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BYRON BROWNE: THE MEASURE OF A POLEMICAL LEGACY

by

APRIL JOYCE PAUL [NEE LAPLAND]

VOLUME I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2002

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Approval Page

This manuscript had been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

9/19/02
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

9/19/02
Date

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Professor Emeritus Robert Pincus-Witten

Dr. Francis V. O'Connor

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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DEDICATION PAGE

To Dr. Joseph Armstrong Baird, Jr. (1922-1993)

Noble man of letters, sorely missed.

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Abstract

BYRON BROWNE: THE MEASURE OF A POLEMICAL LEGACY

by

April Joyce Paul [Nee Lapland]

Adviser: Professor Diane M. Kelder

The author examines the life of an American painter whose remarkable creative gifts promised a brilliant career. Indeed, by the time he graduated from the National Academy of Design, Byron Browne (1907-1961) had won nearly every prize and medal offered during his three years at the School. Then, within a short time, Browne shook off the yoke of his conservative training to accept modernism in all its ramifications. He fell headlong into the arms of Picasso and Cubism, an embrace from which he never extricated himself.

The time was 1929, the year the stock market crashed, ushering in the longest financial depression in the history of this nation. This study documents Browne's struggle for artistic survival during that terrible period, occurring at a time when abstract art by an American was an unacceptable commodity. Stubborn, dedicated and persevering against all odds, Browne gained national prominence at the end of World War II, when, finally, American abstraction began to achieve acceptance. Browne, with the patronage of his dealer, Samuel M. Kootz, became one of the most celebrated modernist painters in the country.

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Yet other currents were operating simultaneously, as the brash Abstract Expressionist painters, armed with the Surrealist teachings of André Breton, began to undermine Cubism and everything that harked back to European tradition and our slavish worship of "their" art as the leading edge. Suddenly, Browne found his kind of painting eclipsed by the revolutionary concepts of the New York School. Aesthetically and psychologically, he could not accept the iconoclastic premises of painters like Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and Adolph Gottlieb. By summer's end 1948, Browne learned that his dealer had eliminated him from the gallery's roster, as Samuel Kootz wholeheartedly embraced surrealism and gestural painting that left no room for his decorative Cubist fantasies.

Then, without warning, one Sunday morning in 1951 Browne awakened to learn through a full-page advertisement in The New York Times that dozens of his paintings, held by his former dealer, had been advertised for sale at discount prices on the selling floor of Gimbles Department Store. This unprecedented incident, so publicly announced, devastated the artist, ruining his reputation and driving his prices downward; it shattered an already fragile ego as well. Shortly thereafter, Browne suffered a heart attack from which he never fully recovered.

Browne's paintings from the late 1940s and the 1950s are contrasted with those of the Abstract Expressionists, in a effort to learn what happened to an artist who by all rights could have been among those now-revered members of the New York School. His is at once a marvelous and a chilling story, unfolding during some of the most breathtaking moments in American art history.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are numerous individuals who, throughout this lengthy gestation, deserve my thanks and appreciation for their contributions in seeing this project to completion. To my adviser and Chair of my Examining Committee, Professor Diane Kelder, go more gratitude than language can adequately express. Over many years she has, with grace, patience, focus and not a little amount of firmness, chiseled this unwieldy text to a manageable, accomplished document; her keen editing eye shed a thousand extraneous pounds of words. Let it suffice to say that, without her steadfast support, this dissertation would never have been placed on any library shelf. I am so grateful to her. Professor Kelder, in billboard size neon lights, thank you!

To Professor Robert Pincus-Witten, who was my first adviser and who chaired my Oral Examination Committee, saw me through the proposal of the Byron Browne topic, its approval by the Executive Committee, my advancement to candidacy, and the initial chapters of my text, I am immeasurably grateful. You were the rock upon which I leaned when few believed in this project, and when the problems connected to it seemed insurmountable in every respect. Your critical eye, sound advice, and savvy knowledge of the workings of the "real world" taught me to stand firm against obstacles, far removed from the academic environment, that would have thwarted this document's completion.

Additionally, I owe a large debt of appreciation to Professor Harriet Senie for taking time from her heavy schedule to read and comment on the text, and serve on my Examining Committee. Your insights and thoughtful suggestions were most welcome, and enlightening. Thank you so very much.

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I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Francis V. O'Connor, whose intuition, erudition and vast knowledge of the history of art in the area of my topic has been of crucial assistance in understanding this painter and his times. You have played an essential role in helping me see this work to completion. Over many years you generously shared your wisdom, made available documents I would never have discovered without you, and lent valuable suggestions and additions to the body of information surrounding Browne's oeuvre. Moreover, your special knowledge in the field of the psychodynamics of the artist and artistic creation has helped shed light on this painter's often difficult personality. For reading my text, serving on my Examining Committee, for listening to my problems with patience and understanding, and for being a mentor (although you did not ask to be, and I hope you do not mind if I call you that), thank you, Dr. O'Connor, a thousand times over.

I began this project at a time when the computer came into wide usage for those involved with the written word. Over the years this technology changed but I kept the machine I had, along with its near-letter quality printer, for it served me well. This outmoded equipment has caused me endless trouble with today's sophisticated electronics, to the point that if it had not been for a computer virtuoso, among many other areas of equal expertise, who paved a way to the technical solutions I needed, this text could not have been printed. I wish to thank Dr. Oliver S. Jovanovic for his ability to solve horrendous technical problems, for reformatting this text, and producing out of the chaos, when no one else knew what to do, a splendid example of the art of printing. Thank you, dear Oliver, for saving my project, for there would have been no dissertation and no degree without you. I am eternally grateful.

To G. S. P., thank you for many lovely things. To Marie and Frank Paulin, friends of long standing, who have stood by me for decades, thank you for your part in the

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completion of this project. Long past the limits of friendship, you have, without complaint, put up with my impositions upon you at all hours for assistance, with this endeavor and in countless others. You are true friends, the best, and I love you both.

To the many whose names I have not mentioned, some of whom have, sadly, succumbed over the years, painters, sculptors, professors, historians, writers and editors, librarians, archivists, photographers, museum curators, art dealers, auction house personnel, and colleagues, especially Dr. Ilene Susan Fort, I am deeply appreciative for everything you have done for me.

Finally, I wish to thank the community of the City University of New York Graduate School and University Center, in particular the professors of the Ph.D. Program in Art History, who continued to support me over the years, for keeping the faith, when I needed "just one more semester." You gave and gave to me when you were not required to do so. Thank you for allowing me to stay the course.

To Dr. Joseph A. Baird, Jr., my mentor at the University of California, Davis, who saw me through my Master's Degree, I am privileged to have known you, and honored to have been your student. Wherever you are, know that you are much beloved by all.

And to Dr. Seymour Howard, Professor Emeritus of the Art History Department at the University of California, Davis campus, thank for providing a measure of humor, apart from your area of expertise, to the often-too-serious demeanor of the graduate department. You were a delight to know.

It is with disappointment and regret that my parents, Mona Victoria and Myron Vern Lapland did not live to see this dissertation completed. Learning from them the value of work, they, most of all, would have appreciated the enormous effort it took to get this far.

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Fig. 4-16. Model of Room and Floor Plan of Studio C, Including Mural Design by John von Wicht. 1938. Photocopy of original photograph in files of the Art Commission of the City of New York. Courtesy the Photographic Division of the WPA/FAP.

Fig. 4-17. Abstraction (Study for Mural for the New York World's Fair, for the Hall of Medicine and Public Health Building). 1938, gouache on paper. Coll: Frank Chronican.

Fig. 4-18. Abstraction (Final Study for Mural for the New York World's Fair, for the Hall of Medicine and Public Health Building). 1938, pencil and watercolor on illustration board,
3 5/8 x 7 1/4". Coll: Frank Chronican.

Fig. 4-19. Abstraction (Installation Photograph of Byron Browne Mural in situ in Hall of Medicine and Public Health Building). 1939, medium unknown, 10 x 16 feet; executed by members of the Mural Artists Guild of the AFL's United Scenic Artists. Photo from exhibition catalogue, Dawn of a New Day: The New York Worlds' Fair, 1939/40, The Queens Museum, Helen A. Harrison, guest curator, June 21-November 30, 1980. p. 91.

Fig. 4-20. Forms on Black Space. 1938, oil on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo from exhibition catalogue, American Art Today: Gallery of American Art Today, New York World's Fair, New York, National Art Society, 1939,
p. 53.

Fig. 4-21. Joan Miró. The Birth of the World. 1925, oil on canvas, 98 3/4 x 78 3/4". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. 4-22. Joan Miró. The Hunter (Catalan Landscape). 1923-24, oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 39 1/2". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. 4-23. Peaceful Pursuits of Man (a.k.a. Recreation and Sports). Study for circular photomontage mural, to occupy 324 square feet, proposed for men's Day Room #31, preliminary approval on 4/9/40, Hospital for Chronic Diseases, Welfare Island, New York City. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 4-24. Ilya Bolotowsky. Circular Model of the Men's Day Room, with His Mural Design. 1940 (completed and probably installed, late 1940 or early 1941), Hospital for Chronic Diseases, Welfare Island, New York City. Photo from Archives of American Art Journal, Vol. 22, no. 1, 1982, p. 24. Photo by Otto E. Nelson.

Fig. 4-25. Woman and Bird (a.k.a. Figure). 1935, oil on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 4-26. American Abstract Artists. How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?, April 15, 1940, one-page paper broadside, 15 3/4 x 10 1/4" (full sheet). Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 4-27. American Abstract Artists. How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?, April 15, 1940, one-page paper broadside, lower portion, showing more clearly the list of participants, 15 3/4 x 10 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 4-28. American Abstract Artists. Cover of Twelve-Page Pamphlet. A. D. F. Reinhardt, topography. June 1940. Photo courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

CHAPTER 5. The Kootz Gallery and Celebrity.

Fig. 5-1. Salute Every Time the Cock Crows. 1940, oil on canvas, 48 x 60." Coll: Barney Ebsworth, on long-term loan to St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri.

Fig. 5-2. Pablo Picasso. The Cock. 1938 (March 29), pastel, 30 1/2 x 21 1/4". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin, New York City.

Fig. 5-3. Eugéne Delacroix. Woman with Parrot (La Femme au Perroquet) (a.k.a. Odalisque). 1827, oil on canvas, 24 x 32". Coll: Musée de Lyon, Lyon, France.

Fig. 5-4. Gilt Cock. 9th Century, gilt bronze. Uncited clipping from one of Browne's picture scrapbooks. Believed to be the bird that once surmounted a pinnacle in the old Basilica of St. Peter's, Rome. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-5. Woman with Birds. 1943, oil on canvas, 24 x 16". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-6. Woman with Birds. 1943, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: David R. Rittenhouse, Naples, Florida and Toledo, Ohio.

Fig. 5-7. Woman and Bird. 1945, tempera and India ink on board, 24 x 20". Coll: Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

Fig. 5-8. Bacchante. 1940, pen and India ink on paper, 18 1/2 x 13". Photo courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York City.

Fig. 5-9. Untitled (Head). 1942, pen, India ink and white chalk on paper, 18 1/2 x 13". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sterling, New York City.

Fig. 5-10. Head. 1943, pen and India ink on paper, 24 x 18". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-11. Head. 1944, pen and India ink on paper, 24 x 18". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-12. Head. 1949, pen and India ink on paper, 24 x 18". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-13. Untitled (drawing after Easter Island monolithic heads). 1948, pen, India ink, casein tempera on paper, 26 x 20 3/8". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-14. Easter Island Stone Images. 1000-1500 A.D., ca. 36 feet high, Akivi, Easter Island, South Pacific Ocean. Photograph ca. 1930s. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-15. Head. 1940, oil on masonite, 14 x 12". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-16. Head with Leaves. 1942, oil on canvas, 28 x 24". Private collection.

Fig. 5-17. Head of a Woman. 1944, oil on canvas, 28 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-18. Two Women. 1945, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-19. Untitled (Head). 1946, pen, India ink, crayon, gouache, with scratched areas on paper, 17 1/4 x 12 1/2. Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-20. Woman in Yellow Hat. 1947, India ink, tempera, crayon and torn blotter paper collage on paper, 22 x 17". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-21. Head. 1948, casein tempera and India ink on paper, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-22. Untitled (Head). 1941, casein tempera, India ink and watercolor on paper, 20 5/8 x 13 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-23. Head. 1941, oil on canvas, 25 x 14". Coll: Meredith Long, Houston, Texas.

Fig. 5-24. Head. 1942, India ink and watercolor on paper,
13 1/8 x 10 5/8". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-25. Untitled (head). 1942, pen, India ink and watercolor on paper, 14 1/8 x 11. Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-26. Untitled (head). 1942, pen and India ink, pastel, casein tempera on paper, 14 x 11". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-27. Trumpet Player. 1943, oil on canvas, 16 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-28. Untitled (head). 1944, pen, India ink, watercolor and pencil on paper, 19 5/8 x 13 5/16". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-29. Untitled (head). 1947, pen and India ink, watercolor, crayon and pencil on paper, 19 5/8 x 12 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-30. Head. 1948, oil on masonite, 16 x 12 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-31. Seated Woman. 1940-41, oil on canvas, 14 x 12". Coll: Jacqueline L. Fowler, Stamford, Connecticut.

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Fig. 5-32. Drawing of Airplane Landing Gear. Ca. 1942, pen and India ink on paper, 18 3/16 x 10". Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-33. Cross Section of Unidentified Piece of Military Hardware. Ca. 1942, pencil and white ink on cream paper, 19 x
13 15/16". Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-34. Woman Reading. 1938, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-35. Night Scene (a.k.a. Woman by a Window). 1942, oil on canvas, 41 x 36 ". Coll: Estate of Byron Browne, on consignment to Meredith Long Gallery, Houston, Texas.
Fig. 5-36. Crucifixion. 1937, oil on canvas, 14 x 12". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 5-37. Newspaper Review of Browne Exhibition. Betsy Luce, "Navy Yard Shipfitter Has One-Man show in Painting Gallery," New York Post, 29 March 1943, cols. 1 and 2, p. 8.

Fig. 5-38. Head. 1942, oil on canvas, 14 x 12". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-39. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. 1937, oil on canvas, 28 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-40. Still Life. 1938, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

Fig. 5-41. Pablo Picasso. Woman with Beret and Collar. 1937, oil on canvas, 24 x 19 5/8". Private collection. Photo courtesy Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérése Walter & Dora Maar. Exhibition catalogue, Judi Freeman, curator. Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, February 13-May 1, 1994, fig. 84, p. 120.

Fig. 5-42. The Portrait of Eleanor Zarief. 1940, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. William Hutchinson.

Fig. 5-43. Woman on the Beach. 1945, oil on canvas, 36 x 48". Coll; Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York City.

Fig. 5-44. Woman in Red Dress. 1945, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Housatonic Community College, The Bert Chernow Gallery, Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Fig. 5-45. Still Life with City Window. 1945, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Coll: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

Fig. 5-46. Sun Bather. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Whereabouts unknown.

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Fig. 5-47. The Green Bottle. 1945, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Coll: Meredith Long, Houston, Texas.

Fig. 5-48. Rope and Branches. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 27 7/8". Coll: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York.

Fig. 5-49. Still Life with Branches. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Coll: Mansfield University, Gallery of Art, Mansfield, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 5-50. Lamp with Branches. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Photo courtesy Camhi Gallery, New York City.

Fig. 5-51. Still Life in Primary Colors. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-52. Still Life in Red and Green. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-53. Still Life with Teapot. 1940, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Coll: Ahmet Ertegun, New York City.

Fig. 5-54. The Basket of Leaves. 1943, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Coll: Diane Grant-Greene, Queens, New York.

Fig. 5-55. Still Life with Apples. 1944, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Baxter.

Fig. 5-56. White Still Life. 1947, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Coll: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 5-57. Oceanic. 1948, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-58. Bareback Rider. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-59. Toto the Drummer (a.k.a. Clown with Drum). 1946, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York.

Fig. 5-60. Trapeze Artist. 1941, India ink and watercolor on paper, 18 1/8 x 19 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-61. The White Acrobats. 1946, oil on canvas, sand, 30 x 38". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-62. The White Acrobats. 1946, detail of lower middle area, oil on canvas, sand, 30 x 38".

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Fig. 5-63. Two Figures. 1946, oil on canvas, 47 1/8 x 36". Coll: Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia.

Fig. 5-64. Clown and Lion. 1946, oil on canvas, 36 x 47". Coll: Roy Neuberger, gift to Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Fig. 5-65. Woman of the Circus. 1946, oil on canvas, 40 x 50". Coll: Estate of Samuel M. Kootz.

Fig. 5-66. The Pink Lion. 1947, tempera and India ink on paper, 24 1/2 x 19". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sterling, New York City.

Fig. 5-67. Lion Tamer. 1947, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Victor Wolfson.

Fig. 5-68. Circus Rider. 1947, tempera, India ink and crayon on paper, 26 x 18". Coll: Vera and Albert List, New York City.

Fig. 5-69. The Gray Horse. 1947, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Coll: Esther and Dr. Samuel Prince, North Bergen, New Jersey.

Fig. 5-70. Blue Lion. 1946-47, oil on masonite, wire mesh stove grid set into pigment on circular recessed opening of board, 47 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-71. White Clown. 1947, Tempera, India ink, crayon on paper, 26 x 18". Coll: Vera and Albert List, New York City.

Fig. 5-72. Act I. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Pace University Art Museum, New York City.

Fig. 5-73. Head Stand. 1948, oil on canvas, tempera and India ink on paper, 21 3/8 x 15 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-74. Clown and Lion. 1948, watercolor and India ink on paper, 21 3/8 x 15 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-75. Horse Clown in Blue and Yellow. 1948, tempera and India ink on paper, 22 x 16 1/2". Coll: Vera and Albert List, New York City.

Fig. 5-76. Acrobat. 1948, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 5-77. Jester with Horn. 1948, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Coll: Edwin M. Williams, Naples, Florida.

Fig. 5-78. Pablo Picasso. The Jester. 1905, bronze, 15 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 8 5/8". Coll: Mrs. Bertram Smith, New York City.

Fig. 5-79. Two Clowns. 1948, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-80. Trombone Solo. 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Roy R. Neuberger.

Fig. 5-81. The White Wave. 1946, oil on canvas, 24 x 30". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sterling, New York City.

Fig. 5-82. Circus Bandsman. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 5-83. Two on a Horse. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 5-84. The Pink Clown. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

CHAPTER 6. Propaganda and Pawns: Two Pivotal Post-war Exhibitions.

Fig. 6-1. Still Life in Red, Yellow and Green. 1945, oil on canvas, 23 3/4 x 28". Coll: Auburn University, Union Gallery, Auburn, Alabama.

Fig. 6-2. Stuart Davis. Trees and El. 1931, oil on canvas, 25 1/8 x 32". Coll: Henry Art Gallery, (War Assets Collection), University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

Fig. 6-3. Yasuo Kuniyoshi. N.d. (1946 or earlier), Circus Girl Resting, oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 28 3/4 ". Coll: Auburn University, Union Gallery, Auburn, Alabama.

Fig. 6-4. Exhibition Announcement: Invitation to Opening. Introduction A La Peinture Moderne Américaine, Kootz Gallery and Galerie Maeght, Paris, March 28, 1947. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 6-5. Cover: Exhibition Catalogue. Drawing by Byron Browne, pen and ink, Kootz Gallery and Galerie Maeght, Paris, March 1947.

Fig. 6-6. William Baziotes. Blue Flower. 1947, oil on canvas, 29 x 37 1/2". Coll: Mrs. Alvin Sitomer, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Fig. 6-7. Romare Bearden. Some Drink! Some Drink! (May also be titled The Drinkers). 1946, oil on canvas, 25 x 32". From the series inspired by Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel. Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-8. The White Acrobats. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 37 3/4". Coll: Joseph (Joe) Wissert, Los Angeles, California.

Fig. 6-9. The White Acrobats. Detail, right three quarters of canvas.

Fig. 6-10. The White Acrobats. Detail, arm and chest area of diagonal figure, showing texture and impasto application of pigment.

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Fig. 6-11. Adolph Gottlieb. Pictogenic Fragments. 1946, oil on canvas, 36 x 30". Coll: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 6-12. Carl Holty. The Hockey Players. 1946-47, oil on canvas, 60 x 48". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-13. Robert Motherwell. Western Figure. 1947, oil on panel, 16 1/2 x 5 3/4". Sold at Christie's Auction, Lot #338, November 9, 1983, buyer unidentified.

Fig. 6-14. Two on a Horse. 1946 (June), oil on canvas, 29 7/8 x 23 7/8". Sold at Christie's Auction, Lot #251, June 3, 1982, to unidentified buyer.

Fig. 6-15. Bareback Rider. 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Sigmond Sternberg, New York City.

Fig. 6-16. The Drummer. 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-17. William Baziotes. Pink Wall. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Coll: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City.

Fig. 6-18. William Baziotes. Night Form. 1947, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Missouri.

Fig. 6-19. Romare Bearden. A Blue Note. 1946, oil on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-20. Adolph Gottlieb. Cryptic Tablets. 1946-47, oil and tempera on canvas, 32 x 25". Coll: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University Art Collection, New York City.

Fig. 6-21. Adolph Gottlieb. The Home of the Magician. 1946, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Sold at Sotheby's Auction, Lot #276, November 14, 1991, to unidentified buyer.

Fig. 6-22. Carl Holty. Trees. 1946-47, oil on canvas, 68 x 48". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-23. Robert Motherwell. Orange Personage. 1947, oil and sand on canvas, 54 3/4 x 37". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-24. Robert Motherwell. Starry Personage. 1946, oil and sand on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 6-25. Jackson Pollock. She-Wolf. 1943, oil, gouache and plaster on canvas, 41 7/8 x 67". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. 6-26. Robert Motherwell. Poncho Villa, Dead and Alive. 1943, gouache and oil with collage on cardboard, 28 x 35 7/8". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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CHAPTER 7. The Schism Begins.

Fig. 7-1. The Red Robe. 1947, oil on canvas, 36 x 48". Coll: The Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas, Austin.

Fig. 7-2. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Triptych, Panel 1, left side). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 3 feet. Coll: Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico.

Fig. 7-3. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Triptych, Panel 2, central). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 5 feet.

Fig. 7-4. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Triptych, Panel 3, right side). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 3 feet.

Fig. 7-5. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (With artist standing in front of full triptych, as installed for opening reception at Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York City). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 11 feet.

Fig. 7-6. Pablo Picasso. Guernica. 1937, oil on canvas, 11' 5 1/2" x 25' 5 3/4". Coll: Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 7-7. Pablo Picasso. Bullfight. 1934, oil on canvas, 38 1/4 x 51 1/4". Coll: Victor W. Ganz, New York City.

Fig. 7-8. Black Lion. 1947, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 7-9. Two Figures. 1946-47, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Coll: The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia.

Fig. 7-10. Adolph Gottlieb. The Prisoners. 1946, oil on canvas, 36 x 48". Private collection.

Fig. 7-11. Robert Motherwell. Yellow Figure. (Personage with Yellow Ochre and White). 1947, oil on canvas, 72 x 54". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel M. Kootz.

Fig. 7-12. Woman with Birds. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 7-13. Adolph Gottlieb. Night in the City. Ca. 1946-47, medium, measurements and whereabouts unknown. Image unavailable at press time.

Fig. 7-14. Woman with Birds. 1947, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Coll: Matthew Stirling, New York City.

Fig. 7-15. Woman with Bird. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

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Fig. 7-16. Jackson Pollock. White Cockatoo: Number 24A, 1948. 1948, enamel and oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 9', 6". (Note that the background color has faded from that of orange to dark brown, due to twenty-five years hung in sunlight). Coll: Formerly American Broadcasting Companies, New York City; Currently Private collection, California.

Fig. 7-17. Jackson Pollock. The She-Wolf. 1943, oil on canvas, 41 7/8 x 67". The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. 7-18. "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in America?". Life, Vol. 27, no. 6, August 8, 1949, p. 42, left side of double spread. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

Fig. 7-19. "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in America?". Life, Vol. 27, no. 6, August 8, 1949, p. 43, right side of double spread. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

Fig. 7-20. Bird Catcher. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Holbrook Collection, Georgia.

Fig. 7-21. Figure with Birds. Ca. 1948, India ink and gouache on paper, 17 3/4 x 23 3/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 7-22. Circus. 1947, watercolor and India ink on paper, 25 x 19". Private collection.

Fig. 7-23. Clown and Lion. 1948, watercolor and India ink on paper, 25 x 19". Private collection.

Fig. 7-24. Two Clowns. 1947, watercolor and India ink on paper, 19 x 25". Private collection.

CHAPTER 8. The Kootz Catastrophe.

Fig. 8-1. Dancer. 1947, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: The Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

Fig. 8-2. Crustacean. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-3. Aphrodite. 1948, oil on canvas, string, 30 x 24". Private collection.

Fig. 8-4. Crustacean Dancer. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Alan Jacobs, New York City.

Fig. 8-5. Sea Creature. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Advanced Products Corporation, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

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Fig. 8-6. Gold Pectoral Ornament. Pre-Columbian, size unavailable. Coll: National Bank of Columbia, Gold Museum, Bogota, Columbia. (Photograph, cut out reproduction pasted onto homemade dust jacket of scrapbook).

Fig. 8-7. Untitled (Crustacean). 1948, casein tempera, India ink, pencil on paper, 26 x 20 3/8". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-8. Nocturne. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-9. Homage in Black. 1948, oil on canvas, 26 x 20". Coll: Lehman Brothers, Kuhn, Loeb Company, New York City.

Fig. 8-10. Figure on a Beach-Genesis. 1948, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-11. Queen of the Crustaceans. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-12. Alberto Giacometti. Woman with Her Throat Cut. 1932, bronze, 8 x 34 1/2 x 25". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. 8-13. Crustacean Carnival. 1949, casein tempera on paper, 20 x 26". Coll: David Sachs, Larchmont, New York.

Fig. 8-14. Pyrrhic Dance. 1952, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Coll. Matthew Stirling, New York.

Fig. 8-15. Mark Rothko. Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea. 1944, oil on canvas, 75 3/8 x 84 3/4". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Figs. 8-16, 8-17, 8-18, 8-19. William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb and Hans Hofmann. The Intrasubjectives. Four-page, one-sided, fold-over exhibition brochure/catalogue. 1949, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4" (each quarter sheet), 29 1/2 x 23 1/2" (unfolded), on glossy paper stock. Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York, September 14-October 3, 1949. Photo courtesy The Library of The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. 8-20. Clown with Mask. 1950, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-21. Autumnal. 1950, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-22. Abstract. 1950, casein tempera and India ink on paper, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-23. Africana. 1950-51, oil and collage on canvas, 30 x 24". Coll: Ruth and Barney O'Hara.

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Fig. 8-24. Myth (No. 1). 1954, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-25. Tondero. 1954, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-26. Abstract. 1954, gouache and India ink on paper, 20 x 26". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-27. Still Life in Red. 1952-55, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-28. Nuclear. 1956, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-29. Fiesta. 1958, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. 8-30. Procession (No. 2). 1959, gouache and India ink on paper, 20 x 26". Estate of Byron Browne.

Figs. 8-31 and 8-32. Gimbels Department Store Sale Advertisement of Browne's (and Holty's) Paintings. The New York Times, 4 November 1951, sect. 1, p. 22. Photographs from photocopies, courtesy The Humanities and Social Sciences Library of The New York Public Library, New York City.

Fig. 8-33. Mother and Child. 1949, oil on canvas, 52 x 25". Coll: Mrs. Emanuel (Sadie) Klein, New York City.

Fig. 8-34. Poster for Artists Equity Masquerade Ball. 1952, tempera and India ink on paper, 14 3/8 x 11" (photographed from poster reproduction, not original artwork). Photograph by April Paul, with permission from New York Artists Equity Association.

Fig. 8-35. Letter from Byron Browne to Reginald Marsh. May 23, 1952. Copy of letter courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Microfilm Roll #NBB-2.

CONCLUSION. Death of an American Cubist

Fig. C-1. Venus, or Portrait of R. 1936, oil on masonite, 60 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-2. Portrait of Rosalind. 1936, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Destroyed by artist, November 1961.

Fig. C-3. Portrait of John Gellert. 1954, oil on canvas, 72 x 40". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-4. Portrait of Rosalind. 1954-55, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-5. Joseph Solman. Portrait of Byron Browne. 1954, oil on canvas, 36 x 26". Coll: Joseph H. Hirshhorn.

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Fig. C-6. Portrait of Joseph Solman. 1955, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Coll: The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. Gift of Rosalind Browne.

Fig. C-7. Portrait of Irving Marantz. 1956, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-8. Portrait of Chaim Gross. 1956, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: The Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation, New York City.

Fig. C-9. Portrait of Milton Avery. 1959, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Walter P. Chrysler.

Fig. C-10. Portrait of Domenico Facci. 1960, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-11. Domenico A. Facci. Portrait Bust of Byron Browne. November 5, 1961, terracotta, with painted patina to resemble bronze coloration, 12 1/2 x 7 x 8 1/2". Photo by Walter Russell. Estate of Domenico A. Facci, New York City.

Fig. C-12. Portrait of Julio Prol. 1961, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-13. Self-Portrait. 1939, pencil on cream paper, 17 1/4 x 12 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-14. Self-Portrait. 1947, casein tempera wash and India ink penline on paper, 21 7/8 x 14 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-15. Self-Portrait. February 10. 1953, India ink wash and penline on paper, 20 x 26". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-16. Self-Portrait. 1956, oil on canvas, 40 x 32". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-17. Self-Portrait. 1958, oil on canvas, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-18. Self-Portrait. 1958, oil on canvas, 28 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-19. Self-Portrait. 1960, oil on canvas, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-20. Self-Portrait Holding Mahlstick. 1961, oil on masonite, 16 x 10 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-21. Francisco de Goya. Self-Portrait (at age 69). Ca. 1815, oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 13". Coll: Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

Fig. C-22. The Rose. 1961, oil on canvas, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-23. Willem de Kooning. Woman, I. 1950-52, oil on canvas, 6' 3 7/8 x 58". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Fig. C-24. Seated Bather. 1952, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-25. Satyr. 1954, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

Fig. C-26. Chaim Gross. Roosevelt and Hoover in a Fistfight. 1932, mahogany, 72 x 20 x 1 1/2". Coll: The Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation; The Chaim Gross Studio Museum, New York City.

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INTRODUCTION

A STILL LIFE IN PRIMARY COLORS

> His dedication to his own art was unceasing. He lived for it only. It was his life, his dream, and his glory. For him art was a religion and the practice of it an apostleship.[1]
>
> --Joseph Solman
> From a tribute he delivered at the funeral of Byron Browne, December 27, 1961

Christmas Day, 2001, marks the fortieth anniversary since the death of Byron Browne (Fig. I-1). Who was Byron Browne? Why should we be interested in a painter whose work is infrequently shown and whose name rarely appears in art-historical texts, and whose prices at auction never draw applause and whose work was considered unfashionable even during his lifetime? Was Browne a true original or merely an inspired eclectic? What happened to bring down the painter who, for a breathless time, rode the crest of national acclaim just at that moment when American art exploded to international prominence with Abstract Expressionism?

The artist in primitive cultures was an integral, often revered member of society. He functioned as would a magician or mystic, living by his special talents and powers to convince, a driven creature who produced necessary and desired commodities. Conversely, in contemporary European and American societies the artist or creative person often was and still is to a certain extent looked upon as an oddity, someone outside the mainstream, little understood and unnecessary to the maintenance of the society.

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[1] As students, the painter Joseph Solman had attended the National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts with Browne; they remained lifelong friends.

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Frequently considered a second class citizen, he was generally distrusted as shiftless and unreliable. Byron Browne, in his compulsive drive to make art, to live for the creative act alone, was like that primitive man, but adrift, now, in an alien modern society.

The growth of Browne's conversion to modernism took as many turns as there were artistic movements, resulting in an oeuvre as multifaceted and controversial as the times in which he created it. Few American artists were so gifted, so versatile, so facile, so consumed with the drive to work or so prolific in output as he. Yet in his personal as well as in his professional life, Browne was possessed of equally impressive self-destructive tendencies. Seldom was he in the right place at the advantageous moment, sometimes by accident of poor luck but mainly through his arbitrary determinations. His own statement, that he " was out of step with the times," applied not only to the specific time in which he uttered it but could as well have stood for almost any point in his artistic career.

With the exception of his association with the Samuel Kootz Gallery, 1945-1948, whereby he was provided an agenda, Browne's aesthetic decisions lacked focus and vision; they also assured him a financially stricken existence. As a wage earner he lived, as did his family, barely above the poverty line and not infrequently, below it. Was it an accident that he spent a lifetime going against the grain, or did some inner compulsion, some psychological quirk require that he do so?

In the 1930s, when realistic depiction was the prevailing American visual expression, Browne painted geometrically abstract pictures heavily influenced by Cubism's flat shifting planes. During the 1940s, he passionately insisted on Picasso's Cubism as the singular style upon which to anchor his work and believed it the only method through which American art could grow. For a time he was right and his work reflected an exciting

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experimentation that few other painters could match. By so infusing his work with Cubist shapes and from an American's perspective, he sought to lead his seemingly provincial country away from the popular sentimental narrations that posed as art with an advanced, more sophisticated French idiom, for it was from that side of the ocean that he believed the true avant-garde art ensued and always would. He purposely avoided the Surrealists, here for the Duration of the war, never believing that their psychic automatist theories could have shown him fresh insights and alternative points of view. In reality, by 1948 Cubism no longer served the purpose of the avant-garde, yet long after it had ceased to seem progressive, he refused to recognize its impotency.

Browne was also capable of sudden lightening-fast reversals of that faith, for when the object and the idea of "tradition" itself ultimately came under fire as credible artistic sources and models, he reverted to representation. He insisted on subject matter that had long gone out of favor or that was questionable within American painting, typified by his bullfight depictions, nude figures in the guise of Greek goddesses, and in that final stronghold of the pre-camera painter, the portrait. He held as exemplars painters like Rembrandt, Ingres, and Goya at a time when 1950s Abstract Expressionism, 1960s Pop Art and Minimalism swept such conservatism to the farthest reaches of the commercial gallery system. Those are but a few of his steps out of unison in deference to his self-imposed restrictions and standards against the prevailing art that for a time shut out of consideration any "baggage" that harked back to tradition and "great art."

Browne's insistence that the object was always present no matter how unrecognizable his shapes, may have stemmed from Picasso's claim that "there was no such thing as abstract

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art," that "one must start from something."[2] When the mood among leading American painters was to turn inward to the subconscious, to eliminate all reference to subject matter and reality itself, Browne rebelled by going the opposite way, clinging yet more tenaciously to his belief in the natural world, painting the object back into his work. His imagery became so figurative that by the time he died much of his output reflected the academic rendering of form and treatment of space that he had disparaged early in his career.

One questions Browne's unwavering idealism, his belief in following the great traditions of the past and linking them with his own time, that is, his conviction that all new art must take on something concrete from the proven art of the past. He maintained that no one could ever create freshly without it; indeed, he was incapable of creating anything divorced from it. These were peculiar positions to hold at mid-twentieth century, when not a few of his contemporaries had found a way to new art minus the crutch of the past.

Quite literally, he looked back for nearly everything he needed with which to move forward. In this way he believed that his own painting would withstand the test of time, as had the icons he so admired. Here the artist's intention and his perception of the difference between it and the reality of the day clash into focus. Browne lived to witness his stubbornly held idealism and his integrity ultimately fail him, as painters who held strongly opposing viewpoints rose to prominence. His reticence to discuss what he himself painted disturbed not a few of his peers at the "Club" and he preferred to walk away from

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2 Undated quoted material copied from one of Browne's notebooks that he used as lesson guides for his students at the Art Students League of New York, where he taught for many years.

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their arguments over aesthetic issues rather than join the fracas. In the long run, his nonparticipation in such discussions ostracized him from the camaraderie of the Abstract Expressionists, and consideration from the critical establishment as well. Thus thwarted on every side toward the end of his life, some said that this bitter realization is what really caused his death at the untimely age of fifty-four (Fig. I-2).

Browne, once he liberated his work from academicism, painted from a modernist point of view, yet he concurrently worked in a realistic manner. He possessed an extraordinary capacity for inventive ways to portray fundamental genres ranging from the human figure and still life arrangements to the abstracted microscopic forms brought to human attention through powerful photographic lenses. Such stylistic hopscotching, experimenting, he called it, never settling on any one identifiable style for long and frequently executing work in several during the course of a single year, confused and alienated critics and collectors. He was, one could say, an adventurer, looking ahead with one eye while glancing back over his shoulder with the other, refusing to depose tradition even as he seemingly sought to condemn it. For all his physical largeness, he was well over six feet tall, Browne was a particularly gentle man who never spoke unkindly about anyone, loyal to all who would count him friend. He was an especially quiet person, a family man who preferred to dine at home rather than be "seen" in restaurants or out on the town. He rarely drank and never smoked except for the "worldly" effect it was supposed to evoke when photographers sought him for the ubiquitous publicity shots at exhibition openings. Such events made him uncomfortable and ill at ease; he would rather have avoided them. Despite his exceptionally attractive appearance, he was beneath using it to advance himself for it never occurred to him to do so.

Still, Browne was competitive, aggressive, and driven with ambition but not for

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personal gain. Material things of life seemed unimportant to him; he had had few with which to begin and had learned to do without. He never owned a car and never learned to drive, even when he began to spend entire summers in Provincetown. He had no desire to do anything or go anywhere but to his studio to paint.

Browne was a morally decent man, an innocent in a corrupt world, it was said. As such, he was vulnerable to others more dynamic than he and not so filled with wonder and trust, for he believed that they, as he, could not conceive of perpetrating ill upon one another. Such naiveté cost him dearly. As a grown man in his fifties, there was still something of an aura of childlike innocence about him; the concerns of the everyday world seemed rarely to be his, or so it appeared on the surface. Although he seemed both of this world and beyond it, he was rarely in it.

From the fall of 1948 until his death in 1961, Browne taught painting and drawing at the Art Students League of New York. While he had a following, unlike some he was a not a flamboyant "personality" teacher, for he listened and observed far more often than he spoke. Always encouraging, he urged his students to find their own way rather than impose his standards upon them; one, Robert Rauschenberg, took his advice quite literally.

His wife, Rosalind Bengelsdorf, said his entire life revolved around a pivot of paint tubes, brushes, a pot of ink and a dream. Consumed with a driving need to paint, he did so, she said, for hours every day, weekends and holidays included, much to her aggravation when she needed him to accompany her to social events. His muse was art and his dedication to it was total; he allowed nothing to get in its way. Still, he found time to be a father to his son, born in 1943. His marriage may have been a series of ups and downs but in the long run it proved an institution that protected him and lent an order and stability to his life that the art world could not.

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In turning to his painting, for that is the real issue, the question of his modernism inevitably arises. In his insistence on linking chains of European tradition to a contemporary vision, his attachment of "great art" to his own vision, was Browne's modernism only an illusion? Did his translation and reinvention of French modernism constitute true American innovation, that is, did the results of his efforts contribute to an American avant-garde? Was it enough for an American painter to imitate and play upon innovations originated by others in order to be, himself, innovative? Was there no other way, no alternative, for a painter to enter modernism in the 1930s than through European mimesis? As a practitioner of Picasso's Cubism, who believed that linking tradition to and through it was the single methodology by which one could formulate contemporary American painting, was he so European tradition-bound that he ultimately failed to contribute to or advance the art of his own country?

Browne had the right idea in the beginning, that is, to shed the facade of illusionistic academic realism but in exchange he immediately picked up what some would call a new facade: the "academicism" of the European avant-garde tradition. While still a student at the National Academy of Design School of Fine Art in 1928, he began to question his instructors's teachings and thus his own direction. Shortly following his graduation he chose Picasso for his mentor and retained him more or less to his death, long before that of his distant mentor.

What then does this make of his art? While convinced that Cubism provided the crucial link to American progress, what of his interspersing, as additional sources for his work, art from all previous eras of historical production? He drew readily upon the art of the ancient Greeks, Romans and other long-extinct civilizations for their universally-understood timeless symbols, as he called them? Such attachments, reworked with a

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contemporary twist, eventually become more retrogressive than progressive, for the results often ran beyond mere "appropriation," to touch upon "expropriation."

Browne conceived his paraphrasing from art historical sources as major American innovations. If this is so, then surely he must rank as one of this nation's few originals. This is especially true during the 1930s and early 1940s, when his painting inspired other painters to carry the torch for innovation and abstraction. Yet in the 1950s, when they succeeded and made American abstraction not only tolerable but immensely popular, Browne began to switch from his European allegiances to aspects of the new American phenomenon, Abstract Expressionism, borrowing intermittently and unabashedly from its stylistic markers, especially from "action painting," this despite his loathing of the principles its practitioners professed and the art that resulted. This made for tremendous dualism in his work, as he began to contradict his own dictum about great art of the past as the only valid way to the future. With his work of the late 1950s, he sought to "catch up," but it was too late; the slashing, mutilating gestural style of the action painters had already been written into the history of art, its shock value long since mitigated.

Browne played a central role in the advanced art movements of the 1930s and 1940s, when popular and critical acceptance of abstraction painted by an American did not exist. What then seems peculiar is that no art historian has written about him in depth. Art reviews in newspapers, periodicals, an occasional article and exhibition catalogue essay comprise the bulk of documentation. Rarely is he mentioned in art history texts and only infrequently does one find an example of his art on exhibition. It is as if this painter never existed, so thoroughly has his name been obliterated even by those institutions that early on collected and still hold his work. There is no doubt that Browne was an artistic prodigy, the talents born to him were marvelous. What then went wrong with his once brilliant

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career? The following extensive examination of the life of a major contributor to American art, provides an engrossing and sometimes poignant journey in search of answers.

In his supportive catalogue foreword to Browne's one-man exhibition at the Artists' Gallery in 1939, John Graham placed him among those few who painted in opposition to the firmly entrenched, middle-of-the-road, cornbelt realism then popular. Graham summarized the show in somewhat florid prose

> An exhibition of Browne's paintings is a lesson in good taste and clear thinking for art students and collectors. It clears the road for true American painting instead of clogging it with obsolete and insincere trash of stumbling sentimentality. Browne's art belongs to men who can build, direct and man the simple sheets of native canvas-sails.[3]

By 1943, the art dealer and writer, Samuel Kootz, could say, "His aggressive grasp of our more advanced ideologies pays off in canvases that evidence constant growth."[4] When Kootz opened his own gallery in 1945, which became one of the most avant-garde organizations in the nation, he included Browne among the six upcoming American modernists he represented (William Baziotes, Romare Bearden, Adolph Gottlieb, Carl Holty, Robert Motherwell, and Browne), thereby recognizing his potential as a major participant in contemporary painting. Of Browne's first one-man exhibition at the Kootz Gallery during November of the following year, critic Ben Wolf of Art Digest stated, "The exhibition is convincing proof of Browne's unquestionable talents and right to a position as one of the important, young creative artists in America's today."[5]

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[3] Byron Browne, John D. Graham, foreword, Byron Browne, statement, New York, Artists' Gallery, February 28-March 13, 1939.

[4] Byron Browne, Samuel Kootz, foreword, New York, Pinacotheca Gallery, March 15-31, 1943.

[5] Ben Wolf, "Convincing Proof," Art Digest, Vol. 21, no.4, November 15, 1946, P. 10.

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In his classic survey, Art and Life in America, published in 1949, Oliver W. Larkin spoke of Browne's position in the late 1940s, praising his modernism and illustrating his comments with a reproduction of one of his most abstract paintings. According to Larkin

> It was this intensity of utterance which made the work of the abstract, nonobjective, and surrealist men the focus of attention in the galleries of 1945, this and a painterly dexterity which made more conservative efforts look shabby and perfunctory. Few canvases could hold their own on the wall beside Byron Browne's Still Life in Primary Colors. . . ."[6]

This was high praise from so eminent an art historian.

Still, other voices proclaimed his work too subservient to better-known painters, especially the French modernists, Picasso and Cubism. Without warning, in mid-1948 Kootz dismissed Browne from his by now famed roster of painters. Then, to his absolute dismay, at the end of 1951, Browne found the bulk of his unsold canvases deposited for sale by his former dealer at Gimbels Department Store, advertised over a half-page spread in the Sunday edition of The New York Times at 50% percent discount to the buyer. The shock of this unprecedented episode caused immense and lasting damage to his career as well as to his emotional and physical health. What happened to Browne in so mean and public a way immediately became the subject of outraged editorials and letters in contemporary art periodicals that ranged over several weeks.[7] Although only forty-four years of age, Browne never regained his former stature during the ten years that remained of his life. Why such adversity could have happened at the height of his creative powers has never been fully understood or elucidated and the tremendous implications both personal and professional only hinted.

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[6] Oliver W. Larkin, Art and Life in America, New York, Rinehart, 1949, (revised 1960), p. 473.

[7] This devastating incident and its aftermath will be discussed at length.

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I will argue that this unfortunate incident resulted in part from powerful art politics and forces beyond Browne's control.[8] Coupled as well with irreconcilable differences in attitudes toward the purposes of art in the late 1940s, it is but one of several vital issues that must be addressed if we are to understand Browne and the work he produced.

Ultimately, his pursuit of the double muse, "beauty" and the ideal, and his perception of each caused him the greatest anguish, for they both betrayed him, becoming his greatest enemies. Two of the potent spiritual and intellectual forces in the history of man, their nuances propelled Browne unrelentingly, making him unfit and ill-prepared to conceive an "ugly" unfinished-looking, raw painting when such became the fashion. In the end, he paid dearly for this inability to corrupt his muse, for he became "unfashionable."

Browne outlived public recognition of his innovative spirit. In the years since his death, only three articles have seriously discussed his contribution.[9] Rather than confront and deal with what some might consider a difficult or problematic oeuvre, art historians and critics alike simply prefer to write him out of American art history, thereby confirming a lack of interest that is indicative of the depth of decline in critical esteem for Browne's work.

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[8] Browne, Kootz, the Abstract Expressionists and the politics of art in the Cold War era were addressed in a controversial book: Serge Guibaut, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. by, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1983.

[9] The clearest explanations of Browne's position have been made by the following: Greta Berman, "Byron Browne: Builder of American Art," Arts Magazine, Vol. 53, no. 4, December 1978, pp. 98-102; April J. Paul, "Byron Browne in the Thirties: The Battle for Abstract Art," Archives of American Art Journal, Vol. 19, no. 4, 1979, pp. 9-24, and April J. Paul, "Introduction A La Peinture Américaine: Six Young American Painters of the Samuel Kootz Gallery: An Inferiority Complex in Paris," Arts Magazine, Vol. 60, no. 6, February 1986, pp. 65-71.

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The several exhibitions that focused on aspects of his oeuvre, all from the 1980s, should have gone a long way toward reviving his reputation yet they were greeted with meager critical response or none at all.[10] Silence accompanied the single attempt toward a major museum retrospective, held at the Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, Long Island, New York, but Long Island is not New York City and the show died where it originated.[11] By contrast to the 1980s, not a single solo exhibition of Browne's work is known to have been organized during the 1990s, and well into the twenty-first century.

How then shall one judge the oeuvre of a painter who for his entire career contradicted every tenet held by the prevailing stylistic convention? This dissertation seeks explanation for what happened in Browne's life and in his work to cause such

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10 These exhibitions include : Byron Browne: Decade Memorial Exhibition, Alfred Werner, essay, Naples, Florida, Harmon Gallery, December 13-31, 1971; Byron Browne: Work from the 1930s, John D. Graham, essay (reprint from 1938 Artist's Gallery exhibition), New York, Washburn Gallery, January 7-February 1, 1975; Drawings by Byron Browne, Hayden Herrera, essay, New York, Washburn Gallery, January 1977; Byron Browne, Barbara Rose, essay, Houston, Texas, Meredith Long & Co., May 19-June 18, 1981; Byron Browne: A Retrospective, April J. Paul, essay, Naples, Florida, Harmon-Meek Gallery, January 17-February 6, 1982; Byron Browne: Watercolors from 1946-1949, April J. Paul, essay, New York, Martin Diamond Fine Arts, May 3-June 4, 1983. An attempt to place Browne in proximity to the Abstract Expressionists was addressed in an article by Gail Levin, in "Byron Browne in the Context of Abstract Expressionism," Arts Magazine, Vol. 59, no. 10, June/Summer 1985, pp. 129-133, an abbreviated version of which was printed earlier that year in a brochure for the Meredith Long & Company art gallery in Houston, Texas, for an exhibition that endeavored to promote the same view of Browne's work.

11 Byron Browne: Paintings & Drawings from the 30's, 40's & 50's, Harry Rand, essay, Roslyn Harbor, Long Island, New York, Nassau County Museum of Art, April 5-May 24, 1987. This substantial and beautifully installed exhibition attracted large crowds of Long Island residents but he was a New York City painter and most visitors had never heard of Browne, who had died twenty-six years before. Rand's essay, too, attempted to write him within the New York School, which was what the Estate of Byron Browne urged him to do in order to serve its own purposes in resurrecting the reputation of the painter. To link Browne within the pantheon of the Abstract Expressionists, always denied him, was given the highest priority of the Estate. That he could never have been forms the crux of this manuscript.

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indifference to a vital, once-established reputation. While redeeming and rectifying are not the text's primary goals, Browne's career and the paintings it produced deserve much more than a drawn curtain of obscurity. His story, for it is that above all, unfolds as the painter grows, both literally and within his artistic evolution. The focus of the text, and crucial to the understanding of what caused the demise of his reputation, centers on the period of his involvement with Samuel Kootz, author and gallery owner during one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of American art.

I will argue as well for the establishment of a viable category within the history of painting, that of American Cubism, and place within it not only the key painters from the early portion of the twentieth-century, for the most part already given their due, but those who continued to develop its forms, painting an American idiom as unique to this country as American Impressionism was earlier, and so remains. Byron Browne was one of its major contributors, and perhaps the last disciple and champion of this once great innovation.

Browne was an exceptionally prolific painter, thus the decision to use a traditional chronological methodology seemed the most logical and fair approach to this substantial oeuvre. Whereas over one thousand reproductions have been made available for this project, as for a catalogue raisonné, far fewer tell the story as well or better. Every effort has been made to locate the printed reviews of his exhibitions, and those individuals still living, whose critical evaluations of his output from exhibition to exhibition determined the significance and in the end, the sum value of his labors. Tape-recorded personal recollections from fellow painters and others who knew him over the months and years of this period also play a significant role in "discovering" the painter and the man who was Browne. The text will describe and assess this output both in terms of context and

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standards of the period, presenting insights gained from historical perspective. Biographical incident is interwoven throughout, for his life was inseparable from his art, and, in no small part, determined its direction and melancholy outcome.

Browne was and remains an important representative of the second period of modernism in American painting. His reputation was dearly won, maintained for a time, then eclipsed and obscured by the onslaught of Abstract Expressionism. Appropriately, and above all, this manuscript presents Browne's distinctive, pathfinding and frequently beautiful body of work (Fig. I-3). Doing so endeavors to settle the question posed at the beginning, "Who was Byron Browne?"

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CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY YEARS AND THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN: 1907-1928

> This year the Third Hallgarten [prize] goes to a young painter still in the schools . . . . There are students capable of rising to the challenge and spurring their talents to justify the belief in them . . . and this student has shown signs of such capability . . . .[1]
>
> --Elizabeth L. Cary, art critic
> 1928

December 25, 1961, marked the sudden and unexpected death of Byron Browne. A heart attack claimed him at fifty-four, rather a mid-point in age for some and an older, less hopeful stage for others. Still, despite its premature termination, his life had been tempered several times over by cataclysmic upheavals in American artistic and social history that affected him personally and well as professionally. Some of the fluctuations he helped initiate; others, willingly or not, found him inextricably involved. No year passed free of abrasive events guaranteed to erode all but the most committed artistic spirit.

Browne was an avant-garde painter, a maverick who traveled his own route. This term is used not merely in the accepted American understanding of avant-garde as being advanced or "new," but as it pertains to the wider international meaning that argues for

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[1] Elizbeth L. Cary, "Prize-Winning Pictures in the Spring Academy," The New York Times, Sunday, 25 March 1928, sect. 9, p. 14. Browne was the youngest student in the history of the National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts to win the prestigious award. Questioning the wisdom of the awards committee, some reviewers implied that one so "untried" might not be capable of living up to the achievements that the tribute represented, as it was generally given to much older painters.

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individual self-assertion (or self-defense) within a community in order to goad the larger surrounding society toward "something," specific or unspecified.[2] Within that larger sense Browne remained avant-garde for much of his life because he could not help being so. His prolific output resulted from an inborn compulsive drive to experimentation and discovery, not unlike that of a scientist to whom he often compared the artist. Whether found in literature, art or other creative endeavor, experimentation and creativity constitute the principal characteristics of avant-garde behavior. Even so, in Browne's unrelenting desire to compose, deconstruct and recompose his painted shapes with breathless speed, his facility, this extraordinary urge to produce work, some would have said out-of-control ability, ultimately undermined his contribution.

Browne was born on June 26, 1907, in Yonkèrs, New York, a suburb of New York City, the only son of Cora Elizabeth Poole Brown, a talented portraitist and decorative painter of china tableware, from whom he would take his first inspiration, and Doctor George Byron Brown, a Canadian eye, ear, nose and throat surgeon. They named the child

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2 Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, 1968, pp. 1-5. The state of being avant-garde can be traced to its sociological and psychological roots. Avant-garde art reveals psychological conditions ranging from the idiosyncratic and antisocial to the decadent and alienated, the substrata of an aesthetic. By his statement, Poggioli referred to a manifested reaction by a group or an entire society--a decision, for example, to paint in a manner misunderstood or decried by the majority or even an entity as large as a government--against the artistic norm or status quo acceptable to that society. This same phenomenon can sometimes be manifested by an individual, one who obstinately insists on creating or producing precisely what he knows to be against the conventional behavioral or artistic codes.

In the case of Byron Browne, his conscious desire to paint abstractly, to "go against the grain" of contemporary popular taste, must be considered an avant-garde action. This was a time when certain other American artists were also moving toward controversial modernist concepts. Browne, by adhering to any or all of these concepts, by his self-assertion and his action (painting semi-abstractly or non- representationally), aligned himself with avant-garde thinking, whether self-indulgently effected or subconsciously directed. In America such artists, individually and collectively, were relegated to a substratum of aesthetic hierarchy until the 1950s.

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after his father, but later the son added an "e" to his surname and, when he found the art world too small to contain two American painters named George Browne (George Elmer Browne, 1871-1946), he dropped his first name and thereafter called himself Byron.

He grew up with one sister, Ruth, later Ruth Brown Payne, two years his senior. A photograph taken when he was five years old shows the family without his father's presence (Fig. 1-1). The children, the daughter outgoing, bursting with energy and personality, the son reclusive, introspective and given to quiet artistic pursuits, were never close; at one point in their lives they had lost track of each other for more than fourteen years. Young Browne's way of looking at the world was conditioned by everyday ordinary happenings typical of the life of a boy growing up in an east coast town tempered by the cultural advantages of nearby New York City.

As an artist herself and wanting to instill in her children a love for beautiful objects, his mother often took him and Ruth to the Metropolitan and Brooklyn Museums of Art. In this way he early on developed recognition and taste for the great paintings and sculpture of all cultures and periods. Such exposure to international art forms played a large part in determining the course of a lifetime spent exploring the past and linking its relevancy to the art of his own era. His habit of spending long hours in museums lasted his lifetime.

Apparently his father's conservative physician half of the family had some difficulty reconciling the attitudes of his mother's more liberal romantic half, for these differences drove his parents to court for a divorce; the decree was granted in 1914, when Browne was seven years old. His father returned to Canada and it is doubtful that either saw the other again. What arrangements the doctor made for the support of the family remain unknown but his wife's independent stubborn nature and strong sense of pride, which

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young Browne inherited in double strengths, precluded her from accepting alimony from her former husband, despite having the responsibility of raising two growing children. She did, however, accept an offer from her two brothers to come to live with them. Of necessity a frugal woman, she managed to support her youngsters and herself through various commercial painting jobs, but the family remained financially distressed. Although considered exceptionally handsome, Cora Brown never remarried.

In an interview with Lawrence Campbell during the 1950s, Browne recalled that his earliest memory of himself as artist was climbing to the top of the Palisades Cliffs on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River and painting scenic views on old paper window shades.[3] These watercolor beginnings constituted the first of the landscape/seascape genre that he would paint throughout his career. An even earlier memory was that of two pictures hanging in his home in Yonkers: a young woman's portrait (Fig. 1-2), which he later learned was his mother's self-portrait, and a large depiction of their Saint Bernard dog that his mother had painted, as well.

By the time Browne grew into his teens, his exceptional talents in drawing and painting had become obvious to his family and teachers alike. His earliest surviving painting, a small rectangular still life of a bowl of red roses on a table, Roses, 1921, oil on masonite (Fig. 1-3), that he executed at age fourteen, serves to demonstrate how advanced was his ability for one so young and untrained. Drawing, which came to him easily, often took the form of fantasy illustration. He created dozens of pictures to accompany the children's stories he wrote, for which his mother tried in vain to find buyers.

Browne attended Yonkers High School where the time he spent on elective art

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[3] Lawrence Campbell, "Is a Square More Abstract Than a Face?," Art Students League News, Vol. 6, no. 3, March 1953, n. pag.

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activities soon took precedence over his required academic courses. While the school offered no formal art classes, those few students who expressed an interest were provided with drawing tables, materials and space in which to work. A schoolroom snapshot taken on March 28, 1924, shows him as a serious sixteen-year-old concentrating on his studies in the company of three classmates (Fig. 1-4).

According to a conversation with his friend and former classmate, Abner Dean, there was little guidance from school instructors.[4] The students worked mostly on their own, teaching and helping each other. He recalled that Browne participated actively on the staff of the Yonkers High School yearbook, Blackboard, and executed much of the artwork for the school's literary magazine, Egis. He also painted posters for various school activities and won at least one first prize in a contest for artwork that promoted good health (Fig. 1-5). The photograph shows Browne standing in back of his prizewinning design as he holds up both his and Abner Dean's picture, shown below his, which won a second place award for depicting a bird flying over farmland.

Young Browne also proposed cover drawings and story illustrations for adventure

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[4] Abner Dean, Tape Recorded Interview with author, New York City, 16 January 1981. Browne and Dean, three years his junior, were drawn together in friendship because of their mutual interest in art. Both belonged to their school's sketch club and were involved in projects, such as poster contests. They frequently went off together on sketching jaunts. Dean recalled that Browne was always courteous in response to the work of others; he was never competitive or critical in any way of his fellow students's efforts and often acted as an instructor to the rest because of his advanced skills. Dean felt the art students were more talented than their so-called teacher and he considered Browne the most talented of them all, his skills the most developed.

They continued their friendship when each enrolled at the National Academy School of Art; Dean stayed only one and one-half years but later returned to art, becoming an internationally-known cartoonist. His recollections of this period and his perceptive sensitive insights into Browne's character form crucial aspects of the early portions of this text. I am vastly indebted to him for his generous gift of time and willingness to help with this project. Dean died unexpectedly on June 30, 1981.

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magazines and pictures of unrequited lovers and buxom women to True Confessions magazine, copies of which his mother kept around the house. The humorous characters of a daily newspaper comic strip, Salesman Sam, drawn by George Swanson, also became a favorite source to imitate. Althhough his skills were far advanced for his age, he never managed to sell even one picture, perhaps because his drawings mimicked too closely those of the well-known illustrators he so admired. Undaunted, he continued to submit illustrative artwork to national periodicals, even while he attended the National Academy but met with the same rejections. This extraordinary gift for mimicry would, in later years, create insurmountable obstacles in his career.[5]

The date of Browne's graduation from Yonkers High School remains uncertain to this day.[6] Evidence suggests that he left school in June of 1924, when he would have been within days of turning seventeen, without completing his senior year and graduating, in order to work full-time one year in a lumberyard to earn tuition money for art school, which even then he knew he preferred over college.[7] He may have been employed there part

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5 Dean clearly remembered Browne's extraordinary ability for mirroring other artists's styles in these drawings. With little effort he was able to imitate such popular cartoonists and illustrators of the day, as Francis Leyendecker, Howard Pyle, Norman Rockwell and N. C. Wyeth. Dean recalled that Browne could perfectly copy the technique and mannerisms of each; so developed was his ability to absorb the telling components of their styles that one could distinguish no difference between their artwork and his. He and all the students were, in his words, "flabbergasted" by his singular talents.

6 The keeper of Yonkers Public School Records has been unable to find any trace of Browne's records of attendance. The school relocated several times since the 1920s and some files of old papers are missing. A search for these documents, as well as examples of both the yearbook and the literary magazines from this period in Browne's life was undertaken by school administrators at the request of the author but nothing was found.

7 Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, Tape Recorded Interview, New York City, 20 August 1978. According to Mrs. Browne, her husband's father had been strongly opposed to his son's desire to become an artist and refused to contribute funds toward an ambition

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time the previous year as well and then continued while he attended his first year at the National Academy School. Then, too, he well may have graduated, taken the following year to work full time, and, when he had earned sufficient tuition for the art school, applied to the National Academy of Design. A newspaper article reported his having earned funds in a lumberyard for two years in order to save enough money to live and attend the school.[8] The logical date for his high school graduation would have been June 1925, the year he entered the National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts.[9]

Browne never questioned his ability and by the time he turned seventeen in June 1924, there was no doubt in his mind that he wanted a future in art and that in order to achieve it he must have professional training. During the early summer of 1925, he applied for admission to the National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts. His application and portfolio, which a faculty committee reviewed, were accepted; he was approved for entrance on September 1, and admitted to classes on the 28th. CoincidentalIy, the school, completing its centennial year as an educational institution, witnessed with this 1925-26

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that he believed unworthy of serious consideration. Although his parents had long been divorced, young Browne had approached his father through letters in an appeal for financial help for art school training. His father refused his request.

8 "Hat Checks Pay Way for Prize Artist, 21," New York American, 1 April 1928, n. pag. A photograph of Browne at work in a nightclub accompanied this article. He would graduate from the National Academy of Design School of Art later this spring.

9 There was no question that Browne manifested a talent that merited further development. Like most budding artists, he chose to attend a specialized school for instruction and the National Academy of Design School of the Fine Arts was the best-known of its type. According to Professor Diane Kelder, at that time most colleges did not offer "art for credit" and thus Browne had little choice but to choose an institution devoted to such training.

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season the largest registration in its history.[10]

Browne chose the school specifically because of the reputation of Charles Webster Hawthorne (1882-1930), a noted figure painter, innovator of painting techniques and an artist whom Browne had admired, who taught there. Aside from his reputation in oil painting, he remained a noted watercolorist, especially of land and seascapes.[11] Hawthorne exhibited almost yearly at the Academy's annual exhibitions from 1900 until his death, winning a number of important prizes.[12] Thus, students could not help but be inspired by such access to his work. For many years Hawthorne had also conducted summer classes at Provincetown, Massachusetts, founding the Cape Cod School of Art there in 1899, of which he remained director until his death.[13]

He began his studies at the Academy by drawing from antique casts under Charles Hinton, a sculptor and mural painter. Hinton felt that his student's ability was already developed enough to allow him admittance into the class without first being placed on

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10 Eliot Clark, History of the National Academy of Design: 1825-1953, New York, Columbia University, 1954, p. 109.

11 See: Richard Muhlberger, Charles Webster Hawthorne, Chesterfield, Massachusetts, Chameleon Books, 1999, for a compehensive look at not only his oil paintings, but for his rarely seen watercolors, many of which comprize a second section of the book, with an essay, "The Late Watercolors," by Janet Altic Flint.

12 Ibid., p. 7.

13 Long before Hans Hofmann opened his famous summer school at the tip of Cape Cod, it was Hawthorne who first seeded the idea of Provincetown summer training for art students, a habit many retained for a lifetime, as would Browne. By the summer of 1916, there were five summer art schools in Provincetown. One, run by George Elmer Browne (1871-1946), flourished for decades. Arshile Gorky, who had been there several times, introduced Byron Browne to Provincetown in the early 1930s, whereupon he fell in love with the quaint seaside village although his annual summer-long sojourns there did not begin until mid-decade.

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Probation, a classification accorded most beginning students in every course in order to determine their level of development. That same semester Browne was admitted to life drawing classes under the same probationary prerequisite. In addition to Hawthorne and Hinton, Charles Courtney Curran, also a well-respected figure painter, Alice Murphy and Ivan Olinsky were among his earliest instructors as well.

Many of Browne's classmates that first year were some who would become well known in later decades, including Paul Cadmus, O. Louis Guglielmi, George Prestopino, Albert Swinden and Alice Trumbull (later Mason). During his three years at the Academy other students destined for success included: Harry C. Bowden, Ilya Bolotowsky, Giorgio Cavallon, Abner Joseph Epstein (Abner Dean, whose father was the brother of Jacob Epstein, the noted sculptor), Theodore Roszak, Esphyr Slobodkina, Joseph Solman, Max Spivak, and William Steig. Browne remained a lifelong friend and colleague to these artists throughout his life.[14] Another student, a Brooklyn girl two years his senior named Florence Denn, became one of his closest acquaintances, for they fell in love and eventually married.[15] Denn was beginning her second year in September 1925, as Browne was newly admitted.[16]

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[14] The National Academy School of Fine Arts Record Files. The art school office retains the original records of its students's application, acceptance, courses studied and prizes won. Coupled with more detailed individual information housed in the Archives of the National Academy of Design building, the two sources contain a wealth of information on every artist who attended, no matter how briefly.

[15] Browne married Florence Denn in 1931. They rented an apartment that doubled as their studio at 32 Jane Street in Greenwich Village. Their marriage terminated in divorce in 1936; there were no children.

[16] Judging from her school records, she attended the Academy on a full-time basis, turning in numerous paintings and compositions each year by comparison to Browne's far fewer examples, leading one to suspect that he was indeed employed on a part-time basis.

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During the first semester of his second year at the Academy, Curran, Browne's instructor in life drawing, promoted him to Life in Full, a title designating the course of greatest difficulty involving the undraped figure. Curran remained one of his favorite teachers and, like Hawthrone, one who exerted tremendous influence upon his work, given the importance he would place on the figure throughout his career. By the end of the spring term on April 29, 1927, Browne had won an Honorable Mention for a painting and a $25.00 prize for a still life (title and whereabouts of both unknown). They constituted the first of many prizes awarded him during the remainder of his student days. Winning these awards gave Browne confidence and a new-found pride in accomplishment, encouraging in him a sense of personal self-sufficiency and professional strength previously unexperienced.

It was during this year that he moved to the city from his mother's home at 97 Saratoga Avenue in Yonkers, and rented his own apartment at 296 Manhattan Avenue, across town from the National Academy School. To further sever the filial ties, it was also in 1927 that he added an additional letter to the end of his last name in order to "distinguish" a surname he may have felt too ordinary in light of his excellent progress. Browne made sure the authorities took note of this spelling change by having the school secretary pencil the letter "e" (italics added) after his typewritten name, Brown, on his file card records for 1926-27.[17]

Dean recalled that during this time Browne remained financially strapped but instead of resenting his impoverished position, he seemed to accept it with a peculiar romantic resignation. In retrospect Dean saw him as continuing the tradition of the

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[17] The original yellowed 4 x 5 file cards pertaining to Browne still exist in the Archives of the National Academy School of Fine Arts records. The now faint but still visible little letter "e" is unmistakable.

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nineteenth-century bohemian concept of attic atelier artists whose lives were a continual struggle for survival.[18] Still, Browne managed to save enough money to clothe himself in what he believed the appropriate attire reflective of such an existence. In an overt manifestation of fulfilling his image as artist he appeared one day at school dressed in a heavy, white turtleneck sweater over a baggy-shaped trousers. Apparently, he felt that the role of artist could be visually signified by these outward signs of fashion. In addition, he styled his hair in a longish way that, to his thinking, bespoke "artist" to others. He knew who and what he was and wanted to look the part for all to acknowledge. Dean remembered his friend as openly proud of his status as artist.[19]

Browne's natural ability to recreate his instructors's artistic mannerisms and techniques grew as his skills developed. From 1926 onward he produced paintings much like his favorite teacher, Hawthorne. He not only emulated the shiny, fish-scale finish for which the painter was noted but also managed to accomplish this with very little pigment, using tinted turpentine washes instead of the more expensive impastos of paint, as his instructor preferred. Dean recalled that Browne's paintings at that time were so close to Hawthorne's that others mistook them for his work. He strove to become as accomplished as his instructors and, in the process, "became them."[20]

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[18] Abner Dean, Tape Recorded Interview, New York City, 16 January 1981.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Painting akin to the manner of the instructor, that is, mastering the methods and stylistic manifestations approximating those of an instructor, did mean a certain accomplishment and progress that pleased the instructor. If this criterion marked a successful student, then Browne excelled. Dean saw this ability as both blessing and curse and his observations proved correct. Later, because of his great admiration for Picasso and other Cubist masters's styles, Browne had difficulty letting his own expression dominate. In a sense, the Cubists became his teachers in absentia.

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One can readily observe the young student's exceptional facility for his craft and for absorbing these lessons as well, by comparing two student works of 1927 to two typical paintings executed by Curran and Hawthorne. Browne's Head of a Girl, (Fig. 1-6), has much in common with Curran's The Embroidered Shawl, 1923, (Fig. 1-7), in its strong light directed to one side of the face. The straightforward gaze of Curran's figure confronts the viewer in the same manner as does Browne's sitter and one might surmise that he painted this work as part of an assignment while in Curran's class. Browne's still life, Old Iron, Copper, Etc., (Fig. 1-8), a bravura display of ability to portray glistening copper and silvery fruit, for which he would soon win a major Academy prize, reflects to an astonishing degree the lush painterly quality of the objects within Hawthorne's Still Life with Fish, 1905, (Fig. 1-9).

What can happen to students who immerse themselves in a rigorous period of specialized training had happened to Browne. That is, the teaching methods and techniques demanded by his instructors as the policy of the school were absorbed then regurgitated, so that works produced seemed clones of his instructors. In an effort to please, Browne conformed to their manner during the time he was under their guidance. It is well known that once severed from an atmosphere of strict discipline, students will usually revert to different or newer tendencies. This phenomenon or reversal began to happen in his case even before leaving the National Academy School, for much to the eventual consternation of his conservative instructors, Browne also looked to sources beyond the Academy.

Two important exhibitions of modern French art may have contributed to Browne's interest in art forms not sanctioned by the academy. Held during his student years, they could have profoundly affected his future direction. Given the publicity each exhibition received no student of painting would have missed seeing them. A great deal more credit

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must be given to these early shows for their influence in turning many American artists's traditionally Realist vision to one that incorporated modernist tendencies. Katherine S. Dreier's Société Anonyme exhibition was held at the Brooklyn Museum in November 1926, and in December of the following year, Albert Gallatin's permanent exhibition opened in his Gallery of Living Art in the South Study Hall at New York University.[21]

The two exhibitions caused considerable excitement among students at the Academy, for this was the first time most had had a chance to view modern abstract works in such numbers. The Gallatin collection, by virtue of its permanence, had the greater impact. That Gallatin did not care for academicians and traditional art was apparent from the work he purchased. Here Browne could see the full flowering of Cubism, for many of the best known of the tabletop still lifes, collages and other paintings by Braque, Gris and Picasso formed a significant portion of his collection.[22] He also owned paintings by Arp, De Chirico, Dufy, Masson, Matisse, Miró, Léger, and other modernists. Although himself a reputable painter with abstract proclivities that were strongly influenced by European modernism, Gallatin did not neglect the earliest American efforts in this direction. His collection included works by Demuth, Man Ray, and Marin among others.

Browne may also have seen three exhibitions of works by Picasso that had been organized in the galleries of Wildenstein & Company by 1928, and the Painting in Paris

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21 International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by Société Anonyme, Brooklyn, The Brooklyn Museum, 1926, In Société Anonyme: The First Museum of Modern Art, 1920-1944, Vol. 1, Documents, New York, Arno, 1972.

22 Gallatin had purchased many of Picasso's open window, tabletop still lifes; the Cubist styles and subject matter became a lifelong passion for Browne, one that served his purposes in abstraction as well as in his figurative work.

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show in 1930 at the Museum of Modern Art.[23] Still, it was doubtless the Gallatin collection that exerted the strongest influence on his development during the late 1920s and early 1930s, playing an instrumental role in formulating his tentative excursions into modernism before he graduated from the Academy.[24] One can imagine how exciting such work must have appeared to Browne at the time, compelling his desire to emulate it despite the Academy's rigid prohibition of modernism and abstraction with punishment by expulsion of students who were caught experimenting with it.[25]

Modernism, even that of the late nineteenth-century, such as Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, had no place in the National Academy's teaching curricula. The conservative stance taken by its earliest directors remained intact and, in defensive defiance against each new stylistic encroachment, would remain so for many more years. Ilya Bolotowsky, one of Browne's classmates, cogently expressed his disquietude in an

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[23] Painting in Paris: From American Collections, Alfred H. Barr, foreword, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, January 19-February 16, extended to March 2, 1930. The museum exhibited twelve examples by Picasso, among which were Green Still Life, Abstract Still Life, Pierrot and Seated Woman, 1927, the latest of his paintings. Other artists, mostly of the French School, included Braque, De Chirico, Delaunay, Dufy, Léger, Miró, Rouault, Soutine, and Vuillard.

[24] How Browne became taken by nontraditional art forms so rapidly, considering his conservative background, traditional training and the early success he already achieved within that training is difficult to assess. Visual evidence supports the belief that he began to alter his style nearly immediately after having seen the paintings and sculptures in these exhibitions.

[25] The National Academy School of Fine Art dealt harshly with those who went against school rules; any student who disobeyed them risked immediate expulsion. At the time, there were few places where an art student could go to see paintings and sculpture not derived from classically academic sources. Viewing examples of modernism gave students reason to question and perhaps challenge or reconsider their current direction.

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interview in 1968 with Paul Cummings.[26] When asked if he and his fellow students knew anything about modern painters, such as Cézanne and Van Gogh, he replied that they had all "heard" about them but that the Academy's instructors warned their students in lectures against the modernists because they "could never learn how to do things right."[27] Therefore, the student who followed such artists would never be able to paint properly. Bolotowsky termed the lectures illiterate and recalled that they were never well attended by the students. According to him, those students with modernist leanings, had they made their interests known, would never have been admitted to the school.[28]

Byron Browne recalled an incident in which he was involved that took place at the Academy when he was studying sculpture under Robert Aitken

> I had become interested in modern art, though not one of my teachers had as much as mentioned Cézanne to me and only Hawthorne had ideas about color. One day I pinned a reproduction of an African mask to the wall. In came Mr. Aitken, noticed what I had done, but at first said nothing. He took a long time to reach me. Finally he came, and said, pointing to the mask: `Don't you know those things were done by ignorant, stupid people? They are childish and distorted. If you work like that, you'll have to leave the class![29]

Browne claimed that it was at an exhibition of Jacob Epstein's African mask-inspired

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26 Paul Cummings, Tape Recorded Interview with Ilya Bolotowsky, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 24 March 1968. There was then an attempt by Academy officials to institute into the studio training comprehensive lectures on the history of the arts. Bolotowsky recalled most were delivered by the sculptor, Robert Aitken, a teacher as well as the powerful Chairman of the School Committee that determined policy.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Lawrence Campbell, "Is a Square More Abstract Than a Face?," Art Students League News, Vol. 6, no. 3, March 1953, n. pag.

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marble heads, in 1928, that he discovered primitive art.[30]

From the outset Browne's art demonstrated his care for detail and fine draftsmanship. He distinguished himself, becoming one of the Academy's most accomplished and promising students during his three-year residency. He worked arduously at all his assignments, an especially serious, dedicated student who methodically heeded the lessons of his instructors. Ilya Bolotowsky remembered Browne "as a very nice, timid and sensitive fellow who was always rushing somewhere very ambitiously."[31] He continued his coursework, acquiring a strong studio foundation with the ultimate goal that of the presentation of his work in the large and much-anticipated Annual Exhibition.[32]

Browne was duly honored by his instructors and other judges at the spring exhibition of 1928, that marked his graduation. In late March he was given a third-place award in the Hallgarten Prize competition for the still life painting he titled Old Iron, Copper, Etc., (Fig. 1-8). Not only was he the youngest artist, at twenty years of age, to win the award in the one hundred and three year history of the Academy's Annual

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30 Abner Dean, Tape Recorded Interview, New York City, 16 January 1981. Sir Jacob Epstein was Dean's uncle and during their Academy days together, Dean showed Browne some of Epstein's sculptures that belonged to his parents, most of which, according to him, showed a marked predilection for primitive forms. Browne was stunned by this work and immediately located a piece of stone and tried to emulate, in his studio at home, one of the marble heads that Dean had shown him.

31 Idem., Cummings, Interview with Bolotowsky, 1968.

32 Clark, History of the National Academy, p. 242. The most anticipated events of the school year were the public exhibitions and being chosen to participate, having ones work placed on display, marked the student with enormous distinction. The Annual, held in the spring toward the close of the school term, with artwork chosen by jury, was considered the most important.

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Exhibition, but more remarkable, he was still a student and in competition with professional painters long since graduated.

No New York newspaper that covered the art scene failed to note the Academy's Annual, giving it, in most cases, headlines in the art sections. Of those who singled out Browne's Hallgarten Prize painting, The New York Times and the New York American contained the most revealing comments. The critic of the American stated that Browne's work, ". . . was distinguished by something more than the fact of the painter being a student in his very early twenties in the school of the National Academy."[33] The Times's critic, took a slightly harder line with Browne for being too young for the prestigious award

> This year the third Hallgarten goes to a young painter still in the schools, a still life of old iron, copper and other items, including some vegetables. The light on the copper is boldly and successfully attacked. The arrangement is conventional but well balanced, with good muscular angles. A greater sense of rhythm could have been managed with the drapery at the left, but the work as a whole expressed a temper of sincerity that promises to survive the too early prize award.
>
> There is, of course, the pertinent question, whether prizes should be given for admirable promise or restricted to admirable performance, matured. There are students capable of rising to the challenge and spurring their talents to justify the belief in them manifested to such awards, and this student doubtless has shown signs of such capability, but the public is left confused.[34]

If the critic voiced hesitancy over his "premature" triumph, it is doubtful that Browne let it daunt his enthusiasm. His prize included a cash award of one hundred dollars, a considerable sum for a student or anyone at that time. He wrote his mother shortly after winning the Hallgarten Prize, when reporters from the American and the

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[33] William B. M'Cormick, "National Academy's Spring Show Best in Many Years," New York American, 25 March 1928, sect. M, p. 8.

[34] Elizabeth L. Cary, "Prize-Winning Pictures in the Spring Academy," The New York Times, Sunday, 25, March 1928, sect. 9, p. 14.

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Times pursued him for interviews and photographs (Fig. 1-10), "I am getting famous, you know."[35]

The Julius Hallgarten prizes, which are still awarded, are given for oil paintings executed in the United States by artists under age thirty-five. Browne's award paintings, the Hallgarten Prize, Old Iron, Copper, Etc. (Fig. 1-8), (Academy catalogue #29) and another prize winning canvas, Still Life or Blue Pot (Academy catalogue #72; image unrecorded and whereabouts unknown), were exhibited from March 21-April 8. His work enjoyed a prominent place in the principal wall of the South Gallery of the Academy's offices in the American Society of Fine Arts Building at 215 West 57th Street, which also housed the Art Students League of New York; the well-publicized show attracted large numbers of visitors, as it still does. The price of admission was fifty cents, which included a handsome publication, The 103rd Annual Exhibition Catalogue of 1928, in which Browne's name and the titles of his two paintings were listed on page eight.

In one of his interviews (Fig. 1-11), he expressed a desire to do modern sculpture, although he did not explain what he meant by "modern."[36] What seems especially noteworthy is his public response to sudden and unaccustomed publicity. Browne's quiet demeanor blossoms in an awkwardly charming way as he genuinely savors the new-found attention directed toward him and his work. Handsome, slender and standing well over six feet, he appears older and far more mature than most young men his age. Still, in a

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[35] Both newspapers ran interviews and candid photos of Browne in their rotogravure magazine sections, making him something of a celebrity for a time among the students.

[36] "Hat Checks Pay Way for Prize Artist, 21," New York American, 1 April 1928, n. pag. Browne was still in school and did not dare discuss his developing interest in the kind of art that was out of bounds for students of the National Academy School of Fine Arts.

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mood of self-effacement or in youthful embarrassment to the unaccustomed limelight, he openly criticizes his Hallgarten painting by comparing it to the works of older, established artists and then discussing what he should have done to make it better.[37] During this time Browne worked nights tending the checkroom at the Arcadia Dance Hall on Broadway in order to support himself and continue his education during the day (Fig. 1-12).

At the closing exercises for the term on April 30, 1928, Browne's drawing of a head (whereabouts unknown) won him the National Academy's Suydam Medal, an award presented annually by the president after addressing his students. Cast in silver, it was awarded to a graduating student for superior work accomplished in the life class and represented a memorial to the late James Suydam, a major donor of fellowship funds.

Browne's laudatory honors continued. He won yet another prize, twenty-five dollars, for his Still Life (a.k.a. Blue Pot), recently on view in the Academy's Annual. An additional prize was given to him for a "composition." All of Browne's awards were presented, it should be noted, for traditional representational works in competition with hundreds of his classmates.[38] His numerous awards and honors formed a grand send-off for the young artist, now on his own. While he certainly was not the only student who received awards and prizes, he garnered the greatest share, and as young as he was he seemed well aware that he had been given a head start over most of his peers.

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[37] "Harlem Claims Youngest Winner in an Art Competition," The New York Times, 1 April 1928, n.pag.

[38] Eliot Clark, History of the National Academy of Design: 1825-1953, New York, Columbia University, 1954, pp. 209-210. Browne's numerous awards were all the more remarkable when one realizes that there were close to 600 students competing with him. For example, during the 1925-26 school year the registration numbered 574 students, climbing to over 600 in subsequent years.

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Before Browne graduated from the Academy school, his position was so strong among his instructors that the administration considered him for a coveted teaching post despite his apparently having been ". . . kicked out of the sculpture class for Cubist influence."[39] This recently-discovered comment affirms the belief that he began to practice modernism while still a student. Although it cannot be substantiated, suspicions voiced by some members of the instructional staff with respect to his incipient disposition toward modernist forms, ultimately overrode their consideration for his appointment and he was never hired. Unquestionably, this ultra conservative faculty clique convinced those in charge of staff appointments to pass him by despite willingness on the part of some to overlook certain prohibited tendencies. Their decision also supports Bolotowsky's comments regarding the school's negative attitude toward the avant-garde.[40]

In abandoning his allegiance to academic principles Browne permanently severed himself from Academy fellowship. So thoroughly did the school erase his name that Browne was never so much as invited to membership at the parent National Academy of Design. The governing board eventually discovered his burgeoning professional interest in abstraction, which precluded all consideration. Apparently, theirs was a belated discovery despite the episode in his sculpture class.

The single exception to the Academy's rejection of his work happened the following year when another of Browne's paintings, executed following his graduation, titled Still Life, 1928 (Fig. 1-13), was chosen to hang in the school's 104th Annual

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[39] Color and Rhyme, "Byron Browne--Painter, Sculptor," no. 9, 1938, p. 13, a periodical edited by David Burliuk.

[40] Idem., Paul Cummings, Tape Recorded Interview, (see footnote 24).

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Exhibition, March 20-April 7, 1929.[41] In a newspaper review of this exhibition's still life section, an art critic from The New York Times singled out only Browne for discussion, calling his work a "modernistic design of kitchen things."[42] It suggests that the Academy was still proud of its former student despite certain "modernistic" tendencies in an otherwise traditional arrangement of inanimate objects. Its imagery, culled from his own kitchen, consisted of a bottle of wine placed behind a two-burner hotplate in which a frying pan containing an egg still in its shell, occupied the right burner; a crumpled towel cradling two more eggs filled the lower right corner of the canvas. In its reduction of detail, flatness and tilted format, a hesitant yet unmistakable reference to European modernism permeates the composition, indicating that Browne had explored Picasso or Braque's Cubist works.

Later, at an unknown date, in what may have been a symbolic manifestation of his break from academic tradition and to finalize his cutting of ties to the Academy, Browne destroyed the realistic Hallgarten painting, Old Iron, Copper, Etc. (Fig. 1-8), that had brought so much honor upon him, leaving only a black and white photograph to recall his moment of youthful glory.

Whatever disappointment he experienced at the time, a career as an instructor was not what Browne envisioned as his future despite his need to work, unlike the decision

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[41] Although the date of execution of this painting is not certain, the academic rendering of a strongly-slanted, tabletop arrangement, was likely executed after he left the National Academy, for its peculiar, tilted angle would have displeased his instructors.

[42] Elizabeth Luther Cary, "A Tasty Meal Offered," The New York Times, Sunday, 24 March 1929, sect. 10, p. 12. Browne's still life traveled that year to the Art Institute of Chicago. It was reproduced in a review of the exhibition, by Forbes Watson, in The Arts, Vol. 16, no. 4, December 1929, p. 226.

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made by Arshile Gorky, whom he would soon meet.[43] As a way to ease his chronic poverty, Gorky, who had studied at the Grand Central School of Art beginning in October 1925, when he was twenty years old, almost immediately had to give up his student status to become a member of the school's faculty, where he remained until 1931.[44]

One of Browne's first paintings executed after his graduation, The Portrait of Jack Kelly, ca. 1928-29 (Fig. 1-14), does not contain enough volume, its shapes are too flat and the light too generally placed to be a good example of traditionally interpreted portraiture. Yet when this seated figure is compared to another of Browne's seated figures, an untitled Harlequin or clown figure who holds the traditional magic wand, ca. 1929-30 (Fig. 1-15), the differences are conspicuous and telling. While the little tabletop still life within his composition may manifest some vestiges of illusionistic rendering, its sharp forward tilt indicates Cubist orientation, its source unmistakably derived from numerous works of the same subject by Picasso, Gris or Braque: their foreward-tilting, table top with fruit, glass, bowl and guitar still life formats of ca. 1911-1920.[45]

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[43] The deprivation wrought by the coming Depression not withstanding, poverty had been no stranger. That artistic struggle must by shared with material survival had already shaped part of his upbringing.

[44] Arshile Gorky: 1904-1948: A Retrospective, Diane Waldman, essay, curator, New York, Abrams and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, April 24-July 19, 1981, p. 257.

[45] As late as 1919, Juan Gris painted Harlequin Seated Beside a Table, a work whose imagery nearly matches the seated harlequin in Browne's painting (Douglas Cooper and Gary Tinterow, The Essential Cubism: Braque, Picasso & Their Friends, 1907-1920, London, Tate Gallery, 1983 (exhibition dates: April 27-July 10, 1983), p. 177). In the 1928 issue of Cahiers D'Art, p. 203, there appears a reproduction of a seated harlequin leaning against a table (1924), by Picasso. It is also remarkably similar to Browne's painting and suggests he may have used this work as his guide in an effort to teach himself what his former instructors would not. Foreign art magazines, such as Cahiers D'Art, become the principal source of information and exerted substantial influence on American

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As major subject material of the Cubists, the fact that Browne chose the traditional comic character for his subject speaks volumes for the young painter in the process of questioning three years of specialized training that deliberately overlooked the explosive events and changes in the painting of his own time. It would have been unthinkable to believe that Browne could have gotten away with such unmodulated coloration and spareness of figure in Curran or Hawthorne's classes. The pronounced angle of the floor as well as the canted furniture and the flattening and elongation of his Harlequin clearly reflect a struggle on Browne's part to approach the figure from a new and provocative stylistic direction, that of French Cubism.

A series of female figure drawings will also serve to demonstrate Browne's progression from academic perspective to the spatial ambiguities of modernism. Two untitled student drawings of the nude figure, from 1927 (Fig. 1-16) and 1928 (Fig. 1-17), retain the chiaroscuro techniques of illusionistic representation of space and volume. There is little distortion of either figure's proportions, indicating his desire for a realistic approach to rendering human form. Quite the opposite occurs following graduation. A small untitled ink and pencil drawing of a nude from 1929 (Fig. 1-18), for example, is too reductive, out of proportion and too little delineated to have been an approach encouraged by the National Academy School. Similarly, a seated figure drawing from 1930 (Fig. 1-19), strongly indicates that Browne had been looking at the masters of the School of Paris, particularly Picasso and the primitivized facial features he depicted in Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907, rather than the Old Masters. The striated hatch lines

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painters striving for new ideas in their attempt to be "avant-garde." The black and white reproductions gave Americans, such as Browne, uninhibited freedom to choose any and all colors, when the hues of the French Cubists were, to about 1917, essentially of a limited, neutral palette. For Browne, who shared the pages of these magazines with many another painter, the effect of the reproductions changed the course of his career.

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used to replicate modeling on the face and other areas, the monumental unrealistic proportions and the meandering vine crown flowing from one of the heads replace his earlier academic style and clearly point to an experiment with modernism.

If we compare his drawings to the figure types reflected in Braque's Large Nude, 1907-08 (Fig. 1-20) and to Picasso's Head, Study for Les Demoiselles D'Avignon, 1907 (Fig. 1-21), the Braque figure's broad back and fleshy buttocks are innovatively assimilated in Browne's figure. The flatter, schematized and more angular configurations of Picasso's study also appear to have been appropriated in Browne's mask-like faces. Léger, another of the French artists closely studied by American painters, frequently covered his drawings with complicated cross hatching and Browne appears to have been experimenting with this technique, as well.

As already indicated, French periodicals, such as Cahiers d'Art and Verve and an American counterpart, Creative Art Magazine of Fine and Applied Arts, which reproduced works by all the modernists, greatly influenced American artists and Browne was no exception. He and his artist friends traded each others's copies and took clippings and ideas from the reproductions, to work them up in their studios.[46] As demonstrated by these studies, the abrupt differences presume such contact and point to a young painter's search for newer, more simplified forms within the conventional subject matter of the ordinary undraped figure with which he was already proficient.

For one so recently graduated, Browne's career progressed with astounding leaps. He was invited to show his Hallgarten Prize painting, Old Iron, Copper, Etc. (Fig. 1-8), in

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[46] Tape Recorded Interview with Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, New York City, 2 September 1978. According to Mrs. Browne, they all did this, herself included, as it was the only way they had to learn about modern art.

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the Guilford (Connecticut) Art Exhibition, during the entire month of June 1928; the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., exhibited his Crucifixion, 1928 (image unrecorded and whereabouts unknown) in November. As already discussed, his Still Life, 1928, (Fig. 1-13), hung in the galleries of the 104th Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design, March 20-April 7, 1929, The Green Bottle (image unrecorded and whereabouts unknown), was shown in the Allied Artists of America Sixteenth Annual Exhibition, at the American Fine Arts Society Building, New York, from April 15-May 5, and the Buffalo (New York) Fine Arts Academy, Albright Art Gallery, exhibited his Christ (image unrecorded and whereabouts unknown), in the 23rd Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists, April 21-June 17. Still, of the four known exhibitions in which he participated in 1929, the Art Institute of Chicago's Annual Exhibition of American Paintings and Sculpture, October 24-December 8, proved the most important and instrumental for his future; their curator chose Still Life, 1928 (Fig. 1-13), as his lone entry.

Browne, the neophyte with the bare start of a reputation in New York and unknown in Chicago, found himself in the heady company of more mature or already established painters such as Milton Avery, Alexander Brook, John Steuart Curry, Andrew Dasburg, Childe Hassam, his former instructor Charles Hawthorne, Guy Pène du Bois, Max Weber and Grant Wood, among many others. This bird's eye view of ordinary objects, a bottle of wine and eggs in a frying pan atop a small gas burner, was given a full page reproduction in the December issue of The Arts, a major national periodical.[47] The attention accorded him by the arts writers would indicate that Browne's career was being monitored and that

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[47] Forbes Watson, "Chicago Holds a Liberal Exhibition, " The Arts, Vol. 6, no. 4, December 1929, p. 226.

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his production was already sufficiently interesting to merit their continuing observation.[48]

The importance of being shown in major exhibitions such as the Chicago Annual coupled with his receiving national magazine coverage cannot be underestimated. He was only twenty-two years old and these were singular honors and achievements for one so young. Certainly, for confidence in himself and encouragement for a future in the field, these exhibitions were crucial proving grounds. It would not be long, however, before he would refuse to exhibit with such conservative groups. In fact, the kind of painting he soon began showing would preclude his being invited. An event of greater portent loomed in his future. On October 24, the downward spiral in stock prices that had started in September began its fatal plunge toward the ultimate collapse of the American stock market on October 29, ushering in the worst financial disaster in American history. Overnight, disillusionment replaced optimism with harsh devastating reality and its far-reaching effects heralded the decade of the Great Depression. Browne, flushed with success and the accompanying feeling of confidence for his future, was totally unprepared for the events that followed.

The closing year of the decade was capped by the November 8th opening of the Museum of Modern Art under the direction of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., a brilliant classically-trained art historian from Wellesley College. The much-anticipated event happened just ten days following the crash of the American stock market. Barr, as if to forecast the direction of American modern art, chose for the museum's second show a large and eclectic

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[48] As Browne had no gallery affiliation at this time, he was responsible for managing all the details of correspondence, packing and crating his work.

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cross-section of bland work by nineteen American painters.[49] Of those nineteen painters, only two could be considered modernists for their tentative approach to abstraction: Lionel Feininger and John Marin. The canvases of the remaining seventeen, safe and palatable to all, would have pleased the most arch conservative viewer, so provincial, sentimental and parochial was the imagery.[50] Such work could have graced the exhibition halls at the National Academy of Design without a ripple of objection. Barr did not include a painting by Browne, for his was a name as yet unrecognized.

Browne pursued his publicly-stated interest in sculpting and before the end of the decade had carved several stylized marble heads and torsos. Photographs exist of two untitled examples, a half-figure of a woman with a hand raised over her head, 1928 (Fig. 1-22), and a head of an Etruscan-looking goddess with huge eyes, 1929-30 (Fig. 1-23). While neither can be called modernist or abstract, much less Cubist, each represents a departure from the Realism espoused by Academic precepts. Unfortunately, they were destroyed when the tiny basement studio in which he worked, as well as the building above it, were demolished without notice. In retrospect, their stoic solidity no longer reflected the direction Browne wished to travel, as his interests turned increasingly toward abstraction and the canvas.

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[49] Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed., New York, Museum of Modern Art, December 13, 1929-January 2, 1930, p. 9. This second exhibition was the first to show art by American painters.

[50] The following are names of the other seventeen living painters "who it is believed are fairly representative of the principal tendencies in contemporary American painting:" Charles E. Burchfield, Charles Demuth, Preston Dickinson, George Overbury "Pop" Hart, Edward Hopper, Bernard Karfiol, Rockwell Kent, Walt Kuhn, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Ernest Lawson, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jules Pascin, John Sloan, Eugene Spicher, Maurice Sterne and Max Weber. Barr's selection was "deliberately eclectic and even he mentioned that some were so conservative as to be out of fashion.

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Ironically, just as Browne was beginning to come to terms with European Modernism, a growing spirit of cultural and political isolationism challenged anything that was viewed as foreign, i.e, un-American. He would discover that the modern kind of art he chose as his course for the future would have to be fought for if it were to surface above the popular style that attempted to engulf all American painting in a wave of sentimental representational imagery reflective of growing nationalistic chauvinism. The idea of an American abstraction and an international stylistic approach, toward which he increasingly leaned, would be confronted, as we shall see, by overwhelming criticism from every side.[51]

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[51] In the following year, the painting that caught the eye of an entire nation was Grant Wood's American Gothic, 1930. Such easily understood representational imagery of homespun midwestern types, or scenes of social injustice and protest, subsequently categorized as American Scene, Regionalism or Social Realism, became the popular painting styles during the decade of the Depression. While less intellectual than the more conceptual approach to form, this type of visually coherent subject matter told the history of America and reflected the values of its people at a particular time, raising complex issues still discussed.

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CHAPTER 2

THE CASE FOR CUBISM: EXPERIMENTATION AND REBELLION

> I have always been interested in the mainstream of the classical direction in painting that began with Ingres, continued into Cezanne, and was brought up to our times by the so-called "Cubists."[1]
>
> --Byron Browne
> Ca. early 1940s

America's attention during most of the 1930s centered on the Depression and the blow it dealt to the country's economic and social stability. It would be hard to exaggerate the repercussions of this crisis on the millions of people who experienced it. After more than a decade of prosperity, the vast middle class lost jobs, savings, homes and perhaps worse, their self-esteem and expectations for a better future. With the population caught in the terrible debacle and much of the Mid and Southwest gripped in the worst drought of the century, artists, always among the first to bear the brunt of economic setbacks, shared deprivation alongside such dissimilar social classes as the Wall Street broker and the household plumber; neither their products nor services were in demand.

When the Governor of New York State, Franklin D. Roosevelt replaced incumbent President Herbert Hoover early in 1933, the new President's primary objective lay in trying to restore fiscal stability through government-sponsored projects. Of paramount importance to America's artistic community would be the various New Deal relief programs designed to keep artists and creative people of all specialties from slow

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[1] Comment quoted from a note penned into one of Browne's numerous sketchbooks. Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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starvation or from having to put aside their creativity entirely to take such jobs as there were in order to subsist and prevent eviction from their studios, which generally served as their living quarters, as well. Ultimately, those who participated in these vast social projects, and Browne was among them, would enrich public buildings in even the smallest towns with colorful murals, easel paintings and works of sculpture.

Between the onset of this Great Depression and our entry into the Second World War, there occurred a period that produced the strongest experimentation toward an American abstraction since the trailblazers of the teens. Most of the earlier painters, including Thomas Hart Benton, Arthur B. Carles, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, John Marin, Alfred Maurer, Morgan Russell and Max Weber, abandoned their modernism for a more straightforward realism by the early 1920s. Among these early modernists, Stuart Davis, born in 1892, was the only figure to bridge the generations and continue to paint the American idiom with his highly original synthesis of Cubism.[2] According to Kelder, ". . . his work reflects an abiding interest in translating the dazzling ephemera of our existence into a meaningful, permanent statement."[3]

Davis, who had lived in Paris for more than a year in 1928-29, was ten years older than those who would lead a second contingent of modernists. While acknowledging the influence of Picasso and Léger, he denied "speaking their language."[4] With his singular

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[2] Although influenced by Cubism, he was not a "French Cubist," preferring to combine pictorial elements of common objects from American daily life into flat, dynamic, jazzy juxtapositions of line, color and shape.

[3] Diane Kelder, ed., Stuart Davis, New York, Praeger, 1971, p. 13.

[4] Diane Kelder, "Stuart Davis and Modernism: An Overview," in Stuart Davis, American Painter, Lowery S. Sims, organized by, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Abrams, November 23, 1991-February 16, 1992, p. 26.

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style of abstraction that never accommodated popular taste or followed the footsteps of others, Davis rose above arguments from either side: the story-telling Realists or those painters, like Browne, too young to have had any experience with the first wave of American modernism that included him.[5]

As this new group's aversion to the narrative content found in current realism grew, they strove to counteract by re-introducing a second cycle of abstraction with roots, unlike Davis's looser "Americanized" Cubist interpretations, firmly bound to tenets of French Cubism as formulated by Picasso and Braque, coupled with some adherence to the austere geometric style of Cubism as expressed by the Russian Constructivists and Suprematists. Thus, in the midst of a wave of popular realism, a tentative move toward a revival of abstraction begun by a handful of younger artists grown to maturity during the late 1920s, Browne among them, began to surface in the last years of that decade. While their abstraction was by no means "new," their intense interest and practice of it, as well as belief in its viability from an American standpoint was. By the mid-1930s, this impulse had blossomed into a genuine outcry for change and acceptance; a full-fledged movement ensued.[6]

This second, highly persistent group of the 1930s evidenced their concern for abstraction with different results than their predecessors, those first generation abstractionists who matured during the teens. Still, it took nearly two decades of bitter

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[5] It is interesting to note that while Browne had known Davis, he never referred to him in his notes, letters to editors or interviews with art historians. Davis outlived him by three years.

[6] Browne and the group that would surround him did not acknowledge as catalyst the modernist contributions of the first wave of Americans. He chose instead to look directly at the Cubist work of Picasso, while others embraced the geometric abstraction of the Constructivists.

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contention before their efforts ultimately prevailed, placing abstraction within a permanent American aesthetic system. Thus the Depression, despite its dark spirit, fostered the blossoming of a second generation of painters and sculptors whose ideas renewed and revitalized abstraction as a legitimate American art form. Essentially, they laid the foundation for the post-World War II painting of the Abstract Expressionists, who would continue to build upon their foundation, expanding nonrepresentational art ever further.[7] Unfortunately, the Abstract Expressionists remained closed to their predecessors, ostracizing them socially as well as professionally to their own art-political ends. Browne would be among those left outside that loop.

Paradoxically, the 1930s also witnessed an unprecedented, reactionary retreat of the majority of this country's artists, even those who lived on the eastern seaboard with its greater opportunity to view progressive forms of earlier modernism, to an insular and provincial American Scene, Regionalist and Social Protest narrative, as noted on the last page of Chapter 1. With subject matter rooted in realistic depictions of things familiar, their homespun and sentimental themes appealed to the masses for their easy comprehension. At best this approach represented a resentment against contemporary European artists, the progressive American painters of the 1920s, and most "eastern" artists, primarily those from New York, the city that symbolized a hedonic bohemian vulgarity, precisely what the rest of the country considered wrong with America.

Later, an energetic street-smart kind of Urban "Regionalism" emerged from New

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7 Matthew Baigell, "The Beginnings of 'The American Wave' and the Depression," Art Journal, Vol. 27, no. 4, Summer 1968, p. 387. In the continuing circular route of all things, the eventual hybridness of Abstract Expressionism was rebelled against by yet another later group of young artists, the so-called Minimalists, as they sought to free themselves and their art of what they believed to be the excesses of their predecessors.

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York City, a counterpart to its tamer midwestern sister but one that buffered the realism of the other, such as found in the imagery of painters Reginald Marsh, Isabel Bishop, the twins Moses and Raphael Soyer, and their brother, Issac. They shared a chauvinistic patriotism and enjoyed the support of the majority of the populace, as well as the arts community collectively: gallery dealers, museum curators and their trustees, art instructors and, importantly, a great number of art critics and reviewers writing for newspapers and periodicals. As such, they presented formidable barriers to the painter who dared direct his vision on another level. Some circles even construed abstract art as "un-American." It was into this social milieu that Byron Browne consigned his blossoming career in what was to become the battle for recognition and acceptance of a renewed American modernist idiom. Increasingly, as he abandoned National Academy dictates and strove toward predominantly European modern expressions, he discarded altogether the "American" approach toward interpreting subject matter and the realism in which it was couched.

Any artist beginning a career at the onset of the 1930's unwillingly found himself a combatant in a stylistic contest between the two camps: the numerous realists and the "new" modernists, a peripheral "fringe" group with far fewer adherents. Thus very early in the decade Browne learned that identifying with the progressive modernist movement in America meant not only holding a supportive attitude toward foreign, i.e., French art styles but also possessing a strong conviction against mounting odds that his decision to follow the less common path was right and timely.[8] The majority of Americans, if they

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[8] Undeniably, the original impulse to be abstract originated and spread from France. Henry McBride, one of the great American art critics from the teens to 1962 and one of few who could discuss abstract art with the appropriate language and an innate feeling for its validity, clarified the situation as no other at that moment. In his comments on abstraction in early 1930, McBride said that, " . . . the whole thing depends upon your attitude toward abstract art." "If you violently and flatly refuse to believe that abstract art

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considered art at all, could not or refused to make the effort to understand the "realism" that existed within the language of any expression but the most simple, easily grasped and readable scenario. This predilection for the traditional or middle-of-the-road, pedestrian art indicated as well a strong preference for native, home-grown and lascivious-free imagery. The dichotomy now spread, as did the sweeping miseries of the Depression, from a confrontation of styles to one along purely nationalistic lines involving two mutually exclusive groups.[9] Little wonder that politics eventually entered the fracas.

Although he could not have been aware of any incipient drive so early on, we will see, in successive chapters, how Browne became a leader of this second vanguard that played a major role in altering the course of American art in the years following the end of World War II. Young, rebellious, idealistic, ambitious and immensely talented, Browne found himself competing against this rising nationalistic approach to painting, a situation compounded, as mentioned, by nearly total hostility of the critical establishment toward those who embraced a European role model. Thus his career, while fortuitously launched from every outward standpoint, in reality faced overwhelming obstacles, coupled with the monumental economic and social problems created by an unrelenting Depression.

According to Carter Ratcliff, ". . . to be an American modernist in the thirties meant to aim at mastery of the then current Parisian styles, and this meant choosing sides, from across the Atlantic, in the stand-off between officially approved Surrealists and

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can be anything but trickery then you may as well go your way and give up the study. That is the rock on which we all split." "An odd thing is that most objectors, in a vague way, feel that this form of art is impregnated with sin . . . ." Henry McBride, "Modern Art," Creative Art, Vol. 6, no. 3, March Supplement I, 1930, in Henry McBride, The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms, Daniel Catton Rich, ed., and Hilton Kramer, foreword, New Haven, Yale University, (1975), 1997, pp. 264-265.

9 Op.cit., Baigell, p. 388.

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abstractionists."[10] Byron Browne, completely unmoved by Surrealism, unhesitatingly aligned himself with the latter irrespective of the growing demand for an American nationalistic art that allowed no room for either approach.[11]

While no records point to a specific moment, Browne's decision to forsake his conservative training and revolt against mimetic tyranny happened rapidly and overtly once he left the Academy. The paradox of his having come from a conservative family background and traditional academic art training, and his sudden attraction to flattened, nonillusionistic styles cannot be easily explained. What we do know is that his ability to manipulate color and to model shapes to achieve the illusion of three-dimensionality, for which he received accolades and prizes from the Academy, abruptly gave way to new interests and strategies assimilated from the "prohibited" modernists. Freed from the Academy's watchful eye, he experimented prodigiously, distilling from what he normally would have rendered in precise illusionistic realism. By the following year, as noted, certain changes appeared in his work. Given this abrupt and definitive transformation, the probable impetus behind these changes points to Cubism. Quite simply, Browne was smitten with the nuances of its flat geometry and multiple facets.

The year 1929 marked a major turning point in Browne's progression, for it was during these twelve months that his defection from academic standards for representing form became unmistakable and total. This conversion can be documented with a single painting, The Clocktower, 1929, (Fig. 2-1), and a carved marble sculpture, Head, (Fig. 2-

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[10] Carter Ratcliff,"New York Letter," Art International, Vol. 21, no. 6, December 1977, p. 62.

[11] Later, in the 1940s with the French Surrealists firmly planted in New York, Browne continued to find their principles unpalatable.

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2), of the same year, the two earliest surviving works that point to a fundamental change. The painting, a still life depicting the Con Edison Tower at Fourteenth Street and Irving Place (in Manhattan), describes a night vista as seen through a large open window. Browne then lived at 47 East 12th Street from which a clear view of the tower was and still is visible. His former reliance on modeling and adherence to realistic depiction of space largely have been replaced by Cubist fragmentation of shapes, angularity, shallow pictorial space and transparency of objects.

Braque, Gris and Picasso's use of space and representation, was obviously what Browne strove to replicate as best he could through magazine reproductions. Although hesitant and clumsy in some respects, Browne's grasp of Cubist structure goes beyond mere embryonic effort; his attempt to learn the masters's techniques in The Clocktower produced this first full "Cubist" statement in one of his favorite categories of painting, the still life genre.

Here Browne expands upon a conventional close-up of objects on a table to include an open window, stretching space to the garden and buildings beyond. Nevertheless, he truncates the long depth-of-field by compressing and flattening his subject matter. In fact, he has so squeezed space and shortened perspective that the interior area becomes one with the exterior expanse. That Browne showed both the front and side of the table, which would not normally appear to the observer's eye, further demonstrates the effort he took to assimilate Cubist strategies. In addition, his arbitrary assignment of flat primary colors to objects that would in reality never carry such hues indicates further evidence of his avoidance of the academic. If his efforts toward implementing Cubist techniques seem awkward and not fully resolved, his restatement and adaptation of French modernist principles had provided the basis for a fresh, highly personal metamorphosis. It is

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significant that Browne executed Clocktower long before instructors, such as Hans Hofmann, disseminated information about Cubist compositional "know how" to hundreds of American art students through his popular classes during the 1930s. That he had absorbed some of the tenets of Cubism underscores the immense importance of the French periodicals and later, of Gallatin's collection, for American painters striving to work out a methodology of modernism.

Cubist stylistic concepts were not limited to painting. Sculptors such as Alexander Archipenko, Jacob Epstein, Henri Laurens, Jacques Lipchitz and Picasso himself translated Cubist principles to the third dimension. In America, Max Weber, noted primarily for painting, became an exponent of sculpture for a time. Likewise, the following generation of American modernists did not limit their experiments to those on canvas. In his marble Head, 1929 (Fig. 2-2), Browne, too, turned to angular flattened Cubist devices for expression. Its forms lie somewhere between and owe much to the stylized Negroid heads of Picasso, the abstract geometricised forms of Laurens and Lipchitz, and even the facial elongations of Modigliani, all of whom Browne would have studied through reproductions in French art periodicals. The sculpture's smoothly-chiseled, slanted surfaces pit convex form against the concave, resulting in strong interplays of chiaroscuro. Bold and simple, eliminating extraneous information through the same system of flattened planes employed in The Clocktower, this carving reflects Browne's close observation and comprehension of the volumes necessary to three-dimensional aspects of Cubism.

Certain features in Browne's Head manifest interesting counterparts when compared to the characteristics of works by artists both tribal and Western: a Senufo Figure (Fig. 2-3), from West Africa, Laurens's Man with a Clarinet, 1919 (Fig. 2-4), Archipenko's Head:

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Construction with Crossing Planes, 1913 (Fig. 2-5) and in Epstein's Sunflower, ca. 1910 (Fig. 2-6), all of which he could have seen in reproduction by randomly thumbing through art periodicals of the day. It is of no small significance that Browne's efforts in sculpture at this time may well have been inspired by Jacob Epstein, the American-born British sculptor. Recall that Epstein was Abner Dean's uncle and Dean was aware of his friend's admiration for this sculptor's abstract work.[12] It was Dean who introduced Browne to his uncle's sculpture, thus igniting his interest in three-dimensional aspects of art.

Each of Browne's stone carvings was marked by an extreme stylization of facial features and strict reduction of incidental detail. From the beginning he seemed to understand intuitively which details to discard and which to retain as essential to meaning. Although the dimensions of Browne's white marble Head are unknown, the 1933 photograph showing him seated beside his work (Fig. 2-7), indicates it to be approximately two and one-half to three feet in height. His sculptures should be considered a momentous step for one whose antecedents lay wholly in an academic depiction of the natural world. These two seminal works of 1929, and others now lost, marked the onset of a new pictorial language for Browne and much of his production in the following decade would build on this development.

Browne continued to experiment with aspects of French modernism, as gleaned from reproductions in periodicals or from the examples in exhibitions. A worn black and white picture of Picasso's early and well-publicized collage Still Life with Chair Caning,

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12 Dean, Tape Recorded Interview. Dean remembered Browne pounding away at a stone in some basement where he lived during the late 1920s. He remembered having seen an enormous head and a kind of half-figure. According to Dean, Browne's period of fascination with his uncle's work was at this time. The sculpture has never been found and is believed destroyed.

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1912, was among the numerous picture references he had clipped from magazines and compiled over the years. Cubist emphasis on papiers-collés sparked his own work with glued papers or attached objects as early as 1930, and led to a lifelong interest in the medium, to which he added, as did they, extraneous materials of his own findings: string, sand and wire mesh pieces of window screening. In one painting from 1937, Browne cut out a circle from the canvas and affixed a metal stove grate into the hole.

His initial experiments began by taking his own drawings in graphite pencil, pen and ink or watercolor and then adding strips of colored construction papers, fragments of magazine or catalogue advertisements or colorful pictures of fruit and vegetables torn from seed catalogues, and pasting them onto his already-drawn compositions. One early effort in collage resulted in a nonrepresentational work titled Fugue, 1930 (Fig. 2-8). Here narrow strips of red, black, and white construction paper, pasted vertically and horizontally, overlap at right angles to form a Cubist grid upon which to build flat planar structure. Browne then added hand-painted bars of contrasting hues to the spaces between to create contrapuntal rhythms across the entire surface. They result in a composition that at first glance appears wholly abstract. Closer examination refutes this impression, for subtle outlines in ink of two human faces or masks, one in profile, the other full face, appear to be imbedded in the complex masses on both left and right sections.

This small work, measuring only 15 1/4 x 17 1/2 inches, was at first believed to have been an isolated example, the only collage of its style and early date. In June 1980, however, a search of the artist's apartment, still retained by the estate, revealed another collage, similarly composed of narrow paper strips in bright yellow and red, of comparable size. Signed and dated 1930, the work was untitled, as Fugue may have been

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prior to its consignment to a dealer.[13] It is believed that the pair were Browne's first efforts in the medium of collage.

In subsequent early collages, such as Abstract, 1933 (Fig. 2-9) and Non-Objective Composition, 1934 (Fig. 2-10), Browne drew pen lines of varied widths on top of torn and pasted scraps of paper to create new shapes and integrate color planes, similar to those seen in George Braque's Glass, Carafe and Newspapers, 1913 (Fig. 2-11). With diversely spaced opaque pieces of paper united by pen and pencil lines, an abstracted still life emerges, a model for the larger Cubist paintings he would soon begin.

Unlike the French Cubists, Browne never added columns of newsprint, but simulated the appearance of newspaper by drawing rows of undulating horizontal ink lines. He never used words, alphabet letters, numerals or newspaper mastheads as did they, nor was he attracted to their habit of applying theater ticket stubs, cigarette package wrappings, sheet music fragments or bits of wallpaper to the surfaces of his collages. On the contrary, Browne purposely avoided such references in an effort to make his work "Americanized" despite such popular objects existing in American culture as well.

During the later 1930s and well into the 1940s, his collages gradually assume additional coatings of elaborate penline embellishment, another effort to divorce both pictorial subject matter and methodology from those of the French. Their interest lies more in establishing the differences that the collage technique provided between reality,

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[13] The collage was discovered among several "favorite works" discretely put aside by the artist's widow, (Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, 1916-1979), for her personal collection. She had hidden them under loose floorboards in the back of a closet in Browne's former studio at their home on West 86th Street, so that they would not be seen and sold by art dealers. Forgotten, the cache was discovered by her son when he cleaned out the closet after her death. Apparently, the collage was never photographed prior to its consignment and subsequent sale by a local art dealer in the 1980s.

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what is actual, and illusion, often to the point of trompe l'oeil. Browne's concerns chiefly lie in the capacity the medium holds for arbitrary nonobjective composition and pattern. In an untitled watercolor and pen and ink collage, 1936 (Fig. 2-12), depicting a profile head, the head acts merely as foil for his ornate designs. Here he covers brightly colored pasted bars with decorative ink line patterns, concentric circles and abstract curlicues.

Browne's penchant for the still life motif, that insists on some retention of the natural object as discrete form, is reconciled in a curious way in a group of early collages. Three small untitled works from 1934 through 1936 (Figs. 2-13, 2-14 and 2-15), incorporate realistic components in the form of cutout seed catalogue photographs of ripe fruit on plates pasted onto the stomach areas of previously drawn anthropomorphic fantasy figures in black ink. Browne composed numerous such works on paper and in each his complex use of rich penline suggests that he may have looked to the Swiss painter and etcher, Paul Klee, famous for his small fanciful linear compositions, especially of the head. Klee, who died in 1940, was neither Cubist nor French, and it is questionable that he would have held Browne's interest for long.

In two additional untitled colleges of 1933 and 1938 (Figs. 2-16 and 2-17), long strips of colored papers lend directional emphasis to abstract designs. By 1938, Browne thoroughly understood the medium's capacity to enrich the play between art and reality. Later, he took these initial steps further by interweaving photographs with painted images in a large-scale photo montage and art mural project for the Work Projects Administration of the Federal Works Agency.

Reduction of fact through geometrical shapes became another method that Browne used to transform imagery into nonobjective language. As late as 1929 and throughout the 1930s, in an effort to undermine or eliminate representation, he experimented with the

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geometry of Russian Constructivism of the type that falls somewhere between French Cubism and an austere pure abstraction. Sometimes his shapes assumed sharp, angled edges; in contrast, he sometimes allowed them to meander, softly curved and indeterminately configured, to become biomorphic and organic in conception. Wide black outlines frequently confined these color shapes, acting as part of the all-over pattern. Just as often he allowed color alone to make divisions, frequently both happened within the same painting.

During this period it is evident that Browne concentrated on liberating natural form from direct association by another "method," that is, working his colors in an arbitrary fashion, making no attempt to balance hues with their complements or to utilize the appropriate color one would expect a corresponding object to reflect in the real world, such as a blue for sky or sea and green for grass. Just as arbitrarily, he sometimes limited his palette to neutral beige, white and black pigments, indicating his use of black and white photographic reproductions from European magazine sources as study guides. By reducing shapes to Constructivist and Cubist equivalents via consolidation of those he saw in European-conceived styles, Browne produced some of the earliest, completely abstract art conceived by an American during the late 1920s and 1930s, works ostensibly free from referents. Mastering these skills marked a transformation of monumental proportions for the prize-winning, academically trained painter only recently graduated from the National Academy School of Art. More remarkable, by 1929, Browne had created his first totally nonobjective work at the age of twenty-two.

A pair of hard-edged, geometrical drawings titled The Table (Table I), (Fig. 2-18) and The Table (Table II), 1929, (Fig. 2-19), depict only flat, overlapping planes of pure geometry. Their titles, specific references to concrete subject matter, a table and

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objects presumably placed upon it, were probably added later, when exhibited after Browne's death. Still, in The Table (Table I), residual reliance on perspective and the precise placement of shapes when viewed in their totality, vaguely suggest a vase and other fare common to still life arrangements. This is not so in the second drawing. Browne probably derived each from physical "things" arranged in front of his easel.

These drawings marked the beginning of a series of Cubist and Constructivist-formulated still lifes in which he strove to disguise all allusions to subject matter, giving them nonspecific titles as "composition," "arrangement" or "painting," in order to discourage the viewer from searching for realistic equivalents.

The sharp angles of the Table drawings give way to more yielding edges in a drawing of unknown title and whereabouts, (Fig. 2-20), 1932, where a still life of ordinary studio objects has been pared down to simple geometric components. While the flat overlapping planes appear randomly chosen, as in the two Table drawings, they are precisely placed and represent subtractions from natural sources despite their un-detectibility. In this study of objects presumably carefully arranged upon a fabric covered shelf or table top, in keeping with still life tradition, a table drawer in the shape of a three-sided white rectangle binds the work to reality.

Browne professed throughout his life never to have worked without reference to actual subject matter, claiming that one cannot paint what cannot be seen. Nonrepresentational or figurative, his still lifes originate either from an arrangement of concrete things in front of him or from photographic reproductions, reconstructed in his mind.

Infrequently, through title and imagery, Browne did allude to to tangible referents. In the painting, Still Life with Apples, 1935 (Fig. 2-21), the title alone leaves no doubt as

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to the origin of his subject matter. With this painting, his ability to explore highly expressive properties inherent in line, color and form, combine with rounded rhythmic shapes to demonstrate a new elegance and a mastery of a quasi-Cubist idiom. Braque's slightly earlier, softly-hued The Pink Tablecloth, 1933 (Fig. 2-22), although depicting more realistically rendered, "readable" components, makes a telling comparison with Browne's still life of similar subject matter.

By reducing his referents to their underlying geometric constituents, Browne demonstrates that rounding the hard-edged geometry into softly interwoven shapes, here laced with vibrant color, can convey just as much power and meaning as sharply-angled, flat planes of pure geometric origin. The awkwardness that previously existed in his formative Cubist paintings, particularly in the "window" pictures and earlier portraits, has given way to a self-assured command of his craft, which, in Still Life with Apples, results in an expression of lyrical beauty.

By 1935, few painters were courageous enough to turn their backs on American Scene and Social Realist imagery; fewer wished to reject traditional approaches to picture making. The majority felt that modernism rejected the politically or socially comprehensible realities of life and, not infrequently, indicted those who leaned toward more progressive approaches, as traitors to what they considered true American expression. Arshile Gorky, among the most progressive of this small group resistant to the status quo, refused to make "poor art for poor people."

Gorky's Still Life on the Table, 1935 (Fig. 2-23), executed the same year as Browne's Still Life with Apples, reflects as well, similarities of modernist influence and source. However, one detects in Gorky's painting, an arrangement of fruit, bowls and goblets, vestiges of these objects. This is not so in Browne's work. If his title had left

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content "undeclared," neither the two spheres in the lower center nor any other section of this work could have been read so specifically as "apples." In a way, Browne's painting is more schematic than Cubist, for true Cubism was never a totally abstract style; content, no matter how fragmented, remained discernible.

Only in his Still Life, 1929 (Fig. 2-24), did Gorky approach Browne's level of reduction. Although it is not known when they met, the two young painters may have exchanged views at this early date, for Gorky, two years his senior and living in New York since 1925, had already acquired a respectable reputation among the small circle that was the New York avant-garde. Browne, out of the National Academy and on his own for only one year, would surely have managed to meet the fast-talking, opinionated Armenian painter, who by that time had become familiar to all the Fifty-Seventh Street galleries. Gorky's strong personality and advocacy of Cubism would have attracted the more reticent younger man but whether he exerted specific influence on his decision to pursue a Cubist-based modernism remains uncertain.

Another of Browne's geometric Cubist paintings, Variations on a Greek Urn, 1935-37 (Fig. 2-25), alludes to the objective world with segments of a vase easily discerned.[14] As Browne worked within its disconnected sections, he gradually eliminated mimetic features, seeking instead geometric metaphors for parts, thereby revealing form rather than representing reality. While this painting appears compartmentalized into squared-off planes and boxes, in fact, it depicts a highly unified composition of balanced curvilinear

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[14] That Browne couches a classical object in the most contemporary twentieth-century terms emanates from the vases, jars and bottles used by the French Cubists in their still life pictures. Yet his choice of a specific vase also refers to his love for the writings of the nineteenth-century British poet, John Keats, whose poem, Ode on a Grecian Urn, was one of Browne's favorites, given its dog-eared page corner in a small volume of the writer's poetry found in his library.

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shapes and colors flowing around and through each other. This format is true of another similarly worked painting of even greater density, Still Life Study, 1935-37 (Fig. 2-26), executed over the same two-year period.

Throughout the 1930s, Browne continued to experiment as he synthesized and translated international abstract and French synthetic Cubist concepts and methodologies, as he comprehended them, into a personal style candidly expressive of his own sensibility. The fragmented shapes found within still life objects used by the French Cubists were those he tried to locate, as closely as possible, into his own carefully arranged setups, distilling from them the shapes and imagery that, beyond duplication, determined his final decisions on canvas.[15] For example, the configurations in works like Variations on a Still Life, 1935-36 (Fig. 2-27) and Painting, 1936 (Fig. 2-28), are suggestive of a series of concrete associations: an animal's claw, a piercing bird's eye, protruding jawbones or jutting noses, the tail or fins of fish or flower petals and stamens, and pointed star-like configurations. These impressions repeat in work after work until a type of symbolic language in paint emerges from the series. For Browne, these symbols became part of the rudimentary emergence of a personal iconography of biomorphic forms in combination with those of geometric provenance, that will serve his imagery during his entire career.

Structural complexities of composition do not obscure such symbols in the animated geometry found in Arrangement, 1938 (Fig. 2-29). Black circles outlined in white are set into shapes vaguely reminiscent of parts of fish or birds, and stamen-like flower shapes that push from the central mass of the painting. Of the paintings in this geometricised series, Non-Objective Composition, 1935-36 (Fig. 2-30), best illustrates

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15 Browne, Tape Recorded Interview, 26 August 1978.

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Browne's new attitude toward the supremacy of geometry as a means of eliminating any suggestion to natural referents. Clean, hard-edged, trapezoidal planes cut into or intersect their surrounding shapes, while small splintered geometric forms act as a galaxy, their parts surrounding the large central block. Browne's calculated positioning of red, black and white areas, the predominant colors, activates the surface to staccato rhythms. To all appearances he has completely detached his imagery from subject matter, allowing the sensuous aspects of shape and color alone to dominate.

Although this painting connotes no specific subject matter and Browne makes certain that the viewer understands this by titling it Non-Objective Composition, it makes a telling comparison with a more figurative painting by Juan Gris that refers as well, by its title, to the realistic subject matter contained therein but one utilizing similar hard-edged, blade-like shapes, Guitar with Sheet of Music, 1926 (Fig. 2-31). If Browne had referred to such a descriptive model for his own guidance, his intention to go one step further is immediately evident, for it eliminates all mimetic features of the kind that can still be observed in the Gris painting, using instead only patterns of flat color skimming the shallow picture plane.

While Browne easily fluctuated between pictorial polarities, that is, sometimes his work appeared nonobjective and just as often it retained vestiges of the object, critics, museum curators, and such public audience as existed for painting that was not realistic and narrative, began to perceive him as an "abstract" painter. A superimposed set of mask-like shapes titled Variations from a Still Life, 1936-37 (Fig. 2-32), suggests affinities with Picasso's Three Musicians, 1921 (Fig. 2-33), in the collection of the Museum of Modern

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Art.[16] In Browne's refined pared-down approach to the human face, this painting remains one of his finest adaptations of synthetic Cubism executed during the 1930s. It also illustrates the duality within his painting at this time; as he continued to search for expression within the abstract language, he found that his work alluded just as often to observable phenomena.

Beginning about the mid-1930s, one also notices an increasing use of a feathery calligraphic line, perhaps an extension of Browne's personal handwriting style, which contained swirls and flourishes of exceptional elegance. Eventually this embellishing line will become one of the distinguishing features of his painting, conclusively marking a work his, as much as the "whitewriting" style does the work of painter Mark Tobey, in, for example, Broadway, 1936, (Fig. 2-34).

Among the earliest paintings in which a pronounced use of calligraphic embellishment occurs is Woman with Stars, 1938 (Fig. 2-35). Here a semi-abstract figure reclines against a brilliant yellow field and red sky studded with irregularly-pointed, exploding white "stars," which in turn are filled with black designs resembling children's toy jacks. His extravagant brushline is everywhere, sometimes encircling the stars in scrolled loops or sweeping across the canvas in great arabesques. He stops, barely short of annihilating the figure with repetitious flourishes.[17]

The precise geometrical hard-edged shapes of the earlier more severe paintings

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[16] Three Musicians was placed on view for the first time in New York in 1934, at the Durand-Ruel Galleries, garnering considerable publicity during its stay. The stylistic similarities Browne's mask shares with that of the far right mask in the Picasso painting would support argument for this assumption.

[17] This tendency to weigh down a figure with pattern and heavy calligraphic flourishes resurfaces in the late 1940s.

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have given way to graceful crescent forms and imperfectly shaped circles, triangles and squares of varying thickness of line, all moving in opposition to one another. Delicate curlicues flick rhythmically over and through the prone body, saturating its form with lines. The lyrical mood of the painting is new and significant, for it insists upon at least some referent to nature in the midst of nonfigurative designs.

Thus the dual directions perceived earlier now emerge overtly with this picture. Browne's subject, a "recognizable" figure set in specific space, is delineated within the context of abstracted shapes. It is not the subject that is the important issue but the disjunctured patterns that construct the figure and occupy its surrounding space. This double attitude toward form, the desire for the nonobjective versus that for representation within the same work, the inability to let go subject matter permanently, will characterize much of his painting during the next two decades. Browne learned to control his quick "handwriting" of the brush until it became instinctive and integral to his painting, a unifying force within each picture in which he used it. The star-like configurations that abound in Woman with Stars will consistently reappear throughout his work.

In 1915, the Russian artist, Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935), formulated the principals of Suprematism, offering an alternative style that reduced subject matter and paint itself into flat, spare, geometric masses totally unrelated to nature, as demonstrated by his precedent-setting Black Square, 1914-15 and Suprematist Composition, 1916-17 (Fig. 2-36).[18] Constructivism, while related to Suprematism, made use of techniques and

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[18] Malevich has been called the "Picasso" of Russia, the modernist leader who produced a unique contemporary art style to compete with, and, it was hoped, to supplant even that of Picasso himself. The exodus of numerous Russian artists to Western Europe and especially to Paris in the early twenties, among them the influential Vladimir Tatlin, led to wide dissemination of his reductivist theories, presented as the "new painterly realism," toward art, architecture and design. Malevich himself never traveled any farther

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materials created for modern technology; it is seen as the successor stylistic movement to the earlier Suprematist experiments. Paris, around 1920, became its center with Jean Arp the best-known interpreter. Conceived by Tatlin and supported by the brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, this architectonic, three-dimensional time and space approach to construction flourished, continuing into the 1930s. Its spirit spread to influence many, including young American artists eager for any and all new directions.[19]

The aesthetic theories and art forms of both movements held immense appeal especially to Gertrude Greene, living in Paris from 1931 to 1933. When she and her husband, painter Balcomb Greene, returned to New York in 1933, Gertrude began to produce sculpture after Constructivist concepts of absolute abstraction based on elements of pure color, line and form.[20] Among her colleagues was Byron Browne, who, for a brief time in 1937 and 1938, was attracted to Constructivist relief sculptures.

Browne executed at least two and probably many more, wood relief compositions in the manner of the Constructivists: Construction, (Fig. 2-37) and Construction in Wood, (Fig. 2-38), both 1937-38 (present whereabouts of each unknown). Because of their friendship and association one can assume that Gertrude Greene served to reinforce these

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West than Germany.

19 While Suprematism was an intellectual movement accompanied by manifestoes, American interpretation simplified, often employing the addition of common objects such as string, pieces of wood and sand to the canvas or paper surface in an effort to make their compositions more "three-dimensional."

20 See Linda Hyman's essay from the exhibition catalogue, Gertrude Greene: Constructions, Collages, Paintings, New York, A.C.A Galleries, April 4-25, 1981. She became active and influential in the small but growing set of avant-garde artists struggling to establish a foothold in American art. This group, the American Abstract Artists, will be discussed in another chapter. The Greenes were held in high esteem by its members, for few had traveled to Paris let alone had lived there.

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endeavors. Since photographs of Arp's geometric and biomorphic constructions, as well as those of the Russians frequently appeared in French art periodicals, they should also be considered a probable influence, inasmuch as Browne's two works look similar in design, judging from magazine reproductions of his two constructions. The reliefs appear to have been made out of wood forms glued or screwed to a flat board and, as he openly admired the work of Greene and Jean Arp, he probably applied color to parts of each piece, as did they. The force produced by precise placement of shapes in Malevich's flat paintings is also echoed in Browne's three-dimensional works, as they are in the wood designs of Gertrude Greene, Construction in Blue, 1937 (Fig. 2-39) and Composition, 1939 (Fig. 2-40).

Browne applied the same geometric and biomorphic vocabulary of shapes to the low reliefs as those employed in his nonfigurative paintings of the same period. If anything, the tensions resulting from opposing three-dimensional forces appear the stronger of the two processes. Still, Constructivism as a method of expressing abstract vocabulary did not interest him for long, as 1938 marked the end of his experimentation with pure geometric forms regardless of medium, according to Vaclav Vytlacil.[21] While only two such constructions can be documented and these only through magazine reproductions, it is believed that Browne made many more, all of which have been lost. What remains certain is that he did not stay long with this style, in sculpture or in painting. Given the abruptness with which he ceased painting pure geometrical subject matter, he may have destroyed

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21 Vaclav Vytlacil, "Interview with Vaclav Vytlacil," New York City, 10 January 1974, in Susan Carol Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group: A History and Evaluation of Its Impact upon American Art," Ph.D. dissertation, 2 Vols., Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University, 1975, pp. 573-586. Vytlacil recalled Browne having said to him, ca. 1937-038, "I'm not going to subscribe forever, from now on, to painting geometric pictures." Vytlacil added, "And he didn't." pp. 129, 585.

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their counterparts in wood to mark the end of his association with a rigid almost "academic" method of rendering form, precisely as he did his Hallgarten Prize still life canvas to signify the end of his interest in the academic dictates of painting and to symbolize new beginnings.

As noted in Chapter I, aside from the few exhibitions that showed examples of School of Paris modernism, French art periodicals provided the second main source of instruction for progressive American artists. There existed, however, another source influential in propelling American artists toward a renewal of modernism. During September 1930, a gallery-going, fabric salesman, advertising-man-turned-critic from Virginia named Samuel M. Kootz published Modern American Painters, the first, full-fledged inquiry into the burgeoning American nationalistic attitude toward painting.[22] In this much-discussed book, which Browne purchased in 1931 and kept in his library all his life, Kootz observed that the most significant modern painting came from France, not from American painters, and questioned why this was so.

Kootz used his conviction of French superiority to measure current American production and publicly condemned the lack of originality generally found in the work of American painters, accusing them of suffering from the Puritan inability to express emotion.[23] He went on to say, "If a good artist happens . . . to appear distinctly American, add that to his credit side if you will, but there seems little to gain in beseeching our

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22 Samuel M. Kootz, Modern American Painters, New York, Brewer & Warren, 1930.

23 Ibid., p. 20.

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painters to portray American scenes. Nostalgia also can be purchased on postcards."[24] Kootz referred of course to the comparison of the quickly read, instantly recognized content within popular American Scene and Social Realist painting.

Charles Burchfield and Edward Hopper, according to Kootz, typified the "100% Americanism" being brought to art as its reason for being. By contrast, he found the work of Charles Demuth, Preston Dickinson, Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Scheeler and Max Weber at the opposite polarity. For "doing yeoman service in the field of modern art," he singled out seven older foreign-born, "modern American painters": Vincent Canadé, Elsie Driggs, Morris Kantor, Bernard Karfiol, Walt Kuhn, Benjamin Kopman and Niles Spencer.[25]

Kootz challenged painters to see new forms, create original inventions to meet their own needs and to regard America with fresh eyes and an upheaval of old ideas. The changes he called for could be effected, he felt, by using their materials to express only the primary thing they had to say.[26] He believed that this new vision could be achieved through Cubism, which he saw as an aesthetic divorced from realism and one relying on disinterested, objective geometry. In a comment that soon attained the pitch of a battle

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[24] Ibid., foreword, n. pag.

[25] Ibid., p. 63. Kootz believed that these painters, all of whom were born in the nineteenth century, had laid the groundwork by introducing to American audiences aspects of modernism learned from their European experiences.

[26] Ibid., p. 23. As well, Kootz felt that prevailing social conditions strongly affected a nation's painters but he believed the moribund state of current American art, i.e., its imitation of reality, could be relieved by an expressive freer interpretation of an individual "inner" reality in terms of a universal order. Essentially, he argued for an American artistic renewal similar to the renaissance that had taken place in Mexico with the avant-garde muralists. Kootz did not, however, point out that such murals were also politically motivated, simplistically figurative and highly nationalistic in content.

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cry, he fervently stated that Cubism was the aesthetic of intellectualism[27].

The book was widely circulated among painters; who was "in" and "who was not" became the subject of many a barroom and coffee house discussion. In truth, John Marin was the only painter presented whose work even began to approach the Cubist model Kootz sought and at that, his painting fell far short, for at its best it was only superficially Cubist, abstracted from the clearly discernable realistic prototype.

Although variations of Cubism by American painters were employed in the early teens, the initial interest and impetus had dissipated by the mid-1920s, following the initial wave of American modernism. Little wonder then that a new generation of young American painters, took up the challenge Kootz offered and began, with their fresh outlook, to look intensely at Picasso, Gris and Braque's Cubist paintings in order to work out their own formats.[28]

This book, as much as any other source, offered strong encouragement to those too young to have participated in the first wave of modernism, who now sought a new direction to approach the problems of space and form. In unmistakable language, Kootz had launched the seeds of dissatisfaction with the status quo, giving further incentive to those artists adventurous enough to shake their traditional training and seek their own

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[27] Ibid., p. 5.

[28] One has to question why Kootz omitted Stuart Davis, intermittently influenced by Parisian Cubism from 1922 until 1928, when he had developed an idiomatic Cubism of his own, from his discussion. Davis, already fifteen years old when Browne was born in 1907, did not begin to paint his most abstract work until the end of the thirties, with the forties and fifties witnessing his greatest periods of abstraction. It may be that prior to the 1930 date of publication of his book, Davis's shapes and imagery, while Cubist oriented, were just too removed from Parisian Cubism for Kootz's consideration. It would be hard to believe that Kootz did not know of Davis, for his work was widely exhibited during the twenties, with one-man shows at the Downtown Gallery from 1927 on.

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breakthrough to modernism. It is significant that Europe, Cubism and geometry were precisely the directions to which a cohesive group of American artists, Byron Browne among them, looked for their "new vision," with the goal of establishing its permanence this time around. Browne, already in the vanguard of discontent, was heartened by the philosophy of this author who, many years later, would become his mentor and dealer and, ultimately, his detractor.

The Kootz book, which stirred considerable controversy between advocates and those at variance with his call for an "American Renaissance," resulted the following year in The New York Times publishing "America Uber Alles," a further Kootz harangue against provincialism and those who denigrated the contribution of the School of Paris.[29] His strongly opinionated article, published on December 20, 1931, ignited a public controversy among readers and respondents that lasted well into January.

Kootz complained that he found great difficulty in locating evidence of a true native art. "Surely," he implored, "there must be better painting than this in the United States."[30] According to his thinking, most gallery and museum walls were covered with ingratiating, depressing and mediocre bourgeois pictures that lacked spirit and freshness. In the article, the recently-opened Whitney Museum of American Art did not escape his criticism.[31] Kootz spoke out against its backward-looking policies, taking issue with the

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29 This phrase refers to Kootz's article, " "America Uber Alles." Critic Rises to Admonish Our "Renaissance"--Urges: "Let's Forget Premature Circus," " The New York Times, 20 December 1931, sect. 8, p. 11.

30 Ibid.

31 The Whitney Museum, an offshoot of the old Whitney Studio Club, opened at 10 West 8th Street on November 18, 1931. Its first exhibition, displaying works from the extensive permanent collection, were selected by the Whitney's director, Juliana Force,

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styles of art chosen for exhibition during the first weeks of operation. According to his thinking, by refusing to recognize the newer and more progressive ideas being explored by some artists, the Whitney's ". . . ingratiating pictures, undisturbed by either vitality or freshness of art, [represented] a display of depressing bourgeois rendering of others' thoughts and emotions [that] should make self-respecting painters shiver in revulsion."[32] After having trudged through the museum's galleries, Kootz was unable to find any evidence of mature native art and he finally accused the museum of being a depository of mediocrity.

As might be expected, his article generated impassioned letters to the editor the following week,[33] prompting a further published reply.[34] Again the Times readers's responded the following week, disclosing that what they perceived as American in American art was many-sided.[35] All in all, the exchanges indicated that there was widespread interest in American art of all stripes.

Both Kootz's book and newspaper article were extensively read. Browne could not

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while working closely with the museum's founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

32 Ibid.

33 Letters, "What is American Art? A Readers' Forum of Opinion--Replying to Last Sunday's Diatribe by Mr. Kootz," The New York Times, 27 December 1931, sect. 8, p. 12 and Albert Sterner, Letter, "What is American Art? A Readers' Forum of Opinion--This Week We Submit a Letter from Albert Sterner", The New York Times, 10 January 1932, sect. 9, p. 13.

34 Samuel M. Kootz, Letter, "What is American Art? A Reader's Forum of Opinion Regarding This Much Discussed, Many-sided Topic," The New York Times, 10 January 1932, sect. 8, p. 10.

35 Letters, "What is American Art? A Readers's Forum of Opinion -- Rivera and American--Other Comment Submitted," The New York Times, 17 January 1932, sect. 8, p. 12.

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have missed them, for they remained heated topics of discussion among painters long after publication. The call for a new American modernism and a fresh interpretation and reexamination of Cubist tenets, as endorsed by Samuel Kootz, inspired Browne to continue seeking innovative approaches to his painting. At the least, he was reassured that he had chosen the right path for solutions to his own confusion and that he was not alone in what he saw as a major problem confronting American art as a whole. Still, several years after Kootz's call for an American rebirth, the dismal situation with its accompanying biased attitude toward modern or abstract art, attended by strong preferences for conservative Social Realism and Regionalism, had not appreciably changed. If anything, the status quo grew more entrenched.

While museum curators, gallery dealers and the public purchased little American abstract art during the 1930s, a few courageous institutions would exhibit it. Despite his lack of significant reputation, Browne had the good fortune of multiple opportunities to present his work, if not frequently, at least with some consistency. From 1929 through 1930, he showed in five exhibitions, among which was an invitation to hang his Still Life, 1928 (Fig. 1-13), in the 125th Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, January 26-March 16, 1930, the same work he displayed a year earlier at the Chicago Institute of Fine Arts. Recall that it was also the work exhibited in the 104th Annual Exhibition at the National Academy of Design, March 20-April 7, 1929. Two shows in 1931, organized by the Allied Artists of America, and at the Art Students League of New York, included paintings by Browne. One of the worst years of the Depression, 1932 also marked a year of extreme discouragement for the twenty-five year old, as he participated in no exhibition. Four opportunities were presented in 1933, one of which was his first one-man show at the Eighth Street Playhouse Gallery, located near the Whitney Museum, and

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he participated in five group shows in 1934, including the Wanamaker Regional Art Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, held at their flagship New York building, where he displayed one of his earliest explorations of Cubism, The Clocktower, 1929

(Fig. 2-1).[36] While no sales seem to have ensued, that the exhibitions occurred in such difficult times points to a substantial achievement for Browne.

Nevertheless, apathy and bias reigned rampant in the form of critical silence and unsold art; both critic and audience alike directed their wrath against any American artist who strove toward other than realistic painting. The situation so angered Browne that, perhaps taking his cue from Samuel Kootz, he composed his own letter expressing concern and irritation against the powerful senior art critic of the New York American, Thomas Craven, to its art editor; his letter appeared on the editorial page, February 6, 1935, and marks as well the first time he acknowledges his admiration for Picasso.

> The time has come for artists to take to task those art interpreters who are constantly ballyhooing the ignorant public. Thank God, we have one lone voice so far in the fine book just published by Sheldon Cheney

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[36] The art galleries of the famous John Wanamaker store at 9th and Broadway and its Philadelphia store headquarters, frequently exhibited American art. The store held a large simultaneous exhibition of oil paintings by Americans from October 13 to November 5, 1934, in which Browne's work was displayed in each.

The purpose of the Wanamaker exhibitions, aside from drawing attention to itself, was to stir interest in art produced by the artist employees of the Public Works of Art Project, in operation by this time. The "Contemporary" part of the title meant just that, not in the sense of modern or avant-garde, as a sampling of titles and the names of the artists will attest: Negro, by the arch conservative, Thomas Hart Benton, Tumblers, by Lucile Blanch and Tattoo and Haircut, by Reginald Marsh. Browne's work, The Clocktower, 1929, an early attempt to convert conventional, tabletop still life subject matter into the Cubist style, was not purchased for the Wanamaker's permanent collection. His painting seemed to be one of the rare, modernist exceptions among the overwhelming number of Social Realist, American Scene and Regionalist examples. Included were works by such heterogeneous painters as George Ault, Milton Avery, David Burliuk, and George Biddle. The stylistically mixed bag reflected the tastes of store management.

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called Expressionism in Art. Don't let the word "expressionism" frighten you, Mr. Craven. Really, it is not a theory nor is it a school. It just means creativeness.

It is people like Craven who start all this bunk about isms and theories. A great mind like Picasso's is no playboy's. He is beyond isms. His stage of development, like those dealing with elemental forms in nature, miscalled "cubism" by some non-believer, is as natural a flow of thought and just as sincere as the development of (let's pick some of Craven's shining lights) Curry, Benton and Brook, only more profound.

They say that the people who understand Einstein are very few. But shall we all be jackasses and call him an old fool or a playboy? Why not take the same attitude with the plastic arts? It is obvious from Craven's writings that he hasn't the slightest realization of Picasso's influence on contemporary life.

There happens to be a backwash today from a great wave. It started with the Government sponsorship of art works. Naturally, the Government wanted pictures glorifying the American scene, which, incidentally, has nothing to do whatsoever with painting. Immediately all the weaklings eager for praise, all the opportunists and all the hangers-on of the art world jumped on the bandwagon. Since that time, there has poured forth some of the most banal, unimaginative and many times vulgar paintings in the history of American art. The cry today to young budding artists is "Go American, me lad!" I am as American as anybody in these United States and my ancestors can be traced back to the Revolutionary War, if that means anything, and I say that sort of thing is grossly unintelligent.

It happens that the world is not all unimaginative. It took three hundred years to bring El Greco to where he should be and I dare say Picasso is laughing up his sleeve at Craven's pratings, that is, if he ever heard of him, which I doubt.[37]

--Byron Brown [sic]

One senses just how resentful Browne was toward the situation when he penned these lines, venting the bulk of his anger against Craven, whose reputation for conservativism was legendary. The wonder of it is that the newspaper published the letter at all, given its blasphemous nature aimed at one of their own.

For years Craven had championed American Scene, Regionalism and Social Realism, modes of painting that Browne and like-minded avant-gardists deplored.

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[37] Byron Browne, Letter, "To Whom It May Concern: Picasso Laughing Up His Sleeve," New York American, 6 February 1935, sect. 1, p. 17. The letter is quoted in its entirety.

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Clearly, Browne blamed Craven and critics of similar judgment for part of the difficulty he and other abstract artists experienced in public acceptance of their work. His exasperation is real and touching for his steadfast idealistic belief in the validity of his vision despite the obvious and formidable impediments.

While he never lost sight of that vision, his desire to carve some aspect of modernism kept him out of the mainstream and on the fringe of the art world to which he so desperately wanted to belong. Appreciation for his efforts remained nearly nonexistent. Browne enjoyed neither critical consideration nor esteem, and obtaining a place in important exhibitions, or simply locating a place to show at all, was difficult at best. Gallery owners for the most part shunned abstract work by Americans since they could not sell it. Such art simply had no market and it is believed that Browne never sold a single painting or construction during this time.[38] Yet in addition to Samuel Kootz, whose diatribes Browne may have recalled, he could claim kindred spirits with still another author, Sheldon Cheney.

In his letter Browne believes Cheney an enlightened exception to the prevailing conservatism. In Expressionism in Art (1934), Cheney talked about form and movement, planes, order and balances and how important they were to a good picture, stressing the depth element and the backward and forward movement of planes, a development in

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38 Browne took various jobs in order to keep himself during these meager years. One of the first he held was that of a checkroom attendant at the Arcadia Dance Hall on Broadway. He had found the job while still a student at the National Academy and continued to work there intermittently following graduation.

When one realizes that the depression with its vast unemployment further contributed to Browne's difficulties, his ability to find such odd jobs as longshoreman, lumberyard worker, statue washer, designer and carver of tombstones constitutes a major achievement, albeit, born of desperation. Self-sufficient, enterprising and willing to apply himself to any job, no matter how menial, he always seemed able to find part-time employment.

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painting which, according to him, began with Cézanne.[39] What he indirectly described, of course, was the structural approach to Cubism coupled with the brash new methods of teaching espoused by the German artist, Hans Hofmann, who had been instructing art students in the United States since 1932. He dismissed as trivial the "Sur-Realists" with their retreat into fantasy and Browne would follow his lead.

Cheney's ideas were crucial to the future of American art, for they reiterated and brought up to date, perhaps even more succinctly, the views expressed four years earlier in Kootz's book. His concepts reinforced Browne's commitment to modernism and helped formulate the foundation for his mature philosophy. He never discarded his belief in the premises clarified in these writings and frequently referred to them in later years. As one reads through Browne's copy of Cheney's book, its pages profusely underlined in pencil, it becomes apparent that his views were tantamount to ecclesiastical pronouncements, a practical working methodology for the revival of a native modernism.

On one such page, so dog-eared that the upper left corner had broken off, Browne had emphasized the following passage

> The Cubist may claim that he affords an abstract of the apple or the vase or the mandolin player. He has looked not only at the "front" surfaces, which happen to present themselves to the common eye; he has viewed the object from all sides, from front and back, below and above, from without and within. He has sought its essence, not merely its physical aspect under casual light. He reveals this "soul" of the object--let the appearances fall where they may. "Abstraction" is defined as "an idea stripped of its concrete accompaniments." An "abstract" is the "essence" or "summary."[40]

To illustrate his point, Cheney chose one of Franz Marc's Cubist

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[39] Sheldon Cheney, Expressionism in Art, New York, Liveright, (1934), rev. 1948.

[40] Ibid., p. 82. It is a mark of how seriously and literally Browne took Cheney's ideas, for he used many times over the same objects the author had listed, as subjects for his own experiments with Cubism.

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paintings of animals.

Just as important to Browne's further development toward understanding the structure of modern art were the lessons of the aforementioned painter, Hans Hofmann, with whom he briefly studied in 1935. Browne put into direct practice the influential German's theories on the sensation of movement and depth on flat, two-dimensional picture surfaces. Hofmann's classes were the first he had attended since graduating from the National Academy seven years earlier and the first in which he was exposed to the practice of modern theory. Browne did not stay with Hofmann for long, as he found him too dictatorial and could not always comprehend his thickly accented verbal instructions.[41] Still, much of his work at this time reflects the celebrated instructor's pictorial strategies on color, form, and composition that culminated in his famous "push-pull" color theory.[42]

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41 Steve Wheeler, Tape Recorded Interview, New York City, 3 September 1978. According to Wheeler, Hofmann's class monitor and student during this time, Browne left Hofmann's course principally because he could not tolerate the German master's loud overbearing system of instruction.

42 Hofmann's heavy German accent and incomplete knowledge of spoken English often made it difficult or impossible for his American students to understand or communicate with him. Nevertheless, the importance and extent of influence Hofmann exerted on the development of many young American painters interested in modernism at this time appears to be enormous and needs and deserves much further research in determining the credit due him. For several months in 1935, Browne was Hofmann's student. Therefore, it is conceivable that not a few of his ideas regarding the treatment of the picture surface in flat planes and his reluctance to think in terms that precluded Cubistic space stemmed from Hofmann. Still, it was Picasso's Cubism that originally drew Browne to its formal structure and reductive qualities.

From 1932 onward, Hans Hofmann was crucial in bringing the gospel of modern art to New York City artists via his classes at the Art Students League and at his school, which he opened in the autumn of 1933. By 1937, almost half of the charter members of the newly-founded American Abstract Artists group, to be discussed in a later chapter, had attended his classes. Hofmann stressed the dynamics of movement, countermovement, positive and negative spaces, advancing and receding color and composing the canvas surface in terms of flat overlapping planes. The depth he sought to create was not through illusionistic chiaroscuro but by means of the forward and backward rhythmic animation of

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Whether in painting or sculpture, no matter his choice of subject, stylistically his principal shapes and forms ensue from the same source, that of French Cubism, with the work of Picasso paramount. From these initial interests came the building blocks of his entire career, yet influences other than style drove the young painter in his growth to maturity. In addition to his central choice of Cubism and Cubist models as mentors, succeeding chapters examine some of Browne's secondary historical and thematic motivations in both painting and sculpture.

As he evolved artistically and grew more confident of himself and his direction, it seemed an entire art market had locked its doors against his kind of art. Browne learned that abstract work by an American painter was an unwelcome irritant to critics and dealers alike, and that if he were to succeed as a painter, another uphill struggle beyond that of the Depression was at hand.

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the entire surface through non- representational color shapes alone. So close, in fact, are Cheney's comments to Hofmann's theories that frequently their ideas appear to coincide, leading one to believe that Cheney was directly influenced by him, as well.

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CHAPTER 3

SEEKING A VENUE: THE BATTLE FOR ABSTRACT ART DURING THE 1930s

Those who wage the battle of non-figurative versus figurative are falsifying the real issues in painting.[1]

--Byron Browne
1939

Then, as now, it was crucial for a painter to exhibit his work before the public, yet with the economic and social situation in such turmoil, one was lucky to exhibit at all. Rock bottom prices aside, neither Browne nor any painter or sculptor could make a fair living from his talent.[2] Art was deemed the least necessary commodity for basic survival and therefore the last on which people spent precious dollars. Still, despite extreme Depression-induced hardships that daily reduced the number of jobs and the ranks of those employed, he managed to eke out a meager living working at a variety of odd jobs, among them tombstone carving and cleaning the bronze statues in public parks.

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[1] Byron Browne, from the introduction to the catalogue of his exhibition at the Artists Gallery, 33 West 8th Street, New York City, February 28-March 13, 1939.

[2] Francis V. O'Connor, ed., The New Deal Art Projects: Part 4--A Dialogue, pp. 309-310. Marchal E. Langren, one of five participants in the Dialogue, pointed out that besides the few commercial galleries in existence at that time, the only other places that the artist could show in the early 1930s, were in The Corcoran Biennial and The Carnegie International and later, in 1932, with the advent of The Whitney Biennial of Contemporary American Painting. All were highly competitive and governed by restrictive regulations that made participation difficult. Those participating in this historic discussion, recorded in July 1968, were: Olive Lyford Gavert, Jacob Kainen, Marchal E. Lundgren, Audrey McMahon and Francis V. O'Connor.

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Following the Whitney Museum's Abstract Painting in America, in February through March 1935, in which he showed Window at Night, 1934, oil on canvas (present whereabouts unknown), the number of exhibitions in which Browne participated dwindled.[3] Despite the willingness of some museums and galleries to show infrequently new work by American modernists, opportunities were meager at best. At this time there was not a single gallery dedicated to American abstract works of art, with the exception of Alfred Stieglitz's An American Place.[4]

Stieglitz had opened The Intimate Gallery in 1925 as the exclusive outlet for a small group of first-wave American modernists, namely Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin and Georgia O'Keeffe. After closing it in June 1929, he established An American Place that December, at 509 Madison Avenue, where he continued to exhibit the

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3 Abstract Painting in America, Herman More, curator, Stuart Davis, intro., New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, February 12-March 22, 1935.

4 A few galleries, among them the Downtown Gallery, the Artists' Gallery, and the Julian Levy Gallery, occasionally showed the work of American abstractionists but not on a regular basis. The Downtown Gallery, owned by Edith Gregor Halpert, opened in 1926 and closed upon her death in 1970. Among the more progressive artists she promoted were: Stuart Davis, Marsden Hartley, Ben Shahn, Niles Spencer, Max Weber and William and Marguerite Zorach. Still, abstract work by American painters was never the gallery's focus.

The Artists' Gallery, a nonprofit organization supported by voluntary contributions, was founded in May 1936 by Hugh S. Stix. Stix was among the very few gallery dealers willing to take a chance showing more avant-garde work, primarily because it was run on the nonprofit plan. Its first location was at 33 West 8th Street, near the Whitney Museum of American Art. Among dozens given one-man shows were: Byron Browne, Werner Drewes, Elsie Driggs, Adolph Gottlieb, John Graham, Zoltan Hecht, Aristodemus Kaldis, Richard Pousette-Dart and Ad Reinhardt. The gallery survived into the late 1950s. The Julian Levy Gallery opened in late 1931 and closed in April 1949. Levy's interests included the Surrealist artists and the Neo-Romantics. Jared French, Arshile Gorky, Walter Quirt, I. Rice Pereira and Abraham Ratner were among the Americans he showed. Prior to his entering the gallery business, Alfred Stieglitz had been a pioneering late nineteenth and early twentieth-century photographer.

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same artists. The gallery remained in operation until his death in mid-1946. Of the aforementioned painters none was wholly abstract and not a single one painted in the manner of Browne's geometric and Cubist reductive forms. In all that time Stieglitz never exhibited works by the younger abstractionists, which is not surprising since they generally dismissed him and did not consider his gallery an appropriate venue for their work. Likely, too, Browne and his contemporaries found Stieglitz a trifle "old hat," functioning at least one generation or more behind their own.

Resigned to this lot, Browne needed to steel himself against perpetual rejection. As well, a commitment to the unpopular abstract style, coupled with the economics of the nationwide Depression, locked all but a fortunate few into unremitting poverty. Like most artists, he faced deep privation that rarely allowed enough food for the table.[5] Still, no matter how difficult and insecure his life at this time, Browne remained adamant and steadfast, refusing to become discouraged or reverse his chosen direction.

After the closing of the Whitney's Abstract Painting in America, Browne participated in only one additional exhibition in 1935, that of a large, loosely-organized multistylistic coalition of artists, Salons of America, held in April at the Anderson Auction House Galleries. His single entry, a sculpture titled, Entity-Gigantism (present whereabouts unknown), was based on one of his "creature" fabrications, so-called for their fanciful configurations.

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[5] Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, "The American Abstract Artists and the WPA Federal Projects," in The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1972, p. 225. When Rosalind Bengelsdorf met her future husband at an Artists's Union meeting in October 1934, she recalled that he had told her he lived each day on a quart of milk, a box of cornmeal, a head of lettuce and some raisins. If insufficient in quantity, it nevertheless was a nourishing diet.

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Browne had produced numerous small pencil, pen and ink and color crayon sketches, most of which were untitled and labeled simply Design for Sculpture. Some of these drawings for sculpture dating from 1931 through 1938, represent elaborate machine-like beasts, fantastic humanoid-insect or animal motifs supported on a cone or tripod base (Figs. 3-1 and 3-2). They also represent an early glance to Picasso's sculpture for direction, as the similarities to his Bather with Beach Ball, 1929, and Anatomical Drawings, 1933 (Figs. 3-3 and 3-4), will attest. Each of Browne's drawings had in common variations of geometric configurations, which would have been relatively easy to translate to welded sheet metal pieces. Thus they served dual roles: templates for sculpture and experimental drawings. One can presume that the work Browne exhibited in the Anderson Galleries contained similar components intended to be constructed of metal parts.[6]

While prospects for 1936 seemed initially brighter with a January invitation from The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia to show one of his window pictures, Constructive Elements, 1934, (Fig. 3-5), Browne's high hopes for the new year were soon dashed. Shortly thereafter, he learned that he and other abstractionists had been excluded from the prestigious exhibition of modern art titled Cubism and Abstract Art, organized by Alfred H. Barr of the Museum of Modern Art.[7] His decision to focus on the works of pioneering Europeans implied that the efforts of American artists were inferior

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6 These tripod-supported figures predict, to a certain degree, Browne's crustacean series of the late 1940s. Except for the single entry shown at the Anderson Galleries it is presumed but not documented that similar sculptures were realized.

7 Cubism and Abstract Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., essay, New York, Museum of Modern Art, February 26-April 12, 1936 (reprinted 1974).

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or negligible.[8] In the catalogue preface Barr rationalized his exclusion or omission of American abstractionists by stating that their work had been featured the previous year at the large Whitney exhibition. Despite his explanation for the exclusion of the latter, to those who had struggled for recognition their deletion appeared as a slap in the face, as if to affix the position of American abstract artists to the lowest ladder rung.

The discouraging outlook for American abstractionists can best be expressed through a comment attributed to Barr, who reportedly stated that, ". . . art could be American or abstract but not both."[9] He intended his exhibition as a historical survey of an important moment in modern art, yet by his deliberate snub he delivered a serious blow to the fledgling American abstractionists's confidence, depriving them of the showcase that would have granted them official sanction and a viable future. Browne remained bitterly disappointed by Barr's attitude and carried his anger, as did every struggling abstractionist, into the following decade when they staged on the sidewalk in front of the building a highly vocal, public protest march against the museum. The incident occurred

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[8] Among the contributors to this enormous exhibition, which encompassed film, furniture, photography, theater design, architecture and poster art, as well as painting and sculpture, were: Alexander Archipenko, Giacomo Balla, George Braque, Giorgio de Chirico, Robert Delaunay, Nahum Gabo, Juan Gris, Jean Hélion, Frank Kupka, Michael Larionov, Henri Laurens, Kasimir Malevich, Juan Miro, Piet Mondrian, Ben Nicholson, Antoine Pevsner, Pablo Picasso, Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin and Jacques Villon. The spelling herein reflects that of the catalogue.

[9] This comment, recalled by artist Frederick Whiteman, is contained in a catalogue essay by Patterson Sims, footnote number sixty-one, for the exhibition Jan Matulka: 1890-1972, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art (in association with the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution), December 18, 1979-February 24, 1980, p. 37. Barr may have made the statement when pressed to include the work of the American Abstract Artists in Museum of Modern Art exhibitions or, perhaps in April 1937, when invited to attend this group's first exhibition. Whiteman was among those whose work was shown in their initial show.

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on April 15, 1940, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Expectations soared once again when it was rumored that there would be a possibility of abstract art being included in a large exhibition planned for the Temporary Galleries of the Municipal Art Committee, located at 62 West 53rd Street, the only gallery, albeit a nonprofit one, that seemed disposed to show such work but only as a group endeavor. Following inquiries, the opportunity for the show materialized.[10] The gallery sponsors required a minimum of twenty-five exhibitors for their classification as abstractionists but the number of abstractly-inclined artists in New York that they had so far located fell far short of the quota.[11] The task now lay in quickly seeking new converts to their cause. Yet despite an intense word-of-mouth effort that did produce new recruits, they could not meet their quota.

Nonetheless, by early April, the group had pulled together a sufficient number of abstract paintings and while only fifteen painters had committed work, they applied for and were granted exhibition space in the Temporary Galleries. Although the list fell short of the number initially required, the governing committee of the organization permitted them the show anyway, for the large number of works they could pledge to hang on the walls. The Seventh Municipal Art Gallery Exhibition opened to the public on April 28, 1936.

On April 26, an enthusiastic Byron Browne wrote to Beaumont Newhall, then

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10 The gallery was sponsored by the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP, 1935-1943, successor to the PWAP), a relief program in which most struggling artists of any ilk participated.

11 Susan Carol Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group: A History and Evaluation of Its Impact upon American Art," Ph.D. unpublished dissertation, 2 vols., Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University, 1975, p. 220.

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Librarian at the Museum of Modern Art, inviting him to the opening:

> Dear Mr. Newhall,
>
> Beginning April 28 and continuing thru May 17, there will be shown at the Municipal Galleries, 62 West 53rd Street, a group of abstract paintings which we believe to be of definite significance to those interested in modern painting. We, who are exhibiting feel conscious of the value of these pictures and candidly state that we believe much of the best in future non-figurative expression will come from this this [sic] group.
> We feel sure that your attendance will be justified.
> Very Truly Yours,
>
> Byron Browne [12]

The second page of his letter contained the following list of exhibitors: Rosalind Bengelsdorf, Harry Bowden, Jeanne Carles, Giorgio Cavallon, Ivan Donivetsky [sic], Arshile Gorky, Balcomb Greene, Ray Kayser [sic], Marie Kennedy, William Kooning [sic], Leo Lances, George McNeil, Albert Swinden and Albert Wilkonson.

The return address Browne gave for Newhall's reply, 63 East 11th Street, was also that of Rosalind Bengelsdorf, leading one to speculate that by this time they were involved romantically, sharing studios as well as living quarters as an economic practicality of the times. That summer Browne and Bengelsdorf traveled to Gloucester, Massachusetts, a picturesque seaside village long frequented by painters, where their photograph was snapped alongside some sailboats (Fig. 3-6).

While there seems to be no record of any response Newhall might have given to

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[12] Byron Browne, Letter to Beaumont Newhall, 20 April 1936, Estate of Byron Browne, New York City. This exhibition, which bore no specific title, opened in Temporary Gallery 1, at the Municipal Gallery at 62 West 53rd Street, and ran from April 29 to May 17, 1936. It featured only abstract work, as noted in Browne's letter. By contrast, on the second floor in Gallery 2, a group of conservative painters offered representational pictures. Newhall later became the founding director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art and an author of numerous books on that subject. He held other important positions since then and continued to be active in the photographic field until his death in 1993.

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Browne's invitation to the exhibition, it was reviewed by the chief art critic of The New York Times, Edward Alden Jewell, who stated

> The out-and out abstractions . . . palpably derive from one phase or another of the inexhaustible source, École de Paris modernism. If in this sense academic, the work, however, by no means is cut all from the same piece.[13]

Browne's two entries were Painting in Gray, 1936, (image unrecorded and present whereabouts unknown), and Composition, Ca. 1936, a low wooden relief of geometric designs affixed to a board (Fig. 3-7). Jewell stated that Composition, "Within its own very restricted sphere the design submitted by George Byron Browne is perhaps the most effective he has yet produced."[14] His use of "George," the given name that Browne discarded while a student at the National Academy, remains unexplained.

Jewell's comments are noteworthy in that he chose to review the exhibition at all, yet by reproaching the abstractionists for creating pastiches of French painting, thereby questioning the "Americaness" of their art, he set the platform for the next major hurdle artists such as Browne would have to overcome, that of unrelenting accusations of derivation and lack of originality. Browne and his small group of like-thinking artists would have to look elsewhere for an audience that might appreciate their seemingly futile labors. In the following year, many painters from this exhibiting group would band together to build a much larger, stronger organization, the American Abstract Artists, to combat the chronic

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[13] Edward Alden Jewell, "City Art Galleries Open New Exhibit: Varied Material Marks Seventh Show Assembled by the Municipal Committee: Samples of all 'Schools'," The New York Times, 29 April 1936, col. 8, p.17.

[14] Ibid. There is no way to know for sure to which design Jewell referred. Painting in Gray was surely an oil on canvas grisaille. While all the paintings were for sale, no one recorded if even one work had found a buyer.

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lack of support for their kind of art.[15]

Despite vast federal programs to aid the unemployed artist (the topic of the following chapter), the sorry economic plight of the majority remained. The situation bode ill in particular for those who were not painters of American realism. Thus the abstract painter faced two disheartening struggles simultaneously: one at the economic level and the other on the aesthetic front. It had become painfully obvious to any artist working outside popular modes of representation that alternative locales for presentation of their work had to be found and that one would have to fight for recognition. In truth, the battle for the validity of American abstraction had only begun.

In late 1935, Byron Browne and a small group of exasperated, embittered friends, among them sculptor Ibram Lassaw and painter Albert Swinden, all of whom had encountered similar difficulties in finding acceptance, gathered to discuss the situation at Bengelsdorf's and Browne's studio to assess their predicament. Realizing their need for public exposure, they proposed banding together in an effort to popularize nonfigurative art by holding their own exhibitions in order to compete with the currently "fashionable" American Scene painting that appeared to have no difficulty finding a showcase or critical acceptance.

The idea of uniting for their own survival spread rapidly and early the following

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15 That May, Browne exhibited an untitled painting in a group showing at the Nicholas Roerich Museum, housed at that time in a splendid twenty-nine story Art Deco stone building that contained a theater in the basement, on Manhattan's Riverside Drive at 103rd Street; the building still stands. The museum currently, since 1949, occupies an ornate Neo-Gothic mansion at at 319 West 107th Street, three houses in from Riverside Drive (between Broadway and Riverside Drive). The final exhibition of his work for 1936 happened at the museum that had recently declined exhibiting his work, as well as that of other American abstractionists, the by-now detested Museum of Modern Art, in a Federal Project that will be discussed in the following chapter.

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year an even larger assembly of abstract artists met at Ibram Lassaw's studio. Their numbers now included Burgoyne Diller, Balcomb and Gertrude Greene, Harry Holtzman, George McNeil, as well as Albert Swinden and Lassaw, Browne and Bengelsdorf. Despite past failures to breach the walls of traditional exhibition facilities the little group boldly invited John I. H. Baur, then a curator at the Brooklyn Museum, to view their work with the hope that he would be sufficiently impressed to give them a show. They arranged to meet again in Bengelsdorf's studio, with each artist bringing an example or two for Baur's perusal. To their astonishment Baur did come to look at their paintings but he ultimately decided in the negative, dashing their hopes as well as spirits.[16] Vastly disappointed but undaunted by his unfortunate decision, the group held five subsequent meetings in 1936, with attendance increasing each time.

Two of the meetings, held at Harry Holtzman's studio in November 1936, led to the historic formation of the cohesive group that would call themselves American Abstract Artists. To the first such meeting, Holtzman invited every abstractionist of whom he was aware, a list that included Willem de Kooning and Arshile Gorky, who had formed a close friendship. The meeting resulted in a series of arguments about how they should organize and who should assume leadership, points that were left unresolved for another meeting.

The arguments resumed at the second meeting of that year, during which the ever feisty Arshile Gorky challenged Holtzman's leadership in a loud bid to head the group himself. When his efforts failed, he stalked out, his ego considerably deflated by lack of

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16 Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, Tape Recorded Interview, New York City, 26 August 1978.

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support from the majority, despite their admiration for his abilities as a painter. Before the meeting ended, de Kooning, who considered Gorky his mentor as well as friend, also walked out. The pair never returned to show with the group after its formal organization although most friendships continued as before.[17]

By the end of November the group had enlarged to thirty, due in part to the growing numbers of interested persons studying modern approaches to painting as taught in the classes of two outstanding instructors, Jan Matulka and Hans Hofmann, both of whom had taught at the Art Students League of New York prior to opening their own schools. Matulka taught privately after 1932, and Hofmann opened his own school in New York in 1933, with a summer school in Provincetown opening the following year. Word of the American Abstract Artists existence was now widespread.

Finally, the nucleus of an association united in purpose materialized. Weekly sessions began on January 8, 1937 with the artists officially adopting the name, "American Abstract Artists," during a subsequent January 15 meeting. Balcomb Greene was elected the group's first chairman, Rupert Turnbull became their secretary and John Opper the

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17 Larsen, pp. 221-228. The precise date of this occurrence is not known. Gorky did, however, attend their exhibition openings and continued to fraternize with individual members, according to George McNeil in "American Abstractionists Venerable at Twenty," Art News, Vol. 55, no. 3, May 1956, pp. 64-65. In retrospect, the loss of Gorky and de Kooning dealt a major blow to the prestige of the group. In hindsight, it meant that two of the principal figures of the future New York School had broken ties from the outset and that, in their eyes, the American Abstract Artists were and would remain a period group, retrogressive and provincial. While part of Gorky's behavior resulted from wounded ego, consistent with his perspective, he saw the group's quest and art in narrow terms that lacked a certain broadmindedness. According to how the Abstract Expressionists would derive their brand of nonrepresentational "abstract" imagery in the mid to late 1940s, this was certainly true. The weaker of the pair, deKooning, followed whatever route Gorky took. The American Abstract Artists remained the most progressive group in the country until Surrealism and psychic automatism usurped their philosophy.

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treasurer; twenty-two artists of the original thirty were recorded and invitations to join sent to the other eight who had been present at previous meetings. They hoped to be able to hold two large exhibitions each year.

Another meeting on January 22 admitted to membership Josef Albers, Giorgio Cavallon, Ray Kaiser, George L. K. Morris and the sculptor David Smith. Morris proposed that his friend, A. E. Gallatin, whose Gallery of Living Art had afforded the young abstractionists one of their first opportunities to view modern European art, be invited to join. An exhibition committee had succeeded in renting space for two weeks in the Squibb Building and began making plans for the group's first show, scheduled for the Squibb Gallery on the thirty-third floor of the building, located at 745 Fifth Avenue.[18] A second exhibition, to be held later in the year, was planned for the galleries of the Municipal Art Committee, where many had shown the previous year.

As unestablished artists for the most part, valiantly persevering during the Depression, most members of the fledgling American Abstract Artists shared an impoverished existence. Had it not been for federal government support that enabled them to pursue their careers the abstractionists might not have survived as artists. The longevity of such an apolitical group with stylistically-limited membership would have been precarious without the quasi-security provided by the WPA/FAP.[19] Fortunately, George L. K. Morris and Charles G. Shaw, who joined them for the first exhibition, came from

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[18] Ibid., pp. 229-40. The majestic old Squibb Building, between 57th and 58th Streets on Fifth Avenue, still exists. Its fine Art Deco interiors have recently been restored, as have the lobby ceiling and wall murals, painted by Arthur Covey in 1930.

[19] The impact of the federal government projects following President Franklin D. Roosevelt's assumption of office in March 1933, will be discussed in the following chapter.

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affluent families, as did A. E. Gallatin, who joined in 1941, the year of their fifth annual show. Through his friend Morris, Gallatin offered the group one hundred dollars toward publicity expenses for the Squibb exhibition. Gallatin and Morris would continue to donate funds to the group.[20]

As one of the founding members, Browne was among thirty-nine artists who participated in the first American Abstract Artists Exhibition, April 3-17, 1937, the largest showing of nonobjective paintings and sculpture ever mounted without museum sanction. Not only was it well attended--some fifteen hundred saw the exhibition during its two week's run--but the sale of a portfolio of lithographs, one by nearly all participants and created especially for the show, proved financially successful.[21] Werner Drewes produced the frontispiece for the folio using cleverly juxtaposed lettering that set the tenor for the abstract reproductions that followed (Fig. 3-8). Each page measured 10 3/4 x 8 1/2 inches and was bound between plain paper covers. Of the thirty-nine participating artists, thirty-one had prepared lithographic prints; some had joined the group too late to have their contribution included.

Presentation in the folio went by alphabetical order according to last names and

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[20] As affluent as Gallatin, Morris, Shaw and a few others were, their financial support remained intermittently offered. They shared a certain meanness of spirit and did not include the group within their own exclusive circle of friends. Certainly they could not relate to the poverty in which most of the American Abstract Artists lived. Their struggle for artistic recognition may have been a common concern but their trappings of bohemianism remained a mockery. In no way could the group depend on their generosity, as grateful as they were when it was forthcoming.

[21] Larsen, pp. 242-245. Vaclav Vytlacil, a member of the American Abstract Artists group, had suggested the money-raising scheme. Instead of publishing a catalogue of the exhibition, a portfolio would be produced for which each participating artist prepared a drawing to be made into a lithograph. They printed five hundred copies of the portfolio, which sold for fifty cents.

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Browne, whose extremely linear abstraction appeared on the fifth page, had allowed his ink pen to improvise multiple concentric squares and circles connected by lines that perforated numerous small solid black circles staggered at right angles throughout. A lively textured "connect the dots" pattern prevailed over the entire surface (Fig. 3-9). By contrast, R. (Rosalind) Bengelsdorf's picture offered simplified organic configurations of solid black shapes offset by line-enclosed white square areas. This she punctuated by inserting an area of small stripes in a black outline in the upper right corner and placing in the center of the whole what appears to be the line drawing of, presumably, a tilted cocktail glass (Fig. 3-10). Giorgio Cavallon's entry was dominated by a series of triangular shapes that he filled with numerous mesh grids of varying thickness from fine as hair net threads to the wide bars of storm drain covers (Fig. 3-11). Each lithograph was created in black ink or crayon and while most were nonrepresentational, a few, by Harry Bowden, Ray Kaiser and Louis Schanker, left figurative aspects clearly intact.

Of significance were the large numbers of visitors, proving to the young abstractionists that their style of painting had something worthwhile to say.[22] Despite the Museum of Modern Art's refusal of a request to sponsor this show, its director and staff members witnessed what a determined group of painters could accomplish without their endorsement. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. had received a personal invitation to attend the opening and did visit the exhibition, although his comments, if any, were never recorded.

The exhibition must be considered among the most important presentations of modern art in this country since the Armory Show held twenty-four years earlier.[23] That it

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[22] Ibid., pp. 250, 262.

[23] While the Armory Show displayed works by both American and European modernists, this exhibition presented work by American artists exclusively.

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had received only a fraction of the attention accorded the 1913 show may attest to the degree of familiarity "strange" modern art had acquired in the interim. Despite large attendance, no one cared sufficiently to purchase the art, a lack of response that cannot be entirely blamed on Depression economics. It is doubtful that many visitors actually liked what they saw and fewer yet understood the significance of their innovative efforts. Yet if their abstract paintings at least elicited public interest, the critics were another matter, for they remained unconvinced of their merits.

Edward Alden Jewell of The New York Times, called the work clever and accomplished but decorative, thereby negating a certain degree of its impact and power. He categorized the art generally as academic in its own way as that being shown at the National Academy. He also felt the artists were bent upon reshaping, restating and adapting ideas first developed by the School of Paris coupled with a rehashing of the earlier generation of American Cubists's efforts in the teens. Thus Jewell questioned their originality, laying open a broad avenue of doubt as to their validity. By singling out two affluent members, George L. K. Morris and Charles G. Shaw, Jewell implied, wrongly, that upper class social intercourse was the basis for recognition among the members of the admittedly obscure group.[24]

Martha Davidson, writing for Art News, said that ". . . if the works were those of ~~the imagination, it was alas the~~ imagination of European leaders."[25] While she derided

[24] Edward Alden Jewell, "American Abstractions," The New York Times, 11 April 1937, sect. 11, p. 10. He mentioned their names only within the context of their being exhibited together in a show being held simultaneously at the Reinhardt Gallery, where Morris's wife, Suzy Frelinghuysen, also a painter, and A. E. Gallatin were included. Warren Wheelock was the only other artist mentioned by the critic.

[25] Martha Davidson, "Thirty-Nine Practitioners of "Abstract" Art," Art News, Vol.35, no. 29, April 17, 1937, p.26.

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their academic dependence on older formulae, she looked forward to future exhibitions of the group and, closing on an encouraging note, she expressed hope that a creative abstract movement would arise from their efforts.

Jacob Kainen, critic for the liberally-inclined Art Front, organ of the Artists' Union, wrote more generously of the newly organized group of painters, most of whom were Union members. While he felt many painters were eclectic and without a positive viewpoint, Kainen at least recognized the necessity for the abstract artists to band together for mutual defense in an effort to validate and popularize their stance.[26]

On the positive side, the group's members themselves had observed within their ranks a large and eclectic gathering of American abstraction for a second time. In every aspect a group diverse in their approach to abstraction, they respected each individual strategy, comparing their ideas and influences and spending countless hours discussing nuances within each picture. Despite the lack of sales, for no one recalled for sure if anything sold, the fact that artists were able to take a studied look at each other's work became extremely encouraging for the future. Morris recalled that the critical reverses were taken in stride, having been more or less expected. All were keenly aware that the earlier wave of American abstractionists, too, had taken unmerciful beatings at the hands of a discrediting press.[27] Undaunted, the group remained intact vowing to grow and repeat their experience the following year.

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[26] Jacob Kainen, "American Abstract Artists,"Art Front, Vol.3, nos. 3-4, May 1937, pp. 25-26.

[27] George L. K. Morris, "The American Abstract Artists: A Chronicle 1936-56," in The World of Abstract Art, The American Abstract Artists, editors, New York, Wittenborn, 1957, p. 136.

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Their exhibition aside, acceptance for contemporary abstract American art improved little; the critics continued to express scant interest and offered no encouragement. Browne took special umbrage against Peyton Boswell, the powerful and influential critic of The Art Digest, for what he believed was his unacceptably provincial stand against American abstraction. Boswell's favorite painters ranged from John Sloan and Charles Burchfield to Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, Peter Hurd and Eugene Speicher, among many other realist painters, most of whom were born in the nineteenth century.[28] Boswell's strong advocacy of this type of painting lay at the heart of the matter.

In autumn 1937, Browne felt compelled to take on the critic. His letter to Boswell, expressing his frustration, was published in The Art Digest. It is quoted in its entirety.

> In the old days when confronted by Cézannes and Van Goghs the art critics laughed outright and probably spit a little, too. Today, in a slightly more enlightened era they do not resort to such uncouth methods but use a form of skepticism or take a stand of complete indifference. Having been a reader of The Art Digest for the past three or four years, I noticed that this magazine took the same position in relation to new art movements as all the other periodicals in spite of its contention to be 'an unbiased compendium of the news and opinion of the art world.' In this great era of changing standards you will insist upon emphasizing a school of painting and sculpture that is out-moded. The fact that the cows in the pictures are shown eating grass in the present day middle west and not in an idyllic landscape of the 1860s does not hide from the progressive mind the uses of academic methods. In the present issue of the Digest I find three main

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[28] In 1940, Peyton Boswell published his book, Modern American Painting, New York, Dodd, Mead & Company, in which he chose the most "American" of American painters for inclusion, with one or more color illustrations of work by each. On pages 87-90, in his essay that attempted to define the American artist, Boswell asked, "Is there an American art?" While acknowledging that American painters lacked the brand of artistic sensitivity that lies in a French painting, he firmly stated that, "There is an American art, as American as corn pone and dude ranches."

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> articles upon abstract art in some phase; your writings on the 'Guggenheim Angle,' the short discussion of the Picasso panel and another article on the forthcoming abstract museum. Each article is pervaded with the constant air of doubt and incredulity. If anything is conceded for abstract painting and sculpture, it is immediately negated. Your insinuation that abstractionism may become a dead issue in a few years is 'old hat.' I can remember such statements that were made nearly ten years ago by our 'leading art critics,' and today we find abstract art more firmly entrenched than ever in spite of the tremendous amount of ballyhoo given to the American scene. Abstract art is no 'Art Nouveau.' It is the natural expression of intuitively wise artists living in a world such as ours presents today. We know that painting a cow in its naturalistic appearance is no longer getting at the truth of the matter. What makes a cow exist is identical with the forces of nature that keep a mere book from deteriorating for a certain period of time. Everything is hinged upon one basic law. A painting can no longer be a picture of anything but an idea of reality. The picture plane must be treated realistically, that is flatly, not by the false means of light and shade. To return to the magazine, give more attention to abstract painting and its relative arts. If lavish praise can be given to very bad painters such as Frederic Remington or Frederic Taubes as we find in the August issue, I see no reason why fine abstract painters of the American School should not be given the same treatment. Abstract art is here to stay and if I may be allowed to say so, I really believe it to be the art of the future, as time will show. But in the meantime abstract painters and sculptors are human beings and being so must sell their work and eat like any Provincetown boat painter. This can only come about by bringing abstract art out of the cellar into the sunshine where it rightfully belongs.[29]

Beyond its indictment of the magazine's unrelenting bias against American abstractionists, Browne's comment on flatness is worth noting for it anticipates the discourse that would be central to critical inquiry for the next twenty years.[30] It is difficult to believe that seven

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[29] Byron Browne, Letter, "Peyton Boswell Comments: Two "Revitalizing" Letters," Art Digest, Vol. 11, no. 20, September 1, 1937, pp. 3-4, 23.

[30] Long before the pronouncements of either Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, the issue of illusionism versus flatness, the precise culling out of the major difference between a traditional and a modernist approach to form, and the real crux of the problem now at hand, had just been inadvertently set forth by Browne. This statement is above all noteworthy for its having been published, thereby establishing a documented record of Browne's clear understanding of a matter of major implication.

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years had passed since Samuel Kootz published his plea for a new modernism in his book, Modern American Painters. Browne had participated in twenty-three exhibitions since 1930, yet in all that time the response of museums, critics and the public to abstraction had not changed appreciably.

George L. K. Morris, writing after the group's Second Annual American Abstract Artists Exhibition, held February 14-28, 1938, at the American Fine Arts Gallery on 57th Street, found that the show resounded with a "native clarity," stating

> I cannot foresee what your group may be producing in a decade. But in the meantime you qualify as the sole organization in America that is dedicated to the hewing out of an authentic and appropriate cultural expression.[31]

His prescient comments notwithstanding, New York newspaper critics as well as editors from the principal art periodicals continued their diatribes unabated.

Among the fifty-four painters and sculptors exhibiting, Jerome Klein found it impossible to locate even one who was "not above imitating other [earlier French models] artists in the most slavish manner."[32] He insulted the group further by writing that their cult of "personal isolation" from [mainstream] realism only resulted in an exhibition of "duds."[33] Moreover, he and other critics felt that abstract art shut itself off from people, that is, its nonrepresentational content failed to address real life.

While Browne's verbal responses to this review can only be imagined, its message

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31 Morris, George L. K., "To the American Abstract Artists, American Fine Arts Galleries: Art Chronicle: Some Personal Letters to American Artists Recently Exhibiting in New York," Partisan Review, Vol. 4, no. 4, March 1938, pp. 36-38.

32 Jerome Klein, "Art Comment: Plenty of Duds Found in Abstract Art Show," New York Post, 19 February 1938, cols. 1 & 2, p. 18.

33 Ibid.

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did not escape the attention of Stuart Davis, who eloquently defended the exhibition in a letter, which Klein published in the following Saturday's edition of the Post. In part, Davis wrote

> Your review of the American Abstract Artist's exhibition in the Post of February 19 seemed to be lacking in sympathy. But instead you mumbled something about "dry bones" and so indicated that the organization might have some kind of spine after all, a point to which you unwittingly become the first public witness. I believe that your fatal weakness in this case results from the fact that you considered the Abstract Artists' exhibition as an isolated phenomenon apart from its historical relations. The result is a critical evaluation having an aridity of content which compares very favorably with those "dry bones" you spoke about. Because of this non-objective approach it is only natural that you omitted the following objective facts from your considerations. (1) The category of art practice has internal as well as external relations, all of which are involved in its development, and art is no mere reflection of the external relations. (2) Abstract art is an outstanding progressive force in modern art . . . . (3) Abstract art is the expression of an important aspect to contemporary reality . . . . (4) The content of the best examples of abstract art is objective in meaning and social in use. (5) Formalism is no more an essential aspect of abstract art than it is of any other school of painting. (6) Social content in art is not dependent on descriptive naturalism in method. (7) A popular art is not necessarily dependent on descriptive naturalism in method. ((8) Fascism suppresses abstract art along with progressive development in philosophy and science. (9) With democratic support like that of the Federal Art Project, abstract art continues to develop and take on new life. (10) The formation of the American Abstract Artists is in part a reflection of this democratic support . . . . (11) The American Abstract Artists support the Federal art bill. (12) The principles of democracy in culture, and a democratic front in culture against reaction, should teach us to welcome a newly organized group in the field of art which is on the side of progress. In closing I wish to say that I am not at this time a member of the American Abstract Artists. Nor do I agree with most of the theoretical opinions of its members as set forth in their catalogue. But this organization has a significance apart from the individual opinions of its members and I believe that its existence holds promise of valuable contributions to the development of American art.
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> Stuart Davis[34]

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[34] Jerome Klein, "Art Comment: Stuart Davis Criticizes Critic in Abstract Art: Painter Sees Lack of Sympathy in Review of Work by New Group," New York Post, 26 February 1938, p. 26.

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Klein spent the next seven paragraphs defending his attacks against the "effete spirits" of some exhibitors, naming A. E. Gallatin, for one, and refuting Davis's defense.

Browne, who showed three untitled paintings and one sculpture, (all undocumented and unlocated), also wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Post in which he responded to statements made by several American Abstract Artists members in the eighty-page "Yearbook," that accompanied their second exhibition.[35] These statements reflected the growing diversity of viewpoints in the membership, that not infrequently led to friction. Browne had openly disagreed with some of his colleagues. In his letter, abridged for publication by the newspaper's editors, he pointed out just how individual those opinions were

> Many within this group struggle for results and are searching for that new form which we feel is just around the corner, and we do not set content within the narrow channels of formalism which some members would like the American Abstract Artists to stand for.[36]

Browne's observations reflect his and other painters growing concern that the advocacy of the hard-edged, geometric approach practiced by some would effectively stifle the organization's goal of advancing a broad-based, individual approach to abstraction, thereby limiting experimentation. Stuart Davis made a similar observation in

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35 American Abstract Artists, edited by, American Abstract Artists: 1938, New York, Privately printed, 1938 (reprint, New York, Arno, 1969). This yearbook marked the first of several such books published by the American Abstract Artists in subsequent years.

36 Byron Browne, Letter, in "More Comments on Abstract Art," New York Post, 12 March 1938, col. 4, p. 28. Browne's original letter from which these excerpts have been taken has been lost.

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his letter to Jerome Klein. Internal controversy aside, recognition of their worth increased with the attendance of over 1500 viewers during its three week's run, despite the largely negative reaction of the critical establishment. Moreover, the organization received a request for a second venue at University Hall, Columbia University, November 1-30, at which Carl Holty gave a lecture,[37] with offers from several western museums to take the exhibition on tour over the following year, offers they did not refuse.[38]

In their third annual exhibition, held at the Riverside Museum, New York City from March 7-28, the group included nearly two hundred and fifty works of art, the largest to date, with fifty-three exhibitors of widespread origins and tastes in abstraction.[39] Browne exhibited several untitled works, the whereabouts of which are unknown. Several thousand visitors came to the upper West Side to view the show, the group by this time being well known to all New York art world segments, if for nothing more than the reams of vituperative criticism garnered after every exhibition.[40] Edward Alden Jewell still felt

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37 American Abstract Artists, Van Deren Coke, acknowledgements, Thomas Tritschler, essay, Albuquerque, The University of New Mexico, February 27-April 3, 1977, p. 13.

38 Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group," P. 278. In October 1937, The American Abstract Artists organized a second exhibition of about forty works, shown at Columbia University in November. Under the guidance of Vaclav Vytlacil, Chairman of the Exhibition Committee, he arranged to send this smaller show to the West and Midwest, circulating among the following museums during 1938: The Henry Arts Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, William Rockhill Newson Museum, Kansas City and the Art Institute, Milwaukee. Albert Gallatin and George L.K. Morris, the wealthiest members of the organization, each donated one hundred dollars to help offset expenses of the traveling exhibition.

39 The Third Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists, New York, Riverside Museum, March 7-28.

40 Larsen, The American Abstract Artists, p. 309.

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that abstract compositions, whether European or American, constituted mere decoration.[41] As before, critics refused to accept anything less than "originality" as criterion for excellence.

George L. K. Morris, always an articulate and supportive member of the abstract vanguard of the 1930s, addressed the issue of originality in his introductory essay for the "Yearbook," declaring

> It is in no way unnatural that any large group of artists oriented toward an internal expression should continue in the direction of others whom they have admired. The greatest art . . . is very frequently derivative; Rubens derived from the Venetians, Picasso from whatever might interest him at the moment, and to what such masters have learned from others is then added an imprint of their own. Intelligent derivation is to be commended.[42]

His attitude is shared by many of today's artists who admit that all grow out of one another and that each preceding generation gives something to the next. In a sense, all preceding artists become spiritual "fathers," with the newer generation inheriting everything that came before. To dismiss, as most critics did, the only avant-garde work then being done in America as nothing more than imitative geometric abstraction is to obliterate from American art what was one of the most important movement of the 1930s to the mid-1940s. Moreover, it would certainly deny Abstract Expressionism some of its

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41 Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art: Activities of the Waning Winter: Our Annual Non-Objective Field Day: Exhibition by American Abstract Artists at Riverside Museum Raises High--and Controversial--Partisan Claims," The New York Times, 12 March 1939 (Sunday ed.), sect. 11, p. 9.

42 George L. K. Morris, "The American Abstract Artists," in American Abstract Artists: Three Yearbooks, p. 88. Morris goes on to quote Hélion: " 'Art is something to continue, not to start. . . It is born of itself permanently, and cannot be born of anything else. Painting is what provokes painting.' " Morris referred to the French painter, Jean Hélion, who was not a member of the American Abstract Artists.

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origins and the very climate in which it could function.

Indeed, his argument reflected Alfred Barr's recent effort to regard the development of modern art as a series of stylistic developments and influences. While Morris's comments argued well for the legitimacy of derivation, some among the American Abstract Artists saw his statements as little more than an argument for academicism. Morris, for all his succor, lost his chance to goad the group to search beyond their present archetypes, stifling any such impulse through his condescending manner.

The obsession with stylistic derivation versus "originality" would dominate artistic innovation throughout the next decade, significantly affecting the course of American painting. The possibility of derivation had become unmentionable and the unfortunate result of any such allegation damaged the careers of those so accused. Ironically, in 1951, as Abstract Expressionism was being heralded as an innovative combination, Thomas B. Hess observed, too late to help the cause of the American Abstract Artists, that the concept of "sacrosanct originality" was little more than an American myth especially perpetuated by art dealers.[43]

In 1939, Robert Coates of The New Yorker, noticed in the group a trend toward strict geometrical form.[44] He felt this artistic purity dull and of negative virtue as apparently did a few of its own members, who were beginning to work more expressionistically and even semi-abstractly. Byron Browne, among the latter, had already voiced his opposition. He found it increasingly difficult to adhere to the hard-edged

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[43] Thomas B. Hess, Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase, New York, Viking, 1951, p. 107.

[44] Robert Coates, "The Art Galleries: Abstractionists, and What About Them"?, The New Yorker, Vol. 15, no. 5, March 18, 1939, pp. 57-59.

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aesthetic direction espoused by the majority of the group. Vaclav Vytlacil recalled Browne saying, "I'm not going to subscribe forever, from now on, to painting geometric pictures,"[45] reflecting Browne's opinion toward the rigid orthodoxy held by some members of the American Abstract Artists. He meant what he said, for he painted no more strictly geometrical pictures after 1938.

As a viable exhibiting group, The American Abstract Artists continued despite the severe restrictions of World War II. Still, by 1945, its stylistic confines were insufficiently broad to contain the innovational gestural approach of a vastly different group of painters whose work soon would supplant their narrow Cubo-geometric path to nonfigurative art. By then, artists with abstract proclivities had found a growing number of galleries willing to risk showing their kind of work, making painters less dependent upon this single organization as their only vehicle for exposure.

It is ironic that few artists of the emerging New York School stemmed from this earlier pathfinding group. So eclipsed stylistically and philosophically would the initial American Abstract Artists become that few members even desired to bridge the gap between them and their successors. Yet credit must be given to them for establishing the

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45 Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group," p. 585. However, Larsen also states, pp. 430, 432, that nowhere in the records of the group was there mention of a "geometric" style. While this is true as far as the General Prospectus the group adopted, individual members frequently referred to the term. For example, as early as 1938, Charles C. Shaw, in his essay, "A Word to the Objector," in American Abstract Artists: Three Yearbooks (1938, 1939, 1946), New York, Arno, 1969, p. 9, mentioned "geometric" painting and "geometric" pattern. Balcomb Greene, in his essay for the same yearbook, "Expression as Production," p. 31, mentioned "geometric" forms and used the adjective "amorphous" as well. While not specifically mentioning "geometric style," it is clear that this was precisely what each writer meant. The adjectives "abstract," "nonfigurative" and "concrete" appeared most often to describe the kinds of abstract art styles of the 1930s and the terms continued to be used well into the 1940s and beyond.

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first permanent collective abstract presence in this country.[46] Without the pioneering efforts of Browne, Benglesdorf and the others, for attempting to get the support of museums and seeking to develop a public response to their work, who believed so passionately about their art, the innovations of the so-called New York School might have had a more difficult time.

The existence of the American Abstract Artists was of enormous importance to the development of American art, for the group also initiated a dialogue between its own members and the rest of the art community. Its position became stronger with each successive exhibition until New York City became the focal point of avant-garde activity in abstract painting and sculpture.[47] Its influence and that of abstract art in general eventually spread throughout the country to areas where, although the art may have been misunderstood and even disliked, it was now recognized and therefore open to consideration. One of their most significant accomplishment must lie in that initial success in April 1937. That it also left a legacy of historically important, progressive work is equal reason for their relevance.

Browne showed three paintings and one collage in the first exhibition of which only one work has been traced, Still Life Study, 1935-36, oil on canvas (Fig. 3-12). Its flat, interlocking curved shapes point to Cubism and one need not look far to determine that Browne used the visual reference of objects from common existence from which to extract and reconstruct his overlapping planes. That he heaped his objects upon the top of a table, as did the Cubists, is evident from the bit of table leg protruding in the lower left corner,

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 431.

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anchoring the picture. It is believed that some of Browne's finest early efforts in abstraction, both structured geometric and bimorphic, were created and shown in these first American Abstract Artists's exhibitions but it is unfortunate that so many entries went undocumented. Still, his evolution as a painter continued free and separate from any constraints of the organization. The exhibitions of the American Abstract Artists continue to this day despite the original reasons for the need of such a group having long passed.[48]

The economic debacle of the 1930s, that witnessed some ten thousand unemployed artists among the fifteen million or more unemployed of the general population, encouraged the former to organize into professional groups other than for exhibition purposes. Against their natural inclinations as artists, they entered the political fray in order to defend themselves collectively. One such organization was the Artists' Union, formed in late 1934 whose major purpose was to unite artists in a common struggle for economic security. In order to strengthen and realize this ideal they affiliated in December 1937, with the C.I.O. (Congress of Industrial Organization) as Local 60,

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[48] American Abstract Artists: 1936-1966, American Abstract Artists, edited by, Ruth Gurin, intro., New York, Riverside Museum, (exhibition catalogue), Ram Press, 1966, n. pag. This book contains many reproductions of lost early works and a valuable essay recounting the history and struggles of this group. It was written on the occasion of the exhibition that celebrated the beginning of their fourth decade of operation as the American Abstract Artists. It should be noted that from the outset the American Abstract Artists never discriminated against women as members. Paintings by women were treated with the same respect as were the men's. In fact, the efforts of women were crucial in launching the organization and eight women showed their paintings in the first exhibition. When the group became more open to all aspects of abstraction, many more joined. Among the new members, Cubo-Realist Fannie Hillsmith, began to exhibit in 1945 and Charlotte Cushman, the following year. Lenore (Lee) Krasner had exhibited with the group as early as 1941. Browne ceased exhibiting with the group after their 1946 show although he resumed participation from 1954 until his death.

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whereby they changed their union's name to United American Artists.[49] A tabloid style newspaper, Art Front, became the Artists' Union's official publication with its first issue printed in November 1934.[50]

The struggle for artists's rights did not confine itself to the written word. Artists' Union members learned the art of dissent and were frequently militant in their efforts to obtain city and federal job support (among other demands) for unemployed artists. Massive, vociferous and often violent picket lines, demonstrations and protest marches took place with some only ending when police riot squads were summoned. Billy club bruises and wholesale arrests of dozens of Union members were commonplace. Artists also learned how to stage sit-in demonstrations, a new method of bringing attention to issues that were generally more closely associated with labor disputes than with those whose lives revolved around aesthetic matters.[51] The "gentlemanly" painter, used to wielding nothing more lethal than a brush aimed at a canvas target, now learned to fight with tougher materials; clenched fists and clubs simultaneously rose in anger and not

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49 135th Anniversary Exhibition: The Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, Inc., Dore Ashton, intro., New York, The Gallery Association of New York State, 1976, n. pag.

50 In the pages of Art Front art and politics shared equal roles, resulting in an organ that became concurrently an important chronicle of the art world. Among its contributors were Stuart Davis, Robert Godsoe, André Malraux, Harold Rosenberg, Meyer Schapiro and Moses Soyer; Joseph Solman became editor-in-chief in June 1936. Short-lived, Art Front ceased publication with the November 1937 edition, in part, perhaps, because it reflected the communist, leftist position of its writers, a viewpoint whose popularity slowly lost adherents with the worsening of events in Europe.

51 Lincoln Rothschild, "The Index of American Design of the WPA Federal Art Project," in The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1972, pp. 200-201. This valuable book of essays is also a gold mine of information on various aspects of the government art projects.

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infrequently, in combat.

In one of numerous Union protests, at some point between 1935-1937, Byron Browne helped lead a march by assisting fellow artists in carrying a spectacular Cubist construction through the streets of Manhattan (Figs. 3-13 through 3-22). The colossal wood and canvas assemblage represented a joint effort on each artist's part with Browne's contribution being that of the uppermost, rear "animal" head painting (Fig. 3-18).[52] If the artists's demands were seldom heeded, they at least knew how to draw considerable attention to themselves as individuals as much in need as any other segment of the population. On one occasion they elicited the support of Mayor LaGuardia, who went off to Washington to appeal for restoration of federal relief funds that had been allocated, then reduced.[53]

Byron Browne and six other members of the fledgling American Abstract Artists, Rosalind Bengelsdorf, Herzl Emanuel, Hananiah Harari, Leo Lances, George McNeil and Jan Matulka, used the editorial pages of Art Front in the October 1937 issue, this time not in the name of politics but to correct what they felt constituted an erroneous point of view by one Baroness Hilla Rebay.[54] In a letter to the editor, they responded to the narrow

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52 The design is based on Picasso's ten-foot high costumes worn by the French and American managers for the Cocteau/Diaghilev collaboration, Parade, 1917.

53 Rothschild, p. 202. Using their cause as excuse, he took advantage of the occasion to promote his own agenda as well.

54 Byron Browne, et al., Letter, Art Front, Vol. 3, no. 7, October 1937, pp. 20-21. In Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne's 1972 essay for The New Deal Art Projects, pp. 230-32, she recalled her reaction to Baroness Rebay. The newly-formed American Abstract Artists had arranged for a cocktail party to welcome her to the United States. Miss Rebay, however, spent that time lecturing to the artists at the gathering; her opinions made most of them extremely angry. The Guggenheim Collection, purchased with the advice of Rebay, who also acted as the collection's curator, featured the work of Rudolph Bauer, an imitator of Kandinsky and, not surprisingly, Rebay's lover. Space for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Painting was found at 24 East 54th Street; the new gallery-museum did not open to the public until June 1, 1939.

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views and opinions on the purpose and implications of abstract art expressed by Rebay upon the occasion of the recent establishment of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which she directed.

One of the Foundation's stated purposes was to provide for the promotion and encouragement of abstract art and, in view of Rebay's commitment to the nonobjective cause, the group had hoped to enlist her support and that of Mr. Guggenheim for their own organization. However, she angered them by stating that abstract art had no meaning, that it represented nothing and that it was the prophet of a desiccated spiritual life, something unearthly. Abstractions, she believed, were worlds whole unto themselves, achieved as their creators turned away from the contemplations of earth.[55]

One can imagine the consternation of the American Abstract Artists, who were having a difficult enough time as it was without contending with what they perceived as the misinterpretations of so influential a spokeswoman as the Baroness. Two paragraphs from their long letter indicate just how forcefully the group wished to set the Guggenheim camp straight. Aiming their barbs specifically at the woman who controlled the foundation and, as was widely suspected, also controlled Mr. Guggenheim, they wrote

> We the abstract artists are, of course, the first to recognize that any good work of art has its own justification, that it has the effect of bringing joyful ecstasy to a sensitive spectator, that there is such a thing as an aesthetic emotion, which is a particular emotion, caused by a particular created harmony of lines, colors and forms. But the forms may not be ghostly-pure-spirit-suspended as Baroness Rebay would wish. Who knows whether the divorce of cosmic atmosphere and earthly air is so absolute? Who can tell us into what reaches the intuitive soul of an artist must extend? Perhaps there are some spectators who behold and enjoy a square, more or less, of fine color, and go away refreshed, but not frozen into the state of sublime non-intellectuality that Baroness Rebay described.

[55] Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, The New Deal Art Projects, p. 231.

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> It is our very definite belief that abstract art forms are not separated from life, but on the contrary are great realities, manifestations of a search into the world about one's self, having basis in living actuality, made by artists who walk the earth, who see colors (which are realities, squares (which are realities, not some spiritual mystery), tactile surfaces, resistant materials, movement.[56]

In Bengelsdorf's eyes, Rebay's attitude was condescending and her aesthetic ideas unsound. The group felt she was a threat to the democracy they practiced among themselves and they resented her power. Needless to say, the American Abstract Artists were never invited to exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum nor did she visit their shows; never did they receive monetary aid from the Baroness, although she frequently helped struggling artists who were not members of their group.

The first Artists' Congress was organized in New York in February 1936. In common with most of the organizations that sprang up during the Depression, the focus of

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56 Ibid. Rosalind Bengelsdorf, all her life an artist, writer, critic-reviewer and instructor of art and art history, was invited to deliver a lecture at a meeting of the Artists' Union, September 23, 1936. The title of her talk, "Basic Approach to the New Realism in Art," concerned the scientific discovery of molecular structure and atoms, planes, space and movement and how the mechanical copying of an object is an incorrect approach for a painter. Her use of the term "New Realism" is unusual and telling but the term is not hers. She most likely borrowed it from Fernand Léger, who in 1935, in conjunction with his exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Museum of Modern Art, discussed the term in a lecture he delivered, an excerpt of which soon appeared in Art Front. The term was used infrequently by others as well at this time but it never caught on in a popular sense. Many years later, in 1973, Léger's term reappeared in, Léger, Functions of Painting, (The Documents of 20th Century Art), London, New York, pp. 109-110, based on that earlier lecture and an even earlier writing, "A New Realism--the Object," in The Little Review (Paris), Vol. 2, no. 2, Winter 1926, PP. 7-8. In 1974, Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne in her published reviews and in her teaching at the New School for Social Research resurrected and applied the term to current abstract art but then, as now, abstracted art, no matter the degree of abstraction, essentially remained called by that name, "abstract."

Her unpublished document is also valuable for insights into an era long past, for she frequently referred to aspects of the economic plight of artists trying to survive, as well, the Depression, which she experienced first hand.

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the Artists' Congress was highly political and, as such, it welcomed Communist Party members as well as those of differing or no political persuasion. Browne, along with hundreds of fellow artists and sympathetic citizens attended the initial meeting, where Lewis Mumford exhorted everyone to form a united front against rising Fascist forces. The escalating political disasters in Europe had a profound effect on the spirits of those in the arts and Stuart Davis, one of the most articulate members, spoke out against both Fascism and war at their meetings. Already a major contributor and editor of Art Front, he also served as president of the Artists Union (1935-36), Davis held the respect of his peer group and membership in general; people listened to what he had to say.

Now, for the first time in the United States, artists--abstractionists and realists alike--came together to experience professional solidarity as they tried to influence economic, political and aesthetic policies that had impact on their lives. The Artists' Congress discussed and took sides in international issues and at one point called for political action from Washington, as they condemned Italy and Germany for their aggressive behavior during the months that led to the outbreak of World War II in Europe. Not surprisingly, the volatile international situation provoked dissention within the various political factions prompting some to regroup in opposition to the Artists' Congress.[57]

In 1941, a new organization was created that is still in existence, The Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, Inc., whose interests lay more in aesthetic values than in political action and slogans. Ilya Bolotowsky, Adolph Gottlieb, Balcomb Greene and Mark Rothko became founding members of the Federation. Byron Browne, tired of

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[57] 35th Anniversary Exhibition: The Federation of Modern Painters, n. pag. Internal political dissention eventually caused the organization's downfall in 1940.

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dodging brickbats, protest marching and picketing, did not join the Federation until December 1950. By that time, however, the artistic climate had vastly changed; the era of political involvement and protest marches for artists was over.

The history of these groups and others like them became the history of the issues confronting contemporary art and politics in the 1930s and early 1940s, until World War II relocated priorities. Rarely had there been a time when two disparate entities, art and politics, shared such similar problems, becoming dependent upon one another for so much. They are as much a part of the history of the Great Depression as were the Projects, breadlines and Roosevelt's New Deal socialism.[58]

In addition to the annual exhibitions of the American Abstract Artists group Browne was fortunate to exhibit his work upon occasion at one of the rare spaces that welcomed abstraction, the Artists' Gallery at 33 West 8th Street in Greenwich Village, owned and operated by Hugh S. Stix. In December 1936, he invited Browne, Joseph Solman and Earl Kerkam, to participate in a three-man show titled Drawings and Watercolors, Ten to Fifty Dollars.[59] The low prices bespeak works slated for holiday gifts and, while no record exists of sales, Browne's contribution must have elicited some interest, for two years later he was again asked to provide work for an exceptionally large fall group show, Seeing: Art Through the Eye.[60]

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58 One is soberly reminded that for all of President Roosevelt's acclaim as the one who led America out of the Depression, it took twelve years and a World War to bring it to an end.

59 Drawings and Watercolors: Ten to Fifty Dollars. New York, The Artist's Gallery, December 1936. Obviously a holiday gift show, every work was priced for a quick sale. There is no record of what works Browne exhibited.

60 Seeing: Art Through the Eye. New York, The Artists' Gallery, October 2-October 16, 1938.

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Among the nearly eighty-five exhibitors to this show were Chaim Gross, Raphael Soyer, de Kooning, Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Federico Castellon, Lee Gatch and John Flannagan, indicating the acceptability of all artistic styles. Browne brought two crayon drawings and five watercolor and graphite pencil drawings to the show but it is not known if all seven works were accepted or if the gallery selected from among them. Although no measurements appeared in the gallery's preliminary checklist, most of the work was probably of modest size, for the gallery itself was small. His crayon drawings, for example, were never executed on large sheets of paper. In an effort to be fair to each artist, all painters's names were taped over so that those clients interested in purchasing chose the work because they liked it, not for the reputation that the artist might have acquired. In this way no exhibitor was put at an unfair advantage. The gallery's president, Hugh Stix, clearly liked Browne's work and offered to give him a solo exhibition of paintings in early 1939; Browne jumped at the opportunity.

Byron Browne: Paintings, opened at the Artists' Gallery on February 28.[61] Although no checklist has been located, two black and white installation photographs (Figs. 3-23 and 3-24), confirm that at least three geometric pictures, Still Life Study, 1935-37 (Fig. 3-12), Classical Still Life, 1936 (Fig. 3-25), Africana, (a.k.a. Painting on Black), 1937-38 (Fig. 3-26) and two figurative works, Woman with Flower, 1937 and Wrestlers, 1938, all oil on canvas, were among those shown. Of these, all but Wrestlers were eventually located and subsequently sold many years later.

Browne knew John Graham well enough by 1939 to ask the painter to write a catalogue foreword to this his first one-man exhibition at the little gallery. Graham wrote

[61] Byron Browne: Paintings. Byron Browne, statement and John D. Graham, foreword, New York, The Artists' Gallery, February 28-March 13, 1939.

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a glowing, albeit metaphor-ridden tribute to his friend's efforts at progressive abstraction

> I wish to congratulate the Artists' Gallery on its choice of artists and shows. Byron Browne represents a healthy trend in American painting toward clarity of statements, in the purity of medium. After the caesarian deliveries of our Academico-impressionisto-Cezannistic drudgery of muddled up colours and forms, after the hangovers of our successful painters, with their stuttering slobbering speech, a whiff of fresh bracing wind is most welcome.
>
> Byron Browne shows a discriminating and exact usage of colour and selective usage of articulating shapes. Browne speaks the language. It is the language of oil paint and shapes and tactile statements. It is sane, graceful, pure and authoritative. An exhibition of Browne's paintings is a lesson in good taste and clear thinking to art students and collectors. It clears the road for true American painting instead of clogging it with obsolete and insincere trash of stumbling sentimentality.
>
> Browne's art belongs to men who can build, direct and man the simple sheets of native canvas-sails. Salute to your effort, Browne. Salute to the Artists' Gallery as the first organized effort in the direction of the constructive taste, perhaps the first cultural institution of its kind in America.[62]

By stating that Browne "clears the road for true American painting instead of clogging it with . . . stumbling sentimentality," Graham unmistakably alluded to the Regionalist and Social Realist styles, still popular in this period. Still, words alone could not persuade an ingrained dislike for abstract work; by the end of the show not one of Browne's paintings had been purchased.[63]

In retrospect, his Artists' Gallery show marked a crucial moment in Browne's career, not so much for the work exhibited but for the ensuing dialogue and critical reviews. Telling comments by visitors to his exhibition were recorded into the gallery's

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, The Artists' Gallery, Roll No. 79, frame no. 265. Similarly, the second American Abstract Artists exhibition, which had closed less than a month before, produced no sales.

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guest book records during the show's opening reception and at its closing. According to its director Federica Beer-Monti, and Hugh S. Stix, its president, the attendance was good and some critics from the local press visited the gallery. When a visitor did not bother to sign the guest book, they made their own observations and recorded them. Notations like the following were typical

> Miss Genauer came for the first time in quite awhile but did not write a word about the exhibition which Mr. Browne thought was very funny since she always mentioned his work in group shows.
>
> Mr. Devree came and wrote lengthily about the show which was very nice of him after Mr. Browne had tried to pick a quarrel with him through the mail. They spoke together at the gallery for almost an hour.
>
> Mr. and Mrs. Janis (Sidney Janis, the collector, writer and future art dealer) came and thought the show was "exciting." Spoke about the Baroness Rebay who ought to have seen the show, but whom we cannot seem to interest in any of our exhibitions.[64]

Three days after his show closed Browne wrote to the director to express his gratitude for the opportunity. His reaction to the lack of sales was one of profound disappointment, and in a self-effacing mood, he closed his letter by saying, "I hope to prove in the future that the Artists' Gallery was justified in giving me my first exhibition of paintings."[65]

An important insight into the artist's aims and values has been provided by a position statement printed opposite Graham's catalogue foreword. Browne maintained that whether discernable or not, the forms in his paintings had their origins in overt visual

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[64] Ibid. Browne had also invited Juliana Force, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, then situated across the street and two doors to the east, at 10 West 8th Street. Evidently she never saw the show, for had she, the gallery would have recorded the event.

[65] Ibid., frame no. 258

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experience. He wrote

> The purpose of art at all times has been to insinuate the unknown quantity "X" through the most immediate and realistic means. It is in the nature of man to want to peer beneath the watch-case in order to find out what makes the wheels go round. A special privilege is granted to those who take the greatest leaps into the darkness. They arrive at the greatest results.
>
> No work in this exhibition should be considered abstract or non-objective, regardless of the fact that the "object" is discernible in some pictures and not in others, the purpose has been the same throughout. Those who wage the battle of non-figurative versus figurative are falsifying the real issues in painting. Because a form is not readily recognized does not make it plastic. Every shape or form that is drawn, painted, sculptured, sawed or pasted has its counterpart in nature or a "man made" product, and is carried into the picture either by direct visual contact or thru the memory channels. One cannot paint what one has not seen. The only way the ancients could conceive a deity in their art was by making it in the image of a man or a combination of man, object and animal. The "deity" today has taken on a much wider scope. It may be the amoeba or the dynamo. Thru it (the object) aided by the knowledge given us by contemporary science we can express life by every conceivable method.
>
> On the other hand, being new, will not make our work profound. Plastic knowledge plus intensity of concept is the only thing that will make a painting live. We must beware of the danger of "tabloidism," a form of painting that runs rampant in America today. If we are to retain the stature of the great artists of the past, it will be by the same attitude they took, that is a real interest in the problems involved in the specific art of painting or sculpture, and not remain just "picture makers."[66]

In retrospect, Browne's statement reflects more than a simple rejection of American Scene painting, as he elevates science and its new discoveries to the service of the artist, even when their findings are invisible to the unaided eye. It is curious, after more than a decade of experimentation, in which Browne began with explicit subject matter, learned to

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66 Op. cit., Byron Browne: Paintings, Byron Browne, statement. The picture makers to whom Browne refers are the American Scene, Regionalist and Social Realist painters--the realists in general. The term "plastic," is no longer used today in the context it once was, except to denote synthetic materials made of the substance. It was used in the 1930s in America to refer to three-dimensional form or space, especially the illusion of it on a flat, two-dimendionsl surface, like canvas, or paper. Plastic also refers to the malleability of a material, such as clay, wax, or plaster, in designing a three-dimensional figure or sculpture but again, the term, generally misunderstood, has gone out of fashion.

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free himself from it and then, later, gradually return to it, he argued that his work was never completely free of representation and that he never wished to achieve full autonomy from the object observed in nature. When his work appeared devoid of any reference to the natural world, Browne insisted that references were not only present but observable.

Thus began Browne's unyielding denial of the existence of form outside nature, whether visible or invisible to the naked eye. With such confusing statements as, "One cannot paint what one has not seen," Browne establishes the position that he will hold for the rest of his life.[67] Moreover, his insistence that no form exists if one has not seen it in some aspect, annuls his abstraction to a certain extent and reorders how one perceives his nonfigurative production. This distinction will become the major difference and obstacle separating his philosophy from that of the Abstract Expressionists.

Over the years Browne kept notebooks into which he pasted pictures of artwork, newspaper photographs, copied quotations uttered from famous people or simply entered his own comments; rarely did he bother to date these clippings or notations. In one notebook Browne reiterated his commitment to pictorial concerns, "What I have to say in painting must rest upon solid plastic values, not upon any pictorial gimmicks such as surrealism, non-objectism, purism or any other ism." He unequivocally claims to equate a form in the natural world to every form on his canvas, thereby transcribing from nature alone. Nevertheless, the exhibit-going public remained unconvinced of any correlation to reality in much of his work and while terms like abstraction, nonobjective, figurative and objective became permanent art-historical terminology, they, along with the much-

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67 From artist's statement published in the exhibition catalogue, Byron Browne: Paintings, New York, The Artists' Gallery, February 28-March 13, 1939.

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disdained stylistic "isms", served only to confuse viewers further.

The serious obstacles confronted by Browne and other abstract painters, especially defending their European derivation, were all brought into sharp relief by Howard Devree's review of Browne's exhibition at the Artists' Gallery. It is with this exhibition that the problem of Picasso first becomes a public issue. Devree, a principal reviewer for The New York Times, not only reproaches Browne, an "abstract" artist, blaming him and others like him for much public confusion about abstract art versus decoration but names the greater culprit, Picasso. Devree wrote

> The very earnest exhibition of paintings by Byron Browne at the Artists' Gallery leads me to suspect more than ever that much of the confusion and muddled thinking about abstraction is due to the failure of both the abstract artist and the layman, in many cases, to determine what should become "applied" art. I have pointed out before that architectural use of colorful "abstract" design--in place of the present murals of the RCA Building, for instance--is one possibility. The use of Miro and Léger designs in rugs and fabrics points to another possibility. In Mr. Browne's current show, aside from two or three figure pieces in which he has not yet outgrown the Picasso manner, he very seriously essays "abstract" compositions of broken forms, of the type made familiar to us in recent years by a number of European artists. Earnest as the painting undoubtedly is, it does not seem to me to afford a personal or important contribution as yet, whatever Mr. Browne may eventually work out for himself.[68]

Beyond chastising the artist for his continual dependence on European models, it reveals the critic's failure to distinguish between the goals of abstraction and what was still perceived as design and mere decoration.

Recall that Browne had publicly stated that it was Cubism and Picasso he most admired and that it was Picasso's way of seeing that he strove to comprehend and bring to

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[68] Howard Devree, "A Reviewer's Notebook: Paintings by Modernists among Recently Opened Exhibitions in The Galleries," The New York Times, 5 March 1939 (Sunday ed.), sect. 10, p. 10.

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American art, an endeavor he would continue to uphold. Browne held steadfastly in his efforts to see that his belief in himself and his kind of art would triumph. Yet his dependence on the School of Paris for direction, his emulation of Picasso's subject matter, and his continuing adherence to Synthetic Cubist structure have subsequently become the major obstacles he must confront. These accusations will haunt him and become the major criticism against his work, as Cubism and Picasso himself dwindle in importance to American art.

Browne and his contemporaries keenly felt that there would be a day when nonfigurative painting would come into its own as an important aspect of American Art. Without knowing precisely how or when this acceptance would happen, they believed against obvious and inexorable odds. Their as yet unsuccessful efforts to build a permanent American abstract art based on Cubist principles or nonrepresentational geometric or biomorphic shapes, that tentatively began at the outset of the 1930s, had now grown to a battle that would wage far into the next decade.

While paying rent on his studio apartment, keeping enough to eat on the table and finding the wherewithal to buy paint and canvas were Browne's most immediate concerns, establishing his own style and finding his place in American modernism remained his most elusive goal.

Browne held steadfastly in his belief in himself and that his kind of art would prevail. Shortly, his efforts, and those of a handful of others, to bring advanced painting to the American public, would find their greatest ally and nearly their only one in the most unexpected of sources, the federal government.

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CHAPTER 4

SURVIVING THE GREAT DEPRESSION: THE NEW DEAL ART PROJECT

If I am qualified to exhibit my work in the best shows why does not this great art movement give me assistance? God knows I need it and would gladly take it at half the sum now being given out.[1]

--Byron Browne
From a letter to Juliana Force
1934

In 1933, in an effort to pressure the national government for subsidies, many artists from the New York area banded together to form the Unemployed Artists Association. In late 1934, as times worsened and its members became more radicalized as they themselves became more desperate, they formed the Artists Union. Still, it was not until Roosevelt assumed office in March of 1933, that any widespread relief programs were established to mitigate the predicament of artists; the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP, 1933-1934) became the first of several New Deal efforts designed specifically for them.

Earlier, during the latter part of President Herbert Hoover's administration when America's economic circumstance rose to crisis status, modest efforts attempted to alleviate the destitute condition of artists in New York City. With unemployment climbing (to thirteen million by the end of the year), and banks closing by the hundreds, the Gibson Committee for the Unemployed was formed in 1931. However, according to

[1] Juliana Force, who was the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, had also been appointed the New York Regional Committee Chairman of the Public Works of Art Project, a powerful position. Browne's impassioned letter to her was written in March 1934, after he had been dismissed from the Project.

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painter Joseph Solman, this Committee was little more than a six-month makeshift program of inconsequential accomplishment.[2]

Not only was a deprived class of citizens partially relieved of financial suffering but federal patronage also provided an unprecedented showcase for all kinds of visual art. For American modernists like Browne, it afforded an opportunity for public exposure of progressive ideas that continued to elude mainstream consideration. Had they not had such leverage at this moment, abstractionist painters may well have regressed in discouragement and ceased altogether being artists.[3]

According to Edward Bruce, director of the PWAP, artists were selected first on the basis of need and, second, on their professional qualifications. Complete freedom of expression was permitted within the confines of the sole subject matter assigned to them: the depiction of all phases of American life. Yet the given subject matter begs the question, "How does an abstract work of art depict a "phase of American life?" From the outset, although an open-door policy appeared to have been established, that supposedly included all degrees of abstraction, occasions arose when the work of such artists

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[2] Joseph Solman, "The Easel Division of the WPA Federal Art Project," in The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1972, p. 115. Later, under the supervision of the College Art Association, the Committee funded a second project; this time one hundred destitute artists were given art-related jobs. Still, not two years after the October 1929 stock market crash, their numbers multiplied, as did the ranks of ordinary unemployed American workers.

[3] Artists and creative persons of every persuasion from this generation, be they realist or abstractionist, painter, sculptor or architect, have all said that had it not been for government patronage at this critical time, most would never have been able to maintain their lives as artists and presumably could not have made the effort to try when the war was over. Sculptor Chaim Gross claims that it was the federal arts projects alone that were responsible for allowing him to continue to be a practicing artist and, in this sense, provided for his successful career.

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encountered opposition.[4]

The bias toward nonrepresentational painting partly reflected the pro-Realist attitudes of the PWAP's New York Regional Committee Chairman, Juliana Force, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art.[5] Considered by some to have been selected because of her association with wealthy patrons, her choice for this post disappointed many. Mrs. Force chose as her assistant Lloyd Goodrich, also of the Whitney Museum. Under her lead the PWAP was administered as an autocratic system; she required all artists to explain each work submitted for approval to the Project and she had the power to fire anyone she found displeasing her.

Force's selection as PWAP Regional Chairman especially angered the Unemployed Artists Association. One member, sculptor Ibram Lassaw, recalled that in 1933, its members picketed the Whitney Museum building at 8 West 8th Street, in which Force occupied a well-appointed apartment.[6]

Late in 1933, Browne, inexplicably signing his name George Byron Browne despite

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4 Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, " The American Abstract Artists and the WPA Federal Art Projects," in The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1972. p. 224. Her opinion differs from that of O'Connor's, which stated that the PWAP's idea of quality art required a representational style as well as depiction of American Scene imagery. Isamu Noguchi, the abstract sculptor, never had his designs approved either by the New York Committee or the Washington office. Although it has been said that his rejection occurred because he was not an American citizen, this could not have been the reason; having been born in Los Angeles, Noguchi was American by birth. See Francis V. O'Connor, Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now, Greenwich, Connecticut, New York Graphic Society, 2nd ed., 1971, p. 33.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., The confrontation marked the first time in history any American museum had been so treated; it would not be the last.

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having dropped "George" at an earlier date,[7] wrote directly to Juliana Force, seeking employment in the PWAP. In an appeal for help he complained, ". . . artists who have not even registered are already drawing relief money from the government."[8] He went on to say, "I have stood on line hours in order to register and have received no work. It is very discouraging to me as I have no income. What would you suggest?"[9]

By December 28, 1933 Browne had received and filled out a PWAP application and inquiry as to his training and interests. He submitted three works to the agency to prove his ability: Girl with Fruit, Reclining Figure and Two Figures (present whereabouts of each unknown). In his hand-written response to the Public Works of Art Project inquiry Browne stated, "Am interested in and have made most all my efforts in figure work. Have not done murals but have painted large canvases of a decorative nature. My work belongs to the easel painting class."[10] Evidently he was accepted immediately.

While not stating his leaning toward the abstract or "work of a decorative nature," as he put it, this aspect of his work did not pass unnoticed, for in the files at the National

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7 Browne, as it turns out, did not change his name legally. That he dropped his given name, George, to call himself Byron was always a matter of whim, for he remained on authorized records with the name accorded him at birth. Since he was appealing for federal funding, using his legitimate name would have been the correct decision.

8 Correspondence of the Region 2 Office with Artists, Records of the Public Works of Art Project, Records of the Public Building Service, Record Group 121, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C., 1933. In order to obtain such employment, Browne may have had to produce a birth certificate for proof of citizenship, an important factor in determining eligibility. The document would have reflected his given name and he would have had to continue using it for subsequent government-sponsored programs and correspondence.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid. While "figurative," Browne's subject matter was far from realistic.

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Archives a typewritten sheet of paper contains the following terse notation, "3rd Class." "Has vigorous distorted style which would be very difficult to place in a public building."[11] The word "Easel" had been handwritten across the page; the evaluation was neither signed nor initialed. [12]

Distorted style aside, Mrs. Force placed Browne in the Easel Painting classification and assigned him to paint an upright composition on canvas. At the end of a month he had nearly completed his assignment, as noted in a progress report dated February 1, 1934.[13] Titled Music, Nocturne (present whereabouts unknown), containing figures of large proportions painted in brilliant hues, the five by four foot painting was to have been "suitable also as a mural for a library or music hall."[14]

Browne's success was short-lived. No sooner had he submitted the work than on February 9, a letter arrived terminating his employment, effective the next day. The letter

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[11] Ibid. Browne probably never saw this evaluation of his work.

[12] The easel painting division, in the beginning very small and regarded as an elite group, became a special field for the few lucky enough to get on. A series of grievances against the limitations led to Washington's expansion of the division. Painters as diverse in their stylistic approach as Stuart Davis, Karl Knaths, Arshile Gorky, Louis Schanker, Willem de Kooning, Philip Evergood, Alice Neel, Jack Tworkov, Giorgio Cavallon, Milton Avery, Marsden Hartley, William Baziotes and Byron Browne were among those hired by division.

[13] The National Archives and Records Service, Civil Archives Division, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. According to the last communication from the National Archives, information requested and received on August 21, 1980, final disposition of the work seems not to have been noted. Efforts to locate this 1934 painting have ended unsuccessfully and no photographic copy has been found. According to their records, its subject consisted of several figures gathering wheat in a field, a highly unlikely subject for Browne who, for the sake of a salary, may have sacrificed his overt modernist leanings.

[14] Ibid.

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offered no explanation other than, ". . . owing to restrictions in the number of artists we can employ, and the large number now on our waiting list, we are forced to terminate your employment under this Project, effective Saturday, February 10."[15] The unsigned letter stemmed from the office of the Public Works of Art Project, New York Regional Committee, chaired by Mrs. Force.[16]

In extreme frustration, Browne reciprocated with a letter to Mrs. Force asking if any way could be found to allow him to continue with PWAP. As he was cut off after only four weeks, he asked, "Why is such an unjust attitude taken?" (Fig. 4-1).[17] On March 5, 1934, Browne received the following response

> In reply to your recent letter, the Public Works of Art Project can employ only a limited number of artists, and under our new instructions from Washington we must cut down on our employment week by week from this time on, in line with the general curtailment of Civil Works Administration activities. Under the circumstances we very deeply regret our inability to reconsider our decision.
>
> Very truly yours,
> Juliana Force
> Chairman[18]

Hardly cheered by her reply, Browne wrote yet another letter, a touching appeal for assistance, to the PWAP Regional Office. He detailed his grievances

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15 Op. cit., Correspondence of the Region 2 Office with Artists, Record Group 121, 1934. Mrs. Force's name did not appear on this letter but everyone who received such a letter knew whose decision it was.

16 Ibid.

17 The National Archives and Records Service, Civil Archives Division, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. Correspondence of the Region 2 Office with Artists, Records Group 121, 1934. Browne's letter occupied a brief three paragraphs on a single sheet of paper.

18 Ibid.

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Received your PWAP booklet and read with interest the items in it. My reason for writing is to offer a complaint. The PWAP like the NRA [National Recovery Administration] is not above criticism.

I offer myself as a case in point. The PWAP does not help the real creative artist. In the first place the subject matter is dictated to the artist. As my work contains little or no emphasis on subject matter I was ignored for a long time after the PWAP began to function and then cut off after a period of four weeks. This has also happened in many other cases. So here we have a great art movement in the country with the idea of aiding the artist. As far as I and many others are concerned we might as well be at the North Pole.

One case in particular I know of which I should like to bring to your attention. People receiving incomes from various sources are getting the government check regularly while the ones in need have barely a roof over their heads. This is not laying it on too thick as I know that from first hand information. Now about the case I spoke of. Here is an artist who receives a steady, reliable and comfortable income and is employed by the PWAP. This person's contribution consists of small etchings done from photographs of historical buildings. This, you can readily see, does not come under the heading of creative art. The project, in inspecting the works on the fifteenth, finds this contribution to its liking.

I myself, upon entering the project, set to work to make a large 5-foot canvas of an imaginative nature, and not dealing with any subject matter upon the so-called American scene, which I believe has nothing at all to do with art. My idea must certainly have been disliked by the committee as I was out off a whole week before the 15th. As to the quality of my work: I am the youngest man in America to win an award from the National Academy Exhibition. I had exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, Pennsylvania Art Academy, Art Institute of Chicago, Buffalo Museum, and many other shows in different parts of the country. If I am qualified to exhibit my work in the best shows why does not this great art movement give me assistance. God knows I need it and would gladly take it at half the sum now being given out.

Sincerely,
George Byron Browne[19]

Browne attributed his unfortunate experience solely to his insistence upon abstracted forms. Although his case seemed to have been atypical according to records, the episode reflected similar situations that, with the passage of time, have gone unrecorded and are

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[19] Ibid. Although undated, Browne's letter was probably written in early March, shortly after receiving Mrs. Force's March 5th reply. Her response, if any, remains unlocated.

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largely forgotten. At this time few American artists painted such stylistically advanced work; its reception out of New York City, had Force wished to so locate it, would have been misunderstood or refused. Browne's insistence upon submitting "distorted" or semi-abstract work did not reflect the attitude of all modernists assigned to the PWAP, for many capitulated to the realist tenor of the requirements. Of stubborn Scotch ancestry, he clung tenaciously but steadfastly to his commitment to modernist expression despite the inevitable result.

Meanwhile, General Service Administration records indicate that Browne was given relief employment under the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), from the New York office, effective December 13, 1934. His job category was listed as stone carver, which, translated, meant public park statue washer, at $1.75 per hour. His pay received card indicates that he earned $47.25 that first week and $15.75 the next. His termination then followed until August 1, 1935, when he was hired by the WPA/FAP, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, as an artist, at $95.44 per week.[20]

Browne's letter to Juliana Force, which evidently ended his correspondence with PWAP, reiterated his substantial exhibition record, as he mentioned inclusion in several major and numerous minor shows prior to and since his first one-man show in 1933, reflecting a certain confidence and pride in his achievements within the modernist camp. Thus, his having been so stymied by the Project director's seemingly provincial attitude frustrated Browne even as it bitterly disappointed him. He and others similarly ejected

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[20] I would like to thank Dr. Francis V. O'Connor, an authority on the federal government's 1930s New Deal art projects, for providing fresh material in this period of Browne's life.

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from the PWAP became sufficiently angered to picket yet again the Whitney Museum, which included Mrs. Force's apartment quarters, located on the floor above the street level museum areas and within her sight and hearing distance of their loud megaphones.

The Whitney remained the target of the politically dissident from all sides. According to Avis Berman, at one of many such protest marches, more than one hundred demonstrators, members of the Unemployed Artists Association, assembled in front of the museum, loudly agitating for jobs.[21] The noisy group attracted neighbors and passersby and soon the police arrived in squad cars. At their approach, the protestors pushed their way through the Whitney Museum doors, only to have the police escort them back out. No riot ensued but one artist, reportedly Browne, was struck with a billy-club. Eventually, four protest leaders, including Browne, were permitted to reenter for a confrontation with Juliana Force. Their meeting lasted ninety minutes, after which the artists returned to their headquarters and drafted a list of eleven demands. At the top of the agenda was the issue of immediate employment for all artists who registered for unemployment, and retroactive pay for those periods when out of work. Moreover, they demanded permanent free exhibition space for all artists.

Additionally, they sent Mrs. Force a telegram accusing her of "callous disregard for hundreds of destitute artists."[22] Their boisterous hollering, "We want Jobs!" night after

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21 Avis Berman, Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art, Atheneum, New York, 1990, pp. 356-357. Berman mistakenly writes that these demonstrators were members of the Artists Union. They could not have been. The Artists Union was not formed until late 1934; the PWAP disbanded in April 1934 and with its demise Mrs. Force ceased to be a power within the government relief projects. Artists Union members would not have picketed her for jobs she was in no position to provide.

22 Ibid., p. 357.

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night beneath her bedroom windows prevented her sleep. As most were habitually out of work, they continued to picket on a regular basis, which, more than inconveniencing her, began to annoy Force to the point where she took strong measures of retaliation. Although by this time the PWAP was no longer headquartered at the Whitney, having been transferred to the Municipal Building on March 3, 1934, Mrs. Force called it quits and abruptly closed the entire museum on March 27, six weeks prior to its normal seasonal closing, for the museum continued to be targeted by both Right and Left factions.[23] Despite all their efforts, the PWAP, with Edward Bruce as the agency's director, officially disbanded on April 28, 1934. Hundreds of artists were dismissed from the payrolls each week until none was left to fire.

One of Browne's acquaintances from his student days at the National Academy, Ilya Bolotowsky, recounted an incident, directly related to one of the Whitney protests, that occurred sometime during the short existence of the PWAP. He had just managed to get himself hired by Mrs. Force, at thirty-eight dollars a week when

> On the same day I was told that I was on the job, the other group who were not on the job, because they never got the idea of using a phony postcard, were picketing outside.[24] And I joined them. People told me I was crazy because Mrs. Force was looking out of the window and she would recognize my mustache (which was smaller then), but I felt it was a matter of duty.
>
> Max Spivak was there actually leading this whole thing. And also Byron Browne. And I don't know whether Balcomb Greene was there but he might have been. There were a few others. Anyhow, I noticed that the leader, Max Spivak, when the riot squads arrived, was around the corner discussing some very abstract matters very passionately so you could see that he had nothing to do with it except in a very, very spiritual sort of way. But I, being old-fashioned, thought it was my duty to walk toward the cops. The cops were drunk and they didn't like their job and so they were

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23 Ibid.

24 Bolotowsky had faked his card ordering him to report for work.

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> smacking people around, but they let me pass and I walked back and forth making a nuisance of myself.
>
> I remember they especially went after Browne because he was a good-looking boy and he looked like a tall policeman, and even though he was a husky, big fellow he would make just a nice target for their clubs. Mrs. Force it seems was in hysterics. That was the beginning of the PWAP. Some of these (PWAP) paintings now, I think, are in the Corcoran Gallery Collection. They are kept in a cellar I suppose.[25]

It should be remembered that strike breaking and the use of no-holds-barred physical violence were commonplace occurrences during the 1930s but not for those in the arts.

The most effective of the federal relief agencies, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), followed the demise of the Public Works of Art Project. It also had the greatest longevity, surviving well into the Second World War, offering opportunities not only to visual artists but to musicians, playwrights, photographers and writers as well. Browne and thousands more were able to remain practicing artists because of the financial assistance it provided.[26]

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[25] Interview with Ilya Bolotowsky, Paul Cummings, for The Archives of American Art, New York City, 24, 31 March 1968, in "Adventures with Bolotowsky," Archives of American Art Journal, Vol. 22, no. 1, 1982, p. 20. A visit to the archives of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., determined that they owned no work by Browne. Most of their Depression era exhibitions were of the American Scene, Regional and Social Realist types and, except for the 1929 exhibition, Browne's work did not appear at the Corcoran again until 1982, more than twenty years after his death. See the complete list of Browne's exhibitions in the Bibliography.

[26] Government relief for artists (and other segments of the population), while helpful to many, did not mitigate circumstances for all. As late as 1939, poignant notices such as the following could be found on a daily basis in every newspaper: "Artist Ends Life," "Lloyd Pennington, 20, an artist whose total wealth apparently was 25 cents and several pawn tickets, committed suicide by gas today in his furnished room at 117 E. 19th St." New York Journal and American, 7 August 1939, p.3.

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Cooperative effort generally characterized most WPA/FAP work.[27] While some painters for instance were awarded their own mural assignments, most who were placed in that division found themselves spending long months not on their own projects but assisting highly skilled muralists, as did Browne at one point.

A positive result of the ensuing mural "renaissance" allowed a number of young modernists the opportunity to experience step by step the creation of a large work, demonstrating their ideas on expanses of public city walls.[28] In this way their work reached a wider, more permanent audience than through short-lived exhibitions. Few American painters had been trained in fresco techniques, a direct on-the-wall process in wet plaster, so those given their own mural assignments most often used oil on canvas, producing the work in their studios for later attachment to the walls of buildings. Byron Browne, Ilya Bolotowsky, Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Karl Knaths, Willem de Kooning, Louis Schanker and John Von Wicht were among those who initiated American abstract

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27 Another important aspect of "the Project", as it was popularly known, involved giving art lessons to the public. Hundreds more artists, who could not be hired as art makers, were put on the rolls as instructors. Still, the WPA/FAP placed its strongest emphasis on mural decorations for public buildings, stressing social content, as typified by contemporary examples of the famed Mexican muralists.

28 Credit must also be given to the Treasury Section for its major contribution to the American mural renaissance. The Section, directed by Edward Bruce, awarded commissions for murals and sculptures for post offices and other federal buildings. From October 1934 to 1938, the agency was called the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture; from 1938 to 1939, the Treasury Section of Fine Arts; from 1939 to July 1943, the Section of Fine Arts of the Public Buildings Administration of the Federal Works Agency. Altogether, 1,116 murals and 301 sculptures were commissioned; works were selected by anonymous competitions. Information published in: New Deal for Art: The Government Art Projects of the 1930s with Examples from New York City and State, Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, essays, Hamilton, NY, Gallery Association of New York, 1977, p. xii. Browne never participated in the Section competitions, for modern art styles were unwelcome and he refused to compromise.

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mural painting.[29]

In many ways, Depression era painters who worked abstractly were the most fortunate of all artists assigned to this public assistance art program. Considering how few artists currently worked in a nonrepresentational manner, the number accepted for mural assignments by various federally-sponsored programs in comparison to the total output was substantial, marking a milestone in the history of American art. Their struggle for acceptance of the new art as well as recognition for themselves might have taken much longer had they not been encouraged to pursue such goals.

Burgoyne Diller, who headed the WPA/FAP Mural Division in New York from its inception in August 1935 to its demise in January 1943, was himself an abstractionist.[30] Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne recalled that Diller not only encouraged abstraction in his mural assignments but openly sought transfers of abstract artists to his division. Most important, he had sufficient influence to persuade the New York City Art Commission administrators and many private sponsors to accept abstract works in public buildings.[31]

Being in the good graces of such a director was important to Browne, for the Mural Division offered some of the finest creative opportunities of the 1930s; it should be counted as one of the few positive aspects of the Depression. Susan C. Larsen, writing about the abstract murals placed in Brooklyn's Williamsburg Housing Project, Rikers

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29 Joseph Solman, "The Easel Division of the WPA Federal Art Project," in The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1972, p. 116.

30 Burgoyne Diller, "Abstract Murals," in Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Boston, New York Graphic Society, (1973), 1975, pp. 69-71.

31 Browne, "The American Abstract Artists," p. 227.

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Island buildings, Newark and La Guardia airports, Radio Station WNYC, the 1939 New York World's Fair and numerous other public buildings, speculates that they might have turned out to be conservative, pedestrian works geared to the prevalent, aesthetic taste of the majority had the Mural Division been placed in the hands of one less secure of his own artistic values.[32]

In late 1936, a WPA committee decided to place nonrepresentational murals in the social rooms of each housing unit of the newly constructed Williamsburg Public Housing Project in Brooklyn, a low income apartment complex designed by William Lescaze. Aside from affording employment to Browne and eleven other abstractionists, the commission offered one of the rare early opportunities for public exposure of this still unfamiliar painting style. Each was to prepare two preliminary studies from which one per artist would be translated to full size. Several of the twelve chosen were recognized painters, including Francis Criss, Stuart Davis, Paul Kelpe and Jan Matulka, yet it was the unseasoned among the group, Byron Browne, Ilya Bolotowsky, Harry Bowden, William de Kooning, Balcomb Greene, George McNeil, Eugene Morly and Albert Swinden, who received special critical recognition for their efforts.[33] All had their mural studies placed on exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art except Morly, who had been given his assignment too late for inclusion.

From September 14 through October 12, 1936, the Museum of Modern Art

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[32] Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group," p. 196. For a discussion of the Williamsburg Housing Project murals, see Chapter 5.

[33] Burgoyne Diller, "Abstract Murals," in Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project, Francis V. O'Connor, ed., Boston, New York Graphic Society, (1973), 1975, p. 70. Diller believed that nonobjective subject matter would be better suited for the recreation and social rooms, whose walls had been designed to accommodate the addition of mural decoration.

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sponsored a large exhibition of oil paintings, works on paper, graphic arts, sculpture and mural designs, produced by artists nationwide who had been assigned to the Federal Art Project, a government-sponsored relief organization. Titled New Horizons in American Art, the show documented the Project's first year of activity.[34] The mural studies of the eleven designers, pioneer abstractionists all, were included in the special Williamsburg Federal Housing Project section of the exhibition. Although Browne eventually enlarged one study to an oil on canvas panel nine and one-half by fifteen feet, in preparation for placement at the Housing Project, as had each participant in anticipation of being chosen for the project, only works by four of the painters, five panels in all, were subsequently installed; Browne's panel was not among them.

For Byron Browne, representation of one of his two mural study designs for the housing projects's social rooms marked his initial appearance at the prestigious museum, as it did for all but two of the muralists, Jan Matulka and Stuart Davis, each of whom had had their work exhibited there before.[35]

Both Holger Cahill, the Federal Art Project's national director, who wrote the introduction to the catalogue, Dorothy Miller, director of the exhibition, and the Museum's director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., believed without elaborating any further that the

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[34] New Horizons in American Art, Holger Cahill, intro., New York, Museum of Modern Art, September 14-October 12, 1936, p. 7.

[35] Browne would not show again at the Museum of Modern Art until 1951; 1952 marked his third and final inclusion in an exhibition organized by the museum during his lifetime.

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show revealed "a view toward new horizons," thus establishing its title.[36] However, the only nonfigurative works in the entire show, which was comprised of pedestrian, realistic depictions of dust bowl farms, small town folk and local scenery from cross sections of the nation, were the abstract color studies of the proposed mural designs by the eleven New York painters for the community social rooms at the Williamsburg Federal Housing Project.

Although the muralists were instructed to provide two designs, each painter was allowed to show only one, each of identical size, fourteen by twenty inches; as well, all eleven were assigned the homogeneous title, Abstraction.[37] Not a single mural study was reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, which was filled with the pictures of artworks by others, as if having done so might somehow have upset the cohesive impact of the figurative work, the major part and entire point of what otherwise was an extremely conservative show. Browne's two unlocated gouache color studies from 1936, copied from black and white estate record photographs, are the only reproductions on record, Abstraction (Fig. 4-2) and Abstraction, (Fig. 4-3). While no one recorded the coloration, their nonfigurative shapes combine hard-edged geometry coupled with whimsical Miró-like configurations.

Unfortunately, installation of one of Browne's panels never took place. In contrast, murals by Ilya Bolotowsky, Balcomb Greene, Paul Kelpe (in his case both panels were

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[36] Ibid., p. 40. Barr's bland comment belied his principal intention, to reveal what he believed were major trends in contemporary American art, and included abstraction only reluctantly.

[37] The enlargements differed slightly in size. The exhibition catalogue printed measurements of each small study as if it were fully realized. For instance, Browne's mural brought to full size would have measured nine and one-half by fifteen feet; Stuart Davis's mural would have been fourteen and one-half feet long and Bolotowsky's, the longest at seventeen and one-half by seven feet.

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enlarged and situated) and Albert Swinden were installed. Decades later, after viewing the reproductions of Browne's two study panels, George McNeil, who had also enlarged his abstract mural design for the Williamsburg Project, believed that Stuart Davis's Trees and El, 1931, (Fig. 6-2) was the work included in the museum exhibition.[38] The murals by Davis and Criss are currently in public collections; the status of the majority of those remaining has not been fully established.[39]

Following a lengthy search during the late 1960s, the New York Housing Authority uncovered and restored the five still-extant panels, long believed lost or destroyed. Of the twelve murals originally enlarged and submitted, only one each by Bolotowsky, Greene and Swinden and two panels by Kelpe were found at the housing development.[40] Since no panel by Browne was discovered and those connected with the recovery of the artwork had never encountered his name in researching old records, the New York Art Commission

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38 In August 1980, in a telephone conversation with George McNeil, the painter surmised that Browne's mural, like his, had never been installed but he had no idea where the paintings were or if they still existed. He recalled "storing" his panel in the hallway of his studio, leaving it there when he went away to serve in World War II. It was gone when he returned at the end of the war and he never saw or heard of its whereabouts since. The several murals that were installed at Williamsburg were subsequently covered by many layers of paint or ruined by graffiti from the housing project's uncaring and irresponsible tenants.

39 Murals by the four painters whose work had been installed, Ilya Bolotowsky, Balcomb Greene, Paul Kelpe (two panels), and Albert Swinden, were later reclaimed, restored and placed on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art on March 30, 1990, for long-term loans to the museum by the New York City Housing Authority. See: The Williamsburg Murals: A Rediscovery. Barbara Dayer Gallati, essay, New York, Brooklyn Museum of Art, March 30, 1990, continuing.

40 That the painters originally had been asked to prepare two preliminary studies may account for the two installed panels by Kelpe. It would seem that at some point he enlarged his second panel and someone decided to use both.

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concluded that it was it unlikely his work was ever installed anywhere in the complex.[41] This same lack of evidence also suggests that works by the remaining eight painters had never been placed anywhere in the complex. It should be noted that the Williamsburg murals are considered to be the first nonobjective wall paintings created in the United States and as such, possess considerable historical value.[42] This exhibition's cross sampling of American art reemphasized the strength of American Scene painting, above all, that of Regionalism. Progressive abstract art such as Browne's appeared out of place among the dozens of cheerless depictions of ordinary aspects of life, much of it, given the times, dreary and depressing. It was obvious to those struggling for recognition of an alternative approach to the "times" that support for anything close to a new modern movement could not be counted on from other regions of the country either. Alternatives to their entrenched conservatism were nonexistent, for painters from such regions who desired change had already fled eastward. The struggle for abstraction, centered in New

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41 In time the five panels fell sorry victim to passive neglect over the decades. The rooms had been converted into offices or storage areas where the artwork remained ignored and eventually obliterated under many layers of paint, forgotten except for reputation by art historians. The restoration was made particularly difficult in the case of those by Bolotowsky and Greene, for much of the original paint surface had disintegrated; extensive passages of the canvases had to be in-painted to bring their designs to a reliable approximation of their original appearance. The painstaking rescue process included locating, documenting the works and obtaining funding for their costly restoration, undertaken by Margaret Watherston, Inc.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the mural exhibition organizer, Barbara Dayer Gallati, Associate Curator, American Painting and Sculpture Department, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, for her helpful information. Ken Martin, of the New York City Housing Authority, under whose direction the location and rescue was accomplished, kindly took time to assure me that Browne's mural had never been installed. To this day its whereabouts remain unknown.

42 It should be understood that the enlargements were all prepared in the painters's studios in oil on canvas panels and then subsequently installed; they were not painted on site.

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York, remained a nascent one.

To make matters more discouraging, Edward Alden Jewell, of The New York Times, published a scathing review of the exhibition, accusing the Works Progress Administration of bringing into existence "depressingly worthless," and "perfectly terrible art," and it would seem that his comments included the abstract paintings as well.[43] Never did he discuss the one ray of sunshine that might have been found in the little sub-section of abstract muralists's entries. Still, since the overwhelming numbers of paintings were of the realistic narrative type, the fact of Jewell's condemnation could also have been taken as a positive sign, for at last someone of authority had publicly spoken out against them.

In the following Sunday's Times, Jewell was democratic enough to print excerpts of Stuart Davis's lengthy, two-column rebuttal defending the Federal Art Project exhibition. As the National Executive Secretary of the National Executive Board of the American Artists' Congress, he had plenty to say. Airing his articulate views in Jewell's widely read art columns created far better publicity and visitor traffic for the show than it otherwise would have garnered.[44] Davis, egalitarian to the core, defended all of the art, not just the abstract entries in which he was included, when he stated

> American society had decided against you, Mr. Jewell, because it advocates, at least in theory, that the fruit of the manual and intellectual labor of the people belong to them. Your conception that no purpose is served by the wide distribution of what you term 'average works of art,' would have more chance of finding favor under a Fascist regime wherein

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[43] Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art: Two Notable Early Shows: Extending Our Horizons: A Year's Federal Art Activities Surveyed in Museum of Modern Art Exhibition," The New York Times, (Sun. ed.), 20 September 1936, sect. 9, p. 8.

[44] Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art: New Activities of Many Fronts: Opinion Under Postage: American Artists's Congress Apparently Wants Project Unreservedly Praised," The New York Times, (Sun. ed.), 27 September 1936, sect. 10, p. 9. At this time the Federal Art Project had 5,300 artists on its rolls.

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> each class is told exactly what it may or may not own. American society is based on the belief that the 'average' person has equal rights with the 'above average,' in certain basic matters such as education and freedom of thought and expression. Surely you would not deny the right of the average American to participate in the artistic development of the average American artist. We believe that special excellences in art develop from a broad base of art production and that the possibility of the achievement of the great masterpiece is directly dependent on, and is thus and integral part of, the work of many artists working toward a more or less common objective. But it is indeed an error because of this fact, to seek to promote art in terms of masterpieces. Such a practice has meaning only for the art dealer and speculator.[45]

In truth, the inclusion of the abstractionists's mural designs had been the choice neither of the trustees nor of the director of the Museum of Modern Art, but added to the show only because they represented paintings produced as a result of social misfortune, the Depression. The museum's acceptance of the idea of American abstraction for its own worth on its own terms would not happen with this exhibition nor within the decade.

In late 1938 or early 1939, Browne, de Kooning and others were assigned to assist Fernand Léger on his mural commission for the façade of the French shipping line pier on New York's Hudson River. Léger, a French citizen, had been awarded his commission through the auspices of the WPA/FAP where only the presence of American assistants made it legally possible for him to be hired. As head of that agency's Mural Division, Burgoyne Diller chose Byron Browne, de Kooning and other American Project artists to assist the famed French painter. Unfortunately, when Léger's leftist political leanings became known, the plan failed to progress beyond the preliminary drawing stages. Diller recalled

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[45] Ibid. The sentences quoted were compiled from several paragraphs of Davis's extremely long, detailed rebuttal, which Mr. Jewell seems to have printed nearly verbatim. While brief by comparison to the whole that comprised Jewell's entire Sunday art review, these excerpts represent the core of his argument. Davis singled out no participant in the vast exhibition.

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> Fernand Léger wanted to paint--above all to have a mural in America. He's never had one in Europe, and they thought there was a wonderful possibility of his doing something in America. No one wanted to take it upon themselves--private industry or anything of the sort . . . . So that Léger was unable to obtain anything. They got in contact with the Project [W.P.A. Mural Division] as a possibility, so that after discussions with Audrey McMahon [Supervisor of New York City, New York State and New Jersey W.P.A./F.A.P.; the New York City W.P.A./F.A.P. functioned independently as a separate program], who thoroughly approved of the idea that something, might be done on the Project. It was turned over to me to see if it would be possible. We couldn't employ him as an artist on the Project either as relief or non-relief because he was not a citizen. But on the other hand we had an excuse for using him because of his name, and so on, and the fact that a good many American artists might like to work with him on a mural, so it would give them employment.
>
> We decided that if we could find a place where we could do a job that would employ a group of American artists that might take the same theme that he would take . . . he could collaborate with them, and he could more or less establish a theme and then they could do whatever variations on that theme that they pleased. It might make a very interesting project. It was exciting for all of us to do it, and dealing with Léger was a very great pleasure. We got a group of artists to work with him. He came down to the studio area we had at the time. He worked with these artists and then he drew lots at his own studio, until finally we developed this series of sketches for this mural. It had been suggested that perhaps the French Line pier would be good. It was natural for Léger, in collaboration with American artists, to do decorations for the French Line pier. We took the presentation sketches to the Line's office and saw . . . (the director). I introduced him to Léger, and he said, `I know that man,' and started off in a tirade in French . . . (He) practically told him: `You worker, you communist.' Léger was terrifically indignant about the whole thing . . . so we picked up and walked out. That was the end of the project.[46]

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[46] Burgoyne Diller, Tape Recorded Interview, in Garnett McCoy, "The Artist Speaks, Part V: Poverty, Politics and the Artist 1930-1945," Art in America, Vol. 53, no. 4, August-September 1965, p. 99. Diller recorded these reminiscences for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, in 1964, one year before his death.

Diller was mistaken when he stated that Léger had "never had one [mural] in Europe . . . ." He had produced several totally abstract hard-edged murals in Purist manner from 1924 through 1926 and his mural, Le Balustre, was part of the architecture of a house-as-machine in the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, designed by Le Corbusier for the French section of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, which opened in April 1925, in Paris. Additionally, Léger painted a nonfigurative mural to decorate the entrance hall of the French Embassy for the same Exposition. Léger also executed a mural project for the Brussels World Fair in 1935, the first of a series of such projects for fair pavilions that continued through 1939: Palais de la Découverte, Paris, 1937, and the New York World's Fair, 1939.

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With the passage of time it was believed that the pier project's demise occurred before Browne and others had executed any studies for Léger. However, years later, several of Léger and Browne's color sketches that may have been executed for this project have sporadically surfaced, namely at the Joan Washburn Gallery, New York, and at Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses. Subject matter consisted of semi-abstract nautical themes, such as coiled boat lines, buoys and anchors in prominent French flag colors, red, white and blue.

Simon Willmoth, a British scholar, believed that a considerable body of work had already been produced by the Americans prior to the project's cancellation. In his interview with Willmoth, de Kooning said that he had proceeded with work before it was canceled.[47] Consequently, it is likely that Browne had also. Already extremely prolific, and enthusiastic over the opportunity to work with the famed French painter, Browne would have produced ideas immediately.

Small studies by Léger bearing various dates from around this time, works with nautical themes in color on paper, occasionally appear in auction sales and in gallery exhibitions in New York. Conceivably, some may have resulted from preliminary work on this aborted French Shipping Line project, for they are quickly-executed studies that

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[47] Simon Willmoth, from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England, who is currently writing a dissertation on Léger in America, spent several months in research in the United States during 1982. Most of Léger's mural studies have been dated 1940. Since he did not return to this country for his fourth trip until November 1940, Willmoth believes the earlier date, 1938 or early 1939 (Léger left for Paris from the United States in March 1939), is more correct. Moreover, Léger is known to have received several American commissions for murals, not only those for the French Line. Because of his strong influence on Browne's WNYC mural in 1938, the earlier attribution seems the more accurate. Many thanks to Simon Willmoth, Joan Washburn, Susan Seidel and Larry Saffire for sharing their knowledge of Léger's work in America with me.

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would suffice in large format for murals. Although one would find difficulty proving their American provenance, it seems logical that most were, for their geographic location in New York. It would follow that if Léger had found time to prepare studies, so then had his assistants, who would have been eager to work up examples to please their celebrated "boss."

Ill-fated, many murals executed under WPA/FAP assignments were either destroyed or badly damaged, for with the passage of time they were considered of so little value that their canvases were frequently recycled as pipe insulation. Two that Browne painted in New York survive in situ, perhaps for the reason that their material was not canvas and not easily recycled: the Rima Mosaic panel, 1936 (Fig. 4-4), and Abstraction (a.k.a. Architectural Views) 1938, paint on acoustical pegboard, (Figs. 4-5, 4-6 and 4-7), a commission received for New York City's Municipal Radio Broadcasting Station, WNYC, located on the twenty-fifth floor of the Municipal Building, 1 Centre Street. Browne executed the mosaic when he was on the WPA/FAP mural project and it remains his only work in this medium.

The first known indication of Browne's curiosity for indigenous primitive forms was manifested in this large mosaic panel, mounted on heavy board, that depicted a female figure in the company of a large jungle bird. The dramatic, highly stylized and semi-abstract imagery, Rima Mosaic, 1936, seemed specifically designed to accommodate the tiny, brilliantly-colored tesserae stones of the ancient craft of mosaic construction. The panel was eventually placed in the United States Passport Office in

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Rockefeller Center, where it remains on view today.[48]

These sharp-edged configurations of a woman feeding maize to a large bird perched on her shoulder reflect motifs from a literary source, William Henry Hudson's haunting novel, Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest.[49] Browne's fictional subject involves the heroine protagonist of South American Indian descent, a shy young girl whose only friends were the forest birds. The theme would later hold special significance for him, as Hudson's romance, steeped in native tribal lore, fired Browne's imagination enough to have been the catalyst for his lifelong attraction to women with companion birds as subject matter.

The design reflects affinities with Pre-Conquest imagery, suggesting a composite derived from what Browne knew of designs prevalent in Aztec, Mayan and Peruvian civilizations from books that were found on his library shelves. As well, he used the pages of discarded books as scrapbooks for pasting in photos and reproductions of artworks, thus

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48 This mural is in perfect condition following repairs by the artist in 1957, the date the mosaic was placed for the first time in a permanent location. An additional cleaning and restoration in 1990, followed redecoration of the Passport offices. For years the work lay in a government warehouse until the Passport Agency's director unearthed it and ordered Browne's mosaic placed in this the principal office in New York City for obtaining such documents. The current director was unable to locate any information pertaining to the mosaic's commission, its placement in storage or how it fell to a Passport Office agent to rediscover this panel. Note that it was reported to me in June 2002 that this panel has not been on view; no one of the guards at the International Building was familiar with the artwork. Checking into the matter, it turns out that the former Passport Office was moved approximately five years ago to the New York Emergency Passport Office at 376 Hudson Street in downtown Manhattan. Browne's Rima Mosaic panel was also relocated to that office.

49 The novel was first published in 1916, in New York, and reissued in 1959, and several times subsequently; it was also made into a motion picture. A copy of the 1916 edition was among Browne's library books. It is interesting to note that this art form also attracted Jackson Pollock, who executed a single example, Mosaic, ca. 1938-41. Pollock's figures were more abstract than Browne's.

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making the recycled book a visual reference tool. The work of Aztec craftsmen, noted especially for their beautiful mosaic objects, such as ceremonial knives and funerary masks, filled these pages, as did reproductions of their figure-saturated codices and fabrics, leaving little doubt that the Rima Mosaic was a summary of all the images that Browne had accumulated. That he never created another work in the medium may have reflected his discouragement in knowing that his initial effort was placed in storage and forgotten for over twenty years.

Browne's WNYC mural endures as an outstanding example of pure abstraction at its most austere. Neoplastic elements found in the work of Mondrian were at first thought to be Browne's reference but that remains too simplistic an explanation. Mondrian, who spent most of the war years in Manhattan, died in the city in 1944. While Browne and many young modernists were briefly stimulated by the austere intellectualism of Mondrian's style, its severity and "emotionless" approach were unsympathetic to Browne's more romantic nature, and he did not adhere for long to its dictates.[50] Logically, one should turn to Léger, Browne's former employer, albeit briefly, for primary stimulus.

The vertical and horizontal right-angled bars of color in three early Léger mural compositions (Figs. 4-8, 4-9 & 4-10), closely echo similar shapes in Browne's work; even his subtitle, Architectural Views, repeats in part one of Léger's L'Architecture. When one recalls that at this time Browne was assisting him on his French Line mural, natural

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50 On February 18, 1953, in his letter to Lawrence Campbell, art reviewer and Archivist for the Art Students League, who was compiling information from the painter for an article he would write, Browne, wrote, "Please don't mention Mondrian in connection with my work as I doubt that there is much bearing if any on it." Ilya Bolotowsky remains one of the few artists who, early on, embraced Mondrian's Neoplastic ideals; he never swerved from this commitment. Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glarner and Harry Holtzman were others exceptionally influenced by the work of Mondrian, creating a small but vigorous movement of their own in this country.

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curiosity would have led him to research the published spectrum of Léger's work in an effort to better understand what might be expected on his assignment, not only for him but for his WNYC commission. It is to Léger's rectangle-filled mural compositions of 1924-1925, rather than the softer biomorphism that characterized some of his later painting models that Browne turned. Under the foregoing circumstances, the inspiration of Léger would seem inevitable, while Mondrian, no matter the period, presents a far less likely archetype.

Upon entering Studio D, a small space considering its function, ones eye is immediately drawn to Browne's large mural, which nearly covers one wall and constitutes the focal point of the WNYC broadcasting room. Aside from an overwhelming nostalgia experienced upon entering the room, what with the baby grand piano, tall microphone and sheet music stands of a bygone era still in use, one was struck by the mural's overt monochromatic beige and browns in blocks of solid color with wide and narrow black bars and two right triangles slicing vertically through the work, interrupting its overall tranquility.

Browne allows but a single circle to break the overwhelming angularity of the composition. All is muted, flattened and Bauhaus crisp, a rule and compass framework of precisely balanced shapes that anticipate the impersonal hard-edged abstraction of the 1960s. The imposing work marks a singularly powerful one for Browne, who concurrently was beginning to soften his geometry and ease figurative elements back into his easel painting.

Examination reveals that a good part of the mural's ground, rather than canvas or the wall itself, consists of a newly developed material called acoustical pegboard, sheets of small, closely spaced circular open perforations into which the paint sank. The board

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contributed a better quality sound to broadcasts emanating from the studio. Wherever Browne encountered the perforated surface, he simply continued, as he had on the plaster skin. The result of pigment sinking into and sometimes only partially filling the small openings or holes, lends the surface a gritty texture, as the detail illustrates (Fig. 4-11).

Subsequent abuse through irresponsibly-placed electrical outlets, decades of abrasion from furniture pushed against it, and New York soot, have marred the mural's pristine beauty, leaving it badly in need of restoration.[51] Browne signed and dated the mural 1938; the final approval, installation and presentation did not take place until the following year.

Edward Alden Jewell, who covered the dedication ceremony for The New York Times, stated that Browne's mural, while neat and trim, had been painted out of an

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51 In the mid-1980s, the old radio broadcasting rooms underwent modernization to accommodate television equipment; all but Louis Schanker's mural were removed. Byron Browne's mural, so large it had to be divided into four sections, was restored and placed on view at the last moment (too late for catalogue citation) in The Machine Age in America exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, October 17, 1986-February 16, 1987, on loan from the City of New York. After the show Browne's mural was returned on March 10, 1988 to the Municipal Building, twelfth floor north, in a large crate marked Department of General Services, City of New York. Schanker's work, never placed in one of the studios but in the reception entrance room, was restored in situ, vandalized, restored again and boarded over for "protection," which is its current status. John Von Wicht's mural was removed, restored and displayed in the Brooklyn Museum Machine Age show, also too late for catalogue inclusion. Stuart Davis's work, Mural for Studio B, had been removed in 1965, restored and placed on loan by the City of New York to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it is currently. The murals will not be returned to their former walls and, while safe, their future is undetermined. The New York City Art Commission, under whose jurisdiction the murals are, is itself in the process of moving and the murals will probably go into storage until a permanent home for them can be found through the Adopt-A-Mural program. The Alan Farancz Company undertook the restoration. I thank Charles Corcoran, Senior Vice President of Station WNYC and Liz Reynolds, Registrar, Brooklyn Museum, for taking time to update me on the status of the murals.

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academic sensibility, one by no means American.[52] His reference implied no political insinuation as to its "un-Americanness," only that he recognized its affinity to European modernism; the work did not express "American" type themes. Jewell, in his dismay that the work of the modernists was not of a more figurative nature, therefore, more "American," instantly politicizes his point, once again dredging to the surface the tiresome, decade-old antagonism for Browne and all modernists, that of nonfiguration in opposition to realism. Then, yielding but slightly, the critic conceded that abstract murals were particularly suited for use in modern broadcasting studios, where everything had to contribute to quiet concentration and uninterrupted functioning of the broadcast. Jewell's tokenism was hardly encouraging for future abstract mural commissions.

In contrast to the three other WNYC murals, commissioned at the same time, those by Stuart Davis, Louis Schanker and John Von Wicht, Browne's Abstraction in Studio D stands apart for its pure, nonobjective content. Figurative aspects are obvious in John Von Wicht's geometric Abstraction (Fig. 4-12), for Studio C, with its indirect references to phonograph records and album covers, Louis Schanker's elongated lobby mural, Music (Figs. 4-13 and 4-14), the most "figurative" of all, that compacts depictions of every conceivable aspect of the music industry in one continuous symbolic story, and Stuart Davis's brightly-colored lively composition, Mural for Studio B, (Fig. 4-15), featuring

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[52] Edward Alden Jewell, " Abstraction and Music: Newly Installed WPA Murals at Station WNYC Raise Anew Some Old Questions," The New York Times, 6 August 1939, sect. 9, p. 7. The murals were dedicated over the radio airwaves in a broadcast emanating from one of the three studios and each of the four painters was interviewed. Each had been assigned one room and worked out independently his own design to the common theme of some aspect of music. Together they planned the ornamentation of the entire station, coordinating interior decoration and furniture with the architecture. Apparently, the muralists completed their commissions at different times, accounting for the late dedication.

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juxtaposed depictions of abstracted yet distinguishable objects related to the operation of a radio station: a yellow saxophone with red finger keys blaring a red musical note, radio waves and an antenna, electrical symbols and a technician's operating panel board, all imaginatively exaggerated rather than factual.[53]

Another feature of the broadcast studios was that of the special flooring designs. All studios housing the new murals had the same striking pattern in black and white linoleum tiles, as seen in the model room and floor plan of Studio C, with John von Wicht's mural study in the background, (Fig. 4-16). Browne's Studio D original floor pattern had been covered by plain linoleum tiles sometime in the 1940s, as seen in Fig. 4-5. The original floor pattern is still hidden from view by a layer of (protective?) nondescript tiles.[54]

Probably finished before the mural installation, its formal, black and white geometric pattern features a motif of large circles and elongated black bars similar to those of a music staff. Its striking design may have prompted Browne to compliment it with an equally severe geometricized mural. When viewed collectively, as the photograph demonstrates, floor and wall motifs play off and balance each other harmoniously.

Late in the Depression, with Europe already at war, and Americans nervous that their own country might become embroiled, the New York World's Fair of 1939-40, provided welcome release from the mounting tensions. As well, the fair offered

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53 For a discussion of this mural in Davis's own words, see Diane Kelder, Stuart Davis, Documentary Monographs in Modern Art, New York, Praeger, 1971, p. 92.

54 Since I had already seen plans of the original design the change was easily spotted the moment I walked into the room. The glue from several linoleum pieces had loosened and, prying beneath and lifting them with a house key, I could see remnants of the authentic early pattern, in what looked like good condition, leading me to believe the original was intact under its inferior overlay.

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employment opportunities for hundreds of artists; those skilled in mural decoration were especially sought. The fair's key promotional theme, the streamlined, world-of-tomorrow, gave artists wide leeway for imaginative decorations. In keeping with this futuristic tone, the Medicine and Public Health Pavilion designers, completing a structure that represented one of the most conservative of fields, surprisingly commissioned abstract artwork for its embellishment.

The WPA Federal Art Project with the support of the American Medical Association, as if to proclaim abstract concepts as indicative of future medical discoveries, sponsored eight large modernist mural panels, each measuring ten by twenty feet, for the Hall of Medicine; Byron Browne, Ilya Bolotowsky, Balcomb Greene and Louis Schanker's examples were considered the most stylistically advanced of all the fair's artists. While two panels depicted themes free of subject matter, Browne's interpretation (Fig. 4-17) and that of Schanker's retained nebulous references to the object.[55] All four had been designed to

> perform the function of decorative, visual spots in an interior filled with concrete, realistic exhibits. Thus the visitor will come into the main entrance hall, see the large murals, study them as closely as he chooses and then turn into auxiliary galleries where he will experience the psychological relief of seeing large areas of color which do not demand close attention but which will afford an uncomplicated sensuous pleasure.[56]

The tone of this statement, explaining the use of abstract and semi-abstract motifs, operates more on the order of an apologia. That the murals demanded little of the

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55 Francis V. O'Connor, "The Usable Future: The Role of Fantasy in the Promotion of a Consumer Society for Art," in Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair, 1939/40, Helen A. Harrison, curator, New York, Queens Museum, Queens Museum and New York University, June 21-November 30, 1980, p. 63.

56 Elizabeth McCausland, "Preview: World's Fair Murals and Sculptures: Contemporary American Art at the Fair," Parnassus, Vol. 10, no. 7, December 1938, p. 8.

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observer's concentration, that little more was expected of them, articulated the current predicament of modern art, paralleling that of the artist-practitioner; abstraction had progressed but fractionally toward comprehension by the American public. Abstract art appeared at the fair only to the exact extent that it was tolerated in the visual arts of the time. A pre-psychological and under-technological culture was not yet ready to yield to what it could not see in realist terms as a meaningful aesthetic expression.[57] Despite successes, for all the effort exerted by Browne and the American Abstract Artists, progress toward public acceptance of art whose thesis was not clearly recognizable remained negligible and would for several more years.

Browne's final color design for his World's Fair mural, divided into two parts by its content, consists of abstracted paraphernalia used by the medical profession (Fig. 4-18). Vertical bars on the left half represent test tubes in holders while the design to the right describes a microscope with an enlarged view of a cell structure. Its Synthetic Cubist mode permitted a flattened, semi-abstract poster style meant to be seen as both modern and associative, abstract and figurative. In keeping with the Fair administration's wish to provide "psychological relief" to visitors to the Hall of Medicine, Browne used soft, matted shades of beige, peach and blue instead of his typically vibrant palette. Although well lighted, judging from the photograph of the completed work in situ, its placement high on the wall above another mural panel of representational content makes one wonder if many noticed it at all (Fig. 4-19). Despite identifiable content Browne's title, Abstraction, bespoke the mural's anonymous nature.

As O'Connor points out, union regulations required the mural designs be translated

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[57] O'Connor, op. cit., p. 63.

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to walls by sign painter members of the Mural Artists Guild of the American Federation of Labor's United Scenic Artists, not by the artists whose designs they were. Although some joined the union in order to have control over their work, most did not; few wished to unionize in order to be "allowed" to paint and fewer could afford to do so. Such requirements automatically designated the work not representative of the best capable by each.

The muralists' chief accomplishment lay in introducing a "radical" style of art to the nonmuseum-going public.[58] Because of the protracted duration of the World's Fair the exposure of these and other abstractly-oriented murals may have, in the long term, bettered the cause for modern art more than all the short-lived American Abstract Artists's exhibitions with their necessarily smaller, already-conditioned audiences. These murals were presumed destroyed along with the demolition of the buildings at the close of the fair.

Easel painting also played a role in the scheme of the World's Fair, albeit a lesser one than the highly visible mural format. In 1939, the Contemporary Arts Building with its twenty-three galleries housed a sizable exhibition, American Art Today, of examples from all forty-eight states.[59] The five hundred fifty paintings, two hundred fifty sculptures and four hundred works of graphic art had been chosen on a regional basis by local art juries, necessitating at best an uneven taste and quality. Although the exhibition had no connection with the WPA Art Project, hundreds of anecdotal vignettes of American Scene and Regionalist art, typical WPA fare, predominated over an inconspicuous few

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[58] Ibid., p. 65.

[59] American Art Today, Holger Cahill, author, New York, Gallery of American Art Today/New York World's Fair, National Art Society, 1939.

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modernist works.

Democratic in its intention, however imbalanced the content, exhibition organizers sandwiched abstract, semi-abstract and realistic works into a massive cultural document. Urban or rural, Depression ravages spared no part of the country. Big city views of its casualties, such as bank closings, breadlines, panhandlers and park shanties, offset vignettes of mid and southwestern counterparts, such as dust bowl and farm belt victims, animal and human alike. Each work stood as a grim reminder of hard times, each, that is, except for those of the modernists's. Installation photographs show that these entries were not isolated in their own section but interspersed among realist works, making their difference the more pronounced.

Byron Browne's entry, a nonfigurative painting titled, Forms on Black Space, 1938 (Fig. 4-20), represented one of only ten nonfigurative entries and stood alone, conspicuous among even those for its combination of two major modernist tendencies: Surrealism and the hard-edged angles evocative of the impersonal precision of Malevich and Suprematism. Its whimsical forms, heavily indebted to Wassily Kandinsky and Juan Miró of the mid-nineteen twenties, seem especially reminiscent of the latter's The Birth of the World, 1925 (Fig. 4-21), and Catalan Landscape, 1923-24 (Fig. 4-22), which Browne would have seen at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936.

Numerous Miró exhibitions of Surrealist content, in which small undecipherable forms floating on atmospheric backgrounds were typical, had taken place at the Pierre Matisse Gallery from 1930; American painters, especially those in the New York City area interested in modernist developments, could not avoid being stimulated by the lively

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inventiveness of his work.[60] The hard-edged geometric components in Browne's painting play the lesser role.

Browne's own atypical assimilation of Miró's "other-realist" spirit would appear to initiate a shift away from his geometric and Cubist abstraction to a new interest in Surrealism. Still, this single work misleads, for he did not pursue Surrealist expression; Forms on Black Space remains outside the general scope of his oeuvre and is of inconsequential importance to his development, despite such nascent promise.[61]

In none of its varieties was the Surrealist vision of much relevance to him and he frequently decried the methods adherents used to reach their imagery.[62] Yet demonstrating in his own work such direct stylistic influence from a movement he denigrated may have been an attempt on Browne's part to "test the waters" for critical reaction, as well as to display a work markedly different from his nearby mural in the Hall of Medicine, and from the rest of his oeuvre as well.

In Holger Cahill's comments from his catalogue essay for American Art Today,

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60 For an excellent and detailed account of Miró's influence on American artists, see the exhibition catalogue Miró in America, Barbara Rose, Judith McCandless and Duncan Macmillan, essays, Houston, Texas, Museum of Fine Arts, April 21-June 27, 1982. Browne was among those painters singled out as having incorporated aspects of Miró's imagery for his own inventive purposes.

61 In his reply to my inquiry of June 26, 1982, Browne's friend, George McNeil, who also painted a nonfigurative work for this exhibit, recalled that since all the art placed in the show had been created on the artists's own time, not Project time, they had been allowed to retain their work, if not sold, when the show closed; they did not go to the government at the termination of the exhibition. While McNeil admits to destroying his own entry around 1946, he felt Browne's work was still extant. Nevertheless, no further information of its whereabouts has come to light in the intervening years.

62 Browne's attitude regarding Surrealism, both the Dali realist and the French, Bretonian (automatist) approaches, will be discussed with his work of the 1940s.

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there lies a glimmer of hope for the future of abstract and nonrepresentational art

> While abstract art is in the minority, there is enough of it in the exhibition to indicate a genuine resurgence of interest throughout the country. This new interest may be in the nature of a recoil from the recent overemphasis upon the more obvious aspects of the American scene. Certainly abstract art is no longer in the state of experiment or exercise. The work of the abstract realists is directed toward the expression of our modern industrial society which is displayed so lavishly in the World's Fair, the new forms, the new lightings, the new speeds, the new perspectives of today. The work of the non-objective group may be called a search for a universal symbolism of art, a plastic and visual language which will be understood by all men.[63]

Of the six painters Cahill singled out for this category Browne was the first mentioned. While artists such as Balcomb Greene, Carl Holty, George McNeil, George L. K. Morris and Jean Xceron omitted realistic content from their examples, theirs expressed the already-dated geometric viewpoint of the more dogmatic members of the American Abstract Artists.

Still, if Cahill's remarks expressed encouragement for modernists, other critics and reviewers voiced a contrary attitude. Doris Brian of Art News felt they should not have been in the exhibit in the first place

> The desire to avoid charges of prejudice against the other extreme, however, has resulted in the admission of a number of abstractions which might well have been excluded. Usually, American artists are not proficient in this form of expression. Too apt to regard it as a shorthand method, they will not expend the time and attention which most of its best European practitioners invest in their work.[64]

Brian clearly disliked abstract painting, dredging up terms like "derivative" and "radical."

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[63] American Art Today, Cahill, p. 28. Cahill divided the abstract artists into two camps, one nonobjective and the other what he called abstract realists, that is, those who have no aversion to subject matter or representation of some kind within their abstraction. He felt the art of the latter group mirrored the designs of the contemporary industrial world especially. He placed Browne into the nonobjective group.

[64] Doris Brian, "U.S. Art at the Fair: Democratic Selection & Standardized Result," Art News, Vol. 37, no. 32, May 6, 1939, pp. 8-10, 19.

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In her attempt to explain what she herself did not comprehend, she tempered her final comments, pronouncing the exhibition as a whole, "middle-class art depicting the life of the middle-class man . . . ."[65]

The final mural commission Browne received from the Project remains veiled in mystery. Preliminary approval had been given on April 9, 1940, for one of his designs for a photomontage mural that had been proposed only three days earlier. Incorporating artwork as well as photography, it was to be placed in Day Room Number Thirty-one, at the Chronic Diseases Hospital on Welfare Island in the middle of the East River in New York City (renamed Roosevelt Island in September 1973). Despite its photographic content, records in the National Archives confirm this commission had been awarded to Browne, a painter unfamiliar with the camera and so disinterested in its mechanics and potential usefulness for the artist that he did not own one.[66] Lack of documentation to the contrary, the photographic portion of the mural surely must have been contracted to one more skilled in the medium.

The imagery depicts a tennis game played by wholesome-looking young men and women (Fig. 4-23), figures that would reflect the theme, Peaceful Pursuits of Man. Apparently, more than one mural was to have been based on this idea, with Browne's section subtitled Recreation and Sports, the practical focus of one of the principal rooms. The painted backgrounds and stylized sun, similar to that found in the Rima Mosaic (Fig. 4-4), seem to be the only parts conceivably executed by Browne, although the design itself may

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65 Ibid., p. 10.

66 National Archives, Still Life Picture Branch, Audiovisual Archives Division, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., picture #69-AN-P3966, Box 2. There is no mention of this assignment or work among papers in the Browne estate.

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well have been his. The huge mural, covering 324 square feet, was of circular wraparound format to conform to the shape of the male patients's lounge. September 10, 1940 marked either the mural's completion date or that of its installation, or both, if work had commenced directly upon the wall. Ilya Bolotowsky recalled having seen it in place during the latter part of that year.[67]

No one could have predicted the mural's bizarre reception! The physically active positions taken by some of the female players, who wore extremely short tennis shifts, apparently resurrected the patients's dormant libidinous instincts for, "The confined men, aroused by the sight of scantily-clad females, had defaced the photo-mural with pornographic graffiti".[68] Clearly, the situation demanded prompt action.

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[67] In her conversations with the artist during the late 1970s through late 1981, Bolotowsky's biographer, Sandra Kraskin, then a doctoral candidate writing her dissertation on Bolotowsky at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, recalled his having mentioned that he had seen this work after its installation. Until then, Kraskin had been unaware of Browne's involvement in the photomontage mural. In any case, a Bolotowsky painting definitely replaced the existing mural. See: Sandra Kraskin, "Ilya Bolotowsky: A Study of His Painting and Examination of His Relationship to the Development of Abstract Art in the United States," University of Minnesota, 1991. Bolotowsky died on November 22, 1981. I would like to thank Dr. Kraskin, currently curator at the Sidney Mishkin Gallery of Bernard M. Baruch College, City University of New York, New York City, for her helpful comments.

[68] Rosalind Browne, "The American Abstract Artists," p. 234. Browne discusses but does not refer to the photomural as that of her husband's. At a time when Mrs. Browne strove to raise her deceased husband's reputation from a period of neglect and did not want fresh, possibly unfavorable publicity about Bolotowsky's work obliterating one of his murals, she refrained from discussing the origins of the photomural, as if not wishing to acknowledge that her husband had even been awarded the commission, inasmuch as his mural had been removed and replaced with work by someone else. Instead she concentrates only on the Bolotowsky (replacement) mural.

She and Browne had been acquainted since the mid-1930s and she frequently shared her studio with him; they married in July 1940 and she would have been in a position all along to know of any commission Browne received. Still, her lack of mention of this photomural as belonging to Browne offers just as convincing an argument against his having executed the work at all.

In order to help substantiate Browne's authorship beyond Project records to the

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The inability of authorities to cope with the unexpected predicament forced reconsideration of the mural's content; Bolotowsky was subsequently hired to design an alternative subject matter. He replaced the defaced mural with one of nonfigurative, purely abstract geometric shapes in hope that lack of identifiable content would keep the patients quiet (Fig. 4-24).[69] Apparently, it did and so pleased those in charge that they commissioned Bolotowsky for yet another work.[70]

Today, neither Browne nor Bolotowsky's versions can be located although it is theorized that the first was painted over, obliterated by the second. Moreover, the location of building thirty-one, called the Day Room or Klondike Room, cannot be pinned down and is believed destroyed, as many of the unprotected old buildings on the island have

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affirmative, Bolotowsky's mural commission and execution fell into 1941, after the 1940 date of Browne's, so the possibility of the work being his is chronologically feasible. Mrs. Browne and Bolotowsky were the only people who recalled this episode, which resulted in so much dissatisfaction.

69 I owe a debt of thanks to the Reverend Oliver T. Chapin, Episcopalian Chaplain of Coler Memorial Hospital, Roosevelt Island, New York City and that island's very knowledgeable historian. We spent a day together in the summer of 1982, searching for the correct building that housed the murals and interviewing elderly patients who were there at the time of the mural's installation. Many indigent, chronically ill persons have spent whole lifetimes in the wards of this nearly-forgotten hospital. Despite my rare opportunity, the endeavor unfortunately yielded no new information.

Several buildings had changed names and functions through the years and as close as Reverend Chapin can determine, the Klondike Room for Men, as the Men's Day Room was correctly called, no longer stands. He has administered to the needs of the island's patients for over twenty years and had never seen one mural. For a time, 1971-1975, he occupied an apartment in the now-closed and partially demolished Central Nurses Residence; he reports that no artwork covered any wall then. Rosalind Bengelsdorf and other artists had painted murals under the direction of the Project during the 1930s for this residence. This building's ravaged hulk still stands. Currently, Reverend Chapin is writing a history of the island.

70 Bolotowsky painted a large geometric abstract mural for the second floor staff dining room of the Administration Building of the Chronic Diseases Hospital.

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been.[71] Neighborhood vandals have also ruined much, stealing what could be carried away or setting fire to interiors, for this area is located in the isolated southern tip of the narrow island.[72]

For Browne, there exists a body of nonfigurative--biomorphic, geometric and semi-abstract--murals, both extant and through photographic records, attesting to his personal struggle for endorsement of an aesthetic ideal that most were incapable of comprehending. That is not to say that his recognition as an abstractionist arrived with the federal mural programs. Yet by the advent of American involvement in World War II and the demise of the Projects, Browne had succeeded in making his an established name in the cause for a type of art that would, in the near future, take its place beside and eventually supplant those painters and viewers savoring only mimesis.

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[71] A recent newspaper article has finally put the question to rest, at least in part. Bolotowsky's mural has not only been located in situ but underwent painstaking restoration and has been returned to its former beauty. Color photographs, showing pastel-colored geometric shapes, accompany the article. As part of New York City's "Adopt-a-Mural" program, funds were raised to remove seven layers of surface paint. The article confirms Byron Browne as the artist of first choice for the commission. Since his work involved large-scale photographic reproductions, as well as painted imagery, it seems likely that the completed work was mounted on large board panels, which were easy to transport, install, or remove. This would necessarily leave the wall surfaces "clean," if ever they had to be removed. It certainly must have made it easier for the installation of Bolotowsky's painted abstract mural replacement. See: Daniel J. Wakin, "Shedding Seven Coats, A Beauty Emerges on a Hospital Wall: Years and Paint Stripped Away from a Noted Abstract Mural," The New York Times, sect. B (Metro), Wednesday, 27 June, 2001, pp. 1 & 4.

[72] In an effort to locate what might remain of the once-bustling site, in the summer of 1982 I took a bicycle trip to the island in the middle of the East River. Here, weeds grew everywhere, windows had no glass and birds flew freely through immense rooms that still contained remnants of furnishings. Debris covered everything. Eerie silence, after the din of New York, pervaded this extremely remote, isolated area; not even squatters were to be seen. One building, the former nurses residence (that for which Rosalind Bengelsdorf executed murals), had been gutted by fire; no roof remained and except for a spiral staircase that led aloft to nowhere the entire main floor lay unimpeded from front to rear.

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While it is doubtful that the work Browne produced under government auspices could be considered the finest of his career, his letters suggest he did not believe so, the confidence gained in himself as a creative, productive person and the return of that confidence evidenced in successive assignments had an enormous impact on his maturing talents. In a sense, Browne came of age as a painter during and partly because of this special federal patronage.

As late as September 1939, modern art as executed by Americans continued to suffer condemnation. William Randolph Hearst, politically an outspoken isolationist and zealous nationalist, expressed his animosity toward American modernism through hostile editorials printed in his own vast chain of newspapers and magazines. One particularly senseless diatribe appeared in the New York Journal and American in August 1939.[73] Among other claims the unsigned editorial declared modern art nothing but dishonorable fakes.

> One of the most surprising and successful--but no longer amusing--frauds of the post-war period is the one known as the Modern Art movement.
>
> It is most notorious and flourishes best in painting, although music, poetry, architecture and other media have been left not been left uncontaminated.
>
> Modern Art, as written in capitals by its devotees, is neither modern nor art. It is a competition in perversion, a contest to see who shall be most bizarre and who can advance the most meaningless cant to justify it, a rivalry in insanity and inanity.
>
> There is some system in its madness, of course. Drum-beating of the pseudo-critics, of the bewildered copy-cats and the booming pundits, has actually created a market for Modern Art.
>
> The crudest, most senseless, incredibly fantastic daubs, solemnly heralded and exhibited, have stimulated a fashion to pretend an understanding for what cannot be understood, to explain and admire things whose imbecility is self-evident and which manifest nothing but sterility

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[73] "'Modern Art': Weird, Fantastic Daubs Are Not Real Art at All," The New York Journal and American, 9 August 1939, p. 16.

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and insolence.

The thing called "Modern Art" nowadays is not a manifestation of logical growth and progress. It is pure buncombe designed to impose on the ignorance of people who do not know art and consequently are not equipped to recognize fraudulent art.

It is necessary, for the sake of those artists who are painting honestly and competently, especially the contemporary school of sane American craftsmen, to expose the concocters and peddlers of the ridiculous, unconvincing and impudent smears that collectively dishonor what the words "Modern Art" should mean.

True modern art is sane and solid. It depicts for us the aspect and the character of our land and people.

Compared to it, the cantraps, grimaces and far-fetched antics of the fake "Moderns" are pitiably cheap, sadly comic, technically feeble, and completely unworthy of any honest and intelligent person's consideration.[74]

In offended response and in an effort to end Hearst's ceaseless assaults, the politically liberal A.C.A. Gallery, which opened in 1932 (then at 52 West 8th Street and, while having relocated several times, is still in existence at 529 West 20th Street in Chelsea), mounted a protest exhibition that included modernists of every ilk. Most exhibitors were members of the United American Artists, a union whose roster included many of the abstract artists then working. According to the statement released by the artists, the show had been organized "as an answer to the Hearst Journal and American's attack on `modern' art," but that it had "broadened to become a challenge to the infamous Colonel Brehon Somervell, WPA administrator."[75] Instances of alleged mismanagement by Somervell were cited, along with three typical case histories of artists's experiences in trying for re-enrollment in the Federal Art Project from which they had been dropped.

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74 Ibid.

75 Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art: Autumn Season Tries Its Wings," "The `Organized' Artist: The Practical Benefits of Association Versus Spiritual Need of Solitude," The New York Times, 24 September 1939, (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 7.

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They accused him of being against all art.[76]

The WPA/FAP had just been removed from the jurisdiction of Holger Cahill's national office in Washington and put back in the local control of an administrator, Colonel Brehon Somervell, who ran the entire WPA operation in New York. No friend of the artist nor even slightly interested in things aesthetic, he coupled painters with sewer maintenance men, ditch diggers and other such workers. His favorite occupation, judging from daily press coverage, seemed to be that of breaking strikes mounted by those who worked under the WPA. Along the way he gained a notorious reputation for handing out pink slips by the thousands to striking workers who had been away from their jobs for as few as five days. Somervell's well-publicized insensitivities placed the fate of future art projects in jeopardy.

In his preface to the catalogue Herman Baron, director of the gallery, explained

> We are glad to give this group of artists an opportunity to answer the attack made on their democratic right to self-expression. This assault on progressive art and artists evidently has spread to the New York WPA art project. The United American Artists [formerly the Artists' Union] are now appealing to the public to stay the wrecking tactics of Colonel Somervell. The A.C.A. Gallery cannot remain indifferent to this appeal and is bringing it to the attention of the gallery visitors.[77]

Edward Alden Jewell of The New York Times picked up on the controversy by

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Browne, "The American Abstract Artists," p. 240. The A.C.A. Gallery exhibition was held from September 18-30, 1939; Herman Baron, wrote the catalogue preface. For further information on this gallery and the Hearst attacks, see the Herman Baron Papers on microfilm in any of the offices of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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giving it the lead story of the art section on Sunday, September 24, 1939.[78] He refrained from taking a supportive political stand, his prerogative as leading critic, preferring no stand instead. Then, in another section on the same page, called "Local Shows," he proceeded to review the A.C.A. exhibition as if it were an ordinary show devoid of political implication.[79]

Jewell accompanied his review with a large reproduction of Browne's entry, a Synthetic Cubist, semifigurative painting titled Figure, later retitled Woman and Bird, 1935 (Fig. 4-25). Symbolic in its chimerical imagery, the work depicts a grotesque human figure on the left reaching out to an equally distorted rooster perched on a stack of books in the right section; Jewell termed it "entertaining." On the one hand it was obvious that the critic neither cared to take on Mr. Hearst nor, on the other, did he wish to extol the virtues of Hermon Baron, the gallery owner. Jewell was never one for risking his own position but in the minds of the painters involved, by remaining impartial, by not choosing their side, he weakened the power of that position. Those wishing to fuel continuing dialogue were understandably disappointed.

While political isolationism held American attitudes inward in a type of narcissistic stupor, painter Steve Wheeler suggested other reasons for the slow emergence of the abstract movement. In an interview granted in 1978, Wheeler recalled that New York City's mayor, Fiorello La Guardia (mayor from 1934-1945), had characterized abstract art as "scrambled eggs and ham," stamping his widely-reported public ridicule of

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78 Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art: Autumn Season Tries Its Wings," " The `Organized' Artist: The Practical Benefits of Association Versus Spiritual Need of Solitude," The New York Times, 24 September 1939 (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 7.

79 Ibid., "In the Realm of Art: Autumn Season,": "Local Shows," The New York Times, 24 September 1939 (Sun.ed.), sect. 9, p. 7.

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unrealistic work indelibly upon the minds of millions.[80]

Aside from the negative attitudes expressed by Hearst and the mayor, an additional blow to the advance of modern art in America was its denigration by yet another powerful media person, Henry Luce of Life and Time Magazine. His prejudice extended beyond native modernism, for neither had he use for European "foreign" abstraction; he especially deprecated the work of Picasso. Seldom would Luce reproduce any abstract art except to make fun of it, which he frequently did. To make matters worse, Hearst saw to it that European magazines would neither discuss nor reproduce American abstract art. Thus, there existed an artificially contrived feeling against indigenous abstract art from within its own country and from abroad as well.[81]

Accordingly, the advent of the 1940s found the abstract painter, despite gains, still suffering much the same dearth of acknowledgement and appreciation as encountered during the previous decade. Most New York museums continued to shrug cold shoulders toward American abstractionists, refusing to recognize the existence of a movement. The growing influence of a Surrealist idiom, coupled with gradual termination of WPA/FAP support for artists, served further to heighten an already chronic uneasiness. Additionally, the open-mindedness of artists's organizations and their involvement with various political camps, caused critics to take pleasure in designating modernists as leftists, socialist-radicals, Bolshevists and Communists. Of many, during the 1930s, this was true, for

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[80] Steve Wheeler, Tape Recorded Interview, New York City, 3 September 1978. Wheeler, Browne's friend of long standing, whose memory of this period is acute, shed valuable light on little-known but important facts that connect and explicate artistic, social and political times of the 1930s through the 1950s. I am immensely grateful to him for sharing his vast knowledge, recorded on several tape cassettes.

[81] Morris, "The American Abstract Artists: A Chronicle 1936-56," p. 139.

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adherence to such groups and causes reflected their profound effort to find a better way of living than the miserable existence they faced. Growing unease in Congress eventually led to investigating committees and witch hunts; Colonel Sommervell suspected Communists had infiltrated the Project and relentlessly searched for them, dismissing all those he remotely suspected of being among them.[82]

Early in the new decade, on April 15, 1940, Byron Browne, together with fifty-one members of the American Abstract Artists, Gallatin included, signed their names to a large one-page broadside titled, How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art? (Figs. 4-26 and 4-27), in which they asked, and answered, pertinent questions designed to take the museum to task. Ad Reinhardt designed its elaborate typography using antiquated scripts that they believed appropriate to the museum's equally obsolete outlook.[83] The eye-catching handbill chastised the institution for showing a collection of Italian Renaissance paintings earlier that year and naming many museum-sponsored exhibitions the group felt should have included examples of American abstract art. They even took on Nelson Rockefeller, since 1939 the President of the museum, for his financial policies. As Russell Lynes noted, "This was one of the earliest public outcries made by artists against the museum."[84]

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[82] One of the results of this unfortunate labeling caused New York University, which for twelve years had allowed Gallatin's Museum of Living Art to occupy quarters, to give two weeks notice to Gallatin to vacate the premises. Having no choice, he complied.

[83] Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group," pp. 325-334. This factual description details the inception, content, distribution and aftermath of the broadside incident. According to Larsen, the drawings were the winners of a contest sponsored by the paper.

[84] Russell Lynes, Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Atheneum, 1973, p. 230. At the root of the problem was the Museum's lack of concern for the contemporary American artist and an over-emphasis on

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Then several militant members of the group, Browne among them, marched back and forth along Fifty-third Street, picketing the museum during the April 15 opening reception of an installation of drawings and cartoons that had appeared in the afternoon tabloid newspaper, P M, while distributing their large handbill to the exhibition-bound crowd. The artists had reason to picket. The major and immediate object of their anger was the museum's current exhibition of drawings and cartoons from an evening tabloid called P M (a left wing newspaper to which Reinhardt frequently contributed artwork), a show requested by and dear to the heart of an important trustee, Marshall Field, of Chicago retail department store prominence.

The artists argued that, if space in the museum could be found for newspaper drawings, why then was there no room for showing American abstract art?[85] The occasion marked the first time the Museum of Modern Art faced open confrontation in opposition to its policies but not the initial time an American museum had been the object of demonstrations as already noted (see footnotes 6, 20, 24, this chapter).[86]

By the time the Fourth Annual American Abstract Artists Exhibition opened at the American Fine Arts Gallery, June 3-16, 1940, group frustration had come to an angry head. With the era of protest and picketing then at it peak, the artists decided to publish a proclamation of their discontent with the current state of the art world, especially art criticism and those who wrote it. Again, they took the Museum of Modern Art to task, denouncing it as "decadent."

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what was new in Europe.

[85] Ibid., p. 328.

[86] In the case of the Museum of Modern Art it would not happen again until the early nineteen seventies, when two strikes precipitated the formation of a professional staff union.

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Instead of the customary catalogue or yearbook accompanying their exhibition, the group published a twelve-page pamphlet containing numerous criticisms that they deemed erroneous and biased against their painting. A huge solid black question mark occupied nearly length of the entire right margin. Titled The Art Critics--How Do They Serve the Public? What Do They Say? How Much Do They Know? Let's Look at the Record!, they distributed the pamphlet during the two-week presentation (Fig. 4-28).[87] Again Ad Reinhardt, with the assistance of Balcomb Greene, designed its eye-catching cover, headline and interior typography. While their introduction attacked no institution but the Museum of Modern Art, not a newspaper or magazine art critic escaped unscathed; each was given space and his or her due.

Essentially a proclamation voicing the American Abstract Artists's discontent with the treatment they received from the arts writers, they aimed their criticisms not only at local critics's opinions but also writers from national magazines, clipped from publications covering the previous ten years. They were printed as they had originally appeared with anonymous group members writing explanatory text between quotations.

Its twenty-five unfavorable opinions or misinterpretations were selected among those gathered by members and edited to embarrass or emphasize the critics's mistakes. After years of struggle, they believed the art press incapable of understanding or responding to the new generation of artists. These comments proved their suspicions correct. Writers Royal Cortissoz, Thomas Craven, Edward Alden Jewell, Howard Devree, Jerome Klein, Emily Genauer, Henry McBride, Robert M. Coates and Peyton

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87 The American Abstract Artists, The Art Critics--How do They Serve the Public? What Do They Say? How Much do They Know? Let's Look at the Record!, Ad Reinhardt and Balcomb Greene, typography, New York, American Abstract Artists (twelve-page pamphlet, privately printed), June 1940.

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Boswell were among those castigated, as were the editorial positions of such periodicals as Time, Life and Parnassus.

By virtue of his control over the art pages of The New York Times, coupled with his unfailing inability to comprehend their efforts, the American Abstract Artists allotted Jewell the greatest space. About him they wrote

> In his endless columns of personal opinions, . . . Jewell has long reflected a completely superficial approach to the understanding of art. . . . Jewell never once approaches the problems of the artist from the viewpoint of his medium . . . . [88]

They complained that Jewell's lack of knowledge about abstract art led him to say "'. . . non-objective art appears in the main to be a matter of mathematics and geometry.'"[89]

The powerful critic had recently published a book, Have We An American Art? (Longmans, Green and Company, 1939), from which the group quoted

> . . . thousands of artists . . . become little mimics, and sometimes very accomplished mimics indeed--a fact attested in particular just now by some of our non-objective abstractionists. They follow the leader . . . . Yes, they become . . . parasites and sycophants.[90]

Jewell's simplistic appraisals allowed him, they believed, to dispense casually with one of the most significant movements and efforts of individual artists. He finally concluded that an American art does exist

> . . . Yes, I am prepared to affirm, not tentatively, not timidly, not apologetically, nor yet bumptuously [sic], but instead as a Categorical Imperative, that we have an American art because we are Americans.[91]

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[88] Ibid., p. 6.

[89] Ibid., p. 7.

[90] Ibid., p. 8. The offended American Abstract Artists felt he was referring directly to them.

[91] Ibid., p. 9.

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Upon analyzing The Art Critics, it becomes apparent that Browne and other members were not disturbed so much by the impenetrable position of the press as by their own " . . . feeling of isolation and desire for a constructive dialogue, which would put aside the question of abstraction as an issue in itself and begin to make finer and more productive discriminations."[92] For all that, those critics who reviewed the show, some of whom the artists had rebuked, did not refer to their pamphlet.[93]

By August 1940, Browne had became so depressed by the art world and combatting prejudice against which only minimal gains seemed to have been won, that he wrote a letter to the art editor of The New York Times expressing in vitriolic terms just what he thought of the public. Obviously weary of the battle, yet in no mood to compromise, Browne minced few words when he set forth the course of the painter as a solitary one:

> I am glad to see the pros and cons of this business of selling pictures taking such a realistic slant in your columns. It is high time we view all this in a most candid manner. So far Arnold Friedman's letter [published earlier in The New York Times] is the only one to hit the problem in the center. Why don't painters stop worrying and fretting about a public that is more interested in cocktail shakers and crooners than in good pictures?
>
> When they do buy it is not with the purpose of obtaining an object that might serve as a spiritual force in their home, but merely something decorative that blends with their furniture. Must paintings always harmonize with chairs, rugs and wallpaper? People are intensely afraid of a picture that will make them think. They don't ask Beethoven, Sibelius or Bach, on their radios and pianos, to harmonize with their pearl gray rugs. Why must a fine work of art?
>
> The great American public has what might be justly termed "a baseball mind." The mysteries of painting and art in general are not for them. It is the old story: I'm from Missouri and gotta be shown." Hence cocktail shakers and crooners. What does all this leave to the creative painter? It leaves him to a great extent a solitary figure following a most

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92 Op. cit. Larsen, p. 342

93 Ibid., p. 344.

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> difficult path, one demanding the utmost in spiritual and physical courage. I for one have steeled myself to this indifference. Yes, I have been very grateful for the aid given by the Federal Art Projects but I do not expect people to buy or even to like my pictures.
>
> If an artist must paint because he has been born with that ruthless inner urge to do so he should couple it with a tremendous reservoir of faith and courage, which must last to his dying day. He should not expect his fellow-men to jump up and pat him on the back.
>
> Byron Browne[94]

Browne's letter to the art editor was one of the last times the painter exposed his private feelings in print. Thereafter he shunned the rallies, organizations and time-consuming meetings in order to devote himself more completely to the act of painting. Rarely did he again allow his life to be interrupted by such contradictory forces. One senses that as Browne matured, he decided that his greatest statement would lie in fulfilling that inner urge to visual expression that came to him so naturally.

The political and artistic alienation he and other American abstractionists experienced began to dissipate as the nation's economic situation slowly shifted toward recovery, albeit because of the war. As more factories began rehiring and domestic products rather than materiels of war were manufactured, an aura of hope unexperienced in the previous decade began to supplant the ingrained national pessimism. The impending war and focus on victory, more than any overt change in public attitude or in that of the tightly knit art world itself, served as catalyst--for artist and ordinary citizen alike.

According to his General Services Administration records, Browne resigned from the WPA/FAP on July 28, 1942, for "outside employment." America by this time was fully involved in war armaments production and, given the times, work in these factories paid far higher wages than those of the Depression era projects. Browne would soon be

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[94] Byron Browne, Letter, "Artist and His Market: Our Readers Continue to Discuss Problems Concerning Purchase of American Art," The New York Times, sect. 9, cols. 7 & 8, 11 August 1940, (Sun. ed.), p. 7.

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hired by one of these factories. His participation in the Federal Arts Projects, no matter how difficult it had been for him to secure commissions, provided the opportunity to express his kind of art and be seen in the most public of ways through the large format of the mural. Although conceivably too little time had passed to enable him to look back in retrospection and distance himself from the wrenching events he experienced, Browne had witnessed and survived a cataclysmic decade in American political and aesthetic history. In a vastly dissimilar way the 1940s would prove even more angst ridden.

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CHAPTER 5

THE KOOTZ GALLERY AND CELEBRITY

> The fact that my painting this year has been "taken in" by a progressive and enterprising 57th Street gallery and adequately sold has not lessened my feelings of resentment against the state of cultural indifference.[1]
>
> --Byron Browne
> 1946

Issues of abstraction versus realism, dichotomies that had kindled heated debates during the 1930s, continued throughout the 1940s and lingered well into the Cold War 1950s. When it came to validating the modernism of American artists, attitudes remained nearly as obdurate as during the previous decade. So strongly ensconced was this prejudice, many even refused to recognize realism's "alternative" as art.

Only toward the latter half of the 1940s, following the cessation of World War II, did critics begin to come around, as they realized, like it or not, abstraction was here to stay. Having no choice, they begrudgingly accepted the issue while attempting to devise an appropriate language with which to mount a dialogue.

Byron Browne exhibited little during the war years; concerns of art ranked low, as

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[1] This quotation is taken from a letter Browne wrote to arts writer Elizabeth McCausland, of Magazine of Art. Her article in the January 1946 issue ("Why Can't America Afford Art?," Vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 18-21, 33-36), addressed the problem of how, or if, artists managed to make a living from sales of their work. The issue of the fine artist's years of constant uphill struggle for recognition from all sides, dealer, press and collector alike, had left Browne desperately poor, stressed and bitter. Yet unlike some who gave in, taking on commercial work in order to make a living, a controversial topic at the time, Browne refused, as he believed doing so would lower his standards. McCausland's article prompted Browne, already affiliated with the Kootz Gallery, to write in response.

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priorities turned to critical matters of defense. He participated in four group exhibitions in 1940, with the Fourth Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists in June among them.[2] In all of 1941, only one opportunity to exhibit his work materialized, three during 1942, and three in 1943, one of which marked his first solo exhibition since 1939 (to be discussed). Opportunities improved in 1944, for not only was he given another one-man show, he participated in several group exhibitions as well. With the end of the war in 1945, Browne contributed work to a record number of seven group shows by year's end. Still, sales turned out to be as financially unprofitable as were those of the Depression years.

While Browne and his contemporaries would have welcomed financial acceptance, the marketplace as a goal reflected neither their attitudes toward the making of art nor their expectations; they painted knowing that no market existed for them. As in the previous decade, lack of income forced nearly every artist to find time-consuming, alternative means of making a livelihood. Not until joining the Kootz Gallery in mid-1945, when he was thirty-eight years old, did Browne begin to make a living solely from the sales of his pictures. Nonrealistic imagery simply did not sell.

Browne had worked nonobjectively as early as 1929, establishing his reputation with geometric and biomorphic soft-edged abstractions, still he continued to paint semi-realistically as well, often simultaneously. It was not uncommon to find in his studio an abstract work in progress on one easel while he worked on a realistic figure at the same time on a second. By 1940, his predilection for the figure began to take preference over the

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2 The Fourth Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists, New York, American Fine Arts Galleries, June 3-16, 1940. Browne showed one untitled painting for which no documentation has been located.

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nonobjective style that he continued to exhibit in the American Abstract Artist annuals. This dual tendency in his work is aptly manifested in one of the most enigmatic of his paintings, with an equally enigmatic title, Salute Every Time the Cock Crows, 1940 (Fig. 5-1), a canvas divided vertically into two evenly balanced but dissimilar halves, one completely abstract, the other figurative, albeit far from "realistic."

In this painting, the double sides and shifted forms of the left section recall an earlier format and the figure style devised by Fernand Léger, for whom Browne had worked briefly as an assistant on a WPA/FAP project during his stay in New York in the late 1930s. Aside from Léger's influence, Browne's shapes reflect aspects of North or Meso-American Indian design elements. He pairs the Amazonian female central figure with an equally impressive, pattern-covered rooster, a widely understood symbol of sacrifice and fertility, that sports a spectacular red comb. The bird stands on a red table top directly in front of her. Although Browne"s reasons for juxtaposing the interlocking bands of lines and concentric circles of the nonfigurative right half of the painting with its subjective realistic left side, and then subdividing that into yet another plane remain perplexing, several interpretations of the imagery itself should be weighed.

Considering the year in which Browne painted the canvas, the composition could symbolize French and American attitudes toward the Germans, who were at this moment rampaging across Europe. German armies had overpowered Poland in 1939; in June 1940 (during the run of the Fourth Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists), France fell under German occupation. Since le chanteclair is the traditional emblem of France, as the female figure, La Marianne, personifies that Republic, Browne may have politicized his work to symbolize the country's vigorous spirit predominating over forces of evil.

The image also recalls Picasso's frequent use of this bird, as in 1938, with his brutal

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Girl with Cock, symbolizing the destruction of helpless humanity during the Spanish Civil War that had immediately preceded his painting.[3] That Browne had looked to Picasso for the source of his rooster is undisputable when one compares the creature in his picture to another image of the same bird by Picasso, The Cock, 1938 (Fig. 5-2); they are nearly identical.

Throughout history, birds have long been associated with women. Records show that artists as early as the ancients have used the harmonious combination of women accompanied by various kinds of birds, representing diverse meanings.[4] Consider the famous Nike of Samothrace, herself part bird with wings greater in span than those of the mighty eagle. In more contemporary eras, birds, above all the male of the species, have also acted as unmistakable emblems of eroticism or an exotic lifestyle, and thus the fitting companion to women, as typified in some of Courbet's imagery and in a nineteenth-century depiction of a nude by Delacroix, Woman with Parrot (Fig. 5-3).

Browne, who kept numerous scrapbooks of pictures cut from magazines and newspapers, placed a clipping of a ninth-century gilt bronze sculpture of a cock that once surmounted a pinnacle on the old Basilica of St. Peter, found loose in one such scrapbook

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3 American sculptor and collector Mary (Meric) Callery, a friend of Picasso and owner of Girl With a Cock, explained that Picasso esteemed the painting highly and reluctantly sold it to her because he wanted to raise money for Spanish relief. Meyer Schapiro suggests that the head of the girl resembles no other female head by Picasso so much as it does his own seen in left profile, his lock of hair combed down over the temple. While the face in Browne's work is not his self-portrait, although he may have meant it as self-referential, the two pictures share remarkable similarities in form and content.

4 Egyptians chose a falcon to represent their god Horus, a solar deity. In Greek mythology the goddesses of fertility and the coming of spring, demeter and her daughter, Persephone, claimed the cock as their own. So did it serve as the attribute of Athena, the goddess of war, for cocks are always ready to fight. Later, in Christian iconography, the cock became an attribute of St. Peter and, subsequently, a symbol of the Passion, because such a bird crowed after Peter had three times denied knowing Jesus.

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containing color reproductions of stained glass windows

(Fig. 5-4). Its configurations, too, bear a remarkable likeness to those depicted in Salute Every Time the Cock Crows. Always well aware of the creature's symbolic potency, Browne previously had made the bird integral to his work, as seen in Figure (Woman and Bird), 1935 (Fig. 4-25) and the Amazonian goddess of the Rima Mosaic, 1936 (Fig. 4-4), and he continued to include it in his compositions with increasing frequency.

The artist's son, Stephen B. Browne, recalled his mother having mentioned that Salute Every Time the Cock Crows had humorous connotations, yet she never divulged them. It was on July 16, 1940, that she and Browne married, the same year he painted the canvas. Considering the primitive aspect of this work, perhaps Browne had depicted himself, as recorded in folkloric annals, in the role of "sacrificial cock" in the hands of his new goddess. Taken a step further and in the context of erotic conjecture, the cock may simply refer to his own carnal inclinations.

Still, rather than ascribing portentous and speculative meaning to the work, a simple accounting may serve more appropriately. When the painting is turned upside down, the abstract portion becomes a monstrous head, rudely sticking out its tongue at the viewer. This may indeed have been the humorous connotation to which Browne's widow alluded. In many ways, as we shall see, this divided painting format will symbolize the dichotomy that lies at the heart of much of Browne's work during the 1940s and later: the schism between realism and abstraction that never witnessed resolution.

Browne continued to elaborate upon the theme of women in association with the bird throughout the 1940s. Using a synthesis of styles that generally incorporated Cubist structure and geometric abstraction, forms are often characterized by the addition of elaborate, agitated surface decoration. Yet despite their frequently semi-abstract

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disposition avian subject matter can always be identified. For example, the black outlines confining a female figure's upturned head and arm in the extremely ornate Woman with Birds, 1943 (Fig. 5-5), are filled with the concentric circles, boomerangs, dots and circles, lines and bars that are now familiar symbolic configurations from Browne's repertory. Only slightly less elaborate but stronger in its jewel-like, cloisonné compartments is another painting of the same title and year, (Fig. 5-6). In another canvas, Woman and Bird, 1945 (Fig. 5-7), geometric patterns and whimsically brushed lines animate the composition but do not extinguish the principal subject matter.

Throughout the 1940s, as he had during the previous decade, Browne continued to explore the universal theme of woman through drawing. Using decidedly "unclassical" distortions to signify contemporaneity, it is in the female head in particular where his experiments incorporate the full range of classical art history. More than many painters of this period, Browne continued to believe it vital to link his work to the highest achievements of past world art, if his efforts were to build a future and have lasting purpose. To this end there exists a large body of works on paper that falls outside the parameter of painting with this intention behind their execution. The human head, judging from their great numbers, became his subject matter of choice in this exploration.

When confronted with a drawing such as the exotic face of Bacchante, 1940 (Fig. 5-8), classical Greek sculpture immediately comes to mind for its look of chiseled marble, imparted by graphite laid against smooth white paper. In other untitled heads on paper from 1942 through 1949, influences from observed drawings by Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Raphael, Ingres and Picasso are easily detected despite their deliberate distortions (Figs. 5-9, 5-10, 5-11 and 5-12). In part, this work stems from Browne's fascination with infinitesimal detail, such as his use of intricate crosshatching, a method of

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shading learned from studying Picasso's classicized drawings and from studying his own books on the drawings of Michelangelo.

Such drawings, divorced from abstraction yet "abstracted," point to Browne's devotion to revitalizing the classical, therefore "realist" tradition, even as he thwarts its purity by reconfiguring content, this as early as 1940, when his geometric abstractions far overshadowed realist tendencies. These works on paper affirm that, although a contemporary modernist, Browne continued to believe in the importance of the craft of drawing, echoing Ingres's well-known teaching that drawing was the basis of all art.

Hayden Herrera points out that by exaggerating the stylistic idiosyncracies of each of the artists, Browne did more than emulate his sources, for his drawings depart in curious ways.[5] For instance, while they are finely modeled with meticulous attention paid to the eyes or disposition of limbs, garment folds remain simply rendered, abbreviated patterns of crosshatched lines.[6] Browne's eccentric heads often juxtapose several drawing styles within one work. This assimilation, resulting in partly humorous, partly serious adaptations, represents yet another method of splicing traditional venerated art to twentieth-century counterparts, thereby legitimizing the work despite overt departures.

While exaggerated characteristics from art-historical periods provided the catalyst for many heads, so did certain renowned monuments of human achievement. In the example of an untitled ink and tempera drawing on paper, 1948 (Fig. 5-13), principal configurations derive from the profiles of the well-known ancient stone heads discovered

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[5] Drawings by Byron Browne, Hayden Herrera, essay, New York, Washburn Gallery, January 1977. Herrera analyzes a series of Browne's drawings of classically-inspired heads executed from 1934-1952. The exhibition was the first to show these drawings as a group.

[6] Ibid.

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on Easter Island (Fig. 5-14), although in this watercolor they are not "sculptural," as could be said of his pencil or pen and ink drawings. Browne often expressed fondness for these imposing carvings, keeping several photographs among his scrapbooks; their silhouettes reappear in later work. More than purely imaginative compositions, the creative impulse behind this large group of drawings had at its core works by time-proven masters of the medium.

Conversely, Browne's oil paintings of female heads from this period, while stemming from the same traditional sources as his drawings, exist on a separate level and take on a fresher, more spontaneous appearance. Some are distinguished by their simplicity as well as their flat, strongly abstracted forms, while others reflect a growing use of whimsical calligraphic line or his personal version of Synthetic Cubism, a fanciful breaking up of facial features into multicolored planes. Others depict a more straightforward rendition taken from antique classical sculpture. Clearly, Browne's multiple thematic excursions reflect a young artist's ongoing experimentation in search of an expressive style of his own.

An example of his investigation is reflected in the erratic modeling of a woman's face in Head, 1940 (Fig. 5-15), suggesting that Browne purposely imparted a variety of modernism to what may have begun as an ordinary realistic portrait based upon the observed human model. Here her elongated neck, unrealistic proportions and the peculiar rendering of the eyes preclude literal interpretation.

Other female heads from this period illustrate the extraordinary ease with which Browne is able to build and diversify each head. His curvilinear Head with Leaves, 1942 (Fig. 5-16), an elaborate version of the 1940 Head, just discussed, Head of a Woman, 1944 (Fig. 5-17), the partial figure study, Two Women, 1945 (Fig. 5-18), an untitled gouache

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head, 1946 (Fig. 5-19), Woman in Yellow Hat, 1947 (Fig. 5-20) and Head, 1948 (Fig. 5-21), demonstrate an undisputable facility for manipulating shape, color and line, as he intentionally contrives the distortions within each work.

A group of Cubist heads, separate from those just discussed and executed over several years, demonstrates Browne's affinity for the grotesque. Such deformity and distortion however, was never an excuse for animosity, malevolence or perversity on his part. Rather, the juxtapositions result from efforts to extend imagination and design as far as possible until the consequences read more as "stand-ins," symbolic substitutes for the reality he had been shedding since 1928.

A decorative yet realistic painting such as Head, 1940 (Fig. 5-15), already discussed, is markedly different from the simpler planar composition of an untitled abstract head from 1941 (Fig. 5-22) or from Head (Fig. 5-23), from the same year, yet each work serves to represent an aspect of human emotion or a concrete structural part. In the ink and watercolor Head, 1942 (Fig. 5-24), some of the shapes, especially those of the hair and eyes, recall heads from the 1930s but here Browne manifests a greater understanding of the principles of Cubism and he can afford to have more fun, as this work demonstrates. His capacity for reigning-in, for knowing when to stop, prevents this series from becoming mere exercises in chaos.

Browne's shapes always stood as symbols for larger meanings, and he encouraged, indeed expected viewers to use their powers of perception to reconstruct meaning accordingly as each perceived it, despite his having destroyed and transformed any preset notions of the original subject matter, in this case the human head. In two small untitled heads in pen, ink and watercolor on paper, from 1942 (Figs. 5-25 and 5-26), Browne's resourceful marks or "symbols," concentric circles, keyhole openings and multiple wavy

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lines, reorder typical human head images into cauldrons of interconnected patterns. Even in as literal an example of subject matter as the head of the musician in Trumpet Player, 1943 (Fig. 5-27), shapes are so segmented and gorged with abstract design elements that symbols alone are forced to represent the principal subject, a musician and his instrument. When viewed upside down, one is conscious only of geometry, circles, angles, ellipses, and lines of varying widths; the subject is lost within its means.[7]

Thus for Browne, as for many painters, the human head provided an important and endless opportunity, a proving ground to experiment with the shapes and patterns he already knew by heart. Other untitled heads from 1944 through 1948, (Figs. 5-28, 5-29 and 5-30), continue to establish how consistent he was certain designs within this exploration. While such thematic focus does not act as a conclusive measure of his development, nor were the experiments always successful, they furnished a lifelong laboratory through which he filtered his boundless imagination. Throughout his life, Browne would reapply characteristics of these experiments to the larger aspects of his art. By themselves, Browne's paintings and drawings of heads constitute a discrete and significant body of work spanning more than two decades.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the months before American involvement in World War II provided few opportunities for showing his paintings, with the American Abstract Artists fifth annual exhibition comprising Browne's single

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7 According to his son, Browne frequently turned his work upside down as a way to "read" the solidity and balance of his composition. This practice also eliminated the distraction of subject matter, allowing him to determine the strengths or weaknesses of design elements, such as color blocks and line, lights and darks. Having done so with slide reproductions and actual paintings, I can attest to the logic of this practice.

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participation during 1941.[8] Again, the critics undermined the group's efforts for their perceived inability to enter mainstream American art circles. Holding the critics primarily to blame for their abysmal lack of sales and for discouraging art dealer interest in showing it, while they promoted European abstraction instead, Browne cited their unrelenting narrowness of opinion and unabated outpourings against American abstraction. With renewed anger and resentment toward them collectively, he sent the following letter to The New York Times in July

> To the Art Editor:
>
> In a recent article Mr. Jewell asserts abstract painters are merely embroidering upon the efforts of past masters. We say that we are concerned with the principles of space, and that is why pictures of this kind have a homogeneous appearance. So have the paintings of the Renaissance and of eighteenth-century France a similar look.
>
> Also, as artists we are concerned with the "impulse toward." Toward what, we do not say and cannot say. The atmosphere is charged with enigma. The eternal enigma of uncertainties and contradictions, a basically humanistic thing.
>
> How can you, the critic, dogmatize, when we, the artists, who have the affront to hold up the mirror to this terrific turmoil and try to mold an idealism out of it, do not dare?
>
> I mean to say that you constantly insinuate that this kind of painting, which at best is only thirty years old, has run its course. After all, art is nothing more or less than what it always was, a continual reiteration upon the same theme, the theme being the human drama and the voice speaking is space.
>
> To return to embroidering. Did not El Greco as a young painter embroider upon his master's (Tintoretto's) style? Did not Van Gogh apply his impressionistic technique to actual compositions of Millet and others? The hairline of difference between David and Ingres is only created by the latter's better sense of space.
>
> I feel that to embroider upon the cubist principle of space is more courageous than to paint those Kansas red barns and Middle West haystacks after the fashion of Currier and Ives or J. G. Brown. Why is it that an ancient piece of African or Greek archaic sculpture may be safely exhibited

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[8] The Fifth Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists, New York, Riverside Museum, February 9-February 23, 1941. Browne exhibited four untitled paintings for which no documentation exists.

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> with a true modern painting? Because the basic idea of space is the same and the human drama implied is also alike.
>
> Byron Browne[9]

Coupled with his affirmation of humanist principles already strongly manifested within his psyche, Browne had earlier asserted his belief in Cubist notions of space as the great modern connective thread to tradition. These ardently written comments regarding the "humanistic thing" and the "human drama" are telling and predictive of the stance to which he would cling ever more vociferously, as he witnessed the erosion of such values from the mid-1940s into the following decade. The abstract characteristics of his work aside, this humanistic approach and philosophical position governed his painting for the remainder of his life and would eventually act to his great detriment.[10]

Browne would continue to insist with stubbornly renewed vigor that the human element, the figure or some aspect of recognizable subject matter, must be present in painting. The majority within a new group that would become the Abstract

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9 Byron Browne, Letter, "Opinions Under Postage: Art Today," The New York Times, 13 July 1941, sect. 10, p. 7.

10 The earliest twentieth century American critic who expressed similar humanistic feelings toward the making of art was Christian Brinton, in his essay for the catalogue of the art exhibition at the Panama Pacific International Exhibition, 1915, in San Francisco. Brinton, who had witnessed the famous Armory show two years earlier and perhaps sensing the danger of modern art's erosion of the human spirit, stressed the presence of the human element as necessary to good and enduring art. Browne must have concurred with his viewpoint for his library contained two volumes of Brinton's writings. Despite wholly nonrepresentational aspects of Browne's production, as subject matter became increasingly suspect in the eyes of some painters, more and more he grew to regard it as an essential element in the process of making art. As some tried to rid their work of all references to the natural world, Browne took the opposite tack.

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Expressionists, later known also as the New York School, repudiated his viewpoint.[11]

In addition to the future Abstract Expressionists on the homefront, many well-known European avant-gardists would soon be on their way here because of deterioration of the political climate overseas; some had already arrived. Their teachings would compound the problem of American abstraction. Although neither Browne nor anyone else could have predicted the outcome, these temporary expatriates, among them important French Surrealists, would at the same time invigorate America's abstract movement with original concepts, many of which would conflict with his own.

Despite the negativism Browne expressed in his letter, American critics, such as Edward Alden Jewell, at last perceiving abstraction as more than fad, had inaugurated efforts to explain abstract concepts so that readers could better understand the "new" painting. By this time a few critics, their charges of derivation aside, recognized the earnestness of artists who worked in this manner and strove to create an appropriate critical language with which to describe it.[12] Nevertheless, they themselves seemed confounded as to how proceed with the task.

By now there is a familiar, almost harping ring to Browne's plea for American modernism via the School of Paris. Yet even as he wrote in mid-1941, some critics,

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[11] During the 1950s, but beginning toward the last half of the 1940s, Browne's humanist position became increasingly unfashionable among a certain group of painters. Inevitably, his position, essentially an antinihilistic approach to space and form, was swept aside by the antihumanist, antitraditionalist attitudes of this group of outspoken painters of opposing artistic values.

[12] Edward Alden Jewell, "Abstraction Once More to the Fore: Exhibitions of the Week Bring Forward Diverse Expressions in This Field--An Old Issue Analyzed Anew," The New York Times, 16 February 1941, (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 9. It is fair to state that no critic at this time could write appropriately about abstract and nonfigurative form and imagery. It took years longer to work out a satisfactory discourse.

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writing since the 1930s, already expressed receptive, even bored resignations of acceptance with "the same old stuff of the School of Paris," as many from the 1930s designated French abstraction. By this time exhibitions of abstract works by French and American painters were becoming more frequent. American galleries and museum visitors alike certainly had a wider field of modernist art to view than at any time before, although the public's understanding of and taste for abstraction had improved little and sales were still rare.

Yet Byron Browne was not the only letter writer to launch public diatribes in the name of art. As Samuel M. Kootz had demonstrated upon prior occasions, the collector, critic and proselytizer for American art knew well how to embroil the art community and he continued inflaming it. His so-called "shattering bomb" letter, printed in The New York Times, August 10, 1941, prompted a lengthy controversy waged nearly weekly on the newspaper's art pages; the reverberations extended until early March of the following year.

Kootz contended that in a ten-year search he had failed to encounter a single new idea issuing from American studios. American painters, he intimated, appeared to be either asleep or dead on their feet; if the art of this country was to have any future, the situation needed immediate correction. Said Kootz

> Under present circumstances the probability is that the future of painting lies in America. The pitiful fact is, however, that we offer little better than a geographical title to the position of world's headquarters for art.[13]

Kootz cited the recent New York World's Fair, where work from all the "best" painters from each of the forty-eight states had been shown. For him, the experience was appalling, "I have not discovered one bright, white hope." "I have not seen one attempt to

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[13] Samuel M. Kootz, Letter, The New York Times, 10 August 1941, (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 7. The letter appeared in Jewell's "Opinions under Postage" article.

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experiment, to realize a new method of painting."[14] Kootz accused American artists of regurgitating the same old ideas, resting on their laurels. ". . . no new talent has come forward to challenge them."[15]

Believing that the Great Depression was finally dissipating, he remarked that ". . . things are on the up and up." "Money can be heard crinkling throughout the land."[16] What galleries needed, he felt, was fresh new talent. The only thing Americans had to do now, and he included female artists as well, was to find a new approach. "God knows," he wrote, "you've had a long rest."[17] Pandora's box flung open, Kootz now left it up in the air, challenging the artist himself to make corrections.

His rousing letter shocked readers, setting off a storm of angry repercussions across the country. Yet not all reacted unfavorably. Edward Alden Jewell agreed that even in 1941, American art had reached an impasse, that anecdotal painting was just marking time. He published the Kootz letter in its entirety, convinced its accusations merited further investigation.

Dozens of painters and sculptors, Stuart Davis, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Stefan Hirsch and Nathaniel Pousette-Dart among them, along with interested persons from across the

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

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country responded; the Times published a few of their more impassioned replies.[18] Many agreed with Kootz, that the American artist had not tried to expand on the status quo, and that his wake-up call was timely; some, like Davis, thought it unrealistic of Kootz to demand more of artists when it was the art institutions, such as the dealers, museums, critics, government art projects, national art magazines and even college art departments, that dictated policy and artistic standards, essentially tying their hands and leaving them powerless, for artists had no voice in their decisions. Davis equated the problem to the poor judgment and lack of insight that this strangling monopoly held over the artist, while unhesitatingly placing Kootz within this monopolizing group. Wrote Davis

> I would be interested in knowing whether Mr. Kootz would agree with me on the mere possibility of a connection between our monopoly's taste and the fog with the unpleasant odor that seems to hover over American art. It may simply be the cultural halitosis of our monopoly.[19]

Then, midway through the controversy, Kootz retorted with yet another published letter. Expanding his earlier argument, he referred to some of the points respondents had raised in answer to his railings against American painters, thus sustaining an endless stream of rebuttals, pro and con.[20]

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[18] For a complete understanding of the ongoing "Bombshell Controversy," see the opinions expressed by various readers, mostly painters, in the following Sunday editions of The New York Times: 24 August 1941, sect. 9, p. 7; 31 August 1941, sect.9, p. 7; 7 September 1941, sect. 9, p. 7; 14 September 1941, sect. 9, p. 7; 21 September 1941, sect. 9, p. 5; 28 September 1941, sect. 9, p. 5; 12 October 1941, sect. 9, p. 9,; 19 October 1941, sect. 9, p. 9; 23 November 1941, sect. 9, p. 9, and 7 December 1941, sect. 10, p. 13. All opinions appeared in the art criticism pages of Edward Alden Jewell.

[19] Stuart Davis, Letter, The New York Times, 12 October 1941 (Sun. ed.), p. 9, sect. 9.

[20] Samuel M. Kootz, Letter, "Bombshell Clarified," The New York Times, 5 October 1941, (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 9 .

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While one could argue the consequences, the Kootz "Bombshell" letters, as they came to be known, and the immediate controversy they engendered, resulted in two highly-publicized exhibitions: Contemporary American Paintings, opening January 5, 1942, a showing of "modern" works that Kootz organized for the R. H. Macy & Company department store on 34th Street, and The Bombshell Artists Group exhibition the following March, organized to rebut and challenge the writer-collector's diatribes. Composed mostly of unknown figurative artists and quickly organized, fifty-five sculptors and painters of the latter group heeded an open call and mounted a large presentation of over two hundred paintings at the Riverside Museum at West 103rd Street.[21] All works carried a price tag and each group published a catalogue that included essays explaining the painters's opposing positions.

Reviews were mixed, with surprisingly scant acknowledgment of the Bombshell group show. In the case of the Macy's exhibition, realists occupied hanging space alongside abstractionists causing most critics to wonder if the examples Kootz presented were really what the entrepreneur had been seeking for ten years, so "unmodern" and conservative were many of his choices.[22] Even Browne's lone entry, Seated Woman, ca. 1940-41 (Fig. 5-31), a charming but hardly modern classicized seated nude figure sporting a crown of leaves and clutching drapery across her thighs, seemed retardataire in light of his abstraction and

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[21] Contemporary American Paintings, New York, R. H. Macy & Company, Macy Galleries, January 5-25, 1942 and The Bombshell Artists Group, New York, Riverside Museum, March 3-22, 1942.

[22] This comment refers to that made by Samuel M. Kootz in his "Bombshell" letter to The New York Times, 10 August 1941, cited in footnote 20, referring to his futile decade-long search for intelligent inventive talent.

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his not infrequent diatribes over the matter in the public press.[23] It can be surmised that Kootz, in the name of retail sales, had a last minute change of heart and toned down his desire for innovative work in deference to the average Macy customer's conservative taste. Sales were reported brisk but Browne's painting, which carried a tag of $49.75, in typical department store pricing fashion, remained unsold. This exhibition launched Kootz's career as an art dealer.

A secondary reason for discussion of such a mediocre affair, for all its prior publicity, is that it marked the first time Browne dealt on a professional level with the man who, in four years, would launch one of the most innovative, contemporary and controversial art galleries in New York. Samuel Kootz would include him among the permanent roster of six American painters whom he believed represented the most advanced painting then achieved in this country.

Meanwhile, anticipating United States involvement in the already-commenced European war, in October 1941 the Federal Security Agency, U.S. Office of Education and the War Department, issued Browne a Vocational Training Card. Under mandatory

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23 For newspaper coverage of the Macy exhibition, ranging from Kootz's initial call for paintings, Macy's advertisements, to reviews and criticism, see the following issues of The New York Times: 7 December 1941, (Sun. ed.), sect. 10, p. 13; 4 January 1942, (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 9; 11 January 1942, (Sun. ed.), sect. 9, p. 9; 18 January 1942, (Sun. ed.), sect.9, p. 9. PM's Weekly, 11 January 1942, (Sun. ed.), Vol. 2, no. 30, sect. 2, p. 60, and the New York World-Telegram, 10 January 1942, (Sun. ed.), p. 9. For coverage of the Bombshell Artists Group exhibition, see The New York Times, 4 March 1942, p. 24 and the New York Post, 2 March 1942, p. 8.

Considering Browne's disdain for the commercial aspects of art promotion, it is doubtful that, then as later in his career, he was proud of this type of affiliation, where customer's mentalities ran no further than "the right picture for every sofa." However, World War II was just beginning for Americans, government support programs of the 1930s were drying up and little else was happening in the art world, as attention turned to political and military events: Pearl Harbor and mobilization of armed forces. Macy's exhibition included works by Stuart Davis, George L. K. Morris and Milton Avery among numerous others.

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orders he underwent instruction for pattern making, lathe turning and bench and machine work at the Brooklyn Technical High School, as part of the Emergency Training Program for National Defense.[24] As he had been during the Depression, Browne again found himself and his career restricted by Federal government projects.

During 1942, Browne completed further training as an airplane mechanic at the Aviation Trades Center, sponsored by the same federal training program. When authorities learned that he was an artist they put him to work drawing complicated aircraft machinery parts, such as landing gears, (Fig. 5-32) and cross sections of secret military hardware, (Fig. 5-33). Although a "safe" military job, he nevertheless requested a transfer and, having no choice in the matter, he soon found himself involved in heavy defense work, working long hours.[25] As time allowed, he attempted to paint but, reviewing his exhibition record during the war years, his meager output attests to the near impossibility of such double duty.

In late 1942, utilizing his newly-acquired war training skills, the Republic Aircraft Factory in Farmingdale, Long Island contracted him to turn out thousands of identical assembly line airplane parts, a job that soon proved untenable. The extreme stress of such an ear shattering, repetitious job, combined with late night shifts, soon adversely affected

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24 Following the Japanese bombing attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Congress voted for declaration of war against Japan, which President Franklin Roosevelt formally declared the following day; three days later, Germany and Italy declared war against us and Congress, in turn, against those countries.

25 Many of his friends who were inducted into the armed services served by using their artistic skills, drafting and making isometric illustrations of machine parts for the war effort. Browne could have also and seriously considered doing so, going so far as proving to superiors that he was capable of tight rendering of machinery parts. Browne soon chose heavy defense work instead, however, fearing that being tied to this kind of "art" would interfere with his creative effort and destroy his abilities.

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his health; he could neither physically nor mentally stand the monotony. After only four months he was forced to quit.

Browne's next job, occupying much of 1943, taught him the specialty of shipfitter 1st class at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, by then the largest ship building center in America. There he learned to operate a welder's blowtorch, a skill that proved useful for the metal sculpture he later constructed. Days were long, twelve to fourteen hour shifts were common, and he frequently came home with his eyes nearly closed from the torch. Such work was dangerous and he witnessed serious accidents, becoming involved in some while on duty. Once his head was so severely struck that stitches were required to close the wound.[26] Again he was forced to request his release.

For reasons undetermined but perhaps because of his age, now thirty-five years, and that he was married and had recently become a father, Browne's preinduction physical examination was not administered until the end of 1943. It was then that he learned he had a serious heart disorder, an enlarged heart--commonly known at that time as athlete's heart--on one side. Whereas he had been initially issued a 1-A draft card category, he now became 4-F; this unexpected finding eliminated him from further consideration for draft into the armed forces, as well as for strenuous defense work alternatives.[27]

On January 24, 1944, the Selective Service System sent Browne official notice that

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[26] Articles in the daily newspapers attest to fatal accidents occurring on a regular basis in jobs of these types. Compounding the problem, one never knew just how extensively ones fellow workers had been prepared for their jobs--rarely enough training time was ever allowed--and people were killed or maimed as a result. Mental stress, combined with constant noise and fatigue, made such jobs nearly intolerable for some. Browne may have suffered a kind of nervous breakdown, understandable in work so antithetic to human sensibility and creativity.

[27] The implication of this finding would lie dormant until 1952, when Browne suffered his first heart attack.

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he had been rejected for service in any military branch, based on findings from his preinduction physical; his new 4-F classification card arrived a few days later. Given his passive nonviolent disposition, being prevented from fighting in the war did not fill him with guilt. Now, despite the war, he found himself free to return to painting.

Yet a greater reason to remain at home had occurred on April 18, 1943, in New York City, when a son, Stephen Bernard, was born to Rosalind and him.[28] Now, unable to perform defense work but losing the paycheck it provided, and with the added responsibility of a child to support as well as his wife, Browne desperately needed full-time employment. Friends suggested he apply for a guard job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which he did, and was hired immediately, remaining there until mid-1946.[29] Although the museum atmosphere was far more compatible to health and temperament, once again his employment precluded painting during normal daylight hours, severely limiting the number of canvases he could complete.

Whether by choice or chance, Browne's security guard assignments most often placed him in the Greek and Roman sculpture sections or in Neoclassical painting department, especially that area exhibiting works by the French painter, Jacques Louis David, whose work Browne loved. His constant exposure to such works, coupled with a deep appreciation for true classical art, strongly affected his painting, influencing it even in

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28 Their friend, the painter John Graham, sent the couple an amusing poem of congratulations.

29 Mrs. Browne recalled that, as part of his duties, her husband had to carry a gun, which he very much disliked having to do. Cleaning toilets was another requirement of museum guards at that time. A telephone call on June 13, 1983, to the personnel office of the Metropolitan Museum of Art requesting dates of Browne's employment led to naught. All such records from the 1940s had been destroyed so that Browne's exact tenure cannot be verified.

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its modernism. Aside from his certainty for the "rightness" of classical content in the work of Picasso, his conviction of the continuing progressive tradition in great art, as exemplified by this work, was reaffirmed through such close and constant contact, convincing him of the validity of his long-held stance. He refused to believe otherwise for the rest of his life.

Prior to Browne's leaving his defense employment, collector- promoter Samuel Kootz again reentered his life. In March 1943, at the urging of Kootz, his friend Rose Fried, owner and director of the Pinacotheca Gallery, organized a solo exhibition of twelve of Browne's paintings and drawings. Scheduled at the height of American involvement in the war effort, when Browne, already under stress from his ill-suited defense job could spare little time in his studio, Kootz prodded and encouraged him on a daily basis to produce as much new work as possible, agreeing to augment that with examples from past years. Somehow, Browne managed to come up with several new canvases. Kootz composed the catalogue essay in which he commented

> America's more important artists are consistently shying away from regionalism and exploring the virtues of internationalism. This is the painting equivalent of our newly-found political and social internationalism.
>
> Byron Browne is making a personal contribution in this field thru energetic inventions, brilliant color dissonances and athletic rightness in space divisions.
>
> His balanced designs and rhythms are highly rewarding and repay continuous investigation. In an area not yet familiar to most of the American public Byron Browne is rapidly succeeding in creating a fine place for himself. His aggressive grasp of our more advanced ideologies pays off in canvases that evidence constant growth.
>
> And the drawings he's showing are right out of his top drawer.
>
> Samuel M. Kootz[30]

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30 Byron Browne: Recent Paintings, Samuel M. Kootz, essay, New York, Pinacotheca Gallery, March 15-31, 1943. The gallery was located at 20 West 58th Street, directly across the street from the Plaza Hotel.

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As evident from the context, Kootz placed Browne in the lead of the new "international" style of art as early as the beginning of 1943, while giving a verbal coup de grace to painters who would continue in what he felt was the antiquated Regionalist and American Scene manner. Both he and Browne had shared this "antibarnyard" philosophy since 1930.

The support of Samuel Kootz, now well known in art circles, not only lent a measure of confidence but also enhanced Browne's stature. Despite painting time lost during his war employment, Browne's career now took an unexpected upward propulsion it heretofore lacked. Browne's job as a Navy Yard shipfitter, a curious occupation for a painter but one that demonstrated his patriotism and strength, coupled with his simultaneous participation in the American Abstract Artists group in their seventh annual show, added further aura to the reputation Kootz began to build.[31] In order to locate paintings sufficient to mount a substantial show, paintings from as far back as 1937 had to be included: twelve were finally chosen. Understandably, the war years took away much of his creative time, preventing noticeable stylistic development.

While not completely enthusiastic, a flurry of press coverage, entranced by the fact of his being a defence worker as well as artist, a most unlikely alliance, accompanied Browne's show. According to Carlyle Burrows of the New York Herald Tribune, "He uses human interest in his subjects, designing them mainly with figures at the back of his mind." "But there are different influences apparent in his work-a little of this and a little of that-

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31 The Seventh Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists. New York, Riverside Museum, March 16-April 25, 1943. Apparently those who participated hung their paintings according to a numbering system where no titles were used. Browne's records for this exhibition are lost.

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which keeps him from standing forcefully on his own feet."[32] Burrows accompanied his review with two reproductions, an older work, Woman Reading, 1938 (Fig. 5-34) and a recently painted canvas, Night Scene (a.k.a. Women by a Window), 1942 (Fig. 5-35), depicting a monumental classicized female figure grasping a cleaver in her right hand while standing beside a table top still life of sliced watermelon on white fabric folds; a comic strip moon and stars, seen through an open window in the background, add to the incongruity of the brightly colored scene. Included in the show was the 1937 Crucifixion (Fig. 5-36), a stylized linear depiction of the Biblical story. Although the whereabouts of much of the work exhibited remain unknown, Night Scene was recently shown.[33]

Burrows's statement that Browne "uses human interest in his subjects, designing them mainly with figures at the back of his mind," attests to his veering from the geometric abstractions of the previous decade to a new focus on recognizable, albeit highly exaggerated human aspects within his work. Viewers, consistently incapable of seeing the "realism" inherent in geometric abstraction, seem to have driven Browne toward the figurative, for, although "abstracted," conspicuous within each work were both realist and nonfigurative components. Not until the mid-1950s would a totally nonfigurative format re-interest him.

Helen Boswell of Art Digest, termed his work "highly imaginable, with inventive creations that carry his own stamp," and she, too, reproduced Browne's figurative Night

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32 Carlyle Burrows, "Eclectic Modern," New York Herald Tribune, 21 March 1943, sect. 6, p. 5. Burrows, always a perceptive critic, has early on pinpointed the problem of Browne's overt influences that, he felt, tended to hide his "own equally strong" individualism.

33 Byron Browne: 1930's to 1950's Evolution of an American Modernist, Matthew Baigell, essay, New York, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, September 21-October 26, 1991.

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Scene.[34] Boswell also felt that Browne's designs, while energetic, still relied too heavily on Picasso. Although she did not care for his "oversize female figures," the subject matter of this work and several others, she wrote favorably about most, mentioning a grape-toned Crucifixion as especially "pleasing."

Howard Devree of The New York Times wrote that Browne's work appeared "forceful in its explicitly decorative statements." He also said that he was one of the ". . . most diligent and self-directed tillers of the somewhat arid borderland between the abstract and the nonobjective . . . .," recognizing "Here and there the impact of Picasso . . . ."[35]

Betsy Luce of the New York Post, who accompanied her article (Fig. 5-37) with a photograph of Browne and a reproduction of Woman Reading (Fig. 5-34), interviewed him and questioned what impact the world war had on his painting

> I paint this way because I feel the intensity of modern life, so I try to express it through bright colors and an agitated type of design--I try to symbolize rather than reproduce photographically. The world is going through some sort of change; the direction can be expressed through art.[36]

The anonymous reviewer from Art News noted that although he had "borrowed much from the European experimentalists, notably Picasso, . . . his work . . . reflects a

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[34] Helen Boswell, "Byron Browne Exhibits," Art Digest, Vol. 17, no. 12, March 15, 1943, p. 23. A box announcement of this exhibition appeared on page 21; the Pinacotheca Gallery was located at 20 West 58th Street.

[35] Howard Devree, "From a Reviewer's Notebook : Some Recently Opened One-Man Exhibitions," The New York Times, 21 March 1943, (Sun. ed.), sect. 10, p. 7.

[36] Betsy Luce, "Navy Yard Shipfitter Has One-Man Show in Painting Gallery," New York Post, 29 March 1943, cols. 1 and 2, p. 8.

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strong personality."[37] Browne's prices, quoted in the text, ranged from $50 to $400.00.

Emily Genauer from the New York World-Telegram wrote

> Byron Browne hasn't yet unhitched his wagon from the Picasso star. But in his new pictures, one feels that he is no longer just groveling blindly and reverently behind the great Spaniard. Now, one becomes convinced, he could very well operate under his own steam, if he chose. Browne seems at last to be getting somewhere.[38]

Although acknowledging that he worked with forms suggested by Picasso, the well-respected critic said, "You still get the curious feeling that this is personal and even original stuff."[39]

Repeatedly, Browne emphasizes the relevancy of abstract symbols or abbreviated code marks over literal or naturalistic depiction as fundamental to comprehension of his work. When Browne paints unevenly pointed, childish star shapes that fill a background, they generally indicate night scenes, irrespective of background color that might be bright as daylight; one sweeping line will represent a full masculine head of hair and an elongated vertical curlicues, flowing feminine tresses; a circle or triangle enclosing a dot may represent an eye, not necessarily placed in a head where one expects it; incised consecutive lines indicate wood-grained surfaces.

Browne's fondness for strident clashing hues placed next to each other lend pattern

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37 "The Passing Shows: Byron Browne," Art News, Vol. 42, no. 4, April 1-14, 1943, p. 23.

38 Emily Genauer, "Art and Antiques," "At the Pinacotheca," New York World-Telegram, 20 March 1943, p. 9.

39 Ibid. Genauer, who liked Browne personally as well as professionally, would demonstrate an increasing admiration for his art. She remained a supporter of Browne's work throughout his career.

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and turmoil to otherwise passive surfaces; sharp angles on the diagonal contribute further to this strategy. As he told Luce in her New York Post review, "A shipfitter's job has a lot to do with design. Sometimes I stare at all those angles on a ship's turret and see all sorts of wonderful designs in them."[40] Without meaning to, Browne found he could transpose the mundane means of his employment to service aesthetic ends.

The Pinacotheca exhibition was Browne's most important since the start of his career, for it represented a seasoned, if not fully matured painter. At thirty-five, he had ample time to know himself, realize his preferences and limitations and to possess foresight enough to envision his future direction. Acquired along the way, as well, was a certain amount of recognition and prestige from the critical sector, regardless of the review. The growing respect of his peers in the American Abstract Artists group contributed further to his self-esteem.

Although still insecure and unable to make a living from his artwork, Browne's recognition by Samuel Kootz as a serious American painter of stature was significant. If not yet successful in his objective to fuse modern School of Paris standards into American mainstream art, at least his persistence, for well over a decade, had unquestionably contributed toward the unprecedented changes occurring in American painting and in critical attitudes, as well. Many who had before looked with askance now took his work seriously, monitoring his career.

At the end of April 1943, Samuel Kootz published his second book, New Frontiers in American Painting, in which he paired his estimates of individual American

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[40] Op. cit., footnote 43.

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modernists with his theory of American art's indebtedness to modern French painters.[41] In its sixty pages of text and eighty-nine reproductions, he included two of Browne's canvases: the geometric abstract painting, Africana (Painting in Black), 1937-38 (Fig. 3-26) and Night Scene (Woman by a Window), 1942 (Fig. 5-35). With a degree of pride Kootz acknowledged that abstraction in America, as practiced by Browne, Davis, Gorky, Graham, Holty, Matulka, Morris, Xceron and many others, had progressed directly from French Cubism.[42] Kootz was convinced that this form of abstraction represented the most advanced work yet being done in the United States. In his discussion of Browne's painting Kootz stated that

> Browne diffuses his energies and ideas, hopping from lively abstractions to representational work that is not too far removed from academicism. The latter work offers no room for discussion whereas his abstract inventions, his brilliant color harmonies and his spare rightness in space decisions are highly rewarding. He has the equipment to do a good job in abstraction. I sincerely hope he confines himself to using that equipment as a good body of his work promises.[43]

Raising the issue of realism in his work by terming Browne's proclivity to representation as "academic," while omitting further discussion, Kootz indicated that he found Browne's personal preference for classicizing heads and figures inconsistent within his modernism. His was a forewarning, an early caveat of concern for a direction the dealer

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[41] Samuel M. Kootz, New Frontiers in American Painting, New York, Hastings House, 1943. From April 26-May 1, a selection of paintings reproduced in the book was shown at the Downtown Gallery.

[42] The point of departure for their abstraction was rooted in existent reality; American painters adhered to the natural world, not geometry or abstract intellectual concepts for their subject matter.

[43] Kootz, New Frontiers, p. 49.

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felt wrong. Kootz warned of another potential trouble spot in Browne's work: his habitual bounding from one theme to another, one style to another in rapid order without having exhausted the possibilities of either, often without developing a strong series within each. This lack of interest in or inability to curb his perpetual experimentation with form, Kootz believed, would eventually diminish the strength of his oeuvre, damaging his career. At the time no one could predict how prophetic were his intuitions.

Kootz, as he had in the daily press, often wrote sweeping statements of his concern for the hopelessness of American art, belittling the Regionalists as destructive currents. Well-publicized, the book provoked a hornet's nest of adverse response from critics, artists and public alike. As in the previous Modern American Painters, Kootz attempted, thirteen years later, to redefine what was truly American in American art and profile what he considered the most progressive trends defining its strengths.[44] His book was timely and well researched.

While motivated always by self-interest, Kootz's viewpoints were also governed by a keen intellectual ethos that allowed him to observe and discern see more clearly than most. Despite his derogatory and somewhat discouraging prognosis, to the dealer's credit there emerged an underlying optimistic and passionate excitement about the possibilities inherent in the future of American painting. Still, major arguments differed little from

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[44] The volume of publicity and criticism surrounding the publication of this book is astonishing, even by today's standards. For a comprehensive coverage and look at the temper of the times, see: the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Kootz Gallery Papers, Microfilm Roll numbers 1318, 1319 and 1320. Additional information on Kootz as pertaining to Browne can be obtained from the following Archives's microfilm rolls: Roll number 97, Samuel Kootz, Main Photograph File; Roll number N131; Roll number 11-71, Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, Exhibition Catalogues. Had this been 1993 instead of 1943, Samuel Kootz would have been the guest on every television talk show in the nation.

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his numerous prior attempts to eject lethargy from the work of American painters. The new Kootz book marked an important step in Browne's career, for, as well as championing American abstract art and artists, it was the first time his work had been reproduced and discussed in a nationally distributed publication that was not an exhibition catalogue.[45]

The following year art dealer Sidney Janis, as if unwilling to allow Samuel Kootz to upstage him, published Abstract and Surrealist Art in America, a succinct and more representative survey of the advanced movements in American art, in that it paid special attention to Surrealism as well as abstraction.[46] Where Kootz had written off Surrealism and its primarily foreign-born devotees as "chi-chi eroticism," giving it but slight regard in his book, Janis devoted one of five chapters to paintings by European Surrealist war exiles, who were by this time a highly vocal and influential group in New York City art circles.

Again, Browne found himself in the favorable position of having his work considered in a nationally distributed book, in which was reproduced his colorful abstract Head, 1942, (Fig. 5-38). In his essay preceding the chapter titled American Abstract Painters, Janis labeled Browne a Cubist, a division under the umbrella of abstract painting, which also included biomorphic styles of abstraction. Browne shared space with Mercedes Carles, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Balcomb Greene, Hans Hofmann, Carl Holty,

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45 Today, nearly fifty years after its publication, this book is considered a classic among twentieth century treatises on American art.

46 Sidney Janis, Abstract and Surrealist Art in America, New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944. Among the American Surrealist painters illustrated in his book were: William Baziotes, Fannie Hillsmith, Morris Graves, Dorthea Tanning, Leon Kelly, Walter Quirt, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, for lack of having any other category suited to his work.

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Karl Knaths, Lenore Krasner and A. D. F. Reinhardt, among numerous others, attesting to the growing popularity of less realistic painting within the artistic community, as well as with the lay population. Surprisingly, of the original members of the American Abstract Artists group, who had proselytized for geometric abstraction with such vigor, Janis included few, indicative of a widening chasm between the two principle camps of abstraction.

It is peculiar, too, that, in the group of thirty painters that Janis included in the American Abstract Painters chapter, Browne's distorted abstracted head and the largely representational examples by Ralston Crawford, Abraham Rattner and Joseph Solman were the only "figurative" depictions. All other examples expressed completely abstract geometric or biomorphic configurations.[47] Browne's omission from the biomorphic group and subsequent placement within Cubism's rubric could be seen as recognition on Janis's part of his growth, that he had indeed separated himself from pure geometric abstraction,

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[47] Janis's book consisted of five chapters, each representing a stage of progression in American modern art: 1. Sources in Twentieth-Century European Painting, 2. American Pioneers in Twentieth-Century Painting, 3. American Abstract Painters, 4. American Surrealist Painters, and 5. American Paintings by Artists in Exile. Evident by this time is the impact of Julien Levy's gallery and Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, in which the budding American Surrealists predominated. Janis, by allotting them extensive coverage in his book, gave credibility to this type of art, the counterpart of the severe intellectuality and restraint of much current American abstraction.

Although Levy placed the abstractionists in a separate category, he did not feel the schism between the two factions was as insurmountable as each group's adherents believed. He felt that some abstract painters, such as Gorky, Gottlieb, Hare and Rothko, were able to bridge the gap to Surrealism. Browne could not, then or in the future. However, Janis felt that artists who incorporated both directions had for a precedent the work of Picasso. Browne's firm attachment to Cubist structure as the prime conveyer of the world's artistic legacy carried to modernism, precluded his involvement with the theories and devices of such a splinter submovement as Surrealism, whose function it was to break with the past. Even Picasso claimed rejection of Surrealism despite the European Surrealists's idolatry of him. Considering his esteem for Picasso, it is not surprising that he, too, refused to embrace its tenets. Surrealist content aside, it is entirely possible that Browne based his decision to ignore the Surrealists solely for that reason.

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his major stylistic mode of the 1930s, and the style with which the American Abstract Artists group were identified. In his caption under the reproduction of Head in Janis's book (p. 56), Browne spoke of its content in terms of "a symbol." However, he neglected to explain what his Cubist head symbolized in terms of the visual "symbols" he used.

The Janis book spawned a traveling exhibition beginning at the Mortimer Brandt Gallery in New York in December 1944, with the book's title also serving as the title of the exhibition. By July 1945, many of paintings reproduced on its pages, including Browne's Head, had traveled across the country to museums as far west as Seattle and San Francisco.

The Pinacotheca Gallery arranged a second exhibition for Browne the following year, for which he had found time to prepare several new paintings. Yet as in the previous Pinacotheca show, several canvases had to be culled from years past in order to round out the installation. Byron Browne: Sixteen Paintings, opened on December 11, 1944, with critics again noting his proclivity for, indeed devotion, to Picasso's styles and subjects.[48] Nonetheless, they expressed a generally favorable opinion for his work and admired his inventiveness. Howard Devree of The New York Times, called it the ". . . best show he has yet put together."[49] The anonymous reviewer from Art News, who accompanied his article with a reproduction of Salute Each Time the Cock Crows, 1940 (Fig. 5-1),

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48 Byron Browne: Sixteen Paintings, New York, Pinacotheca Gallery, December 11, 1944-January 6, 1945. Barely a week after the opening, famed European painter, Wassily Kandinsky, died in Paris on December 17, at the age of seventy-eight.

49 Howard Devree, "Among the New Exhibitions," The New York Times, 17 December 1944, sect. 2, p. 4.

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characterized his works as "extremely decorative abstractions,"[50] and observed

> Though many of his forms are frankly derived from the recent French experiments, nevertheless the artist has an inventiveness of his own as well as a good sensitivity to color. The Etruscan Woman, 1936 (Fig. 3-37), is a very handsome picture indeed, though the debt is obvious. All in all, with its vigor, delicacy, and variety, this is a striking show.[51]

Maude Riley of The Art Digest found wit and humor in Browne's paintings, especially in female figures such as Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, 1937 (Fig. 5-39).[52] The depiction reminded her of a Helen Hokinson character and she felt Browne must have had a good time preparing most of the canvases.[53] Reaching beyond Browne's stylistic affinities, she thought he demonstrated a new warmth and assurance in his work and wrote, "Browne's . . . "strict devotion [to Picasso and David] has eased into confidence and that, in turn, has produced a new freedom." His "color is clean and rich, his touch decisive and his forms imaginative."[54] Yet neither Riley nor any reviewer noted that many of Browne's paintings, as in the first Pinacotheca exhibition, had been executed for and exhibited in earlier shows.

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50 "The Passing Shows," "Byron Browne," Art News, Vol. 43, no. 17, December 15-31, 1944, p. 19.

51 Ibid. Browne's prices for paintings in this show had been raised slightly from what they cost the year before, ranging now from a low of $150 for works on paper to $400.00 for the largest oils on canvas.

52 Maude Riley, "Byron Browne's New Freedom," The Art Digest, Vol 19, no. 7, January 1, 1945, p. 12.

53 Helen Hokinson, a trained fashion artist, became famous for her cartoons of garden club, lecturing lady types of a certain age and girth, drawn for the New Yorker since 1925, six months after the magazine began publication.

54 Ibid. In 1945, Maude Riley would leave The Art Digest to publish her own periodical, MKR'S Art Outlook, a type of gallery and auction market guide that included short reviews of current shows.

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Other works in the show included Lady in Starlight, (later retitled Woman with Stars), 1938 (Fig. 2-35), Still Life, 1938 (Fig. 5-40) and Night Scene, 1942 (Fig. 5-35), from last year's Pinacotheca exhibition. Browne, as if making a point of mimicry, may have modeled Woman with Stars after seeing the wildly contorted, pattern-filled designs of Picasso's depictions of women, such as Woman with Beret and Collar, 1937 (Fig. 5-41) and other of his paintings from the mid to late 1930s, where star configurations, lines, crosshatching and curvilinear shapes saturate the figures within his canvases.

To the surprise of many, Browne included in his show a life-size canvas depicting the draped seated figure of a contemporary woman realistically rendered but wearing a Grecian gown and situated within ancient classical architecture, The Portrait of Eleanor Zarief, 1940 (Fig. 5-42). Five years earlier Mrs. Zarief had gained wide recognition for becoming the mother of quadruplets, then a rare occurrence and cause for national celebrity status. Her husband and Browne were friends and at Browne's request she agreed to sit for her portrait, the monumentality of theme and dimensions of which suggesting those equivalent of her recent achievement. Still, for its high degree of realism, couched as it was in classicized references, the picture seemed ill-chosen for an exhibition purporting to set forth Browne's advanced abstraction.[55] As had his war defense work earlier, Browne's newly acquired employment at the Metropolitan Museum of Art prevented him from showing but few new paintings and may account for the decision to include the five-year old portrait. Previously exhibited or new, the maximum number of paintings he could come up with totaled only sixteen.

With final Allied victories occurring in May and August, 1945 marked the end of

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55 The painting was never presented to the Zarief family, was never sold and remains in the Estate of Byron Browne.

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World War II. On a smaller personal scale, 1945 also proved pivotal for Samuel M. Kootz in that, in mid-July, he opened his first public gallery. Earlier that year, Kootz had organized a large "debut" exhibition that opened on April 9, in borrowed spaces at the Feigl Galleries, 65 East 57th Street, in which he featured the current American work of Fernand Léger, consisting of paintings, gouaches and pen and ink drawings, as well as one example each of four lesser-known American painters: William Baziotes, Carl Holty, Fritz Glarner and Robert Motherwell. Kootz did not include Browne's work.

A comment regarding Motherwell's painting indicates how limited some reviewers were in dealing with abstraction. Jo Gibbs of The Art Digest wrote, "So far, no amount of concentration has brought this reviewer within the realm of communication with his work."[56]

Having tested the waters, Kootz, writer of plays and mystery stories, promoter and collector of contemporary art as well as private dealer, next opened his own gallery in mid-July, at 15 East 57th Street, a prestigious location, and a peculiar time to do so, for most galleries either closed for the remainder of the summer or operated on a limited schedule. He placed little box announcements in the art pages of city dailies and in the glossy art periodicals, notifying readers that an "Important Group Show," had just opened on July 16; by this time he added Browne to his small roster of painters. [57] The Kootz Gallery's inaugural exhibition also included works by William Baziotes, Robert Motherwell, Carl Holty, Fritz Glarner and Fernand Léger, artists who were, in the words

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[56] Jo Gibbs, "Kootz Opens Gallery," The Art Digest, Vol. 19, no. 14, April 1945, pp. 11, 31.

[57] Inaugural Exhibition: Important Group Show, New York, Kootz Gallery, July 16-August 31, 1945.

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of the anonymous Newsweek critic, ". . . surrealists who paint abstractly."[58] That Kootz attracted the attention of a national news periodical as well as the art journals, is noteworthy, marking the beginning of many such coups for the enterprising dealer.

It was obvious that Kootz had chosen each painter for his differences within the abstract idiom. Carl Holty exhibited one semi-abstract painting titled The Warrior, 1945 (whereabouts unknown), reported to be "a Kaleidoscopic jigsaw puzzle of angular shapes describing a knight in abstract armor."[59] Fritz Glarner represented the hard-edged, Neoplastic, "Mondrian" aspect of abstraction. Fernand Léger, for the past three years residing in exile in the United States, showed reductive figurative works. Kootz was delighted to exhibit works by such an esteemed figure with examples of his fledgling group. He could not have chosen a more diverse group of painters with which to introduce his new gallery.

Browne's two paintings, Still Life, 1938, (Fig. 5-40) and a Cubist composition, Woman on the Beach, 1945 (Fig. 5-43), so confounded reviewers that part of the caption under its reproduction in Newsweek included an explanation of the correct side on which the viewer could find the figure's head. Said Browne to the reviewer, "I stand all day in front of a Veronese," . . . "then go home and paint the opposite."[60] According to this reviewer, "Typical of his work today is the gallery's Woman on the Beach, which he painted after a vacation at Long Beach. The perplexed lady is there, all right, but her

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58 "Kootz's Kaleidoscopes," Newsweek, Vol. 26, no. 5, July 30, 1945, p. 74.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

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wildly abstracted anatomy is hard to find."[61]

An anonymous reporter for Art News noted

> The effect of white walls punctuated by the brilliant fragmentations of Carl Holty, Baziotes' handsome counterpoint, the whirling calligraphy of Byron Browne, the dramatic resolutions of Robert Motherwell is distinctly striking. Léger, however still carries the day by proving himself a great decorator--which the young Americans are not, although Motherwell's largest might make a memorable stage setting.[62]

Stymied in his efforts to articulate the baffling array of abstracted forms before him, the reviewer at least observed that, "The gallery is doubly welcome in that no one can now complain of the lack of outlets for the experimental elements in our native painting."[63] While far from laudatory, these painters could take some comfort in the seemingly positive attitude expressed by most critics in that abstract works produced by Americans no longer merited their former derision. At last Browne had begun to realize the fruit of years of struggle for personal recognition for his kind of work. Still, its sanction did not necessarily mean that viewers understood it.

Carlyle Burrows of the New York Herald Tribune, singled out Carl Holty and Fernand Léger, saying that, "While both of these artists find inspiration in tangible, realistic forms to be elaborated decoratively, the remaining artists of the group exhibited

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61 Ibid. Although defined by heavy black lines into shapes that suggest a woman prone on a horizontal band of green--the "beach,"--the work is confusing for its profusion of concentric curving lines and abstract patterns that not only fill her geometricised figure but also flood the canvas edge to edge. One can locate the bow and sail of a boat in the middleground; the orange-hued background, congested with serpentine lines, implies the sun's heat waves. Neither of Browne's paintings was wholly abstract.

62 "The Passing Shows," Art News, Vol. 44, no. 10, August 1-31, 1945, pp. 24-25.

63 Ibid.

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work with freedom in the non-objective form."[64] Burrows apparently did not find any degree of reality in Browne's forms, although they were hardly "non-objective."

How financially successful the exhibition proved remains a matter of conjecture but the critical response to such advanced work can be surmised in the tone expressed by another arts writer, who, unlike those of earlier groups, treated the paintings Kootz displayed more as curiosities than works of art. Judith Kaye Reed of The Art Digest, for instance, termed Browne's Still Life "heavy handed with calligraphy," and his Woman on the Beach "as enigmatic to this reviewer as proverbial femininity but not nearly as intriguing, we suspect."[65] Her prose, mannered and ambiguous, was still typical of the meaningless and ill-informed verbiage of most critics. For this baffled writer, whose position was that of Assistant Editor on the magazine's staff, each of the painters was "exploring one or more of the bypaths in the rarified jungle of abstract art."[66] Unfortunately, like Burrows and Gibbs, abstraction frustrated her. She was incapable of addressing the formal issues raised in the work Browne presented.

Nonetheless, Browne was thrilled to be affiliated with the gallery and to find his work discussed by important members of the art press in what he accepted as promising terms. Among his estate records is a letter he wrote to his wife Rosalind, regarding the opening. She and their son, now two years old, had gone to Provincetown for the summer

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64 "Carlyle Burrows, "Art of the Week: In the Galleries: A New Venture," New York Herald Tribune, sect. 4, 22 July 1945 (Sun. ed.), p. 4. Entirely missing from this critic's review was a vocabulary from which to mount an intelligible discussion of the works at hand.

65 Judith Kaye Reed, "Kootz Opens Gallery," The Art Digest, Vol. 19, no. 19, August 1, 1945, p. 9.

66 Ibid.

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Sunday Nite
July 22 [1945]

Dear Rosalind,

Well Kootz's gallery finally got off to a good start. Will have lunch with him tomorrow. Expect to have my picture in a mag. called Newsweek in an article about the gallery.

Don't think I'll be able to get out there for some time. There is so much to do and so little time to do it. Give Stevie a big kiss for me. I wish I could be there to play with him but fate decrees otherwise. Enjoy yourself.
Love,
George[67]

Having lunch with a New York gallery dealer was not an experience to which he was accustomed and the excitement shows in his letter.

Browne, still feeling as financially vulnerable as ever, kept his full-time job as guard at the Metropolitan Museum, joining his wife whenever he could find someone to drive him to Cape Cod on his days off. He had never learned to drive a car and in any case, could not afford to buy one had he so wished. Now, with the real possibility of a new career in store for him with Kootz, his professional future as well as his financial position appeared more optimistic. It would mean, however, spending less and less time at the place he had grown to love, his light-filled rented studio and cottage in Provincetown. At Kootz's persistent urging Browne agreed to be placed under a three year contract with option for another two. He also agreed to produce a specific number of works per year for a specified annual salary: three thousand dollars the first year, the same for the second and thirty-five hundred for the third. This arrangement, whereby the dealer purchased everything the artist produced in return for a guaranteed stipend, constituted an innovation in the American gallery business and soon had tongues

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[67] Letter courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne. For his family, Browne retained his original given name.

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wagging the breath of 57th Street.

Although his contract stipulated he give his dealer all the art he produced in one year, Kootz allowed him to keep [own] one painting for himself per year. He set Browne's minimum number of works to forty pictures annually or 120 for the duration of his contract.[68] Among numerous stipulations, his contract also guaranteed Browne one solo exhibition per year with appearances in numerous group shows in the interim. Kootz paid no commission on any artwork that he sold regardless of the price the work commanded. Unsold works were to remain the property of the dealer. Peggy Guggenheim may have followed the lead of Samuel Kootz regarding her new contract with Jackson Pollock.[69]

At the time, three thousand dollars represented an enormous sum, more money per year than he had ever earned for any part-time employment or from his full-time work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which paid a salary of fifty dollars a week or an annual salary of $2600.00. Although his fee for the number of paintings required seems paltry by today's standards, it should be remembered that such a sum, in 1945 and following the

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[68] Rosalind B. Browne, Tape recorded reminiscences of Rosalind B. Browne, 1971. As a young man, Samuel Kootz had graduated from the University of Virginia with a law degree, which, according to Mrs. Browne, resulted in the dealer seeming needlessly to complicate the language of the contract, something neither she nor Browne had dealt with before. She wanted Browne to take the document to another lawyer for an evaluation but, trusting Kootz implicitly, he would not hear of it. At some point after having been dropped by the Kootz Gallery, Browne was so troubled by the occurrence that he destroyed his contract.

[69] Stephen Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, Jackson Pollock: An American Saga, New York, Potter, 1989, p. 497. In April 1945, when Jackson Pollock's contract came up for renewal following his second solo exhibition for the dealer that March, she (reluctantly) agreed to double his monthly allotment in exchange for all the paintings he produced in the coming year minus one, this despite the lack of sales of his work. Painters Baziotes and Motherwell had defected to the new Kootz Gallery after signing similar contracts in February and Peggy was desperate to keep Pollock from following. I wish to thank Dr. Francis V.O'Connor for initially bringing this information to my attention.

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war, was more than he or nearly any American painter, had ever received per year for his artistic efforts. Browne, who had sold few works in his lifetime, gladly signed the three-year contract that Samuel Kootz offered him on August 20, 1945.

When Kootz first approached him with the idea of a contract, it seemed like the answer to a dream. Still, he was so unbelieving that such a good thing could happen to him that he refused to give up his job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for fear something would go wrong, as things often did, leaving him once again without means for making a living. Aside from his fear that this "dream" would somehow shatter, Browne did not dislike his job with the museum and thought it absolute balm to spend whole days looking at Rubens, Rembrandt and Greek and Roman statuary. Aside from the other duties connected with his job, cleaning restrooms, sweeping stairs and having to carry a firearm, he felt reluctant to leave the museum's aesthetic environment. Kootz had to talk him into quitting and that took the better part of a year.

Once accustomed to the reality of his new situation, Browne's apprehension gradually abated, leaving him feeling singularly fortunate that his effort over the many years was finally paying off. For the first time in his life, Browne experienced a sense of security and devoted himself to the pleasure of painting full time. He was thrilled with his good luck and genuinely grateful to Kootz--in hindsight, perhaps too naively so.

Uncommonly prolific, trusting and generous to a fault, by the end of three years Browne had given a total of 322 pieces of artwork to his dealer, oil paintings as well as watercolors and gouaches, far more than the 120 promised under contract. During his three-year affiliation with the Kootz Gallery he had participated in sixteen exhibitions of which four were one-man shows.

By peculiar contrast, far fewer works were expected of William Baziotes and

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Robert Motherwell, who had affiliated with Kootz earlier, in 1944.[70] Baziotes had made it clear from the outset that his production was slow and uncertain and Kootz accepted this, asking for only twelve or thirteen paintings. Still, Baziotes found even that small quota too hard to meet and as a result he was never able keep a single work for himself. As for Browne's astonishing tally, Baziotes believed that his colleague's generosity was "extremely gallant and that Browne simply wanted to share the excess with Sam."[71]

Rosalind Browne recalls having argued with her husband many times over the excessive number of works he turned over to his dealer, especially since Kootz had no idea how many he was producing in his studio. Exasperated, she explained to others that he was an obsessive worker who thought in pure paint. She recalled that

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70 The Ringling Museum of Art (Sarasota, Florida), Bulletin, Vol. 1, no. 4, April 1962. In 1944 Kootz decided to enter the art world on a new basis as a patron-dealer. He felt strongly that the painters who were coming up should be subsidized completely, not just helped occasionally. His plan was to buy the entire production of an artist during the perilous time of his development and to enter into the unusual percentage agreement once the artist's reputation was well established, often, however, not waiting for the reputation to ascend before striking the deal. Kootz choose Baziotes and Motherwell as his first proteges, sending them to Florida in 1944 to paint. He added Carl Holty to his gallery after its initial exhibition, opening April 9, 1945. Byron Browne and Romare Bearden were added to this exclusive representation in 1945, although Bearden did not sign the same contract or, in fact, any contract. As a result, Kootz never compiled an inventory of his work, as he did with all the others. Later, Kootz asked Browne if he felt Adolph Gottlieb's work was good, questioning whether he felt he should he be invited to join. Browne wholeheartedly supported Gottlieb's addition to the gallery and Kootz signed the painter, at that time affiliated with the Nierendorf Gallery. Hans Hofmann and David Hare joined late, in 1948. Alexander Calder and European artists, Arp, Braque, Miró, Mondrian and Picasso frequently supplemented his regular roster. An eclectic group, it indicated the breadth of the dealer's contemporary taste. Along with Betty Parsons and Peggy Guggenheim, Samuel Kootz became the most important and influential avant-garde art dealer in the country.

71 Rosalind B. Browne, Tape Recorded Interviews with author, New York City, 20 August, 26 August, 2 September, 8 September 1978. At one point, Mrs. Browne remarks that she invited her friend, Ethel Baziotes (Mrs. William Baziotes), to make statements in order to help her recollect events long since transpired. William Baziotes died in 1963.

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> He evolved one painting from another and each very often came out as a complete work of art. His whole method of working was first of all, constantly; he was always working. He was a recluse and lived a very monastic life. He painted an oil, possibly two or three [at the same session]. At night he would place a table in front of him and a ream of buckeye cover stock, which contained a lot of rag--it was good paper and he relaxed by doing watercolors and drawings. This was the way he evolved his iconography. He loved the physical act of painting, the doing of it and discovering the results later. His only outside entertainment was walking. He used to walk from their apartment on East 15th Street to his job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art [at 82nd Street and Fifth Avenue]. He walked constantly; his pleasures were in the museum and now and then with friends. But his friends usually had to seek him. I had to take over all the practical details of our living [one of the reasons she gave up painting]. Byron never answered the telephone and when I was not around to do so, the phone just kept ringing. If Samuel Kootz wanted him and I was not there, Kootz had to go up to the apartment and bang on the door. This greatly irritated the dealer but at least Byron could rightfully claim he was at work and for him. It was very difficult to be the wife of such an obsessive artist because he worked Saturdays, Sundays and the 4th of July--all the time.[72]

His initial solo exhibition at the Kootz Gallery, Byron Browne: Twenty Paintings, opened on January 21, 1946, with semi-abstract Cubist still life paintings and figures of women.[73] This was an especially important exhibition, for it marked only his third one-man show in the eighteen years he had been a professional artist. Browne, now thirty-nine years old and well-seasoned, needed to pull his experience together to consolidate his career and envision the future.

Kootz, a master promoter, had bombarded the press for weeks with advance information on Browne and the work being created especially for this show. Consequently, critics from The Art Digest, Art News, Pictures on Exhibit, the New York Sun, The New

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[72] Ibid. Rosalind mentioned the "monastic lifestyle" that Browne led, often leading to difficulties within their relationship.

[73] Byron Browne: 20 Paintings, New York, Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, January 21-February 9, 1946. The catalogue contained three black and white reproductions but included neither essay nor artist's comments.

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York Times and other periodicals, as well as dozens of the dealer's friends and collectors, flocked to the dressy cocktail opening to see his newest work.

Socially shy, somewhat inarticulate, neither a drinker nor a smoker, Browne tried without success to avoid the scene by sneaking out a side door but Kootz, suspecting as much, had never let him out of his sight. Caught midway down the staircase, he angrily insisted Browne stay to the end and all but dragged him back into the partying milieu, reminding him that as part of their contracts, the dealer expected his painters to greet clientele and guests with welcoming enthusiasm. Browne that night learned valuable social graces as he learned to dislike them the more.

For the next two weeks Browne found himself treated to more publicity and critical notice than he had ever experienced. Thrust into the unaccustomed disconcerting spotlight of celebrity painter, he found it a role for which prior experience had left him wholly unprepared. No longer the seeker of attention with his efforts ignored or rebuked by critics, but the one sought, he had become an unwilling star.

In his positive review, Robert M. Coates, art critic for The New Yorker, stated, "Mostly, his [Browne's] attack on his subjects is direct and sure, and the process of abstraction he practices, although daring, is also extremely logical. I have seen few recent abstract paintings which impressed me as much as Woman with Red Dress," 1945 (Fig. 5-44).[74]

Another reviewer declared

> . . . his present exhibition at the Kootz Gallery places him definitely among the best of our American abstractionists. The work now on view is large and assured, at times daring. It is not quite non-objective, for the forms are

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[74] Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries: Abstraction, Surrealism and the War," The New Yorker, Vol. 21, no. 51, February 2, 1946, p. 70.

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> evidently derived from suggestions of reality. The most striking is perhaps Still-Life with City Window, 1945 (Fig. 5-44), remarkable for its controlled color and organization.[75]

Browne's classic Cubist painting depicted a compote of fruit, an entangled vine and a wine bottle arranged on a tilted table top situated in front of an open window through which could be seen distant geometricized shapes of skyscrapers.

If such affirmative reports were not enough to insure Browne's critical success, Jo Gibbs's opening paragraph in The Art Digest settled the question

> Byron Browne's handsome, big abstractions have been receiving plenty of attention in the annuals this season, from the Audubon to the Whitney, and it looks as though his current show at the Kootz Gallery might multiply the acclaim by about 20--the number of canvases in the exhibition.[76]

For the first time in his life Browne experienced what could only be termed rave reviews; one could say that such positive comments marked one of the rare moments for American abstraction, as well. Consciously setting out to create a new type of figure specifically for this show, Browne fragmented to the extreme his ten canvases portraying female figures. He and Samuel Kootz decided that his exhibition should be broken into the two categories best representing themes favored by the French Cubists and by Browne himself but somehow stressing an American, not a French viewpoint. They divided the show evenly, half figure, half still life, with Kootz asking him to free his work from the authority of Picasso's influence and devise a new "look," consistent throughout. Thus every work conveyed Cubist constructs with discernible subject matter although one could not

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[75] "Byron Browne," Art News, Vol. 44, no. 19, January 15-31, 1946, p. 21. Still Life with City Window was purchased by Edith and Milton Lowenthal, who in turn presented it to the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1957.

[76] Jo [Josephine] Gibbs, "Byron Browne Goes Entirely Abstract," Art Digest, Vol. 20, no. 9, February 1, 1946, p. 10.

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point specifically to Picasso or any single French Cubist as source. Objects within the still lifes, such as the meandering vine, reappear in some manner in the figure paintings, creating relationships between the categories. This new figure type established Browne's reputation as the quintessential American Cubist.

Similarities within Browne's paintings of figures of women and his still lifes as well, can be readily detected. In the canvas Sun Bather, 1945, (Fig. 5-46), characteristic of other figures in the show, an elongated, black-outlined female form sprawls horizontally across the canvas. Her disjointed anatomy appears fashioned of angular stripped-off automobile parts or plumbing pipes, configurations the antithesis of the fleshy classicized women that Kootz loathed in Browne's repertory. Kootz considered these figures unprogressive and refused to show this other side of Browne's work. Among other paintings was Woman on the Beach (Fig. 5-43), shown earlier in the Kootz Gallery inaugural show in mid-1945. The same comparison holds true for the still life canvases, such as The Green Bottle (Fig. 5-47), Rope and Branches (Fig. 5-48), Still Life with Branches (Fig. 5-49), Lamp with Branches (Fig. 5-50), Still Life in Primary Colors, (Fig. 5-51) and Still Life in Red and Green (Fig. 5-52), all from 1945.

Each painting contained complex abstracted Cubist shapes filled with dense patterns for visual texture and outlined in black. In each still life Browne began from a table top arrangement of objects, with references clearly evident in the finished work. Although spatially "flattened," his compositions still argued well for elements of illusionism and the third dimension. While the images could not be considered beautiful in the conventional sense of the word, their rough surfaces, juxtaposition of shapes in a Baroque frenzy of enclosures and clashing colors accompanied by turbulent line made for a show of exceptional visual excitement.

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Some reviewers noted that Browne had been leaning more toward the abstract in recent years and that whereas his style had derived from Picasso, it now contained an independent, personalized quality. Jo Gibbs, wrote " . . . the dignified ladies that were his modern version of the Ingres [classicized] tradition have disappeared completely . . . abstracted to mere lines and color planes, and so much warmer, wittier and more dynamic . . . ."[77] A few still believed him either too much under the influence of Picasso and Cubism or too elaborate in his designs. According to what the word "abstract" meant to each reviewer, most concluded that subject matter indeed did dwell within his "abstraction." Some believed that his style needed more polishing, meanwhile terming him inventive and forceful, with color his most persuasive asset. Never had Browne experienced such diversity of opinion from so many critics.

Henry McBride compared the work of Robert Motherwell, whose one-man show had just concluded, with that of Browne's stating

> . . . he is just as abstract and just as violent in his attack upon the canvas, but he is not so near to achieving a personal style. In a general assembly it might not be so easy to pick out a Byron Browne, and that indicates that the style needs more polishing. In the meantime, it is forceful.[78]

This was the show that validated Browne's reputation on a national scale making him, during his tenure at the Kootz Gallery, among the first in the burgeoning era of "celebrity" painters, a role commonly reserved for musical and theatrical professionals, now newly extended to the visual artist. Kootz's pioneering marketing strategy,

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[77] Jo Gibbs, "Byron Browne Goes Entirely Abstract," The Art Digest, Vol. 20, no. 9, February 1, 1946, p.10.

[78] Henry McBride, "Attractions in the Galleries," New York Sun, 26 January 1946, p. 9. He, too, cited Still Life with City Window as Browne's outstanding painting. At the time the work, executed in 1945, had already been purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lowenthal, who loaned the painting for the duration of the show.

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deliberately applied to the American art milieu, consisted of eye-catching theme shows, cultivating the art press, and unabashedly promoting the creative skills of his painters. Kootz made sure that in addition to photographing the artworks each created, his painters were also photographed on a continuing basis and these publicity photographs were sent out in press releases so that reviewers came to know and associate the individual man to the painting style he produced. In a sense, the dealer made stars of his painters, as producers in the film industry promoted their movies through the film stars who performed in them.

Today, it remains one of the principal promotional methods used by the gallery business. One thing that both Kootz and Browne understood, it was important to be written about and discussed, for exposure meant name recognition and sales. As a result of the power of publicity combined with Kootz's prudent wooing of new collectors to American abstraction, many paintings by Browne and others within the Kootz circle found buyers.

Making a rationale for the profusion of disparate critical opinion begins with analysis of the material Browne presented. The critics seemed to miss in their assumptions that Browne was not so much controlled by Picasso as he was, above all, a confirmed Cubist, struggling to find new adaptations within that format. Cubism served as a methodology through which he experimented and interpreted shapes through his own sensibilities.

Browne's painting had been far more abstract during the 1930s, when geometric and biomorphic color patterns and interpenetrating planes of pure color predominated. Now he leaned once again toward the figure with obvious visual references and subject matter

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within each canvas, which he claimed never to have abandoned in the first place.[79]

Although he did not broadcast such information to Samuel Kootz for obvious reasons, Browne continued, contrary to his dealer's wishes, to paint heads and figures based on antique models. He partnered the abstract mode of expression with the realist, not unlike two painters somehow psychologically bound into one. He loved both notions and saw no reason why he should give one up entirely for the other, despite currents of new criticism that began calling for complete abolition of the object as subject matter and the annihilation of illusionism.[80] Browne refused to consider such radical concepts during his entire career.

For her forthcoming book on the social history of the artist in America, Elizabeth McCausland, author, art critic and contributor to a national periodical, Magazine of Art, asked readers a question that had perplexed Browne since 1928, "Why can't America afford art?"[81] She recognized that artists did not, for the most part, make a living from their

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79 It should be understood by viewers of Browne's work of this time and for much of his oeuvre except that of the later 1950s, that he insists, accurately or not, what appears nonobjective he first sees as real objects, whether it be a female model, pots, bottles, rope or leafy tree branches. Browne claims to have looked at such objects while he abstracted from them. Cubism, for all its destructive properties, is fundamentally an art form of representation, not complete abstraction. The segmentation of Cubist planar space can be and often was applied to nonobjective painting and three-dimensional constructions as well.

80 This period, 1945-46, saw the rise of the art criticism of Clement Greenberg, who proselytized for retaining the integrity of the two-dimensional picture surface of the canvas, thereby rejecting any reference to illusionistic visual reality. The fame of Jackson Pollock, who did just that and discarded all references to nature and subject matter as well, is due in great part to the critical boost provided by Greenberg's writings and his mentorship.

81 Elizabeth McCausland, "Why Can't America Afford Art?," Magazine of Art, Vol. 39, no. 1, January 1946, pp. 18-21, 33-36.

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artistic production.

Under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts in collaboration with the Magazine of Art, McCausland sent a questionnaire to 500 leading painters and sculptors, Browne among them. The form, reproduced in the article, asked data on income from art, rent and studio costs, how artists sold their work, whether directly from their studios or through a dealer and, if through a dealer, what commission did he take, and what work did the artist have to perform to pay rent and keep food on the table. McCausland received many revealing if not pathetic replies, some of which appeared in a later issue.[82] The consensus from the questionnaire was that America, as wealthy as it was, could indeed afford art but did very little to help the creative artist.

Browne, who had signed with the Kootz Gallery in 1945, and was unwilling to reveal the particulars of his new status, did not reply to the questionnaire directly [artists were asked to sign their names] but responded with a personal letter to McCausland on January 18, 1946, shortly after reading her article.

> Dear Miss McCausland,
>
> I read with great interest, as I suppose all artists did, your article in the recent issue of the Magazine of Art on the Plight of the Creative Artist. I was not one of the painters who answered the questionnaire but I do believe you might be interested in the facts relative to my career. Since I have never been one to accept with laissez-faire attitude the status quo of our lot, I suppose I have been pursuing my art with a deep smouldering [sic] in the

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82 The respondents, most of whom had devoted an average of twenty years to the field, depended largely or entirely on income from sources other than their painting, such as teaching, commercial advertising art and war service; only twenty-seven per-cent reported that the bulk of their income stemmed from art sales. A fortunate few, five per-cent, derived their income from private sources, such as trust funds and the stock market. The largest number of artists who responded made one thousand dollars or less annually from their art sales and the second largest group reported no sales at all; only four artists reported incomes from art sales of eighty-five hundred dollars, the highest income from the year of measurement, 1944.

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breast for twenty two years. To paint under a continual emotional stress must certainly leave its mark on the character of ones work.

Let us agree at the beginning that most artists keep going because "hope springeth eternal in the human breast" especially when backed up by belief in ones ideas. The fact that my painting this year has been "taken in" by a progressive and enterprising 57th St. gallery and adequately sold has not lessened my feelings of resentment against the state of cultural indifference. It has always been of my opinion that pictures were like "calling cards of a civilization". By this statement you can see that I believe painting to be a sort of social must. That, I suppose, is one of the reasons, along with a few others, why I pursued uncompromisingly my art. I say pursue in a most literal sense--since every penny that came my way had to be earned in a way that required much perspiration and many spiritual headaches. All this because right from the beginning, around 1927, when I first started to exhibit, I have firmly refused to do any commercial type of art. I refused as it always amounted to a lowering of principles on my part. I do believe most emphatically that an artist stands or fails according to the staunchness of his principles. "Preserve your integrity at all costs, even if you have to dig a ditch," is the sorry sum total of advice to present day artists.

Frankly speaking there are too many artists resorting to the dubious solution of commercial work. This can only mean a lowering of cultural values and a bastardizing of ones fine art efforts. It has to be a matter of all or none.

Here is a brief summary of how I have kept going:

1927-28 Deck hand, Hudson River freight boat
1929-31 Broadway Dance hall attendant, cashier, etc.
1932-34 Stone Yard (grave stones), Laborer
1935-39 Intermittent W.P.A. art program with odd jobs
1940-41 Airplane Mechanic, Republic Aviation
1942-43 Shipfitter 1st class, U.S. Navy Yard, N.Y.
1943-45 Guard, Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.
1946 Living by sales of pictures

Hoping this will be of interest to you.

Sincerely Yours,

Byron Browne[83]

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[83] Copy of letter, courtesy Estate of Byron Browne, December 8, 1980. Browne's letter was discovered by Garnett McCoy, senior archivist for the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., in December 1980, tucked away in material from files other than those housing Browne's documents. This accounts for its being neither catalogued nor microfilmed with the papers presented to the Archives by his widow in the late 1970s. Browne's list of employment dates with the WPA/FAP, as stated in records issued through

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For its embittered tone and raw honesty, Browne meant his letter to McCausland to have been nothing more than a private response to her January article, since he had refrained from a formal response to her questionnaire but continued to feel strongly involved with the issue. Nevertheless, whether he wished it or not, she published his letter in a highly edited version under the heading of Letters to the Editor, in the April 1946 issue; the salutation, "Sir," had been substituted for that of Browne's more gender-appropriate, "Dear Miss McCausland"

> Sir:
>
> I read with great interest, as I suppose all artists did, Miss McCausland's article in the recent issue of the Magazine of Art on the plight of the creative artist.
>
> Since I have never been one to accept with laissez-faire attitude the status quo of our lot, I suppose I have been pursuing my art with a deep smouldering in the breast for twenty-two years. To paint under a continual emotional stress must certainly leave its mark on the character of one's work.
>
> The fact that my painting has been "taken in" this year and adequately sold by an enterprising 57th Street gallery has not lessened my feelings of resentment against the state of cultural indifference.
> Right from the beginning, around 1927 when I first started to exhibit, I have firmly refused to do any commercial type of art. I do believe most emphatically that an artist stands or falls according to the staunchness of his principles.
>
> Frankly speaking, there are too many artists resorting to the dubious solution of commercial work. This can only mean a lowering of cultural values and a bastardizing of one's fine art efforts.
>
> --Byron Browne,
> New York City[84]

In his original letter to Elizabeth McCausland, Browne listed the odd jobs that had ~~kept him solvent, enabling him~~ to continue as a practicing artist from the 1920s, when he the General Services Administration, and the specific jobs performed within those dates, ~~differs slightly from what he sent to Elizabeth McCausland~~. For this list in the

[84] Byron Browne, Letter, Magazine of Art, Vol.39, no. 4, April 1946, pp. 163-164.

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published version. The deletion was significant, for Browne had sought to prove a point.

In both his original letter and the published version he takes certain attitudes as a personal affront to his dignity and integrity and mounts an offensive against those artists who would lower their standards by taking commercial art jobs as a way to support themselves. Browne believed, as did many from this era, that to do so constituted a "bastardizing of one's fine art efforts." He had managed never to have done so and felt that if he could survive without having "gone commercial," somehow others could.

At this time there existed a distinct demarcation between fine and commercial art. The stigma has since been relaxed, yet the differences between "art for art's sake" and "art to order" for the selling of products still obtain. More than fifty-six years have passed and Browne's genuinely expressed argument seems pretentious and superficial in light of today's more liberated attitude toward commercial aspects in matters of art. In that interim the line between the two has blurred.[85] Browne never wavered in his idealizing philosophy, limiting as it was already becoming.[86] This reliance will become indispensable to his psychological survival.

From the outset, the table top still life arrangement functioned as an integral

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85 For a fascinating opposing view of this dilemma, see: Harry Gage, Letter, Magazine of Art, Vol. 39, no. 3, March 1946, p. 123. Gage held many important positions in the art field and was at the time a trustee of Pratt Institute, a private art school in Brooklyn, whose curricula stressed the commercial application of art. It would seem, from Gage's comments, that in 1946, there already existed a mounting argument for dismantling the wall or stigma between the creative arts, fine or commercial.

86 He had reason to feel apprehensive. In the late 1940s and through the 1950s, he came to rely on his ardent personal justification, deriving great strength from a purist attitude and steadfast position of uncompromising integrity to the principles of art, as he saw them, and other long-held values eroded and all but swept away by the free-wheeling New York School painters.

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component of his oeuvre, its changes through the decades mirroring his stylistic development. With the 1940s and his return to more representational work, the genre assumed greater importance. Paintings such as Still Life with Teapot, 1940 (Fig. 5-53), although loosely based on Cubist structure, recollect his geometric abstractions of the previous decade. By 1943, however, references to objective nature are well-defined with paintings such as The Basket of Leaves, 1943 (Fig. 5-54), Still Life with Apples, 1944 (Fig. 5-55), and White Still Life, 1947 (Fig. 5-56).[87] With this painting he relies less upon the heavy dark contour lines that he typically applied for clarification of form. His earlier interest in American Indian shapes and symbols as pattern can be seen in the predella area beneath the edge of the white table cloth.[88] In each still life, waving lines and curving shapes at the lower half of the picture indicate folds in a piece of fabric. Collectively, the paintings reflect consistent thematic expression and a sophisticated use of dynamic and static lines to create tension and movement. Still, two years later the heavy black outlines will return to Browne's work, in deference to the true French Cubism that he so admired. Admittedly, the difficulty of pinpointing specific objects is made easier by titles chosen to ease the viewer's consternation. Nothing bored Browne more than having to explain to those who could not see "things," as he often put it, in his paintings.

Samuel Kootz, recognizing Browne's adeptness with the still life genre, encouraged

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87 White Still Life is in the collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. The painting was purchased in 1971, when the museum was known as the National Collection of Fine Arts.

88 During this period one notes particularly Browne's prevalent use of richly suggestive sprouting plant forms, meandering vines and recurring ecstasy of the flowering branch that intertwine the figure as well as inanimate still life objects. This inclination may reflect a growing interest among many American painters at this time in world mythologies. Browne will also revive his earlier concern for the aesthetic aspects he could draw from the art expressed by ancient and primitive cultures.

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him to continue. During his three years with the gallery, he executed numerous paintings and watercolors composed from arrangements on a table of commonplace objects found around his house. Such works are "variations on a theme" incorporating bottles, vases, lamps and compotes of fruit united by a shared piece of fabric, crumpled newspaper, length of branch or intertwining rope.

The expressive properties of color had always interested Browne and these still lifes show him at his fully developed coloristic powers. Hues are bold, even strident with their clashing color wheel opposites often placed next to one another for maximum contrast. He frequently mixed his pigments with sand or squeezed strands of pure paint from their tubes directly onto the canvas for added texture and decorative ornamentation. Shapes are congested with intricate abstract designs. It is within the still life genre that Browne developed and reached maturity. With them he came the closest he ever would to bravura painting.

Art historian, Oliver Larkin, chose Browne's Still Life in Primary Colors, 1945 (Fig. 5-51), for reproduction in his book, Art and Life in America. Of this painting he declared

> It was this intensity of utterance which made the work of the abstract, nonobjective, and surrealist men the focus of attention in the galleries of 1945, this and a painterly dexterity which made more conservative efforts look shabby and perfunctory. Few canvases could hold their own on the wall beside Byron Browne's Still Life in Primary Colors . . . .[89]

Although Larkin expressed this attitude toward a painting now four years old, the work continued to exemplify the changes currently undergoing post-war American art.

Browne's Still Life in Primary Colors was selected to be shown at The Whitney

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[89] Oliver W. Larkin, Art and Life in America, New York, Rinehart, 1949, pp. 473-474. Larkin had not changed his opinion for the 1960 edition of this book.

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Museum Annual: Contemporary American Painting, in November.[90] According to Edward Alden Jewell's review, the Whitney show contained paintings by 165 artists of which he estimated one-third addressed themselves to abstract expressions.[91] Jewell continued to have difficulty comprehending abstraction and still had not formulated appropriate descriptive and critical terminology. He cited Browne, along with John Atherton, William Baziotes, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb and Balcomb Greene, as abstractionists whose work was also nonobjective and, as such, pronounced "virtually all were sometimes mystifying."[92]

When the Whitney Museum of American Art acquired Still Life with City Window, 1945 (Fig. 7-49), in 1957, Browne wrote some revealing statements on the museum's information data form, comments applicable to most of the still lifes painted throughout his career.

> I worked all my still life subjects directly from nature, changing only that which contributed to its design and expression. There are cubist elements in its spatial aspects in that the flatness of the picture is retained and depth is arrived at by advancing and receding planes of different color and value. I attempted to create a mood by using a somewhat tonal selection of greys, etc., coming to a climax in three or four areas (small) of bright colors.[93]

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[90] The Whitney Museum Annual: Contemporary American Painting, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, November 27, 1945-January 10, 1946.

[91] Edward Alden Jewell, "Stress on `Painting': Contemporary Work at Whitney Includes Much Abstraction--Other Events," The New York Times, (Sun. ed.), 2 December 1945, sect. 10, p. 7. Among those contemporary abstractionists mentioned in the review was Arthur Dove, the early modernist, who died in the year this show closed, 1946.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Archives, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, records of Byron Browne. Browne's comments were made on May 5, 1957, to accompany the acquisition. The Whitney acquired this painting as a gift from its original owner, Milton Lowenthal,

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By the time Browne departed the Kootz Gallery in July 1948, a curious and inescapable change had pervaded his work in this genre. Typical of this change is the imagery found in the still life Oceanic, 1948 (Fig. 5-57), depicting a vase of wild flowers. The work is distinguished by the sparkle and energy of quickly applied paint, a flighty nervous line totally out of context with the weighty linear masses typical of his approach in all previous examples.

Here Browne is far less dependent on confining cloisonné outlines; gone is the overdependence on the flat Cubist, overlapping and interpenetrating planes. It is at this point that he begins to initiate a more emotional and spontaneous approach in sharp contrast to the more formal aspects of Cubism, although he never completely abandons its structure. The expressionist aspects incipient within this still life will be fully developed in the 1950s.

Of the sixteen exhibitions, solo and group, in which Browne participated while with the Kootz Gallery, it was for the circus-inspired Big Top exhibition, a large all-gallery group show, that he developed some of his most inventive imagery. The allure of the circus as a rich visual resource of color and motion had interested Browne from the outset of his career although it was not until his association with the Kootz gallery that he had reason to focus on the subject in a consistent way, producing numerous oils and works on paper that addressed its myriad aspects. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to surmise that as an artist and nonconformist himself, who had struggled for years to achieve his own recognition and style, Browne may have felt a particular empathy for the circus performer, who lived as dangerously and precarioulsy in his way as Browne did for life he pursued.

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who had purchased it from the Samuel Kootz Gallery.

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Of the many artists who made circus performers a major part of their oeuvre, the sculptor Chaim Gross, in particular, took special effort to understand his subject by becoming the personal friend of many. He befriended acrobats in particular, frequently inviting them to his home and dinner table. In turn they posed for him and whenever the Ringling Brothers Circus came to town, Gross was given a seat literally on the center ring where he drew them closeup in rehearsal. Countless drawings, watercolors and many sculptures, some of which he named after the performers, ensued over the years.

Amid much pre-opening hullabaloo from Kootz and subsequent publicity from the art press, The Big Top opened on March 3, 1946.[94] In his catalogue text, Kootz maintained that such an exhibition ". . . would offer stimulation to invention and provide comparison to the spectator of the personal styles and approaches of each artist . . . ."[95] Browne showed three new paintings, Bareback Rider (Fig. 5-58), The Great Juggling Act (whereabouts unknown) and Toto the Drummer (a.k.a. Clown with Drum), (Fig. 5-59). With but two exceptions, entries by Picasso and Léger, Europeans brought in to round out the show and demonstrate the historic importance of this special theme, the show was wholly American.

The exceptions, Picasso's Acrobat, 1930, loaned to the gallery by the Museum of Modern Art and Léger's The Chinese Juggler, which he painted expressly for the show prior

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94 The Big Top, Samuel M. Kootz, text, New York, Kootz Gallery, March 4-23, 1946. During the entire month of March, on a daily basis, large advertisements had been inserted in all the daily newspapers; huge colorful posters appeared everywhere announcing the opening of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus, in town April 4 through May 12, at Madison Square Garden. Cleverly, Kootz understood that launching his show in such a timely manner allowed him to take advantage of the already-paid-for massive advertising campaign that the circus had inadvertently provided. The Big Top proved to be the most successful exhibition the gallery would have in its initial three-year operation.

95 Ibid.

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to returning to Europe, caused as much comment as the work by the Americans. Sanctioning his exhibition with works by such famed Europeans was a clever ploy, for while bringing cachet to the gallery retainers, it accomplished the same for Samuel Kootz himself. Kootz also showed a line drawing, Alley-Oop, by Alexander Calder, whose circus-inspired wire sculptures were widely admired. The public loved the exhibition and critics wrote enthusiastically.

Ben Wolf congratulated the dealer, acknowledging that Samuel Kootz had distinguished himself from all other New York dealers by his keen sense of show business, and skillful salesmanship, which resulted in strong private and institutional purchases. In addition, he was able to contrive unusual themes for the shows and directed his painters to execute large numbers of canvases that conformed thematically.[96] His efforts paid off, resulting in gallery openings that were among the most publicized occasions in the art world and always well-attended. Wolf termed Browne's Bareback Rider, a "top performer" and accompanied his review with a reproduction of the painting.[97]

Edward Alden Jewell cited Browne's "blithe color," noting that he "lets natural

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96 Exhibitions carrying such titles as The Big Top, Modern Paintings for a Country Estate, Women: A Collaboration of Artists and Writers and Homage to Jazz (complete with jazz trio) garnered publicity and increasing fame for the dealer as well as for the painters contracted to him. By March 1946, they included Browne, William Baziotes, Romare Bearden, Carl Holty, and Robert Motherwell. For reasons unexplained, Romare Bearden was the only member of the Kootz group never signed to a Gallery contract. Samuel Kootz can be credited with creating major careers for these Americans as well as cultivating a growing market for their work by July 1948. He supplemented their work with periodic shows of Alexander Calder, Picasso and Léger.

97 Ben Wolf, "Don't Shove, Don't Push," Art Digest, Vol. 20, no. 12, March 15, 1946, p. 10. The following year, the painting was shown at Galerie Maeght in Paris, in an exhibition of works by the six Americans comprising the Kootz permanent stable; it marked the first opportunity to view contemporary American painting since the outbreak of the war. Unfortunately, the Kootz-organized exhibition created a controversy, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

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forms crawl in, part way, under the flap (of the circus tent)."[98]

Labeling the show a "festival of athleticism," Henry McBride observed

> Subject matter in abstract art, however, is not so important as the artist, and there are some benighted art lovers, looking at this particular circus, who will feel, like the small boys who have to look through slits in the fence at the show, that they are only getting a piece of it. There are lots of flashing colors and swift movements in the improvisations of Carl Holty and Byron Browne, though, ...[99]

Judging from the two available reproductions of Browne's work from The Big Top, the "athleticism" to which McBride referred may have been his reaction to the profusion of geometric designs with which Browne lavishly filled his imagery. One questions his insatiable appetite for virtuoso draftsmanship that, at times, tends to cause figures to annihilate themselves, so smothered are they in labyrinths of repetitious calligraphy.

Six months earlier, in September 1945, Browne had met Alexander Calder when Samuel Kootz invited the internationally known sculptor to exhibit several gouaches of circus themes in his gallery. It may have been then that the idea to install a gallery-wide circus theme exhibition occurred to the dealer. Both Browne and Kootz openly admired Calder for the special animation he lent to this subject, yet beyond admiration for Calder's dexterity and inventiveness, he exerted no significant influence on Browne's decision to make circus imagery one of his own principal themes.[100] Although dissimilar

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98 Edward Alden Jewell, "Sam Kootz's "Big Top," The New York Times, 10 March 1946 (Sun. ed.), sect. 2, p. 6. Jewell felt that most of the examples from every participant were too occupied with nonobjective shapes for a theme such as the circus.

99 Henry McBride, The New York Sun, 9 March 1946, p. 9.

100 Browne was fully aware of the nineteenth and twentieth century European tradition of the circus and its profound influence on nearly every painter ranging from Seurat, Daumier, Toulouse-Lautrec, early Picasso, Rouault and Beckmann, to name but few. In addition, the Spanish bullfight, as performance and pageantry, moved him perhaps more than the circus. In 1958, Browne took his first and only trip out of the United States

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in their interpretations by comparison, like Calder, rather than dwell on the pathetic or sordid aspects of circus life as did some American artists, such as Walt Kuhn, Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Aaron Bohrod, and the photographer Diane Arbus, Browne, too, portrayed his figures in rollicking lighthearted playfulness.

Painted when Browne was twenty-two years old, an early circus-inspired painting of a clown figure, Harlequin (a.k.a. Seated Pierrot), ca. 1929-30 (Fig. 1-15), although obviously derived from Picasso's circus family paintings of 1901-1903, even to his predominant use of blue hues, indicates Browne's youthful curiosity for the subject as portraiture. More important, it documents his initial interest in the art of the famed Spanish painter, who would soon hold sway over much of his output. Sporadic occurrences of the circus theme, such as the complexly detailed Trapeze Artist, 1941, (Fig. 5-60), began to appear in his oeuvre but not until the Kootz Gallery show in March 1946, did he develop the motif with real purpose.

In the two months prior to the opening Browne worked up dozens of oils and works on paper depicting images of clowns, bareback riders, lions, acrobats, and circus bandsmen in preparation for The Big Top, thus providing Kootz with many choices.[101] Works such as The White Acrobats (Figs. 5-61) and a detail of the lower central area (Fig. 5-62), Two Figures (Fig. 5-63), Clown and Lion (Fig. 5-64), and Woman of the Circus (Fig. 5-65), all

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precisely to travel to a single country, Spain, to see the spectacle of the famous Spanish bullfight. On a daily basis, he could be found sketching in the rings of whatever town he found himself in; the trip resulted in several hundred drawings and watercolors, some of which he worked up into oil on canvas paintings upon his return.

[101] It was at this time that Browne began taking his son, now three years old, to the Ringling Brothers Circus, an annual event held in New York in the spring of each year. In this way, Browne renewed his visual knowledge and remembrances from his own childhood, which may account for his continuing attention to the subject long after the show closed.

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executed in 1946, reflect Browne's Cubist spatial organization and brilliant coloration; his figures, both human and animal, also point to a certain charm and capricious fantasy as he catches them in the midst of performance.[102]

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[102] It was thoughtfully suggested by Dr. Francis V. O'Connor, art historian and critic, that Browne's unique lion type, with its massive head bearing a great flame-like mane, as seen in Figures 5-64, 5-66 and 5-74, and others dating from 1946 through 1948, may have been suggested by a style of lion drawn by Ben Shahn, and possibly shown in his 1947 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art: Ben Shahn: Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings, Posters, Illustrations and Photographs, James Thrall Soby, curator, New York, Museum of Modern Art, September 30, 1947-January 4, 1948. While no catalogue accompanied this show, there was a major article by Soby in that summer's special edition of the Bulletin, devoted to Shahn: James Thrall Soby, "Ben Shahn," The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art, Summer 1947, pp.1-47. Many works shown in his retrospective were reproduced for that article but none was of a lion image. As well, no title from the checklist referred to the animal. A small monograph, unconnected to Shahn's retrospective, yet illustrating some of the works from that show, was also published in 1947; none of its thirty-two reproductions depicted a lion image: James Thrall Soby, Ben Shahn, West Drayton, England, Penguin, Penguin Modern Painters Series, 1947. Further investigation led to a catalogue of Shahn's graphic work: Kenneth Wade Prescott, The Complete Graphic Works of Ben Shahn, New York, Quadrangle (The New York Times Book Company), 1973, in which a black and white line drawing of a lion, bearing a huge head of flame-like mane (akin to Browne's lions's mane), that he referred to as the "fire-beast," and shown levitating his huge body over a cluster of four small children, was reproduced: Allegory, 1948, tempera on paper, 36 x 48 inches, Oliver Baker, photo, collection: Bill Bomar (or Somar). This image, among several by Shahn, was commissioned to illustrate a lengthy article in the August 1948 issue of Harper's Magazine, that told the tragic account of a recent tenement fire in Chicago, in which four Negro children perished as they huddled together: John Bartlow Martin, "The Hickman Story," Harper's Magazine, Vol. 197, no. 1179, August 1948, pp. 39-52. The lion fire-beast image was never used; however, Shahn's pen-line drawing of the huddled bodies of the four children was reproduced--the exact duplication of the cluster of children beneath the overhead "floating" figure of the lion as depicted in the tempera painting, Allegory. Shahn used only the lion's head for at least two editions of prints during the 1950s and into 1960; the cover of Prescott's 1973 graphics catalogue bore an embossed head of the fire-beast lion.

One must conclude that, as incredibly related as are Browne's and Shahn's images, there was no way Browne could have been inspired by the latter's work; the time factor rules this out. I would like to suggest that the possibility of any inspiration may have been in the reverse, that it was Shahn himself who saw the potential of its ferocious countenance for his own agenda. He very well could have witnessed Browne's circus lions from the several well-publicized shows at the Samuel Kootz Gallery that surely attracted artists as diverse in their intentions as were they. That Ben Shahn saw the unique lion image over the three years that Browne repeated and elaborated upon it at the Kootz Gallery is entirely

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Leo Lerman, in his article on contemporary painting in the December issue of House and Garden, included a full-page color reproduction of Woman of the Circus, depicting a scantily-clad female bareback rider juggling hoops atop a prancing pink horse.[103] Lerman illustrated his article with works by several other painters of dissimilar imagery, Milton Avery, Jacob Lawrence, Loren Maciver, Ben Shahn and Abraham Rattner among them, and at the conclusion, printed their photographs along with brief biographical sketches. Of Browne, he remarked that his colors were more lush than Avery's or Lawrence's and his patterns more complicated, adding

> But he is indisputably a virtuoso of the palette. Looking at his paintings, it is immediately obvious that he loves living, that he loves painting. His canvases are rich, gregarious, bombastically vital. Woman of the Circus is symbolically Byron Browne. It fuses his talents, concentrates his gifts. . . . somewhat reminiscent of abstract Picasso, a little owing to Klee, but always Browne.[104]

Browne took special pride in his inclusion in magazines of upperclass taste and bought copies to give to his friends, some of whom teased him about his going "chi-chi" on them. In truth, many of his contemporaries were openly jealous of his successes. Some even dropped him as friend, believing that he would turn his back on them. Unlike the readers of art magazines, House and Garden enjoyed a primarily upperclass financially well-off readership. Sam Kootz, finding that Browne's good looks attracted admiring wealthy

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possible. Truth of the matter is that Browne's images of the fiery-headed beast surfaced prior to Shahn's image, and for entirely different purposes.

[103] Leo Lerman, "The American Eye," House and Garden, Vol. 90, December 1946, pp. 120-125, 208-211. Lerman was profiled for this issue as a "witty, bearded New Yorker," a lecturer, writer, critic of the arts and one who had also published books on Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. He was as well a novelist. Lerman continued to contribute articles to magazines of style and culture, such as Vogue, until his death in 1994.

[104] Ibid., p. 211.

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society women, who had begun flocking to openings that included his work, encouraged him to pay them special attention. He could not. Browne was too naive to realize the useful connection between his attraction and sales and far too shy and ill at ease socially to have become a drawing room type. There was little Kootz could do about it.

Although he never again organized an exhibition devoted to the topic, Kootz continued to show circus imagery and encouraged his painters to continue producing works reflecting that subject. For subsequent gallery group shows Browne painted the following circus compositions in 1947: The Pink Lion (Fig. 5-66), Lion Tamer (Fig. 5-67), Circus Rider (Fig. 5-68) and The Gray Horse (Fig. 5-69).

Until recently a semi-abstract painting in shades of blue and black titled Blue Lion (Fig. 5-70), had been dated at 1936. However, its advanced forms for that time, clearly out of context with Browne's stylistic development, raised questions as to the accuracy of its dating. The painting appeared more in keeping with the work prepared for Samuel Kootz. Browne had painted no other work in a similar manner during that period and it remained a peculiar and isolated example. Still, the signature as well as this date were clearly inscribed in the pigment in Browne's unmistakable handwriting, on both the front and back of the canvas.

After careful examination under ultraviolet light, it was determined that the work consisted of two separate paintings, an earlier 1936 geometric abstraction beneath Cubist circus imagery from 1946-47. Portions of the earlier underpainting can be seen in the geometric configurations at the upper left side, the middle right and across the lower foreground, at bottom edge. Visible undertextures of former brushstrokes also provided clues that Browne had repainted much of the work but neglected to change the original date.

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In the earlier version Browne had cut out a triangular piece from the canvas and replaced the opening from the back with a board. He then nailed a wire mesh stove grid onto the board from the front and covered it with a coat of thick black paint, that left visible small portions of the original texture of the grid. The geometric surface decorations of this work look back to 1936, but in the reworking Browne integrates them along with the triangular grid insert to comprise part of the anatomy of a clown figure that clearly points to 1946. In a similar way, he drew a triangle shape as part of a clown's anatomy in a work on paper, White Clown, 1947 (Fig. 5-71).

Blue Lion is an important painting for the early date in which Browne imbedded foreign objects onto surfaces of his canvas, making them integral to the meaning and composition of the work. This example and the few others that integrate string and sand in the paint predate by many years the work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who developed the idea of incorporating much larger objects in or onto the surface of the painting into a major American art idiom. Still, the work undeniably continues the Cubist practice of adding extraneous materials and objects to the painted surface. It is unfortunate the conflicting styles and dates resulted in the consignment of the painting to storage and oblivion, for Blue Lion was never shown during the Kootz years or during his lifetime.

After 1948, turbulent surfaces became endemic to his work as textural manipulation and use of multiple arabesqued lines gouged into the pigments of his pictures mark a strong stylistic shift. Whereas colors were often unmodulated and smoothly applied, he now fills Cubist compartments with skein after skein of repetitive, closely spaced concentric circles and other decorative, surface-disturbing devices in an attempt to add distinction and difference within repetitive subject matter. In paintings such as Act I

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(Fig. 5-72), depicting an upside down clown balancing on one hand, Head Stand (Fig. 5-73), Clown and Lion (Fig. 5-74), Horse Clown in Blue and Yellow (Fig. 5-75) and Acrobat (Fig. 5-76), the most heavily decorated design of all his figures from 1948, Browne transforms every inch of surface within every figure into an arena of wildly spinning, concentric circular shapes.

While intricate patterning certainly energizes, causing surface tension and movement within the mazes of linearity, in the final analysis, technique overshadows and strangles the art itself. Unlike the still life series from the same period, the later circus paintings are painstakingly overworked, lacking the noble heraldic appearance of his earlier circus subjects.

The fault was not entirely his. The constant pressure from Samuel Kootz to come up with something fresh, a new angle to present to his dealer's clientele, had forced him to outperform himself too many times, in too many shows over the three years. These pictures bespeak Browne's efforts to be original and the anxiety shows. Unavoidably, the effort has taken its toll, for the paintings, as well as the painter, began to display the signs of burnout and over extension.

From this series, however, there does emerge one particularly striking example of circus imagery, Jester with Horn, 1948 (Fig. 5-77), a majestic seated figure of a green-hued harlequin holding a large brass trumpet. So changed is this picture's surface, so placid by comparison with the numerous works, that it may have been executed later in 1948, following the end of Browne's tenure in the Kootz Gallery. While beholden in large part to Picasso's 1905 sculpted bust of the same subject, The Jester (Fig. 5-78), Browne's canvas is free from the incrustation and intricate linearity of the body of work just discussed.

When Browne severed ties with his dealer in July 1948, he continued to rework the

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circus theme but in a nonfigurative style that foreshadows the direction he would take in the early 1950s. For example, an enigmatic painting titled Two Clowns, 1948 (Fig. 5-79), marks a return to nonobjective, hard-edged geometric content recalling his Cubist-oriented work of the 1930s. The viewer is confronted with two distinct halves or "clowns," but is hard pressed to identify any reference to the title subjects.[105] The circus series, decorative, amusing and lighthearted in feeling, is entirely in keeping with similar aspects in his own personality and indicates an innately positive attitude toward life. Along with other thematic assignments executed while under contract to Samuel Kootz, the numerous paintings of circus content comprise another of Browne's efforts toward composition with a series in mind. Yet the circus paintings in particular seem to have intensified his feral appetite for the ornamental whereby he used their subject matter largely as vehicles on which to pin his unique vocabulary of shapes and symbols.

By the time the Kootz Gallery had been in business for little over one year, it had garnered more press coverage than any other gallery in the city. The dealer's decision to feature work of a consistent group of little-known contemporary American painters, building their reputations and making them well known in the process, seemed to be paying off. His timing was also right. World War II had ended, soldiers were coming home by the tens of thousands and citizens, for the most part, had jobs and money with which to move out of cramped apartments, build new homes and purchase automobiles; the populace was in the mood to buy. The general disposition nationwide was one of elation coupled with a positive attitude toward the future. People could again enjoy the pleasures

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105 The distinct shape on the left side of the painting will soon be transformed into a series of fantastic sea creatures Browne designated "crustacean." This bifurcated painting may well be its prototype.

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of life and one of those pleasures, if Samuel Kootz could have anything to do with it, was the decoration of all the new homes with pictures from his gallery.

Samuel Kootz had few competitors, the only other galleries in New York that promoted American avant-garde art were those of Peggy Guggenheim and Betty Parsons, and, with the war over, Guggenheim decided to terminate her gallery the next year; Art of This Century closed its doors on May 31, 1947. Peggy Guggenheim left shortly thereafter to spend the rest of her life in Venice. Thus between the two dealers, Kootz and Parsons, they bore the weight of a future, or lack of one, for contemporary American art.

The fledgling group of painters in the Kootz stable began to sell, and works by Byron Browne sold better than those of all the others. Browne became, as Kootz would happily tell prospective buyers, his "best seller," due in great measure to his retention of recognizable subject matter within his work and his dealer's lucid explanations of the unrecognizable aspects.

Within ten months of his first one-man show Kootz gave Browne his second, an unprecedented move by any standards and one not extended to the other gallery painters that Kootz nurtured. The extraordinary speed with which Browne was capable of finishing new works certainly determined the dealer's decision. Baziotes, by contrast an extremely slow painter, often lingered over a single work for weeks. Browne's rapid rise in recognition and popularity did not pass unnoticed by the others and resentment among them grew. Motherwell, for example, ceased speaking to him and refused to attend his openings.[106]

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[106] One questions whether such ostensibly gallery-wide resentment stemmed from other than Browne's popularity among Kootz's clients, considering Browne's reluctance to engage in disputes of any kind, coupled with his well-known gentle disposition. According to Steve Wheeler, jealousy among the other painters was rampant and when one

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Byron Browne: An Exhibition of Recent Paintings, opening on November 11, 1946, showcased eighteen new works of varied theme, among them the circus, jazz musicians and Provincetown sea and landscapes.[107] By this time, Kootz had raised Browne's minimum price to $450 for works on paper with a ceiling climbing to $900 for the oils, higher than his established values for the works of any of the other five gallery painters.

Virtually every art critic and reviewer in New York, including one from the Daily Worker, had something to say about Browne's new work. If space in the daily newspapers and art periodicals counted as a measure of success, surely his exhibition marked a triumph. Of all the critics, the extensive commentary by Thomas B. Hess best represents an insightful summary of Browne's mature achievement.

> Byron Browne, in his current show of new paintings, demonstrates that he has established a personal, static equilibrium between his vision as a man and his vision as an artist. The subject, for him, is an endless source of complex forms which he arranges and distorts on his large canvases to create, not so much a new insight into nature, but a new decoration. Browne's academic studies at the National Academy (he won the third Hallgarten prize at the Academy annual in 1928 at the age of twenty-one, the youngest winner in 103 years) had little influence on his style which rapidly became abstract. But it probably started his continued interest in the history of techniques and of art. He admires Catalonian Romanesque frescoes and Paolo Veronese, more concerned with building up his luminous whites and greens in carefully planned glazes than in specific symbols and messages. His new paintings of jazz musicians do not stem from an absorption in complex riffs and rhythms, (he considers jazz "fun," noisy, and vulgar) but from an interest in the intricate shapes of the instruments and the expressive actions of the players. Object and subject fuse, as in the circular form in the center of Trombone Solo which not only acts as anchor for the angular forms of the composition, but is the spotlight in a smoke-filled room. Browne's art is

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sold a painting, or heard that Kootz had sold a painting by one member, the painters whose work had not sold began to blame their dealer for not promoting them.

[107] Byron Browne: An Exhibition of Recent Paintings, Weldon Kees, essay, New York, Samuel Kootz Gallery, November 11-November 30, 1946.

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> anachronistic, for it expresses none of the chaos of our world. Yet beware, socially conscious critic, of calling this escapism, for here is a much needed anachronism--a painter, born to become a painter, fulfilling his potentialities with honesty and courage, and with rapidly increasing success.[108]

Opposite his review Hess ran a full page reproduction of Browne's powerful Trombone Solo, 1946 (Fig. 5-80), an abstracted standing figure of a Negro trombone player in the midst of performance, blowing his horn, his head lowered following the downward thrust of his instrument, and one foot raised on the edge of a drum as he tapped out rhythms. Unmodulated colors, as rich and intense as the music he played, in burnt umbers, orange and black, were broken into flat Cubist planes delineated by strong dark brown lines. A large black-outlined circle of gray and white angles acts as focus and anchor, enclosing and spotlighting the performer and his trombone.

Hess, citing Browne's opinion of jazz music as "noisy and vulgar," could not have been aware that this was how he literally referred to such music. Browne never responded to jazz, never played it on records, and never attended live sessions in the clubs that abounded in nearby Greenwich Village. His stated preference, in music as well as in art, was for the classical masters, uplifting "good" music embodied in works by composers, such as Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. Good music, like good art, he once said to a friend, went hand in hand. Such self-imposed limitations precluded appreciation for popular or "vulgarized" art forms. Browne weighed this kind of music with the same logic with which he weighed the commercial arts in comparison to their fine arts counterpart, never allowing or considering that popular culture presented many options and could as well possess its

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[108] Thomas B. Hess, "Betwixt Abstract and Actual," Art News, November 1946, Vol. 45, no. 9, pp. 32-33.

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own refinement.[109]

In his essay for the exhibition catalogue, Weldon Kees wrote

> . . . Browne is far from ready to move on to any location, and, importantly, along with him he drags the best of his past. This luggage includes a continuing devotion to nature and the human image, his admiration for the Venetians and for primitive art, and the equipment of one of the most crafty and brilliant colorists we have. It includes, perhaps most notably of all, a delight in the physical qualities of paint and textures that has never been more arresting than in these new canvases. Scratched, glazed, sanded, scumbled, their surfaces are marked by a grainy, sensuous, heroic character that match and advance Browne's larger conceptions.[110]

Much was printed in praise of Browne and his show, yet it took a writer from an obscure publication to pinpoint his growing problem. In a response contrary to Kees's ardent commentary and that of others, Jane Griffith observed

> The foreword to the exhibition listing says Browne's paintings mirror his devotion to nature and human image, his admiration for the Venetians and for primitive art. This is true. But the thing that isn't mentioned is Byron Browne's over-dependence on Picasso. And we would like to ask why in heaven's name does an artist, who shows the mastery of all the elements that go to make up fine painting that Browne does, lean so heavily on the French leader. When this artist throws away his crutch it will be something to see.[111]

Whether she realized it or not, Griffith saw through Browne's superficial "prettyness," his

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[109] These inflexible demarcations or rules that allowed little or no breaking of the line, an either/or, one or the other but nothing between compromise, governed much of Browne's life. His inability to bend his own rigid standards, rules he set for himself, while meant to be guidelines for betterment, acted as drawbacks, precluding any adaptability to change.

[110] Ibid. Weldon Kees was a young poet of some recognition, who began studying painting at the end of 1948. The newly established Peridot Gallery mounted several shows of his abstractions, an "amalgamation of Browne, Baziotes and Pollock," one critic noted by way of a review. It is not known if Browne or Samuel Kootz choose Kees to write his catalogue essay.

[111] Jane Griffith, "Gallery Reviews," M K R'S Art Outlook, Vol. 1, no. 21, November 25, 1946, pp. 5-6. Griffith, an associate editor, accompanied her review with a reproduction of The Cellist.

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extraordinary manipulations of surface texture for its own sake, and his "cover." Griffith stripped his facade bare and found little of substance beneath.

Critic, Marion Summers, raised a more disturbing issue

> Byron Browne is one of our more brilliant young American painters. He has grown out of the Picasso tradition but has developed a language of his own. There is no denying his inventive ability, his craftsmanship or his cleverness. He paints with ease and authority and in recent years with occasional slickness. His paintings now at the Kootz Gallery are not dull or pedestrian. He is not one of the endless collection of academic abstractionists that clutter up the American art scene.
>
> But recognizing all these things, I am still left cold. This is picture making, facile, selfcontrolled and tasteful. This is painting for its own sake. The compositions are fine, large and completely dehumanized. His studies of jazz musicians, white and Negro, are paper cutouts seen without feeling and rendered with disinterested facility. It is painting with one hand behind the back, or one brain lobe in action. I am getting a little fed up with all the pure visual experience being dished out on 57th street, and I spend a good deal of time praying for just a little experience, which might touch the mind and the heart.[112]

One sees exactly what these two critics mean when other paintings from the exhibition are examined. Browne's imagery is fantasy work of the highest order, they are pretty pictures, with his figures adrift in an airless sphere. Aside from Trombone Solo, the whereabouts of most of the eighteen exhibited works remain unknown, although a few, all painted in 1946, exist in reproduction, namely The White Wave (Fig. 5-81), Circus Bandsman (Fig. 5-82), Two on a Horse (Fig. 5-83), The Pink Clown (Fig. 5-84) and Woman of the Circus (Fig. 5-65), shown in The Big Top exhibition and discussed earlier. The magazine Town and Country, which seemed to favor the Kootz Gallery when it came time to borrow paintings for their contemporary room settings for its editorial pages, published a reproduction of The Pink Clown, an elaborately costumed rider atop a rearing

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[112] Marion Summers, "Art Today: Painting with One Hand Tied Behind Back," Daily Worker, Vol. 23, no. 287, 30 November 1946, p.11. This newspaper enjoyed a large circulation among artists. It regularly reported news of the galleries and museums and carried their advertisements.

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horse, at the close of an article having not a thing to do with Browne or art.[113] Still, once the initial bravado of shifting planes of color, linear extravagance, and other visual texture are eliminated, there is no great symbolic significance within the work and there is little to cause psychological introspection, if that is what one seeks.

The "crutch" of Picasso resides in Browne's Cubist breakup of space and juxtapositioning of outlined forms heavily encased with geometric decorations. Concentric circles, squares and chevrons, configurations often used by Picasso in his work of the 1930s, especially the latter part of the decade in his depictions of women in seated or reclining poses, saturate Browne's imagery as well. His enormous gift for draftsmanship is indisputable but his work is becoming increasingly facile and repetitious.

Despite mention by the arts writers of his derivatiness, lack of feeling, and disinterested facility, collectors of his work liked his amalgamation of European and American abstraction and seemed indifferent to its sources. Anyone mildly interested in "modern" art generally recognized Picasso's work and if that imagery sometimes manifested itself in an American's efforts, so much to the good, critical harping aside. For the first time in Browne's career an exhibition sold out long before its close.[114] In truth, an appreciation for Browne's work and American contemporary modernism in general, was expedited by client recognition of Picasso's shapes and imagery in his work, as an American Cubist. Falling short of calling him "America's Picasso," Kootz derived

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113 Town and Country, Vol. 100, no. 4290, November 1946, p. 279. The picture was reproduced in black and white.

114 Neither Baziotes, Bearden, Gottlieb, Holty nor Motherwell would be able to claim that kind of success while they were affiliated with the Kootz Gallery. As stated previously, in large part, the ease with which Browne's paintings sold contributed to the growing resentment and open hostility demonstrated against him among the gallery roster.

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financial gain far larger than his initial investment in Browne for encouraging him to follow in the great Cubist's footsteps.

Although America had won a great war and moral victory, The country discovered that it could depend upon its own wiles and ingenuity under the gravest of pressures. With its sovereignty as world leader assured, the moment marked a time to move forward. Still, American painting at mid-twentieth century was headed for crisis. There existed among artists as well as critics increasing doubt as to the wisdom of continuing to look to other countries for artistic leadership, especially since the war had prevented reciprocity of ideas for close to five years. The time indeed seemed ripe to look inward toward itself for new ideas, new directions and a new art.

Nowhere was this more concretely expressed than in a letter from the painter, Sol Wilson, to an editor, published in late November 1946. He expressed concern for the future of art in this country and pointedly called for elimination of the Europeanizing of American art. Prophetically, he felt that the change would come from a single mind. Accordingly, he wrote

> More and more do I hear discussions and opinions expressed relating to an ultimate indigenous American art. The idea of a native art is as yet nebulous but it is in "the air," probably as a result of being "fed up" with borrowed formalisms, good and great as they might have been originally. Native culture is important to the growth of any country. I don't believe in autarchic art, in self-sufficiency. We should learn and we have learned from others and we have assimilated a great deal. A native art is not "nationalistic" in a narrow sense. A native art must possess universal values. But must we go on plagiarizing and imitating *ad infinitum?* Just as the Romans haven't created better Greek art, so no American artist has ever created better French or German or Mexican art. We have painted English portraits and landscapes; French impressionists; Cezannes, Picassos and Braques; futurists, cubists, and surrealists. We have succeeded wonderfully well in academicising European moderns. Now what?
>
> It is time to begin thinking in the direction of our own native expression. It is your opinion that "Seeing no new form indicated as near realization, we therefore expect a major revolt of subjects . . . ." No one

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> can foretell or even speculate with any degree of certainty on the form art in this country will eventually take. Our literature has found means to express this, our music, our dance and architecture. But our art . . .?
>
> I agree with the following quotation from your article. "I think we may develop an individual before we will mature a movement." Sure. But the individual has to be encouraged by those who are in a position to do so and who should fully realize the importance to our country of a native art movement: the museums, foundations, universities, art schools, critics, the collectors and dealers.
>
> Sol Wilson[115]

Wilson's comments were no mere existentialist war hangovers but stem from a lucid appraisal of the status quo and a genuine "Where-do-we-go-from-here?" questioning. Samuel Kootz, too, understood that need for change, for new beginnings, and sought for it in earnest. Undeniably, he believed that the talents of the six men in his gallery held the key to this new direction. Yet American painting, as the Cold War period accelerated, was not admired by all; some read in its forms a Communist subterfuge bent on undermining American values. Two years after the American army marched into France, helping to expel German occupational forces and freeing a grateful nation, an entire Parisian art establishment denounced the American art they saw in an exhibition Kootz organized for a major French gallery, and accused the visiting Kootz Gallery painters of copying their School of Paris, of subverting French artistic endeavor to their own selfish ends. More conclusively than other early post-war cultural exchange events, two widely publicized European exhibitions held in the neo-Cold War era helped to politicize and polarize American art. As we shall see, Browne found himself unwittingly embroiled in both.

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[115] Sol Wilson, Letter, M K R'S Art Outlook, Vol. 1, no. 21, November 25, 1946, pp. 2-3.

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CHAPTER 6

PROPAGANDA AND PAWNS: TWO PIVOTAL POST-WAR EXHIBITIONS

> NO, NO, NO, NOT THAT . . . Is the man in the white jacket here yet? This is by Byron Browne and is called "Still Life in Red, Yellow and Green."[1]
>
> --Anonymous art critic, the New York Journal-American
> 1946

With Allied victory and peacetime, the months following the end of World War II witnessed an American population enjoying unprecedented economic prosperity. After having demonstrated its military might, the United States government now sought to establish international leadership in nonconfrontational arenas, among them the cultural front. Championing American artistic richness, one of Washington's approaches designed to expedite passage through the post-War years, seemed a wise and beneficial route toward effecting a new American foreign policy and image. As one of the earliest projects toward this goal, the State Department organized an international traveling exhibition to showcase the most innovative contemporary visual art the country had to offer. Little did its promoters realize that they would be instigating a war of another type, with works of art as pawns.

During the spring and summer of 1946, with full government sanction and funding, two State Department officials, Richard Heindel and J. LeRoy Davidson, purchased seventy-nine oil on canvas paintings and seventy-three watercolors by artists considered to

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[1] Anonymous, "Exposing the Bunk of So-Called Modern Art," New York Journal-American, 3 December 1946, p. 15. Making fun of abstract art was but one example of the kind of yellow journalism promoted by the powerful Hearst newspaper organization.

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typify advanced styles. Together, Heindel, chief of the State Department's Division of Libraries and Institutes, and Davidson, a Harvard-educated former assistant director of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, whose position had afforded him familiarity with contemporary art, planned to divide the collection into several units for a five-year world-wide journey promoting America's cultural supremacy.

Between them they took sole responsibility for determining which paintings to buy after consulting with dozens of dealers, among whom was the ailing Alfred Stieglitz, for their choices and opinions of the most progressive American artists. The Samuel Kootz, Downtown, Kraushaar and ACA Galleries were among those from which Davidson and Heindel selected their paintings. By summer's end, 1946, Davidson had purchased seventy-three watercolors, and seventy-nine oils for the remarkably small cost of less than $600 apiece, with a total for all the artwork under $49,000.[2]

Among the abstract and expressionistic works were canvases and watercolors by Baziotes, Bearden, Browne and Gottlieb from the Kootz Gallery, as well as those by Davis, Dove, Drewes, Gropper, Hopper, Kuhn, Kuniyoshi, Levine, Marin, O'Keeffe, Pereira, Rattner, Shahn, Weber and Zerbe.[3] The organizers were fortunate that leading segments of the art community, dealers and collectors elated that such a project could attain government patronage, priced their paintings below market value. Davidson and Heindel

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[2] Only thirty-five of the seventy-three watercolors traveled with the exhibition. The remaining thirty-eight, purchased later than the rest of the collection, formed a separate group scheduled for China.

[3] Gropper and Shahn were unusual choices for a show of this type. Their focus, conceived primarily to point out political and social grievance, could hardly have been called new or contemporary from the standpoint of style or topic. The freedom with which these painters were allowed to express their concerns contrasted markedly with policies prevalent in some of the countries to which the exhibition would travel.

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titled the exhibition to reflect their mission, Advancing American Art.[4]

Prior to World War II, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. had been the major organizer responsible for establishing America's aesthetic image in overseas embassies but Davidson considered their taste far too restrained. Conceived as a counterbalance to this ultra conservative institution, with its interests primarily in European art, the organizers intended their exhibition to demonstrate, especially to the overseas European cultural community, just how innovative a force the United States had become in contemporary painting.

Davidson and Heindel were fortunate to have prominent connections in the art world who supported their project and, anxious for as much publicity as possible prior to its tour, the pair arranged to showcase the work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in autumn 1946. Advancing American Art opened on October 4 and remained through the 27th, with Hugo Weisgall writing an explanatory essay for the accompanying catalogue.[5]

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[4] Advancing American Art: Politics and Aesthetics in the State Department Exhibition, 1946-1948, Margaret Lynn Ausfeld and Virginia M. Mecklenburg, essays, Montgomery, Alabama, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, January 10-March 4, 1984 (traveling). This exhibition documents and recreates, in as much as possible, the works shown in the original exhibition. A later book, Advancing American Art: Painting, Politics, and Cultural Confrontation at Mid-Century, Taylor D. Littleton and Maltby Sykes, essays, Leon F. Litwack, intro., Tuscaloosa, Alabama, University of Alabama, 1989, is cited here for further reference but will not be referred to, as much material duplicates the earlier exhibition catalogue and, additionally, its primary interest lies in promulgating works from the war assets sale purchased for its own collection.

[5] Advancing American Art, Hugo Weisgall, essay, U.S. Information Service, Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1947. The essay consists of twelve unpaginated pages and is primarily an outline of the history of painting in this country, designed to enlighten audiences unfamiliar with American art. Black and white reproductions of many of the traveling works, Browne's Still Life in Red, Yellow, and Green among them, augmented his text. The English version of the catalogue accompanied the initial showing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In all other cases, Advancing American Art will refer to the re-creation of the exhibition mounted by the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama.

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Byron Browne's whimsical Woman and Bird, 1945, tempera and ink on board, (Fig. 5-7), and the linear, highly abstracted tabletop arrangement Still Life in Red, Yellow, and Green, 1945 (Fig. 6-1), were placed alongside equally abstract designs by Ralston Crawford, Werner Drewes and George L. K. Morris. Still, only Irene Rice Pereira's ink and gouache design could claim total freedom from natural referents.

As anticipated, the art press enthusiastically covered the exhibition. Alfred M. Frankfurter, the powerful editor of Art News, liked the idea behind the show and devoted a major part of the October issue to Davidson's venture.[6] Critical reaction was generally favorable with a young Clement Greenberg, at that time writing for the Nation, calling the exhibition "the best group show of this nature to be held in New York for years."[7] He praised Davidson's bold decision to slant the show in the direction of the abstract in order to prove that American could keep abreast of European advances in art

> But Mr. Davidson's exhibition does not make the point of being advanced merely for the sake of being so; in proportion, there is almost as much bad advanced or abstract painting as there is any other kind. Mr. Davidson also had a taste, a personal and definite one, that accords with the line he took. Though he shows many bad pictures by poor artists, he shows enough good pictures, even by mediocre artists, to more than make up for them. And at least there is some relation to be discerned between the bad and the good; they are not thrown together helter-skelter by a jury the only connection between whose members is one of time and place; they have an organic relation to each other that is enlightening in itself. Mr. Davidson's exhibition is in a way a remarkable accomplishment, and its moral should be taken to heart by others who control the public destiny of art in our

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6 Alfred M. Frankfurter, "American Art Abroad: The State Department's Collection," Art News, Vol. 45, no. 8, October 1946, pp. 19-31, 78. The article provided a complete list of State Department purchases and the galleries from which they came. A landscape of trees by Walt Kuhn, one of the most realistic works in the show, was reproduced in color on the cover.

7 Clement Greenberg, "Art," The Nation, Vol. 163, no. 21, November 23, 1946, pp. 593-94.

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country.[8]

After closing at the Metropolitan Museum Davidson divided the exhibition into two sections, one bound for Europe and the other destined for Latin America with thirty oils and some watercolors sent first to Cuba and then Guatemala. The second group, forty-nine oils and thirty-five watercolors, went to Paris for display at the Musée d'Art Moderne, where it acted as the American contribution to festivities accompanying the first general conference of the United Nations Organization's UNESCO division. Parisian response, Davidson felt, would mark the true measure of the success of their exhibition.[9] Whatever his expectations, disappointment remained his lot.

French consensus disavowed any independence from their own tradition; they neither praised nor disparaged the American effort. This evaluation stood in marked contrast to that of the American press, which, deprived of contact with contemporary French painting since the war years, saw greater autonomy in the work exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[10] The disappointment of Davidson and Heindel by the lukewarm French response would be offset by its reception at the next venue.

The exhibition closed in Paris on December 20 and was immediately shipped to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where it opened to instant popular acclaim on March 6, 1947. By the time it closed nearly three weeks later, eight thousand persons had flocked to see the paintings. The show traveled to similar successes throughout other Czechoslovakian cities

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[8] Ibid., p. 594.

[9] Advancing American Art, p. 16. The exhibition remained in Paris for the month of November and most of December, closing on December 20, 1946. The oils were then shipped to Prague to begin a five-year tour; the watercolors traveled to Guatemala.

[10] Ibid., p. 17.

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and in all, over seventeen thousand persons viewed the exhibition during its two-months tour of that country. The Latin-American segment was similarly well received.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm with which the paintings were welcomed by most foreign viewers belied an embarrassing political brouhaha in the making at home. While the exhibition had been scheduled for additional Slavic cities through the end of 1947, and other countries over a five-year period, Secretary of State George C. Marshall abruptly ordered his Assistant Secretary, William Benton, to detain the works; on May 5th, the House Appropriations Committee voted to cut off funds for the remainder of the tour. Public money, it seems, had been used to purchase leftist paintings executed by Communist-leaning artists; all manner of trouble with a full-fledged scandal appeared imminent.[11] A certain newspaper magnate, it turns out, had begun lodging exceedingly public complaints. Browne's paintings, as well as those of everyone else, had been purchased with American taxpayer dollars.

On June 11, 1947 Secretary Marshall officially ordered the return of the works, brought back to Prague, in order to avoid additional risk of "embarrassment" to the U. S. government. A panel of art specialists was to be called to review the "legitimacy" of the government's entire art program.

Shortly after the exhibition tour initiated, when all seemed calm, the syndicated powerful Hearst press, headed by arch-conservative William Randolph Hearst, whose loathing of modern art was no secret, began to mount an escalating diatribe through his many newspapers against what he called "leftish" paintings by artists who followed the Communist line. What began as low-keyed sniping at the project by groups of

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[11] Ibid., pp. 17, 19.

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conservative artists not chosen to participate in the exhibition, which drew Hearst's attention initially, turned into a full blown field day for the conservative press, politicians and, coaxed by Hearst writers, for a citizenry growing increasingly outraged that their taxes had been spent to pay for such "junk."

A few overlooked artists, members of the American Artists Professional League, angry that the paintings had been chosen by Davidson, essentially a one-man jury, composed a formal complaint and sent it to the Secretary of State.[12] The group questioned "the cultural value of any exhibition which is so strongly marked with the radicalism of the new trends of European art. This is [work] not indigenous to our soil."[13] Hearst, with his chain of thirty-six newspapers published daily in major American cities, recognized his opportunity to attack the work he loathed and seized the situation from there.

In reality, the trouble had been preplanned by Hearst people with protests beginning the day the artwork went on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in October the previous year. A writer for the New York Journal-American, a widely-read, major Hearst-owned newspaper, focused on the leftist political affiliations of some artists included in the collection, naming eight but singling out William Gropper, who often

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12 Ibid., p. 17.

13 See, Albert T. Reid, "League Protests to the Department of State," Art Digest, Vol. 21, no. 4, November 15, 1946, p. 32. The letter, dated November 6 and addressed to the current Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, was reproduced in this periodical in its entirety.

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denounced American policy, in particular.[14] The journalist began his article with a statement guaranteed to provoke ire among its readers

> The State Department, which officially is refusing to compromise with international Communism, is currently sponsoring an art exhibit which features the work of left-wing painters who are members of Fed (sic) [Red] Fascist organizations. Among the artists in the State Department exhibit, which opens today at the Metropolitan Museum are brush wielders who served on Communist fronts set up by Moscow to attack this nation's foreign policy.[15]

The stage thus set, a series of three more "exposé" styled articles followed, each occupying a full page, on November 19, 26 and on December 3, 1946. Each debunked modern art, heaping devastating ridicule upon the paintings through carefully planned captions under numerous intentionally ill-reproduced photographs. Their purpose, to inflame the passions of readers made hostile by the "ugly" reproductions, especially as Hearst journalists continued to underscore that public money had been used to purchase them, succeeded far beyond their anticipation. Thousands of letters from irate citizens, denouncing the exhibition and fraudulent use of their taxes, began to pour into Congress and to State Department offices.[16]

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[14] Howard Rushmore, "State Dept. Backs Red Art Show," New York Journal-American, 4 October 1946, p. 6. A fellow-traveler of the Communist Party, although never a card carrying member, and supporter of Communist and Socialist ideology since the early 1930s, Gropper had been a leading editorial cartoonist for numerous leftist periodicals, including the Daily Worker and New Masses. A fellow-traveler of the Communist Party, although never a card carrying member, and supporter of Communist and Socialist ideology since the early 1930s, Gropper had long been a leading editorial cartoonist for numerous leftist periodicals, including the Daily Worker and New Masses.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Advancing American Art, pp. 19-20. Citations for the three Hearst newspaper articles, all from the New York Journal-American, are as follows: "Debunking State Department's Art", 19 November, 1946, p. 17; "Debunking State Department's Art," 26 November, 1946, p. 17; "Exposing the Bunk of So-Called Modern Art," 3 December 1946, p. 15. Each contained lengthy vitriolic commentary accompanied by sarcastically

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For the December 3rd article, the anonymous Hearst writer vilified Browne's Still Life in Red, Yellow and Green, and placed Stuart Davis's semi-abstract Trees and El, 1931 (Fig. 6-2), beside it. Making fun of Browne's picture and in a not-too-subtle manner suggesting that the artist was mentally deranged, the caption under his reproduction read

> NO, NO, NO, NOT THAT . . . Is the man in the white jacket here yet? This is by Byron Browne and is called "Still Life in Red, Yellow and Green." We hope we have it right side up, or does it matter? It is to be sent to Paris in the State Department exhibition.[17]

Surprisingly, the newspaper published Browne's work right side up but this may have resulted inadvertently, so visually uninformed was the writer.

Using the strident language of taunting bullies, the caption under the Davis work invited reader's to name calling

> NOBLE NATURE . . . You think you know what a tree looks like? Well, you don't. That stuff on the right is really what a tree looks like, in the mind of Stuart Davis, and that stuff on the left is an elevated station. He calls it "Tree (sic) and El." What do you call it?[18]

Still, the most damaging perception of the traveling collection did not ensue from a Hearst organ. A far larger national audience subscribed to Look magazine and in the February 18, 1947 issue, a double-page spread announced, "Your Money Bought These Paintings." Although never alluding to ulterior motives, the short article was accompanied by seven "distorted" realistic works by artists with foreign sounding names, purposely chosen to point out their implied un-American, therefore leftist and transplanted European

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captioned reproductions; none carried a by-line.

[17] "Exposing the Bunk of So-Called Modern Art," New York Journal-American, 3 December 1946, p. 15.

[18] Ibid.

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flavor.[19]

For popular radio broadcaster Fulton Louis, Jr., paintings by O. Louis Guglielmi, Nahum Tschacbasov, Ben Shahn, Gregorio Prestopino, Robert Gwathmey, Karl Zerbe and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, constituted ". . . excellent examples of the very worst and most terrible phase of WPA art project junk in its very worst manifestation." " They're grotesque . . . ." "If that be American art, God save us."[20] Thus the collection came to yet wider national attention with his verbal assault, prompting many more taxpayers to demand a State Department investigation of the art project.

To add to the mounting crisis for Davidson's exhibition, President Harry S. Truman, who like Hearst despised modern art, got into the fracas. As a highly quotable and outspoken opponent, Truman referred to the abstract works in Advancing American Art as products of the "ham and egg" school of painting. Other of his caustic remarks made for good press coverage. Holding up to Truman a reproduction of what had became the symbol of the show, Kuniyoshi's Circus Girl Resting, date unknown (Fig. 6-3), depicting an overly endowed, scantly clad, seated female figure, Truman remarked, ". . . if that's art, I'm a Hottentot."[21] In a letter to Assistant Secretary of State, William Benton, Truman expressed his feeling that "so-called modern art is merely the vaporings of

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19 "Your Money Bought These Paintings: They Are Part of a Collection of Modern American Art Purchased by the State Department for Exhibition Abroad," Look, Vol. 11, no. 4, February 18, 1947, pp. 80-81.

20 Fulton Louis, Jr., on his radio program broadcast on February 5, 1947. The following day he continued his nationally aired diatribe, calling the art project a waste of funds.

21 Advancing American Art, p. 20. A Hottentot was a member of a people of southern Africa. In other words, President Truman referred to the Negro race.

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half-baked lazy people."[22] His comment was leaked to the press causing much of the nation to think so too.[23]

Although the show had been booked for several years, by March 1947, Benton concluded that it could not be salvaged in its present state and ordered the paintings detained in Czechoslovakia and in Haiti until a panel of art experts could determine the exhibition's fate. Then, compounding the situation, Davidson, who had been urged not subtly to resign, did so. His position was immediately abolished.[24]

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22 President Harry S. Truman, Letter to William Benton, 2 April 1947, File #RG PPF-45F, Harry S. Truman Archives, Independence, Missouri.

23 Increasingly, Congressmen found it difficult to justify their constituents's continued funding for the exhibition. With upcoming hearings of the Appropriations Committee scheduled for May 1947, the situation passed from being a mere annoyance to one gravely serious. With the new Secretary of State, General George C. Marshall, now questioning the validity of the exhibition while giving testimony before Congress, the risk of further embarrassment was viewed by the Assistant Secretary, upon whose shoulders the problem had been placed, as unacceptable. His key concern was that the Soviet Union, with its political propaganda against the United States ever escalating a Cold War, would exploit the fact that American artists with known Communist sympathies were included in an exhibition purported to represent a culturally advanced, non-Communist country. According to the Congressional Record, U.S. Congress, 80th Congress, 1st session, May 13, 1947, Vol. 93, pt. 4, pp. 5279-5282, twenty-four artists included in Advancing American Art, Philip Evergood, William Gropper and Ben Shahn among them, were named by the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities records as being affiliated with organizations such as the Communist publication New Masses and the John Reed Club. Being associated with art for so long, however, it was neither the work nor the political affiliations of its creators that troubled him, it was Davidson's use of a "one-man jury system" for choosing the work in the first place.

24 Although the State Department officially held that art *was* an appropriate instrument of American foreign policy, it was now deemed inappropriate for Davidson alone to have chosen the paintings. Confronted with hostile House Appropriations Committee hearings, Benton, in hindsight and eager to avert further criticism, admitted that the decision for the choice of artworks should have been made by a jury of several, representing all factions of artistic taste while stating that the exhibition was still worthy and should follow its schedule. Nevertheless, funds for the art program were cut off on May 5, 1947, with a recommendation that the entire division itself be abolished.

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Despite a vigorous letter writing campaign from an outraged art community, to which Byron and Rosalind Browne each sent strongly worded contributions deploring the State Department's censorship and decision to close the exhibition, their dissent occurred too late for any reconsideration. In a telegram dated June 11, Secretary George Marshall ordered the return of the works, still in Prague, so that a panel of experts could review the art program; such a "panel" never materialized and was never meant to.

Looking out for his own career as well, Benton concluded that the continuing attacks on Congress amounted to political suicide for any Congressman to attempt a defense and that the value of the endeavor did not merit further crusade on its behalf. Simply abandoning the works, however, would only invite further controversy and so the art programs staff finally agreed that the collection should be sold, thereby putting an end the conflict.

Subsequently, State Department lawyers determined that the Department lacked legal authority to sell the paintings itself. This left the bizarre alternative to declare the property war surplus, allowing surrender of the work to the War Assets Administration, normally occupied with sales of heavy equipment and war materiel, for disposal at international auctions. Lloyd Goodrich, associate director at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in order to give bidders a chance to view the works, offered to provide wall space for its installation. His offer accepted, he had the crates shipped to New York where the collection was installed at the museum from May 17 to June 20, 1948.[25]

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25 Peyton Boswell, editor of The Art Digest, deplored calling the paintings "war surplus" and their sale as such, in his editorial for the June 1, 1948 issue ("Peyton Boswell Comments: When Art Becomes "War Surplus," The Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 17, June 1, 1948, p. 7). Wishing to forestall any further unfair criticism of modern art in the Hearst newspapers, he wrote that never had the art of painting faced such a market handicap. Boswell doubted that the paintings would receive more than ten cents on the dollar and that

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The government printing office published a small catalogue listing all 117 oil and watercolor paintings; submission of sealed bids closed on June 19 at 10:00 A.M., Eastern Standard Time.[26] Using an elaborate system set up for the sale, with ninety-five percent discount over fair market value, 148 bidders vied for the collection, including tax-supported institutions, such as museums and universities, war veterans, commercial galleries and private citizens.

When the sale ended, the University of Oklahoma, Norman and Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, received the largest groups of paintings numbering thirty-six each. Kuniyoshi's controversial, much maligned painting, Circus Girl Resting, which had become the unwitting symbol for the exhibition, commanded one of the highest prices, $2,000.00, and went to Auburn University. William Benton, who by now had resigned from the State Department, bid on thirteen works but was unsuccessful in acquiring even one for himself.

All in all, the government collected merely $5,544.00 for a collection appraised at $85,000.[27] A list of each artist, title of work and the price for which it sold, as well as the

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under government red tape such a sale would not prove a criterion of their true value. He also feared that most publications would mark the episode as the downfall of the modern movement in America. In the same issue, writer Jo Gibbs praised LeRoy Davidson's selections by stating that the collection achieved precisely what it set out to do--demonstrate the many facets found in modern American Art. (Jo Gibbs, "State Department Art Classed As War Surplus," The Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 17, June 1, 1948, pp. 9, 37.)

26 Catalogue of 117 Oil and Watercolor Originals by Leading American Artists: Offered for Sale at Sealed Bid by War Assets Administration, P. O. Box 216, Wall St. Station, New York, N. Y., May 1948 [probably]. This booklet, an auction catalogue, contained pages of bid forms and special instructions for various categories of bidders, including veterans who might have wanted to participate. Each painter was given a short biographical sketch along with the titles of works. The only deceased painter represented in the sale was Marsden Hartley, who died in 1943. Other than a painting by Sol Wilson appearing on the cover, none of the work was reproduced.

27 Advancing American Art, p. 25.

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name of the successful buyer, appeared in the July 1 issue of The Art Digest.[28] Browne's Still Life in Red, Yellow, and Green sold for $500.00 and went to Auburn University, while his tempera on paper, Woman and Bird, purchased by the University of Oklahoma, Norman, sold for $200.00.[29] Thus an auction settled the fate of the once-celebrated collection, killed by politics.

Complaints of lack of homespun influences, radical stylistic trends and non-American values aside, most of the abstracted paintings from this traveling overseas exhibition maintained links with observed nature; few were completely nonfigurative although to the eyes of government authorities, the most vociferous complainers, even slightly unrealistic work seemed beyond and unworthy of any effort to comprehend. As a case in point, Browne's two examples, while abstracted, unquestionably contained distinctly identifiable subject matter. His Still Life in Red, Yellow, and Green included organic shapes resembling fruit and leaves on branches; bottle shapes can be plainly determined. Horizontal placement of forms coupled with the balancing vertical "window" frame to the left and a leafy tree branch penetrating both inside and outside window planes lent further spatial reality to the picture. Configurations in Browne's Woman and Bird also referred to their title.[30]

In organizing the exhibition, Davidson and Heindel's goals were open, honest and

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[28] Alonzo Lansford, "State Department Art Auction, Sic Transit," The Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 18, July 1, 1948, pp. 13, 21. The article's title spoke volumes.

[29] A telephone call to each university confirms that, in January 2000, Browne's paintings are still safely protected in their permanent collections, and are, in fact, frequently shown.

[30] In his initial choices Davidson bypassed the Surrealists, for he considered them frivolous. As well, he omitted works of pure geometric content, a style he felt dated.

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democratic even as they were as well, politically propagandistic. As the nation sought to reconcile its recent role in Europe and Japan, the exhibition seemed the perfect orchestration for bettering foreign relations and fostering intellectual and creative aspects of American culture. Realizing that the rest of the world was interested in seeing the tranquil side to a powerful, newly victorious nation, they hoped to promote international understanding while celebrating, in contrast to repressive totalitarian governments, a society that allowed its creative members complete freedom of expression, even when that expression extended to "controversial" art. How controversial, of course, could never have been anticipated.

Virtually every art magazine, newspaper and radio station had something to say about this exhibition and the right (or lack) of the American government to subsidize or to politicize art. The significance of Advancing American Art, aside from its sanctioned use as a political tool, lies primarily in the telling reaction it generated from its own people. The vitriolic attack, more political than aesthetically directed, was launched essentially because certain of the artists belonged to or supported organizations in the past that now were listed as subversive by the Attorney General. The State Department, for all its outward might, found itself intimidated into withdrawing the collection from touring by reactionary members of Congress, who themselves feared rebuke not only from the Hearst newspapers and the equally powerful anti-administration radio commentators but also from their constituents, who could remove them from office with the next election.[31] Ill-fated, the collection suffered the misfortune of becoming the pawn of outside factions

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[31] Lloyd Goodrich, "Politics and Policies in American Art," The Art Digest, Vol. 26, no. 3, November 1, 1951, pp. 20,63.

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unrelated to its original purpose as an exhibition of works of art.[32]

The vehemence of popular reaction to this exhibition, in rejecting its organizer's broad goals for narrower viewpoints, demonstrated how pervasively insular, conservative, isolationist, nationalistic and anti-elitist was the majority of the American populace.[33]

Criticism of Advancing American Art amounted to but a trickle compared to the torrent of abuse that would ensue in the 1950s during the McCarthy era, when the battle between the creative segment of our society and politics reached a new low during the "Red Scare" and Cold War American policy.[34]

In contrast to the discord at home, European and Latin American populaces demonstrated far broader and more sophisticated attitudes toward the paintings in Advancing American Art. Aside from its cool reception in Paris, which could be automatically predicted, the exhibition accomplished its goals in the countries where it was seen and would have continued doing so if its tour had not been cut short.

The irony of the entire fiasco was that Communist governments held no more

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[32] American art was no stranger to political maneuvers, particularly during the Depression of the 1930s, when painters of the Social Realist and Regionalist schools especially, functioned as social critics. The government, nonetheless, supported them, as it did all artists in need, through federally financed projects to ease their suffering. Loud objections were raised, for some regarded New Deal projects as an effort by the Roosevelt administration toward a Socialized form of government. Still, the Projects survived to became a model of appropriate use of government funding for the arts.

[33] Modern art clearly frightened many people who, because they did not understand a picture's content and were unwilling to learn, quickly found all manner of demons to threaten their straightforward way of life. Using art as a political tool was not the problem in itself but modern art, with its perceived unnatural distortions or total removal from recognizable form, was. Related only in part to its paucity of deified American Scene-type imagery, the modernism expressed by the examples in this show merely exacerbated the problem. In trouble before, "Modern Art" would continue to find itself in hot water.

[34] Advancing American Art, pp. 26, 32.

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approval for such art than did the vociferous conservative contingent in America, thus establishing an unwelcome, little-discussed but unmistakable common link between the two groups. In many ways they behaved exactly alike. As Payton Boswell commented

> . . . the only two modern states that have attempted to control their creative artists--Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. Whatever the conservatives wish to call modern art, surely they cannot brand it "communistic"; rather, it represents democratic experimentation as the scientist knows it. This attack on freedom of expression is democracy's current art problem.[35]

Paradoxically, as Congressional and State Department officials determined to close Advancing American Art, the open-minded and appreciative president of Czechoslovakia was arranging for his government to pay the costs of expanding its tour, so eager were his country's people to see art of the new world leader.[36]

Still, the ignominious Advancing American Art could not claim sole possession to notorious publicity. As the scandal unfolded in the daily press, another fiasco bided its time in the wings. Samuel Kootz, who had seen to it that his painters figured prominently in that show, now triggered his own political confrontation, manipulating his roster as pawns on a game board, in an exhibition of their paintings in Paris that was financially backed by a federal government agency.

Ever the enterprising art dealer, Kootz generated excitement and publicity in nearly everything he organized. In early 1947, he engineered what many critics called the

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[35] Peyton Boswell, "Peyton Boswell Comments: Killed by Politics," Art Digest, Vol. 21, no. 15, May 1, 1947, p. 7. Boswell called the action by the State Department "stupid."

[36] To Davidson's opponents, however, promoting the collection was considered not only another effort akin to New Deal socialism but such paintings, with strong biases toward French, German or other "foreign" avant-garde stylistic forms, represented a blatant attempt to uproot all that was cherished and perceived as sacred in the American way of life. Advancing American Art, p. 57.

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art coup of the decade by flying to Paris "on a gamble." Although Kootz had never met the reclusive Picasso,[37] he not only managed to do that but he also persuaded the famed artist, with a gift of a new Cadillac automobile as wedge, to give him paintings for exhibition and sale at his 57th Street gallery.[38] Kootz returned in triumph with nine canvases of the first postwar work by Picasso seen in this country. In February he put the paintings on view, providing one of the most newsworthy events of the spring art season.

Although reviews of this exhibition were divided, as could be expected from a press that still found even semi-abstract art mostly unfathomable, Kootz nevertheless garnered reams of sensational print and drew international attention to himself. The show was a sellout almost before it opened, with hundreds of curious visitors gravitating to the gallery each day; prices for his paintings ranged from $3,500 to $20,000.[39] For sheer "box office" appeal, Picasso was compared by Time magazine's writer to the pop idol of the moment, crooner Frank Sinatra.

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[37] Advancing American Art, p. 57.

[38] The great Brassai, one of Picasso's personal photographers as well as his close friend, was also a friend of Carl Holty, a member of the Kootz stable. Kootz implored Holty to intercede for him and, at Holty's urging, Brassai took Kootz to met Picasso while he was at work in his studio.

[39] "That Man is Here Again," Time, Vol. 49, no. 6, February 10, 1947, p. 57. This first Picasso exhibition is reviewed also in: Peyton Boswell, "Peyton Boswell Comments: Too Close to Home," The Art Digest, Vol. 21, no. 15, May 1, 1947, p. 7, although the article mainly discusses the later Galerie Maeght show. See also: Alonzo Lansford, "New Picassos from Paris Rate High," The Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 9, February 1, 1948, p. 13. Lansford mentions the excitement Kootz caused by "scooping the art marts" the previous year, when he showed the first new Picasso paintings to be seen in America since before the war. His article primarily discusses the Kootz exhibition of the following year, when in January and February 1948, the dealer showed another group of nine 1947 Picasso paintings, together with several from the 1941-45 period as comparison pieces, to critical acclaim. Kootz had again gone to Paris to deal with Picasso. Later, Kootz would obtain the right to act as Picasso's sole American dealer.

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In an attempt to soften the hard-to-get painter the dealer had shown Picasso photographs of canvases by his gallery's modernists. According to Kootz, Picasso commented that "he hadn't realized such creative painting was done in the United States." Perhaps as a gesture of friendship to Picasso and the French people but definitely with a keen eye toward the untapped postwar European market, as a turnabout, Kootz said to him that he would try to arrange to bring his painters's work to Paris; Picasso promised to attend the opening should such an exhibition transpire.

Samuel Kootz had high expectations for a second coup, this time involving members of his own gallery but with Paris as the venue. Now he would confront the French and match them at their own game on their own ground. No American gallery dealing with contemporary art had effected an arrangement like this before. Beyond the sheer audacity of the idea, to Kootz's mind the show meant sales accompanied by what he hoped would be critical raves that could be publicized in New York. He had made his gallery painters celebrities and now he himself would share that stardom by becoming the most celebrated dealer in New York. From now on his would be an international gallery.

Kootz wasted no time making preparations for his Paris show. With the cooperation of his French counterpart, Aimé Maeght, owner of one of the most prestigious art galleries in Paris, Galerie Maeght, he organized a large exhibition of paintings executed by his six avant-garde artists. They scheduled the opening for late March 1947.

Mindful of the intensifying political controversy over the still-traveling Advancing American Art exhibition but with a domestic government beginning to recognize the importance of closer ties with non-Communist European nations, Kootz was able to bypass Congressional negotiation and appeal directly to a government agency recently set up to finance private cultural ventures abroad, the United States Information Services (USIS).

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The primary role of this overtly political agency was to let it be known, especially in Europe, that America was not the cultural backwater that the Russians, during this period of the Cold War, claimed it was.[40] Aside from gaining prominence as a dealer, Kootz could proclaim as well his strong patriotism.

Although he and his painters were unknown in French art circles, Kootz intended to make his "chosen" the toast of Paris and thus of the whole of postwar Europe. As one of the earliest supporters of American modernism, Kootz was already plotting to reverse the time-honored dominant position France occupied as leader of new innovative art. Now, in 1947, he had his greatest opportunity to do so with his government's full backing and with none of the disparaging controversy that accompanied Advancing American Art.

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40 Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1983, pp. 150, 237-238, note 174. Although not covert in the true sense of the word, the purpose of such an agency was to gain as much control of European intellectual life as possible with the ultimate goal of laying a foundation for international cooperation in the fight against Communist infiltration and takeover. Wishing to maintain the momentum of its military victory in World War II and retain its power as world leader in all aspects of human endeavor--including cultural domains--government funds, although not nearly to the extent of those expended by Russia, were allocated to several such agencies for the support of private museums and galleries and other areas of intellectual creativity in order to promote American shows abroad, thereby showing off our own cultural and creative strengths, always the weakest link in our powerbase. For its absolute cultural and intellectual dominance, France constituted the crucial American target from the federal government's standpoint. Of course, the USIS disguised the extent of its interest, kept a low profile and acted with the full cooperation of Samuel Kootz and Amié Maeght. The way in which Kootz became aware of this agency and his decision to use its "services," may never be known. This writer's feeling is that the government approached the dealer with the idea and, offering financial support, Kootz was only too happy to oblige. Guilbaut, in researching his book, was repeatedly denied access to Galerie Maeght archives while in Paris and Mr. Maeght refused him a requested interview. Moreover, Samuel Kootz, who had at first agreed to an interview, canceled the appointment upon hearing of Guilbaut's special interest in the question of how the exhibition was organized and financed. "There are," wrote Guilbaut on page 238, "pools that apparently stink if they are stirred." Samuel M. Kootz died of cancer on August 7, 1982.

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Amid much fanfare, Introduction à la Péinture Moderne Américaine opened in Paris on March 28th, at Galerie Maeght on the Rue de Téhéran (Fig. 6-4), with the three B's, as the New York press always referred to them--William Baziotes, Romare Bearden and Byron Browne, (now thirty-nine years old)--along with Adolph Gottlieb, Carl Holty (the oldest at forty-seven) and Robert Motherwell (the youngest at thirty-two).[41] They were at that moment the six most talked-about, exhibited modernists in America; Kootz hoped to make them so in Paris.

Each painter was represented by five examples for a total of thirty oil on canvas paintings, all executed during 1946 or 1947. One work by each was reproduced in the catalogue for which Byron Browne executed a special circus theme cover, a pen and ink line drawing depicting a female horseback rider atop a rearing steed (Fig.6-5).[42] His five paintings, all carrying circus theme imagery, expressed conspicuously greater realism than works by the other four. So distanced from the nearly nonfigurative examples by the others were his paintings that one is left to speculate if the inclusion of a reproduction of Still Life in Primary Colors, 1945 (Fig. 5-51), a predominantly abstract work unlisted in the catalogue but presumably hung in the exhibition, was chosen to mitigate the contrast.[43] Harold Rosenberg, the highly-regarded arts writer and critic, contributed a two and one-

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[41] Introduction à la Péinture Moderne Américaine, Harold Rosenberg, essay, Paris, Galerie Maeght, Sous Le Patronage Des United States Information Services et avec le Concours de l' Association France and Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York, March 28-April 30, 1947.

[42] Although charming, Browne's drawing was neither avant-garde nor contemporary but had much in common with earlier linear depictions of circus folk by the sculptor, Alexander Calder. It seemed an unlikely choice to use for the cover, considering the abstracted content of the majority of examples shown.

[43] According to Stephen B. Browne, this painting was sent to Paris along with the other works, giving Browne a total of six paintings, one more than the others had.

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half page introductory essay in French.[44]

Neither the dealer nor any of his six painters went abroad for the vernissage; they could ill afford to travel and their dealer could not afford the time. Samuel Kootz and Aimé Maeght then awaited the accolades, for this, the first presentation of modern American painting since the German army occupied the country seven years before.[45]

Meanwhile, Kootz simultaneously prepared to mail invitations for his own gallery's opening of new paintings by William Baziotes, scheduled for April 7th. Into each envelope he proudly slipped a card containing the announcement of the Galerie Maeght exhibition. The last paragraph of his accompanying, frequently published newsletter, Gallery Notes, read

> This is my first attempt to display advanced American painting in Paris, in which the concentration is completely upon modern work. It will be interesting to learn the French reaction and we hope to reproduce some of the criticism in the next catalogue.[46]

As it turned out, Kootz never reproduced a single word of that ensuing French criticism. Indeed, he soon wished he had never sent his paintings abroad.

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[44] This important essay will be discussed later in the chapter.

[45] Romare Bearden recalled an amusing anecdote. Some concern for the safety of the crates containing the thirty paintings arose when the plane on which they were supposed to have been shipped arrived in Paris without them. When Kootz informed his artists that the works had apparently been lost or stolen, they were overjoyed because it meant some insurance money, for no one expected to sell anything. Frantic efforts to trace the shipment ensued from both continents until someone finally located the missing crates--outdoors and forgotten, buried in the snow in Iceland--and rushed them to the gallery, barely in time for the scheduled opening. The crates had been removed from the cargo section for transfer to another plane. Somehow, when the paintings were unloaded from the first plane, workmen neglected to place them on the next for the remaining leg of the flight. Romare Bearden, telephone conversation with the author, New York City, 25 June 1984.

Bearden died on March 12, 1988 at the age of seventy-six and, with the death of Robert Motherwell in July 1991, no member of this group of six survives.

[46] Archives of American Art, Papers of Byron Browne, roll #1318, frame 677.

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The French critics were shocked by what they saw. Because of their isolation during the war they had no idea what direction American painting had taken and were thoroughly unprepared for work by foreigners that, they believed, looked every bit as though it had come from the hands of their own artists--only the Americans imitated it badly. The chauvinistic critics found the efforts pathetic for their near total dependence on modern French styles. Deference is not an attribution the French possess in abundance and they minced no words; they tore apart each painter's work with nearly equal vituperation.

Of the six painters generally, one French art periodical stated

> These audacities have been familiar for a long time to Western European art. For us it holds no surprises or shocks. The only thing that can now attract us in a work of art is quality but in the paintings of these Americans it is lacking.[47]

From La France au Combat

> The apparent case of Picassoesque drawing and the decorative mosaics of colors made fashionable by Matisse are the primary reasons for this exhibit; color reproductions make their task easier. Now American painters no longer have to come to France to copy our masters.

Caustic commentary ensued from every side. The critic from Le Monde Illustré said, "Do not tell us where they are going. For that matter we are not asking them." "In searching for an original language they have not found it yet," said the critic from

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[47] All quotations are from French newspapers and periodicals recorded on microfilm at The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, New York. However, many of the review clippings that were provided for microfilming had been incompletely cited from the start. Not infrequently only the text had been filmed, omitting the name of the newspaper or periodical quoted. Among the files most frequently consulted were: the Kootz Gallery Papers, Roll N70-68, frame 154, Roll NY65-1, Roll D114, frames 613-614, Roll 97, Roll 292, Roll 1318, frames 278-286, Rolls 1322 and 1323, Roll N131, frames 11-71, Roll NMcB-10, frames 656-734; the Byron Browne Papers, Roll NBB1, Roll NBB2, Roll 79, Roll 97, Roll D308, Roll D313, Rolls 1021 and 1022, Roll 1162, Roll NDA18, Roll SM1, Roll N69-46, Roll 439-441. Papers from the Estate of Byron Browne did not include a single French reviewer's commentary, leading one to conclude that they had been purposely omitted for their disparaging evaluation of Browne's work.

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Carrefour," particularly terrifying is the dryness of soul; does the art of a young and powerful people have to go through this ungraceful phase before acceding to a new world?" Sarcasm aside, the most telling comment of all issued from the same critic who, in summarizing his review asked, "Why does American art always have to have an inferiority complex when it is face to face with Europe and why doesn't an autonomous school develop?" Without realizing it, this critic prophesied the seminal fledgling excursions of a separate handful of American artists, independent of Kootz's group, who were, at that time, inadvertently forming the nucleus for just such an autonomous school of painting.

French critical reaction to individual painters was even more defeating, for it robbed them of every independent idea they had tried to express. "William Baziotes apparently thought he could do without the help of design," said one writer, perhaps referring to his Blue Flower (Fig. 6-6), an image of indeterminant organic shapes. "Baziotes's work has a literary quality approaching symbolism, which is fatal to artists. His is a minor effort and one gets the impression that he does not know very much about what he is aiming at," wrote another.

"Romare Bearden is the worst," felt a critic, who might have been viewing The Drinkers (a.k.a. Some Drink! Some Drink!), (Fig. 6-7), when he dismissed his "loose and facile" style. "Bearden's colors are nothing but a puzzle of screaming accents. A painter of this sort would be considered very mediocre in France," commented another.

Byron Browne, they believed, "had succumbed to the magic charms of Picasso," but "with very different results." "He uses all Picasso's means but stripped of the sensuality which their use implies. His White Acrobats (Figs. 6-8, 6-9 and 6-10), reminds us of Picasso's 1935 work, but Browne was unaware of his current style, for Picasso had evolved

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toward a new form of expression."[48] Complained a critic from the Paris L'Opera, on April 16, "Without Seurat and Persian miniatures, what would Browne be?" The writer from the April issue of a French magazine called Arts evinced no kindness

> A few of Browne's paintings give evidence of Picassoesque memories. This artist, who has not tried to be abstract, seems rather to be attracted by a graphic expressionism. In fact, his distortions are full of emotion, rather than plastic intentions. It is deplorable that the color, much too inadequate and rudimentary, bears no relation to the structure. His matiere, thick and scratched, suffers sometimes from indiscriminate mixing.[49]

Adolph Gottlieb's symbolic pictograph paintings, such as Pictogenic Fragments, 1946 (Fig. 6-11), confused the critics. They still found reason to equate such pictographs with existing French painters while at the same time noting how permeated it was with what they thought might be American Indian patterns. "Gottlieb slavishly copies these motifs without suspecting their magic importance and reduces this intense art to designs for upholstery materials," said one.

French writers covering the show behaved no less malevolently toward the work of Carl Holty. It seemed to resemble one of their modern painters, Pignon, with the difference that "Pignon was a good painter." "Holty makes use of a mechanical drawing resembling geometrical shapes used in posters." The author of those comments might have been referring to his Hockey Players (Fig. 6-12), a painting composed from "geometrical shapes" heavily outlined in black. "We deplore his total absence of sensitivity." "His calligraphy makes facile deformities in the good company of the Fauves," a disgruntled

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[48] Aside from Les Acrobates Blancs (The White Acrobats), Browne's four other paintings listed in the catalogue are: Deux sur un cheval (Two on a Horse); Cavalier sans selle (Bareback Rider); Batterie (Drummer) and Le Lanceur de balle (The Ball Player or Pitcher).

[49] The Kootz Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Roll #1318, frame 279.

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writer concluded.

Robert Motherwell fared best at the hands of the French. "His five paintings are disarming in their simplicity but they are without much thought for construction." "He evokes Miró but beyond this technique, he impresses one as a real personality." His Western Figure (Fig. 6-13), they said, "could hang honorably with our Surindependents."

Thus, according to the French viewpoint, the American painters were nothing more than inferior mimics, copyists of magazine reproductions of their own artists's styles. "There must certainly exist another modern American painting." "Who will show it to us?" Picasso, as he had promised, had come alone to the gallery and ordered the doors shut while looking; he left, it was observed, without saying a word. His silence said volumes.

The painters participating in the Galerie Maeght exhibition apparently did not learn of their bad reviews immediately. Samuel Kootz saw that the worst remained in French and in France, for it was not only his painters he sought to protect but, essentially, his own reputation. If the French critical reception was disparaging, the dealer had no intention of letting reality tarnish his standing in New York for having shown abroad what he believed was some of the most progressive work being created in America.

In one sense, Kootz had created an enormous problem for himself. Early on he saw to it that the French exhibition had been well publicized in the American press. Conspicuous advertisements, emphasizing his artist's international stature, appeared in major New York newspapers as well as the nationally distributed art periodicals. Galerie Maeght in return sent a special but short, three-paragraph press release to The New York Times, announcing the exhibition in that city by the six Americans. None of the American critics or reviewers had gone to Paris to see the exhibit so, luckily for Kootz, little mention ensued from local publications.

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What few notices were reported generally came in watered-down translations from the less scathing comments by French press. The Art Digest, for example, quoting from The New York Times and Vogue magazine, in a paragraph about the current Franco-American lend-lease in the arts, merely mentioned the occurrence of the show as having been sponsored by the Kootz Gallery. The most extensive coverage appeared in a damaging revelation from Time magazine, when its writer remarked that the Paris show "closed in a hurt hush."[50] While noting that the French critics had not been kind, the article then proceeded to quote from translation the same French critics's responses.

It was left to Peyton Boswell, the influential editor of The Art Digest, in the final mention of the show in a later issue of the magazine, to tell Kootz how to find "balm for his wounds," by citing an earlier French failure in this country.

> Alert, enterprising Sam Kootz can find balm for his wounds by remembering the late lamented exhibition of young Frenchmen at the Whitney Museum; there, indeed, was artistic ventrilocution, lacking only the skilled larynx of an Edgar Bergen to provide articulation. Generally speaking, this would appear to be another case of the pot calling the kettle black--or at least battleship grey.[51]

Ultimately, the art world barely took notice of what Kootz had hoped would be another exploitable triumph, propelling him and the American work he handled to international fame. Still, if the Galerie Maeght exhibition failed to achieve these objectives, it did so verbally through its prophetic introductory catalogue essay.

The catalogue essay by Harold Rosenberg remains a document of considerable historical importance, articulating one of the first discussions of the new issues that were

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[50] "Art: Paris Copies," Time, Vol. 44, no. 16, April 21, 1947, p. 79.

[51] Peyton Boswell Comments: "Too Close to Home," Art Digest, Vol. 21, no. 15, May 1, 1947, p. 7. Boswell elaborated no further on the Whitney Museum's exhibition.

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informing contemporary American painting, that of existentialism and the subjective. The text appeared in French and only in the exhibition catalogue, although the little review Possibilities, under the editorship of Robert Motherwell, one of the Galerie Maeght participants, published its English translation the following year.[52] None of the American critics so much as mentioned Rosenberg's contribution, leading one to believe that they never saw the essay. Harold Rosenberg's complete text, translated from Possibilities, "Introduction to Six American Artists," follows

> Here are six American artists who feel no nostalgia for American objects and landscapes -- no scenes of childhood, no regionalism of cowboys, country stores, cornfields, lighthouses, oil wells, no city streets, no social syntheses. Hence their paintings have no connection with that art which enjoys the largest journalistic reputation in America. Rather the paintings stand for a peculiar truth -- or, more precisely, truths; since they are, above all, the work of individuals -- of the creative process in the United States.
>
> Not one of these painters shows the slightest sentiment about his own past. Nor, what is perhaps even more unusual, for the past of the art of painting as a tradition. Their nostalgia is rather for a means, a language, that will formulate as exactly as possible what is emotionally real to them as separate persons. And beyond his separateness, each hopes for future simplicities of human communication.
>
> On the western shore of the Atlantic, then, these men have sought out, made their own, and applied to the needs of their special passions the international idiom of twentieth-century painting -- an idiom that belongs to no one country, race or cultural temperament (though it is associated above all with Paris), but that in fact achieves much of its energy, inventiveness and glory in negating what is local and folkloristic through assimilating all national vestiges into a transcendental world-style. Such is the Modernism of a Chagall or Miró, insofar as the echoes of the East European ghetto or the Spanish village sound in their images. And only to this extent, and in this subjective sense of a creative transformation, is America present in this exhibition. It would almost be correct to say that Art is the country of these painters. Except that they did not receive Art as a continuing spiritual tradition embracing them all in the same movement. Art to them is rather the standpoint for a private revolt against the materialist tradition that does surround them. they are not a school, they have no common aim, not even the common tension that comes from

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[52] Harold Rosenberg, "Introduction to Six American Artists," Possibilities: An Occasional Review, No. 1, Winter 1947-48. p. 75. This was the only issue published.

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> rejecting the validity of the same art-history. They have appropriated modern painting, not to a conscious philosophical or social ideal, but to what is basically an individual sensual, psychic and intellectual effort to live actively in the present -- mysteries of the flesh and the eye, excitations of the nerves, alternative disorders and serenities of the brain, an eagerness for an order that will contribute a momentary sensation of security rather than recall the etiquette and grace of long-accepted disciplines. Attached neither to a community nor to one another, these painters experience a unique loneliness of a depth that is reached perhaps nowhere else in the world. From the four corners of their vast land they have come to plunge themselves into the anonymity of New York, annihilation of their past being not the least compelling project of these aesthetic Légionnaires. Is not the definition of true loneliness, that one is lonely not only in relation to people but in relation to things as well? Estrangement from American objects here reaches the level of pathos. It accounts for certain harsh tonalities, spareness of composition, aggressiveness of statement. At the same time, however, the very extremity of their isolation forces upon them a kind of optimism, an impulse to believe in their ability to dissociate some personal essence of their experience and rescue it as the beginning of a new world. For each is fatally aware that only what he constructs himself will ever be real to him.[53]

According to Rosenberg, the images presented in the Galerie Maeght exhibition emerged from a psychological isolation pushed to extreme limits; the artists had been able to dissociate personal essences of their experience and reissue them as new aesthetic beginnings, or as he stated it, "beginnings of a New World." Lamentably, the French could not comprehend what an enormous leap the Americans had taken, even in their "appropriation." Instead, they remained on the defensive, seeing only flagrant imitation of the stylistic achievements of their best-known painters.

His succinct essay reveals a prescience of developing trends, specifically the emergence of existentialism as the dominant philosophy among American artists and intellectuals in the wake of World War II. His radical call for a denial of tradition, the negation of the object, and an existentialist inclination toward dependence upon subjective,

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[53] Ibid.

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private feeling as the basis of creativity, becomes the first coherent statement establishing and binding into a codified, collective direction a hitherto diverse and scattered current within American art, among a handful of painters. Yet nowhere in the text does the word "existentialism" appear, nor does its writer openly suggest it as a prevailing group philosophy. Still, the intimations are clear and amount to a major campaign for the movement he saw as already having begun.

Had the text been shown to Browne at the time, Rosenberg's proclamations would have sounded particularly odd, even alarming. Clearly Samuel Kootz appeared "on" to something long before having discussed it with his six painters, whose work collectively seemed far less than the sum of Rosenberg's ideas. Although Bearden, Holty and Motherwell could read French, Bearden recalled that Kootz had never shown them the text prior to its publication in the catalogue, which was printed in Paris. He believed all had seen it only long after the exhibition had closed. Mrs. Ethel Baziotes reiterated Bearden's comments, leading one to presume the same held for everyone.[54]

Rosenberg's words challenged not only the participants but the entire creative community to forage new systems, to overthrow the status quo and what had preceded it. His strategy for the subjective in American painting, begun with this essay, announced an agenda that would be articulated ever more potently in the 1950s. Little wonder then that Kootz chose to remain silent to his painters, for even he must have been unsure of what steps to take next. The possibility is strong that Rosenberg never bothered to show his essay to Kootz. Mrs. Baziotes remembered that Samuel Kootz was always very deferential to Rosenberg and never seemed comfortable with him. Ultimately, differences in

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[54] Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, Tape Recorded Interviews with author, New York City, 8 September 1978.

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temperament and personal philosophy caused friction between them, eventually resulting in a sharp cleavage in their relationship.[55]

Although seldom referred to today, Rosenberg's text remains a crucial document in the formulation of a hypothesis of Abstract Expressionism. The ideas it contained served as a unifying force behind the course that American painting would take, setting the stage for the existentialist necessity of individualism, loneliness, the tragic and even nihilism, four principal features of the new painting. Ironically, with the exception of Baziotes and Motherwell, Rosenberg's ideas seem unrelated to the paintings exhibited by the other four participants.[56]

Browne's work was the most referential and stylistically the most Cubist-derived of all the examples in the show. Such paintings as Two on a Horse (Fig. 6-14), Bareback Rider (Fig. 6-15) and The Drummer (Fig. 6-16), all from 1946 and depicting what the French critics complained constituted "an appropriation of Picasso's means," were hardly indicative of a radical project of "annihilation" and "estrangement." Rosenberg identified the subjective and existentialist transformation of painting as the annihilation of an artistic past, a refutation of nostalgia and longing for American-type objects and scenes. This lies in direct opposition to Browne's primarily light-hearted imagery of lively circus performers, topics that could be no more "American-type" than that. Never would he have painted to substantiate Rosenberg's criteria had he been aware of his text.

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55 Ethel Baziotes, telephone conversation with author, New York City, 15 September 1983. This information confirms my suspicion that Samuel Kootz never saw Rosenberg's text prior to the exhibition.

56 While the Galerie Maeght paintings of each of the six artists will be discussed, only those of Byron Browne appear in the body of the text. Discussion of works by the others appears in Footnote 61.

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For unexplained reasons, suggesting again that he, too, had never read the catalogue text, Kootz chose Browne's recognizable imagery for its cover, a simple ink and penline drawing of a spirited circus horse and its rider (Fig. 6-5). The dealer may have decided to reproduce such a clear and readable subject because he understood that circus imagery, aside from being an "American" subject was one that held great appeal for European audiences, in particular. Recalling how fond the French were of Alexander Calder's circus imagery, Kootz may have wanted to remind them that we had other artists who interpreted that universal theme. Moreover, Browne's line drawing closely reflected the linear aspects of Calder's wire figures that he had introduced to Paris audiences many years before.[57]

An example of each man's work from the show appeared in the catalogue and in the 1947 edition of the major French art periodical Cahiers d'Art, which enjoyed substantial American circulation.[58] It is curious that for Browne's reproduction in the magazine, Kootz submitted a photograph of his highly abstracted Still Life in Primary Colors, 1945 (Fig. 5-51), so that his semi-figurative Maeght paintings would not contrast sharply with those of the more abstract painters.[59] Although still relatively early, Kootz may not have wished French posterity to record that representational imagery, even of the disjointed type that was Browne's (and Bearden and Holty's), still functioned as an important factor

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[57] Calder first showed his wire sculpture circus figures in Paris in 1929, and frequently exhibited in that city and in other parts of Europe when he lived in Paris during the early 1930s. The French loved his playful figures.

[58] Cahiers D'Art, April, Vol. 22, 1947, pp. 330-335.

[59] Contrary to comments made by the artist's son, Stephen B. Browne, who claims that the work was shipped and exhibited in the show, proof of such has never surfaced. It seems unlikely that Browne would have had six examples on display when the others had but five. Records of all Kootz Gallery transactions are stored in a warehouse and unobtainable from that estate, despite repeated inquiries.

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among any of the painters connected to his gallery, widely advertised as avant-garde.[60]

Meanwhile, major shifts in attitude had developed in the two years since Browne first joined the gallery, challenging the prevalent meaning of avant-garde. The unique combination of abstraction and realism that he brought into still-readable art was indisputably "advanced" for that time and was precisely what Samuel Kootz had liked and encouraged in his work. Yet at this moment a schism slowly emerged, for the terms "modern," "avant-garde," and "advanced" now implied something else to the dealer and that "something else" precluded depiction of recognizable imagery and anything that linked the work to Picasso and Cubism. Thus in the place of one of Browne's Galerie Maeght "figurative" pieces, Kootz substituted a reproduction of the reductive Still Life with Primary Colors. In all other instances the photographic reproductions in Cahiers D'Art reflected exhibited works as listed accordingly in the catalogue entries.[61]

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[60] Kootz accepted Browne's work in the show (as he did Bearden and Holty's), for he had little choice; Browne never painted nonrepresentationally during the entire time he was under contract to the gallery.

[61] William Baziotes was among the few American artists of his generation to become acquainted with the French Surrealists, who were in New York for the duration of the war. Along with Robert Motherwell, he was also one of the earliest (since 1942) to begin experimenting with automatic writing or psychic automatism, practicing such free association in the form of doodling. The experience led to a more intuitive approach, taking his work deeper into symbolic and organic abstraction. Nevertheless, his painting still contained remnants reflective of his earlier Cubist period. One sees this in his work for the Galerie Maeght exhibition where the precise geometric forms of Pink Wall (Fig. 6-17) give way to the subconsciously evoked sensual imagery of Night Form (Fig. 6-18). Two fundamental implications are integral, creating a dialogue of meanings that reflect the two extremes in his work: beauty and death, the aesthetic and lethal. For example, the idea of a lovely blue sky poised above the aquamarine waters of Caribbean seas, beneath which lurk sharks and death, provide a perfect analogy to his dichotomous orientation.

Romare Bearden worked in a vastly different mode as well as from a dissimilar aesthetic sense. His major interest then, as later, was the human being and his conduct in life. In order to accommodate these feelings, Bearden's work had to be primarily figurative and thematic, such as his depiction of a jazz guitarist in Blue Note (Fig. 6-19), referring to the music he loved and composed as an amateur musician. Titles of other

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works shown, The Drinkers (Fig. 6-7), The Hunters and Interior, also bespeak figurative subject matter. As in Browne's examples, narration overruled any psychological or emotional undercurrents. Rosenberg's push toward existentialist anxiety and alienation was the antithesis of where either painter would take their imagery. Judging from evidence provided by Bearden's work in the Galerie Maeght pictures, and from this period in general, such as his Iliad Series of 1947, all five paintings demonstrated the same heavy influence of Cubism as did Browne's.

Adolph Gottlieb, as early as 1941, with his first pictograph, was aware of the power of primitivistic signs and myths as timeless and conscious clues directing the viewer to deeper inward experiences. Use of such symbols offered him a way out of traditional subject matter and Cubist shapes despite their grid-confined placement, and was directly responsible for a fresh vocabulary of abstracted esoteric images. His interest in the subconscious, if not stated as such, seems evident. Gottlieb was represented by five new compartmentalized pictographic paintings, including Cryptic Tablets (Fig. 6-20) and The House of the Magicians (Fig. 6-21). The French did not comprehend that within the rectilinear subdivisions the symbolic referents were far removed from their ethnic origins, for it had not been his intention to convey their original magical properties. His pictographs, both referential and nonfigurative, become instead abstract signs and metaphors without significant mythic content--the "idea" of myth and mystery rather than an interest in specifics. Still, by his use of such imagery, Gottlieb challenged accepted notions of what constituted subject matter in contemporary American painting. Traditional perspective within his rough rectangular areas is nonexistent, indeed purposely "killed," in keeping with one of the tenets of Abstract-Expressionist thinking, to which, inadvertently or not, his Galerie Maeght work in many respects already belonged.

Carl Holty's overpowering calligraphy never completely disguised his subject matter, which was only quasi-abstract and wholly referential to the tangible material object. The French critic's remarks about his "mechanical drawing resembling geometric shapes in posters" referred to the exuberant curvilinear, black-outlined shapes permeating his work at this time (and had been since 1942), such as those describing Trees (Fig. 6-22). The underlying Cubist structure upon which he grounded his work until the late 1960s is apparent despite this network of spinning elements covering the pictorial field. Yet the kinetic force, the internal energy of the work, strikes one as being more related to Futurist principles of movement and speed. Holty's unique style was as different from the other five painters as each was from him but like Browne and Bearden, existential philosophy or culling imagery from the subconscious never interested him as substance for art, nor did Surrealist practices. Titles of other paintings in the exhibition, Hockey Players, Pipe and Calliope, bespoke his preference for nature as source from which to begin his pictorial metaphors. This approach was precisely what Rosenberg condemned in his essay.

By contrast, the unique experience of Robert Motherwell set him apart. In 1941, Motherwell met and befriended the European artists in exile in America during the war, becoming among those few who gained entré to their elite circle. He immersed himself in Surrealist theories, including Freudian psychoanalysis and psychic automatism, as a direct result of their influence. In that, he stood alone among the six in intimately sharing their philosophy. Such application resulted in canvases of unrelated shapes and colors that bore no kinship to the external world; he worked totally without concrete imagery or reference to nature. That Motherwell displayed work of obvious relationship to Miró's shapes, the

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In response to this author's inquiry, Motherwell recalled the exhibition as not having been well received. Kootz, he thought, had arranged it all on his own, meaning that the idea for such a show originated with him alone. Motherwell believed that its critical failure was partly the result of choices being made on commercial rather than aesthetic grounds. Indeed, the adverse critical response ruined pending sales and any hope for commercial success, either abroad or in New York. Motherwell also felt that the timing was wrong, this being historically too early for Paris to recognize or embrace a foreign modernism.[62]

The brief analyses of the Galerie Maeght paintings indicate that although some of Rosenberg's provocative ideas were in various degrees nascent within the conviction of at least half of the six participants, he wrote well beyond the philosophy and ahead of the imagery of most at this time. Recall that much of the work sent to this exhibition was executed the previous year. Meanwhile, Rosenberg had called for new thinking, a genuine individuality, but what was presented paid homage, with few exceptions, to the long established School of Paris.

Still, American painting appeared poised on the brink of a true revolution, for the

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moons and stars is not surprising although the Spanish Surrealist did not visit America until 1947. The Miróesqueness of Motherwell's exhibition entries is apparent in Orange Personage (Fig. 6-23), 1947, Starry Personage (Fig. 6-24), 1946, and in many other works of the same period. Although not totally free of conscious notations and structure, the paintings represent earnest striving to convey the unpreconceived subconscious. Miró's automatism, was directly responsible for Motherwell's early ability to free his work of inherited structures, especially that of Cubism. Thus, not even the French took umbrage with him for his lingering but negligible attachment. Compare this attitude to their unrelenting criticism against Browne for his emulation of Picasso's Cubism. The gap between Browne and Motherwell's opposite approaches to the act and essence of painting grew wider as time passed. Along with Baziotes, Motherwell's painting came the closest to realizing Harold Rosenberg's prophetic dictates.

62 Robert Motherwell, correspondence with the author, 15 January 1985.

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late 1940s marked the beginning of a period of independence from all preceding models, including that of the School of Paris. Clement Greenberg metaphorically but correctly referred to 1947-48 as the "turning point -- marking the great stride forward," for the emergence of the attributes of Abstract Expressionism.[63] In retrospect, the rumblings of that breakthrough were clearly audible in this exhibition; Abstract Expressionism would soon explode into a full-fledged entity.

That June, as was his custom, Samuel Kootz closed his 57th Street gallery for two and one-half months, to reopen in mid-September. He spent the better part of each summer in Europe purchasing art for the next season, for despite the American focus of his gallery, Kootz now purchased and sold works by the best European modernists. On July 6th, from his vacation spot in Juan-les-Pins, in the south of France, where he had gone to prevail upon Picasso for more work, Kootz sent a folksy mimeographed letter to each of the painters who had participated in the French exhibition. In it he tried to explain why the critics were "confused" by what they had seen, never minding that the exhibition had closed more than two months before, on April 30th, making his tardiness appear purposely effectuated

> Your tongues are probably hanging out for Galerie Maeght news. The good news first. Zervos is reproducing each man in Cahiers d'Art, but Cassou

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63 Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," Art and Culture: Critical Essays, Boston, Beacon, (1961), 1965, p. 219. His essay first appeared with the same title in, Partisan Review, Vol. 22, no. 2, Spring 1955, pp. 179-196. This essay, considered one of the most pivotal of Greenberg's writings, refers to the term "abstract expressionism," invented by the art critic of The New Yorker, Robert Coates, to apply to American painting, as one filled with misleading connotations; Greenberg used it in his essay demarcated by quotation marks. By this time (1955) it had become the current, most often cited covering designation for the new art, of which Jackson Pollock, with only a year left to live, remained its principal exponent. Greenberg preferred the phrase "American-type painting," as the more appropriate. He was quick to note that it was only in 1950 that "abstract expressionism" jelled as a general manifestation.

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> [the director of the French modern museum in Paris] had to turn down the pictures for the Modern Museum, as his committee will accept only French painting. Monroe Wheeler from the Museum of Modern Art was here during or right after the show, and told Maeght and others that ours wasn't really representative American painting; he gave Maeght a list of the artists in America he thought worthwhile, but naturally Maeght misplaced it. Naturally this should not be an incentive for any one of you to rip out dear Monroe's balls. The show confused most people, since they'd never seen your work before. Then having suddenly to appraise six different personalities was a bit too much for them.[64]

Their dealer's letter confirms that he spared his painters much of the truth of the fiasco, especially by telling them how much their work "confused" people, meaning (and blaming) the critics, who could not understand such "progressive" painting. Still, his comments are deceptive inasmuch as he is simultaneously guarding as best he can his own reputation.

It would appear that Kootz never divulged the nature of the French reviews, of which he had been aware from the start. According to Serge Guilbaut, Monroe Wheeler complained to Maeght that the exhibition was not only one-sided and incomplete but also an advertising stunt for promoting Kootz's version of American art.[65]

Monroe Wheeler had been an influential figure since 1935 at the Museum of Modern Art and Kootz had no intention of incurring his animosity. At the same time neither did he want to anger his own artists, who surely would have conveyed their displeasure to Wheeler. While it would have been enticing to learn the names of the "worthwhile" artists on Wheeler's list, one can be certain that Kootz already knew who they

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64 Samuel M. Kootz, Letter to Baziotes, Bearden, Browne, Gottlieb, Holty and Motherwell, Juan-les-Pins, Provençal, France, 6 July 1947. Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

65 Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, trans., Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1983, note 175, p. 238.

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were and in which competitor's gallery they showed.[66]

At the time Wheeler made his suggestions he was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art (1945-66), Director of Publications, and was responsible for arranging many of the museum's traveling exhibitions to Europe. His opinions were highly respected and carried enormous clout in art circles.[67] In all likelihood Kootz was vastly upset by Wheelers's negative opinion of the Maeght show, for there can be no doubt that he would have liked, above all, to have seen his painters in the Modern's permanent collection.

Samuel Kootz had cause for concern. He should have been wary ever since critic Clement Greenberg had praised Jackson Pollock's work two years before, in his second one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century, March 19, 1945. The previous year, Alfred H. Barr had approved the purchase of Pollock's The She-Wolf, 1943 (Fig. 6-25), and Robert Motherwell's collage painting Pancho Villa, Dead and Alive, of the same year, (Fig. 6-26), for the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. It was Greenberg's extraordinary review of Pollock's show in The Nation that placed the

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[66] Jackson Pollock may well have been at the top of Wheeler's list. In February 1946, Kootz nearly succeeded in adding Pollock, whom he dearly wanted, to his roster when Peggy Guggenheim decided to close her gallery to return to Europe. (See: Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, Jackson Pollock: An American Saga, New York, Clarkson N. Potter, 1989, p. 514.) He lost out to Betty Parsons. Baziotes and Motherwell had already left Guggenheim for the Kootz Gallery in February 1945. Betty Parsons, Kootz's nearest rival, exhibited up and coming painters, future Abstract Expressionists, such as Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Ad Reinhardt, Richard Pousette-Dart, Gerome Kamrowski, Seymour Lipton and Herbert Ferber; Barnett Newman and Bradly Walker Tomlin would join in 1949. In January 1947, as Kootz finalized plans for the Galerie Maeght show, Pollock was exhibiting his latest work; it was his last show organized by Art of This Century (January 14-February 1). Guggenheim had already left and Betty Parsons would market his paintings from then on.

[67] Long after his retirement in 1967, Wheeler remained actively involved in Museum business, especially as consultant of the International Council, which supported the Modern's overseas exhibition and educational programs. Monroe Wheeler died in August 1988.

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spotlight on a new kind of raw but powerful painting. Greenberg made "ugly" palatable and exciting when he said of Pollock

> [It] . . . establishes him, in my opinion, as the strongest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miró. The only optimism in his smoky turbulent painting comes from his own manifest faith in the efficacy, for him personally, of art. There has been a certain amount of self-deception in School of Paris art since the exit of cubism. In Pollock there is absolutely none, and he is not afraid to look ugly--all profoundly original art looks ugly at first.[68]

Byron Browne, in a July letter to his wife Rosalind Bengelsdorf, who was spending the summer in Provincetown, apparently had just learned of the bad reviews

> Here is a letter from Sam and Jane [Kootz] which I am enclosing. It will give you an idea about our reception in dear old Paris, plus a stab in the back from old Monroe Wheeler from the Museum of Modern Art. I stuffed up my telephone and door bell.[69]

The Kootz letter, a charitable one that glossed over the details, seems to have been the only direct account Browne had of the exhibition that ended three months earlier. Reactions to the American efforts had stunned as well as bitterly disappointed Kootz, which may have accounted for his delay in reporting the unpleasant news. Since he had sent the identical letter to each of his six painters, in all probability it marked the first official acknowledgment by their dealer that any of them had been given of the exhibition's failure.

One can presume that eventually each discovered or was made aware of the negative nature of the reviews for what the French critics perceived as deliberate derivation of their

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[68] Clement Greenberg, "Art," The Nation, Vol. 160, no. 14, April 7, 1945, p. 397. It was Greenberg's favorable review in this little periodical of limited circulation that launched Pollock's career. Thus, in a single text, Greenberg condemned the School of Paris as the leading force, while simultaneously pronouncing the death of Cubism. Pollock's "ugly" work had no parallel in the Galerie Maeght show.

[69] Byron Browne, Letter to Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, New York, NY, 31 July 1947. Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne. Browne hated the interference of both instruments and, in the days before removable wire jacks, he often stuffed the contents of the laundry bag over the offending device.

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own painters's styles. If unaware before, each of the six was surely astute enough to sense something awry when the commotion that accompanied their European exposure reverted to stony silence upon the exhibition's closing and the return of every canvas. Had they not striven to do so before, the six might now have avowed, as a direct result of the exhibition, to rid themselves of the stylistic dependence that swamped their efforts toward a French-free, true American modernism. Cubism, dated and suspect as a means for building an advanced art, was already seen as such by some among the group. In the final analysis, Cubism had become a dead issue; the Maeght exhibition singlehandedly opened some of the American painters's eyes to that reality.[70]

At nearly the same time The Galerie Maeght show opened in Paris, Advancing American Art was ordered detained in Prague by our State Department. One could say that, while not "detained," the reception accorded the Paris exhibition quickly tempered any preconceived notions that Americans or Europeans, particularly the French, might have entertained about how modern or advanced our art really was. The French could take courage in that this purported American challenge to their cultural hegemony resulted in nothing more than a pastiche of what they themselves had already generated. Crucial for their national fiscal stability, their balance of payments, their influence and renown in luxury items, the visual arts included, French domination remained uncontested.[71]

With the original goals of both exhibitions thwarted, each in a disparate way, at the

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[70] In hindsight the reasons are clear for their unsold work but it was historically too soon for Kootz to see the modus operandi necessary for correcting the problems. Upon the return of the paintings, Kootz could not recreate the exhibition for American audiences, as he had intended, expecting the endeavor to have been a success. Instead, he tried to sell the work by quietly placing certain pieces in each artist's subsequent gallery shows. While a few did find their way to collectors, the whereabouts of most remain unknown.

[71] Op. cit., Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, p. 153.

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bottom lay a common unifying fact of political ambitions gone awry, both in those connected to the art world and those in the realm of government. The United States Information Service helped fund the Gallery Maeght exhibition as a show of power to garner prestige for American culture. With a mandate to sell the rest of the world on the benefits of life under capitalism, it was imperative that the show be successful and acquire international recognition for such. In matters of culture, the government needed an identifiably American avant-garde, art freed from its European umbilical cord, if it were to advance its Cold War programs in all their ramifications and Samuel Kootz guaranteed satisfaction. Thus, set into motion at this moment were the seeds for change, from what had been before to an expression wholly untrodden, virginal, and most of all, American. Already saddled with the Prague dud, the USIS did not need the Paris failure; neither did Samuel Kootz.[72]

Failures or not, both government sponsored shows were important, for they set the precedent for exporting and exhibiting aspects of American culture abroad in an overtly political and propagandistic effort. From now on, separating contemporary American art from politics would prove a nearly impossible task; if sent abroad, art became but another politically expedient commodity and pawn as the Cold War with Russia gathered momentum.

The breadth of true American avant-gardism really began after the war, when the refugee exiled artists went home, leaving our painters on their own. Still, their departure did not hamper or change the fact of their profound influence on those American painters

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72 The United States Information Agency (called Service overseas) still exists, with offices in nearly every major city. Its purposes remain essentially the same. Use of the plural, Services, on the cover of the exhibition catalogue has not been explained and may have been a simple typesetting error.

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willing to listen to their ideas and practice their Surrealist theories. To the contrary, their power grew, serving to further the move toward the spontaneous, emotional, and subject-free painting that paid homage to no one, spawning an entirely new way of making art. While this is not the place to discuss the rise of the New York School, something unsettling that could be felt by all was clearly "in the wind."

By the summer of 1947, the six painters of the Kootz Gallery suspected that adherence to the French School no longer made them new, advanced or even particularly modern. Kootz knew this, too, for the Galerie Maeght exhibition had made it abundantly evident. Browne, Bearden and Holty, who were unwilling to omit from their work representational, recognizable aspects from the natural world, would soon find themselves marginalized from the incipient movement identified in Harold Rosenberg's essay.

More and more, Kootz would find their lingering dependency upon Cubist structure incompatible with what he saw as emerging and desirable directions in American painting: an unstoppable tendency away from nature as source to one turning inward toward the subconscious. The cohesive movement, only hinted at in the Galerie Maeght catalogue essay and in some of the works exhibited, would soon be openly proclaimed. For that reason, and literally overnight, this exhibition's stunning failure made art of any other perception seem out of step and unfashionable. The metamorphosis was already in progress and not confined to those in the Kootz Gallery.

The inroads of thinking were imperceptible at first but gained in momentum and significance, so that by 1950, an astonishing breach had been made with nearly all traditional methods of seeing and making visual art. Browne, Bearden and Holty stood somewhere outside the peripheries that bound this "new" art. That something "in the wind," had materialized: psychic automatism, as practiced by the Abstract Expressionists. The

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Galerie Maeght exhibition and its aftermath had been indispensable in formulating the doctrine, verbally as well as visually.[73] The era of the New York School had materialized.

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73 See author's article addressing the Galerie Maeght exhibition: April J. Paul, "Introduction Á La Péinture Moderne Américaine: Six Young American Painters of the Samuel Kootz Gallery: An Inferiority Complex in Paris," Arts, Vol. 60, no. 6, February 1986, pp. 65-71.

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CHAPTER 7

THE SCHISM BEGINS

> Many of us still living sat at the death bed of the beautifully anemic French Impressionism, the Mimi of art movements. We now are watching die, in the last stages of a less poetic consumption, the Parisian Abstractions. [in reference to Cubism][1]
>
> --Clarence J. Bulliet
> 1947

For Kootz, 1947 marked a crucial year filled with the apprehensiveness of change and stronger than usual vicissitudes of the art market. Having gone from his sensational New York triumph selling the first post-War Picasso paintings that January, to tail-between-the-legs failure with his American painters in Paris only four months later, Kootz vowed never again to place himself and his reputation in such a vulnerable position.

While the presence of the celebrated French Surrealists in New York for the duration of the war had provided curious American painters with first-hand explication of their theories, few comprehended them at first. Still, interest in their unique methods of formulating art steadily grew.[2] With the opening of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery in 1943 and that of the Betty Parsons Gallery in September 1946, substantial promotion of the Surrealists began.[3] It was during this time that methods for a

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[1] "A Movement Dies," The Art Digest, Vol.22, no. 4, November 15, 1947, p. 30.

[2] Many American artists who might have been interested in their theories were dissuaded for the added difficulty of a language barrier, as most did not speak French.

[3] Peggy Guggenheim closed her Art of This Century gallery on May 31, 1947, and left America to go to live in Venice.

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new and vastly different way of seeing and making art solidified into concrete visual expression. These inroads seemed slight and elusive at first but gained in significance so that by 1949, a clear breach in the art world had occurred, jeopardizing nearly all traditional, previously- accepted notions of contemporary visual art.

The Whitney Museum of American Art opened its 1947 Annual exhibition in early March, in which Browne showed one work, the watercolor version (whereabouts unknown) of the oil on canvas painting, The White Acrobats, 1946 (Figs. 6-8, 6-A and 6-B). In Clement Greenberg's review of the drawing and watercolor section of the two-part Whitney Annual for The Nation, he stated, ". . . advanced American art is still too enterprising and narrow; our temperaments still seem to fit too easily into the canonical modes already laid down by the School of Paris, Kandinsky and Klee."[4] Even so, he could say that Browne's entry, The White Acrobats, while not moving or upsetting, was "pleasing and among the best water colors and gouaches at the present show."[5] Byron Browne was, in his opinion, a painter who was "improving rapidly."[6] While Browne welcomed the publicity and enjoyed being singled out in his review, since he had been working in the watercolor medium for twenty years, Greenberg's citation solely for his "improvement" frustrated him. He believed that Greenberg misunderstood his intentions and never again

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[4] Clement Greenberg, "Review of the Whitney Annual and Exhibitions of Picasso and Henri Cartier-Bresson," The Nation, Vol. 164, no. 14, April 5, 1947, pp. 405-406. The Whitney Museum of American Art exhibition, Contemporary American Sculpture, Watercolors and Drawings, was only one part of the Annual; a later installment featured oil on canvas paintings. The show opened on March 11 and closed April 14.

[5] Ibid., p. 405.

[6] Ibid. This was the also the review in which Greenberg called David Smith the greatest sculptor this country had produced, a comment for which he was soon ridiculed.

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felt kindly toward the critic.[7]

The following month Greenberg repeated his call for a self-reliant American art in his review of the American Abstract Artists annual exhibition. To his thinking, none of the works shown by the thirty-seven painters "broke through the canonical modes of the School of Paris to assert a new independent personality--or an idea." Like American poets and critics, they are mortally afraid of making fools of themselves."[8] He was convinced that all of them took off from aspects of Cubism. Browne did not send a painting to this show, leading one to consider the possibility of politics entering his decision, if indeed that decision had been his. It is likely that Browne, one of the founders of the group, was prohibited from participating for his being an integral member of the Kootz organization and that the dealer believed his painters had developed beyond the confines of the group of which Browne alone of the six regulars was a member. Ten years had passed since the American Abstract Artists pioneering efforts toward recognition of abstraction had begun and Kootz may have felt that they had already achieved their goal.

In early June 1947, Greenberg unequivocally clarified and narrowed the problem as he perceived it. While less strong among American painters than their European counterparts, the ingrained desire to hold on to traditional easel painting, coupled with a reluctance to push beyond Picasso and Cubism, held back those Americans who would be progressive. Greenberg was obviously relegating every American painter who adhered to

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7 This watercolor study may have served as the prototype for the larger painting, which would be shown in the Galerie Maeght exhibition in Paris, opening March 28, two and one-half weeks after the inauguration of the Whitney show.

8 Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Marc Chagall, the American Abstract Artists, the League of Present Day Artists, and Ivan Mestrovic," The Nation, Vol. 164, no. 18, May 3, 1947, p. 525. From 1947 until their annual exhibition in 1954, Browne did not participate in the American Abstract Artists's activities.

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any aspect of Cubism to the dust bins of history, while simultaneously fueling Jackson Pollock's reputation, for only Pollock among American painters had shed his easel for the vast expanse of floor and wall, space unreachable between two widespread arms, as was the case when seated at the easel. More than that, Pollock had embraced the concepts of Psychic Surrealism as had few other painters. It was then that Greenberg boldly proclaimed, "Pollock is the most important new painter since Miró himself."[9] Shocked readers considered Greenberg's comment little more than a joke.

Samuel Kootz, ever aware of the necessity to maintain the momentum his gallery had established at the outset, challenged his painters to create new directions in their work and to that effect he arranged private pep talks with each through weekly meetings held in the privacy of his apartment. Of one thing he was certain, the elegance, refinement, and finish of contemporary French taste, as archetype for his men to build upon, now seemed misguided and out of step with developing sensibilities. The Galerie Maeght incident had been but the inception.

Following the characteristics identified and defined by Harold Rosenberg in his catalogue essay for that exhibition, Kootz now urged them to invent more from personal subjective experience, rather than exclusively from the external objective visual world.[10] Above all, he cautioned them to distance themselves from the School of Paris and Picasso, whose Cubist shapes, spaces and imagery had accorded most with the foundation for much

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[9] Clement Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Joan Miró," The Nation, Vol. 164, no. 23, June 7, 1947, pp. 692-694.

[10] See Chapter 6, pages 34-35, for the complete quotation of Rosenberg's catalogue text to this pivotal exhibition.

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of their work.[11]

Byron Browne, thus goaded by his dealer into the reality of current circumstances and desiring above all to please him, chose "bigness" of canvas and topic with which to begin a project for his forthcoming solo show, a triptych depicting a Biblical chronicle of epic human disaster, the story of the Apocalypse. Work on the canvases for this event and others for the fall season prevented his going to Provincetown, where earlier he had sent Rosalind and their son. Browne, who loathed the interruption of phone calls, had never bothered to install a telephone in the summer cottage so that his only communication with his family was by mail.

The following letter, written in mid-July, refers indirectly to one of the large panels for this exhibition and describes the kind of summer he was having without his family

July 22, 1947

Dear Rosalind,

Glad to hear the place is O.K. Its either been raining or looking like it since you went, except Sun. So I went up to the meadows behind the Museum [The Metropolitan Museum of Art] and got a little sun. I go to bed every night at 12 and get up around nine, so I get a lot of work done. The doorbell and telephone ring but I don't answer. Got another bill from the cat place for 3.50 until July 29. How about that? I thought it was all fix [sic] up. I primed and sized my large canvas and it looks almost too beautiful to work on. Will go over to visit Lassaw [Ibram] one night this week. Barney Newman called up and I answered the phone without thinking, so I will go visit him. Its been nice and cool here for past 2 days. A big kiss for you and Stevie.

X Georgie

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[11] It would be acknowledged that Motherwell's and Baziotes's adaptations of Surrealist practices allowed for a personal originality that distinguished them from the other painters of the group.

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> P S. Don't let Stevie get out of the yard when you are not looking, and get out in the road or water.

Browne devoted the remainder of the summer to hard work on his paintings. Only once, when he found someone driving up to the Cape for a weekend, a seven-hour trip from Manhattan, did he get an opportunity to visit his family that summer.

Clement Greenberg's search for a new American art continued to gather momentum. In a lengthy article, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," in the October issue of the British art periodical, Horizon, Greenberg maintained

> The American artist with any pretensions to total seriousness suffers still from his dependence upon what the School of Paris, . . . accumulated before 1935. The three, four or five best artists in this country yearn back to Paris as it was, almost, in 1921, and live partly by time transfusions.[12]

Unrelentingly, Greenberg continued to pound away at those who leaned on French modernists for the gist of their style, and Kootz followed suit.[13] Then he, with backhanded praise, conferred knighthood upon Pollock, the final admonishment not withstanding

> Significantly and peculiarly, the most powerful painter in contemporary America and the only one who promises to be a major one is a Gothic, morbid and extreme disciple of Picasso's cubism . . . . His name is Jackson Pollock . . . . For all its Gothic quality, Pollock's art is still an attempt to cope with urban life; it dwells entirely in the lonely jungle of immediate sensation, impulses and notions, therefore is positivist, concrete. Yet its Gothicness, its paranoia and resentment narrow it; large though it may be in ambition--large enough to contain inconsistencies,

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[12] Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," Horizon (British, London), Vol. 43-44, nos. 93-94, October 1947, pp. 28-29. He left those "best artists" unnamed.

[13] Browne, already at odds with Greenberg for his evaluation of his watercolor efforts, took it as a personal affront, for he continued to believe that his own endeavors remained at the forefront of American painting.

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ugliness, blind spots and monotonous passages--it nevertheless lacks breath.[14]

For Greenberg, only two artists, Jackson Pollock and the sculptor David Smith, finally relieved him of the necessity of being apologetic about American art.[15] Although published in England and in a periodical not generally read by the American art community, word of his article quickly spread; within days of publication, every American painter was discussing its focus on Pollock, whom few, including Browne, were willing to recognize as an artist of talent. Pollock's frequent and often violent bouts of drunken behavior was what most knew about him.

In the fall of 1947, Christian Dior's "New Look" for women's fashion-- pinched-in waist, flattened bosom, excessively long and full skirt and puffed hipline--was the talk of the country. As early as July, following his Paris show, news had spread of this revolutionary style and the subject of "woman" came to the attention of the press as fashion had never before. Samuel Kootz, ever abreast of popular culture, was also aware of the exceptional attention being paid to the female gender. Accordingly, for his opening fall exhibition that September, he organized a show that featured paintings only about women, a collaborative effort between his artists, who had been asked to prepare one canvas apiece to reflect this theme. In addition, he hired an equal number of well-known writers and poets of the day, each of whom was to expound upon a single painting and, in order to avoid inevitable problems of preferential choice, Kootz himself assigned each writer his painter. Among the collaborators were David Hare and Jean-Paul Sartre, Picasso and Lewis Galantiére, and Byron Browne and Barry Ulanov; other writers included Paul

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[14] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[15] Ibid.

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Goodman, Clement Greenberg, Weldon Kees, Benjamin Péret, Harold Rosenberg, Tennessee Williams, William Carlos Williams and Victor Wolfson. Each wrote original text or poetry expressly for the show.

Apart from works by the six regulars, Gottlieb, Holty, Motherwell and the "three B's," Kootz added one painting by Hans Hofmann and a sculpture by David Hare. He augmented this group with Cubist paintings by Braque, Léger and Picasso, all of whom had produced their entries before Kootz announced the theme of his show. Titled Women: A Collaboration of Artists and Writers, the combination of art and text made for a seductive and much-discussed exhibition.[16]

Byron Browne's horizontally formatted canvas titled The Red Robe (Fig. 7-1), depicts in semi-abstract language, a rearing lion whose wide open jaws snarl threateningly at viewers. Totally unperturbed by the beast, an equally grand but stoic-faced, slate gray amazonian figure also gazes directly at the viewer. She raises her head from behind the animal's, while riding astride him as she would a horse. She grasps the ruff on his neck with a fist and raises one leg as though to dismount; with the other hand she holds up and flings dramatically out behind her, like a bull fighter's cape, a flowing scarlet cloak.[17]

Browne's enigmatic example of "woman" perplexed the critics, as did nearly every picture exhibited, for no artist had created an "acceptably" beautiful female according to their standards. His writer, Barry Ulanov, in his essay titled "The Ephemeral Feminine,"

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[16] Women. Lewis Galantiére, et al., essays, New York, Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, September 8-27, 1947.

[17] This painting, belonging to the writer James A. Michener and on long term loan to the Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery of the University of Texas at Austin, in the James A. Michener Collection, was made a full gift to the university's permanent collection in 1991. Another Browne painting, Dance of Bacchus, 1953, also belonging to Michener, entered the university's collection at the same time.

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expressed no such misgivings with the painting; instead, he used the picture to his own political viewpoints. In the opening paragraph Ulanov asks, "What manner of woman is this? Circus performer? Goddess? A woman scorned, of fury as hell hath none"? Several paragraphs followed in which he discussed interpretations of women by various painters over the past one hundred years. He then seized his opportunity to interject personal politicized wrath by concluding with comments referring to "repugnant contemporary politics," thus locating Browne's imagery in unusual but timely circumstances, a point he freely acknowledges in stating that

> There is grim irony in the spectacle of an abstract painting of a red robe, a woman and a lion taking a firm position in the defense of dignity and individual life. It is ironic because nothing so completely polemical was in the painter's mind as he gathered his objects and subjects for this painting. It is grim because we can no longer call on the professional defenders of dignity and individual life, the political scientists and sociologists, the psychologists and the political strategists, for a successful fight; they are too deeply engaged in sectarian heresy hunting, in the passionate conflicts within the confines of their own professions, to be fully available for the great battle for human rights; they have become so absorbed with the means they have forgotten the end to which they are directed. The artist, so much a part of the world in which he lives, so frequently a victim of fashion, has often been limited by this short view. But he has also reminded us of the eternal feminine; sufficiently aware that his responsibility as an artist transcends fashion and short views [so that] he can remind us that there are other eternals.[18]

Ulanov's statements indirectly referred to the government's ongoing witch hunt in Hollywood with investigations of Communist activities alleged prevalent in the film industry, a "hunt" that devastated the careers of certain well-known directors and other important figures in that industry. United States Senate and House committees claimed that ten screen writers were either card-carrying members of the Party or had strong "Red" leanings. These men, it was argued, had no place in an industry strategically placed to

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[18] Barry Ulanov, "The Ephemeral Feminine," essay, in Women, n.pag.

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transmit the propaganda of foreign ideologies. Like other writers of his day, Ulanov was both incensed and fearful that the investigations would spread to include other types of writers, such as himself, and even to broader areas of the creative segment involving painters and sculptors. His worst fears eventually materialized.[19]

For Ulanov, Browne's strong image symbolized far more than the painter's politically benign intention. Positioned alongside the king of the beasts as her companion and, by extension her protector, Ulanov saw her as an allegory representing humanity taking a stand against such callous ferreting out of the creative segment, thereby ruining careers and lives, by those elected to uphold the standards of human rights.

As a writer possessing as well a keen sense of the implication of color, Ulanov also deciphered the predominance of red hues in the painting as politically relevant, further triggering notions of Communism and the necessity of taking a heroic stand in protest of the "red scare" loyalty investigations proceeding in Hollywood. For all its political innuendo, Ulanov acknowledged that his interpretation did not echo the artist's intentions. Browne contended his figure represented nothing more than a typical circus bareback rider, albeit an uncommon one who rides lions instead of horses, painted in modern distorted shapes and that he implied no underlying motives. A politically-naive individual from

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19 See: Committee on Un-American Activities, ed., Cumulative Index to Publications of the Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1954, Washington, D.C., U.S. House of Representatives, 1955; Martin Dies, Martin Dies Story, New York, Bookmailer, 1963; William Gellerman, Martin Dies, New York, John Day, 1944; August Ogden, The Dies Committee: A Study of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944, Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America, 1995. All readings refer to a particularly sinister time in American politics when no person involved in any of the arts was above suspicion of subversive, i.e., Communist activities, for the purpose of undermining the functioning of the American government. Many an innocent person suffered lifelong blacklisting, confiscation of passports and ruined careers by finding their names on lists compiled by unrelenting head-hunting committees.

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the start, Browne remained unsophisticated in that way all his life, never expressing his views openly, above all, never through his art.

Samuel Kootz, no stranger to the book marketing industry and encouraged by wide interest shown in this unusual collaboration of painter and distinguished author, composed a suitable introduction, hired a graphic designer, and published an expanded version of the exhibition catalogue as a book titled simply Women.

It is regrettable that Browne's views on Ulanov's position, that is, using his painting to take a political stance, go unrecorded. This disgraceful period in American politics to which Ulanov referred has already figured in the text of this dissertation with the returned paintings from the American exhibition in Prague. Browne was no stranger to the whims of the political right and while his intentions differed from those of Ulanov's, it is apparent from the latter's comments that Browne was in accord with their sentiment. Toward the end of 1947, Kootz published Woman as a book, designed by Paul Rand, the first publication of Samuel M. Kootz Editions. Each painting was reproduced in half-tone and placed beside the written contribution to which Kootz added his own essay, for a total of forty-eight pages. Eighteen hundred copies of the book were printed and it sold for five dollars, which was one dollar less than the regular price if ordered prior to the publication date of December 15. In 1948, the Institute of Graphic Arts, New York City, named the book one of the "Fifty Books of the Year 1947," citing its experimental layouts.

New circus imagery constituted the greater part of Browne's third one-man show at the Kootz Gallery scheduled to open in October. Still, the main purpose of the exhibition was to introduce his large triptych, Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, (Figs. 7-2, 7-3 and

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7-4), the project that had occupied his entire summer.[19] The mural-sized work marks Browne's most ambitious undertaking for the gallery with the central panel measuring six by five feet and each of the side panels six by three feet. Framed separately but hung closely together for compositional unity, as designed, the triptych measured eleven feet across (Fig. 7-5). Under the arrangement signed earlier with his dealer, the Four Horsemen panels fulfilled numbers 216, 217 and 218 of his contract, which called for a total of 322 works of art over a three-year period. Browne either completed or delivered the three panels to Kootz on September 29, 1947.

From the beginning of his career, Browne instinctively assumed the mission of art was to give pleasure to the beholder and this point of view infused his work to the end. Never did he believe that portraying human emotion of any kind added importance to the content of art and he distanced himself accordingly. It is for this reason that his depiction of the allegorical nightmare from the Bible's Book of Revelation, Chapter 6:1-17, conveys neither the weighty emotion nor compassion with which the theme is typically associated. The vigorous forms of the four horses and their riders, one each comprising the flanking sections and two within the larger central panel, unquestionably transmitted frivolity in concert with the jolly mood depicted in thirteen smaller, circus-inspired oils and works on paper that were also on exhibit. Although the pathos and tragedy of the human predicament inherent in Apocalyptic readings are universally understood as such, Browne's light-hearted interpretation made it difficult to associate his effort with introspective

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[19] Byron Browne: Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and Other Paintings, New York, Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, October 13-November 1, 1947.

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narration of any kind.[20]

Rather than being painted in hues traditionally associated with these appalling horses and riders, and the horrifying news each bears-- the white horse (deception, the false Christ), the red horse (war), the black horse (famine), and the pale horse (death)--in Browne's interpretation, the Apocalyptic horsemen wear lively colors and comport themselves in the manner of performing circus clowns. Moreover, the figures ride astray in a labyrinth of decorative surface patterning. It was Browne's intention to reinterpret and update the Biblical narration into contemporary cataclysmic terms but the vaudevillian riders and their huge flying steeds would have been too beautiful in their brilliant glazes and too comical in their prancing, merry-go-round movements to elicit much conviction. Although Browne planned his figures to be prophetic and visionary in a contemporary interpretation, it is their overtly decorative quality that alone remains their strongest message.

His choice of theme may have been a mistake from the outset. Inescapably, the three panels, despite his use of color, invite comparison with the grisaille imagery of Picasso's Guernica, 1937 (Fig. 7-6), and that artist's earlier Bullfight, 1934 (Fig. 7-7), where the twisted forms of the horse presumably served as model for Browne's quadrupeds. Still, the grounds for execution distinguish his work from Picasso's depiction of tragic human slaughter, an actual event that occurred ten years earlier in Spain, for he deliberately removed his figures from the agonizing pain and death throes depicted in the Spaniard's symbolic horse. Instead, his panels portrayed fantasy not reality, delight rather than

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[20] Browne purposefully intended the mood of his triptych to transcend solemnity and border a more moderate sentiment. In this approach he took a chance, supported by his dealer, but ultimately failed in his effort.

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horror.

Browne saw nothing to prevent his borrowing a major theme from mythology or religious history and recasting it in the light of his own time and sensibilities. While thematically and stylistically akin to aspects of Picasso's work, as in its Cubist structure and the shapes of the figures, no social statement and none of the compelling political concepts attached to Guernica obtain in Browne's panels. As well, he neutralized the implications of the Biblical prophecy. Picasso conceived Guernica, however, out of the emotional impact of actuality; this was not the case with Browne's subject matter.

Reviews of Browne's triptych were many and mixed. Some praised him for his capacity for antic imagination and interesting compositional variations on circus lions which, they recalled, he had begun showing the previous year. Considering the title of the triptych and uncertain of Browne's intention, a few critics saw his frolicking horses not as ghostly specters of disease, death and warfare but only as circus performers accompanying the thematic balance of pictures that hung elsewhere in the gallery.[21] To most, his figures seemed ill-suited for the complexity of designs contained within the negative spaces of each canvas. Still others commented that the triptych had been executed without the emotional impact that should rightfully attend such universally-understood themes of doom.[22]

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21 "Reviews & Previews: Byron Browne," Art News, Vol. 46, no. 91, (part 1), November 1947, p. 56.

22 Carlyle Burrows, "In the Galleries," New York Herald Tribune, sect. 6, 26 October 1947, p. 4. See also the following reviews: Henry McBride, "Attractions in the Gallery, Byron Browne," New York Sun, 17 October 1947, p. 29; Judith Kaye Reed, "Modern Apocalypse," Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 2, October 15, 1947, p. 13; Howard Devree, "Among the Shows: Recent Paintings by Segunzac, and Dufy--Palmer, Browne, Houmere and Others," The New York Times, (Sun. ed.), sect. 2, 19 October 1947, p. 9; Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries," The New Yorker, Vol. 23, no. 36, October 25,

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Despite the negative criticism Browne received he was not without sentiment for the implications underlying his theme. His unorthodox approach to the mystical allegory was never meant to imply its mitigation, merely an attempt to reinterpret a theme that had always been open to interpretation. He deliberately overrode its dark cryptic messages of doom. It may be suggested that Browne's decision to approach the subject in the manner so done was the direct result of his personal cognizance of the potentiality of mankind's annihilation, as demonstrated by the explosions of the atom bomb and their devastating aftermath only two years earlier. It is entirely plausible that such consequential events induced him to rethink his topic and search for an alternative, more positive approach, in keeping with his inborn optimistic outlook on life.[23] Still, Browne adhered tenaciously to his belief in the fundamental "rightness" of building an American art based on European archetypes. Such archetypes, however, had of late come under heavy scrutiny.

Clement Greenberg was not alone in exhorting American painters to develop

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1947, pp. 80-81. Generally, the critics misunderstood Browne's intention, in that he did not wish to impart a traditional solemn reading of his work, and so most agreed that his "hilarious" circus-like interpretation undermined whatever seriousness he may have or must have intended.

23 While all three panels are in the collection of the Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico, they were not accessioned at the same time. Samuel Kootz apparently could not sell the work as a whole and represented each piece as a separate painting, for which he could make more money. Albert A. List, the collector and philanthropist, owned one panel that he donated to this museum many years ago. In 1979, Lisa Schiller, a private art dealer, told Stephen B. Browne that another dealer, Larry (Lawrence) Shar, owned some Byron Browne work. When Shar was contacted, Browne found the two remaining panels there in storage racks, an inheritance from Shar's father, a friend of Samuel Kootz. After some convincing on the part of Browne's son, the following year (1980) Shar agreed to donate the two panels to the Roswell Museum to make the triptych complete. Both List and the elder Shar had thought they were dealing with individual paintings, obviously what Samuel Kootz had wanted them to believe.

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independence from Parisian models. Six months following Greenberg's scathing review of the American Abstract Artists show in The Nation, (see Footnote 8), the November 1947 issue of the widely read The Art Digest, carried a forceful entreaty from Chicago-based art critic, Clarence J. Bulliet. Intended as a review of Abstract and Surrealist American Art in the 58th Annual American Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, it presented a cogent perspective.[24]

Whether in support of Greenberg's position or because he had seen enough of imitative French painting by Americans, Bulliet roundly castigated the American abstractionists, Browne included, in his article titled "A Movement Dies."[25]

"Visitors who wise-cracked and grimaced at the works on view were," he said, "blithely unaware that they were in the presence of impending rigor mortis." In Bulliet's eyes, the American abstractionists were of small consequence, for the work that supposedly represented the best conveyed nothing but shallow language cloned from reproductions of French art. His opening sentence set the tone

> The musty, dying breath of a once noble art movement, Parisian Cubism, pervades the atmosphere of the galleries in the Art Institute of Chicago where is hung the Abstract and Surrealist show, styled drolly the 58th Annual American Exhibition. Our American Abstraction . . . is of small consequence artistically because it is practically wholly imitative and is inferior to what has gone before it. It is an imitation, moreover, of an imitation.[26]

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[24] Abstract and Surrealist American Art: 58th Annual American Exhibition of the Art Institute of Chicago, Katherine Kuh and F. A. Sweet, essays, Chicago, the Art Institute of Chicago, November 6, 1947-January 12, 1948.

[25] C. [Clarence] J. Bulliet, "A Movement Dies," The Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 4, November 15, 1947, pp. 8, 30.

[26] Ibid., p. 8

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He proclaimed that most of what was shown disgraced the walls of the Art Institute and amounted to nothing but clever "commercial artist" translations of Picasso, as seen in slick magazine advertisements. "When movements die," he wrote, "the spectacle is as sad as the death of a political enthusiasm . . . " His concluding statement brought to the message a vivid clarity

> Many of us still living sat at the death bed of the beautifully anemic French Impressionism, the Mimi of art movements. We now are watching die, in the last stages of a less poetic consumption, the Parisian Abstractions.[27]

Browne's exhibition entry for the Chicago show, The Black Lion, 1947, oil on canvas (Fig. 7-8), featured a snarling feline, not unlike the crouching animal of The Red Robe, that sported an immense ruff proclaiming its maleness. Upon his back sat a precariously perched, ball-twirling female acrobat. The image at first strikes the viewer as an arresting picture that bedazzles the eye with its incongruous subject; stylistically, it merely extended various phases of decorative Cubism that Browne favored and for which he had become recognized. Its quasi-Cubist structure and bulky breakup of shapes were indicative of those imitative qualities against which Bulliet railed.

On the first of October Samuel Kootz opened a show titled simply Eight Paintings, publicized as exhibiting a single "new" example by each of the gallery's American artists, plus one by Braque and Picasso.[28] Local critical praise took the opposite tack from Greenberg's recently scathing evaluations. In his review of the Kootz show for The Art Digest, Alonzo Lansford, after first extolling the domination of the two French

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[27] Ibid., p. 30.

[28] Eight Paintings, New York, Kootz Gallery, October 1-18, 1947.

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painters, wrote that the gallery's "three Bs," ". . . came off extremely well."[29] After addressing Braque and Picasso in the first part of his review, he singled out Browne for discussion, specifically his painting of the blue toned clowns or acrobatic tumblers, Two Figures, (Fig. 7-9), now in the collection of the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia, which demonstrated "the possible scope of his growing stature." Referring to the cavorting pair of circus clowns or acrobats of the principal subject matter, his indeterminate comments leave open to question exactly what he meant by the "possible scope . . . . " As compared to what, one might ask. He then called Brown's picture "rich, luminous, mature and altogether satisfactory."[30]

Browne, neither acknowledging nor wishing to acknowledge transformations unquestionably afoot, stubbornly resisted, indeed fought change and conveyed every

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[29] Alanzo Lansford, "Eight Who Share the Modern Approach," The Art Digest, Vol. 22, no. 1, October 1, 1947, p. 19. Browne's work was hardly new, having been painted in 1946 and this being nearly 1948. "New" may have referred to the work never having been exhibited. Lansford's article reproduced Georges Braque's Uranie, an atypical small plaster panel painted in fine lines that used only two or three colors; he achieved the white accent lines by incising them into the plaster surface. Browne's work in contrast represented cavorting circus performers. By this time Gottlieb was formulating his compartmentalized pictographic compositions.

[30] Ibid. For all Lansford's ambiguous accolades directed to Browne, far more astute, even prophetic, were his comments about Adolph Gottlieb, who showed a work titled The Prisoners, 1947 (Fig. 7-10). Gottlieb "remains primitivesque with his compartmentalized pictographic compositions," and "Motherwell's Yellow Figure (Fig. 7-11), is another version of the one shown in Paris recently," referring to his work in the ill-fated Galerie Maeght exhibition, and one of the few critics who so much as mentioned the French show. According to him, Gottlieb had continued moving forward experimentally, using "caged" symbolic forms, while Motherwell seemed locked into repetitive regurgitations of French-based abstraction. According to Lansford, Browne, like Motherwell, had repeated Cubist-inspired forms and used heavily textured surfaces. Despite noting the opposite approaches taken by Browne and Gottlieb, the reviewer possessed neither the critical knowledge, historical foundation nor the innate intuition to judge that the work of the majority of the Americans was at this moment retardataire and choking on its own subservience.

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intention of unflagging continuation of the status quo despite the risks involved. As 1947 closed, his allegiance to French painting and a retardataire past only deepened.

As a case in point, Browne clung to what might be termed the ideal past, to a nostalgia no longer appropriate to the times. In one of his personal notebooks, at an undisclosed moment in 1947, he penned the following comment

> What are my pictures? I wish them to be as poems . . . songs of hope and joy, songs of what I see, a flower, a face, a bird, the moon and the sun.[31]

While sentiment lovingly expressed, such poetic odes to nature and the visible world placed his work both stylistically and progressively at a dead end.

No diatribe aimed at American lack of progressiveness prepared readers for the next blast at Cubism early the following year. Clement Greenberg launched massive verbal artillery in the spring of 1948, with the now famous article that appeared in the March issue of Partisan Review, "The Decline of Cubism." His well-reasoned essay unnerved artists and caused a sensation throughout the art community.[32]

While Greenberg called Cubism the great epoch-making feat of twentieth-century art, equaled only by accomplishments of the Renaissance, he detected in examples since the end of the war, through their trickling in to American galleries, repetitious retrograde tendencies in the work of the Parisian modernists themselves. What he found now, in the more than forty years since Cubism's invention, was a pattern of their recycling of the forms that made painters such as Picasso, Braque, Arp, Miró and others "notable" in the

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[31] Quotation courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

[32] Clement Greenberg, "Art Chronicle: The Decline of Cubism," The Partisan Review, Vol. 15, no. 3, March 1948, pp. 366-369. Reproductions of two paintings by Arshile Gorky accompanied Greenberg's article: The Betrothal I and Agony, both 1947. Gorky, so full of potential for developing in his painting an utterly original direction, committed suicide on July 21, 1948, at the age of 44 years.

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first place. While this was understandable after a hiatus of six years (1939-1945) because of the war, Cubism had lost its power and significance and was in decline at that moment.[33]

He continued, saying that he believed these originator artists, Picasso and Braque, as well as their later close followers, had exhausted Cubist experimentation, to be replaced [and eclipsed] by Surrealism. This exhaustion, he said, was especially evident in those Cubist artists who had spent the war years in America, notably Léger, Chagall and Lipchitz. Although not stated as such, Greenberg implied that those American painters who adhered to an art form that had, by 1939, declined into nothing but refinements by second generation French Cubists, were following a false premise. He then singled out Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock and the sculptor David Smith as the emergent new talents.[34]

According to Greenberg, the rise in stature of American art during the war years, of its "independent" development when little or nothing of contemporary French art could be seen and imitated, seemed to account for the handful of new talent. He then concluded ". . . much to our own surprise, [that] the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power."[35] This, said Greenberg, permitted the painter to abandon chronic and justified

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[33] Ibid., p. 369.

[34] Ibid. It should be recalled that all three earlier on had experimented with Cubism, creating substantial bodies of work based on what they understood of its structure. Still, they found ways to work out of its grip and move on stylistically.

[35] Ibid.

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pessimism about the prospects of American Art.[36] National optimism, as a result of our recent victories in battle and emergence as a world superpower, and despite the great fear of the recently exploded atom bombs, resided among the American people as a whole; in turn, this fueled American artists living on these shores to do, essentially, what the Cubists before them had accomplished: invent a radical new art form.

While not sounding its death knell as an historical style, for Greenberg's respect for Cubism remained, he considerably dampened the fires of its absolute influence. Cubism, he wrote, was still the only vital style of our time but it is less able to withstand the tests of the last twenty years.[37] He declared that the more radical artists who invented it became demoralized and lost nerve, due to the political climate over which they had no control, but radical artists survive on nerve to go against the norm in order to continue such a course; conservative artists just ride on the momentum and eventually lose touch with the insights of the time and that is what, essentially, occurred with the great Cubists. Greenberg agreed that it was hard to be radical and Cubism was a radical art.[38]

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[36] Ibid., p. 369.

[37] Ibid., p. 367. For Greenberg, Cubism, at the time of his article, remained the single best style capable of supporting a tradition qualified to survived into the future, out of which new artists would grow. He meant, of course, out of which a new art form or style would grow.

[38] For further reading about the advance and decline of Cubism and subsequent questioning of the validity of the forms espoused by the School of Paris as a foundation for current progressive American art, see: Alfred Neumeyer,"Picasso and the Road to American Art," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 1, no. 6, August 1942, pp. 24-41; Greenberg, "Art Chronicle: The Decline of Cubism," The Partisan Review; Adolph Gottlieb, "Unintelligibility," 5 May 1948, a talk given in Forum: The Artist Speaks, a three-day conference of thirty-six leading vanguard artists, organized as an attack against art reviewers and critics and discussions of the developing reaction against the current, primarily abstract art. It is notable that Byron Browne was excluded from among the speakers and the thirty-six organizers, although he and his wife, Rosalind Bengelsdorf,

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Every American painter read and discussed, agreed or sometimes vehemently disagreed, with what the critic stated in his influential article. Yet as Greenberg sought to

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were among the hundreds who attended. The original four-page typescript of Gottlieb's talk is housed in the Library files at The Museum of Modern Art. Among the seven participating speakers were: Carl Holty, chairman of the meeting, Paul Burlin, Stuart Davis, Adolph Gottlieb, George L. K. Morris and James Johnson Sweeney. In his diatribe against the New York critics, Gottlieb clearly states that their attacks ". . . are focused on those [artists] who emphasized the subjective side of abstract painting . . . . " See also, excerpts from the final session, and also the statements by de Kooning, Hofmann and Motherwell on the discussion of the difference between American and French art: "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, eds., in Modern Artists in America, New York, Wittenborn Schultz, 1952, and Irving Sandler, The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism, New York, Harper & Row, 1970, p. 217, for the importance of deviating from tradition. See also the exhibition catalogue, Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments, Michael Auping, et al., essays, Buffalo, NY, Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Abrams, September 19-November 29, 1987. See also: Eugene C. Goossen, "The Big Canvas," Art International, Vol. 2, 1958, pp. 45-47.

For more recent interpretations of the art of this period and the rise of Abstract Expressionism from Cubism's dominance, see: David Anfam, Abstract Expressionism, World of Art series, London and New York, Thames and Hudson, (1990, 1994) 1999; Stephen Polcari, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience, New York, Cambridge University, 1991; Martica Sawin, Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, (1995) 1997; Francis Frascina, ed., Pollock and After: The Critical Debate, 2nd ed., (an anthology), London and New York, Routledge, (1985), 2000 and, for its last chapter, Annie Cohen-Solal, Laurie Hurwitz-Attias, trans. by, Painting American: The Rise of American Artists: Paris 1867-New York 1948, New York, Knopf, 2001.

In Sandler's interview with Byron Browne's widow, (Irving Sandler, Tape Recorded Interview with Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, New York, City, 29 January, 11 February, 16 February 1968, typescript pp. 95-96), in preparation for his book, The Triumph of American Painting, he and Mrs. Browne touched on the subject of one of the issues from that 1948 conference (Forum), that of French versus American art. Although the conference was "closed," Mrs. Browne said she remembered Gottlieb's pro-American, anti-French remarks, statements that had made the rounds of the artists long before being set to print. She recalled these comments as arrogant and brazen and that Gottlieb's statements, in particular, drew angry criticism from some parts of the artistic community. When Sandler queried her as to Byron Browne's attitude, she partially evaded the subject replying that neither she nor her husband were nationalistic about art; they did not care what country it came from. She remembered Browne as unsympathetic to what Gottlieb had said. It seems that it was at this moment that a bitter personal feud over ideological differences in their approach to art developed between Gottlieb and Browne, who had met early in the 1930s and even traveled as friends to Provincetown together. Their feud became irreparable and soon led to Gottlieb's speaking against Browne to their dealer, Samuel Kootz.

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define the reason for Cubism's rise and subsequent decline, Browne's fidelity to Cubism increased the more, as he struggled to resist its undermining and an encroaching, shifting change in the way art was perceived.

While the presence of the French Surrealists in America cannot be designated the sole instigation of a new American movement or school, it must be given credit for having made the single, most important contribution to it. Their writings and practices provided a method through which American artists could free their work from all external influences, including refined French modernism, "dated" Cubism, and their own ingrained Americanism. Most of the expatriated French artists returned to Europe in 1945, following the end of World War II, but by then the seeds of their thinking had been taken root.

Fully cognizant of the revolutionary approach to painting that Surrealism allowed through the application of automatism, and how it drastically revised all traditional approaches to painting while eliminating no-longer-new Cubism, Greenberg sought, and found, artists who would formulate the new work; his choice was Jackson Pollock but he refrained from positioning him on either side.

The Surrealist technique of abstract psychic automatism allowed artists to achieve organic indeterminate rather than geometric hard-edged shapes. As a movement, Surrealism did not evolve directly from the preceding linear movements of Fauvism and Cubism, pictorial means that the Surrealists treated as a burdensome legacy, but from new philosophical and psychological premises. Like tradition, they were to be eradicated.[39]

It is no wonder that few American artists accepted the Surrealists's iconoclastic

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[39] Irving Sandler, Triumph of American Painting, pp. 38, 40.

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point of view. It could be surmised that, lacking sufficient tradition of their own on which to fall back, ridding themselves of what little they had already acquired, although largely inherited from Europe, was a concept that they could not comprehend let alone act upon.[40]

According to Irving Sandler, by 1946, an antipathy toward European art had increased among certain American painters, as their newfound interest in the art of primitive traditions grew.[41] These artists took issue with Cubism for the canon of design that had been imposed on nearly all previous art [since its development in 1907]. In particular, they wished to free themselves from the illusion of even the shallow depth that was created by adhering to Cubist structure. After 1947, and continuing well into the 1950s, the growing notion of the absolute flatness of Gesture or Action painting and Color Field painting in the work of some Americans began to be felt to the extent that its premises could no longer be denied as an open and public force in contemporary art.

Among the artists belonging to the Kootz Gallery, only Robert Motherwell, Baziotes and to some extent Gottlieb, engaged in these new concepts; Browne did not, nor did Bearden, or Holty. Kootz, for all his early and abiding interest in pushing American artists forward, continued to believe in Cubism. Indeed, because of his affiliation with

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[40] It should be remembered that the European artists had come from a long history steeped in iconoclasm so that severing themselves of traditions came easily and, in fact, frequently became the desirable approach to matters. French acceptance and admiration for the art of primitive cultures can certainly be understood in this context. Picasso and Braque's purchase of African tribal masks for their studio as early as 1907, attests to an openness toward the unknown and a willingness to reach beyond what was familiar and comfortable, for wider considerations.

[41] Sandler, p. 69. This attraction to native or non-Caucasian art forms that had flourished without benefit of European history lead to a growing rejection of the established European traditions and their allegiance to it as the only viable way to see art. Thus, by repudiating conventional ways of seeing, by immersing themselves in universal myths, by attempting to reach beyond their familiar world and traditional art, certain artists seemed on their way to new and challenging departures in painting.

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Picasso, his most financially successful business venture, Kootz counted on the staying power of Cubism, while deliberately overlooking Surrealism as a methodology for creativity. Aside from personally disliking any of its aspects, more to the point he disliked Surrealism because Picasso himself disliked it. Under no circumstances did he wish to incur the latter's animosity and risk loosing his client. At one point Kootz openly declared himself "not a Surrealist," and refused to show works he believed were derived from its premises.[42]

Not until 1949, would Kootz admit, or be forced to submit, to Surrealism's currency. When he did, he rushed to embrace its tenets utterly, as we shall see. His conversion brought devastating results to the reputations of those artists connected to his gallery who refused to acknowledge or accept the validity of Surrealist strategies. Byron Browne was among them.

To celebrate the end of his third year in business as an art dealer, Kootz organized a large group exhibition that included his current roster of painters, as well as many French modernists. He also added sculptors, such as David Hare and Arp. Titled Third Anniversary, the show opened April 1, 1948.[43]

Following her visit to the show, Helen Carlson of the New York Sun, attempted a comparison between the contrasting styles of Browne and Gottlieb. "Personal preference

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[42] Ibid., p. 32. Kootz made his judgment against Surrealism early on, in 1942, not foreseeing and thus ignoring the possibilities and role the émigrè artists were beginning to play with regard to Surrealistic tactics in American art. Much later, when he realized the impact that their teachings had made, he changed his mind.

[43] Third Anniversary: An Exhibition of Modern French and American Painting and Sculpture, New York, Kootz Gallery, April 1-17, 1948. At the time of this show, which began it's fourth year of operation, the Samuel Kootz Gallery was considered the leader in the "direction" toward which American art was headed.

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goes to Browne's Woman with Birds, 1948, oil on canvas (Fig. 7-12), and Gottlieb's Night in the City, (Fig. 7-13), although it is bit difficult to explain why."[44] Her praise for both painters notwithstanding, unwittingly, she provided the perfect example of an absurd lack of communication between critic, artist and the art produced. Her blithe comment indicates an inability to articulate those differences in language and echoed the plight of other critics at this time. Browne's nontraditional type of painting [and Gottlieb's] reinforced the necessity to develop an appropriate critical language. The problem that had existed since the 1930s had never been addressed in all the succeeding years and while arts writers were now forced to accept American abstraction, they were ill-equipped to deal with its formal properties or its imagery.[45]

Again, Byron Browne's painting had captured a reviewer's attention and with the exception of her mention of Gottlieb, Carlson discussed no other works among the Americans, painters or sculptors. She justified her comparison of the two by stating "Perhaps the contrast between Browne's irresistibly gay patternings and Gottlieb's primitivistic emblems has something to do with it."[46] If demonstrating diverse aesthetic positions among Americans was what Carlson sought, inadvertently or not, she chose the two major stylistic juxtapositions of the day, for Browne's cluttered, embellished circus forms could not have been further removed from Gottlieb's simplified totemic themes.

Still, some critics continued to insist on comparing Browne's work to Picasso's

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[44] Helen Carlson, "Traditional Art and Abstractions: Samuel Kootz Gallery," The New York Sun, 2 April 1948, p. 31.

[45] Carlson, Carlyle Burrows, Thomas B. Hess, Judith K. Reed, Stuart Preston and Sam Hunter were among the important critics and reviewers of the day.

[46] Idem.

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paintings, which was easy enough to do since they hung nearly side by side. The reviewer for Pictures on Exhibit, while feeling that the gallery's "three B's" continued to stand out for stimulating originality, expressed a caveat ". . . Byron Browne's Woman with Birds is too Picassoesque for comfort, despite the young American's boldly original harmonies of black, lavender and gray."[47]

In another review of Kootz's Third Anniversary group show, the unidentified writer for Art News considered the works on view the "direction of the young Americans."[48] Calling the European painters their "mentors," this critic saw the exhibition as a confrontation between them and the European "extremists" of Cubism, Braque and Picasso, along with Mirò and Mondrian.[49] It would be safe to say that Cubist concepts and structure had been crucial to Browne's development. His admiration of Picasso had begun from the late 1920s, and now, in 1948, he still considered Cubism the principal link of traditional art to contemporary expressions of modernism and he clung to his premise of

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47 "Here and There," Pictures on Exhibit, April 1948, pp. 21, 37. This anonymous reviewer's comments about Browne appeared on page 21. In addition to the "three B's," and Gottlieb, Kootz also included works by David Hare, Hans Hofmann, Carl Holty and Robert Motherwell, along with the Europeans, Braque, Léger, Miró, Mondrian and Picasso, making the show truly one of international contemporary abstraction. The critics termed it one of the most exciting exhibitions of the year thus far. That said, one had only to look at Jackson Pollock's new paintings from his latest New York solo exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery (Jackson Pollock: Recent Paintings, January 5-23, 1948), to realize that Browne's "original harmonies of black, lavender and gray" and the logic and order of harmony itself, stood in conspicuous contrast to Pollock's seemingly frenetic chaos, marking the opposing ends of contemporary American painting.

48 "Reviews and Previews: Personal Abstractions," Art News, Vol. 47, no. 2, April 1948, p. 61. Although not one of the original six painters, Samuel Kootz had begun to include Hans Hofmann's work in his group shows.

49 Ibid. While never explaining why, the critic commented that Gottlieb's Night in the City, was his first ". . . entirely successful picture . . . ."

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developing and expanding that tradition. Thus his opportunity to share the gallery walls with such a respected international figure seemed to him a rare honor. Still, this proximity made it more difficult than at any previous point for him to avoid being compared to so great a painter. Having been criticized since the 1930s for leaning too heavily on Picasso's Cubism and imagery, avoiding what were by now becoming tiresome, if not risky analogies from the arts press he wished most to be supportive proved impossible.

By the spring of 1948, despite his enormous step into the national spotlight, Browne's career stood at crossroads, both aesthetically, and, within the gallery system, politically. It is doubtful that Browne recognized the seriousness of the challenge posed by the type of painting admired and promoted by critics such as Rosenberg or Greenberg. His temperament, training, and aesthetic goals were diametrically opposed to those who espoused the new emphasis on the subjective. Never was he to embrace this concept. So fundamental to his thinking, so ingrained were his convictions that the idea of attempting to deny or eradicate their existence by implementing "subconscious recollections of prehistory" and his "early" life within that concept, was abhorrent to him, for as he had already declared, "one cannot paint what one cannot see."[50] His deep conviction that art was rooted in nature, that is, the natural world in present time, coupled with his stubborn refusal to question the continuing viability of his own adaptations of Cubist practice would soon isolate him from the mainstream of contemporary American painting.

In 1947, and again the following year, Browne experimented with a new technique in Woman with Birds, 1947 (Fig. 7-14), and in another version of the same subject, Woman

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[50] Courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne. This quotation appeared, written in pencil, on one of the undated pages of a notebook.

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with Bird, 1948, (Fig. 7-15). First, he covered the entire ground with an intricate web of fine linear abstract patterns. Then, using a brush loaded with solid color to create flat negative spaces, he masked out or inscribed his figures, tracing bird and female shapes in heavy black line for further clarification. He also used a stylus or, perhaps the handle-tip of a thin brush, to scratch lines into the wet pigment in what could be seen as "graffiti," lending a decorative aspect to the work. Browne would use this distinctive technique again in the 1950s to achieve paintings wholly free of figurative references.

Although speculative, it is possible that the dense tracery or weaving forming both pictures's understructure, stems from the most unlikely of sources, Browne's observance of Pollock's unorthodox "automatic" method of painting that led to his dripped and poured works of 1947-1951. Over this presumed version of Pollock's linear network Browne then inscribed his own imagery. The Pollock correlation may not be so overstated as it at first appears.

When Pollock's White Cockatoo, Number 24A, 1948, (Fig. 7-16), is compared to Browne's Woman with Bird, (Fig. 7-15), one recognizes the ostensible connection. Here, use of a predominant blue color and heavy black lines in the shape of large balanced ovals create movement across the canvas while they isolate and define the figure. The solid lines provide contrast for the elaborate surface treatment contained within them. Curved networks of tiny parallel lines incised into the still-wet pigment with a stylus fill the figure and parody the direction of the ovals.[51] These fragments of dense subsurface design

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[51] Graffito means "scratch" in Italian and graffiti can refer to drawings or images scratched into and onto surfaces. Graffito was not an unknown technique, and Browne frequently scratched into the wet surfaces of his canvases. As well as Pollock, artists such as Cy Twombly and the French painter Jean Dubuffet used this scratching method extensively in their work. Illicit grafitti dates back to ancient Egypt; its recognition as a discrete art form, included within the gallery system in America, dates from the mid-1970s to the

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elements, where Browne masks out configurations with flat color, leaving areas of dense pattern visible, can be seen in Woman with Birds, 1947, as well. Yet where Pollock's webbed density is chaotic--splashed and matted--the density achieved in Browne's work reflects a controlled use of repetitive symbols, compact, but not so as to disguise their individuality. In these curious, tentative and wrongheaded efforts toward understanding what it is that Pollock does, Browne differs dramatically. The timing seems appropriate for such experimental parodies, if they are that, considering Pollock's recent, well-publicized exhibitions and Browne's growing dislike for him. No other work of this nature exists in his oeuvre during the 1940s.

Gossip, in 1943 as now, was endemic to the art world. Like other artists in this still-insular, New York art scene, Browne kept close watch over who painted what and how work was painted, who sold what to whom and for what price, who won competition prizes and awards and who was left out of consideration for both. In November 1943, Browne went to see Pollock's initial one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century galley. Pollock had joined the gallery that year and each succeeding year thereafter, through January 1947, the dealer had given him a solo show.

In early January 1933, when Browne and Pollock first met, the latter was working as a "studio boy" at the back yard atelier of his stone-carver instructor, sculptor Ahron Ben-Shmuel. Pollock then had a great interest in becoming a sculptor. At the time Browne occupied an apartment and maintained his own studio above that of Ben-Shmuel's, so his

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mid-1980s. However, artists from this period often had a different agenda then mere scratching into wet paint as a texturing technique. It is entirely possible, too, that both Browne and Pollock may have seen Ben Shahn's work in graffiti, which for him, constituted an entire thematic program, especially in his graphic work.

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and Pollock's paths often crossed.[52] However, since they shared no common interests and Browne was five years older, he and Pollock never developed a friendship. It is doubtful they would have, for even then Pollock's severe drinking problem interfered with his developing lasting relationships.[53]

When Sidney Janis published Abstract and Surrealist Art in America, in 1944, in which he reproduced Browne's Head, 1942 (Fig. 5-38), already discussed, awareness of Pollock's raw style would have been inescapable, whether he had seen his Guggenheim show or not, for Janis included She-Wolf, 1943 (Fig. 7-17) in his book. Still vaguely conveying references to nature while adapting some of the stylistic mannerisms of Cubist space, Pollock's work was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art, at Janis's suggestion, through Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, just weeks before the book was published; it appears in color in the Surrealist section, on page 113. From that moment, Pollock's revolutionary, undisciplined looking paintings would provoke constant argument and comment.

With World War II concluded and Europe again accessible, at the end of May 1947, Guggenheim made final preparations to return to Venice, not however, before seeing to it that her rival, the art dealer, Betty Parsons, assumed Pollock's contract. Parsons gave him his first show in January 1948.[54] Such was his growing notoriety that in the following year, Life magazine could title an illustrated article on Pollock, "Is He the Greatest

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52 Naifeh, Steven and Gregory White Smith, Jackson Pollock: An American Saga, New York, Potter, 1989, p. 240. The address was 35 Jane Street, in Greenwich Village.

53 No two people could be further distanced culturally. Browne loathed bars and neither drank nor smoked or used profane language.

54 Naifeh and Smith, Jackson Pollock, pp. 545-547.

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Living Painter in America?"[55] A color photograph of the surly-faced unshaven painter slouching in front of one of his paintings, lighted cigarette dangling from his lips, accompanied the story (Figs. 7-18 and 7-19). The impact of this single article had on his career cannot be underestimated for, aside from angering many another painter, it made both Jackson Pollock and his bewildering painting style as infamous as it was simultaneously celebrated.

Millions across America laughed at the undecipherable squiggles comprising the content of his paintings; most were put off by the photograph of the sneering, disheveled man who created them. The majority of painters in New York felt the same. Browne was no exception, loosing all respect for Pollock for what he perceived as his effort toward undermining basic aesthetic values in order to mask his lack of talent, and for his overt rejection of illusionism on the two-dimensional picture surface, a device that Browne considered crucial to good painting no matter how shallow the spatial plane. At the least, Browne considered Pollock's work corrupting and the result of ineptness.

Still, his curiosity had prompted him to experiment with what he perceived as Pollock's wildly meandering circular configurations and long curling repetitive lines of spidery webbings of paint so dense that they obscured the ground beneath. While Pollock dripped, splashed and poured his pigments without benefit of brush, Browne sat at his easel and "drew in" with his brush, equivalent schemata of carefully controlled, repetitive concentric circles or lines and ellipses with "eyes" in the center, which can readily be seen in the two paintings, despite the partial obscuring of shapes by linear swipes of solid black

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55 "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in America?", Life, Vol. 27, no. 6, August 8, 1949, pp. 42-43, 45. In its declarative form, the double-page headline would have read, "He Is the Greatest Living Painter in America," which was how some interpreted the magazine's underlying statement.

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pigment. Pollock, too, for a short time partially masked out his "imagery" with lines of solid pigment to create a secondary impression. Browne seems to have treated his concession to Pollock's style as nothing more than a trial, a trial done his way, for he had no intention of adopting methods so contrary to his training.

Samuel Kootz, always aware of the press coverage received by artists outside his gallery, had observed Pollock's development through his exhibitions at Art of This Century. Upon learning that his competitor, Peggy Guggenheim, was planning to close her gallery, and astutely recognizing Pollock's potential, he now sought him for his own gallery. The dealer went so far a with his scheme as to approach Lee Krasner Pollock with a contract already drawn, hoping that she could persuade her husband to sign it on the spot. This, of course, never happened. Kootz subsequently learned of Pollock's drinking problem and reputation for violence and soon lost interest in adding him to his roster.[56]

Guggenheim meanwhile delayed her departure until she could persuade Betty Parsons to assume what remained of the Pollock contract, although Parsons had refused to sign him to one of her own when the Guggenheim arrangement expired. Browne by this time, had signed his own three-year contract with the Kootz Gallery and by the end of May 1947, when Peggy Guggenheim finally sailed for Europe, he had been with the gallery for nearly two years. That the two painters appear to have had a mutual distrust or dislike of long standing is born out by the following incident.

If Browne had been watching the growth of Pollock's career, Pollock was also keeping track of Browne's. Pollock had apparently made the rounds of the galleries

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[56] Considering the vast differences between Browne and Pollock's painting styles, as well as their personalities, and between Pollock and all other Kootz Gallery painters, unpleasant clashes would have been inevitable had Kootz succeeded in his quest.

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including that of Kootz, where Browne had paintings on view. That no love was lost between both parties is evident from a remark Pollock made in a gossipy letter dated June 2, 1946, to Louis Bunce, his friend from WPA days, who was currently out of town. The following comments act as a summary of gallery news and events happening in New York. He dismisses Browne with a less than flattering remark

> Joe Meert [a painter, friend of Thomas Hart Benton and Pollock's from Art Students League days] is in New York and getting some painting done between jobs---some exciting stuff, abstraction with a personal touch. Jim Brooks . . . is back from the army and painting abstractions . . . . Baziotes I think is the most interesting of the painters you mentioned---Gorky has taken a new turn for the better---from Picasso thru Miro---Kandinske and Matta. Gottlieb and Rothko are doing some interesting stuff--also Pousette-Dart. Spivak is working toward abstraction. Byron Browne continues along the same slick pace . . . .[57]

If Pollock's remark discredits Browne's work as trivial, as the word "slick" implies, Browne utterly repudiated Pollock with three telling words he penned into one of his personal notebooks at an unspecified date, "Pollock, the Pigmy."[58] Browne's experiments with what he perceived as Pollock's technique ended as abruptly as they had begun and he returned to the familiar anchorage of Picasso.

Browne never tired of painting works that associated women with birds, although the subject itself often served as mere vehicle for stylistic experimentation, rather than a

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57 Naifeh and Smith, Pollock, p. 515.

58 Courtesy, the Estate of Byron Browne. This undated comment, as well as expressing precisely what he thought of Pollock and his painting, was also revealing of Browne's personal attitude toward the state of American art and his incomprehension of and concern for developments happening as he wrote. It is telling also for his powerlessness to do anything to reverse the situation. The author speculates that the date of Browne's comment falls somewhere between 1947, when he first seems interested in experimenting with Pollock's methods and August 1949, the month of the Life magazine article that featured Pollock, bringing his name and work to national attention. It was also the month that Samuel Kootz reopened his gallery without Browne.

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consistent working goal toward the creation of any series. Paintings such as Bird Catcher, 1948 (Fig. 7-20), express exaggerated distortions characteristic of Picasso's fragmented depictions of women that he created during the 1930s and early 1940s. Still, Browne's articulation conveys none of the innate pessimism or implied violence toward women that the Spaniard frequently portrayed. In this work, an aggressive vine envelops the woman's torso, which Browne capped with a tilted, oval-shaped Cubist head; one gigantic hand reaches upward to snare a stylized bird in midflight. Rather than conveying sinister undercurrents, its narrative is lost in a predominantly comedic aura, more conducive to decorative patterning than weighty content. This painting reflects many that Browne executed over surfaces of already prepared subskins of abstract symbols and design patterns.

In Figure with Birds, 1948 (Fig. 7-21), composed almost entirely of incised concentric circles, the figure reclines on a linear zig-zagging vine that supports her as would cushions on a sofa. In a universal sense, Browne invokes certain time-honored spiritual qualities of women in concert with plant and animal nature, as in the notion of woman as progenitor and protector of nature, in this instance the bird, a subject that had interested him since the Rima Mosaic in the 1930s. Browne regarded femininity as an integral part of nature, on a par with the birds and plants he depicted, for each represented symbolic equivalents of fertility and life's continuance, aspects of human existence and the way of the natural world that he understood and accepted. As benign as his avian series may appear to those less perceptive, this body of work should be considered among the most sensual of his career.

The idea of a new American art divorced from its European antecedents would

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never have been a consideration for Browne.[59] He and his group had fought too long and hard for an abstraction based on progressive European painting to throw out their accomplishments.[60] Yet, as early as 1945, impulses rose in that direction. These urges, fueled by such critics as Greenberg and Rosenberg, had spread to artists grown tired of basing their work on what they considered worn out European models. Beyond the growing reputation of Pollock, the works of Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning and Adolph Gottlieb, manifested fresh and dynamic new approaches to art, one homegrown and American, blatantly free, for better or worse, of any European considerations.[61] Thus by 1948, Browne found himself on the defensive, the only position left to him.

Browne's fourth and as it turns out his final one-man exhibition for the Kootz Gallery, The Watercolors of Byron Browne, opened on June 1st, 1948. In it he showed sixteen small colorful works on paper, each measuring nineteen by twenty-five inches.[62] In

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59 Implicitly, he stood for what he believed was the perfection inherent in the Greek Ideal and considered his mission, connecting American art to its principles through a linear development, the only valid course. Fueled by an inborn optimistic outlook on life, Browne saw his purpose as an artist as perpetuating classical idealism and beauty, placing human values and dignity uppermost. Ridding himself of these entrenched principles proved impossible.

60 Rooted in Scotch, English and Irish ancestries, temperaments and cultures immersed in self-appointed standards accompanied by no little amount of stubbornness, it is little wonder that Browne's ability to shift abruptly from one aesthetic stance to another of opposite sensibility seemed self-contradictory and wholly incompatible to his personality.

61 According to Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, in her tape-recorded interviews with the author, bizarre was the word her husband most often used when referring to Pollock's work, that is, when he was being polite.

62 The Watercolors of Byron Browne, New York, Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, June 1-25, 1948. By this date, Kootz had begun to list the names of all the painters and sculptors that he showed in his gallery on his brochures and catalogues. To those of Picasso, Braque and Lèger, he added Arp, Hofmann and Hare. Following the name of his

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the box advertisements for the newspapers Kootz announced their prices at $150.00 per framed image. Again, Browne located his theme in the circus tent, depicting further interpretations of lively performance imagery. Clowns, jugglers, harlequins, horses with bareback riders and acrobats comprised the principal subject matter. In fine or broad penline, he filed the interior shapes of his paramount figures with linear surface texture in the form of elaborate calligraphic patterns, concentric circles and starbursts, patterns that he had used since the early 1930s. The entire sheet of paper, negative spaces included, frequently bore a profusion of other symbols in the form of strict geometric configurations, singly, attached to or tumbling over and into each other in flat abstract Cubist planes.

The entire show expressed both delicacy and vigor, combining a lighthearted imaginative and whimsical spirit in keeping with an almost child-like rendering of the basic figures in each of its paintings. Content stressed representation over abstraction with Browne making no attempt to be other than amusing in a delightful tongue-in-cheek way. Still, his imagery was repetitive for it contained the same formalized designs that had distinguished his figures in The Big Top oil paintings three years earlier except that the current watercolors placed stronger emphasis on improvisation of line and shape.

For the most part critics disliked his new exhibition. Sam Hunter, reviewer for The New York Times, stated, "At any rate, his method is heavily inspirational. In its favor are hardy zest and spontaneity. Weighing against it are the easier satisfactions of slickness, ever complicated decoration and repetitive pattern."[63] "Although Browne has a

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gallery, all business stationery, press releases and publications carried the announcement, "Modern French and American artists," in that order.

63 Sam Hunter (S.H.), "New Art Displays Open at Galleries: Group, One-Man Exhibitions Scheduled at Local Salons---Browne Works on View," The New York Times, 5 June 1948, p. 13.

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definite and personal flair for color organization," he said, "his main efforts seem to be in the direction of formulating a style or recognizable manner."[64] "His pictures still doggedly resist the problem of developing any central plastic or pictorial ideas."[65] Hunter concluded that Browne had discovered his idea and image in the process of improvising his designs, a convoluted way to go about things.

Helen Carlson of The Sun recognized Browne's facility in handling forms and linear variations.[66] Comparing his work on one level to Klee's winsome quality, she concluded, "But where Klee is always at ease, Browne is often guilty of laboring a point."[67]

The most positive comment came from Margaret Breuning, who wrote in The Art Digest, "There is a combined delicacy and vigor in the craftsmanship that attains both a rhythmic web of arabesque and a sound balance of forms in these gay fantasies."[68] She singled out Circus (Fig. 7-22), with its intricately patterned female rider holding a large open ring in each hand while seated backward upon a horse, as filled with esoteric "cabalistic" designs, so interwoven as it was with geometric detail. His Lion and

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64 Ibid.

65 Ibid. At the same time, Hunter also reviewed Jackson Pollock's show held at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Hunter made note of the blunt power of ugliness that he saw in Pollock's Cathedral. "It is hard to say whether his deliberate crudities represent the force and size of his attack or have simply become a personal mannerism designed to shock."

66 Helen Carlson, "Samuel Kootz Gallery," The New York Sun, 11 June 1948, p. 23.

67 Ibid.

68 Margaret Breuning, The Art Digest, "Fifty-Seventh Street in Review: Byron Browne Watercolors, June 1, 1948, Vol. 22, no. 17, p. 21.

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Tumblers, were especially "imaginative and spirited paintings, said she."[69]

Breuning's telling comment about Browne's "rhythmic web of arabesque," although unlikely to have been made with the work of Jackson Pollock in mind, nevertheless touched on a modicum of truth. It was at this time that Pollock was gaining critical attention for his enormous canvases featuring intricate "webs" or networks of poured-paint surface textures. In an overt gesture, Browne may have meant his latest work as an answer or response to Pollock's, however differently each achieved his end.[70]

Other typical examples from the exhibition, Clown and Lion, 1948 (Fig. 7-23) and Two Clowns, 1947 (Fig. 7-24), express the same inventive graceful calligraphy, what he had begun to refer to as "poetic gesture." Browne's use of this phrase to describe his own work first appeared in comments printed in a catalogue that accompanied a group exhibition shown in late 1946 at the National Academy of Design,[71] and, again, at the

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69 Ibid.

70 Unlike Pollock, Browne was never comfortable working on large canvas sheets. His experiment with largeness, the three panels of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, 1947, each six feet high, proved a critical disaster, confirming, at least for him, that largeness was not conducive to quality. Aside from the additional expense incurred in the purchase of canvas and paint, which he did not feel he could afford, he was an artist who preferred to sit at an easel, never painting wider than what his outstretched arms could reach and his brush could control within that expanse. Control may be the key word, for unlike Pollock, Browne did not care to leave his work to chance or accident. What he had to say did not need outsize canvas sheets; he saw no point in or advantage to the extra yards of material. Later, toward the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, he again experimented with a few large canvas panels (although never the size of Pollock's), but they, too, contributed nothing to the quality of his work, indeed undermined it. His preference for the small format may account for his large output of works on paper; over a lifetime they accounted for more than half of his oeuvre.

71 Statement submitted with his painting, In the Sun, oil on canvas, 38 x 30, date and whereabouts unknown, to the third annual Pepsi-Cola Company's Paintings of the Year exhibition, New York, National Academy of Design, October 1-31, 1946.

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beginning of 1948, in a group show held at the University of Illinois.[72] In early 1949, in a two-paragraph "artist's ideas" section as part of a rèsumè he prepared, he stated in part

> Then there is the question of imagery. It is my belief that a painting should fall into a humanistic category rather than a mechanistic one. I accept painting as a poetic gesture not as a mechanical contrivance. Therefore all plastic consideration has as its ultimate goal the portrayal of feeling.[73]

A more thorough explanation of the phrase "poetic gesture" appears in a statement he wrote for the brochure of a solo exhibition held at the University of Louisville, where he showed fourteen watercolors, chiefly circus themes from 1947 and 1948.

> Painting to me has always been a matter of making poetic gestures concerning things seen and felt. Thus the object has been of prime importance in my work. I start with the commonplace and progress toward the extraordinary. I find almost everything in the visual world grist for this process of thinking.[74]

Browne's use of "poetic gesture" as a term for certain of his pictures, mainly those exploiting an excess of detail and linear abstract designs, acquires a defensive tone for a mannerism growing increasingly ardent. In an effort to formulate new and consistent

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[72] Competitive Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Allen Weller and Frank Roos, essays, University of Illinois, College of Fine and Applied Arts, Urbana-Champaign, February 29-March 28, 1948. His oil on canvas, Two Figures, 1946, 47 x 36 inches, now in the permanent collection of the Chrysler Museum, was shown.

[73] A partial quotation taken from a longer "Ideas ..." statement typed on the last page of his rèsumè. The three-page inventory of accomplishments was prepared after he left the Kootz Gallery, for it lists a 1949 exhibition (no specific dates) held at Grand Central Galleries, his new dealer. He sent this rèsumè to Lawrence Campbell, then the archivist for the Art Students League, New York City.

[74] These comments, taken from his longer catalogue text dated 1948, appeared in Byron Browne: Watercolors, Louisville, Kentucky, University of Louisville, Allan R. Hite Art Institute (shown in Rotunda and Library Lobby), January 3-29, 1949. By now with a new dealer, Grand Central Galleries, Browne nevertheless showed many of the watercolors and pen and ink drawings from his June 1948 Kootz exhibition. Presumably, Grand Central borrowed works from his former dealer, Samuel Kootz, in a collaborative arrangement.

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stylistic identifiers that pointed away from Picasso and to him alone, he began to choose traditional subjects from common experience--man, woman, child, house, table, bottle, flowers, horse--and deliberately made of them uncommon fantastic objects and figures, calligraphically decorated through what he termed "poetic gesture," but retaining still-recognizable subject matter.

As a matter of principle, Browne took an increasingly strong stance in opposition to the mounting emphasis, in literature, theater and film, as well as in matters of the visual arts, on an existentialistic rationalale for painting, what Browne called "antihumanistic" and nihilistic" thinking.[75] Judging from the titles given to the exhibited works in the Louisville, Kentucky exhibition, among them The Wounded Lion, The Jester, Girl with Watermelon, Clown and Lion, Head of a Woman and Head of a Girl, Browne had no intention of removing narrative content or references to the naturalistic world from his painting, for the visible world was the only reference that existed for him.

His philosophical position becomes clear upon reading the remainder of his statement for the University of Louisville exhibition brochure

> I feel the tradition of art behind every picture I do. There cannot be a new art without a solid basis in understanding of past art. Greek, Roman, Romanesque and Byzantine schools I find most rewarding. Here we have monumental conceptions along with human attitudes, attitudes that should certainly exist in any form of art. For that reason I would object to my work being called abstract. As to this business of attempting the extraordinary, what importance does an art have that gives us only what we see with our eyes? Art can only be significant because of that extra something it passes on to us. A vision of the ideal life presented in the sculpture of the Greeks becomes an extraordinary thing. There are a number of visions that will give us that spiritual lift of great art; the mysteries of

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75 French Existentialist philosophy was introduced to America shortly following the close of World War II. It focused on alienation, anxiety and estrangement, and stressed as well the impotence of reason, among numerous other considerations. Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre were the major thinkers of the movement.

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> the skies for one, the profound enigma of birth, life and death for another. Perhaps my art is a symbolic one and the human figure and face which appear in most of the pictures become the vortex around which the pageantry of life gyrates. I am sure that I identify myself with those figures and faces.[76]

In his conviction that all art must give a "spiritual lift" or a "vision of the ideal life," Browne establishes a position that increasingly places him in opposition to those that refute the necessity of nature or tradition as crucial to painting or art.

The years 1947 and 1948 were particularly decisive for American art. By this time neither Browne nor any abstract artist was ignored by the press, as had been the case during most of the previous decade until well into the 1940s. The problem now was that most critics still wrote with limited knowledge and even less understanding of the structures and aims of abstract works they reviewed. Especially lacking was an appropriate critical language with which to express its subtle nuances. Most presented overly simplistic interpretations and, in general, had only vague ideas with regard to expressing intelligible judgments about the "new" art. Many current arts writers had held their positions since the 1930s, when the attacks against Americans who painted abstractly were first launched. These were the same critics who simply did not like abstract art. Now, with so many artists painting some phase within the abstract mode, the writers were forced to contend with it, recognizing that the momentum of abstraction was accelerating.

Despite reams of descriptive adjectives pouring forth few critics comprehended what was happening to American art at this time. Fewer yet understood the new attitudes some of the painters had taken, leaving those painters justifiably annoyed. Only at a symposium held at the Museum of Modern Art, where artist after artist stood denouncing them, did the critical establishment, that soon learned of the loud complaints, begin to

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[76] Ibid.

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comprehend that their continuing lack of sensitivity toward the artist's abstract work must cease.[77] The crises of ideas and ideals and the inevitable polarities among artists and their motivations had developed over a considerable time but few critics recognized or wanted to acknowledge that something truly revolutionary was afoot in American aesthetic thinking. While the powerful Greenberg and Rosenberg's writings may have influenced the artists about whom they wrote, they appeared to have had little influence over other writers. Still, the symposium's participants agreed that the pair had come closest to devising a critical methodology. With the exception of Hunter, most of the critics who covered Browne's watercolor show that June were among those who fell short in their rationale (see footnotes 62-68).

There were two indispensable certainties of which Browne often spoke: one reflected his concern for the physical act of painting itself, that is, how he used pigment in the solving of spatial problems; the other was how to express a personal equation or humanistic subject matter within that art. Browne created most of his work with these two factors in mind. As a result, his paintings reflected ongoing experimentation, a reluctance to settle on a single stylistic aspect from one to another. While this led to a markedly diverse oeuvre, it also confused both critic and viewer alike, a situation of which Browne was well aware.

As a response to those who expressed such concerns and in an attempt to mollify their confusion and misinterpretation of his intentions, in late 1946, he wrote

In making a modern picture, I am conscious of two important facts. Being

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77 "Unintelligibility," in Forum: The Artist Speaks, seven speakers, including Paul Burlin, Stuart Davis, Adolph Gottlieb, George L. K. Morris and James Johnson Sweeney, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 5 May 1948. This symposium addressed other issues as well but denouncing critics hostile to abstract art was the meeting's major purpose.

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> a great admirer of the many beginnings, I have found these two facts recurring again and again. Firstly, the work always answered a space question. That is, the placement of areas and weights of color were carefully considered. Secondly, the work was deeply rooted in the humanism of the times. That is to say, it had moral value, in that it was mainly concerned with the aspiration and dreams of its peoples. I have always tried to keep these two points as the springboard of my efforts.[78]

Browne believed that he had an obligation to be in accordance with what he considered right conduct or its principles and he conformed to them regardless of current efforts or moves to change or undermine such principles. By his use of the phrase "moral value" he was saying that while aware of efforts in other directions, he would adhere to a standard of art ethics he had long ago set for himself and remain steadfast in that integrity, an integrity without compromise. Two years later, toward the end of 1948, Browne distanced himself even further as he became more adamant regarding his attitude toward the importance of tradition in art as the sole basis for picture making.

His increasingly strident posture, in candid opposition to the expanding existentialist aesthetic among the avant-garde of New York, began to take on an openly moralistic mantle. Browne, in 1948, intentionally and irreversibly removed himself from all considerations of the fledgling New York School. He refused to waver from his chosen position, some would call it integrity, and during the following year his determination to retain his principles became even more entrenched, as he watched the erosion of these ideals by other American painters who chose an opposite point of view. Browne further defined his stance by defensively stating that

> I like to feel the tradition of art behind every picture I do. There cannot be a new art without a solid understanding of the art of the past. Greek, Roman, Romanesque and Byzantine schools I find most rewarding in their

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[78] Quotation courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne. Browne penciled these statements into one of his notebooks. Later, he would use portions of these writings in various exhibition catalogues.

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> contributions to present day painting. Here we have monumental conceptions coupled with human attitudes, attitudes that should certainly exist in any form of art. Since I work toward those effects I would object to my work being called abstract. As I have mentioned, the object is of great importance to me. In some quarters a painting is condemned the minute the objects of our immediate surroundings begin to assert themselves. Because a form is readily recognized does not by any shadow of a doubt render ineffectual the meaning or success of the picture. Every shape of form that is drawn, painted, sculptured, sawed, pasted and spattered has its counterpart in nature or a man-made product, and is carried into the picture either by direct visual contact or thru the memory channels. One cannot paint what one has not seen.
>
> I am busy working my way back to the human race and figure, that most constant of symbols in eight thousand years and of recent times cast into ill repute in art.[79]

There is no doubt that Browne knew that his work was under question for being "behind the times," not only by the art critics, for they made that evident in their comments, but by his colleagues and his dealer as well. During this period of great fluctuation in the art world Browne refused to be caught up in the dramatic changes taking place, rebelling even against some of the painters in his own gallery, namely Gottlieb and Motherwell. He had begun to suspect, and then was sure, that they had approached Kootz to persuade him to eliminate him from the gallery roster, because his style of painting no longer fit the criteria of the "new painting."[80]

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[79] Quotation courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne. Undated, but ca. mid-1948 or early 1949 statements penciled into one of his notebooks. More than a code of ethics, Browne's assertions amount to a manifesto. He would use parts of these statements in various exhibition catalogues.

[80] This situation of in-house discontentment and rivalry among some of his fellow painters, even to boycotting his opening receptions, was clearly described many years later by his widow in interviews with her during the late summer of 1978. Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne was adamant in her belief that Gottlieb and Motherwell had conspired against Browne to have him eliminated from the Kootz Gallery. Evidence of such a conspiracy was brought to both Browne and her through another painter in the gallery. Whether Gottlieb and Motherwell threatened to leave the dealer for another gallery if Kootz retained him is open to speculation but stated as such in her most bitter comments. She blamed these two painters in particular for the lamentable events that followed.

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While he had never socialized with Motherwell or, of late, Adolph Gottlieb, for their friendship that dated to the early 1930s had long since cooled, their artistic development had not in the beginning differed dramatically from his own. Yet by 1948, their divergent approaches were undeniable.[81] The supremacy of the personal humanistic factor in painting had become increasingly necessary for Browne as the issue diminished in relevance for the others. William Baziotes, the only member of the group who remained friendly toward Browne, had himself developed a keen interest in the methodologies of Surrealism, as had Robert Motherwell even earlier. Several times he had attempted to engage him in its methods but Browne, of course, had refrained, eschewing all interest.[82]

The burgeoning notion held by some, of eradicating the presence of cultural and art-historical tradition in painting, held no credibility with him; for Browne it was a necessity. That Cubism was essentially an art of flatness was beside the point, for it was also an historically rich style that retained, to one degree or another, realistic depictions of the object or subject matter, which was his goal. Thus he could say

> I have always admired the dicipline of the Cubists. To me they are in the direct line of tradition, making the logical connection between the past and

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81 While many painters did strive to eradicate all references to any aspect of traditional art and, or French modernism, Diane Kelder correctly noted in one of many conversations, that neither Adolph Gottlieb nor Robert Motherwell strove to eradiate the presence of cultural and art-historical tradition but they viewed it in disparate ways, and differently than did Browne.

82 If his art is to be fully grasped, his inflexibly held set of humanistic values and his sense of morality, his "code of ethics," as he imposed them upon himself as "right beliefs," must be empathized with by the viewer. Browne, for all his contemporaneity, was no iconoclast. Cherished beliefs and traditional institutions remained intact and undiminished for the remainder of his life.

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the twentieth century.[83]

It was impossible for Browne to close the door on what meant so much to him and he did not try; his work continued to remain more or less Cubist or realistic within an abstract format for the rest of his life.

Acknowledging Browne's convictions makes it easier to understand why he could not accept the denial of art-historical tradition, what he termed the "humanistic" approach to art, and, as well, the carefully considered problems of formalistic elements of visual design, the overthrow of which increasingly occupied the concerns of an expanding group of American painters enjoying a new attention. He could not exchange the beliefs upon which he had based his work thus far and found it impossible to accept the ideas espoused by this group of painters, the burgeoning Abstract Expressionists.

As a result of clinging to what he deemed proper, he gradually found himself excluded from discussions, meetings, and arguments over issues of art with his peers and, finally, isolated from the camaraderie of the new avant-garde, most of whom were of his own generation and had been his friends. Still, Browne was not entirely without blame, for he refused to join them in local bars for drinks and intensely disliked verbalizing about art, standard procedure for the lengthy discussions that lasted hours. Whether in fear of speaking his thoughts in front of others or for a smothering shyness that was his lot from the start, or both, in truth he had little in common with them with which to mount any kind of dialogue. "Put me down," he proudly penned into a notebook, "as an artist who doesn't care

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[83] Comment written into one of Browne's undated notebooks. Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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to make speeches about art; who avoids it with great effort."[84]

His thinking became the antithesis of that of the emerging Abstract Expressionists and therein began the ever-widening fissure between two opposing camps of thought. It is extremely important that we understand why Browne chose the route he did, for only then can the sad events that followed be comprehended.

By June 26, 1948, the day after the closing of what turned out to be his final show for the Kootz Gallery, Browne had delivered 322 oil paintings and works on paper, fulfilling his three-year agreement and thus freeing him from his present contract. Increasingly, he had become displeased with the arrangement he had made, for he felt he was being taken advantage of given the increasing value of his work. Still, he expected that Samuel Kootz would ask him to sign another contractual agreement for the succeeding three years and he intended to ask for an arrangement that would give him more control over his prices per picture.

On this date Samuel Kootz also closed his gallery for the summer season, as he had typically done in the past from July through Labor Day. Without warning his artists, the Kootz Gallery summer closing turned into a permanent one. Only toward the end of the summer did Kootz tell them that they were now on their own. Responding to Picasso's suggestion that he could make more money by representing him alone, he decided to give up his gallery space and become a private dealer on behalf of the famed painter. Kootz, who now operated exclusively from his apartment on Park Avenue, proudly claimed through extensive advertising that he was Picasso's world agent.

His necessarily disillusioned and very angry painters prevailed upon him to

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[84] Isolated undated quotation from a sketchbook. Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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reconsider but to no avail. Browne, who had implicitly trusted Kootz, now believed himself used, "sold out" and betrayed by his dealer. Ingenuous and naive in that trust, he inadvertently left himself open to such treatment. He felt ashamed and humiliated for having been dropped and, shortly, severe psychological reactions surfaced that would have lasting consequences.

A year and a half later, because he missed his painters and the hectic daily activities of managing a public space, Kootz reconsidered and finally decided to reopen his gallery, this time making the emerging Abstract Expressionists and the New York School the exclusive focus of his inventory.[85] Under the circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that Kootz invited Baziotes, Gottlieb and Motherwell to join his new gallery. He never approached the other members of the original group, omitting Browne, Romare Bearden, and Carl Holty from his representation.

Browne and his family, as yet unaware of Kootz's strategy, spent the summer of 1948, as they had done for years, in Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod. Now, for the first time, Browne possessed the financial means to buy something beyond the everyday necessities, such as a summer residence. With the money he managed to save from his three years at the gallery, he was able at last to purchase the small cottage they had previously rented for so many summers. For a man who could never afford so much as an automobile, owning his own house, however modest, represented a considerable achievement. At the age of forty-one, Browne was finally experiencing a measure of security and monetary

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[85] The new Samuel Kootz Gallery became the first in America to do so and the first to recognize their work as a group.

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return for his years of struggle in poverty.[86]

This house, situated at the far end of Commercial Street and well away from the bustling tourist and restaurant area, had at that time a splendid view of nearby Provincetown Harbor with Boston Bay opening beyond. Browne set up his studio in the front room that had once served as a neighborhood grocery store. It was in this room with its huge picture window overlooking the bay that Browne had painted most of his seascapes and would continue to do so for the rest of his life.[87]

Eventually, Browne was able to build a large separate studio at the rear of the house. These summer weeks, the first time in three years that he was not obligated to paint according to the thematic dictates of his dealer, soon to be his former dealer, turned out to be some of Browne's happiest.

He had left the Kootz Gallery at the height of his career, nationally recognized as one of America's foremost modern painters. Few of the younger artists in America had received such extensive press coverage, prizes and accolades as he had. The art world held him in esteem, and on a personal basis he had been exceptionally well liked. His paintings had been purchased by many private collectors, and were represented in the permanent collections of public museums. His work had been shown in numerous exhibitions in New York, across the nation and in Europe. Although far from wealthy, he was at least making a

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[86] Browne participated in no further exhibitions for the remainder of the year following the closing of his last show for the Kootz gallery at the end of June.

[87] At that time the area was not so developed as it is today and during raging nor'easters, waves from the raw Atlantic Ocean on the opposite side of the spit of land tore through to the quiet harbor side, etching a wide swath through which the sea flowed. His property was situated in the path of this recurring onslaught and for this reason the house had to be raised on high beams. Through time, shifting sand from the gigantic dunes, windblown into ever changing hills and gullies with every set of winter storms, eventually sealed this natural sea path, allowing his house to be fixed permanently on the ground.

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living from his art, and was, at this moment, enjoying a privileged life that few painters could hope to experience.

For a short while, the cares with which he had struggled all his life melted into the warm sun-filled blue skies of a perfect Provincetown summer.

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CHAPTER 8

THE KOOTZ CATASTROPHE

> I have given much thought to a method of selling these paintings by [Holty and] Browne. The sale at Gimbels was obviously one of desperation upon my part, an attempt to recapture money I have laid out--a situation explained to the artists, and intelligently appraised by them. We now find that Gimbels also cannot sell these paintings.[1]
>
> --Samuel M. Kootz, Gallery dealer, New York
> January 1952

During the relative freedom of the summer of 1948, with no pressing urgency to complete paintings for a specific exhibition, Browne spent a happy two months with his family, painting the sea, sunsets, fishing boats, the salt marshes and enormous sand dunes for which Provincetown is justifiably renowned. Sea creatures common to this area and its salt marshes, such as the hermit crab, clam, lobster, and large humpshelled skate or horseshoe crab, salt water animals that he had witnessed on the flats and marsh ponds on a daily basis each summer since the mid-1930s, became subject matter for a series of oil paintings and works on paper.

With the thought of working on future projects for the Kootz Gallery for the coming season, Browne developed a morphology of an upright hybrid personage, a fantastic allegorical "mythic" icon, part man and part sea animal. He termed his anthropomorphic creature "The Crustacean." Each painting contained a massive and centrally focussed apparition balancing on two widespread leg supports, as seen in Dancer,

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[1] Samuel M. Kootz, Letter to the editor, The Art Digest, Vol.26, no. 7, January 1, 1952, p. 4.

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1947 (Fig. 8-1), a precursor of the idea of crustacean. All components of the mature figure are present in nascent state, including the hint of a shoreline horizon. By this summer, his figure, mere dancer no longer, had changed into the defined configurations as found in Crustacean, 1948 (Fig. 8-2). Fully developed paintings with titles such as Aphrodite, (Fig. 8-3), to which Browne added string mired in pigment, Crustacean Dancer (Fig. 8-4), and Sea Creature (Fig. 8-5), were conceived during his summer sojourn. They form the nuclei of dozens of formal variations on canvas and paper, marking the initiation of a major cycle.

Aside from the opportunity to observe the actual animals, during his habitual long shore walks, another source for his imagery rests in the history of art itself. An early interest in pre-Conquest Mexican, South American, and Alaskan Eskimo art led Browne to compile several scrapbooks of this imagery from reproductions clipped out of magazines, or collected from museum postcards. He chose a color photograph of a flat gold pectoral object of Pre-Columbian origin (Fig. 8-6), as a cover decoration for one of his homemade dust jackets. The object's intricately carved surface ornamentation strikes an uncanny correspondence to similar shapes and details in his crustaceans. Although in reality the ornament represents the human figure, depicting angular arms and legs, Browne conceives it as a stylized "crustacean."

In a sustained and unprecedented burst of creativity, Browne worked on the series daily throughout the summer with painting following painting in rapid succession. While some of his crustaceans loomed large in the foreground others stepped back into sunsets and shadows, as observed in an untitled work on paper, (Fig. 8- 7), or walked out of the sea on a moonlit nights, as in Nocturne (Fig. 8-8), and Homage in Black (Fig. 8-9), depicting a crustacean grasping pray, enemy or food, in its right claw. Their interior shapes were

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always filled with compacted ornamental designs, as shown in an extreme example, Figure on a Beach-Genesis (Fig. 8-10).

It may be that Browne also looked to yet other sources for inspiration. In Queen of the Crustaceans (Fig. 8-11), one is reminded of Alberto Giacometti's disturbing image in a 1932 sculpture that was known to everyone through its title if not the work itself, Woman with Her Throat Cut (Fig. 8-12), which Browne surly knew from visits to the Museum of Modern Art. There are unmistakable similarities between the two.

Browne continued developing the figure into the following year and beyond, allowing the creature to clone itself within the picture plane, as seen in the distorted shapes in Crustacean Carnival, 1949 (Fig. 8-13). Although the sensibilities for conceiving their imagery stem from contradictory poles, Browne's work on paper fairly bursts with life, recalling Joan Miró's equally teeming painting Carnival of Harlequin, 1924-25, oil on canvas (26 x 36 5/8 inches, Coll: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY). The multiplicity of figures within Pyrrhic Dance, 1952 (Fig. 8-14), suggests that Browne may have had Mark Rothko's iconic Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea, 1944 (Fig. 8-15), in mind, for striking similarities are apparent despite the differences in horizon line and canvas size. Rothko's "mythic" pair stride from the sea as do Browne's apparitions.

Aside from the circus paintings, Browne's series became the largest protracted effort of a single subject of his career, lasting well into the 1950s, when the crustacean figure disappeared into a mass of abstracted shapes in 1953, effectively ending the endeavor. In November 1953, he wrote, "To hold up the mirror to nature and to record all its moods, forms, varieties, colors, and movements and combination of such is the only

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duty of the artist."[2] This was precisely what he did in the crustacean pictures. As it turned out, this large body of paintings and watercolors represented his first work freed from the demands of the Kootz Gallery.

Credit surely must be given to Samuel Kootz for advocating in Browne and the other painters in his gallery, the professional value of developing serial imagery, that is, confining and evolving a single subject or method of approach over a period of time. Until his affiliation with Kootz Browne tended to vacillate from one image and style to another entirely different, so that one finds in his oeuvre few instances of consistent production for any given period. It was as if the mood of the moment served as his guide, which resulted in an uneven, scattered body of unrelated works. Under Kootz's direction all that changed, as thematic exhibitions demanded correlated material.

When he learned late in the summer that his dealer had decided to close his gallery permanently and that no contract would be forthcoming, essentially terminating their relationship, Browne was so shaken and angered by the unexpected news that he made an arrangement to have a friend drive him back to the city to confront Kootz, and look for another gallery to represent him. It took all of Rosalind's coaxing to keep him from leaving. Inasmuch as most New York galleries were closed during the month of August, it would have been a futile plan anyway. For the remainder of the summer, neither he nor Rosalind, who was just as angry, spoke about their immediate future but the reality of his loss of representation, literally his job, distressed both considerably.

When Browne returned from Provincetown after Labor Day, he repeatedly tried to contact his former dealer, who had given instructions to a secretary to say he was out of

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[2] Quotation courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne. This is one of the rare instances when Browne bothered to date a notebook entry.

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town. Frustrated, he finally gave up, for his first and most pressing order of business was to find a means of supporting himself and his family, something he had not had to consider since being put under contract to the Kootz Gallery in 1945. Now, with no money coming in, he relied on the savings he and Rosalind had frugally put aside, and, left with no dealer to promote and sell his work, he had little choice but to find employment, which he quickly did. He applied for and was accepted as a part-time painting instructor at the venerable Art Students League of New York, on West 57th Street, beginning that fall, and this relationship lasted until his death thirteen years later.

However helpful, the meager teaching salary he received from the League did not pay all the bills, especially with a child now five years old and about to begin private school. It was then that Rosalind began supplementing their income by writing reviews and criticism for a number of art periodicals. Later, she would teach art history courses at the New School for Social Research. Between them they barely managed to make ends meet.

His production from the summer required a venue. With Kootz no longer his representative, thus depriving him of a way to promote, exhibit and sell his recent work, Browne urgently needed to establish a new gallery affiliation; he now directed his attention and energies to that task. There is no record indicating how many gallery dealers he approached but at the beginning of 1949, he completed arrangements for affiliation with Grand Central Moderns, located at 5 West 57th Street.

This branch of the conservative parent, Grand Central Galleries, whose showrooms were located in the office section of the fabled Grand Central Station off Vanderbilt Avenue at 42nd Street, catered to younger, adventuresome collectors willing to take risks with its contemporary art offerings by, often. lesser known painters. Unlike his ageeement

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with the Samuel Kootz Gallery, where he was paid $3000 annually, at $75.00 per week for a certain number of works, his arrangement with Grand Central was more traditional, that is, on a sale/commission basis. Meanwhile, his former dealer retained ownership of every unsold painting that Browne had turned in during his three years with the gallery.

His initial exhibition with Grand Central Moderns opened the following March, and included fourteen canvases that introduced the crustacean paintings, as well as some previously-created circus subjects on paper.[3] Browne received wide publicity with critics from more than seven newspapers and art periodicals covering the show. Most had reviewed his work for the Kootz Gallery, and were anxious to see what new ideas might be forthcoming. Still, opening publicity aside, most seemed baffled by his crustacean fantasies, accusing Browne of overly elaborate use of design and pattern that obscured his original concept.

Carlyle Burrows, for example, found that while Browne's work was "poetic" and that of an "extreme modernist," his "tendency for crowded compositions and heavily worked surfaces seemed to communicate far less than what the artist expected."[4] He considered the progress in Browne's painting restricted in scope.[5] Burrows, who understood better than most the tenor of the times, felt that "his dependence on the subconscious as an

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[3] Byron Browne, New York, Grand Central Moderns, March 15, 1949. No records have been located that provide the exhibition's closing date, although it conceivably lasted until the end of the month.

[4] Carlyle Burrows, "Art in Review: Browne and Hare," The New York Harold Tribune, Sunday ed., 20 March 1949, sect. 5, p. 4. Burrows correctly noted that Browne, in many of his canvases, strove for a darker palette than he had used earlier, in order to covey, he believed, the coloration of things that might lie far under the surface of the sea.

[5] Ibid.

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esthetic anchorage was not firmly to be relied upon for invaluable emotional experience."[6] Stuart Preston wrote that "Browne is a clever picture maker, "but by indulging in too many tricks, he sails near the rocks of static decoration."[7] Henry McBride reached the heart of the matter when he commented that Browne was "inclined to put more items into his compositions than he can properly manage."[8]

While Browne's semi-abstract fantasy figures may have been an anathema, for they had never seen anything like them, such comments did not amount to real critical comprehension of his efforts either. What they failed to say was that Browne, in March 1949, seemed out of step with what was now recognized as advanced painting; no longer was he perceived as part of the avant-garde. That having been said, one questions why not a single critic found in them anything of beauty, for some indeed were.

The critics aside, Browne still enjoyed a substantial following from his years with the Kootz Gallery. Collectors who may not have understood his painting, bought his work because they liked it, and one can presume that he brought this clientele to his new gallery. Now that he was no longer with Kootz, where he had been paid a reliable weekly salary, his new arrangement forced him to learn to help market his own work, a task he thoroughly disliked, as did most artists. Despite numerous inquiries to the management of Grand Central Moderns and to the parent gallery [the organization has subsequently gone out of

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6 Ibid.

7 Stuart Preston, "Abstract Contrasts - New Shows Include Work by Hare, Margo, Browne," The New York Times, Sun. ed., 20 March 1949, sect. 2, p. 8. Browne and Preston would soon quarrel over these unflattering published statements.

8 Henry McBride, "Art Reviews: Grand Central Galleries," The New York Sun, 18 March 1949, p. 25.

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business], they could locate no sales records from this exhibition nor from the period in question. His arrangement with Grand Central Moderns allowed for one solo exhibition annually.

Meanwhile, in September 1949, Kootz had a change of heart and decided to reopen his gallery, at 600 Madison Avenue between 57th and 58th Streets, citing the lack of daily contact with artists and collectors. "I couldn't stand it," he said. "Besides, we lived too publicly at home--people who had visitors would entertain them by bringing them over to see our Picassos."[9] He announced his decision by mailing an engraved card to all his old clients, stating that he would continue his sponsorship of creative American painting, as well as carry the important European painters.

Paintings by Browne, Bearden and Holty were conspicuously absent at Kootz's gala opening exhibition, the now famous Intrasubjectives show, for which Harold Rosenberg and Samuel Kootz each composed an essay.[10] William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb, retained from the earlier gallery (as was Robert Motherwell) and Hans Hofmann, also included in the show, designed a striking red, green and black four-page, one-sided, fold-over brochure\catalogue printed on light beige paper. Each used several of his lively abstract signature motifs in large format in a clever eye-catching layout, such as Gottlieb's pictographs and Baziotes's biomorphic shapes, over which they placed the typed essays

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9 Kootz was referring to his rude clients, who used his home-based private salon as if he were still operating a gallery open to the public. Quotations excerpted from: Grace Glueck, "Kootz Art Gallery Closes Tomorrow," The New York Times, 8 April 1966, p. 28. This article, recapping the dealer's twenty-one years as a major force in American art, stated that Kootz now wished to develop his own talents [namely writing] instead of those of others.

10 The Intrasubjectives, Samuel M. Kootz and Harold Rosenberg, essays, New York, Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, September 14-October 3, 1949.

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written by Rosenberg and Kootz (Figs. 8-16, 8-17, 8-18 and 8-19). This pivotal exhibition immediately established Kootz as an early champion of Abstract Expressionism that soon brought international recognition and respect to American painting, eclipsing for the first time the supremacy of France as the world's artistic leader.

As his first gallery had brought legitimacy to avant-garde American painting, so did his re-entry from a more extreme viewpoint, in which he also showed the revolutionary, sometimes shocking paintings of Pollock, Reinhardt, de Kooning, Gorky, Graves, Rothko, Tobey, Tomlin and Motherwell. Kootz acknowledged loans of works from the Betty Parsons, Egan, Julian Levy and Willard Galleries. Browne, Bearden, and Holty, painters unwilling to omit from their work recognizable objects, who still painted from nature, simply did not conform to the new attitude and intention, as initially and fundamentally proposed in Rosenberg's essay for the Galerie Maeght exhibition more than two years earlier.

The Kootz show marked the earliest attempt by either gallery or museum to define those who were potentially the best painters in the [Abstract Expressionist] movement. Kootz had carefully chosen those whose imagery could be classified into a coherent movement. Diverse as they were, in some manner all had derived their ideas, or said they did, from an "inward" source, and were, as a unified group, capable of initiating a pristine American school, The Intrasubjectives, for which the gallery, and by extension, Kootz himself, would be fittingly honored.

In his essay Kootz explained that intrasubjectivism meant a point of view, not an identical painting style among his artists. The show, although visually incomprehensible to most, became prophetic for its Surrealist-oriented abstraction and Kootz had hoped that the new movement, which at this point remained unnamed, would become known as the

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Intrasubjectives. To his lasting disappointment, the name did not catch on. Instead, the painters became known as the Abstract Expressionists, a term first used to describe the new contemporary American painting by the writer Robert Coates, in early March 1946.[11]

While Kootz no longer represented Browne, he still owned unsold works that he occasionally included in special shows, as he did in October with The Birds and the Beasts*, where, curiously, for all his bridling against nature, "nature" and the object made their reappearance in paintings by Picasso, Braque, Arp, Miró, Dubuffet, Calder, Hofmann, Hare, Baziotes, Gottlieb and Motherwell, as well as Browne and Holty.[12] Billed as "Strange and Wonderful," with juxtaposed subtitles and copy, such as "the likes of which have never been seen on land, in the air, under the sea," and "By World Renowned Artists (with a dubious bow to nature)," and "*(with, occasionally, a few ladies thrown in.)"[13] The asterisk-marked aside referred to that following the word Beasts in the main title. His sometimes absurd text aside, Kootz seemed to declare his joy at having once again an open public forum in which to exercise his showmanship and considerable promotional skills.

Altogether, Browne showed paintings in five exhibitions during 1949, the same number as the previous year when he was with the Kootz Gallery. He had proved to himself that he could function in the art market just as efficiently without the backing of his more

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11 Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries," The New Yorker, Vol. 22, no. 7, March 30, 1946, p. 83. This was the first use of the term, applied in a discussion of American painters. The coined name for the new painting, two words easy to put together and easier to understand when separated than the works to which it applied, caught on with the critics and public alike, and stayed, over the more vague phrase, New York School.

12 The Birds and the Beasts* by World Renowned Artists, New York, The Samuel Kootz Gallery, October 25-November 12, 1949.

13 Ibid. Specific works of art were not noted in the brochure.

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aggressive, sensation-seeking former dealer. His final show for the year came with his participation in the Annual at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in which Aphrodite, (Fig. 8-3) 1948, a string collage and oil on canvas painting representing a version of the crustacean, was exhibited.[14] Still, there is no record that even one painting had been sold during that year.

Browne opened his third solo exhibition for Grand Central Moderns at the end of January 1951.[15] Included among the twelve works was Clown with Mask, (Fig. 8-20), painted the previous year, the reproduction of which appeared in black and white on the inside cover of the exhibition catalogue. The following statement, comprising its only text, proclaimed his current philosophy

> The will of the Gods of many centuries and the knowledge today of the scientific order of the Universe have become one and the same thing. Painting, now as always, the calling card of a civilization, reflects this. It is attempting to depict the exactitudes and relationships of the Great Project, and insinuate those Mysteries which are not readily accepted by the human mind. What lies behind the object has become of utmost importance.
>
> Today, man has seen vast new horizons, new galaxies thru a two hundred inch telescope and new revelations thru powerful microscopes. Should there be any doubt that all this would have its affect upon painting? We are dealing with new Symbols, grappling with the realisms of our times. Internal Truths, eternally the backbone of Art, are being dealt with again.[16]

Browne's use of capitalized words in his statement is telling, for not only does he ask the viewer or reader to understand that he probed beneath reality to bring to light

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[14] The 1949 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, December 16, 1949-February 5, 1950.

[15] Byron Browne: 12 Paintings, New York, Grand Central Moderns, January 24-February 7, 1951.

[16] Ibid. Browne's statement is quoted in full.

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another kind of physicality but that this newly-discovered internality, as symbolic as it appears on canvas, must be considered equally "real" and "truthful." By his comment "grappling with the realisms of our times," Browne places himself in direct opposition to and purposely refutes the contradictory objectives of the New York School painters.

While the language seems too euphemistically couched for today's readers, his position within the art world of that moment could not be more emphatically set forth: the object remains valid and reality, even when seen through the wonderful tools of the scientist, is fitting subject matter for the artist. For Browne, as a contemporary painter who functioned in an increasingly outspoken artistic milieu that sought above all to negate reference to the object, it is a statement of defiance as well as one of personal defense. Still, his scorn proved no match for the driving onslaught against which he contended: the artist masterminded by an increasingly powerful media that included partisan critics as well as art dealers.[17]

A gradual change took place in Browne's style in the 1950s so that by 1954, a departure from all previous work can be recognized. Cubist space, while remaining his foundation, slowly relaxed as he began to thin his colors, allowing them to flow unconstrained from shape to shape. In addition, quickly applied slashing brushstrokes began to compete with his usual carefully-considered application of pigments. Sparked perhaps by what he observed of the slashing techniques of other current painters, such as de Kooning and Kline, his was an evolution marked by numerous transitions from the figurative to semi-abstract,

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17 One cannot overlook the significance of writer/critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, who played major roles in overthrowing the dominance of the School of Paris, replacing it with American painting of the New York School. Such critics organized shows for galleries and hand picked artists to be included, then followed up by critically reviewing the shows for journals and art periodicals. Through these maneuvers, they wielded enormous power to sway opinion in the art milieu of this time.

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and nonrepresentational, and back again to the figurative. While these leaps from one mode to another had been constants in his development, it is with the above changes in mind that Browne's innovations become apparent. This is particularly so with his nonrepresentational work. Although he continued to insist that the object stood behind every work, visually much of his output from the 1950s belies this stance.

In the following transitional paintings Browne retains both his familiar figurative shapes combined with abstract symbolic components, the latter weighing the stronger: Autumnal (Fig. 8-21), Abstract (Fig. 8-22), 1950, and Africana (Fig. 8-23), 1950-51, where Browne "turpentines down" his pigments so thinly that in controlled accidents, his color washes spill down the canvas surface to dissipate where they will.

In this, one is reminded of the manner in which Arshile Gorky worked his pigments late in his career. It would seem that Browne may have reconsidered the rawer aspects of his methods. Now more three years deceased, Gorky's reputation had risen considerably for his advanced abstraction and for his unique application of paint thinned to the consistency of watercolor pigments. Earlier, Browne would have wiped the drips from his painting as unacceptably messy and lacking "finish." One also notes Browne's greater inclination to scumble the paint, allowing glimpses through to the gessoed ground beneath. This new ease, allowing drips to occur and remain, while no longer innovative, marked a fresh attitude for Browne. Still, it would take three more years for him to liberate his work from entrenched attitudes about "right ways" to create a painting.

By 1959, his emotionally charged brushwork resulted in imagery totally freed from any constraint. The following oil paintings demonstrate this remarkable progression: Myth (No. 1), 1954 (Fig. 8-24), Tondero (referring to a Peruvian folk dance), 1954 (Fig. 8-25), Abstract, 1954 (Fig. 8-26), Still Life in Red, 1955 (Fig. 8-27), Nuclear, 1956

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(Fig. 8-28), Fiesta, 1958 (Fig. 8-29), and Procession (No. 2), 1959 (Fig. 8-30), India ink and gouache on paper. These abrupt changes through the decade demontrate his sheer joy in taking a loaded brush and swiping its bristles down the canvas face in a purely emotional response to paint. One might also consider that Browne's application of paint reflected his duplication of the brushwowrk of Abstract Expresssionism, a catch-up effort too late.

That Browne was no longer represented by the Kootz Gallery did not prevent the dealer from trying to sell the work he still owned, as already demonstrated. Recall that Browne had given Kootz 322 paintings and works on paper in his three years instead of the 120 his contract stipulated, at forty works per year. How many paintings and watercolors sold during those years remained and still remains a mystery, for Browne unwisely made little effort to keep track of his sales, although he made a list of the titles, their dates and medium as he completed them. Kootz was always secretive in such matters. Most dealers covet the names of their clients and collectors, preferring never to allow access to their files, even to those who created the work. In one degree or another, this cloak of secrecy prevails still. Later, when pressed for this information, Kootz refused to disclose it.

One surmises that he still held a sizable inventory of Browne's work, and Holty's as well, and that this inventory had become a burden, given the type of painting he now promoted. Gallery storage space may also have become a vexing problem considering the increasingly larger formats chosen by New York School painters. Thus, in order to recoup some remuneration for these holdings, he organized a special exhibition, a champagne gala and one-night sale for select clients, of 100 paintings by Byron Browne and Carl Holty, on the evening of May 23, 1951.[18] All canvases were marked down to $300 each; their value,

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[18] Carl Holty was another of the original members of the Kootz Gallery who had signed a contract but was not retained when the gallery reopened in 1949.

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Kootz said, ranged from $700 to $1500. Using copy that rang of department store advertising language, Kootz requested in his "never-to-be-repeated sale" that you "limit your purchases to two pictures, preferably one to a customer."[19]

One questions the ethics of this kind of "bargain" sale jargon, where "merchandise" consists of painters's original creations. Moreover, Kootz never bothered to inform Browne that his work would be offered under such belittling circumstances. The irony of the situation surfaced when, despite Kootz's clever advertising techniques, the art buying public stayed home. The sale was, in his words, "a flop." Undaunted, Kootz refused to give up. He found another, far more cruel method to divest himself of stock by artists who no longer interested him. The results of his next enterprise dealt devastating and permanent blows to the reputations and self-images of both Byron Browne and Carl Holty, the only painters involved.

The nightmare began the following November 4, when there appeared a full-page advertisement in the widely-read Sunday New York Times, announcing a special sale at the well-known Gimbels Department Store on 33rd Street of many works by Browne and Holty at "50% off the dealer's list price" (Figs. 8-31, 8-32).[20] Browne's The Juggler, a

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19 This text appeared on the announcement and invitation card to the dealer's one-night sale. On the card's reverse Kootz printed a blank order form and enclosed a return envelope. He requested his customers to "sign and return it, for in doing so, he would place their name on his list of purchasers and on the evening of the sale/party that customer would make his choice in order of the receipt of subscriptions. He urged each customer to "send in his order as rapidly as possible."

20 "Gimbels sale of fine modern paintings by Byron Browne and by Carl Holty 50% off dealer's list price," The New York Times, sect. 1, p. 22, 4 November 1951. Other newspapers were given press releases and reported the news of the sale, such as the New York Herald Tribune, "Gimbels Shows Paintings of Contemporary Artists," 2 November 1951, which gave the story three short undistinguished paragraphs. Surprisingly, this announcement appeared two days earlier than that of the Times and caused no furor. The straight forward report did not call attention to itself and made no

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watercolor of an acrobatic clown standing on his head, "complete with recessed wormwood frame," was included in the announcement; a large block of advertising copy ran next to it, on the right. Each of the forty works by Browne, oils and watercolors, was listed by title, size, dealer's list price and Gimbels's markdown price. Still, Kootz retained many more Browne paintings and drawings than he gave to Gimbels to sell and at this writing they have not been accounted for.

The Sunday readers's attention was also attracted by a clever, eye-catching line drawing of a snooty tuxedo-clad gentleman, an "uptown" art dealer, standing with his nose high in the air in front of a stanchioned-off gallery wall upon which hung abstract caricatured penline sketches of some of the sale paintings. Beside the little drawing the text read: "sorry . . . no funereal atmosphere, no velvet ropes . . . no attendants to tell you to shush. Gimbels has a sale, not a mere exhibit, of important modern art."

The advertising copy described Browne's work as "brilliant, happy paintings," stating that both he and Holty were "two of the country's best abstractionists." The sale, organized by Kootz but orchestrated and promoted by the store, took place on the seventh floor the next day, Monday. It was, as the copy stated, "aimed to acquaint the buying public with the work of modern abstractionists." "Gimbels hopes that the exhibit will enable the artists to reach a larger audience than might be possible in an art gallery."[21]

As might be expected the incident soon turned into a public scandal and before the episode was over it had effected extraordinary damage to Browne's career. Almost immediately many collectors of his work began telephoning Grand Central Moderns

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mention of the offensive "50% off" copy used by the Times.

21 Ibid.

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wanting to sell their paintings back to the dealer, for they now felt his work was nearly worthless. Incredulous friends called to say that they had seen the ad and wondered why he had allowed his work "that kind" of publicity.

Unwisely and inadvertently Browne himself had "agreed" to the Gimbels's sale. Long prior to the event, Kootz requested permission by telephoning him and asking if he would mind very much if he tried to realize some money on a portion of the pictures he held by having a sale at "a very fine (but unspecified) department store." It was to have been "beautifully handled" and he would "have nothing to worry about," so his former dealer promised. Thus Browne, despite the shabby way he had been treated, did not object to the manner in which Kootz presented the idea to him at the time of their conversation. Unwittingly, he gave his consent, presumably because he still naively wanted to trust rather than disparage their former relationship.

There is no way to convey the shock and anguish Browne felt upon opening the Sunday paper and seeing his name emblazoned in large boldface type directly above the "50% off" sign. Justifiably enraged, Browne immediately telephoned his former dealer but the phone was never answered and, being Sunday, Gimbels was closed. According to his son Stephen, his father was so sickened by the department store ad that he refused to go to see the presentation. His wife, Rosalind, went instead and discovered that there was no "show" or opening, as a gallery would have organized. She found her husband's paintings stacked on the floor one behind the other in the picture frame department; not one work had been hung on the wall.[22] Although the advertisement listed each title, size and price,

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[22] That these paintings were sold on the seventh floor seems peculiar in that Gimbels for years had a fine arts collection department on their fifth floor where the atmosphere would have been more conducive to such a sale.

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she said that there was no way to locate a specific work except to paw through the stacks one by one. Typical of any department store's method of ridding itself of sale goods, Rosalind vividly recalled that the paintings were "insensitively strewn all over the floor like pieces of junk." [23] "They might just as well have been pots and pans or articles of clothing, furniture or rugs."[24]

Beyond subjecting Browne's career as well as his crushed ego to devastating consequences, the incident also outraged much of the art world, prompting The Art Digest, in its December 1st issue, to carry a full page editorial by its editor in chief, Belle Krasne. Krasne's statement, while entirely sympathetic to Browne's situation, failed in part to provide a clear picture of what actually happened and in doing so distorted the issue. Her editorial is reprinted in its entirety for the light it sheds on the situation, as understood from several perspectives

December 1, 1951

GAMBLES AND GIMBELS

> A reputation is a rather intangible thing. A livelihood is a little more concrete. Recently there has been talk about an alleged injury to the reputations and livelihoods of two contemporary American artists. This talk raised a few provocative questions.
>
> The talk started in mid-November, shortly after Gimbel Brothers department store in New York took a quarter page [the space occupied a full page] of The New York Times to advertise as nobody, but nobody except Gimbels can, a 50 per cent discount sale of paintings by Byron Browne and Carl Holty. How, then, did Gimbels come by those paintings?
>
> Several years ago, Samuel Kootz, owner of the Kootz Gallery, conducted his business on the French plan that is, by contracting his artists,

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23 Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, Tape Recorded Reminiscence, Kootz Dumping of Browne, New York City, 1971. Copy (typed) of transcription of unpublished comments of Rosalind Browne. Copy of transcript provided by Estate of Byron Browne to author for educational purposes.

24 Ibid.

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paying them a flat sum per year in return for ownership of their annual output. Holty and Browne, then under a five-year contract with Kootz, were required to turn out a minimum of 40 paintings per year in return for their guaranteed annual stipend. Browne's income from Kootz was fixed at $2,500 during the first year of the contract and stepped up to $3000 during the second year. During the third year, the plan was scrapped. Since the dealer pleaded bankruptcy, Browne explains, the artists under contract to him had no recourse but to accept severance.

Though, by terms of his contract, Browne was obliged to turn over to Kootz only 120 paintings during their three-year association, he actually supplied the dealer with 322 items, including oils, temperas, and drawings. Questioned about this, he explained that he is a prolific painter, that he was enthusiastic about the plan. He adds, too: "If I'd been a better businessman, I wouldn't have gone into the deal," a sentiment echoed by the dealer.

Last spring, Kootz, who no longer represents either Browne or Holty, decided that he would try to realize some of his original investment in these two artists, an investment which was, and still is, largely tied up in paintings. In his own gallery, the dealer staged a private discount sale of Holty and Browne work. The sale flopped.

More recently, Kootz decided to give Gimbels an option on the paintings. Though he did not consult the artists about his own sale, he did ask them about the one at Gimbels, promising, according to Browne, that the pictures would be sold in a "dignified" manner. "What could I say," Byron Browne comments. Kootz could put the pictures up at auction, which would be worse for me."

What both Browne and Kootz (and presumably Holty, although he was not available for comment) failed to account for in this transaction was Gimbels. If Kootz had contracted with Tiffany's to sell the work, all interests might have rested comfortably in the knowledge that the matter would be handled discretely and decorously, if not successfully. But the work did not go to Tiffany's on consignment; it went to Gimbels. And Gimbels, as anyone knows, makes no fetish of decorum or dignity or, for that matter, esthetics. At Gimbels, Art is art.

All things considered, the big department store showed an unprecedented degree of restraint in its splashy newspaper announcement of the sale. The copy for the ad will probably serve as a model for future generations of department store publicity men. It reads,

"Sorry, no funereal atmosphere, no velvet ropes, no attendants to tell you to shush . . . Gimbels has a sale, not a mere exhibit, of important modern art . . . 50% off dealers's list price.

"Gimbels loves modern art (we like the Mona Lisa, too, but she's 150 years old), but we don't spell art with a capital A. The mention of the word doesn't send us into awe-struck silence. We think fine paintings are just as logical in a department store as they are in a hushed, plushed gallery. That's why Gimbels jumped at the chance when one of the best-known uptown art galleries decided to let us sell paintings of two of the country's

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best abstractionists. You won't find this store that sold the Hearst collection sitting around on ten-year-old laurels. But are our prices the same as the uptown galleries'? The answer is 'not very likely!' Gimbels doesn't see any reason why we can't save you money on a fine original painting as easily as on a pot or a pan, or a pair of nylons . . . ."

This was the ad that started the rumpus. It did not, however, start a run on the work of either artist. Gimbels found buyers for seven Browne watercolors. Altogether the sale included 40 of Browne's paintings, 59 of Holty's. In the store, Browne reports, the paintings were displayed rummage style in the company of gilded mirrors, fixtures and other home furnishings. Gimbels lived up to its promise: no velvet ropes, no attendants, no exhibit, just a sale.

There is no telling what would have happened if Gimbels had sold out its consignment of paintings. But since Kootz failed to sell the work at reduced rates to a selective market, there was no reason to expect that Gimbels would sell it to a public which was still fairly hostile to abstract art.

It was probably with the bitter taste of disappointment in his mouth that Browne decided to take the matter to [Artists] Equity. Equity countered with the following letter to Bernard J. Gimbel,

"We wish to call your attention to a recent advertisement by Gimbel Brothers in the New York Times. . . .

" Allow us to explain that we are heartily in accord with the attempt to promote sales of contemporary art in a department store. We must, however, express our concern with the method of advertising and presenting the work of these artists.

"The physical presentation of the work is shabby and without dignity. The fact that a large body of work by two living American artists is thrown on the market, sensationally advertised at half-price, and placed in the class of pots, pans and nylons, is injurious to the reputation and livelihood of the artists involved. We assume that Gimbel Brothers took part in this promotion without fully considering the economic effect on these two artists. . . .

"Since the issue here involved is moral and ethical, we are appealing to you to:

1. Withdraw from this type of advertising, in relation to this promotion.

2. In any future promotion of sales of paintings by living artists, to fully consider the economic consequences to the artists before participating in a sales campaign.

"We are inclined to place full responsibility for a situation like this on the art dealer, rather than on the store, since, by his experience, he is in a better position to understand the effect of such a sale on the artist. . . . " [25]

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25 The reader is cautioned that since no copy exists of Equity's original letter to the department store owner, and none was found among the Browne papers, the foregoing quotation from the periodical may not be the complete text.

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> Art dealing is a relatively new concept. But unless contemporary artists get an unexpected windfall in the form of federal subsidy, art dealers are convenient and necessary. The dealer is in a businessman's position. And for the businessman, art is a commodity.
>
> Some years ago, Kootz invested in a group of artists--obviously because he had faith in their ability to make his investment good. He supported them during a period of their development. Practically speaking, he was not being an altruist; but as long as there is a dealer's livelihood to consider as well as an artist's, there is little room for altruism in art dealing.
>
> After a time, Kootz found that he could not sell the work he bought. He could not sell it at market price; nor could he sell it at cut rate. He couldn't sell it to collectors; couldn't sell it back to the artists; couldn't even sell it to the artists' new dealers. His problem for which he claims he will accept any equitable solution -- was how to dispose of the paintings he owned without damage to himself, to his gallery, or to the artists.
>
> Thus, the dilemma. On the one hand there is the artist; on the other hand there is the dealer. Both need a livelihood; each feeds off the activities of the other. And so long as the artist is subsidized by a dealer, he faces the prospect of being unceremoniously dumped in the event that his particular commodity proves to be unmarketable. Regardless of what we expect of dealers, we cannot expect them to operate as patron saints.
>
> Perhaps there is no immediate remedy. Perhaps a solution is a long way off. But until then, if the non-subsidy dealer-artist relationship which has been adopted generally in this country is not the best arrangement, at least it insures the artist against the worst aspects of business dealings and, at the same time, insures the dealer in his big art speculation gamble.[26]

Browne certainly had no quarrel with The Art Digest. Still, Krasne, in her effort to describe the situation fairly, innocently but erroneously printed the dealer's reasons for conducting the public discount sale of Browne's work without investigating the validity of Kootz's statements. Kootz, in his declaration that after a time he found he " . . . could not sell the work he bought . . . . " failed to mention the many paintings by Browne that he did sell over the three-year period.

Kootz intermittently reported sales to the family during each season. Not only did he realize assets well over his original investment and thus suffered no loss through the

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[26] Belle Krasne, "Gambles and Gimbels," The Art Digest, Vol. 26, no. 5, 1 December 1951, P. 5.

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artist's work but Browne came to his gallery in 1945 as the best known of the six artists Kootz signed and was, according to the dealer who often proclaimed it aloud, his "best selling painter" during their association. A case in point, Browne's first two shows sold out. At receptions and other functions where his artists were present, Kootz frequently introduced Browne as such to collectors, a comment that was unfortunately overheard more than once by the other painters, causing jealousy and much unspoken resentment against Browne.[27]

Browne felt that the "lull" in sales was a sudden one, brought on only by the dealer's questionable and undeniably offensive methods of marketing his work. However true, that may not have been the underlying reason, for by late 1951, the escalating reputation, if not sales, of the new type of painting by those of the New York School, had already begun to push aside artists like Browne and Holty, who continued to premise their work on the recognizable object in nature.[28] Dealers, such as Samuel Kootz and a handful of others, banking on the new painting, must be blamed in large part for systematically shutting them out of contention through lack of promotion and exposure or by denying them gallery affiliation.

After having read Krasne's editorial Rosalind Browne, always the more articulate member of family and one quicker to anger and more likely to respond with action when

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[27] It is feasible that a certain amount of resentment on the part of the current gallery stable rose against Browne (and Holty) for the amount of time their dealer spent showing his clientele works by painters he no longer represented, which prevented him from devoting full effort toward promoting the art of the current group.

[28] As an example of such a sale, in early 1949, the Whitney Museum of American Art purchased Adolph Gottlieb's Vigil, 1948, a symbolic compartmentalized canvas. Even while he was with the first Kootz Gallery, Gottlieb's work tended to move toward new directions.

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need arose, began early in December to compose what she termed a "retraction." However, she clearly meant it as a rebuttal, intended for publication in the next issue of The Art Digest, in order to show how their editor had unknowingly introduced adverse and false information about the Gimbel's fiasco.[29] Simultaneously, she wrote a personal letter to Belle Krasne explaining the wording of her rebuttal, while for the first time pinning much of the blame on gallery politics. Mrs. Browne was extremely worried that the false information would do further damage to her husband's reputation and she made no effort to conceal their opinion of Samuel Kootz. Her personal letter of explanation, far different in tone than the rebuttal text she intended for publication, is here summarized and quoted in part

> Mr. Kootz did loose money on some of his artists but my husband was not one of them. In fact he called Byron "my best seller." Any capital gained through his present attempts to dispose of the paintings is pure gravy.[30]

Midway into her letter, Mrs. Browne makes a most poignant and revealing comment

> Another point: My husband was not dumped because his work was unmarketable but because the existing stable felt that he and Mr. Holty had ideological differences with them. It was pure gallery politics. In other words they (Browne and Holty) were not intra-subjectivists.[31]

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[29] Although Mrs. Browne's corrections would have set the story straight, her rebuttal never saw publication, in part because while it praised Krasne's efforts to "describe the situation fairly," it nevertheless chastised the editor for printing false information. Certainly the chief editor realized that, although she had indeed presented erroneous information, however innocently, she did not wish to be placed in an unfavorable light under any circumstance.

[30] Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, Letter to Belle Krasne, New York, December 1951, courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne.

[31] Ibid. Mrs. Browne's allusion to "intra-subjectives" refers to the title of the first exhibition Samuel Kootz organized following his gallery's reopening in September 1949, The Intrasubjectives. The new painting had not been categorized or named as yet; Kootz

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> Though your information was offered with the best of intentions and journalistic honesty, you unconsciously introduced adverse and false information about my husband that can do him further damage. The fact that Mr. Kootz led you to believe that he suffered a loss with Mr. Browne's work proves conclusively his lack of ethics. Though I have no legal evidence to prove the reasons for Mr. Kootz's financial set backs, I know that he invested heavily in certain foreign painters--I know at the time he could not afford the investment.[32] He is in effect blackballing my husband with other galleries by making it appear that Byron's work is unmarketable. I resent Mr. Kootz making my husband a scapegoat for losses he suffered elsewhere.[33]
>
> My husband was extremely honorable in his relations with Mr. Kootz and more than generous. He believed in Mr. Kootz -- he exulted in the profit Mr. Kootz was making, because he believed it was for his eventual good.
>
> May I appeal to you to rectify the misinformation you published about my husband's work being unmarketable and causing Mr. Kootz to suffer a loss. The evidence to the contrary is in our hands and at your disposal.[34]

The last sentence referred to a previous comment in her letter, that Browne possessed a list of the collectors of his work (only those of which he had knowledge) during the time he was with the gallery. While it was but a partial list, it amounted to one substantial enough to determine the margin of profit the dealer made on his investment at the time, and supported Browne's contention that, indeed, Kootz profited handsomely from the sales of his work.

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labeled those painters thus and he hoped the name would catch on. As history shows, it did not.

[32] Rosalind, as she edited text, had drawn a pencil line through this sentence.

[33] Ibid. The foregoing sentence had been hand written between paragraphs of her typed text.

[34] Ibid. From the draft copy of Mrs. Browne's personal letter to Belle Krasne, December 1951. Mrs. Browne also prepared a rebuttal to The Art Digest editorial, intended for publication, which she enclosed in the same envelope as her letter to Belle Krasne. The rebuttal was never published and she received no further written communication from Krasne, as far as is known.

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Rosalind's referral to "intra-subjective" would tend to clarify several aspects of Browne's life that heretofore remained conjecture. Recall that The Intrasubjectives was the title of the initial exhibition of the reopened Kootz Gallery. In the show were twelve carefully chosen men then considered to be among the most avant-garde American painters of the moment, artists who claimed to cull their imagery from both their subconscious and their emotional depths. Kootz had eliminated all artists who derived their imagery from aspects of Cubism and who still clung to the natural world, the "outside" world, rather than exploration from "inside" their psyche subconscious, for subject matter. In the words of Harold Rosenberg, who wrote the catalogue essay for this exhibition

> At a certain moment, American painters one after the other began to consider the canvas as an arena in which to act out their emotions rather than a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or `express' an actual or imagined object. Thus the canvas was no longer the medium for a picture so much as an event.[35]

By 1949, that moment had arrived. Certainly Browne's opinions toward what constituted a good painting did not coincide with those of the artists whom Rosenberg and Kootz termed the "Intrasubjectives." In reality, Kootz and certain others within the gallery began to shut him out before the opening of his final solo exhibition; it is likely that he had been slated to be dropped long prior to its closing.

Rosalind Browne's comment regarding the bias against Browne by the Kootz Gallery stable for his unyielding attitude toward retention of the object and the natural world as fundamental to painting would be difficult to question, given what is known

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[35] The Intrasubjectives, Harold Rosenberg, essay, New York, Kootz Gallery, September 14-October 1, 1949, n.pag. The statement was republished in, Harold Rosenberg, The Tradition of the New, Chicago, University of Chicago, (1959), 1982, p. 25.

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today of the history of the Eighth Street Club and the rise of the New York School.[36] The ostracism, surfacing in the late 1940s and early 1950s, of artists opposed to the sentiments of the Abstract Expressionists, namely that of their blanket rejection of European-oriented painting and modernist, especially Cubist stylistic traditions, became overt reality by late 1950, when these ideological differences began to ruin careers of those who thought otherwise.[37]

Robert Motherwell, who had been adversely reviewed by the French critics (as was Browne) in the Galerie Maeght show of 1947, for his mimicking--"badly"--French

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[36] Sandler, The Triumph, pp. 216-217. The Eighth Street Club or The Club, so named for its location on that street in Greenwich Village, was founded in the fall of 1949 and functioned throughout the 1950s. It remained the principal gathering place of the Abstract Expressionists for their discussions. A diverse and frequently divided group regarding their aesthetic approaches to art, its members found it impossible to promote a focussed aesthetic agenda or point of view. The major, if not the only cohesive point about which they all seemed to agree was the issue of the differences between American and French art and the merits of each. Harold Rosenberg and Samuel Kootz tried, with The Intrasubjectives exhibition, to give the group the cohesive status of a movement.

Membership required an artist be sponsored by a current member and then approved by committee. Members were selected primarily for their social compatibility rather than by how they painted; conversation and participation in the discussions was mandatory. Philip Pavia, the aggressive treasurer of the Club, and dominating member (called the "hatchetman" by some), arranged the speakers's programs. While most members were abstractionists, gesture painters, like de Kooning predominated. The group, whose numbers approached sixty by 1950, promoted openness yet they little tolerated formal analysis or pictorial fact or discussions of a "look" to their works; bitter personality conflicts frequently resulted from their blunt remarks and ego-saturated bombast. Originally meant to be private and informal, soon the Club became a public entity, with invited speakers and, after 1951, panels of artists discussed various topics. Their provocative programs soon attracted critics, art historians, dealers and collectors. Little wonder that Browne shunned this group from the outset, given his loathing for self-expression, explanation of his philosophy and argumentative discourse.

[37] Artists who had previously enjoyed the recognition that accompanied reasonably or even highly successful careers found themselves with fewer or no clients; many commercial galleries lowered the values of work created by these artists or ceased to represent them at all. The reputations of all artists who did not convert in some manner to the stylistic canon of the "new" art found themselves relegated to near oblivion, their status that of historical, not contemporary.

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painting, now just as openly and vehemently opposed the styles of the School of Paris he once so desperately strove to make his own. He spoke out as well against those American artists who followed still. There is ample reason to believe that this attitude carried over in his relationships with fellow painters in the Kootz Gallery. His preference or more specifically, prejudice, caused an overt cooling in his dealings with Browne, Bearden and Holty and an overt distancing from them socially. This distance widened as he and several other gallery members began to absorb and practice Surrealist teachings, above all, the recently learned method of subconscious, psychologically induced "doodling" or "scribbling," the automatic writing of automatism.

The new avenue to subject matter, so recently learned by the Americans from within the tight-knit circle over which Breton presided, immediately separated those who practiced it from those who did not; Motherwell and Baziotes from the Kootz Gallery became apostles. While few American painters responded to the aloof Breton, who spoke only French and who expected them to want to be part of his clique, Motherwell spoke fluent French, making himself compatible to the Breton clique from the outset. In 1951, Motherwell counterpoised the "American" styles of certain painters of the new art in an exhibition he organized in Beverly Hills, California, making it all the more apparent that the Abstract Expressionists early on did establish a pantheon.[38]

Kootz, who was in France when The Art Digest published Krasne's editorial in the December 1, 1951 issue, responded in kind by sending them a copy of the letter he had written to the New York Artists Equity Association, after he received their carbon copy of

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38 The School of New York, Robert Motherwell, essay, Beverly Hills, CA, Perls Gallery, January 11-February 7, 1951, n.pag. The painting styles, new to California audiences, were not well received. Also see, Irving Sandler, The Triumph of Abstract Expressionism, New York, Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 269, 276.

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complaint to Bernard Gimbel, written on Browne's behalf. Browne had appealed for help and advice to the Association, a nonprofit organization founded in 1947, to further economic, cultural, legislative and legal interests of artists, and to this day does still.

In its response, Artists Equity blamed Kootz entirely for allowing the sale of Browne's work at Gimbels, an accusation that intensely angered the dealer, who then defended his actions through a subsequent rebuttal. A copy of the original letter written on store letterhead, which Mr. Gimbel sent to Equity, was never found among Browne's papers, presuming Equity's attorneys had forwarded a copy to him. The letter was subsequently published within the text of Belle Krasne's editorial that appeared in the December 1st issue.[39]

In its January 1, 1952 issue, The Art Digest published the complete text of Kootz's rebuttal letter in its "Letters to Editor" section.[40]

GAMBLES AND GIMBELS AND KOOTZ

> To the Editor: I regret I was in France when your editorial "Gambles and Gimbels" appeared (Digest, Dec.1). Since the Gimbel sale has been given such prominent editorial notice, it seems to me that certain facts should be set straight.
>
> First, and most important, this was my answering letter sent to Artists Equity when I received a carbon of their letter to Gimbels:
>
> "Gentlemen:
>
> "Your letter to Mr. Bernard Gimbel in reference to the sale of paintings by Byron Browne and Carl Holty was sent me in carbon form.
>
> "I am at a loss, since you place the blame of this sale upon my shoulders, why I was not asked about the circumstances of the sale.
>
> "For your information, both the artists, Holty and Browne, were

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39 See footnote 24 for the complete republished Gimbels' text. Recent inquiry regarding any documentation pertaining to this matter, that might have been in their Archives could not be located by the present executive director of Artists Equity, Regina Stewart.

40 Samuel M. Kootz, Letter, "Gambles and Gimbels and Kootz," The Art Digest, Vol. 26, no. 7, January 1, 1952, p. 4.

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informed of this sale last spring, and their permission and agreement upon the sale was secured by me before I accepted Gimbels offer to have the sale. Your letter implied such a sale was done without the artists' knowledge; this will clarify that point.

"You comment that the issue involved is *moral and ethical.* I do not recall any members of your organization protesting to me that I was doing anything wrong morally or ethically when I, acting only on my own judgment, purchased the paintings of these two men for several years. This, at the time, seemed a fine solution to the artists' economic problems.

"I no longer handle these artists, and I find no demand for their work from my customers. In such a situation *what would Equity suggest* as an escape from economic suicide? An investment such as this becomes throttling to the Gallery's progress and existence unless it can be freed and the money used in the continuous conduct of the Gallery.

"I have given much thought to a method of selling these paintings by Holty and Browne. The sale at Gimbels was obviously one of desperation upon my part, an attempt to recapture money I have laid out--a situation explained to the artists, and intelligently appraised by them.

"We now find that Gimbels also cannot sell these paintings. Whether their presentation was bad I cannot say; I feel that every retail concern has its own manner of doing business, and attracts or repels customers through that manner. However, it is through that manner that it achieves and retains its reputation. For that reason, I have left the presentation to Gimbels, just as I would expect a new artist in my gallery to accept my manner of presenting his work.

"Perhaps Equity may have a suggestion as to the disposal of these paintings. I am ready at any time to be assisted in selling them"

[To the editor] I have never received an answer from Artists Equity to the above letter.

Samuel M. Kootz
Kootz Gallery
New York, N. Y.[41]

If Samuel Kootz's letter contained additional comments about the situation, the periodical deleted them in deference to space consideration. It is noteworthy that Kootz continued to stress the issue of his financial losses through his investment in the paintings he claimed he could not sell--his attempt to "recapture money he has laid out." Never had the dealer acknowledged, even to Browne, that his original investment in his paintings, paid

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[41] Ibid.

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through weekly stipends for three years, had long since been recovered. What galled Kootz most was the idea of the money he perceived he could make from the remaining stock.

When he read Kootz's published reply, Browne angrily dashed off a terse handwritten note to his former dealer: "I didn't intend my agreement to you of the Gimbels sale to be interpreted as an admission on my part that you were attempting to recoup money lost on your investment of me."[42] He heavily underlined the words, "recoup money." His note went unacknowledged.

To compound the issue, Edith Gregor Halpert, the director of the well-known Downtown Gallery, which specialized in paintings by American Realists, added to the fray with her letter to the editor regarding the Kootz scandal and its repercussions for her own gallery's approach to business; The Art Digest published it in the December 15, 1951 issue.[43]

As an art dealer, Halpert was interested because she had recently opened what she formally termed the Ground-Floor Room, an exhibition space in which she embarked on an experimental buying program, in which she gave each artist a guarantee of purchases each year, plus all costs of presentation and promotion, that she hoped would set a new standard of gallery practice beneficial to them. Artists, apprehensive that what had happened to Browne could just as well happen to them, spoke openly about the situation for they, too, were just as beholden to their dealers and equally vulnerable to the whims of market and personality. Halpert immediately set out to assuage any possibility of a growing distrust by artists of their dealers. While her concern may have been self-motivated, she set forth a

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[42] Copy of this note courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne.

[43] Edith Gregor Halpert, Letter, "No Gambles at Downtown," The Art Digest, Vol. 26, no. 6, 15 December 1951, p.4.

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reasoned argument for the dealer/artist relationship in general when she wrote

> The picture you [Belle Krasne] presented in the editorial, while factual, is so angled that it is prejudicial to the store and more so to the dealer. We are naturally concerned, since our method may be interpreted within the same classification.
>
> In the Ground-Floor Room, we are giving each artist a guarantee of purchases each year, plus all costs off presentation and promotion. The artists are giving the gallery options or four years further to purchase outright from their production, paying on an annually rising scale. The prices are mutually agreed upon. The artists have been told that the aim of the venture is to attract the less experienced and more adventurous buyer, to widen the art-market, and that consequently we must buy at low prices in order to sell at equally low prices. The guarantee means that the artist had the security of our faith and a minimum income, with no demand on amount of production or on aesthetic direction. The gallery pays more for pictures by the less productive artist, at prices commensurate with the artist's prolificacy, selling at comparable prices. Hence, we do not expect to find ourselves glutted with forced production to fulfill an unreasonable contract. And because we have chosen nine artists at once--artists selected from thousands available, artists in whom we have strong faith on a long-term basis--we feel that our investment is sound. We consider it a slowly maturing "gilt-edge" security which may take years to show a profit. We consider it an opportunity for the artist to work under the most favorable conditions offered at this time. We feel that--if our judgment is true--the artist, the gallery, and the public, will benefit greatly. And we are sure that none of the paintings we buy will end up in a bargain basement. Our faith has paid off in the past. And the extraordinary response to the Ground-Floor Room gives indication that the system will be successful, and may in time become the accepted standard for galleries. . . .
> Edith Gregor Halpert, Director
> The Downtown Gallery
> New York, N. Y.[44]

While Halpert's letter was motivated by the ongoing, highly public Kootz scandal, her agenda was to set forth her gallery's policy toward the artists on its roster, in contrast to the method used by the Kootz Gallery. She believed hers would not only protect the

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[44] Ibid. Halpert's long letter to the editor has here been condensed for its irrelevance for purposes of this dissertation. While reiterating the Kootz Gallery practice of stipends for his artists's work, she had devoted much space to setting forth and explaining gallery practices used by various other dealers in their treatment of artists re consignment of work and in methods of selling it, information she felt was not generally available to the public at large or to artists themselves.

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gallery from overstock in the work of one artist but would also in the long run be more equitable to artists. Halpert pointed out that, "Neither the public, the press, nor many of the artists are familiar with the distinctions in current gallery practice, and assume that all dealers function alike." While this was and is still so, one of her comments upset Browne to the point he felt compelled to write to her, hoping that she would then better understand his difficult situation. The sentence provoking him reads as follows,

> A large majority automatically assume that the artist is always the victim. It is necessary, therefore, to point up the facts, to explain that even in the consignment system, the practice varies widely.[45]

On December 20, ten days before publication of the Kootz letter, Browne sent the following letter to Halpert, whom he had known for many years. In it Browne reiterates some of the concerns that Rosalind Browne pointed out in her rebuttal to Belle Krasne's editorial. Browne's contempt for his former dealer's behavior is clear; equally emphatic is his statement that Kootz made a great deal more money from the sale of is work than Browne originally believed,

> BYRON BROWNE 216 East 15th Street, New York 3, N. Y.
>
> December 20, 1951
>
> Edith Gregor Halpert
> Director, The Downtown Gallery
> New York, N. Y.
>
> Dear Mrs. Halpert;
> I naturally read your letter that appeared in the Art Digest of December 15th with great interest, since I was involved. I am sure there was no reflection cast on your new venture by the tone of the article that was written by Miss Belle Krasne. It is a known fact in the art world that there are such people as ethical and unethical dealers. Mr. Kootz happens to belong to the latter. Your artists, many of whom I am friendly with, speak of you in the most glowing terms.
>
> But to get to the real reason why I am writing to you. In the letter

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[45] Ibid.

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> you state the editorial was angled to be predudicial [sic.] to the dealer (Mr. Samuel Kootz). I would like to say that the statements issued by Kootz to Krasne are utterly false. I call your attention to one statement in particular. It reads as follows, "Last spring, Kootz decided he would try to realize some of his original investment....an investment which was, and still is, largely tied up in paintings". This statement, as far as I am concerned is highly erroneous and emphatically false. I was Mr. Kootz' best seller and I have facts and figures to prove it which I will impart to anyone who is interested. Mr. Kootz lost money on his investment in artists, But he did not lose [sic.] on ME. His present actions are highly unethical and he is merely trying to justify his attempts to get a fast dollar by putting my pictures up for sale at "reduced" prices in these "rummage" sales. Mr. Kootz made three to four times the amount he gave me.
>
> I have asked Belle Krasne to do something about those false statements, as I consider them very damaging to my reputation and verging on slander.
>
> Sincerely,
> Byron Browne[46]

Although no record exists of any ensuing response, one can be sure that some kind of communication resulted from one or the other, if not by letter then by a telephone conversation or through Browne visiting Halpert in her gallery. Still, by this time the unfortunate event that had happened in early November seemingly had been reduced to a nonproductive trail of letters, responses and counter responses that could never rectify the initial and continuing damage to both Browne's depressed spirit and his blemished reputation in the art world.

When the Brownes saw that the attorney for Artists Equity would do little more than write of their frustration, they took the case to Mrs. Browne's father's lawyer, Sidney Pollack, with the intention of pressing charges of slander against Samuel Kootz. Still, proceedings never materialized, for they had failed to take into consideration Pollack's complete unfamiliarity with the workings of the art world and laws pertaining to artists and dealers.

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[46] Byron Browne, Letter to Edith Gregor Halpert, 20 December 1951. Photocopy of the original letter courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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Pollack did not set to work on the case immediately and, although he composed an article intended for publication in The Art Digest, the final draft went unfinalized as late as mid-July 1952, when he sent it to Browne for approval. Pollock mailed the following letter to the Brownes, who by now were summering at their home in Provincetown, Cape Cod

Sidney Pollack
Counselor at Law

5 East 57th Street
New York, N. Y.
July 14, 1952

Mr. Byron Browne
602 Commercial Street
Provincetown, Massachusetts

Dear George and Rosalind:

As I told you I have not forgotten your matter and am enclosing a copy of an article that I am going to submit to the Art Digest for the purpose of publication.

This to me is the final draft, but, however, before doing anything further, I am sending the same to you for any notations or corrections which you may desire to insert.

I would appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience. May I at this time take the opportunity of wishing you a very pleasant summer.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely yours,
Sidney
Sidney Pollack[47]

Whether Browne approved Pollack's draft and whether the attorney ever sent it to the periodical is unknown. Ultimately, Pollack's text was never published and no copy has been located in Browne's records. It is doubtful that the article even reached the editor's desk at The Art Digest. With other more crucial events happening in Browne's life, nothing further seems to have done and the family let the matter rest for the time being. A Provincetown summer was in progress and with it an easing of some of the pain.

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[47] Sidney Pollack, Letter, 15 January 1954. Copy of letter courtesy the Estate of Byron Browne.

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Browne's lawyer let nearly two more years lapse before writing to him that he felt the case a lost cause. What becomes curious is that this correspondence between Pollack and Browne indicates that some kind of communication between parties and The Art Digest must have taken place, for underneath the letter's date was the heading: " RE: Byron Browne v Art Digest," evidence that the focus seems to have shifted from Kootz and Gimbels to the magazine, which earlier seemed Browne's sole refuge. That said, whatever did transpire was never documented or the documents had been purposely destroyed. Pollack's letter, written in January 1954, reads as follows

> Mr. Byron Browne
> 216 East 15th Street
> New York, 3, New York
>
> Dear Byron:
> I have been "horsing" around with the above matter for quite sometime. It seems that the only way to get some sort of definite satisfaction would be to institute a law suit.
>
> However, I feel that it would not warrant such proceedure [sic.]. Oh, yes, I appreciate and understand your feelings in the matter, but, from a very cold blooded realistic approach I can only advise you that nothing can be gained by starting and prosecuting an action.
>
> Since so much time has elapsed, it many well be, that the best policy is to let sleeping dogs lie.
>
> With kindest regards to yourself, Rosalind and Stevie, I am
>
> Sincerely yours,
> Sid
> Sidney Pollack[48]

With this letter, three years and two months following the Gimbels sale announcement in The New York Times, the matter died, as far as any further legal proceedings. Plainly, the attitude Pollack expressed in the last sentence reflected his feelings all along. Pollack knew Browne had no funds to spend on such a costly time-consuming action and that little likelihood existed of being paid for his legal efforts. The

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[48] Sidney Pollack, Letter to Byron Browne, 15 January 1954.

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costs of mounting a case of slander would have put Browne in debt for the rest of his life and most likely would have produced no winner. Samuel Kootz refused to open his books for Pollack and the lawyer let matters slide, and on the surface at least, a worn out Byron Browne did so, as well.

Still, no lawsuit could have mitigated the psychological blow Kootz's thoughtless action dealt Browne, nor could it have restored the reputation his work formerly enjoyed. Browne strove for most of the remainder of the decade to counteract the adverse commercial aspects and neglect of his work that ensued. The struggle to recover from the personal depression and damage that this episode caused continued. If anything, the psychological effects and bitter resentment grew stronger.

Although on the surface Browne never let on that the episode had deeply scarred him, at one point in an effort to erase the memories he destroyed his original contract with the Kootz Gallery and all other evidence he could find that referred to that time. This may account for the missing documentary links in this event. No amount of consolation from friends had alleviated Browne's anguish and after a time even they avoided discussing the matter for its pointlessness. Browne never fully recovered from the ramifications that plagued him to his death and, even after, his widow continued to pursue avenues of recourse.

In the interim, Browne's reputation had suffered irreparable damage. Slowly, collectors began to turn toward the new art, such was the growing power of the critics to sway opinion. His sales at Grand Central Moderns were down and fewer art reviewers covered his activities; his work never again enjoyed the former prestige of being considered advanced. The onslaught of the Abstract Expressionists obliterated any hope for a resurgence to the fore of his painting style and sensibilities. Rosalind Browne recalled that many artists lamented to her as well about the terrible thing that had

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happened to him but they, of course, were helpless to do anything about it.

Slowly, by seeking professional help through a prominent psychiatrist and collector of African tribal art, Dr. Emanuel Klein, Browne managed to overcome some of his personal depression and problems in coping day by day with his loss of the professional esteem he once commanded.[49] Browne arranged to pay his fees through gifts of art, such as the oil on canvas Mother and Child, 1949 (Fig. 8-33). That he continued to grow artistically, to find a niche and to recoup a position of respect in the art world demonstrated an innate desire and drive to overcome obstacles as best he could in order to be what was only possible for him to be.

Twenty years later in 1971, and a decade after Browne's death, Rosalind Browne, spoke into a tape recorder of this terrible period, narrating events as she recalled them. So extensive were her comments that it took two sixty-minute, double-sided cassettes to record them. Her intention, to provide as accurate an account as possible of the circumstances under which Browne first met Samuel Kootz until the events that led to the Gimbels episode that ended their relationship, was to provide future art historians an easier job of constructing the episode accurately from the bits of scattered information available.

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[49] Browne sought the help of Dr. Emanuel Klein for his deepening depression, a situation of which Mrs. Browne may not have been aware, for Browne was never open about personal matters, even to his wife. I was introduced in 1983 to his widow, Mrs. Sadie Klein, through Browne's son, Stephen, who understood that his father had sought treatment. When requested to do so, Mrs. Klein explained that she, by law, could not open and share the information in her husband's medical files, despite the fact that both Byron and Rosalind, as well as Dr. Klein, were deceased. She allowed me to photographed all the paintings that Browne had given the doctor in lieu of payments for his bills. Dr. Klein thus acquired many very fine works dating from 1949 until 1959, the date when Browne apparently ceased consulting the doctor, a period of ten years. Given the quantity, both oils and works on paper, it seems that Browne visited him frequently. He had also painted large realistic portraits of Mrs. Klein, and their then very young daughter, Norma, now a writer of children's books.

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Mrs. Browne minces no words and names those who, in her view, were directly or indirectly responsible for Browne's problems. The tape is rife with the politics of the period and the scenario she presents begins to take on a life of its own, the missing pieces found, the puzzle completed. Her handwritten title on the label of side A of the first tape poignantly read, Kootz Dumping of Byron Browne.[50] The following paragraphs are excerpts transcribed and paraphrased from the first of the two tapes.

Browne had been working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for fifty dollars per week when Samuel Kootz approached him with a contract in the spring of 1945, asking him to become a member of his gallery. It was like an answer to a dream for Browne. Still, he was so unbelieving that such a thing could happen to him that he would not give up his

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[50] Rosalind Browne, Tape Recorded Reminiscence, Kootz Dumping of Byron Browne, notes transcribed from the tape on June 22, 1980. Mrs. Browne recorded two separate tapes over a six-year period: the first dated 1971, the second, 1977. Her comments described her husband's relationship with the dealer, Samuel M. Kootz, and gave detailed information on the Browne/Gimbels Department Store sale that began Monday, November 5, 1951, the day following the store's New York Times announcement. The Kootz tapes contain information on the dealer's gallery, politics of the current art milieu and intimate commentary on persons still living at the time of her recordings. As such, they are restricted in their use only to scholars of Browne. Permission to listen to these tapes must be obtained from the Estate of Byron Browne, specifically, Stephen B. Browne, current owner of the original recordings. All information other than the newspaper advertisement and subsequent writings published in art periodicals, ensues from her personal, revealing and frequently scathing comments about the Gimbels sale and other incidents in Browne's life. I listened to the tapes only after the death of Mrs. Browne, which happened on February 10, 1979. Certain of her comments regarding the Kootz situation and Browne's position in his gallery and his relationship to the other gallery members are vague and will likely remain so. Mrs. Browne had intended to add this tape in transcribed form in its entirety to the Browne material already given to the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, with the proviso that it would be restricted in its use for twenty-five years following Browne's death in 1961. That meant that it would be 1986 before the restriction could be lifted and access to the material open to everyone. It was to have been made available by written permission through the Archives of American Art; it may no longer be restricted in any way. Mrs. Browne stated in the recording that anyone wishing this information was required to write to her for permission. To date neither this tape nor its transcription had been received by the Archives of American Art.

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museum position. His son was now five years old and he was afraid to loose the security of a steady income. Browne continued to work there throughout his first year after signing the contract and Kootz, she recalled, had to work hard to talk him into quitting. Once he quit, like a child, he transferred all his trust to Sam Kootz, never believing, never thinking that the dealer, like a father, would dispense with him. When Kootz did not renew his contract and closed the gallery, Browne considered it a betrayal of his trust and took the dismissal personally and much harder than the other painters.[51]

Mrs. Browne stated that, apart from the commercial aspects of the Gimbels sale, there were other forces at work to demean Browne and keep him "out of the race." She believed as well that Browne did not want to be a part of or participate in the stylistic changes that were beginning to emerge during the last year of the Kootz Gallery. Especially, did he not want to participate in the special meetings that included many of the same Kootz artists, whose activities coalesced in the fall of 1949, when he was no longer part of the gallery. They had begun gathering on a regular basis, as their numbers grew, as the Eighth Street Club.

Certain artists whose proselytizing and interpretation of Existentialism, involving people from the Kootz Gallery as well as others of the Eighth Street Club, incorporated a negative view of art and life with which Browne unequivocally disagreed, and so he shunned the gatherings. However, she stressed that he did not express by word or overt action his disagreements with their opinions, especially those involving accidental or "free" painting,

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51 Neither Holty nor Bearden took their loss of Kootz representation so personally as did Browne. Although Holty's reputation never regained its former stature, he continued to develop and exhibit his work. Bearden quit painting for many years and when he returned to it, his fresh style brought him wide acclaim, far more than he had ever enjoyed while with the Kootz Gallery.

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as she put it. He simply did not consider this as creating art. The fact that some artists now applied paint more freely than had most of the previous generation [1930s], did not, in Browne's view, "free" them from their responsibilities as creative artists, and for Browne that meant a classic orchestration of building form. Some of the American Abstract Artists group members were expressionists, yet that did not preclude them from dealing thoughtfully with form. That de Kooning or Franz Kline, for example, applied paint more freely or loosely likewise did not free them from the responsibility of classically orchestrating form. Still, she insisted, Browne had always respected the work of these painters.

Mrs. Browne related how during meetings of the last year and a half of the Kootz Gallery's existence, Harold Rosenberg joined the group and a lot of talk about "action painting" took place. The artists who "jelled" with these concepts--accidents, automatic painting--were those who had come from the Peggy Guggenheim stable and who were now with Kootz: Baziotes, Gottlieb and Motherwell. In her opinion these artists were interested in two things: Surrealism and rebellion; Browne was not interested in the former and his "rebellion" was not theirs.[52] He felt there was a negativism very loosely attached to Surrealism, an attitude in direct conflict with his personal optimistic persuasion and one which did not meet his standards and requirements for what a fine artist should be.

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52 In 1971 and 1977, when Mrs. Browne recorded these comments about Surrealism, she still had Peggy Guggenheim's reputation in mind, not Betty Parsons's, who had shown works by these painters in other spaces prior to opening her own Gallery under her name in September 1946. Peggy Guggenheim's infamous reputation as THE Surrealist dealer had left an indelible impression on everyone connected to the art world and it is apparent that this was so in Mrs. Browne's case. While it is true that Motherwell did come to the Samuel Kootz Gallery from Guggenheim's Art of This Century, he showed briefly with Parsons until they had a falling out. Baziotes and Gottlieb showed at the Betty Parsons Gallery until signing with Samuel Kootz. It should be recalled that all three, as well as Browne, were with the Kootz Gallery in the fall of 1945.

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Rosalind Browne states what she already knew, that her husband was not a "joiner," that his personality was that of a "loner;" he was not gifted with an articulate way of expressing himself, as were many other painters, and he knew this. This was his way of avoiding embarrassment. She recalled his activities and causes during the 1930s, when he protested and marched and shouted his beliefs but by the late 1940s, he had "had it." Browne did not participate in the Cedar Bar discussions; he neither drank nor smoked and therefore, did not frequent bars. He painted with every free moment he had and "joining the boys in the bar" would have wasted his time. He believed in the spirit of his modernism, in the classical tradition of art and painted the way he believed. He was an innovator; he wanted to work as of today, modernistically, but he wanted to do it in concrete terms within certain traditions. "This, she emphasized, did not "jive" with what was going on, and so he was left out of the loop."

While Browne had suspected certain artists had wanted him removed from the gallery, Mrs. Browne felt that the first overt proof that members of the Kootz stable were definitely against Browne was after Kootz opened his gallery for the second time in 1949. Kootz had organized a show of some of Browne's paintings he still owned (referring to the one-night, champagne gala sale of May 23, 1951). Both Browne and his wife had come to the opening and found that not a single member of those artists who formed the new Kootz Gallery attended, and neither did the three members of the group from the first gallery who were still with Kootz.[53] Nobody appeared. In their eyes that amounted to an organized boycott.

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53 Recall that aside from Browne, Bearden and Holty were the other two artists not retained by Kootz; Baziotes, Gottlieb and Motherwell had been asked to return, and they did.

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Moreover, she had subsequently learned that the other painters from the Kootz group strongly resented Browne's extravagant prolificacy, and that he had presented Kootz with dozens of works beyond what was called for in his contract, far more than they were required to give to the dealer in fulfillment of their own contracts. That Browne flooded Kootz with his work and they did not, and could not, seemed to have caused an unspoken enmity toward Browne nearly from the beginning.

Mrs. Browne admitted that there was no proof that the crude actions and methods Kootz chose to dispose of her husband's work came about directly because of the influence of certain members of the first gallery, namely Baziotes, Gottlieb and Motherwell, and indirectly through the growing advocacy of Abstract Expressionism by Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg. Nevertheless, she felt the painters and critics cited were inclined to exclude those with the attitudes similar to Browne's. If you were not a "joiner," she recalled, you were an "enemy" of the new cause. "These artists [and critics] held his attitudes against him."[54] They became his enemy and "pushed him out," and he became the enemy of the new cause.

In 1963, eight years prior to this taping, Rosalind Browne recalled that an artist, whose name she left unrevealed or had forgotten, told her he and some other American painters, among them Adolph Gottlieb, had attended some meetings with the French Surrealist Andre Breton, who came to America in 1939. He remembered Breton having told the young painters that, "If they were to succeed, they had to destroy whatever had come immediately before." In effect Breton outlined a plan for the American painters's success. Now, in retrospect, in 1971, Rosalind understood clearly that because Browne's

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[54] Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, Tape-recorded Reminiscences.

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personality was that of a loner and with his affinity toward nature and his desire to drag the best of his past along with him, it absolutely precluded his fitting in with the [opposing] attitude held by the Abstract Expressionists.

Today Breton's admonition is well-known. The surprise was that Mrs. Browne, at the time of the recording in 1971, would remember it and find in it a link to her husband's problems and that it would have direct bearing on the Kootz situation and, having been aware, that she would have realized how important an element his statement was in Abstract Expressionist sentiment. She had hit upon one of the key factors that segregated Browne from the attitudes of the painters who early on strove to sever ties with historical continuum. As diverse as were their individual styles, this opinion marked one of the few points upon which all those of the New York School seem to have been adamant. It is no surprise that Byron Browne remained naively unaware, given his abhorrence of Surrealistic practices and ideologies and that he, as far as is known, stayed as far away from Breton's gatherings as he did the informal gatherings at the Cedar Bar and the Eighth Street club. He effectively shut himself off from everything that was happening.

Rosalind Browne in an effort to uncover the roots of her husband's troubles also recalled that he had alienated the writer Thomas Hess, who become one of the big supporters of Abstract Expressionism, before the unfortunate incident at the Kootz Gallery reception transpired. While Hess had given Browne a fine review, including a color reproduction in a 1946 issue of Art News, he had written a subsequent review or essay that had infuriated Browne, who then fired back an objection against Hess, not to Hess himself but to Alfred Frankfurter, editor in chief of the esteemed periodical. Hess was at that time managing editor and of course Frankfurter showed him Browne's harangue. From there on Hess eliminated Browne from any consideration.

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Although Browne preferred to keep to himself by choice for almost all his career, as Rosalind Browne frequently reiterated, she also mentioned that he occasionally wrote "foolish" objections, as he had to Frankfurter, or objected in ways that were "hostile" to himself when critics wrote damagingly of his work. For example, Edward Alden Jewell, leading art critic of The New York Times, favored Browne from as early as the 1930s, but Howard Devree, his assistant, once wrote a derogatory review and Browne fired back to Jewell, that if he himself could not come to review future exhibitions, he was not to send Mr. Devree, for if he [Browne] ever saw him at one of his shows again, he would punch him in the nose. Not only did Jewell cease to review Browne's work from there on but Devree, she said, never forgot or forgave Browne and "took it out on him," on which she commented no further. She believed that some artists could get away with that kind of behavior, those who were more socially engaging or who had dramatic personalities, but the recluse-like Browne was at a disadvantage.

Mrs. Browne felt that the powers of the establishment were entirely against Browne for the duration of his lifetime after the Gimbels Department Store sale. Even at his death ten years after the Gimbels disaster, when hundreds attended his funeral during Christmas week, Rosalind Browne commented that the only member of the second Kootz group who came was Ibram Lassaw and his wife, Ernestine. Lassaw, a sculptor, joined the second Kootz Gallery but, she said, he requested Browne's opinion before doing so. Browne advised him to go ahead, warning him to be careful.

Rosalind Browne, aware that she was slowly dying of incurable and steadily progressing bone cancer when she recorded her recollections on the second tape in 1977, candidly stated that it was Adolph Gottlieb and Robert Motherwell who were the leaders in convincing Samuel Kootz to eliminate Browne from his second gallery in September

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1949.[55] While Baziotes was strongly loyal to Motherwell and opposite in ideology to Browne, as well, she believed that he was not an "overt" actor against him.[56] Mrs. Browne was and remained a close friend of his wife, Ethel.

Hans Hofmann, who joined the second Kootz gallery and had been a teacher to both Byron Browne and Rosalind Bengelsdorf prior to their marriage in 1940, also may have helped convince the dealer to omit Browne. She recalled that Hofmann always sounded off against all American painters, calling them "decorative," whenever asked about the work of specific artists. He had publicly called both Browne and Stuart Davis's work decorative and to be termed a decorative artist in 1949 meant artistic death.[57] As already discussed, Browne disliked Hofmann's gruff teaching style and he had difficulty understanding him for his overt German accent; he quit his class after a short time.

Mrs. Browne considered both Gottlieb and Motherwell "accomplished hatchetmen." She was now convinced that it was Gottlieb alone who had been strongly

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55 Those who fit the mold of painters admitted to the "pantheon" of the New York School had been established by the fall of 1949. Samuel Kootz made it abundantly clear who was admitted and who eliminated when he reopened his gallery that autumn with the Intrasubjectives exhibition.

56 On the second tape recording done six years later in 1977, Rosalind Browne invited her "very dear friend," Ethel Baziotes, wife of the painter William Baziotes, to sit with her as she recalled over several day's time her memories of these long-past events, in order to correct--to verify or disagree--what she remembered. By this time William Baziotes had also died, June 4, 1963, a year and a half following Browne's death, December 25, 1961. Mrs. Browne, with the knowledge of her own impending death, spoke openly and freely, naming names and unafraid of making certain accusations against those she believed purposely ruined her husband's career, and who in effect were responsible for causing his premature death. She spoke rationally and calmly but her underlying anger was never far from the surface.

57 While Davis was never Kootz gallery material, his so-called decorative style brought him great fame during his life and after. His modernism was far different in sensibility than that of Browne's or the Abstract Expressionists.

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responsible for the placement of Browne's work on the selling floor of Gimbels. While she had some proof in regard to Gottlieb, which she discussed on the tape recording, nothing in her comments set forth specific concrete evidence constituting legitimate proof that would stand up in court. She does cite small incidents of hostile behavior on the part of Gottlieb to which she was witness, mystifying behavior certainly, since it was Browne who convinced Kootz to take Gottlieb into his gallery in the first place, about a year after Kootz opened.[58] Neither she or Browne ever understood Gottlieb's lack of appreciation, that he could betray the man who had helped him.

The preceding excerpts, transcribed and edited from Mrs. Browne's two tape recordings made long after her husband's death, explain to some degree the slow buildup of causes for Browne's elimination from the mainstream of advanced American painting.[59]

In the final analysis, it is to Byron Browne himself that the art historian must turn for shouldering the responsibility for events of his life. In his case it becomes increasingly clear that art and politics are intimately woven entities and while the artist in certain respects has control over his work and his life, to a greater degree he does not. Browne could not help the reclusive personality with which he was born and which hindered him far more than he was himself aware. Nor could he overcome his stubborn built-in reticence to

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58 I am convinced that Rosalind Browne's efforts at objective appraisal are genuine and accurate despite the distance of time. She knew she had bone cancer and that little could be done. The tone of the lengthy recordings makes this nearly certain. Even so, she seems to be restrained, even cautious in her reporting, as if she were holding back more than she dared expose. Often she repeated the phrase, "I am trying to be as honest as possible in my recollections, as I remember them." She sincerely meant her work for the use of art historians in the future."

59 It is bitter irony that no painter who belonged to the earlier pioneering American Abstract Artists group, that paved the way to American acceptance of any form of abstract imagery, became an Abstract Expressionist.

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change, that is, to undergo revolutionary change, in the fundamental concepts and standards to which he clung. Browne, in the course of being true to himself, of keeping his integrity, maintained certain criteria for the production of art long after it was obvious to him that by do doing he made his work look unfashionable to the very power structure he wished to please.

Browne was forty-four years old when without warning on February 19, 1952, he suffered a near fatal heart attack. He was immediately rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors were able to save his life, but he remained in intensive care until April 2nd, a total of forty-two days, before he was well enough to return home.

Lengthy specialized care such as Browne required proved extremely costly. In the days before health and hospitalization insurance became commonplace, individuals paid their own fees from savings or bank loans. Such a catastrophic incident could be even more disastrous to the family of an artist whose income was meager and sporadic during even the best of times. Rosalind keep the bills hidden for a time so as not to upset him but eventually Browne discovered them and panic ensued over how they were to be paid. His expenses brought them close to having to apply for public welfare assistance, which for Browne was tantamount to personal shame of the magnitude that he had felt with the Gimbels advertisement. Had it not been for quick-acting friends, there would have been no alternative.

In order to help defray the enormous and ever mounting costs and to assist Browne financially during his long recovery, Elizabeth Holty, the wife of painter Carl Holty, and Nancy Galantiere, personal friends of the family, organized a raffle among Browne's numerous acquaintances. The tickets cost $5.00 and a drawing was held in which the winners each received a work of art by the painter.

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Dozens of friends and family members rallied to his support with many going directly to his apartment to buy a painting from Rosalind outright instead of participating in the lottery. In this way they provided more immediate help. Others sent checks for tickets to the Artists Equity Fund, Inc., in support of their Spring Fantasia--1952, an annual masquerade ball to be held at the Astor Hotel that May 15th. Prior to his illness, Browne had designed a bright cover for the event's catalogue, painting in its center a colorful clown figure holding a mask to his eyes (Fig. 8-34). A poster that could be sold was then printed. To Browne's surprise the planning committee generously turned the proceeds of the gala evening over to him as an additional gift to supplement the lottery funds.

Collectors of Browne's work and fellow artists also rose to his support, among whom were author-collector James Michener, Edith and Milton Lowenthal and painters John von Wicht, Abraham Rattner, Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Robert Gwathmey. In addition, the Art Students League, under the direction of Stuart Klonis, continued to send Browne his salary until he was well enough to resume his teaching responsibilities.

Reginald Marsh, a good friend despite their being stylistically worlds apart, saw to it that the National Institution of Arts and Letters, now the American Academy of Arts and Letters, sent Browne a check for $200.00, a substantial sum in those days.[60] Browne's letter of gratitude for this generosity (Fig. 8-35) is brief but extremely warm

> May 23, 1952
> 216 East 15th Street, New York 3, N.Y.
>
> Dear Reginald Marsh -
> I have just received a letter and check for $200 from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. This is the matter you spoke about the other day.

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60 Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Microfilm Roll No. NBB-2. In 1961, Browne would be invited to become a member of the Academy but succumbed to a second heart attack before that could happen.

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Many many thanks, Marsh. My recent illness cost me plenty and your kind interest is greatly appreciated.

Best Wishes,
Byron Browne.[61]

Prior to his heart attack, Browne had been contracted to teach summer classes at the Corcoran School of Art, where he was scheduled to instruct studio courses in still life painting, figure drawing, and composition.[62] Although the salary would have been helpful, Browne had not recovered sufficiently by June to go to Washington, D.C., to keep his commitment. Still, the incredible financial support Browne received from these several sources enabled him to pay for his hospitalization and keep his home and studio intact. It was no surprise to Browne that neither Samuel Kootz nor the painters in his gallery, several of whom had begun with him in 1945, had sent so much as a get-well card.

While no one can determine for sure whether Browne's experiences with Kootz and Gimbels contributed to or directly caused his physical debilitation, the mental anguish and depression he faced every day of his life thereafter took its toll of his will and spirit and left him deeply scarred psychologically in invisible ways. Today, one knows that because they are so interconnected, the healthy mind and physical health go hand in hand with one equally affecting the other.

Both Byron Browne and his wife were certain that his illness directly resulted from the heartless treatment he received at the hands of his former dealer. When one recalls that on January 24, 1944, Browne received notification from the Selective Service System that the results of a physical examination showed him to have a displaced heart and that he had

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[61] Byron Browne, Letter to Reginald Marsh, 23 May 1952.

[62] Browne negotiated for the appointment of his friend Carl Holty as his substitute.

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been classified 4-F in the draft as a result, therefore ineligible to serve in the military, might it not be possible that intense and prolonged mental stress could provoke an imperfect heart to fail?[63]

Through an interview with the sculptor Ibram Lassaw, a close friend of both Byron and Rosalind Browne, and one of the few artists, painter or sculptor, who bridged the differences between the American Abstract Artists (recall that Lassaw was a founding member) and the New York School, we learn, somewhat surprisingly, that Browne had been asked many times to come to the informal meetings of "The Club."[64]

Lassaw, along with his wife Ernestine and others, had started the Club with people who frequented Greenwich Village cafeterias for a cup of coffee that was always accompanied by long discussions about art. The Lassaws were the prime movers before the Club drew so many members that the group was forced to find its own meeting place, a loft on Eight Street in Greenwich Village. The first meeting prior to securing this loft took place in their studio on 12th Street at 6th Avenue, in November 1949. Considering the eventual significant role of the Club, with its regular Wednesday and Friday night discussions, and the reciprocity of ideas among stylistically diverse groups of artists in the

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63 There is no measure for human misery, yet the worst sort is that suffered at the hands of ones own kind. The extent of mental anguish Samuel Kootz inflicted upon Browne can never be assessed. More hardened individuals than he would have borne the trouble with far less trauma; certainly Carl Holty fared much better, although his career, too, never recovered its earlier momentum. Browne, whose reluctance to mention the experience thereafter was well known, had repressed its impact after the initial hullabaloo had subsided. His family and friends believed that he buried it so deeply within that on that day in February 1952, the burden, becoming more than he could take, precipitated a massive heart attack that nearly killed him. Mrs. Browne said that from then on, Browne was never unaware of his fragile mortality.

64 Ibram Lassaw, Tape Recorded Interview with author, Springs, East Hampton, Long Island, New York, 26 January 1981.

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founding of the New York School, it is baffling to learn that despite entreaties from Lassaw, Browne never attended a single meeting. By so doing, he cut himself off from the determining initiation of the first generation of Abstract Expressionists. His difficult personality and the Kootz episode aside, he had been welcomed from the outset.

Lassaw suspected that there existed a split between Browne and the group that hung out at the Club. He recalled that neither Byron nor Rosalind liked the members to the point that they refused to attend their parties; in time they were no longer invited.

Lassaw's interview revealed another surprise. The permanent closing of the Kootz Gallery had struck a deep and devastating psychological blow to Browne, far more than originally thought. He and Rosalind were infuriated by the dealer's behavior, for both had expected, perhaps ingenuously, that the gallery would continue indefinitely. All the artists of the initial group likewise expected to have their contracts renewed. Yet while the other painters, although upset, apparently shrugged off their dismissal, Browne could not cope with the rejection. He felt let down, abandoned, personally devastated and humiliated. There were days when he locked himself in his studio and Rosalind feared he would take his life.

Lassaw said that when he joined the Kootz Gallery and signed his contract for what was then a tremendous sum of money, everybody in the art world, including his closest friends, looked up to him with awe and newfound respect for his accomplishments and good luck. Never had Browne enjoyed this kind of adulation. He had, as he predicted while still in the Academy, "become famous." Then, when Kootz reopened without him in September 1949, by which time Browne had affiliated with Grand Central Moderns and had already had his first show, he believed he had lost face, his enormous sense of pride had been crushed, his career rejected and more to the point, he was rejected. How could this

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have happened when he had done everything his dealer had asked him to do, and more? While his friends continued to be supportive, perhaps in what Browne might have considered a patronizing way, he never felt the same afterward, such was his perceived shame at having been let go by Kootz, the man he had worked so hard to please over their three-year association. According to Lassaw, "from that time on, Byron began keeping more to himself."[65]

It should be remembered that Browne had spent his life pleasing people, and painting what they had wanted and expected him to paint, for which he was always rewarded. From his mother, his first teacher, who praised him when he did well, to those instructors at the National Academy of Design who awarded him prizes for painting "in the manner of," to his dealer Samuel Kootz, Browne did as he was bid, in order to please, and perhaps, to be told how well he had done. He seemed always to have needed that reassurance, and the contentment that accompanies it. When he could not paint "the new" because he could not understand it and thus did not like it, when he no longer knew how to please, indeed, could not please, he collapsed under the strain.

Lassaw recalled that after Browne severed ties with Kootz he began to make friendships with the more conservative artists, the old-timers whose lives revolved around Provincetown during summers. Simultaneously, Browne began to withdraw socially even from the artists he had known for years, who were his closest friends, including Lassaw, becoming more "separate" and reclusive. He also drew closer to those with whom he emerged artistically, such as the members of the American Abstract Artists group, and began to show with them again.

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65 Ibid.

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Most of the artists of the new crowd summered in the Hamptons on the eastern shores of Long Island, for its proximity to the city, their dealers and to the emerging group of art critics who enjoyed following them out to the beaches. Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning even purchased homes in Springs, as did Ibram Lassaw, whose house abutted de Kooning's property.[66]

Lassaw concluded that the initial problem was that Browne felt terribly ashamed and truly believed that he had irrevocably lost face with his peers. There was nothing more they could do or say that would change this perception.[67] Thus it was left to Browne to heal himself, for this seemed to be his preference.

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66 Ibid. Ibram Lassaw still lives and works in his home and studio in Springs.

67 Ibid.

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CONCLUSION

DEATH OF AN AMERICAN CUBIST

> His easel was kind of a magical object and on its back he pasted statements about art and artists he clipped from magazines and newspapers. One reads "Everybody is lost in his own tragedy."[1]
>
> --Lawrence Campbell, review of Browne's memorial exhibition
> February 1962

For a painter whose reputation rested on works that bore little evidence of the concrete object, Browne's late obsession with and belief in the necessity of the human figure in contemporary art strikes one as an idiosyncratic forward route. The battle for recognition of abstract art had occupied more than two decades of his career. Yet with the notoriety, subsequent acceptance and popularity of American abstraction in its myriad guises during the 1950s, he gradually allowed the object back into his art, becoming at the end of his life a painter of figurative portraits.

For reasons never fully understood, his nature from the outset rebelled against the popular or prevalent trends of the moment, as if purposely done in the name of perversity or inwardly compelled by personality to do so. From the outset it was never any different and he died leaving his final efforts bound in realism and locked in an academic treatment of space, completely out of fashion, as the epochal transition from Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art and Minimalism occurred. It was to those early accomplishments, not far removed from his Old Iron, Copper, Etc. prize winning painting from 1928 (Fig. 1-8),

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[1] Lawrence Campbell, "5 Star Shows This Winter: Browne," Art News, Vol. 60, no. 10, February 1962, pp. 44, 65.

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that Browne had begun to defer. No longer looking ahead, he turned backward instead to find himself, at long last.

The representation of the human figure and other tangible subject matter, which to his mind were never absent from his imagery or, at least from its starting point, became toward the end his most important symbol. Taking his cue from Rembrandt's rationale, he believed that the human being, above all subject matter, communicated on a universal basis.

While for many contemporaries this belief in universality and a kind of humanism, that ones work had to be understandable and uplifting to all, were long out of favor, he felt as he stated earlier, that the "human face and figure were the most magnetic symbols of any age," even one dominated by a concerted effort to rid painting of all such "retardataire" vestiges.[2] It is not so difficult then to understand that in this decade of personal and professional crisis, he should again defer to the kind of art that had initially provided the springboard for his career. If he could not communicate to others his type of abstraction, then why not return to that most catholic of images, the human figure?

With that in mind, during the mid-1950s, while summering in Provincetown, Browne embarked on a serious program of portraiture of his fellow artists. Leisure time was more available then and everyone came to sittings relaxed. By the time of his death at the end of December 1961, Browne had amassed a large and completely separate body of work, a portrait series representing the culmination of his artistic efforts. His bow to traditional realistic portraiture sets the series apart from the whole of his oeuvre with

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2 Frank Crotty, "Provincetown Artist Says Most Magnetic Symbol is Human Face and Figure," Worcester Sunday Telegram, 26 November 1961, Feature Parade, pp. 21-22. Crotty's interview had taken place that summer while Browne was still in Provincetown. He quoted Browne's oft reiterated statement for the title of his article.

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imagery that is only peripherally and incidently abstract. His flesh and blood sitters forced him, very late and for the first time, to look at his subject for exactly what it was on its own unique terms.

Browne's interest in portraiture developed while he was still a student in the Academy during the late 1920s, for the category comprised part of his coursework. The earliest record of his efforts to depict specific persons other than his classmates dates to 1936, when he was twenty-nine years old, with two portraits of Rosalind Bengelsdorf, a young art student who also modeled for painters.[3] Venus or Portrait of R., 1936 (Fig. C-1), depicts the nude figure of Rosalind, setting the foundation for what would become a lifelong practice, that of presenting women as mythological goddesses.

Browne poses his corporeal model on a wooden crate in his bare studio. With no inclination toward elaboration, she wears a gathered towel over which has been fastened a string of pearls for a crown and a gathered length of cloth across her thighs as an indication of the draped figure type from antiquity. Her gesture of holding a bare breast for presentation evokes the familiar pose of female fecundity, which since earliest times has symbolized woman as fertility goddess or mother earth figure, the perpetuator of life. Browne, who early on knew the value of perusing art journals for ideas for his work, could have seen similar poses in numerous accounts of historical art through the ages. The actual pictures from his studio wall, reproduced in the painted space behind the sitter, anticipate a practice he never outgrew in the reality of his own studio, that of papering his easel and the walls with art reproductions and photographs, many of which he never removed short of

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[3] Browne had fallen in love after having met her at the Art Students League when she was only sixteen years old. At this time the couple lived together and shared studio space; in 1940 they would marry.

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a physical move to another building, and then they went back in place as before.

That same year Rosalind posed for a second, Portrait of Rosalind (Fig. C-2), this time in contemporary dress with an open book on her lap, a prop he would frequently use to occupy his model's hands and a traditional attribute for a contemplative figure. The flat planes of her body are evident through the chiaroscuro folds of her garment and hint at Browne's early interest in Cubism. Her enigmatic expression reflects the countenance that will characterize most of his female subjects, whether done from life or modeled after Classical or Neoclassical sources. The solidity or sculptural quality of her form repeats in much of his subsequent portraits of women.[4] Both pictures of Rosalind depict exceedingly different aspects of the same young woman. By contrast, his male portraits, including his self-portraits, offer the antithesis of the sensation of carved marble flesh.

While his figures of women served as transmitters of time, allowing values of classical tradition to enter mid-twentieth-century figurative painting, their demeanor lies in direct contrast to the carefully-observed likenesses in his series of portraits of male sitters from the mid-1950s through 1961. These portraits, mostly of his fellow painters, never achieve the mythic connotations of his female sitters. Instead, they become as breathing flesh rooted in empirical fact, functioning in Browne's own time and place. He rendered their faces in a straight forward, realistic manner according to individual characteristics, demonstrating his exceptional powers for recording observed detail. They are individualistic, uncontrived and for that reason preferable to his female portraits, which for his love of sensual femininity he could not help but idealize.

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[4] For reasons known only to him but in an act of extreme anger, Browne destroyed this portrait of his then wife-to-be, in November 1961, one month before his death. While Browne's son divulged this information, he refused further comment.

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Browne's first known male sitter is of an especially slender, dapper man named John Gellert (1901-1969), 1954 (Fig. C-3). The son of the Danish-American sculptor whose life-size marble carvings adorn the facades of the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the New York Customs House, among other buildings, Gellert was by way of employment a Federal Housing Authority mortgage broker who had been on Wall Street. He was also an amateur painter who lived at the time of his portrait in Browne's East 15th Street neighborhood. His costume was no contrivance, for he had acquired a legendary reputation for sartorial splendor. None other of Browne's male portraits is so endowed with grandeur as this picture of an aristocratic-looking gentleman, who chose formal evening attire when Browne asked him to pose in whatever made him feel comfortable.

The paleness of Gellert's skin contrasts sharply with his black attire and equally black background. Browne positioned him in a corner of his studio, making no attempt to readjust the decoration to suit his sitter's apparel, as for example, there is no proper place to hang his hat, gloves and walking stick, so they rest on the floor under his chair or lean unceremoniously against it. Except for the theater program he holds, they are the only extraneous objects in the picture. Gellert's head is relaxed as he cooley gazes at the painter, who gazes in turn back toward him. Yet Browne undermines his sitter's elegance by having him cross one leg over the other so that the viewer is confronted with an enormous bent knee. A few feathery brushstrokes in bright gold, flicked onto the neutral background, provide a foil for Gellert's quiet immobility and hint of the feverishly painted backdrops that would soon would envelope his sitters.

Rosalind Browne, who through the years had modeled for her husband numerous times, posed for Portrait of Rosalind, 1954-55 (Fig. C-4), over several sessions while

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costumed in an extravagant satin ballgown trimmed with flowing ribbons.[5] The wealth of fabric in her wide ruffled skirt is echoed in the massive fullness of her auburn hair, crowned, it seems, in a halo of flames. The lushness of the painting belies his subject's peculiar expression as she focusses her trance-like gaze away from the viewer while simultaneously avoiding the eyes of the painter. She seems lost in private thought as she sits stiffly upright, her hands folded one over the other curled together on top a crossed knee. He permeates his subject with unresolved psychological tensions and her withdrawn countenance disturbs the viewer; something undefinable beyond mere petulance operates here. The striking aquamarine, gold and reddish hues of this portrait are diminished by their excessive repetition on the walls of the room behind her. As before, Browne jars the elegance of his work by choosing a common kitchen chair, when a throne would be in order. Still, of all Browne's depictions of women, Portrait of Rosalind stands as his is his most penetrating study and as such remains one of the important works in the series.

As a reciprocal gesture to his friend the painter Joseph Solman, for having painted his portrait in 1954, Portrait of Byron Browne, (Fig. C-5), Browne returned the favor the following year. Portrait of Joseph Solman, 1955 (Fig. C-6), shows the relaxed and pleasant features of the artist, known for his expressionistic depictions of New York City, as well as for portraiture. Solman had been an organizing member of The Ten, a group of nine painters (they added the tenth member later) without gallery representation, who

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5 Whereas most of Browne's pictures of her are stylized and abstracted, this portrait is the first surviving work where she is realistically portrayed albeit garbed as a nonspecific mythological deity.

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banded together in 1936 in order to show their work.[6] Solman sits facing the viewer, his proud bearing--head slightly raised, one hand firmly planted at the hip--radiates with the confidence and ease of one familiar with such poses, who knows as well how to hold them and is fully aware of the struggle taking place behind the easel in front of him.

Browne purposely kept certain details abstracted, such as the areas around his legs and feet, Solman's tie and one side of his jacket, which he partially subsumes into the countering brushwork of the wall behind him. Carefully placed hairpin-turned linear flourishes of paint are evident over the surface but do not yet saturate the canvas as they eventually will. The vivid coloration of Solman's attributes that Browne included--a vase of brushes placed so that their tips act as flower buds and his paint-loaded palette--provide some relief from the overall bluish green tonality of the picture. If color can be said to establish the mood of a painting, then that of Joseph Solman's portrait is one of coolness. One can imagine the bemused look on Browne's face as he considered, then finally decided to affix his signature sideways on his friend's palette.[7]

Other portraits show an increasing degree of abstraction, not from the reality of the sitter's features but in the clothing worn and in the background in which Browne places them. In pictures such as Portrait of Irving Marantz, (1912-1973), 1956 (Fig. C-7), a

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[6] Aside from Joseph Solman, the other members consisted of: Ben-Zion, Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko (then Marcus Rothkowitz), Jankel Kufeld, Ilya Bolotowsky, Louis Harris, Louis Schanker and Tschacbasov. Ralph Rosenborg, Earl Kerkam and John Graham joined later. All were individualistic within their expressionism. They supported each other, developing their ideas and growing strong together in a era that was not kind to any American expression other than literal realism. The group broke up in 1941, under pressure of their advancing individuality, but each by then had made a name for himself in the art world.

[7] Both portraits are in the permanent collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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fellow painter who spent summers at Provincetown, Browne's expressionistic handling of paint, as predicted in the Solman work, comes forth raw and vibrant. Browne's nervous brushline with its hairpin bend strokes commands the viewer's attention, not the presence of the sitter.

Rich surface patterns and vivid colors also dominate the Portrait of Chaim Gross, (1904-1991), (Fig. C-8), but not to the exclusion of the subject. Gross, the well-known sculptor, owned a large nineteenth-century house high on a hill overlooking the town from bay to sea. Its former owner, who built the rambling house by adding porches and wings to the original barn, was George Elmer Browne, a painter famous more for establishing an art school at the Cape than for his own work.[8]

Gross sat for Browne during the same period as did Marantz. His intense stare and strained forward thrust to the upper torso lend an unintentionally aggressive mood to the work, as Gross stiffly occupies a chair that seems uncomfortable. No professional attributes surround him to give the viewer a sense of what the sitter does in life, as Browne took great care to establish in Solman's picture; the use of harsh reds to the skin tones of the face and neck tends to sharpen the sculptor's already chiseled features. The broad vertical brushwork applied to the background contrasts pronouncedly with Gross's forward curving body and clothing fabrics but Browne curbed somewhat the slashing paint application that overwhelmed the Marantz portrait.

Summer after summer Browne continued his portrait series with the exception of 1958, due in part to Browne's lengthy trip to Spain, which occupied nearly half the summer

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[8] Recall that it was this same painter, whose name, George Elmer Browne, was also that of Browne's, whose given name was George. "George" became Byron when the confusion of two painters named George Browne in tiny Provincetown became one George Browne too many. George Elmer Browne died in 1946.

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he normally would have spent painting at Provincetown. Upon his return from abroad he spent much of the time that remained recapturing on canvas the impressions inspired by that visit, namely of the bullfight and colorful matadors, precluding any work with portraiture.

Browne resumed the portrait series in 1959, with his friend of long standing, the painter Milton Avery (1885-1965), as his first sitter. Avery was already seventy-four years old when Browne asked him to pose. As it turned out, 1959 would be the next to last summer that Avery could spend on the Cape, as developing ill health would prevent sojourns to places situated far from the specialized medical care he required. Browne's Portrait of Milton Avery (Fig. C-9), shows the painter clad in a blue polo shirt and yellow trousers, seated in the plain studio chair, now given a coat of red paint, that had seen service through several seasons worth of portraits. The choice of bright primary colors lends the picture a distinct liveliness to what is essentially a "quiet' picture. Avery sits straight as a ramrod, legs crossed, holding a lighted cigarette between the fingers of his right hand.

As in other portraits, light comes from the sitter's right, playing upon one side of Avery's face, falling down across his shirt and bouncing off the top of his crossed knee, which has become the position of choice for male legs. Other areas are treated less importantly. For instance, few details describe the painter's hands, the chair and background, essentially brushed in with dark paint, which emphasizes the expressive head all the more. He treats the shapes of Avery's clothing with light feathery brushstrokes, saving a contrasting realism for the face. His features, as they are on each sitter's, are more exactingly executed and Browne captures the essence of Avery's gauntly handsome, dignified face. Since he had known his sitter for many years he was familiar with his personality as well and this intimate knowledge resulted in a work of quiet understatement

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and intelligence that was the sitter's demeanor.

By far the most compelling and romantic visage Browne accorded any sitter belongs to that of sculptor, Domenico Facci. In Portrait of Domenico Facci (Fig. C-10), the viewer is struck by Facci's dark penetrating eyes, bronzed skin and ebony hair and beard that at once establish him as a man of commanding physical presence. Browne wisely plays up these dramatic features. The sculptor leans far forward in his chair, confrontationally more than conversationally, in a three-quarter view, the lower portion of which emerges directly from the foreground plane. It is a closeup "shot," an intimate analysis executed with great consideration for his sitter's unique characteristics.

Facci, who lived and maintained his studio in New York, revealed during an interview that he had sat for Browne at least a dozen times before the painter was satisfied.[9] The portrait sittings continued when they returned to New York, in the studio of a friend on Tenth Street, closer to Facci's studio than his own. Typically, Browne completed his portraits over the summer in which they began. Facci recalled that he worked slowly and with extreme care because the paintings, to his mind, seemed more than just portraits to Browne but trial investigations, with meticulous handling of pigments. Facci was convinced Browne was trying "something," to work out "something," just what, he could not be certain other than he observed Browne reworking certain areas many times. He said that Browne seemed not to want to discuss his project, if there was one, or the problems he may have been experiencing and Facci, respectful of the endeavors

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9 I arranged to meet the sculptor in his studio in the early 1990s. His looks had changed very little; even his hair remained dark. A kindly thoughtful man whose work was unfamiliar to me, he only reluctantly showed examples upon my insistence. He is best known for his commissioned portraits of prominent public figures, such as Albert Einstein and Winston Churchill. Domenico Facci, who was born in 1916, succumbed in 1994.

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of a fellow artist, never pressed the issue.

Browne's willingness to spend so many hours with Facci would indicate that he accorded similar treatment to every portrait, despite their overall look of facile spontaneity. Beyond doubt, he had embarked on a consistent and serious campaign, one dissociated from all previous work, yet capable of encompassing realism as well as the most abstract gestural style. Thus it was with portraiture, a time-honored traditional category of painting but currently of little interest to artists, dealers or collectors, that Browne struggled to come to some final reconciliation with the profusion of diverse and erratic modes of painting that had stamped his imagery from the beginning.

Late the following year, in return for Facci's courtesy and patience in having posed for him, Browne agreed to sit for the sculptor for a life-size portrait bust.[10] The terracotta bust was executed on November 5, 1961, in twenty minutes, while Browne sat in front of an audience, a meeting of the American Society for Contemporary Artists, at the Roerich Museum in New York City. Facci then asked Browne for a second sitting in his studio but he kept postponing the visit and then, of course, it was too late.

Portrait of Byron Browne, 1961 (Fig. C-11), shows the haggard, sad face of a once handsome man. Now he appears ill and careworn, far older than his fifty-four years. Anyone observing this work could not help but notice his overwhelmingly melancholy countenance. Facci remembered that Browne behaved in that same manner, a markedly changed personality from the optimistic front he generally presented to others that had

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[10] Facci, who had always worked in a representational manner, was noted for his extraordinary ability to capture his sitter's characteristics rapidly. On the day of our meeting, he showed me Browne's sculpture and loaned photographs of it for this dissertation. In return, I gave him a color reproduction of his portrait by Browne. Rosalind Browne, he said, came down to see the work but became so overwhelmed with emotion at the sight that she burst into tears and fled his studio. She never requested a cast.

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been fully intact when he sat for his friend only the year before.

Working with extreme deft and the help of photographs that Rosalind provided, Facci was able to finish the portrait posthumously from that single sitting. He faithfully captured his unhappiness, especially apparent in the puffiness around the eyes and the lines surrounding his firmly pressed mouth; it was the way Browne appeared and no photograph could have expressed the truth of that moment any more poignantly or convincingly. That same look of tragedy appears again in Browne's final self-portrait finished only days before his death. Facci's terracotta bust has never been cast into bronze.

Browne's zeal for the portraiture project continued undiminished to his death. Prior to December 1961, he completed the following works: The Portrait of Lila Copeland, 1956, The Portrait of Sol Wilson, 1960, and those of Harold Baumbach, Herman Maril, Leo Manso, Bernard Simon, and Julio Prol (Fig. C-12), all 1961. Prol, a classical concert guitarist, and instructor of music at several universities, was a good friend of Byron and Rosalind. Mrs. Browne, he recalled in a conversation in September 1983, had studied music with him for many years, becoming a player of some accomplishment of the difficult music written for the instrument.[11]

Here Browne depicts Prol wearing the elaborate formal costume, complete with white ruffled shirt, of Southern Spain where he was born. He holds the instrument of his profession in playing position and, as if wanting to capture some of the aura of the fiery

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[11] A conversation with Prol on August 22, 1983, confirms that he, too, sat numerous times for Browne for his painting. Browne worked very slowly, often wiping out entire facial areas done the previous session, so as to perfect the characteristics of his sitter, which became easier--or less difficult--with each sitting. This portrait was an exception among the others in that it was begun and completed in late fall, 1961, in Browne's studio on Fifteenth Street after he returned from his summer at Provincetown. Julio Prol was not among those who summered on Cape Cod.

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flamenco music for which his subject was noted, Browne paints him in front of a spirited abstractly patterned background of hot reds, oranges and yellows. Browne completed the work after he returned to New York in the early fall of that year and, as fate determined, The Portrait of Julio Prol became his final portrait.

Browne, who never exhibited any work from this project with the exception of Sol Wilson and Milton Avery's pictures, had now amassed sufficient canvases with which to do so. Colette Roberts, his gallery director, viewed the canvases for the first time in October and encouraged Browne to present them as a coherent group in his 1962 show for Grand Central Moderns, in the spring. Then, with his unexpected death, the gallery management considered organizing a posthumous exhibition during his regular time, given he was only three months or so shy of his scheduled annual, but then decided against the idea, choosing to hold a memorial exhibition instead.

Those most familiar with Browne's intentions for the portraits are no longer living, as is the case of many of his sitters as well, thus closing the door to unanswered questions of intention. The majority of the works in this collection were in the painter's studio at the time of his death and remain to this day the property of Browne's estate, which manages to show them from time to time.[12] How far Browne could have taken this special work and how much longer he would have devoted to the effort had he lived must remain conjecture. The portraits combined both realism and abstraction, his intention from the outset of his career. Since pursuing any greater degree of abstraction would have defeated the purpose

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12 One of the portraits, that of Chaim Gross, now belongs to the Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation, New York, where it hangs in the Chaim Gross Studio Museum, housing seventy years of sculpture and works on paper by this artist. Following the death of Gross in 1991, his widow, Renee Gross, arranged to acquire the painting from Browne's son, by exchange.

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of portraiture itself, the only logical result could have been that of an increasingly greater degree of academicism. It remains conjecture if Browne would have "regressed" to that extent.

Despite Browne's having summered in Provincetown for decades and being known to everyone, his first solo exhibition in the small resort opened in July 1960, at the Tirca Karlis Gallery.[13] The anonymous author of a small Provincetown newspaper called New Beacon, headlined his article by announcing that this was his forty-second solo exhibition of his career but he/she, too, failed to discuss the content of the show.[14] Nevertheless, those who doubt Browne's strong commitment toward "something" have only to consider the following statement, made to a reporter for the Provincetown Advocate on the opening of the summer 1960 exhibition at the Tirca Karlis Gallery

> Art is not a charming decoration that serves only as a soothing pallative [sic.]. It [art] is a "moment of truth" --a moment expressing all the vitality, tragedy and comedy involved in the process of living. Without the forces that ennoble the dignity of man, man does not exist. I am possessed by interest with the human element -- and despite long experience in the abstract idiom, I find myself more and more inclined toward an expression that will return to an identification with man.[15]

One saw, as the shift in art world aesthetics slowly moved away from Abstract

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[13] Byron Browne: Selections 1954 -- 1960, Tirca Karlis Gallery, Provincetown, MA, July 14-[closing date unrecorded], 1960. This was only the second summer of Browne's affiliation with the gallery. The gallery printed a brochure but included no checklist.

[14] "Exhibit at Tirca Karlis Gallery is Byron Browne's 42nd Show," New Beacon, Provincetown (MA), 13 July 1960, n. pag.

[15] "Browne Progresses Far in Art World," Provincetown Advocate, 14 July 1960, p. 12. The anonymous author prefaced Browne's comments by a discussion of his affinity for things Spanish, particularly the bullfight, by saying that, "He defines his feeling about art very much as he defines the bullfight." In essence, that art was a "moment of truth," as well, expressing all the vitality, tragedy and comedy involved in the process of living.

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Expressionism toward its austere antithesis of cool minimalist and conceptualist expressions, with even further distancing from the "human element," as Browne so frequently put it, that he placed even more emphasis on literal realism, not a symbol or stylization of such, of the human figure in art, swinging toward its accurate interpretation, as if to punctuate his contemptuous feelings for this new onslaught against all that was figurative. Only the portrait possessed the capacity to encompass and demonstrate such a sentiment and it was to the portrait that Browne turned in defiance of the rest of the art world and in refuge from it. With portraiture, the rapid flow of art historical "isms" meant little, providing Browne freedom from the always present stress of "originality" and the unceasing hunt for it.

As in his work with other sitters, the same directness of expression can be found in the few late self-portraits that Browne painted. Although never motivated to paint himself repeatedly in any effort at record keeping, through a curiosity toward understanding himself as subject of the artist, he amassed a fair number of likenesses by the time of his death. Unlike his idol, Rembrandt, whose habit was to depict himself in every conceivable guise at every stage of his career (some sixty self-portraits are known to exist), Browne never considered himself so interesting a subject. Still, toward the end, there can be seen a quickening of the pace in which he produced them and an ever deepening effort toward self-analysis, as if in a rush to make up for lost time. He did not attempt a serious oil portrait of himself before 1956, roughly the same time he embarked upon his portrait series, five years before his death.

Browne drew his head in pencil, Self-Portrait, 1939 (Fig. C-13), a serious countenance but with outsize, out of focus eyes, as if he were in a trance, reminding one

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again of John Graham's drawings of similarly transfixed women.[16] Still, an exceptional amount of skill and consideration went into this drawing. Browne's delicate, controlled line quality and use of chiaroscuro lend the work depth and a solidity worthy of the finest academic drawing that negates its eccentricity.

It was eight years later before he again sat for himself. In Self-Portrait, 1947 (Fig. C-14), Browne portrays himself in profile silhouette, covered with a dot and line, "connect-the-dots" superstructure network, one of the rare occasions he drew any line with a ruler. Considering that at this time the atom and its molecular structure was the popular topic of the day, Browne symbolized his own "molecular" structure in the composition.

In a subsequent work on paper, Self-Portrait, 1953 (Fig. C-15), his eyes again remain the compelling focus of attention. These double images of himself, done in ink and wash, are the last portraits that show him still a relatively young man of forty-five. There has been a vast change in that his previous youthful carefree look has been replaced by a stern cynical visage. His expression shows a tired face with dark puffy circles under the eyes. He drew the foreground figure strong and clear, larger than its twin that fades, diffused and vague of countenance, in the background, as if Browne had at last emerged from the death that nearly happened. It should be remembered that Browne had suffered a near-fatal heart attack the previous year and this catastrophic physical assault seems mirrored in his baleful glance.

For his first self-portrait in oil, 1956, Browne, now forty-nine, depicted himself at

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16 John Graham may be said to have inspired Browne, as well as Gorky and de Kooning, among many others. Graham's System and Dialectics of Art was first published in Paris in 1937, and published later that same year in New York City; there was not an artist who hadn't read the book. Painter, collector and friend to artists, his influence was extensive. Graham wrote an essay for Browne's first major solo exhibition at the Artist's Gallery in 1939, and they had remained friends for years. Graham also died in 1961.

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work, paint-loaded palette and brush in hand in hand, seated at his easel (Fig. C-16). He interpreted his likeness in the manner of most of his other portraits, that is, a realistic face and body with a less important treatment of clothing set within a background of myriad nonrepresentational shapes. The picture he paints at his easel is of no particular interest to Browne. What does concern him is an accurate portrayal of his own features and he paints them as though every stroke of the brush uncovered a new and curious fact about himself: the skin's indentations, the light on the cheek bones, shadows, the sweep of his hair. Gone are the enormous staring eyes of his early self-portrait drawings. Browne seems mesmerized with the adventure of his own face, as if it were a map guiding him through avenues to discovery.

Upon the occasion of his fifty-first birthday on June 26, 1958, Browne began a close-up portrait of himself seated at his easel, (Fig. C-17). The picture's background consists of a painting in progress, one whose canvas surface is covered with abstract flourishes that reflect those applied to his clothing areas. He made no attempt to paint his features in a flattering manner. The bilious green color of his hair, the red bulbous nose and the return of the huge eyes set in wide pools of white, make him appear buffoonish. Photographs of him at this age and older show him to be far more physically attractive than he sees himself. Yet his look is quizzical and the half smile implies that the whole idea might be a perpetration. The work is not emotionally self-revealing, rather it is a superficial rendering of his own reality, a humorous birthday card to himself.

Another self-portrait painted later that year, (Fig. C-18), shows him, brushes in hand, seated half in shadow against a black and red abstract tapestry. While he achieves an effect of a casually executed work, in essence it is anything but that. The picture portrays the strain of concentration and, if we compare this first serious effort to his portraits of the

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other sitters he was painting simultaneously, we see a calmly detached but meticulous observer recording the event in front of him, practicing as if he were seeking and finding precisely what he should be looking for in the faces of others through his own example.

As did his revered Rembrandt, Browne also collected but rarely wore a variety of headgear and in 1960 at age fifty-three, he portrayed himself in a severe closeup wearing his blue Scotch tam-o'shanter and a muffler at his neck (Fig. C-19).[17] In an abrupt turn from the previous painting, this interpretation conveys a serious almost haunted look, as he glares directly at the viewer from one piercing eye. His somber choice of palette, coupled with overall gray-blue hues, connote a certain coolness and tension or uneasiness not present in any of the portraits of his friends and never before in his self-visualizations. The work is expressive of a soul-searching unseen in his previous self-portraits, an intense examination not only of the surface characterizations but of an inward psychological scrutiny as well. It is his finest portrait so far.

It is not difficult to see why the viewer is profoundly moved by Browne's final look at himself painted a few days prior to his death. Self-Portrait, 1961 (Fig. C-20), portrays a man who has aged many years in the space of one. The setbacks and disillusionments of a lifetime are painfully etched in the lines on his face. Eyes look out dejectedly from their swollen sockets; the mouth is resignedly set and wisps of white hair flick over his forehead. There is a haunted, desperate look about him, bordering on bitterness but closer to weeping. Although Browne painted the shadows at the side of his face toward the viewer in bright orange hues, any warmth is canceled by the same pervasive, death-like gray-green tone to his skin, noted in an earlier picture, that undermines the

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17 Browne's many hats, as well as his set of bagpipes, still hang on pegs in his studio.

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whole.

Browne's intense mien of despair shows the wear produced by more than thirty years of struggle; the toll is devastating. There is an unmistakable weariness akin to a premonition of death in this self-portrait; the jet black easel that occupies the entire left edge of the canvas seems more like a cross of crucifixion than a support for works of art.

One cannot help but compare this portrait with Goya's well-known Self-Portrait, Ca. 1815 (Fig. C-21), which he saw at the Prado in Madrid during his trip in 1958. The similarities are profound, for the same aura of despair prevails in the face of each and present, too, is the same excruciating sorrow. While Goya was then sixty-nine years of age and suffering all manner of illnesses, Browne, fifty-four, appears the older, more haggard of the two. Recall that shortly before he died he said that any face was worth painting. Browne has taken a final searching look at life by including his own; the results are his most penetrating articulation of what he termed the "human aspect." Little did he dream that that aspect would best be found in his own countenance. Ironically and poignantly, this final self-portrait, believed to have been his final painting, may not have been.

A very small painting, The Rose, 1961 (Fig. C-22), was found after his death among the numerous works stacked in his studio. Within its vertical format a ghostly white hand shimmering in light, reaches across from the lower left corner to proffer a long-stemmed red rose that rises across the picture plane on a diagonal nearly to the upper right corner. To whom does he offer the rose? There is no visible recipient. Browne holds the flower in front of him in his left hand as he paints. Perhaps he offers it to his wife, whose given name incorporates that of the flower; perhaps, even, he presents it to himself, the artist, as a final tribute to a lifetime faithful to the quest. What is so strange, even mysterious about this little image is that both the hand and the rose are bathed from

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behind in an ethereal ectoplasm of grayish-white paint, like fog or mist rising from a pond in the middle of a humid summer night. Compounding its eccentricity, Browne chose to paint it on a swatch of black velvet fabric, the pigments of which were still wet when discovered. The work was eventually framed, as seen in the illustration. Years later a friend interpreted its meaning as that of the hand of death reaching out to the still-living artist, a foreboding conjecture, but intuitive premonitions of ones own death are not uncommon. Usually, it is another artist who portrays this sentiment of a fellow artist whose death came prematurely, not the one still living.

The year 1961 had brought trouble of a personal nature at home, severely straining the relationship between Rosalind and himself, as rumors of his longtime extramarital affairs surfaced.[18] To make matters worse, he learned that the building where he and Rosalind had lived and worked for nineteen years, 216 East Fifteenth Street, was going to

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18 Browne was indeed having an affair with at least one, possibly more women. In the course of research for this dissertation, I have received letters from several of his former students at the Art Students League that attest to their writers's clear recollections of his having brought a "red-headed woman" to his classes upon several occasions. She was not a student and waited patiently in a corner of the studio for him to finish his class, which he generally did rather too rapidly for some; after having looked at each student's work on its easel, Browne would depart without further word or instruction. He, apparently, never stayed the length of the class. It was generally understood, from the way Browne treated her, that she was his "girlfriend."

In reality, she, too, was married, the wife of a doctor, a woman of means and collector of his work, as well. Interviews with some who had met her, recall that Browne often brought her to their homes, as a dinner guest companion. Mrs. Chaim Gross recalls that Browne brought her to their home for dinner several times; she did not like her and both she and Chaim began to dislike Browne, having known and liked Rosalind. Mrs. Gross finally asked him not to bring her when he came to visit. Browne made no effort to hide his relationship, for it was generally understood that the marriage between Rosalind and him had taken a rocky turn. None seemed to have questioned their arrangement. When Rosalind threatened divorce, Browne, tried, to no avail, to free himself from the "other woman," who refused to end the relationship of some long standing. Although her name is known, little good can come of discussing the matter further since Browne's death unexpectedly settled the issue.

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be torn down to make room for a new luxury highrise apartment complex, forcing them to move from the neighborhood and away from friends of longstanding. Against his protestations Rosalind preferred to live uptown on the West Side where rents were less expensive and greater space could be had for the money.[19] They chose a large but dark and nearly sunless apartment on the second floor at 203 West 86th Street at the upper middle class, subsequently landmarked Belle Nord Apartments; they moved in November. The apartment contained an extra bedroom that Browne converted into a studio.

In order to save precious funds, Browne himself had carried everything but the heaviest furniture, so that the transfer of household goods would be less costly. Little did he realize that helping to move would be the worst thing that he could have done, for it taxed his already damaged heart and the resulting exhaustion left him weak and unable to paint for days.

On December 24, Rosalind had gone down to Greenwich Village to attend a Christmas Eve party at the home of their friend, the painter Lila Copeland. They were midway through the evening when the telephone call came from their son Stephen, home on holiday vacation from Stanford University, saying that Byron had been stricken with what he believed was a heart attack.[20] He had not felt well during the day and so declined accompanying her, happy to have an excuse not to go, for parties were never his favorite way of spending time, even during the holiday season. Mrs. Samuel L. Welkes, a neighbor who

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19 This move upset Browne considerably, for not only did he dislike changes in his life, he resented the time it took to find boxes, pack and move. Rosalind's choice for their new home was decidedly not to his liking. The Brownes made their move in mid-November, barely six weeks before his death.

20 Browne's son, Stephen, had been awarded a full scholarship to Stanford University, for four years of undergraduate study in the area of film and creative writing.

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still lives at that same address, and one of the few friends the Brownes had had time to make in their new building, recalled the ambulance attendants carrying Browne out of the apartment on a stretcher to the hospital. He was rushed not to the closest facility but to Montefiore Hospital on 210th Street in the Bronx, where he had stayed during his first heart attack.

Physicians operated on Browne immediately but so severe was the damage to an already damaged heart, with subsequent complications setting in, that they were unable to save him. Under an oxygen tent, he died the next day of a massive coronary thrombosis. Rosalind and Stephen were at his bedside and Stephen, eighteen at the time, vividly and touchingly recalled having held his father's hand. Here was a man who did not smoke or drink, who underwent invigorating walks daily and took better care of himself than did most people. Still, he died at fifty-four years of age, as much the victim of a terrible twist of fate as from any other cause.

Joseph Solman, Browne's lifelong friend and colleague, delivered one of the eulogies, an obituary tribute Solman titled In Memorium--Byron Browne, at his funeral service on December 27, at Riverside Memorial Chapel on Broadway, not far from their apartment building. Solman, who had been a student and friend to Browne as young men attending the National Academy, began his eulogy by quoting from a poem by Emily Dickinson

> The vastest earthly day
> Is shrunken small
> By one defaulting face
> Behind a pall.[21]

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[21] Dickinson, Emily. Thomas H. Johnson, ed. by. The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson (Poem No. 1328, composed 1874, p. 576). Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1960. Dickinson, an American poet, was born in 1830 and died in 1886.

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Stewart Klonis, the executive director of the Art Students League and Browne's employer, also spoke, delivering a second eulogy.

Several hundred artists and friends attended this service and signed the guest book. Rosalind recalled that day, saying she felt that Browne had been particularly well liked because "He was so good to so many other painters; he had never spoken ill of anyone."[22] Still, the only member of the second Kootz Gallery group and the only friendly member of the new "establishment," the Abstract Expressionists, to attend his funeral, was Ibram Lassaw and his wife, Ernestine, one of Rosalind's closest friends.[23] The indifference to Browne's funeral on the part of the New York School contingent, aside from demonstrating extremely discourteous behavior toward the widow of a painter all had known for many years, serves to emphasize how wide was the breach between their art and politics and those of Browne's. Virtually every newspaper and art periodical that covered events of the art

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22 Tape Recorded Interviews with Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne, New York City, August 20, 26, September 2, 8, 1978. Mrs. Browne was desperately ill and dying of cancer when this series of four separate interviews was conducted from her bedside, at 203 West 86th Street, between hospital stays. Her comments, made when she knew she would not survive, are candid accounts of her turbulent life with the painter, the politics of the times and monumental difficulties she had in trying to resurrect his reputation and to locate a suitable gallery to handle his large estate when she was no longer able. She made every effort to place his work in public institutions following his death. Her remembrances, now transcribed, are historically important, for she knew everyone, and merit future publication. Mrs. Browne lived to early February of the following year.

23 Recall that their friendship with the Lassaws went back to the founding of the American Abstract Artists group in 1935-36. Lassaw was one of the few sculptors able to bridge the gap between the American Abstract Artists and the Abstract Expressionists, and now was affiliated with Kootz. He had been asked to join the second Kootz Gallery and when he consulted Browne as to whether he should or not, Browne, putting aside his animosity toward Kootz, encouraged him to do so, which he did.

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world published his obituary.[24]

Dozens of tributes, cards, telegrams and letters of sympathy poured in to the distraught widow, comforting her as best they could. In reading them one catches a glimpse of just how well-liked a person Browne was despite snubs by some. People from all segments of the art world wrote of their remembrances, a few citing incidents dating to the time Browne was an eighteen-year-old youth starting his first day of classes at the National Academy of Design. While these condolences from such artists as Raphael and Moses Soyer, Philip Evergood, Carl Holty, museum curators and others contain poignant reflections of their friendship with Browne, they also ought to be read for their insight into an art world vastly changed from the time they had entered it.[25]

In January, Arthur J. Foster, President of the Art Students League, announced that there would be a Byron Browne Merit Scholarship established that would last for thirteen years, or the length of time that he had taught at the League. It would begin in the fall of 1962 and continue through 1975. Browne's dealers, Erwin S. Barrie and Colette Roberts of Grand Central Moderns, together with the Art Students League, arranged for immediate joint retrospective exhibitions of his work, each to take a specific area.

Stuart Klonis of the League, borrowing from public and private collections,

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[24] Among Browne's obituaries are the following: "Byron Browne, Painter, was 54," The New York Times, 26 December 1961, sect. 1, p. 25; "George Byron Browne," New York World Telegram and Sun, 26 December 1961, sect. 2, col. 2, p. 21; "Byron Browne Dies; Painter, Art Teacher: Abstract Works Hang in Many Collections," New York Herald Tribune, sect. 1, col. 5, p. 6; "Byron Browne Dies Suddenly in New York; Artist Summered Here More Than 25 Years," The New Beacon (Provincetown, MA), 3 January 1962, n. pag.

[25] Rosalind Browne donated all the material associated with Browne's death to the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, where they were placed on microfilm and are available to scholars for research under the artist's name.

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exhibited thirty-two paintings ranging from 1930 through 1961 and included three sculptures from 1958 and 1959, while Grand Central Moderns showed eleven portraits, all but one painted from 1959 through 1961. It was Roberts's decision to show his latest portraits rather than to take a reflective look at all. As retrospectives go, each was relatively small, given the brief warning the organizations had for mounting the shows; the miracle is that they occurred at all. Browne's retrospective at the Art Students League of New York opened on January 24 and ran through February 15.[26] Its catalogue cover reproduced in color Browne's last self-portrait. Included among paintings that dated from 1930, were his earlier efforts in portraiture; those of Rosalind Browne in costume, Chaim Gross and Irving Marantz were featured. Klonis paid tribute to Browne in an article published in the League's monthly newsletter that included the complete text of his eulogy.[27]

For its share of the retrospective, Grand Central Moderns chose ten late portraits, those from 1959 through his own Self-Portrait, 1961.[28] The gallery included an eleventh picture, Head of a Girl, 1927 (Fig. 1-6), a charming portrait done from the model while he was still in art school, in order to demonstrate the profound stylistic changes that had

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26 Byron Browne Tribute: Retrospective Exhibition, Stewart Klonis, essay, New York, The Art Students League of New York, January 29-February 15, 1962.

27 Stewart Klonis, "A Tribute to Byron Browne at the League and at Grand Central Moderns," Art Students League News, Vol. 15, no. 2, February 1962, pp. 1-2. The tribute to Browne included three reproductions of his paintings and a copy of an April 7, 1956 letter that he had written to Sidney Waintrob, in which were copied some of his beliefs from his notebooks, sent at the other's request.

28 The Grand Central Moderns exhibition had opened earlier, on January 27, in order to allow visitors time to attend both shows. The closing date was the same, February 15. The same four-page, fold-over brochure sufficed as catalogue for both institutions.

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taken place over these thirty-four years.[29]

Most New York newspaper critics devoted the major portion of their art review sections to the double venue exhibitions. Nearly all included a reproduction of one of the exhibited works to accompany their columns, with Browne's final self-portrait being most frequently chosen. Few among them had been cognizant of Browne's efforts with portraiture, consequently none had any idea of the large body of work of this nature that he had compiled over the final three years of his life. All seemed genuinely surprised and remarked that he had to have worked at a frantic pace to complete so many. Even more surprising, nearly all felt this final realistic work was the best of his career, not his lifelong efforts in abstraction. Their comments, conclusions and summaries of Browne's place in American art and his contribution to it unmasked feelings previously unstated or sublimated. Now, his death provided the necessity or afforded the opportunity and freedom with which to do so.[30]

Stuart Preston of The New York Times, for whatever reason unable to view either exhibition, wrote from his previous acquaintance with Browne's work, reproducing the final self-portrait to accompany his review of the unobserved exhibitions. He stated

As a painter Browne had remarkable early-recognized natural gifts and

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29 Late in 1961, Browne had begun a portrait of a woman known only as "Ann." The precise date of completion of this portrait is unknown but it is believed that work on "Ann" was begun prior to his self-portrait, which was begun and finished only days before his death. Although the unfinished work was shown in the Grand Central Moderns's part of his retrospective memorial exhibition in 1962, nothing further is known of this person and the painting's existence was never discussed in public by either Rosalind Browne or his son, Stephen. The checklist acknowledged that the painting was in the collection of Dr. Harry Sterling, who may have commissioned it. All efforts to locate this doctor have been unsuccessful. No photograph of the work appears to have been taken.

30 These double memorial exhibitions represented Browne's final large public display until many years later.

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> energy second to none. The way in which he threw himself so whole heartedly into one different style after another was certainly a sign of versatility, but one of weakness as well. More than restlessness kept this talented, facile mannerist on the move. It is sad that death came before he found the exact expression of a vital temperament.[31]

Lawrence Campbell, Browne's unfailing defender through the years and the archivist for the Art Students League where Browne taught, also wrote reviews for Art News. He devoted considerable space to his discussion that communicated a more personal look at the man than did other writers

> His easel was kind of a magical object and on its back he pasted statements about art and artists he clipped from magazines and newspapers. One reads "Everybody is lost in his own tragedy." Browne's tragedy was that he was always working under pressure, and had so much ability that a consistent direction was difficult for him to maintain: during our period of the cult of personality, it was difficult for him to project a clear-cut image of his best side, and only too easy for him to put over the ornamental, eclectic side.[32]

The following review in Arts Magazine is quoted verbatim for its cogent overview of Browne's problems with a too-long reliance upon Picasso as mentor

A heart attack killed Browne on Christmas day, 1961. He was fifty-four

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[31] Stuart Preston, "Renewals and Limits of Styles in Modern Painting: Byron Browne, 1907-61," The New York Times, 28 January 1962, (Sunday ed.), sect. 2, p. 21. Rosalind immediately wrote a letter to John Canaday, the Art Editor of The New York Times, to thank him for seeing that Preston's review appeared simultaneously with the opening of the shows. The underlying reason for the letter was to express her anger or disappointment with his closing statement, made before he had an opportunity to see the portraits. It is interesting for the emphasis she places on this largely unknown group of portraits, being shown for the first time, and not for the abstractions for which Browne had literally struggled his lifetime. It is as though she depended on them to erase all previous problems the critics found with his work. She expected a far more favorable review from Preston.

[32] Lawrence Campbell, "5 Star Shows This Winter: Browne," Art News, Vol. 60, no. 10, February 1962, pp. 44, 65. Campbell also pointed out that Browne worked in many styles and that his career was a continual exploration and restatement of the history of art but he was first and foremost a figure painter who always came back to a personal kind of Synthetic Cubism.

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> and still in the midst of a series of portraits that--without any sentimentalizing the fact to suit the drama of an occasion that a memorial exhibition is--truly represented the maturity of an artist who had had a particularly difficult time finding himself. During most of the thirty-one years documented by a joint exhibition at his dealer's gallery and at the school at which he taught, Browne had lost his way (after a promising start) in the blind alleys of research and compromise before he began with almost startling suddenness to pull together the loose ends of all those years of effort. The late portraits are not inestimably great but are certainly representative of what the man could do independently. Whatever their failure as compositions, they radiate an extraordinary nervous vitality. Mostly of his artist friends, the portraits are hurried, but at the same time they revel in their new-found freedom. In them Browne beat back the strangling influence of Picasso, who nonetheless taught him the principles of revolt in the first place, and then accepted an abstractly oriented realism in which the sitter's head is a keenly observed, swiftly painted orb of luminescence anchoring an otherwise weightless crescendo of line, mass, and sometimes harsh color. Through the late thirties and all of the forties Browne ran the gamut of Picasso's several plastic theses from monumental Neo-Classicism to strongly patterned anatomical disruptions, for neither of which Browne possessed corresponding reflexes. Picasso was for Browne a quixotic genie into whose centrifugal plasticity Browne poured his admiration for all the old masters from Botticelli to Rembrandt. But since Picasso was himself as ambivalent as Browne where tradition was concerned, he was no help on a fundamental level, and much too dominating on the visual one. The Portrait of Eleanor Zarief (1940), recapturing some of the naive intensity of Browne's youth, must have been one of the works that reopened the door to his belated maturity, a transformation completed in the last two years of his life, when for the first time Browne got his own excitement out on canvas, convulsive and impatient, but right.[33]

Not a single critic reproduced an abstraction, upon which his career had been based. Their preference for the final self-portrait to accompany their reviews overwhelmingly confirms that of all Browne's work, they considered the portraits the best of his oeuvre, with the last self-portrait as representative and most forthright of them all.

Emily Genauer recorded the most sympathetic account of Browne's achievements

> Now the most interesting and rewarding aspect of Browne's work going back to the mid-'30s when he was a founding member of the then avant-garde association known as American Abstract Artists, was the fact that he

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[33] Sidney Tillim, "In the Galleries: Byron Browne," Arts Magazine, Vol. 36, no. 6 March, 1962, p. 51.

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> combined an insatiable curiosity about new ideas and currents with basic respect for traditional values strong enough to inform even his abstraction. Year after year one saw in his shows lively reflections of what progressive artists here and abroad were thinking. And that seemed natural and valid enough, since there could be no mistaking his own great technical gifts or sincerity. But now Browne's untimely death puts his pictures in another perspective. The successions of styles and influences--e.g., geometrical abstraction; a neo-Classicism out of Ingres and David that for a time fascinated many New York painters, notably Browne's friend, Arshile Gorky; a primitivism absorbed via Klee; an old master humanism deriving from, of all people, Rembrandt, can no longer be viewed as steps on an artist's painstaking, agonizing way to developing a personal style. Death robbed Browne of the chance to achieve a synthesis. We remain confronted with steps broken off in mid-air. The tragedy is that in his most recent works he seemed to be staking out an area that was completely his own. He had begun to concentrate on portraiture, today a moribund art sorely in need of the new vigor that a man as dynamic, as talented and as experimental as Browne could bring to it. He painted his portraits with a fine, free swinging style with brushstrokes flying all over the canvas in explosions of incandescent color and richly grained texture, and yet never permitted to get out of hand. But even in his portraits there was no real resolution. His subjects were his artist friends, men who would have understood and sympathized with any liberties he might take with their appearance. Yet he topped the marvelously free painting of their bodies with heads almost porcelain smooth and academically lifelike. It is as if he were determined to make portraiture respectable again, to prove that one could be free and factual at the same time even as earlier he wanted to wed experiment and tradition. It was a noble purpose. But he didn't live long enough to integrate its dichotomous aspects. The ambivalence, the inability to make a choice that haunted Browne as he pursued each phase of his career, were with him to the end. And he was haunted. One has only to look at his self-portrait, the best picture in both of his shows, to see it.[34]

Essentially, Genauer said that while Browne died prematurely in chronological time, he was no longer a young painter who could be forgiven such floundering. While that is how a young artist learns his craft and establishes his way in an effort to acquire skills, find himself and find a suitable personal style, Browne searched as a professional for over

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[34] Emily Genauer, "Steps Ending in Mid-Air: Two by Browne," New York Herald Tribune, 4 February 1962, sect. 4, p. 8. She, too, chose to reproduce the 1961 self-portrait to accompany her text. It should be remembered how prolific Browne was, for while painting portraits, he painted other imagery as well. The portraits were only a small portion of his total output during 1959-61.

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thirty-four years without coming any closer than the day he began.

After that length of time, one can no longer be considered a novice and forgiven for continually leaning on the art of others and constant experimentation in which the structure and imagery holding the work together belongs to the great artists and art styles of the past. It was expected of Browne that he would have "found himself" long before.

Rosalind Browne took umbrage with nearly all the critics's reviews in letters either to them or to their editors. Stuart Preston's review angered her most, especially as he had not seen the shows but wrote from previous acquaintance with Browne's work. She did not waste time venting her anger at Preston but wrote instead to John Canaday, the chief art critic of The New York Times, who had assigned Preston. Canaday replied kindly that the problem was one of an early deadline for a Sunday publication and that he was sorry she was disappointed with some of Preston's remarks. Still, he refused her request to send another critic for a re-review of the same show. In a short time, Rosalind, who minced no words in expressing her thoughts, had alienated nearly every critic and arts editor in New York.

She was most gentle with Emily Genauer, who reviewed for the New York Herald Tribune. In her letter to Genauer, with whom the Brownes had maintained a cordial relationship over the years, she wrote

> Dear Emily:
>
> I want you to know that I responded deeply to your feeling for Byron in your survey of his career in last Sunday's Tribune. You expressed understanding and many truths and I will always remember the extent of your appreciation for Byron and his complex situation within the cross currents of the contemporary art world.
>
> There was just one misunderstanding that bothered me - between ourselves. Byron could very easily have made a choice and rested comfortably on any small section of his virtuosity. But he deliberately chose the hard way toward his aim - an aim you understand well - that of

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creating a contemporary classicism - toward achieving a synthesis that would unite arbitrary experimentation with the mainstream of tradition in art. There is no quick, honest way to achieve this - especially today - for an artist of integrity. It took Goya many years to create the "black paintings".

This is the only lonely banner that I wave in the face of all his critics. He could have made a choice but was too dedicated an artist to be tempted or intimidated by the current worship of an easily acquired style. He had a purpose - as you said - and he was beginning to achieve it toward the end. And he was haunted - by the torture he had to face continuously for his integrity which he would not sacrifice on any terms.

This was the point of his life. You understand so much that I hesitated to cavil with so much sympathy. But you are so intelligent and broad in scope that I finally realized that it was an insult to you to feel I couldn't tell you of this aspect which is so important a consideration in reviewing Byron's life.

I hope by this time that you are fully recovered. You will always have my deepest respect. With warm regards,

Sincerely,

Rosalind
Rosalind Browne[35]

Whether Byron Browne had continued to live or not matters little at this point; the issue is one of determining if he had already, and long before 1961, "found his way," all possibility of which the critics denied him.[36] That he seemed to be heading toward yet another tangent with portrait painting should not be a condition of this determination, unless one ignores the sacrifice of a lifetime of struggle and achievement in other expressions, for the three or four years of concentrated work on portraits, many of which look stylistically much alike.

How much longer would he have continued to paint them before exhausting the

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[35] Rosalind Browne, Letter to Emily Genauer, 8 February 1962. Copy of letter Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne. There is no record of Genauer's response, if any.

[36] Consequently, with the passing of time, Byron Browne's name ceased to be but infrequently mentioned by the criics. His work languished in near oblivion for many years in his studio and apartment.

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possibilities? While some are beautifully and sensitively rendered, they are not great paintings; some are not even good. It is doubtful that Browne could have taken them any further in their development. Had he abstracted to a greater degree, they would have ceased to be portraits; had he retreated toward greater realism, he would have returned to the academic fold from which he fled in 1928. In all likelihood, if he had lived, Browne would soon have ceased to paint them in order to move on to something else, as was his restless practice. While it may be too harsh to think of this late work as only another "experiment," it is doubtful that Browne would have "found" himself through portraiture, just as he had not in any other mode.

In so many ways Genauer's comments regarding Browne's wish to combine traditional portraits in an academic realism via Rembrandt with what was "the new" in contemporary modernism, in order to create a personal style were exceedingly perceptive. The academic strain that rested always just under the surface in his thinking and work, had emerged full-fledged once more. Here, with portraiture, he could have the academic side by side with the abstract and he could now justify both modes without feeling guilty. Yet while he saw portraiture as a way of anchoring to the past, he just as surely saw it as negating anything progressive in his work. Had he wanted, he could have made a name for himself as a painter of portraits and taken commercial commissions for such work. Still, it would be unrealistic to believe that he entertained portrait painting as his final goal. The last thing Browne would have considered for his livelihood and the remainder of his professional life was commercial art, for in doing so, he knew that the artist lost his freedom, becoming subservient to the taste and direction of the one who commissions, as well as the face of his sitter. Accordingly, he maintained a lifelong belief in the separation of fine art from that of the commercial and illustrative category.

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Far more than bad luck colored his life. While roving from one stylistic idiom to another in rapid order marked his career, that alone was not the only factor that conspired against him. His natural taciturn character certainly added to his difficulties from the outset. Still, one of the greatest factors in his troubled life stems from his simple childhood habit of replicating other artists's work and allowing himself to lean upon it for his direction. Beginning with the cartoon figures from his school days to his later reliance upon Ingres and Picasso, then a multitude of other painters, including Pollock and de Kooning, Browne was never without an absentee mentor. A comparison of de Kooning's figure type and slashing brushstrokes in Woman, I, 1950-52 (Fig. C-23), with Browne's Seated Bather, 1952 (Fig. C-24), and Satyr, 1954 (Fig. C-24), point to direct observation of de Kooning's gestural work. By this time de Kooning had gained considerable notoriety for his "lacerated" figures of women and Browne was surely exploring the possibilities of such gestures in his own work of the same subject. That is not to say that he was a servile copyist, but he depended upon the foundation of the art of others in order to blaze his own inventive trail. While this carried him for a time, its usefulness played out, leaving Browne on his own to fend for himself. That he could not was his great tragedy. There was no way he could appropriate and rework the personalized, extremely emotional painting of the Abstract Expressionists. In the final analysis, Browne's portraiture may well have been the most honest, independent, original and self-expressive work of his career, but it remained far from his best painting.

With Browne's death the last of the American Cubists died as well. He had taken the great visual revolution of the twentieth century and expanded upon its possibilities longer than any painter dared or desired to do so. Once no longer on the defensive over the critical acceptance of American abstraction, he chose Picasso's Cubism as the foundation,

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the "grid" upon which to invent his personal interpretations. Later, he seemed unaware that it, like all great movements, was itself exhausted and had nothing left to offer. That he was hardly suited temperamentally to take his warning criticism seriously, to believe that he needed to abandon his ingrained idea that the continuum of modern art grew only from Cubism, worked against him. Still, it would seem, in the late 1950s until his untimely death, that he finally did seek that change through portraiture, an all but abandoned enterprise.

Browne's Americanization of Cubism continued what the pioneering painters, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Alfred Maurer, and Max Weber had begun soon after the radical fragmented work by Picasso and Braque became known. Hardly an American painter and not a few sculptors could resist experimenting with Cubism's intersecting angular shapes. Even that great resister of modernism, the sculptor Chaim Gross, noted for the exaggerated corpulence of his female acrobats and dancers, could not help but try out its sharp, hard-edged angles with a flat board relief interpretation titled Roosevelt and Hoover in a Fistfight, 1932, (Fig. C-26). This amusing sculpture represents the caricatures, drawn from newspaper coverage of the election campaign then in progress, of New York's Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt choking the incumbent President Herbert Hoover with two circular fists during their decisive contest that, once over, changed the face of the Great Depression and the history of America. It was Gross's first and only foray into Cubism and modernism, and he did not like it.

Although the curiosity of some may have ended as abruptly as it began, there were numerous painters who stayed the course long enough to be classified as American Cubists. While there is not to be found in their work the stylistic or thematic homogeneity characteristic of a school, they were Cubists nonetheless, freewheeling American-style

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Cubists painting with all the gusto and innocence they could pour into their borrowed French style. It should be noted that, as Abraham Davidson points out, the Americans did not produce pale imitations of the European models.[37] Often American painters used haphazard compositional patterns or a partial utilization of the Cubist aesthetic[38], as the unique Cubist style of Stuart Davis, among many others, attests. While some traveled to Paris to study first hand the works by its originators, others were not so fortunate, being far too poor to even consider the thought. As little Cubist work could be seen in New York in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and Browne wanted to practice its methods, magazine reproductions had to suffice as his primary learning experience.

When Picasso himself had long since ceased to paint in a Cubist manner, others, French painters as well as those across the whole of Europe and America, continued to play off its forms until a Mannerist exhaustion quelled further interest, and other aesthetics emerged. The full impact of Cubism arrived late to America and American painters stayed with it longer. As a result, in this country there exists a large body of innovative work created by numerous painters from about 1910 on, that falls into the category of American Cubism. As surely as there exists a strong category of American Impressionist art, inspired by those early nineteenth-century French painters of light, and much promoted of late, there exists as well an equally strong category of American Cubist art that needs

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37 Abraham Aba Davidson, "Some Early American Cubists, Futurists and Surrealists: Their Paintings, Their Writings, and Their Critics," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1965, p. 232. Davidson's text focussed on the paintings, to 1930, of Demuth, Dove, Hartley, Marin, Maurer, and Weber.

38 Ibid.

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the same explication.[39] The matter remains an oversight to be addressed.

Rosalind Browne, who made the decision to have her husband's body cremated, took his ashes to Provincetown in the spring and, with a small gathering of friends, tearfully allowed the wind to scatter them over the dunes he had tread upon so many times, to rest indistinguishably upon the grains of sand with which they mingled. On that day, with that act, all the love, hate, transgressions, the adversities and successes of twenty-five tempestuous years of their life together were remembered, forgiven, or pushed to the far recesses of the mind.[40] Byron Browne's long struggle was finished, but hers had just begun.

Browne, to his detriment, never understood Surrealism. He could not grasp its ability to open doors, to widen vision, when that was what he needed most. Everything about Browne was on the exterior. He was an artist who worked from the surface, not from the inside out; he was incapable of mining the emotional depths necessary to become the painter he so desperately wished to be. Not an expressive artist, but a defensive artist, he worked against his talents. Browne was a competent illustrator. Adept at and used to manipulating the work of others to get what he wanted, he fell into a trap, never finding the strength or ability to transcend that prison into which he had locked himself. In the long

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39 Addressing the dearth of attention to this special category, the author organized a gallery-wide exhibition of Cubist paintings and sculptures for the Sid Deutsch Gallery. See: American Cubism: 1909-1949. April Paul essay. New York, Sid Deutsch Gallery, May 9-June 3, 1992. Thomas Benrimo, Hugh H. Breckenridge, Byron Browne, Konrad Cramer, Stuart Davis, Manierre Dawson, Herzl Emanuel, Suzy Frelinghuysen, Hans Hofmann, Carl Holty, Raymond Jonson, Karl Knaths, Blanche Lazzell, Jan Matulka, Irene Rice Pereira, Abraham Walkowitz, Max Weber, Agnes Weinrich, and Marguerite and William Zorach were among many other artists included in this large group presentation.

40 During the summer she tried to enjoy their cottage that they had worked so hard to own but she could not bear to live in it any longer or even open his studio to sort his possessions; she sent their son instead. That fall she arranged, too hastily, for its quick sale. Rosalind Browne never returned to Provincetown.

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run, art is all about vision. Byron Browne could have been a great painter, but, always looking backward, he seemed to have possessed little of that magical ingredient. As a result, he doomed himself to perpetuity in its shadow.

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A

BYRON BROWNE: THE MEASURE OF A POLEMICAL LEGACY

by

APRIL JOYCE PAUL [NEE LAPLAND]

VOLUME II

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2002

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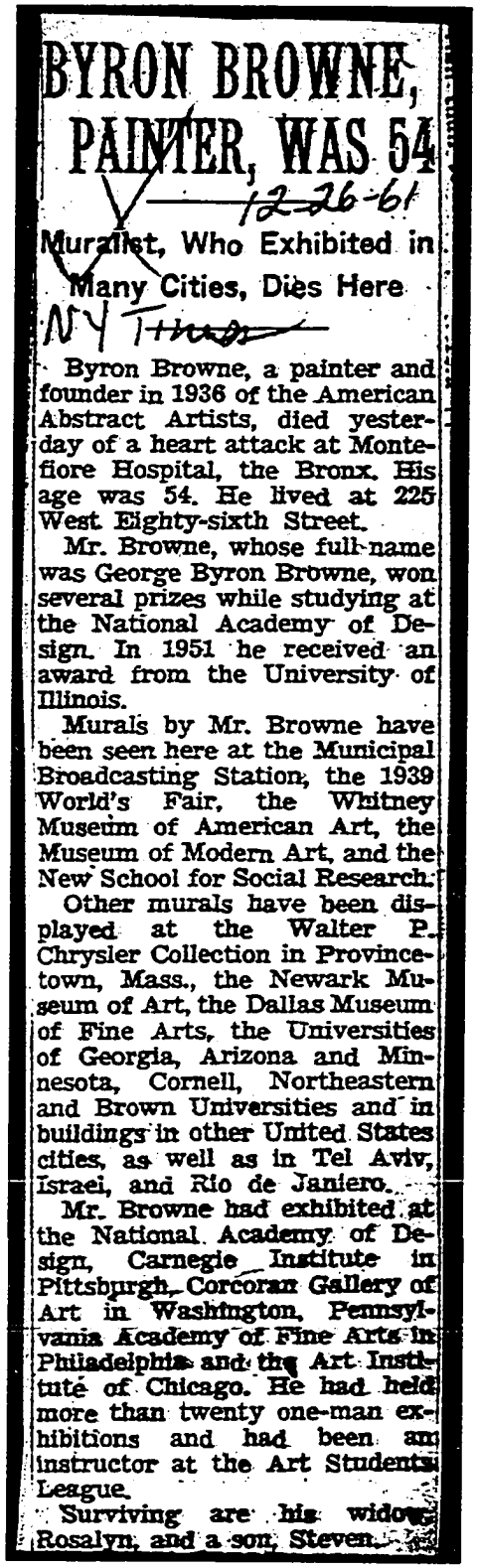
ILLUSTRATIONS

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Fig. I-1. Byron Browne in His Studio, Seated Next to One of His Crustacean Paintings. 1949, Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Photographer unknown. Estate of Byron Browne.

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BYRON BROWNE, PAINTER, WAS 54

12-26-61

Muralist, Who Exhibited in Many Cities, Dies Here

NY Times

Byron Browne, a painter and founder in 1936 of the American Abstract Artists, died yesterday of a heart attack at Montefiore Hospital, the Bronx. His age was 54. He lived at 225 West Eighty-sixth Street.

Mr. Browne, whose full name was George Byron Browne, won several prizes while studying at the National Academy of Design. In 1951 he received an award from the University of Illinois.

Murals by Mr. Browne have been seen here at the Municipal Broadcasting Station, the 1939 World's Fair, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the New School for Social Research.

Other murals have been displayed at the Walter P. Chrysler Collection in Provincetown, Mass., the Newark Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, the Universities of Georgia, Arizona and Minnesota, Cornell, Northeastern and Brown Universities and in buildings in other United States cities, as well as in Tel Aviv, Israel, and Rio de Janiero.

Mr. Browne had exhibited at the National Academy of Design, Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and the Art Institute of Chicago. He had held more than twenty one-man exhibitions and had been an instructor at the Art Students League.

Surviving are his widow, Rosalyn, and a son, Steven.

Fig. I-2. Photograph of the Obituary of Byron Browne, as it appeared in The New York Times, 26 December 1961.

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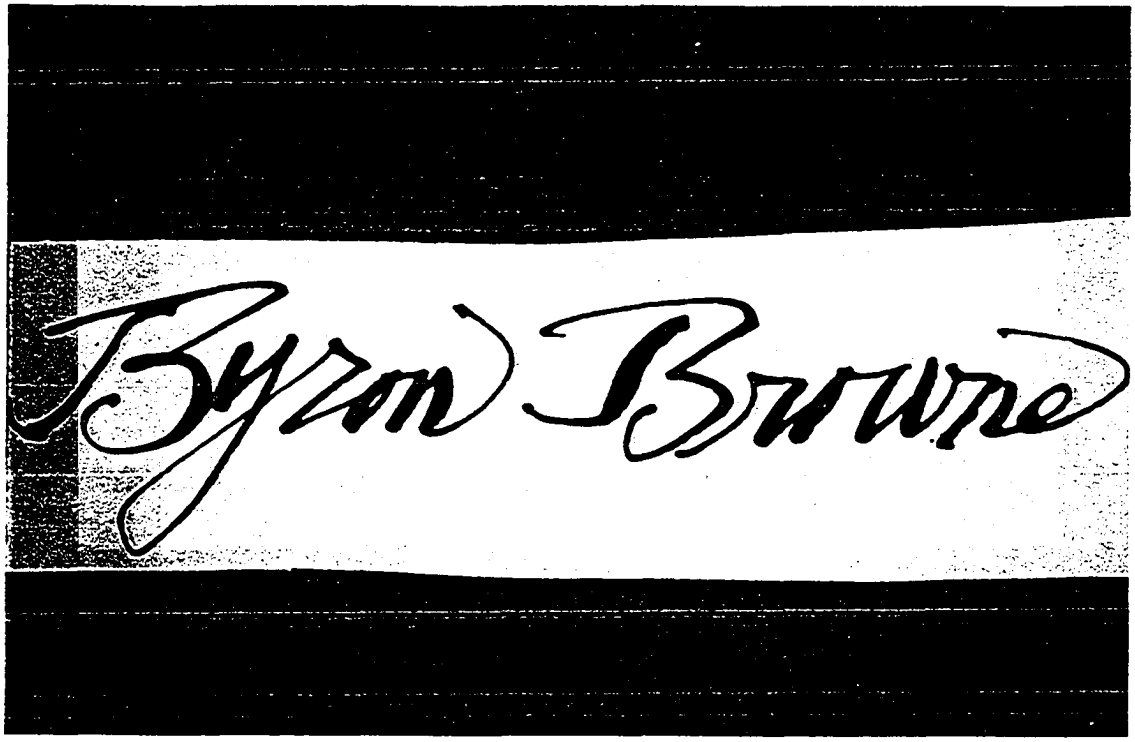


Fig. I-3. Signature of Artist. Photograph of the cursive handwriting style, unique to Byron Browne, with which he signed his work. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, New York City branch.

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Fig. 1-1. Byron Browne (at age 5) with Mother and Sister. 1912, Lakewood, New Jersey. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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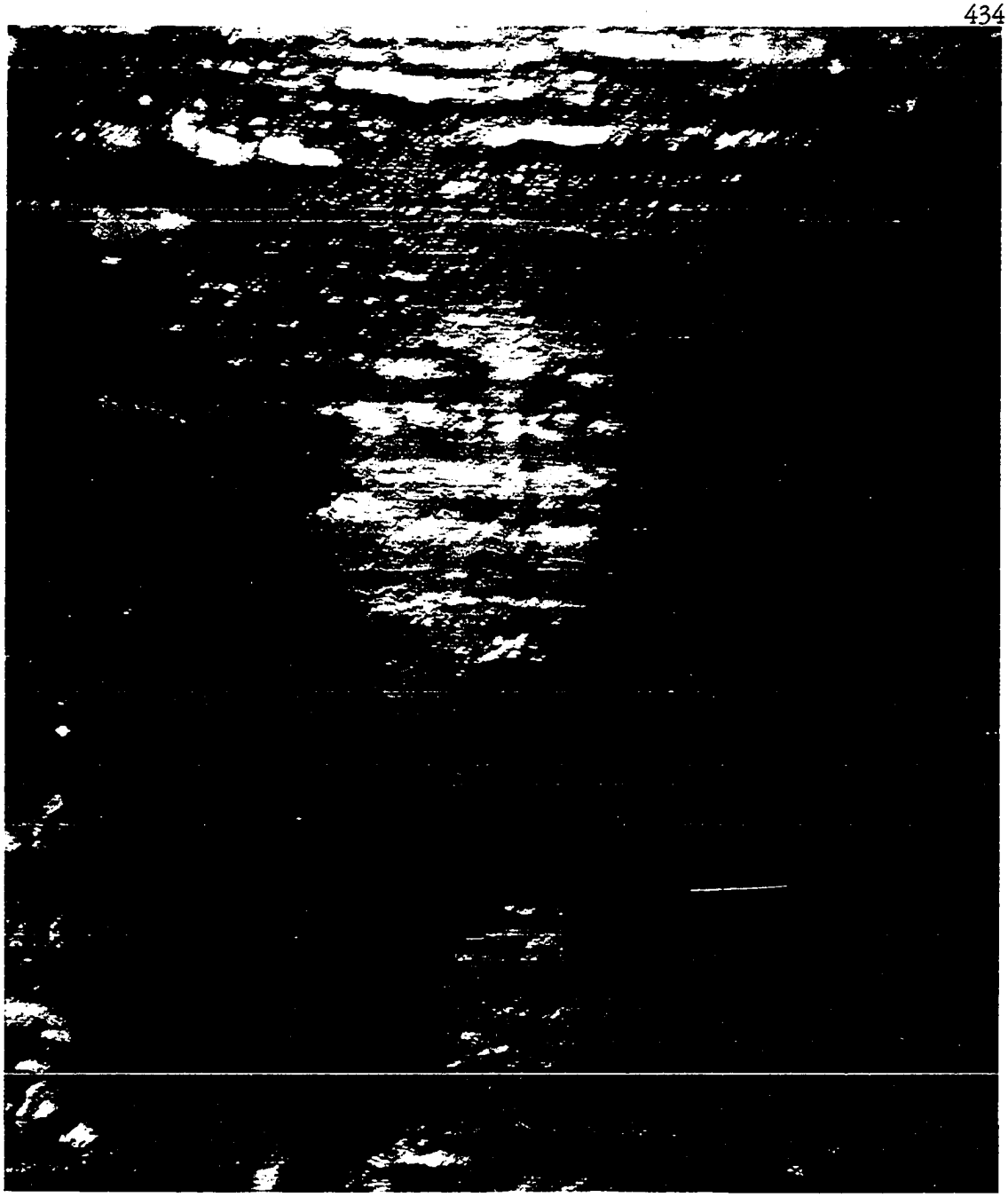


Fig. 1-2. Cora Elizabeth Poole Brown, (Mother of Byron Browne), Self-Portrait. N.d., oil on canvas, measurements unknown.

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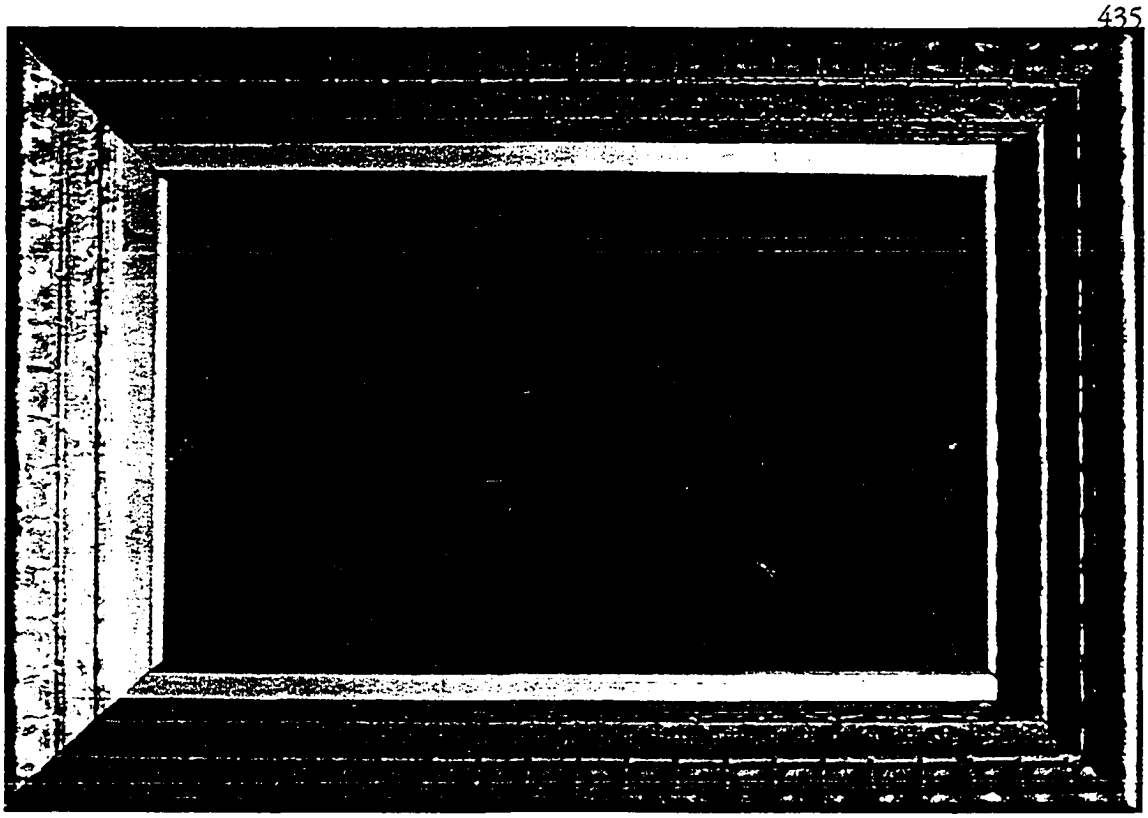


Fig. 1-3. Roses. 1921, oil on masonite, 9 1/2 x 16", (executed when Browne was 14; earliest existing painting). Coll: Estate of Byron Browne.



Fig. 1-4. Byron Browne (2nd from left) in Drawing Class. March 28, 1924, Yonkers High School, Yonkers, New York. Photo courtesy Estate of Abner Dean.

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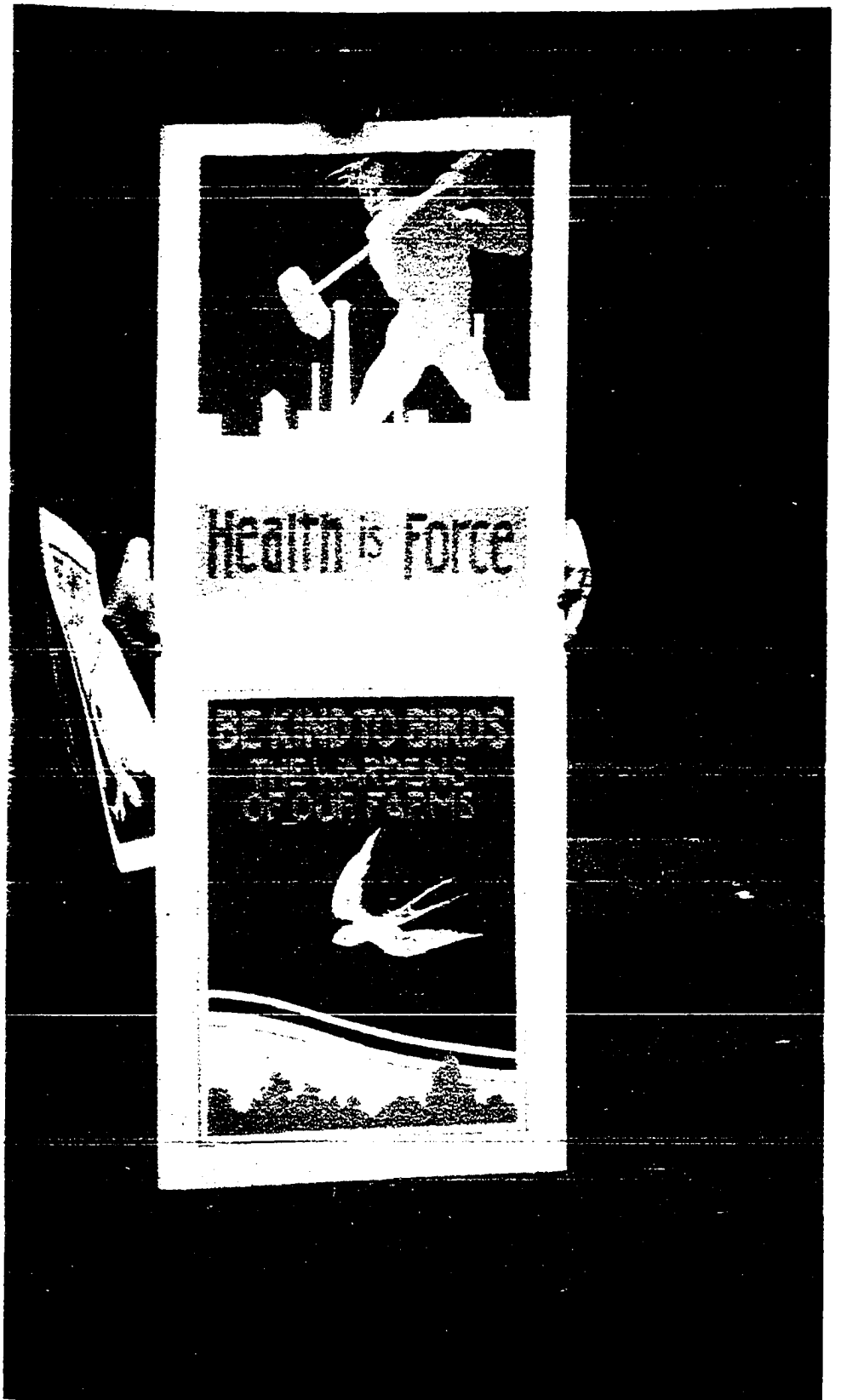


Fig. 1-5. Byron Browne Showing His Prize-Winning Poster (lower poster is that of fellow student, Abner Dean). Ca. 1924. Photo courtesy Estate of Abner Dean.

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Fig. 1-6. Head of a Girl. 1927, oil on canvas, measurements unknown.
Coll: Eli Barson, Mexico. Photo by Geoffrey Clements.

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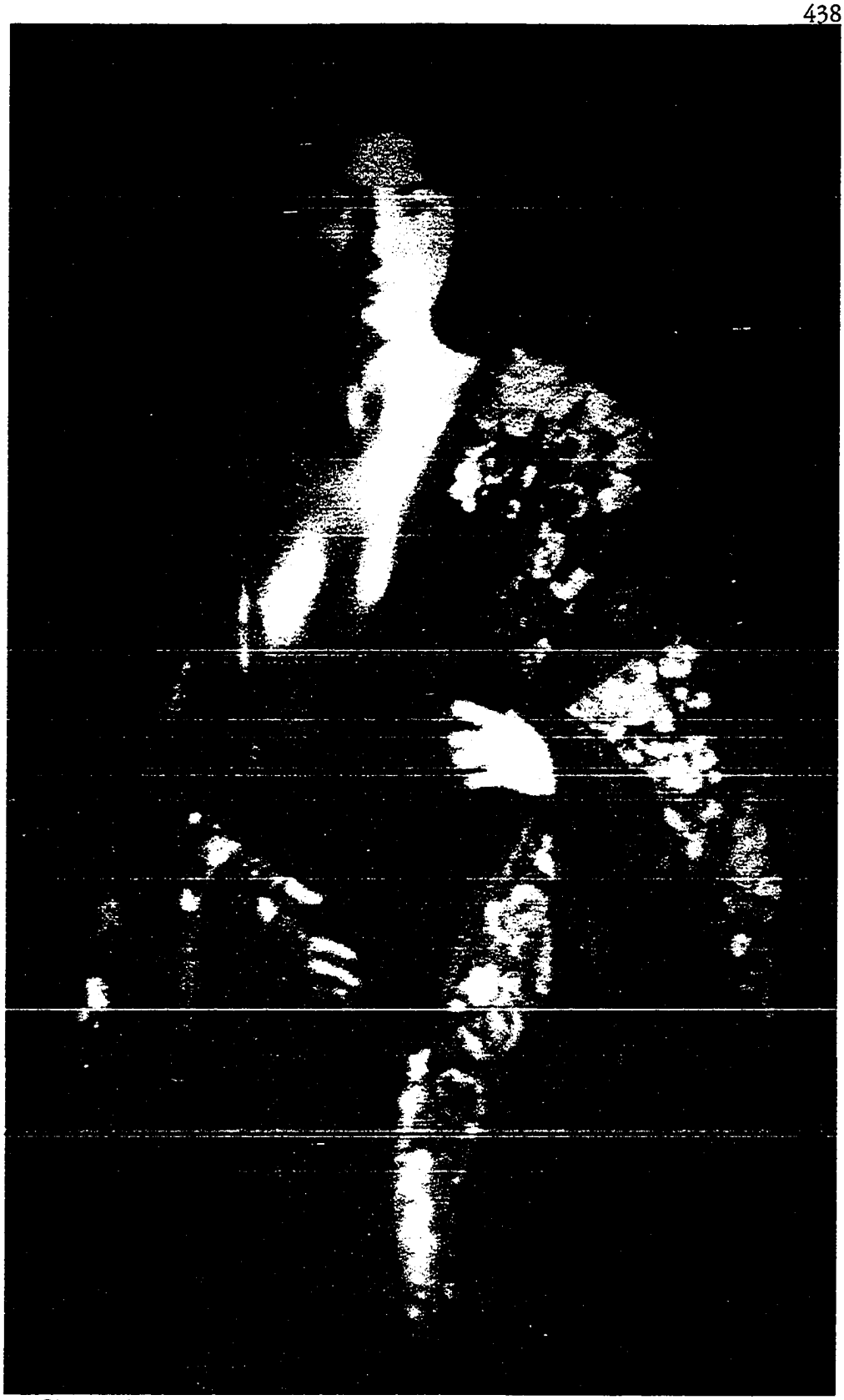


Fig. 1-7. Charles Curran. The Embroidered Shawl. 1923, oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 20". Photo courtesy Christie's Auction Sale Catalogue, December 11, 1981, Lot #187.

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Fig. 1-8. Old Iron, Copper, Etc. 1927, oil on canvas, measure- ments unknown. Destroyed by artist. Photo by Geoffrey Clements.

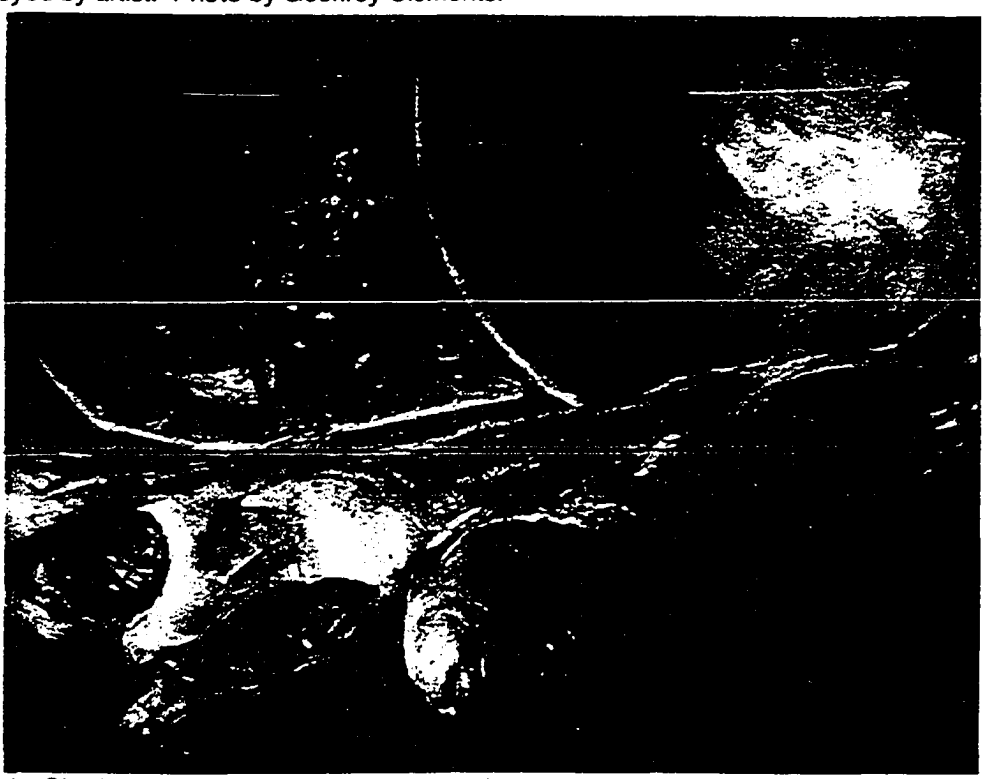
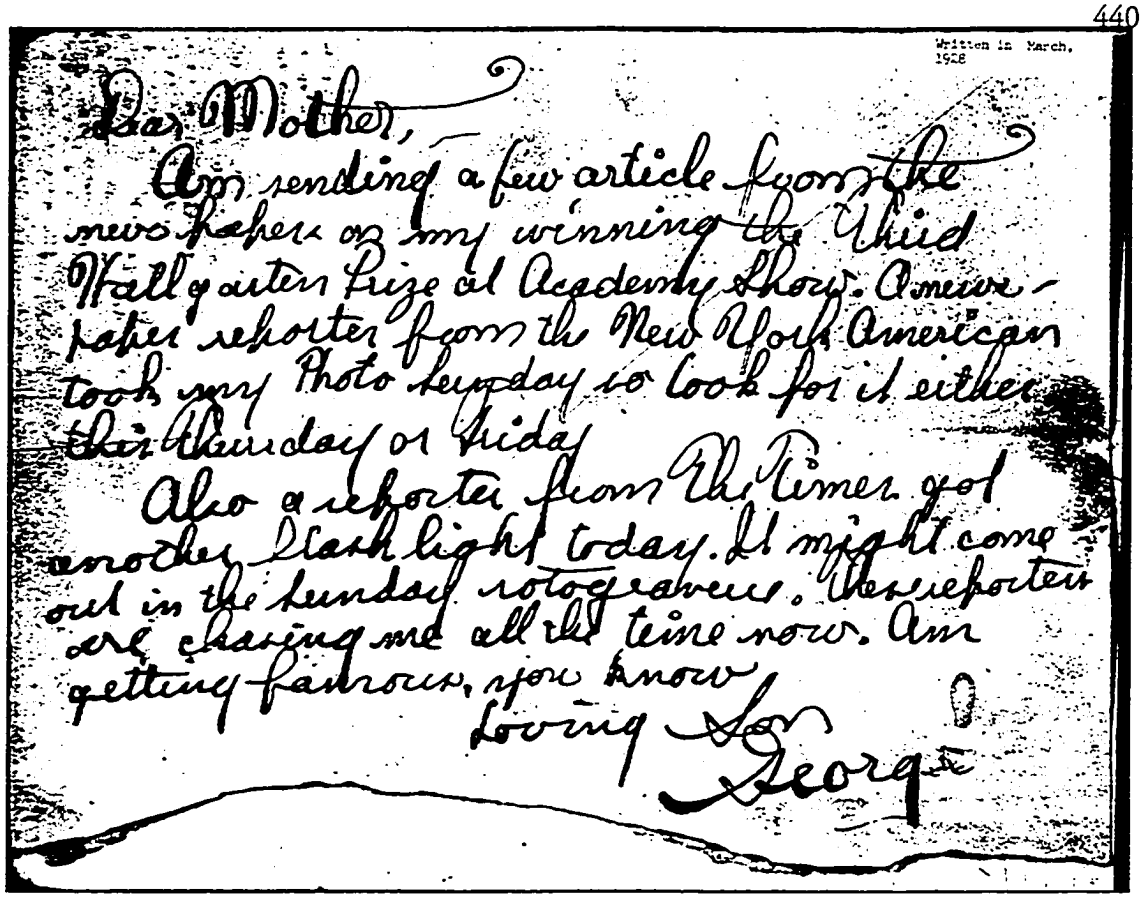


Fig. 1-9. Charles W. Hawthorne. Still Life with Fish. 1905, oil on canvas, 28 x 36". Coll: The Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Provincetown, Massachusetts.

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Written in March, 1928

Dear Mother,

Am sending a few article from the news papers on my winning the Third Hallgarten Prize at Academy Show. A news-paper reporter from the New York American took my Photo Tuesday to look for it either this Thursday or Friday

Also a reporter from The Times got another flash light today. It might come out in the Sunday rotogravure. The reporters are chasing me all the time now. Am getting famous, you know

Loving Son

George

Fig. 1-10. Letter. Written by Byron Browne to His Mother after Winning Hallgarten Prize, National Academy of Design. March 1928. Courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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OWN CRITIC:—
This picture of still life won a $100 National Academy prize for George Byron Brown, but as he stood beside his canvas he pointed out the faults he hopes to correct. He works in a dance hall check room by night, and paints during sunlight hours.

"CHECK please. . . ."

George Byron Brown, twenty-one, spends the hours between seven and one waiting for hat checks in a Broadway dance hall. But he also spends much of his time painting. He has just been awarded the third Hallgarten prize for his still life canvas shown at the 103rd annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design.

And now he is waiting for another kind of check—$100—which is the prize he won. He said:

"Painting the check room in Arcadia Hall isn't my life's ambition. I want to do modern sculpture now that I've got a start. Dad was a doctor and very much against my being an artist so I have just been on my own."

After working for two years in a leather yard, young Brown saved enough money to live on and to go to school for a while. But since his funds were exhausted he has gone back to night life so he could continue at the National Academy during the day.

Standing before his prize-winning canvas the artist uncomfortably began to criticise it, comparing it with the work of older artists rather than dwelling upon a satisfaction from its accomplishment.

Brown, who lives at No. [illegible] Lexington avenue, is completing his third year at the National Academy but had never before attended classes.

APR 1928
NEW YORK AMERICAN

Fig. 1-11. Newspaper Article. "Hat Checks Pay Way for Prize Artist, 21." New York American, 1 April 1928. Estate of Byron Browne.

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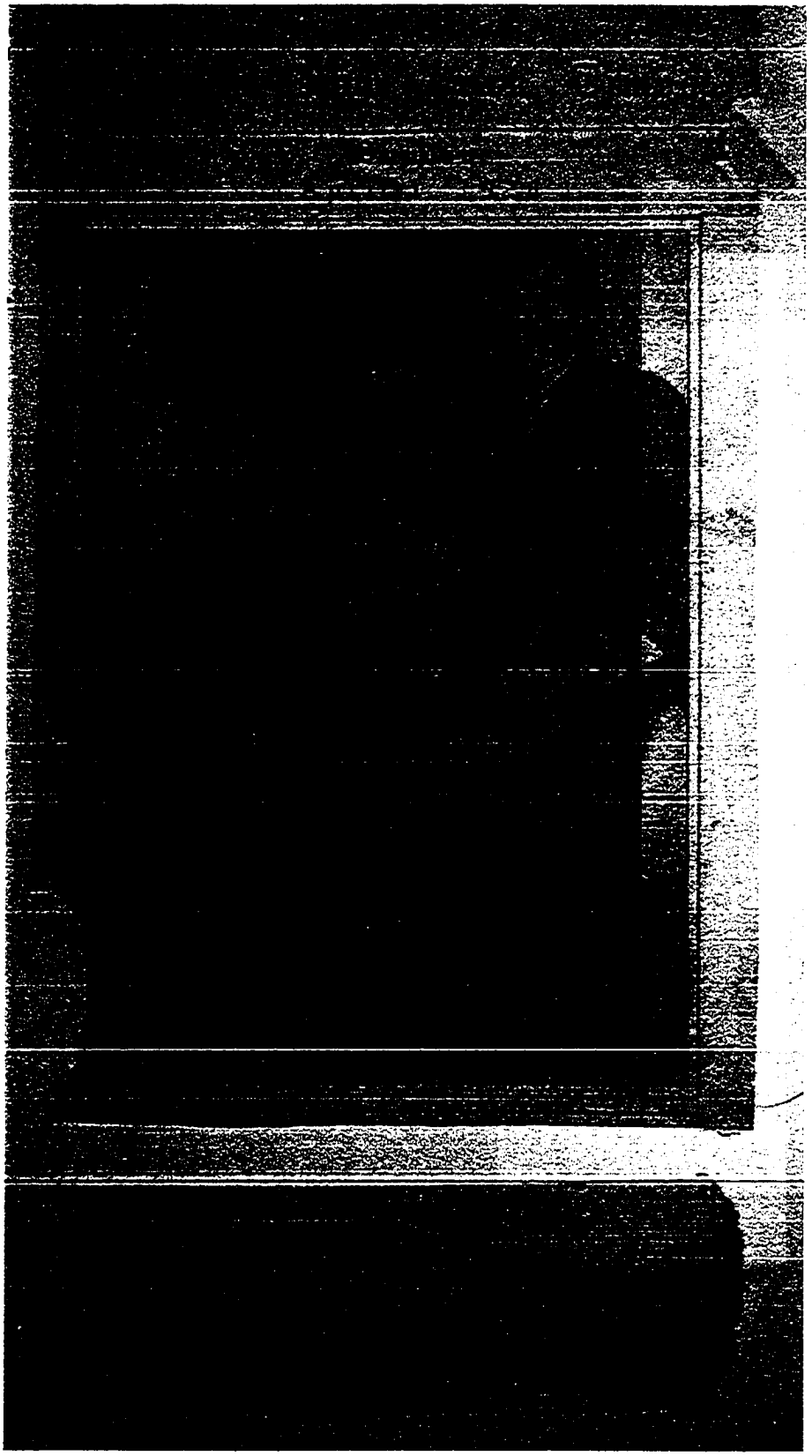


Fig. 1-12. Newspaper Article. "Harlem Claims the Youngest Winner of an Art Competition." The New York Times, 1 April, 1928. Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 1-13. Still Life. 1928, oil on canvas. Photo courtesy The Arts, Vol. 16, no. 4, December 1929, p. 226.

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Fig. 1-14. Portrait of Jack Kelly. 1928-29, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Whereabouts unknown.

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Fig. 1-15. Untitled (a.k.a. Harlequin; Seated Pierrot). Ca. 1929-30, oil on canvas, 38 x 30".
Coll: Willard B. Golovin, New York City.

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Fig. 1-16. Untitled (Nude Figure). 1927, charcoal and pencil on paper, 13 3/4 x 10". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 1-17. Untitled (Nude Figure). 1928, India ink on paper, 12 1/2 x 10 3/4". Courtesy Harmon Gallery, Naples, Florida.

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Fig. 1-18. Untitled (Nude Figure). 1929, India ink and pencil on paper, 16 3/4 x 11". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 1-19. Untitled (Seated Nude). 1930, India ink and pencil on paper, 21 3/4 x 14 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 1-20. Georges Braque. Large Nude. 1907-08, oil on canvas, 55 1/2 x 40".
Coll: Galerie Alex Maguy, Paris.

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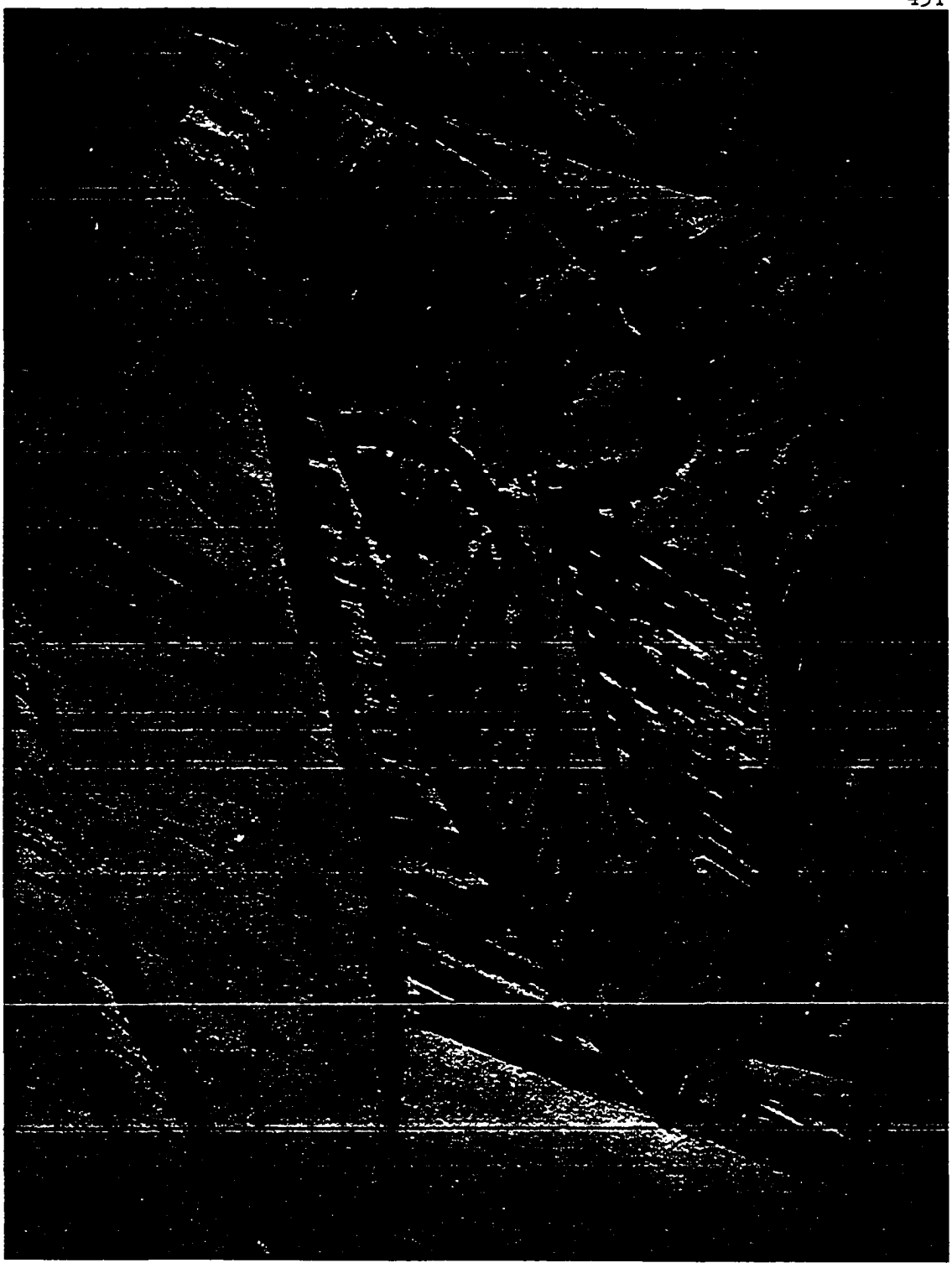


Fig. 1-21. Pablo Picasso. Head (Study for Les Demoiselles D'Avignon).
1907, India ink and watercolor on paper, 12 1/4 x 9 1/2". Private collection, Paris.

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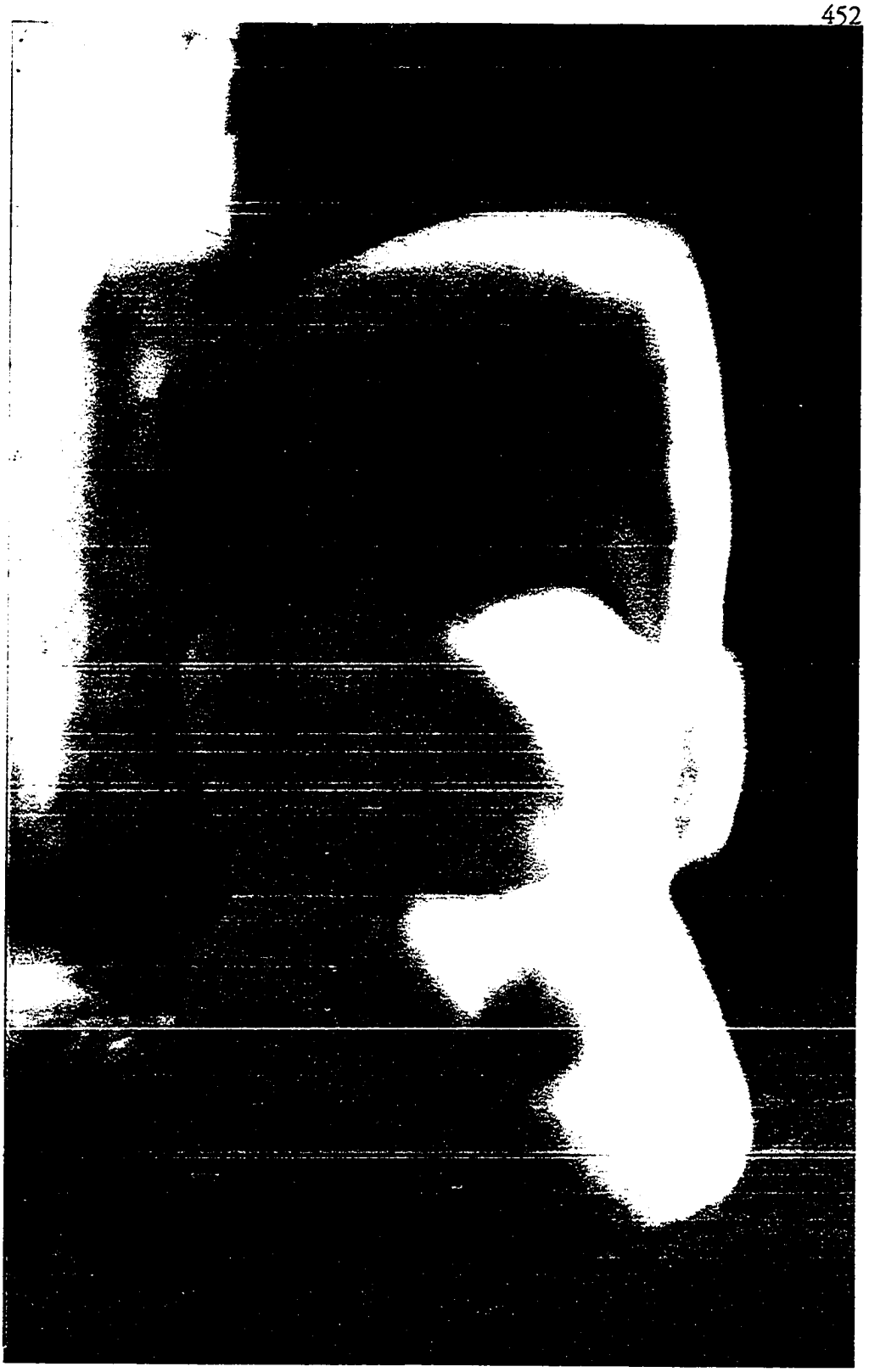


Fig. 1-22. Torso of a Woman. 1928, white marble, dimensions unknown. Destroyed.

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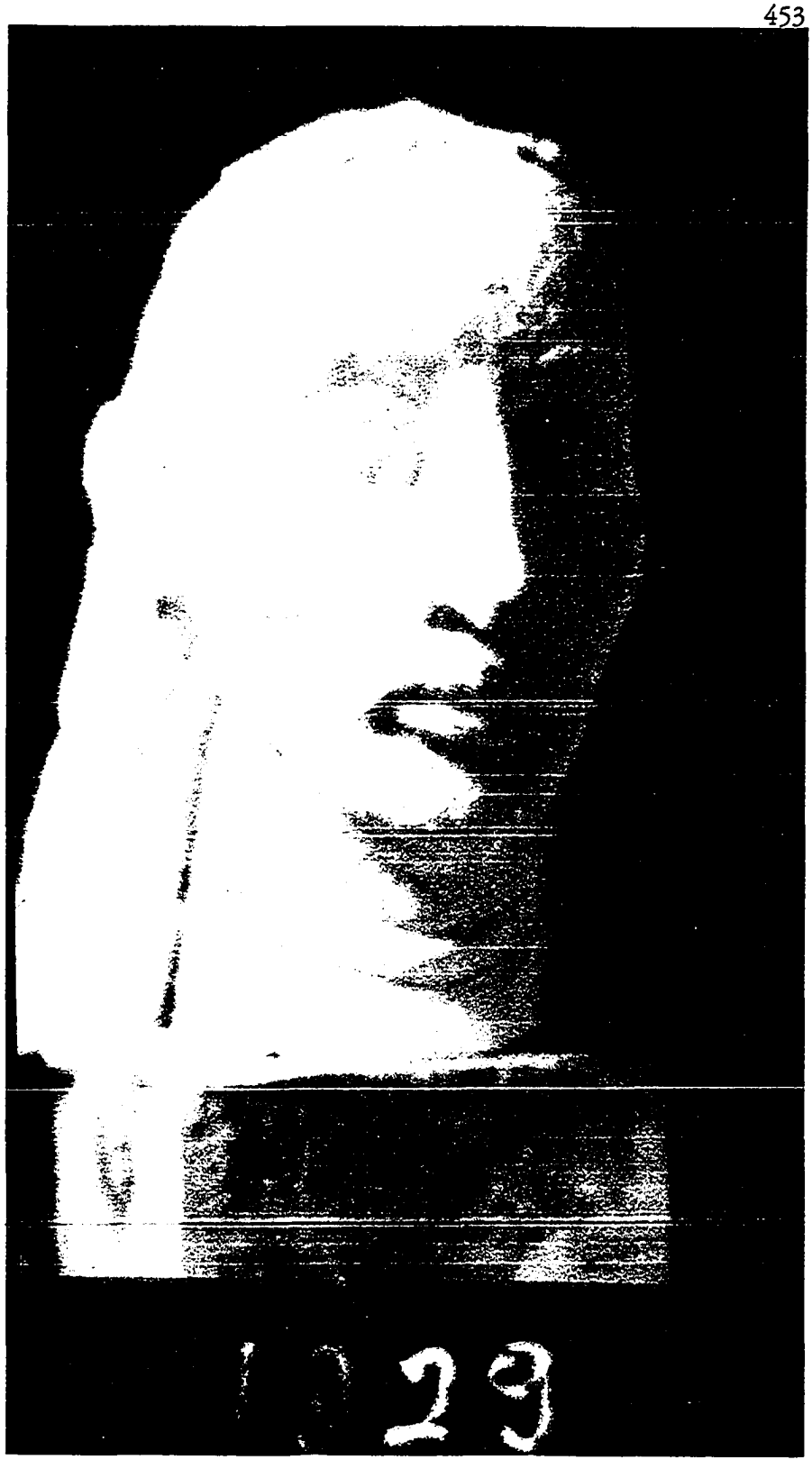


Fig. 1-23. Head of a Woman. 1929-30, white marble, dimensions unknown. Destroyed.

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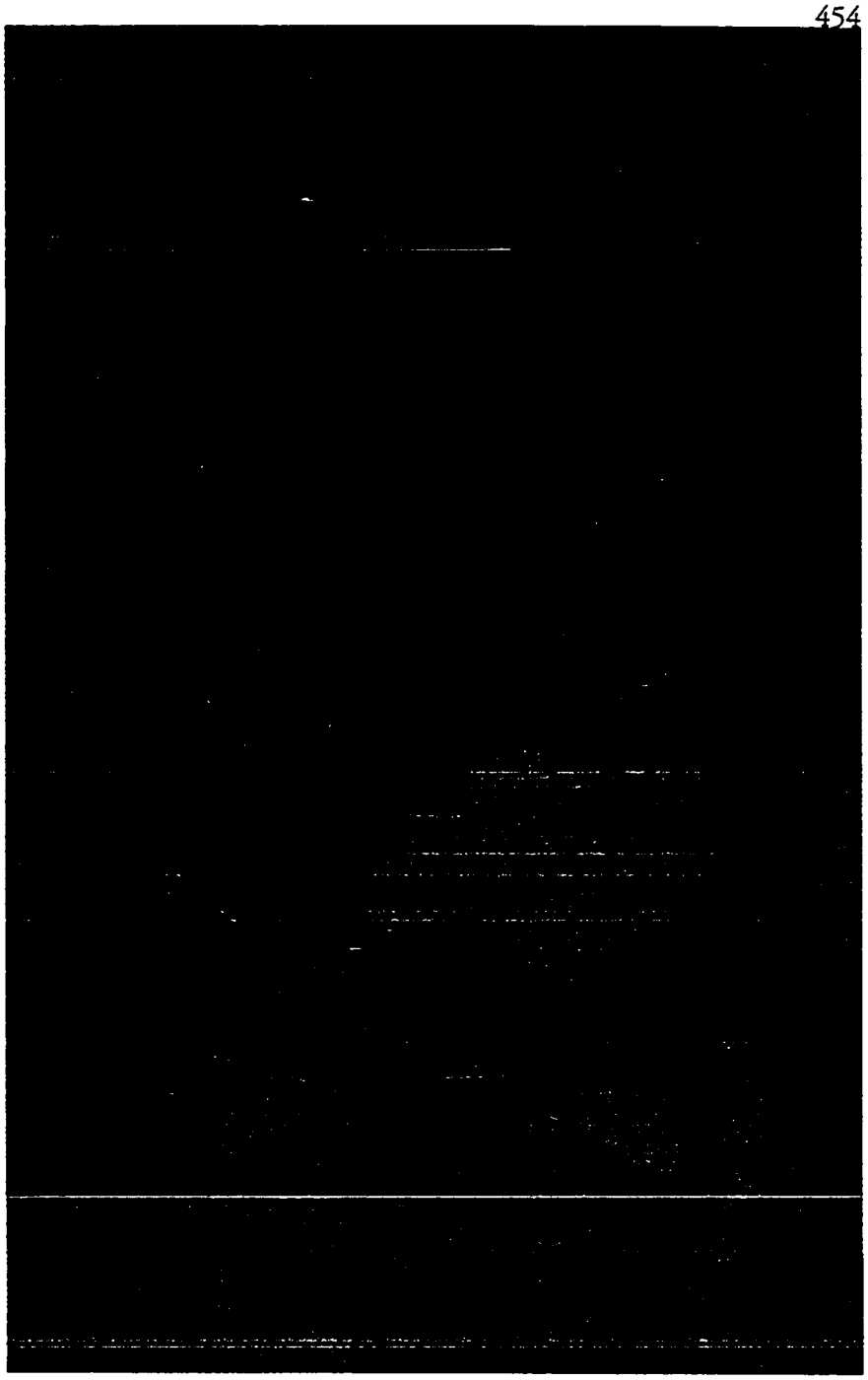


Fig. 2-1. The Clocktower. 1929, oil on canvas, 47 x 30". Private collection.

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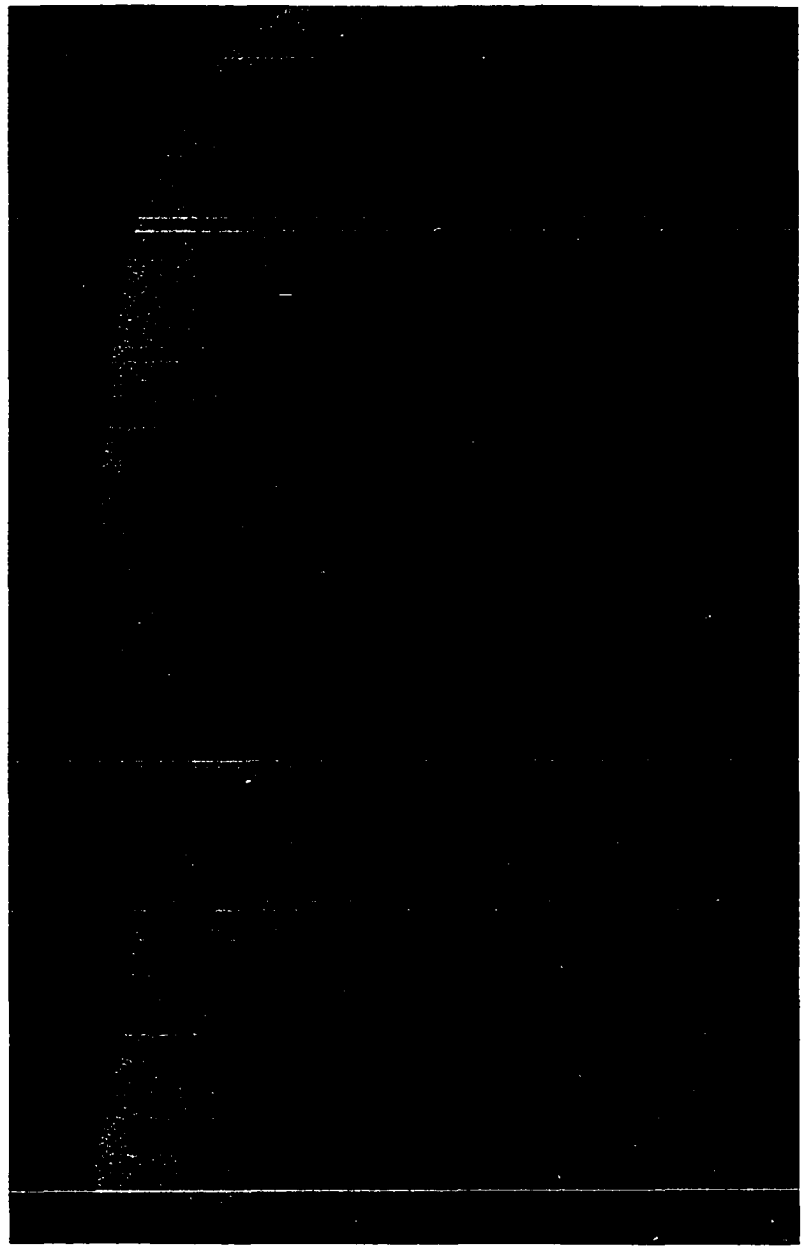


Fig. 2-2. Head. 1929, marble, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo by Geoffrey Clements.

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Fig. 2-3. Ivory Coast Senufo (West African) Figure. Wood carving, date, dimensions and current whereabouts unknown. Formerly collection of Paul Guillaume, Paris. Photo by Walker Evans.

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Fig. 2-4. Henri Laurens. Man with a Clarinet. 1919, stone, 23 5/8 x 8 7/8 x 6 3/8".
Coll: The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

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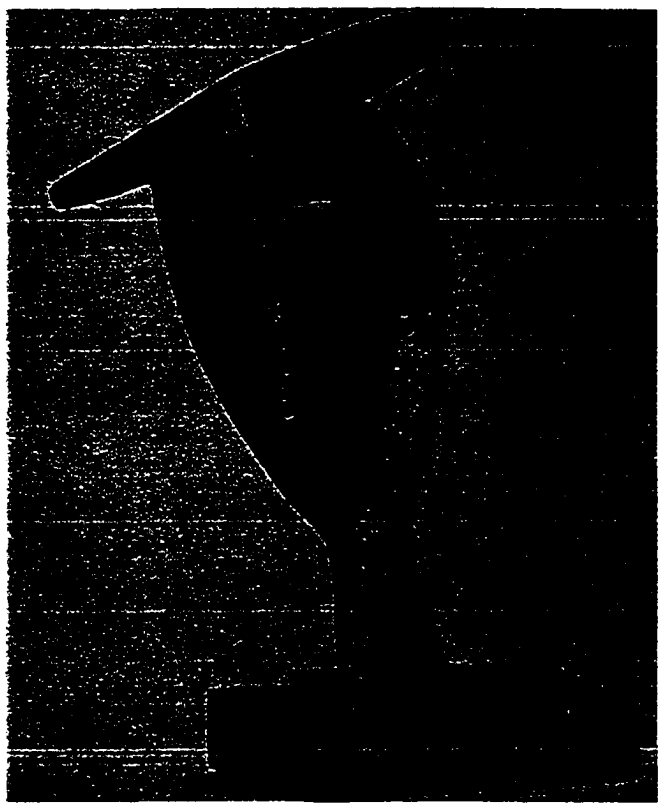


Fig. 2-5. Alexander Archipenko. Head: Construction with Crossing Planes. 1913, reconstructed ca. 1950, cast in bronze 1957, 15 x 11 1/2 x 11". Coll: The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

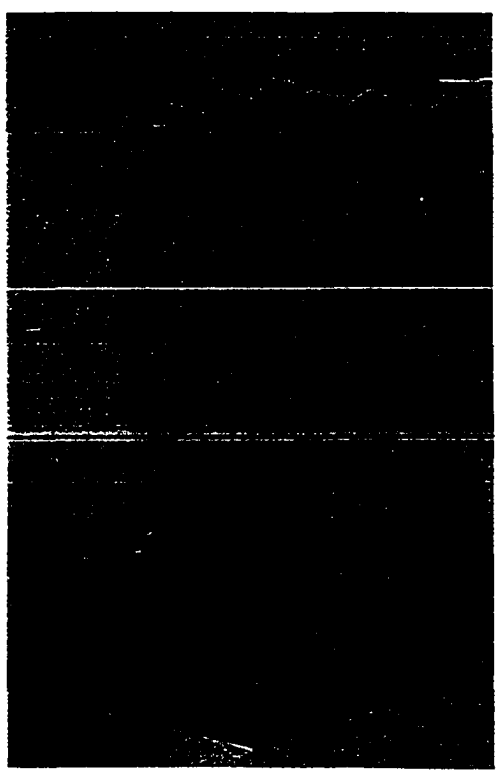


Fig. 2-6. Jacob Epstein. Sunflower. Ca., 1910, San Stefano stone. Private collection.

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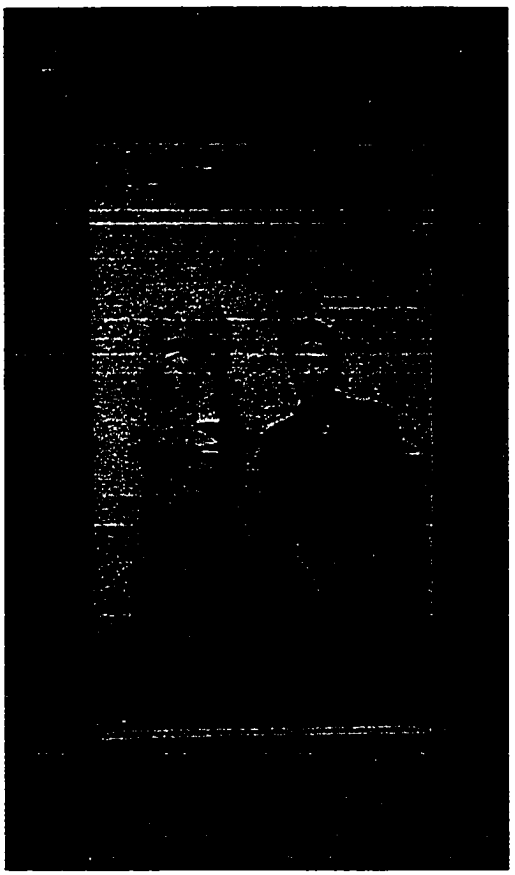


Fig. 2-7. Photograph of Byron Browne Sitting Beside His Sculpture (Head, 1929). 1933 (see Fig. 2-2). Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne; photographer unknown.

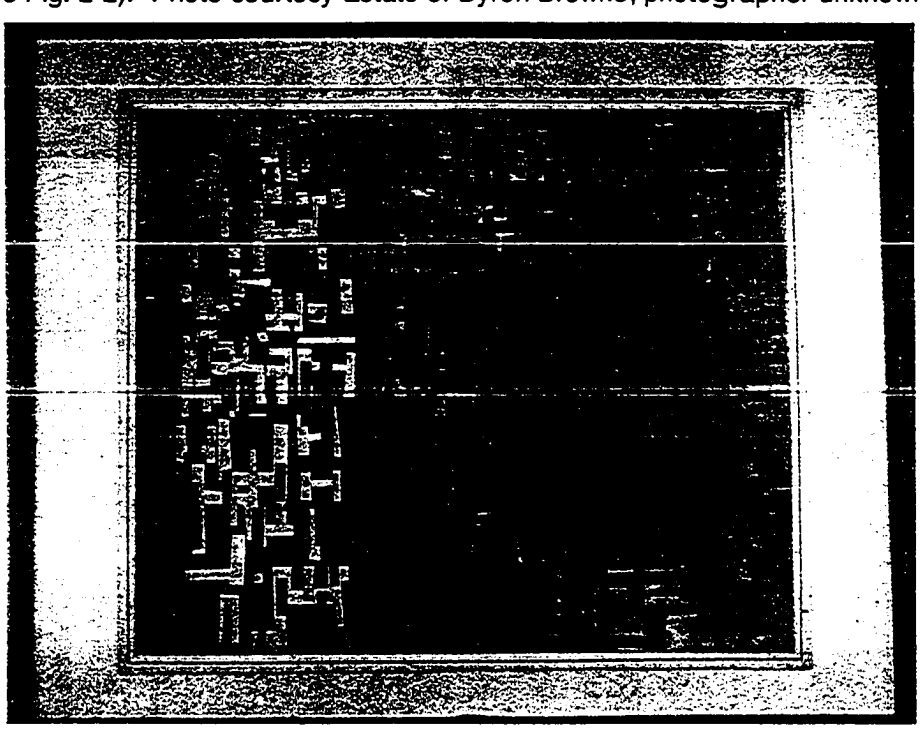


Fig. 2-8. Fugue. 1930, paper collage, mixed media and casein tempera, 15 1/4 x 17 1/2". Coll: Gilbert H. Kinney, Washington, D.C.

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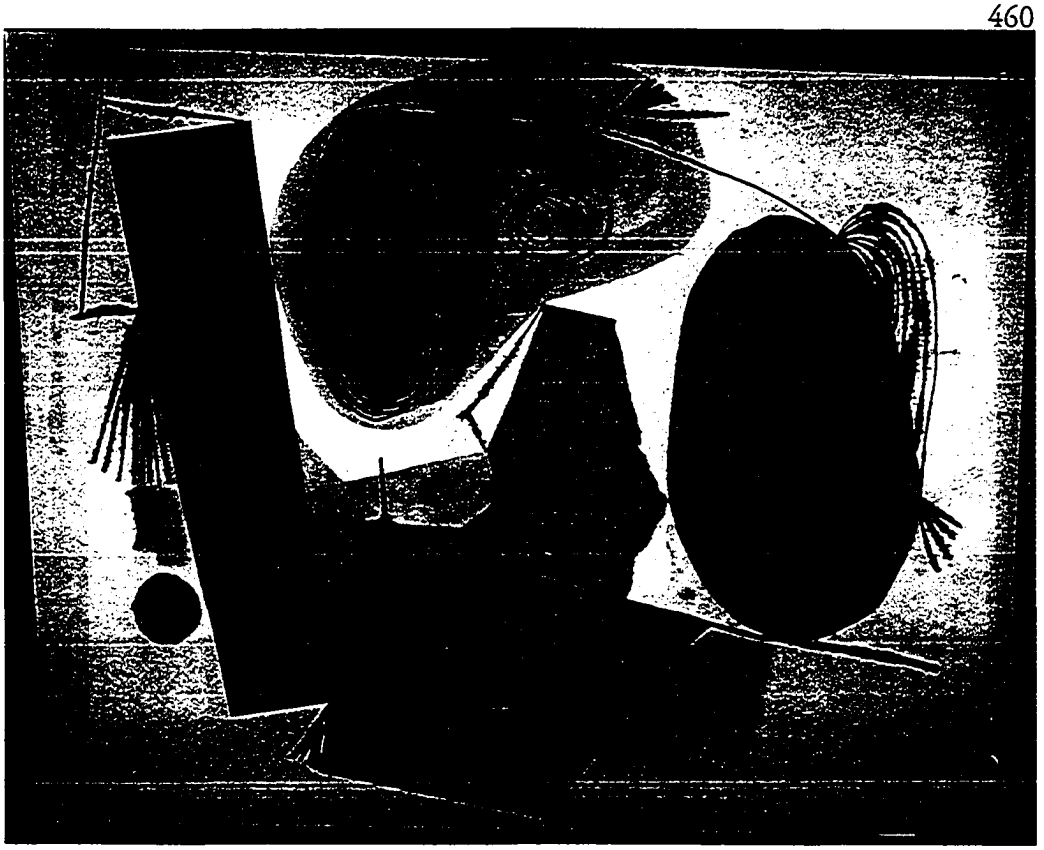


Fig. 2-9. Abstract. 1933, India ink, watercolor and collage on paper, 15 x 17 3/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

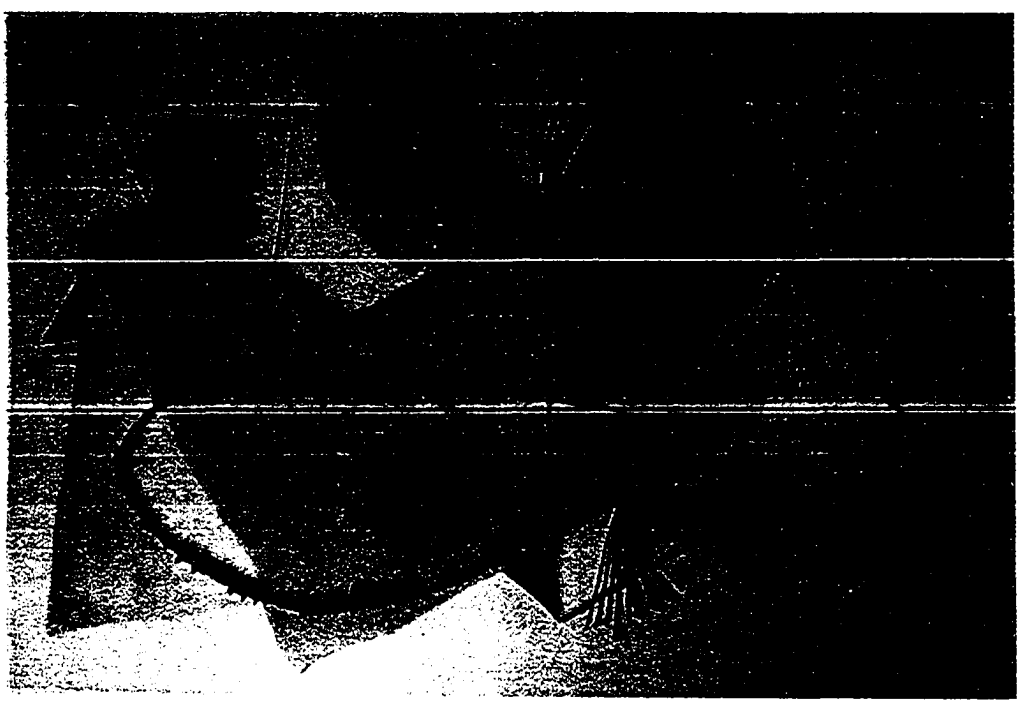


Fig. 2-10. Non-Objective Composition. 1934, collage, ink and tempera on paper, 10 x 15". Estate of Byron Browne.

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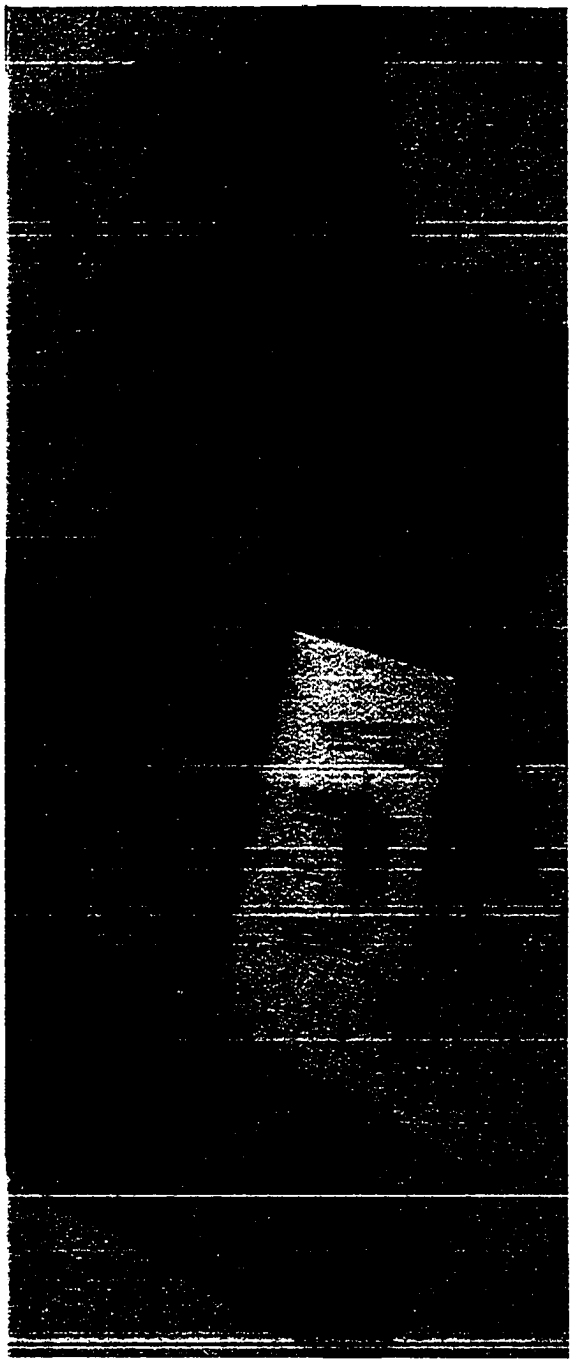


Fig. 2-11. Georges Braque. Glass, Carafe and Newspaper. 1913, papier collé, 24 5/8 x 11 1/4". Private collection, Basel, Switzerland.

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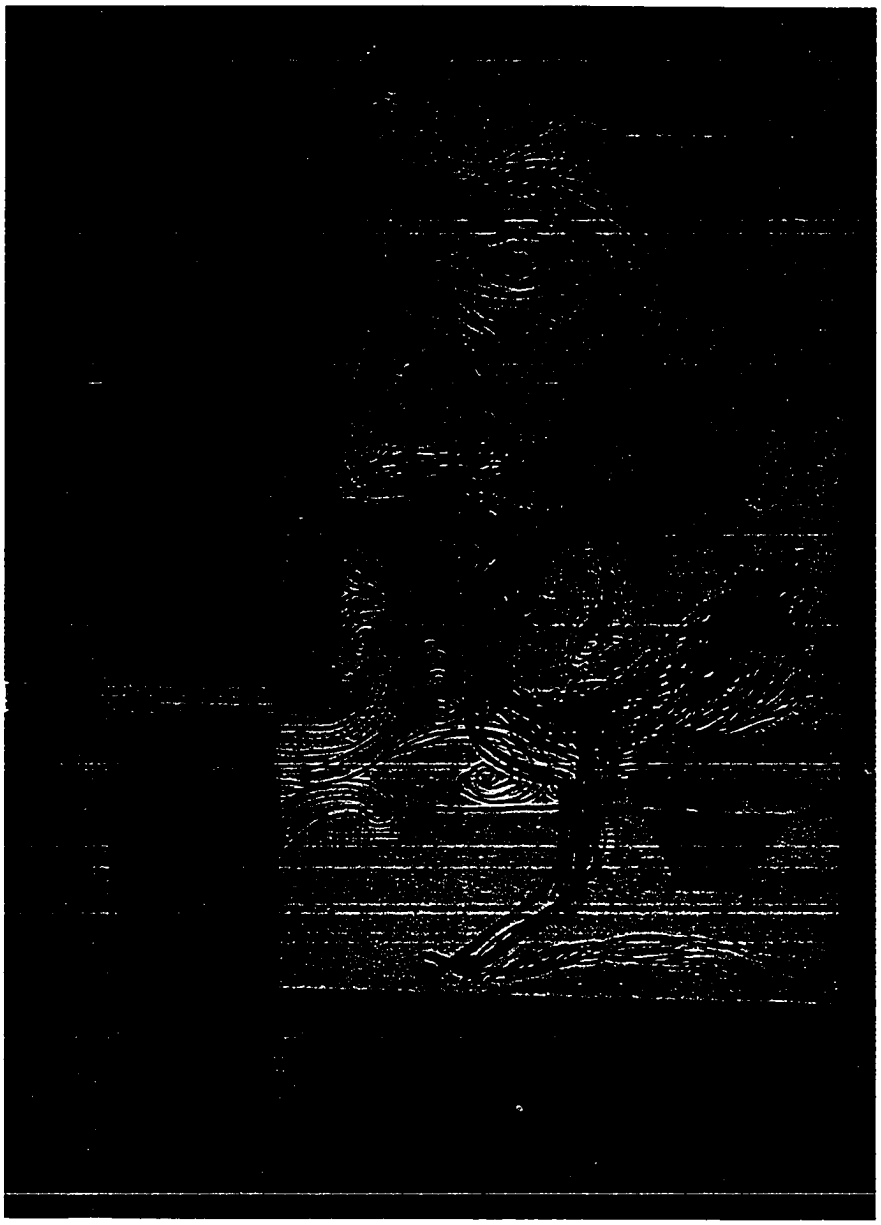


Fig. 2-12. Untitled (head). 1936, pen and ink, watercolor and collage on paper, 15 1/4 x 9 7/8". Estate of Byron Browne.

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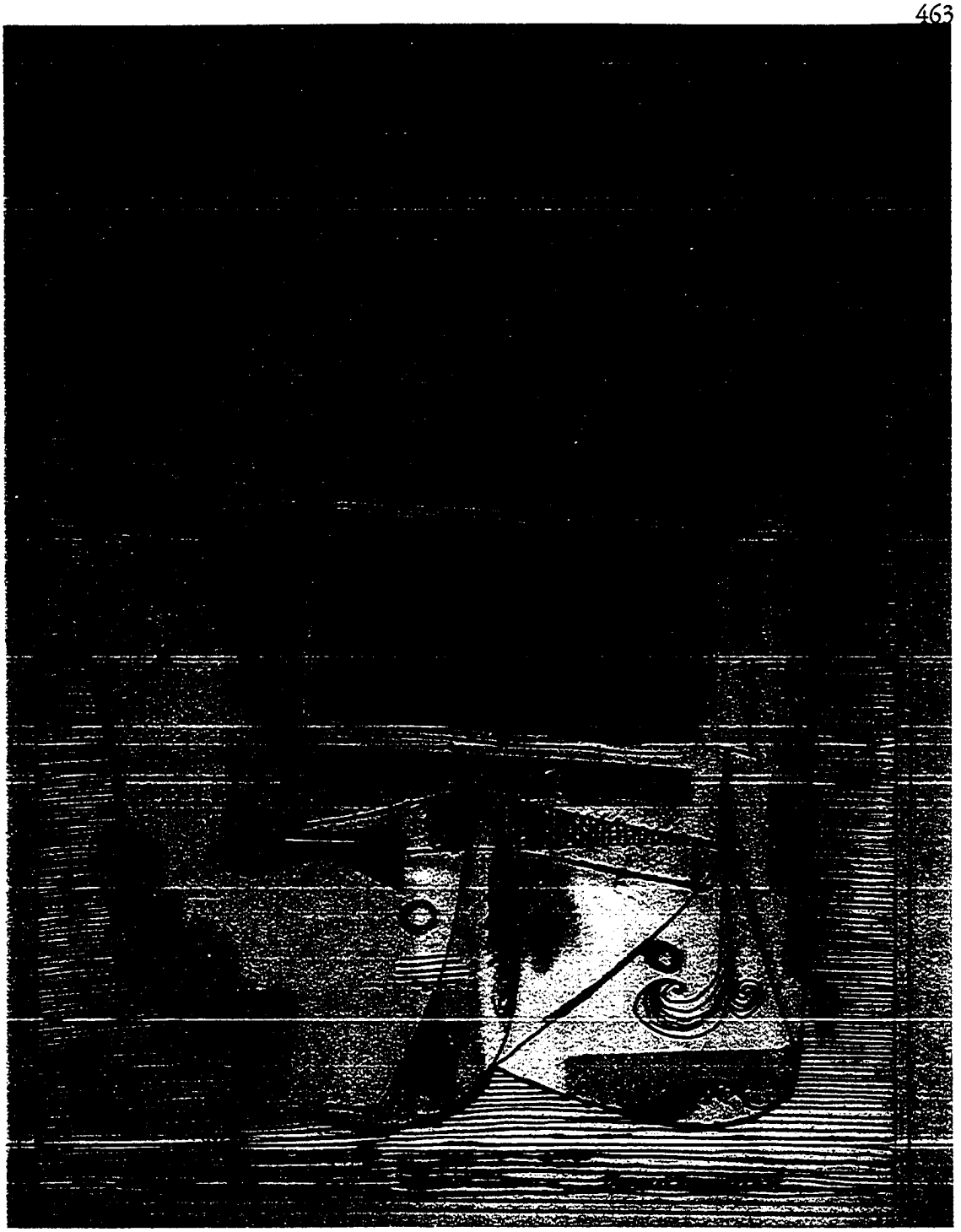


Fig. 2-13. Untitled (head). 1934, pen and ink, watercolor and collage on paper, 15 7/8 x 10 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 2-14. Untitled (seated figure). 1934, pen and ink, pencil, watercolor and collage on paper, 16 x 10 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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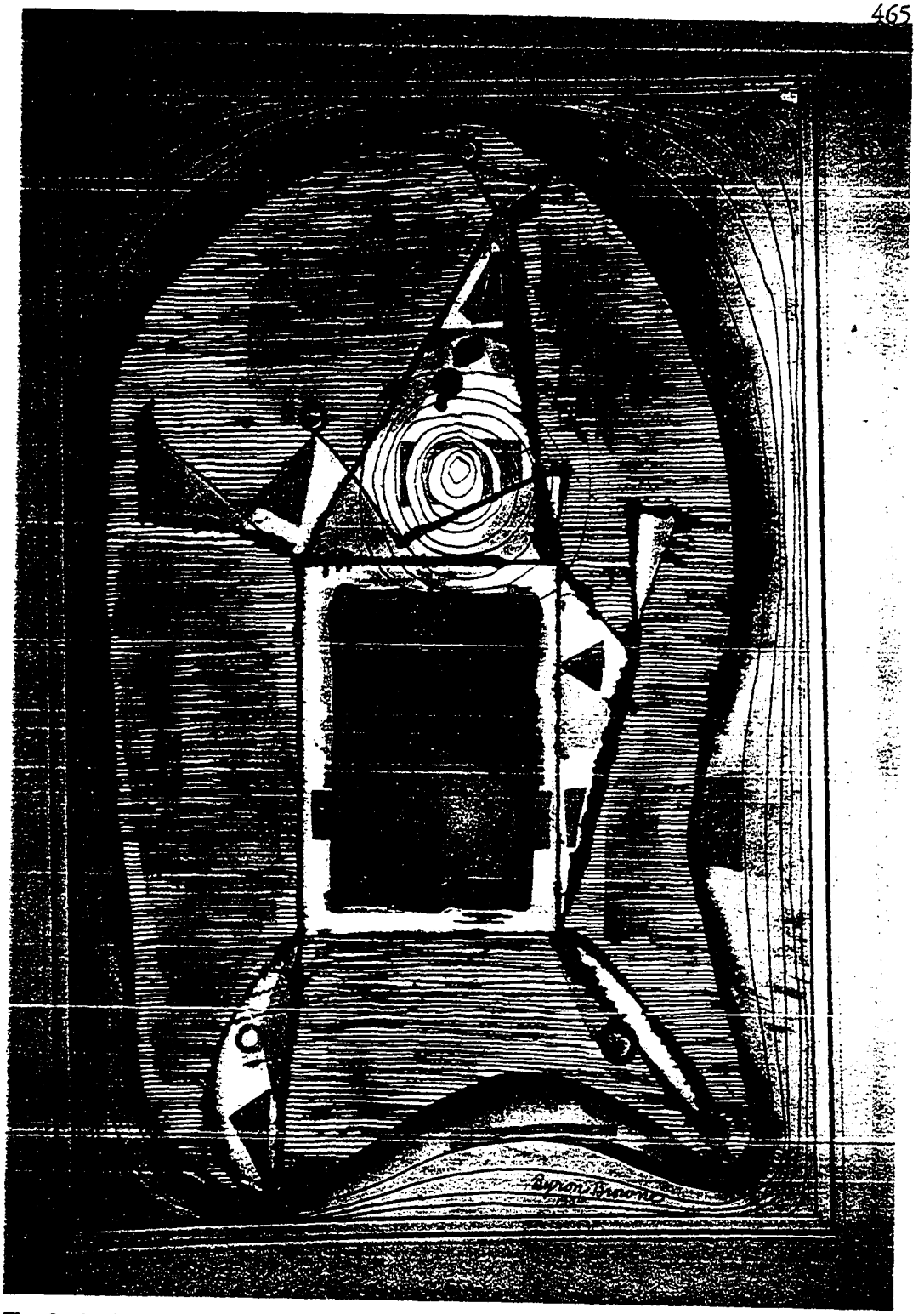


Fig. 2-15. Untitled (standing figure). 1936,
pen and ink, gouache, collage on paper, 16 x 10 3/4".
Estate of Byron Browne.

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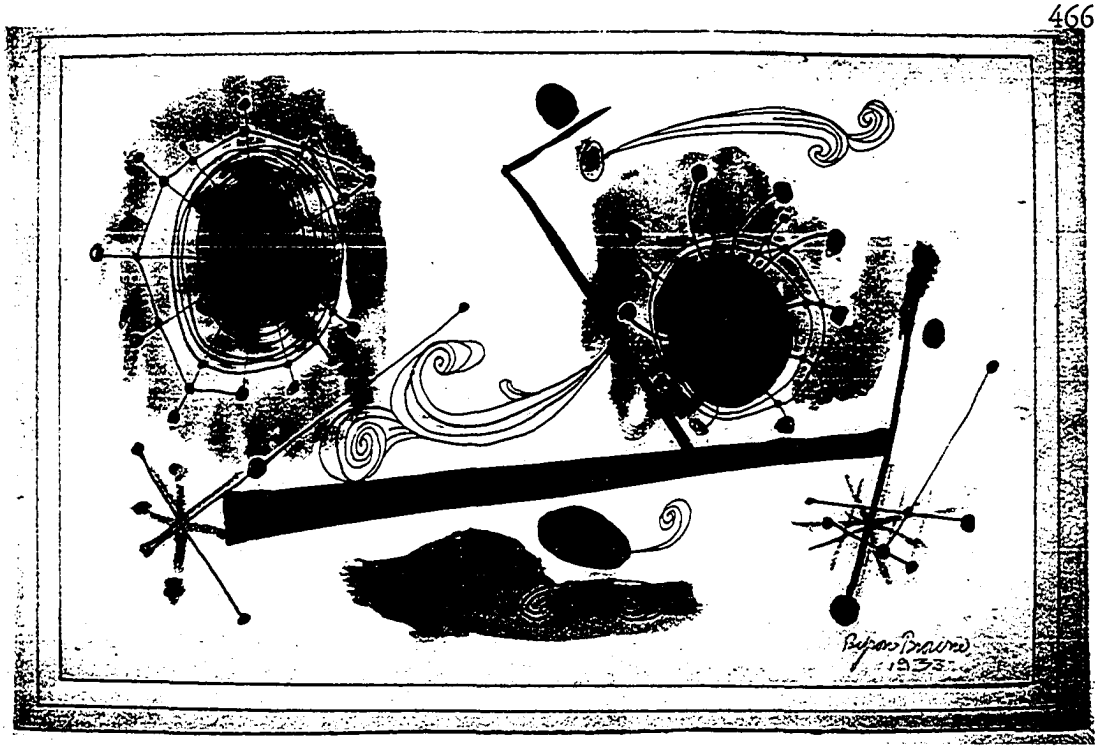


Fig. 2-16. Untitled (abstraction). 1933, India ink, watercolor and collage on paper, 9 1/2 x 14 3/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

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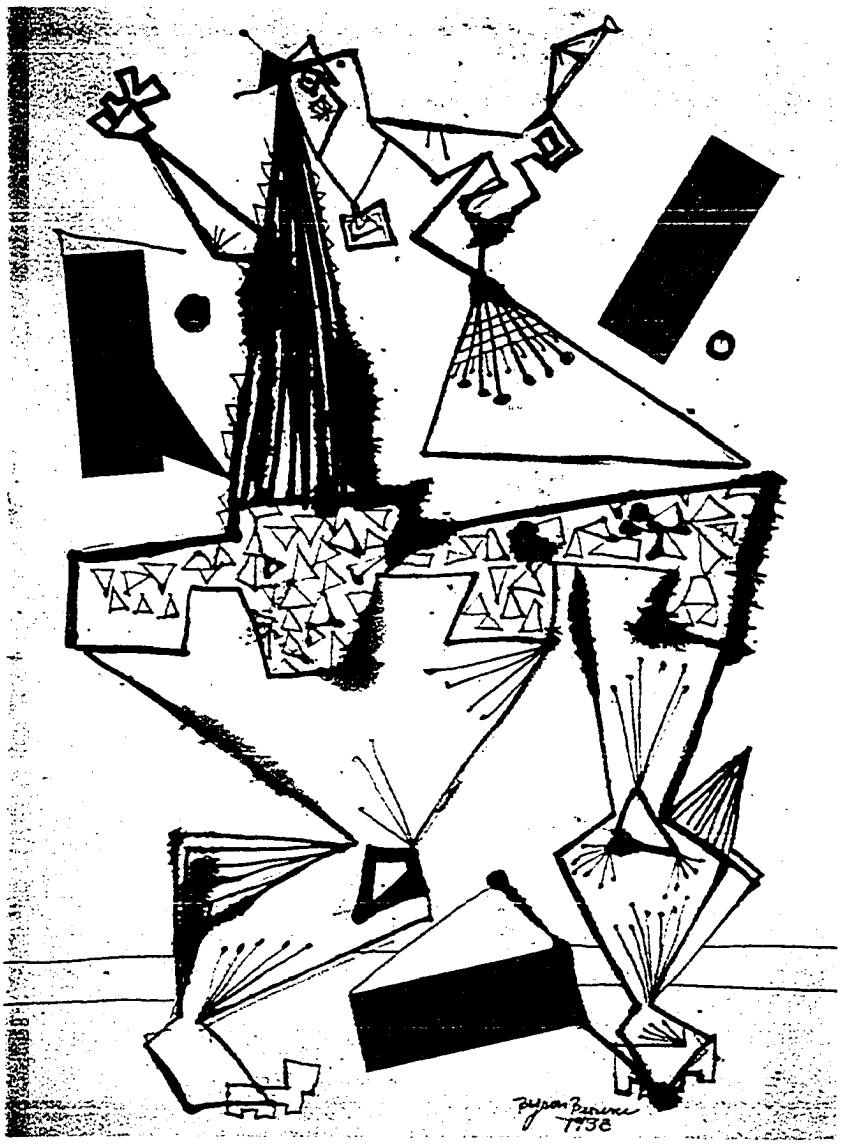


Fig. 2-17. Untitled (abstraction). 1938, pen and colored inks, pencil and collaged strips on paper, 12 x 8 7/8".

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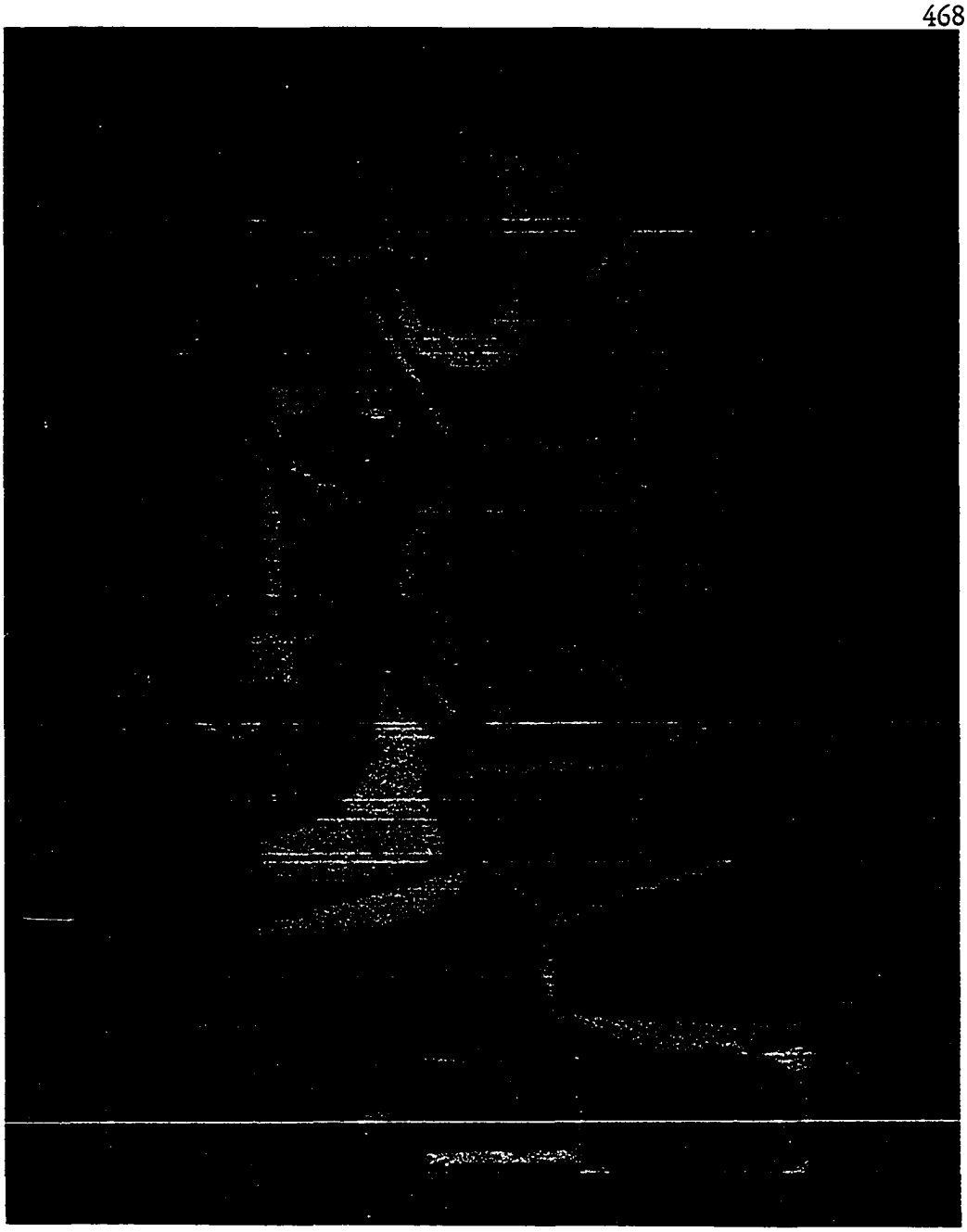


Fig. 2-18. The Table (Table I). 1929, India ink on paper, 16 3/4 x 13 1/2". Incorrectly printed at photo lab, film is reversed, black areas should be white, and the white should be black. Coll: Meredith Long Gallery, Houston, TX.

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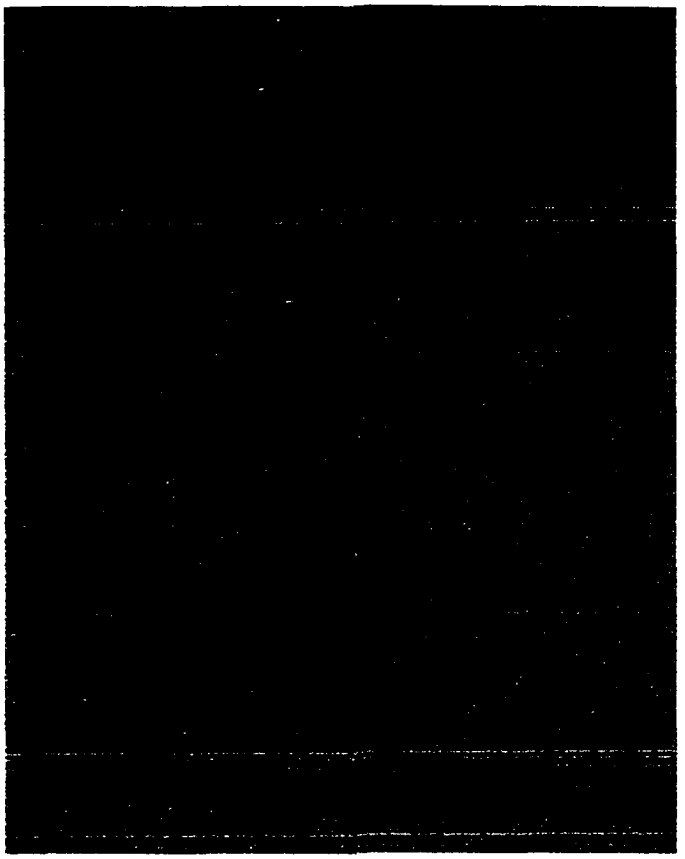


Fig. 2-19. The Table (Table II). 1929, pen and ink on paper, 17 1/2 x 14 3/4". Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York City.

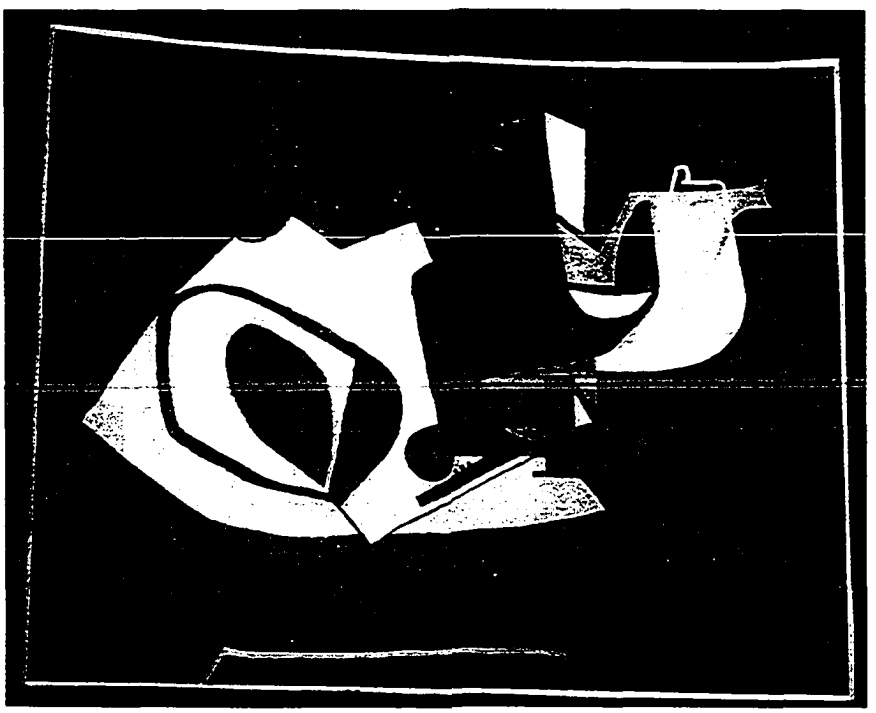


Fig. 2-20. Untitled. 1932, oil on canvas, measurements and whereabouts unknown.

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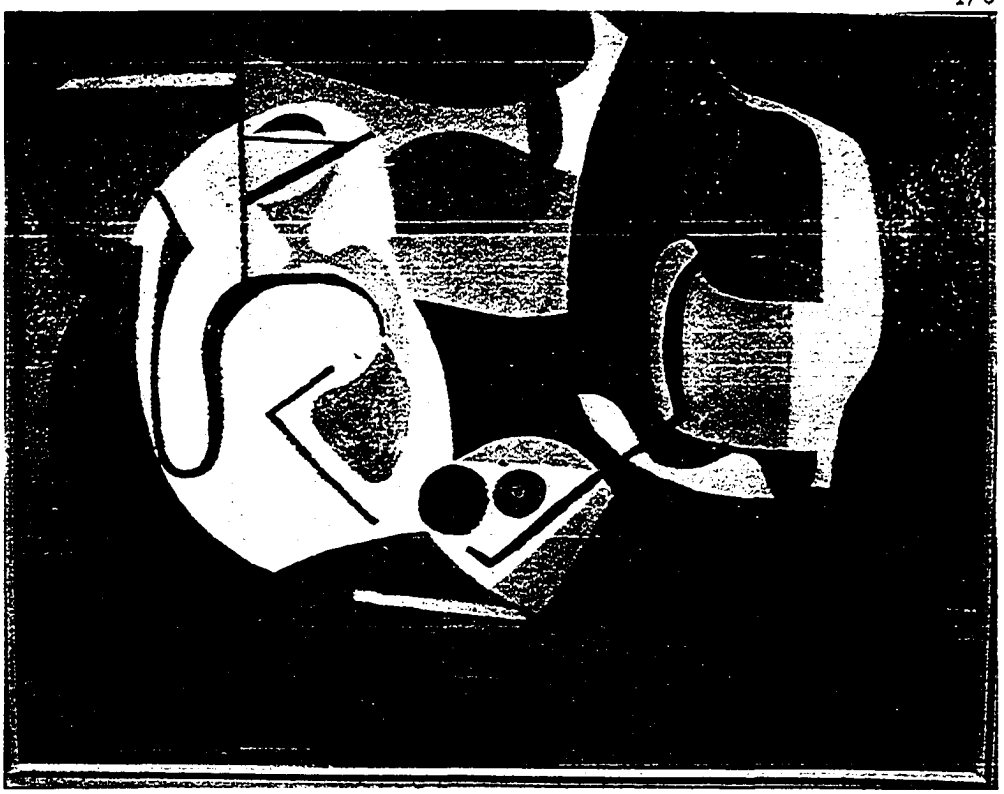


Fig. 2-21. Still Life with Apples. 1935, oil on masonite, 30 x 38".
Coll: Harvey Rambach, New York City.

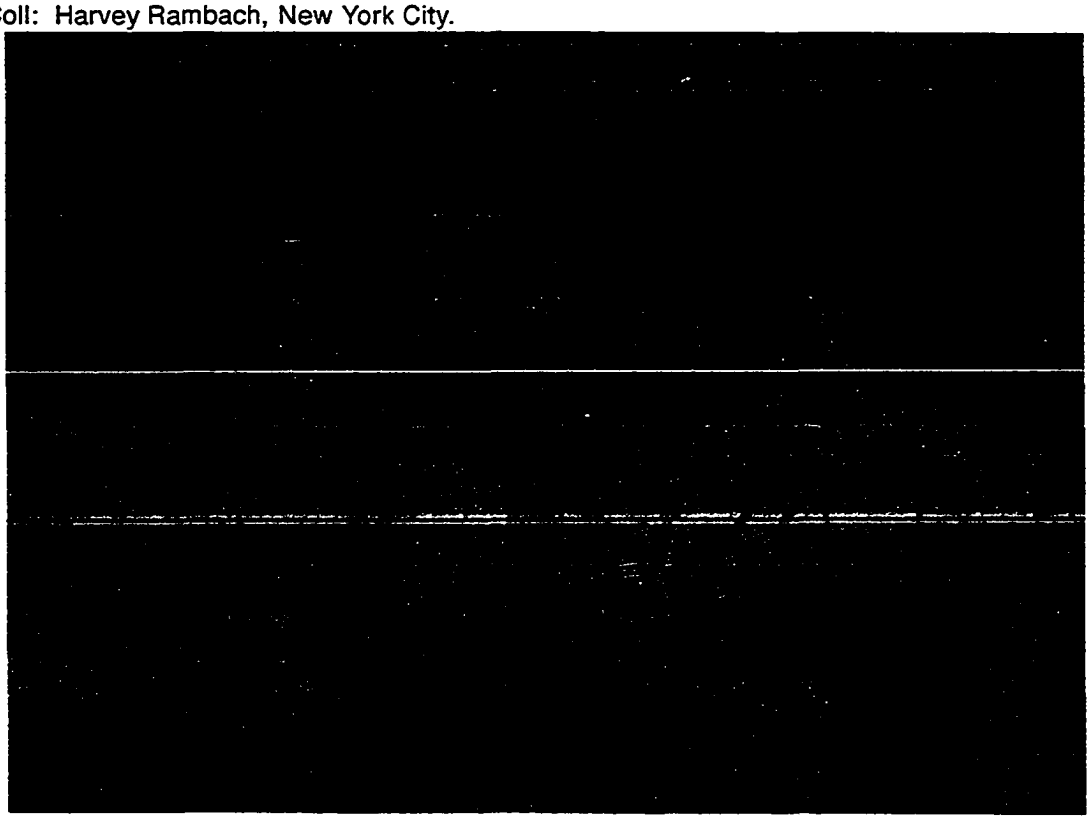


Fig. 2-22. Georges Braque. The Pink Tablecloth. 1933, oil on canvas with sand, 38 1/4 x 51 1/4". Coll: Walter P. Chrysler, New York City.

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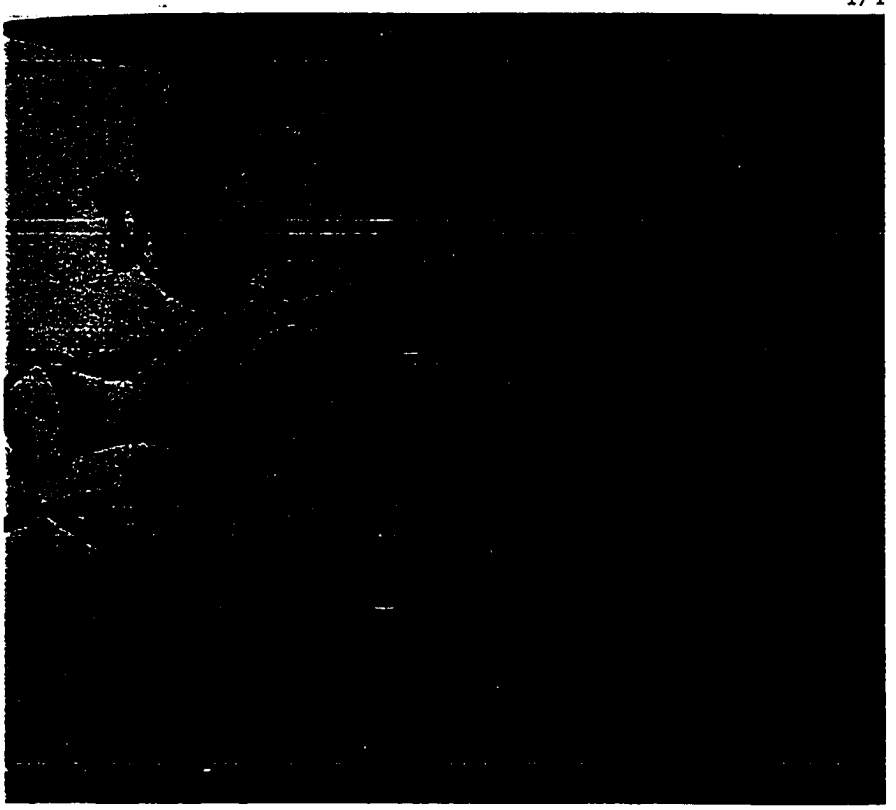


Fig. 2-23. Arshile Gorky. Still Life on the Table. Ca. 1935, oil on canvas, 54 x 64". Private collection.

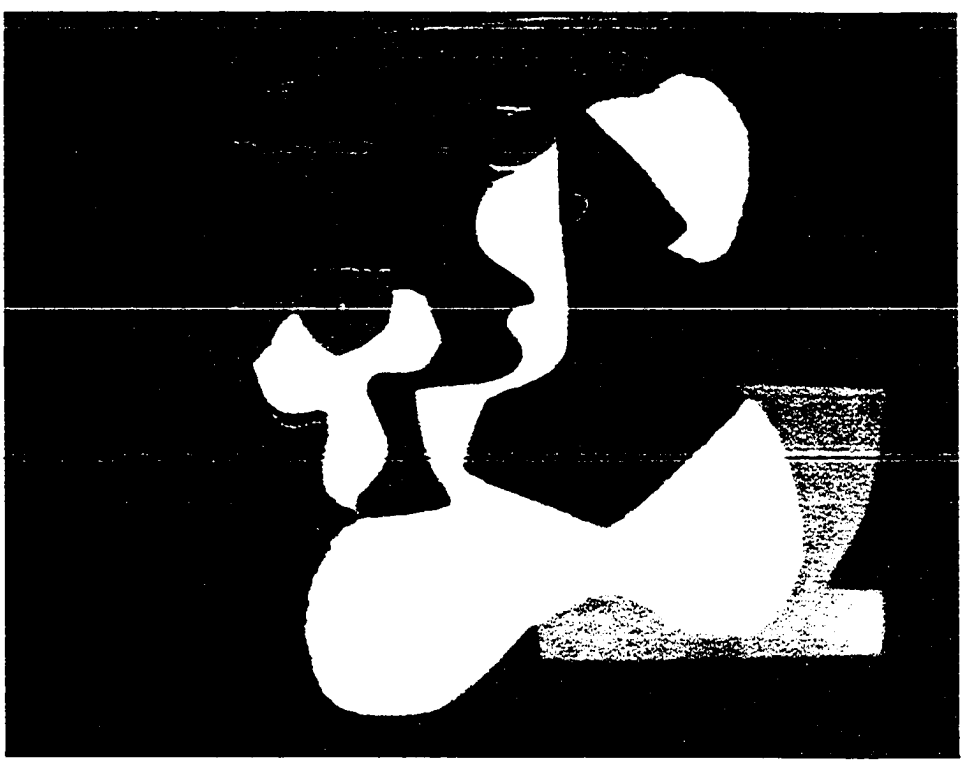


Fig. 2-24. Arshile Gorky. Still Life. 1929-32, oil on canvas, 42 7/8 x 60 1/2". Private collection.

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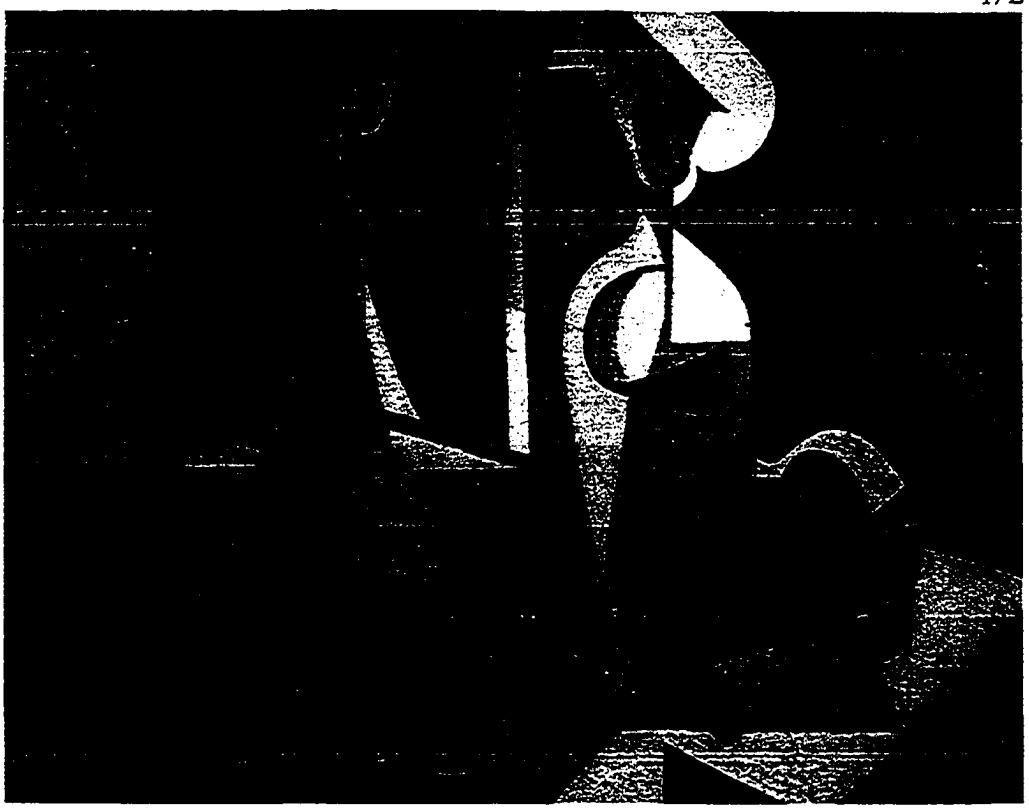


Fig. 2-25. Variations on a Greek Urn. 1935-37, oil on canvas, 48 x 60".
Coll: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

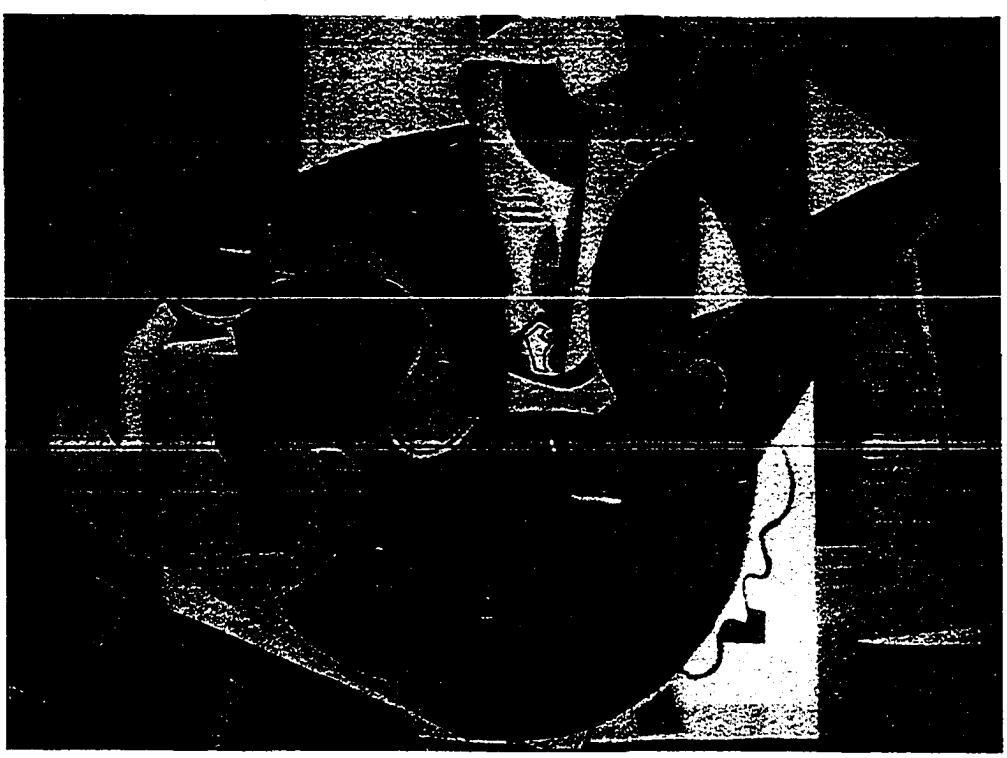


Fig. 2-26. Still Life Study. 1935-37, oil on canvas, 36 x 47".
Photo courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York City.

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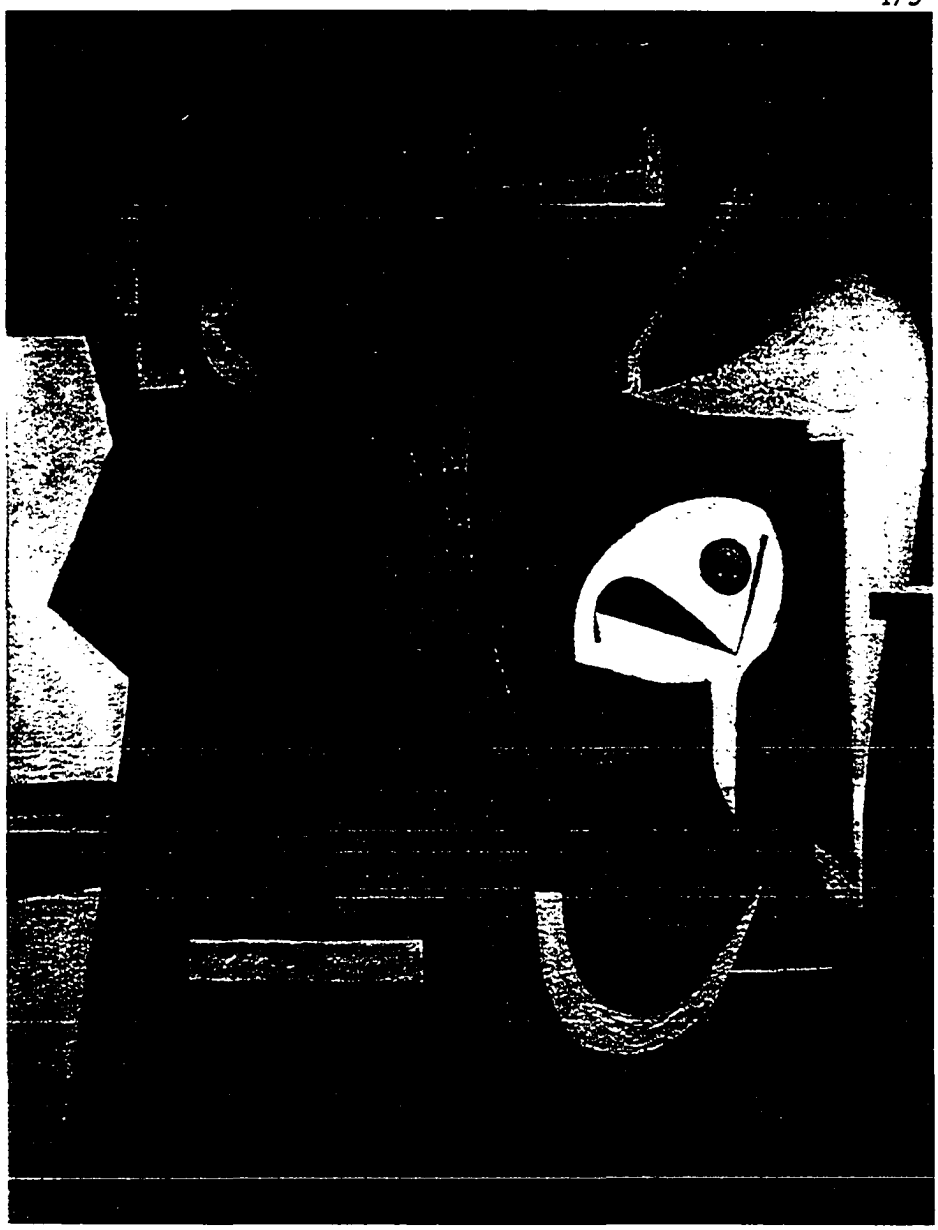


Fig. 2-27. Variations on a Still Life. 1935-36, oil on canvas, 60 x 48".
Coll: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

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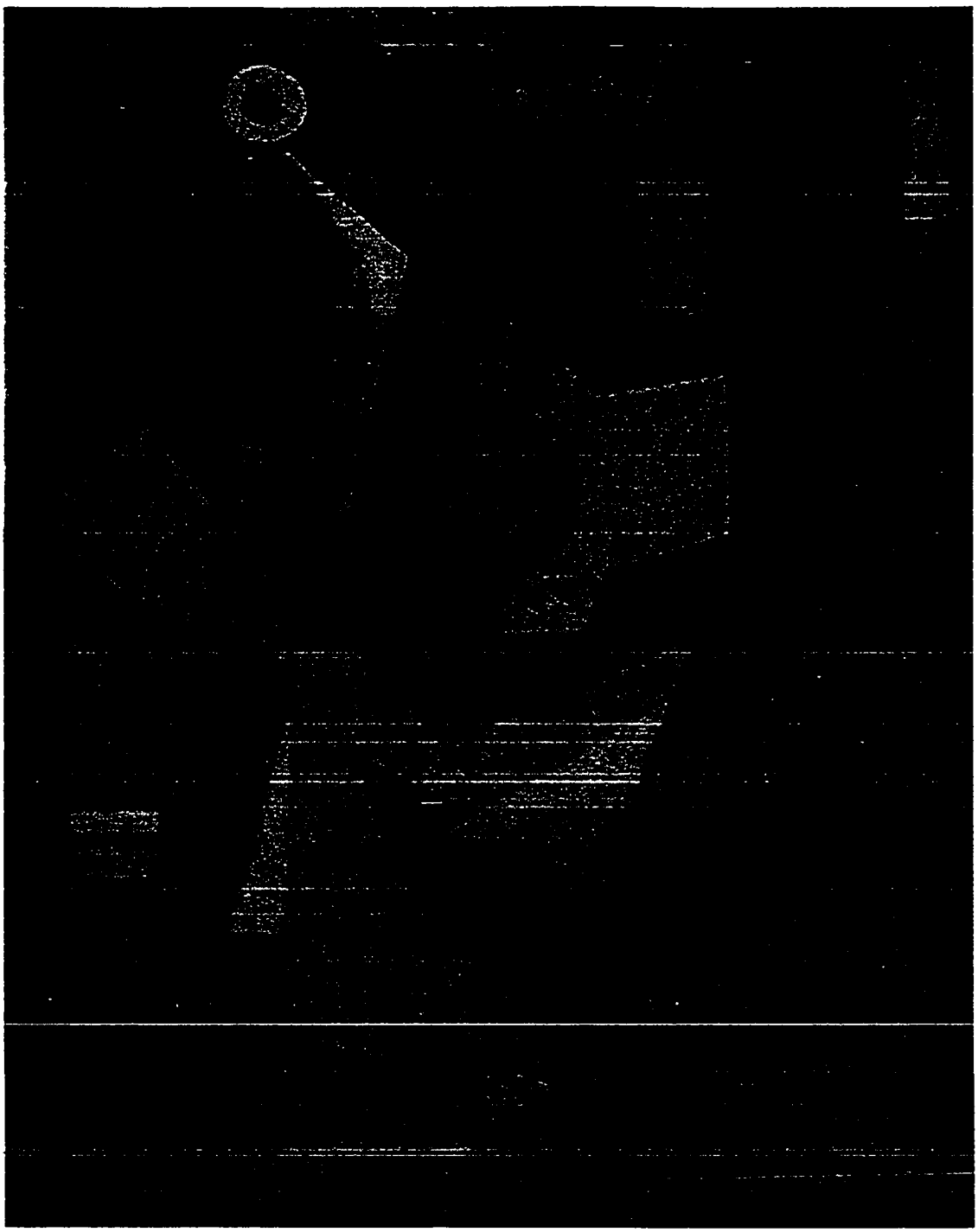


Fig. 2-28. Painting (Abstract Composition). 1936, oil on masonite, 38 x 30".
Coll: Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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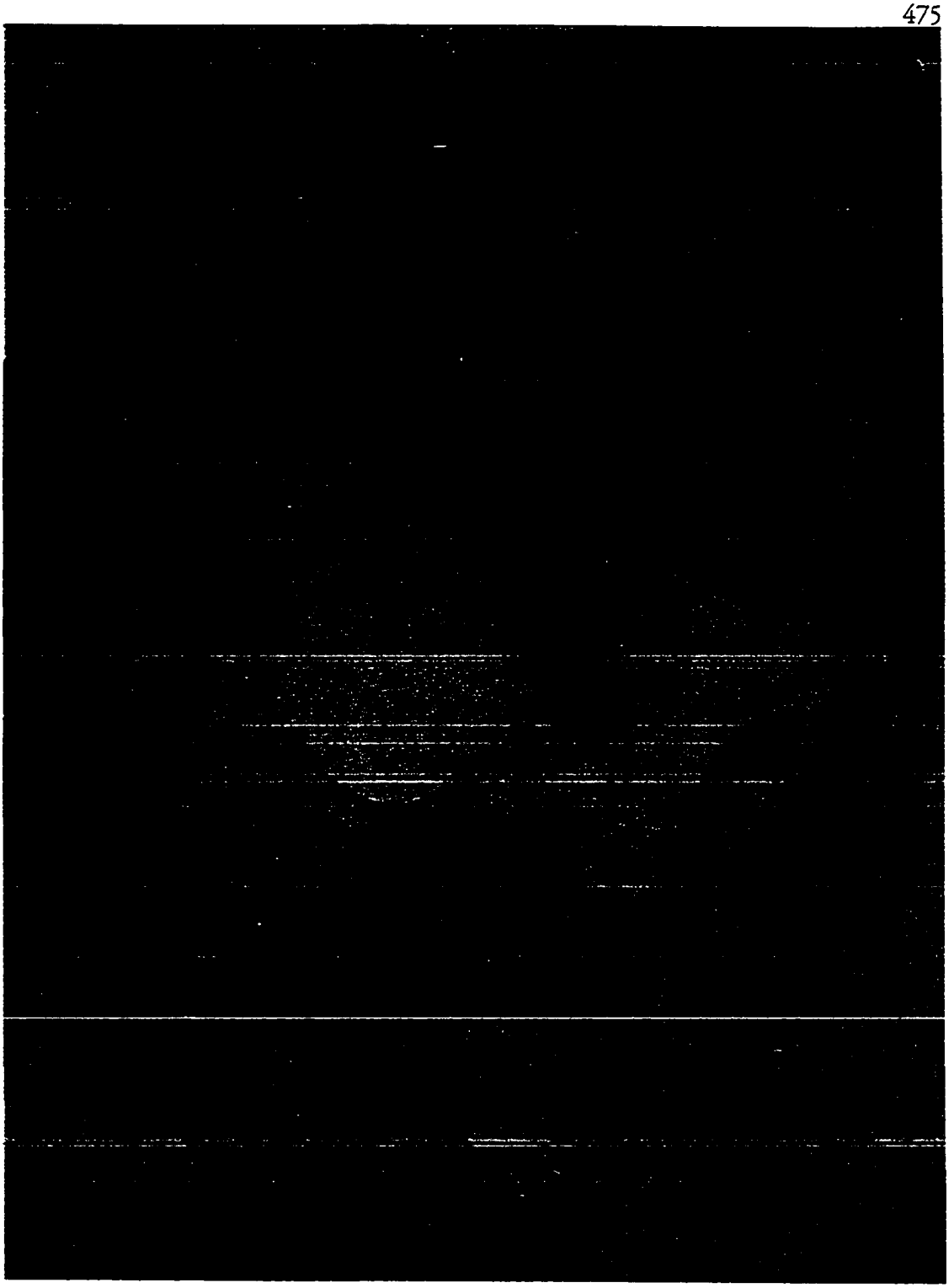


Fig. 2-29. Arrangement. 1938, oil on canvas, 38 x 30".
Coll: New Jersey State Museum, Trenton.

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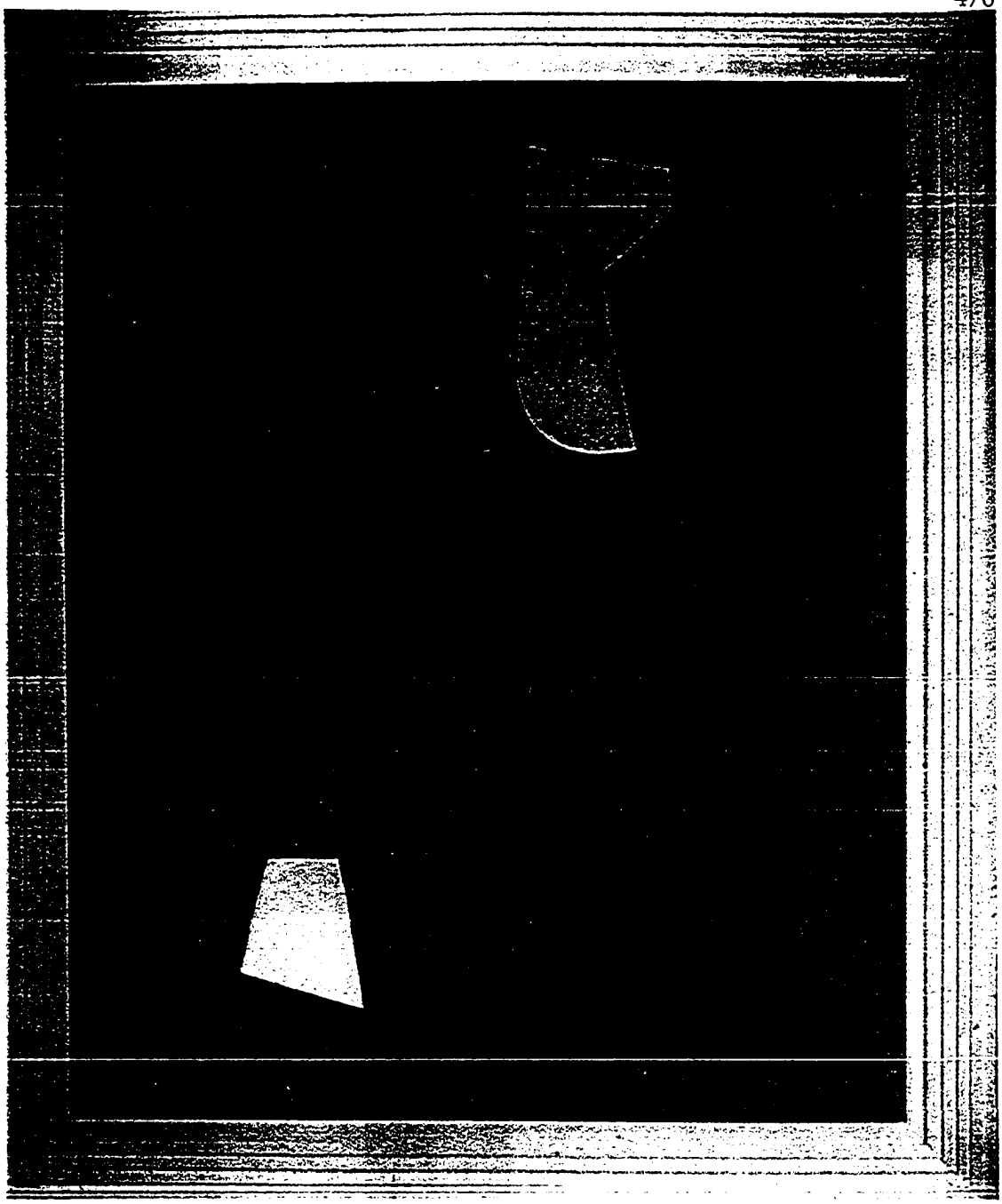


Fig. 2-30. Non Objective Composition. Ca. 1935-36, oil on canvas, 36 x 29".
Coll: Meredith Long, Houston, Texas.

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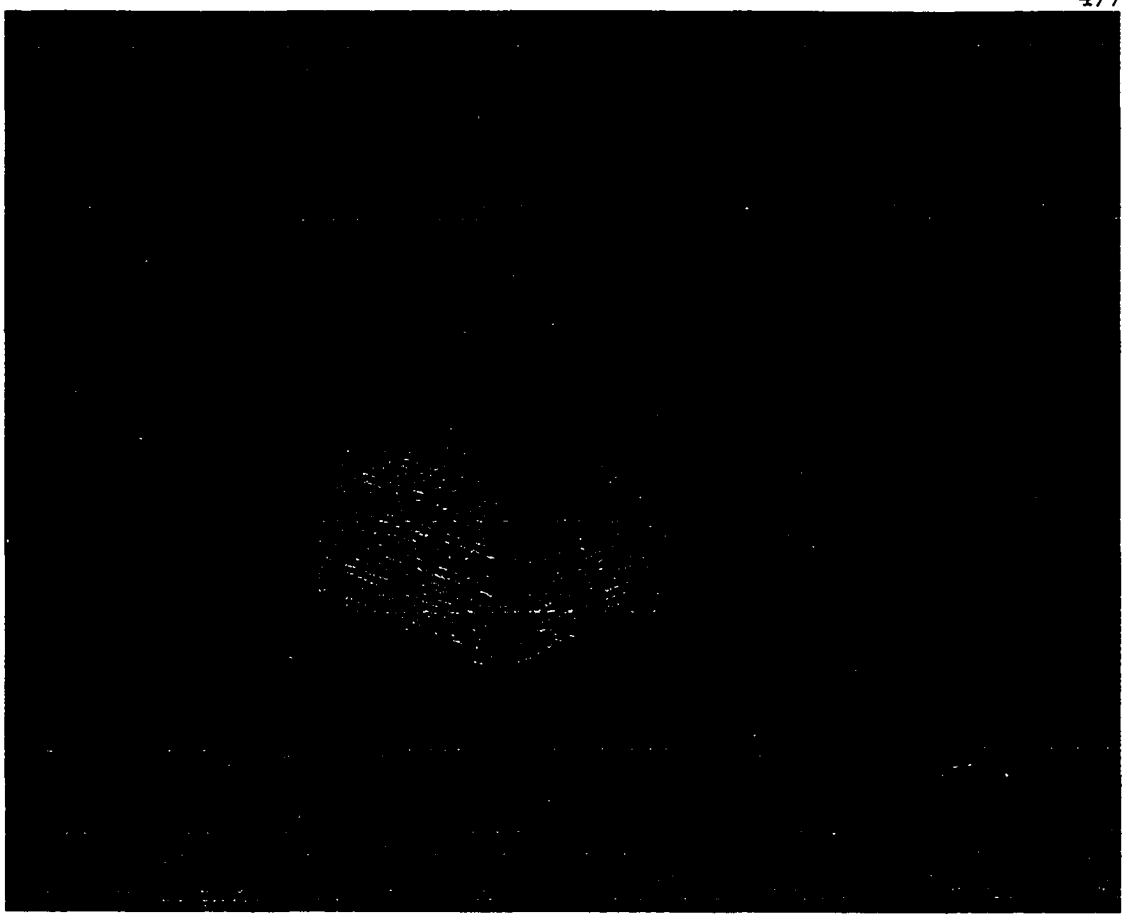


Fig. 2-31. Juan Gris. Guitar with Sheet of Music. 1926, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 31 7/8". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Saidenberg, New York City.

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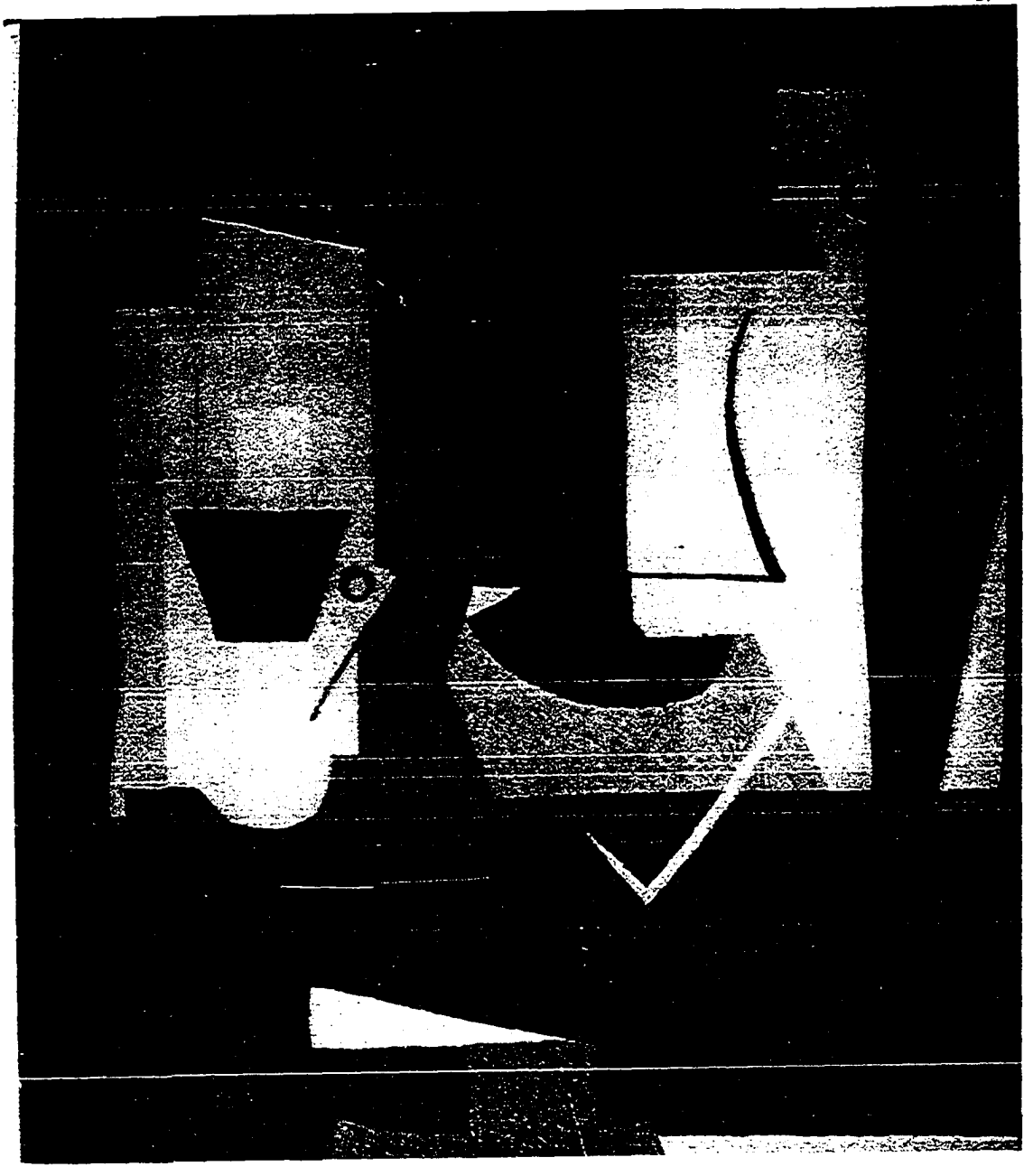


Fig. 2-32. Variations from a Still Life. 1936-37, oil on canvas, 47 x 36".
Coll: The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, New York.

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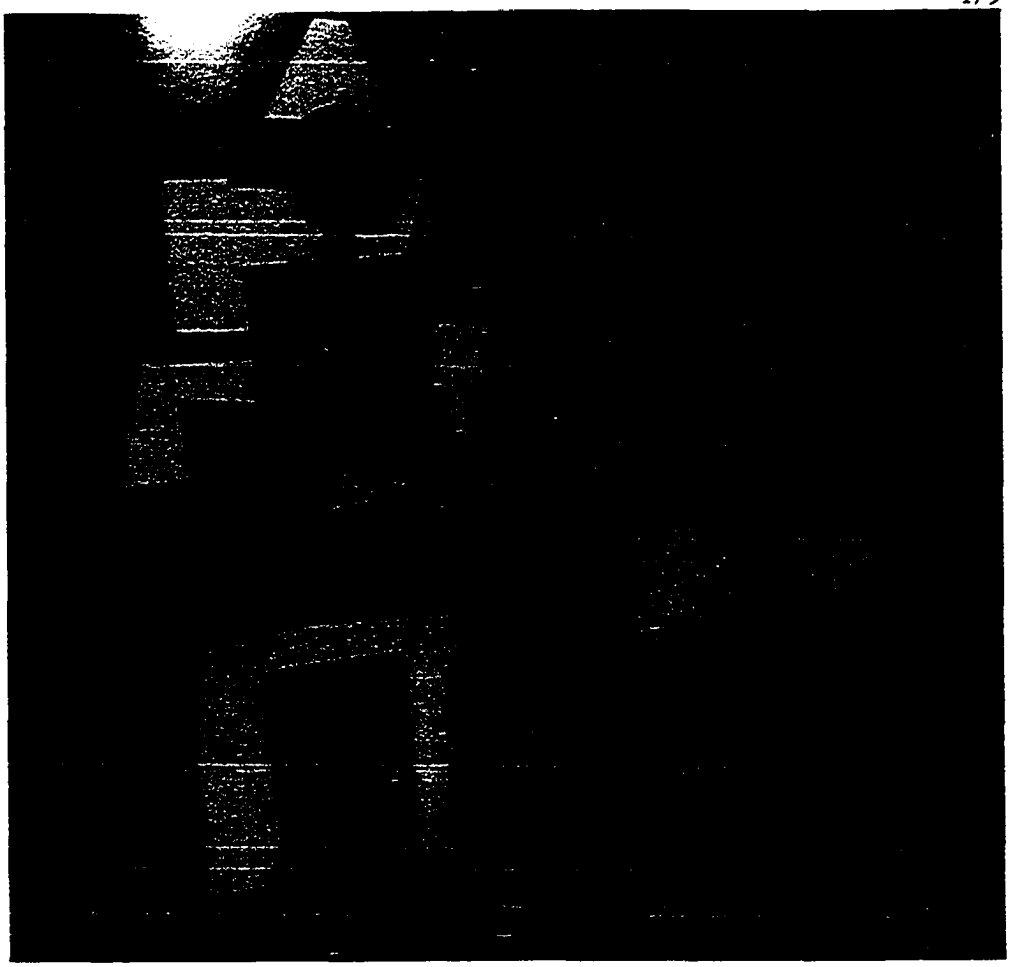


Fig. 2-33. Pablo Picasso. Three Musicians. 1921, oil on canvas, 79 x 87 3/4".
Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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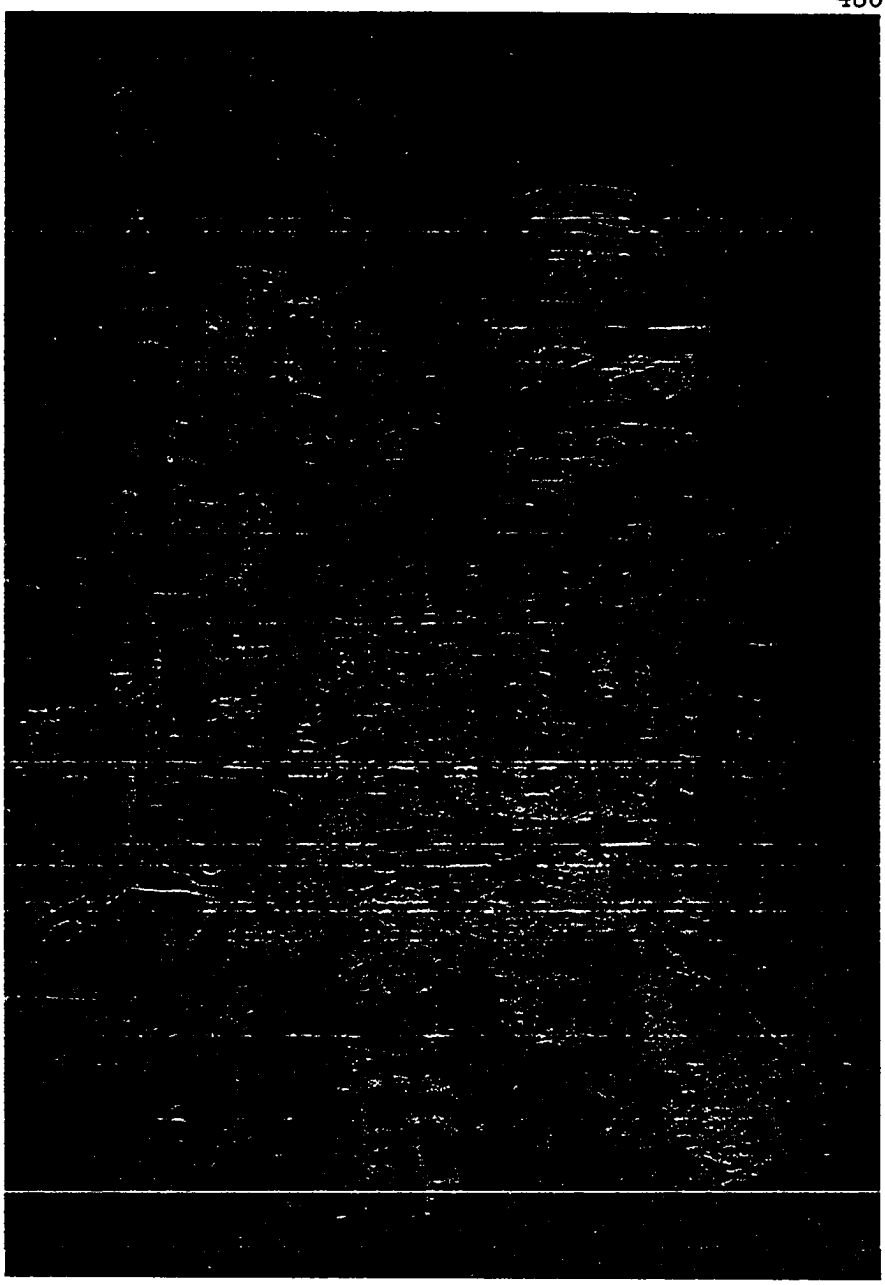


Fig. 2-34. Mark Tobey. Broadway. 1936, tempera on masonite, 26 x 19 1/4".
Coll: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

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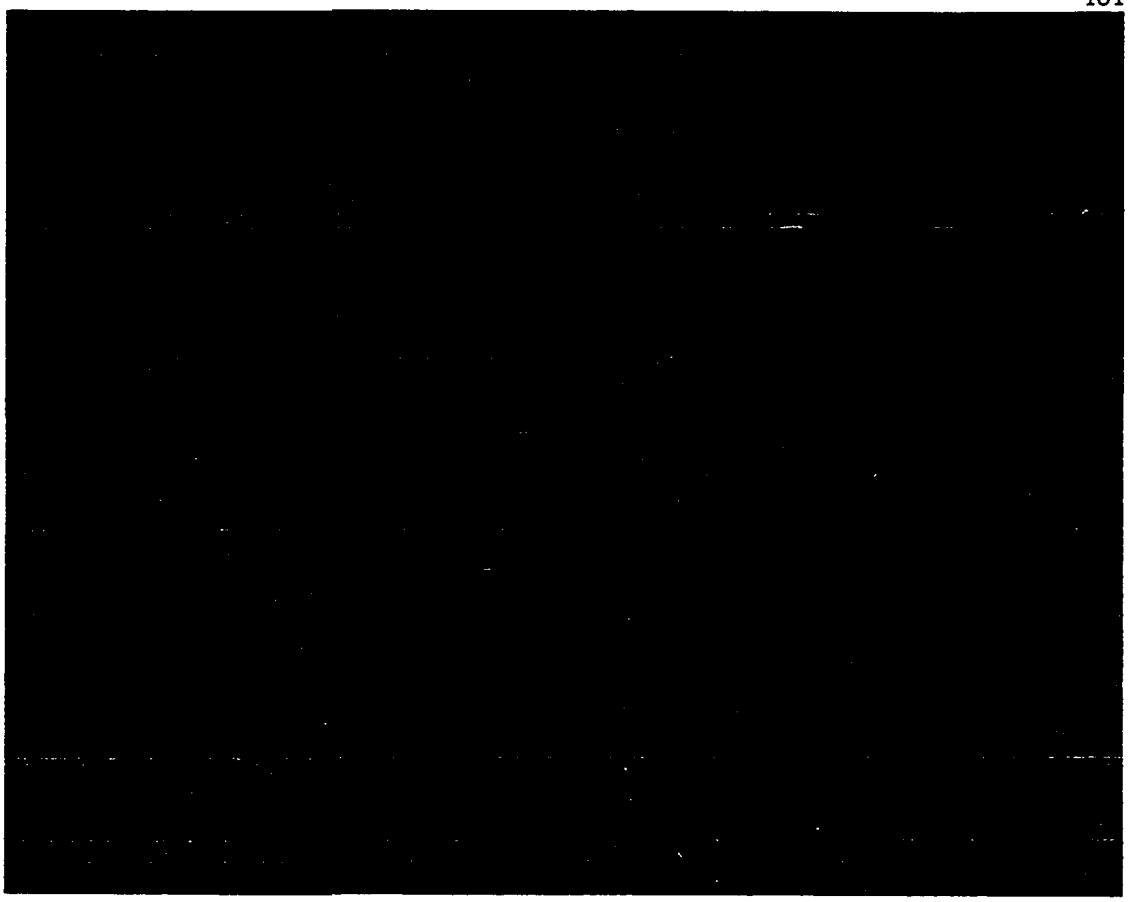


Fig. 2-35. Woman with Stars (a.k.a. Lady in Starlight). 1938, oil on canvas, 30 x 38".
Coll: Emden family.

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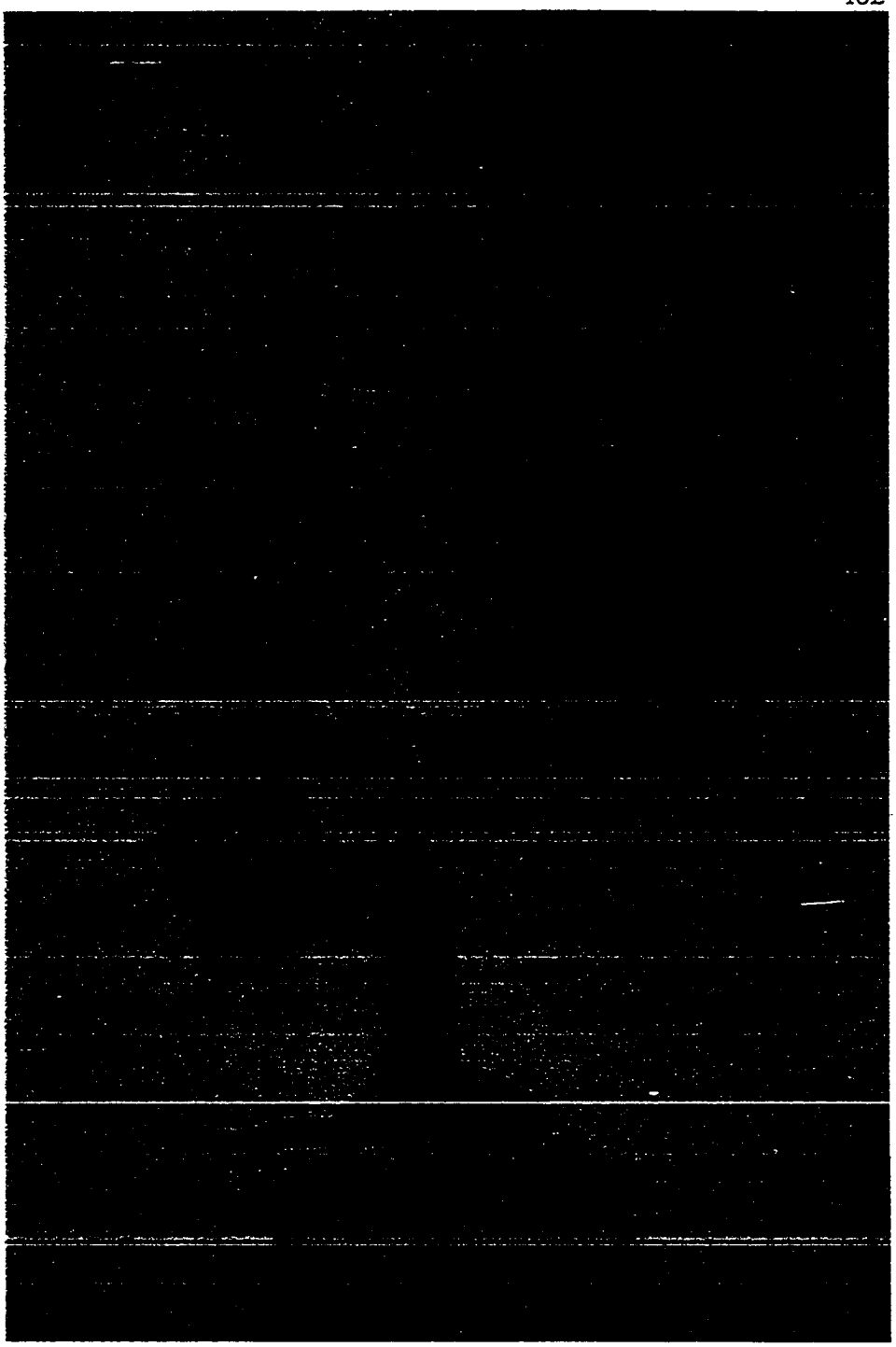


Fig. 2-36. Kasimir Malevich. Suprematist Composition. 1916-17, oil on canvas, 38 x 26". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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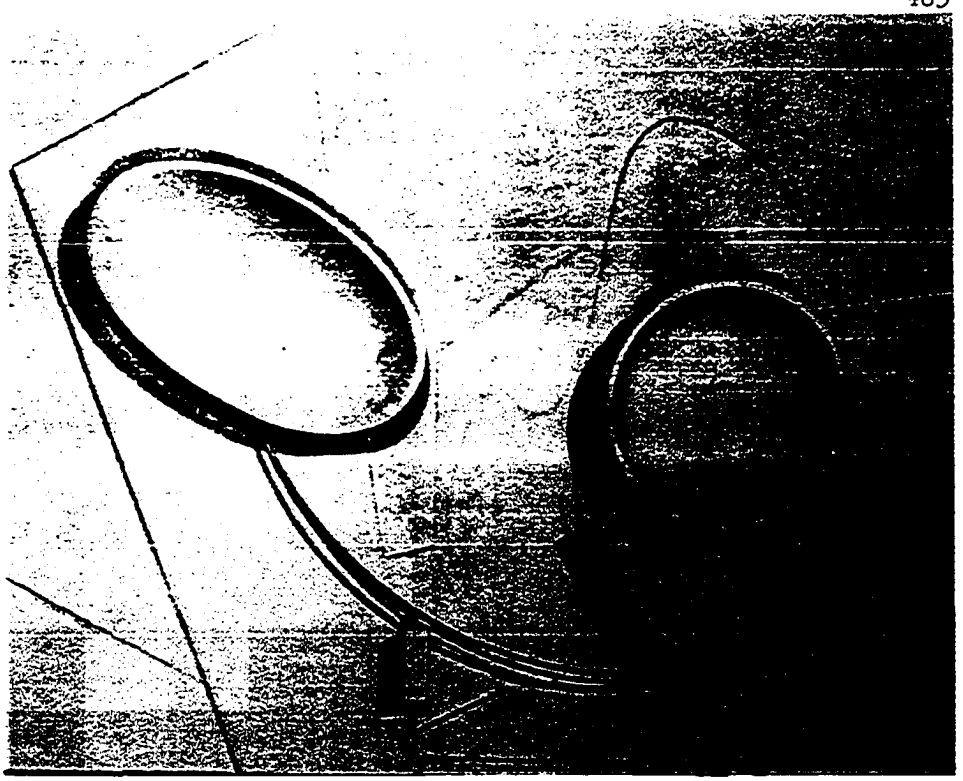


Fig. 2-37. Construction. 1938, wood pieces on board, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo from American Abstract Artists: Three Yearbooks (1938, 1939, 1946). New York, Arno, 1969, p. 43.

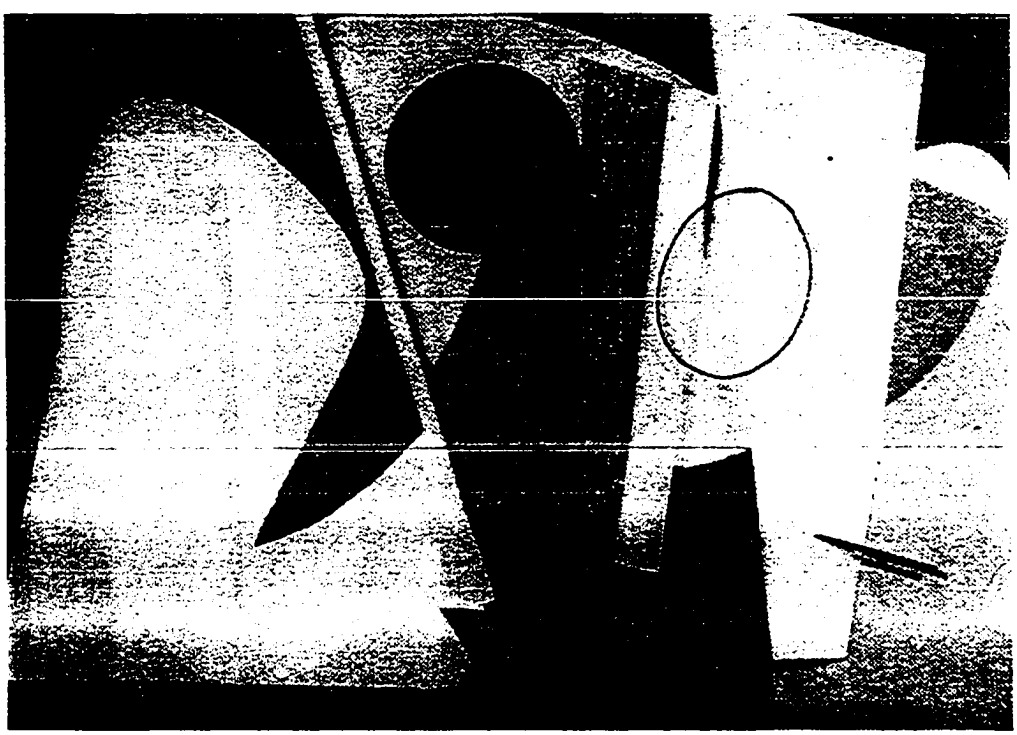


Fig. 2-38. Construction in Wood. 1937-38, wood pieces on board, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo courtesy Color and Rhyme, no. 9, 1938.

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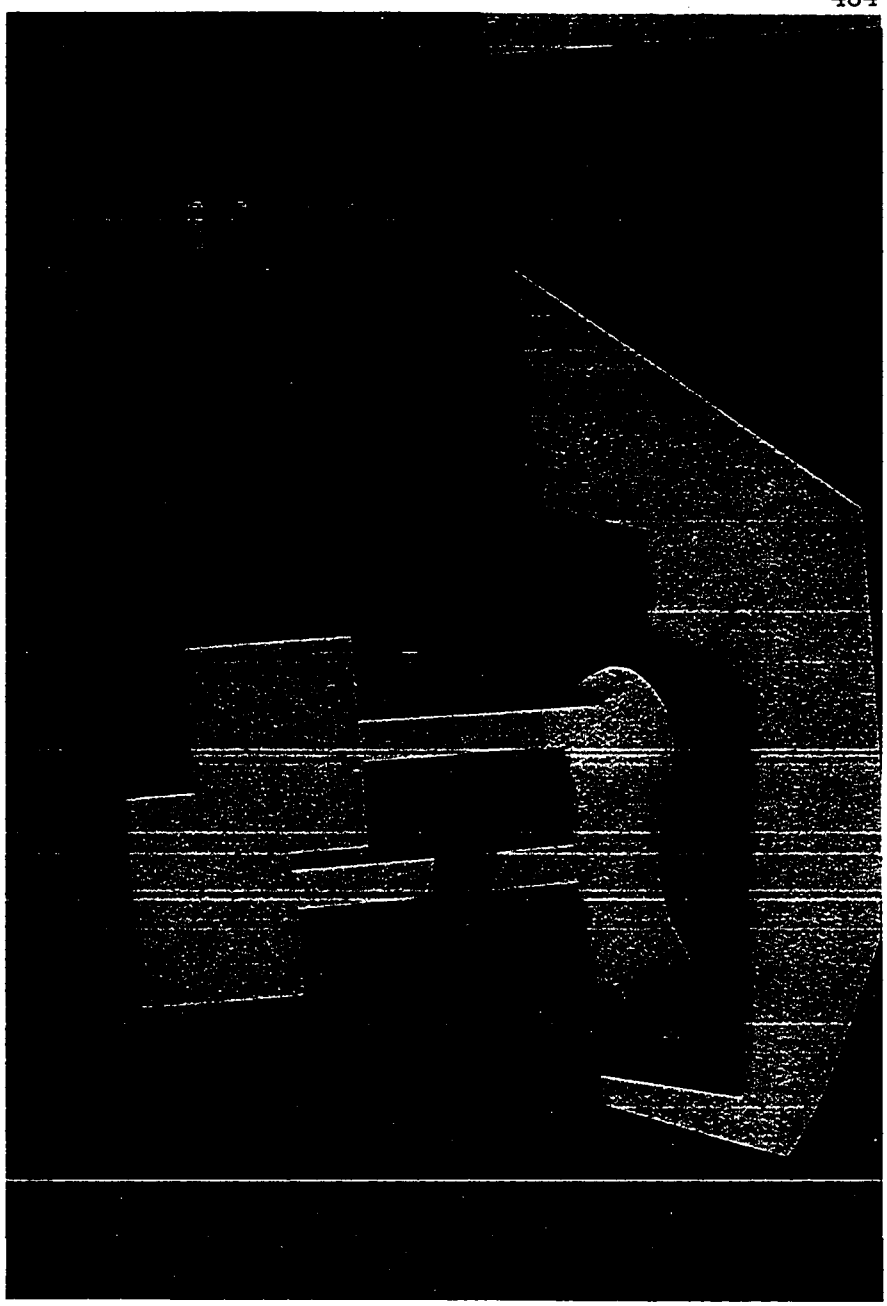


Fig. 2-39. Gertrude Greene. Construction in Blue. 1937, painted wood cutout pieces, 48 x 32 1/2". Coll: Barbara Millhouse, New York City.

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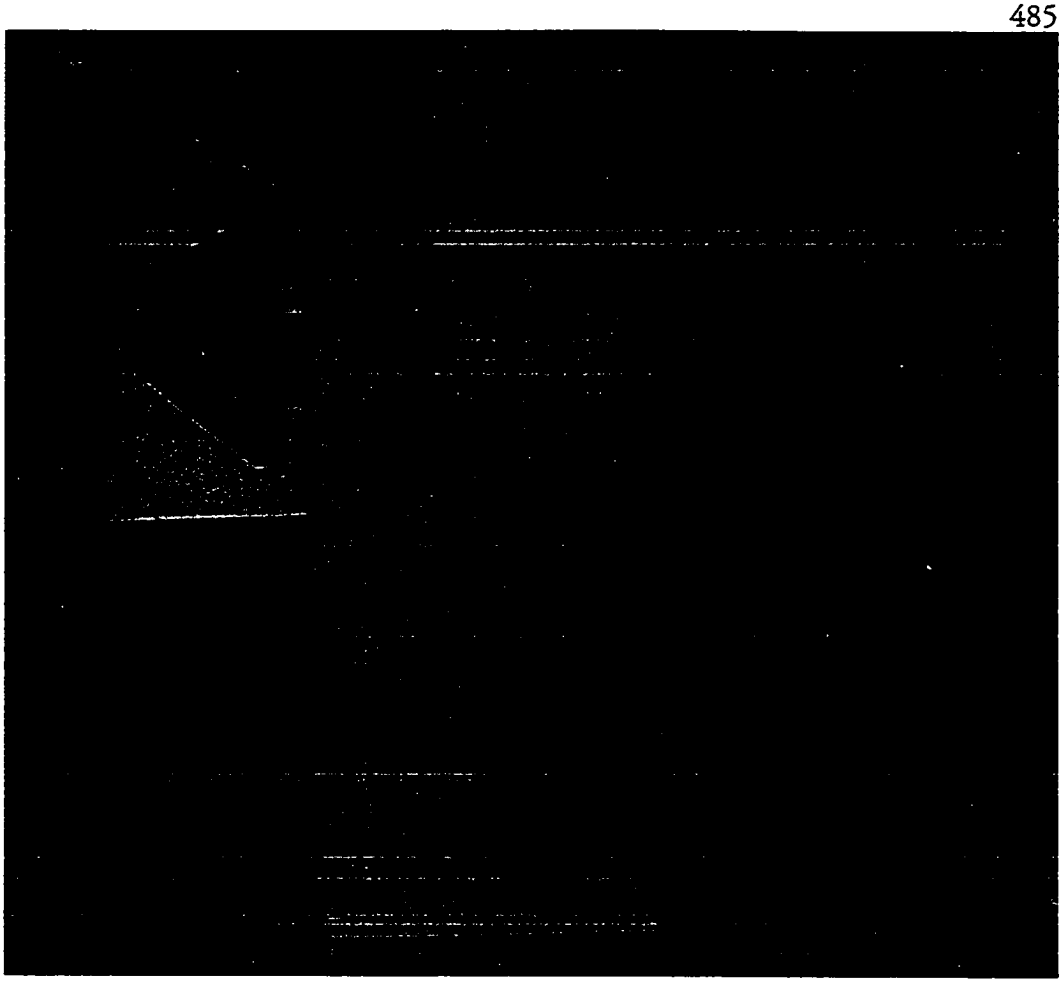


Fig. 2-40. Gertrude Greene. Composition. 1939, painted wood cutout pieces, 27 x 30". Courtesy Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York City.

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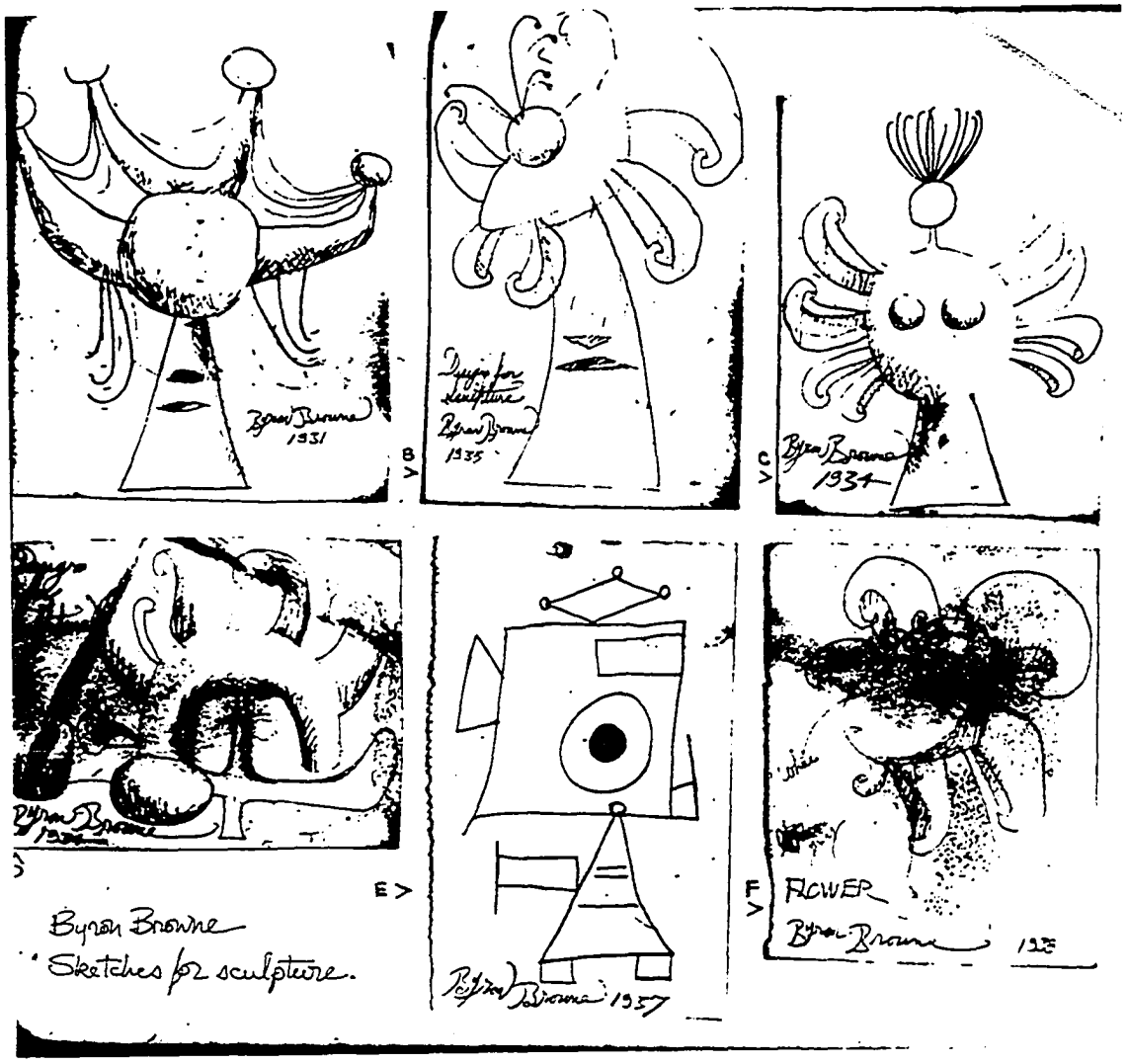


Fig. 3-1. Designs (Sketches) for Sculpture. 1931-1938, India ink and pencil on paper. Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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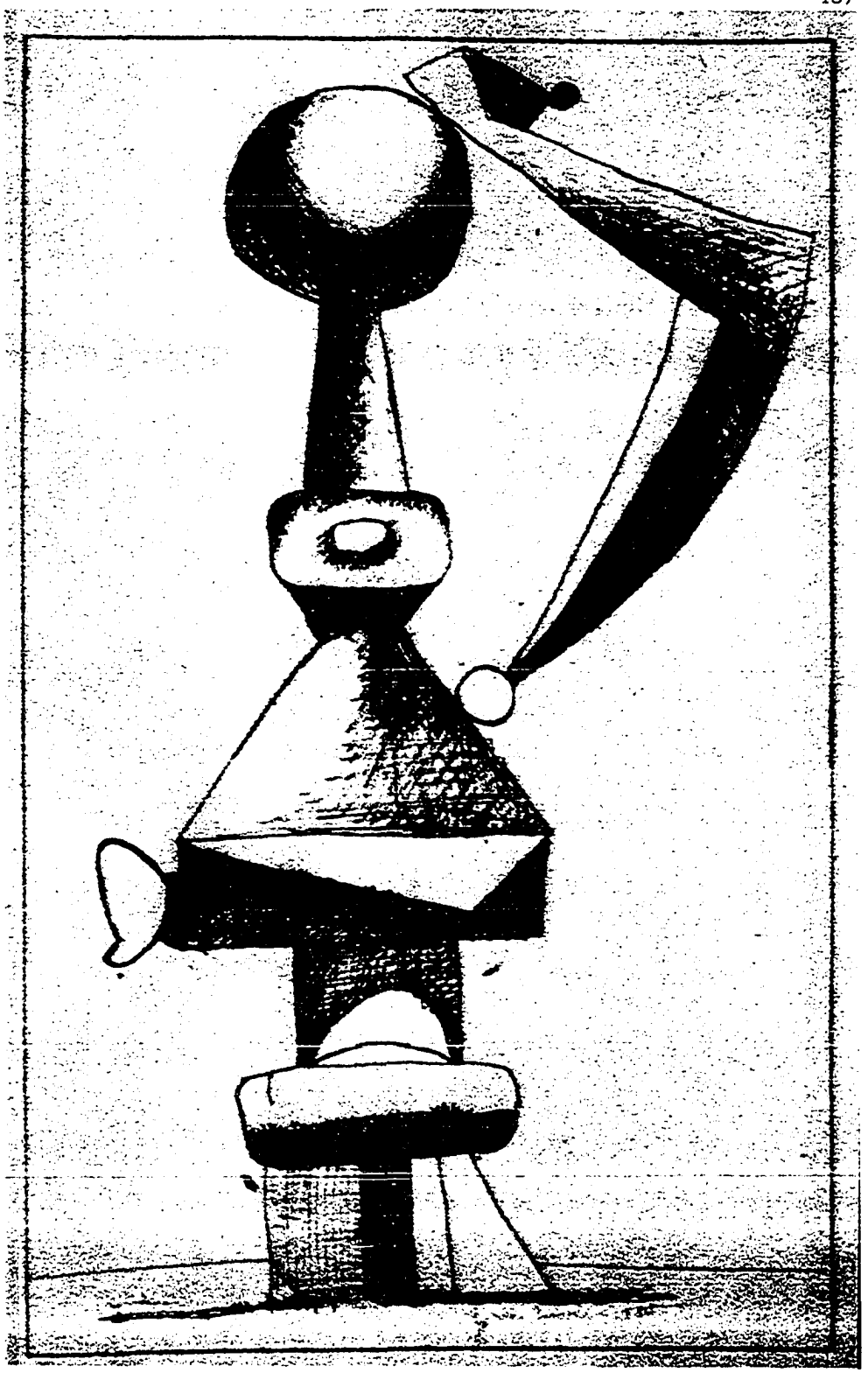


Fig. 3-2. Design (Sketch) for Sculpture. 1935, pencil on paper, 11 3/4 x 18 1/2". Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.v

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Fig. 3-3. Pablo Picasso. Bather with Beach Ball. 1929, pencil on paper, 8 5/8 x 5 1/2". Musée Picasso, Paris.

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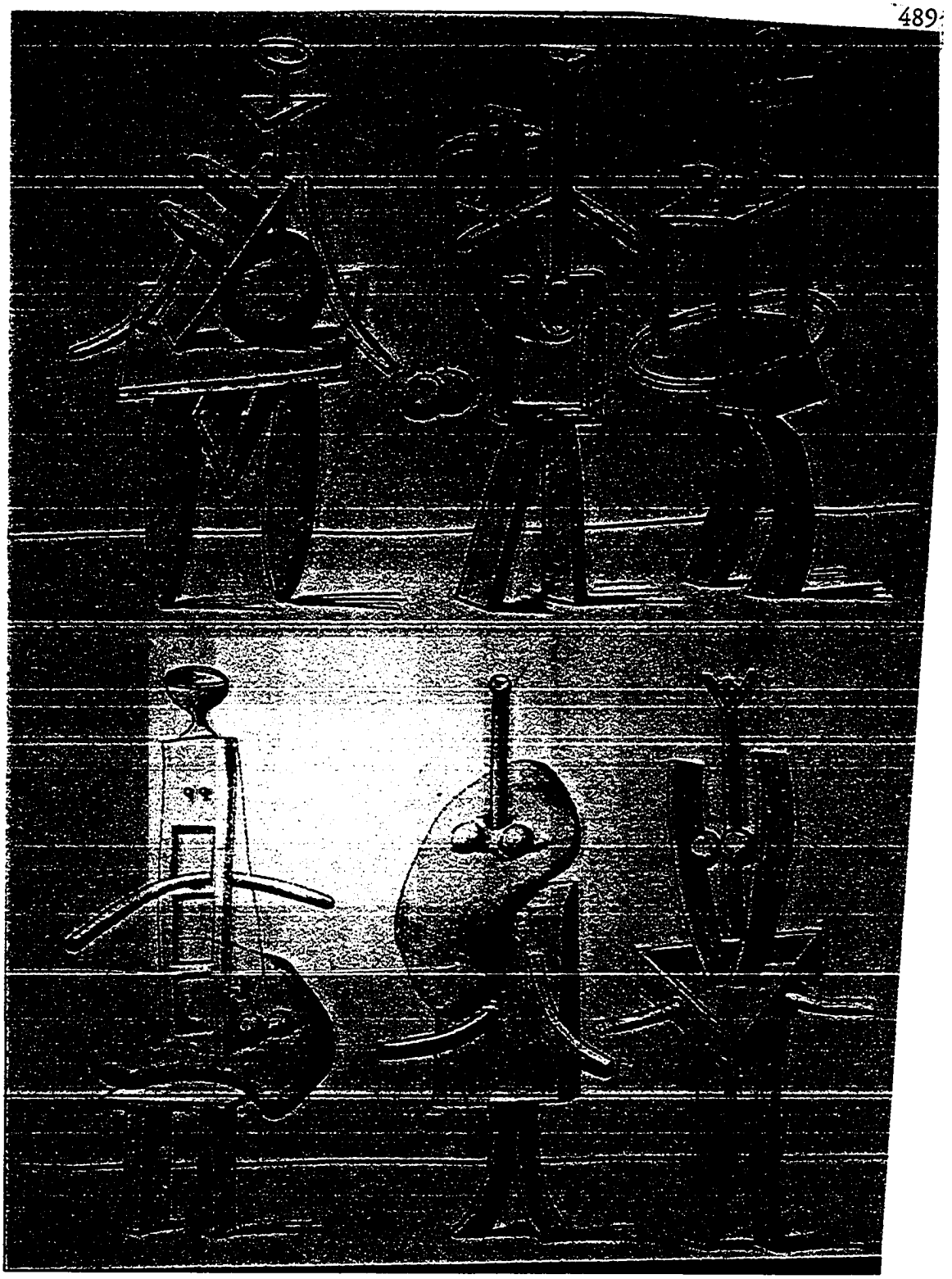


Fig. 3-4. Pablo Picasso. Anatomical Drawings. 1933, pencil on vellum, 8 x 10 5/8". Musée Picasso, Paris.

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Fig. 3-5. Constructive Elements. 1934, oil on canvas, 47 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 3-6. Byron Browne and Rosalind Bengelsdorf on Boat Dock at Gloucester, Massachusetts. 1936. Photographer unknown (possibly Adolph Gottlieb). Courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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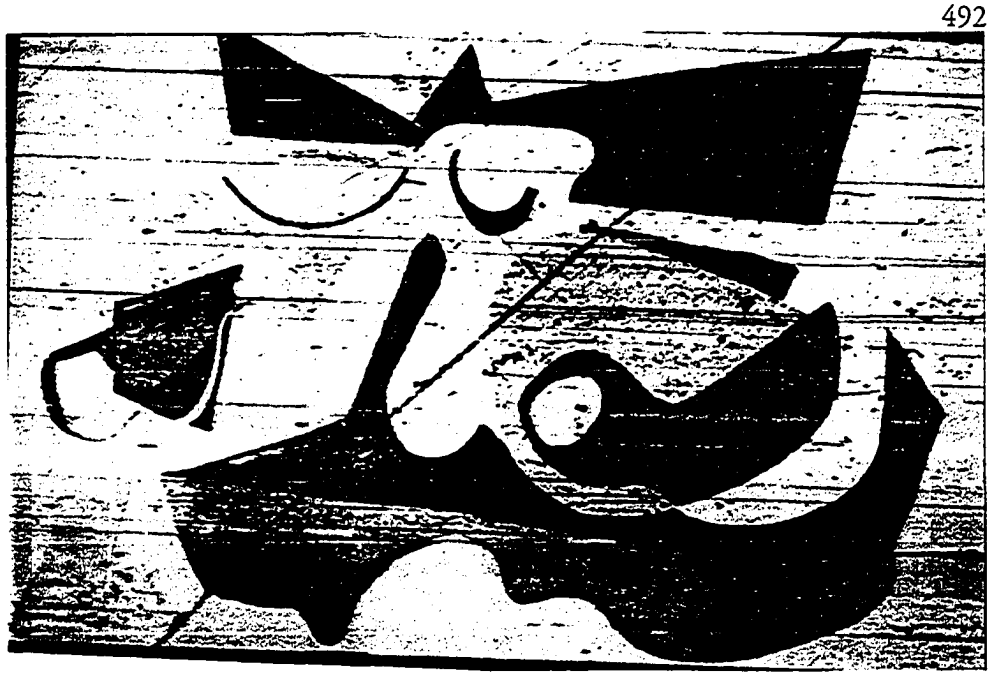


Fig. 3-7. Composition. Ca. 1936, wood relief construction on board, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photograph from Art Front, Vol. 2, no. 7, July-August 1936, p. 11.

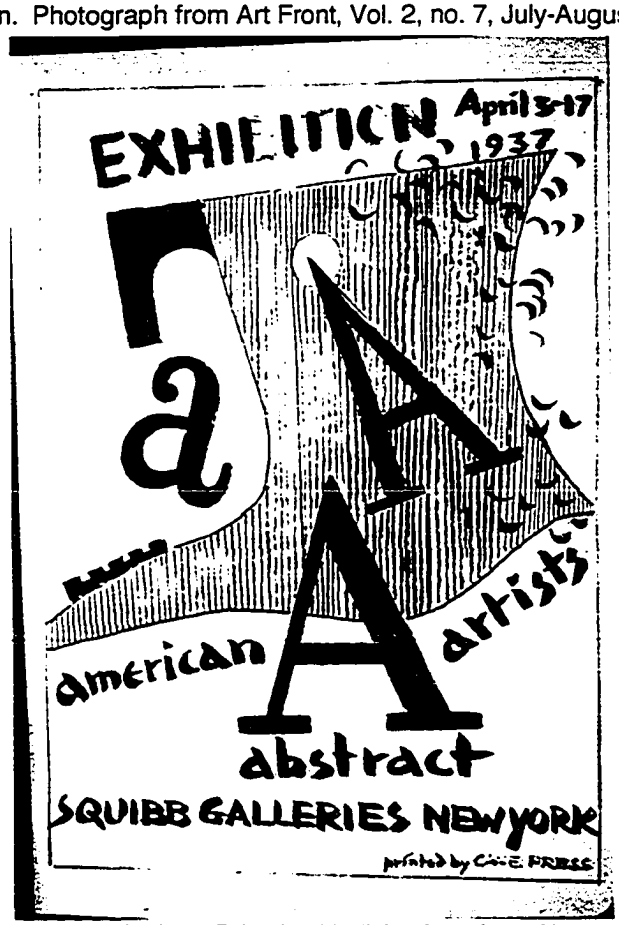


Fig. 3-8. Werner Drewes. Frontispiece Print (untitled) for American Abstract Artists Exhibition Portfolio of Lithographs. 1937, black and white lithograph, 10 3/4 x 8 1/2".
Photo from set of original folio prints.

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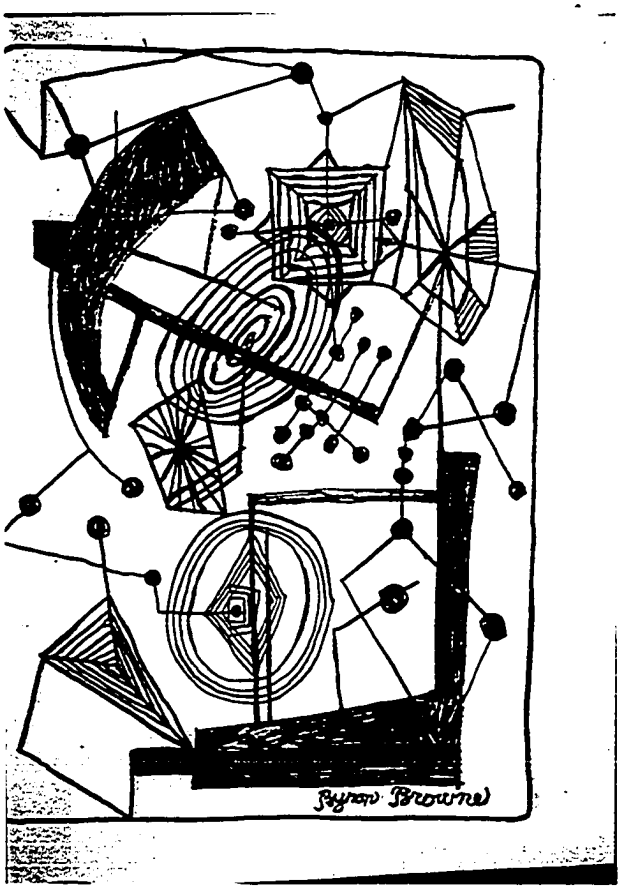


Fig. 3-9. Print (untitled) for American Abstract Artists Exhibition Portfolio.
1937, black and white lithograph, 10 3/4 x 8 1/2". Photo from set of original folio prints.

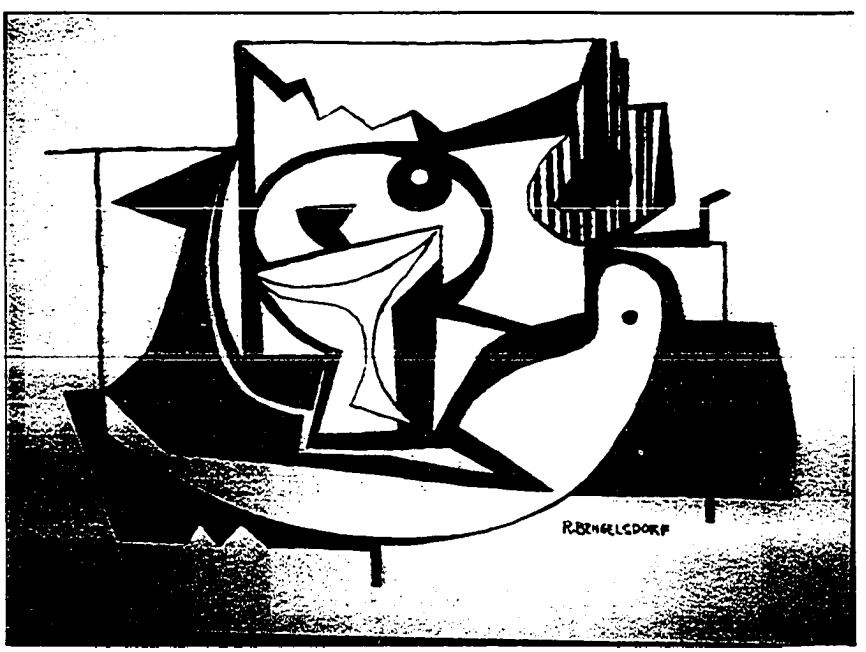


Fig. 3-10. Rosalind Bengelsdorf. Print (untitled) for American Abstract Artists Exhibition Portfolio.
1937, black and white lithograph, 10 3/4 x 8 1/2". Photo from set of original folio prints.

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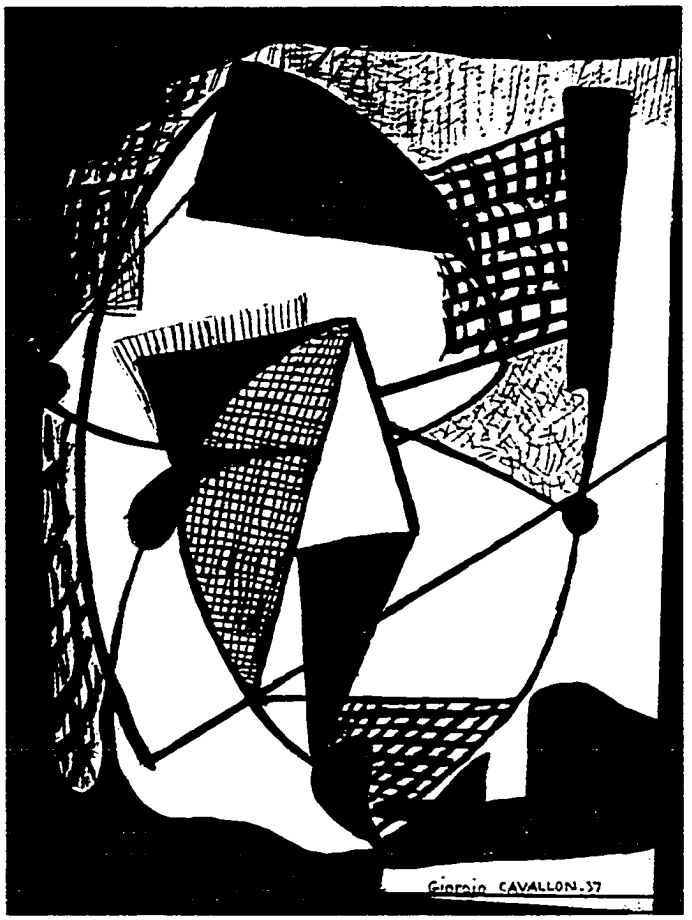


Fig. 3-11. Giorgio Cavallon. Print (untitled) for American Abstract Artists Exhibition Portfolio. 1937, black and white lithograph, 10 3/4 x 8 1/2." Photo from set of original folio prints.



Fig. 3-12. Still Life Study. 1935-36, oil on canvas, 36 x 47". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 3-13. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City.
Unemployed artists heading down Fifth Avenue, crossing West 8th Street. Ca. 1935-37.
Photographer of Figures 3-13 through 3-22 unknown.



Fig. 3-14. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City. Posters and banners held aloft.

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Fig. 3-15. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City.
Byron Browne (second from right) helping unidentified fellow artists carry a huge construction down the street; center figure may be Jan Matulka.



Fig. 3-16. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City.
Unidentified demonstrator selling copies of Art Front, the Artists' Union newspaper, during protest march.

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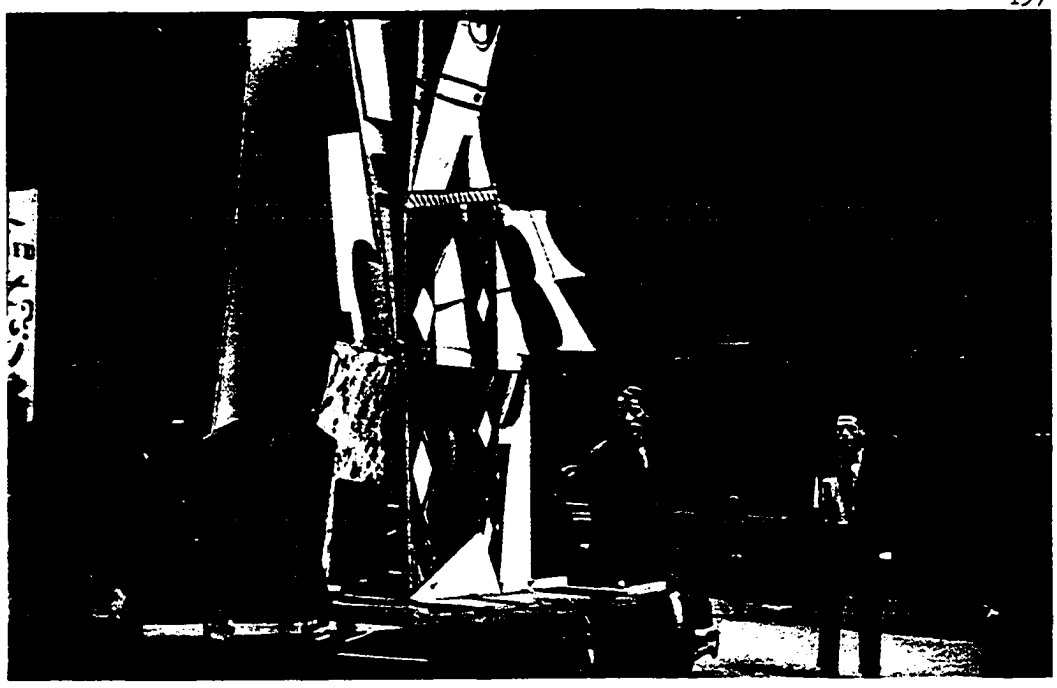


Fig. 3-17. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City.
View of lower portion of huge Cubist construction being carried by Byron Browne, left corner (viewer's right) and unidentified fellow artists.

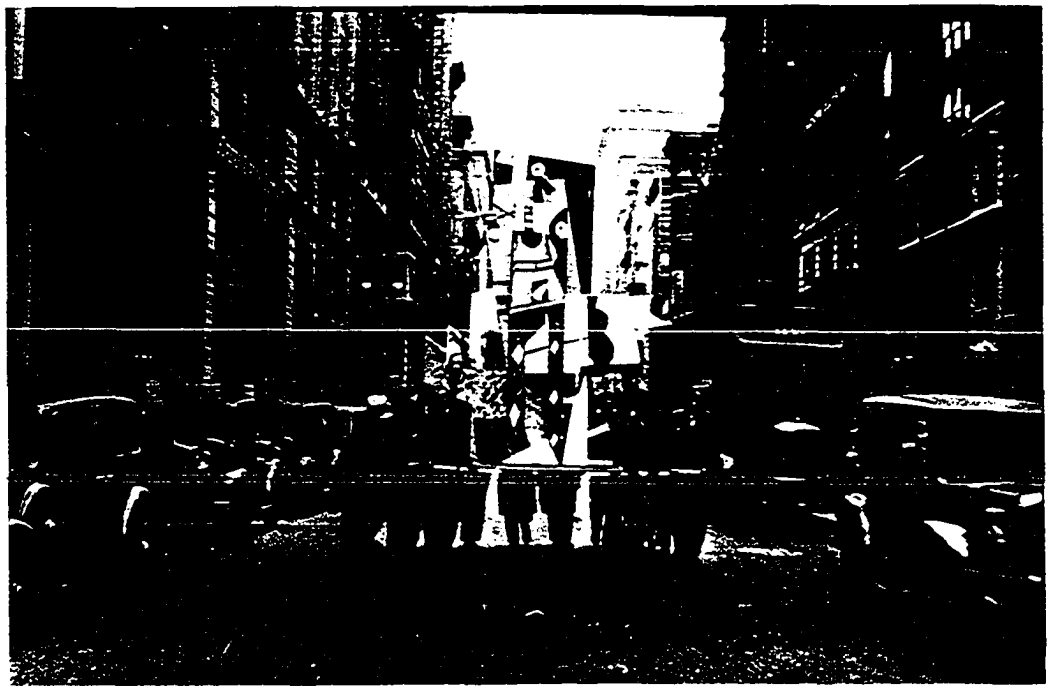


Fig. 3-18. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City. Full front view of towering Cubist construction, similar to Picasso's American Manager's costume for 1917 ballet, Parade, being carried down Fifth Avenue during demonstration. Byron Browne's Cubist animal head design appears at the top of construction; Browne is on viewer's far right side.

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Fig. 3-19. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City. Protest poster of unidentified image, "This Is Not An Artist," held aloft during march.

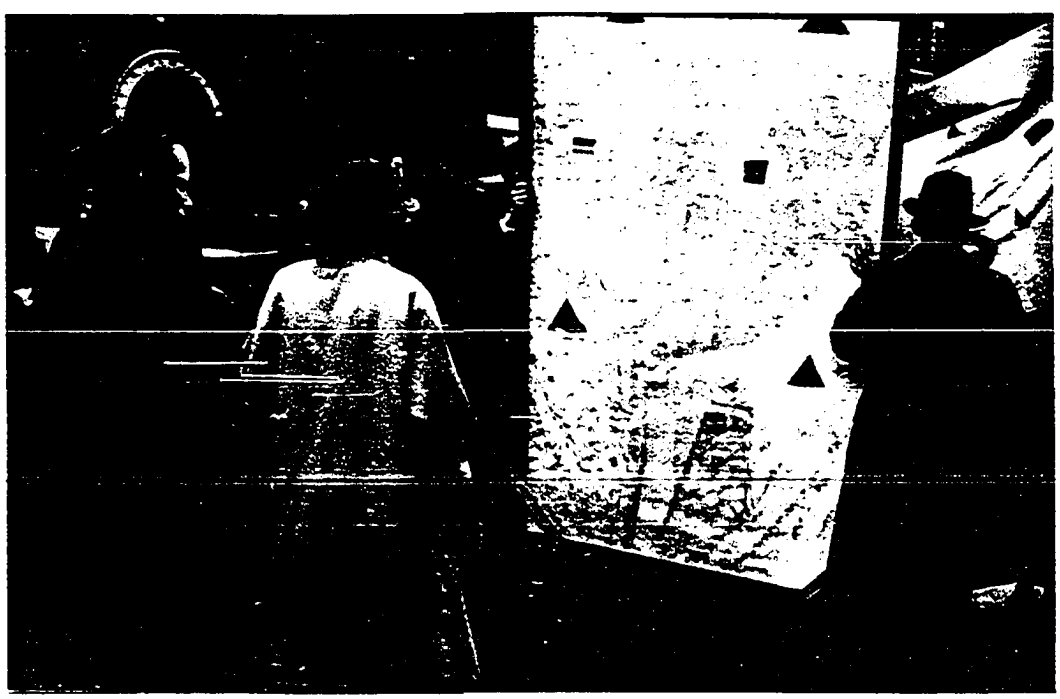


Fig. 3-20. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City. Handwritten poster listing demands for jobs for artists. Man on far left may be Stuart Davis.

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Fig. 3-21. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City.
Two marchers carrying artwork during the walk for jobs. Man in cap may be Arshile Gorky.



Fig. 3-22. Artists' Union Protest March, New York City.
Unemployed artists reach the court district in lower Manhattan and begin forming a massive picket line to demand jobs.

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Fig. 3-23. View of Installation of Paintings by Byron Browne at Artists' Gallery Exhibition. New York City, February 28-March 13, 1939. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.



Fig. 3-24. View of Installation of Paintings by Byron Browne at Artists' Gallery Exhibition. New York City, February 28-March 13, 1939. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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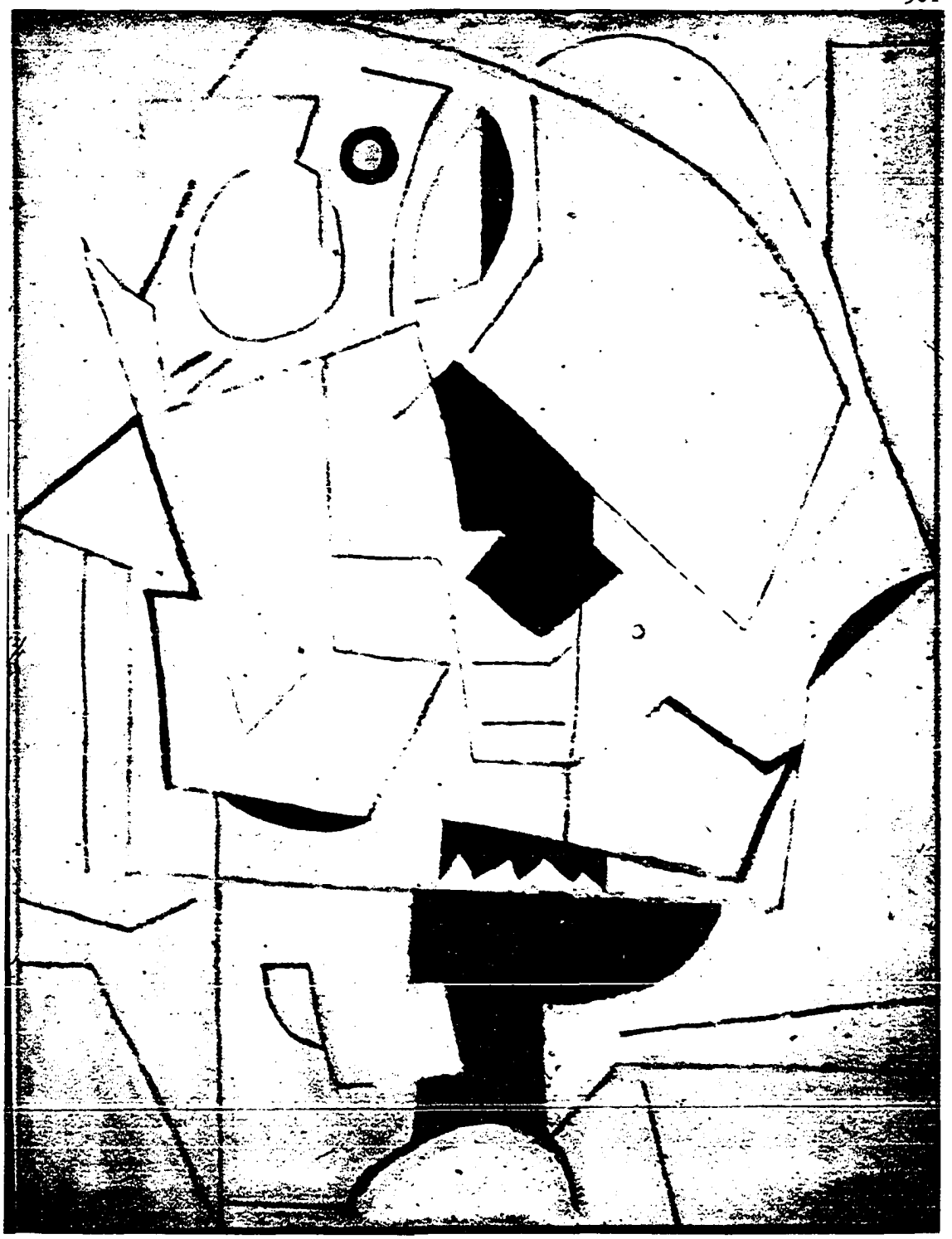


Fig. 3-25. Classical Still Life. 1936, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Coll: Barney Ebsworth, St. Louis.

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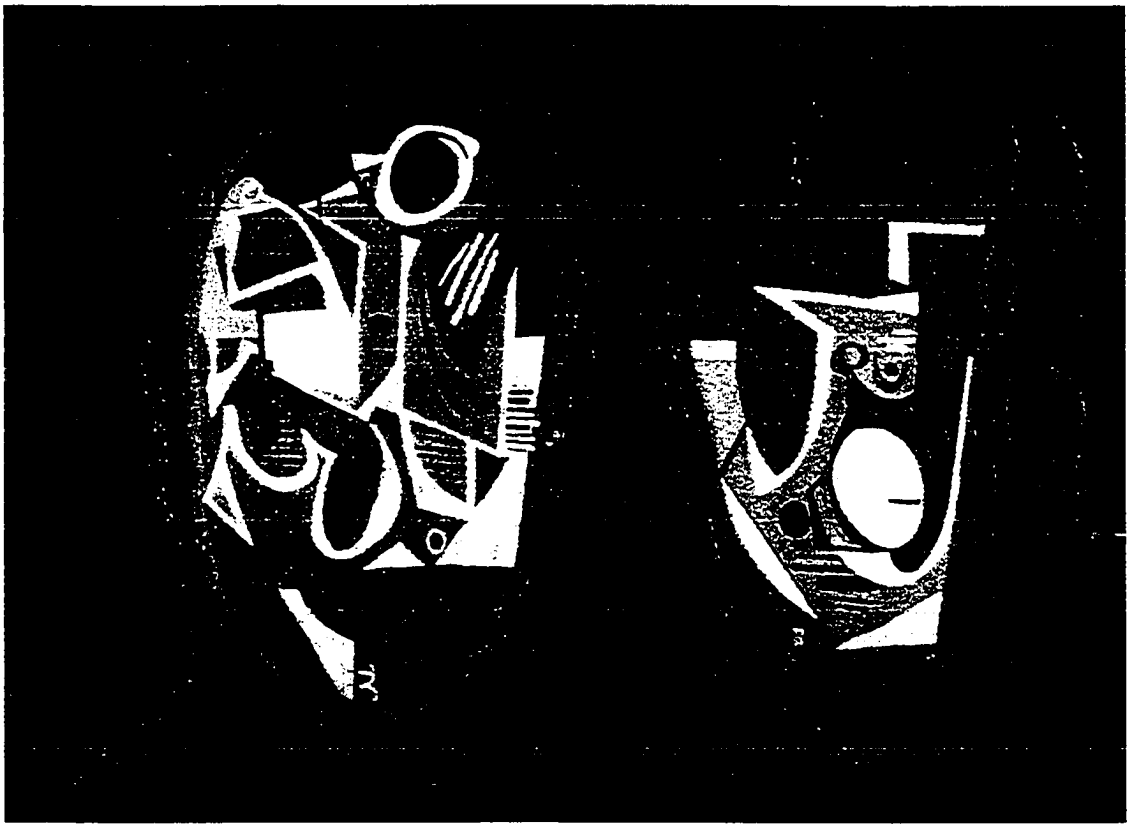


Fig. 3-26. Africana. (a.k.a. Painting on Black). 1937-38, oil on canvas and string, 36 x 47".
Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Long.

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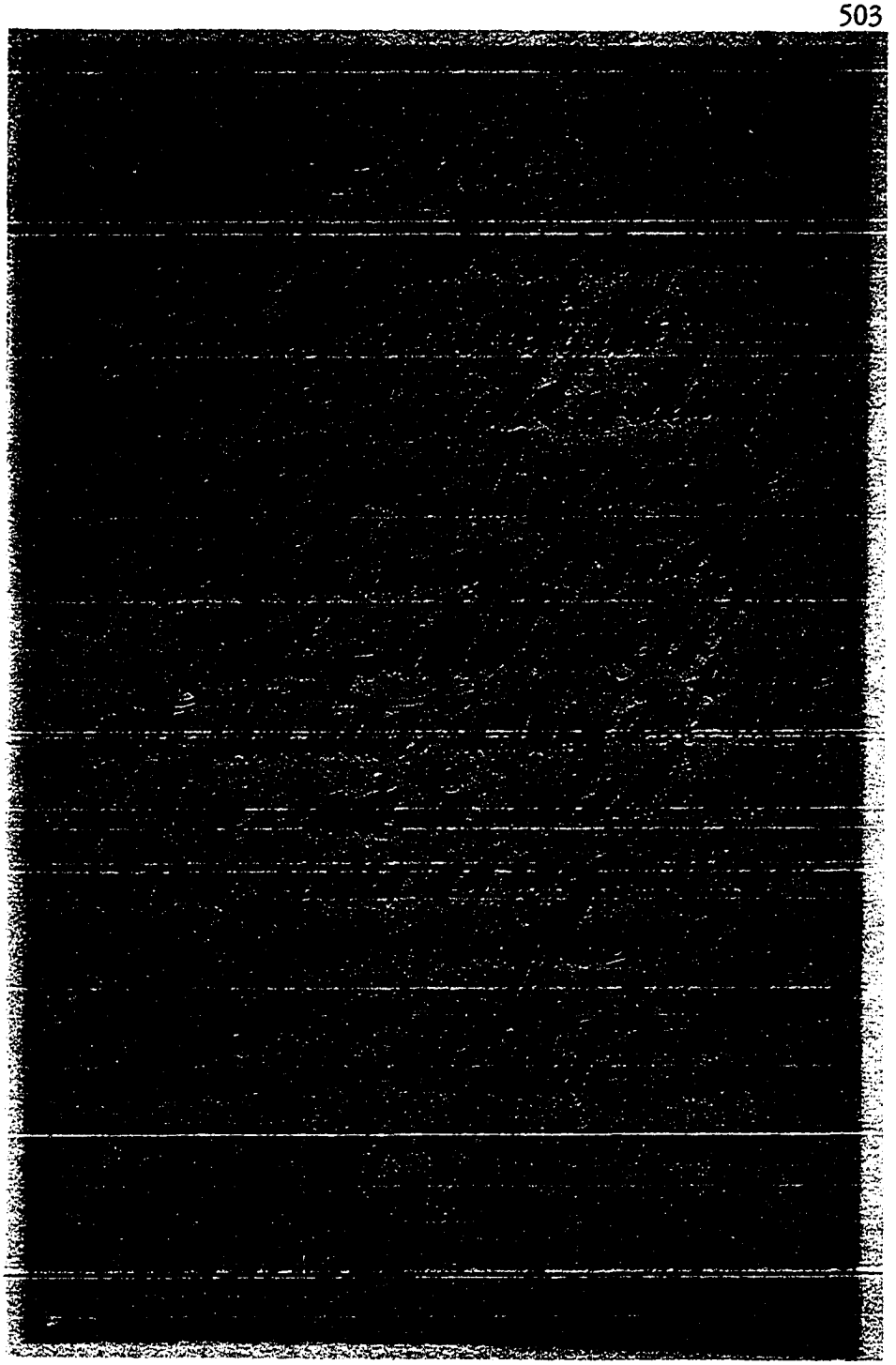


Fig. 4-1. Letter. Byron Browne to Mrs. Juliana Force, March 5, 1934.
Photograph courtesy the National Archives and Records Service, Civil Archives Division, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., Records Group 121, 1934.

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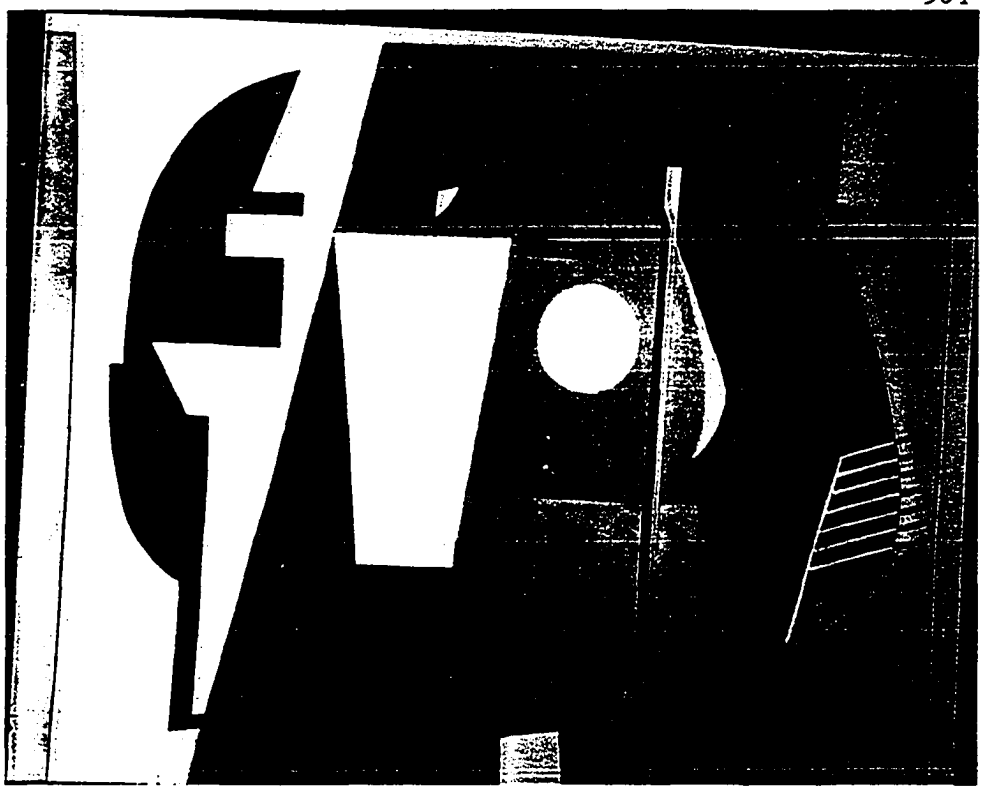


Fig. 4-2. Abstraction. Mural study for Williamsburg Federal Housing Project. 1936, probably gouache on paper, 14 x 20". Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

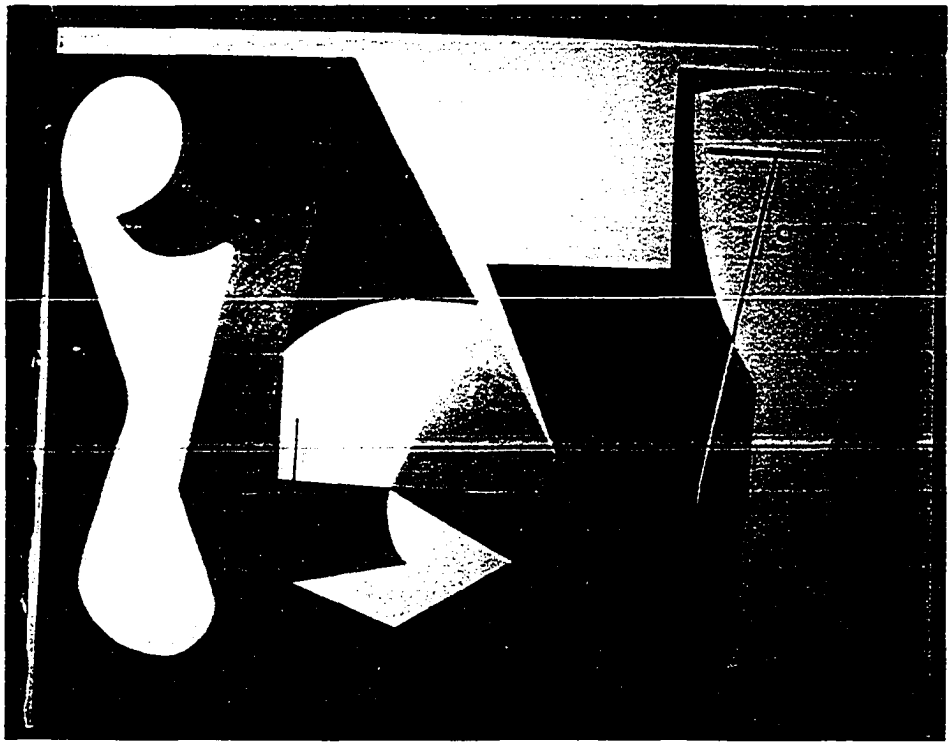


Fig. 4-3. Abstraction. Mural study for Williamsburg Federal Housing Project. 1936, probably gouache on paper, 14 x 20". Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 4-4. Rima Mosaic. 1936, mosaic on wood panel, 50 x 36".
Coll: The United States Passport Office, Rockefeller Center, New York City.
Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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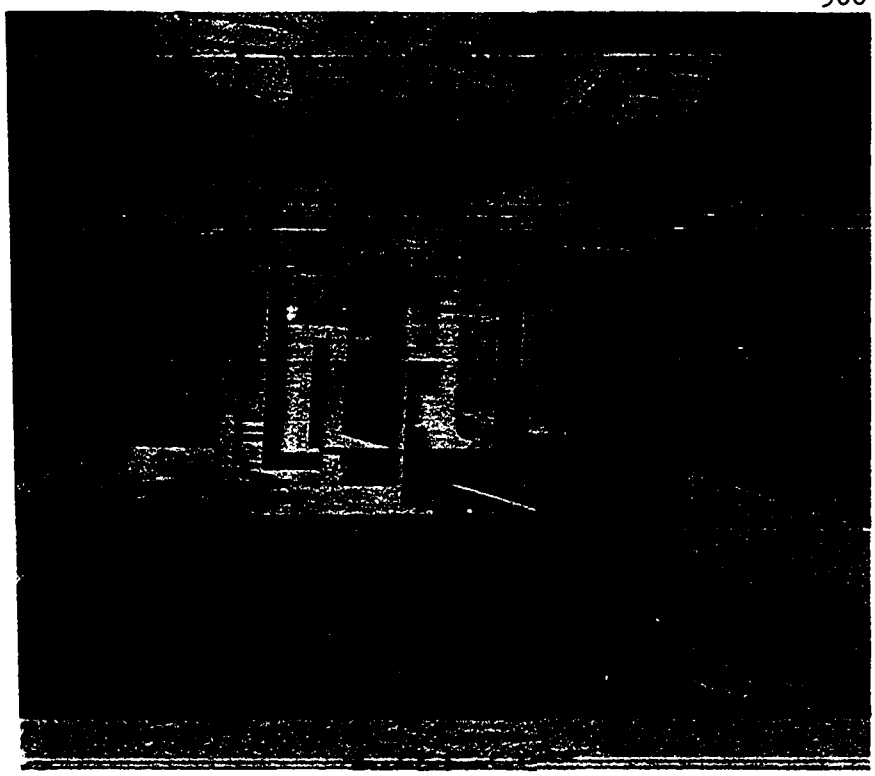


Fig. 4-5. Abstraction (a.k.a. Architectural Views). Ca. 1940s. View of Studio D, showing Byron Browne mural, and original floor pattern at WNYC Radio Broadcasting Station, Municipal Building, New York City. Coll: The Art Commission of the City of New York. Photo courtesy the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

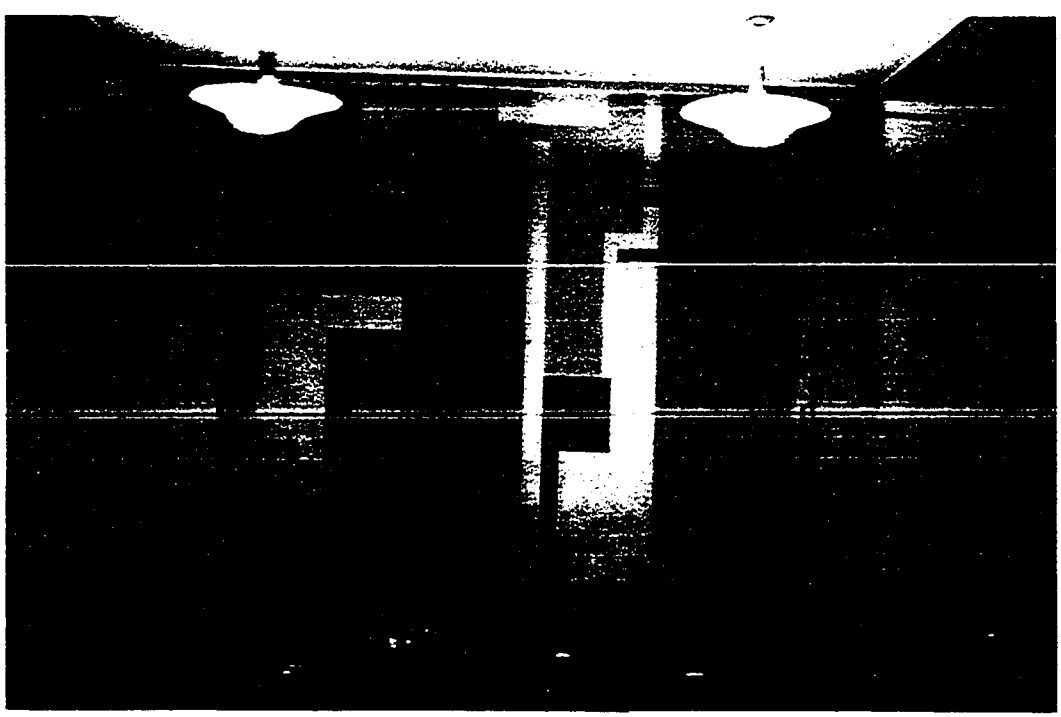


Fig. 4-6. Abstraction (a.k.a. Architectural Views). 1938, industrial paint on acoustic pegboard, 6 x 9 feet. WNYC Broadcasting Station, New York City. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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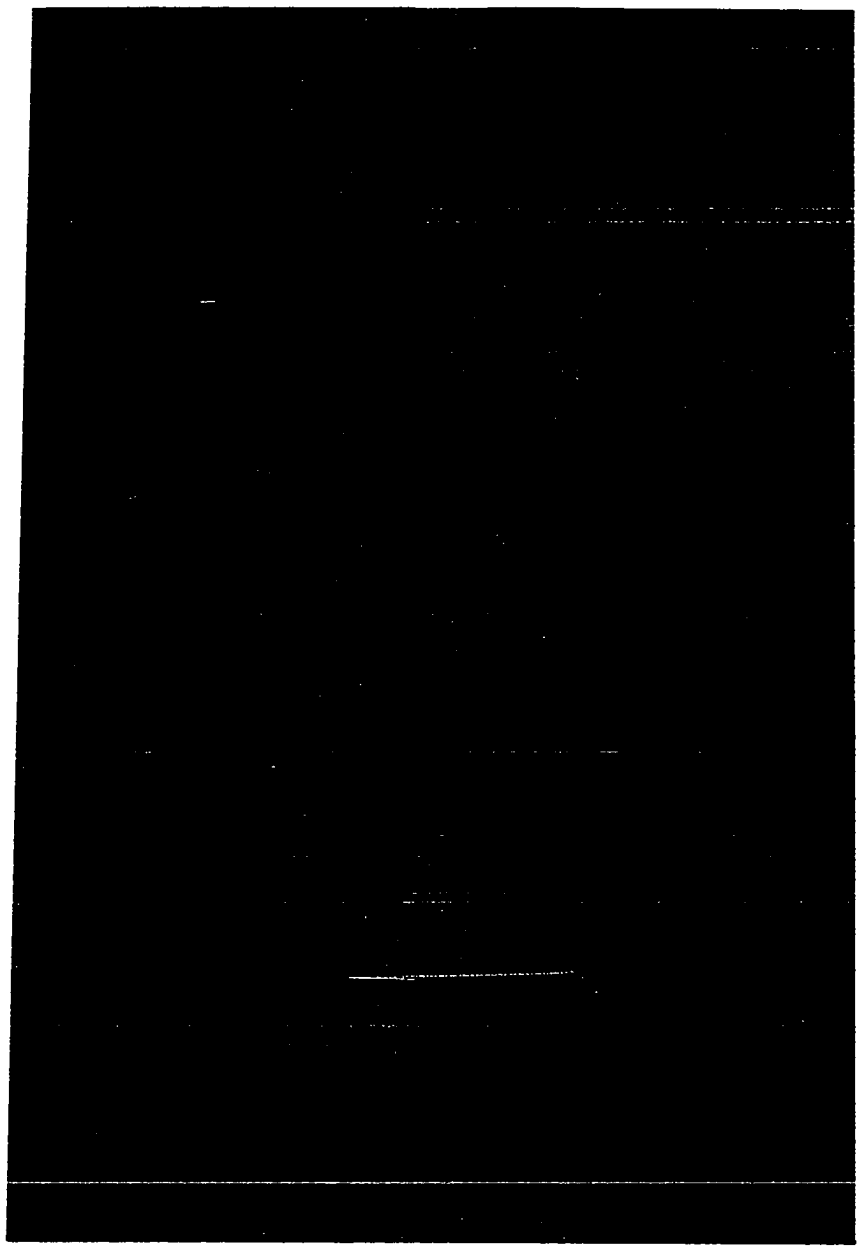


Fig. 4-7. Abstraction (a.k.a. Architectural Views). 1938, detail of lower center, industrial paint on acoustic pegboard. WNYC Broadcasting Station, New York City.
Photographed in situ in Studio D by April Paul.

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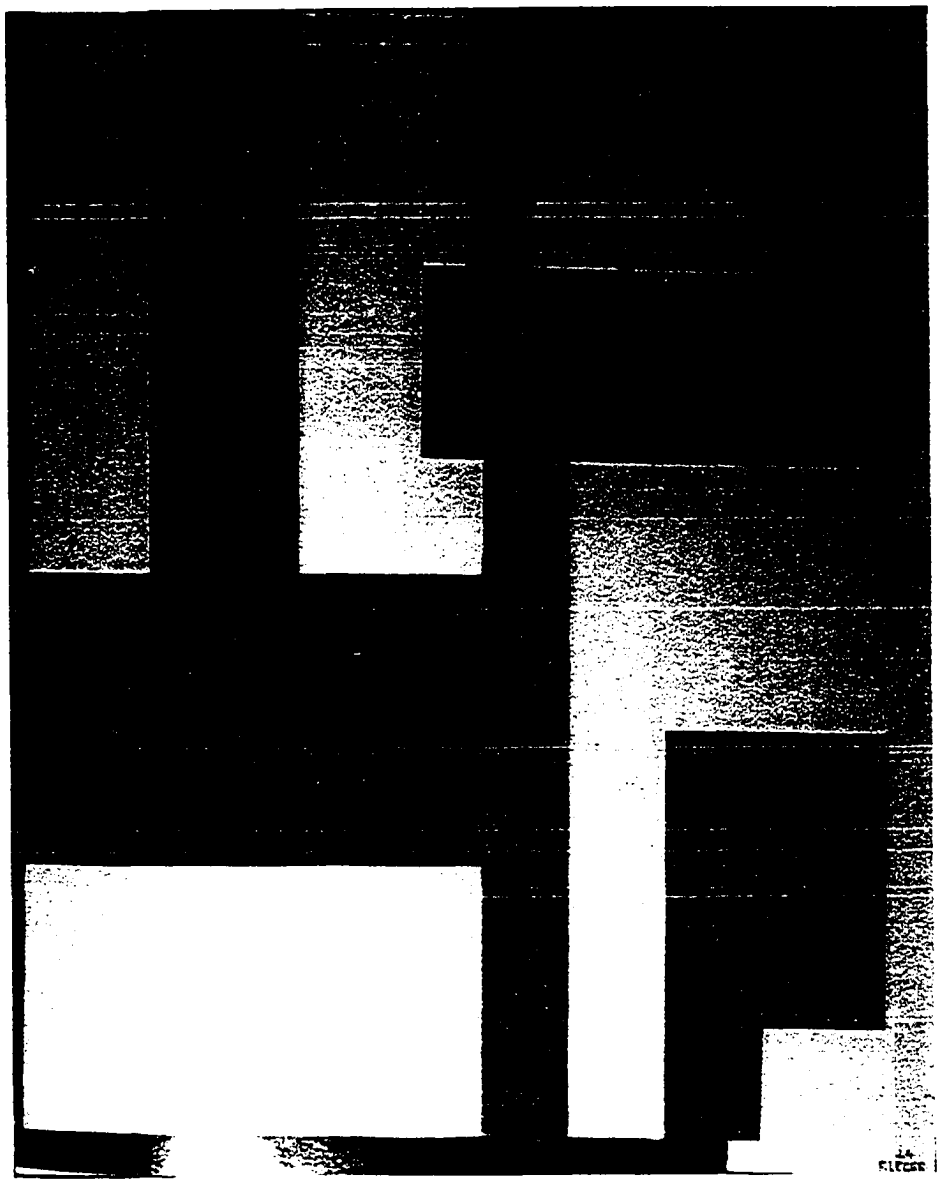


Fig. 4-8. Fernand Léger. Mural Composition (Composition Murale). 1924, oil on canvas, 63 x 51 3/16". Coll: Musée Nationale Fernand Léger, Biot, France.

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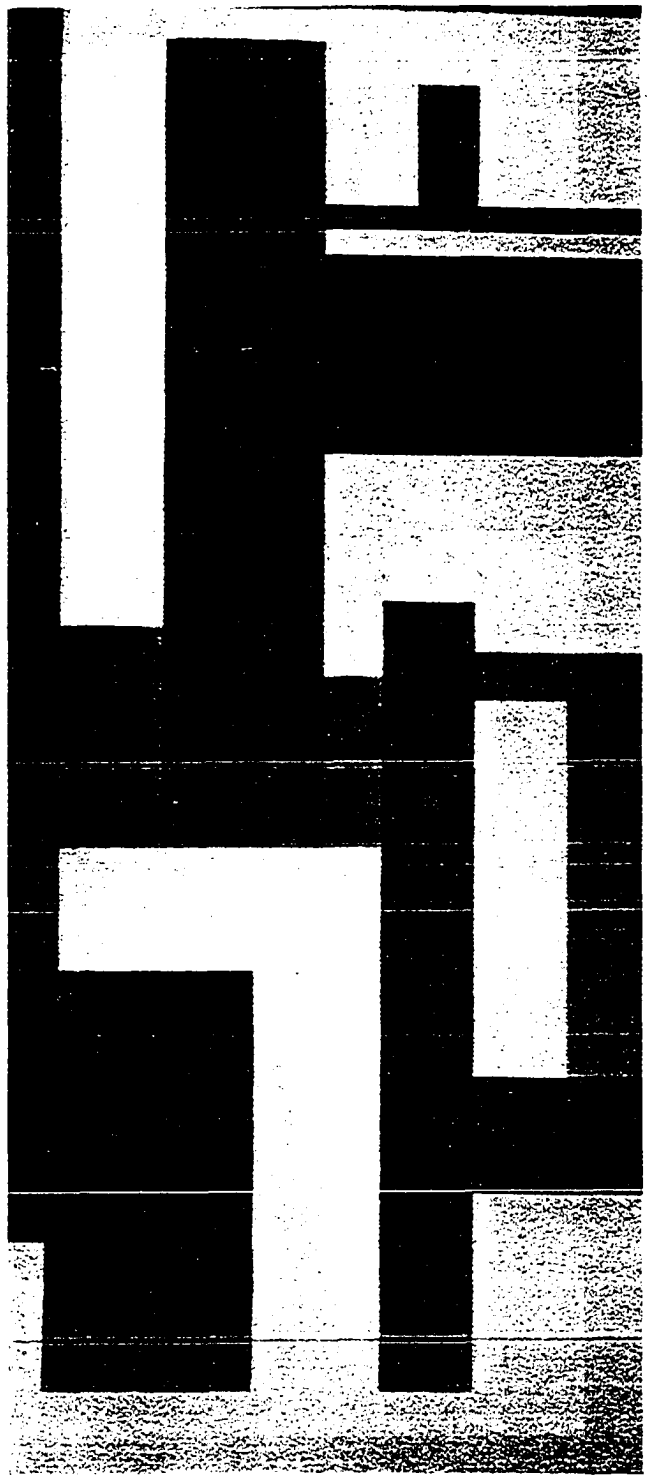


Fig. 4-9. Fernand Léger. Peinture Murale. 1924, oil on canvas, 70 3/4 x 31 1/2".
Coll: Musée Nationale Fernand Léger, Biot, France.

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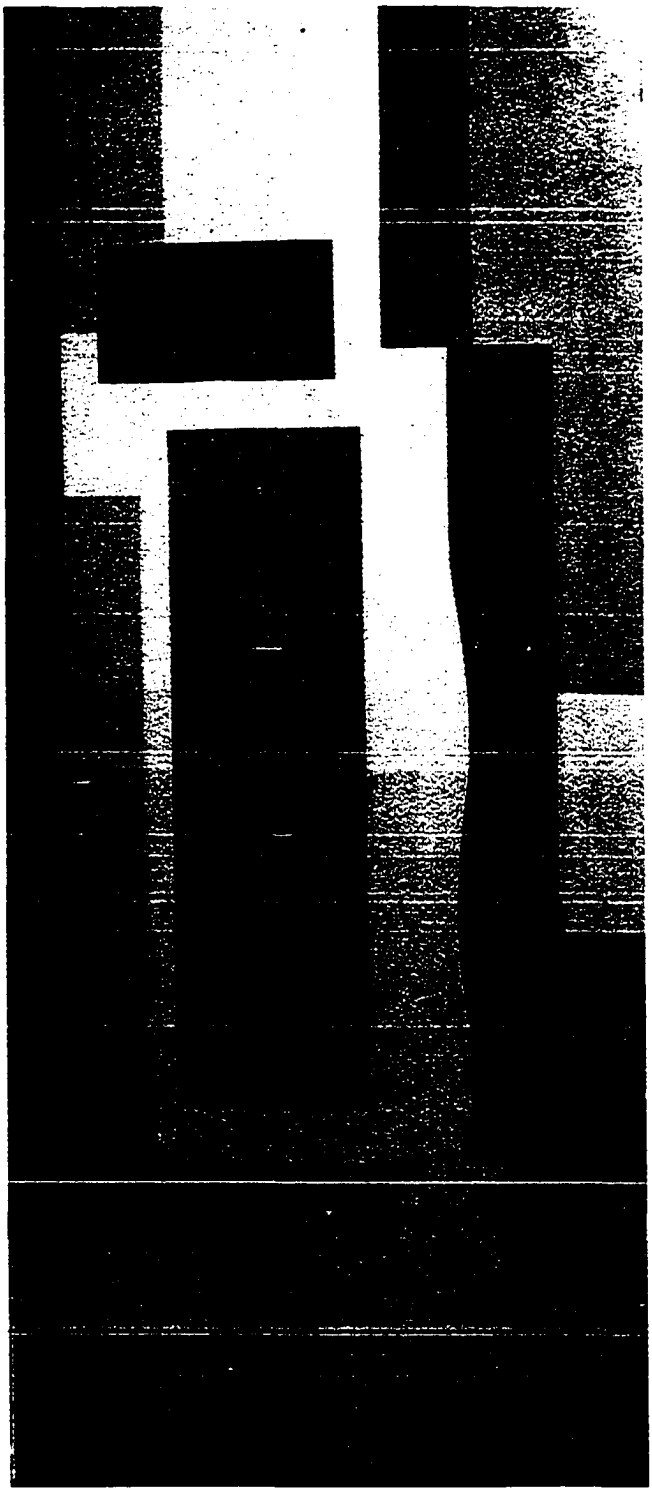


Fig. 4-10. Fernand Léger. Mural Painting (Peinture Murale). 1924-25, oil on canvas, 71 x 31 5/8". Coll: Solomon R.Guggenheim Museum, New York City.

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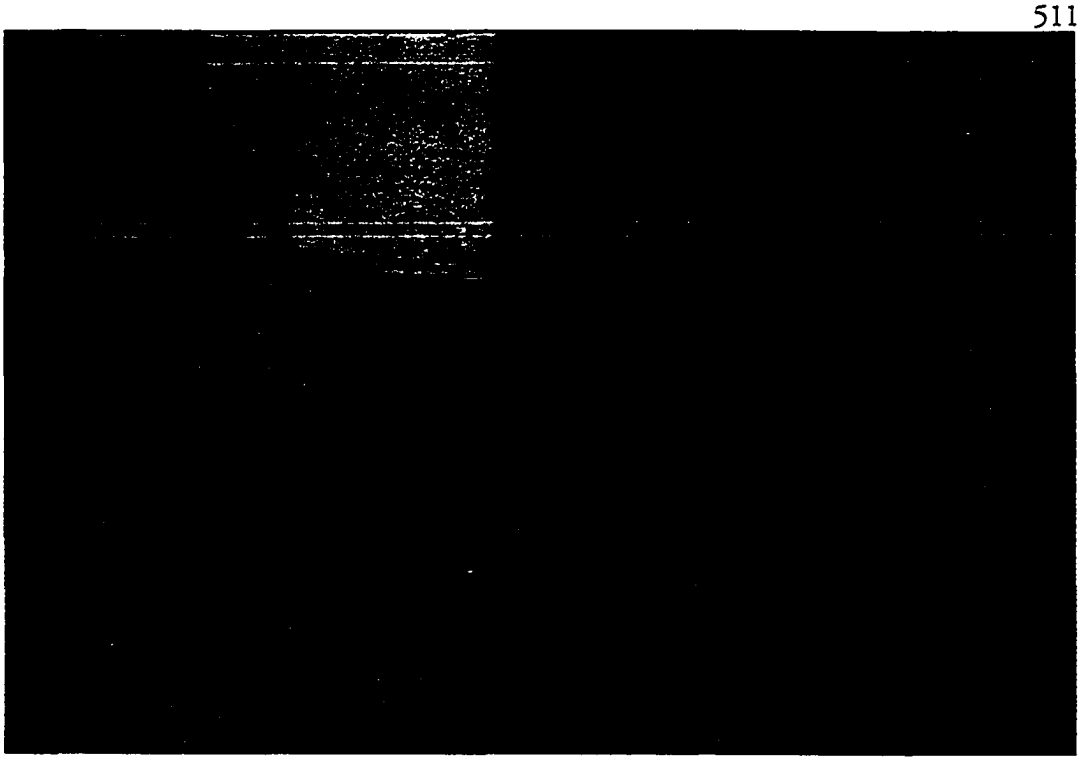


Fig. 4-11. Abstraction (a.k.a. Architectural Views).
1938, detail of lower right, industrial paint on acoustic pegboard.
WNYC Broadcasting Station, New York City. Photographed in situ in Studio D by April Paul.

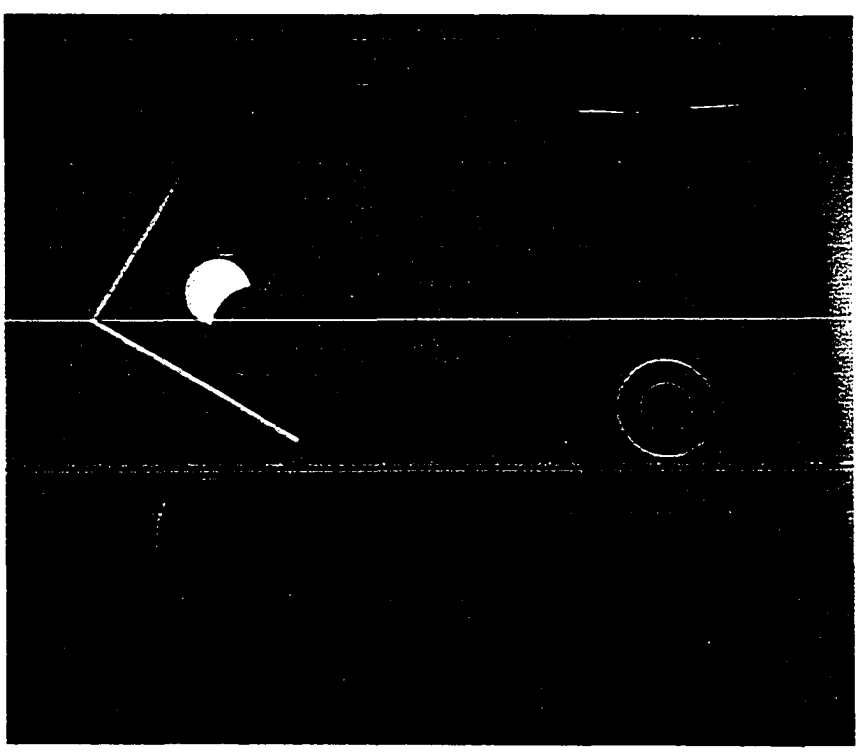


Fig. 4-12. John von Wicht. Abstraction. 1938-39, oil on canvas, 8 x 7 feet, 2". Restored.
Mural painting for Studio C, WNYC Broadcasting Station, New York City.
Coll: The Art Commission of the City of New York. Photo by April Paul.

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Fig. 4-13. Louis Schanker. Abstraction (To Music). 1938-39, tempera and encaustic on canvas, 6 feet, 6" x 22 feet. Restored in situ, 1978. Mural painting for reception lobby of WNYC Broadcasting Station, New York City. Photographed in situ by April Paul.

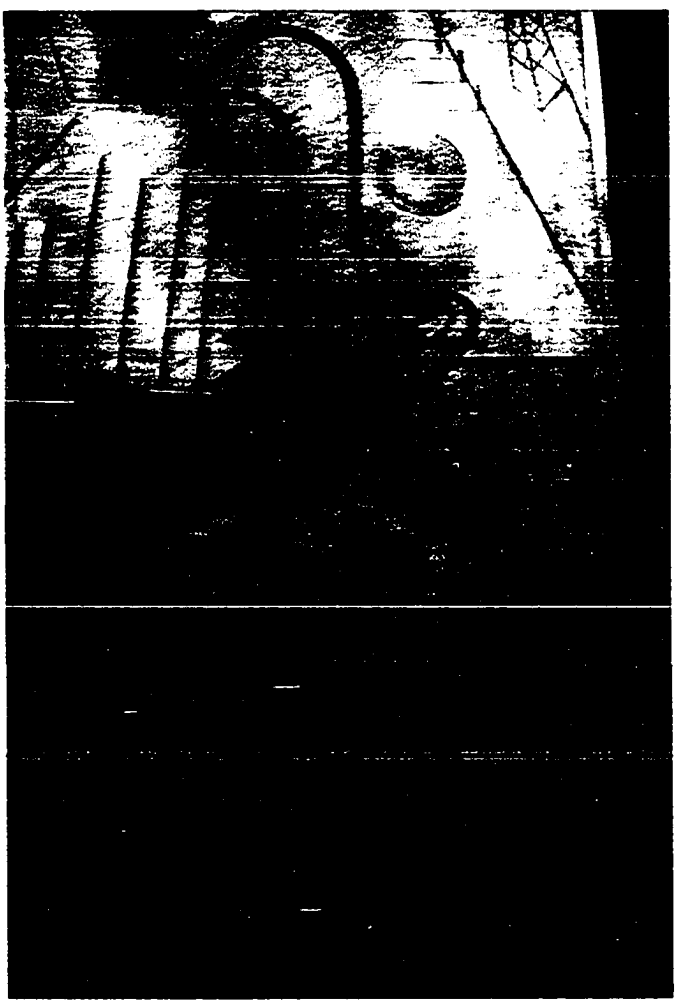


Fig. 4-14. Louis Schanker. Abstraction (To Music). 1938-39, detail of upper right corner, tempera and encaustic on canvas. Mural painting for reception lobby of WNYC Broadcasting Station, New York City. Photographed in situ by April Paul.

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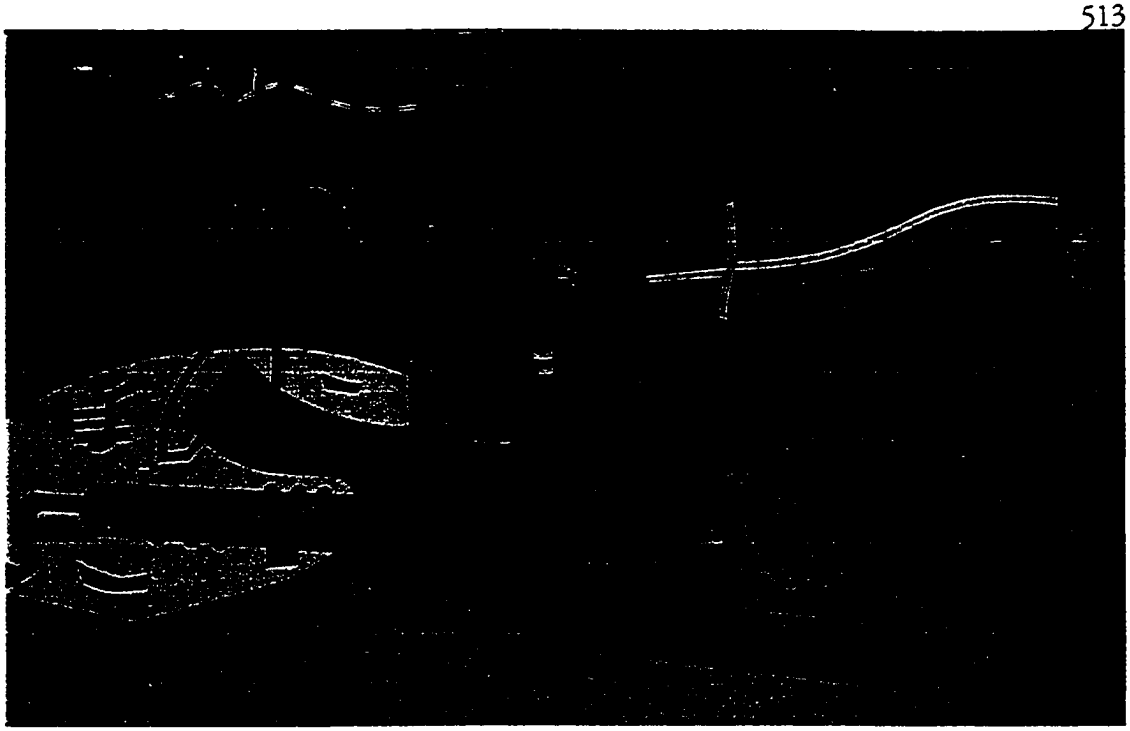


Fig. 4-15. Stuart Davis. Mural for Studio B. 1939. oil on canvas, 84 x 132".
Mural painting for WNYC Broadcasting Station.
Coll: The Art Commission of the City of New York.

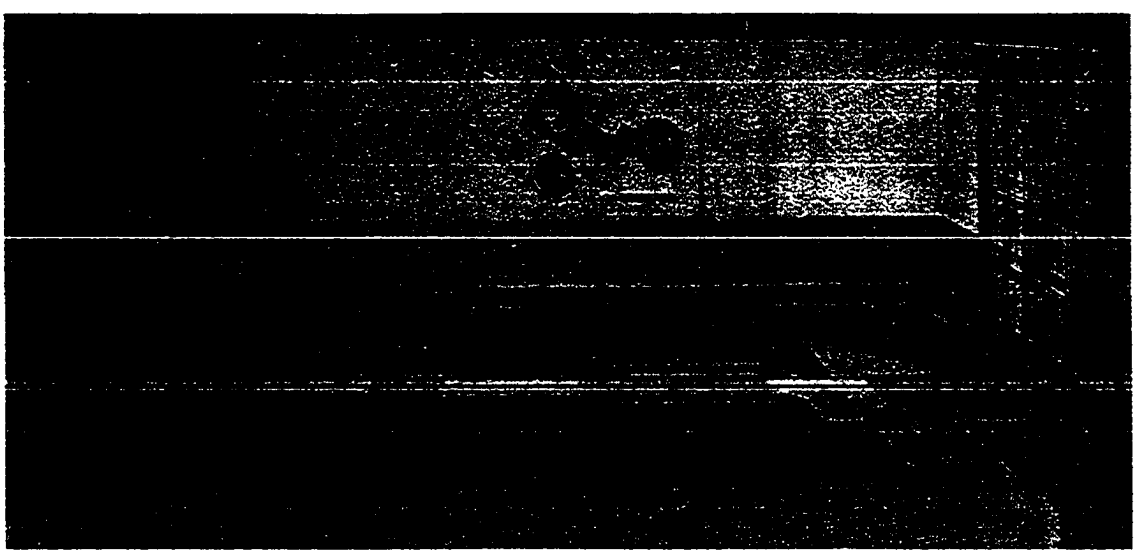


Fig. 4-16. Model of Room and Floor Plan of Studio C, Including Mural Design by John von Wicht. 1938. Photocopy of original photograph in files of the Art Commission of the City of New York.
Courtesy the Photographic Division of the WPA/FAP.

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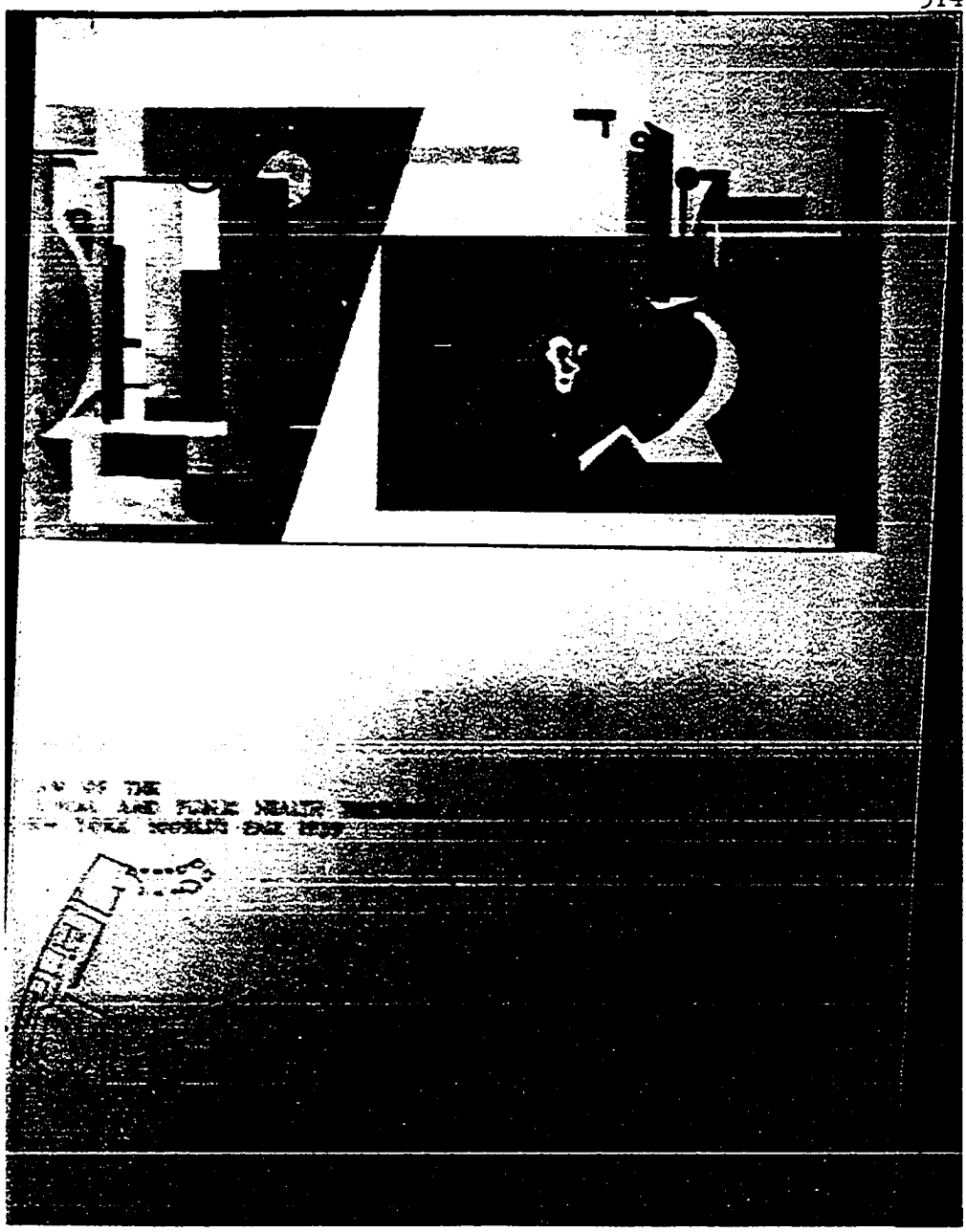


Fig. 4-17. Abstraction (Study for Mural for the New York World's Fair, for the Hall of Medicine and Public Health Building). 1938, gouache on paper. Coll: Frank Chronican.

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Fig. 4-18. Abstraction (Final Study for Mural for the New York World's Fair, for the Hall of Medicine and Public Health Building). 1938, pencil and watercolor on illustration board,3 5/8 x 7 1/4". Coll: Frank Chronican.

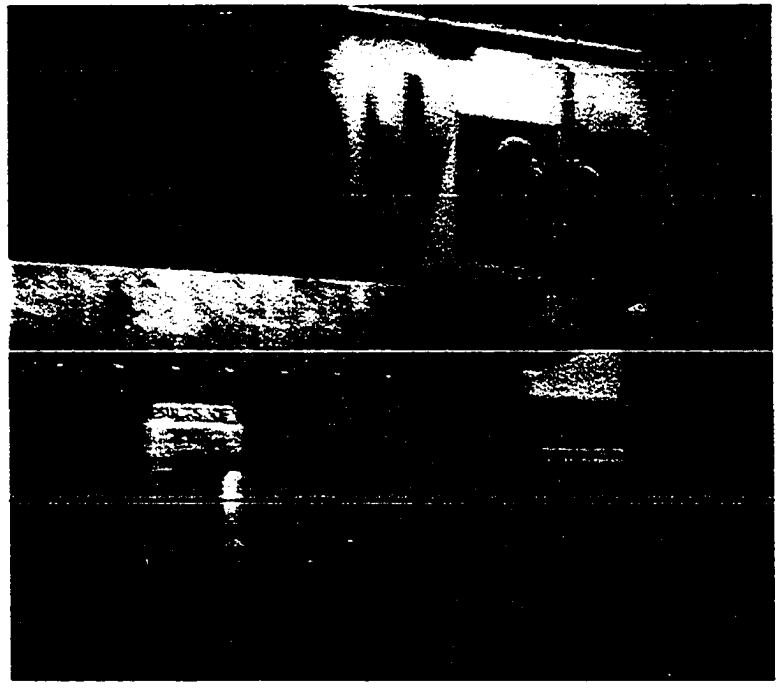


Fig. 4-19. Abstraction (Installation Photograph of Byron Browne Mural in situ in Hall of Medicine and Public Health Building). 1939, medium unknown, 10 x 16 feet; executed by members of the Mural Artists Guild of the AFL's United Scenic Artists. Photo from exhibition catalogue, Dawn of a New Day: The New York Worlds' Fair, 1939/40, The Queens Museum, Helen A. Harrison, guest curator, June 21-November 30, 1980. p. 91.

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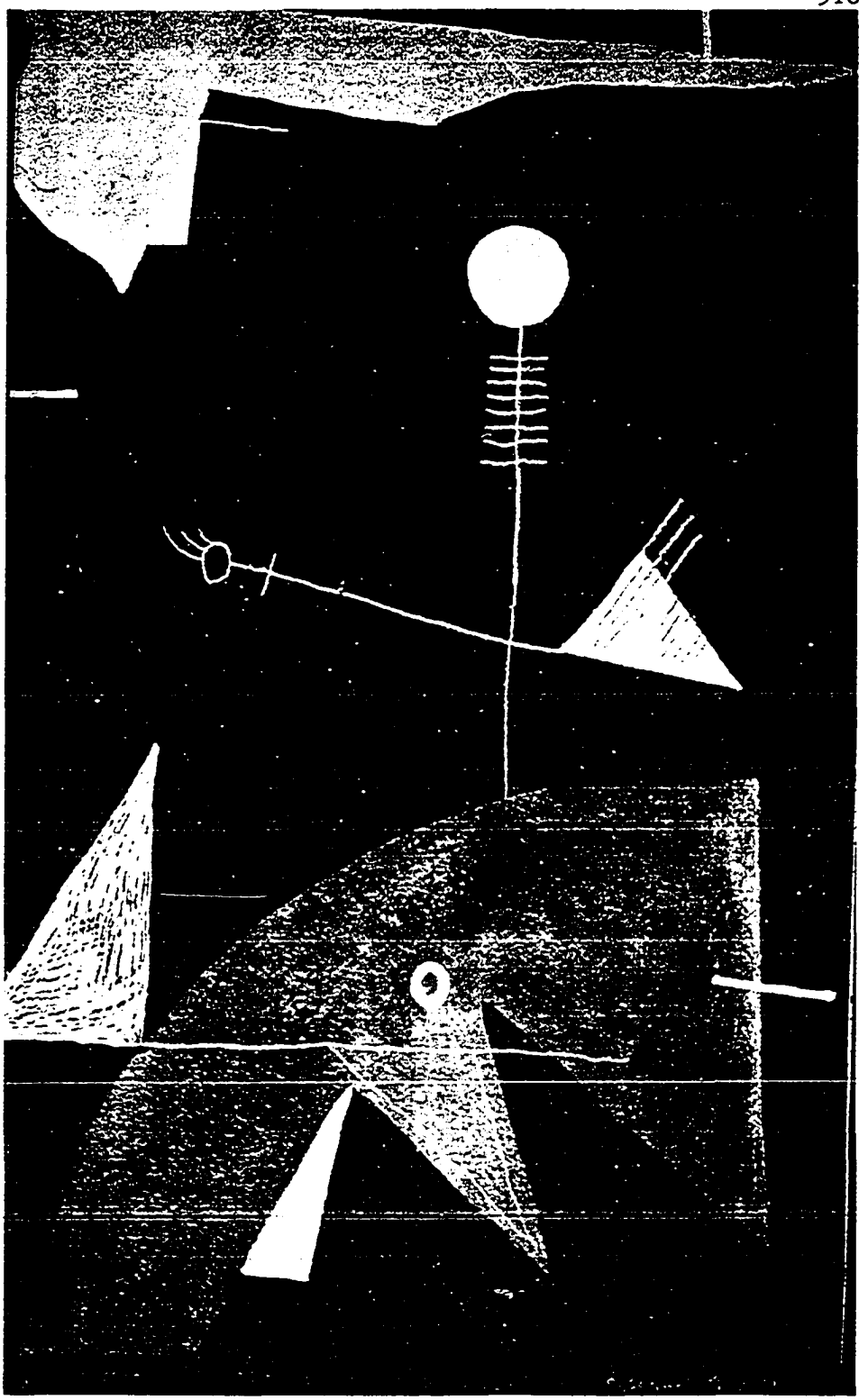


Fig. 4-20. Forms on Black Space. 1938, oil on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo from exhibition catalogue, American Art Today: Gallery of American Art Today, New York World's Fair, New York, National Art Society, 1939, p. 53.

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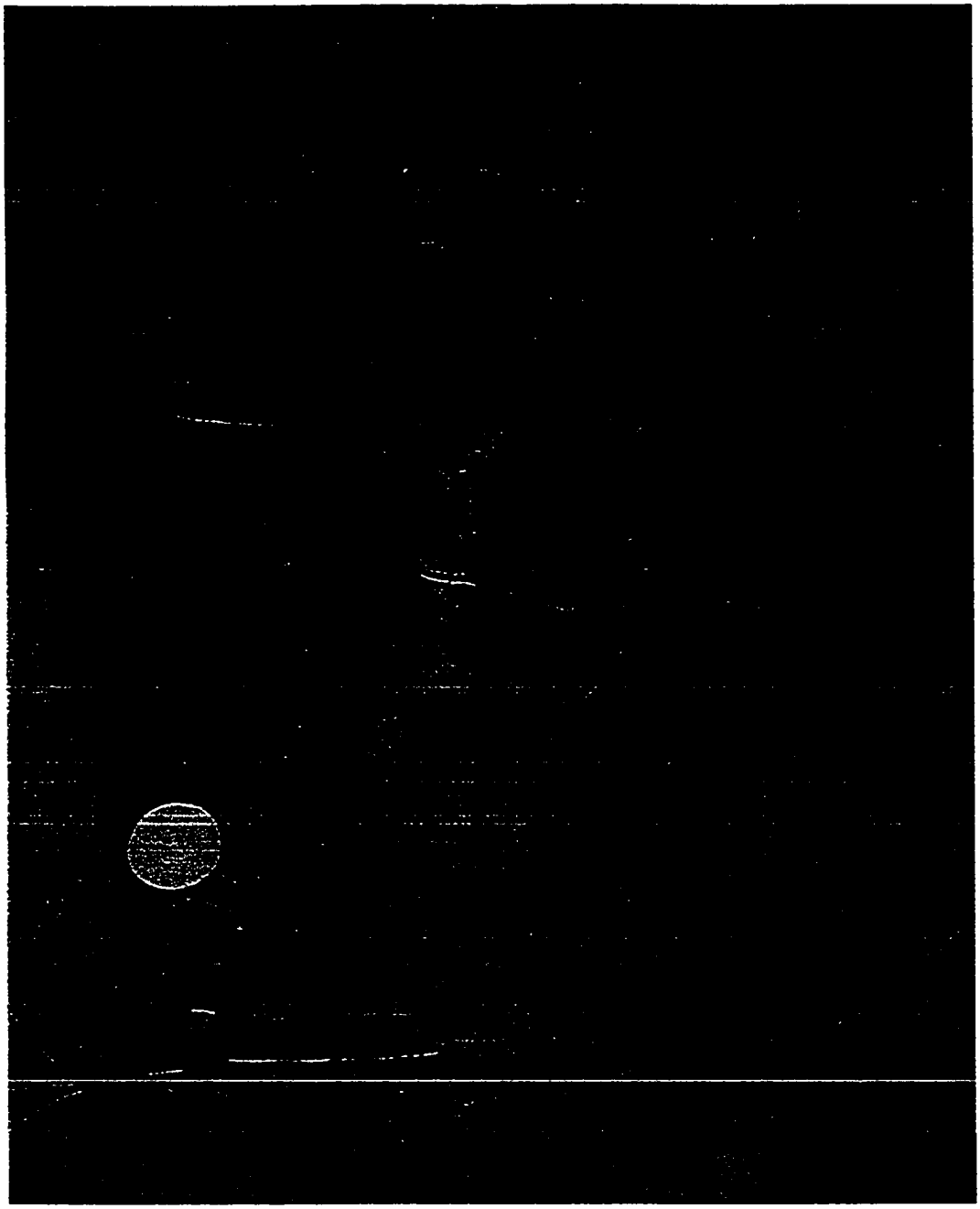


Fig. 4-21. Joan Miró. The Birth of the World. 1925, oil on canvas, 98 3/4 x 78 3/4".
Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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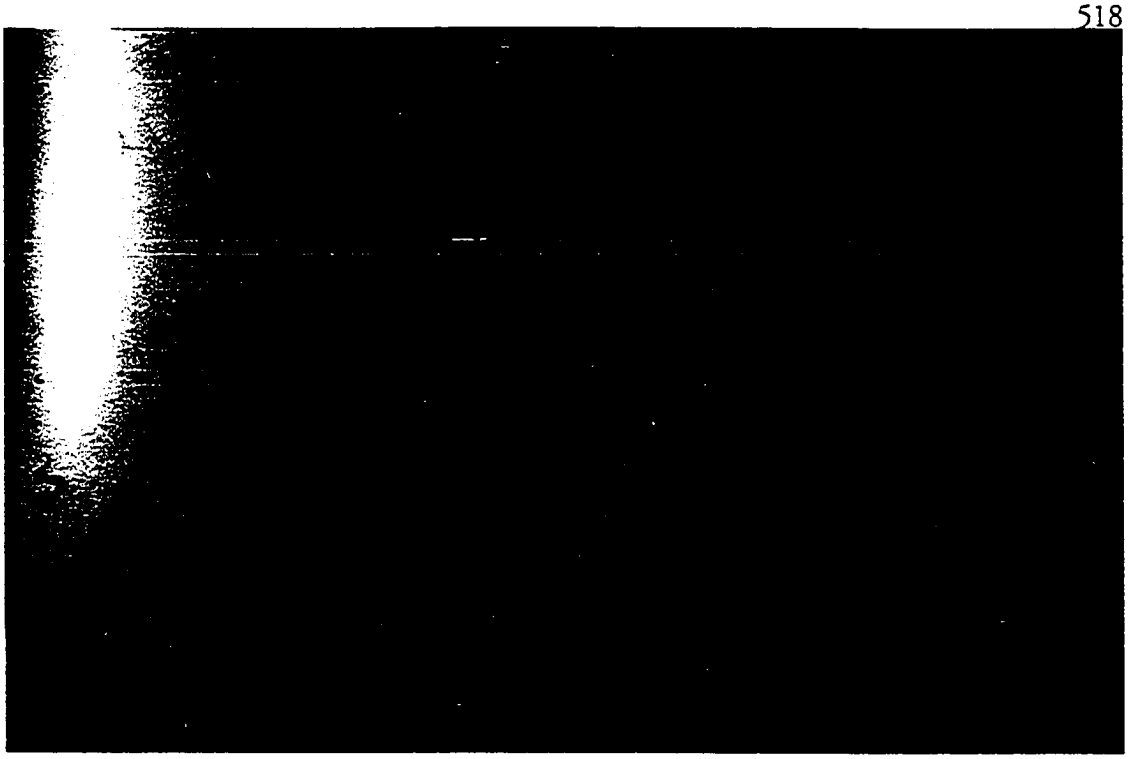


Fig. 4-22. Joan Miró. The Hunter (Catalan Landscape). 1923-24, oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 39 1/2". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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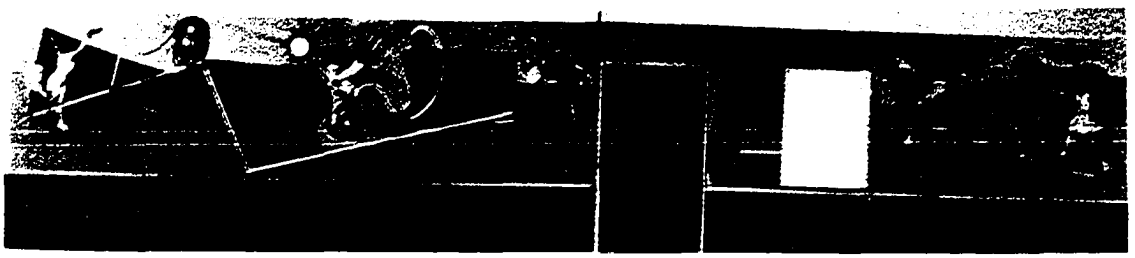


Fig. 4-23. Peaceful Pursuits of Man (a.k.a. Recreation and Sports). Study for circular photomontage mural, to occupy 324 square feet, proposed for men's Day Room #31, preliminary approval on 4/9/40, Hospital for Chronic Diseases, Welfare Island, New York City. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

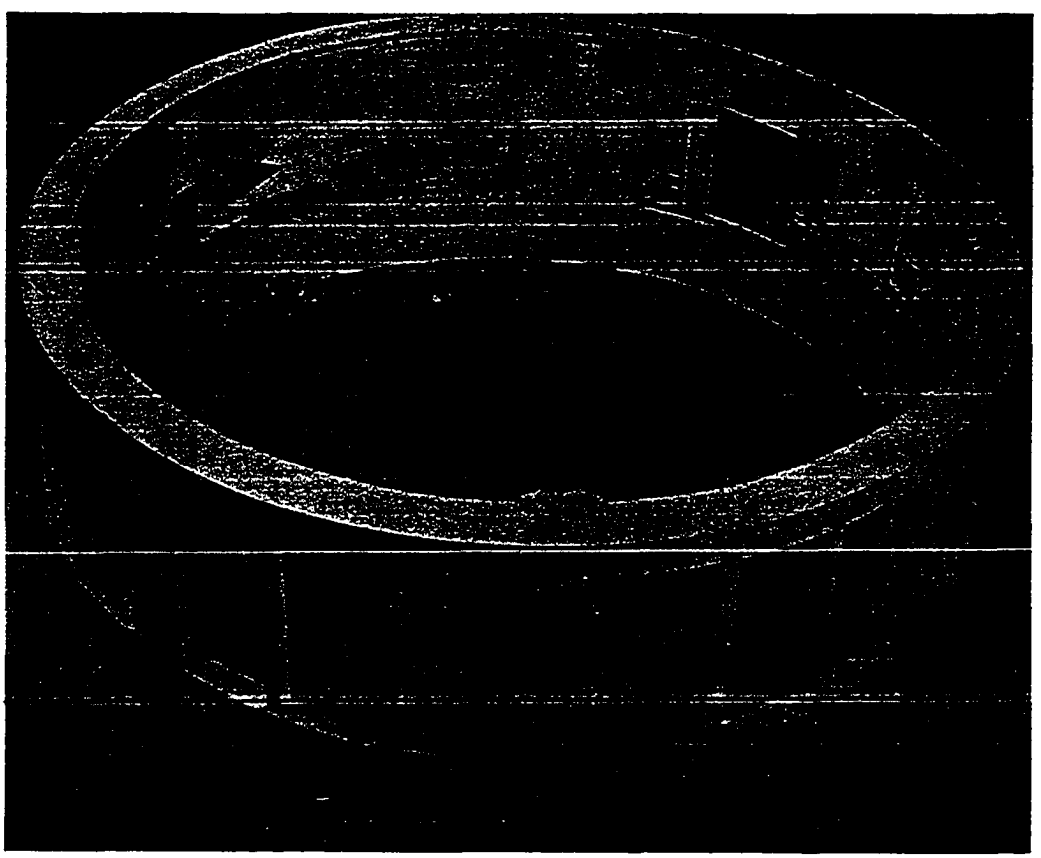


Fig. 4-24. Ilya Bolotowsky. Circular Model of the Men's Day Room, with His Mural Design. 1940 (completed and probably installed, late 1940 or early 1941), Hospital for Chronic Diseases, Welfare Island, New York City. Photo from Archives of American Art Journal, Vol. 22, no. 1, 1982, p. 24. Photo by Otto E. Nelson.

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Fig. 4-25. Woman and Bird (a.k.a. Figure). 1935, oil on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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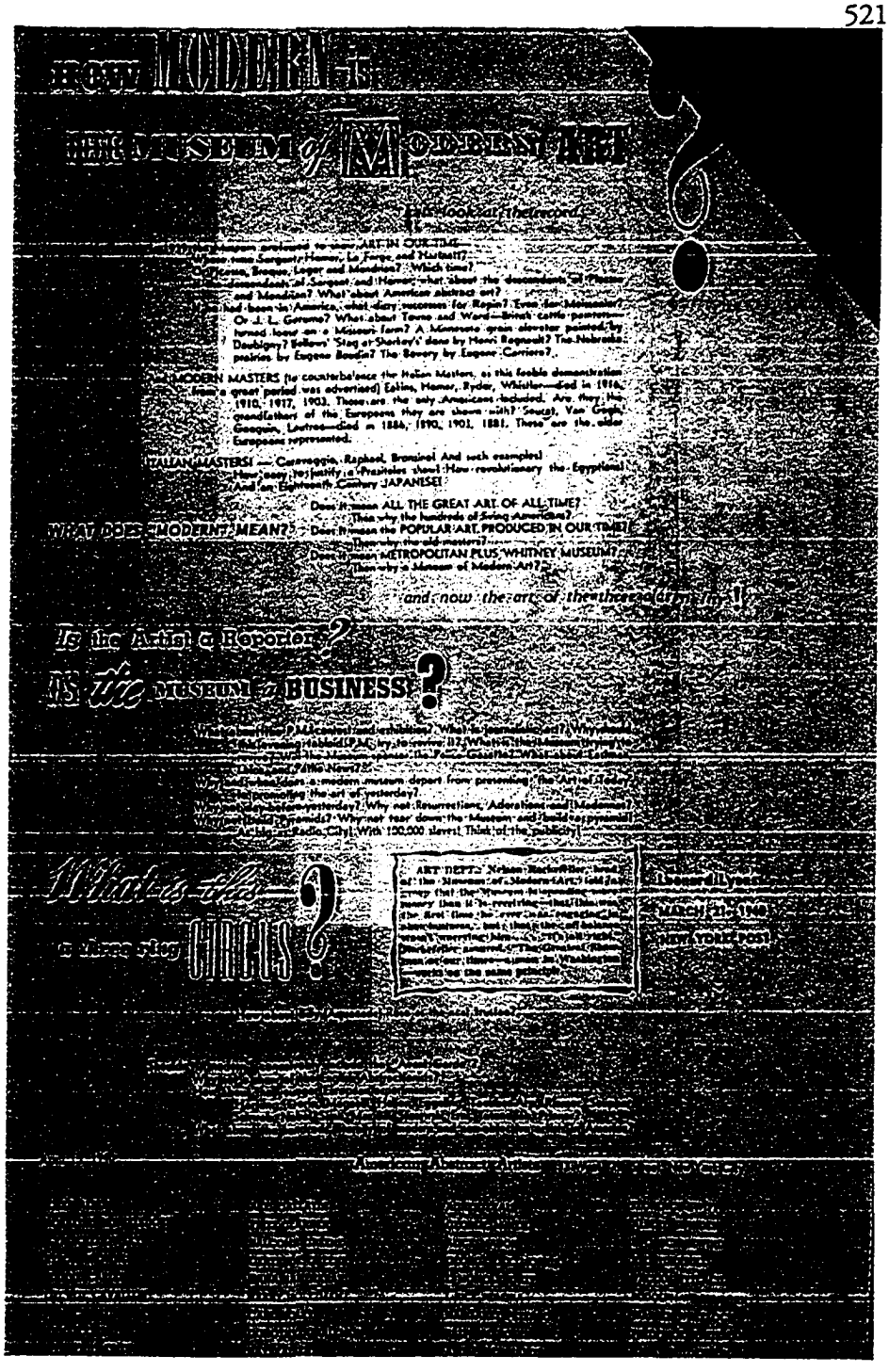


Fig. 4-26. American Abstract Artists. How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?, April 15, 1940, one-page paper broadside, 15 3/4 x 10 1/4" (full sheet). Estate of Byron Browne.

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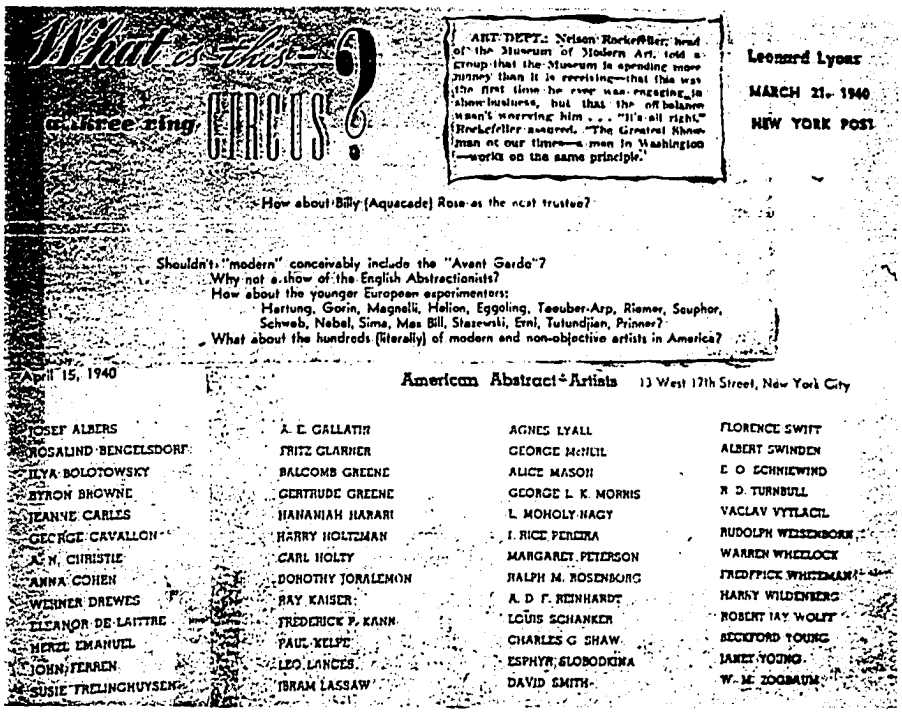


Fig. 4-27. American Abstract Artists. How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?, April 15, 1940, one-page paper broadside, lower portion, showing more clearly the list of participants, 15 3/4 x 10 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

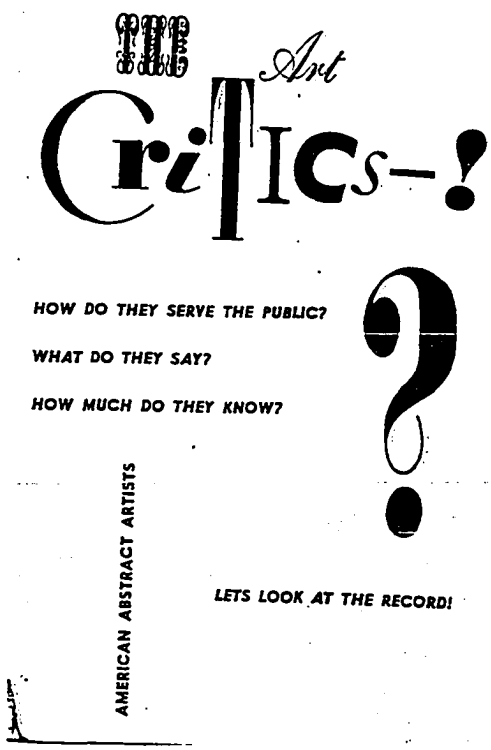


Fig. 4-28. American Abstract Artists. Cover of Twelve-Page Pamphlet. A. D. F. Reinhardt, topography. June 1940. Photo courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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Fig. 5-1. Salute Every Time the Cock Crows. 1940, oil on canvas, 48 x 60."
Coll: Barney Ebsworth, on long-term loan to St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri.



Fig. 5-2. Pablo Picasso. The Cock. 1938 (March 29), pastel,
30 1/2 x 21 1/4". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin, New York City.

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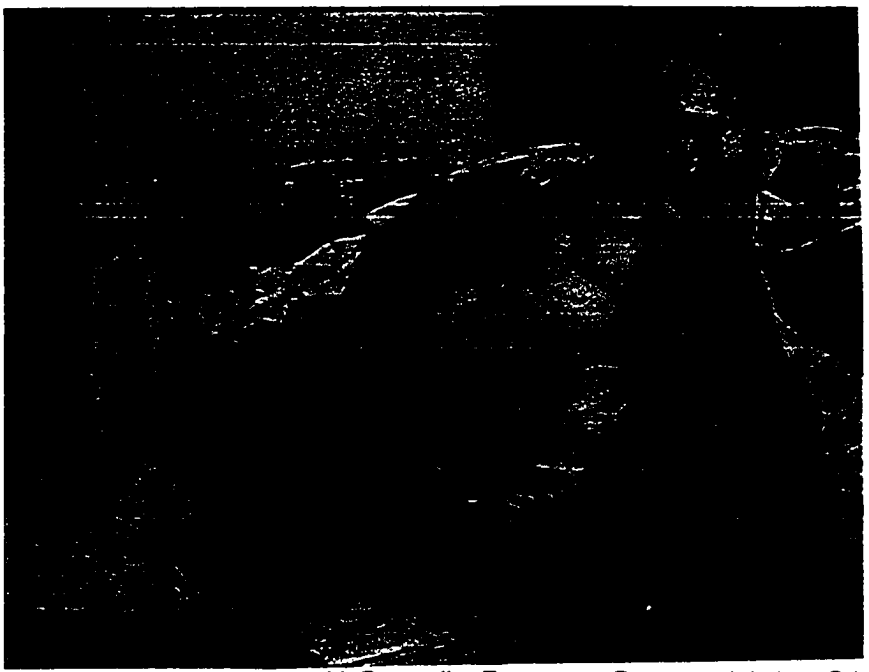


Fig. 5-3. Eugéne Delacroix. Woman with Parrot (La Femme au Perroquet) (a.k.a. Odalisque). 1827, oil on canvas, 24 x 32". Coll: Musée de Lyon, Lyon, France.



Fig. 5-4. Gilt Cock. 9th Century, gilt bronze. Uncited clipping from one of Browne's picture scrapbooks. Believed to be the bird that once surmounted a pinnacle in the old Basilica of St. Peter's, Rome. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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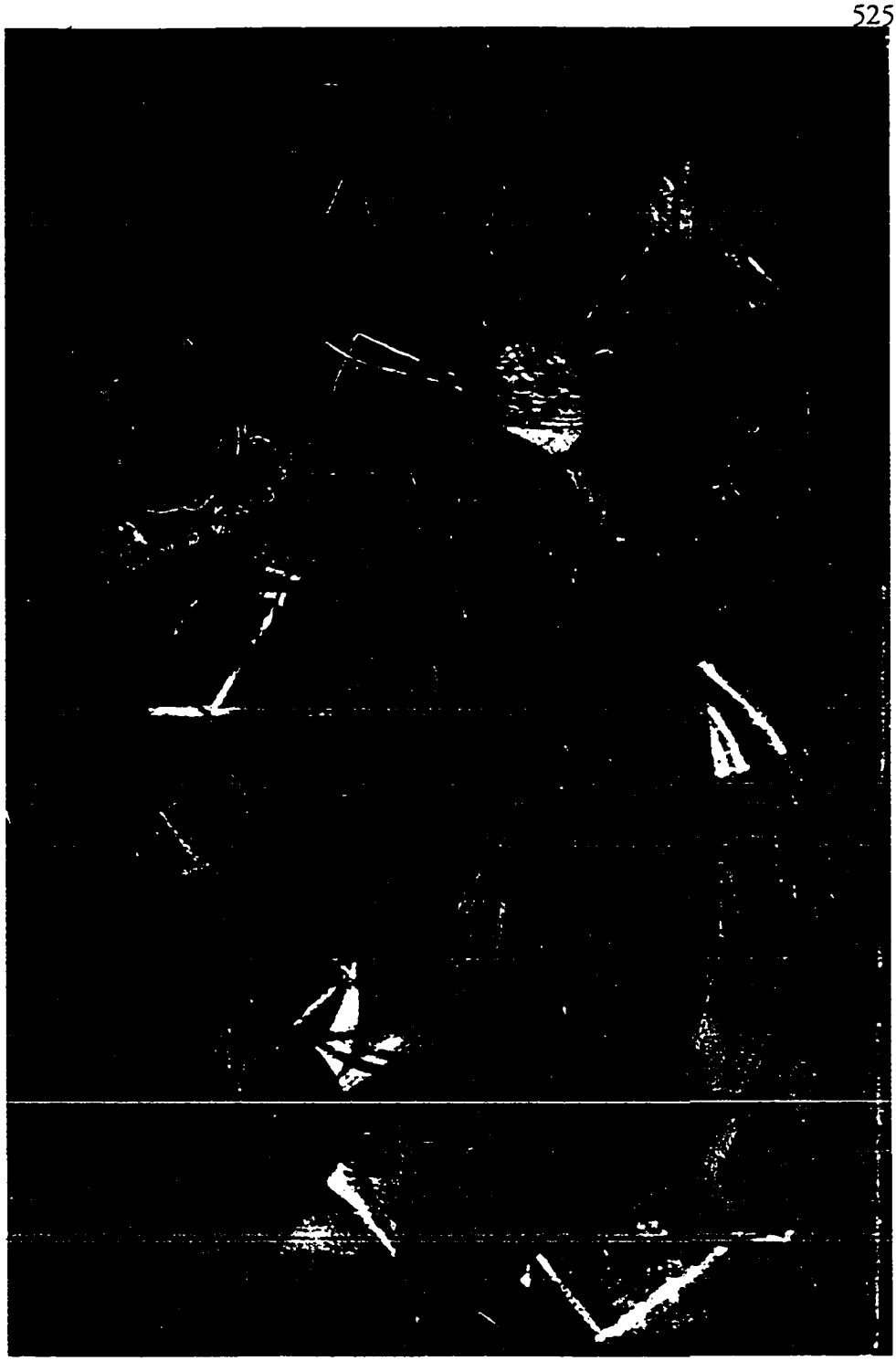


Fig. 5-5. Woman with Birds. 1943, oil on canvas, 24 x 16". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-6. Woman with Birds. 1943, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: David R. Rittenhouse, Naples, Florida and Toledo, Ohio.

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Fig. 5-7. Woman and Bird. 1945, tempera and India ink on board, 24 x 20".
Coll: Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

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Fig. 5-8. Bacchante. 1940, pen and India ink on paper, 18 1/2 x 13".
Photo courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York City.

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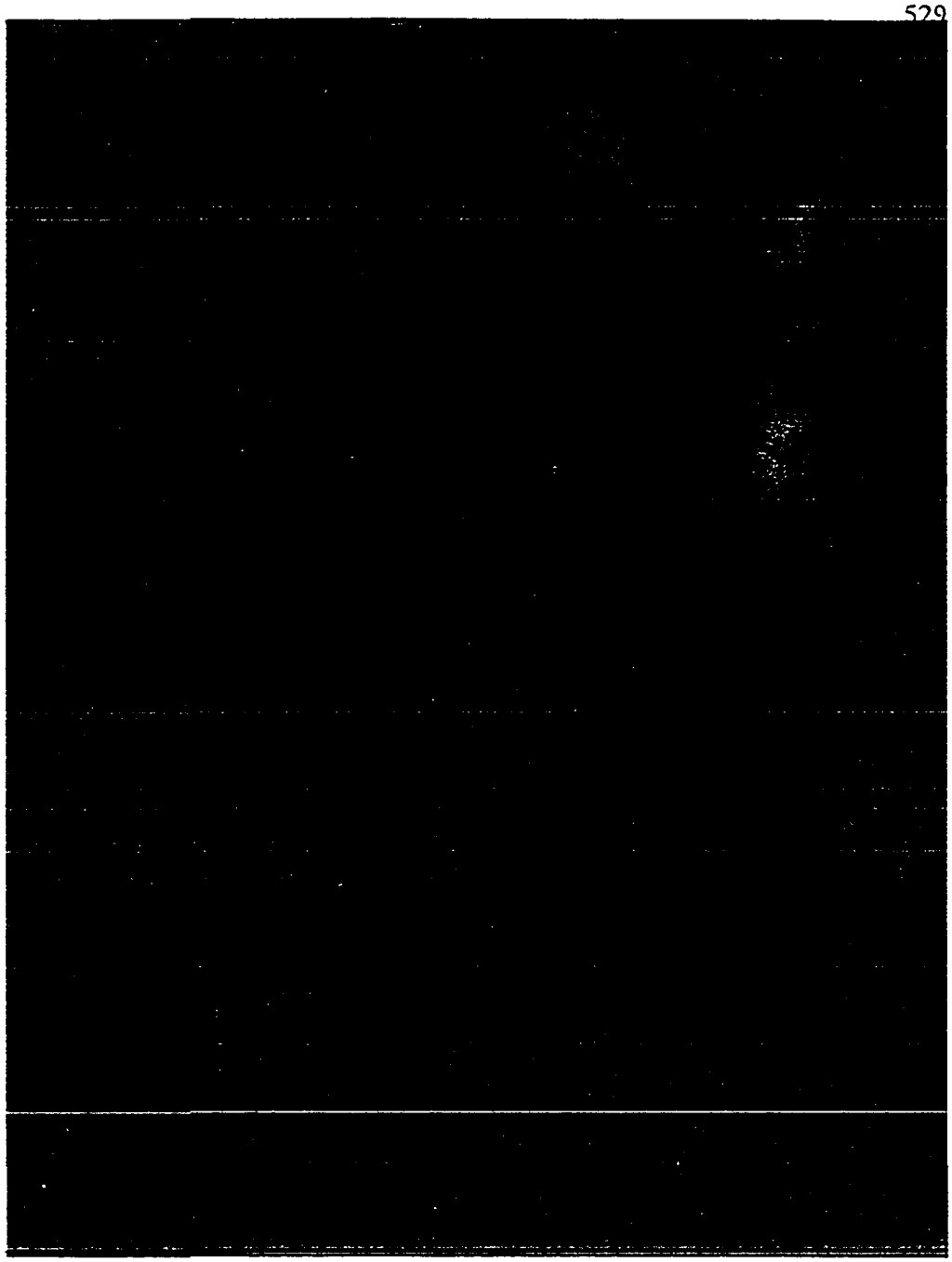


Fig. 5-9. Untitled (Head). 1942, pen, India ink and white chalk on paper, 18 1/2 x 13".
Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sterling, New York City.

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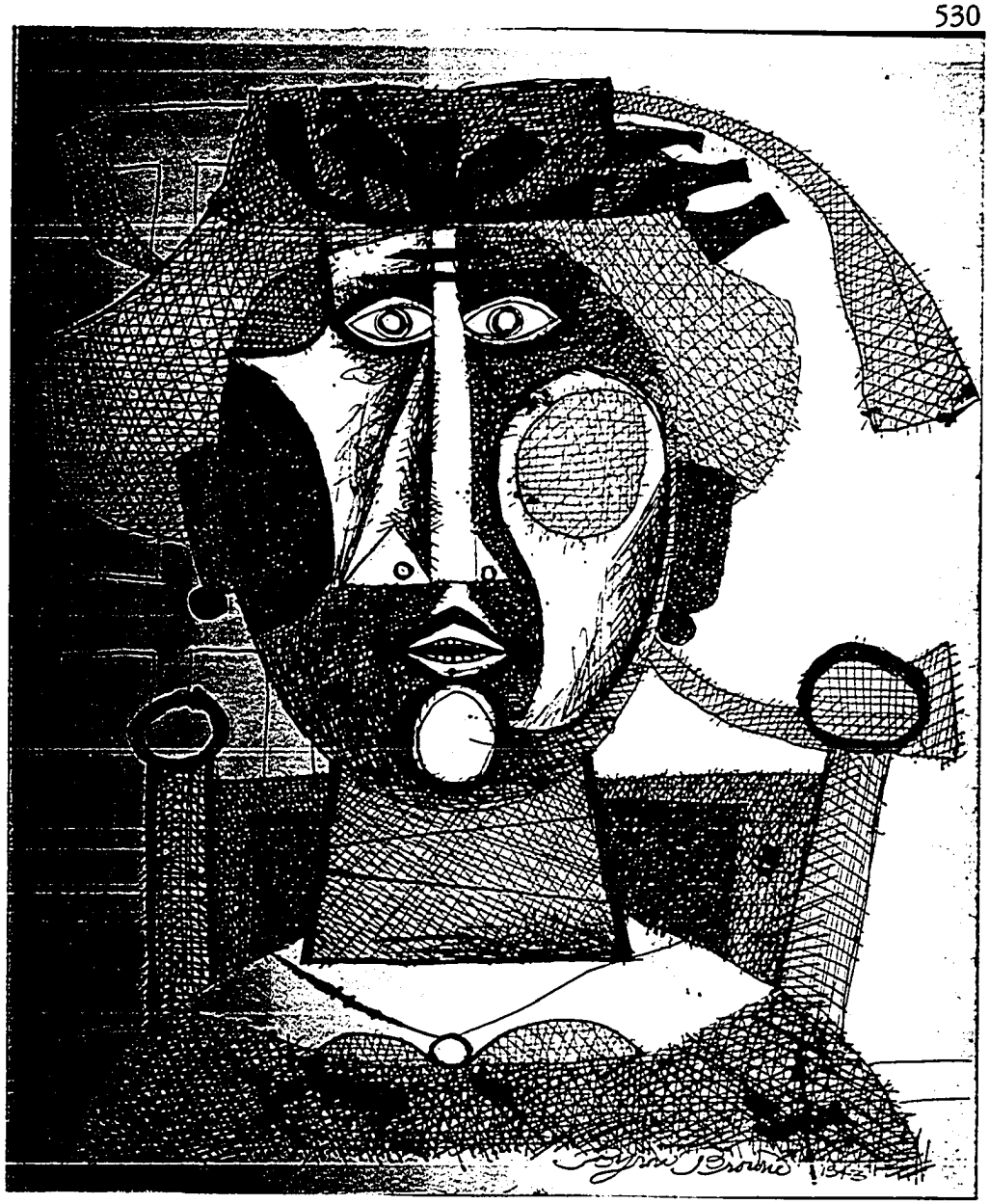


Fig. 5-10. Head. 1943, pen and India ink on paper, 24 x 18". Estate of Byron Browne.

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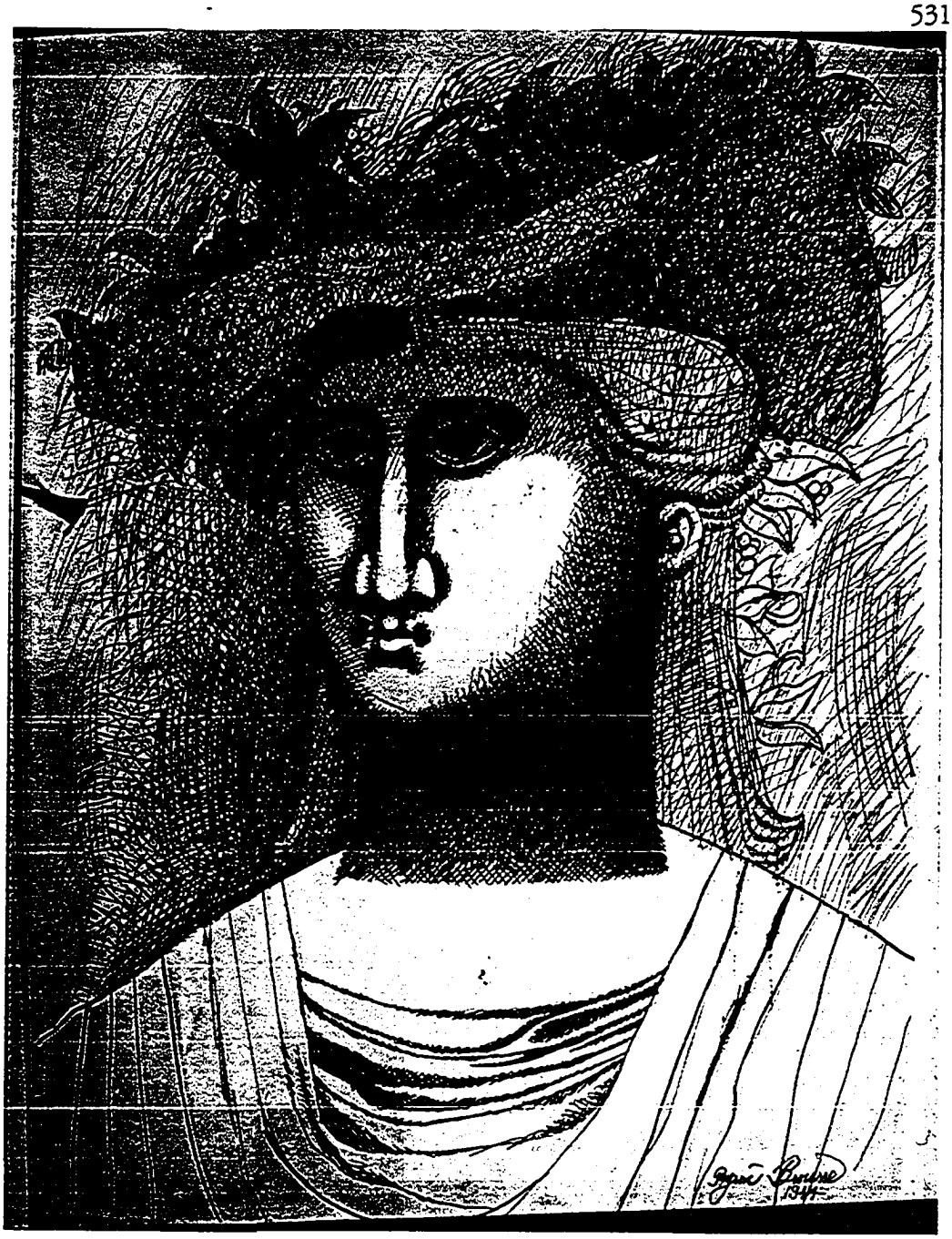


Fig. 5-11. Head. 1944, pen and India ink on paper, 24 x 18". Estate of Byron Browne.

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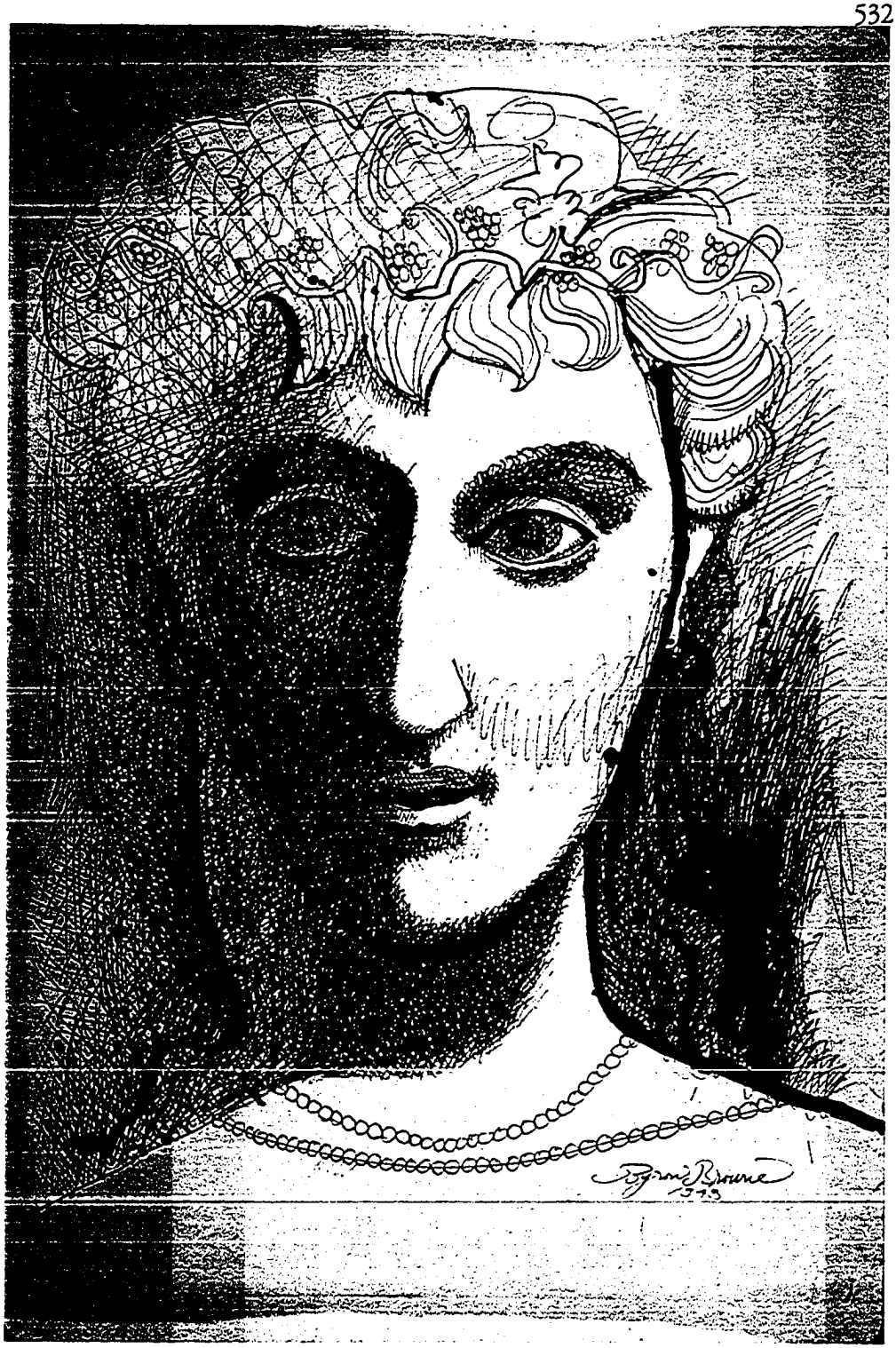


Fig. 5-12. Head. 1949, pen and India ink on paper, 24 x 18". Estate of Byron Browne.

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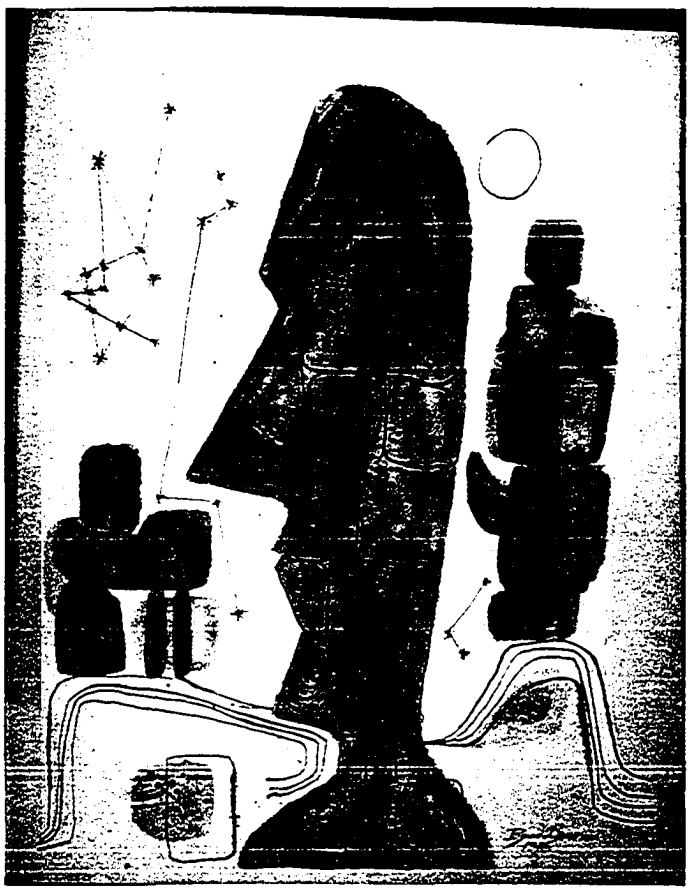


Fig. 5-13. Untitled (drawing after Easter Island monolithic heads). 1948, pen, India ink, casein tempera on paper, 26 x 20 3/8". Estate of Byron Browne.

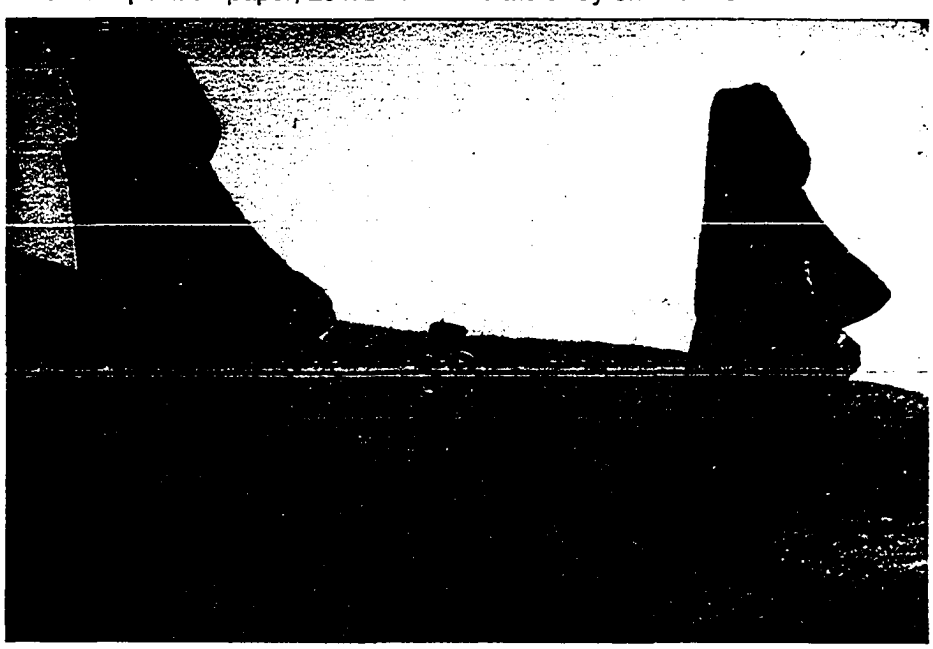


Fig. 5-14. Easter Island Stone Images. 1000-1500 A.D., ca. 36 feet high, Akivi, Easter Island, South Pacific Ocean. Photograph ca. 1930s. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-15. Head. 1940, oil on masonite, 14 x 12". Estate of Byron Browne.



Fig. 5-16. Head with Leaves. 1942, oil on canvas, 28 x 24". Private collection.

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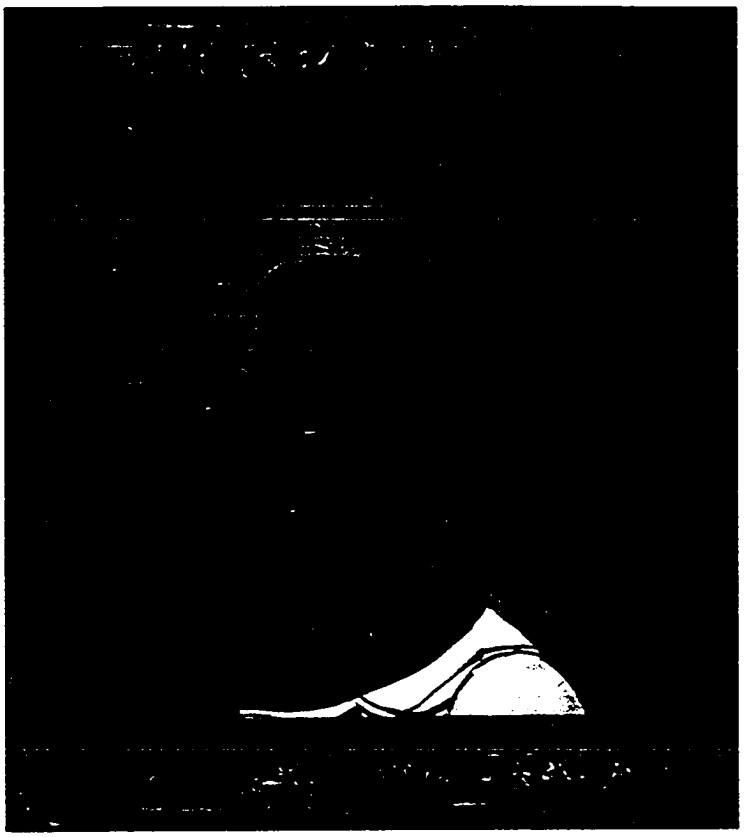


Fig. 5-17. Head of a Woman. 1944, oil on canvas, 28 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.



Fig. 5-18. Two Women. 1945, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Estate of Byron Browne.

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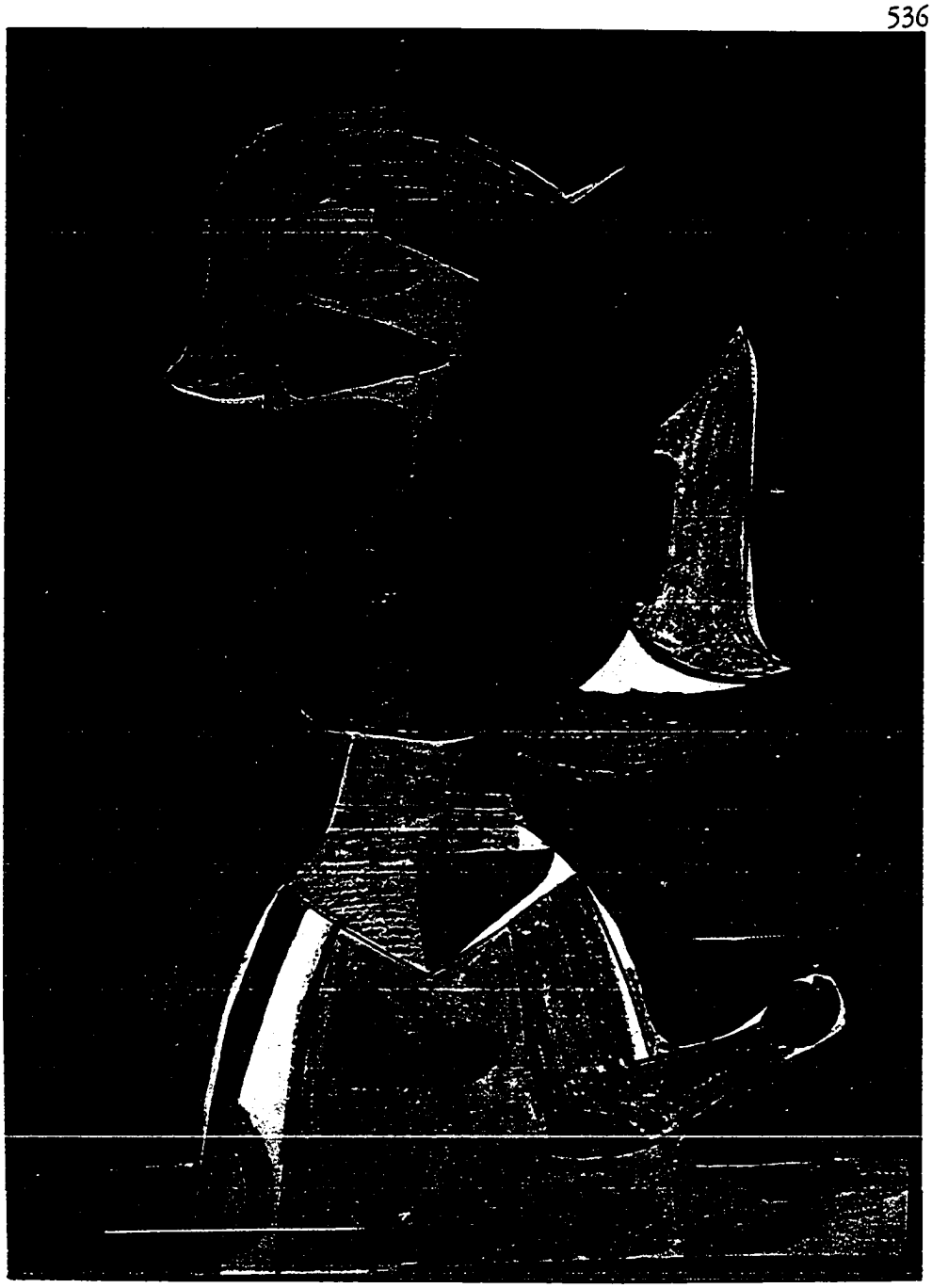


Fig. 5-19. Untitled (Head). 1946, pen, India ink, crayon, gouache, with scratched areas on paper, 17 1/4 x 12 1/2. Estate of Byron Browne.

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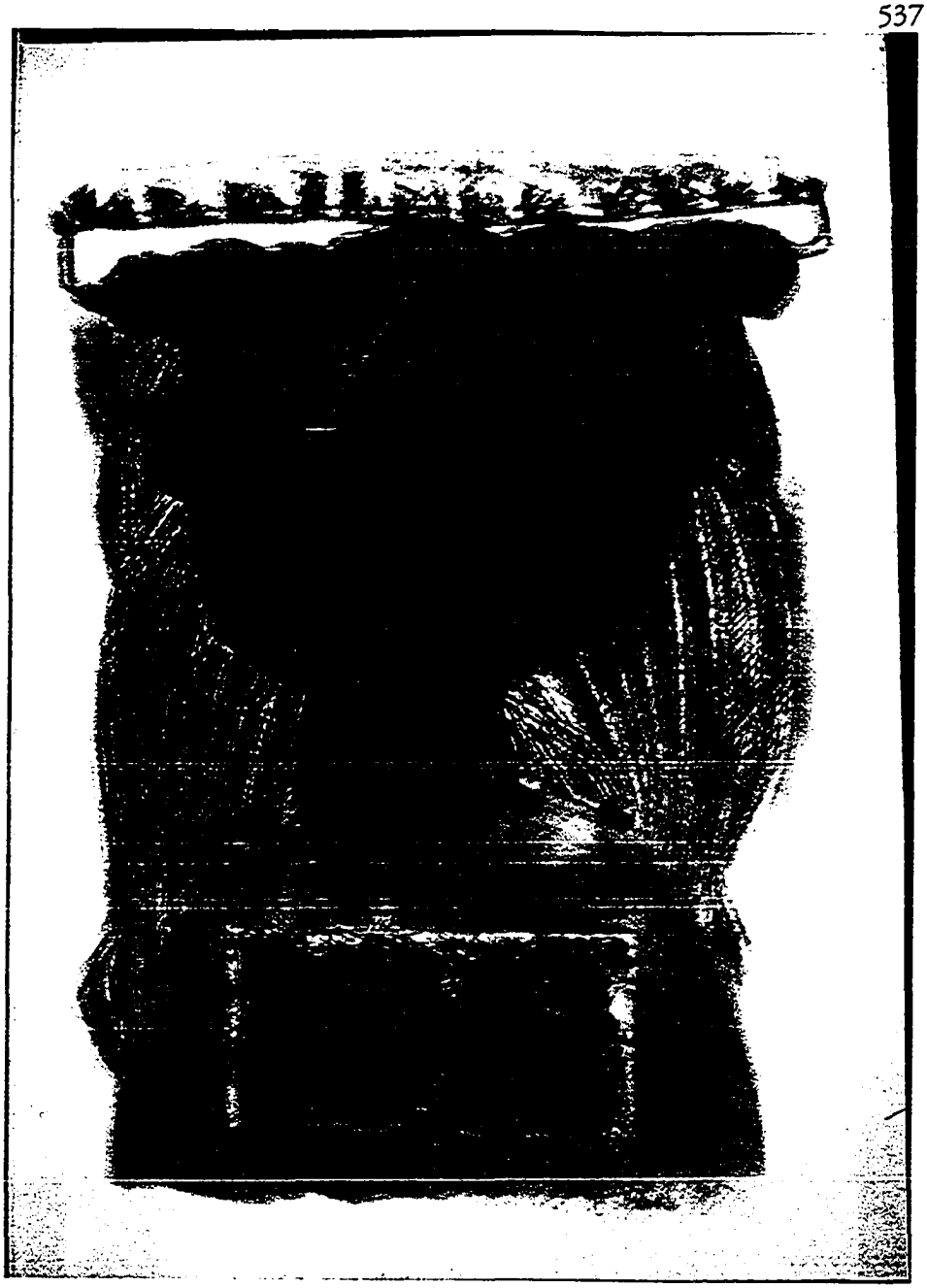


Fig. 5-20. Woman in Yellow Hat. 1947, India ink, tempera, crayon and torn blotter paper collage on paper, 22 x 17". Estate of Byron Browne.

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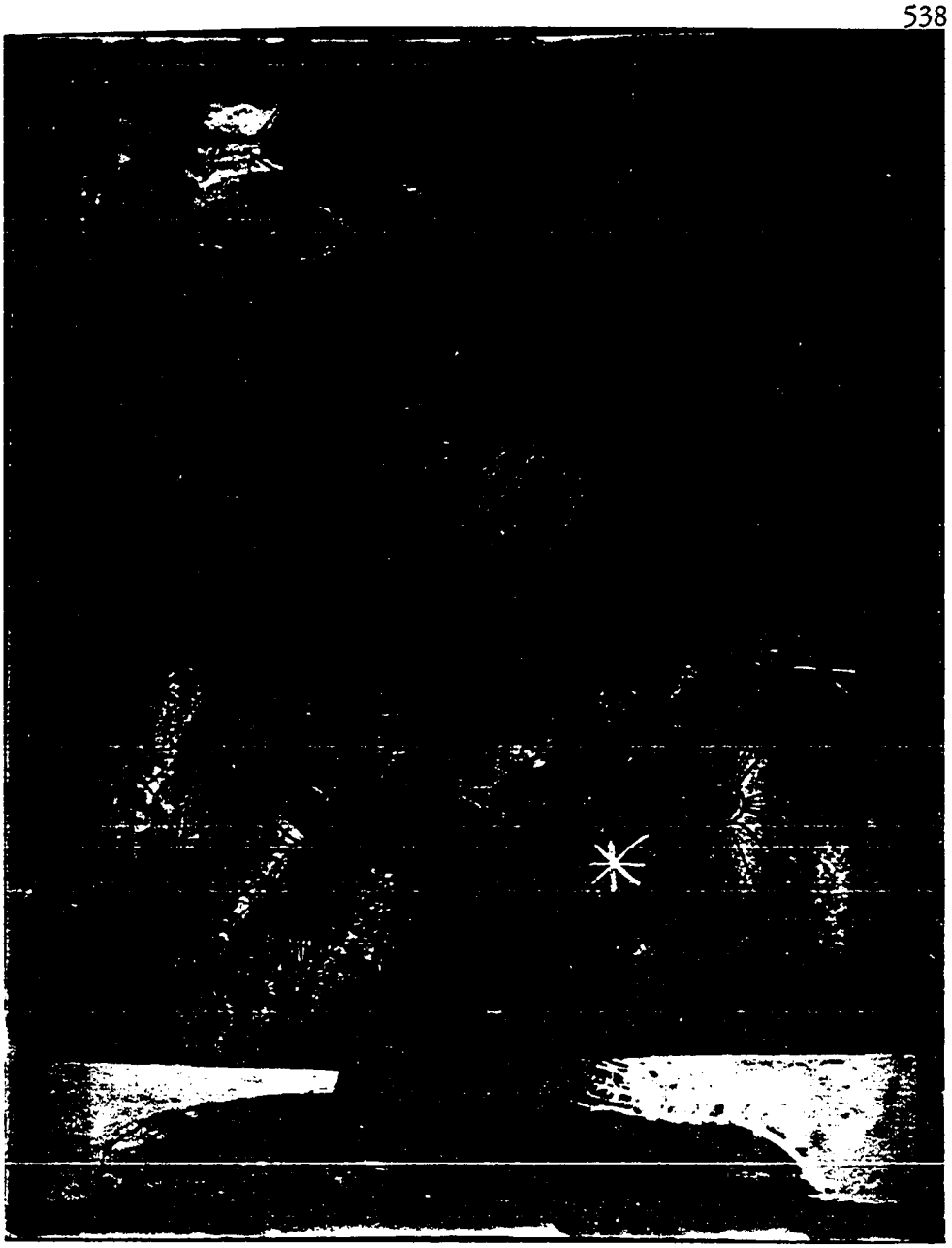


Fig. 5-21. Head. 1948, casein tempera and India ink on paper, 26 x 20".
Estate of Byron Browne.

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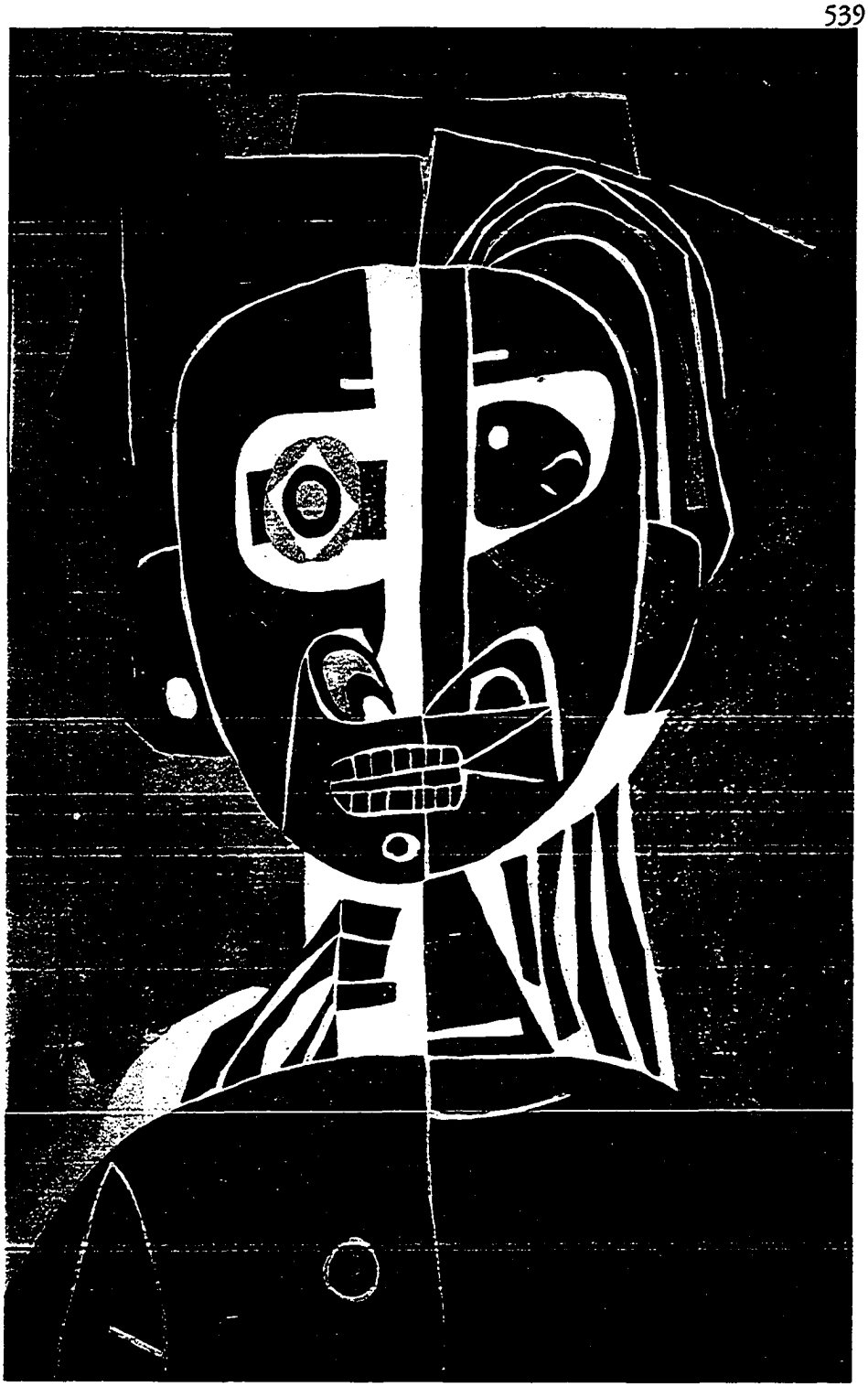


Fig. 5-22. Untitled (Head). 1941, casein tempera, India ink and watercolor on paper, 20 5/8 x 13 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-23. Head. 1941, oil on canvas, 25 x 14". Coll: Meredith Long, Houston, Texas.

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Fig. 5-24. Head. 1942, India ink and watercolor on paper, 13 1/8 x 10 5/8". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-25. Untitled (head). 1942, pen, India ink and watercolor on paper, 14 1/8 x 11. Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-26. Untitled (head). 1942, pen and India ink, pastel, casein tempera on paper, 14 x 11". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-27. Trumpet Player. 1943, oil on canvas, 16 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

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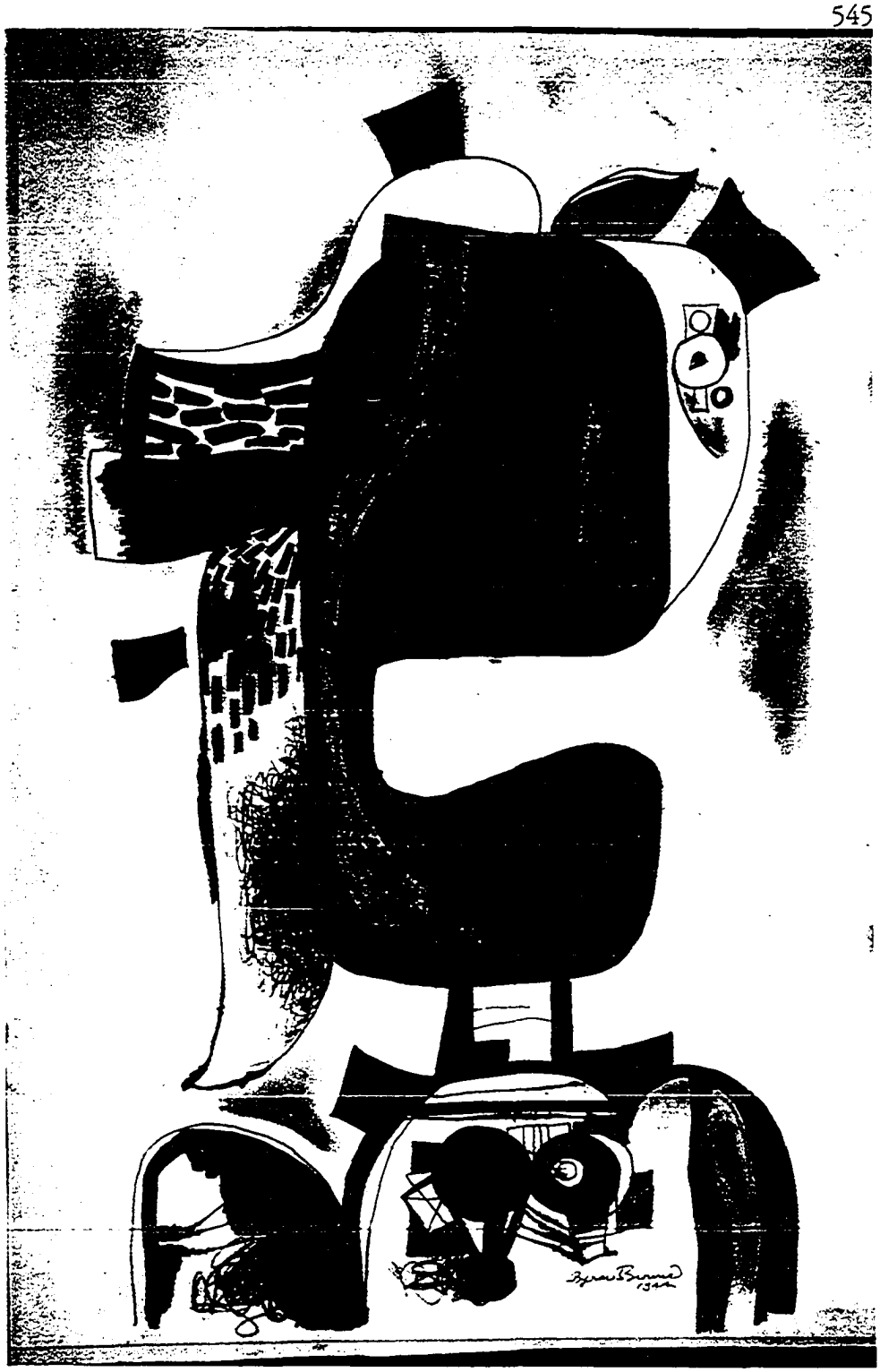


Fig. 5-28. Untitled (head). 1944, pen, India ink, watercolor and pencil on paper, 19 5/8 x 13 5/16". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-29. Untitled (head). 1947, pen and India ink, watercolor, crayon and pencil on paper, 19 5/8 x 12 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

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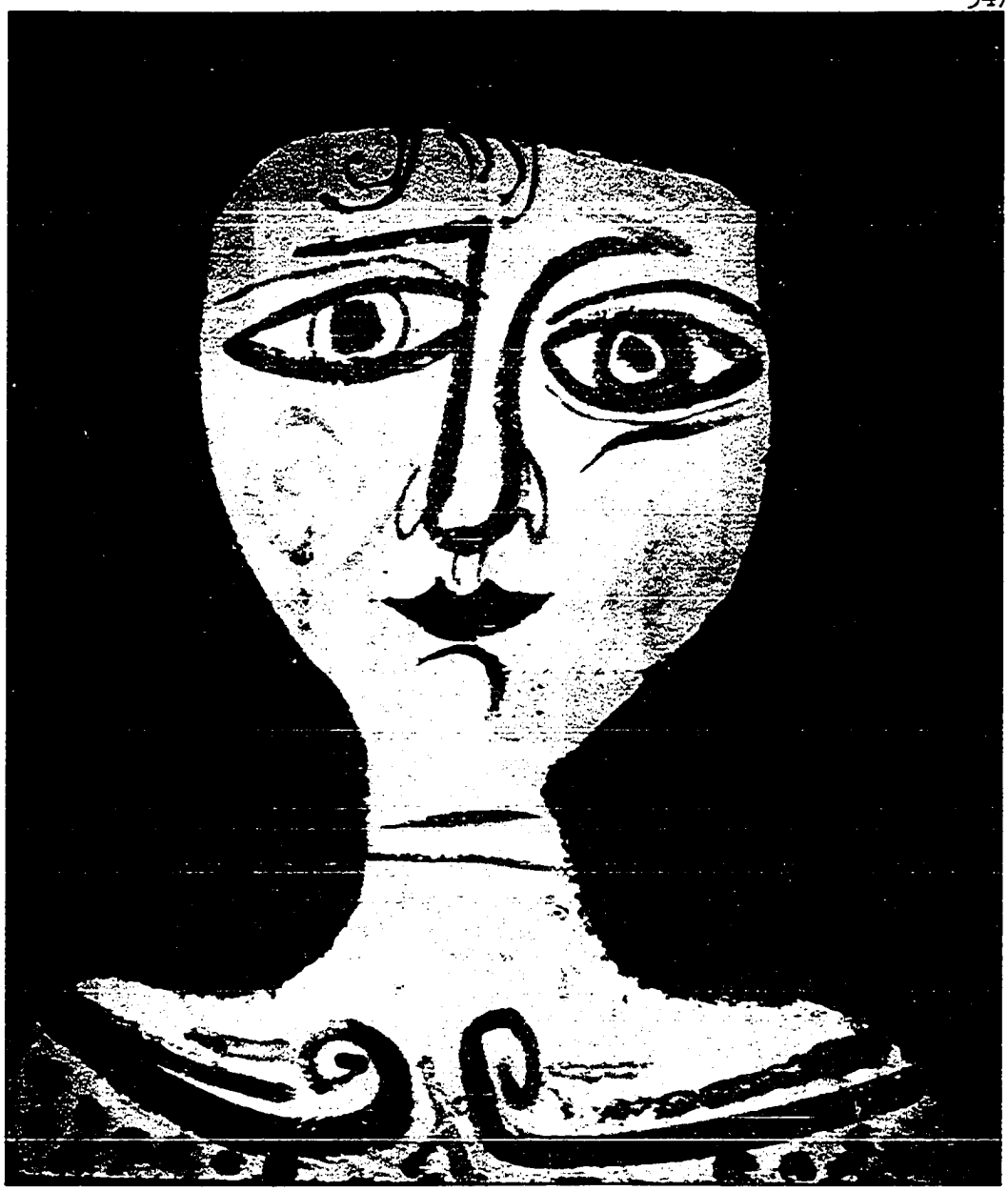


Fig. 5-30. Head. 1948, oil on masonite, 16 x 12 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-31. Seated Woman. 1940-41, oil on canvas, 14 x 12".
Coll: Jacqueline L. Fowler, Stamford, Connecticut.

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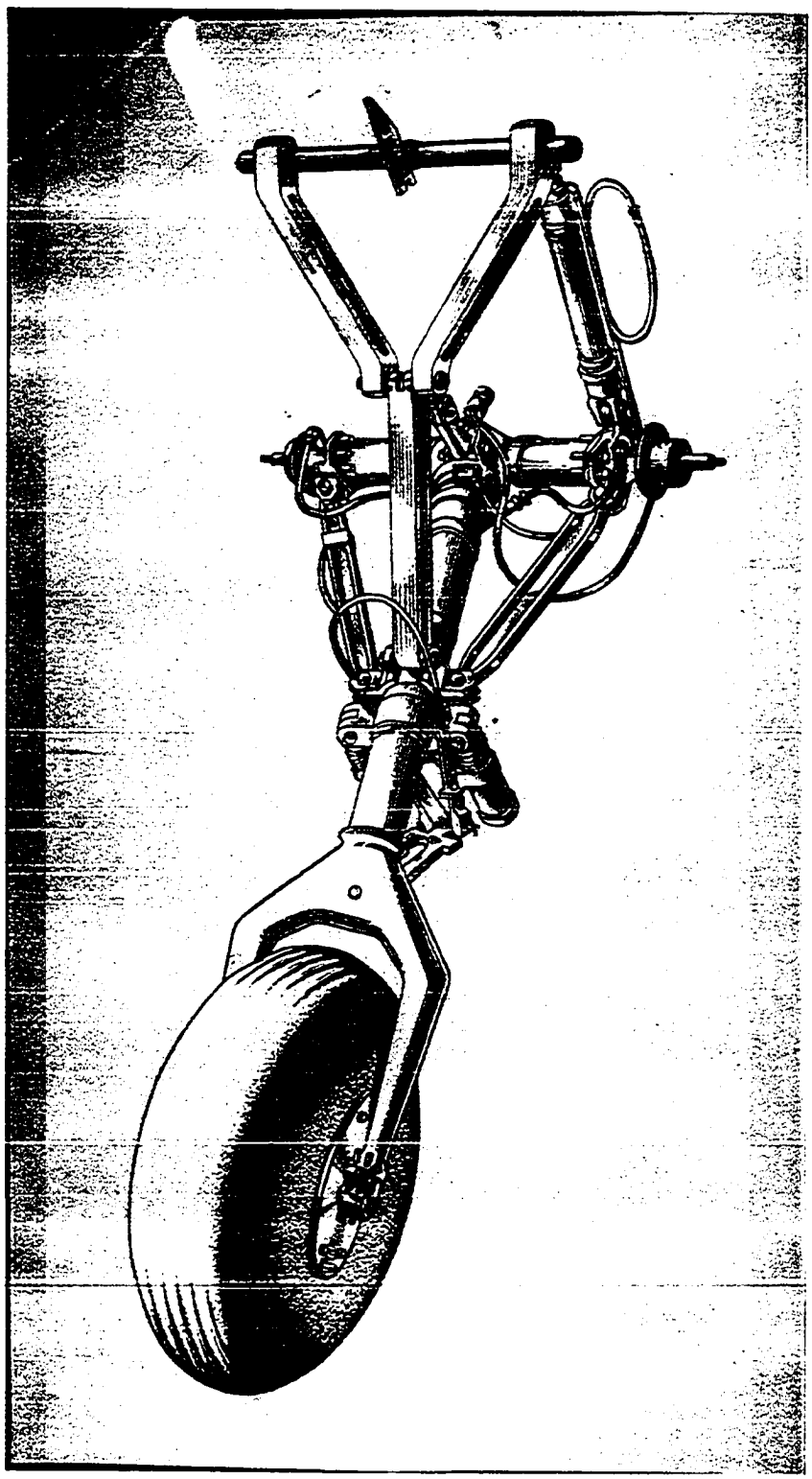


Fig. 5-32. Drawing of Airplane Landing Gear. Ca. 1942, pen and India ink on paper, 18 3/16 x 10". Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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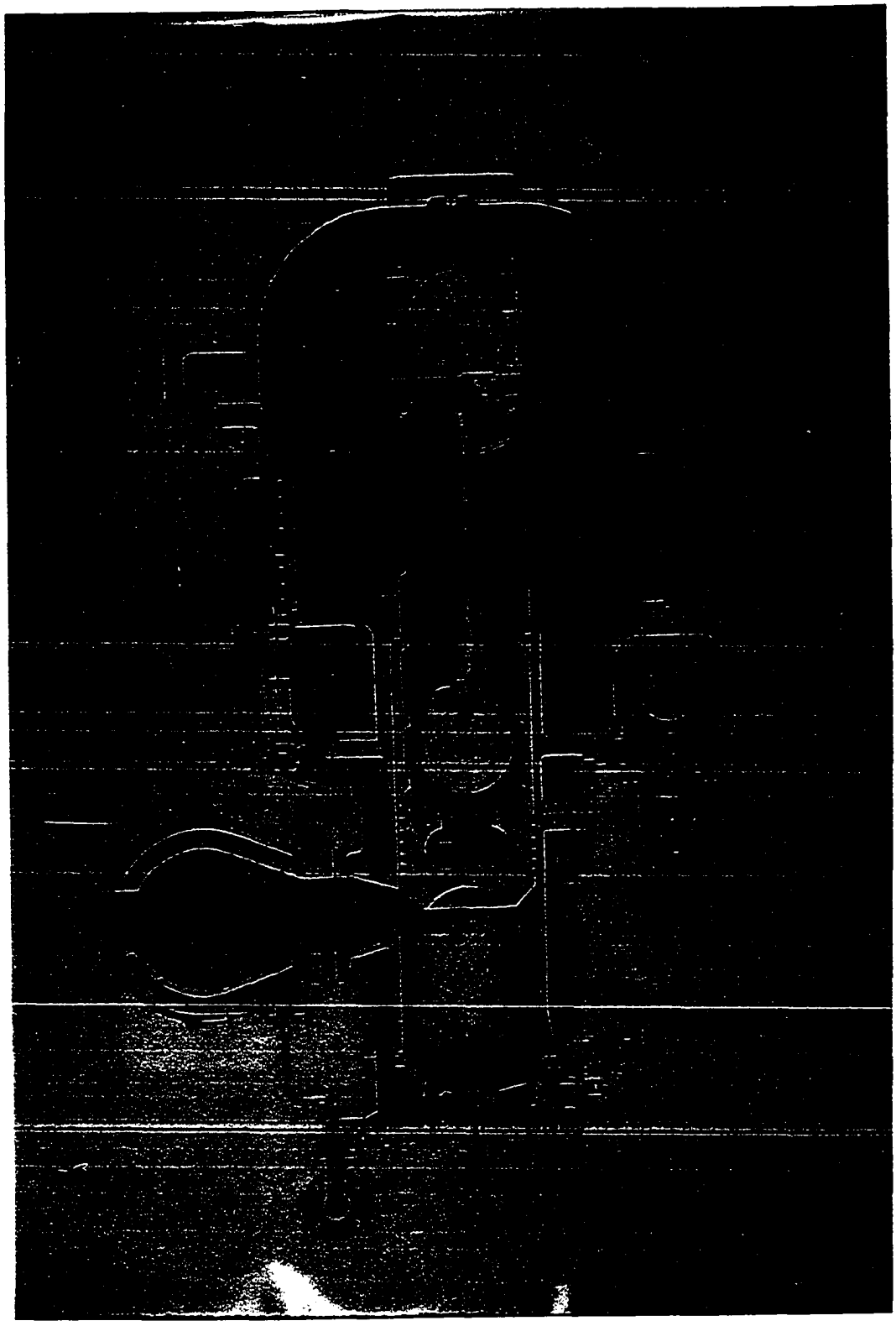


Fig. 5-33. Cross Section of Unidentified Piece of Military Hardware.
Ca. 1942, pencil and white ink on cream paper, 19 x 13 15/16".
Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-34. Woman Reading. 1938, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-35. Night Scene (a.k.a. Woman by a Window). 1942, oil on canvas, 41 x 36 ".
Coll: Estate of Byron Browne, on consignment to Meredith Long Gallery, Houston, Texas.

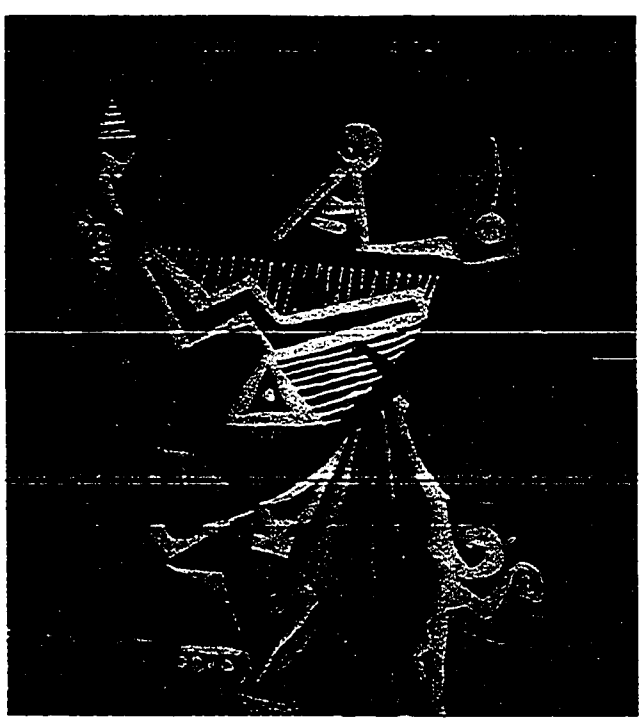


Fig. 5-36. Crucifixion. 1937, oil on canvas, 14 x 12". Whereabouts unknown.

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NEW YORK POST, MONDAY, MARCH 29, 1943

Navy Yard Shipfitter Has One-Man Show In Painting Gallery

When George Byron Browne quits his shift as a shipfitter at the Brooklyn Navy Yard at 4 a. m. he goes home to 216 E. 15th St., snatches some sleep and is up again in a few hours to paint. At 5:15 p. m., he reports back to the yard for work.

The result of this leisure-time activity is a one-man show that opened this week at the Pinacotheca Gallery, 20 W. 58th St.

Browne, who is 35, tall and blonde, doesn't see anything unusual about this contrast in jobs.

"I'm working for the war and satisfying my own desire to paint at the same time," he explained today. "A shipfitter's job has a lot to do with design. Sometimes I stare at all those angles on a ship's turret and see all sorts of wonderful designs in them."

Few Know of His Work

He said that only a few men at the yard knew that he was an artist. "It's a rough-and-tumble life over there," he explained. "I haven't talked about my painting."

Before starting at the Navy Yard six months ago, he worked for four months at an aircraft factory at Farmingdale, L. I., but he could not stand the monotony of turning out one part just like another over and over.

In earlier stages of his career as an artist, he kept the wolf away from the door (behind which is his wife, Rosalind) by working as a hat-check boy at the Arcadia Dance Hall, longshoreman, lumber worker and designer of gravestones. He is a native of Yonkers. His father, Dr. George Byron Browne, a nose and throat specialist, died of overwork for the Red Cross in the Ohio floods of 1937. Browne studied at the National Academy of Design and in 1928 won the Hallgarten Prize.

Uses Primitive Inspirations

He derives much inspiration for his painting, which is of the impressionistic school, from primitive, Aztec and African objects.

His explanation of the impact of a world at war on his painting is:

"I paint this way because I feel the intensity of modern life, so I try to express it through bright colors and an agitated type of design—I try to symbolize rather than reproduce photographically. The world is going through some sort of change; the direction can be expressed through art."





GEORGE BYRON BROWNE and one of his works, which is called "Woman Reading."

Fig. 5-37. Newspaper Review of Browne Exhibition. Betsy Luce, "Navy Yard Shipfitter Has One-Man show in Painting Gallery," New York Post, 29 March 1943, cols. 1 and 2, p. 8.

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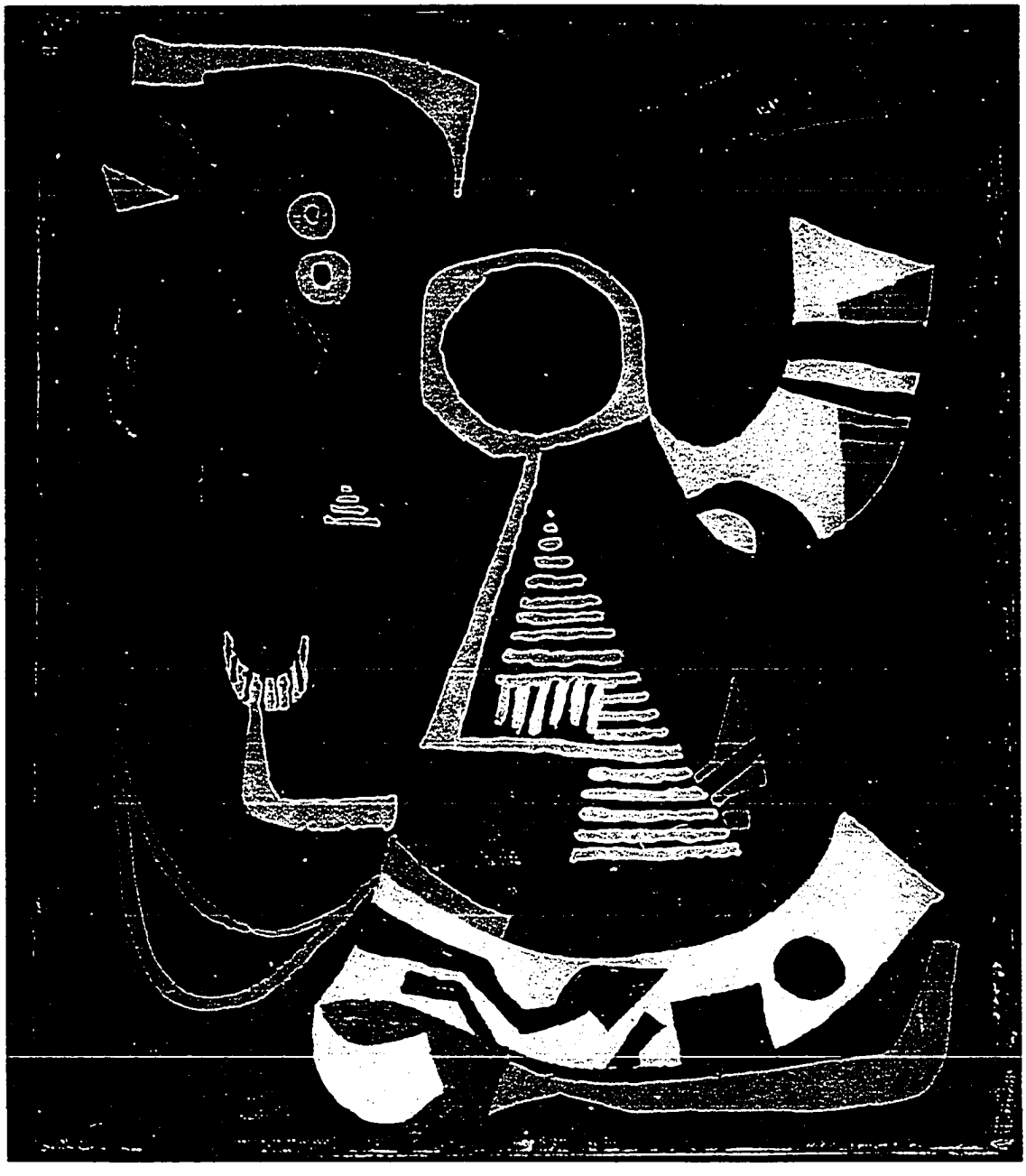


Fig. 5-38. Head. 1942, oil on canvas, 14 x 12". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-39. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. 1937, oil on canvas, 28 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

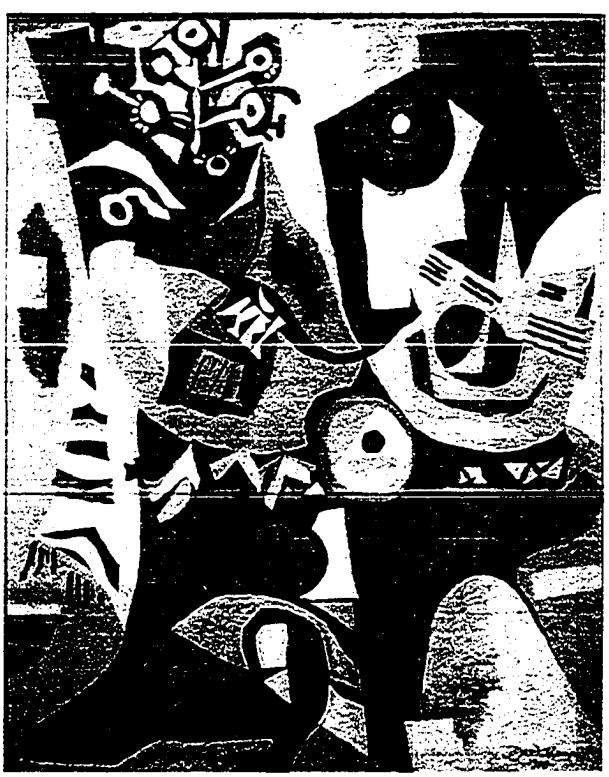


Fig. 5-40. Still Life. 1938, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

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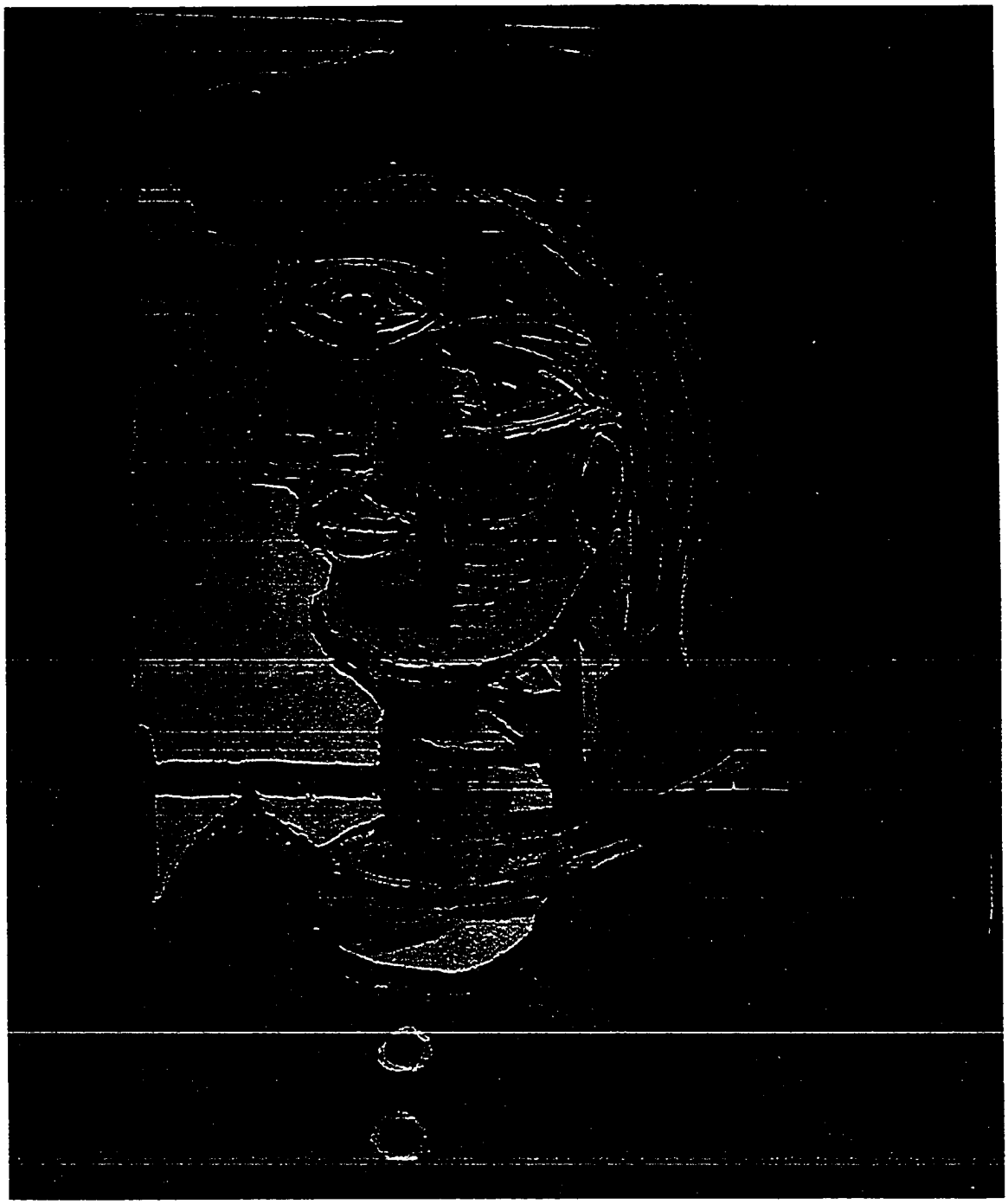


Fig. 5-41. Pablo Picasso. Woman with Beret and Collar. 1937, oil on canvas, 24 x 19 5/8".
Private collection. Photo courtesy Picasso and the Weeping Women:
The Years of Marie-Thérése Walter & Dora Maar. Exhibition catalogue, Judi Freeman, curator.
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, February 13-May 1, 1994, fig. 84, p. 120.

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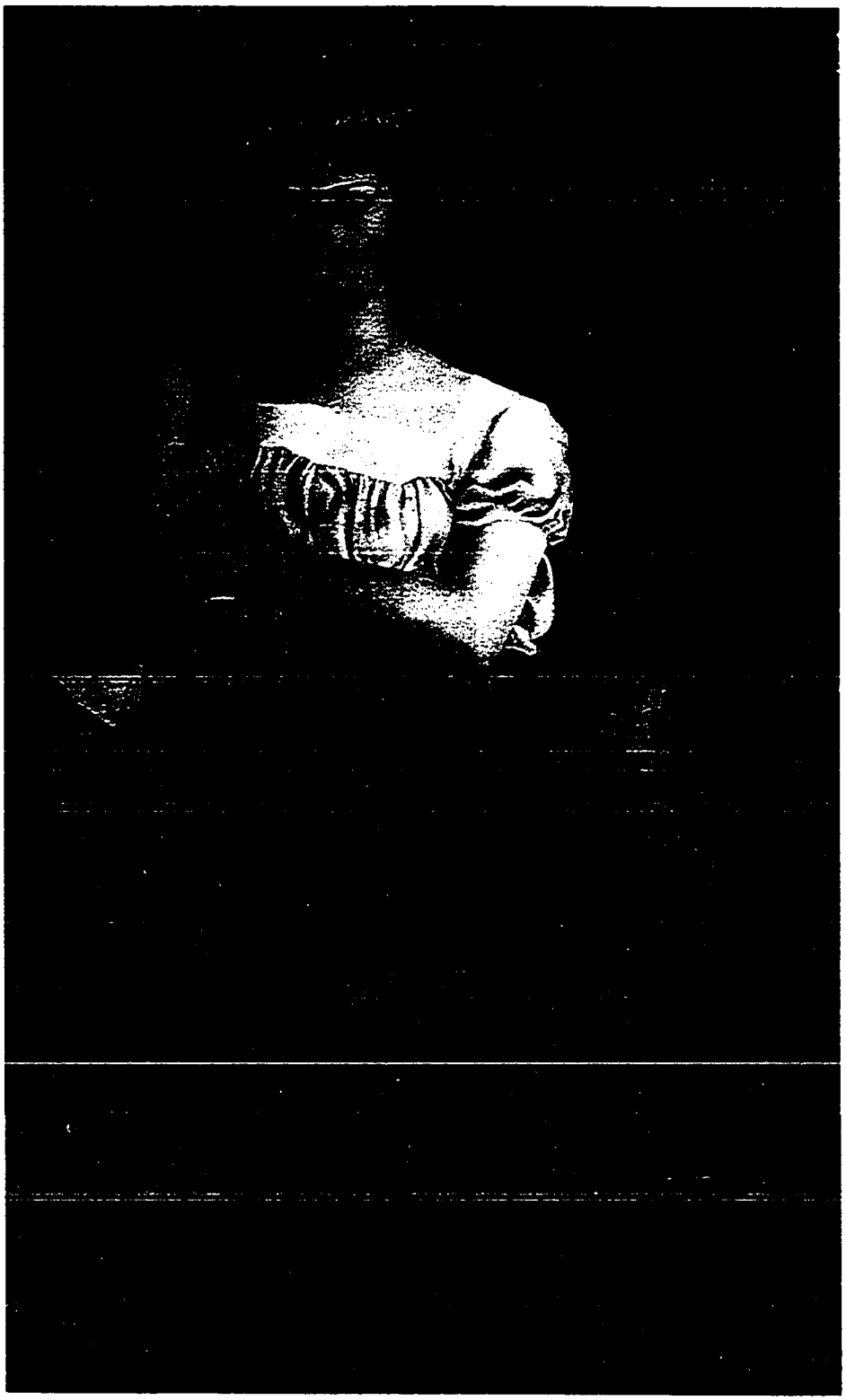


Fig. 5-42. The Portrait of Eleanor Zarief. 1940, oil on canvas, 60 x 36".
Coll: Mr. and Mrs. William Hutchinson.

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Fig. 5-43. Woman on the Beach. 1945, oil on canvas, 36 x 48". Coll; Sid Deutsch Gallery, New York City.

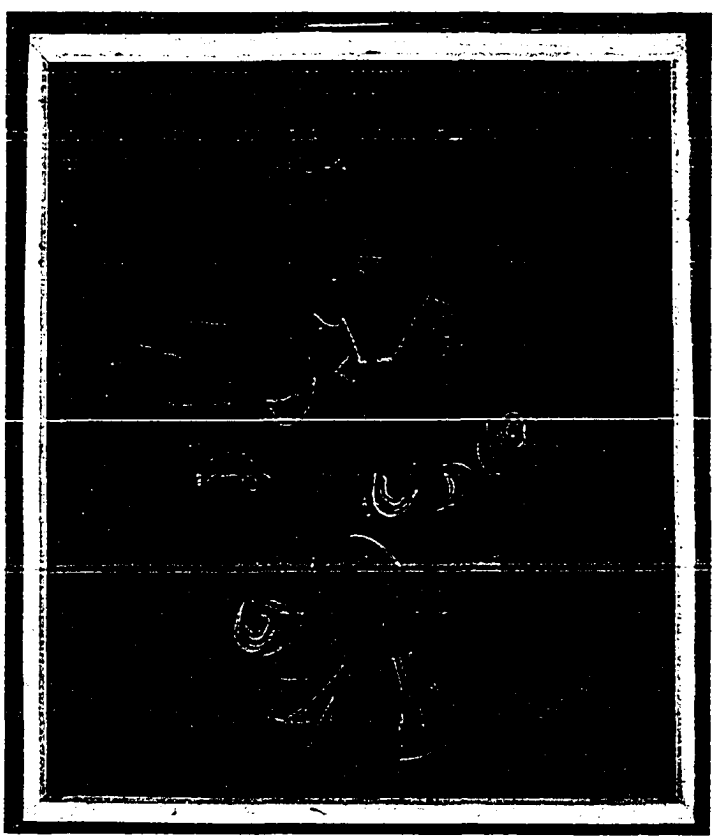


Fig. 5-44. Woman in Red Dress. 1945, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Housatonic Community College, The Bert Chernow Gallery, Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

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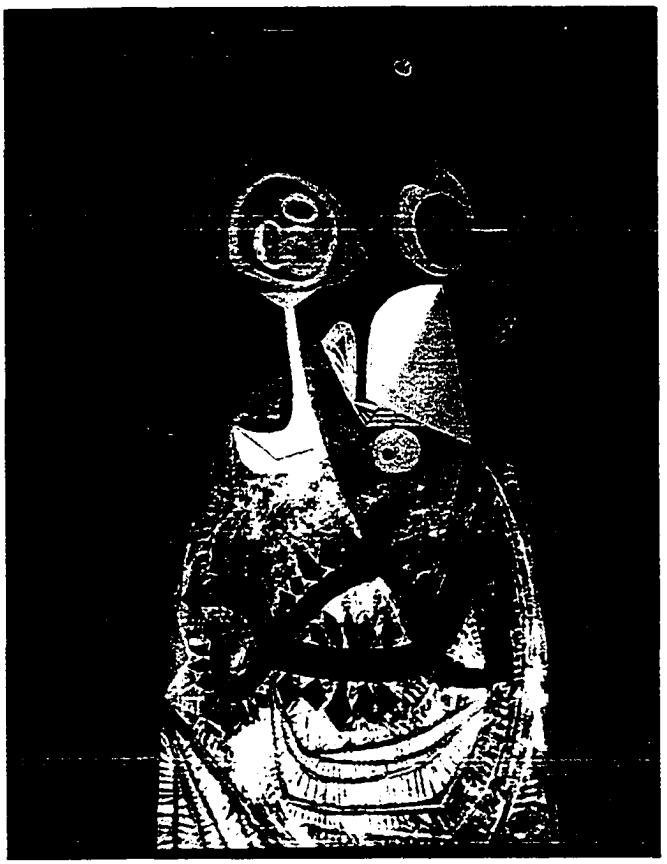


Fig. 5-45. Still Life with City Window. 1945, oil on canvas, 47 x 36".
Coll: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

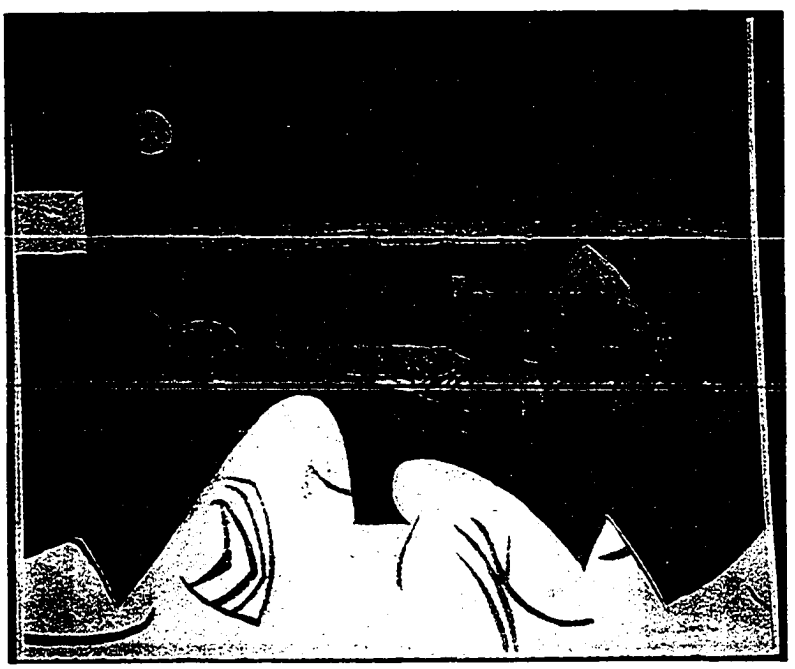


Fig. 5-46. Sun Bather. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Whereabouts unknown.

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Fig. 5-47. The Green Bottle. 1945, oil on canvas, 47 x 36". Coll: Meredith Long, Houston, Texas.

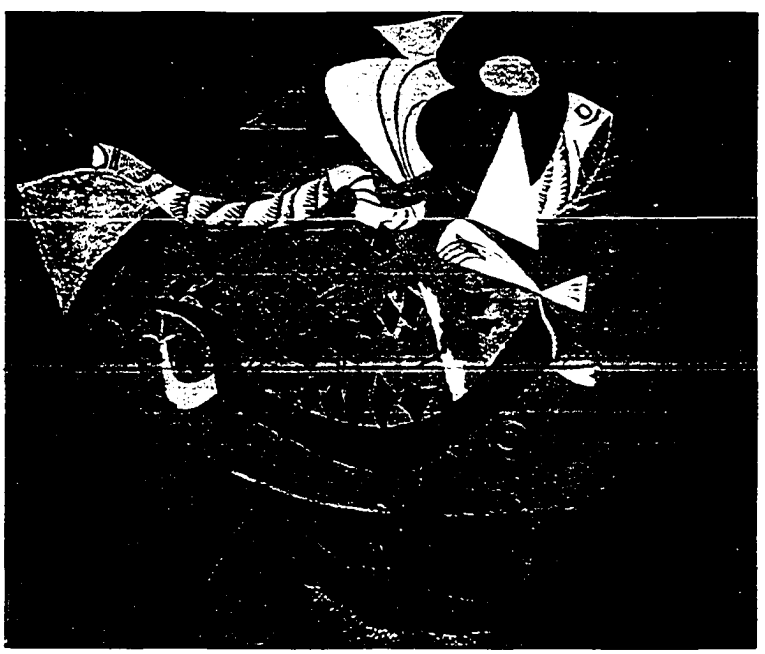


Fig. 5-48. Rope and Branches. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 27 7/8". Coll: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York.

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Fig. 5-49. Still Life with Branches. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Coll: Mansfield University, Gallery of Art, Mansfield, Pennsylvania.

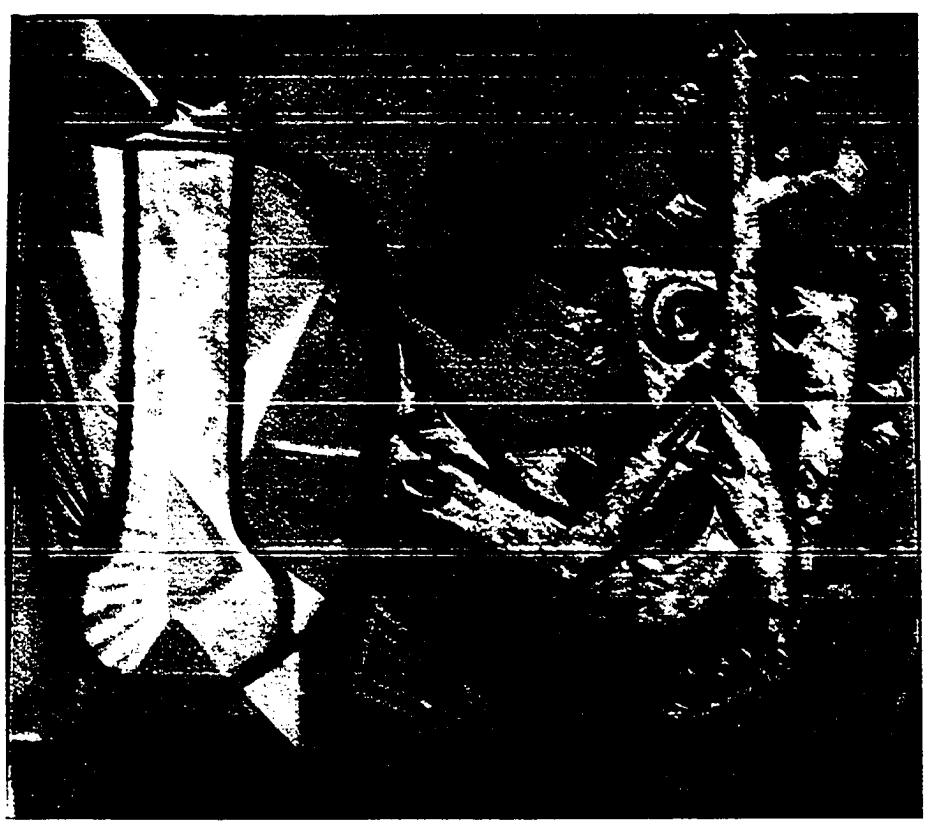


Fig. 5-50. Lamp with Branches. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28".
Photo courtesy Camhi Gallery, New York City.

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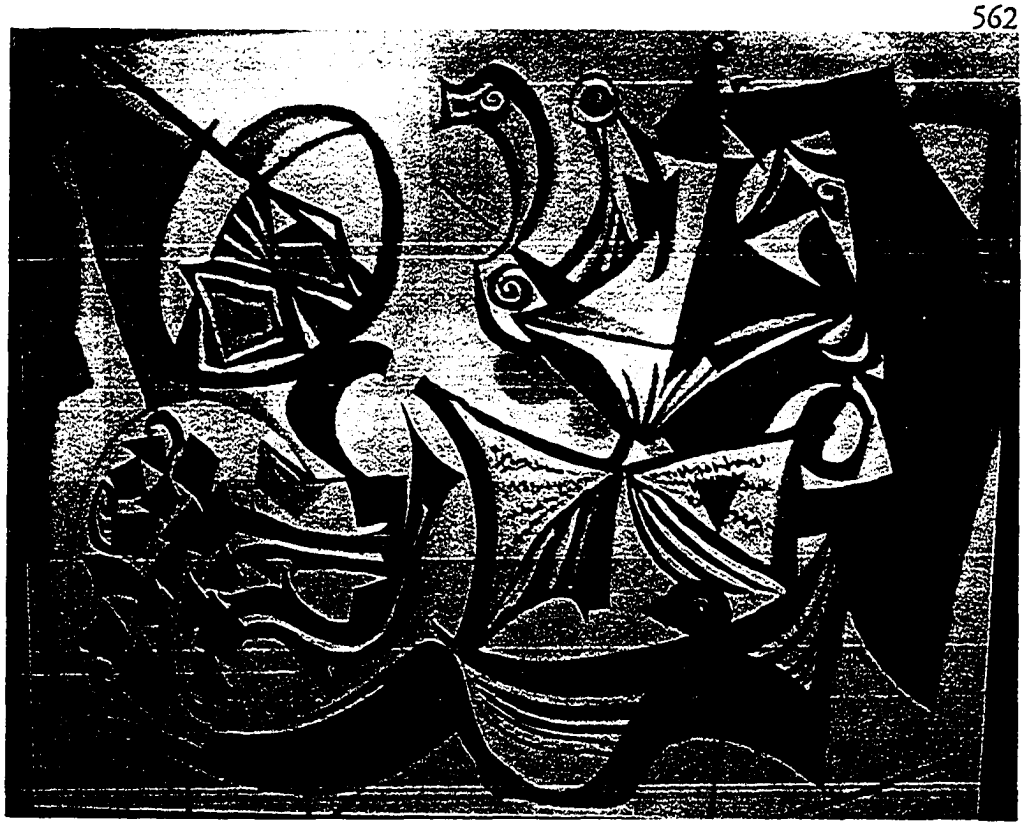


Fig. 5-51. Still Life in Primary Colors. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Estate of Byron Browne.

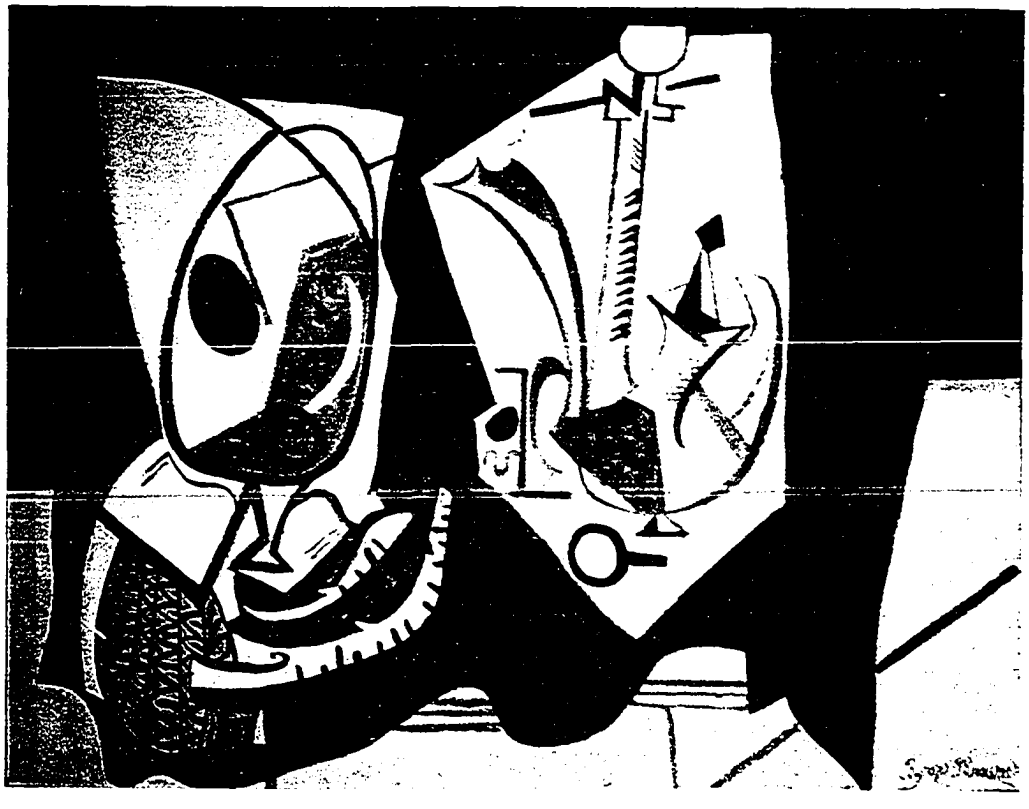


Fig. 5-52. Still Life in Red and Green. 1945, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Estate of Byron Browne.

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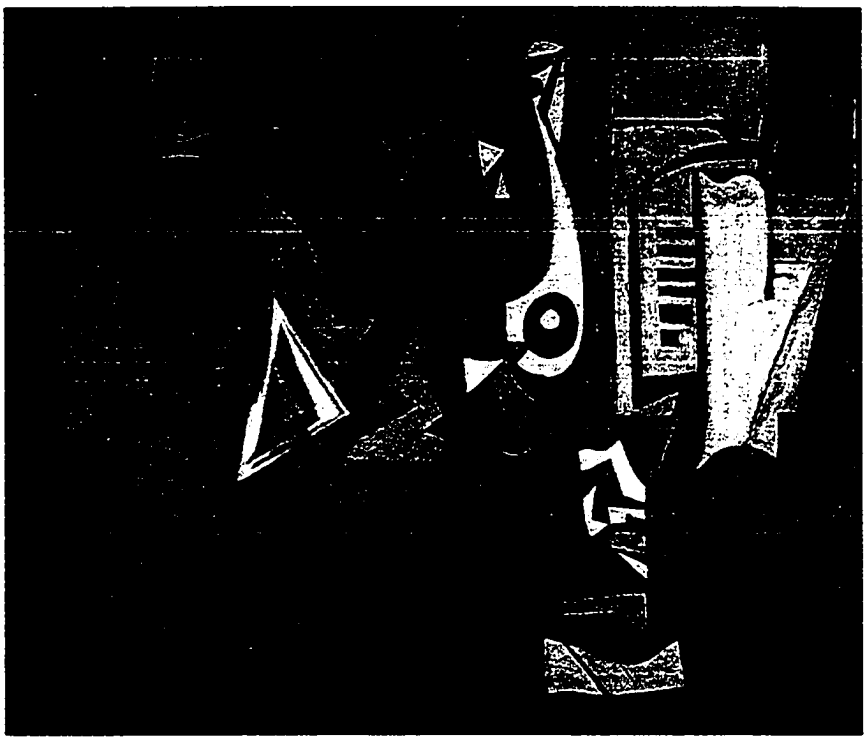


Fig. 5-53. Still Life with Teapot. 1940, oil on canvas, 24 x 28".
Coll: Ahmet Ertegun, New York City.



Fig. 5-54. The Basket of Leaves. 1943, oil on canvas, 24 x 28".
Coll: Diane Grant-Greene, Queens, New York.

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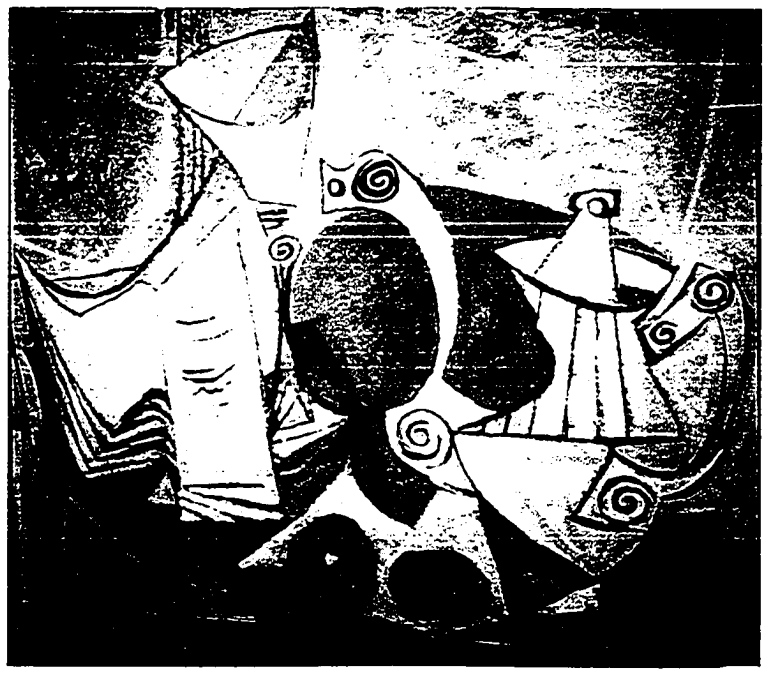


Fig. 5-55. Still Life with Apples. 1944, oil on canvas, 24 x 28". Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Baxter.



Fig. 5-56. White Still Life. 1947, oil on canvas, 30 x 24".
Coll: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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Fig. 5-57. Oceanic. 1948, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

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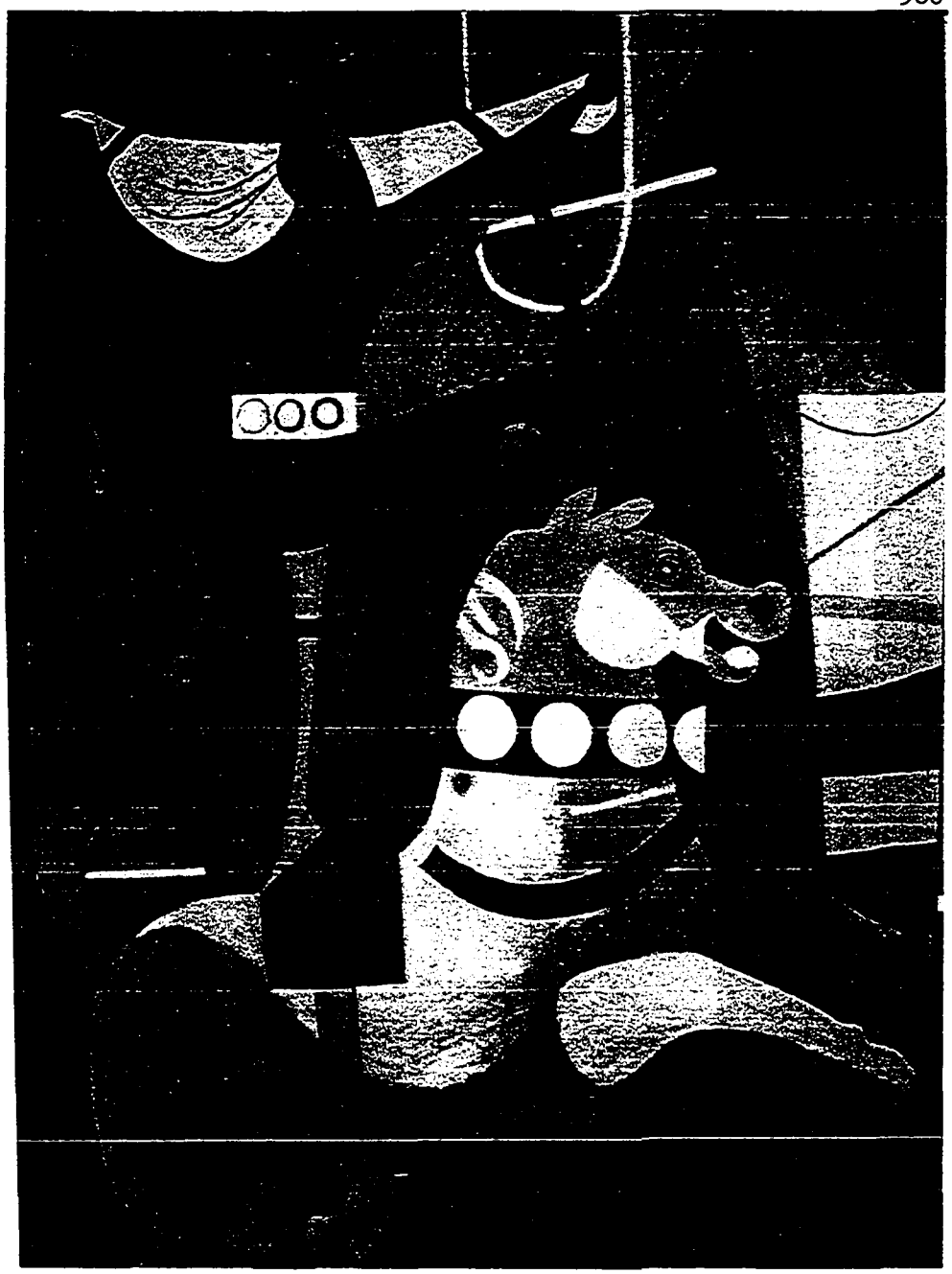


Fig. 5-58. Bareback Rider. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

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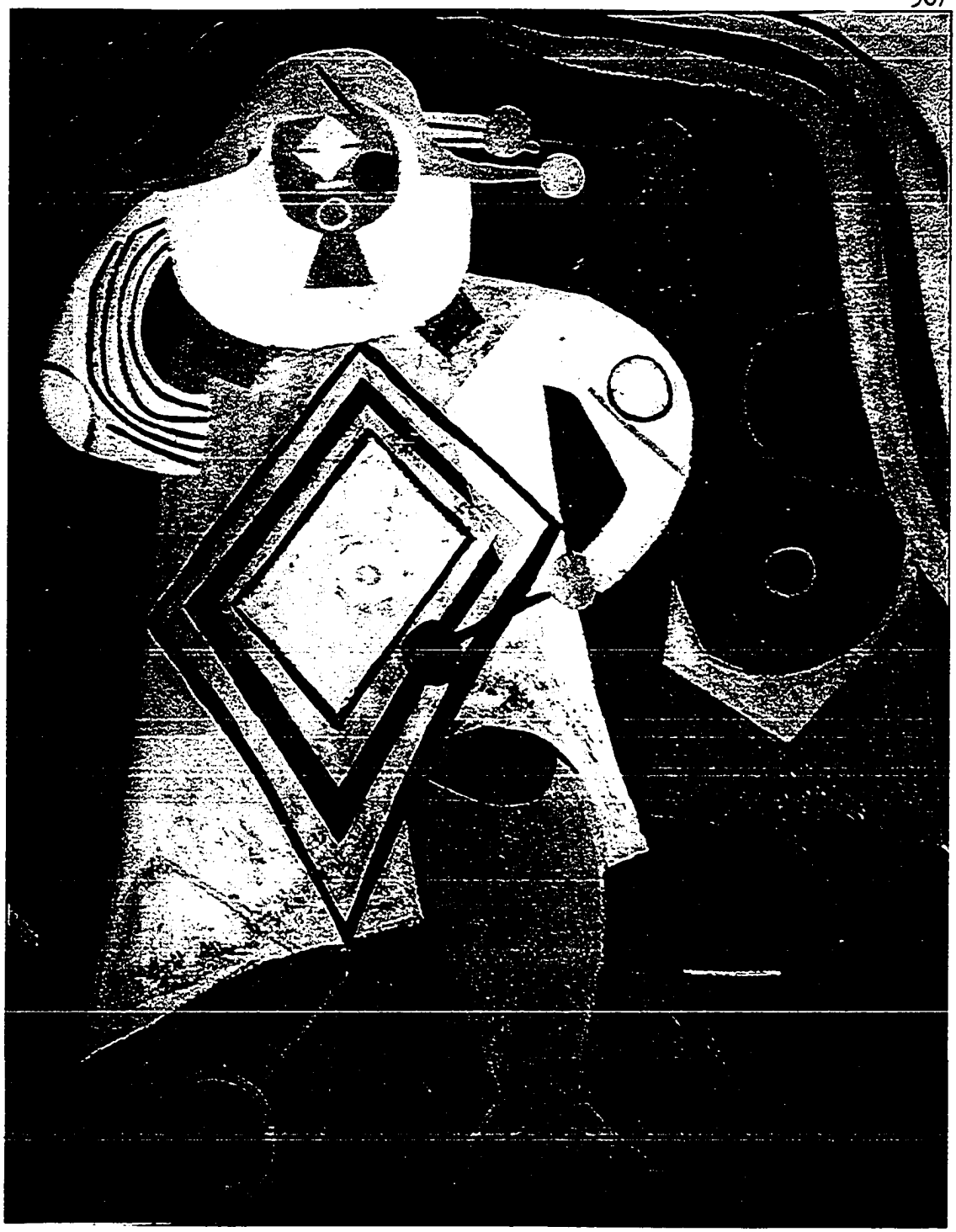


Fig. 5-59. Toto the Drummer (a.k.a. Clown with Drum). 1946, oil on canvas, 38 x 30".
Coll: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York.

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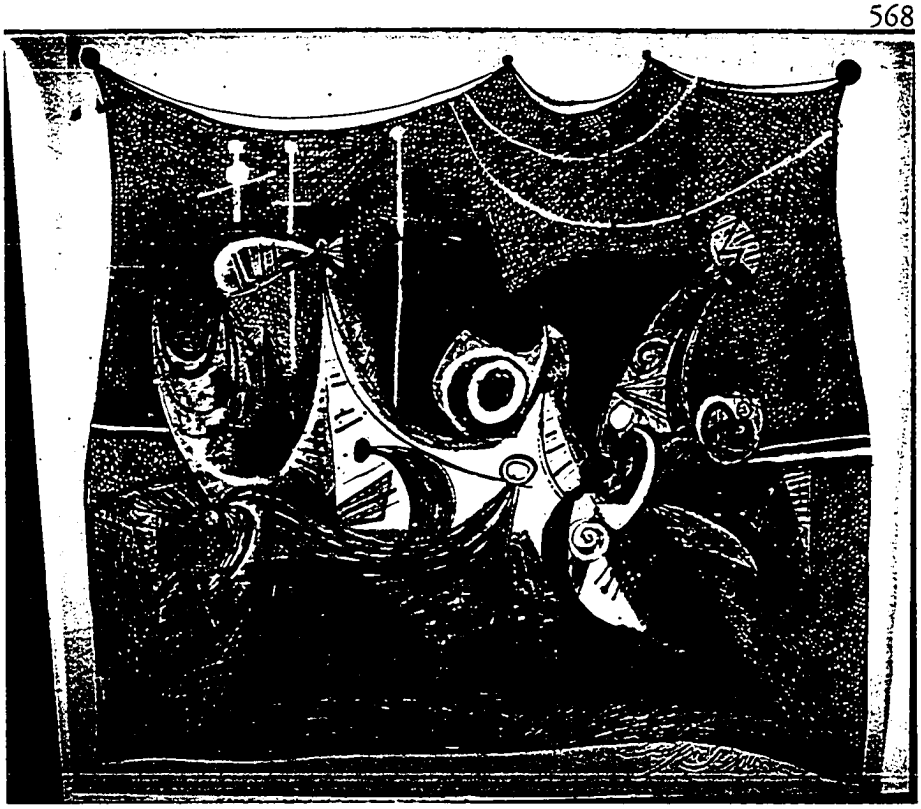


Fig. 5-60. Trapeze Artist. 1941, India ink and watercolor on paper, 18 1/8 x 19 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

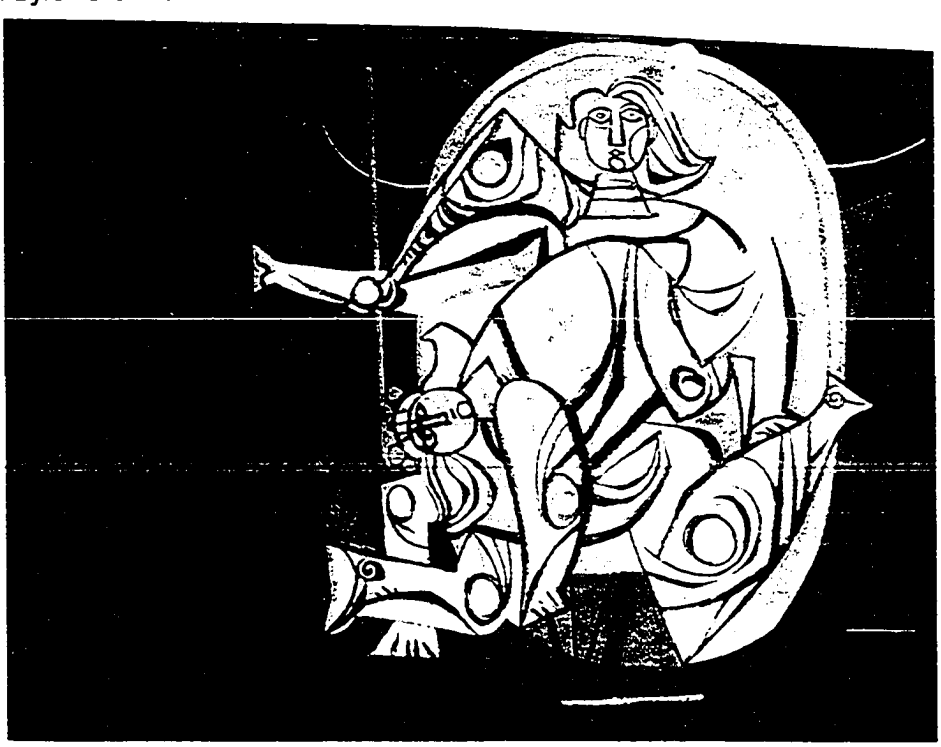


Fig. 5-61. The White Acrobats. 1946, oil on canvas, sand, 30 x 38". Estate of Byron Browne.

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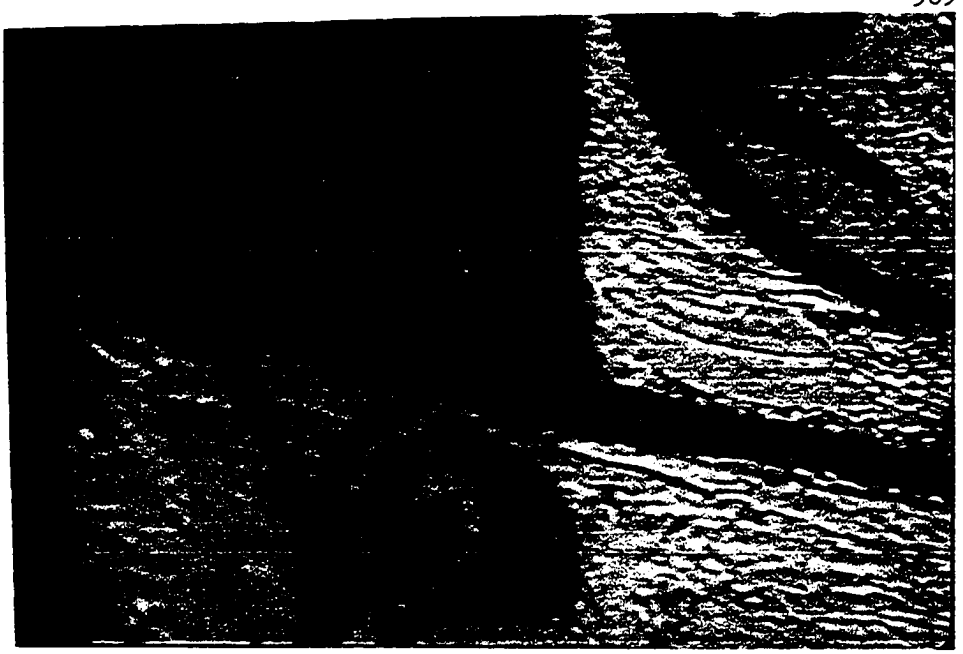


Fig. 5-62. The White Acrobats. 1946, detail of lower middle area, oil on canvas, sand, 30 x 38".

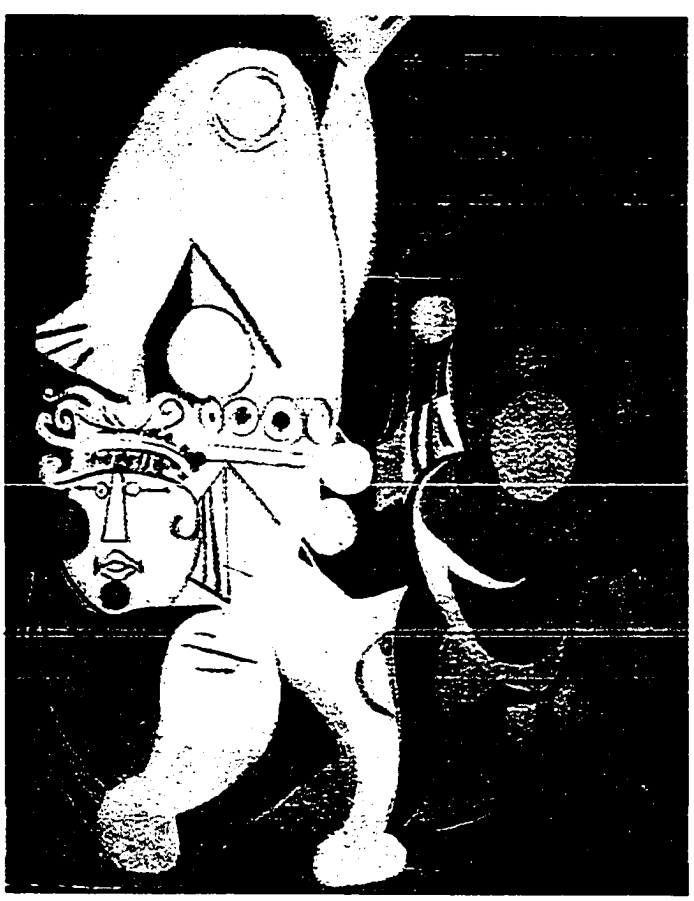


Fig. 5-63. Two Figures. 1946, oil on canvas, 47 1/8 x 36".
Coll: Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia.

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Fig. 5-64. Clown and Lion. 1946, oil on canvas, 36 x 47". Coll: Roy Neuberger, gift to Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

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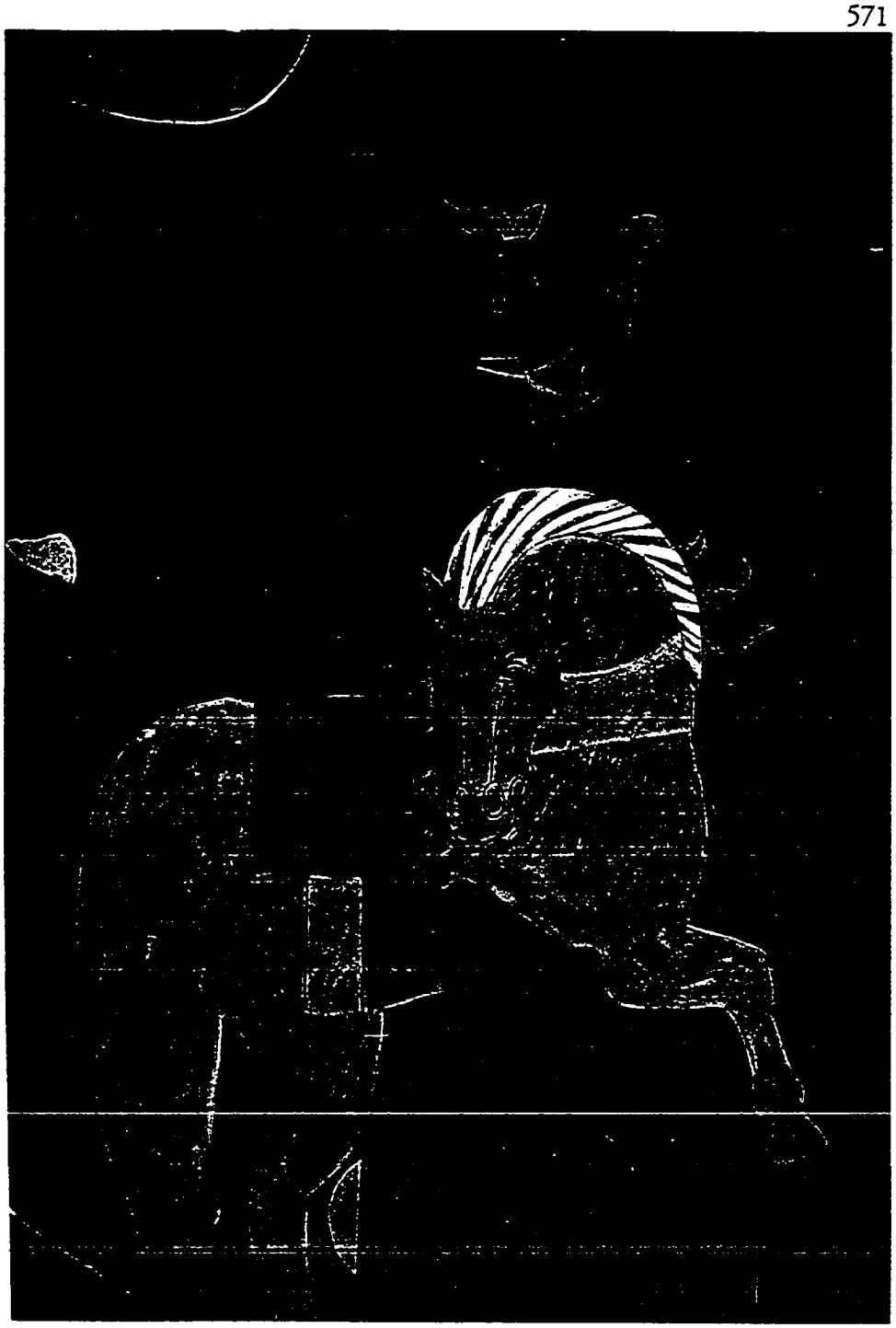


Fig. 5-65. Woman of the Circus. 1946, oil on canvas, 40 x 50". Coll: Estate of Samuel M. Kootz.

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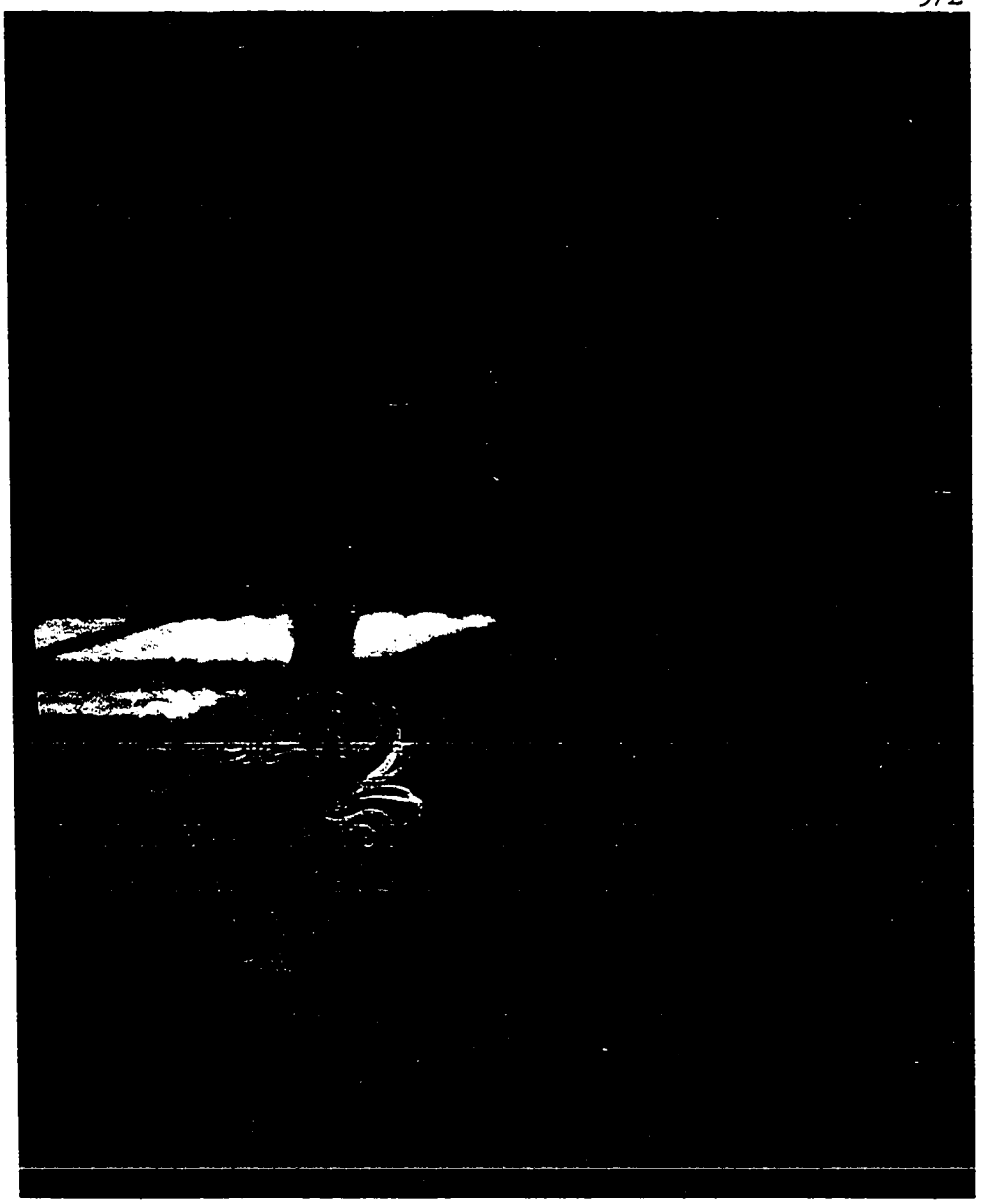


Fig. 5-66. The Pink Lion. 1947, tempera and India ink on paper, 24 1/2 x 19".
Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sterling, New York City.

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Fig. 5-67. Lion Tamer. 1947, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Victor Wolfson.

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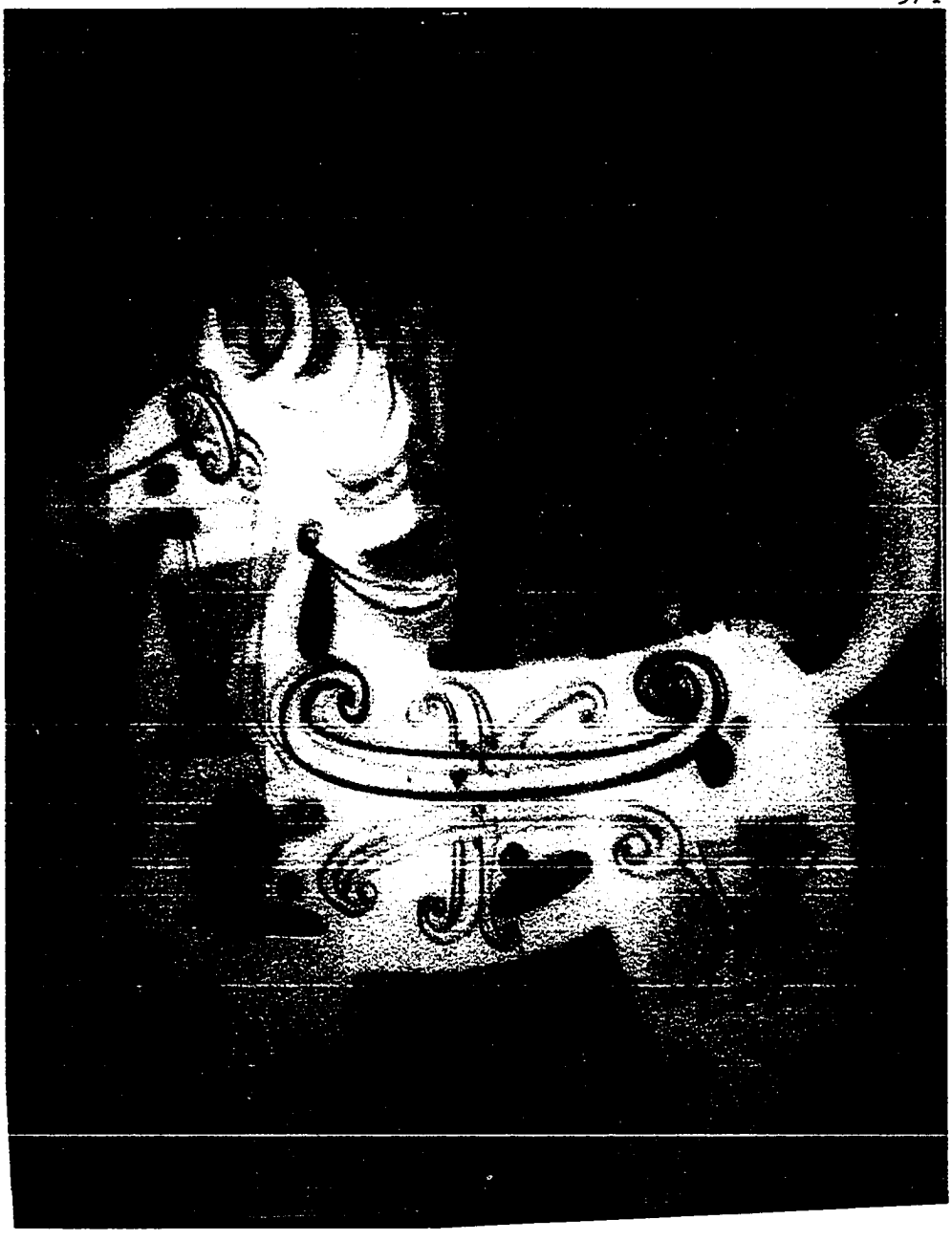


Fig. 5-68. Circus Rider. 1947, tempera, India ink and crayon on paper, 26 x 18".
Coll: Vera and Albert List, New York City.

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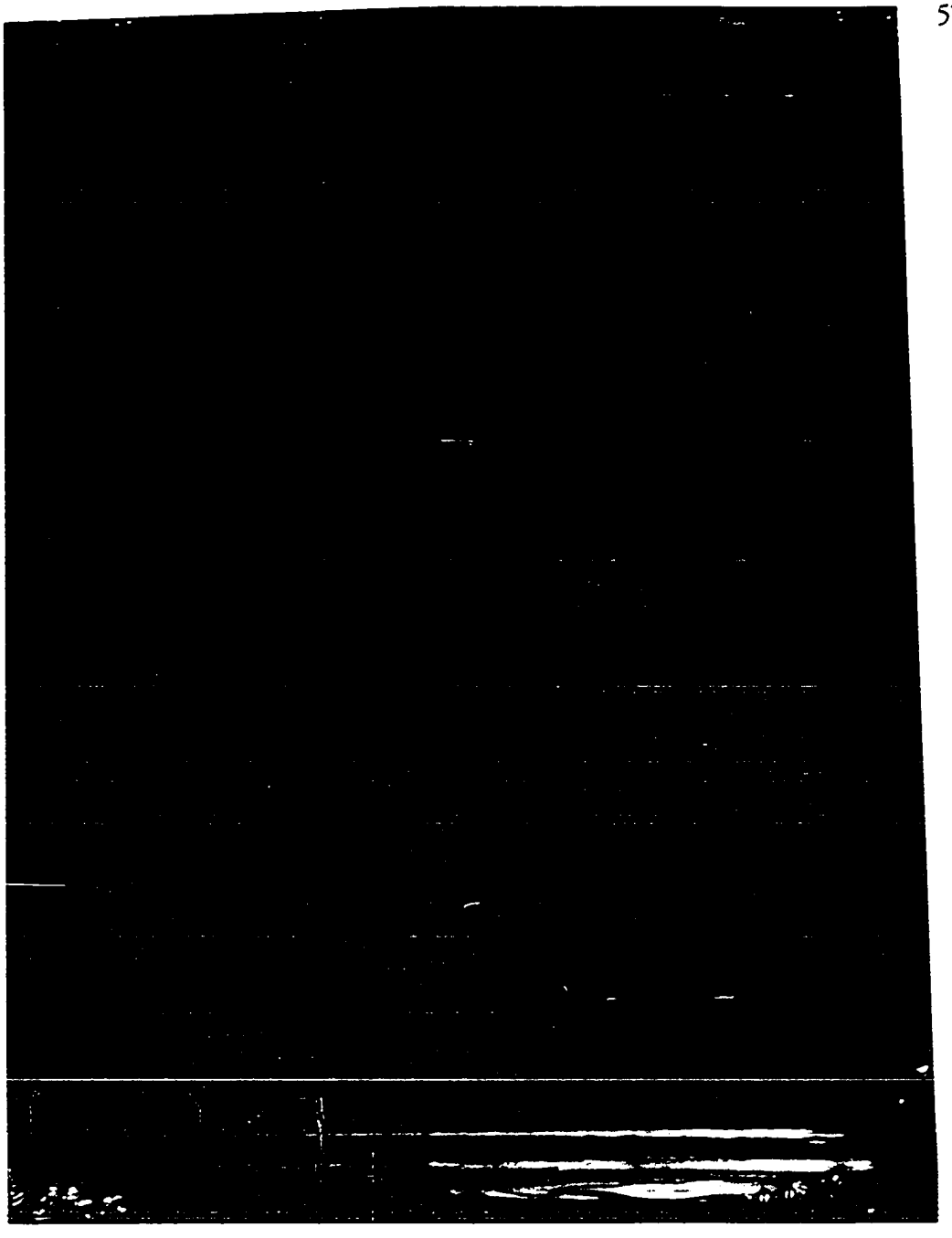


Fig. 5-69. The Gray Horse. 1947, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Coll: Esther and Dr. Samuel Prince, North Bergen, New Jersey.

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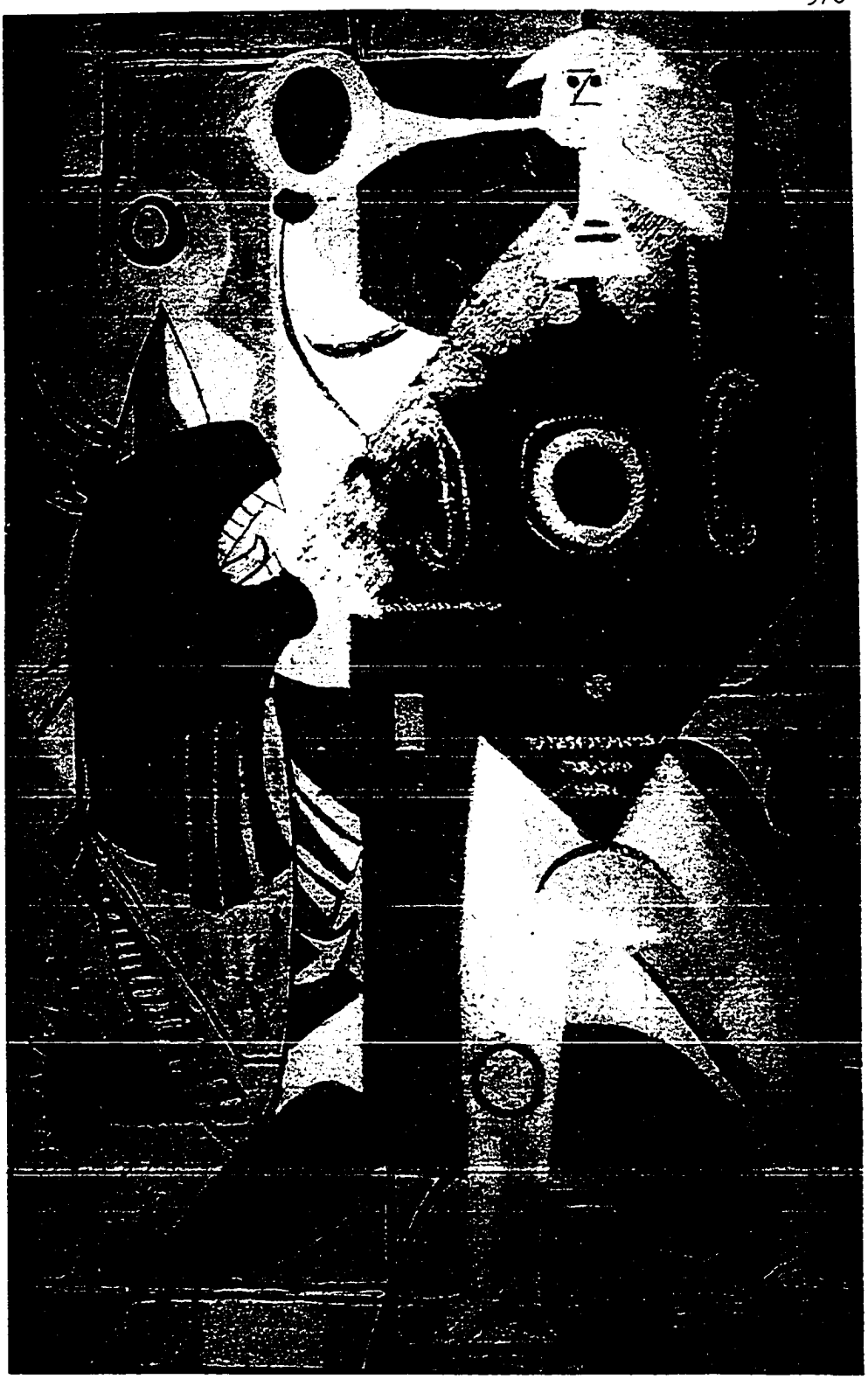


Fig. 5-70. Blue Lion. 1946-47, oil on masonite, wire mesh stove grid set into pigment on circular recessed opening of board, 47 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-71. White Clown. 1947, Tempera, India ink, crayon on paper, 26 x 18".
Coll: Vera and Albert List, New York City.

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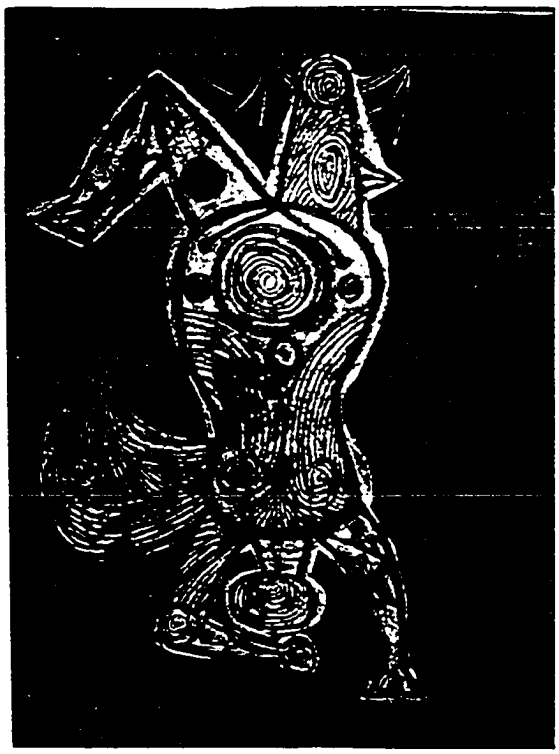


Fig. 5-72. Act I. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30".
Coll: Pace University Art Museum, New York City.t



Fig. 5-73. Head Stand. 1948, oil on canvas, tempera and India ink on paper, 21 3/8 x 15 1/4".
Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-74. Clown and Lion. 1948, watercolor and India ink on paper, 21 3/8 x 15 1/4". Estate of Byron Browne.

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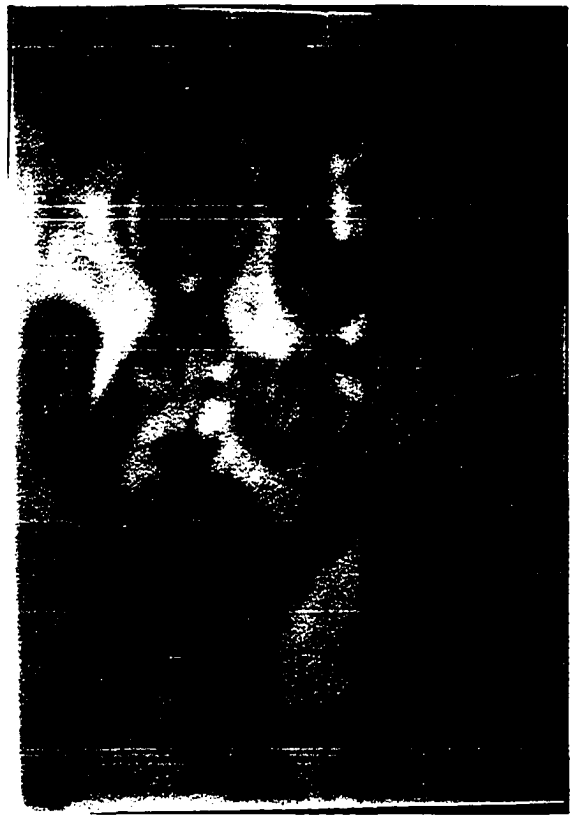


Fig. 5-75. Horse Clown in Blue and Yellow. 1948, tempera and India ink on paper, 22 x 16 1/2". Coll: Vera and Albert List, New York City.

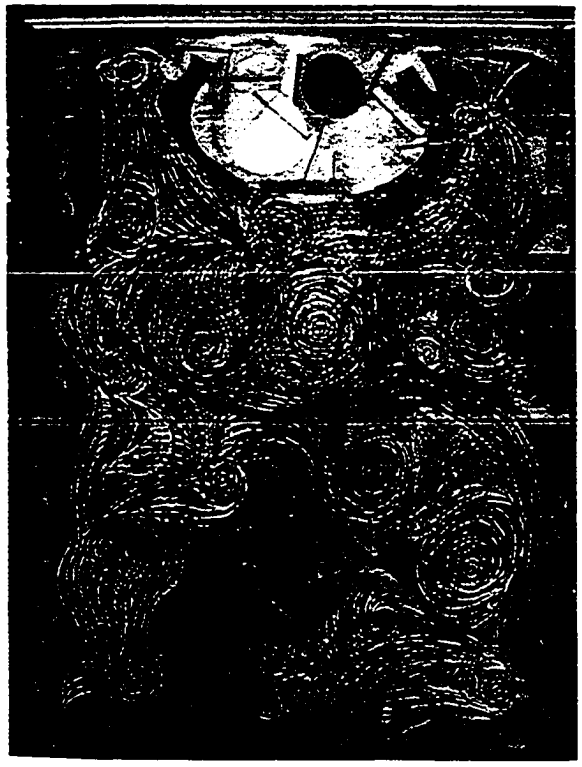


Fig. 5-76. Acrobat. 1948, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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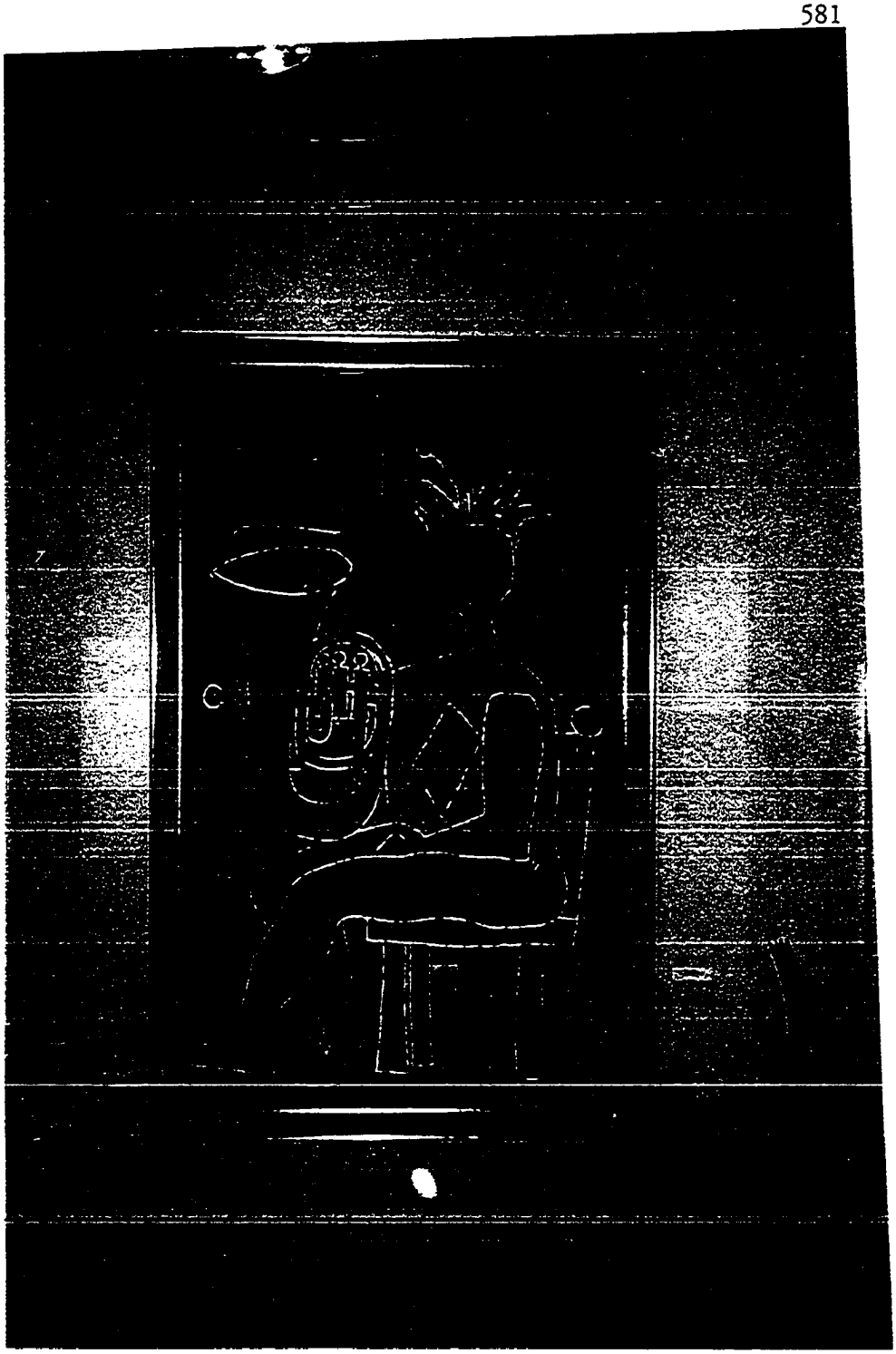


Fig. 5-77. Jester with Horn. 1948, oil on canvas, 60 x 36".
Coll: Edwin M. Williams, Naples, Florida.

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Fig. 5-78. Pablo Picasso. The Jester. 1905, bronze, 15 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 8 5/8".
Coll: Mrs. Bertram Smith, New York City.

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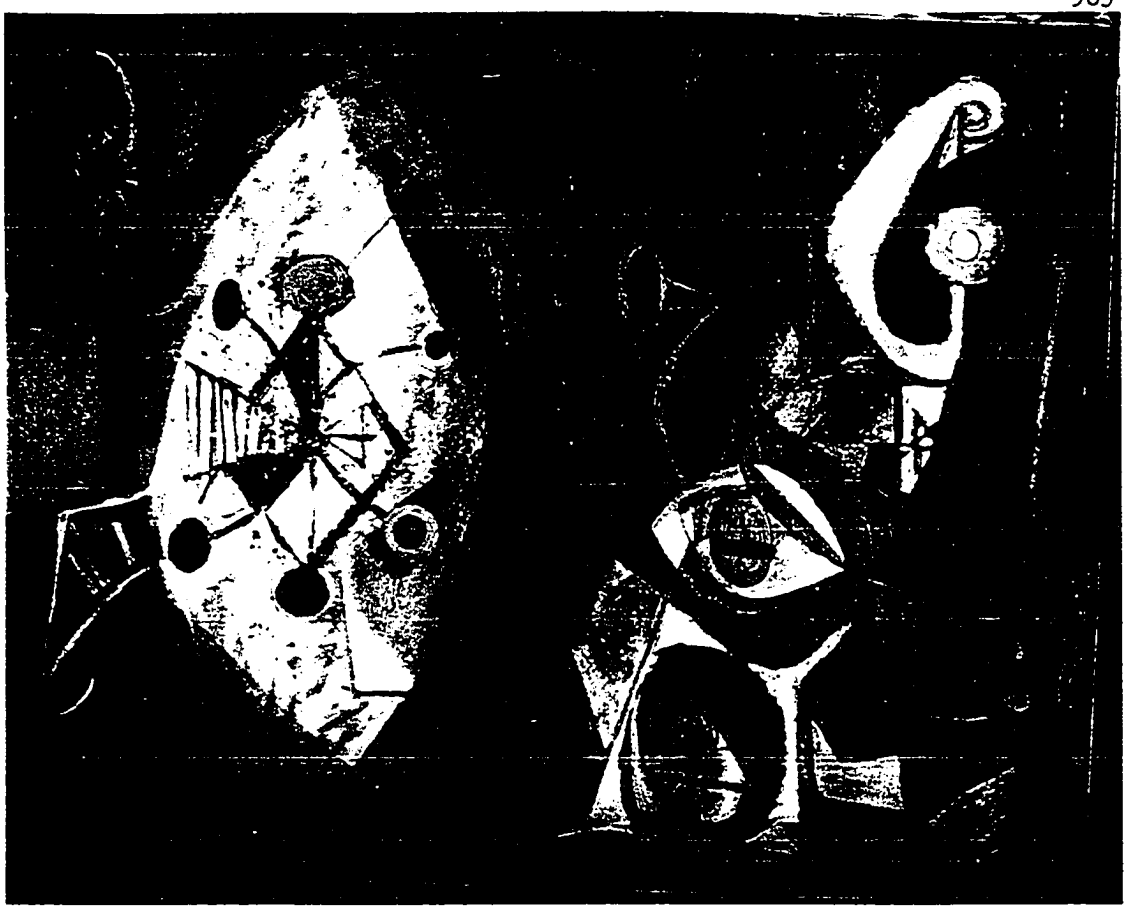


Fig. 5-79. Two Clowns. 1948, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 5-80. Trombone Solo. 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Roy R. Neuberger.

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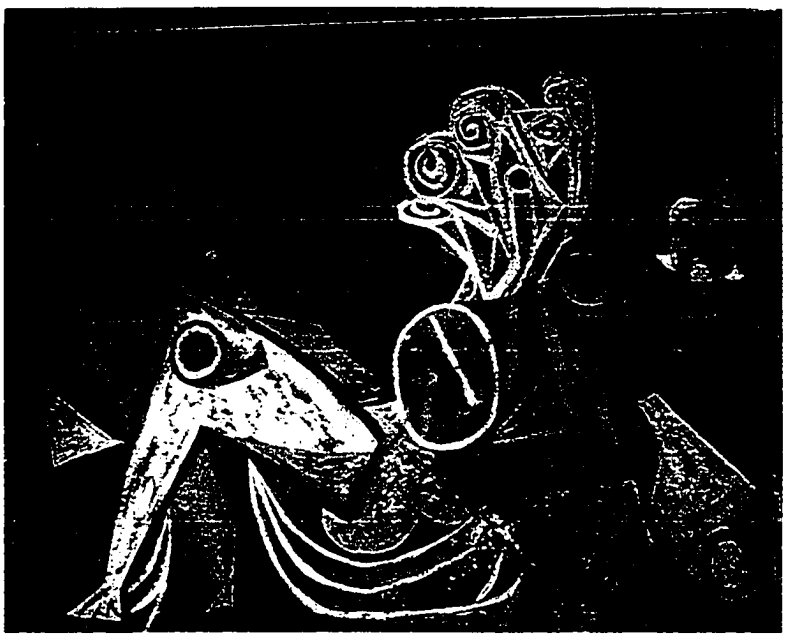


Fig. 5-81. The White Wave. 1946, oil on canvas, 24 x 30".
Coll: Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sterling, New York City.



Fig. 5-82. Circus Bandsman. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

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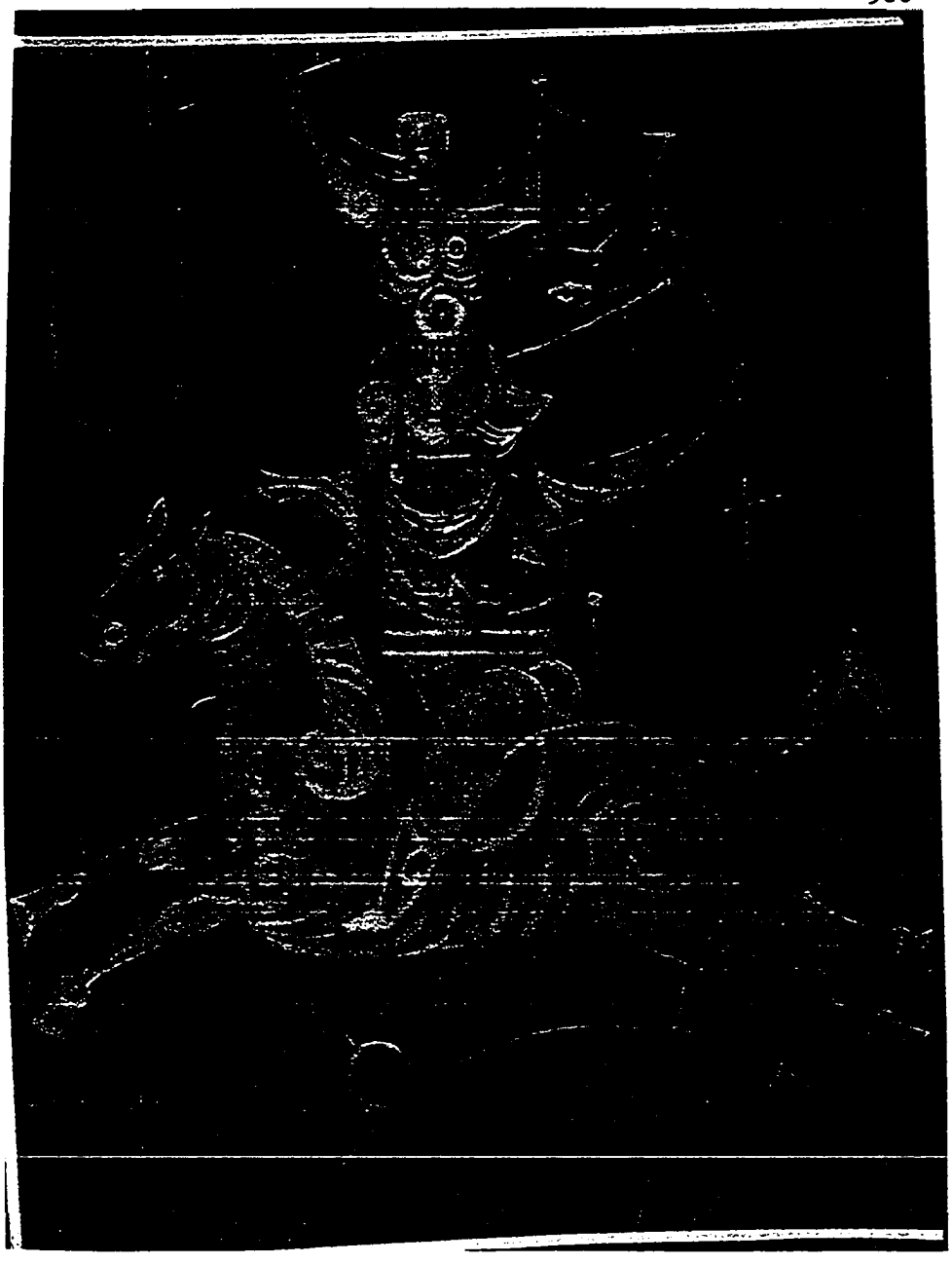


Fig. 5-83. Two on a Horse. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

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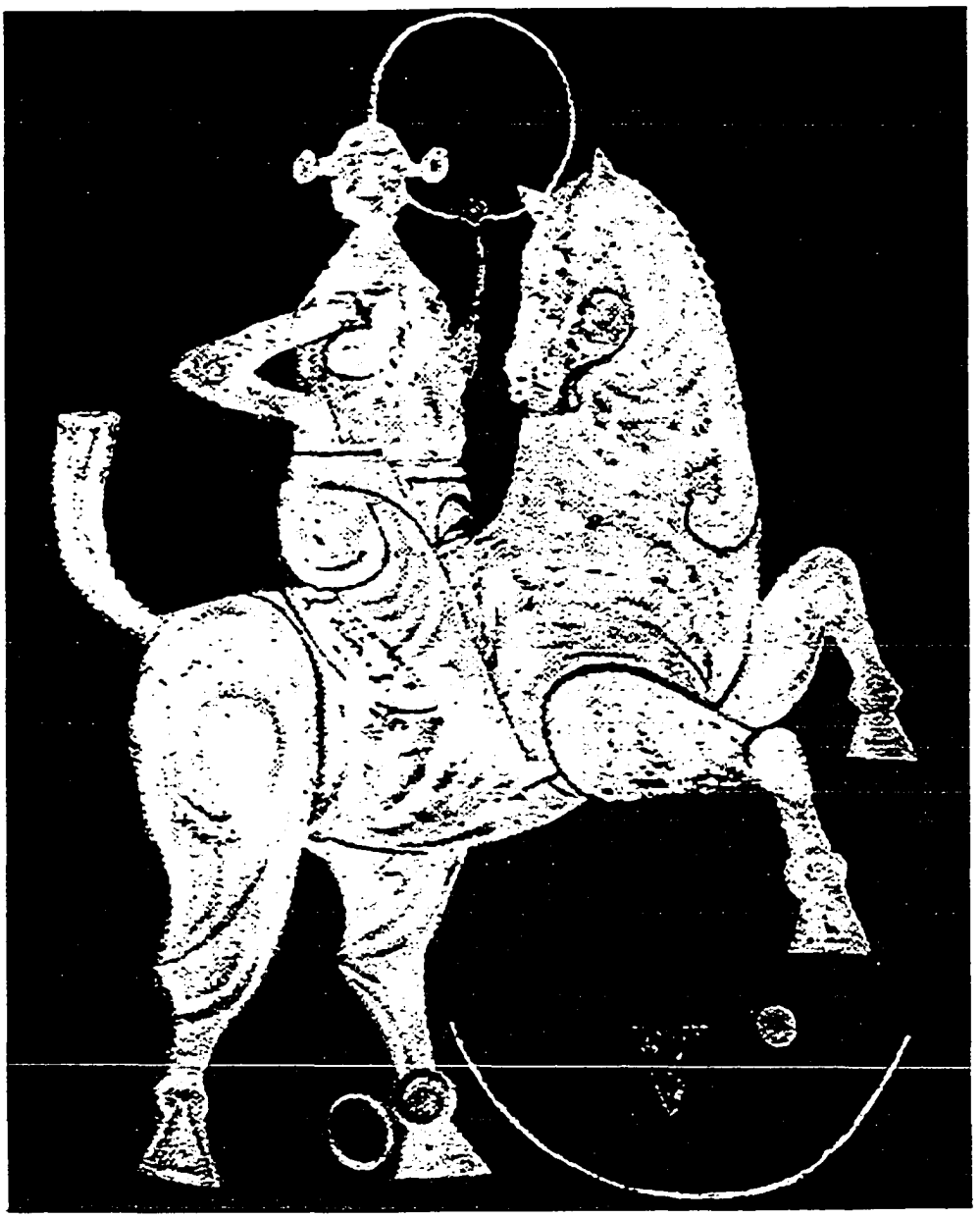


Fig. 5-84. The Pink Clown. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Whereabouts unknown.

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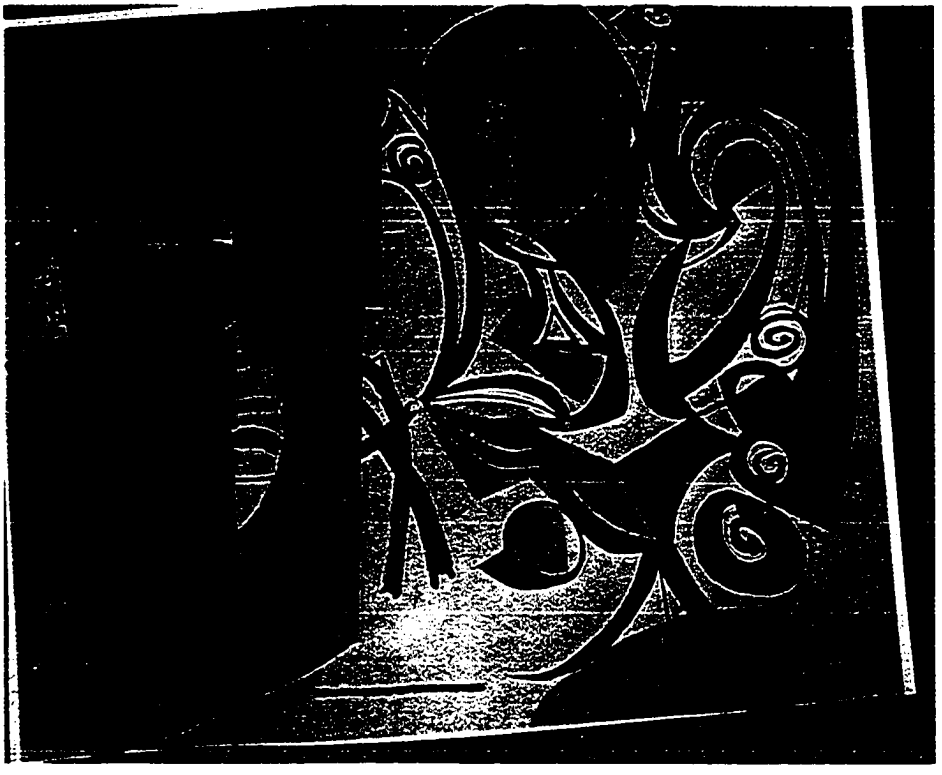


Fig. 6-1. Still Life in Red, Yellow and Green. 1945, oil on canvas, 23 3/4 x 28".
Coll: Auburn University, Union Gallery, Auburn, Alabama.

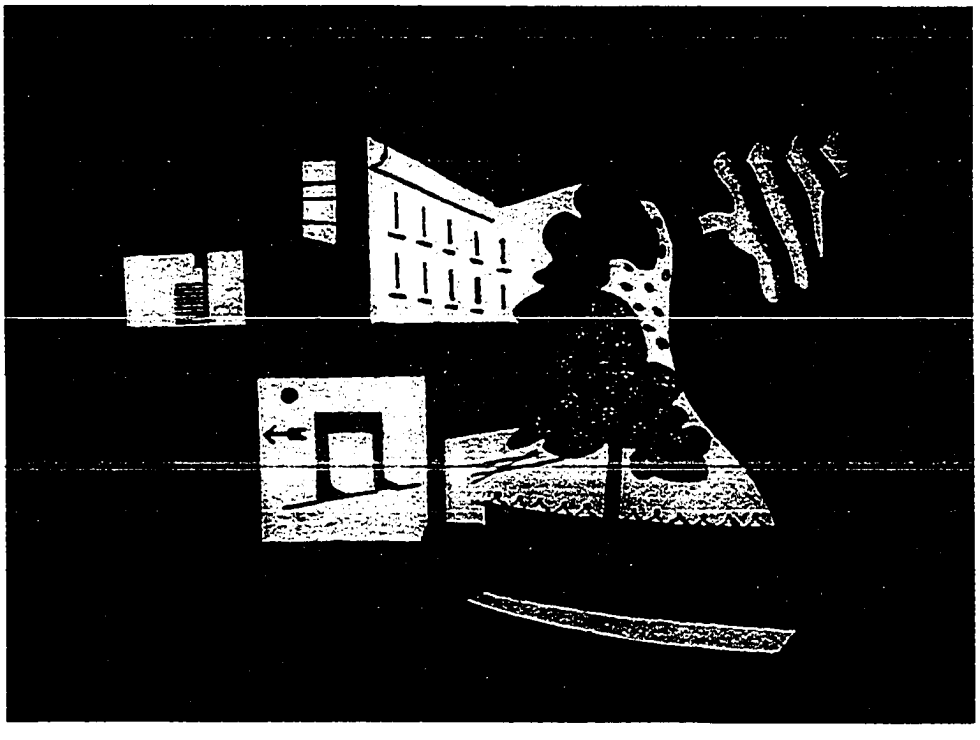


Fig. 6-2. Stuart Davis. Trees and El. 1931, oil on canvas,
25 1/8 x 32". Coll: Henry Art Gallery, (War Assets Collection),
University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

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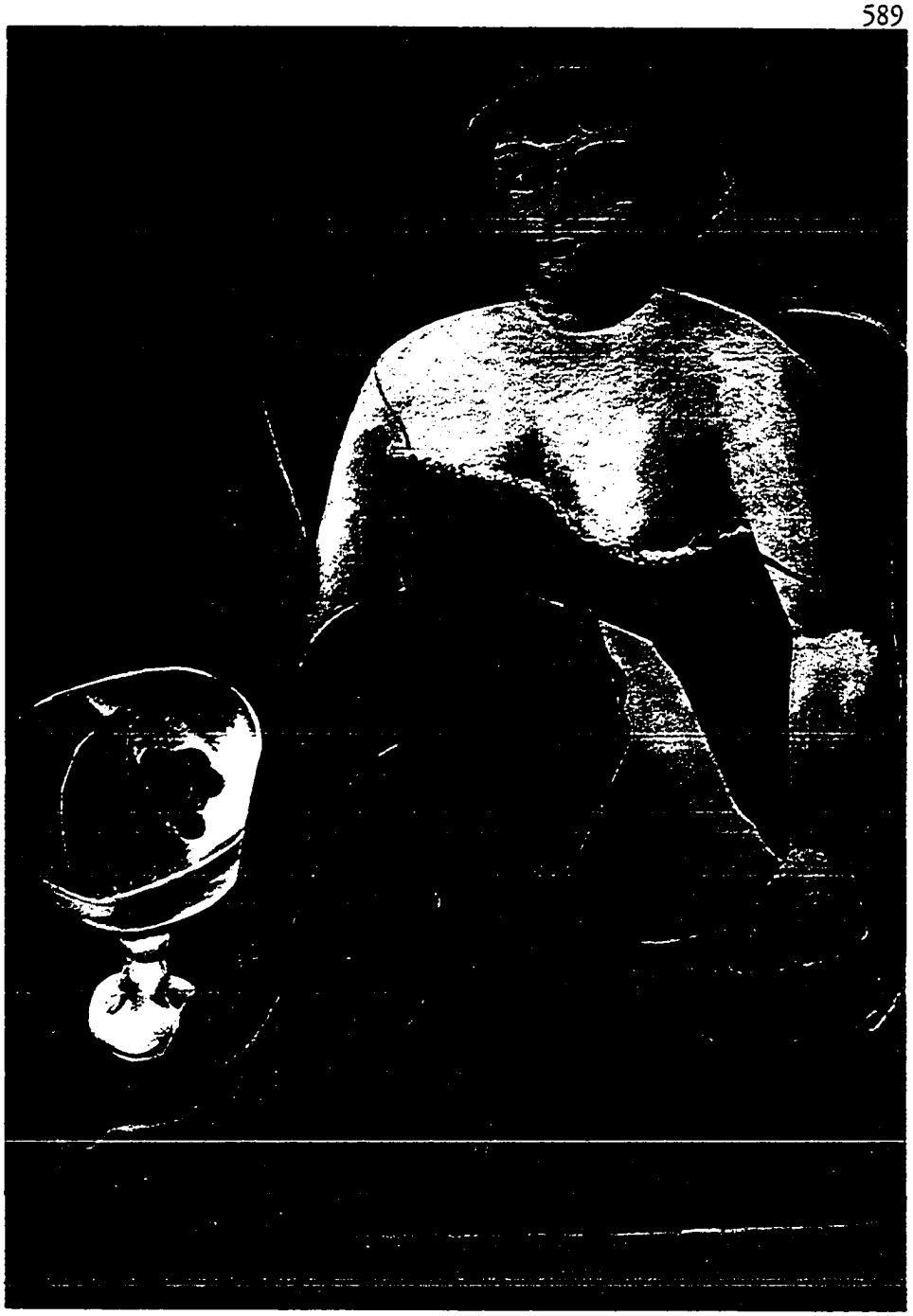
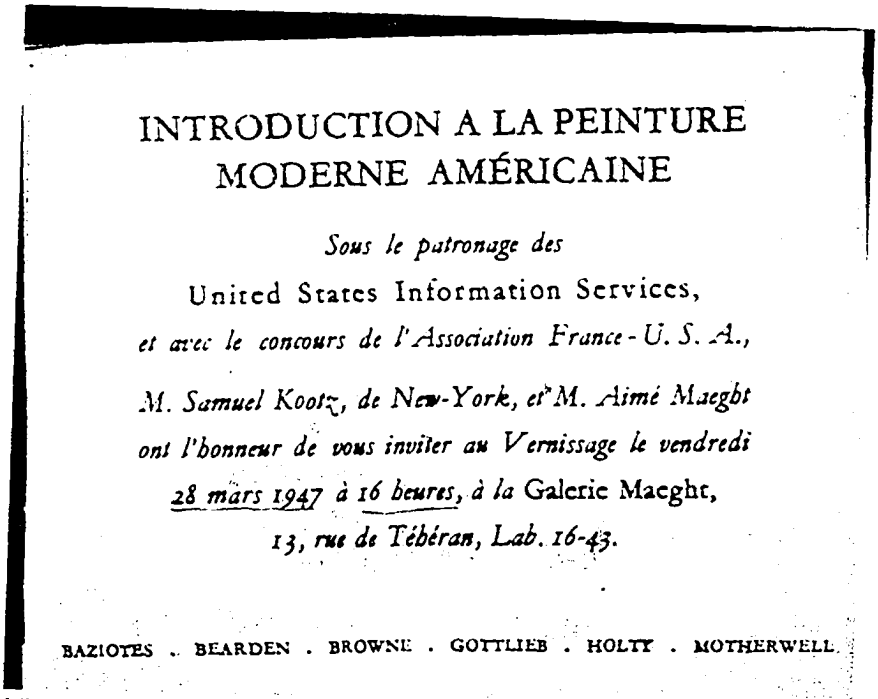


Fig. 6-3. Yasuo Kuniyoshi. N.d. (1946 or earlier), Circus Girl Resting,
oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 28 3/4 ". Coll: Auburn University, Union Gallery, Auburn, Alabama.

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INTRODUCTION A LA PEINTURE
MODERNE AMÉRICAINE

Sous le patronage des
United States Information Services,
et avec le concours de l'Association France-U. S. A.,

M. Samuel Kootz, de New-York, et M. Aimé Maeght
ont l'honneur de vous inviter au Vernissage le vendredi
28 mars 1947 à 16 heures, à la Galerie Maeght,
13, rue de Téhéran, Lab. 16-43.

BAZIOTES . BEARDEN . BROWNE . GOTTLIEB . HOLTY . MOTHERWELL

Fig. 6-4. Exhibition Announcement: Invitation to Opening. Introduction A La Peinture Moderne Américaine, Kootz Gallery and Galerie Maeght, Paris, March 28, 1947. Photo courtesy Estate of Byron Browne.

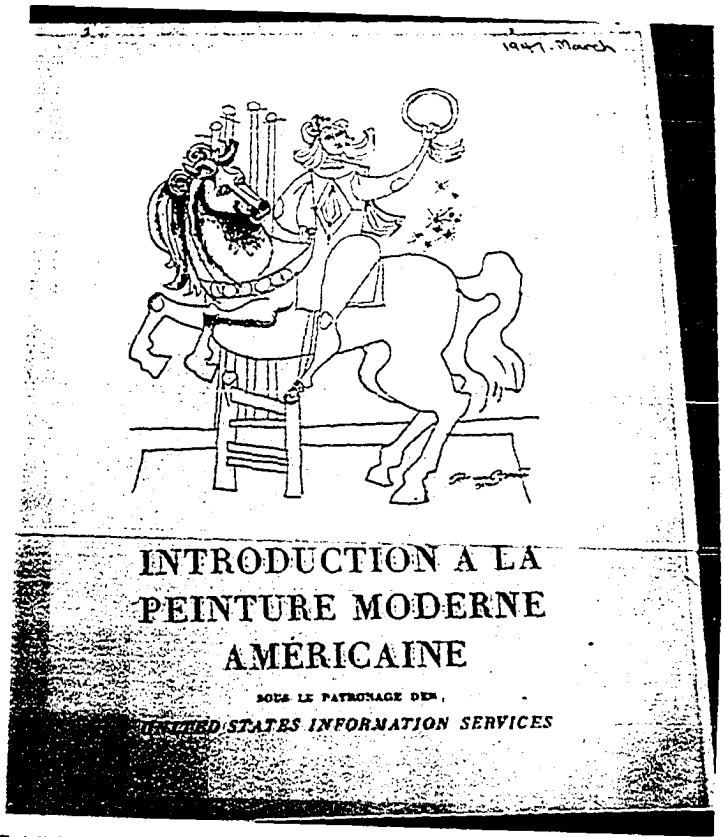


Fig. 6-5. Cover: Exhibition Catalogue. Drawing by Byron Browne, pen and ink, Kootz Gallery and Galerie Maeght, Paris, March 1947.

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Fig. 6-6. William Baziotes. Blue Flower. 1947, oil on canvas, 29 x 37 1/2".
Coll: Mrs. Alvin Sitomer, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

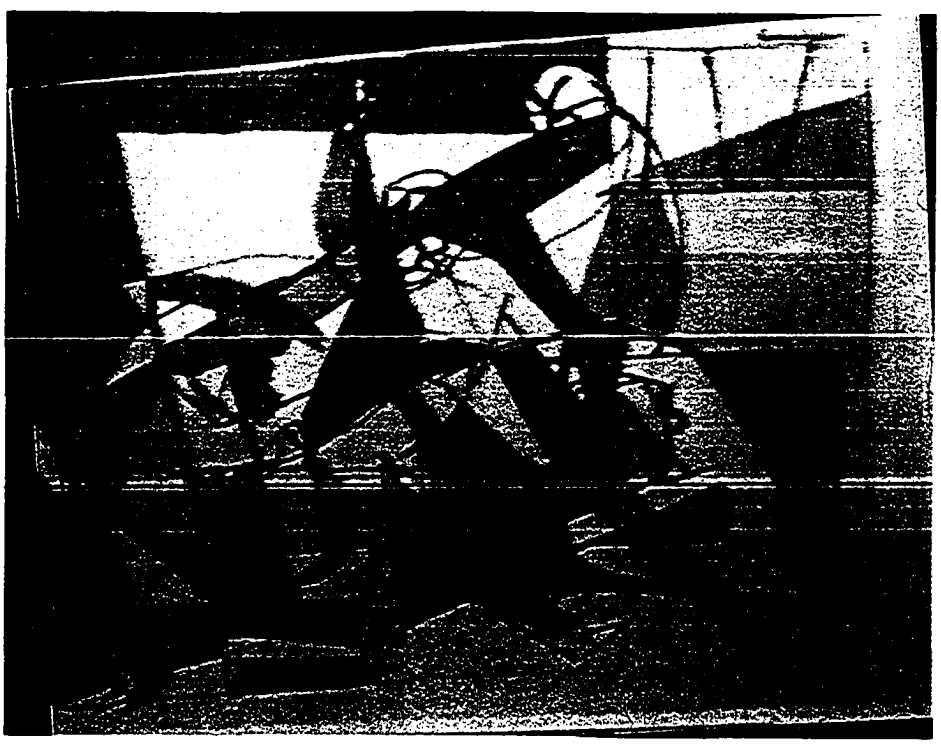


Fig. 6-7. Romare Bearden. Some Drink! Some Drink! (May also be titled The Drinkers). 1946, oil on canvas, 25 x 32". From the series inspired by Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel. Whereabouts unknown.

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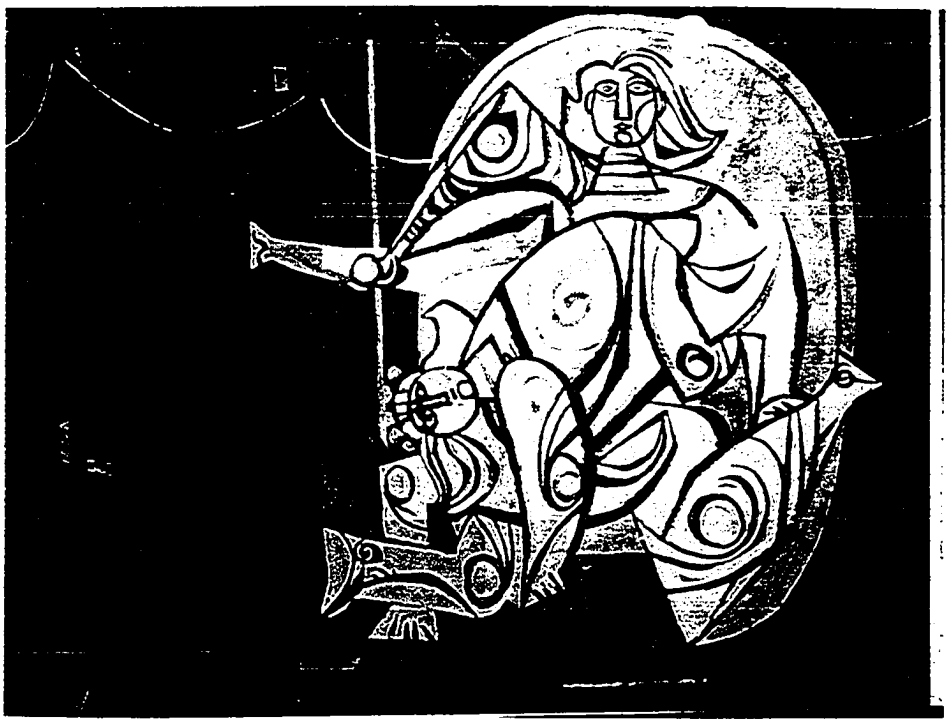


Fig. 6-8. The White Acrobats. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 37 3/4".
Coll: Joseph (Joe) Wissert, Los Angeles, California.

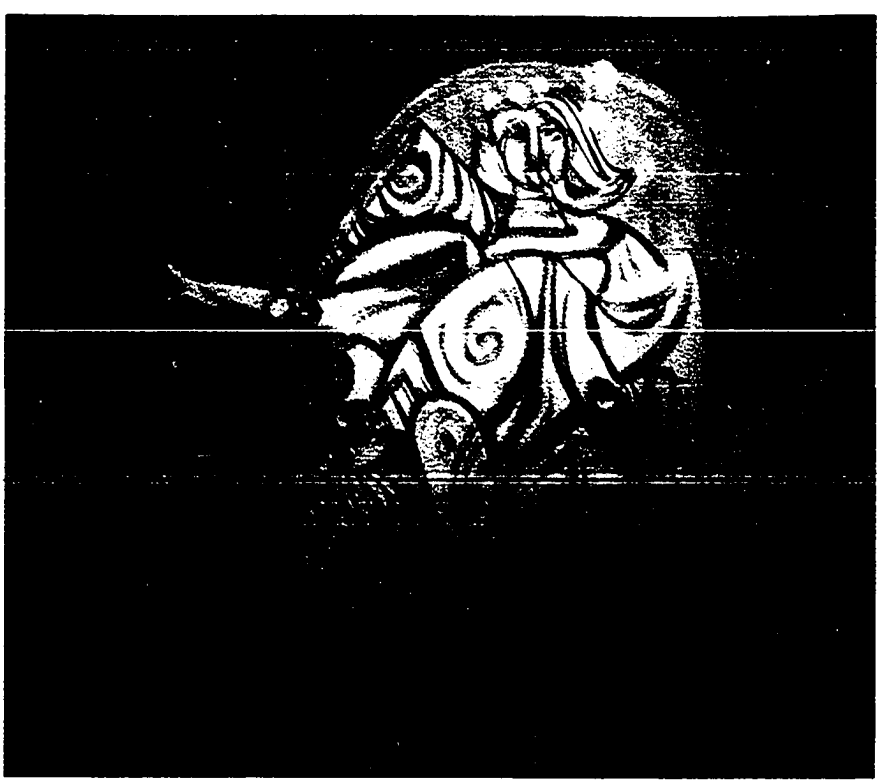


Fig. 6-9. The White Acrobats. Detail, right three quarters of canvas.

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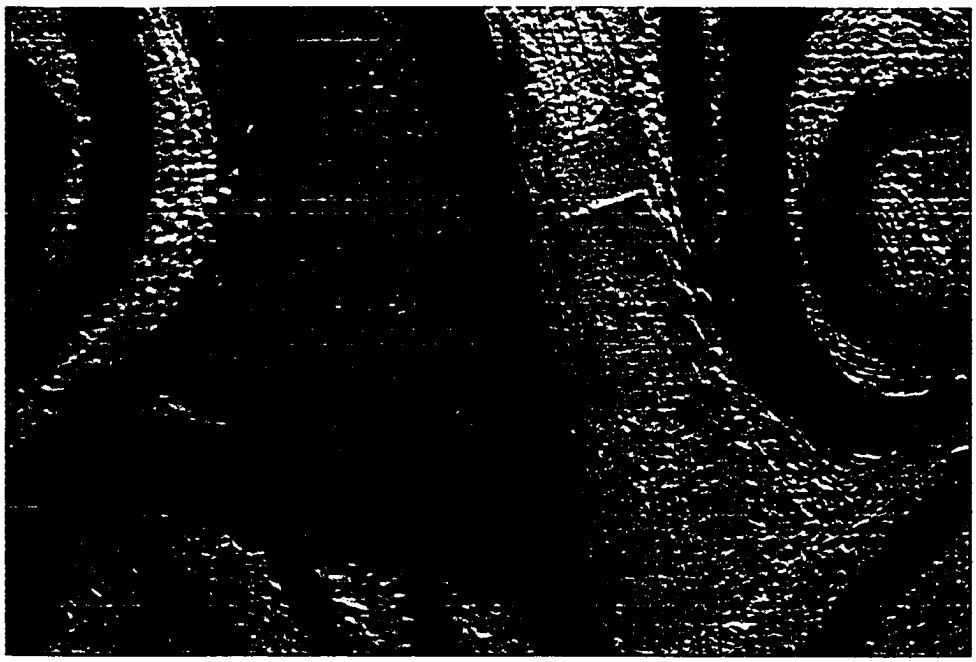


Fig. 6-10. The White Acrobats. Detail, arm and chest area of diagonal figure, showing texture and impasto application of pigment.

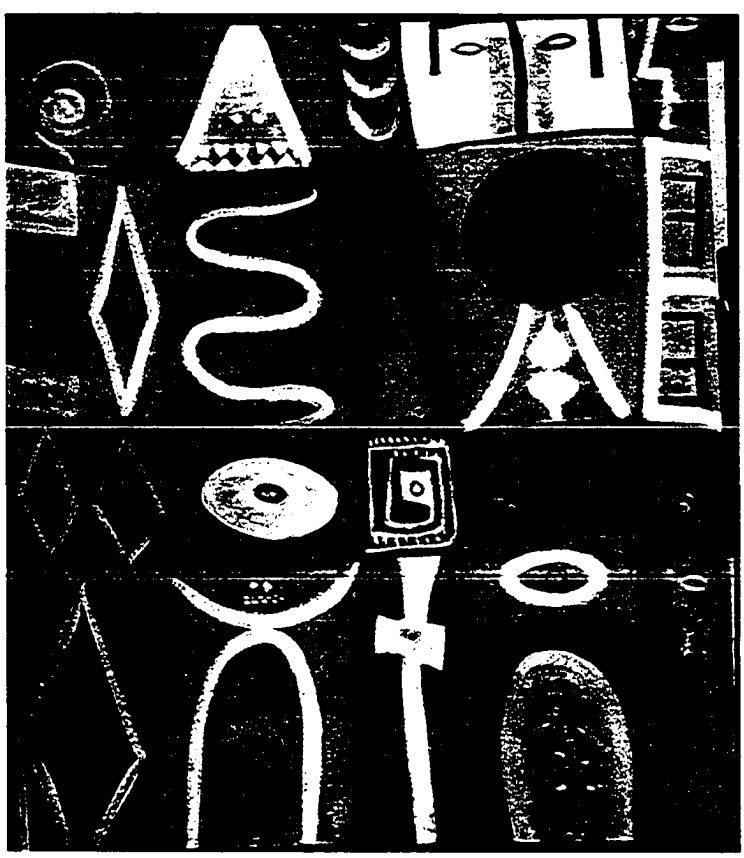


Fig. 6-11. Adolph Gottlieb. Pictogenic Fragments. 1946, oil on canvas, 36 x 30".
Coll: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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Fig. 6-12. Carl Holty. The Hockey Players. 1946-47, oil on canvas, 60 x 48". Whereabouts unknown.

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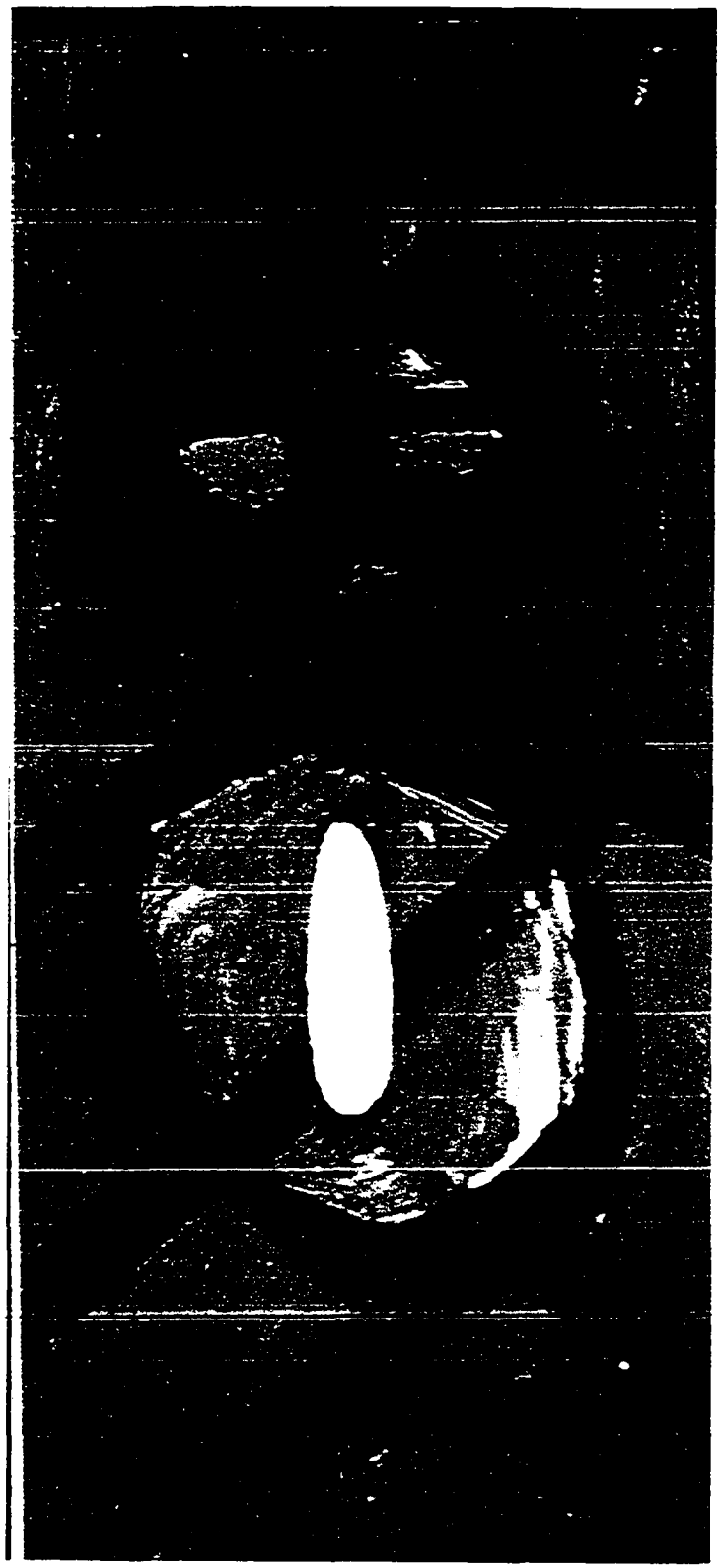


Fig. 6-13. Robert Motherwell. Western Figure. 1947, oil on panel, 16 1/2 x 5 3/4". Sold at Christie's Auction, Lot #338, November 9, 1983, buyer unidentified.

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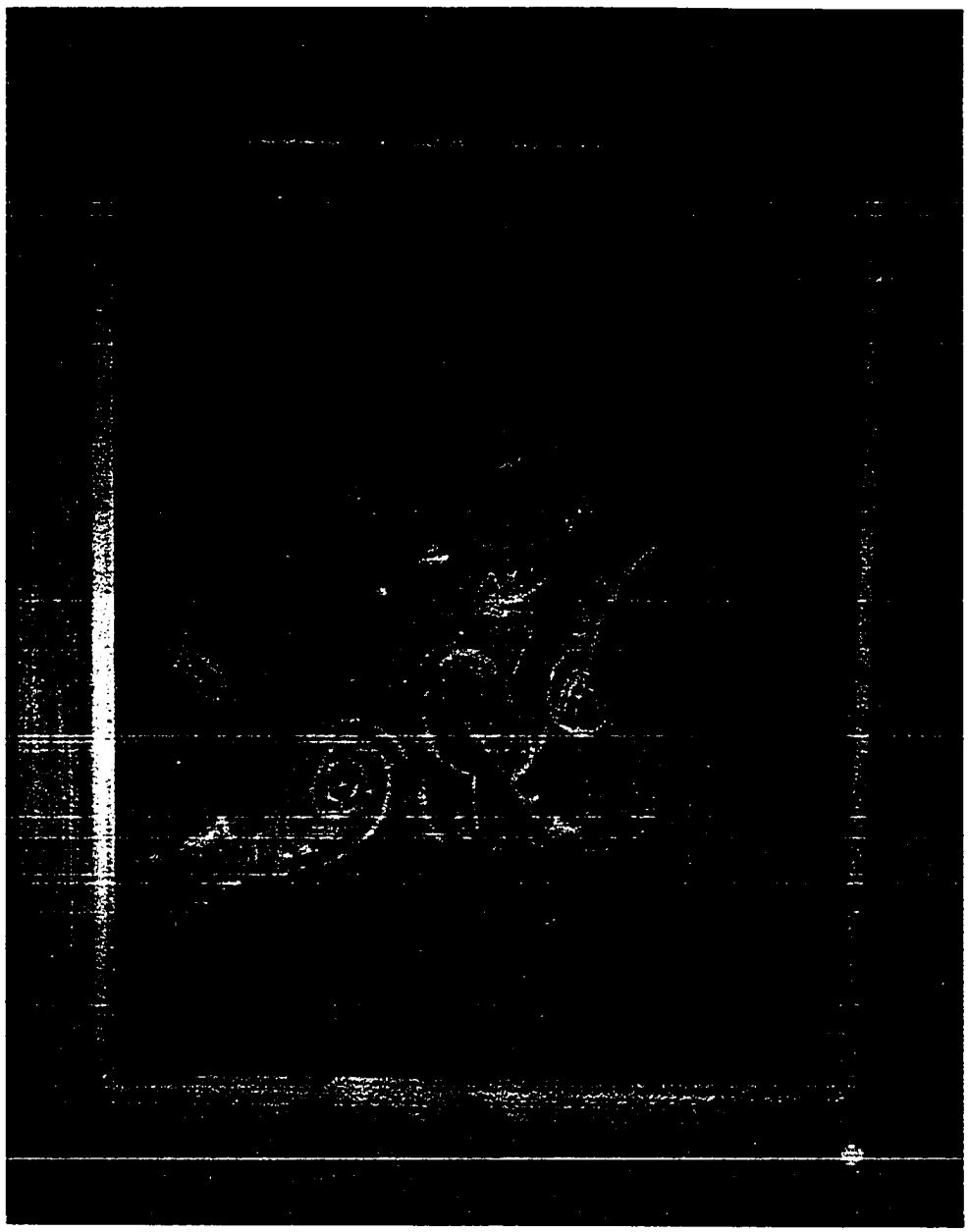


Fig. 6-14. Two on a Horse. 1946 (June), oil on canvas, 29 7/8 x 23 7/8".
Sold at Christie's Auction, Lot #251, June 3, 1982, to unidentified buyer.

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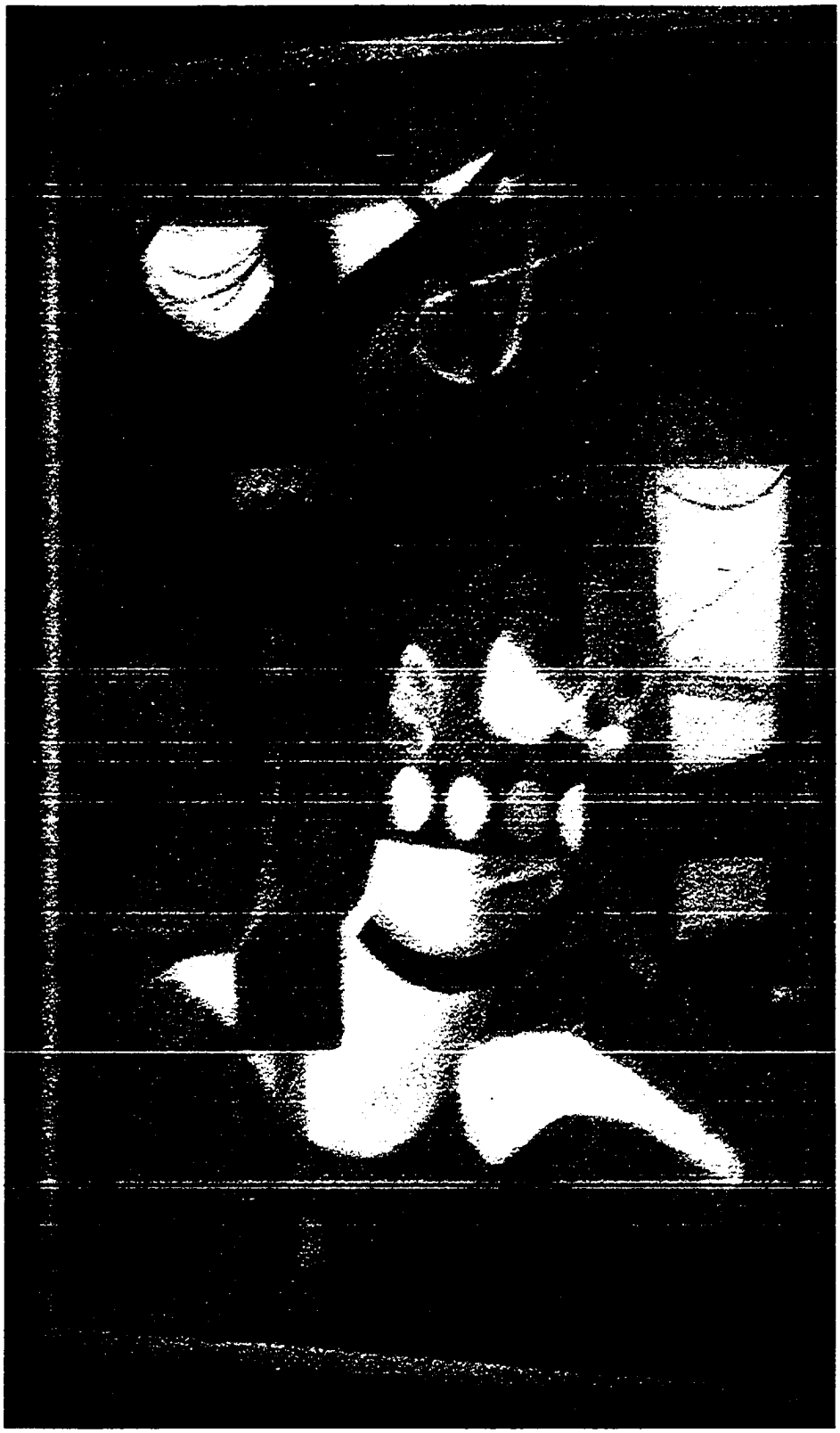


Fig. 6-15. Bareback Rider. 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 36".
Coll: Sigmond Sternberg, New York City.

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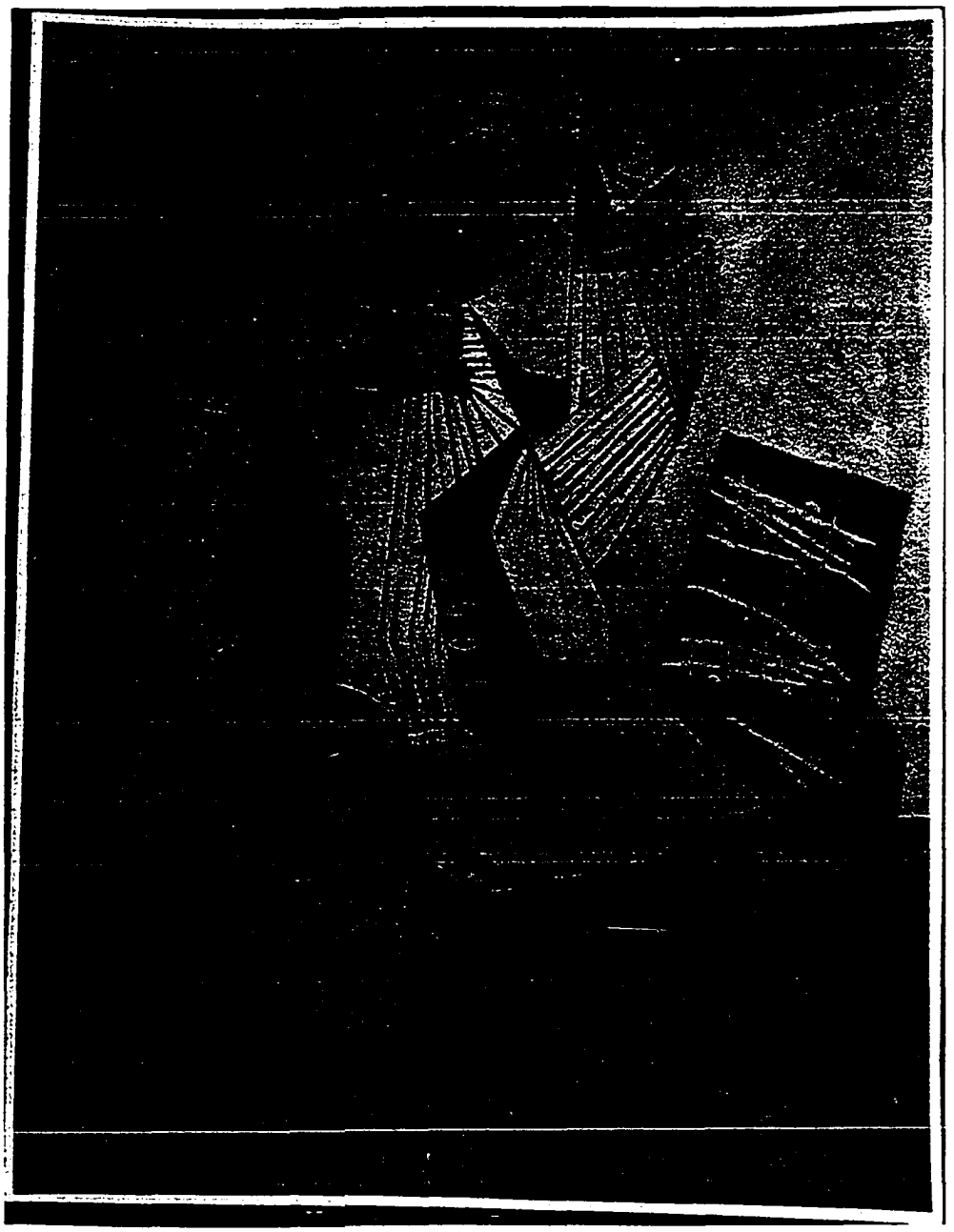


Fig. 6-16. The Drummer. 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Whereabouts unknown.

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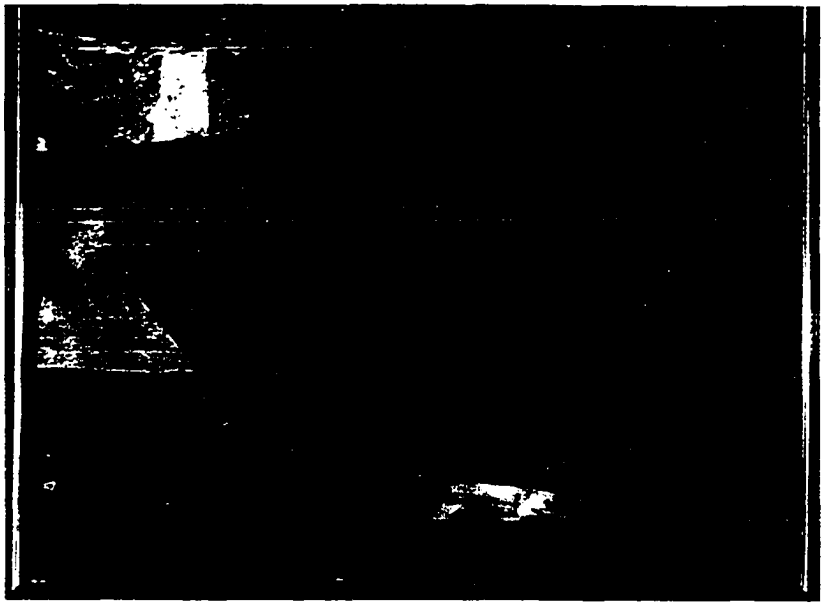


Fig. 6-17. William Baziotes. Pink Wall. 1946, oil on canvas, 30 x 38".
ttColl: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City.

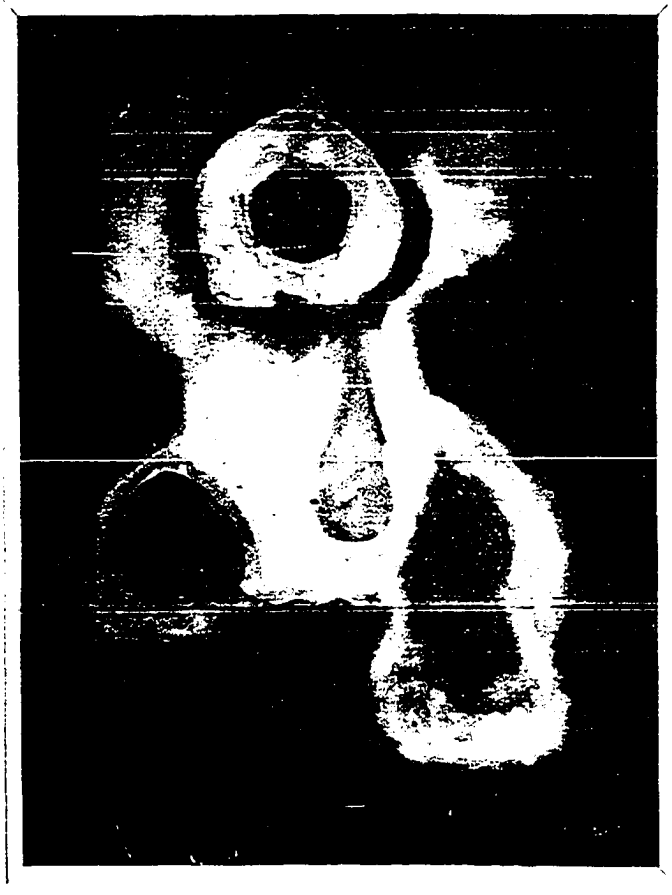


Fig. 6-18. William Baziotes. Night Form. 1947, oil on canvas,
48 x 36". Coll: Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Missouri.

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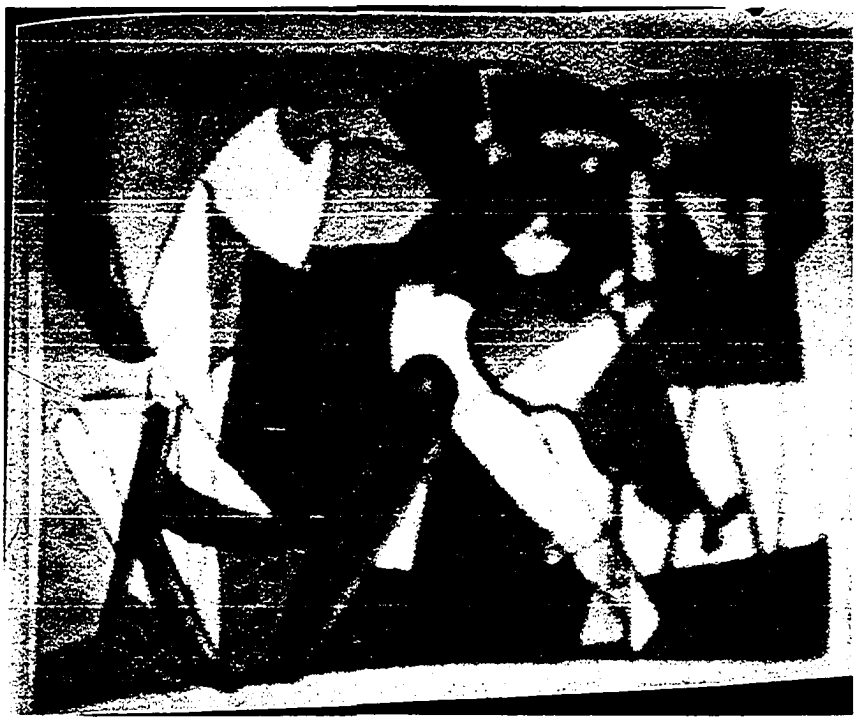


Fig. 6-19. Romare Bearden. A Blue Note. 1946, oil on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown.

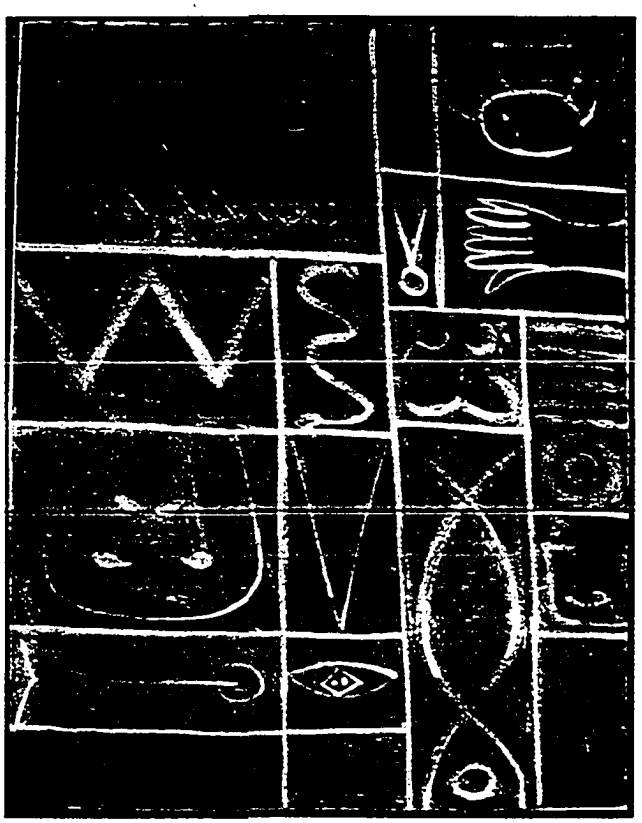


Fig. 6-20. Adolph Gottlieb. Cryptic Tablets. 1946-47, oil and tempera on canvas, 32 x 25". Coll: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University Art Collection, New York City.

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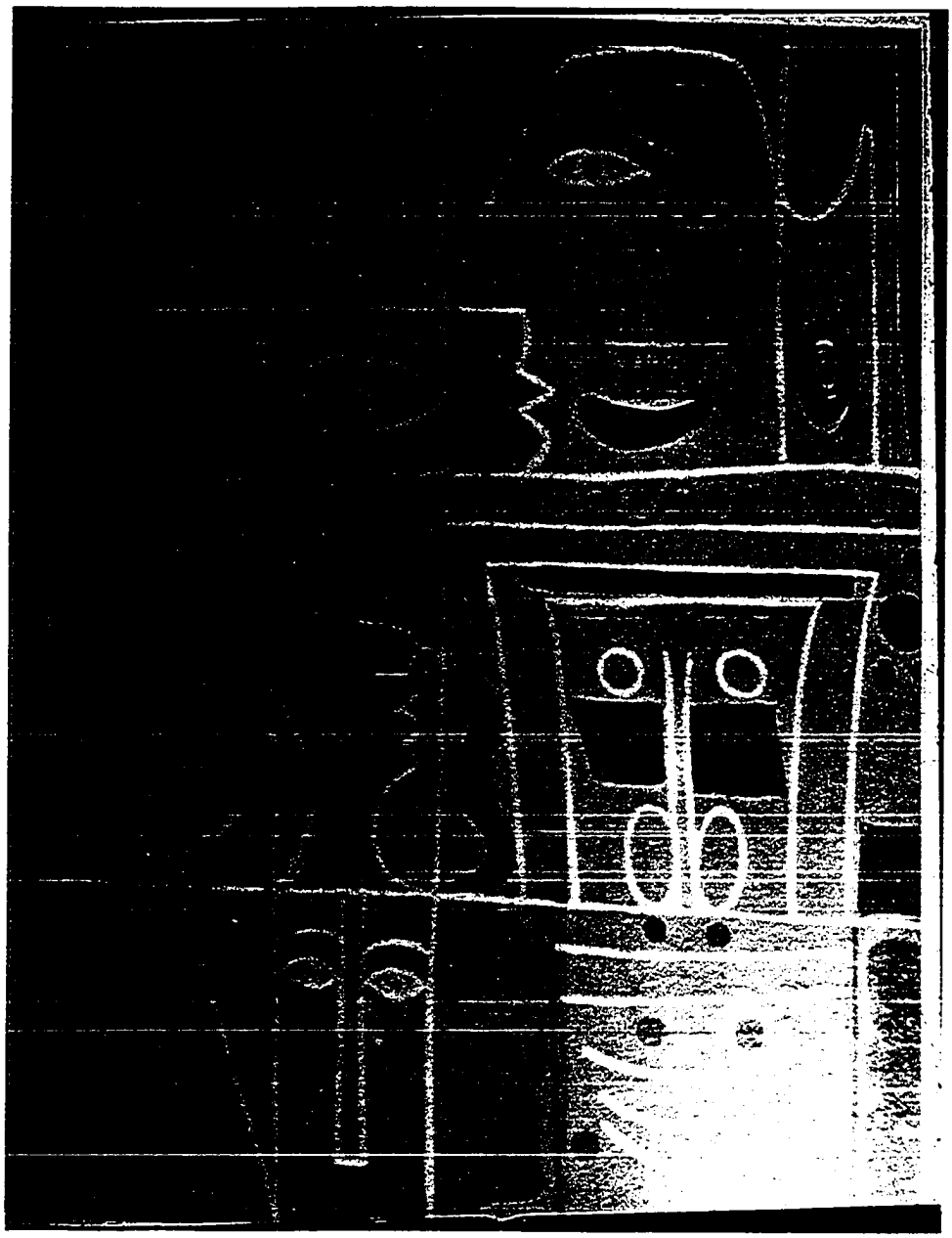


Fig. 6-21. Adolph Gottlieb. The Home of the Magician. 1946, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Sold at Sotheby's Auction, Lot #276, November 14, 1991, to unidentified buyer.

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Fig. 6-22. Carl Holty. Trees. 1946-47, oil on canvas, 68 x 48". Whereabouts unknown.

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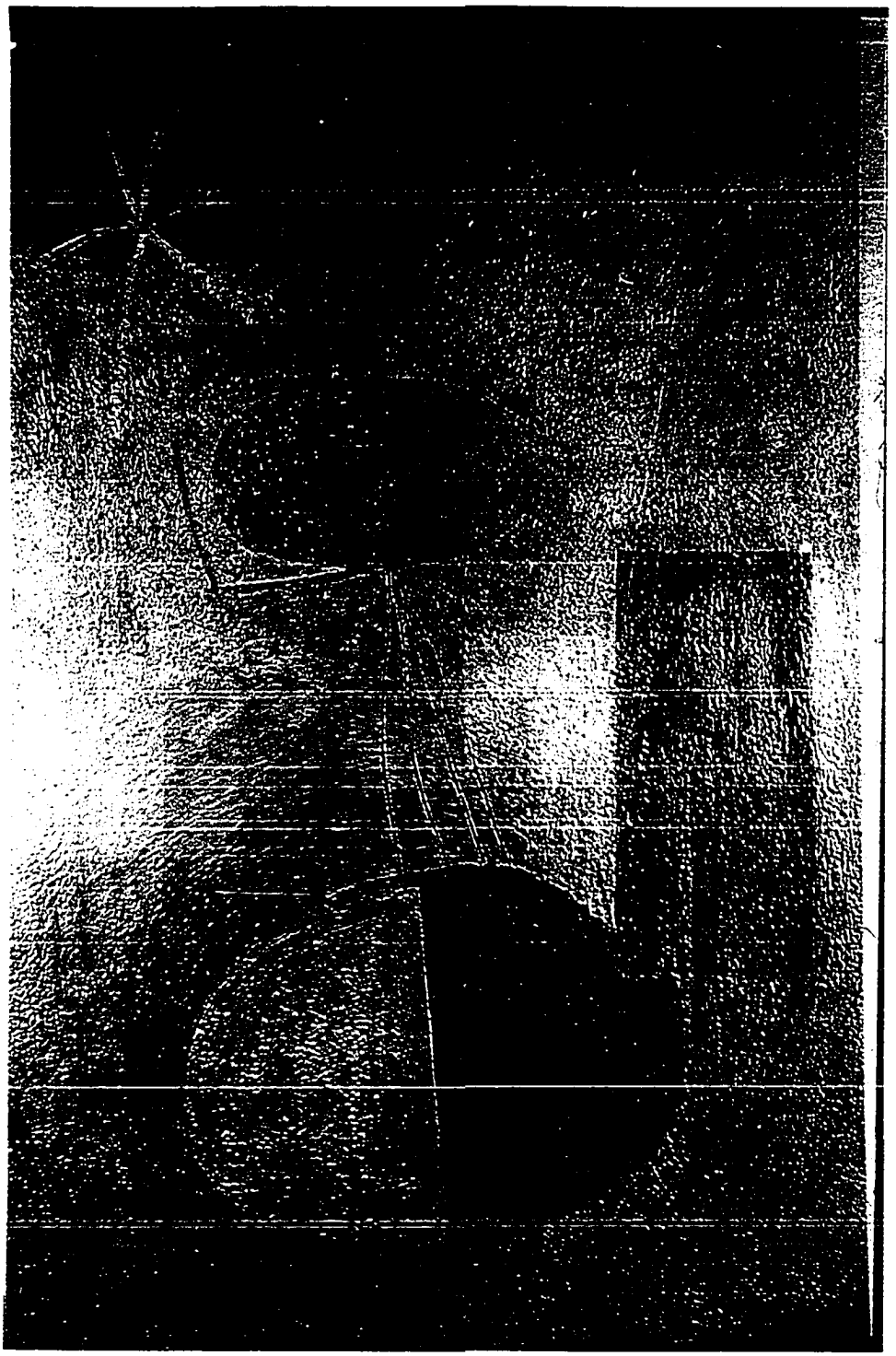


Fig. 6-23. Robert Motherwell. Orange Personage. 1947, oil and sand on canvas, 54 3/4 x 37". Whereabouts unknown.

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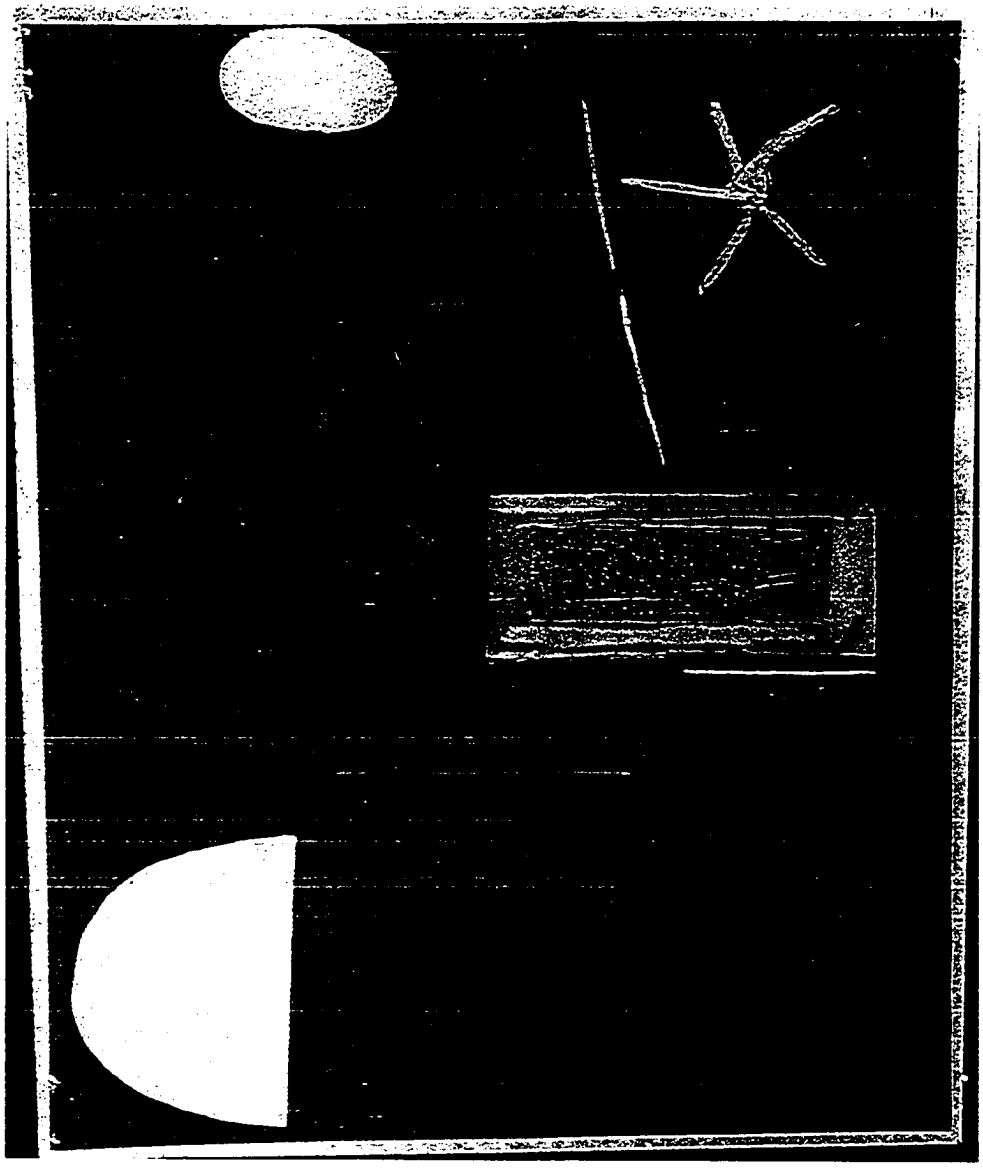


Fig. 6-24. Robert Motherwell. Starry Personage. 1946, oil and sand on canvas, dimensions and whereabouts unknown.

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Fig. 6-25. Jackson Pollock. She-Wolf. 1943, oil, gouache and plaster on canvas, 41 7/8 x 67". tColl: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

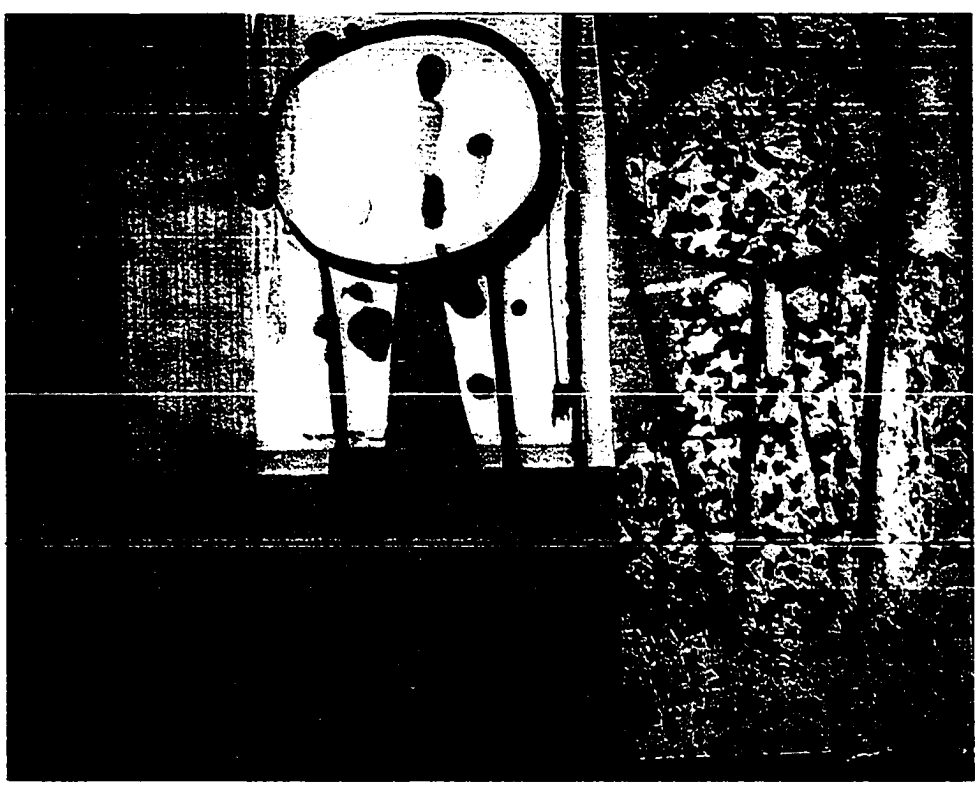


Fig. 6-26. Robert Motherwell. Poncho Villa, Dead and Alive. 1943, gouache and oil with collage on cardboard, 28 x 35 7/8". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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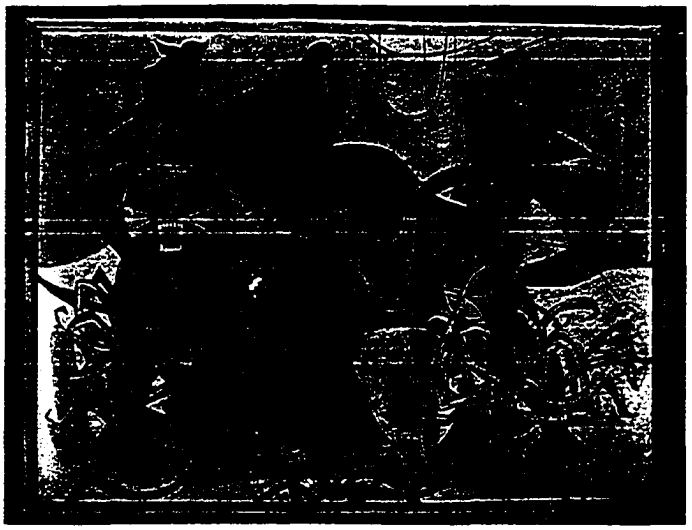


Fig. 7-1. The Red Robe. 1947, oil on canvas, 36 x 48".
Coll: The Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas, Austin.



Fig. 7-2. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Triptych, Panel 1, left side). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 3 feet. Coll: Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico.

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Fig. 7-3. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Triptych, Panel 2, central). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 5 feet.

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Fig. 7-4. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Triptych, Panel 3, right side). 1947, oil on board, 6 x 3 feet.

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Fig. 7-5. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (With artist standing in front of full triptych, as installed for opening reception at Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York City).
1947, oil on board, 6 x 11 feet.

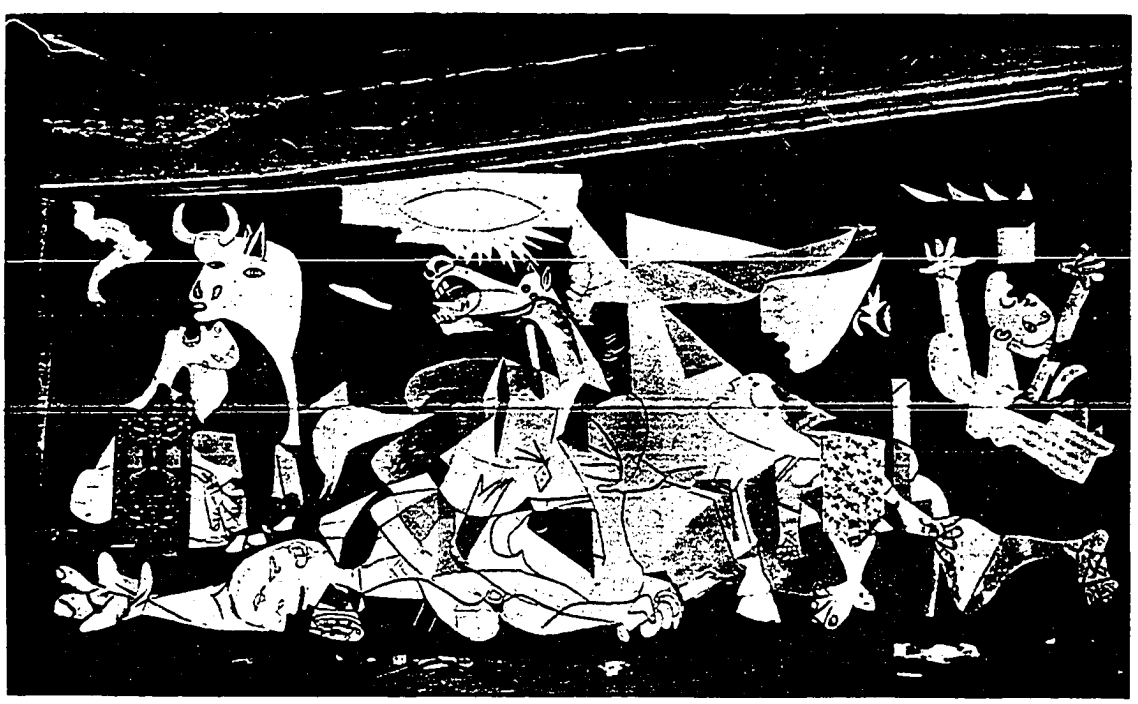


Fig. 7-6. Pablo Picasso. Guernica. 1937, oil on canvas, 11' 5 1/2" x 25' 5 3/4".
vColl: Museo del Prado, Madrid.

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Fig. 7-7. Pablo Picasso. Bullfight. 1934, oil on canvas, 38 1/4 x 51 1/4". Coll: Victor W. Ganz, New York City.



Fig. 7-8. Black Lion. 1947, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Whereabouts unknown.

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Fig. 7-9. Two Figures. 1946-47, oil on canvas, 47 x 36".
Coll: The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia.

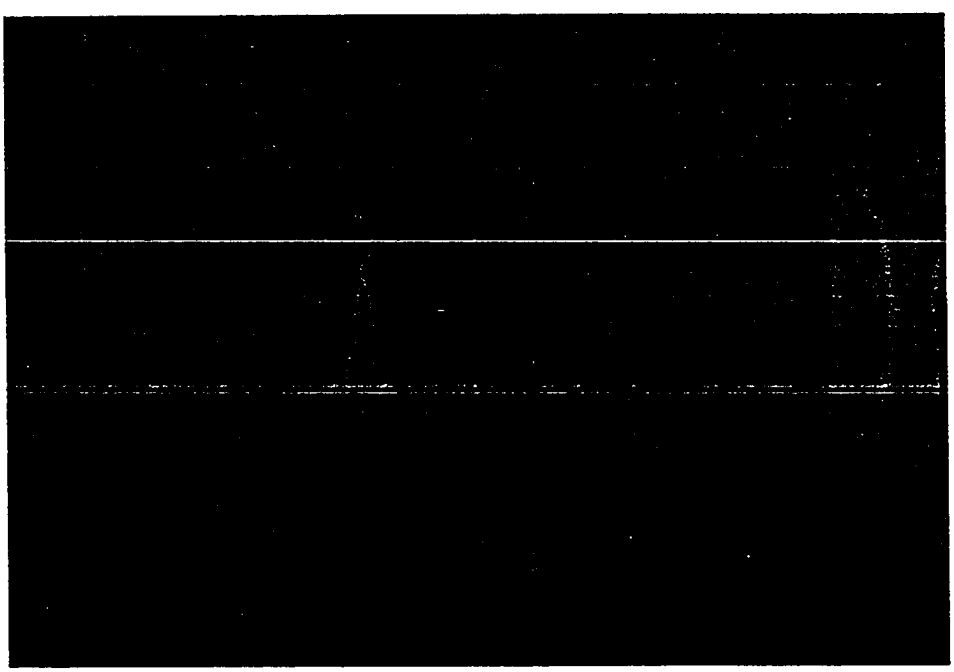


Fig. 7-10. Adolph Gottlieb. The Prisoners. 1946, oil on canvas, 36 x 48". Private collection.

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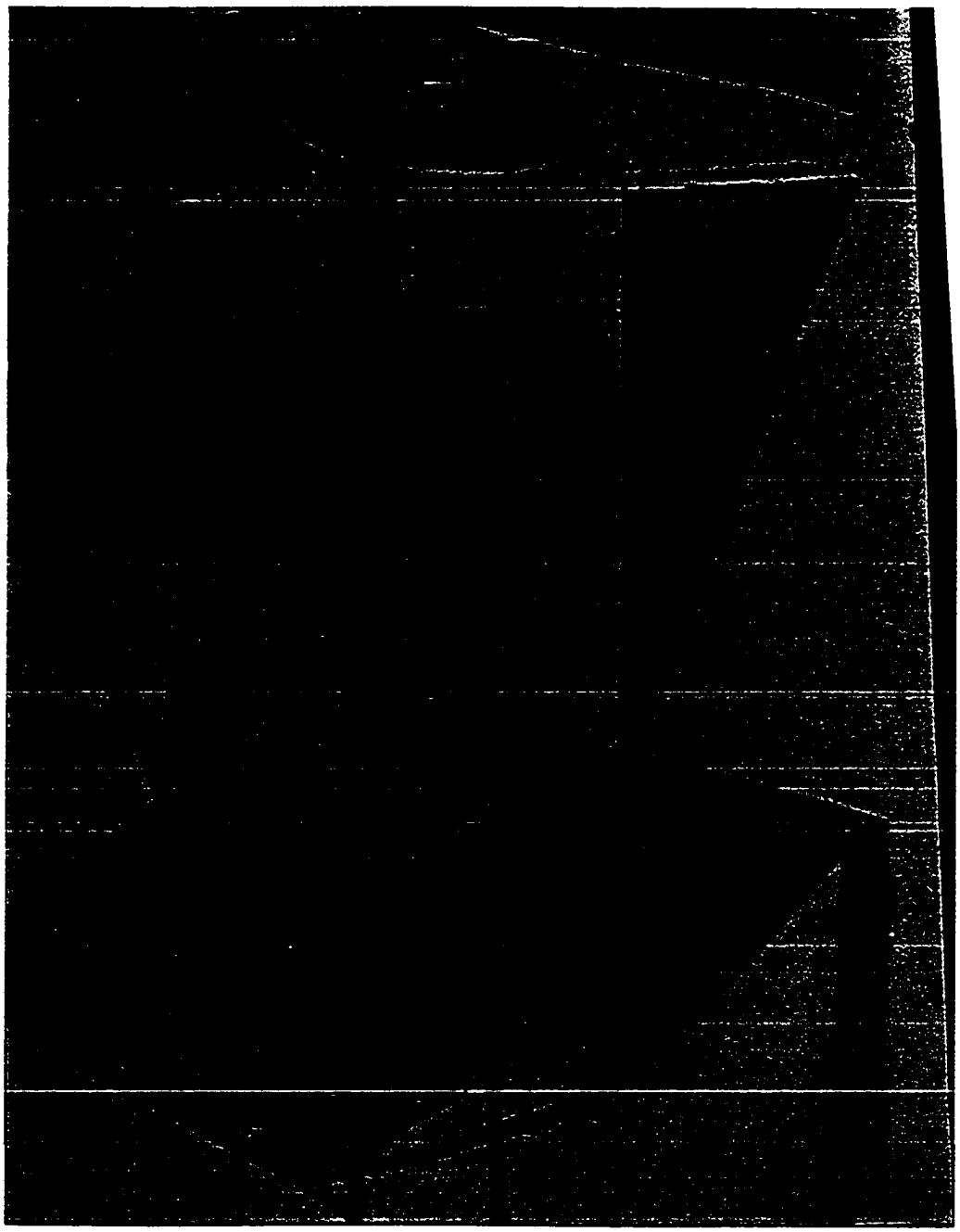


Fig. 7-11. Robert Motherwell. Yellow Figure. (Personage with Yellow Ochre and White). 1947, oil on canvas, 72 x 54". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel M. Kootz.

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Fig. 7-12. Woman with Birds. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Whereabouts unknown.

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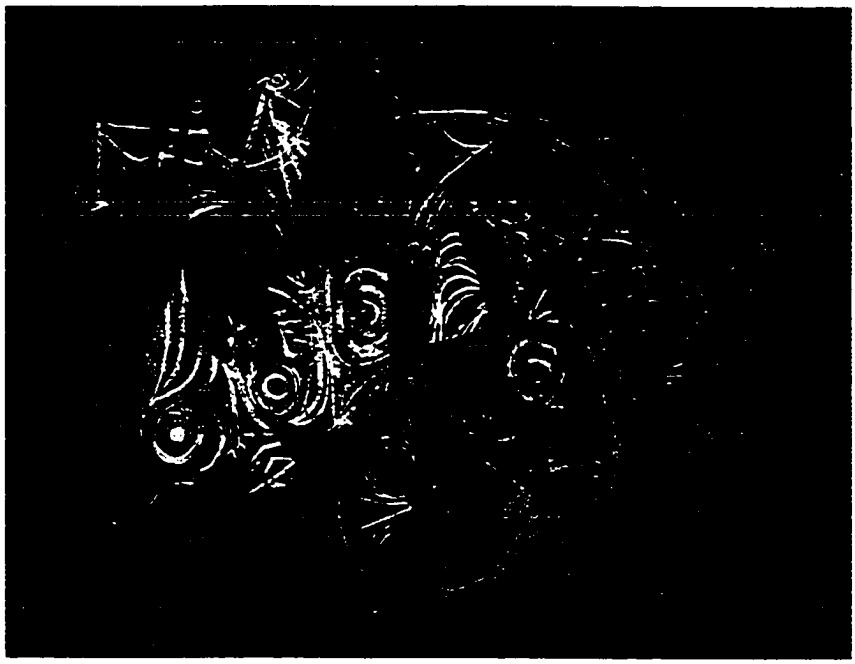


Fig. 7-14. Woman with Birds. 1947, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Coll: Matthew Stirling, New York City.



Fig. 7-15. Woman with Bird. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30".
Coll: The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

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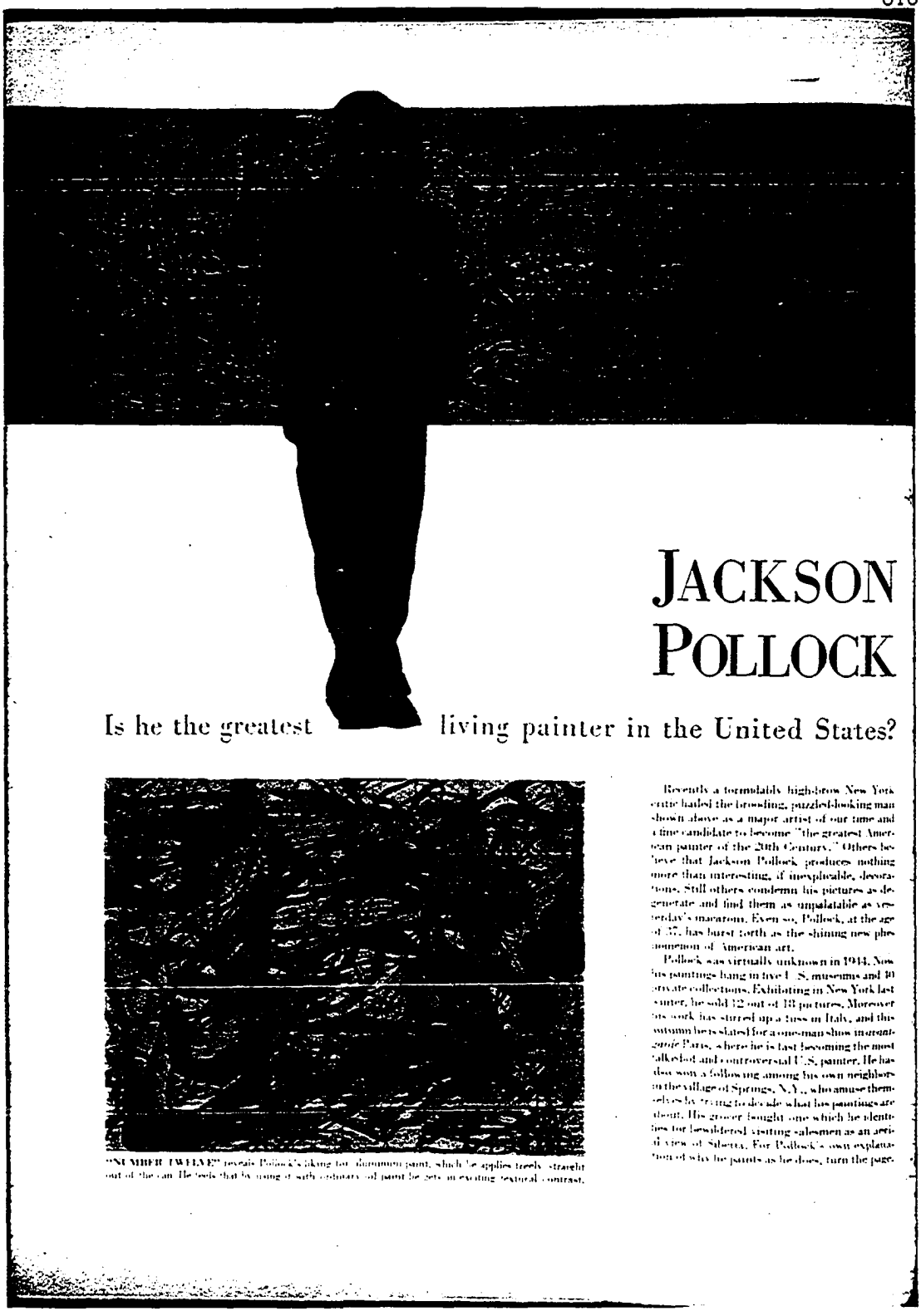


Fig. 7-16. Jackson Pollock. White Cockatoo: Number 24A, 1948.
1948, enamel and oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 9', 6".
(Note that the background color has faded from that of orange to dark brown,
due to twenty-five years hung in sunlight). Coll: Formerly American Broadcasting Companies,
New York City; Currently Private collection, California.



Fig. 7-17. Jackson Pollock. The She-Wolf. 1943, oil on canvas, 41 7/8 x 67".
The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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JACKSON POLLOCK

Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?

"NUMBER TWELVE" reveals Pollock's liking for aluminum paint, which he applies freely straight out of the can. He feels that by using it with ordinary oil paint he sets up exciting textural contrast.

Recently a formidably highbrow New York critic hailed the brooding, puzzled-looking man shown above as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become "the greatest American painter of the 20th Century." Others believe that Jackson Pollock produces nothing more than interesting, if inexplicable, decorations. Still others condemn his pictures as degenerate and find them as unpalatable as yesterday's macaroni. Even so, Pollock, at the age of 37, has burst forth as the shining new phenomenon of American art.

Pollock was virtually unknown in 1944. Now his paintings hang in five U. S. museums and 10 private collections. Exhibiting in New York last winter, he sold 32 out of 33 pictures. Moreover his work has stirred up a fuss in Italy, and this autumn he is slated for a one-man show in *avant-garde* Paris, where he is fast becoming the most talked-of and controversial U. S. painter. He has also won a following among his own neighbors in the village of Springs, N.Y., who amuse themselves by trying to decide what his paintings are about. His grocer bought one which he identifies for bewildered visiting salesmen as an artistic view of Siberia. For Pollock's own explanation of why he paints as he does, turn the page.

Fig. 7-18. "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in America?".
Life, Vol. 27, no. 6, August 8, 1949, p. 42, left side of double spread. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

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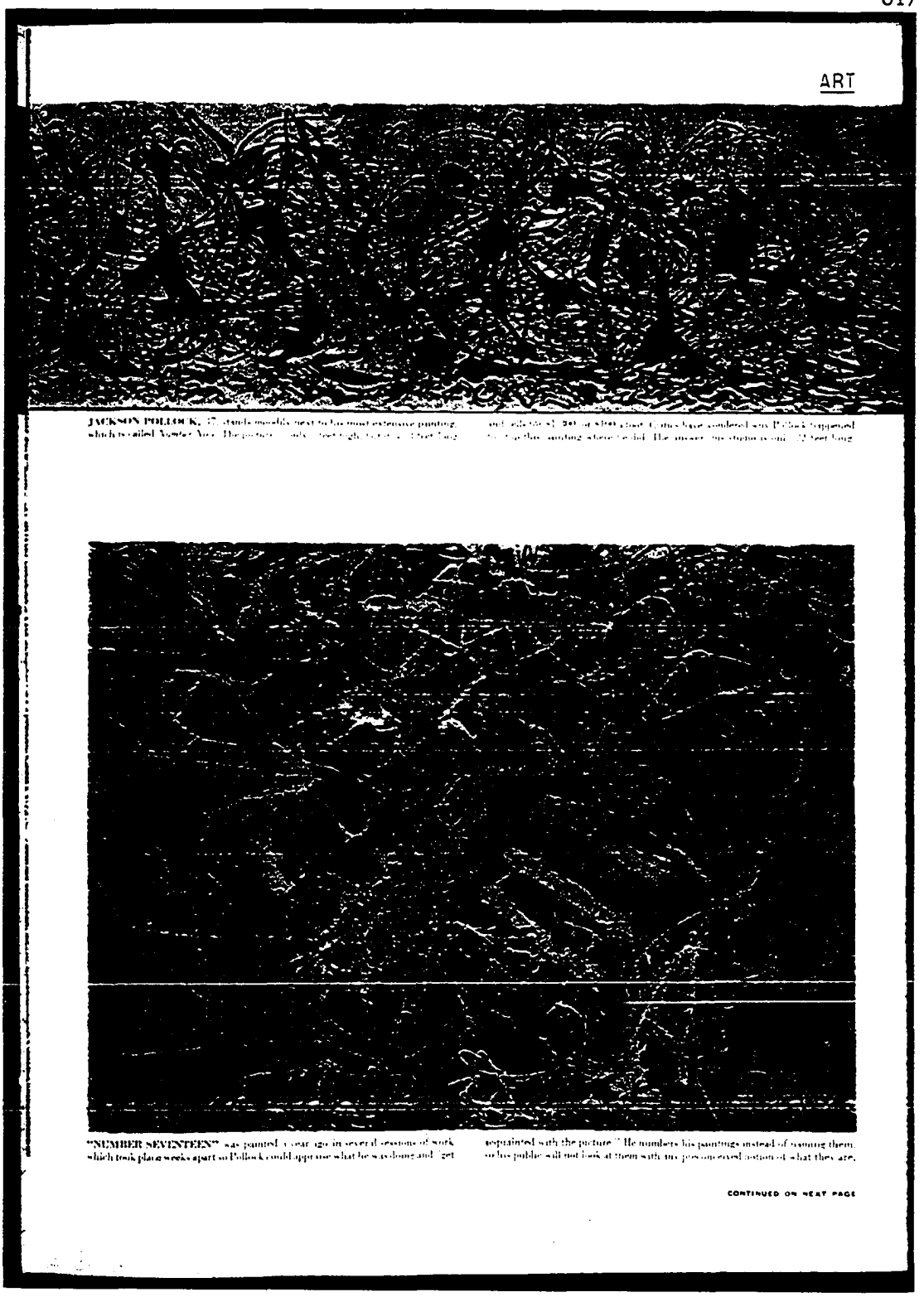


Fig. 7-19. "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in America?". Life, Vol. 27, no. 6, August 8, 1949, p. 43, right side of double spread. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

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Fig. 7-20. Bird Catcher. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Holbrook Collection, Georgia.

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Fig. 7-21. Figure with Birds. Ca. 1948, India ink and gouache on paper, 17 3/4 x 23 3/4". Estate of Byron Browne.



Fig. 7-22. Circus. 1947, watercolor and India ink on paper, 25 x 19". Private collection.

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Fig. 7-23. Clown and Lion. 1948, watercolor and India ink on paper, 25 x 19". Private collection.

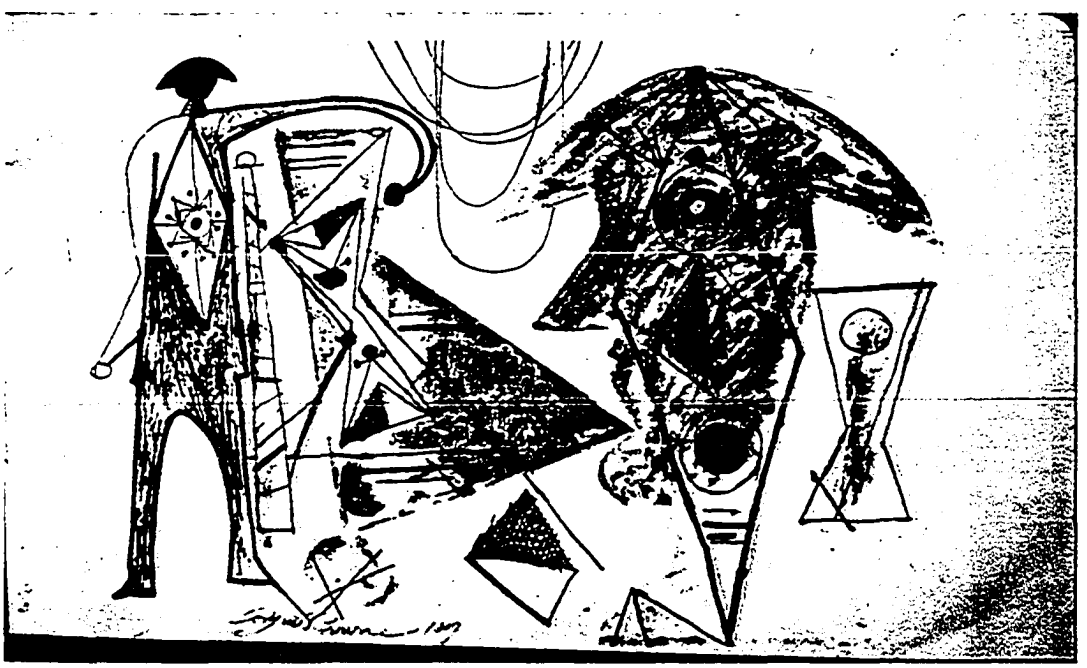


Fig. 7-24. Two Clowns. 1947, watercolor and India ink on paper, 19 x 25". Private collection.

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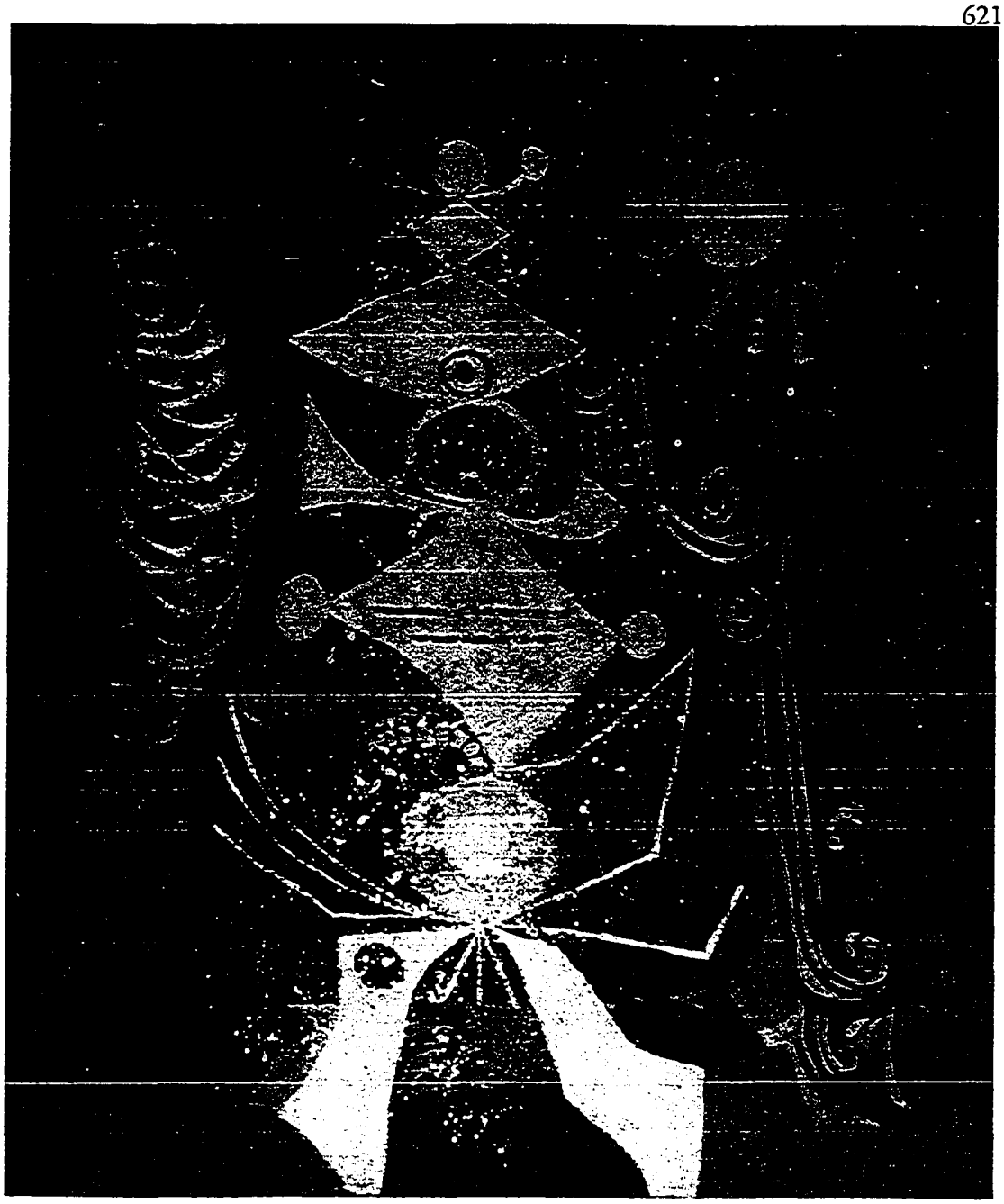


Fig. 8-1. Dancer. 1947, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: The Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

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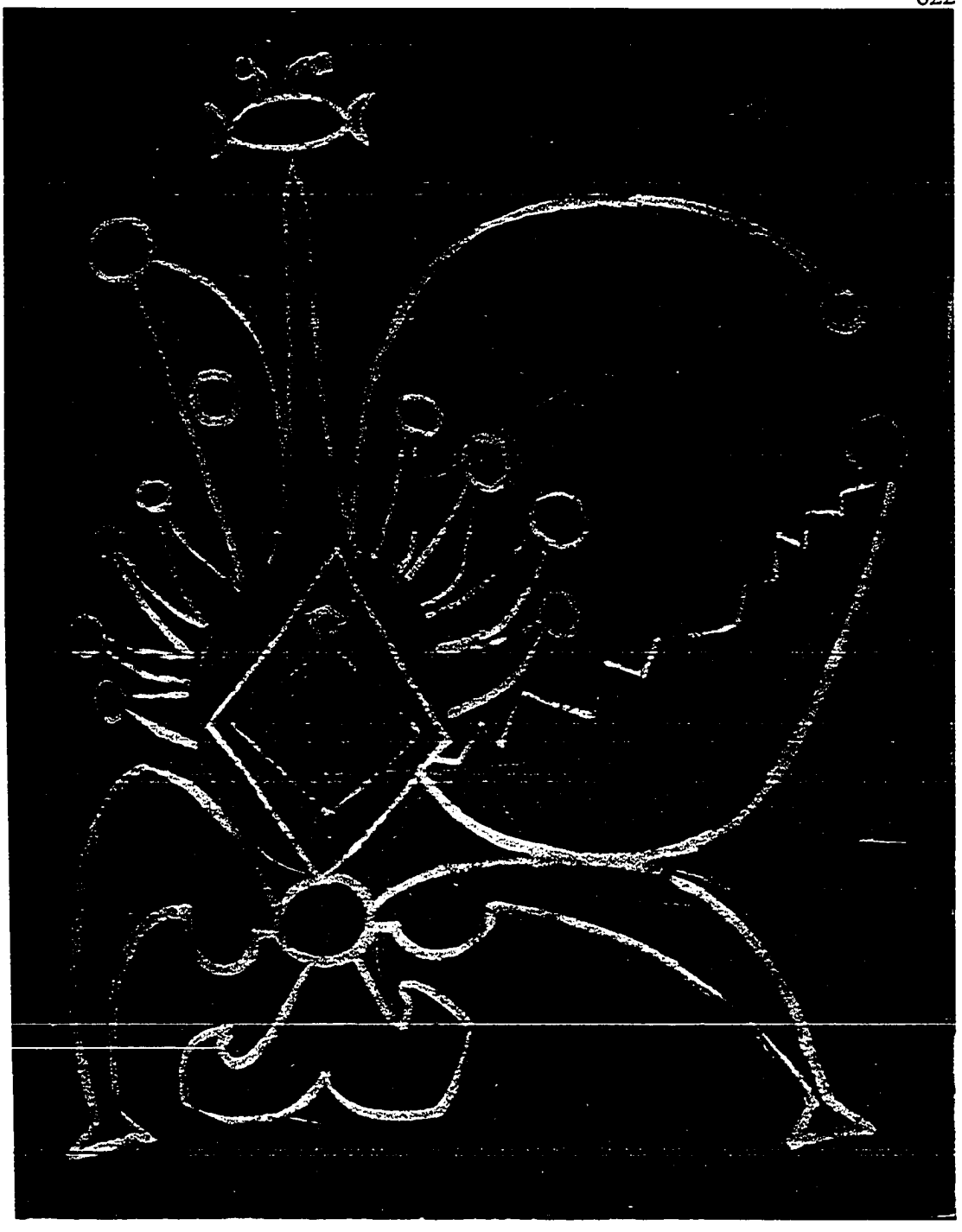


Fig. 8-2. Crustacean. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-3. Aphrodite. 1948, oil on canvas, string, 30 x 24". Private collection.

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Fig. 8-4. Crustacean Dancer. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Alan Jacobs, New York City.

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Fig. 8-5. Sea Creature. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Coll: Advanced Products Corporation, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

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Fig. 8-6. Gold Pectoral Ornament. Pre-Columbian, size unavailable.
Coll: National Bank of Columbia, Gold Museum, Bogota, Columbia.
(Photograph, cut out reproduction pasted onto homemade dust jacket of scrapbook).



Fig. 8-7. Untitled (Crustacean). 1948, casein tempera, India ink, pencil on paper, 26 x 20 3/8".
Estate of Byron Browne.

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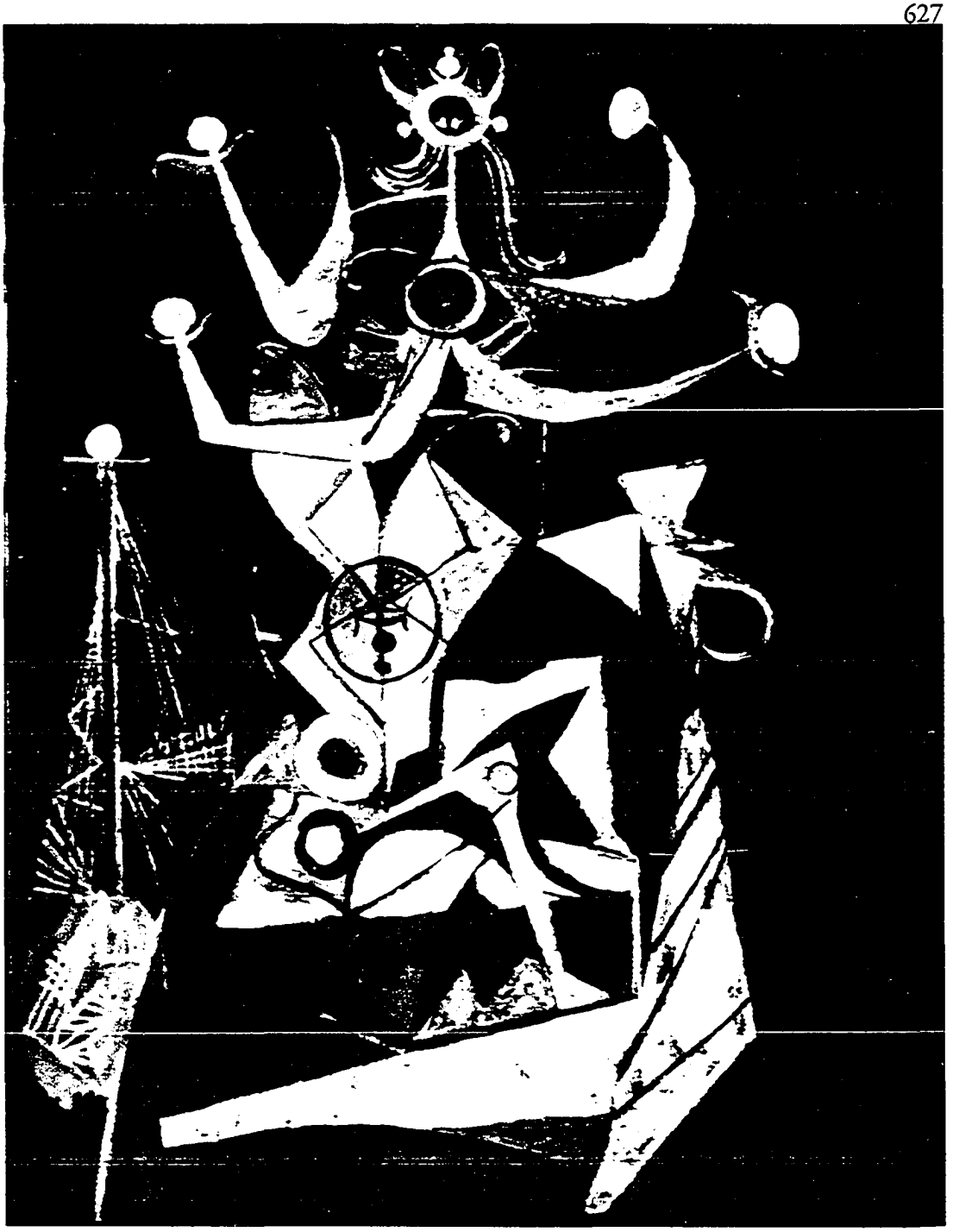


Fig. 8-8. Nocturne. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-9. Homage in Black. 1948, oil on canvas, 26 x 20".
Coll: Lehman Brothers, Kuhn, Loeb Company, New York City.

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Fig. 8-10. Figure on a Beach-Genesis. 1948, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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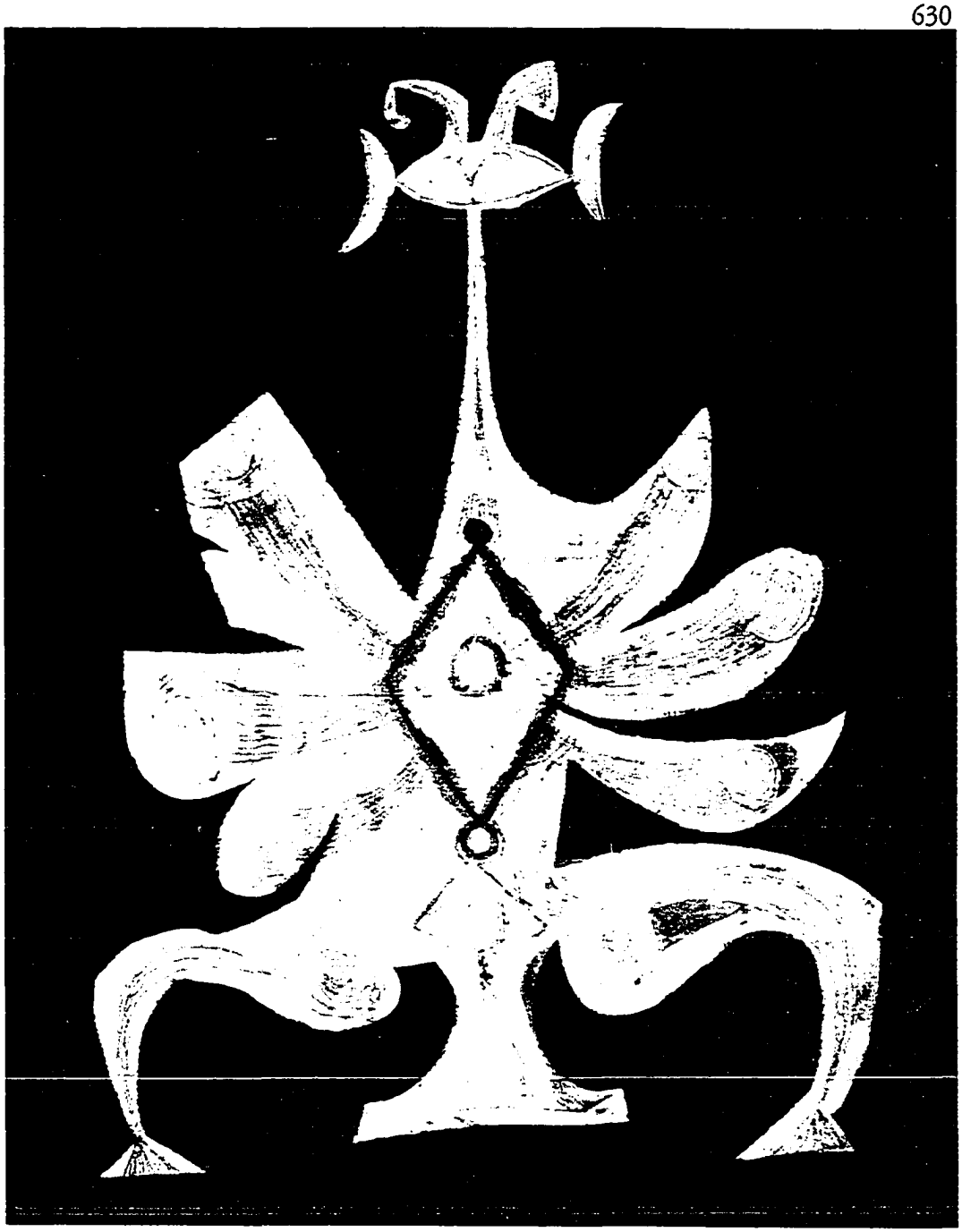


Fig. 8-11. Queen of the Crustaceans. 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-12. Alberto Giacometti. Woman with Her Throat Cut. 1932, bronze, 8 x 34 1/2 x 25".
Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.



Fig. 8-13. Crustacean Carnival. 1949, casein tempera on paper, 20 x 26".
Coll: David Sachs, Larchmont, New York.

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Fig. 8-14. Pyrrhic Dance. 1952, oil on canvas, 30 x 38". Coll. Matthew Stirling, New York.t

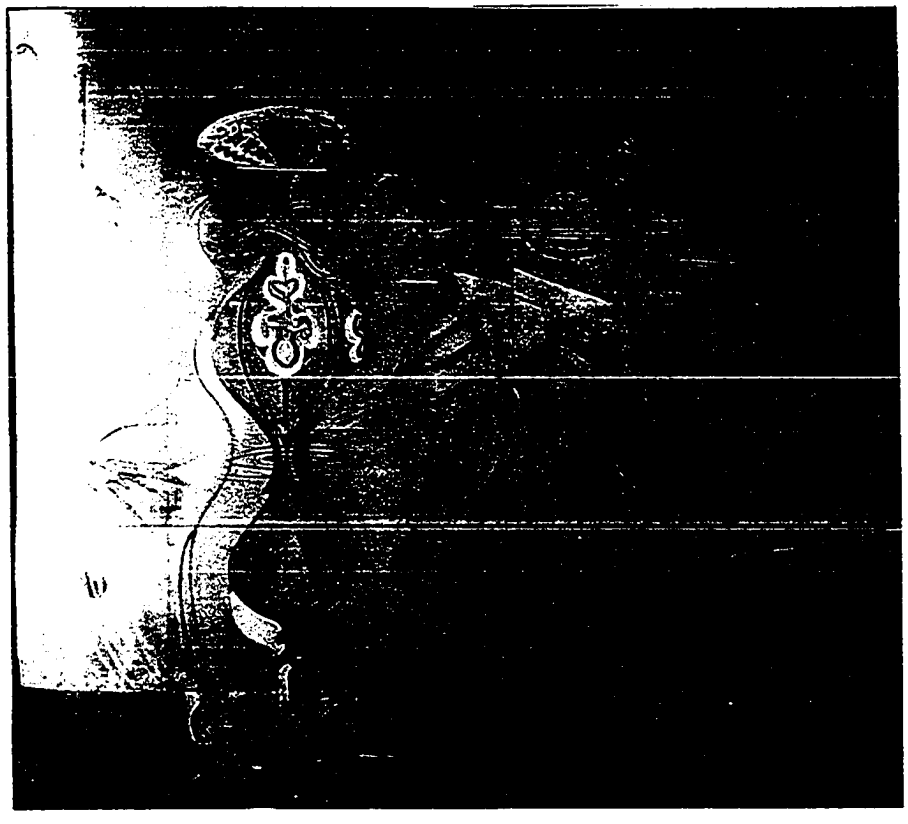
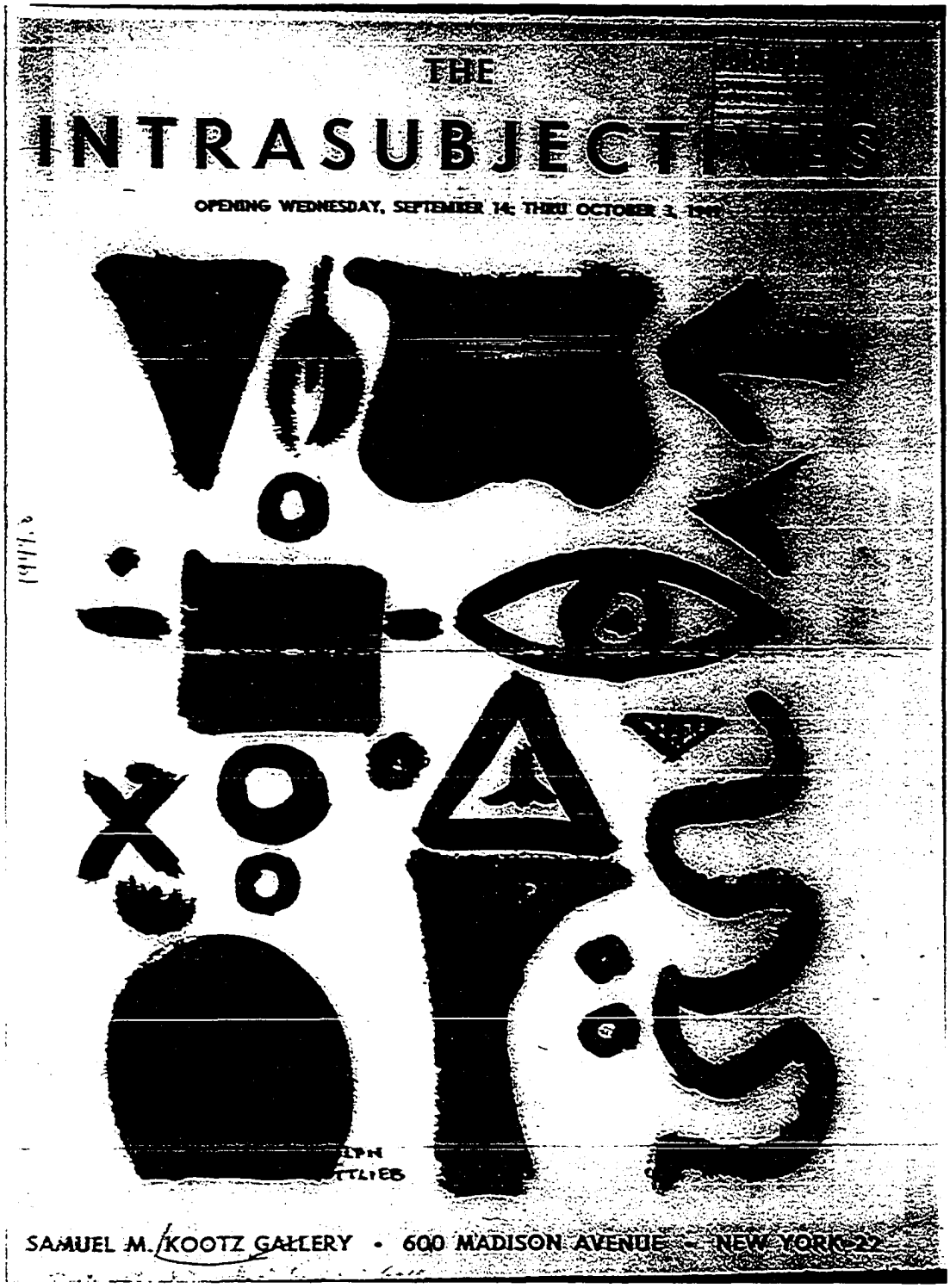


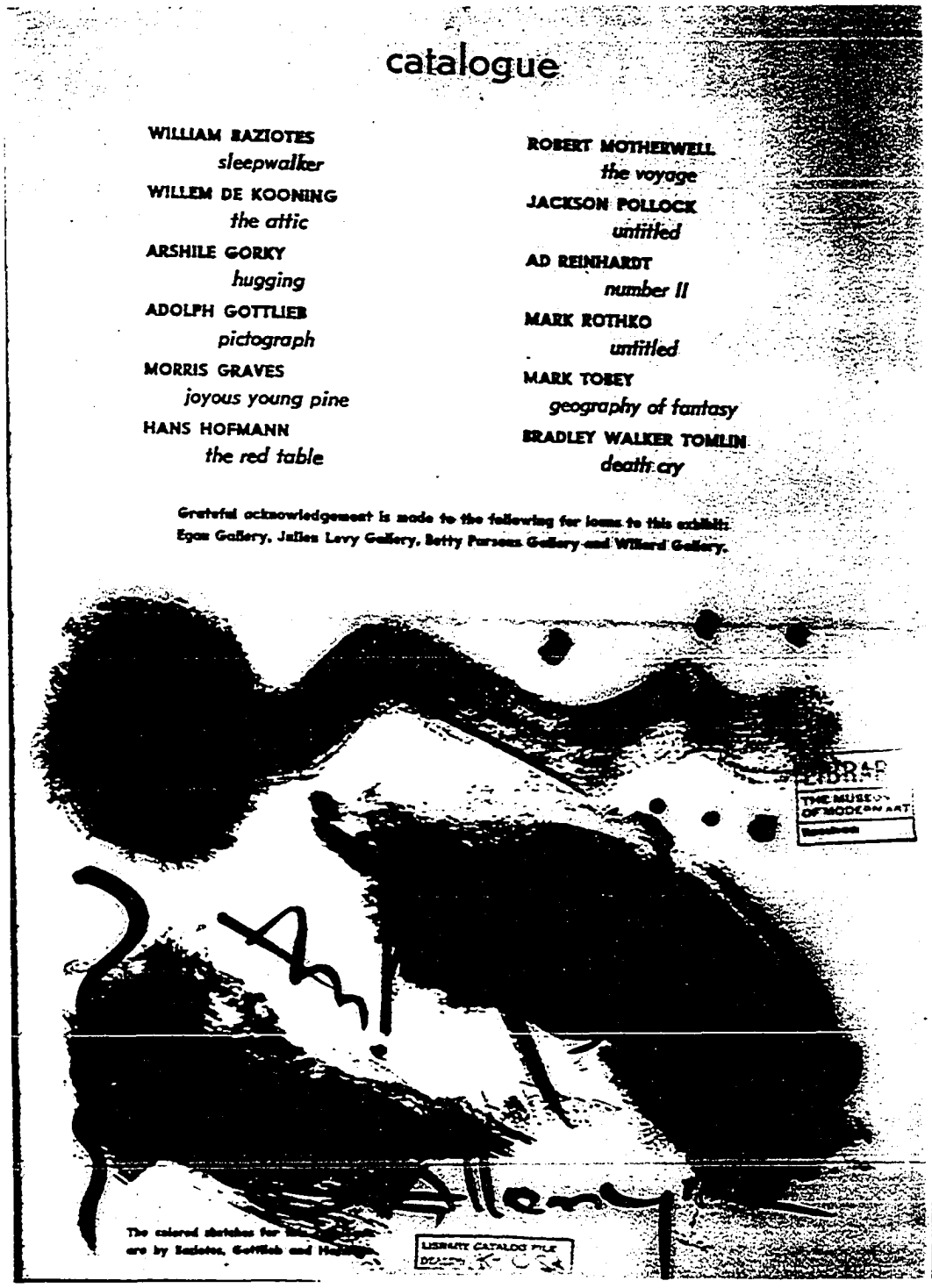
Fig. 8-15. Mark Rothko. Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea. 1944, oil on canvas, 75 3/8 x 84 3/4". Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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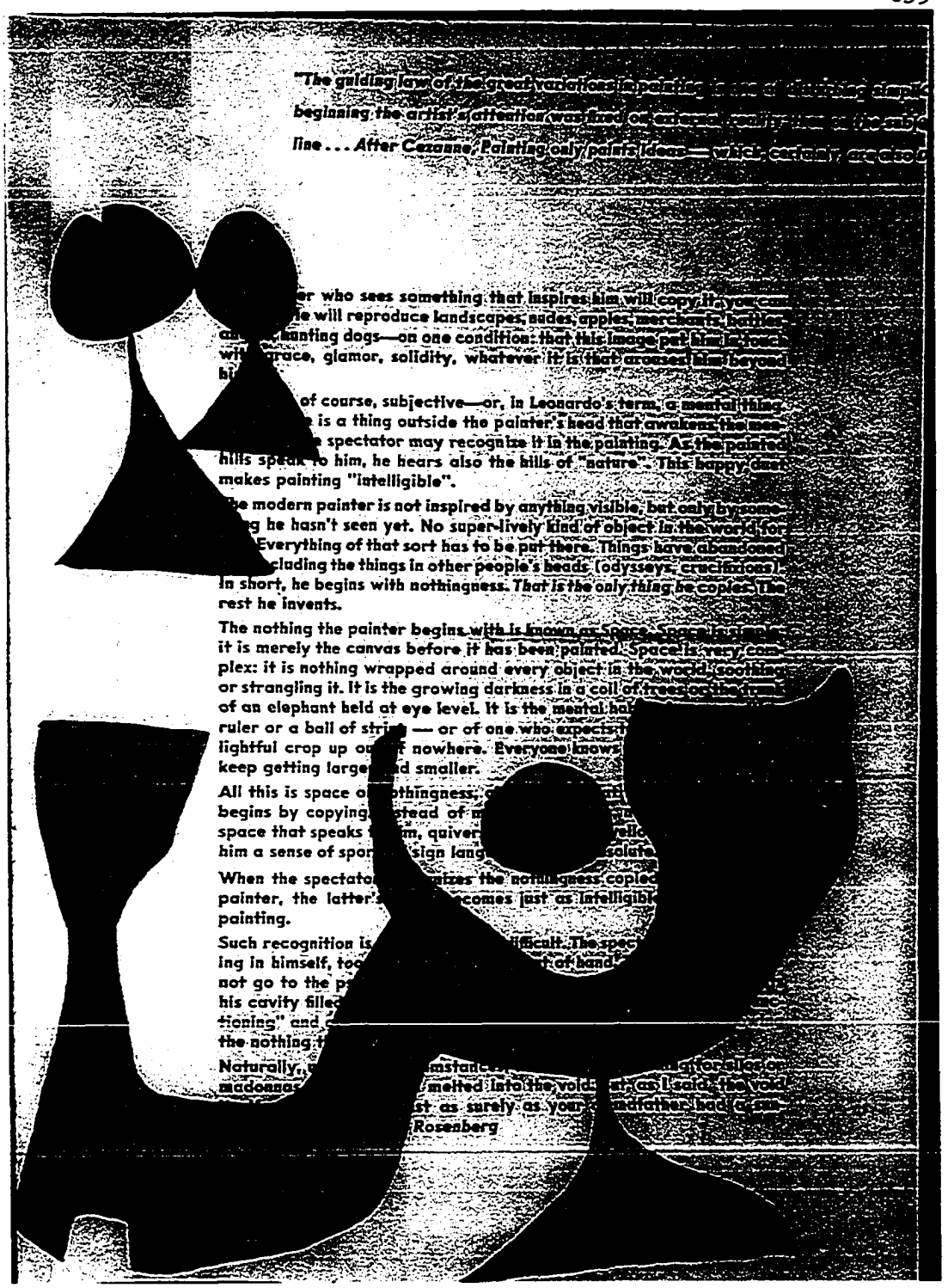
Figs. 8-16, William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb and Hans Hofmann.
The Intrasubjectives. Four-page, one-sided, fold-over exhibition brochure/catalogue.
1949, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4" (each quarter sheet), 29 1/2 x 23 1/2" (unfolded), on glossy paper stock.
Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York, September 14-October 3, 1949.
Photo courtesy The Library of The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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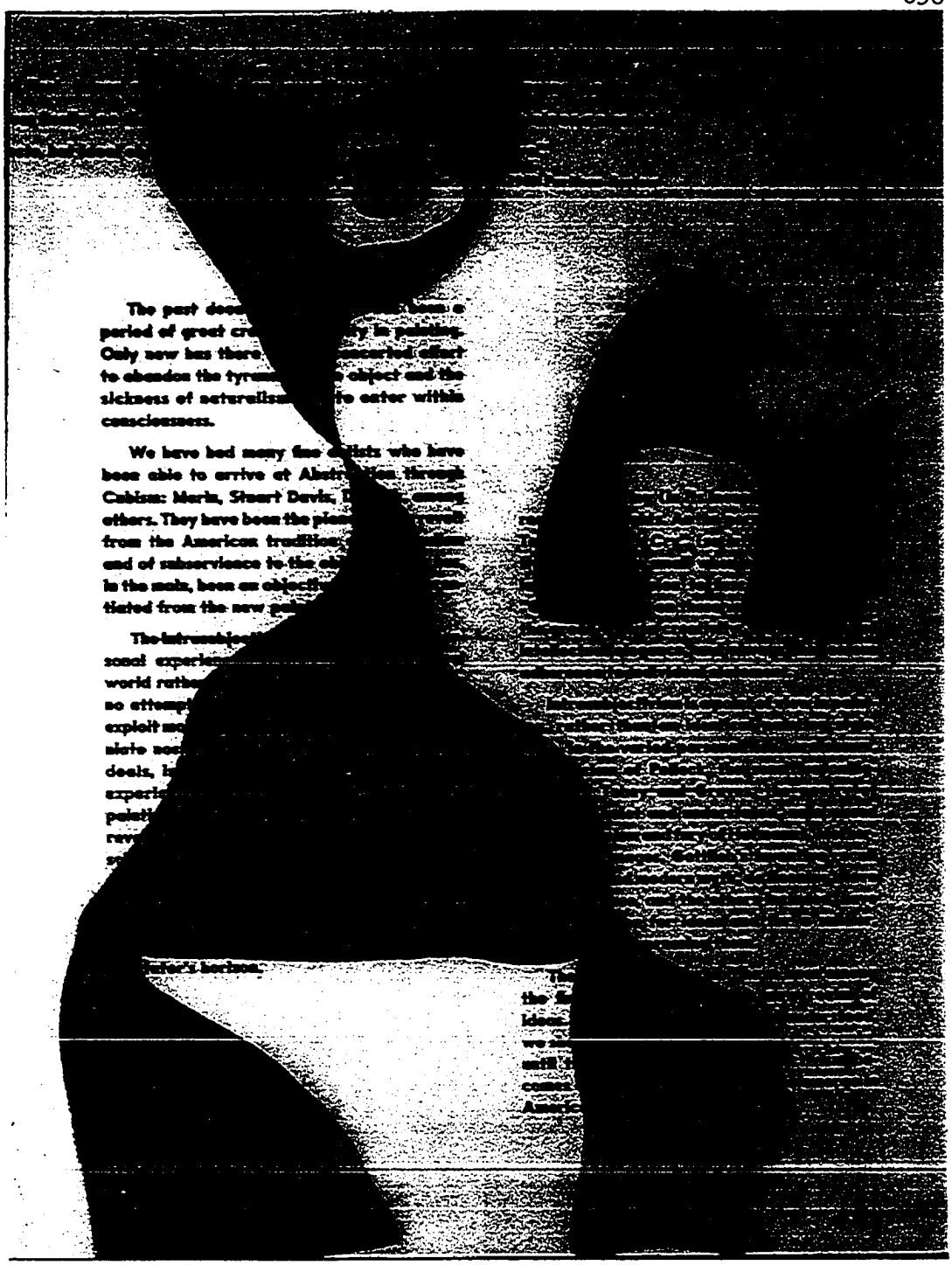
Figs. 8-17, William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb and Hans Hofmann.
The Intrasubjectives. Four-page, one-sided, fold-over exhibition brochure/catalogue.
1949, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4" (each quarter sheet), 29 1/2 x 23 1/2" (unfolded), on glossy paper stock.
Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York, September 14-October 3, 1949.
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Figs. 8-18, William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb and Hans Hofmann.
The Intrasubjectives. Four-page, one-sided, fold-over exhibition brochure/catalogue.
1949, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4" (each quarter sheet), 29 1/2 x 23 1/2" (unfolded), on glossy paper stock.
Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York, September 14-October 3, 1949.
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Figs. 8-19, William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb and Hans Hofmann.
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1949, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4" (each quarter sheet), 29 1/2 x 23 1/2" (unfolded), on glossy paper stock.
Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York, September 14-October 3, 1949.
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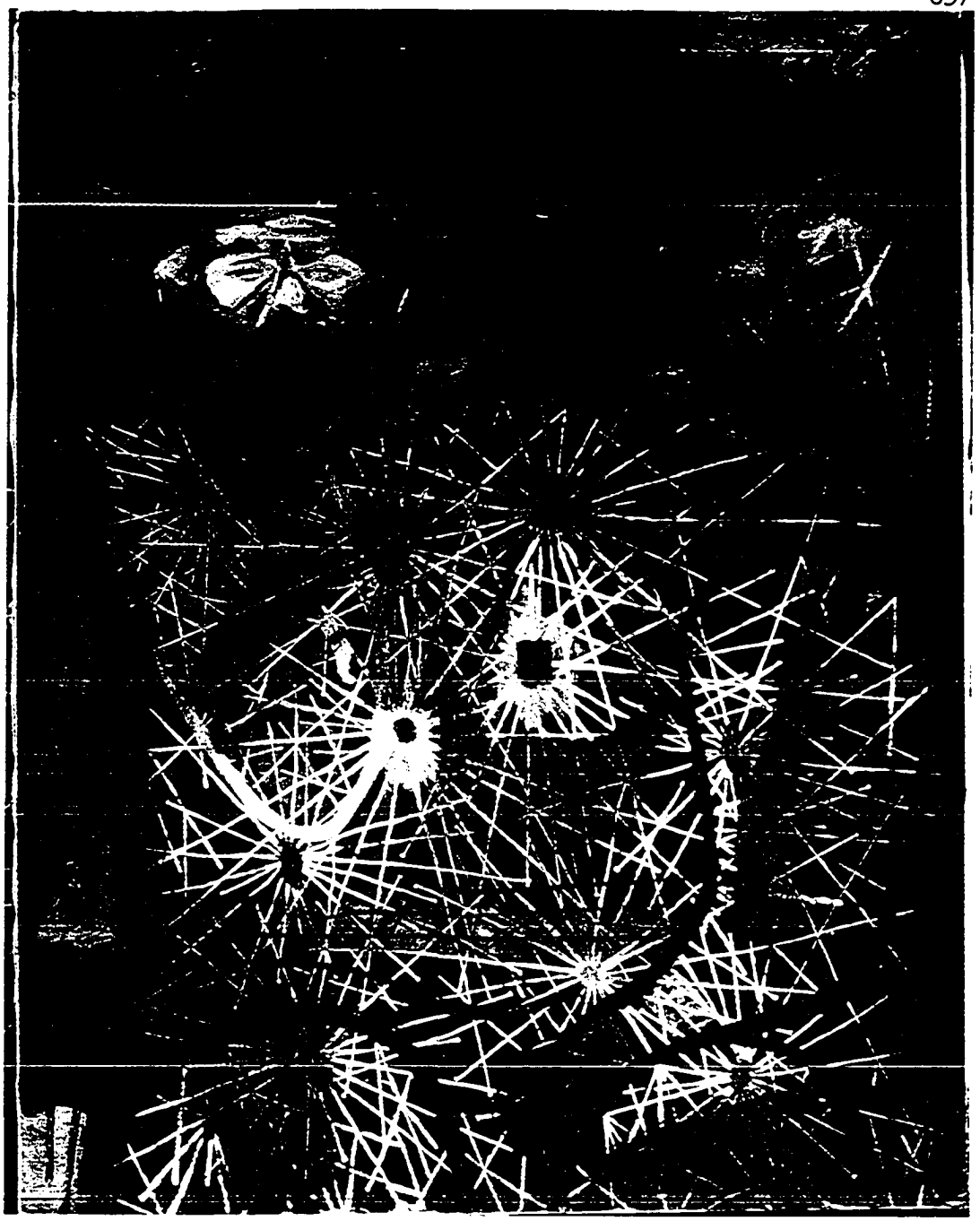


Fig. 8-20. Clown with Mask. 1950, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-21. Autumnal. 1950, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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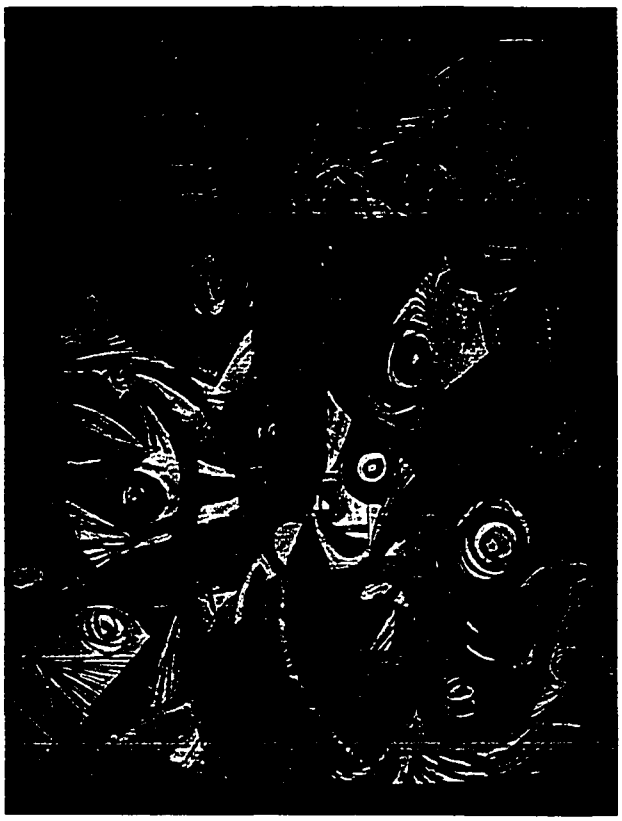


Fig. 8-22. Abstract. 1950, casein tempera and India ink on paper, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.



Fig. 8-23. Africana. 1950-51, oil and collage on canvas, 30 x 24". Coll: Ruth and Barney O'Hara.

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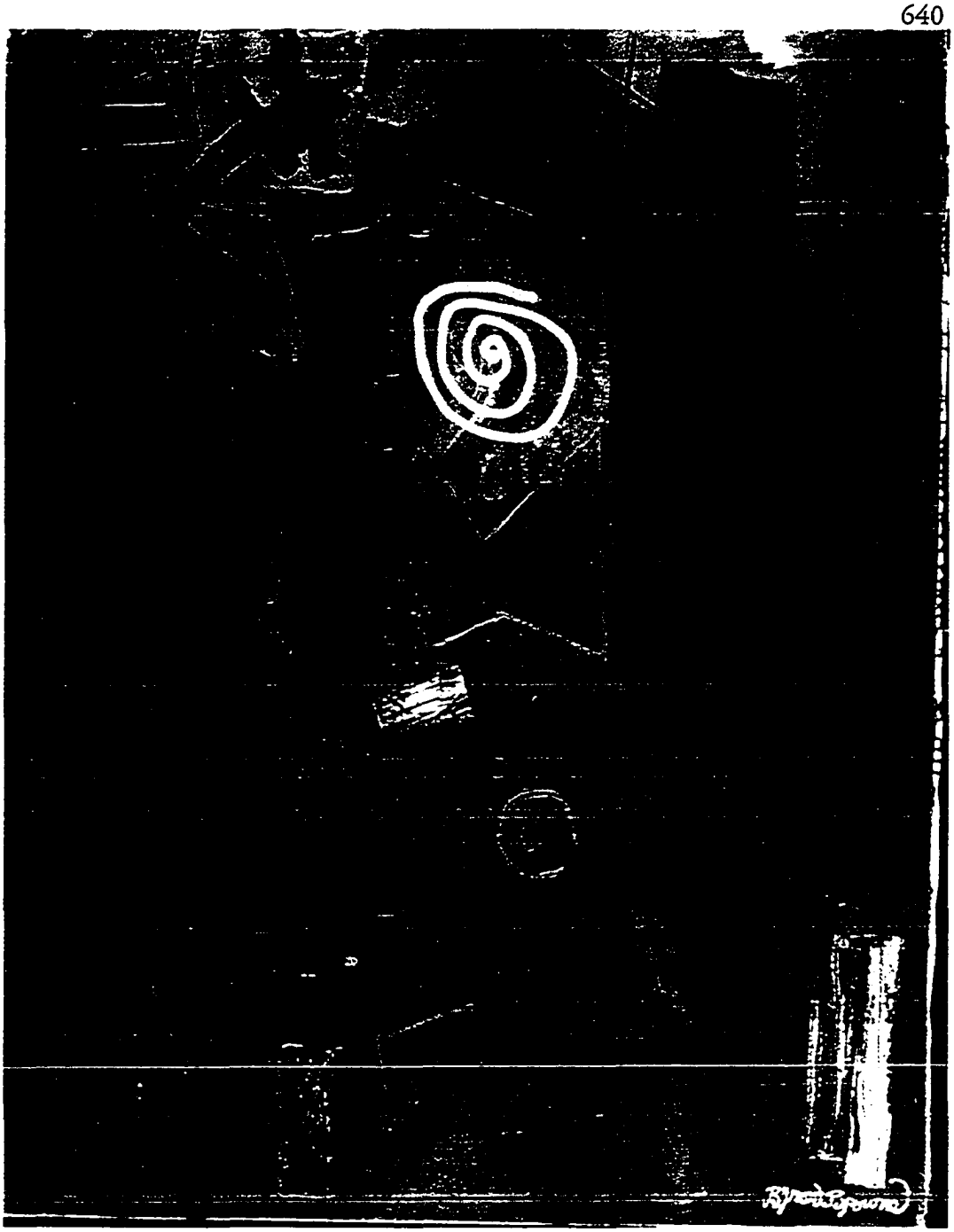


Fig. 8-24. Myth (No. 1). 1954, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-25. Tondero. 1954, oil on canvas, 30 x 24". Estate of Byron Browne.

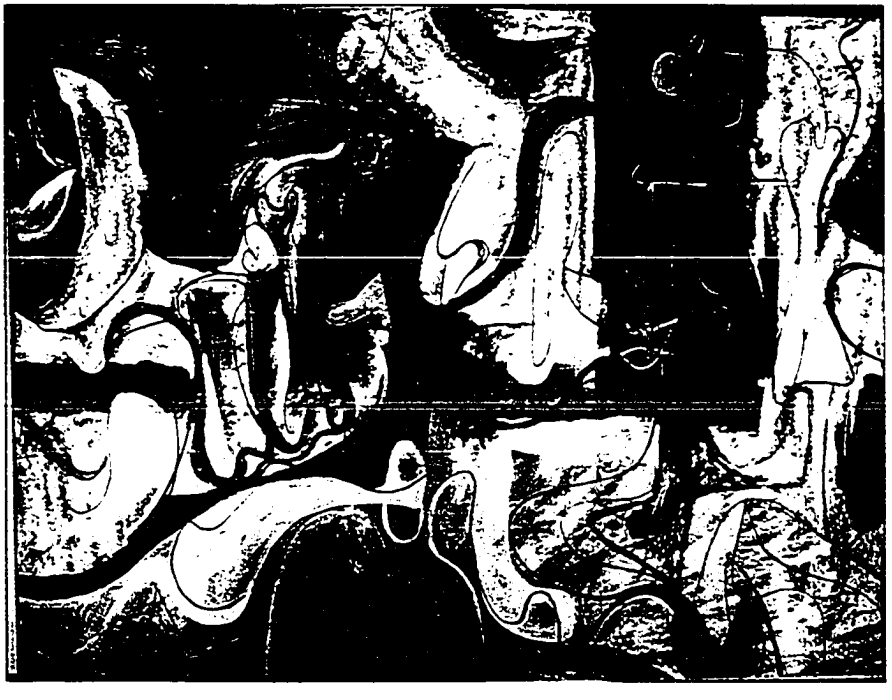


Fig. 8-26. Abstract. 1954, gouache and India ink on paper, 20 x 26". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-27. Still Life in Red. 1952-55, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. 8-28. Nuclear. 1956, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

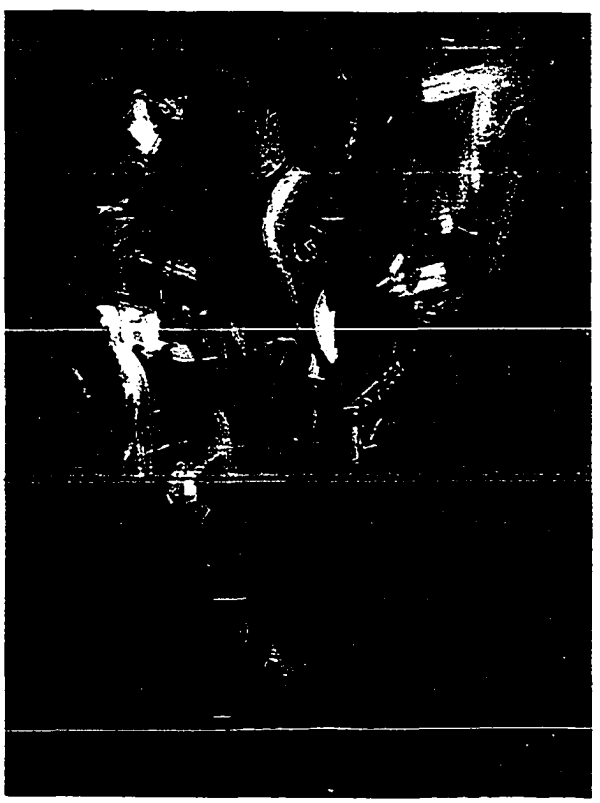
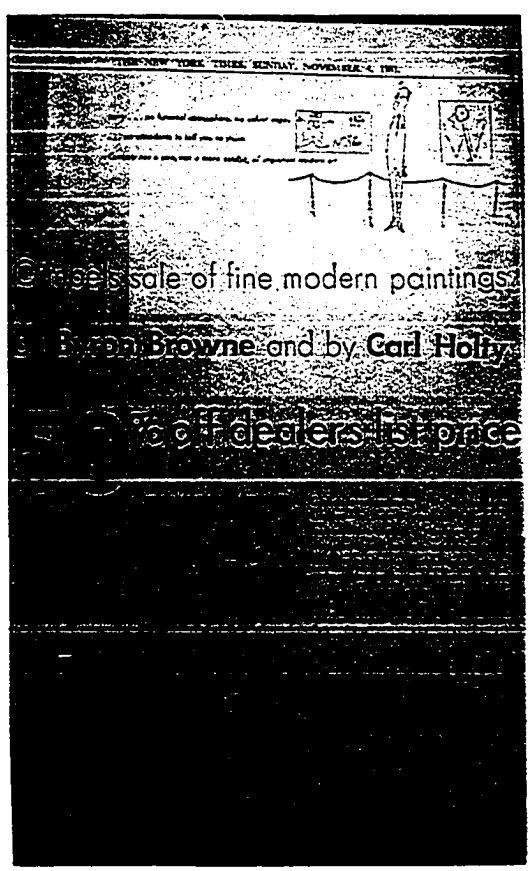


Fig. 8-29. Fiesta. 1958, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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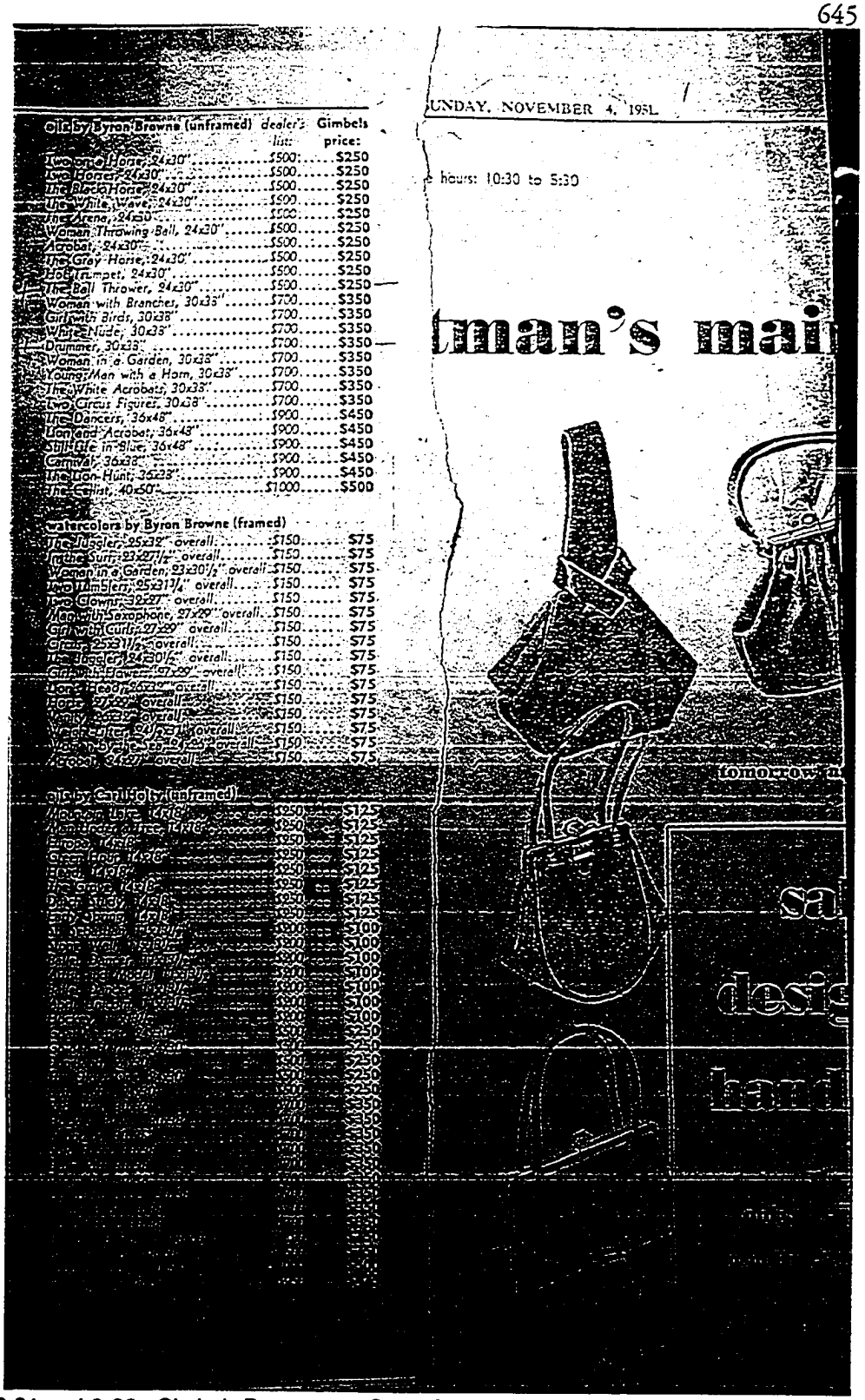


Fig. 8-30. Procession (No. 2). 1959, gouache and India ink on paper, 20 x 26". Estate of Byron Browne.



Figs. 8-31 and 8-32. Gimbels Department Store Sale Advertisement of Browne's (and Holty's) Paintings.The New York Times, 4 November 1951, sect. 1, p. 22. Photographs from photocopies, courtesy The Humanities and Social Sciences Library of The New York Public Library, New York City.

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UNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1951

e hours: 10:30 to 5:30

tman's mai

tomorrow

oils by Byron Browne (unframed)	dealer's list:	Gimbels price:
Two on a Horse, 24x30"	$500.	$250
Two Horses, 24x30"	$500.	$250
The Black Horse, 24x30"	$500.	$250
The White Wave, 24x30"	$500.	$250
The Arena, 24x30"	$500.	$250
Woman Throwing Ball, 24x30"	$500.	$250
Acrobat, 24x30"	$500.	$250
The Grey Horse, 24x30"	$500.	$250
Holy Trumpet, 24x30"	$500.	$250
The Ball Thrower, 24x30"	$500.	$250
Woman with Branches, 30x35"	$700.	$350
Girl with Birds, 30x38"	$700.	$350
White Nude, 30x35"	$700.	$350
Drummer, 30x35"	$700.	$350
Woman in a Garden, 30x38"	$700.	$350
Young Man with a Horn, 30x38"	$700.	$350
The White Acrobats, 30x35"	$700.	$350
Two Circus Figures, 30x38"	$700.	$350
The Dancers, 36x48"	$900.	$450
Lion and Acrobat, 36x48"	$900.	$450
Still Life in Blue, 36x48"	$900.	$450
Carnival, 36x38"	$900.	$450
The Lion Hunt, 35x28"	$900.	$450
The Easel, 40x50"	$1000.	$500
watercolors by Byron Browne (framed)		
The Juggler, 25x32" overall	$150.	$75
The Surf, 23x27½" overall	$150.	$75
Woman in a Garden, 23x30½" overall	$150.	$75
Two Women, 25x31¾" overall	$150.	$75
Two Clowns, 32x27" overall	$150.	$75
Man with Saxophone, 27x29" overall	$150.	$75
Girl with Curls, 27x29" overall	$150.	$75
Circus, 25x31½" overall	$150.	$75
The Juggler, 24x30½" overall	$150.	$75
Girl with Flowers, 27x29" overall	$150.	$75
Long Head, 26x30" overall	$150.	$75
Figure, 27x29" overall	$150.	$75
Family, 25x28" overall	$150.	$75
Woman Dancer, 24x27½" overall	$150.	$75
Woman with Basket, 24x27" overall	$150.	$75
Acrobat, 24x27" overall	$150.	$75
oils by Carlisle Holty (unframed)		
Mexican Lure, 16x18"	$250.	$125
Abstract Figure, 16x18"	$250.	$125
Bridge, 16x18"	$250.	$125
Green Figure, 16x18"	$250.	$125
Boat, 16x18"	$250.	$125
The Grey, 16x18"	$250.	$125
Dance Study, 16x18"	$250.	$125
Early Spring, 16x18"	$250.	$125
[illegible]	$200.	$100
[illegible]	$200.	$100
[illegible]	$200.	$100
[illegible]	$200.	$100
[illegible]	$200.	$100
[illegible]	$200.	$100
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[illegible]	$500.	$250
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[illegible]	$500.	$250

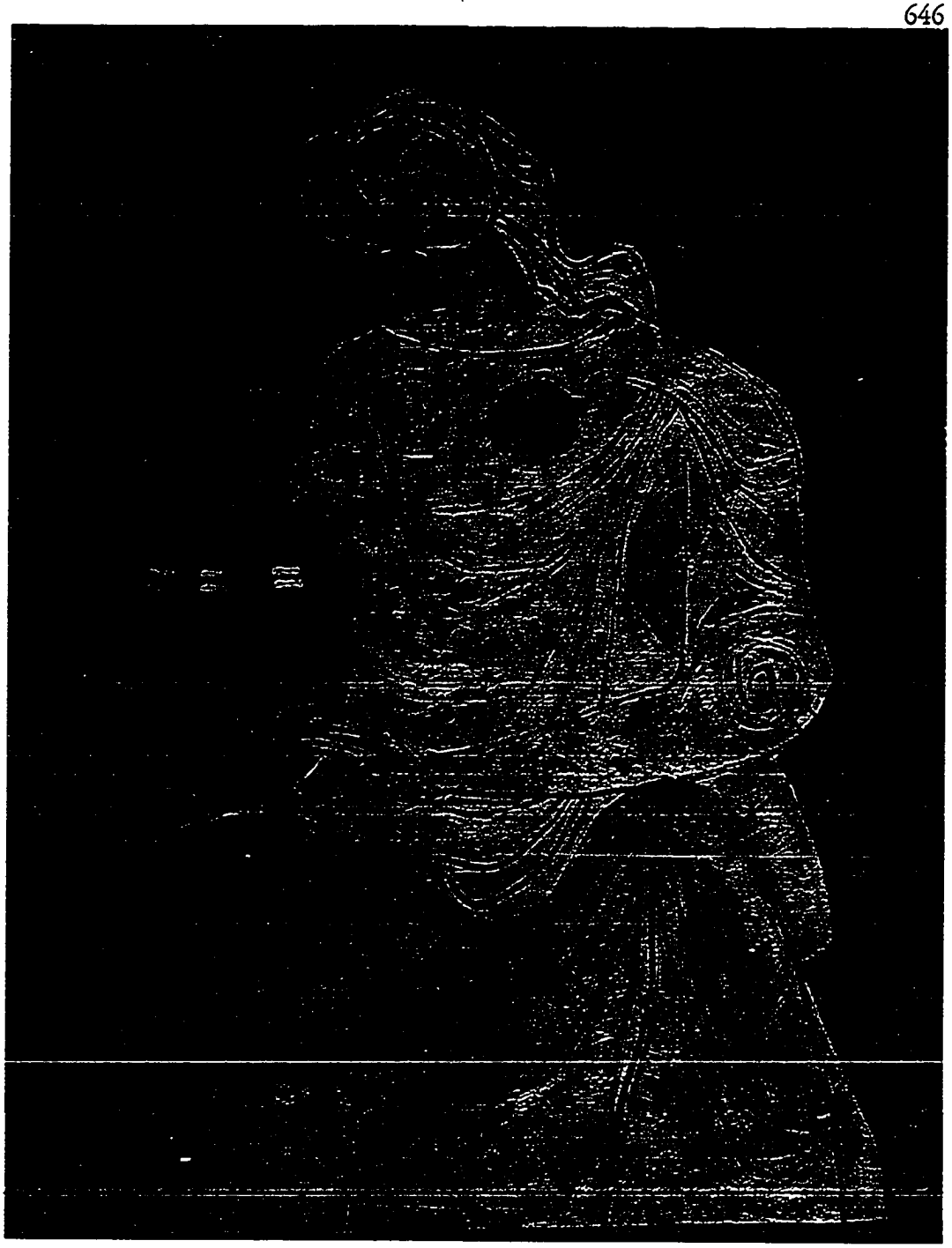


Fig. 8-33. Mother and Child. 1949, oil on canvas, 52 x 25".
Coll: Mrs. Emanuel (Sadie) Klein, New York City.

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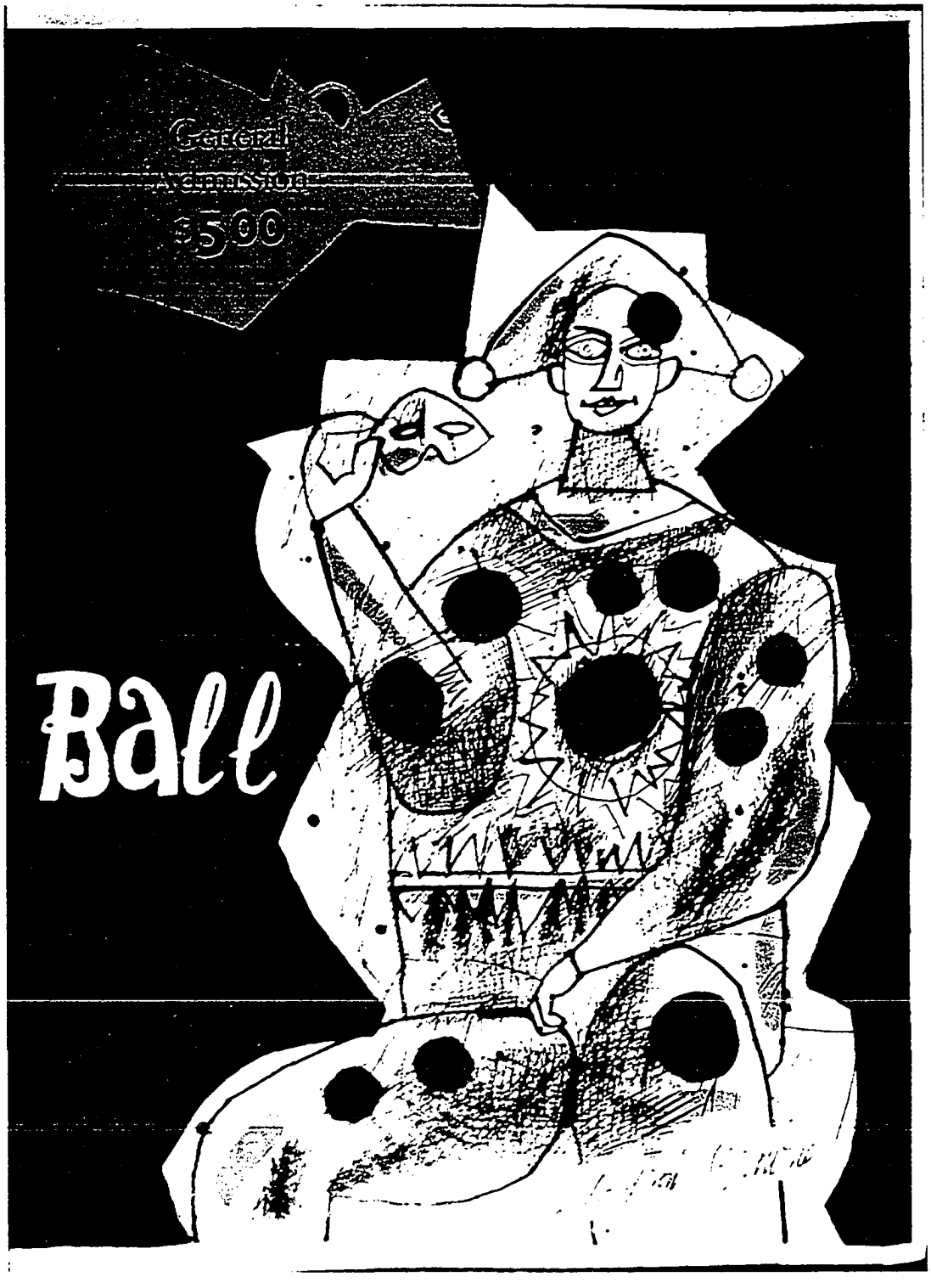
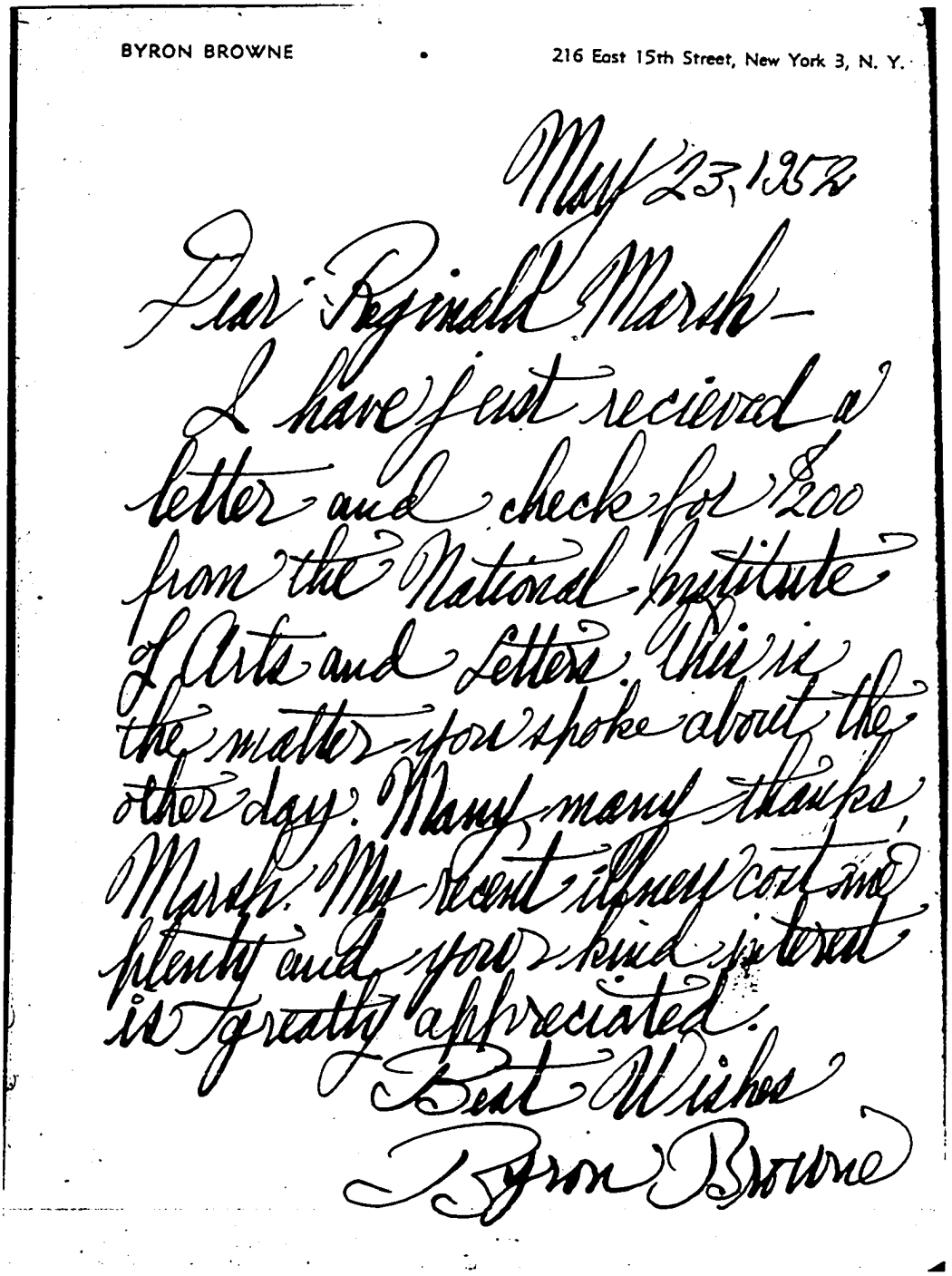


Fig. 8-34. Poster for Artists Equity Masquerade Ball. 1952, tempera and India ink on paper, 14 3/8 x 11" (photographed from poster reproduction, not original artwork). Photograph by April Paul, with permission from New York Artists Equity Association.

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BYRON BROWNE • 216 East 15th Street, New York 3, N. Y.

May 23, 1952

Dear Reginald Marsh—

I have just received a letter and check for $200 from the National Institute & Arts and Letters. This is the matter you spoke about the other day. Many, many thanks, Marsh. My recent illness cost me plenty and your kind interest is greatly appreciated.

Best Wishes

Byron Browne

Fig. 8-35. Letter from Byron Browne to Reginald Marsh. May 23, 1952.
Copy of letter courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Microfilm Roll #NBB-2.

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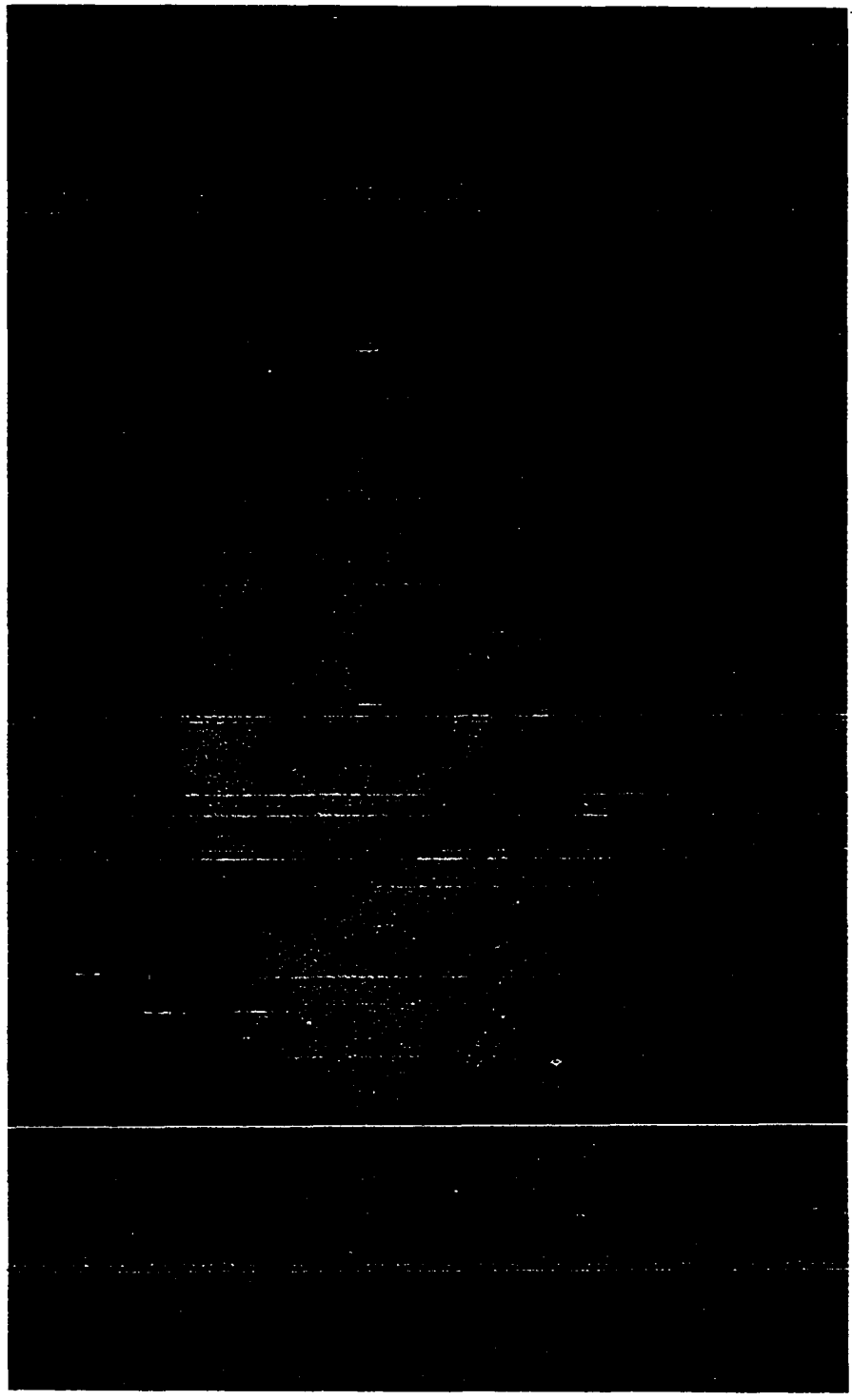


Fig. C-1. Venus, or Portrait of R. 1936, oil on masonite, 60 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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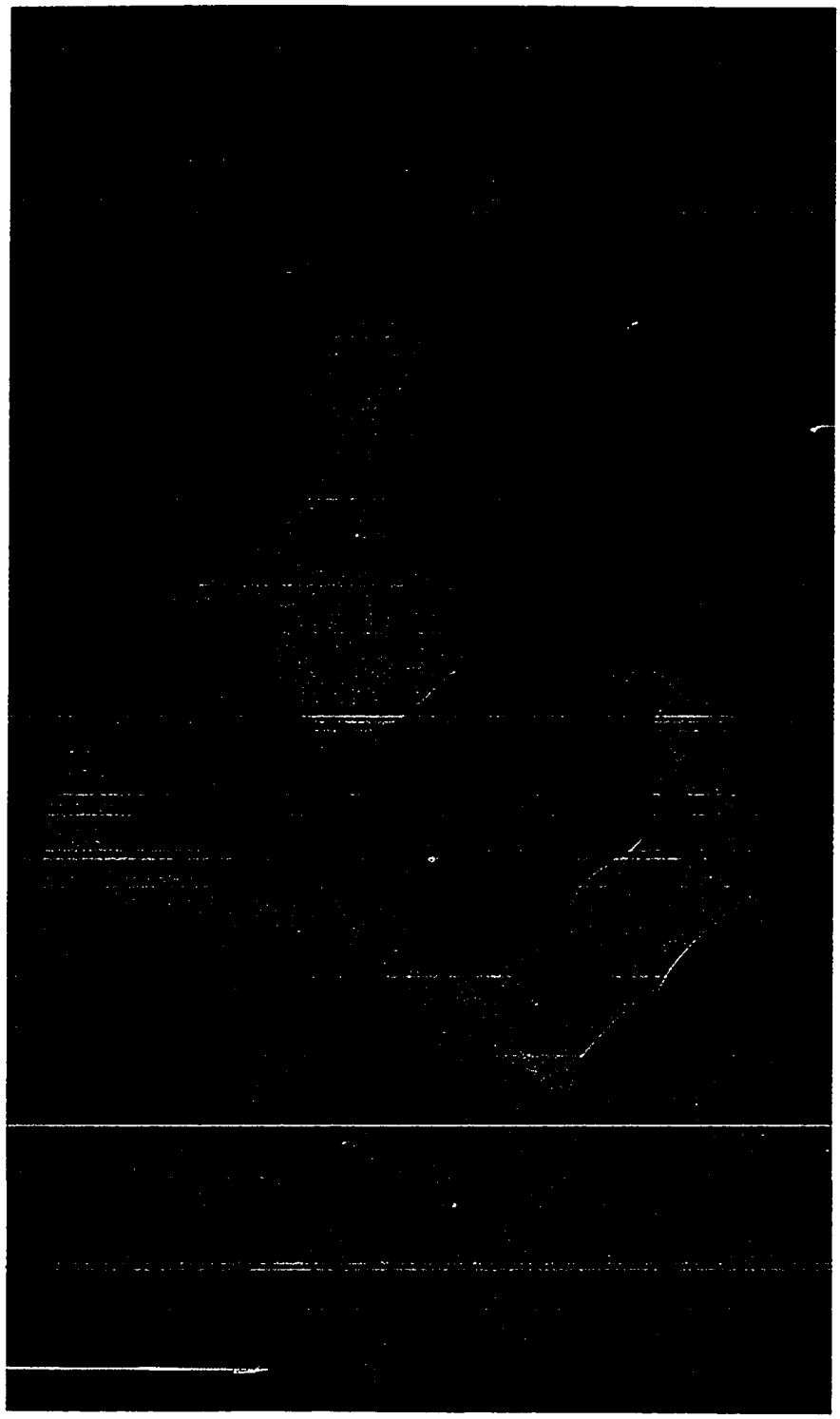


Fig. C-2. Portrait of Rosalind. 1936, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Destroyed by artist, November 1961.

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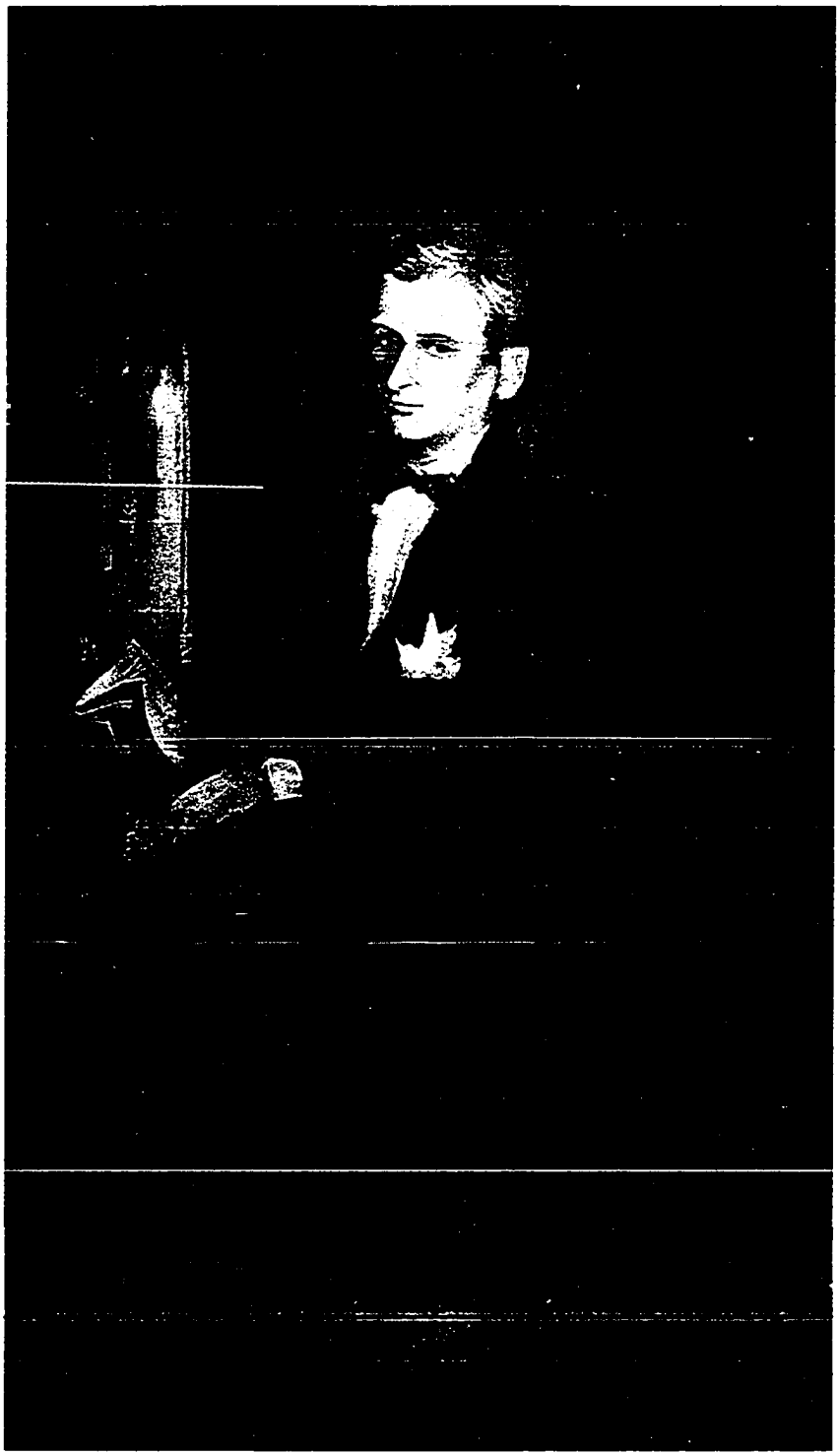


Fig. C-3. Portrait of John Gellert. 1954, oil on canvas, 72 x 40". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-4. Portrait of Rosalind. 1954-55, oil on canvas, 60 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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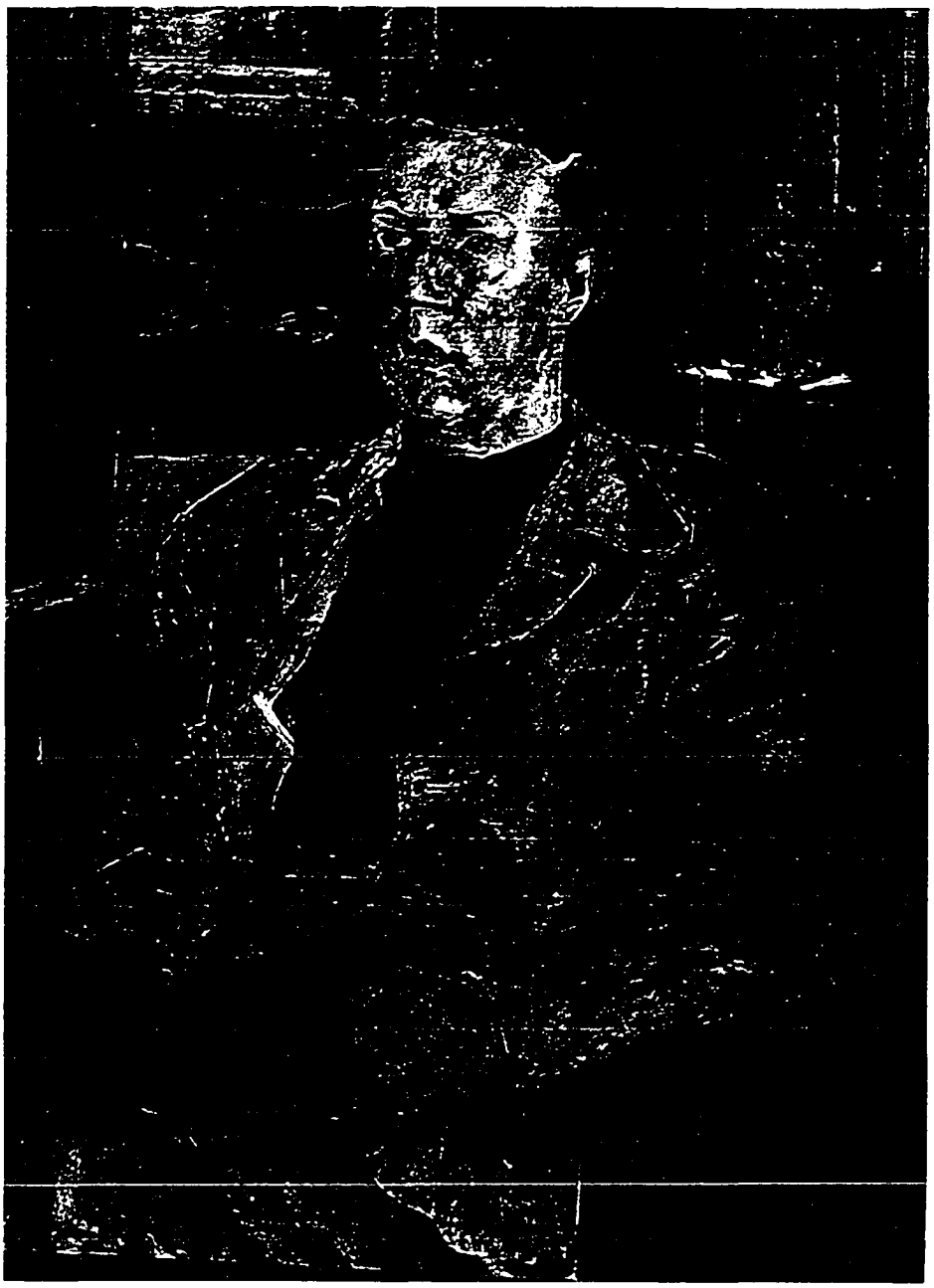


Fig. C-5. Joseph Solman. Portrait of Byron Browne. 1954, oil on canvas, 36 x 26".
Coll: Joseph H. Hirshhorn.

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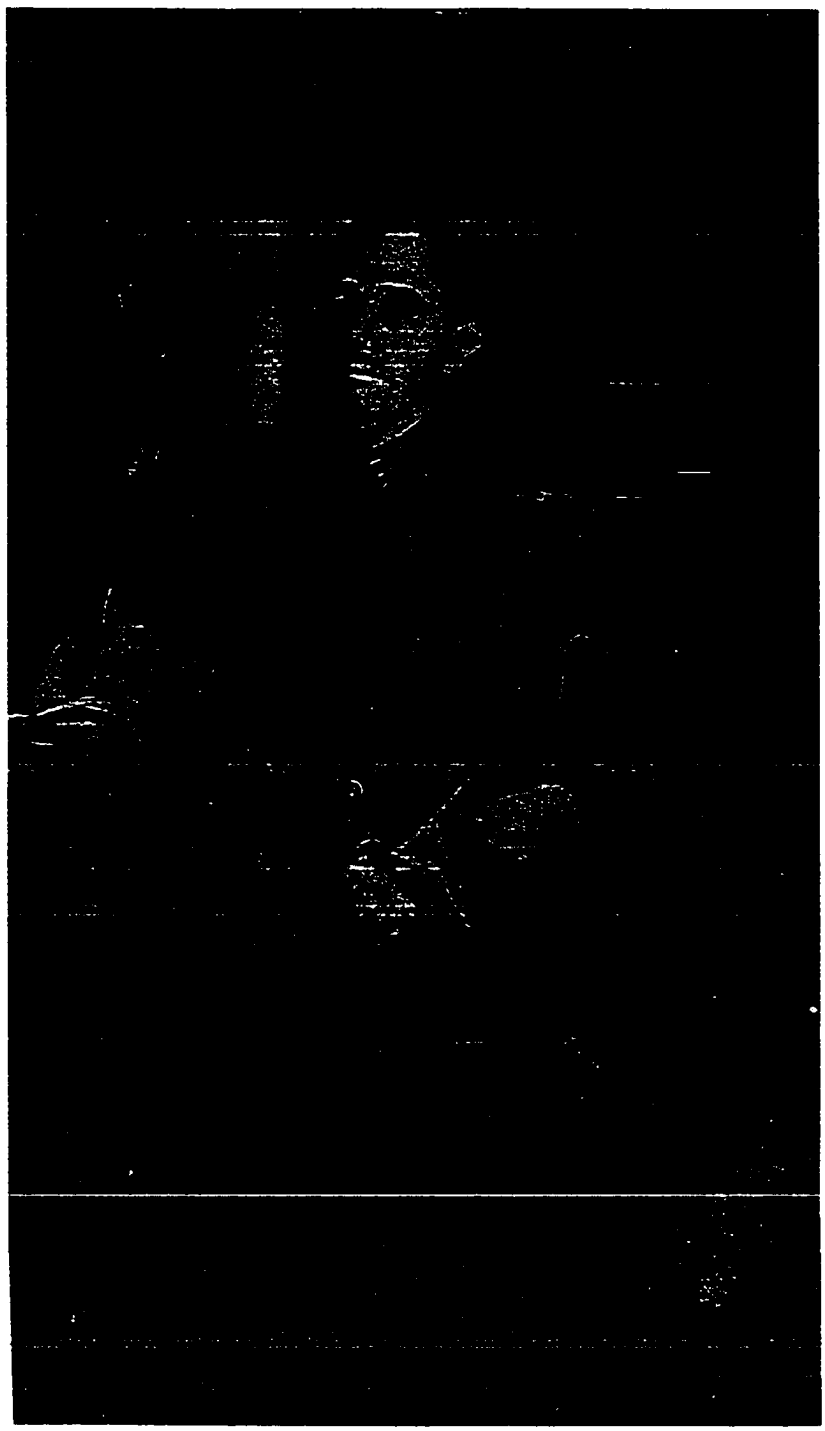


Fig. C-6. Portrait of Joseph Solman. 1955, oil on canvas, 60 x 36".
Coll: The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. Gift of Rosalind Browne.

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Fig. C-7. Portrait of Irving Marantz. 1956, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-8. Portrait of Chaim Gross. 1956, oil on canvas, 48 x 36".
Coll: The Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation, New York City.

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Fig. C-9. Portrait of Milton Avery. 1959, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Coll: Walter P. Chrysler.

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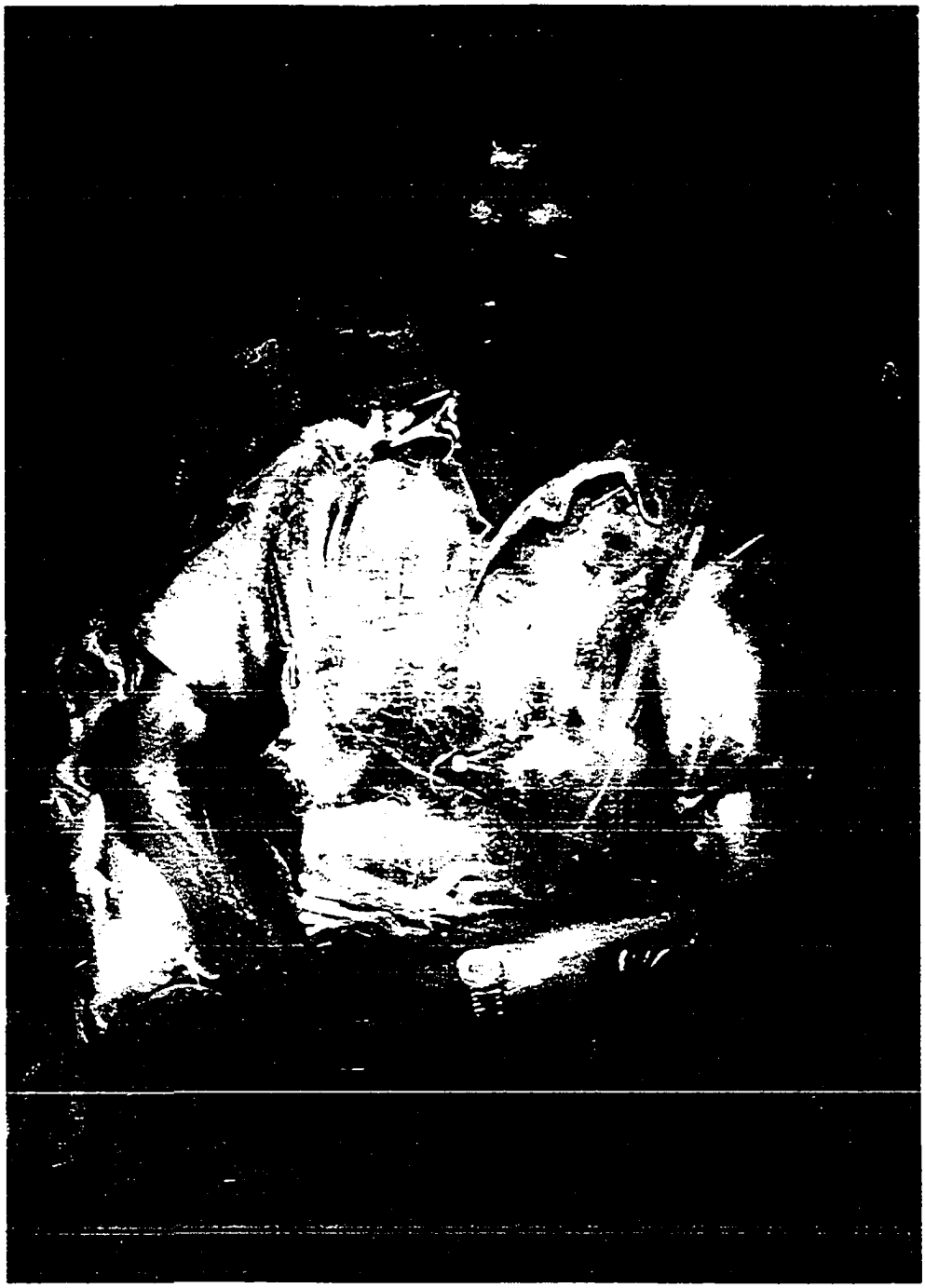


Fig. C-10. Portrait of Domenico Facci. 1960, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-11. Domenico A. Facci. Portrait Bust of Byron Browne. November 5, 1961, terracotta, with painted patina to resemble bronze coloration, 12 1/2 x 7 x 8 1/2". Photo by Walter Russell. Estate of Domenico A. Facci, New York City.

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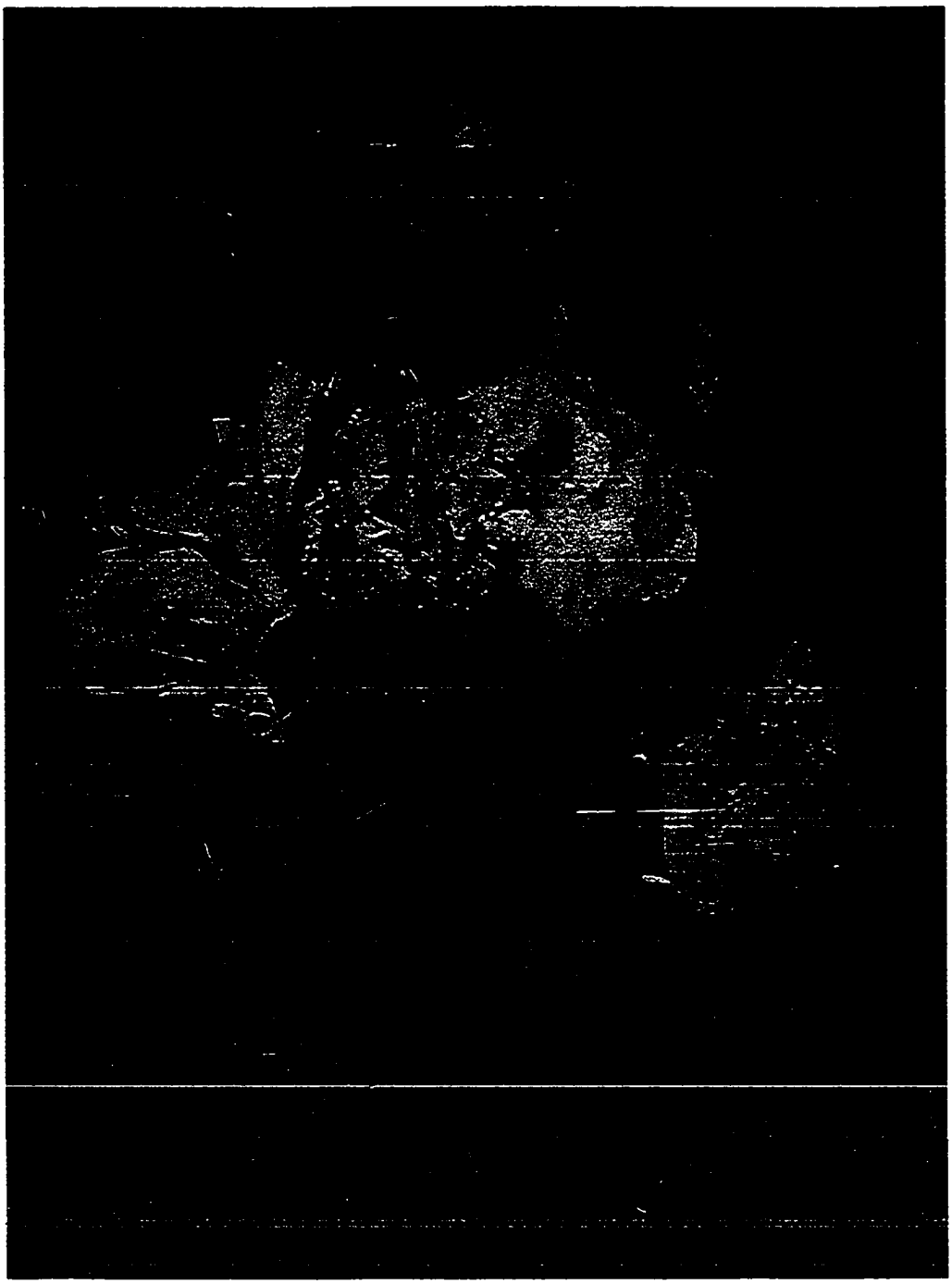


Fig. C-12. Portrait of Julio Prol. 1961, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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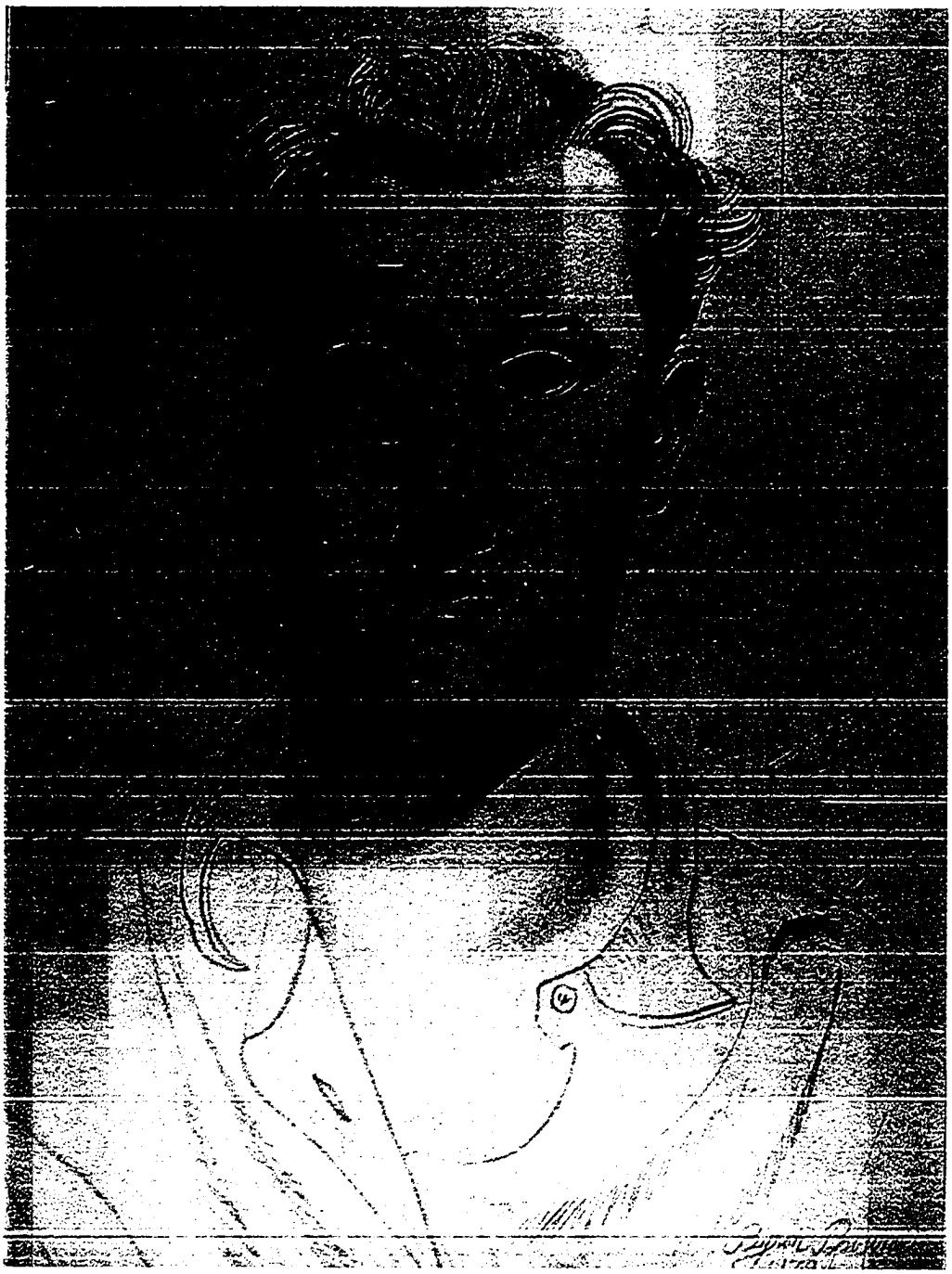


Fig. C-13. Self-Portrait. 1939, pencil on cream paper, 17 1/4 x 12 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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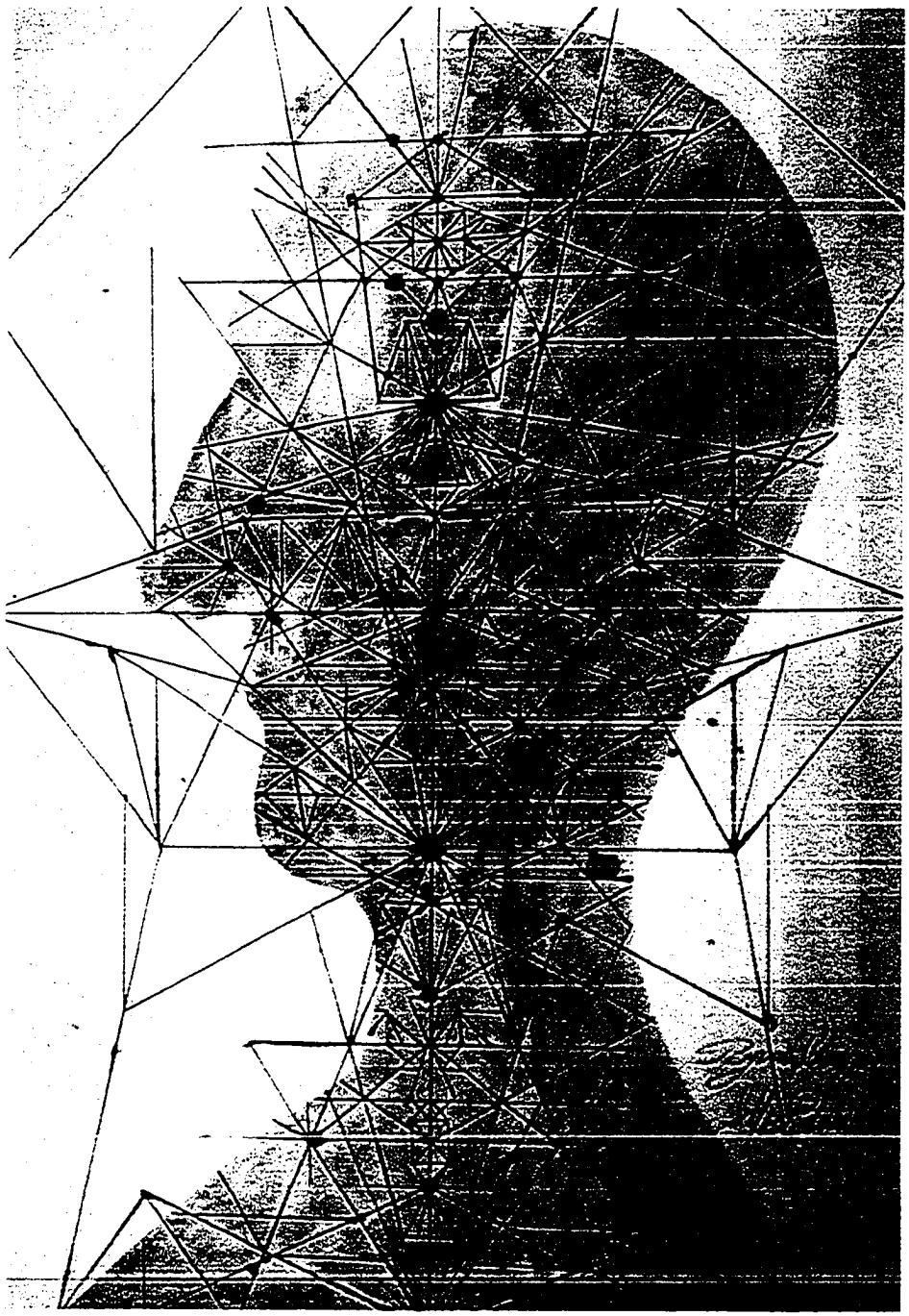


Fig. C-14. Self-Portrait. 1947, casein tempera wash and India ink penline on paper, 21 7/8 x 14 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-15. Self-Portrait. February 10. 1953, India ink wash and penline on paper, 20 x 26". Estate of Byron Browne.

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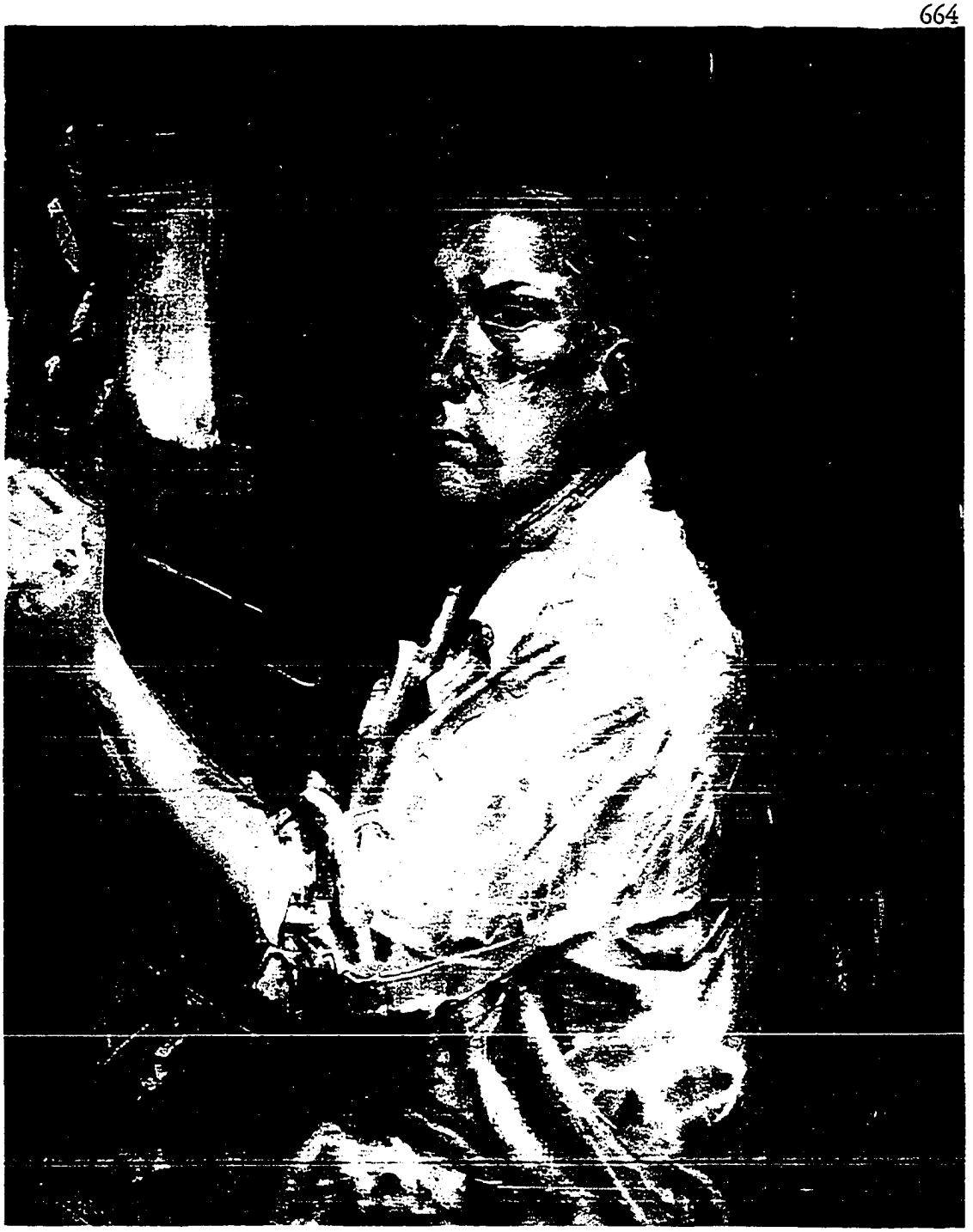


Fig. C-16. Self-Portrait. 1956, oil on canvas, 40 x 32". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-17. Self-Portrait. 1958, oil on canvas, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.

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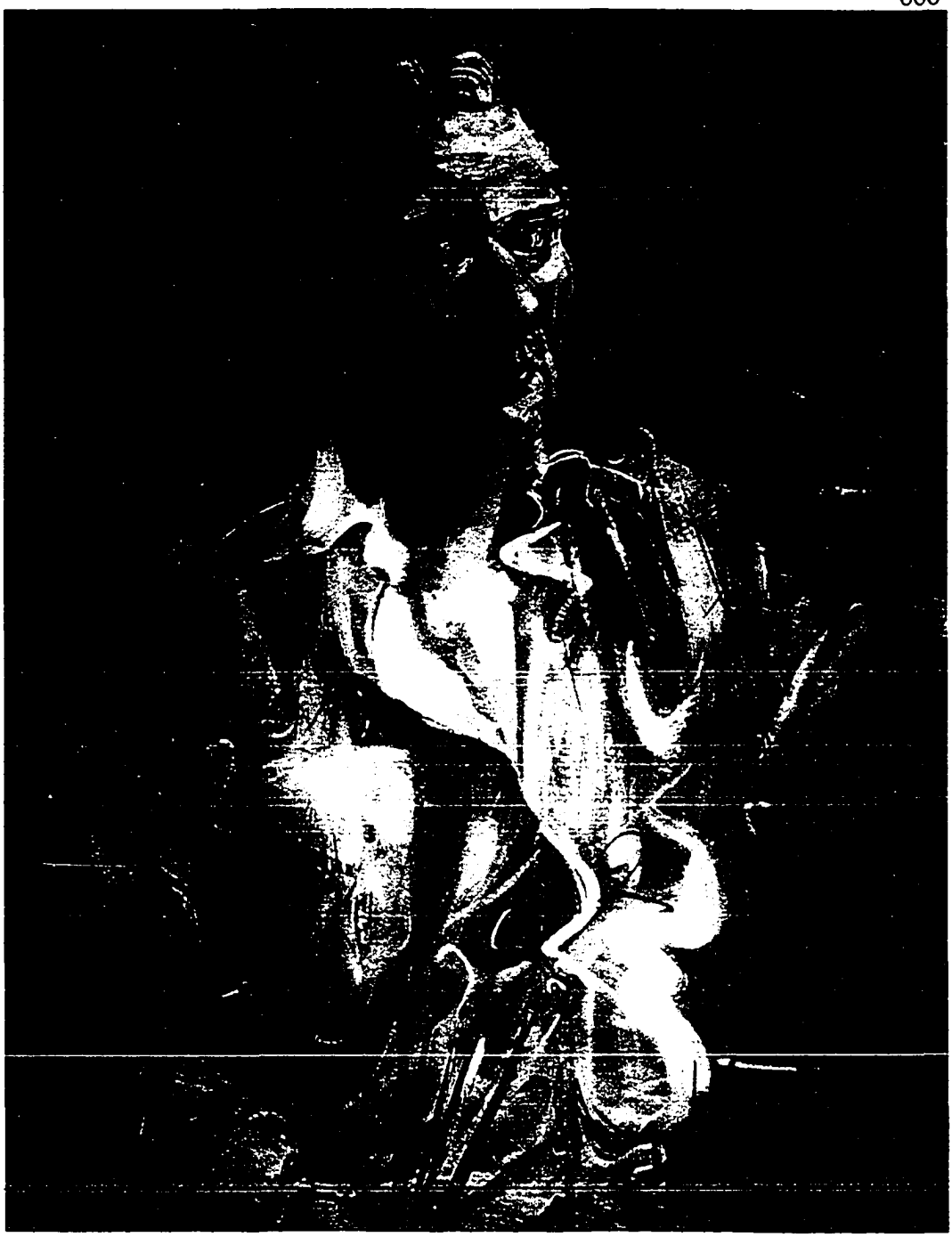


Fig. C-18. Self-Portrait. 1958, oil on canvas, 28 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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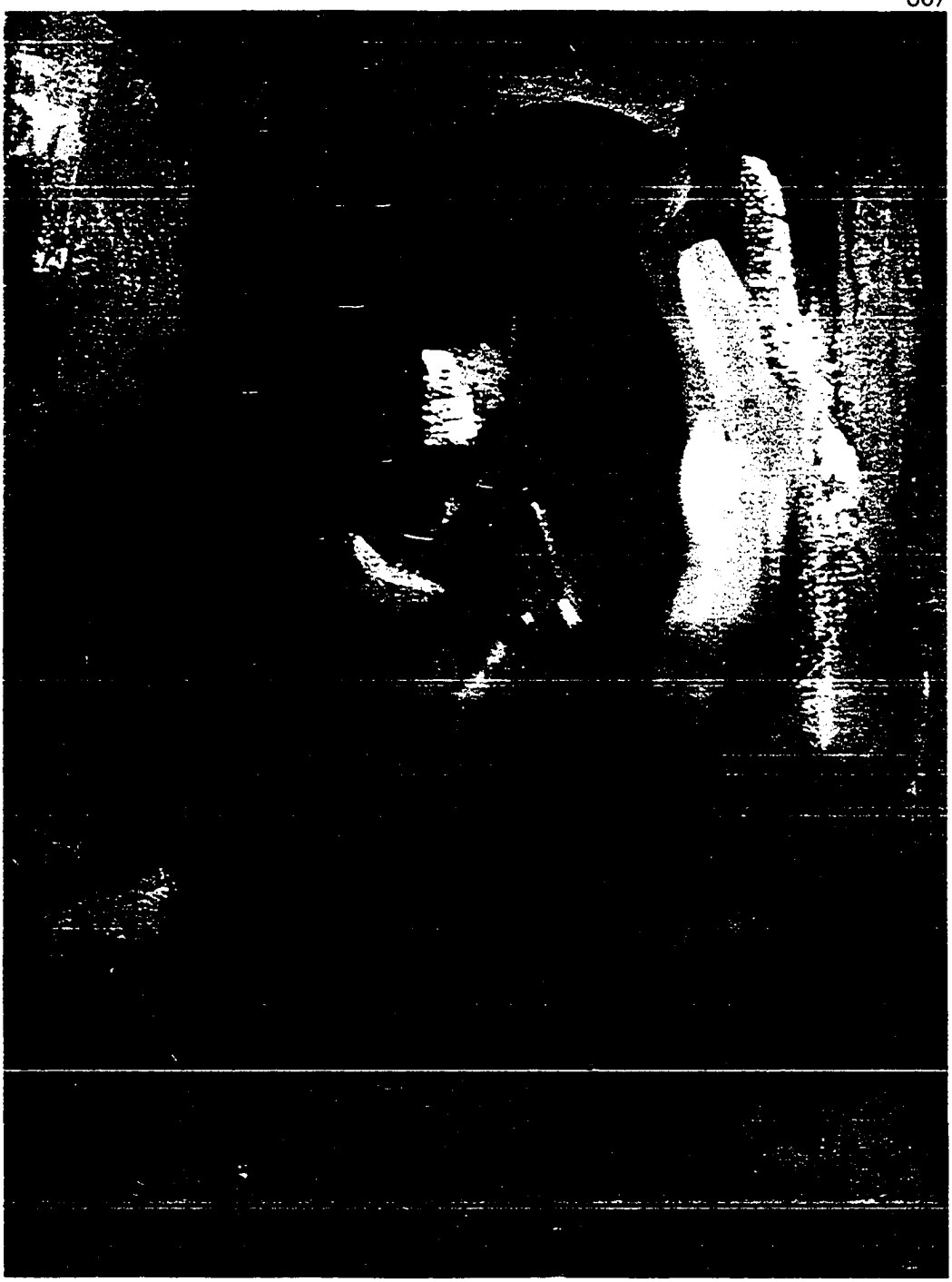


Fig. C-19. Self-Portrait. 1960, oil on canvas, 26 x 20". Estate of Byron Browne.

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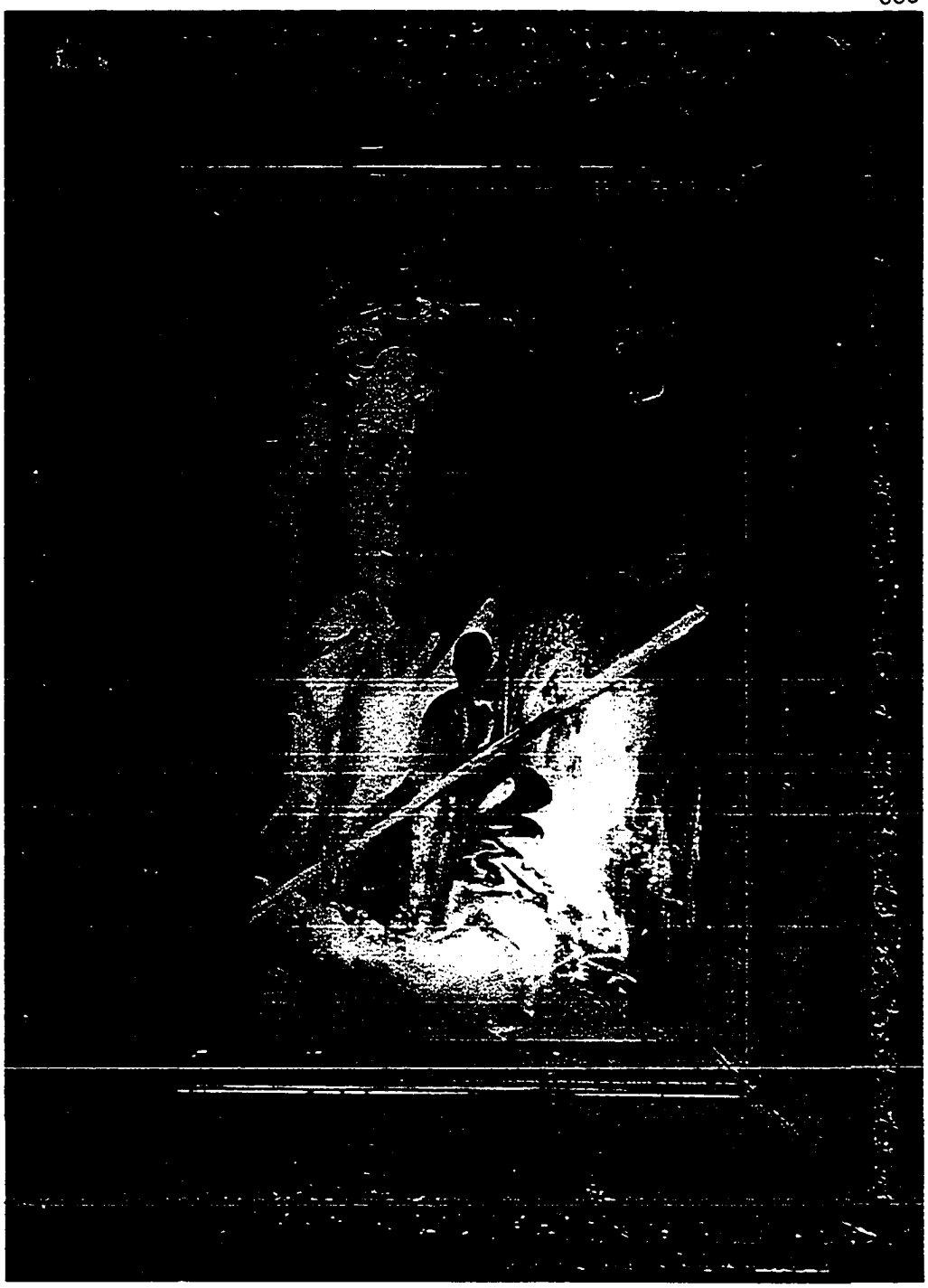


Fig. C-20. Self-Portrait Holding Mahlstick. 1961, oil on masonite, 16 x 10 1/2".
Estate of Byron Browne.

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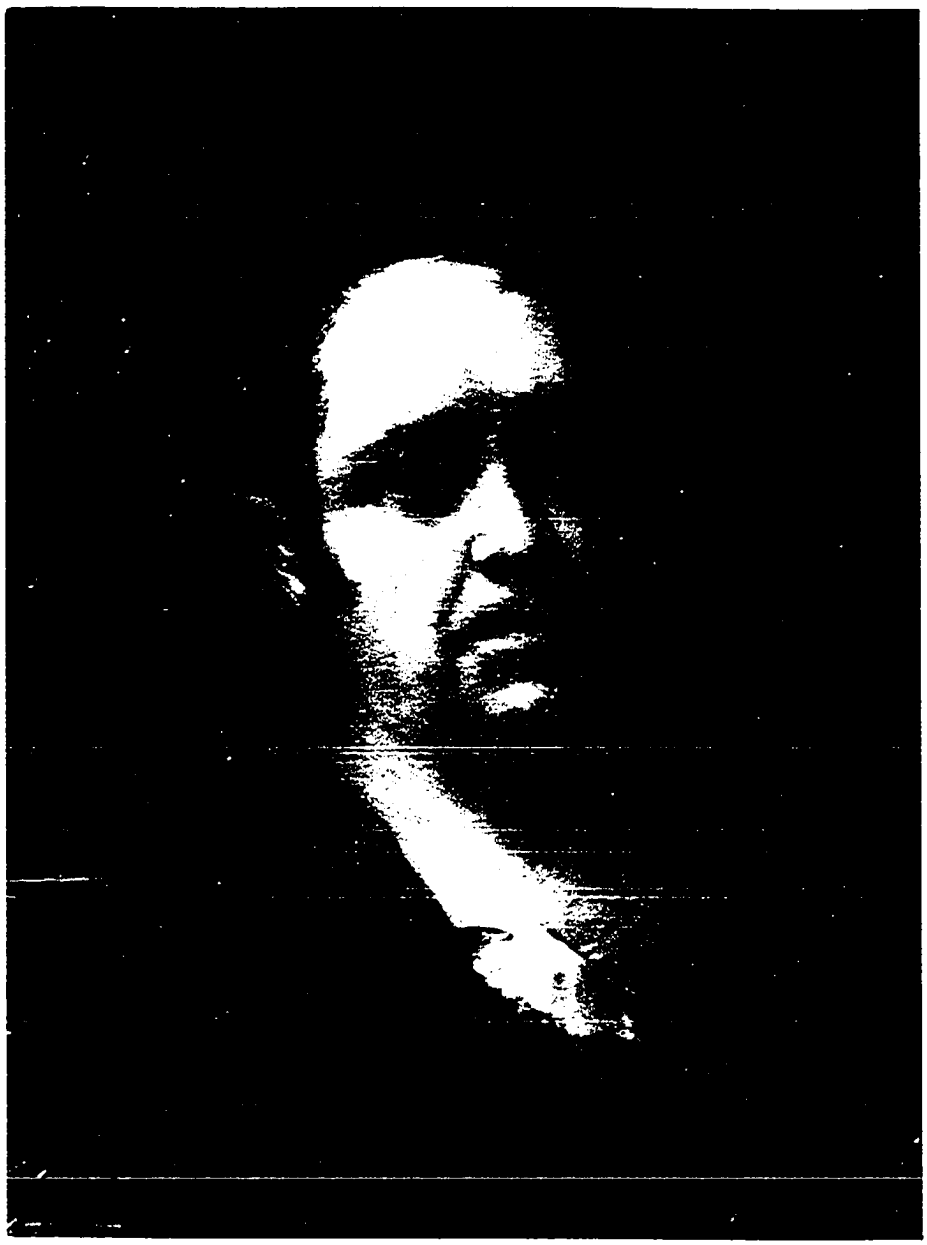


Fig. C-21. Francisco de Goya. Self-Portrait (at age 69). Ca. 1815, oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 13".
Coll: Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

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Fig. C-22. The Rose. 1961, oil on canvas, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-23. Willem de Kooning. Woman, I. 1950-52, oil on canvas, 6' 3 7/8 x 58".
Coll: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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Fig. C-24. Seated Bather. 1952, oil on canvas, 38 x 30". Estate of Byron Browne.

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Fig. C-25. Satyr. 1954, oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Estate of Byron Browne.

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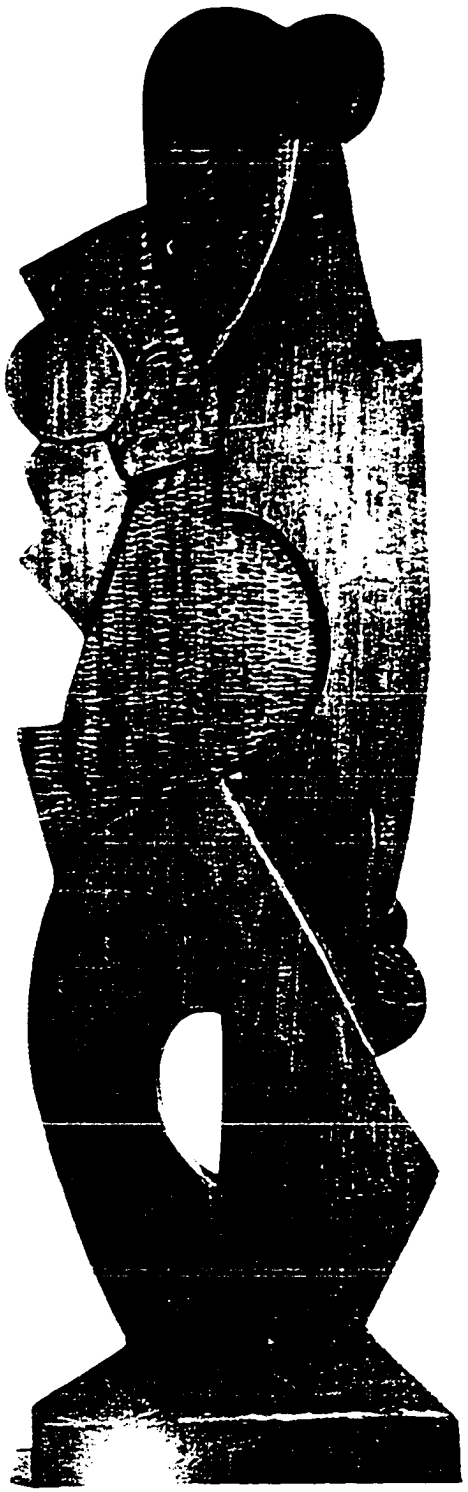


Fig. C-26. Chaim Gross. Roosevelt and Hoover in a Fistfight. 1932, mahogany, 72 x 20 x 1 1/2". Coll: The Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation; The Chaim Gross Studio Museum, New York City.

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