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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

Printer: omit all artists' names

THE FIRST DAY

April 21, 1950

Artists:

William Bazotes	Peter Gricpe	Robert Motherwell
Janice Bala	David Hare	Barney Newman
Louise Bourgeois	Hans Hoffmann	Richard Pousette-Dart
James Brooks	Weldon Kees	Ad Reinhardt
William de Kooning	Ibram Lassow	Ralph Rosenberg
Jimmy Ernst	Norman Lewis	Hedda Sterne
Herbert Ferber	Richard Lippold	Bradley Walker Tomlin
Adolph Gottlieb	Seymour Lipton	

Moderators:

Richard Lippold
Robert Motherwell

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 1 -

(Note: preliminary remarks were not to be recorded.)

Moderator Lippold: It might be advisable to list a few things which we will probably not want to discuss. It would seem that the method of work of most of us who are here in this group has been a lonely one - I feel that much is gained from argument. I would like to learn from conversation with my confrères.

Hare: I think we ought to define terms and find a subject to speak about. Everybody here knows everybody else's work. There is no advantage in talking about a school of painting. I think we ought to talk about the problems of the particular artist, and not of ~~the~~ particular school. I don't see any point in discussing our own work. What a painter thinks or does is very often different from what he does. There are painters who are extremely vocal. We would like to talk to them and see their work, but their work and speaking don't coincide. You can do it or you don't do it. You can talk about it, but you can't accomplish anything in talking about it. We don't just want to hear everybody talking about his own point of view. I don't see that we can get anywhere unless we all state a problem and give our ideas on that particular problem. Has somebody a problem to suggest?

Pousette-Dart: Our togetherness happens in institutions. It seems to me that you can't carry on a discussion like this without talking about museums. We don't get together ourselves, so we get together in the museums which persecute the artists.

Ferber: The public has been mentioned, and it seems to me even in a sophisticated group like this we should attempt to identify our relationship to the public, perhaps in two ways. In a personal way, and in a way which relates to our work. By the second I perhaps mean that the public really is asking all the time "What does this work mean?" I think it might be helpful to adopt an attitude toward the public in the sense of an answer to that question. We needn't answer the question. What I am asking is that we should adopt an attitude of either discarding the question or trying to answer it... Another thing I want to suggest is that we might want to talk about the possibility of discussing whether any of us feel that there

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 2 -

is any difference in what is happening in America and what has happened heretofore, and in what is happening in Europe. There is some difference which is not a question of geography but of point of view. It is a question of origin of ancestry.

Gottlieb: It seems to me that we are approaching an academy version of abstract painting. I think that has some bearing on our getting together here, in that I think, despite any individual differences, there is a basis for getting together on mutual respect and the feeling that painters here are not academic, and we should make some distinctions.

Hofmann: What is abstract art in the "good" sense?

Moderator Motherwell: The word "abstract" has a technical meaning. It means to take from. As a method, it signifies selecting one element from a myriad of elements, for the purpose of emphasis. Whitehead says, "The higher the degree of abstraction, the lower the degree of complexity." I suppose the word was first applied to a certain kind of art that was very highly abstracted (in Whitehead's sense) but consequently with a low degree of complexity. The people who first said abstract must have meant that so much was left out.

Grippe: Why is it that Picasso is not considered "abstract?"

Moderator Motherwell: Because Picasso represents a higher degree of complexity and a lower degree of abstraction than Mondrian, for example.

Moderator Lippold: I feel that if we are going to learn something from each other, let's dismiss our problems with relationship to the public and concern ourselves with the problems of creativity: how each one begins his piece of work and how he proceeds with it.

Hewson: I was going to try to formulate a question. When Gottlieb raised the question of abstraction, I don't think we should just dismiss it. It might be formulated into this question: do we artists really have a community? If so, what makes it a community?

Here: I don't see why we shouldn't feel lonely. An artist is always lonely. That is why he is an artist. An artist is a man who does not get along with society. You can be beyond it, or ahead, but in any case you don't get along with it. I think our

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 3 -

problem would seem to be fundamentally psychological. We feel badly because we are not accepted by the public. We can't be accepted by the public. As soon as we are accepted, we no longer are artists. Perhaps we go around on occasion thinking to ourselves, "This won't do, If we could only explain to the public, they would agree with us." They may agree in the course of years. They won't agree now..... I think this group activity, this gathering together, is a symptom of fear. Possibly you could connect this with the question of democracy, in the sense that in this country there is a feeling that unless you have a large public you are a failure. The public is always concerned with successful people. I will always be opposed to those people. We should get the public interested, if possible, but I don't think it is necessary to worry about whether the public understands, and I certainly don't think it is necessary to try to explain under the assumption that once you explain, they will agree. They shouldn't agree with us - they are not opposed to the status quo.

Reinhardt: There are many things that Hare brought up that I don't agree with. I think we should follow some kind of procedure, isolate some ideas, and find out each artist's opinion. Newman's question is pertinent. Why can't we find out what our community is and what our differences are, what each artist thinks of them?

Moderator Motherwell: What then exactly constitutes the basis of our community?

Sterns: We need a common vocabulary. Abstract should mean really abstract, and modern should mean really modern. We don't mean the same things with the same words.

Hoffmann: Why should we? Everyone should be as different as possible. There is nothing that is common to all of us except our creative urge. It just means one thing to me: to discover myself as well as I can. But everyone of us has the urge to be creative in relation to our time - the time to which we belong may work out to be our thing in common. But to formulate this would not be simple.

Reinhardt: There are a great many differences which I think we should find out about here. If we are doing the same thing, or have the same problems or the same fears - what are they?

Pousette-Dart: The museums can bless any artist and make him successful in a moment.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 4 -

The museums can, at any moment, bless any one of us. The disaster is that they can cause disparity among us, too.

Reinhardt: Does that have anything to do with our discovering ourselves?

Hare: I can't see how the museums have anything to do with the artist. In general, museums don't have very much taste.

Fousette-Dart: The people turn to the museums.

Moderator Lippold: What we are leading up to is why each person paints or sculpts. Why each person thinks he should paint. Do we do it to be a success, to make money, understand ourselves, or what is the purpose? To describe our own creative nature? Why do we use titles? Where do we pick such titles? Where do we begin?

Hare: I suggest that we pick three or four questions and ask the same questions of everyone around the table; since a lot of people won't express their points of view, we have the same ones talking all the time. Why not pick three or four questions and ask each person to give his thoughts about it?

Ferber: It seems to me that most of the questions revolve around "meaning." The public, the museums and the artists themselves are involved in the question of "meaning." It need not be "meaning" in any simple sense; but when Mr. Lippold asks for a description of the way in which, and the why-for in connection with a piece of sculpture or painting, he is asking about "meaning," I think.

Moderator Lippold: That isn't what I said.

Ferber: Then, I misunderstood you. If we attempt to talk about what in general in the work of this group has in common, I think it has been mentioned that it is modern, advanced and not-academic; we can rule out the problem of the museum, because we will be telling the public in our own way what we mean and the museum is no longer a problem. So far as the community of artists goes, it seems to me the question would involve the question of difference - between us and other artists. In that way we may have a feeling of community.

Moderator Lippold: To continue with the suggestion I made before: I would like to suggest that the question of method might be broken down into this: first - is it possible to say why we begin to create a work? Is it possible to say, if so, what is

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 5 -

it? Second - how do we begin the work; from an idea, an emotional point of view based on experience or form? Where does the suggestion come from? Third - when is the work finished? How do we know that? I can't see that my relationship to the museum or to the public is concerned with what I am making. I am interested in how other people work.

Hofmann: A very great Chinese painter once said the most difficult thing in a work of art is to know the moment when to stop.

Moderator Motherwell: The question then is, "How do you know when a work is finished?"

Moderator Lipold: I don't know if I can separate that question without thinking about the first two questions. I would say the work seems finished to me when it concludes successfully the prophecy of its beginning and the problems involved in its working out. It may be that my work, by nature, almost determines its own conclusion; ~~however~~ it is not possible to do very much in making changes once the thing is quite far along. The early suggestions of form take place for many of us at the stage of sketching or small model making - if you have to make a model - and when that phase seems to have come to an end, and when I then begin to work on the piece itself, or a larger piece, so far this seems to be a more or less technical process. I would like to say a little about the beginning of my method. I have never begun a piece from the point of view of "pure form." I have never made a piece without its springing from the memory of some experience - an emotional experience, generally. I almost always, from the beginning, have a title which labels that experience, because I want it to act as a discipline in eliminating any extraneous ideas which might come into the sculpture. As we all know, the first line or brush stroke can lead to millions of possibilities, and for me to keep clear is to keep a title in mind. It is of value to me at the beginning. When an experience has made itself so persistent in my unconscious or conscious mind - or both - that I feel that I want to make something which reflects that experience, I find my eyes constantly observing all things. At the same time, that experience is a memory, and it may be that it is at the moment

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 6 -

a line on someone's face, or a crack on the floor, or an experience at a newspaper theatre. The the problem of how to work out the experience which I have had presents itself; I may begin with that idea, and I have to adapt it to my medium. I have to make it clear enough for others to see in its relationships. All of this takes place in the sketch stage - in the models I make from drawings. The drawings become more conclusive as I work. Generally when I work on a piece I make very few changes. But with the last piece I made, the procedure was different, because towards the end technical and expressive problems required my altering the piece several times. I re-did it three or four times. But I felt that the piece was finished when I felt it satisfied my original intent. I can't talk about conclusions without talking about intent. On rare occasions I have seen a form which suggested some kind of relationship which called back a memory or experience. It is always an interplay between the two, I find. It is never one thing or the other.

Brooks: I think quite often I don't know when a work is "finished," because I often carry it a little too far. There is some peculiar balance which it is necessary to preserve all through a painting which keeps it fluid and moving. It can't be brought to a stop. I think you have to abandon it while it is still alive and moving, and so I can't consider a painting "finished." I can't think of working with a clear intent on a painting, because it often develops as I go through a painting. ~~xxxxxx~~ It quite often changes in the middle of a painting. But the "end" is a very difficult thing, something that is determined, not by the form that is "finished," but by the fact that I have worked on it. It satisfies a need of some kind.

Kees: It is usually finished when it defies me to do anything more with it. I start with drawings and when I find that the drawings are incapable of being turned into a painting, then I start to paint.

Bariotes: I consider my painting finished when my eye goes to a particular spot on the canvas. But if I put the picture away about thirty feet on the wall and the movements keep returning to me and the eye seems to be responding

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 7 -

to something living, then it is finished.

Gottlieb: I usually ask my wife... I think a more interesting question would be, "Why does anyone start a painting instead of finishing it?"

Ferber: I would say that I don't think any piece of sculpture I make is really "finished." Nor do I think it possible to call a piece a realization of any particular idea evolving from a specific emotion or event. There is a stream out of which these things pop like waves, and fall back. Therefore works aren't really complete in themselves. I think the day of the "master-piece" is over. When we look at our own work, in ten or fifteen examples, we really understand what we are doing, and what our friends are doing when we look at a group of their things. The sense of "finishing" a particular work is meaningless.

Moderator Lippold: I would like to ask you if what you describe applies to an individual piece? It is a thing which exists within its own particular shape. How can that come about?

Ferber: For a sculptor to insist that a piece of sculpture rises out of his stream of consciousness is perhaps ridiculous because sculpture is so three-dimensional and hard put. But I don't think there is any difference between one piece and another in the development and fulfillment of a particular idea.

Lassow: I would consider a work "finished" when I feel all the particulars participate in the scene and no part is less strong than the other.

Ernst: My work consists of two separate stages of development. I consider a painting almost "finished" when I am half finished with it, when I have reached what seems to be the greatest measure of surprise. The rest of the action is disciplinary on my part. When I see that I am beginning to destroy the surprise - the basic element of that surprise - then it is time for me to stop.

Pousette-Dart: For me it is "finished" when it is inevitable within itself. But I don't think I can explain anything about my painting, just as I can't explain anything about a flower or a child. When is anything "beautiful" finished? I can't discuss things about my paintings. The true thing I am after

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 8 -

goes on and on and I never can completely grasp it.

Lipton: I think that we require time and intimacy and aloneness.

Biala: I never know when it is "finished." I only know there comes a time when I have to stop.

Newman: I think the idea of a "finished" picture is a fiction. I think a man spends his whole life-time painting one picture or working on one piece of sculpture. The question of stopping is really a decision of moral considerations. To what extent are you intoxicated by the actual act, so that you are beguiled by it? To what extent are you charmed by its inner life? And to what extent do you then really approach the intention or desire that is really outside of it. The decision is always made when the piece has something in it that you wanted.

Hare: It seems to me there are two problems: when you stop, and when it is finished.

Rosenborg: When it stops, why does it stop? While the hands do, the picture moves, having a life (objective, emotional and intellectual) of its own. When I can do no more on it, it is done.

Sterne: Painting for me is a problem of understanding. As I try to approach a subject, uncluttered by prejudices, I try to explain it to myself and it then turns into action and, I hope, an explanation. While I work the thing takes life and fights back. There comes a moment when I am vanquished and can't go ahead, and then I stop until I tackle the thing again.

De Kooning: I refrain from "finishing" it. I paint myself out of the picture, and when I have done that, I either throw it away or keep it. I am always in the picture somewhere. The amount of space I use I am always in, I seem to move around in it, and there seems to be a time when I lose sight of what I wanted to do, and then I am out of it. If the picture has a countenance, I keep it. If it hasn't, I throw it away. I am not really very much interested in the question.

Bourgeois: I think a work is "finished" when I have nothing to eliminate. I

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 9 -

make constructions that are usually vertical; when I start them they are full of colors and are complicated in form. Every one of the complications goes and the color becomes uniform and finally they become ~~an~~ completely white and simple. When there is nothing else to take away, it is "finished." Yet I am disgusted by simplicity. So I look for a larger form and look for another work - which goes through the same process of elimination.

Grippe: A work of art is never really "finished." There is a feeling of trying to express the labyrinth in one's mind - its feelings or emotions, and to fulfill one's personality. Each work is trying to complete the expression of that personality. Whether it becomes more profound, I don't know; but I think a person is much more aware of himself in relation to the rest of the world.

Reinhardt: It has always been a problem - about "finishing" paintings. I feel very conscious of ways of "finishing" a painting. There is a value placed on "unfinished" work today. Disturbances arise when you have to treat the work as a finished and complete object, so that the only time I think I "finish" a painting is when I have a dead-line. If you are going to present it as an "unfinished" object, how do you "finish" it?

Lewis: I have stopped, I think, when I have arrived at a quality of mystery. I know this doesn't describe it, but it is the best word I can use.

Hofmann: To me a work is finished when all parts involved communicate themselves, so that they don't need me.

Moderator Motherwell: I dislike a picture that is too suave or too skillfully done. But, contrariwise, I also dislike a picture that looks too inept or blundering. I noticed in looking at the Carré exhibition of young French painters who are supposed to be close to this group, that in "finishing" a picture they assume traditional criteria to a much greater degree than we do. They have a real "finish" in that the picture is a real object, a beautifully made object. We are involved in "process" and what is a "finished" object is not so certain.

Hofmann: Yes, it seems to me all the time there is the question of a heritage.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 10 -

It would seem that the difference between the young French painters and the young American painters is this: French pictures have a cultural heritage. The American painter of today approaches things without basis. The French approach things on the basis of cultural heritage - that one feels in all their work. It is a working towards a refinement and quality rather than working toward new experiences, and painting out these experiences that may finally become tradition. The French have it easier. They have it in the beginning.

De Kooning: I am glad you brought up this point. It seems to me that in Europe every time something new needed to be done it was because of traditional culture. Ours has been a striving to come to the same point that they had - not to be iconoclasts - but to be able to recognize ourselves as being elegant object makers.

Moderator Lippold: There are those here who feel that the things which they make are simply moments of a continuity and, therefore, in themselves, are not subjects for their own sakes, but just moments in the continuity. Is there an irreconcilability in making an object in itself which, at the same time, reflects continuity? This, so far, has been spoken of as incompatible.

Sterne: But that means that you have decided already exactly what is "beautiful." "Beauty" can't be pursued directly.

Gottlieb: There is a general assumption that European - specifically French - painters have a heritage which enables them to have the benefits of tradition, and therefore they can produce a certain type of painting. It seems to me that in the last fifty years the whole meaning of painting has been made international. I think Americans share that heritage just as much, and that if they deviate from tradition it is just as difficult for an American as for a Frenchman. It is a mistake to assume that we are innocents who, just because we have no background of culture, are doing something which is new or unique. I think what Motherwell described is the problem of knowing what the tradition is and being willing to reject it in part.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 11 -

De Kooning: I agree that tradition is part of the whole world now. The point that was brought up that the French artists have some "touch" in making an object. They have a particular something that makes them look like a "finished" painting. They have a touch which I am glad not to have.

Baziot: We are getting mixed up with the French tradition. In talking about the necessity to "finish" a thing we then said, American painters "finish" a thing that looks "unfinished," and the French, they "finish" it. I have seen Matisse's that were more "unfinished" and yet more "finished" than any American painter. Matisse was obviously in a terrific emotion at the time, and it was more "unfinished" than "finished."

De Kooning: I don't mean that. I think this idea of picking up a "finished" painting . . . (trails off). I don't mean it because I have no idea really what kind of experience Matisse had in making a painting. It is possible that it was "unfinished" - you know what I mean. I am a little bit surprised that you talk in terms of the actual, formal ways of making a painting. There is an almost fluid expression in painting. ~~Some~~ I never thought about it in terms of being "finished" or not. This terminology I am almost surprised about.

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 12 -

THE SECOND DAY

April 22, 1950

Artists:

Same as on the first day : with the addition of David Smith.

Moderators:

Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Richard Lippold

Robert Motherwell

Sterne: I find that the painter has the problem of the title; the title seems to classify him. If you make a long, poetic title, you are immediately classified in one way or another. If you put a number, you are classified as non-objective. Whatever you do, it would seem a statement of attitude. You can't see apples or bread in a basket the way others see things they do, because that ~~same~~ implies again a statement of attitude. So you refrain, or if you don't, somehow or other you create a misunderstanding.

Reinhardt: If a title does not mean anything, why put a title on a ^{painting?} ~~picture~~

Brooks: To me a title is nothing but identification. I have a very hard time to find a title and it is always inadequate. I think when titles are very suggestive, they are a kind of a fraud, because I believe they throw the spectator away from the picture rather than into it. But numbers are inadequate.

Gottlieb: I think the point Miss Sterne raised is inevitable. That is, whenever an artist puts a title on a painting, some interpretation about his attitude will be made. It seems obvious that titles are necessary when everybody uses them - whether verbal or numbers; for purposes of exhibition, identification and the benefit of the critics there must be some way of referring to a picture. It seems to me that the artist, in making up titles for his pictures, must decide what his attitude is.

Moderator Barr: Most people seem to think that titles are a kind of

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 13 -

necessity. Does anyone think that titles have real usefulness in supplementing the object?

Rosenberg: The title is always arbitrary because we deal with unseen audiences; the reason for a title is that every Tom, Dick and Harry has to have some link. Once I had a show where I had numbers from one to twenty, and when it came to a question of reviewing, the critics found that number six was better than four, etc. I hope that the onlooker will make up his own title!

Grippe: The title is a very necessary key to the kind of expression - the kind of symbolism that is behind the work. We are all working in a subjective approach. Therefore, it becomes difficult to title works. Another factor is fear - I think Miss Sterne reveals fear. We feel in some way someone is going to criticize. I think we must get away from this fear of titling works. We ought just to be honest with ourselves as well as others.

Fousette-Dart: I think if we could agree on numbers it would be a tremendous thing. In music they don't have this dilemma. It would force people to ~~just~~ just look at the object and try to find their own experience.

Ernst: I would object to doing any such thing as that - such as numbering a picture. I don't particularly care what people classify me as, or whether people understand the title or not. It suggests something to me, or something may pop into my head - so I give it that title.

Smith: I think titles are a positive means of identification. I never objected to any work of art because of its title. The only people who have objected were critics because they did not like the work.

Reinhardt: The question of abandoning titles arose, I am sure, because of esthetic reasons. Even the titles like "still life" and "landscape" do not give you anything about a picture. If he does have a reference or association of some kind, I think the artist is apt to add a title. I think this is why titles are not used by a great many painters - because they don't have anything to do with the painting itself.

Moderator Barr: There are some painters who attach a great deal of importance to titles.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 14 -

Moderator Motherwell: I think Sterne is dealing with a real problem - what is the content of our work? What are we really doing? The question is how to name what as yet has been un-named.

Moderator Barr: I would like to get some information on this. Would you raise your hands if you name your pictures and sculptures?

(raised their hands.)

How many people number their pictures?

(three ^{people} raised their hands.)

How many don't title their pictures at all?

(raised their hands.)

(Note: objections to this procedure.)

Hare: It seems to me if you worry about titling, it is the same as worrying about how to make it. Both are creative acts. I think the only thing the title of the picture can do is note the content of the work.

Basileas: Whereas certain people start with a recollection or an experience and paint that experience, to some of us the act of doing it becomes the experience; so that we are not quite clear why we are engaged on a particular work. And because we are more interested in plastic matters than we are in a matter of words, one can begin a picture and carry it through and stop it and do nothing about the title at all. All pictures are full of association.

Reinhardt: The titles are very important in surrealist work. But the emphasis with us is upon a painting experience, and not on a sexual experience. The only time I would object to a title is when it is false or tricky, or is something extra that the painting does not have.

Sterne: I don't think anybody really has a right to say exactly how I feel about my paintings. It seems too intimate to give them a correct title.

Moderator Barr: Do you think it is possible to enrich the painting by words?

De Kooning: I think that if an artist can always title his pictures, that means he is now always very clear.

Lassow: I usually take a combination of words that has no meaning in itself.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 15 -

Ferber: What we all have been saying is that the designation of a painting or a piece of sculpture has become more important as a problem than it has before. An Assumption or a Crucifixion needed no title. I think that numbering pieces is really begging the question. Because numbering the piece is an admission or a statement or a manifesto that this is pure painting or sculpture - that it stands by itself without relation to any other discipline. We should not cut ourselves off from this great rich world.

Moderator Barr: I don't know how much longer this discussion of titling works will go on. There are a good many interesting implications. It seems to me there are three levels of titles: (1) Simply a matter of convenience. (2) Questions of titles as explanations or as a kind of finger point and which did not work particularly well. (3) There is the surrealist title in which the words are a positive part of the work of art, and there is a question and conflict set up between the words and the picture. It is the second of those that I would like to hear some conversation about very much. The question of specific emotion in the work of art. The general public is very much interested in that factor of the work. How did the artist feel when he did the thing? Was it painful? Was it a matter of love or fear, or what not? Very often he gets no guidance at all from looking at the picture. That's where the factor of titles comes in. At the same time the title may distort the picture a great deal. But to return to the process of painting. How important is (whoever wants to answer) the expressed emotion in the sense that you describe pleasure, grief or fear in making your work?

Pousette-Dart: I believe that a natural work of art should not only be not titles, but I think it should not be signed.

Newman: I think it would be very well if we could title pictures by identifying the subject matter so that the audience could be helped. I think the question of titles is purely a social phenomenon. The story is more or less the same when you can identify them. I think the implication has one of two possibilities: (1) We are not smart enough to identify our subject matter, or (2) language is so

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 16 -

bankrupt that we can't use it. I think both are wrong. I think the possibility of finding language still exists, and I think we are smart enough. Perhaps we are arriving at a new state of painting where the thing has to be seen for itself.

Moderator Lippold: I think we are getting away from the question - a description of the subject of the picture - especially Mr. Barr's question in relation to an emotional experience we might have felt.

Moderator Barr: I don't want to have the discussion kept on a question of that sort, but I was interested really not in the question of title, but as to whether emotions such as grief or joy or pleasure or fear - how important are they consciously in the production of the works of art.

Grippe: I think of the title around the idea. When I have the idea it becomes richer and more personal when I know the idea so that I can add a great deal more and the work itself becomes simpler because I have the idea.

Moderator Barr: Is the work of art an act of confidence or pleasure?

Bourgeois: I try to analyze the reasons why an artist gets up and takes a brush and a knife - why does he do it? I felt it was either because he was suddenly afraid and wanted to fill a void, afraid of being depressed and runs away from it, or that he wants to record a state of pleasure or confidence, which is contrary to the feeling of void or fear. My choice is made in my case, but I am not especially interested in talking about my own case.

Brooks: It seems to me that it is impossible generally to clarify the emotions that go into painting. We can't get away from the grief or joy we put into a painting; it is a very complex thing and in some cases a very ambiguous thing. I think we are in some cases identifying ourselves through our painting and that means everything we are and a great many things we would like to be.

De Kooning: If you are an artist, the problem is to make a picture work whether you are happy or not.

Moderator Barr: Could you raise your hands to this question: "How many

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 17 -

people name their works of art after they are completed?"

(thirteen raised hands to this question)

2How many people name their works when they are half-way through?"

(six raised their hands to this.)

"How many people have their work named before they start on it?"

(one person responded.)

(Note: Mr. Barr said the above was just a rough count of hands.)

Moderator Lippold: It has seemed to me that the whole business of title or what to make is a phenomenon peculiar to our times. The job was a great deal easier, it seems to me, in being artists in any period but our own. The idea of what to paint was already pre-determined. I am talking of such cultures as the oriental and the middle ages - in which a sculptor was asked to carve a king or queen. It wasn't his job to complain because he did not want to make a king or queen. And there are people like that now, too. I believe that in our own time the discipline that is enforced upon our work has to come from ourselves. The title for me exists at the beginning and all through the piece, and it keeps me clearly on the road, I believe, to the conclusion of the work. The only thing I am interested in resolving is that intent with which I begin, because I feel in our time there is very little else with which to begin. To grope through a series of accidents is not the function of the artist.

Baziotas: Mr. Lippold's position, as I understand it, is that the beginning of a work now has something about it that would not have seemed quite logical to artists of the past. We apparently begin in a different way. Is that what you mean, Mr. Lippold?

Moderator Lippold: Yes.

Baziotas: I think the reason we begin in a different way is that this particular time has gotten to a point where the artist feels like a gambler. He does something on the canvas and takes a chance ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ the hope that something important will be revealed.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 18 -

Reinhardt: I would like to ask a question about the exact involvement of a work of art. If there is love of grief of some kind, well, I don't understand the love of anything except the love of painting itself. If there is a love of landscape, I think that is alright, and if there is agony, I don't know exactly what kind of agony it is. I am sure personal agony would not enter into the agony of painting.

Moderator Barr: I would like a show of hands on this question; Is there anyone here who works for himself alone - that is, purely for his own satisfaction - for himself as the sole judge?

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De Kooning: I feel it isn't so much the act of being obliged to someone or to society, but rather one of conviction. I think, whatever happens, every man works for himself, and he does it on the basis of convincing himself. I force my attitude upon this world, and I have this right - particularly in this country - and I think it is wonderful, and if it does not come off, it is alright, too. I don't see any reason why we should go and look into past history and find a place or try to take a similar position.

Biala: I don't think a work of art is finished until it has found its audience.

Moderator Motherwell: Is the artist his own audience.

Hare: I would work whether I had an audience or not.

Rosenborg: How many people consider themselves craftsmen or professionals? What is the relationship to the social world?

Brooks: When we paint pictures, we assume other people feel the way we do.

Biala: Nothing exists by itself. It only exists in relation to something else: when it can find one other person in the world.

Pousette-Dart: Is prayer a creative act? I would say that it depends upon the prayer itself, but there is no other person necessarily involved. A painter can paint for the satisfaction of his soul, but he can mean it for everyone.

De Kooning: There was the case of paintings which were found in France just lately. Were they works of art before we discovered them? This is the question.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 18 -

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 19 -

Newman: I would like to go back to Mr. Lippold's question - are we involved in self-expression or in the world? It seems to Lippold you cannot be involved in the world if you are a craftsman; but if you are involved in the world, you cannot be an artist. We are in the process of making the world, to a certain extent, in our own image. This removes us from the craft level.

De Kooning: This difficulty of titling or not titling a picture - we ought to have more faith in the world. If you really express the world, those things eventually will turn out more or less good. I know what Newman means: it is some kind of feeling that you want to make your place in the world.

Newman: About specifying - if you specify your emotions - whether they are agony or fear, etc. - I believe it is bad manners to actually say one is feeling bad.

De Kooning: I think there are different experiences or emotions. I feel certain parts you ought to leave up to the world.

Newman: I think we start from a subjective attitude, which, in the process of our endeavor, becomes related to the world.

Ferber: I want to add to what Newman has said, which is that it is impossible to escape an attitude towards the world. I would like to bring into this discussion, if possible, the artist as being a man, and not as a mere practitioner or craftsman, because if we have any integrity at all, it is as men and women.

Pousette-Dart: Why does the modern artist feel the need to sign his work?

Baziotes: When we make a work of art we must get our praise after it is finished.

Pousette-Dart: In certain cultures none of the works were signed.

Baziotes: If you were commissioned to do a picture of the Madonna in the middle ages that was praise to begin with.

Gottlieb: I think the answer is that the work that really has something to say constitutes its own signature.

De Kooning: There is no such thing as being anonymous.

Hare: I think a man's work is sufficient signature. I go further with that. There is a tendency to say, "Let's not sign our things." The only reason why people don't want to sign their things is fear. Art has never been anonymous.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 19 -

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 20 -

It is just anonymous to us.

Rosenborg: It is a beautiful question. In our society, with manufacturers, businessmen, etc., it is necessary to sign something for the purposes of identity. But still the thing is, how could one maintain an identity without signing. Who wants to title a work? To sign a work?

Lewis: But how are you going to get that to the public?

Moderator Barr: You are interested in the problem of how to get your painting to the public?

Lewis: During the period of impressionism you had the artists showing their work in cafes or any places where they ate. At one time they were exhibiting in the open air shows in the Village. And there was the Federal Art Project. People no longer have this intimacy with the artists, so that the public does not know actually what is going on, what is being done by the painter. I remember organizing on the water-front. Certainly people the didn't know the function of a union, or what was good about it, but gradually they were made aware of it. They saw a need for it. The same is true of our relationship with the people; in making it aware of what we are doing. Certainly you are going to run into ignorance.

Hare: Lewis brings up the question of painters showing in the open air and moving out of that and moving uptown to galleries. I don't think the public here isn't interested in art or has a contact with it. Sometimes a man of thirty, or less, becomes well known. He already is a member of the reaction. He can't help it. It is not such a good thing to find yourself at the top before you know where you are. I speak of the top, not of sales, but in a situation where we arrive without any reason.

Reinhardt: It is exactly what the involvement is in relation to the other world. I think everybody should be asked to say something. Lets see what they have to say.

Moderator Barr: Apparently many people don't want to answer the question.

De Kooning: I think somebody who is a professor of something never is a professor. I think we are craftsmen, but we really don't know exactly what we

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 20 -

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 21 -

are ourselves, but now in the profession we haven't no position in the world - absolutely no position except that we just insist upon being around.

Moderator Lippold: I should like to say ~~more~~ that the job of the artist is only a job of a craftsman.

Ernst: I am rather happy with my position in society. In other words, I would much rather be unattached to any part of society than to be commissioned to carve a picture of Mr. Truman, because I am not interested in that. I think what we are overlooking here - and I have believed this for a long time - is the fact that we cannot draw our reaction altogether from the present, nor can we create out of past experience alone.

Tomlin: It seems to me before we examine our position in relation to the world we should examine our position in relation to each other. I understood that to be the point of this discussion and that is why we came together. I am sure there are a number of people who are interested in the matter of self-expression alone and there are others who are not.

Newman: I would like to emphasize Mr. Motherwell's remarks: we have two problems. (1) The problem of existing as men and as artists and (2) As ^{grown} ~~grown~~ men and as artists.

Moderator Barr: There seems to be some feeling that this is a practical body rather than a liberal one. Do you want to discuss whether you want to do something practical or go ahead in the search of what we call truth?

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 21 -

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS
stamps

incomplete

- 23 -

THE THIRD DAY

April 23rd, 1950.

Moderator Motherwell: The questions we all have written down fall into three categories, though they overlap. One is a series of questions that are historical, which Grippe, Ernst, Hare, Reinhardt, Barr and Gottlieb ask; the largest number of questions are strictly esthetic questions, about the process of creation and about the quality of creative works - the questions of Ferber, Hare, Baziot, Lippold, Smith, Sterne, Hoffmann, Biala, Lassow and Bourgeois. Five people, Pousette-Dart, Lipton, Tomlin, Newman and Brooks, have asked an identical question; a question of community - what is it that binds us together (if there is something that binds us together)? Would you like me to read all the questions, either anonymously or signed?

All: Read them signed.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 27 -

Moderator Motherwell: I would suggest, to expedite matters, that we vote on which category of these three groups we wish to begin with. Most people here are involved in the esthetic question and would prefer to give it preference, no doubt. Would it seem agreeable to vote?

Reinhardt: There are really only two categories - historical and community are really the same thing. The question of community is, in practice, the historical problem, and would take less time than the esthetic question.

Moderator Motherwell: The questions that are dealing with the creative process tend to revolve around the question of how a work originates: what it is really referring to, and in that sense what its actual content is and how clearly it is known at the inception. And the other series dealing with creative process tend to revolve around the question of quality - what quality is. However, it also involves some social problems - why we are together. Shall we begin with the questions that have to do with origin. It seemed to me quite clear the first day that there were two differences mentioned which over-lap. One is a notion that a work in its beginning has its conclusion implied. The conclusion follows the original line of thought and the process is to cut out anything that is irrelevant to that line of thought. The other notion is a notion of improvising - that one begins like a blind swimmer and what one finds en route often alters the original intent. The people who work like that are involved in the problem of inspiration. That's enough to annoy somebody, perhaps.

Ferber: I wasn't making any point about inspiration.

Pousette-Dart: Would you say a work was an experience of discovery - that you are turning up new stones?

Moderator Motherwell: Sterne said that any other position involves an a priori notion of what beauty is.

Pousette-Dart: You have to ^{know} ~~know~~ if you are . . .

Moderator Lippold: (interrupting) We have moved forward only when a specific problem presented itself and we have groped around for a conclusion. I attempted to explain that my method seems to be to have a problem with which to begin and

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 28 -

then proceed with it. I would like to take some questions which have been suggested which have to do with the genesis of a work.

Ferber: What about this problem of how a piece is begun?

Moderator Lippold: I think Miss Sterne's question has to do with origin. I would say that in terms of origin is it a question of wanting to say a specific thing, or of how one says it? And where do the two meet? Do we begin with the necessity to convey a message, or do we become intrigued with the way in which it is to be said?

Ferber: Could the process which I suggested as one process be compared to the way in which one handles a kaleidoscope? One's relationship to the world in which we live might be a kind of base from which one starts. If you turn the kaleidoscope you stop at an image which takes form in a satisfactory way; and the painting becomes the realization of that image - which is only a moment in the whole process - then you turn the kaleidoscope and make another image.

Moderator Motherwell: Are the elements in the kaleidoscope essentially "hownesses" or "whatnesses?"

Sterne: I think that for the artist himself the problem is not "beauty," ever. It is one of accuracy, validity and life.

Moderator Barr: Would you say preoccupation with the idea of beauty is a bad thing?

Sterne: No, but it does not lead anywhere, because "beauty" is a matter of conception.

Newman: A concern with "beauty" is a concern with what is "known."

Pousette-Dart: "Beauty" is unattainable.

Newman: The artist's intention is what makes a specific thing uniform.

Pousette-Dart: I have the feeling that in the art world "beauty" has become a discredited word. I have heard people say you can't use the word "God." When a word becomes trite . . .

Sterne: I am here not to define anything; but to give life to what I have the urge to give life to. We live by the particular, not by the general.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 29 -

Moderator Motherwell: It is not necessary for Sterne to define "beauty" for what she is saying. "Beauty" is not for her the primary source of inspiration. She thinks that "beauty" is discovered en route.

Reinhardt: Is there anyone here who considers himself a producer of beautiful objects?

Gottlieb: I agree with Sterne that we are always concerned with the particular, not the general. Any general discussion of esthetics is a discussion of philosophy; any conclusion can apply to any work of art. Why not have people tell us why they do what they do. Why does Brooks use swirling shapes? Why Newman a straight line? What is it that makes each person use those particular forms that they use?

Smith: I agree with Miss Sterne. The question of "beauty" does not inspire the creator, but is a result of recognition.

Lipton: I feel that Sterne's view seems valid. The work of art is an end result. The other concern (formulated by Lippold) is an a priori kind of view. I see Sterne's concept of art in its relation ^{to} "beauty;" why she is concerned with "beauty" and leaves it out of the discussion.

Brooks: I suggest that the artists begin with a discussion of their own particular points of view.

Moderator Motherwell: (to Brooks) I am extremely interested in something you do, which is painting behind the canvas.

Brooks: My work is improvisation to start with. My purpose is to get as much unknown on the canvas as I can. Then I can start digesting or changing. The first thing is to get a great many unfamiliar things on the surface. The working through on another side is an unfamiliar attack. There are shapes suggested that start improvising themselves, which I then start painting. Sometimes there is a terrible confusion, and a retreat into tradition. If, for example, I rely on cubism, my painting loses its newness to me. If I can manage to keep a balance with improvisation, my work can get more meaning; it reaches a certain fulness.

Gottlieb: Isn't it possible that a straight line could develop on your canvas? I am inclined to think that it does not appear because it is excluded. Swirling

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 30 -

shapes are not just the result of unconscious process.

Brooks: It is not as deliberate as you think. I have a preference for it, but that is as far as I can go.

Tomlin: Can one interchange the words "automatic" and "improvise?"

Brooks: No, I don't consider them synonymous.

Tomlin: Do you feel that the "automatic" enters into your work at all?

Brooks: I am not able to define exactly what the mixture is.

De Kooning: I consider all painting free. As far as I am concerned, geometric shapes are not necessarily clear. When things are circumspect or physically clear, it is purely an optical phenomenon. It is a form of uncertainty; it is like accounting for something. It is like drawing something that then is bookkeeping. Bookkeeping is the most unclear thing.

Reinhardt: The emphasis on geometry is on the "known," on order and knowledge.

Ferber: Why is geometry more clear than the use of swirling shapes?

Reinhardt: I want to straighten out the terminology, if I can. Vagueness is a "romantic" value, and ~~its~~ clarity a "classic" or "geometric" value.

De Kooning: I meant geometry in art. Geometry was against art - the beauty of the rectangle, I mean.

Moderator Lippold: This means that a rectangle is unclear?

De Kooning: Yes.

Moderator Motherwell: Lippold resents the implication that a geometric form is not "clear."

De Kooning: The end of a painting in this kind of geometric painting would be almost the graph for a possible painting - like a blueprint.

Tomlin: Would you say that automatic structure is in the process of becoming, and that "geometry" has already been shown and terminated?

De Kooning: Yes.

Newman: It is not a question of "clarity" at all. When a thing is precise, does that make it clear? Precision does not mean clarity.

Moderator Motherwell: It seems to me that what De Kooning is saying is plain.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 31 -

He feels resentful that one mode of expression should be called more clear, precise, rational, finished, than another.

Baziotes: I think when a man first discovers that two and two is four, there is "beauty" in that; and we can see why. But if people stand and look at the moon and one says, "I think it's just beautiful tonight," and the other says, "The moon makes me feel awful," we are both "clear." A geometric shape - we know why we like it; and an unreasonable shape, it has a certain mystery that we recognize as real; but it is difficult to put these things in an objective way.

Newman: The question of clarity is one of intention.

Sterne: I think it has to do with Western thinking. A Chinese thinks very well, but does not use logic. The use of geometrical forms comes from logical thinking.

Reinhardt: (to Sterne) Your work to some extent looks generally planned and preconceived. I would like some discussion on it.

Sterne: I think if you can achieve what you want, it is a question of mastery. It is very difficult because the thing takes life, and becomes stronger than you. But if you are strong and great yourself, in achieving it you become greater. I feel that we are too concerned with words and I feel the need is "how." I try to create a kind of vacuum of esthetic prejudices. I try to find shapes which impress me strictly psychologically. I don't think of a painting. I go through it and see what I can do with it.

Kees: In regard to this issue of clarity, it might be interesting if we could find anyone who could say that he doesn't care very much about clarity as an element in his painting.

Smith: I am not involved with clarity, but a straight line is a form which is the most abstract thing you can find. It is a support, not an element.

Hoffmann: I believe that in an art every expression is relative, not absolutely defined as long as it is not the expression of a relationship. Anything can be changed. We speak here only about means, but the application of the means is the point. You can change one thing into another with the help of ^{the} relations of the things. One shape in relation to other shapes makes the "expression;" not one

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 32 -

shape or another, but the relationship between the two makes the "meaning." As long as a means is only used for itself, it cannot lead to anything. Construction consists of the use of one thing in relation to another, which then relates to a third, and higher, value.

Moderator Motherwell: (to Hoffmann) Would you say that a fair statement of your position is that the "meaning" of a work of art consists of the relations among the elements, and not the elements themselves?

Hoffmann: Yes, that I would definitely say. You make a thin line and a thick line. It is the same as with geometrical shapes. It is all relationship. Without all of these relationships it is not possible to express higher art.

Ferber: The means are important, but what we were concerned with is an expression of a relationship to the world. Truth and validity cannot be determined by the shape of the elements of the picture.

De Kooning: About this idea of geometric shapes again: I think a straight line does not exist. There is no such thing as a straight line.

Reinhardt: We are losing Ferber's point. I would like to get back to the question of whether there is another criterion of truth and validity, apart from the internal relationships in a work of art.

Moderator Motherwell: It would be very difficult to formulate a position in which there were no external relations. I cannot imagine any structure being defined as though it only has internal meaning.

Reinhardt: I want to know the outside truth. I think I know the internal one.

Moderator Motherwell: Reinhardt was emphasizing very strongly that the quality of a work depends upon the relations within it. Between Ferber and Reinhardt the question is being raised as to whether these internal relations also relate externally to the world, or better, as to what this external relation is.

Tomlin: May I take this back to structure? In what was said about the parts in relation to Brooks' work, the entire structure was embraced. We were talking about shape, without relation to one possibility of structure. I would like to say that I feel that geometric shapes can be used to achieve a fluid and organic structure.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 33 -

Hofmann: ~~There is a fluidity in the elements which can be used in a practical way, which is often used by Klee. It is related to handwriting - it often characterises a complete personality. It can be used in a graphic sense and in a plastic sense. It leads a point to a relation with another point. It is a relationship of all points considered in a plastic relation. It offers a number of possibilities.~~

Reinhardt: (to Hoffmann) Do you consider the inter-relationships of the elements in a work of art to be self-contained?

Hofmann: It is related to all of this world - to what you want to express. You want to express something very definitely and you do it with your means. When you understand your means, you can.

Moderator Motherwell: I find that I ask of the painting process one of two separate experiences. I call one the "mode of discovery and invention," the other the "mode of joy and variation." The former represents my deepest painting problem, the bitterest struggle I have ever undertaken: to reject everything I do not feel and believe. The other experience is when I want to paint for the sheer joy of painting. These moments are few. The strain of dealing with the unknown, the absolute, is gone. When I need joy, I find it only in making free variations on what I have already discovered, what I know to be mine. An example: I have discovered for myself black and white stripes, vertical, side by side, with edges as though cut by scissors. My pictures that embody them have the general title of "Spanish Elegies:" each is named after a Spanish town, Granada, Madrid, Barcelona, etc. Sometimes I think plastically of the discovery that they represent as though it were that I had a great striped loaf, like a gigantic loaf of bread, whose slices were alternate stripes of black tar and white chalk, somewhat different on each slice, a loaf whose interior I wanted to know better and better, to feel so familiar with it that I could play with it. Sometimes I want the striped more regular, sometimes more rough and brutal, sometimes with greater precision and vibration more sensuous and austere. The joy is in playing with my own known . . . We modern artists have no generally accepted subject matter, no

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 34 -

inherited iconography. But to re-invent painting, its subject matter and its means, is a task so staggering that one must reduce it to a very simple concept in order to paint for the sheer joy of painting, as simple as the madonna was to many generations of painters in the past. My black and white stripes are an existing subject matter for me - even though I had to invent them to begin with - whose variation gives me moments of joy . . . The other mode is a voyaging into the night, one knows not where, on an unknown vessel, an absolute struggle with the elements of the real.

Reinhardt: Let's talk about that struggle.

Moderator Motherwell: When one looks at a Renaissance painter, it is evident that he can modify existing subject matter in a manner that shows his uniqueness and fineness without having to re-invent painting altogether. But I think that painters like Mondrian tend to move as rapidly as they can toward a simple iconography on which they can make variations. Because the strain is so great to re-invent reality in painting.

Reinhardt: What about reality and the reality of painting? They are not the same thing. What is this creative thing that you have struggled to get? What reference or value does it have, outside of the painting itself?

Moderator Lippold: I should like to find where I think I am. It is the general impression that it is a great problem as to what to paint, and with what to begin. Unfortunately, it is never a problem for me. I have material for the next ten to fifteen years in my sketch books . . . We have talked about formal relationships. This is not a new thing with the abstractionists. It would seem to me that people of Mondrian's school have been interested in exploring formal relationship internally. Other schools have been concerned with the relationship of art to propaganda. Others seem to explore the areas of a dream world. If we are aware of the things which happen to us in our immediate past, those things come into our consciousness and into our work. We cannot pretend to sit down with no idea as to what has happened before, and to create something entirely new which has never happened before. I feel that all I am doing is synthesizing

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 35 -

something which has happened in the past. My materials are not new; my relationships are not new.

* * * * *

Moderator Motherwell: We have some questions which have not been read - they are by people who came in late:

Stamps: Is automatic painting conscious or not? in the early 1900's Ernest Fenollosa wrote an essay with an introduction by Pound on the Chinese character as a medium in poetry. Are the artists today familiar with it, or are such characters or writing unconscious? There is an amazing connection between the two. Are certain artists working closer with the tradition of the Hudson River School in the sense of the organic esthetics? If they are, what are the binding factors of both?

Lewis: Is art a form of self-analysis?

Moderator Motherwell: Are you saying that art is not a form of analysis, and that we should not be here analyzing what is going on? Or that art is a way of analyzing the world?

Lewis: Yes, psychoanalysis.

Moderator Motherwell: Is art a form of self-analysis?

Lewis: Yes, phrase it that way.

* * * * *

De Kooning: If we talk in terms of what kinds of shapes or lines we are using, we don't mean that and we talk like outsiders. When Motherwell says he paints stripes, he doesn't mean that he is painting stripes. That is still thinking in terms of what kind of shapes we are painting. We ought to get rid of that. If a man is influenced on the basis that Mondrian is clear, I would like to ask Mondrian if he was so clear. Obviously, he wasn't clear because he kept on painting. A picture to me is not geometric - it has a face . . . It is some form of impressionism . . . We ought to have some level as a profession. Some part of painting has to become professional.

Newman: De Kooning has moved from his original position that straight lines don't exist in nature. Geometry can be organic. Straight lines do exist in

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 36 -

nature. If I can draw a straight line, I can draw it because it does exist. It exists optically. When De Kooning says it doesn't exist optically, he means it doesn't exist in nature. But the edge of the U.N. building is a straight line. If anyone could make it, it does exist in nature. A straight line is an organic thing that can contain feeling.

De Kooning: What is called Mondrian's optical illusion is not an optical illusion. A Mondrian keeps changing in front of us.

Gottlieb: It is my impression that the most general idea which has kept cropping up is a statement of the nature of a work of art as being an arrangement of shapes or forms of color which, because of the order or ordering of materials, expresses the artist's sense of reality or corresponds with some outer reality. I don't agree - that some expression of reality can be expressed in a painting purely in terms of line, color and form, that those are the essential elements in painting and anything else is irrelevant and can contribute nothing to the painting.

Ferber: It seems that Gottlieb is making the point that non-objective art is a relationship that is internally satisfactory.

Gottlieb: That's not satisfactory.

Moderator Motherwell: It is not the real issue. All of the people here move as abstractly or back to the world of nature as freely as they like to, and would fight at any time for that freedom.

Newman: We are raising the question of subject matter and what its nature is.

De Kooning: I wonder about the subject matter of the Crucifixion scene - was the Crucifixion the subject matter or not? What is the subject matter? Is an interior subject matter?

Hofmann: I think the question goes all the time back to subject matter. Every subject matter depends on how to use meaning. You can use it in a lyrical or dramatic manner. It depends on the personality of the artist. Everyone is clear about himself, as to where he belongs, and in which way he can give esthetic enjoyment. Painting is an esthetic enjoyment. I want to be a "poet." As an artist I must conform to my nature. My nature has a lyrical as well as a

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 37 -

dramatic disposition. Not one day is the same. One day I feel wonderful to work and I feel an expression which shows in the work. Only with a very clear mind and on a clear day I can paint without interruptions and without food because my disposition is like that. My work should reflect my moods and the great enjoyment which I had when I did the work.

Reinhardt: We could discuss the question of the rational or intuitional. That might bring in subject matter or content. We have forms in common. We have ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ cut out a great deal. We have eliminated the naturalistic, among other things, the super-realistic and the political.

Rosenborg: We are also trying to cut out by still putting in everything.

Reinhardt: You're putting in everything about yourself, but not everything outside yourself.

Rosenborg: The object is not to put yourself in the middle and say, "That's me."

Ernst: I know I can't paint when my mother-in-law is in the house.

Moderator Motherwell: Thus we go on with the practical questions:

Reinhardt: What is your work (of art)? Do you consider the production of it a professional activity? Do you belong to Artists' Equity? Why, or why not?

Barr: What is the most acceptable name for our direction or movement? (It has been called Abstract-Expressionist, Abstract-Symbolist, Intra-subjectivist, etc.)

Smith: I don't think we do have unity on the name.

Rosenborg: We should have a name through the years.

Smith: Names are usually given to groups by people who don't understand them or don't like them.

Moderator Barr: We should have a name for which we can blame the artists - for once in history!

Moderator Motherwell: Even if there is any way of giving ourselves a name, we will all still be called abstract artists . . . Do you regard painting as a profession?

Reinhardt: All of us exhibit in large exhibitions alongside of artists who consider themselves "professional" business men, such as the members of Artists' Equity.

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page 26

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 38 -

Moderator Motherwell: Do you regard it as a profession to earn your living as a painter?

Reinhardt: You could be unemployed and still be a "professional" or a member of Artists' Equity.

Moderator Motherwell: If you define "profession" in terms of what you do most often, of what is your major activity, then everybody here is a "professional" painter.

Reinhardt: Then should or shouldn't we belong to Equity?

Ernst: I joined because I was tired of being asked why don't I belong.

* * * * *

Newman: The thing that binds us together is that we consider painting to be a profession in an ideal society. We assume the right of insisting that we are creating our own paradise. We should be able to act in a professional way on our own terms. We go out into normal society and insist on acting in our own terms.

Smith: I exist in the best society possible because I exist in this time. I have to take it as the ideal society. It is ideal as far as I am concerned. I will not go back and admit that there is any history in my life outside of the times in which I live. Nothing was more idealistic than right now - and there never will be an ideal society.

Moderator Motherwell: (to Newman) You mean that we are not acting in relation to the goals that most people in our society accept?

Newman: Yes.

Smith: This is the time in which I live and have to function. Therefore, it has to be ideal. How can I consider an ideal society as ideal in one that I can't possibly live?

Moderator Motherwell: What distinguishes these people is that they are trying to act ideally in a non-ideal society.

Fousette-Dart: It is an ideal society, but only the artist realizes it.

De Kooning: You can't call yourself "professional" unless you have a license,

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 39 -

such as an architect has. There are differences, we can make money without a license, but to call ourselves "professionals," we can't do that; you must be a "professional" to someone else - not to yourself.

Smith: It is just an attitude of mind.

Reinhardt: You must remove yourself from the business world in order to create fine art.

Moderator Motherwell: Can we say that every one here accepts the fact that in most societies people have a "career" of one kind or another? To choose painting as career and, at the same time, to insist on the integrity of one's own expression, is really to make an idiotic choice of a career.

Ernst: Can we say that no one here is an amateur?

Rosenborg: I wouldn't advise anyone in the outside world to be an artist, but if I had to do it all over again I would do it.

Brooks: "Professional" conveys, to the outside world, that people spend a great deal of time in what they are doing.

Newman: "Professional" means "serious."

Moderator Motherwell: In relation to the question of a name, here are three names: Abstract-Expressionist; "Abstract Symbolist; Abstract-Objectivist.

(refers to Barr's question - see page 37)

Brooks: A more accurate name would be "true" art. It doesn't sound very good, but in terms of meaning, abstraction is involved in it.

Tomlin: Brooks also remarked that the word "concrete" is meaningful; it must be pointed out that people have argued very strongly for that word. "Non-objective" is a vile translation.

Newman: I would offer "Self-evident" because the image is concrete.

De Kooning: It is disastrous to name ourselves.

THE END

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 23 -

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THE THIRD DAY

April 23rd, 1950.

Moderator Motherwell: The questions we all have written down fall into three categories, though they overlap. One is a series of questions that are historical, which Grippe, Ernst, Hare, Reinhardt, Barr and Gottlieb ask; the largest number of questions are strictly esthetic questions, about the process of creation and about the quality of creative works - the questions of Ferber, Hare, Baziotes, Lippold, Smith, Sterne, Hoffmann, Bläa, Lassow and Bourgeois. Five people, Pousette-Dart, Lipton, Tolain, Newman and Brooks, have asked an identical question; a question of community - what is it that binds us together (if there is something that binds us together)? Would you like me to read all the questions, either anonymously or signed?

All: Read them signed.

Moderator Motherwell: I would suggest, to expedite matters, that we take as our three groups we wish to begin with. Most people have asked questions that have to do with origins. It seemed to me quite clear the first day that there were two differences concerned which overlap. One is a notion that a work in its beginning has its conclusion implied. The conclusion follows the original line of thought and the process is to cut out anything that is irrelevant to that line of thought. The other notion is a notion of improvising - that one begins like a blind explorer and that one finds one's way after a long and difficult journey. The people who work like that are involved in the question of inspiration. That's enough to start with, perhaps.

Ferber: I wasn't asking any point about inspiration.

Pousette-Dart: Would you say a work was an experience of discovery - that you are learning as you discover?

Moderator Motherwell: There could be any other position involved as a notion of what beauty is.

Pousette-Dart: We have to know if you are . . .

Moderator Motherwell: (Interjecting) We have moved forward only when a specific problem presented itself and we were forced upon for a resolution. I attempted to explain that as nothing seems to be to have a problem with which to begin and

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 27 -

Moderator Motherwell: I would suggest, to expedite matters, that we vote on which category of these three groups we wish to begin with. Most people here are involved in the esthetic question and would prefer to give it preference, no doubt. Would it seem agreeable to vote?

Reinhardt: There are really only two categories - historical and community are really the same thing. The question of community is, in practice, the historical problem, and would take less time than the esthetic question.

Moderator Motherwell: The questions that are dealing with the creative process tend to revolve around the question of how a work originates: what it is really referring to, and in that sense what its actual content is and how clearly it is known at the inception. And the other series dealing with creative process tend to revolve around the question of quality - what quality is. However, it also involves some social problems - why we are together. Shall we begin with the questions that have to do with origin. It seemed to me quite clear the first day that there were two differences mentioned which over-lap. One is a notion that a work in its beginning has its conclusion implied. The conclusion follows the original line of thought and the process is to cut out anything that is irrelevant to that line of thought. The other notion is a notion of improvising - that one begins like a blind swimmer and what one finds en route often alters the original intent. The people who work like that are involved in the problem of inspiration. That's enough to annoy somebody, perhaps.

Ferber: I wasn't making any point about inspiration.

Pousette-Dart: Would you say a work was an experience of discovery - that you are turning up new stones?

Moderator Motherwell: Sterne said that any other position involves an a priori notion of what beauty is.

Pousette-Dart: You have to ^{know} ~~know~~ if you are . . .

Moderator Lippold: (interrupting) We have moved forward only when a specific problem presented itself and we have groped around for a conclusion. I attempted to explain that my method seems to be to have a problem with which to begin and

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 28 -

then proceed with it. I would like to take some questions which have been suggested which have to do with the genesis of a work.

Ferber: What about this problem of how a piece is begun?

Moderator Lippold: I think Miss Sterne's question has to do with origin. I would say that in terms of origin is it a question of wanting to say a specific thing, or of how one says it? And where do the two meet? Do we begin with the necessity to convey a message, or do we become intrigued with the way in which it is to be said?

Ferber: Could the process which I suggested as one process be compared to the way in which one handles a kaleidoscope? One's relationship to the world in which we live might be a kind of base from which one starts. If you turn the kaleidoscope you stop at an image which takes form in a satisfactory way; and the painting becomes the realization of that image - which is only a moment in the whole process - then you turn the kaleidoscope and make another image.

Moderator Motherwell: Are the elements in the kaleidoscope essentially "hownesses" or "whatnesses?"

Sterne: I think that for the artist himself the problem is not "beauty," ever. It is one of accuracy, validity and life.

Moderator Barr: Would you say preoccupation with the idea of beauty is a bad thing?

Sterne: No, but it does not lead anywhere, because "beauty" is a matter of conception.

Newman: A concern with "beauty" is a concern with what is "known."

Fousette-Dart: "Beauty" is unattainable.

Newman: The artist's intention is what makes a specific thing uniform.

Fousette-Dart: I have the feeling that in the art world "beauty" has become a discredited word. I have heard people say you can't use the word "God." When a word becomes trite . . .

Sterne: I am here not to define anything; but to give life to what I have the urge to give life to. We live by the particular, not by the general.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 29 -

Moderator Motherwell: It is not necessary for Sterne to define "beauty" for what she is saying. "Beauty" is not for her the primary source of inspiration. She thinks that "beauty" is discovered en route.

Reinhardt: Is there anyone here who considers himself a producer of beautiful objects?

Gottlieb: I agree with Sterne that we are always concerned with the particular, not the general. Any general discussion of esthetics is a discussion of philosophy; any conclusion can apply to any work of art. Why not have people tell us why they do what they do. Why does Brooks use swirling shapes? Why Newman a straight line? What is it that makes each person use those particular forms that they use?

Smith: I agree with Miss Sterne. The question of "beauty" does not inspire the creator, but is a result of recognition.

Lipton: I feel that Sterne's view seems valid. The work of art is an end result. The other concern (formulated by Lippold) is an a priori kind of view. I see Sterne's concept of art in its relation ^{to} "beauty;" why she is concerned with "beauty" and leaves it out of the discussion.

Brooks: I suggest that the artists begin with a discussion of their own particular points of view.

Moderator Motherwell: (to Brooks) I am extremely interested in something you do, which is painting behind the canvas.

Brooks: My work is improvisation to start with. My purpose is to get as much unknown on the canvas as I can. Then I can start digesting or changing. The first thing is to get a great many unfamiliar things on the surface. The working through on another side is an unfamiliar attack. There are shapes suggested that start improvising themselves, which I then start painting. Sometimes there is a terrible confusion, and a retreat into tradition. If, for example, I rely on cubism, my painting loses its newness to me. If I can manage to keep a balance with improvisation, my work can get more meaning; it reaches a certain fulness.

Gottlieb: Isn't it possible that a straight line could develop on your canvas? I am inclined to think that it does not appear because it is excluded. Swirling

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 30 -

shapes are not just the result of unconscious process.

Brooks: It is not as deliberate as you think. I have a preference for it, but that is as far as I can go.

Tomlin: Can one interchange the words "automatic" and "improvise?"

Brooks: No, I don't consider them synonymous.

Tomlin: Do you feel that the "automatic" enters into your work at all?

Brooks: I am not able to define exactly what the mixture is.

De Kooning: I consider all painting free. As far as I am concerned, geometric shapes are not necessarily clear. When things are circumspect or physically clear, it is purely an optical phenomenon. It is a form of uncertainty; it is like accounting for something. It is like drawing something that then is bookkeeping. Bookkeeping is the most unclear thing.

Reinhardt: The emphasis on geometry is on the "known," on order and knowledge.

Perber: Why is geometry more clear than the use of swirling shapes?

Reinhardt: I want to straighten out the terminology, if I can. Vagueness is a "romantic" value, and ~~for~~ clarity a "classic" or "geometric" value.

De Kooning: I meant geometry in art. Geometry was against art - the beauty of the rectangle, I mean.

Moderator Lippold: This means that a rectangle is unclear?

De Kooning: Yes.

Moderator Motherwell: Lippold resents the implication that a geometric form is not "clear."

De Kooning: The end of a painting in this kind of geometric painting would be almost the graph for a possible painting - like a blueprint.

Tomlin: Would you say that automatic structure is in the process of becoming, and that "geometry" has already been shown and terminated?

De Kooning: Yes.

Newman: It is not a question of "clarity" at all. When a thing is precise, does that make it clear? Precision does not mean clarity.

Moderator Motherwell: It seems to me that what De Kooning is saying is plain.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 31 -

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 32 -

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Reinhardt: We are losing Ferber's point. I would like to get back to the question of whether there is another criterion of truth and validity, apart from the internal relationships in a work of art.

Moderator Motherwell: It would be very difficult to formulate a position in which there were no external relations. I cannot imagine any structure being defined as though it only has internal meaning.

Reinhardt: I want to know the outside truth. I think I know the internal one.

Moderator Motherwell: Reinhardt was emphasizing very strongly that the quality of a work depends upon the relations within it. Between Ferber and Reinhardt the question is being raised as to whether these internal relations also relate externally to the world, or better, as to what this external relation is.

Tomlin: May I take this back to structure? In what was said about the parts in relation to Brooks' work, the entire structure was embraced. We were talking about shape, without relation to one possibility of structure. I would like to say that I feel that geometric shapes can be used to achieve a fluid and organic structure.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 33 -

Hofmann: ~~Maqubrtmawndkndmndk~~ There is a fluidity in the elements which can be used in a practical way, which is often used by Klee. It is related to handwriting - it often characterises a complete personality. It can be used in a graphic sense and in a plastic sense. It leads a point to a relation with another point. It is a relationship of all points considered in a plastic relation. It offers a number of possibilities.

Reinhardt: (to Hoffmann) Do you consider the inter-relationships of the elements in a work of art to be self-contained?

Hofmann: It is related to all of this world - to what you want to express. You want to express something very definitely and you do it with your means. When you understand your means, you can.

Moderator Motherwell: I find that I ask of the painting process one of two separate experiences. I call one the "mode of discovery and invention," the other the "mode of joy and variation." The former represents my deepest painting problem, the bitterest struggle I have ever undertaken: to reject everything I do not feel and believe. The other experience is when I want to paint for the sheer joy of painting. These moments are few. The strain of dealing with the unknown, the absolute, is gone. When I need joy, I find it only in making free variations on what I have already discovered, what I know to be mine. An example: I have discovered for myself black and white stripes, vertical, side by side, with edges as though cut by scissors. My pictures that embody them have the general title of "Spanish Elegies:" each is named after a Spanish town, Granada, Madrid, Barcelona, etc. Sometimes I think plastically of the discovery that they represent as though it were that I had a great striped loaf, like a gigantic loaf of bread, whose slices were alternate stripes of black tar and white chalk, somewhat different on each slice, a loaf whose interior I wanted to know better and better, to feel so familiar with it that I could play with it. Sometimes I want the striped more regular, sometimes more rough and brutal, sometimes with greater precision and vibration, sometimes more sensuous and austere. The joy is in playing with my own known We modern artists have no generally accepted subject matter, no

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 34 -

inherited iconography. But to re-invent painting, its subject matter and its means, is a task so staggering that one must reduce it to a very simple concept in order to paint for the sheer joy of painting, as simple as the madonna was to many generations of painters in the past. My black and white stripes are an existing subject matter for me - even though I had to invent them to begin with - whose variation gives me moments of joy . . . The other mode is a voyaging into the night, one knows not where, on an unknown vessel, an absolute struggle with the elements of the real.

Reinhardt: Let's talk about that struggle.

Moderator Motherwell: When one looks at a Renaissance painter, it is evident that he can modify existing subject matter in a manner that shows his uniqueness and fineness without having to re-invent painting altogether. But I think that painters like Mondrian tend to move as rapidly as they can toward a simple iconography on which they can make variations. Because the strain is so great to re-invent reality in painting.

Reinhardt: What about reality and the reality of painting? They are not the same thing. What is this creative thing that you have struggled to get? What reference or value does it have, outside of the painting itself?

Moderator Lippold: I should like to find where I think I am. It is the general impression that it is a great problem as to what to paint, and with what to begin. Unfortunately, it is never a problem for me. I have material for the next ten to fifteen years in my sketch books . . . We have talked about formal relationships. This is not a new thing with the abstractionists. It would seem to me that people of Mondrian's school have been interested in exploring formal relationship internally. Other schools have been concerned with the relationship of art to propaganda. Others seem to explore the areas of a dream world. If we are aware of the things which happen to us in our immediate past, those things come into our consciousness and into our work. We cannot pretend to sit down with no idea as to what has happened before, and to create something entirely new which has never happened before. I feel that all I am doing is synthesizing

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 35 -

something which has happened in the past. My materials are not new; my relationships are not new.

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Moderator Motherwell: We have some questions which have not been read -- they are by people who came in later:

Stamps: Is automatic painting conscious or not? In the early 1900's Ernest Fenolosa wrote an essay with an introduction by Pound on the Chinese character as a medium in poetry. Are the artists today familiar with it, or are such characters or writing unconscious? There is an amazing connection between the two. Are certain artists working closer with the tradition of the Hudson River School in the sense of the organic esthetics? If they are, what are the binding factors of both?

Lewis: Is art a form of self-analysis?

Moderator Motherwell: Are you saying that art is not a form of analysis, and that we should not be here analysing what is going on? Or that art is a way of analysing the world?

Lewis: Yes, psychoanalysis.

Moderator Motherwell: Is art a form of self-analysis?

Lewis: Yes, phrase it that way.

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De Kooning: If we talk in terms of what kinds of shapes or lines we are using, we don't mean that and we talk like outsiders. When Motherwell says he paints stripes, he doesn't mean that he is painting stripes. That is still thinking in terms of what kind of shapes we are painting. We ought to get rid of that. If a man is influenced on the basis that Mondrian is clear, I would like to ask Mondrian if he was so clear. Obviously, he wasn't clear because he kept on painting. A picture to me is not geometric -- it has a face . . . It is some form of impressionism . . . We ought to have some level as a profession. Some part of painting has to become professional.

Newman: De Kooning has moved from his original position that straight lines don't exist in nature. Geometry can be organic. Straight lines do exist in

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 36 -

nature. If I can draw a straight line, I can draw it because it does exist. It exists optically. When De Kooning says it doesn't exist optically, he means it doesn't exist in nature. But the edge of the U.N. building is a straight line. If anyone could make it, it does exist in nature. A straight line is an organic thing that can contain feeling.

De Kooning: What is called Mondrian's optical illusion is not an optical illusion. A Mondrian keeps changing in front of us.

Gottlieb: It is my impression that the most general idea which has kept cropping up is a statement of the nature of a work of art as being an arrangement of shapes or forms of color which, because of the order or ordering of materials, expresses the artist's sense of reality or corresponds with some outer reality. I don't agree - that some expression of reality can be expressed in a painting purely in terms of line, color and form, that those are the essential elements in painting and anything else is irrelevant and can contribute nothing to the painting.

Ferber: It seems that Gottlieb is making the point that non-objective art is a relationship that is internally satisfactory.

Gottlieb: That's not satisfactory.

Moderator Motherwell: It is not the real issue. All of the people here move as abstractly or back to the world of nature as freely as they like to, and would fight at any time for that freedom.

Newman: We are raising the question of subject matter and what its nature is.

De Kooning: I wonder about the subject matter of the Crucifixion scene - was the Crucifixion the subject matter or not? What is the subject matter? Is an interior subject matter?

Hofmann: I think the question goes all the time back to subject matter. Every subject matter depends on how to use meaning. You can use it in a lyrical or dramatic manner. It depends on the personality of the artist. Everyone is clear about himself, as to where he belongs, and in which way he can give esthetic enjoyment. Painting is an esthetic enjoyment. I want to be a "poet." As an artist I must conform to my nature. My nature has a lyrical as well as a

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 37 -

dramatic disposition. Not one day is the same. One day I feel wonderful to work and I feel an expression which shows in the work. Only with a very clear mind and on a clear day I can paint without interruptions and without food because my disposition is like that. My work should reflect my moods and the great enjoyment which I had when I did the work.

Reinhardt: We could discuss the question of the rational or intuitional. That might bring in subject matter or content. We have forms in common. We have ~~Rosenborg~~ cut out a great deal. We have eliminated the naturalistic, among other things, the super-realistic and the political.

Rosenborg: We are also trying to cut out by still putting in everything.

Reinhardt: You're putting in everything about yourself, but not everything outside yourself.

Rosenborg: The object is not to put yourself in the middle and say, "That's me."

Ernst: I know I can't paint when my mother-in-law is in the house.

Moderator Motherwell: Thus we go on with the practical questions:

Reinhardt: What is your work (of art)? Do you consider the production of it a professional activity? Do you belong to Artists' Equity? Why, or why not?

Barr: What is the most acceptable name for our direction or movement? (It has been called Abstract-Expressionist, Abstract-Symbolist, Intra-subjectivist, etc.)

Smith: I don't think we do have unity on the name.

Rosenborg: We should have a name through the years.

Smith: Names are usually given to groups by people who don't understand them or don't like them.

Moderator Barr: We should have a name for which we can blame the artists - for once in history!

Moderator Motherwell: Even if there is any way of giving ourselves a name, we will all still be called abstract artists . . . Do you regard painting as a profession?

Reinhardt: All of us exhibit in large exhibitions alongside of artists who consider themselves "professional" business men, such as the members of Artists' Equity.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 38 -

Moderator Motherwell: Do you regard it as a profession to earn your living as a painter?

Reinhardt: You could be unemployed and still be a "professional" or a member of Artists' Equity.

Moderator Motherwell: If you define "profession" in terms of what you do most often, of what is your major activity, then everybody here is a "professional" painter.

Reinhardt: Then should or shouldn't we belong to Equity?

Ernst: I joined because I was tired of being asked why don't I belong.

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Newman: The thing that binds us together is that we consider painting to be a profession in an ideal society. We assume the right of insisting that we are creating our own paradise. We should be able to act in a professional way on our own terms. We go out into normal society and insist on acting in our own terms.

Smith: I exist in the best society possible because I exist in this time. I have to take it as the ideal society. It is ideal as far as I am concerned. I will not go back and admit that there is any history in my life outside of the times in which I live. Nothing was more idealistic than right now -- and there never will be an ideal society.

Moderator Motherwell: (to Newman) You mean that we are not acting in relation to the goals that most people in our society accept?

Newman: Yes.

Smith: This is the time in which I live and have to function. Therefore, it has to be ideal. How can I consider an ideal society as ideal in one that I can't possibly live?

Moderator Motherwell: What distinguishes these people is that they are trying to act ideally in a non-ideal society.

Fousette-Dart: It is an ideal society, but only the artist realizes it.

De Kooning: You can't call yourself "professional" unless you have a license,

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Wittenborn	I.C.29

- 39 -

such as an architect has. There are differences, we can make money without a license, but to call ourselves "professionals," we can't do that; you must be a "professional" to someone else - not to yourself.

Smith: It is just an attitude of mind.

Reinhardt: You must remove yourself from the business world in order to create fine art.

Moderator Motherwell: Can we say that every one here accepts the fact that in most societies people have a "career" of one kind or another? To choose painting as career and, at the same time, to insist on the integrity of one's own expression, is really to make an idiotic choice of a career.

Ernst: Can we say that no one here is an amateur?

Rosenberg: I wouldn't advise anyone in the outside world to be an artist, but if I had to do it all over again I would do it.

Brooks: "Professional" conveys, to the outside world, that people spend a great deal of time in what they are doing.

Newman: "Professional" means "serious."

Moderator Motherwell: In relation to the question of a name, here are three names: Abstract-Expressionist; "Abstract Symbolist; Abstract-Objectivist.

(refers to Barr's question - see page 37)

Brooks: A more accurate name would be "true" art. It doesn't sound very good, but in terms of meaning, abstraction is involved in it.

Tomlin: Brooks also remarked that the word "concrete" is meaningful; it must be pointed out that people have argued very strongly for that word. "Non-objective" is a vile translation.

Newman: I would offer "Self-evident" because the image is concrete.

De Kooning: It is disastrous to name ourselves.

THE END