The painter Cy Twombly retains strong ties to the American South, where he grew up, and to the milieu of New York in the 1950s, where he formed his style as the contemporary, friend, and peer of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Yet since 1957, Twombly has lived and worked principally in Rome, and his reputation has taken on an aura of myth, not only because he resides abroad and is protective of his privacy, but because of the singular nature of his art. An almost legendary figure among artists throughout the sixties and seventies in his individual pursuit of painterly abstraction, he has received broader recognition since the resurgence of European painting in the eighties. Twombly's work forms a bridge between Europe and America in the postwar era, and stands as a unique link between such disparate traditions as Abstract Expressionism and conceptually oriented art.

The extensive literature on Twombly contains several volumes with diverse essays of appreciation and a few important catalogues raisonnés of his paintings and drawings. Yet there has been no full, chronological study of the artist's life and the development of his work. In this volume, an extended essay by Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, examines the artist's background and early education in Lexington, Virginia, and charts his study at the Boston Museum School, the Art Students League of New York, and the renowned, progressive Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Twombly's early contacts with both the modern European tradition and New York School painting are examined, and the emergence of his own distinct style in the mid-1950s is presented with a new clarity. The complex question of Twombly's interactions with European art is discussed, as is Twombly's distinctive conflation

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This publication is made possible by a generous gift from Emily Fisher Landau.
The Museum of Modern Art is privileged to have the opportunity to honor Cy Twombly. Though his work is held in the highest regard by connoisseurs worldwide, he has perhaps been lauded more extensively in Europe than in his native land. It was the firm conviction of Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, that our public, and especially a generation of younger artists, needed an opportunity to study afresh the full extent of Twombly’s achievement. Since the retrospective exhibition mounted at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1979, significant early works have reemerged, and the artist has produced a substantial body of important new work. Many of the works in the present exhibition have never before been incorporated into a retrospective, and many others have not previously been shown in America.

We hope that a new view of Twombly will be stimulating to contemporary artists and their public, and will also provide the opportunity for us to reconsider our familiar ideas of the progress of avant-garde art since 1945. Twombly’s art—which seems to belong both to America and to Europe and embraces abstraction, figuration, and writing—unifies in a challenging way many of the styles and domains of recent art that are frequently considered to be rigidly separate.

We deeply appreciate the generosity of the many collectors and institutions whose loans made the exhibition possible. We are also especially grateful for the committed patronage of two exceptional benefactors, Lily Auchincloss and Emily Fisher Landau, whose donations supported respectively this exhibition and its publication. A project of this nature, with art as challenging as Twombly’s, is unfortunately not likely to attract corporate support. We therefore depend on the vision and generosity of such private donors, who believe both in the mission of the Museum and in the value of contemporary creativity.

Finally, we owe very warm thanks to the director of the exhibition and author of this publication, Kirk Varnedoe. His admiration for the art of Cy Twombly, and his personal commitment to presenting it as fully and thoughtfully as possible, are evident in all aspects of this project. Preparing this exhibition and book with such care and intelligence, while meeting with equal sensitivity and professionalism the heavy demands of his role as Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, required extraordinary dedication, energy, and long hours. He too deserves our admiration as well as our gratitude.

Richard E. Oldenburg
Director
The Museum of Modern Art
Cy Twombly at Black Mountain College. 1951. Photograph by Robert Rauschenberg
ILLUSTRIOUS AND UNKNOWN: this was what Degas aspired to be, and what Cy Twombly has become.1 His imposing reputation has an aura of myth and ambiguity, for reasons that have partly to do with the elusiveness of the artist himself (residing abroad and protective of his privacy), but more to do with the singularity of his art. Twombly first came to prominence in the later 1950s, when his graffiti-like pencilwork appeared to subvert Abstract Expressionism. Yet he then sustained painterly abstraction through a time in the 1960s when the imagery of mass culture and the certainties of geometry seemed destined to kill it off. While linked by generational ties and friendship to Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, he has suffered from the fact that unlike theirs, his work—with no bold graphic or photographic imagery—tells little in reproduction, and provides no convenient entrance into Pop art. The elements of ironic realism in their art have been considered progressive and in tune with postmodern sensibilities, but Twombly’s unique combination of bare astringency and sensual indulgence has proved harder to confine within such tidy generalizations. He has further distanced himself from his contemporaries by embracing the classical past and reaching for epic narrative in an era when such models appeared wholly derelict. In addition, his work has often sought its own poetics by invoking the heritage of literature, during a long period in which “literary” was a term of condemnation. These commitments, and their author, have never found a ready niche in accounts of the progress of art since 1950. The countless paperbacks and catalogues that have canonized the line of artists from Pollock to Warhol as the mainstream of American art’s postwar ascendancy have typically neglected Twombly rather than contend with the ways his inclusion might disrupt that story’s flow. A fellow artist already saw the problem in 1955: “[Twombly’s] originality,” he said, “is being himself. He seems to be born out of our time, rather than into it.”2

That assessment cannot satisfy: no person has such autonomy, and clearly Twombly’s art is specifically contemporary. Efforts to link him to the art of his time have left us, though, with an oddly piecemeal fabric of interpretations—one which only now, in the mid-1990s, appears to be assuming enough breadth and density to wrap the complex achievements of the work itself. Over almost three decades, Twombly has been repeatedly “rediscovered” by American critics, in various ways. The white-on-grey paintings he made in the late 1960s were welcomed as having an anti-sensual, cerebral spareness that related them to Minimalism and Conceptual art; and the fascination with linguistic models of criticism focused special attention on the play of marking, writing, and schematic figuration in his work. Then, more important, American awareness of European contemporary art expanded: in the 1970s a sharpened focus on the art of Joseph Beuys—concerned with grand myth and history, but also esoterically personal and tied to a bodily animism—began a reorientation that favored Twombly in other ways; and the advent of a new painterly expressionism in the 1980s, in artists as diverse as Anselm Kiefer and Francesco Clemente, further catalyzed a fresh assessment of his importance.

More recently a fraught concern with sexuality has appeared among contemporary artists whose anti-formal expressivity and candor about the body has
opened still another avenue into Twombly’s complex achievement. As did the
earlier frames of reference (Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Dada, Minimal and
Conceptual art, Neo-Expressionism, and so on), this one can help us see valid
aspects of the work. Taken in sequence, however, each of these terms has tended
to exclude or ignore the others, and none accounts for the presence within
Twombly’s art of all these, and more, contradictory climates of feeling. Offhand
aspects of the work. Taken in sequence, however, each of these terms has tended
opened still another avenue into Twombly’s complex achievement. As did the
verbalization and uncongenial to analysis. In the extensive literature on Twombly,
strongly on the kind of direct response to physical presence that is resistant to
abstract fingerwork with paint—all ask to be understood in concert.

In that complexity, this art has proved influential among artists, discomfiting
to many critics, and truculently difficult not just for a broad public, but for
sophisticated initiates of postwar art as well. It will almost certainly continue to
defy ready acceptance by a wide audience, as its particular impact depends so
strongly on the kind of direct response to physical presence that is resistant to
verbalization and uncongenial to analysis. In the extensive literature on Twombly,
many sensitive writers and acute theoreticians have already grappled with that
difficulty, in efforts to capture poetically the seductive force of his work, and
to analyze its singular aesthetic structure. With respect for and indebtedness to
many of their texts, this retrospective essay approaches its subject in a different
and perhaps more prosaic fashion, by attempting to examine the art within the
context of a fuller account of the basic circumstances of time, place, and biogra
phy in which it has been made.

It is, after all, not just the internal complexity of any given work that is so
challenging; the several shifts and turns this long career has seen, and the varieties
of feeling that shape its different periods, also confound generalizations. Yet—
amazingly, given Twombly’s stature—there still exists no standard, documented
history of exactly what has happened in the evolution of his art, when, and in
what order. The dates and the durations of his formative experiences have been
only vaguely sketched out in writing on him, and the shifting locales in which
he has worked (clearly understood by his intimates as central to the variety of his
production) are known to outsiders only as a string of often unfamiliar names—
Sperlonga, Bassano, Bolsena, Gaeta, and so on (see map, fig. 47, in the notes). If we
are ever to come to firmer grips with the art in its broader implications and his
torical role, we would do well to start by better understanding these basic matters,
and trying to integrate them into a reliable chronicle of Twombly’s experience.
This will not of course “explain” anything: a creator’s work is never reducible to
his or her life, and lives are themselves constructs that need interpretation. Yet
few artists’ work seems so closely—one wants to say so nakedly—tied to the
vicissitudes of an individual temperament unfolding in time. Historians must
eventually reckon with the specifics of that connection, not because such facts
will provide answers, but because they will help us frame more telling questions.

The crucial first step has already been taken by Heiner Bastian in his
superb catalogue raisonné of Twombly’s paintings, which is mapping the extent
of the oeuvre, allowing us to see countless little-known canvases, and establishing
an order. With that reference in hand, we can now trace the development of the
work, and, with the artist’s generous cooperation and the help of new
documentation, begin to chronicle more fully his life and art in tandem. The
thumbnail biography that has been ritually repeated throughout the literature
cites, for example, three formative episodes: his childhood in Virginia; his educa
tion in Boston and New York and at Black Mountain; and his move to Italy in
1957. We can start simply by reexamining these givens, and reassessing what they
have meant for Twombly as an artist—with the intent that through such efforts
he should become a little less unknown, and thereby the more illustrous.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION, 1928–52

Edwin Parker Twombly, Jr., was born on April 25, 1928, at Stonewall Jackson
Hospital in Lexington, Virginia. Second child and only son, he inherited the
nickname his father had earned—recalling the legendary pitcher Cy Young—
as a professional baseball player. Both parents were Northeasterners by birth,
but the South was vital to the family’s experience and Twombly has remained
unmistakably Southern in important aspects of his presence and character. The
rhythm of his childhood, inflected by regular sojourns with his extended family
in Massachusetts and Maine, involved what he sees as a happy alternation of
two basic American cultures. The family’s roots in New England supplied cooler,
analytic elements of Yankee temperament, but it is the South, he feels, that is
more closely allied with the Mediterranean world he embraced as an adult.
Virginia and Italy, Twombly maintains only half jokingly, are both Mediterranean
cultures.

That connection is long-standing: the antebellum South had a special vein of
neoclassicism, from Thomas Jefferson’s Palladian buildings at Charlottesville
and Monticello through the pedimented porticoes of plantation architecture, to
the Latin names frequently imposed on slaves. More generally, the traditional
elements that thickened the “atmosphere” of Southern life—a honeyed ease
with spoken language and a rich literary tradition, a certain sensual languor, and
the lingering romance of fallen grandeur—could all be taken to have predisposed Twombly toward the Roman life he later chose. There are also other, less evident strains of Southern culture that Twombly understands explicitly, including a dark current of fantasy and irrationality, just as there are more specific aspects of his birthplace that helped form him.

Lexington, set in the Blue Ridge Mountains west of the Shenandoah, is dominated by two institutions: Washington and Lee University, where Twombly's father worked as coach and later athletic director, and the Virginia Military Institute. The community's bookstores and faculties opened horizons and encouraged ambitions in ways that belied the usual limitations of a small town. The military college also added a special dimension. Within the Old South, the uniformed cavalier had always constituted a special ideal of aristocracy, fostering the cult of honor and the formalities of chivalry; nowhere would this have been more evident than in the place where Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson taught and are buried. In Twombly's youth, when local sons and daughters of Confederate soldiers still retained memories of Manassas they had learned at the knee, this association among historical myth, cultural grace, and arms would have been especially pervasive. It might seem to have little direct bearing on art, but on an imagination later fired by Troy and Thermopylae, it left its imprint. (In 1975, Twombly made a collage whose title, Mars and the Artist [pi. 83], specifically associated creativity with the god of war.) Moreover, the military households in Lexington—more spartan than other homes, but often informed by wider travel and experience of the world—displayed their porcelain and other fine objects in an austere and focused isolation that Twombly recalls as one of his earliest experiences of aesthetic sophistication.

As for true artistic instruction, though, Lexington was barren. Twombly was artistically gifted and precociously facile at working with his hands, and his parents and teachers encouraged him. Yet his training might have depended only on the Sears, Roebuck art kits he ordered by mail, if Pierre Daura (a Spanish artist connected to Virginia by marriage and driven from Europe by the outbreak of war) had not settled nearby and started giving private lessons just when Twombly, at the age of twelve, began to devote significant energy to painting. As a veteran of the avant-garde and an adept of the Cercle et Carré group in France, Daura opened an avenue out of the provincial South toward the tradition that extended from Paul Cézanne into modern European art. Twombly embraced that tradition swiftly. The first painting he remembers making was a copy of Marie-Thérèse Walter slumbering on the cover of Jean Cassou's 1937 book on Picasso; and on his sixteenth birthday, his mother gave him Sheldon Cheney's A Primer of Modern Art, which he says he "devoured." Cheney's book was less a history than an evangelical tract: it trumpeted the visionary courage of the modern movement, sneered at bourgeois tastes, and—with a grudging nod to Cubism, but no regard for geometric abstraction—preached that the tradition of expressionism manifest in artists such as Oskar Kokoschka was the true legacy of Cézanne and the royal road of contemporary creativity.

Twombly's first formal art school training, in Boston after high school, reinforced this emphasis. Though the School of the Museum of Fine Arts emphasized practical matters of technique and materials with an eye to training teachers, it had a bias toward German aesthetics and was a seedbed of the expressionist painting that flourished in Boston in the late 1940s. The local Institute of Contemporary Art shared that orientation. In contrast to the perceived prejudices of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, it favored Northern Europe over Paris as the central terrain of the modern tradition, and figurative over non-objective painting. Twombly visited the Institute often; to the extent that it valued regionalism and mistrusted abstract art, its programs would have helped delay his awareness of the avant-garde in New York and focus him instead on a European expressionist heritage. In this vein, aside from such figures at the school as the German Karl Zerbe and locals such as Hyman Bloom, more exalted
Some of the earlier works bear such titles as *The Slaughter* and *Attacking Image*, and as late as April 1951 the artist could write that the emphasis of his art was on “movement and power.” In contrast, the motifs of the late summer and beyond seem increasingly static in their monumentality, and more evidently marked by a form of primitivism that was becoming central to Twombly’s art. Such interests may have had early roots—Cheney’s book already invited an attention to archaic styles, and Daura’s wife, Louise Blair, was known for her interest in prehistoric cave art—but it was not until after he arrived in New York that he acknowledged the fascination. “I’ve been very interested in the primitive art of the American Indian—of Mexico and Africa,” he wrote in late November 1950. “So much art looks affected and tired after seeing the expressive simple directness of their work.”

While that sentence could easily have been penned by hundreds of artists, the sentiment in fact informed a specific and personal, threefold attraction: to the fresh simplicity of “primitive” art’s forms; to the evocative richness of its aged surfaces; and to the aura of animistic superstition or obsession that surrounded certain of its objects. In a statement on his work written in early 1952, Twombly affirmed: “For myself the past is the source (for all art is vitally contemporary). I’m drawn to the primitive, the ritual and fetish elements, to the symmetrical plastic order (peculiarly basic to both primitive and classic concepts, so relating the two).” The affinity for symmetry is clear in works like *MIN-OE* (pl. 3), with its heraldic confrontation between near-identical “personages,” and in the series of openwork web structures that were, despite their apparent monumentality (fig. 6), based on the small, ancient Iranian metalwork pieces (bits, bridle ornaments, and so on) generically known as Luristan bronzes. These latter canvases also reflect Twombly’s companion interest in the corroded surfaces of archeological artifacts: the rusted crusts of the excavated iron drew him to this ancient metal. Charles Olson saw that a feel for such aged and soiled textures underlay the particular poetics of Twombly’s painting; after a visit to the studio at Black Mountain in January 1952, Olson wrote: “… the dug up stone figures, the thrown down glyphs, the old sorrels in sheep dirt in caves, the flaking iron: these are his paintings.”

Four years later, after the experience of Europe and North Africa, Twombly would still write (now with broader experience and deeper self-understanding) that “Generally speaking my art has evolved out of the interest in symbols abstracted, but never the less humanistic; formal as most art are in their archaic and classic stages, and a deeply aesthetic sense of eroded or ancient surfaces of time.”

The missing ingredient in this description, however, is the irrational, and
specifically sexual, aspect that Twombly sensed in the “ritual and fetish elements”
of primitive art. The fence-like arrays of vertical forms that recur in canvases,
drawings, and one sculpture (pls. 4–7) were apparently inspired by African fetish
works—incorporating sticks tipped with charges of pitch—which Twombly
knew from books on tribal art. Their phallic implications hardly need empha-
sizing, and in a more general sense, Twombly tends to class all the basic shapes in
such works as either male or female.40

The art had, on the other hand, nothing of the superficially sensual or
ingratiating; its erotic energies negated the suave in favor of a rough urgency.
That toughness—especially with the inclusion of earth in the surfaces of some
of the works—may owe to the influence of Jean Dubuffet, whose work had first
attracted Twombly in the late 1940s.41 Just as he used static symmetry to still the
compositional dynamics of action painting, so he used Dubuffet’s granular,
coated surfaces in order, literally, to put “grit” into its liquid, gestural virtuosity.
With help from such models, Twombly reversed the evolution of the New York
School, using the painterly language of the early 1950s to invoke the romance of
primitive, buried signs that had occupied painters such as Gottlieb, Rothko, and
Pollock years earlier.42

Further in the spirit of rejecting familiar indices of sensual beauty, Twombly
was also bent on eliminating the vibrant colors that remained from his earlier
engagement with expressionism. The exclusively black-and-white look we now
see in his art of the early fifties is a result of other paintings having been lost or
destroyed,43 but also of a willful choice, conditioned by his relationship with
Rauschenberg (whose 1951 show was dominantly black and white), and his
admiration for the power derived from monochrome work by de Kooning,
Kline, and, perhaps most directly, Motherwell. In 1949, the dealer Sam Kootz
had held a show called “Black or White: Paintings by European and American
Artists,” for which Motherwell wrote the catalogue preface, and Motherwell’s
own, dominantly black Elegies for the Spanish Republic might be counted among
the closer ancestors of some of Twombly’s early compositions.

Whatever Twombly’s relationship to Motherwell’s painting, Motherwell
was impressed by his work. He introduced Twombly to Kootz, opening the way
for a show at the end of 1951, and wrote a glowing endorsement of the paintings
for another show earlier in the autumn in Chicago. In that text, while lauding
Twombly as “the most accomplished young painter whose work I happen to
have encountered,” Motherwell knowingly analyzed the mix of influences—
aspects of Picasso, the loaded surfaces of Dubuffet, and a strong admiration for
primitive art—that he saw in his canvases. He assessed the twenty-three-year-old
as a “natural” in his instinctive feel for “the abandon, the brutality, the irrational
in avant-garde painting of the moment,” and remarked on “the sexual character
of the fetishes half-buried in his violent surface.”44

Kootz presented Twombly in December 1951, in a two-person show with
Gandy Brodie. The display received only light attention from critics, who sought
to identify the influences (Clyfford Still for one writer, Dubuffet for another)
that formed the beginner. The responses split along lines that would become
familiar: one found the work “dour,” “grimy,” and not sufficiently ingenious in
conception, while another spotted an “insinuating elegance” in the patterns of
the paintings.45

7. Cy Twombly. Untitled. 1951. Bitumen and house paint on canvas,
495/8 × 543/4" (125.7 × 137.8 cm). Marx Collection, Berlin
EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA, 1952 – 53

By the time the Kootz show closed, Twombly was looking toward Europe. In January 1952, when he and Rauschenberg were enrolled in the winter session at Black Mountain, he contacted the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts about a travel fellowship. Rauschenberg, by then estranged from his wife and on the way to a divorce, joined the travel plans; with the idea that he and Twombly could eventually share the fellowship funds abroad, he prepared the photographic portfolio of paintings submitted with Twombly’s application. In the written part of the proposal, Twombly said he hoped to “experience European cultural climates both intellectual and aesthetic” and to “study the prehistoric cave drawings of Lascaux (the first great art of Western civilization). The French, Dutch and Italian Museums, the Gothic, Baroque architecture, and Roman ruins.” Another strong letter from Junkin (who explained that this young painter’s “ideas stem from a deep interest in primitive shapes”) supplemented recommendations from Motherwell and Shahn—the former remarking on “the excellent reception among the painters of his recent exhibition in New York,” and the latter calling him “unquestionably, the best of my students” at Black Mountain.

The grant was awarded in late May, just at the close of the session at Black Mountain. It seems likely that it was during a spring break, or in the latter part of June, that Twombly and Rauschenberg traveled together through the South, to Charleston, New Orleans, and Key West, and to Cuba. Rauschenberg then worked at Black Mountain in July, when Kline was in residence as an instructor; Twombly, though primarily painting in Lexington and no longer registered as a student, also returned to visit.

In late August, Twombly sailed from New York, and after a brief stopover in Palermo, landed in Naples and went straight to Rome in the first days of September. He settled into a pensione on the piazza di Spagna, began an intensive reconnoitering of Roman sights (fig. 8), and in the latter part of the month traveled with Rauschenberg to Florence, Siena, Assisi, and Venice. All of this was exciting, idyllic, and instructive, but before long Rauschenberg began to feel a sharp financial crunch (which he has blamed on Twombly’s purchases of antiquities); and acting on a tip that there were jobs to be had in Casablanca, he left for North Africa. At first Twombly stayed behind in Rome, where he already had plans for a January exhibition, but he followed Rauschenberg near the end of October, with the intention of touring North Africa and Egypt for two or three months.

North Africa was then still divided into zones of foreign occupation. In Casablanca the ruling French were pressing local youths into conscription for military duty in Indochina, and the town was tense with hostility. To make matters worse, both artists fell prey to intestinal illnesses, and as soon as Rauschenberg had earned enough money for his eventual return to the United States, they left in search of happier grounds, traveling through the Atlas Mountains to Marrakech. By mid-December they had established themselves in Tangier. Twombly pursued archeology at nearby Roman ruins, Rauschenberg photographed the symmetrical, weathered designs of local tombstones (fig. 9), and the two made contact with the expatriate writer Paul Bowles, who traveled with them, near the end of the year, to Tetuan in Spanish Morocco. Eventually, they returned to Italy through Spain, arriving in Rome in February 1953.

The gallery exhibition Twombly had been counting on having in Rome in January apparently never materialized. It is unclear what he had been planning to show; he had not made any paintings during his travels. The major fruit
of the trip was a group of six or eight wall hangings (which he called “tapestries”), made in Tangier from brightly colored fabrics used for local clothing. These surprising, dominantly geometric abstract designs were shown in mid-March in Florence, in a joint exhibition with Rauschenberg’s tufted hanging pieces and tiny box assemblages—he’s Statolet contempative e fetici personal (Contemplative Boxes and Personal Fetishes)—at the Galleria d’Arte Contemporanea (see figs. 48–50, in the notes). Rauschenberg disposed of most of his works from this show by dumping them into the Arno, and Twombly’s fabric works have also been lost.59

By this point Rauschenberg was firmly fixed on returning to the States, and Twombly went back with him. The two artists were in New York in May, and Rauschenberg established a studio, which they often shared, on Fulton Street.60 The time abroad had been a revelation for Twombly; he wrote that he had found Rome and Florence “inexhaustible,” and had been strongly taken with Etruscan civilization on “many trips to the tombs of Tarquinia and Vièv.” “It is difficult,” he said, “to begin to tell of the many, many things I saw and experienced— not only in art and history but of human poetry and dimensions in the fleeting moment and the flux. I will always be able to find energy and excitement to work with from these times. I see clearer and even more the things I left. It’s been like one enormous awakening of finding many wonderful rooms in a house that you never knew existed.”61

The same letter related that, while Twombly was eager to resume showing, Sam Kootz apparently had no immediate opening for an exhibition. Instead, Eleanor Ward issued an invitation that expanded into an offer for a joint exhibition with Rauschenberg, at her new Stable Gallery. To make possible a larger show, the two artists agreed to work during the summer to refurbish the gallery’s basement space.62 Then, for the September opening, they installed the ground floor and basement with a mix of Rauschenberg’s Black paintings, White paintings, and his sculptures made from rock, wood, and string; and a group of Twombly’s paintings, executed in New York since his return from Europe and titled with the names of North African villages—Tiznit (pls. 10, 11), Volubilis (pl. 14), Quarzazat, and others.63

The paintings were large (up to seven feet wide) and took a stride beyond anything the artist had done previously, but critics were in sharp disagreement as to whether or not they had anything in particular to do with North Africa.64 The question is not a simple one to answer. Their origins lie in homemade “sketchbooks” of stapled-together conté crayon or pencil drawings (figs. 10–12; pl. 8) that were inspired principally by tribal items from Abyssinia and sub-Saharan Africa that Twombly found in the displays of the Pigorini ethnographic museum in Rome.65 Though the motifs do not lend themselves to precise identification, Twombly seems to have been especially fascinated not by figural works, but by costume, ornaments, sacks, and fetish pieces—and, while in North Africa, by forms of vernacular architecture, such as the beehive turrets of mud kilns.

The drawings appear to show tuberous bundles, twig fascias, and decorative accessories, made perhaps from perforated, partially depilated hides and ornamentally stitched fabric with coarsely nubbled textures. Elevated to the monumental scale of the paintings, these motifs become personages, with the kind of ponderous presence found later in the gravelly comic work of Philip Guston. Building from the heraldic face-offs of works such as MIN-CE (pl. 3) or the fence-like array seen in Solon I (pl. 5), but now abandoning symmetry, they confront each other or assemble in implied narrative, animated by passages of compression and extrusion—wrapped bundles and bristling releases—that are anything but static. The drawings also suggest forms studded with nails or other embellish-
ments, or hung with tassels, fringes, thatches of raffia, and pendants of feathers and hair. When translated onto the painted surface, the relatively casual and cursive strokes that conjure these excrescences (fig. 11; pl. 9) become the pretext for a pervasive linear scratching unattached to the description of form: overlays of repetitive markings that dig into and scarify the paint in a way that makes drawing, with crayon and pencil, a major part of the art’s expressiveness (see the detail of Tiznit, pl. 10).

The technique of drawing into wet paint may have its roots in Twombly’s earlier, student experiences of scraping into encaustic or melted crayon surfaces. As used here, though, it introduces a distinct affective element: the boldness of expressionist brushwork is displaced by something dry and systematically scruffy, with overtones of slashing defacement. At a minimum, Twombly seems to have been intent on expunging any residue of virtuosity: his choice of technique for a contemporaneous printmaking experiment—scoring cardboard with a nail—bespeaks the same willfully coarse anti-aesthetic of “impoverishment” (fig. 13; pls. 12, 13).

Other painters, from Delacroix to Klee and Matisse, had drawn from their first experience of North Africa a heightened sense of vibrant color, and Twombly’s brilliant wall hangings from Tangier show that he was not immune. The lasting impression evident in these 1953 paintings, however, was of white. Rauschenberg had painted all-white works two years before, but intended them to remain (by repainting when needed) forever fresh; he described them in terms of virginity and silence. Twombly’s white was a song less of innocence than of
experience, evoking the brightness of the Mediterranean sun through echoes of crumbling chalk, bleached bone, and eroded lime. From the white columns of Virginia and the crisp linen of torrid summers, this color had already been marked for Twombly, and other reinforcing experiences—Greek island villages, the furnishings in Egyptian tombs—were yet to come. These paintings marked the first occasion, though, on which his early, atavistic romance of dark pitch and flaking iron was transmuted into a new love of exposed rather than buried things, as the scraped tablets of time's inscription. This was certainly spurred by the North African passage: on a sketchbook page where he enumerated what he saw of materials ("rope, fur, sack, velvet, feathers, brass taks, nails, cut tin and copper") and of colors ("brown, blue, dust, black brown, orange, faded siena"), the largest, last notation, set off by a ruling line, is "chalk white" (pl. 8a).59

The Stable show was broadly, and unfavorably, noticed. For the first time, Twombly's art elicited the charge of infantilism and the comparison with vandals' markings that would later become, in praise and in dismissal, familiar tropes. "Large, streaked expanses of white with struggling black lines scrawled across them, they resemble graffiti, or the drawings of pre-kindergarten children," said a usually sympathetic critic who now feared, looking at Rauschenberg's and Twombly's works, that Abstract Expressionism had let too many liberties loose in the world. He used the two young artists as whipping boys for what he saw as the sins of a generation, and Twombly, later to be judged unworthy of comparison with his New York School elders, was here attacked as their all-too-legitimate heir.70 It is impossible to gauge what proportion of such ill feelings was an effect of the dismay over Rauschenberg's all-white and all-black works; in June 1954, the critic of the Herald Tribune ranked this show as one of the two worst of the past season, largely because of those blank white works.71 For both artists, it was an unhappy moment in their relationship with the New York art world. "I lost friends over that show," Eleanor Ward later recalled. "A great many people thought it was immoral. I had to remove the guest book from the gallery, because so many awful things were being written in it."72
lights out. Unlike the "automatic writing" of the Surrealists, which aimed to elicit a smooth, uninterrupted flow of unconsciously motivated line, this exercise in reduced control seems to have been intended to impede and slow down the artist's graphic skill, and force into it some of the distortions of children's drawings. The blind practice contributed to the scrawling cursiveness and the looping, elongated proportions that are the hallmark of the Augusta drawings, and the nocturnal, uncensored manner of rendering may also account for the more candid opening of the imagery onto a psychosexual subconscious.75 Both qualities feed directly into the paintings of 1954 (see pis. 17—19), which were done largely during the spring and early summer, when Twombly was posted by the Army to Washington, D.C., and frequently traveled to New York during periods of leave.76 With their imagery of snaking tubes, meandering bladder-like biomorphs, and streaming clouds of scumble, these works are far more actively "narrative" than the arrays and face-offs of the year before. In them Twombly all but abandoned the paintbrush in order to elide—with the pencil point, a broader graphite-rubbing stroke, and wax crayon—any remaining distinction between painting and drawing.77 Though the painted surface is still heavily striated by the marks of fingers or a blunt stylus (see detail, pi. 18), the blacks of the crayon and pencil rub that surface or lie under it, without the scarring incisions that marked the penciled passages in the 1953 canvases: those former repetitive scratchings are translated here into grassy, continuous strokes, furthering the overall effect of upheaval, turbulence, and urGENCY that makes the 1953 paintings look by comparison heavier and more stiffly constricted.

An equally telling change in color and surface accompanies the new forms and psychic charge. The thick white lead and ochre of the 1953 works give way to mottled alternations of matte and glossy patches, cream whites, and liquified, pink-tinged passages. In dialogue with the imagery of release and flow, the ruddy, recurrently overpainted surface speaks of staining and smeared effacement. The bleached and aged surfaces evoked by the previous year's work are now supplanted by connotations of flesh, skin, and fluids—of spillage, excess, and overflow, rather than erosion.

When these paintings were shown at the Stable Gallery in January 1955—Twombly's first show after his release from the Army the previous August, and his first one-person show in New York78—the critic Frank O'Hara thought the artist profited from being seen alone and on his own terms. Taken as such, he said, the work seemed less abrasively experimental than it had before:

... the quality is clear and strong. His new paintings are drawn, scratched and crayoned over and under the surface with as much attention to esthetic tremors as to artistic excitement. Though they are all white with black and grey scoring, the range is far from a whisper, and this new development makes the painting itself the form. A bird seems to have passed through the impasto with cream-colored screams and bitter claw-marks. His admirably esoteric information, every wash or line struggling for survival, particularizes the sentiment. If drawing is as vital to painting as color, Twombly has an ever ready resource for his remarkable feelings.79

O'Hara concluded by mentioning the sculpture in the show: "... witty and funereal, big white boxes with swinging cloth-covered pendulums and sticks and mirrors." These works are now all but unknown. The Menil Collection's example (fig. 18), with its hanging fetish-bundle, fits the description, and photographs taken by Rauschenberg in his Fulton Street studio (figs. 15, 16) confirm that others were similarly connected—by their whiteness, by their use of bundled and wrapped fabric, and by the mirrors—to the North African experience.80 They had as well elements of deeper retrospect. The twin palm-leaf fans on block pedestals in two of the photographed works, and in one surviving from the same period (pl. 25), recall the archaic formality and symmetry in some of
the artist’s earliest paintings, drawings (see fig. 17), and assemblages,81 just as the panpipe group of wrapped sticks in another 1953 sculpture (pl. 7) returns to the “fence” array of fetish-sticks in other early works (pls. 4, 5). Still, it seems clear that the works in Rauschenberg’s photographs were done in 1954: two of the assemblages are experimental “combines” which include paintings or drawn elements related to the work of that year.82

The other important but no longer extant body of work from this period was a series of six or eight dark-ground paintings, on cheap cloth with drawing in friable white chalk. These grey-ground works are known principally from photographs (see fig. 19). The largest, Panorama (pl. 23), was shown in January 1957 and still exists;89 the rest were apparently destroyed soon after they were made. They were, however, doubtless seen by Twombly’s artist friends and made an impression on others as well.84 The striking aspect of these works is not only the reversal of light/dark relations (something Twombly had evidently tried before, and would again in the 1960s),85 but also the radical shift in the composition, space, and emotional tenor of his art, between the residually Surrealist figuration of the 1954 paintings and the abstract quality of run-on “handwriting” in these coolly grey canvases. Some of the passages are recognizable as loopily caricatured reminiscences of forms in the paintings or sculptures of 1954,86 but the loose mesh of overlaid lines confuses the distinction of figure from ground, making the separateness of individual forms far less important than the overall field of linear marking. The thinly painted ground also has diminished physical presence, and the black thus suggests a space of uncertain depth, behind the tangle of line.

No painter could have made pictures of this kind in New York in the mid-1950s—particularly a picture of the scale of Panorama—without thinking of their relation to the poured paintings of Pollock, and certainly not Twombly,
who was and is a deep admirer of Pollock’s genius. The parallel elements, however, only throw the differences into sharper relief. The evidence of process here tells of insistently discontinuous, programmatically repeated passages with the chalk stick, yielding none of the liquid, variegated, organic webbing of the poured paintings. There is also, more than in Pollock, a sense of overrunning extension out of every side of the canvas. The wholeness of Pollock’s dense, explosive clouds of energy is replaced by a dispersed, jumpily nervous electricity, as the local structures of both drawing and writing seem continually to pull and tug at the cumulative abstract palimpsest. The character of the drawing, especially in the cartoonish feel of the residual closed shapes that appear here and there, suggests something of Dubuffet—which would make these pictures among the most evident, if neither the first nor last, of Twombly’s efforts to fuse the scale, energy, and abstract freedoms of American painting with elements of expressive language learned from Europe.

It is difficult to say whether it was the irrational or the rational aspects of these works that were the more disconcerting for eyes adjusted to Pollock and de Kooning: the apparent mindlessness of a linear activity pursued, both obsessively and indulgently, without concern for the compositional drama of the whole; or the untoward interjection of mind—of something self-consciously, cumulatively cerebral—into what in New York School painting had been a concept of self-expression by the energetic physical release of gestures pressured by unconscious impulse.

Though Twombly remembers the early grey-ground paintings as having been done in 1955, some doubt surrounds their date. They were photographed in Rauschenberg’s Fulton Street studio (fig. 19), and almost certainly painted there as well. By January 1955, though, Rauschenberg had left this studio to move into a loft on Pearl Street adjacent to Jasper Johns’s, and by February, Twombly himself had moved back to Virginia to take a teaching job at a preparatory school for women, Southern Seminary and Junior College, in Buena Vista. He left his small apartment on William Street in Lower Manhattan (where he had been living since leaving the Army) in the care of Ward and her gallery and, aside from a brief return in late March, stayed in Virginia through mid-May.

Given this history, it seems likely that the grey paintings were made in late 1954. There are related drawings from that year (pls. 20–22), and there is also a probable connection between Panorama and a critic’s reference to drawings presented as a “Panorama” group, in a show at the Stable, in September 1955.
Whatever the month of their execution, these dark paintings veer away from the figuration that originated in the Augusta drawings, and toward the abstract linearity Twombly would pursue in 1955. A smaller, pencil-on-oil work done in Lexington early that year (fig. 20) still retains some of the Dubuffet-like character seen in the grey pictures, but the canvases in the next one-person show, of January 1956, had expunged it completely.93

Those paintings, including The Geeks, Criticism, Free Wheeler, and Academy (pls. 26-30), were done in the William Street apartment in New York, most likely during the summer of 1955, when Twombly returned to the city during Southern Seminary’s vacation months. (Their unusual titles were derived from a list compiled in collaboration with Rauschenberg and Johns, and were assigned to the pictures more or less arbitrarily.)94 At first glance, they might appear simply to maintain the vocabulary of all-over linear marking found in the grey paintings, with a reverse to dark lines on a light field, but the changes are in fact more drastic. In place of the thinly coated and relatively clean dark ground, these pictures have dense and variegated surfaces with multiple layers of paint: pencil and crayon lines and colorless scumbling with a blunt stylus are worked into and against the viscosity of the cream field. These thickets of marks (with flecks of terra-cotta color from colored pencils and crayon) have a congested, “hot” frenzy in comparison to the relatively airy work on the grey canvases—even though the stroking itself has changed from the loose and fluid lines of 1954 to more brittle striations. Closed biomorphic forms are all but forgotten, and the residual figuration now comes in the form of elemental signs, such as crosses, X marks, rectangles, grids, triangles, and circles, and especially in the emergent elements of written language. Letters, notably A, E, K, N, V, U, H, and I, alone or in fragments of words, appear on the teasing edge of legibility.95 The dialogue of inscription and erasure is essential not only to this level of “reading” the works, but to their overall energy. They are intermittently casual, furious, self-
doubling, and self-annulling—attacks against the aesthetic of painterly abstraction, from which Twombly's mature personal style was emerging.

"Personal" is, however, too loaded a term to use without qualification in this case. The idea of a unique individual manner had been a shibboleth of Abstract Expressionism, but similarities among the styles of New York School artists suggest they did share certain ideas, often garnered from European Surrealism, of what inner truth should look like. Their gestural abstraction expressed the notion that the most acute moments of self-realization were epiphanic and to be externalized only by heroic acts of Zen spontaneity, disengaged from control and committed instead to dynamism, risk, and chance. Yet in the same fashion that the deliberately slow, methodical pace of Johns's encaustic strokes belied the idea of such fervor, Twombly's switch from the brush to the pencil eliminated all the signs of splatter, streak, and drip that had become the familiar indices of committed engagement. His process of marking the canvas spoke of more dogged labor, and also (unlike Johns, whose images had a pre-formed wholeness) of discontinuity. Both artists defined their artistic sensibilities with elements of what was, in terms of the conventions they inherited, a determined impersonality. Yet while Johns's departures into deadpan, iconic imagery were more obviously drastic, Twombly's apostasy may have seemed the less acceptable, because it stayed closer to the very models of abstraction, and the modern traditions, that it undermined—accepting their freedoms while disrespecting what had appeared to be the attendant responsibilities. A crucial ingredient in the Abstract Expressionist ideal of self-realization on canvas had been some form of resolution, transforming inner chaos and conflict into a highly charged but ultimately balanced wholeness that invited neither subtraction nor addition. Twombly's accumulated scrawlings implied no such drama, and instead adulterated the grand angst of the previous generation with a different kind of anxiety, compounded of impetuosity and frustration, obsessiveness and idle disregard, transgression and self-doubt. The toughness of the pictures thus came not from muscular architecture or bold lyric flow, but from a bristling refusal of those standard graces. Some form of irregular organicism had long seemed the natural language of psychic profundity, and because the inner self was understood to be darkly conflicted, a certain density and gravity were expected in serious painting. The spindly lightness that Twombly's works maintained, despite the thickness of their hatchings, again belied this depth, and insisted on the complexities of overlay on the surface.

Johns has said that he did not want his emotions or inner life to show in his work, but Twombly's different kind of " impersonality" was apparently in the service of an opposite task—subverting Abstract Expressionism's generic conventions of individuality until they could fit his particular sensibility.

There were of course precedents for the style Twombly was forging, in the long-standing modern fascination with children's art and the more recent attention to graffiti. In earlier modernity, though, when artists such as Matisse or Kandinsky or Klee turned to the art of children for inspiration, it was typically with admiration for the compressed, schematic economy of the "conceptual" or inherently "logical" renderings, and the supposed consonance of such drawings with prehistoric and tribal art. Twombly, working through and beyond the figurations of Dubuffet into the area of abstract scribblings and doodles, wanted a quality that was not so much about economy as about squandering, recalling childish disorderliness and impatience with boundaries or niceties of logic. Not coincidentally, this concept of early creativity has less to do with mental operations than with instinctual life, and it connects in Twombly's art to the fuller expression of a protean sexuality. In the area of graffiti, he was less drawn to particular pictograms, as evidence of universal elements of mental life, than to the look of accretively scarred walls, with their layers of overlapping marks that subsume individual moments of expression into dense accumulations. Such models allow for a style based not on the ideal of the wholeness of a unique individual temperament, but on the intuition of the self as a society of feelings and impulses that can disgorge themselves, independently and interdependently, into the act of creation; they speak not in the buried code of a dark, primitive consciousness, but in the common inflections that have marked pictorial street slang at least since the walls of Pompeii.²⁰

 Appropriately, that maturing style emerged not out of some linear, progressive development in Twombly's work, but from a back-and-forth interweaving of contradictory impulses, between the return from Europe and the 1956 exhibition. The 1954 paintings, stemming from the personal approach to Surrealist biomorphism in the Augusta drawings, and arising immediately from the pressures of his Army experience in the deep South, were pulpier and more organic than anything he had done before. Then, in a rhythm that would recur on a grander scale a decade later, the next move was to the cooler grey-ground canvases, conceived and executed in New York, less figurative, more calligraphic in their abstraction, and without either sensuous creaminess or surface distress. After that, in the paintings of the next year—connected in some tangential way to both the lushness of the landscape and the loneliness of the life in Buena Vista, though painted in New York—a new style began to assert itself in the deliberate, repetitive, but unplanned piling up of layer over layer of abstract scorings, and in the simultaneous declaration and suffocation of legible signs and words. Along
the way, Twombly had abandoned the romance of darkness and deeply buried things. Working through a fusion of Dubuffet and Pollock, he transformed his early love for naturally eroded and aged surfaces into the embrace of an explicitly human, cultural "patination." He chose graffiti-scarred walls as model sites of intersection between the urgency of graphic impulse and the authority of accreted age, the infantile and the immemorial. There the "automatic writing" beloved by Surrealism relinquished its claims to private privilege and instead spoke of the more complex self shaped through social existence. This aesthetic, tentatively refined into greater spareness and abstract severity during the relatively fallow year of 1956, was the one Twombly took with him when—just turning twenty-nine, after four eventful years in America—he returned to Rome.

ITALY, 1957–58

Accounts of Twombly's career have tended to treat his expatriation to Italy in 1957 as a decisive abandonment of New York in favor of Mediterranean culture. In distant retrospect there may be some truth in this, but human histories as actually lived have a way of being messier and less pointedly strategic. That holds particularly true for this departure, which was longer and more complex in its preparation, yet also more unexpected in its results, than any account has allowed.

Almost as soon as he had started teaching, Twombly had tried to obtain a grant from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, which would free his time for painting. When that effort failed, he had accepted a second year at the Southern Seminary post, through the autumn and spring semesters of 1955–56. In that second spring, he began his effort to return to Europe by again applying to the Virginia Museum, specifically for a fellowship to travel abroad. He wrote that he wished to spend time in Paris (especially to see the Egyptian material and the seventeenth-century French paintings in the Louvre) and travel to Egypt, Athens, Crete, and Mykonos. This application was also unsuccessful, and having had enough of teaching, he reluctantly made plans to move back to the William Street apartment in New York for the summer of 1956 and the ensuing winter.

His reasons for wanting to return to Europe clearly involved, beyond his interest in older art, a keen sense of the possibilities of the present. The application made this explicit: "Since having been to parts of Europe," Twombly wrote, "I can renew friendships among the painters, writers and international set that afford invaluable exchange of ideas in creative research and new directions for both sides. I have also been offered shows in galleries in both Paris and Rome, which show only the more important French and Italian contemporary art. Due to the expense of shipping, I could only do this if I were there." We forget how involved this young artist was, long before his supposed "self-exile," in European art. His training in Boston had pointed him toward Europe, and there was ample opportunity in New York to expand that awareness in the contemporary arena. During his visit to Rome in 1952 he specified that he had chosen a pensione "a block from via Margutta where most of the important contemporary Italian painters and sculptors have studios," and during that same trip—when both young artists made contacts with local galleries—Rauschenberg paid a visit to one of the avant-garde leaders, Alberto Burri.

Before and after the trip, Italian art had a lively presence in New York, especially at the Catherine Viviano Gallery, but also regularly at the Stable—where, Rauschenberg has complained (with some exaggeration), he was "the only non-Italian artist (except for Cy Twombly) that was showing." Conrad Marca-Relli, who was a bridge between the Italian and American art worlds, showed with Ward, and became Twombly's friend around 1953. Through such contacts, Twombly would have had occasion to meet visiting figures from the Roman milieu, including the painters Afro, Piero Dorazio, and Toti Scialoja, during the early 1950s.

The precise occasion for his return to Rome came, however, from a different area of personal contact. A longtime friend from Lexington, Betty Stokes, had married a Venetian count, Alvise di Robilant, in 1956, and their first child was born in February 1957. Shortly after the birth, and with support from Ward, Twombly went to Italy to be with Betty, and stayed with the di Robilants at their home in Grottaferrata on the outskirts of Rome, near Frascati. He had not planned a lengthy stay, but found Italian life seductive, especially after he was persuaded to spend the summer by the sea, on the island of Procida. More tellingly, he found himself caught up in an unexpected and powerful tide of personal and art-world circumstance, centering on a new nexus of friendships.

Shortly after his arrival, a luncheon was arranged to introduce the artist to Giorgio Franchetti and his sister Tatiana, the young offspring of a prominent Italian family with an illustrious history of patronage in art. Giorgio was taken with Twombly personally as a "natural aristocrat" ("very elegant, very handsome, very aloof, but actually highly emotional"); and the drawings he saw that afternoon struck him instantly and profoundly, "like an electric current." In retrospect the encounter has an air of fatefulness, if not fatedness, about it. Tatiana, who had at the time already established a following as a portrait painter,
would become the artist's wife two years later. In the intervening period, Twombly would sharply change the course of Giorgio's involvement with art, while Giorgio would in turn provide a special entrée into the Roman art scene at a uniquely auspicious moment. 

The life of Italian art in the early fifties had been fragmented by politicized debates about issues of nationalism and internationalism, and realism and abstraction, with the communist party consistently hostile to non-objective art as well as toward all things American.10 In 1956 (the year of the Soviet invasion of Hungary) the hold of the party's strictures began to weaken; younger artists were starting to reassess both the earlier traditions of European abstraction and the contemporary American avant-garde, in their effort to find a progressive form of engagement with their era. A turning point came at the Venice Biennale of that year, when a survey of modern American art was presented at the United States pavilion, and when the painter Afro—who had shed his earlier Picassoesque figuration for a style of lyrical abstraction tied to art informel and to New York School painting—was awarded the Prize of the City of Venice as the best Italian painter. In the aftermath of that event, he and others enlisted Plinio de Martiis, whose Galleria La Tartaruga in Rome had been associated with more conservative (and acceptably communist) art, to bring in fresh talent and new ideas. A major protagonist in this shift, and an advocate of the new generation, was the man who would be the gallery's financial backer, Giorgio Franchetti.11

In 1957, just at the time Twombly arrived, Tartaruga was initiating an entirely restructured program that especially featured artists with a direct connection to postwar America.12 At exactly the same time, postwar American painting, which had been making inroads into Italy since the late 1940s, was beginning truly to assert its presence elsewhere in Rome. In February the Galleria dell'Obelisco opened the first one-person show of Arshile Gorky in Italy, and the journal Arti visive devoted its entire summer issue to Gorky, with articles by (among others) de Kooning, Scialoja, Afro, and Burri. That same July, the Rome—New York Art Foundation launched its program of showing Italian art side by side with recent American painting, especially by New York School artists. Franchetti's meeting with Twombly, in the late spring of 1957, accelerated the pace of these changes. Prompted in large part by what he heard of the Manhattan art scene from Twombly and Betty di Robilant, Franchetti went to New York at the end of the year and (through the social connections of his in-laws and the introductions of Leo Castelli) made a rapid but productive reconnaissance, purchasing works by Kline (which comprised an important show at Tartaruga just after his return) and by Rothko.13

Over the next few years, into the early 1960s, increased collaboration between local and American dealers meant that Rome received the American art of the 1950s in a telescoped rush—so that Pollock, de Kooning, and Kline on the one hand and Rauschenberg and Twombly on the other were all shown in fast, overlapping succession. Between these generations of artists, historians have since tended to draw very sharp lines, but in the late 1950s the borders were less well patrolled, and crossovers seemed not simply possible but desirable. Younger Italian painters were drawn to the previously forbidden freedoms embodied in Abstract Expressionism, but also concerned—in part because their politics were still strongly to the left—to avoid accusations of mere bourgeois subjectivism; they were leery of both the romantic, rhetorical indulgences and the descent into aestheticism that had become the plagues of an aging informel aesthetic of gestural abstraction. The desideratum was an abstraction that blended more objectivity and distance into its spontaneity, and stiffened its personal liberties with more attention to the outside, material world. In this regard Twombly seemed a godsend. Cesare Vivaldi's reminiscence, published in a sometimes awkward English translation in 1961, is worth citing at length, for the full sense it gives of that special reception:

Among all the American painters of the latest generation, Cy Twombly holds a particular position of his own, and one of the most recognizable and interesting. Viewing the latest expressionists on the one hand, the neo-dadaists on the other, Twombly was able to find a position where the basic motives of these two currents of the American young art are inter-fused, and furthermore goes beyond them with such a success and seeming ease as only a pure, exquisite, "naive" poet as he is, could have found.

... [he found] a position which sets him apart from the other American and European artists—of his generation or not—and even from the Roman milieu he had at first so much affected, exerting on the elite of young artists a stimulating function full of implications.

The first paintings and drawings Cy brought from New-York startled and impressed all those who had the chance of seeing them, mainly because of that poetic, but almost merciless way in which the extreme conclusions of both action painting and neo-dadaism were drawn. Thin and nervous signs, nearly hysterical, black in general with some yellow and some red-pink, staked [sic] the white canvas with a sort of lucid but bewildered fury. Something was known about Twombly's participation (if we can speak so approximately) in the neo-dadaist group, yet these paintings had none of the literary suggestions so evident by that time, for instance, in Rauschenberg; if a connection could have been found, it was perhaps with the first, the most poetic and bewildered of the great Americans, Gorky.
Above all Cy's canvas reminded us in some way of Gorky's latest drawings (predominance on the pure white paper, of black signs, with some yellow and some red-pink), but as if dissolved by a reagent, cut down to his purest and most incorporeal essence. If there was something neo-dadaist in these paintings of Twombly, it is this sense of absolute, almost devil-may-care freedom, which made the painter able to be delicate, hallucinated but ironic too. A way of approaching the canvas with the attitudes of an action painter, but at the same time with such a shrewd charge of irony as to offset any melodrama possibility, any danger of egotism and imbrided self-exaltation (dangers that are inherent in those attitudes) yet making those values of lyric—the action painting has conquered once and for all—survive.114

Twombly's art seemed directly in line with younger European artists' growing predilection for a drier abstraction containing some sense of universal or cultural determinants outside the self—a direction perhaps most clearly indicated by the plaster-white Achrome works that Piero Manzoni began around 1958, and reinforced by the exhibition "Monochrome Malerei" ("Monochrome Painting") in Germany in 1960.115 Twombly had begun reading Stéphane Mallarmé, the prime poet of empty whiteness, shortly after his arrival in 1957,116 and the increasing self-consciousness of his commitment to white monochrome painting was made explicit in a statement he published a few months later. The Roman artists Gastone Novelli and Achille Perilli had just launched a journal, L'Esperienza moderna, to champion the new push to abstract art, and for its second issue, August—September 1957, they solicited one of Twombly's rare texts about his work. It concluded by defending expressive abstract art in general, but began with a reflection on the monochrome quality of Twombly's own work:

The reality of whiteness may exist in the duality of sensation (as the multiple anxiety of desire and fear).

Whiteness can be the classic state of the intellect, or a neo-romantic area of remembrance—or as the symbolic whiteness of Mallarmé.

The exact implication may never be analyzed, but in that it persists as the landscape of my actions, it must imply more than selection.

One is a reflection of meaning. So that the action must continually bear out the realization of existence. Therefore the act is the primary sensation.

In painting it is the forming of the image; the compulsive action of becoming; the direct and indirect pressures brought to a climax in the acute act of forming. (By forming I don't mean formalizing—or in the general sense the organizing of a "good painting.") These problems are easily reached and solved and in many cases have produced beautiful and even important works of art.)

Since most painting then defines the image, it is therefore to a great extent illustrating the idea or feeling content.

It is in this area that I break with the more general processes of painting.

To paint involves a certain crisis, or at least a crucial moment of sensation or release; and by crisis it should by no means be limited to a morbid state, but could just as well be one ecstatic impulse, or in the process of a painting, run a gamut of states. One must desire the ultimate essence even if it is "contaminated."

Each line now is the actual experience with its own innate history. It does not illustrate—it is the sensation of its own realization. The imagery is one of the private or separate indulgences rather than an abstract totality of visual perception.

This is very difficult to describe, but it is an involvement in essence (no matter how private) into a synthesis of feeling, intellect etc. occurring without separation in the impulse of action.

The idea of falling into obscurities or subjective nihilism is absurd—such ideas can only be held by a lack of reference or experience.117

The key revelation Twombly had to offer Novelli, Perilli, and other young Roman artists, though, was not in his ideas but in his painting. He began working almost as soon as he arrived, first at Grottaferrata and then on Procida over the summer, producing smaller works on paper that were thickly coated with oil-based house paint, or occasionally white lead, which frequently served to cover all but a few isolated pencil motifs. It was not until the autumn, when he established a studio in Rome overlooking the Colosseum, that he was able to complete larger works on canvas and resume the direction he had set in the paintings of 1956.118

These new Roman paintings (fig. 21; pls. 31—33), in contrast to works from Lexington and New York of 1955—56, had less crusty and less harshly striated surfaces, even if the house paint, sometimes worked in with the artist's fingers, was still used to veil or efface earlier layers of pencilwork. The paint itself was now an Italian product known as cementito, and Twombly was taken with its specific character, which yielded a more creamily smooth surface. The fields of the canvases seem newly aerated, with a sense of space and light—and color, in crayon passages of yellow, orange, red, and ocher—that contrasts with the more crowded pictures from 1955—56. With less thicketted markings that tend instead to coalesce in separate clusters, the 1957—58 pictures begin, as well, to show a noticeable diagonal "lean," or lower-left-to-upper-right "drift," that would become an enduring characteristic of Twombly's mature work.119 More impor-
The discontinuous strokes of these works include a mix of casual meander and insistent repetition, as well as recurrent evidence that the artist has returned to obliterate or embellish—or to encircle, isolate, and “frame”—earlier moments of drawing or casual incidents in paint. The effect is one of unconscious expressive release and reflexive, analytic self-awareness unfolding in unstable concert; aimless insouciance and worried rumination live out a nervous, permanently provisional accord. Within that tangle, an array of recurrent separate signs multiplies, mutates, and metamorphoses, sometimes in echo of the biomorphic figurations of 1954. In *Olympia* (pl. 31), for example, there is a double-looped infinity sign, or uneven, horizontal figure 8, that appears large at the upper left in pencil and small at the lower left in crayon. At the bottom it acquires a darkened crotch at its juncture, with a scumbled cloud above, while at the top its larger sac is hung with a cursive, looping fringe. Across the canvas, this same basic configuration mutates into double-looped variants which seem to spawn nascent Ms or reclining Bs, bat wings or bow ties, and fluttering hearts. In other works rectilinear and curved passages crisscross in the thickets of strokes teasingly to suggest numbers (3, 101, 0, 8), fragments of letters (A, E), and boxes or framed windows (fig. 21), while curving strokes flirt with the threshold of legible writing. From the episodic quality of these scattered events arises the works’ authenticity, as a model of experience in process: “The imagery,” as Twombly had said, “is one of the private or separate indulgencies rather than an abstract totality of visual perception.”

In this interplay of private and public signs and levels of meaning, the evident and striking novelty was the unequivocal assertion of words—“OLYMPIA” being only one of the most evident—in fractured or loosely running letters. Uncertainty and partial concealment still characterize some of the word content; we can see, though, that the normally formulaic and marginal elements of a painting’s inscription—the signature, place, and date—are often enlarged, becoming inescapable graphic elements. Previously, Twombly had signed and dated his works on the back, if at all; now a new sense of public self-assertion is literally out front, inscribed within the art. In one untitled work, for example (pl. 35), a large scrawling “Cy Tw...” begins from the left, only to be interrupted by a downward S stroke that forms the numeral 5 in a large “58” at bottom center, prior to “rom” in the lower right corner. Varying configurations of “ROMA” recur frequently, large and small (as at the bottom center of *Olympia*), and once apparently with its palindrome, “AMOR” (fig. 21).

Since Joan Miró’s poem-paintings of the twenties and thirties, and Paul Klee’s imagery of imaginary scripts and hieroglyphs, the idea of writing as an element of abstract painting had been widely available to painters. Among Twombly’s immediate predecessors, the interests of artists such as Kline, Tobey, and Motherwell in Eastern calligraphy, or of Adolph Gottlieb and others in ancient symbolic language, would have been familiar to him. Yet only an occasional and exceptional image, such as Pollock’s *Stenographic Figure* (fig. 22), appears to offer any direct anticipation of Twombly’s way with disjointed stick letters and scattered letter fragments. Twombly’s use of detached words, like his general approach to the heterodox discontinuities in many of his works, may owe at least as much to the tradition of collage he knew through Schwitters. It is
the cognitive act of naming, though—the direct citation of the concept in the picture—that is as important as the formal nature of words or writing in general. Twombly's addition of "ROMA" or "OLYMPIA" in stiff script sets up a dialogue between the given associations of the idea and the character of its inscription, in scale, in speed, and in emphasis—an interweaving of complex mental resonance and immediate physical presence that changes both the idea and the picture, as a familiar tune is altered by its rendering in an altered rhythm on a new instrument. Repeatedly in later years, and most notably in his monumental treatment of the _Iliad_ (see figs. 38–40), he would take the leap of faith that such acts of inscription alone could hold together his work and the admired ideal in mutual invigoration.

These inscriptions on the paintings of 1957–58 were among the principal cues that convinced viewers and commentators (beginning with Palma Bucarelli in the brochure of Twombly's first show at Tartaruga, in the spring of 1958) that Twombly had opened his art to the abundant graffiti on Roman walls and monuments. That renewed association of the work with graffiti had, however, a very different valence from the criticism of 1953. In the context of European art around 1960, the implications of an anti-aesthetic gesture that connected with the common language of society were entirely positive. In the same reasoning by which Twombly's work was seen as both continuing and subverting Abstract Expressionism, the evocation of graffiti seemed to speak at once of uncensored, expressive personal urgency and of objective engagement with a common, social language; to be of today and yet agelessly ancient.

Specifically in the Roman milieu, works such as _Olympia_ and _Arcadia_ must have had a special, revelatory shock. For modern Italian artists, Medardo Rosso and the Futurists being the prime examples, the sheer age of Italy and the weight of its classical past had often been deemed a suffocating burden, from which an engagement with the raw life of the street was escape and salvation. The fascists' appeal to Roman glories had only redoubled this prejudice. Twombly, however, was a more innocent initiate into the grand Mediterranean legacies; he absorbed them simultaneously with the pleasures of his expatriate life in Rome, ungirded from the drier constraints of American mores. In his experience and in his art, a new feel for ancient traditions inhabited a new space of lived, contemporary freedoms. He experienced the opposites together, and surprised the Italians by showing them their own ignored or scorned environment, cultural and visual, as the stuff of a truly contemporary and personal art. Rephrasing elevated, mythical notions like Arcadia and Olympia in a rough script resembling that of street writing, he seems to have joined antiquarianism and New Realism, finding a zone of inspiration that was socially conscious and anti-authoritarian, yet immemorially cultured, and at the same time personal. The esoteric elegance with which the canvases seemed to enact those unlikely paradoxes—minimal, Marxist, and Mediterranean all at once—only deepened their impact.

With all this said, it is certainly oversimplified and reductive to imagine that the 1958 canvases, or any of Twombly's subsequent works, simply embody a response to what he "discovered" on seeing the scribblings on Roman walls. He had of course seen those walls long before, and the art he made in Europe is fully (if not seamlessly) consistent with the sensibility and vocabulary he had already formed in America. It was precisely what he had brought with him—an affinity for white, and what he called in 1956 his "deeply aesthetic sense of eroded or ancient surfaces of time," as well as a recently formed vocabulary of overlaid linear markings—that would have now attuned him to the scarred marble of Rome. Similarly, his feel for the modern tradition of collage would have sensitized him to the many composite walls made from recycled stones with fragments of ancient figures and inscriptions. He also had seen far more than just a formal language in such sites. The implications of the marks he passed by in countless ruins and streets—implications of deep, recurrent patterns of human desire expelled in impetuous graphic motions beyond training, overlaying the great achievements of culture with accretive textures of endurance—were more than enough to lure him.

The idea of approaching and revivifying the culture of the past through
what appeared merely to mar it was a sufficiently personal and instinctive challenge. It encompassed a sense of Roman light, and one of darkness as well. Especially in more traditional societies, graffiti often mixes superstitious dread (evil eyes, curses, and prophylactic signs) with mockery, celebration, and boasts; it often seeks to tame what is feared, by an act of desecration. In Twombly’s works of 1957–58, “death” is written at least three times (see for example pl. 35, at the right edge, just above center) and “morte” twice (see pl. 31, to the upper right of center).126 “The reality of whiteness,” as he had written, “may exist in the duality of sensation (as the multiple anxiety of desire and fear).” In this respect, the affinity of Twombly’s paintings with Roman walls represented a new realization of his earlier primitivism, not just in the use of reductive, archaically simplified forms, nor only in the continued attraction to aged surfaces, but also in his attraction to cultural residues in which the unstable combination of eros with dark, animistic superstition has been deeply invested.

Whatever inspiration Twombly drew from the Roman milieu in 1957–58 he repaid by the decisive influence he had begun to exert on younger artists such as Novelli and Perilli. Yet no matter how solidly established he may have appeared to others, he continued to look homeward to America. On arriving in Italy in the spring of 1957, he had judged the gallery scene “nil,” and even with the increase in activity the following year, he despaired of selling any of his work in Europe. He continually hoped, throughout 1957 and 1958, to obtain a teaching job in the U.S.—if only to be able to earn enough money to come back to Europe for a longer stay.127

Franchetti and de Martiis, however, tried to promote Twombly’s work, and eventually found a reception that surpassed even their most optimistic expectations. An initial Twombly exhibition was presented at Tartaruga in mid-May 1958, and then sent to Venice during the summer, with no commercially encouraging results.128 But in November, when the same exhibition opened in Milan, it turned out to be a stunning success: all the paintings in the show sold in the first two days, with demand for more. An American observer of the Italian art scene reported:

Milan, at least in patronage, is known to be more receptive to contemporary expression than Rome, but it came as something of a surprise when all of Cy Twombly’s “difficult,” American, wall-sized, white, pinpoint Action Paintings were snatched up by Milanese collectors, at Novelli’s recent exhibition of works which certainly did not have that success in Rome. This was the latest indication of a recent and growing trend toward including advanced examples of American art in private and public collections. In fact, nothing like it has been seen since Whistler won the first prize at the Venice Biennale.129

Twombly himself was delighted, but also caught by surprise. Since the first months of 1958 he had been planning to return to New York in early autumn, and had been corresponding with Eleanor Ward about the best dates for a winter exhibition at the Stable.130 By the time he was able to sail for America at the end of November, however, virtually everything seemed in flux. For lack of available work, Ward had been forced to postpone indefinitely the plans for a show, while Twombly found himself, with only a week or two before his boat sailed, trying to adjust to the rush of interest surrounding the success in Milan.131 He had planned only a short stay in New York before going on to Lexington, where he arrived before the New Year.132 The stopover proved to be an important moment of transition, however: while he was in New York he broke off his relationship with Ward and agreed, following Rauschenberg’s move earlier that year, to begin showing with Leo Castelli.

1959, A PIVOTAL YEAR

When Twombly returned to work in Lexington at the start of 1959, he was flush with recent success abroad, looking forward to a timely show with his new American dealer, and anticipating an early-spring return to Rome.133 Yet over the next four months, he produced ten of the barest, most austere works of his career. The first four, completed by mid-February,134 moved directly to an extreme of asceticism: they have an echoing airiness dusted over with minute motes and threads of linear energy that share virtually nothing in the way of traditional compositional bonding (pl. 36, 37). The breeze that blew through the works of 1958 has all but ceased, and like sparse stubble in a snow-covered field, an obsessively miniaturized repertoire of graphite lines, points, and familiar signs—hearts, lazy 8s, cloud puffs with central clefts—scatters itself across these eight-foot stretches of white and cream. The scratchy loquaciousness of the Roman canvases gives way to a wordless, whispering delicacy—a pixilated music seemingly keyed up by the most powerful compression. The general idea of this astringency had already been essayed in drawings done in Rome (pl. 34), which in turn only intensified an impetus toward reduction that had marked Twombly’s development since 1956. Yet in its realization this merciless constriction may also have included an added element of response to the return home, after almost two years of a very different life abroad.
The pictures are spare in part because a good deal was effaced in the process of their making. Extra layers of paint, used to conceal and erase, articulate the generally dry surfaces in sheets and patches of dripping liquidity, and it is this incipient physicality that increases noticeably in the next group of canvases, done three months later, in May. These slightly smaller works begin to announce a rebound from the wintry ethereality of January: the cream overpainting becomes a more evident part of the composition, just as the penciled elements regain some size and clustering coherence, and the general turbulence of the field increases (pl. 41).135

In between the two campaigns in Lexington, Twombly was in New York. Tatiana Franchetti, who had been making yearly trips to America to paint portraits on commission, had at first accompanied him to Lexington, and was then sharing an apartment with a friend in Manhattan; the apartment became an improvised studio where Twombly sat on the floor and—while listening to Vivaldi, as he remembers—made a new series of drawings.136 These are similar to the paintings but more horizontal and bottom-heavy, with emptied space above an annotated field and a stronger presence of run-on "writing" strokes (fig. 23; pls. 38, 39). Only one of the earlier canvases had been signed, in tiny discretion, in a corner of the surface, but in these drawings the signature becomes a prominent element, and some of them proclaim one specific date in fullness: "NY City / April 20, 1959" (see pls. 38, 39). Five days shy of the artist's thirty-first birthday, it was a moment worth memorializing; on that date he and Tatiana, with a few invited witnesses, went to City Hall and were married.137

Catching family and friends on both sides by surprise, the event brought Twombly formally into the Franchetti family, whose lives had become so intertwined with his since 1957. Giorgio's support had enabled him to work more or less as he wished, without worry over the costs of studios or materials and without undue concern for the sales of his paintings. Simultaneously, Giorgio and Tatiana had also introduced him to a new circle of European acquaintances, invited him to share vacations at the family's castle in the Dolomite mountains near Cortina, and had enlisted him to join them in seaside holidays, travels, and other diversions. Up to 1959 these may have seemed only the holiday pleasures of a wandering expatriate. With the marriage, however, Twombly would find such circumstances a more permanent and consequential part of his life: the "emigration" to Italy, which had begun so tentatively with the 1957 voyage, was now more solidly confirmed.

The couple waited until after the second work period in Lexington, which lasted through late May, to take a honeymoon trip to Cuba and Mexico. They returned to Italy in time to rent a home in the beach town of Sperlonga, on the Mediterranean coast between Rome and Naples, for July and August. That summer, during which it became evident that Tatiana was expecting their child, was immensely important for Twombly as an artist. In a notable change, he abandoned the house paint that had till then been his preferred medium, and began using oil paint from tubes, with its wholly different physical properties. Instead of flowing, this material issued forth in discrete mounds that stood off the surface with a smooth, plump integrity, and required pressure to flatten and spread. These new properties were immediately exploited in abstract collages (pl. 40) and in an important group of drawings.

Rather than only providing a skin to draw into, or a covering veil, the white oil pigment had a "body" of its own. The series of Poems to the Sea used this cool, linen-white matter as an independent element of line, shape, and low relief against the drawn indications of open horizons and largely wordless writing (figs. 24, 25). The numerous larger drawings from Sperlonga (see pls. 42–44), though, initiated a more paradoxical combination of elements, which would inform Twombly's paintings for years thereafter. The pencilwork introduced a family of "rationalized," diagrammatic elements: ruled rectangles, singly or in series; sequences of numbers; circles and repeated semicircles; and clusters of forms that suggest overhead, plan views of unknown arrangements. In contrast to such compulsive, analytic schemes, the paint was used in a seminal, newly
sensual way: for coating and effacement as often before, but also now in multiple small flecks, streaks, and droplets, which often leaked aureoles of oily stain. The resultant drawings—with their long horizontality, dispersed and often miniaturized signs, and references to rational mapping—seem to join the Poems to the Sea in opening up a new, specifically landscape-like space in Twombly’s work.

That combination of pencil and paint was then translated, on a grander scale, into the canvases of the end of the summer and the autumn. In works such as Study for Presence of a Myth and View (pls. 45, 46), elements of the Sperlonga drawings (numbers, rectangles, freehand triangles and squares) were joined by a family of more organic signs—tubes with darkened points, double-ended lozenge forms, vertical bars in circles, reclining and extended diagonal 8s—that seem to slide into and away from reference to bodily forms; and the whole field was put into sweeping motion. The gentle lifting of the emptier 1958 pictures is reborn as an upheaval that raises the array of signs from the lower left and sends them pressing and leaping—with the urgency of spawning fish against a tumbling cascade—across the canvas and toward its upper right corner. The paint, meanwhile, spatters the canvas as if from a spray, in droplets, spots, crusts, oozing drips, and compressed blobs, which have often been further demarcated, encircled, or boxed in by pencil lines.

It must have been paintings of this kind that Twombly described to Leo Castelli, near the end of August, as “4 new paintings quite different from those you have, [and] ... painted with tube paint.” Reluctant to roll these works for shipping, and recognizing the change that had taken place over the summer, he asked Castelli, who was eager to give his new artist a first one-person exhibition, to consider mounting a show of only the Lexington pictures. “[I]n a way,” Twombly wrote, “I like the image of seeing just the paintings you have with a few drawings—the obsessive austerity of the idea rather than variation.... The new things are naturally more active and physical so a certain poetry would be lost with juxtaposition with these.”38 (Castelli did not, however, present that show of “obsessive austerity”; the Lexington pictures remained largely unknown, and we are left to speculate on the impact they might have made in 1959, on a New York art world just experiencing the first shocks of emerging Minimalism.)

In the same letter, Twombly warned that the upcoming months would be crowded ones, as indeed they were: he had to move out of his bachelor apartment into new quarters with Tatiana, prepare for the birth of their child, and contend with a flurry of demands for exhibitions of his work throughout Europe—all of which left little time to paint. An extraordinary aggregate of pressures thus surrounded the few large paintings that emerged from this autumn,
and their combination of expansive reach and compulsive nervous energy may reflect some of the tenor of the moment. The most ambitious of them was made at the very end of that season, and of the year. Two weeks after the birth on December 18 of a son christened Cyrus Alessandro, Twombly unfurled a huge bolt of canvas and—as the lone refugee from a family New Year's Eve party—spent the final hours of 1959 and the first moments of 1960 creating The Age of Alexander (pl. 47).139

This was by far the largest work he had ever attempted, overflowing the limits of the room—it covered one wall and wrapped around the corner to another—and surpassing the height of his reach.140 Kept in the artist's home and not shown publicly until 1994, the dry, spottily painted picture is more like a grand, operatic drawing, and is far from being a resolved whole. But the scope of the effort, and the complex fertility of its making, are impressive and absorbing. Twombly had named his son for two great conquerors, and some of that epic spirit carries over into this run-on, diaristic conception. Amid a virtual dictionary of Twombly's emerging sign language—personal shorthand devices that occasionally suggest winged forms; phallic signs; graph-like rising and falling lines; circles that become breasts, clouds, and so on—we find notations of time and fragmented words of rumination.141 Distracted, nervous, and headlong, this teeming rush of disjunctive, largely uncensored moments of engagement with the vast blankness of the fabric includes an element of aleatory development with more marked than that in any of Twombly's previous work.

The Age of Alexander seems one of those occasions in modern art (there are others in Matisse, in Picasso, and elsewhere) when what one takes to be basic passages in life—marriage, the advent of a child, the possession of a new home—give rise to such a welling pressure of mingled emotions (procreative joy, ennui, suffocating anxiety) as to evoke a statement of exceptional scope or intensity. In Twombly's case, the swiftness and extent of the dislocations that had separated him from his former life in New York added another factor of magnitude. Some of all of that informs this sprawling journal of a night, which offers an ode to a new birth and a colossal capstone to a year of rapid changes. During 1959, Twombly's art had passed through a dramatic convulsion, closing down to its barest, most minimal baseline in the Lexington pictures of the winter and spring, and then, as if he had backed up to leap the further forward, expanding through the summer and autumn into the prolix comminglings of painting and drawing, word and sign, disclosure and hermetic self-absorption, obsessively private concern and grand cultural address, that would define the style of the next, most lavishly productive years of his career.

NEW THEMES AND COLOR, 1960–61

Twombly and his family moved into a grand new home on the via di Monserrato in early 1960, and the artist began to adjust to the roles of paterfamilias and master of the mansion with apparent delight. While renovation of the building was still under way, with a month's trip to the Sahara coming up and the prospect of shows at Tartaruga in April and in New York in the autumn, he wrote to Castelli that "my life has become hopelessly and grandly spoiled. I am the owner of a beautiful long grey eyed blond son named Cyrus Alessandro and an enormous 17th Century Palace near Palazzo Farnese.... I have worked wonderfully well and have quite a few paintings now."144

Those paintings and the others of 1960 were created in the noble, high-ceilinged rooms of the new residence, and were often titled with florid evocations (Crimes of Passion) or homages to art and artists: To Leonardo; Woodland Glade (to Poussin); Garden of Sudden Delight (to Hieronymous Bosch); Study for School of Athens. Such christenings almost never indicate visual correlations, and can easily be overinterpreted. Twombly is not, for example, a particular admirer of Raphael ("the most boring painter I know, aside from some of the portraits"); and when he cited the School of Athens fresco in the Vatican, or even used its prominent archway as a point of departure (see pl. 52), the gestures had some knowing element of irony.143 The nods to Poussin or Leonardo, while more appreciative, have equally little to do with mimesis. The titles are more useful in the general sense of showing how far the artist had moved—not just from Lower Manhattan loft life but also from his original territory of the prehistoric and tribal—into the halls of high European culture. Yet the paintings themselves suggest he was not immediately at ease in his new—old—world. The white of the new canvases was colder, the colors relatively wan, and the compositions, often center-weighted and organized more in terms of vertical columns than of lateral, narrative movement, became less turbulent and more stiffly iconic (fig. 26). An air of grand rhetoric and formality thus replaced the hot crudeness of works such as View (pl. 46).

The familiar mix of schematic forms and numbers with organic pictograms continued, and often the references to the body and its processes became even more active and insistant (fig. 26). Yet the overall feeling of the pictures is clinically diagrammatic. Some of the ambivalently biomorphic shorthand signs are recurrently framed within ruled boxes, as if they were details isolated for detached scrutiny. At the same time, the graph-like passages of rising and falling lines (which are on one level ideograms for Dolomite-like mountain ranges) are typi-

cally underlined with ruled bases and overlaid with counting sequences of numbers. These are parts of a general practice by which Twombly juxtaposes motifs of the irregular, organic, and intuitional with marks connoting the systematic, unyielding, and cerebral. Such oppositions are basic to his work before and after, but in 1960 the pairings seem more premeditated and self-consciously analytic. In the autumn, when Castelli’s first Twombly show brought recent works together with hotter and more active earlier pictures, the contrasts must have been telling, not least for the artist himself. Throughout the early and mid-fifties, he had banished color, taken up house paint, and replaced the brush with the pencil in order to gain—by suppressing what Rauschenberg called the “baroque” side of his art—a willfully uningratiating originality. Yet, as even so contrary a manera can raise the risk of a mannerism, at the other end of this process the devil of virtuosity threatened to return: the sparse linearity could, if unpressured, err into vitiating elegance.

The aggressive drawings of the summer of 1960, done away from the Roman home, on the island of Ischia and in Greece, already began to counter that risk; in the next year, when Twombly moved his studio out of the palazzo on the via di Monserrato and into rented rooms on the piazza del Biscione, he made a flurry of works that obviated it altogether. These paintings, from the summer of 1961, are among the most impressive, most emotionally wrought works of Twombly’s career, and not coincidentally they bring together in extreme compression the contradictions of “griminess” and “insinuating elegance” that critics had seen cohabiting in his work since his first exhibition in 1951. They reach for a higher level of lyricism, and a greater grandiloquence, precisely through their more aggressive release of explicitly defiling messiness. The insistence on soiling excess is both playful and violently transgressive; when it is joined with glorious color, aerated white space, and a baroque sense of monumental aspiration and exultation, the result is an unfamiliar merger many will find easier to reduce, either to raw chaos or mere lyric splash. Yet in all of Twombly’s work, and here most especially, those who focus on the appeal to
cultural grandeur but slight the celebration of bodily physicality, or vice versa, miss what is most distinctive about the art: it wants exactly to convey a sense of life energy that yokes these exalted and debased domains together and makes their energies indivisible.

The different tenor was already clear in January, when The Italians (pl. 50) replaced the pristine clarity of the 1960 canvases with a rougher scramble of paint and pencil recalling the works of late 1959. That picture, however, still maintained Twombly’s long commitment to an essentially white field covered by graphite and crayon imagery. In the more spectacularly innovative production of the summer, white would be eclipsed by vivid color, and paint would largely supplant drawing (pls. 48, 49, 52–55, 59–61). Across the nearly sixteen-foot extent of Triumph of Galatea (pl. 48), for example, virtually nothing depends on either graphic signs or words. There are still some familiar references to lower-body parts and processes, but the dizzyingly rich corporeality in the work derives less from these than from the physicality of the medium itself as it is dabbed, spattered, and smeared across the surface—and from the intensely fleshy palette of roses and carmines offset by yellow-oranges, notes of silver, and pure white. Deeper maroons and scarlets, meanwhile, conjure not just the surface of the body but its interior, rapturously disgorged.

Aside from occasional passages of dripping rivulets, the paint itself does not flow; its drier, separate masses instead show clearly how it was pressed onto the canvas, directly from the tube or in fistfuls and finger streaks. Twombly had worked into painted areas with his fingers before, but now he began to use his hands as the main instruments of picture-making—a change in method that was as transforming as the change in materials at Sperlonga two summers before. For Twombly, the application of the hand (a primordial index of direct engagement with art, from prehistory through Miró and Pollock) had a particular set of pragmatic purposes, side effects, and connotations. Clutching gobs of oil pigment let him work more continuously, uninterrupted by the need to “reload” a brush, and it put him, literally, in closer touch with the picture. For a long time he had been working on canvases fixed to a wall rather than a stretcher, so that the fabric could bear the pressure of his pencilwork. Now, instead of passing through a sharp point, his impulses would meet the surface sensuously, in the broad, flat engagement of the palm, or by fingertip daubs, or through varieties of clawing and caressing (see detail, pl. 54). That sensuality encompassed, too, the most basic and earliest life associations of primal creativity asserting itself through uninhibited play with every substance at hand.  

Scanning the almost twenty large pictures Twombly painted in this way during the summer of 1961 is akin to watching the changing rhythms of an immense fireworks display: their explosive energy is sometimes lyrical and confetti-like in its delicacy, sometimes frenetic and concussive in its impact. Though for some their energies may connote violence, the pictures also have a nervous elegance, derived from the tension between the separate anarchies of local impulses and an overall dance of binding motion. Through all the immensely ambitious and fertile production of that summer, that intuitive choreography helped transmute whatever elements might connote base corporeality into an overall feeling of lightness, staying unfailingly uplifted until the end.

The end came in the five Ferragosto pictures, named for the mid-August holiday when Rome is smothered in heat and empty of its residents. The last two of this series (pls. 60, 61), and the last one in particular, have the kind of earthy fleshiness we associate with the Flemish Baroque, and carry uncharacteristic overtones of engagement and satiation. That heavy, end-of-the-line carnality helps us see more clearly the lighter touch of the earlier color pictures, and reflect on the particular aversion to all that is ponderous in the “expressionism” of the year’s production.

The outpouring of fervid color in 1961 might be seen as a resurgence of Twombly’s earlier expressionist strain. His former passion for Soutine and Kokoschka has now been aerated, though, by a sense of expansive levitation that denies the heanness of physical concerns. In this and in his landscape-like spaces, especially in many works on paper, Twombly’s often cited relation to the visceral Surrealism of Gorky seems to meld with an affinity for the ecstatic upheavals of Kandinsky’s early abstractions (figs. 27, 28; pls. 56–58). That mixed metaphoric resonance between body and landscape may even reverberate through the choice of browns, pinks, reds, and whites Twombly deploys. It is such overlapping associations of external and internal experience, bright openness and intimate physicality, that give the large colored canvases their charge of ecstatic fantasy, and keep their sensual intensity from ever becoming turgid or weighty.  

Light and lightness are essential to the look of the works, and to their meaning. Twombly has spoken of an “irresponsibility to gravity” as central to his art, and has described his understanding of classical mythology as a realm of imagination which is not only shadowless but also without weight or constraining center. Yet this sense of floating, and this relationship to the Mediterranean past, is anything but a bloodless flight of fancy: the antique heritage he treasures is one that includes the malicious jealousies in the Iliad, the eros of Sappho, and the ribaldry of Archilochus. Precisely because he treasures such myths and poetry as living communications of timeless human experience, he is out to translate
their spirit fully into the present tense. Through the insistently episodic, uncomposed sequences of marks and signs and names he put on the canvas, such fantasies of time as continuous and open-ended—and of physical pleasure made spiritually immortal in art—were enacted as non-stop sensation. Twombly thus resisted any standard structure of narrative organization that would align these events with a vector that led to a resolved end point, or otherwise threatened their moment-to-moment specificity. In this same regard, weight—all that would be bound together in mass, and ordered by the shared pull to earth—would connote surrender to inertia and mortality.

In its newly exuberant scale and color, Twombly’s work of 1961 has also been seen as reflecting his response to the great Baroque spaces of Rome.149 This formal intuition, whatever its quotient of truth, must still be grounded in some denser reckoning of the various things the city meant to him, beginning with Olympia’s scarred wall in 1957 (pl. 31), and deepening seamlessly into the different complexities of the great “baroque” summer four years later. Twombly himself recognizes that he would never have made the large color paintings in America, since they draw on a freedom of indulgent sensual release that only living abroad allowed him.150 Similarly, the Rome they embody is a matter of visceral experience as much as of grand architectural design, and includes a strain of Neapolitan color and energy. When he moved there, Twombly’s home on the via di Monserrato was in a decayed area still infested with petty thieves, and the studio on the piazza del Biscione not only adjoined the crowded open-air food market in the Campo dei Fiori, but sat above a cheap movie house and overlooked a ripe zone of prostitution.151 Walking from home to studio, Twombly passed not only through the august Rome of the Caesars and the Baroque popes, but also through this environment of coarsely vital contemporary existence. The tense balance in the works, between a light-filled exaltation and a pungently darker sense of human physicality, embraces something of both the grandeur and decadence of that city.

The same could be said in broader terms of Twombly’s relation to all Mediterranean culture, in Greece and Egypt as well as Rome. In life as in art, Twombly’s responses never entail mere antiquarian nostalgia, but rather a desire to hold the past and present simultaneously. It is the living continuity between the heights of antiquity and the common orders of the day that forms the texture of his experience and the stuff of his work. Affectionately searching for a metaphoric way of describing this special blending of cultured refinement and appreciation for the pithier vernacular of life, a friend once mused that Twombly’s ideal abode might be “in a palace,” then paused and added, “but in a bad neighborhood.”
Twombly began an entirely new cycle of works in 1962. Using squarer formats and emphasizing the vertical midline of his compositions, he more and more abandoned a dispersed "narrative" in favor of the frontal, iconic presentation of prominent, closely massed imagery. Early in the year, this new approach yielded a masterpiece in *Leda and the Swan* (pl. 64). The subject of Jupiter assuming the form of a swan to ravish the beautiful Leda has typically been the pretext for titillating images of incongruity, avian and human appetites confronted amid contrasts of feathers and flesh. Twombly's fantasy of this fateful copulation (from which issued Helen, and thus ultimately the Trojan War) involves instead an orgiastic fusion and confusion of energies, within furiously thrashing overlays of crayon, pencil, and ruddy paint. A few recognizable signs—flying hearts, a phallus—spray off the periphery of this explosion. It is, however, not those energies that were carried forward from this picture; instead, it is the drier comment of the marginal "window" rectangle above that indicates the directions—thinning, slowing, and stabilizing—that Twombly's art was beginning to take.

That rectangular form dominated a series of canvases that showed monument-like motifs standing solemnly in barren spaces, and which bore titles of mortality and debacle from Italian and Roman history: *Death of Giuliano de' Medici, Death of Pompey, Ides of March* (fig. 29), and so on. In these works, the isolated arrays of pigment were still applied by hand, but only to circumscribed areas and without any of the former sense of scattered urgency, while the fireworks of color faded to a more limited palette of blood-reds, deep maroon-browns, and white. Twombly made several images in this grim genre throughout 1962, suspended it during most of the next year, and then brought it to summation in *Discourse on Commodus* (see figs. 30–32), "a painting in nine parts" whose vertical formats and dark subject—in this case, a psychotic Roman emperor whose reign was one of cruel excess—conformed to the earlier sequence of canvases.153

In retrospect, the *Commodus* ensemble has the cautionary mark of something self-consciously intended to be culminating and grand, pushing to extremes the august high-mindedness and morbid pathos that had informed its predecessors. All nine of the "portraits" were painted on canvas with a commercially prepared, dove-grey ground that lent a note of smooth elegance; in each, two side-by-side clumps of thickly scumbled, often streaked or dripping paint conjured a variety of moods, from cloud-like lightness to agitated, bloody violence. One of the prime guiding spirits behind the combination of the decorative and the gruesome in the series, and likely behind the whole extended project of imagined portraits from history, was the painter Francis Bacon.153 Twombly's admiration for the British artist—whom he considers "the last great European painter"—has its grounding in his long-standing dialogue with the tradition of European expressionism. Bacon's efforts to bring the meaty power of that kind of painting into the barer existential spaces of postwar experience, and to make a personal poetry by mixing lush painterly aesthetics with a sense of the gross materiality of the life of the flesh, were ready avenues of affinity.

Though likely plotted beforehand, the *Commodus* ensemble was painted in December 1963, soon after the assassination of President Kennedy—an apt moment to be reflecting on leaders, disasters, and the fate of empires—and it became, ironically, a grim milestone in the artist's personal history as well. Its debut in March 1964 at Castelli's gallery was Twombly's first New York show
in four years. In the interim, while the New York art world had been changing swiftly, he had acquired an aura of mystery by his absence (and by rumors of his success abroad), and expectations were high. The crash was thus all the more precipitous: in print, Donald Judd called the *Commodus* show a "fiasco," and apparently the word-of-mouth reaction was even more damning than press commentary suggests. Arriving at a moment of ascendancy for Pop art and hard-edged Minimalism, these works were seen as woefully out of step—embodifying everything that was at best suspect, at worst loathed, in the *art informel* of 1950s Europe. Warhol’s grainy, drumbeat images of the police dogs of Birmingham and of the mourning Jackie Kennedy, not to mention the events they reflected, were just then altering the terms in which murderous history might be viewed, and the coin of both subjective expressionism and high abstract metaphor was in a free-fall of devaluation.

Worse than a momentary misstep, the ill-fated encounter between these paintings and that critical climate hobbled Twombly’s reputation in America for years to come. Neither the spare, white canvases of 1959 nor the major color works of 1961 had been shown in New York or were known to Americans outside a tight circle of dealers and friends of the artist. Many critics, collectors, and curators thus saw *Commodus* virtually in a void, and, caught up in an especially chauvinist moment in American art, used their dislike of it to cement their suspi-
cions about Twombly's move to Rome. The same painter who had been criti-
cized in the late 1950s for insulting high art with his lack of aesthetic organization
was now accused of being over-refined and arty in a dammingly old-world,
European way. 155

News of that reception stunned Twombly's Italian supporters. 156 When
Rauschenberg won the Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale that June, it appeared
the European embrace of postwar American art had finally been sanctioned at
the highest level, and that the efforts of Franchetti, de Martis, and many
others who had promoted it were now to bear fruit. Yet at the very moment
of this triumph, Twombly, who had been among the first of the young American
artists to succeed abroad, seemed to be castigated as a passe foreigner and set
outside the forming canon that positioned Johns and Rauschenberg, with their
"American" irony, imagery, and use of mixed mediums, as the crucial precursors
of the aesthetics of the 1960s.

GREY PAINTINGS AND RELATED WORKS, 1966-72

In wry and somewhat rueful reminiscence, Twombly has said that the Commodus
episode made him "the happiest painter around, for a couple of years: no one
gave a damn what I did." 157 For a long stretch, he in fact did much less. After the
astonishingly fertile period of the early 1960s, his production had begun in 1963
to revert to the slower pace of the 1950s, and after Commodus it fell off even
more. The catalogue of his work shows twenty canvases from 1964, and virtually
none from 1965. When he resumed in 1966, it was to pursue a sharply different
direction, in a new cycle of grey-ground canvases that would dominate his work
into the early 1970s.

Expressly for a show in Turin in early 1967, he created three dark-ground
pictures (figs. 33, 34; pl. 65), the first since the lost chalked canvases of the
mid-1950s. 158 Just as those earlier pictures had represented a cooling shift away
from painterly and erotic energies, these new canvases were lean and unemotional, in contrast to the baroque color and violence of the work of the early 1960s. In the three-part Problem (fig. 33) and the other works done for the Turin show, geometrical and gestural elements of Twombly’s previous style were stripped down and isolated, translating them into a bare baseline to find a new point of departure.

In that sense, this small series represents a hinge point, analogous to the Lexington works of 1959. Then, the primary issue was space—emptying out as a way of moving from the congested wall toward an open landscape whose scale would accommodate a fresh diversity of scattered, discontinuous forms. In 1966, time seems to have been the more central concern. In the nine “installments” of Discourse on Commodus, and in a 1964 triptych on a battle theme (fig. 45), Twombly had already been exploring new structures of storytelling; now, stripped of literary or historical associations, some of those same issues—of flow, segmentation, development, and change—would themselves become the story. The Problem pictures are a three-part chronicle of the variation and transformation of a basic shape, and Night Watch (which has nothing to do with the Rembrandt picture of that title) presents a cinematic, time-lapse image of a box form advancing and turning in space (pl. 65). That temporal aspect was then extended throughout the grey-ground works of the next few years, in the frequent imagery of analytically segmented movement, while the rolling scroll of the third 1966 picture (fig. 34) established another enduring, and complementary, motif of continuously flowing energy. Twombly’s previous attraction to the evidence of deep, slow, “vertical” time, in scarred surfaces, here is translated into a fascination for the forms of “lateral” speed, forms and forces rushing by with their proliferation of marks more rationally divided than confoundingly layered.

In numerous grey-ground works between 1967 and 1971, Twombly sends a repetitious flurry of lines—bulging curves or slashes—spilling diagonally down and across the surface, and then slices it with a regular beat of vertical “measuring” markers (pls. 68, 79). That language of flow and fracture draws directly on the early modern fascination with the “cinematic” decomposition of forms in motion, in Duchamp (Nude Descending a Staircase, 1912) and most notably among Italian Futurist artists, particularly Giacomo Balla. While the reference is novel in Twombly’s work, the Futurists and that kind of time/motion imagery had been of principal importance to the Italian painters around him for more than a decade. In rejecting both Stalinist realism and fascism, the younger Italian artists of the 1950s had revived early Futurism as an alternative, usable past—a model of modernism in which revolutionary social concerns were legitimately con-
nected with the push to abstraction. In this context, the “rational” side of Futurism—its analytic, semi-scientific decomposition of movement—was stressed. Twombly seems, though, to have responded more intuitively to the way the Futurists dispersed forms into linear sequences and made analytic rigor collide with onrushing flux. Umberto Boccioni for one had seen that these fractured dissolutions were a way to represent the agitations of the spirit (fig. 35), and this metaphorical aspect is unlikely to have been lost on Twombly.

Something similar could be said with regard to the influence of Leonardo da Vinci, which also affects Twombly’s work in this period. First signaled in 1960 by the title To Leonardo, this interest initially centered on the Renaissance master’s notebook pages, where the combination of scattered drawings, geometric signs, and passages of mirror-script writing connected with Twombly’s aesthetic. Yet while Twombly’s interest in Leonardo’s studies of nature and mechanics became even more evident when he later used reproductions of them in collage-drawings (fig. 36; pls. 67, 71, 72), it should not be understood as simple admiration for an analytic or scientific outlook. Joseph Beuys was apparently attracted to the same aspects of Leonardo’s drawings, because he saw in these innumerable dissections, diagrams, and codes something irrationally driven, by a demon of secret knowledge, and freighted with a private poetry of obsession. Twombly’s response involves a similar intuition. He recognizes that Italian art, often talked about in terms of sunlight and Renaissance clarity, also has a dark, neurotic, and obsessive side—and he situates Leonardo there. The imagery of Leonardo’s work to which he was most consistently drawn during the late 1960s was that of maelstroms and cataclysms (see pl. 67). Their destructive turbulence has an obvious expressive dimension that overlaps with the Futurist metaphors of spiritual agitation, and Twombly melded it with the forms of Futurist imagery in many of the canvases of the late 1960s.

Despite these elements of Italian art, and although the first examples were made in Italy, Twombly found that the new dark-ground style seemed, in its relative coolness, an appropriate form of work to pursue in New York, where he spent long stretches of time in the late 1960s, working in studios on the Bowery and on Canal Street. In contrast to the misfortunes of Commodus, this new aesthetic seemed in step with favored contemporary currents in America; it had a chaste severity that suggested the artist had ceased being erudite and had gone back to school, renouncing former pleasures and submitting himself to a penitent discipline many Americans found more admirable and less discomfiting. When he had his first one-person museum exhibition in America, at the Milwaukee Art Center in 1968, Robert Pincus-Witten approvingly called the new work “heroic.” “With it,” he wrote, “Twombly casts down all that was grandiose in his mature style, rejecting a lush manner for simple and stringent exercises.”

It would be misleading, though, to connect the black paintings only to the asceticism of Conceptual art or Minimalism. Their thinly washed surfaces, which vary considerably from dark green-blacks to lighter and chillier greys, often have great atmospheric subtlety in the layered complexities of their application (pls. 65, 70; see detail, pl. 69). In their linear motifs also—drawn into the thin wet surfaces with a special white crayon—neither geometry nor straight edges ever dominate the variations of the hand as it moves, from tremulous slowness to headlong impulse to casual meander. Fluctuating individual energies invariably take precedence over rigorously systematic ideas.

Among the most characteristic of these images are those banded with rows of running loops that have been compared to basic Palmer Method exercises imposed on schoolchildren as a part of learning to write (fig. 34; pl. 66). These are “signature” images in several senses—because they ostensibly present an abstracted, wordless essence of the handwriting that is associated with so much of Twombly’s work; and because they vividly embody, again and in renewed form,
the artist's willingness to take on the most unpromising premises as the basis of his art. In the internal terms of his work, what is striking about these images is their insistence on the kind of driving linear continuity that had heretofore been specifically excluded: the gesture that formerly closed on itself to produce the looping breasts, or the heart, or the figure 8, as isolated bursts suspended here and there in white space, now never closes but runs on without cessation. Personal expression becomes no longer something realized in the impulses of scattered, separate moments, but something subsumed within a stream.

In broader terms, what is remarkable is the project of trying to make a personal art—or art, period—out of means which appear so studiously, so implacably artless. As before, Twombly courts the accusation that there is no mind involved—previously, because the manner seemed chaotically subjective, without sufficient ordering control, too episodic and too little marked by work; and now, because it seems mechanically rote and impersonal, too monotonous and too completely a matter of work. No familiar evidence of heroic spontaneity or intuited compositional judgment, nor any universal coordinate such as geometry, anchored the pictures' claim to attention. When Twombly first showed them at the Leo Castelli Gallery in the autumn of 1967, Max Kozloff described the ongoing difficulty of trying to reckon with Twombly's work, old and new, in terms of traditional expectations. The lines, for example, offered him none of the familiar cues that advertised Surrealist automatism or Expressionist gestures as involuntary indices of psychic pressure. The work's contrary quality of self-aware detachment might, along with a "hidden iconography," point up possible affinities with Rauschenberg and Johns; but the grey paintings' sense of "distraction," and their singular mix of a "fastidious" artfulness with implacably lean and self-evident systems of marking, resisted any ready labeling by ism or school.

Later, after the close of the grey-ground series, Robert Pincus-Witten restated the same dilemma in terms of Twombly's failure to satisfy the available repertoire of critical categories: too anti-heroic and impersonal for Abstract Expressionism, he was also too subjective and undisciplined for Minimalism or systemic art. Twombly's late 1960s work might better be located, though, in the terms of a very different aesthetic, with the earlier decision to enlarge and use his signature as an expressive element. Then, he had unmoored a legibly meaningful but formulaic piece of language and pulled it back into the realm of abstraction; now, he took something prior to language, the unformed exercise of proto-handwriting, and pushed it up to a communicating role. In both instances, as indeed in a great deal of modern art previously, the artist takes what others see as inert and merely instrumental adjuncts to creativity—wrap-up conventions or warm-up exercises—and proposes them as the principal drama of art. In the modern tradition, this confounding practice has typically been a gesture of aggression against tradition, but with equal frequency it has proved to be a means by which respected older values get remade in terms that respond to contemporary experience. Thus, for instance, the seeming denial of subjectivity in Minimalism defined the terms on which some of the most poetically personal and intimate works of the late 1960s were made (in the sculpture of Eva Hesse, to cite only one example). In Twombly, Kozloff rightly saw the rejection of familiar signs of personality and the denial of a former "heroic" subjectivity. What we may see with longer familiarization is how those same gestures could come to communicate their own specific, nervously headstrong temperament, enacting a risky dance along the edges of meaninglessness that is at once unre lenting, maddeningly casual, and absorbingly uncertain.

As we have seen in music, too, the apparent "impoverishment" of reductive repetition could serve not just as the grounds of such delicate and nuanced subjectivity but also as the basis for new forms of monumental, operatic ambition. In trying to combine such reformed intimacy with such redefined grandeur, Twombly's grey-ground series, which continued through 1971, reached a peak moment in two huge paintings executed in his home on the via di Monserrato in 1970 (pls. 77, 78). Here, as in the work of other artists as diverse as Hesse and Richard Serra, one of the challenges of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the recovery or reinvention of important parts of Abstract Expressionism, and especially Pollock's legacy, that had been suppressed by Pop and Minimalism.

The smaller and squarer of these 1970 pictures (pl. 77) draws on the unlikely, idling vocabulary of the "Palmer Method" images. On a ground rich with the layering over of previous networks of lines, three tense rows of loops,
like coils of brittle wire extended in tangles, are stacked one above the other. A
top row, relatively small, pale, and open, has beneath it a larger, more tangled,
matching line of rolling strokes; and finally, the bottom half of the canvas is
dominated by a swirling, triply worked tumbleweed cluster whose strokes
encompass the height of a body. The increasing scale and intensity, combined
with the particular tautness of the alternately stumbling, halting, and grandly
sweeping strokes, give this work a sense of colossal address and absorbing drama.
Standing before it can be akin to hearing a series of musical movements, each
one a grander and more complex variation on the previous, an urgent, heroically
shaped and slightly crazed crescendo.

The other of these two giants (pl. 78) is dramatically different in feeling: its
edge-to-edge, top-to-bottom overlapping of layer on layer of open, running
strokes creates a constant, all-over inscription of motion; it permits no compar-
able sense of developing time, and dissolves all ready reference to scale. Here,
even more than in the earlier Panorama (pl. 25), the legacy of Abstract Expres-
sionism is at issue: Twombly ventures into the area of an engulfing abstract sub-
lime that Pollock had defined, and that had seemed off-limits to the art of the
1960s. The prospect of extending and remaking Pollock’s legacy by changing
everything deemed essential to his art might appear as perverse as the notion of a
grand subjective expression built on Minimalist reduction, and yet both are here,
remarkably realized. Twombly replaces the colored organicism of Pollock with
colorless lines whose steady, progressive rise and fall insists on their attachment to
the drier constraints of writing, will, and culture. Instead of the varied, looping
choreography of pouring, he offers a labor of marking so furiously repetitive, so
unconcealedly relentless and unvarying, as seemingly to preclude all sense of
lyricism. The results are, however, transporting. The picture brims over with a
nervous, obsessed energy, yet its trance-like monotony also opens out into a
sense of serene, oceanic dissolution, in a nebular cloud of great depth and infinite
complexity. Here, the fusion of sensual body with sunny landscape in the sum-
mer of 1961 finds its counterpart: a no less moving metaphor of oneness joins the
shuttling loom of the mind and the fathomless expanse of the night sky.

Though the dark-ground work dominated in Twombly’s production well into
the early 1970s, it never held exclusive sway. As in the early part of his career,
Twombly often tried reversing himself, using the same linear vocabulary in pen-
cil or crayon on light-ground canvases either white or tinged with rubbed blue-
white or red-white tints. He also produced, in 1969, one large body of paintings
that broke the continuity of the dark-ground phase and introduced a different
space, surface, color, and vocabulary of moving form (pls. 75, 76). These pictures
had their origins in a set of drawings done at Grand Case, on the island of
St. Martin in the Caribbean, in January 1969 (fig. 37; pls. 73, 74). Frequently
covered with tracings of small seashells, the drawings surround their elements of
system and geometry—tumbling squares, sequences of rectangles, and so on—with a vivid, lively jumble of confidently baroque draftsmanship which often
includes a peppering of verbal notations and a strong proportion of sexual im-
agery. By the time these drawings were translated to canvas, however, the sur-
roundings were completely changed. The paintings were done in a long and
often lonely siege of work in August and September, at a large stone palace
owned by Twombly’s friend Giovanni del Drago, overlooking the Lake of
Bolsena, north of Rome. Though Twombly purposefully made the ground of
these paintings an ochre-white to give them more warmth, the vitality of the
seaside drawings was generally subdued, as the element of tumbling geometry
and insistent analysis—measurement, segmentation—dominated the typical
movement of their forms, from upper right to lower left. The sexualized energies
of works around 1960 had defined this diagonal as an uphill course of leaping
thrusts, but now, a decade later, it returned as a downward-spilling cascade. The
shaping of that final imagery owed neither to beach life nor to the more somber
scenery of the deep volcanic bowl around the lake at Bolsena, but rather to
Twombly’s preoccupation with the Apollo space flight that summer, which
landed the first men on the surface of the moon, in July. All the talk of vectors,
orbits, rocket segments, and distances in space filled his thoughts as he painted.
FROM EPIC TO PASTORAL: THE LATER 1970s AND THE 1980s

After 1971, the dark-ground cycle ended, and Twombly began working much less frequently. Through the seventies and the eighties up to the present he has averaged only a few pictures per year, even when we include three multi-canvas ensembles. In part this reduced production owes to the time taken away by two extensive programs of architectural reconstruction: beginning in 1972, he restored as his first country home a decayed palazzo on the edge of the village of Bassano in Teverina, north of Rome in the area of the gardens of Bomarzo; and then in the late 1980s he partially gutted and rebuilt a hillside house in Gaeta, a port town on the coast between Rome and Naples. In these residences, the present "natural" and apparently venerable order was in fact won by labors of rearrangement that absorbed him, pleasurably, for more than a year in each case.

Still, such specific distractions cannot fully explain the overall slowing down, which is one instance of a general pattern of sharply varying production that has characterized his entire career. Twombly does not consider himself a "professional" painter, in the sense of someone whose life always centers on the work of making art; he feels no need to be in the studio regularly, and can happily go long stretches without a picture. Nor does he work comfortably within the clutter of daily existence: since reaching maturity, he has been predominantly a "summer painter," working only when the rest of the world leaves him alone. He has left most of the business and practical concerns surrounding his work in the hands of various dealers and friends in a close personal circle, while maintaining an almost archaic purity at the center of his life, with none of the usual trappings found around even moderately successful painters of a younger generation. With no studio assistants, no secretary, and no typewriter (much less a fax or computer), he answers his own phone, organizes his own studio, and paints (or doesn't) according to the pace he sees fit.

Brancusi is reported to have said, roughly, "It is not difficult to work; it is..."
difficult to get in the mood to work,” and there is perhaps no artist for whom
this holds more true than Twombly. His art brings little with it in the way of set
compositions, prepared formulae, or determining tasks that can be carried over
from one work to the next. An exceptional portion of its reason for being lies in
the unstable emotion that can be made to live in momentary inflections of line,
or in hesitations and erasures concealed or not. Precisely because this is an art
that traffics in what appears to be casual, formless, and undisciplined, it may be
one of the hardest to bring forth on any regular basis, with the level of saving
tension and authentic engagement it requires. Twombly typically develops a
slowly mounting readiness during periods of other activity (especially travel), and
then, as he puts it, “gets into a state” to work, through focused periods of read-
ing. Phrases or lines of poetry, jotted on studio scraps, become particular spurs to
initiating a painting. In what some would consider indolence and others anxiety,
this intuitive rhythm is one he respects and refuses to overrule.

Yet when the moment arrives to work, he may be seized with huge ambi-
tion, as his major project of the 1970s demonstrates. In the summers of 1977 and
1978, while preparations were under way for his retrospective exhibition at the
Whitney Museum of American Art, he created, for the first time since Discourse
on Commodus, an historical ensemble: Fifty Days at Ilium, a treatment in ten
monumentally scaled canvases of the Trojan War as recounted in the Iliad (see
figs. 38–40). He had broached this subject in a 1964 triptych (fig. 45), and one
of its heroes, Achilles, had figured in a 1962 “portrait” (fig. 41). In opposition,
though, to the triptych’s busily detailed story of a battle clamorously waxing and
waning, this series imposed a solemn drumbeat of iconically isolated moments,
and in place of the spidery line and airy rhetoric of blood in the previous
Vengeance of Achilles, it presented densely worked motifs on a heavily painted,
wall-like surface. The formality and smooth glamour that had intruded on the
Commodus ensemble is absent from Fifty Days. Instead it translates onto a monu-
mental scale the elliptical address, the pleasure of line and writing, the magic
resonance of the iterated name, and the evocative texture of surface that had
marked Twombly’s more intimate works since the days of Olympia. If Commodus
sought to be grand, this effort reached for the epic, and—in part because of
the intransigent simplicity of its unlikely means—reimagined that term more
successfully.

The character of these paintings is fundamentally different from that of
the works Twombly has made in Rome, and part of that difference may have
involved his intuitive response to the environment at Bassano, where the can-
vases took over his normal studio and two adjacent rooms in the course of their
creation. Though these rooms open onto a light-filled vista, the building itself
is immensely weighty and silent, with massive stone walls and a dark gravitas not
found in the artist’s urban home. For Twombly, the house has a “charge” that is
conducive to painting. Add to this its decor of fragmentary Roman sculptures
and tapestries of military conquest, and the music of Wagner that played in the
studio while he worked, and one has a propitious setting for a rumination on
Hector and Priam.

For direct inspiration, however, Twombly depended on the Alexander
Pope translation of the Iliad, which he appreciates for its “frenzied energy” and
“headlong forward rush”—qualities directly rendered as sweeping horizontal
clatter in the 1964 attempt, but sublimated in the memorial, tombstone verticals
of this group. Pope’s neoclassical version is far from the most faithful rendering
of the story, but that matters little to the artist. A lover of antiquity, but precisely
for that reason no antiquarian, he has often approached classical civilization
through the imaginations of intermediaries, whether through the Renaissance or later classical revivalists, Poussin being one obvious example. The act of translation, of reconceiving the past in contemporary terms and by this traduction insisting on its presentness—or in general of crossing over from one form of "language" to another to capture complex meanings—has been central to his pursuits.

As opposed to the 1964 exhibition of the Commodus pictures, the New York showing of Fifty Days at Ilium in early 1979 (at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery) arrived ahead of its optimum moment. A certain strand of bemusement ran through the critical response, as the whole enterprise seemed far away from the larger frame of contemporary artistic concerns; John Russell found analogies in modern opera or poetry, but had to look to nineteenth-century Salon painting for comparable themes on canvas. Within a few years, the connections would have been more easily made: Anselm Kiefer's resurrections of both epic battles and ancient myths, and the specific involvement of younger Italians such as Sandro Chia with Mediterranean myth, would have shown the immediate "relevance" of Twombly's cycle to the art of the 1980s. His influence on painters such as Kiefer—as on Julian Schnabel's more operatic rephrasings of combined words and abstraction, or on aspects of Francesco Clemente's erotically elegant draftsmanship, and on other younger artists—would become steadily clearer throughout the eighties.

By the time the eighties' concern with history caught up with Twombly, though, he had already moved on, away from the realm of myths, bards, and battles toward water, sky, and flowers. He has always had what he calls a pastoral streak in his temperament, reflected in his love of Virgil's Eclogues and Spenser's The Shepheardes Calendar; life at Bassano reinforced this. The land around the house and the (then depopulated) village was thoroughly rustic, and shepherds would come with tinkling bells on their flocks to play music on the hillsides below the studio windows. Whether from these or other, internal cues, Twombly's art changed as he moved between his fiftieth and sixtieth years. For a long time his work had been so strongly marked by metaphors of the body and a concern for manmade surfaces that landscape acted only as a generic format or an abstract spatial stage. After 1980, a more specific imagery of nature began to appear, given less to upheaval in the manner of Kandinsky and more to atmosphere, enveloping effect, and contemplation, in the vein of Turner or Monet.

Twice in that decade, Twombly returned to the idea of a group of paintings made to be seen as an ensemble in one room; but instead of epic narration from history, the new subjects were ephemera of the seasons—roses, clouds, and reflections—realized not in the panoramic sweep of moving time and landscape, but in the stasis of vertical "portraits." In the major ensemble of the mid-1980s, an untitled five-part group, inscribed “Analysis of Roses as sentimental as despair” (see figs. 42–44), the former scarlets and carmines of blood became the red of the rose and lovers' poetry. This ensemble, now at The Menil Collection in Houston, found its chromatic complement in an entire room of green abstractions, very much under the spell of the water imagery of Monet's later life, painted for the 1988 Venice Biennale. Just as the Fifty Days at Ilium pictures were painted in the year before the Whitney retrospective, these green decorative canvases were made at the time a large Twombly exhibition was being prepared for Zurich, London, Paris, and Madrid, and represent a summation and closure of a certain line of inquiry.

A new quality in both 1980s ensembles is their liquidity, in one case in subject, but in both cases in material. We may think of Twombly primarily as a "dry" artist, more given to drawing than painting, and desiccating the organic smoothness of Pollock's or de Kooning's luscious surfaces. Fluidity and viscosity have nonetheless been basic concerns of his work technically and thematically from the earliest days, when his keen understanding of the use of material as meaning was already evident. One of his most enduring personal practices has involved working in wet areas of paint, and the nature of that meeting of hard and plan elements has been a crucial variable: the texture of the paint as it dries, its density as a skin in resistance to the running pencil or crayon, its thinness as a veil over things below, the effect on it of gravity, all these factors informed and collaborated in Twombly's imagery of flux—spurting, streaming, spotting, and cascading—as an essential sign of life. This concept of flow is as important to the spirit of many of the grey-ground canvases, with their imagery of rolling turbulence, as it is to the more obviously geysering releases of the early 1960s. In the 1980s, though, Twombly's new vein of aquatic imagery tended away from such agitation, toward the evocation of profound depths and still, reflecting surfaces. In the untitled "Analysis of Roses" painting of 1985 (figs. 42–44), the thinned liquidity of paint itself became more and more pronounced, and gravity assumed full dominance over its streaked, dripping descent.

The major "story" picture of the decade, executed principally in 1981, was that of Hero and Leander, a classical legend of doomed love and tragic drowning which Twombly had found revived in a poem by Marlowe (pl. 91). The event is told in three panels, and in thick sea-greens mixing into foam whites; the wave that swallows and drowns the lover rises in its crest in the left-most canvas, at the beginning of the story, and then tails down to an expiring wash in the near-
empty panel on the right.179 The aftermath, and the return to a mournful peace, dominates the imagination of the tale. In such works, and finally, in the green decorations of the 1988 Venice “Monet” room and related canvases, Twombly’s ongoing involvement with fluidity as a metaphor of life and spirit seemed to seek a level, in gentle melancholy and tranquility.

At the opposite extreme from the monumentality of Fifty Days at Ilium, the late 1970s also saw Twombly resume production of the small, makeshift sculptures that had been a recurring component of his work from the beginning (pl. 87). Nothing could seem further in spirit from the epic militarism of the paintings of Troy than these fragile constructions—including a slender wooden war chariot produced in the same period (pl. 84). Yet without putting more weight on this little vehicle than it can bear, we should see that its basic geometry is as indispensable to understanding Twombly as are the massive canvases. He pursues such reductive simplicity of form, as many modern artists have, not because elemental shapes have more secure and firmly delimited meanings, but for the opposite reason: because basic shapes are more pregnant with possibility and contain within themselves the potential for many simultaneous allusions. We saw this in earlier paintings where looping 8s and circles often metamorphosed into erotically charged ideograms. Here, the simple opposition of a circle and a straight line conjures something elemental about thrust, directionality, and narrative flow; elsewhere, these associations expand further, and the chariot merges with a schematic phallic sign (see fig. 45). The point is not that the recurrent form, in any particular work, is only one or the other, but that its simplicity is such that it may evoke all (see pls. 85, 86). The liability of meaning in such simple forms entails the element of metamorphosis that Twombly is so drawn to in classical
myth: the fantasy, inspiring to his imagination, of the easy, weightless transformation of one thing into another. (In the case of the chariot specifically, the combination of the wheel and the flange or wedge may be, still in a playful spirit, a more personal symbol: the title he gave to one drawing of these shapes, *Anabasis* [pl. 85], refers to a legendary military drive from the coast of Asia Minor into the interior in the fourth century B.C., by the conqueror Cyrus the Younger.)

At another level, the “punning” of the chariot’s particular shapes carries with it a familiar psychoanalytic concept by which armaments and aggression are linked to male sexuality, and the more general notion that underneath the welter of our technologies and languages lie some elemental exchanges between the desiring body and the productive mind. These kinds of verbalizations are, however, antithetical to the white simplicity of the toy, which “illustrates” nothing and says what it says wordlessly and with a strict avoidance of labored complexity.

This chariot, a wagon bearing flowers (pl. 87), and a slightly later boat (pl. 94) are based not only on the toys Twombly made and collected in his own childhood, but also on aspects of Egyptian art, which has been consistently undervalued as a part of the artist’s connection with ancient cultures. Less full in the imagery of the body than Greek art, Egyptian imagery is far more attentive to the particulars of flora and fauna, and its schemas for encoding trees, gardens, lakes, and so on had a relevance to Twombly’s visual language beginning in the late 1950s. When he eventually visited Egypt, in 1962 and again in 1985, he was taken less with the gold masks of the pharaohs than with depictions of daily life in tomb paintings, and he focused especially on the humble miniatures of vehicles and furniture that crowd the less frequented vitrines in the Cairo Museum.

These fragile wooden structures, often painted flat white, suggest a complex overlay of associations among childhood, play, fantasy, and the immemorial element of hopeful magic that can underlie the simplest acts of marking and stick assemblage as well as the grandest monument of culture—the drive to cheat death by representing life. A confluence of these associations, and the symbolism of the lotus as a flower of transcendence and eternally renewed life, came together in the little flower wagon, which the artist originally made as a gift for Tatiana when she was seriously threatened by illness.

Connoting the child’s ability to build rich fantasy worlds from simple shapes and found materials, such toys raise again the question of childhood and “childishness” as it applies to Twombly. As suggested earlier, he is far from being the first modern creator to look backward within both human ontogeny and human history for unspoiled and more elemental expressions. The more familiar modern...
motive for that regression, however, has involved an urge to escape the chafing, decadent confines of high Western culture into a zone of more authentic "primitive" expressions; Twombly has a deeper affection for the vitality of that culture, from Homer through Rilke and beyond, and no such interest in chest-thumping "savagery." His interests in the links between childhood and adult expression came closer to Baudelaire's belief that "genius is only childhood recovered at will," and his implied alliances between the ancient world and infantile experience may have their closer parallels in Freud. When we consider his splicing together of heroes from the Iliad with graffiti-like renderings, for example, we might think of Freud's similar push (most famously in naming the Oedipus complex) to show that the figures and structures of classical myths were coded expressions of immemorial, still-recurrent aspects of children's early sexual experience. Twombly's "regression" has less to do, though, with baring the roots of repression than with tapping the font of rejuvenating energy. For him, the quality of the infantile is central to understanding the sensual, instinctive dimensions, and the "irresponsibilities" which he feels are the grounds of a liberating affinity between aspects of his own temperament and Mediterranean culture. There is a necessary and close exchange in Twombly's work between his affection for the venerable and timeworn and for the fresh and simple; in the fantasy of the work they fuse to their mutual benefit. His experience of the ancient world as continuously, sensually alive in layers of translation is in some senses consistent with a lush decadence properly called Alexandrian, and it needs constant refreshment by his parallel love for a crude, naive, and uninitiated manner of expression.

Both in sculpture and in painted works on paper, Twombly has been especially drawn to a motif of flowers emerging on spindly stalks from a massive mound of earth (pls. 115, 116). In the sculpture Thermopylae (pl. 115), one might read a specific reference to the Spartan king Leonidas and his elite troops who, after carving their testament in rock, gave their lives in battle against the invading Persians to hold the mountain pass at Thermopylae so that Greece might survive. What Twombly has inscribed upon his "rock," however, are lines from the poem "Thermopylae" by the modern Greek poet C. P. Cavafy, which invokes the ancient legend metaphorically, in honor of all those whose personal integrity is shown in the self-sacrificing defense of ideals, even in the face of impossible opposition. The motif exists independently of either reference, though, and like all Twombly's signs, mutates and acquires new meanings as he uses and reuses it. In the very similar motif of Summer Madness (pl. 116), for example, the frailness of radiating stems against an obdurate mass of earth, so much at issue in the sculpture, is no longer seen amid the riotous blossoming of color.

Early in his career, Twombly had given up the brush for the pencil to suppress virtuosity and gain a childlike immediacy; in Summer Madness and related groups of flower drawings from the last few years (pls. 110–14, 116), he has pursued the same goal, in reverse. Smothering the fine linearity that has been the most personal essence of his work, he has adopted the broad daubs and bright colors we associate with the kindergarten paint pot. For a theme of freshness and renewal, nothing stale or practiced would do, but only a reconquered "beginner's" simplicity.

These recent flower drawings have been executed in other places, such as the Seychelles islands, but their heightened color and vertical energies are linked to the home Twombly established in Gaeta, only a few miles from Sperlonga, in the late 1980s. Twombly's white-stuccoed house there has an entirely different character from the stone Renaissance palace in Bassano: clinging to a hillside, it has been built in the organic fashion of a small village of intimate spaces, courtyards, and gardens on several levels, and it seems to look less to Italianate grandeur than to the vernacular of the Greek islands or North Africa. Above all, it and its environment are brighter and lighter, and Twombly paints in a breezeway room next to tall windows overlooking the full sweep of the harbor of Gaeta, a legendary port in antiquity, where boats of all sizes and kinds still come and go throughout the slightly misty warmth of the day. Though this increase in brightness and noise worries him as a possible distraction from his work, the proximity to the sea has also been rejuvenating. One need only compare two smaller drawings of...
flowers from Bassano (pls. 113, 114) to Summer Madness (pl. 116), done at Gaeta, to measure the increase in luminosity and hue this new setting has encouraged. Besides this bay over the last few summers, Twombly has also produced several freshly conceived paintings on an impressive scale (pls. 117, 118, 120, 121–23).

Two of them revive several of the elements of earlier work: most evidently, the white ground and pencil writing, but also handwork with paint in bright yellow, red, and blue (pls. 117, 118). With these turns against the monochrome imagery of a few years previous, Twombly celebrates light and air: working in color principally on the edge of the large field, he evokes an openness that suggests sky more than sea, and regains the sense of floating or uplift that had been submerged in the “aquatic” work of the 1980s. The vertical “portrait” format once given most often to frontal, iconic subjects now receives some of the dispersal, and omnidirectional movement, of landscape; standing before them, one has the sensation of looking into the central, cloud-surrounded spaces of an eighteenth-century ceiling painting. That sense of flight and of floating reverberates in the inscription on one of the works—“Victory / outside, an amazing space / on the other side of / Air” (pl. 118)—while both canvases are inscribed with a more ambiguous reference to zephyrs and flight as cautionary spiritual metaphors, in Baudelaire’s confession, “I have felt the wind of the wing of madness.” These phrases conjure both exultation and foreboding, achieve of an eighteenth-century ceiling painting. That sense of flight and of floating reverberates in the inscription on one of the works—“Victory / outside, an amazing space / on the other side of / Air” (pl. 118)—while both canvases are inscribed with a more ambiguous reference to zephyrs and flight as cautionary spiritual metaphors, in Baudelaire’s confession, “I have felt the wind of the wing of madness.”

Despite such intimations of mortality, Twombly’s art is certainly not about to cease. In 1994 he brought to conclusion a monumental new series, The Four Seasons (see pis. 121–23), on which he had been working for almost two years. He thinks of the series as beginning not with the fresh promises of April, but with the richer mellowness of October; the deep reds and purples of the Autumn canvas (pl. 121), and its outpouring of energy, resonate with the intoxication of the yearly wine festivals at Bassano, where the series was initiated. The panels Winter (pl. 122) and Spring (pl. 123) both continue the motif of the “ship” from previous Gaeta canvases, but each in a sharply separate spirit: somber, in the deep black, chilly white washes and stately, tough rhythms of the former, densely layered with lines of poetry from Seferis; more soaring and open, with brighter space and warmer hue, in the latter. Flowers and sun-warmed lyricism naturally attend Spring, but Twombly has also been reflecting on Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring, and its inflections of more rasping sharpness, in his choice of color combinations. Summer (completed too late to be reproduced in this volume) is the broadest and hence in some senses the most eased and calmest of these unusually tall panels; awash in the warm shimmer and dazzle of misty light on water, it returns, in its dominant play of melting yellows and whites, to the atmospherics of Turner’s landscapes, which Twombly has so long admired. The subject of the seasons’ cycle is, of course, traditionally associated with quiescent or even melancholic retrospect; but the grand scale and ambition of these canvases speak more forcefully of new confidence and freedom—savoring the pleasures and mournfulness of each part of the turning year, but drawing special energy of renewal from the season of Silenus, heady with autumn’s deepened wine and the sustenance of the harvest already gathered. As he approaches the inauguration of a special building dedicated to a survey of his work, at The Menil Collection in Houston, Twombly is further applying these energies to the completion of the various sections of an enormous painting (approximately fifty feet in total length) that has been in the works for years, under the alternative titles The Anatomy of Melancholy and On Wings of Idleness.

A final assessment of this already tremendously distinguished career will thus, happily, have many more developments to account for. At this moment in a long and wonderfully productive life in art, however, Twombly’s work already
has given us far more than can be readily articulated, or trapped within the ready categories of contemporary criticism. Certainly it gives the lie to the shopworn notion that modern art advances by a series of ever more drastic breaks with the high traditions of Western culture. Beginning with Cézanne’s ambition to “redo Poussin after nature,” modern artists have been consistently motivated by the desire to reformulate the admired values of the past, and of great traditional art, in terms that would make them come alive to the eyes and sensibilities of our own time. Twombly belongs fully to this lineage; his efforts to rescue the classical world from the confines of academicism and translate it into the present tense extend a pursuit that has concerned modern Western culture from the time of the French Revolution. Since Léger’s metallic rigor followed closely on Matisse’s visions of arcadian abandon (if not since J.-L. David painted The Oath of the Horatii and the Portrait of Madame Récamier in swift succession), it has been clear that the modern imagination of antique “simplicity” entails two contrasting fantasies, of armored idealism on the one hand and of ungirded, “natural” sensuality on the other. Twombly’s art includes, but polarizes, that dichotomy. Spare austerity is moved higher, aestheticized into a poignantly fragile, personal poetics, in the unornamented, scrawling invocations of Apollo and Achilles; while natural candor is moved lower, out toward scarred public walls and transgressive affirmations of nether-body life. Too aristocratic and at the same time too demotic, the results refuse either to buttress bourgeois idealism or to flatter bourgeois pleasures in any familiar fashion. They want a sense of revived classicism, and of modern life, that operates outside those bounds.

That rebellion has its more immediate context in Twombly’s personal tussle with his elders and his surroundings. As a young man, he inherited the challenge of an avant-garde that sought the values of an ancient mythology and the universal fundamentals of culture by drawing on each artist’s individual, inner resources. It seemed that his prime goal in maturing was to kill off this darkly heroic notion in painting, and to replace it with something more impersonal, grittily debased, dry, and insistently hostile to such idealism. Yet he used the new art he created precisely to reforge, in a wholly different poetics of light and sexuality that was specific to his experience, the link between the heritage of the human past and the life of a personal psyche.

In this pursuit Twombly has at times cited, and must in some sense identify with, Goethe, Keats, and other visitors to Italy from the North—artists who have contended with the link between a mind full of Romantic ideals and a body touched by unaccustomed warmth, and with the tensions between distanced understanding and the lure of decadence. Closer in time, he may share loose bonds of affinity with Joyce, in the effort to fuse antiquity’s epic spirit with the slang, raw data, and fragmented time of modern experience; the headlong run of Finnegans Wake, with its metamorphosing overlays of language and its covert combinations of earthiness and erudition, seems particularly relevant. Perhaps the most obvious and most telling of the frames of reference in which we should consider the work, however, involves Twombly’s place within the long dialogue between America and the European tradition.

The American lineage Twombly most admires is that shared by Whitman and Pollock; his idea of genius is exemplified by their model of troubled psychic energies transcendentally externalized into a flood of all-leveling emotive lyricism. One part of his effort as an artist has been to put together their sense of now with a European sense of then, wedding appetite to taste, and the raw permissions of innocence to the knowing tolerances of sophistication. His willied naïveté, erudite but never false, draws on a fantasy of living in high refinement and at the same time in great, unprejudiced indulgence, experiencing the tremendous force of human time and cultural memory not as a snobbish burden but as a focusing, liberating, confirming presence within the immediate apprehension of sensual life.

As he pulls together the fresh and the ancient, Twombly deals simultaneously not only with opposite spheres of culture, but with upper and base body functions as coexistent and interdependent. It would be wrong, though, to credit the art with bringing these disparate things together: they are together, always, even if other orders of art do not allow for their collisions or coexistence. Nor does the work “represent” their intersection: as does a great deal of modern art, it adds something apparently gratuitous and disorderly to the world, by presenting marks, colors, words, and signs in a unique array that we are then challenged to match with our understanding of the world’s possibilities. In this fashion, for almost a century now, new parameters for art have been constantly re-formed, and private obsessions have created public languages that have widened the domains of feeling accessible to us. Twombly’s work, and our response to it, involves acts of faith in this modern experiment to renew a basic magic of art, immemorial, endlessly uncertain, and always open to discovery. For all the complex linguistic structure of his aesthetic and the rich web of his references, what his achievement may ultimately depend upon most heavily is the power he has drawn from within himself and from so many enabling traditions, to isolate in a particularly raw and unsettled fashion that primal electricity of communication, in his apparently simplest acts of naming, marking, and painting.

He reminds us, too, that under the skin of modern art’s parsimony, its constantly renewed urge to see what it can do without, lies a matching and par-
allel aspiration toward globally expansive forms of idealism. The two have gone hand in hand through the century, and the panoramic range of subjects and areas of emotion mapped out by Twombly’s reduced means—reaching from atonal barrenness to grand opera, and enfolding along the way idle anxiety, obsession, explosive eroticism, epic heroism, melancholy, and pastoral idyll—reconfirm the possibility that art can pull the fullness of the world back in through portals of the most stringent simplicity.

Twombly’s work, of course, “illustrates” none of this. It has no calculated political agenda and is made according to no historical strategy. It has created and still creates its own justification, which our explanations threaten only to belabor or artificially delimit—as I was reminded on my last visit to the artist’s silent and empty studio at Bassano. Ruminating on the nail holes and flecks of paint on the stone walls and floors, the remnants of works long since gone to other corners of the world, I saw the edge of a paper scrap, with writing on it, jutting from beneath a stack of boxes of crayons and oil sticks. Uncovering the paper and turning it over in the slant of afternoon light through the half-closed shutters, I picked out a rising and falling graphite script in cursive and capitals, mingled into obscuring smears and casual splatters of color (fig. 46). Finally I made out the line; it is among the least poetic, perhaps, of many that have struck this most literate yet least literal of artists, but it is tersely apposite for every writer about art, and as penciled on this fragment it seemed at that moment the embodiment of its own truth. In crude imitation of an inimitable orthography, we would print it as: “The Image cannot / be dispossessed of a / primordial / freshness / which ideas / can never claim.”

46. Cy Twombly. Untitled (Studio Note), c. 1990. Pencil and paint on paper, 4 3/4 x 6 3/4” (12 x 17 cm). Private collection
The standard reference texts for Cy Twombly's paintings are the two volumes prepared by Heiner Bastian: *Cy Twombly: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings*, vol. 1: 1948–1960 (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1992), and vol. 2: 1961—1963 (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1993). In the present publication, references to the catalogue numbers in those volumes are preceded by the abbreviations Bastian I and Bastian II.

There are three principal archival sources for Twombly's career up to the early 1960s: (1) The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has a file containing correspondence, applications, and letters of recommendation relevant to four applications Twombly made for fellowships. The first two applications, in 1950 and 1952, were successful, and the files therefore include extended correspondence with Twombly regarding his use of the grants; the latter two, in 1955 and 1956, were unsuccessful. All material cited in connection with these applications and fellowships, including the artist's statements, letters of recommendation, and correspondence during the tenure of his two grants in 1950–51 and 1952–53, is in this file, unless otherwise indicated. (2) Correspondence between Twombly and the dealer Eleanor Ward in the years 1955–58 is preserved (but not yet microfilmed) among the Eleanor Ward Papers, at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. All cited letters between Twombly and Ward are among these papers, unless otherwise indicated. (3) The archives of Leo Castelli preserve correspondence between Castelli and Twombly, beginning in early 1959 and continuing through the 1960s. All cited letters between Twombly and Castelli are in this archive, unless otherwise indicated.

All information cited as "conversation with the artist" is based on notes taken by the author during informal discussions with Cy Twombly in Rome, Bassano, and Gaeta between June 1962 and July 1963.


2. Conrad Marca-Relli, from a letter of recommendation he wrote in connection with Twombly's application for a fellowship in 1955. See note 90, below, for a fuller citation of this letter. A copy of the letter is in the Eleanor Ward Papers.

3. See the headnote, above.

4. An article written on the occasion of Edwin Parker Twombly, Sr.'s retirement as athletic director of Washington and Lee University offers these details of his baseball career: He started playing semi-pro baseball at the age of fourteen. In 1917, after beginning his college education at Lehigh, he spent spring training with the St. Louis Cardinals, and was signed to a contract by Branch Rickey, but then the war and military service intervened, and after that Mr. Twombly decided to finish his education (at Springfield College) and did not follow up on the contract. He graduated in 1921, pitched for the Chicago White Sox that summer. Immediately after his marriage, in the autumn of 1921, he took a coaching job at Washington and Lee, which precluded his participation in 1922 spring training. His contract was therefore sent to Minneapolis, where he did not wish to play, and he then had himself optioned to Danville in the Piedmont League. The article relates that during his career, "he played with or against players like Walter Johnson, Tris Speaker, Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb" (“Twombly Has Not Regretted Giving Up Big-Time Baseball for College Work,” Lexington [Va.] News-Gazette, March 26, 1969).

Another, undated article (apparently from a Massachusetts newspaper in 1966), in the possession of the artist's sister, specifies that after his stint in the major leagues Mr. Twombly continued to pitch during the summer with teams in Danville, N.H. (1922–23); Manchester, N.H. (1924–25); Newark, N.J. (1926–27); Providence, R.I., and Worcester, Mass. (1928–29) and Lewiston, Maine (1930).

5. The artist's father, Edwin Parker Twombly, Sr., was born in Groveland, Mass., June 15, 1897, and died December 3, 1934. His mother, née Mary Velma Richardson, was born in Bar Harbor, Maine, May 11, 1897, and died December 28, 1938. They were married September 13, 1921. The artist has one sibling, a sister, Ann Leland, four years older. In regard to Twombly's later involvement with classical culture, it should be noted that his older sister studied classical languages extensively, through eight years of Latin courses and six years of Greek. His father, who knew Latin, would joke with the artist's sister in Latin (conversation with the artist).

6. The artist's father was hired as a golf and swimming coach at Washington and Lee in 1921. During his long tenure there, he also coached football, basketball, and baseball. From 1934 to 1939 he served as athletic director, and remained as golf coach after his retirement. In the Doremus Gymnasium complex at Washington and Lee, a swimming pool is named in honor of him.

7. Thomas Jonathan ("Stonewall") Jackson taught natural philosophy and artillery tactics at the Virginia Military Institute for ten years before the outbreak of the Civil War. The bullet-pierced coat he wore...
at the battle of Chancellorsville, and the stabled remains of his war horse, are enshrined in the V.M.I. Museum. The local cemetery where he is buried is named for him. Robert E. Lee took over the presidency of what was then Washington College in 1865, less than six months after the surrender at Appomattox. The Robert E. Lee Chapel in Lexington includes a recumbent effigy of the general, and his horse is buried just outside. V.M.I. cadets were during Twombly's youth under orders to salute on passing the chapel.

8. Conversation with the artist.

9. Conversation with the artist's sister, Ann Leland, December 1993. In this piece read at the conferment of Twombly's honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree by Washington and Lee University on June 4, 1993, it was said that "Mary Monroe Pennick once recalled that his talent was apparent even in high school, and she put him to working on backdrops and set designs for musical productions."

10. Twombly took private lessons from Dauna for four years, until he graduated from high school. Dauna's wife, Louise Blair, studied the cave art of prehistory and—in the 1940s, when the first photographs of Lascaux paintings began appearing—may have helped fuel Twombly's fascination with the prehistoric signs of art (see below). On Dauna and his wife, see Virginia Irby Davis, A Retrospective Showing of Works by Pierre and Louise Dauna (Lynchburg, Va.: Lynchburg College, 1990). Dauna had a joint exhibition with Jean Hélon (also residing in Virginia during the war) at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond in 1942.

There is virtually no published record of Twombly's work at this time, though he did show it. The artist's 1950 application for a grant to support his study in New York included the notice: "Exhibited three paintings in the Scholastic Art Show in Richmond while in High School / two paintings have been published in the Washington and Lee literary magazine" (see note 20, below).

11. Sheldon Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1939): This was the tenth edition of a work originally copyrighted in 1924.

12. Between high school in Lexington and the studies in Boston, Twombly spent one year at the Darlington School, a college preparatory school in Rome, Ga. He also spent the summer of 1947 with an aunt in Onguinut, Maine, where he came in contact with a summer colony of artists and painted "abstract seascapes" (conversation with the artist).

The choice of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts may have been influenced in part by family ties, as Twombly could live in an artist colony of artists and painted "abstract seascapes" (conversation with the artist).

13. On art in Boston in this era, see Frederick S. Wight, "New England," Art News, vol. 43, no. 9 (November 1945), pp. 16-21; and Piero Foscari's "The Figure in the Air: The Other Expressionists," Art in America, vol. 70, no. 11 (December 1982), pp. 110-12, 141, 147. My thanks to Thomas McDonough, who provided these references in the context of a seminar paper for the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, autumn 1993.

14. From December 1945 through June 1946, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston presented three anniversary exhibitions which examined its history. The first of these was titled "The Expressionist Challenge." The press material released by the Institute on October 1, 1945, summarized the exhibition's three succinctly as follows: "During the '30s and '40s the ICA mounted several exhibitions of Northern European Expressionism, including the first major exhibitions in America of Kokoschka, Munch, and Ensor and an exhibition of artists whose work was forbidden by the Nazi government in Germany. These shows bespoke a strong cultural exchange between Boston and Northern European cultures. Unlike institutions elsewhere, notably in New York, the ICA chose Expressionism rather than Cubism, Surrealism and de Stijl as the European cornerstone of international modernism. This choice has had a major impact not only on Boston's artistic community, but also on the nation's introduction to modernism."

15. In March 1948, Max Beckmann showed recent paintings at the Museum of Modern Art, and had his "Letters to a Woman Painter" read to a student audience during his visit (see Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Seventy-Fifth Annual Report, for the Year 1948 [Boston: T. O. Mccall Co., 1960], pp. 75-76). The Beckmann lecture was published in College Art Journal, vol. 9, no. 1 (autumn 1960), pp. 42-44.

16. Conversation with the artist. Twombly remembers a phase in the late 1940s when he practiced "like Soutine, only crazier." This period of involvement with Soutine may have actually come later, or lasted into 1950. In that year, when Twombly was in New York, a Soutine retrospective was shown at The Museum of Modern Art. See among other references the article by the painter Jack Tworkov, "The Wandering Soutine," Art News, vol. 49, no. 7, Part 1 (November 1950), pp. 30-33, 62. Tworkov was a close associate of Willem de Kooning's, and Twombly remembers with pleasure that during a visit to de Kooning's studio, he saw the same book on Soutine which he himself had treasured. More important, perhaps, Tworkov also became a friend and supporter of Robert Rauschenberg in the early 1950s; through this connection, his enthusiasm for Soutine could certainly have been communicated to Twombly, if only to reinforce an affection already formed.

17. The references to Twombly's early experiences of Schwitterns and Giacometti are both from a conversation with the artist. In an unpublished paper for a seminar at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, autumn 1993, Thomas McDonough points out that
My work goes on. It has changed quite a bit since the painting you saw in
Richmond (for the letter I hope). I've been very interested in the primitive
art of the American Indians—of Mexico and Africa. So much art looks affected
and tired after seeing the expressive simple directness of their work. There is
a wealth of material to see in the way of art here—It will probably take me sev-
eral months after I leave to organize and visualize what I've seen.

25. Letter to Leslie Cheek, Jr., March 27, 1951:
Have had a productive period in painting the last few months. I wish I had
photographs of some of my things to show as it is hard to explain in a letter.

26. On Rauschenberg in these years, see Walter Hopps, Robert
Rauschenberg appeared with his wife in an article dealing with their

27. The statement about shared interests is from a conversation with
the artist.

Compare Twombly's untitled sculpture of 1947 (pl. 2) with the
sculpture assembled from a pole and two Chianti bottles, The Man
with Two Souls, shown by Rauschenberg in his joint exhibition with
Twombly at the Stable Gallery in 1953 (Rauschenberg's sculpture is
illustrated in Hopps, Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s, p. 35). In
January 1952, Charles Olson, the rector at Black Mountain College,
described assembly sculptures Twombly made from found materials
sculptures that seem to anticipate Rauschenberg's fetish pieces in
Rome, or even more pointedly his rock and string pieces in New
York in 1953; see note 63, below.

28. Letter (sent from Lexington, Va.) to Leslie Cheek, Jr., June 11,
1951: "...I hope to go down to Black Mountain College for July and
August—to study with Ben Shahn and Bob Motherwell.

29. On Black Mountain generally, see Martin Duberman, Black
Mountain: An Exploration in Community (New York: E. P. Dutton,
1972); and Mary Emma Harris, The Arts at Black Mountain College
(Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1967). For a specific account of the
college at the time Twombly attended, see Francine du Plessis Gray,
"Black Mountain: The Breaching (Making) of a Writer," in Adam and
also the discussion of Rauschenberg's and Twombly's time at Black

30. According to Twombly, Motherwell conveyed the impression that
he was there for the summer to relax, and did not want to see
other painters. This antipathy toward fellow artists became especially
clear when Motherwell had a party to which he invited everyone in
the summer session except Twombly and Rauschenberg. Twombly
remembers that when Ben Shahn asked him which painters he liked,
he said: "De Kooning and Ingres." When Shahn said in reply that he
thought that split in tastes was schizophrenic, Twombly cited the early
de Kooning drawings of his wife, Elaine, as being like Ingres in their
mechaclastic linearity (conversation with the artist). Rauschenberg
also remembered that Twombly was the "darling" of Ben Shahn during
this summer (conversation with the artist). Rauschenberg owns an early
collage by Twombly that includes as its central motif an unfolded cut-paper element which is symmetri-
cal, or nearly so, top to bottom and side to side, somewhat in the
fashion of a Rauschach blot.


32. Letter to Leslie Cheek, Jr., November 26, 1950: My direction has become consistent and more person-
al—being in the realm of semi-abstraction and abstraction—simple in form
and color with great stress on movement and power.

My new work is a long way from the poetic portraits and landscapes of
last year...
...the substance of this learning is accessible to everyone now, through reproductions and museums and quick travel, though surprisingly few acquire it; it requires a certain animation of mind to make one's own imaginary museum, and most young painters begin with the one next door, too rarely outgrowing it. So that perhaps what is most remarkable about Twombly, what leads one quite spontaneously to call him a "natural," is native temperamental affinity with the shoreline, the brutality, the universal in avant-garde painting of the moment. His painting process, of which the pictures are the tracks that are left, as when one walks on a beach, is organic; the sexual character of the fetishes half-buried in his violent surface is sufficiently evident (and so is not allowed to emerge any more). Yet the art in his painting is natural, often surprisingly simply symmetrical, and immediately harmonious.

Robert Motherwell, October, 1951

45. Heiner Bastian lists these works as having been shown: Bastian 1, no. 24-26. The reviews in fuller citation include the following.

Stuart Preston, New York Times, December 9, 1951:

There are no questions of symbolism or communication here; plumes are taken into abstractions of subjectivity...Twombly's shadowy patterns, in degraded blacks and whites, are more gracefully balanced with regard to the over-all surface, more helpful of the demands of flat design.

Prudence B. Read, "Duet," Art News, vol. 50, no. 8 (December 1951), p. 48:

In both artists it is interesting and instructive to look for the possible influence of DuChamp. Twombly, using a restrained color scheme of white to black enlivened with tan and blue, creates large rhythmic patterns which have intimateing elegance. Some are static, others flow and flowing. The blacks carry the framework and yet melt into the lighter areas.

James Finniss, "New Talent," Art Digest, vol. 26, no. 6 (December 15, 1951), p. 29:

Cy Twombly's vision is related to that of Clifford [sic] Still and Welden Kees. In some of his large loose paintings, irregular circles of greyish white seem to mushroom on a grey or black field. In others, light areas are smoky and undulant. They gleam like reflections on a wet pavement at night, or make splashes (of stark white. Limiting himself to black, grey, and white, and to configurations that are often too obviously symmetrical, Twombly seems to be handicapping himself. The application of paint shows its genesis: one would like to see more ingenuity at the conceptual level.

46. See two letters of January 1952 to Leslie Cheek, Jr. The first, undated but responded to on January 24, inquires as to eligibility for a fellowship. The second, dated January 26 and written on the stationery of Black Mountain College, requests the application forms.

47. Rauschenberg remembered (Rose, Rauschenberg, p. 36):

At a certain point, he [Twombly] was eligible for a museum scholarship. So I did his portfolio. He didn't want to go over there by himself. I thought it would be great. We were going to share the scholarship. I did big blowups of his works and dry mounted them beautifully. Allen would have liked that.

Twombly's letter of May 4, 1952, to Leslie Cheek, Jr., states:

For the One-of-Off Fellowship I am sending a portfolio of five and four photographs of my paintings taken by a young photographer from New York, along with four of my paintings, so as to give the Committee an idea of my work.

I would be terribly difficult as well as expensive to send ten of my paintings, since many of them are quite large, but I think with the four as color reference the photographs will define the work quite accurately.

48. The complete statement is as follows:

In the complexity of modern art, in the wide and diverse background of causes and origins it is fatal to look merely on the surface for cause, but to go back to the roots of the primitive cultures, classic construction and even minimal traditions—for it is apparent that Mondrian is an enunciation of Vermeer and the Flemish tradition, as Maissone is the French tradition, while Picasso draws directly and freely on the Spanish, French, African and Classic cultures.

The nineteenth century is the great period of weakness of all known past cultures—the art of the Africans and Indians and etc., which have been considered barbarous, thus inferior cultures, have taken their due place of importance in relationship to our own present cultural patterns. The static classic cast and the eighteenth artificiality, which are concept, has thus broken down to a great degree.

As I am trying to establish it—that Modern Art isn't dislocated, but something with roots, tradition and continuity.

For myself the past is the source (for all art is vitally contemporary). I'm drawn to the primitive, the ritual and festive elements, to the symmetrical plastic codes (peculiarly basic to both primitive and classic concepts, so enriching the two).

A Fellowship would be a great help. It would enable me to go to Europe to come in direct contact with sculpture, painting and architecture in context. To experience European cultural climates both intellectual and aesthetic.

I could still be able to study the prehistoric cave drawings of Lascaux (the first great art of Western civilization), The French, Dutch and Italian Museums, the Gothic, Baroque architecture, and Roman noses. Such experience will provide energy and material for my work. It will broaden my own knowledge and concepts, not only for the paintings I intend to do there, but for a lifetime of work.

49. The letter of recommendation from Ben Shahn, dated April 25, 1952, says:

During the past summer I had, in my class at Black Mountain College, a young artist named Cy Twombly [sic] who was, unquestionably, the best of my students there.... Mr. Twombly's painting is in the abstract direction, but

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and he has a broad understanding of art history. Furthermore, I assure you that Cy has had the discipline of realistic growing as a background for his abstract work and can do beautiful paintings when he desires, but for the present, he has gone for an exploring a future on non-objective expressions.... He works insistently and probably he forgets his meals for love of painting more often than anyone I know.

Motherwell's letter of April 28 mentions he believes Twombly to be "precisely the proper recipient for a painting fellowship—and... the excellent reception among... painters of his recent exhibition in New York is evidence that I am not alone in this opinion."

The letter announcing the award was dated May 26, 1952. The award was $1,500, payable $250 per month for a year.

An undated letter to Leslie Cheek, Jr., specifies that Cheek's last letter had not been forwarded to Black Mountain, and that Twombly has just received it on returning to Lexington. Since Cheek replies to that letter on June 10, it must have been written in the first week of June. Another letter to Cheek, announcing, "I was just able to get passage for Aug. 20—so will leave earlier than planned," is dated July 8. This would allow the last three weeks of June for travel.

The departure date of August 20 can be established by a letter to Leslie Cheek, Jr., written on July 8, 1952 (see note 51, above). The arrival is announced in a letter to Cheek, September 6, 1952 (see note 54, below):

1. Twombly with musical instrument, Rome. 1953. Photograph by Robert Rauschenberg

I finally arrived in Rome and have a large room in a pensione overlooking the Piazza di Spagna a block from the via Margutta where most of the important contemporary Italian painters and sculptors have studios. I got off the boat in Palermo, Sicily, in hopes of seeing the many Greek ruins throughout Sicily and the Arab-Norman buildings located in Palermo. In the two days I've been here I've walked miles to see everything at once, but I still have to plan more. I'm very anxious to start to work myself and just buy materials. I will work each morning in my room then site see in the afternoon, and read up the night before the history of the Church, ruins, palaces &c., which I will go to the next day. Yesterday I've not many American painters (so called) while eating mostly but most of the Sunday type. It is terribly important for me to be here now and I am very excited to work & learn and see as much as it is humanly possible. I will probably stay here at least a mo. if I don't find it too expensive—then to Florence for awhile & Venice.

2. Rauschenberg told Barbara Rose (Rauschenberg, p. 15): We went to Rome. It was good and interesting for about two weeks. Then Cy started collecting antiques. He still collects great antiques. He discovered a flea market, not the flea market outside of town, but one in a little Piazza del something or other. Anyway, the farmers would bring in Etruscan things and occasionally a marble bust. He just went crazy. He kept his half of the money he was making here and bought me an American who asked me for directions. We started talking and he bought me a drink and said he worked for the Atari Construction Company in Casablanca. He told me I should go there because they hired hundreds of people every day.

3. Letter (sent from Rome) to Leslie Cheek, Jr., dated October 15, 1952:

I've been getting along very well. Spent a week in Florence which was almost impossible to take in in such a short time—but I will try and go back later. It was wonderful to return to Rome not as a stranger. I was able to make short stops at Assisi and try to see the beautiful Giotto—but the poor lighting makes it very difficult—also Siene. I plan to go to Africa at the end of this week for 2 or 3 months—going first to Tunis and visiting Carthage, then to Egypt—perhaps to Cairo, Greece and then back to Italy. I'm having a show here in Rome in Jan., at a very nice gallery near Via Veneto. The gallery where Matta and some young Italian painters exhibit. I've done quite a lot of work lately but mostly small things. I want to do a couple of figures and have them cast in bronze, which you can have done here in Rome very cheaply.

Conversation with the artist.

4. In an undated letter to Cheek sent from Tangier, Twombly wrote:

I've just returned from digging at a Roman bath with the Director of the Museum here—Northern Africa is covered with wonderful Roman sites and in this part they are just beginning in the last yr. to excavate. I've learned so much from the Arabs. My painting has changed a great deal. I have hundreds of sketches to use for paintings. Moving so much I haven't been able to actually paint. I've made 6 or 8 large tapestries out of bright material which the natives use for clothing—I plan to use them in my show in Rome next mo.—I can't begin to say how Africa has affected my work (for the better I hope).

I leave in the morning to go to Tétouan in Sp. Maroc for a few weeks, then to Sevilla & Madrid & the prehistoric section in Northern Sp.—before going to Rome. In Feb. I plan to go to Greece, Crete and then down to Egypt.

Cheek, usually quite prompt in his responses, replied to this letter on December 31, which would date Twombly's letter sometime around Christmas. This would seem to coincide with the account in Michelle Green, The Dream at the End of the World: Paul Bowles and the Literary Renegades in Tangier (New York: Harper & Row, 1991), p. 102:

In December, the two [Bowles and his friend Ahmed Yaouchi] left Tangier for a month in Tunis, a handsome town that was the capital of the Spanish zone. For company, they had the artist Robert Rauschenberg, who happened to be staying down the street from their hotel on the rue General Franco.

5. In his summary letter to the Virginia Museum (see note 61, below), Twombly stated that he had shown the tapestries in Rome and Florence, but no other record of a 1953 Rome showing of the tapestries, or any other work, has appeared.

6. I've been getting along very well. Spent a week in Siena, then to Tuscany and visiting Castiglione, then to Carthage and then back to Italy. I'm having a show here in Rome in Jan., at a very nice gallery near Via Veneto. The gallery where Matta and some young Italian painters exhibit. I've done quite a lot of work lately but mostly small things. I want to do a couple of figures and have them cast in bronze, which you can have done here in Rome very cheaply.

Conversation with the artist.

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57. In his summary letter to the Virginia Museum (see note 61, below), Twombly stated that he had shown the tapestries in Rome and Florence, but no other record of a 1953 Rome showing of the tapestries, or any other work, has appeared.

58. See the letter quoted in note 56, above. Rereading the letter in 1994, Twombly affirms that the drawings now associated with the North African journey were all done after the trip, in Rome.

59. There is a notable resemblance between the tapestry in fig. 30 and Rauschenberg's painting with fabric collage, Yicks, of 1934 (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York).

60. Twombly probably returned to New York in late April or very early May 1953. He remembers traveling on the ocean liner Andrea Doria. A letter to him from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, sent to Lexington and dated May 7, requested his summary statement regarding the use of the fellowship. The letter he then sent to Leslie Cheek, Jr., cited in note 61, below, mentions nine months of the fellowship, which would date the letter in May 1953.

61. Undated letter to Leslie Cheek, Jr. (probably written in May 1953; see note 60, above). The complete text is as follows:

I was able in nine months to do almost all of the things I intended to do—with possibly the exception of getting to Egypt. I visited most of the important towns, monuments and museums of Sicily, Italy, Spain, and Morocco.
It was important to live in each place long enough to absorb the old as well as the new climate.

Rome and Florence proved inextricable, for they are so rich and complex. In Rome on any street one can find a jewel of a Baroque church, or Roman sculpture in a street and car hidden away and never found in a tourist guide book.

I was quite taken by the Etruscan civilization, and made many trips to the tombs of Tarquinia and Vetulonia. Each day was filled with so many wonderful experiences that I found it hard to believe that things occurring in the morning, could have happened in the same day.

In Tarquin I made large simple abstract sculptures of bright colored raw material, and later exhibited them in Rome and in Florence. My painting was monumental and great.

Mr. Kootz was very happy at the development and has promised me that he will show my work regularly as soon as he has an opening. In the meantime another gallery has asked to show it.

It is difficult to begin to tell of the many, many things I saw and experienced—not only in the art and history but of human poetry and dimensions in the fleeting moment and thus.

I will always be able to find energy and excitement to work from these times. I see cleaner and even more things as I left.

It's been like one enormous awakening of finding many wonderful rooms in a house that you never knew existed.

As for future plans—I would very much like to find a teaching position in Virginia.

62. Rauschenberg told Barbara Rose (Rauschenberg, p. 47): 

Eleanor Ward wanted to show Twombly, and Cy felt that our works together had such impact that he wanted us to show together. Eleanor said that we could double the space in the gallery. We spent a summer raking out the basement to show Rauschenberg's early summer at the insistence of Jack Tworkov, and there saw we did it all! That was where I had my first all-black and all-white show....

...his sculptures...are properly made up from what we, here, stone, iron, wood, he picks up, and in so respect facts, the accidents of same. This is the term methodology, in this documentation, these sculptures of his also show how accurate his generation of the suitably bearing on us as there are the artifacts he finds surrounding himself in the same diggings out of which he is digging himself.

When interviewed by Barbara Rose, Rauschenberg affirmed that his works and Twombly's were mixed together in the exhibition (see note 62, above), and exact photos of the installation confirm this—contrary to the review by Lawrence Campbell, "Rauschenberg and Twombly (Stable; September 15—October 3)." Art News, vol. 52, no. 3 (September 1953), p. 50, which said that they "each occupy a separate floor."

64. James Fitzsimmons said, "Twombly's recent paintings are based on drawings made in North Africa, but there is nothing specifically African about them." (Art, Arts and Architecture, vol. 70, no. 10 [October 1953], p. 34).

66. We might compare these materials with those in the fetish figures Rauschenberg constructed for his shows in Florence and Rome. However, on the island of Procida during the summer of 1957, he did live and paint in two domed rooms that overlooked the sea, and this is the reference intended in the Pincus-Witten text.
fashioned spikes or totems. Presumably the feeling-content of this art is ugliness: shrillness, conflict, cruelty. There is something that resembles a crown of thorns. One is aware of the pain of the artist's imperfections and the ineptness of their work served to crystallize my impressions of a great deal of our avant garde painting.

In Art News, vol. 52, no. 5 (September 1953), p. 50, Lawrence Campbell also saw the relation to graffiti-marked walls, though in less negative terms:

'Twombly' paints fetish forms and black configurations on white surfaces which, more or less, partially hide other figures. These strange stringing lines, like series of arrows, or shapes like fingers or open mouths, are often fringed with smaller radiating lines, sometimes scratched into the white. They suggest anonymous drawings on walls, a resemblance enhanced by his interest in the textures of the paint. In places he has dropped bits of Dutch Boy lead white which have yellowed, and here and there he has introduced scribbled lines with orange—very faint toucher of color. Both artists show individual and interesting qualities.


72. Tomkins, Off the Wall, p. 85. My thanks to Leslie Jones for bringing this reference to my attention. In his unpublished notes for this book, Tomkins recorded a fuller version of Eleanor Ward's reminiscences over the impact of the show: "Everyone was hostile, with the exception of a few artists. One well known critic was so horrified he came out on the street literally clutching his forehead, and then fled down the block..."

In another part of these notes, she was recorded as remembering that "Cy's work seemed to affront people as much as Bob's then—the same scribbled image." She also recalled about the same time: "Bob's then—the same scribbled image." She also recalled about the time: "Bob's then—the same scribbled image."

73. Twombly has related that, when he was faced with the Army, his father convened a colonel and two majors to give him advice. He was told to: (1) never make a mistake, for that would let them "get your name" the following advice and did R.P. only once during his tour; and (2) score high on the I.Q. test (his success in this regard brought him the assignment in crypotgraphy).

He actually remembers basic training with some affection: he was impressed by the military's sense of balance and order, and by the precautions taken in teaching trainees to deal with deadly weapons. The most educational part of the experience was seeing the wide social range among the trainees, rural and urban, white and black, poor and middle-class, educated and uneducated.

74. This phrase is from the chronology prepared in collaboration with Twombly by Heiner Bastian in Cy Twombly: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, vol. 2, 1951-1966. 1953, p. 276.

75. Robert Pincus-Witten, after conversations with the artist, reported that "While in the army, Twombly recalls, he often drew at night, with lights out, perfecting a kind of meandering and imprecise graphology for which he would shortly be esteemed." ("Learning to Write," p.p.) In the same text, Pincus-Witten described Twombly's work from 1956-57 onward in these terms, related to the question of the artist's efforts to suppress virtuosity: "The heart of this work was secured in Twombly's sense of an elegance and naturally facile draughtsmanship. Pearing dickness, he drew as if with his left hand. To avoid striking the surface straight-on, he drew in oblique and contorted angles, punitively disciplining his linear seductiveness."

76. Twombly has recently given the following account of his Army experience after Camp Gordon. He was sent to work at the Pentagon in Washington, but the decoding work he was given was racing for him; he thinks he is "too vague" for such exacting tasks, and remembers the uncomfortable pressure of feeling that any mistake might be construed as an act of sabotage. Eventually, his superiors gave him a choice of reassignment to London or Paris, but he said he preferred to stay in Washington. Then they proposed to send him to an air base in the Midwest. This prospect "broke my concentration." He stopped decoding near the end of one week and complained to an officer; he was then taken for psychiatric observation to Walter Reed Hospital and kept there for the weekend. By chance that weekend the hospital was host to a conference of psychiatrists, and Twombly and one other patient were chosen to be interviewed by a panel of these doctors. One of the questions asked of him in this interview was, "What do you think of van Gogh's last painting?" Upon the panel's recommendation, he was given a medical discharge for reasons of "anxiety," and he happily went back to his quarters, packed his bags, and left—conversation with the artist.

This departure from the Army can be dated by an article in The Virginia Reel, a newsletter of Southern Seminary, vol. 8, no. 2 (April-May 1953), p. 3 (see note 90, below), which specifies in connection with Twombly's appointment that "Mr. Twombly served in the Intelligence Corps of the United States Army, from which he was separated in August."

In the unpublished notes of his interview with Eleanor Ward, Calvin Tomkins records her as saying that Twombly was drafted right after the joint show with Rauschenberg, was "away ten months, [and] had a dreadful time." Combining these sources, we can see Twombly's Army period as beginning in November 1953 and ending in August 1954.

77. In her interview with Rauschenberg, Barbara Rose said: "The first pictures I ever saw of Cy's were the 'graffiti' paintings. Rauschenberg corrected her: "The drawings, you mean. Everybody said that it wasn't painting, but drawing. But he did some really baroque painting early on." (Rose, Rauschenberg, p. 37).

78. This exhibition included Bastian 1, nos. 43, 45 (pl. 17), 46, 47, 46 (pl. 19), 49. The乳业 gallery itself was called "American Art." The catalogue annotated the exhibition as "recent works," and although Twombly was away in the Army, and had included Salon II (Bastian 1, no. 32). It is interesting to note that this group show came only a few months after the joint show with Rauschenberg, yet Twombly (and/or Ward) chose not to display any of the recent works, which had not sold.

At the time of the January 1955 show, Twombly's work attracted attention from an unlikely quarter: the art department of the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., requested a group of works to show in its gallery the following month. A letter from Clare Fontanina, head of the art department, dated January 24, 1955, confirms that the request had already been made, through Father Alexus Robertson, and that he would select the works on January 31. A checklist of the show in the Eleanor Ward Papers documents that it included twelve works by Twombly and eight African masks, and ran February 7—March 4. It lists the following Twombly works: (1) Drawing I, oil and pencil; (2) "Laia," oil, owned by Thomas Wilber; (3) "Quandry," oil, owned by Thomas Wilber; (4) Drawing II, oil and pencil; (5) Drawing II, oil and pencil; (6) Salon II, oil; (7) "Quandry," oil; (8) "Solon II," oil; (9) Drawing IV, oil and pencil; (10) "Laia," oil, owned by Thomas Wilber; (11) "Veluchis," oil; (12) "Marrakesh," oil.

Allowing for typing errors, it seems certain that number 11 was possibly by Bastian for this information.

79. Frank O'Hara, "Cy Twombly," Art News, vol. 53, no. 8 (December 1954), p. 46: "Cy Twombly previously showed with Gandy [Brodie] and with Rauschenberg and the heavy, brooding forms which dominated his canvases were given an air of force and of experiment alien to them by juxtaposition with quite different works."

Twombly has referred to a now lost 1954 painting with a motif that resembled a "skinned turkey" as being the one that apparently prompted O'Hara's remarks about bird claws dragged through the paint. That "bird" motif is found among the Augustus drawings still owned by the artist. He has also pointed out a passage in the center top of an untitled 1954 painting (pl. 19), which he said related to a doodle made by a sergeant at Camp Gordon (conversation with the artist).

80. Rauschenberg's untitled 1955 sculpture made from a Coca-Cola bottle crate, now in Twombly's collections (reproduced in Hoppé, Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s, p. 162), includes two circular mirrors closely resembling those which appear in Twombly's piece in The Menil Collection (fig. 18). Rauschenberg also used mirrors in the few pieces he made in Rome in early 1953, and in one of the sculptures he showed in the September 1953 joint exhibition at the Stable Gallery.

81. The palm-leaf fans themselves could plausibly have been items associated with the warm climates of either Italy or North Africa (and their metonymic standing in as palm trees makes them even more natural for the latter), but they were also a staple item of the southern United States before the spread of air-conditioning, and would have been for Twombly a reminder of origins as well as travels. Twombly has recently affirmed that the standing fan suggested for him a poised cobra with its hood spread behind its head (my thanks to Heiner Bastian for this information).

82. The painting seen at the left in the background of fig. 16 is a work shown in the 1955 exhibition and now lost (recorded as no. 44 in Bastian). The other large painting in these photographs, and those attached to sculptures, are not otherwise documented and presumably no longer exist.

The resolutely frontal, planar nature of much of this sculpture is worth noting. Unlike many of Twombly's later assemblages, these works are conceived very pictorially, often to the point of including a frame. Of special interest is the standing "fence" of branch-like rods on the floor behind the ornate bundled column in fig. 16, a sculptural conception without readily identifiable precedent (and without issue in the artist's later work).

83. The reproduction of Panorama in Bastian, Cy Twombly: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, vol. I, 1941-1966, pp. 98-99, intensifies the contrast of light and dark to make the lines clearly visible, but in so doing makes the picture appear more sharply focused and less grey than in fact it now is. A comparison of the painting itself with older photographs of it suggests some differences in surface. In addition to the photograph of the painting in its original state published here, see also the photograph of Twombly standing in front of Panorama at or near the time of its execution, in Heiner Bastian, Cy Twombly: Bilder/Paintings, 1952-1958 (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, and Vienna: Propyläen Verlag, 1978), p. 54; and the photograph of Twombly standing in front of Panorama, published in Flash Art, no. 8 (September-October 1968), p. 50.

84. The artist remembers that the large scale of Panorama made it possible by the acquisition of a 9 x 12' piece of drop-cloth material for the studio (conversation with the artist). The sewn on mate-
This poses a potential conflict with Eva Karp's recollection. The picture figure in an interview with Karp carried out by Paul Cuminns for the Archives of American Art on March 12, 1969.

Of Twombly, Karp said:

"To me he's one of the most important forces in American art. I remember as a young man wandering about the New York art scene that Twombly made a very powerful impression on me when I first saw his work at the Stable Gallery in the middle fifties. I think it was. The white chalk on the blackboards were shown first at the Stable Gallery, it was actually white chalk at that point. There were more than a few amateurs at that time. I think Mrs. Ward, the Director of the Stable Gallery, still has a couple of those paintings. Twombly says he always wants to go see them. I remember there was a disparaging review of them but they had an illustration of his blackboard painting (I think it may be a reference to Alfred Frankfurter, "The Voyage of Dr. Caligari Through Time and Space," Art News, vol. 33, no. 9 [January 1937], p. 31). I remember cutting it out and put it on my personal dictionary at home, my little precious dictionary. And that was my prime illustration of what art was supposed to be. I thought that was the most important object of abstract art in the world.

Twombly, on reading this account in 1994, stated that Eleanor Ward never had any of the grey canvases, and that Panorama was the only surviving example.

84. Twombly had apparently been working alternately in white on black and black on white for some time: Rauschenberg remembered "some sort of blackboard series" being done in 1952 (see note 43, above), but if grey-ground works were done then, none survive and none were recorded by the artist for his catalogue raisonné.

85. At the upper right of Panorama (pl. 23), the form of the sculpture with two fans (pl. 25), drawn in a cartoon-like wavering fashion, can be discerned (identification made by the artist in conversation).

86. This difference in the treatment of the edges of the field may owe something to the different working methods. Pollock circled his "some sort of blackboard series" being done in 1952 (see note 43, above), but if grey-ground works were done then, none survive and none were recorded by the artist for his catalogue raisonné.

87. The canvases in this show included Bastian 1, nos. 53-59.

91. These three 1954 drawings, in Rauschenberg's collection, are in colored crayon, with some paint, on the same pastel paper as the Augustus drawings, and apparently were made near the same time. Rauschenberg remembers them as having been done in New York, and it is possible they were made during one of the weekends when Twombly took from his posting in Washington, or later in 1954 after his discharge from the Army. They also resemble the Twombly drawing that Rauschenberg included in his painting Rebe in 1955 (private collection, France).

93. The canvases in this show included Bastian 1, nos. 53-59.

104. Conversation with the artist.

105. The game of trying to "read" these canvases is tedious, reducible, and ultimately inconclusive, albeit also challenging and hard to resist. To guard against too much reading-in, the search is best undertaken in front of the actual works, even if the minimizing effort of reproduction can sometimes make the widely dispersed letters more legible. See for example an untitled painting of 1955 (Bastian 1, no. 56, reproduced p. 109), where rising and falling curvilinear strokes to the left and gentler curving strokes to the right conform to both "What" and "Why" with a following question mark. Similarly, the word "such" can arguably be discerned at the bottom center of Acadian (pl. 30). Such "readings" are, however, far from central to the effect of the works, and "legibility" is clearly more desired than encouraged.

had thought about coming to New York for the month of June and staying in the apt. We can make plans about the apt. after I know what I will be doing next yr. & etc, but I would like to stay there if I can.

(All the above documents are in the Eleanor Ward Papers. No record of this application exists in the files of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.)

As for Twombly's continuation at Southern Seminary the following year, the autumn 1955 issue of The Virginia Reel (vol. 9, no. 1, p. 6) relates that he was at the school for the Halloween party: "A bit among hits was the impromptu jitter-bugging of Mr. Twombly, assisted by a score of courageous partners." The return address on Twombly's application for the Fellowship (see note 99, below) shows he was still there in the spring of 1956. He taught (according to the Catherwood application) one course in Drawing and Painting, two in Art History, three in Commercial Art, and four in History of Architecture and Interior Decoration (beginning and advanced courses).

99. The application for the Catherwood Foundation Fellowship Grant and associated material are in the files of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Twombly's statement reads:

It is quite obvious that one of the first great assets to a Fellowship is the essential direct energy toward one's own work. The second and equally important is the opportunity to go to the cultural & artistic sources of which the roots and expansion are in Europe.

Since having been to parts of Europe, I can sense friendships among the painters, writers and international vet that afford invaluable exchange of ideas in creative research and new directions for both sides. I have also been offered shows in galleries in both Paris and Rome, which show the more important French and Italian contemporary art. Due to the expense of shipping, I could only do this if I were there.

If my work seems difficult to someone not familiar with present trends in painting, it is now the less serene and dedicated to its intellectual honesty.

Since the middle of the 19th Century, the most important and truly creative art has come from the advanced groups; therefore the problem lies in the complete expression of one's own personality through every faculty available. The mass of derivative and mediocre painting soon falls away, leaving only the daring, that week which remains vital because of its unique vision.

I feel more and more that my work has evolved out of the interest in the visible, in the abstract, and in the classic stages, and a deeply aesthetic sense of eroded or ancient surfaces of time.

A letter of recommendation written by Marca-Relli in connection with Twombly's 1955 application for a fellowship, note 98, above, Marca-Relli summered on Long Island, and Twombly visited him there. In the summer of 1956, on Long Island, Twombly met Jackson Pollock on three occasions (conversation with the artist). Since the Museum of Modern Art presented in 1949 a major exhibition, "Twentieth-Century Italian Art." The Catherine Viviano Gallery opened the next year with "Five Italian Painters." Afro spent eight months in the United States around the time of his one-artist show at Viviano in 1950, and at that time developed his knowledge of and admiration for the painting of Gorky (see Germano Celant and Anna Costantini, Roma-New York, 1968-1968, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Milan and Florence: Edizioni Chatta, 1993, p. 59). In this period, Sam Kootz and Sydney Janis were mounting exhibitions that presented European and American artists together. The Museum of Modern Art also showed in 1955 (May 12-August 2) "The New Decade: Twenty-two European Painters and Sculptors." Burri came to New York for this exhibition, and for his own one-person show at the Stable Gallery in the same spring. Piero Dorazio was in New York in the same year.

They were close to the Communist party; they did not really have Castro [Remo Guttuso, the leading artist/ideologue of socialist realism in Italian art of the early 1950s], but they had never shown an abstract picture. Naturally, the young artists did their best to democratiser the gallery, and to make it show something new. De Mattis was already in touch with Giorgio Franchetti, and when Totti Scialoja and I returned from New York (in the autumn of 1956), Afro informed Totti about what had been going on and said we should think of La Tartaruga as a support for new initiatives. And indeed, two years later, Giorgio Franchetti left for New York.

112. Piero Dorazio, an abstract painter and outspoken enemy of Stalinist policies, had a show there in January 1957. In February, Tartaruga featured Afro, Burri, and Scialoja in a joint show; and in May and October respectively it showed two artists who symbolized the "American connection," Salvatore Scarpitta and Conrad Marca-Relli.


114. Cesare Vivaldi, "Cy Twombly tra ironia e lirismo / Cy Twombly between irony and lirism / Cy Twombly Between Irony and Lyricism [sic]," in Galleria La Tartaruga (Rome: Galleria La Tartaruga, 100.)

From Twombly's application for a fellowship in 1956; see note 99, above.

"morte" appears in Sunset (Bastian 1, no. 93) at the upper right; and "morte" appears in Bacchus (Bastian 1, no. 31), just to the right and above center. "morte" is written in an unstated work (Bastian 1, no. 68) at the right just above center; in another work (Bastian 1, no. 99, pl. 35) in the same place; and in a third (fig. 21) in swirl, at the upper right. There is a likely connection between these inclusions and the contextual words Arcadia (Bastian 1, no. 99). Twombly's notion of Arcadia was strongly marked by Poussin's Et in Arcadia Ego, which deals with discovery of a tomb, and hence of death's presence, amid the idyll, Arcadian realm.

Several unpublished letters to Eleanor Ward reveal Twombly's reactions to the Italian scene in his first year there. In what appears to be his first letter after arriving in the spring of 1957, he says, "Had dinner with Gabriela, Toni & the Afros the other night. Arte Viave has folded. The gallery situation is nil. Even Atto had to show at a Communist gallery on Babuino & there was hardly any response." Presumably, the gallery referred to was in fact the Tartaruga, which was then located at 196 via del Babuino. The reference to the collapse of Arte Viave is premature: the periodical published its last issue in November 1956. A year later, in a letter apparently from March 1958, Twombly inquires, "Do you know if Bob sold anything from his show?" (presumably referring to Raschenberg's first one-person exhibition with Leo Castelli, in March 1958), and says, "There is very little chance of my selling here." With regard to employment, in an undated letter apparently from late April 1957, Twombly writes, "I wrote Porter McKay [McCray] finding me a teaching position for Fall & I hope something comes of it." In the same letter referred to above (apparently from March 1958), he asks, "If anyone is looking for a teacher next winter write me to inquire." Finally, in a letter of October 1958, after a reference to the teaching position Marcia-Reilly had just taken up in California, Twombly says, "I hope I can get that job next year. Then I would come back to Europe for a few more yrs."

A group of letters from Twombly to Ward indicates that the show at Tartaruga was postponed at least twice because the artist fell ill and had to be hospitalized in the early part of 1958. The show was held August 18-27, 1958, at Galleria del Cavallino in Venice, and then November 1-10, 1958, at Galleria del Naviglio in Milan. Twombly sent Ward a postcard on November 10 saying: "Show in Milano 'gran successo.' Sold everything and want more (which don't exist)." A later letter continues, "Art Aujourd'hui is doing a big article with about 6 reproductions; assume you'll see it. I think it all seems odd. They even want a show in Stockholm."

A newspaper clipping in Twombly's file in the alumni office at Washington and Lee, dated January 1, 1959, is headlined "Twombly's Return More After Successful Tour in Europe." It describes how "recently returned to Lexington from Europe, where his paintings have been received with wide interest." The article says he plans to work here for about three months in preparation for shows in New York and in London and Paris. On the basis of this article, it seems safe to assume that Twombly was in Lexington in time for Christmas.

Apparently Twombly traveled to Cuba early in 1959, after Castro's forces had entered Havana on January 2. A postcard to Leo Castelli says, "I love Havana as it is quite like Napoli, but not so grand... Will see you in N.Y. in April." The postmark of the card is illegible except for the year, which is 1959. Both Twombly and his wife, Tatiana, have a clear memory of being in Havana shortly after the Castro triumph, when soldiers had gone there to celebrate and the whole city was alive with festivity. This visit had been thought to be part of their honeymoon in June, but may in fact have been at this earlier date.

An undated letter to Castelli, sent from Lexington, specifies that Twombly has "7x 9 x 8 paintings finished and stretched," and says that he will soon leave for a month's visit elsewhere, then "for my dearest Romes," bringing nusretio to New York "somewhere around the first of April." Castelli apparently is replying to this letter in his letter of February 28, 1959, when he says, "Yes, do send the four 6 x 8 that you have finished. I would like to have them."

Using the letter to Castelli, apparently of mid-February (see note 133, above), we can judge that four of the Lexington canvases, described as 6 x 8', had been finished by that date. Bastian 1, nos. 110-16 are each within an inch or two of being exactly 6 x 8', and are thus presumably the works referred to in the letter. A second group, of somewhat smaller canvases, approximately 5 x 6' in size, includes a work (Bastian 1, no. 106) specifically dated on the recto "Lexington May 23." Presumably the others of the same size (Bastian 1, nos. 110-12) were executed near that same time. Two other works associated with this series (Bastian 1, nos. 117, 135) are x 3', larger size, 7' 8" x 4' 9"; their date cannot be fixed precisely.

For a listing of the canvases likely to have been executed in May, see note 134, above.

Conversations with the artist.

The alumni magazine of Washington and Lee University, in its spring 1959 issue, contained the notice:

Twombly's work for the 1959-60 school year is in the alumnae and with the same qualifications (see note 91, above), the word "OK" might be discerned here, to the left of the word "olympia."

Twombly's use here of his own handwriting as a source of abstract pattern anticipates, in certain senses, his later use of cursive scrolls, in the manner of pyramids' exercises, in the grey-ground pictures of 1966-71 (see text below).
On August 10 he sent a radiogram urging that Twombly send paintings to a rush, in time for a show in November. It was likely in response to this cable that Twombly replied:

"I do have a new paintings quite different from those you have, but they are painted with tube paint and so they take a lot of time to dry. I can't very well send them now—there are none available of the old ones & I haven't even got the black one as I was waiting to be settled first—You wouldn't consider just using the ones done in V.T.? This fall will be heavy with moving, a child & about 8 shows here in Europe starting in Oct.—will go to Paris the 1st of Nov., as I have a show at the Palace of Arts in Brussels... in a way I like the image of seeing just the paintings you have with a few drawings—the obsessive austerity of the idea rather than variation—the book by that time would be ready and can be a reference to before and after works. The new things are naturally more active and physical so a certain poetry would be lost with juxtaposition with these—my ideas at a time are maybe too singular and don't take in a very rounded possibility."

This letter was probably written during the week of August 20, as Castelli responded to it on August 21, Soliciting Twombly and still urging him to send "the four new paintings and the revised black one" and "if possible to add a few more important ones." Finally, a telegram from Twombly to Castelli on September 17 said, "Everything up in the air and working hopelessly will have to postpone show until another year terribly sorry."

139. The circumstances of the making of The Age of Alexander were recounted by the artist in a conversation with the author.

140. To some extent these contingencies explain the relative emptiness of the left half, especially in the upper area, and the barrenness of the top edge throughout: the dominance of activity, including the heaviest pink-white paint, centers in the right half of the canvas at what would have been eye level, and extends within the compass of an arm's reach above and below.

141. We can read at various points, for example: "o'clock," "1919 into 1966," "new," (1960), "give a Sign!", "Why cry anymore?" "foolish," "sad flight," and most prominently, low and left of center "[illegible] why / my heart / in your / birth / [illegible] Death / for even."

142. He also writes, "There is still work to be done and I have been doing the props each day in my half-ass Italian without any disastrous results yet... I leave for the Sahara in 10 days or so—for a month and then most likely to Greece in the summer."

143. Conversation with the artist.

144. See for example Bastian 1, no. 148 (untitled); and Bastian 1, no. 62 (Nicotiana).

145. See note 43, above, for Rauschenberg on Twombly's "baroque" painting.

146. The connection of "formless" painterly expression with the transgressive nature of the lower body as a theme is a topic closely associated with the writer Georges Bataille, as has often been elucidated in recent writings by Rosalind Krauss. For her latest work, see The Optical Unconscious. See also the round-table discussion of "The Politics of the Signifier in: A Conversation on the Informe and the Abject," October, no. 67 (Winter 1994), pp. 3–21.

147. See Bastian 11, no. 82, where Twombly specifically associates colors with landscape and body references.

148. Conversation with the artist.

149. The connection of Twombly's art of the 1960s with the Roman Baroque has been a staple of commentary on the artist; its first appearance may be in Robert Pincus-Witten's essay, "Learning to Write," for the catalogue of Twombly's first museum exhibition in America, at the Milwaukee Art Center in 1968. "His pictures, already large, grew space with a preoccupation with the Baroque richness of his new environment.... The pictographic unrolling of his pictures was profoundly altered by the sweeping planes and space of the Baroque contract."

150. Conversation with the artist.

151. These are the recollections of Twombly and Nicola del Roscio:

"152. There exists correspondence between Twombly and Leo Castelli on the Commodus series. In an undated letter, Twombly says: Have you seen series finished, 9 in all and 1 separate piece if you need it?... I am really terribly happy over them & I think you will be pleased by them. Thank you so much for going the check on the Commodus: I lost my head for it, but it inspired this series so maybe it is good to lose my head & gain a new.

Note the implication that Twombly's purchase of a head of Commodus in New York was the immediate spur to the paintings. Castelli replies to this letter on January 16, 1964.

153. Donald Judd, "Cy Twombly," Art Magazine, vol. 38, nos. 8–9 (May–June 1974), p. 38: Twombly has not shown for some time, and this adds to the fiasco. In these paintings there are a couple of spots of red paint mixed with a little yellow and white and placed high on a medium-grey surface. There are a few days and spatters and an occasional pencil line. There isn't anything to the paintings.

154. Conversation with the artist.


156. Max Kozloff, "Cy Twombly, Castelli Gallery," Artforum, vol. 6, no. 4 (December 1967), p. 34.


158. The problem of scale presented by this huge canvas and the other one made at the same time was solved in an ingeniously low-tech fashion. Twombly wanted to be able to work continuously across the width of the works, at every level including those well above his reach. A motorized lift or rolling ladder could conceivably have solved the problem, but Twombly worked in a much simpler fashion. The upper areas of both canvases were executed with the artist sitting on the shoulders of a friend, Nicola del Roscio, who shuttled back and forth across the canvas so that Twombly could work on the moving surface as if he were a typewriter striking its moving platen (conversation with Nicola del Roscio, September 1993).

159. Conversation with the artist. To gain some idea of the Bassano environment, see "Portrait of a House—As the Artist," with photographs by Deborah Turbeville, Vogue, vol. 172, no. 12 (December 1982), pp. 226–274, 337.

160. Conversation with the artist.


162. Conversation with the artist.

163. Conversation with the artist.


165. Conversation with the artist.


168. Conversation with the artist.

169. Conversation with the artist.

170. Conversation with the artist.

171. Conversation with the artist.

172. Conversation with the artist.


174. Conversation with the artist.

176. In a rough schema of Europe, Twombly thanks, as others have, of Germany in terms of philosophy, France in relation to language, and Italy as a realm of feeling. (One might measure the truth content of such stereotypes by comparing the kinds of critical response Twombly's own work has garnered from each of these cultures.) It is the heavy role of instinct and feeling that he designates as the "infantile" element in Italian, and by extension Mediterranean, culture.


   For the top left lines (from p. 411):
   Yet there, on the other shore, under the sun's black star, 
   you wore male pride, and held your shoulders, 
   you were there, you suffered 
   the other labor, love, 
   the other dawn, the appearance 
   the other birth, the resurrection. 
   Yet there, in the vast dilation of time, 
   you were remade 
   deep by deep, like veins, 
   like the stalactite, the stalagmite.

   For the top right lines (from p. 412):
   The blood surges now 
   as heat swells 
   the veins of the inflamed sky. 
   It is trying to go beyond death, to discover joy. 
   The light is a pulse 
   beating ever more slowly 
   as though about to stop.


180. The line is from Baudelaire's "Journaux intimes," originally published posthumously in 1877; see "Journaux intimes, Fades ([Hygiène])," in Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, p. 1265.

181. My thanks to Udo Brandhorst for identifying the lines of poetry in this painting. See George Seferis: Collected Poems, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (expanded ed., London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1980). Twombly's phrases are fragments of different poems, and several lines are deliberately abbreviated by the artist. The immediate contexts are:

   For the top left lines (from p. 411):
   "Essentially I'm a matter of light." 
   And still today when you lean 
   on the broad shoulders of sleep 
   or even when they anchor you 
   to the sea's shrewd breast 
   you look for security where the blackness 
   has worn thin and has no resistance 
   gaping you search for the lance— 
   the lance destined to pierce your heart 
   and lay it open to the light.
PLATES

The works illustrated in the plate section are included in the exhibition, with the following exceptions: pls. 8a, 8b, 34, 41, 43, 46, 119, 120.

In the captions, dimensions are given height preceding width, followed in the case of sculpture by depth.
LEFT: 1. Untitled, 1946. Wood and metal, 14⅜ × 3⅜ × 3½" (37 × 9 × 9.5 cm). Private collection

RIGHT: 2. Untitled, c. 1947. Doorknobs, faucet handle, wood, and paint, 14 × 10¾ × 12" (35.7 × 26.7 × 30.5 cm). Collection the artist
3. MIN-OE. 1955. Bitumen and house paint on canvas, 34 X 40" (86.4 X 101.6 cm). Collection Robert Rauschenberg
4. Untitled. 1951. House paint on canvas, 40 × 48" (101.6 × 121.9 cm). Private collection
5. Solon I. 1952. House paint and earth on canvas, 40 × 32 1/4" (101.6 × 132.7 cm). Private collection
6. Untitled. 1953. Conté crayon on paper, 28⅛ × 34⅞" (71.7 × 87.6 cm). Collection the artist.
7. Untitled. 1953. House paint and wax on fabric and wood, with twine, wire, and nails, 15 1/4 x 10 x 4" (39 x 25.4 x 10.1 cm). Collection Robert Rauschenberg
9. Study for Tiznit. 1953. Conté crayon on paper, 28 1/4 × 34 1/8" (71.7 × 87.6 cm). Collection the artist
OPPOSITE: 10. Detail of upper center of *Tiznit* (pl. 11), actual size

ABOVE: 11. *Tiznit*. 1953. White lead, house paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 53 3/5" × 6' 2 1/2" (133.0 × 189.2 cm). Private collection
LEFT:  12. Untitled. 1953. Monotype in paint, 20 1/4 x 26 1/4" (51 x 67.2 cm). Collection the artist

RIGHT:  13. Untitled. 1953. Monotype in paint, 20 x 26 1/2" (50.9 x 67.2 cm). Collection the artist
LEFT: 15. Untitled. 1954. Pencil on paper, 19 × 25" (48.2 × 63.5 cm). Collection the artist

RIGHT: 16. Untitled. 1954. Pencil on paper, 19 × 25" (48.2 × 63.5 cm). Collection the artist
17. Untitled. 1954. House paint and pencil on canvas, $28\frac{3}{4} \times 36'' (73.4 \times 91.4 \text{ cm}). The Menil Collection, Houston
OPPOSITE: 18. Detail of upper edge, center, of untitled painting (pl. 19), actual size

ABOVE: 19. Untitled. 1954. House paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 68 3/4" × 72 2/3" (174.5 × 218.5 cm). Private collection


BOTTOM: 22. Untitled. 1954. Gouache and crayon on paper, 19 x 25" (48.2 x 63.5 cm). Collection Robert Rauschenberg
24. Untitled. 1955. Wood, cloth, string, and wall paint, 22\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 5\(\frac{1}{8}\) x 5\(\frac{3}{4}\)” (56.5 x 14.3 x 13 cm). Collection the artist
55. Untitled. c. 1935. House paint, two fans, and wooden box, 54½ × 26¼ × 5" (138.5 × 66.8 × 12.8 cm). Collection the artist
27. Criticism. 1955. House paint, crayon, pencil, and pastel on canvas, 50 × 57¾" (127 × 147 cm). Private collection
Opposite: 28. Detail of right center of Free Wheeler (pl. 29), actual size

Above: 29. Free Wheeler. 1955. House paint, crayon, pencil, and pastel on canvas, 68\frac{5}{8}" x 6' 2\frac{3}{4}" (174 x 190 cm). Marx Collection, Berlin
30. Academy. 1955. House paint, pencil, and pastel on canvas, 6' 3¾" X 7' 10¾" (191 X 241 cm). Private collection
31. *Olympia*. 1957. House paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 6' 6 3/4" x 8' 8 3/8" (200 x 264.5 cm). Private collection
OBSITE: 32. Detail of upper right of Blue Room (pl. 33), actual size

ABOVE: 31. Blue Room. 1957. House paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 56⅜ × 71¾" (142.9 × 181.6 cm). Sonnabend Collection
34. Untitled. 1958. Pencil and crayon on paper, 27 1/4 x 39 3/8" (70 x 100 cm). Courtesy Galerie Kasten Greve, Cologne
35. Untitled. 1958. House paint and pencil on canvas, 52 1/4 × 62 1/4" (134 × 159 cm). Collection David Geffen
36. Untitled. 1959. House paint, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 6' 2" × 8' 2" (188 × 249 cm). Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston
37. Untitled. 1959. House paint, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 6' 2" × 8' 2" (188 × 249 cm). Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston
38. Untitled. 1959. Pencil on paper, 24 × 30⅞" (60.9 × 92 cm). Private collection
39. Untitled. 1959. Pencil on paper, 24 × 30½" (60.9 × 92 cm). Private collection
40. Untitled (Sperlonga), 1959. Collage with paint on paper, 33 7/8 x 34 3/4" (85.7 x 87.6 cm). Private collection
41. Untitled. 1959. House paint, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 60" × 6' 2" (152.4 × 188 cm). Private collection
42. Untitled (Sperlonga). 1959. Paint and pencil on paper, 27 3/4 x 39 3/4" (70 x 99.6 cm). Collection Reiner Speck
43. Untitled (Sperlonga). 1959. Paint and pencil on paper, 27⅜ × 39⅜" (69.3 × 99.7 cm). Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne
44. Untitled (Sperlonga), 1959. Paint, pastel, and pencil on paper, 27 × 30⅞" (68.5 × 100.3 cm). Sonnabend Collection
45. Study for Presence of a Myth. 1959. Pencil and oil on canvas, 70¾" × 6' 6¾" (178 × 200 cm). Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum
ABOVE: 46. View. 1959. Pencil and oil on canvas, 70" x 6' 6½" (177.8 x 200 cm). Morton G. Neumann Family Collection

FOLDOUT: 47. The Age of Alexander. 1959–60. Oil, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 9' 9½" x 16' 4¼" (300 x 500 cm). Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston
FOLDOUT: 48. Triumph of Galatea. 1961. Oil, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 9' 7¼" X 15' 10¾" (294.3 x 483.5 cm). Collection the artist. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston.

50. The Italians. 1961. Oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 6' 6\(\frac{3}{4}\)" × 8' 6\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (199.3 × 259.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Blanchette Rockefeller Fund.
111. The First Part of the Return from Parnassus. 1961. Oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 7' 10\(\frac{3}{8}\)" × 9' 10\(\frac{3}{8}\)" (240.7 × 300.7 cm). Private collection
52. School of Athens. 1961. Oil, house paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 6' 2/3 x 6' 6/3" (190.3 x 200.5 cm). Private collection
53. *Empire of Flora*. 1961. Oil, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 6' 6\(\frac{3}{4}\)" × 7' 11\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (200 × 242 cm). Marx Collection, Berlin
OPPOSITE: 54. Detail of lower right of Bay of Naples (pl. 55), actual size

ABOVE: 55. Bay of Naples. 1961. Oil, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 7' 11½" x 9' 9½" (240 x 300 cm). Dia Center for the Arts, New York, and The Menil Collection, Houston


59. Untitled. 1961. Oil, crayon, house paint, and pencil on canvas, 6' 7½" × 7' 10½" (202.5 × 240.5 cm). Private collection
60. **Ferragosto IV.** 1961. Oil, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 65\(\frac{3}{4}\)" × 6' 6\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (165.4 × 200.4 cm). Collection David Geffen
LEFT:  62. Untitled. 1961–63. Ballpoint pen, pencil, and crayon on paper, 13½ × 14" (33.6 × 35.6 cm). Collection the artist

RIGHT:  63. Untitled. 1961. Ballpoint pen, pencil, and crayon on paper, 13½ × 14" (33.6 × 35.6 cm). Private collection
64. **Leda and the Swan.** 1962. Oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 6' 3" x 6' 6¼" (190.5 x 200 cm). Private collection. On loan to the Kunstmuseum, Bonn
65. Night Watch. 1966. House paint and crayon on canvas, 6' 2\frac{3}{4}" × 6' 6\frac{3}{4}" (190 × 200 cm). Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Paris, Milan
66. Untitled. 1967. House paint and crayon on canvas, 6' 7" × 8' 8" (200.7 × 264.3 cm). Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Paris, Milan
67. Untitled. 1968. Pencil and collage on paper, 37⅝ × 17⅞" (94.7 × 45.5 cm). Private collection
68. Untitled. 1968, 1971. House paint and crayon on canvas, 6' 6⅛" × 8' 1¾" (199 × 248.2 cm). Private collection, Germany
Oppo site: 69. Detail of lower left of untitled painting (pl. 70), actual size

Above: 70. Untitled. 1968. Oil and crayon on canvas, 6' 7" X 8' 7" (200.6 X 261.6 cm). Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.
The Albert Pilavin Collection of Twentieth-Century American Art
71. Untitled. 1969. Pencil and collage on paper, $34\frac{3}{8} \times 18''$ ($87.9 \times 45.7$ cm). Collection Robert Rauschenberg
72. Untitled. 1968. Pencil and collage on paper, 29 × 17½" (73.8 × 44.5 cm). Private collection
73. Untitled. 1969. Pencil and crayon on paper, 22\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 30\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (57.8 x 77.5 cm). Private collection
74. Untitled. 1969. Pencil and crayon on paper, 22¾ × 30½" (57.8 × 77.5 cm). Private collection.
75. Untitled (Bolsena), 1969. House paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 6' 6\frac{5}{8}'' \times 7' 10\frac{3}{8}'' (199.5 \times 240 cm). Private collection
76. Untitled (Bolsena). 1969. House paint, crayon, and pencil on canvas, 6' 6" × 7' 10\(\frac{1}{2}\" (200 × 240 cm). Collection Nicola del Roscio
On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston

On loan to the Kunstmuseum, Bonn
79. Untitled. 1971. Oil, house paint, and crayon on canvas, 6' 7\(\frac{3}{4}\)" x 11' 2\(\frac{1}{4}\)" (198 x 348 cm). Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston

LEFT: Apollo and the Artist. 1975. Oil, crayon, pencil, and collage on cardboard, 55 7/8 x 50 3/4" (142 x 127.4 cm). Collection Alessandro Twombly

RIGHT: Mars and the Artist. 1975. Oil, crayon, pencil, charcoal, and collage on cardboard, 55 7/8 x 50 3/4" (142 x 127.4 cm). Collection Alessandro Twombly
TOP: 84. Untitled. 1978. Wood, fabric, wire, nails, and paint, 17” X 7” X 7½” (43 X 222.5 x 19.5 cm). Private collection. On loan to the Kunsthau, Zurich

BOTTOM LEFT: 85. Anabasis. 1983. Pastel, oil, and pencil on paper, 30⅝ X 27⅞” (100 X 70 cm). Collection the artist

BOTTOM RIGHT: 86. Untitled. 1979. Bronze, gesso, and paint, 19⅛ X 16½ X 8¼” (49 X 42 X 22 cm). Private collection. On loan to the Kunsthau, Zurich
87. Untitled. 1977. Painted synthetic resin with crayon, 34\(\frac{3}{4}\) \times 31\(\frac{3}{4}\) \times 7\(\frac{1}{4}\)" (87 \times 79 \times 18.5 cm). Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston
88. Untitled. 1980. Oil, watercolor, synthetic polymer paint, chalk, pastel, and photocopy on paper; three sheets: 23 3/4 x 19 3/4" (60 x 50.5 cm); 47 x 39 3/4" (119.5 x 101 cm); and 13 3/4 x 8 3/4" (33 x 21.5 cm). Private collection.
89. Naxos. 1982. Oil, crayon, pencil, and tempera on paper; three sheets: 32⅔ × 25" (82.3 × 63.5 cm); 68⅔ × 55⅛" (173.7 × 141.5 cm); and 32⅔ × 25" (82.3 × 63.5 cm). Collection Froehlich, Stuttgart
90. **Suma**. 1982. Oil, crayon, and pencil on paper, $50\frac{1}{2} \times 50\frac{1}{2}$" (143.5 x 127.5 cm). Private collection. Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: 91. **Hero and Leander.** 1981 (left panel replaced 1984). Oil and crayon on canvas; three panels: 60 5/8" × 6' 8 3/4" (184 × 205 cm); 68 1/8" × 6' 11 3/4" (174 × 213 cm); and 68 1/8" × 6' 11 3/4" (174 × 213 cm). Private collection
92. Wilder Shores of Love. 1985. Oil, crayon, and pencil on plywood, 55⅜ × 47⅝" (140 × 120 cm). Private collection
93. *Wilder Shores of Love*. 1985. Oil, crayon, and pencil on plywood, 55 1/4 x 47 1/4" (140 x 120 cm). Private collection
94. Winter's Passage, LUXOR. 1985. Wood, nails, and paint, 21 1/4 x 41 7/8 x 20 3/8" (54 x 105.7 x 51.6 cm). Private collection. On loan to the Kunsthalle, Zurich
95. Untitled. 1964, 1984. Oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 6' 8\%" x 8' 2\%" (204 x 240.5 cm). Collection Emily Fisher Landau, New York
Gaeta Set I. 1986 (series of six drawings; shown top left to bottom right). Private collection

96. Gaeta Set I, no. 1. House paint, crayon, and oil on paper, 11 1/4 x 10 5/8" (28.5 x 26.5 cm).
97. Gaeta Set I, no. 2. House paint, crayon, and oil on paper, 11 1/4 x 9 3/4" (28.5 x 25 cm).
98. Gaeta Set I, no. 3. House paint, crayon, and oil on paper, 11 1/4 x 9 5/8" (28.5 x 25 cm).
99. Gaeta Set I, no. 4. House paint, pencil, and crayon on paper, 11 1/4 x 10 5/8" (28.5 x 27.5 cm).
100. Gaeta Set I, no. 5. House paint, crayon, and oil on paper, 11 1/4 x 9 5/8" (28.5 x 25 cm).
101. Gaeta Set I, no. 6. House paint, crayon, and oil on paper, 11 1/4 x 9 5/8" (28.5 x 24.5 cm).
Gaeta Set II. 1986 (series of eight drawings; shown top left to bottom right). Private collection

102. Gaeta Set II, no. 1. Pastel on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
103. Gaeta Set II, no. 2. House paint and tempera on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
104. Gaeta Set II, no. 3. House paint and tempera on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
105. Gaeta Set II, no. 4. Tempera, house paint, crayon, and pencil on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
106. Gaeta Set II, no. 5. Crayon and tempera on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
107. Gaeta Set II, no. 6. House paint, charcoal, and tempera on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
108. Gaeta Set II, no. 7. Paint stick and charcoal on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
109. Gaeta Set II, no. 8. Charcoal on paper, 11 1/2 x 10 1/4" (29.2 x 27 cm).
LEFT: 111. Untitled. 1990. Synthetic polymer paint on paper, 29\(\frac{3}{4}\) \(\times\) 22\(\frac{3}{4}\" (75 \(\times\) 57 cm). Private collection

RIGHT: 112. Untitled. 1990. Synthetic polymer paint on paper, 20\(\frac{1}{2}\) \(\times\) 22\(\frac{3}{4}\" (53 \(\times\) 57 cm). Private collection
113. Untitled. 1990. Synthetic polymer paint, oil stick, and pencil on paper, 30 × 23 ¼" (76.2 × 59.5 cm). Private collection.
114. Untitled. 1990. Synthetic polymer paint, oil stick, and pencil on paper, 30 × 22 1/4" (76.2 × 56.5 cm). Private collection

Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston
117. Untitled. 1992. Oil, pencil, and crayon on plywood, 7' 8\(\frac{3}{4}\)" \(\times\) 6' 7\(\frac{5}{8}\)" (234 \(\times\) 172.5 cm). Private collection.
118. Untitled. 1992. Oil, pencil, and crayon on plywood, 7' 8¾" × 6' 7¾" (234 × 172 cm). Private collection
119. Untitled (Boat). 1991. Baked synthetic clay, $\frac{1}{16} \times 11\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{5}{16}$ ($4.8 \times 28.6 \times 11.4$ cm). Private collection. On loan to The Menil Collection, Houston
120. Untitled. 1993. Oil, crayon, and pencil on plywood, 6' 5" × 59½" (195.5 × 152 cm). Collection Udo and Anette Brandhorst, Cologne
121. The Four Seasons: Autumn. 1993–94. Synthetic polymer paint, oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 10' 3\(\frac{3}{4}\)" X 6' 2\(\frac{3}{4}\)" (313.7 X 189.9 cm). Private collection
122. The Four Seasons: Winter. 1993–94. Synthetic polymer paint, oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 10' 3¼" × 6' 2½" (313 × 190.1 cm). Private collection
The Four Seasons: Spring. 1993–94. Synthetic polymer paint, oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas, 10' 3 5/6" X 6' 2 1/4" (312.5 X 190 cm). Private collection.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a comprehensive bibliography, see the catalogue raisonné of Twombly's paintings, by Heiner Bastian, listed below.

MONOGRAPHES AND CATALOGUES RAISONNÉS

EXHIBITION CATALOGUES ON THE ARTIST
Milan: Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea. Cy Twombly: 50 disegni, 1951—1970. Texts by Mercedes Garber; Zeno Brolli, "Is, the bend, is, in, go in, the form;" and Gabriella Drudi, "L’epos sfigurato di Cy Twombly."

Siegen: Städtische Galerie Haus Seel. Cy Twombly. Text by Katharina Schmidt, "Cy Twombly."
SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

This list is devoted to the artist's one-person exhibitions, supplemented by important early group exhibitions. Catalogues of the exhibitions listed here are cited in the Selected Bibliography. For a comprehensive exhibition history, consult the catalogue raisonné of Twombly's paintings, by Heiner Bastian, also cited there.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In Paris in 1988, at the comprehensive exhibition of Cy Twombly’s work organized by Harold Szeeman, I found myself tremendously moved by the experience, and immediately began to focus on this work as never before. When I then met the artist for the first time, in 1989 in Rome, I became even more deeply engaged: talking with him and seeing the work in the setting from which it had sprung exerted a powerful fascination. Since a retrospective exhibition was already being planned for another museum in America, I did not suspect that I would ever have the good fortune to work on such a project. When that other exhibition was abandoned, I was pleased to be able to enlist the artist’s cooperation in preparing a retrospective for The Museum of Modern Art.

At that time, I stood as a rank outsider and non-initiate in regard to the circle of devoted friends and admirers who have followed Twombly and his art for more than three decades. My first two guides in this new terrain were Angela Westwater, who kindly arranged my initial meeting with the artist, and Thomas Ammann, who encouraged my interest, helped me start to discriminate among the many aspects of the oeuvre, and frequently acted as a liaison between Rome and New York. Thomas’s enthusiasm for Twombly’s work, and his excitement over the prospect of a show at this museum, meant a great deal to me. It is a source of profound regret that—taken from us by an untimely death—he has not been here to give counsel in the final stages of the project, and to enjoy the results. I take consolation in the fact that his sister Doris Ammann has continued to play a vital role, less tasks over the course of the past two years. His good will, and indefatigable ability to “make things happen” in response to countless requests, have been crucial ingredients in the success of the project. I have been grateful for his hospitality in Rome and Greece, and for his help in every phase of the exhibition, from its earliest beginnings onward.

Closer to home, Larry Gagosian has also taken a lively interest in the exhibition, and has given a great deal of time in efforts to help realize the project in the best fashion. Leo Castelli opened his archives, and graciously answered many questions. Bruna Sonnabend, and also Antonino Homem of the Sonnabend Gallery, were very helpful in allowing me to study several works and in making available loans for the exhibition. I am also grateful to David Whitney, and to Steven Mazoh, for discussing the show and Twombly’s work with me, and for their help with our many inquiries.

When I first began to prepare the checklist of works, I knew that one crucial resource could be the archive assembled by Heiner Bastian in preparation for his multi-volume catalogue raisonné of Twombly’s paintings. Mr. Bastian’s great generosity in opening these archives to me, even prior to the publication of the first volume, was the key piece of aid that launched the entire endeavor. Since then, he has been generous with his time and patient with my unending inquiries, and has helped me resolve several potentially troublesome problems in the preparation of the exhibition and the text of the catalogue. I have greatly appreciated his hospitality and that of his wife, Céline, during many visits to Berlin. Mr. Bastian has of course written extensively and with special sensitivity on Twombly’s work, and I have learned a great deal from our many conversations, as well as from his attentive and helpful suggestions regarding my essay. His advice and aid have been indispensable at every step of the way, and his collaboration with this museum in ensuring the quality of the catalogue’s production has been a gesture of truly remarkable devotion to the artist. A debt of appreciation is also owed to Christine Stoitz, who assists Mr. Bastian in research, and who has been a constant source of help with our many inquiries.

In Cologne and Paris, Karsten Greve has been very helpful in gaining access for me to many private collections of Twombly’s work. Even in the midst of a hectic schedule, he sacrificed large amounts of time, and arranged complex travel schedules that allowed my research to move ahead in the most efficient and unimpeded way. He has also shared with me his broad knowledge of the artist’s career, and worked closely with me in my efforts to select the best possible exhibition. For all this, and for his loans to the exhibition, I owe him a great debt of thanks.

I would also like to express special thanks to Nicola del Rezzo for all the assistance he has given to me and to Cy Twombly, in countless tasks over the course of the past two years. His good will, and indefatigable ability to “make things happen” in response to countless requests, have been crucial ingredients in the success of the project. I have been grateful for his hospitality in Rome and Greece, and for his help in every phase of the exhibition, from its earliest beginnings onward.

When we sought information about Twombly’s early years in Lexington, many people stepped forward to aid the research. Martha Daura, the daughter of the artist’s first teacher, Pierre Daura, helped us learn more about her father’s work. Virginia Irby Davis, Director-Curator of the Daura Gallery at Lynchburg College in Virginia, and Nancy L. Pressley made further material on Daura available to us. At Washington and Lee University, William Cocke, Brian Shaw, and Pamela Simpson all lent their aid to our efforts to gain information about the connection of the artist and his father with that institution.

Our research in Lexington was furthered by Barbara Crawford, William Hess and his son, William L. Hess III, Sally Mann, and Harry Simpson, and we thank them all for their aid. Thelma Sowder Lomax was especially helpful with information regarding the Southern Virginia College for Women in Buena Vista (formerly Southern Seminary and Junior College).

I am very grateful to Ashley Kesler, Assistant Curator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, for her kindness in helping me study a work there for Twombly, and for her help in giving me access to the material in the museum’s files pertaining to the artist’s fellowship applications in the 1950s. At the Archives of American Art, I was aided by Judy Throm, Head of Reference, in my pursuit of material among the papers of Eleanor Ward, and Lisa Klobury acted as our temporary researcher in the Washington, D.C., galleries of the Archives. Assistance was also provided at Leo Castelli’s archives by Christopher Galagher and in Rome by Patrizia Cavazzini. In my contact with Robert Rauschenberg and my work with his photography archive, I enjoyed the kind assistance of Bradley Jeffries. Calvin Tomkins, in addition to the resources provided by his published works, generously allowed me to study the notes from his interviews with Ward. In the late stages of research, Michael Sims of Vanderbilt University and Michael Rüffert and Marina van Zuylen brought to a successful conclusion our search for particularly quotations from the works of John Crowe Ransom and of Baudelaire. In these latter searches especially, and in several other tasks, I also appreciate the help of Kader Kobrina, intern, who worked resourcefully and tirelessly to help solve thorny problems of bibliography and source material.

During the period when I traveled to study Twombly’s work in various private and institutional collections, I benefited from the...
assistance of a great many collectors and museum colleagues. I am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rademacher and Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Metzelder for their hospitality. I also appreciated the chance to visit and talk with Mr. and Mrs. Udo Brandhorst, Dr. Reiner Speck, Dr. and Mrs. Ernst Jung, Mr. and Mrs. Luz Schirmer, and other collectors, who wish to remain anonymous; they were each kind enough to permit me to visit their homes, study their collections, and learn from their knowledge of the artist’s work.

I also wish to thank Paul Winkler, Director, and Walter Hopps, Curator, of The Menil Collection, Houston, for the help they gave me in studying the holdings of that museum, as well as for their invaluable support of the exhibition, and their great patience and flexibility in working with us on the project. Thanks, too, to Lowery Sims of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for her assistance, and to Dr. Margret Sturmann of the Stadelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt. In addition to Mr. Winkler and Mr. Hopps, I thank Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Conservator, and Julie Bakke, Registrar, of The Menil Collection, for the help they gave in arranging for the tour of the exhibition; and Nancy Swallow, Associate Registrar at the same institution, for responding so promptly to our various requests for photographs. It has also been a pleasure to work with Richard Koselleck, Director, Paul Schimmel, Curator, and Alma Ruiz, Exhibition Coordinator, at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in the planning of the exhibition’s tour; and with Dieter Honisch, Director of the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, whose institution will host the exhibition at its final showing. The coordination of that overseas venue has been greatly aided, too, by the work of Elizabeth Streibert, Exhibitions Coordinator, at The Museum of Modern Art. They have both been superb at their tasks, and it has been a pleasure to work with them.

The administration of the exhibition project, and all arrangements involved with its tour, have been in the very capable hands of Richard Palmer, Coordinator of Exhibitions, and Eleni Cocolas, Associate Coordinator of Exhibitions, at The Museum of Modern Art. They have both been superb at their tasks, and it has been a pleasure to work with them. James Snyder, Deputy Director for Administrative Affairs, has also played a valuable role in these arrangements; and Waldo Rasmussen, formerly Director, International Program, helped establish initial agreements with the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin before his retirement. Diane Farynyk, Registrar; Meryl Cohen, Associate Registrar; and James Goddington, Conservator, have worked to ensure that all the objects in the exhibition are transported, handled, and displayed in the safest and most professional fashion possible. Jerome Neimer, Director of Exhibition Production and Design, and Karen Meyerhoff, Assistant Director of Exhibition Production and Design, worked with me on the arrangement of the gallery spaces, and prepared the necessary models and schemes that allowed the show to be envisioned well in advance. For all their efforts, I am deeply appreciative.

The design of the catalogue has drawn on the talents of Emily Waters, Senior Designer, who has worked in cooperation with Michael Hentges, Director of Graphics. I am grateful to them for the sensitive and imaginative work done in the face of considerable challenges. I have also enjoyed working, as often in the past, with James Leggio, Editor, in the revision of texts and the careful scrutiny of all the related components of the publication. His keen attention to detail, and many extremely helpful suggestions, have improved my essay and have contributed enormously to the quality of the catalogue. Amanda Freymann, Production Manager, and Vicki Drake, Associate Production Manager, oversaw this book’s production with an admirable combination of exacting control and resilience in the face of problems. Finally, all phases of the publication, from initial inception to completion, were closely and thoughtfully supervised by Osa Brown, Director, Department of Publications. I have been fortunate to work with her, and with her staff.

I would also like to thank my immediate office staff, Victoria Garvin, Administrator/Assistant to the Chief Curator, and Betty Arceby, Executive Secretary, for the countless hours of work they have put into this project, and for the many tasks they have taken on in an effort to free my time to work on it. Their constant support and unceasing upbeat attitude have been invaluable. Their constant support and unceasing upbeat attitude have been, again and again, essential to the progress of the project. Adrian Sudhalter, Administrative Assistant, gave us invaluable help with the preparation of our applications for United States indemnity.

The person who has been most deeply engaged with the organization of both the exhibition and the publication is Fereshet Dastiani, Curatorial Assistant. On Feri has fallen the full weight of responsibility for all the countless, and endlessly revised, listings of works under consideration, in all media; and for the preparation of the bibliography. She also handled alone all the time-consuming chores of obtaining photographs, and in addition spent innumerable hours in archives and libraries, and traveling, in order to secure the basic research materials for my essay. Through everything, she has been impervious to fatigue, and consistently positive and good-natured in the face of every challenge. The seriousness and thoroughness with which she undertakes every task, and the high professional standards to which she holds herself, have been inspirational to me and everyone else involved. I am enormously grateful to her for a job very well done.

Two enlightened patrons have made the exhibition possible through their financial contributions. Emily Fisher Landau was the first person to come forward in support of the project, with a very generous grant for this publication. Her belief in the importance of the catalogue, and her willingness to make an early commitment to it, are greatly appreciated; her generosity allowed us to move ahead, without cutting corners, at a crucial moment. Many thanks, too, to Bill Katz, curator and advisor to Mrs. Landau, for his help in that aspect of the exhibition effort, as in many others. Lily Auchincloss is the principal supporter of the exhibition itself, by virtue of an extremely generous donation that was all the more remarkable for not having been solicited. Before I could ask Mrs. Auchincloss, she came to me on her own initiative, offering a grant to be used for whatever purpose I felt was most urgently important. That extraordinary gesture, for which I am more grateful than I can say, was the critical commitment that guaranteed the project could move forward as it should. To both Mrs. Landau and Mrs. Auchincloss, I offer my most profound and admiring gratitude.

Very special thanks should be extended as well to the many institutions and collectors who so kindly agreed to lend their works for this exhibition. The fact that we were virtually never refused a loan is eloquent testimony to the affection and dedication felt for the artist by all those who live with his works. The lenders’ willingness to share those works with a broader public was, of course, the indispensable element in the entire preparation of the show.

My wife, Elyn Zimmerman, has been a valuable counsel in my efforts to understand and express my admiration for the art in this exhibition, and has patiently provided essential support throughout the project, especially during the demanding period of the catalogue’s preparation. As in so many other areas, my ability to work at these tasks, and the quality of the results, owe a great deal to her.

Finally, I would like to express my warmest gratitude to Cy Twombly, to his wife, Tatiana Franchetti Twombly, and to their son, Alessandro, for the hospitality they have shown me on my several visits to Rome and Gaeta. I am, above all, grateful to the artist himself for his patience and good will at every step of the way over the past few years. It has been an exceptional privilege to work with him, and it would be my fondest hope that he would feel that this exhibition and catalogue do honor to his work and reward his generous cooperation.

K.V.
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Dia Center for the Arts, New York
The Menil Collection, Houston
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum

Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Paris, Milan

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of the high European tradition of painters and poets—from Homer to Poussin to Cavafy—with the irrepressible impulses of graffiti and children's drawings. Epic and intimate by turns, deeply personal and spontaneous yet insistently linked to broad and venerable cultural codes, Twombly's art has long demanded the more complete and nuanced study that this volume—with the artist's generous personal cooperation—now provides.

More than fifty of the artist's most important paintings from all phases of his career are reproduced in color, including recent works never seen outside the studio and several important earlier works not previously published. A dozen sculptures, stretching from the artist's early assemblages of the 1940s through work of recent years, are also reproduced, as well as more than forty works on paper.