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JAMES BROOKS: FROM DALLAS TO THE NEW YORK SCHOOL

By

ANNE L. ABELES

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

2001

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

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Abstract

JAMES BROOKS: FROM DALLAS TO THE NEW YORK SCHOOL

by

By Anne L. Abeles

Advisor: Professor Gail Levin

Texas bred James Brooks, began his career as an artist when a Dallas high school student. He painted regularly until illness made it impossible some seventy years later. His long, illustrious career embraced many kinds of art-making from his early commercial work, to his murals, to his later abstract painting as an active member of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Major recognition came to Brooks as a lyrical New York School artist in 1963 when the Whitney Museum of American Art gave him a retrospective.

The introductory chapters trace his family background, education, and early career as a lithographer, muralist, and war artist. As Brooks' mature career develops, the text refocuses on the works, their content, exhibition history, and the critical response to them. It

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examines Brooks' theory of painting and discusses formerly unknown influences. It also considers the artist's participation in communal activities of the New York School.

Out of the research came questions that this dissertation attempts to answer. If mentioned in much Abstract Expressionism literature, why is the artist's work and name not more readily recognized? What is unique in his contribution? What is his legacy?

This research draws upon early and late literature on Abstract Expressionism and subsequent twentieth century art. The Archives of American Art, National Archives, and museum libraries held rich information, as did the artist's archives, family journals, and exhibition catalogues. James Brooks' widow, the artist Charlotte Park Brooks, has been an indispensable resource. I have interviewed such professionals as Dore Ashton and Irving Sandler who knew Brooks personally. In considering Brooks' achievement, the latter wrote,

> Most writers on art have overlooked the deeper content in Brooks painting….

This dissertation takes up the challenge. It revisits the artist's oeuvre and fulfills the need for a complete and current account on Brooks' lengthy career.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I approached the writing of this dissertation with both hope and fear. Having chosen to explore the career of James David Brooks, whose strong, handsome abstractions have long invited art world attention, I hoped for the clear-headed wisdom and sound judgment to open the discourse on his art it has long merited. That was the hope. And opposing hope, the doubts. Can one be objective and fair, and still be an advocate? Does one have the time, energy, and insights to complete so grand a task? Countless people along the way have either supplied or renewed those essentials. Now, with the project nearing completion, I understand how large a part of this work is indebted to them. Their help and encouragement have kept me focused and dedicated during my six years of research and writing. Without them, this dissertation could not have been completed. But since the list stretches on, I have chosen to name only the very few have been indispensable.

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To painter Charlotte Park Brooks, I am truly grateful. Her complete and current archives, willingly made available, are the foundation on which this work was fashioned. But it is her intelligence, her perceptiveness, and her ability to share that have made our working relationship most harmonious. In this context, thanks must go also to her present archivist, painter Tracy Harris, and to her past archivist, art historian Sihoban Conaty, both of whom have produced endless documents and answered unending questions, with patience and good cheer.

My greatest debt, undoubtedly, is to my Dissertation Advisor, Professor Gail Levin. For the many years it has taken, Professor Levin has overseen this project with wisdom, authority, and patience. Her profundity and accessibility can serve as models of what advisement should be; and her inclusion of her graduate students in her many art-related activities, reinforces her bond with them and infuses it with warmth. To Professors Anna Chave, for her thoughtful questioning; to Professor Richard Powers for his historical perspective; and to Professor Greta Berman, for her patient penciled annotations, suggestions, and corrections, my enduring gratitude.

Special thanks, too, to James Brooks' friends, colleagues, and critics, who have provided background

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material and recalled their experiences with him and with his work. Few people of his generation remain, so I'm especially grateful to those who could enrich my knowledge with personal reminiscences. Some were like Irving Sandler, kindly lent handwritten interview notes and hard-to-find catalogues; some like Dore Ashton, were generous in their offers to help. And, in addition to each of them, there are countless unnamed museum and library staffers who graciously shared the objects and information in their storage vaults, and archives.

Finally, I have been extremely moved by both the love, help, and concern expressed by my husband, our children, and our small family circle. To them, as well as to my most faithful friends who have been generous with their encouragement, this dissertation is dedicated.

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Fig. 1. *Eight New York Painters of International Influence*. Irving Penn, Photo.© Condé Nast Publications, Inc.
Back Row: Theodoros Stamos, James Brooks, Philip Guston, Dorothy Miller, Franz Kline, William Baziotes. Front Row: Jack Tworkov, Barnett Newman, Sam Francis.

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INTRODUCTION

…good painting, as always, is a door opened to a man's spirit…

James Brooks

James David Brooks, the eminent American painter, died in 1992 leaving a record of lifelong accomplishment. He had been both a mural and easel painter, a professor of drawing at Columbia University, of lettering at Pratt Institute, and a critic in advanced painting classes at Yale's School of Architecture and Design. His works received numerous prizes and awards. Between 1933 and 1972 he participated in no fewer than twenty invitational Annuals and Biennials at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Moreover, his works were shown in countless exhibitions countrywide in the most esteemed museums. At the Museum of Modern Art, New York, they were included in such historic shows as *Twelve Americans* of 1956 and *The New American Painting* of 1958-59. Barely five years later the Whitney Museum mounted a major retrospective of his work.

Having moved from his earlier realist style to

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abstraction--a matter of profound conviction--in 1947, soon after his return from service as an official Army War Artist, Brooks became an active and highly articulate participant in a circle of artists whose precedent-breaking goals he shared. Their movement, known as Abstract Expressionism, introduced the most fundamental changes in art. And in the development of his radically revised signature style, Brooks would both introduce and explore the use of stain painting. He was invariably present and an integral part of the group in all its most familiar photos (fig. 1). Still the literature on his works is limited and much of it outdated. Because of the noteworthy quality and scope of his contributions to art, a complete and current study of his life is long overdue—a gap this dissertation proposes to fill.

Primarily it is an account of the artist's life, his aesthetic sources, and his works. It also examines some of the issues related to Brooks' paintings. Why, for example, should Brooks' works--so important during his lifetime--now receive more modest attention than heretofore? Has abstract art in general been similarly affected? Or did the artist's reluctance to articulate the meaning of his work make it appear arcane? Does his content compare with

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that of his colleagues? Do titles serve a function besides identifying a work? As a corollary, this dissertation undertakes to clarify Brooks' legacy and to situate him among his peers within the hierarchy of Abstract Expressionism. To achieve these aims, a non-traditional methodology has been used. Briefly, let me explain.

The first five chapters deal with Brooks' life from his boyhood on--through schooling, mural painting, army career, and breakthrough to abstraction. These are researched and reported objectively. Beginning with his affiliation with the Abstract Expressionist movement, my approach to the material and means of reporting it changes. The development of the movement within the chronological period is examined. Greater attention is paid to considering reasons behind exhibitions, their themes and venues, and the critical reviews they receive in the press. The text departs from impartial reporting to adopt an advocative stance--building a case that documents the artist's activities, defines his level of accomplishment, and quantifies his recognition. Toward that end, the critical reviews written by art professionals play the part of "expert witnesses". This explains why, in many cases, they are given precedence over personal observations. The

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available literature on Brooks, considered below, is the foundation on which this dissertation is based.

There are five main sources of information: (1) the single existing monograph written by Sam Hunter on the occasion of the 1963 Whitney retrospective; (2) a number of perceptive interviews on the artist's background, the stages of his career, his technical procedures, his reflections on works and on the Abstract Expressionist movement; (3) catalogs of exhibitions in which he took part; (4) the anthologies in which his art is discussed; and (5) the coverage of his art in periodicals—whether articles or reviews. They will be considered in this order.

Although a fair and accurate account of Brooks' life and art at its 1963 publication date, the catalog *James Brooks* written by Sam Hunter for the Whitney Museum show is at present outdated and incomplete. A decision made to exhibit no works prior to those done in 1947 excluded the artist's juvenilia, his early success with lithography, and any discussion of the murals produced through government funded programs of the 1930s. The last is an omission of some importance since Brooks was the painter of one of the largest Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project

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murals ever assigned and one of the decreasing number now in existence. Called *Flight,* it circles the rotunda of the Delta Shuttle Terminal at New York's La Guardia Field. Of necessity, Hunter's monograph also leaves undocumented the last twenty-two years of the artist's career--the fruitful period between 1963 and 1985 when, forced by ill health, the artist stopped painting. Still the late works have all the vigor and emotional intensity of paintings by a much younger artist. They evolve naturally out of the earlier works with modifications in style, but truly no sudden break. Nor is there ever a paucity of artistic ideas in the several decades of work awaiting informed study and discussion here.

As for interviews with the artist, they had been frequent in his lifetime. For an overview of James Brooks' world both past and present, three have special importance. Dorothy Seckler conducted the first in 1965 for the recently formed Archives of American Art. That same year Gertrude Kashdin interviewed Brooks for her Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Abstract Expressionism: An Analysis of the Movement Based Primarily on Interviews with Seven Participating Artists.* Exactly a decade later, Louise A. Svenson of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum recorded a

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question-and-answer session with the intention of broadcasting it. Both Seckler and Svenson discussed Brooks' early life and education, his mural assignments, his involvement with those rebellious painters who would earn the name Abstract Expressionists. Seckler's questions focused on the ideology of the group, where and under what circumstances they came together, and what their shared interests and values were. Svenson was more interested in the origin of stain painting, and Brooks' media and techniques. Kashdin's questions overlapped the others' somewhat. She queried all seven artists interviewed on their earlier styles, on the impact of Surrealism, on "the Club" and why it dispersed. She asked them to identify the "common factor," in Abstract Expressionism, then to reveal what they thought of the waning of the movement, inquiring (as had Seckler) about existentialism and its relationship to the painting. These interviews should be consulted for anyone seeking information on Brooks.

Two other interviews demand scholarly attention although the interviewers sought information for the purpose of subsequent publications. Irving Sandler, author of many books on the history of American art since the mid-20th century, interviewed Brooks in fall 1962 and asked

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questions dealing mainly with the form and content of the paintings. The topics discussed were, in all likelihood, in preparation for an *ARTnews* article entitled "James Brooks and the Abstract Inscape" which appeared concurrently with the Whitney retrospective the following year. It formed the basis also for the discussion of Brooks' work in Sandler's book *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*.

The painter Bernard Chaet, a colleague in teaching at Yale, interviewed Brooks about the media he used, the reasons he chose them, and the effects sought. His *Artists at Work* is the most complete guide to the artist's thoughts on different paints and supports, and the effects they create on the finished work.

One other series of interviews deserves to be mentioned before moving on. These were not interviews with the artist, but with the person closest to him--his wife Charlotte Park Brooks. No one could have been more generous in giving the time and effort required over a prolonged period of time to bring this project to completion. She has been gracious in answering all questions, in giving complete access to the artist's archives.

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Besides interviews, exhibition catalogues are perhaps the researcher's best resource. They announce the themes of shows, the dates, the venues, and the participants. The number of exhibitions in which Brooks took part is far too great to enumerate or analyze here although three shows of historic importance are mentioned above. Other landmark group shows that included his work were Holger Cahill's *New Horizons in American Art* of 1936, and in 1951, both Andrew C. Ritchie's *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* and *The Ninth Street Show*--the first two at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the latter at a temporary exhibition site. In 1955 at the Whitney Museum there was John I.H. Baur's *The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors*, and in 1961, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim was H. H. Arnason's *Abstract Expressionists and Imagists*. There were also works shown regularly at the *Pittsburgh Internationals* organized by Carnegie Institute and at the Art Institute of Chicago's shows of *American Painting and Sculpture*.

Abroad Brooks' works were seen in the 1957 *Bienal* at the Museo de Arte, Sao Paulo, in *The New American Painting* shown in eight European countries, at *Documenta II* of 1959

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in Kassel, Germany; and throughout Latin America in an exhibit called *Debujos y Acuarelas USA* of 1963.

In more recent years, Brooks had one-person shows at the Philadelphia Art Alliance (1966), the Dallas Museum of Art (1972), Cooper Union (1975), the Montclair Museum (1979), the Portland [ME] Museum of Art (1983), and the Heckscher Museum of Art (1988). For all but one of these, there was a catalogue containing significant data. In the artist's archives catalogs are arranged according to decade beginning with slim ones in the 1930s and continuing through his life. They have been fully considered within the text of the dissertation and can be found in the bibliography.

When surveying the literature on mid-20th century art, the name James Brooks has most frequently appeared in the context of gestural or action painting of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Listed here are a few of the anthologies of value in providing a fuller understanding of Brooks' stylistic range. On the murals both Greta Berman, and F. V. O'Connor have written extensively. Berman's *The Lost Years: Mural Painting in New York City Under the W.P.A. Federal Art Project, 1935-1943* and "A Story of Four Murals," in *Art for the People—New Deal Murals on Long*

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Island contributed an impeccable perspective as did *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs*, edited by O'Connor. On later works, see Ashton, *The Unknown Shore*; Kingsley, *The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art*; Motherwell and Reinhardt, eds., *Modern Artists in America* which covers the final sessions of Studio 35; Ritchie, *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*; Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting…*; and, for a broad background of the movement alone, Seitz, *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America*. If the references to Brooks are brief, they are nevertheless valuable in helping to define the artist's strengths and struggles and enabling us to recreate the artist's mind-set as the art world changed.

Because of their abundance, newspaper and periodical articles used in preparing this text can be neither judged for their importance nor enumerated here. Since Brooks' home and studio were in New York, the New York newspapers have been systematically scanned for references to the artist and his work. That holds true for the major art publications such as *Art International, Arts Magazine*, and *ARTnews*, and several popular periodicals such as *LIFE*, the *Saturday Review of Literature, Time*, etc. These and many

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more unspecified documents here have been studied for the purpose of recreating for the reader a true picture of the artist's life and art. Though not a biography, this dissertation deals with that life chronologically.

Chapter One tells of Brooks' childhood and early art education in Dallas. Chapter Two covers the artist's arrival in New York, his education at the Art Students League, and success in setting up a lettering shop which provided him with a source of income. Lithographs created then earned him early recognition. Chapter Three gives an account of the mural painting years. Of the four murals assigned to him, three were completed and two are still in situ. Chapter Four relates Brooks' life during World War II: we follow him to Cairo, and trace his career as one of the few official Army War Artists. By Chapter Five, with the war over, Brooks was back in New York, and renewing acquaintanceships with Jackson Pollock, Bradley Walker Tomlin, William Baziotes, and Philip Guston in whose work representational images had already been superseded by abstract ones. Guided by the painter Wallace Harrison, the artist learned the visual language of Cubism, and having mastered that, in the late 1940s he made the breakthrough to abstraction. Chapter Six describes Brooks' role in the

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New York School, and the growth of his artistic recognition. There was a great sense of excitement in the air, and this coalition of artists was acknowledged as having revolutionized the techniques as well as the subjects of painting. They had approached abstraction in an entirely unique manner. Alternately called the New York School, they gained worldwide attention over the next few years during which the focus of vanguard art shifted from Paris to New York. Chapter Seven covers the years 1960 to 1966 during which Brooks earned several awards and much honor: he earned the Norman Waite Harris Silver Medal and Prize at the 64th Annual Exhibition of the Art Institute of Chicago; a Ford Foundation Purchase Award; a Guggenheim Fellowship; and he served as artist-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome. Chapter Eight begins with the year 1967, when Brooks shifted his studio to the beautiful, pastoral community of The Springs, a section of East Hampton, where he and his wife Charlotte Brooks had maintained a summer residence for twelve years. Two and a half hours from the city, this was and is a famous community heavily populated with artists and others with art interests. From there his career of painting, always accompanied by teaching assignments at prestigious art schools, would

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continue at only a slightly more relaxed pace until the mid-1980s when he was beset by illness. But before that happened, Mobil--a multinational corporation--commissioned him to paint two abstract mural segments for the entrance of their corporate headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia.

During his long career, his iconography was to change becoming simpler, yet more powerful and affecting. By career's end, he had been elected a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and been awarded an unsolicited grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Still the name James Brooks is unfamiliar to many art lovers. Having earned these honors, why has Brooks' reputation not enjoyed the lasting level of acclaim his achievement warrants? It is a question this dissertation addresses, a wrong it seeks to correct.

The Epilogue, in a backward glance, summarizes Brooks' career. It weaves together the disparate threads of his life—his dedication to painting, exhibiting, teaching, his fidelity to the theoretical bases of his art, as well as his interest in and interaction with the art community. In so doing it makes clear the artist's contribution to the art of his time. It celebrates his lasting creativity and the sincerity and majesty of his efforts.

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CHAPTER 1

DALLAS AND THE BUDDING OF AN ART CAREER: 1916-1926

Although not born in Texas, James Brooks usually claimed Dallas as his home town when recalling his youth in later years. Before settling there his parents, William Rodolphus Brooks and Abigail Williamson Brooks, had moved so often during his childhood, the artist once quipped that he never finished the school year in the same school in which he had begun it.[1] He believed his parents had met at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis and married soon after. Because his father was a salesman whose mid-and-southwest territories were prone to change, the family moved often and their four offspring had been born in different cities.[2] James, the second eldest, was born in

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[1]James Brooks. Interview by Dorothy Seckler, 10 June 1965. transcript. Collection of Archives of American Art. New York, NY.

[2]His siblings were an older brother Charles and two younger sisters, Helen and Mary Nell. Charlotte Park Brooks, interview by author. June 1995, tape recording. They were born in Burton, AR, Oklahoma City, OK, and Denver, CO respectively. Seckler interview, 10 June 1965. Charles' birth date is unknown but may have been 1905; his sisters' were 1912 and 1915 respectively. The last two dates are from *Texas Centennial Exposition: Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture & Graphic Arts,* exh. cat. (Dallas: Dallas

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St. Louis on 18 October 1906. He would have been ten or eleven years old when the family arrived in Dallas--the city in which they would settle and where he would be graduated from Oak Cliff High School in 1922, attend the art school at Southern Methodist University from 1923-1925, and briefly attend the Dallas Art Institute in 1926, its inaugural year. It was the city he would leave before the year's end seeking wider artistic horizons.

Dallas in 1916, when the Brooks family settled there, was by objective standards an ambitious but provincial city. It had been created a city by act of the Texas legislature only sixty years earlier, with a population numbering about four hundred, and in that year--1856--elected the first mayor and governing officials. The introduction of railroads in the post-Civil War days accelerated its physical and economic growth, and by 1872 the population had quadrupled. The decade of the seventies brought the first fire department, street cars, and gas street lights; more important culturally, the first opera house and a public library were built, and nine newspapers and journals made Dallas "one of the best informed centers of population of the southwest."[3] Still, acknowledging its amenities and the

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Museum of Fine Arts, 1936), 80, 90.

[3]George H. Santerre. *Dallas' First Hundred*

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expansion of city limits from their original area of one-half square mile to an area of over nine square miles, Dallas in 1916 could not compete culturally with such cities as New York and Chicago, the homes of the major museums, art schools, theatres, and concert halls. It was but the fifty-fourth city in size in the country. And only in 1915, the year before the Brooks family's arrival, did Southern Methodist University open its doors to extend the educational possibilities in that southwestern area. As Justin Kimball, a Superintendent of the city schools of Dallas, was to reflect close to the time of Brooks' departure,

> Will you let the writer say frankly that much as he loves our city, he cannot see how a young artist touched with genius could content himself to make it his home for fear his soul should starve. There is a very real probability that other types of genius in science and art are finding themselves driven or drawn from Dallas to other cities which provide richer and rarer food for the mind and spirit.[4]

Although some would deny the opinion Kimball expressed, a matter to which we shall return, it sketches with reasonable accuracy the existing state of affairs at the time James Brooks graduated from high school. Was he already aware he would choose to become a painter? One guesses not. If there was a strain of artistic talent in

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Years,1856-1956 (Dallas: Bookcraft, 1956) 1856-1916 passim.

[4]Justin F. Kimball, *Our City--Dallas* (Dallas: Kessler Plan Association of Dallas, 1927), 381.

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his family, it had until now gone unrecognized. Although he had enjoyed drawing as a child and wanted to be a cartoonist from his early days, activities that may even have been encouraged by a father who was formerly an academic, Brooks came to a career in art through circumstance--knowing little about the fine arts because his family were not "museum goers."[5] Instead he conscientiously studied images in magazine and comic strips. And because times were hard and his father's earnings limited, he worked summers and after school in a variety of jobs. Charlotte Park Brooks, the artist's wife, believes he worked at F.W. Woolworth Co., the local five-and-ten cent store, about the time of high school graduation.[6] There, because the person charged with making them was absent, he was asked to letter the "show cards" that display prices. He was sufficiently skillful at this task to be given a job by a lettering shop that hoped to attract Woolworth's patronage. That lettering

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[5]Julie Lawrence Cochran, an art historian and niece of the artist, suggested this kind of parental encouragement. Julie Lawrence Cochran, interview by author, 15 May 1996, Dallas, tape recording. Brooks himself categorized the family as non "museum goers." James Brooks, interview by Dorothy Seckler, 10 June 1965; tape 1, Archives of American Art.

[6]Since F.W. Woolworth Co. does not keep employment records longer than five years except for employees on a managerial level, this is impossible to verify. Nancy Cruz-Lugo, Store Personnel, F.W. Woolworth CO., NYC, interview by author, 25 July 1996, telephone. However, in random conversations, family members have remembered this being so.

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could be a profession, that it was a skill he possessed and enjoyed, and that it could provide a respectable income all made art an attractive possibility. He did not yet realize the difference between "fine" and "commercial" art but nevertheless decided to follow this career path.

The account of Brooks' art education in the four years between 1922 and 1926 is not entirely clear, but enough is known of his activities to review his early art training. "Studied with Martha Simkins, painting, private class, about 1922 or '23," his autobiographical notes read.[7] This appears to be his earliest formal training. Probably a family friend and known to be a neighbor in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas, Simkins was nevertheless a dedicated artist and strict art teacher, in a city where professional art training was limited. She is believed to have influenced Brooks greatly in his early days.[8] A glimpse at her background permits us to understand the nature of that influence.

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[7]James D. Brooks. Memoirs. Artist's archives, n.d. Collection of Charlotte Park Brooks. Though Brooks attended a "private class," Simkins taught other students. Frances Battaile Fisk, "Tendencies of Contemporary Texas Painting: Prominent Women Painters," *A History of Texas Artists and Sculptors* (Abilene: Frances Battaile Fisk, 1928), 72.

[8]Charlotte Park Brooks, interview by author, 26 May 1995. East Hampton, tape recording.

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Simkins had been born in Florida in 1869 into a privileged, indeed aristocratic, family that moved to Texas in 1871. Both parents were artistically gifted. Her early success copying prints the family owned were evidence of her talent. Planning to become an illustrator--quicker and less costly than becoming a painter, she thought--in 1892 she entered the Art Students League in New York to study black and white illustration with Kenyon Cox and Sidon Mobray, but she soon entered the "private studio" of William Merritt Chase probably to study portraiture.[9] During her subsequent return to Texas which lasted from 1901 to 1906, she was an art instructor at North Texas Normal School. In 1914, she traveled back to New York for extended study: at the League for a total of seven years with breaks between; at some point with Chase; and subsequently to Europe where she was thought to have studied with Cecilia Beaux and John Singer

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[9]Biographical information given by Fisk, 72-73 is contested by Diana Church, *Guide to Dallas Artists 1890-1917*, (n.p., 1987). The latter maintains Simkins entered the Art Students League, studied with Chase, and studied figural compositions and portraiture with Kenyon Cox. Since Simkins initially wished to be an illustrator, this sequence seems less likely than Fisk's account. However, the term "private studio" used by Fisk and quoted here should probably read "classes." For Chase scholar Ronald Pisano knew of "no such arrangement during this period of his [Chase's] teaching career." Ronald G. Pisano to author, LS, 10 July 1996. That Simkins was a member of Chase's class at the Art Students League is confirmed by Lawrence Campbell. Lawrence Campbell to author, LS, Art Students League, 23 May 1995.

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Sargent.[10] During her lifetime she exhibited widely at such venues as the Paris Salon in 1927, the National Academy of Design in New York, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and at numerous places throughout the southwest. At the time Brooks studied with her, Simkins had a winter studio in Dallas; summers were spent in Woodstock, New York.

She maintained ties with many art associations and exhibition groups throughout her career.[11] Though not exclusively a portraitist (she produced still lifes and landscapes, as well) her commissions were mainly for portraits and figurative works. In 1934 she returned to Dallas for family reasons, and from then until her death in 1969 remained there leading a quiet, secluded life.[12]

The years 1922 and 1923 when James Brooks studied with

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[10]R.A. Florio of the Art Students League of New York to Roger E. Saunders of Ruxton, Maryland, LS, 15 August 1978. It confirms the fact that Martha (Mattie) Simkins studied there from 1892 through 1899. She "resumed at the League in 1914 and 1915, 1916, 1921, 1922 and 1928, 1929, and 1940. She returned in 1961 for two summer months."

[11]Church, *Guide to Dallas Artists,* n.p. notes she belonged to the Pen and Brush Club, N.Y. and National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, N.Y. until returning to Dallas, after which the memberships were dropped. Fisk in *A History,* 72-73, mentions her membership in the Lorrilard Wolfe Club, the Southern States Art League, and the Woodstock (N.Y.) Artists Association.

[12]Roger Saunders who boarded at her home while a student at SMU, and a lifelong friend, believes this death date is inaccurate. He thinks she died in 1971 at age 102. Roger Saunders, interviewed by author, 27 June 1996, Ruxton, MD, Telephone.

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her, were just prior to her busiest, most acclaimed years. In Dallas of that day, there were few art schools, and only a handful of art teachers. No record remains of how often Brooks took classes, nor of Simkins' teaching method--only his recollection of "painting of oils in Dallas before coming to New York" and doing "still lifes with her for several months," so when he came to New York he already felt competent.[13] From these days in Dallas, only two still lifes remain. The earlier (fig. 2), possibly undertaken as an art lesson for his two younger sisters who both displayed sufficient talent to have works included in 1936 Texas Centennial Exhibition, is undated but known to be from this period.[14] Well observed and freely brushed in gouache and watercolor, the artist's innate ability is already apparent in his grasp of the furled contours and his suppression of unnecessary details. In contrast, and more likely in response to Simkins' lessons, is a complex oil study of the same period (fig.3). Involving the organization of various

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[13]James Brooks, Interview by Seckler, Transcript.

[14]Charlotte Park Brooks, interviewed by author, 1 July 1996. Taped recording. She remembers cabbage paintings by sisters Helen and Mary Nell, and suggests this as the possible motivation of this work. All three siblings were included in the *Texas Centennial Exposition* held by the State Department of Fine Arts at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. *Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts,*(Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1936). 80, 89, 90.

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objects, the balancing of warm and neutral colors, the modeling of form in light--all typical studio assignments--it is handled skillfully, in a manner already confident.

In Simkins' work, there is nothing comparable that permits the judging of her impact as a teacher. *The Spanish Girl* of 1925 is close in time to the lessons Brooks received. It is a bust length, three-quarter view of a young woman's face (fig. 4). The conception is essentially romanticized, and the brushwork (seen only in a printed reproduction) echoes the bravura brushwork of Chase, Simkins' teacher. The liveliness of the artist's brush stroke was to remain characteristic of her style through much of her career, as later portraits show.[15] If mastery of the brush was not immediately achieved, Brooks surely learned from Simkins such fundamentals as correct drawing, proper use of media, and a sense of art's real purpose.

Ready for more serious study, in the school years 1923-24 and 1924-25, Brooks was also to matriculate at Southern Methodist University with a concentration in art studies. The school's initial catalog contained a statement of purpose--that is, its rationale for providing such an art

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[15]Two undated but commissioned portraits--one of Dr. Albert C. Zumbrunnen and the other of Dean Harold von Mickwitz--from the SMU University Art Collection which were examined by the author personally confirm the artist's stylistic characteristics and her mastery of her medium.

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program.

> [Its] responsibility as a Christian institution of higher learning to emphasize the fine arts in the curriculum and to provide first rate instruction and facilities for the spiritual and esthetic nourishment which comes inevitably to the individual student who engages in this study.[16]

The facilities to realize this ambition were perhaps less grand than the aim itself. Though an *inclusive* College of Fine Arts was originally been one of SMU's schools, a 1917 reorganization found the departments of art, speech, and theatre incorporated into the College of Arts and Sciences. These programs became the vehicle through which many of the students--non-art and art majors alike--would gain a grounding in the various arts.[17] Were they degree granting or adequate preparation for the career in arts? A brief description published in *American Art Annual,* a periodical that surveyed art facilities nationwide, described the SMU art department thus:

> Olive Donaldson, head of department; four instructors. Founded 1915. Portraiture, illustration, landscape, design, commercial art, modeling, interior decoration normal course, pottery, life drawing, costume design. Tuition $180 for nine months. Enrollment 150.[18]

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[16]Restated not quoted. Marshall Terry, "A Christian University and the Arts," *Dallas Times Herald,* 31 July 1960, sec. Texas North Roundup, p. 11.

[17]Ibid.

[18]*American Art Annual,* v. 23 (Washington, DC: The American Federation of Arts, 1927), 326.

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Although Brooks never discussed particulars of courses taken here, in notes he mentioned two teachers he found memorable -Olive Donaldson and Ralph Rowntree.[19]

Donaldson, both painter and potter, was generally respected by students for her "stern manner and serious appreciation of art."[20] She had an inquiring intellectual bent and was an art activist anxious to promote interest in the fine arts among students and the Dallas community alike. This she achieved through teaching but also through public lectures on such subjects as the culture and lore of ancient Greek pottery. It is not known if she exhibited; available biographical sources show no exhibition records though a former student recalls her as a "genteel artist of still lifes and pastoral landscapes."[21] Perhaps this omission is explained by her perception of herself primarily as educator, a profession for which she was singularly well prepared.

In 1899, the University of Chicago had conferred on Donaldson a Bachelor of Arts degree, generally comparable to

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American Federation of Arts, 1927), 326.

[19]Brooks, Memoirs. Artist's Archives, n.p.

[20]Francine Carraro, *Jerry Bywaters: A Life in Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 7.

[21]Carraro, 7.

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today's Bachelor of Fine Arts, which indicated a thorough foundation in visual arts. She had already completed Normal School and taught and administered various schools in Illinois and Ohio for more than a decade. In 1903, working mostly in summer sessions, she reentered classes at the University of Chicago to attain her educational accreditation. Researching ancient Greek vases under the head of the archeological department of the School of Education, she finally earned her Ph.B. degree in Education in August 1912. She had supplemented these studies with courses at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1911-12 and 1913-14, and is said to have also studied Greek at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and art and archeology at the American College in Athens.[22] In addition to teaching pottery making prior to coming to SMU, she had amassed a formidable store of knowledge on wild flowers and other flora of the southwest and used it to create a regional garden on the university campus.[23] Since Brooks' transcript at SMU includes a sequence of three clay modeling courses, it is likely

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[22]Fisk, 81.

[23]Maxine Hunsinger Sullivan, University of Chicago Registrar to author, LS, 17 July 1996 and Andrew Hanna, Registrar's Office, U. of Chicago, telephone conversation with author, 24 July 1996. Also, Olive Donaldson, academic transcript for 1911-12, 1913-14, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Fisk, 81.

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Donaldson was the professor for these.[24]

Ralph Rowntree, an assistant professor of painting in the SMU art department, was the other teacher Brooks recalled.[25] A graduate of SMU who had studied art at the California Art School, Rowntree was drawn to exotica. After completing his schooling, he spent several years in Asia before returning to Texas to teach. In 1927 he traveled to France and Spain on a painting expedition with one of Brooks' fellow students, in 1929 he won the Louis Comfort Tiffany Fellowship, and in the year 1930 he became a professor in a Floating University. The Asian experience pervaded his sensibility and provided ample subject matter for his paintings and pastels, which along with his private collections of Chinese pottery and Javanese batiks aroused great viewer interest.

Unlike Simkins, Rowntree did not rely on nature for his subject matter. His works, shaped in part by his poetic awareness, bore names like *The Twig is Green, Under Southern Waters,* and *Things that Fade.* Two contemporary critics viewing them said,

Mr. Roundtree's [sic] work shows that he has been

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[24]James David Brooks, Southern Methodist University. Student's Permanent Record, semesters of 1923-24, 1924-25.

[25]Bywaters spelled this name Rountree, and noted the spelling used here and Roundtree. Carraro, 12.

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> strongly influenced by the brilliant scheme of coloring, of costume, of vegetation, and eastern countries ...[26]

and,

> ...He seems to linger and dream over his work, touching in color with painstaking care, producing almost perfect beauty, haunting loveliness and poetry.[27]

Still Brooks was not to return for further study with Rowntree. For reasons not known, but probably because the January 1926 opening of the Dallas Art Institute held out the promise of a more intensive, less academically oriented art education, Brooks enrolled in this school rather than completing SMU. The establishment of the Art Institute is often attributed solely to Olin Herman Travis although evidence exists that James A. Waddell was its co-founder.[28] The impact of these teachers on Brooks and on the community

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[26]Mr. Clarence L.F. Godhes, quoted in Fisk, 96.

[27]Mr. Godhes quoting an unidentified Mrs. Hunt. Ibid.

[28]Many sources acknowledge Olin Travis as the founder of the Dallas Art Institute, among them Peggy and Harold Samuels, *The Illustrated Biographical Encyclopedia of Artists of the American West* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 489, and Carraro, 18. However, two sources record the co-founder as James A. Waddell. Brooks, who was personally close to Waddell and traveled to New York with him, is one. His account, confirmed as it is by Peggy Louis Jones in "One-Man Show by Olin Travis Now On View," *The Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1945, p. 5d. is probably accurate. She wrote, "After about fifteen years in Chicago, he [Travis] returned to Dallas and in 1926 founded, in collaboration with James Waddell, the Dallas Art Institute which continued under his leadership until 1941 and which numbers among its alumni many of Dallas' best known artists."

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was considerably different. Travis, newly returned from Chicago where he had studied at the Art Institute, taught, and had begun his art career, was to be a major force in shaping Dallas art though it is not known if Brooks ever studied with him. In contrast, Waddell, another AIC alumni with whom Brooks *did* study drawing, exerted little discernible influence on the community, but radically reshaped the aspirations of his pupil.

It is important to study Travis' contribution here; it reverberates even today—decreeing, in a sense, the art that will be hung in Dallas museums and galleries. Though still in an embryonic stage, his concept of art is one from which Brooks, in search of wider horizons, would soon break away.

Olin Travis (1888-1975), was perhaps the first native born Dallas artist--a kin, some believed, of William Barret Travis who defended the Alamo. Already in high school, he had studied mechanical drawing while his love of the fine arts was simultaneously developing. Encouraged by a talented and successful sculptor--Clyde Chandler, a neighbor--who had produced the monumental sculpture *The Gulf Winds* for the State Fair grounds, Travis went to study at the Art Institute of Chicago. There he was to continue from fall 1909 to fall 1913, and again from October 1919 to

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November 1920, after first having completed Metropolitan Business College.[29] In his final year at the Institute, his teaching career began: he was listed as "one of the graduates or advanced students...acting as assistant teachers in the Saturday juvenile class."[30] He would teach, too, at the Chicago Commercial Art School before retiring from commercial art and returning to Dallas with his wife, established artist Kathryn Hail Travis. There he would cooperate in organizing the Art Institute of Dallas. The need existed; small at first, the institute quickly attracted students and grew in importance.

Carraro in assessing the significance of the school observed in part, it "served as a central meeting point for artists and a focal point for developing new ideas in art."[31] Interestingly, the new ideas would virtually ignore stylistic innovation. Travis, a good-humored and empathetic teacher, painted landscapes, portraits and genre scenes highly esteemed for their pastel colors and free brushwork. Having come from the conservative AIC, he did not influence students toward any particular art theory or style of

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[29]Olin Herman Travis, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Official Transcript, semesters of 1909-1910, 1910-11, 1911-12, 1912-13, fall 1913, 1919-1920.

[30]*The Art Institute of Chicago Circular of Instruction for 1912-1913,* 18.

[31]Carraro, 33.

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drawing or painting, but focused instead on having them achieve well composed and well painted works. After mastering such elements of art, he believed students would arrive at a congenial style.

If style was not emphasized, by contrast iconography was. Indeed, the principal concern of the "new ideas" fostered here was subject matter. It took precedence over style, and to Travis and the group of talented students under his wing, an appropriate subject would soon come to mean a *southwestern* or *regional* image. The reasoning behind this is complex. Pride in the uniqueness of the locality, the influence of neighboring New Mexican artists in painting their indigenous culture, an anti-modernist bias against Impressionist techniques which a group of young Dallas Art Institute painters felt unequal to capturing the beauty of their region--these were all part of it.[32] But underlying it, as well, was a denial of Dallas as an art backwater, a more positive view of that city's culture than previously expressed.

These Texans--primarily artists, art critics, and writers, but some lay persons, too--detected a strengthening of interest in the arts in the opening decades of the

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[32]For an expanded discussion of this, see Chapter 3, "A Hotbed for Indigenous Art," Carraro, 28-43.

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century. It was manifested in such events as the 1903 formation of the Dallas Art Association which was to promote art exhibitions and begin building a permanent collection; the 1905 building of a Fine Arts Building to be used as a gallery on the State Fair Grounds; and from 1909 on, the large, international exhibitions with curators of note, and more.[33] The Mexican muralists would inspire them, as would the critical writings of Henry Nash Smith in the *Southwest Review*. By 1930 the artists among them, nurtured by Olin Travis and closely allied to the Dallas Art Institute, would have coalesced into rigid arbiters of what Texas art should be. Among them, and most articulate, was Jerry Bywaters, later director of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, writer, curator and lifelong painting professor at SMU. His painting *Sharecropper* of 1937 (fig. 5) illustrates the subject matter favored by Travis-taught art students. Those of like mind included Otis Dozier, John Douglass, Lloyd Goff, William Lester, Charles McCann, Perry Nichols, Everett Spruce, and Buck Winn, a group that would later earn the name "The Dallas Nine." It was to escape the confines of such narrowness of mind, but even more to take advantage of

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[33]Curators of note included Forbes Watson and Robert Macbeth of Macbeth Galleries, NY. Jerry Bywaters, "1900-1930," *Seventy-Five Years of Art in Dallas* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1978).

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the art training a major city offered, that James Brooks joined James Waddell, Ed Bean, a friend who worked for the telephone company, and an unknown fourth passenger in "an old Moon automobile," and came to New York in 1926.[34]

[34]James Brooks, Interview by Seckler, Transcript.

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CHAPTER 2

NEW YORK, EARLY EXPERIENCES AND SUCCESSES: 1926-1934

Many details of James Brooks' life after his arrival in New York are unknown. We know that the travelers--Waddell, Brooks, and their companions--arrived during the summer of 1926, and settled in a rooming house on the upper West Side of Manhattan--at 113 West 77th Street.[1] Charlotte Park Brooks is reasonably sure Brooks spent his days seeking and executing lettering assignments that would finance his schooling.[2] And we know that he enrolled in a night class at the Grand Central School of Art to study illustration with Pruett Carter, a prominent illustrator whose work he had long admired.[3] Though he neither anticipated nor planned it, an experience at this chosen school would ironically redirect his art career.

Brooks had, after all, come east seeking to hone his

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[1]Address given on academic transcript, The Art Students League, 1927-28. Street address also mentioned in James Brooks. Interview by Dorothy Seckler, 10 June 1965, transcript.

[2]Charlotte Park Brooks, interview with author, 23 January 1997.

[3]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," interview by Dorothy Seckler (10 June 1965), *Archives of American Art Journal* 16 (No. 1, 1976): 12.

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artistic skills and use them in producing his livelihood. Having already enjoyed some success lettering signs and show cards, he was predictably drawn to the Grand Central School of Art because of its awareness of

> ...new art consciousness developing in America today...given impetus largely through...the demands of modern industry...[4]

It therefore expanded its curriculum to include costume design, advertising, and illustration, along with its fine arts courses. In this highly successful school, started only two years earlier by the American Impressionist artist Edmund W. Greacen, Pruett Carter was not merely a teacher of illustration, but a star attraction. A catalogue printed only a short time later would report he had,

> ...built up a class known throughout the country, and has given this fine art of illustration a great forward impetus due to his sincere and extensive work.[5]

Artist Mort Kunstler, an authority on the works of foremost 20th-century illustrators, confirms this assessment, finding Carter endlessly creative, productive, and flexible enough to change styles as times demanded.[6]

Western-trained at the Art Students League of Los Angeles, Carter had by age twenty-five come east and become art director of *Good Housekeeping Magazine* and evolved the

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[4]Annual Catalogue (N.Y.: The Grand Central School of Art, 1934) np.

[5]*Grand Central School of Art Catalogue*, n.d., but probably 1930. In Edmund W. Graecen Papers, 1905-1946. Archives of American Art.

[6]Mort Kunstler, interview by author, 28 February 1997, Oyster Bay Cove, NY, Written notes.

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philosophy that set his work apart, and that he would articulate later in life.

> The illustrator may be likened to the director of a motion picture, or a spoken stageplay. He must know his characters--their emotions and desires--he must set the stage and direct the arrangement and action and conflict of drama. He must live the part of each actor. He must do the scenery, design the costumes and handle the lighting effects...[7]

Before returning to the west in 1930, he would teach first at Pratt Institute, and then at Grand Central where his sensitive posing of the figure, his brilliant and tasteful use of color, and his handling of light as a theatrical element would inspire students toward careers as illustrators.

Like his classmates, Brooks had first opted for this kind of instruction and in the months he studied with Carter he had worked to achieve the "illustrative poses" for which his teacher was known. The two oil studies that remain of his class work--*Nurse* and *Old Lady* (figs. 6 and 7), c. 1927 --are painted in a student version of Carter's style which Brooks was to describe as "Post Impressionist, or John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase sort of, tempered by Pruett Carter [with] kind of a luscious paint."[8]

Both figures amply fill the pictorial space allotted to them and both are freely brushed, showing the assured use of oil paints the young artist's study with Martha Simkins had

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[7]Pruett Carter as quoted in Walter Reed and Roger Reed, *The Illustrator in America,* 1880-1980 (New York: The Society of Illustrators, 1984), 158.

[8]James Brooks, Interview by Seckler, transcript.

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already provided. The figure in *Nurse* is seated casually on a low stool, supporting her weight with her right hand. She wears a headpiece traditionally associated with nursing, although her brightly colored garments seem questionable. Her downcast eyes bespeak a feminine modesty suitable to 1920's notions of womanhood. *Old Lady* is by contrast more stark. She is not defined by her pose, but by the austerity of her style and surroundings, and her sad almost suspicious expression. Although the formal qualities of both have merit, the figures yield few of the psychological insights of serious portraiture. Brooks must have sensed with shallowness himself, for an overheard remark of this time was to change his career.

The chance remark Brooks attributed to Arshile Gorky, who in September of 1926 had just been appointed a full time faculty member of Grand Central School of Art. He instructed evening classes in Life Drawing as well as Antique Drawing (from casts of classical sculpture). Recalling the incident in later years, Brooks was convinced it was Gorky's voice that drifted over a classroom partition, proclaiming to his students that there was more to painting than just drawing correctly.[9] Indeed Gorky's pupil Walter Murch confirmed that making students conscious of this fact was inherent even in his critiques. For example, in criticizing a well observed and well drawn nude, Gorky is

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[9]Ibid.

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reported to have advised,

> ...that the medium or the artist must be allowed to take over...that the medium was interesting in itself, not merely a vehicle for something else...that the given, the observed could be wrong...[10]

and he criticized views that were dull or insipid. Murch, and presumably fellow students,

> ...thus began to learn what art was, and how it could be superimposed on the given; he began to sense the infinite possibilities and endless relationships between the observed, himself, and something that Gorky was certain about: Art.[11]

In any event Brooks, having assimilated Carter's special gifts for color, the fluidity of his line and brushwork, now found the study of illustration dull. With a mind always open to new ideas, he suddenly saw the grander possibilities of art--art beyond commercial art, that is.[12] When resuming school in the fall semester of 1927, he did not register for Gorky's class, however, but for the class of another artist whose "enormous reputation" attracted Brooks. It was Kimon Nicolaïdes, then teaching at the Art Students League. One can only speculate he had learned of the League's virtues from Simkins, who had already studied there for twelve years

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[10]Daniel Robbins in *Walter Murch: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island School of Design Museum, 1966), 21-23, as quoted in Diane Waldman, "Arshile Gorky: Poet in Paint," *Arshile Gorky: 1904-1948, A Retrospective*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams in collaboration with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1981), 17.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Charlotte Park Brooks, interview with author. 12 March 1997, telephone. Mrs. Brooks commenting on the openness of her husband's thinking, and his willingness to examine new ideas.

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and would return again.[13]

The Art Students League, founded in 1875 by a group of students who had left the National Academy of Art in protest, was one of the more popular training grounds for those wishing to become artists. Brooks enrolled there in 1927 when it already had a student population exceeding twenty-five hundred, and a faculty of thirty-four teaching a wide variety of painting, drawing, sculpture, printing, and commercial art courses. Nicolaïdes, only five years back from France where he had studied painting and been given his first one-man show at the venerable Bernheim Jeune Gallery, taught Life Drawing and Antique Drawing at this school where he himself had earlier been a student. Brooks' choice was Life Drawing at night.[14]

Nicolaïdes was a popular and conscientious teacher, said to have an "extraordinary talent for human relationships."[15] Thoughtfully he had worked out his pedagogical system and drafted a book on it, to be published only posthumously in 1941.[16] Called *The Natural Way to Draw: A Working Plan for Art Study*, it set forth for those

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[13]See 20, n. 10.

[14]James Brooks' academic transcript. The Art Students League, 1927-28.

[15]Kimon Nicolaides, *The Natural Way to Draw: A Working Plan for Art Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941). Repr., Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

[16]Ibid. First printing, 1941, three years after the author's death in 1938.

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opting to be self-taught a program of drawing exercises that, if faithfully followed, would be the equivalent of a year's study in his art school class. From it can be learned something of the teacher's methods: his emphasis on *contour* and *gesture* as the basis for all drawing, his method of "catching" the pose, his reliance on memory in creating group compositions, his capturing of weight (i.e., form) and action, his approach to light and shade, anatomy, and body structure, and the interweaving of all the above into more complex compositions. Meticulously planned, it provides an insight into the thoroughness of Nicolaïdes' instruction.

Though unfortunately none of Brooks' student contour drawings remain, it is clear from such surviving figure studies as *Farmer Packing Produce*, prepared for the mural *Labor and Leisure* of 1938 (fig. 8), that Nicolaïdes' lessons were thoroughly absorbed. Nicolaïdes' class instruction in contour drawing, as later set down in his book, was this:

> Sit close to the model or object which you intend to draw...Focus your eyes on some point...along the contour of the model...Imagine that your pencil point is touching the model instead of the paper...Then move your eye *slowly* along the contour of the model and move your pencil *slowly* along the paper...THIS MEANS THAT YOU MUST DRAW WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE PAPER...[17]

What this method yielded, when mastered, were figures or objects with outlines so assured, they seemed to free themselves from the grounds on which they were drawn and imply their own three-dimensionality. This firm contour becomes one of the distinguishing characteristics of Brooks'

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[17]Nicolaïdes, 9-10.

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figurative works. A related skill mastered by Brooks under the tutelage of his League teacher was the capturing of action poses.

"Gesture drawings" was the name Nicolaïdes gave to the latter. The occasion for this kind of drawing was a model moving quickly from one pose to another, with the student directed to "Try to feel the entire things as a unit--a unit of energy, a unit of movement." The directions for achieving this are very specific.

> You should feel that you are doing whatever the model is doing. If the model stoops or reaches, pushes or relaxes, you should feel that your own muscles likewise stoop or reach, push or relax. IF YOU DO NOT RESPOND IN LIKE MANNER TO WHAT THE MODEL IS DOING, YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU SEE. If you do not feel as the model feels, your drawing is only a map or a plan.[18]

Clearly, such instructions were enabling for the young artist as he became proficient in each required phase of study (figs. 9 and 10). As a whole, these phases would constitute the lifelong foundation of his draftsmanship--reflected in both the drawing for, and the painting of, such figures as an airborne man in the *Flight* mural Brooks would begin only a decade later (figs. 11 and 12). Although Nicolaïdes' instruction would remain profoundly important to Brooks' future work, his teaching method which Brooks had liked at first, ultimately seemed too subjective. The following year, Brooks would change both his residence--

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[18]Nicolaïdes, 16.

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moving closer to the city art community--and teacher.[19] For the latter, he chose Boardman Robinson because "he seemed more externalized and more interested in how pictures were made."[20]

From Brooks' descriptions, it is clear Robinson had quite different concerns and methods than did Nicolaïdes. Born in 1876, he was farther along in his career. He called himself an illustrator, lithographer, and painter, but he was also a caricaturist of sufficient force to be described as 'the American equivalent of Daumier.'[21] In the latter capacity he had worked mainly for liberal periodicals, and developed a style of crayon drawing powerful and realistic enough to inspire a whole coterie of socially conscious followers.[22] This called *Cross Breaker*, of 1912 (fig. 13), was drawn for the periodical *Masses*. Although his course was listed as Life Drawing, apparently at the time Brooks was his pupil, he had already broadened the scope of his teaching, for in response to Seckler's question, "What particular things did you get from Boardman Robinson that

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[19]The new address was 219 West 14th Street, N.Y.C., nearer to both the Union Square and Greenwich Village studio areas. Academic transcript. Art Students League.

[20]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives...Journal*, 12. Also, School records, The Art Students League, 1928-29.

[21]Critic Charles Henry Melzer quoted in "Robinson to Teach," *The Art Digest*, September 1930, 30.

[22]Periodicals at which Robinson worked included *Masses*, the *Tribune*, and *The New Masses*. Milton W. Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 30, 187.

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were formative to you?" Brooks responded:

> I think a more conscious feeling of the designing of areas and spaces. Nicolaïdes was all intuitive--what came out was fine if it was felt. Boardman Robinson attacked it a different way--a formal derivation from what he thought the good muralists of the past were doing. So they were quite different [it was] mainly a difference between the completely introspective life and the more objective life.[23]

Another significant difference was that Robinson, taking a cue from wall painters of the past and the Mexican muralists at work during the last decade, had already become immersed in mural painting and had accepted a commission to paint a series of nine works depicting the *History of Commerce* to be installed in 1929 in Kaufmann's Department Store, Inc. of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. To accept and carry out such a major assignment must have caused him to rethink all aspects of painting. Toward this end, he had already refined traditional compositional methods in favor of a more simplified approach which could, in turn, be passed on to his students. A contemporary critic, while commenting enthusiastically on the finished murals, called this to public attention:

> He [Robinson] has scrapped the old conventions. There is not a trace of trite symbolism here nor is there a hint of that mode of composition, carried down from such masters as Raphael and Veronese, which depends upon an almost geometrical balancing of factors in a design. Instead of that Mr. Robinson practices a kind of Giottesque simplicity--without the smallest Italianizing of his scheme. He secures order, symmetry in his groups by the easiest naturalistic process in the world, blending the animation and truth of life with the

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[23]James Brooks. James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives...Journal,* 12.

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> exigencies of architectural decoration in a manner that is as spontaneous as it is monumental...He draws as ever with enkindling force.[24]

Brooks was to study with Robinson through 1929 when his formal education (though not his thirst) for all art-related knowledge was to end. Texan and New York teachers alike had served to perfect different areas of his skills. Eager to test them but needing to support himself, the artist wisely decided to divide his year.

His pen lettering was of sufficiently high quality to devote but six months a year to it and so earn enough money to support his painting for the remainder of the year. If not an ideal solution, it was nevertheless a practical one. Many young fine artists were concurrently supporting themselves supplying illustrations for advertising.[25] Brooks instead chose to letter the bold captions for ads in styles and layouts that typography had not yet the flexibility to produce. Significantly, in the graceful lines of this early, cursive lettering the lyricism of his later abstract form is prefigured. A ledger he kept at the time reveals both the importance of the agencies he serviced (J. Walter Thompson, Benton and Bowles, William Esty & Co.,

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[24]"The New York Season," *The Art Digest IV*, (Mid-December 1929): 17.

[25]Michele Bogart, discusses the relationship of fine artist to commercial demands for illustration in *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Supplementary to this discussion is one concerning the number of fine artists straddling the line between fine and commercial art in decades of the twenties and thirties.

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etc.) and the status of their clients for whom he worked (Lux soap (fig. 14), Gorham silver (fig. 15), Sharp & Dohme, J.R. Reynolds tobacco, etc.) Ledger entries and a 1937 letterhead also verify that he and two colleagues had a small lettering service which continued until 1945.[26] For James Brooks it purchased the time to create works that would earn him his first public recognition.

Again, specific information about these early years is incomplete, except for a few facts. While fall, winter, and spring were spent in New York, the summer months were spent painting in the west or southwest. A second hand car was bought annually for the trip, only to be sold after the return. During one of these trips, Brooks met and courted Mary MacDonald who returned to New York with him where they were married in 1934. About this marriage, later dissolved, little is known--except that the bride was striking in physical appearance, and commemorated in a couple of portraits the year they wed (fig. 16).[27] We know, too, the artist devoted himself to both painting and lithography. Works in both media found early acceptance and were exhibited with some regularity. And Brooks' circle of acquaintances now increased, probably through contact with other young artists fortunate enough to have similar

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[26]James D. Brooks, 441 Lexington Ave., NYC. Associates were Edward A. Batt and John Q. Andrew.

[27]According to papers filed in the District Court of the Second Judicial District of the State of Idaho, 2 October 1934 was the wedding date and 23 June 1942 the date of the divorce decree.

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commercial assignments or gallery affiliations.

One such friend was Bradley Walker Tomlin, a slightly more mature artist, born and educated in Syracuse, New York --and further trained in French academies as well.[28] In the summer of 1931, both artists were to share a converted barn-studio at Woodstock, New York. It was probably Brooks' first contact with so active an art colony, and one with an established art association holding scheduled exhibitions. Although he would not do so again, he did participate in one that summer.[29] Two works painted in Woodstock, plus others painted during the following two years, provide some insight into the development of the artist at that time.

Brooks' oil paintings of the years 1931 through 1933 are all easel-sized works of modest dimensions. They can be divided into subjects easily tackled in the studio--that is, still lifes and studies of posed figures--or landscapes and genre scenes of a kind that would soon be called American

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[28]Bradley Walker Tomlin, born 1899, was educated at the College of Fine Arts, Syracuse University. In 1923 he studied at the Académie Colarossi and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris. Jeanne Chenault, "Bradley Walker Tomlin," *Bradley Walker Tomlin: A Retrospective View* (Buffalo: The Buffalo Academy of Fine Arts, 1975), 7-13.

[29]The Woodstock Art Association could supply neither name nor exact dates of that exhibition, however, a Brooks biographical statement in the second undated catalog supports the fact that he participated in a Woodstock show. *The Exhibition of Paintings of American Scenes and Subjects* catalog for a College Art Association exhibition at the Frank K.M. Rehn Gallery states, "[Brooks] has exhibited at Woodstock Art Association." This latter document could not be dated by either the C.A.A. or the Rehn files in the Archives of American Act.

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Scene painting. That phrase indicates subject matter drawn from settings or events reflecting American experience alone. It also reflects rejection of the influence of such foreign art movements as Cubism, Constructivism, and Fauvism. Paintings bearing such titles as *Oklahoma Town* (fig. 17), *Butte, Montana* (fig. 18), and *Kellogg, Idaho* were probably painted during trips out of the city. However, whatever the genre, the artistic intelligence at work here has simplified and strengthened each by excluding all extraneous objects or details.

The two nudes, for example, are frontal and somewhat stylized, which tends to accent the athleticism of the male while depriving the female of sensuality--though her ample curves suggest that was not the artist's intention (figs. 19 and 20). The still lifes--numbering seven--like the nudes occupy a barren space: each has but a few objects and they are seen from a bird's eye view (figs. 21 and 22). Two employ drapery, which serves more to frame the objects and introduce contrasting color than to relieve the starkness (fig. 23). The buildings in town scenes and industrial landscapes share this austere quality and, for the most part, picture desolate areas (fig. 24).[30] Though no social criticism is overt, the severity of the scenes--the starkness of the mines and grain elevator--implies something of the hopelessness of the early depression years. In

[30]I am grateful to Art Historian Gail Levin for calling my attention to the similarity in style between these works and Lee Krasner's painting *Gansevoort I* , c. 1934.

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directing his attention to such subjects, Brooks followed a pattern established by Charles Burchfield, Edward Hopper, Thomas Hart Benton, John Stuart Curry, Reginal Marsh, and others. Spurred in part by the current economic depression, and residual xenophobic attitudes resulting from World War I, yet tempered by optimism in the future of their country, they had revived an interest in realism which many American artists would embrace during the decade of the 1930s. Had he no personal link with these artists, Brooks could still have read about this in *The Art Digest*, a periodical that carried a succession of articles both for and against American Scene themes, or he might well have heard it discussed in the places artists gathered such as the local bars and cafeterias on 14th Street, a studio-rich area where he made his home.[31]

But to return to the works themselves, we note color has a redeeming effect. Though limited in numbers of hues, the predominant scheme--rusty reds and red oranges played off against rich blue greens and olives--bestows an unexpected vibrancy on this group of works. In each, drawing is subordinated; the form structured with separate

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[31]The debate was originally on "American wave," later to be called "American Scene," artworks vs. French-influenced modernism. A few articles addressed to this topic, either pro or con, are "Here Is An Answer to the American Attack on French Modernism," and "Uber Alles," both from *The Art Digest* (1st January 1932): 7; "Michigan's 22nd Annual Gets Roasted for Its Modernism," *The Art Digest* (15th January 1932) 3; "Nation's Print Makers 58 Percent Conservative, Year's '50' Reveal," *The Art Digest* (1st March 1932): 3: "The Debate," *The Art Digest* (15th March 1932): 15, 21-2.

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strokes of paint, as if the artist had long studied Cézanne's works. The feathery brushwork has been replaced; now each mark is thoughtfully and deliberately placed.

It is a sign of critical approval that by October 1932 a painting, *Still Life for White Cup* (fig. 25), was included in an "Exhibition of Young Painters," assembled by the College Art Association aided by Director Winslow Ames of the Lyman Allyn Museum and shown in the Ferargil Galleries in New York City. One of forty works selected from the five hundred submitted, it ushered in the artist's long exhibition history.[32] Within the year, Brooks' *Oklahoma Barber Shop* would be shown in another C.A.A. exhibition, "American Scenes and Subjects," held at the Frank K.M. Rehn Gallery in New York City.[33] Though this in itself didn't constitute success, there were adequate indications to predict it.

In the Sixth Annual Allied Arts Exhibition of Dallas County held in the spring of 1933, a juried show of more than three hundred works encompassing many categories of painting, sculpture, and the graphic and decorative arts, Brooks had the painting *Scene in Woodstock* and four lithographs shown. While the show, sponsored by the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts to display the works of Dallas county artists, had no specific thematic focus, many of the award

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[32]Carraro, 55 and 239, n. 29, citing "Art Notes," *Dallas Morning News* (1 October 1932): 7.

[33]The catalogs for these early C.A.A. assembled exhibitions have no dates.

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winning works did portray Texan regionalist experience.[34] And a local art critic would comment:

> To those of us who call Dallas home, this exhibition has a genuine significance that a collection of the finest masters in the Louvre would not have, because here we find the living art...born of our own lives and own environment.[35]

Brooks, whose works were not specifically related to Texas, nevertheless was awarded first prize in the category of lithography for *Lithograph No. 2*, and three honorable mentions for the remaining works. *Early Morning*, 1932 (fig. 26), one of the lithographs shown here would find an equally warm reception in New York and Chicago. It was shown at the invitational Whitney Biennial of Contemporary American Sculpture, Watercolors, and Prints (the first biennial had been limited to paintings alone) which ran from 5 December 1933 to 17 January 1934 and included such established artists as Aaron Bohrod, Rockwell Kent, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Louis Lozowick. Shown again at the First Municipal Art Exhibition held at Rockefeller Center between 28 February and 31 March 1934, it was singled out once more for recognition.[36] This was a large show of works by 412

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[34]Since his parents still lived in Dallas, it is likely he still thought of himself as a Dallas county artist, at least enough to take advantage of another exhibition opportunity.

[35]John Williams Rogers, "Public to Have First View of Allied Arts Exhibit at Fine Arts Museum Today," *Dallas Times Herald*, 19 March 1933: sec. 4, p.6.

[36]Besides *Early Morning*, Brooks showed *Derelicts*, of 1931, *White Horse* of 1932, and *Interlude* of 1933. *First Municipal Art Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: 1934).

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artists, and precedent-making in that it was sponsored by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, the first chief executive of this city to so support a show of contemporary art. Its director, Holger Cahill, also called attention to the fact it attempted to:

> include outstanding American artists who are identified with the New York art world and whose contribution to American art has been recognized by American museums.[37]

And here *Early Morning* was among twenty works the mayor of the city, in a unique gesture, selected to be purchased for presentation to the schools.

Also in 1934, it would be shown at the extensive Century of Progress Exhibition, an event sponsored by the Art Institute of Chicago.[38] More than 700 paintings, divided into four chronological periods, were here presented, with the intention of showing "masters of American art," and revealing "the true place of America in the annals of the world's art history."[39] Once again this work by Brooks, only a few years out of art school, was in august company.

At this juncture the subject of lithography in the

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[37]The quotation is from First Municipal Art Exhibition catalog, n.p. Director Holger Cahill was an influential American arts administrator and writer who was appointed director of exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932 and from 1935 to 1941 would be head of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project.

[38]It was curated by the Director, Robert B. Harshe, the Associate Curator of Painting, Daniel Patton Rich, with the help of Mildred J. Prentiss, Curator of Prints and Drawings.

[39]"Art of America Is Feature of Chicago's Great 1934 Exhibition," *The Art Digest VIII*, (1st June 1934): 5-6, 10-13.

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1930s merits attention. As a painter James Brooks was one of many who at this time turned to the graphic arts. In fact, the rush of interest in graphic processes caused art periodicals to address columns specifically to printmakers' needs.[40] In Brook's case, lithographs were his main interest, but other artists were producing etchings, woodcuts, and aquatints, as well. The national economy was one obvious reason this was so. Having suffered the market collapse of 1929, the country was in the grip of a depression. Artists, never strongly supported by the public and without easily marketable products, suffered more than most. Their neediness caused an art periodical to suggest this remedy: that artworks could be bartered for "food, or the services of doctors or dentists, and for rent."[41] Because a print was a work that could be produced in an edition relatively inexpensively, it answered a need for an egalitarian artwork within the financial reach of a larger public.

Lithography, in particular, gained popularity in the third decade of the century.[42] Once called the "Stepchild of the Arts," because of chromolithography's association with commercial images, it had nevertheless attracted

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[40]See, for example, "Among the Print Makers, Old and Modern." *The Art Digest*, series in the 1930s.

[41]"Art for Barter," *The Art Digest VII* (1 April 1932): 4.

[42]For further reading on this subject, see Clinton Adams, *American Lithographers 1900-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, c. 1983).

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several major artists and technicians of the late 19th-century for the range of values it permitted them to achieve. By the first years of the new century, an artist like John Sloan found it admirable for the purpose of expressing his realist themes (as had Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec before him). And as the century progressed, it became the favored graphic medium of many artists with similar concerns--Louis Lozowick and Raphael Soyer, among them. Because he situated himself within this realist framework, Brooks, too, was drawn to lithography for his graphic works of this period. *Early Morning* was one of his attracting major attention.

Parked curbside and slightly oblique to the picture plane in the center of the image is a tarpaulin-covered road-paver seeming to announce the activities of the coming day. Behind it a horse-drawn milk cart stands near a colonnade curving to the right, while at left a figure trudges through the dawn darkness and pelting rain. Awakening at 6 a.m., it is a scene any city dweller might have witnessed. But it speaks metaphorically of urban change, as well--the paver standing for industrialization and its future promise; the horse, for the fast receding pastoral life. In both its evocation of loneliness and in the tonal range from sooty black to stark white the artist was able to achieve, it is compelling. For these virtues plus its expressive qualities and technical skill, the art

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establishment accorded it a quite exceptional reception.

As the 1930s approached the halfway mark, Brooks' life was to change once more. He could now more comfortably divide the last year between lettering and months in the studio, and so with Bert Goodman, he rented a manufacturing loft at 11 West 17th Street near Fifth Avenue. Goodman, a friend with whom he had worked at an art service when he first came to New York, was now "painting all the time." Said Brooks, "We had just gotten Max Doerner's book on techniques...," and "went through the book pretty much and tried all kinds of glazing techniques, underpainting, and stuff we hadn't known about before."[43]

Different than the formal education received at previous schools, the book by Doerner entitled *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters,* was a treasury of information for any artist wishing to broaden his experience.[44] Doerner, had been, for the past quarter century, a professor in the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, lecturing to students on the technical methods of painting. The book is a compendium of those lectures and more. It deals with such practical subjects as "The Preparation of Grounds for Easel Pictures," "Pigments," "Painting in Oils," "Tempera Painting," etc.

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[43]James Brooks, Interview by Dorothy Seckler, transcript.

[44]Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters,* trans. Eugen Neuhaus (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934 repr. Rahway, NJ: Quinn, Boden, 1935)

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Besides that, it advises on aesthetic matters, providing students with such warnings as this: "Complementary colors of equal strength in juxtaposition and covering equal areas... are offensive to sensitive eyes," or "It should always be borne in mind that modeling in light and dark should at the start be attended with restraint." Though these specific instructions were useful, of greater use were the instructions on mural painting. The chapter dealing with this must have been inestimable for Brooks remembered,

> ...[W]e were very much interested in murals at the time because the big resurgence in Mexico was just happening ...We entered some mural competitions and I won the one I entered, which was for the Hempstead, Long Island Post Office, a good-sized job--five big panels, I don't remember what it paid.[45]

With faith in his talent, and a modest record of accomplishment behind him, Brooks' career would enter a new phase.

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[45]James Brooks. Interview by Dorothy Seckler, transcript.

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CHAPTER THREE

NEW YORK, THE MURAL YEARS: 1935-1942

In the latter part of the "mural years" there occurred the first clear move toward modernist style in James Brooks' career. At the outset of this period, beginning in 1935, his genre paintings and graphic works were clearly allied with the American Scene aesthetic and its obligatory realist form. At its termination, and particularly in the mural *Flight*, there was a marked interest in, and tentative exploration of, the process of abstraction. Here Brooks investigated both the geometric simplifications imposed by Cubism and the organic forms introduced by Dada and Surrealism. Although these years would find the artist primarily involved with the planning and painting of four mural assignments, they were not his exclusive concern.

Brooks did continue to show at museums and galleries--participating in a number of prestigious shows, some jury-selected. His works were included in the *42nd Annual Exhibition* of the Cincinnati Art Museum in spring 1935; and in 1936, in the *Second Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Drawings, and Prints* of the Whitney Museum of American Art; its *Summer Exhibition* of the same year; and its 1939 show, *Twentieth-Century Artists*, the

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museum's official World's Fair exhibition. From the Second Biennial, the museum purchased Brooks' lithograph *Copper Mine, Butte*--his first work to enter a major museum (fig. 27).[1] He had shown the same work in the exhibition of the *Texas Centennial Exposition* of 1936, another large juried event. But most of his energy, and that of his friend Bert Goodman, was now devoted to poring over the Doerner book, studying it, and tabbing it so as not to lose a moment in locating the desired passages. With the goal of entering some of the government-sponsored mural competitions for artists, they all but memorized mural techniques and materials. And hoping to see mural painting first hand, Brooks had also petitioned Diego Rivera to let him observe the process. Rivera responded with an invitation to the New Workers School, the site of his present endeavors.[2]

The competitions they hoped to enter were part of a federal assistance program to rescue artists from poverty during the depression years. From the October 1929 market

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[1]*The Forty-Second Annual Exhibition of American Art* was at the Cincinnati Art Museum between 9 May and 9 June, 1935. The Whitney Museum of American Art's *Second Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary Sculpture, Drawings, and Prints* was from 14 January to 13 February, 1936. The *Summer Exhibition* of the W.M.A.A., ran from 12 May through 30 September 1936. The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts' *Texas Centennial Exposition, Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture, & Graphic Arts,* was from 6 June to 29 November 1936. Dates from museum exhibition catalogs.

[2]Diego Rivera to James Brooks, SL, 10 August 1933. James Brooks Papers, Archives of American Art.

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crash on, unemployment had become an increasingly insistent economic problem which could no longer be ignored by the time Roosevelt assumed office in 1933. Although his predecessor Herbert Hoover had signed an Emergency Relief Act that provided money to the states to be given to the poor and insolvent, it was simply too little money to deal with the problem. Roosevelt at first continued this program; however, Harry Hopkins, his director of the Federal Emergency Relief Act, favored the creating of jobs rather than the existing monetary distribution. He felt it more humane. In November of 1933, the Civil Works Administration was therefore created. Its goal--to give employment to 4,000,000 for the hard winter months--was achieved. Still this was costly and did not alleviate the problem. And in December 1933, the Treasury Department eased the situation by introducing a program to employ artists. Treasury had traditionally been in charge of planning and building new federal buildings. Influenced by the Mexican Muralists and their admirable program of creating art on public buildings to attract community attention and response, artist George Biddle presented the President with the idea of using artists in a similar capacity. The program thus introduced would be called the Public Works of Art Project and would last until April 1934, when it would be supplanted by other programs. In spite of its brevity, it not only succeeded in providing meaningful work for artists, but for the first

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time in the country's history, it provided the assurance that the federal government believed art worthy of support. However, the program had uncovered a fundamental dichotomy in the aims of the federal government. On the one hand, it needed to aid indigent artists of varying abilities by providing art jobs for them to fill (toward which the earlier aid program had been directed, as noted). On the other, it wished to still procure for government buildings artworks of highest quality, created by artists of acknowledged talent and experience for whom economic aid was not necessarily a consideration (toward which some of the new programs would be geared). To fulfill both, it ultimately set up two programs. The Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture (changed four years later to the Treasury Section of Fine Arts) was established in October 1934.[3] Two of its five published objectives were:

> 1. To secure suitable art of the *best* quality for the embellishment of public buildings. (Emphasis added.)
>
> 2. In carrying out this work, *to make every effort to afford an opportunity to all artists on the sole test of their qualifications as artists* and, accordingly, to encourage competitions wherever practicable recognizing the fact, however, that certain artists in the country, because of their recognized talents are entitled to receive work without competition.[4] (Emphasis added).

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[3]Francis V. O'Connor, *Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1969), 23.

[4]*Bulletin No. 1,* Section of the Painting and Sculpture, Public Works Branch, Procurement Division, Treasury Department (Washington, D.C.: Treasury Department, 1 March 1935), 3-4 RG 121/130, National Archives, College Park, MD.

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Still by April 1935 it was necessary to also create a program that would concurrently meet the needs for ongoing financial relief for the unemployed. This would be the most extensive and have the greatest impact of all aid programs. It was the Works Progress Administration, part of whose mandate was to aid and support artists, which would be carried out under the Federal Art Project.[5] In the forthcoming years, Brooks would apply to both Treasury Section and W.P.A., with generally positive results.

In his interview with Dorothy Seckler, Brooks referred to what was probably his first experience with federal art programs--that was, his submission of mural sketches to a competition sponsored by the Treasury Department Section of Painting and Sculpture in 1935 for the Hempstead, New York newly constructed post office. He made it clear that for him, need was not the motivation since his lettering was "getting better and selling for more money all the time."[6] And actually, need would not have made him a winner of the competition, for this federal agency had a primary objective to secure the best possible art for the public buildings they were charged with embellishing. They were not funded

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[5]After July 1935 the W.P.A. would also fund a relief program called the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP). Not of consequence to James Brooks, it will not be discussed further here. For more about TRAP, see O'Connor, 25-26.

[6]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives...Journal*, 13.

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by direct Congressional appropriations as were the other agencies. Instead, one percent of the funds budgeted by Congress for a building was set aside for decoration. This funding system allowed the Section some latitude in exercising options over the kinds of art selected. But ultimately that choice was conservative and favored realism over abstraction, with subject matter that preferably had "some relation either to...local history, past or present, local industry or pursuits."[7]

For larger, more important commissions, an Advisory Committee of twenty-one experts from all over the country, had already suggested and voted on a roster of eminent artists whose expertise was such they could be given assignments without entering competitions.[8] Artists receiving fewer than the three votes necessary to make the list competed for other choice commissions, and runners up were assigned to less important federal buildings throughout the country. The remaining commissions were awarded by anonymous, open competitions--occasionally on a national, but more frequently on a local, level. It was one of the

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[7]Announcement of competition. Treasury Department, Procurement Division, Section of Painting and Sculpture (Washington, D.C.: Treasury Department, 1935), 2. RG 121/131, National Archives.

[8]These artists were Thomas Hart Benton, George Biddle, John Steuart Curry, Rockwell Kent, Leon Kroll, Reginald Marsh, Henry Varnum Poor, Boardman Robinson, Eugene Savage, Maurice Sterne, and Grant Wood. O'Connor, 22.

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latter Brooks entered.

The first of four commissions the artist won has been somewhat cloaked in mystery. Brooks remembered the award and, in fact, photos of both a preliminary clay maquette and a submitted oil sketch of the same work have been published (figs. 28 and 29).[9] *Receipt of the Mail from Holland* was its subject. However, the works now in situ are by another artist. "...They called it off," the artist offered, and hinted at "their" dissatisfaction with an expanded drawing. The facts are these.

The competition was announced as opened to "any artist resident of New York State, who lives within a thirty mile radius of Hempstead, Long Island..."[10] Since New York City is within that limit, the number of possible entries could conceivably have been large. To reach artists, a bulletin noting all requirements was prepared and readied for distribution on 18 March 1935 and contacts were made with The Mural Painters Society, The Art Students League, and the

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[9]A photo of a clay maquette was published in "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 16, No. 1 (1976): 13. The idea of making such a clay maquette Brooks owed to his friend Bert Goodman, a former student of Thomas Hart Benton who recommended this procedure. A photo of the oil sketch *Receipt of the Mail from Holland* appeared in a review of a Midtown Gallery exhibit in the *New York Herald Tribune*, 1 December 1935, sec. V, p. 10.

[10]Austin Purves, Jr., Competition Chairman, to Olin Dows, Assistant Superintendent, Section of Painting and Sculpture, Treasury Department. LS, 11 March 1935. RG121/130. National Archives. College Park, MD.

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National Academy of Design, "as the three places which would be in touch with the mural painting profession and aspirants for mural painting."[11] The competition was also publicized in the newspapers. The terminal date for submission of sketches was 1 June 1935. Nevertheless, Austin Purves, Jr., Art Director of Cooper Union Art Schools and chairperson of a six-member jury, notified Olin Dows, Assistant Superintendent of the Section, a talented artist, and tireless administrator, that 174 people had "registered a desire to enter the competition," by 13 May, an arbitrary date at which entries seem to have been closed.[12] All received the competition rules, and blueprints of the mural space were given to 75, although others could make their own tracings. Ultimately, 49 sets of mural designs were received by the committee.[13]

As for the murals, there were five equal size areas for them although the competition initially invited designs for only two, which might possibly be awarded to different artists (fig.30).[14] Brooks was later advised that he could

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[11]Austin Purves, Jr. to Olin Dows, LS, 24 June 1935, RG 121/133, National Archives.

[12]Austin Purves, Jr. to Olin Dows, LS. Re: Closing date of 16 April 1935. National Archives.

[13]Austin Purves, Jr. to Olin Dows, LS, n.d. RG 121/133, National Archives.

[14]Austin Purves, Jr. to Olin Dows, LS, 24 June 1935. RG 121/133, National Archives.

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submit ideas for those remaining even if the appropriation did not yet cover them.[15] The full area of each is 18'6" x 10'.[16] Also, an artist could "submit as many designs as he desires," as long as he provided "a sealed envelope, with his address, with each entry."[17]

The procedure was that the local jury would first judge unsigned entries. Based on their decision, the works of a number of front-runners would then be taken to Washington. Two letters confirm that James Brooks was, indeed, the competition winner. Mr. Purves informed Olin Dows on 19 June 1935 that No. 25 (James Brooks' entry) earned 7 of the jury votes. Behind him, in the second, third, and fourth places were Nos. 28, 2 and 33, each with fewer votes. The following day, Olin Dows wrote to James Brooks, that it gives him,

> great pleasure to inform you that the Section of Painting and Sculpture agreed with the local committee in considering your design for the Hempstead, Long Island post office the best sketch submitted."[18]

At the same time Dows requested, as he often did, that

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[15]Olin Dows to James Brooks, LS, 26 August 1935, RG 121/133, National Archives.

[16]An exception: Mangravite was told the mural size was 16' x 7'3", which was the area within the frame. Edward Rowan to Peppino Mangravite, LS, 30 October 1935. RG 121/133, National Archives.

[17]Quoted passages from the Competition Bulletin. RG 121/133, National Archives.

[18]Olin Dows to James Brooks, 20 June 1935. RG 121/133, National Archives.

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that Brooks,

> make three inch scale studies of panel number four and panel number two, ...on the clear understanding that the Government is not committing itself in this case, and the contract will only be awarded if the sketches seem suitable.[19]

Dows' letter, nevertheless, complimented the sketches both on their conception and color, adding that this is "a very important mural," in "an important town," and will therefore attract "a great deal of publicity". In so doing, he sounded an unwarranted warning note.

Was Dows' ambivalence justified? The passage of time permits a dispassionate judgment, but making one requires a review of certain facts about the composition of the jury, the usual Section/artists relationship, and the relative rank of the job. In regard to the first, it is essential to note that Jury Chair Austin Purves was head of a major art school and therefore, almost certainly, an aesthetically competent judge of artwork. Only six days after this letter, presumably to know both the awardee and his art better, he had visited Brooks' studio and reported to Dow,

> This evening I went to James Brooks' studio to look at his work. It is really very good, and I really think the Section would be justified in awarding him the Hempstead job without demanding much further work from him...[20]

And his judgments would have been reinforced by those of the

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[19]Ibid.

[20]Austin Purves to Olin Dows, LS, 25 June 1935. RG 121/133, National Archives.

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building's architect, E. Post Tooker, a second competition juror with a trained aesthetic background. Juror William Palmer likely added to their artistic expertise, for a well-trained WPA mural painter by that name was then in the New York area, having recently finished murals for the U.S. Post Office building in Washington and the Queens General Hospital in Jamaica, NY. I suggest juror William Palmer was he. Of the other jurors we know only that one was the Hempstead Postmaster Thomas J. Harnett; another, Mrs. Thomas J. Cuff, was the wife of a Supreme Court judge; and the last, Mrs. A. Alden Seabury, in all probability had ties to one of Hempstead's oldest and most prominent families.[21] Whatever their qualifications, it seems predictable that the two or three strongest jurors would have prevailed, but the speculation is moot: the vote for Brooks' entry was, in any case, unanimous.

Dows' apparent qualms can be explained in other ways, however. Though Brooks was probably unaware of it, the acceptance of sketches was often accompanied, as his was, with criticism on the quality of drawing--though criticism was not confined to that. In their pursuit of excellence,

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[21]The list was provided in a letter to Dows. Austin Purves, Jr. to Olin Dows, LS, 16 April 1935, RG 121/133, National Archives. Facts about members have various sources. The Reverend Seabury's family was already here in the first half of the 18th century. Austin Purves, Jr., et al., *Mural Prospectus*, 11 March 1935. More about the Seabury lineage appeared in the *Hempstead Sentinel*, 20 March 1902, and about Judge Cuff, in the *Hempstead Sentinel*, 13 July 1933.

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those representing the Section were downright querulous. The subject matter, clarity of composition, the proper use of light, correct proportions, even technique were frequent areas of contention.[22] Some artists, particularly those with established reputations, resisted or fought back successfully. Brooks, both a reserved man and emerging artist, did neither. He did as requested. Although by 12 July the drawings had yet to be photographed and returned to him in New York, as soon as they arrived, he enlarged them without help (none was provided at this stage) and hurried to return them two months later--even noting in his cover letter that,

> parts of the sketch could use more finishing [but] I carried various parts far enough to give you an idea of my drawing.[23]

Oblivious to the Section's sternness in dealing with its artists, he had offered a guileless explanation of his hastiness which, it appears, was misinterpreted as a defense

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[22]In discussing the federally subsidized art programs, including the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture, several authors have described the kinds of criticism often offered, and how artists reacted to them. The drive for excellence prompted carping observations. See particularly, Belisario R. Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1983), 53, F. V. O'Connor, ed., *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972) 34-36, and Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 10-28, 112-137.

[23]Olin Dows to Ms. Isabel W. McNeely, LS, 12 July 1935. RG 121/133 and James Brooks to Olin Dows, LS, 16 September 1935, RG 121/133. Both National Archives.

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of his thoroughly professional presentation. This ingenuousness cost him dearly.

Finally, the magnitude of the job itself posed a threat to his success. Those making the decision in Washington to accept or deny became overly self-protective. The Hempstead budget of $4425 was unusually big--the sixth highest budget out of the eighty-six works the Section would commission in the New York area from its inception through 1943. Did this make the supervisory staff wary of a lesser known artist? Brooks was at the time twenty-nine years old, with a solid record of accomplishment for one so young. His works had been exhibited in group shows in both museums and galleries, but he was yet to have a one-man show, and lacked previous mural experience. When asked to summarize his accomplishments, his letter was completely candid, including only the achievements discussed above.[24] Could his choice then be

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[24]James Brooks to Forbes Watson, 1 August 1935, RG 121/133, National Archives. After citing facts of birth and education, Brooks continued:

I have lived in New York since 1926, spending summers in Woodstock (1931), Texas, and Idaho, and Oklahoma. I have exhibited at

Woodstock Gallery (1931)
College Art Assn. (Am. Scenes Show) 1931
" " " (Younger Painters Show) 1933
Whitney Museum (1934)
New York City Municipal Exhibition 1934
Chicago Art Institute (Century of Progress) 1934
Pennsylvania Academy Annual ex 1935
Cincinatti [*sic*] Museum International 1935

During 1934-35 I have exhibited at the Midtown Galleries in New York.

The only works I have sold are
1 lithograph to N.Y.C. - Mayor LaGuardia

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defended when older, more experienced artists were available? Apparently the Section thought not, and several essays support the fact that such switches were not unusual. Though the artist had faithfully followed all the Section's suggestions, Edward Rowan--successor to Olin Dows as Superintendent of the Section of Painting and Sculpture--wrote to Brooks on 24 September 1935,

> Your revised design [it was enlarged, not revised] leads us to believe that carried out in full scale it would not be improved, nor would it meet our requirements for a mural to be installed in a Federal building...For this reason we are forced to announce the Hempstead competition closed with no award granted.[25]

There was a special irony in this: In the July-August *Bulletin No. 40* published by the Section as well as in the September issue of *Art Digest*, names of the winners of the regional Section competitions were announced publicly.[26] Brooks' name was naturally among them. In early December, an exhibition of the Section's winning mural sketches was

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1 lithograph to Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.C.
2 lithographs and one oil painting to private collectors.
I have made my living by doing lettering for advertising.

[25]Edward B. Rowan to James Brooks. LS, 24 September 1935. RG 121/133, National Archives.

[26]"Recapitulation, Completed Competitions with Awards Made," *Bulletin No. 4*, Section of Painting and Sculpture, Public Works Branch, Procurement Division, Treasury Department, Washington, D.C. (July-August 1935): 13. RG121/130 National Archives. "Murals, Murals in Every Post Office, But What Do They Express?" *Art Digest 9* (1 September 1935): 7-8. Also, "The Government Art Program Up to Date," *New York Herald Tribune*, 22 September 1935, sec.V,p.8.

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mounted at the Midtown Gallery in New York City.[27] Not only was Brooks' post office sketch included, but in the New York *Herald Tribune,* art columnist Carlyle Burrows, who was uninformed of events, reproduced it and singled it out for praise.

> ...James Brooks, in his study of early Dutch life in America, has one of the freshest, as well as authentic and picturesque, designs on display.[28]

It is probable, though not provable, that Brooks submitted sketches for five panels in the Hempstead post office mural commission. The Bulletin left the choice of one, two, or five to the artist's discretion. Dows' letter of 20th June informing Brooks of his winning, and requesting the enlargement of panels number two and four, makes it likely Brooks had indeed completed designs for at least four. But the original sketches have disappeared; besides the scene of mail being received from Holland all that remains is an untitled oil sketch of colonial life intended for the Hempstead job.

The range of subject had been all but decreed. Although the bulletin specified only that the artists "interest themselves in the historical background and local color which will make the subject matter convincing," the

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[27]Carlyle Burrows, "Notes and Comments on Events in Art," New York *Herald Tribune,* 1 December 1935, sec V, p.10.

[28]"The Government Art Program Up to Date," New York *Herald Tribune,* 22 September 1935, sec.V, p.8.

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Section had received letters from Hempstead residents specifically requesting historic content, and to achieve it did recommend research at selected libraries to fortify those whose knowledge of history was weak.[29] Also, included in a letter to Dows from Purves was a two-page exploration of subject matter undoubtedly prepared for these particular competitors. It contained a history of Hempstead beginning about 1640 and continuing until 1802, the year Hempstead acquired its first postmaster, and urged contestants, "not to go beyond the time of...the first postmaster." Brooks complied; taking the instruction literally, in *Receipt of the Mail from Holland* he showed late 17th or early 18th-century settlers at right watching expectantly as the mail is taken from sacks and sorted. A three-masted ship--the one that presumably brought the mail--rides at anchor in the center background, while in the left foreground two Native Americans occupy themselves with a large cauldron. Nearby, behind a stalwart handling a barrel, a small family of settlers savors a letter from home. Historically the artist stood on firm ground: as early as 1652, the Dutch in New Amsterdam *had* organized a postal system using ships.[30]

Philosophically, too, the subject satisfied the

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[29]See Contreras, 104-105. Contreras specifically cites Treasury Department *Bulletin No. 6,* October-November 1935, 3-4.

[30]Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail: Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1972), 14.

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aspirations of Section and community: it showed a heterogeneous group working diligently and harmoniously to fulfill communal needs, and to establish a strong foundation on which this country would build.

Once the subject was established, composition was yet another challenge to the artist. Park and Markowitz have considered the organizational problems of Section murals for post offices and their most suitable solutions.[31] Here the composition more or less conforms to what they call "a clear geometric pattern, whether curve, zigzag, triangle, or rectangle which gave an order to the forms of the painting..." The figures to the left are grouped within a triangular outline whose broad base coincides with the mural's bottom border, while those on the right form a triangle whose base hugs the right edge and whose apex is at the center. The diagonal path between them takes the viewer's eye back to the ship--whose significance is indicated by virtue of its placement if not its size.

The second untitled oil sketch painted as part of this commission is similarly organized into two triangle groups with a space between (fig. 31). It leads the eye back to a beckoning figure on horseback, presumably bringing the mail. The disposition of the foreground figures, all engaged in laudable domestic pursuits, has a Giottoesque clarity which

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[31]Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* ..., 114-124.

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Brooks attributed to Boardman Robinson's teachings. Brooks had of course also been influenced by what he called the ongoing Mexican renaissance, and recalled,

> At first I liked Diego Rivera, as most of us did. Then it was completely Orozco, who was a much superior man...And then I started studying through Orozco, or Giotto, whom I think he drew from pretty much.[32]

The pleasing color harmony of blue-greens heightened by red-oranges show the continuing attraction these hues held for the artist. But because of the abortive resolution of this commission, the proposed mural panels never received critical attention.

Later that year the Hempstead P.O. commission would be reassigned to another artist--the better established Peppino Mangravite--who had not participated in the original competition, but had two sketches included in the National Post Office Competition Exhibition.[33] Dows was later to deny the agency's ever having "reversed a local jury's recommendation" without compensating the artist with an

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[32]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler." *Archives...Journal,* 13.

[33]Mangravite was a decade older than Brooks. He had been born and educated in Italy and later at the Art Students League. He was an author of periodical articles on art and art education, and was active in several artists' societies. He had occupied the position of Art Director at Avon College, Avon, CT., Birch-Walthen School, Ethical Culture Schools, and was on the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College--the latter three in New York. His work was in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Art Institute of Chicago, and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The National Post Office Competition Exhibition was held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. from 29 October to 21 November 1935.

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alternate assignment.[34] His memory was faulty; the Section had indeed rescinded Jim Brooks' commission with finality--a bitter experience for the young artist that would only be ameliorated through his own efforts. His constant striving would win him two W.P.A. mural assignments and the subsequent award of another Section mural commission.

The first of these was the mural *The Acquisition of Long Island* (fig. 32) painted for the Woodside Branch of the Queens Borough Public Library, under the patronage of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration. Thankfully for the artist, there was a period of less than six months between Rowan's discouraging news and 13 February 1936, when the Building and Grounds Committee of the Board of Trustees of the Queens Borough Public Library system approved "designs submitted by Mr. James Brooks for the mural panel at the end of the Adult [Reading] Room."[35] Much of that time was undoubtedly spent in preparation of the new work.

The exact circumstances leading to the award of this job are unknown. However, Brooks divulged to interviewer Dorothy Seckler that he had been contacted by Burgoyne

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[34]Olin Dows, "The New Deal's Treasury Art Program: A Memoir," In *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs*, ed. F.V. O'Connor, ed., 41.

[35]Louis J. Bailey, Chief Librarian, Queens Borough Public Library to Cyril Kay-Scott, Assistant Project Supervisor, F.A.P.#1. LS, 4 March 1936. Collection of the Art Commission of the City of New York.

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Diller, a friend of a mutual friend, who had become head of the Mural Division of the WPA/FAP in 1935, and told,

> they needed some non-relief artists to supervise projects because they didn't have quite the right talent to handle the big jobs, so in some cases they were taking non-relief. So he offered a non-relief thing, which was fine. The money that I had saved through work was gone then...and I was glad to go on the project instead of going back to lettering...I was put on the project immediately because of the mural competition I had won.[36]

It was important to repeat here that the Federal Art Project of the WPA was essentially different than the Section in mandate, organization, and scope. Holger Cahill was its devoted and able director from inception in 1935 to phase-out in 1943. Unlike the Section, it was primarily concerned with creation of jobs: 90 percent for artists on relief rolls; 10 percent for those who were not. Through its public art program and through instruction, it aimed to broaden the public's knowledge of art and involvement with it, to integrate art and life in every way. In organization, Cahill decentralized--dividing responsibility between a central administration and directors in each state. The sponsors for desired projects bore part of their costs so each was a shared federal and local project. Finally, both in terms of number of works produced and subsidiary activities such as art classes, the WPA/FAP was more far reaching and had greater impact on American life than all

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[36]James Brooks, interview by Seckler, transcript.

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other federal programs.

As for the job Brooks was offered, that was in the small, two-story Carnegie Library at Woodside, a red brick neighborhood branch only recently completed (fig. 33).[37] The site, which the architect used to its limits, resembled a truncated cone in plan. The building was in a modified Georgian style, with an entrance and small foyer at the narrow end, and a single story room at the rear with a separate entrance. Despite this simple exterior, the decorating scheme within, whose labor was largely WPA/FAP financed, was elaborate.[38] A mural on the *Evolution of the Art of Writing* by Edward (Buk) Ulreich had been authorized for the Children's Room on the second floor. A mural by Ms. F. Wynn Graham on children's activities during the four seasons had been authorized for the Children's Story Haunt/Lecture Room. And Brooks' mural *The Acquisition of Long Island,* approximately 28' across, was to occupy the most prominent spot--the west wall of the Adult Room above

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[37]Art Commission of the City of New York, Preliminary Approval of Plans to Build. Certificate No. 3887, 14 October 1930. Collection of the Art Commission of the City of New York.

[38]Under the W.P.A., the artist was salaried by the government agency. The art materials were the responsibility of those in charge of the mural site: in this case, the Queens Borough Public Library, Woodside Branch, Woodside, L.I. The appropriation of materials for the *Acquisition of Long Island* was $40, and for *Indian Village Life* (also called *Primitive Indian Life)* was $11. Preliminary Approval Forms. Certificate nos. 5018 and 5404, of 3-10-36 and 9-14-37, respectively. Collection of the Art Commission of the City of New York.

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the book cases and directly opposite the entry (fig.34). To this the panel *Indian Village Life* , some 6-1/2' wide, was later added (fig. 35). Both were to be painted in casein tempera on a gessoed support and then affixed to the walls.[39]

The scope of this Brooks job, while far more modest and less remunerative than the Hempstead murals, nonetheless included assistants to aid him in the work.[40]He believed Sande McCoy, brother of Jackson Pollock, was assigned in this capacity. Through him, Brooks would meet both Pollock and Phil Guston who, with Sande, would remain close lifelong friends. But the job provided more immediate benefits as well: it served to amplify the artist's mural experience and also give him the self-confidence to readdress the Treasury Section in search of another commission.

Brooks recalled being comparatively free to choose his subject. It was to be a "more or less historical, episodic sort of thing," about which the artist provided a very

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[39]James Brooks to *The New York Times* art critic on the casein tempera process. "Casein is nothing more than the curds of skim milk, or ordinary pot cheese. It is a natural emulsion and dries impervious to moisture. In this painting I have used artificially dried and ground casein, emulsifying it with carbonate of ammonia and diluting it with large quantities of water. Casein tempera is an extraordinary medium and has been employed since the beginnings of art history." *The New York Times*. 3 January 1937, sec. X, p.9.

[40]James Brooks, Interview by Seckler, transcript.

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specific outline.[41] The mural would have five contiguous segments reading from left to right. *Indian Village Life* above, shows Native American life prior to the coming of European settlers--that is, at their communal activities of grinding corn, hollowing a log to make a canoe, providing for traditional needs. The scene to its right, *Purchase from Indians* (fig. 36a), has two representatives of the Dutch West India Company bargaining for land and supplies from the native inhabitants. *Immigration and Settlement* (fig. 36b) portrays colonists around a table dividing the land. The stockade behind them protects houses of both Dutch and English origin, acknowledging the gradual British dominance in the colonies. *Warfare and Conquest* (fig. 36c) suggests the colonists' destruction of the Indian culture, as well as portraying the war which ensued for American independence. Finally, *Rehabilitation* (fig. 36d) shows the colonial family resuming its peaceful pursuits--farming and spinning yarn, among them. Though Brooks did not specifically state this, his purpose appears to be both instructive and inspirational, and in that it conforms to the priorities of many WPA/FAP murals painted under Cahill's leadership. Unlike the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture which made excellence the prime criterion of its works, the Federal Art Project saw art as having a social

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[41]Ibid.

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purpose, and growing out of the experiences of the common man. As planned here, this panorama would instill pride in the viewer's national roots while assuring his full awareness of the traditions of sacrifice and sanctity that nourished those roots.

Apart from this, few observations about this work can be made since all murals in the Woodside branch building were demounted when the library was renovated in 1962-63, and have subsequently disappeared. Any discussion, therefore, must be limited to what can be seen in a black and white photo. In *Acquisition of Long Island* there is a rhythmic interweaving of figures and unlikely postures which once again suggest close attention to Thomas Hart Benton's work (fig. 37), although Brooks' own natural restraint would prohibit use of the former's arabesques and exaggerations. By the time he painted *Long Island Indians*, he had returned to the less flamboyant form of the remaining Hempstead sketch, and here one is particularly conscious of the imposing aspect of the figures and of their inherent dignity--again the heritage of Boardman Robinson's teaching. He had urged his pupils to study the wall paintings of Giotto and Piero della Francesca.[42] From such works as

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[42]When touring Italy, Robinson had stopped in Padua and seen the Scrovegni Chapel, which he admired greatly. Christ-Janer, *Boardman Robinson* (New York: Columbia U., 1946. Piero della Francesca's name was suggested by Charlotte Park Brooks, interview by author, notes. 3 June 1997.

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Piero's *Discovery and Proof of the True Cross* (fig. 38), Brooks was to acquire an admiration for the command of the human figure, and an ability to group figures to dramatize their narrative potentials. What he learned is reflected in his own figurative groupings throughout this period.

Possibly because he wished to exercise extra care, thereby avoiding any chance of rejection, Brooks drew some, if not all, of these mural figures from the model, as he would continue to do throughout the mural-painting years. An astonishing number of pencil, ink and charcoal studies exist. Most figures begin with a contour drawing of the nude body (fig. 39a), and continue in studies draped or clothed (fig. 39b). There are studies of individual body parts (fig. 39c) and hair styles, studies of how an implement is held (fig. 39d), how light reveals form (fig. 39e). No detail escaped the artist's eye. Indeed, in these drawings are presaged the stylistic traits that would characterize his paintings, even the most abstract, for years to come. They include a reliance on firm contours, good proportions, and strong light-dark contrasts. By the 13 June 1938, this commission was complete, installed, and photographed, and final approval of the Art Commission of the City of New York was granted on 15 November 1938. But even before, there was professional approbation. Barely six months into the commission, from 14 September-12 October 1936, a model of the Woodside branch library with a sketch

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of this one mural in place would be shown at the important *New Horizons in American Art* exhibition at the prestigious Museum of Modern Art. With its main essay by Holger Cahill, National Director of the Federal Art Project, the catalogue not only discussed the aims and scope of the public art programs, it familiarized the public with what the artists had achieved with the single year of the Project's existence, and allowed artists to learn about their colleagues' works.[43] Of the 434 murals completed that first year and 55 in progress, the works of only 41 muralists were included. Photos of it were also shown in May 1938 in a large WPA exhibition at the Federal Art Gallery called *Murals for the Community,* and in the exhibition of WPA art called *Work in Use* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in August 1941.[44] It received attention in the printed media, as well.[45] After the Hempstead debacle, here indeed was validation of Brooks' mural painting ability. In all likelihood it supplied the needed courage for the artist to reopen correspondence with the Section of Painting and

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[43]Holger Cahill, *New in American Art* , (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936) 9-41.

[44]For more about *Murals for the Community,* see B.A. Jewell, "Federal Art Show has Preview Here," *New York Times,* 25 May 1938, p. 21. For more about *Work in Use,* see Howard Devree," A Reviewer's Notebook," *New York Times,* 27 July 1941, sec. IX, p. 7.

[45]In print media, *Acquisition* photos reproduced in *New York Times* (see n.39) and in Edward Alden Jewell, "Tomorrow, Inc.," *Parnassus* 9 (October 1937), 3-8.

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Sculpture of the Treasury Department which would result in his third commission--a mural at the Little Falls, N.J. Post Office.

Even as he worked on the Woodside mural, on 2 November 1936 he wrote to Edward Rowan, Superintendent of the Treasury Department's Section to explore the feasibility of requesting another assignment. After reviewing his earlier experience with the Treasury, he stated that he had spent his entire time since then "in study and analysis of mural work and [added deferentially] I believe I have overcome many of the inadequacies of my earlier work." He described his work in the Woodside library and then continued,

> In as much as I worked for a number of months on the Hempstead sketches without remuneration and as I earnestly believe my present work warrants your consideration, I would be grateful if you consider me for an appointment to a mural project under the supervision of your department.[46]

His request was granted. On 16 March 1937, Brooks again wrote to Rowan--now to thank him for the invitation to "submit designs for a mural painting in the post office at Little Falls, N.J."[47] The post office, built by the federal government to service an area where there had previously been no permanent facility, was on that day exactly two months old. It was one of a common type--"a very small and

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[46]James Brooks to Edward Rowan, LS, 2 November 1936. RG 121/133, National Archives.

[47]James Brooks to Edward Rowan, LS, 16 March 1937. RG 121/133, National Archives.

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plain one"--with a long, narrow lobby (fig. 40).[48] At one end was the door to the postmaster's office between two bulletin boards. The area above, 12' x 5'6" and lit by the front windows, was the mural site, somewhat difficult to plan because of skewed sight lines and competing architectural details nearby. Nevertheless, the Section of Painting and Sculpture was prepared to pay the artist $700 (less nominal committee expenses should there be a competition) because the estimated price for the building had been $70,000.[49] Though there is no record of it in the Little Falls folder at the National Archives, such a competition seems to have taken place since James Brooks was ultimately awarded the job on the "basis of merit of competent designs submitted..."[50]

By late May Brooks had sent Rowan a Preliminary Idea Sketch of the mural he had in mind (fig. 41).[51] Three were to follow. He had already accepted Rowan's suggestion to

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[48]Park and Markowitz, 114.

[49]*Memorandum to the Director of Procurement* 5 May 1936, RG 121/133, National Archives. (This is 1% of construction costs.)

[50]Edward B. Rowan, Superintendent, to James Brooks. 16 February 1937. RG121/133, National Archives.

[51]This sketch was from the National Archives files. A second such sketch, which was submitted to the WPA, remained in Brooks' studio and came to light when several hundred of his drawings were recently presented to the Brooklyn Museum archives of WPA murals.

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"call the Postmaster and at the same time determine the exact dimensions and most suitable character for the decoration"--that is, to arrive at a subject matter that "embodies some idea appropriate to...the particular locale of Little Falls, New Jersey."[52] While its pencil lines suggest the architectural details with which the artist would need to contend, it also permits us to follow the development of the pictorial concept.

Little Falls, in northeastern New Jersey, is a small town within easy commuting distance of cities like New York, Newark, Patterson, and Passaic. Although it had two reasonably large industries, many of its inhabitants worked in the city. Hence these two populations, the local factory workers (right) and commuters to the city (left), bracket Brooks' composition. Between, in the area of greatest significance, is the "most striking feature of the town," which is,

> ...the beauty of its natural setting, of which the residents are proud and which is responsible for its commuting population.[53]

Here grownups frolic, commune with nature, are happy and carefree in their pastoral setting. This is at best a first draft soon to be superseded. Close inspection of a new

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[52]Edward B. Rowan to James Brooks, LS, 16 February 1937, RG 121/133, National Archives.

[53]James Brooks to Edward Rowan, LS, May 1937, RG121/133, National Archives.

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sketch (fig. 42) of August 1937 rearranges the commuters, farmers, and factory workers without capturing the unique flavor of life here. But in the next sketch, (fig. 43) the central area has been broadened laterally to become the pivotal point of the entire mural. The river has patches of rapids, and though turbulent, it supplies power to the factory in the distance while cooling picnickers on its high banks. It is a scene that simultaneously suggests that prosperity of farm and industry, the sanctity of family relationships. With figures less energetic than those in murals that precede and follow it, this work looks back to the Hempstead panels in organization and has a conservatism unique in Brooks' oeuvre. It nonetheless makes its figures symbols of the two aspects of this town's daily life--labor and leisure--which was the name Brooks gave to the mural.

Still the Section had suggestions to make:

> ...the figures under the tree be represented in a less crowded manner and that the figure with the apples [sic] be placed in the composition so that there is an authenticity of placement relative to his lower extremities. Though not seen they must be accounted for.

also

> The right line of the river seems rather hard and unpleasantly angular.[55]

With these corrections in place, and numerous small details

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[55]Edward Rowan to James Brooks. 20 January 1938. RG 121/133, National Archives.

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strategically added to lead the eye and dramatize Little Falls' link with nature, the color sketch of the mural received final approval in early April 1938 (fig. 44). The full-sized cartoon was then begun and completed in June. At last painting could begin.

Like the past mural, this was not done in situ. Thanks to Brooks' meticulous record keeping we know exactly what preparations were used and in what proportions. The duck support was coated on both sides with preparatory coats of various kinds.[56] The actual painting was accomplished in two stages: underpainting was done in mixed white and overpainting in oil.[57] The duck was then mounted to the wall with a heavy paste of white lead and damar varnish. This method of mural painting was one of several alternatives to true fresco painting favored by both Section and WPA artists, for it relieved them of such inconveniences as waiting for new plaster to become firm enough to paint on, or of the tedious procedure of applying fresh plaster for each days' share of the work, or of painting on scaffolds in

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[56]A coat of glue size on both sides. 1 coat of gesso, 1 coat of damar which Brooks called an "isolating coat," and 2 coats of *imprimatura*, a thin, transparent glaze (sometimes called a veil) consisting of burnt umber and Indian red in damar. Archives of James Brooks.

[57]The mixed white was composed of egg plus permalba and permalba in oil. Permalba was a tradename for a prepared artists' white made by F. Weber. The medium for the oil used in overpainting consisted of one part sun thickened oil, two parts turps, 2 part damar. Archives of James Brooks.

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areas to which the public had access. The work was not varnished at completion but was to be varnished when the underlayers had completely dried after several months. It was hung on 15 November 1938, and days later the *Little Falls Herald*, noting the installation, proclaimed on its front page, it "adds substantially to the decoration of the building."[58] Still in situ but badly in need of cleaning, both the realism of the figures, and its sepia-toned, monochromatic palette enlivened with subdued reds and pinks, contrast strongly with those in the next, and last, of the early murals James Brooks would paint. It was a work of grand scale he would soon begin, and it would consume the next few years of his life.

The origin of Brooks' next federally funded work has been documented by Art Historian Greta Berman: "Burgoyne Diller, the head of WPA/FAP's Mural Division in New York, had offered the artist a choice of available sites," and he chose one at the new terminal at North Beach airport.[59] Countrywide, the 1930s were the decade in which many of the major city airports were built with WPA help. This particular airport, now La Guardia Field, is named for the mayor who believed it essential that so important a city have its own local airport. New York was soon to host a World's Fair, and New York bound passengers were still

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[58]"Mural Hung in Post Office," *Little Falls Herald*, 29 November 1938, 1.

[59]Greta Berman, "Does 'Flight' Have a Future?" *Art in America* (September/October 1976): 97.

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landing at Newark. The "new terminal" Brooks would paint was initially a seaplane base although it has now become home of a major air shuttle service.

At the shoreline of Flushing Bay, it had been designed as the departure and arrival site for all amphibious aircraft, or "clippers," then considered efficient for transoceanic flight. The terminal provided one of the largest paintable mural sites in WPA history: a rotunda 235 ft. in circumference by 12'3" high, or some 2880 sq. ft. For the challenge of its size alone, Brooks might have been drawn to it. But there was likely a further attraction. Arshile Gorky, whom he credited with inspiring him to become a fine artist, had recently finished painting ten mural panels for the Newark Airport Administration Building.[60] Much discussed because of Gorky's innovative, virtually abstract imagery, and surely known to Brooks because one panel and sketches of the others had been included in the "New Horizons" show (as had Brooks' *Acquisition...*), those murals presented a challenge to Brooks. Having been granted a rival venue, he apparently began work on the sketches immediately and commonly gave 1938 as the date of their inception, though approval for his mural would be withheld

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[60]Begun under W.P.A. auspices for Floyd Bennett Field, the project was reassigned to Newark about August 1935 where the works were subsequently mounted in 1937, when finished. Francis V. O'Connor, "Arshile Gorky's Newark Airport Murals: The History of Their Making," in Ruth Bowman, cur. *Murals Without Walls, Arshile Gorky's Aviation Murals Rediscovered* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1978), 24.

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until it assumed a more finished state. [61]

Because of the scope of the job, a corps of assistants was assigned to him. Brooks himself tells us that preliminary work on the cartoons was carried out by them in a Manhattan studio in an unoccupied pier on the Hudson River. Herbert Muhlstein was in charge of a crew of young artists who translated the original small drawings into a full scale cartoons.[62] Brooks would "draw [on] them again and then trace them down."[63] Although some of this crew would work at the airport doing preparatory work, the artist was never able to let anybody else paint on the mural because "nobody worked quite like I did and I was just too jealous of the job." And that painting was done directly on the rotunda wall.[64] On 13 February 1940, almost two years

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[61]Although the papers of the Art Commission of the City of New York give the submission date of the drawings as 26 January 1940, Brooks certainly worked on the murals prior to this. Collection, Art Commission of the City of New York. He wrote the mural took "four years to design and execute." James Brooks Personal Archives. He also told Greta Berman he worked four years on the mural. Since the terminal date was '42, '38 must have been the starting date. James Brooks, interview by Greta Berman, 20 May 1976, quoted in Berman, 99.

[62]Names as artists who at various times assisted in the work at both locations were Sarah Newman, Ben Katz, John Becker, Joseph Hochfeld, Bartholomew Manganaro, Sadie Bordeaux, Evangeline St. Clair, Gilbert Sackerman, Felix Janowski, Eldridge LaPlante, James Sterling, Miriam Wachtel, Sanford [sic] McCoy, and Fred Farr. James Brooks, *"Flight" A Mural by James Brooks for the Sea Plane Terminal Building* (New York: New York City WPA Art Project, n.d.),4.

[63]"James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," interview with Dorothy Seckler (10 June 1965), Archives of American Art Journal 16, (No. 1, 1976): 15.

[64]There is confusion about this. Berman states

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after work had begun, a Committee of three Commissioners (Peixotto, Halsey, and Osborn) acting for the Art Commission of New York City, "having considered the designs for, and location of, a mural..." for this building gave it their preliminary approval based on certain specified requirements.[65]

A statement of the artist's intent in tackling this assignment exists in his own hand.

> "Flight" is the subject of the mural which encircles the rotunda...It was executed by James Brooks and assistants ...taking four years to design and execute.
>
> A literal portrayal of the development of flight as we know it was not attempted. The aim of the design is to identify the spectator, who may be planning an air voyage, is inquiring about one, or has just completed one...with the broad scope of man's yearning for flight and its final realization.

Though the mural space is uninterrupted, the space beneath it was trisected by three main openings--the street entrance, and gates labeled Departures and Restaurant (formerly the Arrivals door). Brooks wisely chose to use the area above these as breathing spaces--narrow,

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"assistants first attached Belgian linen to the wall by means of white lead." Berman, 99. Brooks told Seckler it was done in fresco secco, and that linen had been used in Woodside. James Brooks, Interview by Dorothy Seckler, 10 June 1965. transcript.

[65]*North Beach Airport, Queens, Mural for Marine Terminal Building,* Submission 6235, 13 February 1940. Collection of the Art Commission of the City of New York. The standard caveat was that preliminary approval was based on the commissioned artist conferring with the "Painter Member of the Commission in the development of the designs; that large scale or full sized drawings of such of the designs as may be agreed upon are submitted for approval before the final work is begun, and that the executed work is to be submitted for final approval before installation of the same."

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monochromatic, decorative panels between the three considerably larger, narrative bands. Over the entry portal is an arrangement of overlapping, somewhat abstracted vertical airplane propellers (fig. 45a). Above the door to a restaurant, similarly abstracted, is an arrangement of buildings, from the earliest ones to towering skyscrapers, with one of the latter still under construction (fig. 45b). And above Departures, a composition of aerodynamic shapes with diagrammatic air currents flowing through and around them (fig. 45c). To answer any public questions about the imagery, the artist composed a written explanation of his iconography. Though the kind of program favored by the WPA for such a project would usually have had a historic approach, Brooks was specific that his was to

> re-create the wonder that was and still is felt at the phenomenon of man's leaving the earth and soaring through the air. It utilizes not historical events but historical attitudes toward flying...[66]

To realize this intention, he designed three large narrative panels to fill the intervening spaces which merit closer attention here.

"Imagined Flight" is the panel to the left of the doorway which pictures concepts of flight from prehistory until the High Renaissance (fig. 46).[67] At its left edge a

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[66]Edward Alden Jewell quoting James Brooks, "Art Covers Our Walls, *New York Times*, 23 June 1940, sec. IX, p. 7.

[67]Berman, 97. Although these titles were used by Brooks in describing the panels, they do not appear in print elsewhere. It is probable when Berman interviewed Brooks he did refer to the different scenes by these names.

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primitive man cowers beneath a streak of lightening, apparently frustrated by his inability to escape his earthbound limitations. Not far away, a small group gathers around an altar; their rites conjure up the vision of a man in flight, an achievement apparently made possible only through divine help. Within a white square below is the drawing of a falling man. Together, the two recall Daedalus and Icarus, mythological figures of ancient Greece who attempted flight. At their right a towering man swings a censer with one hand, subtly suggesting the sacred nature of early concepts of flight. His other hand draws primitive kinds of flight machines--pioneering designs that predate aviation's more technological solutions. He stands, his head through an oculus and ringed with stars, as both maker and observer of progress. He is important to the mural as a visionary; his significant act is the drafting of flight machines some of which free themselves from paper to become three-dimensional. At far right Leonardo da Vinci watches as a flying apparatus (fig. 47), sketched in his *Codex Atlanticus* (c. 1490), takes flight. Transfixed by the possibilities of flight, an obsessive concern of his, the master kneels holding an anemometer to measure wind velocity, while behind him an apprentice prepares to observe the flight of a real bird.

Directly opposite, and virtually a mirror image, is "Flight Accomplished," which again references history but expresses instead the wonder that accompanied the

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realization of flight (fig. 48). The narrative begins at left with events at Kitty Hawk about 1900, and continues to the "modern air flights up to the time of the Yankee Clipper"--the latter being the transatlantic planes serving this terminal even as this mural was in progress. The images of monoplanes and sheds are the product of the artist's research, and again there are enlarged figures--now a couple who, with binoculars, can scan the sky for an arriving clipper already visible in the sky beyond. A group of smaller figures, one perhaps a pilot, sit around a table planning and helping to guide a flight. Finally, at the far right, a figure stands ready to tether an incoming plane, thus inferring the end of a flight and safe arrival.

The mural between these, called "Release" by Berman, is really pivotal (fig. 49). If the panels that embrace it relate to a spiritual quest to be airborne, this panel speaks of the freedom of flight. Once more there is an outsize figure, now lofted in the air, free of all earth-binding concerns. Brooks first planned this panel as a "group of people of various races and nations...gazing at an airplane whose shadow...binds them together."[68] But this concept was replaced with a second idea soon discarded: of wily Daedalus, whose self-fashioned wings permitted flight but cost him a son. Still the image was troubling until

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[68]James Brooks. *Design for Mural in Sea Plane Terminal Building at North Beach Air Port*. Typed notes attached to "Work of Art" form, Art Commission city of New York, 6 February 1940.

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freed of a specific identity. Here it functions as both flight and freedom. At one side, a companion still holds one bird, having just released another; on the opposite side, it hastens to flock with those that joyously encircle the globe--somehow imparting to the man this same ability. In this panel's more relaxed use of picture space the very notion of soaring is made manifest.

Not only conceptually, but stylistically, this mural surpasses Brook's prior murals. Tackling and solving its problems one by one had been a maturing process for the artist. No longer the novice, in the few years of involvement, the artist became more innovative in his organization, more dedicated in his research, more catholic in his choice and use of influences. Though we cannot discuss all in detail, scanning this array of forward steps helps us to see the artist in a new light. Always the careful craftsman, he was now also self-assured, and possessed both the conceptual ability and technical expertise to produce a mural worthy of a major urban airport, a facility being rushed to completion for the 1939-1940 World's Fair, then under construction.

Departing from the format of Brooks' earlier murals, the composition no longer masses figures of uniform scale at left and right thereby creating a central path for the eye to follow. Instead, the figures are grouped according to size--the smallest figures around altar or table, with no claim to individual identity. Next in scale are those we

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might recognize--Leonardo at the left, Orville and Wilbur Wright at the right--or might not--the man with doves in "Release". Finally, there are three central figures or figural groups who loom largest: a male who undoubtedly symbolizes the universal curiosity and creativity of humankind, a second already discussed as the achiever of flight, and a third, a modern couple who having flight available are its beneficiaries. The idea of such size disparities said painter Seymour Fogel who used a similar device in his murals, "had its origins in Medieval and Renaissance paintings of large saints or Madonna and Child encircled by an entourage," He cited Giotto, Piero della Francesca, and Uccello as precedents.[69] Brooks, as noted, had studied these artists; surely he shared Fogel's admiration for them. His use of varying scale within each panel does, like their use of it, give greater authority to particular figures. Unlike theirs, however, it functions formally to emphasize the surface of the picture plane which, being cylindrical, challenged the artist to maintain the appearance of shallow picture space.

Stylistic innovations do not end here, however. The figures are more economically rendered, all unnecessary details pruned away--a process that can be followed in the generous number of drawings and gouache enlargements of

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[69]Greta Berman. "A Story of Four Murals," Art for the People--*New Deal Murals on Long Island*, exh. cat., David Shapiro, ed. (Hempstead, NY: The Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra U., 1978) 28.

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specific details (fig. 50). The simplicity of the results ironically adds to the stature of the figures. Comparing these in *Labor and Leisure* with those in Flight, differences are immediately apparent. Each has a female figure with an arm raised figs. 51a and 51b). While the former is conceived as a group of closely connected ovoid and cylindrical forms, modeled in highlights, shadows, and some blended halftones, the woman in "Flight Achieved" is composed of geometric shapes. A trapezoid of shadow defines her chin and her breasts are conical. Middle values are suppressed, she is a study in light and dark values, with little mediation between them. Where the skirt of the former figure cups her round buttocks and falls in curvilinear patterns near her knee, the dress of the other resembles an inverted funnel with three arrow-straight lines to suggest the faintest ripple of fabric. This comparison applies for the other figures, as well. Not surprisingly, this geometricizing is a step already taken by more radical WPA muralists--Stuart Davis, Seymour Fogel, and Anton Refregier, among them. Though the differences between these artists is ultimately greater than their visual similarities, each of them has moved toward the abstraction that will engage the artists of the following decade.

There is also a movement away from realist form toward a more abstract style with increased use of both European and American modernist pictorial idioms. Berman correctly notes Brooks' "immensely varied range of shapes" and sees

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his cubist forms--presumably all roughly squared bodies and such details as the flattened form of Kitty Hawk era aircraft--indebted to Picasso's *Guernica*, Neo-Plastic paintings, and the 'concrete' art of Moholy-Nagy.[70] Surely his friend Philip Guston's more cubic approach to the figure in the Queensbridge murals of 1940 deserves a nod, too (fig. 52). Berman also attributes the 'stylistic streamlining' of the abstract motifs to "the vocabularies of Miróo, Arp, and especially Brancusi," all of who had been shown in New York by that time.[71] Considering Brooks' openness to stylistic innovation and the widening of his artistic horizons as both confidence and his circle of artist-friends grew, one is not surprised to detect these new influences and find them assimilated.

However, one might conceivably *be* surprised at the sources of some of these images. By 1940, WPA artists were expected to research the background of their subject. Lacking a background in aeronautics, Brooks who was no

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[70]Berman, "*Flight*," 98.

[71]Miró's work was displayed in eight New York venues between 1938 and 1942. These included yearly exhibitions at Pierre Matisse Gallery, a group exhibition at the Gallery of Living Art at N.Y.U., and a one-person retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings, works of Jean Arp, and six sculptures by Brancusi had all been included in both the exhibit and publication *Cubism and Abstract Art* by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (New York: the Museum of Modern Art, 1936). Brancusi had visited the United States and had sculpture exhibited at the Wildenstein Galleries in New York as early as 1926. He made his third and final visit to this country in 1939, and exhibited two works in the 10th anniversary show *Art in Our Time* at the Museum of Modern Art that year.

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exception, naturally turned to literature on the subject. His most valuable source was F.T. Miller's *The World in the Air: the Shape of Flying in Pictures,* a two-volume set soon added to his personal library. It supplied pictures of the historic aircraft the towering visionary figure appears to design. Where the artist might have frivolously imaginative, he exerted the effort to be authentic and to paint aircraft designs across time. (figs. 53a, 53fb, and 53c).[72]

A Daedalus image also found in Miller may well have been the inspiration for the flying figure in "Release" (fig. 54). When pivoted 90°, it is difficult to ignore the similarity of pose of head, arms, hands, and upper bodies of these two male figures. But no single source gives evidence of how broad the artist's interests were.

For example, Giotto throughout these years has been an inspiration. The monumental aspect of the principal figures--surely the one with his head in the heavens--seems to continue that homage. Paradoxically, it provides evidence that Brooks remained more aware of Gorky's activities than may heretofore have been known. From Giotto may well have come the suggestion for the star-ringed head, for the convention of a temple in his Scrovegni Chapel frescoes is a three-walled building whose apse, undomed, is

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[72]Historic flying machines from left to right: under the hand, unknown. Letur, 1852; Danjard, 1871, Archytas, early 4th century, B.C., and Claudel, 1864. Francis Travelyan Miller, *The World in the Air: The Story of Flying in Pictures,* 2 vols. (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), v.1:93, v.2:315-16.

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open to the heavens. In the panel *The Handing Over of the Rods* (fig. 55), the priest's scullcap falls just short of this blue space, but makes the visual connection between head and heaven. The relationship to Gorky is more tenuous, but worth noting. Gorky had recently finished murals in a building with precisely this kind of open-to-the-sky ceiling. At the newly built Riviera night club, a retractable dome over the dance floor could be rolled back on clear nights to let patrons dance beneath the stars (fig. 56)--a fact newsworthy enough to be covered by *The New York Times* four times in 1937.[73]

A more curious use of sources, but one nevertheless worthy of note, is the artist's bolder (yet backward looking) grasp of perspective and foreshortening that recalls the daring experiments of Renaissance and Baroque painters. Interested in Cubist art by his own admission, he yet tried in his perspectival projections (as in both the Daelalus image in "Flight Imagined" and the clipper image in "Flight Achieved,") to weave the two together. On reflection he said, "...I had some vague idea that I could get both things in, a kind of Renaissance organization of painting, and then some of the other modern stuff integrated with it somehow...,"[74] Ultimately his feelings toward the

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[73]*New York Times*, 11 March 1937, p. 43, 2 May 1937, sec. XIII p.6, 9 June 1937, p. 31, and 12 June 1937, p.8.

[74]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," interview by Dorothy Seckler (10 June 1965). *Archives of American Art Journal* 16 (No. 1, 1976): 14.

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result of this experiment remained ambivalent.

As for color, Brooks returned in this mural to the colors that seem to have fascinated him from the start. True, there are the sparkling reds and blacks of Miró, but overall the ground has alternate areas of his favorite blue-greens and red-oranges, lightened here, darkened there, but still the same basic hues that beguiled the artist from the start of his career. It is a palette to which the artist will remain faithful throughout his brush-painting years, but eventually varied and unexpected combinations of color will become one of the artist's great strengths.

Finally the mural was painted in a material newly developed by Raphael Doktor and the Technical Division of the WPA. Of great durability and resistance to moisture, it was called casein glyptol resin elmulsion, and appeared like fresco on the wall.

By 1942 when Brooks was to finish the mural, events had greatly changed life in the United States. In 1941 we had entered World War II and young men were needed for military service. Economic conditions had bettered. Lest this mural painting drag on, Colonel Behon Somervell, WPA administrator of New York City, constantly pressured the artist bring this project to a close. Finally, by 18 August it was revealed to the public for the first time.[75] *New Horizons* reported the increasing size of crowds that came to see it, or

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[75]Photographs of it had been shown at the *Work in Use* exhibition of WPA works at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, August 1941.

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revisited it to study the separate panels.[76] And Edward Alden Jewell, art critic of the *New York Times* was to call it

> one of the most striking mural projects launched under government or city sponsorship. There is evidence nowhere of impatience, hurry or recourse to makeshift or slipshod slushing."[77]

In spite of its acclaim, when the Marine Terminal was turned over to the Port Authority in 1955, those in charge, thinking it looked old-fashioned, painted it over. So it would remain until a movement to restore it in the 1970s.

But by 1942, the last of the mural years, Jim Brooks was already preparing for a new phase of his life--his military service.

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[76]"Urge Painted," *New Horizons* (November 1942): 14.

[77]B.A. Jewell, "Art Covers Our Walls,".

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CHAPTER 4

CAIRO AND BEYOND: THE ARTIST TRANSPLANTED (1942-1945)

Selective Service, the government agency charged with supplying the United States Armed Forces with personnel, had allowed James Brooks to defer his military service long enough to complete the North Beach airport mural before inducting him into the army. Knowing he was eligible to serve, he had tried to prepare by taking civilian pilot training for which he found himself temperamentally unsuited. By 15 March 1943, the day of his induction, the United States had already been embroiled in World War II for more than fifteen months, and had its military forces deployed throughout the world. Brooks was 36 years old, almost at the terminal age for conscription.[1] He was assigned to basic training in Atlantic City where he would be only six weeks before his commanding officer would receive an order which read in part:

> The services of the following named enlisted man under your command are desired in connection with an approved War Art Project involving the assignment of qualified artists to overseas service in some War Art Unit for the purpose of painting battle scenes depicting a pictorial history of the war.[2]

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[1]In World War II men between the ages of 18 and 37 were subject to compulsory military service.

[2]A.U. Turner, Captain, Office of the Chief of Engineers, to Commanding General, First District, Technical

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Brooks' name followed, as did this explanation.

> The nature of this assignment is such that the best of talent should be made available in portraying such [a] pictorial history of the war. Pvt. Brooks is one among a very small and selected group recommended by the War Department Art Advisory Committee to paint battle scenes overseas...[3]

The orders did not come as a surprise. In a letter to a former official of the Treasury Section of Fine Arts, now associated with War Department's Advisory Committee, Brooks indicated he had already been contacted and sounded out about serving on such a project. With his usual prudence, he had posed questions and received reassuring replies about the service before concluding he was "anxious to get on the program..." and considered himself "extremely fortunate in being invited."[4] By mid-June shipping orders arrived directing him to report for duty with Headquarters, Middle East Theater of Operations, Cairo, Egypt. Thus began a short but interesting interval in Brooks' life previously unexplored, as such service often is in the careers of other war artists.

The idea of artists recording a war was not new.

Training Command, Greensboro, NC, 23 April 1943. Re: Transfer.

[3]Ibid.

[4]James Brooks, New York City to Edward Rowan, Public Buildings Administration, Washington, D.C., LS, 15 April 1943. Collection U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C.

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Ancient battles, though not factually portrayed, had been captured by artists in both pictorial and sculptural form. Architectural bas reliefs of the Greeks showed them or their sacred protectors, the Gods, opposing their traditional enemies, the Trojans, Centaurs, and Amazons (fig. 57). Several centuries later, the Column of Trajan pictured events from ancient Roman battles with the Dacians--legions building encampments, fording rivers, engaging in bloody encounters, listening as their emperor addressed them (fig. 58). And throughout the following ages this genre had attracted artists as different as Michelangelo and Meissonier (Figs. 59 and 60).

In this country, although artists had portrayed earlier wars unofficially, it was not until World War I that War Combat Artists were actually appointed by the War Department.[5] Aware of the camera's potentiality to capture action quickly and with exactitude, but simultaneously wary of photography's tendency to be too particular, impersonal, and inexpressive, the military commissioned a team of eight artists. Sent to France with the American Expeditionary Forces, they were soldiers themselves charged with capturing on a graphic surface significant military engagements as well as the more mundane rhythm of daily army life. Their pictorial works which served doubly as morale boosters for

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[5]*U.S. Army Art Collection*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, n.d.).

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the troops in the field and historical documents at home would become the nucleus of the Army Art Collection. By 1942, having preceded the U.S. into war, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany, and other of the Allied or Axis countries already had official war artists at work. On the home front, surely the artists were ready. Just after Pearl Harbor Day, thirty national artists' groups with an aggregate membership of 10,000 had merged to form Artists for Victory, a manpower pool ready to serve 'well without guns.'' Also, in 1941, even as the prewar government mural programs was winding down, administrator Olin Dows had forged a plan for artists to record the imminent war. "It undoubtedly helped plant the seeds from which grew the Army's Artist Correspondent Unit," said the author of an anonymous exhibition catalogue commenting on the part played by Dows' program.[6] But Congress apparently dragged its feet on mobilizing these resources. It was only on 27 April 1943, The *New York Times* could announce the formation of "War Artist Units, composed of military and civilian artists who will make paintings, drawings, etchings, and sketches of the fighting fronts...," under the direction of Major General Eugene Reybold, Chief of Engineers.[7] There were to be approximately 42 artists in all, 23 military and 19

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[6]*The Army at War: A Graphic Record by American Artists*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 23.

[7]"Artists to Depict Actual War Scenes," *New York Times*, 27 April 1943, 10.

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civilians, appointed by the War Department's Art Advisory Committee chaired by painter George Biddle.[8] (Biddle, brother of the U.S. Attorney General, was 58 and a well-established artist.) Besides Brooks and Biddle, who named himself as one of this group, a partial list of appointed artists follows: Aaron Bohrod, Howard Brodie, Manuel Bromberg, Harry A. Davis, Olin Dows, Frank D. Duncan, David Fredenthal, Albert Gold, Richard Jansen, Joe Jones, Reuben Kadish, Lucien La Baudt, David Lax, Edward Laning, Jack Levine, Carlos Lopez, Ludwig Mectarian, Reginald Marsh, David Stone Martin, Frank Mechau, Barse Miller, Ogden Pleissner, Henry Varnum Poor, Savo Radulovic, Edward Reep, Sidney Simon, Mitchell Siporin, Harrison Standley, A. Brockie Stevenson, Rudolf Van Ripper, and Frede Vidar.[9] In

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[8]The number varies, but 42 has several sources: *U.S. Army Art Collection;* Peyton Boswell, "Congress Fumbles the Ball," *Art Digest,* 17, 1 August 1943, 3, and Edward Reep, *A Combat Artist in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1987) xiv. "The Army Artists," *Newsweek,* XXI, 10 May 1943, 80, gave the number as 37, with "plans to appoint thirteen more." "U.S. Artists Depicted Tunisian War Scenes," numbers them at 40. *New York Times,* 1 June 1943, 9.

Members of the Committee who advised the Army on suitable artists were David Finley, Reeves Lewenthal, Henry Varnum Poor, and Edward Rowan. *The Army at War,* 44. Frances Henry Taylor, director of the Metropolitan Museum, acted as consultant.

[9]Because Congress failed to fund the War Combat artists in mid-1943, causing some to be privately funded by outside sources, it is difficult to reconstruct the original group. The names above appear in Gordon R. Sullivan, ed., *Portrait of an Army* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), 165-176. From the Deputy to the Division Chief, U.S. Center of Military History, the author received the impression no definitive list exists. Marylou Gjernes, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 3 November 1997.

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groups composed of two to five artists each they were to visit the various scenes of action and to document either the fighting or the war-related activity there. An inspirational memo from Biddle constituted their instructions.

> In this war there will be a greater amount than ever before of the factual reporting, of photographs and moving pictures. You are not sent out merely as news-gatherers. You have been selected as outstanding American artists, who will record the war in all its phases, and its impact on you as artists and as human beings. The War Department Art Advisory Committee is giving you as much latitude as possible in your method of work, whether by sketches done on the spot, sketches made from memory, or from notes taken on the spot, for it is recognized that an artist does his best work when he is not tied down by narrow technical innovations. What we insist on is the best work you are individually capable of, and the most integrated pictures of war in all its phases that your group is capable of. This will require team play on your part as well as individual effort. It is suggested that you will freely discuss each other's work and assignments, always in the hope of new suggestions. Any subject is in order, if as artists you feel it is part of War; battle scenes and the front line; battle landscapes; the wounded, the dying and the dead; prisoners of war; field hospitals and base hospitals; wrecked habitations and bombing scenes; character sketches of your own troops, of prisoners, of the natives of the country you visit...the tactical implements of war; embarkation and debarkation scenes; the nobility, courage, cowardice, cruelty, boredom of war...Try to omit nothing; duplicate to your heart's content. Express if you can--realistically or symbolically--the essence and spirit of War. You may be guided by Blake's mysticism, by Goya's cynicism and savagery, by Delacroix's romanticism, by Daumier's humanity and tenderness; or better still follow your own inevitable star.[10]

The last line would be humorously remembered and quoted by Brooks throughout his life. Artists were provided with materials of their choice and probably received a sum of

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[10]George Biddle, As quoted in Reep, *A Combat Artist…*, xv.

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money to procure additional supplies. They were each authorized to carry a camera and film, as well. Completed paintings, drawings, and photos were finally to be sent to the War Department to be used in compiling a history of this war.

There is a question of whether artists were given a choice of, or assigned, their destinations. At the time they were organized, the German Afrika Korps under command of Field Marshal Rommel had not yet been defeated and expelled from North Africa, though this would occur just prior to the arrival of the first artists there. Nor had a foothold yet been established on the European continent. But War Artist Units were almost immediately dispatched around the globe: to Alaska and the Aleutians, to England, India, Iceland, Southwest Pacific, Central Africa, and other war zones. Some would accompany our troops to Sicily and advance north through the Italian boot, or be assigned to the forces invading France. Others like Brooks and his colleague Richard Jansen, a former staff artist for *Fortune* magazine, would remain mainly in North Africa, and while stationed in or near Cairo travel by whatever means possible—car, camel, foot or plane—throughout the whole area.

The works these two would paint could no longer be scenes of ammo explosions, fire power, and human carnage; the actual battles were already being fought elsewhere,

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beyond Brooks' and Jansen's territory. Their subjects were instead the preliminary dangers of troopship travel and the fearsome aftermath of war (figs. 61 and 62). Less dramatic but more expressive of the tactical advantage that Allied control of North Africa presented, were paintings of this area as a strategic supply source for Russia—an ally besieged yet desperate for the arms and equipment which could reach them through no other route (fig. 63). The artists painted army supply posts, ports, and efforts being made to keep this area open so that British oil and other necessities could flow to the various European fronts. Their subjects were airfields built or destroyed, "naked, torn, and twisted machinery, with soldiers wandering stunned around the destruction" (Fig. 64)[11]

Most often Brooks' works were relatively small in size--that is, less than 3' in any dimension. Gouache, a medium preferred by several of the other war artists presumably for its ease of transporting and applying, was frequently his choice--gouache used now in a more subdued palette than heretofore. Various values of olives and earthy ochres predominate.

In the paintings, the style has changed subtly although Brooks continued to explore the Cubist-inspired vocabulary of planar forms introduced in the mural *Flight*.

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[11]Fred Lee, Radio Broadcast, Cairo, to Blunetwork, NY, 8 October 1944.

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All traces of its Surrealist flourishes and arabesques have vanished, however, as if the playfulness of biomorphic forms ill-suited the mood of the moment. In their place is a new reductiveness of form eliminating any vestige of the heroism possessed by such figures as *Flight's* Leonardo. Note how, in studies of army personnel such as *Supper on Shipboard* painted en route to the Middle East, the faces are free of detail and generalized (fig. 65). This makes them appear very private: each locked in thoughts he neither wishes nor dares to share. The bodies, too are reduced to a series of somber color panes. This is not the illustrational style of Warren Leopold's *Mess Sergeant* (fig. 66); Brooks has revealed a deeper meaning, the very foreboding beneath the veneer of good behavior that links these fighting men.

There is a second stylistic change in many of the gouaches. Perhaps because North Africa's brilliant light tended to blur defined edges, Brooks added a drawn contour line to previously rendered forms as had Cézanne (fig. 67). Unlike Cézanne's contour lines, however, which are meant to separate planes in space while allowing passage from one to the other, these lines articulate and clarify the enclosed forms with the same sureness and precision that characterized Brooks' earlier lettering (fig. 68).

Brooks also produced innumerable vignettes of G.I. life—drawings of soldiers hanging from their bunks, of men working at repetitive and sometimes boring military tasks,

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or playing cards or resting. In the drawings especially, style is both realistic and reportorial (fig.69).

Under the original terms of the War Artists Units, enlisted men in the program were to achieve the rank of Technical Sergeant. Officers, until promoted, would retain the rank they held when becoming War Combat Artists. The artists' original orders had stipulated that at the end "of this temporary duty," a report would be made to the Commanding General of each area or to the Chief of Engineers in Washington as to whether the man should be "returned to the United States or reassigned to some other theatre of operations." This would have no doubt have been implemented except for an unanticipated hitch. In the summer when the plan was introduced, Congress refused to allocate the money to fund it. (In a military budget of more than $71,510,000,000 the total amount of the art project was $125,000.)[12] It was then that *LIFE, Colliers,* and corporate sponsors such as Abbott Laboratories, E.R. Squibb & Sons, Chrysler Motors, and perhaps others stepped in to underwrite the costs. *LIFE* and the artists it chose to subsidize enjoyed mutual benefits from the arrangement. The artists earned a stipulated salary for their war art; better still their works were invariably published and received immediate public attention. The magazine or corporate sponsor, in turn, had access to documents produced for the Historical

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[12]"House Is Prepared to Pass Army Bill," *New York Times,* 20 June 1943, sec. I, p. 9.

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Section of the Army, not otherwise as available to them.

Not among these fortunate few, Brooks and Jansen continued to work in and about Egypt. How this was possible is unclear. However, there is some evidence that Generals George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower, favoring the War Artists Units, may have acted on their behalf.[13] Though the war paintings of Brooks and Jansen would not be published in the mass media, they would enjoy success at Middle East Headquarters where they were first exhibited, and later at Camp Russell B. Huckstep, outside Cairo, to which the artists would eventually be transferred.[14] They would be published in *YANK*, the Army's weekly newspaper, and acclaimed in an Army broadcast before being sent to Army headquarters in Washington, D.C.—their permanent repository.[15]

Because of the specific intent of the War Combat Artists' program, those invited to participate had been traditionalists usually grouped under such labels as American Scene painters or Social Realists. It is not surprising, then, that the *LIFE*-sponsored works, when shown at the Metropolitan Museum in August 1943, received only

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[13]Reep, 24.

[14]"G.I. Artists Will Exhibit Pictorial History of M.E.," *Stars and Stripes*, 6 October 1944.

[15]Sgt. Jack Denton Scott, "G.I. Art," *Yank The Army Weekly*, Middle East Ed., 18 May 1944, 12-13. Fred Lee, Radio Broadcast, 8 October 1944.

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tepid praise from Robert M. Coates of *The New Yorker*, who felt the work shallow. "War," he noted, "has far deeper meanings than its surface manifestations bring forth."[16] The Middle East studies of Brooks and Jansen were not included in this exhibit.

After using his lettering skills to fulfill such assignments as the masthead for *Sandscript*, Camp Huckstep's newspaper (fig. 70), Brooks would be honorably discharged 14 September 1945. Not wishing to immediately cope with the problems of being a civilian again--finding a place to live and studio space--he stopped in Washington, D.C. on his homeward trip, to visit a friend employed by the Office of Strategic Services, predecessor to the C.I.A. There he found a job: his design skills made him a useful member of the art staff, and he was one step closer to resuming his prewar life some two and a half years after joining the military. It was a life he would share with another O.S.S. artist, the Yale-educated painter Charlotte Park, during the exciting years ahead.

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[16]Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries Reports from the Front," *The New Yorker*, 28 August 1943, 43.

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CHAPTER 5

RETURN TO NEW YORK; EMBRACING ABSTRACTION IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (1946-1949)

Three years constitute a short portion of one's life, yet three years can be crucial to the development of one's art. They were to the art of James Brooks. In the late summer of 1945, a recently discharged veteran, he had resumed his art career in a limited way. As noted, he had functioned briefly as a commercial artist employed by a branch of the U.S. government in the nation's capital. But slightly before 1946 arrived, he was back in New York, where he decided to focus exclusively on painting--briefly rejecting all commercial assignments that would encroach on his time, even if they supported him financially. And by 1949, or even earlier, he had achieved his aim--to completely change his style and bring it into the line conceptually and aesthetically with what New York's avant-garde artists were then producing. He was no longer the representational artist he had been prior to and during the war. Instead, convinced of the efficacy of abstract painting to eloquently communicate the artist's meaning, he had undergone a conversion of great magnitude and forsaken

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all mimetic imagery.[1] In making this move he allied himself with the young rebels currently changing the city art scene.

Art historians and critics may disagree on the date this avant-garde actually coalesced into the movement now known as Abstract Expressionism. Lee Krasner is said to have believed, "Abstract Expressionism was formed in the late 1930s and early 1940s and was consistent throughout."[2] Yet Michael Leja, in researching, found a range of opinion: some questioned if this group could *ever* have constituted a 'coherent movement' while others held that "any new effort to attribute group status to these painters would have [had] to start virtually from scratch, and this is indeed what happened in 1949-50."[3]

The dates cited by Krasner and Leja are the outside limits. Most moderate observers would likely cite the early to mid 40s, as did curators Robert Hobbs and Gail Levin of the Whitney exhibition *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative*

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[1]There was another reason for the change in style. Convinced that regionalism or political references made his art too illustrational, Brooks searched for ways to avoid "remembered forms--remembered from other artists..." and "invent fresh ones." Gladys Shafran Kashdin, *Abstract Expressionism: An Analysis of the Movement Based Primarily upon Interviews with Seven Participating Artists* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1965), 19, 35.

[2]Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge, England, New York, and Oakleigh, Australia: Cambridge U. Press, 1993), xviii.

[3]Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism, Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 21, 44.

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Years, who proposed that the works presented were "evidence that it had begun at least by the early 1940s."[4] Artist James Brooks would have agreed. Returning to full-time painting in 1946, he believed that his two and a half years absence on military duty were a setback; they had caused him to miss out on some critical developments in painting.[5] His individual growth and consequent maturation would be thereby delayed. Catching up would require singleness of purpose; no alternative activity would be allowed to distract him from his goal.

His close relationships with those colleagues pursuing similar goals undoubtedly firmed his resolve, as did his knowledge of their progress. He had on his return to New York, as an example, renewed his friendship with Bradley Walker Tomlin, whose Woodstock studio he had earlier shared, and whose art was just now undergoing fundamental revision. Having met Adolph Gottlieb and become aware of new directions in painting, Tomlin had discarded illustrational motifs and synthetic Cubist compositions in favor of the

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[4]Robert Carleton Hobbs and Gail Levin, curators, "Checklist of the Exhibition," *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978).

[5]Of those who comprised the Abstract Expressionist group, only Ad Reinhardt and James Brooks actually served in the military. Polcari, 18. Brooks observed on his homecoming, "Most of the men who are pretty well established now had already made their names by the time we came back." James Brooks, interview by Seckler, transcript.

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abstract images and more fluid compositions seen in *The Armor Must Change* (fig. 71). It was a major advance. Philip Guston, a high school classmate of Jackson Pollock's whose skill at composing murals Brooks greatly admired, was also in the process of transforming his imagery. While still figurative, the figures were being flattened, distorted, and dissected in the interest of his achieving a more expressive, more symbolic art. Such changes are evident in this unidentified 1945 work before which Guston stands in a *LIFE* magazine photo (fig. 72).[6] Furthermore, Jackson Pollock, a friend from mural days whose loft Brooks now shared with Jackson's brother Jay and wife Alma, would create his ultimate series of brush paintings prior to his revolutionary introduction of dripped or poured works (Fig. 73).[7] But how was catching up to them to be accomplished?

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[6]Guston spent most of this year in St. Louis as Artist-in-Residence at Washington University, returning to New York City for his first one-man show at the Midtown Galleries. Later this year he won the first prize in Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute Annual-the event celebrated in *LIFE*'s story. "Carnegie Winner is Abstract and Symbolic," *LIFE*, May 1946, 90. According to David McKee of McKee Gallery which handles Guston's estate, this painting may have been called *Somersault*. He is not sure. If so, it was probably destroyed because the artist felt it was "not working." David McKee, interview by author, New York, NY, 24 April 1998. Telephone.

[7]Shortly after the Krasner-Pollock nuptials of October 1945, the couple moved to the Springs on 3 November. James Brooks, who had met Pollock through his brother Sande McCoy, rented the front part of the apartment they had just vacated. Deborah Solomon, *Jackson Pollock a Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 159, 164. This was the apartment to which Jackson and Lee Krasner would return periodically on city visits.

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In his art school education, Brooks had had little contact with Cubist form. Although early in the century most vanguard European artists, and indeed such American pioneers as Max Weber, the Synchromists Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell, the Precisionists Sheeler and Demuth, and as forward-looking and independent an artist as Stuart Davis had been absorbed with Cubism for longer or shorter periods, the act of compressing pictorial space by fragmenting and reconstituting volumetric form had not engaged Brooks prior to the mural *Flight*, where he did so somewhat tentatively. That hesitancy needed to be addressed.

In his direct fashion Brooks arranged to share a studio with painter Wallace Harrison, whose technical virtuosity and 'penetration into cubism' he admired.[8] Harrison, British-born and educated in Australia, had spent three years in Paris prior to his coming to New York.[9] There he immersed himself in both the works and milieu of Picasso, Braque, Dufy, Derain, and Soutine until, forced by the depression, he came to New York in 1932. From then until 1938, he would share his extensive knowledge of contemporary French painting with students at Cooper Union, where he was an extremely popular faculty member. In 1938, he started

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[8]Brooks, quoted in Sam Hunter, *James Brooks*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 10.

[9]This Wallace Harrison is not to be confused with his contemporary namesake, the prominent American architect Wallace K. Harrison.

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his own studio school. There on the advice of painter Paul Feeley, her teacher at Bennington College, Helen Frankenthaler studied during 1949 while Brooks still shared the studio space and Charlotte Brooks was herself a student.[10] Charlotte remembers him as an admirable teacher, as do other former students contacted.[11] Excessively private, he neither showed his work nor granted interviews. But his school would continue until 1950 when he retired to his farm to paint before returning to Europe.

Though no formal teacher-student relationship existed then between Harrison and Brooks, it is evident that paintings Brooks observed in Harrison's studio and Harrison's helpful criticism aided the younger artist to progress from his former representational style to new Cubist-inspired abstractions. Still, in 1946 Harrison had not entirely resolved his own stylistic direction. Expressionism dominated some works (fig. 74), others were Miróesque (fig. 75), while others were airless synthetic Cubist compositions

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[10]John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 16-17.

[11]Charlotte Park Brooks, interview by author, East Hampton. 2 December 1997, Tape. Another former student, Florence Kunstler, recalled he taught her the process of abstracting and said, "He was a very exacting teacher." Dikran Dingilian, later a Copper Union faculty member himself, reported, "[He was] the best teacher I ever had...He emphasized no school; he wanted us to find our own. In his mind it was the poetry in art that was important." Former Cooper Union students Kunstler and Dingilian, interviews by author, Bayside, NY and Marble Hill, NY respectively. 15 December 1997, telephone. Helen Frankenthaler did not

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(like this one of 1948) from which all illusory space had been squeezed (fig. 76). Though Brooks would learn from the latter, two other powerful sources for his understanding of Cubism cannot be overlooked. One was the local accessibility of such Picasso works as *Three Musicians* of 1921, whose forms he would later advise a painting student to study, and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* of 1907 (fig. 77), about which he said,[12]

> It showed me a lot about the paradox of space--the surface and depth existing at the same time, kind of supporting each other in a mysterious way. All good painting had it but this one demonstrates it more clearly than most.[13]

The second was a particularly timely exhibit: in 1946, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. of New York's Museum of Modern Art had expanded and updated the 1939 exhibition catalogue of a former Picasso show. His book, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* would become a cornerstone of Picasso scholarship.[14] Coincidentally, a large show of the museum's collection would direct public attention to other of the artist's original works.[15]

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respond to a letter of inquiry.

[12]Both could be seen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY by the late 1940s.

[13]Grace Gluck, "The 20th-Century Artists Most Admired by Other Artists," *ARTnews* 76 (November 1977), 81.

[14]Alfred H. Barr, Jr. *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946).

[15]*The Museum Collection of Painting and Sculpture*, 20.

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Though Harrison and Brooks shared this profound admiration for Picasso, what they extracted from studies of his works is nevertheless different. If both are dependent on the underlying grid of Synthetic Cubism and its reduced pictorial space, the forms in Brooks' *Night Conference*, 1946 (fig. 78) are fewer but proportionally larger and less reliant on strict horizontality and verticality than those in Harrison's *Le Cabinet Etrange*. Some are quasibiomorphic. Their layering is uncrowded in the existing illusionistic space. And that space commands as much visual interest as shapes occupying it. In subject matter they differ, too. Harrison, clinging to traditional Cubist subject matter, continued to use the studio setting--here the fragmented human forms. For Brooks, however, whose wartime experience was still too fresh to permit so precious and narrative a theme, there was a move toward a broader subject--one that was evocative rather than descriptive. *Night Conference* addresses the viewer entirely on the basis of its forms, their disposition in space, and moody tonal color. The change involving both style and meaning was neither quick nor easy. Pressing himself, the artist examined his purpose in painting and worked ceaselessly to create numbers of small, exploratory works. He experimented with media--gouache on paper was a favorite, but he used charcoal, pastel, and oil paint, as well, on a variety of supports

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June 1945-13 January 1946.

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including canvas and homosote.[16] In creating these, not yet the expression of latent poetic instincts that his mature works would be, he took his first step toward aligning his themes with those Abstract Expressionist artists were already exploring. The nature of existence, its generation, the idea of rebirth, our belief systems, the role of the unconscious--all such life-shaping forces would, in their various guises as metaphoric images, be given visual form. Recalling this period he said,

> There was a kind of metamorphosis in my work, a breaking loose into using my unconscious a little more, so that I was able to work much more freely.[17]

As hoped, the experience of sharing Harrison's studio had yielded valuable rewards: the search for an art both more current in form and universal in meaning that had once motivated Brooks to leave Dallas found its first considered solutions here. Would this have happened without the immediate impact of works by Pollock, Still, Motherwell, de Kooning, Kline, Rothko, and Newman near at hand--without the invigorating environment their art provided or the impact of their creative revolution? One can only review what they

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[16]Homosote is a compressed cardboard building product about 1/2" thick. Its use was properly inspired by the experimentation with different types of supports such as asbestos panels in Siqueiros' New York workshop opened in 1936. Recalled by Alex Horn in "Jackson Pollock: The Hollow and the Bump," and quoted in *Pollock, Orozco and Siqueiros*, exh. cat. (New York: Joan T. Washburn Gallery, 1998).

[17]"James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives…,Journal*, 16.

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had to offer and try to establish how that reverberated in the art of James Brooks.

Jo Gibbs' comments at the end of 1946 call attention to the changing climate of American art that year. In reviewing the recently opened Whitney Biennial she observed:

> When a poignant little *Urban Imp* in a rocking-chair rendered with characteristic sensitivity...looks like the acme of conservatism, it means that the 1946 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American painting at the Whitney Museum has swung just about as far to the left as is possible. In last year's show emphasis on advanced schools of painting was marked. This year there is relatively little else. Predominating are well chosen examples of creative expression that make for the strongest argument yet that there is a potent yeast at work in American art.[18]

Included in this exhibit and individually noted in the Gibbs article were works by Rothko, Guston, Pollock, Baziotes, and Stamos. Though the literature does not generally treat 1946 as a moment of significant development in their art, or in that of their colleagues recently christened Abstract Expressionists after a descriptive phase coined by critic Robert Coates, it was in fact a year of decisive shifting.[19] Influenced primarily by Picasso and Mondrian, the Cubist infrastructure had until now dominated the art of Gottlieb, de Kooning, Motherwell, and Tomlin. That would soon change: in the works of many of these artists the Surrealist

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[18]Jo Gibbs, "Whitney Annual of American Painting Moves Far to the Left," *Art Digest* 21, (15 December 1946): 5.

[19]Robert M. Coates, *"The Art Galleries," New Yorker,* 30 March 1946, 83.

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technique of automatic writing and the Surrealist ethos would have a profound impact on the work produced.

It is oversimplifying to imply these were the *sole* styles or guiding concepts contributing to Abstract Expressionism's development. The subject is far too complex for a thorough review here for the artists concerned were voracious in their intellectual and aesthetic appetites. They embraced Kandinsky and also Matisse as stylistic models, investigated the Freudian (and later Jungian) preoccupation with the unconscious, displayed an atavistic interest in primitivism and in mythologizing, lauded organic over geometric forms, and more. Remember, the André Breton-led expatriate Surrealists were on the scene in force--all mature artists with records of achievement. Their use of automatism for achieving spontaneous and improvisory effects and expressing secrets long locked in the psyche did provide an additional technical tool to explore. Matta was active in indoctrinating the young New York artists, who gave automatism a new purpose. Its use became one of the distinguishing processes of New York School painting.

So it was that within the year to come, Pollock would apotheosize the concept of automatism and alter the course of painting by discarding all but the dripped or poured image. Newman's vertical zip would be introduced and reappear in countless gestural or linear variations, and

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Rothko's early metamorphosing forms would be replaced by vaguely defined rectangles of color. Gorky even earlier had begun to let his viscous paint drip and dry where it rested. The use of such unorthodox and impromptu practices was not limited to these few artists alone; it would later transform the works of Kline, de Kooning, Still, Tomlin, Guston, Baziotes, and Brooks, as well. As a group these artists, many of whom had already been recognized with one-man shows in New York galleries, stood at the very forefront of art in 1946.

After months of intensive labor in this invigorating intellectual climate, Brooks' painting was also rapidly progressing. *Composition*, 1946 (fig. 79), shows his progress when compared with the earlier work. Though their palettes are similar, the image in *Composition* is organized with more fanciful, Miró-inspired forms hovering in a lighter-colored space which is neither flat nor entirely logical. There is a new playfulness about the subject, and one is not surprised to hear Brooks advising an interviewer,

> It was time for Freud's seeds to ripen, and it did among the painters, and they trusted their unconscious more, and were able to free themselves. At any rate we were able to use ourselves more spontaneously than we ever had before--to cast off some of the very strict Parisian Cubism.[20]

Nor was it surprising to learn that his progress was

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[20]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives…,Journal,* 16.

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sufficient for him to have been included in two group exhibitions--the more important, the acclaimed "Critics Choice" show at Grand Central Galleries.[21] Jo Gibbs, in reviewing it, predicted optimistically that artist would "bear watching."[22] But Brooks was already broadening his reach. While observing Harrison teach, he had found teaching something he was tempted to try--something to supplement his limited income. That very year, nearly apace with the artists he considered advanced, he began to instruct evening classes in drawing at Columbia University. Two years later he would begin to teach lettering to art students at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, as well.

In the year 1947, Brooks continued his dedicated pursuit of a new, vanguard style. The painting *Dialogue* shows greater assurance in the handling of both positive and negative shapes, and in their complex interweaving (fig. 80). As in Picasso's *Three Musicians* or Guston's *If This Be Not I* (fig. 81), either of which may have inspired it, at least one figure here with the playfully small hand is masked and confronts the viewer. Though still essentially Cubist in structure, the inventive shapes and disposition of light and dark areas, clearly show the artist's growing

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[21]The second was at the Mortimer Levitt Gallery, New York, N.Y. Both the works shown and dates of exhibition are unknown.

[22]Jo Gibbs, "New York Critics Nominate New Talent," *Art Digest* 21 (15 December 1946), 12.

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mastery.

Dialogue was accepted for one of the year's most prestigious art shows, *Abstract and Surrealist American Art* at the Art Institute of Chicago--hand-picked by its curators Frederick Sweet and Katherine Kuh who personally traveled some 24,000 miles to select some 256 exhibits for the late fall event. Unfortunately, reviews of the show were tepid--judging many of the Cubist works derivative--although the roster of exhibitors read like a list of America's best known artists. Peyton Boswell, Jr., one of the few to comment positively on the show, wrote:

> ...it must be admitted that the Institute has succeeded in presenting a true cross-section of abstract and surrealist art in these hectic, confused days of pseudo-peace.[23]

Brooks' inclusion in an exhibit of this scale--in one of the nation's most venerable venues with curators of impeccable credentials--was, even without the added kudos of a prize, the first solid recognition of his talent as an abstractionist. But it was only one of the years's sources of happiness. On 22 December 1947, he would marry the artist Charlotte Park whom he had met in Washington, D.C. on his return from service. She was and is a skilled abstractionist and lyrical colorist as one of her works shows

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[23]Peyton Boswell, Jr. "Chicago Surveys the Abstract and Surrealist Art of America," *Art Digest* 22 (15 November 1947): 9-10. Also in the same issue, P. Boswell, Jr., "Abstract Questions," 7, and C.J. Bulliet, "A Movement Dies," 8,30.

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(fig. 82). But by applying her creative skills to the more concrete problems of industrial design (first in the offices of Raymond Loewy and later Donald Deskey), she managed to save enough money to allow them to vacation in Maine during the first summer of their marriage. (Charlotte still chuckles at rumors that circulated about Brooks having married a rich woman.) Nevertheless, it was on this very trip that Brooks made a real breakthrough in his art that permitted him to leap from Cubo-Surrealist to Abstract Expressionist.

That breakthrough introduced stain painting-a process often inaccurately credited to other artists, but one so closely linked with the aesthetic of all Brooks' work after 1948 that its misattribution should be corrected.[24] This is what occurred. Brooks, as previously noted, was fond of exploring the possibility of unconventional supports. A few experimental works were on wood, some using its natural contour without modification, as *Untitled,* 1948 (fig. 83). Others used a burlap-like bagging fabric called Bemis' Osnaburg cloth in place of the more costly canvas. That

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[24]Stain painting is frequently attributed to Helen Frankenthaler who was inspired mainly by "the sight of Pollock's exhibition of black-and-white pictures" of 1951. (Ironically, we are told "She occasionally saw such 'later' gesture painters as James Brooks whom she had known since the Wallace Harrison days...") John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler,* 45,49. Clement Greenberg's version of the genesis and development of stain painting is discussed in Clement Greenberg, "Louis and Noland," *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* v. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance,* 1957-1969, ed. John O'Brian.

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summer in Maine offered him great freedom to experiment. The artist had been painting some images on paper and, with an eye to making them both more permanent and more stable, collaged them to a cloth support. In this procedure he used a black heavy glue. In doing so, he noticed the black penetrated the cloth creating shapes on both the face and reverse sides of the support that could be individually developed. And in ensuing works he made use of this knowledge. To initiate a new work, he laid his cloth support on the floor and poured paint on it (a stand-in for the glue) which served as a kind of matrix around which the image would develop. The initial color would be dictated by the color key the artist intended to use. Then, thinning various pigments almost to the viscosity of watercolor, he poured them on the untreated cloth sequentially and spread them with a squeegee until they saturated the surface and made color as one with the weave of the cloth itself. To finish a work he tacked the work-in-progress to the wall, where he could adjust the shapes and continue to articulate them with a brush and paint, often the same color as the cloth. On the wall he could further refine some of the elements. It was, indeed, a process of discovery about which the artist would soon say:

> My painting starts with a complication on the canvas surface, done with as much spontaneity and as little memory as possible. This then exists as the subject. Between painting and painter a dialogue develops. At first a rhythm of the painting is modified, then a chain

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> of formal reactions sets in that carries painting and painter through violent shifts of emphasis and into sudden unfamiliar meanings. At some undetermined point the subject becomes the object, existing independently as a painting.[25]

His closeness to Pollock at this time undoubtedly provided precedents for several aspects of his project. The inception of the work, itself--spreading the support on the floor and working from all four sides--follows a Pollock procedure. Also like Pollock, Brooks decentralized his compositions, now preferring allover images that lacked particular foci of attention. Another Pollock legacy was the unconventional freedom of action this level of creativity demanded. Yet the works of the two artists are different: unalike in scale, in forming pictorial space, and in the way the surfaces of the works accept paint. Brooks' were, of course, the more modest in these early years, growing to mural size only as his confidence increased. Never do they propose themselves as engulfing visual environments. As for the paint texture, Pollock's remains on the surface in energetic and inscrutable patterns; thinned, Brooks' paint is absorbed by and becomes one with the canvas. Although his images are often quite breathtaking, they tend toward the lyrical rather than the assertive. But the Pollock-Brooks influence worked in

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[25]James Brooks, "Statement," *Contemporary American Painting*, exh. cat., (Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 1952), 174.

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reverse at times. When both artists forsook titles in favor of numbering works, Brooks appears to have led in doing so.[26] And to Brooks alone can we credit this process of staining his canvases, a process later artists would adopt--often without acknowledging his pioneering efforts.

The two-sided *No. 5*, 1951, while painted shortly after the period considered in this chapter, is nevertheless a valuable vehicle for understanding the artist's working method (figs. 84a and b).[27] Each side is an independent work. The recto has broad, curvilinear swaths of paint dancing to a leisurely rhythm while the verso has a dense population of smaller jostling forms. Brooks has outgrown his former geometric framework, any lingering references to Cubism, and the diagrammable space they imply. In their place are freely made marks with poetic connotations in ambiguous but shallow space. But beyond the obvious, the greater import of this work is that it gives insight into the painter's response to the first poured mark, as registered on opposite sides of the cloth, his bringing automatism into play, and his final articulation of forms and space using traditional brush painting. It was this

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[26]"Jim first numbered his paintings, *#1*, 1941, *#2*, 1941, etc. He found it difficult to recall a number, or associate it with a painting, so [later] started to use a letter, starting each year with the letter A..." Charlotte Park Brooks to author, Note, 4 March 1998.

[27]Mistakenly identified as *No. 5*, 1948 in Hunter, 11.

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combination of improvisory techniques and conscious painterly decisions which permitted James Brooks to progress triumphantly to the mature stage of his art.

Before this, the forms had been deliberated; now chance played a leading role in their conception. Using poured paint as the initial mark, he would respond to it in unprecedented ways, "...Anything that wasn't a brushstroke or a habit or cliché," or the way he had worked before would do. The aim was to get him started "in a new direction that will flower into some kind of new, imaginative thing."[28] The support was either stained with color as in *No. 25,* 1949 (fig. 85), or left in its unsized state as in *No. 11,* 1949 (fig. 86). The absorbency of the support and the openness of its weave were of primary importance to the painter for the ability of paint to penetrate made the surface more real to him. Finally, it was the artist's dialogue with the developing imagery which would later bring the works to their final form--images that were both exhilarating enough to keep people interested yet unfamiliar enough, having originated in the artist's unconscious, to bring viewers to a "new place, an unknown place," within their own psyches.[29] Hence his work is less an existential statement than a contemplative surface whose forms, when

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[28]James Brooks. "James Brooks Talks with Dorothy Seckler," *Archives…,Journal,* 17.

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explored by a perceptive eye, might lead to insights about the self and one's inner and outer space.

Stylistically his painting did not change much in the following year. Some works like *No. 11,* 1949 were dense; others, like *No. 25,* 1949 open--their rhythms vary as do their palettes, but the characteristics that link works as a family, are still identifiable. Those are the flowing shapes and graceful cursive lines that draw together the various elements of each image.

Also during this year, Charlotte and Jim Brooks' personal lives would change. In visiting Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock at the Springs and in hiking around that area, they discovered how much they enjoyed the eastern end of Long Island. They therefore decided to summer at Montauk, a move that would bring them into close proximity with artist friends like the Pollocks who shared the Brooks' ambitions and goals. They would continue to do so until establishing a permanent residence there several years later.

There was an optimistic, significant career change, too. Although the artist had exhibited since his early career, usually that had been in group shows. That did not change immediately. But in 1949, James Brooks would meet Lou Pollack of Peridot Gallery, one of New York City's better contemporary galleries, who would include him in yet

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[29]Ibid., 18.

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another group show this year, and in 1950 give him the first one-man show he would have. Indeed, he would continue to represent him until 1953 when Brooks, in following a trend for artists to move from downtown galleries to those on 57th Street, would move to the gallery of Grace Borgenicht. In three years, Brooks had turned his career around and fulfilled his most immediate plans for the future.

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CHAPTER 6

THE ARTIST'S ROLE IN THE NEW YORK SCHOOL: THE ACHIEVEMENT AND GROWTH OF ARTISTIC RECOGNITION (1950-1959)

Art historian April Kingsley has called the year 1950 "The Turning Point," for its imminent promise. She wrote,

> During 1950 the artists and their public became aware that something extremely important was going on in New York, something that wasn't happening anywhere else. The excitement was palpable; to be in the art world in that time and place was to be at the center of it all.[1]

This was in contrast to the fact that the United States was still embroiled politically and militarily in difficult situations. True, the nation had definitely put World War II behind and returned to many of its peacetime social and domestic activities. Still, feisty incumbent President Truman who had presided over the war's conclusion--even authorizing use of the atom bomb to achieve victory--nevertheless faced other daunting problems. These included the investigation of the State Department by notorious Senator McCarthy at home, the North Korean invasion of South Korea and consequent deployment of U.S. troops abroad-even an attempted presidential assassination by the Puerto Rican nationalist movement.

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[1]April Kingsley, *The Turning Point: the Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 13.

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To pinpoint a date so precisely courts dissent. However, most knowledgeable observers would agree that by 1950 the New York City art world was alive with promise. Already those artists to whom the name "Abstract Expressionists" applied had coalesced into a loosely formed clique, drawn from various smaller circles. Several, and this included Pollock, Baziotes, Hofmann, Reinhardt, and Rothko, had met and/or been shown at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery between its 1942 opening and its 1947 terminal exhibition. (Brooks was already close to Pollock, Guston and Tomlin by the latter date.) Hans Hofmann's school, first opened in 1934, had been another gathering place. With his dynamic personality and profound knowledge of European abstraction, Hofmann had attracted such talented pupils as Lee Krasner, critic Clement Greenberg, and various less well known artists--Fritz Bultman and George McNeil among them. Also, by that date New York galleries had been established in which the newer, more radical work would be shown--particularly in those of Charles Egan, Betty Parsons, and Samuel Kootz. Still other artists--notably Gorky, Motherwell, and Baziotes--gathered at the knees of the Dadaists and Surrealists Matta, Max Ernst, and Duchamp to learn such techniques as automatism and the use of chance, which became central to their processes of invention. Finally, there were the shared social spaces where this recently united community gathered to thrash out such issues as the importance of abstraction and what constituted acceptable subject matter. Among these were the Cedar Street Tavern, a couple of

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neighborhood cafeterias, but more importantly, the Subjects of the Artist School (later continued as Studio 35) which opened in 1948-specifically to involve budding artists in such discussions. Planners included Clyfford Still, who departed for the west before it opened, along with Robert Motherwell, sculptor David Hare, and William Baziotes. Though sketchy at best, this list of meeting places must include the Club, or more formally the Eighth Street Club, a semi-official spot, where Brooks recalled "ideas might be thrown around," and "where a few writers and poets and musicians and composers were brought in" to discuss their own works, the general state of the arts, cultural events, or important books or theories.[2] A list of guest speakers recorded by Irving Sandler follows,

> ...philosophers William Barrett, Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Bluecher, composer Edgar Varese, social critic Paul Goodman, Joseph Campbell, Father Flynn of Fordham University, and art critic Thomas Hess. There were also parties held in honor of artists such as Alexander Calder, Marino Marini, and Dylan Thomas.[3]

But there were some artist/speakers who, "concerned with...the breakdown of the recognizable image" would explain the changes their work was undergoing.[4] Panels, too, were formed which Brooks often found inconclusive but "valuable in that the peripheral sidelights or unconscious suggestions that came out

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[2]James Brooks, interview by Dorothy Seckler, Part 2, 12 June 1965, transcript, 28.

[3]Irving Sandler, "The Club," *Artforum* (September 1965): 30.

[4]James Brooks, interview by Seckler, Part 2, transcript, 28.

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were important."[5] Panelists are known to have included Baziotes, de Kooning, Gottlieb, Guston, Franz Kline, Reinhardt, Tworkov, and others. A chronology of who knew whom and where they met is available elsewhere, and will not be repeated here.[6] But those important to the group included James Brooks, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, Mark Rothko, Theodore Stamos, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and still others.[7] They were bound together yet loosely defined by shared values and events: the letters, essays, and statements in which their ideas were articulated, the political actions they undertook to publicize and achieve their goals, and the shows and symposia in which they participated.

A symposium, atypical because it was closed but important nonetheless for the serious tone of its discussions, was the final activity of Studio 35. Held in the later afternoons of 21-23 April 1950, it was attended by virtually all artists named above and more, and moderated by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum of Modern Art, sculptor Richard Lippold, and painter Robert Motherwell. Its purpose was both to sum up the discussions held at Studio 35,

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Clifford Ross, ed. *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics, An Anthology* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 296-300.

[7]There is no definitive list. However, Peter Busa, Gerome Kamrowski, Lee Krasner, Philip Pavia, as well as sculptors, Herbert Ferber, David Hare, Ibram Lassaw, Seymour Lipton, and David Smith subscribed to very much the same aesthetic concerns.

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successor to the Subjects of the Artist school, and to have artists, usually isolated in their studios, assemble to define and discuss their joint interests and issues. Or as Lippold said simply,

> It would seem that the method of work of most of us has been a lonely one...I would like to learn from conversation with my confreres.[8]

There were concerns (many left unresolved) about what constituted the basis of the community of artists; the need for, and function of, the title of a work and its relationship to meaning; the artist's responsibility, if any, to make meaning clear to the public; the linkage between meaning and structure of the art object; the name by which the group would choose to be known and consideration of what is meant by the word "abstract."[9] Much discussion centered on how the artist knew a work in question was finished--which also brought comparison of French and American practices. Responses varied and ranged from Gottlieb's "I usually ask my wife (the painter Esther Dick)," to Brooks' introspective reply,

> I think quite often I don't know when a work is 'finished', because I often carry it a little too far. There is some peculiar balance, which it is necessary to preserve all through a painting which keeps it fluid and moving. It can't be brought to a stop. I think you have to abandon it while it is still alive and moving, and so I can't consider a painting 'finished'...because it often develops as I go. It quite often changes in the middle

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[8]Robert Goodnough, ed. "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," in Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, ass. eds., *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951, 10.

[9]Brooks suggested "direct," Tomlin recalled Brooks talking of "concrete" and belittling "no-objective," [sic] and Newman offered "self-evident." Goodnough, 22.

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> of a painting. But the 'end' is a very difficult thing, something that is determined, not by the form that is 'finished', but by the fact that I have worked on it. It satisfied a need of some kind.[10]

Such answers shed light on the artist's creative processes and problems, and the importance each assigned to them. Here, for example, Motherwell asked Brooks to explain his process of "painting behind the canvas," his original strategy for staining the reverse side of the canvas and developing the configuration as it appears on the right side. Brooks explained:

> My works is improvisation to start with. My purpose is to get as much unknown on the canvas as I can. Then I can start digesting or changing. The first thing is to get a great many unfamiliar things on the surface. There are shapes that start improvising themselves, which I then start developing...If I can manage to keep a balance with improvisation, my work can get more meaning; it reaches a certain fullness.[11]

Again, the answers provide insights into the artistic process. They provide us with documentation of the artists' thinking at that particular time. They also help us understand the value of the symposium to the participants. Fundamentally, group goals were to collection information, to assess its value to those involved, to stimulate thinking about painting practices and purpose, and offer ideas for the consideration of all. At this stage in his career, Brooks was certainly central to the group: an active and equal participant.

For the Brookses, these early years were filled with the

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[10]Goodnough, 11.

[11]Goodnough, 18.

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excitement of producing groundbreaking abstractions, and playing an active part in what they surely saw as a prophetic movement. Charlotte Park Brooks remembered there was an active give and take among the artists; naturally there was competition, but a spirit of cooperation prevailed. Drawn together by mutual need and lack of funds, unlikely partners like Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman found each other (the former helped the latter to hang his second one-man show).[12]

Still the growing optimism all felt was not yet a reflection of improved sales nor growth of income. At 500 West Broadway in New York City, the loft space that Jim and Charlotte Brooks shared until 1965, their sitting room at first served them both as a studio which likely accounts for the moderate size of most works produced, with few exceptions. To supplement their funds, both were teaching. This meant each could count on exclusive use of the space only at certain intervals. But balancing the handicap of limited space, each had the competent criticism and helpful support of the other.

If anything, the works gained in confidence and consequently in fluency. And since Brooks numbered his, we have an indication of how prolific he was; in the year 1950 he completed at least forty-six paintings (besides drawings and watercolors). Many of these would be greeted with favorable comments when shown at Lou Pollack's Peridot Gallery between 27 March and 22 April. Two follow:

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[12]Charlotte Park Brooks, interview by author, Notes, East Hampton, NY, 27 February 1998.

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> ...he is more successful than most because [of] his particular sensitivity to color... The shapes flow, collide, and melt into each other at top speed, and in certain canvases...he brings off very happy results.[13]

and,

> At a time when the majority of abstractionists often sacrifice validity for innovation, it is gratifying to find an accomplished artist whose very subtlety is misleading. James Brooks is such a painter, and after 25 years of painting, his first one-man show is impressive and refreshing.[14]

Two works, the modest *No. 36* (fig. 87) and mural-sized *No. 42* (fig. 88) permit a study of this year's changes. Though still initiated by the method described above, the developed works owe a diminishing debt to Pollock's. While that artist's images often appear as shallow, open-meshed nets whose thick and thin threads have been twisted, knotted or woven together and suspended before planes of atmospheric color suggesting space or wall, Brooks' bobbing, biomorphic forms have assumed substance. In an array of light and dark values of few closely keyed colors, as in *No. 36*, or in stridently contrasting hues of *No. 42*, the forms have both a new assertiveness and a new density. Larger, more distinct, and more solid than heretofore, they contend with their neighbors for position, but are linked together and to the surface with finely dripped or drawn lines. Their energy is exuberant and expressive, even when thinly painted on Osnaburg cloth. But increasingly, canvas or duck would soon come to be

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[13]S[tuart] P[reston], "Trio of Art Shows Marked by Variety," *New York Times*, 7 April 1950, p. 23.

[14] M[arynell] S[harp], "Brooks Musical Abstractions," 1950:20.

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used as alternate supports.

Before 1950 was over, Brooks would join with others in that group of,

> modern painters who are puritan in the sense that they believe that all representationalism should be shunned in order to concentrate on form, color and texture,

for two historic events.[15] On 20 May he would join with other progressive artists in sending a protest letter to the President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It claimed that jurors selected for a major exhibtion scheduled for December were "notoriously hostile to advanced art," and he like the others would not therefore submit work to the Jury.[16] And before the end of the year he would be photographed with "The Irascibles," fifteen of the eighteen painter/signatories of the letter.[17] Photographer Nina Leen took the picture, subsequently published in *Life* magazine on 15 Jamuary 1951 with the caption "Irascible Group of Advanced Artists Led Fight Against Show" (fig. 89). The name has identified these artists since.

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[15]S[tuart] P[reston] Ibid.

[16]Painters who signed the letter were Jimmy Ernst, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, William Baziotes, Hans Hofmann, Barnett Newman, Theodoros Stamos, Clyfford Still, Richard Pousette-Dart, Ad Reinhardt, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Hedda Sterne, James Brooks, Weldon Kees, Fritz Bultman. Sculptors included Herbert Ferber, David Smith, Ibram Lassaw, Mary Callery, Day Schnabel, Seymour Lipton, Peter Grippe, Theodore Roszak, David Hare, Louise Bourgeois. The protested jury members were to serve for the exhibition *American Painting Today—1950*.

[17]Of the painters, Hofmann, Kees, and Bultman were absent, as were all the sculptors.

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Strangely enough Brooks experienced his colleagues as more benign than irascible. As noted, he attended panel discussions and when questioned about the topics discussed, he remembered no dogmatic objections or flare-ups regarding figurative art--only that de Kooning "was doubted a little or slighted a little" when he returned to the figure.[18] In the main he saw individuals rather than the group concerned with getting "Europe[an artists] off our backs."[19] And he denied an interviewer's suggestion "that this group of artists wanted to vehemently reject any connection with a mass audience or with culture in any sense," saying,

> [There was] no thought of being in or out of the establishment...We all liked to go to [gallery] shows and were glad when any exhibitions did occur of our work...We were anxious enough to show and we got galleries when we could. But we didn't expect sales and we didn't expect to be liked by our fellow artists who shared our viewpoint.[20]

In fact, it was not until the individual artists began selling works that the closeness of the group started to crumble. The artists who experienced success avoided those who didn't for fear of embarrassing them. Although close friendships would continue to exist between pair or trios of artists, as a group they would never again be as cohesive.

Nevertheless, other linking influences remained: specifically, group interest in such topics as Existentialism and Zen [Buddhism]--both noted in later texts by Alfred Barr,

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[18]James Brooks, interview by Seckler, Part 2, transcript, 19.

[19]Ibid. Gottlieb, Brooks felt, had this concern.

[20]Ibid.,untranscribed notes.

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Jr. and Dore Ashton--but more often overlooked in the literature.[21] Though part of the zeitgeist, their precise roles are hard to pin down. Zen, already practiced in Japan in the 12th Century, had spread to the United States by 1905, and by a quarter-century later had a sufficient following for the first Zen Institute of America to be established in New York City. Neither religion nor philosophy, Zen is a method of disciplining the mind through ritual and meditation to arrive at a better understanding of reality--though necessarily one more intuitive than rational. In its sweeping away of "all definitions, intellectual concepts and speculations" concerning itself, it established a parallel with advanced art of mid-century which discarded concepts and techniques of previous art practices to achieve a tabula rasa on which a new art would be generated.[22]

In speaking to Dorothy Seckler fifteen years later, Brooks added that a good many members at the club were "very receptive to it because it emphasized the pure confrontation of things rather than intellectualization," and "there was a deep need to confront things in a purer way, without bias, or as innocently as could be done... So Zen did take hold or we had

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[21]Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Introduction," *The New American Painting* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 16. and Dore Ashton, *The Unknown Shore: A View of Contemporary Art* (Boston, Toronto: Little Brown and Co., 1962), 103-112. On Zen alone, refer to Helen Westgeest. *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West* (Zwolle: Waanders.b.v. and Armstelreen: Cobra Museum voor Moderne Kunst, 1996).

[22]Alan W. Watts, *The Spirits of Zen: A Way of Life, Work and Art in the Far East,* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 30.

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a great many talks about it," although ultimately Brooks felt the art community too Western for its prolonged practice.[23]

More, of course, has been written about the links between Abstract Expressionism and Existentialism, which the artist characterized as life-affecting. Existentialism is a philosophical movement reflected in the writings of Kierkegaard and developed in the works of many other 20th-century writers--notably in those of Franz Kafka and Jean-Paul Sartre. It denies that there are natural laws governing our universe, which can be studied to fathom the reason behind the sequence of events that one calls "life." Instead it proposes that nothing precedes nor follows life; and the course of one's existence is determined by the individual alone and the decisions he or she makes to shape that existence. The individual lives in a state of anxiety and isolation arising from the complexity of this framework: what choices to make of the many paths open to him, what the purpose of so finite a life, etc. Artists sensing this philosophical viewpoint as pertinent to their mid-century existence frequently talked of it at the club. "We accepted it as a thing that was affecting our lives and it was very important."[24] Not only were the spontaneous acts of painting and assembling sculpture considered existential acts, but the isolated position of the artist in the process of making choices approximated the

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[23]James Brooks, interview with Seckler, Part 2, 12 June 1965, untranscribed notes.

[24]Ibid.

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alienation existentialists understood as modern man's natural state.

As noted, however, such topics were often overlooked by the art press. In 1950 two of the most widely read were *The Art Digest*, which took a conservative approach to art commentary, and *ARTnews*. The former, while not openly hostile to vanguard artists, had lead articles devoted instead to traditional exhibitions--whether group, solo, or thematic--and attention was paid to such favored Realists and Precisionists as Hopper, Wyeth, and Demuth. An editorial of 1 October 1950 noted restlessness in art museum and art school circles, yet avoided more specific references to change.[25] Another of 1 December 1950, in considering "that the swing to abstraction is reaching bandwagon proportions" included this thought,

> But the wholesale swingover to abstraction does not greatly bother me. For one thing, I believe it is cynical and the more wholesale it is the sooner it will be completed as a cycle.[26]

Nevertheless, both Pollock's and Motherwell's one-man gallery shows were given favorable reviews shortly thereafter.[27] It was not till the following January, after the death of editor Peyton Boswell, Jr., that an editorial proclaimed,

The Digest favors no school or style of art over any

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[25]D[oris] B[rian], Managing Editor, "The Art Digest Comments," *Art Digest* 25 (1 October 1950): 5.

[26]Paul Bird, "The Editor's View," *Art Digest* 25 (1 December 1950): 5.

[27]B[elle] K[rasner] reviewed the Pollock show at Betty Parsons Gallery and the Motherwell show at the Kootz Gallery. *Art Digest* 25 (1 December 1950): 16,17-18.

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> other. Within the limitations of magazine layouts...,it selects for reproduction those works of art, old and new, that are significant art news--without inquiry into the political leanings of those who create them.[28]

And the editorial policy of the publication would slowly become more equitable in its coverage of New York School art.

ARTnews was, on the other hand, more favorably disposed to the vanguard. In January 1950, Thomas Hess could write of the current Whitney Museum Annual of Contemporary Painting that certain works in the exhibition--notably those by de Kooning, Marin, Pollock, Hofmann, Knaths, and Motherwell,

> ...add to the excellence of the exhibition, and to the growing understanding that America's young school of abstract art is one of our distinguished contributions to twentieth century culture.[29]

And as the year continued, the magazine would follow a progressive course: it would publish a description of Hans Hofmann's painting technique and it would applaud the three museum directors who had issued a joint "Statement on Modern Art" supporting the innovative in art and pledging to show it.[30] In the May 1950 issue, Hess, soon to become editor, did run the story "Seeing Young New Yorkers," which reported on Clement Greenberg's and Meyer Schapiro's choice of youthful artists for a Kootz show--among them, Elaine de Kooning, Robert de Niro, Franz Kline, Larry Rivers, and Esteban

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[28]Paul Bird, "The Editor's View," *Art Digest* 25 (1 January 1951): 5.

[29]Thomas B. Hess, "8 excellent, 20 good, 133 others," *ARTnews* XLVIII, (January 1950): 34-35.

[30]Elaine de Kooning, "Hans Hofmann Paints a Picture," *ARTnews* XLVIII (February 1950): 38-41, 58,59. A[lfred] M. F[rankfurter], "Vernissage," *ARTnews* XLIX (April 1950): 15.

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Vicente.[31] Subsequently, *ARTnews* published a copy of the artists' protest letter to the Metropolitan Museum although such an event as the symposium at Studio 35 was entirely ignored.[32] Finally, Alfred M. Frankfurter, editor, and James Johnson Sweeney would succeed in having a resolution adopted by the International Association of Art Critics that urged freedom and tolerance for all kinds of artists and art.[33] But whatever the pressures of victories these outside forces presented, it was the work itself that mattered most.

Let's then return to the works of the 1950s. While Brooks' transition to abstraction was already accomplished by 1950--its gestural form reinforced by Pollock's closeness as friend and critic--the early works of this period sometimes reflect an alternate influence. That is, they recall cubism's vertical/horizontal infrastructure. A grid, more suggested than actual, orders the forms in space. While this appears to be the case with *No. 36*, 1950 (fig. 87), it can not be said of *No. 42* (fig. 88) of the same year. As if centrifugally dispersed, forms radiate out from a center. No longer interlocked in space, a characteristic believed to look back to de Kooning's 1946-1950 black and white works which culminate in *Excavation* (fig. 90), they enjoy more breath-

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[31]Thomas B. Hess, "Seeing the Young New Yorkers, *ARTnews* XLIX, (May 1950), 23, 60.

[32]A[lfred] M. F[rankfurter], "Vernissage." *ARTnews* XLIX, (June-July-August 1950), 15.

[33]A.M.F., "Vernissage," *ARTnews* LXIX, (September 1950): 13.

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ing room. Though still weaving over and under each other, they do so playfully without restricting the action of neighboring forms. This change anticipates the future.

When biomorphic, which they most often are, is it Gorky to whom they are indebted as has been suggested?[34] Brooks' forms surely had a broader base. Biomorphism presented itself as early in the century as the Dada movement--roughly coincident with the onset of World War I. It countered Cubist preoccupation with intellectual geometric forms with poetic, biologic forms. Gorky's use of such forms derived from Surrealism and reflected his predilection for fantasy. Brooks certainly would have seen the former's *Agony* I (fig. 91), purchased by the Museum of Modern Art the very year under consideration here. But like Miró, an artist he greatly respected, Brooks, too, was naturally drawn to cursive forms as his samples of lettering show. Though his particular admiration for Gorky may have strengthened his direction, his need to produce forms suggesting life and growth was innate. It reflected his belief that forms originate in the unconscious and take final shape with human intervention--that is, with the gestures that give them meaning.

As for size, Pollock had of course begun to paint mural-sized works as early as 1947, after having earlier created a mural for Peggy Guggenheim's apartment (fig. 92). He had that same year proclaimed his intention to move in this direction,

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[34]Kingsley, 122-123.

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same year proclaimed his intention to move in this direction, a direction he saw as essential to modern painting.[35] Based on both the grandeur of enlarged scale and the possibilities greater size brought within reach--the work constituting the viewer's entire visual field, for one--others of the advanced guard soon followed suit. By 1950, it was not extraordinary to have works of 7' in one dimension. As his confidence grew, Brooks would expand his works, as well. In this year he moved from easel-sized works of 40-50" to at least one work of grand scale. The size of *No. 42,* can best be appreciated in an informal studio photo where it forms the backdrop for a conversation between Pollock and Brooks (fig. 93). Though modest by comparison with larger Pollock and Motherwell works, its own monumentality becomes apparent when measured against human scale.

All of these--the loosening of the grid, biomorphic forms, and impressive size--are incremental rather than revolutionary changes in style. James Brooks, thoughtful and deliberate in his actions, had a compelling belief in the direction in which he pushed his art, and the fitness of bringing it to conformity with the stylistic criteria of his colleagues. In retrospect, one tends to forget that this

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[35]Pollock's 1947 application for Guggenheim Fellowship said in part, "I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is toward the wall picture or mural...The pictures I contemplate painting would constitute a halfway state, and an attempt to point out the direction of the future, without arriving there completely." Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock,* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), 40.

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occurred under considerable opposition from both critics and educated laypersons. For example, President Truman has been quoted as saying, "so-called modern art is merely the vaporings of half-baked, lazy people."[36] But far more virulent, indeed, were the comments of professional critic Ralph M. Pearson who surveying Whitney Annual and Pittsburgh International of 1950, published such sentiments as,

> The worst of the blunderings [at the Whitney]--by Motherwell, de Kooning, Tomlin, Gatch and others less well known--should be admitted to a beginning student exhibition only for reasons of tolerance and optimism.

or,

> Chaos is not art. The chaoticists and the beginners represent but a segment of the modern movement. But, when prizes, honors, purchases and publicity are bestowed upon them [at Pittsburgh] along with the self-claimed and thoughtlessly accepted title of "*avant garde*," the time has come to take stock.[37]

Personal integrity plus the ability to shut out such a negative voice were required to stay the course.

As the decade progressed, however, there were reasons for optimism. The Whitney Museum of American Art had two invitational shows annually--one earlier for sculpture, watercolor, and drawings, the later one for contemporary American painting--to give lesser known artists new exposure. The museum extended the invitations; the artists responded by submitting works from which the staff then made their selection, all styles being accepted. Brooks was fortunate

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[36]Maurice Winograd, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 2 November 1952, sec. VI, p.4.

[37]This and the previous quotation from Ralph M. Pearson, "A Modern Viewpoint," *Art Digest 25*, (1 December 1950): 14,25.

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to have works accepted for both.[38] And there were other such venues.

In trying to examine abstract art in this country--its development, the reasons for its development during this period, the characteristic forms artists gave their abstractions and the stylistic innovations they introduced--in 1951 the Museum of Modern Art's Director Andrew Carnduff Ritchie put together a landmark survey of domestic art entitled *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* in which Brooks' work was shown.[39] That it was intended to be and indeed was a major show cannot be doubted. It was large in scope, including 108 works dating from 1912 to 1950. Signifying its importance, on 5 February a historic symposium was held on the subject, "What Abstract Art Means to Me." Ritchie was moderator. Calder, Motherwell, Stuart Davis, and de Kooning were among the participants. The accompanying show was scheduled to travel over a period of two years: to Dallas, where Brooks as a hometown celebrity earned a headline in the local press of "Multi-faceted Brooks; A Top Abstractionist."[40] Also, to St. Paul, Minnesota; Winnipeg, Canada; Toledo, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and Carbonvale, Illinois. Eventually

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[38]Brooks showed a gouache *No. 11* in the first, which ran from 23 January to 25 March, and a painting *No. 44* in the latter, which ran from 8 November 1951 to 6 January 1952.

[39]Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951; repr. Arno Press, 1969).

[40]Bob Brock, "Multi-faceted Brooks..." *Dallas, Texas Times-Herald*, 30 September 1951.

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the tour was extended to include the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts where Ritchie was on hand to speak on opening night, 14 October 1953.

For purposes of clarifying precedents Ritchie had grouped all works in one of five classifications, four of which were geometric. Brooks' work *No. 27*, 1950 fell in the fifth: Expressionist Biomorphic. For it, as for the others, Ritchie gave "origins": Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, and "characteristics." They are:

> a) irregular-shaped forms and calligraphic interlacings bearing, if any, a relation to organic or anatomical forms; composed usually in dynamic, symbolic or emotively suggested relationships; often showing evidence of an automatist or 'doodling' origin.
>
> b) space treated three-dimensionally; in its variegated depth, shallows and movement related to concepts of space found in landscape; reflects the mysterious instability and vibrating life of the forms within.[41]

In this category too, were Gorky, Calder, Pollock, Pousette-Dart, Gertrude Greene, Stamos, Baziotes, Noguchi, Lipton and others. That the exhibition dramatically aided the understanding and acceptance of contemporary art is confirmed by Sheldon Cheney who observed, "...Ritchie seemed to bring a great Museum's authority to usage of "abstraction" as an overall word..." and by H.H. Arnason of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum who called this show "official recognition" of Abstract Expressionism as a movement.[42]

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[41]Ritchie, 125.

[42]Sheldon Cheney, *The Story of Modern Art*, (New York: Viking Press, 1958), 635, and H.H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968), 508.

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Beside these, a biennial show of watercolors was held at the Brooklyn Museum, and various universities or university museums put together exhibitions of more advanced work. University galleries at Lincoln, Nebraska and the University of Minnesota had shows of interesting current works this year, as they would continue to do. Brooks' work was represented in all of these.

But perhaps the 1951 show that earned the greatest attention from city artists was the famous *Ninth Street Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, held between 21 May and 10 June (fig. 94). Leo Castelli and members of the Club had put it together--a joint venture of seven galleries and sixty-one artists, among whom were Giorgio Cavallon and Nick Carone, close personal friends of the artist who urged Brooks to participate. Whatever the initial expectation for the event, it was resounding success. Essentially, it served notice that American art had changed and now commanded serious attention.

For Brooks there were other consequences of this show. Both he and Helen Frankenthaler exhibited here. He, his painting *No. 41,* 1949 (fig. 95) begun with a stain on the Osnaburg support and transformed into its final form by stain painting; she, one of her current brush-painted works. Though downplayed in the literature, as we noted, Frankenthaler and Brooks had a previous acquaintanceship from Harrison's studio.[43] It would certainly have made her take note of his

[43] On the advice of her Bennington painting teacher

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work and store in her visual memory the possibilities inherent in Brooks' use of film-like color. Popular cant, emanating from the pen of critic Clement Greenberg, instead credits her with the origin of stain painting, and attributes its genesis to Pollock's inspiration. Rather than questioning the substance of the legend and whom it benefits, let us consider the works. A comparison of *No. 41*, 1949 and Frankenthaler's *Mountains and Sea*, 1952 (fig. 96) shows they have greater similarity to each other than the latter does to any 1951/52 work of Pollock's. Brooks and she both poured veils of thinned pigment on absorbent supports and let residual color stain dictate what next step would be taken to bring the images to completion, although Frankenthaler may have guided hers to create a loosely preconceived configuration--here a landscape--which Brooks did not. Smaller drips are used by both to augment the larger images, and both wed the various parts of the images with extremely precise drawn lines and arabesques. There is enough concordance in their techniques to concede the impact of Brooks' staining on her development.

These first years of the fifties were, in fact, extremely busy for Brooks. Besides the shows already mentioned, the artist would generally have a solo exhibition at Peridot, his official gallery, and also take part in any group shows that gallery mounted. In 1951 that would have included a *Sculpture by Painters* show (March/April) that yielded one of only two pieces of sculpture Brooks was to

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Paul Feeley, Frankenthaler had studied painting with Wallace

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make, a show of watercolors by gallery artists (May/June), and a show entitled *Younger Abstractionists* (September/October).[44]

Most exciting were the shows that in some way signified unusual recognition. Very late in 1951 Leo Castelli organized the second in a series of exhibits for Sidney Janis Gallery. His 1950 exhibit *Young Painters in the U.S. and France* had paired a handful of expressionist artists of both nationalities and had been shown successfully both here and in the French capital. His follow-up for the same gallery was *American Vanguard Art for Paris,* shown in the spring 1952 as *Regards sur la Peinture Américaine* at the Galerie de France, Paris. Included in its roster of twenty artists were Brooks and some of his fellow irascibles.[45] As a pair, these shows gave the French the fullest account of New York developments yet to be presented on the continent.

Other exciting opportunities were the grand international competitions like Carnegie Institute's 39th exhibition, the *1952 Pittsburgh International* that had been initiated by Andrew Carnegie in the very late 19th Century for the purpose of bringing "sweetness and light into the lives of Pittsburgh's workers."[46] Open to the public this year

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Harrison while Brooks was still working in his studio.

[44]Jim Brooks to author, LS, 24 April 1978 gives data on sculpture.

[45]The others were Albers, Baziotes, Goodnough, Gorky, Gottlieb, Guston, Hofmann, Kline, de Kooning, Matta, MacIvor, Motherwell, Pollock, Russell, Reinhardt, Tobey, Tomlin, Tworkov, and Vicente. (26 December 1951-1 May 1952).

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from 16 October to 14 December, the show included over 300 works by 270 artists--works currently selected by the Carnegie's new director Gordon Washburn and his associate director John O'Connor, Jr. Purposely choosing more abstract works than usual, they presented a "far more lively and up-to-date show than those to which Pittsburgh has been accustomed..."[47] In spite of the fact that critic Tom Hess judged his own country's entries as best, most of the prizes went to Europeans who took first, second, third and fourth prizes.[48] James Brooks, showing *M*-1951 (fig. 97), was one of the only American prizewinners. In competition with Kline, Motherwall, Tobey, Vicente, Balcomb Greene, Gottlieb, Stuart Davis and others, he received the fifth prize of $400. And although Washburn was not himself a juror, he was to say of this award,

> Here the prize goes to an abstraction which reflects a somewhat new line of American painting, a work expertly and sensitively executed by a young painter who is little known to most art lovers.[49]

Indeed, *M-1951* is a large, arresting painting with a

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[46]Kenneth Neal, *A Wise Extravagance: The Founding of the Carnegie International Exhibitions,* 1895-1901, (Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 172.

[47]Howard Devree, "Modern Round-Up, Abstract Work Dominates International Exhibition at Carnegie Institute," *New York Times,* 19 October 1952, sec.II, p.11.

[48]Hess, "Miracle of Schenley Park," *ARTnews,* 51, (November 1952),: 29.

[49]Gordon Bailey Washburn, "Prize Winners, The 1952 International," *Carnegie Magazine* XXVI, (November 1952): 301. Presumably "little known" refers to the Pittsburgh audience, in New York Brooks had an established reputation.

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subdued palette ranging from ochres to sooty olive-blacks. Across its tonal ground jigsaw-like shapes hover. Their contours alone call to mind the freely drawn shapes of such de Kooning works as *Light in August* of 1946 (fig, 98), but the resemblance is superficial. De Kooning's imaginative forms, boldly interwoven on the blackened picture plane, invite our speculation and recognition. (Saloon doors and a sphere, perhaps.) Speculation draws us into the work. In contrast, the contour lines of Brooks' organic forms rarely serve a descriptive function. Color divorced from contour in his work yields shapes both gravity-free and evanescent. The vaporous space they occupy leads the viewer to a private universe. Hess would help spread knowledge of the artist's work in his book *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase,* published that very year.[50]

Most of what is known of this period can be gathered from catalogues, tear sheets, art commentaries, etc. meticulously filed by the artist. Also in 1952 Charlotte Brooks began to keep daybooks of the couple's activities. In many cases these are short notations listing events rather than describing them. Omitted is any discussion of personal feelings. Still, they permit a more intimate view of the Brooks' personal life. We know they attended art shows regularly--a watercolor show at the Whitney, a Cézanne retrospective at the Metropolitan where they also saw Indian

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[50]Thomas Hess, *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase,* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), 137-142.

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rugs which inspired certain cursive patterns in James Brooks' work, the opening at MOMA of *Fifteen Americans,* openings of friends' shows, etc. We know they still attended the Club when possible--to hear Mercedes Matter, John Cage, or to see European slides shown by Martin James and Ad Reinhardt. We know they spent summers in Montauk in a rented house/studio to which they joyously repaired when not teaching. And we know who interviewed Brooks (the March of Time on 3 November), and with whom they shared meals or other social events--the Gustons, Tworkovs, Cavallons, and increasingly the Pollocks, and others. It was an art rich life, and if their material wealth was limited their existence was full in many different ways.

The notes of 1953 show little change in life style. Winters in the city were taken up with painting, of course, also teaching one or two days a week, visiting museums and galleries, and dining frequently with artist friends and their spouses. Summers began at May's end. Warm weather signaled a change of address--from city to Montauk, where by mid-June Charlotte Park Brooks could write, "Cleaned Jim's side of the barn today. All ready for work." She added one reason for living in this area, "Porpoises play in [ocean in] front of Piles' house."[51] But it was not all work. By now both Brookses were fully entrenched in the east end art community, and such notes as,

> Ran into [gallery owner] Bertha Schaefer and took her home with groceries and passed Bill de Kooning on

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[51]Charlotte Park Brooks, 1953 Daybook, 29 May. Collection of its author.

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> bicycle. He came to Bertha's and we had drinks then on to Pollock's for dinner--Several others. *Look* magazine in area doing article on painters in area.[52]

But ultimately painting was their single most important concern and the hub around which their professional and social lives revolved. Even as the scheduled exhibits continued at virtually the same demanding pace, the artist never quite content, made delicate adjustments in his style and paint handling, for example.

In *K*-1952 (fig. 99), the favored palette was still blue-greens interacting with red-orange masses over and around which threads of color stitch areas together. Surely in an effort to broaden his means of expression, while paring away excessive gestures, variations in his imagery appeared. In such works as *Triptych-1952* (fig. 100), the value of the colors is varied, as well. Both blues and red-orange are paled with white--refined, to communicate a lighter mood and sense of harmony. The number of colors on each panel is reduced, masses have grown larger, the space they occupy more shallow, and the "threads" have all but disappeared. The rich gray ground unifies the work whose individual panels can be rotated 180° to vary the aspect of the lively yet elegant image, which has several times been said to recall the beauty of Chinese painting.[53] Later that same year, in *P*-1952 (fig.

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[52]Ibid, 20 October.

[53]Sam Feinstein, "Brooks: Intuitive Agent," *Art Digest* 27 (1 February 1953): 15. Also see, Sam Hunter, *James Brooks*, (New York: Praeger for the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1963), 13.

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101) the work took an alternate direction. Now the color shapes have lost their distinctive contours and the vague forms playing against the painted ground are tonally modulated, creating the illusion of a diaphanous space. But the lines here, still cursive, are more muscular and bind together the various surface elements.

In 1953, the searching continued. *M*-1953 (fig. 102) shows only a few of the trademark biomorphic forms remaining although the artist's preferential palette still prevails. The field is composed of bundles of parallel brush strokes, some secured, some freely distributed like so much harvested wheat tossed in random patterns on the ground. The poetic image has given way to one expressing stronger emotions--restlessness, even foreboding. The diaries provide no clues to the change and historically the year was quiet, although the hydrogen bomb, a valid cause for unease, had recently come into existence and been tested. Then, by year's end, in *U*-1953 (fig. 103), we note the seeking has subsided: the graceful signature style has returned with its contrasts of mass and line, its rhythmic sweeps of rounded forms on a thinly painted ground. Brooks has laid out the parameters of his style. Until mid-decade his works will conform to these self-set limits.

If Washburn had been able to describe the artist as "little known" in 1952, that label no longer fit by 1953. In January the *Magazine of Art* devoted a double page spread to a short biography of Brooks and to his works. In February,

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after his third one-man show at Peridot, *New York Times* reviewer Stuart Preston was to call him "an abstract painter of considerable esthetic virtues," whose work conveys "feelings of strength and gaiety," while another would proclaim him a "rare artist whose painted images are as hypnotically affective as ephemeral dream semblances..."[54] His works would be shown in San Francisco; he would this year take part in both of the Whitney's annual shows, and in an invitational show at the University of Illinois Festival of Contemporary arts. However, the following year would be less kind. After its auspicious start with a gallery change to the Borgenicht gallery, a work shown in the spring Whitney annual, another in the Pennsylvania Academy Annual, and a third in the Guggenheim's exhibition *Younger American Painters*, an act of nature would deprive the artist of much of 1954's production.[55] This was, incidentally, the year Brooks changed his way of naming his works. After numbering earlier works, then in late 1952 or 1953 using single letters to identify paintings, he now began to use alphabetically-ordered, made-up words--made-up to avoid a poetic or narrative reading of the image.

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[54]Stuart Preston, "Diverse Showings, Realism and Surrealism--Collectors' Finds," *New York Times*, 8 February 1953, sec.II, p.9. Also, Sam Feinstein, 14.

[55]The shows were as follows: a solo show at [Grace] Borgenicht Gallery, 25 January-13 February, 1954. Group shows: *The Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*, 24 January-28 February. The Whitney Museum *Annual of Contemporary Sculptures, Watercolors, and Drawings*, 17 March-18 April. Also, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Younger American Painters*, 12 May-31 July. All are in the New

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Hurricane Carol was the name of the previously mentioned event. On August 30th, Charlotte Brooks noted,

> Strange weather—clouds--painted and both of us started new paintings...got information that a hurricane was due within the next 24 hours. The rain started and blew hard...[56]

By the next night the storm had increased, but pressed by the illness of their cat both Brookses drove to East Hampton and the veterinarian. When they later tried to return to Montauk, they were stopped until the storm subsided. Among the first to go through, they nevertheless found "our barn, which had been completely destroyed. Jim's half was gone except for a pile of broken up wood." Charlotte Brooks' half was "twisted and up on the wood pile."[57] It as a sight which reduced Pollock, who accompanied them to tears.[58] When able to investigate, they found their works of the entire summer, plus all but two of Charlotte Brooks' winter paintings and all but two or three of Brooks' had been lost. Of those saved, one painted by each was at the house, one by each at a local exhibition.[59] Threatened with another hurricane, the Brookses returned to the city before September's end--back to the cycle

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York City but the Pennsylvania Academy… of Philadelphia.

[56]Charlotte Brooks, 1954 Daybook, 30 August.

[57]Ibid., 31 August.

[58]Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1985), 207.

[59]Although not listed under "Group Exhibitions," Charlotte and Jim had been invited by Don Braider to show at Music and Books, opening 15 August. Charlotte Brooks, 1954 Daybook, 1 August.

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of painting, teaching, visiting museum and gallery shows, and again participating in such autumn exhibitions as the Whitney *Annual of Contemporary American Painting.*

1955 would be more productive. There would be fewer of the smaller paintings; the larger scale generally prevailed. There were changes in the image, too. The number of forms were reduced but those remaining grew in size, as in *Floxurn* (fig. 104) of this year. Brushstrokes were broader now, and charged with power. The illusory space they occupied appeared shallower, the format was clarified, and the dependence on calligraphic lines--formerly so important for the interweaving of elements--was minimized. In all, the images gained in monumentality and assurance.

By now, the reigning powers in the art world and in art periodicals--in particular, *Arts Digest* which would change its name, policy, and editorial staff to a more enlightened one soon--were no longer engaged in battle with abstract art.[60] Having arrived, it was accepted without resistance to its virtues; in fact, the reaction to its dominance had already set in. In the wake of de Kooning's return to the figure and his scandalous exhibition of the six *Women* paintings in 1953, interest in figurative elements had been stimulated among younger artists like Larry Rivers and Grace Hartigan. That was reversal of direction Brooks was never tempted to investigate.

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[60]*Arts Digest* became *Arts Magazine* with the October issue. The periodical was reformatted and made more current. Leo Steinberg, Margaret Breuning, and Dore Ashton were on staff.

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As for exhibiting, 1955 would be quieter than the previous year had been. The hurricane had caused a loss of new work and for that reason there was no one-man show. Brooks did, however, participate in several large competitions, in some of which he was a veteran. At the University of Illinois' *Seventh Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture,* said to be "one of the most important shows of contemporary American art outside the eastern seaboard," a three-man jury would opt for the breadth of contemporary expression rather than confining themselves to "the cream of American Art."[61] "Culling work from galleries in New York, Boston, and Chicago...and from the larger museum exhibitions" they put together,

> a broad group of painters and sculptors...whose work is representative of the divergent trends of various phases of the art which is currently being produced in this country.[62]

Among the 145 works in the show, an anonymous critic singled out a number of sculptors and painters for praise, noting approvingly that Brooks' "art continues to grow both stronger and more profound."[63]

The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors was the next show, and a singularly important one, in which Brooks participated. It was noteworthy in signaling a change in the

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[61]"Contemporary Americans." *Arts Digest* 29, (15 March 1955): 14.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid., 15.

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policy of Whitney Annuals, which for years had purported to provide a stage for cutting-edge artists, some of whose reputations were already secure. Now the curators wished to make room for younger, lesser-known artists of talent, not to the exclusion of their seniors but in separate exhibitions. *The New Decade*, planned as a traveling show for greater exposure, was their solution.[64] Stylistically diverse, it included New York School painters Pollock, de Kooning, Motherwell, Gottlieb, Kline, Pousette-Dart, Reinhardt, and Tomlin as well as others like Stephen Green, John Helicker, and Magic Realist George Tooker. Sculptors included Ferber, Hare, Lassaw, Lippold and Lipton. For the catalogue Brooks, like fellow participants, composed a statement that reveals not only his personal creative ethos but also the mystique that underlies Abstract Expressionist painting. He wrote,

> The painting surface has always been the rendezvous of what the painter knows with the unknown, which appears on it for the first time. An engrossment in the process of changing formal relations is the painter's method of relieving his self-consciousness as he approaches the mystery he hopes for. Any conscious involvement (even thinking of a battle or standing before a still life) is good if it permits the unknown to enter the painting almost unnoticed. Then the painter must hold this strange thing, and sometimes he can, for his whole life has been a preparation for recognizing and resolving it.[65]

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[64]John I.H. Baur, *The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1955). The schedule was as follows:

11 May-7 August 1955	Whitney Museum of American Art
6 October-6 November 1955	San Francisco Museum of Art
20 November-7 January 1956	Art Galleries, U. of Cal., Los Angeles
9 February-20 March 1956	Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center
15 April-15 May 1956	City Art Museum of St. Louis.

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What did the artist hope to portray? Not a pictorial mystery, but an abstract image which mysteriously reveals something of the painter's relationship to his life, times, and moral code. Brooks, like many artists, was silent on the meaning of his works--believing the image an independent and self-sufficient means of visual communications. To acquaint the layperson with this pattern of thinking, William Seitz, who has investigated the question of Abstract Expressionist subject matter and content in great depth and authored a definitive study on the movement, provides a cogent framework.[66] He sees the transformation from traditional to modern meaning as evolving naturally from such early 20th-century movements as Cubism, which increasingly subordinated customary subject matter (whether landscape, portrait, or still life) to form. This devalued representational images and led to abstraction. But if abstract, art must still have meaningful content as Abstract Expressionism proposes to do. Its concerns are humanistic, spiritual, and ethical--yet such qualities must be communicated through purely pictorial means. These are the materiality of the paint, the way it is applied, the forms found within the process of applying paint, even the objecthood of the finished work. Says Seitz,

The painting emphasizes its existence as a kind of human

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[65]James Brooks in *The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors, 13-14.*

[66]William Seitz, *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America*, (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983).

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> fabrication, but its perceptual vitality and aura of feeling have made it another kind of artifact. A spiritual tuning fork, it is first an object for sensing and next for emotional and ideological response, symbolically mediating between spectator and the world.[67]

In striving to achieve this, the artist internalized his subjective experience then gave it visual form. The more authentic expression it was of the artist's thinking, behavior, and motivation, the more it was thought to be "true," the highest accolade colleagues could bestow on each other's works. And because of Brooks' involvement with such communal activities as the Club and the Studio 35 symposium, we can be assured he shared this value system in making and judging art.

Concurrent with Whitney's *New Decade* show, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York was a companion exhibit. Called *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors,* it included the work of Afro, Karel Appel, Francis Bacon, Alberto Burri, Lynn Chadwick, Jean Dubuffet, Pierre Soulages, among others.[68] The two shows begged comparison. It was a challenge *Art Digest's* Robert Rosenblum accepted and wrote about at length.[69] And in Rosenblum's estimation, it answered a

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[67]Seitz, 127.

[68]Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors,* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955). This, too, was a traveling show. The schedule follows:

10 May-7 August 1955	The Museum of Modern Art
21 September-30 October 1955	The Minneapolis Institute of Arts
21 November-7 January 1956	Los Angeles Country Museum
2 February-15 March 1956	San Francisco Museum of Art.

[69]Robert Rosenblum, "The New Decade," *Art Digest* 29 (15 May 1955): 20-23.

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question sorely bothering the art world: how did our artists rank with the European? His answer is unequivocal.

> ...the fact of the matter is that, with few exceptions, the best European work shown is less vigorous, less innovating than the best of the Americans at the Whitney...whereas American painting and sculpture would have looked provincial and derivative when seen against its European counterpart at almost any time until about 1945, by far the best painting and probably the best sculpture of the post Second World War period was done right here. Americans are so used to suffering from a cultural inferiority complex (especially in the fine arts) that the realization of our present international importance makes us a little uneasy and bewildered.[70]

Individually, too, he compared works of local and foreign painters and frequently found the Americans superior as with Brooks' works. Comparing it to the works of two German painters, Rosenblum asked rhetorically,

> ...but is their art as alert, is their style as coherent as that of, say James Brooks' *No. 27*, 1950, with its quietly luminous intertwinings of tangled black rhythms?[71]

A negative answer is obviously implied here. To the larger question of the quality of American art, the art public in the cities the two shows would tour would have a chance to decide independently in the months that followed.

Before the August closing of the Whitney Museum's *Decade*...show, the Brookses embarked on an experience that yielded a summer's worth of admirable studio conditions in a creative community, closeness with nature, daily contact with a group of exceptional artists, and a lifetime of firm friend-

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[70]Rosenblum, 21.

[71]Rosenblum, 21.

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ships. On the basis of their individual talents, they had each been selected for a residency at the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire. They would arrive on 1 July, and leave again on the 29 August. Between those dates, they would have two rooms and washbasin (the bath was shared) in "a nice little house, called Paris cottage," in which the artists Giorgio and Linda Cavallon and Gregorio Prestopino and his wife were also housed. Each would be given a studio, where lunch would be delivered daily so that the artist could eat and work in seclusion. Other meals and evening activities were communal. A resident composer might play for the group, a writer might read a work in progress, or the group tour the studios to see works still on the easels. Charlotte Park Brooks' notes record her husband's and her infinite delight--aside from their work--in swimming in a nearby lake or pool, in picnics and car trips to nearby mountain peaks, in a family of phoebes nested on the porch. Not only were the artistic atmosphere and the daytime privacy conducive to work, but the beauty of the landscape was exhilarating. Refreshed they returned at summer's end, enriched by the experience itself and the friendship of such MacDowell fellow residents as poet Stanley Kunitz, with whom Brooks would remain friendly for the rest of his life.

With autumn he would again resume a busy schedule. Besides painting and preparing for exhibits, he would begin a new teaching assignment as Visiting Critic [of Advanced] Painting at Yale University. Joseph Albers, head

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of the art school and resident professor of this class, appointed Brooks apparently because his work possessed the expressive, romantic qualities that were in contrast to Albers' own intellectual approach to painting.[72] As a team, they offered students a broad spectrum of criticism--a truly advantageous circumstance.

To enumerate every show in which Jim Brooks participated in the last five years of the decade serves little purpose. There were many, and those with the most impact on the art world will be considered here.

For Brooks, as for his colleagues and the professional critics, the 1955 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting, was such a major event. Still it was a disappointment. Again assembled by Gordon Washburn--Carnegie Institute's director--and invited jurors, the show was larger in size and scope than heretofore.[73] Brooks showed *F*-1955. Besides this, it included some 327 works in widely varied styles from 23 countries; the prizewinners all artists from

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[72]Suggested by Victor George Kord, interview by author, 13 July 1999, Telephone. Kord, then a student at Yale Art School, believes that Albers in selecting critics like Brooks set up a kind of dialectic. Albers' aphorism recalled by Kord tends to substantiate this. He told students, "Art is the product of thinking, not emotion."

[73]Jurors were "Afro, the Italian artist...; René Huyghe, honorary curator of painting and design at the Louvre..."Perry T. Rathbone, director of the Museum of fine Arts at Boston; Ben Shahn, leading American artist; and G. David Thompson, Pittsburgh industrialist and one of the best known collectors of twentieth-century art in this country." "1955 Jury of Award," *Carnegie Magazine XXIX*, (October 1955): 260.

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other countries.[74] In trying to tell us what was going on in painting, a task both identified and criticized as the goal of the show by critic Hilton Kramer, Washburn had been over-ambitious. Therefore the critical reaction was disheartening. Kramer then commented that " 'what is going on' is nothing less than the *decline* of easel painting" (emphasis added).[75] Howard Devree of the *Times* took as glum a view.

> What is disturbing is to find so much of this work dead level, so much that has fallen back on the clichés that have come into being with the development of an international style.[76]

The consternation was sufficiently widespread that *Arts Magazine* editor Jonathan Marshall devoted part of his editorial page, not to the works but to the distribution of prizes. He wrote,

> The leading arts critics were unanimous in their criticism of the Carnegie show's weaknesses. This is not mere flag waving, but we do believe in American artists and their works...[77]

Perhaps for the first time this decade critics had been in agreement and acting with conviction in opposing a jury's choice. More importantly, their stance reinforced the opinion voiced earlier this year regarding the comparative

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[74]In numerical order they were Manessier, a French abstractionist, Mexican Tamayo, Italian artist Birolli, Chilean artist Matta, and Italian artist Scialoja.

[75]Hilton Kramer, "Pittsburgh's International," *Arts Magazine* 30 (November 1955): 18.

[76]Howard Devree, "Big International: The 1955 Pittsburgh Version Raises Questions of the State of Our Art," *New York Times*, 16 October 1955, sec. II, p.12.

[77]J[onathan] M[arshall], "The Trouble with Juries," *Arts Magazine* 30, (December 1955): 11.

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strengths of European and American painting. At last a group of culturally aware Americans had become convinced that the most original, most significant art was being made on this side of the Atlantic. The art capital of the western world had shifted to New York.

There is an irony here. From the present perspective, the Abstract Expressionism movement is understood as waning by 1955. Contemporaries, however, would understand it as a recently accepted fact. Therefore, it was somewhat courageous in the last months of 1955 for Leo Steinberg to write as a strong advocate of both de Kooning's and Pollock's paintings.[78] Indeed, such forthright critical advocacy had formerly been infrequent. And there began to be coverage in the art press of the impact of expressionism abroad. In covering a "mammoth international exhibition in Paris...called 'Phases de l'art contemporain'," Dore Ashton noted that the new 'informalism' practiced here by a hundred artists from a dozen or so countries owed a great deal to American painters Tobey and Pollock. Although her topic was "What is 'avant garde'?" she pronounced judgment. She lamented the participation of some of "Europe's most gifted artists," among "the welter of mediocrities," and observed that the show presented a "huge number of flabby works by artists who let a painting happen"--in other words, by artists letting

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[78]Leo Steinberg, "Month in Review," *Arts Magazine* 30 (November 1955): 46 and (December 1955): 43-44, 46.

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automatism run amok.[79] Hardly chauvinistic, Ashton's was a candid report on how painting on the continent responded to what was known of New York School works. Until now it had been unthinkable abroad for New York to set the pace; now that was happening.

In Brooks' studio, where "flabbiness" was unknown, there was growing confidence. The artist thought in terms of fewer and more monumental forms arranged tightly on the picture plane, hovering just behind it, or straining forward as in *Karrig* of 1956 (fig. 105). More varied now, some are straight-edged, most are curvilinear created with bold, energetic brush-strokes. The artist paid great care to their interaction, laying transparent planes on or next to opaque ones, placing color-saturated reds beside neutral blacks and crystalline whites. Sam Hunter has suggested this palette as a possible response to Philip Guston's current color key, but that seems improbable.[80] While the two visited each other's studios and homes, knew and discussed the other's works, Brooks used the same colors but with freedom and verve; in Guston's work--*Dial*, 1956 (fig. 106), for example--black smolders, suggesting an evasive and threatening force in the process of assuming shape. This is an early rupture in Guston's abstract style anticipating his later figurative body of work.

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[79]Dore Ashton, "What is 'avant garde'?" *Art Digest* 29, (15 September 1955): 6-8.

[80]Hunter, 15.

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For Brooks the opening show of 1956 would be another Whitney Museum *Annual of Contemporary Sculpture, Watercolor and Drawing* that ran from mid-April to mid-June. In what was a pattern in their lives, on the evening of the preview the Brookses planned a small celebration before attending the show. On this night their invited guests were all closely related to the art world but with different functions; they were Eleanor Ward of Stable Gallery, a strong supporter of Brooks' since the Ninth Street show and the person who would represent his work shortly; Georgine Orgy; artist Louise Bourgeois and her husband art historian Robert Goldwater; and painter John Ferren, another Whitney exhibitor. Together they toured the largest annual held by the museum to date, which presented an array of varied styles rather than devoting itself to a display of a single dominant style. Fairfield Porter reporting on the show for *ARTnews* confined his remarks [80]largely to the 'rational' sculpture, which for him was the major interest.[81] It included works by Ferber, Kiesler, Lassaw, Nakian, Roszak, David Smith, Stankiewicz, but also Nevelson and Cornell. Of the watercolors, only a handful were mentioned at all, and these included Brooks *No. 3*, 1956, on the basis of which Porter praised Brooks as a "colorist."[82] But the show drew only moderate critical response. Not so, the Museum of Modern Art show that followed.

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[81]Fairfield Porter, "Meeting Ground at the Whitney," *Artnews* 55, 38-39, 63-64.

[82]Porter, 64.

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Genuine excitement and a more enthusiastic reception attended the opening of *Twelve Americans*, an exhibition curated by Dorothy Miller at the Museum of Modern Art, which opened on 29 May that same year. There were two reasons. Dorothy Miller herself was an outstanding curator, the first professionally trained curator to join the Museum of Modern Art staff.[83] She came to the museum in 1934 and retired in 1969. Between these dates she planned a number of exceptional exhibits, some of which were directly responsible for acquainting the public with New York School artists. In 1946 she organized *Fourteen Americans* in which both Motherwell and Gorky participated. *Fifteen Americans* of 1952 included works of Baziotes, Pollock, Rothko, Still and Tomlin. In 1956, she presented *Twelve Americans*, which showed works by Brooks, Sam Francis, Guston, Hartigan, and Franz Kline, among others. Each of these exhibitions consisted of a number of mini-solo shows. They were planned to present a body of work by a group of individual artists, each of whom was provided a gallery where his or her works alone were displayed. In the catalogue of *Twelve Americans* each artist was introduced by a photo and a statement, accompanied by photos of several of his or her works.[84] Brooks and others of the twelve showed ten works, though that number was somewhat flexible. The small catalogue

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[83]Michelle Elligott, "Dorothy Miller and the New York School," *MOMA* 1, (November/December 1988): 16.

[84]Brooks' statement for *The New Decade* show was repeated and another added.

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also contained a short biography of each, and an exhibition history. In hindsight one finds that Miller's choices of artists, made from the fullness of her knowledge of the art world, were so accurate that they virtually predicted which artists would enjoy successful careers. So acute, too, was her perception of significant trends in painting and sculpture, her exhibits became paradigms by which other exhibits were (and would continue to be) judged.[85] In 1958 she would also direct the influential *New American Painting* show containing the work of seventeen painters "devoted specifically to Abstract Expressionism in America."[86]

The critical response to Brooks' section of *Twelve Americans* varied greatly. The works he showed were *R*-1953 (fig. 107), *Qualm*, 1954 (fig. 108), and from 1955, *Floxurn* (fig. 104), *Gant* (fig. 109), *Holdan* (fig. 110), *M*-1955 (shown the previous year at the Whitney Painting Annual and specifically requested by Miller), *Quatic* and *Undical*. Also *Altoon*, and *Berl* of 1956. Leo Steinberg, who focus was analytical and whose writing style was poetic, devoted two separate monthly columns to covering the entire show. The first concerned the contributions of only Fritz Glarner (whose work he found "idealized and even beautiful" but ul-

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[85]T[homas] B. H[ess], "Editorial. The Year's Best: 1956," *ARTnews* 55 (January 1957): 27. In reviewing the works presented in 1956, Hess would find this one of the three most important exhibitions mounted by an institution.

[86]*The New American Painting*, exh, cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 6.

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timately off-putting) and Philip Guston, whose work merited an analysis precisely formulated and lavishly phrased.[87] The second began by mentioning the sculptors in the show, but concentrating on works by Raoul Hague, the artist with whom the author was least familiar but the one whose "strength and considerable originality" Steinberg applauded. After two-and-a-half pages, he squeezed the three remaining sculptors into a brief paragraph apiece before turning attention to the six remaining painters. Of these, he recalled having reviewed several previously, and here chose to not revisit them. Finally he moved to the unconsidered painters starting with Grace Hartigan. Her goals, as she expressed it, was to evolve "an art that is not 'abstract' and not 'realistic'..." Oddly, Steinberg perceived this as a "straining away from abstraction," and attributed such straddling to inadequacies inherent in some abstractions. Brooks' works, though well painted in Steinberg's judgment, were unfortunately seen as color

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[87]On Glarner's painting, for example, "But I find no place in it to which my eye will cling; no line in it so moves that it and I could swing along together."

On Guston's Paintings, "...For their last effect--when the initial shudder over these thick smears was passed--is the remote and radiant joy, the very quality, in fact, which again and again tempts one to locate these worlds of entrails in the sky. In their slow, tempered breathing there is not a shred of conflict, and no violence. The intrusive grays are linked and latched to the organic fiber, the two sustain each other like a warp and weft; the grays, for all their otherness, become a necessary and welcome presence, and the picture smiles with ashes in the mouth," Leo Steinberg, "Month in Review: Fritz Glarner and Philip Guston Among 'Twelve Americans' at the Museum of Modern Art" *Arts* 30, (June 1956): 44.

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shapes whose meaning was elusive-i.e., inadequate.[88] This was the crux of his criticism. Brooks had anticipated the question of meaning being raised and had sought to address it in his new statement. It read,

> There is no more forthright a declaration, and no shorter path to man's richness, nakedness and poverty then the painting he does. Nothing can be hidden on its flat surface--the least private as well as the most personal of worlds.
>
> It is unforeseen, disquieting, inevitable and necessary. It says little to those occupied with only its peripheral aspects, so interesting to talk and write about. It will not return to nature, as it is a part of nature. *Its meaning is carried in its relationships; and the shapes, colors, and things in it exist not as separate entities at all, but as carriers. The impulse they transmit through the painting is its spirit, image, and meaning.* [Emphasis added.][89]

Steinberg in fact quotes the italicized passage. And here the critic who had so poetically described Guston's color omits all mention of Brooks' palette or indeed his stylistic development within this group of works.[90] In *R*-1953, the shapes which compose the image are smaller, denser, still bound together by threading line; in the works that follow those forms have grown more muscular, more dramatic and less

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[88]Brooks is a good painter; but one regrets that not enough of the man is being converted into art. I cannot feel the forms are the equivalents of real experience. Leo Steinberg. "Month in Review: 'Twelve Americans': Part II," *Arts Magazine 30* (July 1956): 27.

[89]James Brooks, Artist's Statement, *Twelve Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956), 15.

[90]On Guston's color, "A narrow range of shades of red heaves back and forth between pale rose and scarlet...And then --in brutal confrontation with these membrane pinks and glutted reds--the streaks of gray, color of ashes, of fasting, of old age and privation." Steinberg, "Month in Review: 'Twelve Americans': Part II,"44.

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and less lyrical. They move in a still shallow but more ambiguous space. In both assertive color and confident forms they voice a variety of human experiences and human emotions for those sensitive enough to read them. Young Steinberg, much of whose scholarship had previously been devoted to Renaissance art, and who was writing one of his first art critical articles, clearly was not.[91] He casts them aside with these words,

> ...Their meaning is exhausted in their self-significance as colored shapes. And it is the detriment of such abstract painting, that as a human activity, it is so highly specialized as to consign the bulk of lived experience to irrelevance.[92]

The remaining two painters--Ernest Briggs and Sam Francis--came off no better. He damned both with faint praise calling them "very accomplished painters" but ultimately characterizing their work as "interior decoration." "They create a dream with no presence in it, an empty scene, a backdrop, a surface, a texture," he wrote and contrasted their work with that of Paul Brach, a painter whose images he called "amazingly potent" although not included in this show.[93]

Fortunately, Steinberg's view was not universally held as evident in other contemporary criticism. Hubert Crehan

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[91]Steinberg, for reasons cited above, has recently regretted his harsh judgment of Brooks' works in this show. Steinberg, interview with author, Telephone, 29 July, 1999.

[92]Steinberg, "'Twelve Americans': Part II", 27.

[93]The quotations in this and previous sentences from Steinberg, 44.

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fired off a letter complaining that Steinberg, "whose writing is usually both lucid and judicious, I find gets tangled up...specifically in his remarks on the painting of Ernest Briggs and Sam Francis."[94] James Thrall Soby surveying the same group of works observed,

> Brooks brings to his art a quite extraordinary elegance of tonal control and a muted intimacy of expression which repays our closest attention. If he is known as a 'painters' painter' that is only another way of saying how good he is.[95]

Reaffirming this opinion were both Tom Hess of *ARTnews* and Kenneth B. Sawyer, an art critic syndicated in Baltimore. Hess reported to his readers,

> Brooks is a more formal abstractionist than Kline or Guston, more concerned with the plastic forces he observes in conflict on the canvas he is painting. He solves his canvases into balanced, flat, beautifully colored units. They suggest a grand style, a cultivated art, under sufficient control to decorate a palace and yet sufficiently personal to express the vulnerability of the artist.[96]

It was an opinion virtually paraphrased in Sawyer's opening remarks,

> James Brooks is an extremely sensitive painter. For those who respond to low key colors in relaxed and unstartling balances, he is virtually irresistible--particularly in the most recent works, Brooks is, above all things, a colorist (perhaps the only colorist in the show)...[97]

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[94]Hubert Crehan, Letter to the Editor, *Arts Magazine* 30 (September 1956): 4-5.

[95]James Thrall Soby, "The Fine Arts: *Twelve Americans.*" *Saturday Review*, (19 June 1956): 35.

[96]Thomas B. Hess, "Great Expectations, Part 1," *ARTnews* 55 (Summer 1956): 60-61.

[97]Kenneth B. Sawyer, "Art Notes: Modern Museum's '12 Americans,'" *Baltimore Morning Sun*, 1 July 1958.

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However, no artist escapes negative criticism at some time during his or her career. Most serious artists learn either to deal with it or ignore it. That the "meaning of" his work continued to be source of concern and conjecture to Brooks is evident in his answer to a letter from John Baur the following year. Yet the strength of his convictions kept him on the same path; works rather than words serve as a response.

Interestingly, one unanticipated periodical article became a vehicle by which these images, still considered avant-garde, would filter down to popular culture. Surely not the sole vehicle, though we have no specific knowledge of others, this example provides insight into the wider public's introduction to the province of high art. In June 1956, *Mademoiselle,* ostensibly a fashion magazine for alert and ambitious young women on a career track, ran a feature entitled, "Scoops of the months: money-in-the-bank fashions." The introduction mentioned types of beauty from "harsh realism to pure abstract form," tying them to the *Twelve Americans* show then in progress. With an editorial policy geared to broaden the sophistication levels of its readership, *Mademoiselle* used works by Brooks, Lipton, Kline, Guston, and Hartigan as the backgrounds for fashion models wearing appropriately smart clothing (fig 111). The message here was clear: seeing art firsthand, visiting museums and galleries, is what upwardly-mobile, intelligent people do.

The summer continued with several large exhibitions at

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which Brooks' works were also represented. For one, he showed with the American Abstract Artists, an organization formed in 1936 to promote exhibitions of young abstract artists' work, and to promote abstraction in general. Possibly influenced by friend Georgio Cavallon, a member for a number of years, he joined and showed with them on four occasions, although their group was most often associated with geometric abstraction. His debut was at the Riverside Museum; the occasion was the twentieth anniversary of the group. He would show with them the following year at the Contemporaries gallery, at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1959, and finally at Lever House in 1961. He seems then to have quit the organization.

In 1956, the Whitney Museum also presented an ambitious show surveying works in their collection from 1900 to the present year, approximately a half-century later. The stylistic spread ranged from "The Eight" at the opening of the century to the Abstract Expressionists then preeminent. Not yet sure of the staying power of newer work--among which was Brooks' *No. 27* of 1950--nor the relationship of works such as this to the traditional art on view, *New York Times* critic Howard Devree surveyed the wide range of work on hand. The show would, he wrote, give the visitor a chance to observe the "quickening pace of change" on the art scene as well as its shifting emphasis.[98] Judging the abstract works earnest and worthy in caliber, Devree wished the movement that generated

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[98]Howard Devree, "American Survey: The Whitney Selection Covers Half Century," *New York Times*, 5 August 1956, sec. II, p. 6.

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them to have "a full hearing and time to work out its problems," so that issues seeming unresolved could be decided.[99]

Perhaps the summer's saddest, most shocking event occurred in mid-August. Since first summering in Montauk, the Brookses had become friendly with many in the art community. In her notebooks, Charlotte Brooks noted the dinner and beach parties, the local art events at the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton and East Hampton's Guild Hall. After work was done, there was clamming and swimming, television to watch, or even a new experience like hearing the sound barrier being broken by an airplane. The names that appear are almost all familiar--the artists John Little, the Nick Carones and Zogbaums, the Marca-Rellis, the Balcomb Greens [sic].

Throughout the years their earlier friendship with Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock ripened. It was a long-standing association dating back to the painting of the North Beach airport mural. There Pollock's brother Sande McCoy had been Brooks' assistant, and through this connection the artist had grown close to the Pollock family. Both Brookses became genuinely fond of Pollock, Charlotte Brooks detecting in him an innocence, Jim Brooks providing a kind of stability to his friend's troubled life but simultaneously respecting his knowledge of painting, studio chats and advice, and the informal get-togethers documented in Charlotte's diaries.

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[99]Ibid.

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A typical entry follows.

> 29 August 1954. Jim called Jackson and Lee when we were in the village. They suggested [their] bringing a box lunch out and spending the afternoon. We went to the beach after they arrived for a while then back to here for dinner.[100]

In 1955 there was the McDowell Colony, and therefore less contact. When the friendship resumed the following year, things had changed.

> 18 June 1956. Went to Pollock's for dinner last night. Had invited them here but Jackson's going through another bad spell...Jackson is in bad shape but went to bed for about a half-hour and when he got up was much more coherent...[101]

The drinking that had made Pollock incoherent that night would continue. In mid-July Charlotte Brooks recorded Krasner's departure for Europe--alone--and the presence of her husband's new romantic interest, Ruth Kligman, at the Pollock home. Not even a month later, on 12 August 1956, Charlotte Brooks would lament the artist's tragic death in an automobile accident, and his sad funeral and burial nearby. It was a loss keenly felt by both Brookses--the end of friendship Jim Brooks would commemorate with a painting named *Jackson* (fig. 112).[102]

Jackson, an almost square work exceeding five-and-a-half feet in both dimensions, reveals in its deployment of paint—thinly in this area, thickly elsewhere—the artist's exceptional sensitivity to the medium's viscosity.

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[100]Charlotte Brooks, 1954 daybook, 29 August.

[101]Charlotte Brooks, 1956 daybook, 18 June.

[102]Their friendship was warm enough for Lee Krasner to invite Brooks to serve as pallbearer.

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Black and white predominate here as they do in most of Pollock's own paintings--but there comparison ends. The remaining palette suggests landscape in color if not in form. A loosely brushed, loamy brown at lower right continues at intervals around the periphery. Above it a rough fretwork of white, briefly accented with yellow, mounts toward an area of radiant blue that has been coaxed into broad horizontal projections. At lower left and upper right, black imposes itself as fact rather than threat. And this black, interrupted as it is by a less intense gray, moves lightly across the surface. Far from evoking thoughts of death, the power and certainty of both shapes and brushwork suggest a still-vital force. An appropriate tribute.

The 1956 *Whitney Annual* at which it made its appearance was a single exhibition, which combined painting, sculpture, watercolor, and drawing, formerly divided into two shows. Resisting the tendency to include more at each show, the curators reduced the number of works dramatically. There were 129 pieces, 27 of which were by artists exhibiting for the first time. *Jackson*, a larger work, was lumped with others by reviewer James R. Mellows of *Arts Magazine* who, after mentioning works by John Ferren and Stephen Pace, found the works by Brooks, de Kooning, Edward Chavez and William Keinbusch "also notable."[103]

One more exhibition finished the year. In December

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[103]J[ames] R. M[ellow], "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 31, (December 1956): 52.

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Stable Gallery assembled a group show in which smaller, more intimate works were suggested as holiday gifts for private collections. From a short review by Vernon Young, we know some of those represented by the gallery at that time. Besides Brooks, affiliates were Louise Bourgeois, John Graham, Lee Krasner, Corrado (Conrad) Marco-Relli, Kyle Morris, Jeanne Raynal, and Wilfred Zogbaum. Eleanor Ward, one of a number of women gallery owners of "determined vision and confident taste," managed this interest-provoking stable of artists--on the whole, a group who would leave their mark on art.[104] And on behalf of her artists, she was a tireless champion.

Before considering the new year, however, let's pause to discuss a problem that spanned the years 1956-1957 for the Brookses. The Montauk property on which their house stood had been sold, making it necessary for them to find new living space. During the summer and fall of 1956 they had been searching for suitable land. Finally on the 30 August Charlotte Brooks recorded the down payment on property in a section of East Hampton township called The Springs--a beautiful large piece of land, rich with resident wildlife and the scrub vegetation that grows near the ocean. It is property large enough to hold the Montauk house which would be floated on a barge to its new location, plus two studios--all with complete privacy. Lee Krasner, though still grieving, was one of their weekend hosts. While staying at Lee's on 20 October, they planned where the house would be placed on the land. But

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[104]Judith K. Collischan Van Wagner, *Women Shaping Art:*

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it was not until June of the following year that the land would be cleared for a foundation, and not before 30 July 1957 that the house would be brought to the site and made secure. This achieved, Charlotte and Jim Brooks could once again enjoy this area they had grown to love.

For Brooks, the following year opened splendidly. He submitted *R*-1953 (fig. 107) to the Art Institute of Chicago's *62nd American Exhibition*, held alternate years--this year between 17th January and 3rd March. This show, which had its beginning in 1888 and was therefore an established tradition, was another in an unconnected series seeking to investigate the current direction of American art. Brooks, however, chose not to enter his most recent work. For reasons unknown, but possibly because he had lived with earlier work and felt more comfortable with it, he made that his choice.

Of the 171 works included, 45 on the theme of the city had been selected by Katherine Kuh for the previous year's *Venice Biennale*. The remainder--both paintings and sculpture--were selected by Frederick Sweet, Curator of American Painting at the AIC, and judged by a three-person jury. Dorothy Miller, painter Arthur Osver, and sculptor Theodore Roszak had prize money of $7200 to distribute, as well as the Logan gold medals newly redesigned by sculptor David Smith for the top two winners. Seymour Lipton's bronze sculpture *The Cloak* and Brooks' *R*-1953 won the Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Art Institute medals, and first and

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Profiles of Power (New York: Praeger, 1984), 2.

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second cash prizes. The balance of the prize money was divided between Hedda Sterne, Keith Finch, Franz Kline, Kenzo Okada, Theodore Appleby, Joseph Cornell, John Miller, and Marianna Pineda; several other artists received critical praise.[105] If the show had a particular direction, critic Allen S. Weller of *Arts* found it in the reemergence of the image in certain works, noting that the artists taking this route were suggestive rather than explicit and "wishing to preserve complete freedom of choice."[106]

Critical writing on this Biennial brings us back to the thorny problem of meaning in Brooks' work. Weller, while seeming to praise the work ironically read it as lacking meaning.[107] "[It] is in the series of relationships, the pressures, the visual shifts," Brooks had reasoned. "I don't feel the need of everyday objects in my work, though I wouldn't resent them if they appeared."[108] *ARTnews*' A. James Speyer echoed Weller's unease. After first pronouncing *R*-1953 "a handsome, sober, dappled decoration which might

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[105]See A. James Speyer, "Art News from Chicago," *ARTnews* 55 (February 1957): 21, and Allen S. Weller, "Chicago," *Arts Magazine* 31 (February 1957): 13-14.

[106]Weller, 13-14.

[107]This is an ingratiating work, a wonderfully tasteful staining of a large surface with intermingling moving areas of black, several slightly varied reds, and greens. There is a remarkable combination of substance, even weightiness, of form, with floating lightness of movement. No trace of imagery or association disturbs its purely decorative effect. Weller, 13.

[108]James Brooks, "Art: What Wins a Prize?" *TIME*, 21 January 1957, 54.

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complement an architectural space," pronounced it "awfully slick and superficial by contrast with some of its neighbors in the present show."[109] In relation to the mid-fifties readings of images, this seems a harsh, almost frivolous assessment. To place this remark in context a discussion of meaning in the works of other Abstract Expressionist artists is in order.

As noted earlier, Brooks almost never discussed his images, although abstract artists of his generation frequently provided some clues as to the meaning of their works, of hints on how the public might begin to probe meaning. (Much scholarship in the last fifteen years has been devoted to decoding their various levels and devices of symbolism.) Let's turn to Mark Rothko as a case in point. As he achieved complete abstraction in his painted images, he became less willing to explicate their meaning. However, in talking to a student audience about his earlier images, he recalled it was with "the utmost reluctance" he found "the figure could not serve my purposes," therefore he moved on.[110] Subsequently asked by Katherine Kuh for information about what he was after in his abstract works, he answered.

> I think I can say with some degree of truth that in the presence of the pictures my preoccupations are primarily moral and there is nothing in which they seem involved less than aesthetics, history or technology.[111]

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[109]Speyer, 21.

[110]Bonnie Clearwater, "Selected Statements by Mark Rothko," *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970*, exh. cat. (London: The Tate Gallery, 1987), 73.

[111]Mark Rothko to Katherine Kuh, LS, Archives of

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But the words that most often frame his works, removing them from the world of everyday objects and endowing them with special significance are, "The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them."[112] Hence, most lecturers or writers on Rothko works immediately situate them in a matrix of philosophical and numinous considerations (although such studies of Abstract Expressionist iconography as Anna Chave's and Stephen Polcari's prove Rothko's ambitions far more subtle and complex).[113]

Even an artist as taciturn as Clyfford Still was not immune to providing more subtle clues. He wrote:

> Demands for communication are both presumptuous and irrelevant. The observer usually will see what his fears and hopes and learning teach him to see. But if he can escape the demands that hold up a mirror to himself, then perhaps some of the implications of the work may be felt.[114]

Scornful of the critics' ability to elicit meanings, he

American Art, Chicago. As quoted in Michael Compton, "Mark Rothko: Subject of the Artist," Clearwater, 58.

[112]Clearwater, 73.

[113]Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 133. For his classic paintings, Chave believes Rothko "adapted a landscape schema to constitute an abstract figure," thereby creating an "exceptionally pregnant image-sign--a way of imaging the...pivotal relation between the inner self and the outer world." Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, 1991; repr. 1993), 149, sees Rothko's lifelong theme as "the absorption of the individual by his spiritual environment."

[114]Clyfford Still, In *Fifteen Americans,* exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1952), 22.

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penned a passage clearly detailing his innermost struggle to achieve deeply serious, even revelatory, subject matter. It describes an ethical and involved man's spiritual quest in life.[115] In that sense it recalls one of Still's early figurative works, *PH-323* (fig. 113), and anticipates later abstract works.

> It was a journey that one must make, walking straight and alone. No respite or shortcuts were permitted. And one's will had to hold against every challenge of triumph, or failure, or the praise of Vanity Fair. Until one had crossed the darkened and wasted valleys and come at last into clear air and could stand on a high and limitless plain. Imagination, no longer fettered by the laws of fear, became as one with Vision. And the Act, intrinsic and absolute, was its meaning, and the bearer of its passion.[116]

But unlike Rothko or Still, James Brooks left virtually no quotations or metaphors that can be consulted to aid in interpretation of his works. The reasons for this are multiple--some we can only guess.

Initially there was the artist's reticence. As contrasted with shyness, reticence can spring from a sense of inner security about one's achievements. This artist felt no need to explain. Also, explanation could serve to confer on the work a narrative character. Brooks felt this unnecessary: the work was to speak for itself.

Then, too, some knowledgeable observers of the current

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[115]For a fuller discussion of Still's meaning, see Polcari, 91-116.

[116]Clyfford Still to Gordon Smith, director, the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, LS, as published in *Paintings by Clyfford Still*, exh. cat. (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1959.)

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scene were keenly aware of the fundamental changes in the creative process wrought by the use of automatism--and the consequent changes in the "meaning" of an object so created. The unconscious was, of course, in integral source of New York School imagery. Five noted artists and scholars with differing perspectives contributed their views at an American Federation of Arts convention in early 1957.[117] Psychologist Rudolf Arnheim observed ruefully,

> Creative work tends to be looked upon as something done through the artist rather than by the artist, and what used to be a spiritual activity turns into a spiritualistic one-man séance.[118]

He saw this as reflecting the extreme passivity of our civilization, a passivity an artist would justify in himself by accepting certain assumptions. First, that a difference in principle exists between the mind's conscious and unconscious forces. Then,

> ...by relying on impulses that derive from 'the unconscious' a work of art will acquire significance automatically and infallibly.[119]

Were this the case, Arnheim anticipated a state of affairs that would allow artists to neglect meaning. Quite an

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[117]They were Marcel Duchamp, Stuart Davis, Rudolf Arnheim, Randall Jarrell, and Meyer Schapiro. Focus of the talks was not on the unconscious per se, but on new styles and their implications. To celebrate the fifty-fifth anniversary of *ARTnews*, editor Tom Hess published the five addresses that had attracted an unanticipatedly large audience. *ARTnews* 56, (Summer 1957).

[118]Rudolf Arnheim, "The Artist Conscious and Subconscious," *ARTnews* 56 (Summer 1957): 31.

[119]Ibid.

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opposite view was envisioned by Professor Meyer Schapiro, who proposed that the abandonment of representation had not been a pretext for making meaningless art, but could be understood instead as a reaction to a complex contemporary culture. His perception of that culture was one that had become "increasingly organized through industry, economy, and the state." (David Halberstam reminds us this was the decade in which both the computer was invented and television revolutionized daily communications, the Korean war had begun, the birth control pill forever changed sexual mores, and the U.S. experienced demographic shifts of population.)[120] All this intensified the desire of the artist to create forms that affirmed his liberty. And Schapiro contended that when the,

> idea of art was shifted...from the aspect of imagery to its expressive, constructive, inventive aspect...a new liberty had been introduced which had, as one of its consequences, a greater range in the appreciation and experience of forms.[121]

Also,

> The artist came to believe that what was essential in art--given the diversity of themes or motifs--were two universal requirements: that every work of art has an individual order or coherence, a quality of unity and necessity in its structure regardless of the kinds of forms used; and, second, that the forms and colors chosen have a decided expressive physiognomy, that they speak to us as a feeling-charged whole through the intrinsic power of colors and lines, rather than through the imaging of facial expressions, gestures and bodily movements, although these are not necessarily excluded--for they are also forms.[122]

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[120]David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (New York: Villard Books, 1993).

[121]Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art, *ARTnews* 56 (Summer 1957): 37.

[122]Ibid.

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Conscious control, he added, was only one source of such order, while "the unconscious, the spontaneous and unpredictable are no less present in the good work of art."[123] But his pronouncements do not promise easy access to this art. He seems to move the burden of interpretative responsibility from artist to viewer.

> You cannot extract a message from painting by ordinary means' the usual rules of communication do not hold here, there is no clear code or fixed vocabulary, no certainty of effect in a given time of transmission or exposure. Painting, by becoming abstract and giving up its representational function, has achieved a state in which communication seems to be deliberately prevented...
>
> The artist does not wish to create a work in which he transmits an already prepared and complete message to a relatively indifferent and impersonal receiver. The painter aims rather at a quality of the whole that, unless you achieve the proper set of mind and feelings toward it, you will not experience anything of it at all.[124]

Marcel Duchamp seconded this latter view. At this same forum, he declared,

> All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone, the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and adds his contribution to the creative act.[125]

These divergent views, articulated in the summer of 1957, substantiate that meaning was still a matter of debate, with several authoritative voices agreeing on the viewer's

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[123]Ibid, 39.

[124]Ibid., 40-41.

[125]Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," *ARTnews* 56 (Summer 1957): 29.

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contribution in reading the work.

But there was an even more compelling reason Brooks disdained explanations of his work. As noted, he believed the paintings must speak for themselves; he thought his imagery self-explanatory to those who spent time with the work and intellectually processed what they saw. These beliefs may bear the imprint of a persuasive author writing about creative concerns. He was Igor Stravinsky, the composer of musical works strongly admired by Brooks, who himself was a music-lover, and listener to music as he painted.

Stravinsky by then was a cultural presence in the United States, having been invited to come here in the winter of 1939-40 to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard College, and having been delayed in his return home by the onset of war. Instead he married here, became a citizen, settled in Hollywood, and even accepted commissions for more popular music. In 1956 his Norton lectures would be published in book form with the title *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*. That they meant much to Brooks is certain: two much-read, heavily pencil-marked copies were found in the Brooks' New York and Montauk studios.[126] Instead of dealing with the meaning of Stravinsky's music, they dealt with various phases of the

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[126]Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Random House, 1956).

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creative process. The introductory lecture outlined how the material would be presented. The second dealt with "musical phenomenon...insofar as it emanates from a complete and well balanced human being endowed with the resources of his senses and armed with his intellect." The third--and for Brooks by far the most important--was the composing of music. The fourth was on musical typology and included a discussion of style. The fifth was devoted exclusively to Russian music. And the sixth and last lecture dealt with actual performance. Several indicators point to the importance of this publication for Brooks.

Consider. Although money was still far from plentiful, he bought two copies so one would be at hand wherever he was. In passages that correspond to or reflect Brooks' own creative experiences and challenges, both are much annotated and still have folded-paper markers in place. We can imagine Brooks' thrill of recognition in encountering them, because the productive state is so often a lonely one. How pertinent, even comforting, Stravinsky's thoughts on the "new" must have seemed, for example, to this groundbreaking artist labeled one of the Irascibles by those outside the art world. The musician wrote,

> If only one need to break a habit to merit being labeled revolutionary, then every musician who has ever had something to say and who in order to say it goes beyond the bounds of established convention would be known as revolutionary. Why burden the dictionary of the fine arts with this stertorous term, which designates in its most usual acceptation a state of turmoil and violence, when there are so many other words better adapted to designate originality?

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> In truth, I should be hard pressed to cite for you a single fact in the history of art that might be qualified as revolutionary. Art is by essence constructive. Revolution implies a disruption of equilibrium. To speak of revolution is to speak of a temporary chaos. Now art is the contrary of chaos. It never gives itself up to chaos without immediately finding its living works, its very existence, threatened.[127]

But by far the most salient passages for Brooks were those discussing what music is and what it means to be a composer. On music,

> For the phenomenon of music is nothing other than a phenomenon of speculation. There is nothing in this expression that should frighten you [the listener]. It simply presupposes that the basic of musical creation is a preliminary feeling-out, a will moving first in an abstract realm with the object of giving shape to something concrete.[128]

And on composing, Stravinsky observed that although most music-lovers believe inspiration to be the "creative emotive disturbance" that sets the composer's creative imagination in motion,

> ...inspiration is in no way a prescribed condition of the creative act, but rather a chronologically secondary manifestation.
>
> *Inspiration, art, artist*--so many words, hazy at least, that keep us from seeing clearly in a field where everything is balance and calculation through which the breath of the speculative spirit blows. It is afterward, and only afterwards, that the emotive disturbance which is at the root of inspiration may arise--an emotive disturbance about which people will talk so indelicately by confirming upon it a meaning that is shocking to us and compromising the term itself. Is it not clear that this emotion is merely a reaction on the part of the creator grappling with that unknown entity which is still only the object of his creating and which is to become a work of art? Step by step, link by link, it will be granted him to discover the work. It is this chain of

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[127]Stravinsky, 12-13.

[128]Stravinsky, 28.

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> discoveries, as well as each individual discovery, that gives rise to the emotion--an almost physiological reflex, like that of the appetite causing a flow of saliva--this emotion which invariable follows closely the phases of the creative process.
>
> and,
>
> The very act of putting my work on paper, of, as we say, kneading the dough, is for me inseparable from the pleasure of creation. So far as I am concerned, I cannot separate the spiritual effort from the psychological and physical effort; they confront me on the same level and do not present a hierarchy.[129]

Stravinsky in these passages both analyzed and demystified the creative act as he experienced it. One can only conjecture that on the most profound level, his discussion struck a respondent chord in Brooks--indeed, satisfied an existing intellectual hunger. Still other outlined passages testify to the sympathetic reception Brooks accorded the composer's views.

> The idea of work to be done is for me so closely bound up with the idea of the arranging of materials and of the pleasure that the actual doing of the work affords us that, should the impossible happen and my work suddenly be given to me in perfectly completed form, I should be embarrassed and nonplussed by it, as by a hoax.[130]

And underscored,

> We have a duty toward music, namely, to invent it...
>
> Invention presupposes imagination but should not be confused with it. For the act of invention implies the necessity of a lucky find and of achieving full realization of this find. What we imagine does not necessarily take on a concrete form and may remain in a state of virtuality, whereas invention is not conceivable apart from actual working-out.

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[129]Stravinsky, 50-52.

[130]Stravinsky, 54.

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> Thus what concerns us here is not imagination in itself, but creative imagination: the faculty that helps us pass from the level of conception to the level of realization.[131]

There is, of course more. In the creative process, Stravinsky contemplated the advent of the unexpected, and welcomed it putting it to "profitable use." He bemoaned the "terror" that assailed him when confronted with an "infinitude of possibilities" in composing. But he reassured himself by surveying the notes and chromatic intervals at his disposal and realizing he had "solid and concrete elements" that offered a "field of experience just as vast as the upsetting and dizzy infinitude" that had originally beset him.[132] Whether as brief as these thoughts or prolonged, there is little doubt that the insights Stravinsky provided in *The Poetics of Music*...were not only congenial to, but actually stimulated, Brooks' thinking. (Although Brooks was never to meet the composer, as a gesture of gratitude and admiration upon his death in 1971 Brooks painted a large commemorative work called *Igor S.*, as he had for Pollock and J.F.K., two persons whose contributions he admired.)

The depth of Brooks' debt to Stravinsky has yet to be fully plumbed. Yet consider this. Because music is abstract and musicians need not leave the same clues to the meaning of their works as visual artists do, Stravinsky's

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[131]Stravinsky, 54-55.

[132]Stravinsky, 66-67.

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Poetics...can have provided a model that reinforced Brooks' own unwillingness to reference his works. And because the public has come to rely on such clues, one must wonder if their absence affected the public reception of Brooks' works over time? Art critic and historian Leo Steinberg thinks it would have. He confirmed the mid-century artists' belief that "the art object speaks for itself," and added, "that was indeed the faith that drove the best abstractionists of that day." But, he warns, "experience does not seem to bear them out. Art needs to be discussed, championed, explained."[133]

There are, however, other possible explanations for his silence on meaning. Rather than imposing some significant meaning on his imagery as both Rothko and Still had, Brooks perhaps thought in terms of relational painting. Fritz Glarner used this term with capital letters to refer to his late paintings; for Brooks the usage would have been different. "Relational" for him referred to paintings in which the nature of the relationships the artist sets up are of primary importance, as noted in his statement of the *Twelve Americans* catalogue.[134] Significant are both the 'pressures' set up by the interaction of formal elements such as color, shape, light-dark contrast, and the 'visual shifts'

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[133]Leo Steinberg to author, LS, 5 January 2000, New York.

[134]The original reference is on page 174. As a reminder, Brooks said, "Its meaning is carried in its relationships; and the shapes, colors and things in it exist not as separate entities at all, but as carriers. The impulse they transmit through the painting is its spirit, image and meaning."

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occasioned by changes in pictorial depth, for one, or in having the eye move from one kind of surface to another, or from the object to its surrounds. It comes as no surprise that the artist would construe these as content since the sensory receptors of the viewer produce a psychological response just as a musical line does.[135] An earlier statement appears to confirm this belief. Brooks wrote,

> The painter convinces himself that he is working with formal relations alone, and that is his strength. He really knows that the relationships are meaningful only if they imbed his real reason for painting-a way of feeling that is forming and unnamed.[136]

In fact, "relational painting" and "relational sculpture" were somewhat familiar terms in the art vocabulary of 1957. Artist-critic Fairfield Porter discussed the latter in his review of the Whitney Annual in May 1956, where he suggested that relational sculpture "imitates 'American type' painting," in which a painting is turned into an object.[137]

To make that object real and mind-engaging, it has been suggested, the abstract artist selects and molds his formal elements so that they insinuate a subject wide in its references that calls forth aesthetic response and is emotionally evocative. It may be distilled from count-

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[135]See, for example, Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).

[136]James Brooks, Statement in *Forty American Painters, 1940-1950, exh. cat.,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1951) n.p.

[137]Fairfield Porter, "Meeting Ground at the Whitney," *ARTNews* 55 (May 1956): 38-39, 63-64.

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less sources--anthropology, mythology, psychology, and metaphysics, among them. Unlike the Renaissance artist's use of his source material--which is narrative and edited to express a viewpoint--the Abstract Expressionist's use is most often symbolic. The artist influences the form, substance, and finish of his work so that it functions metaphorically, or, as Brooks would have it, psychologically. Seymour Lipton's widely praised work *The Cloak* (fig. 114) illustrates the former. In using a vertical form with encircling metal members--the upright implying the human--it clearly reminds us of the fragility of man as well as the protective and historic function of armor.[138] In similar manner, Roy Gussow's *Mitosis* (fig. 115) recalls scientific concepts. Though this topic can be expanded, we stop here having made our point about the content and form of relational works. Colors, shapes, paint application, etc., all communicate with unique voices and contribute to the reading of the work that lacks more literal imagery. That this was the artist's framework is evident in a statement made on the occasion of a 1953 exhibition.

> I work under these assumptions: that no one is contained by his own skin, but shares his birth, living and death with all others; that a private symbolism is not even possible; that my painting will occupy others as it

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[138]Seymour Lipton described it in part as, "The figure of man [who] protects himself from a hostile world by two sheets of armor held in position by many barbed fists jutting through the shield," Seymour Lipton Papers, Archives of American Art. Quoted in Ann Gibson, "The Rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism," *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987.)

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> has me; that whether it does, and how soon, depends on things we cannot know--the ultimate power of the painting and the need felt for it: that manipulation of meaning to assure an audience would destroy the reality of the work and debase the concept of communication; that good painting, as always, is a door opened to man's spirit; that it will not repel because of its obscurity, but may because of its directness.[139]

Generally these are subjective reflections on Brooks' iconography. We shall revisit the topic later from more objective viewpoints. Before quitting, however, another relevant document on the issue of meaning and the related genesis of forms should be considered. It is a mid-1957 letter written by Brooks that is self-searching and, as always, unflinchingly candid. John Baur had invited the artist to participate in a forthcoming Whitney Museum show to be called *Nature in Abstraction*, an important venue for participating artists. Brooks responded:

> My paintings do not have their genesis in the contemplation of nature (as you define it--not man-made) nor do they end, for me, in imagery of that nature, although I would certainly not exclude the possibility of its being there. Too many people have seen it suggested there for me to ignore it.
>
> My work consists almost entirely of curved areas--which suggest natural growth as opposed to the man-made straight line, angular or rectangular forms. But I do not look at natural growth or forms more often than I look at man-made things, and it never occurs to me in painting that I am taking either from nature or manufacture; everything pools into one source, I suppose, and is unconsciously drawn on.
>
> Thinking longer about it, the gesture of the shapes from my paintings are probably taken more from human gestures than from dumb nature. This, though is only conjecture on my part. The final concern, for me, is that I do not have a subject, even in a vague sense--and

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[139]James Brooks, Statement. In *Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture,* exh. cat. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1953)

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> that the object (the completed painting) does not to me contain or suggest the image of nature, or of anything else. I know that a painting is finally not just a complex of the painting elements that exist for the sake of an articulate structure. There is always something that this adds up to, which contains the real meaning of the work.
>
> But I am not certain what this meaning is, and I am not able to relate it to nature except in a most all embracing sense--that nature is all we are, affected by, and aspire to.
>
> I do not know, then, whether I should be included in the show--whether my painting intentions, which are not concerned with nature and are largely unconscious, are the determining factor; or whether it should be my work as others see it that should determine my participation or non-participation.[140]

In a characteristically modest way, Brooks had revealed certain beliefs about his work. His images, which relate to Porter's criteria for being relational, are in fact that. However, his iconography is not metaphoric. His works appear to originate in his unconscious, in what Thomas Hess had described as "the working of a picture from 'within', from within the creating self outwards to the point where the artist stands in front of the completed work.[141] It is what Pollock did, and what the Surrealists did before them. And like Pollock's works they may arise from and, indeed, illustrate human gestures. Introspection provides Brooks' palette; automatism is his tool; existentialism is his source. He defines his life as a painter by the act of painting. By extension, his art proclaims life is *about*

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[140]James Brooks to John Baur, LS, Museum copy marked "Received May 1957," Artist's File, Library, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, N.Y.

[141]Thomas B. Hess, "Younger Artists and the Unforgivable

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acting rather than passivity.

As for the remainder of 1957, Brooks had a one-man show at Stable Gallery beginning in March, with most favorable reviews. James Mellow noted that "the overall impression of the exhibition is one of the richness, variety and control within the style for which the artist is well known." And Fairfield Porter was generally laudatory.[142] However, when the Museum of Modern Art mounted the show *Recent American Acquisitions* that same month, Mellow frowned on their choice for their collection of Brooks' painting *Qualm*, 1954 (fig. 108), finding his works in the contemporaneous Stable show more impressive.[143] The shows of newly acquired American works were important, however, indicating that museums now found domestic art as worthy of collection as European art. Also, the movements initiated by young artists following Abstract Expressionism now commanded serious attention.

Those post-Abstract Expressionist artists were in several other significant shows that were early challenges to that movement's preeminence. Even as first generation expressionists were still enjoying their most successful exhibitions, according to Thomas Hess of *ARTnews*, two other New York City museums presented the works of their successors. The Whitney Museum showed *Young America, 1957, Thirty American*

Crime," *ARTnews* 56 (April 1957): 48.

[142]J[ames] R. M[ellow], "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 31 (April 1957): 63. Also F[airfield] P[orter], "Reviews and Previews," *ARTnews* 56 (April 1957): 10.

[143]Ibid.

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Painters and Sculptors under Thirty-Five, and the Jewish Museum exhibited *The New York School, Second Generation.* Hess' commentary, presumably objective, dismissed many of the Whitney artists as derivative and some as "voracious eclectics," but saved praise for a few.[144] Moving on, Hess found the Jewish Museum show infinitely more satisfactory, for the artists shown recognized the prevailing style and built on it or departed from it while significantly preserving their own identities.[145] Finally Hess dealt with the Modern Museum's show of American acquisitions, again singling some youngsters for praise, but leaving his readers with a subtext: the reigning style of Motherwell, de Kooning, Hofmann, et al. still prevailed although a new generation was increasingly seeking freedom from it. Hess foresaw a new beginning rather than a worn-out end.[146]

For Brooks, the balance of 1957 was a busy one. He was included in the Albright-Knox show of *Contemporary Art: Acquisitions* 1954-1957--forty works primarily from the last three years--which was interesting for several reasons. Urged by its former director Gordon Washburn, now of

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[144]Thomas B. Hess, "Younger Artists and the Unforgivable Crime,": 46, 49. Praised were Frankenthaler, Goldberg, Ippolito, Muller, and Stankiewicz.

[145]Hess, 49. Among those named here were Lester Johnson, Elaine de Kooning, Alfred Leslie, Joan Mitchell, Robert de Niro, and Robert Rauschenberg.

[146]Hess, 64. Artists mentioned at the Modern included Wolf Kahn, Gandie Brodie, Helen Frakenthaler, and Jan Muller, besides some Abstract Expressionists.

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the Carnegie Institute, and funded mainly by Seymour Knox, president of its Board of Directors, this Buffalo, New York museum had taken a bold step in 1939. It had established a collection of contemporary art apart from the permanent collection, and set aside a special space, the Room of Contemporary Art, for continuous display of these works. If works selected to show there were found to be satisfactory, they were purchased with special donations earmarked for this purpose. If not, they were sold or exchanged. Begun with watercolors by Cézanne and Picasso, the collection had grown to almost 300 works by 1956-57 when it was decided to dedicate purchase funds to obtaining works by leaders of the Abstract Expressionist movement, without slighting artists of newer movements which might be arising. Since the aim was to build "an outstanding and truly contemporary collection in America," with the emphasis on quality above quantity, it was a signal honor for Brooks to have *Gant*, of 1955 (Fig. 109), accepted and exhibited with such works as Gorky's *The Liver is the Cockscomb*, Pollock's *Convergence*, de Kooning's *Gotham News*, and works by Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, Hofmann, and Rothko.[147]

Gant is a large oil painting, whose name offers no clue to its meaning. Brooks intentionally chose words that are non-referential. Beginning with the letter "G", *Gant* followed Brooks' annual naming system that started each new work in alphabetical order. In future years *Cooba*, 1963

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[147]Gordon M. Smith, "The Brave Buffalo," *ARTnews* 56 (May 1957): 70.

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would also be purchased for the Albright-Knox collection.

During the remainder of the summer and fall, Brooks' works would be shown at widespread locations. All summer he would be represented in exhibitions at the Denver Art Museum and Minneapolis Art Museum. At the change of seasons, he would be included in a biennial at the Museu de Arte Moderna, in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Considered one of the most prestigious invitational art events in the Western Hemisphere, this--the fourth such Bienal--opened on 16 September and remained open to the year's end. An international exhibit, the works sent by the U.S. were selected by Frank O'Hara, a staff member of the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, in consultation with members of a committee.[148] Shown were five living painters--Brooks, Guston, Hartigan, Kline and Rivers--plus a major exhibition of drawings and paintings by the late Jackson Pollock whose work had gained celebrity and attracted interest abroad. Also, participating were three sculptors--David Hare, Ibram Lassaw, and Seymour Lipton.

Considering the breadth of the show--it included painting and sculpture from forty-three nations plus engravings, architectural expositions and contests, Eskimo soapstone sculpture and '4000 Years of Glass'--considering also the fame

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[148]Others were Porter A. McCray, Director of the International Program; James Thrall Soby, Chairman of Departments of Painting and Sculpture; Dorothy C. Miller, Curator of the Museum Collections; and Sam Hunter, Associate Curator, Departments of Painting and Sculpture. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. *IV Bienal*, exh. cat., (Sao Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1957).

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of such participating artists as Marc Chagall, Ben Nicholson, and Giorgio Morandi--it is not surprising the prizes were with a single exception awarded to better known foreign or South American artists. The exception was the New Yorker Seymour Lipton, who was awarded 100,000 cruzeiros or the equivalent of $1250. In addition, Pollock's 34 paintings and 29 drawings received a special "hors concours" mention, prior to traveling to Europe.

The Brooks' paintings shown were an interesting group although too close chronologically to allow for stylistic development.[149] Nevertheless, we can generalize about the group. Where five years ago Brooks had favored painting with enamels on Bemis' Osnaburg cloth or cotton duck, the present works are the more conventional oil on canvas. Still Brooks was not committed to one medium or support exclusively; in the recent past he had experimented with other kinds of paint like Polyvinyl acetate and Rhoplex. Since paint was so important and sensuous a part of the painter's equipment to him he let the paint 'act naturally' He told his colleague Bernard Chaet in an interview.[150] That meant paint applied thickly and opaquely in one area, translucently in an adjoining one, or as a film of color in yet a third. Paintings were no longer

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[149]Works shown were: *Qualm*, 1954, *Holdan*, 1955, *Martoc*, 1955, *Doppler*, 1956, and *Karrig*, 1956.

[150]This interesting interview was the basis for an article by Bernard Chaet called "Concepts of Space and Expression: An Interview" in *Arts Magazine* 33, January 1959; a chapter in his book *Artists at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Webb Books, c. 1960) 81-83; and a related exhibition.

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developed solely from random marks on the *reverse* of the support. Brushwork ranged from sweeping, impastoed passages to paint dragged dryly across a surface with squeegee or handy cardboard wedge. This produced variations in surface texture, and the resultant effect of "surface activity".[151] While 1953 had been a year of experimenting with the image, it was also a farewell to the smaller, more complicated and active forms in his work. Like the slightly later paintings that have grown in size and grandeur, the elements of the mid-decade images are larger, more vibrant. In *Altoon* and *Gant* they shoulder each other assertively while, relaxed, in *Holdan* (fig. 110) and *Quatic*, they assume a more tranquil aspect. But in the States little critical coverage was devoted to the merits of individual works; sadly, newspapers and periodicals were mainly concerned with reporting the sizes of the prizes and names of prizewinners.

The last big exhibition of 1957 in which Brooks participated was the Whitney Annual, a venue in which Brooks' works had regularly been shown. This year there was a change in the planning: in a combined annual, American painting was shown along with watercolors, drawings and sculpture. But, alas, the art press reception was cool; the size of the show, the mediocrity of its choices, and the lack of viewpoint all drew criticism. Happily, Brooks' painting *Boon* was well received; *New York Times* critic Howard Devree

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[151]Ibid.

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twice praised it--once calling it "richly rewarding", and another time classing it with "outstanding paintings with varying degrees of abstraction."[152] Still the diversity of stylistic directions and lack of uniform quality among the works seemed the result of following too many leads at one time. "Which one," the Whitney seemed to ask, "will point to the future?" The answer was not to be found in this show.

In many ways, the year following was a banner one for Brooks and established him as an artist of international reputation. In 1958 his works were shown in seven major European cities; also, in Japan. At home, exhibition sites were Cincinnati, Ohio; Richmond, Virginia; and New York, both in the city proper and at East Hampton. In large part the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, in organizing the traveling exhibition *The New American Painting*, was responsible for the enhancement of his reputation. This was, of course, the Dorothy Miller-curated exhibition mentioned above. Devoted almost exclusively to Abstract Expressionist works, it had been assembled at the request of European institutions and was the most comprehensive show of its kind so far, and the first traveling exhibit to be seen in New York after its return. During 1958, it was seen at the Kunsthalle in Basel, in Milan's Galleria Civica d'Arte

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[152] Howard Devree, "Choosing Shows: Whitney Annual Raises the Question of the Basis of Selection," *New York Times*, 24 November 1956, sec. II, p. 18. Also, Howard Devree, "Art, Another Whitney Opens," *New York Times*, 20 November 1957, 71.

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Moderna, the Museo Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo of Madrid, in Berlin at the Hochschule für Bildende Künst, in the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.[153] Other venues were scheduled to follow.

Besides Brooks sixteen painters were included--the fourteen generally classified as Abstract Expressionists were Baziotes, Gorky, Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, de Kooning, Motherwell, Newman, Pollock, Rothko, Stamos, Still, Tomlin, and Tworkov, plus Grace Hartigan and Sam Francis, who were not.[154] In Basel, Berlin and later Paris, it was paired with a large one-man show of Pollock's work, some fifty-eight paintings and drawings, with an introductory essay by Sam Hunter who had a year earlier curated a Pollock exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.[155] All others showed either four or five works ranging in date from a 1945 Gorky to works just completed. Brooks showed *R*-1953, *Qualm*, 1954, *Jackson*, 1956, *Karrig*, 1956, and *Bixby*, 1958--a range enabling the viewer to follow his stylistic development over a five year period from the restless dynamism of his smaller, translucent

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[153]In Basel, 19 April-26 May; Milan 1-29 June; Madrid, 16 July-11 August; Berlin, 1 September-1 October 1958; Amsterdam, 17 October-24 November; Brussels, 6 December-4 January 1959. "Itinerary of the *New American Painting*," *The New American Painting*, 4.

[154]Clement Greenberg, "Hans Hofmann: Grand Old Rebel," *ARTnews*, (January, 1959). Quoted in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*:, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 1957-1969, 67-73. Greenberg's only comment on this historic show was a long lament on the misjustice of Hofmann's omission and testimony to that artist's contribution to the movement.

[155]19 December 1956 to 3 February 1957.

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arabesques to the layered organization of forms both opulent in size and extravagantly colored. Three were illustrated in the New York catalogue that also pictured various foreign installations and reprinted critical reviews that varied widely according to the receptivity, knowledge, and taste of the reviewer.

Poet/critic Kenneth Rexroth related that the press reception was "by and large a parade of busted clichés and demoralized preconceptions."[156] Two reviews by leading professional critics better illustrate the gamut of acceptance. Leonard Borgese of Milan wrote,

> It is not new. It is not painting. It is not American. There is no deep necessity, no inner torment, not even a serious formal research. No one of these painters goes against the current. Not one of them is anti-conformist. There is no spiritual flight.[157]

while Will Grohmann of Berlin observed, in part,

> They all use vast dimensions, not from megalomania, but because one cannot say these things in miniature... Americans are world travelers and conquerors. They possess enormous daring. One proves oneself in the doing, in the performance, in the act of creation... In any case, these young Americans stand beyond heritage and psychology, nearly beyond good and evil. In Europe we are a little bit afraid, confronted by such a lack of prejudice. Could it be that we are already in a state of defense?[158]

The enlarged scale, the origin of the image in lived

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[156]Kenneth Rexroth, "U.S. Art Across Time and Space: Americans Seen Abroad," *ARTnews* 58 (June 1959): 30.

[157]Leonardo Borgese, *Corriere della Sera* (8 June 1958), quoted in *The New American Painting*, 8.

[158]Will Grohmann, *Der Tagesspiegel* (7 September 1985) quoted in *The New American Painting*, 10-11.

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experience, and the dramatic impact of both on the meaning of the work, was sensitively addressed in still another paragraph. This is devoted to the work of specific artists:

> Unknown to us were Clyfford Still and James Brooks, who with their enormous dimensions make us sense what goes on within an American painter, faced with the immensity of his continent and his growing history. These are maps that reach from the South Seas all the way to the Atlantic; and when Brooks calls a painting 'Doubt' [*Qualm* had been its English name], (1954), it is not meant in a psychological sense (what would we care about the psychology of Mr. Brooks) but in the sense of a universal event. Nevertheless the colors are as optimistic as those of our E.W. Nay, the only one who dares to work in larger dimensions. Still, they would seem, like miniatures next to those world maps.[159]

Some other reviews were respectful and acknowledged the power of spontaneity in this style of painting even as they forged links to *tachisme* or other European sources. *Time*, a magazine usually sparing in its appreciation of contemporary abstraction, devoted six pages to coverage of the European tour. It reprinted the 1951 group photo of the artists and reproduced several color pages of the Milan installation, including one showing Brooks' *R*-1953 (fig. 107). Calling it "one of the most explosive and controversial shows in the decades," it quoted both advocates and faultfinders finally concluding,

> The interest and enthusiasm of young European artists for 'The New American Painting' suggest that this influence is now being exported to Europe. Whether it will have force enough to break down the scorn of the unconverted critics and the bewilderment of the public is still to be seen.[160]

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[159]Ibid.

[160]"American Abstraction Abroad," *TIME* 72 (4 August 1958): 40-45.

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Remembering back, Lawrence Alloway, an eminent British art critic, provided the assurance that in 1958 that influence was, indeed, forceful enough to assure change. Although he recalled the show as "thinly attended," he clearly saw it as "attended seriously," and recalled it as "the show we had been waiting for, for years." Not himself an artist, but deeply involved in the London art world, he agreed this was fully "avant-garde," and defined its impact on his locale--though in Europe artists would recognize its originality and authority, as well.

> It was avant-garde because it revised our hitherto standard ideas of picture making. You were more familiar, in the United States, with large scale and flatness, for example, than we were in England. That was definitely a postwar discovery spurred on by the American Abstract Expressionism. And not only that, some of the Abstract Expressionist artists, as their scale got larger, seemed to enter an environmental space, which was of particular interest to the younger abstract painters in Britain at the time, and to me as a critic.[161]

At the time of exhibition, Alloway had been more specific in his remarks about participating painters. The concluding paragraph of his *Art International* review which focused on Brooks' work speaks to the admiration felt here for these works. He noted,

> James Brooks, it was interesting to see in England, was the painter who most nearly resembled the general style of abstraction among the younger artists in London. Though they shall talk about Still and Rothko their work resembles Brooks' (if it doesn't come from Francis.)

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[161] Lawrence Alloway, interview by Michael Auping, 26 September 1986, Tape recording, in Lawrence Alloway, "Field Notes," comp. Michael Auping, *Abstract Expressionism: Its Critical Developments* (Buffalo and New York: Albright Knox Art Gallery and Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 124, 130.

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> Brooks is preoccupied with the interplay of oil and enamel, of transparent and opaque pigment, and it is on this sensuous carousel that his image depends. His handsome pictures are neither the results of radical simplification of means nor of a gesture heavy with memory...[162]

As might be expected Brooks' style of abstraction is individualistic and memorable, as are the styles of the other joined in this grand venture. In his catalogue "Introduction," Alfred Barr, Jr. had purposefully underscored this by saying,

> The briefest glance around the exhibition reveals a striking variety among the paintings. How could canvases differ more in form than do Kline's broad, slashing blacks from Rothko's dissonant mists or Pollock's Dionysiac *perpetuum mobile* from Newman's single, obsessive, vertical line?...[163]

Brooks' works were like none of these. They stood alone in presenting bold shapes, some cursive, some geometric, that echo the human gestures in which they originate. Often now in a starker palette of black, white, and pure color, which does not preclude the subtle mixed hues of earlier works, these robust and sometimes restless forms weave in and about each other within a restricted pictorial space.

Until now, we have neglected to consider a very meaningful part of Brooks' life. Every year from 1946 through the last years of the 1960s, Jim Brooks taught at one of the city's preeminent art schools. When he started, he probably did so because painting sales were never assured.

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[162]Lawrence Alloway, *"The New American Painting," Art International III* (4 March 1959).

[163]Alfred H. Barr, Jr. "Introduction," *The New American Painting* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 17.

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Teaching not only augmented his income, but gave him contact with a future generation of artists--a contact he truly valued. His introduction to teaching was at Columbia University where he co-taught Life Drawing with Henry J. Meloy in the University Extension, which meant three-hour evening classes twice weekly. And this instruction, so necessary for those planning a career in art, would continue for the two subsequent years of 1947-48 and 1948-49. Though little is known about the students he instructed or his actual teaching experience there, the course description tells us the emphasis was placed on "figure construction, linear drawing, action sketches and elementary anatomy." Also, the approach varied from drawing rapid sketches to final compositions in tone.[164]

While still on staff at Columbia, in the 1947-48 school year Jim Brooks was appointed to the faculty of Pratt Institute, where he would be an instructor in lettering in the Advertising Design Department. Having had a lettering shop in New York earlier where he served clients of note, this was a skill he was eminently qualified to teach. And he would continue to do so until 1958.

Again, before leaving Pratt, for the 1955-56 school year he accepted yet another teaching assignment, surely a rigorous but stimulating one. According to the *Historical Register of Yale University...*, this was as a Visiting Critic of Painting at the School of Architecture and Design, a post

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[164]Columbia University Extension, Course Bulletin, p. 163.

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he would continue to hold through 1958 and again for the 1959-60 school year.[165] Until 1959, Joseph Albers was both Chairman of the Department of Design and Professor (later Professor Emeritus) of Art. He appointed the Visiting Critics--one for each special area from graphic arts to city planning. It was Brooks' task to visit the painting class weekly to critique students' paintings, to help solve their technical difficulties, and to resolve concerns. Since Albers and Brooks were unlike in personality and their personal philosophies of painting, as a team they could address a gamut of student needs.

How was James Brooks as teacher regarded by his students? Across a breach of a half-century, more or less, several former students responded to this inquiry. Without exception, all spoke with admiration for his thoughtfulness in the process of evaluating work of varying styles, his ability to suggest methods of mastering art skills, his tact and modesty in the face of his own growing fame. Al Adabody who studied lettering with him at Pratt in 1951 and 1952 remembered his superb control at the blackboard with broad, long strokes forming perfect letters. He spoke of this shape-making as "quiet theatre," and said he would see in Brooks' abstract, painted shapes the skills refined through lettering.[166]

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[165]*Historical Register of Yale University*, 1951-1968 (New Haven: Yale University, 1969), 178.

[166]Al Adabody, interview by author, notes. Southampton,

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George Chaplin, who received his undergraduate degree from Yale in 1958 and his M.F.A. soon after, recalled the advice Jim once gave. Stressing the importance of shape, he advised his student to trace the shapes in Picasso's *Three Musicians,* although "that painting seemed to have little to do with what I was personally involved with at the time. But the exercise was beneficial over time."[167]

Painter Richard Lytle, later a Yale faculty member, wrote perhaps the most complete account of his study with Brooks in 1957-58. In part, his letter follows,

> James Brooks was a very important mentor for me at the time. His role at Yale was to bring a certain balance to the painting program which was dominated by the all-pervasive presence of Albers. Brooks represented contemporary New York and the dominant philosophy of abstract expressionism, and since I had formed my painting approach at Cooper Union, Brooks was the supportive voice for those of us who wanted to be part of the "avant-garde," even though Albers often derided "action-painting" as being mindless. Since Albers had appointed Brooks, it was obvious that he respected Brooks, and though Brooks knew he was a polar opposite of Albers as an artist, he had great respect for Albers. It was a very healthy situation for developing painters because we were exposed to differing powerful ideologies through the sensibilities of two powerful and articulate artists.
>
> James Brooks was always calm, kind, deliberate and thoughtful in an introspective way. He had a way of posing questions that stimulated reconsideration. He was often curious about Albers' reactions too in a way that signaled his openness. Above all, he projected authenticity through his paintings that resonated with bold and solid plasticity. Color seemed to contain light and weight and several of his works stuck in the mind because of the gestures that were saturated with glowing intensity.[168]

NY, 20 July 1999.

[167]George E. Chaplin to author, LS, Manchester CT, n.d.

[168]Richard Lytle to author, LS, 19 August 1999.

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Lytle's letter, however, did not contain the significant advice Brooks gave to Robert Birmelin, an undergraduate painting major in his 4th year when Brooks came to Yale in 1956, and later a graduate student. Birmelin's painting was figural and was therefore "remote from Brooks." As a man, Brooks was not sympathetic to his works, which he did not try to change. But for Birmelin's development of a broader base for painting, Brooks did recommend his reading of *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* by Anton Ehrenzweig, a book which Brooks had found invaluable in relation to his own work.[169] This precious volume of Ehrenzweig's remained in the artist's library at his death--and like Stravinsky's book, it was dog-eared, much annotated, and with paper markers still in place. Brooks may have seen a review of the book, first published in Britain in 1953, in the September 1954 *Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism*, or have met the author who toured the U.S. in 1956-57[170]. Either way, he read the first edition avidly and when it was published here in

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Woodbridge, Connecticut.

[169]Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing: An Introduction to a Theory of Unconscious Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953; repr., New York: George Braziller, 1965). In addition, Brooks' advised Birmelin: View the painting not as a painting but as an organism where everything has a potential for activity and keep a dynamic attitude toward composing. The painting should be open to insights which come out of the painting process, and remember the whole configurations is important--not just the details. Robert Birmelin to author, Telephone, 12 July 1999.

[170]Travel dates supplied by Nellie L. Thompson, Curator of Archives and Special Collections, Abraham A. Brill Library, New York Psychoanalytic Institute, 13 February 2001.

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1965, he acquired it.

A thorough explanation of Ehrenzweig's theory would demand an overlong detour, but is vital to understanding Brooks' thoughts on the nature of art. Ehrenzweig opposed the current belief of gestalt psychologists which holds that those perceiving or creating an artistic configuration, order it in terms of simplicity, compactness and coherence. He would argue they simultaneously fail to notice any vague, incoherent, or inarticulate forms that accrue to it. He explained it in this way: the mind has a tendency to articulate a visual experience through a conscious and rational perceptive process that he called "surface perception." The striving to do so is so strong it may restrict access to one basic art technique--the generation of an image through the creative accident. He recalled however that Freud, while accepting such articulating tendencies, in accounting for dream visions attributed them to lower layers of the mind [the depth mind] that tend to be inarticulate. Since psychologist Otto Rank had also discovered that artistic creativeness involves a cyclical displacement between the two different levels of consciousness, Ehrenzweig reasoned that the "creative individual is one whose ego is *flexible* enough to undergo the temporary dissolution of its surface, rational facilities, to reach deeper levels of unconscious sensing, which cannot be apprehended on a conscious level, only through a kind of secondary elaboration..."[171] Although the

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[171]Nicola Glover, "Ehrenzweig and the Hidden Order of

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process of surrendering to this chaos of undifferentiation [the lower level] by the conscious ego brings fear, "Ehrenzweig concluded that any act of creativeness requires a temporary, cyclical paralysis of the surface attention."[172] He also believed the boundaries between the ego, super-ego and id become less clearly differentiated during creativity. And our unconscious is of necessity dynamically involved in the creative process, turning 'disruptive' effects into 'constructive' ones.[173] Though oversimplified and far from complete, this explanation makes it possible to thread one's way through Ehrenzweig's theory that "modern art [that is, such abstract movements as cubism, action painting, and optical art] dispenses with the surface gestalt and lays bare the creations of our depth mind." He gave primacy to the unconscious as the source of one of art's most fundamental processes--the generation of an image through automatist gesture [creative accident]. Since psychoanalysis and psychology were at this time topics of widespread interest to all vanguard artists, one can calculate this theory's intellectual appeal to any artist using this process.

How it impacts on both the making of and meaning of Brooks' art is a significant matter. As Stephen Polcari had demonstrated, many of the Abstract Expressionist artists

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Art," *Psychoanalytic Aesthetics: The British School.*, Human-nature.com.

[172]Ibid.

[173]Ibid.

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sought a symbolic or emblematic expression of their paintings' meanings. James Brooks did not. Persuaded by Ehrenzweig, and in the manner of Stravinsky, he truly believed the *source* of his art was intuitive. More conscious guidance would bring it to its completed form. This is a conclusion with which Charlotte Brooks concurred.[174] Interested in the psychoanalytic process yet not deeply informed about it, the Brookses nevertheless found *The Psycho-analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* compelling reading. This and Ehrenzweig's later pamphlet, *The Hidden Order of Art,* shaped James Brooks' conceptual framework from this point on.[175] How does this affect meaning? Rather than interpreting the symbols favored by the group, this body of work repaid both artist and sympathetic viewer by addressing one's spirit and, in the process, setting the stage for meaningful personal reflections. For some these may be insights into the unknown and infinite; for others, meditations on life's mystery.

But to return to the exhibitions, if those following the European showing of *The New American Painting,* lacked the ambitious program and far-flung exposure it had enjoyed, they did provide regional exposure.

There was *An International Selection,* a show that traveled to Osaka, Japan in November 1958. Assembled in part

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[174]Charlotte Brooks, interview by author, 13 February 2001, Notes, East Hampton, NY.

[175]Brooks owned a personally inscribed Offprint of Anton Ehrenzweig, "The Hidden Order of Art, *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 1 (3 June 1961).

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by the French curator Michel Tapié, its fundamental purpose was to seek common roots and aesthetics--i.e., a search for unity which Tapié saw as important in a time of change--among works from Europe, Asia, and the United States. He also wished to make American artists aware of what was being done abroad. He was not alone in this effort. His collaborators were the artist/founders of the East Hampton, NY, Signa Gallery, whose name came from the ancient Greek word for sign or symbol. While he chose the artists from Europe and Japan, Alfonso Ossorio, Elizabeth Parker, and John Little (artists themselves) chose the American artists. Those three had opened Signa only a year earlier with the goal of bringing the kind of advanced painting and sculpture currently sparking urban interest to the outer reaches of the metropolitan area. To do so, they culled through "hundreds of offerings in the galleries in New York City...to offer a surprisingly accurate reckoning of what was significant."[176] Though not a cooperative, artists pitched in with time, money, or labor to realize the project. One example, the stylish window lettering Brooks provided for Signa's opening site (fig. 116). The gallery had mounted five evocative exhibits in the summer of 1957, in at least three of which Brooks' work had been shown. While most centered on the development of domestic avant-garde art, the last exhibit of the following season,

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[176]Helen A. Harrison, *East Hampton Avant-Garde: A Salute to the Signa Gallery, 1957-1960,* with an introduction by Dore Ashton (East Hampton: Guild Hall of East Hampton/East Hampton Center, 1990), 10.

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took a new direction. It was *An International Selection,* which opened locally on 22 August 1958 and remained for the months. Included were some thirty-four artists whose art had traveled to Osaka the previous April, and which was scheduled for a European tour. They included, besides Brooks, Fontana, Damian, Degottex, Domoto, Hantai, Saura, and Teshigahara. Little attention was given the event by the American art press.

In fall 1958 the pace of work hastened for Brooks. Besides his studio activities and teaching, there was the additional task of readying work to show. This year again the artist participated in the Whitney Museum *Annual Exhibition of Sculpture, Paintings, Watercolors, and Drawings*--an annual again criticized for lacking a philosophy or point of view even when the works were first rate. He showed *Cantanda* judged "elegant" by Tom Hess in coverage so general that few individual artists were singled out for praise.[177]

Then through the efforts of artist friend Nick Carone who traveled frequently to Italy he showed also at the *Galleria La Tartaruga,* housed in a venerable palazzo in Rome. For an independent gallery to underwrite such an exhibition of Abstract Expressionist paintings indicated how avidly the Italians sought to learn about postwar American abstraction.

Finally, Brooks participated in the *Pittsburgh*

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[177]Thomas B. Hess, "The Cultural-Gap Blues," *ARTnews* 57 (January 1959): 62.

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Bicentennial International held by the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh between 5 December 1958 and 8 February 1959. A large show, it was hoped this lavish display would help stimulate "a resurgence in the arts that will rival Pittsburgh's fame as the City of Steel."[178] As in the past, there were juried awards totaling $13,000 to be distributed by an extremely varied jury.[179] The awards they were to announce, said noted *New York Times* critic Howard Devree, "may well make the big show the most controversial in the whole long line of Pittsburgh international exhibitions..."[180] The five main painting prizes were given to European artists.[181] Jasper Johns was the sole American painter to receive a prize--"an anonymous donation of $500 for *Gray Numbers*, in which gray numerals appear in each of the numerous gray checkerboard compartments,"[182] However modest the prize, it forecasts the

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[178]Leon Anthony Arkus, "The Retrospective Exhibition," *Carnegie Magazine* XXII (November 1958): 297.

[179] Three were artists--American Mary Callery, Frenchman Marcel Duchamp, and Belgian Raoul Ubac; one, Vincent Price, was an art collector and movie star; another, James Johnson Sweeney was the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and finally the last, was both art scholar and educator Lionello Venturi.

[180]Howard Devree, "Art: Pittsburgh Bicentennial Show," *New York Times*, 4 December 1958, 36.

[181]First prize of $3000 to Antonio Tapies for *Painting;* second prize of $1500 to Afro for *Villa Fleurent;* third prize of $1000 to Albert Burri for *Grande Legno* 2-58; fourth prize of $750 to Viera da Silva for *Changeable Weather;* and fifth prize of $500 to Pablo Palazuelo for *Mandala.*

[182]Devree, "Art: Pittsburgh Bicentennial Show," *New York Times*, 36. Also, "1958 Pittsburgh Bicentennial International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture," *Sixty Second Annual Report Department of Fine Arts* (Pittsburgh:

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future direction of American painting—the ascendancy of Pop Art. Fellow American Alexander Calder was more fortunate; he managed to come away with the first prize of $3000 for his large mobile *Philadelphia*.

In 1959, even as his public acceptance grew, James Brooks' style of painting underwent a fundamental change. In the earlier 1950s, cursive forms laced through with fine lines had predominated--though this had never been his exclusive means of expression. With impeccable judgment, he had formed them with gentle authority--underscoring their energy and exuberance while containing any suggestion of the riotous--in both their sitings and complex color relationships. Still, as this decade faded into the 1960s, the number of cursive forms, the undulating rhythms in his work, diminished. In their place and new here were larger, more muscular shapes laid on in layers which suggest modified depth. Often the paint is opaque--applied in painterly strokes. But paint texture varied and interacting layers could alternately be thin and virtually transparent, or translucent and light-transmitting. Modulated hues, so important early on, were used more sparingly now. And as the forms within became more monumental, the nature of each image grew more architectonic as in *Rasalus* of 1959 (fig. 117).

The change in both technique and image was not lost on colleagues and professional reviewers who visited his one-man exhibition at the Stable Gallery in February. (Though his

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Carnegie Institute, 1958), 13.

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only solo exhibition this year, he would participate in some ten other group shows.) The January issues of *ARTS* had printed the Chaet interview with Brooks mentioned earlier. (Chaet, a painter, had become Acting Chair of Yale's Department of Art about 1960.) In it, Brooks questioned about materials and methods used, confessed to having tried a wide variety of the former, and experimented much with the latter to achieve the desired effects. He recalled his earlier use of enamels on Bemis' Osnaburg cloth, or on cotton duck canvas. As noted, he had also experimented with other media in the interim. But because it produced the non-reflective surface the artist sought, he was now painting with Lucite paints thinned with turpentine to which linseed oil had been added. Brooks credited his different surface effects and rich variations of texture to the natural action of the paint, leaving unmentioned his innate sensitivity to materials. But it is precisely this sensitivity which accounts for his limitless textural effects and the newly realized hints of variable space.

Works with the effects the artist took such care to produce were in major shows like *The New American Painting* with its profound impact on both domestic and foreign art. Late in May 1959 it returned for a few months long stay at the Museum of Modern Art where it ultimately served to reify the Abstract Expressionist movement for the American public-at-large. Critics Kenneth Rexroth and Howard Devree in reviewing the show make this clear.

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> Most informed people in America would consider this selection, give or take a few names, representative of the most important recent tendencies in our painting. And certainly it is among these painters that the first American "movement" to exert a powerful, world-wide influence was generated.[183]

and,

> Since museums and gallery visitors here have been growing up with this work for the last ten years and have seen many examples in group and one-man shows before the current exhibition was assembled, it is hardly likely to cause major convulsions.
>
> But the eighty-one paintings by seventeen artists, the work of about a decade, does get to the heart of the new expression and reveals both the variety and such unity as the movement compasses.[184]

In a review not wholly laudatory Devree went on to add that black and white reproductions of the works were inadequate since they fail to show the subtleties--as, for example, the "lyrical curvilinear floating shapes of Brooks" whose color is their essence.[185]

Also molding public taste, but broader in scope and less devoted to a single style, were shows at several other well-established venues in which Brooks was represented. Among these were the *26th Biennial Exhibition* of the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington D.C.; the inaugural show at the new Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, which opened in October 1959 and continued for eight months; and the *Annual Exhibition of*

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[183]Kenneth Rexroth, "U.S. Art Across Time and Space…, 30.

[184]Howard Devree, "The New Vision: American Painting That Europe Saw Shown at Museum of Modern Art," *New York Times*, 31 march 1959, sec. II, p. 13.

[185]Ibid.

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Contemporary American Painting at the Whitney Museum at the year's end. Not events that generated criticism about the work of a single participant, these were covered for their general newsworthiness. In the case of the Guggenheim Museum, it was the celebrity surrounding the opening of Frank Lloyd Wright's first New York City building with its spiral ramp galleries and giant oculus. In contrast, criticism of the Whitney show was virtually an inventory of the styles of works included: Abstract Expressionism dominating while "younger painters who are rejecting the high polish and high style of this academy...having a rough time."[186]

Abroad, but independent of *The New American Painting* show were *II. documenta `59: Kunst Nach 1945 [Documenta II `59" Art Since 1945]*, a major art event by virtue of its size, international scope, and prestige of its organizers, and *Arte Nuova*, at Turin, Italy.[187] The painting section of the former was mounted in the Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany. Brooks showed *Number 42*, 1952, *Loring*, 1957, and *Acanda*, 1958 (fig. 118). Second in a series of what, even then, was intended to be an art world institution, *Documenta* was described as "an intensive display of 'what's new' since

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[186]John Canaday, "Art U.S. Cross Section," *New York Times*, 9 December 1959, 56.

[187]*Documenta II* ran from 11 July to an uncertain date in October. (The organizer was Professor Arnold Bode, with help from a committee of ten including Professor Will Grohmann and Dr. Werner Haftmann.) *Arte Nuova* ran from 5 May to 15 June.

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1945."[188]

> [Here]...a total of more than 1,000 works--paintings, sculpture and graphic arts--from countries in Europe, Asia, and the United States, from both sides of the Iron Curtain, will be presented and will offer art teachers and students a unique opportunity to compare national, international and individual developments in the ever-changing, ever-exciting field of contemporary art.[189]

In spite of its intention to survey all styles, the preponderance of works were abstract. The nucleus of American artists represented was the same as that in *The New American Painting Show*, presumable because MOMA's Porter McCray of the International Program had again selected the works, but also because it was this "American School" that contributed to "the world competition," "very important painters and sculptors."[190] However, their number was amplified by several painters like Frankenthaler and Rauschenberg, even now exploring new territory, and seven sculptors frequently associated with the New York School. Together they presented a narrower picture of American art than did the works in the slightly earlier Arte Nuova show in Turin. But, more importantly, how were they received? According to a current article,

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[188]Arnold Bode, Director, to a mailing list of art school faculty, LS, May 1959, Collection of Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

[189]Ibid.

[190]Will Grohmann, *The 2nd documenta in Kassel 1959; A Preview*, exh. cat. (Koln: M Dumont Schaubergh, 1959.) The additional painters were Norman Bluhm, Giorgio Cavallon, Helen Frankenthaler, Michael Goldberg, Hans Hofmann, Conrad [Corrado] Marca-Relli, Joan Mitchell, Richard Pousette-Dart, Robert Rauschenberg, and Theodoros Stamos. Sculptors were Alexander Calder, Herbert Ferber, Naum Gabo, Ibram Lassaw, Isamu Noguchi, Theodore Roszak, and David Smith.

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"The press was curiously reticent. There is hardly an opinion to be found."[191] Friedrich Bayl, a critic who did comment, wrote on "the huge size of the works, which almost push the Europeans from the walls, as well as the frightening energy." *Arts Magazine* writer Thwaites says Bayl saw differences between the abstractions from various countries less in terms of European versus American than as barbarian versus civilized.[192] With visitors numbering about 130,000, the public exposure of this show had a dramatic effect on art here and abroad.

As for the Turin exhibit, sponsored by the Circolo Degli Artisti of the city and the Associazone Arti Figurativa, it had brought together avant-garde artists from three continents as well as skilled Japanese flower arrangers. Luciano Pistoi, in the introduction to the catalogue, mentioned the "aesthetic development which is known as *Informel* or better still, *Art Autre*." And artists working in or close to this style--tactile abstractionists like Fautrier and Wols, Burri and Tapies--were included. Seeking the common thread uniting them all, Pistoi wrote:

> ...In their variety and individuality of artistic expression these separate works of art may be related to each other through the common human experience of spiritual and material needs, of which we are all aware. And if art establishes the place of values in a material world, then amidst the welter and complexity of these new forms of pictorial expression (now emerging) with equal force in France, America, Italy and Japan) every one of

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[191]John Anthony Thwaites, "Report on Documenta II," *Arts Magazine* 34 (November 1959): 46.

[192]Ibid.

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> us must seek the poetic significance which, in this exhibitionist civilization of ours, these contemporary artists are trying to uphold.[193]

Interested in probing the essential starting point of what he saw as "a new tradition," with origins in the "period of experiment that began in the void of post-dadaism," Michel Tapié, curator of last year's Osaka Festival, had again brought together the works of 72 artists--most of whom showed a single work.[194] For Brooks, this was *S*-1951, illustrated in the catalogue above his photograph and biography.

The remainders of the exhibits in which Brooks works were shown were in smaller museums and in facilities associated with universities. Often there was no catalogue essay to explain the organizer's thought or the aesthetic goals of the project. And the artist might remain uninformed why his or her participation had been requested.

Though in many cases we lack specific details about such smaller shows, by their very number one can conclude that knowledge of the artist and his work was growing. It must have been greatly satisfying to him that the periodical *Current Biography* which ran two-or three-page profiles of people in the news included one of Brooks in its February issue. It was an honor shared with the theatre's Harold Clurman, Pope John XXIII, writer Boris Pasternak, and comedian Danny Thomas.

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[193]Luciano Pistoi, "Introduction," *Arte Nuova* (Torino, 1959).

[194]Michel Tapié, "Preface," *Arte Nuova*.

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Also, his one-man show at Stable Gallery early in February had harvested some positive response with reviewer Dore Ashton analyzing and once more reporting with keen interest,

> ...Endowed with new force and density, James Brooks' paintings at the Stable Gallery had a quality missing in his last show: they swept behind the surface to illuminate their sources.
>
> Although the Brooks' signature-forms have remained unchanged--large, jagged, often diagonal shapes--they now evolve from a background situation...They well up, or shoot out, or slide obliquely into place, but from somewhere. The difference between these paintings and those of Brooks' last show is that he has seen the life of his painting as an analogue to general life. It has its sources, its lights and shadows, it extension in time, its evolutionary possibilities...[195]

These last two sentences are particularly revealing. Ashton is sensitive to the relationship between the artist and his conceptual framework. Being both writer on art and Hampton neighbor, she knew the artist personally and had visited his studio. Her writings undoubtedly reflected their conversations. And her conclusion rephrases a firm belief of the artist who had recently discussed it with interviewer Bernard Chaet. That is, the meaning of a work resides in the work itself; the artist need not otherwise provide it.[196] "A painting is expressive of everything the artist identi-

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[195]Dore Ashton, "ART." *Arts & Architecture* 76 (April 1959): 10.

[196]Facts about the artist's life may be interesting, but only in a peripheral sense. It is the painting I prefer to know." James Brooks, interview by Bernard Chaet. In Chaet, "Concepts of Space and Expression...,67.

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fies himself with."[197] ...[The] interaction of shape and color--that is, the groupings or relationships they may produce--transmits an impulse which is the image and meaning of the painting."[198] However, a distinction need be drawn. Such an 'interaction' could produce either "painting" or "decoration." Brooks believed both present in the best works, however, he differentiated between them. "Decoration," a term of faint praise, he associated with works which repaid the viewers only with "pleasure and exhilaration." In contrast, significant painting rewarded the viewer with some sense of cosmic, both "frightening and unknown." Therefore, the reading of the work was based on visual stimuli, received physiologically, in turn translated into psychological response.

This analysis of meaning is essential because misunderstanding it has so often been the cause of fretful criticism as, indeed, it was from the pen of L[awrence] C[ampbell] of *ARTnews*. He called the works "large, contentless, contented, gracious paintings," and noted,

> In writing about the show you find you have no words, and no feeling either. The paintings are simply there--large, bland, rather pleasant--but there.[199]

Compare this, then, to what Dore Ashton wrote for another critical assignment--about the Stable Gallery show for the *New York Times*. She remarked on what she saw as a blending of an

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[197]Ibid.

[198]Chaet quoting Brooks, 67.

[199]L[awrence] C[ampbell], *ARTnews* 57,(February 1959):13.

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earlier style with the artist's more recent style.

> Now, Brooks has taken back shadowed nuances and returned to sinuous, interweaving shapes. But at the same time he has not lost the bold, rugged character of the forms in his last show. The branches have come together again.
>
> Brooks has a personal way of handling both blacks and whites. His whites, which range from cream to ice water in tone, are opaque and massive. They work like color as do the rich blacks. In larger compositions on view Brooks brings the two most powerful contrasting values into relationships with brilliant red, blues, oranges and greens. The results are extremely energetic compositions with emphatic rhythms.[200]

And although another reviewer would disagree on the blacks, declaring, "Part of his difficulty is his failure to make black function as a color, hence an autonomous form," inspection of the works assures us that Ashton was the more accurate observer.[201]

As the decade drew to a close, such negative criticism provided food for reflection, but not harmful setback. In his mid-fifties, the artist continued to paint vigorously. His work was well respected by his colleagues and had been acquired by both major museums and important patrons. Although Abstract Expressionism as a movement would wane, his career would thrive. In the new decade Brooks' efforts would be rewarded with a major retrospective and honors conferred by his peers.

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[200]Dore Ashton, "Art: James Brooks' Paintings on View," *New York Times*, 4 February 1959, 29.

[201]S[idney] T[illim], "Reviews," *Arts Magazine* 33, (February 1959) 56.

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CHAPTER 7

KUDOS AND REWARDS

(1960-1966)

For most Americans, the decade of the 1960s promised a bright future. Characterized by "Rising Expectations"--and so called in a popular account of the period--the early sixties enjoyed prosperous times made possible by the prolonged growth of the economy.[1] Equally important to this rosy picture, were the social changes--by-products of that economic well being. Included were the improvement of race relationships brought about by effective civil rights legislation, the development of feminism as a cultural and political force, the burgeoning interest in preserving the environment that led to the Clean Air Act, the Water Quality Act, the Endangered Species Act, and finally, the public's enthusiastic support of our revolutionary space program which put men in space and then on the moon. Though too soon marred by the assassination of President

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[1]Mark S. Hoffman, ed., The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1993, (New York: Pharos Books, 1992), 512.

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John Kennedy and the growing military demands of the Vietnam conflict, the dawn of the decade seemed boundless in the possibilities it offered.

For the many first generation Abstract Expressionists whose work had already won critical acclaim, as had the paintings of Jim Brooks, the years ahead could predictably be regarded with optimism. But could they? Brooks himself was painting well and prolifically. There were always invitations and opportunities to exhibit, and income from both the sales of works and teaching was now adequate to ensure financial independence. Still complacency evaded the art community; the supremacy of Abstract Expressionism as a movement--its gestural branch, in particular--was being challenged. After a decade of preeminence, it was coming under attack--charged with being academic.

Art Historian Irving Sandler contends that already in 1957 or 1958 the viability of gestural painting as an established style was being questioned. Likely it was critic Clement Greenberg who, at a 1956 discussion at the Club, launched the assault. Gesture painting, formerly supported by him, he now declared "timid, handsome, second-generation...in a bad way."[2] He had already surveyed the life

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[2]Clement Greenberg in Club panel, "The Role of the Critic in Contemporary Art," 25 May 1956, as quoted by

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cycle of Abstract Expressionism and concluded its energy spent because of the numbers of young painters slavishly joining the movement without making any significant contribution to the style. But it wasn't until 1960 that he first articulated (and expanded in 1962) the direction that painting would take. He wrote,

> Each art had to determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself. By doing so it would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of that area all the more certain...To achieve autonomy, painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture...[3]

That, of course, meant the banishment of any spatial illusions which gestural painting produced. At this point, however, such criticism was "within the family," rather than a matter of public debate. And gestural painting still had strong advocates. In reviewing the period, Sand-ler finds that painter John Ferren and critic Dore Ashton disagreed with Greenberg's assessment and instead saw the movement as consolidated by its growth and continuation. Critic Tom Hess, denying claims that the artists' clannishness led to

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Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 279.

[3]John O'Brian, ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, "Modernist Painting" 86,88. See, too, "After Abstract Expressionism," 121-134.

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relaxation of critical standards, stood firm on their achievements. He saw in what was going on a sense of "individual freedom, 'signs of life,'" and characterized their activities as heterogeneous and having depth.[4] But John Canaday, appointed art critic of *The New York Times* in September 1959, became a dedicated foe. Disapproving of the works of the movement, artists believed he deliberately set out to destroy the Abstract Expressionists.[5] About the same time, the issue of whether gesture painting was now academic aroused greater interest at the Club. Two particular panel discussions--"What is the New Academy?" of April 1959 and the subsequent "Has the Situation Changed?"--framed the issue. And a question period gave rise to troubling questions: whether younger painters were imitating their elders, whether they were perpetuating a style instead of seeking out original directions, etc. And although some knowledgeable observers like Alfred Barr, Jr., head of New York's Museum of Modern Art, still saw possibilities for

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[4]Thomas B. Hess, "Inside Nature," *ARTnews* 56 (February 1958): 64-65, and Hess, "The Many Deaths of American Art," *ARTnews* 59 (October 1960): 25.

[5]A letter protesting the virulence and unfairness of his comments and signed by forty-nine artists, including Brooks, was published in the *New York Times,* 26 February 1961, sec. II, p. 6.

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discovery within gesture painting, he nonetheless encouraged young painters to go forth and seek a new path. By 1960, detractors grew more numerous. William Rubin, reflecting Greenberg's influence, wrote of the "poor quality of Abstract Expressionist or de Kooning style painting."[6] Soon Hilton Kramer, too, writing for *ARTS,* would express disapproval of the renewed interest in figuration by gestural artists.[7] And painter Frank Stella, feeling the romance of Abstract Expressionism spent, urged paintings based on good ideas—for example, repetition of stripes parallel to the framing edge--rather than a celebration of painting process.[8] Thus the climate of acceptance was modified. If not immediately apparent to the outside world because of the self-protectiveness of the artists, the course of art would also change. Former supporters like curator Dorothy Miller would include artists from other groups in her new shows; the 10th Street galleries and the Club, both so essential to the success of gestural painting,

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[6]William Rubin, "Young American Painters," *Art International* 4, (1960), 24-31.

[7]Hilton Kramer, "Month in Review," *ARTS Magazine* (January 1960): 45.

[8]William Rubin, *Frank Stella* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970) 9—12.

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would gradually close, and most younger artists would turn away from action painting with its emphasis on the expressionist palette, ambiguous forms and signature brushwork.[9] They favored instead purer hues, defined forms, and impersonal brushwork. Though some would continue as latter day gestural painters, others would explore the new directions subsequently labeled Pop Art, Neo-Dada, Colorfield painting, Minimalism, Happenings and Environments. As for the first generation Abstract Expressionists, their original aesthetic would govern their later works even when there were stylistic changes that accompanied their growth and maturity.

Brooks' stylistic evolution as an expressionist had already begun in the early years of the previous decade. While his practice of starting works on unstretched canvas on the studio floor remained the same, worrying thinned pigment into position with squeegee, brush, or cardboard, then blotting them with crumpled paper towels, when the work had progressed sufficiently to be transferred to the wall, the artist now used a broader brush and more robust

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[9]John Canaday, "Good-bye Forever: A Final Sad Farewell to Tenth Street," *New York Times,* 19 May 1963, sec. II, p.11.

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brushwork, as already seen in *Karrig,* of 1956.[10] But here, unlike his works of the early 1950s, the forms do not interlock and weave in and out of the others. Forms articulated in vibrant reds, blacks, light blues, golds, and whites sometimes overlay one another, veiling each other, adding drama to those that are half-hidden. Creating transparencies of this subtlety was one of Brooks' great technical gifts. Use of the acrylic synthetic resin Lucite, dissolved in a mixture of turpentine and linseed oil, likely aided in the achievement of such effects. It also produced the matte surface the artist preferred. With it he often used Behlen's paste-form pigments in linseed oil—these thinned with an extender when he sought a color with both viscosity and transparency. But his work was never confined to these. He had used a variety of products and tube colors as the work demanded.

In the new decade such choices would allow him to move further from his original signature style. Over time, the number of painted elements would decrease. Not only would they grow in size but they would become more expansive, as would the layered space they inhabit. Their restlessness would abate; their movement became slower and more stately.

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[10]Charlotte Park Brooks, in conversation with author, 8 May 2000.

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Also, the favored red-orange/blue-green palette, so familiar through the early 1950s, would virtually disappear. Its replacement--whites, blacks, and blues in many variations--had already assumed primary importance in his work, with resonant reds and mustardy yellows still imperative resources. Such coloristic changes are apparent in works like *Flintro* and *Iago*, both of 1960 (figs. 119 and 120), just as the formal direction the artist would pursue is seen in the contrast between *Rodado* of 1961 (fig.121) and *Obsol* of 1964 (fig.122). All this would soon be summed up in a statement by the artist published in the periodical *Scrap*. He said,

> ...I have had the feeling lately that I would like to get away from the active shape movement into a sort of looming mystery--something different than the mystery of complication... Like many of the painters, I have become dissatisfied with paintings that are complicated by unfinished strokes. The evidence of the process of the painting has lost interest to me. I want to present a more completed painting...I would like to absorb the the accident. I would like a quieter painting, a painting that is dumber, less articulate, that has fewer interesting parts and less fascination in the working parts of it. I want more meaning for the whole.[11]

Though less often quoted, the artist's remarks on technique are equally revealing. He sought "a more constructed picture," and cited *Haneve* (fig. 123) as example.

It is affected by the shape of the brush. In this

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[11]"...A Looming Mystery.," James Brooks interviewed. Sidney Geist, ed. *Scrap,* 20 January 1961. p. 3.

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> painting it was a flat brush pulled down. Generally it's a round brush filled with liquid paint. The rounded form is much more like me...This painting is a pull against myself, and I'm not ready to accept it yet...A person gets an illumination at one time in his life about who he is, but what comes out may not be the kind of painting he has always admired...There is that pull between what you are like and what you do and that accounts for the pull in the work, and this particular painting pulls very far...[12]

Even as his style would change, so would other basic aspects of his life. Prominent among them was a change of gallery handling his work. Late in 1959, as he and his friend Giorgio Cavallon had previously done, he left one gallery for another. In this case, he moved from the downtown Stable Gallery to the progressive uptown gallery of Samuel M. Kootz. The latter had been hospitable to Abstract Expressionists and active in their promotion almost from the movement's beginnings. Of particular note was his 1949 exhibit *The Intrasubjectives*, and his representation of Gottlieb and Rothko, among others. The work of Corrado (Conrad) Marca-Relli, another close friend, was already handled by Kootz. Because of this change, Brooks would have no one-man show in 1960. But he had been included in an introductory welcoming show in September 1959, and he was also in a group show of all Kootz artists concurrent with a solo show of William Ronald's paintings

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[12]Ibid.

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that marked the gallery's fifteenth anniversary. This opened in late October 1959.[13] He would take part in a number of other interesting exhibits in this year.

As usual, museums and galleries with national reputations presented the largest and most ambitious shows, although some of the latter—the competitive biennials--were on foreign soil. Smaller venues—often local museums or university galleries—presented more modest offerings. In 1960, shows at the Decordova Museum in Lincoln, MA, the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery in Memphis, TN, and the Signa Gallery in East Hampton, NY, were in the latter category. Though their aims were altruistic and high-minded, they were not of national significance. The biennials abroad, like that in Mexico City in 1960, briefly multiplied in number with the increased activity of the International Council at the Museum of Modern Art of New York.[14] And participation in

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[13]Besides Brooks, at this time Kootz represented Cavallon, Hare, Hofmann, Lassaw, Marca-Relli, Mathieu. Kyle Morris, Raymond Parker, Ronald, Gerard Schneider, Schumacher, Soulages, Kumi Sugai, and Zao-Wou-ki.

[14]Beginning in 1963 the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, $265,000 out-of-pocket for financing foreign biennials, decided to discontinue funding U.S. representation. The government was asked to take over. However, a five-year plan for exhibitions abroad was put in place. Sanka Knox, "U.S. Art Display to Lose Sponsor," *New York Times,* 2 May 1962, p 34.

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these provided the opportunity for winning prizes as well as enhancing the artist's prestige outside the U.S. But it was the large shows in urban centers that would be discussed and reviewed in major newspapers and art periodicals that would earn artists the greatest kudos. In 1960, Brooks participated in several of sufficient significance that they merit attention here. Two of this year and one of the following year are linked by their rather unusual themes which address art's bond with the economy. They were *Business Buys American Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Paintings on Loan from the Chase Manhattan Bank* at the Albright Art Gallery, and the 1961 show *American Business and the Arts* at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

It is the contention of Christin Mamiya, author of *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* that the economics of the decade had much to do with the development of a consumer culture and establishment of this link. She writes:

> Between the years 1958--1964, the United States witnessed an explosion in the size and geographic diversity of American corporations...So pervasive was the corporate presence that it resulted in the entrenchment of corporate mentality in the American public psyche.[15]

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[15]Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumber Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1992), 14.

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She rightly sees this as an underlying factor in the development of Pop Art, but her subject precludes consideration of the economy's tie to other styles of art. However, during this period of détente between corporations and the art establishment, wealthy companies like Pepsi-Cola, de Beers, IBM, Manufacturers Trust Company, Chase Manhattan Bank, Dole Pineapple, and some 93 others out of 187 answering a questionnaire on this topic, invested in art collections for various reasons. These included beautifying their premises, acquiring prestige, or speculating on a rising art market. Others used the work of fine artists in their advertising programs and house organs, or to create well designed consumer goods from automobiles to record album covers. Curators were hired to make suitable choices. Their goals were to stimulate consciousness of good design in both factories and business offices and promote "well-planned uses of painting and sculpture." Hence John Gordon, curator for *Business Buys American Art,* showed an outsized Calder mobile and a photo-mural of a David Hare bronze relief for an office building in his exhibit. Many paintings were shown, including Brooks' *Number 44,* 1951, from the collection of the Glen Alden Corporation. They were not the painter's only corporate clients. Ciba-Geigy collected avidly; and later

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in that year, the Brooks' painting *Gananogue,* 1960, owned by Chase Manhattan Bank, could be seen at the Albright Art Gallery. And in 1961 on the occasion of an international industrial conference, the San Francisco Museum followed suit with its own business-oriented exhibition which included Brooks' *Number 4,* 1952, property of Neuberger & Berman. While shows like these are of interest in examining an existing societal phenomenon--and it *was* a phenomenon important enough to soon earn it page one coverage on the Business Section of *The New York Times*—ultimately they contribute only in a minor way to the artist's reputation.[16]

Some exhibitions, however, have greater aesthetic resonance and draw attention to the quality of the works rather than to their usage. Such was the case with Walker Art Center's *60 American Painters 1960: Abstract Expressionist Painting of the Fifties.* On view from April to May in Minneapolis, it opened the decade with a mission. H.H. Arnason, Walker director and exhibition curator, called it,

> …an attempt to look at the present state of health of the movement some seventeen or eighteen years after its

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[16]William M. Freeman, "Business and Financial World Shows Rising Interest in Approach to Art," *New York Times,* 29 December 1963, sec. III, p.1.

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inception.[17]

And he related the selection process in which the works of 200 painters were first narrowed down to 100 and then to 60. Intentionally aligning himself with those maintaining the vigor of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Arnason held that the works ultimately selected represented a kind of "summing up" of its present condition, or,

> conclusive evidence of the enormous continuing vitality of this movement[18]

It was an opinion shared by his co-author Sir Herbert Read in their *Dialogue on Modern U. S. Painting* published in *ARTnews* of May 1960. Read's remarks repeated here yield a fuller understanding of how he perceived the overall status of Abstract Expressionism at this moment. He said, for example,

> I cannot think of any other country where you would find so many contemporary painters of this over-all level of quality.
>
> From here I can get a general impression of the exhibition and I would like again to emphasize the sense of bursting energy which these paintings convey to me...The traces of foreign influence have disappeared or been assimilated and we have here something which is independent, positive and coherent.
>
> The real impact [on artists abroad] did not, I believe,

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[17]H. H. Arnason, "Foreword," *60 American Painters 1960: Abstract Expressionist Painting of the Fifties,* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1961), 7-9.

[18]Arnason, 23.

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> begin until 1958 with the circulation of the Museum of Modern Art's 'New American Painting' exhibition and the Pollock exhibition. However, since that time it has been overwhelming. Certainly the younger British painters have been swept off their feet by the discovery of what is really happening in the United States.[19]

That both Read and Arnason were of one mind about Brooks' painting *Karrig* (fig.105) also emerges. In discussing individual works, Read had this to say,

> This is also a painting of beautiful movement of color in space—the reds and blacks and blues float over and and under each other in a slow and stately tempo. This is one of the most lyrical paintings in the exhibition and at the same time one of the most carefully composed.[20]

And while Arnason left us no such comment, that he selected *Karrig* and had it reproduced in color as the frontispiece of his catalogue signifies his esteem.

There was yet another change in the artist's life this year. Joseph Albers, who had appointed James Brooks a visiting professor, had retired as Chairman of the Art Department of Yale Art School in 1958. Succeeding him, until Jack Tworkov accepted the Chairmanship in 1963, were a number of interim chairmen. Since the supplemental income teaching provided was no longer necessary, and relinquishing teaching

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[19]Sir Herbert Read in Herbert Read and H. Harvard Arnason, "Dialogue on modern U.S. painting," *ARTnews* 59 (May 1960): 32-36.

[20]Read, "Dialogue…," 36.

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would leave the artist more time to devote to his studio, he severed his connection with Yale in 1960. This did not end the artist's teaching career; but it provided the needed respite for the strenuous period ahead.

As the following year began, Brooks' one-man show mounted by Kootz received high praise. Irving Sandler writing for *ARTnews* and Vivien Raynor for *Arts Magazine* were extravagant in commending the works shown. Said Sandler,

> James Brooks's recent pictures are beautiful in the profound sense of that word. Massive, loosely painted forms that slowly move in from the edges jostle each other gently, expanding and contracting, probing for their shape and place. It is this adjustment of areas, unpremeditated yet careful, that gives these canvases their unity and presence...The momentum of gradually shifting areas evokes imperceptible but vast natural rhythms... *Iago, Jondol,* and *Khaeo* are among the most compelling canvases that Brooks ever painted.[21]

Raynor's comments were only slightly less eloquent. In part the critic observed,

> Brooks, one of the original participants in the American Abstract Expressionist movement, amply demonstrates how a glorious bloom can descend on the successful.[22]

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[21]I[rving] H. S[andler], "Reviews and Previews," *ARTnews* 59 (January 1961): 10.

[22]V[ivien] R[aynor], "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 35, (January 1961): 51.

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With that as preface to the year's activities it is not surprising to learn that 1961 would be an auspicious one for the artist.

It started on a high note. The Art Institute of Chicago scheduled its *64th American Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture* between 6 January and 5 February, and Brooks submitted *Larapolo*, 1958 (fig. 124) to an exhibition whose principal aim was to,

> …give a cross section of what is being done in America today, from coast to coast, and from the visual right to the visual left. Each item has been chosen only because each item has seemed to be *as good of its kind* as could be obtained.[23]

This painting, only slightly higher than wide in format, has looping light areas opposing sooty darks—the darks massed though infiltrated by the dispersed strands of light tones. The paint is applied vigorously and with conviction. It was a work the three-man jury--that is, Sherman Lee of the Cleveland Museum of Art and painters Ivan Albright and William Brice--would award of the Norman Waite Harris silver medal. It was one of thirteen such prizes given, and the third largest in terms of money.[24]

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[23]J.M., *64th American Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1961), n.p.

[24]The principal painting awards and their amounts were made to the following: William Baziotes ($2000), Hans Hofmann ($1500), Franz Kline ($1500), James Brooks ($1000),

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Another, more modest venue in which Brooks was soon represented was the Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture of the University of Illinois' new Krannert Art Museum. The museum housing the show was brand new, and had not yet been dedicated on 26 February when the exhibit opened. There were a variety of artists and styles. Franz Schulze, Chicago columnist for *ARTnews,* however, reserved praise mainly for the youthful, post postwar generation…in whose "rhapsodic" and "unworried" attitude, and "hot and delicious" colors he found a lyricism and "painterly punch." He noted, too, that this was the first recent American show "in these parts… not dominated by New York abstraction or extremely conscious of Chicago imagery."[25] *Denain,* 1960, the oil by Brooks, was, however, an example of the former. And the artist had sent a statement to accompany his work in answer to a museum questionnaire about imagery. The question:

> There seems to be a new interest in subject matter in contemporary American painting and sculpture. Do you feel that works of art reflecting the entirely formal

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Stuart Davis ($750), Adja Yunkers ($500), Richard Pousette-Dart ($500), Ellen Lanyon ($500), Seymour Rosofsky ($100), Stuart Kaufman ($100). *64th American Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture,* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1961).

[25]Franz Schulze, "Chicago," *ARTnews* 60 (September 1960): 21.

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> (or non-representative) elements are becoming outmoded? Do you see a return to figurative subject matter, or do you see any other changes in the present directions of American art?

Brooks responded:

> There has never been a purely formal or purely figurative art, and the artist is not interested even in the degree of mixture of the two. These are anxieties of the trend-setter, the historian, the power-hungry critic, and the venal painter.
>
> Unable to predict the outcome of a single work, an artist is certainly unable to predict a trend.
>
> To paraphrase Robert Graves: The subject matter of art has always been the same, and for the artist there has been no choice but the single theme of Life and Death. The function of art is the religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites.[26]

In several ways this provides insights into Brooks' thinking. From it, and other information collected, we can infer Brooks shared the same interest in the intellectual roots of Abstract Expressionism, as author Stephen Polcari defined them. He has quoted James Joyce and Robert Graves in his public statements, and exhibited profound interest in the workings of the unconscious mind. Of particularly note here is the fact that Graves was a writer interested

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[26]James Brooks in answer to the Krannert Art Museum's *Questionnaire for 1961 Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting.* The questions asked mainly about the painter's education and exhibition history. Besides the above, it asked, too, which hand was used in painting. That was left unanswered.

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in, and familiar with, ancient mythology. Yet Brooks never moved toward the branch of expressionism that developed mythological symbolism. The theme of Life and Death is grander, surely more philosophical. There is no attempt to make art easier for the spectator. Also interesting, is his resistance to playing the seer--as if, indeed, this is outside his power.

The spring of 1961 was occupied with several small exhibitions and it wasn't until autumn that the artist would again be involved in the kind of an exhibition that attempted to define the state of art at a particular moment.[27] H.H. Arnason, late of the Walker Art Center, had accepted a vice-presidency of New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum where he undertook to produce a major exhibition called *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists*. As in the *60 Painters...* show held at the Walker, this again attempted to survey the current art scene but the essay revealed a slight shift from Arnason's former

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[27]The exhibitions not specifically named in the text were the *71st Annual Exhibition of Nebraska's Art Association* at the University of Nebraska's Galleries at Lincoln; *Collector's Choice/2* at the St. Paul School Gallery and School of Art, St. Paul; the *21st Annual Exhibition* of the Society for Contemporary Art of the Art Institute of Chicago; and the *25th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists* at Lever House, NYC. Also, there was the *American Business and the Arts* show previously discussed.

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position. His updated premise was this: besides the action painters of the Abstract Expressionist movement, there had always been a parallel group of painters whose work was more formal, more classical, in its direction. Arnason then described the various schools of art from Cubism to Surrealism on which Abstract Expressionism drew, and for want of a better designation, called the formalists Abstract Imagists. He cited their concern for creating, through "the dominant assertion of a single overpowering element," "an all-encompassing presence" which functioned as an abstract symbol or image.[28] They--and this included Rothko, Newman, Gottlieb, and Reinhardt, among others--achieved this non-naturalistic image through flatly painted color areas "and isolated and highly simplified elements."[29] While pursuing a common goal, this group of artists took different routes. Other artists shown worked in a variety of styles. Some, following Albers created precisely drawn color areas; others, like Rauschenberg and Johns reexplored Dada's use of the ready-made. Arnason called the former Neo-Precisionists and the latter Neo-Dadaists, though other

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[28]H. H. Arnason, "Introduction," *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists*, (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1961), 24.

[29]Ibid.

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names for such tendencies would be soon found. From both the original movement and the plethora of options open to followers, Arnason chose sixty-four works by different painters to show. The Brooks work hung was *Octon*, 1961, which would be acquired by James Michener the following year and thereafter widely exhibited.[30]

Ironically, it was discussed in only one of these reviews--that of Stuart Preston--in which it was noted

> Both the James Brooks and the Philip Guston are curiously tentative and indecisive.[31]

Two adjectives could hardly be less appropriate! *Octon* (fig. 125) is a large oil painting, 84 x 66". Largely in black, it has white flourishes in the upper right quarter that invade the black calligraphically and recall shadows left by the sun breaking through leaves. To their left are brushed areas of pale blue above crimson with a somewhat transparent patch of black covering their joint meeting place. Both are bordered by a broad ultra-marine stroke ending just short of midway down and permitting the viewer awareness of the black ground beneath it. At lower left,

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[30]James Michener Collection was presented to the University of Texas at Austin, c. 1977.

[31]Stuart Preston, "All Unquiet on the Wide Abstract Expressionist Front," *New York Times*, 15 October 1961, sec. II, p.17.

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arcing blue strokes, some lightened with white, serve to balance the textured upper right. The somewhat lighter lower right quarter offers relief to the more formal and dense area diagonally opposite. White strokes, capped with an animated slash of red, sweep in toward the center, but are contained beneath two graceful, sweeping brown arcs and a plume of matching hue. Beautifully conceived and painted, *Octon* is the epitome of what Brooks had declared he would search for in the 1960s,

> "...away from the active shape movement...something different than the mystery of complication...I want to present a more completed painting...a quieter painting... I want more meaning for the whole.[32]

As for the show, this was a major event. Nevertheless, art critics Sidney Tillim, Jack Kroll, and Emily Gennauer were virulent in their judgment of it. Stuart Preston and Dore Ashton were more objective in their views, and Robert M. Coates was positive in his praise. Tillim, uncomfortable with abstraction, accused the museum of "following the party platform" in mounting a show of abstract art and argued that Abstract Expressionism has run dry, as it "inevitably" had to do. Finally, he quoted a question Arnason posed in his introduction to the show.

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[32]Excerpted from artist's interview with *Scrap*. See p. 238.

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"What and how well is De Kooning—or Motherwell—or Guston—or Goldberg—or Ronald painting now?" And Tillim himself answered, "I Agree with Emily Gennauer of the *Herald Tribune* that they are painting very badly indeed…But I also wonder if some are painting at all."[33] His colleague, Jack Kroll took issue with the exhibition because of its focus. He wrote,

> Just as he did last year when, as director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, he hung an exhibition of similar size and scope. Mr. Arnason has chosen to concentrate on "abstraction." By setting up the implication of "abstract" vs. "representational" or "figurative," he has deprived us of a chance to see, in the full range of American painting today, something of what the relationship might be between those artists who are represented in the show and painters such as Larry Rivers, Alex Katz, Robert Goodnough, Lester Johnson, Robert de Niro, Fairfield Porter, Elaine de Kooning, Nell Blaine, Earl Kerkam and Richard Diebenkorn.[34]

Stuart Preston made a pretense of impartiality- failing, however, to adhere to it. He complained that Arnason would have,

> …done well to concentrate exclusively on one [expressionists] or the other [imagists] rather than try, more cunningly than successfully, to maintain that a single unbroken tradition connects the fauves of 1945 with those of 1961.[35]

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[33]Sidney Tillim, "Month in Review," *Arts Magazine* 36 (December 1961): 42.

[34]Jack Kroll, "American Painting and the Convertible Spiral," *ARTnews* 60 (November 1961): 34, 37.

[35]Preston, "All Quiet…," p. 17.

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He grudgingly admitted that although "snobbery and some desire to in be the swim affected some conversions to the new style [Abstract Expressionism], they cannot pretend to account for the decisive influence it has had on contemporary painting the world over."[36] Summing up, he found the show oddly tame and on occasion slick and academic. Praise was reserved for three directions taken in abstract painting today: the geometrical lucidity of Ellsworth Kelly, the symbolism of Jasper John, and the highly charged technical expressiveness of Robert Richenburg.

Dore Ashton, in contrast, exonerated Arnason of any faults with the exhibition finding them characteristic of the homogeneity a modern exhibit imposes on the work.[37] She noted the difficulties of studying a single painting and tried reflecting on how differently it would be perceived in a studio environment. She decried the Guggenheim's particular architecture and lighting, but lauded the catalogue as an "invaluable aid" for the background material it provided, and agreed with Arnason's contention that one could see in the newer work "a pronounced tendency to simplifica-

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[36]Ibid.

[37]Dore Ashton, "Art," *Art & Architecture* 78, (December 1961): 4.

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tion and reduction." She also preferred the word emblematic (the visible symbol of an idea) to imagistic for the kind of work produced. Little was said about individual artist's works except to say spectacular, simple paintings carry the day while intimate paintings in which the abstract image is secreted fare badly. She used Guston's *Duo*, 1961, "a superior example of his work," as an unfortunate example of the latter.

New Yorker critic Robert Coates, who had named Abstract Expressionism somewhat earlier turned up with the most positive view of the exhibit. In the minority, he nevertheless judged,

> On the whole,...it is an excellent presentation, and, with sixty-odd paintings by as many artists, it is a comprehensive one. It's an up-to-the minute show, too, --for with only a few exceptions--...the works are dated within the past year and are now being exhibited for first time, and this gives it considerable freshness.[38]

Whichever viewpoint one took of the show, however, this dialogue did little to restore the original lustre to the movement.

The *1961 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture,* triennially presented by Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh, ran almost concurrently

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[38]Robert M. Coates "The Art Galleries," *The New Yorker,* 4 November 1961, 145.

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with the *American Abstract Expressionist and Imagist* exhibition, and although a much larger show with a greater variety of art works, it encountered virtually the same kinds of criticism. It was judged too large and reliant on accepted schools of art rather than identifying what was new and exciting. Lead articles had been written by Alfred Frankfurter for *ARTnews*, by Hilton Kramer for *Arts Magazine*, and by John Canaday of the *New York Times*—each of whom would prove to be uncongenial, if not hostile, to abstract art.[39] That does not necessarily invalidate their criticism for some complaints were justified. But a central complaint was that Gordon Washburn had chosen all works personally, and it was felt that job should be divided, and the director have better informed contacts to advise him about art abroad.

One interesting insight emerged from this. After charging that such international exhibitions (the most important worldwide along with the Venice Bienale and the Sao Paolo Bienal) have now become enormous art fairs with the function of selling in both the rhetorical and commercial sense, Kramer charged that "what intellectual content

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[39]See n. 5.

[40]Hilton Kramer, "The Latest Thing in Pittsburgh,"

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the exhibition does yield, is not, unfortunately, altogether separable from the commercial flavor of the whole. "Intellectually," he writes, "the International is not so much Mr. Washburn's exhibition as Mr. Clement Greenberg's." His statement refers to the power of the art critic to influence without having had any hands-on involvement. And he makes a further charge about that influence:

> One notes with interest that four of the nine prizes at Pittsburgh went to artists who were represented by French and Co. during Mr. Greenberg's brief tenure as Artistic Advisor. Messrs. Olitski, Gottlieb, Hollegha, and Smith [that is, David Smith, sculptor].[40]

Not the only critic to find fault with the jurors who selected prize winners, Kramer fails to name them.[41] In making an issue instead of Greenberg's clout, he warns indirectly about who will shape this decade's art.

We have until now sidestepped an important question that is central to James Brooks' career. It is incontro-

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[40]Hilton Kramer, "The Latest Thing in Pittsburgh," *Arts Magazine* 36, (January 1962): 24-27.

[41]The jury was Kenzo Okada, a well-known, Japanese-born New York artist; Lawrence Alloway, a British writer on art and exhibit organizer; Robert Giron, Director of the Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Seymour Knox, president of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery of Buffalo; and Daniel Catton Rich, director of the Worcester Art Museum, formerly of the Art Institute of Chicago. Painting prize winners were Mark Tobey, Jules Olitski, Adolph Gottlieb, Ellsworth Kelly, and Wolfgang Hollegha.

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vertible that he had made a success of his art in two distinctly different styles requiring a major transition from the representational to the abstract. He had been closely involved in the Abstract Expressionism movement from 1948 on, and been included in such key exhibits as *The New American Painting*. His work had been singled out for honors and prizes, and more often been lauded in reviews. He would be given a one-man retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art only a little more than a year after this Pittsburgh International ended. Still he was less well known to the public than colleagues who spoke about their art more readily, than those with a greater need for self-glorification, or those with an advocate. To a large extent, those advocacy roles were filled by Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, and others who not only theorized about art in their prolific writings but who gathered proselytes in the studios, the museums, the social gatherings, and after-hours spots where artists met and talked. They attracted coteries not to be breached by outsiders, explained the puzzling aspects of abstraction to the literati from whom the uninitiated would learn, and anointed the heads of those they identified as leaders. In the 1950s Greenberg had nominated Pollock "the best painter of a whole generation," and to a lesser extent championed

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de Kooning, Gottlieb, Hofmann, Kline, Motherwell, Newman, Rothko, Still, and Tobey. Though he supported them all, it seems clear in retrospect his closest personal relationship was with Pollock, to whose studio he would bring young artists who might profit from the visit. In contrast, de Kooning was the painter who typified the new "arena" of painting--action painting, that is--for Harold Rosenberg. As time passed, however, their critical positions would alter—Greenberg's more than Rosenberg's. Thus, in the later years of that decade, while Greenberg was still reviewing Abstract Expressionist exhibitions in which his favored artists participated, by 1960 (as noted) he had already begun to both forecast and support the direction their successors would take. Hence, his essay promoting the 'color' painting of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland in the May 1960 issue of *Art International,* and his subsequent powerful 1962 essay *After Abstract Expressionism* that virtually elevated Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Clyfford Still to status as elders of the movement and prophets of the future. His advocacy of their aesthetics and techniques, led to his selection of Noland and Louis as their heirs. In a process originated by Brooks, but uncredited to him by Greenberg, both stained their unsized and unprimed canvas, thereby identifying their use of color

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more closely with its ground. It was Greenberg's determined insistence on the correctness of this direction, this new pictorial flatness, which contributed to diminishing the strength of Abstract Expressionism as it continued into its second decade.

But to return to Brooks... In spite of his personal acquaintanceship with both Greenberg and Rosenberg, for unknown reasons--perhaps, his independence and indifference to being promoted in this manner--they had refrained from commenting on his painting and thereby denied him the opportunity to profit from their praise. True, he counted among his supporters Dore Ashton, Thomas Hess, Sam Hunter, and Irving Sandler. But the power of Greenberg and Rosenberg advocacy permeated and moved the art community in countless indirect ways such as the French and Co. connection to which Kramer has called our attention. Artists outside their orbit simply received less attention.

If the Guggenheim show had aroused widespread disagreement, so, too, did the last show of the season in which Brooks would be invited to participate. It was the Whitney Museum's *1961 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting.* Two critical comments tell the story. Lawrence Campbell, covering the event for *ARTnews,* cap-

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tioned his review "New Blood in the Old Cross-Section," and amplified that thought by writing,

> One of the pleasant things about this 1961 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting to which 136 artists were invited to be represented by one work apiece is that, perhaps for the first time since these exhibitions have been staged, one feels it is day in America.[42]

In contrast, Sidney Tillim in *Arts Magazine* observed,

> A chronological and stylistic carnival develops as the impresarios—trying to quiet the house—whip out one more gaudy prop after another—old sets, new acts and entr'actes.[43]

It was a desultory ending to the year, although the year had had its brighter moments. The artist had been asked to participate in the "Four O'Clock Forum, for one. Here his statement, invested with the same poetic flow so often found in the paintings, gives insight into his mediating personality.

> Discipline is felt as Giotto, El Greco, Cezanne and others wander into the studio, each supremely confident and insistent. What they say sounds right, but the painter knows he lives among different things and events, and sees other paintings than they did. So he locks his door, knowing he will hear their voices the rest of his life, but hoping he will hear them not as many voices but as one great amalgam, style.
>
> If the painter is lucky, painful conflicts between freedom and necessity, subject and object,

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[42]Lawrence Campbell, "New Blood in the Old Cross-Section," *ARTnews* 60 (December 1961): 38.

[43]S[idney] T[illim], "New York Exhibitions: In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 36, (February 1962): 43.

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> dissolve as he works. Discipline and spontaneity, that had seemed so antagonistic, merge as he engages in a dialogue with his painting.
>
> Our own personalities, developing from one of countless changing gene combinations; our close environment; partly happenstance and partly chosen—but chosen through predetermined affinities and affections; our wide environment on the earth and now into the galaxies, all this is circumstance, which we must balance with tradition to accomplish a form. The tool for doing this is an awareness of the pattern of life and its most permanent records, which might be called style or discipline.[44]

Beginning in January 1962, Brooks' works would again tour here and abroad in a group of interesting exhibitions. In this year alone they would be seen in Caracas, Chicago, Philadelphia, Sarasota, Minneapolis, Seattle, Waltham and Boston, New York City and East Hampton. And this year again his work would be singled out for an honor: a Ford Foundation purchase award (one of only six such awards annually), for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts to acquire *Mohan*, a work shown at its *157th Annual Exhibition of American Oil Painting and Sculpture*.

This exhibition which began in mid-January, was almost concurrent with another well-attended annual—the *65th Annual American Exhibition* of the Art Institute of Chicago. Both were usually omnibus events, but as an indicator of the

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[44]James Brooks, "Four O'Clock Forum;" 1961; reprint, *Discipline*, 1961.

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increase in number and cost of submissions, both revised their selection process this year. The painting and sculpture juries of the Pennsylvania Academy split their task. First, they invited work from 182 artists--Brooks among them—of such stature that they could no longer be asked to compete through jury selection; they were counted among "those...whom residents of Philadelphia deserve to see...."[45] Second, they asked less known or less highly regarded artists to submit slides of works rather than the works themselves for the initial selection process. Some 4500 slides were reviewed by a jury of three. Artists whose works passed this initial screening process, were then asked to send the works themselves. From this selection process a show of 279 works (213 paintings and 66 pieces of sculpture) was assembled. In contrast, AIC's *65th Annual* was chosen largely by A. James Speier making his debut as curator of 20th century art. Called the "Institute's most sparkling conversation piece," in a season with "an unremitting string of important and frequently concurrent events," the show had been reduced to fifty-seven artists whose works were of "absolute quality," clearly presented

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[45]All facts about the selection process and numbers involved from "Footnotes," *American Artist* 26 (March 1962): 6, 8.

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and a "coherent review of a number of tendencies that are primarily associated with New York abstraction."[46] Included was Brooks' *Haneve* of 1960 (fig. 123), a brilliant oil painting with an image of cascading deep red brushstrokes, that appeared almost tree-like against a blue-gold ground.

In January, too, the circulation of an exhibit prepared and supplied by the International Council of New York's Museum of Modern Art began throughout Latin America. Called *dibujos y acuarelas abstractos usa* [Abstract Sketches and Watercolors U.S.A.], it featured mainly small works by the twenty-eight artists included, and for Brooks, three untitled gouaches. The roster was composed chiefly of Abstract Expressionists, but included such diverse styles as the Neo-Plasticism of Burgoyne Diller and Proto-Pop of both Rauschenberg and Johns.

April again became a high spot of the year for Brooks' paintings were seen in three more shows simultaneously. *Artists of the Kootz Gallery* at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, conceived by museum director Kenneth Donahue, was the second in a series devoted to showing works of artists represented by a preeminent urban art gallery. For students and native Floridians it

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[46]Franz Schulze, "Chicago," *ARTnews* 60, (February 1962): 48.

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recreated the experience of visiting the Kootz Gallery itself.

Kootz, one of the great supporters of contemporary art, was a man with an unusual spectrum of interests and abilities. Knowing his background and his yearning to find "new talent, intelligent invention," makes his relationship with Brooks more meaningful.[47] He was a playwright and author of several books on art, plus a number of mystery stories. He had been a silk converter and account executive in advertising. But his passion for art led him to open his first gallery in 1944 with William Baziotes and Robert Motherwell as his original protégés. He then became Picasso's representative in the United States, and later championed a host of both American and foreign artists. The show, though ostensibly a tribute to Kootz himself, in fact made available to students and other Floridians avant-garde artworks not otherwise accessible outside major art centers. Each artist was represented by a relevant statement, a short biography, and two works--in this case, the beautiful *Rodada*, 1961 and *Burwak*, 1962 (fig. 126). The latter Sam Hunter would subsequently describe as

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[47]Kenneth Donahue, "Foreword: The Kootz Gallery," *Bulletin* 1, (April 1962). Donahue describes Kootz in his early days as "...a prophet crying out, often bitterly, for Messiahs whose exact nature he didn't yet know."

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"…'oceanic' in [its] impact with strangely disturbing powers of ego-reduction."[48] It is a 6-foot square work with two monumental, translucent blue verticals against a dark ultramarine and black-crossed ground--grave, yet hopeful and saved from somberness by glowing red and red-orange strokes at its left and right framing members. "One rejoices," said Hunter, "in a few bright scraps of color…"

Another unconventional but interesting venue for Brooks' painting that summer was the *Art Since 1950* at the Seattle World's Fair 1962. Sam Hunter, in his capacity as director of the Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University, was charged with the selection of contemporary American works. He chose seventy-five paintings and thirty seven sculptures by eighty-seven artists working during the last decade. His European counterpart for art of the last two or three years was Willem Sandberg, Director of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam. There are few surprises in either section although an introductory essay by Hunter, beginning with the work of Pollock and moving on to his successors, does attempt to lay out the important directions in which art is moving. In particular, Hunter stressed the purifying influence of Rothko's, Newman's, and Still's art on the

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[48]Sam Hunter, *James Brooks,* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 17.

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generation coming to maturity while simultaneously drawing the viewer's attention to the vitality of the first and second generation Abstract Expressionists, with whom he classified Brooks. Press coverage of the exhibition was negligible in the art periodicals. *New York Times* critic John Canaday, notoriously unsympathetic to contemporary art as noted, enjoyed the Northwest Coast Indian Art and Oriental installation while proclaiming the contemporary section "more clamorously hollow than would normally have been expected."[49] Katherine Kuh covered it for the *Saturday Review* lamenting that this is "predominantly a fashionable report stressing The New York School and what Manhattan dealers are showing these days." She raised curatorial questions on several scores: the narrowness of Hunter's range of choices, the quality of works by even exceptional artists, etc. And she deplored the fact that the coming New York World's Fair of 1964, with far greater resources, planned no special American art exhibition on its premises.[50] At the fair's end *Art Since 1950* would travel

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[49]John Canaday, "Art: Preview of Seattle World's Fair," *New York Times*, 17 April 1962, p. 70.

[50]Katherine Kuh, "Rewards and Regrets at Seattle," *Saturday Review*, 26 May 1962, 25.

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first to the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, and then to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

There would be other shows this year, but among the more satisfying to the artist must have been the outcome of the one-man show scheduled by the Kootz Gallery for 25 October.[51] If Brooks had been well received up to this moment, his 1962 exhibition would be a triumph. Reviewers for both *ARTnews* and *Arts Magazine* were generous with their praise. We know only that *Garn* (fig. 127) was among the works shown, but one reviewer, G.B.S[wenson], concluded by saying,

> Brooks has shown a talent and eloquence which have never been pedantic. His new work, so fresh and even surprising, testifies to the vigor of the New American Painting and to the spirit of this painter.[52]

The *Arts Magazine* reviewer agreed and observed,

> ...Brooks has developed a natural variety of sensory forms which sweep in from all sides of the canvas, plunging, weaving, and rolling toward or past each other. The intent is to minimize opacity and let the color breathe even as it forms fairly definite shapes.

He noted what he perceived as a past difficulty with black,

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[51]Brooks would be included in *Recent Acquisitions 1960-62* at the Walker Art Center from 29 April to 29 May, *Summer Selection* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, from July to September, and at *Guild Hall Collectors,* at Guild Hall, East Hampton, dates unknown.

[52]G. R. S[wenson], "Reviews and Previews," *ARTnews* 61, (November 1962),:10-11.

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continuing,

> Now he is more successful in making the entire surface "positive" because of his great mastery of color with no sacrifice of contrast.[53]

But perhaps his most meaningful review would have come the following month in *ARTnews* which, in reviewing the year's best one-man shows, picked the ten it considered outstanding and then, finding twenty more "so close to the top that they are really integral to it," added them. In making this list, Brooks was in good company. It included Robert Motherwell, Fairfield Porter, Alfred Leslie, James Rosenquist, and John Chamberlain, among others.[54]

Of still greater import--the highlight of his career so far--was the opening of his one-man retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art from 12 February 1963 to 17 March 1963. As early as September 1961, Brooks had received a note from John I.H.Baur, Associate Director of the Whitney saying, "We have all long admired your work and feel that it would be a notable addition to our program of one-man shows by living artists." The show was to be

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[53]This quotation and the previous one from S[idney] T[illim], "New York Exhibitions: In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 37, (December 1962): 50-51.

[54]T[homas] B. H[ess], "The Year's Best: 1962," *ARTnews* 61, (January 1963): 8.

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curated by Sam Hunter, a summer neighbor of the Brooks' for more than a decade, and someone who had selected Brooks' paintings for his past shows at the Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University and elsewhere. At this point two decisions were made. Hunter and "Jack" Baur (as he was known) would select the works together with the artist's help and advice. Also, after its stay at the Whitney Museum, it would travel to Brandeis, and then embark on a yearlong tour of other venues. The possibility of its traveling abroad was raised, but the Whitney until now had sent no exhibitions abroad.

As assembled, the exhibit consisted of 44 oil paintings, 7 gouaches, and 12 drawings. It was Hunter's decision to exclude any works earlier than 1947, the pivotal year in which Brooks turned to Cubism after his military service. Therefore, none of his earliest regionalist works, mural sketches, or wartime gouaches were shown here. And one sees in this decision a belief that the pull of Abstract Expressionism was still so strong, that works in prior, incompatible styles would have impeached the artist's standing as a member of the avant-garde. Though slightly favoring 1950s works in terms of numbers shown,

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the show was a well-selected sampling of major works from all periods.[55]

How was it received? For the general public, *Time* devoted a generous portion of three pages to covering the Whitney retrospective in an illustrated article entitled "As Art Leaves the Brush." *Time*, whose disdain for abstract art was common knowledge, treated both Brooks and his art in a fair, dignified, and informative way. Influenced perhaps by the breadth of his background, the reporter responsibly accounted for his defection from representation. He described him as "…swept into the new cult of abstract expressionism that was rocking the world in the postwar years," as if, indeed, personal choice and one's art world framework played no part in the sweeping. And continued. "…[he nevertheless] has managed to turn the style into something important and intensely personal."[56] There was a description, too, of both the man, "a tidy man with a soft, self-assured way of speaking…" and his painting,

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[55]Sam Hunter had been the curator of Pollock's first posthumous show at the Museum of Modern Art. The selection of works from different periods is similar.

[56]"As Paint Leaves the Brush," *Time*, 8 February 1963, 52-3. 55.

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> …His canvases have a flat quality that underscores his almost complete preoccupation with surface; the occasional effect of depth, as in his *Rasulas,* comes simultaneously with a consciousness of what lies on the plane of the canvas itself."[57]

And lest readers wondered should they attend the exhibition, this verdict would probably have reassured them. "Brooks is a sage man who does better than most in trying to articulate the sometimes manic-expressive business of abstract art."

Dorothy Adlow writing for *The Christian Science Monitor* defined for her readers the honor a retrospective at the Whitney Museum signifies. When an American artist is given one there, "he is being signalized with a certificate of merit." She reminded us how few achieve this honor accorded Brooks in his mid-fifties. Like the *Time* reporter, she went on to sketch the history of his career, filling in gaps left by the show, and then described particular works and the artist's relationship with the Abstract Expressionist movement. Her summary was especially significant:

> But in the end the pictures should and will speak for themselves, and many items in the Brooks repertoire are among the best in the repertoire of abstract expressionism.[58]

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[57]Ibid., 52-55.

[58]Dorothy Adlow, "Honor for a Vanguard Artist: Brooks Display at Whitney," *Christian Science Monitor,* 8 March 1963, p.4.

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Stuart Preston of *The New York Times* hedged his criticism. Noting that Brooks was "for the last 15 years …in the vanguard of non-objective art," he reported the earlier pictures "most ingratiating," but found the latest works "less immediately attractive, coarser, harsher and more blatantly preoccupied with the possibilities of paint-colors themselves." But optimistically he read this as a transitional phase--a phase of moving from one style to another.[59] It was a shrewd observation.

There were, in addition, innumerable reviews in the press as the show moved from city to city. Most found both artist and work praiseworthy. When we turn to the professional literature, we find a vast chasm between the reviews of such writers as Irving Sandler and Harvey Arnason, on the one hand, and Donald Judd, on the other. Sandler's article *James Brooks and the Abstract Inscape* proposes that the retrospective may well cause a re-evaluation of Brooks' stature among Abstract Expressionists precisely because the quiet, reticent nature of the work, not the man, has caused its richly deserved recognition to be delayed.[60] In

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[59]Stuart Preston, "Art: Works of Brooks," *New York Times,* 13 February 1963, p. 7.

[60]Irving Sandler, "James Brooks and the Abstract Inscape," *ARTnews* 61 (February 1963): 30-31, 61-63.

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discussing this with the author recently, Sandler said, "Brooks was a beautiful artist," and the fact that he had less acclaim than others, he attributed to his less aggressive, less dramatic imagery. Also, he spoke of the politics of the 1960s, when artists like Baziotes, Brooks, and Tomlin no longer received the kind of support from their colleagues that would have assured their places in history. The feeling of brotherhood and the existence of mutual support had diminished among members of the movement.[61]

Like Sandler, Arnason, an affirmed admirer of Brooks, interviewed the artist several times before writing. That he chose to write was unusual since he was now an officer of the Guggenheim Museum writing on a show originally at the Whitney and currently at the Poses Institute of Art at Brandeis. Deemed consequential, his essay was the lead article in the March issue of *Art International,* and indeed it had an ambitious program. It gave the background of the artist, described formal changes in the various periods of the artist's works, spoke of the artist's primary concerns. On the expressiveness of the work:

> Brooks' search during the last fifteen years has been for a total picture space in which no element, color,

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[61]Irving Sandler, Interview by author, 7 March 2000.

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> or sign dominates; there are rarely visual, naturalistic illusions or associations, even to the anthropomorphising of abstract color shapes. He seeks a quality of living and energetic totality, a solidity of forms which never destroy the picture surface but which maintain that surface in a state of vibrating tension. It is in the quality of life the expressive element resides, the painting as a living entity with its own cycle of conception and birth. The painting is complete when the painter feels it to have come alive, when emotions, needs, relationships which existed in his subconscious have merged in an organic unity on the canvas. Beyond this the spectator who is responsive to brilliant color, shifting spatial relations, rugged brush textures, and brittle linear movements can read into individual paintings innumerable separate associations of mood and emotion.[62]

In contrast to Stuart Preston's views, the works of the last two years, he saw as "characterized by an urge to greater monumentality and simplicity as well as the confidence which arises from the ever expanding plastic means." And he summed up by predicting that Brooks is "on the threshold of an entirely new vein of expressionism, one which would seem to encompass, distill, and clarify the major ideas of his career."[63] It was a sensitive, extremely perceptive notation, for near the chronological end of the exhibit was the painting *Lurry* of 1962 (fig.128) forecasting Brooks' future direction.

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[62]H. H. Arnason, "James Brooks," *Art International* VII, (25 March 1963): 17.

[63]Ibid., 19, 22.

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There is no radical break with the past here. Lights and darks are still balanced and pictorial space is as shallow, perhaps more shallow, than heretofore. But the shapes comprising the works are larger, with simpler, more defined contours. Paint, deprived of brushiness, is still beautifully nuanced allowing areas of relatively flat color to retain their subtlety and textural interest. Most important, the crisp, controlled, and cursive lines so characteristic of Brooks' earlier painting and lettering have returned to bridge the forms and direct the viewer's eye. In most cases they will remain an element of this later style. In a natural evolutionary process the painting has taken on an air of tranquility. And though, one suspects Brooks would be the first to deny it, his *Lurry,* among other works, moves closer to the Abstract Imagist definition.

But to return to criticism, the only truly negative voice came from Donald Judd who was then actively questioning the premises of his own art and searching for a new direction. Barbara Haskell's monograph on Judd considers the uncertainty of this period for the young artist.[64] Born in 1928, the art of his youthful period had been realism which he rejected because it was imitative. Maturing

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[64]Barbara Haskell, *Donald Judd* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1988).

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during the period of expressionism's dominance, he found expressionism inauthentic in its focus on the artist's subjectivity and his desire to communicate through metaphoric or metaphysical imagery. Seeking truth in art, he felt art must be factual and unambiguous, and he dedicated his efforts to producing such an art. His search was for an art that could say no more than its formal limitations permitted.[65] 1963 Was crucial in the search process for it was then he moved from painting to sculpture to avoid the illusionism that is most often a part of painting, and began to produce his primary objects later associated with Minimalism. The *angst* of his own dilemma surfaces in his criticism.

Judd initially asked how retrospectives of "uneven" artists should be presented, but did not fault the Whitney for their chronological approach to Brooks' oeuvre nor their particular choices of Brooks' works. He did note that nothing before 1947 is shown, and before considering the works made a summary judgment.

> In the fifties Brooks was always reviewed as the next artist to be sainted. His exhibition makes it clear that his work is not comparable to Pollock and De Kooning and others of the first rank, within themselves disparate.[66]

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[65]Ibid., 17.

[66]Donald Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 37

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He offhandedly complimented two works--*No. 41*–1949 and *No. 36*–1950--as "both nice paintings," noting their debt to Pollock, and later observed that Brooks would appear better if,

> "a majority of the paintings were from 1955, 1956 and 1957…. The paintings of this short period are Brooks's only claim to permanent third-ratedness, which is not so bad. They are good and reasonably unique works.[67]

He then cited *Ainlee* (1957), owned by the Metropolitan Museum and not in the exhibition, and *Karig* [sic](1956), in the collection of Walker Art Center, as respectively a "salient example," and a "pretty good one." After the prime years of the fifties, the work became for Judd "more spatial," "irresolute and thin," and showed "reversions to the obvious romanticism." Surprisingly he concluded, "This exhibition,[was] certainly deserved for the work until 1957 or so…," after which he listed the succeeding venues.

To put Judd's criticism in perspective, however, consider this. Brooks was not the only artist to be rated poorly by Judd. The previous March issue of *Arts Magazine* had carried his criticism of Kandinsky, of whom he wrote, "Kandinsky was not an artist of the first rank…" Judd found his work after 1921 "generally considered a

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(May-June 1963): 104-105.

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decline..." Ironically this was brought to the reader's attention by *Arts Magazine's* own correspondent in Germany, John Anthony Thwaites, writing to complain of the reactionary tendencies of its general critical staff, among whom he named not only Judd but also Hilton Kramer, Vivien Raynor and Sidney Tillim.[68]

The exhibition was still in progress when Baur sent Hunter a note praising his efforts and his catalogue. He added, "It appears you have been very successful, judging by attendance and stray compliments..." But Brooks had little time to reflect on the retrospective; in January James and Charlotte Brooks had enjoyed a short visit to Chicago where he had served on a jury for a show at the Art Institute; by late March they were on their way to Europe where Brooks would for three months be a "painter in residence" at the American Academy in Rome.

The process of becoming an artist-in-residence is vague; an invitation is apparently issued at the discretion of the Director of the American Academy in Rome who in 1963 was Richard A. Kimball. There are no established qualifications but the residencies are usually awarded to artists who have made a name for themselves in their own fields.

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[67]Ibid., 104

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At the time of Brooks' residency, the sculptor-in-residence was Walker Hancock, the composer-in-residence, Elliott C. Carter; the architect-in-residence, James M. Hunter; and the landscape architect-in-residence, Richard Webel. There were also a group of distinguished guests that included the art historian Howard Hibbard, painters Bernard Chaet (a former colleague from Yale Art School) and Alfred Blaustein, and a sculptor Gilbert A. Franklin. And we know from the *American Academy in Rome Annual Report, 1959-1964* that "Mr. Brooks quickly won the confidence and admiration of the five Fellows in painting" who were Marjorie Kreilick, A. Robert Birmelin, Robert J. Jergens, James J. Hennessey, and Ronald Schwerin. He himself did not keep a journal so we do not know his responsibilities toward the Fellows on a day by day basis. However, the journal kept by Charlotte Brooks relates something of their daily routine. And one can assume the intellectual climate was extremely stimulating.

They left New York on Saturday, 23 March aboard the ship *Saturnia* and arrived in Rome 5 April. It was a fairly long crossing because the ship first made port in Lisbon, Casablanca, Palermo, and finally in Naples where they

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[68]John Anthony Thwaites, "The Worst in *ARTS*: An Examination," *Arts Magazine* 38 (February 1964): 14-16.

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disembarked. Charlotte Brooks recorded their drive to Rome,

> Drove along Appian Way--lined with umbrella like pines --houses rubbed with ochre-burnt umber. Arrived Rome and academy about 4:00...We are on the highest hill in Rome.

And we share her excitement. Bernard Chaet came by to

> "drive them around to the Vatican and St. Peter's, the Spanish Steps, fountains by Bernini, Victor Emmanuel." statue, ruins and colleseum [sic]-moonlight, Spanish Steps...back at midnight thrilled and exhausted."[69]

It was not only the new scenery that pleased them. There were dear, old friends living in or passing through Rome. Besides the Chaets and Birmelins, the latter, a Brooks student at Yale, painter Charles Pollock, Jackson's brother, was there with his wife Sylvia, as were Conrad and Anita Marca-Relli, the painter Afro, and Giorgio and Linda Cavallon. With their closest friends nearby, Charlotte Brooks observed they might well have been in East Hampton. At the Academy they also met and were entertained by visiting luminaries, and of course, they partook of concerts and scholarly lectures the Academy made available. It seemed to have been a wonderfully vibrant moment in the lives of both Brookses. Jim Brooks, of course, advised the painting fellows who were his responsibility. But he also

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[69]Charlotte Brooks, 1963 Daybook, Collection of Charlotte Brooks, East Hampton, NY.

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had time to visit almost every corner of Rome and its environs, to tour much of Greece, and finally, upon departing, to stop in Spain long enough to visit the Prado and see the beloved works of Goya, Velasquez, and el Greco, as well as the Renaissance and Baroque Italian masters. Only occasionally did a misdirected tour guide cause them discomfort, as did one in Greece who followed them through a hallowed temple compound constantly demanding they hire him at larger and larger sums (fig. 129). And with each demand they grew more somber.

Indeed, Charlotte Brooks' daybook reads like a travel folder. Naturally, they made time to visit Ravenna, Venice, Perugia, as well as Assisi, Florence, Arrezzo, Sansepolcro--the places where Giotto, Cimabue, Masaccio, and Piero della Francesca had left murals Jim had admired since student days. Only at Padua, at the Scrovegni Chapel, were they disappointed to find it closed by the damage inflicted by a winter of bad weather. And too soon, did the residency end. By 12 July, they were home again in New York where they would quickly resume their normal schedules.

In fact, in the following days they were meeting once again with friends they had seen abroad---the Cavallons, Marca-Rellis, the Charles Pollocks, and William King--or

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friends who had remained home—the Kootzes, the Hunters, the Roueches, Tony Rosenthal, the Gottliebs, Ray and Denise Parker, the Ferrens, the Littles, the John Oppers, and Jeff Potter… Generally, the day was reserved for working; social life began with drinks before dinner. That was the time set aside for exchanging views and news, for welding a group of disparate people into an art community.

There would be a few less significant shows for the remainder of the year. Even while Jim and Charlotte Brooks traveled, the retrospective was on the move. For most of April, it would be shown at the Rose Museum at Brandeis, after which it would travel to the Walker Art center and be there from 1 September to 13 October, and from there on 1 November to 8 December it would move to the Washington Gallery of Modern Art. Finally, in 1964 it would be at the Art Galleries of the University of California at Los Angeles from 5 January to 9 February. Brooks would be away for several openings, but would attend the one in Washington. Charlotte noted,

> Went to opening after nine. Very nice, friendly, Good crowd. Paintings looked very good.[70]

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[70] Charlotte Brooks, 1963 Daybook.

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The next day, revisiting it she met museum staffer Adelyn Breeskin and artist Grace Hartigan, often considered a second generation Abstract Expressionist, with friends. She did not, however, record their conversations.

Lost, too, unfortunately, are many of the clippings of out of town reviews. But the two that exist from the Los Angeles exhibition are both interesting. Rosalind G. Wholen, correspondent for *Arts Magazine,* welcomed Brooks' exhibit for the "grace they [the works] contribute to New York painting," and continued,

> The opportunity to see works by a mature artist when he was in the process of assimilating others' knowledge, to the final resilience of Brooks' personal way of understanding form was particularly valuable for a university audience.

While Los Angeles Times Art Editor Henry J. Seldis told readers,

> To me, Brooks has always seemed the most lyrical and controlled among those New York painters who have been lumped together as abstract expressionists. An artist of sound training and great sensitivity, Brooks demonstrates a consistent concern with esthetic matters without inhibiting his urge for self-expression and self-exploration in the least.[71]

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[71]This quotation and the previous one are from the following sources respectively, Rosalind G. Wholden, "Paint and Fable," *Arts Magazine* 38, (March 1964): 41, and Henry J. Seldis, "Top Abstractionist's Paintings at UCLA," *Los Angeles Times,* 20 January 1964, sec. IV, p.10.

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And works would be shown in interesting (if less personally significant) shows that would take them further from home: to Panama and Mexico with the *Debujos y Acuareles USA* exhibit, and to the National College of Art in Dublin, for the *Irish Exhibition of Living Art 1963*. The latter, consisting of 150 works by living Irish artists had been given an international flavor by including works of twelve American artists.[72] Most importantly, these were intended to give young Irish artists, who would not otherwise have seen them, a sound idea of American developments in art.

There was yet another international show in which Jim took part that deserves mention--the *Dunn International*, shown in October in the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick and later in the Tate Gallery, London. Organized by author-curator John Richardson at the behest of Lady Beaverbrook in honor of her first husband Sir John Dunn, it presented about 100 paintings by those thought to be the world's most celebrated artists, an international group whose works ran "the whole gamut of modern painting," and "significant painters who have not always had their

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[72]The other eleven artists were Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Sam Francis, Adolph Gottlieb, Jasper Johns, Corrado Marco-Relli, Robert Motherwell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, and Mark Toby.

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due."[73] Not surprisingly most of the painters on the roster had already achieved fame. They ranged from Picasso to Sam Francis whose work *Round the Blues* was widely acclaimed.

During this time the Brooks continued their friendship with Musa and Phil Guston. Guston was moving away from the Abstract Expressionist style and seeking a new direction. To some extent this is paralleled by a search in Brooks' work. But as Guston's work darkens in both palette and mood, Brooks' works consolidate the stylistic changes already initiated and replace the virtuoso clusters of brushstrokes in works like *Rodado,* 1961 (fig. 121), by sharper-edged, simplified, and clarified forms of more massive proportions. This change is especially noticeable in the bold forms of *Burwak*, 1962, (fig.126). Often, too, the drama shifts from center canvas to the edges of the work. Beyond those edges, forms are generated that allow only a truncated portion of themselves to project and interact with others on the pictorial field. The sureness of their contours has been a hallmark of Brooks' style from his earliest work to the present.

The end of 1963 would not be as joyous as the earlier

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[73]Preston Stuart, "Fame and Promise," *New York Times,* 9 September 1963, sec. II, p. 23.

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year had been for the Brooks family. On 29 October, shortly after this 57th birthday, Jim Brooks would receive word of his mother's death, a source of personal mourning. On 22 November, not even a month later, Brooks as well as the nation at large would be transfixed at another death--that of President Kennedy. For the first time in Charlotte Brooks' daybooks, she mentions watching television. And although she has said conversationally that Brooks was not a political man, he was sufficiently moved by the event to paint *J.F.K.* (fig. 130), the second of his commemorative paintings which would be acquired by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts almost as the paint dried.[74]

Large and square, this work is unique in Brooks' work for the starkness of its color contrast and extreme flatness of its planes. Black and white--here a very grayed white--fashion the image and recall the frequent use of this palette by Motherwell, de Kooning and Kline, each for his own purposes. Here the grayed-white is pulled tautly across the black, seeming to cover with a textured veil both the darkness and an adjacent area of light. A fragment of torn newsprint interrupts their union. Though

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[74]It would be one of the works included between 30 April and 24 May 1964 in *Accessions and Proposals* at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1964).

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solemn in mood, the work's small poles of bright color and whiplash lines, act to relieve the mournfulness. But for Brooks, there would soon be a more personal loss. On 29 December, his friend Sande McCoy, Jackson Pollock's brother who been on Brooks' mural crew and who had earlier rented him the studio Pollock had recently vacated, died. The year which had begun so auspiciously drew to a sad close, but not before the indefatigable Sam Hunter mounted another exhibition—this, of the Rose Art Museum's Gevirtz-Mnuchin Collection of works which included Brooks' *Rodado,* 1961. Called *New Directions in American Art,* within the next year it would travel from Utica to New Orleans, Atlanta, Louisville, Bloomington, St. Louis, and Detroit. Four of the eight venues were in university museums, which more and more had been active in securing and showing works by eminent artists. That they were university museums reminds us that the generation of artists coming into their own were now or soon to be university trained--the first generation with such credentials. Hunter's introductory acknowledgment lays out his objectives in mounting the show:

> …that the show will provide a more complete, if far from comprehensive or exhaustive, anthology of contemporary creation, and illustrate some its principal

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> tendencies today, against the background of the work of the pioneering abstract expressionist generation.[75]

For probably the first time, Hunter's premise was defensive. While more open to competing styles, he still regarded the abstract expressionist generation as remaining steadfast to their original premises, as having no diminution of energy, and as still painting the finest works of their careers. His point of view, however, was increasingly challenged. Almost a year earlier, as the *28th Biennial Exhibition of American Art* had opened at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., Frank Getlein, writing for *Burlington Magazine,* had observed that,

> like other recent big shows in the field [this] demonstrates pitilessly the sky rocket fall of abstract expressionism as the one and only way to practice painting in America...The vast majority of abstract expressionist work is frankly and prettily decorative—and totally without significance.[76]

It was an argument destined to continue for several years to come.

Even as the argument progressed, surviving Abstract Expressionist artists remained active and had their works included in virtually all exhibitions surveying painting.

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[75]Sam Hunter, "Acknowledgements," *New Directions in American Painting,"* (Waltham: The Poses Art Institute of Fine Arts, Brandeis U., 1963).

[76]Frank Getlein, "Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions," *Burlington Magazine* CV, (March 1963): 141.

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Despite the accelerated search of the art press for a "new avant-garde" and the increasing attention accorded Pop, Assemblage, Minimalism, Happenings, and other emerging styles of art, 1964 would find this artist as busily engaged as previous years. Once again Brooks would participate in such omnibus events as the *159th Annual Exhibition…* of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts at the beginning of the year and at the *1964 Pittsburgh International* held by the Carnegie Institute near its end. *Obsol,* 1964, the work selected for the *International,* was praised by *Arts Magazine's* critic in his coverage of the artist's annual one-man show at Kootz. He wrote,

> There is a lot of Gottlieb in the very handsome work Brooks has in the Carnegie International, though the final effect is Brook's.[77]

It is a criticism to which we'll return shortly, but this was again a World's Fair year. By spring the debate over how and whether art would be shown at the fair was a matter of greater community consternation.

Some World's Fairs have central pavilions devoted to the art of many countries. The 1964 New York World's Fair did not initially. Though Robert Moses--New York State's famous Park Commissioner and President of the World's Fair

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[77]S[idney] T[illim], "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 39, (December 1964): 68.

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Corporation--would deny it, his disapproval of contemporary art (particularly if abstract), caused him to withhold approval of space until chance intervened. The backers of the Argentinean Pavilion, having run out of money, reneged leaving an empty building that various art groups were quick to appropriate. Originally the plan had been to have art works or small exhibitions scattered throughout the fair, usually as part of the display of a particular state or country.[78] There being no central pavilion planned at first, for the fair's duration New York City museums and galleries had felt the responsibility of planning special events for visitors. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art, The Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art all mounted such exhibits. Brooks' works were included in two of these. From 1 July to 13 September, *Dolamen* of 1958 was shown with *Van Gogh and Expressionism* at the Guggenheim, while from 24 June to 23 September, *Rasalus* of 1959 was

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[78]Italy showed the *Pietà* of Michelangelo from St.Peters, Spain showed a gamut ranging from old master paintings to contemporary works by Picasso, Dali, and Miró, the Egyptian and Chinese pavilions both showed notable works of art. New York State had two thematic exhibits—one for each year of the fair. The Skowhegan School of Painting and the Hall of Education Pavilion both sponsored modest exhibitions. "New York: The City and the Fair," *Arts Magazine* 38, (May-June 1964):54-57.

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seen with *Between the Fairs: 25 Years of American Art, 1939-1964* presented by the Whitney.

The former show was a pendant to one of the same name that had broken all attendance records between 1 April and 28 June, containing as it did 60 paintings and 60 drawings by Vincent Van Gogh.[79] As a follow-up Maurice Tuchman, then a research fellow and lecturer at the Guggenheim, planned an exhibit tracing the development of expressionism using the works of seven European artists ranging from Munch to Soutine, and to the American de Kooning. To do this he retained 33 of the Van Goghs to which he added 65 works of 28 other artists--both Pollock and Matisse besides Brooks--and presented an accompanying explanatory brochure.

Expressionism was also paid some attention at the Whitney Museum's Fair offering, but here it was one of a number of movements whose development and thrust John I. H. Baur explained and chronologically situated in an exhibit John Canaday was to praise extravagantly. The opening sentence of an equally agreeable review read,

> The Whitney Museum of American Art should be passing out cigars. After a protracted accouchement (25 years) it has brought forth a bright, bouncing beauty of a show called "Between the Fairs: American Art 1939-

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[79]According to news reports 276,000 attendees. "28 Artists Added to Van Gogh Show," *New York Times,* 1 July 1964, p. 38.

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1964."[80]

In the years reviewed, many of the movements favored representation over abstraction--a fact that probably contributed to Canaday's great joy. On Abstract Expressionism, Baur set down its influences and pioneers, and then observed.

> ...its vocabulary was significantly enlarged by a long list of exceptionally able painters: William Baziotes, Paul Burlin, James Brooks, Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Conrad Marca-Relli, Robert Motherwell, Kenzo Okada, Richard Pousette-Dart, Theodoros Stamos, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Jack Tworkov, and many others.[81]

Rasalus, from the museum's permanent collection as were many of the works, was reproduced in the catalogue in a full-page, four-color illustration. If this exhibit had a weakness it was the eccentricity of its choices. Rothko's work was not shown (possibly the artist's choice), nor were works by such artists as Ellsworth Kelly, Sam Francis, Morris Louis, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, all of whom by this date had established reputations. By its very nature, the thrust of this show was retrogressive rather than the other way round.

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[80]John Canaday, "Art: A Blessed Event at the Whitney," *New York Times,* 24 June 1964, p. 34.

[81]John I. H. Baur, "Introduction," *Between the Fairs, 25 Years of American Art, 1939-1964,"* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1964).

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But there were always other events that demanded the artist's time, and we know something of how he spent it. When at home, he maintained a fairly regular routine. Asked about it he replied to an interviewer,

> …the painting develops through the working through it so I start to work whether I am interested in working that day or not. And a habit has developed as it has with most painters, of going to the studio and just starting to work or looking at your work…and I find that if you can sit down and look at an uncompleted work that you are immune to it, so there's no bother about that. And that anything that happens that might complete the work or give it a real kick occurs as you're working on it, certainly not anything you've thought of in between work times…[82]

And since this is a time of stylistic change, hear, too, what the artist says about change.

> The…change that occurs in different periods is partly deliberate but it's also that as you work the forms don't satisfy you and you're--your usual way of working is that you erase things if they don't satisfy you. That's all. And then you're consciously searching but you're also unconsciously searching for a form that will satisfy you. You can do it sometimes…(or help yourself to do it) by changing your media a little or material you work on. Something that gives you some kind of a resistance, that slows you up, that creates new kinds of things, new kinds of images, new kinds of unforeseen things…[83]

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[82]James Brooks, interview by Gladys Shafran Kashdin, 8 March 1965, Sarasota, Florida, as quoted in Merrill C. Rueppel, curator, *James Brooks* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts), n.p.

[83]Ibid.

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Change is significant here because a reviewer--almost certainly Sidney Tillim--at Brooks' late October solo show at Kootz Gallery remarked on the change.[84] He sensed "An apparent effort to trim the billowing sail of his previous work," and catalogued the specific differences:

> …hardly as much roll to his unbroken masses
> …their edges are clipped without exactly becoming hard
> …stringy lines are loosely scattered through the pictures, accompanied occasionally by a Gottlieb kind of splotch or a semiconsciously gratuitous swatch.
> …structure is more important here than in *Obsol,* shown at the Carnegie International, where color took precedence.
> …more angularity to the masses which seem flatter than before
> …they do not breathe tonally and are shorn of Brooks's customary *élan*…

He closes by pronouncing them "transitional," suggesting an oeuvre at a time of change.[85] We can contrast this with the words of another reviewer covering the same show,

> It is remarkable how much variety Brooks has acquired in the range of his colors and their shapes--more than ever before…More important his [pictorial] depth runs parallel to a psychological depth in his color.[86]

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[84]The Kootz show ran from 20 October to 7 November 1964. Works shown included *Nerry, Ealand 2,* and *Cooba.*

[85]All above quoted characteristics from S[idney] T[illim],"In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 39 (December 1964): 68.

[86]N.E., "Views and Previews," *ARTnews* 63 (December 1964): 17.

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In looking at *Garn* earlier, we, too, had become aware of a shifting of emphases. Indeed, Tillim's observations—particularly those on masses and edges, angularity and flatness—seem well observed. Yet the implication of "stringy' lines implies random, unruly lines, which those by Brooks never are. Cursive and hairline-fine, purposefully they bind together different parts of the composition or act as a pathway for the viewer's eye to move from one part of the composition to another. If, as the reviewer notes, a similarity exists to Gottlieb's splotches, it is more by accident than by influence, although a close personal friendship existed between the two. Finally, where Tillim sees a lack of *élan,* and greater emphasis on construction than on color, your author sees a more sober mood often reflecting growth and maturity—but not altogether unrelated to the national mood. The aftermath of the Kennedy assassination still hung over the nation. Also in 1963, among other unsettling events, there were the March on Washington to demand equal rights for blacks and the poor; the impact of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* published the previous year; the demands of feminists for equality; and the buildup of military power in Vietnam, to name a few.

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As summer faded into autumn, there was a somewhat abrupt change of pace for the artist. We must ask if it was for Brooks alone, or for the larger art world. Likely both. During the following year, on the request of his friend Syd Solomon, Brooks would resume teaching, and be temporarily transplanted to Florida. The occasion was the staffing of the Fine Arts Institute of New College, a college as new in concept as its name signifies. While the student uprisings that characterized the mid-sixties were still in progress, this well-endowed and somewhat permissive school opened its doors in the fall of 1964. Its first class of 97 students sought a fine education with few of the customary school rules--euphemistically called 'expectations' here.[87] In a radical three-year plan, students who attended eleven-month sessions for three years, with annual two-week vacations in August and at Christmas, would earn their baccalaureate degrees. Seminars and tutorials were planned, and teachers as renowned as historian Arnold Toynbee would serve as visiting professors. The campus, including the mansion formerly belonging to circus owner Charles Ringling, was

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[87]A former student recalls the student body as the brightest, most independent students she had yet encountered. Sherry Berg, telephone interview by author, 24 August 2000.

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designed by architect I.M.Pei to be completed in a fifteen-year building program. Pei's eminence was matched by that of the Board of Trustees. A trustee of particular note here was Alfred Barr, Jr., Director of Collections for the Museum of Modern Art. The remaining Fine Arts faculty members were Conrad Marca-Relli and Balcomb Greene. All had originally been hired to share teaching assignments during the first year. However, their assignments would be extended and they would later be joined by others.

But the status of art had also changed as both art and non-art periodicals make us aware. James Mellow, outgoing Executive Editor of *Arts Magazine*, discussing the expanding link between the fine arts and the popular media--*Esquire, Newsweek*, etc.--warned us that with all the increased attention,

> …the art field may soon rival Hollywood, with the doings of the stars and starlets greeting us from our morning papers…while the industry itself proceeds along its course of phlegmatic decline.

The redeeming side, he observed, is that artists with stamina and minds of their own may find the field more open to their work than it has been for several years."[88] Sidney

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[88]James R. Mellow, "Editorial," *Arts Magazine* 39, (January 1963): p. 9.

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Tillim bemoaned the "cultural euphoria" in a similar way. Recognizing the tie of art with popular culture he said, "It isn't always easy these days to distinguish a protest [civil rights or the war in Vietnam] from a celebration."[89] Both writers were aware of the proliferation of styles of art but wary of this unexpected bounty.

For the public Harold Rosenberg reviewed the status of art in *Esquire*, as did an unidentified columnist at *Newsweek*.[90] Both agreed that New York was now the center of the art world, that art works had now become commodified, that there were a bewildering array of styles, and that no one--neither artists nor critics--really knew what style of work would be the next success. Rosenberg diagrammed cities in which art was important as well as their major collectors and museum and art school directors (fig.131). A central area called "centers of power" also named important museums and galleries. Kootz Gallery, of course, fell within that area as did artists he represented--Brooks among them. Columnists for major newspapers, radio, and TV reporting were also listed. Though both articles were

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[89]Sidney Tillim, "Art au Go-Go or, The Spirit of '65," *Arts Magazine* 39, (Sept.-Oct. 1965), p.38.

[90]Harold Rosenberg, "The Art Establishment," *Esquire*, January 1965, 43-46,114 and "Vanity Fair: The New York Art Scene," *Newsweek*, 4 January 1965, 54-59.

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droll; *Newsweek's* gives a better idea of the confusion concerning style.

> What's the word? Pop is chic, thus going out. Op is in. Hard edge? Doubtful. Abstract Expressionism? Big names in, the rest—out. And a nifty little revolution for sideshow purposes: "Object" art. Coming attractions: Kinetic art (bone up on the Poetry of Technology). The Word on the words? Commitment is out. So are Accident, Chance, Happening, and other deities. Alienation is still in, but badly shopworn. The big word is cool, which won out over Deadpan...[91]

Whatever the big word, there was developing on the gallery scene an indefinable coolness to Abstract Expressionist shows, though not to specific artists. Shows promoting this single style would no longer be savvy; expanding on a trend already under way by 1965, exhibitions of value would generally be a composite of many styles.

The year began with a flurry of excitement. Brooks flew first to Miami to attend the preview of the show of works of the Kootz Painters at the James David Gallery.[92] Barely had it previewed when he left for Dayton to serve on the jury of the Dayton Art Institute art show. Then back home. In February both Brookses would again take flight

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[91]"Vanity Fair: The New York Art Scene," 54.

[92]Though no written record exists, Charlotte Brooks believes this to be *Kootz Gallery Presents*.

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--this time to assume his academic role at New College. He would be welcomed by students in mid-February, and return to New York on 22 March. No notes tell us of experiences there. Charlotte Brooks recalls he did not have a studio outside the school but did what work he could relying on the school's facilities.[93] And his acceptance of a repeat contract the following year implies his happiness with the with the assignment. Even before his return to New York, his work was shown at the Krannert Art Museum of the University of Illinois. Allen Weller, who coordinated the exhibition, had been mounting such shows for a number of years. This, the twelfth in seventeen years, contained a wide range of work, acknowledged by Weller in his introductory remarks. He observed that there is an astonishing amount of work by *new* artists that one wants to see. But explaining his inclusion of such veterans as Brooks, Weller said that despite the show's receptivity to what is new, "good artists keep on being good, and we continue to want to see their most recent work."[94] Instead

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[93]Charlotte Park Brooks, interview by author, 24 August 2000.

[94]Weller reminds us that 34 artists chosen in 1963 are also in this exhibition; 20 artists in the show 10 years ago are again represented. Brooks had been in both. Allen S. Weller, "Circles, Men, and Others," *Contemporary*

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of defining styles, he classified the works according to the kind of symbols used--the circle being one of the earliest historically and anthropologically. He approached its variations: when "free-flowing," with "almost mandala-like forms," it appears quite different. "When it responds to change, when it is influenced by pressures or tensions or boundless space," "it may assume bold, rhythmic qualities, as in the paintings of James Brooks [here *Ealand,* 1963 (fig. 132)], or suggest swift intuitive upsurgings, as does Robert Motherwell, with his suggestion of planets and horizons."[95] Although this was a university exhibition, because of Weller's discriminating taste and interesting patterns of thought, the art community generally took notice of his shows, which often rated comment in the art press as this one did.[96]

Before the month was out, the Metropolitan Museum of Art mounted a huge exhibition of nearly 500 paintings for its historic *Three Centuries of American Art* show. From the museum's permanent collection, the curators chose all

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American Painting and Sculpture, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1965).

[95]Ibid.

[96]"Circles, Men and Others," *Arts Magazine* 39, (April 1965): 13-15.

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but thirty works for this show that covered the period from colonial times to the present. In conjunction with the exhibit, three important volumes on the museum's collection were published. Henry Geldzahler, author of the new *American Painting in the 20th Century* and associate curator whose responsibility included selection of works from the earliest 20th century on, chose Brooks' *Ainlee,* 1957 (fig. 133), purchased by the Metropolitan in the year painted. *Newsweek's* reporter, like Dore Ashton aware of significant gaps in the Met's modern collection, nevertheless called this "one of the highest quality modern American art shows ever seen anywhere."[97] Even more positive was Katherine Kuh, writing for the *Saturday Review.* She judged it "an informative, entertaining, and disarming experience," and concluded, "Rarely has such a dispassionate panorama of American painting been spread before our eyes, allowing us to judge our own heritage and compare it with parallel European developments." And she summed up,

> Lost are our naiveté and our robust simplicity; instead America is producing an art that parallels the complications of contemporary life. To be sure, the old vitality remains, added is a new violence, a new freedom, that makes this country's twentieth century painting at

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[97]"The Met Looks Homeward," *Newsweek,* 19 April 1965, 87. And Dore Ashton, "3 Centuries of American Painting," *Studio International* 170, (August 1965): 87.

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once a jarring and exhilarating encounter.[98]

Brooks recorded a celebratory dinner three days prior to the opening. Although he thought the dinner "very well done," he noted with disappointment, "not many painters there."[99] Unanticipated was the accolade for his contribution to the show from Southern Methodist alumnus Francis Murray not known to Jim. He wrote to the university's newspaper,

> I recently attended an exciting show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Three Centuries of American Painting."
>
> Included in the collection was a painting by James Brooks, who according to the catalog, was an art Major at SMU...He has an impressive list of credits, and I think he would be a good subject for a profile in THE MUSTANG.
>
> This is the type of person I like to read about in THE MUSTANG...[the SMU newspaper][100]

Before summer passed into autumn, Brooks became engaged in a project that demanded his complete attention. From the time that he and Charlotte Brooks had moved to the Springs, they each had individual studios. Hers was the shed that had been their guest house in Montauk--

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[98]Katherine Kuh, "The Nation's Past in Paint," *Saturday Review*, 24 April 1965: 40, 42.

[99]Charlotte Brooks, 1965 Daybook.

[100]Francis Murray, "Dear Mustang," LS, undated).

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transported here as the house had been, by barge--then renovated for its new role. His, the former Wainscott, NY Post Office, decommissioned and deserted, they had spotted one day in their local travels. Purchased from the government, it was moved to the spot by truck and readied for Brooks' use. That arrangement would change in 1965. The painter had long envisioned the precise kind of studio he needed for his work; finally it would be realized according to his instructions and under his supervision. In a wooded area where deer still munch on grass, a two-room studio took shape. The room into which one enters is large, high-ceilinged, and square with two banks of skylights running the length of the building. Besides cabinets holding lithographs and drawings, and shelves filled with the usual studio paraphernalia, there stand a number of easels. Several paintings--usually those awaiting study or shipment to an exhibition, or those needing attention--rest against the walls. A daybed stands nearby.

Adjacent to the front door is a second doorway. It leads to a smaller rectangular room with a worktable along its one long wall and storage racks against the other. Some of the works still in possession of Charlotte Park Brooks or the James and Charlotte Brooks Foundation are stored here. Next to the doorways are three or four huge

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wall panels that Jim designed to be lifted in suitable weather. A special screening offers insect protection while natural light fills the studio. As completed, this studio would serve Jim as long as he continued to paint.[101] Because of its convenience some time in the late 1960s he would give up his New York studio and confine his painting to East Hampton.

For reasons not known but unrelated to the building of the studio, this fall Jim did not have a one-man show at Kootz as he had formerly had. This was perhaps the choice of the gallery owner who had a major decision to make the following year. Instead, as an interesting "aside" to his painting, a project started a year earlier came to fruition and was published. It was initiated by writer Francine du Plessix, who considered good painters learned men who often had a deeper understanding of literature than poets and musicians had of paintings. She recognized and cited as precedent the close ties between painters and poets through the centuries. To encourage this tie, she wrote to twenty-two painters and asked them to choose a contemporary poem, and "to make for it a work in black and white, in the

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[101]A basement would later be excavated and an efficient heater added.

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medium of their own choice."[102] The results were published as a Poetry Portfolio in the October-November issue of *Art in America*. Poet Stanley Kunitz wrote the editorial which introduced his reflections on such collaborations. After defining *haiku,* a Japanese verse form which may have a sketch that serves as a companion piece, he spelled out the hoped for achievement of this venture.

> He [the Western artist creating the graphic element] must not only define the nature of this relationship to the poem and his understanding of it--not always a simple matter, given the complications and contradictions of the poetic voice--but he must also justify his tinkering with it. And what is most formidable among these challenges--he must invent a style of graphic translation that enables him to register his variable sense of the poem.[103]

In other words, Kunitz foresaw not the illustration of a verse but the "offering of a visual commentary..." Given the opportunity to make individual choices of poets, not surprisingly the painters most often opted for those with whom they were friendly or with whom they shared family ties. Du Plessix expressed sadness at the absense of Boris Pasternak, William Carlos Williams and T.S.Eliot among those chosen. But considering the closeness of their

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[102]Francine du Plessix, "Painters and Poets," *Art In America* 53, (October-November 1965): 24.

[103]Stanley Kunitz, "Editorial: The Sister Arts," *Art in America* 53, (October-November 1965): 23.

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relationship and mutual professional admiration, Brooks' choice of Kunitz and his poem *Among the Gods* might have been anticipated.[104] His choice was a tribute to the shared experience of creating and to the exalted status of creators—whether of text for Kunitz, or image for Brooks.

As an abstract painter, Brooks painted not the scene evoked, but something grander—the gritty texture of the words (fig. 134). Though this account has not discussed Brooks' drawing, he drew prodigiously. Yet the drawn lines here are not the cursive hairlines with undulating curves we have come to expect. Rough-edged, and "shaggy with gray lichen," they establish a site where new fruit of lasting sustenance will be borne. The words, "Among the gods," seem to float across a limitless space in which vertical marks in one direction engage contrasting marks in dialogue, and letters are both echoed and dispersed in the

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[104]The other pairs were Stephen Greene and Robert Lowell, Jasper Johns and Frank O'Hara, Jack Youngerman and Ezra Pound, Helen Frankenthaler and James Merrill, Ben Shahn and Alan Dugan, George Segal and Wallace Stevens, Barnett Newman and Howard Nemerov, Joseph Albers and Da Capo, Jim Dine and Allen Ginsberg, Edward Giobbi and Salvatore Quasimodo, Robert Motherwell and William Berkson, Philip Guston and Musa McKim, Paul Brach and Pierre Emmanuel, Loren MacIver and Lloyd Frankenberg, Theodoros Stamos and Robert Price, Robert Goodnough and Barbara Guest, Jimmy Ernst and Andrei Voznesensky, Paul Feeley and Lawrence Alloway, Grace Hartigan and Theordore Roethke, and Minoru Kawabata and Seiji Tsutsumi.

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forms below. Though more did not come of it, this was a challenging exercise for those participating.

At the year's end, in a change of pace, Brooks would participate in two more shows, both of which bridged the old and new years. He was once again represented in the *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Whitney Museum, and at a four-man exhibition at the Peale House Galleries of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The latter was apparently arranged with the Kootz Gallery which loaned all works. Those participating were Brooks, Hofmannn, Marca-Relli, and Soulages, each of whom showed three works. In spite of the change in critical taste to the less painterly styles of Newman, Louis, and Noland, three of those exhibiting were decidedly gestural while Marca-Relli had already arrived at his mature style in which collaged aluminum or canvas planes were also painted.

Still, this had been a good and profitable year. The artist was painting well, he was sustained by many close friends in the art community including Sam Hunter, Harold Rosenberg, and Harvey Arnason. Also, his teaching at New College with Conrad Marca-Relli, Syd Solomon, and Balcomb Greene had served to broaden his career. He had every reason to approach 1966 with optimism. For one thing, it

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opened well with an invitation to show at the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts' *One Hundred and Sixty-first Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture.*[105] Essentially a large, conservative show of almost 300 works and many juried prizes, the excitement in participating lay in having been among those "artists of such national reputation as to merit inclusion in a major exhibition without preliminary submission to jury action." Others were asked to submit slides of works, and only if approved were their works included. *Obsol* (fig. 122) was the work Brooks chose to show.

Yet 1966 would not be a happy year for the nation. The United States had over 400,000 troops in or near Vietnam, inextricably engaged in a war that refused to call itself a war. And the population, uneasy at first, soon grew rebellious. While there is no direct link with Brooks' painting, his palette had grown darker and his images more solemn, as did those of such colleagues as Guston.

Guston and Brooks, close personal friends, would be linked in another way this year, as well. Though assigned to different time slots, both would teach at the Fine Arts

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[105]Exhibition dates were 21 January through 1 March 1966.

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Institute of New College. Three veterans of last year's faculty--Syd Solomon, Jim Brooks, and Conrad Marca-Relli—would return. Philip Guston, whose work was concurrently seen in two major retrospectives, the Italian artist Afro, and the young, acclaimed American Larry Rivers would replace Balcomb Greene.[106] Guston's work was then on the cusp of a momentous change from his sensitive color usage and energetic painterliness to the elaborated and dark-spirited social dramas of his late career. Still the change was yet to come as the works shown in the New College art faculty exhibit testify (fig. 135). Called *Six Artists in Sarasota,* it was held in the Ringling Museum between 28 February and 17 April. Participating in the show was virtually the only Florida contact the two artists had that year, though they continued to see each other back in New York. Their intimacy, however, seems unrelated to formal changes that occur in their works.

As for teaching, Brooks had two other opportunities this same year to interact with students. Prior to arriving in Sarasota, he had taught for ten days at the Miami Beach Art Center, as well. And in the fall he would

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[106]*Philip Guston: Recent Paintings and Drawings* was at the Jewish Museum, New York and *Philip Guston: A Selected Retrospective Exhibition: 1945-1965* was at the Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA.

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be invited to teach painting at Queens College, part of the City University of New York system. In autumn, too, he was invited to be a juror along with sculptor Seymour Lipton and museum director Gordon Washburn in judging works by artists trained in upstate New York. Winners were to be exhibited at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery between 7 November and 11 December.

If out-of-studio events stimulated the artist and caused him pleasure, there were several sad events in this year. In February Hans Hofmann died, and in July came news of Frank O'Hara's tragic accidental death. While neither was an intimate friend they were both so much a part of the art scene, their losses caused universal sorrow as did the continuing conflict in Vietnam.

To protest the latter, Los Angeles artists had issued a statement and called for a symbolic structure that would draw universal attention to a conflict they considered illegal.[107] Designed by sculptor Mark di Suvero, and erected at the corner of La Cienega and Sunset Boulevards, it took the form of a steel tower beneath which, in

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[107]We artists today, each day, attempt to summon creative energy in an atmosphere polluted with the crisis and the moral decay that is the reality of the war in Vietnam. It is no longer possible to work in peace. Dore Ashton, "The Artist as Dissenter," *Studio International* 171 (March or April, 1966): 164.

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billboard fashion, all the 2′ x 2′ painted panels submitted by participating artists were fastened together. Though not an initiator of protest, Jim Brooks was sympathetic to the cause and quickly rushed a panel to signify his alliance (fig. 136).

Still another event became a source of major personal concern in 1966. On 31 March while visiting the Marca-Rellis Brooks learned that Sam Kootz wished to close his gallery--a wish he actually fulfilled on 9 April. "Running the gallery was more profitable than it ever had been in the past, but it just wasn't much fun anymore," he told Jay Jacobs.[108] The rumors of a bankruptcy were untrue, even ludicrous. Kootz complained "...it's too easy now... anything we hung—even if it had nothing to do with the kind of art we'd always stood for—would be snapped up indiscriminately just because we were showing it."[109] But for Brooks the following months were filled with uncertainty and inquiries--questioning friends, seeking assistance, trying to relocate. It was probably the first time in his career James Brooks had had to resolve this problem without recommendations from close associates. Though he was

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[108]Jay Jacobs, "New York Gallery Notes," *Art In America* 54, November-December 1966): 109.

[109]Ibid.

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reticent, it was accomplished. Sometime before the year's end, he would reach a tentative agreement with Martha Jackson that her gallery would henceforth show his work.

Perhaps exacerbated by the few months of anxiety, in mid-August Brooks' usually robust health suffered a decline. A short hospital visit provided the diagnosis of ulcers, and the complete rest recommended for several weeks was effective in restoring his vigor. Though his studio work was delayed, his exhibition schedule was unaffected. Beginning in early fall his paintings would first be shown at the Benson Gallery in Bridgehampton, along with sculptures by Ibram Lassaw and photos by Hans Namuth, and later in the Whitney Museum, the Albright-Knox, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Let's briefly review these venues.

The show at the Whitney Museum of American Art was special in that it marked that institution's major move from 54th Street to expanded quarters on Madison Avenue at 75th Street where a boldly cantilevered new concrete building had been designed by Marcel Breuer and Hamilton Smith. Small wonder the museum staff decided on a special celebratory show called *Art of the United States: 1670-1966*. Contrary to what was believed to be their usual mandate—that is, "art of our time"—the catalogue's intro-

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ductory passage explained that historic American art was also within the province of the museum which, prohibited by lack of space, it had formerly explored in a limited way. However, this Lloyd Goodrich-curated show was rich in works from colonial time until the present—almost 400 works—the oldest from the 17th century. For the catalogue essay Goodrich reedited a text, parts of which had already appeared in *Art In America* entitled "What is American About American Art?"[110] All significant painters and sculptors from Robert Feke in the mid-eighteenth century to Larry Poons in the late twentieth century shared the galleries. *Rasalus*, 1959, already in the Whitney permanent collection was the Brooks work shown. Public reaction to the exhibit exceeded expectations; Charlotte Brooks visiting it on opening day noted, "...there was a line turning the corner--found it [the show] quite impressive."[111]

With early autumn and the recovery of Brooks' health he resumed teaching again at Queens College. During this same period, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery showed a number of works that had been given them by Seymour Knox, President of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy between 1962 and 1965.

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[110]Lloyd Goodrich, "What is American About American Art?" *Art in America* 51 (August 1963): 24, 29-35, 38-39.

[111]Charlotte Brooks, 1966 Daybook, 28 September.

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Astute and generous, Knox built up by purchase and donation a contemporary collection that was literally unrivaled. It included objects by artists both here and abroad working in all styles and all media; Brooks' *Cooba,* a work of grand scale in which globes of reds and blacks float before a ground of vary-colored golds and whites, was illustrated in color in the exhibition catalogue (fig. 137).

In Charlotte Brooks' Daybooks, between notes of the many exhibitions visited, friends seen [Kenneth Snelson and family], and non-art activities undertaken [a walk in the woods], are hints of the day-to-day drama behind the seemingly placid surface of the artist's life. On 17 October, for example, Charlotte Brooks noted "Big fire in New York City. Adolph's [Gottlieb] studio completely demolished also Al Leslie's--all his work & film & clothes, etc."[112] Startled into conceiving the dimensions of this tragedy and powerless to help, it nonetheless provides insights into the precarious nature of artists' lives.

Between October and November, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston would show two more works of Brooks'--*Perraloo,* 1956 and *Pask,* 1961. They were in the collection of Susan Morse Hilles, a patron who had formerly studied art and who had decided in 1955 to buy only the works of living art-

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ists, a limitation that shaped her collection of 99 very varied works. She had, for example, works by Baziotes, Hofmann, Kline, Marca-Relli, Pousette-Dart, Reinhardt, and Stamos, but none by Newman, Rothko, or Still. Her choices of Brooks' works were stylistically divided: *Perraloo*, 1955, like several other works exhibited this year, reflects the artist's earlier style with energetic forms jostling for position. *Pask*, 1961, by contrast has a more relaxed and open ground with luminous white and red shapes defining the edges of the work (fig.138) Between them a golden form thrusts from left to center, and white streaks below dart toward the right edge where a thick blue and hairline yellow line meander vertically. As always the brushwork in both is vigorous. On 4th November the Brookses would drive to Boston to see the collection, which pleased them with the discriminating taste that had shaped it and its general high quality.

Only days later Brooks' one-man show opened at the Philadelphia Art Alliance. Unfortunately, little is known about it and inquiries have brought no response. Jim Brooks noted the reception which he attended was on 11 November although he does not record either the number of works shown nor their specific names. Charlotte Brooks'

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[112]Charlotte Brooks, 1966 Daybook, 17 October.

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diary does record the invitation to stay at the house of his former pupil and colleague from Yale, Neil Welliver, now often associated with the Photo-Realists. Welliver was, in fact, fond of Brooks to whom he believed he owed a debt of gratitude. In an interview he recalled coming to Yale to study with Albers, Burgoyne Diller, and Marca-Relli. There he met Jim Brooks "who stimulated …[his] interest in Pollock and de Kooning, and his painting moved off in an Expressionist idiom," though that would be only a way station in his stylistic evolution.[113] Broadening a pupil's scope without necessarily changing his personal style was one of James Brooks' pedagogical skills many former students remembered gratefully. Still here in Philadelphia the artist seemed disappointed in the reception the paintings received--believing the audience unenthusiastic about abstraction. Critical reviews that would supply details have not been found.

Later in November the Brookses flew to Sarasota to celebrate Thanksgiving weekend with close personal friends Syd Solomon and Conrad Marca-Relli, still at New College, and their wives. This gave them a brief chance to keep up with developments in each others' art and to see the new

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[113]Rackstraw Downs, Welliver's Travels, *ARTnews* 66 (November 1967): 36.

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gallery of Dorothy Blau's son, James David, later to represent Brooks in Florida. By Friday night they were home again, and back to daily routine. That routine included attending a reception on 6th December prior to the public opening two days later of *200 Years of Watercolor Painting in America* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The show *200 years…* was another omnibus exhibition with more than 300 paintings, or as *Arts Magazine's* reviewer reported "…more than it is possible to review (or even view) in any sort of detail." [114] It drew on both the Met's collection for more than 250 works dating back to colonial times, and 78 works supplied by the American Watercolor Society to mark its bicentennial. As did many shows the Met presented in the 1950s, this one had a conservative bent with one reviewer wishing that more Feiningers, de Koonings, or Motherwells might have been preferable to 17 Winslow Homers.[115] Conservatism did not extend to the medium, however. Tempera, gouache, and transparent watercolor were equally welcome. Brooks favored gouache, an opaque watercolor, for both its sharp definition and freedom of application--often using it for his smaller

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[114]C.T., "In the Museums," *Arts Magazine* 41 (February 1967): 54.

[115]Ibid., 55.

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works on paper. Here the works shown were *F*-1963, a gouache, ink, and tempera and *Untitled*, 1963, a gouache on paper. In the few columns devoted to the show only a limited number of artists earned mention, and then simply for being represented, or for being part of a group with a distinct direction. One or two alone drew praise for their individual accomplishments.[116] *200 Years…* would span the years 1966 and 1967--the latter, a year that would bring both joy and cause for reflection.

At sixty, James Brooks' age when the year began, he was still wholly absorbed in making art and painting vigorously. That would remain unchanged. In the months that followed, however, he would gradually relocate his activities. Until now he had maintained a studio in New York City. Soon he would transfer that activity to his more spacious, newly completed studio in East Hampton. Lovers of the pastoral life, Charlotte and Jim Brooks would spend more time in the country while still maintaining a pied-à-terre in the city. This city home was important when attending lectures and symposia, meeting city friends, greeting out-of-town callers, and as a retreat after a day

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[116]Specifically, Ogden Pleissner, a fellow war artist of Brooks', and Barse Miller. Herb Aach, "Insight Out," *Arts Magazine* 41, (February 1967): 66.

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of museum or gallery viewing. Still a major part of their future lives would be spent at the beloved eastern end of Long Island in a bucolic setting which promised closeness to nature and peace. As we shall see, it was in no way a retirement--but more a self-assigned reward for their hard work. It was above all a setting where future work could continue without the myriad intrusions of city life.

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CHAPTER 8

THE LURE OF THE EAST END: TO A SERENE, MORE PRIVATE WORK SPACE

(1967-1992)

This period in James Brooks' life, lasting longer than any we have yet considered, deserves closer study than it receives here. For, in moving his studio activities to The Springs, the artist had not meant to retreat from his customary routine. Nor had he in fact relinquished any of his former activities. As previously noted, Brooks' new accommodations were simply more convenient and comfortable for year round use than his city studio. And he was at a stage of life when both those qualities held great appeal. A further attraction was the natural beauty of the Hamptons themselves, of which The Springs was a part.[1]

Since the late 19th century artists had been drawn to this series of small communities at the eastern end of Long Island for their scenic beauty, their informal approach to

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[1]The Springs lies close to both East Hampton and Amagansett villages, but is a separate hamlet within the township of East Hampton.

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the rigors of daily living, but especially for the quality of clear, bright light enjoyed by those living near the shore. If these villages started as a series of summer resorts to which artists came seasonally, that changed about the time that Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner moved to East Hampton in November 1945. There began an influx of year-round artist-residents drawn by the various neighborhood attractions. Economical living was one; privacy and peaceful working conditions were others. And because it enticed so many artists, the Hamptons as an entity developed as an art community--with clubs, discussion groups, galleries, and at least two accredited museums--the Parrish in Southampton and Guild Hall in East Hampton. During the winter, those for whom it was a summer resort disappeared leaving it to the local tradespeople, professionals, and artists. Most of the latter were solvent if not rich, and mobile enough to travel from time to time. Among them were Lee Krasner, the Jimmy Ernsts, Balcomb Greenes, Ibram Lassaws, Hans Namuths, John Ferrens, and Adolph Gottliebs, all close friends of James and Charlotte Brooks. Others like Elaine and Willem de Kooning, or May and Harold Rosenberg they saw socially if less frequently. Their lives intersected at informal dinners, community

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meals where each brought a dish, but also at committee meetings and local gallery and museum gatherings. A jitney and commuter train made it convenient for them to travel the two hours to New York and return in a day, if necessary. And if the Brookses most often spent midweek in the city, the studio in the Hamptons was nevertheless a distinct source of comfort. Most of the shows in which Brooks' works were shown were still significant. Happily, the days were full.

A typical year would include some of the following activities. Beginning in January of 1967, for example, Brooks taught at Queens College of City University once each week. We know, too, that he and Charlotte Brooks continued to frequent gallery and museum openings. She has noted visits to the following shows in the first few months of the year: to exhibitions of Robert Birmelin, Yves Klein, Franz Kline, Alfonso Ossorio, Louis Nevelson, Morris Lewis [sic], Sam Francis, and others. We can assume such visits were part of their usual routine. In mid-March, Brooks had received a most welcome letter from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. It notified him that he had

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been awarded the "Fellowship that you requested."[2] It took the form of a $10,000 award given for "creative painting," although he had requested the funds for travel abroad and for studying works of art in foreign museums and collections. Then in April, there was an event the Brookses could not miss out of respect and devotion to the artist shown: a large Pollock retrospective that opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It briefly reunited them with Pollock's brother Jay and his wife Arloie, and friend Reuben Kadish. Also, in early April, Brooks flew to Cleveland with Noguchi for a two-day session of jurying a show. On 11 April, he flew to Miami, attended an opening in James David's Gallery in which his works were on view, went on to Sarasota the following day to teach for several weeks at New College and to see the new contemporary wing of the Ringling Museum nearby. On 30 April, he was home again, resuming his responsibilities as a painter. He attended at least two meetings of the Club, and in June he met with Martha Jackson who vacillated about setting the

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[2]Unsigned correspondent to James D. Brooks, LS, 15 March 1967. Archives of J.S.Guggenheim Foundation, New York City. It was his second request. The first had been upon his return from army service.

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date for his next show.[3] All during this year he would have works shown in various group exhibitions. Like those of most Abstract Expressionist colleagues, his works (however admirable) were no longer hot news.[4] If he and the others continued to paint as expressionists, in homage they were given retrospectives. But they were shown as a group mainly when the curator intended to provide an historic perspective. However, it was health--not the state of art --that would temporarily slow his activities in July. Complaining of stomach pains, he was hospitalized long enough to have a gangrenous appendix removed. And before he left the hospital an eye infection robbed him of several weeks of productivity. All this would temporarily deprive him of his regular hours of studio work, and his evening socializing with friends in the community.

But to return to exhibitions, in October Brooks' work was a part of a unique extended exhibition. Max and Jeanne Wasserman, long private collectors and builders of a luxury apartment house at 180 Beacon Street, Boston, embarked on an idealistic project. Aided by a Selection Committee that

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[3]His notes record two Club meetings in March: one with Ray Parker moderating a panel, another with Fay Lansner also moderating. Subjects of panels not given Charlotte Brooks, 1967 Daybook, 3 March and 10 March.

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included Dorothy Miller, H. Harvard Arnason, among others, and chaired by Sam Hunter, they gathered an art collection of museum quality and displayed it in all public areas of the apartment complex. As Hunter described it, represented in the collection were,

> ...many of the more recent international reputations of the postwar period...The collection places primary emphasis on the significant changes in art of the past decade...[5]

For the lobby of the building and viewable both from inside and out, they chose Brooks' *Triptych,* 1952, a work unique in the artist's oeuvre for its flexibility of arrangement. (As previously noted, the artist did not designate top or bottom of these panels; each is compatible with its neighbors as long as it is vertically oriented.) Art luminaries attended the opening, and the *Sunday Herald Traveler* devoted several pages to its coverage (fig. 139).[6] Jim and Charlotte Brooks traveled north for this exceptional opening.

Finally, in mid-December 1967, the Whitney Museum *Annual of Contemporary Painting* was once again held.

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[4]Gorky, Kline, and Pollock were already dead.

[5]Sam Hunter, *The 180 Beacon Collection of Contemporary Art* (Boston: 180 Corporation, 1967).

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Invited to submit a work for this venue the artist chose to show a large, new work *Erelon,* 1967 (fig. 140), likely acquired by the Chase Manhattan Bank collection even before this showing.[7] Rarely had he shown so recent a painting before. Here blues in myriad light/dark values, pure or violet-toned hues, are both the ground and the larger rugged form superimposed on it. Moving in from the periphery to engage each other are several black shapes. They hover, palpitating—recalling two fighters taking each other's measure. The smaller has finely detailed contours. Those of the larger are simpler, more flowing, suggestive of equine form. At top left and lower right, again in contrasting sizes, are white areas--brushed, mottled, or so thinly drawn across the surface as to form an ice-like sheet revealing the dark ground beneath. Limited in its number of hues, limited, too, in its vocabulary of shapes, and so beautifully balanced, this work shows Brooks at his very best, exploiting his every strength. Truly a superb

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[6]Caron Le Brun, "Art Where You Live," *Sunday Herald Traveler,* 29 October 1967, pp. 26-28.

[7]For *Erelon's* Chase acquisition, a date prior to the Whitney show was suggested to the author during a telephone inquiry to Carol DeVito, Chase Art Program, on 17 November 2000. It may have been the "good sized" painting he learned was acquired by Chase. Charlotte Brooks, 1967 Daybook, 9 November.

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canvas, as were many of the late works, and one that would win praise from as far away as Kansas City.[8]

By the year's end, Martha Jackson had at last scheduled a show for February 1968. This coming year would not, however, be a happy one for the country. The U.S. was inextricably engaged in what many Americans thought to be an illegal war. Between those who believed it a just cause, the hawks, and those who resisted its enlargement and found it immoral, the doves, there was sufficient tension to divide the country. A counter culture developed that challenged every tradition in American middle class life. On 30 January the Tet Offensive took place which brought the United States to seek an end to war. Additionally, on 4 April and 6 June respectively, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy died at the hands of assassins. Though it did not affect art directly, the nation became fixated with television news coverage that in turn fostered such post-expressionist styles as Pop art and Happenings.

But let's return to the artist's activities. Brooks' solo show—his first in New York in four years—was held from

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[8]Joseph Kaye, "ABC's Adorn Painter's Canvas," *Kansas City Star,* 10 January 1968, p. 8D.

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3 February to 2 March 1968. Among the works shown were *Diston, Cullodon, Kantry,* and *Noran* (fig. 141), most of 1967. Observing them critics were largely enthusiastic. Natalie Edgar of *ARTnews* wrote of Brooks,

> …he brings with him his refined sensibility of color and space, developed through years of painting, and that lets him set free resonances of color within this new restricted environment…[9]

While Anita Feldman of Arts Magazine noted,

> …the show as a whole conveys a sense of conviction, technical resourcefulness, and emotional intensity[10]

And Grace Glueck of *The New York Times* added,

> In view of all the cool work about, it's refreshing to see again in Mr. Brook's canvases those dear old traces of the painter's "hand"—his droppings and splotchings, and even the hairs from his brush.[11]

In truth, there do not seem to be marked iconographic differences between this group of works and those of the

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[9]N[atalie] E[dgar], "Reviews and Previews," *ARTnews* 66, (February 1968): 10-11.

[10]A[nita] F[eldman], *Arts Magazine* 42 (March 1968): 62.

[11]Grace Glueck, "Art: 'Wandering Rocks'," *New York Times,* 10 February 1968,p. 28. Her reference to "cool work" comes from Irving Sandler's description of 1960s art as "The New Cool-Art," *Art In America* 53 (Feb. 1965): 96-101. Elsewhere he differentiated, saying, "Instead of the hot, dirty, handmade, direct-from-the-self look of the fifties art, sixties art looked cool, clean, mechanistic and distanced from the self. Sandler, *American Art of the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 60.

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few years preceding. *Noran* preserves the impression of movement, even aggressiveness, noted earlier while *Erelon* is slower paced, more tranquil. The change the artist made was technical--he had begun to paint with acrylics: they allowed him flexibility with no loss of options and were faster drying. For a painter whose surfaces are rich, dense, and usually layered, this was an advantage. Black--a reflection of his love of Miró's painting--and white were often starting points of a work, although ultramarine was so much a favorite at this time that painter Tracy Harris has been heard to call it "Brooks blue."[12] Photographs of these works are visual reminders of composition alone. In no way do they convey the tactile beauty of the work seen first hand, nor of the processes used to achieve the final surfaces: the dragging of a bead of paint across the surface, the scumbling and blotting. The sizes generally remain large--at least 4' in one dimension--and the images seem the result of large arm motions that endow them with grandeur.

Of the critics, only Rosalind Krauss sounded a sour note. Had she been independent rather than a member of

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[12]Tracy Harris in conversation with the author, 4 June 2001.

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Greenberg's coterie, her comments would have carried negligible weight. However, being young, self-assured, and having the authoritarian support of a guru, she spoke to her readers confidently, though inaccurately. And one wonders if such reporting does not diminish an artist's accomplishment in the eyes of his admirers. She said,

> The surfaces of the paintings...carry the imprint of Pop color and technique like an infection which has dried their skin and hardened it into rigid inexpressiveness.[13]

But are these the uninflected, commercial, primary and secondary colors of the usual Pop palette? As described by the critics above, they are rather,

> Layers of strong unhesitant color [that] seem to vie on the surface of the canvas for domination...each color enhances and gives force to each other color.[14]

or,

> ...lush glazes of clear vivid color [that] create forms which seem to tremble with movement and light...[15]

Finally,

> ...a celebration of subtle color harmonies on a clearly higher note than formerly evidenced.[16]

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[13]Rosalind Krauss, "New York," *Art Forum* 6 (April 1968): 58.

[14]Martin Lust, host, "The Critical People," a broadcast on WBAI-FM, 3 March 1958.

[15]Feldman, Ibid.

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Not surprisingly, the critics approach a consensus on color. Color, either shocking in contrast and intensity, or closely keyed and subdued, has been Brooks' forte from his earliest career. When he failed to find a specific hue, he mixed it meticulously from powdered pigments kept for the purpose. But her comparison was not Krauss' sole mistake. She was equally wrong on the relationship between Pop technique, requiring a flatly painted, impersonal surface, and Brooks' expressive brushwork. Finally, in accounting for the stylistic changes in his recent painting, Krauss recalled an interview in which Brooks had said, "I want more meaning for the whole." In searching to achieve it, she suggested he has looked at "[Ellsworth] Kelly's painting of the early 1960s where the distinction between figure and ground was negated by the propulsion of every shape to the surface of the canvas."[17] She failed to recognize that Brooks from 1948 on had maintained extremely shallow pictorial space. Moreover, Charlotte Brooks' Daybooks which meticulously record their gallery and museum visits as well as the names of artists whose works were of

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[16]Unsigned art critic, *New York Post*, 17 February 1968, p. 7.

[17]Krauss, Ibid.

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interest to them, do not substantiate this hypothesis. Kelly's name is not found in her records. Strongly affected by her own partisan ties, Krauss had wrongly attributed influence. Unlike Kelly, Brooks never bound his image to ground so relentlessly that illusionistic space was eliminated. Nor was Brooks ever influenced by those nominated by Clement Greenberg to establish the future direction of painting.

Other exhibitions of 1968 were largely out of the city--in Texas, Ohio, Washington, D.C., Miami, and in other regions of New York State. Brooks would enjoy a brief two-man show at Southampton College of Long Island University. Coordinated with the extremely popular, short-term summer workshops offered by the Fine Arts department, they gave promising students access to faculty members and exhibitors drawn from the ranks of distinguished artists in the neighboring art communities. Alfonso Ossorio was his co-exhibitor.

A rather bigger event was the trip the Brookses began in mid-August after his recovery. With both in sound health they now departed--not for Europe--but for the west. Brooks had been invited by Director Martin Friedman to jury

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a show at Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; that determined their first stop. Donald Judd was a co-juror, but if his earlier critical remarks aroused tension, it would have been quickly dissipated by the arduous jury duties and the intervening social events. At the end of two days, the Brookses flew to Portland to begin their first trek down the west coast together. Their unrestrained pleasure at the sights they encountered makes itself felt in the Daybook.[18] Brooks does not report having a sketch book with him, nor do we know the impact of this trip on his painting except that the light/dark contrasts of nature are always present in his work, as is the drama of interacting forms. On Friday, 23 August, they reached San Francisco. "Saw paintings," Charlotte Brooks records, "from *Looking Back '45-'62* at the San Francisco Art Museum...Good show—very interesting to see abstract express [sic] paintings again."[19] By 25 August they were on their way again after visiting the Muir woods. The variety of produce and

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[18]"We drove along the Columbia River gorge... It's really a magnificent sight... The sky was full of heavy, dark clouds, some very black and rain spit from time to time... Sun came out and in." Charlotte Brooks, 1968 Daybook, 17 August.

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flowers seems to have fascinated them as they headed for Monterey and Los Angeles. They found the California residence of Martha Jackson easily and were welcomed there and escorted on a sightseeing tour that included June Wayne's Tamarind lithographic workshop and spots where artists like Richard Diebenkorn would be found. On 29 August, the day after being guests of honor at a dinner party given by Jackson at which the guests watched the troubled Democratic convention in Chicago on TV, the Brookses flew home arriving just past midnight. On 18 September, Jim Brooks resumed teaching at Queens College.

One of the more interesting programs in which he participated during the fall and coming spring was *Critics Choice 1968-69,* jointly initiated by the New York State Council on the Arts and the Office of University-Wide Activities of the State University of New York. Sam Hunter, in October named Visiting Critic in the Visual Arts by the sponsors, was in charge of choosing both artists and students for the program. Three hundred of the latter, divided into small groups, would make scheduled studio visits to each of the ten artists during the year. They

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[19]Ibid. 23 August 1968. This is the first time either of the Brookses acknowledges that one now looks *back*

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observed them at work and had them accessible for all kinds of shoptalk, as well. After being exposed to a gamut of styles, students in the program were to visit the contemporary art collection of a major collector--in this case, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Schwartz. Finally, with Hunter moderating and some of the artists participating, a symposium called *New Directions in American Art* would be held to review their recent discoveries. Besides Brooks, the artists in the program were Frank Bowling, Chryssa, Allan D'Arcangelo, Helen Frankenthaler, Charles Hinman, Robert Indiana, Howard Kanowitz, Seymour Lipton, Larry Rivers, and Robert Smithson. From among their works, some would be selected for the *Critics Choice* exhibition, a significant element of the program scheduled to tour five New York State University campuses.[20] And for each artist, Hunter spelled out the characteristics that made him or her important to the project.

> For James Brooks the drama of contending forms is mediated by an instinctive reserve; his tempos are slowed and agitated surfaces subdued. The artist works in a low key, measuring out, as it seems, appropriate quan-

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to Abstract Expressionism.

[20]Jim's studio visits were on 2 and 3 December 1968, 10 and 11 February, and 24 and 25 March 1969. The campuses visited were at Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, New Paltz and Potsdam.

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> tities of dispersed marks, wipes, and stains, and then cunningly integrating them into an exquisitely modulated, coherent whole. His shapes are stretched and attenuated until they approach their break-point, we gain more time to experience their action and to empathize with these subtle shifts and adjustments. In *Methyr* [one work in the show] a tangled, overlapping variety of wide and thin pigment streaks activate a matte black ground with an effect of somber brilliance.[21]

Although Helen Frankenthaler was one of the artists recruited, Hunter overlooked Brooks' influence in her color-staining of the canvas, yet he did correctly credit her with influencing Kenneth Noland. Still, a Brooks interview conducted by April Kingsley in 1975 assures us that staining remained basic to this artist's process.[22] A description of his process follows.

> …it's very important to me to lay a canvas on the floor because I work largely with liquid paint, acrylics now mostly, and it's pretty thin when I start. Working this way the flow of the paint dictates a great deal of the start to me…

As an alternative, his canvas was at times prepared with a coat of black gesso or gel to ready it for receiving paint.[23]

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[21]Sam Hunter, "Introduction," *Critics Choice 1968-69,* (New York: New York State Council on the Arts, 1968), n.p.

[22] April Kinsley, "James Brooks, Critique and Conversation," *Arts Magazine* (April 1975):57.

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In early November, Brooks, persuaded by Harvey Arnason, joined the Century Association, a club that boasted a distinguished membership interested in promoting cultural aims.[24] With a roster of many well-known artists, there were regularly scheduled art exhibits. Brooks was still a new member when the *Exhibition of Sculpture and Oil Painting for Artist Members* opened. Even a partial list of those exhibiting assures us of their professional standing and degree of skill.[25] Awards would be presented to paintings deemed worthy by jurors like Harvey Arnason, James Thomas Flexner, or John Goldsmith, Jr.. Though a newcomer to the ranks, on 5 December Brooks was awarded the Art Committee Medal for a painting mistakenly called *Patchogue*, judged the best oil painting in a large show.[26]

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[23]"I try to do a simple thing in color, black and white, if possible, to start with, and go into more color when I'm forced to by the painting." Ibid.

[24]Prospective members were nominated by present members. Jonathan Harding of the Century Association, interview by author, telephone, 15 September 2000.

[25]Louis Bouche, Albert Christ-Janer, Ralston Crawford, and Robert Cronbach are names taken from an incomplete and unpublished list furnished by the Century Association. The show ran from 13 November 1968 to 4 January 1969.

[26]The name of the work was *Appaquoque*, 1967, according to Brooks' records.

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At the acceptance dinner, he would, perhaps for the first time, wear formal clothes--a club custom. And as 1968 yielded to 1969, some of Brooks' more important occasions would again be celebratory.

In January 1969 Richard Nixon had taken office as President, and preliminary peace talks had begun although troop withdrawals and war protests were still much a part of everyday life. Still by 1969 a cautious optimism was in the air, and for Brooks the first nine months of the year reflected that. By 10 January, his first Florida one-man show in three years opened at the Berenson Gallery in the Miami area. It included sixteen new works--both large acrylics and smaller gouache from 1960 to 1968. Since no catalogue exists, only one work is known from this show--*Ivaro*, 1968 (fig. 142). In a favorite compositional scheme of the later 1960s, the forms that originate beyond the perimeter, frame the edges of the canvas. Though more sparing in number, most forms are still grand in size. Here, two networks of delicate, trembling lines reach across the intervening spaces to confer on the image a dynamic unity.

As usual, there were openings to be attended and works to be seen. After gallery visits, close friends of

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those exhibiting would gather for drinks, dinner, or the exchange of art news. In February, a Helen Frankenthaler retrospective opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Hilton Kramer of the *New York Times* called the exhibition "genuinely illuminating," praising her accomplishment. He related what had become conventional litany by now: how she had adapted Pollock's drip technique to staining and then passed it on to the color abstractionists of the sixties. From this perspective, it seems difficult to understand how Brooks' innovative use of staining in the early fifties, reported in all pioneering books on Abstract Expressionism, should so completely have escaped the notice of both Frankenthaler or Kramer.[27] But the questionable origin of the technique did not go uncontested. On 4 May 1969, Lou Pollack, Director of the Peridot Gallery wrote to the Editor of the *Times* saying,

> Although several writers have recently attributed the origin of stain painting to Helen Frankenthaler, it is generally known that the first paintings in this method were exhibited by James Brooks in a group show at Peridot Gallery in November 1949, and subsequently in his first one-man exhibition in the same gallery in the spring of 1950.

In the interest of historical accuracy, this fact

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[27]For one such pioneering book, see Thomas Hess, *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), 140.

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should be established.[28]

It was testimony to Brooks' personality that, aware though he was of a claim made to the origin of staining on Frankenthaler's behalf, he could still admire her work without jealousy or rancor.

From March through May Brooks was painting well and his paintings were shown in a number of exhibits in and out of town. *Noran* and *Orrib*, of 1967 (fig. 143) were shown in *Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture from New York Galleries* at the Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts (now the Delaware Art Museum). The palette in both--a riot of pure bright primaries offset by white and velvety black--echoes a series of Miró paintings from 1938. *Self-Portrait II* (fig. 144) by the Spanish artist, one of Brooks' favorites, was shown in New York during March 1966.[29] It appears a likely influence.

Brooks chose to show *Gandoon* of 1966 in another show probing the scope of the decade's work. Sponsored by the

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[28]Louis Pollack, "Accuracy," *New York Times*, 4 May 1969, p.7. Four years later, William Seitz would reconfirm this attribution. See William Seitz, "Introduction," *American Art at Mid-Century 1*, exh. cat.(Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1973), 6.

[29]*Self-Portrait II* was auctioned by Parke-Bernet on 23 March 1966, and would have been on display prior to that.

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Art Association of Indianapolis, *Painting and Sculpture Today! 1969* united some hundred and fifty-four works in many of the sixties' styles. R.L.W., author of the catalogue "Introduction," whose full name is unknown, tried to isolate what was common to all. The following excerpt is insightful, if not specific to Brooks. He wrote,

> Much of the literally "new art" is a great deal more cerebral and conceptual in the demands it makes upon the viewer. Scale is becoming an important facet of these works. Our ability to create is of greater importance. Historically, the joining of an artist and viewer in the work is a concept which has been one of the central struggles in this century. Unlike the art of other times, art today strives to unite in a single moment the artist, the viewer and the *resultant* creation.[30]

That viewers are unwilling to accept this partnership, to probe meaning in an unrecognizable image or a work based on unconventional premises, may be one reason some artists have been less warmly received by the public than others. It is a topic to which we shall return. But some exhibitions were less serious. The *Mr. and Mrs. Painting and Sculpture Show* at the Alonzo Gallery from 13 May to 7 June introduced a lighter note. Here seven artists with artist spouses were each invited to submit a work--one goal

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[30]R.L.W.,"Introduction," *Painting and Sculpture Today-1969* (Indianapolis: Art Association of Indianapolis, 1969), 123.

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of the show being to ascertain if married couples shared themes in their works.[31] Not all did.

But we have said before this was an upbeat year. Partly that was due to two singular occasions for recognition--both originating with the Rockefeller family. The first, on 17 April was a single evening celebration hosted by David Rockefeller, Chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank, and his wife Margaret celebrating the 10th anniversary of the bank's art collection. The guests were largely the one hundred twenty-five painters and sculptors represented in the collection, their wives, and bank officers. Also present were the six advisory panelists who selected art for Chase's 80 metropolitan branches and 20 overseas branches: Director Perry T. Rathbone, of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, who addressed the guests, the omnipresent Alfred Barr, Jr. and Dorothy Miller, both of the Museum of Modern Art, Robert B. Hale of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, James J. Sweeney, Director, the Houston Museum of Fine arts, and Gordon Bunshaft, the architect.

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[31]Others participating were Joyce Weinstein and Stanley Boxer, Grace Borgenicht and Warren Brandt, Anne Arnold and Ernest Briggs, Andrée Golbin and Don David, Lynn Drexler and John Hultberg, and Jan and William McCartin.

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It was a grand enough affair that *The New York Times* devoted most of a page to it, and *Women's Wear Daily* gave it equally as much space with pictures of many of the guests (fig. 145). As for Brooks' work, Chase had purchased *R*-1953, the year the collection was instituted. By now historic, it had been seen in both *Twelve Americans* and *New American Painting,* captured a Logan medal at the Art Institute of Chicago's *62nd American Exhibition,* and was included in Brooks' Whitney Museum *Retrospective,* etc. Chase would continue to build its collection of Brooks' paintings until they had acquired six, still hanging in corporate offices, or exhibited as the occasion has demanded.[32]

The Nelson Rockefeller exhibitions that followed outdid in size, diversity, and splendor the David Rockefeller/Chase Manhattan Bank celebration. Nelson, from childhood a lover of art, had amassed several collections divided in focus. Only the third concerns us here, although all three would be shown simultaneously that

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[32]Other works in the Chase Collection are *Embo, Erelon, Gananoque, Loring,* and *Ronsard.*

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summer at different museums.[33] On 28 May, one opened at the Museum of Modern Art--*Twentieth-Century Art from the Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller Collection*. It included the largest and most comprehensive display of the collector's American and European artworks up to that time. (Two days earlier a black tie dinner at the St. Regis roof had been given to mark these events.) Not only did this group of works include fabled treasures from abroad--that is, examples of Cubist, Fauvist, Futurist, and Pan American painting and sculpture--but in the area of domestic art--Abstract Expressionism, for example--which was a personal preference of Rockefeller's, this array was virtually unexcelled.

Rockefeller purchased works by Pollock as early as 1950, and from Brooks he acquired the commemorative work called *Jackson* discussed above. Charlotte Brooks recalled that Rockefeller visited the artist's studio personally to select a work. The importance of this exhibit can be judged both by its book-length catalogue whose text was written by William Lieberman, and by the amount of space

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[33]On 10 May, the *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the America's* opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art where it occupied seventeen rooms. *The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection of Mexican Folk Art* opened at the Museum of Primitive Art on 18 May.

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devoted to it in the popular and trade press.[34] While some of his brother's advisors also advised Nelson Rockefeller, those closest to him agreed that the majority of his choices were made intuitively, based on his highly developed taste. Naturally, the collection was rigorously pruned for this showing. From fifteen hundred works, only "a hundred paintings and as many sculptures and constructions, together with a number of watercolors and drawings," were selected. Brooks, of course, was accustomed to having work in major exhibits. But with all its fanfare, being represented here must have brought the artist special pleasure. The balance of the year would be more difficult.

Even while this show continued, the Museum of Modern Art introduced another important show on 18 June--*The New American Painting and Sculpture: the First Generation*. A decade earlier the Museum had held the now famous *New American Painting* exhibition that spread the doctrine of Abstract Expressionism abroad as it toured eight European

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[34]The catalogue was *Twentieth Century Art from the Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller Collection* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1969). Other coverage was, James R. Mellow, "Rocky as a Collector," *New York Times,* 19 May 1969, Sec. IV, pp. 34-37,40,43,46,48,53-54, 56, 58. And

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countries before being shown in New York. However, in adding the "first generation" to its name, the curators had left room to broaden the show to include works of a number of artists not in the first show. They had two reasons to do so: because in the ten years since the first exhibition other artists of promise had come to the fore and curators felt they now deserved recognition, and then because curators themselves had changed and brought into play new standards of critical judgment and taste. Also, the premise of the 1969 show was new: the museum for the first time opted to show works only from its permanent collection or promised to it, and for this purpose it had set aside a large space. *New American Painting: The First* Generation was to occupy that area. But because the permanent collection was weak, the museum was forced to be innovative in acquiring works. Requests therefore went out to artists and donors to give or loan works. Though never verified, the possibility exists that such solicitations skewed the choices of works. Some artists who had been represented by several works in the first show were here reduced to fewer paintings, as Brooks was. (He had one work instead of

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Barbara Gold, "Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection: 'Modern Works at Moma," *Arts Magazine* 43, (May 1969): 28-31.

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five.) Still others were added who bore no relationship to New American painting and sculpture. Although Dorothy Miller was still Senior curator, Co-Curator William Rubin of the Department of Painting and Sculpture chose the 157 paintings and installed the show. As a member of Clement Greenberg's circle, his taste would shape a radically different view of the state of painting. William C. Agee, an Associate Curator, chose the sculpture none of which had been included in the earlier show.

Of the painters, fifteen of the original remained: Baziotes, Brooks, Gorky, Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, de Kooning, Motherwell, Newman, Pollock, Rothko, Stamos, Still, Tomlin, and Tworkov. Nineteen were added: Bearden, Cavallon, Goodnough, Grippe, Hofmann, Krasner, Liberman, Louis, Marca-Relli, Marsicano, McNeil, Ossorio, Pousette-Dart, Reinhardt, Resnick, Sills, Twardowicz, Vicente, and Yunkers. Only two were entirely omitted, and they were Francis and Hartigan. *Qualm*, 1954, given to the museum by Mrs. Bliss Parkinson in 1956, was the sole Brooks work shown here.[35] But whether one or more gifted works were

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[35]MOMA now owns 6 works by Brooks: three paintings, and three prints, all but two acquired subsequent to this exhibition.

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requested of the artist is unknown. Such gifts had indeed been solicited from other artists and that became the basis for a small scandal. In asking artists for gifts, the museum was accused of a "subtle form of blackmail" by the Art Workers Coalition. However, ensuing days brought disclaimers from the major artists that they had been pressured into giving works, and there the matter rested.[36] Still critic John Canaday was to muse,

> Anyone interested in taking a census, especially with a bone to pick, could no doubt find numerous over-representations and under-representations.[37]

For the major effort this exhibit represented, the integrity of the choices was undermined.

In early summer, the Brookses' equanimity would be further disturbed by a number of events. In mid-June, Jim Brooks missed the opening of *The First Generation…* because of severe cramping in his leg. A medical procedure performed earlier that year had caused a blood clot to form

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[36]Grace Glueck, "Modern Museum's Policy on Artists' Gifts Assailed," *New York Times,* 12 June 1969, p.50. Also, an answer: "Artist Defends Modern Museum in a Dispute Over Soliciting Art," *New York Times,* 13 June 1969, p. 40. The artist referred to is Barnett Newman; supporting him were Ferber, Gottlieb, Grippe, Guston, Lipton, Motherwell, Roszak, Rothko, and Mrs. Ad Reinhardt.

[37]John Canaday, "Museum of Modern Art Unveils Summer Show," *New York Times,* 18 June 1969, p. 30.

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in his leg, making it necessary for him to remain off his feet until late July. He could not stand, drive, nor swim. Then, too, on 4 July, Charlotte Brooks and he received a call from Tony Borgzinner of the Martha Jackson Gallery that the 62-year old gallery owner had been found dead in her Los Angeles swimming pool about 5:30 in the afternoon. Though Brooks' relationship with the gallery was secure since Martha's son David Anderson was there to continue it, this was nonetheless a great and unexpected loss to him. Some months later they would learn also of the untimely death of Lou Pollack, Director of the Peridot Gallery, who had early in his career given Jim his first solo shows, and who had recently written on his behalf to *The New York Times*.

However, there was little time for prolonged mourning. In April, the Archives of American Art had opened its New York office. The Archives, only fifteen years old at the time, had begun in Detroit for the purpose of documenting the art of the United States. Toward that end it collected and aimed to make available to researchers all relevant art data including letters, diaries, journals, newspaper stories, and photographic records. Brooks would spend part of the early fall putting his files in order and

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making them ready for the several autumn days Butler Coleman, New York area director, would visit to obtain them.

Also a disappointment as the sixties drew to a close was Brooks' omission from Henry Geldzahler's historic Metropolitan Museum show *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970,* which was meant to summarize the period. Young Geldzahler, recently appointed the museum's first Curator of Contemporary Art, assembled this massive exhibit as the opening event in the celebration of the museum's hundredth anniversary. For the sheer number and grandiosity of the works, it had seldom been equaled. Geldzahler, who hoped to give historical perspective to the thirty-year period in which New York attained preeminence in art on the world scene, selected some 410 largely large-scale art objects made by 43 artists. They ranged from precursors of Abstract Expressionism and members of the Abstract Expressionist movement itself to Pop artists, Minimalist sculptors, and color abstractionists (color-field painters). The criteria on which the artists were chosen, said Geldzahler, was,

> ...the extent to which their work has commanded critical attention or significantly *deflected* the course of

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recent art, (Emphasis added.)[38]

But even he conceded he had omitted "many artists of quality."[39] Grace Glueck, tongue in cheek, interviewed some of these "non-deflectors" among whom were Marca-Relli and Alex Katz. Said Marca-Relli,

> I think Geldzahler just hasn't followed New York painting and sculpture enough to make these decisions. It's perfectly OK to choose what you like, but if it's a personal show don't call it 'New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970.'

Katz reacted on a more visceral level, saying,

> I feel sore and sour. I don't think Henry's analysis is very thorough.[40]

And Barbara Goldsmith, art critic for *New York* magazine, found Geldzahler's choices idiosyncratic. She complained that the "deflector" criterion "sounds good," yet she faulted it for overlooking European predecessors in the work of chosen artists and valuing newness of styles above quality. Among her complaints is this,

Even in purely American terms, the "deflector"

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[38]Henry Geldzahler, "New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970," *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970* (New York: Dutton & Co. in Association with the Metropolitan Museum, 1969), 23.

[39]Henry Geldzahler, Ibid.,24.

[40]Marca-Relli's and Katz's comments are both quoted in Grace Glueck, "Deflecting Henry's Show," *New York Times*, 19 October 1969, sec. II, p. 28.

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> criterion is no good. James Brooks (excluded) was the first artist here to use stained canvases, an accomplishment often credited to Helen Frankenthaler (included)…[41]

Nevertheless, as Sandler had observed,

> Because it was at America's greatest museum, organized by the art world's most fashionable curator, and spanned three decades during which New York art was the most vital in the world, the forty-three artists included were taken to constitute a pantheon of American art.[42]

It was characteristic of Brooks that he would leave no hint of how Geldzahler's action affected him—even if Geldzahler himself made a pseudo-apology in his essay.[43] During his

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[41]Barbara Goldsmith, *New York,* 13 October 1969, 44,49.

[42]Sandler, *American Art of the 1960s,* 138.

[43]"At a later time, one might well look back to reconsider and reevaluate, to see different clusters and configurations of artists and movements. Many artists of quality have not been included in the exhibition. One thinks of the American Surrealism of William Baziotes and Theodore Stamos, the Abstract Expressionism of Richard Pousette-Dart, James Brooks, Jack Tworkov, Conrad Marca-Relli, Joan Mitchell, and Al Leslie; the abstractions of Rollin Crampton, Robert Goodnough, Jack Youngerman, Cy Twombly, Ray Parker, Al Held, and Friedel Dzubas; the Abstract Expressionist sculpture of Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, Theodore Roszak, Raoul Hague, and Reuben Nakian; the figuration of Larry Rivers and Alex Katz,; and the full Pop Art of Tom Wesselmann, Jim Dine, Marisol and Robert Indiana. All these artists will be reevaluated by each successive generation of artists, critics, museum men, collectors, and the general public in the process in which

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remaining years he would continue to produce paintings that would win critical praise and find his works in the most selective exhibits.

Two of these bracketing the decade's close were *Signals in the Sixties,* directed by James Johnson Sweeney in 1968 at the Honolulu [Hawaii] Academy of the Arts, and *American Artists of the Nineteen Sixties,* curated by H. H. Arnason as part of a centennial celebration for Boston University's School of Fine and Applied Art. Both "elder statesmen" of the museum profession, they had produced exhibitions ranked as "significant" venues.[44] Sweeney, more closely associated with the Guggenheim Museum, was invited to assemble *Signals in the Sixties* as a vehicle for examining the diversity of 1960s styles, and for overcoming the handicap Hawaii's distance from the mainland imposed on its artists and general population. Therefore, it was a two-part exhibit--with an Art Park outside the museum where young Hawaiians could display their works, while within was the work of celebrated mainland artists. In sketching the history of the past two decades, Sweeney cited a pattern of

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the history of taste merges indistinctly with the history of art." Geldzahler, 24.

[44]Sandler, American Art of the 1960s, 138.

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change in art beginning with Gorky, who moved from "respectful apprenticeship to an effort to find a personal idiom of expression." "Key to the initial liberation" he saw as "renewed regard for the unconscious as a source of suggestion which Surrealism had encouraged through its emphasis on automatism in drawing and painting."[45] This regard for the unconscious was, of course, the legacy on which Brooks built. And Sweeney classed Brooks with those artists whose work in the "sixties is enjoying the same or even greater vitality than it had in the earlier years and [is] making its effective contributions to the general impact of American art today."[46] Echoes of this comment would resound throughout the next two decades.

H.H. Arnason, also invited to survey the art scene in the 1970s, realized that he had personally created several end-of-decade exhibitions that served to map the course of the decades' artistic directions. Once again it was his job to do so. His untitled catalogue essay did not mention Brooks by name nor tell us why he chose his work. Instead,

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[45]Quotations in the last two sentences from James Johnson Sweeney, "Introduction," *Signals in the Sixties* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of the Arts, 1968),6.

[46]Ibid, 10.

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he looked back on the decade past and described its general configuration. He spent much time on the worth of Abstract Expressionism, and later on its outgrowth, color-field painting, with nods at other fruitful developments of the 1960s. The Brooks painting shown was *Oran*, 1969 (fig. 146), in which, the artist ironically moves toward the color-field camp--at least that camp as defined by Clement Greenberg.[47] It was he who specified the characteristics of the style: large, uninterrupted colors and shapes, 'the high keying as well as the lucidity of color...contrasts of pure hues rather than contrasts of light and dark… relatively anonymous execution.'[48] But for Brooks, this was only a brief detour. He could not long forsake the gestural brushwork or inventive paint textures for which he was known.

Such was the state of Brooks' career at the start of this new decade—the 1970s. Now at a stage of life when Rembrandt, Monet, Rothko, and de Kooning developed their "late styles," his painting style remained remarkably

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[47]H. H. Arnason, Untitled essay, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1970), 11.

[48]Clement Greenberg, as quoted by H.H.Arnason, Untitled essay, 11.

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consistent. If there are changes in style or technique, they evolve gradually rather than manifesting themselves as dramatic departures. The show of daring and brilliance in the use of color continues: the same sureness in balancing his elements; the same ability to imaginatively vary the application and thickness of paint with brush, stick, palette knife, or improvised tools. And quality remained high, as proven in a series of critical reviews of the last two decades.

The change that takes place in Brooks' career is this. His pace does not slacken, his triumphs continue. But the dimensions of his triumph change. In spite of the fact that his works will still be seen in group shows of major museums, after 1969 there is a decline in the number of groundbreaking shows in the great metropolitan centers in which his works are included.[49] The evolution of art styles makes this inevitable. Nevertheless Brooks had several highly successful exhibits during this time. The most noteworthy was *American Art at Mid-Century 1* at the

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[49]In fact, during the 1970s his works appeared in three Guggenheim exhibits, two each at the Whitney Museum and Corcoran Gallery, and one each in the National Gallery of Art, the Albright Knox Art Gallery, and the Brooklyn Museum.

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National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., from October 1973 to January 1974. A show to inaugurate a new series of exhibitions devoted to American art, it took shape under the guidance of William Seitz, author of the definitive text *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America*. Of the nineteen painters and four sculptors whose works were shown, Seitz wrote,

> …they were among the last true avant-gardeists: modernists who assserted new forms and concepts in the face of almost universal rejection and little possibility of wordly success.[50]

The Martha Jackson Gallery continued to represent Brooks until 1979. He had shows there in 1971, 1972, a major traveling show in 1975, a print show in 1976. The critics' voices document the success of these exhibitions.

Among the paintings the Martha Jackson Gallery showed in November 1971 were *Ivarin*, 1968 (fig. 147), *Ronsard*, 1969, and *Judy*, 1970, (fig.148). The earlier, *Ivarin*, is slightly larger than 4' square, a work with sweeping forms and overall stateliness in which the dynamism is controlled. *Judy* is by contrast a smaller work--slightly less than 3' square--with many rounded, petal-like forms capable

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[50]Seitz, *American Art at Mid-Century 1*, 5.

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of freer movement within the shallow depth Brooks creates for them. Surveying them, Harris Rosenstein gave the show serious consideration and wrote "Beyond Control," in which he recalled Brooks' statement of 1961,

> I would like a quieter painting, a painting that is dumber, less articulate, has fewer interesting parts. I want more meaning for the whole,[51]

Rosenstein then went on to say,

> At Brooks' current show at Martha Jackson gallery, he is at work at what he proposed, although allowing himself a range in manner from the stringently pared down to the considerably deliberative, conducive to the range of ideas and the balance of expression he keeps alive in his painting...[52]

Ivarin is the more deliberative work and *Judy*, of course, is less so. Rosenstein wants us aware of the scope of the process which he recognizes as difficult to control. He perceives the difficulty of courting accident by originating works in the depth the unconscious, and he uses these paintings to discuss the expressive range of the Brooks' oeuvre. It is in his conclusion, however, that he appears defensive regarding Brooks' overall place in the history of painting. In part, he writes,

Brooks is as truly an Abstract Expressionist as any of

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[51]Harris Rosenstein, "Beyond Control," *ARTNews* (February 1971): 49.

[52]Ibid.

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> his generation. A stereotype view of Abstract-Expressionism as more authentically the province of one kind of temperament than another is misleading.

He is perhaps first to weigh this issue.

On the other hand, Harold Rosenberg, a friend who has steadfastly maintained his critical distance, finally spoke of Brooks' accomplishments about this time. In discussing when an art movement is dead and whether John Canaday's complaint was true that "various modes of American art from Abstract Expressionism on have been 'hothouse' products..." designed for the delectation of various powerful people. Rosenberg retorted,

> An art mode, new or old, is for the creative mind essentially a point of beginning. Content is brought into being by the activity through which the artist translates the movement into himself. In such an appropriation, there is no difference between an ongoing movement and one that is finished.

He continued,

> For an artist such as Brooks, whose recent exhibition is the best I have seen of his paintings in twenty years, it is more rewarding to work in the Action-painting mode today than it was in 1950...At his gradualist pace, Brooks has gained the self-development that was the ultimate aim of Action painting. But whatever Action painting sets out to be, Brooks' exhibition demonstrates that in the terms established by it, it could be the inspirer of good painting.[53]

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[53]Harold Rosenberg, "The Art World: Shall these Bones Live?" *New Yorker,* 6 March 1971, 75-76.

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At an age approaching retirement, Brooks enjoyed criticism whose tenor would remain remarkably consistent through the years ahead. Time had gentled dissident critics, and made the virtues of Brooks' concepts and techniques more obvious. The honors that now accrued to them came in threes, as superstition dictates they will.

First, on 7 November 1972, Jim received a letter from Nancy Hanks of the National Endowment for the Arts notifying him he had been recommended for a Visual Arts Fellowship of $7500 to be used within the year for materials or living expenses. At that time, painters, sculptors, composers, and others who fell under the jurisdiction of the Endowment received grants on the basis of their colleagues' recommendations. They did not apply personally. During the Endowment's first five years, eighteen different disciplines were administered by them. For each, nominations of persons considered worthy grant recipients were received from the field. The final decision on grantees was made by upper echelon persons in the discipline.[54] The grant itself was presented to Brooks in 1973.

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[54]Michael Faubion, National Endowment for the Arts, telephone interview by author, 28 March 2001.

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Also, in January 1973, Brooks received an invitation to become a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the highest institute of cultural achievement in the U.S. The membership of this esteemed group has a fixed number. Members select, propose, and elect others in the arts and letters whom they feel are qualified to perpetuate the ideals of this group. Brooks' induction was on 16 May.

Finally, in January, Dorothy Miller called to say the government intended to restore the mural *Flight,* and requested some photos as guides. It was good news though nothing would come of it for almost a decade.

The best news for an artist--any artist of course--would be the prospect of a museum retrospective. Of these shows it has been said,

> There was no clearer sign of consensus support than a one person show in a major museum with art-world cachet...[55]

Brooks had enjoyed this honor in 1963 at the Whitney Museum. But that was not to be conclusive. During the penultimate decade of his career a number of museums extended invitations and produced highly successful overviews of various periods. In 1972 Merrill Rueppel of

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[55]Sandler, *American Art of the 1960s,* 139.

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the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts mounted a retrospective of Brooks works from his 1948 switch to abstraction to the most current ones.[56] He showed 76 works--fewer than a quarter of which predated 1960, yielding an excellent display of Brooks' achievement in the decade just ended. Rueppel produced a fine catalogue with color plates of many works, a catalogue essay, and quotations of statements Brooks had made about art. The artist, who came from New York to attend the opening, was given extensive press coverage plus the attention paid to a celebrity come home.

Then, in 1975, Elayne Varian, director of the Contemporary Wing of Finch College Museum of Art, collaborated with dealer David Anderson in simultaneously presenting a traveling retrospective of *Paintings 1952-1975* and *Works on Paper 1950-1975,* which opened at the Museum on 30 April, and *Paintings 1973-1975* showed at the Martha Jackson Gallery. The Finch show subsequently moved to Guild Hall in East Hampton, Flint [Michigan] Institute of Art, Grand Rapids Art Museum, and Cranbrook Academy of Art. The painting show, supplemented by paintings from 1967 to 1973, moved abroad to Lorenzelli Galleries in Milan and Bergamo.

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[56]This show ran from 9 May to 25 June 1972.

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In 1976, the Summit Museum of Art of Summit, N.J. would also have a *James Brooks Retrospective*. (This may well reflect the fact that Summit is the home of Ciba-Geigy, whose corporate art collection had been an important patron of the artist.) And in 1980, artist John Opper and Brooks would be given a joint exhibition of *Paintings of the Seventies* at the Montclair Art Museum.

Solo exhibitions sponsored by various galleries besides Martha Jackson's also continued--each stimulating new interest and bringing requests from a host of interviewers and photographers.[57] And curators of group exhibitions continued to request works. Often, at this later stage of Brooks' career, if the show was local he would help with curatorial duties--that is, choosing works in group shows and supervising hanging.

As for teaching, in 1970, he was still teaching one day a week at the University of Pennsylvania, an appointment he accepted only once briefly after 1972. It is a testament to his reputation as a teacher that he was

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[57]Besides his New York gallery, the following became dealers for him. In Miami, the Berenson Gallery; in Ft. Lauderdale, the Carone Gallery; in San Antonio, the S.G. Mathews Gallery; in Houston, the Robinson Gallery; in

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offered no fewer than nine teaching assignments--including a Distinguished Professorship at the University of Houston --in the following years. Of these he accepted only the one offered by Cooper Union where he also exhibited during 1975.

He was invited to jury shows frequently and to sit in on panels discussing the current state of art on several occasions. Some discussions were for public enlightenment --as was the panel discussion at Artist's Space, New York on 22 March 1975. Here the topic was, "Abstract Expressionism--Continuation or Transformation." Irving Sandler was the moderator, Ronald Bladen, James Brooks, Ed Clark, Bud Hopkins, and Jack Whitten, were the panelists. Other panels, like that at the home of architect Percival Goodman, were serious, private, and for professionals only. There the topic discussed was *Art of the Past and Present.*

Brooks was photographed at work in the studio by many photographers. Among them were Hans Namuth, Dorothy Beskind, Renata Ponsold, Timothy-Greenfield Sanders, a British Broadcasting Company crew, a crew from German radio, and the Japanese photographer Yuko Nü documenting

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Bridgehampton, the Benson Gallery; and in Water Mill, the Louise Himelfarb Gallery. The latter two are in New York.

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for his countrymen the American use of the product Liquidtex. But there was so much more to learn and do!

Brooks would return to printmaking--both screen printing and lithography--and become seriously involved in expanding its possibilities while working with Arnold Hoffmann, Jr. at his Screen Print Workshop nearby. He would later work with Dan Weldon transferring images to stone. His graphic skills became so highly developed he challenged them by producing a series of new lithographs like *Eastern* seen here (fig. 149). In the series *Variations,* he took twelve copies of an untitled lithograph originally from 1971, and in 1974, gave each individuality through the addition of collage, ink, gouache, or pencil. In 1975, the *Variations* series was briefly exhibited at Cooper Union, and later shown at the Gruenebaum Gallery. In the very same year a poster by Brooks, one of a series by well-known artists commissioned by Mobil Oil to celebrate the country's bicentennial, would be shown with the others at Pace Gallery in *America: The Third Century.* And in 1977, *A Selection of Prints by Hampton Artists,* at the Alex Rosenberg Gallery in New York, would include a lithograph by Brooks as would the Brooklyn Museum exhibition *Thirty Years of American Printmaking.*

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In 1979, he would once again find a need to change galleries. The Martha Jackson Gallery promised more than it could deliver. The Lerner-Hellman Gallery had shown interest in the artist's work, as had Tom Gruenebaum of the gallery bearing his name. Courted by the latter, Brooks then chose it to represent him for the next nine years. With the exception of three years during that period--1982, 1985, and 1987--he would annually have a solo exhibition, or one shared with a colleague whose work was congenial.

During the seventies, he would travel twice to California, several times to Florida, and for three weeks to France—this deferred and long anticipated trip made possible by the Guggenheim grant. If all this implies he painted less, the implication is misleading. Painting was still his most important, and virtually his daily, activity. It received unexpected approbation and support in 1978. He was approached then by Ivan Chermayeff, the celebrated graphic designer. Chermayeff, likely guided by Mobil Oil's executive head Raleigh Warner who greatly admired Brooks' work, had come to commission a pair of mural-sized paintings for the company's new corporate headquarters in Fairfax, VA. The challenge of such an assignment could not be refused. So it was in 1979, Brooks

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and his assistant Jim Boharn unrolled and sized large areas of canvas on the floor, making them ready to receive the paint for his ultimate pair of murals. Although the images were abstract, he made sketches for the client's approval--contrary to his usual working procedures. There was an odd symmetry to this. Almost simultaneously, in January 1979 he learned for the second time that the long-obliterated mural *Flight* at La Guardia was to be restored. Through the efforts of Geoffrey Arend, publisher/editor of *Air Cargo News* with offices in the Marine Terminal, it had been arranged. Alan Farancz and Denise Whitcheck, working competently and without publicity, were the restorers. And the $75,000 expense was jointly borne by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and two generous donors who split the remaining cost--Laurence Rockefeller and *Readers' Digest's* DeWitt Wallace. Great satisfaction for the artist doubtlessly accompanied *Flight's* rededication on 17 September 1980. Preserved or well-restored W.P.A. murals are a rarity; moreover, the subsequent press coverage would introduce it to a whole new generation.

That fall day would be unique. A limousine whisked Charlotte and James Brooks to the airport, where they were "overwhelmed by the number of people at [the] terminal."

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Mr. Arend and the donors were, of course, present, as were the Borough President of Queens, Mrs. La Guardia, Dorothy Miller of the Museum of Modern Art, and a large number of prestigious guests including Henry Geldzahler, who addressed the crowd and spoke, "surprisingly movingly about the mural..."[58] Brooks spoke, as well, recalling the climate of the W.P.A period and desirability of landmark status for such works. And,

> ...when Jim was introduced, everyone in the room stood up and clapped for a long time...[59]

If the plaque presented to him was a material symbol of the occasion, the unanticipated acclaim of the moment and the thrill of having the mural returned to a pristine state were the true rewards.

As the 1980s began, Brooks retained his youthful awareness and drive, and his paintings of this period continued to win critical accolades. However, in discussing the artist's career, it is useful to establish perspective--both personal perspective and perspective in the larger world. For the two or three previous years, Brooks had had two physical episodes requiring surgery,

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[58]Charlotte Park Brooks, 1980 Daybook, 17 December. "I think it was genuine," she added.

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though one was a quite ordinary hernia. If in the succeeding years, he and Charlotte Brooks continued their daily beach walks or bicycle rides which they found renewing, his health bore watching after the first few years of this decade. Nevertheless, Brooks continued to have an extremely demanding exhibition schedule—though with a difference, as noted.

The venues in which he was invited to exhibit were mainly distributed throughout the Hamptons or in university museums and galleries distributed around the country. Did he view this as a setback? One thinks not, but the state of the country, the state of the art world, and the Hampton's relationship to art are all pertinent here. On a national level, the country had survived those terrible seventies. By 1980 the Watergate scandal and disgrace of President Nixon were behind us. The Iranian hostage crisis endured by President Carter would be resolved almost immediately after Ronald Regan, a paternal presence, was inaugurated in January 1981. With no black clouds on the horizon, Americans breathed more easily and thrived. With money to be invested, art objects became desirable possessions. A whole group of new, youthful artists were

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[59]Charlotte Brooks, 1980 Daybook, 17 September.

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being offered shows in Soho galleries and gradually challenging even the most recognized artists of the seventies--Photo-Realists like Richard Estes and Chuck Close, for example, or New Image artists like Elizabeth Murray and Jennifer Bartlett. There were new art world interests: mainly a return to realism with an expressive bent called Neo-Expressionism. Not without talent, the artists who originated the style were for the most part in their thirties, young for the kind of success they would enjoy. Julian Schnabel, David Salle, and Eric Fishl were among them. Graffitti artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat drew equal attention and rivaled them for fame.

The Hamptons were a different story. Since Pollock had arrived they had attracted many first and second rank Abstract Expressionists who still resided there. Because of this, the area artists continued to treat the movement as *active* rather than as one superseded. The Long Island museums and independent galleries probed it for unexplored themes, using the works of local (though nationally known) artists to promote their theses. Therefore, even in the 1980s the works of Jim Brooks were in constant demand. He told an interviewer then that winter was the best time for

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painting since the summertime brought too many social events, and the spring was time to tend the garden. A new generation of writers would come to see and interview him—critics and writers like Ann Gibson, Carter Ratcliff, and Martica Sawin.

As the decade progressed, works on paper and collages often replaced the large painted works of former years. Group shows originated in the numerous small but high quality independent galleries; solo shows for Brooks were most often at Gruenebaum. In the 1980s, there were a series of new retrospectives, two deserving special mention. In 1983, the first was at the newly enlarged Portland Museum of Art of Portland, ME, and in 1988 another at the Heckscher Museum of Huntington, NY. Both are highly respected, moderately-sized venues. In between, in 1984, the Dan Flavin Art Institute of Bridgehampton, then only a year old, presented *The Drawings of James Brooks, 1946-1978.*

The Portland show, museum Director John Holverson explained, was motivated both by his resolve to enlarge the collection of this museum, now rich in the works of Maine-inspired artists Winslow Homer and Andrew Wyeth, and his wish to find a stimulating artist with some roots in that

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state. A fellow artist reminded him of Brooks' early breakthrough to abstraction in Maine, and his long association with the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. A meeting was arranged out of which the 1982 exhibit grew. It celebrated the opening of the arresting postmodern museum building designed by Henry N. Cobb of I. M.Pei & Partners--a building that quintupled the former size of the museum. It had been donated largely by the extraordinarily generous Charles Shipman Payson (fig. 150). The retrospective included forty-five paintings from 1946 to the time of the exhibit; two works on paper; twelve lithoprints from the *Variation* series, plus the original lithographic print from which the series derived.

Curator Michael Preble's contribution to Brooks scholarship appeared in his catalogue essay that traced the artist's stylistic development. And in analyzing the paintings of the 1960s, he found three new developments for each of which he cited several examples. First, there was the "limitation of the palette to a few chosen colors," accompanied by enlargement of the shapes and a new vigor. *Ivarin,* 1968, is cited (fig. 147). Second, he found a new "simplification based on geometric shapes and the use of the linear and calligraphic element." *Nalon,* 1968, is

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cited (fig. 151). Third, he identified a "decided attempt to create harmony, almost musicality, in the impression of the work." For this he singled out as an example, *Igor S.* of 1971, stunning in the energy of its brushwork and the originality of its color (Fig. 152). These characteristics are by no means exclusive to later works, and may be used singly or in combination by the artist. He concluded from his observations that in the freshest of contemporary works, the inspirations and intentions of Abstract Expressionism remained alive. Not claimed, but certainly implied, is the judgment that Brooks works are among those "freshest" and for that reason command your attention.

That word "fresh" or its synonyms recur regularly in the art criticism of Brooks' work of the 1970s and 1980s which seems quite remarkable. John Gruen used it in 1971, saying,

> The tired vocabulary of abstract expressionism receives a thoughtful, often interesting new lease on life in these recent canvases by one of the best known practitioners of the style.[60]

It is the central thesis in Martica Sawin's article "Through Time and Space: The paintings of James Brooks,"

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[60]John Gruen, "Galleries & Museums, The Lean and Hungry Look," *New York,* 15 February 1971, 59.

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that evolved from her consecutive observation of the restored LaGuardia mural, the 1983 Gruenebaum autumn exhibit of current paintings, and the Portland exhibition. To say it offered an overview of the career of this distinguished painter, "veteran," Sawin suggests, would be easy but inappropriate because the connotations of "veteran" suggest weariness and things "leftover," which Brooks painting is not. At 77 she assures us, he is,

> …painting canvases that surpass his previous work in sonority and weighty presence. His determination to confound us with paintings that are at once random and inevitable, non-referential and yet richly evocative remains undiminished.[61]

And she concludes, after hearing him speak of the anxiety involved in the making of a work,

> One doesn't see the worry in these strong new works. Instead one is grateful for the artist's longevity and for the fact that he has allowed his art to ripen at its own pace rather than forcing it. He has brought to maturity impulses that may have been formed more than forty year ago as he worked out the images and compositions of *Flight*, trying to lead the imagination through time and space while preventing the too literal detail from encumbering the vision.[62]

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[61]Martica Sawin, "Through Time and Space: The paintings of James Brooks," *Arts Magazine* 58 (December 1983): 81.

[62]Sawin, 83.

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The threads of the Flavin exhibit are harder to reweave. On 9 January, Charlotte Brooks noted in the 1984 Daybook "Call Dan Flavin?" And on 4 March, the same notation, but this time with the additional note that she and Kate Sanders visited the Institute to see the drawings on display there. While the connection between Brooks and Flavin is obscure, we do know Dan Flavin opened his Institute in Bridgehampton in 1983, with financial backing from a Texan art lover. Since it was not a sales-dependent gallery, Flavin was free to show what he wanted there. In a 19th century building that was first a firehouse and later a Baptist Church, the Institute was established. Upstairs Flavin's light art occupied the floor. Downstairs, however, were changing exhibits and this was the spot Brooks drawings from 1946 to 1978 would be shown from 30 June 1984 on.[63] As with the Cubist-inspired works of the earlier date, the drawings allow us to study Brooks at his most spontaneous. Some like *Untitled* of 1950 echo the rhythmic scaffolding of his early cubistic paintings (fig. 155).

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[63]On 24 November, Charlotte Brooks noted, "Haneke [Flavin's assistant] and Jim brought all Jim's drawings back..." Charlotte Brooks, 1984 Daybook.

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Others have greater spontaneity and substance, and rely on stark light-dark contrasts for their vitality and graceful movements (fig. 154). The Hooker's Green, from which the series takes its name, was a favorite medium of the artist in later years. Viewers of this show were rewarded not only by seeing seldom-shown works, but by seeing works that provided insights into Brooks' artistic practices.

Finally, in 1988, the Heckscher Museum, a fine, active museum in Huntington, New York assembled the third retrospective of this decade. Called *James Brooks, A Quarter Century of Work,* the introduction informed us that it is indeed that long a time between Brooks' 1963 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art and today. Christopher Crossman, the museum's former director, saw the show as a gesture of homage to "one of the most important artists of a generation that changed the course of modern art."[64] Further he reminded us,

> With much recent art devoted to secondary experience and indirect reference, to forsaking individual vision and feeling for mere annotation and marginalia, Brooks' presence is testimony to a continuing and still viability of great authenticity, originality and passion.[65]

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[64]Christopher Crossman, "Introduction," *James Brooks, A Quarter Century of Work* (Huntington: Heckscher Museum, 1988), 4.

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The twenty-nine paintings chosen for the show were all completed by 1985 although they all were painted since the 1963 Whitney Museum retrospective. Lisa Mintz Messenger, of the staff of the Metropolitan Museum and author of the catalog essay, summed up their characteristics in her essay. After considering the early works, she wrote,

> By comparison, the paintings of the past three decades primarily utilize simplified and enlarged semi-geometric and biomorphic shapes that are defined as large color areas. These broad areas of unbroken color are often contrasted with flashing calligraphic lines and small, quickly brushed passages. Compositions are now more asymmetrically balanced, and the rhythms produced by opposing large-and-small and solid-and-textured elements are more dramatic. In a way, the reduction of the paintings' visual complexities has led to an increase in the emotional impact.[66]

That the individual color keys and forms communicate very varied moods is incontestable. Typically, over the years, Brooks' forms have seemed to reach for each other or confront each other across the pictorial surface. In the dramas taking place on the canvases, as in *Gair*, 1973, or *Cusper*, 1982, (figs. 155 and 156), they appear to be engaged in a dialogue. This is ironic in light of Brooks'

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[65]Ibid.

[66]Lisa Mintz Messinger, "James Brooks," *James Brooks, A Quarter Century,* (Huntington: Heckscher Museum, 1988) 10.

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beliefs, for even at this stage, the unconscious initiated the work. To consciously form them would have violated Brooks' belief system. Still, the dialogue format is a recurring one in the artist's oeuvre. Without artistic volition, it appears to parallel the relationship between painter and painting. Hear how Brooks described it:

> To really paint, I think you have to recognize that the thing you're working on is a definite thing—or you have to feel that it is, anyhow. You have to believe that it's a definite personality that sets up a communication, and a dialogue occurs so that it can give you as much as you give it. I don't think you can force a canvas at all. I don't think you can decide to do things which you think will look good and they'll look good. That never happens. You have to take what's in the canvas, develop it...if it's going to be a successful painting, and then that's very recognizable—it's a kind of transformation. [The transformation] speaks, not as you would have it speak, but in a strange way which is aside from you. It has a life of its own then, very clearly. It is also an invigorating thing in the life of the painter --for when it supersedes him or his thought it leads him into new places that he attaches to the painting but actually is himself that he never knew before.[67]

At some time about 1983, Jim would no longer start new paintings, although he might return to paintings that did not satisfy him. He continued drawing, making collages, and printmaking somewhat longer. Charlotte's accounts of

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[67]James Brooks, quoted in Gladys Shafran Kashdin, *Abstract Expressionism: An Analysis…*,139. Quoted in Messenger, 7.

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their lives betray no foreboding of the future. And, indeed, in 1988, he was still making lists of the season's shows. But the vintage years would end for James Brooks soon after. In the last years of the decade he would be assailed by sickness and loss of memory. Only then did he forsake studio work and retire from a life he had loved. He died in 1992.

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EPILOGUE

Within the preceding text, the career of James Brooks has been discussed in depth. The works and their critical reception have been presented within the context of the Abstract Expressionist movement as accurately and fairly as possible. The artist enjoyed earlier and later career successes, as well. He was an impressive artist throughout his life. "A painter's painter," James Thrall Soby has called him. If textual details have weighed heavily at times--for example, the numbers of participants in an exhibition, or the names of its jurors--including them was always to put long-passed events in perspective. Having documented Brooks' achievements, one wonders why his fame is so private a matter. Are there overlooked issues that demand attention? Has the meaning of Brooks' abstract works been explored in the literature? Has uncertainty about their meaning affected the artist's place in the hierarchy of the New York School? Or do other factors govern the attention he has been given?

His affiliation with the incipient movement could only have begun after his return from military service in 1945. In response to awesome world events, in U.S. cities, but

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especially in New York, a body of youthful artists were eager to jettison meaningless techniques and subject matter in their works. Intellectually curious, they sought to invest art with deeper, cosmic significance, to have it reflect universal human experiences. In their urgency, both singly and at meetings, they rethought and researched every aspect of art making. Their goal was to produce paintings and sculpture that were conceptually original and able to communicate a range of emotions from the tragic to the heroic.

Sharing their dreams and ambitions, James Brooks, through his earlier friendships with Jackson Pollock, Bradley Walker Tomlin, William Baziotes and others, became a member of this group coalescing into a movement. In preparation, he broadened his own stylistic and technical backgrounds--leaving behind a body of traditional works for which he had already won acclaim. For him, Cubism was a way station *en route* to abstraction. Over the next few years his closeness to Pollock played an important role in his conversion to an expressive style of painting. That debt was openly acknowledged. He said,

> I used Pollock's drip method to great advantage because it did free me from my earlier work and from being too self-conscious…

But he qualified the influence.

> Jackson's is a layered thing, spontaneous, uncorrected.

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> I always felt when I did that, and I did try it a few times, that I was thrown out of the work too quickly, that I hadn't lived in it long enough, and that I resented being pushed out of the painting…I do get a good deal of satisfaction out of staying in a painting, manipulating the forms, changing things, and primarily listening to what it speaks and encouraging it.[1]

Their intimacy as friends and colleagues was enhanced by the Brookses moving to Montauk to summer near the Pollocks who had only recently relocated at the eastern end of Long Island. Many scraps of evidence confirm their closeness then.[2] And given Pollock's commitment to the Jungian belief in the importance of the unconscious in producing art, it seems certain that they would have discussed it at this time.[3] What predisposed Brooks to this interest in the unconscious we can only guess. Author Michael Leja has sketched the two predominant and opposing stylistic interests of New York School artists prior to 1945--abstraction and Surrealism--and their subsequent synthesis. Though drawn to both, Brooks' interest was piqued by the possibility of tapping the very inner forces of his being as

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[1]Kashdin, *Abstract Expressionism: An Analysis…*,139.

[2]"At 8th Street, due to their staying in a tiny room, we got pretty well acquainted, although Jackson had a hard time talking." James Brooks, quoted in Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave…*, 92.

[3]While in former times, Pollock's knowledge of the unconscious may have been thought unsophisticated, author Michael Leja gives a convincing account of the depth of his understanding. Leja, 121-202.

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the source of his imagery. That meant allowing his unconscious faculties to participate in originating the work --an interest shared by the several artists who adapted the Surrealist technique of automatism to their needs.[4] We know Brooks explored it and, as Pollock had, arrived at a variant of the Surrealist process to suit his purpose. For him, the psycho-analyst Anton Ehrenzweig later confirmed the initiatory role of the unconscious, a role Brooks continued to believe in for the rest of his life.

Pollock was not his sole contact with artists of the movement, however. Later, Rothko and he would occupy studio space in the same historic building at 222 Bowery. And though, from 1947 on, Guston painted in Woodstock, New York, about 90 miles north of New York City, the artists remained friends and saw each other on Guston's visits to New York City or to the East End, on Brooks' visits to Woodstock, or at New College in Sarasota, Florida where they both taught. Brooks encountered Motherwell at less predictable times--at a National Academy ceremony, at gallery and museum openings, or once, at Motherwell's birthday party. Most

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[4]To be more specific, in following Ehrenzweig, Brooks would have become aware of the different levels of consciousness between full consciousness and unconsciousness. He would probably have thought the least consciously motivated actions to be actions of the unconscious of the "depth mind." Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision…*,3-44.

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often he saw John Ferren, John Little, Balcomb Greene, sculptor Ibram Lassaw, and Adolph Gottlieb who lived nearby. There is no concrete evidence of shoptalk on these occasions though it surely took place. Their styles and images differed so greatly, however, that with minor exceptions, it was clear Brooks' abstractions were not derivative. In fact, his original means of adapting automatism, and his need to avoid a repetitive motif that could become a series, preclude any possibility of outside influences. Only once did Sidney Tillim write,

> There is a lot of Gottlieb in the very handsome work Brooks has in the Carnegie International.[5]

The work in question was *Obsol,* of 1964 (fig. 122). On the basis of either style or technique, the comparison is weak. In this work by Brooks, in which, contrary to his usual practice, he used different values of very similar hues for the ground on which he then floated a vaporous white cloud at top and two orb-like shapes below, one might find affinities to Gottlieb's "*burst*" series. But the two artists' styles and techniques are generally so different, and the occasions so rare when similarities exist, that should one exist, it must be seen as a coincidence. Gottlieb's shapes, opposites of each other, were planned beforehand and were used in a series with metaphoric

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[5]Tillim, "New York Exhibitions,"…December 1964, 68.

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meaning. Brooks' grew out of the process of painting, generated by his depth mind. He did not work in series, and meaning resided in the relationship of colors and shapes, and his extraordinary manner of applying paint. This brings us to the broader question of meaning.

Much has been written about the meaning of the group called Abstract Expressionists. Without dividing the group into the usual classifications of "color-field," or "gestural," we can generalize about their iconography and meaning. Many of the painters and sculptors mythologized. That is, they consciously referenced primitive myths and symbols in their works, and counted on the wisdom and power of the stories to infuse newly created works with meaning. Surely Baziotes, Gottlieb, Pollock, Rothko, and Still did at some stage in each of their careers. Brooks did not. He relied on the formal elements--color, a primary one--tied to specific human reactions throughout time. Both approaches, iconographic and formal, and often added titles, provided viewers with contexts to penetrate the iconography. At no time, however, did Brooks' images have mythological foundations. They grew from Surrealism's automatic writing, as had his hero Miró's throughout the 1930s, and as did Motherwell's through most of his career. Here again, Motherwell used automatism differently. He used it for the small sketches he later enlarged into such major works as

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his *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series. Brooks rejected such a three-step process: first, "finding" the image through automatist techniques, next, locating the moral predicament on which to anchor it, and, finally, discussing those implications publicly so the image would be clearly understood. Nor did Brooks actively discourage discussion of meaning in his works, as Still did, because the painting must be self-explanatory to those sensitive enough to fathom it. Though, as previously noted, he shared the intellectual roots of many of the Abstract Expressionists as set down by Polcari, having read James Joyce, Robert Graves, T.S. Eliot, books on depth psychology, and some Modern Man texts as discussed by Leja, the meaning of his works did not derive from them.[6] Clearly he believed the meaning of the work generated by the viewer's reactions to such specifics as colors, shapes, light-dark values, brushwork. All have their own psychological readings, as does the way in which they are deployed and interact. That is what Brooks speaks of when he mentions the relationship of one element of the work to another. But he counts on the viewer's sensitivity,

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[6]Charlotte Brooks remembers Brooks reading Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living,* for example. Also, Joyce's "'non-narrative' and 'overall' expansive style that was a continuum without focal points" apparently did influence Brooks. Polcari, 36. Also, Leja, 176-178, and Charlotte Brooks, interview by author, 14 May 2001. Telephone.

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as well. Art psychologists Hans and Shulamith Kreitler validate his expectation. They write,

> Artistic experience is a joint product of the stimuli presented in a work of art and of the spectator's responses to these stimuli. In general, the more responsive the spectator is, the more intense is his experience and the more emotionally involved he may become.[7]

As true as this is, the phrase "self-explanatory" when applied to a painting raises problems. Art professionals skirted explanations of meaning. Irving Sandler, in the 1963 essay "James Brooks and the Abstract Inscape," quoted the painter's 1957 response to an inquiry of John Baur's. Baur had invited Brooks to participate in a show he was then planning called *Nature in Abstraction* (see pp. 205-206). Brooks replied,

> I do not look at natural growth or forms more often than I look at man-made things, and it never occurred to me in painting that I am taking either from nature or manufacture; everything pools into one source, I suppose, and is unconsciously drawn on.

He himself still seemed tentative as to the meaning of his work, and asked Baur whether his "painting intentions" which are largely unconscious should be considered or should his work, as others see it (with naturalistic allusions), take precedence. Ultimately, he decided against participating. Only shortly thereafter, in 1959 in an interview by Bernard

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[7]Hans and Shulamith Kreitler, *Psychology of the Arts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 257.

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Chaet, he amended his statement. Brooks said (and here I risk repeating previous text):

> A painting is expressive of everything the artist identifies himself with… [The] interaction of shape and color--that is, the groupings of relationships they may produce--transmits an impulse which is the image and meaning of the painting.[8]

Almost simultaneously, writer Dore Ashton expressed a view of Brooks' work as analogical. She said,

> The difference between these paintings and those of Brooks' last show is that *he has seen the life of his painting as an analogue to general life. It has its sources, its lights and shadows, its extension in time, its evolutionary possibilities…* [Emphasis added][9]

One wonders if she did not sensitively anticipate his feelings when he himself quoted Robert Graves,

> …for the artist there has been no choice but the single theme of Life and Death.[10]

Finally, art historian Helen Weinberg, who like Ashton had known the artist personally, addressed the subject of meaning in Brooks' works.[11] She saw the artist as she saw many American creative forces--as an Emersonian man thoroughly steeped in nature, but one whose invented forms

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[8]Bernard Chaet, "Concepts of Space and Expression…," 67.

[9]Dore Ashton, "ART," *Arts and Architecture* 76 (April 1959): 10.

[10]See note 26, p.

[11]Professor Helen Weinberg, interview by author, May 2001, telephone.

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recall nature and natural forms without their necessarily arising from nature.

Do we belabor meaning? I think not. We recognize that the above explanations lack the precise meanings one attaches to the more mythological paintings of Gottlieb's *Labyrinth* or *Burst* series, or the ambiguity one finds in de Kooning's *Women*. In the absence of an artist's clues to meaning, do we find more difficulty in interpreting a work that originates in the artist's unconscious? Is a painting more resistant to decoding if it offers non-metaphoric imagery—even if its formal elements are skillfully, and poetically, organized? For the wider, lay art audience, the answer is yes. Meaning is often hinged to a suggested topic--a name from antiquity, or on the pundit-like pronouncements of professional art critics and authors. Once published they are repeated in the literature and a definitive meaning is established. Though truly admired by many in the art establishment--Hunter, Sandler, Miller, Ashton, Arnason, and others--Brooks' works have had no clear definitive meaning published. Nor did Brooks, an exceedingly modest professional with no self-aggrandizing goals, promote such an understanding of his work. His custom of labeling paintings with nonsense words as titles --neither descriptive nor suggestive--complicated rather than clarified the issue. Modesty, also, a conviction in

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the painting's ability to stand alone, and an integral sense of his own worth, though all fine qualities on their own, aided neither in the promotion nor understanding of the works. They did not assure the work the level of critical attention and acclaim it so richly deserves. Consider this.

As stated, James Brooks was an integral part of Abstract Expressionism almost from its inception.[12] A recapitulation of his achievement surprises us with its fullness and diversity. Why, then, are his achievements not more widely known? Several reasons present themselves, most previously mentioned in the previous text.

Until now, as noted, the only monograph written on his work was by Sam Hunter who wrote it to accompany his 1963 Retrospective Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. While still interesting and valid for the years covered, Brooks would be active for another twenty-five years after the retrospective. One objective of this dissertation is to remedy that lack of literature and lay the groundwork for future scholarly research on the artist.

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[12]Four early volumes that include Brooks' work: Anthony Everitt, *Abstract Expressionism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1950); Thomas B. Hess, *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase* (New York: Viking Press, 1951); R. Motherwell and A. Reinhardt, eds., *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn-Schulz, 1951); and Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951).

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Perhaps, too, his former gallery representation was less strong and supportive than it might have been. Though we downplay the role of commercialism in an artist's success, by the frequency a gallery presents shows, by its promotional activities and success in the sale or placement of works, it can enhance or impair a career. Brooks' works were shown by some of New York's top galleries. As a young artist, he changed galleries frequently. Later, in quick succession Kootz retired and Martha Jackson died. Besides the cost in time and energy to replace them, there was a concomitant loss of momentum in the artist's career.

Finally, there is the question of the artist's legacy --a gift, or gifts, that in large or small ways change the way art is seen. Brooks left many--they move in ripples out from the artist. As a successful letterer, he introduced two alphabets of his own design to be made available through photo-lettering. Long before computers revamped the process, a catalogue of such alphabets allowed an advertising artist to select and purchase the kind of lettering that matched his needs. Brooks' two alphabets--his Caslon Brilliant and Chiswell--enjoy a particularly fluid grace that anticipates the fine draftsmanship and beautiful shape-making in his paintings and drawings. At Pratt Institute where he taught lettering a half century ago, a former student recalled him as a teacher. At the

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blackboard his control amazed his students, and his mastery in finishing shapes predicted his success as an abstract painter.[13]

As a painting teacher he left a remarkable heritage. To a letter of inquiry addressed to his students at Yale some forty years ago, perhaps a dozen replied. All seemed genuinely pleased that further research on Brooks' career was finally being undertaken. Almost unanimously, they spoke of his qualities as an inspiring teacher and excellent painter--both thoughtful and tactful, in contrast with Joseph Albers' more authoritarian critical style. One recalled his own tendency to create shapes with a facility bordering on glibness, and said Brooks attacked such "superficial invention" of shapes and advised him not to design shapes but to feel and discover them. To achieve this he suggested painting with the left hand temporarily. Brooks also urged him not to follow painting rules set *a priori* for such a practice would lead to the death of the imagination. Instead, rules should be formulated after the fact.[14] Shape-making--that is the creation of effective shapes--was of great importance to him, and he advised

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[13]Al Addabody, interview by author, 20 July 1999. Transcript.

[14]Victor George Kord, interview by author, 13 July 1999.

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students to study, even trace, the shapes in Picasso's *Demoiselles*…. Impressing upon another student the importance of shape, he apparently said when he sees a Rembrandt, "he sees it in terms of patterns and shapes" before noting the content.[15]

Even when a student's style differed greatly from Brooks', he did not try to change it. He urged students to be open to insights that come out of the painting process and to remember the whole configuration was important--not just the details.[16] Often the shapes in his own late paintings reflect the humor he found in Miró's work. While being a great teacher does not automatically assure one of being a great artist, listening to Brooks' advice to pupils convinces us of his great understanding of the artistic process.

As for staining, that is historically his bequest to other painters. Pollock's practice of painting on the floor had suggested it. Miró, whom he openly admired, had even earlier explored "loose brushing, spilling, and blotting thinned-out paint" in *The Birth of the World* as early as 1925. But because the work was not exhibited publicly for more than thirty years, and because the artist

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[15]Ron Markman to author, LS. n.d.

[16]Robert Birmelin, interview by author, 12 July 1999.

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did not further explore the possibilities inherent in the technique, his influence was limited. Colleagues like Arshile Gorky, William Baziotes, and Mark Rothko often used color thinned sufficiently to appear as a toned film on the surface of the support. But here it is the transparency rather than the method of application which is comparable. (See Mark Rothko's *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, 1944; Gorky's *The Betrothal*, 1947; or Baziotes *White Bird*, 1957 (figures 157, 158, and 159).[17] For Brooks the technique of staining originally allowed a form arising from the depth of his unconscious to start the painting process. As he used it, stain became a diaphanous ground suggesting variable but always shallow pictorial depth. On its atmospheric surface, the shapes would position themselves--usually organic, but with an entire repertoire of edges that varied from precisely drawn to aura-like. Sometimes Brooks would leave areas of raw canvas around a color area as if the paint had bled. Sometimes he would totally shade the ground. In so doing he produced ephemeral shapes that functioned between figure and ground. And he became the first artist in the New York School to use the pouring of viscous paint in his characteristic way.

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[17]The first is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the second is in the Katherine Ordway collection, Yale University, and the third in the Albright-Knox Collection.

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Much more can be said about his painting but two characteristics must be noticed. The first is his remarkable way of mating colors that on the surface seem incompatible. In Cusper (fig. 156), flame-like tongues of red-orange and red-violet draw and repel each other simultaneously in a taunting duet. Color is his most flexible tool--used in infinite variations. In mood, this is at a polar extreme from his decorous largely black and white works.

Then there is paint handling. In oil or in acrylic, Brooks managed effects that seemed impossible to achieve. Dark colors inexplicably remain on the surface of the work while lighter colors create the illusion of depth. A whole bag of tricks were devised to create many degrees of transparency and translucency. Used thickly or thinly, Brooks tamed the paint to yield the desired effect.

Ultimately, Abstract Expressionism had no painter who clung longer or more faithfully to its precepts; none who believed in it more firmly, none whose works embody such poetry. Culturally he bridged the distance between Dallas of the 1920s and the New York School of mid-century, and later. Painters who follow will never exhaust the many things his works can teach.

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A

JAMES BROOKS: FROM DALLAS TO THE NEW YORK SCHOOL

By

ANNE L. ABELES

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

2001

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Fig. 2. James Brooks, *Cabbage*, early 1920s.
Gouache on Brown Paper, 8-3/4" x 9-3/4."
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

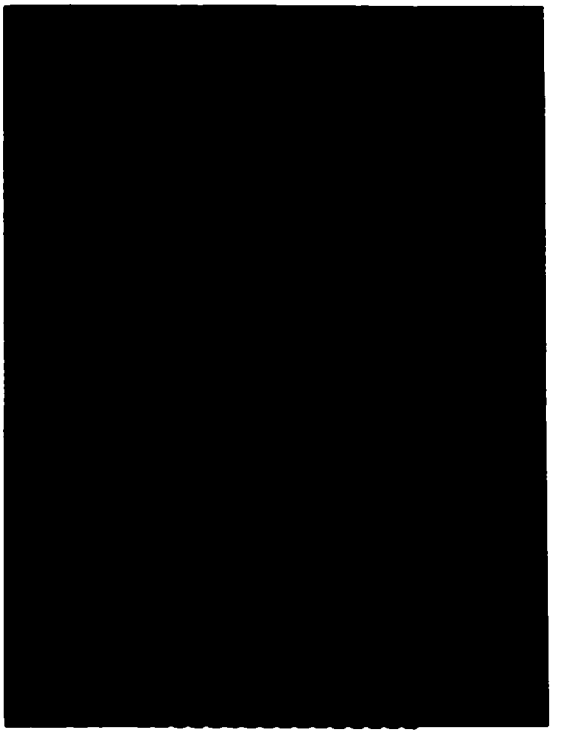


Fig. 3. James Brooks, *Black Kettle*, 1924.
Oil on Canvas, 19 x 24."
Collection of C. P. Brooks

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Fig. 4. Martha Simkins
The Spanish Girl, 1925
Oil on Canvas,
Collection of Jim and Jenoyce Eitelman.



Fig. 5. Jerry Bywaters
Sharecropper, 1937
Oil on Masonite,
29-1/4 x 23-1/2,"
Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 6. James Brooks, *Nurse*, 1927,
Oil on Canvas, 27 x 31".
Collection of C. P. Brooks



Fig. 7. James Brooks, *Old Lady*, 1927.
Oil on Canvas, 32 x 27".
Collection of C.P.Brooks.



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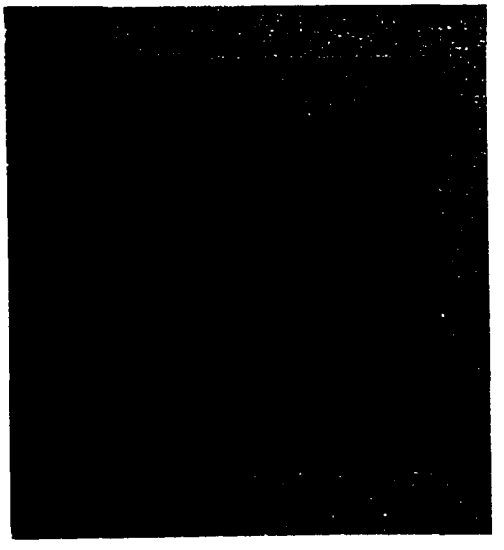


Fig. 8. James Brooks,
Farmer Packing Produce, c. 1938.
Charcoal Drawing,
Brooklyn Museum of Art

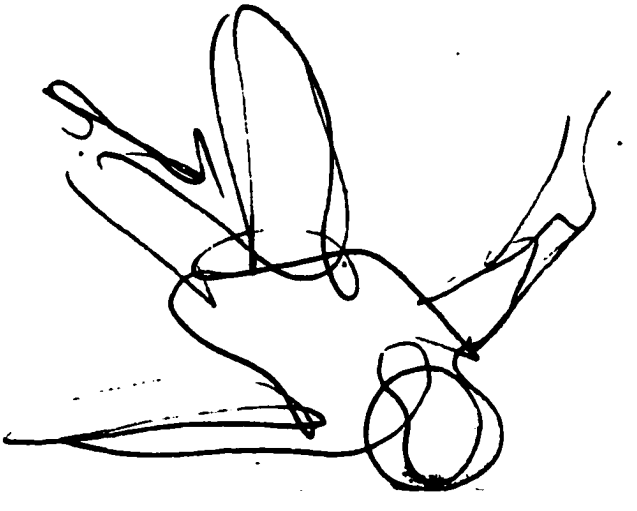


Fig. 9. James Brooks,
Student Gesture Drawing, 1927.
Ink on Paper.
Archives of the Artist.

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Fig. 10. James Brooks,
Student Gesture Drawing, 1927.
Ink on Paper.
Archives of the Artist.

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Fig. 11. James Brooks,
Airborne Man, c. 1938-39 (Mural Study.)
Pencil on Paper.
Archives of the Artist.



Fig. 12. James Brooks,
Airborne Man, c. 1938-39.
Casein-Glyptol Resin Emulsion.
Detail of *Flight* Mural,
Delta Shuttle Terminal, La Guardia Field,
Jackson Heights, NY

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Fig. 13. Boardman Robinson, *Cross Breaker,* 1912. Crayon Drawing for *The Masses*.

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Fig. 14. James Brooks
Lux Soap Advertisement, c. 1937
Artist's Archives.

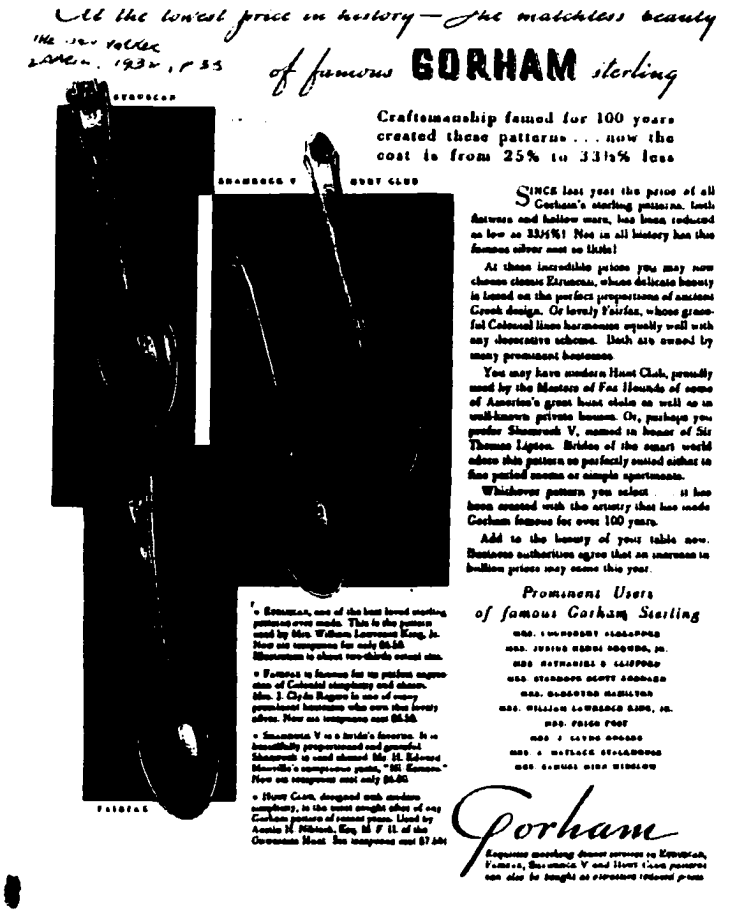


Fig. 15. James Brooks
Gorham Silver Advertisement
2 April 1932
Artist's Archives



Fig. 16. James Brooks, *Mary MacDonald,* 1937.
Oil on Canvas, 30 x 24".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

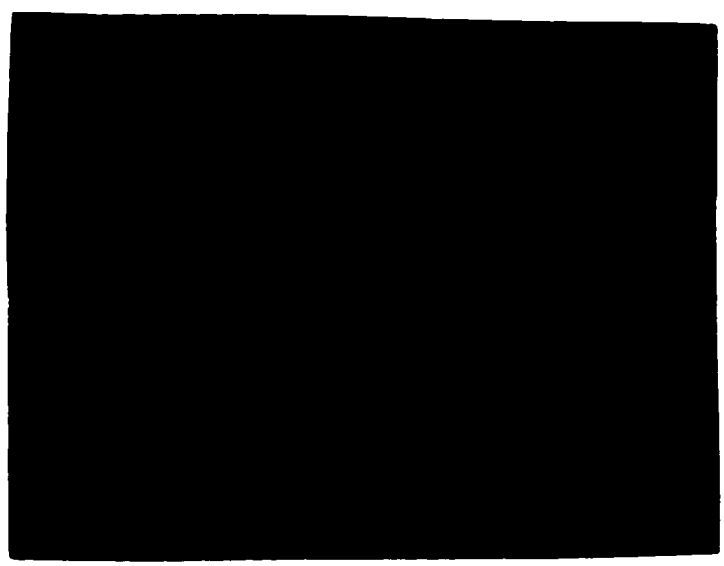


Fig. 17. James Brooks, *Oklahoma Town,* 1931.
Oil on Canvas, 14 x 20".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

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Fig. 18. James Brooks, *Butte, Montana,* 1932.
2. Oil on Canvas, 28 x 36".
3. Collection of C. B. P.

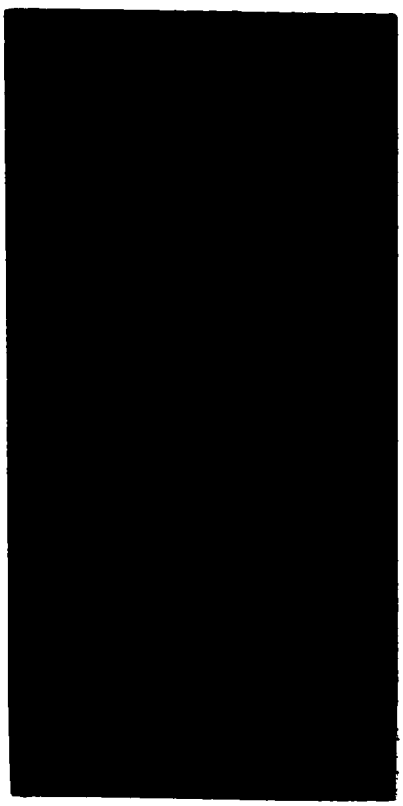


Fig. 19. James Brooks
Female Model, 1931
Oil on Canvas, 23 x 28"

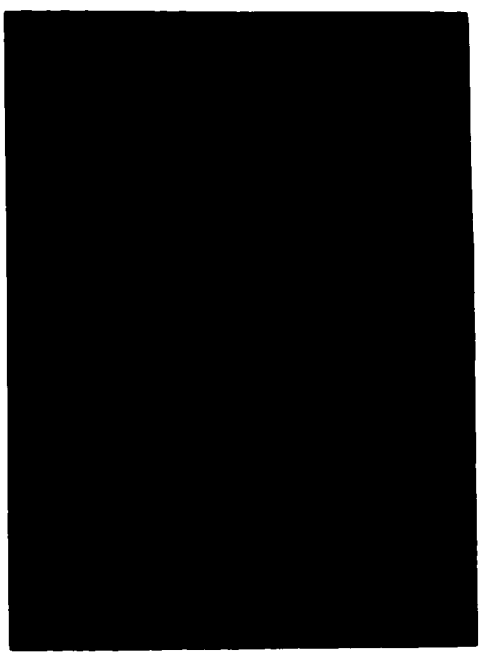


Fig. 20. James Brooks,
*Male Model,*1933
Oil on Canvas, 24 x 32

Both in the Collection of C.P.B.

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Fig.21.(Top).
James Brooks,
Still Life: Kitchen Table, 1931.
Oil on Canvas, 18 x 26".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.



Fig. 22. (Center).
James Brooks,
Pink Slippers, 1931.
Oil on Canvas, 15 x 13".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

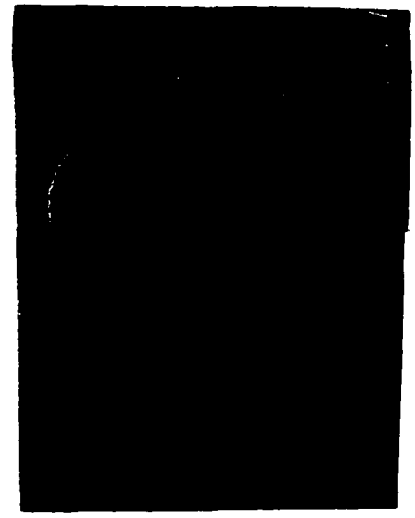
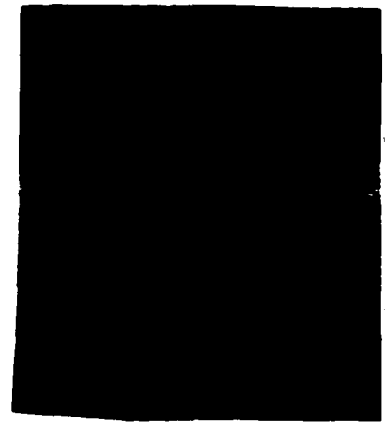


Fig. 23. (Bottom).
James Brooks,
Still Life with Drapery, c. 1931.
Oil on Canvas, 14 x 18".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.



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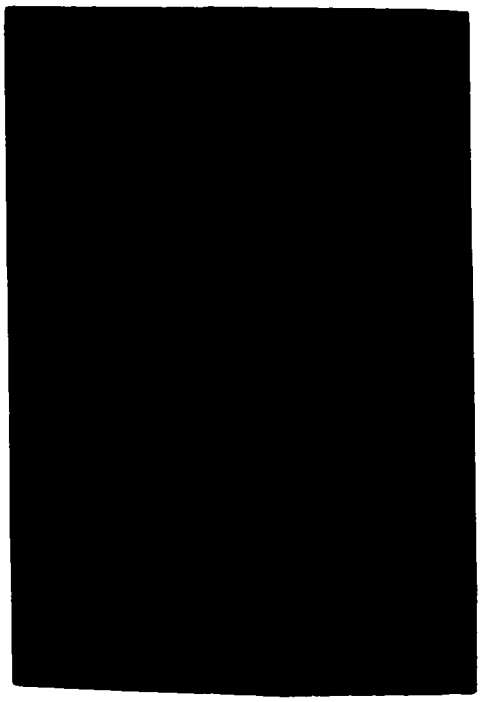


Fig. 24. James Brooks, *Buildings*, 1933.
Oil on Canvas, 17 x 24".
Collection of C.P.Brooks.

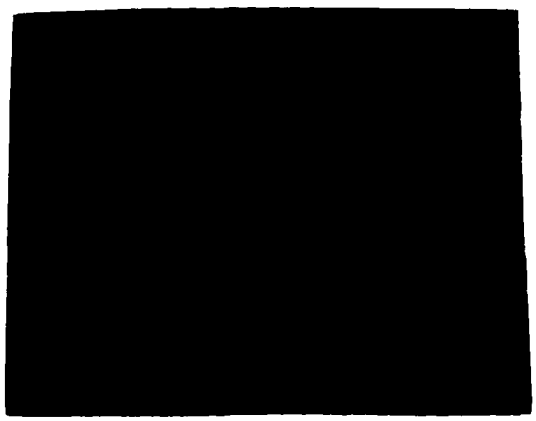
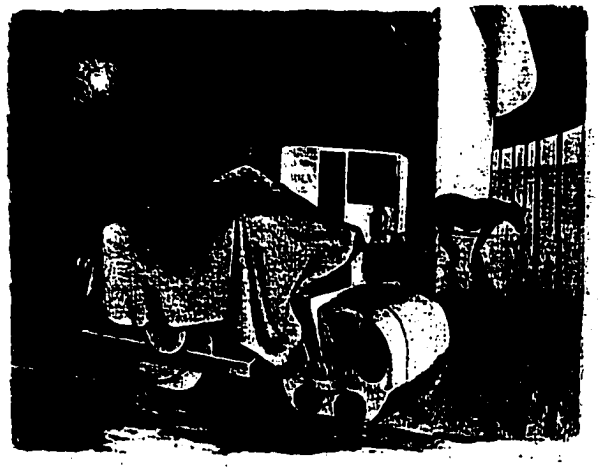


Fig. 25. James Brooks, *Still Life for White Cup*, c. 1931.
Oil on Canvas, 16 x 22"
Collection of C.P.Brooks

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Fig, 26. James Brooks. *Early Morning*, 1932. Lithograph, 9 x 12".



Fig. 27. James Brooks. *Copper Mine, Butte*. C. 1935 Lithograph, 12 x 16-13/16". Whitney Museum of American Art.

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Fig. 28. James Brooks, *Receipt of the Mail from Holland,* 1935. Photo of Clay Maquette no longer in existence. Archives of American Art Journal 16, (No. 1 1976).

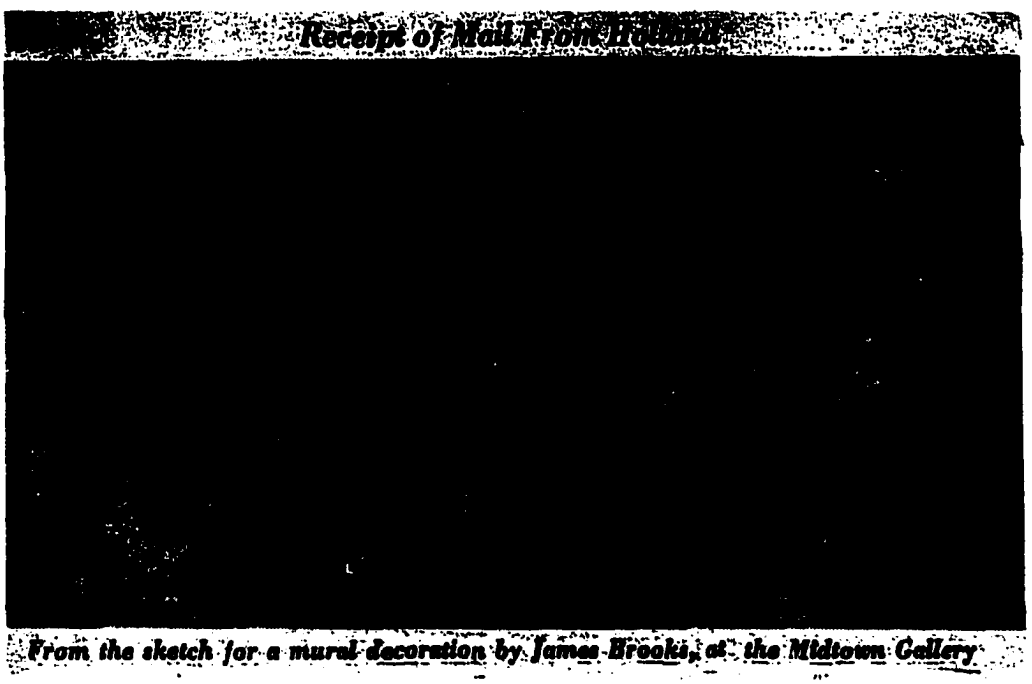


Fig. 29. James Brooks, Mural Sketch of *Receipt of the Mail From Holland.* As shown in the New York *Herald Tribune,* 1 December 1935, sec. V, p.10

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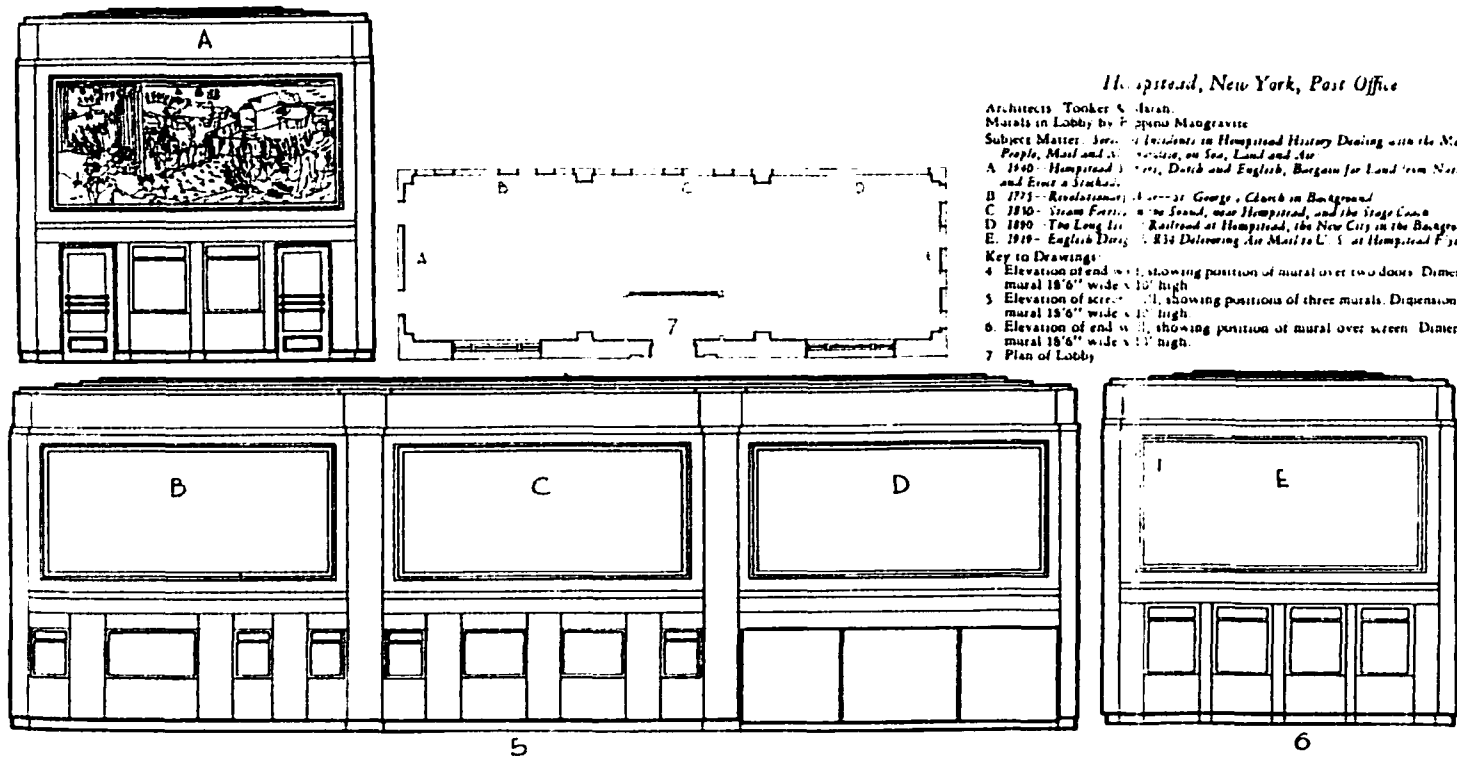


Fig. 30. Lobby Plan and Elevations of the Hempstead, NY Post Office. As shown in *Art in federal Buildings: An Illustrated Record of the Treasury Department's New Program in Painting and Sculpture.*

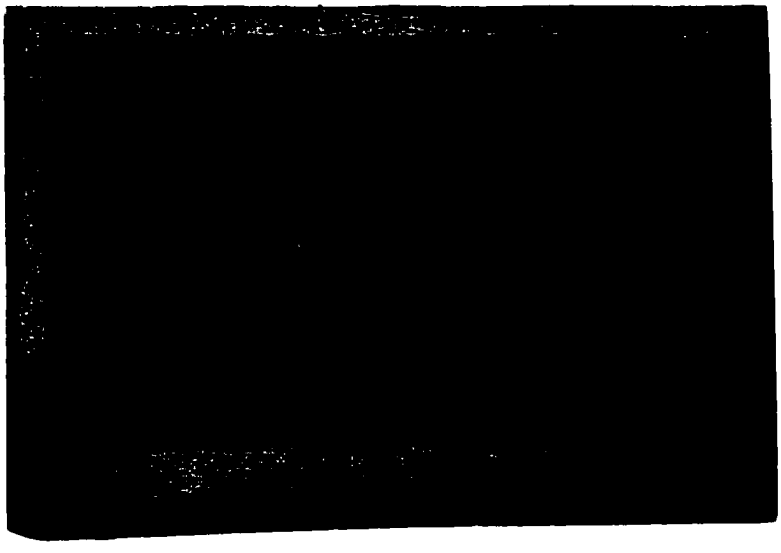


Fig. 31. James Brooks, Untitled Sketch for Hempstead, NY Post Office, 1935. Gouache on Board, 15-1/2 x 28. Collection of C. P. Brooks.

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Fig. 32. James Brooks, *Acquisition of Long Island*, 1936-38. Casein Tempera on Gessoed Linen. Approx. 5'9" x 28'. Demounted and believed destroyed. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art.

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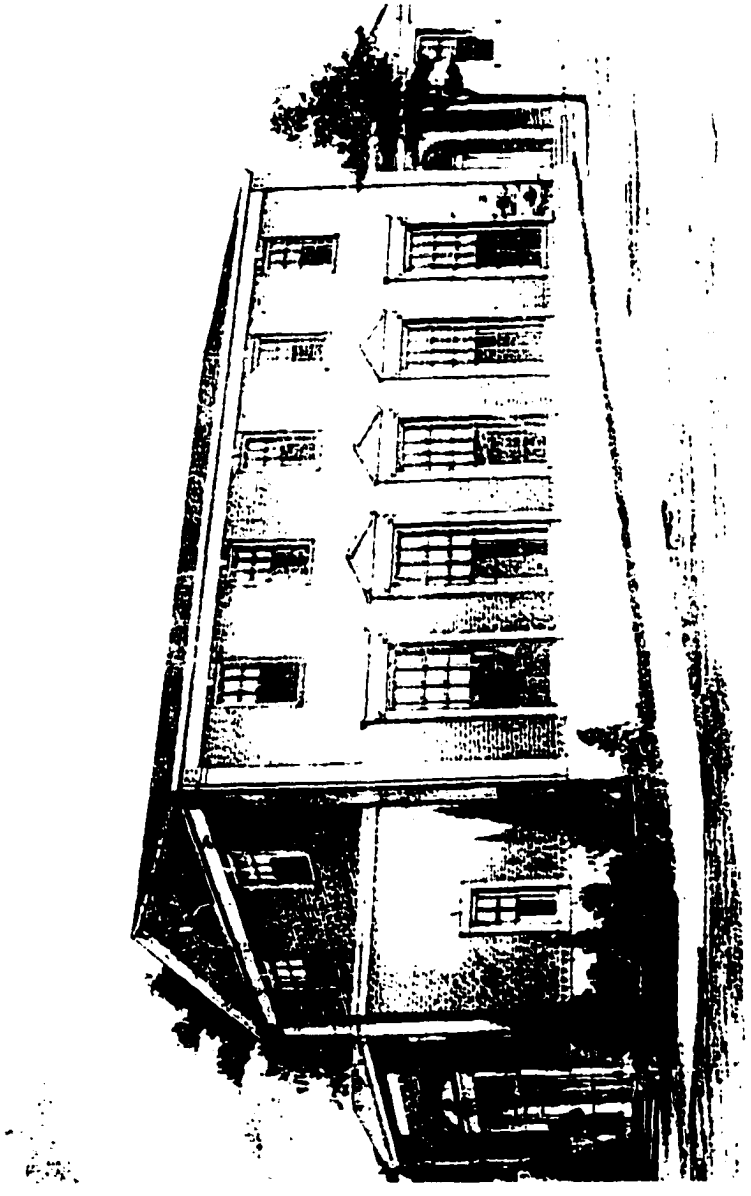


Fig. 33. Exterior View, Carnegie Library, Queensborough Public Library System, Woodside, NY. Courtesy of the Art Commission of the City of New York.

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Fig. 34. James Brooks. *Acquisition of Long Island.* Shown in situ in the Carnegie Library between 15 November 1938 and before renovation in 1962-63.





Fig. 35. James Brooks. Primitive Indian Life (also called Indian Village Life).Casein Tempera on Gessoed Linen.

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Fig. 36. James Brooks, Four segments of the *Acquisition* Mural.

PURCHASE

IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT



WARFARE AND CONQUEST

REHABILITATION



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Fig. 37. Thomas Hart Benton, *Arts of the West*, 1932.
Tempera, 94 x 161",
New Britain, CT Museum of American Art

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Fig. 38. Piero della Francesca, *Discovery and Proof of the True Cross*, 1453-54. Fresco, Church of San Francesco, Arrezzo, Italy.

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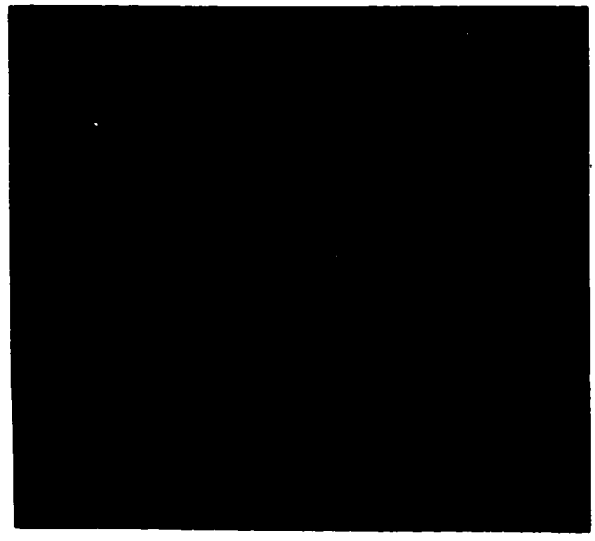
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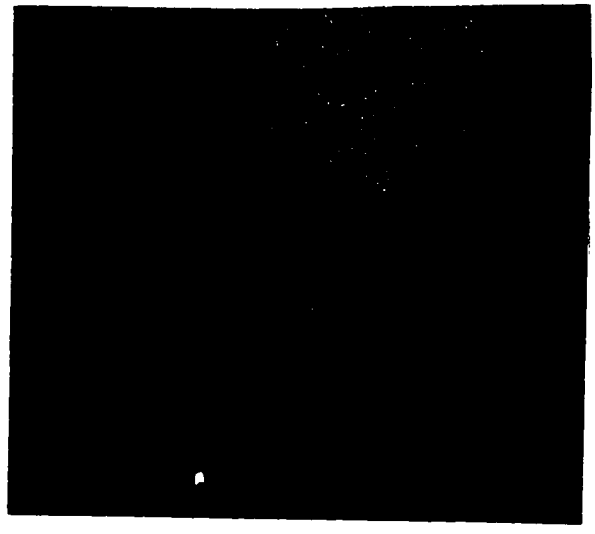
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Fig. 39. James Brooks,Charcoal Studies for Murals. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Charlotte Park Brooks, in Memory of Her Husband James David Brooks.

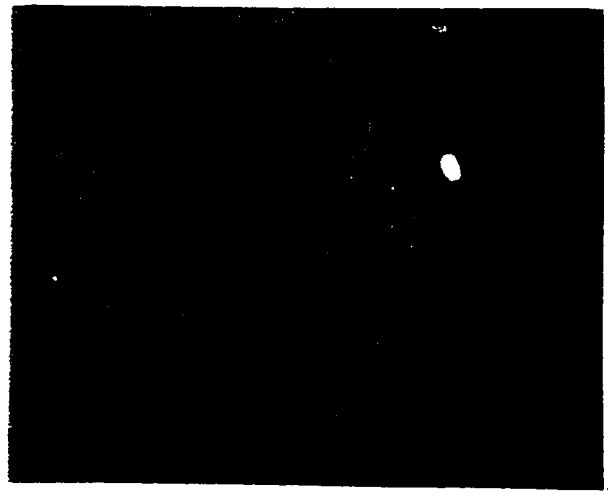
Top to Bottom:
c. Individual Body Part.



d.Body Part with Implement.



e.Study of Light and Shade.



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Fig. 40. U.S. Post Office Building, Little Falls, NJ.
(Now Decommissioned.)
Photo

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Fig. 41. James Brooks, *Labor and Leisure,*
Preliminary Idea Sketch, 1937.
for Little Falls, NJ. Post Office.
Collection of the Brooklyn Museum,
Gift of Charlotte Park Brooks
In Memory of Her Husband, James David Brooks

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Fig. 43. James Brooks, *Labor and Leisure*, 2nd Mural Sketch, 1937.
for Little Falls, NJ. Post Office.
Collection of the Brooklyn Museum,
Gift of Charlotte Park Brooks
In Memory of Her Husband, James David Brooks

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Fig. 43. James Brooks, *Labor and Leisure*, 3rd Mural Sketch, 1937. For Little Falls, NJ, Post Office. Collection of the National Archives, College Park, MD.

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Fig. 44. James Brooks, *Labor and Leisure*, Final Sketch, 1937-38.
Tempera and Oil on Duck, 5'6 x 12'.
For Little Falls, NJ, Post Office.
Collection of the National Archives, college Park, MD.

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Fig. 45. James Brooks, Three Abstract Panels from the *Flight* Mural, Marine Terminal, La Guardia Field.

a. Propellers
(Right)

b. Buildings
(Below Right)

c. Air Currents
(Below)







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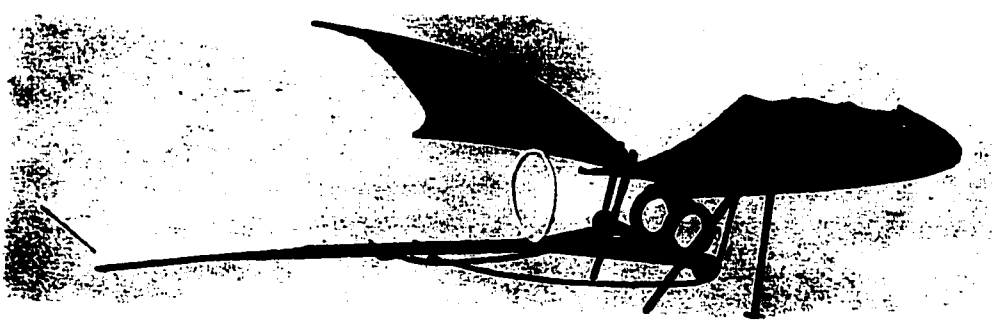
Fig. 46. James Brooks, *Flight*, 1938-1942.
(Detail of *Imagined Flight*)
Marine Terminal, La Guardia Airport,
formerly North Beach Airport
Jackson Heights, NY

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Fig. 47.
a. Leonardo da Vinci,
Drawing for Flying Apparatus from the
Codex Atlanticus



b. A 19th Century Model
Inspired by Leonardo's Drawing



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Fig. 48. James Brooks, *Flight*, 1938-1942.
(Detail of *Flight Accomplished*)
Marine Terminal, La Guardia Airport,
formerly North Beach Airport
Jackson Heights, NY

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Fig. 49. James Brooks, *Flight,* 1938-1942.
(Detail of *Release)*
Marine Terminal, La Guardia Airport,
formerly North Beach Airport
Jackson Heights, NY

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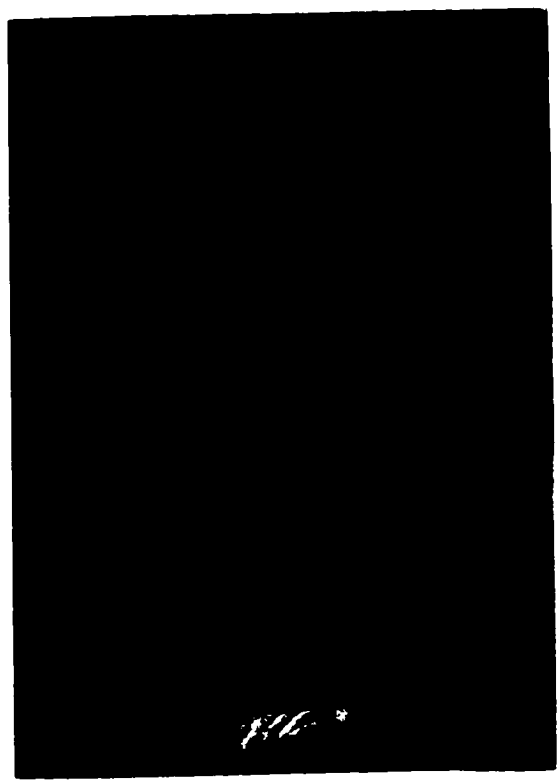


Fig. 50. James Brooks, 3-Panel Sketch for *Flight* Mural, c. 1938-42. Gouache.
Collection of Brooklyn Museum of art, Gift of Charlotte Park Brooks, in Memory of Her Husband James David Brooks.

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Figure 51. James Brooks,

a. Female Figure from *Labor and Leisure*



b. Female Figure from *Flight.*



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Fig. 52. Philip Guston, Queensbridge Housing Project Murals (detail), 1941. Casein-resin Emulsion on Wall.

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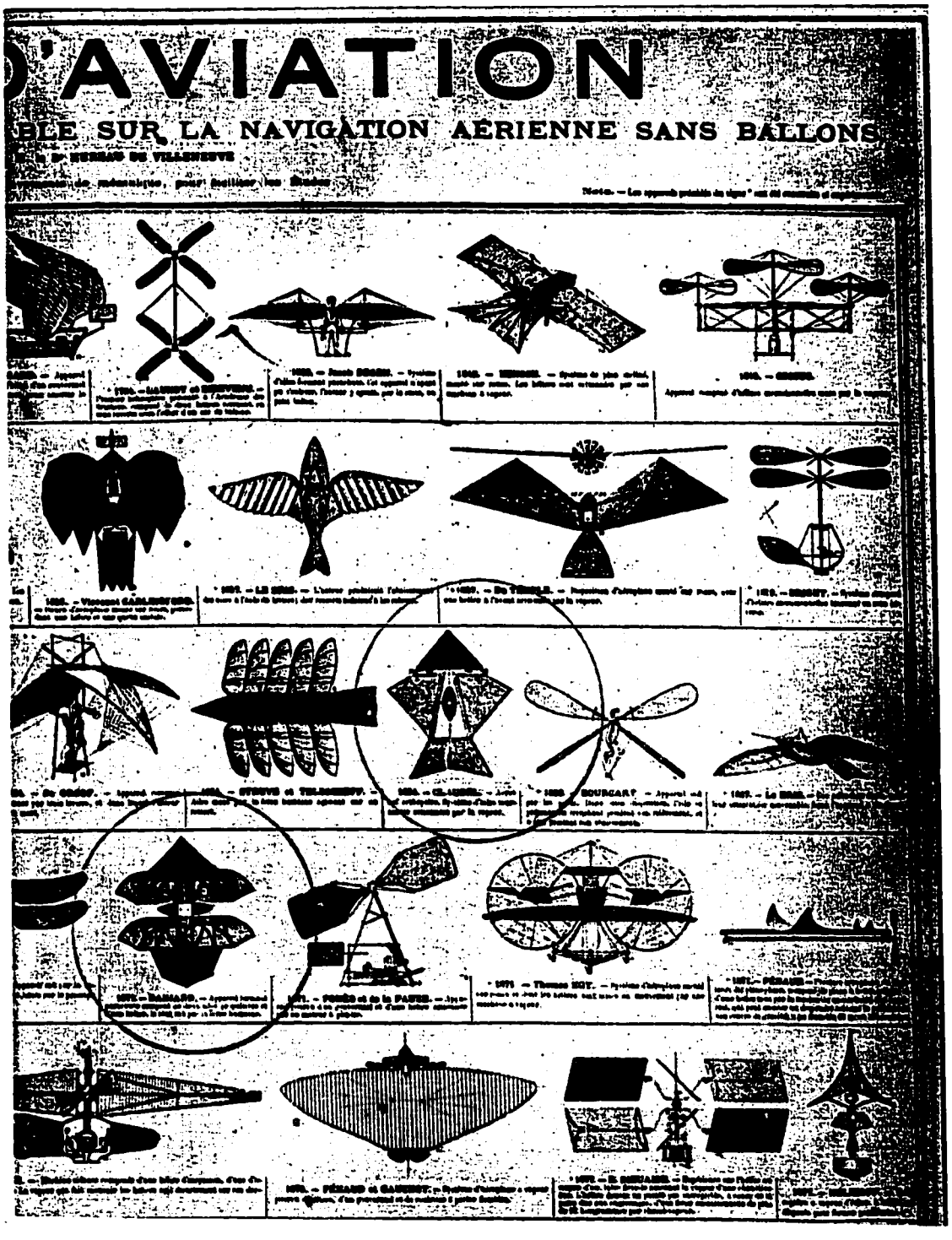


Fig. 53. Plate of Historic Aircraft Used by Brooks as Reference for Mural.

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Fig. 54. Anonymous, *Daedalus*.
From Francis Travelyan Miller, *The World in the Air: The Story of Flying in Pictures*.

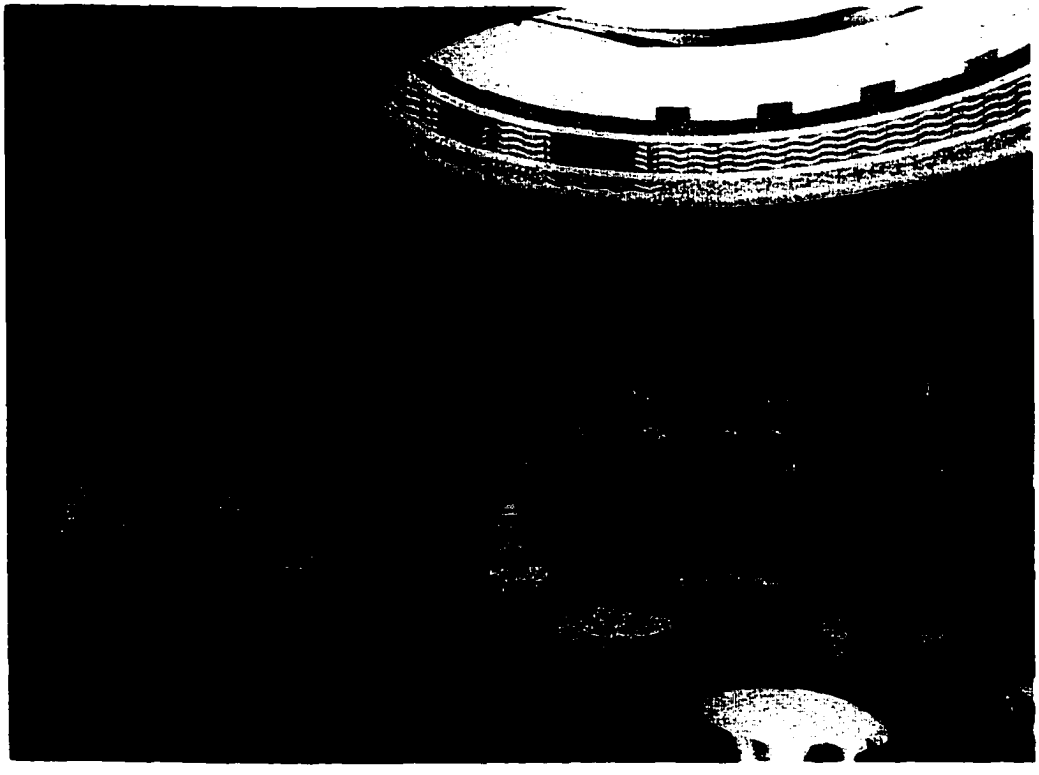


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Fig. 55. Giotto, *The Handing Over of the Rods*, c. 1305. Fresco, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.



Fig. 56. Louis Allen Abramson, Architect. 40-Foot Wide Retractable Dome in the Ceiling of the Riviera Nightclub.



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Fig. 57. *A Battle Between the Greeks and Trojans,* Siphnian Treasury , c. 525, B.C., Marble. Delphi Acropolis.

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Fig. 58. Monument Commemorating Battle.
a. (left). Column of Trajan, 113 A.D., Rome. Marble.
b. (right). *Emperor Addressing His Troops,* (detail).

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Fig. 59. Michelangelo, *Battle of Cascina*, (central portion), Copy Attributed to Aristotile da Sangallo.

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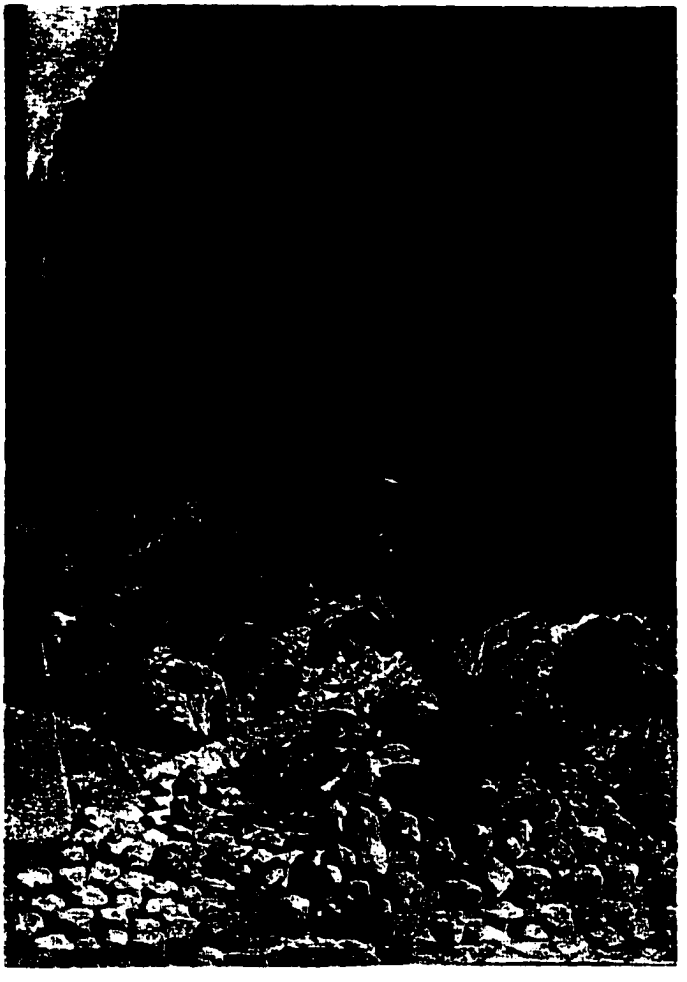


Fig. 60. Ernest Meisonnier, *Memory of Civil War (The Barricades)*, 1849. Oil on Canvas, 11-1/2 x 8-3/4".

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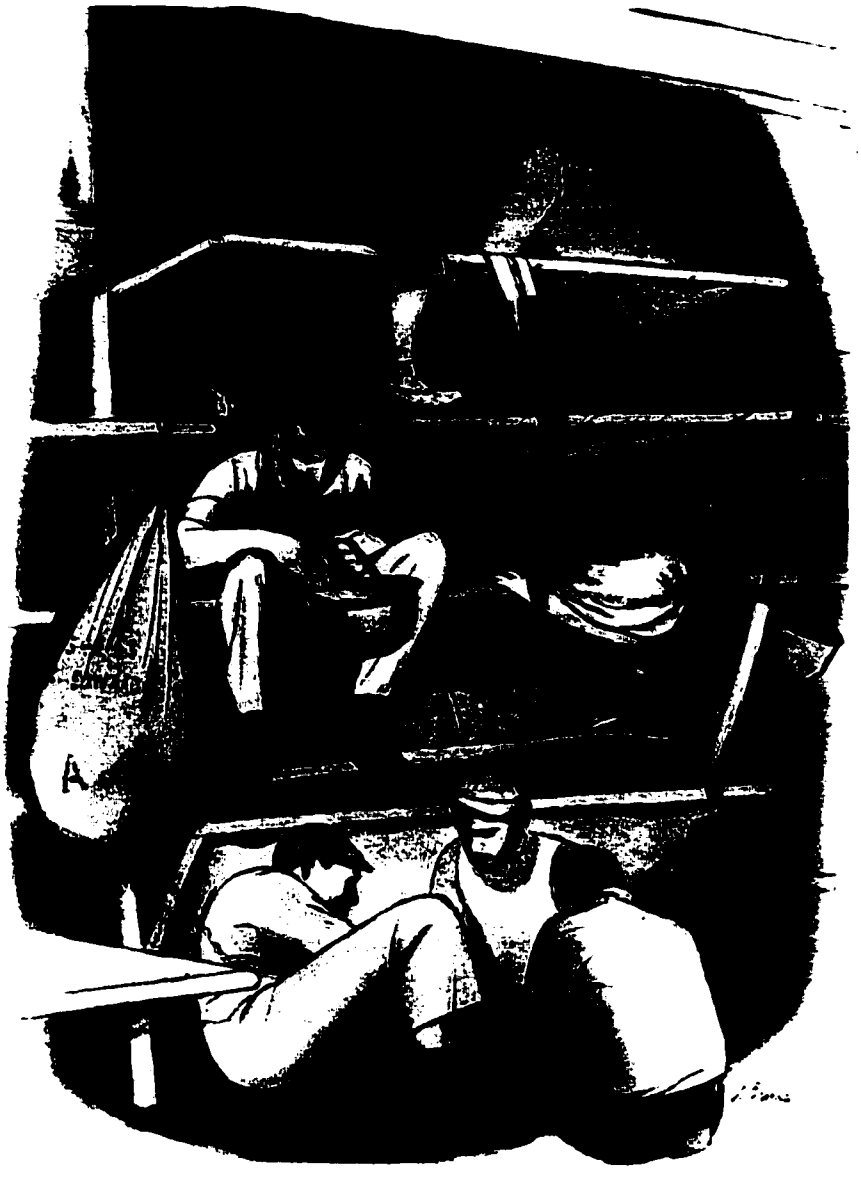


Fig. 61. James Brooks, *Troop Ship Interior*, c. 1943. U. S. Army Art Collection.

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Fig. 62. James Brooks, *Benghazi Lullaby*, c. 1944. Gouache on Board. Collection of C. P. Brooks.

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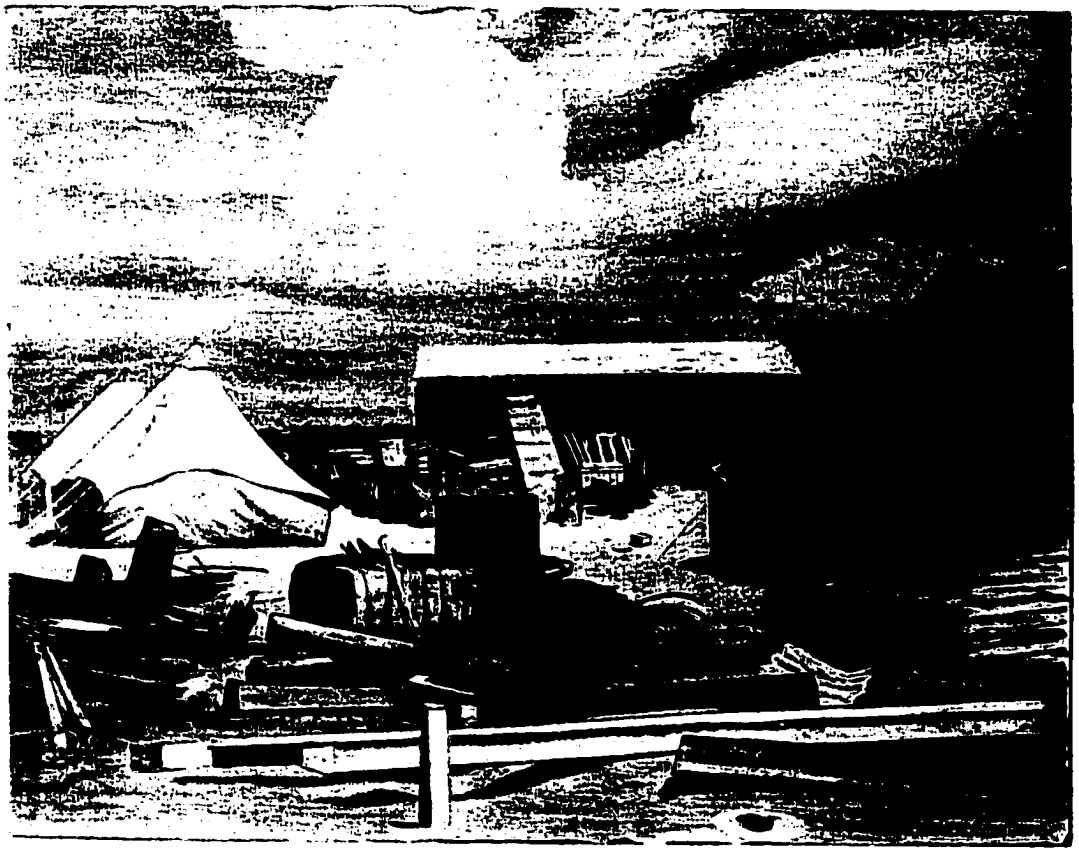


Fig. 63. James Brooks. *Supply Depot*, c.1944. U.S. Army Art Collection.

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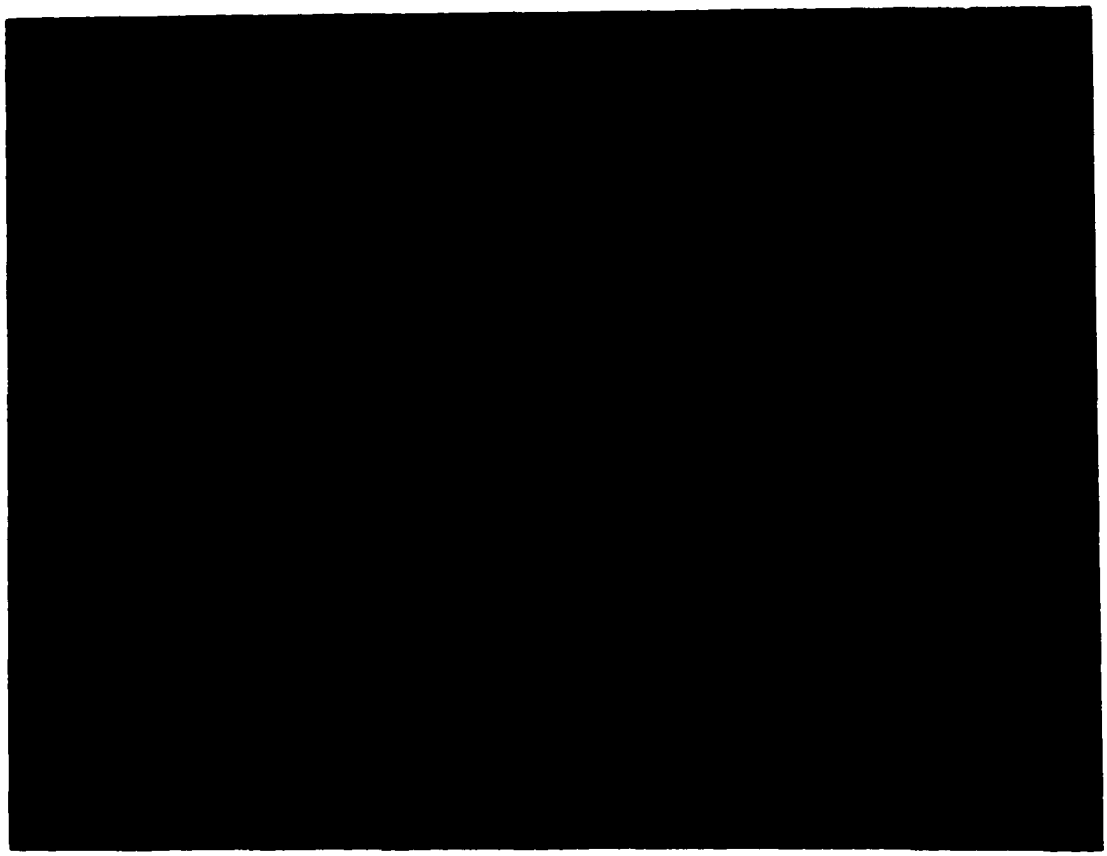


Fig. 64. James Brooks, *Desert Landscape, Burning Plane*, c. 1944.
Collection of C.P. Brooks

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Fig. 65. James Brooks, *Supper on Shipboard,* c. 1934.
Gouache, 26 x 17-1/4"
U.S. Army Collection.

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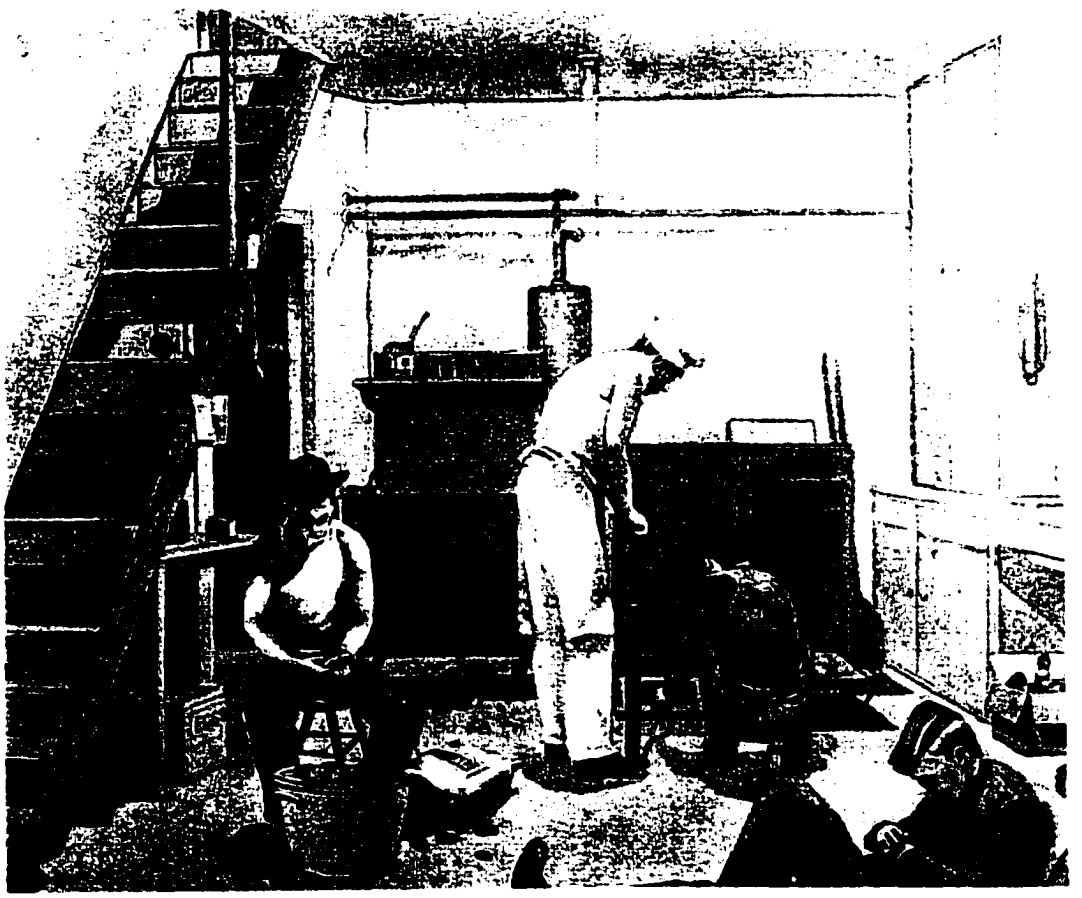


Fig. 66. Warren Leopold, *Mess Sergeant*, 1943. Watercolor. U. S. Army Art Collection.

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Fig. 67. Cézanne. Le Cabanon de Jourdan, 1906. Oil on Canvas, 25-5/8 x 31-7/8". Private Collection.

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Fig. 68. James Brooks, *View of Berka, Number One, c. 1944.* U.S.Army Art Collection.

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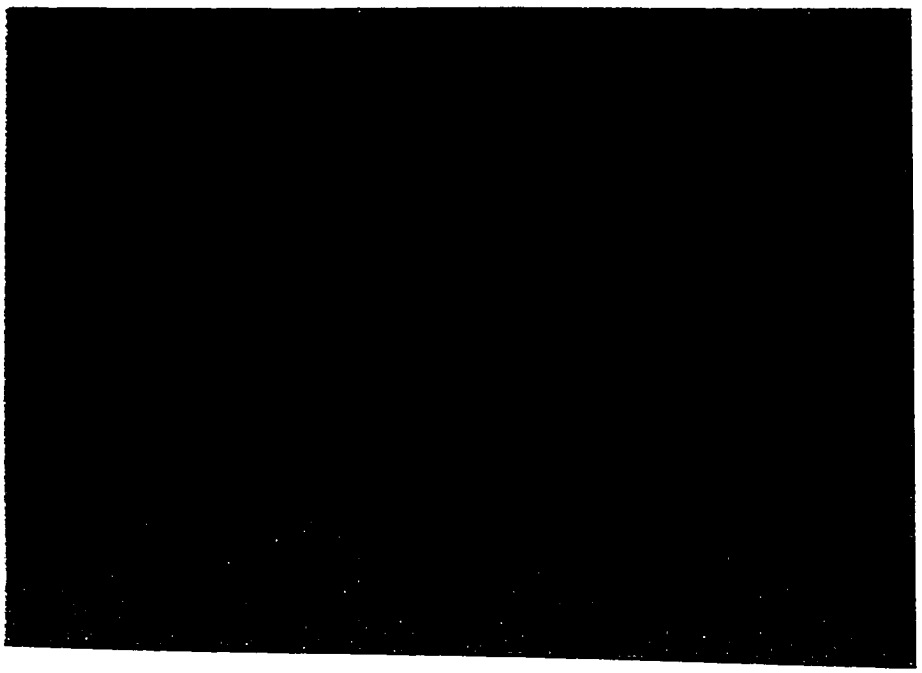


Fig. 69. James Brooks, *Study of Tired Soldier*, c. 1944. Pencil or Charcoal Drawing.

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Published Weekly by Special Service

Sandscript

Camp Russell B Huckstep USAFIME

VOLUME II, No. 52 Saturday, January 13, 1945 PHONE 93 Ring 2

Star Room Getting New Winter Roof

Work was started this week on the covering of the Service Club "Star Room" to provide room for beer drinkers and special events during the winter months.

Heavy posts, supported by guy wires, have been installed and will be covered with canvas to make a big room that will take the strain off the interior of the club, where the congestion has presented a serious problem to Special Service.

Take It E.C!.

Happy Birthday!



Luxor Leaves In Operation, Lebanon Next

Week-end or [illegible]-week trips to Luxor, heart of the ancient civilization of Upper Egypt, now are available to all ranks of U.S. forces with the establishment of regular furlough plane service from Payne Field.

Allotment for the Middle East Service Command is three officers and seven enlisted personnel weekly. Requests for these trips will be submitted by letter as for other furloughs and passes, reservations will be made by the Camps Special Service office.

Fig. 70. James Brooks. Design of Masthead for *Sandscript*, Newspaper for Camp Russell B, Huckstep, USAFIME, c. 1944.

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Fig. 71. Bradley Walker Tomlin, *The Armor Must Change*, 1946. Oil on Canvas, 40 x 48". James A. Michener Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

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Fig. 72, Philip Guston, Shown with an Unidentified 1946 Painting. Courtesy of *LIFE*, 27 May 1946.

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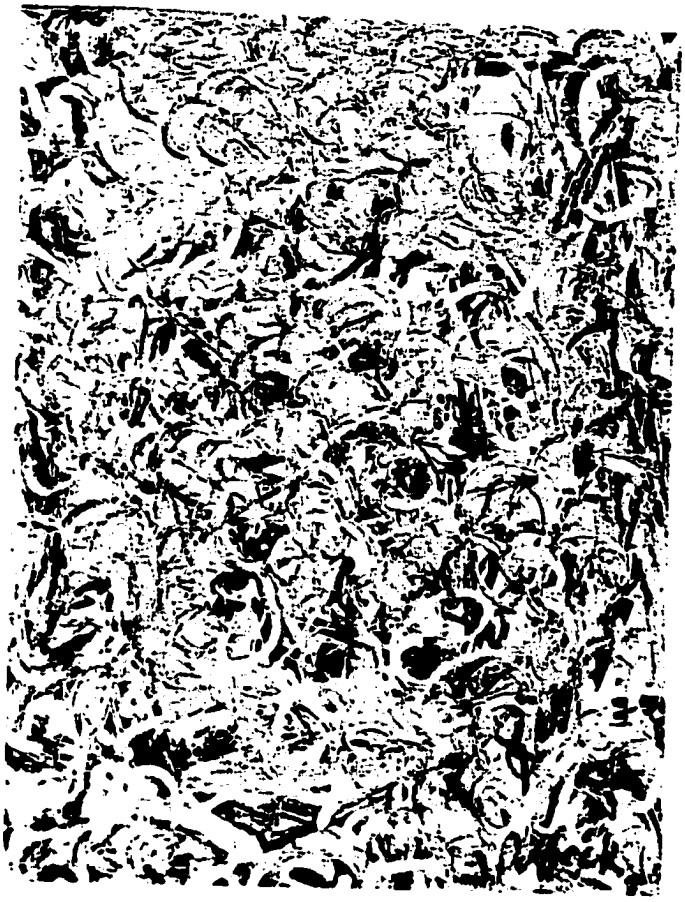


Fig. 73. Jackson Pollock, *Sounds in the Grass: Shimmering Substance*, 1946. Oil on Canvas, 30 x 24", Museum of Modern Art.

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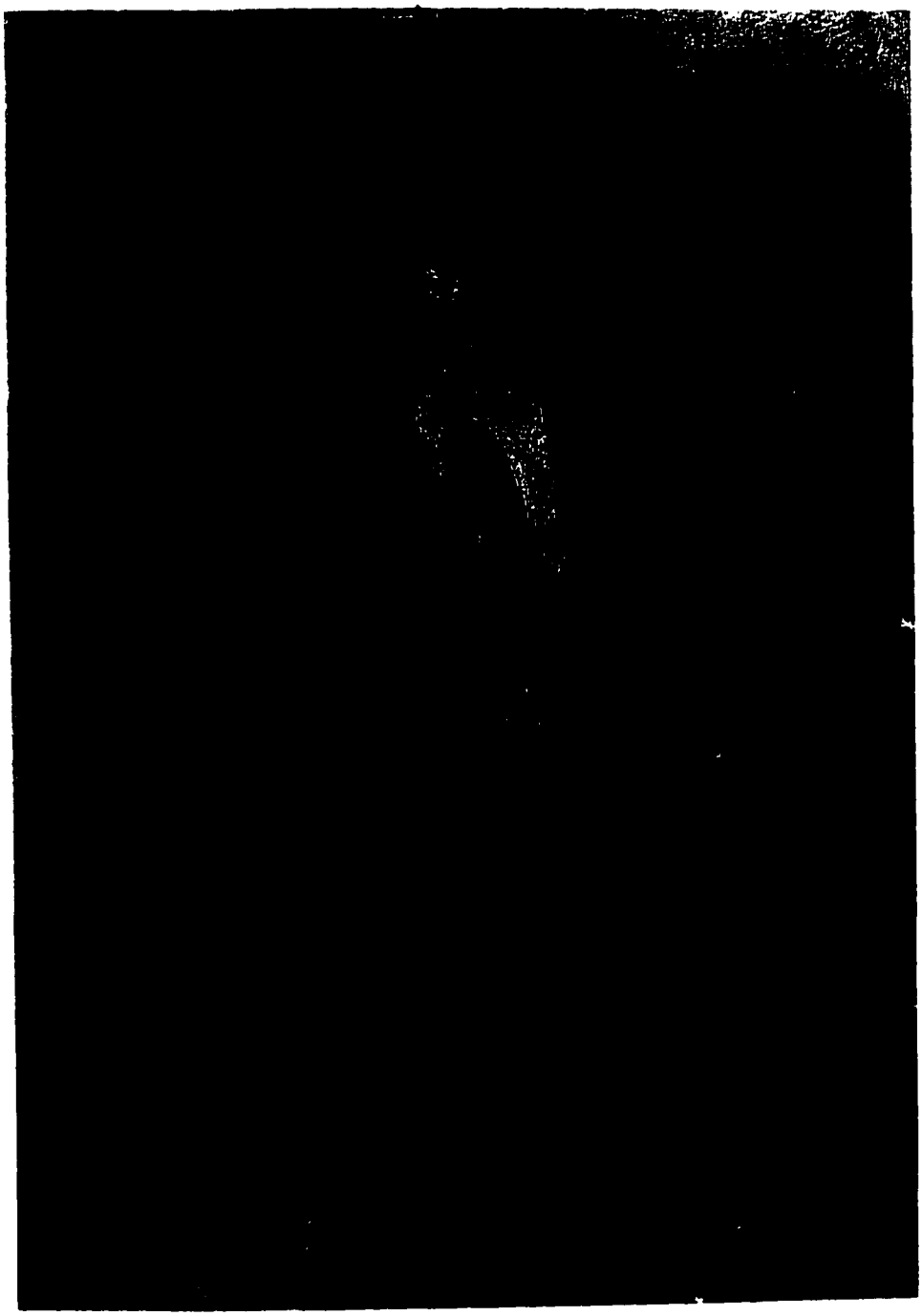


Fig. 74. Wallace Harrison, *Henriette*, 1946.
Oil on Canvas, Appr. 31 x 23".
Collection of Henriette Schutz Harrison.

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Fig. 75. Wallace Harrison, *La Surprise*, 1945. Pencil on Paper, Appr. 7-3/4" x 6-1/4". Collection of Henriette Schutz Harrison.

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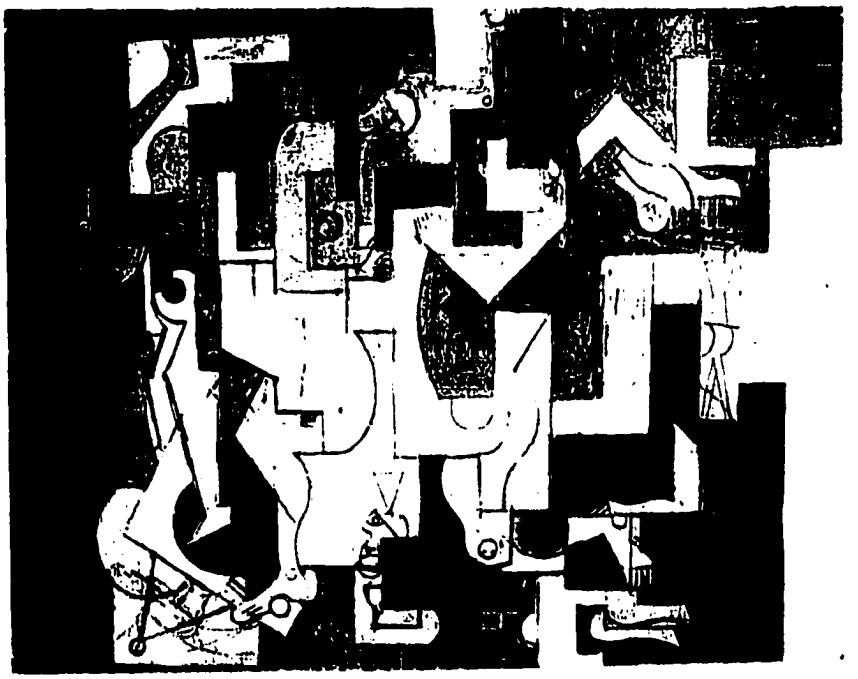


Fig. 76. Wallace Harrison, *Le Cabinet Etrange*, 1948. 12 x 9". Collection of Henriette Schutz Harrison.

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Fig. 77, Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselle d'Avignon,* 1907.
Oil on Canvas, 96 x 92"
Museum of Modern Art.

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Fig. 78. James Brooks, *Night Conference*, 1946.
Oil on Homosote, 28-7/8 x 30". Collection of C. P. Brooks

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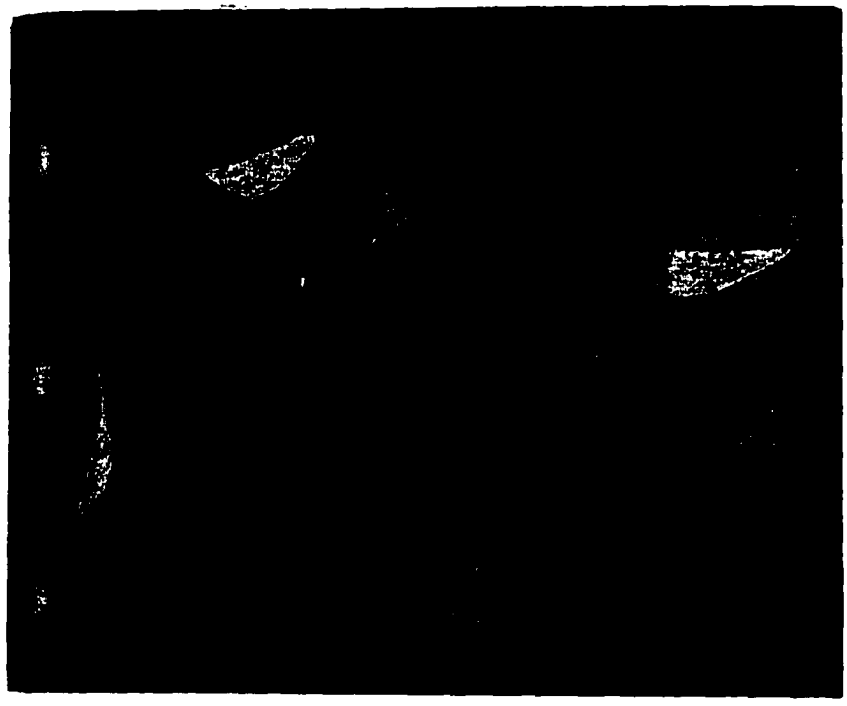


Fig. 79. James Brooks, *Composition*, 1946.
Oil on Homosote, 36 x 47-1/2". Collection of C. P. Brooks

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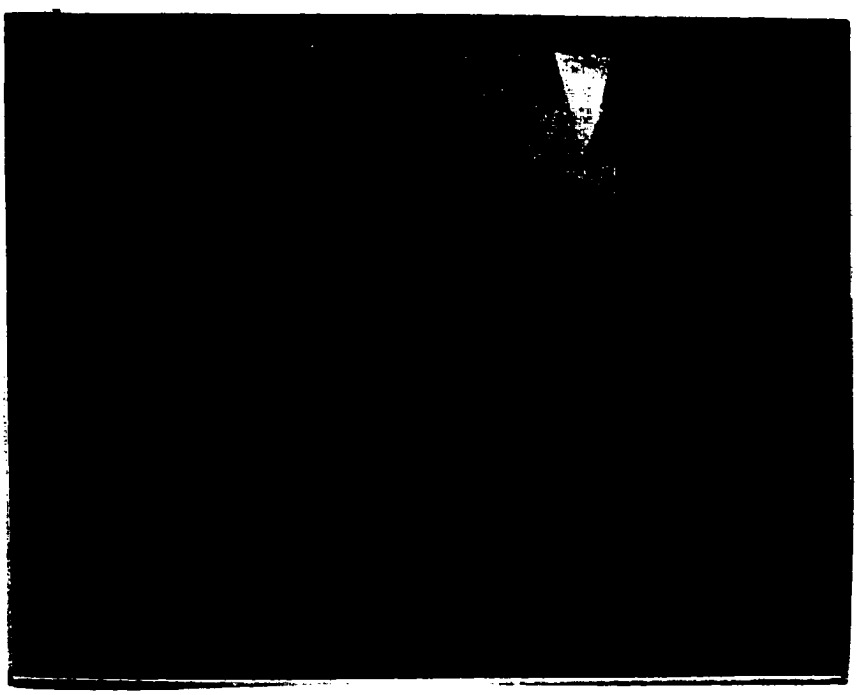


Fig 80. James Brooks,
Dialogue, 1947.
Oil on Homosote, 36 x 48.
Collection of C.P. Brooks

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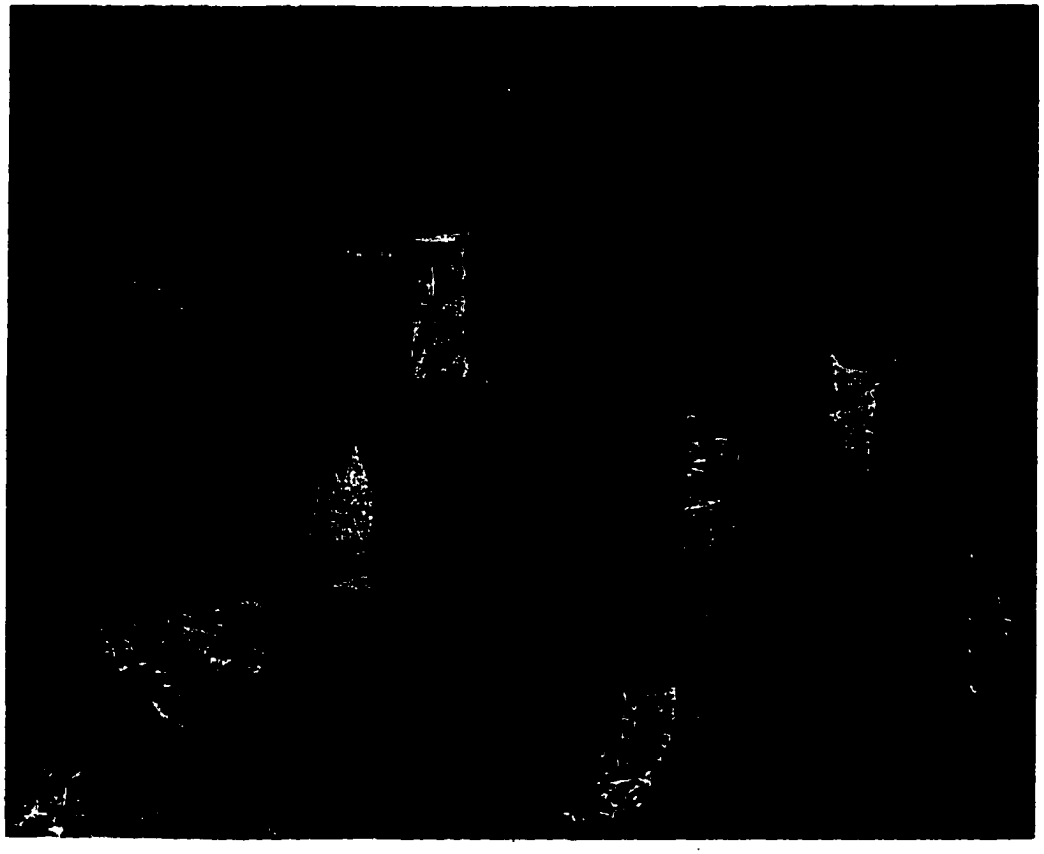


Fig. 81. Philip Guston, *If This Be Not I, 1945.* Oil on Canvas, 42-3/8 x 55-1/4". Collection of the Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis.

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Fig. 82. (Right): Charlotte Park Brooks, *Spring*. Oil on Canvas, 18 x 18". Collection of Artist.

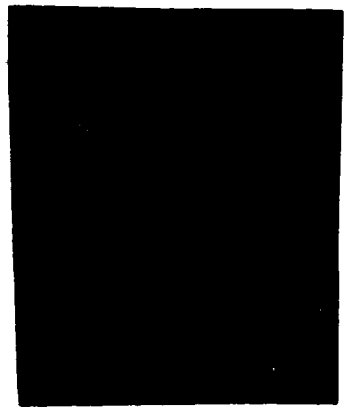
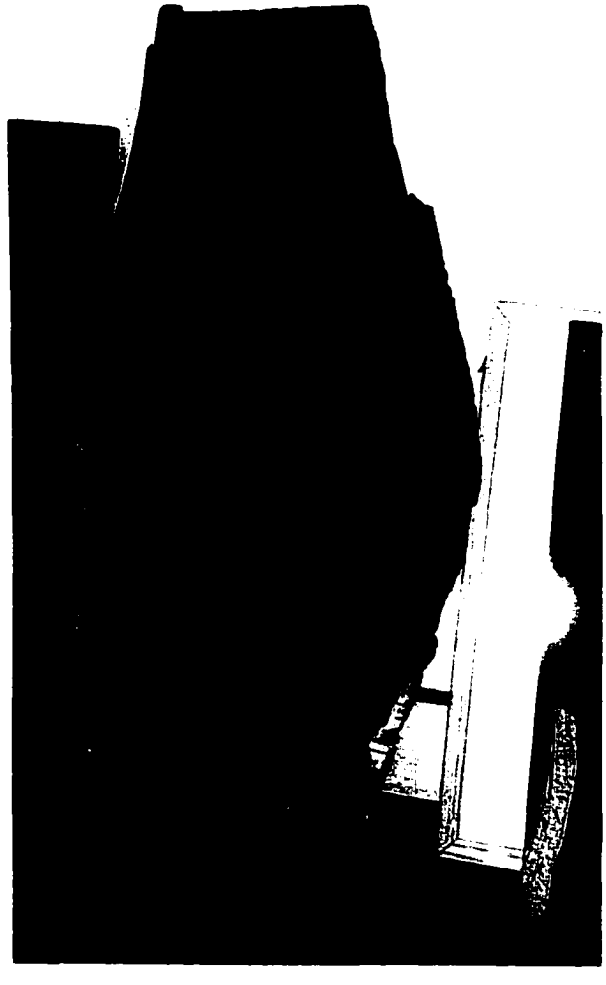


Fig. 83. (Right): James Brooks, *Untitled*, 1848. Oil on Wood, Appr. 18" High. Col-Lection of C. P. Brooks.



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Fig. 84. James Brooks, *No. 5*, 1951. Oil on Osnaburg cloth, 48 x 36". Collection of C. P. Brooks.

a. Recto

b. Verso

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Fig. 85. James Brooks, *No. 25,* 1949. Oil on Osnaburg Cloth, 39 x 63". Private Collection.

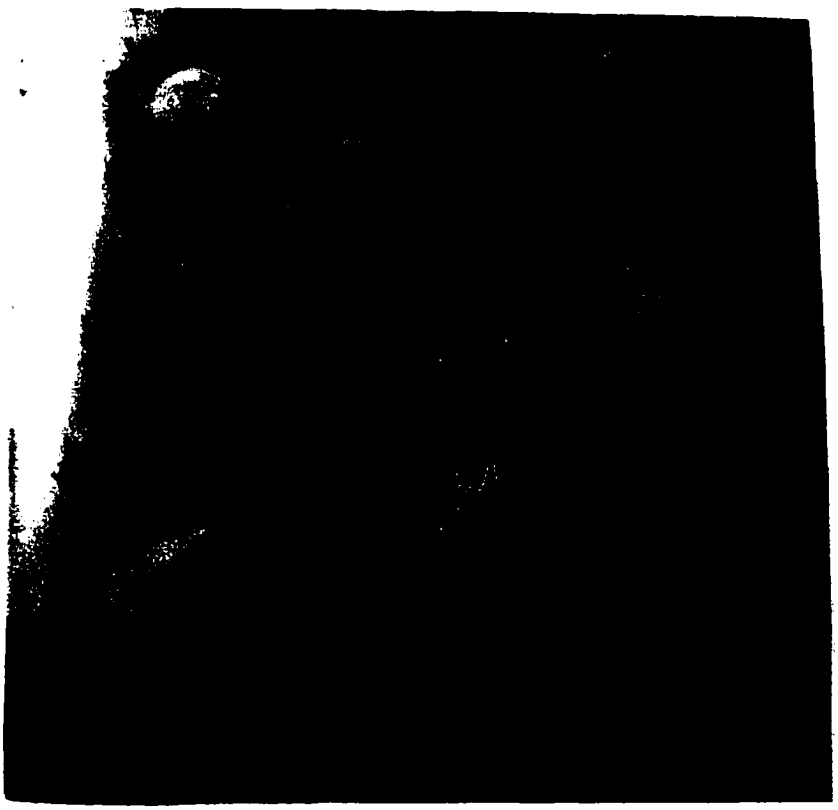


Fig. 86. James Brooks, *No. 11,* 1949. Oil on Osnaburg Cloth. 37 x 41." Private Collection.

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Fig. 87. James Brooks, *No. 36.* 1950. Oil on Osnaburg Cloth, 41 x 45". Collection C.P. Brooks.



Fig. 88. James Brooks. *No. 42,* 1950. Oil on Canvas, 82 x 105-1/2. Collection of C. P. Brooks.

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Fig. 89. Nina Leen, "Irascible Group of Advanced Artists Led Fight Against Show," Photo. *LIFE*, 15 January 1951.

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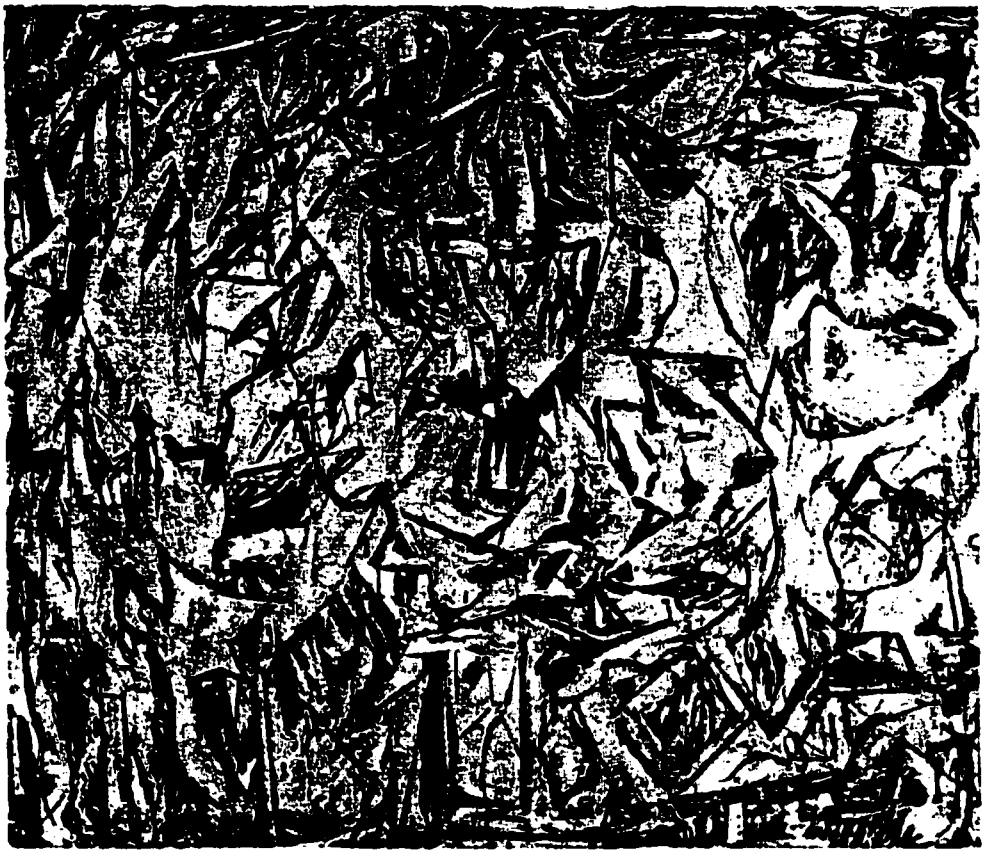


Fig. 90. Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950. Oil and Enamel on Canvas, 80-1/8 x 100-1/8". Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. And Mrs.Frank G. Logan Purchase Prize; Gift of Mr. Edgar Kaufman, Jr. and Mr. And Mrs. Noah Goldowsky.

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Fig. 91. Arshile Gorky, *Agony I*, 1947. Oil on Canvas, 40 x 50-1/2. Museum of Modern Art, NY, A. Conger Goodyear Fund.



Fig. 92. Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 96-1/4 x 238", University of Iowa Museum of Art.

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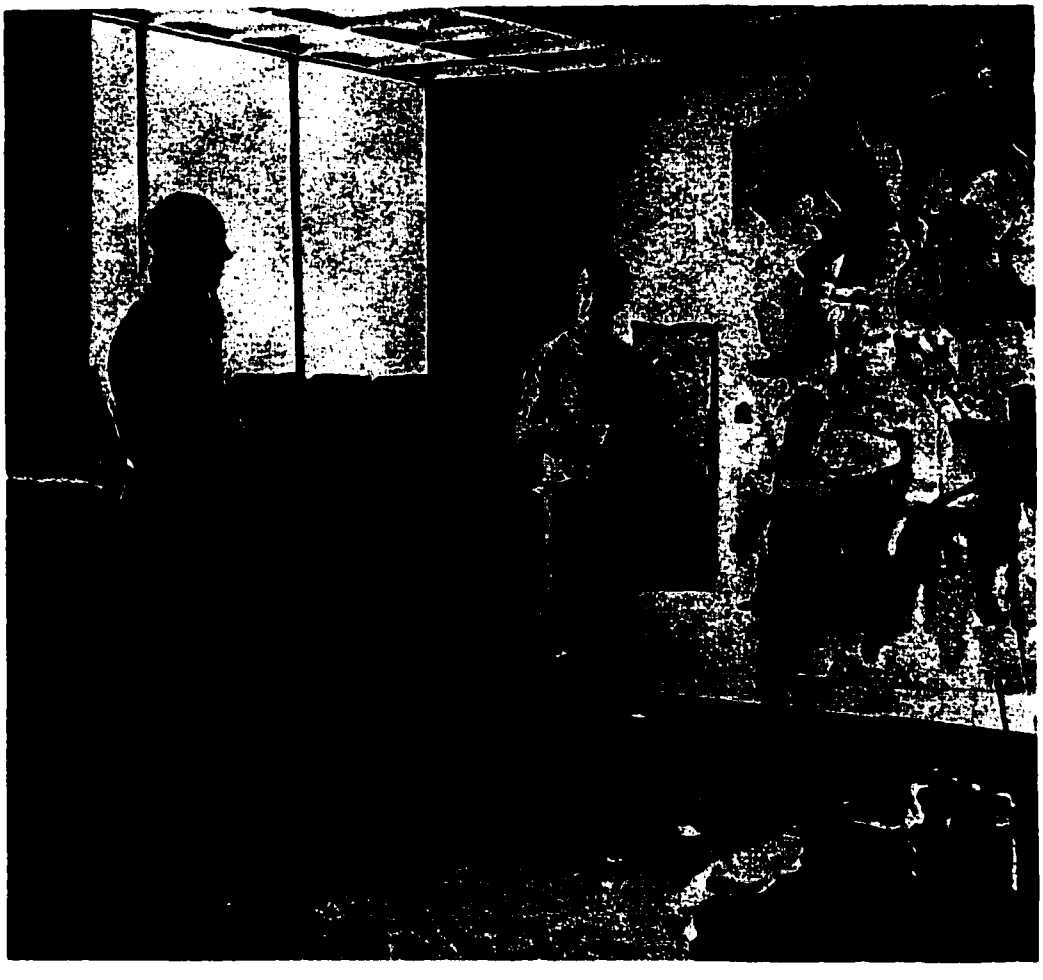


Fig. 93. Hans Namuth. Photo. Pollock and Brooks in Brooks' Studio. Montauk, 1949.

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MAY 21ST TO JUNE 10TH, 1951

PREVIEW MONDAY, MAY 21ST, NINE P. M.

60 EAST 9TH ST., NEW YORK 3, N.Y.

9TH ST.

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE

Fig. 94. 1951 Poster for
Ninth Street Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture.

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Fig. 95. James Brooks, *Number 41*, 1949. Oil on Osnaburg Cloth. 36-1/2 x 96-1/2". Private Collection.



Fig. 96. Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 85-5/8 x 117-1/4". Collection of the Artist, On Extended Loan to the National Gallery of Art.

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Fig. 97. James Brooks, *M*-1951. Oil on Canvas, Private Collection.



Fig. 98. Willem de Kooning, *Light in August,* 1946. Oil on Canvas, 55 x 41-1/2". Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.



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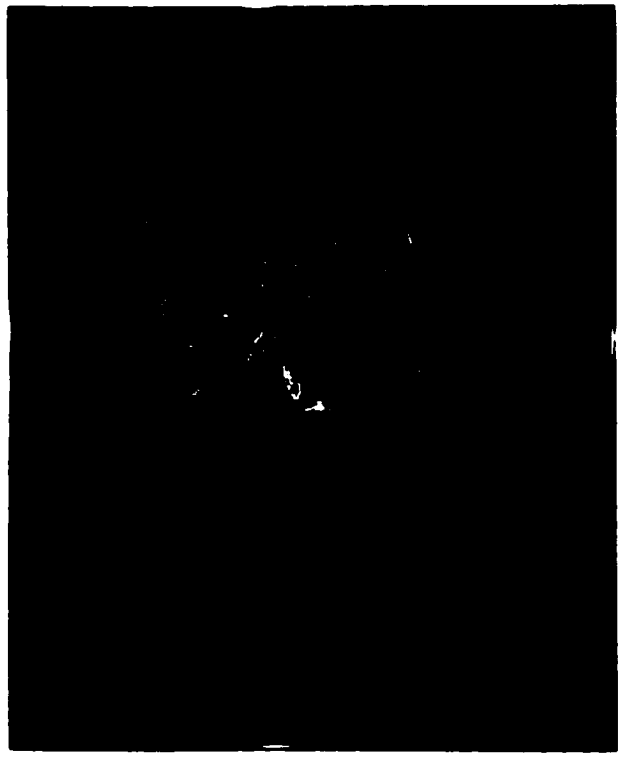


Fig. 99. *K*-1952. Oil on Canvas, 81 x 71.
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

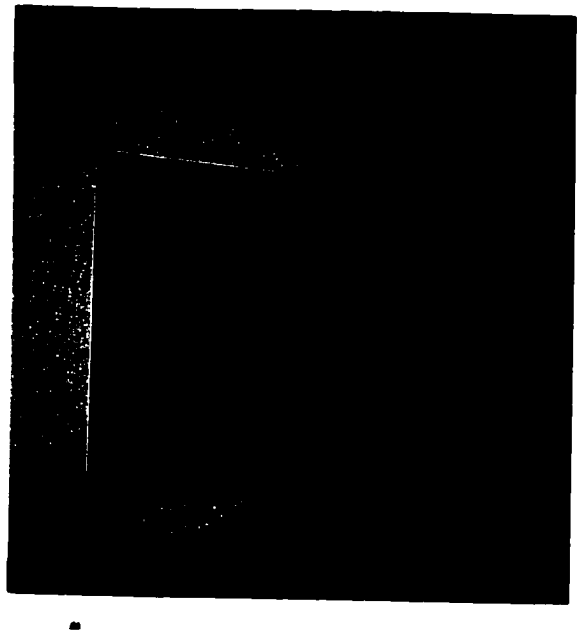


Fig. 100. James Brooks, *Triptych*, 1952.
Oil on Canvas on Wood Chip Panel, 89 x 120",
Fogg Museum, Harvard University,

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Fig. 101. James Brooks, *P*-1952,
Oil on Canvas, 21 x 16-1/8",
Collection of C.P. Brooks



Fig. 102. James Brooks, *M*-1953,
Oil and Crayon on Canvas, 48 x 66"
Collection of C.P. Brooks

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Fig. 103. James Brooks, *U*-1953.
Oil on Canvas, 27-1/2 x 33-1/2",
Collection of C.P.Brooks



Fig. 104. James Brooks, *Floxurn*, 1955,
Oil on Canvas, 64 x 59",
Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton.

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Fig. 105. James Brooks, *Karrig*.
Oil on Canvas, 79 x 73-1/2",
Walker Art Center and Minneapolis Sculpture Garden,
Minneapolis,MN.

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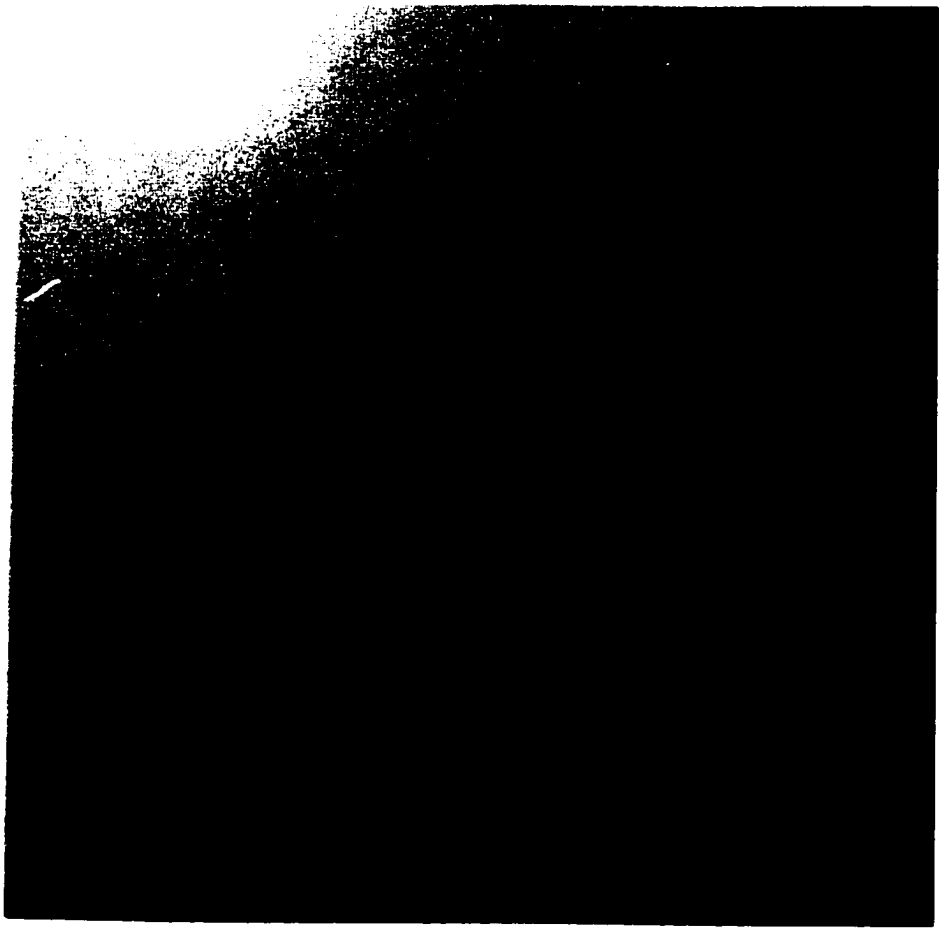


Fig. 106. Philip Guston, *Dial*, 1956.
Oil on Canvas, 72 x 76",
Whitney Museum of American Art.

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Fig. 107. James Brooks, *R*-1953.
Oil on Canvas, 82 x 88".
Chase Manhattan Bank Collection.

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Fig. 108. James Brooks, *Qualm*, 1954.
Oil on Canvas, 61 x 57-1/8"
Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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Fig. 109. James Brooks, *Gant*, 1955.
Oil on Canvas, 53-1/2 x 62-1/2",
Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Gift of Seymour H. Knox.



Fig. 110. James Brooks, *Holdan*, 1955.
Oil on Canvas, 75 x 40".
Private Collection.

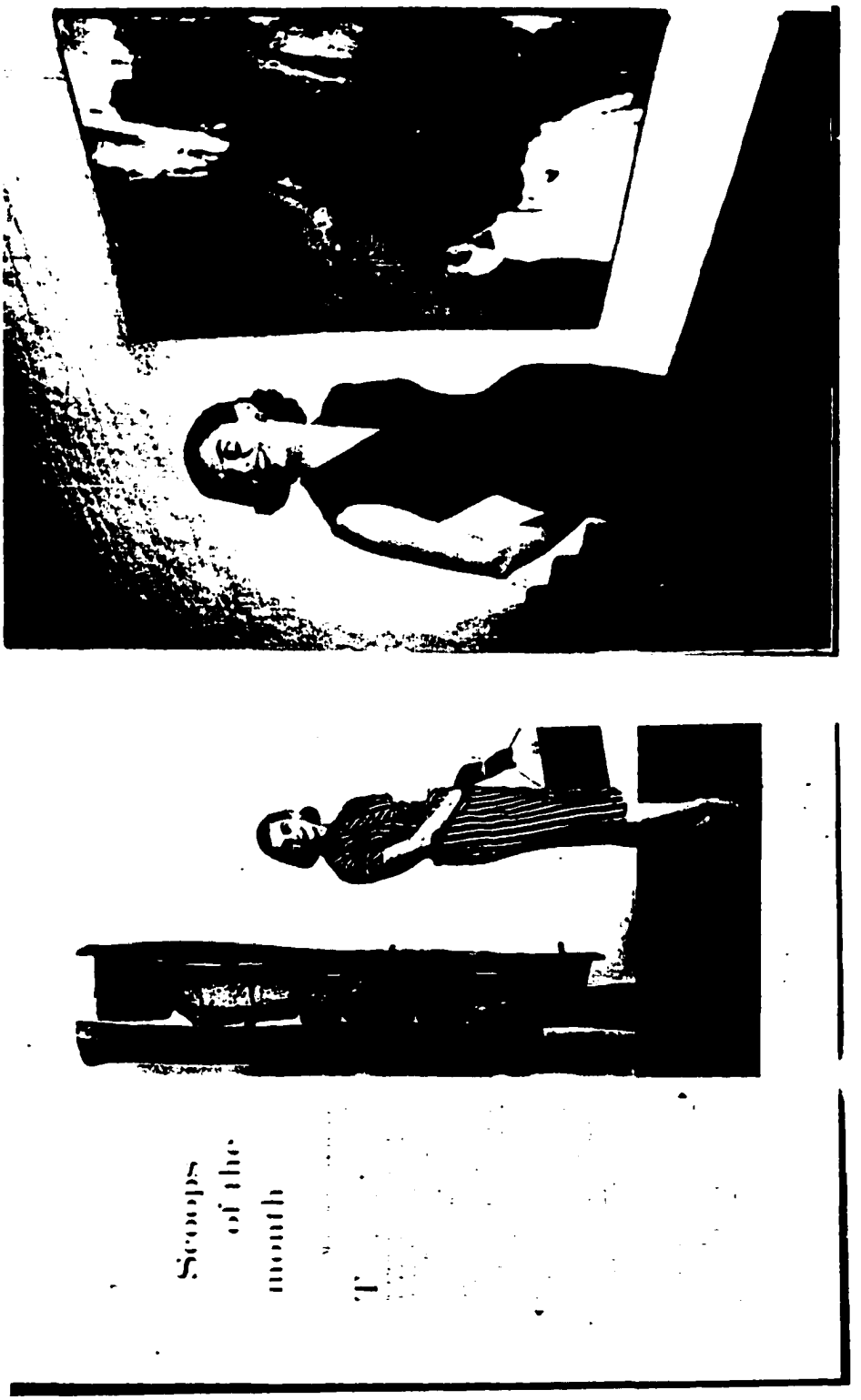


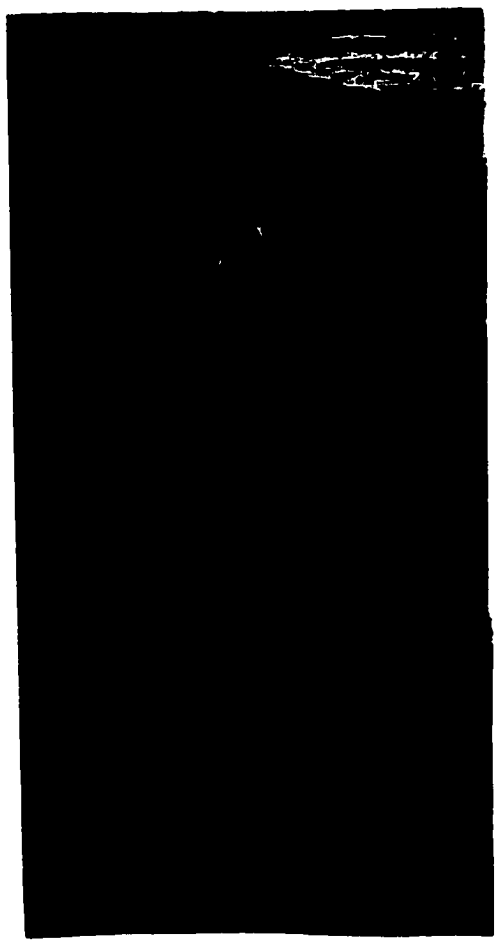
Fig. 111. Virginia Crozier. Photos for *Mademoiselle*, June 1956. Model at Right Posed Against Brooks' M-1955.

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Fig. 112. James Brooks, *Jackson*, 1956.
Oil on Canvas, 66-3/4 x 69-3/4.
Collection of the National Trust for Historic Preservation,
Nelson Rockefeller Bequest.

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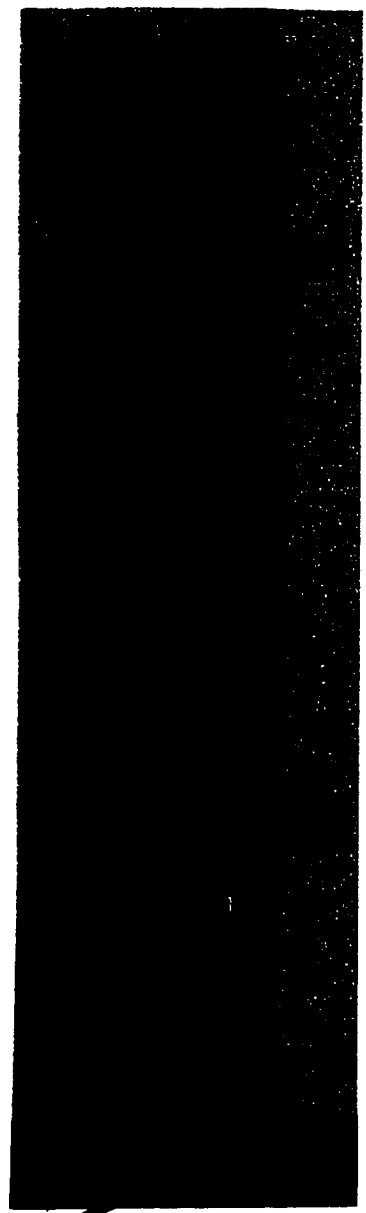


Fig. 113. (Above) Clyfford Still, *PH-323, 1934. Oil on Canvas.* 57-5/8 x 31-5/8" San Francisco Museum of Art.

Fig. 114. (Right) Seymour Lipton, *The Cloak,* 1952, Bronze And Steel, 8' High.

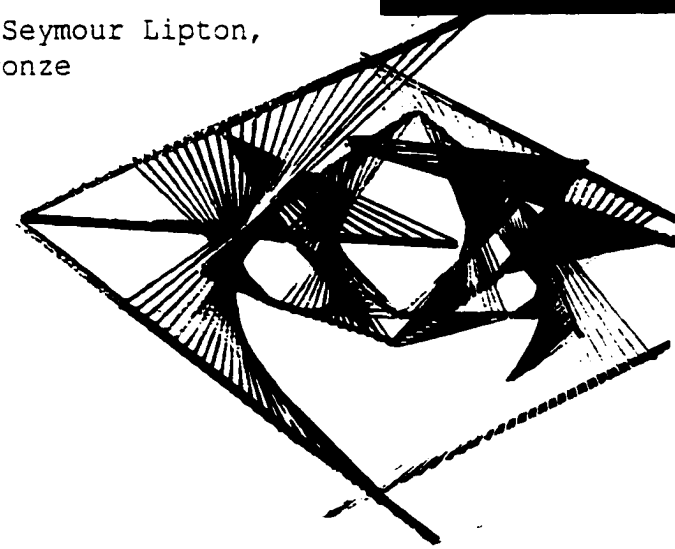


Fig. 115. (Below) Roy Gussow, *Mitosis, No. 3,* c. 1956. Steel. (Detail).

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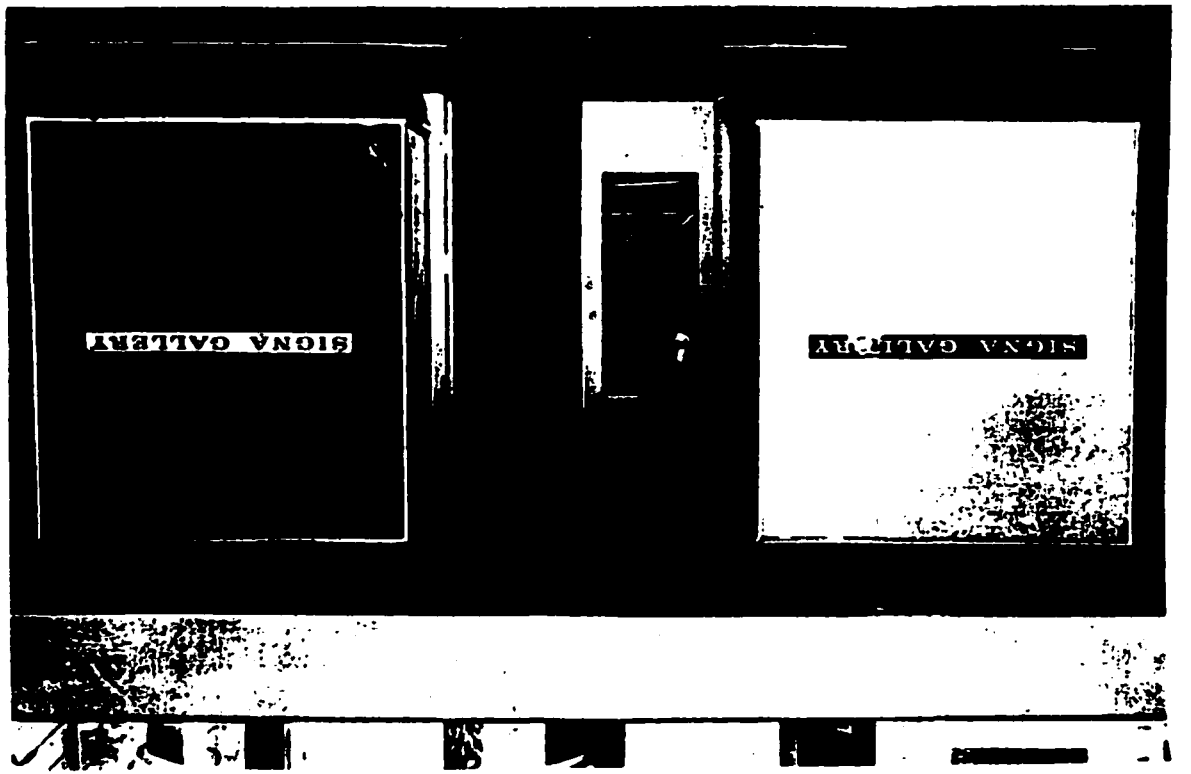


Fig. 116. James Brooks, Lettering on the Façade of Signa Gallery. (Photo).



Fig. 117. James Brooks, *Rasalus,* 1959.
Oil on Canvas, 66 x 79-3/4".
Whitney Museum of American Art.
Gift of Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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Fig. 118. James Brooks with *Acanda*, 1958.
Oil on Canvas, 84 x 66".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.



Fig. 119. James Brooks. *Flintro*, 1960.
Oil on Canvas, 66 x 84".
Private Collection.

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Fig. 120. James Brooks, *Iago,* 1960. Oil on Canvas, 67 x 72". Southern Methodist University.

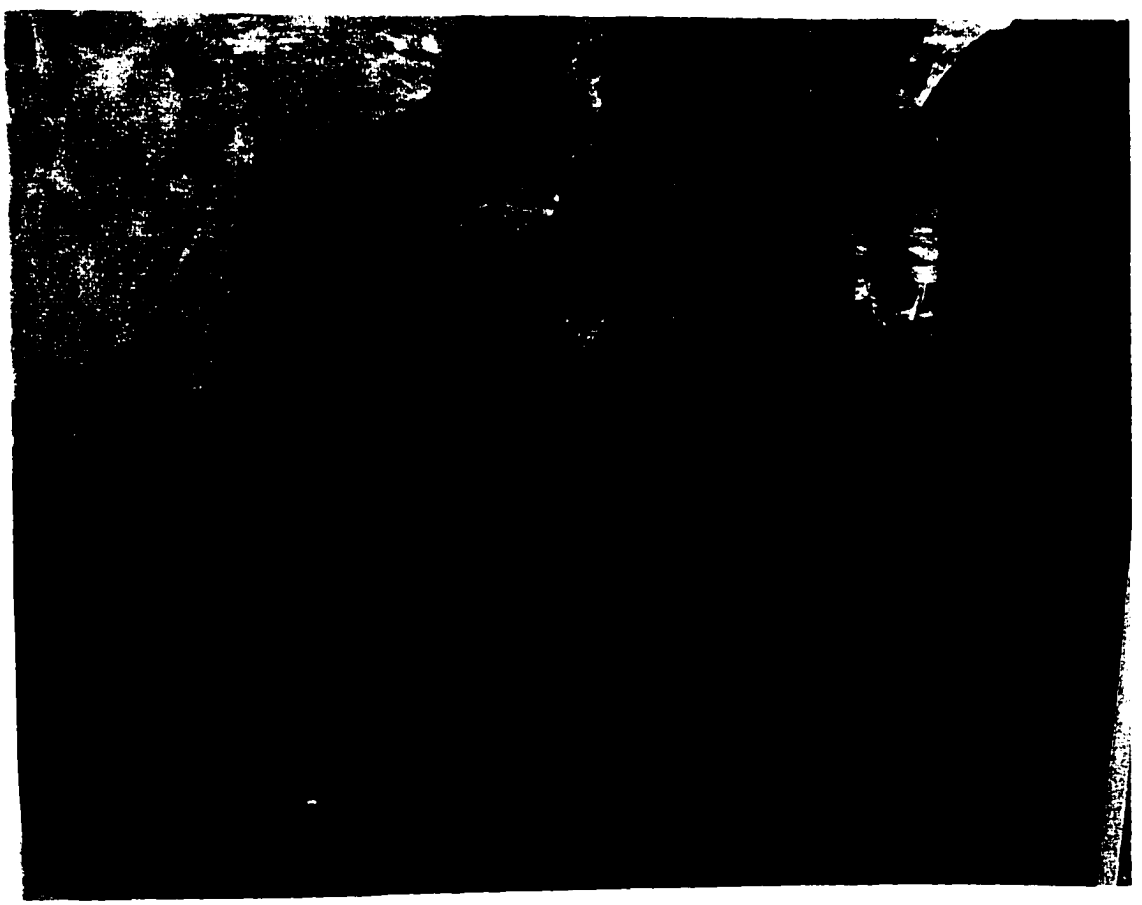


Fig. 121. James Brooks, *Rodado,* 1961. Oil on Canvas, 57 x 78". Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Gevirtz-Mnuchin Purchase Fund.

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Fig. 123. James Brooks, *Obsol*, 1964.
Oil on Canvas, 80 x 74". Private Collection.

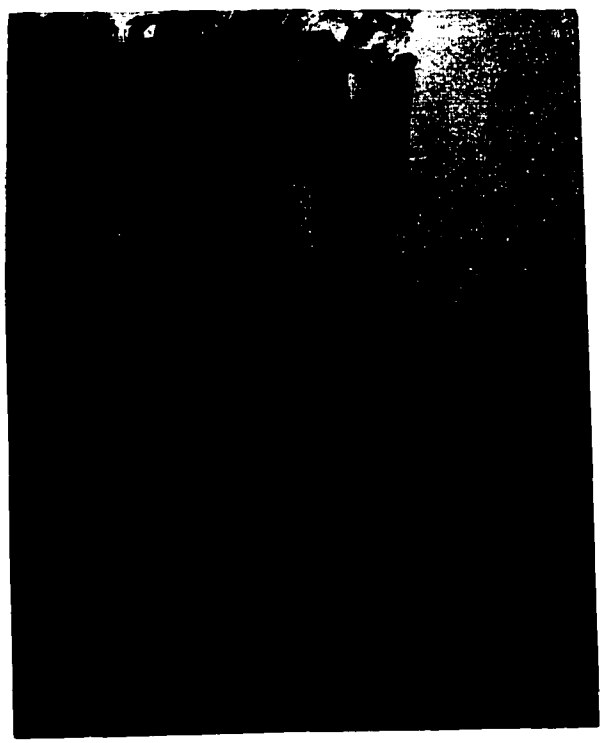


Fig. 124. James Brooks, *Haneve*, 1960.
Oil on Cotton Duck, 92 x 78".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

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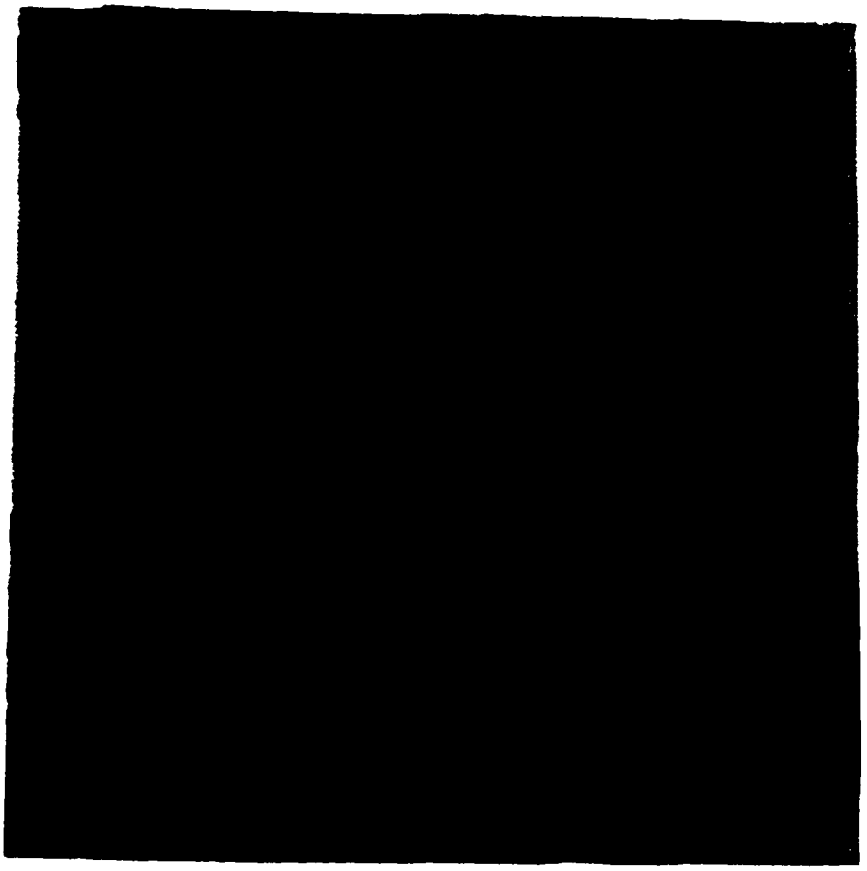


Fig. 124. James Brooks, *Larapolo,* c. 1960.
Oil on Canvas, Size Unknown. Singer Sewing Machine Collection.



Fig. 125. James Brooks, *Octon,* 1961. Oil on Canvas, 84 x 66".
James A. Michener Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

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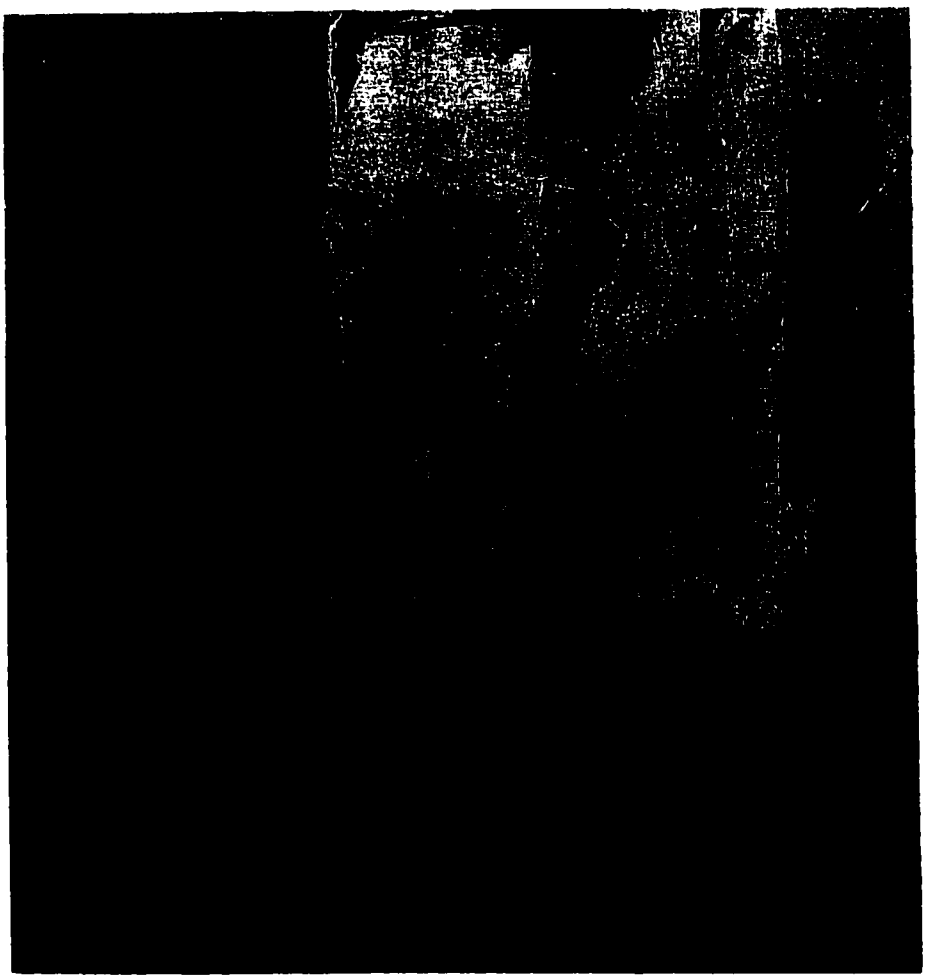


Fig. 126. James Brooks, *Burwak*, 1962.
Oil on Canvas, 72 x 72". Private Collection.

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Fig. 127. James Brooks, *Garn*, 1962.
Oil on Canvas, 34 x 36". Private Collection.



Fig. 128. James Brooks, *Lurry*, 1962.
Oil on Canvas, 48 x 42". Private Collection.

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Fig. 129. Charlotte Park Brooks and James Brooks Touring a Greek Acropolis—After Rebuffing a Too Aggressive Guide.

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Fig. 130. James Brooks, *J.F.K.*, 1963, Oil on Canvas. 72 x 72". Museum of fine Arts, Houston.

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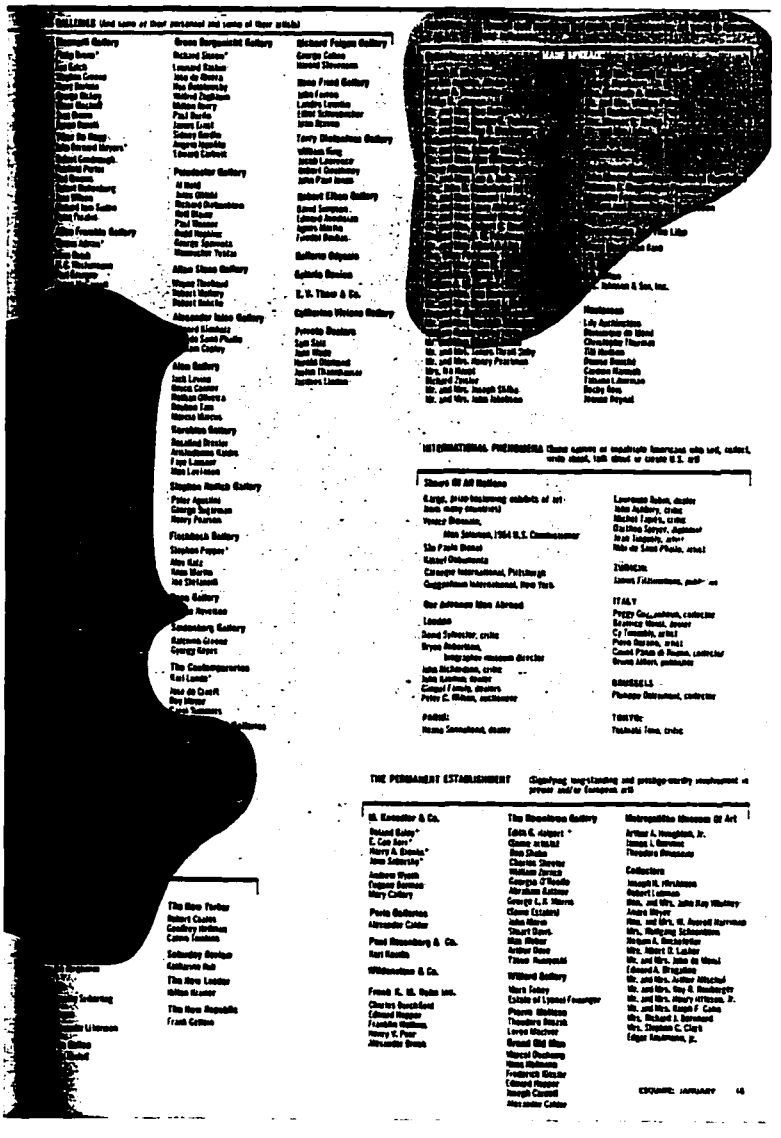


Fig. 131. Right Half of a Chart of the New York Art World. Prepared by Harold Rosenberg for *Esquire*, January 1956.

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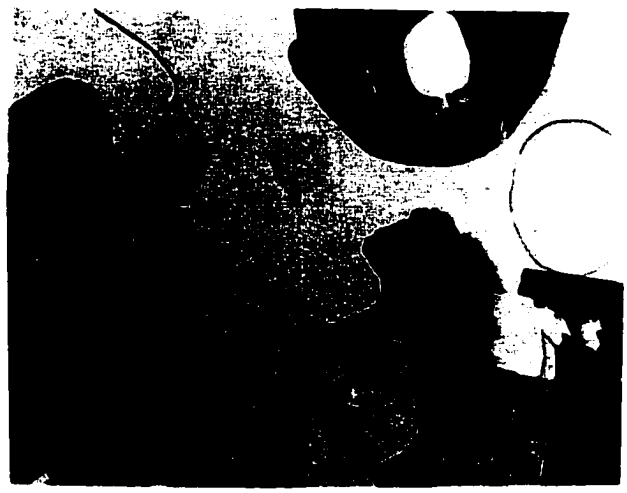


Fig. 134. James Brooks, *Ealand,* 1963.
Oil on Canvas, 74 x 104".
Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign.



Fig. 135. James Brooks, *Ainlee,* 1957.
Oil on Canvas, 84-7/8 x 66-7/8".
Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund

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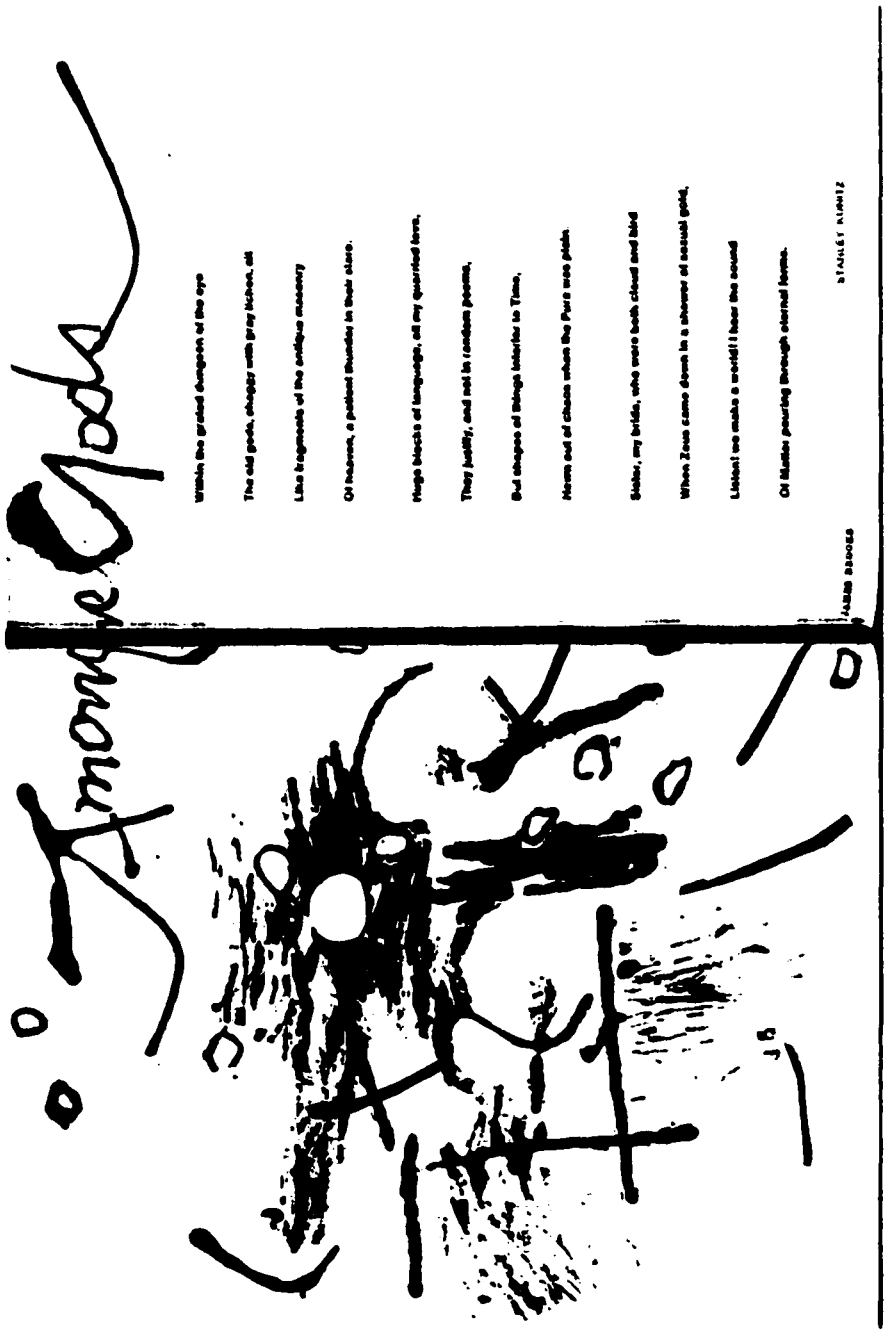


Fig. 134. James Brooks. *Among the Gods*, 1965. Ink on Paper.

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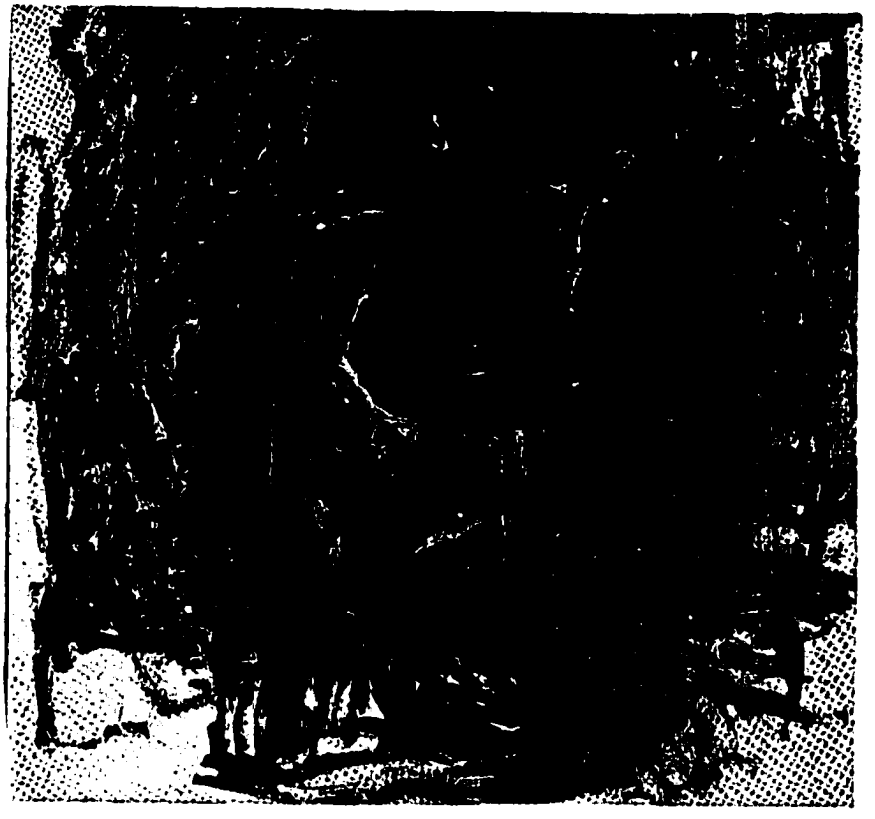


Fig. 135. Philip Guston, *Untitled*, 1962. Oil on Canvas. 68 x 73".

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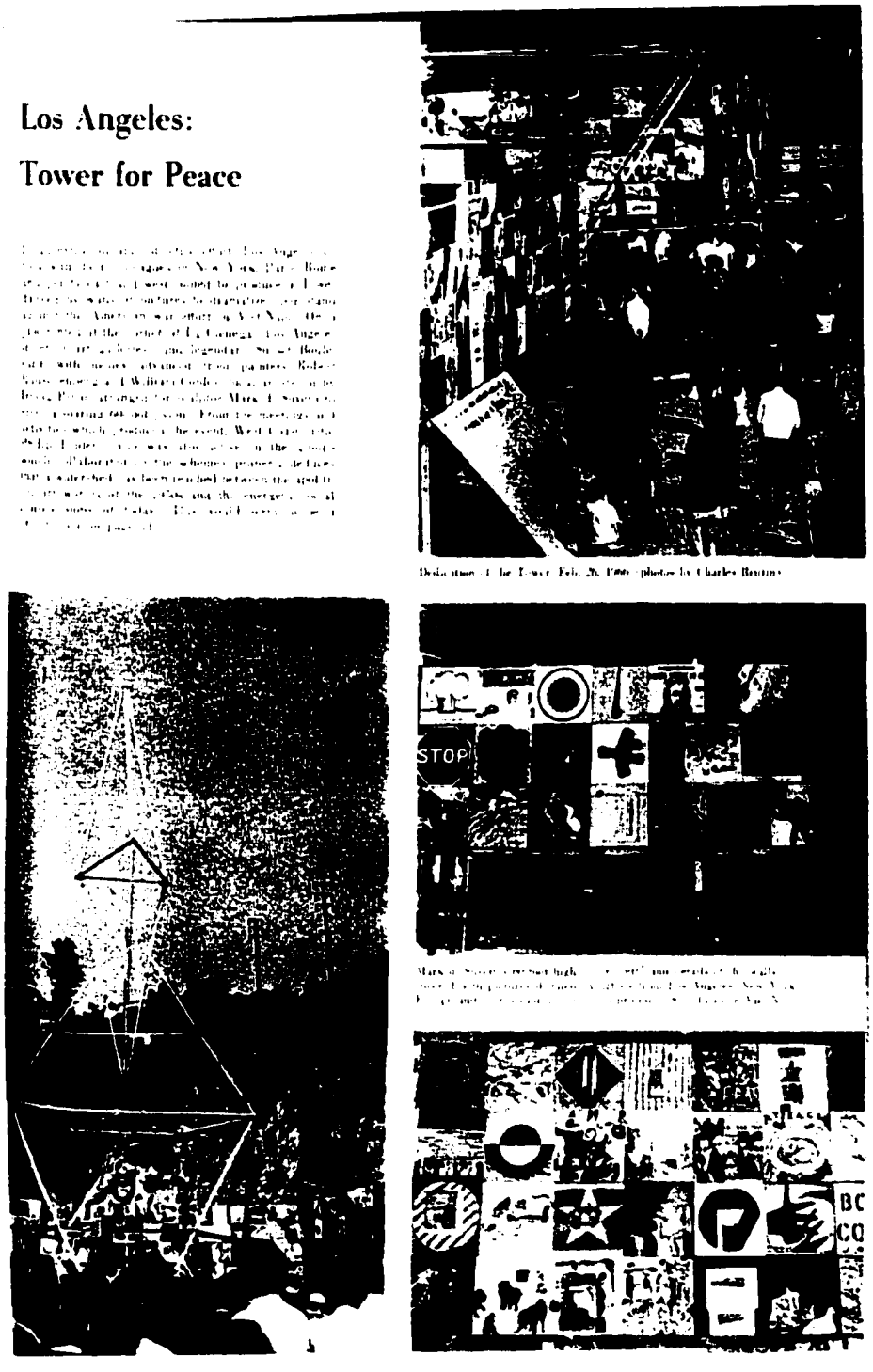


Fig. 136. Los Angeles Monument to Protest the Vietnam War. One Panel Was Contributed by Brooks.

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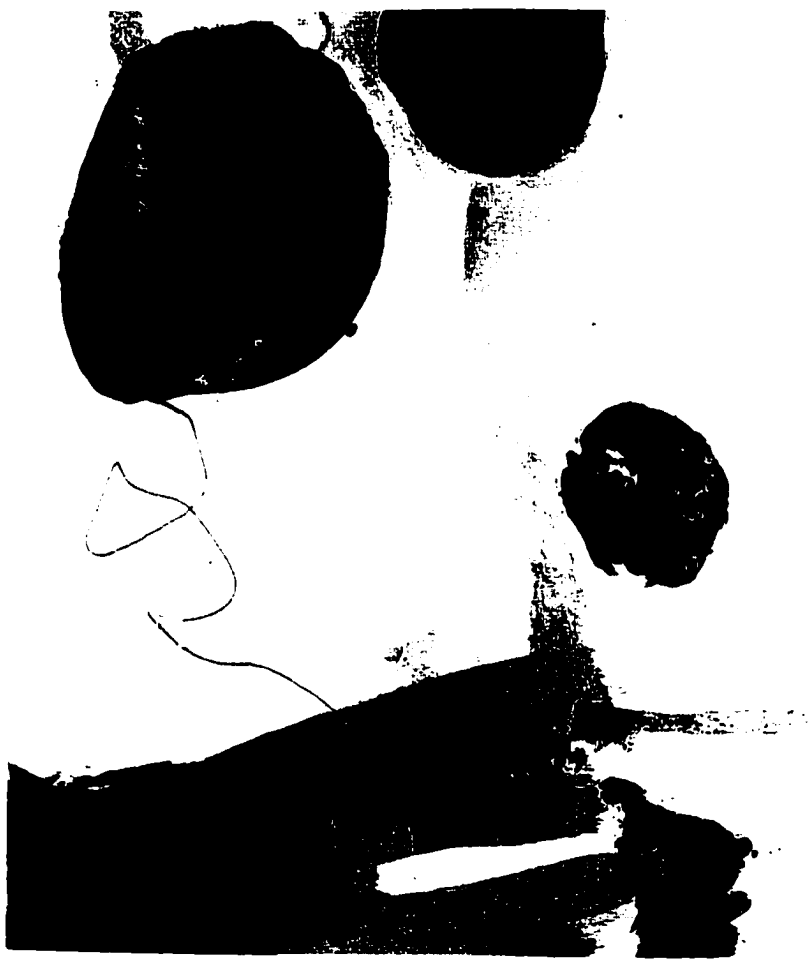


Fig. 137. James Brooks, *Cooba*, 1963.
Oil on Canvas, 80 x 74,
Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Gift of Seymour H. Knox.

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Fig. 138. James Brooks, *Pask*, 1961. Oil on Canvas. 46 x 67". Private Collection.



Emerson students Joseph Levitt, Barbara Segal, Sandie Cohen and Toni Lewis admire "Triptych" by James Brooks and "Dying and Dead Veteran" by Larry Rivers hanging in the main lobby.

Fig. 139. News Photo, Art Where You Live, 180 Beacon Street Collection.

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Fig. 140. James Brooks, *Erelon*, 1967.
Acrylic on Canvas, 72 x 72". Chase Manhattan Bank Collection.

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Fig. 141. James Brooks, *Noran*, 1967,Acrylic on Canvas, *72 x 65."* Private Collection.



Fig.142. James Brooks, *Ivaro*, 1967-8, Acrylic on Canvas,

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Fig. 143. James Brooks, *Orrib,* 1967.
Acrylic on Canvas. 30 x 60." Private Collection.



Fig. 144. Joan Miró, *Self-Portrait II,* 1938,
Oil on Canvas, 61 x 77". Detroit Institute of Art,
Gift of W. Hawkins Ferry.

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Fig. 145. Chase Manhattan Bank's 10th Anniversary Celebration. As Seen in *Women's Wear Daily*, 18 April 1969.

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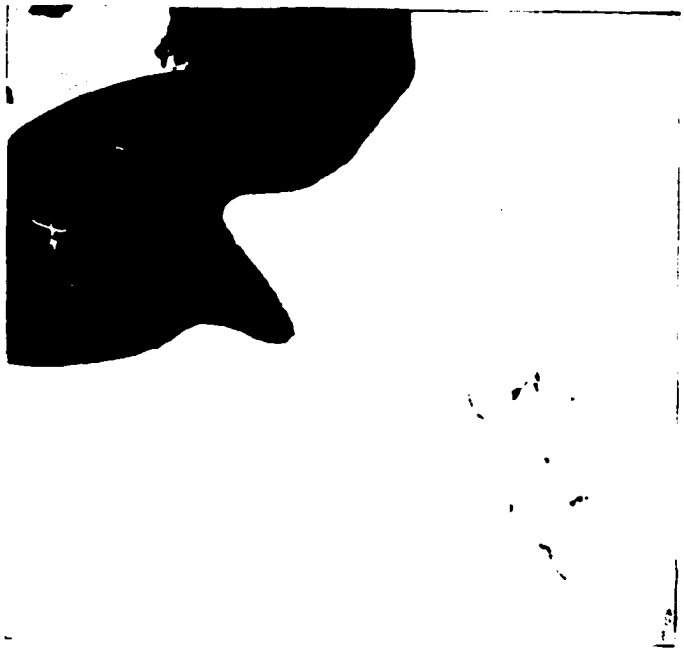


Fig. 146. James Brooks, *Oran*, 1969. Acrylic on Canvas, 108 x 93-1/4", National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Martha Jackson collection, Gift of Mr. And Mrs. David K. Anderson.



Fig. 147. James Brooks, *Ivarin*, 1968. Oil on Canvas, 48 x 50." Private Collection.

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Fig. 148. James Brooks, 1970, Acrylic on Canvas.



Fig. 149. James Brooks, *Eastern*, c. 1980. Lithograph.

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Fig. 150. Henry N. Cobb of I. M. Pei, Architects.
The New Addition to the Portland , ME, Museum of Art



Fig. 151. James Brooks, *Nalon*, 1968.
Acrylic on Canvas, 76 x 102,
Collection of C. P. Brooks

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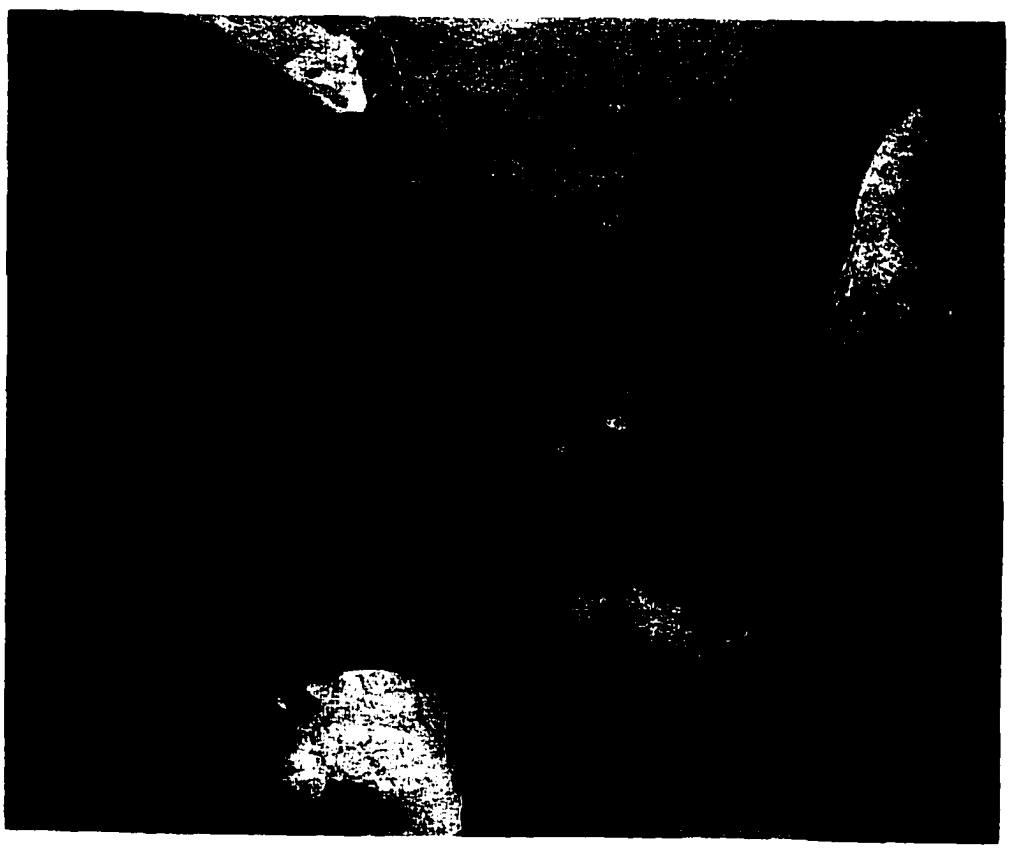


Fig. 152. James Brooks, *Igor S.*, 1971.
Acrylic on canvas, 76 x 97".
Dallas Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift.

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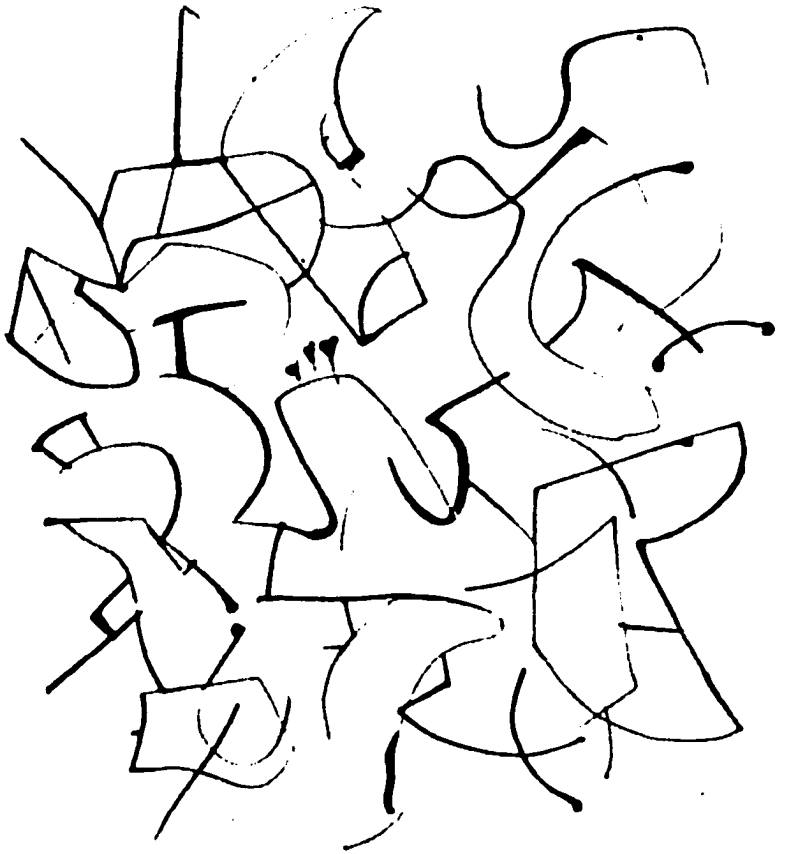


Fig. 153. James Brooks, *Untitled*, c. 1950. Ink on Paper. Collection of C. P. Brooks.



Fig. 154. James Brooks, *Hooker's Green Series*. 1979. Watercolor on paper. Private Collection.

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Fig. 155. James Brooks, *Gair*, 1973.
Acrylic on Canvas, 64 x 64".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.



Fig. 156. James Brooks, *Cusper*, 1982.
Acrylic on Canvas, 40 x 38".
Collection of C. P. Brooks.

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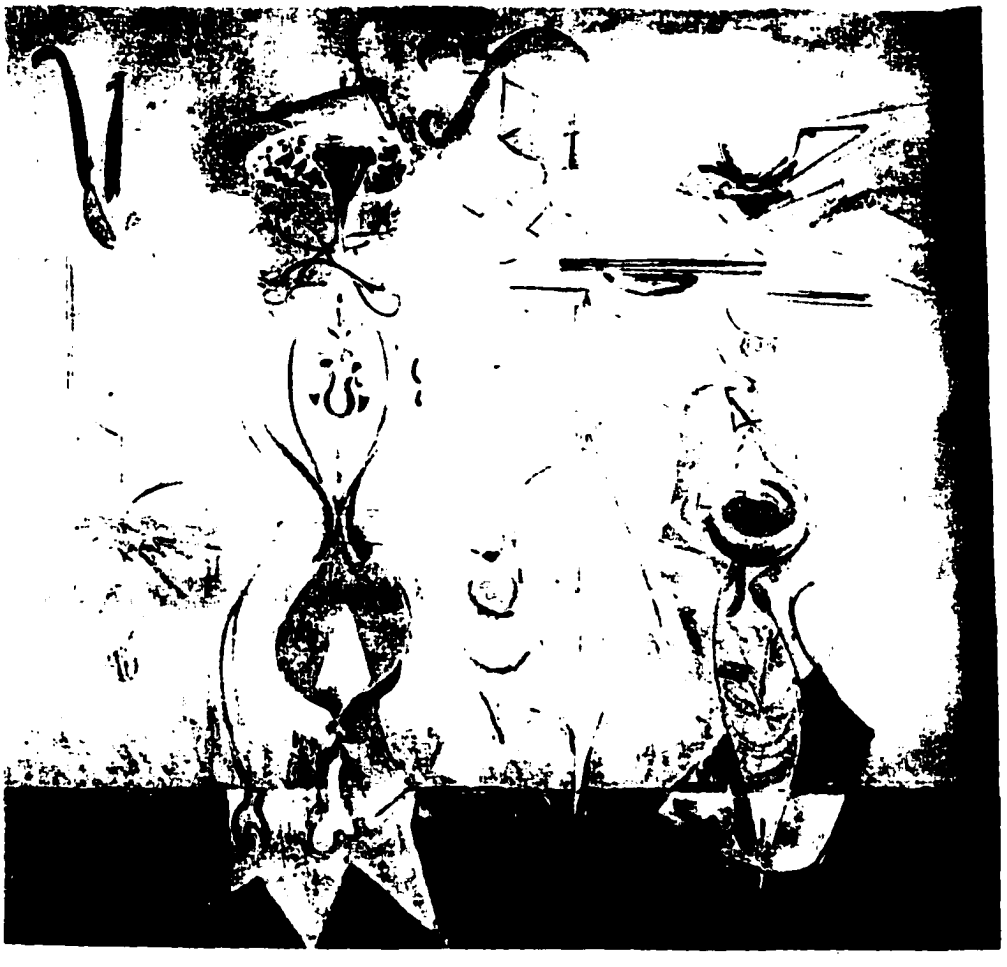


Fig. 157. Mark Rothko, *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, 1944. Oil on Canvas,Appr. 72 x 84". Museum of Modern Art, NY. Bequest of Mrs. Mark Rothko through the Mark Rothko Foundation.

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Fig. 158. Arshile Gorky,
The Betrothal, 1947
Oil on Canvas. 50-5/8 x 39-1/4",
Yale University Art Gallery
Katherine Ordway Collection

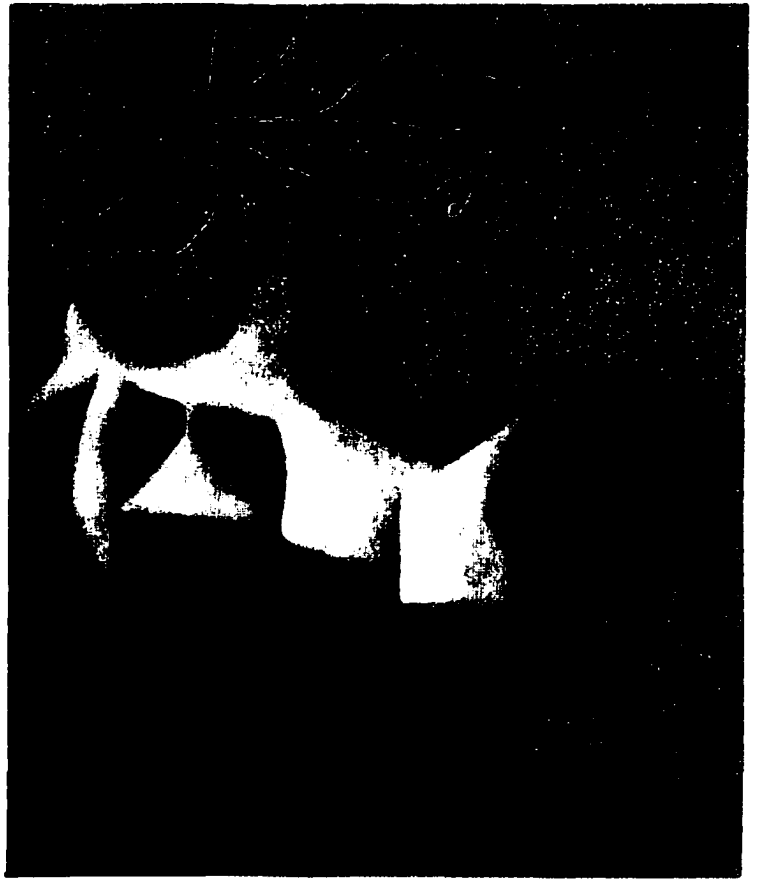


Fig. 159. William Baziotes
White Bird, 1957
Oil on Canvas, 60 x 48",
Albright-Knox Art Gallery,
Gift of Seymour H. Knox.

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