

The Museum of Modern Art

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No. 91

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, September 5, 1967

JACKSON POLLOCK by Francis V. O'Connor. 148 pages, 110 illustrations (1 color gate-fold). Hardbound, \$6.95; paperbound, \$3.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York; hardbound edition distributed to the trade by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

The late Jackson Pollock has been referred to as "the strongest painter of his generation" and the herald of "the disintegration of modern painting." Although much has been written about the artist's work, and his career has become a legend surrounded by anecdote, a reliable account of the events of Pollock's life has never been available. **JACKSON POLLOCK** by Francis V. O'Connor, recently published by The Museum of Modern Art, is such a document, untangling confusions and dispelling myths. For this publication, Lee Krasner Pollock generously put at the disposal of the author and the Museum her own recollections of her husband and her personal files containing previously inaccessible material, including correspondence by Pollock, his brothers, teachers and friends, contracts and letters from the artist's dealers, and statements from interviews with Pollock.

Professor O'Connor's detailed and revealing chronology presents facts which make an objective evaluation of this controversial artist possible. Twenty-five photographs, many of them appearing for the first time, illustrate the text -- giving particular insight into Pollock's childhood as far back as 1914 on the family truck farm in Arizona.

JACKSON POLLOCK is issued in connection with the major retrospective exhibition recently shown at The Museum of Modern Art, directed by William S. Lieberman, Director of the Department of Drawings and Prints, and now on view at the Los Angeles County Museum. The book contains a comprehensive record of exhibitions of Pollock's work both in this country and abroad, accompanied by excerpts from reviews responding to the painter and the artistic revolution which his work initiated. Eighty-five reproductions (including a color gate-fold) provide a discriminating representation of Pollock's paintings and drawings. In addition, there is a selective bibliography and a complete catalogue of the Museum's exhibition.

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Starting with Pollock's birth in Cody, Wyoming, in 1912, the text traces the artist's childhood in the West as his family moved from one state to another. Pollock's sensitive and uncompromising nature is already evident in a troubled letter to his brothers concerning his future: "As to what I would like to be. It is difficult to say. An Artist of some kind." In 1930, Pollock moved to New York and became a student of the regionalist painter, Thomas Hart Benton, at the Art Students League. Acute depression and alcoholism often interrupted Pollock's career. Benton, along with Pollock's devoted brothers and friends, was to lend constant encouragement and advice during these periods: "I am very strongly for you as an artist. You're a damn fool if you don't cut out the monkey business and get to work," he wrote Pollock in 1938. After holding various odd jobs to support himself, Pollock participated in the WPA Federal Art Project for eight years. A contract with Peggy Guggenheim finally enabled him to concentrate completely on his painting. In 1945 he married the artist Lee Krasner. They moved to Springs, Long Island, where they lived until Pollock's death in an automobile accident on August 11, 1956.

The contemporary criticism published in the book is valuable in understanding the development and impact of Pollock's short career and also as a dramatic chapter in the history of modern art. One of Pollock's early paintings caught the attention of a critic for The Nation: "...for once the future reveals a gleam of hope." Pollock's first one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's new museum-gallery, Art of This Century, elicited tentative but positive statements from the reviewers. In the catalogue essay, James Johnson Sweeney felt that the lack of self-discipline in Pollock's unpredictable and explosive canvases was a healthy sign: "...to profit from pruning, a plant must have vitality." Robert Motherwell, writing in Partisan Review, welcomed the artist's extraordinary talent: "Pollock represents one of the younger generation's chances." "An authentic discovery," said Robert Coates. Clement Greenberg in The Nation praised Pollock's ability not only to profit from but assimilate the lessons of Miró, Picasso, and Mexican painting in a highly personal style with great potential.

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By the time of Pollock's second one-man show at Art of This Century in 1945, the press had become more sharply divided. The critic of The New York Times compared one painting to "an explosion in a shingle mill," while to another Pollock's canvases were like "baked macaroni." Meanwhile, Greenberg continued to support Pollock's unconventional idiom: "In the course of time this ugliness will become a new standard of beauty."

Widely exhibited in this country, Pollock's work began to be shown abroad in the 1950s. At the XXV Venice Biennale in 1950, Europeans tended to dismiss the U. S. Pavilion. Pollock alone held their attention, if only because of his inventive and greatly disputed method of executing his canvases on the floor with tools such as trowels, knives, sticks instead of the usual brush -- and even dripping paint directly from a can onto the canvas. Pollock elaborated on this technique in an article published in Possibilities (1947-8):

On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting....When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own.

The critic, Henry McBride, having previously rejected the apparent undisciplined nature of this random spattering, was suddenly struck by one of Pollock's canvases: "...the spattering is handsome and organized."

O'Connor's portrait of Jackson Pollock gives evidence that the artist not only defined but also had the courage to defy art historical categories by remaining true to his own inspiration -- or in Clement Greenberg's words:

It is indeed a mark of Pollock's powerful originality that he should present problems in judgement that must await the digestion of each new phase of his development before they can be solved.

JACKSON POLLOCK is available in two editions: hardbound, \$6.95, distributed to the trade by Doubleday and Co., Inc.; and paperbound, \$3.95. Both editions are available by mail from the Museum or at the Museum bookstore.

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