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Left, Jasper Johns: Untitled, 1990, watercolor on paper, 39¼ by 28⅛ inches.

Top right, Untitled, 1990, watercolor, charcoal and pencil on paper, 30 by 22¼ inches.

Center, Untitled, 1990, oil on canvas, 33¼ by 25¼ inches.

Bottom right, Untitled, 1990, ink, watercolor and pencil on paper, 31 by 22½ inches.

All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

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Trafficking With X

In which the author, finding herself challenged by the avowed mystery image in Jasper Johns's latest series of paintings, undertakes further inquiries into his subject matter, and sheds new light on his "drama of concealment."

BY JILL JOHNSTON

During 1990 Jasper Johns began painting a series of untitled pictures whose source is presently unknown. I first saw one of these images on Oct. 2 in a transparency at the Castelli Gallery. I asked Leo Castelli what it was, and he said the artist told him, "You'll find out." Later in the month a good friend of the artist told me he bought one of these images and that the artist had said, "Nobody will find out [what it is] this time." That sounded strong. And I wondered why anyone would buy such a specific image without knowing what it is. It's impossible not to suspect that the image in the new untitled pictures—currently on view at the Castelli Gallery [Feb. 16–Mar. 9]—is a very specific representation. Even the virgin viewer, without knowledge of Johns's camouflaged images of the '80s, will see that something is hidden in or by this design. It's blatantly both explicit and mysterious. I'm calling the image X because the artist has made a big deal about withholding the identity of its source.

Counterpoised to X in Johns's recent work is another series, also consisting mainly of untitled works, that features an image whose source Johns made clear soon after he began using it, back in 1984. From Picasso's *Straw Hat with Blue Leaf* (1936), Johns lifted details to make a peculiar frontal face. *Straw Hat* is a still life with a book, a vase, some leaves (on the hat) and a bald head in profile consisting of two eyes, a mouth and three rounded protuberances. Johns has used the image as a whole and in part in many different ways and settings. He likes the Picasso for being "more than one thing"[1] and has said, "It's informed with sexual suggestion and very complicated on that level."[2] Johns transplanted the eyes with their prominent lashes to the perimeters of a rectangle, transforming Picasso's nose/mouth into a decorative arabesque that serves as a nose, and adding a mouth—invented or from another source. A Surrealist tendency is very pronounced here, as he carries over the weird, metamorphic design of Picasso's head to his own face-image. Simultaneously Johns went in two directions with Picasso's *Straw Hat* picture: he continued using the whole Picasso image; and, with the transplanted eyes and added mouth, he pursued this rectangle-face as a specific image of his own. At some point he created a veil-face as well—the defining outline of the veil, like the rectangle, fixing the boundaries of the face.

Artists don't generally tag their work to identify references. Yet artists' works in a way consist of nothing *but* references. This aspect of art has long provided critics their bread and butter, identifying influences, exhuming sources. But Johns, of all contemporary artists, has fetishized this presumptive nature of art. The burial of two bodies in his paintings of the '80s has given source-hunting a new meaning. People at large can't see or identify the bodies—don't even know there are bodies there to see. Only their outlines—traced from Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*—describe them as bodies. Otherwise, they are striated, patterned areas, interlocked like flat pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Nonetheless, once you know the images are there, they jump at you as you go from painting to painting: mirrored,

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Johns took two directions with Picasso's "Straw Hat" picture: he continued using the whole Picasso image; and, with the transplanted eyes and added mouth, he pursued the rectangle-face as an image of his own.

upside down or right side up, doubled, obscured in parts, detailed or cameoed, filled in with an endless variety of striping or hatching or set afloat on clear grounds in naked outline. Johns has said that once something is established in his mind as an image, he goes to great lengths to reproduce it by whatever means.

Sometime in the early '80s, after launching this buried-body project, Johns identified one of the bodies himself, telling a few friends that the mysterious lines in the left portion of *Perilous Night* (1981) delineated Grünewald's fallen soldier in the foreground of the Resurrection panel. Still, his secret was largely kept because it was mentioned only in passing by just a few critics after his 1984 show. From what they said and from the lack of specific indicators to match up the Johns images with the Grünewald originals, it was not possible for people to see them anyway. Certainly the issues raised by the use of a religious Renaissance masterwork, and by the fetishization of appropriated material by highly challenging concealments, were left unarticulated. But after Johns's 1987 show of "The Seasons," when the other body, from the Temptation of St. Anthony panel—the dying half-human or hybrid figure covered with sores—was not only found and identified[3] but later discovered in great profusion on many sites (canvas, paper, etc.) in a mass burial, you might say, the subject was opened up. And now, with X, Johns has again distracted his critics and upped the ante by posing a new challenge.

Before, we didn't know at first that there was anything concealed at all. We set out for a walk and discovered a body on the side of the road. Now an all-points alarm has been sounded: a body is missing, and we might want to go out and look for it. If we care deeply enough, we can join in the search. Critics could mobilize like a mob of neighbors and police out to find someone. Or a critic might want to go it alone, hoping to be recognized or rewarded for outstanding spadework or luck in locating the burial site. A clear choice seems indicated: should we run after this thing, spend hundreds of hours in libraries, jump on planes and trains to follow vague clues or hot tips, call strange people in foreign places with urgent, inarticulate questions (what can be asked about a body you can't identify?), consult specialists known for their encyclopedic memories of images, wearily pulling out our wrinkled Most Wanted poster featuring a rectangle with an image of X in it, and so on? Or should we mind our own business and pay attention to the many interesting ways the image (already) has been presented or mutated?

A third choice is indicated for critics who are still curious—but who may not want to degrade themselves by chasing a stick thrown into the center of a whirlpool. We can stay comfortable in our houses, not building up phone bills, simply wondering



Pablo Picasso: **Straw Hat with Blue Leaf,** *1936, oil on canvas, 24 by 19½ inches. Courtesy Musée Picasso, Paris.*



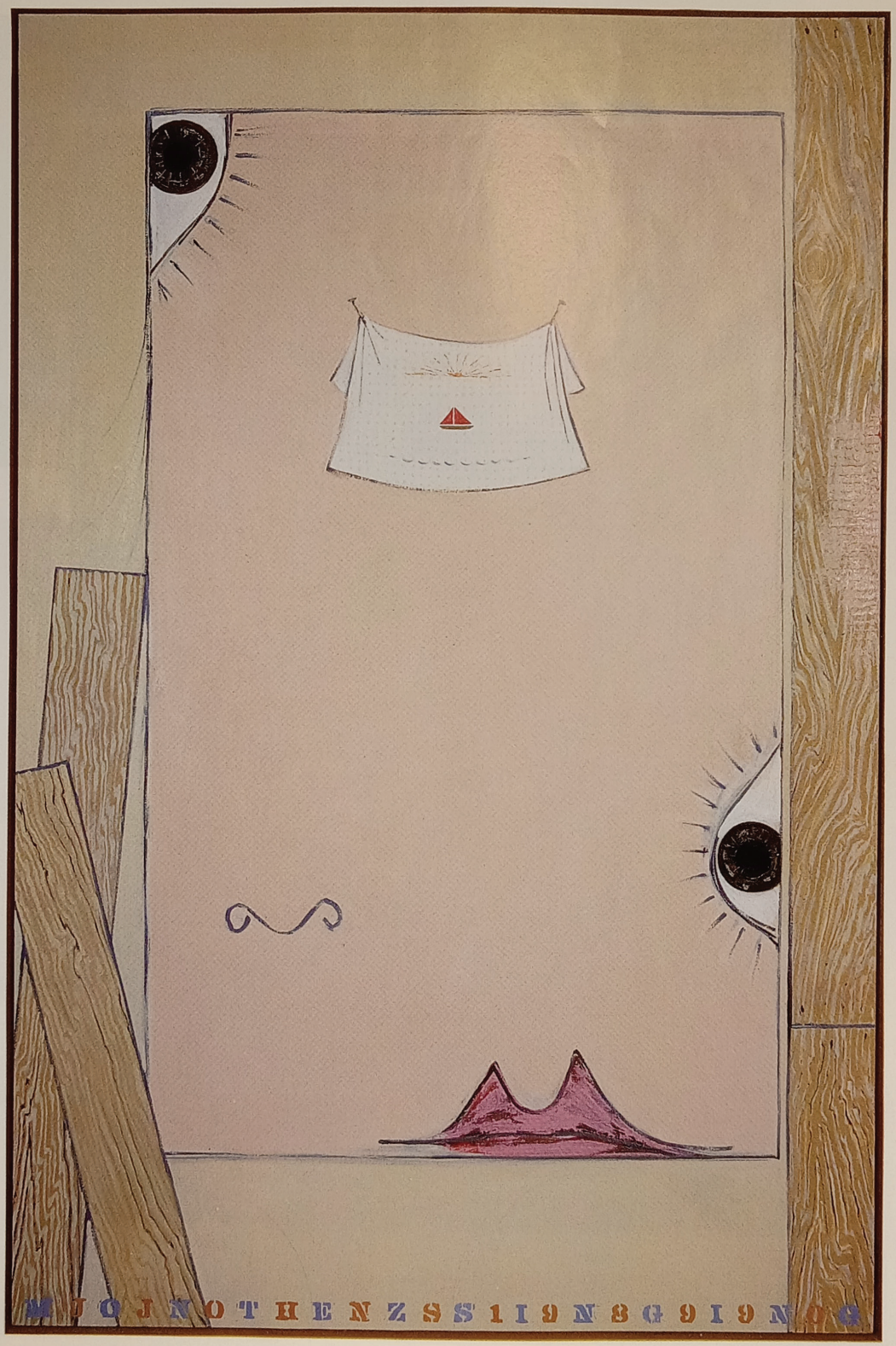
Untitled, 1988, charcoal and pastel on paper, 45½ by 33⅜ inches.



Untitled, 1988, watercolor and ink on paper, 31½ by 43½ inches.

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Montez Singing, *1989–90, oil on canvas, 76 by 50 inches.*

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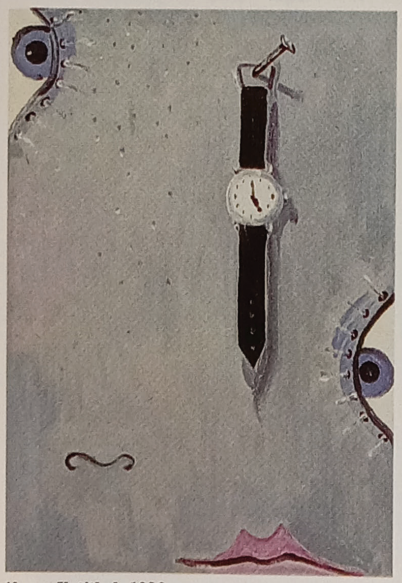
Left, Untitled, 1990, watercolor and pencil on paper, 31 by 22⅝ inches.

Right, Francisco de Zurbarán: The Veil of Saint Veronica, *1658, oil on canvas, 41⅜ by 32⅞ inches. Courtesy Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid, Spain.*

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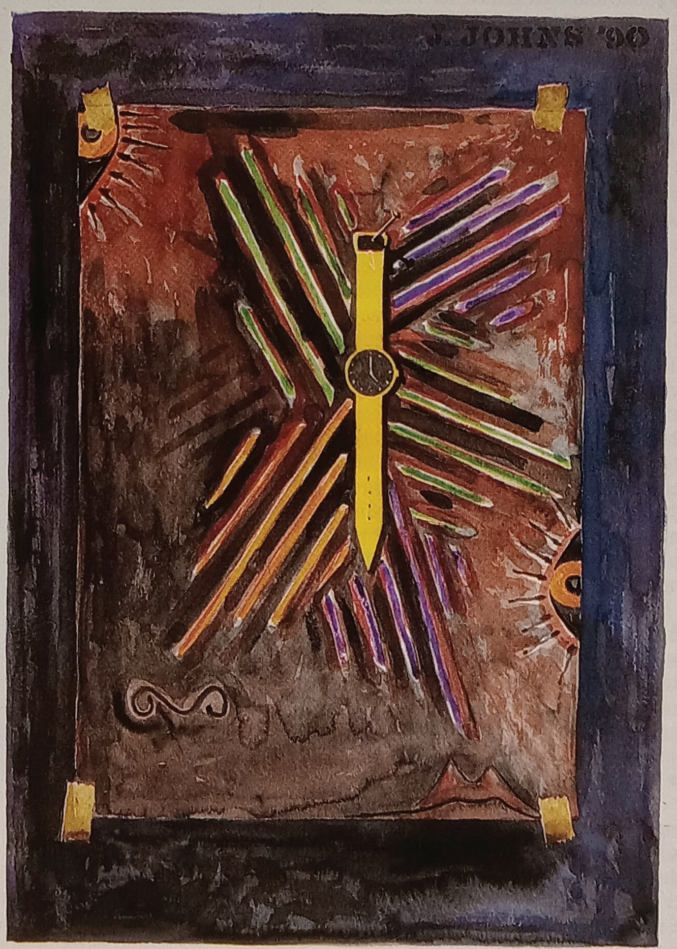
Above, Untitled, 1986, oil on canvas, 17⅜ by 11¾ inches.

Right, Untitled, 1990, watercolor and pencil on paper, 31⅛ by 19⅜ inches.

what has driven the artist to his act.

Naturally we want to know the identity of the body. Johns now plays openly on our curiosity. He can count on being a big enough artist to make people care. And a precedent has been set. Very interesting bodies—with great pedigrees (art historically) and signifiers (biographically)—that have already been discovered make us think X might be interesting, too. Anyway, *knowing* something is concealed—being told by the artist himself—is a terrific summons to action, a gauntlet thrown down in the art ring. It's like Gary Hart challenging reporters to find him in flagrante delicto. Johns held no press conference, of course, but he has let it be known that X is a mystery image.

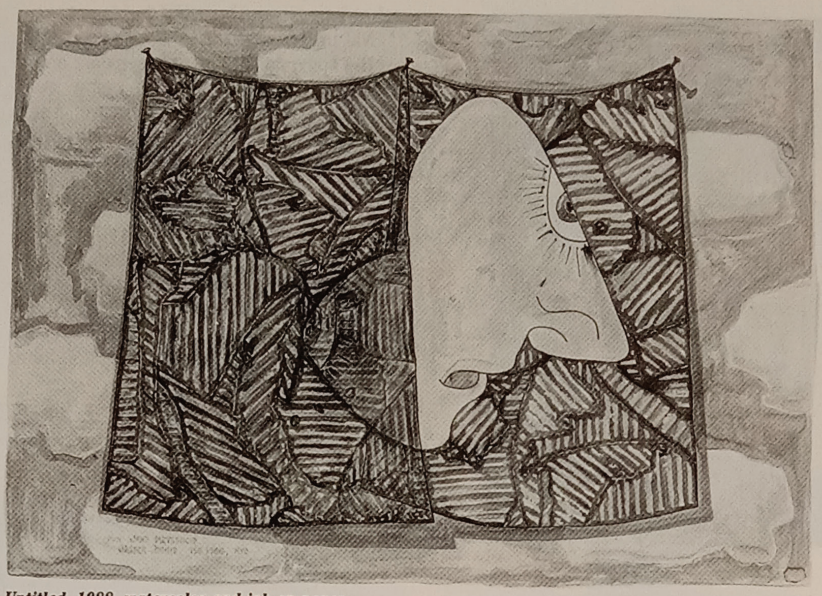
X seems to have features that are unmistakably human or animal-like, especially in the horizontal central element. These features seem at the same time ambiguous, incomplete and contextually dislocated. A tall, irregular shape, suggesting a figure, is broken into 10 or so compartments, like map areas, and is interrupted in its middle by the fat horizontal shape which crosses it. We associate X with its predecessors by its outlining—we assume it's been traced—and its familiar demarcation into puzzlelike pieces,



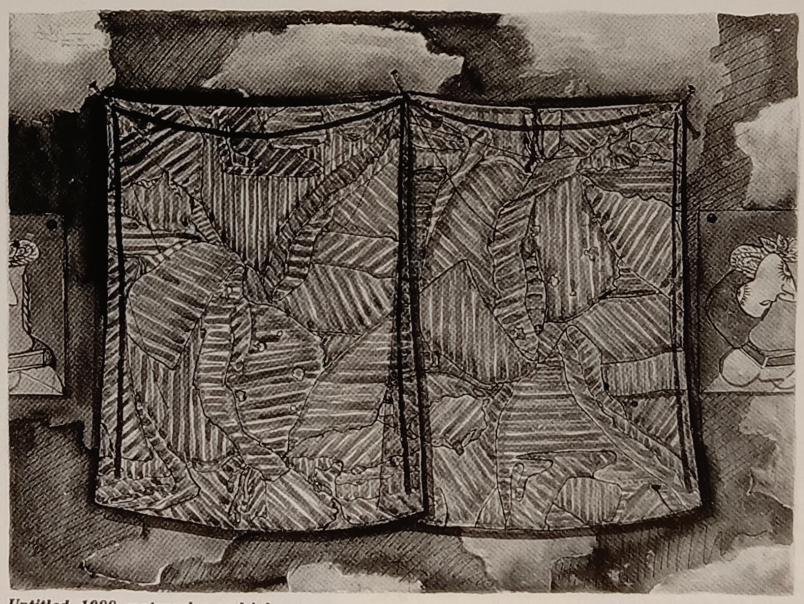
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Being told by the artist himself that something is concealed is a summons to action, a gauntlet thrown down in the art ring. It's like Gary Hart challenging reporters to find him in flagrante delicto.



Untitled, 1988, watercolor and ink on paper, 28 by 39 inches.



Untitled, 1988, watercolor and ink on paper, 22¼ by 30⅞ inches.

many of the colored-in patterns evolved from his familiar crosshatch design. But its predecessors, the camouflaged Grünewald figures, are typically integrated into the pictures where they're featured. X, on the other hand, is written against the sky, so to speak.

Johns's hide-and-seek games, for his and his critics' delectation, have here reached an apex in his treasure-hunt-type ploy for attention. The identity of the image concealed is surely biographically important, but the act of concealment itself is biographically more significant. And what would the artist be concealing if not his biography? Sometime in 1990 I asked Johns a number of questions, and he answered only one with any concern. I wondered if the "public accessibility" of figures he's traced, such as the Grünewalds, interested him. He answered by asking, "If something is a tracing . . . , does knowing [what it is] affect your perception of the work? . . . And if you don't know what it is, do you see it completely differently . . . or not?"[4] Here perhaps lies a clue to his current concealment drama. He is interested, it seems, in finding out what or how people see when they know that important information—which can be biographically (mis)leading—is being withheld. Not for nothing do Johns's recent works feature big, prominent eyes. He wants to know what we see. He's looking at us from the canvas to try to find out. We stare back at him, wondering what he wants us to see. We want to be polite, not see more than he's willing to let out or suggest. But we don't want to miss anything, either. And we may decide to risk being rude, admitting that we see more than appears to meet the eye.

Things perhaps got out of hand for Johns during the '80s. For six years he traced and filled in his Grünewald plague victim without being disturbed by outside knowledge of its identity. His Resurrection soldier was reasonably protected in the same way. Such a programmatic concealment was unprecedented (as far as I know) in his career. He had never before painted a whole body, either, nor anything so psychologically loaded, except perhaps for the skin-imprint drawings he made of his face and hands in 1962, or the cast body parts of his *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955) and untitled 1972 work, with its huge panel containing impaled body fragments. His arm and hand imprints in *Periscope* (*Hart Crane*), *Diver*, *Land's End* and *Hatteras*, of the early '60s, were dramatic, but without the impact of a full body in an expressive disposition. The Resurrection soldier hasn't quite hit the ground, as he turns his torso violently away from the brilliantly encircled risen Christ, at the same time shielding his eyes from the

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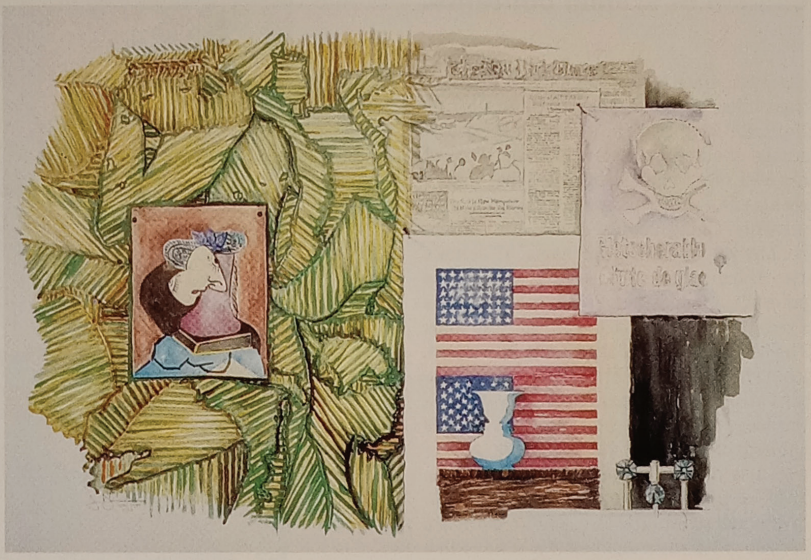
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blinding light. The victim in the Temptation of St. Anthony panel is likewise stunned by the scene before him. Both figures are foreground witnesses, mediating the scene stretching above them both for viewers and for the artist. The St. Anthony victim evokes great pity and fear because the signs of death are upon him—the bloated stomach, the pocked, greenish skin, the amputated left hand. He has already half joined the terrible purgatory of monsters in conflict before him.

By extracting these figures and placing them in his own environments and painting them again and again, Johns has tamed them, decathected them, turned them into emblems. Yet he's created "scenes" of his own in which they perform expressively. He's moved the dying St. Anthony figure around virtuosically, situating him in little "plays" in which he is a kind of "chorus"—commenting on other elements in the picture—or emblematic protagonist, in turn commented upon. He's "figure" or he's "ground" or both, in boundless permutations. There are at least 70 renditions of him.

By means of concealment, Johns created something like a private therapeutic room in which to work out his feelings about, and for, these figures. Even now, most of the viewing public remains none the wiser: it's impossible to see the figures without prior knowledge of them, a knowledge not easy to come by. In context of these concealments, Johns's interest in how we know what we know, or how what we know affects what we see, takes on new significance. How much privacy does he still have, he might ask himself. He could accurately imagine that the public will leave him alone. His critics and friends, though—that small but affective community called the art world—know what he's up to. And I surmise that X is a response to that understanding.

Besides providing the artist new expressive material to deal with privately, X sends a message to Johns's critics about problems of concealment. X focuses attention on the act of concealment itself. Presumably Johns



Untitled, 1988, watercolor, ink and graphite on paper, 31½ by 47½ inches.



The Bath, *1988, watercolor and pencil on paper, 30 by 37¾ inches.*

wants to tell us that the identity of the image isn't important. It's what he does with it that matters. He does amazing things with his images, it's true, marshaling them in surprising combinations, coloring them in with a tremendous range and subtlety. He's a classical composer, creating large compositions consisting of groups of pictures relating to powerful themes. Pictures in every group can be moved to other groups where they also play well. The crossbreeding is intense. A 1990 untitled drawing (watercolor, charcoal, chalk and pencil) is made up of parts from three different series, uniting a part of X with the frame/face eyes and mouth on a ground consisting of the disguised Grünewald plague victim. We know the source of two categories of imagery, but what is this X? Johns is playing for time as he fools around with it and with us in our ignorance. He's given away a lot with the Grünewalds. And he tosses us other bits, hoping perhaps to placate us, take the edge off the curiosity he's created.

Here is *Montez Singing*, for instance, a very large painting which belongs to

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These are pictures framed by the organs of sight and taste. Parasitic on the frame, eyes and mouth hold the pictures together, and present their featured X images as a kind of balloon of cranial contents.

the frame/face series. Not only do we know the source of the image, in Picasso's *Straw Hat with Blue Leaf* (he's coupled the Picasso and the veil or rectangle frame/face of his own often enough to make that clear), we also find a very personal title, along with private-seeming details. For Montez is not Lola: Montez is the first name of Johns's step-grandmother, the second wife of his paternal grandfather, with whom Johns lived, for the most part, until he was nine. The "singing" part of the title is illustrated, metonymically, by a little red sailboat situated at the upper center of the face, where a third eye might appear. The little boat is painted on a small veil or white square which is nailed trompe l'oeil to the "forehead" of the face. Above the boat, still within the veil or square, is a minute sun on a horizon, with rays, and below it a wavy line indicating water. Johns has kindly added to his scanty (public) biography by telling inquisitive people like myself that Montez used to sing *Red Sails in the Sunset* while playing the piano. Montez is happy looking, as these faces go. Some of the faces in the untitled work are pretty angry looking. They are all wall-eyed and/or cross-eyed, with schematic lashes and a caricature Monroe sort of mouth—the only feature not appropriated from Picasso.

Johns retains Picasso's vertically disposed profile eyes as well as Picasso's positioning of them at different heights. Then, in his many repetitions of the theme, Johns goes to work with eyes and mouth, especially the eyes, to vary the look of the faces greatly. The eyes come in many different colors. The lashes take various forms; they may be painted to resemble nails, or, in several works, sperm—swimming, say, toward the eye-womb. In one picture the eyes have a lower extension forming large teardrops. Most of the "twin-peaks" mouths suggest a piece of landscape along the "horizon" of the painting's bottom edge.

The veil paintings present a special case. In them, Johns has apparently conflated several different ideas and images. For one

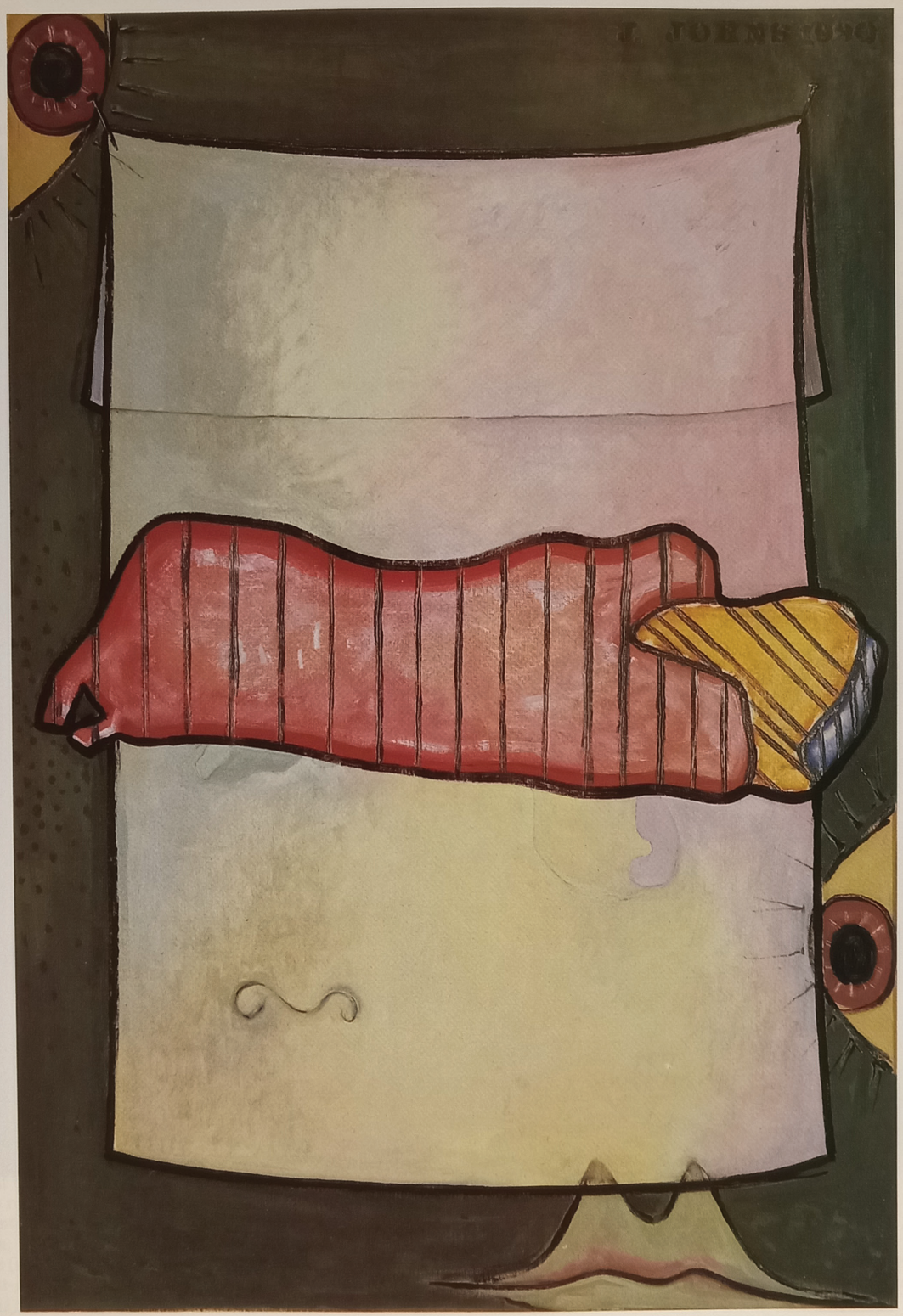
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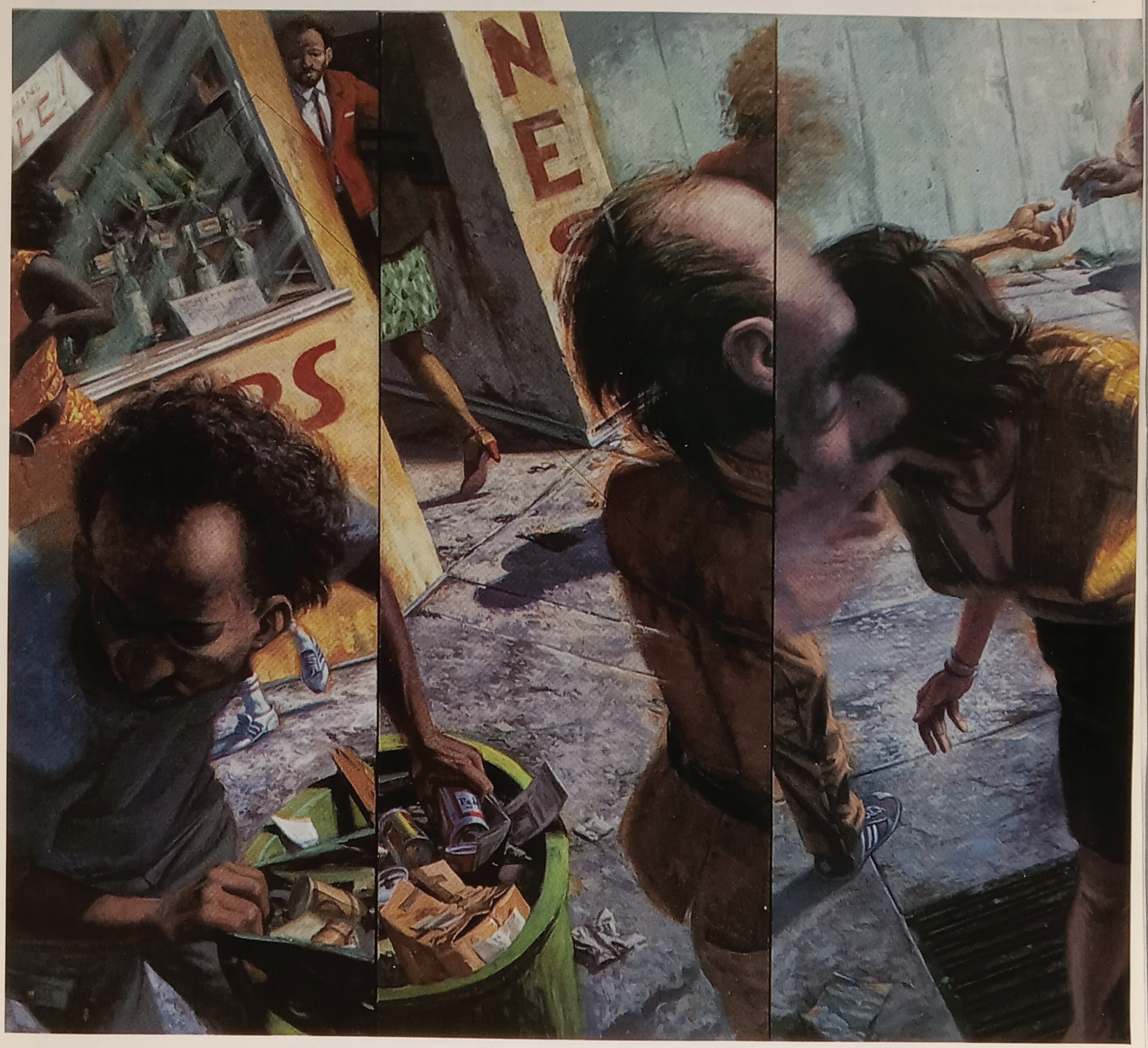
Right, Untitled, 1990, oil on canvas, 37⅛ by 25¼ inches.

Opposite top, Untitled, 1990, watercolor, charcoal, chalk and pencil on paper, 30⅛ by 22⅛ inches.

Opposite bottom, Untitled, 1990, watercolor, pen and pencil on paper, 10⅛ by 12½ inches.

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Johns

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thing, he probably associates the veil with the handkerchief in Picasso's *Weeping Woman* (1936), which Johns used in *Perilous Night* (1982) and subsequently in other works. In addition, there is surely a Zurbarán reference. In December 1987, Johns told me he had been impressed by paintings of the Veil of St. Veronica in the 1987 Zurbarán show at the Metropolitan Museum, and he said that he wished Christ's face had not been on it. In his own paintings of a blank veil, he returns the veil to Veronica, if you will, by showing it framed by his Picassoid female features.

Johns's frame/face Woman is generic and stereotypical. Using the "empty" internal area of the paintings as a receptacle for various objects, Johns at length evidently got the idea of filling up the center with his new X image. Not all, but many, of his X pictures are framed by the eyes and mouth of the rectangle-face. The eyes now work even more surrealistically than before, looking as much like suns (their lashes as rays) as eyes. These are pictures framed by the organs of sight and taste. Parasitic on the frame, eyes and mouth hold the pictures together, set them apart from the world and present their central or featured X images as a kind of balloon of cranial contents.

Some of his faces have within them or attached to a painted border or frame a realistically painted wristwatch hanging from its strap. Another childhood memory, this one involving his father, may be invoked here. There's a story that Johns's father promised him his watch when he was grown-up. Soon after, Johns decided he was grown-up, went to his father's house and took the watch, and his father came and took it back. Johns said, "I guess I wasn't grown-up at all."[5] *Ein Schwert verheiss mir der Vater*—My father promised me a sword. How about *the time*? Johns has clearly taken the watch (for good) at last. Does this mean he thinks he's grown-up now? He began painting it as he approached the age his father was when he died. We speculate impertinently, with nothing but an old story and a painted watch to go by. All we know for sure is that time is important for Johns, as it is for the rest of us. With enough time, Johns can control the space that's really crucial to him, fighting off critics, friends and the public (nobody will find out what X is, he has said—until he's ready to tell us, we could add), protecting the sanctum where self-knowledge is negotiated and where the artist feeds (on) himself, getting what he needs in the style to which he's accustomed from his own productions.

One picture in the St. Anthony group, which also belongs to the Picasso *Straw Hat* group, shows the artist literally feeding himself, or feeding his picture. The bodies painted by the artist must be (aspects of) the artist himself. If he buried them, there must be something wrong with them. There's definitely something wrong with the Temptation of St. Anthony figure. He's dying, he's deformed, he's turning into an animal, he's helpless before his fate—he's not facing a great future. Johns has embraced and adopted this figure, *rescuing* him in a way, bringing him "home," giving him playmates, often a twin, enclosing him in amniotic situations, further protecting him with "guardian" figures such as the old crone who forms part of a trick double image (a young lady is her double), allowing him to fly or swim and, most important of all, establishing him as a kind of basso ostinato to a whole body of work. In this untitled picture from 1988, a largish watercolor and ink on paper, Johns has painted the victim as he is in the Grünewald—sitting upright in the lower left foreground, occupying the left side of a veil which is nailed together with another veil, in trompe l'oeil fashion, to blue sky and clouds. Upside down and mirrored on the right-hand veil, the victim is twinned, though largely obscured, by the bald Picasso head from *Straw Hat*. The head is flopped, and the artist has ingeniously slipped its lower protuberance, capped by an eye, "behind" the left-hand veil so that its eye, now easily read as a nipple, rests against the chest wall of the upright Grünewald victim. Surpassingly painted—a classic example of Johns's late Surrealist style—it's also amusing, unexpected and moving.

In another watercolor and ink on paper, painted two months later (in '88), the Grünewald is depicted similarly, but without the Picasso head. Instead, Johns has restored the Picasso painting to its original form and placed it, much reduced in size, so that, split in half, it flanks the central veils. The two paintings can be read as a text or a story. A sick and prostrated figure is nourished by the "breast" of a big head while flying in the sky. The one who was fed is better now; he flies along on his own. His supplier is out of the picture but appears as a reminder in the margins, on the outside of the "flying machine," ready to provide services again and to make sure the victim is doing okay. The victim in this case is not just twinned but Siamesed—an extra feeding precaution, you could say. Doubling, mirroring—devices used repeatedly by Johns throughout his career—embody a principle of nourishment. When he Siameses his victim, as in these two pictures, he simply joins up their outlines, blending the lines from one with the lines from the other.

If you don't know the identity of this Grünewald figure, you won't see its key function in a picture Johns also painted in '88, for an auction to raise funds for AIDS treatment and research.[6] It forms the ground of the left side of the picture, painted in greens and yellows/tans/oranges, accompanied by a superimposed small rectangle containing the Picasso *Straw Hat* still life. You *will* know the subject by essential signifiers on the right-hand side: the skull and crossbones and part of its warning, "*Chute de Glace*" (Beware of Falling Ice), from paintings of the early '80s, two joined images of the American flag and a copy of part of the front page of the *New York Times* of Feb. 14 (Valentine's Day), 1988, with a headline reading "Spread of AIDS Abating but Deaths Will Still Soar." Johns's ambivalence is clear here. He demonstrates support and sympathy for an embattled cause; at the same time he withholds vital information that could convey his message more expressively. Yet it would be most uncharacteristic of him to bring his victim out of the closet, so to speak, after painting him incognito for so long. For one thing, the figure would then be esthetically unrecognizable. And Johns himself would look like a different artist. Not surprisingly, his ambivalence is compatible, psychologically speaking, with his strategies in art. He's been queried about his Grünewald victim and its connection with AIDS. He appears to accept an association he didn't originally intend (in 1981, when he began painting this figure, nobody knew that an AIDS epidemic was under way) while staying true to his policy of being noncommittal. In October 1988 he told me he had heard recently that food poisoning was the plague in Grünewald's time. In August 1990 I asked him about AIDS: "When did you register AIDS as a phenomenon—when someone you knew died? Have you lost many friends?" And he took the Fifth. Then when I mentioned his AIDS-auction picture, asking him about the use of the Grünewald victim, he accused me of concentrating only on this one aspect of the imagery, thus seeing the work less clearly. He said, "I'm blaming you for directing attention away from the work." I would say, in turn, that whatever is concealed in a work is what will naturally become a focal point. Especially when the

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concealed subject so strikingly embodies the theme of the picture at hand.

Constructing X, Johns evidently intends to make his point about our attention very strongly. As he stares at us from his canvases, he wants to know how we might get stuck on one way of looking at something. He may even determine his next moves not just according to internal dictates of form and structure but in response to what he thinks we see, to elude any particular identifications.[7] He wants us to see the work—the manipulations of parts, design and color—and stop being distracted by identifications. At the same time, X is a great distraction. Johns is saying he has a big secret, thus he clearly wants us to try to discover what it is. The strategy is bold. He would like to fool us anew. He could catch us looking silly running after X to try to identify it. Or he can have us where he has generally had his way with us: preoccupied with structure and the way things are painted, pondering various formalist issues. He can also watch us vainly struggling to make out X on our own, speculating on its identity with no clues to its source. It seems to me he can count on a superficial response to this maneuver, a response congruent with modernist questions of expressive content versus structure and form. If he can fool us into dealing with X at this level, we won't look further—at the psychology of concealment, at the extreme ambivalence underlying the work of this major artist. There is probably only one good counterstrategy for trafficking with X, and that would be to ignore it.

Having said that, and having already demonstrated my interest, I would also say that there can be good fun in the games artists play. Certainly X had people buzzing in London when I flew there for the Hayward opening of Johns's drawing show and an exhibition of new works at the d'Offay Gallery in November '90—my one plane trip on behalf of X. Someone speculated that X is a couple sleeping together. A British person saw a map of England. A well-known British artist, Richard Hamilton, said, "It would be impertinent to ask Jasper anything about [X]." An American man working at the d'Offay Gallery announced fervently, "This is my goal"—to find the source of X. An American woman said it must be something from Cézanne because Johns has been so interested in Cézanne. She also saw a child in swaddling clothes. Another American woman saw Alice in Wonderland walking along carrying the baby that turns into a pig. The American printmaker Bill Goldston, walking into d'Offay's with his wife and baby, who was sleeping in a stroller, said X is unquestionably a Madonna and Child. This seemed to be the consensus, in fact. The English critic David Sylvester saw the Virgin holding the Christ Child in the Annunciation panel of Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*.[8] But he also mentioned Leonardo's drapery studies, shown at the Louvre recently. The American man so determined to discover the identity of X said he thought there were drapes in the picture, too. Angels floated in and out of conversations—a pink angel of de Kooning's, for instance; and an in-house title, *Green Angel*, was seen on the back of the December calendar drawing.[9] I dutifully wrote down all the information about X conveyed to me. I was even told that if I felt like getting on another plane, I could find out in Basel what the image is. On good intelligence, I learned that in April 1990 Johns had sent for a reproduction of X from someone at the Kunstmuseum there. This meant that Johns had engaged a confidant in his scheme, and I knew that even if I had the time and funds to enplane for Basel, I would not get past this confidant. The image might not be hanging in the permanent-collection galleries, and three-headed dogs would bar my way elsewhere.

Johns has already put X through many familiar paces. For a start, I believe he is presenting the image upside down, and it's frequently mirrored. Also, it comes in all different sizes and mediums, and he's colored it with his opposing striped patterns or plain but demarcated areas with the great variety and cleverness and wonderful texture that we've come to expect. Unlike the Grünewalds, the image is decidedly dyadic. The center element, lying horizontally, stands out and is evidently the part with which Johns identifies. It isn't usually colored in like the vertical forms that extend above and below it; it therefore is often silhouetted against the rest of the picture. Johns has also isolated this element to play roles in other pictures. It could surely be a hybrid animal/human. It has a human-looking "hand," and "feet" that look porcine. I think it's lying on a lap (of the vertical "figure") because of the indentation along its "back" (if viewed as upside down). It looks too big to be a child, in proportion to its vertical companion. Both right side up and upside down it looks like the horizontal shape is being carted somewhere—possibly through the sky. (But on a lap?) The whole thing is in the shape of a cross. A religious configuration seems indicated. *You* take it from there.

I trust, for Johns's sake, that whatever it is, it's good. If you find out what it is (in case it remains unidentified when this essay is printed), contact the publishers of "Most Wanted" images, like *Art in America*, or contact me, or the artist himself, who has been known to reward the successful detective. I had some small satisfaction in London, slipping a pin of the Mona Lisa's face in puzzle pieces, bought at the Musée d'Orsay, into the artist's pocket. □

Certainly X had people buzzing in London when I flew there in November—my one plane trip on behalf of X. I dutifully wrote down all the information about X that was conveyed to me. I was even told that I could find the image in Basel.

1. In conversation with the artist, Aug. 2, 1990.
2. Amei Wallach, "Jasper Johns: On Target," *Elle*, November 1988, p. 152.
3. Jill Johnston, "Tracking the Shadow," *Art in America*, October 1987.
4. In conversation with the artist, Aug. 2, 1990.
5. Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, New York, Abrams, 1977, pp. 20–21.
6. The auction, for the Supportive Care Program of St. Vincent's Hospital and Medical Center of New York, was held at Sotheby's, New York, May 2, 1988. Johns also donated the image for a poster that was sold in June 1990 for benefits against AIDS.
7. Fred Orton and Richard Shiff have described Johns's elusiveness in the current semiotic lingo: Orton, in a dense paper uniting Johns and Derrida, says, "Johns's practice . . . can never be brought to a halt because of the relation between signifier and signifier and signifier in pursuit of a signified which is always elusive, shifting and registered to a lack." Fred Orton, "On Being Bent 'Blue' (Second State): An Introduction to Jacques Derrida/A Footnote on Jasper Johns," *The Oxford Journal*, 12:1, 1989, p. 44.

   Richard Shiff has also written, "Since Johns creates conditions for the most active and inexhaustible kind of interpretation, the only dependable 'meaning' that his art signifies is interpretation itself." Richard Shiff, "Anamorphosis: Jasper Johns," in *Foirades/Fizzles, Echo and Allusion in the Art of Jasper Johns*, Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, 1987, p. 116. Shiff noted, in the same essay, by the way, that Johns has often expressed dissatisfaction with his own character.
8. The Virgin has a vaguely similar disposition, but the infant doesn't at all.
9. Untitled, 1990, watercolor, charcoal and pencil; one of 12 drawings reproduced in *Jasper Johns, A Calendar for 1991*, Anthony d'Offay, London, 1990.

New works by Johns are on view at the Castelli Gallery [to Mar. 9]. "The Drawings of Jasper Johns," an exhibition that opened last spring at the National Gallery in Washington and traveled to Basel's Kunstmuseum and London's Hayward Gallery, is currently at the Whitney Museum [to Apr. 7].

Author: *Jill Johnston is working on a book on Jasper Johns.*

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ARTWORLD

continued from page 168

Wexner Award for Risky Art

On the occasion of its first anniversary, the **Wexner Center for the Visual Arts** in Columbus, Ohio, has created the **Wexner Prize**, a $25,000 cash award designed to rank with the Pulitzer prizes in literature and journalism and the Pritzker prize in architecture. The prize will honor an individual for "artistic excellence, creative freedom, innovation and risk-taking in the arts" and will also include a commemorative art work, specially designed by an artist who has yet to be named. The first recipient is expected to be announced in November 1991.

The award is cosponsored by the Wexner Center and Ohio State University and is funded by a $3-million commitment from **Leslie H. Wexner**, chairman of The Limited Inc., who also donated $25 million toward construction of the Wexner's notable deconstructivist building by **Peter Eisenmann**. Specific guidelines and selection criteria for the prize, due in early 1991, will be developed with the help of a new advisory council; its members include dancer **Trisha Brown**, composer and musician **Philip Glass**, L.A. MOCA director **Richard Koshalek** and Williams College Museum director **Linda Shearer**.

The Wexner also announced new residency awards. **Twyla Tharp**, **Terry Allen** and **Paper Tiger Television** will be in residence at the Wexner Center during the 1991–92 academic year. The awards provide each recipient with a $15,000 fee plus a production budget of $35,000–$85,000.

Awards

Robert Storr, curator of contemporary art at the **Museum of Modern Art**, has received the 1990 curator's grant from the **Peter Norton Family Foundation**. The $50,000 award enables curators to select works to be purchased by the foundation for their institutions.

Richard Serra has received the **Wilhelm Lehmbruck Prize** for 1991. The $12,500 award is given to a sculptor every five years by the city of Duisburg, Germany.

The second biennial **Leopold Godowsky, Jr. Color Photography Awards**, administered by Boston's **Photographic Resource Center**, has chosen photographers from Central and South America and the Caribbean islands this year. **Luiz Braga** of Brazil, **Hector Mendez Carratini** of Puerto Rico and **Salvador Lutteroth** of Mexico received the top award of $2,500; **Santiago Harker** of Colombia, **Arnaldo Pappalardo** of Brazil and **Michael Jones** of Chile were given $500 honorable mentions. Next year's awards will go to artists in Europe, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The **Reader's Digest Artists at Giverny** program has announced its 1991 winners. Six-month residencies in Giverny, France, and stipends of $12,600 go to sculptor **Tyrone Mitchell**, video-installation artist **Diana Thater** and sculptor **Ronald Baron**.

The **Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture** has chosen the recipients of its 1991 Skowhegan medals: **Chuck Close**, painting; **Siah Armajani**, sculpture; **Nam June Paik**, video. **Laila and Thurston Twigg-Smith** were given the Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Award for patronage of the arts; the Skowhegan Governors' Award was presented to **Martha Wilson**.

The **French Ministry of Culture** has awarded American photographer **Joel-Peter Witkin** the title Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.

People

John Szarkowski, director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art since 1962, has announced his retirement, effective July 1. The exhibition "Lee Friedlander Nudes," opening July 25, will be his last.

Thomas Hoving, editor of *Connoisseur* since 1981, has been succeeded in that position by **Gael Love**, former editor of *Interview* (1987) and *Fame* (1988–90). Hoving, who was formerly director of the Metropolitan Museum (1967–77), continues at *Connoisseur* as a consultant to the magazine.

Tomás Llorens, director of Madrid's Centro de Arte Reina Sofía until he was unceremoniously dismissed last December [see "Artworld," Dec.'90], has been named chief conservator of Spain's Thyssen collection.

Michael Botwinick, director of the Corcoran Gallery from 1983 to '87, has been appointed director of the Newport Harbor Art Museum in Newport Beach, Calif.

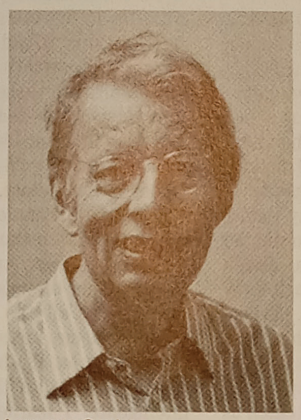
Gary Garrels, director of programs at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York, has been named senior curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

Catherine Hoover Voorsanger has been appointed assistant curator of American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., has named **Norton Batkin** to head its new Richard and Marieluise Black Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture.

David Berreth was named director of the Gari Melchers Memorial Gallery at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Va.

Obituaries



Lawrence Gowing.

Lawrence Gowing, 72, British painter and art historian, curator and teacher who was a preeminent authority on Cézanne, died of heart failure in London on Feb. 5. Gowing organized "Cézanne: The Early Years," seen at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., in 1989. He was Kress professor at the National Gallery's Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts in 1986 and curatorial chairman of the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., from 1987 to '89. Among his more important books and exhibition catalogues are "Turner: Imagination and Reality," which accompanied a 1966 show at the Museum of Modern Art, a biography of Lucien Freud and studies of the work of Constable, Goya, Hogarth, Matisse, Renoir and Vermeer.

Gowing was keeper of the British Collection and deputy director of the Tate Gallery (1965–67); professor of fine arts at Leeds University (1967–75); and Slade professor of art at University College, London (1975–85). A member of London's Euston Road school of painters in the late '30s, Gowing was known since the '40s for his informal portraits of eminent scholars and statesmen.

Giacomo Manzù, 82, Italian sculptor whose extensive series of figures of cardinals brought him wide acclaim, died at his home in Ardea, south of Rome, on Jan. 17. Manzù also made still lifes, portraits and figurative sculptures and reliefs. He designed monumental bronze doors for St. Peter's Basilica, installed in 1964, and doors for churches in Salzburg and Rotterdam. Among his U.S. public commissions are works at U.N. headquarters and Rockefeller Center in New York. Over his long career, Manzù taught art at the Brera Academy in Milan, illustrated books and designed sets and costumes for Stravinsky's opera *Oedipus Rex*. In 1968 he won the Lenin Peace Prize for his opposition to the Vietnam War.

Denys Sutton, 73, British art critic and historian who was editor of *Apollo* from 1962 to '87, died at his home in London on Jan. 30. Sutton's editorial specialty was the multiple-article study of an individual museum. He organized a range of exhibitions, including "Pierre Bonnard" and "France in the 18th Century" at the Royal Academy in London in the '60s; he also organized shows in Japan in the '80s and at Wildenstein & Co. in New York and London. His publications include *Degas: The Man and the Work* (1986).

Nicholas Marsicano, 82, Abstract-Expressionist painter who taught at Cooper Union from 1946 until his retirement in '88, died at his home in Woodstock, N.Y. One of the young New York painters who frequented the Cedar Bar and the artists' meeting known as the Club in the '50s, Marsicano developed a distinctive style of gestural figuration. He showed at Bertha Schaefer Gallery in the late '50s and at A.M. Sachs and Gruenebaum galleries in later years. He also taught at Yale, Pratt, Cornell and many other art schools.

Janet Hobhouse, 42, novelist who also wrote art criticism for *Art in America* and other journals, died of cancer at her home in Manhattan on Feb. 1. She wrote a survey of the nude in 20th-century art called *The Bride Stripped Bare* (1987) and *Everybody Who Was Anybody* (1975), a biography of Gertrude Stein. Her novels include *Nellie Without Hugo* (1982), *Dancing in the Dark* (1983) and *November* (1986).

Andris Slapins, 48, a noted Latvian ethnographic filmmaker, was shot and fatally wounded by Soviet troops as they stormed the Latvian Interior Ministry in Riga last Jan. 20. Internationally recognized for his documentary films about the Siberian people, Slapins was also a staunch supporter of the Latvian nationalist movement and was filming the pro-Soviet attack when he was killed.

David Piper, 72, British art historian and museum director, died of heart failure at his home in Wytham near Oxford, England. Piper joined the staff of London's National Portrait Gallery in 1946, becoming its director in 1964. He headed the Ashmolean in Oxford and the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge before retiring in '85.

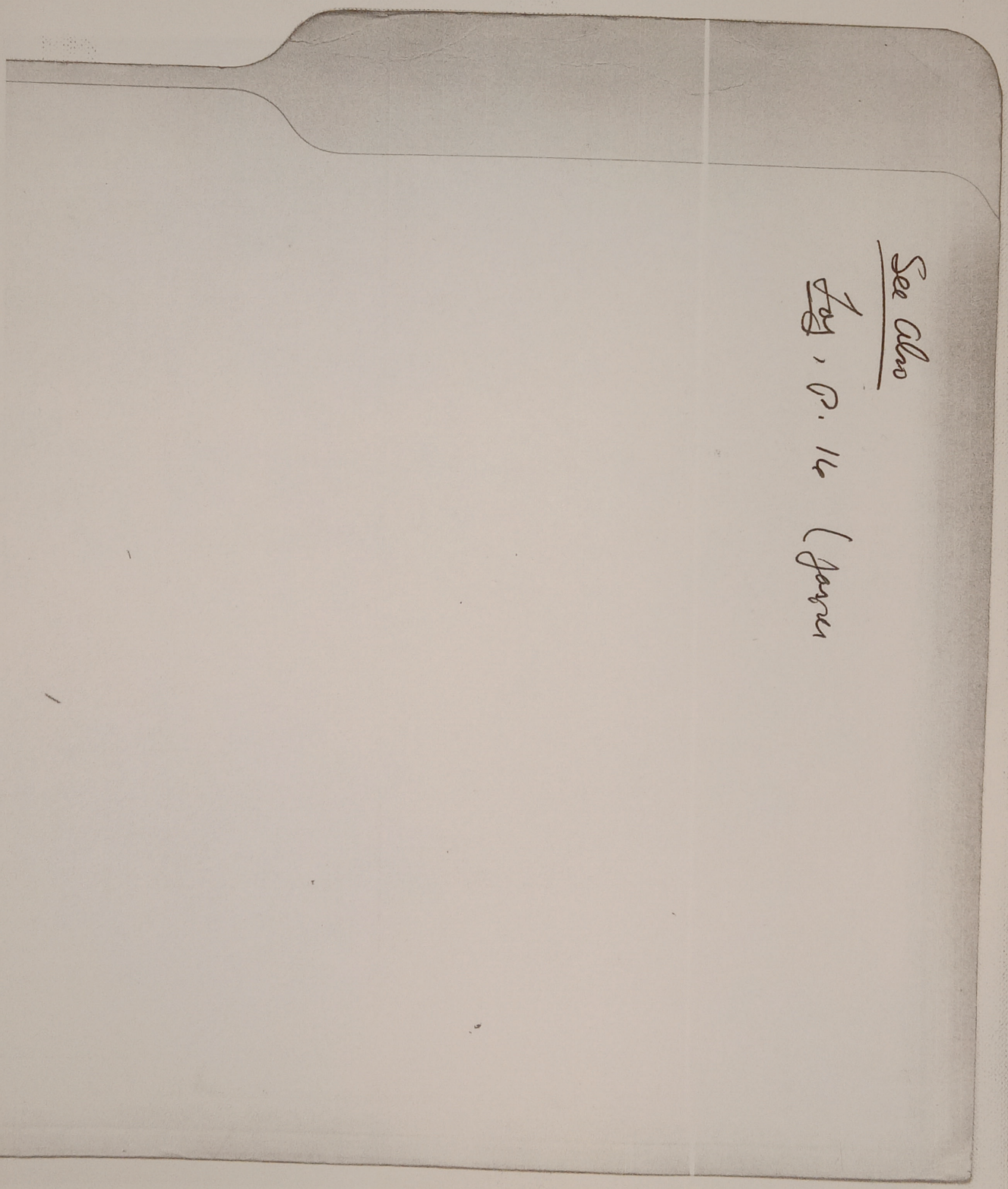
John Graham, 82, architect who designed the Space Needle for the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle, died Jan. 29 in Seattle. In the late '40s, Graham designed the prototypical shopping center, Northgate, outside Seattle.

Reuben Tam, 74, landscape painter whose works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Corcoran Gallery, died Jan. 3 at his home in Kapaa, Hawaii.

—compiled by Walter Robinson and Anastasia Wilkes

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See also
Ivy, p. 14 (Jasper

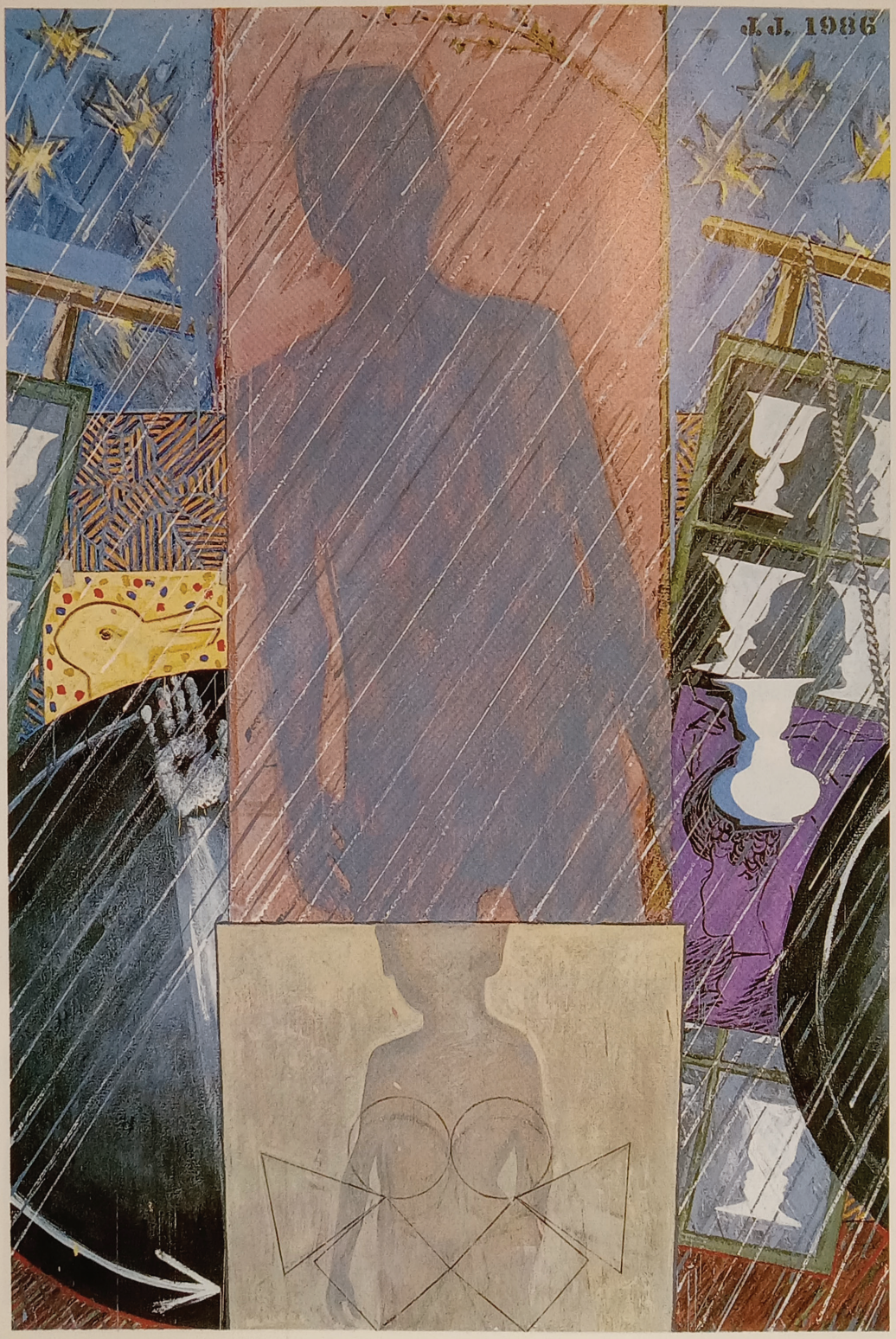
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(13) Jasper Johns - Sam Francis - window display -
Rachel Rosenthal - Pearl Street - Post-Pop Art

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Jasper Johns: **Spring,** *1986,* *encaustic on canvas, 75 by 50 inches. Collection Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.*

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Tracking the Shadow

By dint of industry both art historical and personal, the author here draws the measure of Jasper Johns's increasingly autobiographical work of the '80s. Picking up on hitherto tantalizing but fragmentary references to Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece, she presents an in-depth reading of Johns's recent imagery.

BY JILL JOHNSTON

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence. —Wittgenstein

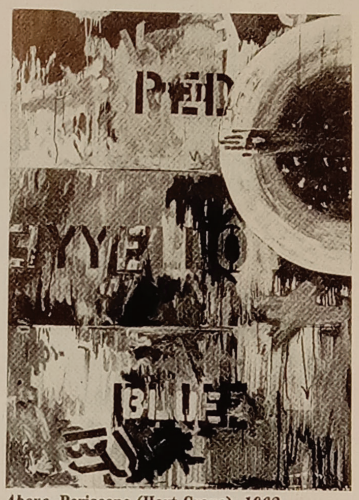
We understand that what we cannot speak about (by saying it) it is necessary to say (by silencing it). —Marie Balmary

In the recent show at Castelli of Jasper Johns's latest work—four largish paintings titled "The Seasons," with a number of drawings and prints related to them—one detail eventually caught my attention, occluding all others. The most obvious feature in these four paintings is Johns himself, represented by his shadow, cast life-size onto the canvases, worked from a tracing drawn by a friend. The same silhouette, painted in rich grays, appears in each Season—*Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter*—tilting left to the same degree.

This four-part work is as literal as anything Johns has done. *Spring*, for instance, is marked by diagonal streaks of white paint crossing the whole canvas and indicating rain; *Winter* is dotted all over with white snowflakes and even has a stick-figure snowman in it. In *Spring*, birth is clearly signified by the centered shadow-form of a child (inside a rectangle) directly underneath the looming, tilting shadow figure of Johns. The child's head, cut off just above the ears, slashes across Johns's body right below the crotch, separated only by its variant gray color and the top horizontal of the rectangle containing and cropping the child's head.

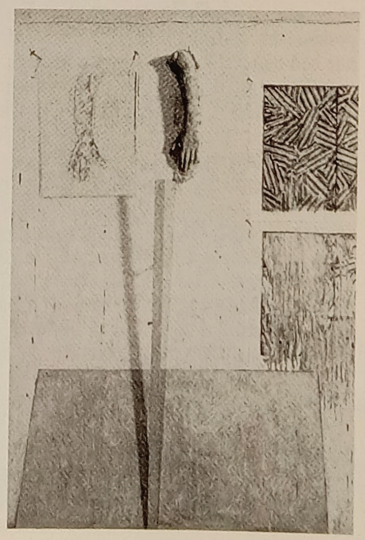
Fall literally depicts a fall. Here Johns has cut his shadow lengthwise in two; a portion of him disappears off the left edge of the canvas and reappears, as it were, on the right, both halves separated by a central vertical "panel" portraying a number of tumbling objects, including the ladder that elsewhere has held them all up and together by means of a rope and that has now broken in two.

The detail that eventually commanded my attention is one of these objects—the section of a painting appearing in each Season and referring to a series of paintings from Johns's 1984 show at Castelli Greene Street. This section, consisting of jigsaw puzzle-like shapes fitted together and made discrete by directionally opposed stripes, is contained by a rectangular frame; it is a section of one of Johns's own paintings, which appears partially obscured by other objects in every Season. The catalogue essay to the recent show, by Judith Goldman, and reviews I read identified it as a fragment from Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*. What fragment? I became curious



Above, **Periscope (Hart Crane),** *1963, oil on canvas, 67 by 48 inches.*

Below, **In the Studio,** *1982, encaustic on canvas with objects, 72 by 48 by 4 inches. Both works collection the artist. All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.*



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The theme of Johns's recent show is a symphonic meditation on his possessions, which include of course his many complex references to those artists whose work he has admired.

to know. Barbara Rose, surely an authority on Johns, was more specific than most: she said it was a detail from the Resurrection panel of the Altarpiece.[1] At first, however, I was preoccupied by the two things that most clearly presented themselves in these new paintings: the shadow itself, said to be Johns's first use of the whole figure, and his various quotations, of himself and others.

Quotes of his own work constitute nearly all the objects in "The Seasons," and these include not only his own past paintings or parts from them but other objects he possesses and has collected, such as his George Ohr pots, which have also been represented in past work. The two most readily recognizable images from his own oeuvre are the Mona Lisa and the American flag. These would go back the farthest, except for the arm/hand imprint that inscribes a half-circle in each Season, which dates back to '63 and is usually associated with *Periscope (Hart Crane)* of that year. In "The Seasons," this image functions like the hands of a clock. The hand points upward in *Spring*, horizontally to the left in *Summer*, three-quarters down in *Fall*, straight down in *Winter*. Inside its circle, it weights each work like a big dark pendulum, partially visible as it "swings" from painting to painting.

The four "Seasons" represent Johns in his studio (or studios: he has four of them), a developing theme of his in the '80s (e.g., *In the Studio*, '82), and here done up in spades, though not in a narrative context the way Picasso showed himself walking into his bedroom in *The Shadow*, 1953. While the viewer can imagine a degree of environmental depth in the four "Seasons" paintings, Johns has really assembled himself and his belongings in collage style on a flat plane.

If the paintings are literal in many ways, they're still not naturalistic. As Barbara Rose has pointed out, Picasso's 1953 painting of himself as a shadow entering his bedroom was a totemic source for Johns's new work. Another source for Johns was Picasso's 1936 *Minotaur Moving His House*. Both Picassos represent the artist's possessions, outstandingly his woman of the moment—recumbent on her bed before him as he enters his door in the *Shadow* picture; and as a horse giving birth (said to represent his then mistress, Marie-Thérèse Walter), head lolling out of the cart he drags (himself as Minotaur) in the *Minotaur Moving His House*. From this picture Johns appropriated a number of elements, most conspicuously the ladder with a rope around it holding up a painting; and the yellow stars, more like flowers or starfish, actually, in Picasso's sky. Also, the wheel of the cart appears in a number of drawings and prints from the "Seasons" show, and at one remove as the "pendulum" in the paintings. A branch, also from the *Minotaur* . . . , overhangs each of Johns's scenes: budding in *Spring*, bearing leaves in *Summer*, withering and broken in *Fall*, dead in *Winter*.

Prominently absent of course from the Johns paintings are the parturient horse and recumbent nude, though in *Summer* Johns painted a whimsical reminder of the former in a little sea horse, a rare species in which the male bears offspring. This information[2] points to the Johns shadow-form in *Spring* clearly parting from the child's shadow directly beneath him. But there are several images of women in the Johns pictures: the Mona Lisa (*Summer*), Queen Elizabeth (her silhouetted profile facing Prince Philip in profile and forming the image of a vase between them in *Spring*), and the trick double image of a lovely girl/ugly crone (also in *Spring*), which could seem to invoke Picasso's general exploitative use of women but was doubtless not intended by Johns to do so.

I saw Johns near the end of February 1987, while his show was still on; then I went to Europe. I asked him some questions and he told me nothing, really. I've known him since 1960, and this is the first true interest I've taken in his work. Which is not to say I haven't liked and admired it, even wished to own it, or have it on loan. Anyway, I've known him much better than his work, and I hardly know him at all. There are people who know him a lot better than I do who might say the same. A typical critic's or interviewer's remark is, "Johns doesn't wish to confide . . . still less to confess." In my new role as "interviewer" I found him more guarded than ever, yet, as always, fun to be with. He was fun even though his back hurt and his right (painting) arm was in a cast. We laughed about silly things. Having just realized how involved his work has been through the years with various poets and literary figures—O'Hara, Crane, Stevens, Beckett and Céline—I told him I don't like poetry. He smiled, knowing I was putting him on while perhaps also telling the truth. He said I suppose you don't like singing either and I replied of course not, except for Frank Sinatra. Then we laughed.

I asked him why he kept for himself his *Fall* painting from the group of four (I had read in several accounts that he did), and he said because there were two left and that was the one he was working on. I remarked on the, to me, amazing coincidence between the accident in which he broke his arm and the main detail in his *Fall* painting. In the central vertical shaft of the painting all his possessions are tumbling to the bottom, the rope that bound them to the ladder and the ladder itself having broken. And this is the painting in which his shadow is split lengthwise. Johns broke his arm in Saint Martin, where he has a studio, not long before his show opened; he was standing on a tall ladder pruning a tree, and a rope that had bound a branch to another tree loosened somehow, causing the branch to boomerang and throw him to the ground. He said he didn't make the association himself between falling and the *Fall* painting, but that others had.

In her catalogue essay to "The Seasons," Judith Goldman asks: "Johns as Picasso's stand-in?"—referring to Johns's self-portrait as a shadow—"This seems inappropriate for an artist who throughout his career has kept art and life separate." What must really be meant by such remarks is not that the artist has kept his art and life separate—how is that possible?—but that the artist has disclosed little or nothing to connect the two, either in the work itself or in commentaries about it. Johns is famously associated with the phrase, "Not mine but taken." To avoid the personal ("I didn't want my work to be an exposure of my feelings"[3]), he painted public icons or found objects—targets, flags, numbers, etc.—with which the spectator has so many associations that the object becomes, in an important sense, meaningless. Conversely, and to the same end, he built up a self-referential body of work, subjecting the spectrum of public icons that he'd made his own to a variety of treatments, to interact with themselves in different mediums and to evolve in relation to each other over time.

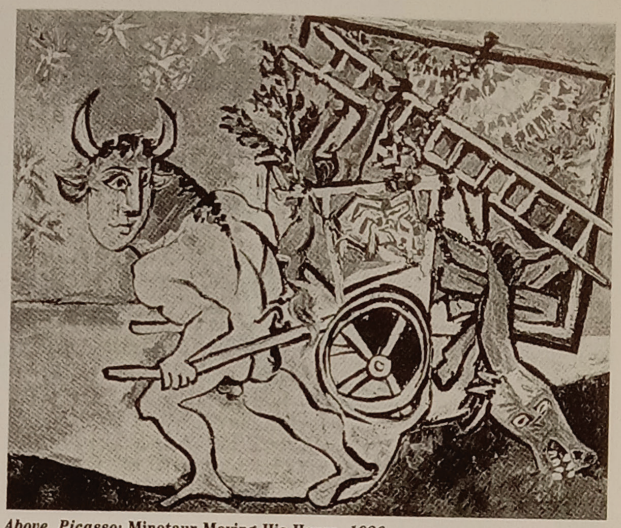
Johns's strengths have been in his ever-rich and subtle handling of paint, the sensuality of his surfaces and the intellectual plays he has conjured between what is seen and what is known. He asks, in his way, if you know what you see, or whether you have ever really seen it, or, perhaps, whether once seen you can ever forget it. Johns's flag, after all, is now almost as assimilated as the flag he copied. Here it is again, he seems to keep saying, in another context—new colors, sizes, settings, bedfellows—and though you might not see it

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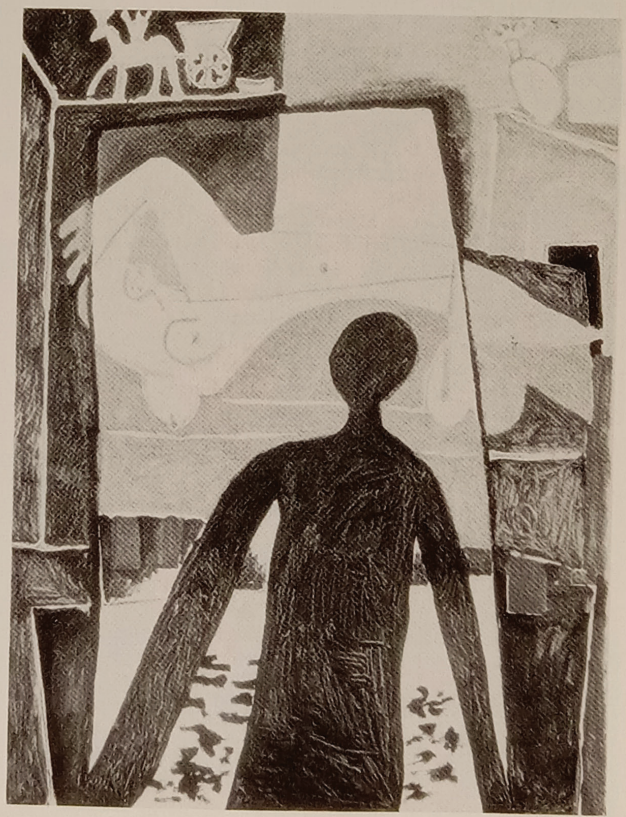
anymore, you surely can't forget it. It belongs to Johns now. It's both America's and his—quite a coup. "Not mine but taken." The theme of his recent show appears to be a symphonic meditation on his possessions, which include of course his many complex references to those artists whose work he has admired and in certain cases—chiefly Duchamp and Picasso—would aspire to enter artists' heaven with. All "taken," even his shadow (in two senses: from Picasso, and from a tracing), all very easy to know (the ambition at least is wonderfully clear).

Except for that damned fragment from the *Isenheim Altarpiece*. Grünewald? Where does *he* fit in? There are associations in Johns's work with Leonardo da Vinci and Dürer, and the 19th-century American Peto, and with Redon and more recently Munch, but otherwise Johns has made his claim to the modernist tradition through the mixed and "proper" genealogy of Cézanne, Picasso, Duchamp, Magritte and Pollock. The Christian reference (altarpieces?) struck me as practically Neolithic; and while, once known, the reference was dutifully repeated, no critic had really touched it.



Above, Picasso:* Minotaur Moving His House, *1936*, *oil on canvas, 18⅛ by 21⅝ inches.

Below, Picasso:* The Shadow, *1953*, *oil on canvas, 55⅛ by 38⅛ inches. Musée Picasso.



I flew to Europe armed with glossy black-and-white reproductions of paintings from Johns's '84 show, along with Xeroxes of all the reviews. I had not asked him about the Grünewald detail because it still seemed unimportant. Of the dozen or so reviews I had with me I found exactly five specific descriptions of the detail in question. These were very brief, and in her '84 *Vogue* piece, not even Barbara Rose mentioned it. Then I decided it was important. John Ashbery in *Newsweek* made the safest, and in the end most accurate (as far as it went) description. He said, "In *Perilous Night* . . . there are . . . almost illegible outlines copied from the drunken soldiers in Grünewald's Resurrection." John Russell in the *New York Times* blended his data, imagining understandably but mistakenly that what was in one painting was probably in others that were similarly patterned. He said, "We could scan the painting called *Perilous Night* quite closely and not guess that both there and in *Ventriloquist* and *Racing Thoughts* there is an echo, faint but distinct, of a figure of a sleeping Roman soldier from Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece in Colmar, France." Similarly, Roberta Smith in the *Village Voice* said that "details abstracted from the Resurrection panel of Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece dominate the left side of *Perilous Night*, *Racing Thoughts*, and an *Untitled* painting."

Jeanne Silverthorne, the reviewer in *Artforum* (Summer '84), was fanciful in another way: "In *Perilous Night* . . . while one of Johns's two reworkings of Grünewald in this painting keeps the sword of the stricken soldier in the resurrection scene in its original position, the other [there are indeed two entire figures of the soldier in *Perilous Night*, unnoticed by anyone else] moves it so that it would, if extended, intersect with the risen Christ precisely at the wound in his side."

Richard Francis, in an article in these pages [see *A.i.A.*, Sept. '84], noted that "*Perilous Night* . . . carries a detail of an image taken from Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece." In his book about Johns of the same year,[4] he assumed, like Russell and Smith, that this detail—the soldier—appeared in other works, however obscured by cross-hatching.

In London I had no time to pursue the question, but in Copenhagen at the end of March I went looking for reproductions of the Altarpiece to locate this soldier. Certainly without the original I was unable to find him in the black-and-white photos I had with me of paintings by Johns from the '84 show, and I was missing a reproduction of *Perilous Night*. The Academy of Fine Arts Library in Copenhagen had no coherent rendering of the Altarpiece. I ended up seeing a clear reproduction of the Resurrection panel at the home of an art

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Johns's strength is in his subtle handling of paint, in the sensuality of his surfaces and in the intellectual plays he has conjured between what is seen and what is known.

historian, in a small book dealing with Christian symbolism. I was lucky. One of my black-and-whites, called *Untitled*, one of at least four *Untitled* pictures Johns made in '84, had mysterious figuration in it that could be compared to the fallen foreground soldier in Grünewald's Resurrection panel. There it was, very precisely delineated once you've located it. The soldier has just fallen, his right leg is still off the ground, his left arm is raised overhead, head turned toward the viewer, as he shields himself from the brilliant light of the rising Christ. Another helmeted soldier leans over him, about to fall across his body it seems, but he doesn't appear in the Johns tracing in *Untitled*. He does, however, appear in the two renderings of the Resurrection detail in *Perilous Night*, as Ashbery indicated; I didn't see *Perilous Night* till I returned to New York at the end of April. Now, in Copenhagen, I imagined my small search to be over. Like Russell and others, I believe I assumed that the soldier was depicted in these other works but in some fragmented, further removed way, making him quite illegible.

I was driving with a friend, south then west through Germany toward Paris, and I decided to make a detour and visit the Altarpiece in Colmar, a city in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France. The Altarpiece resides there in the famed Unterlinden Museum. Colmar is very pretty, and the Altarpiece is definitely worth a detour, but I found nothing further that would illuminate Johns's use of it. I took pictures and bought postcards and drove on to a town south of Paris to visit Teeny Duchamp.

I asked Mme Duchamp almost immediately if she had been to Colmar. She said she and her daughter Jackie had gone there to see the Altarpiece with Jasper in '84—she thought it was '84. Back home I discovered that *Perilous Night* was painted in '82. I knew I had to see him again. Besides, I returned to Castelli's and obtained more reproductions along with all the reviews I hadn't seen of the recent "Seasons" show. The Isenheim detail, so-called, in the four "Seasons" paintings, does not resemble in its handling either the tracing of the soldier in *Perilous Night*, where it floats as a purple outline on or within a sea of black and white paint, nor does it look like the patterning of the soldier tracing in *Untitled*, '84, which is embedded in freely painted stripes that run through the figure all one way, broken into darker and lighter areas. The "Seasons" detail most closely resembles the jigsaw-puzzle patterning, areas with directionally opposed stripes (not technically, as was commonly noted, in Johns's earlier crosshatch style), that occupied the left-hand side of *Racing Thoughts*, '84. This was the side that also contained the photo of Johns's dealer, Leo Castelli, as a young man (itself in puzzle pieces), and a rendering of Johns's pants (some saw a towel) hanging next to it. On the right side of *Racing Thoughts* appears the Mona Lisa, and a kind of logo from the '84 show: the skull and crossbones with its warning, "Chute de Glace"—beware of falling ice, which was painted in variations into many of the pictures. Certainly the overwhelming impression from that show was of death and disaster. Anyway, the Isenheim update, if such it was, in "The Seasons" looked taxonomically related only to this expanse of jigsaw motif in *Racing Thoughts*.

Now I examined the jigsawlike motif in two of the *Untitled* '84 paintings and found some shapes that had to be the same, and in identical relationship to each other in the three works, however much they differed in size or design. And in two of them you can see the same "eyes." In one, these eye forms surround the skull and crossbones and can be read as ghosts or scary night creatures. By now I had reproductions before me of two more of these *Untitled* works, one '83, the other '84, both included in Richard Francis's book. That made five altogether, and I was certain there was no soldier there. I got excited. I suspected I was on to something. This time when I saw Johns, I brought all these glossies, books, notes, reviews, and pictures and postcards from Colmar.

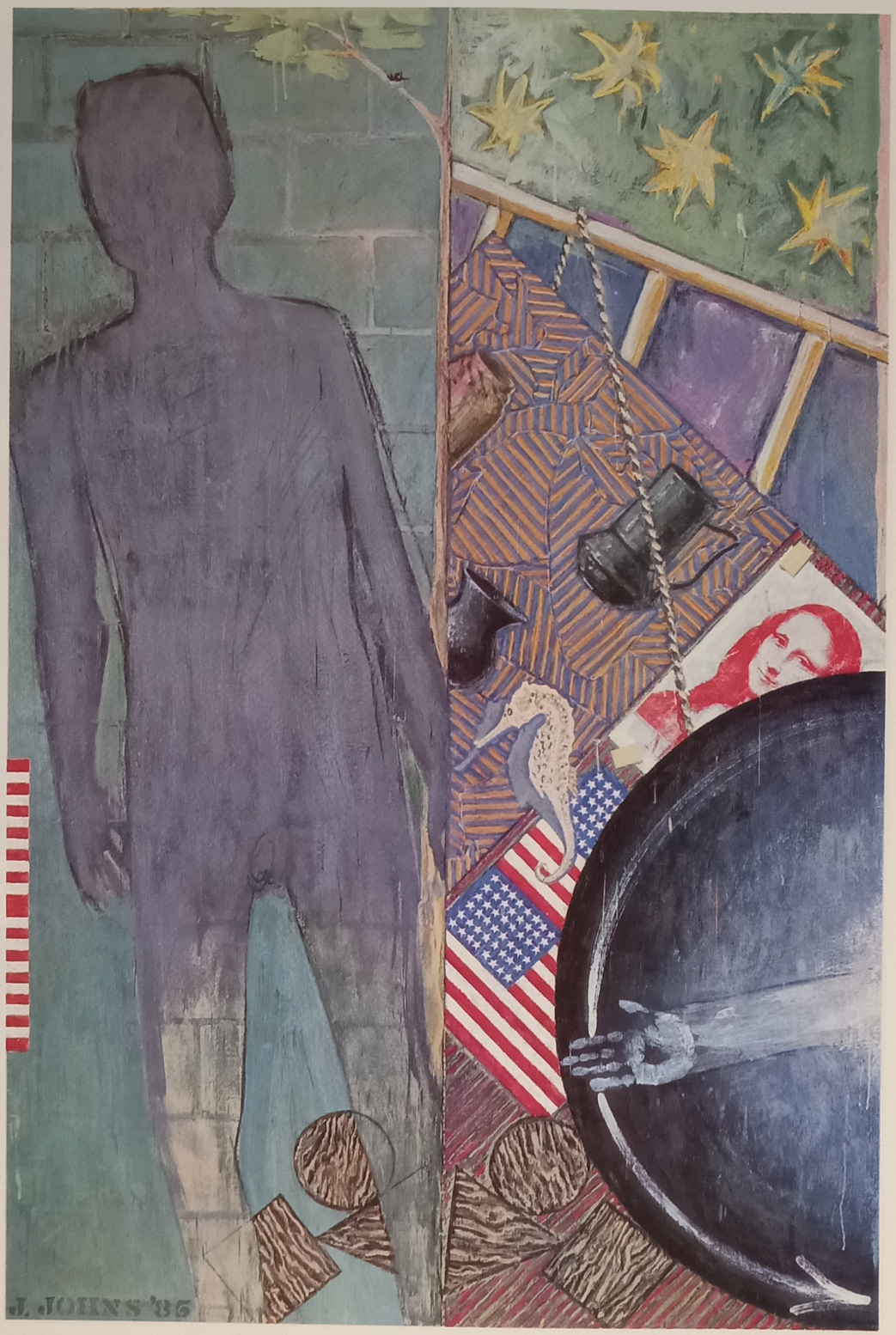
I met him at Da Silvano on lower Sixth Avenue. There's a dividing brick wall in that restaurant, and I arrived first and was seated on the far side as you enter the door. I waited and drank coffee. After a while the waiter came over and told me he thought perhaps the person I was waiting for was already there. He was. He was sitting on the other side near the door, in the same corner position against the wall, drinking a beer. That got us off to a good start—laughing. Still laughing, he said, "*I'm* not going to tell you anything." But he did tell me he had been in Colmar *before* '84, when he went with Teeny Duchamp and her daughter. And that a friend had sent him a big book with reproductions of the Altarpiece which he loved. He sent a tracing of a detail to the friend and that evidently got him going. At length I threw my cards on the table—the glossies, pictures, postcards, etc.—and more or less demanded to know if these patterns in the *Untitled* works and in *Racing Thoughts* were variations on the soldier. He said no, they were not. I said well, what are they then? He didn't answer. I ran down the panels. I didn't think it would be from the Crucifixion or the Annunciation or Nativity or Lamentation. Could it be from the Temptation of Saint Anthony? He thought it was. He wasn't sure. I had those two postcards at home: one shows Saint Anthony (Abbot, 4th century) in long white beard talking to another old man, Paul, in the desert; in the other, Saint Anthony is being dragged by his scalp into the scene of his temptations—a Boschian phantasmagoria of monsters and devils.

At home I spent more than an hour trying to locate a detail in the two Saint Anthony pictures that might match the pattern in *Racing Thoughts* and the five *Untitled* works—the fragment in the four "Season" paintings still itself of course unidentified. I found nothing. These Grünewald pictures are teeming with details. As are the Johnses. I called Johns and tried to pin him down. He was irritated now. He was busy, he couldn't remember, and the information was in the country. I went for it anyway; I said, "Look, there's Anthony in the long white beard being hauled off . . ." There was a brief diversion. He remembered a Gertrude Stein line: "Stop stop I did not drag my father beyond that tree." I remembered the Stein title, *The Blood on the Dining Room Floor*, and he said he had that book and he never read it, and I replied likewise. Then I said, is that it, is it in that particular panel—Saint Anthony sprawled in purgatory? And he said yes, but it's skin. I thanked him and we hung up.

Skin! I spent more time looking, turning the glossies this way and that. I laid out the color reproduction of *Untitled*, '83–'84, in the Richard Francis book. The left side of it is consumed by the design, in purples, grays and whites. I turned it upside down. I put the postcard right next to it. Johns is a very literal guy. The whole figure in the bottom left corner of the Saint Anthony Temptation panel took form in front of me like a picture in a darkroom being birthed out of emulsion, in the bottom left corner of the Johns jigsaw motif—as viewed upside down. I'd located it by concentrating on the outstanding feature in the corner of a three-pronged "claw." The figure is the only human in the panel besides Anthony, though he has an animal characteristic of webbed feet. He's a devastating creature. He has a long sort of fool's cap, his stomach is bloated and ballooned, all his skin (the *skin*!) is marked with pocks, an appendage or arm raised

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Jasper Johns: Summer, *1985, encaustic on canvas, 75 by 50 inches. Private collection.*

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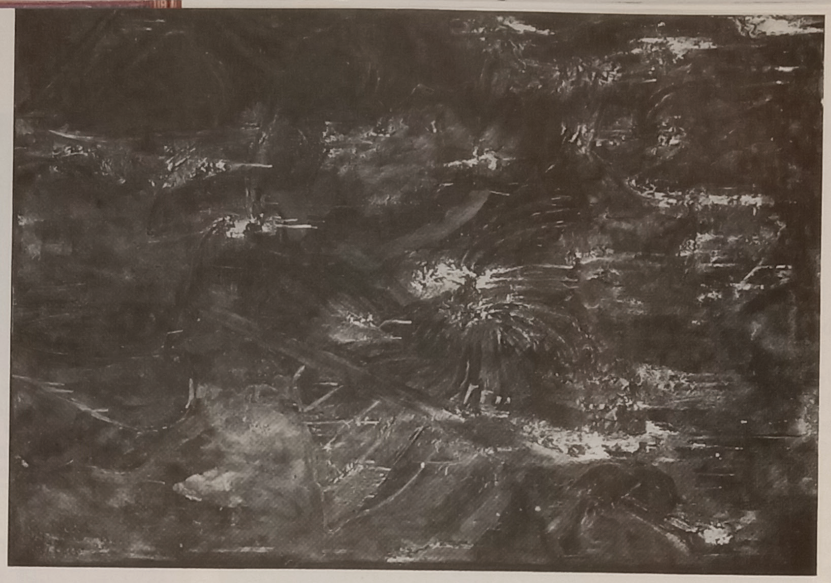
Jasper Johns:
Fall, *1986,*
encaustic on canvas,
75 by 50 inches.
Collection the artist.

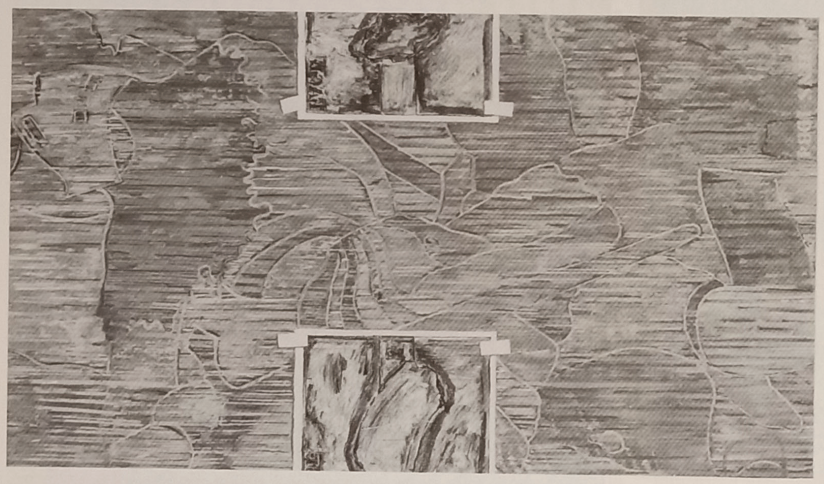
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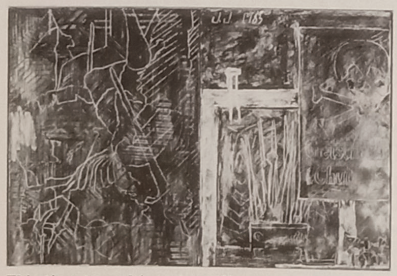
Johns's Perilous Night *(above and pp. 140–41) contains two separate renderings of the two soldiers. Difficult to discern, the figures fill Johns's entire left panel (detail, right); Grünewald's image is reversed and upended, the fallen soldier's head at bottom left. A smaller version of the motif, oriented as in the source, appears in the right-hand panel.*



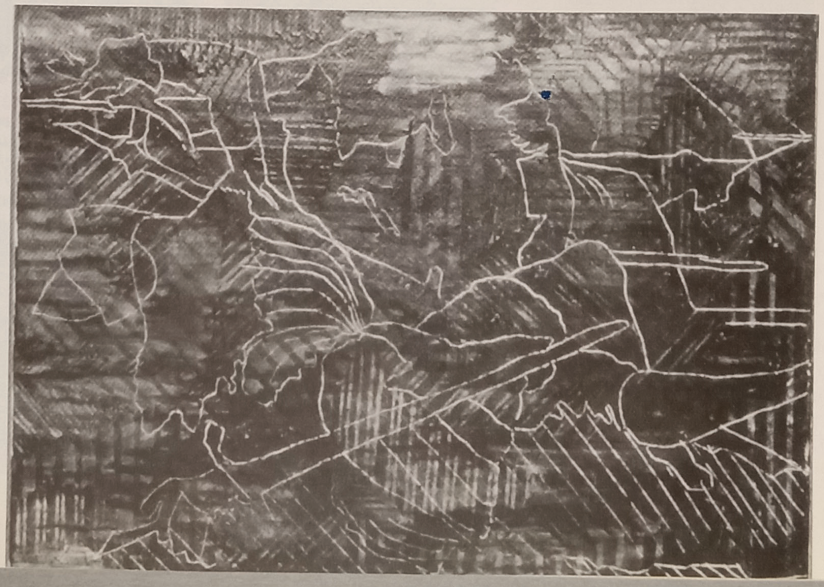




In the left-hand panel of Untitled, *1984 (encaustic on canvas, 63½ by 75 inches; collection Eli Broad), the recumbent soldier is presented more tightly framed and alone; he is again positioned vertically (but not reversed), with his head at bottom left corner (entire work above, detail left).*

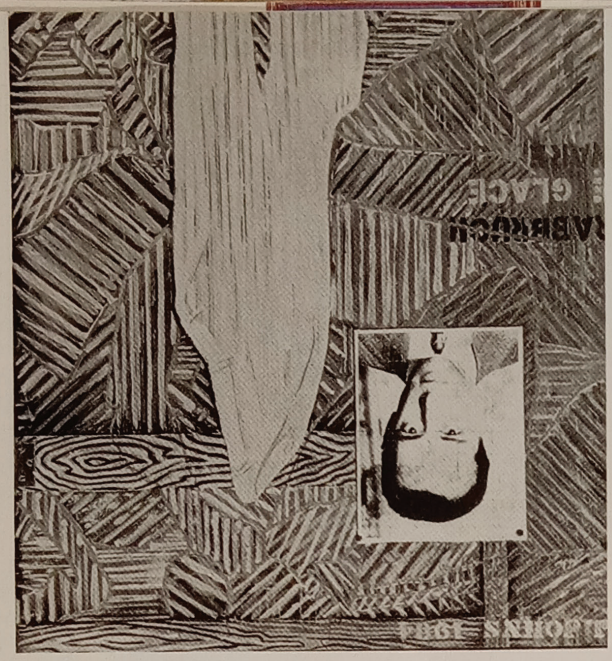


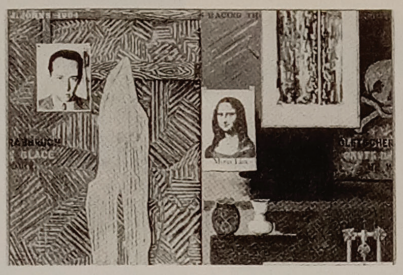
This time traced in pale outline, the two soldiers reappear in Untitled, *1983 (encaustic on canvas, 30½ by 45¾6 inches; collection the artist), cropped differently and upended again (detail right, entire work above). All three details on this page are turned sideways to more clearly reveal the Grünewald image.*



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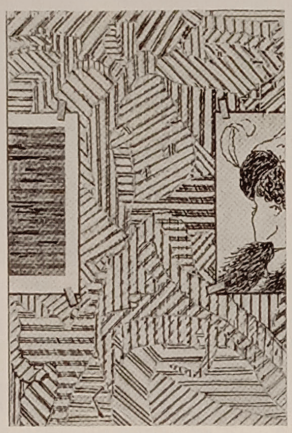
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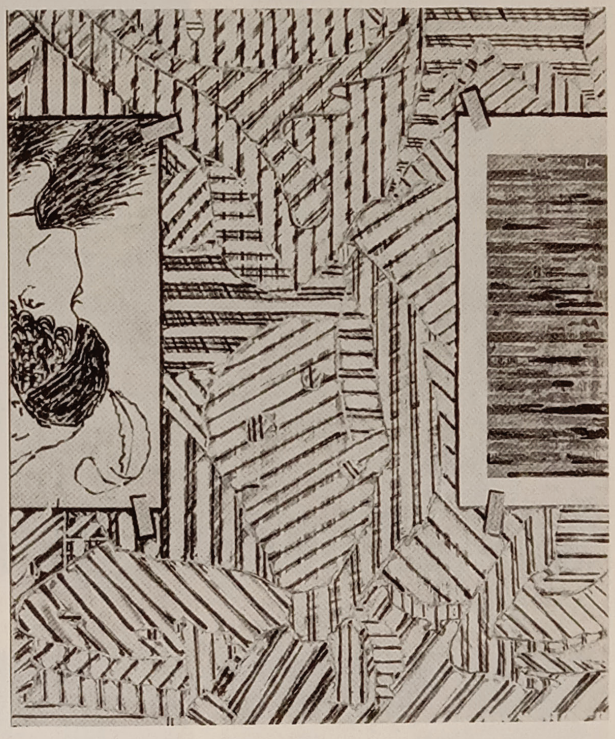


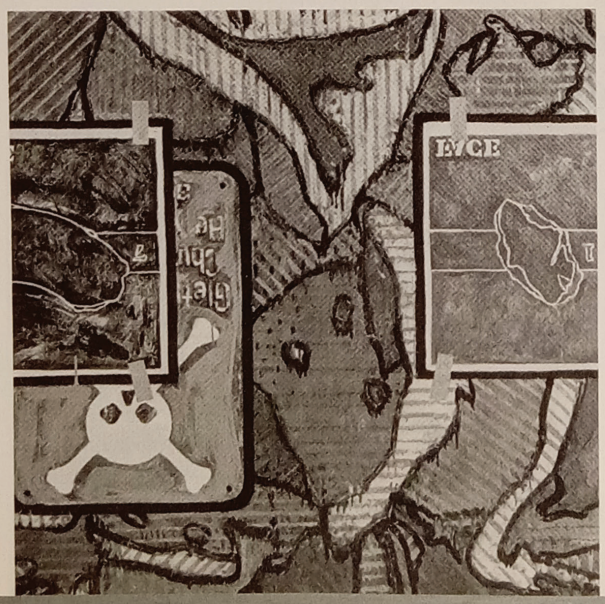


In Racing Thoughts, *1984 (detail left, entire work above; 50 by 75 inches; collection Robert and Jane Meyerhoff), a creature from Grünewald's St. Anthony panel appears upside down and partially obscured.*

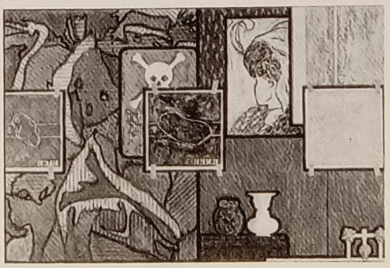
The St. Anthony creature, upside down and reversed, occupies nearly the entire surface of a large (75 by 50 inches) Untitled *painting of 1984 (detail far right, entire work near right). Private collection. All three details on this page are turned upside down to more clearly reveal the Grünewald image.*







Inverted, reversed and broken into discrete, maplike areas, the creature reappears in Untitled, *1984 (detail left, entire work below; encaustic on canvas, 50 by 75 inches; collection the artist).*



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over his upturned head ends in a stump, he's clearly diseased and dying (according to legend, by the way, Grünewald died of the plague in 1528; the Altarpiece is dated between 1512 and 1516). I quickly found the creature in *Racing Thoughts*, then in the other *Untitled* works (except that one with the soldier), and then as a fragment even in the four "Seasons." The bent leg with pocks on it (the "eyes" I saw were the pocks on his stomach) is clearly visible in *Fall*.

I felt very sad finding this figure in the Johns painting. There's great pathos somehow in the carefully hidden and precisely copied forms of this dying creature-person, who appears as overcome by the scene before him—Saint Anthony and the monsters—as does the fallen soldier in the Resurrection panel, stricken by the "blinding" light of the ascending Christ. Then, if you turn the *Untitled* '83–'84 right side up again, you see, in the far right side of the painting, that double image of the lovely girl/ugly crone, the crone suddenly becoming the conspicuous one, assuming a compassionate role of guardian/seer/witness over the "tragedy" in jigsaw. And there she is again in two other *Untitled* works, also overlooking the scene, this time a mirror image of it, though still upside down. In *Untitled* '83, the skull and crossbones in black on white is the opposing image on the right. That leaves *Racing Thoughts*, with the puzzle pieces forming a ground to Johns's pants and the photo of Leo Castelli as a young man. The Grünewald figure is in the same position, upside down, his distended stomach obscured by the pants, his female "guardian" to the right here the Mona Lisa, half of the skull and crossbones visible off to the far right of the picture.

"Not mine but taken" acquires new meaning. What's been taken here is either meant not to be seen or meant to be extremely difficult to see. There's a striking sort of inversion here: in early Johns, the public icon (flag), known by all, is apparently divested of personal meaning and rendered highly visible; in recent Johns, another public icon (the *Isenheim Altarpiece*), unknown to the viewer off the street but charged with personal significance, is rendered invisible to an ignorant public. It's hard to equate "America's and his" flag with "Grünewald's and his" soldier and victim. Gone really is the play of confronting people with images so familiar that they've become invisible, then turning them into something invisible (*familiarly his*) again.

Yet Johns's subject remains concealment. The nature of the concealment has changed a great deal. What was once a kind of game—an intellectual expose-and-seek with objects captured from the public domain—has become more seriously personal. Johns's use of the Grünewald masterpiece and the much more symbolic (however nearly obsessive) deployment of double or trick images in his work of the '80s show an artist tantalizing both himself and his public with vivid subject matter. He might be nearly there (i.e., ready to expose himself), but his cover is still very important.

The shadow itself is a cover. Though all reviewers of "The Seasons" felt constrained to use the word "autobiography" to describe paintings featuring the full-figured tracing of the artist's own shape, which hovers over an obvious collection of the artist's possessions, and is hence additionally autobiographical, the surfaces of the works are no less compelling than before. That which meets the eye is a dazzling symphonic variation in four movements on the theme of time and property. The symbols are all in place—we recognize the appropriate signs of the Seasons as well as the tokens of Johns's past work and the new form of self that endures this passage of time. But the mere projection of the artist's shadow along with his possessions, enduring a condition as general as the passage of the Seasons, is not autobiographical per se; rather, it's the hint or the intimation of the kind of disclosures we associate with autobiography. A shadow is a figure still in darkness, sheltered and protected. It represents the *absence* of illumination. Johns has painted it beautifully—another beguiling concealment of self.[5]

Johns's subject remains concealment. But what was once a kind of game—an intellectual expose-and-seek with objects captured from the public domain—has become more seriously personal.

Vying with concealment as a leading motif in Johns's work must be an increasing drive to express himself more openly. His recent association with Munch seems to signify this desire. His references to the human figure, foreshadowed in his *Weeping Women* ('75), after Picasso, and his *Between the Clock and the Bed* (two versions, '81 and '82–'83), after Munch, indicate some conflict and pressure. Revealingly, Johns said to me, "I resent my continuing dependence on preexistent forms." He said this after I inquired about the "freely drawn" images in his new work. Obviously the "starfish," the branches, the tiny hummingbird are freely drawn. But only the hummingbird is "invented," the others having been "taken." Johns is a master of the secondhand. Entering art history through a milieu that encouraged this theft of the already used, and as an artist who was virtually self-taught, he finds himself now perhaps in a position in which he has made his mark and his fortune doing work that may no longer be adequate to fulfill his expressive needs. Directly after he said he resented his dependency on preexistent forms, I remarked, "Isn't it fortuitous that . . ." and he finished my sentence, laughing uproariously, painfully I thought, ". . . that I would pick up tracing?"

His tracing in *Perilous Night* of the soldier from Grünewald's Resurrection panel was vitally new secondhand material. He tagged the work for meaning, opaque as it was to the general viewer in its submerged tracing, with his title, after a John Cage composition of 1945. In case the title wasn't enough to make the Cage reference clear, Johns incorporated into his painting a page, partially obscured by the hanging cast of a forearm/hand, from Cage's score, including a bit of the title itself: "The Perilou . . ." as well as the composer's name: "J. Cage." Cage has been quoted as saying that his *Perilous Night* was concerned with "the loneliness and terror that comes to one when love becomes unhappy." It was written the same year he separated from his wife of over a decade (Xenia Kashevaroff), and it represented a turning point in his career. He was dismayed by its critical reception. One critic, for example, writing that the last movement of the work sounded like "a woodpecker in a church belfry," prompted Cage to say, "I had poured a great deal of emotion into the piece, and obviously I wasn't communicating this at all. Or else, I thought, if I *were* communicating, then all artists must be speaking a different language, thus speaking only for themselves."[6] Within the next five years Cage would clear himself of such emotional dilemmas by placing his music insofar as possible outside himself. He became the original secondhand sound man, with influence far beyond the confines of music.

Johns met Cage in '54, the year he met Rauschenberg, and for several years, Cage and Merce Cunningham, Johns and Rauschenberg were close friends and supporters of one another's work. Eighteen years older than Johns, Cage was a man whose authority, coupled with the earlier example of Duchamp, would be decisive for the modifications Johns and Rauschenberg would be able to make on the then-prevailing and highly personal Abstract Expressionist esthetic. Between '55 and '60, Johns applied the gestural, painterly stroke of that school to subjects that were otherwise alien to it: the flag, targets, numbers, the alphabet, etc. It would be hard not to see

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Grünewald? Where does *he* fit in? The Christian reference (altarpieces?) struck me as practically Neolithic and no critic had really touched it.

Johns making a strong statement when he reached back, in '82, for the older man's discarded expressive work in the instance of Cage's *Perilous Night*.

But as literal as he may be in his references, Johns keeps an ironic distance from his audience. There is a presumed irony in Cage's title reference to the *Star Spangled Banner*, but Johns is clearly ironic himself in his submergence of a loaded subject, the smitten soldier at Christ's tomb, who was indeed a witness to the outcome of a certain (other) "perilous night."

Johns scoffed at me when we were having lunch at Da Silvano, and I made, I suppose, the mistake of telling him what I saw in two other paintings of his that he tagged by the use of another man's title: Munch's *Between the Clock and the Bed*. He had already told me the Munch work moved him. He once told someone that he sees a thing and then paints it, and other times he paints a thing and then sees it. He saw the crosshatch motif that he had used throughout the '70s in the patterning of Munch's bedspread. Johns transposed the motif to his own works after the Munch, placing it in the same lower right-hand corner as Munch did. In the Johns it seems like a signature, in diminutive strokes, conspicuous on a highlighted ground yet overpowered by the broad striation of hatching that covers the whole canvas, and that is very similar to his '75 *Weeping Women* (after Picasso), also done in three flush vertical panels.

It was his division of the work into three distinct vertical forms, light areas alternating with dark, that made me say I saw the three





Right, Resurrection panel from Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece, *ca. 1510–15, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France. Below, detail of foreground soldiers, a motif which occurs in numerous recent Johns paintings (see examples on facing page). Photo Scala/Art Resource.*

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The whole figure in the bottom left corner of the Saint Anthony panel took form in the Johns jigsaw motif as viewed upside down—like a picture being birthed out of emulsion.

distinct shapes in the Munch work abstractly in his own (Munch's full-length self-portrait with his paintings behind him on the wall, flanked by a grandfather clock on the left and the bed and its spread on the right). "Well, Jill," he said, laughing hard again, "if that's what *you* see . . ." So much for his audience. He isn't inclined to help by either denying or affirming, and he enjoys teasing. But more interesting here no doubt was what originally moved him. He did say he was struck by the coincidence of finding his own motif in the bedspread. Perhaps that inducted him into the Munch painting's subject: the very affecting self-portrait of the artist as an aging man, tired and resigned yet erect and heroic, standing before representations of his work.

Johns's first painting after Munch was done one year before *Perilous Night*. Once the soldier in the latter is "read," what might have seemed the arbitrary element of three forearm/hand casts, dangling across the top right of the picture, might now also be "read" in relation to the smaller tracing of the soldier, appearing in this case right side up, and being nearly touched by the fingertips of two of the cast forearm/hand parts. The same is true, for me at least, of the relationship of crone to victim, once the victim has been "read"—in the *Untitled* works. And in *Perilous Night*, since Johns has taken his soldier out of context, retaining the other falling soldier, who leans over his recumbent one, the falling one who leans over could be imagined as attendant and concerned, and not falling at all. So there are two hovering, caressing elements over the smitten soldier: the one who "falls" on him and the fingertips just above the latter. And one set of fingertips, with its hand and arm, is tellingly laid down across a representation of a Johns (crosshatch) painting, the other across the silkscreen of the Cage score, flush to the Johns. Then—how could you miss the symbolism of the handkerchief nailed to a stretch of paling or wood graining below? Johns's source in the Cage score becomes more cogent: a death (of some sort) or a separation was perhaps involved too.

A similar connection between art and biography has been made concerning Johns's '61 painting, *In Memory of My Feelings—Frank O'Hara*. In a provocative 1984 essay about Johns, two Englishmen, Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, drew what might still be considered unseemly personal inferences.[7] They noted that Johns and O'Hara were friends until 1966, when the latter tragically died, that the O'Hara poem, *In Memory of My Feelings*, written in 1956 and not published till 1967, was dedicated to the painter Grace Hartigan (one of two women, they said, that O'Hara, a homosexual, loved), with whom O'Hara fought in 1960, and from whom he became irrevocably estranged. Harrison and Orton speculate that Johns used the O'Hara title to express feelings of his own over his estrangement from Bob Rauschenberg during '60–'61. They quote Calvin Tomkins[8] on the breakup. They describe the O'Hara poem—an "inventory of feelings, and an assertion of the need to express them," and "images of death" recurring "throughout the poem." Then they ask, "So can we

Above left, Temptation of St. Anthony panel from the Isenheim Altarpiece. *Left, detail of the creature in lower left foreground, which, in disguised form, appears in many '83 and '84 Johns works (see examples on facing page) and in all the "Seasons" pictures. Photo Giraudon/Art Resource.*

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As he turns public and critics into fools, Johns is like a jewel thief who makes a spectacular heist and then basks in the public's interest and ignorance, and the police's unsuccessful pursuit of clues.

connote death from Johns' painting?" and conclude, "It seems so. The words 'DEAD MAN' appear in the lower right of the canvas." But these words are impossible to see. With magnifying glass I can just barely find a trace of them in reproductions myself. However, they are there.

I asked Johns about the words, mentioning the essay by the Englishmen, and he cast me one of his long, suspicious glances, saying, "How did *they* know the words are there?" They did of course note that the words are "veiled, camouflaged by busy grey brushstrokes." To me the words are spooky, given that the painting was done in '61, five years before O'Hara died. Anyway, it was not the objective of Harrison and Orton to expose lives, but rather to bring forward expressive aspects of Johns's work that have been overlooked. "To discuss the vivid surfaces of Johns' work, we suggest, is in itself a relatively uninteresting pursuit. What is significant is that they seem to show how a vivid surface—as the apparent technical 'arena' of the Modernist dynamic—can carry vivid subject matter while, as it were, pretending not to do so." And in sympathy for Johns: ". . . we might say that the ambitious artist of Johns' generation (and since perhaps), who knows his or her Modernism and understands what 'American-Type' painting has to be in order to succeed as Modernism, has a real problem if he or she wants to express and to deal with subject-matter and to express feelings as subject matter."

It's a long jump from *In Memory of My Feelings* of '61 to *Perilous Night* of '82. Harrison and Orton rather quixotically say that Johns returned, "after years with numbers and letters," to "human figuration" when he painted *In Memory of My Feelings*. But of course the figuration there is wholly allusive and symbolic. The weight of feeling implied by the title was carried by the loose gray/dark (i.e., stormy-cloudy-overcast-murky) paint surface.

If his surfaces earlier carried the burden of expression, Johns's emerging figuration, now literal and embodied (however unavailable), could place him in a tradition linking him legitimately or convincingly with Picasso, Munch, et al. Yet it's easy to see that he might abandon these tracings as experimental. He has perhaps the sense that what he "takes" could be difficult or impossible to convert into expressive available currency. He might then have to "give" something he won't, or can't. More daunting, no doubt, is any prospect of drawing the figure freely. As things are, the use of puzzle pieces is itself revealing. The direction he might take next could be a puzzle to him. Yet we may also imagine that Johns has obtained a private pleasure here, turning public and critics into fools. He's like a jewel thief who makes a spectacular heist and who then reads the papers day after day, basking in the public's tremendous interest and ignorance, and the police's unsuccessful pursuit of clues. It's a type of onanism—a public exhibition of a masterful facade, concealing some intimate design or activity. It's also the act of a great magician. Altogether, *nine* of Johns's pictures have featured this incredible little person (victim) in the Grünewald Saint Anthony panel, five of them prominently, and he has made at least three explicit renderings of the soldier from the Resurrection panel—and perhaps more that we don't know about.

In his recent show, he has given us his shadow to contemplate, his possessions and his tricks (double images) and surfaces to admire.



Jasper Johns: **Perilous Night**, *1982, encaustic on canvas with objects, 67 by 9 toward the viewer (cf. also* **In the Studio**, *1982, p. 129).*

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inches. Collection Robert and Jane Meyerhoff. The diagonal shadow at right is cast by a narrow piece of wood which tilts out from the bottom edge of the picture

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Jasper Johns: **In Memory of My Feelings—Frank O'Hara,** ***1961, oil on canvas, with objects, 40 by 60 inches. Collection Stefan T. Edlis.***

The masking of feelings, especially uncomfortable ones, was at the core of the Neo-Dada esthetic. Nor did the modernist esthetic offer a vehicle for the personal.

And while the "Isenheim fragment"—the Saint Anthony creature—is in there, it or he has now been rendered quite unreadable as well as contextless, except in structural or formal relation to the other elements in the work. The emotional connection or moment is over, for Johns and for us, though differently for each. It must have been meaningful for Johns; and we never got it. Yet his (private) moment, surely something far richer for him than the mere pleasure suggested above of relishing the public's ignorance, must be somehow seriously qualified by his refusal or inability to be more direct. Johns has a relationship with his work that is exclusive, or that leaves out a great deal in its final embrace with his public. I remonstrated with him when I saw him, identifying myself as just a spectator off the street (i.e., how am I going to get it?). He protested in turn that I was *not* just a spectator off the street. I said but I was, and I had to go to a lot of trouble to decode this mystery, and I still had not done it (we were talking in the restaurant). And then after a while, he registered his final complaint—in a tone of triumph, I thought. He smiled and said, "But you *aspire* to privilege." There was a slight pause. Then I replied, "Well, yes, I do" (which he laughed over deliciously)—and I can't remember what I said after that. But later I thought he'd made a gilt-edged remark. Privilege, certainly, means everything in relation to his work. He isn't giving himself away to just anybody, and the privileged information that some critic or other obtained in 1984 (perhaps Rose, for a start) about the *Isenheim Altarpiece* easily turned into a Rashomon botch of things. This may be interesting in itself; it may also serve to divert attention away from the artist's own feelings, toward which any substantially accurate information will, in a case like this anyway, lead us. There was no way to appreciate all that "religious" (or personal) subject matter when it was not clearly identified.[9]

While Johns keeps his public at bay, he toys with it as well. He offers suggestive subject matter, which he short-circuits with tricks and deceptions. His ambivalence seems extreme, though concealment still reigns over its opposite. If this is a problem, it inheres in the tradition of detachment that surrounded his formative years as an artist. The masking of feelings, especially uncomfortable ones, was a goal at the core of the Neo-Dada esthetic led by Cage and inspired by Duchamp. Nor did the modernist esthetic offer a vehicle for the personal. Yet in Johns's use of the Grünewald figures, we can perhaps guess that he found some grief difficult to share. If this is true, it represents the autobiographical content that we were unable to see in his '84 show, and that has gone underground in "The Seasons." I read *Perilous Night* as a scene in which one man gently attends the plight of another. I read the Saint Anthony creature as a projection of both victim and witness (e.g., the artist), overcome by death, or by dark forces. This figure elicits a sense of horror and compassion. It's too distinctive, too particularized, too human not to imagine that the artist made some strong emotional identification with it. But equally evident, in retrospect, at least, is Johns's interest in concealing, or not sharing, his involvement with his subject matter. What we can share, perhaps, is a special moment in an artist's career, as we watch him poised between his use of "pre-existent forms" and some aspiration to break away from them, or to risk their deployment in more available modes, if that seems possible. □

1. Barbara Rose wrote a detailed and very informative article "previewing" the Castelli show, "Jasper Johns: The Seasons," that was published in the Jan. 1987 issue of *Vogue.*
2. Barbara Rose, ibid.
3. Riva Castleman, *Jasper Johns: A Print Retrospective,* New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 18.
4. Richard Francis, *Jasper Johns,* New York, Abbeville, 1984.
5. Johns's images, cast with attributes of the four Seasons, are uncannily like some images or scenes in the four suits of the Tarot deck. The number four itself represents the points of the quaternity: an ancient symbol of the self, or of wholeness. Many symbols in Johns's paintings can be found strewn through any Tarot deck: the cups, pentacles (as stars), the child, hands, animals of course, the death's head, snowdrops and other seasonal signs, the "Wheel of Fortune," the plummeting objects, and so forth. The Tarot, like other fortune-telling vehicles, symbolizes the changes we go through in the course of a day, a year, a life; and Johns similarly indicates the cycle of things, while camouflaging autobiographical particulars.
6. Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors,* New York, Viking, 1962.
7. Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, "Jasper Johns: 'Meaning What You See'," *Art History,* Mar. 1984. See also Marjorie Perloff, *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters,* Austin and London, University of Texas Press, 1977, which is referred to by Harrison and Orton as well.
8. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall,* New York, Penguin, 1980.
9. The "Seasons" paintings show a kind of fallout of this subject matter from the earlier work. The Isenheim fragment from the Saint Anthony panel is further detailed, and cast as a souvenir. The death's head, appearing only in *Fall,* is partially obscured and likewise remaindered. The soldiers are gone, but the figure of Christ, so dominant in the Grünewald Resurrection panel and so spectacularly absent from Johns's traced details from same, is now in some poetic sense rigged up in the form of the artist—a "floating," featureless shadow figure, a clear representation of the totality of self. The hands of the "clock" pointing upward, downward and to the side may indicate the points of the Cross. Within the hand imprints are marks (perhaps left by the hollow of the palm, but Rose calls them "pinioned palms") now inescapably resembling stigmata. The ladder itself recalls the ladder depicted in many Crucifixion scenes.

There is another curious parallel between the Grünewald Resurrection panel and a prominent feature that occurs in all the "Seasons" paintings. Johns's very large black half-circles, bearing a striking central highlight from which the arm/hand seems to emanate, could be read almost as a displaced negative image of the great aureole around the risen Christ with arms and hands uplifted. Coincidentally, Barbara Rose's 1984 *Vogue* article noted that *Perilous Night* "contains . . . a passage of a burst of light taken from the central panel of Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece of Christ rising in glory and radiance at the moment of the Resurrection." Johns himself disclaimed this connection when I raised the question with him.

Author: *Jill Johnston is currently working on her autobiography's third volume, to be titled* Sunsets Abroad.

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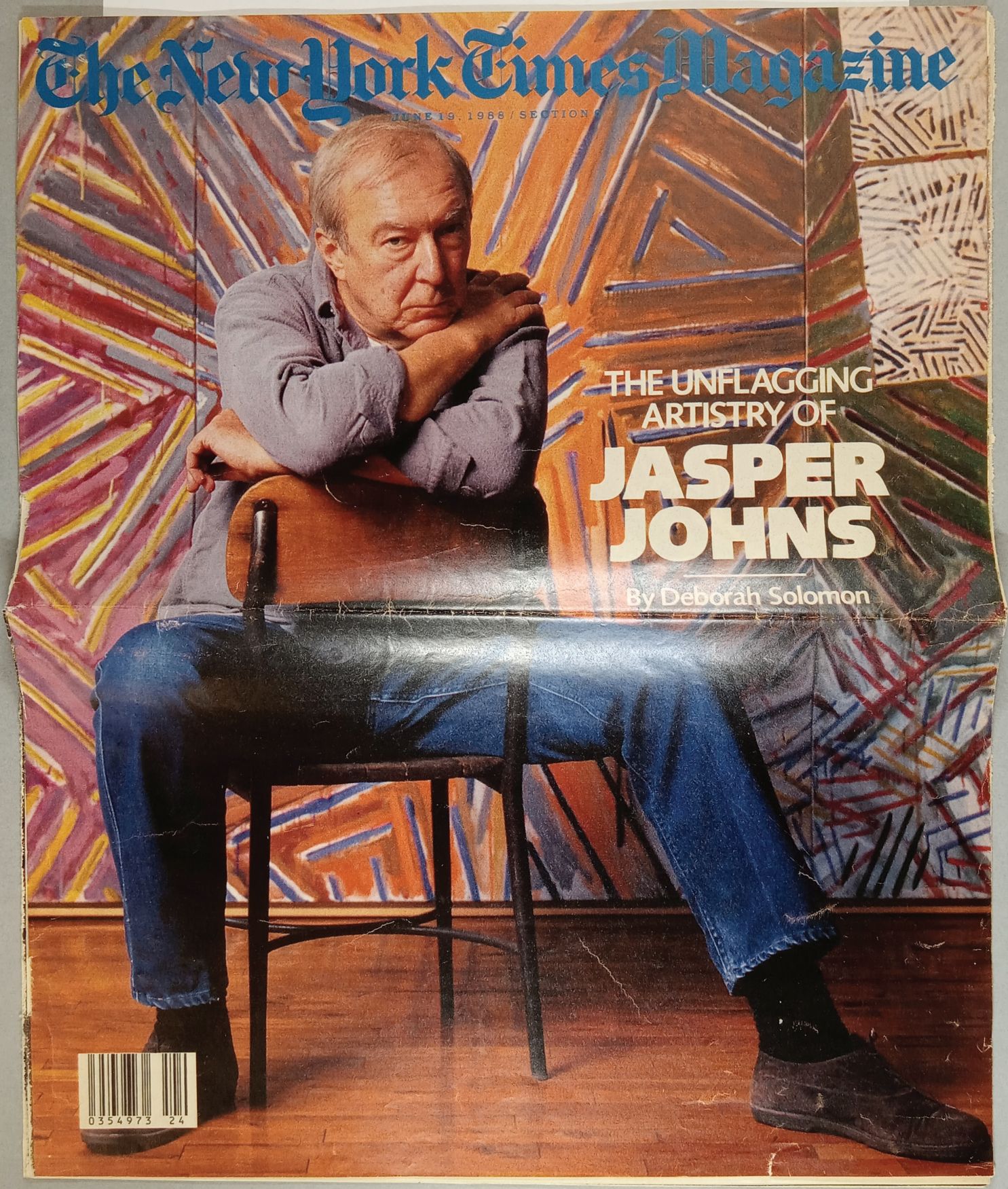
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Jasper Johns: Winter, *1986, encaustic on canvas, 75 by 50 inches. Collection Asher B. Edelman.*

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THE UNFLAGGING ARTISTRY OF JASPER JOHNS

By Deborah Solomon

IN 1959, WHEN JASPER JOHNS was 29 years old, a photograph appeared in Time magazine that shows him standing beside one of his paintings. A slim, brooding young man dressed in a coat and tie, Johns radiates the sort of demonic intensity the public no doubt expected of him. He was, after all, "the brand-new darling of the art world's bright, brittle avant-garde," as the accompanying article explained. "A year ago he was practically unknown; since then he has had a sellout show in Manhattan, has exhibited in Paris and Milan. . . ."

No artist was ever catapulted into fame more suddenly than Johns. His 1958 exhibition at the Castelli Gallery in New York, which brought together paintings of targets, numbers and the American flag, was seen as a brilliant assault on the high-minded strivings of the Abstract Expressionists who then dominated the art scene. What could a picture of a target, even if it *was* nicely painted in lush green strokes, reveal about the agony of existence? Absolutely nothing, and that was the point. As Johns himself later stated, "I don't want my work to be an exposure of my feelings."

In the 30 years since his shining debut, Johns has never been out of the limelight. When the Venice Biennale opens next Sunday, it will be Johns whose work is represented in the United States pavilion. It's a distinction of the highest order, and one that confirms Johns's reputation as the venerated father of the Pop Art movement of the 60's.

In some ways, it's hard to imagine a less likely star than this allegedly hermetic artist who rarely gives interviews or appears in public, and whose work, though based on the most commonplace of images, is difficult, clandestine, and at times vexingly self-involved. But that hasn't kept Johns from winning either an avid audience or commercial success. Last month, his 1962 painting "Diver" sold for $4.2 million, the highest price ever paid at auction for the work of a living artist. (The previous record, held jointly by Johns and Willem de Kooning, was $3.63 million.)

Yet the one development in the artist's career nowadays generating the most interest has nothing to do with money or fame. At 58, Johns has found himself preoccupied by his own vulnerability in the face of age and loss, and eager to surrender his famous detachment to the imperatives of his discontent. His recent work pursues the autobiographical as diligently as his early targets and flags renounced it.

Johns, who lives and works in a handsome white stucco town house on the Upper East Side, speaks of the dramatic change in his work elliptically: "One wants one's work to be the world, but of course it's never the world. The work is *in* the world; it never contains the whole thing."

The artist, a large, gracious, soft-spoken man who characteristically speaks of himself in the third person, is sitting on a hardwood chair in his studio. The room overlooks a stone courtyard and seems surprisingly bare for a work-



PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

PAINTED BRONZE, 1960.
Such works heralded the coming of Pop Art.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, HIS WORK HAS TAKEN ON THE LOOK OF A SELF-PORTRAIT.



Deborah Solomon, a critic and journalist, is the author of "Jackson Pollock: A Biography."

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Jasper Johns in his studio. "The work is in the world," he says. "It never contains the whole thing."

LIZZIE HIMMEL

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LEO CASTELLI GALLERY

SUMMER, 1985, *is one of a series of four paintings collectively entitled "The Seasons." They deal with the theme of man's passage through time, and are his first autobiographical works.*

ART 'CAN NEVER MAKE A COMPREHENSIVE STATEMENT,' SAYS JOHNS, WHO HAS USED COMMON OBJECTS —CANS, FLAGS— IN HIS WORK.

place. There are no easels displaying works-in-progress, no paint splatters staining the pale marble floor. About the only sign of life is a row of flowerpots filled with rare orchids on a window ledge. "Someone gave me a subscription to an orchid club," he explains.

Johns answers questions with short, careful, literal replies, like a witness testifying in court. The information that he chooses to disclose merely underscores his reserve. In 1959, he recalls, he was befriended by Marcel Duchamp, the Dada artist whose "ready-made" sculptures — bottle racks, snow shovels and other manufactured objects proclaimed by the artist to be high art — have had such a large influence on Johns's own work.

Were the two artists close? "I wasn't inclined to approach him," Johns says. "I found it difficult to be with him in a graceful way because there were things I would have liked to ask him, but I couldn't imagine that he would be interested in giving me the information I wanted. Much of it dealt with the past, and who wants to sit around talking about the past?"

The moral of the story is clear: To ask an artist to reflect on the past is to demonstrate bad manners. Johns is particularly touchy on the subject of his childhood. But then it wasn't a happy time for him.

THE ONLY SON OF A FAILED FARMer, Johns spent his earliest years in Allendale, S.C., a small town not far from Charleston. He was raised by his paternal grandfather, a Baptist farmer who took Johns in after his parents were divorced. When Johns was still in grade school, his grandfather died. The young boy was shuttled around to various relatives, and even-

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LEO CASTELLI GALLERY

tually ended up in a town called The Corner, living with an aunt who taught in a one-room schoolhouse. Asked why he lived with his father's sister as opposed to his father, Johns sits quietly before replying. "He didn't invite me," he finally says, erupting into loud laughter.

Johns recalls his years in The Corner as a time of intense isolation. "It was very rural — no telephone, no electricity at first. I had no sense of the world, and still have very little of it."

Early on, Johns retreated into the world of art. From the time he was 5, he drew all the time. "Making drawings was something I liked to do," he says, "and probably it attracted attention. People said, 'Oh, *he* does that!'" He knew for sure he was going to be an artist someday, even though the only artist he had ever heard of was a grandmother he never met, a Sunday painter whose landscapes he saw in the homes of his relatives. He still remembers what her work looked like: "Swans on a stream, cows in a meadow. A heron. I remember a tall painting with a tall heron on it."

At the age of 19, after studying briefly at the University of South Carolina, Johns came to New York to pursue a career in art. Before long he was working as a messenger boy and hazily wondering how best to proceed with his nonexistent career in art. The question was deferred in 1950, when he was drafted into the United States Army for two years of service during the Korean War.

After his discharge, Johns returned to New York and found a job as a sales clerk at a Marlboro bookstore on West 57th Street, next door to The Russian Tea Room. "I had no focus," he recalls. "I was vague and rootless. This image of wanting to be an artist — that I *would* in some way become an artist — was very strong. I knew for a long, long time that that's what I would be. But nothing I ever did seemed to bring me any nearer to the condition of being an artist. And I didn't know how to do it."

A turning point came in 1954, when Johns became friendly with Robert Rauschenberg. He, too, was a transplanted Southerner (he came from Texas). Far more accomplished than Johns, he had already had several one-man shows, and his iconoclastic "black paintings" and "white paintings" had won him considerable attention. As extroverted as Johns was introverted, Rauschenberg knew most of the leading avant-garde figures of the day. Johns has described him as the first serious artist he ever met.

By the mid-1950's, Rauschenberg was living in *(Continued on Page 63)*



LEO CASTELLI GALLERY



LEO CASTELLI GALLERY

DIVER, 1962, *above, sold last month for $4.2 million, the highest price paid at auction for the work of a living artist.*

TARGET WITH FOUR FACES, 1955, *left. Targets are one of the "things that are seen but not looked at" that Johns has often used as a subject for his paintings.*



THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

FLAG, 1954-55, *above, was the result of a dream he had, and was the first of a series of flag paintings.*

PAINTED BRONZE, 1960, *left, was inspired by the comment that Johns's art dealer was so good you could give him "two beer cans and he could sell them."*

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JASPER JOHNS

Continued from Page 23

a loft building on Pearl Street, one flight above Johns. Over the next few years, the two painters traded ideas on a daily basis, criticized each other's work, and "nourished each other," as Rauschenberg puts it, "by being such contradictory personalities."

They offered each other practical assistance, too. In those days, Rauschenberg was supporting himself designing windows for Bonwit Teller on a freelance basis; one day he asked Johns for some help. "I saw that what Bob did was do something, have some money, run out of money, find something to do, get some money." Johns quit his job at the bookstore and began working with Rauschenberg.

Now that he had time to paint, Johns decided to start over, and in 1954 destroyed every work in his studio. "I think I must have recognized some aspect of self-hatred in my aimlessness," he says. "I hoped to instigate a new state of affairs, to change the form of my thought and the content of my work."

Johns wasn't sure exactly what form his new work would take, but he knew what form it would actively resist. By the mid-50's, Abstract Expressionism was the dominant style of the day, and many young artists were eagerly adopting the thrusting brushstrokes, free-wheeling lines and heroic scale of artists like Jackson Pollock and de Kooning. Johns, however, was never one for hero-worship. "I didn't want to do what they did," he says of the Abstract Expressionists. "I decided that if my work contained what I could identify as a likeness to other work, I would remove it."

One day in 1954, Johns casually mentioned to Rauschenberg that he'd had a crazy dream the previous night. "How crazy was it?" Rauschenberg asked. "Well," Johns replied, "in this dream I was painting the American flag." *The American flag?* Rauschenberg didn't think it was crazy at all. "That's a really great idea," he said.

And so Johns returned to his studio and, over the course of several months, painted his first star-spangled flag. Based on the image of an American flag unfurled and stretched tautly across a canvas, Johns's "Flag" was a complicated painting. Is it a flag, or does it just *look* like a flag? Should we stand up before it and recite "The Pledge of Allegiance" — or approach it instead as a pure abstraction, a rectangle divided into bands of color? Like much of the work that Johns did after it, "Flag" blurred the distinction between a painting and the object it depicts, raising basic questions about reality and perception.

After completing several variations on his first "Flag," Johns went on to paint the alphabet, archery targets and the numbers 0 through 9 — "things that are seen but not looked at," he explains. He lavished great care on their execution; most of his work was done in encaustic, a wax-based medium that gave his surfaces a dense, sensuous look. It never occurred to Johns that his paintings of flags or the alphabet might cause an uproar; when he exhibited his "Green Target" in a group show at the Jewish Museum in 1957, no reviewers made note of it.

But Johns's obscurity didn't last long. One day in 1957, Leo Castelli, who had just opened a gallery devoted to avant-garde art, climbed the three flights to Rauschenberg's loft to look at his work and discuss the possibility of giving him a show. When Rauschenberg mentioned that he was going downstairs to get some ice for drinks from Johns's loft (they shared a refrigerator), Castelli's ears perked up. "Jasper Johns?" he asked. "The one who painted the green picture in the Jewish Museum show?" Castelli headed downstairs to look at Johns's work. "It was an astounding experience," he recalls. Forgetting about Rauschenberg for the moment, Castelli scheduled Johns's first show for January 1958.

When Johns's show opened at the gallery, the public was astonished. Here were paintings with names like "Flag," "White Flag," "Target with Four Faces" — and the willful banality of their subject matter seemed to mock the high seriousness of art. Unlike the Abstract Expressionists, Johns had no interest in lofty strivings or romantic ideals or heroic quests for the sublime. The only emotion suggested by his work was a cool, astringent irony. The art historian Leo Steinberg, one of the artist's early champions, has described the reaction of a well-known painter who visited the gallery: "If this is painting," he said, "I might as well give up."

Johns's work was instantly recognized as an ingenious negation of Abstract Expressionism. His flags, targets and stenciled numbers were emptied of all illusion or grandeur, and they made viewers wonder whether a painting, like a cup or a chair, wasn't just an ordinary material object. "At one stroke," the late critic Harold Rosenberg has written, "Johns extinguished speculation about the meaning of individual paintings and directed attention to them as objects among other objects."

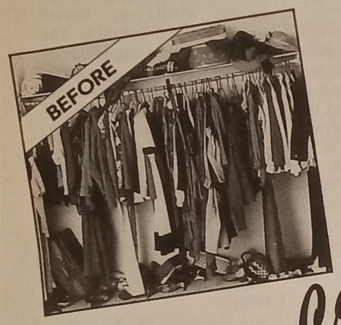
Some critics dismissed Johns's work as a reheated



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version of Duchampian irony ("Dada's the Disease," grumbled Emily Genauer in The New York Herald Tribune); in more influential quarters the reaction was overwhelmingly favorable. The Museum of Modern Art, which was notorious for its wait-and-see approach toward acquiring the work of younger artists, promptly purchased three of Johns's paintings.

Johns's variations on flags and targets, though layered with ambiguity, were relatively accessible compared to earlier avant-garde art, and collectors didn't hesitate to snap them up. Taxi-fleet tycoons Robert and Ethel Scull, delighted by Johns's "number" paintings, commissioned him to paint a picture of a big number five — "our good luck number since three children and the two of us made five," Mrs. Scull explains.

No one was more surprised by Johns's success than the Abstract Expressionists, who had come of age when artists still lived in cold-water flats, rarely made a sale, and prided themselves on their outsider status. One day news got back to Johns that de Kooning had bitterly joked about Castelli, "You could give that son of a bitch two beer cans and he could sell them." The comment inspired Johns's best-known sculpture, "Painted Bronze," in which a couple of cans of Ballantine Ale stand side by side with a dignity befitting Egyptian tomb figures.

BY THE EARLY 1960'S, JOHNS had become a highly influential figure. When Frank Stella painted the austere black-striped canvases that heralded the beginning of Minimalism, he was improvising on the "you see what you see" literalness of Johns's flags and targets. When Andy Warhol painted a picture of a Campbell's soup can, when Claes Oldenburg made a sculpture of a giant hamburger, when Roy Lichtenstein elevated comic-book blondes to the realm of high art, they were all exploring the ideas set forth in Johns's (and Rauschenberg's) paintings of commonplace subjects.

Yet the Pop Art movement, which embraced the whole range of vernacular culture and sought to demystify high art, had little in common with the intellectual riddles inscribed in Johns's flags and targets. As Pop gained ascendancy, Johns left New York for Edisto Beach, S.C., and his flags and targets gave way to a more personal and despairing iconography. "Periscope (Hart Crane)," done in 1963, includes an image of a grasping arm, a reference to the poet's suicidal death by drowning. "Souvenir," in which an actual flashlight is affixed to the canvas, along with a dinner plate bearing a photograph of the artist, is a bitter meditation on the limitations of art, which can no more shed light on human suffering than can the flashlight in the photograph.

As the years passed, Johns's work became more hermetic. Throughout most of the 1970's, while dividing his time between the wooded seclusion of Stony Point, N.Y., and a former bank building in downtown Manhattan, he devoted himself to a group of abstractions known as the "crosshatchings" — little clusters of parallel lines arranged in all-over rhythms. Critics had a field day interpreting the "hatches," and everything from human fingers to "a prolonged cry" to a secret code known only to Johns and his closest friends was said to be embedded in their imagery.

In the early 1980's, Johns found himself increasingly dissatisfied with the smooth, seamless surfaces of his crosshatchings, and anxious to express himself more directly. The result was some of his most forceful paintings ever. "Racing Thoughts" of 1983, a big, horizontal canvas rendered in a *trompe l'oeil* style, depicts a view of a bathroom cluttered with personal mementoes — a photograph of Leo Castelli, some pots by the American ceramicist George Ohr (whose work Johns collects), a Swiss poster bearing a skull. It's an elegiac painting that shows the artist racing to recapture a whole lifetime of experience, but able to retrieve little more than faded old photographs and other fragments of his past.

Why would Johns, who is in good health, be moved to confront his own mortality with such directness and urgency? "I suppose I've become increasingly aware of the ways things can be cut off," he says. "I don't know whether it's the loss of friends. . . ." He stops, and retreats to safer ground. "I think my early work exposed me just as much as any other bit of my work."

Last year, Johns generated enormous publicity with the unveiling at the Castelli Gallery of four big paintings collectively entitled "The Seasons." The result of nearly two years' work, "The Seasons" delineate the familiar theme of man's passage through time, from the bloom of spring to the cold, gray deprivation of winter. They're dominated by the image of the artist's own shadow cast life-size onto the canvas — the first full figure Johns ever painted, his first true self-portrait.

In each of "The Seasons," the shadow is shown inside a studio, surrounded by cryptic images from the artist's past: an American flag, a decoy duck, the Hart Crane hand. These various motifs lend themselves to endless interpretation, but one doesn't have to be a detective to recognize "The Seasons" as a personal lament in the face of old age and death. The shadow lurking in the four paintings isn't a figure of mystery or romance. He's simply a sad, faceless spook, a gray silhouette helplessly watching as his world decays around him.

Despite Johns's reputation for being "the sacred cow" of the art world, as the writer Calvin Tomkins once called him, the reaction to "The Seasons" wasn't unanimously reverent. Some critics found the works contrived; their reviews were laced with stinging phrases like "mere illustration" and "Currier and Ives cartoons." Even the artist's most fervid admirers concede that "The Seasons" have none of the daring originality of

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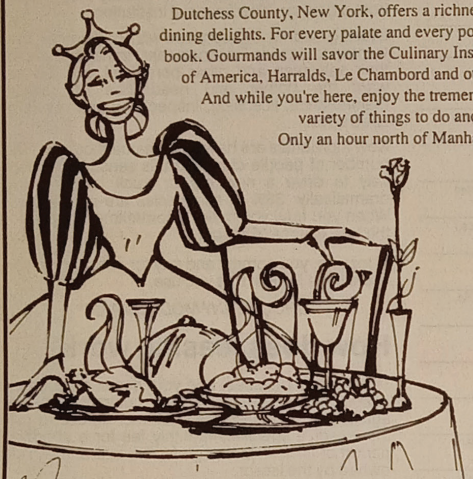
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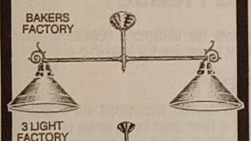
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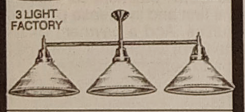
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Johns's early flags and targets. The skull, pots and other objects gathered together in the four paintings link them to the old European tradition of "melancholia" still-life, in which a person is shown surrounded by an arrangement of possessions that evoke life's transience and uncertainty.

"When an artist makes a great contribution to the course of art early in life, people tend to be disappointed later on," says Mark Rosenthal, a curator of 20th-century art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art who organized the current Johns exhibition in Venice. (The show, a survey of the artist's work since 1974, will be seen in Philadelphia in the fall.) "People look at Johns and want to know: Is he still contributing to the flow of art history the way the flags contributed? There is definitely a problem that way for the artist; people don't look at what he's trying to do."

One of the more common complaints about Johns's work is that it's indulgently self-referential, featuring a narrow range of imagery and ideas. Like a kid with only one box of toys, Johns is always playing (and Johns does play) with the same old motifs: a flag, a flashlight, a Savarin coffee can stuffed full of paint brushes. Usually after he finishes a painting, he reworks the image in drawings and prints, cannibalizing his own imagery. "It would be wonderful to leap over certain obstacles and be in a superior position to the one one is in," Johns says. "One sees that one is, in a sense, helplessly concerned with one's concerns. One has to have the thoughts one has, one can't just have the thoughts one would like to have."

Johns tends to work exceedingly slowly. It is not unusual for him to spend two years on a single canvas, and his total output over 30-plus years numbers fewer than 300 paintings. But even when his work is going smoothly, Johns is cautious, critical, painstaking; he manipulates brushstrokes "like cards in a patience game," the critic and painter Fairfield Porter once wrote. Johns doesn't paint so much as he repaints, building up his canvases layer by layer in a process of continuous self-revision.

Johns's slowness as a painter, his careful application of pigment, his endless reworking of the surface, his difficulty finishing paintings — it all hints at the sense of doubt so pervasive in his work. His flags and targets, as much as the quivering shadow in "The Seasons," are emblematic of the incomplete, fragmented nature of existence — and of art's inability to make us whole. "It seems to me," Johns says, "one can never make a comprehensive statement. One just continues to do things — this, that and the other — and then it stops."

JOHNS'S FRIENDS INvariably describe him as a private, guarded man. How private is he? "I don't think I should answer that," replies the author Susan Sontag. "It's a violation of his privacy."

"Knowing him is a great pleasure because you're constantly in the state of a tourist when you're with him," says John Cage, the avant-garde composer. "Every moment is new." Cage's affection for the artist is abundantly evident in the several poems he's published in his honor, one of which ends: "the difficulties/you and your work have given/i cherish more than any others."

Anyone who has ever spent a few hours in Johns's presence would have no trouble understanding "the difficulties" alluded to in Cage's poem. "He's hard to get along with," says the collector Ethel Scull. "If he's in a mellow mood you're on easy street, but he can be icy cold." Rauschenberg, who has known Johns as long as just about anyone, says ruefully, "I'm not certain that he has any close friends. He's cautious and terrified of extending himself and I don't know how he survives."

For all his efforts to protect his privacy, Johns is by no means a loner. Evenings when he's not home watching television ("mostly I just switch the channels") or indulging his omnivorous taste for literature (he reads everything from Wittgenstein to dime-store mysteries), he can often be found at dinner parties. He is said to be an excellent cook who enjoys entertaining at his Manhattan town house and at his island retreat on St. Martin. "He's very sociable," says Leo Castelli, his art dealer. "You can't imagine how many people he knows. I don't think he would go anywhere not having somebody around who he could see right away, if he wanted to."

Even when he's working, Johns isn't completely alone. He is kept constant company by his dog Whisky, a golden-colored mutt. Johns is obviously fond of the dog, and the only real story he volunteers during my visit is the saga of how he came to own her. A decade ago, this story begins, Johns was visited in St. Martin by Teeny Duchamp, the widow of Marcel. "We went to the house of these friends and the hostess was saying she had gotten these pups and she was taking them the following day to the vet to be put to sleep. Teeny said, 'You're not taking them to have them killed! I'm taking them to Paris!' So we put the dogs in a champagne carton, put Teeny on an airplane, and sent her to Paris ... One of the dogs mated with a King Charles spaniel and gave birth to Whisky and her blond sister, Champagne. I was visiting Paris when Whisky was a tiny little pup and I said, 'Well, I would like her.' But she was too young then to travel. Later, she was put on the Concorde, and I met the airplane."

When I noted that it seemed peculiar to bring a mongrel all the way from France, Johns protested. "Well, not with Whisky's background! Her long hair is from her father, the King Charles spaniel. Teeny always called those dogs her *Gauguin dogs because they look like the dogs in his paintings of Tahiti.*"

It was getting late, and I still needed to ask Johns about the shadow that had figured so prominently in "The Seasons." Why had he decided after so many years to paint his first explicit self-portrait? And why had he depicted himself as a quivering spook?

Once again, Johns paused. "It was an easy solution to filling a large part of the canvas," he finally said, letting loose one of his raucous laughs.

But then the laughter stopped, and his long face assumed its usual inscrutable expression. "I wanted something that would be literal," he said. "It is less literal than I intended it to be, but nevertheless it started out as a literal tracing. I stood in the sunlight and there was a piece of paper on the ground and someone drew my shadow. I used that in the painting."

And so it turns out that Johns didn't draw the shadow after all. A friend drew it for him. No one but Johns could have thought to create his first and only genuine self-portrait in someone else's hand. ■

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JASPER JOHNS

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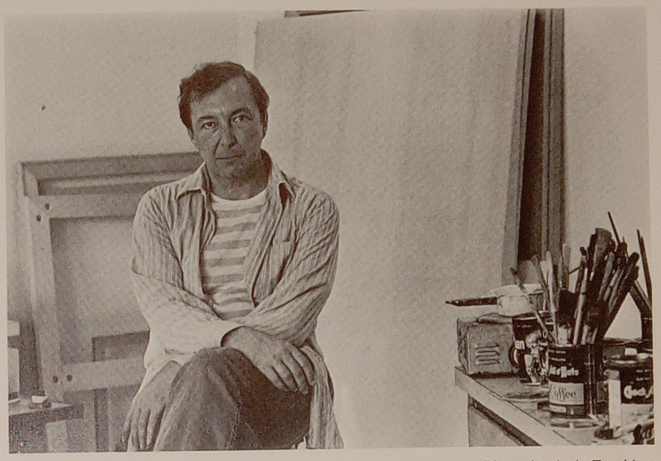


Photo by Judy Tomkins

This retrospective exhibition of paintings, sculpture, drawings and prints by Jasper Johns is the first comprehensive survey of his work in over twelve years.

Jasper Johns was born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1930. He first came to New York in 1949 after attending the University of South Carolina at Columbia. Following military service at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and in Sendai, Japan, he returned to New York where he supported himself by working in a bookstore and by designing commercial displays.

The well known paintings of flags, targets and numbers were begun in 1954-55, and shown in Johns' first one-man exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958. The following year, Johns was included in the *Sixteen Americans* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, and has since been represented in international exhibitions throughout the world.

Retrospective exhibitions of his work were held at the Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina, in 1960; at the Jewish Museum, New York, and the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 1964; and at the Pasadena Art Museum, California, in 1965. Large exhibitions of drawings by Johns were organized in 1966 by the Smithsonian Institution's National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., and in 1974-75 by the Arts Council of Great Britain. In 1970 both the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York held major print retrospectives.

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Since 1963 Jasper Johns has been a director of the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, Inc., and since 1967 has served as Artistic Advisor to Merce Cunningham and Dance Company. Johns was elected to membership of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1973.

This exhibition presents 201 works made between 1955 and 1976. Several of the earliest paintings are being shown together for the first time in many years, and almost all of Johns' sculpture to date is included. Johns' reputation as a draftsman is widely recognized. The selection of drawings in this exhibition illustrates the full range of his work in graphics and demonstrates the elegance and innovative brilliance which Johns has brought to the art of lithography since 1960. The selected 55 examples, in lithography, etching, silkscreen and lead relief, not only provide an opportunity to examine Jasper Johns' career in printmaking, but also allow the viewer to compare his treatment of related imagery through different media.

This exhibition brings together for the first time the large-scale paintings Johns has made since 1962, including *Diver* and *According To What,* and later works such as *Harlem Light, Untitled 1972*, and *Scent.*

David Whitney selected the works for the exhibition and designed the installation. The works are arranged in chronological order with all media combined.

Michael Crichton, the distinguished novelist and film director, is the author of *Jasper Johns,* published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art. The book includes 250 illustrations, of which 61 are in color.

This exhibition is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Philip Morris Incorporated. Following the New York showing it will be seen in Cologne, Paris, London, Tokyo and San Francisco.

Checklist of the Jasper Johns Exhibition At the Whitney Museum

1. Flag. 1955. Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric, 107.3 x 154 cm (42¼ x 60⅝″). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson in honor of Alfred Barr

2. Target with Plaster Casts. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 129.5 x 111.8 cm (51 x 44″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli

3. White Flag. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 198.9 x 306.7 cm (78⁵/₁₆ x 120¾″). Collection the artist

4. Flag Above White with Collage. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 57.2 x 48.9 cm (22½ x 19¼″). Collection the artist

5. Figure 1. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 43.8 x 34.9 cm (17¼ x 13¾″). Private collection, New York

6. Figure 2. 1956. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 43.2 x 35.6 cm (17 x 14″). Private collection

7. Figure 5. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 44.5 x 35.6 cm (17½ x 14″). Collection the artist

8. Figure 7. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 44.5 x 35.6 cm (17½ x 14″). Collection Robert H. Halfff and Carl W. Johnson

9. Green Target. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm (60 x 60″). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Richard S. Zeisler Fund, 1958

10. Tango. 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 109.2 x 139.7 cm (43 x 55″). Private collection

11. Flag (with 64 stars). 1955. Pencil on paper, 21.5 x 25.7 cm (8½ x 10⅛″). Collection the artist

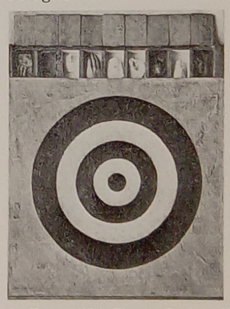
12. Target with Four Faces. 1955. Pencil on paper, 21.5 x 18.4 cm (8½ x 7¼″). Collection the artist

13. Target. 1955. Pencil on paper, 24.2 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Albert Landry, New York

14. Gray Alphabets. 1956. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 167.6 x 124.5 cm (66 x 49″). Private collection, U.S.A.

15. Canvas. 1956. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 76.2 x 63.5 cm (30 x 25″). Collection the artist

16. Flag on Orange Field. 1957. Encaustic on canvas, 167.6 x 124.5 cm (66 x 49″). Museum Ludwig, Cologne



2 Target With Plaster Casts. 1955.

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17. Gray Rectangles. 1957. Encaustic on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm (60 x 60″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

18. Drawer. 1957. Encaustic on canvas with objects, 77.5 x 77.5 cm (30½ x 30½″). Brandeis University Art Collection, Rose Art Museum. Gevirtz-Mnuchin Purchase Fund

19. Newspaper. 1957. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 68.6 x 91.4 cm (27 x 36″). Collection Mildred S. Lee

20. The. 1957. Encaustic on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm (24 x 20″). Collection Mildred and Herbert Lee

21. Book. 1957. Encaustic with objects, 25.4 x 33 cm (10 x 13″). Private collection, N.Y.

22. Flag. 1957. Pencil on paper, 27.6 x 38.9 cm (10⅞ x 15⁵/₁₆″). Collection the artist

23. Alphabets. 1957. Pencil and collage on paper, 36.9 x 26.7 cm (14½ x 10½″). Collection Robert Rosenblum, New York

24. Gray Numbers. 1958. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 170.2 x 125.8 cm (67 x 49½″). Collection Kimiko and John Powers, Colorado

25. White Numbers. 1958. Encaustic on canvas, 170.2 x 125.8 cm (67 x 49½″). Museum Ludwig, Cologne



51 Painting With Two Balls. 1960

26. Numbers in Color. 1958–59. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 170.2 x 125.8 cm (67 x 49½″). Albright–Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y. Gift of Seymour H. Knox

27. Target. 1958. Oil and collage on canvas, 91.4 x 91.4 cm (36 x 36″). Collection the artist

28. Three Flags. 1958. Encaustic on canvas, 78.4 x 115.6 cm (30⅞ x 45½″). Private collection

29. Tennyson. 1958. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 186.7 x 122.5 cm (73½ x 48¼″). Des Moines Art Center. Coffin Fine Arts Trust Fund, 1971

30. Alley Oop. 1958. Oil and collage on cardboard, 58.4 x 45.7 cm (23 x 18″). Collection Robert Rauschenberg

31. Light Bulb I. 1958. Sculp-metal, 11.5 x 17.1 x 11.5 cm (4½ x 6¾ x 4½″). Collection Dr. and Mrs. Jack M. Farris

32. Light Bulb II. 1958. Sculp-metal, 7.9 x 20.3 x 12.7 cm (3⅛ x 8 x 5″). Collection the artist

33. Flashlight I. 1958. Sculp-metal over flashlight and wood, 13.3 x 23.2 x 9.8 cm (5¼ x 9⅛ x 3⅞″). Private collection, New York

34. Flashlight II. 1958. Papier-mâché and glass, 7.6 x 22.2 x 10.2 cm (3 x 8¾ x 4″). Collection Robert Rauschenberg

35. Flashlight III. 1958. Plaster and glass, 13.3 x 9.5 x 20.9 cm (5¼ x 3¾ x 8¼″). Collection the artist

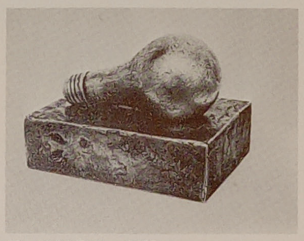
36. Light Bulb. 1958. Pencil and graphite wash on paper, 16.5 x 22.2 cm (6½ x 8¾″). Private collection

37. Coat Hanger. 1958. Crayon on paper, 62.3 x 54.9 cm (24½ x 21⅝″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. William Easton

38. Hook. 1958. Crayon on paper, 44.5 x 59 cm (17½ x 23¼″). Private collection, New York

39. Broken Target. 1958. Crayon on paper, 39.3 x 38.1 cm (15½ x 15″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller

40. Black Numbers. 1958. Crayon on paper, 77.5 x 61 cm (30½ x 24″). Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki



56 Light Bulb. 1960.

41. Tennyson. 1958. Ink on paper, 37.8 x 25.1 cm (14⅞ x 9⅞″). Collection the artist

42. 0–9. 1959. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 51.1 x 88.9 cm (20⅛ x 35″). Collection Ludwig, Aachen

43. Device Circle. 1959. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 101.6 x 101.6 cm (40 x 40″). Private collection

44. False Start. 1959. Oil on canvas, 170.8 x 137.2 cm (67¼ x 54″). Private collection, New York

45. Jubilee. 1959. Oil and collage on canvas, 152.4 x 111.8 cm (60 x 44″). Collection David H. Steinmetz

46. Out the Window. 1959. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 139.7 x 101.6 cm (55 x 40″). Private collection, New York

47. Shade. 1959. Encaustic on canvas with objects, 132.1 x 99.1 cm (52 x 39″). Collection Ludwig, Aachen

48. Highway. 1959. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 190.5 x 154.9 cm (75 x 61″). Collection Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York

49. The Critic Smiles. 1959. Sculp-metal, 4.1 x 19.7 x 3.8 cm (1⅝ x 7¾ x 1½″). Collection the artist

50. Three Flags. 1959. Pencil on paper, 36.9 x 50.8 cm (14½ x 20″). The Victoria and Albert Museum, London

51. Painting with Two Balls. 1960. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 165.1 x 137.2 cm (65 x 54″). Collection the artist

52. Flag. 1960. Sculp-metal and collage on canvas, 31.8 x 48.3 cm (12½ x 19″). Collection Robert Rauschenberg

53. Painting with Ruler and "Gray." 1960. Oil and collage on canvas with objects, 81.3 x 81.3 cm (32 x 32″). Collection Joseph A. Helman

54. Painted Bronze. 1960. Painted bronze, 14 x 20.3 x 12.1 cm (5½ x 8 x 4¾″). Kunstmuseum Basel, Collection Ludwig

55. Painted Bronze. 1960. Painted bronze, 34.3 x 20.3 (diameter) cm (13½ x 8 (diameter)″). Collection the artist

56. Light Bulb. 1960. Bronze, 10.8 x 15.2 x 10.2 cm (4¼ x 6 x 4″). One of four casts. Collection Irving Blum

57. Light Bulb. 1960. Painted bronze, 10.8 x 15.2 x 10.2 cm (4¼ x 6 x 4″). One of four casts. Unlike the other casts, this one has been painted. Collection the artist

58. Flag. 1960. Bronze, 31.1 x 47.6 cm (12¼ x 18¾″). One of four casts. Collection the artist

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59. Three Flags. 1960. Pencil on paper, 28.5 x 41.9 cm (11¼ x 16½″). Collection Hannelore B. Schulhof

60. Gray Alphabets. 1960. Pencil and graphite wash on paper, 97.5 x 70.8 cm (38⅜ x 27⅞″). Collection Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York

61. Two Flags. 1960. Pencil and graphite wash on paper, 75 x 55.2 cm (29½ x 21¾″). Collection the artist

62 A. Figure 0 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 B. Figure 1 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 C. Figure 2 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 D. Figure 3 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 E. Figure 4 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 F. Figure 5 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 G. Figure 6 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 H. Figure 7 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

62 I. Figure 8 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist



84 Device. 1961-62

62 J. Figure 9 (from Ten Numbers). 1960. Charcoal on paper, 24.1 x 19.1 cm (9½ x 7½″). Collection the artist

63. Device Circle. 1960. Pencil on paper, 38.1 x 36.9 cm (15 x 14½″). Collection Mr. Ronald S. Lauder

64. Jubilee. 1960. Graphite wash on paper, 79.7 x 63.7 cm (31⅜ x 25 1/16″). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Extended loan from the Lester and Joan Avnet Collection

65. Out the Window. 1960. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 87.7 x 72.4 cm (34½ x 28½″). Collection Dr. and Mrs. Bernard Brodsky

66. Painting with Two Balls. 1960. Charcoal, pastel and pencil on paper, 49.6 x 38.7 cm (19½ x 15¼″). Hirshhorn Museum Washington, D.C.

67. Thermometer. 1960. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 56.5 x 41.9 cm (22¼ x 16½″). Collection the artist

68. 0 Through 9. 1960. Charcoal on paper, 73.7 x 58.4 cm (29 x 23″). Collection the artist

69. Target. 1960. Lithograph (15/30), 57.2 x 44.5 cm (22½ x 17½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

70. Flag I. 1960. Lithograph (17/23), 55.9 x 76.2 cm (22 x 30″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

71. Coat Hanger I. 1960. Lithograph (21/35), 91.4 x 67.9 cm (36 x 26¾″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

72. 0 Through 9. 1960. Lithograph (19/35), 76.2 x 55.9 cm (30 x 22″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

73. 0 Through 9. 1961. Oil on canvas, 137.5 x 105.1 cm (54⅛ x 41⅜″). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

74. 0 Through 9. 1961. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 114.3 cm (54 x 45″). Collection Carter Burden, New York

75. 0 Through 9. 1961. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 114.3 cm (54 x 45″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. S. I. Newhouse, Jr.

76. 0 Through 9. 1961. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 114.3 cm (54 x 45″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Frank M. Titelman, Boca Raton, Fla.

77. Map. 1961. Oil on canvas, 198.1 x 312.7 cm (78 x 123⅛″). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull, 1963



77 Map. 1961

78. By the Sea. 1961. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 182.9 x 138.5 cm (72 x 54½″). Private collection, New York

79. Liar. 1961. Encaustic, pencil, and sculp-metal on paper, 53.9 x 43.2 cm (21¼ x 17″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

80. In Memory of My Feelings—Frank O'Hara. 1961. Oil on canvas with objects, 101.6 x 152.4 cm (40 x 60″). Collection Dr. and Mrs. Eugene A. Eisner, Scarsdale, N.Y.

81. No. 1961. Encaustic, collage, and sculp-metal on canvas with objects, 172.7 x 101.6 cm (68 x 40″). Collection the artist

82. Good Time Charley. 1961. Encaustic on canvas with objects, 96.5 x 61 cm (38 x 24″). Collection the artist

83. The Critic Sees. 1961. Sculp-metal over plaster with glass, 8.2 x 15.8 x 5.4 cm (3¼ x 6¼ x 2⅛″). Private collection, New York

84. Device. 1961–62. Oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 122.5 cm (72 x 48¼″). Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. Acquired in honor of Mrs. Eugene McDermott. Dallas Art Museum League, Mr. and Mrs. George V. Charlton, Mr. and Mrs. James B. Francis, Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Greenlee, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. James H. W. Jacks, Mr. and Mrs. Irvin L. Levy, Mrs. John W. O'Boyle, Dr. Joanne Stroud

85. 4 the News. 1962. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 165.1 x 127.6 cm (65 x 50¼″). Private collection, New York

86. Fool's House. 1962. Oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 91.4 cm (72 x 36″). Collection Mr. Jean Christophe Castelli

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87. Zone. 1962. Oil, encaustic, and collage on canvas with objects, 153 x 91.5 cm (60 x 36″). Kunsthaus Zürich

88. Passage. 1962. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 137.2 x 101.6 cm (54 x 40″). Museum Ludwig, Cologne

89. Out The Window Number 2. 1962. Oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 121.9 cm (72 x 48″). Collection the artist

90. Diver. 1962. Oil on canvas with objects, 228.6 x 431.8 cm (90 x 170″). The Albert A. List Family Collection

91. Slow Field. 1962. Oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 91.4 cm (72 x 36″). Moderna Museet, Stockholm

92. Folly Beach. 1962. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 90.2 x 73.7 cm (35½ x 29″). Anonymous collection



89 Out The Window Number 2. 1962.

93. Disappearance II. 1962. Ink on plastic, 45.7 x 45.7 cm (18 x 18″). Collection The Honorable and Mrs. Gilbert Hahn, Jr.

94. Study for Skin I. 1962. Charcoal on paper, 55.9 x 86.4 cm (22 x 34″). Collection the artist

95. Study for Skin II. 1962. Charcoal on paper, 55.9 x 86.4 cm (22 x 34″). Collection the artist

96. Study for Skin III. 1962. Charcoal on paper, 55.9 x 86.4 cm (22 x 34″). Collection the artist

97. Study for Skin IV. 1962. Charcoal on paper, 55.9 x 86.4 cm (22 x 34″). Collection the artist

98. Painting with Two Balls I. 1962. Lithograph (19/39), 67.3 x 52.1 cm (26½ x 20½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

99. False Start I. 1962. Lithograph (12/38), 75.6 x 56.5 cm (29¾ x 22¼″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

100. False Start II. 1962. Lithograph (artist's proof), 78.7 x 57.2 cm (31 x 22½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

101. Device. 1962. Lithograph (4/6), 80 x 57.8 cm (31½ x 22¾″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

102. 0–9. 1960–63. Ten lithographs from the portfolio 0–9 (B/C, 1/1, H.C.), each 52.1 x 40 cm (20½ x 15¾″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli

103. Land's End. 1963. Oil on canvas with objects, 170.2 x 121.9 cm (67 x 48″). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson

104. Periscope (Hart Crane). 1963. Oil on canvas, 170.2 x 121.9 cm (67 x 48″). Collection the artist

105. Map. 1963. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 152.4 x 236.2 cm (60 x 93″). Private collection

106. Diver. 1963. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 219.7 x 180.3 cm (86½ x 71″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

107. Untitled. 1963. Charcoal, collage, and paint on paper, 108 x 76.2 cm (42½ x 30″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

108. Hatteras. 1963. Lithograph (16/30), 104.7 x 75 cm (41¼ x 29½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

109. Field Painting. 1963–64. Oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 93.3 cm (72 x 36¾″). Collection the artist

110. Arrive/Depart. 1963–64. Oil on canvas, 172.7 x 130.8 cm (68 x 51½″). Private collection, Munich

111. Watchman. 1964. Oil on canvas with objects, 215.9 x 153 cm (85 x 60¼″). Collection Mr. Hiroshi Teshigahara, Tokyo

112. Souvenir. 1964. Encaustic on canvas with objects, 73 x 53.3 cm (28¾ x 21″). Collection the artist

113. Souvenir 2. 1964. Oil and collage on canvas with objects, 73 x 53.3 cm (28¾ x 21″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

114. According To What. 1964. Oil on canvas with objects, 223.5 x 487.7 cm (88 x 192″). Collection Edwin Janss, Thousand Oaks, California

115. Studio. 1964. Oil on canvas with objects, 224.8 x 369.6 cm (88½ x 145½″). Whitney Museum of American Art. Gift of the Friends (and purchase)

116. Ale Cans. 1964. Lithograph (3/31), 57.2 x 44.5 cm (22½ x 17½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

117. Untitled. 1964–65. Oil on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 426.7 cm (72 x 168″). Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



104 Periscope (Hart Crane). 1963.

118. Skin with O'Hara Poem. 1963–65. Lithograph (artist's proof; ⅛), 55.9 x 86.4 cm (22 x 34″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

119. High School Days. 1964. Sculp-metal over plaster with mirror, 10.8 x 30.5 x 11.5 cm (4¼ x 12 x 4½″). Collection the artist

120. Subway. 1965. Sculp-metal over plaster and wood, 19.4 x 25.1 x 7.6 cm (7⅝ x 9⅞ x 3″). Collection the artist

121. Flags. 1965. Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 121.9 cm (72 x 48″). Collection the artist

122. Eddingsville. 1965. Oil on canvas with objects, 172.7 x 311.2 cm (68 x 122½″). Museum Ludwig, Cologne

123. Pinion. 1963–66. Lithograph (15/36), 101.6 x 71.1 cm (40 x 28″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

124. Two Maps I. 1965–66. Lithograph (12/30), 83.8 x 67.3 cm (33 x 26½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

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125. Passage II. 1966. Oil on canvas with objects, 151.8 x 158.8 cm (59¾ x 62½″). Harry N. Abrams Family Collection, New York

126. Studio 2. 1966. Oil on canvas, 177.8 x 317.5 cm (70 x 125″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

127. Watchman. 1966. Graphite wash, metallic powder, pencil, and pastel on paper, 97.1 x 67.3 cm (38¼ x 26½″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

128. Harlem Light. 1967. Oil and collage on canvas, 198.1 x 436.9 cm (78 x 172″). Private collection

129. Watchman. 1967. Lithograph (3/40), 91.4 x 61 cm (36 x 24″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

130. Targets. 1967–68. Lithograph (3/42), 86.4 x 64.8 cm (34 x 25½″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

131. 1st Etchings. 1967–68. Six etchings from the portfolio 1st Etchings (8/26), each 63.5 x 50.8 cm (25 x 20″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Whitney Museum of American Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley L. Helfgott



145 Decoy. 1971.

132. Screen Piece. 1967. Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 127 cm (72 x 50″). Private collection

133. Screen Piece 2. 1968. Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 127 cm (72 x 50″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

134. Wall Piece. 1968. Oil and collage on canvas, 182.9 x 280 cm (72 x 110¼″). Collection the artist

135. Evian. 1968. Graphite, gouache, and pastel on paper, 76.2 x 53.9 cm (30 x 21¼″). Private collection

136 A. Figure 0. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 B. Figure 1. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 C. Figure 2. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 D. Figure 3. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 E. Figure 4. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 F. Figure 5. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 G. Figure 6. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 H. Figure 7. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 I. Figure 8. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

136 J. Figure 9. 1969. Lithograph (1/40), 96.5 x 78.7 cm (38 x 31″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

137. Wall Piece. 1969. Pencil, graphite, pastel, watercolor, and collage on paper, 69.9 x 101.6 cm (27½ x 40″). Collection the artist

138. Wall Piece. 1969. Ink on plastic, 68.6 x 94 cm (27 x 37″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

139. Zone. 1969. Graphite, chalk, and gouache on paper, 83.2 x 44 cm (32¾ x 17 5/16″). Collection the artist

140. High School Days. 1969. Lead relief with mirror (2/60), 58.4 x 43.2 cm (23 x 17″). Edition of 60. Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

141. Bread. 1969. Lead relief with paper and paint (28/60), 58.4 x 43.2 cm (23 x 17″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Whitney Museum of American Art. Gift of Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc.

142. The Critic Smiles. 1969. Lead relief with gold and tin (28/60), 58.4 x 43.2 cm (23 x 17″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Whitney Museum of American Art. Gift of Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc.

143. English Light Bulb. 1968–70. Sculp-metal, wire, and polyvinyl chloride; dimensions variable—length of base 12.4 cm (4⅞″). Collection Mark Lancaster

144. Voice 2. 1971. Oil and collage on canvas, three panels, each 182.9 x 127 cm (72 x 50″). Kunstmuseum Basel

145. Decoy. 1971. Oil on canvas with object, 182.9 x 127 cm (72 x 50″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

146. Decoy II. 1971–73. Lithograph (3/31), 104.1 x 73.7 cm (41 x 29″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

147. Untitled. 1972. Oil, encaustic, and collage on canvas with objects, 182.9 x 487.7 cm (72 x 192″). Museum Ludwig, Cologne

148. Two Flags. 1973. Oil and encaustic on canvas, 145.9 x 176.7 cm (57 7/16 x 69 9/16″). Collection Jacques Koerfer, Switzerland

149. Untitled. 1973. Oil and pencil on paper, 104.7 x 75 cm (41¼ x 29½″). Private collection

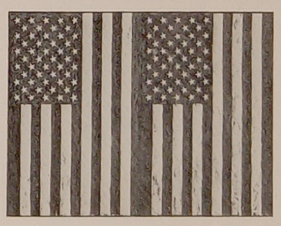
150. Skin I. 1973. Charcoal on paper, 64.8 x 102.2 cm (25½ x 40¼″). Collection the artist

151. Skin II. 1973. Charcoal on paper, 64.8 x 102.2 cm (25½ x 40¼″). Collection the artist

152. Scent. 1973–74. Oil and encaustic on canvas, 182.9 x 320.6 cm (72 x 126¼″). Collection Ludwig, Aachen

153. Target. 1974. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 155.5 x 135.5 cm (61¼ x 53¼″). The Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo

154 A. Face. 1974. Lithograph (2/49), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist



148 Two Flags. 1973

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154 B. HANDFOOTSOCKFLOOR. 1974. Lithograph (2/48), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

154 C. BUTTOCKS. 1974. Lithograph (2/49), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

154 D. TORSO. 1974. Lithograph (2/50), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

154 E. FEET. 1974. Lithograph (2/47), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

154 F. LEG. 1974. Lithograph (2/50), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

154 G. KNEE. 1974. Lithograph (2/47), 78.1 x 57.8 cm (30¾ x 22¾″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

155. CORPSE AND MIRROR. 1974. Oil, encaustic, and collage on canvas, 127 x 173 cm (50 x 68⅛″). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz

156. CORPSE AND MIRROR II. 1974–75. Oil on canvas with painted frame, 146.4 x 191.1 cm (57⅝ x 75¼″). Collection the artist

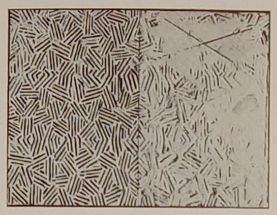
157. CORPSE. 1974–75. Ink, Paintstik, and pastel on paper, 108 x 72.4 cm (42½ x 28½″). Collection the artist

158. UNTITLED. 1974–75. Watercolor and Paintstik on paper, 62.9 x 51.4 cm (24¾ x 20¼″). Collection Janie C. Lee

159. THE DUTCH WIVES. 1975. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 131.4 x 180.3 cm (51¾ x 71″). Collection the artist

160. THE BARBER'S TREE. 1975. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 87 x 137.8 cm (34¼ x 54¼″). Collection Ludwig, Aachen

161. WEEPING WOMEN. 1975. Encaustic and collage on canvas, 127 x 259.7 cm (50 x 102¼″). Private collection, New York



155 Corpse And Mirror. 1974.

162. FOUR PANELS FROM UNTITLED (1972). 1975. Lithograph (A/D, B/D, C/D, D/D; each 1/20), four panels, each 104.1 x 81.3 cm (41 x 32″). Published by Gemini G.E.L. Collection the artist

163. SCENT. 1975–76. Lithograph, linocut, and woodcut (3/42), 79.3 x 119.4 cm (31¼ x 47″). Published by Universal Limited Art Editions. Collection the artist

164. CORPSE AND MIRROR. 1976. Silkscreen (8/65), 109.2 x 135.2 cm (43 x 53¼″). Published by Simca Print Artists, Inc. Collection the artist

165. END PAPER. 1976. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 176.6 cm (60 x 69½″). Private collection

The poster and catalogue for this exhibition are available at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021. Poster $20.00 plus $2.50 postage. Catalogue $12.50 plus 75 cents postage; hard cover book $28.50 plus $1.50 postage.

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JASPER JOHNS,
A retrospective exhibition

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK
October 18, 1977-January 22, 1978

MUSEUM LUDWIG, COLOGNE, GERMANY
February 10-March 26, 1978

CENTRE NATIONAL D'ART ET DE CULTURE GEORGES POMPIDOU,
MUSEE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE, PARIS, FRANCE
April 18-June 4, 1978

HAYWARD GALLERY, LONDON, ENGLAND
June 21-July 30, 1978

THE SEIBU MUSEUM OF ART, TOKYO, JAPAN
August 19-September 26, 1978

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, SAN FRANCISCO
October 20-December 10, 1978

This exhibition is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Philip Morris Incorporated.

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Artforum, Dec. 1985

TARGET JASPER JOHNS

JOHN YAU



Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze*, 1960, painted bronze, 13½ × 8" diameter. Collection of the artist.

Who is Jasper Johns? The first artist to transform the banal overlooked objects and national symbols of the American psyche into private icons? A reticent autodidact who slew the Goliath of Abstract Expressionism? A Clark Kent who deflected the course of Modernism? An art-world star whose reserved work will forever elude certain critics? An artists' artist? A neodadaist? The most intellectual painter America has ever produced? A hermetic researcher of permutations? A magician able to unlock the spell embedded in commonplace objects? The unwitting father of Pop art and Minimalism? An extension of the self-trained native genius in the tradition of Hart Crane and George Ohr? Daedalus patiently constructing a labyrinth down whose paths we can wander, but whose center we will never find?

The closest Johns comes to answering these questions is in sketchbook notes. Here he discloses two deeply and symbiotically entwined personifications —the "spy" and the "watchman."

> The watchman falls "into" the "trap" of looking. The "spy" is a different person. "Looking" is and is not "eating" and "being eaten." (Cézanne?—each object reflecting the other.) That is, there is continuity of some sort among the watchman, the space, the objects. The spy must be ready to "move," must be aware of his entrances and exits. The watchman leaves his job & takes away no information. The spy must remember and must remember himself and his remembering. The spy designs himself to be overlooked. The watchman "serves" as a warning. Will the spy and the watchman ever meet? In a painting named *Spy*, will he be present? The spy stations himself to observe the watchman. If the spy is a foreign object, why is the eye not irritated? Is he invisible? When the spy irritates, we try to remove him. "Not spying, just looking"—Watchman.[1]

This is not an artist's description of universal goals, or of the desire to reach an exalted state. It is the record of a man so self-conscious, so aware of the implications of his own thought, that he will assert openly only the barest semblance of the hidden identities within him, which are themselves forever divided. Johns' entire career has been about leaving possibilities open, about making complete statements and summations that are incomplete and fragmentary. It has been about the dynamic between withholding as much information as possible, and seeing as a form of preservation. It has been about covering the fissures. The spy and watchman are forces engaged in endless opposition, and in endless reflection of one another. This is Johns' vision of what it means to be an artist. His reluctance to explain, confess, describe, or theorize goes against the behavioral drift of contemporary artists. His refusal to be a source of answers for the questions directed toward his art, his reluctance to say what he's doing or to fulfill the intentional fallacy by telling critics what he means to do, has left him alone and us confused.

Johns is the self-conscious embodiment of Narcissus: he gazes longingly into the pool, but sees no whole, beautiful reflection, only the fragments of a life. This absence—this refusal to believe his self can be discovered in nature or in the medium of paint—is finally what separates Johns not only from the Abstract Expressionists, but from the route of Romanticized selfhood and eternal values that the Modernist epoch took, despite Marcel Duchamp's contrary radical discoveries. Johns knows that connections are conditional and temporary, that identities change or erode, that lacunae separate him not only from the world but from himself. He knows that nothing is what it appears to be, that the self is made up of false presences. But however much he doubts, Johns' urgent need is to make something out of all this; he is an artist in love with his materials, and with what they can and cannot say.

Johns is someone for whom the phrase "look before you leap" is particularly ironic in its applicability, because he has already fallen into the well of himself. Transfixed as he is by the absence of a whole reflection, he finds it necessary to break down his perceptions into the smallest integral units of gesture, color, image, mark, and the formal means used to transfer them from one realm to another. Everything must be precisely defined before it can be used. In formal terms, both Johns' need to start a painting with the composition already predetermined and his preference for working within a deliberately limited range of color are what set him apart from his Abstract Expressionist forebears. Gestural painting is a Dionysian enterprise; in such painting, composition is intuitive and arises out of the process. The painter seeks to make thought and action embrace in a transcendent dance of ecstasy and doom. Johns, on the other hand, considers and reconsiders every option. He is the warden of a studio, spying on the movements of its only guard.

Throughout his career, Johns has returned to a handful of motifs: flags; maps; targets; the Savarin can; the Ballantine ale cans; the Modernist triad of red, yellow, and blue; skulls; crosshatching, and fragments of the human anatomy. His development can be seen as starting with the presentation of one of these signs, often returned to in subtly different versions, and sometimes repeated in the same painting. The later work, starting around 1972, can be characterized as a move toward more and more complex juxtapositions, which not only encourage continuous reading of disparate parts, but also assemble, analyze, and broaden the artist's initial attitudes. Common to all these motifs is the disquieting way they connect to either the viewer or each other, or to both. Rather than allowing us the familiar pleasure of looking at a painting, Johns straitjackets us, too, in a state of self-consciousness. Is this a flag? An image of a flag? Is it a painting or an object? Abstract or representational?

Many years ago Johns offered another rare clue to these questions: the single remark, "things which are seen and not looked at."[2] He was seemingly talking about his choice of subject matter, but this was an autobiographical admission. Choosing a subject that was both as public and as invisible as the American flag to lavish his attention on was not merely an act of youthful arrogance. Rather, it was a necessary act of independence from prevailing Abstract Expressionist modes, and a canny way simultaneously to represent his feelings of anonymity—by isolating an

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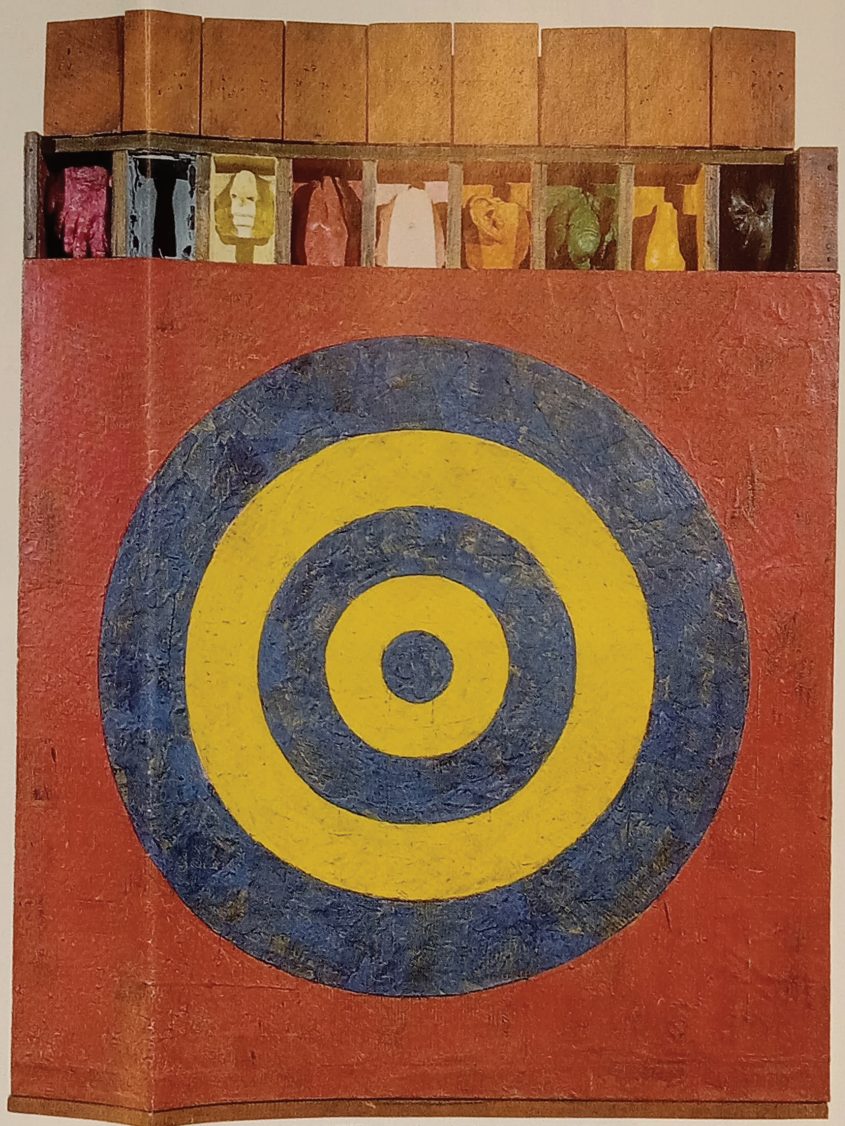
emblem of Everyman—and to assert his citizenship in a world that had not noticed him yet.

In Johns' early work, from the period 1955 to 1960, the viewer is confronted by emblematic embodiments of self-laceration, extreme isolation, vulnerability, inertia, and frustration. However, any speculative reading of the work is difficult because of Johns' choices of formal devices and approaches that implode these complex psychological states, their fragments becoming absorbed in the encaustic or sculp-metal. In this airless realm, the viewer must become a creator of meanings. Yet attempts to penetrate the barrier separating one from the introspective states implicit in Johns' work are almost immediately deflected by the artist's ability to select banal motifs from the public realm. The clinical thoroughness with which he explores these motifs has an immediate confounding effect on the viewer, who is unsure whether to turn the attention on the motif's origins, on the way it has been transformed, or on the interior state it protects.

A severely circumscribed application of trompe l'oeil was one of the first devices that allowed Johns to investigate his experience of the world while protecting himself from the viewer's confusion with subject and author. At various points throughout his career, Johns has carried on an intensely personal conversation with John F. Peto, the 19th-century American artist of trompe l'oeil views. Johns uses this received language to shape and assert, criticize and deny. He went so far as to stencil the signature "Peto Johns" along the bottom of his painting *4 The News*, 1962. Although this connection has been mentioned by a number of critics, Johns' liberation of this minor compositional device has taken a back seat to the critical discussion of his response to Modernist formal issues.

The focus of Johns' dialogue with Peto is the latter's painting *The Cup We All Race 4*, ca. 1900. Rather than glorifying America's 19th-century materialism and its habit of collecting bric-a-brac, as William Harnett did, in this painting Peto applied his illusionistic approach to a battered, melancholy object, a dented tin drinking cup hanging from a hook. The background that the illusionistic hook has been driven into might be the interior of a flattened-out wooden box; it could also be the painted-over back of an old stretcher. The boards; the punning title that looks as if it's been gouged in the wood; the nails; the tacks holding the remaining torn edges of a postcard that appears to have been ripped from the lathe; the brass plate on which the artist's name has been "engraved"—everything is depicted with a painterly verisimilitude that is meant to trick the viewer into thinking that what is seen is an actual group of objects rather than a representation. Beyond its trickster quality, the painting embodies an intense, prolonged gaze at a narrowly defined world.

Johns did more than simply respond to the way Peto employed an illusionistic approach. He understood immediately that Peto's "tricking the eye" method is coextensive with the way we fool ourselves when looking at paintings. The work fuses the



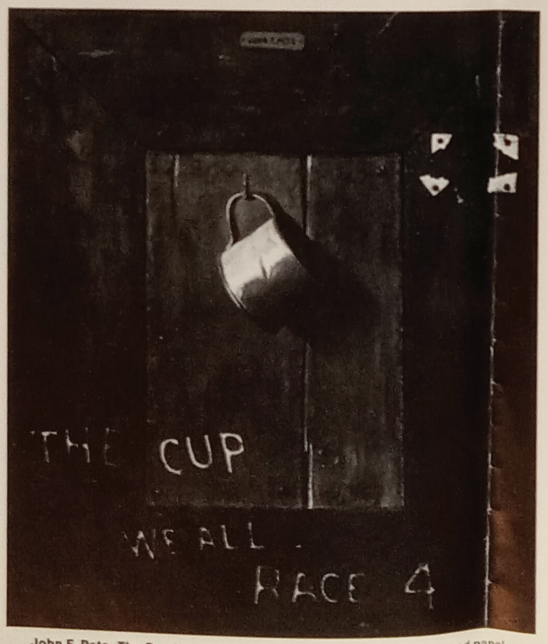
Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955, encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 51 × 44 × 3½". Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli.

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Jasper Johns, *Racing Thoughts*, 1983, encaustic on canvas, 48⅛ × 75⅛".



John F. Peto, *The Cup We All Race 4*, ca. 1900, oil on canvas and wood panel, 25½ × 21½". Collection of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.



Jasper Johns, *Ventriloquist*, 1983, encaustic on canvas, 75 × 50".

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literal with the metaphorical, and its presentation of object as image and image as object suggested to Johns a way past his Joseph Cornell–inspired work.[3] Johns goes further than Peto, of course. He not only isolates his motif from all familiar contexts, but he also eliminates all references to surrounding space. By joining image and object, thingness and its absence, Johns dramatizes the conditional relationship between context and identity.

Implied in Peto's choice of subject matter is the conviction that what we race for—fame, love, money—is an illusion. Instead of glorifying the race, Peto uses trompe l'oeil to trick us into reaching for something we can never grasp. Though reticent with their information, both Peto and Johns convey their relationship to the world by infusing their work with an awareness of being stifled, frustrated, and cut off. Our self-conscious experience of their work reenacts their self-conscious experience of the world. They are able to convey subliminal discomfort because of their hypersensitivity to the pathos embedded in a common object.

Having used the flags and targets to investigate, among other things, the highly charged relationship between painting and sculpture, surface and object, Johns turns his attention to the difference between an object and its representation. In *Painted Bronze*, 1960—the Savarin can filled with paintbrushes—he dramatizes the difference by making a bronze replica and painting it in a way that corresponds to the actual object. The result is a trompe l'oeil sculpture, a descendant of Peto's drinking cup. Because it has been removed from the functional realm, the Savarin can exists as a sarcophagus. Certainly there is something inescapably haunting about a painted sculpture in which brushes—the tools of Johns' trade—have been permanently "encased." The artist not only attacks the myths of painting and of artist-as-magician, but also conveys his immense doubt about the capability of art to transport us from our daily lives to a place that is more exalted, sublime, and healing.

With the Savarin can, frustrated desire and a sense of inadequacy are objectified and given their place. There is no attempt to deny this doubt and alienation; *Painted Bronze* is a whisper of anguish. Johns made the piece after his first, now famous solo exhibition in New York. The fact that he had been catapulted from obscurity to fame did little to assuage his self-doubts. If anything, public attention became another obstacle for the spy and the watchman. It had to be deflected or transformed, as in the self-accusing titles of paintings such as *Good Time Charley*, 1961, and *4 The News*.

Johns goes from periods of ruthless investigation, in which one thing leads swiftly to another, to long stretches of restlessness and reevaluation, and back again. The heated investigatory periods seem to depend on a sudden glimpse contained in a dream, something he notices while sitting in a theater in San Francisco, or sees while driving on his way to the airport. He has, for example, hinted at why he chose the Savarin can as a subject: "I think what interested me was the coffee can used to hold turpentine for brushes—the idea of one thing mixed with another…."[4]

Johns' work has incorporated a wide range of images, as well as stylized abstract marks and mundane objects. He has made sculptures and paintings, and initiated a hybrid form of the two. There have always been allusions to Leonardo da Vinci, Peto, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Paul Cézanne, Willem de Kooning, Edvard Munch, and Duchamp, among others. Johns believes the formal structure underlying Cézanne's paintings is crucial to his investigation. His analysis of these works leads him to formulate that there must be a "continuity of some sort among the watchman, the space, the objects." This provides him with another possible way of exploring the act of "seeing and not looking." It implies that it is possible to evolve a composition in which each depicted object is not only capable of holding its own perspective within a nonhierarchical composition, but will also mirror the others, thus establishing a continuum. Johns is responding to Cézanne's legacy, but he is also suggesting that this legacy does not necessarily lead to nonobjective abstraction. In fact, he is proving that the Symbolist and Impressionist aspects of Cézanne's work have not been fully exhausted. His response to the fact of "things seen and not looked at" has been to evolve a wide range of resonant symbols and formal motifs, such as crosshatching, in which similarly colored, abraded parallel lines are employed as stylized units of *facture* to articulate the surface. Throughout the '70s Johns used this motif to orchestrate various perceptual systems in which the overall composition is made up of equal and distinct parts. The viewer in turn is confronted by a continuum in which predetermined ruptures adding up to an intricately integrated field are the painting's raison d'être.

Derived from the standard vocabulary of etching, the crosshatch motif is a descendant of Cézanne's small juxtaposed brush-strokes of vivid color. The difference is that Johns' unit is an abstract presence: it alludes rather than describes. Johns uses these units to confront the viewer with a highly unified yet completely fragmented visual field which explores perceptual systems, figural presences, and psychological locations. The allusions to the figure, as in *The Dutch Wives*, 1975, *Weeping Women*, 1975, and the "Tantric Detail" series, 1980–81, are as much about absence as about presence. The two *Between the Clock and the Bed* paintings, 1981 and 1983, allude to both psychological locations and figural presences, and also to a late painting by Munch, *Self Portrait Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1940–42. Beyond the title, what links Johns' paintings to Munch's is the patterned bedspread, which is recalled by the crosshatch motif. Munch's grim self-appraisal depicts the artist standing between two symbols of mortality, a faceless grandfather clock and a bed. Backlighting the artist is a yellow sunlit wall, with rough images of earlier works. Johns, aware that to establish a formal connection with Munch's painting and with Munch as his psychic stand-in would be to leave himself vulnerable to the work's trenchant subject matter, makes sure that we can neither fall "into" his paintings, nor discover the spy behind his guise of style, sign, or juxtaposition. Unlike Munch's painting, Johns' contain no figure, only a formal structuring device in which the light emanating from certain areas in the paint suggests a ghostly stick presence.

Throughout the '70s Johns was preoccupied with the possibility of infusing a figural presence into an abstract perceptual system. The "Corpse and Mirror" paintings, 1974–84, for example, can be read as a hall of mirrors in which no figure is present, but, like *Painted Bronze*, they can also be seen as a corpse of painting. Not only do the two sides of these diptych compositions mirror each other in increasingly complex ways, but the outline of the bottom of the Savarin can, which is traced on one side of several of them, suggests that the works be read as tables on which Johns has simultaneously assembled and dissected a perceptual system. The absent paintbrushes are the scalpels Johns has used to peel away the crust of appearances in order to reveal the corpse. The painting is an autopsy.

Johns began his latest phase of inquiry in the early '80s. The paintings synthesize Munch, Peto, and Cézanne, Johns' earlier motifs and new ones. In returning to his interest in Peto, and in choosing to recontextualize some of his earliest motifs, Johns appears to have come full circle. But he hasn't; Johns circles around things, never back to them. His career can be described as an unpredictable series of slow orbits around his absence of an absolute identity. Instead of suddenly switching his orientation or lessening the breadth of his ambition, he has found a way perpetually to sever his images from their social and art-historical usages, making them, as he did the flag, into something personal, complex, and particular. The primary method he uses to dislodge his icons is that of placing them in a new context of resonant relationships. Both where they are placed in the painting and what they mirror in other sections of it determine, in part, their new identity as specific motifs within Johns' resonant lexicon.

In *Perilous Night*, 1982, the two versions of *Racing Thoughts*, 1983 and 1984, *Ventriloquist*, 1983, and the various untitled paintings from 1982 through 1985, Johns introduces emblematic aspects of the watchman and spy, while structuring his compositions according to Cézanne—"each object reflecting the other." In order to fulfill the moves first announced in his sketchbook notes, Johns, with his obsessive patience, has had to discover a whole array of new motifs, among them a black, white, and gray jigsaw puzzle portrait of the young Leo Castelli; a Barnett Newman etching; a Swiss road sign; references to Matthias Grünewald's *Resurrection*, 1510–15, and to a wood engraving of a whale, by Barry Moser, that appeared in the Arion and University of California Press editions of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*; a poster of the Mona Lisa; a vase commemorating the 25th wedding anniversary of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, and Ohr's pots. What are we to make of this sudden barrage of images from a painter known to rework a single motif for as long as a decade? And what do they tell us about Johns—or,

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perhaps more precisely, what has this willful, reticent artist decided to tell us about himself?

In *Perilous Night* the watchman is visible and the spy has left behind an inventory of his considerations. Although the title is derived from a piano composition by John Cage, it also refers to a passage in "The Star-Spangled Banner." Johns is wondering what will happen to motifs of his such as the American flag now that he is making a significant change in his approach. By contextualizing his flag motif in a shallow trompe l'oeil space, as he does in *Ventriloquist*, he knows he is draining away much of its earlier power. He is also appearing to be anecdotal. All of this is the result of his admitting into his compositional procedure a possibility that he had so far rigorously denied throughout his career—a fictive space. Not only do the objects depicted in *Perilous Night* and *Racing Thoughts*, say, mirror each other, but the space they inhabit mirrors the world. No wonder this and other recent paintings are full of warnings.

On the left side of the *Perilous Night* diptych the outline of Grünewald's soldiers is coextensive with the black ground. They represent the watchman fallen "into" the paint, the trap of looking. When they wake up, they will take no information away. Implicit in this motif is Johns' distrust of fictive space and of the pleasures of painting. On the diptych's right side are a series of considerations of both the past and future. Three sculptural fragments of a boy's arm hang along the top of the painting, like shed skins. The stumps are capped by red, yellow, and blue, in their Modernist order, and are attached to the painting by hook-and-eye fastenings. There is also a strip of wood lath tilting away from the picture plane; a reference to *Between the Clock and the Bed*, painted in the mirroring manner of "Corpse and Mirror"; a collaged piece of a page from the Cage composition, and a small painted version, in gray, of Grünewald's soldiers. Along the bottom of the right side are trompe l'oeil gray-and-black wooden planks—with a few drips of red, yellow, and blue paint—on which a trompe l'oeil handkerchief has illusionistically been nailed, recalling Peto's tin cup. All this is lovingly rendered. The spy is the critical force behind the right side: he is considering the effects of naturalistic representation and has decided, as with Johns' earlier response to Peto's trompe l'oeil, to employ it in a severely circumscribed manner. Instead of becoming a representational or realist painter, Johns, mining both conceptual attitude and painterly response, has found a way to have his abstract realm absorb seemingly representational images.

Johns has been circling the spy and watchman since the mid '60s. Now he represents them in symbiotic images through which he reveals his complex attitudes toward the identity of the artist and the purpose of painting. In doing so, he goes even farther than he did in his earlier work, which addressed the identity of a painting, but was never open about the forces behind it. Instead of covering a canvas with, say, orderly rows of encaustic numerals embedded in an encaustic ground, Johns now deploys symbols that mirror the fragmented aspects of his interior life. The suspenseful conditions for the meeting of the spy and the watchman are set up in the diptych *Racing Thoughts*. In contrast to *Corpse and Mirror II*, 1974–75, the painting can be described as a hall of mirrors in which a multitude of reflections appear, each of them emblematic of some glimpse into Johns' own identity that he has let us have over the years. (Characteristically, the artist himself does not make a personal appearance.) If we were able to connect the severed phrases of the Swiss road sign that are located at the left and right edges, the painting would become a cylinder. Meanwhile, the title has been arranged along the top of the right side in such a way that were the letters connected to make the title legible, this panel too would become a cylinder. A circle within a circle has been opened up; the divided selves that have hidden for so long behind the public disguises of such motifs as the flag and the maps are revealed.

The Swiss sign in *Racing Thoughts* serves as a warning: translated into English, the French and German phrases mean "beware of falling ice." A jigsaw puzzle–like portrait of Castelli and an abstract reference to corduroy pants have been placed on top of the crosshatching on the left side, which has imploded the outlines of Grünewald's soldiers so that they are no longer as distinguishable as they were in *Perilous Night*; the superimposed images represent Johns' public persona, and the watchman. The Mona Lisa is present through a trompe l'oeil image of the poster of her on the right side; she is the spy, Leonardo and Duchamp in disguise, and also the ultimate enigmatic image of someone we can never know. The commemorative vase at the right, which plays tricks with positive and negative space, is an irritant—a spy—which in its optical trickery can never meld into a whole image, only into the alternating profiles its outline suggests. (The quest for the cup is false.) The orange, green, and black American flags in *Ventriloquist* offer another aspect of the spy as irritant. These colors will reveal their optical opposites (red, white, and blue) as an afterimage if looked at long enough. In *Ventriloquist* the commemorative vase is again located at the bottom of the painting. On the left side the outline of a whale has been embedded into the pattern; on top of this image Johns depicts more illusionistic pots and cups. They are like bumps on the whale for a phrenologist to read, but these bumps of information cannot be translated, and their meaning will remain hidden. The whale is the watchman.

These are just some of the fragments of Johns' disclosures to be found in his recent work concerning the identity of the artist as split between spy and watchman. Tired of gazing into the pool, he has plunged into it, shattering its surface. But beware of the trap of equating looking with knowing. In a new series of drawings that sketch out paintings currently in progress, and in an etching that serves as the frontispiece for a recently published edition of Wallace Stevens' poetry (Arion Press), a shadowy, featureless full-length figure looms—another blank being. Another psychic stand-in for Johns?□



Jasper Johns, *Untitled*, 1985, etching, 9½ × 6¼". Frontispiece for Wallace Stevens, *Poems*, selected and with an introduction by Helen Vendler, San Francisco: Arion Press, 1985.



Jasper Johns, *The Critic Smiles*, 1959, sculp-metal, 1⅝ × 7¾ × 1½". Collection of the artist.

John Yau contributes frequently to *Artforum*.

1. Quoted in Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, New York: Harry N. Abrams/Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977, p. 51.
2. Crichton, p. 28.
3. See Max Kozloff, *Jasper Johns*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969, p. 15. This reference is cited in Crichton, p. 27.
4. Crichton, p. 43.

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Rachel Rosenthal (Moody) - invu 6/2/78

Born in Paris (1926), of Russian parents. Her father was the pearl king of France, well-to-do. They fled to the US when the war broke out. The father re-established himself here in cultured pearls, and they lived in a large apartment on Central Park West.

After the war Rachel went back to Paris to study theater with the Jean-Louis Barrault troupe, and while there she saw Merce Cunningham perform. Merce and John were there briefly - Merce had just left Martha Graham. Rachel had seen him once in NY, in a solo recital with Cage, and had been crazy about him. In Paris he taught some master classes at a school she was attending (Marianne Preger was also in the class).

Rachel came back to NY and started to study with Merce. She went back and forth between Paris and NY for some time, but continued to study with Merce in NY. One time, John said there's this young painter, who's a genius, and introduced her to Bob. They became friends immediately. She was also on close terms with Remy Charlip, who had been Lou Harrison's lover and was just breaking away. Also Lippold and Ray Johnson, and Sari Dienes - they all hung around together. Rauschenberg was back from his Italian-North African sojourn, and was showing his fetiches at the Stable. Rachel bought one of them, the wooden box with nails driven into it and a stone that made sounds striking the nails when you turned the box.

Bob was with Cy Twombly at the time they met. "I hit it off with Bob very well, I really enjoyed talking with him. He had such a crazy, brilliant, mercurial mind. I was just amazed by his work. I had real feelings of envy about it, as though this was what I ought to be doing.

"Then, in 1954, Jasper came from South Carolina. He was working at the Marboro book store on 57th Street. He was very young, 22 or so. That year it became obvious that Bob was getting very interested in Jap. We did all kinds of things together -- meetings in John's studio or in Sari's large studio in Carnegie Hall, trips to the country to visit Fance Stevenson and her husband...

"I knew Jap as one of the hangers-on, and I knew he was gay. Then one night at Sari's, he started to come on with me, really heavy. We started a relationship after that. I was a few years older, and I fell in love with him. It was obvious he was trying to get away from Bob, who was making a big play for him, waiting for him outside the Marboro every night and things like that. That summer (54) what happened was that Jap and Sari and I decided to get lofts downtown. Almost nobody had them then, except for Bob -- Cy had a small apartment in the thirties, I think. So we spent that summer looking for lofts, and found an incredible brick building on Pearl Street. It had been condemned by the City. It had only two lofts, and I'm sorry to say that Jap and I cut Sari out and took those two. I had the top floor, Jap had the one below. I think the address was 125 Pearl Street -- it isn't there any more. There were four or maybe five floors, and a huge old pulley to pull stuff in and out of the windows of the printers on the second floor, and holes in the floors for the ropes to go through. The rent was something like $50 a month for mine. I spent some money and put in a tub and hot water.

"Bob's loft on Fulton was just a block away. He was just emerging

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No furniture in their lofts - just a wooden platform used for sleeping, eating, sitting. Bob and Jap used to come up to Rachel's to take baths.

Fance Stevenson was a potter and a poet. She was married to an architect or engineer, who was very good-naturedly going along with what was clearly not his scene at all. Fance developed into a Lesbian, and had a thing for Rachel. They built, themselves, a fantastic house in the country somewhere up the Hudson, and very very hospitable about having everyone come and stay. They had a lot of cots with sheepskins to sleep on. You swam in their pond, ate and drank very well, had a good time. M,C. Richards was also part of the group. Eventually Fance divorced her husband and went to live in Paris.

Parties at Rachel's parents -- They knew a lot of Russians - the children of one of Boris Chaliapin's marriages, Jennie Tourel and thru her Leonard Bernstein, others in the music world. They used to love to give Russian parties with lots of food, singing and dancing. Rachel would invite her gang, and the mix turned out to be very pleasant. Merce would dance Russian dances. Jap was so broke that her father gave him one of his overcoats. Rachel had her mother buy one of Jap's early things, a green collage painting, for about $40 - one of the few not destroyed. They had a duplex on Central Park South (where Jap and Rachel had their intense fling while her parents were away one summer).

Cage - a tremendous amount of cross-pollenization going on. John had this wonderful quality of unmitigated passion for somebody's work - he almost treated the other like a guru. And he had total admiration for Bob.

Bob was very shrewd about his career. He thought very carefully about where he should go after the Stable. "I saw him at Egan's, talking people into the paintings. He knew how to sell himself like nobody I ever knew - he would always sound so sophisticated and abstruse, yet people were really taken by him. I never had a feeling that he may have had doubts about his work. There was just never any question of that. To watch him work was incredible -- those long fingers of his, like a divine ape. His decisiveness - it was as tho he were hypnotizing the canvas with those penetrating eyes. He'd have all these open cans of paint around, and he'd take his time, and then when he was ready he'd be so definite and decisive and precise. When he'd talk about his work, it had conviction and strength and total involvement. He'd use difficult words, not trying to make it easy for you; he would always speak as though you understood what he was saying. He was such a master of theater! He really knew how to create a show, he was flamboyant, and yet not at all like the abstract expressionists. He could do it in a cool way. I saw him open people's eyes to his work with words I knew they didn't understand!

Bob never read -- only the comics sometimes. Jap read all the time -- poetry, philosophy, literature, all the latest vanguard authors. He also wrote a lot of poetry, very obscure and e.e.cummings.

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"It was almost a year later that Jap began really to work. Meantime he'd done a lot of collages that showed the print, and with elements that had been shredded -- he'd been working at that a long time. Then one day he destroyed everything, all the old work. He would sit for hours, and just think about his work. It seemed as if his whole new conception was created in his mind -- it was not a work process. As soon as he got a handle on his esthetic he destroyed everything.

"Right after that he started to work with encaustic. He had a big book from Marboro's on artist's techniques, and he got it out of that. It was as though the whole thing were already created in his head before he did it. He was just beginning to work on targets and flags.

"My father died at this point, out in California. I was very pissed afterward because Jap used Fance's face mouth for the Target With Four Faces -- otherwise he would have used mine (Jap had done a preliminary casting of Rachel's, which she has). When I returned to New York, everything just seemed to be there in his work. Then I had to move out here, and I got a job teaching at the Pasadena Playhouse. I knew Bob was going to take over my place. They shipped out a lot of my stuff, and we continued to write to each other until time and distance did it. Then, much later, when I had to sell a lot of stuff for financial reasons, Bob got pissed with me, or so I assume. Every time Jap came out here we'd see each other, we've remained good friends. But Bob! I went once to see Yvonne Rainer dance here, and Bob was in the audience, and he snubbed me completely.

Letters from Bob and Jap to Rachel

RR: "Our ideas are beginning to meet the insipid needs of the business that our shame has forced us to assume the name of Matson Jones - Custom Display...

RR (re a Rauschenberg painting for a Cage concert at Town Hall): "If finances will allow it will be flooded (the painting) with a six-foot water fall, changing lights and beaucoup de coulér."

RR: "I was to be in Newsweek today under 'first new direction in painting' with pictures and a big spread, but as usual at last minute the abundance of world affairs squeezed me out. I say as usual because show in Rome article for Time magazine was scratched because of death of Stalin, then something far less heroic about white paintings for Life and now Newsweek..."

Jap, re Rockland Concert: "I liked the new dance very much in part. There were some exquisite things going on sometimes. But I chose to be offended by a certain winner-looser big/strong/man -- little/weak/man/pick/her/up/and/carry/her/off kind of activity or interference. There were also some group formations or stage pictures that looked like photographs of Balanchine dances (I've never seen a Balanchine dance, I think) which were distracting and contradict that three-or-four-is-a-b-g-crowd look that Merce does so beautifully."

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then from his red paintings into the combines, and the excitement of seeing what was happening there was just fantastic.

"Jap was an artist but he didn't yet consider himself a serious artist. He had hardly any time to paint, and had been living in a tiny apartment. What he'd been doing were collages that he would totally paint over in enamel/ paint. Also a lot of drawings. So when he moved into the loft, he felt he was going to open up and really work/ Our sexual relationship had ended some time before this -- it only lasted a month or so. Bob at that time was earning his living making window displays. He talked Jap into quitting his job and going in with him on the displays. At first Jap was very apprehensive/ But the two of them started to go around to stores. Bob did the talking, and he could always talk anybody into anything, so they got plenty of jobs. For every job, they would use Jap's loft to work in -- Bob's was for serious work. I remember them doing blueprints, and things made of very fine balso wood with gauze stretched over forms, and a gold leaf series -- and each time some of that would spill over into Bob's serious work (Rachel has a rough wooden box in which a delicate balsa-and-gauze box just fits precisely, a gift from Bob).

"Every now and then Bob's ex-wife and son would show up, and there would be some emotional problems there -- he never cut them off.

"This all happened in the summer of 1954. And that winter, Bob had his red show at the Egan. I remember one of the paintings, he'd liked the look of the floor where his paint had dripped, so he cut out a section of floor and attached it to the bottom of the canvas, brought it up into the picture -- this was the first time his work had started to extend out into the space around it.

"Bob was such a dandy then. He wore neat button-down shirts, and often a suit and a narrow tie. He lovedto dress up, in olive drab and kahki and those colors he liked. He and I had this really weird relationship. I was crazy about Jap, but Bob and I often ganged up on Jap, teasing him. Jap had such a quality of jeune fille -- he was shy, and coquettish, a real flirt, and he had such a delightful and appealing personality; his looks were extraordinary -- he had skin like moonstone, almost transparent, and silky platinum hair, and huge blue eyes with long lashes. He was very private, secretive. All those men had a very camp-type sensibility, they introduced me to the joys of appreciating bad things, old Monroe movies like Niagara. The time had a really strange, unreal quality for me. I was very attracted to Bob as this incredible genius. He was seductive, but at the same time he was very shrewd and he knew just how to play on your weak points. I tried to buy one of his pieces for less money than he was asking; he decided I could afford to pay the full price (he was right, too), so he wrote me a letter that was so manipulative and so shrewd that I just fell apart, I wrote back saying I'd even buy it from the gallery and pay extra... He knew how to use people. He's a very emotional, hot person, as hot as Jap is cool. I was just being tossed between them. I was doing sculpture at the time -- the first time I showed was with Jasper in a group show at the Tanager (he showed his piece with the toy piano; I did a big black sculpture coated with tar). In those days I used to work all night, with my cats, at my sculpture and cry because I couldn't have Jap. Oh, and Cy and I did a lot of crying on each other's shoulder... He was very distraught. He'd walk me home some night, and then I'd have to walk him back to his place, and then he'd walk me back. He'd come back from the army and was suddenly there on the →

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scene. He was already full into his scribbles. Bob was very supportive of his work. But we were both getting all kinds of mixed ~~signals~~ messgges. There was lots of murkiness and games being played. Actually it was kind of god-awful.

(Rachel came back from Paris in January 1954; moved into Pearl Street loft summer of 1954; her father died in the summer of 1955, so it was just a year and a half in all).

Bob on ab-ex: "Bob was always making fun of the old guys, and treating them very cavalierly. A lot of wit and irony at the expense of almost everybody. I never heard him say anything bad about Albers. But Kline and deKooning and all the others. His tone of voice was very mocking. He had no idols, he just knew his own work was superior.

Photography - Bob took a lot of pix of the Theater de Lys season. He was still very interested in photography. He never cleaned his negatives, explaining that he liked the dirt-specks, and the little hairs and other stuff that got on them.

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The Washington Post

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Artist Jasper Johns in his New York studio.

BY CORI WELLS BRAUN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Jasper Johns, Personally Speaking

The Artist at 60: Turning Inward in His Work, Breaking the Silence on His Life

The TV Column

Garagiola to Co-Host 'Today'

Executive Dick Ebersol Steps Down; Daniels Joins Ailing NBC Show

By John Carmody
Washington Post Staff Writer

NBC News yesterday announced major changes for the "Today" show cast, including the return of Joe Garagiola to the broadcast as a co-host.

The entire new lineup, which also includes Faith Daniels as news anchor and Katie Couric as national correspondent based in Washington, will be introduced to the viewing public on Monday, June 4, when the program airs from Washington, where the unhappy NBC affiliates will be holding their annual meeting. Couric will start on the show beginning next Monday.

Garagiola will join Bryant Gumbel and Deborah Norville at the anchor desk, while Daniels will have a separate news anchor desk, according to executive producer Tom Capra.

NBC News President Michael Gartner also announced that Dick Ebersol has decided to step down as senior executive for the beleaguered morning show, although the NBC Sports president will remain as a senior vice president of the News division "to work with me on a number of key projects."

See TV COLUMN, F8, Col. 1

Effi Barry's Frugal Film Fest

The Mayor's Wife & Entourage, Tripling Up for D.C. [illegible]

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Special to The Washington Post

NEW YORK

It is 10 a.m. At home in the protective bubble of his midtown Manhattan town house, across its elegant little courtyard, Jasper Johns, arguably America's preeminent living artist, can be seen in his studio, adding a bit of paint to the canvas in front of him. The image: a wristwatch hanging from a nail and set at five minutes before 4.

Aware that a visitor has arrived, he [illegible] crosses the courtyard to offer greetings, and seems suddenly transformed into a wealthy gentleman of high taste, a work-at-home intellectual surrounded by art that suggests a life spent among friends who have participated in the great artistic endeavors of our time.

He also has a great tan.

"I grew up in the South, you're out-of-doors," says Johns, who was most recently burnished in St. Martin in the French West Indies, where he has built a new house on property he's owned since the '70s. Friends often follow him there, and the meals he cooks are legendary.

"I think his place in the history of art is as assured as that of Duchamp or Picasso," says Nan Rosenthal, 20th-century curator at the National Gallery of Art who, with Ruth E. Fine, curator of modern prints and drawings there, organized "The Drawings of Jasper Johns," the mind-bending survey of his work opening Sunday at the gallery's West Building.

Wherever he is—St. Martin, Manhattan or at his country house at Stony Point on the Hudson—Johns has one objective. "I work on everything everywhere," he says. "My studios are set up pretty much identically, the three of them, so they have the same possibilities.

"That's the way I learned to work. When I was young, I never formed good working habits, and had to paint or draw in spare moments. So everything gains the same importance—swimming, gardening, painting, cooking."

A balanced life? "Not particularly," says Johns. "Juggling fragments."

Because he listens so carefully, and gives conversation the full weight of his

See JOHNS, F6, Col. 1

At the National Gallery, Agog Over van Gogh

By Martha Sherrill
Washington Post Staff Writer

His face was deadpan. His voice was calm. But last night at the National Gallery of Art, Werner Kramarsky—the man whose van Gogh just sold for $82.5 million in New York—saw legendary art dealer Leo Castelli cruising by. He touched his arm.

"Done, Leo. It's done," said Kramarsky.

Castelli looked up. He was told the price. And his knees dropped—yes, they did—to the marble floor.

Some expressed shock and near disgust at the record-breaking price—nearly $30 million more than any painting has ever sold for—but in this crowd of 350 big-time collectors and dealers and artists gathered for a dinner celebrating the Jasper Johns drawings exhibition, which opens Sunday, there were many who felt greatly reassured about their own fortunes.

"Museums don't need newspapers," National Gallery Director J. Carter Brown said in opening his remarks after dinner. "I don't think there's anyone left at this dinner tonight who doesn't know that Werner Kramarsky sold a van Gogh tonight—about an hour ago—for $75 million."

Brown cleverly had subtracted the Christie's auction house commission. And his voice, unlike Kramarsky's earlier, was on the edge of thrill. (After all, there were 12 van Goghs sitting in the NGA as he spoke.) "Apparently it's going

See PARTY, F10, Col. 4



BY JOHN McDONNELL—THE WASHINGTON POST

Architect Philip Johnson, left, greets Jasper Johns last night.

By Rita Kempley
Washington Post Staff Writer

CANNES, France, May 15

Herhonner Effi Barry and her two-woman entourage are literally bunking together during their stay here in glamorous Cannes. The three are sharing a studio at the Hotel Croisette Maubury, which comes equipped with bunk and sofa beds. Accommodations for the Washington delegation are running at 742 francs a night, which wouldn't buy six glasses of fresh-squeezed OJ at the Majestic bar.

Barry is accompanied by Teri Doke, secretary of the District of Columbia, and Crystal Palmer, head of the D.C. Office of Motion Picture and Television Development. Their mission, Doke said today, is to "promote the city in a positive light." And as the chairman of the D.C. Bicentennial Year in 1991, Doke is hoping to put a documentary deal together. It's hushhushhush.

"This was our first invitation to attend," says Doke, manning the phones while her roommates rest after their trip. "I think it has something to do with the number of films that are made in your city. I think we reached that level and so we were invited."

"We're acting like we're back in college," she says of

See CANNES, F9, Col. 1

TONY KORNHEISER

The Ordinary Face of Racism

Two men were traveling together last Sunday morning, one white, one black. They were flying from New York to Washington. Both were dressed neatly in suits. Both held similar complimentary tickets, authorized by the airline's management as part of a TV advertising trade-out.

They approached the ticket counter, where two agents—one white male and one white female—were working.

The white man handed over his ticket. The male agent glanced at it, smiled and asked him where he preferred to sit.

"Aisle, near the middle of the plane," he said. He got 17C.

He lingered near the counter, waiting for his friend to select the seat on the opposite aisle, so they might chat during the flight.

The black man handed over his ticket. The female agent glanced at it and asked, "Do you have some identification?"

"Yes, I do," the black man said, and he reached for his wallet. "But just out of curiosity, do you mind telling me why you want to see it?"

The agent grinned in embarrassment.

She said nothing in response.

"How about a credit card?" the black man said, and he pulled one out of his wallet.

"Do you have a work ID?" she asked, apparently hoping to see something with the black man's photo on it.

"No," he said, and whipped out another credit card.

"A driver's license would be fine," she said, sounding trapped.

"I don't have my driver's license with me," he said. "I'm taking the plane, not the car." Though he

See KORNHEISER, F9, Col. 1

TV Previews

Great 'Deal,' On NBC

By Tom Shales
Washington Post Staff Writer

"Shannon's Deal" is an upgrade to first class. NBC's four-star drama series about a wry and wary Philadelphia lawyer completes its limited run tonight with an affecting episode called "Sanctuary," at 10 on Channel 4.

The series, which NBC may put on the fall schedule it announces a week from today, has been a pocket of quality in network prime time. Like "Twin Peaks," it marks a welcome foray into Television Land for an established filmmaker—in this case, John Sayles, who created the character and serves as a consultant.

Sayles isn't slumming any more than David Lynch is. He's helping in the effort to bring film-quality work to TV.

In addition, Executive Producer Stan

See TV PREVIEWS, F3, Col. 1

The Presidential Mirrors

Bush, Reflecting on the Similarities at the Dinner for Tunisia's Ben Ali



BY HARRY WALTOHIYAN—THE WASHINGTON POST

The Bushes with President Ben Ali last night.

By Donnie Radcliffe and Barbara Feinman
Washington Post Staff Writers

When it comes to world leaders, they are two of a kind.

Both are into physical fitness, grandparenting and working the crowds, as well as putting their aides to work.

"You keep track of your cabinet personally with a home computer," President Bush told the visiting president of Tunisia, Zine Abidine Ben Ali, at the White House dinner honoring him last night. "Your home computer is called an Apple. Mine is called John Sununu."

He continued, "In this country, the combination of grandchildren and computer games has produced some unexpected results. It's a true story, Mr. President, the most popular computer game in America is called 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.' Don't worry about the translation—it doesn't make any sense in English either."

While maybe not ready for the David Letterman show, the president seemed quite comfortable last night in the role of comic relief. More so, perhaps, than comedian Don Rickles, one of the president's guests.

Asked by a reporter if he was going to insult anyone, Rickles responded with a big grin. "I can't afford it. The president could get moody and I could end up in Tunis."

That wouldn't be such a bad fate for another of the Hollywood stars at the dinner, "Dynasty's" Linda Evans, who was chatting with both presidents. Afterward, Bush quoted Ben Ali as saying, " 'She's very famous in Tunisia and more people know who she is than President Bush.' He didn't say what that meant," Bush added. Evans later laughed about Ben Ali's assertion that if she came

See DINNER, F4, Col. 1

on a day when some 50-60,000 people might normally throng its halls, the Met drew 26,000.

Some small consolation, however, was felt by pros who make the art route on a regular weekly basis. "On a clear day at the galleries now, you can even see the art," reported one.

ART'S ARTIST

Mum's the word for Jasper Johns, the critic Harold Ro-

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of miniatures Jan. 14-Feb. 2 at IBM Galleries; on Feb. 2 a Mary Cassatt show of 45 paintings, selected by N.C.F.A. consultant Adelyn Breeskin opens at Knoedler. . . . New York artist Ad Reinhardt will be artist-in-residence at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, mid-January through mid-February, by way of a grant from the American Federation of Art.

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Artist Jasper Johns

JOHNS, From F1

attention and intelligence, Johns's answers tend to crystalline clarity and soothing cadence.

Silences, however, are one conversational weapon he has mastered, and like the myths that surround him they function like a low-voltage electric fence, fending off invasive questions before they are asked, and reducing vague queries to ashes.

Often described as "difficult," he is, in fact, invariably polite and accommodating, even warm and welcoming to a stranger, whom he whisks upstairs to his sleek, high-ceilinged kitchen where he deftly puts up a pot of coffee.

Fit and robust, Johns turned 60 yesterday, although the National Gallery, at Johns's request, made no mention of the occasion as it celebratede the exhibition's opening with a dinner filled with friends and art world luminaries. "I never celebrate my birthday. I'm sorry it ever entered anyone's mind," says Johns, filling two proper china cups and setting down at a round kitchen table overlooking the courtyard.

"I do remember being 6, and having a party in my grandfather's garden, behind the house," recalls Johns, who rarely speaks of his childhood. "After the cake and things, we all went to the movies," where children under 6 were admitted free. "For the first time, I got to pay," he says, sticking out his chin in mock-childish pride. "Lots of guests couldn't."

Born in Augusta, Ga., young Johns was sent, after his parents divorced, to live with his grandfather, W.I. Johns, a South Carolina farmer, and his wife, who had the unusual first name of Montez.

"I remember my grandfather used to talk about how wonderful the corn looked, or the cotton, and I couldn't tell what he was talking about: They were only that tall," says Johns, marking off two inches of air with his thumb and forefinger. "They looked all the same to me."

Childhood memories, in fact, seem to be much with Johns these days, though he keeps boxing with the fact that his art has become more personal and autobiographical. "Of course it's about me," he says, though that question has not been asked. "But it's not a *story* about me, for heaven's sake!"

A new painting hanging in his studio suggests otherwise. Titled "Montez Singing," it is a surprisingly spare work, so spare, in fact, that one might assume, incorrectly, that it was still in progress. It depicts little more than a wall, upon which hangs a childlike drawing of a sailboat, set against a diagrammatic sunset that seems to throb with sound. This painting makes very specific reference, not only to the fact that his grandmother used to sing, but that she used to sing "Red Sails in the Sunset." A floating, Picassoesque eye suggests Johns, watching.

In recent years, and especially in "The Seasons," the last suite of work he exhibited, Johns's art has become increasingly personal and introspective, and Johns himself more approachable on the subject of his art.

Is it advancing age that has changed him? Could a serious fall from a ladder in St. Martin's, which broke his right wrist, have further awakened him to his own mortality?

"He's more communicative lately, nothing to do with his birthday per se," says his longtime dealer, Leo Castelli. "It's just that, as we know, he communicates feelings and thoughts which he did not do before. He did deadpan images—flags and targets and letters. Then in 'The Seasons' he became quite autobiographical, including even a drawing of his own shadow.

"He has been, for years and years, very uncommunicative, and didn't want to have interviews," adds Castelli. "If he's not as much talked about as some others, it's his own doing. Ten years ago, he refused to have a profile in the New Yorker. He just didn't want to talk about himself."

Johns has clearly mellowed since then, and in the case of the National Gallery show, has allowed—albeit with reservations—limited exposure beyond the art press. Yesterday, at a press breakfast and preview of the exhibition, the artist made an appearance but no one was surprised when gallery Director J. Carter Brown said that Johns had chosen not to make a statement. When he answered one question about his interest in potter George Ohr, the 50 or so reporters sat in stunned silence and not another question was asked.

After his grandfather's death, Johns went to live with a schoolmistress aunt, where he remained until his final years in high school, when he moved again, this time to the home of his mother and stepfather, two half sisters and a half brother in Sumter, S.C. Johns maintains contact with his siblings, as well as his mother, now 84, who lives in Edisto Beach, S.C.

But considering his childhood odyssey, it was not surprising to learn the history of Johns's rather disreputable-looking black-and-white collie mutt. "She's a dog from the pound," he explained.

"Her name," said Johns, "is spelled either Bina or Binah—I don't know which. There's a folk song," he said, and recited it in singsong: " 'My name is JoBinah, from South Carolina, and I'm sellin' kindlin' wood to get along.' That's where I got the name."

On Becoming an Artist

Johns recalls no training in art prior to his last year in high school, when he took one course, half mechanical drawing, half art. According to his sister, Owen Lee, he was encouraged by a teacher who thought he was the greatest artist she'd ever come across.

"I think most artists are self-taught," says Johns. "If you have the necessity, you quickly learn. I couldn't sit down and make a conventional drawing, I couldn't. Maybe if I felt I needed to do it, I'd learn how."

Johns does remember that in high school, he was already determined to be an artist, though he cannot find a trigger for his ambitions. "I had had a grandmother who died before I was born who had made some pictures, and these were in homes of various relatives. They were like swan on a creek, or crane standing in water, or cow in meadow . . . something like that, and I have the suspicion that they were copied, but I don't know.

"Those were the only paintings I ever saw, real paintings, as a child," he says softly. But he must have seen something—art of some sort—somewhere. "I didn't," he says, "till I came to New York.

"I think that idea of being an artist was involved with the idea of being somewhere else, frankly. I think that was very important. But I'm not sure that that's true, because I certainly didn't know an artist, and no one where I was was an artist. So the idea must have had, as part of its fascination, that one would be somewhere other than in a little town in South Carolina.

"And it's true! It's true for all artists that they have to be somewhere other than in a little town in South Carolina!" He breaks up with laughter at finding himself with a point so craftily made, then returns to seriousness.

"They can't function there. They require a society as part of it. It requires an exchange of ideas, and information about other art and other people and an opportunity to interact."

Johns took off for New York after only three semesters at the University of South Carolina, and worked odd jobs until he was drafted into the Army during the Korean War, during which he spent six months in Japan.

Upon his return to New York in 1952, at age 22, he was working in a bookstore when he met Robert Rauschenberg, five years his senior, and began collaborating on window displays at Bonwit's and Tiffany's. Soon thereafter, Johns met avant-garde composer John Cage and dancer Merce Cunningham, who became lifelong friends.

The rest is recounted in every history book on mid-century American art. Johns, prompted by a dream of painting an American flag, as well as by a desire to invent something entirely different from abstract expressionism, began painting flags, targets and numerals which, both for their freshness and intense painterly sensuality, swiftly attracted the attention of Castelli, and Museum of Modern Art Director Alfred Barr, who purchased several works from Johns's first show.

In recent years, Johns's star—along with his prices—has ascended into the stratosphere, with one of his paintings hitting $17.1 million, the second-highest price ever paid for a work by a living artist. Only one painting, by Willem de Kooning, has surpassed it at auction.

His prices are so high, in fact, that the quarter-million dollars Ford Motors put up to support the gallery show wouldn't presently buy them a single drawing in it. New drawings now average $400,000, old ones far more at auction.

"I hope you make clear," says Johns, "that these record auction prices don't come to me."

"But," says Castelli, "In a sense the money does come to him and to all of us who have Jasper Johns paintings, because they rise in price, and he has the best collection."

Johns is, in fact, the largest single lender to the National Gallery show. And he has long been a generous lender to other major museums, which couldn't conceivably afford to buy his paintings.

Johns has also loaned four of the seven major paintings now on view in the room devoted entirely to his work in the National Gallery East Building. The National Gallery owns no painting by Johns, and the first drawing entered its collection yesterday—a gift from Leo Castelli.

Johns has wisely held back many of his works over the years, hoping to form what he calls "a comprehensive picture, a good indication of my work."

As a result, what Johns will ultimately do with his collection is a subject of much discussion in museums around the world.

"I have a plan," says Johns, "but it could change. The art world could change."

"Of course he has a plan," says Castelli, "but who knows what it is? Maybe they will go to the National Gallery. Who knows? That would be my guess.

"But I certainly wouldn't ask him," he added hastily. "That would be totally indiscreet."

Friends and Influences

Castelli first met Johns during a visit to the studio of Robert Rauschenberg, who lived downstairs from Johns. The two artists shared a refrigerator.

Would Castelli have found him if Rauschenberg hadn't needed ice, and made the introduction after Castelli remembered being bowled over by one of Johns's "Target" paintings he'd seen somewhere? "I don't know. I don't know," says Johns. "It has a wonderful aspect of charm and fate and surprise, doesn't it? I simply don't know."

His sudden success, says Johns, "had to do with the time: coincidences, timing, changes in the atmosphere. There was already a second generation of abstract expressionists, but I didn't know them and they didn't know me. I worked for what seemed to me a long time on my own, and Leo opened a gallery.

"All the coming together of these new elements was very important. And I think that my showing with Leo made it more interesting than it would have seemed at another gallery: He made the impression that something was being made new, which it was, and that atmosphere gave it a freshness.

"Robert Rauschenberg has been the most important to me and my thought," says Johns, "particularly at that time. We were very close, and saw each other on a daily basis, to the exclusion of most other society. Cage, too, is a person of many ideas, and of missionary mind, bringing the word. And Merce Cunningham's work. Those are the essential people."

Evidence of other friendships can be found throughout Johns's airy, uncluttered house, usually in the form of works of art. There are small ones: a windowsill-full of treasured, naughty objects by Marcel Duchamp, a model mind for Johns; large ones, like John Chamberlain's crushed metal sculpture. Two Heinz Ketchup boxes by Andy Warhol serve as end tables.

"I don't pursue it in an orderly manner," says Johns of his eclectic collecting, but he has sought out several pots by George Ohr. In the entrance way a large drawing of romping bathers by Eric Fischl hangs not far from a "Fish" lamp by architect Frank Gehry. A small painting of the head of a man asleep by Lucien Freud hangs nearby.

Oddly, there is very little of Johns's own work around apart from the occasional "Map" drawing or sculpted light bulb. There is, however, one luscious triptych titled "Usuyuki" (which means light snowfall) hanging by the kitchen window. "It is *the* one, the original one, the first," says Johns of this well-known series. "All the others are just variations of that."

Johns had a short list of things he'd like to do, but hasn't done: "I'd like to travel," he says, but he apparently hates doing it."

"I've seen very little of the world," says Johns, who had been to Italy only once when he went to the 1988 Biennale, but had never been to Venice before.

There, he didn't even stay long enough to pick up his grand prize—the famed "Golden Lion," which had to be sent. Asked if he had it, Johns hadn't the slightest idea, but summoned his studio assistant, and a few minutes later he set the gilded object out on a table in the courtyard.

"That's the first time it's seen the light of day," chuckled Johns. "There he is. Quite a sight."

Johns is asked which, of all these treasures, he'd grab first if an emergency arose.

"Me," he squealed, without hesitation, hugging himself. "I'd grab me!"

Weddings Engagements Announcements

on a day when some 50-60,000 people might normally throng its halls, the Met drew 26,000.

Some small consolation, however, was felt by pros who make the art route on a regular weekly basis. "On a clear day at the galleries now, you can even see the art," reported one.

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No Business Like No Business

New York Times 1/16/64

By GRACE GLUECK

"SIC transit, sicker business," gloomed a 57th St. art dealer last week, reporting a 7-day attendance figure of 42 at his gallery. Of the city's dealers, the 57th St. group seemed hardest hit by the strike. Art-trotters stayed away in droves from the choked crosstown artery. The new Dwan Gallery at 29 West 57th, fresh from L. A., reports that its floor last Saturday — normally the busiest gallery day — "was like a desert." So does Tibor de Nagy, in the same building. Openings were bleak affairs. Only a handful showed up for op artist Victor Vasarely's bash the first week of the strike, noted the 57th Street establishment of Sidney Janis.

Upper Madison Avenue was a slightly different story. Parke-Bernet, the 76th Street auction house, reports it was jammed at its exhibition and sale last Saturday and had no complaints at all about weekday business. The nearby Graham Gallery had an "absolute wingding" of a Saturday. The Lefebre Gallery, on 77th Street, said that its paying customers were coming—and so were a slew of people who'd been let out early from work. But then, as one dealer pointed out, the Upper East Side galleries are neighborhood affairs, within easy walking distance of their "solvant-garde" clientele.

Museum attendance plummeted. The Museum of Modern Art, which normally draws 2-3,000 visitors on a weekday, was averaging 600. Most of its departments were open "on a piecemeal basis," a spokesman reported, "depending on the number of guards who show up." For the duration, the museum was closing at 5, an hour early. The Guggenheim Museum, at 89th and Fifth, said its attendance was off by 1/3. But it was running on full schedule. And at 82nd and Fifth, the good gray Metropolitan was also keeping faith. Average weekday attendance at the Met, normally 7-9,000, dropped to 1,300-2,500. Last Saturday, on a day when some 50-60,000 people might normally throng its halls, the Met drew 26,000.

Some small consolation, however, was felt by pros who make the art route on a regular weekly basis. "On a clear day at the galleries now, you can even see the art," reported one.

ART'S ARTIST

Mum's the word for Jasper Johns, the critic Harold Rosenberg has suggested, comparing him with William S. Hart, "the deadpan sheriff of the silent Westerns." (Until he smiles, pardner.)



The New York Times (Sam Falk)

Jasper Johns
Art's William S. Hart

Johns' new, outsize paintings at the Leo Castelli Gallery are deadpan, too. By way of visual puns, shifts in dimension (2-D to 3-D and back) and seeming slips of the brush, they comment obliquely on the process of making art.

"A lot of the things in my paintings are involved with measurement," Johns said the other day. That was obvious (once he'd pointed it out). The paintings bear spoons, rulers, color charts, either attached to the canvas or painted on — finite gauges set against "the immeasurability that art is supposed to have." Johns plays other games on the flat picture plane. He dangles from it items used in doing the work — paint-clogged brushes, empty paint cans, a sponge —along with such other real objects as a half-chair with a cast of half a female leg. (Why bother to render them on a flat surface? Here they are in 3-D, he seems to say.) Contrariwise, sometimes he hinges objects to the canvas, then duplicates them in paint.

"According to What," for example, a wide painting that fills one wall, has a vertical crevasse. Down it ramble brightly painted, stick-up letters made of cast aluminum that spell out colors. Some of them are bent, though their flat replicas on canvas aren't.

"I couldn't bend them myself," says Johns, "so I had to send them to a metal worker, to have them broken, then filled in. I'm a real liar."

Johns has more or less abandoned the early images —flags, targets and numbers — that caused a stir when they were first exhibited in 1958 (although a recent "op" flag painting appears in the Whitney Museum's current annual survey). "A lot of what one does is work toward an idea. Once established, it can be discarded. I was concerned with the invisibility those images had acquired, and the idea of knowing an image rather than just seeing it out of the corner of your eye. I wanted to make the flags and targets very concrete, to see them as objects. I hoped in the end no one could discard my work, as the eye discards a real flag because it has seen it so often."

At the tender age of 36, Johns has already weathered three summit-type shows (all in 1964)—at the Venice Biennale, New York's Jewish Museum, and London's Whitechapel Gallery. Wasn't it unsettling to be that big a winner early on in one's career? Johns says "it's neither depressing nor elating. At first I thought it might be instructive to see all my paintings together — but actually they just looked like a lot of old paintings." Cool, cool.

HIGH FLYER

What? Who? A running nude on Madison Avenue? Yes—on a banner far above the madding crowd. Affixed to the facade of the Graham Gallery, it will advertise the forthcoming show (opening Feb. 1) of Sherman Drexler, New York painter who paints nudes, and not much else.

Mr. Drexler designed the banner for his show from one of his paintings. His wife, Rosalyn Drexler, playwright, novelist, artist, and model for her husband, made a collage paste-up of it for the flag factory's guidance. Graham is seeing the project through, handling delicate negotiations with the factory foreman, who speaks with diffidence of anatomical problems he has encountered in executing the banner.

The flag, white figure on red ground, is said to be the first such (outdoor) attraction on staid Mad Avenue. It will soon fly, reports Graham.

COLLAGE

David Hockney, Britain's hottest pop star, will soon take up permanent U.S. residence, reports The London Sunday Times. "I used to think London was exciting. But compared with San Francisco or New York it's nothing," says Hockney. "I feel more lively there. So I work better" . . . Is Washington's Smithsonian Institution creeping up on New York? Its National Collection of Fine Arts will show selections from its collection of miniatures Jan. 17-Feb. 12 at IBM Galleries; on Feb. 2 a Mary Cassatt show of 45 paintings, selected by N.C.F.A. consultant Adelyn Breeskin opens at Knoedler. . . . New York artist Ad Reinhardt will be artist-in-residence at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, mid-January through mid-February, by way of a grant from the American Federation of Art.

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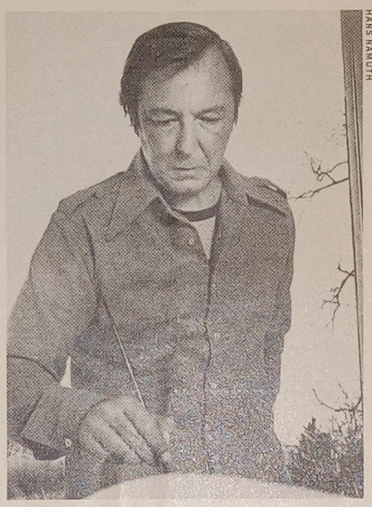
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Pictures at an Inhibition

Jasper Johns' New York retrospective

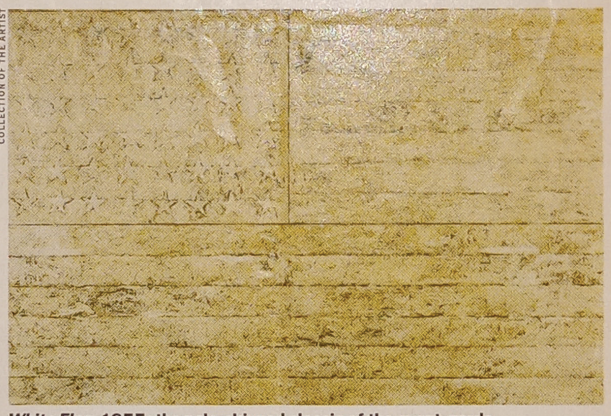
Jasper Johns, considered by many people the greatest artist at work in America, has been in the public eye for not quite 20 years. It seems longer. No art career pupated more quickly. Johns appeared in 1958 at the Leo Castelli Gallery, a reclusive young Southerner from Augusta, Ga., who had been surviving in virtual isolation in Manhattan since 1952. With his paintings of targets and of the American flag, he landed on point, in the spot, at centerstage: the Museum of Modern Art bought three paintings from that first show, an unheard-of gesture to an unknown painter, and the acquisitive frenzy and the search for bankable geniuses that would characterize the American art world in the '60s began in earnest.

From that moment, Johns' work, slowly done and irregularly seen, served as a still, enigmatic center to the turmoil it had helped provoke. In Johns, the '50s artist—imagined as "hot," expressive and tragic—was displaced by the didactic painter-hero of the '60s; a man of distances, margins and blocks, detachedly rendering the nuances of ambiguity through the most commonplace objects. But his work has not been seen whole. Now it can be: last week a retrospective of 201 paintings, drawings, multiples and prints by Jasper Johns opened at New York's Whitney Museum. Curator David Whitney, a former assistant to Johns, put the retrospective together; the West Coast science-fiction writer Michael Crichton *(The Andromeda Strain)* supplied a catalogue text. It is, of course, a fascinating show; but the painter who rises from it is not the Leonardesque genius we have all been conditioned to expect.



HANS NAMUTH

Johns at work on lithograph



COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

***White Flag*, 1955: the pale-skinned classic of the avant-garde**

The game is knowing, the level is seeing, the means is painting.

Between 1955 and '61, Jasper Johns invented most of his principal motifs: the targets, the stenciled words and numbers, the rulers, the fragments of human anatomy, the American map, the American flag. No period in his later work would equal this one for vitality and daring. A work like *White Flag,* 1955, has lost the aura of scandal that clung to it when it was first seen. Instead it has moved into the company of, say, Pollock's *Lavender Mist* as one of the classics of American modernism: a work of such authority, intelligence and opulent technical skill that one can hardly believe its pale, dense encaustic skin was made by a 25-year-old.

"Using the design of the American flag," Johns once remarked, "took care of a great deal for me because I didn't have to design it. So I went on to similar things like targets—things the mind already knows. That gave me room to work on other levels." The most complex of these levels—and Johns' work on it constitutes a great part of his historical importance—was exploring differences between knowing and seeing. A target is a sign. Anyone who has shot on a range knows that looking at a target is an extreme case of hierarchical perception —score 10 for the bull's-eye, 9 for the inner, and so on. Once a target is seen aesthetically, as a unified design, its use is lost; it stops being a sign and becomes an image. We do not "know" it so clearly.

In *Target with Plaster Casts,* 1955, the target's five rings present themselves as painting alone: an even, edible, lovely skin of wax encaustic, no part of it more visually "important" than the next. The idea of putting a bullet through it becomes absurd. What is there to aim at? A sign, which can only be stared at, becomes a painterly image, which must be scanned. But the reverse transformation happens to the plaster casts of parts of the human body in their boxes above the target: anonymous, dipped in paint, they are like fossils or—more exactly—words, denoting "ear," "hand" or "penis." Two systems are locked in paradox: for paradox is Johns' method of seeing clearly.

So with the maps, whose descriptive use is abolished by the storms and flurries of brush marks, and with the lettering, when the word RED turns out to be rendered in blue or yellow paint. Such works do more to force the viewer to think about representation and what it entails than almost any painting since cubism. Johns' art has had episodes of deadpan comedy; *Painting with Two Balls,* 1960, is among other things a hilariously literal satire on the much-vaunted machismo of abstract expressionism. But his art's main strength lay in the subtlety of its linguistic disputes, embodied as they were in memorable, iconic images.

Yet there have not been very many of these images. Lithography enabled Johns to run scores of variations on his standard themes. And since by the mid-'60s it was assumed that he was incapable of triviality —having become, so to speak, a myth of dandyism: the intelligent person's Andy Warhol—this string of refusals and paradoxes inherited the mantle of his strategic mentor, Marcel Duchamp. He was the artist-critic par excellence. As a result, Johns remains the most intimidating artist alive today.

His *tour de main,* a proven success, is to make his viewers feel dumb, usually dumber than they really are. This is partly —but only partly—due to the mass of exegesis that has piled up around his work over the past dozen years. As a living conundrum through the '60s, as the one nonformalist artist whose mastery of painted surface was so self-evident that formalist criticism could not dispose of him by its usual methods, Johns became the focus of a critical debate so intense in its narcissism that it managed to pre-empt most visual reactions to what is, among other

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COLLECTION OF EDWIN JANSS, THOUSAND OAKS, CALIF.

***According to What*, 1964: refusals, paradoxes, letters and a dismembered friend**

***Painting with Two Balls*, 1960: between the splashes, art history and a deadpan joke**



COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

things, a particularly knotty kind of conceptual art.

The fundamental writing on Johns was done by Critics Barbara Rose and Max Kozloff. After them, was there much left to say? Plainly not, if one is to judge from Michael Crichton's catalogue. Meanwhile Johns (unlike Robert Rauschenberg, who cared less about such matters) proved to be a brilliant curator of his own reputation. A standard posture toward his work emerged. One went to it like Oedipus to the Sphinx. Ask it the wrong question and it would bite one's beak off. Almost any question was the wrong question. This is the most inspired snow job any American artist has ever pulled on his public. Perhaps no paintings in the history of modernism have been so protected by their obliqueness as Johns'.

And so one finds in Johns' work two characters interrogating the eye: the Good Cop and the Bad Cop. The Good Cop is a seducer. Not a great colorist, but a tonal painter without peer, he makes the most beautiful surfaces in America: glaze to paste to crust, never a false step or an unintentionally gauche touch. He is no kind of formal draftsman, but his ability to soothe the eye with exquisite scribbles, with clumps and fields of accumulated line, is breathtaking. He cannot make a banal mark with the crayon, partly because his drawing is not descriptive. And as a printmaker, he is the supreme technician of our time in lithography and silkscreen.

The Bad Cop, by contrast, is an intimidator. In works like *According to What*, 1964, or *Untitled*, 1972, he puts wax casts of the parts of a friend's body —hands, a split chunk of face, a buttock, or a pair of legs in a chair. Any Johns reminds one of art history, and this precedent is in Marcel Duchamp's work: the cast human fragments, a vagina or his own cheek, exhibited as sculpture. But the

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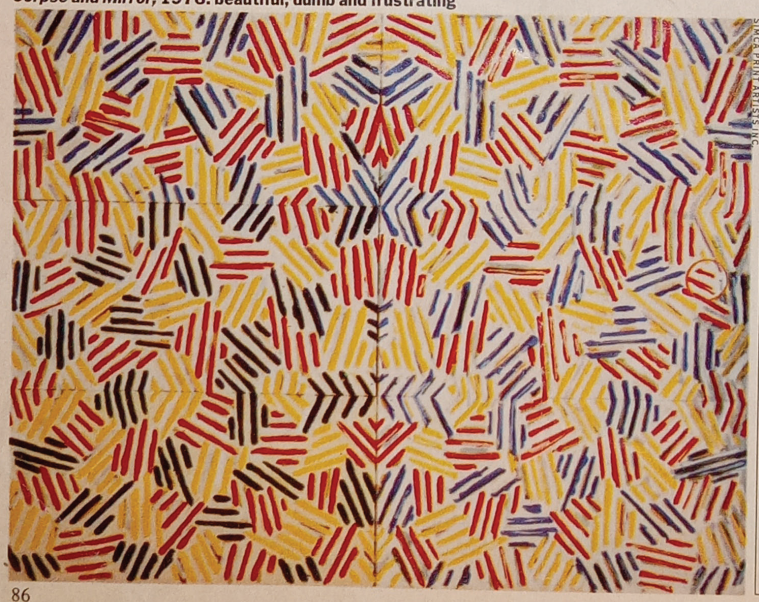
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COLLECTION OF MR. & MRS. LEO CASTELLI

***Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955: turning signs into images**

***Corpse and Mirror*, 1976: beautiful, dumb and frustrating**



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Art

violence of Johns' image, its sense of indifferent dismemberment, is alien to anying in Duchamp.

It is pure hostility, and the spectrum of hostility in his work is wide. At the other end from sadism, it is nearly volatilized. All the same, its trace remains. One thinks of *The Barber's Tree*, 1975—a mute, all-over design of rose and gray hatchings in encaustic, on a ground of collaged newspaper. The title is incomprehensible and refers to nothing that the painting discloses. To get the point you have to know about a photo Johns saw in a *National Geographic:* a Mexican barber painting a live tree like a barber's pole. As Crichton suggests, "It was probably the underlying idea of painting over reality that interested Johns." But who, without the catalogue essay, could possibly be expected to read that into the painting? Its origin is so disconnected from the picture as to have no meaning as subject. Without the photo, one is left with a nice abstract design of hatch marks, beautifully rendered and otherwise unremarkable.

The fact that such paintings are by Johns provides the only reason for imagining they are something more than pattern. "Beat me," begs the masochist. "No," says the sadist. This ancient two-liner has much to say about the relationship Johns' recent work has to its viewers. It is based on frustration.

Frustration has often been a component of Johns' work in the past—the drawers and hatches that cannot open, the mirrors with nothing visible to reflect, the dead flashlights, the rulers with nothing to measure. But in the new paintings and their attendant prints, like *Corpse and Mirror*, 1976, it becomes particularly troublesome. The organization is fanatically strict, but it is never clear why Johns finds this motif of the hatch mark as interesting as he does.

The "corpse" of *Corpse and Mirror* alludes to a surrealist game like "consequences," in which a piece of folded paper was passed around, with each player adding a section of drawing to the unseen one before. The game produced weird and poetic monsters on paper. Johns' interest is only in the folds: the hatchings repeat, mirror and reverse one another. It is only a formal device and, compared with what one has learned to expect from the earlier Johns, it is a weak *raison d'être* for the art.

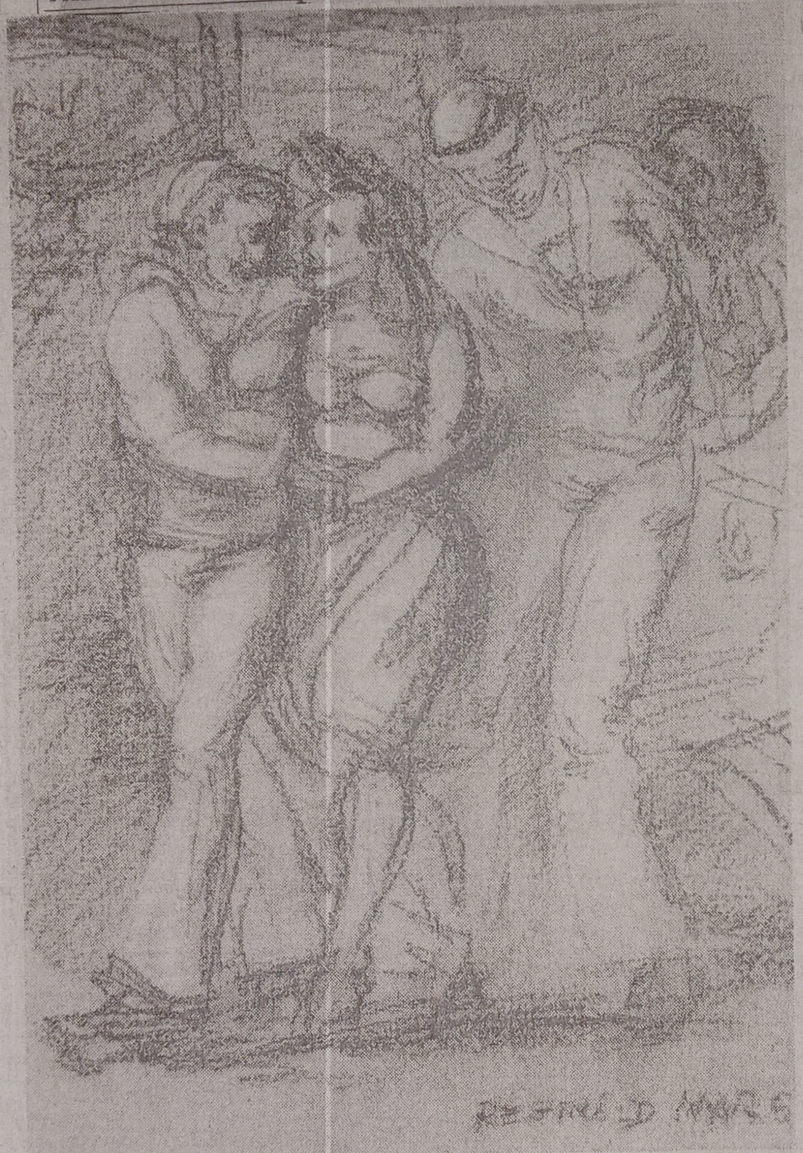
There is an arbitrary quality to Johns' recent motifs—the hatching and the painted flagstones. They seem hermetic and trivial, both at once. They lack the iconic force of the flags, maps, numbers and targets. No painter ever marked time more elegantly. But there can be no summing-up of a 47-year-old in mid-career. Johns is, at present, the Picasso of entropy. But even that strange position commands respect, if not always allegiance or pleasure.

— **Robert Hughes**

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THE STATE — Columbia, S.C., Sunday, December 11, 1977



Untitled Work By Reginald Marsh

A Part Of Jasper Johns' Private Collection

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Johns To Exhibit Private Collection

A special exhibition of drawings from the personal collection of South Carolina native Jasper Johns, considered by many as the greatest artist at work in America, opens today at the Columbia Museum of Art.

Johns' collection includes 43 drawings by 31 modern masters and it will be on display through Jan. 29, 1978. The showing is sponsored jointly by the Museum with the Greenville County Museum and the Gibbes Art Gallery in Charleston.

The drawings in the diverse collection range from Reginald Marsh to Frank Stella and Merce Cunningham's unusual colored inks. A highlight is a combined drawing by Johns' life-long friend Robert Rauschenberg, who with Johns is considered one of pioneers of American pop art.

Rauschenberg's importance is his introduction of combine painting, in which he bodily incorporated objects into the structure of the canvas.

Exhibited with the combined drawing are several musical "scores" by composer John Cage. A close friend of Johns and Rauschenberg, Cage is perhaps the greatest single influence in the development of Pop art, with such offshoots as Happenings, environments, theatre, dance and mixed media productions.

Others represented in the show include Jim Dine, Phillip Guston, Larry Poons, Kurt Schwitters, Willem de Kooning, leader of the Action Painters in the early 1950s and Rene Magritte, probably the most dedicated of all the Surrealists.

Johns has been the center of national attention recently with a retrospective showing of 201 paintings, drawings, multiples and prints at New York's Whitney Museum. In connection with that exhibition, Johns was featured on the cover of a national news magazine.

There will be no admission charge to the Columbia exhibition. Grant assistance for the exhibition was provided by the S.C. Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Youth Orchestra Concert Tuesday

The Columbia Youth Orchestra, directed by Charles Catch, will present a special concert Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at Fraser Hall on the USC campus.

The orchestra, an affiliate of the Columbia Philharmonic Orchestra and the Columbia Music Festival Association, is the only youth training organization of its kind in South Carolina. Its players come from 19 diferent schools in Richland and Lexington counties.

Also scheduled to appear on the program will be the Columbia String Ensemble, a 40-member group organized within the Youth Orchestra. They will perform works by Bach and Handel.

The 65-member orchestra will present an arrangement of Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien* , *La Bamba De Veracruz* by Tucci, *Fugue or Small Orchestra* from the Symphony No. 4 by Charles Ives and an arrangement of the first movement from Haydn's "London" Symphony.

Directing the String Ensemble will be Susan Andrews, string teacher in the pre-college program at Columbia College.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES Sunday, OCTOBER 16, 1977

'Once Established,' Says Jasper Johns, 'Ideas Can Be Discarded'

By GRACE GLUECK

Not untypically, Jasper Johns seems ambiguous about his retrospective show that opens Tuesday at the Whitney Museum, a full-scale affair that covers 22 years of his artistic output and exposes some 200 works—paintings, sculptures and drawings made between 1955 and 1976.

"Of course one likes the attention," says Johns, a very private and guarded personality who tends to keep all self-references firmly in the third person. "And one welcomes the chance to see the work together again—some of it has been in European and Japanese collections for years."

Nevertheless, he allows that the show has kept him busy and harried and cut into his working time for new projects (he spent some three months fussing over the printing of the poster alone) so that in his studio at Stony Point, New York, for the last few months he has only been able to putter around doing odds and ends.

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Yet, with the aid of David Whitney, an exhibition organizer and former assistant to Johns who put the show together, the illustrious Johns icons that are now enshrined in the pages of art history have been assembled. And there he was, on the eve of his first retrospective in 13 years, surrounded by the sculptured beer cans, the light bulbs, the flashlights, the paintbrush-packed bronze Savarin coffee can, the paintings of flags and targets and numbers and maps that followed on the heels of Abstract Expressionism and earned Johns the reputation (along with Robert Rauschenberg) of a true father of Pop.

Always devoted to literal images, he also had a surprise for Johns-watchers. In designing the poster for the show he made a lithograph that poises the Savarin coffee can, done in 1960, against a background of the totally abstract "cross-hatch" painting he is doing now, suggesting the time span covered. "In most of my work I respect the real size of objects," he says. "But here I've made the coffee can larger than life—I figured since it's advertising, I could do it."

Though his paintings are thought of as a bridge between Abstract Expressionism and the development of Pop, Johns

Continued on Page 31

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'Once Established, Ideas Can Be Discarded'

Continued from Page 1

at the same time had a spare way of portraying these objects and designs that was also influential on the work of the Minimal artists. His sensitive, sensuous brushwork that, applied to the most commonplace of images, gives the viewer a set of fresh perceptions about it, has brought him recognition as one of this generation's most accomplished painters. But for Johns, such achievements took a while to arrive at.

As befits the nature of his show, Johns was in a mood to talk retrospectively: about his beginnings as an artist, his close relationship with Robert Rauschenberg, and the inspiration and thinking process behind many of his most important accomplishments.

A large man whose slightly scarred face, aquiline nose and stern mouth (that can break into an impish smile) give him the appearance of an Indian brave, Johns first came to New York from Allendale, South Carolina, at the beginning of the 1950's (he is vague on dates), after a year-and-a-half at that state's university.

"I'd wanted to be an artist from age 5. No one in my immediate family was involved with art (I had a grandmother who painted, though I never knew her) but somehow the idea must have been conveyed to me that an artist is someone of interest in a society. I didn't know artists, but at an early age I realized that in order to be one I'd have to be somewhere else." He roars with laughter, as he does whenever one of his *mots* delights him. "I always had a tendency to try to be somewhere else."

Since Johns had made an agreement with his family that he'd go to commercial art school, he tried that for six months and then quit—after having applied for a scholarship and being told that he could have one even though his work did not merit it. "If that was true, I didn't want it," he says, his face clouding with anger. Johns became a messenger boy and a shipping clerk for six months, then went into the army for a two-year hitch.

"When I came back I thought I really didn't know much, so I'd go to school on the G.I. bill. I enrolled at Hunter and assumed I was going to the Park Avenue branch. But no—that was only for girls then, and I had to go up to the Bronx. The first day I had a class in Beowulf, then a French class in which I couldn't understand a word and then an art class in which a handsome, red-haired lady in a hat told me I drew a 'marvelous line.' Near home, I passed out on the street. I was rescued and stayed in bed for a week and that ended my career in higher education."

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Johns hadn't a clue, he recalls, as to how to operate as an artist. "I didn't know about the scene or getting a loft or anything like that. I got a job in a bookstore and though I looked at art from the first, it seemed to me to exist on a different plane from the one I lived on. Now, from my present perspective, I remember seeing things like Pollock's paintings on glass and an incredible Noguchi sculpture of balsa wood and string, but then it was hard to give what I saw a value."

At soirees given by the artist Sari Dienes, who Johns met while working at the bookstore, he encountered people who "moved in a larger society"—particularly the composer John Cage, the choreographer Merce Cunningham and a young artist slightly older than himself named Robert Rauschenberg. Though Cage and Cunningham were to become important to Johns, his friendship with Rauschenberg was crucial to his development as an artist.

"He was kind of an *enfant terrible* at the time, and I thought of him as an accomplished professional. He'd already had a number of shows, knew everybody, had been to Black Mountain College in South Carolina working with all those avant-garde people." How had a friendship between two ambitious and potentially rivalrous young men worked as well as it did? (Today, although the two men still admire each other's work, they no longer see each other.)

Johns notes that Rauschenberg was between galleries at the time they met, "and focused very much on working. I was prepared to do that, too. He was also involved with Merce Cunningham's dance group and totally unconcerned with his success, in the cliché term. All of the activity had a lively quality, quite separate from any commercial situation."

Johns began to help Rauschenberg do window decoration for Gene Moore at Bonwit Teller's to earn pocket money, and moved into a downtown loft while still working for the bookstore. "Bob and I began to get jobs together. I realized I could do what he did—work only when I was broke and needed money. So I quit my regular job."

Rauschenberg moved into a loft in Johns's building, and for several years the two worked closely together, sharing not so much ideas as painting itself. "You get a lot by doing. It's very important for a young artist to see how things are done. The kind of exchange we had was stronger than talking. If you do something then I do something then you do something, it means more than what you say. It's nice to have verbal ideas about painting but better to express them through the medium itself."

Early on, Johns did small collages that had a Joseph Cornell-like quality but in 1954 he dreamed that he was painting "a big American flag. I got up and began to do it. But these ideas came after the beginning of working," he says. More than a decade ago he gave the reasons why he latched on to such mundane images: "I used things the mind already knows. That gave me room to work on other levels."

But he painted these images—flags, targets, numbers, maps—with such elegance and control that they had to be looked at. And therein lies the quintessential, paradoxical point of his work: "With Johns," notes novelist Michael Crichton, a collector of Johns work who was suggested by Johns himself to write

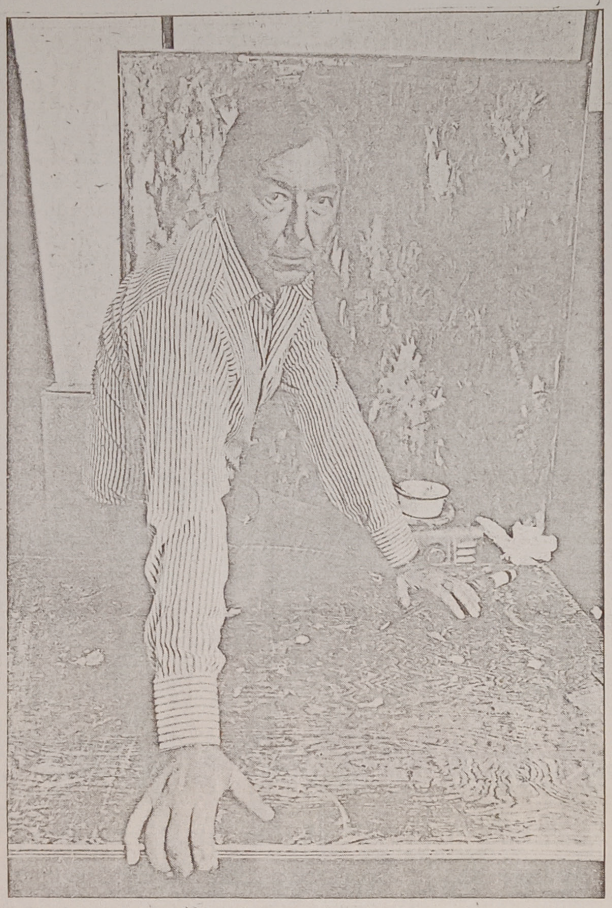
'Johns's friendship with Rauschenberg was crucial to his artistic development.'



"Target"—"such elegance that it had to be looked at"

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Jack Mitchell

Jasper Johns, a father of Pop Art—"I'd wanted to be an artist from age 5."

the catalogue for the show, "the issue of perception—of what you see, and why, and how you decide what you are looking at—are not merely questions to be decided in order to produce some final effect. They are instead the focus of the work itself . . . A painting by Johns, often by its very presence, suggests the question, what is painting?"

Later in the 1950's Johns decided to make sculpture. "I wanted to make a 3-D form that would sit on a flat surface and I couldn't think of what I wanted to do. The painting I was doing at the time had to do with certain literal qualities and that's what I wanted to do in sculpture. First I thought of comment spheres broken open, but that seemed too arty. Then I thought of colored wax sculptures of people, like in posters or cartoons—that didn't work. I wanted it to be something which already existed."

"Then," he continues, there came to me in a flash (no pun intended) the idea of a flashlight, of light bulbs, which did exist, had scale, which I could imitate, and which were still subject to a certain kind of transformation. You could retain a great deal of what they were and still alter them. The first was an actual flashlight covered in sculpmetal, the rest I made."

Although it has often been suggested, he does not think he had been influenced by Marcel Duchamp's Dada ready-made objects of nearly four decades earlier. "I didn't really know Duchamp at the time."

Johns's first early success was phenomenal—his first show at Leo Castelli's in 1958, a sell-out at which three of his paintings were bought by the Museum of Modern Art—and hasn't let up since. (Today, Johns's new canvases go for anywhere between $80,000 and $150,000.)

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In 1960 Johns took up prints, a medium for which he has become almost as famous as his painting. "Prints are no less important to me," he says. "In them I'm able to use images and ideas I work over in painting and subject them to transformation. It's a different physique entirely." He pauses. "The business of making prints is involved with people. I always resented it but now I tend to like it if it works well."

Johns has gone on to other images, of course— but slowly, as is his wont. "A lot of what one does is work towards an idea," he has said. "Once established, it can be discarded." He does not discard images quite so quickly, however: His tendency is to build from one to another, incorporating bits and pieces as he goes along.

His ideas are apt to come from the observance of fleeting visual phenomena: In 1967, for example, while driving through Harlem, he spotted out of the corner of his eye a store with a wall painted to resemble flagstones. Later, preparing to paint it, he sent David Whitney to look for and photograph it. Whitney couldn't find it; neither could Johns when he himself went to track it down. But he claimed the image for himself—"what's interesting to me is the fact that it isn't designed, but taken. It's not mine."

He still uses parts of the flagstone image, often combining it with the cross-hatching that since 1972 has become his principal visual motif: small, clustered lines of color that jackstraw out over the painting surface. He saw the cross-hatching originally painted on a car that went bucketing past him on the Long Island Expressway. Describing his working methods, Johns says, "Sometimes there are slight things I want to do in a slightly different way; I do one thing, the next thing will be done slightly differently. I suppose in fashionable terms you'd call the way I work a 'set'."

He does not quarrel with the assessment that Crichton has made of his procedures: "In one sense he, like the late Adlai Stevenson," writes Crichton, "is a man so extraordinarily intelligent, so deeply aware of his choices, that he perpetually risks frozen indecision. He is able to proceed only by the most stiffly arbitrary maneuvers—to use what is already there, to accept what is given, to proceed on the basis of what has already happened. It is this aspect which has led some to view Johns as a limited, inhibited artist, entangled in his own past, forever forced to confront logical impasses which are, in the end, entirely of his own making."

Yet, Crichton goes on to say, "he is Harry Houdini, the magician who patiently shows you his constraints— the handcuffs and ropes and the locked trunk—and yet escapes from his self-imposed bonds in the nick of time. Watching him, we are fairly sure he knows a way out; even so, we wonder whether he will make a mistake, a fatal slip. Houdini creates illusions, but they are still dangerous illusions."

Johns forsook New York some years ago for the upstate village of Stony Point, where he quite accidentally found a house. He has more or less abandoned the city—and the old bank building he owns on Houston Street, which he uses now as a storage place for his paintings. With a Southerner's taste for the sun, he winters on the Caribbean island of St. Martin, where he has a rambling house on top of a hill.

Far from reclusive, as his reputation goes, Johns likes to entertain friends, in small groups. He is, by their acclaim, a great cook. "To go to his house for lunch is a luxurious treat," says his dealer, Leo Castelli.

For Johns the future holds more of the same. "I'll go on painting— unless seeing all the work together changes things." ■

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Art/Thomas B. Hess

ON THE SCENT OF JASPER JOHNS

"...You can almost smell a logic behind the jittery clumps of green, violet, and orange hatches which make your eyes rock..."

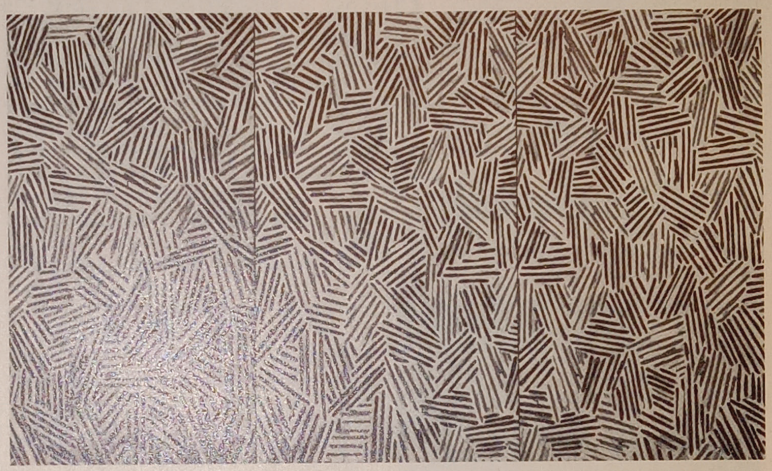
Jasper Johns "puts two flinty things in a picture and makes them work against one another so hard that the mind is sparked," wrote Leo Steinberg in an influential essay published in 1962. "Seeing them becomes thinking," he concluded.

Jasper Johns's 1973–1975 paintings, seven oils and encaustics, at Leo Castelli (4 East 77th Street, through 2/14), mix flinty logic with fluid chaos, and, to borrow a locution from Hercule Poirot, cause you furiously to think.

His basic unit is a straight, characteristically Johnsian, *sui generis* brush mark. It's comparatively long, uninflected, sensitive; sometimes laid down with the fine careless rapture of Douglas Fairbanks skewering an Arab, sometimes as studiously rehearsed as a presidential quip. The marks come in the artist's favorite yellow, blue, and red range of primaries, or in complementary violet, orange, and green—all salted with lots of black and white. The encaustic (wax-based) strokes are mat, slow, dense; the oils are shinier, faster, more translucent. The distinctions are kept to a minimum, however, and you must look carefully to catch the shift of medium from canvas to canvas (it never occurs in a single canvas).

A secondary unit, often the same size and weight as the brush mark, is a collage element, usually a paper strip torn from the New York *Times*. There may be a technical motive for John's application of collage newsprint to encaustic; he's used the method since his first constructions of the mid-1950s to keep surfaces taut and regular. There also may be a metaphorical aspect; many commentators have noticed that Johns's iconography concerns data, information about objects—commitment to a dead-pan factuality. And what could be a more appropriate binder of facts with pigments than your quotidian newspaper—contemporary journalism: yellow, blue, and read.

The basic compositional module in the recent works is a bundle or clump of parallel brush marks of graduated lengths, often arranged in rough triangular or quadrangular bulks. The motif was announced in Johns's untitled



Scent and sensibility: *John's triptych,* Scent, *seems like a random array of crosshatches, but is in fact a carefully structured system of repeated and reversed patterns.*

tetraptych (four panels), 1972, first shown at the Whitney annual in 1973 (see *New York*, February 19, 1973); its far-left wing was packed with similar aggregates. They are easy to read individually and hard to grasp in a pattern, especially as Johns likes to twirl them. Imagine looking at a wall covered with clock dials whose twelve-o'clocks point every which direction. You can tell a particular time at a glance, and three or four times together. Your vision begins to waver, the shapes fall apart, when you attempt to scan the whole pattern. Indeed, a slippery, eliding, dizzying sensation is one of the initial effects of Johns's exhibition. You are reminded of "an explosion in a shingle factory"—which is how a New York critic described Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* when it was the sensation of the Armory Show in 1913. And you wonder whether it's an intentional allusion, given Johns's passionate interest in St. Marcel, whose ideas have critically inflected the younger painter's style, adding a subversive, intellectual glitter to the cutting edge of an already provocative imagery.

After studying the paintings for a while, you begin to sense that strong ordering forces underlie the skin of chaos. And there are some facts that can help. One of the most ingratiating of the paintings, *The Barber's Tree*, in creamy pinks and whites, is based on a 1973 photograph from *The National Geographic*, according to Barbara Rose, the best scholar engaged with Johns's recent work. There is a real, stranger-than-fiction tree in Mexico that a barber painted as his sign, in pink and white hatchings, as if influenced, through some meta-visual ESP, by Jasper Johns's hatchings of 1972. In the artist's revision, the lines are kept as fresh and as disorganized as everyday life.

Studying the two-panel encaustic titled *The Dutch Wives*, on the other hand, discloses the presence of an undermatting of collage strips. Here and there, headlines are emphasized. Indeed, you find that one of them appears in about the same position in both wings of the diptych. It reads: ". . . ORGANIST'S ARREST SHOCKS. . . ." Deduction: the artist bought two copies of the *Times* that day, tore off almost identical sections, placed them in almost identical situations in the two panels. Then, as you watch, the camouflage of hatching melts away, and the panels resolve themselves into twins; one almost exactly copies the other.

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Except that the right-hand wing contains a circle, as if a paint can had been imprinted on it and deposited a ring of orange.

Perhaps it signifies a breast of one of the "Dutch Wives"? Similar circles are displayed in *Weeping Women*, a triptych in which the sections are, respectively, red, yellow, and blue. There are two circles in the right-hand canvas (breasts?) with echoing lines (fragments of breasts/targets?) above them. In the central panel are four imprints of a clothes iron, placed hot on the encaustic; the wax dripped (wept?) down in black and yellow runnels.

Hot-iron marks and circles also appear in *Corpse and Mirror*, an oil-and-encaustic diptych (oil on the left hand, encaustic on the right); and a circle turns up again in *Corpse and Mirror, II*, which is all in oils. In both, what at first might seem to be a heteroclite tumbling of hatches is in fact a pair of symmetrical reflections from one wing of a diptych to the other. In other words, the "corpse" is literally seen in a "mirror" image. And as the vertical arrangements of shapes seem unmediated by any particular order other than dreamlike rambles up and down the field of the canvas, perhaps the "corpse" is a *"Cadavre Exquis"*—an "exquisite cadaver," i.e. a favorite Surrealist parlor game in which a collective drawing is accomplished as each player works on a piece of paper that is folded under, step by step. Thus the vertical figure is found—like a Duchamp object—by sheer chance, and then is minutely altered in acts of replication.

The "cadaver" is exquisitely executed. In the "mirror" part of *Corpse and Mirror II*, reds, yellows, and blues fade into grays as if light were draining from a lens, or is it a modest decomposition of the "corpse"? The question leads you back to the largest, the most difficult, the most dramatic of Johns's new paintings, *Scent*, an encaustic-and-oil triptych, 1973–74 (6 by 10½ feet—just room enough to accommodate three people or three corpses or three graves).

Even more than the other recent paintings, *Scent* resists initial observation, to say nothing of interpretation, which, in Johns's work, is, by the artist's own by-laws, born to lose. It's a bit frustrating at first, because you can almost smell a logic behind the jittery clumps of green, violet, and orange hatches which make your eyes rock in your head if you concentrate on them too closely. Then, after a while, you begin to orient yourself. First, you spot a familiar configuration, like a friend in a crowd. You scan the whole triptych and find it repeated elsewhere. Checking up and across, you discover

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more and more repetitions (not mirror images). Finally a schema becomes evident. Johns has divided each of the three panels into three vertical columns, 12, 17½, and 12 inches wide (and, of course, six feet high). Faint lines indicate how he projected the divisions. Starting from the left, the first column is repeated by the last one at the far right; the third and the fourth columns are the same, as are the sixth and seventh. The second, the fifth, and the eighth are unique jumbles. If *Scent* were a sonnet, its rhyme scheme would be: a,b,c,c,d,e,e,f,a. Three sets of pure rhyme punctuated by three places for the aleatory, the freely inventive, the improvisational. It reminds you of Barnett Newman; he also assigned strictly formulated shapes to certain areas of his image, and spontaneous elaborations to other sections, in what surely is a metaphor for the creative act—for Inspiration tempered by Discipline, to retread a couple of old-fashioned nouns. And the evocation of Barnett Newman and his "broken symmetries" urges you to look again at Johns's format. There, with the aid of a tape measure and John's assistant, Mark Lancaster, you discover that four "secret" squares structure Johns's symmetry. Each of the four side columns (i.e., *abccd, bccde, cdeef,* and *deefa*) initiates a square about 72 by 72 inches. A thinner rectangle, *ccdee,* 72 by 65½ inches, is compressed into the center. The squares at either side of the triptych balance like architectural wings. The complex of rectangles which overlap and pleat across the image evoke a shuttling procession of references, of new ideas, of statements and renewals, aimed at a central, vulnerable shape. What at first seemed an incomprehensible mass of tangling parallel lines resolves itself to a structure of fugal implications.

Scent, of course, is the title of Jackson Pollock's last painting (it used to belong to Johns's dealer, Leo Castelli; Johns knew it well). Johns's recent paintings concern corpses, and their reflections, and mourning women. In *Scent,* fragments of the image are developed vertically and repeated horizontally, as if unfolded from an enormously complicated game of *Cadavre Exquis.* Is there an homage to Jackson Pollock among these chiming colors? A cenotaph to the corpse of the first of the New York School artists—the one who, in Willem de Kooning's generous phrase, "broke the ice"? Certainly Johns sounds an elegiac note in this exhibition. If you translate the nonverbal rhyme scheme of his *Scent* into words, it comes out a quote from T. S. Eliot: "In my beginning is my end."

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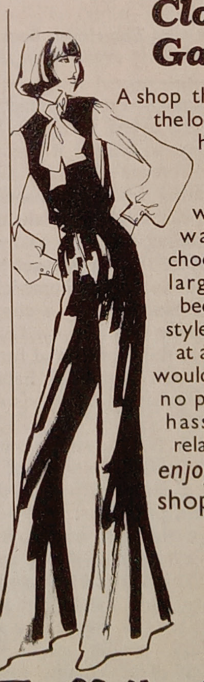
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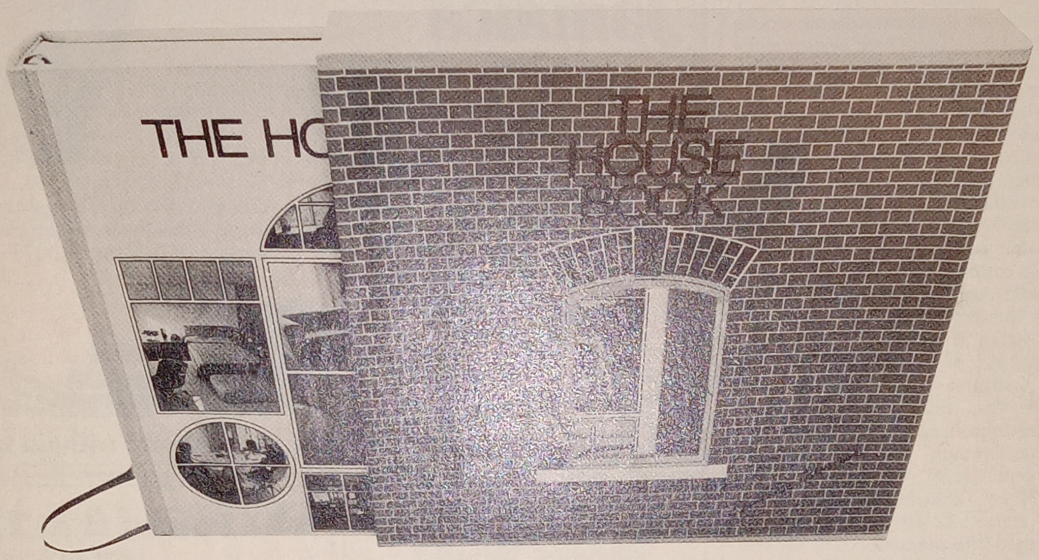
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The Artful Lodger/Joan Kron

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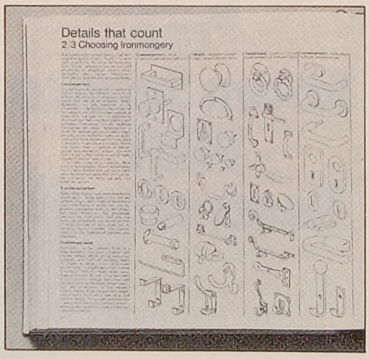
"...What is *The House Book*'s amazing appeal? For one thing, I suppose it's the sheer abundance of its coverage..."



For sale: The House Book, a *1974 British decorating book that's a bonanza of ideas and information for nest-builders, is available in the United States for the first time. It's $30 at Fabrications, 246 East 58th Street.*

It's a puzzlement. French bread, still warm from Paris ovens, arrives in New York every day, so why is it that *The House Book*, Terence Conran's highly touted decorating book, published in London in 1974, should be so late arriving on our doorstep? For the past year, owning a copy of this hard-to-get book has had more cachet in home-icidal-maniac circles than owning a copy of *Tropic of Cancer* did in Ivy League locker rooms in the thirties and forties. In fact, if it hadn't been for Fabrications, the enterprising yard-goods store at 246 East 58th Street, we'd still be doing without it. But the shop's owners had such faith in *The House Book* that they ordered a basementful of them from the British publisher.

And I have the first copy off the plane. Does the book measure up to my expectations? Yes, as far as I've gone in it. The problem is, I can't read more than a few of its 448 pages at a time because certain people here keep snatching it out of my hands. And to hear the oohs and aahs as they turn the pages you'd think they were auditioning for the Fotomat commercial.



Language barrier: *We'd call "ironmongery" "hardware," but, as the text tells you, brass needs the same polishing in London as in New York.*

What is this book's amazing appeal? For one thing I suppose it's the sheer abundance of its coverage. It has over 1,000 color pictures of rooms (most of them new to American readers, unless they subscribe to European decorating magazines), plus diagrams, drawings, and sound advice on home planning, decorating, remodeling, and do-it-yourself projects. (Since it's a British edition, the technical plumbing and electrical information is not all applicable in the U.S. But happily, the measurements are in inches as well as meters.) It covers everything from front-door hardware to wine cellars; from attic aeries to window treatments and floors, to every kind of room in the house.

The author-compiler is industrial designer Terence Conran—a sort of Billy Baldwin to the middle class—founder of London's Habitat, a chain of successful home-furnishings emporiums that bear a strong resemblance to our own Design Research. Habitat's design vocabulary—an eclectic mix of good design basics like bentwood, Bauhaus, and butcher block, plus charm—is strongly felt in *The House Book*, which must be the only decorating book whose film rights have been sold. To Conran's credit, the book is pushing sunshine-filtering-through-plant-filled windows just as hard as it's selling new slipcovers. The only thing it lacks is a brown-paper wrapper to hide it under until I can sneak it out of the office. ■

Photographed by Armen Kachaturian

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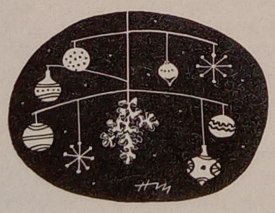
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THE ART WORLD

Twenty Years of Jasper Johns

What is pure art according to the modern idea? It is the creation of an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.
—*Charles Baudelaire.*

BACK in the fifties, Jasper Johns solved the problem of supplying subjects in painting that everyone could recognize: the American flag, targets, numbers, letters of the alphabet. The problem had arisen out of Abstract Expressionism, then the dominant mode in art. The abstract painting derived from Cubism had brushed Cézanne's apples off the table, then brushed away the table. But postwar American artists were not satisfied with an art of meticulously balanced rectangles and bands. The Abstract Expressionists were "abstract," but they insisted on subject matter. Barnett Newman declared that the basic issue for him and his friends was what to paint. A school for art students formed by Newman, Rothko, Baziotes, and Motherwell in 1948 was entitled "Subjects of the Artist." Social and regional themes had been exhausted, and the dissociated imagery of Surrealist "dreamwork" had been turned into light comedy by Dali and Hollywood. Convinced that there was nothing to paint but that subject matter was the heart of painting, the Abstract Expressionists conceived an ingenious strategy: they approached the canvas with no subject in mind, got the picture going through random marks—a number 4 by Pollock, a slash or blot of color by Kline or Hans Hofmann, letters of the alphabet by de Kooning—and, taking off from these forms, relied on the spontaneous activity of painting to supply (or reveal) a subject of its own. In short, the motif of the Abstract Expressionists did not exist either in the mind of the artist or in the outside world; it was entirely a creation, in that it was brought into being by the act of painting. Newman formulated the matter: "An artist paints so that he will have something to look at."



In his newly born subject, the artist made contact with an inchoate myth, which was called in the rhetoric of the period the Unknown. For Newman, his rectangles divided by vertical or horizontal bands were ritual evocations—of Ulysses, the Biblical Abraham, the Stations of the Cross, shafts of power or light. For most of the art public, Abstract Expressionist paintings—stripes (Newman), ovals (Gottlieb), strands and drippings of pigment (Pollock), aerated blocks of color (Rothko), contours and color masses (de Kooning, Hofmann), chromatically keyed brushstrokes (Guston), bars of black (Kline)—were abstractions; that is, organizations of line, color, and form without external relations. Their subjects, real to the artist, came and went, depending on the psychic collaboration of the spectator. In terms of meaning, this collaboration was the point of the painting: immersed in the possibilities of the artist's sign, the spectator could share the creative élan of bringing it to light. An Abstract Expressionist painting completed itself in making an artist of its spectator. Critics, curators, and much of the public, however, rejected the invitation of the Abstract Expressionists to enter into the aesthetic adventure and preferred to peruse their products as decorative images.

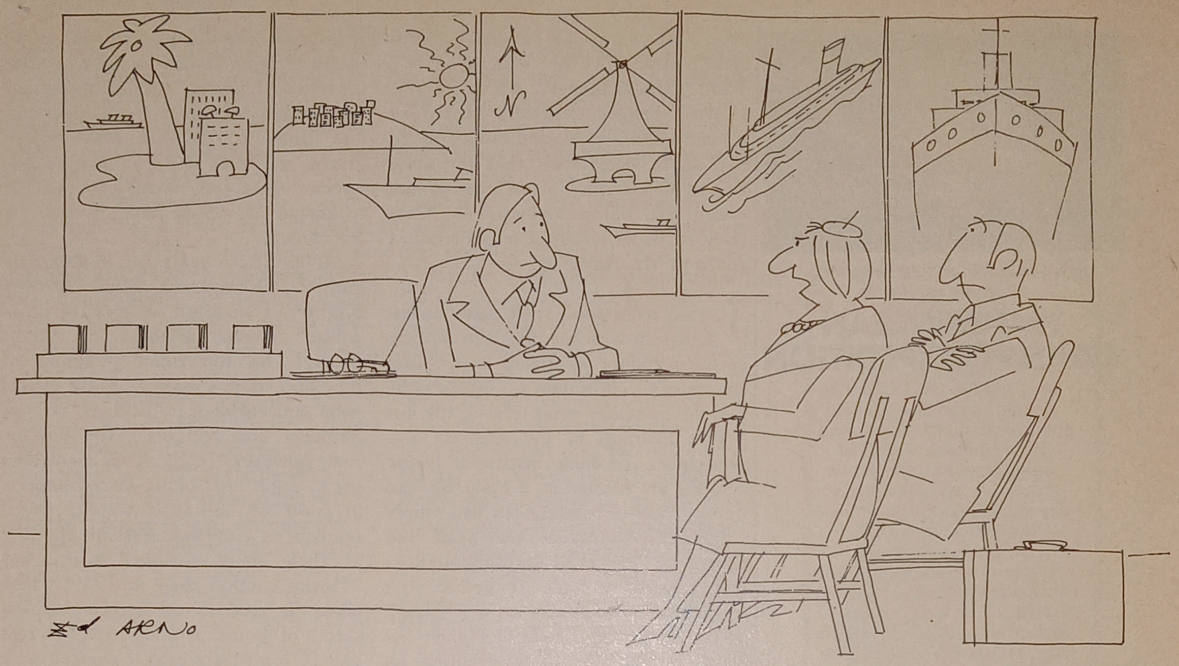
With his first one-man show, in 1958, Johns swept aside the dilemma of Newman and the Abstract Expressionists. If the answer to "What to paint?" was an unintelligible sign that troubled the spectator like a leftover of a bad dream, it was only necessary to eliminate the mystery, and the gap between the artist and his public would be closed. By such reasoning, Johns became one of the first to hit on the idea of producing signs that were familiar to everyone. His use of flags, targets, numbers, letters of the alphabet, objects of daily life was supported by a childlike logic—or the humorous shrewdness of a farmer who outwits the city slickers with a practical solution too obvious for them to have noticed. Flags, numbers, nouns, and names (Johns' "Liar," "Tennyson") belong to the order of phenomena that loom large in the consciousness of children and plain folk. When its subject matter consists of, in Johns' phrase, "things the mind already knows," painting is relieved of the effort of discovery for both artist and spectator—familiarity with Old Glory and the number 3 blocks speculation about them, even when they appear in works of art. With Newman, the painted image represented a "thought-complex." With Johns, it represented nothing. It was what it was, like a stone or a fence—in brief, a thing, clearly labelled with an image (target, flag) or a concept ("Liar," "Tennyson"), as in a mail-order catalogue. At one stroke, Johns extinguished speculation about the meaning of individual paintings and directed attention to them as objects among other objects.

Johns' subject matter did not need to be invented or discovered, nor did it have to be evoked out of psychic states that were difficult to maintain—for example, Pollock's "contact" with the canvas or de Kooning's "inspiration." It lay ready to hand. Better still, his flags, numbers, and targets were already on the way to being paintings, in that they were signs inscribed on a flat surface, apt for placement and handling in any manner the artist chose. Banners of sorts had appeared among the Abstract Expressionists: Gottlieb's three solid ovals above a horizontal field of black; Pollock's "Blue Poles," which one could easily imagine being adopted by a Third World republic. Dispensing with riddles, Johns' subjects were ideally suited to reduce the strain of both thinking and feeling in painting. Confronted by images that it had had no part in creating, painting was as if struck dumb—its guiding axiom after Johns became "You see what you see."

Johns had split Abstract Expressionist painting into two halves; its signs and its agitated handling. Thus divided, both halves were emptied of meaning. Having ceased to embody the artist's psyche, the signs on the canvas joined the order of insignia outside of art—for example, the insignia on packing cases, from which Johns has tended to derive his lettering. Deprived of its goal of discovery, the liberated brushwork of de Kooning, Hofmann, Kline became merely a newly fashionable mode of ornament. As put together in Johns' flags, targets, and numbers, the two halves of Abstract Expressionism became substances of an art completely manageable by the artist, and entirely void of meaning. Every attempt at interpretation was thrown back by the artist's disavowal of purpose. The principles he was prepared to proclaim consisted exclusively of negations of Abstract Expressionist truisms. No more romantic fumblings, supported by declarations that "when I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing." No more pretensions of invading the Unknown. No more "self-expression." To Johns could be attributed a philosophy linked with postwar phenomenol-

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"We're interested in a so-called pleasure cruise."

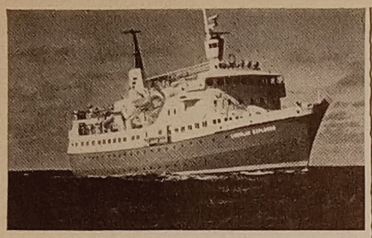
ogy—homemade with him but capable of being stretched by his interpreters to any dimensions they chose. Thus, exegesis of Johns has become a major part of art criticism during the past twenty years, in the midst of which the artist himself has been privileged to preserve a strategic silence. What has been insufficiently stressed is that—apart from Johns' ideas and his interpretations of them—in his paintings both sign and method have become subject matter, modelled on the canvases of his predecessors but transformed by his determination to keep himself out of the picture. The contrast between the agitated surfaces of Johns' flags and targets and the inertness of these motifs presents a lesson in the illusory effects of style considered as expression, since the flags and the surface textures were chosen with the same detachment. Johns' cold-blooded rearrangements of the ingredients of America's passionate postwar abstract art amount to a double parody.

The relaxation of the tensions of Abstract Expressionism which Johns brought about was seized upon with relief by his contemporaries and by artists who came after him—his translation of the recondite sign language of the Abstract Expressionists into commonplaces provided a manageable approach for the generations of painters streaming out of the new university studio departments. It is difficult to believe that Johns himself, a beginning artist from South Carolina in his mid-twenties, could have comprehended the long and complex interchange that led to the Action paintings of Pollock, de Kooning, and Hofmann and the emblematic paintings of Rothko, Gottlieb, and Reinhardt. One of Johns' contributions to the art scene was to cut painting down to his own size, and to help keep it there. Just the other day, a California artist echoed the early Johns in explaining to an interviewer that "almost every object that I use is something we all know, that we all have reference to." Abandoning his shamanistic role, and the rites required to realize it, the post-Johns artist could anticipate a career not too different from that of his non-artist neighbor. In contrast to the vanguard tradition of anxiety (Cézanne), Surrealist self-induced abnormality (Rimbaud's "disorder of the senses"), and "failure" (de Kooning), Johns introduced into American modernism an era of undelayed success: the Museum of Modern Art, in a unique display of foresight, bought three paintings from his first show.

Beyond any innovation introduced by his paintings, Johns' strongest influence lay in his renovation of the artist as a type—an act of dramatic originality. The new artist, an emotionally detached craftsman whose work represents a kind of expository chalk-talk on the rudiments of painting and sculpture, was in intellectual harmony not only with the art-department classroom but with the ever-growing mass of new museum- and gallery-goers being initiated into the enigmas of modernist art. Reacting to painting as a social reality, Johns and other post-Abstract Expressionists looked back to Duchamp, as the disillusioned analyst of the relation between art today and other man-made things, and forward to Andy Warhol, as the artist changed into media celebrity and manufacturer of art substitutes. In this perspective, the one factor in modernism that became irrelevant was the inner self of the artist—precisely the animating principle that Abstract Expressionism had elevated to supremacy. Johns' watchword was impersonality. His exclusion from the art image of any underlying objective reality was completed by the exclusion from it of the aura of the artist as well. Like Ad Reinhardt and certain American followers of the Russian Constructivists, Johns strove for a condition of metaphysical aloofness akin to a quasi-religious asceticism. Leo Steinberg, who contributed the most elaborate speculations concerning Johns' early works (though unaccountably neglecting to take note of the degree to which those works derived by antithesis from Abstract Expressionism), has testified that Johns told him that his aim was to achieve total removal from his prod-

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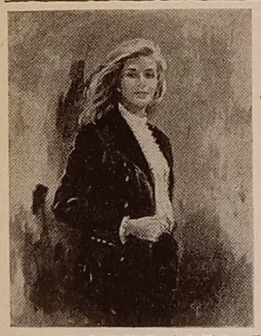


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ucts. "He wants his pictures," Steinberg wrote, "to be objects alone." Johns' "Coat Hanger," which features a wire hanger centrally suspended against a dense ground of black crayon, is a public declaration that the artist prefers the identity of an anonymous, commercial object to his own. "Coat Hanger" is an idealized self-portrait of Johns as Mr. Anything.

JOHNS' redesigned artist plays dispassionately with the possibilities of his craft, including its ability to simulate emotion by technical means—for example, the muscular paint strokes, the impulsive blottings of the Abstract Expressionists. In some instances, Johns' subjects are painted as if the artist had never heard of painting but had simply wanted to reproduce the Stars and Stripes or a target as faithfully and attractively as he could. Together with this takeoff of the naïve artist ("Flag," "Flag on Orange Field"), Johns displayed a virtuosity in transmuting his images that was seemingly without limit. The American flag ceases to be a flag and becomes an abstraction—a rectangle divided into bands of color, with a smaller rectangle containing even rows of stars in the upper left-hand corner. Apparently, Johns sought the ready-made form in order to give free play to his talent for remodelling. "Flag (with 64 Stars)" is an indication that for him the flag is a design that he has the privilege of altering at will. Besides having an enlarged number of stars, "Flag" is drawn in pencil, and its stripes, without color, at times blend into each other. The Stars and Stripes is by no means a model design—Betsy Ross would not have distinguished herself at the Bauhaus. There is a disturbing fussiness about the stars, clustered in the upper left corner. The best painting in Johns' flag series is "White Flag," in which the visual annoyance caused by the stars is reduced by coördinating them into the textured monochromatic surface. A similar gain through reduction of contrast is obtained in "Green Target" and "Tango," but such one-color paintings come close to eliminating their subject matter (in "Tango" it is invisible), and thus returning to their Abstract Expressionist origins. Once a given subject has been established, it can be counted on as a presence affecting the spectator's response, as in de Kooning's "Woman" paintings. Some of Johns' canvases, drawings, and prints—for example, the "0 Through 9" series—tend toward pure abstraction, as if the artist had found his way back to Constructivism. On the whole, however, he has rarely relinquished his Abstract Expressionist resources. And throughout the passage from painting to painting, and from paintings to drawings to prints, an ironic dialogue persists between his subject/no-subject and the technique of representation which he has chosen.

About fifteen years ago, in an article entitled "Things the Mind Already Knows," I analyzed some of the paradoxical effects obtained by Johns through his impersonal juggling of style and subject matter. These effects were concentrated in his flags, targets, numbers, coat hangers. After this period, however, Johns' work seemed to me to begin to abandon shared subjects in favor of ones that were personal symbols or souvenirs. Perhaps the first of these more personal works was "Device Circle," done in 1959, which could be read as an autobiographical sketch of Johns' painting career to that date. On a square canvas covered with interlaid patches of paint and newsprint fragments a circle has been inscribed by the semblance of a nail at the end of a paint-spotted stick, which is fastened in the center of the canvas, as if in preparation for another target painting. This is Johns' first painting about Johns rather than about "Target," "Flag," or "0 Through 9," and in it Johns is presented as a "device" for making paintings. "Device Circle" is followed by other paintings of studio subjects—"Painting with Ruler and 'Gray'" (1960), "Good Time Charley" (1961), "Device" (1961-62), and "Fool's House" (1962)—and by sculptures: the bronze Ballantine ale cans and the paintbrushes in the Savarin coffee can. Contemporary with these are such narrative-suggesting compositions as "No" (1961), "Liar" (1961), "In Memory of My Feelings—Frank O'Hara" (1961), and the ink drawing "Disappearance II" (1962).

During this period, Johns continued to work in lithography on his old themes, but the universal signs diminished, and in 1963-64 the subjectivity of his paintings seemed to deepen to the level of desperation. A series of paintings and drawings bear titles referring to water—"Diver" (1962), "Passage" (1962), "Land's End" (1963), "Diver" (1963)—and in several compositions oblique bars are thrust upward and terminate in blotted hands, like arms raised in a call for help. "Periscope (Hart Crane)," done in 1963, identifies these water-associated canvases with the poet, who committed suicide by drowning. The blotted hand

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of "Land's End" and the two "Diver" works also appears in "Periscope" and in two "Study for Skin" drawings done in 1962; it represents the theme of water-related death again in "Skin with O'Hara Poem" (1963-65).

Johns' symbolism of self is neither very lucid nor visually very attractive. "Periscope (Hart Crane)" and the "Diver" compositions share with works by Rauschenberg a kind of willful messiness designed no doubt to represent directness and spontaneity (though spontaneity ought not to be a goal for an artist who doesn't want his work "to be an exposure of my feelings"). Johns' parody of Abstract Expressionism becomes an obstacle when he resorts to that style to express emotions. In the current Jasper Johns retrospective at the Whitney Museum, I found several works of the middle sixties which continue the morbid theme of the water paintings. One of these, "Watchman" (1964), features a motif that Johns repeats in several works of the decade: a wax cast of a leg "seated" on a fragment of a chair and attached to an upper corner of the canvas. But the outstanding works in the retrospective are the early paintings and sculptures. Since the flags, the targets, and the numbers, Johns has occupied himself chiefly with translating these explicit subjects into drawings and prints. He has also executed several salon "machines" with assorted objects attached. Among these are giant compositions, such as "According to What" (1964), that are far more incomprehensible, both as subjects and as paintings, than any Pollock or Hofmann—except perhaps as anthologies of Johns' favorite motifs, including his canvas on a stretcher with its face flat against a larger canvas, and his cast of a severed leg.

"Flags" (1965), "Two Flags" (1973), and "Target" (1974) are attempts to revive the old magic. But the art-historical drama of twenty years ago—replacing Abstract Expressionist enigmas with familiar signs—cannot be repeated, and this defines the position of Jasper Johns at the end of 1977. Johns' new motifs keep getting more arbitrary and whimsical. In 1967, he hit on the "flagstones" that constitute the left section of "Harlem Light" and consist of irregular shapes of flat red and black scattered among similar shapes indicated in contour on a gray ground. According to the exhibition catalogue, Johns picked up this image from a wall in Harlem which he passed in a cab—an act of finding analogous to Rauschenberg's seeing a stuffed goat in a store window. The flagstones have become an element in Johns' repertory. Like the American flag, they are "things the mind already knows," though it doesn't know why it should pay attention to them—unless in obedience to the Duchampian edict that a thing is art because the artist says it is (a demand that, in my opinion, has used up its credit).

Another new motif that appears in the retrospective consists of cross-hatchings in varieties of color, thickness, and solidity. The hatchings are more suggestive than the flagstones. For one thing, through constant shiftings of direction they constitute a form of animation, and impart a surface shimmer to the canvas akin to, though unlike, Pollock's skeins of thrown paint. In that respect, the hatchings are late Abstract Expressionism. "Weeping Women" (1975) and "End Paper" (1976) demonstrate the capacity of this motif for arousing feeling through color, as in a storm-darkened landscape. Johns' use of the hatchings in a poster that he executed for the retrospective, and in a lithograph that appears on the back cover of the catalogue, seems to me to sum up his essential vision. The poster presents an image of his Savarin-can-with-paintbrushes sculpture in which the brushes consist of vertical paint strokes against a background of the zigzagging strokes of the hatchings—a synthesis of Johns' theme of things changed into paint and paint into the images of things. The masterwork among the current signs included in the retrospective is "Untitled" (1972). A huge painting and collage, it consists of a panel of hatchings, two panels of flagstones, and a panel of wooden slats crossing each other at random, on which are mounted parts of the human body in pink plaster (the body parts, a third new motif for Johns, are a reminiscence of inserts of plaster faces and organs in two early "Target"s). The lack of reference of the motifs of "Untitled" stresses the arbitrariness that has replaced Johns' original objectivism—an arbitrariness far exceeding that produced by Abstract Expressionist inwardness, since inwardness imposes necessities that tend toward an order.

—HAROLD ROSENBERG

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Jasper Johns with his *Map*, 1967-71. Photo Hans Namuth

JASPER JOHNS:

'I have attempted to develop my thinking in such a way that the work I've done is not me.'

BY VIVIEN RAYNOR

ART News
MARCH 1973

Besides being one of the few noble boulevards of Manhattan, Houston Street is, in part, a Mason-Dixon Line protecting the new artists' settlement of SoHo. Anchored at the East River by projects, it runs across the island through tenements, playgrounds and gas stations and past the bocce court at First Avenue. At the Bowery, if you don't make the light, a pack of indigent window-washers will descend on your car to threaten it with greasy rags in return for change. Dividing SoHo from NoHo, it stands between the high-rises of NYU and the cast-iron loft district. At Sixth Avenue, this great wide street splits into two ordinary ones; these proceed by way of elegant anti-climax through older artists' neighborhoods of the Village to the west waterfront.

At the corner of Houston and Essex Streets is a large building that is something of a neighborhood landmark. It is a 19th-century yellow-brick cube standing on a molded base, with enormous windows and a corniced roof. When its lights are on at night, rows of house plants inside cast intricate shapes on the frosted glass, and it is altogether an eccentric and inspiring sight in this Lower East Side wasteland.

Formerly the Provident Loan Society, this is the bank Jasper Johns bought in 1967. Then, it was actually a pawnshop (among whose now-illustrious clients, in the 1940s, were Barnett and Annalee Newman). Johns chose the building because he had got tired of living in "a lot of little rooms" on Riverside Drive — penthouse view notwithstanding — and had begun to want one big space.

At the moment of meeting a prominent artist, one has already "consumed" a large part of him, taking a kind of pride in an imaginary intimacy that is, to say the least, very lopsided. Like seeing a famous film actor in the flesh, it is always a surprise, even though one knows a great deal about him through his work and through the opinions of others. It is customary, after such a meeting to say, "He is just like" or, "He is nothing like."

As is appropriate for someone concerned with modulations of meaning, Jasper Johns is "nothing like." The author of a meticulous, hermetic and, for some, troublesome body of work, he is a large man with a gracious, open manner. The subject of some of the densest scholarly writing of the decade, he likes to lounge and make small talk, to amuse and be amused. This seminal figure of a radical movement says: "I've never been interested in the idea of movements. I'm very devoted to the idea of one person working, and seeing what he does." Furthermore, he disposes of the whole matter of influence by observing, "The problem with influences is that the thing or person you say is an influence has to accept some of the blame for what you've done," and laughing uproariously.

Johns is a highly intelligent, nervous and totally attentive personality. He speaks with great lucidity in King James' version rhythms that are perhaps less apparent when written down. Questions are met by long silences, then answered with a precision that is partly legalistic, partly reminiscent of a dialogue with G.E. Moore, as parodied by the actors of "Beyond the Fringe." On occasion, as when the conversation veered toward Rauschenberg's dedication to art and technology, John's discretion is lowered like a portcullis: "I have an idea about that, but I don't think it would be useful." He has a remoteness that, while very amiable, makes all questions sound vaguely coarse and irrelevant. One feels all too much a part of the outside world that he perceives as continually "trying to figure out what's going to happen, rather than seeing what happens. Everyone is looking for reassurance about what is about to take place!"

Johns' surroundings are easygoing and quite stark; he no longer spends much time in his Houston Street studio. White walls — they must be three stories high, or more — enclose a working and living area of which the accoutrements seem to disappear in the vast space. A ping-pong table in the middle seems no bigger than a footstool. There is not much art around. A Chamberlain sculpture is perched high near one of the two entrances; there is a small Japanese pinball machine which might also be listed as an art object. Most of the collection on view hangs in a low-ceilinged annex, the rear part of which is Johns' bedroom.

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One wall features a blackboard-like painting by Cy Twombly, covered with rows of loopy chalk scrawls. The opposite wall is hung with framed drawings by Magritte, de Kooning and Steinberg, to name a few. There is also a Schwitters, as well as a couple of pages of a music score by Morton Feldman which qualify quite prettily as drawings. An adjoining room contains an unfamiliar (to me) canvas by Johns, involving an area filled with flagstone shapes of mainly white impasto. In one corner of the polished wood floor is a sculpture by Richard Serra; made by setting up a caldron of lead over a fire, standing a large metal plate at right angles to the floor and ladling lead against plate and wall, it has three or four parallel ridges a few inches high, with the plate embedded in the final one.

There is a rumor that Jasper Johns has recently been concentrating a great deal on making prints, and that in the process, he has been experimenting, perhaps even revolutionizing lithography with techniques that are either new or that are new combinations of existing ones. Johns says: "The prints may be more public now, but I've not been any more absorbed in them. I am still painting . . .I don't know what people would call new techniques, I don't know what they mean. All of them are known and are fairly conventional. The only thing that's been new in my work is the use of the offset press at Tanya Grosman's. She got the press for the purpose of—I don't know why she got it, but anyway she got one. She was always opposed to it, you know. She always wanted everything on stone. [With offset] the image comes out the same way you did it [not reversed, as in lithography], so it's a different kind of thinking—if backwards and forwards means anything to you. It has, of course, been very important to me, because I have worked with things that have a left and right orientation."

The proliferation of prints by Johns and other well-known artists has sometimes been considered as part of a general impulse to make art less exclusive. Johns likes the fact that his art is more available—"If indeed it is, and if that is the function of printmaking. I don't really believe it's true, because prints appeal to possessiveness in people even more than painting does. It's probably interesting what prints you have and what you don't have, and you know there's always the possibility of getting what you don't have; whereas in painting, that's just not true."

"You started in 1960 with Tanya Grosman."

"Yes, I'd never made a print. I still don't know how to do it. I don't know how to treat a stone, how to make it print. If I were left in the studio, I think I could figure it out, because I've seen a good deal done, but I've never done it. I simply draw on the stone and then watch what the other people do to it . . .It's marvelous when you're working with someone who seems to know really what he is doing."

"Is it that prints are just a change of medium for you, or is there something extra you don't find in painting?"

"Well—one thing is that in printmaking, one works with other people. That to me is of very great importance. If I go into a shop where there are three or four people to help me work, then I feel I have to be at work. I work a little differently than if I'm in my studio with nobody about."

"Are you a gregarious person?"

"I don't know. I just know that in the studio I'm doing all of the work and I'm fairly lazy, and have never taken any pleasure in compulsive work."

"Max Kozloff wrote once of your way of caressing a canvas all over with brushstrokes as if it were some enormous erogenous zone. It's surprising to hear you're not interested in the sheer act of work."

"Well—I try to do it as well as I can."

"Do you have anything that could be called a routine?"

"I have worked at Gemini two or three times in the past four years."

"They said you were the hardest of all to print!"

"They like to exaggerate. When I go there, I don't just go to California to make one print—it's with some idea of doing a fair-sized body of work. . .But I have no work habit, I grew up with none." (He referred to his background, later in the conversation, as a "situation where art was not respected. Art was valued, but there was none.")

"Well, then, should we conclude there's no great significance—creative or financial—to your having made prints for the last ten years or so?"

"The significance is probably in the terms of whoever thought to ask this. That is, my prints fetch higher prices on the market than most peoples,' but then my paintings also fetch high prices. Let's see, I'm doing a print for Multiples because a friend of mine is doing a portfolio, and one for Vingtième Siècle; that's all I'm doing at the moment."

For some time now, Johns has been rebuilding a house in St. Maarten, with a view to living there most of the time. Recalling combat stories told by other Caribbean settlers about the difficulties of transporting objects as mundane as refrigerators, let alone lithographic equipment, I asked how he would continue to print.

"I won't."

"What will you do?"

"Swim! No, I'm trying to get it set up so that I can paint. I assume I'll continue printing. I don't know. I don't have that kind of plan, really. What I've been doing is, I print and I paint and I occasionally make a sculpture, and every now and again I make drawings. I don't feel very programmed."

We drifted for a while into a discussion of whether art had become just another industry. For him this was not the precise word for the situation, but it led him to comment on what he called the "unclearness" of society, so that "the things which were the foundations of art—the conventions and oppositions to conventions—no longer apply. Society is now too rich to accommodate that kind of simplemindedness, so someone like me—I end up with just me, and I do what I do without any strong sense of its importance. At a certain point, one feels idealistic—that one will put oneself to good use. . .being a painter. Then later on, one comes up with the question of whether it *is* of any use—I'm not sure whether it is or not. But in my life, it's too late—I mean, it would just be a hideous tragedy if I decided it were completely useless"—he broke out laughing at the thought—"unless I just did it with some sense of humor, and I'm willing to do that. Nevertheless, I've trained myself to deal with the things I deal with too completely to throw them aside. I don't think I could just throw over my devotion to the visual arts."

"Do you believe new art is a criticism of the old?"

"I think art criticizes art, I don't know if it's in terms of new and old. It seems to me old art offers just as good a criticism of new art as new art offers of old."

Ambiguity and enigma being important qualities in Johns' work, the question arose as to whether their presence did not explain or even justify public misunderstanding and misuse of his work. "I think," he said, in parry rather than reply, "the artist is not tied to the public use of his work. There can be feedback, but if one has to identify with the way one's work is used, then I think most artists would feel misused. So I think it's best to cut oneself off from what happens after."

"Can you conceive of some ideal reception?"

"No, because my work is in part concerned with the possibility of things being taken for one thing or another—with questionable areas of identification and usage and procedure—with thought rather than with secure things."

"Is there any one person who has said the right thing about it, any one interpreter?"

"I'm always astonished anyone has *anything* to say about it and I'm always interested if they can, because I find it very hard to say anything. . .If I felt my work was any one thing, if it was saying—like a teacher—this is the way you're to behave toward it, then I might have some ideas about it. Mostly I think I've dealt with things by pointing at them in a certain way, seeing if it would change what the thing was, and that allows anyone to do whatever he pleases. There are certain things a writer could say that I would reply to, 'You're wrong,' or, 'Isn't it marvelous that you feel close to the way I feel?'"

"You have in the past shown some impa-

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tience with critics. Would you care to reveal your present feeling?"

After an especially long pause, he answered in a very small voice, "I'm very tolerant," and laughed.

It is hard to be in Jasper Johns' company for long without being impressed by his philosophical detachment, and relaxed by it. I asked if he had always enjoyed this state of apparent grace, whether he had achieved it in his earlier, poorer days.

"No, it isn't a product of luxury. I have attempted to develop my thinking in such a way that the work I've done is not me—not to confuse my feelings with what I produced. I didn't want my work to be an exposure of my feelings. Abstract-Expressionism was so lively—personal identity and painting were more or less the same, and I tried to operate the same way. But I found I couldn't do anything that would be identical with my feelings. So I worked in such a way that I could say that it's not me. That accounts for the separation."

"How about the nature of your early ambitions?"

"Well—I'm going to say what I've said many times before. From early childhood I was going to be an artist. I was always going to be an artist, that was my intention. I went to school, I worked, I went into the army and came out, and I worked. In the early '50s I was going to be an artist, and I kept meeting people who *were* artists, and I thought, 'Here I am, still going to be an artist.' What was different? What needed to be changed, so that I would *be*, rather than *going to be*? It was then I decided I would only allow myself to do what I couldn't *not do*, and whatever I did would have to represent myself as an artist. There was a change in my spirit, in my thought and my work, as well as some doubt and terror."

"What period of your work reflects this change?"

"1953-4."

"Have you ever taught?"

"No. I've been asked to teach and have hedged. Then when it became apparent I wouldn't have to, I said no. The reason is that I've never studied formally. . ."

"Not at Black Mountain with Albers?"

"No. I know it's come out in a number of books, but I never went to Black Mountain. I met Albers when we were photographed together by Mr. Penn, but I don't know him. I've always been terrified of walking into a room and telling people what to do. Have you ever taught?"

"No, I've always been terrified too. My fear is giving a talk on some artist, and waking up at the end to find I've been calling him by the wrong name."

"That happened to me once—I was introduced to Cartier-Bresson and spent the whole evening calling him Mr. Breton."

What cannot be conveyed about this experience with Johns is that it often felt more like an exchange than an interview. To be responded to rather than merely answered, as well as sometimes being questioned back, is an odd experience for a reporter. Nevertheless, it is hard—and probably pointless to try—to reconcile Johns' aura of sociability with the other impression of almost priestly apartness. It is also difficult to visualize exactly what he means when he says, apropos his friendship with other artists like Rauschenberg and Cage and their mutual understanding and influence, that any ideas for art that came out of the association were "ideas that came out of living, not about making something artificial."

Possibly an anecdote he told about Duchamp illuminates the spirit of what we, out here, would call a movement, and, to some extent, of Jasper Johns himself. A noted critic wrote, some years ago, what was considered a really vicious review of a Duchamp exhibition. Asked if he had seen it, Duchamp said he had indeed read it two or three times. What did he think? "You know," he said, "it's very good and, each time I read it, it gets better."

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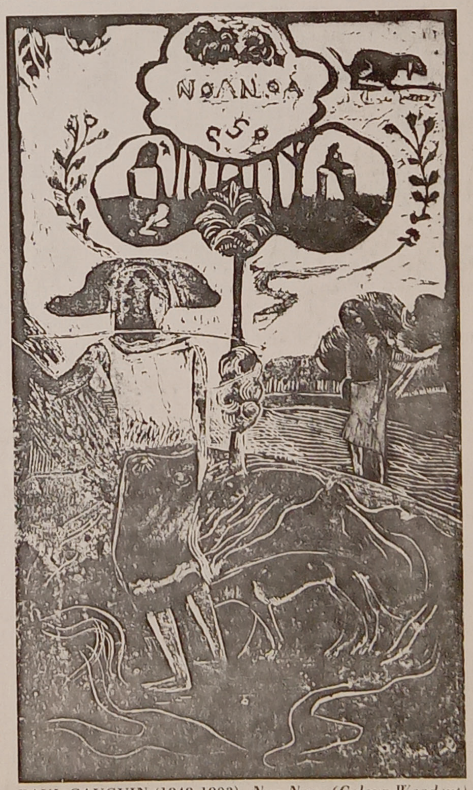
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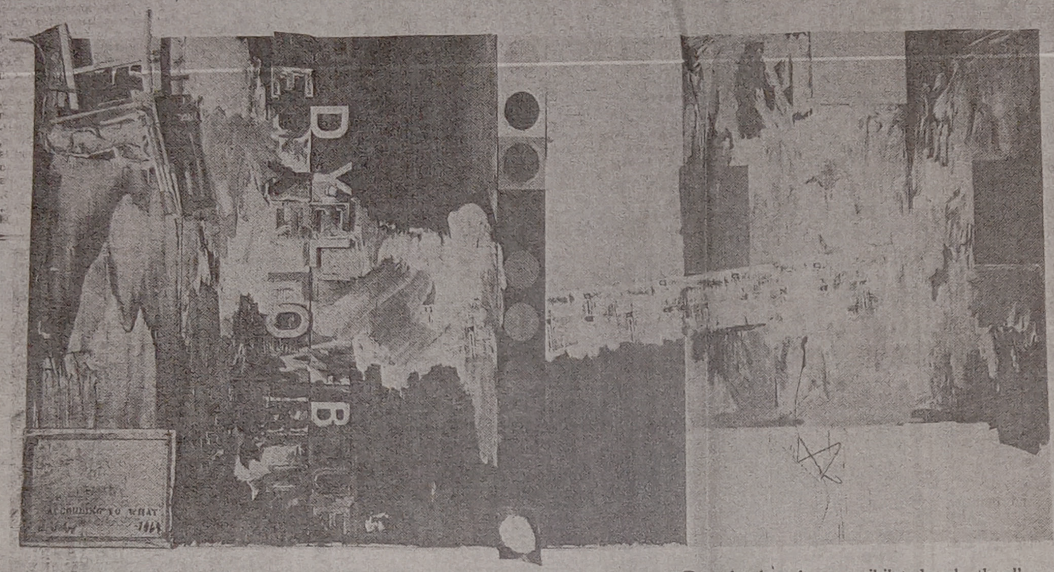
PAUL GAUGUIN (1848-1903) *Noa Noa (Colour Woodcut)*

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Art

"No one wants Dulles to be a malfunctioning shrine or an aeronautical cripple." (Ada Louise Huxtable)



"Johns's 'According to What' is like visiting a scene of battle in which de Kooning and Rauschenberg have annihilated each other."

ART VIEW

HILTON KRAMER

Johns's Work Doesn't Match His Fame

The crowd has long since thinned out at the Jasper Johns retrospective, which opened to the sound of Hosannas in October and continues its now rather lonely slog at the Whitney Museum until Jan. 15. The other day, on a sunny weekday afternoon, there were more people looking at the Balthus show at the Matisse Gallery—and there was a more palpable air of excitement there, too—than there were on the third and fourth floors of the Whitney, where the Johns exhibition, now that "everyone" has seen it, has acquired a distinctly deserted look. Attendance will no doubt pick up with the influx of holiday visitors, but that is always true no matter what the current attraction may be. The conclusion to be drawn is unmistakable, I think—the Johns show has not been the kind of success that its organizers, and almost everyone else for that matter, expected it to be. It may even have proved to be something of a bore.

If this is true—and there is, of course, no immediate way of measuring such boredom and no sure way of assessing its causes—it would tell us much about the relation that obtains between fame and accomplishment in the art world of our time. For no artist within living memory had been catapulted into a more sudden fame than that which came to Johns in 1958 on the occasion of his first solo exhibition at the Castelli Gallery, and few artists of any age have seen their work so promptly elevated to the ranks of acknowledged masterpieces. This 1958 show, in which Johns's paintings of targets, flags and numbers, with their impudently banal subjects executed with a careful painterly finesse, came like manna from heaven. They instantly filled the bill. Here was something unmistakably newer than "The New American Painting," and something that carried delectable aroma of shock. His [illegible] youth's gift to the avant-garde, he was suddenly spoken of as the old master of a new school—with his friend Robert Rauschenberg, one of the true begetters of the Pop movement. This he certainly was. Pop had only to disengage Johns's banal subject matter from its painterly embodiment and provide instead an appropriately "dumb" form to achieve its particular distinction. This it promptly did. Painting acquired a cool, processed look—and a bigger, happier public. Over night, it seemed, art had ceased to be "difficult." It was now as easy as advertising—to take, if not to make. The express train hurried on, to even greater applause. You could become famous just by buying the stuff.

Johns, however, remained aloof. He had ushered in the new era, but he somehow belonged to the old one. He never adopted the "cool" strategies of Pop. If anything, his work became even more painterly (or at least messier) than it had been, and indeed, he did not hesitate to exploit certain mannerisms of the Abstract Expressionist style he had appeared to repudiate in the pictures that won him his first fame. But by that time—in the heyday of the 60's when artists of great reputation began to be heralded as the wonders of the age—he could do virtually anything he pleased. He was a star. Very often he simply went on recycling his familiar repertory of images—now a little tired and shopworn, but still ardently desired by an eager public. When he ventured upon something new and ambitious, especially in his giant painting-constructions, the result was usually a disaster, but who cared? Who There is simply not enough to look at. Johns's art cannot sustain attention on this scale. It not only repeats, and endlessly, the same themes, devices and mannerisms, but very quickly wears them out. Even as one makes the rounds of the third floor galleries at the Whitney, where the earlier work is installed, the suspicion dawns that there was nothing much left after the initial impulse of that first 1958 show was exhausted. When we ascend to the fourth floor, we are in the presence of an artist desperately trying to recover that impulse.

Had the show been limited to five years' work—1955 to 1960—it would probably have made a much stronger impression. As a vast retrospective, however, it is a shambles, for Johns has never mastered the big picture, and it is the big picture that he has attempted again and again and again since the 60's when he was not occupied with his endless production of variations on the same old prints. To study a painting-construction such as "According to What" (1964), which fills a space 192 inches wide, is a dismal experience. It is like visiting a scene of battle in which the de Kooning forces and the Rauschenberg forces have succeeded in annihilating each other. Johns's gifts, such as they are, have always been for intimate statement. He lacks a vocabulary for anything larger and more public, and so he is driven to anthologizing and inflating both his own and the vocabularies of others. One's final impression is of an artist victimized by his own success. An artist of smaller reputation might have been content to work on a scale appropriate to his talents.

There is another reason, too, why this mammoth scale is unsuitable to Johns's art. The mind we find at work in this art is a small one, and it is firmly tethered to a mode of irony that

> 'Everything Johns produced was acclaimed a masterpiece. It was a golden age.'

was given its classic statements by Marcel Duchamp long before Johns appeared on the scene. All Johns could do—and for a brief time he did it well—was to trade on this irony, and add a turn of his own. That is, he could restore to it precisely the element of beautiful painterly surface-making that Duchamp himself had rejected. In other words, he could add de Kooning to Duchamp, which was what he was so much occupied with in the years 1955-1960. It was this that so thrilled—and appalled—his first public. And it is for this minor accomplishment that he will be remembered.

The Whitney, of course, can always be counted on to do the wrong thing, and they have certainly done so in mounting his exhibition as if they had another Calder on their hands. (The public has already set them straight about *that*. But in this case, alas, one cannot be quite certain what decisions, if any, the Whitney actually made in the selection and installation of the Johns show. There is something quite odd about a major museum handing over its principal exhibition of the season to outsiders, and outsiders of very dubious credentials at that. Is this not a damaging reflection on the talents of the museum's own curatorial staff? And all the more so, of course, because those entrusted with the Johns exhibition are clearly museum amateurs.

The show was actually organized by David Whitney, one of Johns's former assistants and a sometime art dealer. The book that serves as the exhibition catalog was written by another amateur—Michael Crichton, a best-selling popular author who is also a collector of Johns's work. It sounds very cozy, but the result is a suffocating air of piety. Like all amateurs, Messrs. Whitney and Crichton could not bring themselves to leave anything—but anything—out. Mr. Whitney obviously put everything into the exhibition he could lay hands on, and Mr. Crichton—well, his monograph on Johns is, in a way, a kind of classic. It reads as if he had taken a crash course in the history of art, sometimes confusing this with the history of physics, in order to produce one of the most ludicrous exercises in the annals of pretentious puffery to come our way in a long time. (Perhaps there are readers who will be pleased to know that "Manet, like Johns, was notable for his willingness to let a painting be flat, lacking the illusion of depth." But this is nothing, a mere passing banality, compared to the nonsense conjured up to explain what is called the "Johnsian system of thought" and its analogues in physics and mathematics.) It is a scandal for a museum to sponsor work of this kind. Why can't the Whitney find a cura-

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Museums Galleries

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THE FOLLOWING IS A PARTIAL LIST OF EXHIBITIONS BY ASSOCIATION MEMBERS.

New York

ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS
Christmas Exhibition-Framed Prints thru Dec. 663 Fifth (52)

LA BOETIE
Seligmann: Ballet, and Jiri Kolar to Jan. 30 9 E 82

BONINO
Contemporary Paintings & Sculpture By appt. PL 2-9556

TERRY DINTENFASS
For the Holidays to Dec. 31 50 W 57

ANDRE EMMERICH
Kenneth Noland, New Paintings to Jan. 11 41 E 57

ANDRE EMMERICH DOWNTOWN
James Wolfe, New Sculpture to Jan. 7 420 W Broadway

FISCHBACH
Victoria Barr; Gallery Group to Dec. 22 29 W 57

XAVIER FOURCADE
Joan Mitchell, New Paintings 1977 to Jan. 14 36 E 75

[illegible] ST, ETIENNE
[illegible] 74 W 57

LEFEBRE
Graphics by Gallery Artists 47 E 77

PIERRE MATISSE
Group Show; Gallery Artists 41 E 57

NEWHOUSE
Fine Paintings of Four Centuries 19 E 66

PERLS
Dufy, Leger, Maillol, others to Jan. 7 1016 Madison (79)

PAUL ROSENBERG
Exhibition of Works by H. Fraser thru Dec. 20 E 79

ROSENBERG & STIEBEL
Old Master Paintings & Drawings By appt. 753-4368 32 E 57

A.M. SACKS
John Gundelfinger, Oils on Paper 29 W 57

SAIDENBERG
Klee, Matisse, Miro; Drwgs, Graphics to Dec. 24 1018 Madison (79)

ROBERT SCHOELKOPF
Richard Piccolo, Paintings to Jan. 7 825 Madison (69)

DAVID TURNCK, INC.
[illegible] Drawings [illegible]

Speaking Of Prints

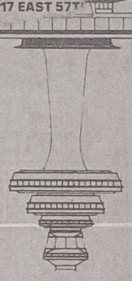
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MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS:
Aspiration by JOHN TAYLOR ARMS to St. Mary's Museum, Maryland, *1812 Overture*, [illegible]



Controversy Over Dulles Airport

mobilizing it as a historic shrine. In 1972, after interviewing several architectural firms, including Roche, Dinkaloo, the successors of Eero Saarinen, the F. A. A. selected the St. Louis firm of Hellmuth, Obata and Kassebaum to work with planning consultants Peat, Marwick and Mitchell on immediate expansion plans. They were also to prepare a master plan for the future. These proposals were approved by the National Capital Planning Commission, which has advisory planning and design review rights for Federal projects in the larger Washington area.

Nothing further was done until last year, when the architects were instructed to carry out the designs for construction. But then a curious thing happened. Concern and protest began to snowball. Like many government agencies, the F. A. A. had been isolated the whole process pretty close to its chest, and when inquiries began to come in from watchdogs of the [illegible] from professional groups to other govern-[illegible] communicative fa-[illegible]

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

sence of the avant-garde spirit—was reborn. Excitement was great. Older, established painters were outraged, and many younger ones got busy. The express train of history was on its way again. The Museum of Modern Art, which had been notoriously slow in acquiring the work of the Abstract Expressionists, was not to be left out this time. It immediately snapped up three paintings out of that first show. Other collectors followed suit. Jasper Johns was the golden boy of American art.

The 60's, which among other dubious blessings brought us the advent of Pop Art, seemed only to confirm his preeminence. Almost before Johns had time to settle into his role as

was something of a "scandal," to be sure, but a scandal in a very special sense. It was the kind of scandal the New York art world was then very much on the lookout for.

It will be recalled this was the period in which Abstract Expressionism, billed as "The New American Painting," achieved its first widespread success abroad. Its accomplishments were now "official." The situation was clearly ripe for variation and new investment—for putting it on the ground floor—was obvious to all but the most benighted observers. A something new, for something "next." The appetite for innovations of the avant-garde spirit was then at those days practically regarded as a national birthright.

DO NOT FORGET THE NEEDIEST!

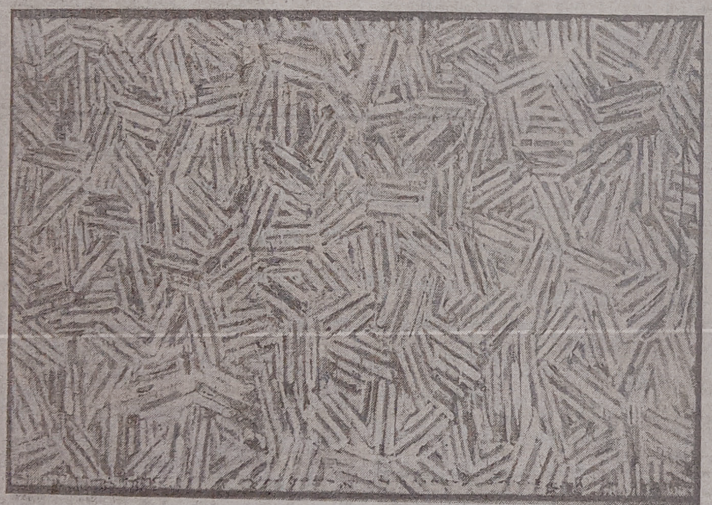
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GALLERY VIEW

JOHN RUSSELL

Jasper Johns Stretches Himself—and Us



Eric Pollitzer

"The Barber's Tree"—"for the eye, the equivalent of a lovers' luncheon"

It is a very promising last quarter of our century which begins with new pictures like the ones by Jasper Johns which are on view at the Leo Castelli Gallery. The show consists of recent paintings, drawings and one very large print. Their cumulative effect is that of a family album in which is recorded an exceptionally high incidence of twins, look-alike seniors and juniors, and a touch or two of incest.

Johns has often chosen to work with motifs which are in themselves familiar, and to go on from there to develop a seemingly limitless expressive potential. This was the case with his paintings, drawings and prints of flags, targets, maps, numbers and alphabets. It was also the case with his ale cans, paintbrushes in an empty coffee tin, and the flashlight on its improvised catafalque. As Johns himself said more than a decade ago, "I used things the mind already knows. That gave me room to work on other levels."

To these preoccupations he brought an unmatched subtlety of expression, plus the ability to pile meaning upon meaning in ways not rivaled by anyone now living. Stretching himself, he stretches us also. If we look long and closely at "Diver," the huge and tenebrous drawing by Johns which dominates the "Drawing Now" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, we may decide that its true point of comparison is not so much with anything else in the show as with Rembrandt.

• • •

"Diver" dates from 1963. Since then, Johns has been more and more chary of the big, old-style confrontation with the public which is implied in a one-man show of new work. (This is, in fact, his first show of that kind in eight years.) This time he has not started from "things the mind already knows," but from a motif which is intrinsically both neutral and quite inexpressive. Basically, it is a repeated cluster of forms, finger-sized and finger-shaped, which spreads itself all over the paper or canvas.

The clusters have no particular sense of direction; nor does any one cluster lead or dominate. Collectively, they set up all-over rhythms which turn out to be infinite in their variety. The pictures are also structured by rectangular divisions within the given field; sometimes these are literal, as when Johns locks several distinct canvases together to make the completed painting; sometimes they are illusory, as when, for instance, the real crevasse between two canvases set side by side is mimicked by a painted one.

Within that general family likeness which I mentioned earlier, there are great differences of character and temperament. Sometimes, as in the painting called "The Barber's Tree," Johns aims at a most delicate coherence, playing off one range of pinks against another, never chopping the all-over rhythm of the picture, and setting up (as beween his brush and our eye) the equivalent of a lover's luncheon. Sometimes, as in the grey painting called "The Dutch Wives"—which is in effect a diptych—he confounds expectation by mating like with unlike and leading from an identical formal beginning to two different formal ends.

Either way, the new paintings make substantial use of encaustic, the medium which contributed to many of John's most conspicuous successes in the early 1960's. The paint structure which results has a hooded eloquence: sunk within it are strips of newsprint, and just once or twice Johns introduces the kind of impressed mark which he used in earlier years—the print of an iron, for instance. We are not encouraged to treat the newsprint as reading matter, since its prime purpose is rather to thicken the visual plot and add a counterpoint of direct statement to the more complex intimations of the paint. References, drawn from this newspaper, to the arrest of a small-town organist have, therefore, a purely formal significance.

• • •

It doesn't do, finally, to assume that the biggest pictures are the most "important." Some of the drawings are statements as dense as any that Johns has ever made. And as for the single print on exhibit, it explores the central motif of the show in terms of three successive and distinct media—lithography, linocut and woodcut. That the whole show is intelligent in the highest degree goes witout saying; but one of the special things about Jasper Johns is that he allows for other things beside intelligence—for the intermittences of feeling, for instance, and for the quirks and accidents and small exasperations which cannot be programmed out of human life.

"Autobiography" is the title of a large exhibition of paintings, old and new, by Lowell Nesbitt at the Andrew Crispo Gallery. The show inaugurates the gallery in its new (and lately redoubled) form. A broad internal staircase leads up to a space formerly occupied by the administrative headquarters of the Jets, with the result that the show can cover the work of more than 10 years (much of it very large) in some depth.

When Lowell Nesbitt arrived in New York in 1963 at the age of 30, he began to study the city in terms of a photo-realistic vision that did not, however, exclude elements of other disciplines. He didn't at all mind if the motif had a strangeness that ran parallel to that of the surrealists; his frontal studies of cast-iron architecture have a presence which is akin to that of De Chirico's early townscapes, for instance, and the play back and forth

Continued on Page 32

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ART

The Lines Lead to Johns

BY DAVID BOURDON

Through an extraordinary coincidence, two of the city's major museums simultaneously offer shows of modern drawing. The Museum of Modern Art has the more provocative of the two exhibitions—**DRAWING NOW: 1955-1975**, an international and somewhat didactic survey of some 175 works by 46 artists. The Guggenheim Museum features a more pleasurable, if traditional show of **20TH-CENTURY AMERICAN DRAWING: THREE AVANT-GARDE GENERATIONS**; it contains about 230 works by 29 artists, ranging from pioneer modernists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove, to pop personages of the '60s, such as Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol.

Both shows are definitely worth seeing. The Guggenheim exhibition seems to be all about connoisseurship, offering little to think about, but much to dazzle the eye. The show at the Modern has a pedagogic thrust, inviting us to reexamine our definitions of drawing. Guggenheim curator Diane Waldman has, in effect, assembled 29 miniretrospectives of drawings, watercolors, and collages that almost any museum would be proud to own. Waldman tends to view drawings solely on their individual merits, without questioning their nature or context. "Despite the radical innovations of the 20th century," she says, "drawing continues to fulfill its two traditional roles, serving as either a finished work or as a preliminary study for a painting or sculpture."

By contrast, Bernice Rose, the curator of drawings at the Modern, zeroes in on the essential characteristics of avant-garde drawing and its development into a major medium. "Given the radical history of modernist art," she writes in her excellent catalog text, "drawing has until recently been regarded as a conservative medium, resistant to ideas of innovation or extension. As a discipline it has with few exceptions remained within parameters basically defined by the end of the 17th century." She claims that artists of the past 20 years have investigated and reevaluated the nature of drawing. "With this process of reevaluation and renewal, drawing has moved from one context, that of a 'minor' support medium, an adjunct to painting and sculpture, to another, that of a major and independent medium with distinctive expressive possibilities altogether its own."

While allowing that all drawing is conceptual in essence, Rose primarily concerns herself with drawings that do not depict conventional subject matter (which is to say about 99 per cent of all the world's drawings). She quests for the sort of drawing that "is most insistent on its own logic as a medium," a pursuit that leads to such mystical ravings as: "The drawing is seen as a field coextensive with real space, no longer subject to the illusion of an object marked off from the rest of the world. The space of illusionism changes, merges with the space of the world, but by doing so it loses its objective, conventional character and becomes subjective, accessible only to the individual's raw perception."

The first drawing that spectators see at the Modern is Sol LeWitt's 10-by-17-foot complex of white lines crisscrossing a black wall in the main hall. This handsome, devilishly methodical work sets the conceptual tone of the exhibition. The other "drawing" that functions as the keynote of the show is Robert Rauschenberg's notorious work of 1953, the "Erased de Kooning." (Rauschenberg, then in his prankish twenties, asked de Kooning for a pencil drawing, then proceeded to deliberately erase it in a recognizably Rauschenbergian manner.) In addition to the LeWitt and Rauschenberg pieces, which represent two extremes of modern drawing, the show contains all sorts of unorthodox drawings, ranging from a page of John Cage's music and Carl Andre's collages of printed words to Robert Smithson's line-incised piece of slate and Michael Heizer's sandblasted sheet of plate glass.

'It may be going too far to say that Johns steals the Modern and Guggenheim shows, but his is one of the most impressive achievements in 20th-century drawing.'



Rudolph Burckhardt

Johns's "Diver," 86½ inches by 71 inches. The Modern's curator says this is "perhaps the most ambitious drawing in 20 years."

But "Drawing Now" isn't totally far out. It also includes a goodly number of more conventional two-dimensional works on paper. The show features a choice selection of drawings by Jim Dine, Lichtenstein, Cy Twombly, and Jasper Johns. (Rose considers Johns's "Diver," a seven-foot-high charcoal drawing to be "perhaps the most ambitious drawing of the past 20 years.") The exhibition also includes the rarely exhibited full sequence of Rauschenberg's 34 illustrations to Dante's "Inferno," which strikes me as a pretty ambitious project, too.

Both Johns and Rauschenberg also figure prominently in the three-generation affair at the Guggenheim. To judge by the Guggenheim's presentation of recent history, the latest generation of masters consists exclusively of Johns, Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Twombly, Warhol, Ellsworth Kelly, and Frank Stella. Some observers object to the fact that all eight of these artists are represented by the Leo Castelli Gallery. Why, some of these people want to know, does a museum curator feel obliged to ratify the taste of one powerful dealer? The situation is particularly ticklish since Diane Waldman's husband is a painter who also happens to be represented by Castelli. In some sectors of the business world, this would be called conflict of interest.

I asked Diane Waldman why she ended up with eight Castelli artists. "It never crossed my mind," she replied. "I work by artist, not by gallery. I was simply looking for a particular kind of quality rather than wishing to work with any particular dealer. The Castelli Gallery was not involved, except to supply me with photographs, and Leo hasn't even seen the show." She also pointed out that her interest in some of the artists (Kelly,

Continued on next page

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Art

Continued from preceding page

Oldenburg) predates their affiliation with the Castelli Gallery.

It would have looked better, ethically, if Diane Waldman had sought out a few artists of quality in other galleries. But at the same time, it's hard to imagine how her show could look better, visually.

Both shows to mid-March.

* * *

One excellent reason for trekking through the MOMA and Guggenheim drawing exhibitions is to gaze upon the good and ample selection of works by **JASPER JOHNS**, who emerges (even in this choice company) as a spellbinding master draftsman. While it might be going too far to say he "steals" both shows, it's no exaggeration to say that his astonishing repertoire of gestural strokes and tonal nuances add up to one of the most impressive achievements in 20th-century drawing. Johns fans are in for a special treat this month, since they can also rejoice in his recent paintings, drawings, and prints, presently on view at the Leo Castelli Gallery, 4 East 77th Street.

Johns's new paintings took some people by surprise because most of the canvases are completely abstract. Many of Johns's paintings up until now gave the spectator plenty to look at, but caused him to grapple mentally with Duchampian puns and paradoxical confrontations between illusion and reality. The present batch of paintings is, in effect, totally formalist, with no overtones of Dada, Surrealism, or Pop. They resemble evenly striped paintings that have been cut up in irregular pieces, like parts of a jigsaw puzzle, then reassembled in crazy-quilt fashion so that the stripes zig this way and that. Actually, the mosaic-type patterning has precedents in John's work—in previous paintings that resembled flagstone walls and, to a lesser extent, earlier paintings of the United States map.

I'd have to look at these paintings much longer before deciding which I liked best. It's easy enough to admire the largest painting in the show, the 10-foot-wide "Scent" with its bright, Matissean clusters of orange, green, and purple stripes. It's also easy to fall for the smallest painting on view, the 54-inch-wide pink and white confection, called "The Barber's Tree." Still, if I were a museum director, I suppose I'd go after "The Dutch Wives," a ravishing concoction of shredded newspaper and encaustic.

However, the most characteristic (and problematic) Johns painting is "Weeping Women," a triptych of predominantly red, yellow, and blue panels. The center panel, which is yellow, contains four identical shapes that suggest the imprint of a flatiron. Two of the "irons" are symmetrically placed at the outer edges of the panel and connected by a drawn line. The word "iron" is written across the other pair. The ghostly flatiron images may allude to the process of working in encaustic, a waxy medium that requires heating before it can be applied to the canvas. But the irons also may be an "ironic" reference to that extra-special quality that is prized in so many critical circles: flatness. Johns could be demonstrating that the most surefire way to honor the "integrity of the picture plane" is to spread out the canvas and iron the pigment flat.

'In some sectors of the business world, Waldman's situation might be called conflict of interest.'

"Weeping Women" lingers in the mind because of its enigmatic quality. But it's a misfit in its present context, surrounded as it is by unproblematic paintings that are simply and splendidly gorgeous. (Through February 14.)

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In addition to his large output of paintings, drawings, and prints, **STUART DAVIS** (1894-1964) also produced seven important murals, which probably qualify him as the leading U.S. muralist of his generation. Until recently, however, his first major mural was for men's eyes only. The reason? The Radio City Music Hall in 1932 commissioned Davis to design a mural for the men's smoking lounge and the artist gratefully accepted the opportunity, as he put it, "to get a work out in public, even in a men's room." For the next 43 years the Davis mural (which represents such "masculine" subjects as card-playing, boating, and numerous smoking articles and accessories) remained in place amid the Music Hall's Art Deco decor. Last year officials of Rockefeller Center and the Music Hall presented the 10-by-17-foot mural to the Museum of Modern Art, claiming that the mural "will be more accessible to all the public, and more readily available to students and art historians." The mural was removed and restored at considerable expense, then finally installed a couple of months ago in the main hall of MOMA's ground floor. To help celebrate the occasion, the Zabriskie Gallery, 29 West 57th Street, assembled a scholarly, surprise-filled show of about 20 of Davis's studies for murals in gouache, pencil, and ink (through February 14).

Alas, Davis's Radio City mural didn't remain visible for long. When the "Drawing Now" show spilled out into the main hall, the space-squeezed Modern constructed a false wall in front of the mural and put a Sol LeWitt wall drawing in its place. The Davis mural will reappear in March and most likely go into storage during the summer. In effect, an important mural that was formerly accessible to only half the population is presently accessible to none. □

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