

POLLOCK
ONE: NUMBER 31, 1950

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *One: Number 31, 1950*. 1950. Oil and enamel on unprimed canvas, 8' 10" x 17' 5½" (269.5 x 530.8 cm). THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. SIDNEY AND HARRIET JANIS COLLECTION FUND (BY EXCHANGE)

A CENTERPIECE AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART SINCE 1968, JACKSON POLLOCK'S

eighteen-foot-wide *One: Number 31, 1950* comes as a big surprise to anyone who visits the museum's painting galleries chronologically. When *One* is finally reached, it looks intentionally revolutionary, assertively different from everything earlier except Pollock's own works—more extreme in abstraction and more engulfing in scale. In art, and much else, large presupposes important.

Today's museumgoers will see *One* differently from their counterparts twenty-five or fifty years ago, when museum galleries were less crowded and it was easier to experience the sublime emotional complexities of *One* in private. Also, while it's true that Pollock [FIG. 1] was already something of a celebrity before he painted *One*, having been promoted in 1949 by *Life* magazine as possibly America's greatest young painter, by now he has become a legend, dramatized in Ed Harris's highly acclaimed film about the artist's fitful life, released in 2000. (I would be surprised if anyone reading this book had not already seen *Pollock* the film.) More important, Pollock's so-called "drip" style initiated something like a seismic shift in the culture of images, and since 1950, large-scale abstract works suffused with myriad scattered details are less the exception than the rule.

Rendered in the drip style, which Pollock had refined through the late 1940s, *One* shows his ostentatious disregard for every pictorial tradition and strategy except for the idea of painting a flat rectangular canvas for display on the wall. Instead of painting with the expensive oils manufactured for artists, he bought quick-drying alkyd paints from the hardware store, and instead of brushes he used sticks and basters, with expert skill, to drip, pour or squirt these paints onto his canvas, which he worked on not on an easel but on the floor. Even though his hand seldom touched the canvas, Pollock claimed to prefer the resistance of a hard surface while painting. Liquid paints congealed where he applied them, never running down the canvas the way paint can when applied to a vertical surface if not carefully brushed. As a result, when Pollock transposed his drip paintings for wall display, the spots and linear trails of paint appear to be suspended on the riotous surface by some galactic or oceanic current. Painting on the floor allowed Pollock to reach into his paintings every which way, but he made them for walls.

One was a wall of paint for Pollock, with all the emotional overtones relating to barriers and confinement. At wall scale, Pollock's painting is a billboard for his message, however that can be understood—surely, though, a message of liberation, of paint let loose. Pollock's drip paintings have no preconceived subject other than paint itself, which "represents" nothing but the self-referential

FIG. 1. Jackson Pollock, 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. COURTESY CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

actions of the painter painting. As Pollock put it succinctly in a note to himself that has been dated to 1950, with reference to a work like *One*: “Energy and motion made visible.”¹ *One*’s first owner, Ben Heller, wrote to Pollock in early 1956: “Great God it is a thing for the ages.”²

In an interview around the time *One* was first publicly exhibited, at New York’s Betty Parsons Gallery in late 1950, William Wright asked Pollock how someone should look at a painting of his. “I think they should not look for,” the artist replied, “but look passively—and try to receive what the painting has to offer and not bring a subject matter or preconceived idea of what they are to be looking for.” He quickly added, “I think the unconscious drives do mean a lot in looking at paintings,” and “I think it should be enjoyed just as music is enjoyed.”³ Amazingly enough, no one seems to have asked Pollock where best to stand in relationship to his paintings: far back to see the full sweep, or close-up to marvel at intricacies. Should a viewer stand aligned with the center, the way viewers have looked at paintings since the Renaissance? They rather share Pollock’s own freedom to dance about the painting, moving back and forth and from side to side. In this sense works like *One* initiated a new mode of viewing, commonplace by now. Unlike viewers of previous art with a finite number of parts and relationships for consideration, viewers of a painting by Pollock may never feel finished, as if they could ever notice every feature it has to offer. “Abstract painting is abstract. It confronts you,” Pollock told a writer for *The New Yorker* who came to his home on Long Island around June 1950, when he was about to start work on *One*. “There was a reviewer a while back who wrote that my pictures didn’t have any beginning or any end. He didn’t mean it as a compliment, but it was.” Pollock’s wife, Lee Krasner, herself a no less serious painter, added, “That’s exactly what Jackson’s work is. Sort of unframed space.” For Krasner, thanks to Pollock’s childhood in Wyoming, Arizona, and California, “Jackson’s work is full of the West. That’s what gives it that feeling of spaciousness. It’s what makes it so American.”⁴

“Jackson used to give his pictures conventional titles . . . but now he simply numbers them. Numbers are neutral. They make people look at a picture for what it is—pure painting,” explained Krasner.⁵ Conspiring with his fellow artists at the Parsons Gallery, Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko, who had already begun to replace titles with numerical designations in 1947, Pollock began to use numbers rather than titles in 1949. A word of caution: from 1950 until 1955, *One* was identified as *Number 31, 1950*. Indeed the Museum’s decision to maintain both its original and its present title (thus *One: Number 31, 1950*) exemplifies how Pollock’s numbering system led to confusion from the start. *Number 31, 1950* (today called *One*) was in fact painted after *Number 32, 1950* and before *Number 30* (today called *Autumn Rhythm*), or even before *Number 27, 1950*. Patience please.

FIG. 2. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Untitled (Overall Composition)*. c. 1934–38. Oil on canvas, 15¹/₁₆ x 20¹/₈" (38.3 x 51.1 cm). THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON. MUSEUM PURCHASE WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE BROWN FOUNDATION ACCESSIONS ENDOWMENT FUND

Aware that many collectors had neither the space nor the money for art made at institutional scale, like *One*, Pollock made drip paintings in many different sizes, but mural art was a long-standing obsession with him. When he was a teenage art student in California, his favorite works had been the socialist-minded public murals of the Mexican artists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, and when he came to New York in 1930, he took classes from Thomas Hart Benton, one of the Depression era’s most successful mural painters. In the summer of 1935, when Pollock and his older brother Sande enlisted as unemployed artists with the Federal Art Project, they joined the mural division, and a year later they joined the experimental workshop organized on Union Square by the Stalinist muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, who encouraged the use of unconventional paints and techniques like dripping, pouring, and airbrushing. There is no indication whether Pollock considered some of the easel paintings he made during the 1930s as studies for murals, but *The Flame* (c. 1934–38) and some other untitled paintings of the 1930s and early ’40s [FIGS. 2, 3] already manifest the rollicking allover compositional style that he perfected in his mural-scale canvases of the 1940s and early 1950s.

Nothing enhanced the uniquely high status of contemporary mural art in New York as much as the May 1939 exhibition of Pablo Picasso's twenty-five-foot-wide *Guernica* (1937), along with his numerous masterful studies for individual details of the painting, in a show at the Valentine Dudensing Gallery to benefit refugees of the Spanish Civil War. Like everyone else, Pollock came under *Guernica's* spell. Later the same year, Picasso's portable mural returned to New York as the climax of the major Picasso retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art [FIG. 4]. Effective July 26, 1943, the Museum accepted the vast painting as a long-term loan. Made without studies, *One* and Pollock's other murals may be understood as in some way his intensely spontaneous response to Picasso's violent call for peace.

Pollock's gallery career began in 1943, with help from different branches of the Guggenheim family. That year he worked briefly as a janitor, art handler, and guard at Solomon R. Guggenheim's four-year-old Museum of Non-Objective Painting on 54th Street, where recordings of Bach and Chopin were gallery background music. Ambitious to paint as non-objectively as possible, Pollock absorbed the collection, rich in work by Vasily Kandinsky [FIG. 5], and he followed the 1943

FIG. 3. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Untitled (Composition with Pouring I)*. 1943. Oil on canvas, 35³/₄ x 44³/₄" (90.8 x 113.6 cm). PRIVATE COLLECTION

FIG. 4. Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) installed in the exhibition *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1939

FIG. 5. Vasily Kandinsky (French, born Russia, 1866–1944). *Panel for Edwin R. Campbell No. 2*. 1914. Oil on canvas, 64¹/₈ x 48³/₈" (162.6 x 122.7 cm). THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART. NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER FUND (BY EXCHANGE)

commissioning of Frank Lloyd Wright to design the current Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum on Fifth Avenue, an institution committed to the ideal display of abstract art. Guggenheim's flamboyant niece, Peggy, had already expressed a competing intention to open a museum for her own rich collection of both Non-Objective and Surrealist art. In October 1942, recently married to the artist Max Ernst, she opened a lavish commercial gallery named Art of This Century at 28-30 West 57th Street, which featured the work of by European artists exiled to New York by World War II. With many expert advisers, Guggenheim put Pollock under gallery contract in mid-July 1943. Simultaneously, as if aware of his ambition to work large, she commissioned him to paint a portable mural for a twenty-

FIG. 6. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Mural*. 1943. Oil on canvas, 7' 11³/₄" x 19' 9¹/₂" (243.2 x 603.2 cm). THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MUSEUM OF ART. GIFT OF PEGGY GUGGENHEIM

foot-wide wall in the entrance hall of her duplex apartment at 155 East 61st Street, headquarters for her entourage of art-world celebrities [FIG. 6]. Seizing this opportunity, Pollock removed an interior wall in his downtown studio to make enough space to paint this ambitious non-objective work. *Mural* was ready by early November, coinciding with the opening of Pollock's first solo exhibition of easel paintings at Art of This Century.⁶

Installed in Guggenheim's apartment with the supervision of Marcel Duchamp, *Mural* introduced the generally subdued coloration Pollock would use for *One* and his other 1950 mural-scale works. It is easy to sense a kinship between the long ropy lines all over Pollock's painting and Duchamp's decoration of the

FIG. 7. Marcel Duchamp's string installation in the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, Whitelaw Reid Mansion, New York, 1942. Photo: John D. Schiff, gelatin silver print, 7⁵/₈ x 10" (19.4 x 25.4 cm). PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART. GIFT OF JACQUELINE, PAUL, AND PETER MATISSE IN MEMORY OF THEIR MOTHER, ALEXINA DUCHAMP

painting gallery at the *First Papers of Surrealism* benefit exhibition in New York in October 1942, where he obstructively crisscrossed the entire space every which way with nearly a mile of string [FIG. 7]. By then Pollock had learned the various automatic techniques at the theoretical heart of European Surrealism—how to draw, paint, and collage while relinquishing control, seen as an obstacle to psychically revealing expressive instincts. Made by pouring and scribbling paint in this spirit, a few of the paintings Pollock included in his first exhibition prefigure his ideas about how to express inner vision with unprecedented graphic freedom. He was not the only artist working this way: Ernst felt that his own automatic techniques [FIG. 8] had inspired Pollock's. The critic Clement Greenberg and the future art dealer Sidney Janis, two of Pollock's earliest champions, pointed out precedents for his drip style in works by older artists, citing both Janet Sobel [FIG. 9], who showed at *Art of This Century*, and Hans Hofmann [FIG. 10], a mentor for Krasner [FIG. 11]. In the opinion of the composer John Cage, overall graphic freedom appeared first in works by Mark Tobey. Like-minded artists aside, Pollock emphasized that his art involved spontaneity, but never Surrealist accident or chaos.⁷

ABOVE: FIG. 8. Max Ernst (French, born Germany, 1891–1976). *The Bewildered Planet*. 1942. Oil on canvas, 9' 2" x 11' 8" (279.4 x 355.6 cm). TEL AVIV MUSEUM OF ART. GIFT OF THE ARTIST

RIGHT: FIG. 9. Janet Sobel (American, born Russia, 1894–1968). *Milky Way*. 1945. Enamel on canvas, 44⁷/₈ x 29⁷/₈" (114 x 75.9 cm). THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. GIFT OF LEAH AND SOL SOBEL, COURTESY GARY SNYDER GALLERY, NEW YORK

FIG. 10. Hans Hofmann (American, born Germany, 1880–1966). *Spring*. 1944–45 (dated on reverse 1940). Oil on wood, 11¼ x 14⅞" (28.5 x 35.7 cm). THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. PETER A. RÜBEL

RIGHT: FIG. 11. Lee Krasner (American, 1908–1973). Untitled. 1948. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25" (76.2 x 63.5 cm). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. GIFT OF MRS. DONALD T. BRAIDER

Peggy Guggenheim's confident promotion of Pollock, as both his dealer and most important collector, gave him enough financial confidence to marry Krasner in October 1945 and to escape New York City stress by purchasing a modest house with a barn in the Long Island village of Springs, near East Hampton. Working in the upstairs bedroom of this house in the winter of 1946, Pollock decided to put a five-by-seven-foot canvas on the floor to paint with bright colors, resulting in *The Key*. Afterwards he painted on the floor by preference, comparing himself to Navajo sand painters, who worked on the ground in private healing rituals. As a Westerner, Pollock had a profound admiration for the heritage of Native American art.

With the arrival of spring in 1946, Pollock moved the little barn on his property and refurbished it for his studio. It gave him one room roughly twenty feet square. That April, as if taunting him to fulfill his mural ideas, Greenberg described Pollock as the most original easel painter under forty.⁸ Meanwhile Pollock's friend Barnett Newman was organizing *Northwest Coast Indian Painting*, the inaugural exhibition of the Betty Parsons Gallery, which would open on September 30 on the fifth floor of 15 E. 57th Street. According to Newman's widow, Annalee, loans from New York's Museum of Natural History would include two 9½-foot-wide house panels [FIG. 12] too large to bring up into the gallery except on the top of

the elevator. The trouble involved in getting these ideographic panels into the gallery prompted both Newman and Pollock to think about the largest possible works that could fit into Parsons's eighteen-foot-wide space.

Coinciding with Pollock's thirty-fifth birthday on January 28, 1947, and Newman's forty-second birthday, on January 29, Pollock's fourth solo exhibition was his last at Art of This Century. Having divorced Ernst, Guggenheim intended to close the gallery and relocate to Venice to realize her private museum. She arranged for Parsons to represent Pollock, Rothko, and Still, and she began to lend and donate works to American museums. Transported from the dealer's duplex to Art of This Century for Pollock's final show, *Mural* was then loaned to The Museum of Modern Art as the very largest work in the April 1947 *Large Scale Modern Paintings* exhibition, rivaled in size only by those by Henri Matisse, Fernand Léger, and Max Beckmann (a triptych). Pollock and his most significant rival, Willem de Kooning, studied these works attentively. Evidently considering *Mural* too large to bring to Europe, Guggenheim donated it to the University of Iowa Museum, which was still under formation.

Obligated to think ahead by his dealer's imminent departure, Pollock applied unsuccessfully for a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, established by another of Peggy's uncles. Channeling a late-nineteenth-century prejudice against easel paintings as market commodities no less than Greenberg's

FIG. 12. Nootka painted house boards, late nineteenth century, Port Alberni, British Columbia, 9' 9½" x 68" (298.5 x 173.1 cm). AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK. CAT. NO. 16.1/1892 AB

enthusiasm for mural art, Pollock made a moderate proposal: “I intend to paint large movable pictures which will function between the easel and mural. . . . I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural. I believe the time is not yet ripe for a *full* transition from easel to mural. The pictures I contemplate painting would constitute a halfway state, and an attempt to point out the direction of the future, without arriving there completely.”⁹ Only months later, Pollock provided a better account for the first and only issue of *Possibilities*, a small magazine edited by his friends Robert Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg:

My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.¹⁰

Having absorbed Siqueiros’s experimental methods and several varieties of Surrealist automatism, by 1947 Pollock was an outspoken art radical: “I continue to get further away from the usual painter’s tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.”¹¹

Pollock’s first show at the Parsons Gallery, in January 1948, consisted entirely of drip-style paintings made on the floor in his barn studio, most of them vertical in format, with evocative titles referring to the enchantment of forests, oceans, and starry skies. The two large horizontal works were entitled *Alchemy* and *Lucifer*; the artist took demons seriously, from experience. Starting around this time, Pollock developed a close friendship with the architect and later artist Tony Smith, who often helped to install exhibitions at the Parsons Gallery. Their discussions about ways to integrate paintings and architecture may have prompted Pollock’s remarkable new interest, throughout the 1948 working season, in frieze-format paintings, perhaps what he meant in his grant application as works in between easel and mural art.

The centerpiece for Pollock’s next solo show at the Parsons Gallery, in late January 1949, was *Number 9A*, a roughly three-by-eighteen-foot frieze very likely made specifically to span one of the short walls in the gallery space. For some reason no installation shots document this exhibition, which included no fewer than five frieze-format paintings. But three weeks before the opening, *Life* photographer Arnold Newman posed Pollock leaning against *Number 9A*, which was tacked to a wall in a photography studio, presumably in Manhattan [FIG. 13]. Spread across two pages, the photograph appeared in *Life*’s feature article of

FIG. 13. Pollock posing with his painting *Summertime: Number 9A* (1948), January 3, 1949. Photo: Arnold Newman

FIG. 14. Pollock with the architect and architecture curator Peter Blake and Blake's model for an "ideal museum" of Pollock's work, Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1949. Photo: Ben Schultz. POLLOCK-KRASNER HOUSE AND STUDY CENTER, EAST HAMPTON, NEW YORK. GIFT OF B. H. FRIEDMAN

August 8, 1949, titled "Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?"¹²

With this welcome publicity in mind, Parsons agreed to renew Pollock's contract and slotted another solo exhibition into the gallery schedule only nine months after his previous one, suggesting the painter's eagerness to show in public again. A huge success in terms of sales, this show, running from November 21 to December 10, 1949, featured an architectural model for an imaginary International Style museum devoted to Pollock in which his works would be installed as walls and space dividers [FIG. 14]. It was Peter Blake, a curator of architecture and design at The Museum of Modern Art, who had arranged to make the model, using reproductions of Pollock works. For Blake, Pollock's barn studio with paintings all around had a majestic visual richness, weirdly reminiscent of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. Blake went so far as to bring the architect Marcel Breuer to the show, resulting in Pollock's first mural commission since 1943.¹³ To top it all, The Museum of Modern Art acquired *Number 1A, 1948*

[FIG. 15], a nearly-nine-foot-wide drip painting, on January 27, 1950, the day before the artist's thirty-eighth birthday, thus endorsing his outlandish style.

Pollock's enthusiasm for the frieze format subsided in 1950, when he cleared enough space on the barn floor for mural-scale paintings measuring nearly 9 feet high by 17½ feet wide—the exact dimensions of the end walls at the Parsons Gallery, from side to side and from floor to ceiling molding. Rendered exclusively in black enamel on raw canvas, the first of these murals, *Number 32, 1950* [FIG. 16], seems something like a response, in terms of loosened gestural energy but doubly large, to de Kooning's *Excavation* of 1950 [FIG. 17] and to his own *Number 1A, 1948*, both chosen for a special exhibition arranged by Museum of Modern Art founding director Alfred H. Barr, Jr., at the summer 1950 Venice Biennale.

As if sensing something big, a number of journalists and photojournalists made the then-four-hour trip to Springs in 1950, including photographer Rudy Burckhardt and emerging abstract painter Robert Goodnough, who was commissioned to write an essay for *Artnews* magazine's regular series documenting the creation of single works. Burckhardt shot several photographs showing Pollock with *Number 32* completely finished on the barn floor in June. But Goodnough's assignment was to watch Pollock paint a canvas from scratch, so he arranged to come back when Pollock started work on a new enormous canvas on the floor: *Number 31, 1950*, or *One* as it is known today.

Pollock began with black enamel as he had in *Number 32*, making rhythmic gestures to fling and sprinkle the paint, moving around the canvas, interweaving counteracting arcs ever more densely. *Number 31* was then allowed to dry overnight, so no paint would run when Pollock raised the canvas the next day to tack it on one of his studio walls for consideration. By Goodnough's account, published in May 1951, it was roughly two weeks later that Pollock returned the canvas to the floor and began to overlay his until-now all-black composition with light-reddish-brown paint. Oddly, Goodnough also describes Pollock applying aluminum paint at this stage; aluminum paint appears in many drip works but not in *Number 31*, which, however, does include gray paint, and possibly Goodnough confused the two. (He later calls what must be the gray paint "silver.")¹⁴ After the application of colored paints, Pollock again waited for them to dry overnight and tacked the canvas to the wall for another pause. During what Goodnough assumed would be the final session on *Number 31*, with the canvas once again on the floor, he watched Pollock snap lines and spots of white paint across his composition as a sort of antithesis to the black rhythms established at the very outset.

A young photographer named Hans Namuth arrived at Pollock's barn around mid-July. The two men seemingly agreed that Pollock's dancelike method of work ought to be documented from start to stop, and Pollock, explaining that

FIG. 15. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Number 1A, 1948*. 1948. Oil and enamel paint on canvas, 68" x 8' 8" (172.7 x 264.2 cm).
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART. PURCHASE

FIG. 16. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Number 32, 1950*. 1950. Enamel on canvas, 8' 10" x 15'
(269 x 457.5 cm). KUNSTSAMMLUNG NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN, DÜSSELDORF

FIG. 17. Willem de Kooning (American, born the Netherlands, 1904–1997). *Excavation*. 1950. Oil on canvas, 6' 9" x 8' 4¼ in. (205.7 x 254.6 cm). THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO. MR. AND MRS. FRANK G. LOGAN PURCHASE PRIZE FUND; RESTRICTED GIFTS OF EDGAR J. KAUFMANN, JR., AND MR. AND MRS. NOAH GOLDOWSKY, JR.

FIG. 18. Jackson Pollock. 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. COURTESY CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Number 31 was finished, invited Namuth to return when he began his next mural. But with *Number 31* still on the floor, both men were impatient, and Namuth started to take photographs. In response, Pollock spontaneously began to make additions to *Number 31*, slowly at first, then more rapidly as he circled its perimeter, adding black, white, and rust-red paint during the course of an intense half hour [FIGS. 18, 19].¹⁵

On subsequent visits to the barn, Namuth documented the evolution of Pollock's next paintings in far more complete detail. In many of his photographs of Pollock at work on *Number 30* [FIG. 20], the painting Pollock moved on to next, *Number 32* and *Number 31* are partly visible tacked on opposite walls of the barn studio. Made aware somehow of Namuth's remarkable photographs, *Artnews* opted to use several of them to accompany the publication of Good-nough's essay, with the confusing result that the text of "Pollock Paints a Picture"

FIG. 19. Jackson Pollock. 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. COURTESY CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

seems to describe all but the final session of work on *Number 31*, while the illustrations show Pollock working on *Number 30* (erroneously referred to in the captions as *Number 4*).

Number 31 can also be glimpsed in the background of a brief film that Namuth made next, showing Pollock at work on *Number 27, 1950*, a somewhat smaller drip composition. Whether or not they were aware of recent or in-process films showing Léger, Matisse, Picasso, and Alexander Calder at work, neither Pollock nor Namuth could possibly have foreseen how successfully Namuth's still photographs and films would convey Pollock's drip paintings to an enormous international audience as records of his spontaneous ritual performance as an artist.

As for the painting itself, *Number 31, 1950* had its public debut at the opening of Pollock's exhibition at the Parsons Gallery on Monday evening, November 27,

FIG. 20. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*. 1950. Enamel on canvas, 8' 9" x 17' 3" (266.7 x 525.8 cm). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. GEORGE A. HEARN FUND

FIG. 21. *Betty Parsons Gallery*. 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. COURTESY CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1950, as a so-called storm of the century finished tracking across the northeastern United States. As if in sympathy with nature, Pollock's own mindset turned especially stormy in the days leading up to his show. He was in Manhattan on Friday, November 24, the day after Thanksgiving, to pose with his closest artist colleagues for a *Life* photographer covering their protest against a too-conservative director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. On Saturday, back in Springs, Krasner prepared a dinner party for no fewer than nine guests including Namuth, who shot the final footage for a color film of Pollock painting *Number 29*, a work on glass, that overcast day. Giddy if not deeply troubled from the excitement leading up to his show, Pollock poured himself a strong drink after several years of sobriety, leading to a brutish outburst in which he overturned the dinner table.

Probably hungover and guilt-ridden, Pollock headed to New York in a truck loaded with his roll of paintings and enough lumber to build the stretchers so important to Parsons, who was unwilling to let him mess up her walls with staples or tacks. The building and elevator would not be accessible until Monday. Painter Giorgio Cavallon was among the friends who helped Pollock to get ready.¹⁶ Perhaps to save time, they stapled the murals to a framework of backing boards without actually stretching the canvas around the edges. As a result, in Namuth's

installation photos of this exhibition *One* appears slightly larger than it does today, when the canvas edges have been properly pulled around a stretcher.

The fact that Namuth or Pollock wanted photographs to document this particular gallery show may be an indication that Pollock had planned the installation in advance, taking advantage of nearly every square foot of wall space in an unprecedented way for commercial-gallery display, emphasizing the ensemble more than the individual works [FIGS. 21, 22]. No wonder Rosenberg called paintings like Pollock's "apocalyptic wallpaper."¹⁷ The two most recent mural-scale works, *Number 31* and *Number 30*, faced each other on opposite walls, which they completely covered. There was no room for labels of any sort, as Pollock managed to re-create the crowded visual atmosphere of his studio as the perfect setting for his new murals. As Parsons feared, there were no buyers for works of this scale. No matter—when it was Newman's turn for a solo show with Parsons, opening on April 23, 1951, he included an untitled eighteen-foot-wide red painting. For clarification, he posted a label that Pollock may have appreciated: "There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance."¹⁸

Judy and Ben Heller already owned a Rothko painting over five feet wide before spending a weekend in 1955 visiting what had become a sort of art-world ghetto in Southampton. In advance of an upcoming Pollock exhibition at the

FIG. 22. *Betty Parsons Gallery*. 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. COURTESY CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

FIG. 23. Barnett Newman (American, 1905–1970). *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. 1950–51. Oil on canvas, 7' 11³/₈" x 17' 9¹/₄" (242.2 x 541.7 cm). THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. BEN HELLER

Sidney Janis Gallery, scheduled for that December, Pollock's friend the artist-collector Alfonso Ossorio urged the Hellers to call him as possible clients. In the barn studio, they saw *Number 30* and *Number 31* stapled to opposite walls. Then and there they offered to purchase *Number 31*, assuming it could fit into the dining room of their Riverside Drive apartment in Manhattan. The \$8,000 price was more than had ever before been paid for any Pollock. Subsequently Pollock rolled the painting and brought it to Heller's apartment, where the two men managed to staple one long edge to the ceiling and then slant the canvas slightly, because it was taller than the ceiling was high. A special stretcher was soon con-

structed so that some of Pollock's canvas could be folded back, thus reducing the face of the mural for the time being.¹⁹

Heller recalls Pollock taking him to Newman's studio at the end of 1955 to see the eighteen-foot-wide red masterpiece shown at Parsons in 1951, eventually entitled *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* [FIG. 23]. During this visit, the idea arose for a show entitled "The Big Picture," to be arranged by Smith and to include the largest works by Newman, Pollock, Rothko, and Still. Pollock immediately called Rothko and Still to share this never realized idea. Heller would acquire Newman's giant work in 1961.

The Hellers also encouraged Pollock to provide a meaningful title for *Number 31*. Recalling times during his life when he felt most at one with the world, mentioning a cross-country trip made as a young man and his summers making large drip paintings, Pollock proposed *One*. As if Pollock and Newman had discussed titles for their emotionally and philosophically grounded paintings, Newman around now entitled several of his paintings *Onement* [FIG. 24].

For months before Pollock's death, in an automobile accident on August 11, 1956, The Museum of Modern Art was planning a retrospective of his art. This was to become a memorial exhibition, opening on December 19, 1956, and here the three 1950 murals were once again displayed together, but *One* had the unique distinction of being reproduced in color as the centerfold of the Museum's *Bulletin*, which served as a catalogue. No one seems to have any recollections about this, but arranging to make the color photograph has to have been anything but routine, since it entailed the transfer of the canvas to a full-scale stretcher.

FIG. 24. Barnett Newman (American, 1905–1970). *Onement I*. 1948. Oil on canvas and oil on masking tape on canvas, 27¼ x 16¼" (69.2 x 41.2 cm). THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. GIFT OF ANNALEE NEWMAN

FIG. 25. Pollock's *One: Number 31*, 1950 installed in the apartment of Ben Heller, Central Park West, New York, in 1960. Other works visible include, on the left wall, Pollock's *Echo: Number 25*, 1951 (1951) and Mark Rothko's *Four Darks in Red* (1958), and on the right wall, Barnett Newman's *Adam* (1951–52)

In 1958, The Museum of Modern Art's International Council decided to convey the significance of Pollock's breakthrough art with an exhibition to tour European museums, and Heller agreed to lend not only *One* but also *Echo* (originally titled *Number 25*, 1951) and Pollock's final eighteen-foot-wide mural, *Blue Poles* (originally titled *Number 11*, 1952). During the more than fifteen months when these paintings were on the road, Heller relocated to an apartment on Central Park West that he reconfigured as a showplace for Pollock's most panoramic works [FIG. 25]. Rothko called it the "West Side Frick." A frequent visitor was the collector and Sarah Lawrence professor William Rubin, who would acquire his own large Pollock in 1961 [FIG. 26]. Like Heller, Rubin was a lender to the second Pollock retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, in 1967, and

FIG. 26. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956). *Untitled (Mural)*. 1950. Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas mounted on board, 6 x 8' (183 x 243.5 cm). TEHRAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

that same year he joined the Museum's curatorial staff. His first major achievement as chief curator of painting and sculpture was to acquire key works by Newman, Pollock, Arshile Gorky, and Franz Kline from Heller's famed collection and so enrich the museum's holdings of American art from the late 1940s and early '50s, countering decades of emphasis on European modern art. As part of this rather elaborate transaction, in 1968, Janis agreed to sell a painting by Piet Mondrian that he had previously given to the Museum so that it could pay Heller \$350,000 for *One*. The Museum for its part purchased Pollock's *Echo*, Gorky's *Study for Summation* (1946), and Kline's *Painting Number 2* (1954) from Heller directly. For his part, Heller made MoMA a gift of Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*.²⁰ The giant paintings were removed from Heller's Central Park West showplace with a crane.

Although no artist directly singled out *One* as an icon until Andreas Gursky and his monumental photograph *Untitled VI* of 1997, Pollock's drip-style murals as a group had an immediate and enormous impact on artists worldwide. Providing awareness of intuitional mental "space," Pollock's labyrinthine accumulations of paint are the obvious starting point for the intensely linear paintings of Cy Twombly and Frank Stella, the intricately grand wall drawings of Sol LeWitt [FIG. 27], the string sculptures of Eva Hesse [FIG. 28], Brice Marden's *Cold Mountain* variations [FIG. 29], and more recently Julie Mehretu's dizzying 2007–9

FIG. 27. Sol LeWitt (American, 1928–2007). *Wall Drawing 86*. 1971. Ten thousand lines about 10 inches (25 cm) long, covering the wall evenly, dimensions variable. PRIVATE COLLECTION, PHILADELPHIA

FIG. 28. Eva Hesse (American, born Germany, 1936–1970). No title. 1969–1970. Latex, rope, string, and wire, dimensions variable. WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK. PURCHASE WITH FUNDS FROM ELI AND EDYTHE L. BROAD, THE MRS. PERCY URIS PURCHASE FUND, AND THE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE COMMITTEE

FIG. 29. Brice Marden (American, born 1938). *Cold Mountain 6 (Bridge)*. 1989–91. Oil on linen, 9 x 12' (274.32 cm x 365.76 cm). SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART. PURCHASED THROUGH A GIFT OF PHYLLIS WATTIS

FIG. 30. Julie Mehretu (American, born Ethiopia 1970). *Mural*. 2007–9. Ink and acrylic on canvas, 22 x 80' (670.6 x 2438.4 cm). PRIVATE COLLECTION

mural for the New York offices of Goldman Sachs, to mention just a few familiar examples [FIG. 30].

Namuth's widely published photographs of Pollock making *One* and *Autumn Rhythm* have been more influential even than the paintings themselves. While it is nearly impossible to call up an accurate mental image of any specific Pollock drip painting, the Namuth images of Pollock working are nearly impossible to forget. Vik Muniz made reprises of these now iconic photographs in chocolate in 1997. Already in the 1950s, Paris-based artists like Georges Mathieu and Yves Klein began to make works as performers, staging and filming their actions in the name of art, thus anointing the realized paintings as indexical relics of the processes that had created them. In the 1960s, one-upping Klein's films of himself using naked bodies and flamethrowers as image-making tools [FIG. 31], Robert Smithson filmed bulldozers making his earth art [FIG. 32]. All but unknown before 1950, floor art and performance art in general owe a lot to the Namuth photographs. Allan Kaprow's Happenings no less than the 1960s floor sculptures of Robert Morris and the land art of Michael Heizer are predicated on works like *One*.²¹ It is probably not going too far to suggest that all the repetition and accumulation fundamental to postwar art, whether made with industrial paint, found objects, or debris, is the heritage of Pollock's drip-style murals.

FIG. 31. Yves Klein (French, 1928–1962) making fire paintings, 1962. Film still. CENTRE D'ESSAIS DE GAZ DE FRANCE, SAINT DENIS

FIG. 32. Robert Smithson (American, 1938–1973). *Asphalt Rundown*. 1969. Film still. Outside Rome, Italy. Photo: Robert Smithson

FIG. 33. Roy Lichtenstein (American, 1923–1997). *Composition II*. 1964. Oil on canvas, 55⁷/₈ x 48" (142.2 x 121.9 cm). PRIVATE COLLECTION

FIG. 34. Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987). *Oxidation Painting*. 1978. Copper metallic paint and urine on canvas, 6' 6" x 17' 4" (198.1 x 528.3 cm). COLLECTION BISCHOFBERGER, SWITZERLAND

Skeptical of the soul-searching sincerity inherent in Pollock's paintings, Pop artists like Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol made slapstick of the drip look by appropriating cheaply designed objects like school notebooks as the basis for large paintings [FIG. 33] or by literally pissing on huge sheets of copper to leave something like "action painting" marks [FIG. 34]. As if choosing the single most difficult and ambitious subject with which to begin his distinguished career as an appropriation artist, Mike Bidlo in the early 1980s transformed a studio at the Queens art space P.S.1 into a laboratory, stocked with a full array of Pollock's unorthodox paints and applicators, to create his "Not Pollock" series, including a few giant canvases on the scale of *One* [FIG. 35]. Thanks to artists like Bidlo and Dan Colen, who revisited Pollock's classic style more recently if less studiously using bird droppings and stretched chewing gum, Pollock's great visual adventure in abstraction continues without letup to obsess contemporary artists. Familiarity with their works makes it impossible to experience *One* as more innocent viewers did in 1950, but for consolation the painting looks maybe more important than ever.

FIG. 35. Mike Bidlo (American, born 1953). *Not Pollock*, 1983. 1983. Oil and enamel on canvas, 38" x 6' 4¹/₂" (96.5 x 193.6 cm). PRIVATE COLLECTION

NOTES

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1. Jackson Pollock, handwritten statement, 1950, in Pepe Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 24.
2. Ben Heller, quoted in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989), p. 765.
3. Pollock, in an interview with William Wright, 1950, in Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 20–21.
4. Berton Roueché, “Unframed Space,” *The New Yorker*, August 5, 1950, p. 16. Reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 18–19.
5. *Ibid.*
6. See Francis V. O’Connor, “Jackson Pollock’s Mural for Peggy Guggenheim, Its Legend, Documentation and Redefinition of Wall Painting,” in Susan Davidson and Philip Rylands, eds., *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century* (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, and Vienna: Austrian Frederick

and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, 2004), pp. 151–69.

7. Max Ernst’s comments are recorded in Peter Schamoni’s film *Max Ernst: Portrait of An Artist*, 1991; Clement Greenberg’s in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 524–25, 873; Sidney Janis’s in Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), p. 50; and John Cage’s in Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), pp. 174–77.
8. Greenberg, “Art,” *The Nation*, April 13, 1946, p. 446.
9. Pollock, application for Guggenheim fellowship, 1947, in Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock*, p. 17.
10. Pollock, “My Painting,” *Possibilities*, Winter 1947–48, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 17.
11. *Ibid.*
12. [Dorothy Seiberling], “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?,” *Life* 27, no. 6 (August 8, 1949):42–45, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 63–64.
13. Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 587–89, 597–600. See also Helen A. Harrison, “Pollock: Blake’s 1949 Museum Design,” available online at www.aaqeastend.com/contents/retrospective/issue-1-retrospective/blakes-1949-pollock-museum-design/.

14. See Robert Goodnough, “Pollock Paints a Picture,” *Artnews* 50, no. 3 (May 1951):38–41. 60–61, reprinted in Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 74–78. On Pollock’s use of aluminum paint see p. 76; on “silver” see p. 78. To confuse aluminum with gray paint is a peculiar mistake, especially since Goodnough specifically mentions Pollock’s preference for aluminum over gray. But there are in fact a number of inconsistencies between the palette Goodnough describes and the finished painting. One can only speculate on how these were introduced: perhaps Goodnough saw less of the painting process of *Number 31* than he realized, or saw more than one painting in production and mingled their details, or added information from conversations with Pollock and others to what he had actually seen. In any case, while his essay may not be completely reliable, it remains a valuable eyewitness account of Pollock at work.
15. See Hans Namuth, “Photographing Pollock: A Memoir,” in Barbara Rose, ed., *Pollock Painting* (New York: Agrinde Publications, 1980). Karmel, “Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth,” in *Jackson Pollock*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), pp. 87–137, is the most thorough study.

16. See Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, pp. 651–54.

17. Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Artnews* 51, no. 8 (December 1952):48.
18. Barnett Newman, quoted in Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), p. 41.
19. See Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2005), pp. 164–69.
20. See William Rubin, *A Curator’s Quest: Building the Collection of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, 1967–1988* (New York and London: Overlook Duckworth, 2012), pp. 124–25, 133.
21. See Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Artnews* 57, no. 6 (October 1958):24–26, 55–57; on the issue of floor and flatness in art, see Joseph Masheck, *The Carpet Paradigm: Integral Flatness from Decorative to Fine Art* (New York, Paris, and Turin: The Edgewise Press, 2010); and Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), pp. 94–97.

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