

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

AMERICAN ART IN THE 20th CENTURY:
THE LANGUAGE OF FORM AND COLOUR

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND C.S.
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART
DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

BY
JAMES KIRWAN

APRIL 1981

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ILLUSTRATIONS	4
INTRODUCTION	
The influences and how they developed	6
CHAPTER 1	
The Language of Forms, Colours and Materials	18
CHAPTER 2	
A reaction against Abstract Expressionism. New experiments with materials. Pop Art, Geometric Abstraction, and Minimal Art	43
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	Seated Girl	William Morris Hunt	9
1a	Sketch of Nelson Mathewson	William S. Mount	9
1b	Broadway	Mark Tobey	10
2.	Mound	Milton Resnick	11
3.	New Year Wall Night	Franz Kline	13
4.	No. 7	Bradley Walker Tomlin	14
5.	No. 42	James Brooks	15
5a	Untitled	Donald Judd	16
6.	Woman I	William de Kooning	26
7.	The Reservoir	Pablo Picasso	27
8.	Trees and Landscape, 1931 Drawing, 1945	Hans Hofmann	28
9.	Island in the Bay	Hans Hofmann	29
10.	The Joy of Life	Henri Matisse	30
11.	Still Life	Paul Cezanne	30
12.	Jackson Pollock at Work		31
13.	Jonah	Albert Pinknam Ryder	32
14.	Autumn Rhythm	Jackson Pollock	33
15.	Untitled	Morris Louis	34
16.	Kaf	Morris Louis	35
17.	Moving In	Morris Louis	36
18.	A Warm Sound in a Grey Field	Kenneth Nolan	37
19.	Ivan the Terrible	Ad Held	38

		By	page
20.	Blue red	Ellsworth Kelly	39
21.	Vir Heroicus Sublimis	Barnett Newmann	40
22.	Orange and Yellow	Mark Rothko	41
23.	Collage	Robert Rauschenberg	47
24.	Three Flags	Jasper Johns	48
25.	Diver	Jasper Johns	49
26.	7 - Up	Claes Oldenburg	50
27.	Marilyn Monroe	Andy Warhol	51
28.	Jackie Kennedy	Andy Warhol	52
29.	Brillo Boxes	Andy Warhol	53
30.	The Marriage of Reason and Squalor	Frank Stella	54
31.	Permutations Algorithms	Victor Vasarely	55
32.	Homage to the Square	Josef Albers	56
33.	Crest	Bridget Riley	57

INTRODUCTION

The influences and how they developed.

It is customary to date the arrival of Modern Art in America from the dramatic Armory Show of 1913, it certainly was the first major breakthrough for Modernism in the United States. However, this did not bring the immediate acceptance of avant-garde art nor a sudden destruction of the Academy.

(a) The Academy stressed the value of inherited traditions, rather than the expression of nature or the inner emotional world of the artist.

(b) Modernism took art out of the role of illustration to interpretation, it showed a distinction between image and symbol, it was abstract rather than representational. (This distinction is fundamental to an understanding of Modern Art).

The National Academy of Design, founded in 1825, sponsored annual exhibitions to preserve these conservative traditions. Drawings such as 'Seated Girl' (fig. 1) and sketch of Nelson Mathewson (fig. 1a) make it clear that American artists in the latter decades of the nineteenth century pursued a variety of styles, some contradictory. As regionalism and technology among other factors brought a quickened and sometimes uneasy pace of life to America after the Civil War, so not surprisingly her art reflected certain new insecurities in its direction and progress.

With the opening of the Armory Show, the provincialism of American Art for the first time became apparent. Attitudes up to this time were pre-Civil War and deeply rooted in puritanism but the full impact of the Show was not absorbed for another thirty years. Americans found it difficult to catch up with the fast changing trends they saw in European Art.

Up to the 1930s and '40s Americans had to travel abroad to find out what was happening in European schools. Marsden Hartley worked with the Blaue Reiter in Berlin in 1912, Edward Steichen saw Cubist work in Paris in 1908, and Alfred Stieglitz, a New York art dealer (in 1905 he opened the Little Galleries of the Photo-Session at 291 Fifth Avenue) and photographer, worked in Berlin in 1881. They were among the Americans who returned from Europe to influence the art movements of America. In the 1930s foreign artists started to arrive. This was a result of the war and political repression in Europe. Artists such as Rothko, de Kooning and Hofmann were some of the first, their arrival and influence created a period of critical redirection from existing traditions.

The influence of European artists gave rise to many art movements: Abstract Expressionism, post-painterly abstraction, Pop Art and Kinetic Art, and Minimalism. These movements were all directly related to new experiments with materials. In the period between Tobey's 'Broadway' 1936 (fig. 1) and Milton Resnick's 'Mound', 1962, (fig. 2), American painters made the greatest advance in the utilisation of the brush as a direct projection of human feelings. William de Kooning with commercial brushes

and various kinds of knives and scrapers activated cubist planes to combine ^{structure} with an entirely personal style. Kleins black and white canvas show the powerful impact of one or two brush strokes with just a house painter's brush on a two dimensional surface (see illustration fig. 3). Jackson Pollock went further, breaking the physical contact that connected hand, brush and surface. By the use of a method of just pouring paint on the canvas he unleashed a rapid swing in the marks he made. For Tomlin (fig. 4) the brush made possible a formal balance between geometric and organic vitality. James Brooks' (fig. 5) application of paint is much freer and his drawing is parallel to wind, water, and other mobile natural forms. He exploited a discovery made by working on paper in 1948 and found that thin paint penetrated the ground like a dye and afterwards he soaked his pigment into the canvas. When he had soaked the canvas he turned it over and worked further on the back. This was five years before the meeting between Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler in which the 'soaking' method was officially inaugurated.

The American Abstract Expressionists exploited and explored the language of colour. The influences of Rothko, Clifford Still and Newmann were the most striking of all the painters at the time. They initiated the most radical break from the past. They made an enormous break-through in colour, surface, scale and structure. The direction of thought at the time can be summarised by a statement made by Hans Hofmann.

"The physical carrier (commonly painting or sculpture) is the medium, of expression of the surreal. Thus an idea is communicable into material terms. The artist's technical problem is how to transform the material with which he works back into the sphere of the spirit."

(1)

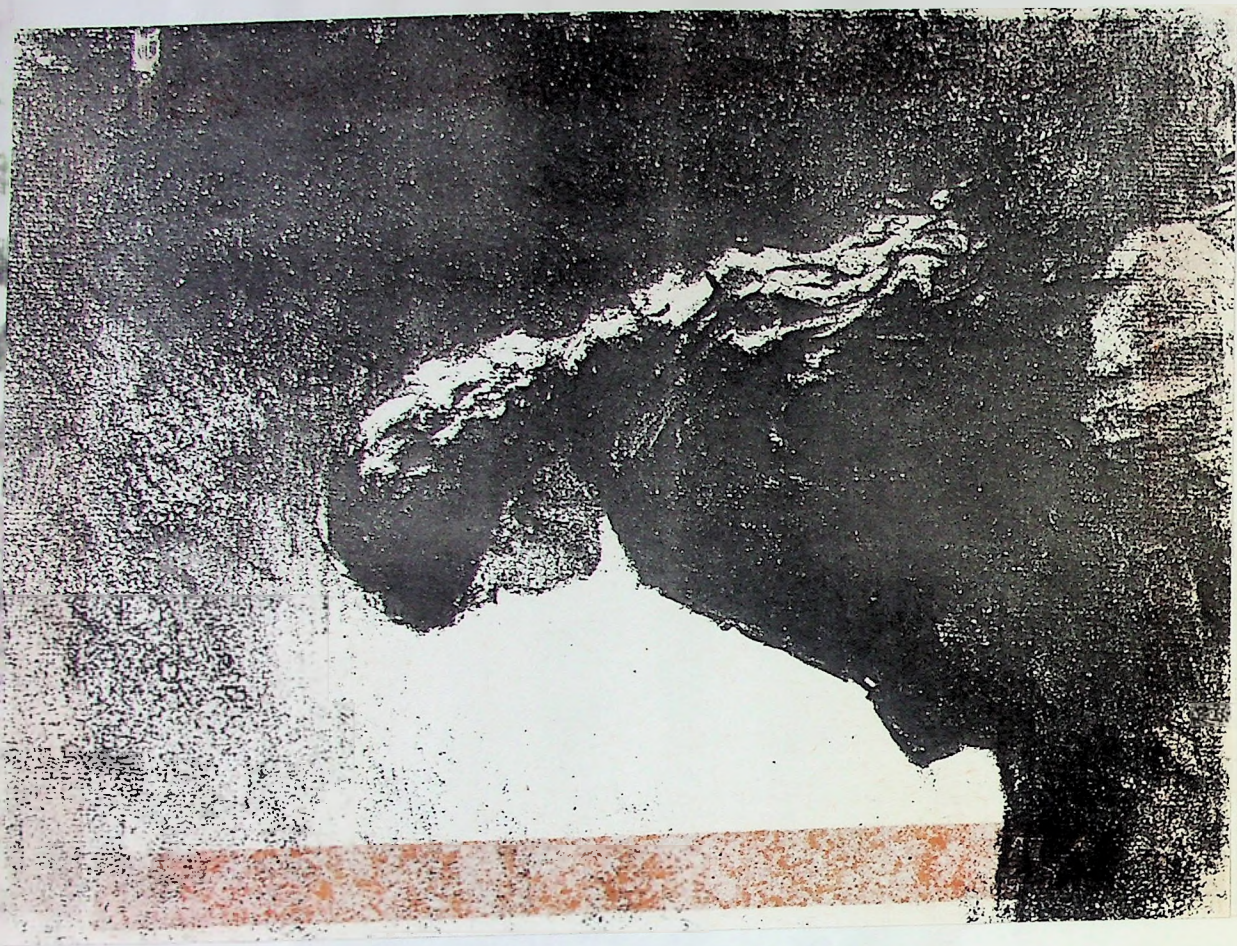
Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler began even bolder experiments with materials and they began to exploit acrylic paint, which is much more flexible than oils. This extension of experimentation led to post-painterly abstraction. The influences of Abstract Expressionism did not stop here however, American Pop Art emerged out of Abstract art as it was a major reaction against Abstract Expressionism. Pop artists realised the tremendous possibilities of mass produced images of their everyday environment as new subject matter. The result was generally more bold, aggressive and even overpowering as in the work of Warhol, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Indiana and Jim Dine.

My intention therefore is to assess the use and influences of materials in American 20th century art. I shall also discuss the works of the Op artists, the influence of Vasarely and the paintings of Bridget Riley which were to move away from Abstract Expressionism into minimal art and primary structure sculpture. (The works of Donal Judd (fig. 5a) are perhaps the best examples to fit the primary structure category).

The minimalists represented a move by artists towards the essentials of geometric structure and environment as well as more objective aesthetic attitudes. The change was also a reaction to the ego-centered Abstract Expressionists of the fifties. Despite their simplified forms the structures created perceptual ambiguities, defying weight, mass and material substance. Most of the sculptural innovations of the 1960s arose from the dilemmas of painting, from essentially pictorial problems of translating three dimensional concepts onto a two dimensional surface. The "field" paintings of Rothko, Newmann and Still, the compositions of Ad Reinhardt, the junk assemblages of Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns all began to assert their separate influences on working in three dimensions. The projection of actual canvas shapes by Frank Stella provided a point of departure for a number of young artists seeking fresh solutions within an anti-Expressionistic style.



William Hunt Fig 1

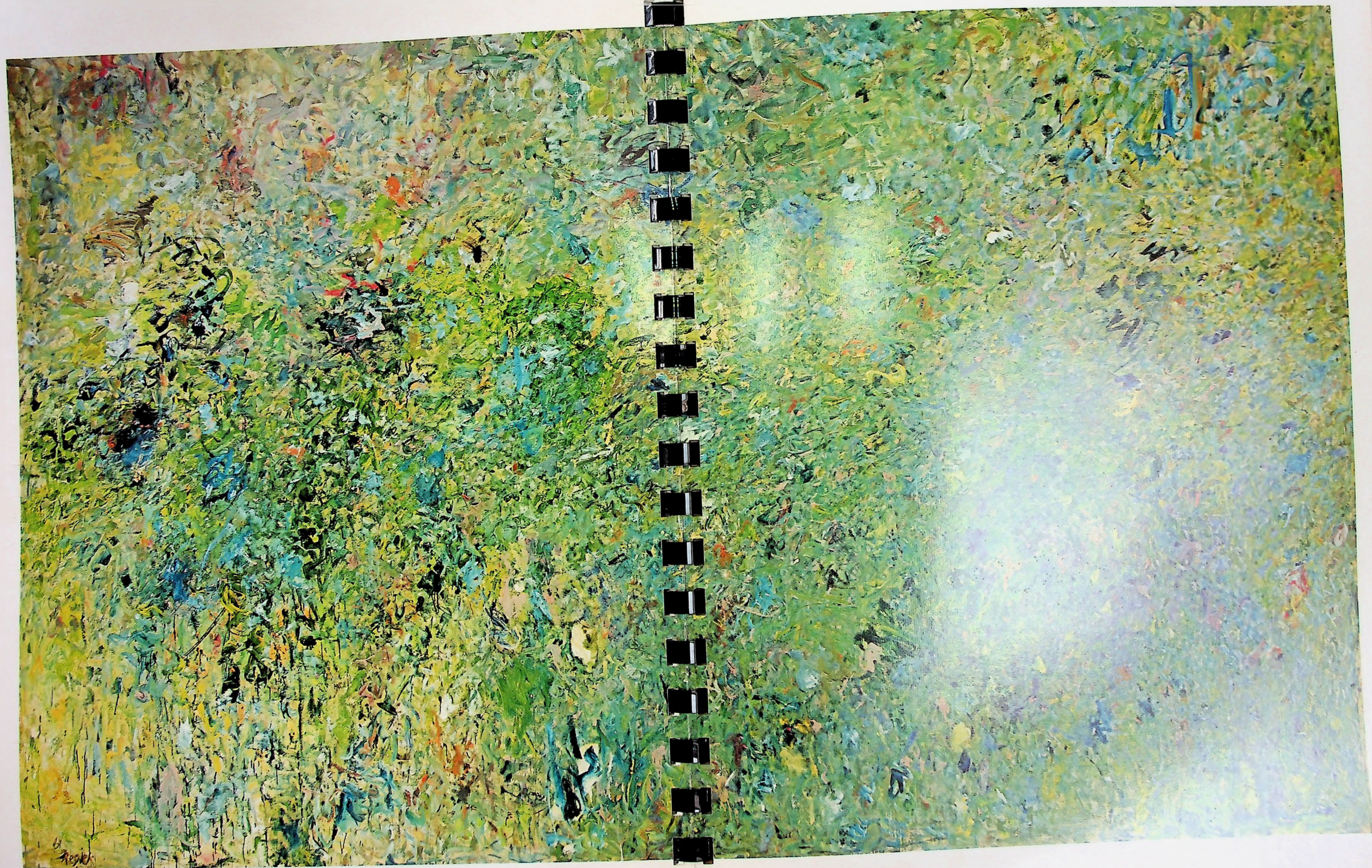


William Mount Fig 1a



858. MARK TOBEY. *Broadway*. c. 1935. Tempera on masonite, 26 x 19 1/4". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Arthur H. Hearn Fund, 1942.

Fig 6



Milton Resnick 1917- / *Mound* (1961)
292 × 399.7 cm (9 ft. 7 in. × 15 ft. 5 in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Wise, New York

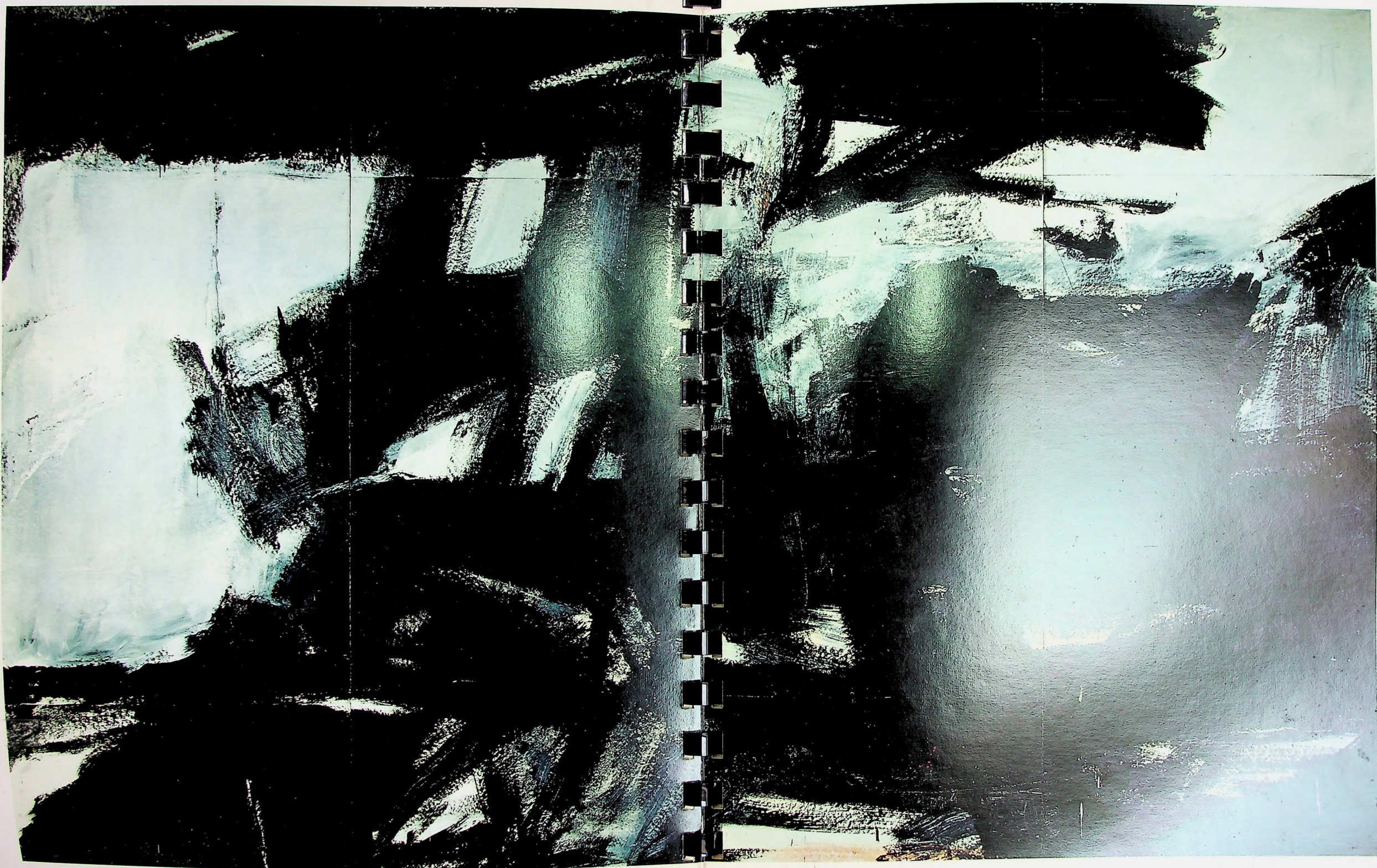


Fig. 3.

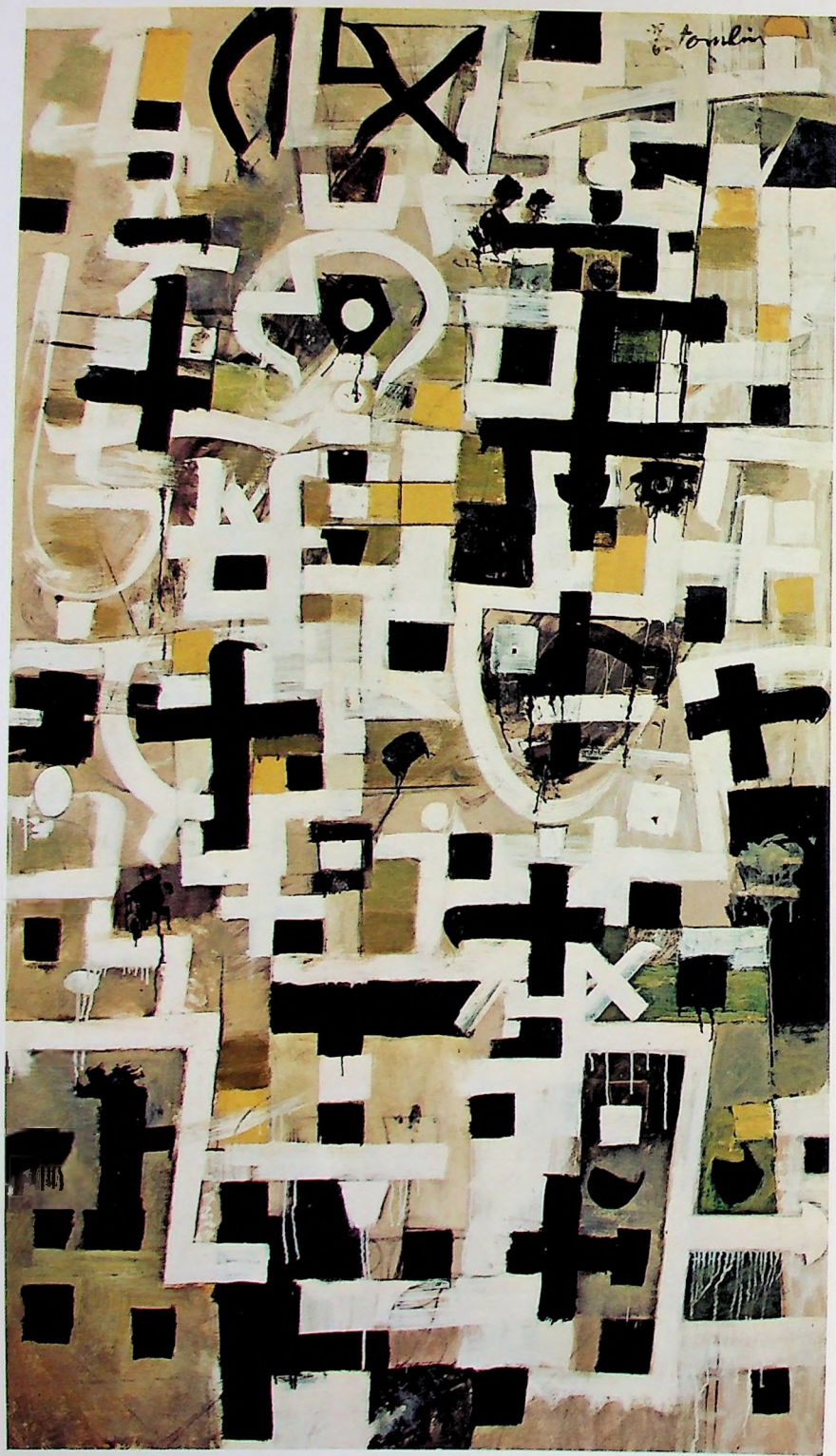


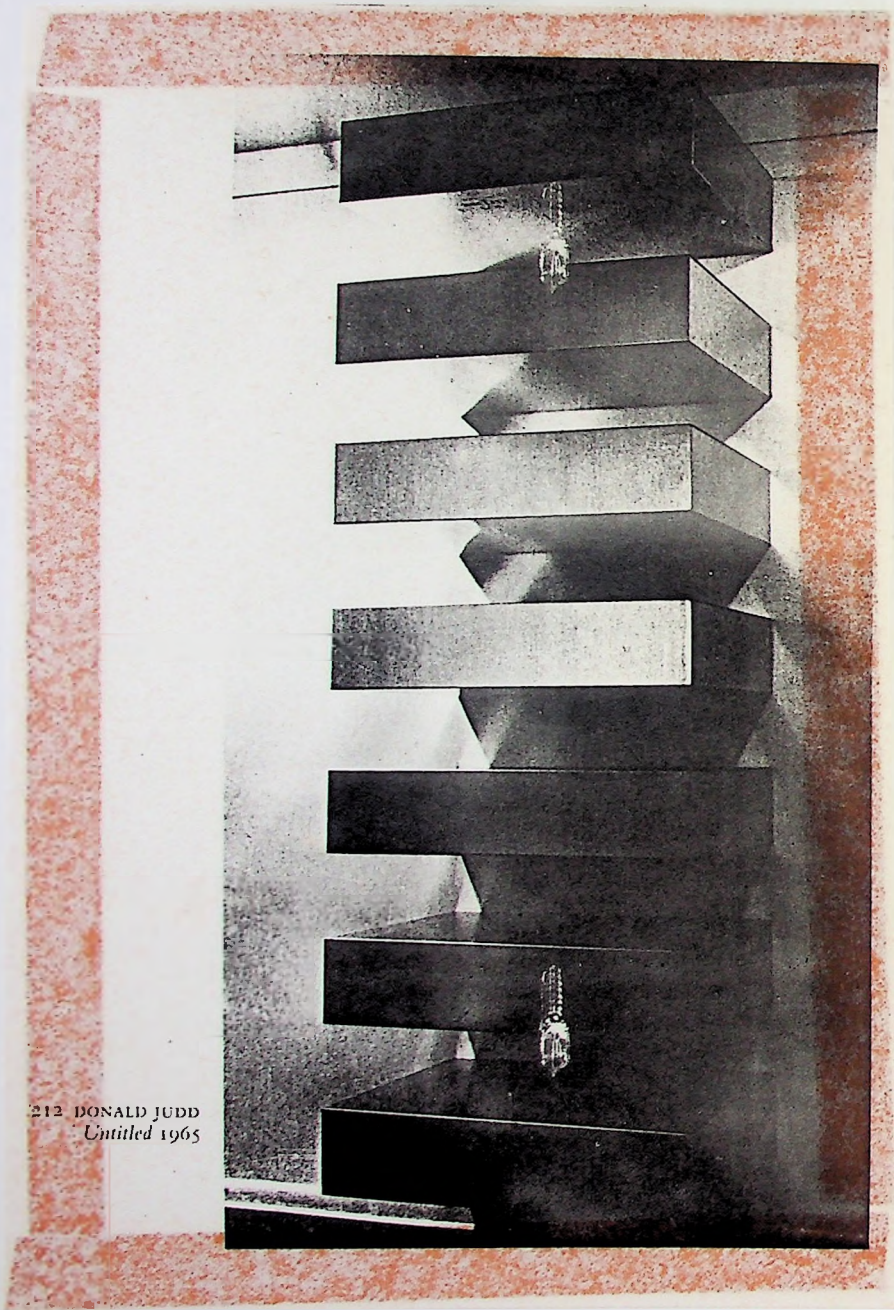
Fig. 4.

Bradley Walker Tomlin 1899–1953 / No. 7 (1950)
203.1 × 116.8 cm (6 ft. 8 in. × 3 ft. 10 in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert P. Kogod, Bethesda, Maryland



Fig. 5.

James Brooks 1906- / Number 42-1950 (1950)
205.6 x 266.6 cm (6 ft. 9 in. x 8 ft. 9 in.)
Collection of Mrs. James Brooks



212 DONALD JUDD
Untitled 1965

Fig. 5a.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sara Weeks and Bartlett Hayes Jr., Search for the real,
Hans Hofmann, M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts,
p 40.

CHAPTER I

The Language of Forms, Colours and Materials.

With Abstract Expressionism American artists were no longer involved in representation but rather they tried to come to terms with reality through the sum total of their sensations and their experience of life. Painting was no longer a case of placing oneself in spatial relationship to the canvas but rather the artist tried to be 'present' in the actual painting itself; it was no longer a question of creating an arrangement of objects one after another on canvas but more a creation of forces through the use of form and colour. This new form of expression incorporated into its language:

- Material - Surface, texture, resistance, and density.
- Colour - Intensity, strength, and relation to light.
- Space - Volume, depth, and dimension.
- Time - Movement, and spatial expression.
- Form - As the result of the interaction of materials of colour and space.

In order to understand fully the use of materials, space, time and form by the abstract painters it is important to consider their experiments since their use of materials (introduction to acrylic paint) is not comparable in any previous art movement in America. The new emphasis was based on primal and instinctive gestures. The traditional concern and use of perspective as a technique was replaced by lateral expansion across the entire surface of the canvas. The canvas tended to fill the spectator's field of vision, the impact of the work was unequivocal. The physical properties of mediums were the new language of modernism in America.

The artists involved - the Abstract Expressionists - gathered frequently for assurance, they exchanged ideas, in order to defend and promote their individual aesthetic premise and so evolved a whole series of theories relating to their work. They established forums where they could address audiences, which stimulated the intellectualization of their work. A large percentage of time was spent in discussion. In 1948 Motherwell, Baziotes, Rothko and David Hare established the 'Subject of the Artist School' in New York. Every Friday evening artists were invited to speak and the sessions were open to the public. Among some of the speakers were Arp, Cage, Cornell, Gottlieb, de Kooning, Motherwell, Newmann, Reinhardt, Rosenberg and Rothko. The artists' sense of community was one of the main factors which sustained their energy. Despite the many differences in their outlook and work, their ideas presented challenging differences and opened up enormous opportunities for individual development.

De Kooning and Hans Hofmann were the innovators of gestural

Abstraction, which most interested the early wave of painters. They were both inspirational figures for the artists of the movement. There were sharp differences between both Hofmann's and de Kooning's attitudes. Hofmann taught that painting at its highest should reveal a spiritual reality. De Kooning's paintings were rooted in the immediacy of his experience, to objects around him, "here and now". There was a sense of constantly taking risks, of refusing to remain in a comfortable habitual style in de Kooning's paintings. He represented a strong case for the inclusion of subject matter in his work, especially in his series 'Women', 1950 - 52. In 'Woman I' (fig. 6) he was concerned both with his subject and with a number of pictorial problems. These included the tension between the figure's three dimensional form and the flatness of the canvas, and the relation of the figure to the environment in which it sits. The brush strokes are dynamic and have a rhythm of their own. He did not outline the forms or model them in the conventional manner of shading. He summarised his feelings on working with actual objects from reality, when he said:

"For the painter to come to the abstract ... he needed many things. These things were always things in life - a horse, a flower, a milkmaid, the light in a room through a window made of diamond shapes maybe, tables, chairs and so forth ... But all of a sudden, in a famous turn of a century, a few people thought they could take the bull by the horns and invent an aesthetic before hand ... with the idea of freeing art, and ... demanding that you should obey them ... The question, as they saw it, was not so much what you could paint but rather what you could not paint. You could not paint a horse or a tree or a mountain. It was then that subject matter came into existence as something you ought not to have".

(1)

He believed that the non-objective artists were trying to make something "abstract" from "nothing", that they were trying to give "nothing" a quality that is only found in tangible objects. They tried to create sensations which demanded the experience of their senses by excluding that which is relevant to these senses, i.e. objects of everyday life. De Kooning painted in depth from the figure, it was the main source for most of his imagery. He admired the paintings of the Cubists and his work can be seen to be influenced by Cubist structure. His brush strokes are more free, and more expressionistic than those of the Cubist (fig. 7). He said on his style in 1950:

"I'm not interested in 'Abstracting' or taking out or reducing painting ... I paint this way because I can keep putting more and more things in it - drama, anger, pain, love, a figure, a horse, my ideas about space".

(2)

Hofmann, on the other hand, was more systematic in his approach,

basing his aesthetics on a belief in universal laws that governed nature and art. He also affirmed the primacy of the artist's spiritual and intuitive feelings. Graphic form received his greatest attention immediately following his arrival to America. We can see in his drawings from 1931 - 45 (fig. 8) a movement towards Abstract expressionism; his drawing 'Island in the Bay', 1931, (fig. 9) is a simplified representation of a landscape. The drawing forms an essentially realistic pattern, the resulting composition is a copy of an arrangement of objects found in nature, instead of being an imitation of objects the picture now actually exists as a fresh new experience on its own. As a teacher he demanded that his students begin to draw from life, the main activity in his classes was drawing from 'still life' or the 'life model'. Yet despite his concern for systematic picture-making, he warned against allowing preconceived notions of any kind to govern creation. In 1949 he said:

"At the time of making a picture, I want not to know what I'm doing, a picture should be made with feeling, not with knowing. The possibilities of the medium must be sensed".

(3)

Both Hofmann and de Kooning were strongly influenced by Cubism. They treated it as the basic ground for modern art. Hofmann fused Cubist structure with Fauve (fig. 10) brush work and explosive colour. He arrived at his compositions primarily through the interaction of colour by playing one plane of colour against another; this technique has its source in the paintings of Cezanne (fig. 11) and Matisse. When a number of planes of colour are opposed one to another, a spatial effect results - a 'push and pull' effect of expanding and contracting, a visual force. Hofmann exploited this technique to the full: he created an enormous sense of volume, of expanding and contracting in his painting. Colour therefore had an intrinsic life of its own which was a vital factor in the plastic creations of American art in the 20th century.

Action painting was a further extension of colour exploration. The painter did not need to approach his easel with an image in mind, instead he approached the canvas with his materials, brushes, paint etc. By fusing these two materials he produced an image which would represent the activity that took place. Jackson Pollock was the artist who exploited action painting to its fullest (fig. 12).

By 1947 he had developed a style for which he is now best known, based on a technique of dripping and smearing paint on the canvas. He singled out Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847 - 1917) - fig. 13 - as the only American master who interested him. 'In Autumn Rhythm', 1950, (fig. 14) automatism reached a culmination on a grand scale never before seen in the history of art. It was a total commitment to abstraction, with no reference to either natural or imaginary forms. But there is also a certain amount of control to be seen in this type of painting and a respect for the edges of the canvas. The lines of pigment do not run off at the edges of the canvas but are held 'by the barriers' of its sides and turn with sweeping curves at the corners. The interlacing lines fill the entire surface with an overall pattern and are organized

along definite horizontal and vertical axes. The bare canvas beneath the overlapping black, white and tan lines imparts a mysterious suggestion space, the total effect is at once dramatic and lyrical. He said of his own paintings:

"My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas on a hard wall or floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I feel 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 Indian Sand painters of the West.

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 or other foreign matter added.

When I am in the 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. I try to let it come through".

(4)

He was drawn into an art of his immediate sensations. An art of the everyday drama of life, he insisted that the painting be experienced as a total action and as an immediate concrete event. The painting thus was a symbol to the painter's action and a form of self-definition in the time and space of now. The painting represents an activity which has taken place; the activity includes the time taken to carry out the painting and also the space used, the surface of the canvas.

It was not meant to be an object, to be perfected as an end product nor was it meant to be some structure made in accordance with prescribed rules; his lines did not define images nor outline planes (the two traditional functions of drawing). His lines constituted an expansive web of forces, because they overlap they seem suspended in front of the canvas, giving a sense of space an interaction between the foreground and background. The shuttling rhythms which Pollock uses tend to suggest a spatial progression across the canvas rather than directly into it, but this movement is always checked, and in the end returns towards the centre where the main weight of the picture lies in many of his paintings. Pollock was very much an isolated individual and did not allow himself to become involved in the social interaction of the Abstract Expressionists; Nolan recalled:

"We were interested in Pollock but could gain no lead from him. He was too personal. But Frankenthaler showed us the way - a way to think about and use colour".

(5)

Unlike Pollock, Frankenthaler used more colour. She also thinned down the pigment to flood her line, spreading it into areas of colour, but she continued to manipulate the linear quality in her paintings. Morris Louis, on the other hand, dispensed with the textural quality of paint and diluted his paint even more. The paint was absorbed into the raw canvas like a dye. He avoided all suggestion of gesture, with the help of gravity he produced striated images, by pouring paint vertically down the side of the canvas (fig. 15). Later he superimposed one layer of colour over another in the same fashion as in the series 'Veils', 1956 - 60. But instead of using the pull of gravity he allowed the paint to flow freely in the 'Floral' (fig. 16) series, 1959 - 60. In his last series, 'Stripes' (fig. 17), 1961 - 62, he bundled together multicoloured ribbons of slightly varied thickness into pulsating shafts that thrust up or down white fields from one edge of the canvas to another. He conveys in these paintings an intense sense of colour which has been compressed without losing the quality or strength of either the individual colours or bare canvas between them. Morris Louis achieved his originality partly through the exploitation of a new material (acrylic paint) which gave his painting a new and very different physical make-up from those of the Abstract Expressionists before him. The staining process meant a moving away from shape, and from light and dark in favour of colour. In fact, Louis did not paint, he poured and scrubbed the colour into the canvas, except for the 'Stripes' series.

In 1959, Nolan presented his 'Target' paintings. Each of these paintings are composed of concentric bands of colour, separated by white, centered on a square canvas. In the early targets the rings are more gestural, later they become more hard-edged. His work from 1961 onwards became more geometrical. He became more concerned with colour interaction than with the gestural marks of his early work (fig. 18). In his stripe paintings the colour interaction causes vibrations which are no longer limited by the edge of the canvas, but rather expand on to the surrounding wall surface.

Jules Olitski was the third major colour field painter. His form of colour field painting can be described as a soaking and staining form of Abstract Expressionism. The essential common bond between these three painters was their concern for immediate, open and buoyant colour.

Awareness of colour interaction created a moving away from gestural painting to hard-edged geometric expressionism. Colours presented themselves in continuous flux, constantly relating to changing conditions. However, the change to geometric abstraction was ^{not} immediate. In 1959, Al Held was working in a hard-edged style, but he continued to build up his surfaces with texture which was still reminiscent of the process of

gesture painting. The forms he created on his canvas did not interlock but rather existed in their own isolated space (fig. 19). Held attempted to thrust his forms at the viewer and make the shapes project into the room. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that hard-edged expressionism was a direct result of colour interaction found in gesture painting. It had its roots in European painting, notably the works of Matisse, Miro, Arp, Mondrian and the Cubists. The work of Matisse shows a greater awareness of abstract colour. Hard-edge painters rejected the Cubist design, in so far as they simplified their formats, often using only two planes rather than the interwoven and intricate patterns of the Cubists. Their purpose was to divide the whole space of the canvas up and not to arrange forms. The focus of hard-edged abstraction then was not on the relationship of shapes but on the colour - shape as a colour and shape. Again, as in Nolan's work, the shapes do not appear to be contained within the limits of the canvas but continue beyond the picture plane. Despite the clarity of the colour shapes in hard-edge abstraction, there is continuous ambiguity. In many of Ellsworth Kelly's works, for example Blue Red, 1964 (fig. 20), the shape forms on a single plane, but because of the colour interaction it is difficult to focus on the form or determine which is the figure and which is the ground. The painting is wholly self contained and bears no reference to associations outside itself. It is a flat painted surface and is devoid of textural variations, composed of a single shape with clear rather than irregular contours. Texture was now an unnecessary addition - it detracted from the colour interaction which was the main concern at this stage. Despite the elimination of texture and gesture in hard-edge painting, there was an Expressionist aspect in the work. The curved forms were suggestive of nature, but, more important, with its roots in private sensibility, the contour, colour and shapes seemed to be determined by feelings and intuition. Kelly said:

"I like to work from things that I see whether they are man-made or natural or a combination of the two ... like a window, or a fragment of a piece of architecture, or someone's legs; or sometimes the space between things, or just how the shadows of an object would look ... I'm not interested in the texture of the rock, or that it is a rock but in the mass of it, and its shadow".

(6)

However, Barnett Newmann in 1950, much earlier than Kelly and Held, had explored 'colour field painting' on a more sophisticated level. He wanted to articulate the surface of the painting as a 'field' rather than as a composition. His way of achieving the effect he wanted was to allow the rectangle of the canvas to determine the pictorial structure. The canvas he divided either horizontally or vertically by a band, or bands, of colour. This division he used to activate the 'field' which was of intense colour, with some small variations of hue from one area to another. In his painting 'Vir Heroicus Sublimis', 1950 - 51, (fig. 21) the three dividing lines seem to move through it at great speed from somewhere outside the 'field'.

The sheer physical expanse of the painting forms a bridge between the individual and a total environmental situation. The scale also demands an intimate sense of involvement for we cannot look back from the painting or even quite absorb it in its entirety. It forces us to identify with its uncompromising and aggressive existence. The rigour of form, the mechanical handling of surface seem not to relate to the work of Kelly or Al Held, but rather to the wholeness of effect and vacancy of minimal art.

The reduction of chromatic expression to near invisibility occurred in the 1960s with the black canvas of Ad Reinhardt. The distinctions of form and colour require intense scrutiny, as his structure is so subtle his work is the most extreme example of purity in art at that time. Reinhardt renounces any form of involvement previously utilized in artistic expression. His work is repetitutive, refined, and inactive, but above all meditative. He wrote:

"No where in the world has it been clearer than in Asia that anything irrational, momentary, spontaneous, unconscious, primitive, expressionistic, accidental or informal, cannot be called serious art ... The forms of art are always preformed and meditated. The creative process is always an academic routine and sacred procedure. Everything is prescribed and proscribed. Only in this way is there no grasping or clinging to anything. Only a standard form can be imageless, only a stereotyped image can be formless, only a formularized art can be formulaless".

(7)

Reinhardt concentrated his entire attention on sharply restricted pictorial composition which was totally uncompromising. He eliminated any indication of personality in his painting by his almost programmed approach to art. But perhaps the most intensely personal style constructed on a basis of renunciation and self-transcendence has been that of Mark Rothko.

The work of Rothko is perhaps the most seductive and sensuous of the colour field painters. The subject in Rothko's large paintings is the infinite, the universal - as in 'Orange and Yellow' (fig. 22). In this large canvas, the planes appear to vibrate and the painting demands contemplation. His art is emotional and responds to sensibility rather than to conceptualism. He disassociated his art from the rich material paint deposits used by many abstract expressionists in the 1950s. He used paint as a dye, dissolving it in thin washes, he leaves the canvas weave exposed and active. His work went through a kind of purifying ritual which stripped it of all affectation. His use of colour sensation was a style tending from one of energy to one of passivity. From the late 1950s onwards, Rothko's paintings became more somber and tragic; dark reds, purples and browns suggest the contemplation

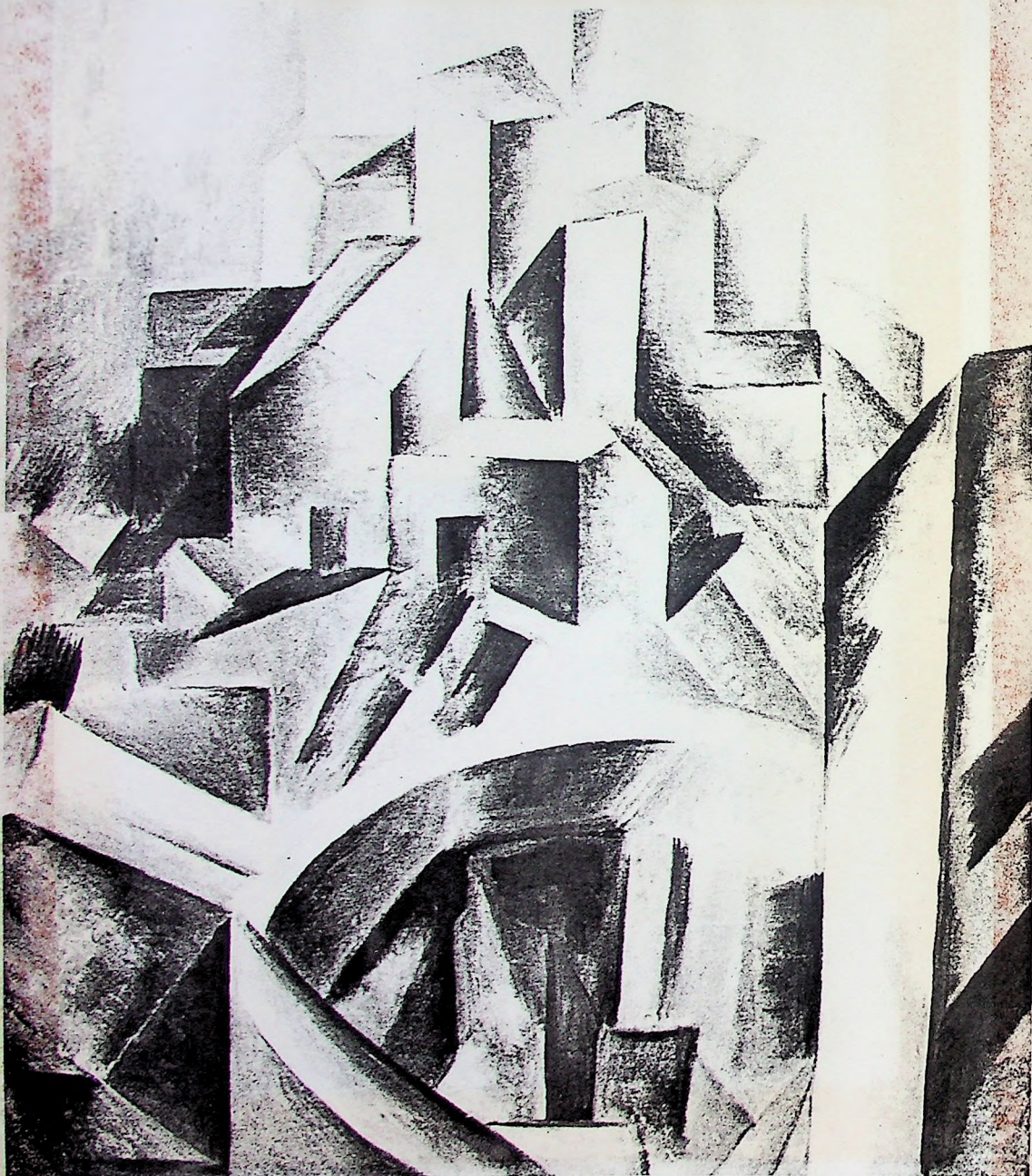
of death and the tomb. In 1970 he committed suicide.

Abstract painting for most of the artists concerned was a period of exploration of materials, colour, and language. Within Abstract Expressionism there was mobility, alienation and improvisation. But by and large Abstract Expressionism had lost its momentum by 1960; and a widespread reaction had set in. This took two principal forms: Hard-Edge Abstraction on the one hand and Pop Art on the other.



Woman I

Fig. 6.



The Reservoir, Horta de Ebro. Horta de Ebro, Summer 1909
Oil on canvas. 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (60.3 x 50.1 cm)
Zervos II.¹ 157. Daix 280. Private collection, New York

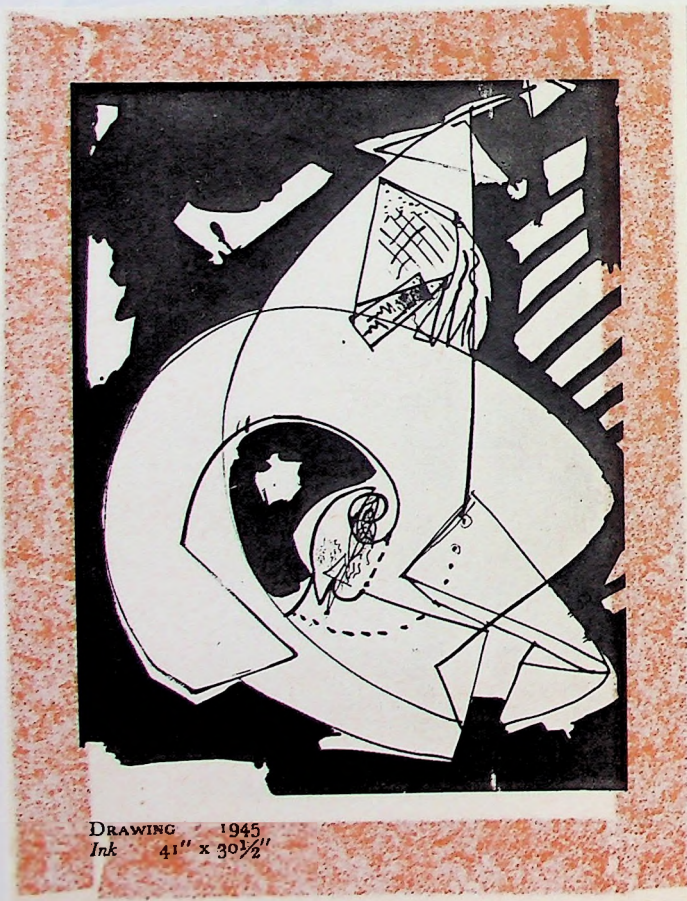
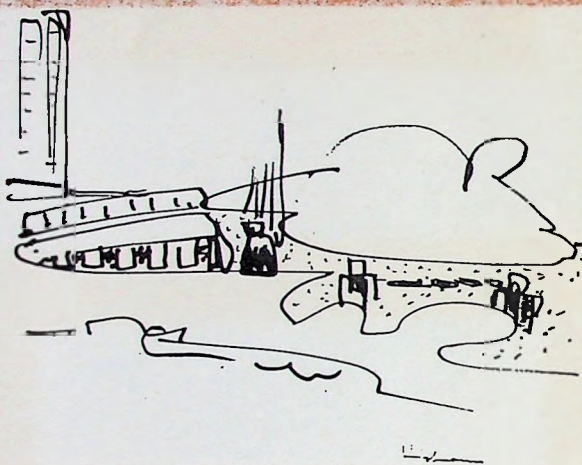


Fig. 3.



ISLAND IN THE BAY, CALIFORNIA 1931
Ink 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 13 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

In Hofmann's simplified representations of landscape, such as the drawing above, it is possible to observe shapes which reappear in his later abstract paintings as fully developed compositions.

"A work of Art goes through many phases of development, but in each phase it is always a work of art. Therein lies the importance of sketches."

Fig. 9.



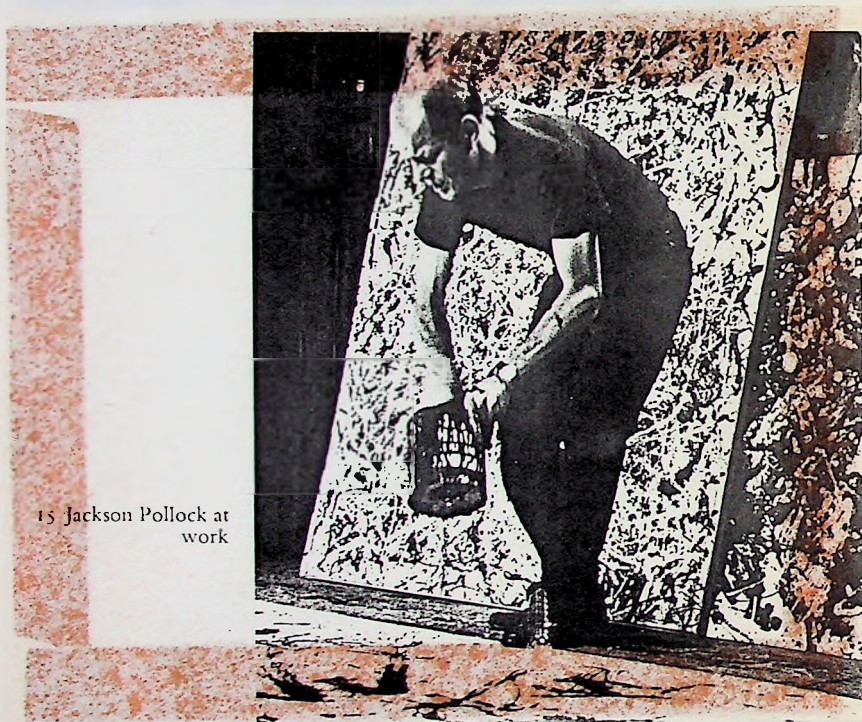
1 HENRI MATISSE, *The Joy of Life*, 1906

Fig. IO.



2 PAUL CÉZANNE, *Still-life*, 1883-7

Fig. II.



15 Jackson Pollock at
work

Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.

ALBERT PINKHAM RYDER. Born New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1847; died Elmhurst, Long Island, New York, 1917. *Jonah*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 26 1/4" x 23 1/2". National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Gift of John Gellady).



Fig. 14.

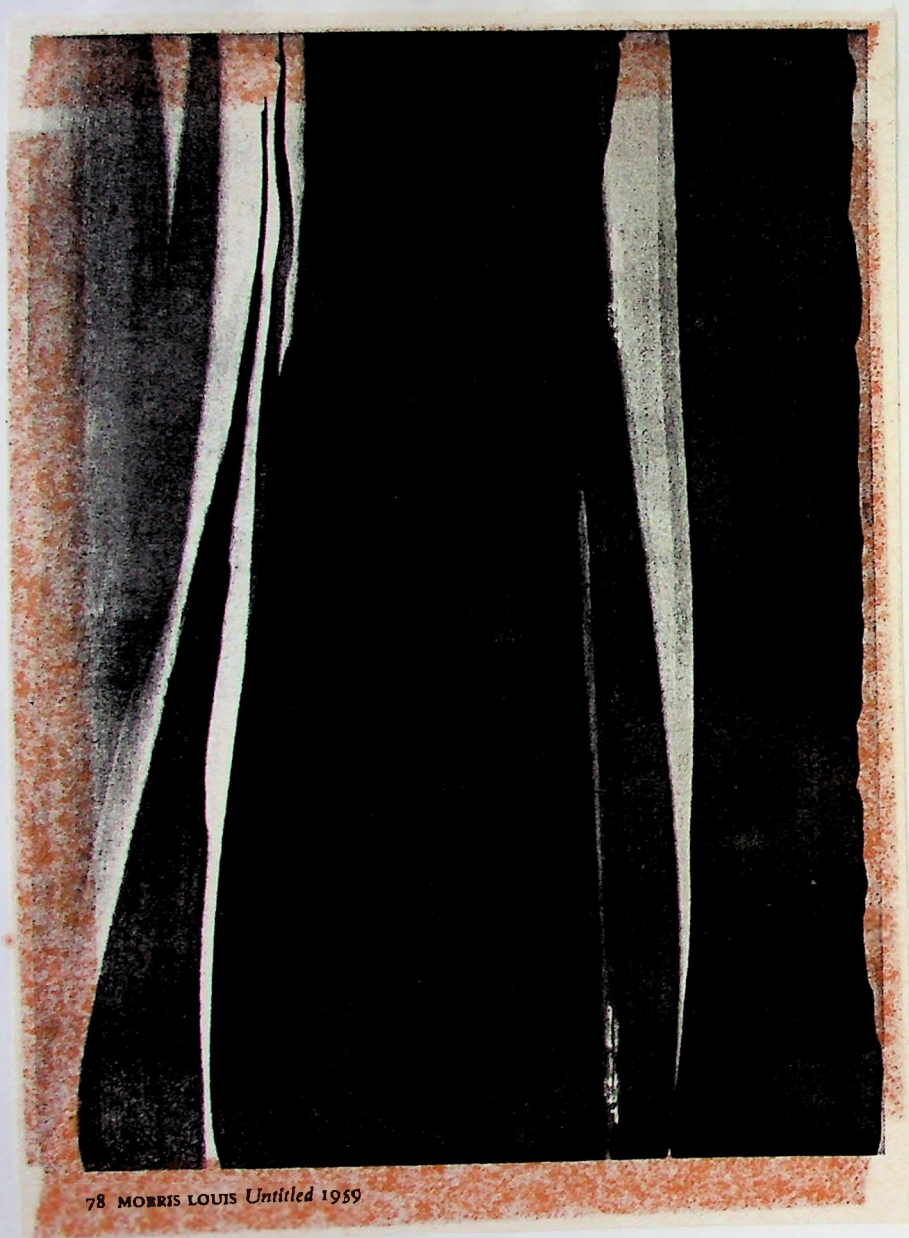
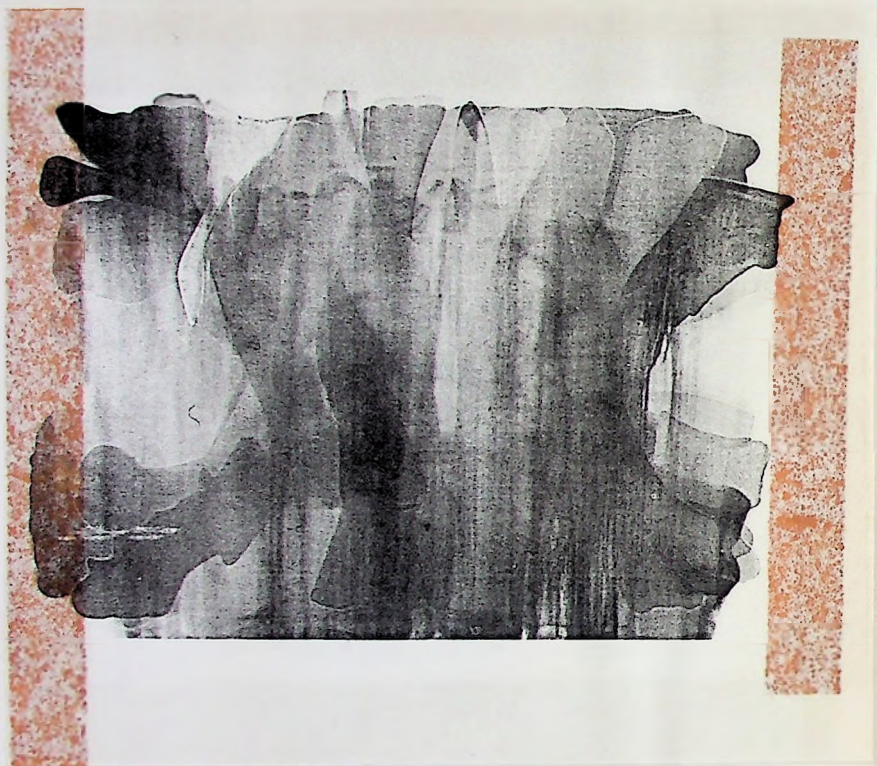


Fig. 15.



MORRIS LOUIS. *Kaf*, 1959-60.
Acrylic on canvas, 8' 4" x 12'.
Collection Kimiko and
John G. Powers, New York

Fig. 16.

MORRIS LOUIS. *Moving In*. 1961.
Acrylic on canvas, 87½ x 41½".
André Emmerich Gallery, New York

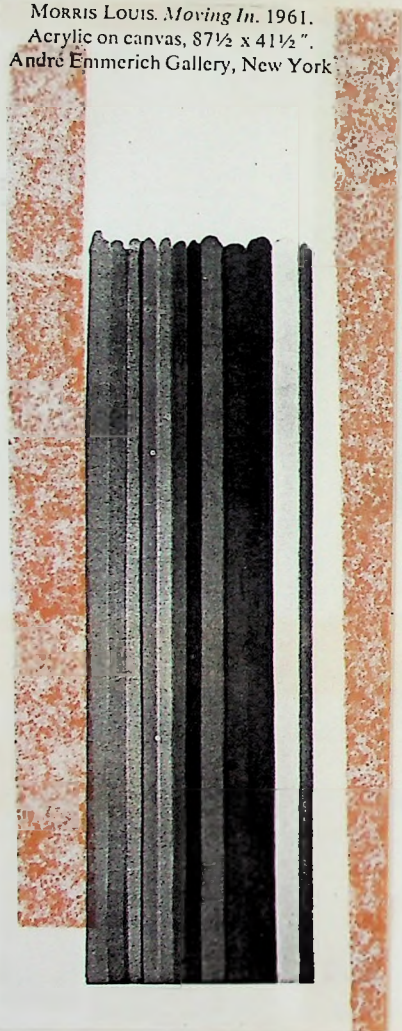
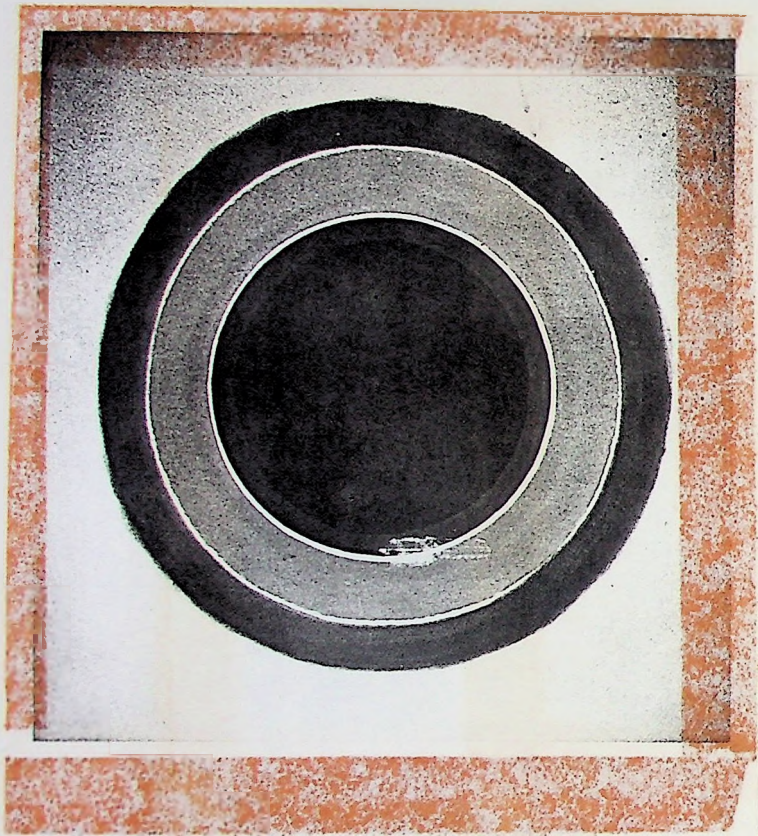
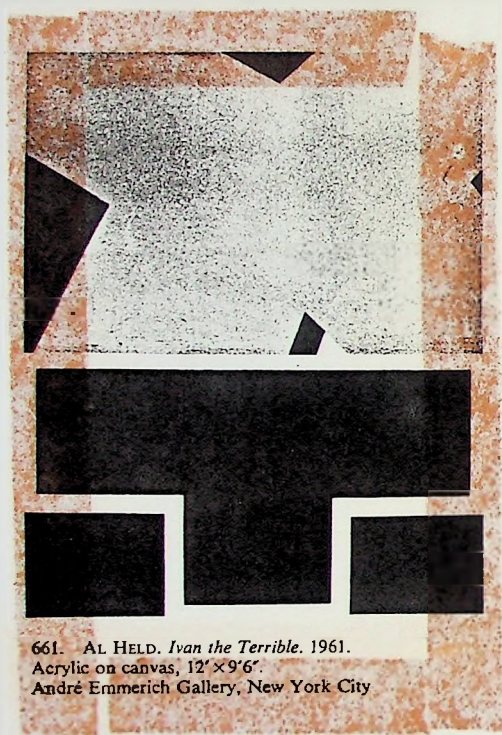


Fig. 17.



KENNETH NOLAND.
A Warm Sound in a Gray Field, 1961.
Oil on canvas, 82½ x 81".
Private collection, New York

Fig. 18.



661. AL HELD. *Ivan the Terrible*. 1961.
Acrylic on canvas, 12' x 9'6".
André Emmerich Gallery, New York City

Fig. 19.

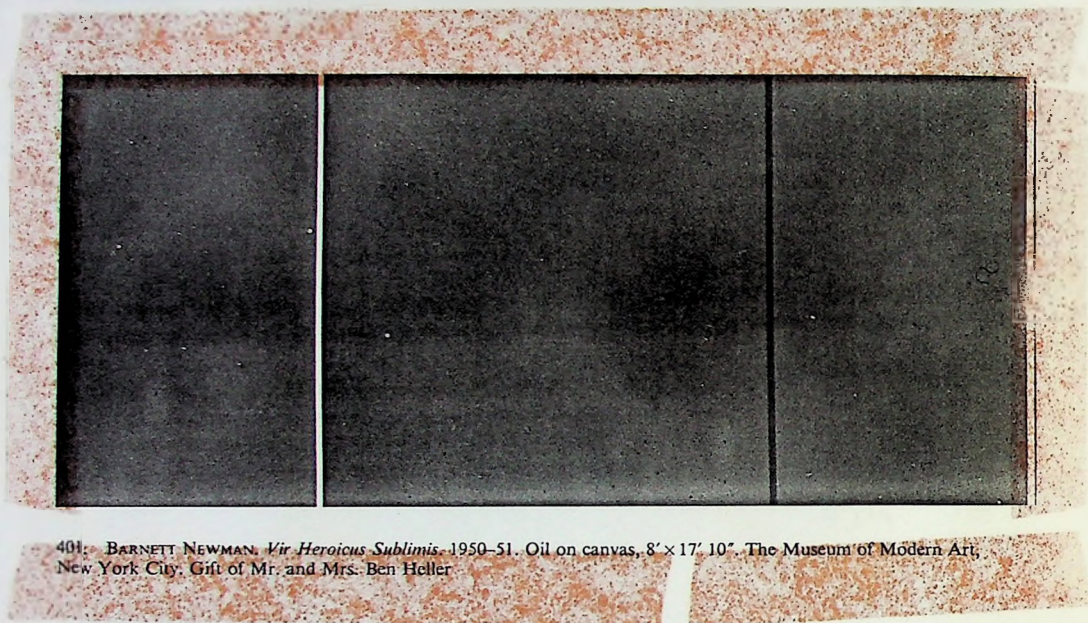


Fig. 21.

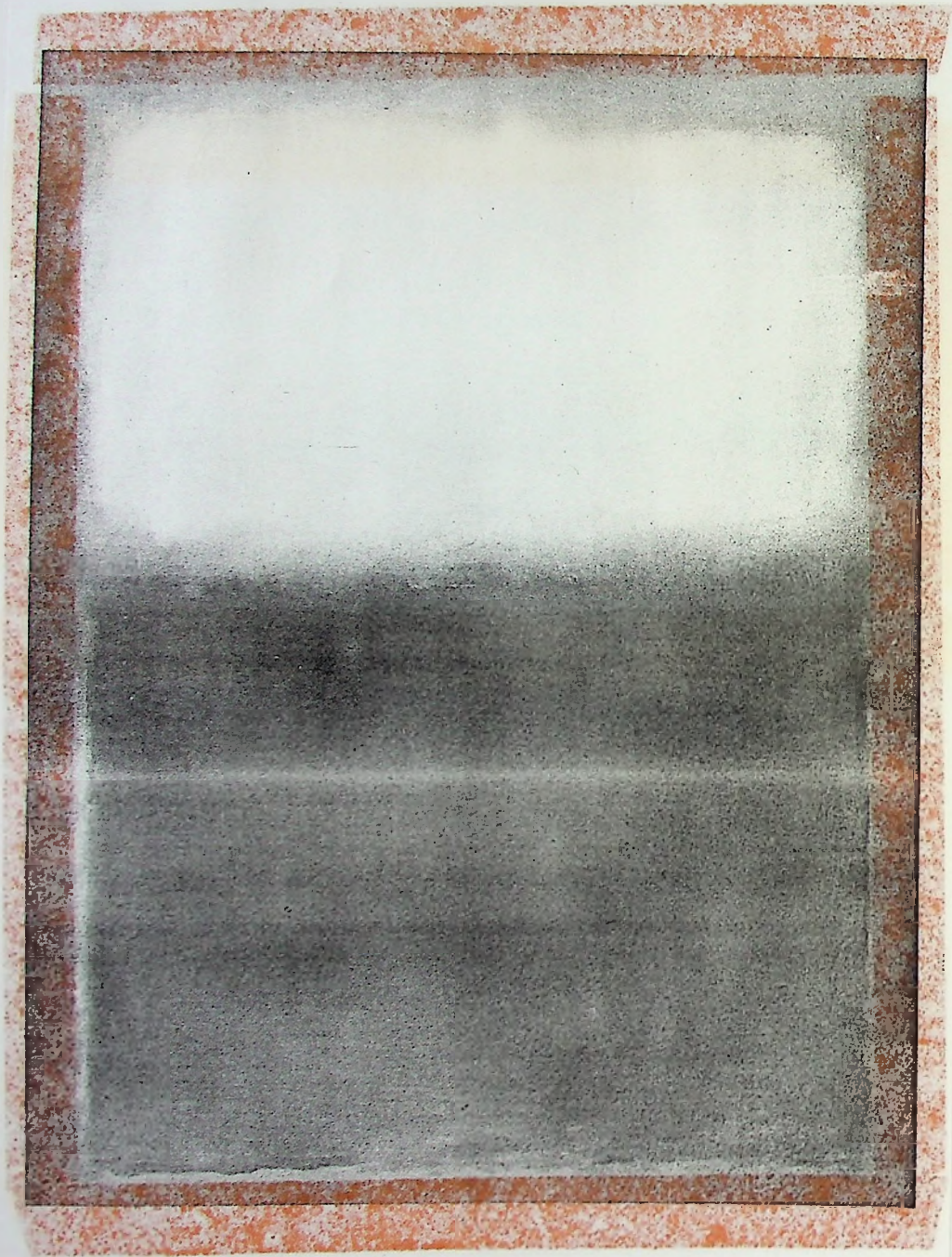


Fig. 22.

Orange and Yellow By Mark Rothko.

FOOTNOTES

1. Irving Sandler, The New York School, Harper and Row, 1978, p 3.
2. Ibid. Note: no intervening reference. p10.
3. Ibid. Note: no intervening reference. p5.
4. Jean Lipman and Helen Franc, Bright Stars, American Painting and Sculpture since 1776, E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., New York, 1976, p 142.
5. Irving Sandler, The New York School, Harper and Row, 1978, p 231.
6. Ibid. Note: no intervening reference. p 222.
7. Ibid. Note: no intervening reference. p 223.

CHAPTER 2.

A reaction against Abstract Expressionism. New experiments with materials. Pop Art, Geometric Abstraction, and Minimal Art.

As Abstract Expressionism began to exhaust its impetus, the prevailing interest in texture led artists to even bolder experiments with materials. Collage was to become the new means of association with the environment. Collage and assemblage provided a means of transition from Abstract Expressionism to the very different preoccupations of Pop Art. It emphasised a new and important involvement with the environment. The most important exponents of collage and assemblages were Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg studied in the black mountain college with Josef Albers. In the 1950s he did a series of all white paintings, where the only image on the canvas was the spectator's own shadow. He later did a series of all black paintings. In the mid 1950s he began to paint with the free brush strokes of de Kooning, but he also began to cover his canvas with rags and pieces of cloth, comic strip fragments and other elements of waste materials. Through his use of junk from the streets he kept a dialogue between art and everyday reality open, and unresolved (fig. 23). Painting itself was given no position of special privilege, but he treated it as a physical factor among others. Rauschenberg dissociated himself from Expressionism by erasing a de Kooning drawing, a gift from the artist, and called it 'Erased de Kooning drawing'.

The formal innovations of Jasper Johns had even a greater influence on the introduction of objects of art than Rauschenberg. The common place object became a potential vehicle of art. Johns' American flags in particular show new possibilities for images already dead from over-exposure (fig. 24). He picked objects that could no longer generate energy. Through his manipulation of the paint on the surface of these objects he gave them new life. But Johns did not show a total break from Abstract Expressionism. In his painting 'Diver', 1963, (fig. 25) he refers to the American poet Hart Crane plunging to his death off a liner at sea. It is built up of marks of different kinds, all of them, so to speak, life-sized sweeps of hand and arm. The composition is centralized by a vertical plank, split by an off-centre line, and the areas of the left and right sectors are treated very differently. At the top, the marks of two bare feet face upwards at the edge of the central plank. The mark of the two pairs of hands face in opposite directions at the top and bottom of two other slightly sloping planks - the right lighter and the left darker. From the lower hands, a pair of segments of circles sweep up, with arrowed tips, suggesting the arm movements of a diver who has entered the water. The drawing shows clearly how our reading of expressionist marks gain meaning from our human experience. This drawing shows clearly the link between expressionism and the use of meaningful objects from everyday life and Pop Art.

But Pop Art in its extreme was to move totally from any notion of Abstract Expressionism. It took its imagery directly from the environment,

from billboards, the supermarket, comic strips, the television and other popular sources. Pop Artists exploited mass media in terms of flat design and condensed the sign language or modern publicity. The ideal of making each canvas a unique and unrepeatable experience was thus challenged. The expansion of pictorial imagery to include external visual reality, material objects and commercial art undercut the predominantly abstract quality of American art. Pop Art was to break down the barriers between art and actual experience in a more obvious way than Pollock did, by including waste materials in his pigment. Pop Art was not to be considered divorced from life, but continuous to it. Pop artists were not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of what they should and would experience through their senses. Instead they used specific objects to stimulate sight, sound, movement and touch. We can still see the influence of Abstract Expressionism in some of the works of Pop Artists however. Claes Oldenburg combined both pop images and abstract expressionism in some of his sculpture; his objects in three dimensions are more sculptured paintings than painted sculptures (fig. 26). The surfaces are rich and alive with colour; the paint is freely applied and active; they are more expressionistic than pop. His food sculptures are somehow consciously synthetic with their shiny enamel colours and free dripping paint, which makes them totally unappetising as food images. The ambiguity of the almost real and the unreal is what he was striving for, whether something is a hamburger or art. He produced something that was half-way between art and reality.

Just as in Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art went through a process of minimalization - when Andy Warhol completely disassembled the structure of art procedure. In its purest form, Pop Art challenged Abstract Expressionism; it was figurative rather than abstract. Pop Art also was newer than Abstract Expressionism, as it was directly influenced by the immediate city environments of America. The painters who worked with pop images were Warhol and Lichtenstein. In Andy Warhol's paintings the choice of banal subjects, depersonalisation of the work of art, and dependence upon commercial art for imagery and technique are carried to an extreme. Popular idols, like Marilyn Monroe (fig. 27) and Jackie Kennedy (fig. 28), were treated as if they too were articles for mass consumption. His portraits, including those of himself, are never done from life but always through the intermediary of a previously existing photograph, which is then still further removed from the living model by enlargement and silk-screening. Warhol used the time-tested images of the world of advertising. He used images that were machine made and untouched by human hand (fig. 29). He accepted, rather than questioned, the form of these images and did not try to promote quality or aesthetic appreciation of the forms and colours. He does not demand any participation by the viewer. He introduced an element of boredom and almost anti-art. Warhol's work was not far removed from Minimal Art. He does not engage any images, he just reproduces countless already produced products as he finds them. His work is more journalistic than artistic and for the most part lacks emotion. The systematic paintings of Warhol were a very definite but perhaps not deliberate anti-expressionistic form of art. His stereotyped images adhere to some clearly visible organised principle.

In Pop Art, the object, the end product was the main concern. With the Expressionists, paint, colour, materials and form were the decisive impulse that created a new literal painting-object, as in the work of Frank Stella (fig. 30). Beginning with his black pin-stripe paintings of 1960 and continuing through to patterns on segmented arcs in vivid acrylic colour, his ideas were minimised by his systematic repeating grids and unified impression of the entire canvas shape as a single image. Stella's painting became an object. His use of colour did not present itself in the same problematic way that Ad Reinhardt's did; Stella's paintings were a powerful immediate visual experience, the throbbing acid-bright colours of intricate chromatic structures seem to be constantly active on the canvas surface. Colour was now a means of creating optical illusion.

With this new concern for colour interaction, the influence of Vasarely was to play a major role in Op art. Vasarely was totally opposed to the idea of free abstraction and he wrote in 1950:

"The artist has become free, anyone can assume the title of artist, or even of genius. Any spot of colour, sketch or outline is readily proclaimed a work in the name of the sacrosanct subjective sensitivity. Impulse prevails over know-how. Honest craftsman-like technique is bartered for fanciful, and haphazard improvisation".

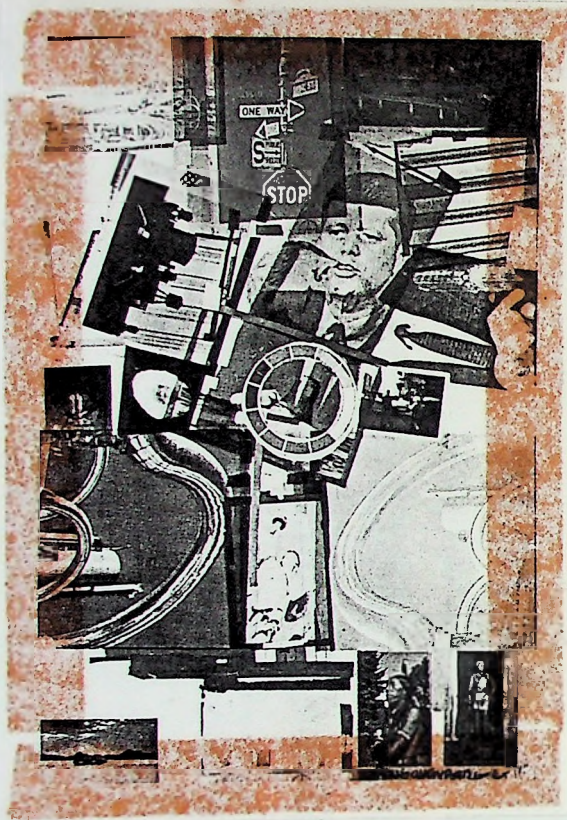
(1)

He regarded the artist as simply a man who makes images that can then be reproduced at will. This is much in line with the thinking and approach of Andy Warhol. They both believed that our times, that is new materials, science and technology, should be used and seen to be used in the work. Vasarely was concerned that by using the methods of the past artists this cast a shadow of ambiguity and mystery over their work. In Op art, the viewer is confronted with colour forms which created complex pulsations of light and movement, with intensified side effects of fusion and dispersion (fig. 31). This turned the canvas surface into an extremely lively and responsive vehicle.

Josef Ambers, in advance of all other painters involved in colour field painting, was the most outstanding of all American Abstract painters. Since 1949, he had repetitively, almost compulsively, done the same type of work in colour exploration. His 'Homage to the Square' (fig. 32) is his most celebrated series. He stated and restated the same theme without exhausting the vitality and unpredictability of colour. His systematic approach was to bring into being a whole new group of artists who concerned themselves primarily with extremely simplified forms, often using colour saturation and rhythmically repeated images to bombard the spectator. These artists include Agnes Martin, Jo Baer, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt and others. Their main focus was on vision. In the case of these artists, their work was a direct result of an increasingly stylised form of Abstract Expressionism.

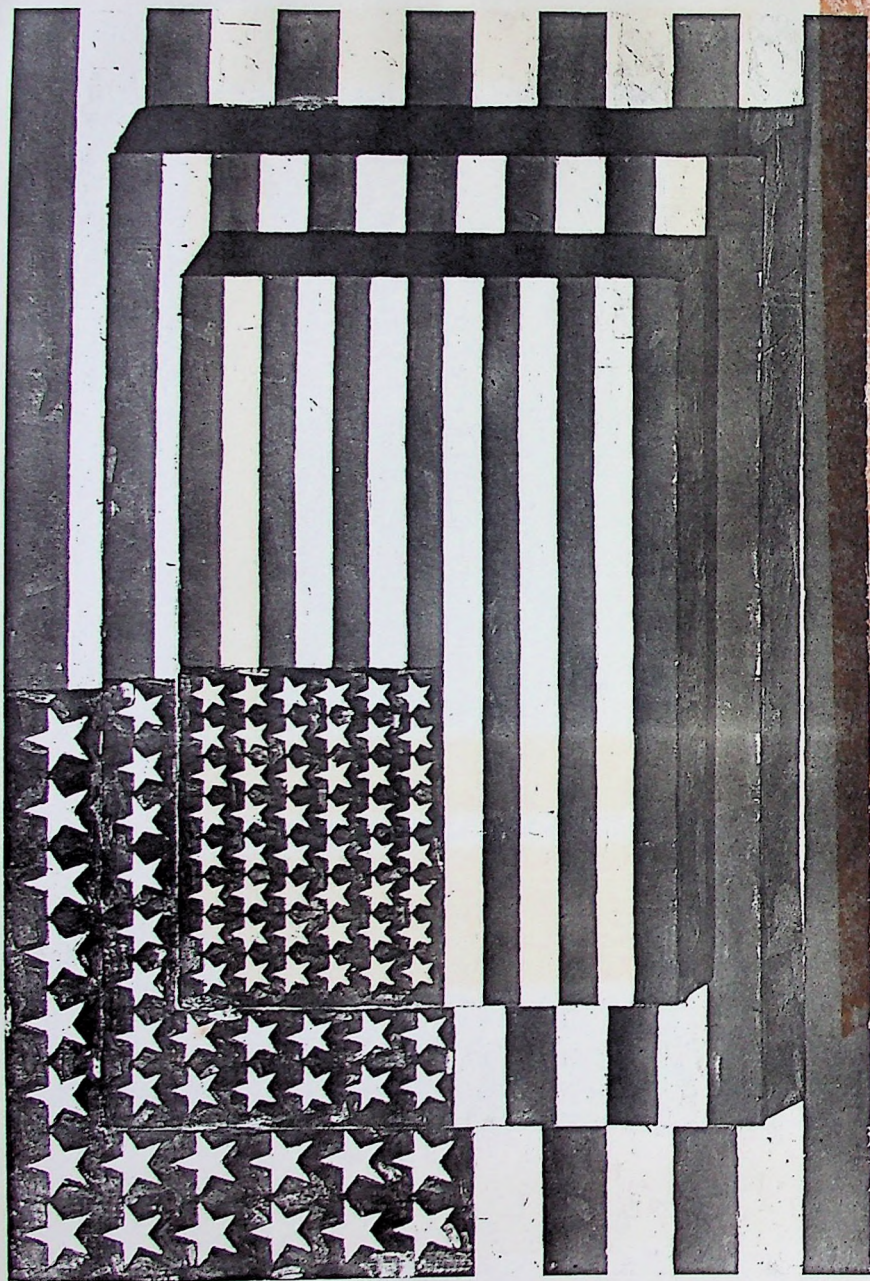
Few optical minimal artists have produced work as complex as that of Bridget Riley. In her painting, the forms seem to conform to a pre-

determined mathematical series, but the progressions are arrived at instinctively (fig. 33). She once worked in black and white but now has moved to a stage where she uses colour. She explores how one colour can bleed over into another by optical means, and how whole picture planes can move from warm to cold through a progression of hues. The surface of the canvas is alive with energy, optically her colours and forms are no longer restricted by the canvas. As paintings were becoming more like objects through shape and surface activity, artists began to move towards three dimensional images. The distinction between painting and sculpture was growing less and less and the painted surface as an object was now the predominant theme. Sculpture no longer had to be a three dimensional free-standing form .



COLLAGE.
 1965
 61,8 x 61,5 cm
 Siebdruck
 Auflage 250, Nr. 130
 Signatur unten rechts: Rauschenberg 65 130/250

Fig. 23



JASPER JOHNS. Born Augusta, Georgia, 1930.
Three Flags, 1958. Encaustic on canvas, $30\frac{7}{8}$ " \times
 $45\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 5". Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Burton
 Tremaine.

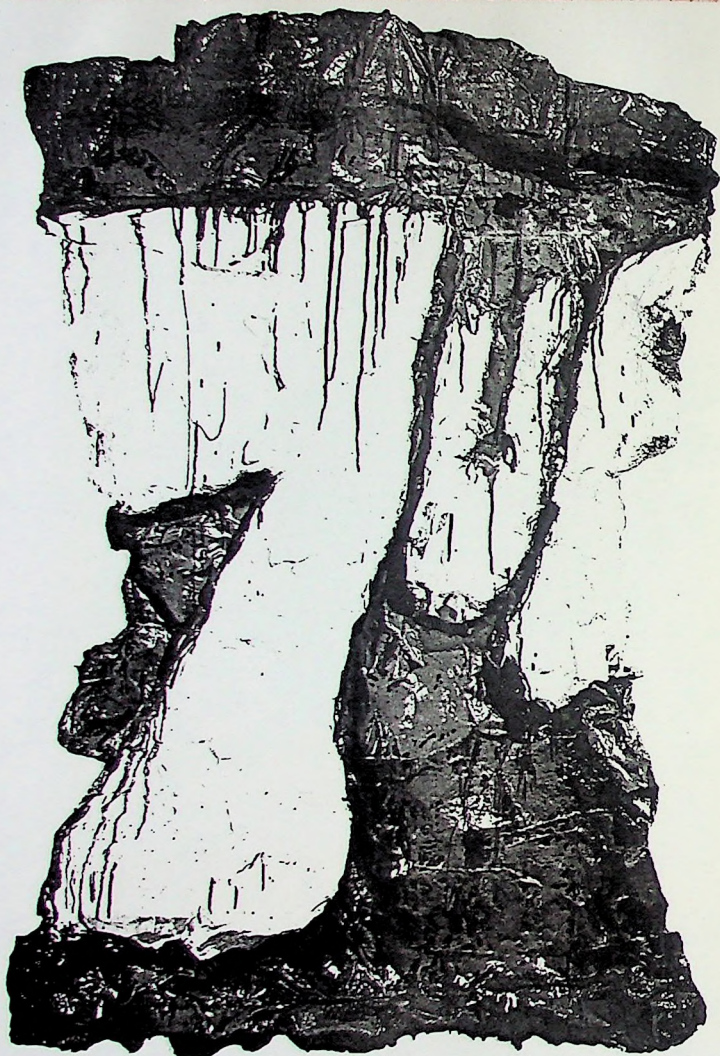
Fig. 24.



PRIVATE COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Jasper Johns

Fig. 25.



CLAES OLDENBURG. Born Stockholm, Sweden, 1929; to United States 1929. *7-Up*. 1961. Muslin, soaked in plaster over wire frame, painted with enamel. 55" x 37" x 5½". Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine.

Fig. 26.



Marilyn Monroe

64 The Twenty Marilyns, 1962



113 Twelve Jackies, 1965

Andy Warhol

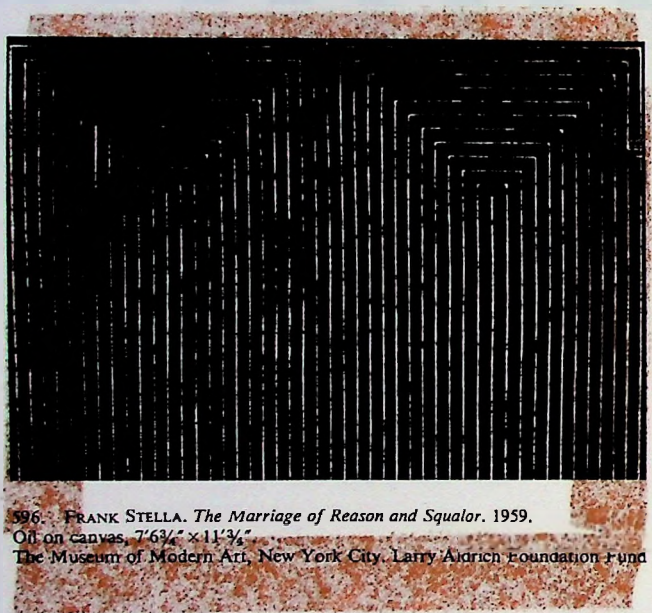


632 Kellogg's Cornflakes Boxes, 1964

639 Mott's Boxes, 1964

634 White Brillo Boxes, 1964

635 Yellow Brillo Boxes, 1964



596. FRANK STELLA. *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor*. 1959.
Oil on canvas, 7'6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 11'3 $\frac{1}{4}$ ".
The Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund

Fig. 30.

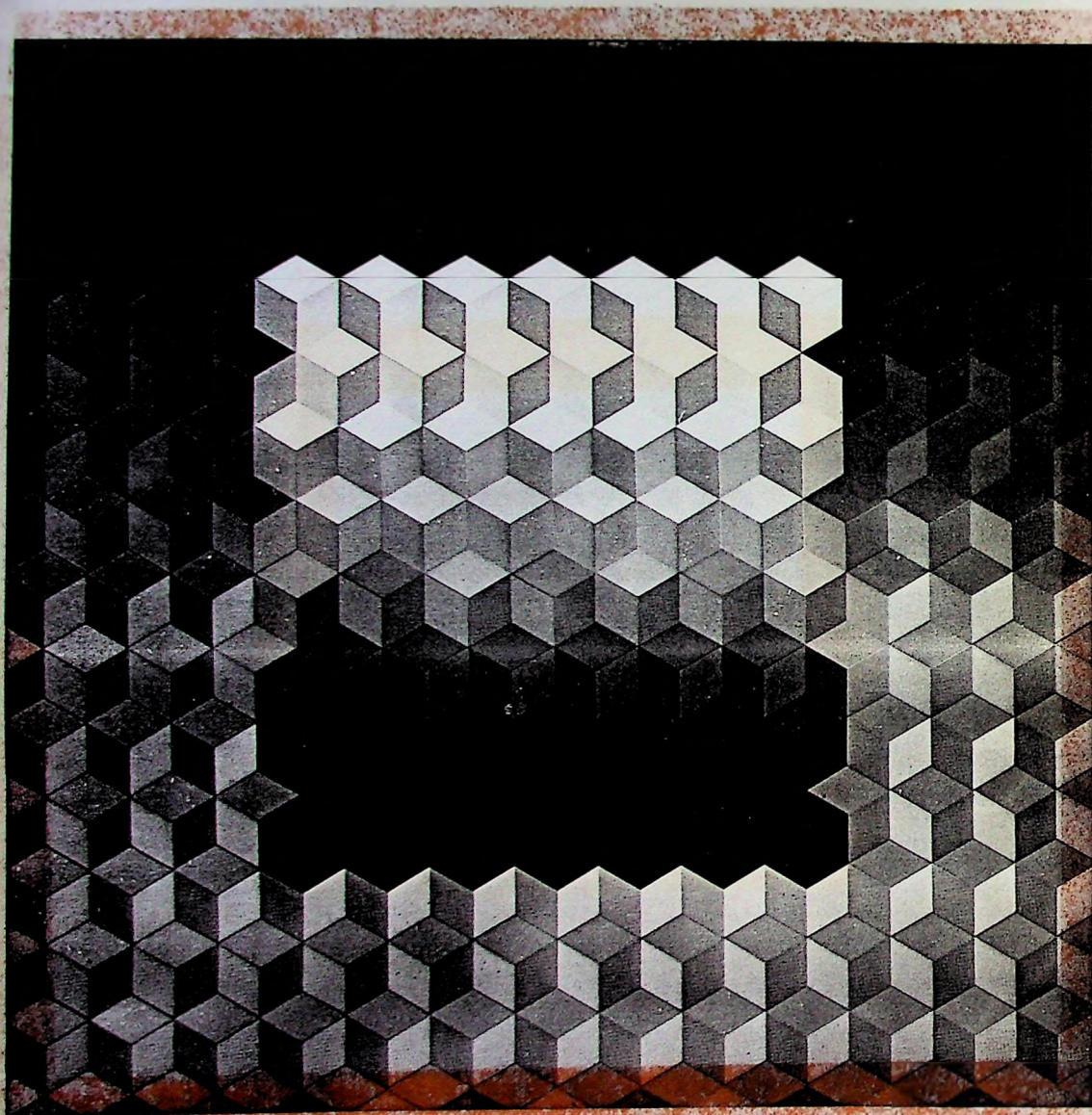
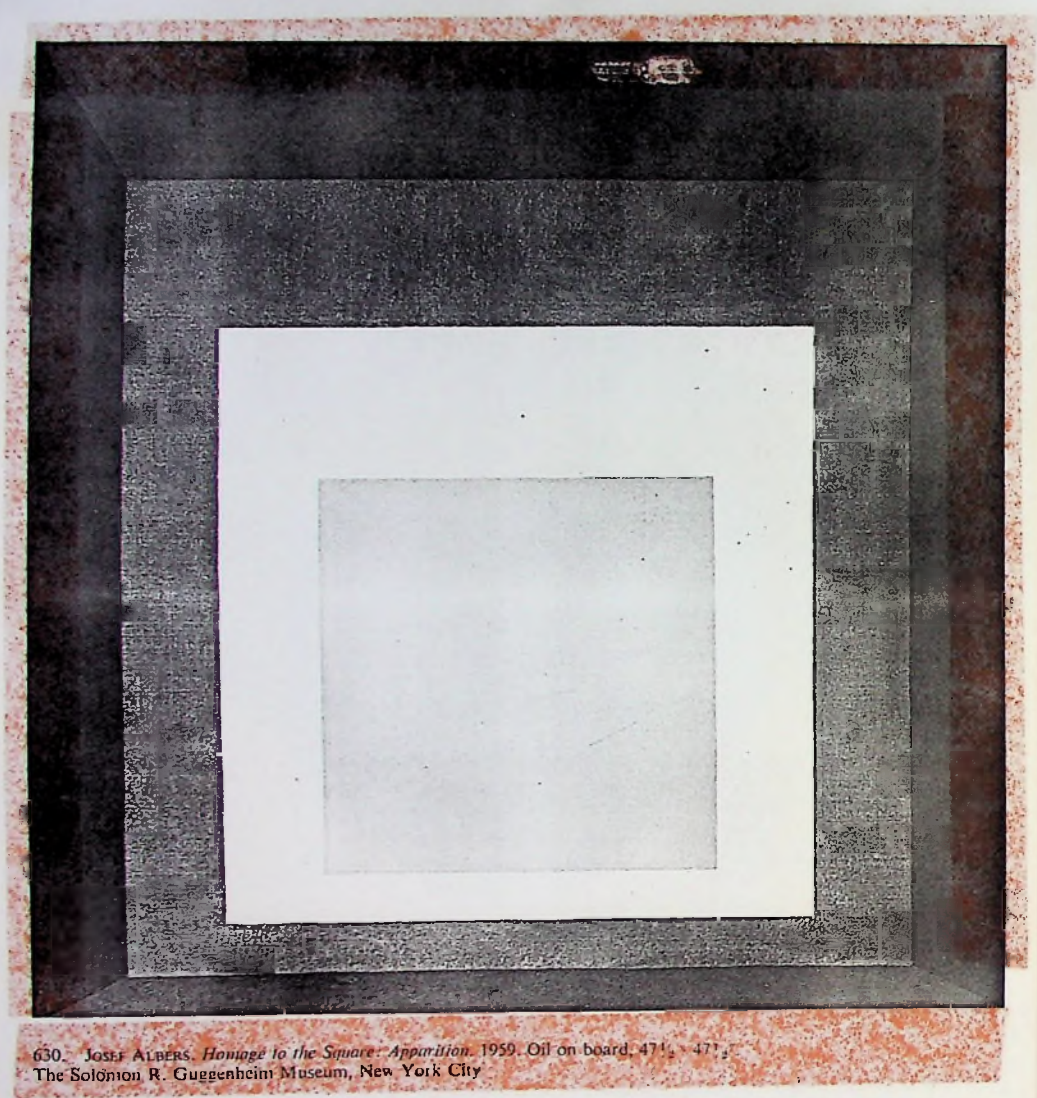


FIG. 31.

Permutations Algorithms. By Victor Vasarely.



630. JOSEF ALBERS. *Homage to the Square: Apparition*. 1959. Oil on board, 47 1/2 x 47 1/2.
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

Fig. 32.

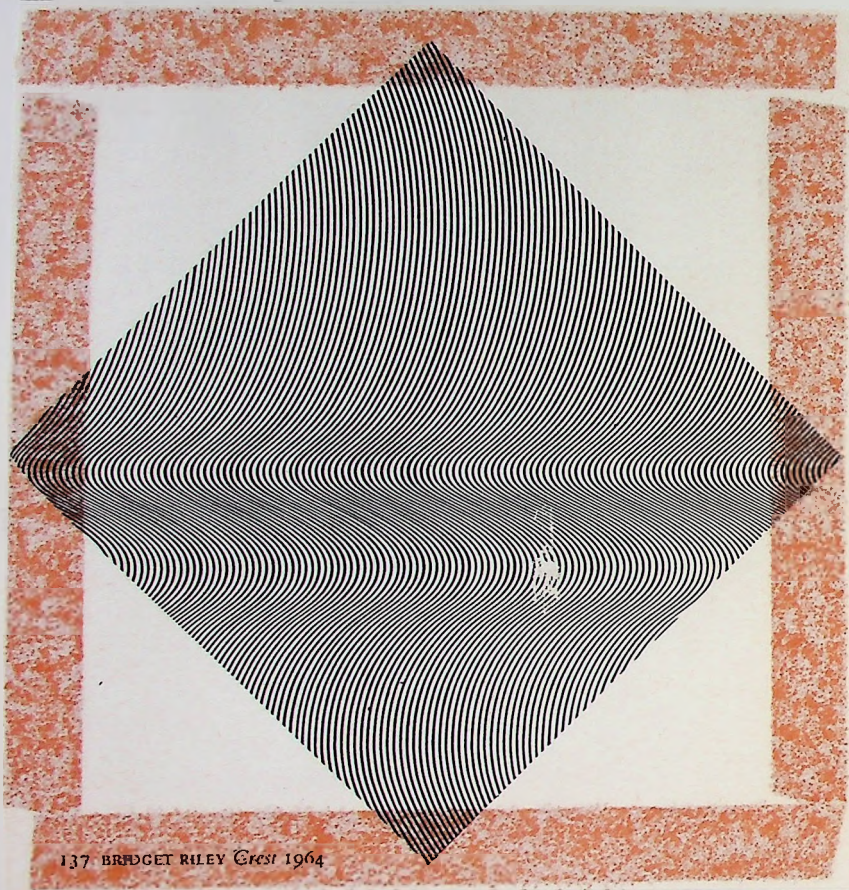


Fig. 33.

FOOTNOTES

1. Edward Lucie Smith, Movements in Art since 1945, Themes and Hudson, 1975, p 164.

CONCLUSION

In the preceeding chapters I have attempted to reconstruct chronologically the development of American Art in the 20th century through the exploration of new theories and new materials. I have covered the arrival of European artists and their influences, from the Armory Show right through to Minimal Art. During this period representational art was rejected, giving rise to Abstract Expressionism. Later rejection of the art object gave rise to Pop Art and indirectly to Minimal Art.

<u>Values of Minimal Art</u>	<u>European Tradition</u>
1. Exploration of new approaches	Continuity of the European tradition
2. Creation of completely self contained, non-referential objects	Reference to things in the outside world
3. Creation of an object that is 'real' in itself	Creation of illusionistic 'realism'
4. Insistence that the object be unitary - immediately apprehensible as a whole, with equal and symmetrical parts	Composition through the balance of constituent parts, arranged in a hierarchical order
5. Detachment anonymity, use of industrial, non-art materials	Indication of the artist's personality through evidence of his handling of the materials
6. Repetition, serialization, simplification	Variety, complexity
7. Clarity, literal unequivocal statements	Subjective interpretations
8. Involvement of the beholder by confronting him with an object or presence that stimulates his awareness of its shape and scale, with reference to his own body and to space in the environment that he and the object occupy.	Self-sufficiency of the creative work, irrespective of the beholder.

(1)

Art in America has gone from pictorial illustration to Minimal Art, through the exploration of form, colour and material. This exploration has broken down the traditional barriers established in the past. Art has extended itself into the realms of never ending possibilities. Art is no longer a fixed physical entity with some degree of permanence nor can it be judged by aesthetic standards of quality. The objects of Minimal Art were conceived with legitimate aesthetic objective. However they demand to be recognised as objects relating to an environment as opposed to art objects which are self-contained. The reduced art object, now fully subsumed by its environment, is declared to be at last a real thing, possessed of more 'reality' than mere art ever had.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jean Lipman and Helen Franc, Bright Stars, American Painting and Sculpture since 1776, E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., New York, 1976, p 190.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ARNASON H. H., A History of Modern Art, Themes and Hudson, 1969.
- CRONE RAINER, Andy Warhol, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970.
- DESAILLY CLAUDE, (Intro.) The Vasarely, Didactic Museum at the Gordes Chateau, Musee Didactique de Gordes, Vaucluse, 1971.
- FRY EDWARD, Cubism, Themes and Hudson, 1966.
- HUNTER SAM, American Art in the 20th Century, Themes and Hudson, 1973.
- INNES HOMER WILLIAM, Alfred Stieglitz and the American avant-garde, Secker and Warburg, London, 1977.
- KLEE PAUL, Paul Klee on Modern Art (with an introduction by Herbert Reed), Faber and Faber, 1948
- LIPMAN JEAN & FRANC HELEN, Bright Stars, American Painting and Sculpture since 1776, E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., New York, 1976.
- LUCIE SMITH EDWARD, Movements in Art since 1945, Themes and Hudson, 1975.
- REED HERBERT, The Philosophy of Modern Art, Faber and Faber, 1964.
- RUBIN WILLIAM, (Edt.) Pablo Picasso a Retrospective, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1980.
- SANDLER IRVING, The New York School, Harper and Row, 1978.
- STEINBERG LEO, Other Criteria, Confrontations with 20th Century Art, Oxford University Press, New York, 1972.
- TUCHMAN MAURICE, The New York School, Themes and Hudson, 1976.
- VERGO PETER, (Intro.) Abstraction towards a New Art, Tate Gallery Publishers, 1980.
- WEEKS T. & HAYES BARTLETT, (Edt.) Search for the real Hans Hofmann, M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976.
- WILMERDING JOHN, (Intro.) 100 American Drawings, The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.