards culture, and our own uncertainties have done nothing to dispel it.[2]

Louchheim identifies an attitude manifest particularly in England and France, and to a lesser extent in Italy, in the immediate postwar period: a belief in the cultural inferiority of the United States. To a large extent, she suggests, the blame lay with Americans themselves, because the image they exported confirmed the stereotype, but she identifies other reasons why Europeans might have taken a patronizing view of American culture: "As Europeans are forced, however grudgingly, to recognize us as a leading world power in economic and military spheres, their own cultural superiority is ever more jealously preserved. Holding us intellectual yokels seems an escape valve for natural resentment of our dominance in other fields; it seems both a conscious and unconscious revenge for economic and military dependence."

Louchheim's review expresses some of the key issues of the 1950s surrounding the influence of America in Europe, where there was genuine concern, particularly among the older generation, about increasing "Americanization" and the erosion of a long-standing, specifically European culture. In Britain, the cultural magazine *Horizon*, founded during World War II by the journalist Cyril Connolly, was something of a barometer of intellectual views on America, and its attitude, at least initially, was disapproving. In January 1945, for example, the philosopher Bertrand Russell, who had spent much of the war in the United States, wrote on the "intolerable boredom" arising from the uniformity that he found among Americans, who lacked "respect for knowledge."[3] Toward the end of the year, Georgina Dix wrote a *Horizon* article caricaturing a fictitious George Brant, citizen of Washington, D.C.—a philistine modernist[4] with no concern for the plight of Europe and no interest in history. "We have extracted all we want out of European culture," Brant opines, "and frankly we don't mind what happens to it." His interlocutor, a Mrs. Rimington, sees America as a country strewn with junk, its cities characterized by a "jumble of towering buildings, neon lights, traffic blocks, drugstores and restless, standardized people."[5] These two articles manifest the legacy of colonialism in the attitudes of the British literati, and disclose their fears of changing values. Apparently vulgar, bland, and disrespectful of the culture that Europe had so lovingly constructed but that appeared under threat of extinction, America had become a target for intellectual brickbats.[6]

Within two years *Horizon* began to modify its position. In an issue devoted exclusively to America, Connolly held out the hope that the nation was on the brink of change: "As Europe becomes more helpless the Americans are compelled to become more far-seeing and responsible. . . . *Our impotence liberates their potentialities*. Something important is about to happen as if the wonderful *jeunesse* of America were suddenly to retain their idealism and vitality and courage and imagination into adult life, and become the wise and the good who make use of them."[7] Yet Connolly also described America as violent, alcoholic, money grabbing, and unhealthy. There was no doubting the country's energy, but there were

doubts about how that energy might be directed.

Anti-Americanism was born from a number of factors. Although Britain had been victorious in the war, it had depended upon American financial aid and manpower. The result had been a growing burden of debt and resentment. There were acrimonious reports in the British press on the differences in the American and the English standards of living. "We think it ironic," wrote a columnist in the trade newspaper *World's Press News*, "that the mere 48,000,000 of us who saved the entire civilized world in 1940 should now be rewarded by being on the rocks"[8]—a statement not only alluding to Britain's parlous economic situation but insinuating the view that the "entire civilized world" was limited to Europe.

Although Britain had remained at liberty throughout the war, it had been "occupied" by large numbers of American troops. During a period of isolation from Europe, the country had been subjected to an invasion of American culture, for example popular music (and later rock and roll), chewing gum, and nylons. Then, in the immediate aftermath of the war, and despite efforts to impose a quota, the British government failed to limit the import of Hollywood films, which American distributors were eager to release in Europe. The British film audience was Europe's largest, and it was mainly through film and music that young people became entranced with America. While the older generation regarded American films as vulgar, unhealthy, and, in westerns and gangster movies, displaying an offensive elementary Darwinism, the majority of the cinema-going public enthusiastically absorbed Hollywood's visions of excitement, affluence, democracy, and rebellion.[9] If for some the new world evidenced decadence and a lowering of standards, for others it was exciting, new, and nonconformist. One generation's barbarism was another's dream. Herbert Read, a frequent visitor to the United States, wrote to Howard Newby of the BBC in 1951: "This is my fourth visit to America, so I am no longer excited by the skyscrapers, American women or even American automobiles. The enduring satisfactions are American plumbing, unlimited supplies of orange juice and the telephone operators. . . . The new horror is the undergraduate in tight jeans with 'crew-cropped' head and ape-like slouch. Thousands of them identical."[10]

The infiltration of American culture was on the increase. American literature was growing in popularity, and would soon be taught in English universities. Discussing contemporary writers in *Horizon* in March of 1949, Stephen Spender pronounced Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, e. e. cummings, and James Thurber "a living body of protest against the vulgarity, commercialization, advertising, exploiting, which many people think of as the most characteristic American qualities."[11] In the art world, too, young people would feel the same kind of excitement about American art that the rest of their generation did about American movies. The English painter Robyn Denny found the Europe of the

1950s dull and boring and British art provincial and uninspiring compared to what was coming out of America: "Europe was exhausted and wound down. Life in London was gray and austere, its art world more than ever prone to compromise and introspection. I felt the whole culture was flawed and frozen into fixed attitudes of expression and our art to have become shallow and self-indulgent. Thus the shows of the post-war American art seen in London during the fifties were a kind of revelation asserting a future for art and, as in other fields of cultural endeavor at the time, the new world was taking the lead."[12]

In his discussion of American literature, Spender had suggested that writers managed to survive success within the highly commercialized society of the United States by seeking isolation and resorting to alcohol. Furthermore, "Alcoholism, the occupational disease of the successful American writer, can surely be explained at least in part as an effort to restore contact with the dionysiac, the violent, the real, the unconscious level of experience, by those who have been cut off by success from their roots."[13] In making this argument Spender seems to subscribe to the view, which was commonly promoted, that the American artist is violent, isolated, in touch with the unconscious, and thus in some way powerfully primitive. There is a consistency between Spender's vision and that of the New Yorker Clement Greenberg, who, in *Horizon* in 1947, had described the violence of Pollock's art as a quality in which it was radically American: "Faulkner and Melville can be called as witnesses to the nativeness of such violence, exasperation and stridency." Acknowledging Pollock's roots in "Picasso's Cubism and Miro's post-Cubism, tinctured also with Kandinsky and Surrealist inspiration," Greenberg also argued that Pollock was "a Gothic, morbid and extreme disciple" of these European models, and alluded to "the ferocious struggle to be a genius" in isolation.[14] His article was the first report of Pollock to appear in the English press, and it set the tone for much that was to follow. Anxious to assert the originality of Pollock, and by implication of a nascent American art, Greenberg contrasted Pollock's "violence" against the suave sophistication of Europe. This idea was to be a leitmotif of British and Continental art criticism during the 1950s.

Writing in the New York journal *The Nation* on the 1950 American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, the English critic David Sylvester took up this theme as a term of opprobrium rather than praise. Demonstrating that anti-Americanism was not solely the preserve of the older generation, Sylvester characterized the artists in the pavilion, Pollock among them, as representing "the seamier side of America—sentimentalism, hysteria, and an undirected and undisciplined exuberance."[15] Soon to become an eloquent supporter of Abstract Expressionism, Sylvester was at this point, by his own later admission, still "blinded by an old-fashioned anti-Americanism,"[16] and two months later, again in *The Nation*, Greenberg accused him of condescension. Anchoring an appreciation of Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Arshile Gorky on their extension of European art (a

refrain from his 1947 article), Greenberg subtly implied that since the work of these artists, although American, was a development of the European tradition, a critic of Sylvester's sophistication should have been able to accommodate it. Taking a passing swipe at English art in the name of Graham Sutherland, he declared that Pollock et al. "must have looked too new" in Venice. In the same issue of the journal, Sylvester launched an aggressive counterattack: "I disliked [the American Pavilion] because most of it represented a brand of American romanticism which . . . I find repellent and contemptible, because it is incoherent, modernistic, mucoid, earnest and onanistic, because it gets hot and bothered over nothing and reminds me of Steig's drawing called 'I can't express it.' . . . Pollock's approach has long been familiar to me though at a more mature level, through the work of Wols, Fin and [Raoul] Ubac."[17] In this way Sylvester asserted not only that Pollock's work was essentially European but that it lagged behind a more sophisticated European abstraction. For him America was characterized by the streamlined and mechanistic (a view shared by many at the time), and its artistic exemplar was not Pollock but Alexander Calder.

This debate between a British and an American critic was published in an American magazine, and would not have been widely read in England. Indeed, aside from Greenberg's article of 1947 there was little mention of Pollock in the English press before 1953. But word was beginning to spread. The Scottish artist Alan Davie had seen paintings by Pollock when Peggy Guggenheim's collection was shown in the Greek Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1948, and had returned full of praise for the artist's "primitive" work.[18] And in 1949, Denys Sutton, writing in *Horizon* on "The Challenge of American Art" and suggesting, in anticipation of Galantière and Louchheim, that America was on the brink of something new, had singled out Pollock for his "pure color and calligraphy" and his "need to secure deliverance from certain images. The artist, whether a painter or a sculptor, is in constant struggle with himself and his material."[19] (Sutton thus extended Greenberg's theme of Pollock's "ferocious struggle" to be an artist, and introduced the idea of the importance of the unconscious.) A visit by the painter William Scott to New York in 1952 yielded an equally enthusiastic response, which he passed on to the artists soon to become associated with Saint Ives, in Cornwall. At the time, the importance of American art was not yet recognized, and American art magazines, though available, were not read with the intensity of such French reviews as *Cahiers d'Art*. Writings on Pollock were therefore overlooked in the Britain of the early 1950s, and word of mouth was an important means of communication.

Pollock's painting was not seen firsthand in England until 1953, when the French critic Michel Tapié and Peter Watson, the backer of *Horizon*, included him in *Opposing Forces*, an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London. Watson had presumably seen or heard of Tapié's *Véhémences confrontées*

exhibition of 1951, at the Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris, which had juxtaposed European *informel* with American abstraction; the idea for the ICA show was similar. Pollock's inclusion was a late idea, and indeed his work arrived late, joining paintings by Sam Francis, Georges Mathieu, Henri Michaux, Alfonso Ossorio, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Iaroslav Serpan. The exhibition was greeted with amusement. A number of reviewers criticized Tapié's enthusiastic but impenetrable text, and ridiculed Pollock before his works had arrived. There was limited knowledge of his techniques; the critic of the *Times*, for example, wrote that Pollock "apparently produces [large pictures] by spilling and dribbling paint while walking over a canvas laid on the floor," thus introducing a myth that was to be quite potent in British art.[20] Among those critics who waited to see the work before writing their reviews, there was a consistent refrain that Pollock's paintings were decorative. Eric Newton, for example, in *The Listener*, described the works of all of the artists in the exhibition as "patterns, and some of them are rather nice patterns, but nothing—certainly not the foreword to the catalogue—will persuade me that they are more than patterns. And surely a painting is by definition more than a pattern."[21] Robert Melville, in *Architectural Review*, expressed a similar idea in a more positive light, reporting that Pollock's paintings "are not pictures in any accepted sense of the term, but they are superb wall treatments, quite beyond the range of the 'interior decorator.' . . . [They are] a majestic turmoil, a breathing wall to mitigate without fussiness or whimsy the interior austerities of machines for living."[22] This insistence on the decorative qualities of Pollock's art was to be a consistent feature of reviews of his work throughout the 1950s.[23]

Of all the reviewers of *Opposing Forces*, the painter Patrick Heron took the show the most seriously. Singling out Mathieu and Pollock, whom he mistakenly characterized as a follower of Riopelle (another example of the degree to which Europeans were ignorant of American art), Heron described Pollock's method of painting as "mechanical."[24] In an article written two years later, dwelling at length on the notion of abstraction and demonstrating the abiding English interest in an art abstracted from naturalistic appearances, he described the work of such artists as Pollock as derived from "the impulse to design," and therefore insufficiently interesting. By contrast the abstraction of Pablo Picasso and particularly Georges Braque, which greatly influenced Heron's own painting of the time, served "to intensify the illusion of reality" and referred its viewers back to the world before them. "I believe painting exists," Heron wrote, "precisely in order to relate our subjective experience, our feelings, to our objective setting, to the world we are endlessly observing. In painting, merely to observe is to subscribe to the heresy of realism; and merely to project a rhythm is to subscribe to the opposite heresy of non-figuration. Great painting lies between the two and performs the function of both."[25] In England in the 1920s, distortion had been

widely considered the defining characteristic of abstract art; apparently the concept of abstraction had barely progressed beyond this.[26]

Herbert Read's outlook too was based on art's relationship to the visible world. Discussing the work of Pollock and other "formless" painters in *Encounter* in July 1955, Read wrote that "a blotch of color" could not be compared to an Etruscan bronze or a Bernini sculpture because it provided "no exercise of the shaping power of the mind." If a painting is "formless," Read argued, the spectator becomes the artist, because, like a Rorschach blot, the painting acts as a springboard for the imagination without necessarily being a work of art. Read's analysis was predicated on the appreciation of harmonious concrete forms. Lacking such formal harmony, he contended, the works of such artists as Pollock "are authentic symbols of chaos itself, of mind at the end of its tether, gazing into the pit on the other side of consciousness." Read recognized the unconscious as a source for art—he was, after all, a keen supporter of Surrealism and psychoanalysis—but criticized the "formless" painters for their lack of "intellection." Their works, he said, were no more than a record of a moment, manifestations of "a vacuous nihilism that renounces the visible world, and even the inner world of the imagination, and scribbles a graph of its uncertainty on the surface of a blank consciousness."[27]

Although these British critics may have seen the article on Pollock that appeared in *Life* magazine in 1948, they clearly knew very little about him. The fact that they made no mention of the concept of action painting suggests that Harold Rosenberg's article on the subject, published in the United States in December of 1952, had not yet reached Britain.[28] Indeed Rosenberg's ideas do not appear to have filtered through to the British press in any meaningful way until 1956,[29] when *Modern Art in the United States*, an exhibition circulated by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, was shown at the Tate Gallery. Organized as a series of groupings beginning with the "Older Generation of Moderns" and ending with "Contemporary Abstract Art," this exhibition (a reduced version of one shown in Paris the previous year under the title *Cinquante ans d'art aux Etats-Unis*[30]) caused a sensation—it was the second-best-attended exhibition held at the Tate since the war. Two talks by Meyer Schapiro accompanied it, one of them, "The Younger Generation American Painters of Today," broadcast on the radio and published in *The Listener*,[31] the other, "Recent Abstract Painting in America," a public lecture at the ICA.

The exhibition was extensively reviewed. Its most popular artists among the critics were Andrew Wyeth and Ben Shahn, but the greatest debate surrounded the contemporary abstract section. Homer Cahill's catalogue introduction lent credibility to some of the stereotypical views of American art that had been circulating since the end of the war: references to areas of Pollock's paintings "lassoed in [a] plunging gallop of line," and to Pollock slapping the canvas

with "paint-covered hands," encouraged a view of the artist as cowboy.[32] Responding to this prompt, the *Daily Mail* critic Pierre Jeannerat invoked the movie western in describing Pollock's paintings as "warpaint let loose,"[33] while Robert Stowe, of the communist *Daily Worker*, saw Pollock's work as resembling "the floor of a cage in which some monkeys have been given several pots of paint without lids to play with."[34] Themes of bestiality, violence, and barbarism, recently associated with fascism, were never far from the critics' minds; and in this way Pollock was framed as an enemy of European civilization.

Reviewing the exhibition for the New York journal *Art News*, the English critic Lawrence Alloway took the daily press to task for their inaccurate reporting and their openly anti-American stance. Yet when he remarked, "One complex of ideas labels as American characteristics independence and violence as opposed to precedent-conscious and civilized Europe,"[35] he left it unclear whether or not he agreed with this view.[36] Violence was also a theme in a number of other reviews. John Berger, a socialist with a preference for a socially engaged art, made an early English reference to Rosenberg when he wrote of the exhibition's contemporary abstract artists, "They call themselves 'Action' painters because they believe that their art can be born only in the violent act of making marks on the canvas. . . . For their own sake these slashed, scratched, dribbled upon, violated canvases would not be worth taking seriously."[37] For Berger it was as though the tradition of European culture was being extinguished in one violent gesture.

The tendency among the critics was to see Pollock's paintings as simply a jumble of chaotic lines. Among the few who appreciated the use of accident was the psychologist Anton Ehrenzweig, who argued in *The Listener* that accidents expressed the artist's unconscious mind.[38] Newton, providing an English view to readers of the *New York Times*, saw in the show "a kind of innocent, uninhibited adventurousness, a willingness to experiment and a freedom from preconceptions. One would think that painting itself was a kind of new toy whose full possibilities dawned on America in the second decade of this century."[39] The subtext of Newton's remarks was that American artists were free from the weight of history that burdened European artists. Sylvester, who would later write that he had undergone a "Damascene conversion" at this exhibition,[40] was also at odds with the majority, commenting that "the wonderful paradox with Pollock is that the frenzy is curiously controlled; Dionysian it may be in the ecstasy of its freedom, yet there is nothing of the outburst in it, nothing of violence."[41] Even before the exhibition opened, Sylvester had begun to see freedom, in itself, as a desirable goal of contemporary art; writing in the *Times* in 1955, he had remarked that "it is precisely [the artist's] desire for freedom to find his way as he goes along, creating his own values as he goes, that impels [him] today to create works which are complex traces of his acts." This aspiration for freedom

Sylvester had seen as the manifestation of an act of revolt against "the anti-humanism of the streamlined surface, an assertion of the artist's humanity and of the value of the creative act, considered as an act."[42] Given these previously expressed views, it appeared that the 1956 exhibition now revealed Pollock to Sylvester as standing in opposition to the essence of mechanized America.

Not everyone agreed on the specifically American qualities of the art. In fact a number of critics situated American abstraction as a kind of extension of European work, with Basil Taylor, for example, in the *Spectator*, referring to Pollock's "Soutine-like violence," and reassuring his readership that "these pictures should certainly not shock or surprise anyone familiar with abstract or non-figurative painting in Europe."[43] Heron, on the other hand, who like Sylvester had become a convert, wrote in the American journal *Arts* that "this movement *is* specifically American [and] *is* notably free of European influence." As distinguishing features Heron noted the scale of the paintings, "their creative emptiness . . . their flatness, or rather, their spatial shallowness," their "consistent denial of illusionistic depth," and "an absence of relish in the *matière* as an end in itself, an absence of worked-up paint quality such as one never misses in the French (sometimes a superbly manipulated surface texture is all one can find in Paris)."[44] Alloway too, in *Art News*, argued that "the European action painters tend towards connoisseur-like surfaces . . . unlike the best Americans."[45] For these authors the seeming crudity of the American painting contrasted positively with the sophistication of European art. While the views expressed in American journals were not read by the British public at large, they were readily available to British artists, who by now were regular readers of such magazines.

For an artist like Denny, European abstraction and *informel* painting were the end of an old tradition, whereas Pollock represented a new era.[46] Indeed the 1956 show was an eye-opener for many young artists, and it was artists, according to Denny, who led the appreciation for this new work. England had been trapped in the grip of Neo-Romanticism, Constructivism, and the objective realism of the Euston Road School.[47] The painter Bridget Riley, who had left the Royal College of Art the previous year, recalls that *Modern Art in the United States* represented

> such a big shift. The scale and freshness of Abstract Expressionism did not look like anything one knew and I found it surprising and stimulating. It made me very curious and I wanted to try to understand what they were doing and why. I remember thinking that obviously art is not dead after all. First there had been the huge interruption of the war and during that time and for a while afterwards, the energy of many artists was channeled into art education. So there was a wide gap for a young artist between what happened on the Continent before the war and the arrival of Abstract Expressionism; for us it seemed that there was only William Coldstream in

> between. Abstract Expressionism was an explosion of vitality and you felt that the real, what we now call the "cutting edge," had not stopped with the outbreak of the Second World War but was still alive. We had a present as well as a past.[48]

The year after the exhibition, Sylvester reported in the *New York Times* that the biggest influence of American painting "has been on young painters still at art schools, so that it will be four or five years yet before the true extent can be grasped."[49]

In November 1958, the Pollock retrospective that had opened the previous year at the São Paulo Bienal, and that then traveled extensively in Europe, arrived at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.[50] With this exhibition the response significantly changed. Bryan Robertson, the gallery's director, decided that the show would need special treatment: in order to stress the materiality of the paint, he wanted to set the paintings against a soft white background, and to avoid placing them against walls with textured surfaces. Gaining a grant of £250 (from the Arts Council of Great Britain) to modify the gallery, Robertson asked an architect, Trevor Dannatt, to design and install new freestanding walls, which were made of cinder block spray-painted with white emulsion. All of the structural walls were covered with a fine, pleated white fabric stretched over wooden frames, and the ceiling too was draped with a white fabric (figs. 1–3).[51] No previous show at the Whitechapel had been accorded such treatment. Finally the exhibition was hung chronologically.[52] Since The Museum of Modern Art had omitted Pollock's early, regionalist-flavor paintings, the effect was to present a consistent development, from the first relatively abstract works to the allover drip paintings and beyond.[53]

These strategies had an immediate impact: whereas previously many critics had seen Pollock's art as chaotic, they now perceived a logical development and an underlying order. The change was immediately evident in David Thompson's review in the *Times* on November 7, which stated that Pollock's paintings "appear . . . not anarchic but exquisitely contrived."[54] The same day, on BBC radio, Sylvester made an admission of previous blindness and bracketed Pollock with the great Europeans: "Pollock's handling of paint and organization of color is in fact as sure, as subtle, as magisterial as Matisse's or Bonnard's."[55] Two days later, John Russell, who had disparaged Pollock's work in 1956, remarked in the *Sunday Times* that "these paintings, so often acclaimed for the apparently haphazard method of their execution, are in fact most carefully designed."[56] Thompson would reinforce this point in a second article: "Although eager to seize on the accidental, [Pollock] was allowing such effects to do little more than titivate the surface of basic conceptions which occupied weeks and sometimes months of mental evolution."[57] There were writers in the popular press who persisted in denigrating Pollock as a "chuck-it-on" painter,[58] but the overall response to the show moved Alloway to charge that his colleagues had swung too far the other

Figs. 1–3. Installation views of the exhibition *Jackson Pollock 1912–1956* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, November 5–December 14, 1958

way: "Faced with the huge, handsome exhibition . . . critics have dropped the myth of Action and plumped for the myth of Order. Pollock is, now, an exponent of order, of control, with an 'aristocratic' ability to put paint in the right place."[59]

At least fifty reviews and articles on the show were published, in newspapers and magazines all over the country. Hans Namuth's color film of Pollock at work, shown twice at sell-out lectures by Robertson, also appeared on BBC television in a program in the *Monitor* series, which had an audience of 2 million. Namuth's film played a pivotal role in shaping response to the show: Pollock's casual but austere appearance, his intensity, his clipped, laconic utterances, struck a chord with a public fed on a diet of American films. The sight of him in action was also inspiring to artists.

In the catalogue, Sam Hunter likened Pollock's method of applying paint to the way a "cowboy swings his lariat," prolonging the image of the Wild West. Hunter also continued to link the artist to violence ("Pollock always saw the painting field as an arena of conflict and strife") and to freedom (Pollock "burst through the mighty boundaries and attained, momentarily and precariously, a state of absolute freedom").[60] These excessively masculine themes pervaded the British press. For the most part, though, the issue of the "Americanness" of Pollock's painting was less to the fore than in 1956. Writing that "action-painting demands no judgements that would not apply in more conventional circumstances. . . . the language of ordinary criticism remains relevant to it," Thompson implied that Pollock could be accommodated within a critical vocabulary equally applicable to French artists. Action painting had "restored to critical currency such old-fashioned terms as 'impasto' and 'expressive brushwork.'"[61]

The idea of freedom, in any case, had a European context as well as an American one. Berger likened Pollock to a man in a white cell who "has never seen anything except the growth of his own body," and who begins to express himself by painting the walls; ignorant of art history and free of artistic convention, he alone is responsible for the gestures he makes, which are "nothing more than the gestures he could discover through the act of applying his colored marks to his white walls."[62] Berger seems influenced here by Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "Existentialism and Humanism" (1946), in which Sartre wrote, "Existence comes before essence. We mean by that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. . . . Before that projection of the self nothing else exists; not even in the heaven of intelligence." For Sartre "the one thing which permits [man] to have life is the deed," and "Our point of departure is . . . the subjectivity of the individual."[63] Rosenberg's concept of action painting was of course strongly influenced by Existentialist thought, and had filtered through to British critics by 1958, as the many references to the concept of "action-painting" testify. (Berger himself had already cited it in 1956.) Existentialism had also been associated with "the new Ameri-

can painting" by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., in his catalogue introduction for the traveling show of that title, organized by The Museum of Modern Art and already circulating in Europe.[64]

The Whitechapel show had an extraordinary impact on artists. Riley would recall, "I was tremendously moved. I was moved by the power of the paintings, their immediacy, their tremendous courage—to respond to an insight requires courage and this is plainly what happened."[65] For Denny and Anthony Caro it was the image of the wild man, the James Dean of painting, that was appealing: in the climate of the "angry young man,"[66] after the debacle of Suez had discredited the authority of the governing establishment, artists and writers were trying to break down social hierarchies and aesthetic conventions, and Pollock's apparent rawness was "innovating and exciting."[67] For this generation Pollock exemplified the spirit of revolt associated with the newly arrived rock and roll, which, Denny remembers, was seen as an anti-Establishment icon, "forbidden fruit. Suddenly something was happening which had nothing to do with received values . . . [and] which was our property, that wasn't something we'd been told or learned about."[68] For some artists, including Caro, the image of revolt in which Pollock was bound up was as important as the paintings themselves.[69] For others the importance of the exhibition lay in the opportunity to view the paintings in the flesh and to appreciate their scale and facture, which black and white reproductions in magazines failed to convey.

When *The New American Painting* opened at the Tate Gallery in February 1959, two months after the Pollock retrospective closed, Pollock was the accepted leader. Given the coverage that the Whitechapel exhibition had received, however, he was no longer news; and as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko gained in strength, Pollock's star began to wane. Even at the time of the Whitechapel show, the critic for the *Burlington* had felt that Pollock had reached a point where "no development seemed possible."[70] Riley similarly, impressed though she was by Pollock's art, has recalled, "I also thought it was an impossible position and I found that terribly distressing as well as moving." For her, Pollock's art represented a "dead end": "What Pollock did was very important but at the same time it was a death knell," since it "had nothing in it to be explored."[71]

The exhibition as a whole was acclaimed. For Alloway, the champion of America, it represented the triumph of New York over Paris: "The point is: Europe cannot match Pollock, Rothko, Still, Newman, De Kooning, Kline, Gottlieb, Guston (and, by the way, Hans Hofmann)."[72] Sylvester had expressed similar sentiments the previous year.[73] New York had supplanted Paris as the place of pilgrimage. Richard Smith (1957 and 1959), Peter Lanyon (1957), William Turnbull (1957), and Caro (1959) were among those who made the trip early, but waves of English artists were to follow.

On November 6, 1959, the *Times Literary Supplement* published a special

issue titled *The American Imagination*. The lead article, "Taking Stock. A Scattered Abundance of Creative Richness," had as its only illustration one of Namuth's photographs of Pollock in action. Another article, by Denys Sutton, was devoted entirely to Abstract Expressionism; echoing his earlier prophecy, Sutton declared that since America had assumed a leading political role, it had been inevitable that the country would develop a leading art.[74] Articles on American literature, architecture, universities, film, musicals, theater, ballet, music, television, advertising, and art collecting indicated a wholehearted acceptance of America as a cultural force.

With the economy on an upswing and rationing at an end, the English were beginning to acquire American consumer products and to participate in the dream. In the decade and a half since the war, America had been transformed from a target for ridicule to a role model.

The Response in France

The French response to Pollock, like the English, was undoubtedly conditioned by prevailing local attitudes toward the United States. Whereas Britain had remained free throughout the war, France had had to be liberated, after a capitulation that continues to haunt the nation to this day. It had ended the war impoverished, and deeply divided between resistants and collaborators. Communism, the ideology of many resistants, was a resurgent political force in postwar France, particularly among intellectuals and in the labor movement; concerned that France would seek an alliance with the USSR, the American government supported anti-Communist initiatives in the French trade unions from 1945 onward, and its interference was resented in left-wing circles. In 1948 Washington introduced the Marshall Plan, which allowed America open access to European markets and the opportunity to shore up a France on the brink of economic collapse, a France in which conditions were ripe for either a civil war or a Communist victory at the elections. As Serge Guilbaut has commented, "What the Americans were trying to protect in France, by at times even meddling into French internal affairs, was a kind of centrist position not too different from the one at home, poised between two different but equally dangerous evils: the Communists and the 'difficult to deal with' Gaullists."[75]

In addition to its influence on the political front, America also infiltrated French culture and commerce. Despite quotas (established under the Blum-Byrnes agreement) that guaranteed French films 25 percent of the nation's cinema screen time, the French market was inundated by American movies.[76] Even after 1948, when the agreement was renegotiated to impose a stricter limit on American films, the French industry failed to fill its quota, so that more American films were shown than was permitted.[77] The quotas were intended to allow the reconstruction of an indigenous film industry, but behind the eco-

nomic argument was a thinly disguised anti-Americanism. American culture was perceived as a threat to French identity (fig. 4). At a time when the French were trying to rebuild their culture after the German occupation, feelings on the subject ran high, especially among Communist sympathizers, who were already antagonistic toward America.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, film was the most popular form of culture in France. Attendance reached a peak in 1947, when 400 million movie visits were recorded; in the 1950s, 1,000 new cinemas opened.[78] Of the films on view, 30 to 40 percent came from Hollywood. The French movie-going public, like the British, apparently enjoyed escaping from the grim reality of postwar austerity by gazing at the modern, affluent society represented in glamorous Hollywood productions. In 1952, *Les Lettres Françaises,* a newspaper of Communist sympathies that ran an anti-American campaign continuously through the 1950s, argued that the French state was killing its indigenous film industry by encouraging Hollywood imports. By way of example it quoted M. Weil-Lorac, a representative of the Confédération Nationale de Cinéma Français, declaring, "These [American] films are, in general, more action-packed, grander productions, and require less thought than the majority of French films. A large proportion of the public, made up of young and simple people, demand that cinema should be

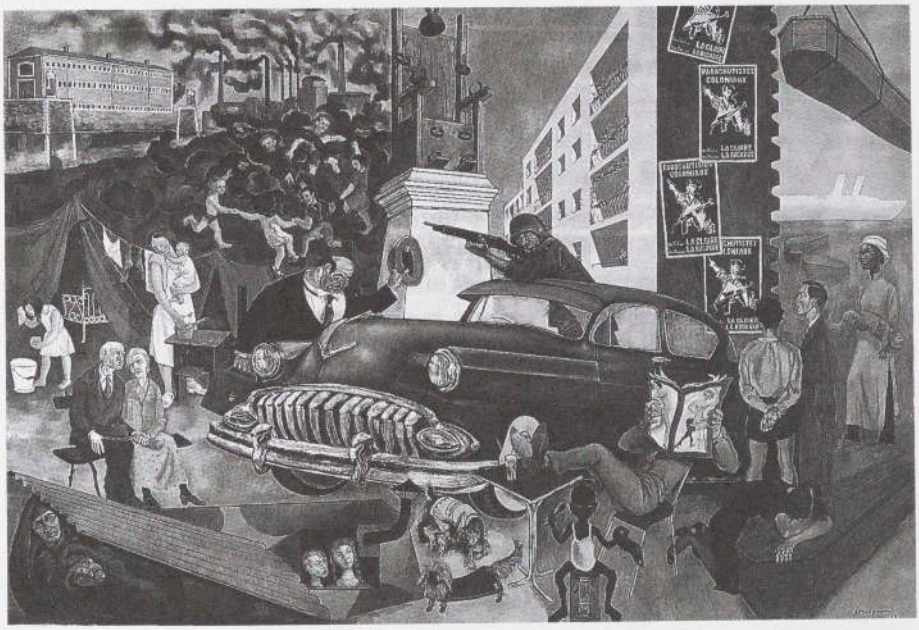


Fig. 4. André Fougeron. *Civilisation Atlantique* **(Atlantic civilization). 1953. Oil on canvas, 13 ft. 1½ in. x 19 ft. 8¼ in. (400 x 600 cm). Collection Indivision Fougeron**

'cinema.' Perhaps those who make films in France should think of that."[79] The statement implicitly suggests that American culture represented a leveling down; as in Britain, French intellectuals felt that American culture was inferior to theirs. In the same newspaper the following day, Georges Sadoul described Hollywood films as an expression of American imperialism and compared them to "Hitlerian" production. By this logic, supporters of American culture were implicitly collaborators.[80] Sadoul added that American films, in celebrating violence and death, "revolt a public enamored with peace."[81] The fact is, however, that the French public lapped up American films, especially the big-budget movies. Furthermore, criticism of French policy on American film imports ignored the fact that the French imposed currency-export restrictions on Hollywood's earnings in France. This did nothing to regenerate the nation's film industry (unlike a similar policy in Italy; see below), but did prevent currency from leaving the country for America. Using the unexportable proceeds, Hollywood began making films on location in France, where the powerful dollar also ensured low costs.[82]

The issue of American influence touched the life of every French person, young and old, left and right. People from both sides of the political spectrum joined forces in a campaign to ban Coca-Cola, which, to some, became a symbol of American imperialism; not only was the drink attacked by beverage companies and health groups, but objections were raised to the relaxed, leisure-oriented life-style it appeared to symbolize, and its advertising techniques were denounced as totalitarian. If the left-wing newspapers were often anti-American, the right-wing paper *Témoignage Chrétien* too could condemn Coca-Cola as "the avant-garde of an offensive of economic colonization against which we feel the duty to struggle here."[83]

In some circles the curiosity about American culture had a more positive tenor. The painter Georges Mathieu, who worked in the public relations department of the shipping line United States Lines, was among the first to take a strong interest. Through his work he was able to travel to New York and to facilitate the travel of others, notably the curator and critic Michel Tapié, who soon became a supporter of American art. In his hagiographic account of postwar Paris, Mathieu claimed to have heard about Pollock by 1946 or 1947, which was early for a European.[84] He introduced the work of the Americans to Tapié and to the critic Edouard Jaguer, a supporter of Surrealism and of the CoBrA group. He also claims to have been the guiding spirit behind *Véhémences confrontées*, the show of works on paper, normally credited to Tapié, that was held at Nina Dausset's bookshop in 1951. This was the juxtaposition of European and American abstraction that Tapié would reprise two years later in the *Opposing Forces* exhibition at the ICA, London.

Véhémences confrontées included the work of Camille Bryen, Giuseppe Capo-

grossi, de Kooning, Hans Hartung, Mathieu, Pollock, Riopelle, Alfred Russell, and Wols. It would come to be seen as a defining statement of *informel* painting. Parisian abstraction was dominated by geometric work, and the *informel* had received little exposure there; Tapié's text for his show introduced the city's public to the notion of an unpremeditated art that ignored the concepts of balance, beauty, intellect, feeling, and color harmony. Recalling a saying of Joan of Arc's, Tapié proclaimed, "To go into the unknown, you have to go via the unknown," a declaration connoting intrepid exploration of new territory and of the unconscious.[85] He would develop his ideas further in a publication of 1952, *Un Art autre*, in which he suggested a continuity from the "shock" produced by the work of Jean Dubuffet, through the work of Jean Fautrier, to the violence of Michaux and the "suffering vehemence" of Mathieu and Pollock.[86] All of these artists, in his view, could be grouped under the heading "*art autre*"—"other art." Far from distinguishing between American and European work, Tapié appears to have been trying to demonstrate a radicalism it shared. In effect he was promoting a new internationalism—an idea at odds with prevailing nationalistic attitudes.

At this point there had been few mentions of Pollock in the French art press. In June 1951, however, in a special issue on contemporary American painting, *Art d'Aujourd'hui* reproduced a full-page Namuth photograph of Pollock crouching, paint pot in hand, with *Number 32, 1950* on the wall behind him and *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* laid out before him on the floor.[87] The photograph closed an article in which Michel Seuphor, a supporter of geometric abstraction, reported on a recent trip to New York: "Young painting only began to exist about five or six years ago. . . . Before that everything was imported. . . . Today Paris is very prestigious in the eyes of most Americans, but they think that their young American painters are as good as ours. Some people, slightly tainted by nationalism, claim that their painters are much stronger than that of an anemic Europe, an old world at the end of its life. They are obviously wrong."[88] For Seuphor, still somewhat protective of the status of French painting, American and French painting were neither better nor worse than one another, and shared similar tendencies; like Tapié, he perceived a common agenda.[89]

Although Seuphor had seen the Namuth film, he did not elaborate on Pollock's method of painting; but the fact that Pollock was the only artist allocated a full-page photograph in the issue must have had its impact. Tapié was more enthusiastic than Seuphor, and in March 1952, at Studio Facchetti in Paris, he organized Pollock's first one-man French exhibition. This show, of about ten paintings from 1951, overlapped with an exhibition of American painting at the Galerie de France, organized by Sidney Janis, which included two paintings by Pollock of 1949 and 1951. There was therefore an opportunity to compare a dripped painting with the poured black paintings.

In the catalogue Tapié expressed his pleasure at disrupting the cosiness of

the French art scene: "I am enjoying throwing such a bomb into the Paris art world." Highlighting a theme that was to recur in both France and Italy, he observed that America had the advantage of lacking an artistic tradition, and thus enjoyed the opportunity to start at "zero." Furthermore, America had "become the actual geographic crossroads for the confrontation of the profoundest problems and great artistic currents of the East and West." America, then, was no longer at a tangent to artistic practice but at the center of it. As for Pollock, he was an "authentic painter," able to pass from figuration to abstraction "without his painting suffering the slightest discontinuity in either depth or surface."[90]

Before the Facchetti show, Jaguer recalls, few Parisians had heard of Pollock: "There was no curiosity in Paris. Few people had an international interest; most people were nationalistic."[91] The exhibition did little to change this situation; it was barely reviewed. Still, it was seen by many important collectors, critics, and artists. Among the artists who signed the visitors' book were Karel Appel, Jean Degottex, Enrico Donati, Sam Francis (twice), Alexander Goetz, Philip Martin (twice), Joan Miró, Pierre Soulages, Pierre Tal Coat, and Tristan Tzara; among the writers, Reyner Banham, R. V. Gindertael, Jaguer, Michel Ragon, Seuphor, and Herta Wescher; and among the dealers, collectors, and others, Heinz Berggruen, René Drouin, and Darthea Speyer of the U.S. Information Service. Jaguer responded to the show by illustrating one of Pollock's paintings in the first issue of the journal *Phases*. He considered Pollock to be working along the same lines as such European artists as Toyen, and had no difficulty accommodating his work. Neither did the reviewer in *Combat*, who likened him to Riopelle.[92] Soulages admired the scale of Pollock's work (he himself was painting two-meter paintings), and was struck by the fact that "the titles of Pollock's paintings were numbers rather than allusive. This implied that the paintings stood for themselves and did not require associative references and were useful support in the battle against the grip of the geometric abstractionists."[93] A practitioner of nonrepresentational abstraction since late 1948, Soulages saw Pollock as a fellow traveler.

If the 1952 exhibition had a limited public impact, Pollock became more widely known in 1955, when *Cinquante ans d'art aux Etats-Unis* was shown at the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris. The exhibition attracted the largest attendance of any in that museum since the war,[94] and many critics complimented the installation and the architecture and print sections. As in London the following year, when the show appeared under the title *Modern Art in the United States* (see above), a talking point was the degree to which the abstract painting could be considered American; here, however, discussion was colored less by the notion of the Americans as culturally inferior than by the threat they were perceived to pose to the hegemony of France. According to Pierre Restany, the critics were influenced in this respect by the city's galleries:

> Paris was increasingly afraid of . . . New York. After the war the Parisian dealers thought they could reestablish the position of the 1920s and 1930s and wanted to repeat the hegemonic situation, but they gradually realized that New York was stronger. They organized an anti-American mafia—Galerie de France, Charles Carpentier, Maeght, Leiris—[and] they created an official mainstream, an abstract post-Cubism, . . . as a tool of war against New York. They tried to struggle against the U.S. by creating an official school of Paris, instead of doing what Tapié did, which was to try to find an analogy between work on both sides of the Atlantic. . . . Most of the critics had no information. This was a direct effect of the struggle between Paris and New York. The French-mafia dealers had a sad effect on relationships between the artists of Europe and of New York.[95]

There was widespread agreement that the most American of the arts was architecture and that the most American painters were the realists Shahn, Wyeth, and Edward Hopper. Since the French knew America principally through film and photography, it is not surprising that "Americanness" was defined by reference to the depiction of American scenes. The abstract painters, on the other hand, were viewed as Europeans. Guy Dornand, writing in the left-sympathizing *Libération*, declared, "An amusing thing is that after having read the introduction which explains the fundamental difference between our abstract art and that of America, one observes that the greater part of the artists are either more or less recent immigrants or apparently sons of immigrants."[96] André Chastel, in *Le Monde*, lamented the abstract painters' "excessive taste for German expressionism" and "poor understanding of Cubism." Where Tapié celebrated Pollock's "degree zero" approach, Chastel adjudged the American artists to have an unsophisticated understanding of the European tradition.[97]

Although Pollock himself was rarely singled out for discussion, *Cinquante ans d'art aux Etats-Unis* as a whole stirred up the Paris art world like no other exhibition since the war. It seems to have precipitated a crisis of confidence in abstraction. In an issue of *Art d'Aujourd'hui* titled *"La Peinture est-elle dans une situation critique?,"* a number of critics suggested that even while the new painting made geometric abstraction seem restricted and overly rational, its reliance on gesture at the expense of reason, and its apparent lack of underlying structure, put its own future in doubt.[98] The overriding feeling was that the new abstraction was gratuitous and quickly boring.

Between 1955 and the spring of 1959, when the traveling Pollock retrospective previously at the Whitechapel and the *New American Painting* exhibition were shown simultaneously at the Musée national d'art moderne, French art magazines published several articles, some by American critics and historians—for example Dore Ashton, Sam Hunter, and Robert Rosenblum—stressing the originality of contemporary American painting. "One might well maintain,"

wrote Rosenblum, "that since the invention of Cubism in Paris, western painting has not undertaken any renovations as fundamental as those which have come from the hands of half a dozen Americans who have been working for a short while in New York."[99] But while the art press had grown keen to discuss American painting, the institutions remained unwelcoming. Jean Cassou, chief curator at the Musée national d'art moderne, had originally booked the Pollock retrospective for June 1958, but postponed it in January of that year. On February 14, he also canceled his booking for *The New American Painting*, stating that his program was full.[100] Cassou wanted to open his recently refurbished galleries by showing the museum's own collection. After political and diplomatic pressure was brought to bear on him, he agreed to take both shows simultaneously at the end of their respective tours, but according to Restany he and his staff were not supportive of them. Cassou, a former resistant and Communist, "was very respected but he was not a man of the visual arts. He was an intellectual but his reactions to new art were negative. [His colleague Bernard] Dorival had a real artistic formation and culture, but he was fixated with the French tradition of painting. He always tried to promote and help people who had French values."[101] The Whitechapel director Bryan Robertson remembers that at the opening of these exhibitions "the French officials gushed about the show" while Porter McCray, director of the international program of The Museum of Modern Art, was present; "As soon as [he left] they were withering about it."[102]

The Pollock retrospective completely eclipsed *The New American Painting*. Whereas in London Newman and Rothko were in the ascendant, in Paris Pollock was the main attraction, or target. Critics of the far right and left were still chauvinistic, but other writers had by now come to accept Pollock's importance. Instead of lauding his painting as American, however, they now claimed that such art was international, as Tapié had done six years earlier. Michel Ragon, for example, wrote in *Cimaise*, "I believe that today's art is . . . far above any simple question of nationality. Yesterday it was in a European context, today it seems to become an international language. 'French' painting is no more important than 'American' painting. What interests me much more are the painters working in Paris, and the painters working in New York."[103] Arguments like this subtly avoided the issue of supremacy; with the power of the French school on the wane, it was important to deny competitiveness.

The shows had been preceded the summer before by an article in *L'Oeil* in which Françoise Choay had nominated Pollock "one of the most important painters of this half-century."[104] Choay recorded the discomfort that the "brutality" and "radicality" of his art could cause its viewers. Accompanied by the now ubiquitous Namuth photograph of the artist in action, this article set the tone for the most thoughtful of the reviews.

Unlike the British critics, most of the reviewers could still see no structure

in the paintings, and references to the violence, anxiety, destructiveness, and freedom of Pollock's art were frequent. Only fourteen years after the liberation of France, and in a cold war climate, a word like "*libération*" must have had particular significance to a public that had been freed from military occupation, but these ideas also had aesthetic connotations. To Soulages, for example, Pollock seemed enviably unfettered by the burden of history; removed from Europe's long traditions, he could act as he chose, free of the tyranny of artistic precedent and convention.[105] The application of Existentialism was also apparent. According to Restany, "It was difficult not to see Pollock as an Existentialist at the time. . . . Sartre was dynamic and inserted himself into the substance of Parisian culture. Through Sartre, Existentialism became not only the expression of the privileged and the elite but part of broader behavior. It became common currency. It was a very special time, because it is rare for a philosophical concept to be part of the base behavior of youth. It was a kind of anticonformism. Violence was the basic material of protest. Pollock was emblematic of that."[106] Thus Pollock became an icon for the younger generation.

If many of the reviewers remained lukewarm or hostile, it was either because they had an antipathy toward artists they saw as representatives of capitalism or because they felt that a national tradition and hegemony were under threat. But the popularity of these shows suggests an appetite for American culture. In fact France was in the grip of a relentless course of Americanization, as English words entered the language, pop music was broadcast over the airwaves, and American films dominated the screen. For many people Pollock symbolized the excitement of the new world, a world without tradition or lengthy history, where the rights of individuals to express themselves freely were paramount.

The Response in Italy

The political situation in Italy after the war was substantially different from that in France. Italy had not been occupied by an aggressor. A substantial part of the population had welcomed fascism, and the government had officially accepted the German occupation; then, toward the end of the war, the nation had changed sides, ending up a victor. The French purged their collaborators; the Italians did not, and many governmental practices and institutions of the fascist regime passed into the new republic. In the absence of a purge, fears of a fascist revival endured, and were an important factor in the appeal of the left. The fascist regime had constructed its mythology around Italian history, emphasizing nationalism and classical art; a specifically Italian identity was therefore discredited in the postwar era, leaving Italians free to look abroad. With Italian society generally polarized between a strong left and a strong right, the left was oriented toward Moscow; for right-leaning liberals the role model was America.

More welcoming of foreign influence than France, Italy was particularly

open to American culture. Many Italians had relatives in America, so there was already a strong link. Not only did the United States seem to stand for modernity, individual freedom, and prosperity, it sent financial aid to the Italian right, in the form of the Christian Democrats. Between 1943 and 1948, Italy received over $2 billion of U.S. assistance, and over the following four years it accepted a further $1.5 billion under the Marshall Plan.[107] To the Americans, Italy, like France, was a theater of war in the fight against Communism. Indeed, for the Italian left, it was the USSR that seemed the model of social justice and antifascism; and because Italy's Communists kept alive liberal and democratic hopes that had been nurtured in the resistance movement, they were supported by the left-leaning sector of the liberal intelligentsia. But Moscow imposed on the Italian Communists a cultural line that was in some ways problematic for them to toe. (In art, for example, it favored social realism and political engagement.) In the interests of ensuring democracy and the continuing suppression of fascism, they went along, but it came as something of a relief to a lot of left-leaning Italian liberals when Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956. Many who did not break with the party line at that point did so after the Hungarian debacle, when 200,000 people abandoned the Italian Communist Party. This discrediting of the USSR allowed America and Italy to grow closer together.

To rebuild the Italian film industry (which, unlike the French, had been discredited by its association with the fascist regime), American film distributors were restricted from exporting currency they had earned in Italy. Instead, they used this income to make films in Italy, which in turn they exported to the United States, where they could retain the profits. More important, the Hollywood studios realized that if Italians made movies to satisfy specifically Italian tastes, the public would continue to frequent the cinemas. Understanding that they would be badly affected if the Italian audience ever tired of American movies, the studios set about supporting the indigenous industry in order to maintain high attendance.[108]

As a result, even left-wing filmmakers were not hostile to American input. After the British, the Italians became Europe's largest consumers of Hollywood productions. Not only was the affluent way of life shown in these films attractive, it came closer to Italian reality as the country underwent an economic miracle between 1958 and 1963. Italy also adopted the American habit of mass consumption, giving rise to the growth of the Italian design industry, which distinguished itself from its American counterpart by concentrating on aesthetic rather than streamlined forms. Finally many American words, forbidden under Mussolini, now entered the Italian language, partly as a result of American films (although many were dubbed), partly through the popularity of *Reader's Digest*.[109]

In the field of art, the years between the wars came to be regarded as an interregnum. The last movement in which postwar Italians could take pride was

Futurism, which had burgeoned before 1914; the art of the following thirty years was considered decadent and shameful. Where the French were trying strenuously to reestablish a national school and to stress the continuity of a national culture, for Italians the concept of such a school had been discredited by fascism. They were therefore more open to outside influences.

Artists began to make contact with foreign practitioners soon after the war, and the process was accelerated in 1948 by the revival of the Venice Biennale. Here was an opportunity to catch up not only with European movements excluded from Italy during the fascist years but with developments in the United States. The American Pavilion presented seventy-nine artists (each exhibiting a single work), including Stuart Davis, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Louis Guglielmi, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Sheeler, and Joseph Stella. The selection from the younger generation comprised works by William Baziotes, Gorky, Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Mark Tobey, and Bradley Walker Tomlin. Thus the public had the chance to see a wide range of American art.[110]

Complementing these other manifestations was an exhibition, in the Greek Pavilion, of Peggy Guggenheim's collection, which offered a varied survey of European art of the first half of the century, as well as a selection of works by Pollock. This show, which had a substantial impact on artists, was Pollock's European debut. After the Biennale closed, the collection traveled to Florence and Milan. Two years later Guggenheim organized a solo show of twenty-three Pollock works, her entire collection of his art, at the Ala Napoleonica, Venice, at the same time that Barr included him in the American Pavilion at that year's Biennale. Guggenheim's Pollocks also traveled to the Galeria del Naviglio, Milan.

Italy took to Pollock more quickly than any other European country. The American dealer Catherine Viviano noted Italian artists visiting the American Pavilion repeatedly in 1950 and being tremendously excited by Pollock's three paintings there.[111] The Venice painter Emilio Vedova—who met Guggenheim soon after she arrived in the city, in 1947, and avers that it was she who "opened up the Pollock issue in Italy"[112]—was not interested in gestural abstraction in 1950, having passed through such a phase in the late 1930s, but would return to it within three years of seeing the Pollock exhibition at the Ala Napoleonica.

In a talk given at the time of the exhibition, Bruno Alfieri remarked that "Pollock's paintings represent absolutely nothing: no facts, no ideas, no geometrical forms. Do not, therefore, be deceived by suggestive titles such as 'Eyes in the Heat' or 'Circumcision': these are phony titles, invented merely to distinguish the canvases and identify them rapidly."[113] In the context of Italian abstraction, which was largely either conceptually based, as in the case of Lucio Fontana, or geometric, as in the case of Vedova, Pollock seemed to represent something completely new, a tabula rasa of nonreferential abstraction. For Alfieri his paintings were surreal, not in the sense of "André Breton's Surrealism,

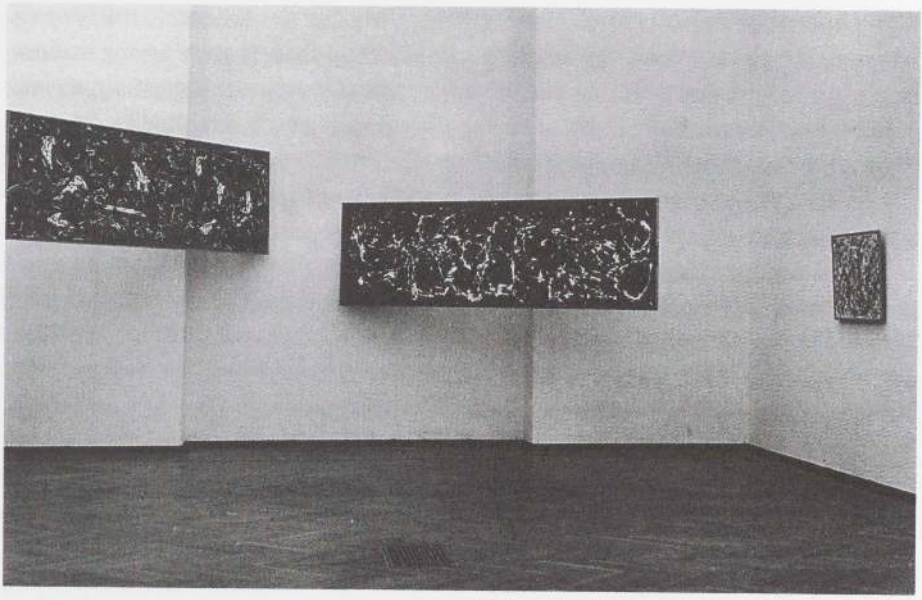


Fig. 5. Installation view of the exhibition *Jackson Pollock 1912–1956* **at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, March 1–30, 1958**

which often develops into a literary phenomenon . . . [but in that of] real Surrealism, which is nothing but uncontrolled impulse." Anticipating Tapié's definition of *art autre*, Alfieri characterized Pollock's work as "chaos / absolute lack of harmony / complete lack of structural organization / total absence of technique, however rudimentary / once again, chaos." "Jackson Pollock," he concludes, "is the modern painter who sits at the extreme apex of the most advanced and unprejudiced avant-garde of modern art. . . . Compared to Pollock, Picasso, poor Pablo Picasso . . . becomes a quiet conformist, a painter of the past."[114] While the French were busy shoring up the School of Paris and promoting Picasso as a Communist hero, Alfieri had cast him aside, and looked to the new world for a new art.

Given the amount of Italian exposure to American art in the first decade after the war, it is not surprising that Italy was not a priority to receive *Modern Art in the United States*, the exhibition circulated by The Museum of Modern Art. The Museum in any case purchased the American Pavilion in Venice in 1954, and therefore had the opportunity to make separate presentations of American art. In 1958, however, the Museum did send both its traveling Jackson Pollock retrospective and *The New American Painting* to Italy, the former to Rome, the latter to Milan. The Pollock exhibition opened first; in fact Rome was the opening venue for the European tour (figs. 5–6).

Hitherto Italian art critics had largely followed party lines in their reviews,

Fig. 6. Installation view of the exhibition *Jackson Pollock 1912–1956* **at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, March 1–30, 1958**

so that the Communist newspapers had decried abstraction in general, arguing that it failed to engage with society or present a social message.[115] Early in 1958, a touring exhibition of the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, had precipitated a battle between left and right: Marcello Venturoli, a Communist sympathizer, had accused Palma Bucarelli, the director of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, of forcing abstract art on Italians, and the Communist Party had called for an investigation of the museum for failing to show figurative art. (Actually the show had included a fair amount of representational work, and the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna ran a balanced program.) It was to be expected, then, that the Pollock retrospective would be attacked by critics on the left.

As it turned out, Venturoli's review of the show in *Paese Sera* was a remarkable turnaround. Venturoli described how, having tried to remain neutral in the arguments between the abstractionists and the realists, he had in recent years committed himself to the side of "national values" and "adherence to reality." (In these terms there was little to differentiate the art once promoted by the fascists from the art supported by the Communists.) "The moral and human task of the best realists," Venturoli wrote, "seemed more fruitful, to our taste . . . we did not believe that the critical phase in which the first masters of abstraction worked could still be meaningful today, after World War II. We honestly believed that . . . emancipation from representation of any recognizable features of the

real world could carry even the most gifted artists to a dead end, . . . leading only to the alchemy of decoration and formalism." Now, however, Venturoli revised his critical referents: "Though we still believe that in the great part we were right, still in the face of the Pollock retrospective . . . we feel it our duty to modify our former position. . . . it is impossible not to accept [Pollock's] formidable and indubitable results. Above all we must confess to having erred in our critical premises: that is, that nowadays one could not paint or create sculpture without at least some reference to external reality. Pollock, after Kandinsky, has served to convince us to the contrary. . . . What Pollock declares to us is that painting has no need of external points of reference."[116]

The review was an extraordinary volte-face. Undoubtedly such outspokenness was made possible by the change in the political climate after 1956, but even so the statement was courageous. In the centrist Milan paper *Corriere d'Informazione*, Giovanni Russo wrote with amusement,

> [Venturoli's] "recantation" provoked a kind of earthquake. The Communist cultural officials did not know what to do and went into a serious crisis. They decided to go and see what kind of things these Pollock paintings were. Last Sunday the galleries of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna presented an amusing spectacle; [Mario] Alicata[117] followed by a queue of "intellectuals" bustled about with black faces through the galleries, peering at the canvases of the American painter with their meshwork of lines and colors, which had so successfully converted one of the most fervent exponents of the Neorealist tendency.
>
> The little group of Communists murmured over the titles . . . they were perplexed, but obliged to admire. Side by side with them, radiantly triumphant, were the abstract painters; they winked their eyes as if each one of them were a Pollock![118]

The Pollock exhibition, then, was something of a watershed for the left, even though not all of the left-wing critics were persuaded by Venturoli's enthusiasm. Writing three months later, the critic of *L'Italia* remained negative, but his remark that it was now impossible to criticize Pollock, because he was regarded as a "genius," indicates how widespread the acclaim for the artist had become.[119] Mario Lepore regretted that the United States had not sent an exhibition of realist painting, which would have been more specifically American;[120] for the critic of *Il Giorno*, on the other hand, American art was now so distinctive, "and its images so pervaded with imagination and the motifs of American spirituality," that it had to be regarded as autonomous.[121] Attempts were also made to define Pollock as a barometer of American society. While some left-wing critics saw him as decadent, Enrico Crispolti, in a substantial text published in September 1958, found an assurance and gaiety in Pollock's drip paintings of 1947–52 that he linked to the vigorous economic and cultural climate of the United States in that

period. Pollock's later period of crisis, Crispolti argued, reflected a more pervasive crisis in America, as evidenced by the nonconformist, oppositional stance of the country's intellectuals.[122]

Pollock's reputation was riding high. Lionello Venturi, a respected art historian and supporter of Italian abstraction, saw him as the greatest of the Americans, whom he characterized as "the more progressive artists . . . of our period."[123] Like their French counterparts a few months later, many critics remarked that Pollock and his contemporaries were free from the weight of a long tradition of art. The critic of *Libera Stampa*, for example, remarked, "The most surprising thing in the exhibition of American painting is . . . the perfect freedom of language with which they succeed in expressing themselves: freedom which is not possible any more to artists of old civilizations and tired traditions."[124] Again the idea of the tabula rasa was attractive to Europeans.

As in France and Britain, the press also capitalized on the myth of the rebel. Such headlines as "The Volcanic Pollock" and "The Presley of Painting,"[125] as well as references to "barbaric apparitions," "frenzy," "screaming," and James Dean, all helped to build the stereotypical image of the artist that circulated around Europe in this period, and was indebted to the assimilation of popular culture. But like some of the English commentators, the more serious critics observed a calmness in Pollock's work. Having seen the Namuth film, one critic concluded that there was nothing violent about the paintings, more a "joyful delirium."[126] Marco Valsecchi, in the independent *Il Tempo Settimana*, remarked upon the "delicate harmonies, . . . the intricate web of filaments," and the "final control of matter and images, which is so astonishing."[127]

The refrain that despite the greatness of Pollock's art, it led nowhere, and could sustain no further development, was also heard in Italy. Crispolti, who was an admirer, said that it was impossible to "redo" Pollock, while the critic of *L'Unità* proposed that "Pollock's experience can teach one thing . . . and that is that this experience ends with itself and cannot have followers. It is a tragic admonition, even if given unconsciously. It is the conquest of a desert by a man who has turned off the light of reason in himself and his work."[128] In fact, although the 1958 exhibitions clearly had an impact on the Italian press, they had little immediate effect on Italian abstract painting. Italy's thriving and varied abstract movement, already widely accepted in artistic circles, was closer to other manifestations of European abstraction than to its American counterpart. Pollock had a greater impact on the later generation of *arte povera* artists. Jannis Kounellis, for example, acknowledges the importance of *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952* in the conception of his sculpures incorporating wool, while Michelangelo Pistoletto admits that Pollock's description of being "in" his painting led him to explore the concept literally through works involving mirrors.

The political, social, and cultural contexts of Pollock's first European exhibitions had a substantial bearing on how he was received. Britain's austere living conditions, its relative isolation from artistic developments elsewhere after 1939, its "special" relationship with America (reinforced during the war), and the language the two countries shared, made it receptive to something apparently confident, bold, and new. Presented like a film star in moody photographs, dressed as a rebel or at least a nonconformist, a Marlon Brando of painting, Pollock captured the spirit of the age, in London as in New York.

The French reaction was more circumspect. Gaullist resentment at having been regarded as a fringe player during the war ensured that American products were not greeted warmly in official circles. Moreover, with national supremacy in the visual arts at stake, attempts to discredit the emergence of a new movement on the other side of the Atlantic were inevitable. The dislocation between politicians, press, and public was such, however, that American products and culture became increasingly popular, no matter what efforts were made to stem the flood. To this day French authorities resist the invasion of English-speaking culture, in vain.

Conditions in Italy were in some ways similar to those in France, with a political system polarized between left and right. But Italian identity was not at stake. The country did not have to exorcise the shame of surrender; toward the end of the war, American troops had been openly welcomed as liberators from both internal and external oppression. In the 1950s, Italy's rivalry with France in the Mediterranean, and its worries over Soviet influence in the Balkans, made America an attractive ally for the right. Even for the left, which would certainly not have countenanced Soviet annexation, the United States was an insurance policy. Familial links with America through emigration, and the diffusion of American films and television programs, reinforced the interest in the United States. The phenomenon of a Marxist critic warmly welcoming a painter who was a product of capitalism demonstrated two fundamental characteristics of Italian society, flexibility and pragmatism. That outlook undoubtedly encouraged a warm reception for Pollock.

Notes

I would like to thank my colleague Michela Parkin for her considerable assistance in researching this paper. I am grateful to the staff of the Archives at The Museum of Modern Art, the Whitechapel Art Gallery, and the Tate Gallery for help in providing information, and to the librarians at the Tate Gallery for their aid.

1. Lewis Galantière, quoted in Aline B. Louchheim, "Americans in Italy," *New York Times*, September 10, 1950.
2. Louchheim, "Americans in Italy."
3. Bertrand Russell, "British and American Nationalism," *Horizon*, January 1945, p. 29.
4. I use the word "modernist" to describe a sympathy for the modern rather than in the art-historical sense.
5. Georgina Dix, "American Conversation Piece," *Horizon*, November 1945, pp. 324, 327.
6. One counterbalance to this wave of anti-American feeling was the weekly broadcast on BBC radio by Alistair Cooke, who also contributed to *The Listener*. These broadcasts would have reached a wider public than *Horizon*.
7. Cyril Connolly, "Introduction," *Horizon*, October 1947, p. 11. Among the contributors to this special issue were Clement Greenberg, W. H. Auden, James Thrall Soby, Philip Johnson, Marshall McLuhan, and Christopher Isherwood.
8. S. Horler, *World's Press News*, January 22, 1948, quoted in Paul Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 107.
9. See Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies 1939–1990* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 95. Television too brought images of American life to England, particularly in the later 1950s; the BBC resisted American imports for much of the decade, but the advent of commercial television in 1957 opened the floodgates.
10. Herbert Read, ms. dated October 24, 1951, in the BBC Written Archives. Quoted in Anne Massey, *The Independent Group* (Manchester: at the University Press, 1995), p. 78.
11. Stephen Spender, "The Situation of the American Writer," *Horizon*, March 1949, p. 163.
12. Robyn Denny, letter to the author, December 8, 1998.
13. Spender, "The Situation of the American Writer," p. 165.
14. Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," *Horizon*, October 1947, pp. 26, 30.
15. David Sylvester, "The Venice Biennale," *The Nation*, September 9, 1950, p. 233.
16. Sylvester, *About Modern Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), p. 20.
17. Greenberg and Sylvester respectively, "The European View of American Art," *The Nation*, November 25, 1950, pp. 490–93.
18. Alan Davie, letter to the author, March 1997.
19. Denys Sutton, "The Challenge of American Art," *Horizon*, October 1949, p. 281.
20. "Opposing Forces in Art," *Times*, January 30, 1953. In the late 1950s, William Green became notorious for bicycling over his paintings. In 1961, the British comedian Tony Hancock made a popular film, *The Rebel*, in which he performed a similar act.
21. Eric Newton, "Around the London Galleries," *The Listener*, February 19, 1953, p. 316.
22. Robert Melville, "Exhibitions," *Architectural Review*, April 1953, pp. 73–74. Among the paintings on view by Pollock was *One: Number 31* (1950, although the catalogue lists the date as 1949). The painting filled a wall—indeed it was too large for it, and was shown, Sylvester recalls in conversation, with one end rolled up.
23. See for example "Drip. Drip . . . ," *Star*, July 1, 1958: "The results might be good for wallpaper or carpet designs"; and William Gaunt, "What Makes a Painting Decorative," *Times*, December 23, 1958, on the concept of the word "decorative," which had recurred in many reviews of the Pollock retrospective at the Whitechapel Art Gallery that year.
24. Patrick Heron, "'Opposing Forces': Paintings by Seven Artists," *New Statesman and Nation*, February 21, 1953.
25. Heron, "Inspiration for the Painter," *New Statesman and Nation*, January 1, 1955, p. 7.
26. Nonfigurative abstraction had appeared briefly in British art of the 1930s, in the paintings of Rodrigo Moynihan and, most famously, Ben Nicholson, but both artists' work could be seen as referring to reality. Heron admired Nicholson, but was critical of the artist's most nonreferential works, his white reliefs.
27. Read, "A Blot on the Scutcheon," *Encounter*, July 1955, pp. 54–57.
28. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News*, December 1952, pp. 22–23, 48–50.
29. Tony del Renzio gave a lecture based on Rosenberg's ideas in 1953 at the ICA, but apparently to limited effect.
30. The Paris exhibition included architecture and film sections that were not shown in London.
31. Meyer Schapiro, "The Younger Generation American Painters of Today," *The Listener*, January 26, 1956, pp. 146–47.
32. Homer Cahill, "American Painting and Sculpture in the Twentieth Century," *Modern Art in the United States: A Selection from the Collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1956), p. 22. In his catalogue introduction for the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1950, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., had already described Pollock as "born in the far west in a town that takes its name from Buffalo Bill."
33. Pierre Jeannerat, in the *Daily Mail*, January 7, 1956.
34. Robert Stowe, in the *Daily Worker*, January 11, 1956.
35. Lawrence Alloway, "US Modern: Paintings," *Art News*, January 21, 1956, pp. 1, 9.
36. The fact that in later writings Alloway continued to apply terms of belligerence to Pollock's paintings suggests that he did. See, for example, his review of the Pollock retrospective at the Whitechapel in 1958: "The paint has been showered down like a saturation bombing raid." Alloway, "The Art of Jackson Pollock," *The Listener*, November 27, 1958, p. 888.
37. John Berger, "The Battle," *New Statesman and Nation*, January 21, 1956, p. 70.
38. Anton Ehrenzweig, "The Modern Artist and the Creative Accident," *The Listener*, January 12, 1956, pp. 53–55.
39. Newton, "As the British View Our Art," *New York Times*, January 15, 1956.
40. Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, p. 20.
41. Sylvester, "Expressionism, German and American," *Arts*, December 1956, pp. 25–26. Sylvester's reference to Dionysos is an interesting recurrence of Spender's use of this concept to describe American writers; see note 13.
42. Sylvester, "End of the Streamlined Era," *Times*, August 2, 1955.
43. Basil Taylor, "Contemporary Arts: Modern American Painting," *Spectator*, January 20, 1956, p. 80.
44. Heron, "The Americans at the Tate Gallery," *Arts*, March 1956, pp. 15, 16.
45. Alloway, "US Modern: Paintings," pp. 1, 9.
46. Denny, conversation with the author, November 18, 1997.
47. "Neo-Romanticism" is the term applied to painting made from the late 1930s through World War II by artists such as John Craxton, John Minton, John Piper, and Graham Sutherland, who produced moody depictions of the British landscape and regarded their progenitors as William Blake and Samuel Palmer. "Constructivism" was a postwar movement that extended the prewar concept of geometric abstraction;

among its adherents were Adrian Heath, Kenneth and Mary Martin, and Victor Pasmore. The Euston Road School was a prewar movement founded by Graham Bell and William Coldstream, committed to realism and meticulous observation, and including such artists as Lawrence Gowing, Pasmore, Claude Rogers, and Geoffrey Tibble. England had recently witnessed the arrival of the "Kitchen Sink" painters, a term coined by Sylvester in 1954 to describe the grim domestic realism of John Bratby, Derek Greaves, Edward Middlediteh, and Jack Smith.

48. Bridget Riley, conversation with the author, May 29, 1998.

49. Sylvester, "American Impact on British Painting," *New York Times*, February 10, 1957.

50. Organized by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition opened at the São Paulo Bienal in the fall of 1957 and over the next year and a half traveled to Rome, Basel, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, London, and Paris.

51. Bryan Robertson, conversation with the author, September 10, 1997.

52. In a letter to Stephan Munsing, of the United States Information Service, dated September 29, 1958, Robertson wrote, "I know I shall be able to hang the exhibition in a more coherent and revealing way than it was in Berlin. The show looked extremely well there in the fine Hochschule, but the actual chronology of events and facets of development did not emerge very clearly, I thought." Courtesy of the Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive. Robertson, Munsing, and Robertson's architect, Trevor Dannatt, had visited the Pollock exhibition in Berlin together.

53. The earliest work in the exhibition was *The Flame* (1937), followed by *Male and Female* (1942). The most impressive painting as far as the critics were concerned was *Blue Poles* (1953), which would also figure substantially in Robertson's 1960 monograph on Pollock, commissioned at the time of the exhibition. In conversation with the author (see note 51), Robertson related how he invited Walter Neurath, the owner of the publishing house Thames & Hudson, to preview the exhibition. Impressed, Namuth sent a photographer to photograph the paintings and asked Robertson to write the book. The plates were proofed at the Paris showing of the retrospective. No contemporary artist had been the subject of such a lavish book before.

54. David Thompson, "Art of Jackson Pollock," *Times*, November 7, 1958.

55. Sylvester, broadcast on BBC radio, November 7, 1958. Published in Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, p. 62.

56. John Russell, "Pollock in Panorama," *Sunday Times*, November 9, 1958.

57. Thompson, "The Hero-Figure of Action-Painting," *Times*, November 11, 1958.

58. Robert Wraight, "Chuck-it-on paintings fail to impress the East End," *Star*, November 12, 1958.

59. Alloway, "London Chronicle," *Art International* II nos. 9–10, 1958 (probably September/October).

60. Sam Hunter, "Introduction," *Jackson Pollock 1912–1956*, exh. cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1958), p. 12.

61. Thompson, "The Hero-Figure of Action-Painting."

62. Berger, "The White Cell," *New Statesman*, November 22, 1958, pp. 72–73.

63. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, 1946, trans. Philip Mairet, 1948 (reprint ed. London: Methuen, 1997), pp. 28, 44.

64. "Confronting a blank canvas they attempt 'to grasp authentic being by action, decision, a leap of faith,' to use Karl Jaspers' Existentialist phrase. Indeed one often hears Existentialist echoes in their words. . . . " Barr, "Introduction," *The New American Painting* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1959), p. 10. *The New American Painting* was curated by Dorothy Miller assisted by Frank O'Hara, and was circulated in Europe by The Museum of Modern Art.

65. Riley, conversation with the author, May 29, 1998.

66. *Angry Young Man* was the title of a 1951 play by Leslie Paul. The sobriquet came to describe a young generation of British authors, including Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, and Arnold Wesker, after the London debut of Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* in May 1956. These writers expressed the political and cultural disillusionment of postwar Britain, which still seemed to be controlled by the prewar generation.

67. Denny, conversation with the author, November 18, 1997.

68. Denny, quoted in Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things* (Oxford: at the University Press, 1995), p. 178.

69. Anthony Caro, conversation with the author, May 12, 1998.

70. "Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions. London," *Burlington Magazine*, December 1958, p. 450.

71. Riley, conversation with the author, May 29, 1998. At the time, Riley probably would not have known Allan Kaprow's article "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 57 no. 6 (October 1958): 24–26, 55–57, in which he argues that Pollock's paintings represented a dead end.

72. Alloway, "Paintings from the Big Country," *Art News and Review*, March 14, 1959, p. 3. This British magazine was devoting a special issue to America. Alloway implies surprise that Hans Hofmann was not included in the exhibition.

73. "The majority of people here who are seriously concerned with contemporary art, take it for granted that America is now the main creative center of painting and sculpture, and the nonspecialists are just about beginning to get used to the idea, though without being terribly keen on it." Sylvester, "London Views Advanced American Painting of Today," *New York Times*, November 30, 1958.

74. Sutton, "The Abstract Image: Diversity of Aim and Technique in the Non-Figurative Mode," *The American Imagination, Times Literary Supplement*, November 6, 1959, p. XXVI.

75. Serge Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick," in Guilbaut, ed., *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945–1964* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990), p. 31.

76. In the first half of 1947, some 340 American films were licensed for screening, compared to 40 French ones. See Irvin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France 1945–1954* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1991), p. 115.

77. Ibid., pp. 116–19.

78. Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies 1939–1990*, p. 89.

79. M. Weil-Lorac, quoted in "Pique," *Les Lettres Françaises*, January 2, 1952.

80. In 1952, Francis Crémieux complained that French radio had been invaded by American culture, and suggested that the willingness of French broadcasters to allow this invasion reflected the state of mind of a collaborator during the Occupation. See Crémieux, "La Culture française à la sauce américaine," *Les Lettres Françaises*, January 17, 1952, p. 6.

81. Georges Sadoul, "Décadence d'Hollywood," *Les Lettres Françaises*, January 3, 1952. Articles also regularly appeared criticizing French radio for its pro-American stance.

82. See Stanley Karnow, *Paris in the Fifties* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 85.

83. *Témoignage Chrétien*, quoted in Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France*, p. 124. On Coca-Cola's colonization of France, see ibid., pp. 122–26.

84. Georges Mathieu, *Au-Delà du*

tachisme (Paris: René Julliard, 1963).
85. *"Pour aller où tu ne sais pas, tu dois aller par où tu ne sais pas." Véhémences confrontées*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie Nina Dausset, 1951).
86. Michel Tapié, *Un Art autre* (Paris: Gabriel-Giraud, 1952), facsimile ed. Paris: Artcurial, 1994.
87. *La Peinture aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, a special issue of *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, June 1951.
88. Michel Seuphor, "Paris–New York 1951," in ibid., p. 4.
89. This view seems to have been shared by the editor of *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, Léon Degand, who wrote in the same issue, "We lack contact with the young painters of the United States as much as they lack contact with ours. . . . We always gain in meeting each other, above all the young researchers preoccupied by the same problems." Degand, "Avertissement," in ibid., inside front cover.
90. Tapié, "Jackson Pollock avec nous," *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (Paris: Paul Facchetti, 1952), n.p.
91. Edouard Jaguer, conversation with the author, October 16, 1997.
92. G.M., "Aspects de la peinture d'avant-garde," *Combat*, March 18, 1952.
93. Pierre Soulages, conversation with the author, May 22, 1998.
94. There were 14,530 paid admissions and several thousand more by invitation. The exhibition was part of a festival, "Salute to France," organized at the request of the French government under the auspices of the American Embassy. The festival included an exhibition at the Orangerie of paintings from American collections, ranging from David to Toulouse-Lautrec; America's connoisseurship was on trial as much as its painters.
95. Pierre Restany, conversation with the author, November 5, 1997. For evidence of how ill-informed the critics of the national press were about American art, see Charles Estienne in *Combat*, Spring 1954, on the birth of the *informel* at the *Salon d'Octobre*, and Jaguer's response in the same journal on April 5, "Revolution d'Octobre ou le 18 Brumaire": "How can you pass by in silence the magisterial contribution constituted since 1943 in America by the work of Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, Baziotes, Reinhardt, Motherwell; and later . . . of Clifford Still and Sam Francis? It is not possible to cover up this America in this way, the only America that counts in our view." Jaguer went on to assert, like Tapié, that American abstraction was part of an international movement taking place "from Paris to Copenhagen, from Milan to San Francisco, from Rome to New York, from Frankfurt to Paris." Estienne was not unaware of Pollock; he had reviewed the Janis show at the Galerie de France in *L'Observateur*, on March 29, 1952. Either he could not connect Pollock to the artist's European contemporaries or he suffered from the need to assert Parisian precedent.
96. Guy Dornand, in *Libération*, April 7, 1955.
97. André Chastel, "Au Musée d'Art Moderne," *Le Monde*, April 2, 1955. Christian Zervos agreed with Chastel's view; see his "Les Expositions," *Cahiers d'Art* 30, 1955, pp. 25–26.
98. The critics included Roger Bordier, Degand, and Guy Habasque. *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, January 1956. Restany agreed with this sentiment; see his "Le Geste et le rythme," *Cimaise*, September–October 1957, p. 30.
99. Robert Rosenblum, "La Peinture américaine depuis la seconde guerre mondiale," *Art d'Aujourd'hui*,, July 1958, p. 13. See also Dore Ashton, "Lettre de New York," *Cimaise*, November–December 1956, p. 29, and, "La Signature américaine," *XXe siècle*, March 1958.
100. Porter McCray, letter to Jean Cassou, February 14, 1958. Archives of the Réunion des musées nationaux, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
101. Restany, conversation with the author, November 5, 1997.
102. Robertson, conversation with the author, September 10, 1997.
103. Michel Ragon, "Art Today in the United States," *Cimaise*, January–March 1959, p. 7.
104. Françoise Choay, "Jackson Pollock," *L'Oeil*, July–August 1958.
105. Soulages, conversation with the author, May 22, 1998.
106. Restany, conversation with the author, November 5, 1997.
107. See Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1994), p. 252.
108. See Christopher Wagstaff, "Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market," in Duggan and Wagstaff, eds., *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society 1948–58* (Oxford: at the University Press, 1995), pp. 94–95.
109. See Diego Zancani, "Anglo-American Linguistic Borrowings, 1947–58," in ibid., pp. 167–87.
110. See Philip Rylands and Enzo di Martino, *Flying the Flag for Art: The United States and the Venice Biennale 1895–1991* (Richmond, Va.: Wyldbore and Wolferstan, 1993), pp. 87–89.
111. Catherine Viviano, in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1989), p. 605.
112. Emilio Vedova, conversation with Michela Parkin on behalf of the author, February 23, 1998.
113. Bruno Alfieri, "A Short Text on the Pictures of Jackson Pollock," Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. See also Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, p. 605.
114. Ibid.
115. Despite the postwar hope for a broad-minded approach to art, Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of Italy's Communist Party, effectively split the Italian art world when he reviewed a 1948 exhibition of contemporary Italian art, held in Bologna, in *Rinascita*, the Party's official paper. Writing under his known pseudonym, Roderigo di Castiglia, he condemned the "new art" as a horror. Artists responded either by breaking with the Party or, like Renato Guttuso, rallying to the cause. *Rinascita*, October 1948. See Mario De Micheli, "Realism and the Post-war Debate," in Emily Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1900–1988*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1989), p. 283.
116. Marcello Venturoli, "Jackson Pollock e gli astrattisi italiani," *Paese Sera*, March 13–14, 1958.
117. Mario Alicata, in Giovanni Russo's words, "presides over the intellectual activities" of the Party.
118. Russo, "Una mostra di Pollock a Roma provoca discordie tra i pittori di sinistra," *Corriere d'Informazione*, March 26–27, 1958.
119. Giorgio Mascherpa, "Il Triste Equivoco Dei Pittori . . . ," *L'Italia*, June 13, 1958.
120. Mario Lepore, "Avanguardia USA," *Visto*, June 14, 1958.
121. "La Pittura Americana Ha Ritrovato L'Allegria," *Il Giorno*, June 10, 1958.
122. Enrico Crispolti, *Pollock* (Milan: Pesce d'Oro, 1958), p. 15. As an example of an American intellectual Crispolti cites Arthur Miller.
123. Lionello Venturi, *Italian Painters of Today* (New York: Universe Books, 1959), p. 12, and Ashton, "Art: Moderns' Old Friend," *New York Times*, November 13, 1958.
124. Mario Marioni, "Moderna Pittura Americano a Milano," *Libera Stampa*, July 1, 1958.
125. In *Il Tempo Settimana*, March 20, 1958, and *Avanti*, 1958 (date unknown), respectively.
126. Lorenza Trucchi, "L'Anarchia Positiva di Pollock," *La Fiera Letteraria*, March 16, 1958.
127. Marco Valsecchi, "Il Vulcanico Pollock," *Il Tempo Settimana*, March 20, 1958.
128. Dario Micacchi, "Il Deserto dell'impotenza nella pittura di Pollock," *L'Unità*, March 12, 1958.

Open-Ended Conclusions about Jackson Pollock

Kirk Varnedoe

In 1998, I had a brush with postmodernism. In an essay draft, I suggested that the way to understand a powerful creator's work was to see what subsequent artists made of it—define what the art *was*, in other words, by studying what it *did*. This approach seemed justified by the linguistic premise that the meaning of a word depends on the way it is used. But by putting use, or influence, first—as William Rubin protested when he read that draft—I was inadvertently nodding toward the more problematic notion (and postmodernist credo) that there are no fixed truths, only interpretations. And on top of that, Rubin further insisted, it was wrong to assume that an artist's best followers were automatically that artist's best interpreters.

To be specific, I had discounted what Clement Greenberg proposed as Jackson Pollock's direct legacy (in stained-canvas work like that of Morris Louis [fig. 1] and Kenneth Noland) in favor of what I saw as a more productive influence on the work of sculptors such as Eva Hesse (fig. 2) and Richard Serra. I felt that Hesse's and Serra's art, being more compelling, told us a stronger truth about Pollock. Rubin demurred: even if we allow that the sculptors were more powerful creators, he argued, this doesn't preclude the possibility that their reading of Pollock might have been faulty, and that the painters actually understood some true, or truer, aspect of Pollock's art—an aspect that might in future be taken up to potent effect by an artist of surpassing achievement.

Put back into generalities, this counterargument holds that, even as we value creative misinterpretation, we can still rank some interpretations as less *mis-*, or more true, than others. And that ranking would depend, not on the interpreters' creative power, but on the acuteness of their discernment about the original object of attention. Above all this view insists that the art at the origin point—in this case Pollock's—is not an infinitely polyvalent proposition, open to all readings, but something about which one can be, in varying degrees, right or wrong.

That is, of course, one of the reasons for retrospective exhibitions: we need the art itself to measure the justice of our ideas about it. And it was in the process

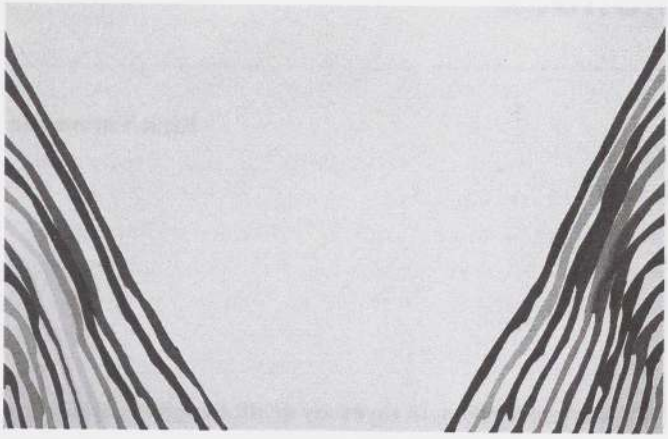


Fig. 1. Morris Louis. *Beta Lambda*. **1960. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 8 ft. 7⅞ in. x 13 ft. 4¼ in. (262.6 x 407 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Abner Brenner**

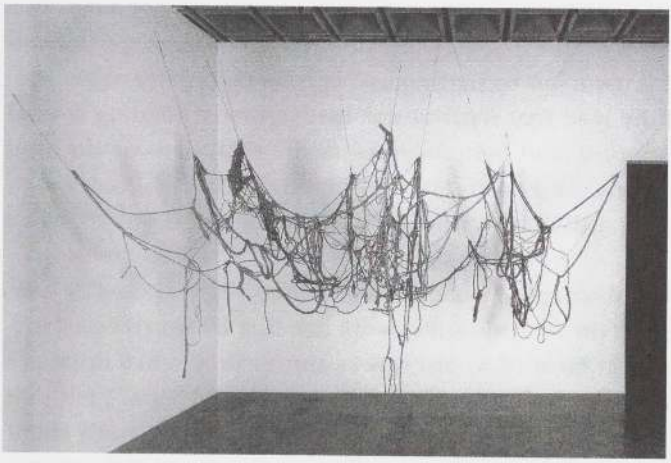


Fig. 2. Eva Hesse. *Untitled (Rope Piece)*. **1969–70. Latex over rope, string, and wire. Two strands; dimensions variable. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase, with funds from Eli and Edythe L. Broad, the Mrs. Percy Uris Purchase Fund, and the Painting and Sculpture Committee**

of mounting this latest Pollock retrospective that I became a modernist again. Or, put another way, I refocused on the Pollock within the pictures as opposed to the one conjured by the literature or by posthumous influences. The more I looked at and lived with Pollock's paintings, the more there seemed to me to be ignored or slighted truths about them—one by one and as a life's work—that still needed recognizing and articulating, and that must necessarily alter and constrain our notions of what Pollock might *legitimately* stand for when he is interpreted.

This is not an essentialist argument for an ur-Pollock, nor is there any finality in it. But we don't need to believe in any final, monolithic truth about an artist to find some statements about him truer than others. We keep attempting, by trial and error, to construct a surer basis for future readings that might be less flawed than the ones we inherited. Such a progress needn't aim so much to discredit older notions as to temper them and meld them into something more

telling, more subtly tuned to the nature of the art. A ready example might be the early reading of Pollock's art as an emblem of fragmentation, barbarism, and angst. Already by the late 1950s such dramatically bleak visions had been displaced, in print, by recognition of the delicately lyrical and lushly beautiful aspects of the paintings. Those first conceptions of savagery have not been wholly abandoned—they tell one truth worth knowing—but now they can only hold conviction when they're subsumed within a more complexly calibrated estimation.

Sometimes, too, new experience revives ideas that have fallen into neglect; the room of Pollock's early-1940s paintings in the recent exhibition is a case in point. Since the 1960s a wide consensus, even among Pollock's admirers, has held that his figurative work of the early and mid-1940s is (regardless of any interest we may have in its subject matter, Jungian or otherwise) bad painting. In countless retellings of Pollock's story, struggling ineptitude in this early period has been the staple prelude to the emergence of liberated fluidity in the abstractions of 1947–50. Yet all along we've known that the sharpest eyes of the time saw it differently. Greenberg latched on to Pollock right away, and had already declared him the strongest painter of his generation ("and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miró"[1]) by 1946. James Thrall Soby also saw the quality, and got The Museum of Modern Art to buy *The She-Wolf* out of Pollock's inaugural show. The 1998 exhibition, in reuniting several works from that 1943 debut, made it easier to reconnect with those long-ago affirmations than to sustain the condescensions of the intervening years. Perhaps 1980s painting like that of Georg Baselitz and Sigmar Polke has altered the way we look, or perhaps we are in general less invested in the agon between figuration and abstraction than were critics of previous decades. But for whatever reason, the recent exhibition revalidated the first-blush enthusiasms, and begged reconsideration of the ways these paintings relate to their time and to the larger career of their creator. What was striking about seeing them together, after fifty-five years, is what, I strongly suspect, was evident to Greenberg and the others right away: that any faults here have far, far less to do with a dearth of ability than with a frame-busting surfeit of ambition. ("He takes," as Greenberg said, "orders he can't fill."[2]) In a picture such as *Guardians of the Secret* there are, to steal a phrase from the contemporary painter Terry Winters, "six or seven paintings trying to get out"; and it was the inventive variety of those endeavors, not the failures of their coalescence, that leapt to the eye in 1998.

In *Guardians* and in *She-Wolf*, for example, it's long been evident how a dark gray overpainting defines shapes like those of the dog at the bottom of *Guardians*, carving them out from turbulent fields of scumbled and spattered paint. What begs fresh notice, though, are the ambiguities of figure versus ground in these overlays—how, for instance, in *She-Wolf*, negative or background zones (above the animal's back) and unexpected solid forms (the diamond with a hole in its

center, under the belly; plate 26) are defined in the same gray paint, apparently on the same plane and in equivalent terms. The general practice of liberal painterly experiment followed by strong self-editing, and this particular way of thinking about *shape* in terms of positive and negative areas, without concern for line binding form, seem to bridge toward later abstractions in general, and perhaps most tellingly toward Pollock's 1948 experiments with cutting forms out of webs of poured paint.

In *Male and Female* of c. 1942, by the same token, it has always been evident that there were "premonitory" passages of forcefully flung liquid paint. But when this picture hung beside *The Moon Woman*, from the same year, it seemed newly apparent how elaborately Pollock varied the passages of thickened and thinned paint in both, and how often he used an extreme dilution of pigment to obtain effects, not simply of violent splatter, but of subtle caress and softened, almost phosphorescent halation of color. In parts of *Moon Woman*, this yields a delicacy and tenderness totally at odds with the general repute of the emerging artist's supposedly ham-fisted expressionism.

Finally, in *The She-Wolf*, in *Pasiphaë*, and in many other early canvases, we find an evident practice of revisiting the same curve or contour both in black and in white, or in two alternative colors. The most blatant example is the repetitive overlay of signatures in *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*, but a related strategy recurs throughout the contours of that image, and in countless other passages among the 1942–44 paintings. Such self-following, or self-doubling, is consonant with the practice described by Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, in which the constant reworking of what was already on the canvas became for Pollock a prescribed road to personal style; and it dovetails as well with James Coddington's findings as to the way Pollock built some of his 1947 abstractions by recurrently playing off, and restructuring, the rhythms and massings of an initial figurative matrix.[3] This self-following also points—in the way it nudges the rhythm of the line away from the task of describing a bounded form—to still broader consistencies of approach within Pollock's work, both before and after the advent of the poured abstractions.

Overpainting, dilution, self-following—in these specific aspects of inventively ambitious practice, it no longer seems adequate to characterize the relation between early and mature work as one of failure versus success, or ineptitude before achievement. And the larger point is not simply that the early works are better than we thought. It is that, in this and other important ways, a new experience of the paintings brought together in the retrospective appears to undermine or contradict the familiar, biographically driven recounting of how Pollock came to be Pollock.

The romance of Pollock's live-hard-die-young biography has been and is powerfully seductive, fostering a narrative of struggling ascent peppered by crises

and ending in a downward slide toward fated tragedy. The faltering decline has, if anything, been an even more telling model than the stumbling ascent. It has been easy to fixate on the conjunction between a documented emotional crisis in 1951 and the sharp shift away from the poured abstractions that same year, and then to accept as logical and inevitable the melancholy parallelism between Pollock's personal deterioration after 1952 and his declining, erratic production as a painter. These years of seeming lock-step links between life outside and inside the studio have colored our vision of Pollock's evolution as an artist in somewhat the same way Hans Namuth's photos have colored our idea of his method. In both cases we are dealing with a singular chapter in a broader story, and we extrapolate at our peril.

As the recent exhibition's chronological layout helped emphasize, the biography and the art are often fundamentally out of synchrony. In several major instances, important artistic shifts have no link to biographical change, and vice versa. Pollock's ten years of student toil provide a largely blank and unvarying prelude after which—suddenly, at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, when his emotional life seems mired in turmoil—the career gets jump-started by an entirely new focus and will to success. In 1943, pictures with poured paint appear "prematurely," with neither evident immediate stimulus nor apparent immediate consequence. The extraordinary *Mural* for Peggy Guggenheim (plate 1) similarly has no precedent and no direct issue. In 1946, Pollock paints two separate series in two sharply opposed manners, though his life is more consistently stabilized than ever before. In 1947, the all-important advent of a new style of poured abstractions does not seem to correspond to any notable event or change in surrounding circumstances; the following year, conversely, one of Pollock's most important life shifts, away from alcoholic binges, brings no telling redirection in that already inaugurated style.

Walking back and forth through the exhibition allowed one, though, to see alternative rhymes, rhythms, and disjunctions, largely independent of the familiar linear arrow of Pollock's biography. These structures center on the likeness of things produced at widely separate times, and conversely on the differences among things created in close proximity. The volumetric contortions of *Birth* (1942; fig. 3), for instance, are miles away from the curvilinear rhythms and lighter hues of the next year's *Stenographic Figure* (fig. 4). The former is deeply entangled with Picasso while the latter seems to reflect an influence of Matisse, carried to Pollock by Lee Krasner (and picked up by her from Hans Hofmann). It's the same dualism that recurs a decade later, when the markedly Picassoid *Ritual* (fig. 5) is created in the same year as *Easter and the Totem* (fig. 6), Pollock's evident nod to the effect of Matisse's 1951–52 retrospective in New York. The recurrence of that Picasso-Matisse pairing belongs, moreover, to a pattern of returning in the '50s to the work of the early and mid-'40s. It's common to see

Pollock's black poured paintings of 1951 as "regressing" to recover some of his early, Picasso-derived figuration; but much less time has been given to examining how this instance dovetails with a broader strategy of self-recovery or doubling back, by which such later abstractions as *Ocean Greyness* and *(Untitled) Scent* (fig. 7) also move noticeably back onto terrain first opened up by *Eyes in the Heat* in 1946 (fig. 8). Throughout his later work, in fact, Pollock revisits a variety of options touched on, then passed over, in his passage toward the "classic" drip or poured paintings of 1947–50.

These parallelisms across time are counterpointed by marked differences within a given moment's production. The sharp distinctions between the two series painted in 1946 have already been alluded to—the cursive, cartoony drawing and cheery colors of the Accabonac Creek pictures seeming to embody an aesthetic and emotional universe far removed from that of the Sounds in the Grass canvases. But

Fig. 3. Jackson Pollock. *Birth*. **c. 1941 (OT: c. 1938–41). Oil on canvas, 45 13/16 x 21 11/16 in. (116.4 x 55.1 cm). Tate Gallery, London. Purchased 1985**

Fig. 4. Jackson Pollock. *Stenographic Figure*. **c. 1942. Oil on linen, 40 x 56 in. (101.6 x 142.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss Fund**

Fig. 5. Jackson Pollock. *Ritual*. **1953. Oil on canvas, 7 ft. 6⅛ in. x 42½ in. (229.9 x 108 cm). Collection Robert and Jane Meyerhoff, Phoenix, Maryland**

Fig. 6. Jackson Pollock. *Easter and the Totem*. **1953. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 10⅛ in. x 58 in. (208.6 x 147.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Lee Krasner in memory of Jackson Pollock**

it's worth concentrating further on the signal differences that separate individual works even within the Sounds in the Grass group. Although Pollock pulled them together under one rubric, the contrasts in technique, structure, density, and palette among, say, the frothing toothpaste curls of *Shimmering Substance* (plate 31), the turgidly knotted ropes of *Eyes in the Heat*, and the fine sgraffito scumbling of *Croaking Movement* (plate 16), might well strike us as more salient than the low-common-denominator factors of painterly abstraction that they share.

Fig. 7. Jackson Pollock. *Untitled (Scent).* **c. 1953–55. Oil and enamel on canvas, 78 x 57½ in. (99 x 146 cm). Collection David Geffen, Los Angeles**

Fig. 8. Jackson Pollock. *Eyes in the Heat* **(Sounds in the Grass Series). 1946. Oil on canvas, 54 x 43 in. (137.2 x 109.2 cm). Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York**

The principal revelation of the retrospective, though, was the rich variety among the poured or drip pictures. Even pictures executed in close temporal proximity show fundamental differences of approach, not simply in their execution but from the initial conception forward. The horizontal *Lucifer* (plate 7) and the vertical *Enchanted Forest* (plate 36), for example, both date from 1947, and both involve pouring over an initial base involving brushwork. But what fundamentally different paintings! The broad underlying motley of pale blue and sand in *Lucifer* is skeined over, in gluily viscous, sluggish drizzlings of black enamel, with a fibrous network of dendritelike clusters, spiked by long, finely stretched, low-relief shooting-star darts of teal, yellow, and orange oil paint squeezed from the tube, and overgarlanded with rightward-dripping festoons of green (flung on at the last, while the picture was standing vertically). The result is a sense of unbounded and directionless drift that, for all the implicit turbulence, has an unimpelled, slackened pace, and tempers the inherently visionary drama of the light-through-darkness image with a sense of reverie. In contrast to this cosmos, *Enchanted Forest* is all earth and water. The limited palette of gray-browns and rust accents is set down in soaking, saturated swags of thinned-flat medium, with broadly sweeping, weedy rhythms whose loops are punctuated with areas of molten puddling and glutted by a murky oversplattering of watery washes and droplets—especially of an off-white closely cousined to the initial ground tone. The painting's swollen, aqueously milky fullness, its soft, churning rhythms, and its limited hue structure stand leagues away from *Lucifer*.

From the moment of their conception through every decision in their execution, these were always vastly different paintings, and the list of their crucial dissimilarities—palette; ground; dilution and mix of mediums; speed; structure; density—is so imposing that it virtually belies, even within this one year, the notion of any common strategy that could be a called *a* style or method. And the problem only becomes more complex as Pollock's experience with poured abstraction grows. On the one hand, despite their differences in pace, palette, and feeling, the structural similarities among pictures of similar format in different years—such as *Number 13A, 1948: Arabesque* and *Number 2, 1949*—suggest an artist working within a repertoire of genres or familiar, retrievable formulae. On the other, the broad variety of essentially one-off approaches in one period—now comparing *Arabesque* to *Number 1A, 1948* (plate 2), or *Number 5, 1948*, or *Number 11A, 1948 (Black, White and Gray)* (p. 148, fig. 7) all in the same year—underline how fertilely inconsistent Pollock was, constantly reinventing his approach, on widely different scales and in broadly varying emotional ranges, throughout the "classic" years of 1947–50. Whether picture by picture or year by year, Pollock's work does not lend itself to being organized according to any consistent, linear model of development—or linked in any steadily evident fashion with the unfolding of his life. And the disconnections between the order of his

innovations and the narrative of his biography is matched, on an even more important level, by the disconnection between these various pictures as we now see them and the nature of the man as anecdotal history allows us to understand him. This is especially true in regard to the poured paintings, which—it needs stressing anew—are not expressionist art in any standard sense of the term.

Pollock's distance from expressionism, in terms of historical linkage, was of course insisted upon initially by Greenberg and has been reemphasized by Rubin, with both authors (and others) positioning the painter in a line of descent from Cubism and Impressionism.[4] But these arguments for Pollock's roots in a Paris-based modern tradition, which downplay the role of raw emotional outpouring in his painting, have often been greeted with suspicion, as tokens of a desire to deal in an art-for-art's-sake realm antiseptically divorced from the messiness of life. Nothing could be farther from what I have in mind. My problem with the expressionist model—the idea of venting private feelings onto canvas—is not that it overemphasizes Pollock's individuality but ultimately that it shortchanges it. No set of stories we have about Pollock, no description of his character or account of him as a person, is anywhere near adequate to the variety of expression we find in the paintings. Those who believe it takes a worried man to sing a worried song, and who would explain the lines in the paintings as the uncoiled lineaments of Pollock's internal knots, are stuck trying to make complex art match up with inadequate, cardboard models of a personality. Such analysts must constrain the paintings to fit the spotty mosaic of ultimately shallow guesses made about Pollock's psyche by those who knew him, or alternatively risk projecting onto these same works their own untestable surmises about the same unknowable inner life. Either way, the process diminishes both the art and the person behind it. We need to accept that the "behavior" demonstrated on these canvases may be sharply different from any Pollock manifested in other areas of his life, and that the range of character the work embodies—with its complex blends of masculine and feminine elements, and its commingling of aggressive impulse and sophisticated control—may not correspond to any other evidence of Pollock's persona, or even to any understanding of himself the artist could articulate in other terms or by other means. The pulverized, softly mottled, cloudy romanticism of *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* (plates 6, 10–15, 17, 18), created by a fanatically complex reworking of the surface with an infinity of speckled incidents and subtly aerated glazes,[5] or the obsessively swirled nets of steadily fine white line in *Number 20, 1948* (plate 37)—these are willfully controlled worlds of feeling that present us with aspects of their maker's temperament otherwise lost to history and perhaps never set forth in any other form.

People are not neat, integrated packages, and their lives and psyches are often compartmentalized, in smaller and larger ways. Pollock in the studio and on canvas was not the same man as Pollock in the house or on the road.

Ironically, it's those who try to explain the "fragmentation" and putatively disturbed turbulence of the paintings as one-to-one indices of the inner man who ask us to accept a falsely neat ideal of integration, wholeness, and consistency, between the different aspects of Pollock's psychic makeup and the variety of expressions in his art. On the other hand, by *dis*connecting what we see in Pollock's paintings from the schematic anecdotes we have about his life, we can allow more of him, not less, into his art. We can begin to see how the person who emerged on these canvases was in many ways antithetical to—and certainly complex in other ways than—the person who comes down to us in family reminiscences, fragmentary and often borrowed quotes, and clichéd sagas of binges at the Cedar Bar.

The search for such finer-grained discrimination fueled the examination, in the retrospective and its accompanying publication, of the way Pollock actually made the poured or drip paintings. In insisting on the evidence of refined control and complex patterns of intent in these paintings, the aim was not to make a fetish of technique; as Pollock himself averred, the end is what counts, and technique is only a means of getting there. But if we are to understand what these pictures are—to say what they properly evidence, and can legitimately be made to stand for—we need once and for all to scotch the false myths of wild and heedless improvisation that cling to them. And what we propose to replace those romances with is hardly the flat-footed conservatism of some traditionally premeditated craft. Just as certainly as Pollock's work belies the simplistic unity inherent in the expressionist idea of inner feeling poured into outer form, so too it will not be accommodated within crude dichotomies between the planned and the unplanned, the intended and the automatic, the knowing and the unconscious, the controlled and the accidental. The constant interplay and feedback among these aspects of his practice was too swift, too inseparably interwoven, to allow for neat antitheses or clear either/or choices. Pollock's improvisational spontaneity was, as Pepe Karmel has suggested, akin to that of the jazz musician who stitches together, on the fly and in wholly unpredictable ways, a repertoire of familiar riffs—or, as I have said elsewhere, to that of the great athlete or dancer who, operating beyond any programmed move or convention, achieves a spectacular grace, its intense, of-the-moment presentness a seamless blend of unthinking spasm and trained will.

Accident and fatality have been the twin plagues of our understanding of Pollock. The two romances—the ideas, respectively, of abandonment to untamed chaos and of entrapment by tragic destiny—have twinned with each other to surround his work with the modern myth of an involuntary art, born of some irresistible necessity or external impulsion, and hence projected beneath or above the mundane thresholds of mere fumbling intent, or into zones of freedom beyond the manacles of conventional cultural construction. We cannot any

longer sustain such myths. The evidence of Pollock's works, one by one and as a sequence of development, argue for a different set of understandings about the underpinnings of radical innovation in modern art—one in which the debunking of both determinism and chance could reestablish both the radical role of individual agency and the fertile flexibility of art's conventions.

Something very important is at stake here. Standing before a great Pollock poured painting—and most especially, at the retrospective, standing surrounded by the three monumental poured paintings of 1950 (plates 3–5)—people are moved in tremendously powerful ways. And it seems impossible to understand why this is so, why Pollock's paintings have the peculiar power they have as art, without acknowledging the very particular and personal ways in which they were shaped as an intricate set of forms, through a complex blend of intent and accident, of reflex and reconsideration, of broad risk-taking and fine-tuned manipulation. And what is at issue ultimately is not only the stature of Pollock's accomplishment, but something even more fundamental, about the promises of what modern art can, at its best, achieve.

Modern art's experiments have always implied a wager. Viewers are asked to give up a lot: no more rosy sunsets or historical chronicles or cuddly dogs or pretty faces or palm trees or, often, even any recognizable things; in Pollock's more extreme case, not even anything we would readily know how to call composition, or hierarchy of forms, or pictorial order. But if we are going to give all this up, and allow artists to wreak havoc with our traditions, we have been led to expect we will get something in return. On the most immediate level, modern art was supposed to generate from its ruptures a set of forms and an orchestration of thought and feeling that we would embrace as more specific to our time—more uniquely anchored in, and generative of, the credo that we and our moment are separate from older modes and other epochs. So hungry are we for this affirmation that we have often tended to overvalorize the modernist destruction of earlier cultural conventions as a self-justifying act, salutary and creative in itself—and in the process often to confuse novelty with innovation, and nihilism with creativity. But in that bargain, we risk accepting, as recompense for all we have given up, only a new and cultish tradition of inbred one-upmanship.

The balancing premise of modern art was implicit in Cézanne's statement of his ambition to "redo Poussin after nature"—that is, to try to recapture and reformulate, by the most progressive and specifically contemporary means (in his case, of Impressionist naturalism), the achievements he so admired in one of his greatest forebears. This is perhaps the most imposing promise of modern art: that what will be left after all the eliminations and destructions will not be just an exhilarating void or an ennoblingly empty ache, but new, unexpected, and unfamiliar languages of art with sufficient suppleness and range to allow the expressions of our own realms of feeling to equal or surpass, in fresh and

unhackneyed terms, the density and range of the greatest human expressions—Shakespeare, Beethoven—we have inherited.

For a long time now, Pollock has been admired as a great eliminator and destroyer, and trumpeted as a poster boy for the anticultural freedom and essentially anarchic, antihumanist force of modern art. This is at best only half the story. Pollock's particular kind of modern innovation undeniably derives much of its cultural power from the corrosive, liberating power of its negations. The countless ways in which it rejects the traditions of painting have long been searingly apparent. But, like the best of modern art, it also has tremendous generative, and regenerative, power. In return for all that it takes away from art's traditions, it gives back something fertile, complex, and expandable—and this not simply by clearing the decks, but by the range of expressive powers in the original language of form it deploys. When Pollock eliminates all that he eliminates from painting, what is left is not chaos, or anarchy, or heedless spontaneity. What is produced is a densely complex language of form, capable of an enormous range of expression, from the monumental to the intimate, from the lyrical to the apocalyptic, from the basely crude to the ethereally fine—and perhaps most enthrallingly, capable of conjuring all these things near simultaneously, in a special wedding of intransigent abstract materiality and rich metaphoric evocation that will not be prized apart. The dream of modern art may be an impossible one, and the wager unlikely—that individual freedoms can yield shared cultures, and that the apparent negation of tradition can rebuild something of equal worth, binding us paradoxically both to our time and simultaneously to the greatest achievements of the past—but in Pollock's best work, we feel, near the end of modern art's first century, that the gamble was redeemed.

Notes

1. Clement Greenberg, "Art," *The Nation* 160 no. 14 (April 7, 1945): 397.
2. Greenberg, "Art," *The Nation* 157 no. 22 (November 27, 1943): 621.
3. See Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, "Jackson Pollock: Response as Dialogue," and James Coddington, "No Chaos Damn It," both in the present volume.
4. See William S. Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," parts I–IV, *Artforum* 5 nos. 6 (February 1967): 14–22, 7 (March 1967): 28–37, 8 (April 1967): 18–31, and 9 (May 1967): 28–33.
5. See Coddington, "No Chaos Damn It," in the present volume.

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Translating this event into book form was no easy task. Delphine Dannaud, Administrative Assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, and Anna Indych, our original Research Assistant for the Pollock exhibition, obtained essential photographs, filled countless informational lacunae, and were an administrative godsend. In the Publications Department, David Frankel, Editor, helped all of us clarify our thoughts and sharpened our prose. Christina Grillo, Senior Production Assistant, worked miracles to get the book printed on schedule and on budget. Michael Maegraith, Publisher, bore with us despite daunting logistical difficulties. We are indebted to Steven Schoenfelder for the exceptionally handsome cover and layout, crafted to harmonize with the design of *Jackson Pollock*, the book published in 1998 to accompany the Pollock exhibition.

Finally we are deeply grateful to The David Geffen Foundation, which has funded this and both of the other publications associated with the exhibition—*Jackson Pollock*, and *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, a collection of earlier writings on the artist published as a companion to the present volume.

—KV and PK

Jackson Pollock *New Approaches*

Jackson Pollock is widely considered the most challenging and influential American artist of the twentieth century. In his revolutionary paintings of the late 1940s, he poured paint into complex webs of interlacing lines, rhythmically punctuated by pools of color. With their allover composition, apparent abstraction, and spontaneous but controlled paint-handling, these powerful works announced the emergence of Abstract Expressionism.

In 1998–99, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, organized a landmark retrospective of Pollock's work, making it possible for a new generation of artists and viewers to experience his paintings firsthand. During the exhibition, nine leading scholars gathered at the Museum to discuss Pollock's work and its meaning today. Their essays, collected in this volume, demonstrate the continued relevance of Pollock's work for contemporary art, and the vitality and diversity of contemporary criticism.

This book is accompanied by a companion volume, *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, collecting essential older texts by or about Pollock. Along with *Jackson Pollock*, the sumptuously illustrated catalogue of the exhibition, these books offer an indispensable overview of a painter who decisively changed the nature of modern art.

248 pages; 145 illustrations (37 in color) ■ Printed in Italy ■ ISBN 0-87070-086-3 (MoMA, Thames & Hudson) ■ ISBN 0-8109-6202-0 (Abrams) ■ A companion volume to *Jackson Pollock* (1998; 336 pages; 227 color and 198 duotone illustrations; ISBN 0-87070-068-5 [MoMA], 0-8109-6193-8 [Abrams], 1-85437-275-0 [Tate]); and to *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* (1999; 284 pages; ISBN 0-87070-037-5 (MoMA, Thames & Hudson), 0-8109-6212-8 (Abrams) ■ Cover: Jackson Pollock. *Number 1A, 1948* (detail). 1948. Oil and enamel on canvas, 68 in. x 8 ft. 8 in. (172.7 x 264.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase ■ **Published by The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019 (www.moma.org)**