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DEPARTMENT OF FINE ART

PAINTING

# ART FOR THE SAKE OF ART

POST MODERNIST THEORY AS AFFIRMATION

DIANA COPPERWHITE

1994.

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## INTRODUCTION

The term painting for the sake of painting, making art for the sake of art is a term that is still under attack and has been for a large portion of the modern period. Critics such as Lucy Lippard claimed in the 1970's and again more recently that all art should have a message, be product persistent and therefore anti formal in approach.

This of course was due partly to the art historicism of Clement Greenberg and the purist and elitist overtones that painting for the sake of painting implies.

Greenberg's historicism has been under attack ever since as its nature is very debatable. As Gloire Moire says (Eva 1993)

"There is a need to redefine the conventional means of abstraction in the sense of abstraction as a progressive reduction of the semantic content of objects because this procedure never reaches an end and points to mental constructs that have nothing to do with reality and finishes in a literal void."

Painting that challenges norms given about the nature of painting have been seen in the past, as nihilistic in



character. This however is only because of the nature of what it really is, rather than something in which it struggled against its nature to become.

While I know that this argument has been debated and to a large extent won, I still feel the need as a painting student to clarify issues for my own sake, and to try and see painting for the sake of painting in terms of more recent debates on post modern thinking. While I could be charged with taking a purist's approach, this is not done to discredit those who do not think in a purist manner, but in order to see painting for the sake of painting in a constructive sense. Creativity knows no real boundaries as it is to a large extent an undefinable and unquantifiable commodity. Therefore painting must be seen as being as important as any other creative catalyst. Therefore it deserves to be seen in the positive light of postmodern theory.

It may not have the ability to openly criticize because its critical commentary lies in its ability to deconstruct and show how all things change but at the same time stay the same.

This thesis therefore turns out to be an argument for painting for its own sake, as an indicator of life, not devoid of life or of an ability to comment on it as many critics from Greenberg down to various purist post modern critics of realism have tried to argue.



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FOR THE YEAR 1900

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## CHAPTER 1

### HANS HOFMAN AS THE INSTIGATOR OF REALITY IN PAINTING

Hans Hofman once said that painting had nothing to do with politics, religion or any form of organised theory and yet true as this statement would be in an ideal world, the reality of the situation has shown that painting in all its purity and innocence will be appropriated no matter what the aesthetic ideals propose as (painting) Art has shown itself to be inextricably bound up with life.

"The world reveals its energy and its conflicting forces at work in the making of History and the world is only known and shaped by man inextricably involved in his act of knowing and shaping". (1)

Hans Hofman and Alfred Barr are key figures in any discourse on American Modernism as much of Greenberg's writing derives from attitudes, writings and lectures given by them both.

In Hofman's case the German born artist is important because of how Greenberg interpreted his attitude to the limits of the medium and the plasticity of the paint.

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1. (Essay: Marxism Existentialism & Christianity).

# CHAPTER I

THEORY OF THE EARTH AND ITS HISTORY

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25. THE EARTH AND ITS HISTORY

Hofman's early years in Germany ensured exposure to German Expressionism and also to the theories of the School of Paris, his tutor Will Schwarz being responsible for the latter.

In 1904 he moved to Paris where he befriended many of the artists responsible for shaping the Art of the early 20th century. He was in Paris at the time when Fauvism and Cubism were coming into being and when Futurism in Italy and Expressionism in Germany were at the height of experimentation. Because of his exposure to such a variety of attitudes and approaches to painting Hoffman's teachings were infused with many diverse elements. Like his thinking and writing his instructions on painting were never confined to the art of one century or to any one style or movement.

Hofman's teachings were infused with both French and German doctrines. Hegel, Wolfin were as much a part of the classroom as the French Cubists, the Fauves, German art philosophy in Der Sturim Die Brucke and the Bauhaus. From his broad attitude towards art appreciation Hofman formed his own opinions. The essence of what Hans Hofman had to say was based on the determination of the artistic process by three absolutely different factors.



"First Nature which works upon us by its own laws, second the artist who creates a spiritual contact with nature and his materials, third the medium of artistic expression through which the artist translates his inner world." (2)

For students and for himself Hans Hofman maintained nature as a starting point. His pictorial message was focused on the plasticity which he defined as the 3D into 2D.

"All lies in the contrast after a lifelong struggle Cezanne made the simple statement that is for Hofman "The birth of abstract art". (3)

It meant to give the most with the least. Not the least with the most.

"It meant in creation to recognise the essential and separate it from the unessential".

This did not for Hofman exclude representation; it simply meant that what was important was the "functions and activities of the means of expression." (5)

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2. Cynthia Goodman (Pg. 110).
  3. Cynthia Goodman (Pg. 110).
  4. Cynthia Goodman (Pg. 110-140)
  5. Cynthia Goodman (Pg. 145)



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FOR THE [Name]  
[Signature]  
[Title]

NOTED  
[Name]  
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With Hegel's philosophy in mind Hofman wrote

"relation of two given realities always produces a higher a purely spiritual third the spiritual third quality manifests itself as pure effect. The quality of the work originates in this transposition of reality into the purely spiritual." (6)

Hofman maintained that all art stemmed from nature and had subject matter. (If we take) the Oxford Dictionary's meaning for subject (and matter) it is:

1. A thinking or feeling entity the conscious mind, the ego as opposed to anything external to the mind
2. The central substance or core of a thing as opposed to its attributes
3. The ego or self and the non ego consciousness and that of which it is or may be conscious.

Subject matter - the matter treated of in a book, lawsuit, etc.

Matter - anything that has mass and occupies space.





If we can draw any conclusions it must be that as we are part of Nature so is anything that an artists creates. It is not outside of nature therefore all art automatically has subject matter even though it still creates its own autonomous reality within nature.

Clement Greenberg in his essay towards a newer laocoon (published July/August, 1940), Partisan Review. Corrected Version) states that the "Avant Garde saw the necessity of the escape from ideas which were infecting the arts with ideological struggles of Society". (7), ideas came to mean subject matter in general.

"Subject matter as distinguished from content in the sense that every work of art must have content but that subject matter is something that the artist does or doesn't have in mind when he is actually working" (8).

As any science book or dictionary definition will give you the basic definition for matter as something which occupies mass or space, the building blocks of the Universe. We must come to the conclusion that subject and content are actually one and the same. Greenberg goes on to state that

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7. Greenberg (Pg. 39, 1940). Essay Towards a Newer Laocoon - Pollock and After the Critical Debate.

8. (Greenberg Pg. 39, 1940). Towards a Newer Laocoon. Reprinted in Pollock and After, The Critical Debate.



"There is nothing in abstract art that compels it to be so. The imperative comes from history, from an age in conjunction with a particular moment reached in a particular tradition of Art" (9)

and from this he can

"only escape by surrendering his ambition and returning to the stale past" (10).

He goes on to say that

"we can only dispose of abstract art by assimilating it, by fighting our way through it, where to I do not know". (11)

If we acknowledge that subject matter and content are unavoidable in art the laws of nature making it unavoidable we must come to the conclusion that there is, in fact, really no such thing as pure abstraction and at the same time acknowledge as Hans Hofman said that abstraction does not exclude representation, it simply means what was important was the

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9. Greenberg - Towards a Newer Laocoon, Pg. 45, 1940.
  10. Greenberg, 1940, Pg. 45, Towards a Newer Laocoon.
  11. Greenberg, 1940, Pg. 45, Towards a Newer Laocoon.

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"function and activities of the means of expression" (12)

It would, thereby follow that art enters into the politics of taste as Ventini says from which there is no exit on paper. Essay 2 Avant Garde and Kitsch "Partisan" Review. Vol VI, No. 5, Fall 1939. Pp 34-49.

In this particular essay written approximately a year before towards a newer lacon Greenberg again addresses the problem of subject matter and content.

"The Avant Garde artist or poet sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relatives and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point". (13)

"Art for art's sake and fine poetry appear and subject matter or content become something to be avoided like the plague". (14)

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12. Cynthia Goodman 1991, Pg 145)

13. Greenberg 1939, Pg. 23, The Avant Garde and Kitsch.

14. Greenberg 1939, Pg. 23, The Avant Garde and Kitsch.

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For Hofman matter is never referred to, as an individual subjective attitude is personal. As in the case of Alfred Barr very early on in his career he rejected the notion that art progressed in one linear line. He saw the history of art as a vast storehouse of ideas that artists could choose from for new departures depending on the energy, vision and independence of the artist. Though Barr chose to concentrate on the formal qualities of cubism.

He also felt the need to relate art and politics describing how it was dealt with by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and Stalinist Russia. He condemned censorship and suppression by bureaucrats, in Europe and in America such as the customs officials who refused to allow 19 pieces of cubist sculpture into the country duty free. So what counted most for Barr was creative freedom.

Even Barr in his writings on abstraction apologises for the use of a word that was both paradoxical and confusing.

"Abstract is the term most frequently used to describe the more extreme effects of this impulse away from 'Nature'" (15)

A question could be put here at this point as to what point does nature and response to nature elapse into the painting. The impossibility of such a question could be





found in the so called great failure of Greenberg's abstract expressionism as a general movement. New imagery was never found. The idea of painting rejecting the world and nature in pursuit of new imagery was a fallacy.

Therefore, this can only lead to the conclusion that there is a need to redefine the conventional means of abstraction. In the sense of "abstraction as progressive reduction of the semantic content of objects because this procedure never reaches an end points to mental constructions that have nothing to do with reality and finishes in a literal void". (16)

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AT THE CITY OF MONCTON  
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SHERIFF

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## CHAPTER 2

### THE HISTORICAL POSITION AND KITSCH

In Autumn 1938 Partisan Review published Dwight MacDonald's translation of Breton and Trotsky's manifesto towards a free art. Trotsky had argued before that part of art's search for truth was a fidelity to its own laws and principles.

Art as a revolutionary force must be bound to the society in which it is produced but constrained by it from pursuing its own goals and principles. By doing this he thought it had the ability to provide a liberating role in consciousness and culture.

Contrary to this Greenberg's writings remove the balance between life art and politics evident not only in Trotsky's literature but also in the work of Breton, Barr, Shapiro, to name but a few. By doing this it would appear that he was able to set up a framework devoid of political or social interests prevalent in the 1930's and in doing thus provide space for theoretical developments. While this may have been done with the best of intentions the irony of the situation has to be that abstract expressionism, was very successfully used as a political tool in an era when any sign of social imagery was seen as threatening in the face of a communist fear.



Because of this censorship, museums in the 1940's and particularly in the 50's saw abstract expressionism as the only Avant Garde movement in America.

Lasch in one of his studies for the organisations infiltrated by the C.I.A. - The Congress for Cultural Freedom - has written

"especially in the 50's American intellectuals on a scale only beginning to be understood lent themselves to purposes having nothing to do with values they professed purposes indeed dramatically opposed to them". (1)

Under these circumstances Greenberg's historicising theories which rejected all forms of representation as a so called failure of nerve took hold. The fact that many artists such as De Kooning and later Pollock, were actually working in a semi figurative manner was ignored or the fact that Rothko's paintings aimed at a religious transcendence was deliberately suppressed in favour of the notion that common experience or subject matter were irrelevant. In doing this painting was faced with the notion that self discovery and self assertion was the only worthy defining concept for painting. This was not a new idea by any means. It had been a theory in European

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1. Towards A New Past, Pg. 323.





art since at least the early 19th century though normally applied to romantic poetry.

It was an ideology that made the use of any external subject matter difficult or impossible in most cases, as it rejected any given logic as decadent.

Artists such as Pollock, Matta and Motherwell met regularly to practice automatic techniques and according to Matta argued over the need for new images for man. They thought this would be possible on some level because of the techniques that they inherited from the Surrealists in Europe exploring means of myth and even anthropology. They explored the possibilities in the most positive way. There was a negative aspect to this as the rejection of common experience and subject matter made any synthesis of imagery practically impossible as to again quote from Hofman

"all art stems from nature" (2)

and therefore evolves in nature. All images are already in nature . Therefore how can anything ever be genuinely new. This notion of painting was a distinctive feature in the young Americans' concept of what art could achieve, regardless of what it inevitably did not achieve in the way of new human imagery. What it did do was to attempt to





extend or change the inherent cultural possibilities in a response to a need for self expression. This can still be seen as the chief critical contribution that it made to Culture as a whole in the notions of what painting could be made do as an autonomous object. In retrospect this is generally understood to a certain degree. However books such as Tom Wolfe's "The Painted Word" demonstrate a complete lack of understanding of creativity. This book in particular while stating that it actually means no disrespect to the Critical Theory puts down the process of painting as some form of lunacy particularly in the references to Jackson, Pollack and ends up, not surprisingly, therefore, as a well put argument defending photo realism. This book is, however, one of many books that apparently sees the self reflexive basis in abstraction as a problem or as a romantic notion removed from reality.

The true reality has to be that the abstract expressionists romantic notions and quest for new images for man was a desperate attempt to comprehend a society that was becoming more global and alienating in its progressive studies in industry and science and also against the background of the horror of war in Europe.

The industrial revolution which urbanised a previously rural population and introduced mass literacy in the West is also responsible for the introduction of kitsch and its counterpart the Avant Garde into society.



The industrial revolution produced not only a dramatic change in literacy but also an insecure middle class dependent on as Kenneth Clarke says

"an inhuman economic system" (3).

This produced hypocrisy on an unprecedented scale that led writers and philosophers such as Engels, Marx and Dickens to bring to light the plight of a very real and large section of the population whose position in society was deplorable.

Kitsch is a German word born in the middle of the hypocritical 19th century and from German it has entered into all western languages.

In Milan Kundera's book "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" the author defines kitsch as something that excludes anything (4) that is unacceptable in human existence. In this case it can be seen as a word which characterises the middle classes' attitude towards their workers as something to be ignored as all economic doctrines pointed towards exploitation as acceptable in theory (5) Malthus for example provided some of the doctrines that created

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3. Clarke, 1976, Pg. 327.
  4. Kundera, 1984, Pg. 248.
  5. Clarke, 1976, Pg. 327.





hypocrisy on this scale in the 19th century while totalitarian values produced the same effect in the 20th century as the writing of the very people for whom justice was a very real issue were debased to a form of kitsch. To quote Milan Kundera

"in the realms of totalitarian kitsch all answers are given in advance and preclude any questions. It thereby follows that the true opponent of Kitsch is the person who asks questions" (6)

If kitsch generally means to debase to produce a compromising solution because mass attitudes demand that it be brought within their reach, then, to question is indeed an opponent of kitsch.

"In the realms of totalitarian kitsch everything that infringes on kitsch must be banished for life every display of individualism because a deviation from the collective is a spit in the eye of the smiling brotherhood". Every doubt because anyone who starts doubting details will end up by doubting life itself all irony because in the realms of kitsch everything must be taken quite seriously". (7)

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6. Kundera, 1984, Pg. 254.

7. Kundera, 1984, Pg. 252.



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Alfred Barr commented in the 50's on the damage to creativity done by the communists in their insistence on social realism and on the anti communists in their insistence on an art devoid of any realism. Both positions, of course, were wrong as creativity creates its own realism devoid of any mass instructions. According to Clement Greenberg the

"true and most important function of the Avant Garde was to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological violence and confusion" (8).

While this statement is a valid one the notion that content could be sacrificed in the name of a linear historicist attitude ended nowhere except in a literal void. In the 60's Greenberg wrote art only does

"What it does. Its effect is limited and small. It is there only to be aesthetically good. He saw no higher point spiritual or otherwise to its production." (9)

An earlier more original reaction to Art for the sake of Art was that of the early modernists. For many artists at

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8. Avant Garde & Kitsch, 1940, Pg.??????

9. Gablik, 1985.

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that time abstraction was an aesthetic theology. Malevich went so far as to say that he saw the face of God in his black square and Theo Van Doesburg declared that "the square is to us what the cross was to the early Christians".

With these notions of transcendence the early modernists created paintings that were valid on their own terms. Greenberg makes the statement that in order to be valid painting must stem from some worthy constraint or original. But on the other hand he makes the statement that

"the world of common extroverted experience have been renounced and can only be found in the very processes and disciplines by which art and literature have initiated the former. These themselves become the subject matter of all art and literature." (10)

This is partly true as to quote Aristotle all art and literature are imitation but in rejecting common experience or content as an important factor is to deprive the paintings of their true reality.

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10. Greenberg, *Avant Garde & Kitsch*, 1940, Pg. 23.



## CHAPTER 3

### PARODY AS REGENERATION

To quote Dwight MacDonald

"we are backward looking explorers and parody is the central expression of our time". (1)

Dictionary references for parody define it as a humourous exaggerated imitation of an author or literary work. A reference for the word imitation is to follow an example of, imitate, be consciously or not like something. To quote Aristotle "all art and literature are imitation".

Therefore parody is not a new phenomena by any means. Parody today has the power to renew art. It need not, of course, do so, but it can because of its

"hybrid nature in connection with the world and in the mixture of social and aesthetic impulses with revolutionary tendencies". (2)

The post modern world as Jean Francois Lyotard calls our post industrial west

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1. Dwight MacDonald, Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 1.
  2. Hutcheon 1985, Pg.1.



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"may well be suffering today from a lack of faith in systems requiring extrinsic validation". (3)

but this has been true for the entire 20th century. Art forms from the beginning of the century have sought to incorporate some critical commentary within their own structures so that they become immune to a large extent to external validations and criticisms. It has not only been the case with art but in other fields from linguistics to scientific philosophy the question of self reference has been paramount as the focus of attention.

"Scientific knowledge today seems characterised by the inevitable presence within itself of some discourse on its own validating principles". (4)

According to the ideology of romantic aesthetics parodied forms of art are by their very definition parasitic. But even within the romantic tradition there is parody.

"To make any sources of cunning cannibalization".  
(5)

Therefore we must assume that parody is not repetition that stresses sameness and stasis

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3. Lyotard

4. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 1.

5. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 8.

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"but is in most 20th century art a major way of coming to terms with the past through ironic recoding". (6)

"Its historical antecedents are the classical and renaissance practices of imitation". (7)

"By its nature parody is paradoxically an authorised transgression" (8)

that can either be conservative or subversive in its use of text or movement as a model.

In this sense post modernist thinking recognises parody as a powerful tool in commenting on reality and art's place in reality.

It sees parody as

"the custodian of the artist's legacy defining not only where it is but where it has come from (9).

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6. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 101
  7. Hutcheon 1985, Pg. 101
  8. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 101
  9. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 73

IN RE: [illegible]

Case No. [illegible]

Filed [illegible]

at [illegible]

Before me, the undersigned authority, on this [illegible]

day of [illegible]

in and for the County of [illegible]

NOTARY PUBLIC

My Commission Expires [illegible]

My Office is located at [illegible]

State of [illegible]

My Notary Public Number is [illegible]

Witness my hand and seal this [illegible]

day of [illegible]

Notary Public

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

To return to some literary references in regard to the nature of the world. Para in Greek can also mean beside so therefore

"there is a suggestion of an accrued or intimacy instead of a contrast. It is this second neglected meaning that broadens the pragmatic scope" (10)

it broadens the notions of parody in a way that is most helpful to discussions of modern art forms. There is nothing in parody that necessitates the inclusion of a concept of ridicule as there is for instance in the joke or burla of burlesque. Therefore modern parody is not attacking the past but rather coming to terms with it through ironic

"trans contextualization and inversion". (11)

This defines painting's place in the post modern as a self questioning, self reflexive area. In coming to terms with many negative responses towards painting as non communicative, this must be seen as an indifference by society to levels of truth.

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10. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 32

11. Hutcheon, 1985, Pg. 32





If anything can be said in favour of art for the sake of art it must be a Freudian quote

"in only a single field of our civilisation has omnipotence of thought been retained and that is in the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of these desires and what he does produces emotional effects thanks to artistic illusion just as though it were something real". (12)

and as Suzi Gablik says anyone trying to face the full reality of modernism can still "get caught even at this point in the crossfire between its admirers and its detractors."

"The instability of art of our times, the confusion over what its purpose is and to whom it should be addressing have become in recent years a new spenglerian darkness". (13)

"Marx felt that the supreme value of a work of art is its ultimate aim and reason for being is achieved along with and through other values, moral religious and social".  
(14)

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12. Pelican, 1984, Pg. 309.

13. Gablik, 1985, Pg. 20.

14. Gablik, 1985, Pg. 29.



Unfortunately modern life has at this stage deprived us of belief in these values.

As many writers have pointed out the real problems of modernity have been those of belief, a loss of belief in anything beyond the self.

Statements such as those made by artists such as Joseph Kosuth in the 60's such as

"being an artist means questioning the nature of art if you make paintings you are already accepting the nature of art" (15)

have not helped the case for painting. But on the contrary to this, as Suzi Gablik says, to sustain itself a society must have traditional beliefs and values that resist change. Painting for the sake of painting is in fact such a value, as the very fact that the artist chooses to do it for its own sake testifies to this notion.

During the high period of modernism between 1910 and 1930 art cut itself free from its social moorings and withdrew to save its creative essence. This was very much the artist's spiritual discomfort in capitalist and totalitarian societies.

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15. Gablik, 1985, Pg. 116.

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As Kandinsky put it - the phrase that for art's sake is really the best ideal a materialist age can attain as it is an unconscious protest against materialism.

In the thinking of most 20th century artists a work of art was an independent world of pure creation which had its own spiritual essence. The artist saw himself as a priest who divined the interior soul or spirit.

Kandinsky and Malevich had a concept of life that was essentially transcendental although not tied to any institutionalized religion. However, the concept of modernist aesthetics was only at this point in its infancy. It is only during the 60's and 70's when Greenberg insistent theories on the separation of matter, spirit and aesthetics full effects could be felt that instances of what Suzi Gablik calls self referring formalism stripped of all experience except a variety of painterly effects could be felt.

"Ever since the advent of romanticism in the 19th century singularity has been the norm instead of in the past mastery over technique or skilled knowledge" (16).

The overriding principle of modernism has been autonomy and its touchstone individual freedom.

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Both positions art as expression of the individual or as fulfilment of social needs seem equally intelligible that the artist's role has become marginal in modern society is not because modern art is intrinsically bad it is because our society has divested art of all but aesthetic value just as it has deprived us of meaningful spiritual experience if the problem between art and society in modern era is to be seen as a problem then it must be understood as a social problem due not to any defects inherent in art but to defects in the value systems of modern society.



## CHAPTER 4

### POSTMODERNISM AS A REAFFIRMATION OF TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES

#### What Post Modernism does for painting.

In answering the question what is post modernism Jean-Francois Lyotard states that the

"post modern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation" (1)

"The operativity criterion is technological. It has no relevance for judging what is true or just". (2)

"Post modern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities, it refines our sensitivity to difference and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable". (3)

If anything was learnt from Greenberg's theories on art it must be that a literal clinical reduction of the semantic

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1. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism; Post Modern Reader, Pg. 139, 1984.
  2. Lyotard. As above
  3. Lyotard. As above



content of objects leads nowhere except into an empty literal void. If this linear historicist line leads us to the notion as it tried to in the 70's that painting had somehow died and had nothing more to say post modernist theory rejects this notion on the grounds that aesthetics were and are not understood as a final literal clinical possessable world item.

He gives us a definition for what he thinks are the differences in modernism and post modernist production.

"Modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime through a nostalgic one. It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents but the form because of its recognisable consistency continues to offer the viewer or reader matter for solace and pleasure".

"The post modern would be that which in the modern puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable, that which searches for new presentation, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a strange sense of the unrepresentable." (4)

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4. Lyotard, Readings, Pg. 24, 1991.





In this case the sublime sentiment is contained within the incommensurable.

Lyotard like Merleau-Ponty praises Cezanne for his deconstruction of vision.

For Lyotard Cezanne is credited with showing both

"the Foveal zone" (5)

the foveal zone being the area of the eye for focusing images a small depression or pit in the retina and the curved periphery of foveal vision in painting. The curved periphery being the boundary of the surface. The painting Mont Saint Victorie which Lyotard claims amounts to showing the condition of visibility itself, the condition of visibility is here understood as the thickness or density of vision lost once vision is understood in terms of vision or as Lyotard says

"of the transparency of object for a subject"  
(6).

For Cezanne the image is divided from itself by its simultaneous participation in radically different spaces and the effect of this is to testify to something that cannot be represented. (7) This is not to represent the

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- 5. Lyotard, Readings, Pg. 23, 1991
  - 6. Lyotard, Readings, Pg. 23, 1991
  - 7. Lyotard, Readings, Pg. 23, 1991



unrepresentable but rather to make us aware that there is something other than representation.

For Lyotard the position of art is the denial of the position of discourse.

"The position of art indicates a function both at the edge of discourse and within discourse". (8)

"It indicates that the transcendence of the symbol is the figure that is to say the spatial manifestation which linguistic space cannot incorporate without being overthrown". (9)

"It is posed as an exteriority which cannot be interiorized as a significance" (10)

Under the common name of painting and literature, a split is taking place. Those who refuse to question the rules of art pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating by means of the so called correct rules.

The endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it. For Lyotard.

"Pornography is the use of photography and film to such an end" (11)

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8. Lyotard, Readings, Pg. 25, 1991

9. Lyotard, " " "

10. Lyotard, " " "

11. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism: P M Reader, Pg.144



and is becoming a general model for the visual arts (12) which have not yet met the challenge of the mass media.

With this attitude in mind Lyotard attacks the cultural policies and the art and book market as being threatening in the face of the sincere artists' efforts to question the facts. If these facts are the facts of reality, or facts aimed at questioning the authenticity of a given reality, then science or industry are no more free of the suspicions that concern reality than are art and literature as Lyotard says

"to believe otherwise is to believe in an excessively humanistic notion of the mephistophelian functionalism of science and technologies". (13)

While today techno science does subordinate the cognitive statements to the best possible performance this is what is called today the dominant technological criterion.

The objects and the thoughts which originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy,, carry with them one of the rules:

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12. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism, Pg. 144, Post Modern Reader.
  13. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism, Pg. 145, Post Modern Reader.





"the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a census between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments". (14)

This is important as it leaves its imprint on the politics of the scientist and of the trustees of capital by severely questioning metaphysical religion and political certainties that previously had a solid basis. But as Lyotard points out this withdrawal of belief is necessary for the emergence of science and capitalism.

"No industry is possible without a suspicion of the aristotalian theory of motion. No industry without the refutation of corporatism and of mercantilism and physiocracy". (15)

Modernism in whatever age it exists cannot exist without shattering previously held touchstones and without the discovery that reality itself has a lack of reality. But because of this we automatically invent new realities or new touchstones. This lack of reality signifies if we can free it from its narrowly historisized interpretation something near to Nietzsches Nihilism or to Kant's theme of what constitutes the sublime. The sublime sentiment is according to Kant a

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14. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism, Pg. 146, Post Modern Reader.

15. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism, Pg. 146, Post Modern Reader.



"strong and equivocal emotion". (16)

It is responsible for both pleasure and pain. This can be experienced in the conflict between the faculties of a subject, the ability to conceive of something and the ability to present something.

"Knowledge exists if at first the statement is intelligible and second if cases can be derived from the experience which correspond to it". (17)

"Taste therefore testifies that between the capacity to conceive and the capacity to present an object corresponding to the concept and undetermined agreement takes place without rules giving rise to judgement which Kant calls the reflective. This may be experienced as pleasure"  
(18)

For Lyotard the sublime sentiment takes place when the imagination fails to produce an object which might if only in concept match the concept. As he thinks we have an idea of the world but nothing we do matches the idea of its totality.

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16. Kant

17. Kant

18. Kant

1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject of the study.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the methods used in the study.

3. The third part of the report is a presentation of the results of the study.

4. The fourth part of the report is a discussion of the results and their implications.

5. The fifth part of the report is a conclusion and a list of references.

6. The sixth part of the report is a list of appendices.

7. The seventh part of the report is a list of figures and tables.

8. The eighth part of the report is a list of footnotes.

9. The ninth part of the report is a list of symbols and abbreviations.

10. The tenth part of the report is a list of acknowledgments.

11. The eleventh part of the report is a list of references.

12. The twelfth part of the report is a list of appendices.

13. The thirteenth part of the report is a list of figures and tables.

14. The fourteenth part of the report is a list of footnotes.

15. The fifteenth part of the report is a list of symbols and abbreviations.

16. The sixteenth part of the report is a list of acknowledgments.

We have an idea of the simple that which cannot be broken down or decomposed but we cannot illustrate it with a fitting object which would entirely explain it. We can conceive of the infinitely great but every object destined to make this absolute greatness visible is painfully inadequate. We must, therefore, accept that these are ideas about which no presentation is really possible. They impart no knowledge about reality. In their impossibility to prevent the free union of the senses which gives rise to the sentiment of the beautiful. They prevent formation of taste. They can be said to be what Lyotard calls unpresentable. This is near to what Kant calls formlessness. The absence of any form that which the imagination experiences when in search for presentation. Lyotard uses a metaphor of Wittengenstein to illuminate the condition of post modern thought

"our language can be seen as an ancient city, a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses with additions from different periods and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses". (19)

We build, we rebuild, we construct, we deconstruct with





this notion in mind. At this point I wish to look at Lyotard's attitudes towards pluralism and deconstruction. Discourse and figure concentrates on the work of art in terms of its formal properties, that being the relation of the formal to the inscription of the surface. When Lyotard talks about deconstruction he insists that our choice of focal point makes a difference produces what he calls an anamorphis (a distorted projection when viewed from a certain angle appears regular) rather than the exclusion of other points of view.

Anamorphiss in painting is the realisation in painting of the co-existence of two radically "heterogenous" (20) spaces (two spaces that contradict). Anamorphis plays upon the co presence of curved and geometric spaces in the visible. There are numerous examples of this.

Richard Diebenkorn is one of my examples. The American painter's ocean park series show some good examples of this. Diebenkorn moves between flatness and illusion with form and colour seeking his own original solution, avoiding a cliché. As Gerald Nordland says of him in his book (21)

"He pushes them to find a satisfying mutation.

He never accepts means to an end and by that

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20. Lyotard, Reading, 1991, Pg. 26.

21. Diebenkorn, 1987, Pg.



token he is not interested in abstraction as a convenience or as some source for an arbitrarily developed stylistic trademark. He is an artist into an expressive sense of structure that he employs in painting which are just incidently non figurative". (22)

Oceans Park, 38 achieves a shifting of planes in the manner of Cezanne or Hofman by creating a diagonal tension across the canvas between the green rectangle on the painting's right side and the yellow and sky blue rectangle in the upper centre.

As the English writer John Russell wrote for a show in London in 1973

"the pictures are much more about flatness and about ways in which the overall flatness can be spiced with forms that seem to overlap. One idea confronts another and neither will break down in a small space" (23)

The paintings are concerned with not only what one sees as the final stopping place but also to some degree the viewer's perception of the means and process that lead up to the conclusion of a painting. There is a co-existence

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22. Diebenkorn, 1987.

23. Diebenkorn, 1987.

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between the breathing spaces of colour and the linear "mixture" sometimes explicit, sometimes just suggested. If anamorphic painting insists on the support of paint as material not as a transparent screen in Diebenkorn's case I would argue that his paintings are in fact anamorphic as they aim at spatial coherence, and this is unescapably representational. The fact that they are abstract does not alter that. Therefore the paint acts as material to support this spatial coherence. To go back to Lyotard

"points of view are not an indifferent unmotivated extension in flat rational space as pluralism insists" (24)

rather the point of view is always wagered against and deconstructed by the continuous figural distortion in which it is implicated.

The implication of opposing construction from a single point of view is not that anything goes or of

"taking a unilinear point of view on history is not that all points are the same" (25)

but that on the contrary different points of view are at

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24. Lyotard, Reading, 1991, Pg. 27

25. Lyotard, Reading, 1991, Pg. 27.



NOTE

stake in different types of continuities, distortions and points of view produced by a point of view.

The disruption of the disruptive figural anamorphis of vision is paralleled in Lyotard's accounts of the figural necessity of anachronism in the writing of history. For Lyotard post modern is part of the modern in its most constructive sense,

"all that has been received if only yesterday must be suspected" (26)

so

"post modernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in its nascent state and this state is constant" (27)

Lyotard redresses the Freudian description of desire in terms of the

"figural co-presence of the incommensurable spaces of the reality principle and the pleasure principles" (28).

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26. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism, Pg. 147.

27. Lyotard, What is Postmodernism, Pg. 147.

28. Lyotard, Readings, Pg. 47, 1991.



The simple opposition of reality to fantasy is displaced. The real and the imaginary are co-present, desire borders reality in that it is present at the edge of reality as different from it, without being eliminated.

To take Umberto Eco's definition

"I believe post modernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined but rather an ideal category or better still a kunstwollen, a way of operating". (29)

Every period has its own post modernism just as every period has its own mannerism. Nietzsche in his thoughts out of season, in which he wrote of the harm done by historical studies

"The past conditions us, harries us, blackmails us. The historic Avant Garde tries to settle scores with the past". (30)

"Down with the moonlight", a futurist slogan - is a typical slogan of every avant garde. You only have to replace it with another noun and you have the grounds for the new?

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29. Eco, Postmodern Reader, Pg. 73, Postscript to 'Name of the Rose', 1984.  
30. Eco, Postmodern Reader, Pg. 73, Postscript to 'Name of the Rose', 1984.



The Avant Garde, finally, through this process, arrived at the blank wall, the ultimate silence because the moment came when the Avant Garde realised it could go no further in its wish to be absolute it killed itself with its impossible texts and problems.

The post modern reaction to this is to recognise the past in a way (Modernism - The Avant Garde) tried to avoid doing because the past can never really be destroyed.

In David Kay Griffin's essay creativity and post modern religion he says

"What God expects from man is not servile submission, not obedience, not the fear of condemnation but free creature acts sin and does not lie in disobedience, but in slavery in loss of freedom". (31)

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31. Griffin, Postmodern Reader, Pg. 373.





## CONCLUSION

The argument over the value of painting is over. Ever since the 1980's there has been an upsurge in painting, and various other forms of expression. Pluralism has triumphed, within this pluralist society painting for the sake of painting has taken a back seat to the more obvious areas dominated by post modern theory and culture. In the case of post modern writers such as Jean Francois Lyotard, painting for its own internal reasons is relevant, as he says a painting of form is the only form. Many critics however, argue in their material for an art with a social conscience, an art that demonstrates an interest in people, and that shows society's faults. Art for its own sake does this, by virtue of the fact that it remains a self concerned entity which reflects reality in the only way it can, that is by re-affirming its own reality or lack of within the confines of a capitalist society. Where capitalist ideology is dominant and in most cases the most democratic. In this situation the deconstructive self questioning values reinforce the position of the artist, as an opponent of kitsch and values that in reality are not values but a need by bureaucracy to place art as a commodity within a quantifiable range. With regard to writers such as Robert Hughes, on the notion that modernism has diminished into an academy. While



there may be some degree of truth in it painting can still struggle within itself to deconstruct any academic notions. To go back to Greenberg, and the notion that art only has to be aesthetically good, an aesthetic reaction is a seen experienced value not a literal given. To quote Lyotard, an exteriority that cannot be interiorized as a significance without being overthrown. If we could understand as Hofman did that art forms from all eras, and does not exclude any forms, rather it excludes falseness, and if we could view the past with more respect for movements that happened simultaneously with Cubism, a picture of the truth might be less hazy.

For Barr Hofman even Trotsky and Marx, to a certain extent, creativity was a valuable unknown. Greenberg on the contrary damaged the unknown by insisting on being responsible for its direction. That this damage has marginalised painting as a narcissistic cult of self with no external value except an aesthetic one can be seen in many post modern writers, who view art's relevance in terms of pop narrative and media art only and miss the point of painting's ability to parody reality within itself.

With regard to what may be seen as the more debatable aspects of Lyotard's criticism he himself says

"I imagine there will always be a difference between artists and theories, but it is rather a good thing



for theorists have everything to learn from artists even if the latter won't do what the former expect so much the better as theorists need to be practically criticised by works that disturb them". (Lyotard Driftworks, Pg. 30, 1984).





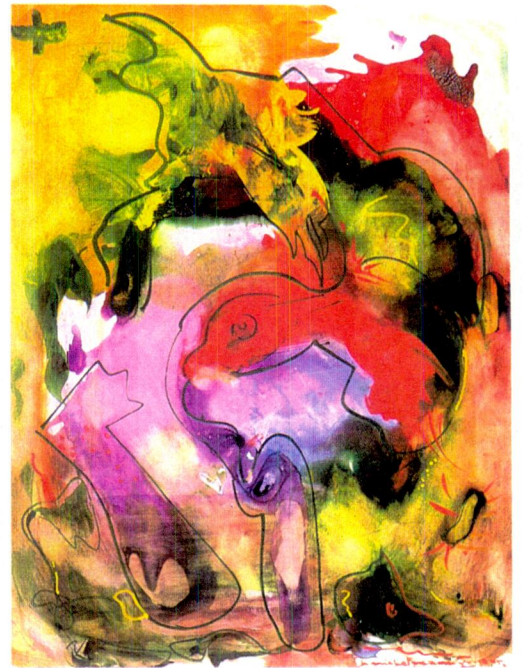


22

22. *Apples*, c. 1932  
Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in.  
Lillian Kiesler, New York



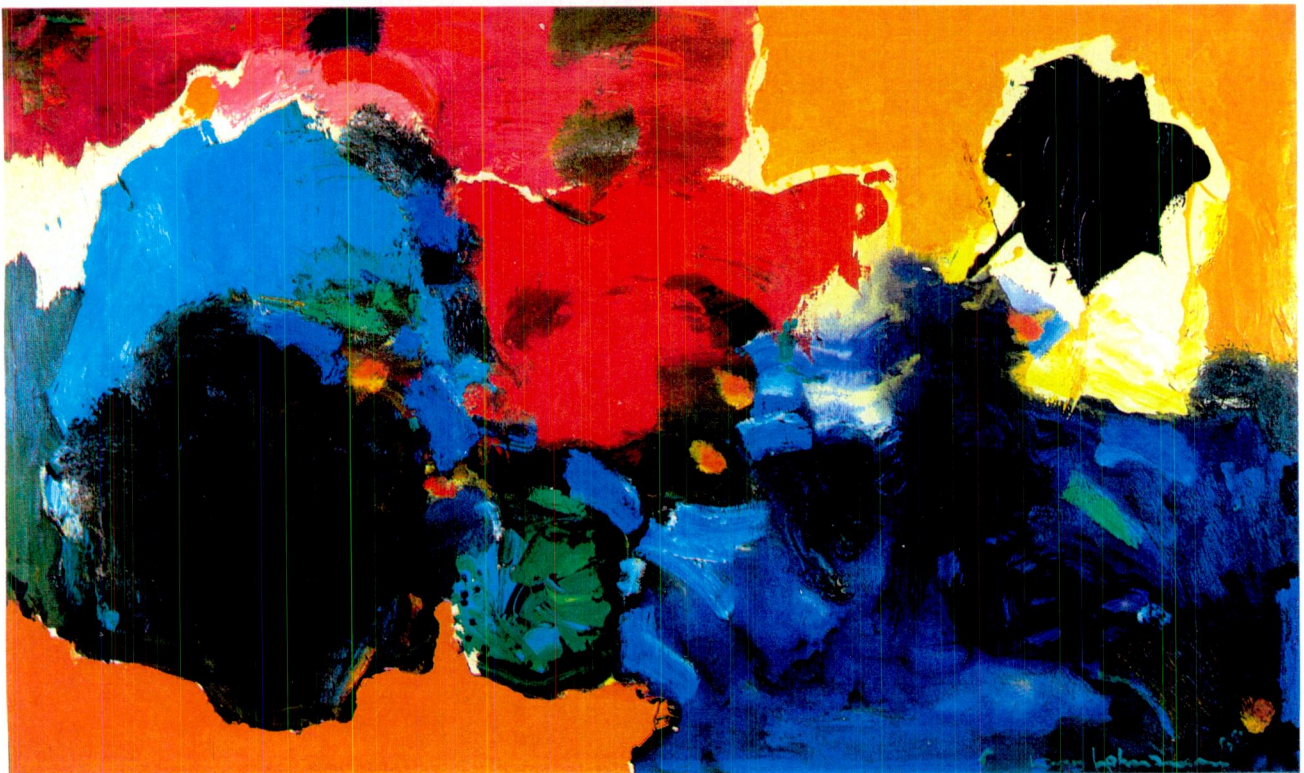




5

4. *Towering Clouds*, 1958  
Oil on canvas, 50 x 84 in.  
Collection Gordon F. Hampton, Los Angeles

5. *Intoxication*, 1945  
Gouache on paper, 28¾ x 22¾ in.  
Private collection



4







66

65. *Smaragd Red and Germinating Yellow*,  
1959  
Oil on canvas, 55 x 40 in.  
Cleveland Museum of Art

66. *Ora Pro Nobis*, 1964  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in.  
Private collection, New York



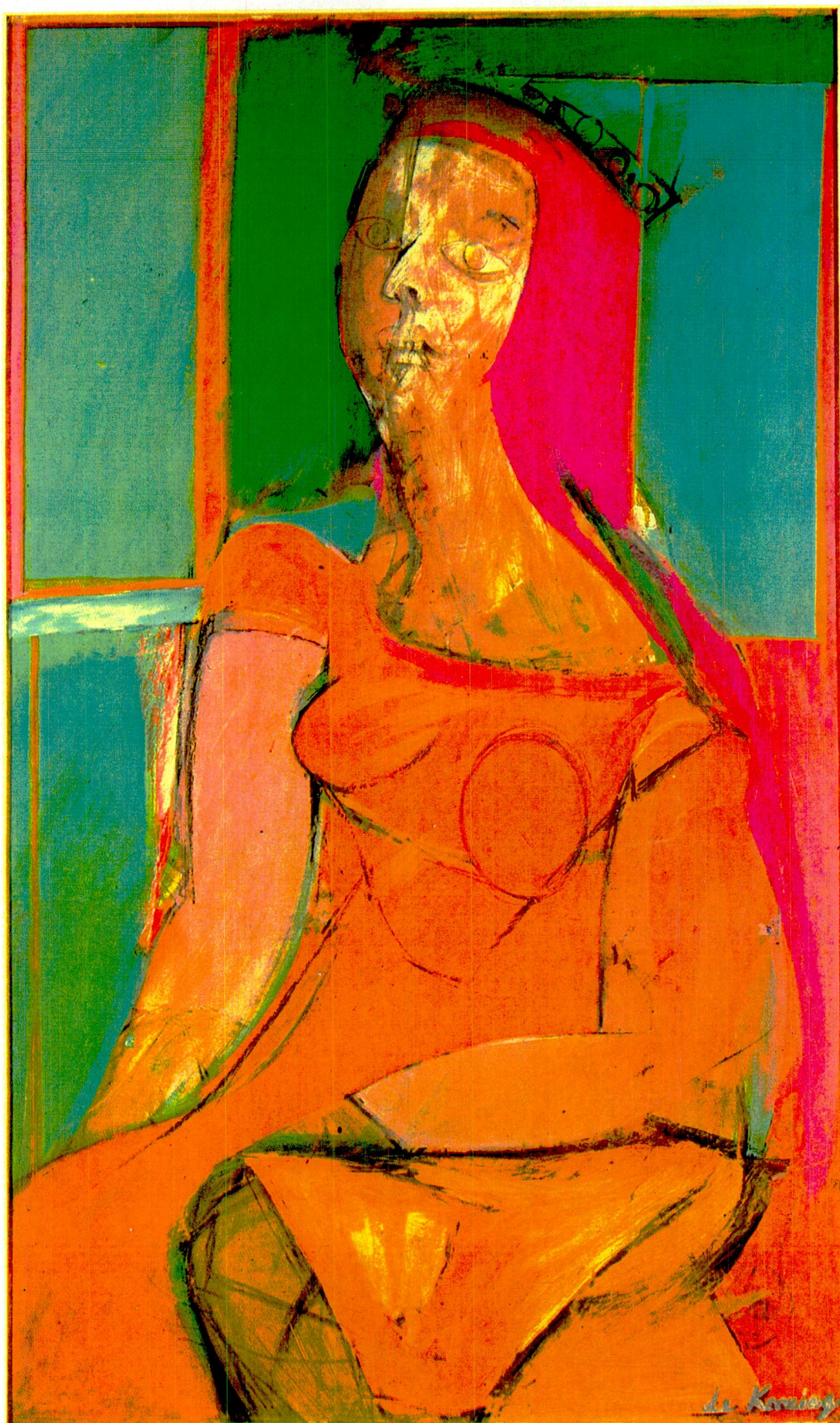




ROBERTO SEBASTIAN MATTA ECHAURREN *To Give Painless Light*. 1955



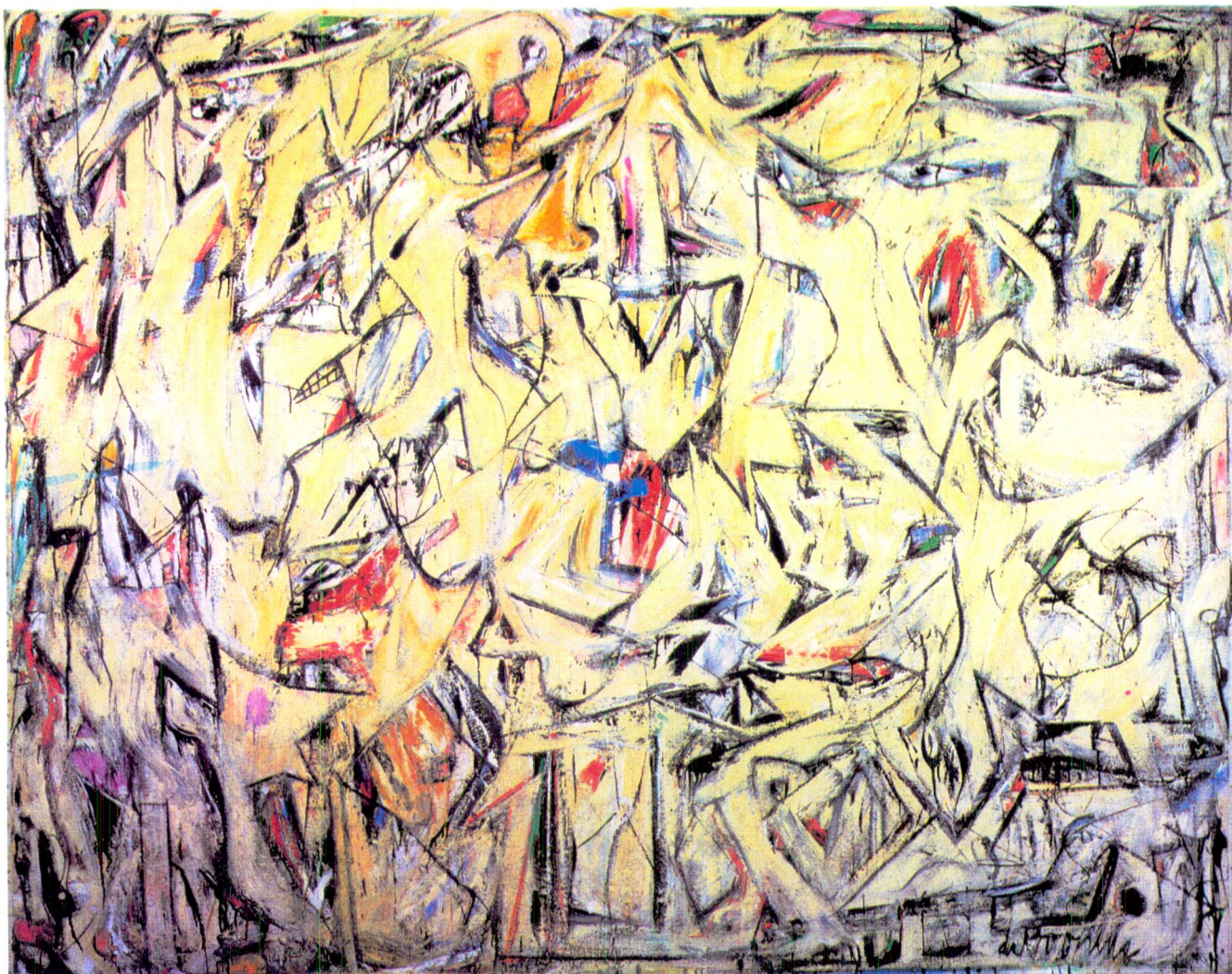




WILLEM DE KOONING, *Queen of Hearts*, 1943–6, oil and charcoal on composition board, 117 cm × 69 cm, 46 in. × 27 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. Photo: John Tennant.







201 Willem De Kooning *Excavation* 1950  
Oil on canvas 80 × 100 ins: Art Institute of Chicago



202 Willem De Kooning *Woman and Bicycle* 1952-3  
Oil on canvas 76½ × 49 ins  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York







JACKSON POLLOCK, *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*, 1943, oil on canvas, 107 cm × 102 cm, 42 in. × 40 in. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Gift of Frank Lloyd. © by A.D.A.G.P., Paris, 1982.



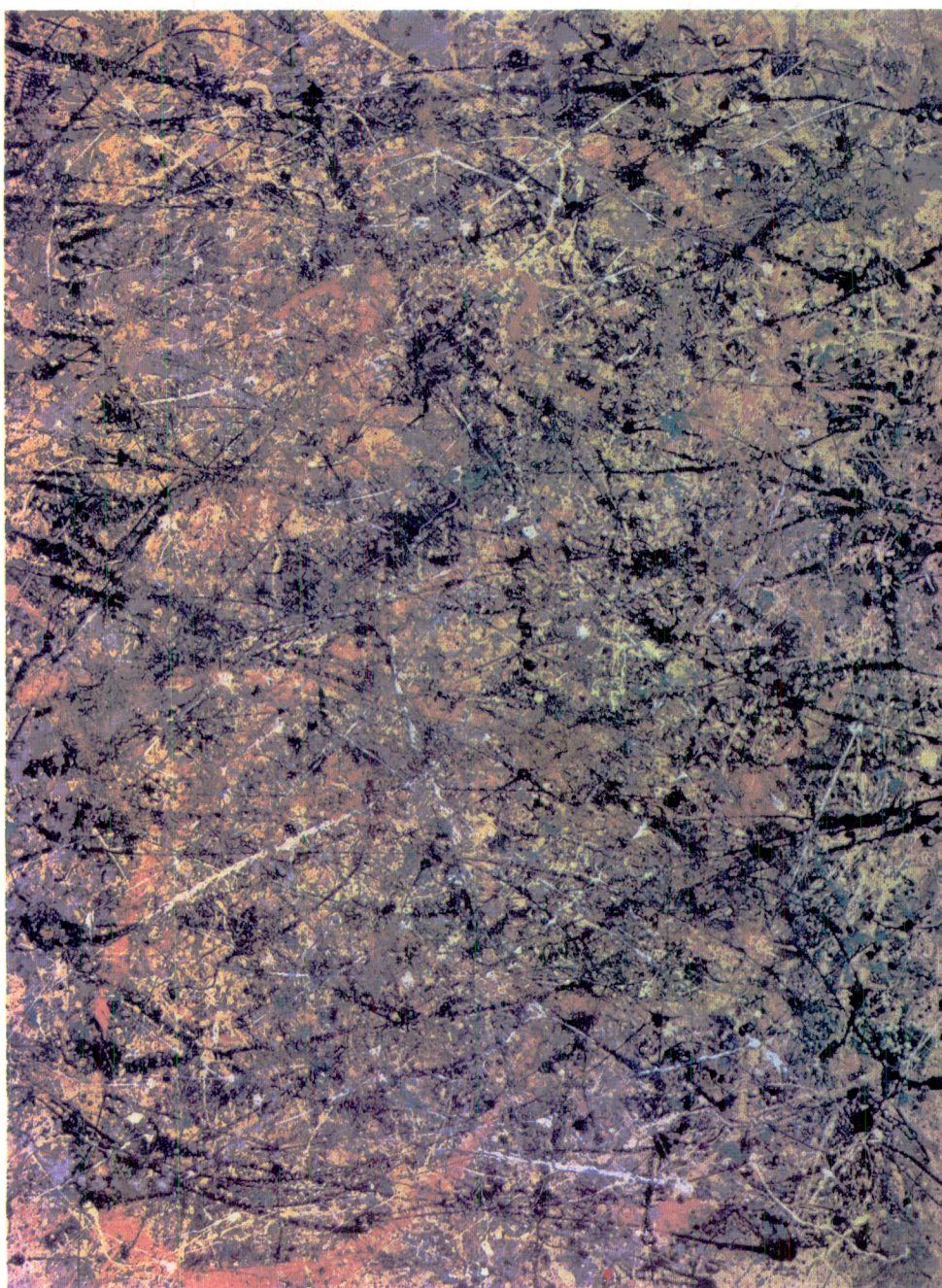




JACKSON POLLOCK *War*, 1947









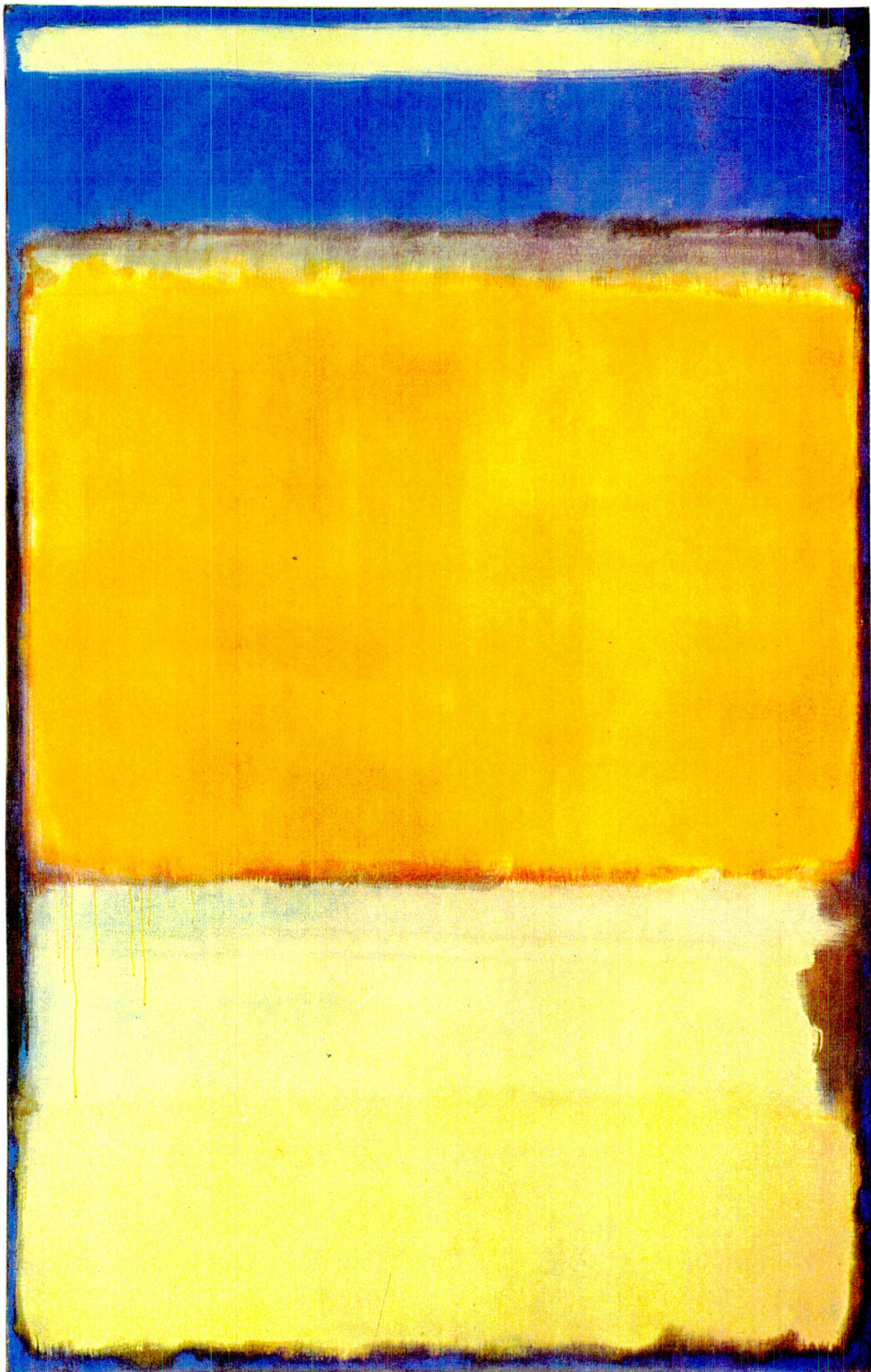




JACKSON POLLOCK *Portrait and a*



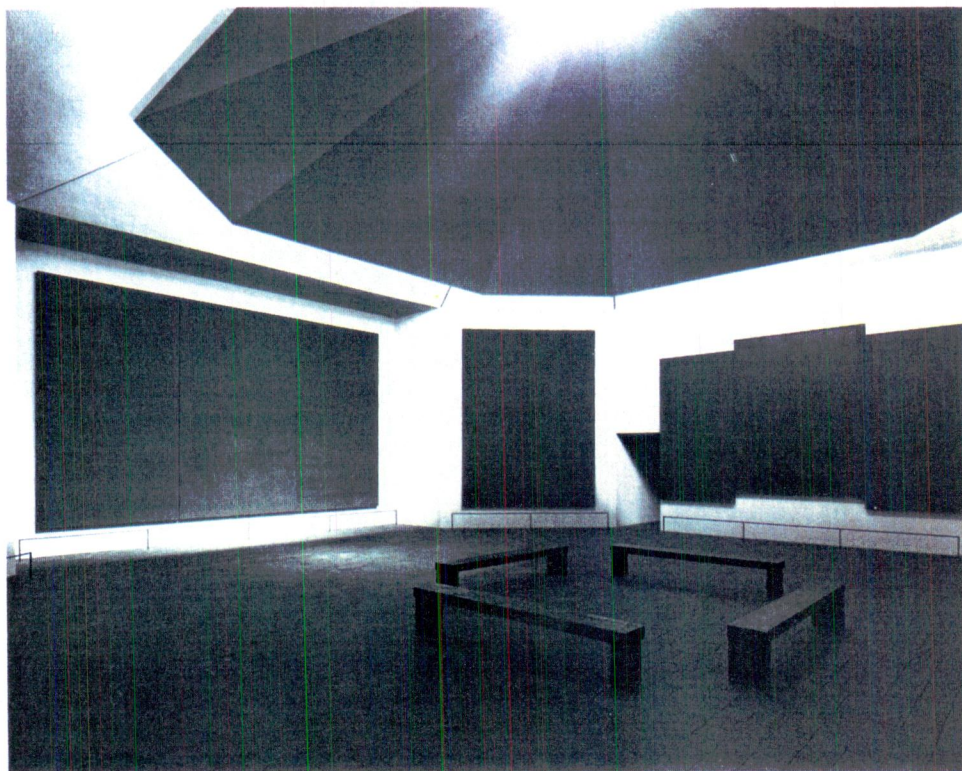




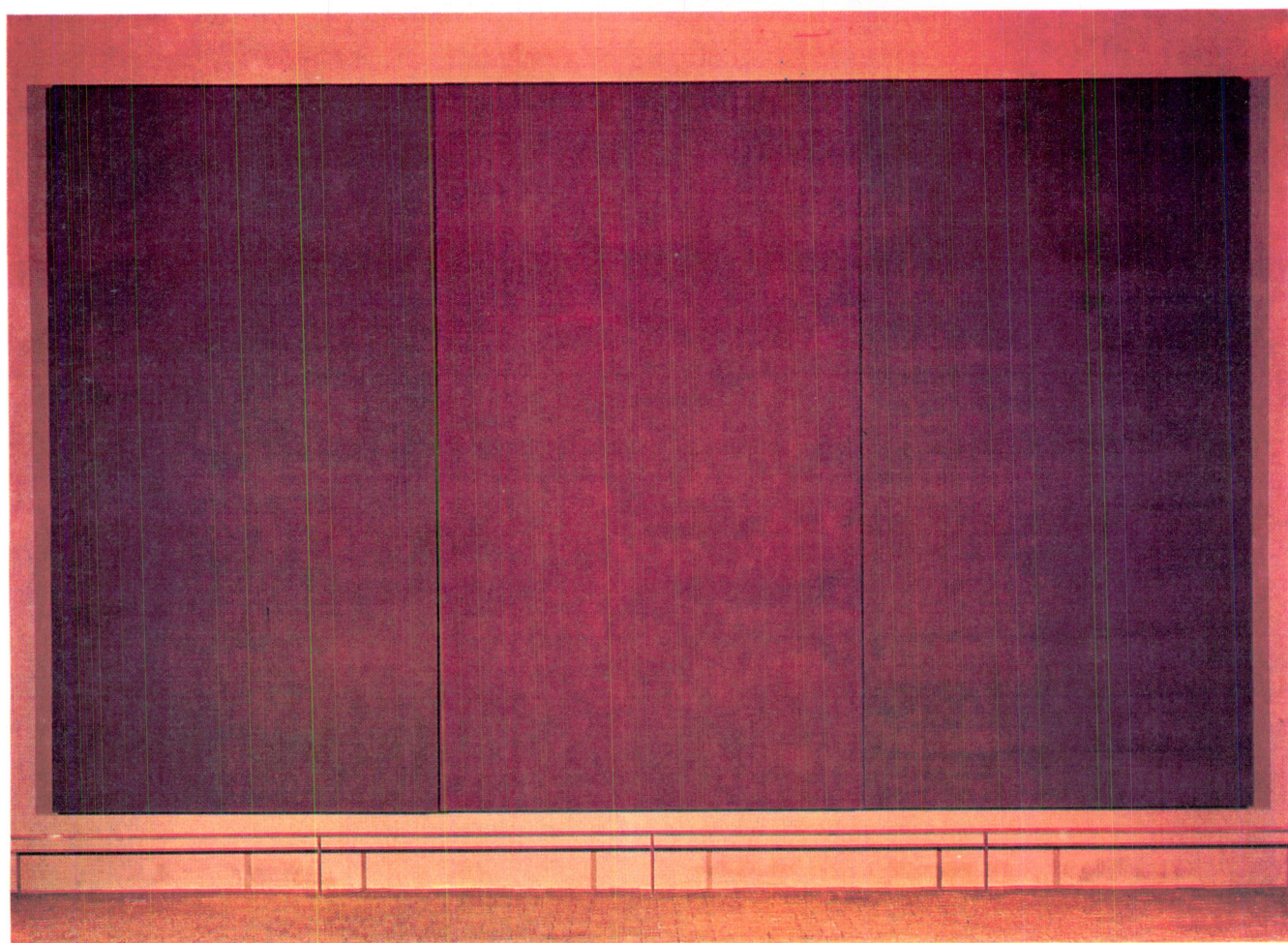
MARK ROTHKO, *Number 10*, 1950, oil on canvas, 230 cm × 145 cm, 90½ in. × 57¼ in. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson.







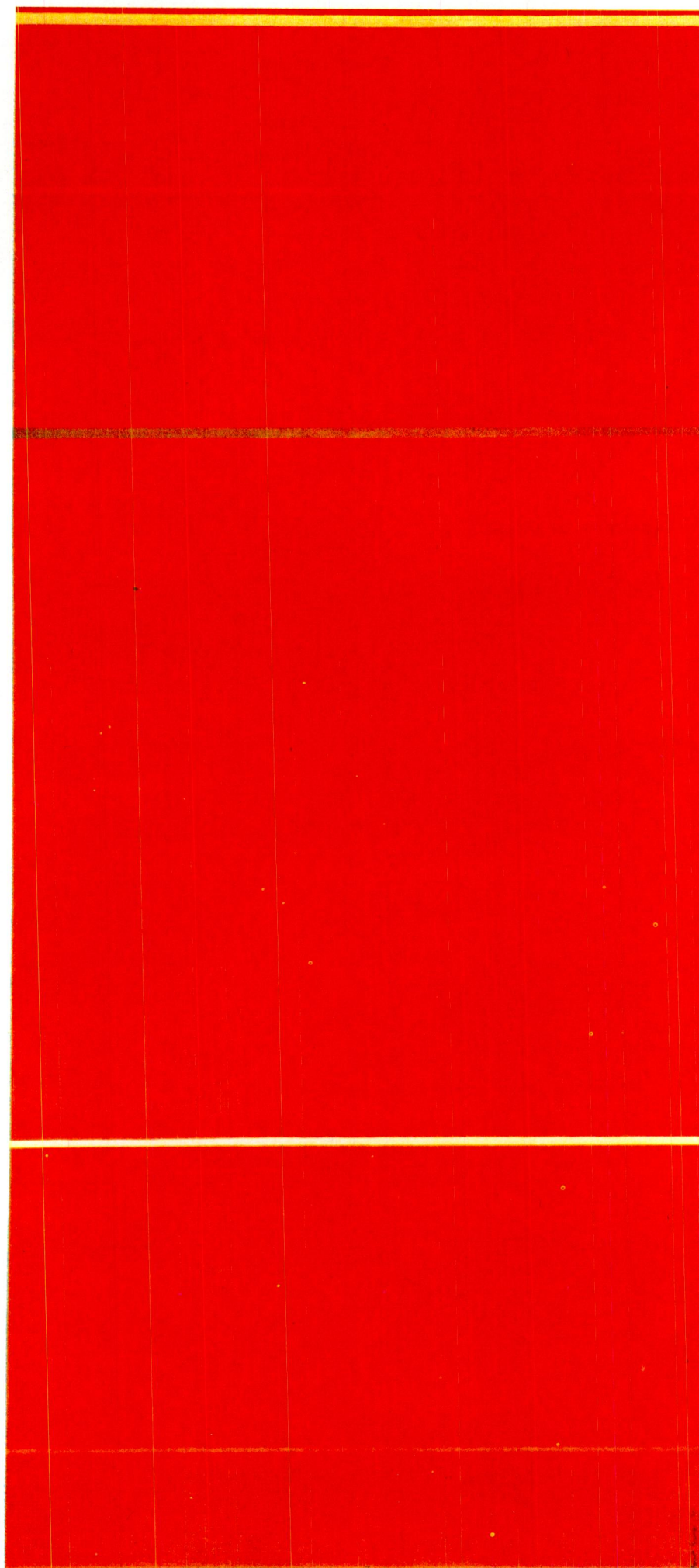
216 *The Rothko Chapel, Houston*



217 Mark Rothko *Centre Triptych for the Rothko Chapel* 1966  
 Courtesy of the Rothko Chapel, Houston



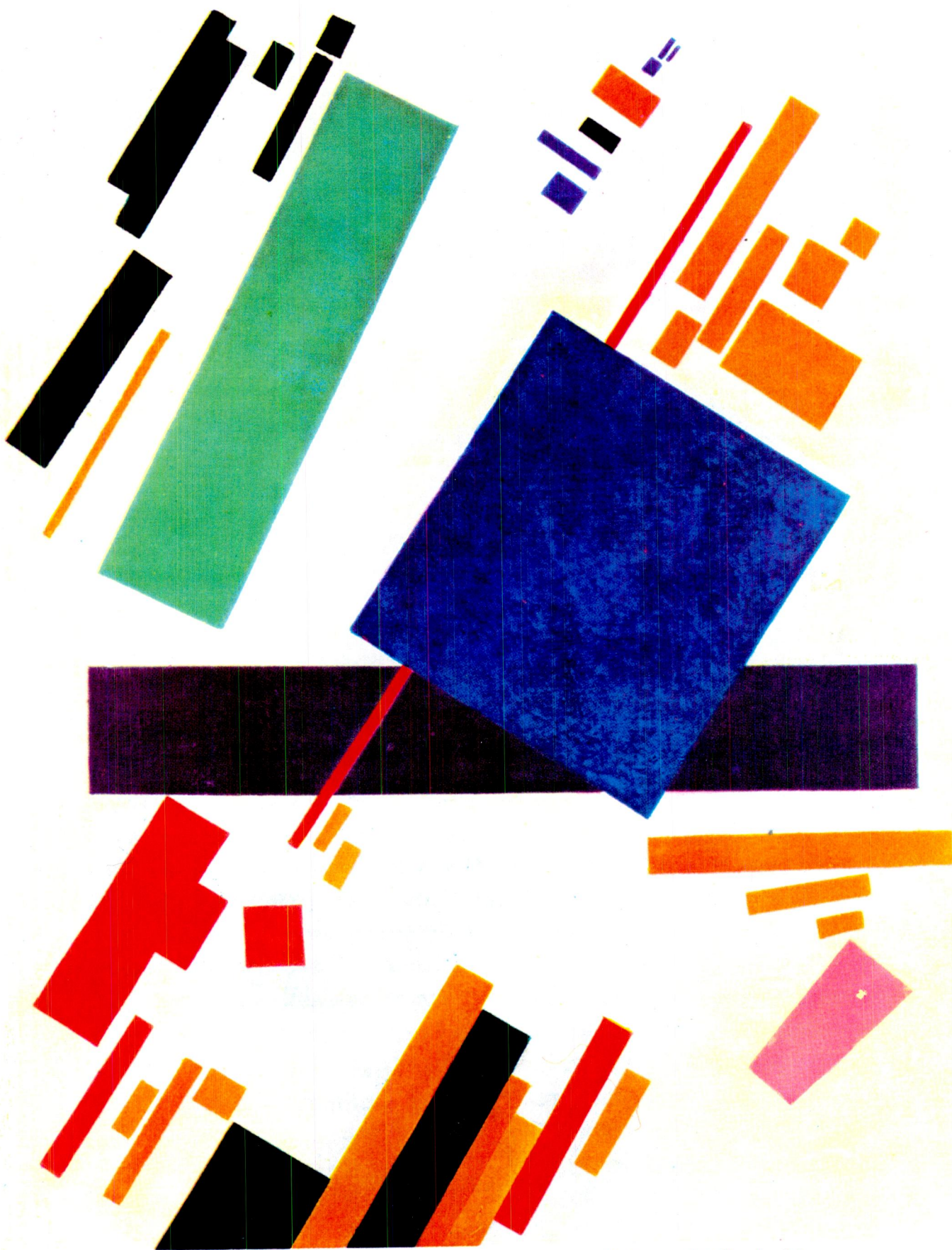




BARNETT NEWMAN, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950–1, oil on canvas, 242 cm × 542 cm, 95½ in. × 213¼ in. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr and Mrs Ben Heller.



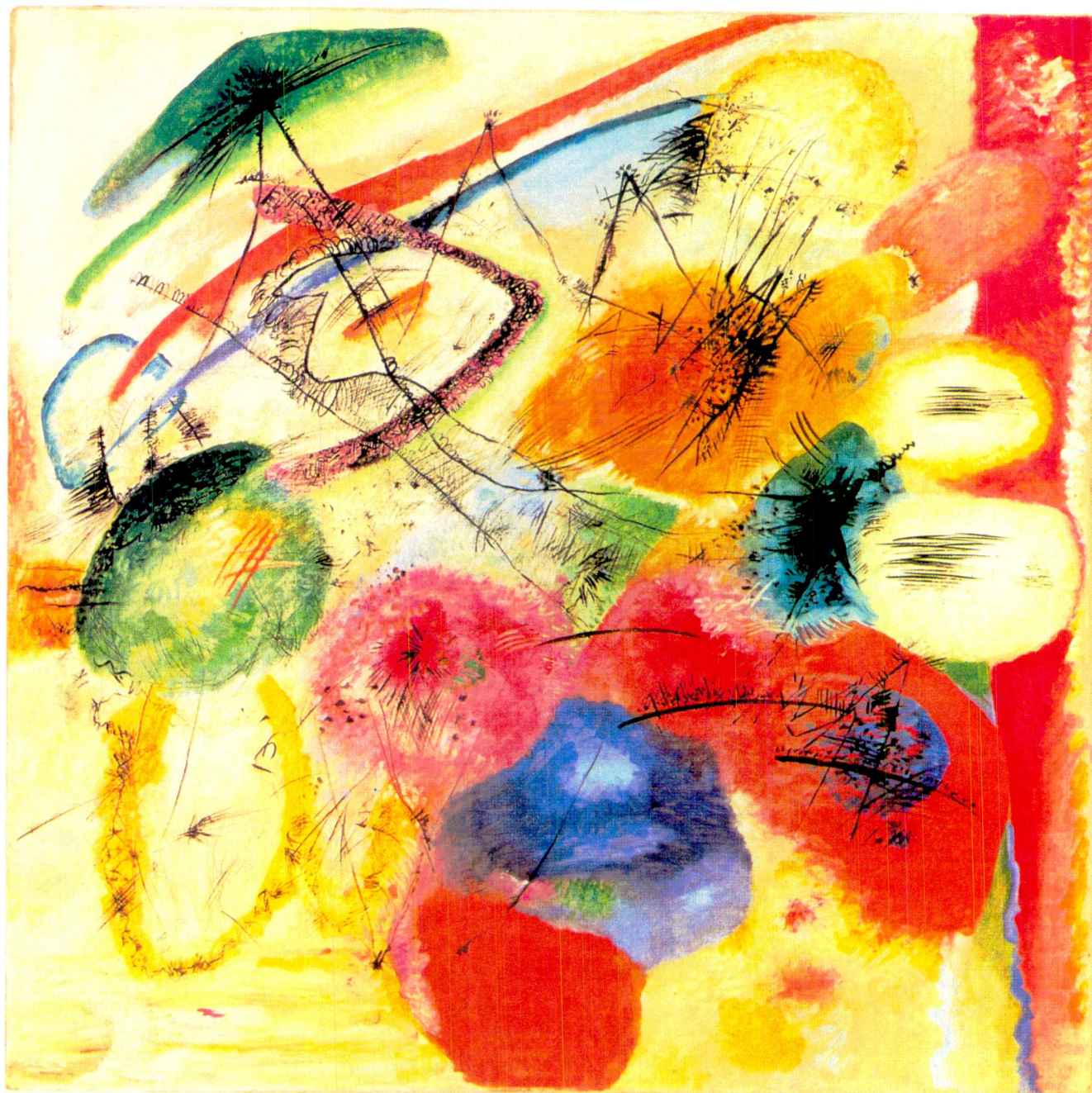




KASIMIR MALEVICH *Suprematist Composition. 1915*



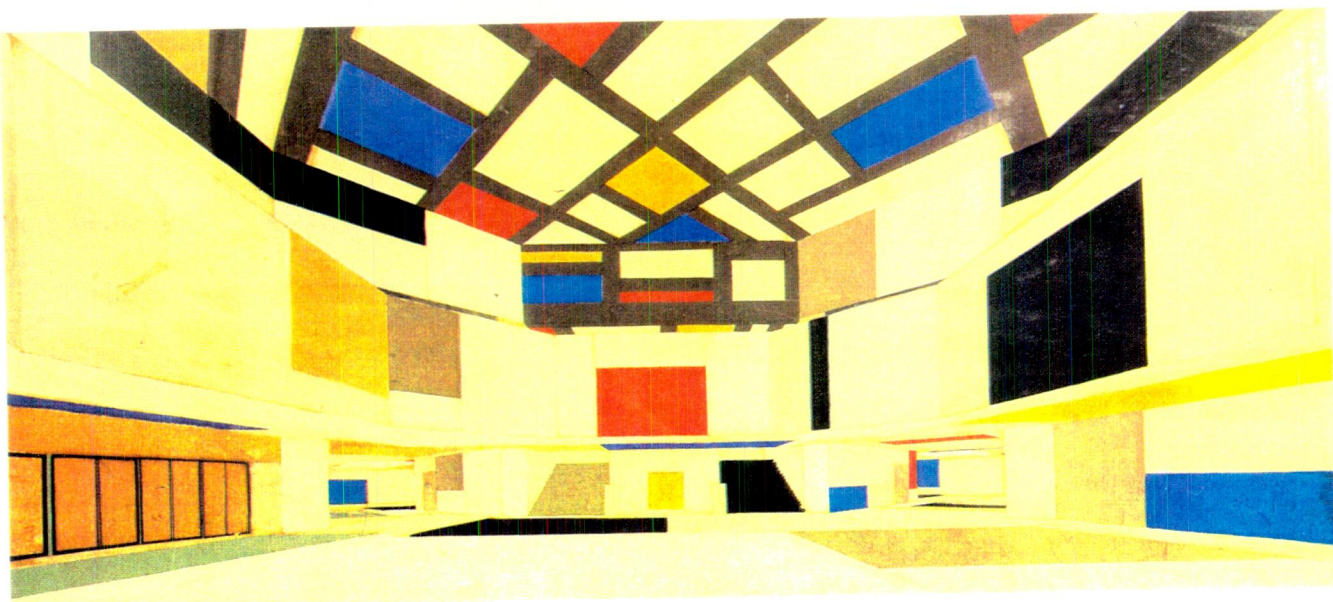




206 Wassily Kandinsky *Black Lines No. 189* 1913  
Oil on canvas  $51 \times 51\frac{1}{4}$  ins  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York © ADAGP







138 Theo van Doesburg *University Hall* 1923  
Collage, tracing paper, pen and ink 25 × 57 ins  
Collection C. van Eesteren, Amsterdam

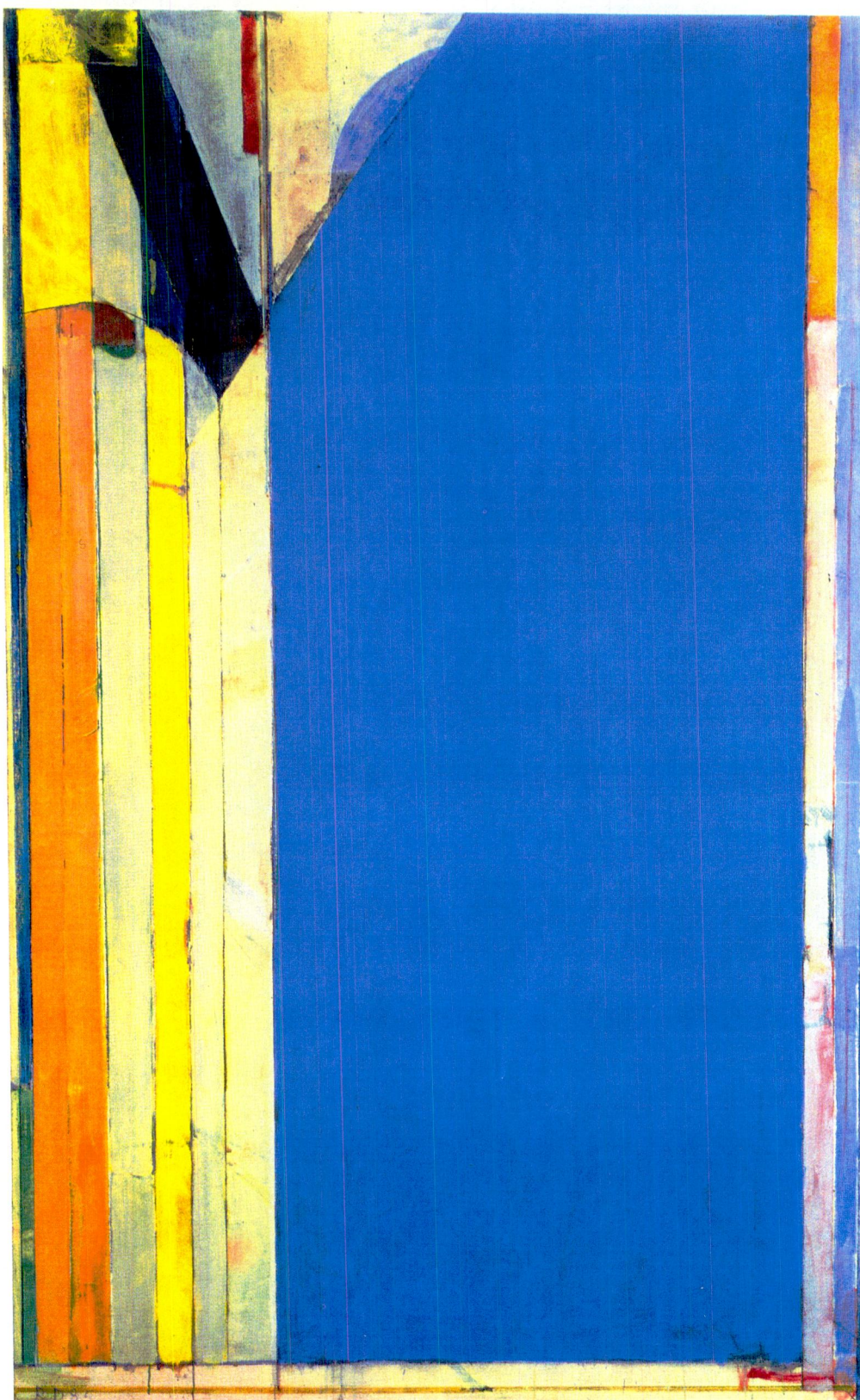










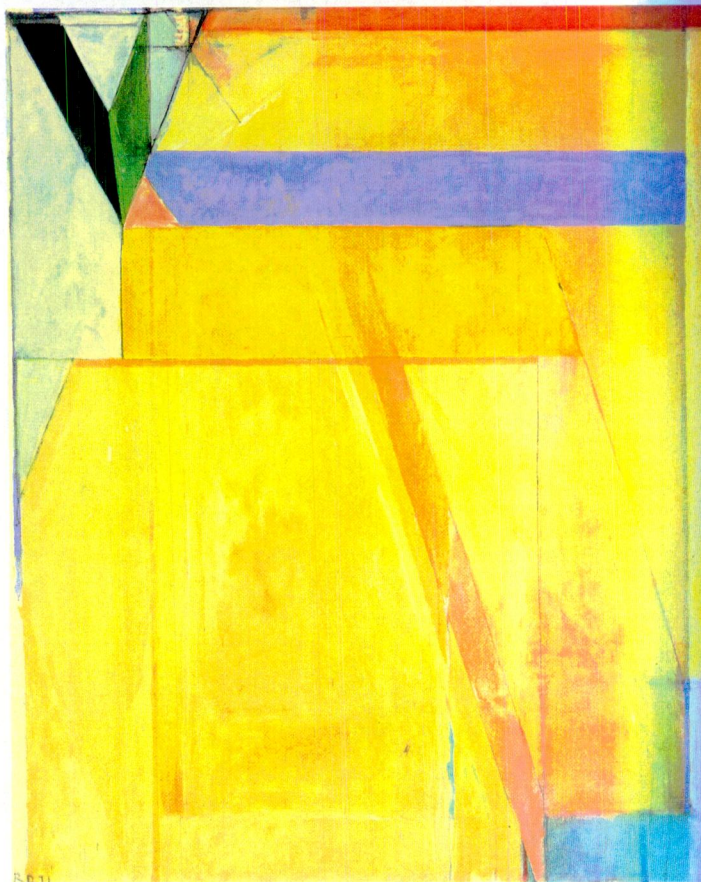
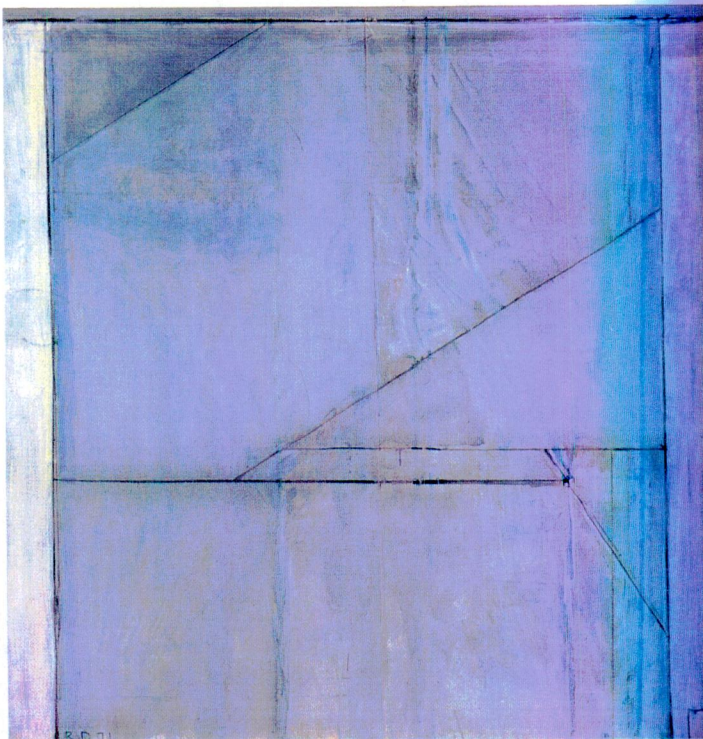






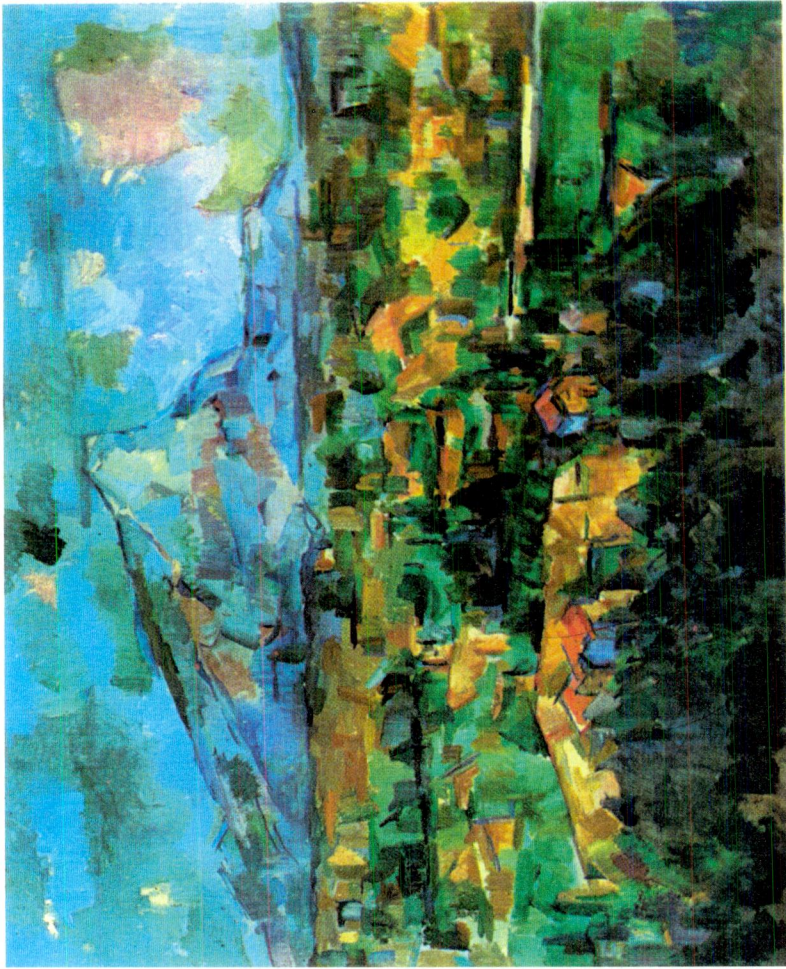
BELOW:

*Ocean Park No. 38*, 1971. Oil on canvas.  
100 x 81 in. Mr. and Mrs. Gifford  
Phillips collection, New York













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