

THE QUALITY OF THREAT

IN MODERN PAINTING

Dissertation

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TABLE of CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Beginnings

Chapter 2: The Moderns at the start of the  
Twentieth Century

Chapter 3: Picasso, Sutherland, Bacon

Chapter 4: Dada to Post Second World War

Chapter 5: Pop Art →

Conclusion

Bibliography

## LIST of ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Portrait of Artemidorus on his mummy case, from the Roman cemetery of Harawa 2nd Century AD
2. The Kiss of Judas GIOTTO DI BONDONE (1266-1337)
3. The so-called "Bearded Lady", Barbara, wife of John Michael, 1656 Printed for Bowles in England
4. The Third of May, 1808 FRANCISCO GOYA (1746-1828)
5. The Uncertainty of the Poet GIORGIO DE CHIRICO (1888- )
6. Ceramic-Mystic PAUL KLEE (1879-1940)
7. Self-portrait, 1910 EGON SCHIELE (1890-1918)
8. Self-portrait with a Red Scarf MAX BECKMANN (1884-1950)
9. After the storm CHAÏM SOUTINE (1893-1943)
10. Female nude CHAÏM SOUTINE
11. Portrait of Boy in Blue CHAÏM SOUTINE
12. Carcass of Beef CHAÏM SOUTINE
13. The Itinerant Workman MARCEL GROMAIRE (1892- )
14. Weeping Woman PABLO PICASSO (1881-1973)
15. Figure with Meat FRANCIS BACON (1910- )
16. Pope Innocent X FRANCIS BACON
17. ChimpanZee FRANCIS BACON
18. A Performing Dog FRANCIS BACON
19. Study for Figure 1V FRANCIS BACON
20. Burke and Wills at the Gulf SIDNEY NOLAN
21. Control Tower JEFFREY SMART
22. Still Life BERNARD BUFFET (1928- )
23. Tête d'Otage No. 1 JEAN FAUTRIER (1898-1964)
24. Vie inquiète JEAN DUBUFFET (1901- )
25. La Hollandaise KAREL APPEL (1921- )
26. Target with Four Faces JASPER JOHNS (1930- )
27. Pow! ROY LICHTENSTEIN (1923- )
28. Susan CHUCK CLOSE (1910- )

## Introduction

"We not only tolerate violence, we put it on the front pages of our newspapers. One-third or one-fourth of our television programmes use it for the amusement of our children. Condone! My dear friends, we love it."

-Karl Menninger, Psychiatrist.

War is one of the most violent of man's past-times, yet many of the atrocities committed are termed heroic deeds. Andre Malraux, one of the leading writer-philosophers of his day, praised the international involvement by so many writers, artists, etc. in the Spanish Civil War as one of the most wonderful deeds of brotherhood in the history of mankind.

There is a strange idolatry that is often accorded to violent criminals such as the early American outlaws, and people like Charles Manson, around whom an entire cult has sprung up.

The "aggressive machismo" is something that boys and young men strive to achieve in most countries in the Western world.

Scientists and philosophers have puzzled these paradoxes for centuries, and this effort to unravel the mystery of violence and aggression bears a fateful significance. For the quality of human life and the survival of man are involved. Rovvery, rape, riots, vandalism, are all now part of man's existence. Around the world, violence has soared. In London, violent crimes increased by 39 per cent in three years. Even sports events (the soccer fans stage gang wars at most soccer matches nowadays, especially in England,) and entertainment—books, movies, television—have become permeated with violence.

It has not always been as bad as this, and as art imitates life, life imitates art, and so aggressive paintings, threatening paintings are now commonplace. In this dissertation, I have studied this development of threat in

painting. What follows is the course my study has taken.

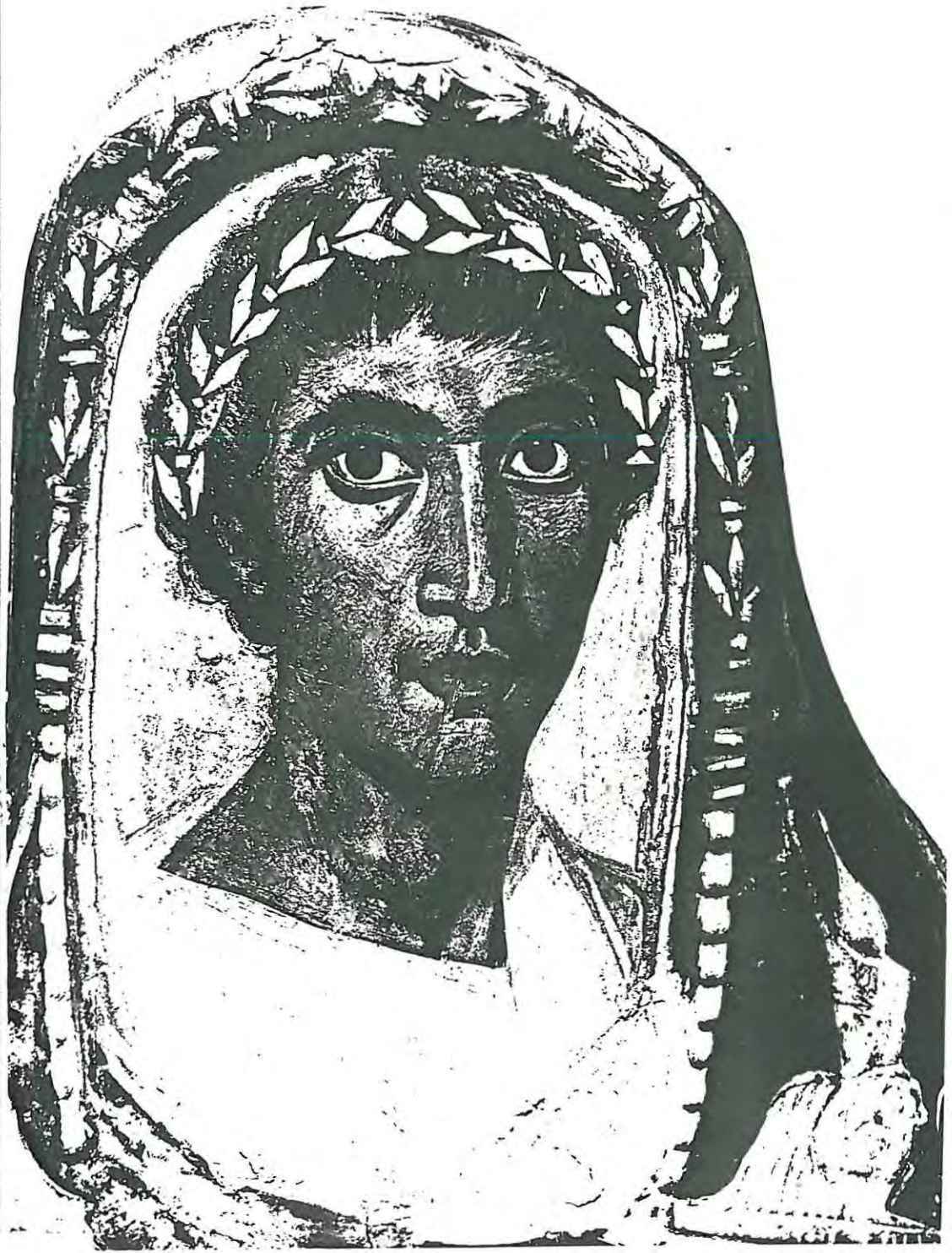
## Chapter 1. The Beginnings

Since man first began painting, he has painted the things which have scared him, such as war, death; when the Christians came along, he began to paint martyrdom, the crucifixion, in fact, the agonies of man. The natives of many of the African lands, have always made masks of the "dark spirits and demons" which they fear.

"When I became interested, forty years ago, in Negro art and I made what they refer to as my Negro period, it was because at that time I was against what was called beauty in the museums. At that time, for most people a Negro mask was an ethnographic object. When I went for the first time, at Derain's urging, to the Trocadère museum, the smell of dampness and rot there stuck in my throat. It depressed me so much that I wanted to get out fast, but I stayed and studied. Men had made those masks and other objects for a purpose, a sacred purpose, a magic purpose, as a kind of mediation between themselves and the unknown hostile forces that surrounded them, in order to overcome their fear and horror by giving it a form and an image. At that moment I realised that this was what painting was all about. Painting isn't an aesthetic operation; it's a form of magic designed as a mediator between this strange hostile world and us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires. When I came to that realization, I knew I had found my way."

-Picasso

It is always the unknown that is feared. Today, as always, death is still one of the most feared things, and we still go to elaborate lengths to ensure that the dead one has a safe and pleasant passage to wherever he is going. Plate 1 shows the face of the Roman, Artemidorus on his mummy



1

case, with a golden laurel wreath around his head, a Graeco-Egyptian symbol of death. Indeed, the entire mummy case is decorated with gilded silhouettes of Egyptian divinities of death. The portrait is purely Roman, however, and this shows how the different cultures borrowed images from one another, which is how, of course, traditions are derived. Anyway, Artemidorus has survived in this painting, whatever has happened now to his original body.

In the Middle Ages, Christian themes were the most popular. Martyrdom, the Crucifixion, and similar subjects were what occupied most artist's minds. Plate 2 shows Giotto's The Kiss of Judas. The composition is perfect. There is no specific setting, and the fraction of space left unfilled by figures is animated only by the lances and blazing torches held by those surrounding the two central figures. The vulgar brutality of the myrmidons of the law, eager for their prey, is stressed. The violence, which is suspended momentarily, is expressed in the guarded faces of the disciples, who are about to panic, and in the hard faces and lances of the surrounding soldiers. There is a dramatic intensity rarely seen in paintings of this period, which tend to be stylised and serene.

Plate 3 shows the Bearded Lady, which is shocking merely because ladies don't normally have beards. It is a strange picture too, as she looks as if she is actually quite attractive, under all that hair. Whether such a woman ever existed is questionable, however, it is an interesting picture.

Before Goya, artists often showed war as a heroic, ennobling act of man; on huge canvases, soldiers marched off to martial strains leaving behind cheering crowds and adoring ladies. Victory was the attainable goddess; honour, the glorifying force. Goya changed all that. He painted and drew war as it is, honoured by isolated acts of heroism, but more often an inferno that can brutalize man to the point where he commits acts against his fellow beings that exceed the most gruesome imaginings.

Probably his most famous indictment of war, The Third of May, 1808 seizes on this sort of brutality. On the third of





3



May, 1808, the french committed a blunder that made war inevitable. They executed, without a trial, all spaniards believed to have been connected in any way with the uprising at the Puerta del Sol. In the painting, the executioners are anonymous soldiers obeying orders. The focal point is the peasant about to be shot, with his arms upraised, a look of hopeless terror on his face. If one looks carefully, each face is personalised, an individual look of horror, fright, or pain engraved on each one. Goya records the brutality and illogic of the war.

He also created a series of etchings which were published after his death, called The Disasters of War. This series shows the Peninsular war at its worst, as indeed it was fought. Both sides committed atrocities. The French tortured and mutilated their prisoners, chopping off limbs and organs even after the men were dead. The Spaniards reacted in kind, hacking off the bodies of the enemy and subjecting their captives to long agonizing deaths. All these pictures show, in minutest detail, what man is capable of doing to man.

The "Black paintings" of La Quinta del Sordo also show Goya's intense awareness of the dark forces of panic, terror, fear, hysteria; the all too real ingredients of the human experience. The most powerful and terrifying of these, and to me one of the most horrifying paintings ever, is Saturn devouring his Son. This mythological subject has been the subject for several paintings by old masters, notably by Rubens, but none can match Goya's in savagery and passion.

## Chapter 2: The Moderns at the start of the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century seems to have heralded the modern disease, psychological imbalance, and "What can be done about it?" Man now questions his place more than ever before. This development is obviously reflected in his painting. To begin with, there was a move towards a certain mysticism, which can be seen in the works of the so-called Metaphysicals; Giorgio

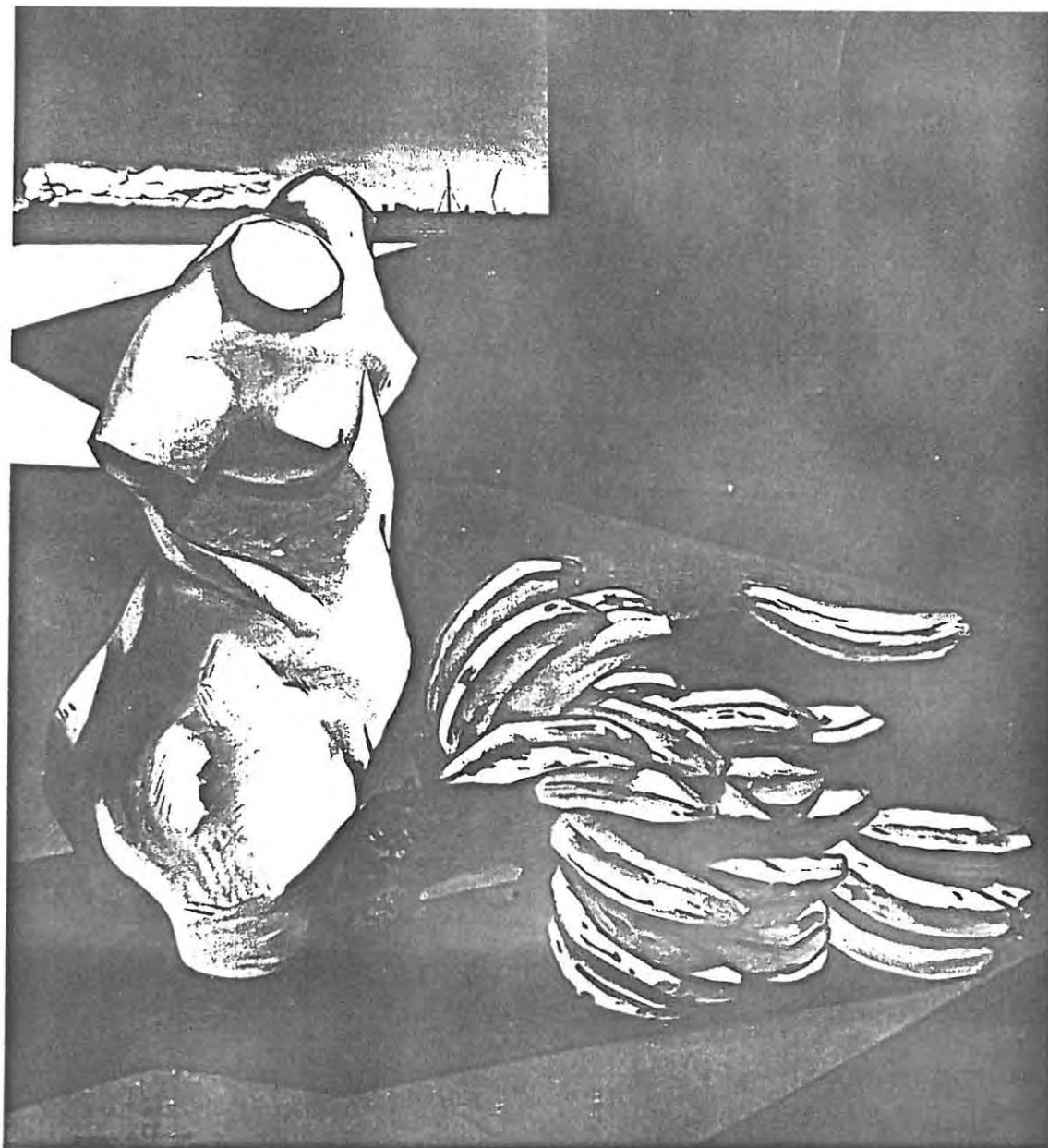
De Chirico, Carra and Morandi. Paul Klee's work also has a sense of mysticism, but the painter who evolved the most mystical work, was Odilon Redon, who died in 1916. He rediscovered a world poised between reality and dream, that half-real world of forms and colours we glimpse with eyes shut, in works like The Chariot of Phaeton, Mephisto, and Sleep. Even before psycho-analysis charted the world of dream images, Redon had set down its forms in paint. Odilon Redon did not use his eyes to see what all of us can see; his images are dredged up out of the deepest world of dreams where what is seen is the unseeable. He created a world of symbols which was most personally his own. This private kingdom can be seen in his strange, sometimes terrible paintings.

The work of Paul Klee has this same quality.

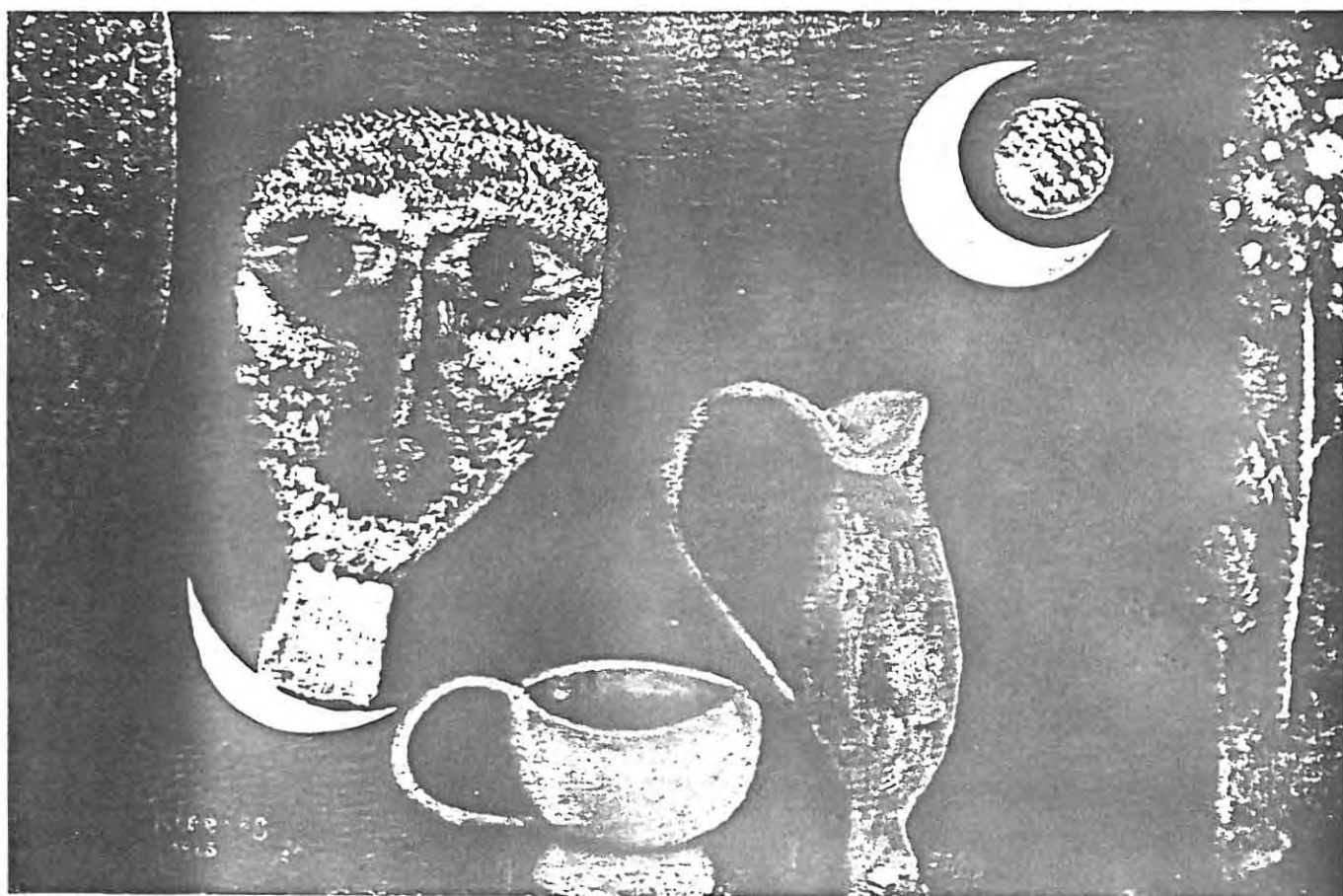
"We used to represent things visible on earth which we enjoyed seeing or would have liked to see. Now we reveal the reality of visible things, and thereby express the belief that visible reality is merely an isolated phenomenon latently outnumbered by other realities. Things take on a broader and more varied meaning, often in seeming contradiction to the rational experience of yesterday. There is a tendency to stress the essential in the random."

-Klee

Only after a long, methodical and patient evolution did Paul Klee admit that he was a painter. And in order to understand his work, it is necessary to know the basic elements from which it was developed. First of all he mastered the technique of drawing and then of engraving. His culture was extremely varied and open. Trained in Munich he came to discover and admire the work of the great visionary artists; Goya, Blake, Ensor, Henri Rousseau and of course Odilon Redon. All his studies and his numerous journeys were designed methodically to master the discoveries of the past. He began to learn what he could from Byzantine mosaics, Persian decorative art, pre-Columbian art and Chinese paintings. He assimilated every possible plastic vocabulary. For a long time, he searched for new ways of seeing which would permit him to catch objects in an



6



10

unusual light. In particular the experience of a journey to Kairouan was decisive as regards his sense of colour. For the first time he then discovered how to define areas of colour coherently and built them into his linear structure as a means of creating space.

Klee had a profound love of music all his life. He loved the subjects of Mozart and Bach, and the most sophisticated of modern music. From these he learned how to break through the old forms of representation, which were simplified, symmetrical and restricted, and to indulge in an infinitely varied exploitation of any theme he took up. His linear variations are blended, reinforced and reconciled by colour just as in music harmony helps out melody. By a creative use of line he was able to qualify his subject, to give it a new existence, to transform a personage, a bird or a fish into a pure arabesque.

In Plate 6, Ceramic-Mystic, the painting is vibrant with intense life, remote from any earthly logic, which communicates a curious metaphysical anguish. Much as children do Klee always builds up an imaginary world around ordinary objects, and thus the eye is inevitably caught by the inseparable and mysterious elements that go to make it up. Elements that are suggestive of a world beyond, which Klee perhaps had in mind when he said: "Do we really know whether this life is more important than the life to come?" Every picture by Him is a microcosm, an abbreviated view of the universe. He stands in front of creatures and objects and sets about making them develop as they might in nature. Klee brings out the character of these objects with elliptical signs, with metaphors, which he explains in little foot-notes placed beside them to indicate their meaning in terms of life, their future evolution, their possible transformations. Klee is both a poet and a painter. Sometimes it can be seen that the poet has been there before the painter. Sometimes it is the other way round.

Towards the end of his life, already a prey to fatal illness, Klee made a radical change in his work. His colours became earthier and more subdued, his lines harsher and heavier; a tragic element appeared, glooming over the lighthearted fantasy world of his earlier years. Now in the shadow of death, there fell upon his work the shadow also of deep earnestness,

and with thoughts turned inward he found no place for flights of fancy. His life work was crowned by these tragic pictures, for example, Portrait of Gaia, which he painted in 1939, a year before his death. These paintings are ultimate manifestations of his adventure beyond the frontiers of the visible into a new realm of inner experience. He always had enough wisdom, curiosity, objectivity and humour to be able to pass a critical and often ironical judgement on anything. He could set down in a pitiless satire the secret vices and fatalities of a face. Some of his last works are an indictment of the collective follies which threaten the continued existence of human freedom. His maxim; "art does not imitate the visible, it makes visible", was amply proven by his own work.

"I know for my own part that I have no programme, only the inexplicable longing to grasp what I see and feel, and to find for it the purest expression." These words of German Expressionist Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, co-founder of the "Brücke" movement in the arts, convey the essence of the revolutionary movement of the German Expressionists, which overthrew the stifling academism of Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany and led in the years between 1900 and 1914 to an amazing upsurge of creativity. They sought simplified forms, new rhythms, intenser colours. They were concerned above all with sheer liberation. Artists in Munich such as Marc, Jawlensky, and Kandinsky; in Berlin such as Feininger and Beckmann; and in Vienna, Kokoschka and Schiele, all worked in related styles.

"In my opinion there are two directions in art. One, which is the more dominant at the moment, is the art of surface decoration, the other is concerned with space and depth; For myself, I pursue the art of space and depth with all my soul, and try to achieve my own style in it. I want a style that, in contrast to the art of exterior decoration, will penetrate as deeply as possible into the fundamentals of nature, into the soul of things. I am fully aware that many of the feelings I experience have already existed before. But I also recognize what is new in my feelings, what I have drawn from my time and its spirit.

It is not something that I want to or can define. It is in my pictures."

-Max Beckmann

Beckmann only really matured as an artist during the war. In the proximity of horror and death, he found himself. Surface gloss ceased to interest him. In a letter to his wife in 1915, he stated, "I hope that I shall gradually be able to get simpler, increasingly concentrated in my expression, but I shall never, I know, abandon the fullness, the roundness, the pulse of life, on the contrary, I should like to intensify it more and more - you know what I mean by intensified roundness: no arabesques, no calligraphy, but volume and plasticity."

After a nervous breakdown in 1915 Beckmann was released from the service. But it was a long time before he was able to exorcize his horror and fear in drawing and painting, to make himself safe against death and danger. Plate 8, Self-portrait with a Red Scarf, shows Beckmann as a man tormented and pursued, a figure apparently unable to stand upright, supporting himself with difficulty by leaning against the edge of the picture.

Another German Expressionist who drew tormented figures was Egon Schiele, as in Plate 7, Self-portrait 1910. Schiele sets his figures against a bare background, without associations, and his handling is more temperate and austere than his contemporaries.

"Art is always the same thing: art. Therefore there is no "new art". But, there are new artists. Even a study by a new artist is always a work of art; it is a piece of himself that is alive. The new artist must be unconditionally himself; he must be a creator; without needing all the relics of tradition and the past, he must have in himself, immediate and entire, the foundation on which he builds."

-Schiele

Schiele was very conscious of the threatened condition of existence. "I am a human being, I love death and I love life." Growth and decay, life and death preoccupied him in numerous paintings. He died a premature death in 1918.



7



8

Chaim Soutine was one of the group in Paris at the beginning of the century to whom self-expression meant more than representing what things looked like. For him, the son of a poor Jewish tailor in a Lithuanian village, that expression was from the outset tragic, and this sentiment tinged the things and people that he painted. He came to Paris in 1913, and studied in the Atelier Cormon for a while. In 1915 he met Modigliani, who committed suicide in 1920. The two were prototypes of the "peintre maudit", and shared a fateful sense of human existence and its vulnerability.

Soutine's chosen images are obsessively repeated: he frequently painted the same motif again and again. But the precise significance of his choice often remains obscure, as in his many portraits of pageboys. In his paintings of people, what the viewer is chiefly aware of is not the sitter's character, but the artist's use of paint as a vehicle for his own anguish. Here is a Romantic revival of the assertion that the movements of the individual soul are of paramount interest, and that furthermore the artist unjustly limits himself, and tends to destroy his own potentialities, if he sets any bounds to his own ego.

In his paintings of dead things, such as his many paintings of dead fowls, and that of Carcass of Beef, Plate 12, Soutine brings us face to face with the tragic mystery and phosphorescent presence of death in the midst of life. His paintings of Hanging Fowls obviously have their origin in the ritual killing of fowls by the village "schocher", a ritual slaughterer in his native Jewish village.

"It is in flesh already dead that he finds his sensual joy. But this flesh must have bled. We must still see red tears welling up in the place of the wrenched-out feathers, doubtful patches must show through the gold of the skin, the green or blue gems that remain of the wings must be stained with sticky crimson. He hangs his bird by the neck, beak open, eyes and tongue sticking out, the marvellous coruscations of crests and





10

18



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12

20

wattles still swollen and running with juices stilled forever. Sometimes they are nailed up by the two wings, their necks limp and their warm nakedness spattered with red, and recall some liturgical crucifixion for heaven knows what holocaust in honour of the sacred appetites of the human animal. Cruelty here which does not stem from the mind, but springs from the heart in obedience to the inexorable forces of life that bind us to the necessity of death."

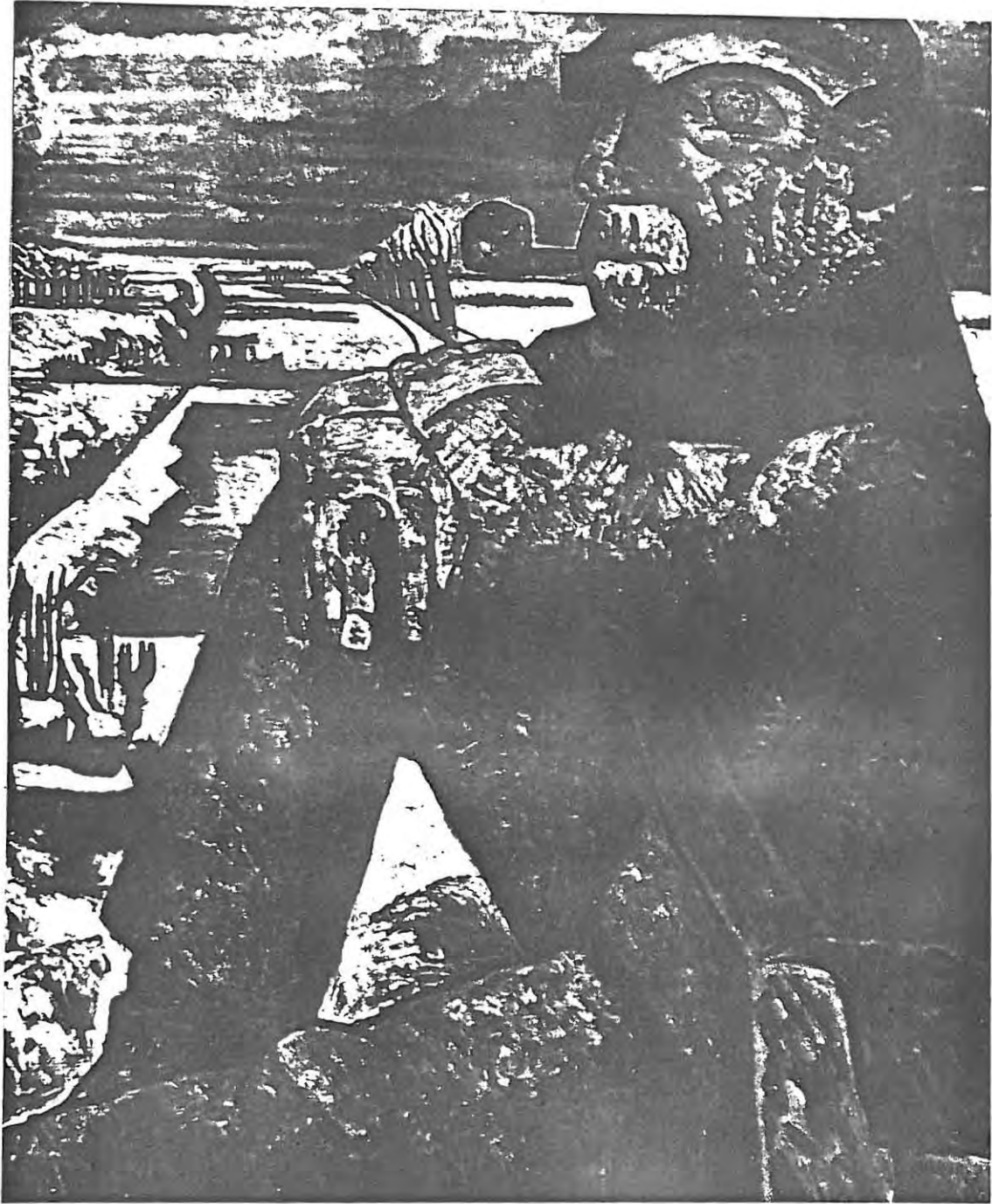
-Elie Faure, 1929

The Futurist manifesto of 1909 sums up the work of the Expressionists: "Beauty exists only in struggle. A work that is not aggressive cannot be a masterpiece. Art must be conceived as a violent assault against the forces of the unknown, designed to subject them to man."

Giorgio De Chirico was the first of the metaphysical painters. He was concerned with the imaginary world of his own creation. He tried to reach the sort of absolute state in which things meet in unexpected relationships. He was disturbed by speculation and abstraction, without any plastic aim in view. His use of geometrical constructions, his invocation of physical laws, was entirely detached and betrays not the least desire to upset them. With Chirico, shadows can fall in a direction entirely opposed to that dictated by the source of light. But, as distinct from Chagall, Chirico was not yielding to the supremacy of his fantasy, he was investigating.

He has written:

"Sometimes the horizon is defined by a wall behind which rises the noise of disappearing trains. The whole nostalgia of the infinite is revealed to us behind the geometrical precision of the square. We experience the most unforgettable movements when certain aspects of the world, whose existence we completely ignore, suddenly confront us with the revelation of mysteries lying all the time within our reach, and which we cannot see because we are too short-sighted, and cannot feel because our senses are inadequately developed. Their muffled voices speak to us from nearby, but they sound like voices from another planet. We must not forget that a picture must always



13

be the reflection of a profound sensation, that profound signifies strange, and strange signifies not-known or perhaps entirely unknown. A work of art, if it is to be immortal, must go far beyond the limits of man. Good sense and logic have no place in it. That is the way in which a painting can approximate to a dream-like or child-like state of mind."

-De Chirico

The deliberate and extreme starkness of Chirico's work was a sign of his great ambition. Through strange combinations and eerie settings he hoped to create the magical projection of a dream-world. His novelty lay in his discovery of new correspondences between objects, in his revelation of the most secret ties which exist between them. Imagination became in his hands the unexpected bringing together of ordinary or preconceived objects, fragments of memory, which may be earlier than or outside of the world in which we live. A creative disquiet is produced in the spectator in proportion as his conventional association of ideas and images is shattered. The silence quivers in expectation of being torn by a cry or by a railway-engine's whistle. In these cold, ideal and pure architectural settings Chirico has created a spatial magic. By using the most impersonal elements: statues or plaster heads instead of people, the most lifeless fruit and vegetables, which he delineates with complete indifference, Chirico was able to detach them from any naturalistic or carnal context, from any literal significance. This was a vein greatly exploited later by the Surrealists.

The theme of metaphysical painting was man's fatal alienation from the everyday objects that had once been the reliable landmarks of his daily existence. The artists who had served in the war suddenly saw these familiar things with different eyes, upon their return to civilian life: They found them nonsensical, but terrifyingly so, and terrifyingly devoid of meaning. It was this panicky anxiety they tried to set down in paint. Precisely because they had come to see that the things men know and use are the enemies of man—a lesson learned again in World War II—their paintings inevitably pinned down with great exactitude the character of things,

what it is that makes them so terrible.

### Chapter 3: Picasso, Sutherland, Bacon

In 1927 Picasso initiated a phase of monsters. He began to imagine a new world peopled with humans, fauna and weird hybrid flora. These he painted with staggering grandeur and precision, for his cosmic inspiration was accompanied by that same poetic imagination that had helped the ancients to create fabulous monsters. Often dramatic painters, eg. Michelangelo, El Greco or Goya, display a tendency to irony. Sometimes this results from a natural feeling of shame at the excess of their expressed emotion, sometimes from a desire to moderate the tragedy of their subject-matter. Picasso frequently submits to this necessity.

The tragic events of the Spanish Civil War, by which he was so deeply moved, could not but inspire in him feelings of revolt. At the very moment when he was imagining a new universe he suddenly found himself confronted with reality. His first gesture of protestation took the form of two sheets of engravings: Dreams and Lies of Franco. With Franco as his direct target he lampooned the dictator as a grotesque creature like a cancerous, hairy turnip, wearing a crown and grinning evilly from a mouth in its middle. This arrogant monster tilts at the sun, slaughters a horse, axes a statue. In some scenes only the victims appear. Mostly they are women and children, dead, dying or hopelessly despairing.

This etching is on two large copper plates, each of which he divided into nine rectangles about the size of postcards. He also decided to add a poem of his own composing written in the style of his earlier verse. If his verbal images were less successful than those he had etched, they still reflected his loathing of the unnamed tyrant:

"Fandango of shivering owls souse of swords of evil-



14

25

omened polyps scouring brush of hairs from priests' tonsures standing naked in the middle of the frying-pan placed upon the ice-cream cone of codfish fried in the scabs of his lead-ox heart..."

Even before this damning portfolio could be issued, the Spanish Republic called upon Picasso the propagandist for a larger effort: a mural which was to be the major adornment of its pavilion at the Paris World's Fair in the summer of 1937. He accepted the assignment but procrastinated for several months. He was stung into action by a single event in the Spanish War, as his compatriot Goya had been more than a century before. On April 26, 1937, German bombers flying for Franco wiped out the small Basque town of Guernica. They attacked at the busiest hour of the market day; the streets were jammed with townspeople and peasants in from the countryside. Never before in modern war had noncombatants been slaughtered in such numbers, and by such means. Guernica had no strategic value for Franco's armies, but it had a poignant meaning for 600,000 Basques: from the early Middle Ages onward, it had been a kind of capital for the Basques, symbolizing their independent spirit and democratic ideals.

An infuriated Picasso immediately set to work on his mural. He set up a gigantic canvas, about 25 feet long and 11 feet high. He completed the work in about a month of unremitting work. Guernica may well be the most terrifying document on the horrors of war ever to be produced by an artist. In it Picasso marshalled many of the techniques he had employed in previous years: the flat fragmented figures of Cubism; the dislocations of eyes and profiles; the powerful, abstracted forms of primitive African Art; the symbols of his minotaur series.

The central figure is a wounded horse, its head upraised in a paralysed fright. Above it is an electric bulb, rather like an eye. Below the horse's hooves lies a slain warrior, one hand clutching a broken sword. To the left of the painter a woman screams over her dead child. At the right a figure falls screaming from a burning house, its clothes aflame. Another runs in mindless flight. A third, represented only by a head and an arm, thrusts forth a lamp. The final painting

contained a number of important changes from Picasso's earlier conceptions of it. Perhaps the most important change was his decision to paint Guernica solely in black, grey and white. These somber hues, unrelieved in any way, emphasize the tragedy. Neither in the colours, nor in the figures, nor in all the complex symbolism of the painting, is there hope. Even the woman's lamp serves to only illumine the calamity.

Picasso hardly ever expounded on his paintings, but in 1944, after Allied troops liberated Paris in World War II, he explained Guernica's two most important symbols to an American soldier who interviewed him at his studio. "The bull is not fascism, but it is brutality and darkness...The horse represents the people." So the bull would seem to represent the villain. However, some critics have suggested that even in its brutality and darkness it is as guiltless as the horse. It surveys the horizon in a bewildered manner. If the bull is not the villain, then he is nowhere on the canvas, which seems to convey the message that: To the victims of modern warfare, the enemy is impersonal and unknown. Guernica is in fact, the "monstrous become probable" of which Baudelaire spoke when writing about Goya. Picasso expressed a supreme moment of human pain and revolt in all its disorder.

Graham Sutherland is one of the greatest living painters in England today. Like Klee, he went through a long apprenticeship, and it is only after 1936 that traces of tension emerged in his canvases, especially in his Welsh landscapes of this period. In these paintings the hills and twisting roads of Wales, rank and decaying vegetation, dead trees in the woodlands, gorse climbing the sea wall, all became alarming motifs with a strong emotional content. It was now that Sutherland became conscious of the possibility of translating objects seen or found in nature into images of his inward vision which, through such metamorphosis, became more real, more expressive than the object which inspired them, transmuting this into something reflecting human responses of fear,

anguish and apprehension. This emotional content found a further outlet in his work as an official war artist. His themes were mainly the devastation of bombed and ruined cities, wrecked locomotives or machinery and twisted girders. While making drawings for the Crown of Thorns for his Northampton Crucifixion, Sutherland came to realise that the thorn tree is not only a biblical suffering but also a natural form with a potent mystique of its own. Since 1944 he has painted many variations on the thorn theme, which has become famous as his own private symbol of suffering.

As a result of his Northampton Crucifixion, Sutherland was commissioned to design the great tapestry for Coventry Cathedral. The theme was Christ in Glory, and his initial treatment of the theme of redemption through suffering was influenced by the photographic records of the German concentration camps. His religious painting is held to be equal to that of Rouault, the great painter of sacred art on the continent; Both realised that in our age, which is certainly not a devout one in comparison to the Middle Ages, a more violent approach is necessary in order to capture the imagination of a by and large non-religious community.

Sutherland's first portrait, of Somerset Maugham, arose out of his chance remark that a face like Maugham's would be interesting to paint. For him this was an experiment, to find out whether he could extend his repertory of forms to the human figure. In his first portraits he endowed his sitters with a certain inorganic quality, the reverse of some of his nature paintings in which inorganic objects were endowed with a human character. Gradually his portraits gained in realism, in certain instances of an almost exaggerated kind. The emphasis is always on the face and often, as in the portraits of Edward Sackville-West, Winston Churchill, and others, certain parts of the body are deliberately left sketchy so as to compel the eye to concentrate more fully on the face.

The ambivalence of his inanimate forms, his animate shapes of vegetation and human beings, reflect the uncertainties

of our age. His painting is also ambivalent in another respect; in the northern expressionist tradition it arouses fear and anguish yet through its sheer pictorial beauty conveys a deep aesthetic pleasure. The reason lies in Sutherland's dual approach, which is both emotional and intellectual. The purpose of his work is above all to express his feelings and thus provoke emotion. But his method of reaching this goal through a long, arduous process of studies is far from being spontaneous. Indeed, it is the rare duality of emotion and intellect with which he endows his work, two qualities that only seldom go side by side, which makes his contribution to European and more particularly English painting, so personal and unique.

"The universe is the same for all of us, and dissimilar for each."

-Marcel Proust

When one is confronted with an object that somehow conveys a feeling that one thought belonged only to oneself, the revelation comes as a shock. And when one is suddenly disorientated by an experience completely outside one's own, that too is shocking. This is mainly what happens when viewing Francis Bacon's work. Excepting Goya, Bacon's work is the most threatening of all that I have studied. He is not concerned with beauty of handling of paint, but with questions of vitality and force, with the dark places in the mind of man.

"What modern man wants is the grin without the cat; that is, the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance"

-Bacon

He is acutely aware of the tedium with which sophisticated people today respond to traditional elaboration. He is determined in his own words, to avoid "the story talking louder than the paint." This attitude is indicated by the deliberately uninformative titles of his paintings, for example; Plates 15 and 19, the Figure with Meat and Study for figure 1V, respectively.

Even his several Studies for Crucifixions, represent not the historical event, but archetypes of the brutality of man's treatment of man, and of animals; for he has spoken of the impression made



upon him by photographs of animals before they have been slaughtered, showing that they are aware of what is about to happen to them.

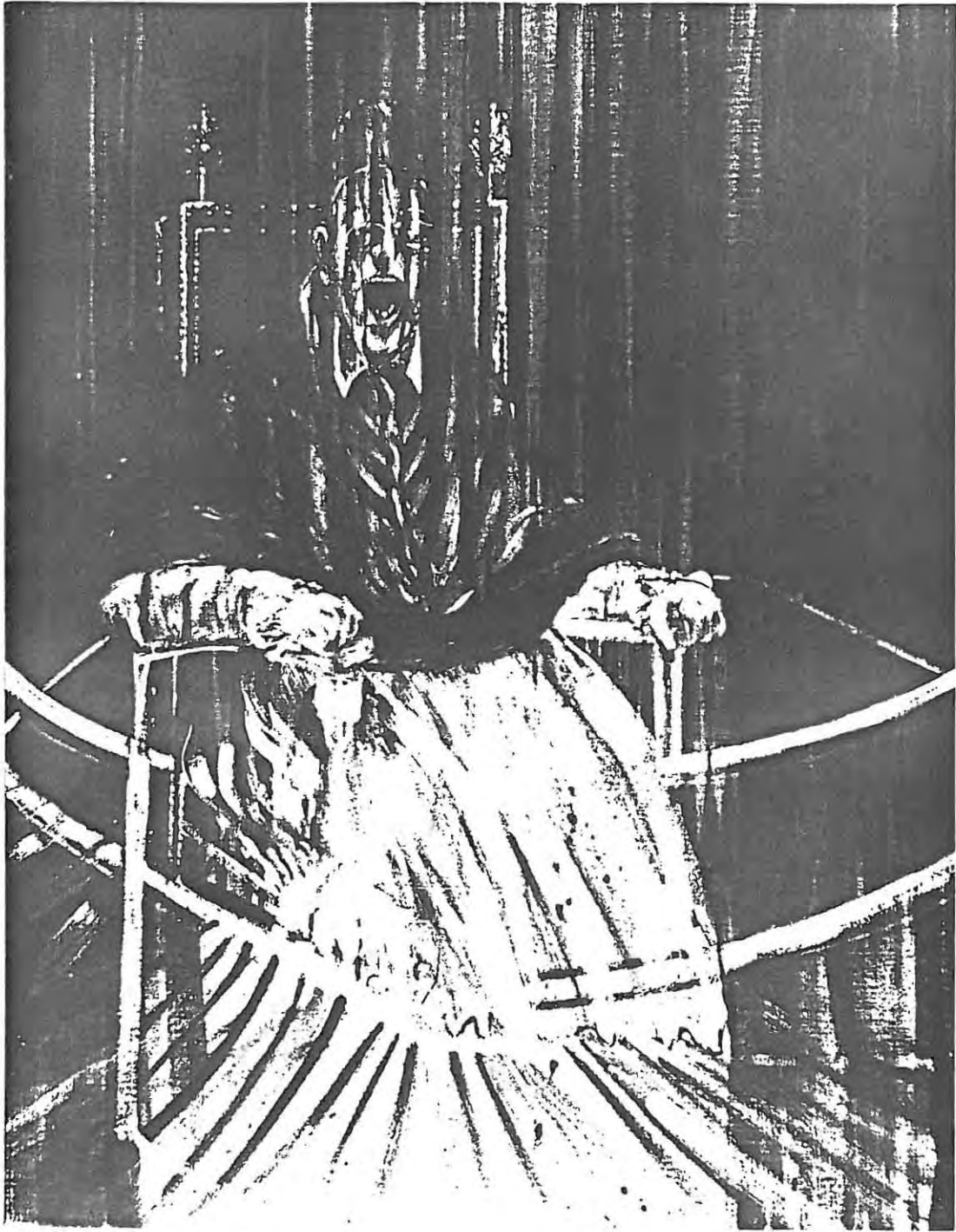
"I recall very vividly how they, the visitors to the Tate, began to tread quietly and talk in low tones. Suddenly they were over-awed by the grandeur of the work, and whatever it was that opened their eyes to the magic of it, they became for a time solemn witnesses of an enveloping and wonderfully sustained vision of human destiny."

-Robert Melville, at the  
1962 Tate Retrospective.

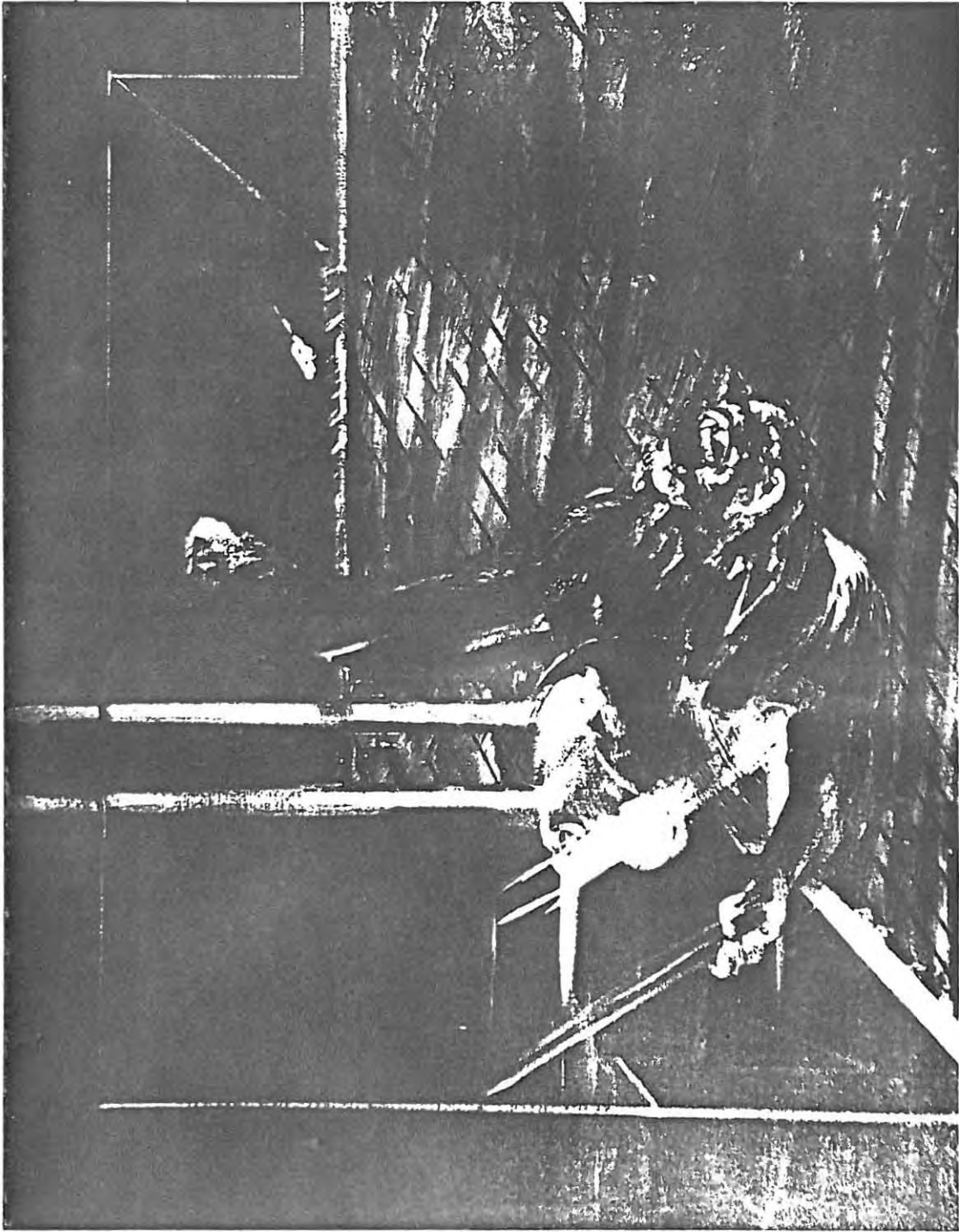
For all his reverence for the great tradition, the echoes in his works of Velasquez and Grünewald, the purple vestments of his prelates and the like, his painting is traditional only in the most superficial sense. Bacon is obsessed by the present, and his obsession is expressed in a language which is well adapted to describe modern man—in the hell of his situation.

Bacon's attitude to man, his main subject contains the conviction that "man now realizes that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without purpose, other than of his own choosing."

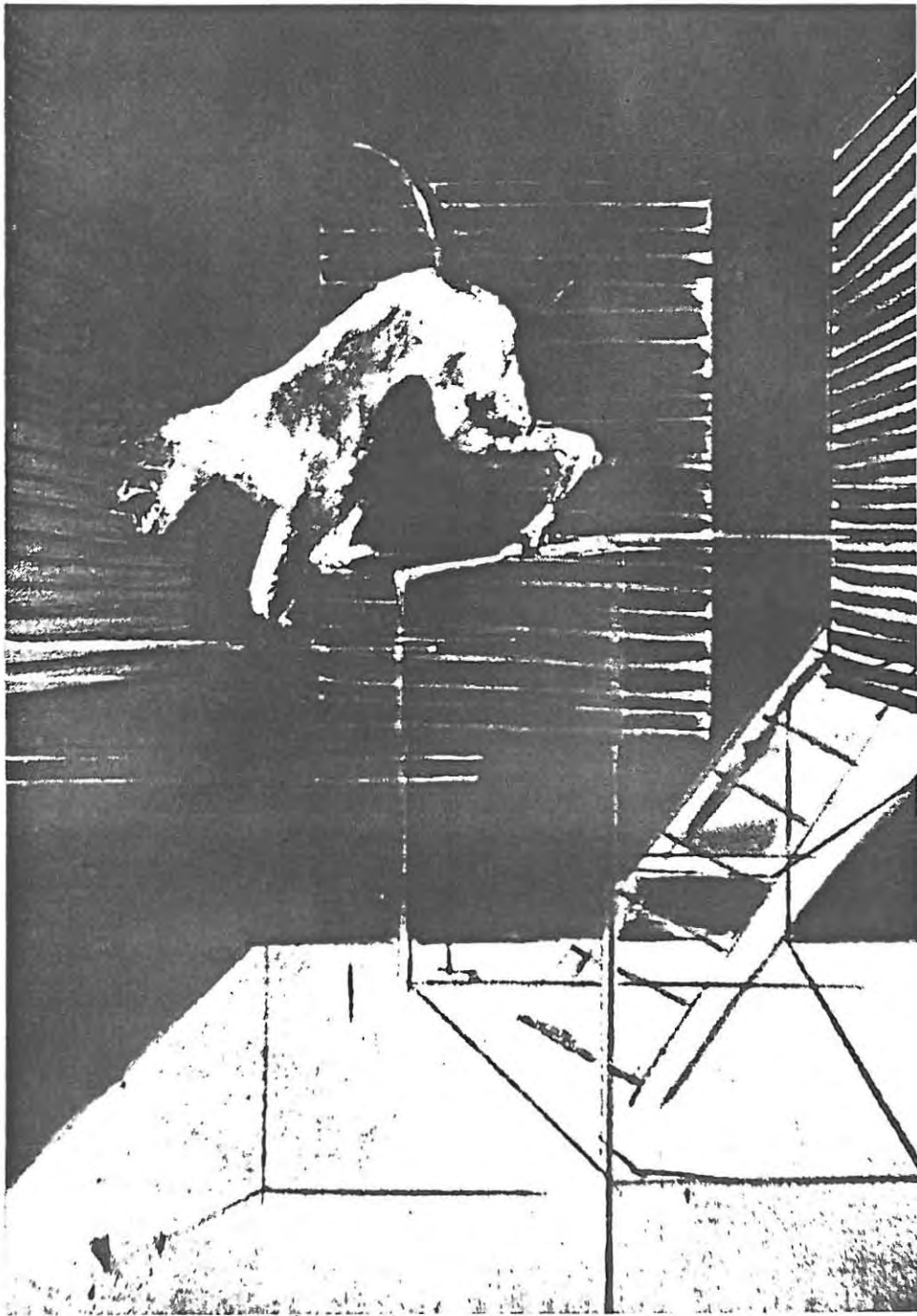
He believes too, that the circumstances in which the artist lives and works today make painting difficult to the verge of impossibility. "I believe that Velasquez thought that he was recording the court and certain people. A good artist today would be forced to set the trap in an entirely different way to record what Velasquez was recording. He knows that that particular thing could be recorded on film; so this side of his activity has been taken over by something else. It is that one wants to be as factual as possible, and at the same time as deeply unlocking of areas of sensations other than the simple illustrations of the object. Abstract art is boring because fundamentally it is the play of free fancy which even at its best can only result in decoration. It is only through obsession with the object that real inventiveness and real



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aesthetic activity can come about. Real painting is a mysterious and continuous struggle with chance, mysterious because the very substance of the paint can make such a direct assault on the nervous system...I think painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the bits down."

-Francis Bacon, in a tribute to Matthew Smith, his only published writing.

"Human beings cannot bear very much reality,...", said T. S. Eliot, and it is the reality, not the fantasy, in the art of Bacon that horrifies. We need as much equilibrium and fortitude as we can command to face the disappointments and fears that are the inevitable part of the human condition. So that we cannot afford, except as an occasional luxury, the gratuitous contemplation of horror. People do not usually watch operations, animals being slaughtered. We avert our eyes from such terrors in order to preserve our sanity. It is Bacon's matter-of-fact treatment of the terrible, and the conspicuously present-day treatment of such subjects that compels us to recognise ourselves in his paintings, however reluctantly, and to come face-to-face with our own fears.

Even in his portraits of animals, such as those shown in Plates 17 and 18, Bacon shows the agony that animals suffer at the hands of man. The chimpanzee feels as much, and suffers as much, as the screaming pope, in his study after Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, Plate 16.

Judith Mason, a South African artist, had an interesting thing to say about this type of painting. She believes that one needs horror sometimes, that in order to experience life one must know its terrors, the evils of man. So she has an answer; If one must own one of these types of paintings, then there must be a separate room for it, so that when it is necessary, one can go and look at it, be absorbed by it, and then, when enough time has been spent, one can leave the

room and the painting behind, to forget it until the next time. She believes that it is not possible to live with such a painting all the time, but that paradoxically it is necessary to see such things every now and again. We must know how bad we are.

And this is what Francis Bacon's paintings do teach us. That man is cruel, that he suffers. His paintings remind us of life.

#### Chapter 4: Dada to Post-Second World War

During the first war and immediately after, the optimistic energy of Futurism was succeeded by the frivolous or despairing nihilism of the Dada movements which sprang up simultaneously in New York, Switzerland, Germany and Paris.

In 1913, Marcel Duchamp's Nu descendant un escalier was the sensation of the already sensational Armory Show in New York. He rapidly became leader of all who were ready to attack the conventional canons of Beauty and Morality, and so became paradoxically the master of anti-painting. "Duchamp's attitude is that life is a melancholy joke, not worth the trouble of investigating. To his superior intelligence the total absurdity of life, the contingent nature of a world denuded of all values, are logical consequences of Descartes' Cogito ergo sum."

This statement by an anonymous friend of Duchamp's, sums up the sort of concept that gave birth to the infamous "ready-mades". By asserting that any object could be turned into a work of art merely by labelling it as such, Duchamp gave free rein to a vein of distinctive irony. How amusing, for example, to submit a porcelain urinal to an avant-garde art exhibition, under the signature "R. Mutt". These "ready-mades" do pose a very important question: How do we recognize a work of art as a work of art? Duchamp offers a disconcerting answer: only because we are already prepared in advance to do so, to accept that the thing presented to us belongs to a special category. What he did was to cut the ground from under traditionally established criteria of aesthetic judgment. It has never been possible to stabilize the situation since. Duchamp's works are not numerous and little-known, but he had considerable influence amongst his

contemporaries. In 1915 he began his most ambitious painting, the Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even. It was supposed to be the syntheses of all his alchemic-magic theories and of his idea of art as a "mental" fact. In 1923 this work was still unfinished, and true to form, he abandoned painting altogether, in favour of playing chess. Although he had stopped painting, he continued his activity of demystifying art and liberating it from outmoded, traditional dogma. But Dada was too nihilistic to last for long. And the direction which art took was merely a continuation of this movement: to Surrealism. The first recognisably Surrealist painter was Max Ernst, who had formed a Dada group in Cologne in 1919. Another early Surrealist was Kurt Schwitters, an original German Dadaist. Since Surrealism lays such stress on spontaneity and the intuitions of the subconscious, it is perhaps surprising to find that some of its best-known exponents are academic in technique. Artists such as Dali and Magritte are so intent on showing us their vision as clearly as possible that they choose the mode of presentation they hope we will find most accessible, the sort of super realistic approach, and reject many of the discoveries of earlier epochs.

The Surrealist movement was officially founded in 1924, with the publication of the First Surrealist Manifesto, a document of comparable importance to Futurist Manifesto of 1909. The word Surrealism is defined in this document:

"Pure psychic automatism, by which an attempt is made to express, either verbally, in writing, or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought. The dictation of thought in the absence of all control by the reason, excluding any aesthetic or moral preoccupation."

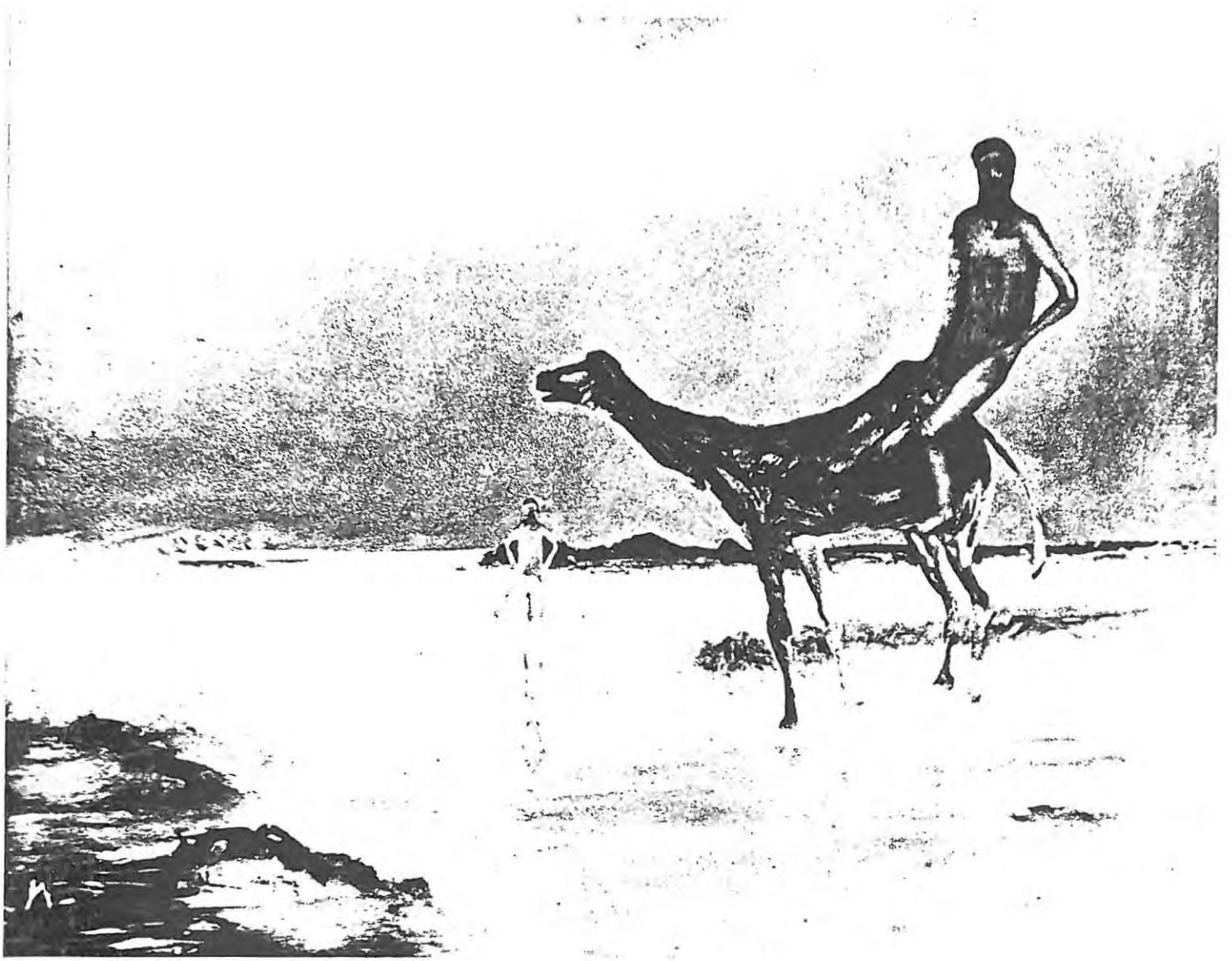
Before I move on to Abstract Expressionism, which was the next school of thought to appear, I wish to mention two Australian artists, who do not seem to fit into any specific category. They are Sidney Nolan, the famous Australian painter, and Jeffrey Smart. Nolan portrays the bush, the wild Australia, whereas Smart paints the built-up cities.

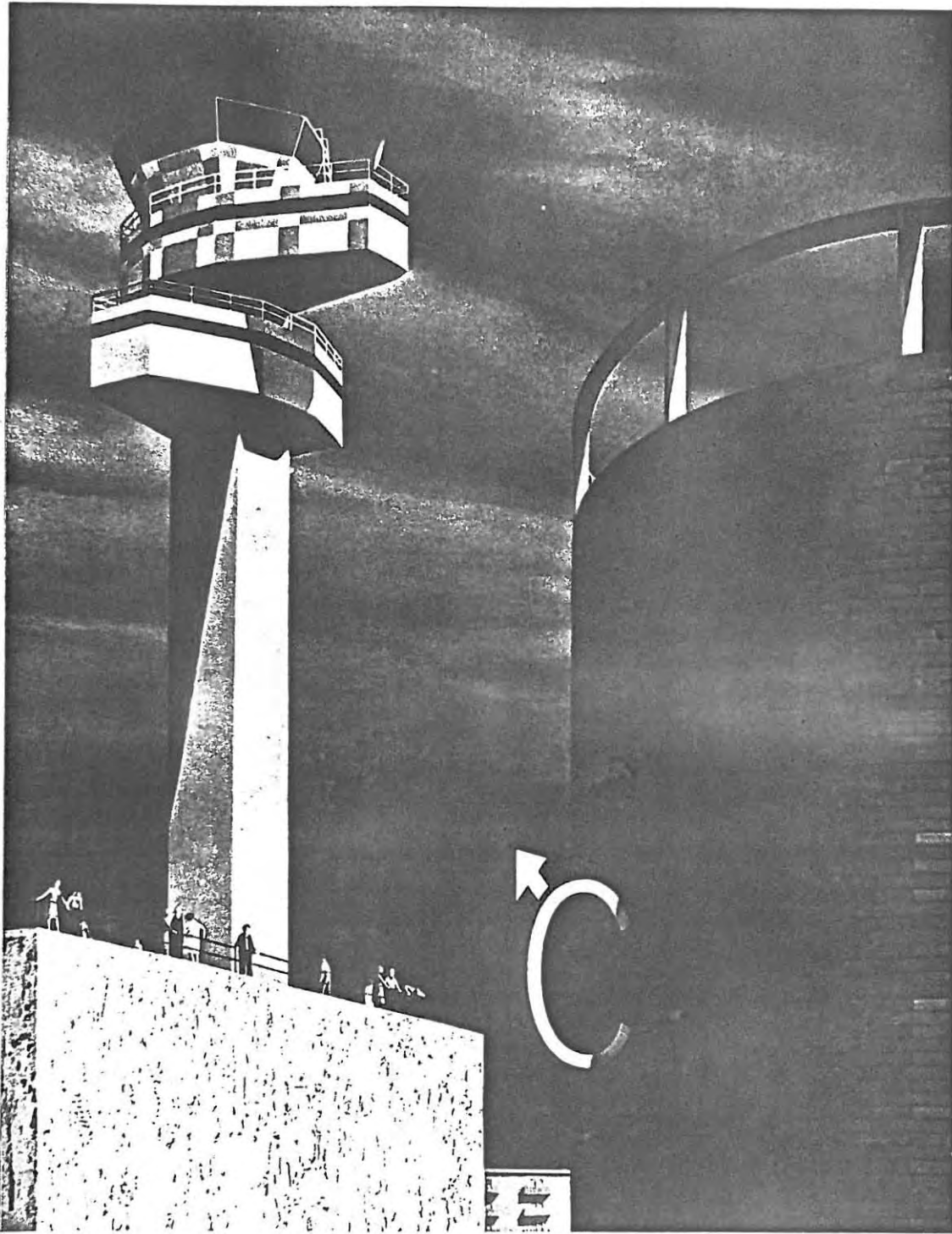
Nolan has painted several series on notorious outlaws such as the pair, Burke and Wills, and the most famous Australian outlaw, Ned Kelly. Plate 20 shows Burke and Wills at the Gulf. The men look pink and sun-burned, they do not belong in such surroundings. The awkward way in which they sit on the very backs of the camels reinforces this. The real outlaws actually died at this spot, and the unreal, misty effect created, seems to convey a dream-like quality, they seem like men already dead. Nolan portrays man totally alienated from his environment. Burke and Wills knew the bush well, (they were outlaws,) but it proved too vast even for them, in the end, and swallowed them up.

Smart portrays man's alienation to his environment too, but this is a man-made one. In Plate 21, Control Tower, Smart uncovers the incredible technological mess of our own cities. The impersonal dominance of Control Tower is typical of Smart's attitude towards the relation of people to the monsters of buildings they have made for themselves and they live with uncomfortably and dangerously. The feeling of human abandonment is overpowering here, in the tower's pointless, aimless noninvolvement with the scene. The Dark sky throws up the warm colour of the brickwork. The upper tower is impervious, unapproachable, completely detached from the dwarfed and purposeless tourists below. Towers seem to be peculiarly Surrealist symbols. For De Chirico they are coolly mystical but somehow triumphant; suggestive of and untouchable and rarified eminence. In Smart's painting, scale, and relative size are made to look odd, the distances and spaces and symbols manipulated to destroy any natural architectural relevance of buildings to humans.

The brooding mood generated by and in the painting is a mood so common to his paintings. One can almost feel the silence, but it is as if Smart's moment is the only really silent one of the day, a moment frozen between jet take-offs, just after a thunderclap, just before a scream.

Abstract Expressionism is a peculiarly American movement, which came into being just after the Second World War. Even during the Thirties the American art scene began to be leavened by the arrival of talented refugees, among them Josef Albers, who had taught at the Bauhaus, and Hans Hofmann. At the out-





break of war, most of the Surrealists fled to America as refugees. They did not mix with people outside their clique easily, and one of the first to acquaint himself with them was the Armenian immigrant, Arshile Gorky, and it is Gorky's painting which forms the bridge between European Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. It is Gorky's sensibility as well as his technique which makes him such a pivotal figure in the history of Twentieth Century American painting. He distilled from Surrealism a way to express his innermost feelings. He underwent a long apprenticeship to Cubism, and when he reached artistic maturity, this grounding stood him in good stead, to understand the Cubist use of shallow space, which Miro for example employed in many of his canvases.

Looking at late paintings of Gorky's, one is immediately aware that the canvas which confronts the eye is almost nakedly autobiographical. These apparently unspecific forms nevertheless speak with great precision about what the painter feels and is. One senses the painter's own masochism from the way in which the forms seem to attack one another. Claws and tendrils sprout from what is apparently soft and harmless. Rubin has spoken of the painter's "emotional fragility", a phrase perhaps justified by Gorky's suicide, after a long series of personal misfortunes, in 1948. One is, however, aware that this fragility is also a form of aggression. Gorky exalts the "I" more openly than any European painter had yet dared to do.

If Gorky formed the bridge from Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism, then it was the painter Jackson Pollock who jumped the gap.

"I don't work from drawings or color sketches. My painting is direct. The method of painting is the natural growth of a need. I want to express my feelings rather than to illustrate them. Technique is just a means of arriving at a statement. When I am painting I have a general notion as to what I am about. I am in control of the flow of the paint; there is no accident just as there is no beginning and no end."

-commentary by Jackson Pollock for the film Jackson Pollock, made in 1951 by Hans Nemuth and Paul Falkenberg.

By 1947 Pollock had made the breakthrough to the series of drip

paintings which are now considered his own most characteristic products. "The classic Pollock of the late 1940s and early 1950s almost becomes a spectacle of nature, a whirlwind vortex of sheer energy that may take us to the cosmological extremes of microscopic and telescopic vision, glimpses of some galactic or atomic explosion, or in more terrestrial terms, the overpowering forces of nature's most impalpable elements, air, fire, and water."

-Robert Rosenblum, in Modern Painting and Northern Romantic Tradition p. 203

Willem de Kooning is one of the most prolific of the Abstract Expressionists, and certainly his work is the powerfully various. The "expressionist" component of Abstract Expressionism becomes most clearly visible in his work. De Kooning has never totally abandoned recognizable imagery, unlike his contemporaries. His best-known paintings are the various series of Women, such as Woman 1, Woman and bicycle, and Two Women. These begin as statement of raw sexuality, but later examples have a sugary prettiness which has suggested a comparison to Jean Honoré Fragonard. But within the apparent inconsistency can be discovered a certain steadiness of aim: "For de Kooning, the urge is to include everything, to leave nothing out, even if it means working in a turmoil of contradictions and, as had been suggested, a turmoil of contradictions is his favourite medium."

-Thomas B. Hess, De Kooning's Recent Paintings

In the 1940s a new and radical art in America. The artists involved, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and William Baziotes, were driven by a kind of despair, within which there was paradoxically a kind of hope.

"In 1940, some of us woke up to find ourselves without hope—to find that painting did not really exist. Or to coin a modern phrase, painting, a quarter of a century before it happened to God, was dead. The awakening had the exaltation of a revolution. It was that awakening that inspired the aspiration—the high purpose—quite a different thing from ambition—to start from scratch, to paint as if painting had never existed

before. It was that naked revolutionary moment that made painters out of painters"

-Barnett Newman Art News, 1958

There was an effort to recreate the force of primitive myth and symbol, things which would have contemporary value and yet be both "tragic and timeless", as Rothko and Gottlieb were to say in a famous joint letter to the New York Times. Rothko's solution, in the search for what could be communicative yet un-specific, was to evolve the centred compositions of softly brushed rectangles of paint floating against a more thinly painted ground which are now associated with his name. Paintings such as Entombment 1, Black, Pink, and Yellow over Orange, illustrate the effect he wanted to achieve: "The progress of the painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point will be towards clarity; towards the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer. As examples of such obstacles, I give (among others) memory, history or geometry".

-Mark Rothko, Artist's statements, exhibition of New American Painting, Museum of Modern Art '58-59

Rothko is obviously one involved in the romance of self-estrangement.

This romance is apparently absent from the painting of Barnett Newman, in whom we see the beginning of a return to the idea of painting as object, rather than that of painting as portrait of an individual soul. His huge canvases are even more uncompromising than Rothko's in their refusal to have anything to do with traditional ways of composing a picture. Newman's art consists of bold colours set out in enormous sizes and shapes. In paintings like Vir Heroicus Sublimis, there is absolutely no atmospheric illusion or texture. They are merely flat, broad, planes of colour which shock the eye by the mere fact of their enormous size. "In pushing painting as near as possible to extinction, Newman showed it to survive as an act of faith rather than as a normal attribute of modern culture"

-Harold Rosenberg, The Redefinition of Art, p.97

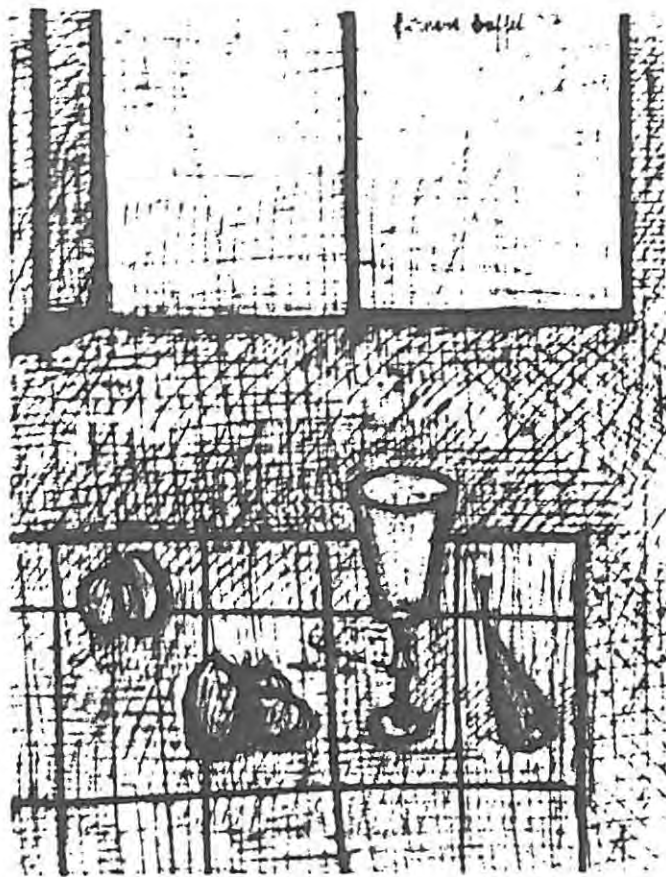
One interesting aspect of the New York School of painting in the

40s and 50s, is its connection with traditional Jewish culture. Rothko, De Kooning and Gorky were all immigrants. Rothko from Russia, De Kooning from Holland, and Gorky, an Armenian. It can be seen that the Abstract Expressionist movement was in a way an extension of the Russian-Jewish Hassidic tradition, and the strangely transplanted expression of a culture which had already been destroyed in its native place. The distaste for specific imagery is traditional in a Jewish sense, as well as radical in terms of the development of Western Painting. Also, the search for some kind of "ultimate" is linked to the Hassidic teachings. The social impotence, the ability to make connections only within the art community, can be read as a curious and significant transmogrification of the ghetto mentality. With Abstract Expressionism, the artist takes up the position that art can only make an efficient contribution to society by becoming a substitute religion.

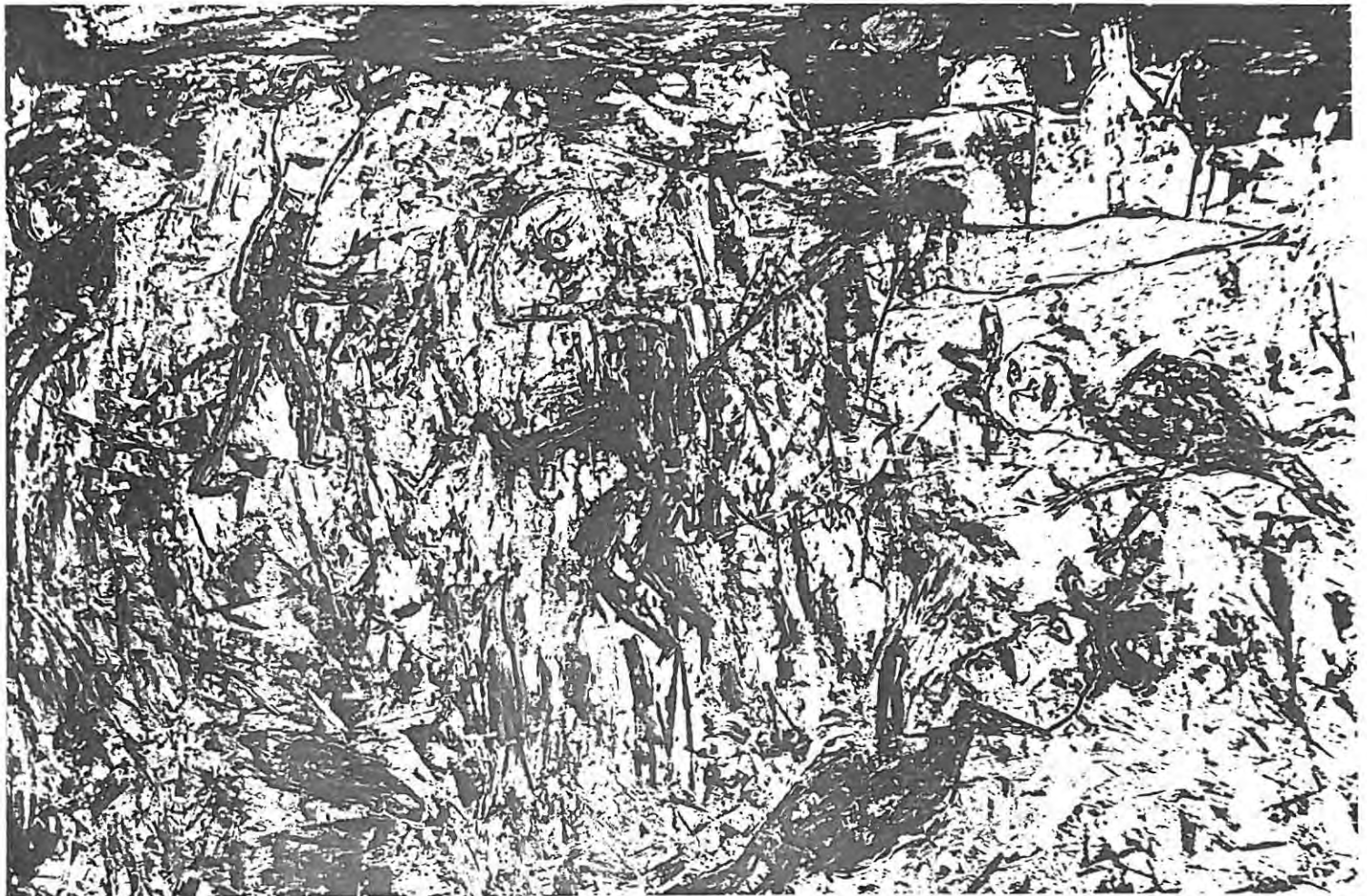
After World War II, the notion gained currency that, at the beginning of his creative act, the artist has no clear conception of what is to emerge from his canvas. This is totally unlike the practise of earlier generations who worked from an initially laid-out concept to the clearest possible realization of it. Here what is implied is that only in the course of the artist's work does a pictorial idea take shape. Many artists, Jackson Pollock among them, have been driven by their inner tension to set down a highly expressive kind of calligraphy; others, like Fautrier, give themselves over completely to the material they work with and voluntarily permit it to dictate what they are to do. In both cases, creativity springs from unplumbed realms of human feeling and the conscious will plays no part. In his series of Otages, one of which can be seen here: plate 23, Fautrier explores and exploits the richly expressive possibilities of his paint. This "haute pate" technique, the luxuriant texture, seems to contradict the tragic subject-matter, for these Otages were inspired by the faces of the hostages whom the artist had seen being taken out to be shot during the war. It seems that he could not resist this technique, the long-established French predilection for a sensual, painterly surface.



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Also immediately after the war there was psychological reaction among artists to what those years had brought. Many painters, most of them young, sought in their art to exorcise the hollowness of existence, the despair voiced by all the things of the world. Bernard Buffet was one of these young men. Born in 1928, he was only eighteen when he painted the morbid Pieta, a painting filled with hopelessness. Most of his paintings of this period were done in apathetic colours, olive greens and dirty blues, such as the one shown in Plate 22, Still Life. Hard, stark lines emphasize the silence, the muteness of despair. This romantic sentiment of hopelessness was conveyed also in the writings of the Existentialists at the same time.

Immensely prolific, Jean Dubuffet is quite unlike any other post-war artist in France. He is a master of his materials. Lacking pretentiousness, Dubuffet also lacks wight. His prolific output seems to stand to one side of the tradition of Modernist painting, just as the prose texts of his contemporary Francis Ponge stand aside from the main course of development of modern poetry. Ponge says that his ambition is to bestow upon any object he may happen to encounter "the good fortune to be born into words". Dubuffet offers the same chance-selected subject-matter the luck to be born into paint. Like Ponge, he recognizes "the object's basic rights, its inalienable rights in opposition to poetic objectives".

There is sometimes a certain resemblance between Dubuffet's work, with its reliance upon ideas taken from child art and mental patients' drawings, and the work of some members of CoBrA Group. But there is also a fundamental difference of attitudes and sympathies. CoBrA represents a kind of Nordic protest against the attempt to renew the dominance of Paris, and we find in it more than a trace of the Expressionism of early Modernist masters such as Munch and Kirchner. The first CoBrA exhibition was held in 1949 in Amsterdam. They also published a magazine; it contained articles about children's art, folk art, and the art of schizophrenics. The aim of the typical CoBrA painter was always the directest possible expression of personal fantasy:



25

"My paint tube is like a rocket which describes its own space. I try to make the impossible possible. What is happening I cannot foresee; it is a surprise. Painting, like passion, is an emotion full of truth and rings with a living sound, like the roar coming from the lion's breast!"

-Karel Appel New York 1962

The explosion of vitality and pictorial fury in Appel's pictures is a protest against numb stagnation, and also a shout of joy for the new horizons opening before man, which is typical of the aspirations of the CoBrA group.

#### Chapter 5: Pop Art →

The two Americans who are now most commonly thought of as the link between Abstract Expressionism and the Pop Art which was to follow are Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Their work has other connections and characteristics which are perhaps even more important in the development of art after 1945. For one thing, they were the twin standard-bearers of the Dada revival which was to have such a tremendous influence over the thinking of all young artists during the 1960s and early '70s. They changed Dada from being an historical phenomenon into something that was at once vivifying and controversial.

The most formative part of Rauschenberg's early career was undoubtedly the years 1948-49, which he spent at the experimental Black Mountain College in North Carolina. This institution was briefly the focus of a number of important talents, such as Albers, the poet Charles Olson, and many others. Rauschenberg's most important contact there was with the avant-garde composer John Cage. It was Cage who implanted in Rauschenberg's mind the notion of "acting in the gap between art and life" which was to result in the creation of the combine-paintings and combine-objects which are his most typical productions.

Works such as *Retroactive 1*, of 1964, undoubtedly contain elements that derive from Abstract Expressionism. But to the fluidity which was an important feature of the painting of the

Pollock-Kline group of Abstract Expressionists, he opposed images which remained discreet and themselves, which insisted on maintaining a value and identity which had nothing to do with their own presence in the picture. "Art by being absent does nothing to assist our reaction to life; Rauschenberg offers neat life; it is for us to find the art in it for ourselves."

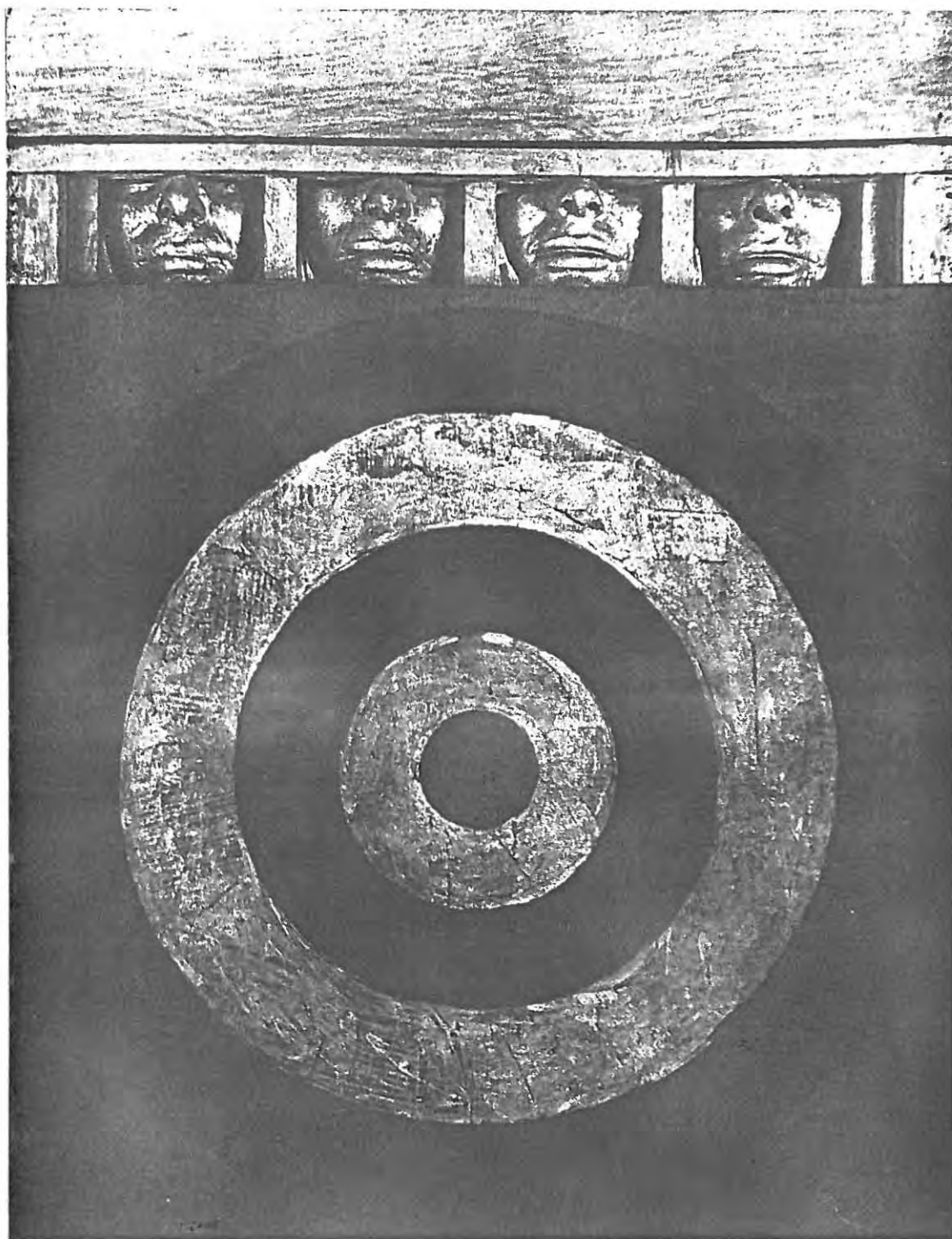
-G. S. Whittet Studio International, 1964 p. 158

One of the logical elements in his creative career has been his relationship to the urban and technological society which surrounds him. The conjunctions of imagery which we see in his work are not juxtapositions peculiar to himself, but ones which assail us at every moment of urban existence. He was the pioneer of many of the innovations afterwards attributed to Pop Art. In 1955 he made a series of paintings using comic strips, which were later imitated by Warhol and then Lichtenstein.

Jasper Johns' career offers many parallels with Rauschenberg's, and, at a crucial point in their joint development, the two shared a studio in New York. Unlike Rauschenberg, Johns is not tremendously interested in recording the way that urban experience impinges on his own sensibility. He makes use of certain "signs", which are "things the mind already knows," his term for them, which allows him to experiment on different levels. The American flag is one of his most famous "signs", as is the target, made use of later on by many other artists, among them Kenneth Noland. The familiar pattern is presented completely frontally, so that the spectator is forced to ask himself what difference exists between a real flag or a real target, and this simulacrum of one which is presented as art. There is a deliberate attempt, in Johns' work, especially in the flag, map and target series, to acclimatize the avant-garde in terms which would be purely American. In this sense Johns continued the effort already begun by the Abstract Expressionists. If Abstract Expressionism had been, in its various ways and with whatever private hesitations, a symptom of faith in the continuing possibilities of Art, then the revival of Dada was a clear symbol of doubt. Pop Art evolved as a natural development in an attempt to find a way out of this impasse.

So Pop Art also had its roots in the past, (like all art





26

movements,) but America and the quality of American life were the basic inspiration of most Pop artists, wherever they happened to hail from. The quality of this involvement varied according to the individual's own temperament. There is a tremendous difference for example, in attitude as well as in method, between the work of Andy Warhol and Jim Dine. In his technique Dine represents a direct development from the Neo-Dadaism of Johns and Rauschenberg. For Dine, as for Pollock, what matters is the problem he sets himself, rather than the eventual solution: "I paint about problems of how to make a picture work, the problems of seeing, of making people aware without handing it to them on a platter" one of the elements which make him a part of Pop phenomenon, is his sly eroticism, which is an ironic commentary on the degree of commercial eroticism in our society.

Warhol is a far more enigmatic personality than Dine, and, many would claim, a more important innovator. He started off as a commercial illustrator, and his transition from this to "high art", was perfectly logical. He achieved it via the comic strip. Even in the first Dick Tracy Blow-ups, there is undoubtedly the uncertainty of technique which probably accounts for his subsequent development towards a kind of art in which all emphasis on handling has been abolished. From his adoption of his most famous image, the Campbell's Soup Can, the natural development was the abandonment of handwork in favour of mechanical process, that of the silkscreen. He produced a series of ikons of well-known personalities, among them Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and Elizabeth Taylor. The technique is used with deliberate crudity, and it is not even certain that Warhol has himself intervened personally in the production of the images that now bear his name. This is because he believes that art should have the egalitarian anonymity of the life he observes around him. "Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I

do and so machine-like is what I want to do"

-Andy Warhol

His nihilism, however, goes even deeper than this. Another characteristic series of paintings are those that he has dubbed the Disasters. These are silk-screened images of ghastly car crashes, of race riots and of the electric chair. The shocking image is slicked over and partly obscured by a wash of colour, orange, mauve or pink. These pictures are at one and the same time an acknowledgment of a deep streak of negative emotion, and a deliberate cauterization of that emotion: "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect." In the end, Warhol has become celebrated merely for being shocking Warhol.

A very different aspect of the American movement is the work of Roy Lichtenstein. His approach to Pop Art, when an abrupt stylistic change came over his work in 1961, was largely negative. His idea was to get "a painting that was despicable enough so that no one would hang it". Lichtenstein's material was also the comic strip, but the material is substantially revised.

"What I do is form, whereas the comicstrip is not formed in the sense that I'm using the word: the comics have shapes but there has been no attempt to make them intensely unified...One of the things a cartoon does is to express violent emotion and passion in a completely mechanical and removed style. To express this thing in a painterly style would dilute it; the techniques I use are not commercial, they only appear to be commercial, and the ways of seeing and composing and unifying are different and have different ends."

-Lichtenstein in an interview with  
G. Swenson Art News 1963

Pop Art was the nearest that avant-garde art had got, during its more than fifty years of activity, to achieving a broad-based popular acceptance.

Artists in Britain were quick to discover the possibilities offered by Pop imagery. The artist in Britain who occupied a position analogous to that of Rauschenberg and Johns in America was Richard Hamilton. The similarity is increased by the fact that Hamilton has taken a lifelong interest in Dada. Hamilton is

SWEET  
DREAMS,  
BABY!



always very willing to supply explanations of his own work, and these explanations give many clues to his attitudes. The painting She, for example, is the subject of a long exposition.

"Art's Woman in the fifties was anachronistic, as close to us as a smell in the drain; bloated, pink-crutched, pin-headed and lecherous; remote from the cool woman image outside fine art. There she is truly sensual but she acts her sexuality and the performance is full of wit. Although the most precious of adornments, she is often treated as just a styoing accessory. The worst thing that can happen to a girl, according to the ads, is that she should fail to be exquisitely at ease in appliance setting—the setting that now does much to establish out attitude to woman in the way that her clothes alone used to. Sex is everywhere, symbolized in the glamour of mass-produced luxury—the interplay of fleshy plastic, and smooth, fleshier metal."

-Richard Hamilton Architectural Design, 1962

She is a compilation from various advertising sources, a picture of a "cornucopic" refridgerator, advertisements for vacuum cleaners and other electrical appliances, an Esquire pin-up photograph.

Hamilton's workm in common with that of other British Pop artists, has a sentimental tinge which makes it seem more charming, and less deliberately aggressive than the work produced by his American counterparts.

An exception to this rule is the work of the American artist Kitaj. He is an émigré who has spent the most important part of his career in England. What Kitaj has in common with Hamilton is that his painting, like Hamilton's, is filled with complex ideas which often require verbal as well as visual expression to make themselves fully apparent. Kitaj is a great admirer of the American expatriate poet Ezra Pound, and his paintings seem meant to contain, and to sustain, a whole complex of allusions, many of them deliberately hermetic, as if the artist were trying to produce a painted equivalent of one of the more involuted segments of Pound's Cantos. His work seems full of possibilities, it seems meant to keep the artist's choices, as well as the spectator's, completely open.

Pop's universal success was a tribute to its appositeness of the time which had produced it, and to its ability to comm-

unicate to a broad spectrum of people.

Op art led on to something named now Post-painterly Abstraction. From the master of Op art, Vasarely, art moved on to someone like Morris Louis. He used the technique of pouring the paint on to the horizontal canvas, and his paintings became more and more impersonal, although they remained painterly. The colour was sometimes even applied with commercial rollers. The colour was no longer on but actually in the weave of the canvas, as Louis abandoned sized canvas for unsized cotton duck. The staining produced a contour which was not drawn; and repeated with streams of paint he could actually produce contour within contour. The development of his work is always towards the more stringent, the more rigorous, the more fully controlled. The most rigorous of the Post-painterly Abstractionists was Frank Stella, who is both the youngest of the group and who seems to mark a transition to another and rather different way of thinking about the visual arts, though it is a transition he himself has been unable to accomplish fully.

Stella first made his reputation with a series of monochrome paintings, based, once again, on the theme of the stripe, like so many of the Post-painterly Abstractionists. Later he turned to colour, but with terrible results. They are rather like bad Lichtensteins, and echo the Art Deco revival which was sweeping through fashionable circles in New York, Paris, and London. With Stella we see, as early as 1960, a groping towards the Minimal Art which was to exercise so powerful an influence a little later, but we also find, encapsulated in his earlier paintings, the nihilism which was to paralyze so many artists in the sixties and seventies. These are nerveless works, which suppress intellect, morality, and above all, alertness, as much as they are able. When Stella finds the dehumanized situation in which he has placed himself intolerable, and attempts to break out, the only escape he can find is to the kitsch which had already been exploited, with more intelligence, by the exponents of Pop Art.



28

## Conclusion

Here my study ends. It seems to me that all the really great artists have been revolutionaries, and I found a quote which if not proves my statement, does support it.

"And why did Plato say poets should be chased out of the Republic? Precisely because every poet and every artist is an anti-social being. He's not that way because he wants to be; he can't be any other way. Of course the state has the right to chase him away—from its point of view—and if he is really an artist it is in his nature not to want to be admitted, because if he is admitted it can only mean he is doing something which is understood, approved, and therefore old hat—worthless. Anything new, anything worth doing, can't be recognised. People just don't have that much vision. So this business about defending and freeing culture is absurd. One can defend culture in a broad general sense, if you mean by that the heritage of the past, but the right to free expression is something one seizes, not something one is given. It isn't a principle one can lay down as something that should exist. The only principle involved is that if it does exist, it exists to be used against the established order. Only the Russians are naive enough to think that an artist can fit into society. That's because they don't know what an artist is. What can the state do with the real artists, the seers? Rimbaud in Russia is unthinkable. Even Mayakowsky committed suicide; there is absolute opposition between the creator and the state. So there's only one tactic for the state—kill the seers. If the idea of a society is to dominate the idea of the individual, the individual must perish. Furthermore, there wouldn't be such a thing as a seer if there weren't a state trying to suppress him. It's only at that moment, under that pressure, that he becomes one. People reach the status of artist only after crossing the maximum number of barriers. So the arts should be discouraged, not encouraged. The thing that's wrong with modern art right now, and we might as well say it—it's dying—is the fact that there isn't any longer a strong, powerful academic art worth fighting against. There has to be a rule even if it's a bad one because evidence of art's power is in breaking down the barriers. But

to do away with obstacles—that serves no purpose other than to make things completely wishy-washy, spineless, shapeless, meaningless—zero.

-Picasso Life with Picasso by Francoise Gilot

Perhaps this is why the layman always claims that Modern art is rubbish, that he doesn't understand it. Ortega y Gasset wrote this fifty years ago:

"Modern Art, evidently, is not for everybody, as was Romantic Art, but from the outset is aimed at a special, gifted minority... Accustomed to dominate in everything, the masses feel that their rights are threatened by Modern Art, which is an art of privilege, of an aristocracy of instinct."

I have traced the quality of threat in Modern Painting, but I have obviously left out many artists. It is not possible to include them all. I believe that man will continue to exercise his evil in paint, because that is now an intrinsic fact about him. Some people manage by way of fighting, others play rugby, others paint. And I believe that to paint is the fullest way to live, however much one suffers. Once someone starts to paint, he hardly ever gives it up. For it is a Way...

"Yes, personally speaking too, art heightens life. She gives deeper joy, she consumes more swiftly. She engraves adventures of the spirit and the mind on the faces of her votaries."

-Thomas Mann Death in Venice

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