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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEAGRAM MURALS BY MARK ROTHKO TO GO ON VIEW
IN NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART'S EAST BUILDING

WASHINGTON, D. C. November 12, 1985. J. Carter Brown, Director, National Gallery of Art, announced that six large-scale mural panels by Mark Rothko are to go on view today in the National Gallery of Art's East Building Concourse Level galleries. These major paintings, the Seagram Murals (1958-1959), were commissioned for the Seagram Building in New York, designed by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson. They will remain on view through April, 1986.

In May 1984, the Mark Rothko Foundation announced that it had designated the National Gallery as the chief repository of its collection. The Seagram Murals are the first of 285 paintings and works on paper, and more than 500 additional reference and study works, to be transferred to the Gallery from the Mark Rothko Foundation. Works in this important gift date from all phases of Rothko's career. By mid-1986, most of the collection is expected to rest in the Gallery, which will become a central repository and study center for Rothko.

Rothko completed three sets of panels for the Seagram commission. The first set of paintings for the murals was in Rothko's characteristic style of vertically stacked rectangles floating on a luminous field. In two successive series he broke away from this format and substituted single or paired rectangles on a dark, usually maroon field. Most of the mural panels measure eight feet nine inches in height, with the

(more)

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exception of four panels that are six feet high and fifteen feet wide. Several smaller canvases are studies for the larger murals, although Rothko considered the studies to be independent works in their own right. Both the large paintings and the studies exhibited here probably belong to the second series, characterized by soft-edged, brushy forms in orange, red, or black.

The final intended arrangement of the panels is not known. Rothko told friends that he wanted to evoke the feeling of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence, giving a sense that all the exits were blocked and there was no escape.

After producing three sets of panels, Rothko withdrew from the Seagram project because he objected to the location, a restaurant, where the paintings were to be installed. Most of the panels ultimately went to the Mark Rothko Foundation or his estate. At the time of his death in 1970, Rothko left a group of paintings, primarily from the third series, to the Tate Gallery in London where they remain a permanent installation.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Neill Heath, Public Information Officer or Carolyn Amiot, Deputy Information Officer, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 (202) 842-6353.

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Irving Sandler, "The New York School" (Harper & Row, 1978)

"Artists were contemptuous of what they believed American society and its dominant culture had become after World War II... (p.16)

Avant-garde artists and writers shared a concern with process, with direct autobiographical content..."at the risk of self-indulgence." (p.20). Olson's theory of projective verse; Olson's concept of a poem as "an open field of energy which at all points discharged energy -- a conception of field composition that called to mind Pollock's 'drop' painting." (p.21)

"The daily music of the gesture painters almost without exception was jazz, particularly Bop." Five Spot Cafe was an artist hangout with announcements of shows on the walls. Rivers and Kanowitz played jazz. (22)

Tenth Street - the block between Third and Fourth Avenues in 1956 contained the studios of some dozen artists including Goldberg, Kohn, de Kooning, Resnick, Vicente. (29). Most of the coop galleries located in this block.

The Club and Subjects of the Artists School - p. 30-31

Cedar Street Tavern - p. 32

Canaday and anti-Canaday - p.188 (misplaced to p. 338; see also notes p. 196)

Meyer Schapiro's frequent lectures attended by nearly all vanguard artists (35)

Hansa Gallery (est. 1952) - p. 36.
Tibor de Nagy (1950) - p. 36
Stable and Martha Jackson (1953) - p.38.
Reuben Gallery (1959) - p. 39-40.
Coenties Slip community - p. 40

"Numbering from two hundred to three hundred painters and sculptors, the avant-garde community was large enough to offer a variety of personality and opinion, and small enough for artists to get to know well most of their fellows." (p. 41)

MOMA's purchase in 1955 of one of Monet's large Nymphéas - p. 51

Frankenthaler's discovery of stain painting - p. 58

"In 1954, Greenberg turned against representation, asserting that it could yield only minor art since 'the best art of our day tends, increasingly, to be abstract... (p.71)

Rivers' intention to outrage - p. 78

San Francisco school of figurative artists - p 90

Early reviews of Rauschenberg (adverse) - -.98 (Note: RR participated in Club panel discussion 28 March 1958, see footnote p. 106) Gombrich comment on Rauschenberg, disliking him but impressed, p. 110.

Cage on Duchamp: "this concern which interests us more than anything else: the blurring of the distinction between art and life." -p.111, 113. Feldman on Cage's self-abolishment thru chance - p. 114. Two directions out of Duchamp: via Cage, fusing art and life; via Johns, art in service of mind, "an art based on conceptions about what art could be, on visual and verbal mixtures, paradoxes, ambiguities, and games." p. 115.

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Sandler, NYSch, cont.

Recognition came by end of fifties for most leading ab-ex and a few younger artists. By 1962 Or 1963 a sizeable audience existed, and a market. Reasons for the change - p. 164ff. First generation became arbiters of quality. Coop galleries gave way to uptown galleries - influential dealers, themselves not influenced mainly by their artists. Influence of certain critics. Hostility of NYTimes, Time, etc.

"In 1950, a sizeable number of early-wave artists received their first major recognition as a group -- in a New Talent show selected by Greenberg and Schapiro and held at the Kootz Gallery, a prestigious uptown showplace of modern masters, including a number of pioneer Abstract Expressionists." (166),

Ninth Street Show in 1951 - -p.167 - success beyond anyone's expectations. Artists decided to arrange another in 1953, uptown at the Stable (first of Stable annuals where the artists were in charge of selection (168). Annuals continued until 1957 when discontinued by organizers.

In 1957 Schapiro selected a show called Artists of the New York School: Second Generation. Included Frankenthaler, Mitchell, Brodie, Elaine de Kooning, de Niro, Forst, Goodnough, Kahn, Pasilis, Pauschenberg, Resnick, Solomon, Jean Follett, Hartigan, Johns, Johnson, Kaprow, Leslie, Müller, Segal. In it, Johns' work generated greatest interest and controversy (169).

Art News in 1958 broadened its policy to deal more with assemblage (called neo-Dada then). p. 171.

Toward end of fifties, Hilton Kramer at Arts became increasingly hostile to Abstract Expressionism - p. 171 ff (see quote).

In 1958 Pavia started publishing It Is, written mainly by gestural abstract artists of NYSchool. Five issues between 1958 and 1960 are valuable historical documentation (p.172).

As fifties progressed, MOMA was widely seen as a champion of the New York School -- p. 173-4. The New American Painting (1958), MOMA's travelling show, and II Documenta 1959 established the international reputation of the school, and prompted the Times Literary Supplement to devote a special number to "The American Imagination: Its Strength and Scope," saying that "it is true to say that the flowering of the American imagination has been the chief event in the sphere of living art since the end of the First World War."

MOMA's Sixteen Americans in 1960 had enormous impact; showed Kelly and Stella, Johns, Rauschenberg, Stankiewicz, Nevelson. Only one gesture painter selected, Leslie.

Greenberg's reputation had declinedsomewhat in late fifties. But Bill Rubin believed the Greenberg line and continued it at MOMA (176), and by 1961 Greenberg was reinstated as dean of US critics.

The real breakthrough year was 1956 - p. 177.

Barr's attack on gesture painting at the Club, 1958 -- p. 189.

Strongest attack on second-generation gesture painting from Kaprow - p. 190

Greenberg's switch to opposition - p. 190.

Reasons for the decline - 191 ff. The shock of Stella's attitude -p192. Stella the butt of ridicule, the juvenile delinquent of contemporary art.

Hostile atmosphere caused decline of the Club (193)

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Sandler, NYSch (cont)

Rauschenberg: Early works in Parsons show had titles such as Crucifixion and Reflection, The Man With Two Souls, Trinity (religious); show influence of Albers (p.118). First Dirt Painting was for John Cage. He studied with Motherwell at Black Mountain (?) -119. His fascination with the obscure or obliterated (erased) presence of an image or object (120). O'Doherty on RR's art encouraging "what could be called the city-dweller s rapid scan, rather than the art audience's stare" (121). How he differs from Cubists or Schwitters, "who integrated found objects into a total design, subordinating them to the work as an entity" (121).

Johns: "Johns's factur after 1960 often looks genuinely 'Expressionist,' and this counter to his stated intention: '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.'" (127).

Environments and Happenings
"It was not until after 1958 that Allan Kaprow, who had studied with Cage at the New School for Social Research the year before, and George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, and Jackson MacLow, who enrolled in the class somewhat later, and other young artists such as Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Claes Oldenburgm abd Robert Whitman, took up the composer's challenge: 'Where do we go from here. Towards theater...'" (131)

Kaprow's first full-blown Happening was "18 Happenings in 6 Parts" at Reuben Gwllery, in 1959. See description, p. 133 ff. Kaprow's "Legacy of Jackson Pollock" article pub. in Art News in fall of 1958 (135),

Dine's "The Smiling Workman" - p. 139

Gutai in Japan - note p. 140.

Cage's objection to Happenings - note p. 143.
Why they declined - p. 206 ff also Fluxus events 1962-64; Avant-garde dance, EAT; new theater; Guerrilla theater p. 206 ff)
Color Field Painting
Greenberg meets Noland at Black Mountain in summer 1950; they resume acquaintance 1953 when Noland visits NY from Wash., introduces Greenberg to Louis, and Greenberg takes them to Frankenthaler studio. In 1951 Greenberg includes both in new talent show at Kootz. In 1959 he arranges one-man shows for both at French and Co, and in 1960 he writes a major article on stain painting. "Underlying Greenberg's aesthetic was the conviction that 'modernist' painting aspires to be 'pure,' that is, occupied exclusively and with what is unique and irreducible in the medium, notably the two-dimensional picture plane. He rejected what he called 'painterly painting' (his name for gesture painting) because it is based on the contrast of light and dark values which create illusionistic space and destroy pictorial flatness." (p 150). Greenberg went on to say that the emergence of Still, Rothko, Newman showed veneration for Monet as against Cezanne. He said American color-field painting was "the most radical of all developments in the painting of the last two decades, and has no counterpart in Paris...as so many other things in American abstract expressionism have had since 1944." (150).

Greenberg was engaged as a consultant for the French and Company Gallery which opened at the beginning of 1959, a post he held until the summer of 1960. Showed Newman as inaugural show (Newman hadn't shown in NY since 1951

Greenberg on Louis' "revulsion against Cubism was a revulsion against the sculptural. Cubism meant shapes, and shapes meant armatures of light and dark...(152)

Greenberg on painterly painting, describing it - p. 160, showing how it failed.

The Second Generation
"Much as the artists professed to feel alienated from the public because of its taste for mass culture, they tacitly accepted the success values of American society, since few, if any, were social revolutionaries." -p 163.

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Sandler, NYSch, cont.

Circa 1960: A Change In Sensibility

"The stylistic common denominator of fifties art was the 'hot,' 'dirty,' painterly look, and of sixties art, the 'cool,' 'antiseptic,' mechanistic look. In fact, the more art was based on clearly defined forms of unmodulated colors, the more of the sixties it looked, so much so that until late in the decade, painterly painting received very little critical attention." p. 200.

MOMA's Assemblage show in 1961 confirmed that assemblage had become "a mass manner." (201)

Decline of Stankiewicz reputation - p. 201, contrasted with Rauschenberg's increasing influence -p.202.

Johns's the major influence: on Oldenburg and Dine, Lichtenstein, Warhol, and Rosenquist (202 ff); on Stella: "The thing that struck me most was the way he stuck to the motif...the idea of stripes -- the rhythm and interval -- the idea of repetition. I began to think a lot about repetition." (p.203),

Stella's work challenges every pictorial conception and romanticist justification of gesture painting - p. 211. See Stella quote, p. 212, about finding "something that wasn't constantly a record of your sensitivity..."

Greenberg unsympathetic to Stella - p. 214.

Greenberg's 1962 attack on Harold Rosenberg in "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name." -p 215.

Greenberg's personal tastes in art -- p. 218. (Apollonian).

Two major thrusts in sixties aesthetics: Duchamp-Cage way toward theater and "non-art," life; a second emphasizing the art object as an impersonal thing in itself rather than being expressive of its creator (link to Robbe-Grillet in novel) - p. 218.

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A Life Round Table on

MODERN ART

FIFTEEN DISTINGUISHED CRITICS AND CONNOISSEURS UNDERTAKE TO CLARIFY THE STRANGE ART OF TODAY

LIFE'S first Round Table was on the Pursuit of Happiness (LIFE, July 12). Here the technique is applied to the question of modern painting. Held in the penthouse of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, attended by experts from both Europe and America, the meeting produced a lively debate. This report was written by Moderator Russell W. Davenport, who conducted the Round Table, with the collaboration of Winthrop Sargeant.

FOR about 40 years the art of painting has exhibited a variety of manifestations loosely identified in the public mind with the phrase "modern art." Originating in the works by such acknowledged masters as Cézanne, Van Gogh, Seurat and Gauguin, these manifestations made their appearance in the studios of Paris in the first decade of this century, multiplied into a kaleidoscope of new artistic styles, found a kinship with a wide variety of intellectual currents and spread throughout the world wherever artists paint. Today they confront the visitor to almost any gallery as strange distortions of reality, private nightmares, depictions of "ugly" things, human figures and objects that "look wrong," cubes and geometrical patterns that accord with nothing recognizable in nature. These "modern" works do not, of course, constitute the whole of 20th Century art. Many artists have remained quite unaffected by them, others have been influenced only during certain periods of their careers. Nevertheless it is fair to say that the "modern" movement has constituted the dominant trend in the art of our time. It has been encouraged by important institutions. It has been promoted by art dealers. And it has left behind it so much controversy and confusion that a great part of the public has become antagonistic to contemporary painting.

It is not easy to sum up the nature of modern art in a few words. Of course there are a number of official categories—cubism, surrealism, expressionism, futurism, abstractionism, nonobjectivism and so on. But when the layman uses the phrase he has in mind two particular characteristics which, for him, set this art off from more conventional painting. First of all, he finds it *difficult to understand;* secondly, he often finds that it does not concern itself with the "beautiful" but with the "*ugly*" *or the strange.* The layman is reassured to find that this kind of painting has drawn the fire of distinguished thinkers. Arnold Toynbee, for example, has declared that modern art is symptomatic of a decay in the moral values of our age; and in a well-known essay, *Art and the Obvious,* Aldous Huxley deplored the failure of much modern art to come to grips with what he called the "great obvious truths" of human life.

Now from the point of view of our civilization as a whole, this situation certainly has its dangers. It may well be true that there has always been a gap between the most vital art of a given period and the general public. For example, the great masters of the Renaissance may not have been immediately comprehensible to the public of their day—and for that matter they are not fully comprehensible even today to one whose education or sensitivity is deficient. Yet the gap today appears to be wider—some would even argue that it is a different kind of gap. And it leaves us with this question: How can a great civilization like ours continue to flourish without the humanizing influence of a living art that is understood and enjoyed by a large public?

In order to shed some light on this, the editors of LIFE determined to hold a Round Table on the subject in accordance with the technique already developed for the exploration of the Pursuit of Happiness (LIFE, July 12). To this end they brought together a group of distinguished critics and connoisseurs and posed to them the following question: *Is modern art, considered as a whole, a good or a bad development? That is to say, is it something that responsible people can support, or may they neglect it as a minor and impermanent phase of culture?*

It was an exciting debate documented throughout by pictures from the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art and from other collections, many of which are reproduced herewith. The panel of 15 had traveled many miles to get there: Aldous Huxley from California; Sir Leigh Ashton and Raymond Mortimer from London; Georges Duthuit, editor of *Transition Forty-Eight,* from Paris. The "local" representatives from St. Louis, New Haven and New York were equally distinguished and are listed below. The Table was carefully balanced between those who were known to be enthusiasts for "modern art" and those who had registered serious criticisms of it. Yet even more important than the balance was the *caliber* of the participants. The object was to obtain a discussion between persons whose knowledge of art could not be questioned, irrespective of whether one might or might not agree with their evaluations.

There is no more complicated subject in the world than that of esthetics. To ask these gentlemen to be honest was, in effect, to ask them to disagree; indeed, as a number of them pointed out, if complete agreement could be reached concerning the important issues of art,

TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 65

WHO'S WHO AT THE ROUND TABLE (OPPOSITE)

The gentleman whose head shows in the lower left-hand corner is Clement Greenberg, *avant-garde* critic. Next, going around the table clockwise, is James W. Fosburgh, LIFE adviser; Moderator Russell W. Davenport (in light suit); Meyer Schapiro, professor of fine arts, Columbia University; Georges Duthuit, editor of *Transition Forty-Eight,* Paris, France; Aldous Huxley (leaning forward), noted author; Francis Henry Taylor (behind Mr. Huxley), director of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art; Sir Leigh Ashton (shirtsleeves), director of Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England; R. Kirk Askew Jr., New York art dealer; Raymond Mortimer, British critic and author; Alfred Frankfurter, editor and publisher, *Art News;* Theodore Greene (head in hand), professor of philosophy, Yale; James J. Sweeney, author and lecturer; Charles Sawyer, dean of School of Fine Arts, Yale; H. W. Janson, professor of art and archaeology, Washington University, St. Louis. Not shown in this picture are A. Hyatt Mayor, curator of prints, Metropolitan Museum, New York and James Thrall Soby, chairman, Department of Painting and Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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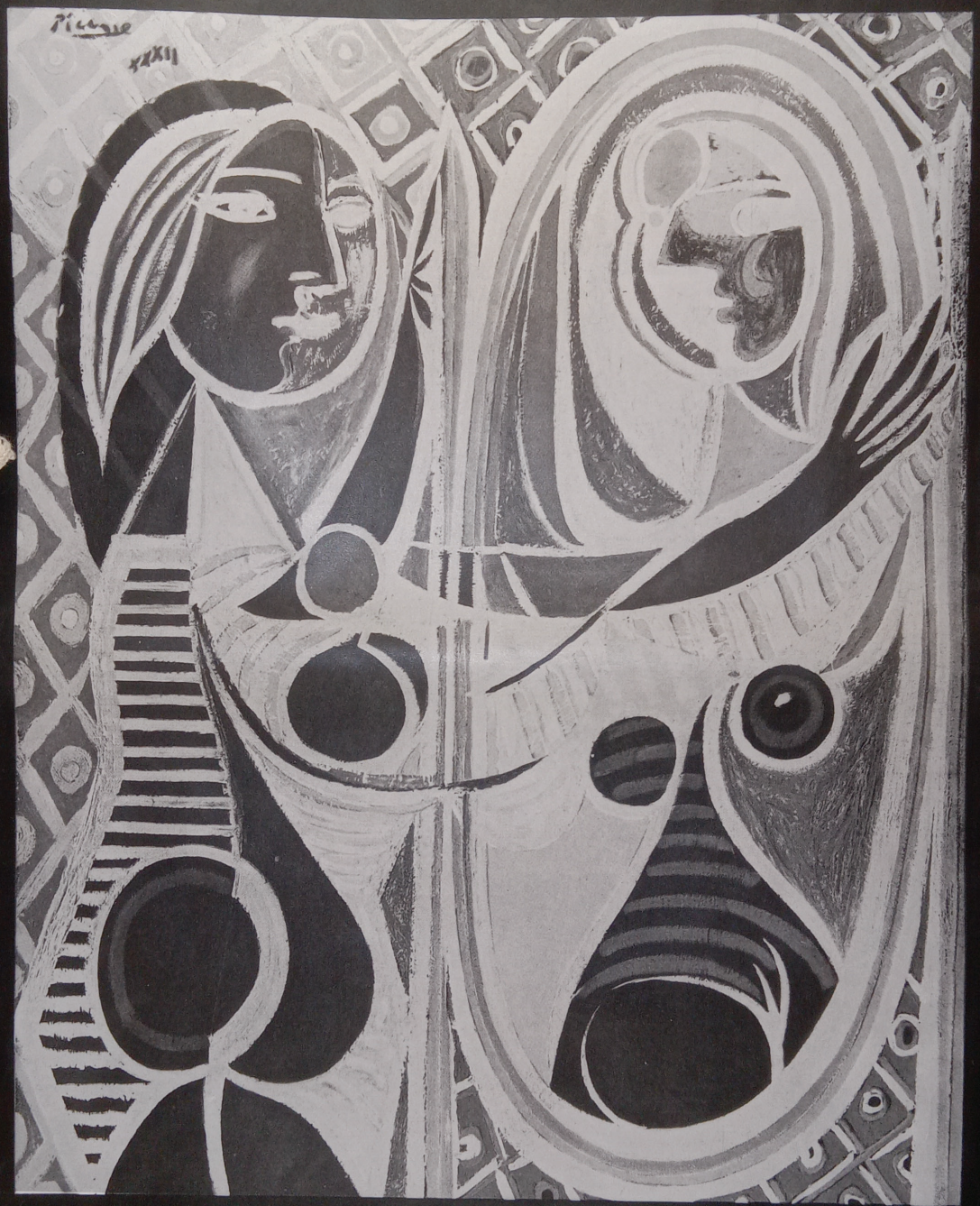


LIFE'S ROUND TABLE DELIBERATES IN THE PENTHOUSE ATOP MANHATTAN'S MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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GIRL BEFORE A MIRROR
BY
PABLO PICASSO

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Two Picassos and a Rembrandt



SCHAPIRO

PICASSO'S *Girl Before a Mirror* (*opposite*) was put forward by LIFE as a key to the whole discussion of Modern Art—for three reasons.

First, it is accepted on every hand as a great modern classic.

Secondly, however, it is not an *extreme* example of "modernism," like some of the pictures on the following pages. The form of the girl is still recognizable; hence the layman can see the physical distortions to which the artist has subjected it, and thereby learn much about what the artist was trying to do.

But, thirdly, this picture is "modern" enough to puzzle the layman. He is apt to ask by what right the artist gives the girl two faces. Why is the face in the mirror an inaccurate reflection of the face of the girl? Why are the breasts dislocated? Why is her arm out of place? Etc., etc. To many a layman it seems as if the painter were inviting him into a crazy world—a world he cannot recognize, in which he cannot find his way around, where the warm, natural values of life are replaced by abstract, geometrical forms and concepts: a world without morals, and hence, without meaning.

This point was raised in a general way by the moderator. From the ensuing discussion there emerged a most important principle, namely, that it is necessary to look at this and other modern pictures with a fluid and sensitive imagination. This was brilliantly demonstrated by Meyer Schapiro, who held the Table spellbound by a verbal exposition of this picture.

"Our knowledge of the human body," said Dr. Schapiro, "is not only anatomical; there is also an image of the body which does not conform to the anatomist's picture and is full of distortions and strange relationships. When you have a toothache, for instance, one side of your face feels bigger than the other. Your so-called 'body image' changes. In a similar way, in fantasy, our conception of the bodies of others is affected by our feelings and desires."

It is this kind of personal, internal image that Picasso is portraying here. The girl is in a state of tension which is highly sensual in character—or, as Sir Leigh Ashton added, highly sexual. As an adolescent looking at herself in a mirror, she feels her awakening impulses, and the painter has sought to portray these, as they seem from the inside.

"In painting the girl before the mirror," said Dr. Schapiro, "Picasso proceeds from his intense feeling for the girl, whom he endows with a corresponding vitality. He paints the body contemplated, loved and self-contemplating. The vision of another's body becomes an intensely rousing and mysterious process. Picasso and other moderns have discovered for art the internality of the body, just as the Impressionists discovered blue shadows, which were at first a scandal.

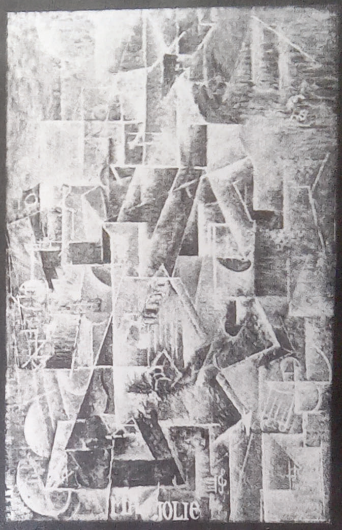
"Thus, the body is represented both from outside and within, and in the mirror is still another image of the body. I think that is a wonderful, magical, poetic idea, to show the human body which is ordinarily represented in one way—in its familiar surface form—as belonging to three different modes of experience, within one picture. I don't know of another painting in all history which does that.

"The woman outside the mirror is unbounded and her arm extends into the mirror image. The mirror is strongly enclosed but by orange and black, two colors which pull apart with an enormous tension. The face is lavender, and where normally there would be a shadow there is a brilliant yellow. This is an inversion of the expected relation of the overt and the hidden. The exposed profile is cool and pale and what is hidden and imagined, the unseen face, is an intense yellow, like a sun—a surprising and poetic idea. In the mirror the reflected lavender becomes richer and warmer. The vermilion and orange seem to grow out of it.

"The shapes, too, are forcefully contrasted and tied together. The repeated form of the breasts and of what we may take to be the womb, and the form at the elbow—the green circle—are all clearly related. The roundness of the face belongs with these circles. But in the face is also a moon crescent which occurs elsewhere on the body and there is a large contrast like that of the sun and moon in the relation of the real body and the mirrored body and indeed the moon has a reflected light. Whether the symbolism is deliberate, unconscious or accidental, I would not dare to say; it is at least a metaphor emerging for me.

"All these colors and shapes are powerfully stimulating to me. They are sustained and intensified by the background. In the body the main parts are distinctly rounded, while the background, like a stained-glass window, is made up of lozenges of brilliant color, each with a tiny circle. These contrasts and repetitions, so luxurious yet simple and clear, have a manifest purposiveness which to me is grand."

The question was raised as to whether Picasso really intended all these things. This question was, of course, unanswerable and was also regarded as irrelevant to the enjoyment of the picture. But it did bring forth a helpful criterion. As Dr. Greene put it, Dr. Schapiro's exposition of *Girl Before a Mirror* "makes sense *because it can be confirmed.*" One might not at first see all that Dr. Schapiro saw. But, said Dr. Greene, once Dr. Schapiro pointed out the things he saw, "any intelligent layman" could confirm them by looking at the picture. As a criterion for the validity of modern art this may be useful.



PICASSO: MA JOLIE

The discussion also embraced Picasso's *Ma Jolie* (*above*), a cubist picture from an earlier period. Like *Girl Before a Mirror*, it was rated as a very important painting, and several thought it the finer of the two. Said Mr. Greenberg, "It is one of the greatest masterpieces ever put on canvas."

Like the Rembrandt, *Ma Jolie* is a portrait, but its subject has been so thoroughly analyzed into lines and planes that it is no longer recognizable. It drew from Dr. Schapiro a defense of the intellectual in art.

"The intellectual is an important part of life. It may become a passion and has its own drama and beauty. Its qualities are as eligible for expression in art as the qualities of other aspects of experience. Some Renaissance painters were intoxicated by the vision of geometry as a kind of perfection. Just as mathematicians have a passionate delight in abstract relations, completeness and necessity, so certain artists express their love of order, exactitude, objectivity and the inventive play with forms by creating works which embody these qualities."



REMBRANDT: ST. BARTHOLOMEW

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MIRÓ: PERSON THROWING A STONE AT A BIRD



MATISSE: GOLDFISH AND SCULPTURE

ROUAULT: THREE JUDGES



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Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird



SWEENEY

THE three pictures already discussed were accepted by the Round Table as classics of their kind. But the large picture on the opposite page, Joan Miró's famous *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, which is usually classed as surrealism, aroused controversy. The Table was divided, both as to its esthetic merits and its stature as a work of art.

MODERATOR. "Sir Leigh, would you have a look at that Miró? What would you have to say about it?"

SIR LEIGH. "I wouldn't like to have a look at it. I don't like its color, and I don't think there is much else to it."

MR. SWEENEY. "There are a sufficient number of forms there to suggest an idea to me—a sort of lyric idea. Let's take the mood first. The mood is gay. The mood—"

SIR LEIGH. "I disagree. I think it is very somber."

MR. SWEENEY. "As an intellectual painter I do not think he stands on the same level as Picasso by any means. But as a lyrical painter I think he stands on a very high level, in the manner that a lyrical poet does—Blake's poems, for instance, and certain nursery rhymes. I think Miró represents something of that sort. In the subject matter, in content, I think he integrates the nursery rhyme, or child, or lyrical quality, just as thoroughly as Picasso relates sex—or, as I call it, voluptuousness—in the *Girl Before a Mirror*."

MODERATOR. "He integrates his lyrical quality with what?"

MR. SWEENEY. "With his means of expression—there is a communication of gaiety—hints of a foot, let us say, walking on the beach, on the sand, yellow sand."

MODERATOR. "Where is the foot?"

MR. SWEENEY. "That large white object at the end of the leg—which is simplified from a man with one eye to a human body with one leg."

MODERATOR. "Why did he do that?"

MR. SWEENEY. "It was his privilege. The man had much more interest in his foot, perhaps, than anything else, except the stone he was throwing at the bird. The foot is increased in volume because it is more important, much as a Christ Child may be exaggerated in size in a medieval painting.

"I think this painting is like a simple rhyme with a hint of universality. Let us go further and say that there is a sense of the terrifying—a little animal, a little bird. There is a certain nature poetry like that of a child who takes pleasure in throwing a stone at a bird and gets a great sense of importance out of slapping his foot on the ground. What interests me primarily is the sensorial stimulus that I get and the organization of the various elements into a unity. These make a composition on a flat surface that is satisfying to the eye, ties up with the content and gives you a unity which is restful—and, to me, pleasing, amusing, lyrical."

MR. FRANKFURTER. "I am interested in and I like the picture, too, but for somewhat different reasons. First, because it shocks me into being interested; secondly, because I am curious to know its title. Without the title you would not know what it was. I think it is a cartoon, a very high form of cartoon in the sense that Bosch and Breughel were cartoonists."

SIR LEIGH. "What alarms me, apart from anything else, and apart from my personal dislike, is that it is so frightfully badly painted. The sky is put on in a manner a child would be spanked for."

MR. MAYOR. "But it does show a sweep of wind and atmosphere."

MR. TAYLOR. "I think it is a very witty picture. I think all Miró's things are witty. I have never seen a Miró that I disliked. I enjoy them all and think them a lot of fun."

DR. GREENE. "May I make a comment? I wonder how many would agree—probably no one here—that Miró expresses a kind of infantilism. I would grant that it is authentic and is a sincere expression, also a skillful expression. I happen to like children. But I think there is a limit to how much time I want to spend in conversation with a one-year-old."

Goldfish and Sculpture



DUTHUIT

THE picture at bottom left on the opposite page is, like the Picassos on the previous pages, one of the acknowledged classics of modern art. Henri Matisse painted it in 1911 at a time when Impressionism had given way to the revolution of the *fauves* and cubists. Yet, as Mr. Duthuit pointed out, *Goldfish and Sculpture* is strongly influenced by the Impressionists as well as by the ideas of formal organization advanced about 1880 by Paul Cézanne. These influences are to be discerned in the intricate balance of colors and in the arrangement of the solid objects (curtain, nude, fishbowl, vase, etc.) which pull the observer's eye toward the center of the canvas and give a feeling of depth to the surrounding space. These objects have been divested of all their qualities of photographic realism in order to heighten the formal and linear character that gives them meaning in relation to the composition of the picture as a whole.

MR. DUTHUIT. ". . . Matisse is also the beginning of something, and it should be interesting to see how far he has been followed and if anything has been added to him. . . . Where people used to believe that this painting—painted around 1911—had brutal colors, now they find something exquisite. The main problem of Matisse has changed. It has been fundamentally a problem of space, of position, of objects, bodies in space, and there I could see an enormous difference between his approach to the outside world and that of his predecessors who compared what he did to the Impressionists and their three-dimensional space. A painting like that came a few years after he absorbed the theories of the Impressionists."

As Mr. Duthuit hinted above, paintings like *Goldfish and Sculpture* have been enormously influential on the whole subsequent generation of modern artists who, like Matisse, are apt to consider the subject matter of their paintings purely as elements in a pictorial organization.

Three Judges



MORTIMER

GEORGES ROUAULT'S *Three Judges*, also a classic of modern art, belongs to the category of "expressionism," where human passion often takes precedence over formal organization. Whether the quality of passion or the quality of formal organization is the fundamental thing that gives the *Three Judges* significance was the subject of a controversy.

MR. MORTIMER. "Some people seem to find a great deal to comment on with regard to human feeling, behavior and even voluptuousness in the Picasso (*Girl Before a Mirror*). But to me it is the Rouault that expresses an artist's response to human beings and to society. It is very powerful, satirical. I think that it is not at all accidental that the painter is a devout, if somewhat unorthodox Catholic. He obviously has a horror of the modern world, a brutal disgust with human injustice. I imagine that that makes the picture easier to approach for the layman. How far this horror goes in increasing one's enjoyment of the picture, I am not sure. I think eventually that what one goes on enjoying in the picture are the emotional qualities caused by the formal values in it. On the other hand I should probably go on getting from it occasionally a certain spasm of horror and begin to think of Dreyfus, Sacco and Vanzetti and the harshness inherent in human society."

MODERATOR. "Does that add to the importance of the picture?"

MR. MORTIMER. "I think it is not the essence of the picture. I think the formal qualities of the picture are what make it go—as it were, the engine. This sense of horror is part of what the engine pulls. And I think that is true of the great pictures of the past."

MR. HUXLEY. "Couldn't you say the social content is one of the things the painter harmonizes in the unification he imposes on the picture by his composition."

MODERATOR. "In other words, the painter reaches out beyond painting itself and harmonizes certain elements in that outer field with the painting?"

MR. HUXLEY. "Yes."

Sam A. Lewisohn, the owner of the Rouault, was present at the Table as an observer. "I think Rouault is a great painter," said Mr. Lewisohn, "because he has a great feeling for the epic. This picture is really a morality play, and those figures are symbols—Mr. Bluster, Mr. Venality and Mr. Complacency. The forms make a beautiful pattern, but this is incidental to the conviction. I think the forms are the more satisfying because they are incidental. It is the conviction that gives this picture importance."

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	Tomkins	IV.C.53

Young American Extremists



GREENBERG

THESE pictures done by young American painters were discussed at the Round Table. Most of them are regarded in modern art circles as typical, interesting, and promising, and they were all given serious attention. The discussion revolving around them, however, was notable for its lack of reliable standards of evaluation. While one or another member of the Table liked or disliked this or that one, few were able to state with any clarity the reasons for their likes and dislikes, or to reach agreement on the standards by which they drew their conclusions. Had a typical layman been present, he would have been tempted to conclude that this was a rather good illustration of the vagueness and subjectivity of most contemporary art criticism. Even more curiously, there was, in the discussion about these pictures, a complete breakdown of the unpredictable attitudes that on most other questions had divided the Round Table more or less sharply into moderates and modern art enthusiasts. With regard to these pictures, enthusiasts disagreed among themselves; so did moderates.

Baziotes' *The Dwarf* aroused immediate controversy. Mr. Frankfurter (tending toward the moderate position) thought it was derivative, and that it was "an example of our greatest problem in interpreting a growing art movement to the public," and that it, along with the other pictures shown here, "does represent one very large and important direction of American painting." Mr. Greenberg (enthusiast) dismissed it unequivocally as bad art, "academic in color," and with drawing that "is rather helpless in relation to the whole canvas." Mr. Soby (enthusiast) on the other hand said, "I think it has a very adroit and sensitive handling of color . . . a kind of over-all cohesive pattern. There is a jagged contour which overflows, which sets up a kind of rhythm through the picture, and which I like very much."



FRANKFURTER

Stamos' *Sounds in the Rock* was thought by Soby to be representative of a present tendency among American painters to return to nature for inspiration. This tendency he found to be characteristic not only of contemporary American but contemporary British painting, indicating a shift from mechanical to natural subject matter. "I think it is a strong current," he observed. Mr. Taylor (moderate) flatly said he disliked it. Mr. Duthuit (enthusiast) said, "It doesn't convey anything to me. I think it is academic." Sir Leigh Ashton (moderate), on the other hand, said, "I think it is a rather good painting. I like it." Mr. Sawyer said, "I think Stamos has a personal and rather sensitive vision. I admit it is a rather limited vision. I like it. He is a pleasant painter in a very limited idiom." Mr. Sweeney (enthusiast) found it "dull, reworked and chewed over."

Gottlieb's *Vigil* also had its champions and its detractors. Mr. Greenberg (enthusiast) liked it and Mr. Taylor (moderate) thought it was "very nice." Sir Leigh Ashton didn't think it was a painting at all. "It has no surface quality of any kind," he explained. He thought it might be more bearable if it were reduced in size and presented as a small woodcut. Dr. Greene (moderate) stigmatized it as "an academic picture in the worst sense." Mr. Huxley (moderate) said, "It could be cut into pieces, and every one would be quite independent of the others."

Pollock's *Cathedral* was championed by Mr. Greenberg who thought it a first-class example of Pollock's work, and one of the best paintings recently produced in this country. Mr. Duthuit said, "I find it quite lovely. It is new to me. I would never think of Beethoven, rather of a contemporary composer playing on his sensations." Sir Leigh Ashton said, "It seems to me exquisite in tone and quality. It would make a most enchanting printed silk. But I cannot see why it is called the *Cathedral*. It is exquisitely painted and the color is ravishing, but I do not think it has structural design."



TAYLOR

Mr. Taylor found it "very lovely." Mr. Huxley was less impressed. Said he, "It raises a question of why it stops when it does. The artist could go on forever. (Laughter) I don't know. It seems to me like a panel for a wallpaper which is repeated indefinitely around the wall." Mr. Frankfurter said he was no admirer of Pollock but thought this work remarkably good if compared with a lot of abstract painting that is being turned out nowadays. Mr. Sweeney thought it had "spontaneity," "freedom," "expression," "sense of textured surface" and "linear organization." Mr. Mayor remarked, "I suspect any picture I think I could have made myself." Dr. Greene said it left him completely cold and seemed "a pleasant design for a necktie."



SOBY

DeKooning's *Painting*, 1948 (painted entirely in black and white) found its champions mainly in Mr. Sweeney and Mr. Greenberg. Said Mr. Sweeney: "I am not familiar with DeKooning's work, really, but I admire greatly the organization of this picture, its variety within the compositional unity. I am never thrown out of a corner or left in an empty spot on the canvas, the way I am in this painting over here (the Baziotes). I think the color contrasts are related to the shapes, the linear shapes, and to the suggestion of three-dimensional shapes in the space of the canvas. I feel that it may be a crowd, a group of heads. It may not be. I do not know what the title is, and the title would not make me like the picture any better."

When the moderator inquired as to what Mr. DeKooning was trying to say, Mr. Greenberg replied that he thought Mr. DeKooning was wrestling with his fears, but that this overtone of foreboding and anxiety was not the most important aspect of the picture. "The emotion in that picture," continued Mr. Greenberg, "reminds me of all emotion. It is like a Beethoven quartet where you can't specify what the emotion is but are profoundly stirred nevertheless."

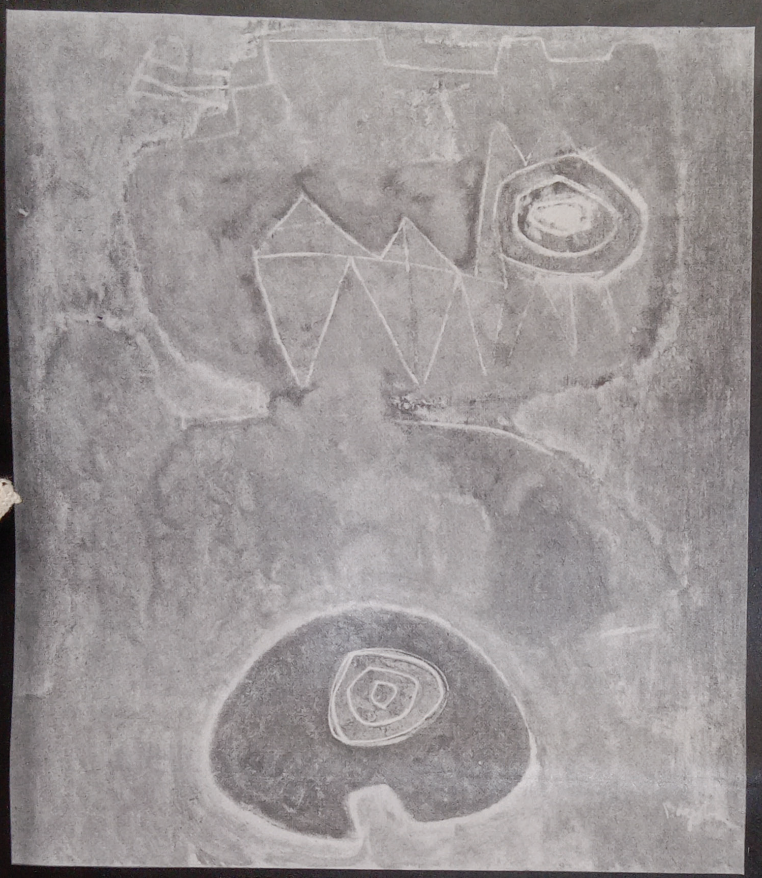
Adding all these impressions up, the layman might justifiably conclude that whatever the values of modern art, the precise determination of them is a matter fraught with a great many difficulties. The critics, at any rate, leave us in confusion.



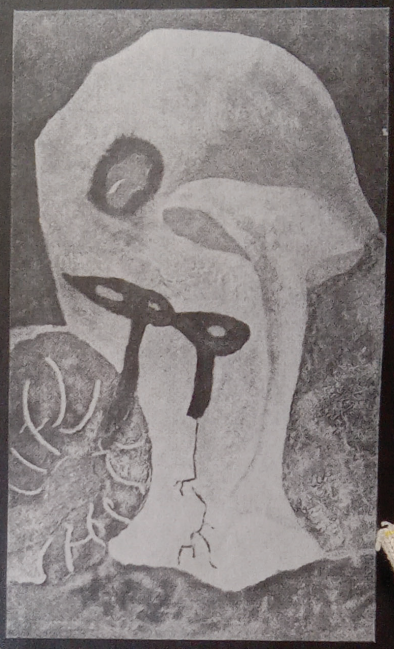
WILLIAM DeKOONING: PAINTING, 1948

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WILLIAM BAZIOTES: THE DWARF



STAMOS: SOUNDS IN THE ROCK



JACKSON POLLOCK: CATHEDRAL



ADOLF GOTTLIEB: VIGIL

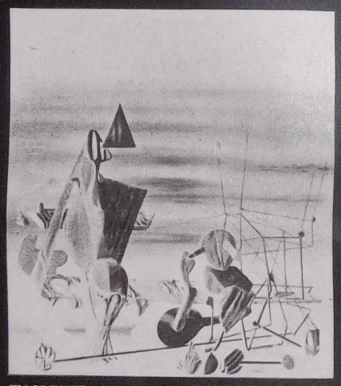
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Surrealism

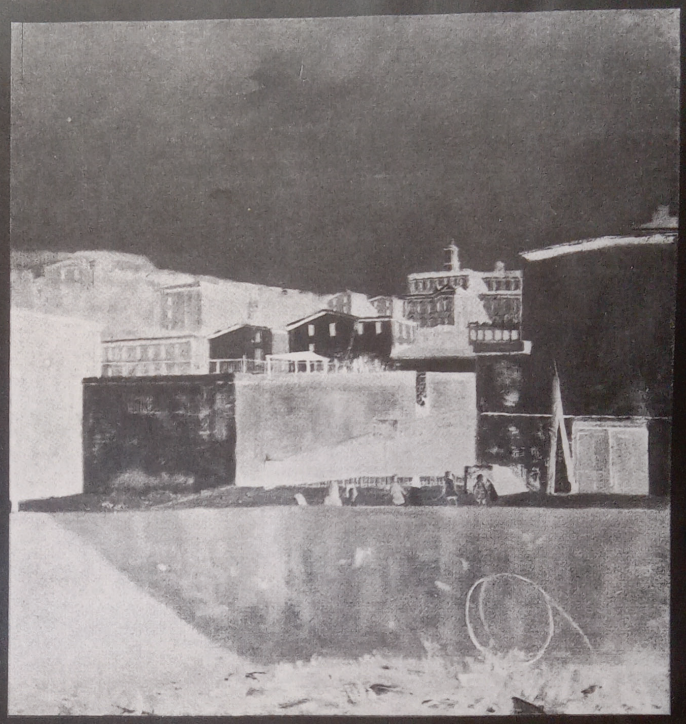
In considering the field of surrealist art, the Round Table made some rather interesting distinctions which are illustrated by the two pictures below. Tanguy's *Slowly Toward the North* was generally regarded as a far superior picture in every way to Salvador Dali's *Spain*. The main reason for this distinction, as explained by Messrs. Sweeney and Frankfurter, is that the dream symbols painted by Tanguy are original and obviously the product of Tanguy's own experience, whereas those painted by Dali are hackneyed and look as though they had come out of a book of Renaissance drawings. The Dali was also criticized by Mr. Sweeney for its "machine finish." Mr. Sweeney also thought that a great many of its shortcomings arose from compromises Dali had made with popular taste. Sir Leigh Ashton was even more emphatic, describing the Dali as "a smart-aleck piece of nonsense from a paint point of view—one of the most disgusting surfaces I have ever seen."



TANGUY: SLOWLY TOWARD NORTH



DALI: SPAIN



STUEMPFIG: MANAYUNK

Romanticism

Manayunk is a typical painting by the American romantic painter Walter Stuempfig and was introduced during discussion as an example of contemporary representational art. It was reproduced in LIFE Sept. 20. Most of the Round Table agreed that it is an admirable and interesting painting. Mr. Mortimer described it as "well composed, beautifully handled and very refined in color." Mr. Frankfurter pointed out that, though the picture is quite representational, it shows the influence of the teachings of abstraction, being so well composed that you could eliminate its realistic detail by turning it upside down and still have a good picture.



GRAVES: LITTLE KNOWN BIRD OF THE INNER EYE

Mysticism

Morris Graves's *Little Known Bird of the Inner Eye* (*above*) was remarkable in that it drew appreciation from both the enthusiasts and the moderates. Graves, who lives in the Pacific Northwest, paints rather enigmatic pictures depicting a private, mystical, dreamlike world of his own. He is a charming colorist and, according to Mr. Soby, "an original and incisive artist." Mr. Frankfurter found him "in his own special and rather private, poetic way a very competent artist," representing "that whole body of artists who have turned to other than the conventional forms of Western art for sources of inspiration." Sir Leigh was also an admirer.

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	Tomkins	IV.C.53

MODERN ART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56

this would be a sign that painting had become academic. The very essence of the modern movement is variety. Nevertheless on one point the Table was unanimous. It did not accept—indeed it denounced—the easy generalization that the layman is inclined to make, that anything exhibiting the characteristics already mentioned, unrecognizability and strangeness, is to be dismissed out of hand. There were "modern" pictures that the "conservatives" admired; and on the other hand there were "conservative" pictures to which the "radicals" at the Table gave at least partial approval. The question of the familiarity of subject matter, in other words, was not accepted as the issue. Deeper and more complex questions were involved.

I. The Esthetic Experience

FOR the purposes of discussion the moderator took the position of the "ordinary layman" who is intelligently interested in painting. There was some objection to the concept of the "layman." Kirk Askew, New York art dealer, maintained that there is really no such thing. He said that anyone who does not actually paint is a layman, and that since no painter was present all the members of the Table were such. A number agreed. Nevertheless the moderator stuck to his position. In his view the members of the panel possessed an expert knowledge of painting which the average person who steps into a gallery does not have. Moreover they possessed a certain attitude, which, as the discussion proceeded, emerged as a key to the whole problem. This attitude was one of *seeking an experience* in the picture one is looking at. As Clement Greenberg, the *avantgarde* critic, put it: "Painting cannot be learned from a textbook or from anyone else's words but only through experience. The layman has to learn to look not for ideas but for experience first, in any picture."

Such experience, which can best be called the "esthetic experience," differs radically from the experiences of ordinary life. It may be humorous or sad, gay or tragic, trivial or philosophical; but it conveys these familiar emotions and moods in a less personalized way than that in which we usually experience them. It leads outward, so to speak, to a larger world, even to the moral and spiritual cosmos itself. It is productive of a certain pleasure, subtle but intense, which defies analysis in words. Said Aldous Huxley when asked to define it:

"It is a terribly difficult problem. I think it starts with a direct sensuous pleasure. But I think it is probably more than that. You will find in Catholic and I think in Hindu thinking, too, the statement that the esthetic experience is an analogue of the mystical experience; that it gives a real insight into the basic nature of things. We do definitely feel that the contemplation of a perfectly successful and harmonious work of art is of an order superior to direct sensuous pleasure.

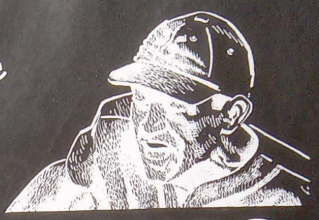
"It may be that the actual experiencing of this requires, to start with, a certain detachment. The artist has got to be able to look at things, not as things useful to him in practical life but as things relatable in an esthetic whole. And the spectator has got to make the same sacrifice. A person who looks at a Titian solely because it represents a naked woman is not getting the full content of the picture.

"I have always imagined that the reason we are appealed to by a beautifully composed picture is that in some curious way it tells us about the nature of the world. And this, I think, passes up from the purely physiological into the intellectual and the spiritual world. It is not the subject matter, but the whole unification and harmonization of elements, *including* the subject matter, which actually forms values and becomes, in a sense, a kind of apocalypse or revelation of the universe."

Now the importance of understanding the esthetic experience lies in the fact that the observer who is not open to it is sure to look for the wrong things in a work of art. This becomes most evident in connection with the whole argument regarding "non-representational" art—that is, art that does not depict recognizable objects and figures. The layman must learn to look *at the picture*

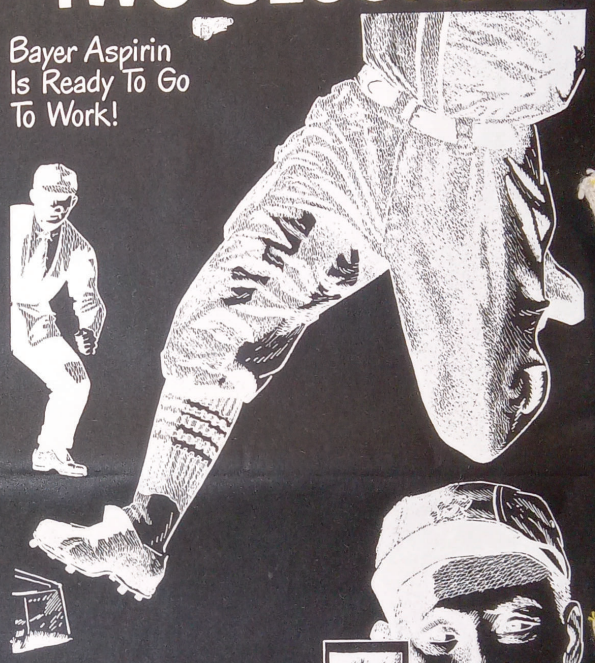
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and not at what the picture is supposed to represent. Sir Leigh Ashton put the matter succinctly: "After all, painters have always sought to make an object. Very often they have taken a *subject* too; but if only this mythical layman could be persuaded instead of looking at the subject to look at the object [that is, the painting itself], he might then be able to appreciate these rather difficult pictures."

One of the prerequisites of the esthetic experience is goodwill. Said James J. Sweeney, noted author and lecturer: "I think that in our discussion of the layman there has been only one type of layman discussed, the hostile layman. But there is also a potentially sympathetic layman who should be encouraged. We are talking of the person of goodwill who is willing to go to the painters to find out what they are doing."

But also, every member of the panel was emphatic that the layman must *look at a lot of pictures*. Long and patient observation of paintings, both ancient and modern, is necessary. Said Hyatt Mayor: "I remember the first Cézannes that I saw in my early 20s. I neither liked nor disliked them. I simply could not read them. I could not tell what was Madame Cézanne, or a hill or an apple. But nowadays, of course, Cézanne seems, like his master Poussin, right in the middle of a great tradition of painting."

This process of self-education can be greatly advanced by the illuminating analysis of competent critics. The panel itself was provided with an example of this in the brilliant performance of Columbia's Meyer Schapiro, who undertook to expound his own esthetic experience with regard to Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*. There is a digest of what Dr. Schapiro said on page 59; the essence of it was that *Girl Before a Mirror* represents not merely the external appearance of the body but the body as imagined and felt from within. It was Dr. Schapiro's point that an observer who comes to this picture looking merely for the anatomical image is bound to miss its meaning. And for many members of the Table his approach shed new light on the picture.

It was thus shown that a painting may conceal many levels of meaning, and that the layman who dismisses such a painting at first glance on the grounds that it is distorted and apparently crazy is depriving himself of an inspiring experience. Said Georges Duthuit: "I consider it impossible for an artist, as long as he is sincere, not to express a truth of some sort about himself or the outside world." But as pointed out by Francis Taylor, all this has nothing to do with whether or not one *likes* the picture. It is quite possible to understand the picture and still dislike it. What the Table warned against was disliking it before understanding it.

Said Charles Sawyer of Yale: "One thing we need to say to the layman is that this process of appreciating a single picture is not a momentary process. It is a question of evolution in the individual. I remember my first reaction to *Girl Before a Mirror* was one of active worry and dislike. It seemed to me strident in color, rather blatant. But now I have seen it for 15 years and my attitude and vision have changed in that period. Today that picture is very satisfying to me."

"Recognition" is unnecessary

THE nature of the esthetic experience was even more pointedly illustrated by the discussion of Picasso's *Ma Jolie* (*p. 59*). This masterpiece of cubism, painted in 1911-12, is apt to leave the layman cold because it takes flight almost entirely from the recognizable world. Yet sentiment at the Table ran rather strongly to the effect that it is a better picture than *Girl Before a Mirror*. Mr. Greenberg likened it to a Velasquez, and many agreed. Aldous Huxley preferred it to *Girl Before a Mirror*. Said Dr. Taylor, who had been "bored" by *Girl Before a Mirror*, "I think *Ma Jolie* is a very beautiful picture, and I like it enormously. But I haven't the foggiest idea of what it means."

The nature of the esthetic experience in relation to this picture was skillfully indicated by Mr. Sweeney: "I look at the *Ma Jolie* with a primarily sensuous approach. The color and the formation both have appeal for me. I have a physical, neural, sensuous response. I enjoy the color of it, as I enjoy the color of *Girl Before a Mirror*, but quite differently, in quite a different mood of enjoyment. Possibly there was a different mood in the creation of them. I am sure there was because the difference is evident in the careful, scrupulous delineations of the *Ma Jolie*, the free handling, the running rhythms of *Girl Before a Mirror*. In the latter there is a curved contour line with a certain voluptuousness. In the *Ma Jolie* there is a careful, architectonic organization of similar similes, let us say, similar form-similes of the human being. For me, there is austerity in its sharp-edged forms. I would personally prefer the *Ma Jolie* as a painting.

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The entire discussion about this picture underlined the point that the layman who looks for "recognizability" first is looking for the wrong thing. This was dramatically illustrated by an interchange between Dr. Greene, Yale's eminent philosopher, and Mr. Taylor.

MR. TAYLOR. "Can't it be reduced to a simple question the layman should ask? 'What does this picture mean to me? If it means nothing, is it my fault or the artist's?' "

MODERATOR. "In the case of the *Ma Jolie* which would it be?"

MR. TAYLOR. "I think it depends on the individual."

DR. GREENE. "Surely, Mr. Taylor, you would say in this case that a layman who gets nothing out of this picture is not on a par with those at this table who get a great deal?"

MR. TAYLOR. "Yes, I think the layman would be at fault. I think the layman should have enough intellectual honesty to admit it and find out wherein he is at fault."

Mr. Sweeney took a tolerant view. "There are first-level artists," he said, "and second-level artists. There are first-level observers and second-level observers. They can profit according to their capabilities. What we have been urging is that the observer on the lower level make what effort he can to come to a fuller enjoyment, a deeper appreciation of modern art—and in that way enrich his psychological, his spiritual world."

The conservative view

BUT there is another side to this question which came up suddenly when the panel turned to the consideration of Rouault's *Three Judges* (*page 60*). This picture had been loaned to the Table by the well-known collector, Sam A. Lewisohn, and Mr. Lewisohn had come to listen to the discussion. It was not long before he was on his feet.

MR. LEWISOHN. "Mr. Chairman, may a layman break into the looking glass?"

MODERATOR. "Certainly, Mr. Lewisohn. Go right ahead."

MR. LEWISOHN. "I am one of those who very much prefer to start with a recognizable subject matter. For instance, to use an analogy, I don't think Winston Churchill's words would be as interesting to me if they had not been used to serve a great cause. I think the conviction is an important element in a painting. But I am convinced that the technique and the structure should be *incidental* to carrying out a deep feeling. I do not think you get a satisfying picture by avoiding life. The form should be an implementation of some conviction regarding life."

MODERATOR. "Would you agree with that, Mr. Greenberg?"

MR. GREENBERG. "No, simply on the score of experience. Titian is not remembered on the basis of his subject matter."

MR. LEWISOHN. "I did not mean that subject matter makes pictures surpassing. But in order to make beautiful forms you should start with a conviction about the subject matter."

MR. GREENBERG. "I don't like that picture [the Rouault] very much—not because of the subject matter but because I don't find it well organized. I think there is something rather dull about it. I'm sorry, Mr. Lewisohn!"

MR. LEWISOHN. "Oh, it's all a question of taste. There are distinguished painters who do not like Picasso's color. I don't like Picasso's color."

At this point James Soby of the Modern Museum opened the way to a partial agreement: "I think this Rouault is a superb image, one of the very great images of our time. My quarrel with the discussion about it is that I do not see why, because we admire it, as I do, we therefore have to dismiss the Picasso cubist picture as not being equally valid."

Dr. Greene followed this up: "We all want to defend the Picasso abstraction against a sweeping condemnation. That is perfectly clear. But it seems to me we should be equally concerned to defend what is distinctive about Rouault. Isn't your layman's question this: 'Why can't modern painters *also* treat of subject matters that would permit them to make significant comments upon life?' "

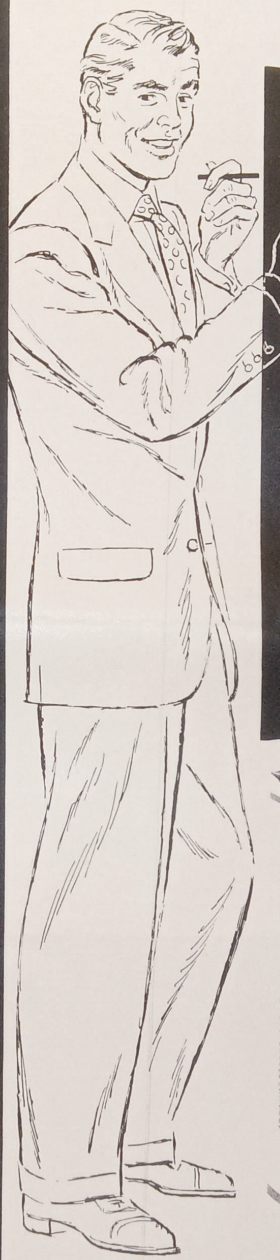
MR. SWEENEY. "Who has denied that they should? I said they certainly have a right to do it, and I think they have a right to choose their own type of expression. But that is just the point. I do not think that because some subject matter may seem a little difficult to the layman the artist should be prohibited from choosing it."

DR. GREENE. "I am trying to defend the distinctive kind of importance that attaches to art like Rouault's, *as well as* the distinctive kind of importance that attaches to work like *Ma Jolie*. We tend to shuttle from one extreme to the other."

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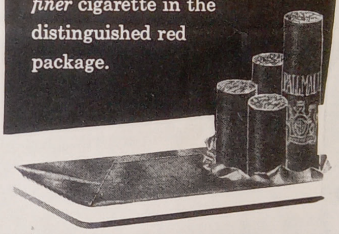
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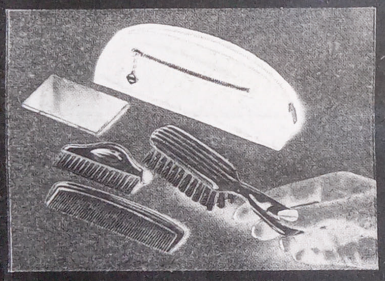
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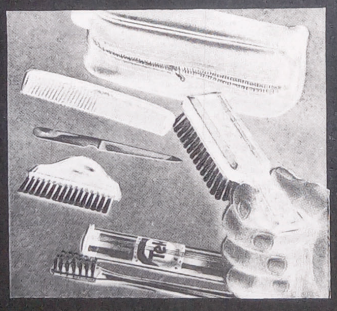


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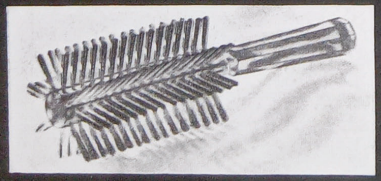
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MR. SWEENEY. "I agree. I admire the Rouault too."

The Table thus set the problem upon a broad base. The subject matter of a picture *may* be obscure, but it does not *have* to be. Alfred Frankfurter, editor and publisher of *Art News*, asked to have some representational work shown and was presented with several examples, including *Manayunk* by Walter Stuempfig (*p. 64*). "I asked to have these pictures shown," Mr. Frankfurter said, "to prove that there are modern representational paintings which have absorbed the teachings of the progressive artists but which are nevertheless—in the abused phrase—intelligible to our layman. To me this Stuempfig is a poetic, personal vision of the world."

Mr. Frankfurter was supported in his estimate of the Stuempfig by Raymond Mortimer: "It is a very good piece of painting. I don't say that it is an important picture, but it is flawlessly composed, beautifully handled and refined in color."

Thus, while insisting that the serious layman must open himself to the possibilities inherent in nonrepresentational painting, the Round Table also acknowledged the value of representational work. Mr. Janson made a neat summary: "Every valid work of art represents the response of the artist to his total experience as a living man. The cubist Picasso draws to the same extent on outside associations as the Rouault. It just happens to be a rather different kind of reality."

What the Table had to say to the layman on this subject may be summarized in the following four points:

1. The layman should guard against his own natural inclination to condemn a picture just because he is unable to identify its subject matter in his ordinary experience.
2. He should, however, be equally on guard against the assumption that a painting that is recognizable in ordinary experience is no good. He should not fall a victim to the kind of academicism that insists upon obscurity for its own sake.
3. He should look devotedly at the picture, rather than at himself, or at any aspect of his environment. The picture must speak. If it conveys nothing to him, then he should remember that the fault may be in him, not in the artist.
4. Even though he does not in general like nonrepresentational painting, this open-minded attitude will very much increase the layman's enjoyment of artistic works, ancient or modern.

II. The Difficulty of Modern Art

YET even when the layman manages to achieve the receptive attitude toward modern art upon which the Round Table insisted, he is apt to feel at a loss as to where or how to go about "understanding" it. It was Mr. Frankfurter who put his finger on one of the big difficulties. The Round Table, he pointed out, could not hope to review the whole body of modern art; it had to concentrate upon its greatest masters. Yet the average layman is not always confronted with masters. When he goes to a show or a gallery he is faced with "the legion of inferior followers —or in some cases excellent followers—of these great men." These followers are constantly influenced by the art magazines and other media, but often in such a way that they misunderstand the inner qualities of the great paintings that influence them. "I think," said Mr. Frankfurter, "that perhaps at no point in the history of art has there been so conscious a pattern of style imposed everywhere in the world by people who have only half-understood, or a quarter-understood, the meaning of what the great masters and innovators have done." Even the works of the young Americans shown on page 63 failed to win the unanimous approval of the Round Table. Yet these are well above the average of what the layman usually encounters in a run-of-the-mill show. There is reason therefore for his confusion about modern art.

Mr. Huxley made the same important point: "May it not be possible that a great many of our objections to what we call 'modern art' are objections to masses of work without talent? Coming through on the train yesterday, I stopped for some hours in Chicago and went to the Art Institute, where there was a large show of contemporary abstract painting. I must confess that the great mass of it seemed to me singularly lacking in talent. There are thousands of paintings made and, as we can see if we study any period of art, the number of bad artists vastly exceeds the good ones."

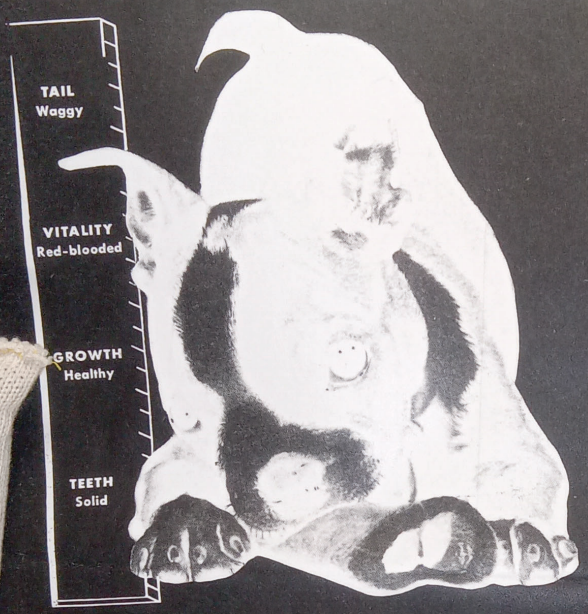
Mr. Taylor went so far as to complain of "rackets" in art circles,

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saying that he believed certain artists and certain styles are promoted by those who have an interest in them, at the expense of the public. Challenged by most of the Table, he explained: "What I want to do is to get rid of the prestige of the second-rate. There are second-rate hangers-on who have a prestige simply because they are artists."

But there is an equal and opposite force at work in modern art which further confuses the layman, and this is the emphasis on originality, on individualism. Within the influence of a given style each painter strives for a unique expression, an idiom all of his own. This key point was emphasized by Dr. Greene. "The modern artist," he said, "feels compelled to develop his own highly individual idiom. But he does not do this out of sheer cussedness. He does it because he feels compelled to express life accurately as he sees it from a highly individualistic point of view. And why does he see it from a highly individualistic point of view? Because we are living in a highly individualistic age.

"Now there is nothing you can do about that directly. You have got to try to build a community, and as you build a community you will get a common language and common beliefs. Then you will get art that communicates itself more easily."

All these points were summarized with a deft touch by Mr. Mortimer: "The danger is that we have lived in a time dominated by a few men of extraordinary imaginative power, like Matisse, Picasso and Braque. Greatly as I admire them I think their effect on their contemporaries and juniors has been catastrophic. To distort before you can represent is like trying to dance before you can walk. We all know that Picasso and Matisse can represent superbly if they choose. But instead of learning to do this, many young painters attempt at once to project their imaginative vision. It would be much better if they would go and examine nature. Eventually they might develop a vision of their own, as Picasso, Matisse and Braque have—and that would be splendid. But the academic work of the followers of those great artists seems to me very dull on the whole. They had much better go back to nature, as Stuempfig has. His is an honest, well-thought-out work.

"Looking around the room at these lovely pictures yesterday, I thought to myself, 'If the Museum of Modern Art offered me one to take home to England, which would I take?' Several of my friends said they would choose the Braque [*Woman with a Mandolin*, *p. 75*], and others the Picasso [*Ma Jolie*]. But I would choose the Matisse [*p. 60*], and I think one reason is that it was painted before 1914. The Braque reflects, to some extent, the horrible things that have happened to us, particularly in Europe—things poisonous to modern art.

"You haven't got in the Matisse the broad interest in humanity, the real humanism that you get in the Renaissance masters or in Rembrandt. But it reflects an intense and valuable pleasure in women, flowers, fish, the sensuous world. We are infected by that picture with a delight in the surroundings. What a rich and contagious response to life it gives! Compare this with the rather frightened escape into the exploration of texture which we were asked to criticize [the Pollock, *p. 63*]. It is painful for us, coming from abroad, to be asked to give snap judgments on paintings unfamiliar to us. But I don't mind giving a snap judgment on *that* picture [the Baziotes, *p. 63*]. It seems to me horrible."

The abuse of symbols

YET there is a further difficulty inherent in modern art, which perhaps tops them all. This has to do with the modern artist's use, or misuse, of symbols.

A symbol is an object or an image that is intended by the artist directly to represent a whole field of reality. Its creation is perhaps the highest artistic act, and it is by no means wholly a conscious act. Great symbols grow; and moreover they grow not only out of the man but, so to speak, out of his being, out of his society, his race, his times.

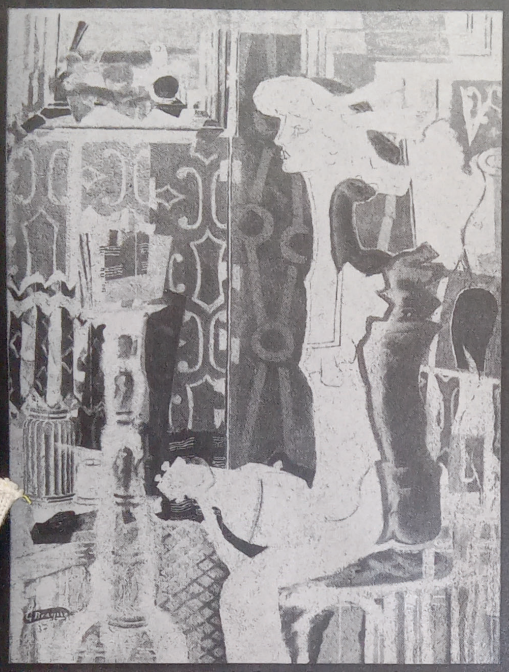
Now one of the leading characteristics of modern art, derived directly from its great emphasis on individualism, is that the symbols have become increasingly *private*. And this sometimes raises almost insuperable difficulties for the observer. Said Mr. Huxley: "In literature you see people using strictly private symbols, which, in the nature of things, nobody else can know about—until you get to complete incomprehension. Tolstoy is perfectly right in saying that art is, among other things, *communication*. When we get to the point of destroying communication by using private symbolism, what about it?"

Said Mr. Taylor: "It seems to me the crux of the situation is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 73

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WOMAN WITH A MANDOLIN, by Georges Braque, was chosen by several as the picture they would "most like to have" of those shown. Mr. Mortimer, however, saw in it the cultural heritage of World War I, chose Matisse (*p. 60*).

MODERN ART CONTINUED

communicability. I think we are up against a situation where private pictures are being produced for public exhibition. *The extent of the privacy of the communication is the measure by which the public will accept or reject the work of art and the artist himself.*"

As an illustration of what he meant by "communicability"—though not in terms of symbols—Mr. Taylor cited an experience at the New York Metropolitan: "Two or three years ago the museum put on an exhibition of William S. Mount. He was a mid-19th Century painter who lived on Long Island—one of the offshoots of the Hudson River group of naturalists. We did not give a great deal of publicity to it. But we suddenly saw a new audience, and in very large numbers. They were bank clerks, salesmen, Long Island and Hudson River Yankees, and I don't think they had ever set foot in the museum before. They came in droves—and we haven't seen them since.

"Now, my feeling is that that particular group of people, who were not professional art lovers or gallery-goers, came in search of something with which they themselves were familiar."

MR. GREENBERG. "I think those people who came only because the pictures were concerned with locales they knew showed a reprehensible attitude toward art. But they had never even taken the trouble to come to look at the old masters in the Metropolitan. You can't cater to that attitude."

MR. TAYLOR. "Says who, Mr. Greenberg, their attitude wasn't right? Fifty thousand people is a lot of people."

MR. GREENBERG. "Are we going to judge truth by quantity and sheer mass?"

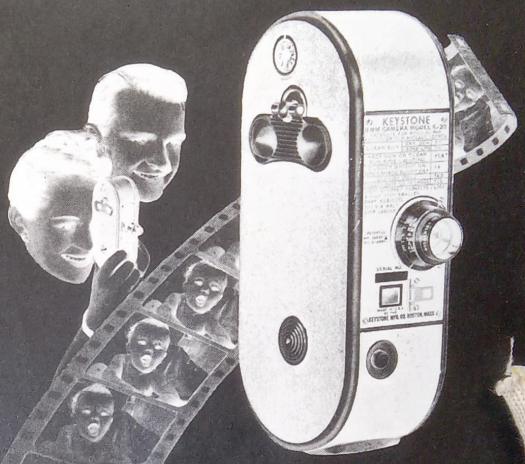
MODERATOR. "Doesn't that indicate, Mr. Greenberg, that the public feels a need for symbols and other elements in art that they can identify as having something to do with their lives?"

MR. GREENBERG. "I think you can find symbols in Chinese art, which happens to be very popular in the West, which are also unintelligible to the Western spectator, who may enjoy the picture on other grounds and enjoy it adequately."

Dr. Schapiro brought out an entirely different side of this question. Said he: "I want to say something about the privacy of symbolism, of which Mr. Huxley spoke. I believe it is not paradoxical

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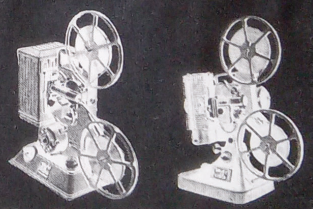
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to say that it is precisely because the symbols are *not* completely legible that we value them. That is to say, we recognize the authenticity of certain paintings in their *strangeness*—precisely because the symbols cannot be readily communicated."

MR. TAYLOR. "Who are 'we'?"

DR. SCHAPIRO. "I am referring to myself and to those who like certain types of modern pictures. We are suspicious of the paintings of Dali, for example, because we *recognize* the symbols. We are able to say, 'This came out of a book; this does not represent a real experience.' In the privacy of the symbolism there is a guarantee of its validity. We ourselves have experienced, within our own dreams and thoughts, unexplained things which surprise us. We therefore say when we encounter such things in a painting, 'This artist is genuine; he has really been able to utilize those experiences for painting.'"

To this Mr. Frankfurter countered: "Symbolism is a strange thing. I do think that the validity of a symbol will come out, as Dr. Schapiro has suggested. But I also think that by giving license to every kind of private symbol, every kind of private experience, as the basis for a style, we are setting up a real cult of unintelligibility—unintelligible even to the followers of the school who practice it. And I believe that the alternative to that is to be found in painters such as I pointed to this morning (*e.g.* Steumpfig), who used a more recognizable image form into which they incorporate their dreams, their sense for the abstracting of the natural world, and many other elements."

Thus the debate about symbolism led to the very heart of the problem. Mr. Frankfurter maintained that it is permissible to speak of *degrees of intelligibility;* that some symbols, and hence some pictures, are more easily understood than others. And his contention was that the artist should strive, within the limits of his own vision, his resources, his conscience and other factors, to work in the direction of intelligibility; that only thus could modern art become acceptable to the public and achieve the kind of cultural validity that its critics demand. Mr. Frankfurter's approach was shared to some extent by Aldous Huxley, on the grounds that art must be able to "communicate"; and also by Sir Leigh, Mr. Taylor and others.

Mr. Sweeney, on the other hand, while offering no objection to more understandable symbols, declared that "Mr. Frankfurter is recommending a method which does more to help the spectator than the spectator does to meet the picture." Mr. Greenberg could not agree with Mr. Frankfurter. He said that Mr. Frankfurter was raising all over again the question of recognizability, which has never been settled. The point to grasp about the modern artist, he said, is that he has become absorbed in *experiences* rather than in the surrounding world.

MODERATOR. "There you have the artist in relation to the spirit of his times?"

MR. GREENBERG. "That is right."

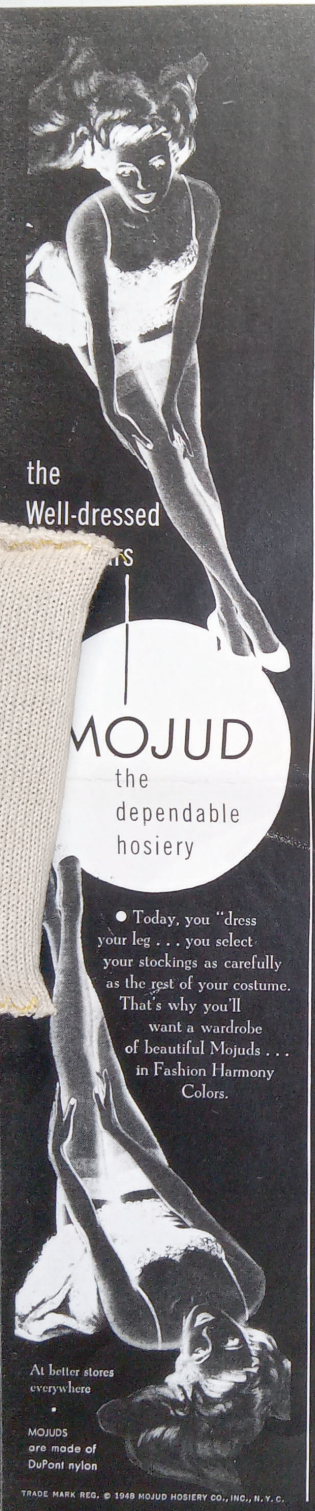
III. The Spirit of the Times

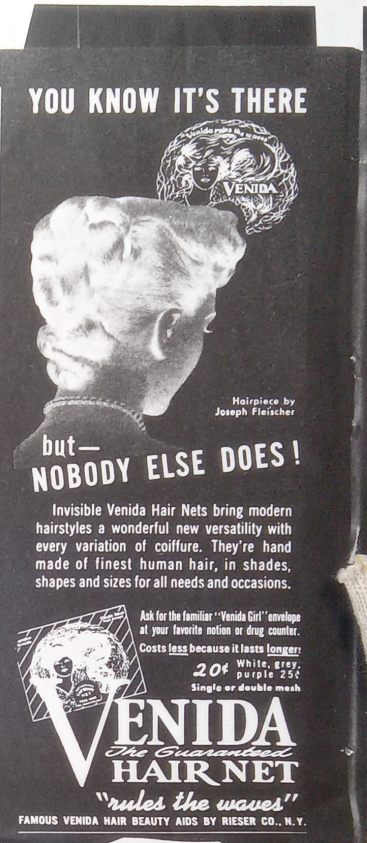
AND in fact it was in the spirit of the times—in the *Zeitgeist*—that the Table found its ultimate estimates of modern art. Many references were made to this. Said Sir Leigh: "Modern art is a reflection of our times, whether you like it or not. When the public doesn't understand one particular phase of modern art, we must not reject it for that reason." Said Mr. Askew: "There is a *Zeitgeist* of *seeing*, which is inherent in the painter and in the man looking at the painting."

To be sure, Mr. Huxley and Dr. Schapiro both raised a warning against a careless use of this idea. Said Mr. Huxley: "There is an assumption in many of the so-called philosophical modern histories that art expresses the social life of its period. I don't think it does. I think frequently art expresses something in revolt against its period." Mr. Frankfurter added the reminder that during the turbulent Thirty Years' War, Rembrandt went on painting serene masterpieces.

But while the influence of the times cannot be construed literally, in the historical sense, it is nevertheless very marked in terms of values and attitudes. Almost everyone at the Table had something to say along this line. Said Mr. Soby: "I wonder whether we would all agree as a general thing that in our time it is more difficult for an artist to make great art out of the tangible world than it has been in past centuries. I think it is due to a cumulative exhaustion of traditional subjects by earlier artists." Several, includ-

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PARNASSUS by Nicolas Poussin, a 17th Century classicist, was cited by Aldous Huxley to illustrate an important esthetic criterion: that one of the characteristics of a great, as opposed to a lesser, work of art is that it imposes a unity on a greater diversity of elements. The Poussin picture, according to Huxley, contains a "very subtle and elaborate system of formal relationships," which the artist has welded into a perfect whole. Mr. Huxley also pointed out that Poussin used the same face for all his female figures, showing that he was much more interested in the picture's formal than in its psychological content.

MODERN ART CONTINUED

ing Mr. Huxley, pointed out that the influence of the times is at work in all the arts. Said Mr. Mortimer: "Modern painting is no more difficult to understand than modern poetry, modern music or, for that matter, modern science."

Dr. Greene insisted that painting must be related to the entire culture and that its difficulties are in great measure the difficulties of the culture. Nobody, he declared, complains that modern science is "too difficult" for the layman. "Are you going to go to Einstein and say, 'Don't be too difficult?'" It seems to be inherent in our culture that the search for truth should be difficult, and we must make the best of it.

But there is another side to the matter. One of the troubles with our culture is a kind of breakdown of standards, so that it is hard for us to make value judgments. "We have almost no capacity," said Dr. Greene, "to recognize maturity and wisdom." We cannot blame this on art, but neither can we insulate art from the general effect of it. "To put it another way, the failure of modern art—if it is a failure—is not so much the failure of the art as it is the failure of our churches, of liberal education, of all those processes that enter into the cultural matrix."

Dr. Taylor spoke of the breakdown of monotheism, which had held the world together for 2,000 years or so. This has resulted, not in a lack of conviction (of which our age is often accused) but in *a multiplicity of convictions*. Mr. Frankfurter expanded on this. "We live in a time," he said, "torn in its allegiance between a dozen or more philosophical or ethical systems, each convinced that it is the true gospel." And the time is critical because "we have now reached the stage where we must finally face the question of how much of the Classical-Christian tradition we wish to retain in our attitude toward art." According to the Classical-Christian tradition the arts, as all things human, are implicated in the problem of good and evil: esthetics is implicated in ethics. This tradition is now opposed by a newer one, which says that esthetics stand alone as a part of human experience; that art is good or bad purely in its own terms, with no ethical or theological references. Mr. Frankfurter made the point more strongly than anyone at the Table—though a great number agreed—that art must have some moral reference. "Once you use the words 'genuine' and 'authentic' you cannot entirely separate morality and truth from the work of art."

Thus the troubles of modern art lead back into the troubles of the age. There was woven into the final moments of the Table a note of tragedy—the tragedy of contemporary man—which has its counterpart in the predicament of modern art. In fact, it was Mr. Greenberg, defender of Pollock, who used the word. "I think it is one of the *tragedies* of our time," he said, "that great painting has to do without a 'recognizable' subject matter."

One of the remarkable phenomena at the Table, unexpected by

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the moderator, was this attitude of honest search, almost of discontent, that was demonstrated by the most enthusiastic defenders of modern art. They were not content to stand pat. The question in their minds seemed rather to be, "Where do we go from here? What is the next step?"

That this attitude is prevalent among artists also was shown by Dr. Schapiro. "In recent years," he said, "there has been much uneasiness among artists. I have talked with few good artists who have not admitted their dissatisfaction and sometimes a nostalgia for certain older things. There are people who have been bold enough to advise these artists to paint religious or political pictures, or to represent the familiar environment, in order to solve their problem. Why haven't these constantly proposed goals been realized? Serious artists are concerned with the question. They want to create an art that is more fully human, more public, more universal—an art that will have a deeper appeal. But before the question, 'What do you propose?' they have confessed their helplessness."

The struggle for freedom

IF the layman is to match this attitude of honest search, his task is to understand the real meaning of modern art—why it is so difficult and strange and seemingly perverse. And the answer is already implicit in this report, especially as set forth by Dr. Greene. The meaning of modern art is, that the artist of today is engaged in a tremendous individualistic struggle—a struggle to discover and to assert and to express him*self*. He has been stripped in this struggle of many of the useful standards that sustained the artists of the past and helped to make them comprehensible—religious beliefs, moral codes, esthetic dogmas—the absolutes of other ages. He is on his own. And his one remaining criterion is a kind of personal honesty, a kind of integrity—the quality that Mr. Frankfurter referred to in the word "genuine." This can be reflected in his pictures; but it may or may not lead him out to the light, and it may or may not be "comprehensible" to anyone else. Dr. Schapiro summed it up as follows:

"The creation of modern art makes certain demands upon the individual who creates it. It gives to individual experiences an enormous value beyond that of previous art. It requires, therefore, a constant searching of oneself, an attentiveness to all that one has done and a perpetual self-renewal. In the great artist the results of this highly individual attitude can be set up beside the great work of the past.

"This attitude further involves a freedom of the individual, an openness to experience—qualities that we consider important, not only in art, but in the broader field of life itself. We value these qualities in human relationships, in science, in ethical behavior; and it is through the arts to some extent that they become evident to us."

Yet this tremendous, individualistic struggle, which makes modern art so difficult for the layman, is really one of the great assets of our civilization. For it is at bottom the struggle for freedom. As several at the Table pointed out, the temptation in authoritarian societies is to settle the problem of modern art by fiat. Both Hitler and Stalin have actually done so—and in both cases the artists were ordered to return to representational painting. Said Georges Duthuit: "Several governments have made a policy of throwing modern art out the window. Our layman does not seem to disagree entirely with this. He says merely that there is some justice in objecting to modern art. But if there is some justice in the objection, is there maybe some justice in the totalitarian point of view as well? In Europe today, for artists and writers, the question is literally one of life and death. This is a time when our layman must get to the bottom of what he means."

Said Mr. Janson: "I feel that the modern artist, in insisting upon the highly individual experiences that have been emphasized today, is fulfilling a very valuable function. He is preserving something that is in great danger—namely, our ability to remain individuals."

Maybe obscurity is a high price to pay for freedom, culturally speaking. Yet it has been, and may for some time continue to be, an inescapable cultural by-product of the great process of freedom which is so critical in our time. This does not mean, on the other hand, that the artist need have no standards. He must have them: he should be free—but not irresponsible. Such, perhaps, is the ultimate answer to be derived from the deliberations of these distinguished men. And in the light of it the layman, who might otherwise be disposed to throw all modern art in the ashcan, may think twice—and may on second thought reconsider.

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Motherwell, at 61, Revels in 'Eternal' Quality of Art

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1976 The New York Times



Robert Motherwell in one of the studios at his home in Greenwich, Conn. The New York Times/Carl T. Gossett

"If I'm really proud of anything, it's that my pictures are as fresh at 61 as they were at 30."

Motherwell, at 61, Puts 'Eternal' Quality Into Art

By GRACE GLUECK

Robert Motherwell is a survivor. Hale and prosperous and turning out a good deal of work, he is one of the few left of the pioneer group of New York painters who, more than 30 years ago, evolved the first great American style of art known as Abstract Expressionism. What's more, after a series of operations last year, he has fully recovered and says that at 61 he still loves painting "as much as I did the day I began."

One of the "superstar" artists, whose imagery is known throughout the world and whose income from painting is substantial, Mr. Motherwell is now geographically—though not emotionally—detached from the New York scene whose legend he helped to create. For the last seven years he has lived in Greenwich, Conn., in a sort of compound put together from the "working quarters" of an old estate. The move, he says, has helped make the 1970's "the most prolific years of my life."

"I'm a New York artist—my relations are with New York," he insists. "But my production has doubled since I've lived up here. For the first time I have adequate studio space for the scale in which I work. And there aren't the distractions of New York, where people just won't believe you're really working."

Robert Motherwell on Art and Artists

PAINTING: "For me, painting is like farming or gardening. You can't force it, you must cultivate it at its own speed. That's not to say there aren't magic moments, but I'm sure there are in farming, too."

STANDARDS: "Art is becoming part of mass culture, and the most revolutionary thing to do is keep standards of quality."

AWARENESS: "Artists don't always know what they're doing, but are usually aware of what they're not doing. What I reject, I'm conscious of. What I'm striving toward is only dimly perceived."

COLOR: "I've used many blues, but I use blue warmly. There's no way to account for it except that I have a warm mind. I think I use all colors warmly, including black. Most artists don't use color at all except as tones. You could change their hues because their pictures are held together by tones."

RECOGNITION: "You think when you're young there'll be a moment when you're mature and you'll be recognized as such. But when you're mature the world has turned its attention to something else. The minute you're understood, you're no longer relevant."

FUTURE: "I think things move more and more toward laser beams, neon lights. Americans are not artisans now, they're mechanics, and it's only natural that they turn to technology. Painting has reached a point where youngsters can only add a footnote. It depresses me a little to think that what was once Indian territory is now pretty thoroughly mapped out."

WORK: "All my life I've been working on the work—every canvas a sentence or paragraph of it. Each picture is only an approximation of what you want. That's the beauty of being an artist—you can never make the absolute statement, but the desire to do so as an approximation keeps you going."

The artist's energy pulses through his current show at Knoedler's, a sort of anthology of Motherwell modes. It presents work ranging from the endless "Elegy for the Spanish Republic" series, his brooding abstract theme of black ovoids imprisoned by vertical bars, to his elegant collages, paper fragments combined with paint in bursts of hedonistic color. There is also a print that reflects his response to the current Minimalist trend, in which the imagery is sparer and more geometric.

"If I'm really proud of anything, it's that my pictures are as fresh at 61 as they were at 30," Mr. Motherwell declares. Convinced that today's art world "wants only the latest thing, the '76 edition," he explains that he selected the show to represent the "eternal" quality of his work, its range and depth, not just his production for this year. "I insisted that every painting be different. I'm not a yardgoods painter and I don't want to look like one."

The artist, comfortably rumpled and sporting a blondish beard and mustache, was holding forth relaxed in his living room, the former hayloft of an old carriage house. It has been elegantly refurbished, the north side of its slanting, beamed roof redone as a huge skylight and the living room hung with a number of Motherwell paintings from various phases of his career. A massive French Renaissance table, inherited from his mother, dominates the otherwise country-style antique furnishings. One wall of the room serves as a "test" space, where smaller Motherwell works are put up against idols as Matisse, Miro, Arp, "to see if mine stand up."

Mr. Motherwell and his fourth wife, the German-born photographer Renate Ponsold, live, so to speak, above the store. Below the living room, on the ground floor, there are seven studios, including a "New York-sized loft," in which he pursues what he calls his "cottage industry"—painting, collage-

Continued on Page 52, Column 1

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	Tomkins	IV.C.53

Motherwell, at 61, Revels in 'Eternal' Quality of Art

Continued From Page 33

making, printing, even framing.

On a tour of the vast working areas downstairs, he paused in a studio where a number of collages lay spread around the floor in various stages of completion. "I walk around a lot, work on a lot of things and let others grow," he said. "As I walk by I suddenly see things —maybe some of the blue is too light or too dark, the form too small or too big. Those readjustments my eye constantly makes as I walk back and forth."

Asked about the presence of a large television set, he smiled. "I work until 3 A.M., and TV is a presence in the room—also, my window on the world. I used to listen to Bach while painting, but then I realized when you listen to Bach, you think you're painting better than you are, so I stopped. I know I'm a better artist than TV is!"

In another studio, he contemplated one of his "Spanish Elegy" paintings, a series begun in 1948, nearly a dozen years after the Spanish Civil War. "I was 21 in 1936," he says. "For my generation, the Spanish Civil War was the first realization that the forces of evil could conquer, an idea that came as a tremendous shock to Western intellectuals."

The powerful, obsessive theme of the black bars and ovoids is not "political," he says, but intended "as a meditation on the death of the Spanish Republic, and then as a general meditation on life and death, their interrelationship. There can't be a final version of that theme. Death can be as lifelong a preoccupation as a woman, as the nude was for Renoir."

The word "brutal" applied to his bold, black imagery does not displease him. Speaking of "Ancestral Image," the biggest painting in his current show, he says: "A European couldn't do it—too civilized. Europeans say I have the deepest atavism of any American. I never forgot when I saw Stonehenge, also Greek fragments, the Altamira caves. Yet art has to be of its own time. I want to make that atavism in contemporary terms."

Shuns Conventional Route

Basically self-taught, Mr. Motherwell doesn't remember a time when he couldn't draw or paint. Growing up in California, he won a fellowship at 11 to the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. "But I never was interested in the conventional route, art school, drawing from life, etc. No one was teaching anything about modern art, and I didn't know how to get to what I wanted to do."

As a Stanford student at 17, a friend took him to the home of Michael Stein, Gertrude's brother and a pioneer collector of modern French art. "When I saw those Matisses, it's as if an arrow went through me—a shock of recognition, the kind Baudelaire must have experienced when he first read Poe," recalls Mr. Motherwell. "This is what I really care about, I thought."

At Stanford, later at the Harvard Graduate School and then in Paris, he steeped himself in French modernist culture, with particular attention to the Symbolist poets —Baudelaire, Mallarmé Valéry. Back in New York in 1940, he enrolled at Columbia to study with Meyer Schapiro, the noted art historian, and through him he met the stimulating group of Surrealist painters and theorists who had come to New York from Europe on the verge of war—Matta, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, André Masson, Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, André Breton.

With a $50-a-week subsidy from his father, president of the Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco, Mr. Motherwell set up in New York, his home ever since. "I didn't like the Surrealists' painting," he recalls, "but they were interested in ideas about art, and they saw that I was. Most young American artists at the time were talking about politics or money, and with reason. They were very poor, and you can't imagine their hostility to Europeans. They'd see artists like Dufy selling for $9,000 when they couldn't get $9 for their own works."

His engagement with Surrealist theory was conveyed to the New York artists he began to meet—William Baziotes, Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb. Both he and Pollock were also interested in Freudian theory, and the two began to experiment with the "automatism" technique of the Surrealists, a kind of "doodling" effected by closing the eyes and letting the subconscious take over.

In 1943 he and Pollock, with Baziotes, showed their first collages at Peggy Guggenheim's famous gallery, Art of This Century, headquarters for the Surrealist group. Later, he met other New York artists—Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still.

Gradually, the New York men and women became conscious of themselves as a group whose aim in an art world still dominated by regionalists, "social realists" and traditionalists was to win acceptance of a forceful new abstract imagery that expressed, in Mr. Motherwell's words, a "feeling of the heroic, a sense of the sublime and the tragic." "Maybe my generation was the last generation innocent enough to be romantic," he says.

Their success is art world history, and Mr. Motherwell sometimes compares those days nostalgically with now. "New York was essentially psychoanalytically oriented, in the sense that they used the language of an internal world. That's why we were able to invent an original painting. We were trying to get at the truth, not involved with shock value. Also, nobody cared what we did. We were able to be very pure because nobody wanted to seduce us."

Asked how it felt to be a survivor, he said, with some bitterness, "I feel a certain loneliness, and I'm also sad to see how the original Abstract Expressionist story has been so distorted. At times, I feel like an old Bolshevik, seeing stuff written by Stalinists, and I can't correct it. I'm shocked at the distortions and deliberate power plays of people who write about those days."

He much prefers to dwell on his present life, which includes two grown daughters of whom he is proud, a Provincetown house in the summer, "adequate money and a marvelous home life I've never had before." And he adds, "I've spent my life self-employed, done what I wanted to do, had a couple of beautiful daughters—how many people can say that?"

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ART IN PARIS

Robert Motherwell—A Survivor

By Michael Gibson

PARIS, July 8 (IHT).—Robert Motherwell is being honored with a large retrospective exhibition of his work at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (11 Avenue du Président-Wilson, to Sept. 20) and he was in town for the occasion.

Motherwell, who is now 62, was the youngest of the group of artists generally referred to as the abstract expressionists (Rothko, Barnett Newman and David Smith were among his closest friends), and he modestly points out that he is one of the rare survivors of that "generation" as one explanation of the interest he has generated on this visit.

The fact is that, in addition to the mute monument of his own work, he also has a lot of interesting things to say about art and artists and about his experiences, which have now become art history—and he says it all very well in a quiet thoughtful tone with occasional humorous undercurrents.



Renate Ponsold.
Robert Motherwell

Surrealists

In 1940, he was then 25, he was studying at Columbia when he was introduced to the French surrealists (speaking recently at the American Cultural Center in Paris, he described the surrealists as a sort of Sicilian brotherhood, adding that if you met one of them and he approved of you, then you were bound, in time, to meet them all).

This encounter turned out to be crucial to him because it introduced him to something he had been endeavoring to find: a "creative principle" which, in the surrealist milieu, appeared as a process they referred to as "psychic automatism" and which psychoanalysts call free association.

"The surrealists," he says, "being a literary movement, in effect a cultural movement, were interested in the whole range of intellectual endeavors. And my own feeling, coming from the university world and looking at the painting scene, was that Americans were technically very competent but that there wasn't any profound creative principle.

"For example, Gorki, who was as great a technician as any painter of this century, and who seemed very modern for an American painter, at one time made the wisecrack that he simply saw 'Cahiers d'Art' before anybody else did. So that in 1933, let's say, he would be painting Picassos of 1931. And it was obvious that it wasn't a question of an inability to paint, or any technical or even human limitations. The problem was to find a point of attack."

Motherwell's interest was to find a principle that everyone could use in his own way. He explained this to Gorki and Pollock and Baziotes and several others, and also wanted to tell Hans Hofmann about it. "I realize now what this implied; the fact that I, in my innocence and in my twenties, would dare explain to a painter nearly 60 what he should do. But, fortunately, or unfortunately, Pollock got so drunk before we got to the point that Hofmann and I had to carry him home, physically.

"You see, the surrealists did not have a problem that we did. Great painting existed in Europe so that they were perfectly capable, without being barbarians, of using psychic automatism to destroy painting in the interests of a philosophy. But we were in a position that we wanted to *create* a painting."

Motherwell himself uses "automatism" as a sort of liberatory discipline of the soul and arm. He considers that a respect for the essential character of the medium is of primary importance.

Dali Approach

"Paper, paint, ink, crayons," he says, "have peculiar qualities of their own, and what interests me is art that, so to speak, uses them in their most natural manner. The Dali approach is to convert these materials into imagery. The imagery does not grow out of the materials. And in that sense, in his process of painting, there is basically nothing he can discover in the act of painting. In fact, it has often struck me how tedious the act of painting must be to somebody who paints in that more illustrative way, filling in a drapery or putting a highlight on a doorknob."

Somebody observed that, on the other hand, an artist producing representational works, like Goya in his black paintings, does not convey any sense of boredom but rather of creative enthusiasm. Motherwell agrees.

"That is because he makes his images out of paint in the sense that I mean it. When I was very young I instinctively liked the last paintings of most painters that I admired, such as Goya, Rembrandt or Titian. And in all of them precisely what I am talking about happens. The pictures are more and more made out of the actual application of paint, whereas in the beginning it is more a rendering. And the whole process of development consists in moving away from this sort of rendering and moving to a manner in which *the paint itself* is turned into the image.

"Somebody once said to me that what he liked about painting was that he had a desire to eat it. Certainly one has no desire to eat a Dali or a Vermeer. But, using this crude metaphor, there are parts of a Rembrandt or a Goya that one could eat. They are so . . . not 'delicious' but so *material*.

"In fact, when I'm surrounded by paint, buckets of it, I sometimes have an irrational impulse to drink some of it!"



"Samurai No. 5" (1974), acrylic on cardboard by Robert Motherwell—in Paris exhibition.

Superb 'M

By John Walker

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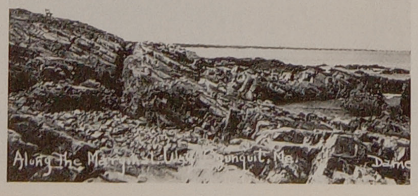
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ing up at a camera store run by a Mr. Dame. Newman relished talking shop with him. He taken by me. What do you think of it Aaron (I mean the photograph)? We are settled here for the rest of the summer. . . ."

As I've indicated, the card is signed "Dame"; it is titled "Newman Cottage," but not in Newman's handwriting. Presumably Dame himself, or an assistant in the shiah, repeating shapes.

Two other cards may or may not be by Newman. One is of "Ogunquit, Sand Dunes," the other, of "Along the Marginal Way, Ogunquit, Me."; both are signed "Dame." Both are of views with which Barnett and Annalee Newman were deeply

Author: Thomas B. Hess is the author of two monographs on Barnett Newman and the organizer of Newman's 1970 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.





Far left
Along the Marginal Way, Ogunquit, Me., signed "Dame." Probably photographed by Newman.

Left
Ogunquit Sand Dunes, signed "Dame." Probably photographed by Newman.

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Some Postcards from Barnett Newman, A Photographic Footnote

BY THOMAS B. HESS

When Barnett and Annalee Newman were married, on June 30, 1936, they got their first "real" camera, a Kodak-type Vollenda (as against their old "Brownies"), and Newman used it assiduously during their honeymoon. He planned the vacation as an excursion to some of the magic sites of Revolutionary and cultural America—towns and edifices whose names had a special resonance for him and which he had studied since childhood in New York. They embarked on a coastal steamer from New York Harbor to Providence, R.I.; then they visited Boston ("Athens of the North"), thence to Concord, where Newman wanted to "tip my hat" to one of his heroes, Thoreau.[1] They walked around Walden Pond, saw The Bridge, Bronson Alcott's Academy, Emerson's House, Hawthorne's Cottage. In the days before Hiroshima, The Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, Watergate, it was possible to announce oneself an Anarchist, to model one's deportment on Kropotkin's, as Newman proudly did, and still move within the Arcadian parameters of the American Dream, as Walt Whitman and Herman Melville had shaped it.

From Massachusetts, the Newmans took a bus to Ogunquit. Newman wanted to push on to Mount Katahdin, the highest peak in Maine and already famous in American art history from views by Marsden Hartley and John Marin. Newman wanted to try hiking in the wilderness. Annalee wasn't as eager. They spent a week in a rooming house in the local artists colony of Perkins Cove. Nearby was a cottage for rent. They decided to take it for the rest of the summer.

They investigated a local art school (a few of Newman's fast drawings done there from the model are preserved). Mostly they walked. They strolled to Ogunquit, about a mile away, to shop, especially for fish. After a landlocked Ohio childhood, Annalee enjoyed the Atlantic menu. They walked the beaches, dunes and tough, "rock-ribbed" coasts. In the evenings, they would promenade along the boardwalk, often ending up at a camera store run by a Mr. Dame. Newman relished talking shop with him. He had experimented with the Vollenda and wanted to grasp the professional "issues" of photography, as well as the niceties and pleasures of the craft. Many of Newman's own photographs from the summer of 1936 are preserved in Annalee's files, including a touching picture of her, under the leafy trees in Hawthorne's Wood at Concord, as well as one taken by her of him.[2]

One day, as the tourist season neared its climax, Dame found that he was overworked at the store, and also that he was running out of postcards. He entrusted his precious box camera to his friend Newman and asked him to take some new postcards for the shop racks. (Something of Newman's genius for friendship can be deduced from this confidence.)

Newman did a surprisingly good job considering his scanty experience, and was able to inject a lively sense of contrasts and motions into the stereotype images. His views are sharp and interestingly composed within the rather static, 3½-by-5½-inch format (almost a perfect Golden Section, by the way).

Annalee Newman has kept a number of the postcards in her files. The first is one of the rare examples in pictorial form of Newman's infectious humor and gaiety. It's a deadpan photograph of a shingled cottage with a spacious, screened sleeping porch; there are flowers all-in-a-row in boxes and beds, and a good-looking girl, in sturdy walking shoes, posed on the stoop. The card is labeled "Newman Cottage, Ogunquit, Me." and is signed "Dame," as if it were of the house of a famous, former resident, the artist Robert Loftin Newman, perhaps, or the Anglo-Catholic cardinal's retreat. In fact, it was the summer rental of our hero. And the model on the stairs is Annalee, happily looking into the sun. Dame printed a number of the cards for Newman, who sent them out as wedding announcements. One of them is preserved, with a message to Newman's friend the photographer Aaron Siskind. On the back is written: "Here is a photograph of my lady and our cottage taken by me. What do you think of it Aaron (I mean the photograph)? We are settled here for the rest of the summer. . . ."

As I've indicated, the card is signed "Dame"; it is titled "Newman Cottage," but not in Newman's handwriting. Presumably Dame himself, or an assistant in the darkroom, labeled and signed the picture.

Two other postcards exist, both unsigned and untitled, but Annalee remembers how Newman took the photographs. One is of the Hillcrest Inn. Newman found a low vantage point where the lush growth of summer bushes would contrast with the neat white clapboard of the hotel above. It looks like a paddle-wheeler awash in a flood of chlorophyll—and cheap sumac leaves at that—the sort that easily could strangle an empire. If there's a metaphor here beyond the pictorial contrasts of dark and light, straight and angled, large and small, it concerns the vitality and genetic force of nature—which became one of the major themes in Newman's later paintings. Also, the fragility of a man-made social system that tries to enclose, or to "crest" nature, is adumbrated.

The other postcard photograph is of Perkins Cove: beached boats, parked cars, the cove at such low ebb that it makes a joke of an elaborate white bridge that spans it. Here, too, the motif concerns man-made artifacts in the environment and the superior strength of nature. Just as sumac bushes could engulf the biggest house in Ogunquit, the ocean, by simply drying up, could strand a whole colony.

Three other postcards are preserved, all of them titled, and signed "Dame," but by at least two different hands (neither of them Newman's). The first is another view of Perkins Cove, also taken at low tide but obviously at a different time. Annalee remembers that Newman used the box camera only for about two days. It is doubtful that the beached boats could have been shifted about so much in only 48 hours, especially as some of them were under repair. Possibly this is a 1935 postcard by Dame, and Newman took it along as a clue to his 1936 version. Certainly Newman's image is stronger in its play of granulated contrasts, its investigation of patterns in the frame house facades, and in the various sizes and textures of pebbles, stones, shingles, hubcaps, glass insulators and other interesting, small, repeating shapes.

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familiar. They walked daily along these rocky coasts and beaches—the kind of places Newman loved, individual sites, marked by local, private characteristics, and still instinct with a sense of the universal.

Newman's feel for nature was strong and blunt. He studied geology, botany and later ornithology as sciences. He collected rocks, analyzed the structure of trees. He wanted to know the environment from the inside out, so to speak, its articulations and taxonomies. The dunes and rocks around Ogunquit are, characteristically, viewed almost as much as laboratories as panoramas. He was interested in history—in how things developed, out of primitive art, out of volcanic eruptions or oceanic entropy. The dunes and stony margins at the edges of Ogunquit were such places for him.

Did he take these two photographs himself? Or did he simply save Dame's two postcards as keepsakes of a summer filled with epiphanies? There is no way to prove either proposition. I, for one, believe that Barnett Newman photographed both the "Dunes" and "Marginal Way"; they have his intelligence, sharpness and poignant sense of the drama which can be drawn from simple visions.

Compare them with a seventh postcard also in Annalee Newman's possession. It is of another spot in Ogunquit, a restaurant called the "Whistling Oyster" that stood near the Newmans' rented cottage. Annalee Newman is convinced that Newman never took the photograph. He disliked the place, she says. It was not the sort of view that interested him. Dame, on the other hand, had every reason to want such a card on supply, both for clients from the Whistling Oyster and for that establishment's own purposes. Visually, the wasted, blank foreground, the haphazard asymmetry with lack of any center of gravity, indicate that the photographer who made the shot might have been skillful. At the instant he pressed the shutter, however, he was a bit bored.

Newman was seldom bored. He did things that excited him, that obsessed him, that fitted into a many-faceted life. He created some of the grand paintings of the mid-20th century. He made monumental sculptures. He wrote essays, poems, fictions—which he never published. And once, for a few summer visitors to New England, between the wars, he caught within the innocent margins of a penny postcard, insights to nature and to the pathos of man's physical absence. The only human present in Newman's landscapes is a photographer, Newman himself, invisible behind a borrowed camera. □

1. Much of the material in this text was extrapolated from research for my book, *Barnett Newman*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1971. None of it would have been possible without the help of Annalee—Mrs. Barnett Newman.

2. The title of the Metropolitan Museum's painting by Newman, *Concord*, 1949, refers to the honeymoon, and the painting's leaf-green colors and dappled textures echo, perhaps unconsciously, the patterns in the photographs they took in Hawthorne's Wood (viz., Hess, ibid., p. 27). That "concord" has other, ethical meanings was not, of course, overlooked by this learned artist in titling a complicated, symmetrically planned picture.



Newman Cottage, Ogunquit, Me., signed "Dame." Photographed by Barnett Newman.



Hillcrest Inn, photographed by Newman (there is no caption on the photo).



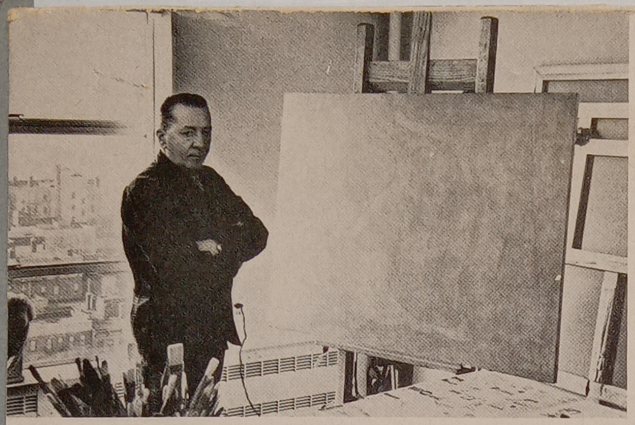
Above Perkins Cove, photographed by Newman (no caption). **Below left** *Perkins Cove*, probably taken at least one year earlier by Dame. **Below right** *Whistling Oyster, Ogunquit, Me.*, signed "Dame." Not by Newman, but found among his papers.





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William Baziotes, 1963, photograph by Fred W. McDarrah.

By Irving H. Sandler

Baziotes: Modern mythologist

One of the first, and one of the most lyrical, of the New York postwar abstract painters has an overdue retrospective, at the Guggenheim

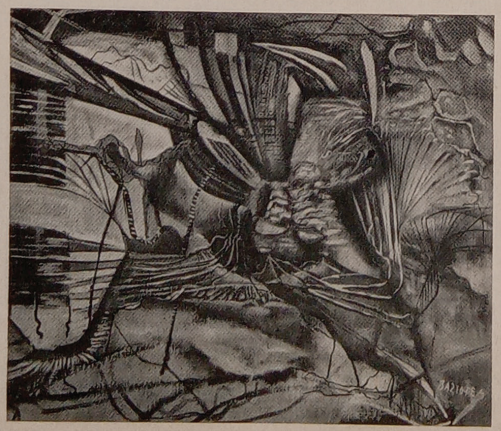
During the late 1930s and early '40s William Baziotes, along with Gorky, Pollock, Rothko, Newman, Still, Gottlieb, Pousette-Dart and other New York painters, felt that the prevailing idioms—Social Realism, Regionalism, Geometric Abstraction—were used up. In the search for a viable subject matter, they turned to mythology and fantasy. They recognized that fantasy has, as Herbert Marcuse points out, a "decisive function in the total mental structure: it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality . . . tabooed images of freedom."

Similar Freudian and Jungian views were held by the Surrealist emigrés who had escaped to New York from Nazi-occupied Europe. Only a few Americans—Baziotes, Motherwell, Hare, Gorky—were close to the Surrealists' Government-in-Exile. In general, New York advanced painters were committed to abstraction and rejected the academic figurative side of Surrealism. However most of them were interested in Miro and in some of the ideas of Matta, spokesman for the automatic and abstract wing of Surrealism. Baziotes, for example, had been impressed by Miro's inspired doodling since 1937, and later was struck by Matta's idea that abstraction could be filled with psychic or mythic meanings. Baziotes used automatic techniques to express a mythic content in an abstract art; one of the first to produce what might be called "Abstract-Surrealism," he played a major role in the evolution of vanguard art in the 1940s.

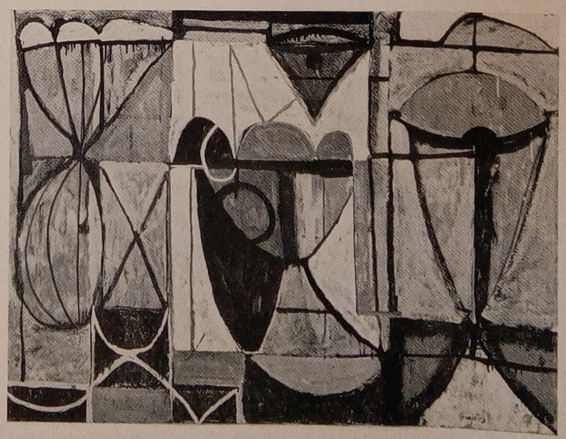
Other myth-makers, including Pollock, Still, Rothko and Newman, who painted signs and symbols, soon eliminated these specific elements. They went on to develop extreme non-figurative styles whose relation to what was generally considered Surrealism was remote. But not Baziotes or Gorky; like Miro and Matta, they remained symbolists; each in his own way painted the fantastic for the rest of his career.

Like Gorky, Baziotes is generally numbered among the Abstract-Expressionists, but his position is difficult to pin down. It is true that by wedding abstraction to Surrealism,

1 *Leonardo da Vinci's Butterfly*, 1941, 19¼ inches high.
Collection Mrs. William Baziotes

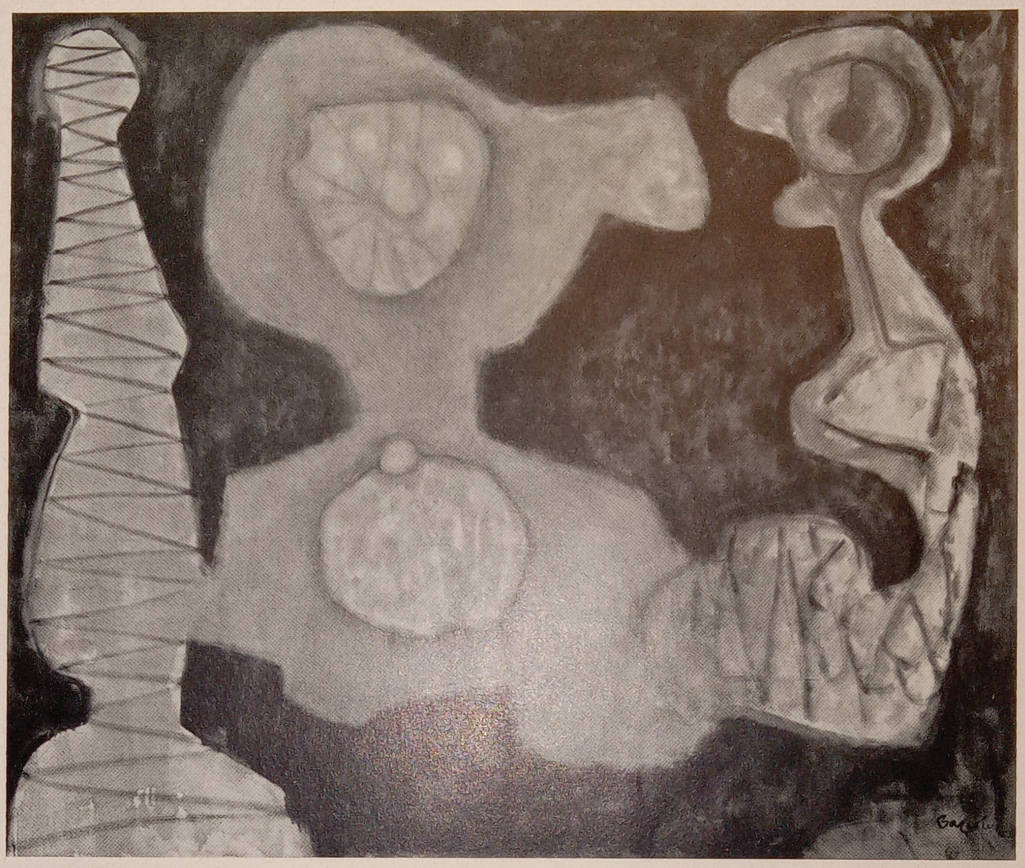


2 *Wineglass*, 1946, 20¼ inches high.
Collection Mrs. William Baziotes



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3 *Night Mirror*, 1947, 49⅝ inches high.
Lent by the Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

he was influential in the development of Abstract-Expressionism. Because of this, critics and curators focused on him early. Clement Greenberg hailed him in the *Nation* [Nov. 11, 1944]: "Two of the abstract painters she [Peggy Guggenheim] has recently introduced—Jackson Pollock and William Baziotes—reveal more than promise: on the strength of their first one-man shows they have already placed themselves among the six or seven best young painters we possess." (Greenberg soon changed his mind about Baziotes.) When *Cyclops* won the top prize in the Chicago Art Institute survey of abstract and Surrealist art in 1947, Baziotes became the first of his generation of vanguard artists to be given official recognition and to become the center of widespread public controversy.

However, unlike the Abstract-Expressionists, Baziotes remained close to Surrealism. And as it ceased to inspire the best artists who matured later, the reputation of many who continued to be identified with it declined. Baziotes' painting also ran counter to the prevailing tendency in Abstract-Expressionism in the late 1940s and '50s. At a time when his contemporaries became freer, more dramatic and daring, Baziotes closed off and refined his painting. The neglect of his works in recent years is regrettable for they possess a quality of poetry and artistry that separates them from the rise and fall of artistic fashions.

However, a show of 43 canvases at the Guggenheim Museum [Feb. 5-March 21] should cause a re-evaluation of Baziotes' stature. The exhibition is flawed by the exclusion of paintings executed before 1946 and by a scanty representation of the 1946-49 period. Curator Lawrence Alloway justifies the omission of the early pictures on the grounds that there was a break in Baziotes' art around 1947. But this led him to leave out many of the best and most influential works. In fact, Baziotes' break with his past was not sharp; his work as a whole is markedly consistent. The beginnings of his improvisational technique, distinctive palette and vocabulary of forms are evident as early as 1938. More important, the Guggenheim show lacks the sense of drama, of struggle, in Baziotes' complex evolution—the way his career really unfolded. Awaited is the full scale retrospective that this artist deserves; but the present show is a big step in that direction.

In 1947, Baziotes wrote: "I cannot evolve any concrete theory about painting. What happens on the canvas is un-

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predictable and surprising to me . . . Each painting has its own way of evolving. One may start with a few color areas on the canvas; another with a myriad of lines, and perhaps another with a profusion of colors. Each beginning suggests something . . . The suggestion then becomes a phantom that must be caught and made real. As I work, or when the painting is finished, the subject reveals itself."

Baziotes' subjects were haunted creatures in submarine landscapes. He used a direct, free-associational notation to cull images from subconscious sources. But these images also referred to (but never illustrated) observed reality. His wife Ethel Baziotes says that the cryptic personage in *Cyclops*, 1947 [fig. 4], was suggested by a rhinoceros, eyes slung low, at the Bronx zoo. At the same time, Baziotes thought of the rhinoceros as the living kin of primordial beasts and as a metaphor for the fearsome one-eyed giants of Greek legends. His image then was the issue of a myth-making imagination.

Myth-making came easy to Baziotes. Of Greek ancestry, he was, as Thomas B. Hess called him, "a card-carrying Hellene, member of a race for whom myth is not exotic, but as domestic and necessary as a loaf of bread." His friends report that Baziotes was obsessed with the strange and demonic side of human experience. He spoke of his works as "mirrors" reflecting the strangeness in himself.

The images of water at night and of water as a mirror are called to mind so insistently by Baziotes' paintings and their titles that if any mythic figure is his hero, it would be Narcissus. There is no proof of this, for although Baziotes stressed the primacy of subject-matter, he rarely talked about his own, even though in a statement about *Pompeii*, 1955 [fig. 5], he indicated that the forms and colors have specific symbolic meanings. Baziotes' reticence was both understandable and fitting, for the sense of poetry that he strove for is based on ambiguity and abstraction, and it would have been distorted in transliteration.

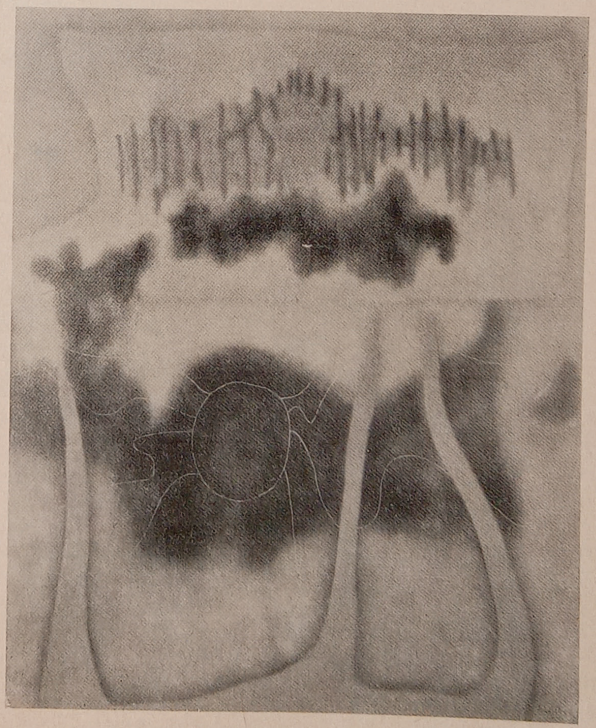
The passive calm that marks Baziotes' pictures after 1947 also suggests the temperament of Narcissus. Marcuse writes that if Prometheus is the god of willful behavior and reason, then Narcissus, Orpheus and Dionysus are his antagonists and stand for a different reality. "They have not become the culture-heroes of the Western world: theirs is . . . the voice which does not command but sings . . . the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature."

Of course, Baziotes' painting involved anxiety and struggle. He compared it to boxing—he had considered fighting as a career. In each an individual makes a tremendous effort. He once copied down a comment by Gene Tunney which he felt summed up his own activity: "If there's any extreme form of individualism, it's ring fighting. You wage your own battle all by yourself. No partners, no comrades in there with you. . . . Like [Continued on page 65]



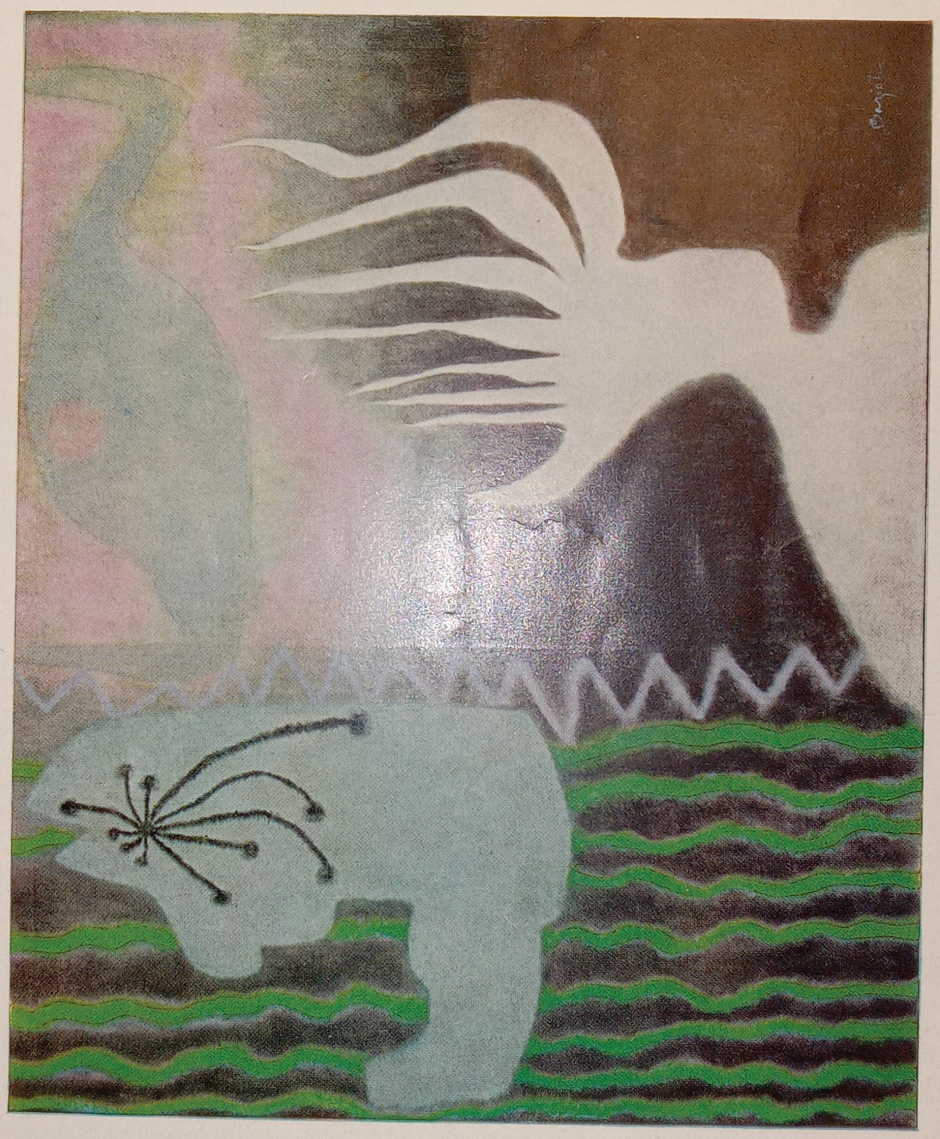
4 *Cyclops*, 1947, 48 inches high.
Lent by the Art Institute of Chicago

5 *Pompeii*, 1955, 60 inches high.
Lent by the Museum of Modern Art, New York



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William Baziotes: *Flesh Eaters*, 1952, 60 inches high.
Lent by Mrs. William Baziotes to the Guggenheim Museum's Baziotes Memorial Exhibition [Feb. 5-March 21]

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the painting at the back of the room in Rowlandson's print of *Christie's Auction Rooms* in the *Microcosm of London*.)

Times have of course changed a great deal since the Second Lord Northwick frequented the auction rooms and built up his collection. Captain Churchill had a taste for the most difficult of all forms of old-master collecting: the re-discovery, that is to say, of works long discredited, or lost, or quite simply indecipherable. "The Northwick Rescues" was his collective name for the paintings thus restored to their rightful place, and he described as "the greatest thrill I get from collecting" the feeling that he had all but recalled the artist to life and got him to paint another picture. These could be, and in anyone else might well have been, pretentious fancies. But in Captain Churchill's case they were justified by the re-discovery of (to name two of the most important) the Dirk Bouts *Madonna and Child*, and the Fra Angelico *St. Cosmas and St. Damian*. Of particular interest to the historian of English painting, again, was the totally discolored portrait which turned out to be of Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia and a key-work (dated 1612) in the development of British portraiture. In the field of Dutch seventeenth-century still-life Captain Churchill's rescues were also particularly happy.

The abiding note of the collection is, above all, one of enjoyment. It has its quota of tough, uningratiating pictures (the huge Garofalo *Stoning of St. Stephen*, for instance), but there is never a piece that was bought because it was in fashion, or because it was an investment. A fine purity of judgment runs throughout, and though the collection was purchased over a total of more than two hundred years and cannot, therefore, be said in logic to witness to any one individual taste, there will always be something to boast of in the words: "It came from Northwick Park."

Baziotes continued from page 30

dying, you fight alone." But the outcome of Baziotes' struggle had to be an art that was tranquil, hypnotic and haunting.

Baziotes had a purpose other than divulging the residues of myths that "lived" in his interior world. He tried to emulate the art of the museums—its masterliness. Having these two aims at the same time seemed natural and essential to him (as it did to Miro and Gorky) but to his friend Matta, it presented problems. Matta distrusted a concern for formal values, for he reasoned that to depict irrational impulses, one had to spurn picture-making. The state of being possessed—of being controlled by pre-conscious forces—was incompatible with the act of possessing—of being under control. Masterliness, after all, requires mastery. Therefore, Matta attacked the tedium of creation, the activity of "producers," of "men with a profession." This point of view also contained an element of snobbery, as Motherwell has observed. Matta imagined himself an artist-aristocrat, contemptuous of picture-making as menial.

Along with Motherwell and Gorky, Baziotes rejected Matta's anti-esthetic position. Much as they valued spontaneity, they realized that if a picture was painted in a banal manner, it could never be marvelous. The raw materials of unconscious life had to be transformed into art. To be Surrealist *artists* counted more to them than being artistic *Surrealists*. They also differed from most Surrealists in that they loved paint and its manipulation.

Baziotes acclaimed artistic quality wherever he saw it. Of Mondrian, whom most Surrealists ignored, he wrote: "Plasticity! How well the great Mondrian understood *that*. Plasticity!" And there were other qualities that gripped him more in the works of certain artists —those he called his "brothers." Of Picasso—one leading Surrealist considered him a pastry-chef—Baziotes said: "Well, I looked at Picasso [in 1939] until I could smell his armpits and the cigarette smoke on his breath. Finally, in front of one picture—a bone figure on a beach—I got it. I saw that the figure was not his real subject. The plasticity wasn't either—although the plasticity was great. No. Picasso has uncovered a feverishness in himself and is painting it—a feverishness of death and beauty."

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1912, Baziotes grew up in Reading, went to New York in 1933 and enrolled in the National Academy of Design where he studied until 1936. From 1936 to 1938, he taught for the Federal Art Project, and from 1938 to 1941, he painted in the easel division. Shortly after leaving art school, he turned to modern European art; his pictures of the next three years, many of them bizarre figural improvisations in exotic Persian miniature colors, owe much to Miro, Klee and Picasso. In 1941, Baziotes began to paint automatist abstractions, two of which, including *Leonardo da Vinci's Butterfly* [fig. 1], were shown at the International Surrealist exhi-

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bition in New York in 1942. However, he considered *Balcony*, 1944, his germinal painting. The all-over network of lines in it is structured in the Cubist manner, but also impulsive. The abstract shapes formed by the linear labyrinth are organic—suggestive of balustrades—and softly brushed so as to appear liquid. But he soon felt that the canvases of 1944, exhibited in his first show at Peggy Guggenheim's, were too amorphous, complicated and profuse. He never rejected this work, but felt he had to shift directions.

In 1945-47, Baziotes reduced and enlarged his forms to make his images less active and more specific. At this time another significant change occurred. Such a picture as *Wineglass*, 1946 [fig. 2], derives in part from Cubism, in its roughly rectangular planes interspersed with curved forms. But in the work of 1947 to 1950, instead of starting with a linear grid, Baziotes tended to begin by spreading colors and determining their edges only at the end. The contours are bluntly drawn in places, broken or blurred—not at all like Miro's crisp, hard edges or Gorky's flowing calligraphy. The sense of an image taking shape slowly, from within itself, contributes to the feeling of quiet in Baziotes' work. His dappling brush strokes also add to this feeling. Although his surfaces are subtly nuanced, they appear to be stabbed or scrubbed, as if Baziotes reluctantly, and at times impatiently, broke a trance to paint. But he also painted the trance; "the textures," Harold Rosenberg remarked in 1947, "seem to absorb silence as if the paints had been mixed in the medium of sleep." The eerie spell that Baziotes conjures up contrasts with Miro's debonair irony, Gorky's erotic reverie and Matta's space-age allegories.

Baziotes also differs from Miro, Gorky and Matta in that his forms lack motility. Swollen and ungainly, they seem inert—unable to move. Their clumsiness and deformity—some suggest amputated torsos and maimed creatures—make them look grotesque. Painted on or between the forms are linear configurations—mostly circle-within-circle, pinwheel and zig-zag motifs. These structures, the remains of his earlier Cubist grids, call to mind eyes, moons and teeth. They turn the color areas into a Cyclops, a dragon, a dwarf or an enchanted landscape.

Baziotes' surfaces are loosely painted, suggesting an aquatic atmosphere (reminiscent of Klee). This substance is viscid, impeding any activity. Water is also suggested by the colors Baziotes favored—nocturnal greens, blues and purples. But they have a peculiar cast—a phosphorescence—that may have had its source in the hues of the butterflies and stones he collected. A sense of mystery is conveyed by the heavy vapor that shrouds the images, screening them from the viewer. But the atmosphere does not de-materialize the forms and the background planes in which they float. Though indeterminate, the space is shallow causing the surface to have a strong presence—an essential of "modern" painting.

Miro showed Baziotes how to use automatism while retaining painterly values. In the 1930s, Miro relied increasingly on the process of painting. "Rather than setting out to paint something," he wrote, "I begin painting and as I paint, the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush . . . The first stage is free, unconscious, but after that the picture is controlled throughout in keeping with the desire for disciplined work which I have felt from the beginning." Not only did each of Baziotes' pictures develop in this way, but his career as a whole can be divided into the two successive stages of which Miro spoke. In the 1940s, his work was at its freest. After 1950, a change in emphasis occurred; his painting became tighter, more calculated and polished—he now labored from six months to a year on a canvas. Baziotes' desire for stillness accounted in part for the change, but equally significant, his classicizing disposition came to the fore. It was as if he was thinking along the lines of Freud's remark to Dali: "In classic pictures, I look for the subconscious . . . in a Surrealist painting, for the conscious."

In the pictures Baziotes painted in the last decade of his life—he died in 1962 at the age of 51—there is a growing concern with the definition of form—rather than the spread of color—and with the creation of a uniform, pulsing, cool light. To achieve these effects, he edged his forms precisely; made the meandering lines delicate and sinuous, and the variations in brushwork, color and texture, smooth. Baziotes' imagery also changed. Instead of painting shapes that suggested creatures, he invented proto-creatures, the kin of boneless, unicellular organisms—protozoa, amoeboids, coelenterates, hydrazoa. These spare, quivering underwater growths are of the same stuff as the shimmering pale jelly in which they drift. There is a loss of freshness and surprise in the late works, but it is compensated for by an increase in finesse. What does not change is the mysterious poetry that distinguishes all of Baziotes' pictures.

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