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INTRODUCTION

My reasons in choosing to write about SOUTINE are mixed. Until a year ago I knew virtually nothing about his works. His name had been mentioned many times in relation to my own paintings of carcasses, but for some reason I declined to look at his work (perhaps fearing that what I had to say had all been said before). Browsing in the library I accidentally came across a book dealing with his paintings. The Ceret landscapes did not impress me, and then I saw his carcass and fowl paintings I had never seen anything so extraordinarily fascinating as these works. I read some remarks made by Ernst-Gerhard Gusse propounding the theory that SOUTINE was a necrophiliac, and I decided to write about SOUTINE - if only to defend his work from such unfound theories. I spent much time looking at his paintings during the course of my studies and gradually I began to see the Ceret Landscapes unravel, as if they were actually breathing and resolving themselves before my eyes.

In the following pages I shall consider the elements in SOUTINE's work which seem most important and individualistic. In particular, his attitude towards the 'subject' and the metamorphic qualities in his paintings will require discussion - though neither of these spheres was SOUTINE's exclusive preserve. I hope to show that his approach here was wholly individual, and that the uniqueness of his contribution to the world of art sprang directly from his handling of subject matter and form.

Because so little is known of SOUTINE's intentions, there is a tendency for critics to theorize in order to offer some sort of explanation on SOUTINE's paintings. An effort will be made to evaluate some of these critiques and form conclusions.

In the second chapter I will trace SOUTINE's development as a painter from the early Cezanne - influenced years to his artistic fulfilment, observing, analysing and relating some of the formal elements in his work in the context of his background and influences.

In chapter three I shall seek to assess SOUTINE's work in relation to his contemporaries in an effort to view him in perspective. Finally I will look at a few artists who share common ground with him and have benefited by his influence.



CHAPTER I

Section I

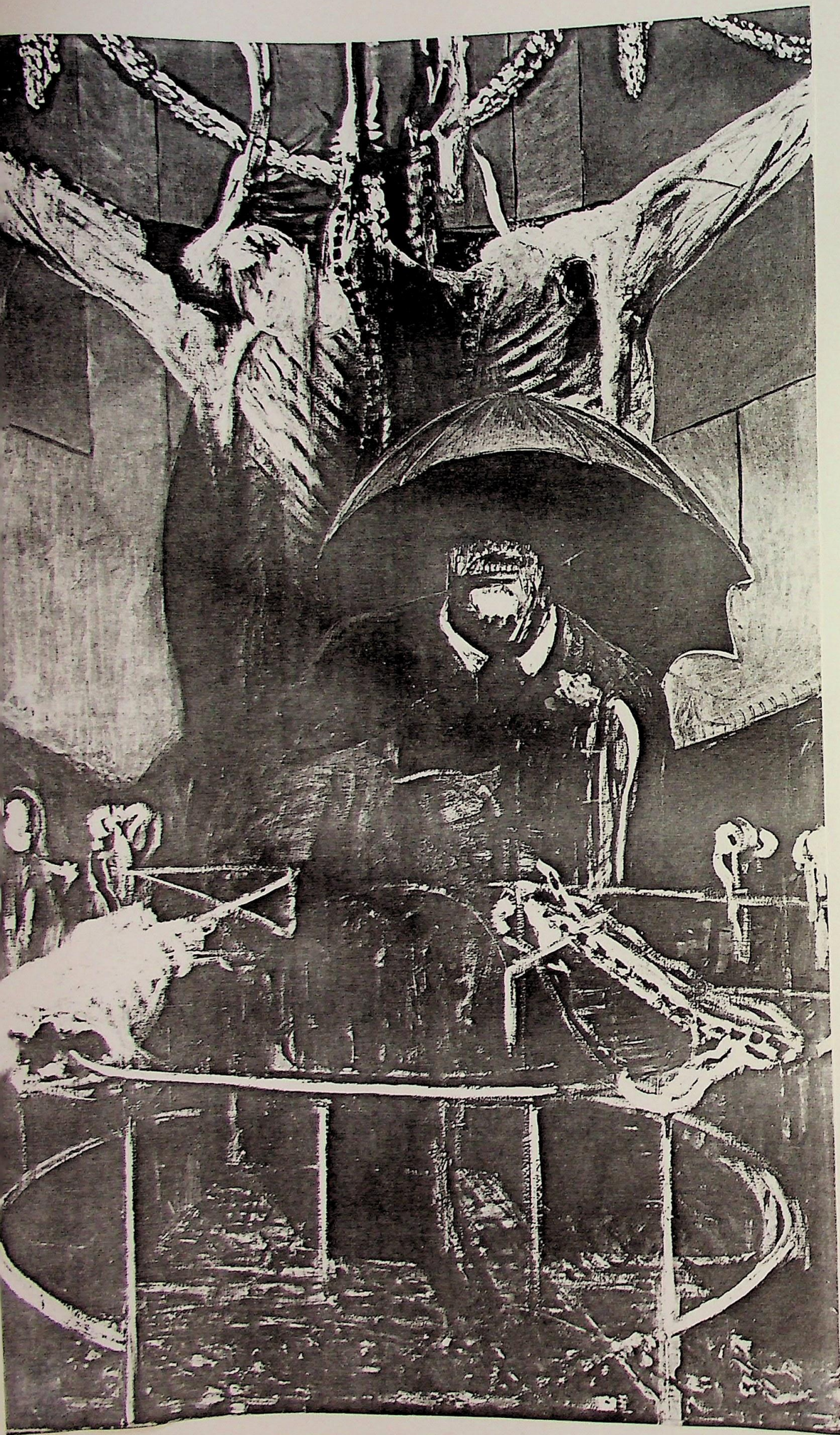
ORGANIC STRUCTURES IN SOUTINE'S WORK

Writers on SOUTINE continually point out the way in which his subjects seem to have a life of their own, whether by their tumultuous movement or their metamorphic qualities. This is perhaps the most characteristic quality in his work. In Still Life With Fish, (Fig. I) the fish writhe from the plate. They almost jump out of the painting itself. The forks in Fish and Tomatoes suggest the grasping of hands, as in the paintings of a dog and a hare, (1920's), where the forks give the impression of hands ripping open the stomach. The Skate (Fig. I5) was also particularly appealing to SOUTINE because of the anthropomorphic possibilities in its striking resemblance to the human face. Many of the late landscape paintings feature trees that seem to take on the appearance of waving arms and staring eyes.

In an interview with DAVID SYLVESTER, ^I FRANCIS BACON talked about his Painting 1946 (Fig. 2).

F.B. "Well, one of the pictures I did in 1946, the one like a butcher's shop, came to me as an accident. I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field. And it may have been bound up in some way with the Three Forms", (Three Studies At The Base Of A Crucifixion, 1944 "that had gone before, but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose this picture". There is a direct link between

STILL LIFE WITH FISH. 1918 Fig. 1



FRANCIS BACON, PAINTING 1946. Fig. 2

the 1946 painting and SOUTINE'S carcasses of beef, but BACON'S nightmarish vision is absent entirely from the more direct images of SOUTINE. Yet the work of these artists share a common ground in a metamorphic sense, although BACON'S paintings tend towards the visual metaphor.

D.S. "The recurring combination of the crucifixion imagery with that of the butcher's shop seems to happen in two different ways - on the one hand by the setting around the sides of meat, and on the other through the transformation of the crucified figure itself into a hanging carcass".

F.B. "Well we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher's shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal you can think of the whole horror of life, of one thing living off another".

AIDEN DUNNE,² writing about BARRIE COOK'S 1960's paintings of disembowled sheep said, "When COOKE enlisted his butcher's aid in recovering portions of sheep carcasses, it followed on from paintings he had made about couples - joining, conjunctions. And when, one day, helpfully sectioning the scapula of sheep, the butcher, cleaver in hand, inquired where exactly he should cut, COOKE, peering at the livid complication of flesh and bone, was struck by this continuity: bone, gristle, flesh. And experienced the revelation that bone is muscle congealed. Not one thing or the other, but both".

This sense of echoing organic relationships throughout nature is the unifying component in SOUTINE'S paintings.

To look at the glorious jewellike intensity of his carcasses, the "blood-redness, fire-redness" ³ of his gladioli paintings, and the suggestion of veins, nerves and body tissue in the membraneous pigment of the choirboys and pastry cooks brings to mind an extraordinary piece of prose written by HUYSMANS, ⁴ in which he describes a collection of exotic flowers. "The Cibotium Spectabile, challenging comparison with the weirdest nightmare with an enormous oran-utang's tail poking out of a cluster of palm-leaves - a brown, hairy tail twisted at the tip into the shape of a bishop's crozier The gardeners brought in still more varieties, this time affecting the appearance of a fictitious skin covered with a network of counterfeit veins. Most of them, as if ravaged by syphilis or leprosy, displayed livid patches of flesh mottled with roseola; others had the bright pink colour of a scar that is healing or the brown tint of a scab that is forming some all white like the Albane, which looked as if it had been fashioned out of the pleura of an ox or the diaphanous bladder of a pig. The Aurora Borealis flaunted leaves the colour of raw meat, with dark-red ribs and purplish fibrils, puffy leaves that seemed to be sweating blood and wine Where she (nature) had not found it possible to imitate the work of human hands she had been reduced to copying the membranes of animals' organs, to borrowing the vivid tints of their rotting flesh, the hideous splendours of their gangrened skin".

CHAPTER I

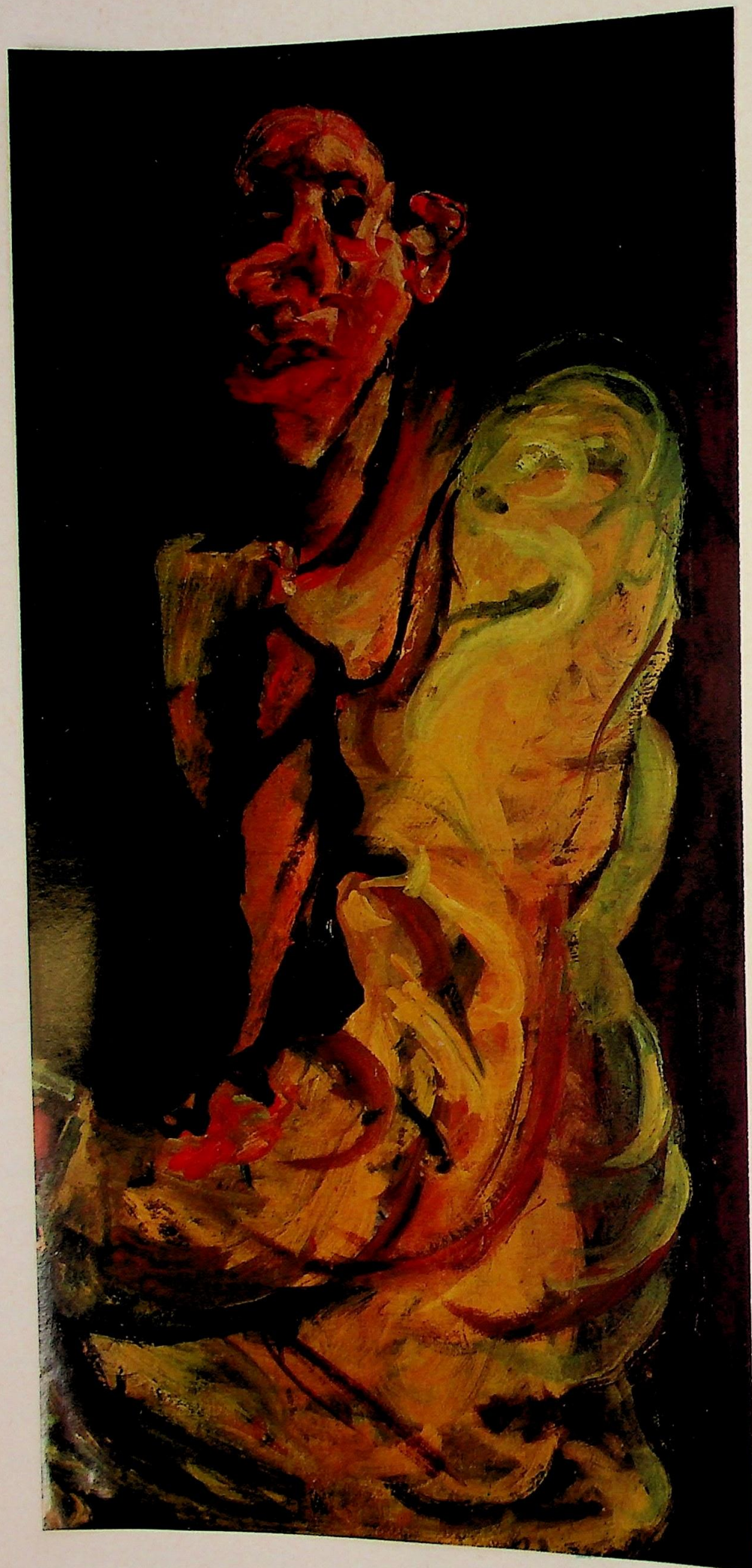
SECTION II

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

SOUTINE always worked directly from his subject matter. ANDREW FORGE⁵ points out that he, "identified himself wholeheartedly with the tradition of painting in front of appearances". Stories abound as to his search for the appropriate subject to paint from. "Mlle. GARDE".⁶ SOUTINE'S mistress, wrote of the time when he went off in search of trees to paint "At last he found a subject. As usual, he looked at the subject at least ten times before deciding to paint it. He went, came back, returned and made so much commotion running back and forth between our house and the trees that it aroused the attention of the police who thought he must be a dangerous madman". In Paris during the 'twenties, he would search the poultry shops with a friend for a particular chicken. On one occasion, the poulterer offered him a fat bird, out of sympathy for SOUTINE'S apparent poverty, but he insisted on buying an emaciated chicken: "I want a very lean chicken with a long neck and flaccid skin". Eventually, he was given a pathetic specimen by the puzzled poulterer. Out on the street he held up the bird admiringly and said, "I'm going to hang it up by the beak with a nail. In a few days it should be perfect"⁷ MADELEINE CASTAING,⁸ friend and patron of SOUTINE relates "Another time he came to us in a state of indescribable excitement: "Come

with me, I beg you, I've found such a lovely horse, it looks almost human. I'd like to paint it, I'll never find such a lovely animal again". We set off to the ends of the earth, and there in the woods was a family of showmen - children, parents - all sitting on the grass eating their lunch. In the clearing stood a gypsy caravan and the unyoked horse, exhausted, its coat covered in mud and with sores too. "Its eyes are human eyes, they express such suffering and exhaustion, it hasn't even the strength left to lie down and wait for a merciful release". We took them all back with us: horse, caravan, showmen, children; they stayed with us for three days - and SOUTINE painted the horse". There were even greater problems in obtaining human models and it is not difficult to imagine how the pursuing, finding and fixing of the subject contributed greatly to the intensity with which SOUTINE finally painted his subject.

SOUTINE'S obsession with the motif was converted directly into his paintings. He did not work, as the Impressionists had done, in the spirit that any piece of nature was nearly as good as any other, and that what mattered was not what it was in itself but the aesthetic impressions that could be got from it. For SOUTINE, it mattered desperately where he was and what he painted. Nor is it possible to relate his subjects to a general intention or philosophy outside the painting experience, as it is with the work of GOYA, DAUMIER or VAN GOGH. His portraits are of all types - his friends, peasants, the bourgeois. Nothing of a social nature can be deduced from his series of uniformed figures of cooks, page boys and choirboys. Perhaps only a late painting called Motherhood (Fig. 9),



SELF PORTRAIT. 1923 Fig. 3

CHAPTER I

in which a seated woman holds a sleeping or dead child, can be read symbolically.

Although SOUTINE'S portraits are full of repetitive mannerisms with a very limited range of pose and type, his figures are so unique as to be almost grotesque. Paradoxically, the one common element in all his paintings is their uniqueness. As ANDREW FORGE⁹ says, "He seems to look at them as if at freaks - as if appalled by the differentness of human beings". Take, for instance the 1923 Self Portrait (Fig.3). The nose is enormous and deformed, the slack lips protrude and are painted in a strong red. The eyes are small and piggish, the ear stands out from the head like a weird handle. It is the same with his still lifes. His compositions revolve round themes related to death, but what carries these themes is SOUTINE'S obsessive awareness of the individual objects out of which the group is made. A lemon could be looked at as an oval sphere, or as an area of yellow, or as a metaphor - a jewel, a piece of gold. But for SOUTINE it was first a lemon - a grotesque and wondrous event that it should look like one, or that is the feeling one gets. His dead fish are like monstrous beings, his turkeys are extraordinary even when most recognisable.

the course of his work from intention to full realization. In attempting to rationalize his creative objectives, wrote: "I have pursued the intention to spell out how I look at nature and yet also reveal myself simultaneously, reveal my innermost, my way of being - as far as this is possible. A well-meaning observer has said that my thought is not separated from matter, that the elements of matter, their intuitive perception enter into my ideas and are intimately permeated with them."

CHAPTER I

SECTION III

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

We know that SOUTINE'S inspiration sprang directly from his subject matter, rather than as a result of the formation of a concept which was realized subsequently, but we do not know how the creative process functioned or to what extent he consciously organised the formal elements in his paintings, nor are we sure of his intentions, or how great a part his unconscious played. Many artists have tried to analyse the creative process in creating a work of art. DUCHAMP, writing about "The Creative Act" ^{IO} made some valuable points about the relationship between the artist, his intention, his realization of that intention, and the relationship between the work of art and the spectator. He believed that the artist was like a "mediumistic being" and this being the case the artist could not be in a "state of consciousness" as to what he was doing or why. The artist then, DUCHAMP believed, had to work on some sort of intuitive level, and would not be capable of analysing the course of his work from intention to full realization. GOETHE, ^{II} in attempting to rationalize his creative objectives, wrote : "I have pursued the intention to spell out how I look at nature and yet also reveal myself simultaneously, reveal my innermost, my way of being - as far as this is possible. A well-meaning observer has said that my thought is not separated from matter, that the elements of matter, their intuitive perception enter into my ideas and are intimately permeated with them;

FOOTNOTES

(CHAPTER ONE)

- I Francis Bacon, in an interview with David Sylvester, Interviews With Francis Bacon 1962 - 79 *insufficient information*
- 2 Aiden Dunne, "Barrie Cooke: The Moment Of Seeing", Magill pp. 51 *late?*
- 3 Monroe Wheeler quoted by Alfred Werner, Soutine, p.78
- 4 Joris-Karl Huysmans, Against Nature, pp. 98 - 101
- 5 Andrew Forge, Soutine, p. 13
- 6 "Mlle. Garde", quoted by Maurice Tuchman, C. Soutine, arts council catalogue, p.64.
- 7 Michel Georges-Michel, quoted by Tuchman, C. Soutine, arts council catalogue, p. 65.
- 8 Madeleine Castaing, "Memories of Soutine", C. Soutine, arts council catalogue, p. 16.
- 9 Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.22.
- 10 Duchamp, "The Creative Act", The New Art, edited, Battcock.
- 11 Goethe, quoted by John Alsberg, Modern Art And Its Enigma, p. 23.

CHAPTER II

PORTRAITURE

The vast majority of SOUTINE's human images are single portraits, usually seated figures, half- or three-quarter length. His female sitters are generally more individual than his male portraits, especially those painted after 1920, in which the majority of them wear some sort of uniform-choir boys, page boys, pastry cooks, valets and waiters. Besides those, there is a painting of a female nude, a few of a mother and child, several of a woman paddling or *reclining* or feeding poultry, and a number of children. His approach to portraiture, which remains constant from about 1916 onwards, rests largely in the distinctive manner in which he positions the figure in the pictorial field. The subjects are placed centrally and frontally in the picture space. They confront you and command your attention, yet there is little dialogue between painter and model; they seem almost indifferent to the presence of the artist. And although SOUTINE projected himself into his portraits, the basic individual character of the persons painted is nonetheless present. In a photograph taken of the model who posed for the *Farm Girl*, twenty-six years after she sat for SOUTINE, there is still a remarkable likeness. MAURICE TUCHMAN,¹ tells a beautiful story of SOUTINE's attempt to retrieve one of his paintings, (a portrait of a small girl) from a dealer, so that he could repaint it. The dealer refused to return it, SOUTINE then implored him, "Please don't look too closely at her feet. She is very poor and her shoes need mending." He looked on the people in his paintings as real, living beings.



THE PASTRY COOK. 1927 fig. 4

SOUTINE'S personages pose purely and simply; he does not attempt to create a formal or narrative setting symbolising their occupation or social position, as for instance the Renaissance Masters would have done. Take for example the painting done in 1927 The Pastry Cook (Fig. 4). The three-quarter length figure stands in the pose most frequently struck by Soutine's models - hands firmly on hips. The white of the cap and garment sing out against the rich dark background, the figure is completely isolated, yet, despite that, there is a dialogue going on between it and the space around, simply because the area surrounding the figure has been painted into the cloth and vice-versa, the edges are broken and bleed into each other. This painting and the Choirboy of 1926 have much in common in the handling of the paint, and to my mind are some of the finest examples of sensuous, organic painting since Rembrandt.

At a glance, SOUTINE'S models seem to exist independently of the surrounding space, but they are distorted and flattened, hung up and spread out. By limiting himself to certain basic methods he was able to focus his attention and indulge himself in those elements that remained open to manipulation. In almost every painting he concentrated on the flesh. The flesh is metamorphosed into a purely coloured conglutinate surface, its viscous nature often of the same textural consistency as the background or surrounding space. "All is flesh, all as if flesh were grafted onto flesh"² - the uniforms of the choirboys and pastrycooks take on a luminous flesh-like quality.



PRAYING MAN. 1921 Fig.5

The portraits of praying men, painted in 1920-21 at Céret, show similar tendencies active in the landscapes of this time. By the formation of a pigment skin, in which the paint and body forms fuse. The forms are manipulated for pictorial reasons. Each distortion has its own logic - the curve of a back may be magnified to balance and echo the curve of the head. (Fig. 5) Praying Man 1921. This particular painting displays a significant resemblance to the Giacometti bronze busts known as *Têtes Tranchantes*. SOUTINE almost always painted the figure from a disconcertingly short distance and ^{always} frontally, except for this strange series of praying men. The fully frontal or three-quarter view is more conducive to a painterly approach (contrasting to this are the more linear, calligraphic portraits of Kokoschka, which are often in profile) but these portraits of SOUTINE'S done in profile are well suited to a praying person who is detached from the outside world. ESTI DUNOW ³ notes that, "The very movements in the paintings, that gives them the feeling of dematerialization, is directly connected to the praying act itself, in which the body's movements, incessant rocking back and forth, echo the reciting of the prayer."

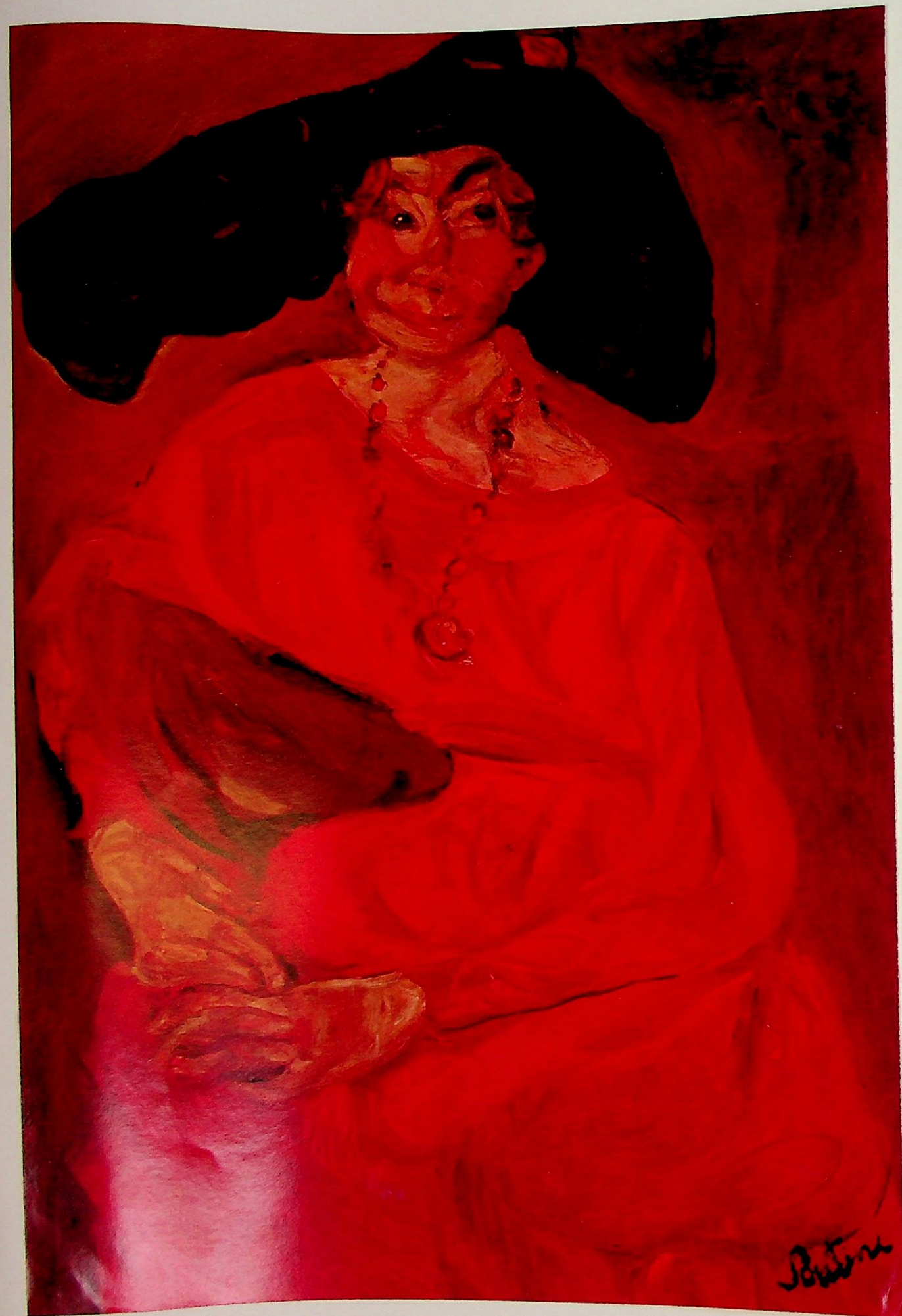
Between 1918 and 1923, SOUTINE painted three self portraits. The most famous of these, Self Portrait 1918 (Fig. 6) is a most unsettling painting not just because of how SOUTINE has portrayed himself as a pitiable, almost moronic like individual, but also because of its strange absence of logic - the head could swell and fill the canvas, the tie could fly off, no sense can be made from the shape of the collar and the shoulder of his jacket, if looked at from a rational point of view.



SELF PORTRAIT. 1910 Fig. 6

"But as soon as we stop doing this and see it as a phenomenon on its own, we see how like the loop of the right ear the collar is and how like the line of the cheek the shoulder is. We begin to recognise a kind of convulsive-ness in the drawing against which the particulars of the head are just holding their own".⁴ Painting a self portrait is an intensely emotional undertaking in which the artist confronts his own self psychologically and physically - the image reflected in the mirror does not necessarily correspond to how the artist feels, and the resolution of this dichotomy poses many problems. There is no intermediary subject through which he can dilute these feelings. That the self portrait was a trying emotional experience is evident in the fact that he abandoned any subsequent attempts.

The landscapes and still lifes of the Cagnes period (1922 - 1925) share certain elements with the portraits, as figure and background pull together. There is the same compression of near and distant forms developing in the landscapes. There is greater harmony between the figures and the space they inhabit. Elliptical patterns in the composition and curvilinear rhythms are predominant. Observe the Woman In Red 1923, (Fig. 7) the shoulders, arms, hands, hat, eyes, nose and mouth, even the chair, all are in keeping with the rounded rhythms. The brushstrokes conform to the rounded movements, as the more jagged treatment of the earlier paintings give way to swirls and curves. The figure stretches over a large area of the canvas, extending towards the edges. The S-shape of the body is exaggerated to the point of rendering the anatomy impossible, as is the odd curve of the nose, the asymmetricality of the eyes,



WOMAN IN RED. 1923 Fig. 7

the unusual length of the mouth and the elongated left arm. (A practice that had been used by CEZANNE and defended by MAX LIEBERMANN, who exclaimed: "such a beautifully painted arm can't be long enough!")⁵

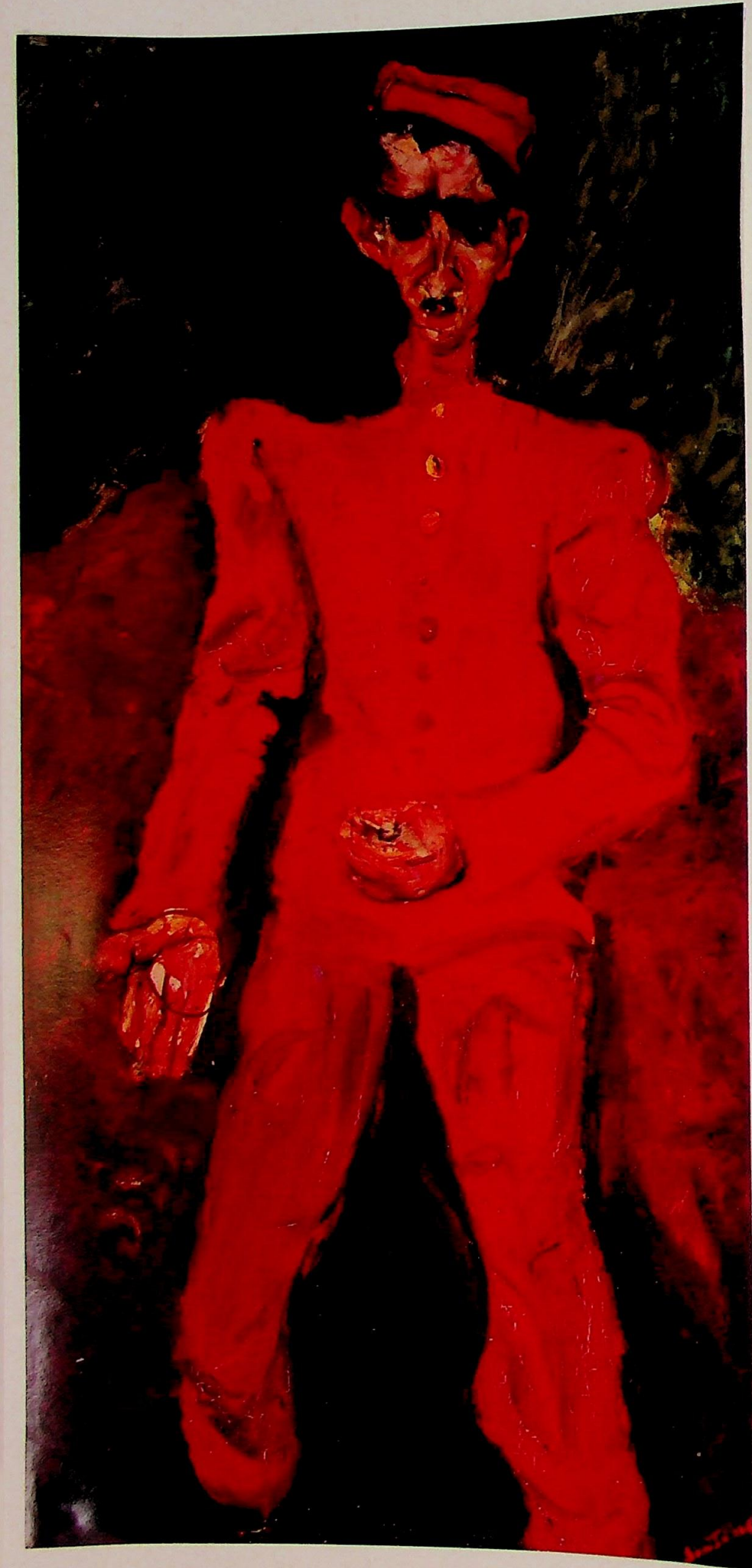
The asymmetrical movements in this painting heighten the personality of the sitter. With one eye looking directly out, and another one askew, the effect is disconcerting - is she confronting us with a knowing roguish look, or is her mysterious smile one of pathetic irony? There is quite a resemblance between this painting and Brian Bourke's series of paintings of Jay with Basque Hat.

In looking at these works, and keeping in mind the fact that SOUTINE strived towards proportional exactitude, it would seem that the only plausible explanation to his distorted forms comes from a deeply-felt agony - caused by the conflicting forces within himself. Throughout his life he suffered great anxiety, whether about himself, or other people, or his paintings. He told the Russian painter MAREVNA⁶ that, "I prefer painting landscapes to portraits. A model tires quickly and then looks stupid, so you have to hurry. I get agitated, I grind my teeth and sometimes start shouting, I smash the canvas and roll on the floor. If the model keeps quiet and doesn't move, then it's all right, but I suddenly lose the line of the nose or the mouth - and then it all goes wrong again. I see flames before me, and burning. So I shout and throw everything on the floor. Its stupid is'nt it. I have this mortal fear; but when it's over I'm as exhausted as a woman who's given birth to a child. I ask myself, what's wrong with me." (It is interesting to note that many artists have drawn a similar analogy between painting and childbirth.)

MATISSE⁷ once said, "I could say that my drawings and my canvases are my real children", and MIRO⁸ talked about the painting process, stating that, "it's like a child gestating in the womb").

SOUTINE'S involvement with uniformed figures, mentioned already in relation to the pastry cooks, continues in the 1926 - 29 paintings of cooks, choir boys and page boys. By and large, these figures stand or sit in a manner that makes them apparently indifferent to the presence of the artist. There is little evidence in these portraits of the predominant modern dialogue between the sitter and painter which, for example, characterises the early portraits of KOKOSCHKA. The exception to this occurs in the Page Boy At Maxims, 1927 - 28 (Fig.8) where the gesture of the outstretched hand invites contact with the viewer. In these works SOUTINE deals mainly with the concentrated colour possibilities made available by the specific nature of the uniforms - the whites of the cooks, the red, blue and dark green of the page boys, the white and crimson of the choir boys. MONROE WHEELER⁹ remarks, "what a boon for SOUTINE that the servant class of France should have kept so many archaic styles of garment, fancy dress without frivolity, which enabled him to strike that note of pitiable grandeur that was compulsive in his mind and heart, and thus avoid our modern drabness".

Gradually, from the late twenties onwards, SOUTINE'S figures become more passive and withdrawn. The proportions are more realistic, and the figures no longer loom up to the edge of the canvas - they retreat further back



PAGE BOY AT MAXIM'S 1927-28 Fig 8.



MOTHERHOOD. 1942 Fig. 9.

in space. These developments seem to show a better understanding of scale and the dialogue between subject and space, which he has grasped from REMBRANDT and the Dutch Masters. However, the real influence occurs in his two versions of the Woman Entering The Water (1930's) inspired by REMBRANDT's Woman Bathing 1654, and his Siesta 1934 inspired by COURBET'S Demoiselles Au Bord de la Seine, 1857.

Not long before his death SOUTINE returned to a theme of his early years - the mother and child (Motherhood 1942, Fig. 9.) It is an unusual subject for SOUTINE because it involves the direct interaction between two figures. It is an extraordinary painting, for it presents none of the usual views of maternity - the protective warmth of the mother, the blissful security of the infant - a self contained unit. In this picture the mother stares out, away from the child, trapped, a look of panic on her face. The child hangs from her lap almost abandoned. She does not bend over him gathering him in her arms, she seems to push him away from her with one arm, while vaguely holding on to his jumper with the other. It is the most profound expression of vulnerability, poignancy and tragic inescapability, and represents the quintessence of SOUTINE'S art.

LANDSCAPE

The first great series of landscapes painted by SOUTINE was done at Céret in the French Pyrenees, where he worked almost continuously from 1919 to 1922. Trees and houses climb steep foreboding hills with barely any sky in view; the colour is dense and dark. ANDREW FORGE¹⁰ describes Trees At Céret, one of the first paintings at Céret:

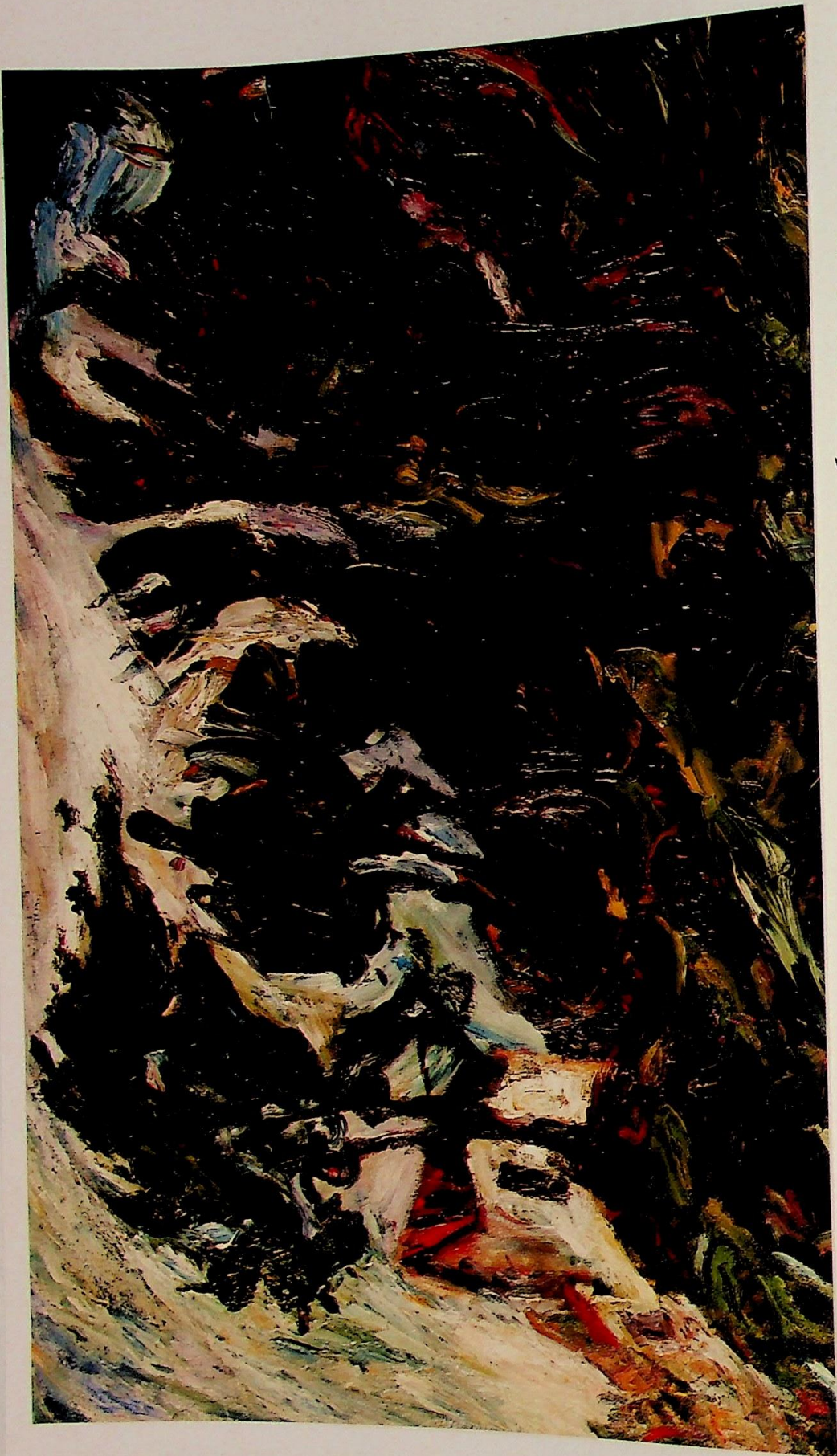
" the front of the canvas is quite filled by the gnarled forms of the tree trunks. It is just possible to see between them to the buildings beyond. One feels fenced in by the monster trees - there is no escape into the distance - their dark, writhing trunks rake up and down the canvas and offer no release. It is a nightmarish picture, an image of panic and hysteria". These paintings have not a great deal to do with the impressions or the act of looking at a landscape. Their essence is in the paint itself, in the jungle of colour, layers of luxurious darkness and inner light that exudes from the forms themselves, and not by a light thrown upon them. It is not really important as to what the shapes stand for - that this is a tree or a house or a hill, unlike a painting done by CÉZANNE or MATISSE or VAN GOGH, in which we get a feeling that the transformation of an object is making us see the object in a new way. These landscapes are not read in terms of objects and the relationship between them. They are comprehended on a deeper level - we experience them through their rhythms and subliminal forces. DAVID SYLVESTER¹¹ likens the viewer's response to the experiencing of a nightmare involving the whole body as if, "swinging, diving, falling, staggering, skating, climbing, gliding, riding downhill, teetering on a cliff edge they

arouse panic - only this panic is resolved, for the opposing forces are all somehow contained and held in balance by the over-riding rhythm of the picture as a whole - not a frantic but an easy rhythm, like the swinging of a pendulum - which resolves convulsion and conflict into an unexpected serenity".

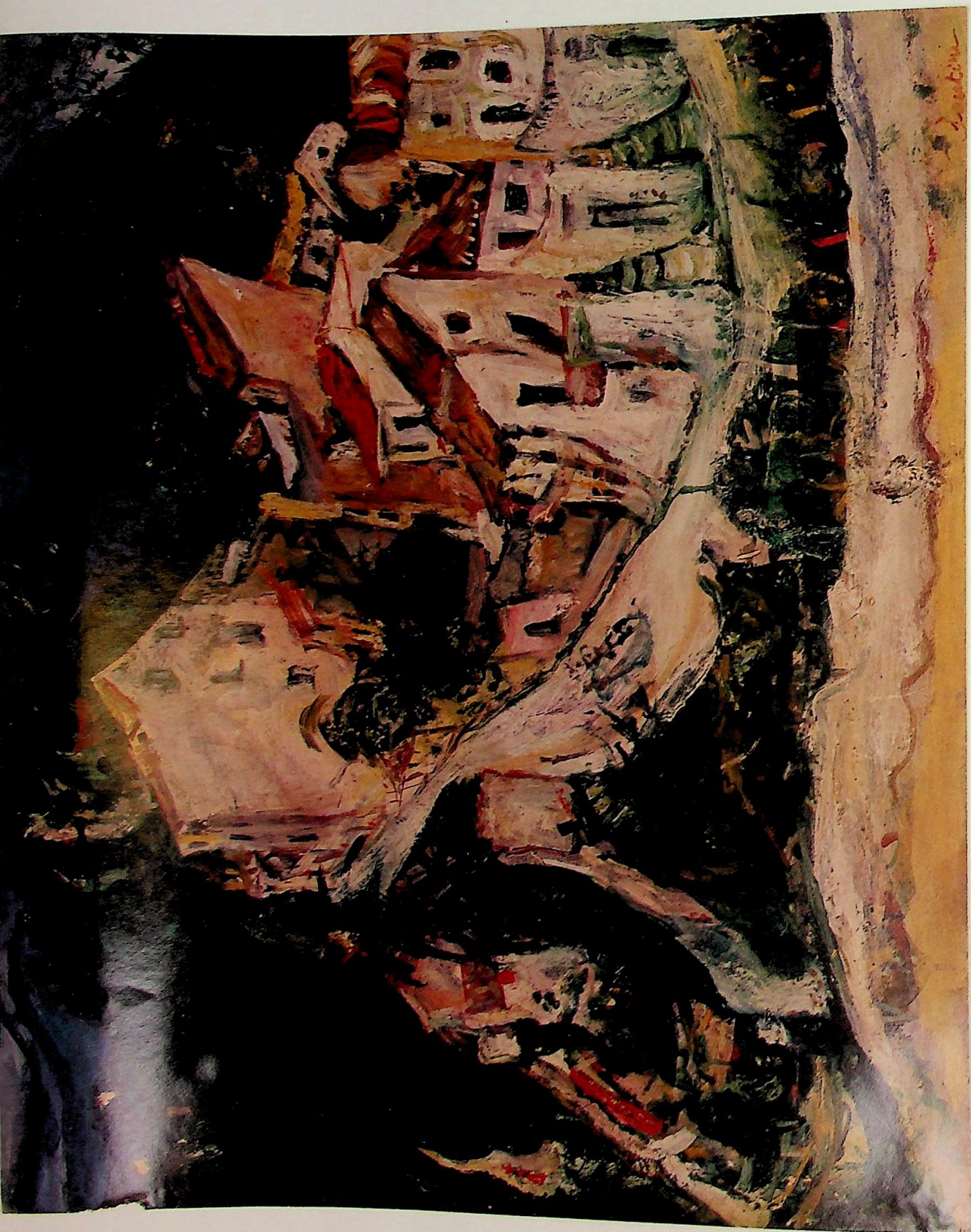
The forms in these paintings gradually become increasingly tumultuous, the overall direction leans more and more to the right side of the picture and is strongly reminiscent of CÉZANNE'S paintings. Gradually the forms begin to lose a sense of mass; modelling gives way to linear agitation - so intense is the turbulence that in, for example, Landscape at Céret (Fig. 10) or Hill at Céret, only gradually do the forms unravel themselves to the eye. During the Céret period the brushstroke carries the weight of the pictorial drama. The spontaneity of these works enters almost into the realm of abstraction, yet the strongest quality in these works is the expressive energy. Perhaps it is this more than anything else that led Soutine to reject and even destroy these works later on in life - they had moved too far away from perceivable reality.

Most people would say that SOUTINE'S main formative influence came from VAN GOGH, because, I suppose, there are many qualities shared by both painters. They both led tortured lives, they identified with the unhappy, the gnarled and the downtrodden. Their paintings materialized directly out of sensation - sensation that precedes any pictorial intention. VAN GOGH's approach to painting was more rational, and his method of painting, (the systematic

LANDSCAPE AT CÉRET. 1922 Fig. 10



inch-long parallel brush strokes, sometimes straight, or snake-like, or frequently in circular rhythm) was more consciously constructive than SOUTINE who instinctively avoided anything that might come close to system, method or order. Nevertheless, there was one important element common to both-their relationship to the subject, "The painter is part of it, his affections, aggressions, fears, needs, are flowing out to it and being answered by it".¹² But to my mind the influence of CÉZANNE seems to carry the most weight. (Although in 1938 he told RENE GIMPEL¹³ that Cubism was cerebral, incapable of giving joy, that CÉZANNE, in whom he had once believed, was too stiff, too recondite, too difficult, too mental). It starts after SOUTINE'S early BONNARD-influenced work and reaches a high point during the Céret period. Along with the dark nineteenth century realism taught at the academies, there is a strong element of CÉZANNE in the Still Life With Lemons (Fig. 13) (1916) and Still Life With Soup Tureen (1916). The slanted arrangement of the table within the canvas and that of the objects upon the table, the flattened form taken on by the plates - certain of these elements appear in other works by SOUTINE, mainly in the early portraits, but even in various pageboys of the mid-twenties. In Pageboy At Maxims (Fig. 8) the modelling of the head is CÉZANNE'S, as is the breaking up of the form of the head into a clearly defined plane. And so too is the broadening of the head in the area of the right ear, as if part of the space behind had been pulled around towards the surface of the picture in an effort - similar to CÉZANNE'S - to take hold of volume in its actuality and press it into the picture space. The Céret landscapes usually are indebted to VAN GOGH perhaps because of their pulsating



LANDSCAPE AT CAGNES. 1923-24 Fig. 11

headlong diagonal movement but there is no similarity in the action. As DAVID SYLVESTER¹⁴ points out, "VAN GOGH is linear; the movement wriggling or streking across the canvas is made by a system of serpentine or spiky lines which incorporate solid forms as a whirlpool sucks things in. SOUTINE'S approach is plastic: the movement is made up of lurching heaving planes. To look at a VAN GOGH landscape after looking at a Céret is to be vividly reminded how Japanese it is. The flatness of the Cérets is not the flatness of a VAN GOGH, it is the flatness of a CÉZANNE, a flatness into/solidity has been compressed".

SOUTINE'S next series of Landscapes were painted between 1922 and 1925 at Cagnes-sur-Mer. Here again trees and houses are set in steep hills, but the composition, in fact the whole atmosphere of the paintings, is more open and the palette much lighter - the foreboding Céret trees give way to white-walled houses, and the general feeling is one of airiness dispelling the claustrophobia of the Céret paintings. The houses in the Cagnes are not marked white patches of paint but solid volumes in space. They are solids, mauled and twisted by the swirling spiril rhythms that shape them. These rhythms do not animate the painting, as the rhythms in the Cérets do, so much as the objects in the paintings. The objects are now anthropomorphic, rather than the brush strokes. The forms are whole and clear-cut. (See Landscape at Cagnes 1923 - 1924 Fig. 11) They interlock according to a strange but quite comprehensible logic. What in the Céret paintings was primarily an expression of movement in the paint is seen here as distortion. Walls lean

50.

or sag, nod from side to side. The intention is towards clarity, but of a strange kind - "There is a suggestion of folklore and fairytale, of crooked doors and crooked roofs, winding steps and little crooked men." ¹⁵ The houses and trees take on a fairy-tale quality, reminiscent of Disney, which is far removed from the disquieting fantastic overtones of the Cérets. This descent to the whimsical is due to a failure of scale brought on by the ill-matched treatment of drawing and the treatment of space. The Cérets are huge and imposing, the Cagnes seem composed of miniature houses and trees. Perhaps the best-known of these, the Street at Cagnes, in which the houses seem to dance and fly off in a pale blue air shows how the brush plays across the canvas with an almost oriental delicacy. This calligraphic gesturing with the brush was to become an increasingly important element. As it got more free and inventive it became the medium by which movement was carried to new extremes - SOUTINE projected his obsession with movement outwards onto the landscape and the violent rhythms of his brush took up his movements.

In the last great pictures of trees, these two qualities are beautifully balanced so that it is not possible to say what is to be attributed to the painting and what to the subject. Perspective plays an important part in these works - there is never any doubt as to what is what. Scale works according to a more traditional form. Turbulent movement courses through the whole canvass originating both from the tossing forms of the trees and from the violent energy and the varieties of gesture that activate the paint. Two factors contribute to this freedom. Firstly, the subject itself. The trees rear up against



WINDY DAY, AUXERRE. 1939 Fig. 12

the picture plane, closing in around it. The forms are closed, filled with tossing movements, activated by wind and weather and by the charge of his brush. They make his gestures just as they seem to make their own. One of his finest majestic paintings, Windy Day, Auxerre (Fig. 12) follows in the line of the Old Masters, and comes as near as any modern artist has got to this great tradition. In the relationship between the tiny human figures and the rearing trees, the figures are dominated by the trees, as the trees themselves are dominated by the howling wind and the light violently breaking in upon them. Landscape has rarely been painted with such imaginative, instinctive comprehension of the order of the whole.

If DUNOW had developed this argument to a close, he would be forced to say that the very fact that SOUTINE painted at all was a wilful destruction of his orthodox Jewish tradition (Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth¹⁷ (second commandment). So perhaps the only thing that can be said about the effect the Shtetl would have had on SOUTINE, without appearing to be presumptuous, is that it would have created in him a most compelling need to experience visual sensation, and since the visual experience was so recusant in his youth, SOUTINE has placed supreme value upon the particularity of the object.

Another theory relates SOUTINE's choice of subject matter to a morbid interest in decay. ERNST-Gerhard Süsser¹⁸ even goes as far as to see SOUTINE as a necrophiliac. He views these paintings as, "the passion to transform

STILL LIFE

It has been said by some writers on SOUTINE that his painting of dead creatures is due to an obsession with food. ESTI DUNOW¹⁶ propounds the theory that the basis of SOUTINE'S imagery lies in his obsession with food. This assumption hinges on three factors - firstly, SOUTINE'S poverty in his childhood and early Paris years; secondly, due to his stomach problems he was prohibited from eating the type of creatures he painted, and lastly, DUNOW believes SOUTINE set out deliberately to violate the Jewish dietary laws by the inclusion of blood in his paintings. However, if DUNOW had developed this argument to a close, he would be forced to say that the very fact that SOUTINE painted at all was a wilful destruction of his orthodox Jewish tradition (Thou shalt not make onto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth¹⁷ (second commandment). So perhaps the only thing that can be said about the effect the Shtetl would have had on SOUTINE, without appearing to be presumptuous, is that it would have created in him a most compelling need to experience visual sensation, and since the visual experience was so recusant in his youth, SOUTINE has placed supreme value upon the particularity of the object.

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that which is alive into something unalive" and states that, "It is this desire above all that influences SOUTINE'S still lifes".¹⁹ He develops this idea further by interpreting the CÉRET landscapes as "a high-point of necrophiliac energy,"²⁰ linking to this SOUTINE'S preference for old, previously painted canvasses to work upon (as every time he painted a picture he destroyed a previously existing work), and even views SOUTINE'S destruction of his own works as belonging in this context. Finally GÜSSE states that, "All the evidence of this destructive impulse, the inner tensions, under which SOUTINE laboured, finds its ultimate confirmation in the years of suffering he endured from the stomach ailment that led to his death. The aggressivity, the destructive impulse, were turned in upon himself; ultimately they were too intense to be banished through painting".²¹ This, to my mind seems an utterly far fetched theory, based purely upon the writer's speculation.

It is far more credible that SOUTINE'S fascination of flesh should reside in its intrinsic character - its rich texture and colour. The very quality of these creatures, entrails exposed, were ideal subjects through which his sensuous handling of paint was served best. For an artist like SOUTINE, who relied so completely on direct observation from nature, the discipline of the still life allowed him the freedom of being able to choose and control the situation in nature before he set out to paint it. Yet it must be said that SOUTINE'S still lifes are not directly related to, although they were influenced by, the sixteenth and seventeenth century tradition of still life painting, in which the objects themselves had little or no emotional

importance and were often used as pretexts for formal experimentation. The fact that he had to go through great difficulties in getting hold of his very particular subjects, and the way in which he painted his motifs in close-up, contributed much to the emotional significance in his paintings, unlike for instance, CÉZANNE'S still lifes, which seem to be almost neutral or objective by way of comparison.

SOUTINE'S still lifes move from a neutral imagery, (Still Life With Lemons 1917 Fig. 13) to a more idiomatic one (Carcass Of Beef . 1925 Fig. 18). The more specific the subject becomes, the more we sense the greater emotional involvement on the part of the artist in that particular thing. Along with the increasing exclusiveness and gradual closing in on the subject, goes a limited formal architecture. Compositions of several objects give way to single-object compositions. The range of motifs also becomes limited and is repeatedly painted. But these are not "variations on a theme"; his concern was to get the image right, no matter how many trials it took. Some subjects were painted twenty times, and there is very little significant formal variation to be found in these series. The difference lay in their quality, usually in the varying intense aliveness of the surface.

Sometimes SOUTINE was led to a motif by the painting of an earlier master, but his paintings are not copies (compositions are often totally different), nor are they interpretations. He did not paint after REMBRANDT or CHARDIN or COURBET, in order to learn a specific technique



STILL LIFE WITH LEMONS. 1916 Fig. 13.

or structure. He recreated the image in real life and painted directly in front of it. These masters helped him sharpen his experience of a particular image that was probably already independently moving on some level of his consciousness. SOUTINE came to Paris without the painting culture that so many of his contemporaries took for granted. Without knowing which were the major artists and which were the minor talents, he was able consistently to find the great masters, "while one should not see SOUTINE as a totally instinctual primitivistic painter, one cannot help emphasising this lack of painting culture in order to prove what a fine and perceptive and naturally trained eye he possessed".²² SOUTINE was influenced by such diverse artists as, (in the early years) EL GRECO, TINTORETTO, FOUQUET; (in the late 'teens into the early 20's) CÉZANNE, VAN GOGH, BONNARD; (in the mid-twenties and continuing through his life) REMBRANDT, CHARDIN, COURBET, and COROT. Working "after" one of their paintings was as much a tribute as an identification. By re-creating the image in real life and painting from it, he could further identify with COURBET or REMBRANDT by feeling that he was standing in their shoes re-experiencing what they felt in front of the motif when they painted their pictures. It is as if SOUTINE has a different concept of the past, as if it is a fluid and living organism without fixed boundaries - which it is, if not looked at subjectively. Some critics have felt that by his incorporation of the past, SOUTINE diluted his individuality. But I would argue that SOUTINE needed, and sought after, the disciplinary qualities found in the Old Masters - the inner balance and clarity of emotional and pictorial content that gave their images dignity and weight.



RED GLADIOLI. 1919. Fig. 14

The images in the early still lifes are of mealtime arrangements - lemons, artichokes, herrings, onions, wine bottles and a few utensils. The forms bite into each other, the drawing is tentative. The quality of line, both form-defining and searching, is influenced by CÉZANNE who also used line to define form little by little, using the bends and breaks and redirection of contour to modify the forms to each other and the space. (Look at Still Life With Lemons. 1917 Fig. 13). A year or so later, SOUTINE moves away from the dark palette. The paintings are now of flowers - carnations, lilacs, roses, but mainly gladioli. The paintings are bursting with organic forms that grow and spread over the surface in almost juicy, flowing thrusts, that are painted in thick, liquid strokes and vibrant colour. MAURICE TUCHMAN,²³ finds BONNARD's influence in this development and speaks of the "membranous pigment-skin" quality of the paint, stating that SOUTINE, "learned from BONNARD how to impart a consistent quality of viscosity to the canvas surface how to work the pigment in a wet and tightly-knit manner" - a quality which SOUTINE was to know more of, by way of REMBRANDT. In Red Gladioli 1919 (Fig. 14) the forms of the flowers are flattened out, the canvas becomes a battleground of cadmium reds fighting with prussian blues. The flowers spread out like claws and whip back and forth savagely. In this painting the still life set-up has been abandoned for a composition that is determined solely by and for the subject. "It may not have been so much the true forms of the leaves and petals which appealed to him" wrote MONROE WHEELER, "as the blood-redness, fire-redness, which he rendered like little licking flames".²⁴ In Fish and Tomatoes. 1923 the image has become focused



STILL LIFE WITH SKATE. 1924 Fig. 15.

and specific. The emphasis is placed on the fish - the other forms go together to reinforce this focus. The fish are enclosed by the plate and forks, the plate by the tomatoes, the tomatoes by the cloth - a series of enclosures flow out from the centre, thus isolating the fish. ESTI DUNOW²⁵ points out that SOUTINE previously used this device in his Ceret and early Cagnes landscapes.

Around this time SOUTINE was looking at CHARDIN'S Still Life With a Skate (1728) in the Louvre and based a whole series of paintings on the skate image. The image was not borrowed from CHARDIN, it was used as an inspirational spring-board. By setting up the still life in nature, painting indirectly from a real skate and only recreating in the composition those objects from the CHARDIN which suited his requirements, SOUTINE made his paintings very much his own, subject to his imagination and control. Although they contain echoes of CHARDIN in the composition, (see Still Life With Skate 1924. Fig. 15) the central positioning of the skate, the jug and ladle on the right, the relationship between CHARDIN's cat and SOUTINE's vase on the left, these paintings are much more consistent with SOUTINE'S own work, containing echoes of some of the CAGNES landscapes. The skate's eerie resemblance to the human face gives it an added emotional significance that has been used by other artists. JAMES ENSOR'S Skate (Fig. 16) painted in 1892 was described by CHARLES STERLING²⁶ as, "monstrously human with its cruel, sardonic face". SOUTINE'S skate is not cruel or sardonic, there is great sadness to it, it seems to cry out in agony. This series of Skate paintings, in their concentration on a specific subject matter which remains constant despite all other formal variations, discloses SOUTINE'S growing



JAMES ENSOR, SKATE (detail) 1892 Fig. 16



REMBRANDT, CARCASS OF BEEF. 1655 Fig. 17.

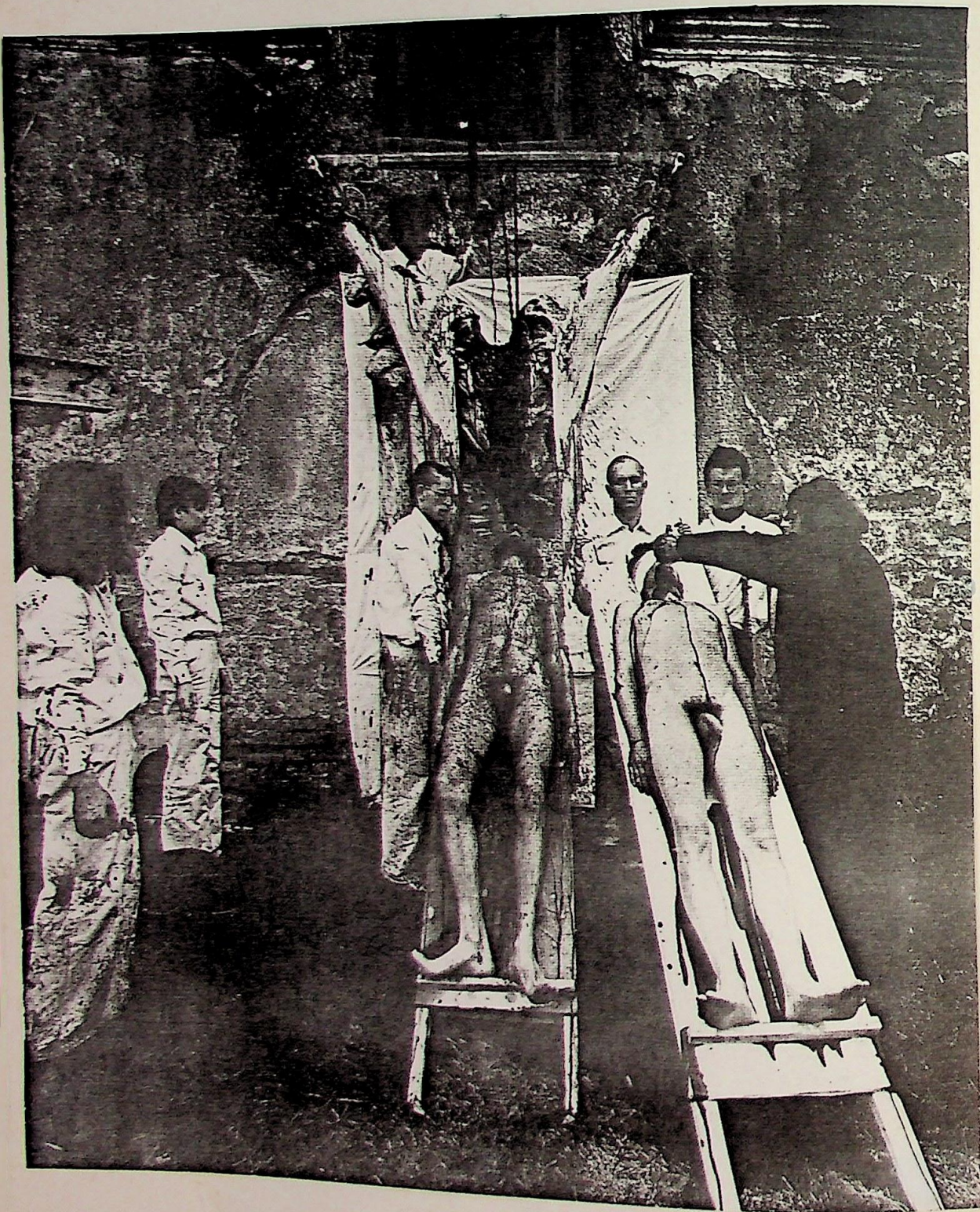
development towards specific subject matter. In the Skate paintings there is still a significant change in colour, brushstroke and composition moving from one painting to the next. But these variations are secondary to the main structural scaffold that has already been determined - that of the centralised configuration defined by the triangulation of the Skate which dominates all the lesser components - the jugs and pots, spoons and tomatoes, which are adjusted to the regularised structure.

From 1925 - 7, these tendencies reach a peak in the paintings of beef, fowl and rabbits. The motif is isolated, framed and presented in a close-up view. All props vanish, and the compositional set-up becomes limited, persistently repeated, so that the differences in these paintings rest solely in the changing nuancing of colour, line and brush stroke that takes place within the dimensions of the beef or fowl itself. At this time and in future times, the most significant painter for SOUTINE was REMBRANDT. He spoke of REMBRANDT to RENE GIMPEL,²⁷ "Ah, the giant is REMBRANDT. He's a god, he's God." I (GIMPLE) said to him: "No, there is no one God, there are all the Gods of Olympus". He disagrees. For him, REMBRANDT is the idol, excelling all painters." It was REMBRANDT's Carcass of Beef, 1655 (Fig. 17) that had the greatest influence on SOUTINE'S beef paintings. Gradually SOUTINE eliminates REMBRANDT's interior settling of poles and scaffold, or any suggestion of environment, and concentrates on the meat itself. The isolated image looms right up to the surface, it spreads over the surface until it is hard to tell what is being painted from the paint itself, so closely-knit is the viscous surface.

(Carcass Of Beef. 1925 Fig. 18). The stories surrounding these beef paintings, (at least 12 of them), are many, but the basic core is the same. He brought the whole carcass of a steer into his studio in the Rue du Mont-St.-Gothard and painted from it. According to these stories, when the glorious colours of the flesh were hidden by an accumulation of flies, he paid some unfortunate person to sit beside it and fan them away. When the meat dried out he poured buckets of fresh blood over it to revive the colours and all the while the meat was rotting away, and somehow SOUTINE took no notice of, or was oblivious to the stench. Eventually the neighbours complained and when the police arrived, SOUTINE persuaded them how much more important art was than sanitation. JOURDAIN²⁸ relates a different end, in which the people from the health service injected the meat with ammonia, in an effort to slow down the decomposing. "From that day, SOUTINE used to come with a box of syringes. He injected everything furiously. The ducks became as stiff as wood, without the colour of their feathers being changed at all. And no more smell! But when the creatures were thrown away, they poisoned the dogs." Perhaps the most potent quality in these extraordinarily beautiful works is the diachotomy between, on the one hand, the tumultuous and sensual joy, and on the other, the tragedy of death. GEORGES BAUDAILLE²⁹ remarks that, "This painting of a huge, twisted, flayed mass of red spread out against a deep blue background marks the zenith of SOUTINE'S career. It is a high point in his artistic evolution. There is nothing to match it (for sheer violence and hideousness). This is painting at its purest, but not the kind of art with which people decorate living rooms and "prettify"

their lives". It seems unbelievable to me that BAUDAILLE should recognise the power of these paintings, without seeing in them great nobility and beauty. Perhaps he cannot distance himself from the disturbing subject matter in order to comprehend how it has been transcended. On one level, the paint seems to become the flesh or each globule of fat; the reds, purples and violets can be felt to glide over or soak into the meat, echoing the buckets of blood refreshing the meat in reality. On another level the paintings can be looked at in relation to their metaphorical qualities. ELIE FAURE³⁰ has written eloquently of this phenomenon: "The mystery of the greatest painting bursts out here, flesh which is more flesh than flesh, nerves which are more nerves than nerves, although they are painted with streams of rubies, with burning sulphur, with droplets of turquoise, with lakes of emerald crushed with sapphires, with trails of purple and of pearl, a palpitation of silver which brushes the surface and shines, an unknown flame which twists the depths of matter having melted its mines of jewels. That a slaughtered ox glitters like the treasures of Golconda, that iridescent insects and birds and the blaze of the tropics roll in torrents in the imminent putrescence and that this is meat dripping blood, that is the inspiration."

Contrasting sharply to SOUTINE'S beef paintings are the AKTIONSBILDER and SCHUTTBILDER (Fig. 19) of HERMAN NITSCH. Although both artists have used the carcasses of animals to work from and both work according to Dionysian principles rather than exercising the control of Apollonesian forces, SOUTINE does not do this by choice



AKTOIN, 1975 PRINZENDORF Fig. 19

as NITSCH has done. NITSCH aims to strike the viewer at "gut level" ³¹ by the use of horrific and powerful dramatic effects, in the practice of disembowling animal carcasses ontop of naked models in a ritualistic-like performance that to his mind expresses, "bliss, excess, waste to the point of orgy," ³² or by throwing dark, blood-red paint against hessian surfaces so that the finished painting (SCHUTTBILDER) looks as if an animal has been sacrificed ontop of it. NITSCH explains that in his work, "Dionysian, the chaos of the unconscious dragged out into the open, is stretched and made partly conscious. It is a psychological purging". ³³ There is a crucial antipathy in the work of these two artists - a moral discrepancy, for SOUTINE hated ugliness; it was his belief that he was unable to paint in the classical manner, because he was lacking in the proper knowledge and technique. The intense looking and recording gives SOUTINE a certain position of objectivity - he is not actively involved in the slaughtering or disembowling of the animal and is therefore able to extract himself from the gut emotional response to death so that he does not enter into any pagan ritualistic-like realm.

SOUTINE'S greatest concern is with flesh and it is this above all else that aligns him with REMBRANDT. He found in REMBRANDT's surface and free handling of paint a palpability of solidity and texture. This to REMBRANDT is considerable not only in the more painterly style and weight of mass in the motif, but also in the radiating light emitting from the image within a dark space. "It was surely in REMBRANDT's encrusted surfaces and the phenomenal quality of his forms that SOUTINE found the strongest symbol of his own experience in front of nature.

For SOUTINE'S surfaces hardly ever distance themselves, or even easily identify themselves: can we say we even see them rather than knead them or rake them or comb them as though they were part of ourselves? " ³⁴ This discovery leads SOUTINE into the realm of spirituality in which the earthiness of the isolated carcass, both tragic and monumental, expresses dignity, benevolence and sensitivity. DAVID SYLVESTER ³⁵ points out that SOUTINE'S fanaticism, his paranoia, his selfishness, his dedication and his anguish are largely related to his passionate and quasi-religious devotion to the motif.

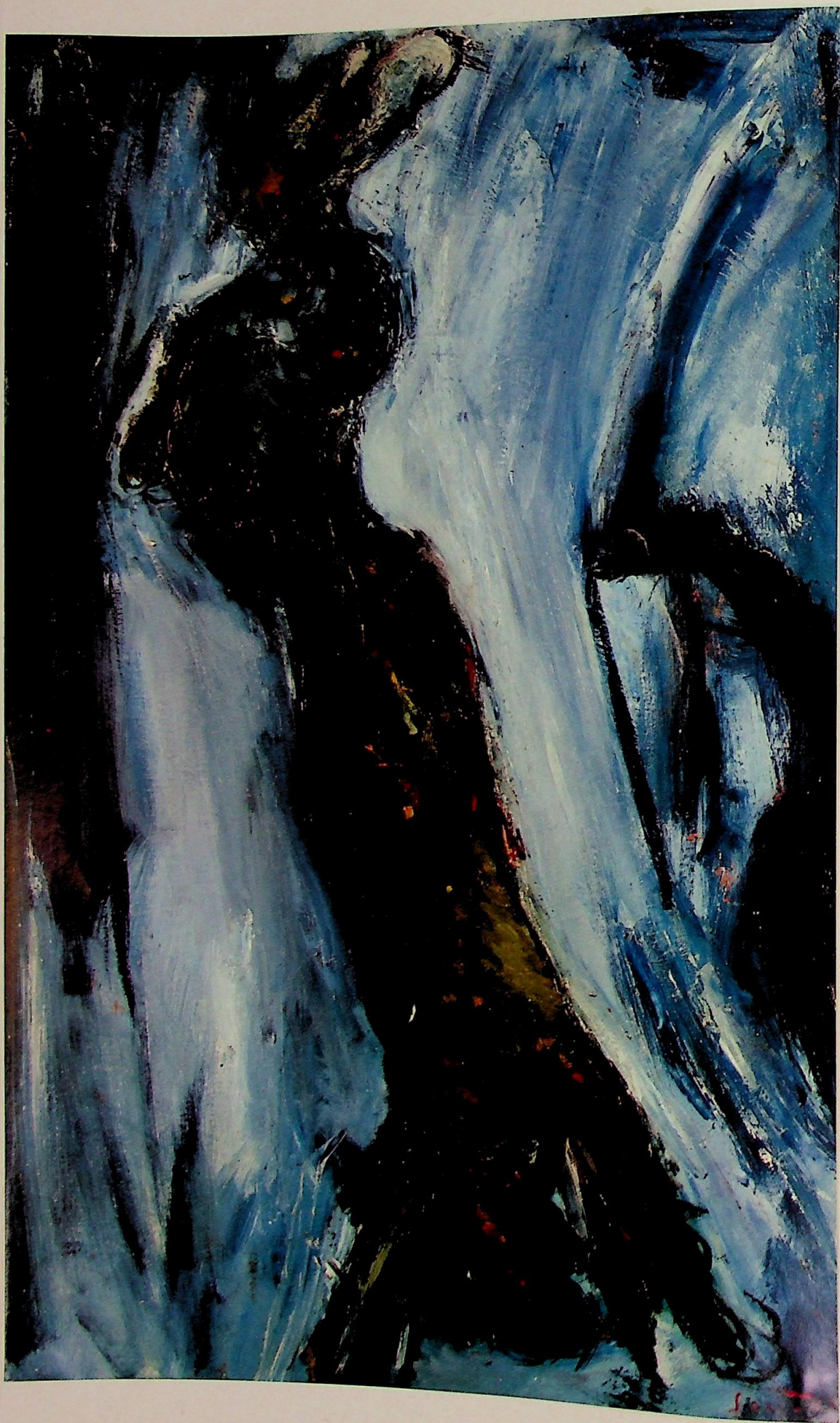
SOUTINE has carried this feeling of flesh right through the paintings of this period and it is this that becomes the strongest connecting factor in the still lifes and portraits. The uniforms and costumes in his portraits are treated as an analogy of flesh. In the pastry cooks (Fig.4) and some of the choir boy paintings, SOUTINE'S ability to produce luminous colour from his whites is extraordinary, for inflected in the subject's white clothes are yellows, blues, greens and purples. These glowing whites, streaked with colour, appear in the Skate and fowl paintings as well as in the Cagnes landscapes. The encrusted pigment with its streaking, gives these paintings an organic quality suggestive of veins, nerves, arteries and body tissue. The membranous pigment of the uniforms are metamorphasised into flesh, revealing life beneath the skin - as in the carcass paintings.

During these years, and for some time later, SOUTINE'S fascination with dead animals continues in his many paintings of dead or dying fowl. These, and the beef



HANGING FOWL. 1924 Fig. 20

canvasses represent the high point of his achievement in still life, and, it could be argued, the zenith of his whole career as a painter. The dead bird becomes, like the trees in the Céret landscapes, an eloquent and malleable vehicle into which he compresses a vast range of feeling. TOUCHMAN³⁶ comments: "The series may be divided into two types: a restless, baroque deployment of open, agitated shapes and swirling lines filling most of the canvas - found in pictures where the fowl is upside down; and a quieter, more self-contained and vertical placement with subtle, nervous movements, (rather than dramatic thrusts of shape) - found in pictures where the fowl hangs by the neck." SOUTINE explores the plumage spread out or draped smoothly, almost as though it is an abstract language, which FORGE³⁷ describes as, "fulfilling a role analogous to drapery in earlier art". The beef image is one of weighty mass, a heavy carcass, containing a sense of gravity, but the bird, with its wings and feathers, brings about a feeling of movement and energy. (Fig. 20 Hanging Fowl 1924). It is this mood of fluctuation between the bird spluttering in the throes of death and the passive corpse lain to rest (e.g. Still Life With Turkey. 1926) evoking a tragic funeral set up, which FORGE³⁸ describes: "the tomatoes are lined up in a guard of honour and the jug and spoon stand like mourners", that constitutes the essence of these paintings. The determining factor is the plumage itself; it serves as the perfect vehicle through which SOUTINE can best express himself. Feathers are the ideal inspiration for his unique rhythmic way of painting - the swirls and spurts of pigment, the calligraphic streaking of paint and the jabs of colour - and can be compared to the wind-lashed trees in his landscapes.

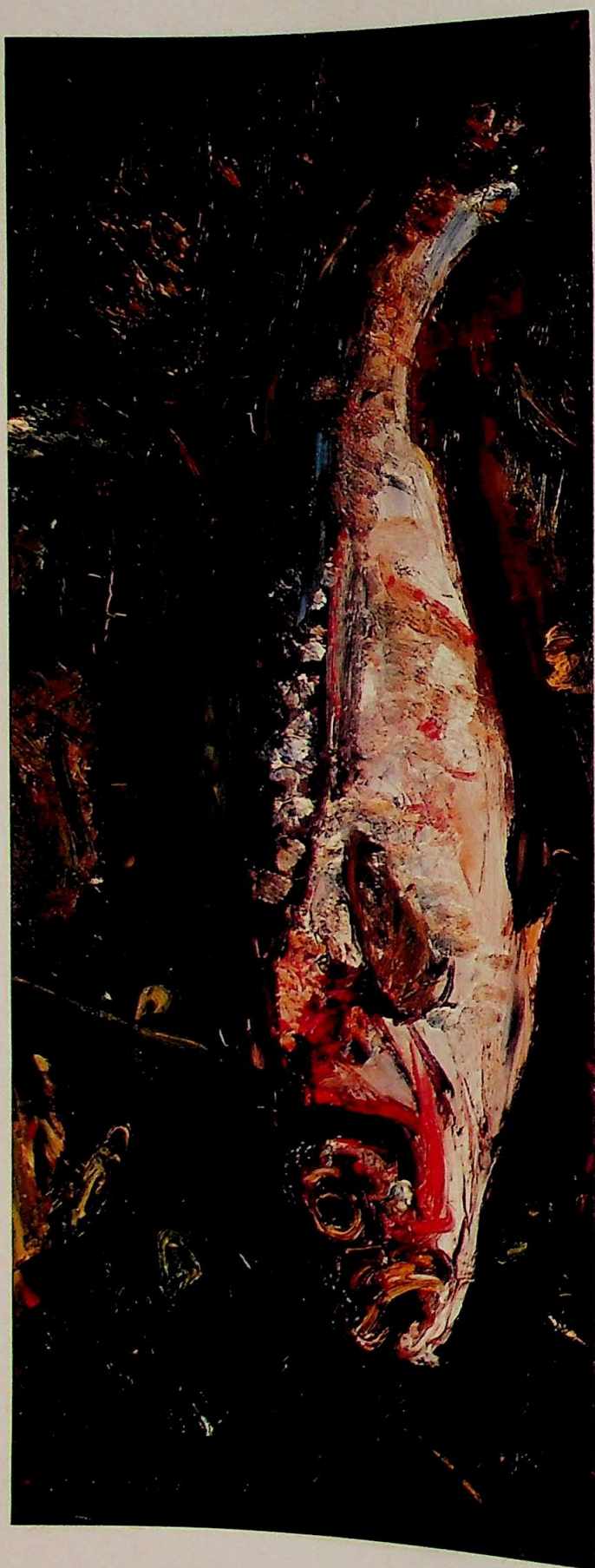


RABBIT. 1925-26 Fig. 21

Along with his painting of dead fowl, SOUTINE painted dead rabbits and hares (see Rabbit 1925 - 26. Fig. 21).

Around this time he had been looking closely at the still life paintings of Dutch, French and Spanish artists in the 16th. and 17th. centuries; however it is not possible to point out any particular painting that served as a definite model, as with the REMBRANDT Carcass of Beef and SOUTINE'S beef paintings. Whatever influence these paintings had, they were more generalized. However, SOUTINE'S dead animals are devoid of any narrative setting, unlike these past still lifes, which placed the animal in either a mealtime or hunting setting. The isolated image of the Rabbit hanging by its feet exudes a feeling of power as it strains against a drapery - like background, to the right the basic shape of the animal is repeated, augmenting the puissant image.

There were only two other painters that SOUTINE is known to have admired in his later years - COURBET and COROT, but particularly COURBET. They were the last great masters before the beginning of modern art, and are the closest to us of the Old Masters. It is therefore significant that SOUTINE should have singled them out since he is reputed to have forbidden people to mention his contemporaries in his presence, speaking only of the Old Masters. He told RENE GIMPEL³⁹ that what he liked about COURBET, was that he was "direct", COROT gave him the "same sensation of immediate contact with things", and it is this that aligns SOUTINE to the tradition of painting things, rather than for example, the impressionists, (who were nearer to him in time) who were concerned with painting sensations. Midway between his move from painting



THE TROUT. 1933 Fig. 22.

dead to living creatures come the paintings of fish.

SOUTINE'S Trout. 1933 (Fig.22) closely resembles COURBET'S Trout. 1871. (Fig.23), although more tranquil in mood. COURBET'S trout is characterised by anguish, it struggles against the taut fishing line pulling it up, its jaws yanked open. LINDA NOCHLIN⁴⁰ writes: "The moment between life and death, the sensation of dying rather than the meaning of death is found in its most distilled, prosaic and poignant form in COURBET'S Trout," and in many ways this is an appropriate summation of the main theme of SOUTINE'S paintings of dead animals.



Courbet, THE TROUT, 1871 Fig. 23.

FOOTNOTES

(CHAPTER TWO)

- ¹ Told to Tuchman by Max Kaganovitch, "Chaim Soutine", Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.65
- ² Ibid, p. 60.
- ³ Esti Dunow, "Chaim Soutine : Evolution in Form and Expression", Soutine, Catalogue, Galleri Bellman, p.12.
- ⁴ Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.13.
- ⁵ Alfred Werner, Soutine, p.88
- ⁶ Jeanie Warnod, "Soutine and the Artists of La Ruche", C. Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.29
- ⁷ Matisse : Matisse On Art. edited by Jack D. Flam.
- ⁸ Miro: Catalan Notebooks of Joan Miro, edited by Gaetan Picon.
- ⁹ Monroe Wheeler, quoted by Alfred Werner, Soutine, p.126
- ¹⁰ Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.15
- ¹¹ David Sylvester, "The Mysteries of Nature within the Mysteries of Paint", C. Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue p.39
- ¹² Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.14
- ¹³ René Gimpel, quoted by David Sylvester, C. Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.43
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p.36

- I5 Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.18
- I6 Esti Dunow, Soutine, Catalogue, Galleri Bellman.
- I7 Ibid
- I8 Ernst-Gerhard Güse, "Death and Distruction in the Work of Chaim Soutine", Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue.
- I9 Ibid, p.105
- 20 Ibid, p. 104
- 21 Ibid, p.110
- 22 Esti Dunow, Soutine, Catalogue Galleri Bellman, p.75
- 23 Maurice Tuchman, Chaim Soutine", Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.55
- 24 Monroe Wheeler, quoted by Alfred Werner, Soutine, p.78
- 25 Esti Dunow, "Soutine's Still Lifes", Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue
- 26 Charles Sterling, quoted by Alfred Werner, Soutine, p.108
- 27 René Gimpel, quoted by Esti Dunow, Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue p.84
- 28 Jourdin, quoted by Esti Dunow, Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.85
- 29 Georges Baudaille, Expressionists, p.152
- 30 Elie Faurie, quoted by Esti Dunow, Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.86
- 31 Herman Nitsch, quoted by R.H. Fuchs, "Das Orgien Mysterien Theater", Herman Nitsch - Catalogue Van Abbemuesum, p.36

32 Ibid

33 Ibid, p.37

34 Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.41

35 David Sylvester, C. Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue

36 Maurice Tuchman, quoted by Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.41

37 Andrew Forge, Soutine, p.41

38 Ibid

39 David Sylvester, Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue, p.45

40 Linda Nochlin, quoted by Esti Dunow, Soutine, Arts Council Catalogue p.96

CHAPTER III

(SECTION I)

SOUTINE IN RELATION TO THE EXPRESSIONISTS

Generally speaking, most people feel compelled to categorize works of art, and it would seem that an artist's work cannot be comprehended unless it has been successfully slotted into a movement, "school" or "ism". In this respect SOUTINE's work has posed many problems to art historians. The most popular view classifies SOUTINE as an Expressionist. But to my mind there is little concrete evidence to sustain this theory, as with another that includes SOUTINE in the vague School Of Paris, associated with such diverse members as Modigliani, Utrillo and Chagall.

In order to look at the problem of SOUTINE in relation to the Expressionists, we must examine the conflict between instinctive drives and formative energies. Nietzsche¹ found the key to the problem in the interaction of antagonistic forces: the Dionysian and the Apollonian. "Apollo" acts like a censor, controlling the elemental urges called "Dionysos". The Greeks called this process "Catharsis", meaning the purification of drives and emotions into formative artistic activity.² The effect of Catharsis is to balance emotional energy by the control of the artist's mental faculties. If this does not happen in a work of art, then artistic form is in a state of precariousness. Flaubert,³ in

a letter to Louise Colet: "You wrote (your poem) La Servante with a personal emotion, that distorted your outlook and made it impossible to keep before your eyes the fundamental principles that must underlie any imaginative composition ... You have turned art into an outlet of passion, a kind of chamberpot to catch an overflow. It smells bad! "

The Expressionists were similarly afflicted with an overtly active obsession with inner emotion thus weakening the artistic form. The works of Grünewald and El Greco became the touchstone of their own efforts. For them, these artists had used pictorial means entirely in the service of feeling, reaching the very depths of human misery.⁴ Matisse, in an interview with Georges Charbonnier, talked about El Greco: "He was a tormented soul who exteriorized his torment and put it on canvas. This torment is certainly communicated to the spectator. But one could conceive that had El Greco dominated his torment and anxiety, he would have expressed it as Beethoven did in his last symphony".

It is often stated that SOUTINE is a painter of uncontrolled, hallucinated ideas. He is rarely credited with the facility to bind his expressive energy with formal organization. Take for example the Skate (Fig. 15); its balanced structure evolves around the subtle triangular interplay between the shape of the fish and the figuration of tomatoes, the curve of the table echoing that of the Skate. Along with the formal elements goes a fine balance of expressive content.

SOUTINE was devoid of sentimentality, and did not paint in the artificially mannered style of the Expressionists. SOUTINE'S work, although highly expressive, is in direct conflict with the kernel of the Expressionists' aims. To them, the subject is a means to an end; with SOUTINE, it is an end in itself.

CHAPTER III

SECTION II

SOUTINE IN PERSPECTIVE

In 1923, Dr. Barnes brought a number of SOUTINE's paintings to be exhibited along with other contemporary European art. SOUTINE's oeuvres offer no autobiographical information and as he left no diaries, memoirs or other literary matter except a few unhelpful letters, there is no way to assess his reactions to the turmoil around him although he lived through two world wars. Even his canvasses remain silent.

His paintings tell us little of what was happening in the contemporary art world. In 1914, when SOUTINE was working on his earliest canvasses, Picasso had already painted Les Femmes d'Alger, Giorgio de Chirico was painting his first "metaphysical" pictures, and Marcel Duchamp had constructed his Ready-Mades. In Paris the avant-garde galleries were hung with works by the Fauves, the Cubists, the Futurists and the Surrealists. To SOUTINE, the demand for experimentation and contemporaneity appeared beside the point, for, as Esti Dunow⁶ notes: "SOUTINE's devotion to past art goes hand in hand with his indifference towards contemporary art". Castaing relates the following, "One day he (Soutine) had finished a canvas The canvas was a success and attractive, but the range of colours struck me as unusual for him. I automatically mentioned Renoir, whereupon he immediately tore up the painting - not because he despised Renoir, but because he wanted to resemble himself and no one else".⁷

While it is possible to recognise SOUTINE's debt to other painters, it is not possible to relate his work to any movement or manifesto of his time, and it would seem that if we wish to put him in perspective we can only do this by looking at his work in terms of its inner necessity.

In 1923, Dr. Barnes brought a number of SOUTINE's paintings to be exhibited along with other contemporary European art, in the Academy of the Fine Arts. The Philadelphia critics found SOUTINE's work rather disconcerting to say the least. One complained about SOUTINE's "Seemingly incomprehensible masses of paint, known as Landscapes". Another wrote, in a mixture of respect and uncertainty: "To us, SOUTINE represents the falling to pieces of old concepts. He may be mad, he may be an outcast, and being a Russian he may be morbid, emotional and unliteral, but he presents his life as he sees it The question is : Are we willing to look at the world with his eyes even if it seems to us diseased and degenerate? Is it a good thing to visit morgues, insane asylums and jails even if we know what is inside? "

The function of art is to reveal rather than to conceal. Therefore in speaking of SOUTINE, Goya, Rembrandt or Hogarth, we also refer to the body of art their work has influenced - to the freedom of expression and of conscience that their works have brought about.

The artists of today owe a great deal to the liberating forces of these masters. Willem De Kooning, along with many members of the Abstract Expressionists, is known to have greatly admired the work of SOUTINE.



WILLEM DE KOONING, MONTAUK, 1969 Fig. 24 (detail)

Generally, critics cite SOUTINE's Ceret Landscapes as having the main influence on De Kooning's Woman series - in the slashing brush work, the freely overlapping reds and greens, and reciprocally, to realize a potential which SOUTINE did not explore - the use of expressive marks on a larger scale. The late 1960's landscape paintings of De Kooning (e.g. Montauk, Fig.24) come closer still to SOUTINE's method of painting, in the rhythmic, luminosity of paint, the quivering of his lines, and in the overall feeling of sensuality. In many of De Kooning's works, notably the Untitled paintings of the early 1940's, the contours of limbs, breasts or paper matches evolve into the area of visual metamorphosis, and can be compared to the forks in SOUTINE's still lifes and the trees in his landscapes (see chapter one). However, in contrast to SOUTINE, De Kooning chose to rely less on specific objects to work from, thus allowing him the freedom to work away from, as he saw it, the confines of "naturalistic" formalities; although, a decade later he announced that painting is inseparable from subject matter. In Renaissance paintings, De Kooning explained, "There was no subject matter. What we call subject matter now, was then painting itself. Subject matter came later on when the burghers got hold of art". "The question, as they saw it", he wrote regarding the Neo Plasticists and the Constructivists, "was not so much what you could paint but rather what you could not paint. You could not paint a house or a tree or a mountain, it was then" he concluded ironically, "that subject matter came into existence as something you ought not have." ¹⁰

Grants Wine Page



Chateau Rausan-Segla

"The most famous of the Eschenauer Estates"

BORDEAUX - THE GREATEST WINE REGION ON EARTH

What a dowry: the gift of Bordeaux - the greatest wine producing region on earth. That's what Eleanor of Aquitaine brought with her on her marriage to England's Henry II in 1152. It is hardly surprising that the English, who have a continuing taste for Bordeaux wines, held onto this possession in France for nearly 300 years.

Almost everything about this 5,000 square mile corner of South West France is devoted to wine making and its 550,000 acres of vineyards produce around 80 million gallons of Red and White wine in a year.

The very names on the map - Medoc, Graves, Pomerol, St. Emilion, Sauternes, Barsac - are a very gazetteer of the immortal names of wine.

Bordeaux red wines are often referred to familiarly as "Claret". This is an Anglicized version of the word "Claret" meaning light and originated in the 13th century when very light wines were shipped from Bordeaux. The name has stayed even though Bordeaux now ships a wide variety of styles of both red and white wine.

APPELLATION CONTROLEE

There are various levels of quality wine produced in Bordeaux. Above Vin de Table the next appellation is Appellation Bordeaux Controlee, which is wine meeting specific production criteria and which comes from the delimited area of Bordeaux. Bordeaux is Bordeaux Superieur, which has a higher alcohol content than the Appellation. In general the tighter the area of Appellation, the higher the quality and therefore the better quality of wine. Above Bordeaux Superieur come wines carrying the district name, blends from vineyards of, for example, the Medoc,

THE MAJOR REGIONS OF BORDEAUX

Medoc The most famous region in Bordeaux producing great wines of elegance, finesse and smoothness. The Cabernet Sauvignon is the most important grape variety, the effect of which is softened with the use of other varieties, particularly Merlot. The wines of the Medoc age well and in this region quality can vary enormously with vintage. Wines of the region, too, are noted for their fine bouquet.

Graves Most people think only of the white wine from Graves but about a quarter of the production is red. Besides Chateau Haut Brion, the Eschenauer owned Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte has made a fine reputation for itself. The reds are stylish and earthy and the white dry and flinty. The Sauvignon grape dominates the whites, its dryness moderated with the use of the Semillon. Sauternes and Barsac are in the very south of Bordeaux. These regions are known for their luscious, sweet wines, the best dessert wines in the world. These are produced largely from the Semillon grape which has been attacked by noble rot.

St. Emilion St. Emilion is often known as the burgundy of Bordeaux; from this area come rich, full bodied reds, with deep colour. They tend to mature earlier than those of the Medoc and are softer, influenced by the predominance of the Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec grapes. The great Chateaux here include Chateau Cheval Blanc and Chateau Ausone.

Pomerol A small area planted with Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and, more importantly, the Merlot grape. The wines from here are full bodied and heavy in colour. Soft, full and rich wines from here are normally quick to mature but can age very well indeed. Its most famous Chateau is Petrus, which commands some of the highest prices in Bordeaux.

Other Districts The wide variety of Bordeaux includes several other regions, notably

The works of two Irish artists, Barrie Cooke and Camille Souter, can be compared to SOUTINE. Cooke's paintings share many elements in common with SOUTINE. He was influenced by the Abstract Expressionists, (who in turn were influenced by SOUTINE), and learnt much from Kokoschka, (who has been compared to SOUTINE). He shares, to an even greater extent than De Kooning, a fluid, rich, painterly approach. His paintings are rooted in reality, and out of that he creates his world. Cooke's directness leads him to grasp his subject and bring out its inner content, be it in water washing over rocks, in the flaccid carcass of a dead animal, or in bone and flesh. When we look at his landscapes (Forest Painting 1976) ^{Fig. 25} we are reminded of the glorious, vibrant aliveness of SOUTINE's carcasses and fowl paintings - the flowing, rich darks that meander beneath the thick resonant lights.

It is in Cooke's overall view of the world that he most closely resembles SOUTINE, and can be illustrated by these few lines from a nursery rhyme:

"Air to water to soil to stone,
As blood to flesh and flesh to bone".^{II}

^{I2} Cooke, writing about his work said, "My concern for the last twenty-five years has been entirely about growth. This has meant often metamorphosis - of water into weed, of weed into fish, fish into stone. For a time it involved human beings. Later two human beings, their conjunction and disjunction and the metaphor that arose between a spread of blue eating or fortifying a spread of red - in fact a true biological "joint"- bringing to mind

BARRIE COOKE, FOREST PAINTING. 1976 Fig. 25

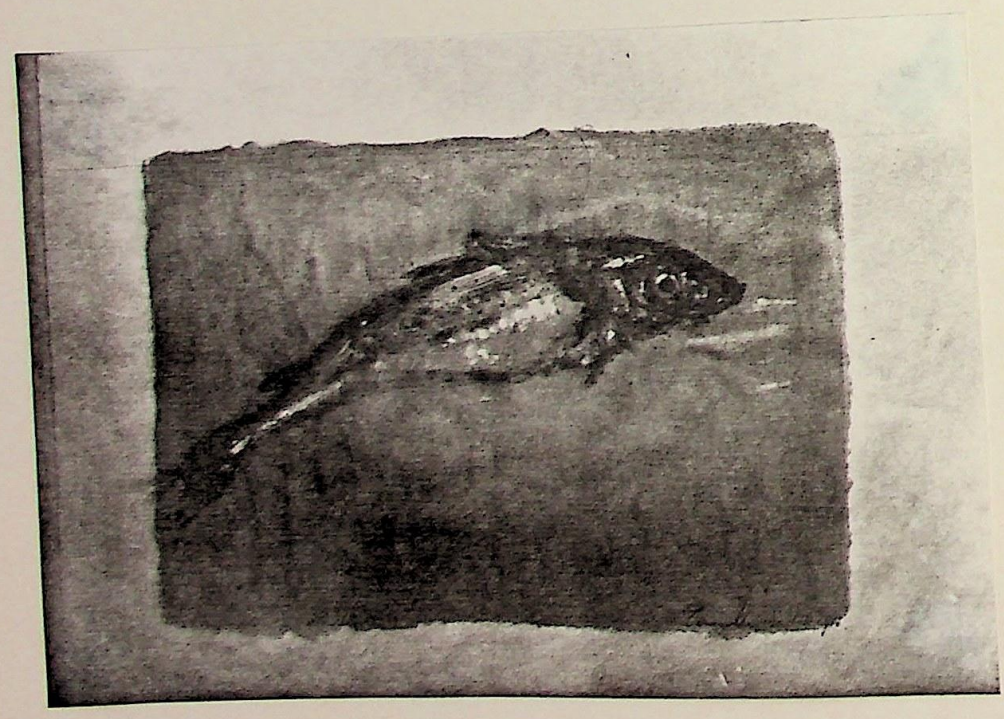
The Pastry Cook (Fig.4) of SOUTINE.

In looking at the work of Camille Souter, we are struck more by the dissimilarities between her work and SOUTINE's, than by what elements they might have in common. This is due to the difference in approach while painting from similar subject matter. Both artists painted from the land and also worked from dead animals and fish. Ann Crookshank wrote, "Not all her (Souter's) joints of beef would get into the oven, but all of them have the gory bloodiness of the old fashioned butcher's shop, so much better named in my Ulster childhood as the "fleshers". I would disagree. Apart from the exception to Souter's series of meat paintings, The Slaughtered Cow ten Minutes Dead 1972 - 73, these works seem almost decorative in relation to SOUTINE's carcasses. Souter is not directly concerned with the actuality of her subject - she has distanced herself from the demanding emotional consequences of what is before her. (MEAT Series 1972, Fig.26). Perhaps the disturbing image of a dead cow is too dominating, so that she cannot see the beauty in it, and chooses instead to concentrate on a more abstracted view of the subject in which marvellous colour and odd joint-like shapes are the main issue.

Souter's fish paintings are more successful, perhaps because they are more realistically painted and therefore have more substance in them. She eliminates any setting and presents the image (Pollock, 1976, Fig.27) as if it floats in water. By the use of tissue paper, into which the paint has been absorbed, she creates an atmosphere of fluidity. The



CAMILLE Souter, MEAT SERIES. 1972 Fig 26



CAMILLE Souter, POLLOCK. 1976 Fig. 27.

paintwork is rich and the blood-red colours sing out against the scale-like silvery lights. But her fish do not command our attention as SOUTINE's do. Souter seems to be painting the fleeting impression of a fish as it streaks by, "Camille sees no distinction between realist and abstract art She starts with everyday subjects but so transforms them that perhaps atmosphere is really the subject". One gets the feeling that at any moment the fish might, with a flick of its tail, make off.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III

- I Nietzsche, quoted by John Alsberg, Modern Art And Its Enigma. p. 133
- 2 Ibid. p.33
- 3 Ibid. p.134
- 4 Georges Baudaille, Expressionists. p.34
- 5 Jack D. Flam, ed. Matisse On Art.
- 6 Esti Dunow, Soutine. Arts Council Catalogue, p.76
- 7 Ibid
- 8 Alfred Werner, Soutine. p.10
- 9 Ibid
- 10 De Kooning, quoted by Harold Rosenberg, De Kooning. p.24
- 11 Nursery rhyme from David Hendricks Gallery Catalogue.
- 12 Cooke, writing for "Objecten en Schilderijen", Galerie In Art Catalogue..
- 13 Ann Crookshank, quoted by Darina Roche, Souter p.35
- 14 Basil Goulding, " 2 Deeply " Catalogue. p.3
- 15 Clement Greenberg quoted by Sam Hunter, Soutine p.15
- 16 Avran Kampf quoted by Alfred Werner, p. 16
- 17 John Fowles, The Aristos. p.196

CONCLUSION

It is too early to assess fully SOUTINE's contribution to the art world, but there is a notable indication that his works are rapidly gaining in prestige. A few critics have even dared to consider his work more important than Van Gogh's. Clement Greenberg¹⁵ states his belief that: "One has to go back to Rembrandt to find anything to which his touch can be likened". SOUTINE has even been viewed in the light of a saint or heroic-like figure - "SOUTINE generalized from his own experience to include all men and the whole world ... He emerges as an artist-hero, the forger of a new style and a new vision".¹⁶ John Fowles, questioning the place of the modern day artist in an industrial and stereotyped world writes: "Our modern saints are the damned: the Soutines and the Alban Bergs They are to us what the martyrs were to the early church; that is, they all died for the worthiest of courses - immortality of name".¹⁷

In the foregoing chapters I have sought to find the quintessential elements which suffuse these magnificent, though disturbing paintings. SOUTINE's vivid and compelling power to communicate, fastening the observer's concentration, is as inexplicable here as in all significant artistic creations. Is this not the authority, the potency which distinguishes^{es} the work of genius? If this is so then SOUTINE's work will survive to sustain and haunt the imagination of succeeding generations.

The power of genius transcends rationalisation and so I did not seek to categorise and, in consequence, confine.

CHRONOLOGY

1893

Soutine was born in Similovitchi, a small, predominantly Jewish town in the Lithuanian part of Western Russia. His father was the village tailor, and the family was very poor.

1909

Travels to Minsk with Michel Kiloïne, and both attend a painting course run by Krueger, (who guaranteed success after a three-months course).

1910

Admitted to a three-year course with Kikoïne, at the School of Fine Arts, Vilna.

1913

Arrives in Paris, and settles at "La Ruche" in Montparnasse - a dilapidated building made up of artists' studios. He lives in poverty. Meets members of the artistic community there - Chagall, Zadkine, Kisling, Archipenko, Dobrinsky and others. Visits the Louvre. Enrols in the Atelier Fernand Cormon at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

1915

Makes friends with Modigliani.

1916

Leopold Zborowski becomes Soutine's dealer. Works at odd jobs - as baggage porter at a railway station and at a Renault factory. Digs trenches during the war, but is soon dismissed for health reasons. Afflicted with stomach problems.

1916 - 1917

Painting Still Lifes of mealtime arrangements and the Landscape around Paris.

1918 - 1919

Flower paintings.

1919

Lives in Ceret for three years. Paints mainly landscapes and portraits.

1920

Death of Modigliani.
Paintings of Praying Men

1922

Soutine returns to Paris with over two hundred paintings.

1923

Albert C. Barnes, wealthy American inventor and collector, buys a large number of his paintings. Soutine financially secure.
His reputation is established.

1923 - 1925

He alternates between Paris and Cagnes-sur-Mer. In Paris he frequently visits the Louvre, taking more and more notice of the Old Masters. Paints series of Still Lives with Skate, based upon Chardins Still Life With Skate, 1728. More Still Lives with fish and fowl. Portraits of single figures, many women, pastry cooks. Landscapes of Cagnes.

1925

Paintings of beef carcasses. Influenced by Rembrandt's Carcass Of Beef, 1655

1926

Still Lives of dead animals. Fowl and rabbits.

1927

Soutine's first one-man show in Paris. A friendship is established between Soutine and the Castaings. Paintings of choirboys, page-boys and pastry cooks.

1928

Begins painting based on Rembrandt's Woman Bathing, 1654

1928 - 1929

Paintings of great tree in Venice.

1932

Zborowski dies. The Castings become his patrons and collectors.

1930 - 1935

Spends these summers at the Castaing home in Leves, near Chartres.
Influence of Rembrandt, Corot and Courbet continuing throughout the decade.
Landscapes of country homes, Chartres Cathedral, portraits of servants and live animals.

1935

First one-man show in America.

1937

Meets Gerda Groth-nicknames her "Mlle. Garde".
Serious stomach problems.

1939

Paints Landscapes at Civry and Auxerre.

1940

"Garde" deported to a concentration camp in the Pyrenees.
Survives the war but does not see Soutine again.
Soutine meets Marie-Berthe Aurenche. They live together.

1941

Fearing the Nazis they change lodgings frequently.

1941 - 1943

Landscapes of Champigny and Richelieu; figures in Landscape.
Paintings of Mother and Child and farm animals.

1943

August 9th. Soutine dies as a result of perforated ulcers and internal haemorrhaging.

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