

National College of Art and Design

Fine Art Painting

An Evaluation of the work of William Scott

by

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a grey world, and austere world:
The garden I knew was a cemetery and we had
no fine furniture. The objects I painted were the
symbols of the life I knew best.

William Scott (Alley, 1986, pg.7)

William Scott acknowledges a restraining element in his personal history, reflecting his formation within a Presbyterian upbringing. He was born in 1913, in Greenock, in Scotland, from where his family moved to Enniskillen in the hope of finding work. He was raised in the Protestant tradition which was in many respects influenced by the sombre imperatives of Calvinism. He was surrounded by a stark and simple environment, in keeping with this Puritanical way of life.

Scott refers to the objects he painted as symbolic to that way of life. Certain writers have commented that Scott had a great awareness of his 'Ulster Calvinist heritage', which appears in his still life work of the 1930's - 40's (Fallon, 1991, pg.2). Scott painted his still life objects in response to the imagery of his 'Calvinist heritage', therefore, a construction of the artist's background and intentions is an important consideration when responding to, and evaluating his art work.

During the course of this paper, it will be made evident that throughout the development of William Scott's work, he fostered a personal visual language amid the progressive and changeable mode of art practices around the world. The route I shall be taking is an evaluation of existing paradigms of analysis already taking place in today's art world. This thesis concerns itself particularly with the modernist paradigm and its interpretation of art work

and questions the rigidity of this analytical approach, with specific reference to the work of William Scott.

I shall begin my examination with an historical look at the still life genre and how it has developed in relation to specific critical interests and trends. It acknowledges various discourse which has reacted to still life's vast range of use, purpose, and meaning. Beginning in chapter one with a brief history of developments in the still life genre spanning from the Dutch still life painting to the Modern French painters such as Cézanne. It will also assess the potential of the still life genre in terms of challenging the traditional ways of expressing and interpreting art. This is substantiated with references to William Scott's still life paintings, and his response to the depicted object. While paying close attention to both visual and historical context of the work. Referring constantly to a range of critiques about the viewers response to object based painting, ranging from symbolism to psychoanalysis.

Chapter Two draws on various critiques and comments on Scott's life and work, made by critics such as Alan Bowness and Scott himself. It sets out to explore Scott's ambiguous relationship with his British contemporaries, within the unstable climate of 1930's and 1940's. While other artists seemed to 'revert to regional norms', Scott maintained his own personal language (Read, 1951, pg.50). Specifically, during the first world war which isolated British artists, including Scott, from the rest of the art world.

Chapter three looks at the life and work of William Scott, who is seen to develop his own 'established aesthetic', that is free from the 'iron clamp of modernist dogma' (Dunne, 1998). The history of art has traditionally been perceived as progressing in a linear fashion. In the mid-twentieth century Clement Greenberg pioneered the notion that modern art developed from

Monet to Abstract Expressionism and beyond. The Modernist practice, therefore, responded to art within an historical or social context. In painting, Greenberg identified flatness, colour, scale and edge as essential for determining the quality of the medium. The literary or theatrical qualities such as subject matter, narrative, realism or drama, were considered redundant by modernist art (Wallis, 1984, pg.xii). This chapter analyses Scott's response to the developments in American painting, by relating Scott's experience to a fellow British artist Patrick Heron who also travelled to New York in the fifties. Focusing on the fact that neither of these artists felt at ease within the physical limitations of Greenbergian purism. It also discusses William Scott's interest in the primitive and relates to the problems that arise when Western art adopts tribal art and bestows it with it's own ideologies.

William Scott's work has changed and developed within the open and eclectic panorama of art history. The art criticism that has established over the latter part of this century, begins a new line of inquiry set outside the canonical discourse of modernism, which leads to a deeper understanding to the emotional and psychological perspectives of William Scott's art. His emergence as an artist in the thirties, and the development of his work throughout his life, will be discussed in the following three chapters with reference to the recent re-arrangement of the cultural landscape. The points discussed in the following chapters will reveal that William Scott was well informed, and participated in the international art world, yet his work seems to be undermined when related to one particular critical framework or movement.

CHAPTER ONE *An examination of Scott's still life painting*

A close evaluation of William Scott and his work involves the careful consideration of his subject matter, and the visual language he uses to represent it. He was dedicated to painting and drawing, and on the evidence of the substantial retrospective show at I.M.M.A., this assessment seems plausible. The show spans his output from the early, representational paintings of the 1930's, (including landscapes and portraiture), to his final monochromatic abstracts.¹ But the most recognizable feature in Scott's retrospective is the progression in his work, which sees a return again and again to still life imagery. He painted domestic objects such as pots and pans, which are synonymous with the artist, particularly in the forties and fifties.

Beginning with an historical account of the developments of still life, this chapter maps out the various avenues explored by artist's in their use of the still life genre, and examines it's influences on Scott.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century in Europe seen a dramatic proliferation of still life genre painting, which up until then was seen as a minor genre. The domination of heroic painting, and portraiture meant that still life was distrusted for its 'trompe d'oeil' illusionism. The conventional narrative history painting declined in status and the artist's attitude towards the representation of the object changed. From the end of the Greco Roman era through the Renaissance, still life elements appeared in European painting as accompaniments to the main image. Foodstuff and cooking implements were combined in compositions to convey readings that not only reflected man's

¹ Chapter Three will argue later about the description of Scott's paintings as abstract. But it is used here as a description not an ideological term.

celebration of the material world and worldly possessions, but also the futility of their pursuits in the long run.

This chapter demonstrates, however, the developments in the use of still life as more than a mere studio prop, used to depict themes of history, or myth. The complexity of the range of still life is revealed when the canons of traditional inquiry are stripped away, and the potential of object painting is revealed. This is reflected in an exploration of Scott's use of still life, and in the critical interpretations of the artists he cites as influential to his work.

William Scott was interested in the still life genre as a paradigm for describing the world around him, and its potential to move away from optical illusory methods to a more concrete presentation of three dimensional space. Scott has often called still life his 'chief occupation', and employs it with the influence of other great painters before him, namely Chardin, Cézanne, and Bonnard. He comments:

My interest in still life painting grew directly out of looking at Cézanne. I wanted to look at Cézanne not through cubist eyes, but rather through the eyes of Chardin.

William Scott (Bowness, 1972, pg.66)

A brief biographical approach to William Scott's work would be justified, if not for no other reason, for the fact that much of Scott's still life works originated from his introduction to the Modern French Painters. Many of his early paintings adopt the 'sensuous' handling of paint reminiscent of Bonnard, or the rendering of 'simple' shapes and forms of Cézanne. Scott was introduced to these French painters by Kathleen Bridle a former student of the Royal Academy in London, and a friend and contemporary of Henry Moore. She

introduced him to the paintings of Cézanne and Bonnard; Picasso, Derain and Modigliani; and the writings of Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Kathleen greatly encouraged the young Scott, who was '... infected by her enthusiasm for modern painting.' (Bowness; 1964; pg.5).

Complimenting his early introduction to Modern Art was a training in the Old Masters techniques, firstly, at the Belfast College of Art in 1928, and then, in 1931 when he spent four years at the Royal Academy School in London (Bowness; 1964; pg.5). His training in London nourished a strong working discipline, one that he maintained consistently throughout his life.

One of his favourite painters from the past, includes Velázquez and his painting Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, with its jug, two plates; two eggs and four fishes. Norbert Lynton claims this painting to have been a stimulus to the young Scott (Lynton, 1990, pg.3).

Velázquez was a master at adding a moral dimension to scenes from everyday life, around the 1620's. As evident in his painting An Old Woman Cooking Eggs, where he portrays an old woman and a boy, and within the painting a representation of still life. Martin Gayford describes how Velázquez painted the figures and still life with a noble quality, for instance, the pan in which the woman fries her eggs. Gayford states that these things are depicted with such an 'exact illusion of texture and volume, and an awkwardness of perspective that only adds to the solemnity.' The simple still life elements, therefore, play an important role in setting the tone of the painting by the artists particular positioning of the objects on the canvas. Scott's painting The Frying Pan 1946 (Plate 1), echoes Velázquez use of simple elements to set the tone and mood of the painting, and consequently free the painting from any literary associations. Gayford refers to still life painting as allowing the artist to 'conjure an image out of thin air.'

The still life paradigm is unconfused by 'questions of the narrative, facial likeness, or the poetic emotions that are hard to separate from landscape'. It

leaves the artist free to create an expression or mood that is not dependent on ideological notions of history or place. He claims that still life was a mode that was incapable of carrying any serious intellectual or moral messages, unlike history painting or mythology (Gayford, 1995, pg.31).

Still life, therefore, allowed the artist to detach himself from conscious considerations such as moral and ideological issues, which would normally be attached to portraiture, or historical painting.

Yet, Norman Bryson suggests otherwise, when he states that:

The meaning of a picture is never inscribed on its surface as brushstrokes are: meaning arises in the collaboration of signs (visual and verbal) and interpreters.

(Bryson, 1990, pg.8)

Norman Bryson analyses still life within an historical paradigm basing his analysis on historical circumstances, which occurred at the time of production and then offers an interpretation of still life within modern perspectives. His essay Looking at the Overlooked is devoted to the resurgence of still life painting in Holland. Bryson believed this occurred prior to industrialization: at a time when the Netherlands enjoyed the success of its banks, and merchant traders. As a result, the wealthy bourgeoisie wanted an art that would celebrate this newly acquired status.

Bryson cites the painting Still Life with Metalware as an example of how the artist reacted to this abundance of wealth. The artist Willem Kalf (1619-1693) organizes the metalware on the table in a heap to suggest a jumble of junk. The artists extravagant and ridiculous use of these valuable objects suggests to the viewer that 'abundance generates waste' (Bryson, 1990, pg.128).

Bryson concludes that Dutch still life is rarely presented to the viewer as a 'neutral inventory of goods', but that it is a '..dialogue between the newly affluent society and its material possessions.' (Bryson, 1990, pg.104)

Norman Bryson's interpretation of traditional still life is that the everyday object functions both as symbols of wealth and success in business. Also, they are the signifiers of how life is lived from a moral and ethical viewpoint. They can signify a moral, sober, puritanical way of life; or a hedonistic life of excess. This interpretation of the still life as a signifier, mentioned by Bryson, can be applied to Scott's still life paintings. Alan Bowness 'fundamental dualism' of Scott's still life 1949-51, for example Two Bowls with Egg 1947 (Plate 3), in which the sensual handling of the painted surface is contrasted by the rather 'puritanical' austerity of his art (Bowness, 1964, pg.8).

The objects used in Scott's paintings are things which function in a given social setting and are used, in a sense, as props. The use of these props by Chardin through to Cézanne, is noticed by Scott. He realized this potential in the still life genre when in 1949 he saw the exhibition A Thousand years of Still Life Painting, in Paris. This encounter was to effect and influence his art.

I was really overwhelmed by the fact that the subject had hardly changed for a thousand years, and yet each generation had in turn expressed it's own period and feelings and time within this terrible limited range of the still life.

William Scott (Bowness, 1964, pg.7)

Through painting the still life, Scott realized it's autonomous mode as a viable paradigm for the investigation into his childhood objects, mainly because of the objects anonymity, apparent in the paintings Painting 1957 (Plate 9), and Breton Woman 1939 (Plate 10). Scott comments:

Behind the facade of pots and pans there is sometimes another image – its a private one, ambiguous, and can perhaps be sensed rather than seen. This image which I can't describe

animates my forms. Its the secret in the picture.

William Scott (Bowness, 1964, pg.8)

What is the imagery that Scott talks about, and just how is the viewer expected to sense it? Alan Bowness identifies a sexual imagery in a narrative which is hidden behind the still life objects. The objects are references to the female and male sexual parts, as sensed in the paintings Pan and Pear, Blue Theme 1975 (Plate 4), Colander Beans and Eggs 1948 (Plate 5), and Composition 1: Pots and Pears 1955 (Plate 6). The placing of these objects suggest erotic connotations. This response to an art work is quite uncontrolled in comparison to the more intellectual analysis which Modernism offers. To speak about the life of imagery is to detach it from the confines of modernist formalist criticism. The sexual imagery in Scott's work, indicated by Bowness, is an assumption that could shed light on the motivation of the artist, offering an new interpretation of the artist's personality, or psyche. This form of reading an art work is typical of psychoanalysis. Cézanne's still life has often been a focus for many psychoanalytical interpretations, one such reading by Meyer Schapiro is relevant to this discussion. He asserts that Cézanne submits 'humbly' to the object, as he tries to reconcile the conflicts with his father, and his anxiety about his own shameful desires (Schapiro, 1981, pg.73). This can also be applied to Scott's incorporation of austere elements as in Pears and a Knife no. 2 1973 (Plate 6), where Scott's economy of the pictorial space could be seen in the context of his Scottish and Irish working class background, his puritanical and stern religious upbringing and the tragic loss of his father at an early age (Morley, 1998, pg.26). This analogy, therefore, offers an insight in Scott's paintings that goes beyond a formalist account.

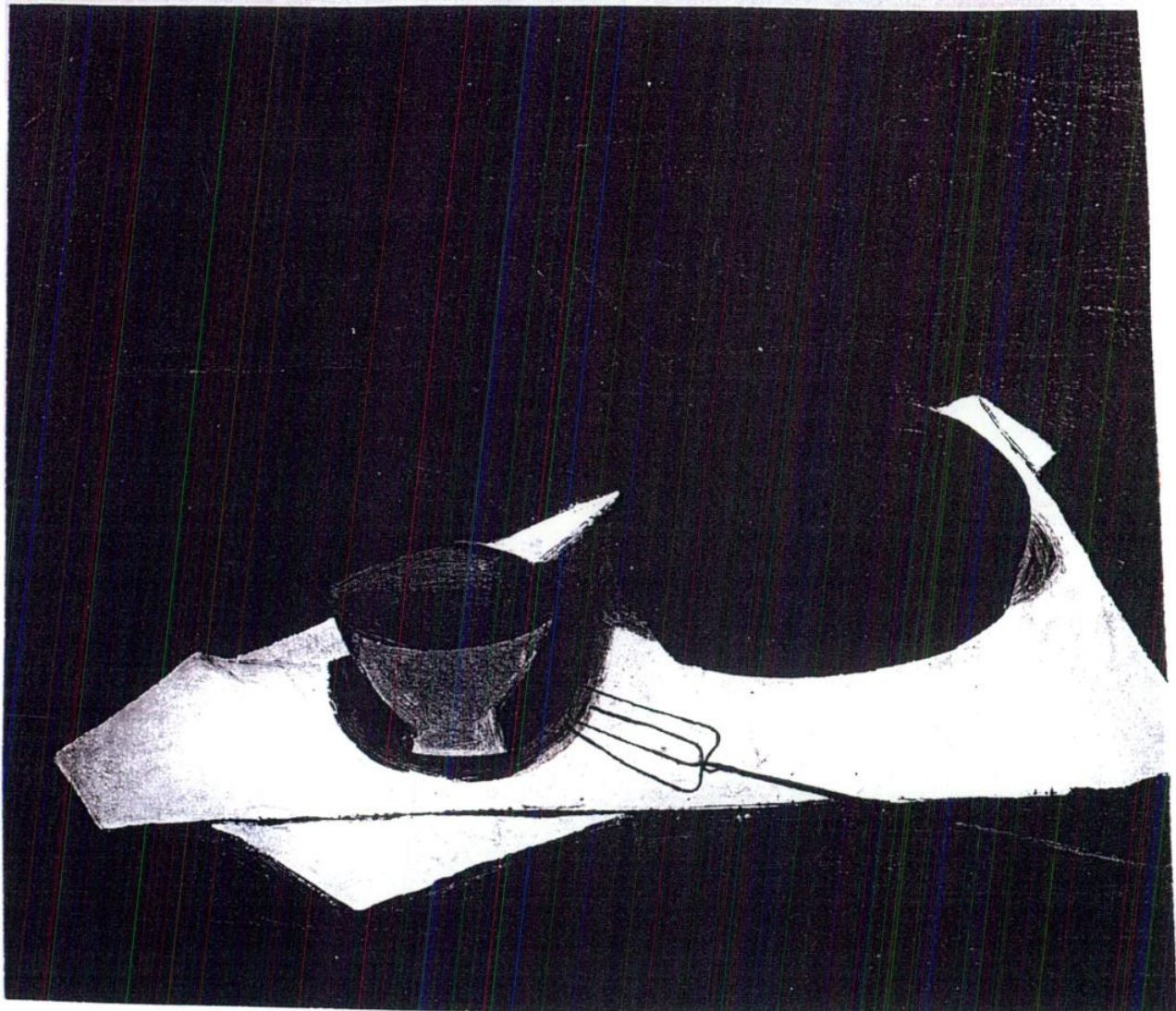
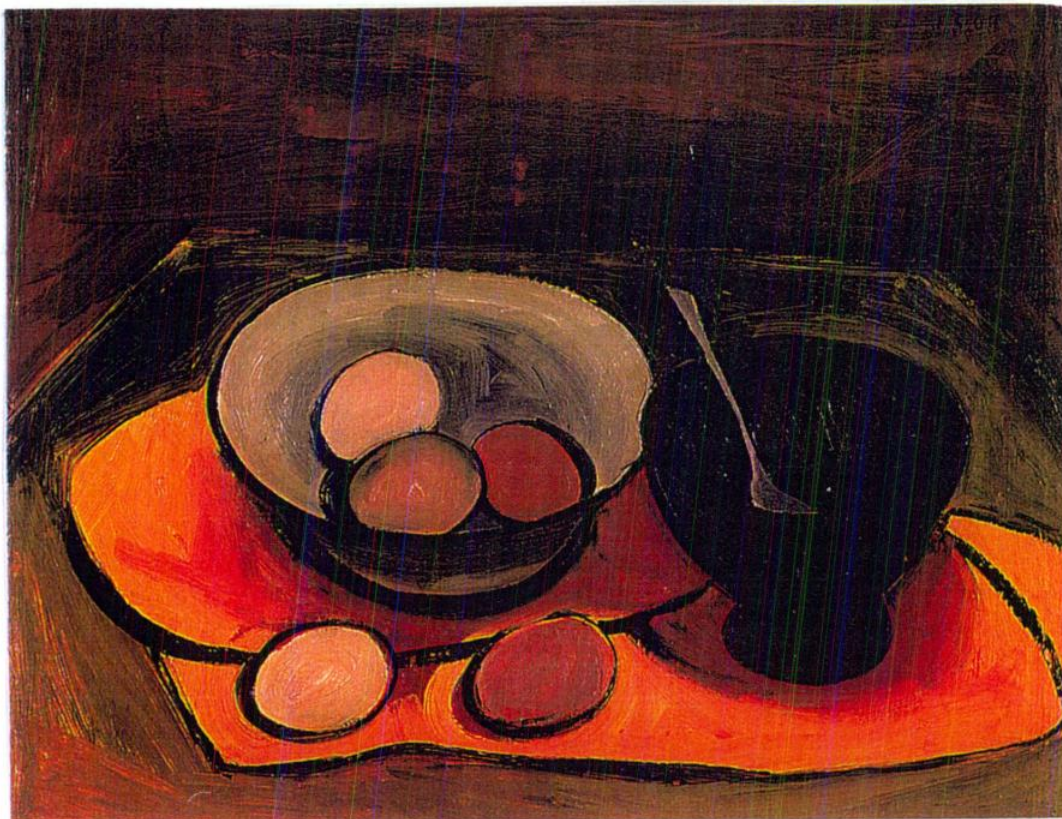


Plate 1. Frying Pan, 1946

Plate 2. Two Bowls with Egg, 1947



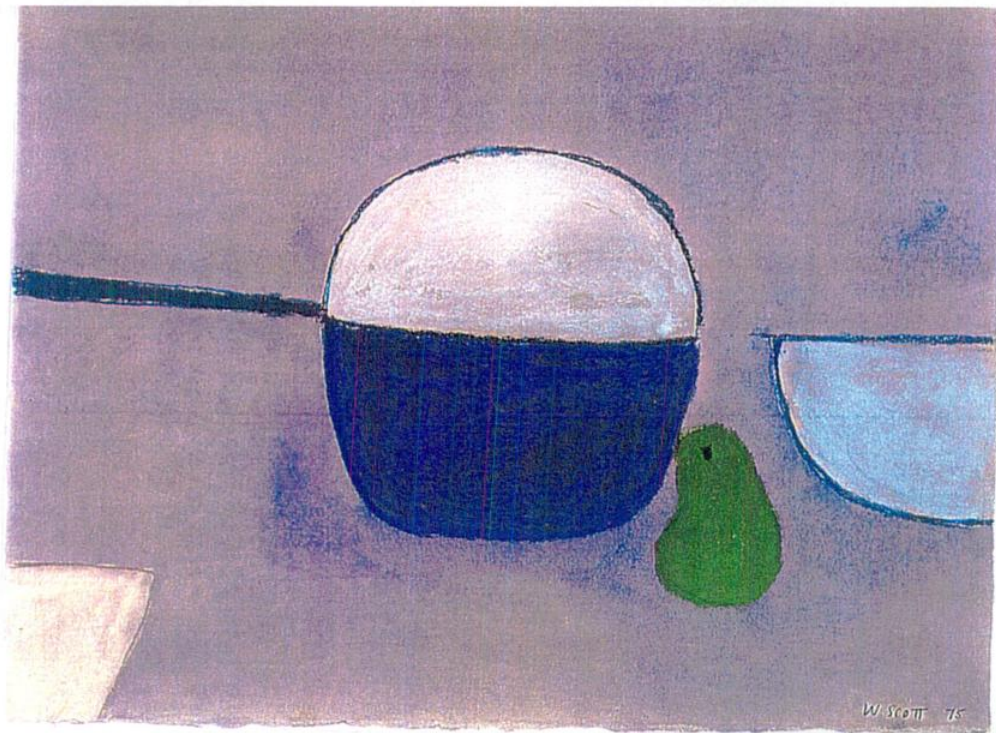


Plate 3

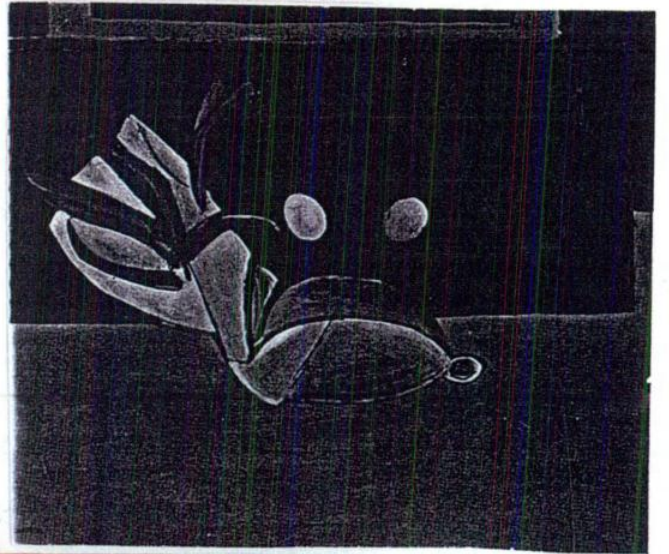


Plate 4



Plate 5

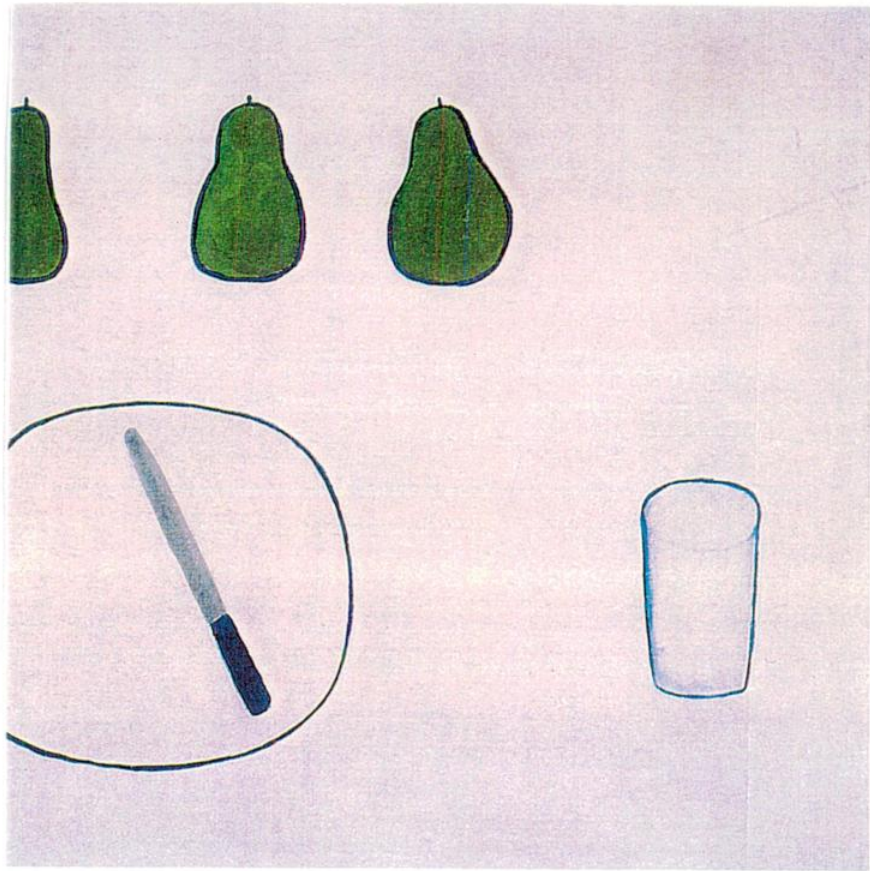
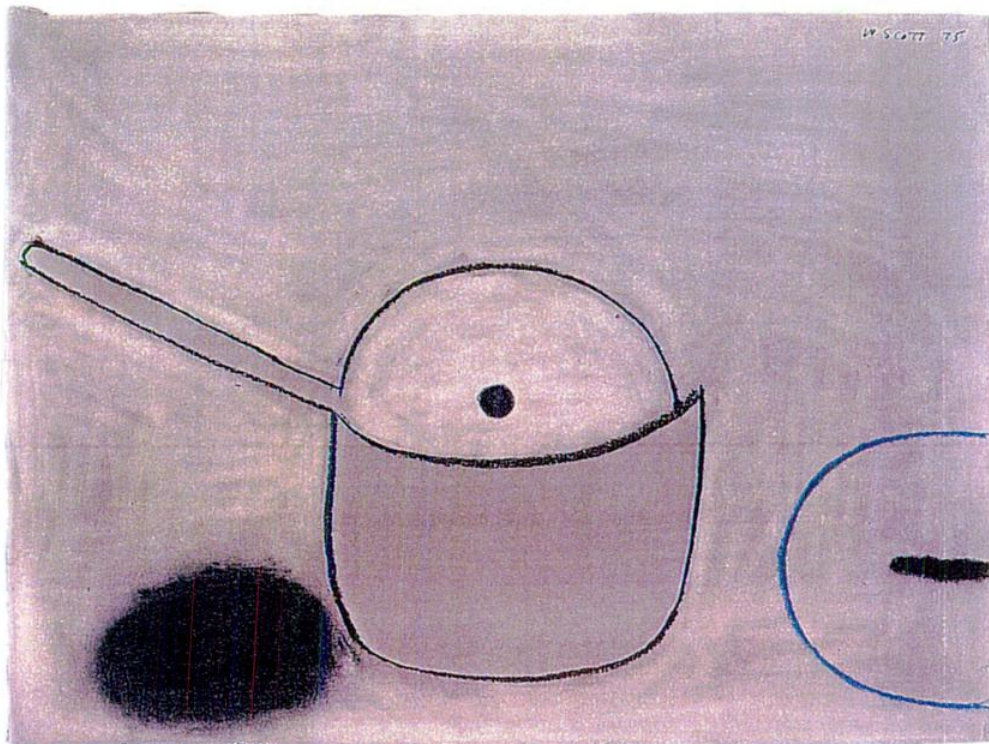


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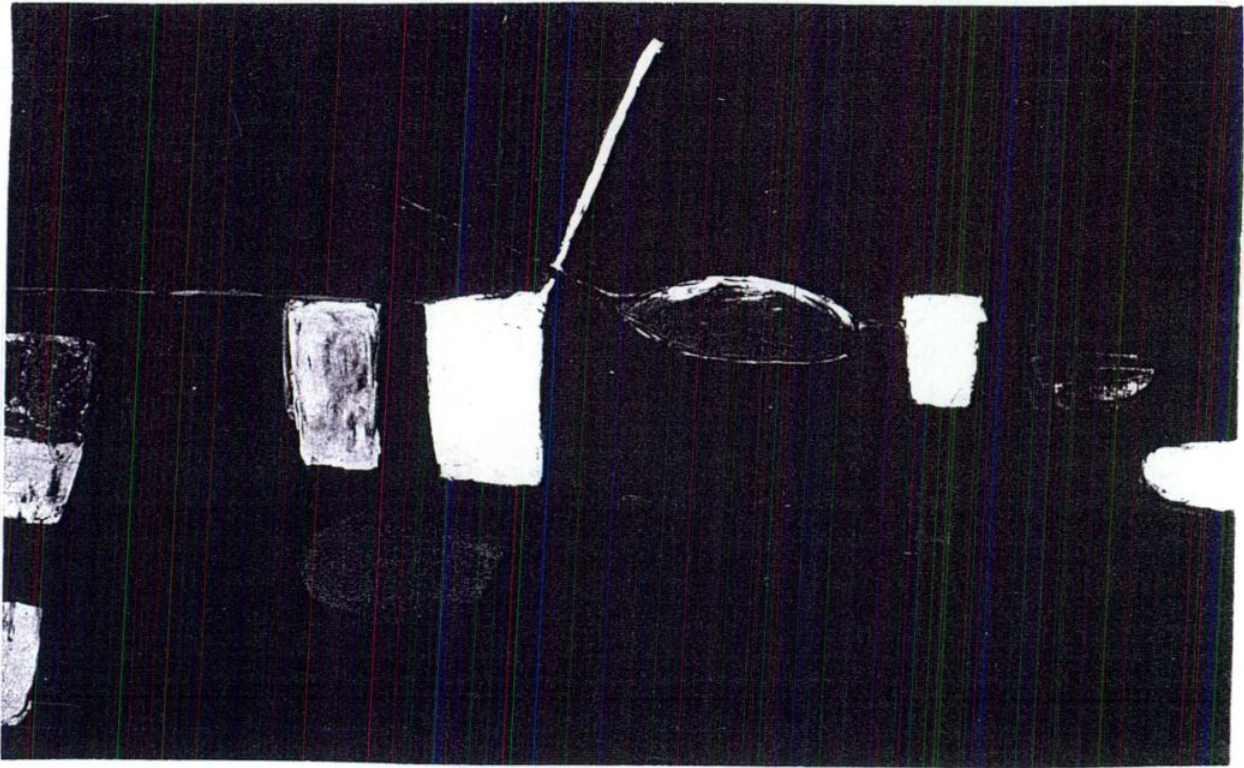
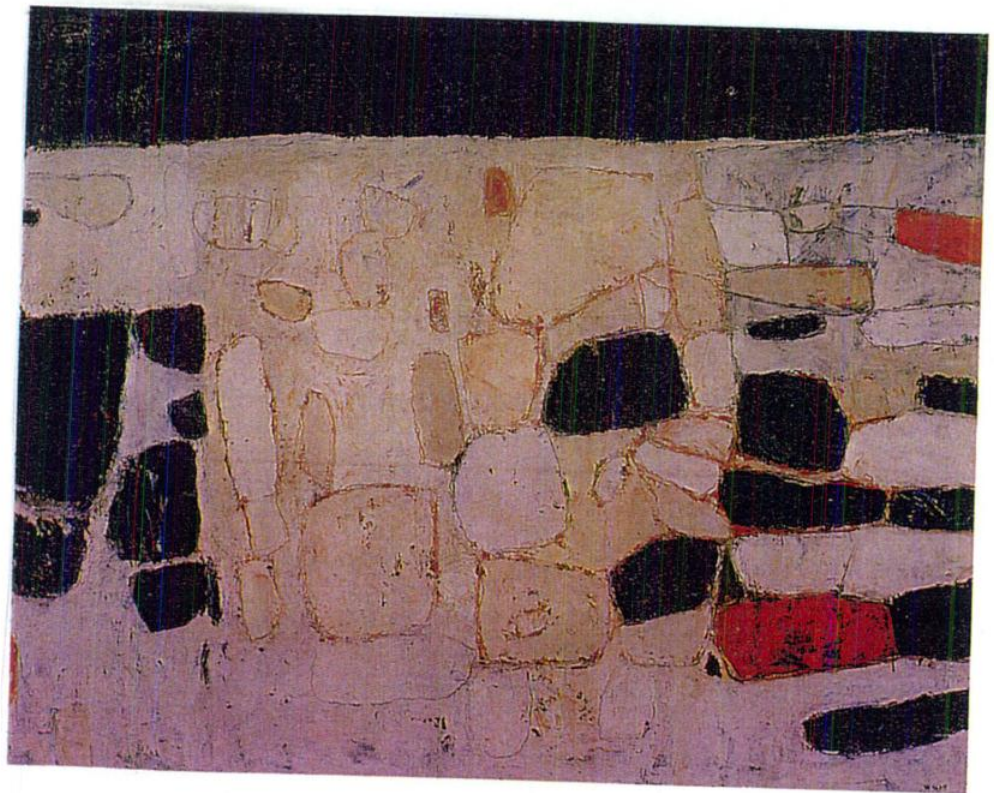


plate 8

plate 9



CHAPTER TWO

William Scott and his British contemporaries.

For my generation neither surrealism nor abstract art had made an appeal, and yet there was little else to put in their place. The period of group activity seemed to be over. I think each of us had to work out a personal way of our own.

William Scott (Bowness, 1972, pg.67)

William Scott's goal was to paint imagery that was personal. To paint after any particular movement or style was not his primary task. Rather it was a means to communicate an allusive and personal language. Alan Bowness comments:

The intention behind Scott's art has changed very little; it is the language used to express the ideas that alters with the times – as must, if the message is to be renewed and not become stale with repetition.

(Bowness, 1964, pg.5)

This chapter sets out to explore Scott's own personal language as evident in his art work 1930–1949. It looks at English art and its influences on the direction of his work. While Scott was aware of local artists and their work, such as St. Ives group, he was reluctant to commit to any one particular group. Thus, initiating an ambiguous relationship between Scott and an art based on a British national identity. This is reflected in the direction of Scott's work and biographical circumstances, which is discussed in this chapter.

Specifically relevant to this discussion is the incoherent state of mid-twentieth century art in Britain, heightened by the isolation of the first world

war. The nationalist motivated art that prevailed during the war, such as the Neo-Romantics, was at odds with Scott's allusive and personal style. It is difficult, therefore, to affiliate Scott with an assured identity or sense of belonging to a definite trend. Whilst the artist's identity is unclear the work is then unconstrained with values or ideologies related to nationalist based art work. This is probably best exemplified by a commentary on the mode of art in Britain during the unsettling years of the thirties and forties, and the way it effected Scott and his work.

Born at the beginning of the twentieth century and living much of his life in Europe, Scott was the inheritor of a period of shifting perspectives in Western art. The dominant pictorial formula in Western art was the 'classical, fixed, single point perspective of Renaissance pictorial space.' (Dunne, 1999, pg.10) The dismantling of the pictorial space, firstly by Cézanne and continued by Picasso, challenged the stability of the conventional mode of representation. The changes that took place in British art in the thirties and forties, therefore, are due to external influences of the School of Paris.

However, the full impact of the Impressionists and Post Impressionists was yet to be seen, as Scott realized, when in 1934 he began a painting course at the Royal Academy School under the direction of Sir Walter Russell. The training here was quite academic and left little room for experimentation, yet, the constant drawing and painting from the Old Masters was to remain invaluable to Scott. He comments:

Continual figure painting made me aware of the great paintings of nudes. The pictures I had in mind amongst the Old Masters were Cranach, Titian, Giorgione, Goya, Boucher, and among later paintings, Corot, Manet, Gauguin,

Modigliani, Bonnard and Matisse.

William Scott (Bowness, 1972, pg.65)

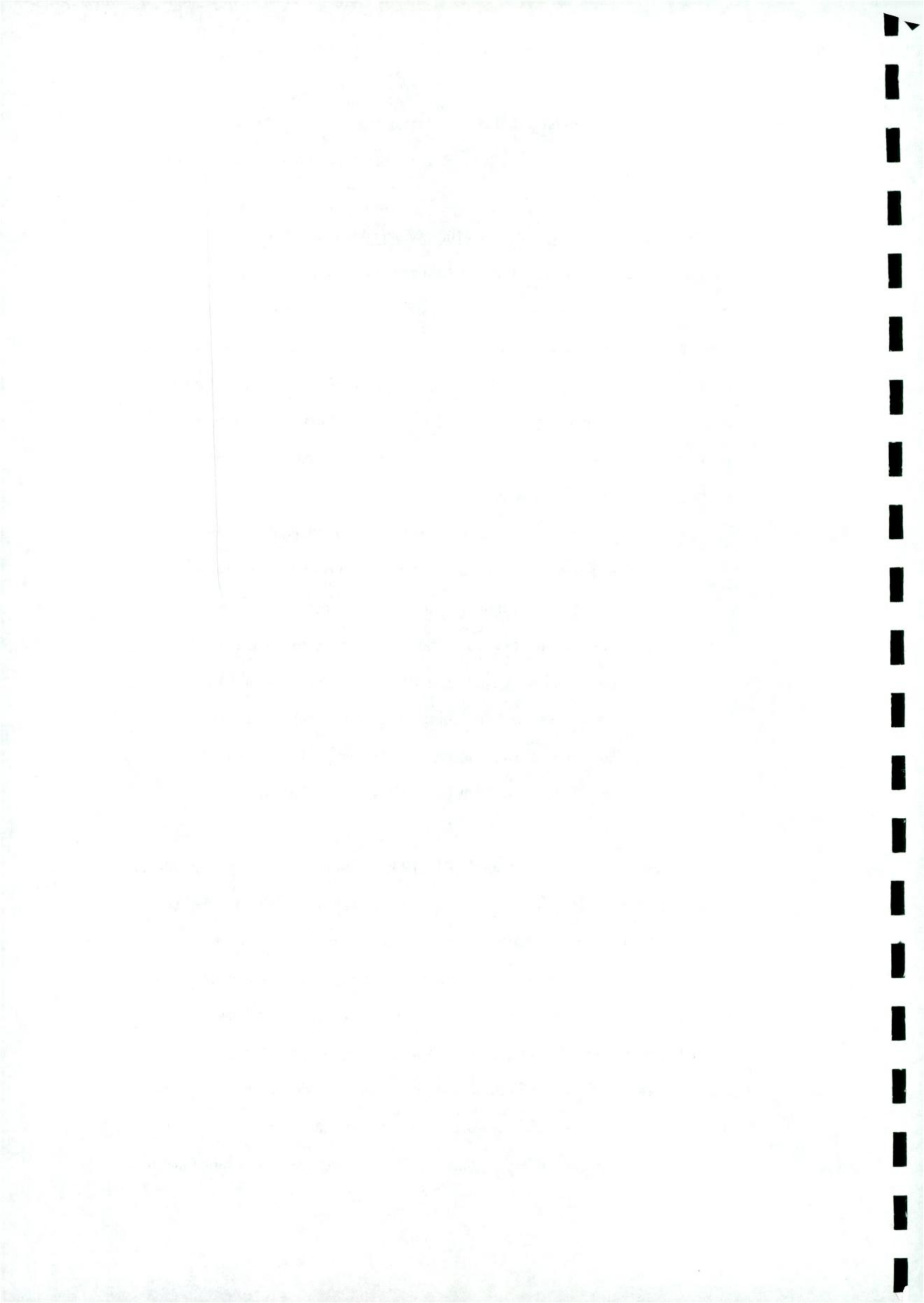
His student painting Adoration of the Shepherds, painted in 1935, was a tribute to one such master Piero della Francesca's Baptism, and rendered in the style of the English artist Stanley Spencer (Alley, 1986, pg.8). His preference for Spencers simplification of tone and colour was unusual in Britain at the time. The common influence was derived from traditional English landscape painters Turner and Constable. Scott felt an uneasy relationship to the English art of the past and was unable to respond to landscape painting. He comments:

Just after leaving art school I'd painted landscapes in a kind of Cézanne manner, and I'd even tried painting in the more English tradition of Turner and Constable, but I found that fundamentally I don't respond enough to nature to be a landscape painter. I don't respond to air and sea and the things of nature, and when I approached landscape it was the man-made things that attracted me.

William Scott (Bowness, 1964, pg.6)

He received a Travelling Scholarship in 1936 to Mousehole, a fishing village in West Cornwall. He realized that his opinion was shared by artists, such as the poet Dylan Thomas. 'Both these Celts were experiencing certain difficulties of adjustment towards England, and more particularly towards literary and artistic traditions that were alien to them.' (Bowness, 1964, pg.6) Perhaps it was because of the unparalleled vigour with which the arts, and in particular French painting, had flourished and developed in Europe that Scott felt the necessity to seek the cultivation of the new.

In 1937 Scott left England and spent two years in France, with his



wife Mary Lucas. They travelled through Italy and France, before settling in Pont Aven, Brittany in 1939. He set up the Pont Aven School of Painting, with fellow artists Mark Gertler and Geoffery Nelson. During visits to Paris and Aix in the summers of 1938 and 1939, Scott was introduced to French artists Maurice Denis, Emile Bernard and Sickert's friend Maurice Asselin (Bowness, 1964, pg.6). Scott's stay in France allowed him to familiarize himself with the surroundings that influenced Cézanne greatly. He was invited to show his work at the Salon d'Automme in which he showed Girl at a Table 1938, with its flattened perspective, simple composition, and richness of surface. Other paintings he made at this time show an onset of a style characteristic of later works from 1946 onwards. For example, Breton Woman 1939 (Plate 10), and Breton Nude 1939 (Plate 11). He states, ' I felt I started to discover what I needed - and then the war came.' (Bowness, 1972, pg.67)

At no other times within the history of art is the question of identity considered important, than within the disruptive effects of war. The outbreak of war forced the Scotts to move back to London in 1939. They spent some time in Dublin before moving to a cottage in Hallatrow in Somerset. He taught at the nearby college the Bath Academy of Art, until in 1942 he was drafted into the Royal Fusiliers. The paintings Scott made from 1939-1942 were mostly destroyed during the war, and it was a period which Scott found unsettling. He resented the separation from the rest of Europe and the tradition that he admired so much. He states:

While in the army I painted some watercolour landscapes, but felt that these paintings, done in very difficult conditions, were not really a continuation of what I had started in Brittany.

William Scott (Bowness, 1972, pg.68)



Many British artists, including Scott, suffered from the isolation and restrictions of the war and this is reflected in the art works. Paintings of this period tend to be motivated by the war movement in Britain. Certainly, the concept of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' were fostered by artists during years of 'national decline or emergency' (Foss, 1991, pg.52). The ideals and characteristics that were deployed as part of the resulting commendation of a myth of national identity derived mostly from the group War Artist's Advisory Committee (W.A.A.C.). Established by the Ministry of Information in 1939, the aspiration of W.A.A.C. was to purchase and commission art works to form an historical record of the war. The art promoted was to be symbolic of everything that distinguished British society from a Fascist society. Hence, the art played a part in the manufacturing of a substantial definition of British culture and identity (Foss, 1991, pg.53).

Other apparent factors controlling the promotion of nationalist art include the economic and material slump which hit Britain in the war years. Andrew Stephenson makes a connection between the economic and social upheaval and the increase in nationalist promoted art. He remarks that British art was under attack from 'militant nationalists', 'criticism predicated on xenophobia' and 'fears about cultural degeneracy' (Stephenson, 1991, pg.31). This meant that foreign artistic styles and influences were considered a threat to a unified British culture. The anti-European mood prevalent at this time is foremost in the works of the Neo-Romantics, including artists Graham Sutherland, Keith Vaughan, and John Minton. They associated themselves with the same style as the French Romantics, which was fuelled by nostalgia and an inclination towards melodrama, providing these artists with an appropriate style for war-time subjects.

Examples of work from this period include Battle of Britain (1941) by Paul Nash, and Shipbuilding on the Clyde (1944) by Stanley Spencer, and The City: A Fallen Lift Shaft (1941) by Graham Sutherland. In these, the scenes of devastation and use of unnatural lighting allows for a theatrical nature to the overall work, which is typical of Neo-Romanticism (Spalding, 1986, pg.134). The Neo-Romantic group painted landscapes that were metaphors of a war-time destruction, the artist Paul Nash described it as creating a new world (Rosenblum, 1986, pg.95).

Scott found himself caught up in this wave of Romanticism, he produced lithographs that were pessimistic scenes of the war and were not typical of his early work.

During those years when I was in the army there was a tremendous amount of discussion and talk about the English romantic landscape painters, and this was a tradition I didn't belong to. It was not my kind of painting at all.

William Scott (Bowness, 1964, pg.7)

Scott was unable to relate to the Neo-Romantics, he remained sceptical of an art that valued the importance of socio-geographic definitions, in this case British art. The difficulties arise when attempts are made to categorize Scott's art within the traditional parameters that groups art into identifiable movements.

Herbert Read states that art in Britain between the thirties and forties was quite unstable. He mentions that British artists were unconvincing at promoting a unified group or movement, mainly because of it's indifferent public. Attempts had been made by the artists Ben Nicholson, Terry Frost, Roger Hilton, Patrick Heron, Alan Davie, and Bryan Wynter, to name a few,

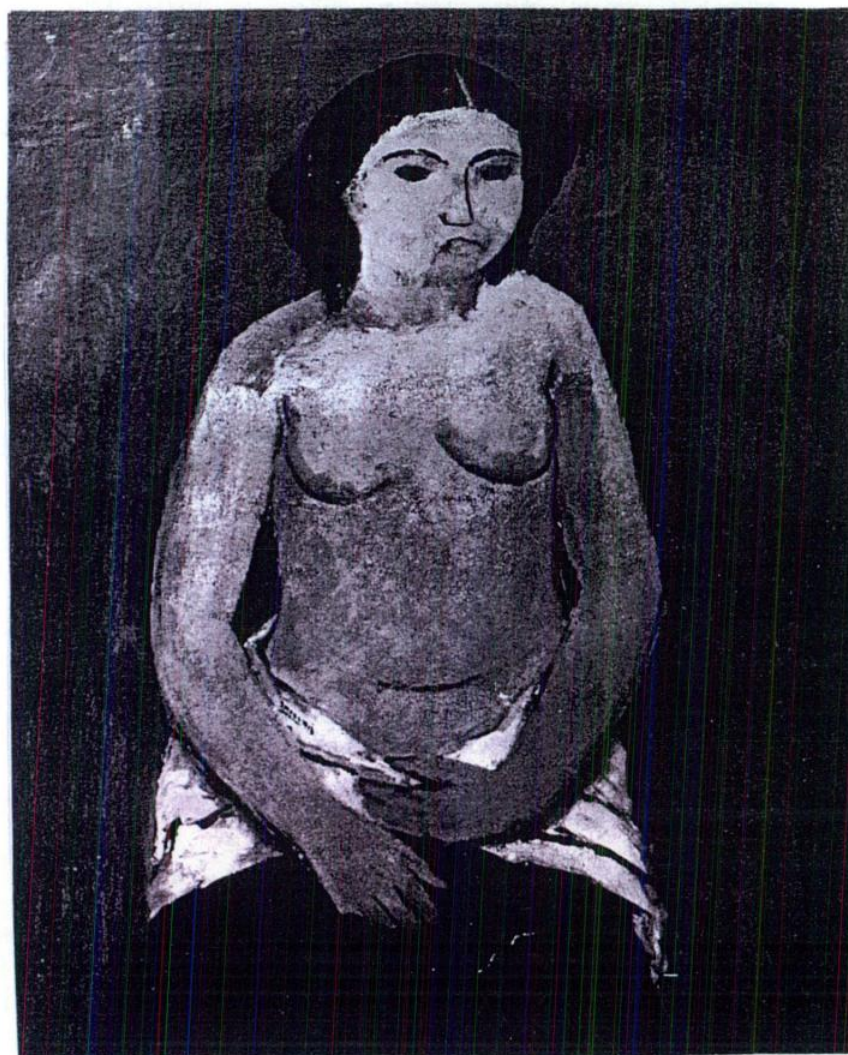
to set up a group called 'Unit One'. These artists were brought together by a common interest to represent the town and surrounding landscape, and they pursued this through the language of abstraction. However, they disbanded after only three years together, part of the group veered more towards Surrealism while the other half remained loyal to abstraction.

Other recent attempts were made to create an identity for British artists after the war, such as the exhibition British Art in the Twentieth Century at the Royal Academy in 1987. This included artists from St. Ives in Cornwall and projected them as a collective movement (Tooby, 1998, pg.11). They were Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson, Patrick Heron, and others. Yet William Scott was excluded from this group show, and this was contrary to the amount of time the artist spent in Cornwall, visiting every summer from 1952. He painted the harbour and surrounding landscape that was familiar in paintings by the St. Ives group. He began to use mediums other than oils and the pictures became more fluid and turned further towards abstraction. Alan Bowness states that he was 'following the logic of his own artistic development.' (Bowness, 1964, pg.9), and moving away from a British art.



plate 10

plate 11



CHAPTER THREE

Scott's ambiguous relationship with the Abstract Expressionists.

I returned convinced that the Americans had made a great discovery and that the mood in England – a longing for nice comfortable realist art would not last much longer.

William Scott (Bowness, 1972, pg. 72)

Scott is referring to the growing interest in American art of the New York painters such as Rothko, Kline, Pollock, whom he visited in 1953 on a trip to America. The effects of the New York School was beginning to make an impact on British artists, who were still concerned with the ongoing debate between a traditional realism and a formalist abstraction, as discussed in chapter two. Scott was one of the first artists from Britain to acquaint himself, on both a personal and artistic level, with the Abstract Expressionists Rothko, Pollock, and de Kooning. It could be said that Scott's later work, from the fifties onwards, corresponds well with the international abstraction of the fifties. Therefore, his paintings received great recognition and interest in America. However, his work did not indicate any underlying trend or school, and he maintaining his own personal style (Fallon, 1991, pg.1). He was interested in the formal aspects of Abstract Expressionism, yet, he remained suspicious of the New York painters and their theories on art. Ronald Alley refers to Scott's visit to New York:

He was overwhelmed by the size, audacity and self-confidence of the new American painting, but he returned to Europe convinced that European painters belonged to a different tradition and that it would be a mistake for them to imitate the Americans.

(Alley, 1986, pg.18)

A similar account was given by the British artist Patrick Heron, who also visited America in the fifties and had experienced firsthand the formalism exemplified by Greenburg.

Heron believed that while British painting in the 1960's had become technically more diverse in its textures and compositions, American painting had developed 'merely academic' attributes. The consequences of the pictorial emptiness of American painting had left it reliant solely on 'concepts' and 'systems'. Unlike Heron's British contemporaries, whom he considered to have access to 'European resources of sensibilities and instinct' (Gooding, 1994, pg.188). Heron considered the spraying, dripping, and rolling techniques of the New York painters as 'clinical', 'impersonal', and 'flat in quality', he also refers to its characteristic symmetrical format and 'systematic repetition of motif' as 'mechanical'. He continues to favour the hand-done paint work of the British artists, that he felt demonstrated 'poetic empiricism', which lay in the intuitive act of painting itself.

Scott's paintings of the fifties, while simulating the size and audacity of American painting, maintained the intimacy and personal touch as mentioned by Patrick Heron. This is exemplified in the painting Blue Painting 1960 (Plate 14), and Black and Grey 1966 (Plate 15), in which evidence of the artist's sensitive line drawing is traced into the rich painted surface. Scott states:

The actual touch and the way I put paint on canvas matters very much. I am extremely interested in textural qualities - the thick paint, the thin paint, the scratched lines, the almost careful - careless way in which a picture's

... painted... I don't like a picture painted with a too slick, too efficient technique – painting with too much know-how.

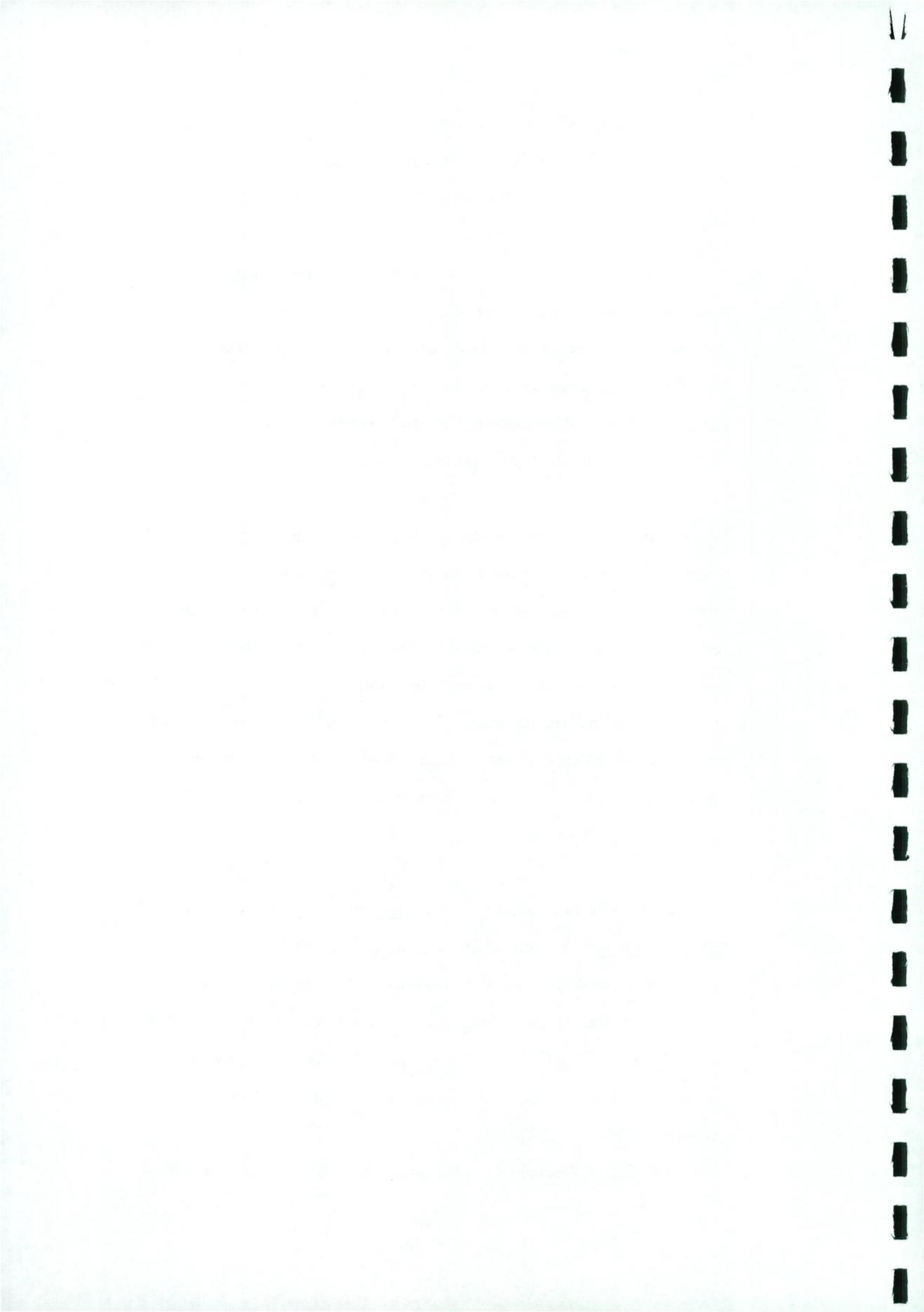
William Scott (Bowness, 1964, pg.11)

Simon Morley denies the claims made by Patrick Heron. According to Rosenblum, British artists failed to recognize that the subject matter for the American artists was not construed in the same sense as Patrick Heron, who was educated by the School of Paris. Contrary to this, painters such as Rothko concerned themselves with the subject matter related to 'metaphysical truths' (Morley, 1996, pg.12).

He continues by saying that Heron's subject matter was the painting itself, and it is used as a vehicle for a sensuous response to the world, reminiscent of Bonnard, Matisse, and Braque. Yet, Rothko's paintings reduced the visual stimuli so that the viewer could concentrate on a 'spiritual, inner calm', rendered more real than the 'outer sensual' one. He goes on to say that the Americans abolished the image and depiction's of events outside the canvas, and replaced it with a new type of activity in which 'painting became it's own subject without meaning.' (Morley, 1996, pg.12)

Similarly, Rosenblum comments in Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition, reflects Morley's statement by concluding that painters, such as Rothko and Still, pursued a 'universal symbol', which was free from the repressive tradition of Western art. He also stated that the need for 'starting from scratch' and purifying the image, was just as compelling to northern Romantic painters such as Blake and Friedrich (Rosenblum, 1994, pg.208).

To revert back to Rosenblum's commentary, and the distinction he makes



between the universal and exterior subject matter of American art, and the English subject matter which is about the painting itself and focuses on the interior. The question that should be asked here is, which description of subject matter corresponds to Scott's work? Scott himself claims to belong to a European tradition, as he stated at the beginning of the chapter. Yet, the critic Simon Morley believes that Scott's abstractions of the fifties and sixties move back and forth between abstraction and figuration. Scott is noncommittal to the purist formal language of Abstract Expressionism. Unlike Patrick Heron, who argues in support of an art that 'stresses expressiveness of form and surface. This view is a common referent to the discourse of high modernism, which is a misleading discourse when describing Scott's work (Morley, 1998, pg.18).

The tensions between abstraction and figurative work is cited by Alan Bowness and his description of the painting Orange Still Life 1957 (Plate 13), in which Scott introduces the figure of a small child peering over the tilted table top. Also, later in Honeycomb Still Life 1957 (Plate 12), the figure is seen to merge with the side of the table. A reclining nude is indicated in another table like form in Upright Abstraction (1957). These paintings refer back to the nudes Scott painted, such as Nude: Red background 1957 (Plate 20), and Seated Figure: Orange 1956 (Plate 21) which demonstrate the beginnings of a move towards abstraction (Bowness, 1964, pg.10). Scott's reluctance to adhere to any particular style, is evident in the ambivalent nature of his paintings of this period, and reflected in his comment:

I may begin a picture as a careful recording of a special sensation evoked clearly at a remembered time and place, and by a continuous process of work, obliteration, change, an expression of an entirely different

thing grows, a figure into a landscape or into a still life, a man into a woman. I have no theory. I am concerned not only with 'space construction. What matters to me in a picture is the indefinable.

William Scott (Bowness, 1964, pg.19)

To further understand the above proposal to position Scott outside of a modernist discourse, it is necessary to supplement this claim with an examination of criticisms pertaining to the rigidity and elitism characteristic of high modernist discourse, heralded by the critic Clement Greenberg.

Peter Osborne sets out to examine Greenberg's account of the European tradition, in particular Cubism and its consequential liberation from imitation and representation. Greenberg believed that, while European painters who succeeded Cubism understood the movements break from representation, however, failed to realize that essentially it was to recapture the 'literal realization' and 'physical limitations of the medium' (Osborne, 1991, pg.65). Greenberg criticizes their return to an illustrative, although abstract, painting such as Kandinsky's 'art nouveau techniques and peasant decorations, failed to exploit the new pictorial space (Osborne, 1991, pg.65). Greenberg favoured an art based on 'the exploration of the emotional content of the pure physicality of pictorial means', exemplified by the Abstract Expressionists (Osborne, 1991, pg.66). Therefore, narrative, realism, description, subject matter of any kind was considered detrimental to Greenberg's idea of 'purism'.

Brian Wallis criticizes the myth of modernism created by Greenberg and his followers Rosenberg and Michael Fried. He examines the way

modernism is strictly bound to its 'own formally reductive system'. He describes it as follows:

...in the aesthetic economy of modernism, the amount of pure pleasure provided by a work of art was often gauged by how effectively that work separated itself from 'real' world to provide an imaginary space of ideal reflection.

(Wallis, 1984, pg.xiii)

Wallis then comments that it is this separation from the real that 'marginalized' issues of artistic motivation of interests outside the art system. As a result, denying an interpretation of the artwork within a specific historical or social context (Wallis, 1984, pg.xiii).

This causes problems when discussing Scott's work within a modernist discourse. To ignore the historical and social content of Scott's work is to dismiss his cultural upbringing, mentioned at the beginning in the introduction, which was a huge influential factor in his work.

David Freedburg is cited in an essay by Simon Morley, where he identifies the motivation of an historical and analytical approach to Scott's work, as a fear of the 'emotional' and 'visceral' reactions associated with an 'untutored' response (Morley, 1998, pg.16). Freedburg wanted to 'integrate our experience of reality into our experience of imagery in general, and through failure to do this, the interpretation of art would 'lapse into categorical preconceptions and ideological narrowness' (Freedburg, 1989, pg.434).

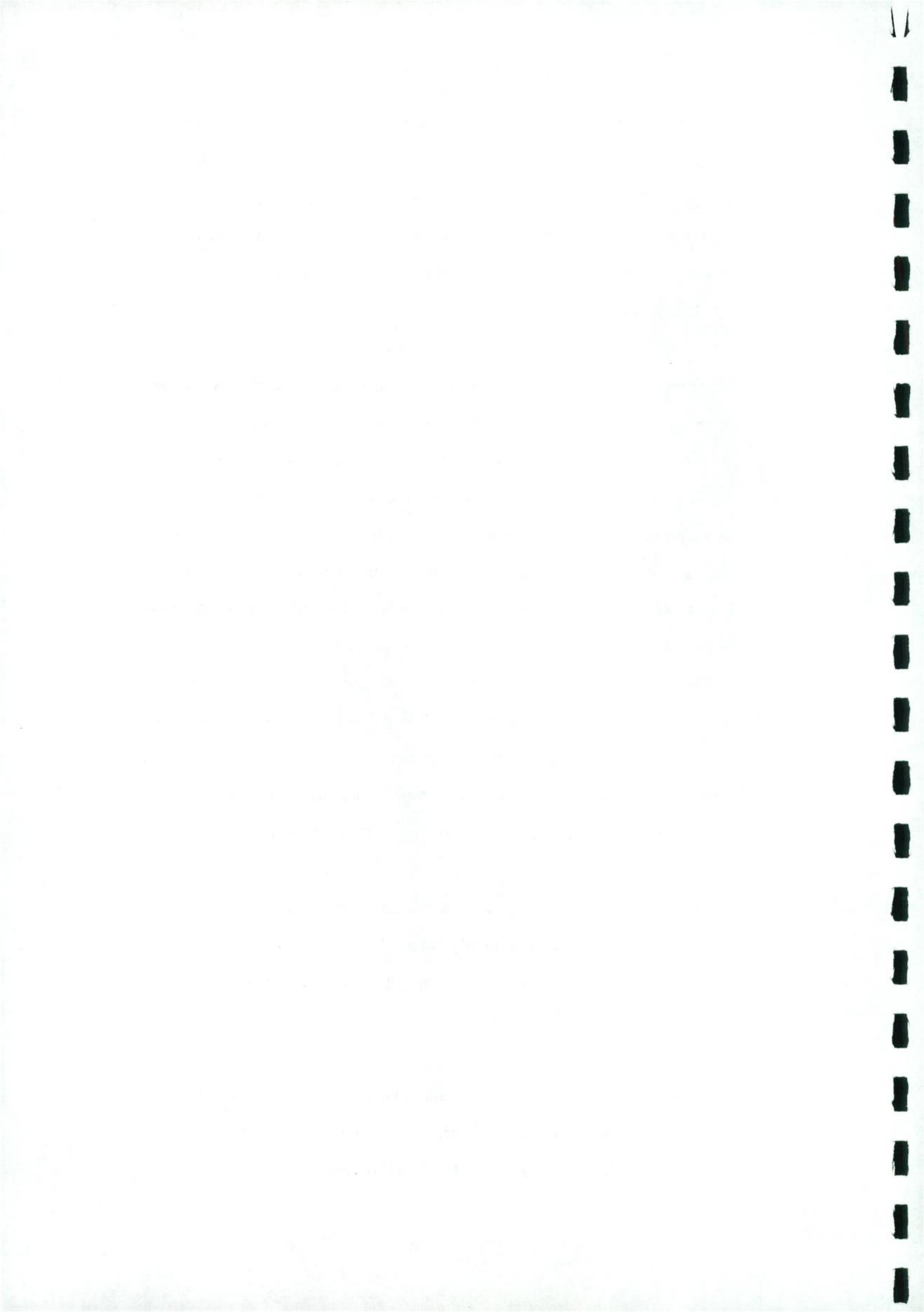
Similar 'ideological narrowness' applies when modernist high art adopts the

primitive and tribal cultures, such as Picasso and his interest in African sculpture. Hal Foster broaches this problem in the essay The Primitive Unconscious of Modern Art, he enquires as to what is at stake ideologically when the 'magical' character of tribal work is bestowed with modern values, intentionality, originality, and aesthetic feeling (Foster, 1982, ppg.201-202).

The reason for the above analysis of modernist adaptation of primitive art is to give an analytical framework within which to assess Scott's reaction to tribal art. Scott experienced firsthand the primitive art at Lascaux Caves in 1955. T.P.Flanagan draws attention to Scott's 'profound impressions' of the Caves, as evident in his late drawings in the fifties to the early seventies (Flanagan, 1986, pg.43). In 1970 Scott took a trip to Egypt, where he was impressed by ancient imagery. During this late stage in his life, and up until his death in 1989, his paintings were abstracting further into simple elements. Scott's persistent breaking down of form seems to Flanagan to be 'out of a need to go back, to rediscover an image of the mysterious, to a figuration of primitive responses.' (Flanagan, 1986, pg.45) Echoes of his primitive response can be seen in the paintings Blue Abstract 1959 (Plate 16), and Direction 1966 (Plate 17).

Another possible reason why Scott was attracted so much to this minimalism, was not because of its potential to pay homage to Greenberg's 'purist' intentions, but rather it a means to curb the infantile and indulgent imagery of the body.

Scott drew with charcoal, and the figures were depicted, not in full life size, but with sweeping contours that were repeatedly stated as to create a web of contours across the page. The finished image, as Flanagan



describes, is a 'vision of woman as the earth mother', as applied in the paintings Nude 1956 (Plate 22), Reclining Nude 1956 (Plate 23), and Study for Girl Surveyed 1971 (Plate 24).

In these drawings Scott eliminates any detail, and this paring down of his visual language assists Scott's efforts to seek out his own personal language that was instinctive. He states:

When I make drawings they are not made for visual data for a specific painting, but for my paintings in the plural. I draw to shock myself out of an easy rhythm. I begin with no conception whatever. An image emerges; almost always any image that I am obsessed with. I rub it out, and begin again, searching for it's counterpart.

William Scott (Flanagan, 1986, pg.45)

Similarly, Flanagan points out that Scott's work suggests rather than finalizes, hinting at an image but remaining allusive. He explains:

These drawings of William Scott's, in their uncompromising stance to resist representation manage to suggest the marls and markings of the natural world, and within their ambiguous configurations, lie shapes waiting like amoebia to resolve themselves.

(Flanagan, 1986, pg.46)



plate 12

plate 13



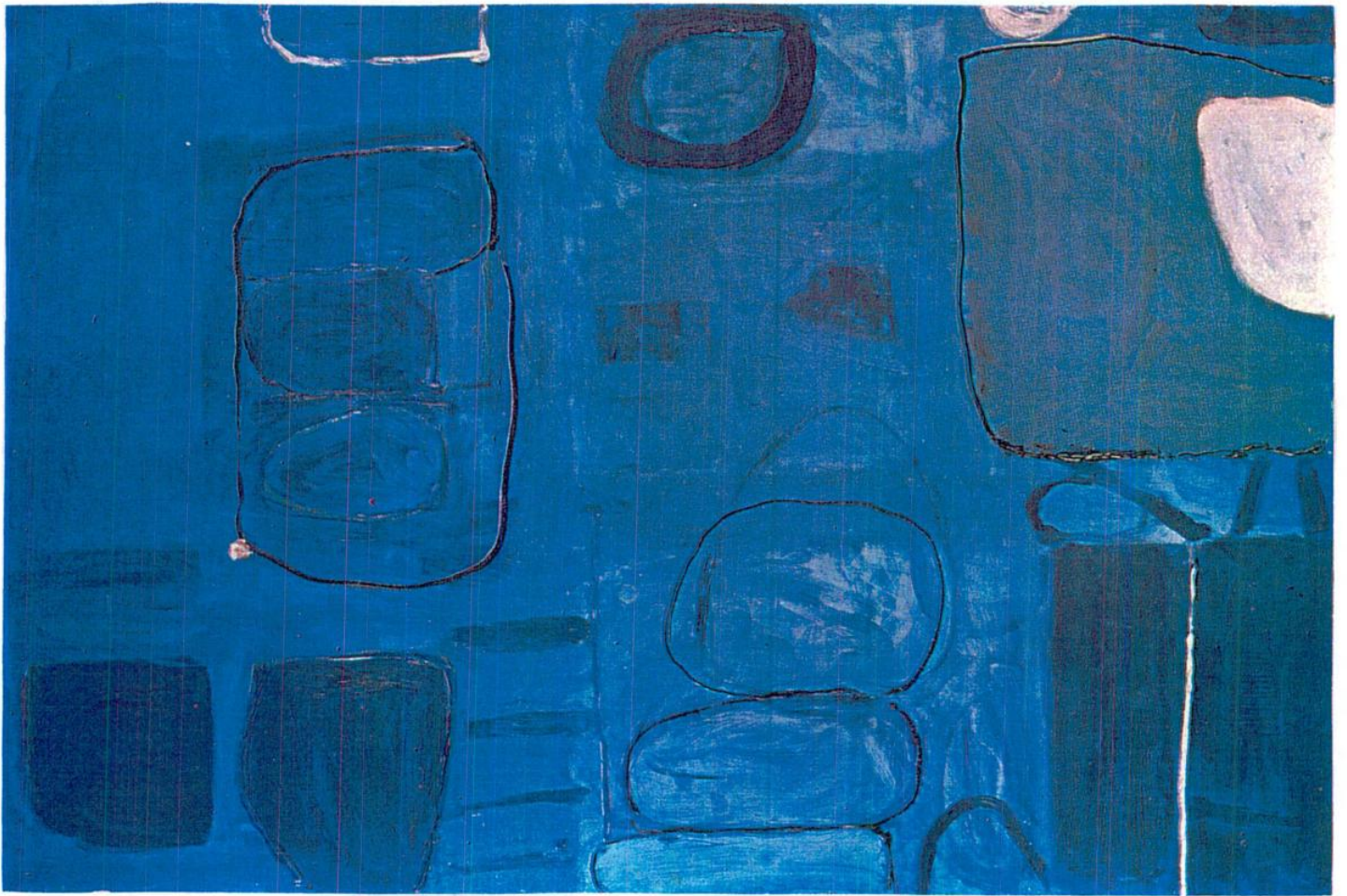


Plate 14



Plate 15



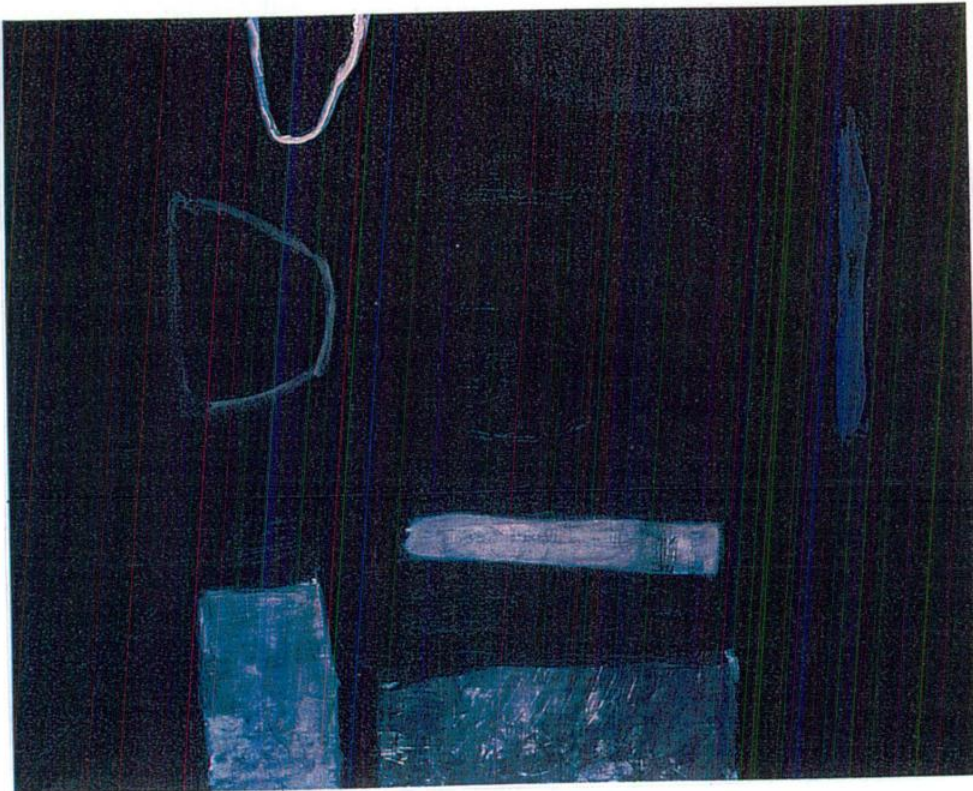
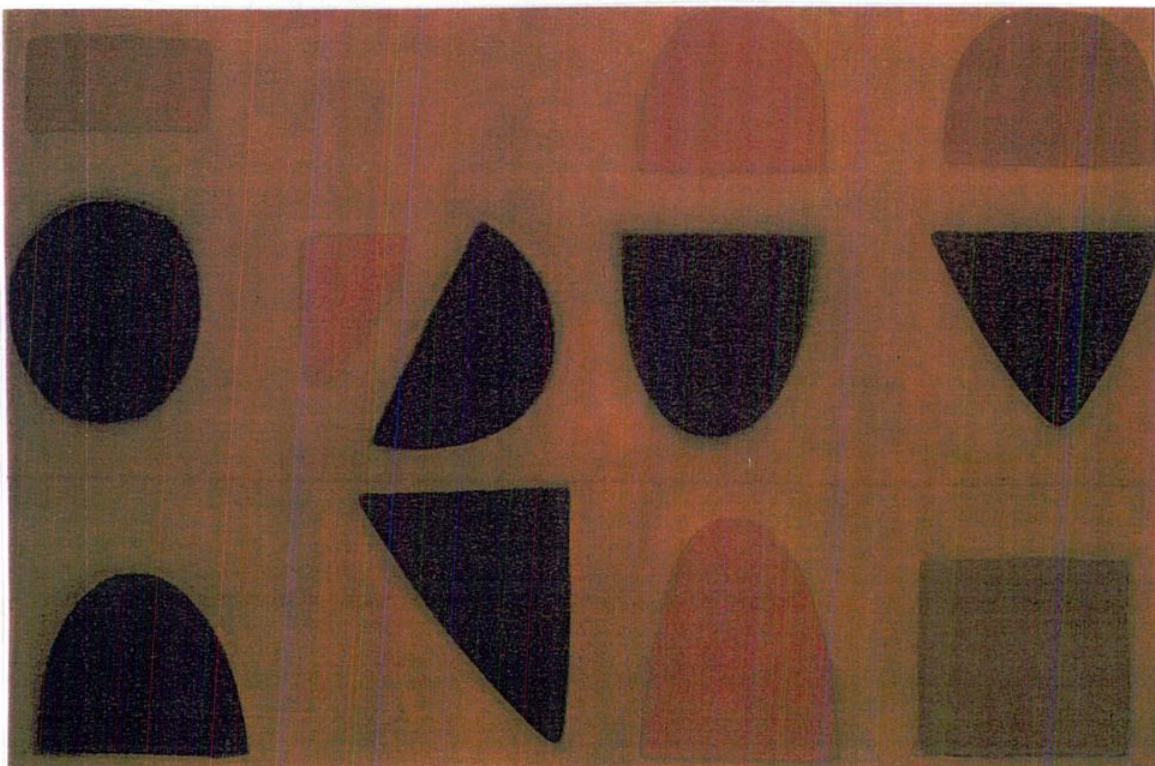
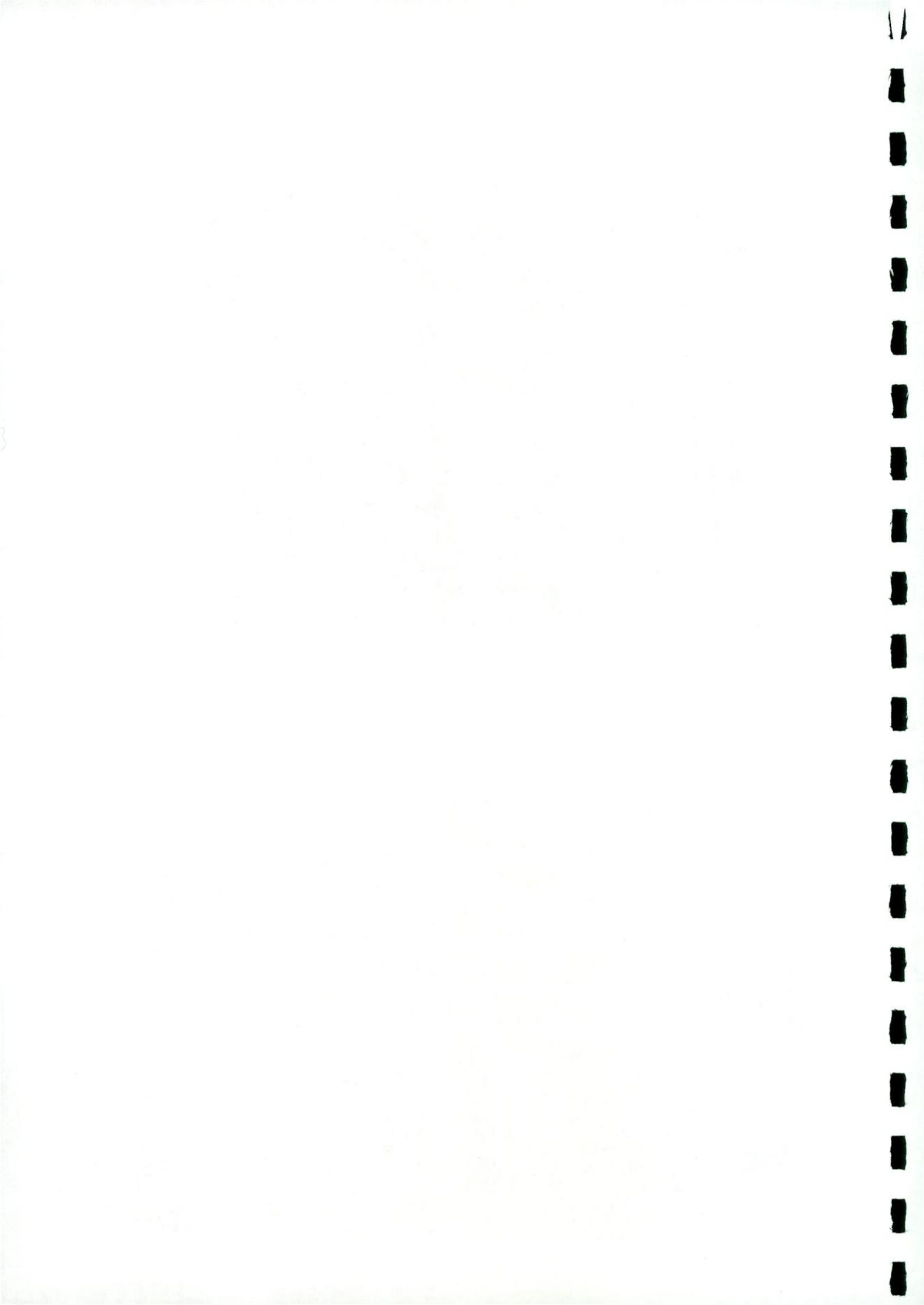


Plate 16

Plate 17





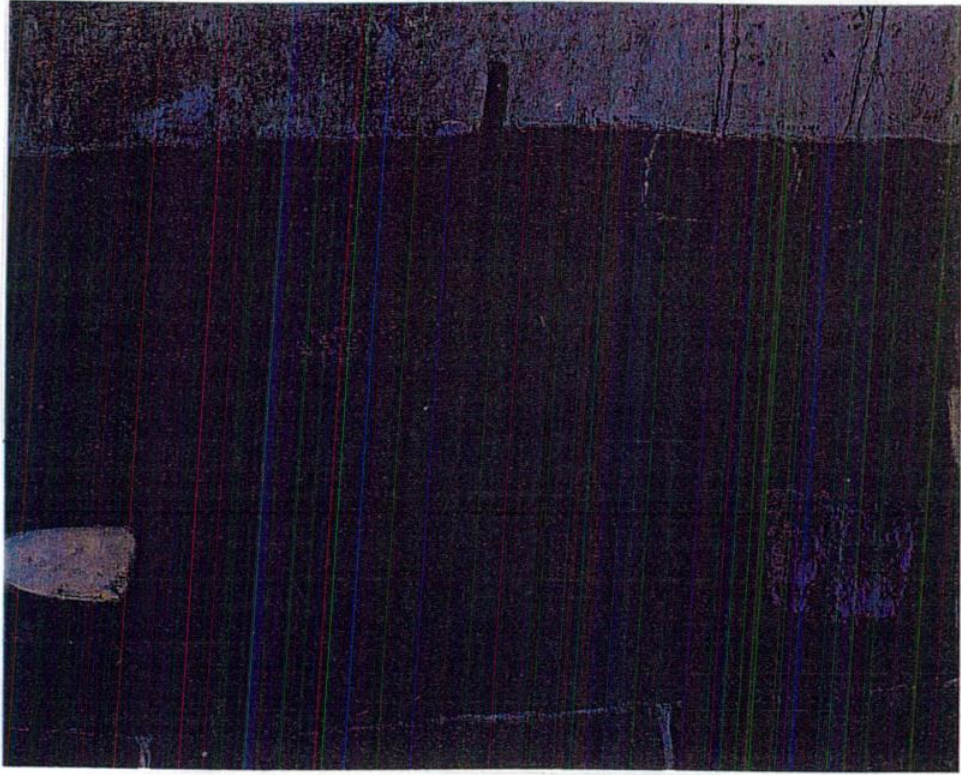


Plate 18

Plate 19

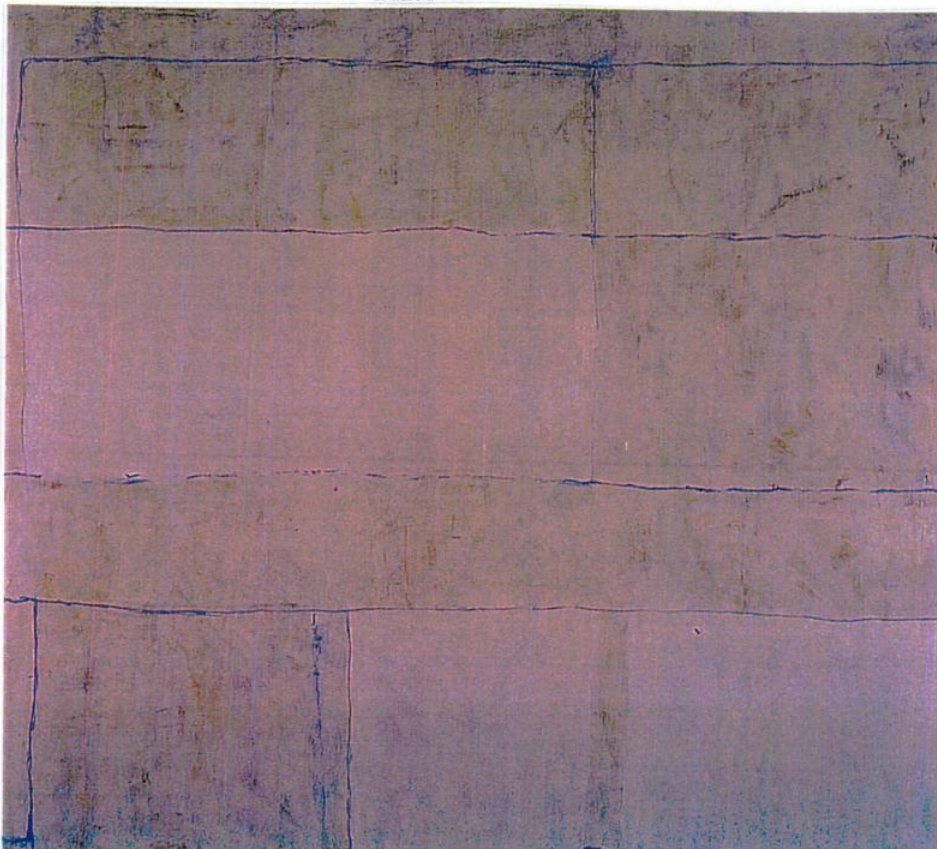


Plate 20

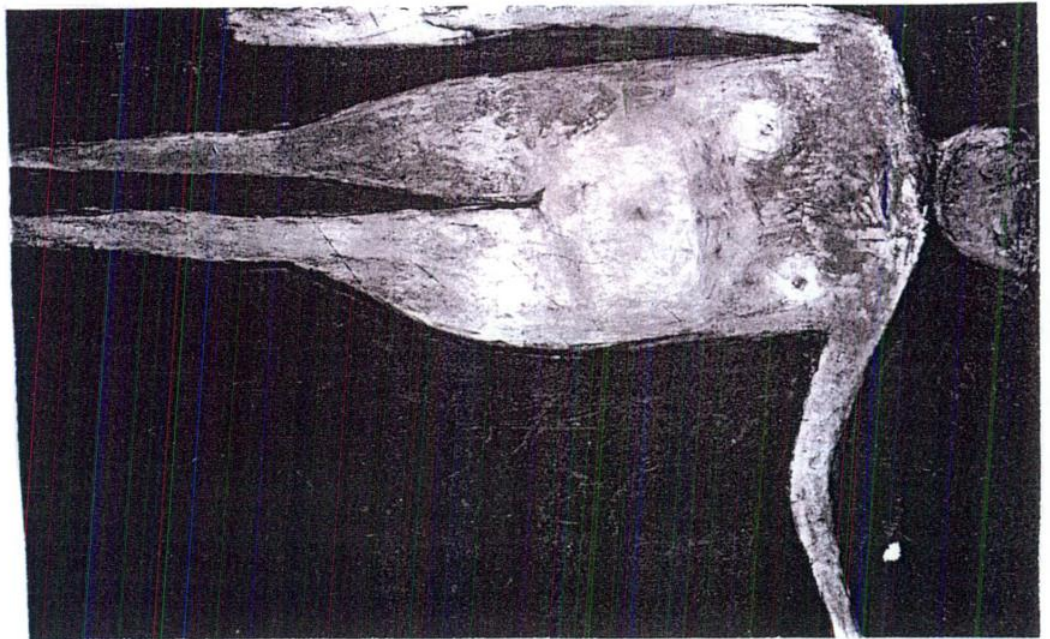


Plate 21

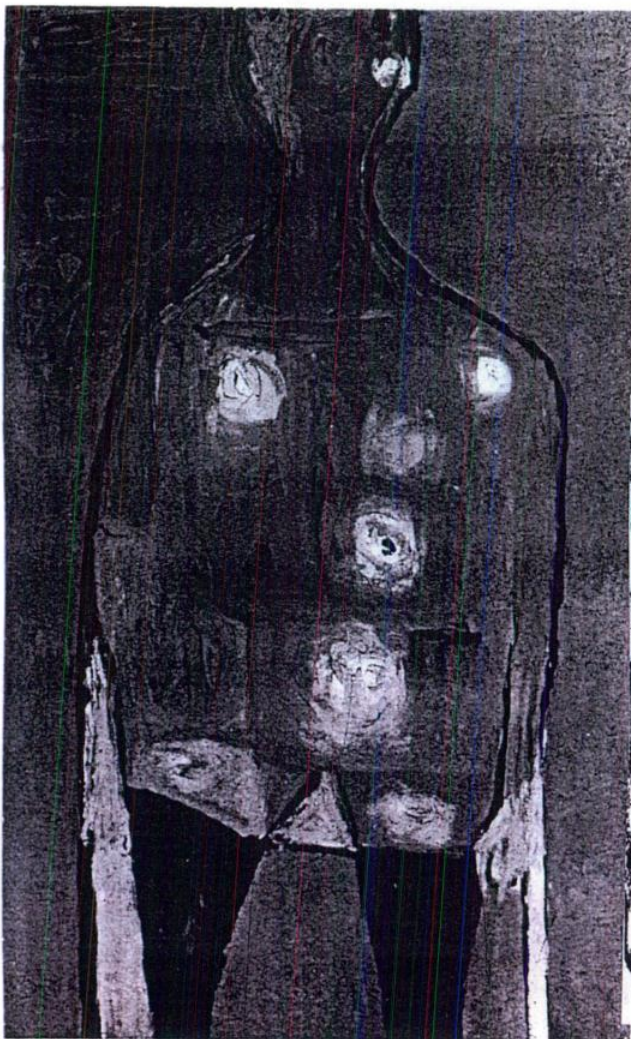


Plate 22



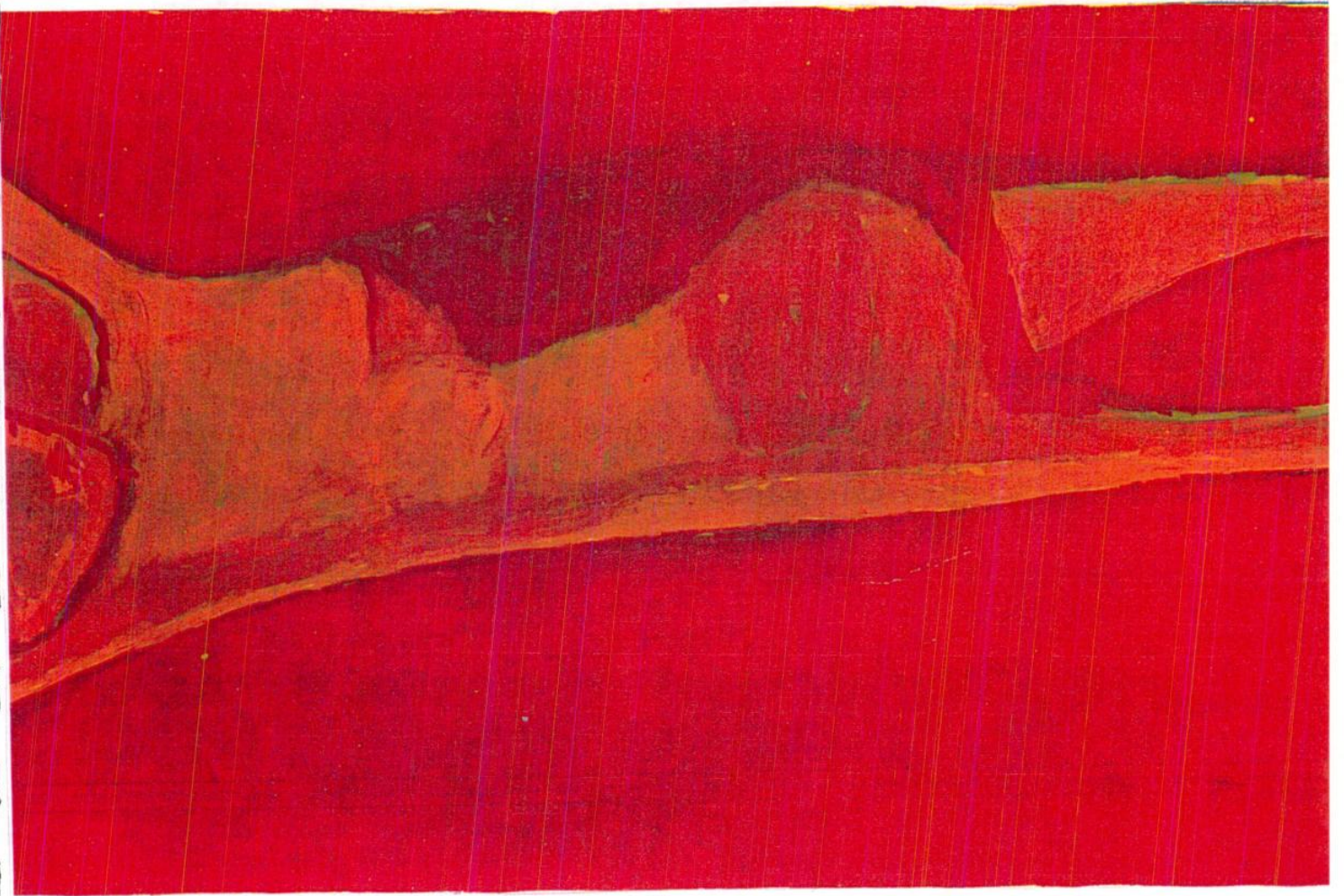
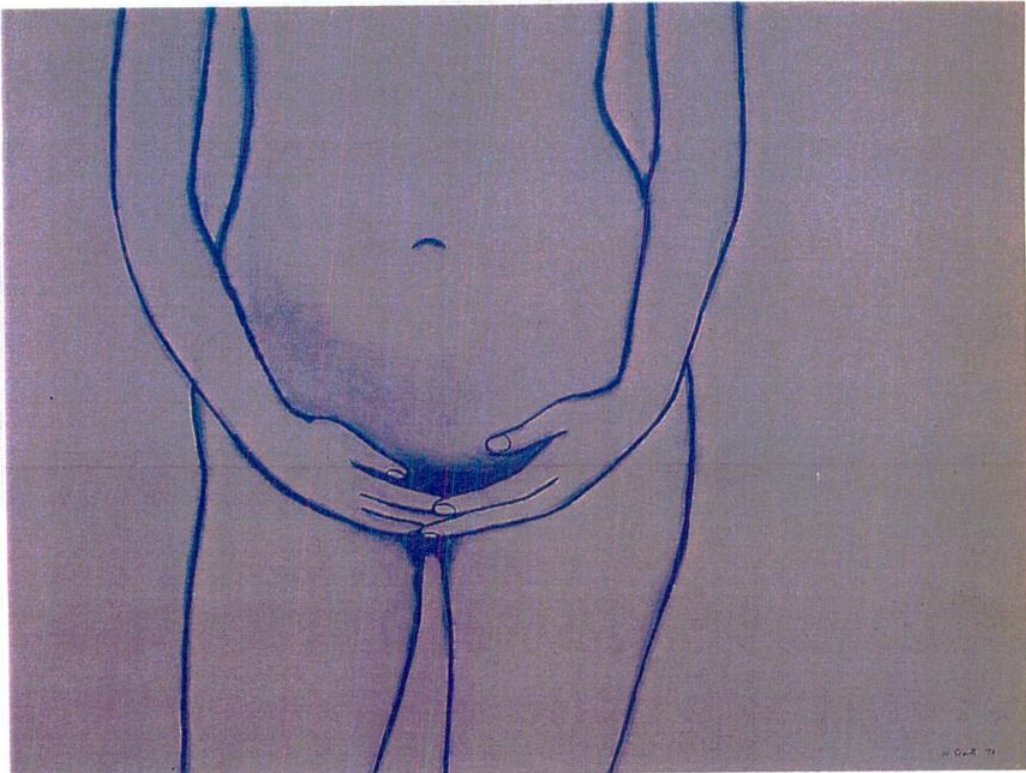
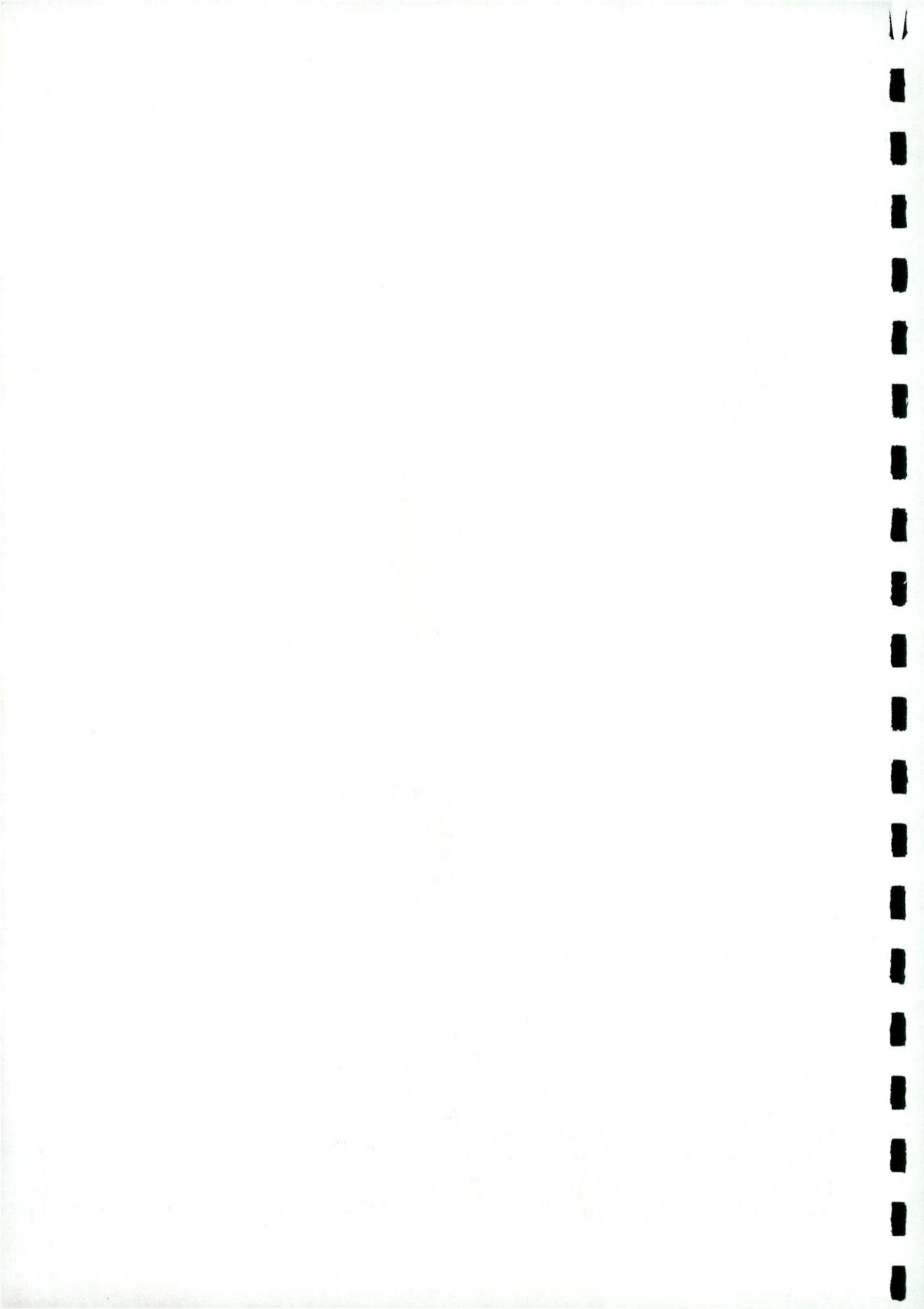


Plate 23

Plate 24





CONCLUSION

In summation, the focus of this thesis has been to explore the evolution of Scott's work. On the whole, the course of his works evolution has been to relate Scott's work to current critical analysis of the modernist paradigm . In doing so, the realization that this form of analysis restricts the power of Scott's imagery by infusing it with aesthetic criteria, which responds to the world in a rational way. It is inevitable that modern art is subject to the modern world, which commands an understanding of it which is straightforward and unambiguous.

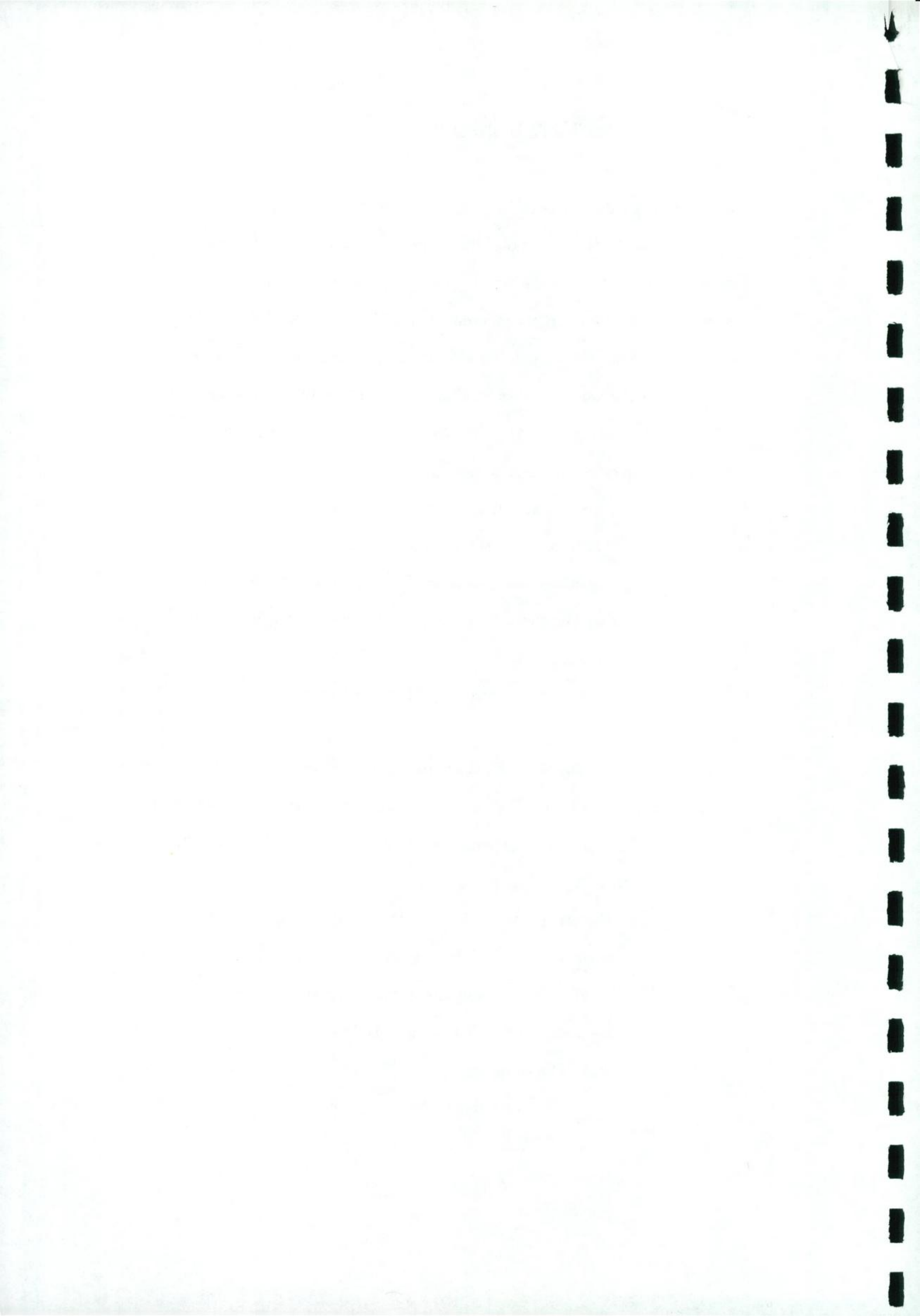
...the danger of a strict and unthinking contextualism is that it fails to take into account the ways in which individuality is pressured by history and context; it assumes the very position of generality that it ostensibly seeks to avoid.

(Freedburg, 1989, pg.439)

The words of Freedburg which claim the contextualism of history to be an eradication of the individuality present in the work. The image needs to be freed from the constraints of conventional critical appraisal as Freedburg continues to remark:

The reality of the image does not lie, as we might like to think, in the associations it calls forth; it lies in something more authentic, more real, and infinitely more graspable and verifiable than association.

(Freedburg, 1989, pg.439)



Freedburg continues to say that the need to return to the origins of the art work is often adopted when the 'strategies of high formalism' fail to satisfy. He states:

The trouble with all this...is that we cannot thus purify ourselves either of our past or of the insistent present. We have seen and learned too much; we cannot see with old eyes. History does not give us that possibility - and so the question still remains whether we have any other resources for grasping the power that is constrained by context, event, and idiosyncrasy.

(Freedburg, 1989, pg.431)

The descent into the area of the untutored response, with the sense of enigma and ambiguity it creates, is best comprehended in terms of psychoanalytic thinking about inherently ambivalent psychic processes. This is reflected in chapter one, which references to psychoanalytic applied by Meyer Schapiro to Cézanne still life, is looked at in chapter one in terms of Scott's still life imagery and his return to the childhood memories which are both allusive and deeply rooted in the artist's psyche. It was also made clear that Scott's exploration still life and the neutrality of the subject gave the artist freedom to explore an individual expression independent from the confines of modernism.

Chapter Two scrutinizes the tendency to group Scott within the context of British art movements and styles. Giving an account of the unstable nature of British art in the thirties and forties, during the war. It points to Scott's ambiguous relationship with his contemporaries and his final turn to an art that is personal and free from association with a British national identity.

Finally, in Chapter Three points to Scott's introduction to the developments in America during the fifties. It confirms Scott's noncommittal relationship with the New York painters and his continual gravitation to a personal visual language.

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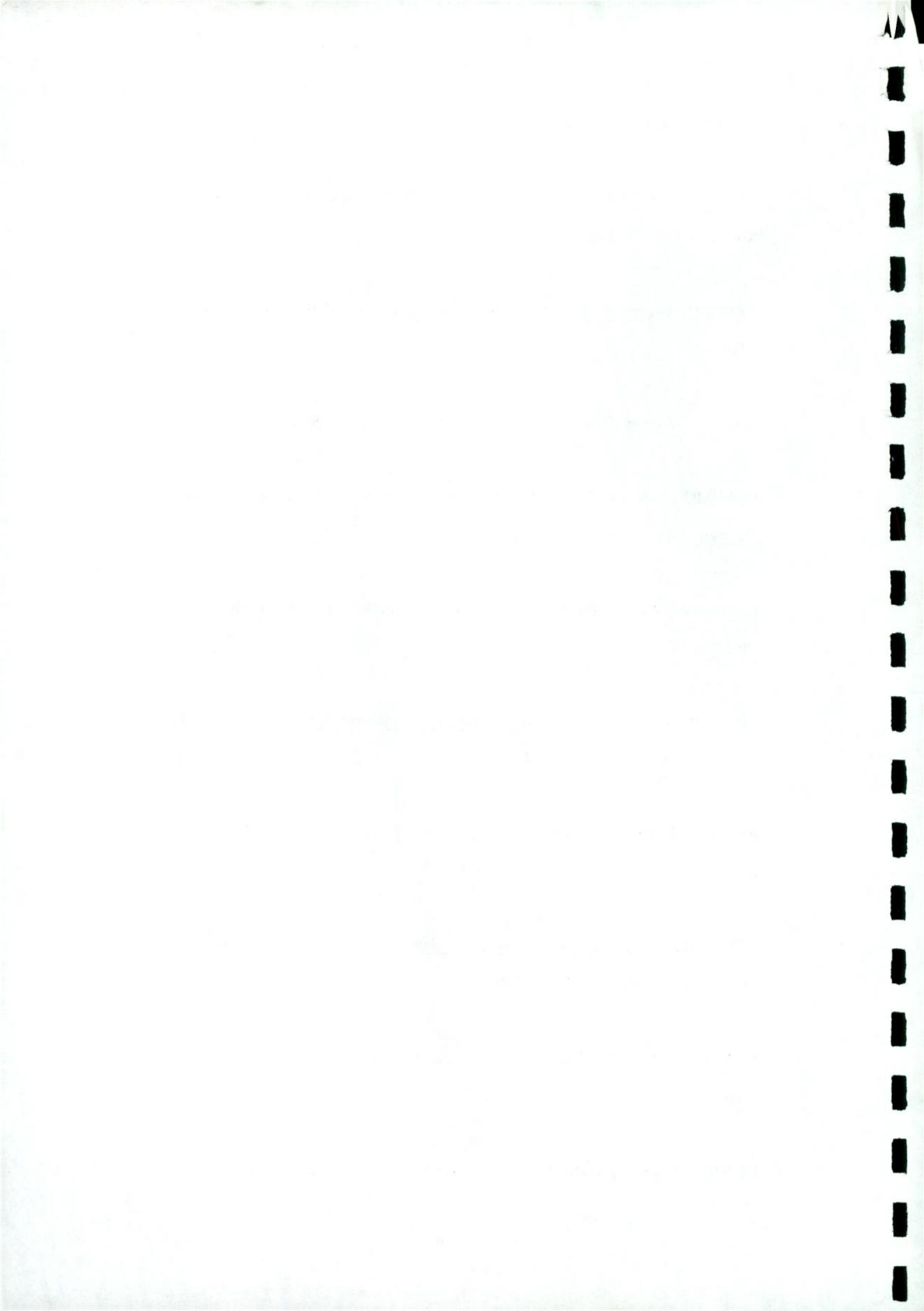
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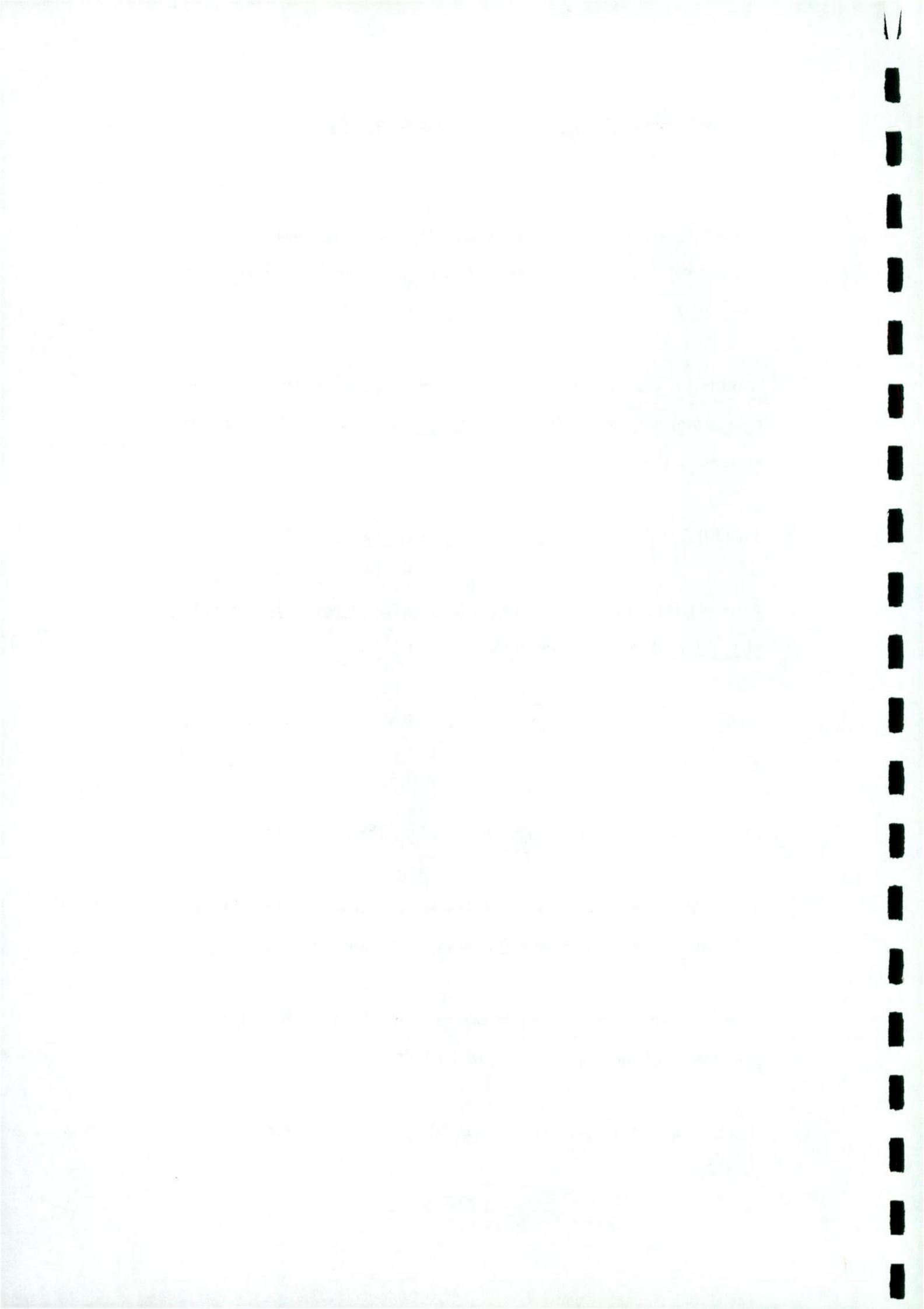
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List of Plates

<u>PLATE NO.</u>	<u>TITLES</u>	<u>SIZE (INCHS)</u>	<u>MEDIUM</u>
1	The Frying Pan, 1946	21X25	OIL ON CANVAS unless otherwise
2	Two Bowls with Egg, 1947	14X18	stated
3	Pan and Pear: Blue Theme, 1975	11X15	
4	Colander, Beans & Eggs, 1948	26X32	
5	Composition I: Pots & Pans, 1955	20X24	
6	Pears and a Knife no.2, 1973	25X25	
7	Still Life Form - Linear, 1975	11X15	Gouache & Pastel on Pape
8	Block Classic Still Life, 1956	43X71	
9	Painting, 1957	48X60	
10	Breton Woman, 1939	40X32	
11	Breton Nude, 1939	32X25	
12	Honeycomb Still Life, 1957	48X60	

13	Orange Still Life, 1957	48X60	
<u>PLATE NO.</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>SIZE</u>	
14	Blue Painting, 1960	72X48	
15	Black & Grey, 1966	40X50	
16	Blue Abstract, 1959	67X40	
17	Direction, 1966	48X71	
18	Still life, 1957	48X60	
19	Space Division, 1962	63X68	
20	Nude: Red Background, 1957	66X40	
21	Seated Figure: Orange, 1956	66X40	
22	Nude, 1956	19X25	
23	Reclining Nude, 1956	36X60	
24	Study for Girl Surveyed, 1971	23X30	Watercolour on Paper

