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A

JEAN XCERON: REDISCOVERED AMERICAN MODERNIST PIONEER
LIFE AND WORKS, 1912-1949

by

THALIA TREZOS VRACHOPOULOS

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.

1999

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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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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; Smith
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Internationally: Musée Picasso, Paris, France;
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Peania, Greece; Nees Morfes Gallery, Athens, Greece;
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List of Abbreviations

Full Name	Abbreviation
Archives of American Art	aaa
Federal Art Project	FAP
Works Progress Administration	WPA
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum	SRGM
American Abstract Artists	AAA

To Stacy and Jimmy,
with Love and
in Friendship Always

INTRODUCTION

A painter one afternoon drew a train.
The last carriage cut away from the paper
and returned to the carbarn all by itself.

In precisely that carriage sat the artist.

Abstracted Painter
Yannis Ritsos

The pioneering contributions of Jean Xceron, a modernist artist who has been overlooked by historians of American art for the past thirty years, deserve re-examination. Born in 1890 in Isary, Greece, Xceron came to the United States in 1904 and studied art at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. during the teens. After graduating he moved to New York, exhibiting with the Society of Independent Artists in 1921-22 with such notables as Joseph Stella, Max Weber and Abraham Walkowitz. In 1927 he went to Paris to further distinguish himself as an art critic and painter participant in the Ecole de Paris, the Abstraction-Création and the Cercle et Carré groups. Influencing American artists not only through his critical writings for the Chicago Tribune¹, but also with his

¹The European Editions of the Chicago Tribune, and the Daily News of New York, were published in Paris, and were part of The Tribune Company of France.

paintings, which appeared in Christian Zervos' journal Cahiers d'Art, Xceron's work was seen and read by American artists David Smith, Ilya Bolotowsky and Arshile Gorky.

After Xceron's death in 1965, the critic Stuart Preston acknowledged the artist's importance to American art. He placed Xceron within American art as a pioneer abstract artist.² Yet soon after his death, Jean Xceron was virtually forgotten. Xceron deserves recognition not only for his contributions to the developments in New York of the movement known as Abstract Expressionism, but also as a bridge figure between what is commonly termed in art literature as the first and second generation of abstract artists. Xceron's presence within the avant garde community during the twenties provides a critical link between these American artists. In a 1968 interview, Ilya Bolotowsky tried to correct a commonly held misconception that American abstraction started in the forties, stating that "it started in the thirties actually. There were some people who started even earlier, but just a few, for example Jean Xceron in the 1920s."³

Xceron was also a link between American and European

²Stuart Preston, "A Salute to a Pioneer Abstractionist," New York Times, (September 12, 1965): unpaginated.

³Ilya Bolotowsky, "Adventures with Bolotowsky," interview by Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art Journal, (January 1982): 22.

art groups during the late twenties and mid-thirties, when many European artists immigrated to the United States because of the rise of Fascism. Piet Mondrian was one such artist who wrote to Xceron from Paris for an invitation to this country in 1938. Jean Hélion contacted Xceron in New York when arriving from Paris in 1939. All three artists were involved with the Parisian Abstraction-Création group in Paris, but in New York they joined the newly established American Abstract Artists⁴. Xceron had been back in New York since 1935, exhibiting and disseminating information about the European groups to American artists. Few Americans had travelled to Europe during that early period, returning with information on the latest styles. Another figure of Xceron's calibre was John Graham, with whom he is often confused.

Despite Xceron's contributions to American art, not a single substantial work has been written about him to date. Why has he been overlooked since his death in 1965? Why has he fallen between the cracks, underappreciated by those he left behind? Why do we learn of some artists, while others languish in obscurity? Answers to these and other questions will be explored within the body of this dissertation.

Xceron wanted to be evaluated on his own merits, and lived in fear of being categorized inaccurately with any particular style. He may have contributed to his own

⁴Subsequently cited in the text as AAA.

marginalization by avoiding group memberships. Although he joined the AAA, he rarely paid dues and, therefore, was not listed as a regular member. Another reason for his marginalization was the bewildering variety of titles under which he exhibited, obfuscating any clear-cut role. During his lifetime he was grouped with American artists, the School of Paris, and also with Greek artists. This panoply of categories is evident in the critical writings which contributed to his disregard. In fact, most people know of Xceron as an abstract geometric artist, assigning him a place in the orbit of Piet Mondrian. Few, if any, know Xceron's biomorphic works of the early thirties which, because of their free-floating organic forms, were often not considered abstract.⁵ When historians discussed Xceron, they placed him as either a second generation abstract artist or as a follower of Mondrian, which antedated and omitted his contribution to the Abstract Expressionists.

In 1957 Claude Marks, who wrote Xceron's biographic entry for an encyclopedia of international artists, touched upon a strong reason for Xceron's marginalization. He wrote:

⁵The biomorphic works by Xceron in the Paris Zervos collection are not generally known in the United States. As a result, he is often included in group context in catalogues and exhibitions which, by their very title, place him in second generation American abstraction. The 1989 catalogue by Virginia M. Mecklenburg accompanying the show of the Patricia and Phillip Frost Collection: American Abstraction 1930-1945 at the National Museum of American Art is one such example.

Although he was one of the few nonobjectivists hired for the Federal Arts Project in the 1930s, his sensitive but undramatic work was later overshadowed by the emergence of abstract expressionism and other, more flamboyant movements. As a result he has not received the popular and critical recognition he deserves.⁶

Although Xceron has been neglected by the art establishment, artists themselves never cease to express their gratitude for his inspiration. Will Barnet, in an interview with the author, said that "Xceron should be venerated for the modernist pioneer he was."⁷ David Smith also admired Xceron, writing in 1957:

You make the pictures and that is not new; you always made them, and maybe they are too good, too subtle, too sensitive; but someday the world will catch up with you. Most artists are with you and that is the greatest level of appreciation.⁸

Except for the short, but very enlightening essay by Daniel Robbins⁹, the curator of Xceron's 1965 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, only exhibition reviews or biographical notes contain notice of Xceron. Through discussion of major canvases, Robbins provided a helpful

⁶Claude Marks, "Jean Xceron." Encyclopedia of World Artists 1950-1980, (1984): 898-99.

⁷Will Barnet, interview by author, April 15, 1997, The National Arts Club, New York.

⁸David Smith, letter to Jean Xceron, April 22, 1977. Jean Xceron Papers, Archives of American Artists (aaa). Reel # D 294.

⁹Daniel Robbins, Jean Xceron. (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1965).

survey of Xceron's stylistic development. However, he omitted the early abstract biomorphic paintings because he did not have access to works in the Parisian Zervos collection.

When art historians do refer to Xceron, they tend to discuss him in group context. Gladys Fabre¹⁰, Virginia Mecklenberg¹¹ and, earlier, Susan Larsen¹² examined abstract artists and groups. Of particular value was a dissertation by Susan Larsen on the AAA. She revised the place of this little known group by highlighting its contributions to, and its impact on, American art in general.¹³

Xceron has been mentioned in several recent exhibition catalogues as well. In 1995 the Gary Snyder Gallery included four Xceron works in an exhibition on American abstraction.¹⁴ The Kouros Gallery has held several shows

¹⁰Gladys Fabre, ed., Paris Arte Abstracto Arte Concreto. Cercle et Carré. 1930. (Seville, Spain: IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, 1990).

¹¹National Museum of American Art. The Patricia and Phillip Frost Collection: American Abstraction 1930-1945 (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

¹²Susan Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group: A History and Evaluation of Its Impact Upon American Art" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1975).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Snyder Fine Art. 1937 American Abstract Art. (New York: Snyder Fine Art, 1995).

which contained Xcerons. One of these, entitled Circle and Square: Geometric Abstraction and Constructivism in the Americas 1934-1950, was accompanied by a catalogue essay written by the art historian Diane Kelder.¹⁵ Mostly biographical, these essays limited their discussion to Xceron's place in American abstraction by narrowly defining some of his contributions.

I plan to examine the reasons for Xceron's relative marginalization, while placing him in the modernist context of his period. In the light of recent scholarship concerned with the implementation of new methodologies and the re-evaluation of existing critical literature, this study will revise Xceron's place in the history of art, from that of neglected artist to an early American abstractionist.

Concentration on the problems of formalist criticism, as well as the socio-political biases and philosophical issues of that period in America, will clarify the reasons for Xceron's relative obscurity in the past thirty years. The revisionist model has been used increasingly since the early 1960s by many scholars rewriting the annals of art by bringing to light lesser-known artists, including women and African Americans. It is also used in reappraising artists and their oeuvre in view of more recent discoveries. Such a

¹⁵Kouros Gallery. Circle and Square: Geometric Abstraction and Constructivism in the Americas 1934-1950 (New York: Manley Riback, Inc. and Kouros Gallery, 1991).

study is Ann Eden Gibson's Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics, in which the author incorporates previously omitted female, African American, Hispanic and gay artists into the canon of Abstract Expressionism.¹⁶

One of the major impediments to a full evaluation of Xceron's role in the history of modern art was the nature of formalist criticism contemporaneous to his development. Meaningful discourse was limited by its self-referential aspect, as well as by its emphasis on the purely formal elements of the art works, or what Brian Wallis has called "the formally reductive system."¹⁷ Self-referential, as it is used in this context, refers to Clement Greenberg's theories, as discussed in his 1957 book, Art and Culture. In it he stressed that each of the arts was so specialized that they were bounded by what was "most positive and immediate in themselves."¹⁸

Such a model would exclude not only constructions which fall between the categories of painting and sculpture, but also the underlying meanings of works of art. Xceron's

¹⁶Ann Eden Gibson, Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁷Brian Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (The New Museum of Contemporary Art, N.Y. in association with David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., Boston, 1984): xvi.

¹⁸Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961): 139.

paintings often reflected multi-dimensional interests. Radar (fig. 1), which was commissioned by the University of Georgia in 1946, is a good example of Xceron's interests. In the accompanying Life essay, Xceron stated that he prepared for its execution "by reading a book on radar."¹⁹ It was published in Life magazine not only for its artistic qualities, but also for the importance the subject of radar held for other artists, such as Ibram Lassaw. Xceron learned about radar's function as a weather detector and sought to evoke the feelings associated with this scientific phenomenon. He assigned meaning to his variably sized rectilinear and curvilinear shapes and configurations, as the following passage illustrates:

The radar mechanism at the lower right with the small blue and the green squares below the antennae represent 5 men who control radar from the ground...the red circle at bottom, stands for cosmogonic calm.²⁰

Xceron's exclusion from the mainstream modernist canon points to another consequence of the ahistorical nature of formalist criticism. This tendency, while it does not reject all historical prototypes, restricts the scope of precedent to artists of great stature. An elitist canon contributed to the exclusion of Xceron, who did not achieve the recognition

¹⁹Jean Xceron "Radar: A NonObjective Painter Tries to Marry Science and Art on Canvas." Life, Vol. 24, no. 5, (February 2, 1948): 69.

²⁰Ibid.

of artists such as Brancusi, Picasso, or even of David Smith. Unfortunately, this restrictive method of evaluation disregards what can broadly be termed the socio-political conditions that influence and inform works of art.

I have chosen a contextual approach for Xceron because it allows for an examination of contemporaneous ideas and tendencies. Erwin Panofsky's iconographical approach has exerted a great deal of influence on art historical scholarship. This broadly based path is especially prevalent in the study of ancient, medieval and Renaissance cultures, where it is essential to understand the socio-political dynamics to fully appreciate the subject matter of the works presented. But as Stephen Polcari duly noted in his book, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience, this approach is flexible enough "to advance an interdisciplinary social and historical understanding of modern abstract as well as traditional art."²¹ This contextual approach is best suited for Xceron because it allows for placement of the artist's oeuvre within the historic aspects of abstraction, and its relation to other styles in Washington, D.C., New York and Paris. It allows the examination of related issues and disciplines such as music, which Xceron saw as the aural equivalent to visual art.

²¹Stephen Polcari, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 22.

Given this method's ability to enrich the analysis of works of art, the art historian Meyer Schapiro used it for many of his analyses. In his 1937 essay, "Nature of Abstract Art," Schapiro stated, "There is no 'pure art' unconditioned by experience; all fantasy and formal construction, even the random scribbling of the hand, are shaped by experience and by non-aesthetic concerns."²² Schapiro challenged Alfred Barr Jr.'s views of abstraction expressed in his Cubism and Abstract Art as "independent of historical conditions," as "realizing the underlying order of nature," and as "an art of pure form without content."²³

By 1937 Xceron's work had already been accepted in the Museum of Modern Art's collection by Barr. In view of the power such a giant yielded, Xceron's own statements about abstraction should be examined for reflections of a formalist point of view. His writings reveal that he discussed abstraction formally, at least before 1949, and in terms of universals like Barr. Xceron's discussion of abstraction was also effected by the ideas of Hilla Rebay, for whom Xceron worked when she was the director of the Guggenheim Museum, then called the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. Hilla Rebay used the term 'non-objective' to refer

²²Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art" in Modern Art 19th and 20th Centuries. (New York: George Braziller, 1982): 196.

²³Ibid, p. 187.

to works of art without any reference to the real world. This is to be found throughout Xceron's writings as well. The art historian Rose Carol Washton-Long has shown that the term 'non-objective,' made popular by Rebay's misleading translation of the German *gegenstandlos*, resulted in the misinterpretation of the term as not objective, or subjective, rather than 'without objects.' Long explains: "Although 'without objects' or 'objectless' is a more accurate translation, non-objective has been used in the United States as a synonym for abstract art."²⁴

The various definitions of the term abstraction used during this period will be examined throughout the body of the dissertation. For the sake of clarity, Xceron's works will be referred to as 'abstract' or 'abstracted.' Works with any trace of the figurative will be called 'abstracted,' while those without any recognizable subject matter will be termed 'abstract.'

The first chapter will locate Jean Xceron and his work within a matrix of powerful ideas common to the modernist era. In this manner, vital data will be provided on the nature and context of modernism in the United States during Xceron's developing career. Given the paucity of useful critical literature on Jean Xceron, biographical information

²⁴Rose Carol Washton-Long, "Non-Objective." The Guggenheim Museum A-Z, ed. Nancy Spector (New York: Rizzoli, 1992): 200.

will be included.

The account of Xceron's rearing as part of a large, poor family in a remote section of Southern Greece, as well as his elementary education, will help clarify some of the proclivities of his later life. The first chapter will also include a section on Xceron's childhood and formative years. This is relevant not only to ascertain the early experiences that informed his art, but also to describe his outlook on life. His quiet, self-effacing, and modest personality is often mentioned in interviews with those personally acquainted with Xceron. His humility stemmed from his simple, religious background, and his village education included the arts and architecture of ancient Greece. Nonetheless, Xceron's humble demeanor contributed to his relatively unpublicized persona.

Xceron's immigration to America at fourteen, and his subsequent art education at the Corcoran School of Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. comprise another section of the first chapter. The adversities he faced as a new arrival did not stifle his spirit. Instead they propelled him to seek knowledge beyond the school's walls. In any other institution his "ethnic" or immigrant status might have been a hindrance, but the Corcoran was known for its acceptance of non-mainstream, including women and African Americans. On the other hand, the strictures at the Corcoran were more

evident on stylistic grounds, such as the requirement to draw from antique plaster casts. This naturalistic or academic style was stifling to Xceron, who very early on abstracted from the motif and was labeled "irascible" by the establishment's staff. His rebel beginnings as a revolutionary were indicative of his later status as a relatively unrecognized artist.

The first chapter will also include Xceron's New York period from 1919 to 1927, when he exhibited abstracted works with the Society of Independent Artists, and became part of the early avant-garde. According to Milton Brown, the author of The Story of the Armory Show, the years after the 1913 exhibition witnessed a general tendency on the part of American artists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Stuart Davis, to experiment with abstraction for the first time. But Brown points out that most of them reverted back to figurative modes.²⁵ Xceron remained committed to abstracting from the motif, although not completely omitting figuration, until the late twenties and early thirties. One of these early works, which shows inspiration from the Armory Exhibition, Cézanne and the abstracting process, is a painting from 1923, Landscape No. 36 (fig. 2). According to Robbins, this study anticipates what would become known as Xceron's most

²⁵Milton W. Brown, The Story of the Armory Show (New York: Abbeville Publishers, 1988): 237-238.

important characteristic of transforming his canvases through the idiomatic use of light, dematerializing space and the creation of veils of transparency.²⁶

With the clear objective of advancing his art education, Xceron departed for Paris in 1927. The period from 1927 to 1935 will be treated in the second chapter, and is of great consequence to Xceron's development. During this time he obliterated all figuration from his work, arriving at total abstraction, and produced critical writings on the international avant-garde community of Paris for the foreign issues of American newspapers. Analyses of Xceron's essays will be included because they reflect not only European events and attitudes, but also his own preferences and biases. The European editions of the Chicago Tribune and the Boston Evening Transcript contain many of his essays on artists Piet Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Jean and Sophie Arp, Juan Gris, Ferdinand Léger, Michel Larionov and Natalie Goncharova.

Xceron's association with the Parisian critics and the Franco-Hellenic artists Ghika, Galanis and Constant, with whom he was closely affiliated, will also be studied. The critiques of his exhibitions at the Surindependents, written by Jean Cassou, Christian Zervos, Eustratios Tériade and Maurice Raynal, and Xceron's Cahiers d'Art - sponsored

²⁶Daniel Robbins, Jean Xceron, 14.

one-man exhibition at the Galerie de France in 1931, helped to make his work known. As Robbins noted, "a procession of notables such as Mondrian, Arp, Léger, Masson, Héliou-- almost every Paris painter of consequence--came to see his paintings and went away impressed."²⁷ Xceron's accomplishments in Paris included the opening of an art school and involvement with several art groups. Always hesitant to accept membership, he nevertheless exhibited with Cercle et Carré, Abstraction-Création and Cahiers d'Art which also published magazines under similar titles. These publications often included Xceron's works or statements in their editions, which were eagerly awaited and read by artists in America.

Chapter 3, "The Late New York Years 1935-49," will begin with Xceron's visit to the United States in 1935 for his Garland Gallery exhibition. He returned permanently in 1937 due to the precarious political climate of Europe, though America was experiencing a severe economic depression. For Xceron the late New York Period was one in which he began to attain some prominence. Esphyr Slobodkina, in writing about that period in which the establishment of the AAA took place, noted "the addition of famous and

²⁷Ibid, p. 14.

glamorous new members, among them Jean Xceron."²⁸

Xceron was one of the artists first engaged by the Federal Arts Project's Works Progress Administration to create abstract murals for the Riker's Island Penitentiary, and his contribution will also be noted in this section. His relationship to the WPA dated back to 1935, a period when, because of its perceived inability to address social issues, abstraction was considered inaccessible and remote.

In 1939 Hilla Rebay, in her capacity as director of the Museum of Non-Objective Art, employed Xceron as the custodian of paintings. In Chapter 3, their lengthy and affectionate, yet tumultuous affiliation will be examined in light of contextual, artistic and political orientations. Rebay, who was at ideological odds with the AAA, of which Xceron was now a member, preferred to use the word 'non-objective' for abstraction, and insisted that the word and the vocabulary held no reference in the physical world. The AAA, on the other hand, experienced the disfavor of the public towards what was perceived to be the lack of social meaning in abstraction. The AAA challenged Rebay's statements in public debate. Due to the two sectors' differing affiliations and socio-political divisions, Xceron abstained from publicly airing his beliefs, thereby

²⁸Esphyr Slobodkina, In the Ingres Tradition (New York: Urquart Slobodkina, 1980): 629.

contributing to his own anonymity.

Rebay's politics were exclusionary and placed abstraction in the realm of the cosmic, while Xceron's leanings were socialist. He viewed abstraction as a form of universal language, much like the fathers of abstraction: Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich. The repercussions of his orientation will be examined not only within the socio-political milieu of the 1930s, but also of the late 1940s, when a purely American style was promoted, with the Abstract Expressionists as its exemplars.

Because of his double alliance to the Museum of Non-Objective Painting and Rebay, and his association with the AAA, Xceron found his position compromised. As a member of the AAA, he was expected to join the many demonstrations against the establishment, but could not because of his commitment to Rebay. Nor could he, as a member of the AAA, ever become one of Rebay's protégés, as had Rudolf Bauer. Despite this, Xceron was much sought after as a teacher, mentor, and friend by contemporary artists. They often visited him in the warehouse of the Guggenheim Museum to seek advice, or to show him their latest works. In one of many letters, David Smith pointed out to Xceron: "Most artists are with you and that is the greatest level of appreciation...and again let me thank you for those early

days, which were most important to my direction."²⁹

I conclude with 1949 because this is the period when Xceron's work returned to a more curvilinear style, and approximately when the Abstract Expressionists came into being, eclipsing many earlier styles, including abstraction. Xceron's legacy to such artists as Nassos Daphnes, David Smith, William Baziotis, Theodoros Stamos, Will Barnet, and Mark Rothko will also be examined in chapter four.

Jean Xceron's impact on American art requires a full-scale re-evaluation. He abstracted from the motif as early as 1915 and, therefore, should be considered part of the early American avant-garde. Even when his curvilinear forms suggested figures in the late 1940s, "Xceron never forsook the [abstract] idiom."³⁰

²⁹David Smith letter to Jean Xceron, April 22, 1957. Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294.

³⁰Doré Ashton "Classic Modern: The Art of Jean Xceron," Arts Volume 58 (June 1984): 132.

THE EARLY YEARS 1890-1927

Classical Genesis and Legacy 1890-1904

Nay, Hear the whole matter in a word -
all human arts are from Prometheus

(Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 525-456 B.C.)

In recounting Xceron's childhood experiences and formative influences, it will become evident how they informed not only his art, but also his future outlook. Most important is the inspiration he attained from local Byzantine art, classical sculpture, folk art and metal working techniques, as well as the impact of his education, which included the study of Platonic theories, on his development of abstraction.

Born in 1890 in Isary, a village in the Arcadian region of the Peloponnesian Peninsula, Xceron was one of seven children. A sleepy, quiet place forgotten by time, Isary lies nestled among the Arcadian mountain ranges. Like most villages in Greece in the 19th and 20th centuries, Isary lost many of its natives to modern cities and foreign lands. In 1895 Isary had a population of 1,800. Presently it has approximately 90 permanent residents, mostly pensioners, of whom 10 are in their thirties. Only three children, taxied to a neighboring village school, remain. Xceron was lucky enough to have lived in Isary at a time when a local school

was active. He attended the First Demotikon (the American equivalent of primary school) until the fourth grade, Scholarchion (secondary grade school) until the sixth grade, and then went on to the Lyceum (high school). Vasiliky and Peter Xceron had six children: Jean, Aristomenes, Panagiotes, Christina, Euterpe and Demeter. When Vasiliky died of tuberculosis in 1919, Peter remarried and had a seventh child, Vasily, who was named after his first wife.

Arcadia is well known for its pastoral and idyllic setting, a subject depicted by many artists such as Poussin in Et In Arcadia Ego, Matisse in Joie de Vivre and Cézanne in Bathers. Arcadia is in the heart of the Peloponnesian Peninsula and stretches over 4,418 square kilometers. Its mountains, Mainolo (1,935 m), Parnon (1,935 m), Saita (1,812 m) and Skiatho (1,800 m) have snowy peaks, with pine, fir and chestnut forests growing at their feet. Young Yiannis, as Jean was called in Greek, often collected pebbles, berries, plants and flowers with which to make paints.

The plains are watered by the river Alpheios, making them suitable for farming, and the mountainsides provide rich grazing fields for flocks of sheep. During ancient times the shepherds of Arcadia were said to worship the goat-footed Pan, who hunted the nymphs through the pine forests of Mt. Mainolo, and whose pipes breathed life into nature. The indigenous population were called Pelasgians. They believed that the first humans were children of Gaea,

the mother goddess.

Xceron's birthplace, Arcadia, was known for its historical importance in the drive towards Greek independence from the Ottomans. Xceron was proud of his heritage, having studied in school its heroes like all Greek children. Legendary figures like Botsaris, Kolokotronis and Bouboulina were just a few whose revolutionary roles he would have studied. The poetry of Lord Byron eulogized the bravery of these and other Greek heroes, and was commonly taught to children all over Greece.

Although this region had been occupied by Dorians, Romans, Franks and Turks consecutively, it maintained much autonomy due to the ruggedness of the landscape. Despite a ban on the education of Greeks during the Turkish occupation, for example, a number of schools functioned in secret, and taught Greek history, culture, and Christian tenets to the children of the local villages. At the monastery of the Dormition in Dimitsana, one such school survives, as do several others, scattered through the landscape of the Peloponnesus. Today it is known as the Dimitsana School, named after the area that produced gunpowder, important to the Greek Revolution of 1821.

When Tripoli, the capital of Arcadia, was liberated from the Ottomans, it became the heartland of the independence movement. The 400 year struggle of the Greeks to free themselves from the Turkish yoke gave rise to a wide

range of epic poetry, folk songs and oral legends. As a young man studying art at the Corcoran in Washington, D.C., Xceron painted large murals for the Neo-classical building's pediment, portraying Greek heroes engaged in the battle for independence (fig. 3).

The region has a large number of monasteries and churches with Byzantine fresco and mosaic cycles in which Xceron was very interested, and often copied. Some of these date back to the tenth or fourteenth centuries, as do St. Athanasius and St. Nicon in Megaloupoli, a large city near Isary. In Xceron's Crucifixion No. 6, 1917 (fig. 4) the figure of Christ is rendered through line, and is depicted in an abstracted, flat and conceptualized style. Reminiscent of the folk icons popular in Isary, and found throughout his native village, these images were created by itinerant artists or local sign makers for the consumption of villagers for their homes or country chapels. The more formal style, as seen in Icon 250A; Christ in Deisis, 1916 (fig. 5), was reserved for the large churches and cathedrals, and was based on traditional Byzantine iconographic models. The iconographers of such works were usually taught in monasteries, or were monks formally educated in the formulas and conventions of that style.

Through their legends, myths, and customs, it is evident that the Arcadians were skilled in metalworking techniques. In keeping with these traditions, Xirocostas Sr.

(as the name Xceron was known in Greek) owned a metal working shop where he made domestic and farming tools out of bronze, copper or iron (fig. 6). These implements included cogwheels for shredding wheat, parts of knitting looms, horse and donkey harnesses, knives, shears, keys and doors (fig. 7). Xceron and his brothers frequented the workshop, helping their father smelt the ores and work the bellows, hammering the hot metal and welding it into form.

When free from the duties of production, Xceron occupied himself by assembling sculptures from the metal scraps which he bound together with wire.¹ Xceron's sculptures of the thirties are evidence of the impression his father's metal creations made on the youngster. Composed of geometric shapes, Xceron, Sr.'s metal tools can be compared to Xceron's sculptures, as seen in the window of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (fig. 8).

Isari is situated 850 meters above the other mountains of Arcadia and Taiyetos, two kilometers northeast of the city of Kalamàta. From here, the main road runs through an oak forest, leading to a fork whose left branch goes to Isari. The right branch leads to the twin village of Likosoura, on the great plain of Megaloupolis. The Arcadians worshipped their gods at the Temple of Despoiena, the

¹As related to the author in August, 1996 at Isary by Vasily Xerocostas and neighbors who knew Xceron as a youngster.

Mistress who is believed to be the deity of darkness, or Persephone. In 1883, among the temple remains, a colossal sculptural group was discovered, executed by Damophon of Messene, depicting Demeter seated with Artemis and the Titan Anytus standing beside them. It must have impressed the young Xceron, for he made special note of visiting this group of sculptures in his later notebooks.

Xceron's Isarian education included studies in mathematics, geography, grammar, literature, geometry, national and international history, and composition. Field trips to historic sites were integral to the education of Greek children. These supervised visits acquainted youngsters with their heritage. Xceron was schooled in the traditions and culture of both ancient and modern Greece, but was most familiar with the sites of many famous battles with the Turks. His education included learning the epics of Homer and the modern heroes of the 1821 Revolution. Traditionally, Greek philosophy was taught during the fifth or sixth grade to Greek children, and most likely included Plato's theories of "Ideal" forms, or universals, which are evident in Xceron's later geometric images, and in his proclivity to essentialize the form throughout his life. According to Edith Hamilton, Platonic thought proposed that "knowledge must be of permanent entities distinct from those we know through the senses...the realm of Ideas is the

reality of the objects which are ordered."² Platonic theory posits that what we sense needs to be altered by our mind or the Idea. Xceron's stylistic preferences accord with Platonic thought not only through his use of essentialized forms in the early years, and geometricity in the mid-thirties, but also in his distant relationship to the motif and dependence on the ideic.

Young Jean Xceron was as intense and devout as he was humorous. He was called "Kettlehead" by the other villagers because he made the rounds of village homes on Sunday mornings with his mother's soup pot in tow, filling it with charcoal remnants from neighboring fireplaces. He collected these for heating the church where he was a choirboy for the Sunday morning service. But there was also personal motivation for his behavior. He took the left-over charcoal and used it for drawing. In fact, at age 10, he published and illustrated his own newspaper, lampooning the various characters in the daily gossip register. He wrote the copies in longhand on double graph sheets, sold and distributed them. This was prophetic in view of Xceron's future as an art correspondent for the American news press in Paris.

In addition to Byzantine iconographic precedents which may have predisposed Xceron to abstraction, folk or

²Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns eds., Plato: Collected Dialogues (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994): xviii.

indigenous art of the area must have had an impact on him. As a boy he liked to draw figures of strongmen or wrestlers and simple landscapes, traditionally portrayed in ancient sculptural reliefs, but also in comic books and popular signposts. These were known to him through illustrated school books, shop signs and popular prints in the little cafés of the village. An image from Isary's only inn, whose tavern contains many colorful paintings by a local naive artist, shows the surrounding hills and countryside (fig. 9). Because the landscape is not depicted through mathematical perspective, the resultant effect is one of flattening out the panoramic view. The distance seems to advance towards the viewer rather than recede into the distance. The figures are rendered in flat schematic shapes with strong outline rather than with chiaroscuro and foreshortening, which would make them appear sculptural. These preferences for a naive style, simplifying the landscape and inverting perspective, appear in Xceron's twenties works, such as Chartres No. 1E, 1929 (fig. 10).

The folk icons in Xceron's environment must have left an impression on the youngster. He made paintings of saints with whatever materials available to him. It was common for itinerant artists to travel through Greece earning their keep through the sale of folk icons. Their images, as opposed to the Byzantine examples, were thought by the academic establishment to be unsophisticated due to the

artist's lack of formal training, or use of convention. Images of Christ or the Madonna with Child in the folk style were the most popular, and can be seen in a 1916 Xceron work entitled Crucifixion (fig.4). Folk art acted as a catalyst for Xceron's eventual development into abstraction because it started him on the road to simplifying and abstracting, or essentializing, from the motif.

Of major import to young Xceron were the arts and crafts of his native village, and his home. Besides the utilitarian metal objects fashioned by Peter Xceron Sr., embroidery and hand-loomed fabrics embellished the Xceron home. Xceron's mother was a respected embroiderer and hand-loomer who taught the craft to her daughters Christina, Euterpe and Demeter. A number of illustrations represent the style of art most commonly utilized by the village women when looming or embroidering. Consisting of a stock number of images, these designs are usually geometric, but could also be of organic stylized plant forms (figs. 11A-H).

Xceron was surrounded by these images, and may have been influenced by the embellishments of the patterned needlework. He watched the family and village women working the hand loom to produce beautiful colors and shapes on sheets, blankets, throws, tablecloths and clothing. He saw them decorate these with native designs and ancient symbols, such as star and planet configurations.

In 1904, at the age of 14, Jean Xceron came to America.

He quickly located his relatives and fellow Isarians, working for them at odd jobs in Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh and Indianapolis. He worked at an ice cream parlor, a hat cleaning business, and restaurants to support himself.³ After he settled in Washington, D.C., Xceron invited his brothers, Aristomenes and Peter, to America, and in the 1920s their sister Demeter followed.⁴ In 1912, when Xceron was just twenty-two, he entered the Corcoran School of Art and began his eight year art training.

The Corcoran School Years: 1912-18

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Washington, D.C. was regarded as "still a quiet provincial town."⁵ Just after the war, however, a rapid population expansion took place, and the city acquired an international flavor.

Allan Thomas Marsh, the historian who wrote about the Corcoran School of Art, documented the impact of Washington, D.C. on artists working there at the beginning of the

³Robbins, Jean Xceron, 12.

⁴Vasily Xirocostas Jr., interview with author in Isary/Likosouras, August, 1996.

⁵Allan Thomas Marsh, "Washington's First Art Academy, The Corcoran School of Art, 1875-1925," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1968, 254-55. This dissertation has been invaluable in providing data on the Corcoran School of Art and on the context of Washington, D.C. at the beginning of this century.

century: "Some interest in painting was aroused by the exhibits at the Corcoran, but more by the historical paintings in the Rotunda of the Capitol and the murals on legendary subjects in the Library of Congress."⁶ During Xceron's years at the Corcoran, he frequented the Library of Congress where he studied plates of Ravenna mosaics. According to Daniel Robbins, Xceron not only copied these in watercolor, but also created his own mosaic designs. This experience would also influence Xceron's later styles with geometric shapes and Cubist analysis.

The pedagogical orientation of the Corcoran School of Art, which emphasized the shapes underlying objects, affected Xceron's predisposition to abstraction. The young students were instructed to draw from geometric forms, similar to children's playing blocks, to enhance their understanding of chiaroscuro and reflected shadow. This pedagogical system was invented by the naturalist teacher Friedrich Fröebel in Germany, and spread to the United States. Fröebel's ideology found correlatives in 19th Century American philosophy, as well as poetry and naturalism. For example, Emersonian Transcendentalism advised the individual to empower himself much like Fröebel did. The Corcoran's teachers were familiar with these precepts, which arose from 19th Century American

⁶Marsh, "Washington's First Art Academy, The Corcoran School of Art, 1875-1925," 253.

Romanticism, and found their resonance in Fröebelian thought. Marsh discussed Thomas Hart Benton, who remembered his early years at the Corcoran with dislike because of the emphasis placed on the Fröebel block system. His personal orientation was more sympathetic to the figure.⁷ Although Benton started working in an abstract idiom, he eventually became known for the figurative Regionalist style of his later years. But Xceron remained devoted to abstraction throughout most of his life. In the 1930s, Regionalist figuration containing social content enjoyed great popularity, while the American public rejected abstraction as decorative, and the abstract artist as politically uncommitted.

By 1912 when Xceron began his art studies, the Corcoran had already established its reputation as an important art academy.⁸ Simultaneously, Xceron frequented the local YMCA to refine his English language skills. The Corcoran School of Art as an academic establishment fostered conservative teaching methods of drawing from antique casts and models, an emphasis quite different from the modern tendencies of The Art Students League or Pratt Institute of Technology in New York. The two teachers in New York who were considered

⁷Ibid., 155.

⁸Ibid., 155.

progressive were Robert Henri and Arthur Wesley Dow.⁹ Henri, who was considered the leader of a group referred to as the "The Eight," or "The Ashcan School," advocated the use of genre scenes reflecting a democratic society, rather than the rarefied idealized themes focusing on upper classes preferred at the academies. Arthur Wesley Dow taught composition at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn during the 1890s and championed Asian art, inspiring Max Weber and Georgia O'Keeffe, among others.

A 1914 work entitled Apollo (fig. 12) reflects Xceron's academic training. This pencil study from a plaster cast shows considerable skill in the delicately nuanced chiaroscuro, combined with a sharp and confident drawing style. When Xceron was asked by the Greek-American community in 1917-18 to execute temporary murals for the United States Treasury Building (fig. 3) celebrating Greek-American solidarity and Greek Independence Day, he reconstructed, in oil on canvas, classical pedimental figures combined with nineteenth century heroes¹⁰. His academic training helped him in the depiction of figures executed in the classical, sculptural style, like his Apollo, 1914, and the banner for the United States Treasury Building.

A number of faculty members at the Corcoran had an

⁹Ibid., 255.

¹⁰Robbins, Jean Xceron, 12.

impact on Xceron. His student cards reveal that Edmund Clarence Messer was one of his teachers who, prior to teaching at the Corcoran, distinguished himself as a private art tutor in the district known as Vernon Row in Washington, D.C. He came to the Corcoran to replace his friend Eliphat F. Andrews as principal from 1902-1916, and taught Still Life, Draped Life and the Antique courses. Messer's philosophy was tied to the academic tradition that remained dominant at the Corcoran until the 1930s. He believed in the eternal qualities of art, and spoke about them in a speech to the graduating class of 1914. Messer said, "If we observe closely the art of different nations and different times we shall find it based, if it is a worthy art, on fundamental principles that neither have a beginning nor end, but are eternal laws."¹¹

Although Messer did not champion modern art, and Xceron did as early as 1914, their thinking coincided on the issue of timeless art. Xceron later wrote: "Pure and eternal creation still remains forever. The Egyptian art and the Greek sculpture still shed their rays of glory."¹² Modern masters, Kandinsky, Malevich and Klee, espoused this

¹¹Edmund Clarence Messer, "The Trend of American Art," 383, from a speech delivered on 29 May 1914 at the Corcoran School of Art. Archives of the Corcoran School of Art, Washington, D.C.

¹²S. C. Fracassini, "The Dilemma of the 20th Century Artists", M.F.A. Thesis, University of Iowa, 1951, 142-43.

viewpoint of the timeless, universal values of art. At the time of Messer's speech to the graduating class, Xceron and his classmates George Lohr, Leo Logasa and Abraham Rattner had already been affected by the art in the 1913 New York Armory Exhibition, and had been labeled "revolutionaries" by the school authorities.¹³ A 1977 article in the Corcoran School of Art newsletter reminisced about the rebels, saying about Xceron: "He too was regarded as a revolutionary for in his painting he did free interpretations of the model including a self-portrait in blues executed with Cubist planes."¹⁴

Messer's speech of 1914 warned against the ills of commercialism, citing it as "a dragon in our path" which must be avoided by making "sure that our ideals be lifted above the sordidness, the commonness of a purposeless life before our art becomes all that it might become."¹⁵ Messer's words expressed a concern of many artists during the early part of the century, including Xceron, who would eventually seek to create art in a more conducive, less materialistic art climate abroad.

A prominent Corcoran teacher was James Henry Moser, a

¹³The Corcoran School of Art, "Student Radicals at the Corcoran School of Art in 1916," Corcoran School of Art News, (Spring, 1977): 1, 18-19.

¹⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁵Messer, "The Trend of American Art," 384.

landscapist who taught watercolor from 1898 to 1913, when Xceron was present. Moser, in spite of his quiet, humble nature, enjoyed great popularity with the students. One of his works had been purchased in 1890 for the White House by the First Lady Caroline Scott Harrison, who also studied watercolor with Moser. In fact, watercolor was a very popular medium at the Corcoran, where classes grew to huge proportions and caused administration to hire "abler hands," as they put it in reference to Moser.

Moser had a distinguished career as teacher and secretary of the Society of Washington Artists, and President of the Washington Water Color Club from 1897-1900 and 1905 to 1913. He also belonged to many prestigious New York art organizations, and exhibited nationally. Moser's typical misty mountain and lake pictures were accomplished with quick strokes, and with a predetermined plan in mind. Moser's watercolor techniques are relevant because they were also used by Xceron, and are stated below:

He started by wetting the paper. Using a large, soft brush, he washed down across the paper in wide horizontal swaths adding sky tints as he desired, then lining in distant mountains with a pale blue and as he advanced, adding more pigment to the blue line of nearer mountains, and finally foreground shades. While the paper was still wet, at just the right moment, he blotted out with bits of soft blotting paper, patches and spots for cloud effects. Some detail was added while the paper was still wet, but the final finishing was usually done when the paper was completely dry.¹⁶

Xceron's watercolors of the New England Coast evince a similar disposition towards transparent washes interspersed with areas of blank paper. Gloucester Harbor (fig. 13), an undated but typical Xceron watercolor, is one such seascape. This watercolor study was painted from the docks of a busy boat basin. Its foreground contains watery reflections created by the two dominant vessels in the middle ground, depicted through broken brushstrokes of greys, blues and browns. The two vessels appear to be blocked in by a boat from their left, and at their helm by a ship and a tugboat. The area to the right of the boats contains yet another boat. The horizon is screened in by a series of buildings that appear to be a customs house of sorts. When comparing the actual work to what must have been the actual motif, several personal alterations become evident. Elements were shifted, moved and omitted in the artist's desire to render

¹⁶Anon. American Art News, 15 November 1913, 4, James Henry Moser Files, Archives of Corcoran School of Art, Washington D.C.

the landscape more personal.¹⁷

On the verso of Gloucester Harbor is a watercolor study that has a large X charcoaled across its surface, which will be called Untitled (fig. 14). It is a seascape which Xceron chose to discard, but is useful because it illustrates Xceron's rapport with Ryder, and with Japanese prints. It has a vortextual composition of huge ocean waves blending with the adjoining cliffs, threatening to capsize a tiny boat. Thematically, compositionally and coloristically, Untitled can be compared to Ryder's Moonlit Cove (fig. 15), a reproduction of which was owned by Xceron.¹⁸

The comparison of Untitled (fig. 14) to Katsushika Hokusai's The Great Wave off Kanagawa, from "Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji" (fig. 16) will be used here to illustrate Xceron's relationship to Japanese prints, and to begin the discussion of his peer relationships at school. The two are connected because his Greek colleague Kimon Nikolaides's father owned a local antique dealership which dealt in Japanese prints. Xceron could have studied them directly

¹⁷I am indebted to the artist's nephew Jeremy Salter, who actually made this comparison at the site, writing to me his very astute observations.

¹⁸When visiting Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1996, I located Xceron's sister-in-law Constance, who had been married to his brother Peter. The family was in possession of Xceron's favorite prints, given to his brother for safekeeping. One of these was the Ryder Moonlit Cove, which I saw on the family's wall in Washington, D.C.

there.¹⁹ An oblique viewpoint, large areas of flat color and simplified forms are just three of the hallmarks these two works share.

The convergences in the lives of Xceron and Nikolaides are too many to be ignored. Both of Greek descent, the two entered the Corcoran School of Art at the same time, and both went to New York in the early twenties. After serving in the army camouflage corps during the Great War, Nikolaides went to Paris, and Xceron, after graduating from the Corcoran School of Art and showing with the New York Independents, followed. Nikolaides continued his art education at the Art Student's League with Kenneth Hayes Miller and John Sloan. Eventually, he became an instructor there, and wrote a book entitled The Natural Way to Draw.²⁰

Xceron was also known to frequent the Art Student's League. Although there are no written records to prove this, there are some oral accounts. Nassos Daphnis, an abstract expressionist artist friend of Xceron's, mentioned that Xceron gave a lecture there, although he did not remember

¹⁹Kimon Nikolaides Jr., telephone interview with author, April 1996. Grandfather Nikolaides Sr. not only dealt in Japanese prints, but had many Hokusai views.

²⁰Kimon Nikolaides Jr., telephone interview with author, April 1996. Kimon Nikolaides Sr. died in 1938 and was survived by his son Kimon Jr., to whom I am grateful for information on his father's and Xceron's student years. He included data about the contents of his grandfather's Washington D.C. gallery, confirming that he carried Japanese prints by Hokusai, Hiroshige and Utamaro among others.

the date.²¹ The Art Students League had acquired a reputation for its open door policy. An artist could go to draw per session from the model without making a large tuitional investment. The school also had some of the most prominent teachers. In the twenties, when Xceron went to New York, he might have frequented the Art Student's League to draw, especially since his friend Nikolaides was affiliated with this school.

Xceron's acquaintance with another colleague, Abraham Rattner, at the Corcoran School of Art would prove crucial not only during their student years when they banded together to mount the little "Armory Show," but also in the early twenties in New York, and in Paris in the late twenties. At the inception of American involvement in World War I, Rattner's studies were interrupted by the draft, and he served in the camouflage corps under Louis St. Gaudens. Returning to the Pennsylvania Academy after the war, he won a Cresson Fellowship to study in Paris, where he stayed almost twenty years.

Rattner's colleagues from the Corcoran were a lively group, including Charles Logasa, who had already been to Paris and was familiar with the European modern developments. Color held strong appeal for Rattner, and he experimented with its effects. Like many other American

²¹Nassos Daphnes, interview with author, November 1997 in his Soho studio.

artists of that period, Rattner, Xceron and Logasa tried Cubism and Futurism as a way of developing into their idiosyncratic styles. With so few of Xceron's student works available, it is hard to ascertain this effect, but Robbins correctly noted Xceron's Cubist Self-Portrait of 1917.²² In 1917 Rattner and another classmate, Nikolaides, began serving in the camouflage section of the Army Engineers. Xceron did not follow in their footsteps, and stayed in Washington, D.C. until 1919 when he moved to New York.

Before he left, Rattner encouraged Xceron to study art in Paris, and provided him with many valuable contacts. The two would continue their relationship, exhibiting together and sharing acquaintances, as well as working in studios across from each other in Paris. Later, upon returning to the United States as a result of repatriation due to World War II, the two friends would once more become reacquainted in the new, exciting atmosphere of New York.

Rattner was one of the four so-called 'intransigents' at the Corcoran School of Art who, like Xceron, found the academic strictures too confining. Whereas Xceron discovered ways to deal with these constraints within the institution, Rattner transferred to the Pennsylvania Academy of Art in 1917. Xceron's student record reveals him as a disciplinary problem for painting Cubist works and showing "geometric

²²Robbins, Jean Xceron, 12.

distortion in flat planes and use of shallow space." His difficulties with the School administration are reflected in the fact that his class attendance record at one point bore the note "discontinued."²³

Charles Logasa was another colleague of Xceron's who shared the same instructors at the Corcoran. He had a studio across the hall from Xceron's at 830 H Street. Seven years older than Xceron, he had been born in Davenport, Iowa in 1883. After completing his studies at the Corcoran, Logasa went to New York. By 1920, following the precedents of his instructors, he too went to France to advance his studies. Records show him back in New York by 1932, working as the director of the Society of Independent Artists. Logasa was instrumental in introducing Xceron to Torres-Garcia, the Uruguyan artist, and Joseph Stella, with whom he became friends in the twenties.

In 1916 Logasa, who had seen the 1913 New York Armory show, and George Lohr, another schoolmate who personally knew Alfred Stieglitz, the owner of some important modernist masterpieces, were the primary forces behind the staging of a modern art exhibition modeled after this prototype in Washington, D.C.²⁴

²³The Corcoran School of Art, Corcoran School of Art News, 18.

²⁴Ibid., 1.

Lohr, the other member of the closely knit group of colleagues, attended the Corcoran during the same period as Xceron, Logasa and Rattner. After graduation Lohr went to New York and kept his ties to the Stieglitz circle while he ventured into the engraving business before returning home to become the art director of the Washington Herald.²⁵ In the early twenties he opened the George Lohr Studios of Art, Design and Photography in Washington, D.C., which he operated until 1970.²⁶

The students, then including Abraham Rattner and Xceron, borrowed thirty works for a "little 'Armory Show.'"²⁷ With the loan, made by the pioneer photographer-gallerist Alfred Stieglitz, the Corcoran schoolmates held the show at their studios situated in the downtown business district of D.C.²⁸ Although this Armory Exhibition is not widely known, there were some acknowledgments of its existence in the local press. One article reported the

²⁵Anon., Washington Post, obituary, 30 September 1974. The Archives of the Corcoran School of Art, Washington D.C.

²⁶I am indebted to John W. Lohr, the artist's son, who kindly provided me with useful information on his father's history, and on Abraham Rattner, whom he knew personally.

²⁷Anon., Washington Post, obituary, 30 September 1974. Archives of The Corcoran School of Art, Washington D.C.

²⁸I am deeply indebted to Ruth Logasa, who is related to the Logasa family through marriage to the son of Charles' older brother. Not only was she good enough to provide me with the family history but also with pictures of Charles and two of his works.

following list of works included in the show: two watercolors by Cézanne, two drawings and two oils by Picasso, a drawing and a watercolor by Matisse, and two Braques.²⁹ A later essay in the Corcoran School of Art News recalled the inclusions of works by Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Derain, Vlaminck, Léger, Gris, Metzinger and Gleizes.³⁰

The impact of these modern works on the Corcoran schoolmates was dramatic, as the Corcoran School of Art newsletter documented. Xceron found his greatest inspiration in Cézanne, Picasso and Braque, a conclusion which could be confirmed stylistically in his student works which, although not located, were reported by Robbins and the Corcoran School of Art essay as Cubist experiments in 1914.

The metamorphosis from the modelled, sculptural tendencies of the academic style to an amalgamation of the Byzantine tradition, folk art and modern tendencies can be seen in two early works, Crucifixion No 6, 1916 (fig. 4) and Adam and Eve No. 9, 1919 (fig. 17). Xceron's Crucifixion can be compared to a 17th Century Crucifixion (fig. 18) in which Christ's body is elongated, and his head is surrounded by a nimbus which are typical traits of Byzantine iconography.

²⁹Anon., Washington Post, obituary, 30 September 1974. Archives of The Corcoran School of Art, Washington D.C.

³⁰The Corcoran School of Art, Corcoran School of Art News, 1.

The similarity with Xceron's work is evident although Xceron's work is more flat and stylized.

In the second painting, Adam and Eve No. 9, an Old Testament theme is depicted in a folk or naive style. While retaining a religious motif, Xceron's work assimilated influences of the early modernists, Picasso, Gauguin and Matisse, whose understanding of primitive art informed their modern idioms. Xceron's use of a limited palette, geometric distortion of the figures, and shallow space, ally him to Cubism, and those works of 1907-10 by Picasso and Braque included in the Armory Exhibition.

Cézanne was another influence in Xceron's early works. When comparing Xceron's Landscape # 36, 1923, (fig. 2) to Cézanne's Well and Grinding Wheel in the Forest of the Chateau Noir (fig. 19), composition and thematic similarities emerge, along with instructive differences. Cézanne remains concerned with the underlying structure of forms and their spatial ambiguity. On the left side of Cézanne's painting is perceived a foreground marked by the small hillock, a middle ground with the wheel, and a background with trees. On the right side, access into the composition is denied due to the absence of clear spatial recession, and the collapse of all three grounds into one through the use of a hatching stroke acts as a unifier. Landscape #36 expresses concern with light that dematerializes and destroys palpable space to create a

buoyant, ethereal atmosphere, like a finely woven web encompassing the whole. Xceron's work is more abstract because he was working from the imagination and the master's precedent rather than on the motif, as did Cézanne.

The influence of Byzantine iconography, combined with modern art styles, aided Xceron in reaching his abstracted, and subsequently abstract, style. Byzantine art had been of seminal importance to him as a youngster when he habitually made icons. His native countryside of Isari, and its twin village, Likosoura, boast of countless churches and monasteries, some dating back to the 10th century, others to the 14th century, containing famous Byzantine fresco and mosaic cycles. St. Athanasius and St. Nicon in Megaloupoli, and the tenth century monastery of Nicephoros Phocas in Tripoli, stand only a few miles from Xceron's home.

The impact of this idiom on Xceron's development appeared in such early works as Icon 250A Christ in Deisis. (fig. 5) Although Xceron used the combination of abstract background with illusionistic figure, Christ's drapery contains arbitrary shading to create a decorative effect, while flattening the figure of Christ. Around 1917 Xceron entertained the possibility of becoming an iconographer, and even did some commissions for Greek Orthodox churches. One of these was in Bethesda, Maryland, another in Tarpon

Springs, Florida.³¹ Iconography, a traditional choice for many Greek and Russian artists, offered a way to supplement their incomes. Although a career in this field would probably have provided Xceron with security and a steady income, he chose the more difficult path of modern art.

From a macroscopic viewpoint, Xceron's work through the early thirties seems to alternate between Cubism and Cézanne, with personal variations. By 1919 he was using an archaicized idiom, combining a Cubist faceting of the figure with forms that attained an almost sculptural appearance, as in Adam and Eve No 9. By 1923 he seems to have returned to Cézanne with his Landscape #36, which is imbued with a very personal atmospheric light. From 1927 to 1929, Xceron worked with landscape in a style that was reminiscent of Picasso and Braque's L'Estaque paintings, but he chose brighter colors, as in Chartres No.1E, 1929 (fig. 10). This vacillation between Cubism and Cézanne kept Xceron from moving to a totally abstract idiom before the early thirties.

The Early New York Years: 1920-27

Xceron encountered many problems when he came to New

³¹New murals grace these churches presently. The Xceron works could not be located, and church records are old and spotty in their information.

York in 1920 to further his art education. The artist had to spend the next few years taking care of his family while studying the New York art collections and training himself in conservation techniques at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Most important was his sister Demeter's illness, whose cure he needed to finance. It became necessary for Xceron to supplement his income with various other jobs, including that of making icons for churches. Xceron later wrote of this episode to his friend Torres-Garcia. "I have been in a very embarrassing situation. My sister got very sick and I had to send her to Washington and spend much money."³³ Another family catastrophe followed when Vasiliky Xceron's mother died of tuberculosis in the early twenties, leaving him responsible for his younger siblings in America. In New York his favorite activity was visiting the few art galleries showing modern art.³⁴ He was especially fond of frequenting the gallery of Marius de Zayas, whose sentiments about modern art agreed with his own. Zayas, who was one of the champions of modernism in America, was by 1916 already experiencing the hostility to modern art, and became disgruntled with American culture in general. He complained about the isolation of the individual who, out of necessity, engaged in a "continuous struggle to adapt himself to the

³³Postcard from Xceron to Torres-Garcia, dated January 18, 1924. aaa, Xceron Papers, Reel # D294.

³⁴SRGM Archives. Xceron Files.

milieu."³⁵

During the 1920s, however, Xceron spent his hours working and exhibiting with the Society of Independent Artists in New York. This organization's goal had been to provide artists with a democratic exhibition outlet. It was based on the motto of the Société des Artistes Indépendants de Paris: "no juries and no prizes."³⁶ The art exhibited at the first exhibition of 1917 at the Grand Central Palace in New York was taken from a wide cross section of artists and styles. It was to this exhibition that Duchamp entered his infamous Fountain, 1916, that was rejected by the jury, under the alias R. Mutt.

While Xceron worked and attended to his family problems in the 1920s, he studied art at various institutions in New York. According to his own notes³⁷ about the period of 1919 to 1927, he traveled several times back to Washington, D.C. to visit his sister, Demeter. In New York he attended lectures and courses at the Metropolitan Museum, Frick Collection, the Morgan and the New York Public Libraries. He studied literature, the history of art and conservation

³⁵Marius de Zayas, Camera Work, No. 47 (1916), quoted in Barbara Rose, Ed. Readings in American Art 1900-1975, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975): 5.

³⁶Francis Naumann, "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists," Artforum, Part I, February 1979, 34.

³⁷SRGM Archives. Xceron Files.

processes. Visiting the galleries regularly, he was especially interested in those dealers showing modern art; Stieglitz, Marius de Zayas and most importantly, J.B. Neumann, who exhibited and collected Xceron's works.

The artists who comprised the Stieglitz group were of seminal value to Xceron who especially admired Dove and others who exemplified avant garde tendencies. American modernists such as Patrick Henry Bruce, Max Weber, Stanton MacDonald Wright and Marsden Hartley went to Europe in the early part of the century to study art, and many returned to become part of Stieglitz's circle. As the Americanist art historian Milton Brown noted, "during the period 1900-1913, nearly every significant modern American artist traveled to Europe. For most Paris was a mandatory stop..."³⁸ These artists were influenced by Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism and German Expressionism. The consequences became evident as they returned to America and showed their works in the modern galleries, changing the American art scene forever.

This juncture of Xceron's career was crucial to his later development. A discussion of the artists and works he saw, and the ideas he encountered in New York, follows. Around 1920 Xceron met Max Weber, one of the American

³⁸Milton Brown, Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, Naomi Rosenblum, David M. Sokol, American Art, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1979), p.367.

modernists who had earlier been to Paris to study art with Matisse, and who was known for his Cubist-Futurist images. Weber was sought after by American artists interested in Continental tendencies. Xceron had been familiar, through his schoolmate Logasa, with the work of Weber, who had been one of the artists showing at Stieglitz's "291" Photo Secession gallery since 1910.

In 1921 and 1922, Xceron exhibited his paintings with The Society of Independent Artists at the Waldorf Astoria, then located at 34th Street and Fifth Avenue. At about the same time he met another modernist, Joseph Stella, through his Corcoran schoolmates, Lohr and Logasa. Although his colleagues knew Stella through Stieglitz, Xceron had been familiar with his work from reviews of the 1913 New York Armory Show. Stella's works of this period contained Cubist fragmentation with Futurist simultaneity. Xceron, who by 1921 had already known Stella for a year, most likely read and sympathized with his indictment of Academic art which appeared in Broom magazine in December, 1921. Writing of artistic freedom and the artist, Stella stated that "according to his credo he will always prefer the emotions as expressed by a child to the lucubrations of those warbling theorists who throw harlequin mantles on insipid soapy academic nudes or to those anatomical forms in wax

chopped a sang froid by necrophiles."³⁹

Xceron and John Marin, another Stieglitz artist, shared a mutual love of the watercolor medium. Xceron sketched the New England countryside throughout his life in the United States. During the twenties he painted the quays and seaports in Gloucester and Rockport, Massachusetts, and Oganquit, Maine. Xceron found his watercolor instructors at the Corcoran inspiring. However, stylistically he had more in common with the work of Marin due to its modernist hallmarks. If a typical Marin watercolor, Off Cape Split, Maine (fig. 20), 1938, is compared to Xceron's Untitled, n.d., (fig. 14) a relationship is borne out by the Cubist fragmentation in both. Xceron may have known Marin's work from the Stieglitz Younger American Painters exhibition of 1910 at the "291" gallery, or through his friend Torres-Garcia, who had shown with Marin at the Whitney Studio Club.

Another similarity in the two works is the theme of the lone sailboat on a low horizon in New England, and the softly blue-washed areas of watercolor expanses. The softness is similar, and allows for much of the underlying white of the paper to show through, a techniques also used by Moser, Xceron's teacher at the Corcoran. The soft texture is achieved by first wetting the paper or cardboard with water, then laying in the color while it is still damp. Both

³⁹Joseph Stella, Broom, December, 1921, as quoted in Barbara Rose Ed., Readings in American Art 1900-1975, p. 56.

artists were inspired by the watercolors of Cézanne and the early Cubist works of Picasso, and both abstracted and simplified their elements.

Joachin Torres Garcia was a Uruguayan artist friend with whom Xceron shared many qualities. They met in New York in 1920 when they were both working from Cézannist-Cubist sources. Their tendency toward a humanistic, spiritual, philosophic view resulted in their desire to develop a universal artistic language. Given their similarities, Xceron and Torres-Garcia became close friends, and correspondents when apart.

In 1922 when Xceron encountered the materialistic art climate of New York, he wrote an embittered letter to his friend Torres-Garcia, who was by then in France. The tenor of the note was out of character for Xceron, who was known to possess a quiet, patient, abiding personality. He complained about the noisy and commercial atmosphere of New York, and concluded with his wish to find a more conducive working environment. He talked of the many hardships he had endured in New York while eeking out a living and painting.

This note, written in broken English for the sake of Torres-Garcia, confirms their search for a more congenial atmosphere in which to create. Sala, another mutual friend, had just written to Xceron about Spain as one choice.

Xceron wrote:

Sala big enthusiasm- like Spain- Advise me leave New York and go there. There is the life and art, he says.- Art situation here same- machine, commerce, money. That is all - Anderson Gallery in business- Next month will be National Bank.- Salons of America!....⁴⁰

Continuing in this vein, Xceron inquired about the situation in France. In the same letter, he aired his political concerns about the Turkish persecutions of the Greeks and Armenians during the post WWI years. "I am sending you pictures to see the Smyrna catastrophe - This catastrophe was terrible."⁴¹

One influential figure who helped Xceron when in New York these early years was Theodoros Dorros a New York intellectual and committed socialist who served as Xceron's mentor in the early 1920s, and who became Xceron's brother-in-law in 1935. In addition to writing poetry, which was considered proto-Surrealist in Greece, he was a master tailor. His younger sister Mary owned a large bridal veil factory in New York and Paris. The type of headresses she made appealed to an upper class clientele, and were representative of Paris couture design. Dorros, who chose not to earn a living as a poet, sewed veils at his sister's

⁴⁰Letter from Xceron to Joachin Torres-Garcia, dated October 22, 1922, Cecilia De Torres Archives, New York.

⁴¹Xceron was referring to the Asia Minor Incident which effected Greeks and Armenians throughout the world. By 1922 Ataturk Kemal and his nationalist armies had exterminated almost two million Armenian and Greek citizens of Asia Minor. Only about 250,000 escaped, mainly to Greece.

shop. In the meantime, he guided Xceron in his selection of literature. Tolstoy was one of his heroes, and he commissioned Xceron to paint a portrait of the great social thinker. As Robbins stated apropos of this painting, when it was completed, and although Xceron needed the money, he was hesitant to sell it.⁴²

Xceron was given entré to the Dorros home where Theodoros introduced him to his sister Mary whom Xceron married in 1935. Fortified with some savings and introductions from the Dorros', Rattner and others, Xceron left for Paris in 1927. It was there that Xceron reunited with many of his old friends, becoming an art critic and a member of the international avant-garde community.

⁴²Robbins, Jean Xceron, p. 13. Also in Robbins notes contained in the Archives, SRGM Xceron Files.

Chapter 2

The Paris Years: 1927-1935

The Paris years from 1927-37 were crucial for Xceron because they saw the cementing of his role as critic, while providing him with exposure to international avant-garde styles. Constructivism, Surrealism, Cubism, Neo-Plasticism, Biomorphism, Dadaism were just a few he encountered. Xceron's familiarity with such a variegated array of artistic voices, resulted in his absorption of many elements with which he arrived at his own unique modernist style. Moreover, Xceron made some of his most valuable lifetime friendships and group affiliations at this time. The Paris years are key to our understanding of Xceron's later, forties, works due to his synthesis of earlier modernist styles.

This chapter begins with the artistic and socio-political climate of Xceron's decade in Paris. The universal boom experienced after World War I lasted until 1919, when a brief depression followed. A long period of worldwide economic and political prosperity ensued which engendered overconfidence and excessive speculation in goods and market economies which would lead to the economic crash of 1929. But, when Xceron arrived in 1927, Paris was enjoying a brief respite from the earlier economic depression. He contacted

old friends and frequented the watering holes of the avant-garde, such as the Café Dôme in Montmartre. The Dorros' welcomed Xceron into their Parisian environment helping him to rent a studio in their building at 18 Emile Augier, near the Bois de Boulogne.¹

In Paris Xceron continued developing his techniques by sketching in the various museums. In his 1929 notes, he referred to the attainment of a "Carte d'Abonnement," which permitted him to sketch and paint at the Musée Nationale du Louvre. He made special note of the works of Millet and Chardin, whose prosaic themes he especially admired.²

During his first couple of years in this city, Xceron worked as a newspaper art correspondent while painting or sketching. He also expanded his social horizons by contacting the Greek and American Diaspora communities. Eustratios Tériade, a Greek art critic, brought him together with Christian Zervos, the publisher who supported Xceron, and introduced him to a substantial portion of the Parisian avant-garde. His acquaintance with Joachin Torres-Garcia was one reason for his involvement in the group, Cercle et Carré, in 1930. Xceron's group and personal affiliations

¹Jean Xceron notes for the preparation of his Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum retrospective catalogue of 1965. Archives of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Jean Xceron Files.

²Ibid. Hence it shall be abbreviated as SRGM, Jean Xceron Files.

would provide him not only with friendships and support but also with exhibitions, reviews, and to an extent, fame. The Parisian Hellenic Diaspora will be discussed first because it was this sector with which he initially came into contact.

Active Greek Diaspora Community

Paris was a watershed for Greek artists wishing to study modern art, most of whom attended the Julian, Collarosi and Grande Chaumière private art academies. Michael Tombros, Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Ghikas, Demetrius Galanis, George Gounaropoulos, and other members of the Hellenic community helped Xceron become acquainted with his new surroundings. Christian Zervos, who began publishing his art periodical Cahiers d'Art in 1926, later became Xceron's staunch supporter. Also present in this city in the early part of the 20th century were several Greek writers and critics who had earned their degrees at the Sorbonne, as had Zervos.³ In 1928 the sculptor Michael Tombros introduced Xceron to Eustratios Tériade at the Café Loire in Paris. Tériade, a Greek critic, was then working at the Cahiers d'Art publication.

Michael Tombros had distinguished himself and received

³Kristian Zervos Tetradia Tis Technis, Ed. Thanasis Th. Niarchos, (Athens, Greece: Ekdotis Kastanioty, 1990): 153.

a grant from the Polytechnic in Athens to study art at the Académie Julian in Paris. After he returned to his birthplace, Athens, he was given a teaching position at the same institution from which he had received his degree. He made numerous trips to Paris where he worked and widely exhibited. In 1930 Tombros edited the publication, 20th Century, comprised of a series of articles from contributors such as Le Corbusier, Léger and Zervos.

George Gounaropoulos (known as Gounaro in Paris) was a Bulgarian-born Greek who studied art at the Athens Polytechnic Institute from 1906-1912. When he was awarded the Averoff prize in 1912 to study art in Paris, Gounaro attended the Academies Julian and Chaumiére until 1931. He was then represented by the Galerie Vavin-Raspail, and became known for his Surrealist style of painting. Xceron sometimes collaborated with Gounaro, who was also a good draftsman, and often drew newspaper illustrations. Gounaro's cartoon illustrations accompanied Xceron's articles for the European edition of the Chicago Tribune. Restricting himself to the distinguishing essentials of the character, Gounaro rendered in linear style the expression of the sitter.

A Xceron essay for the "Who's Who Abroad" column of the Chicago Tribune, dated December 26, 1929⁴, was written about the Swiss art dealer Max Berger, who owned the Vavin-Raspail

⁴Jean Xceron, "Max Berger," Chicago Tribune, European Edition (26 December 1929): 4.

Gallery, which represented Gounaro. In this article, Xceron noted that Berger's gallery provided a constant outlet for the young avant-garde, and often printed full-page critiques of their works in his publication, Le Plastique Nouveau. Xceron's column was accompanied by a sketch of Berger done by Gounaro. With economical means of line, Gounaro captured the largesse of Berger's personality.⁵

Nikos Hatzikiriakos-Ghikas was another Greek artist mentioned in Xceron's papers. After completing his art education in Athens, Ghika (as he was popularly known) travelled to Paris, studied at the Academie Bissier, and with Galanis, who taught at the Academie Ranson. In 1927 Maurice Raynal, the Cubist critic, introduced him to the Galerie Percier, where Ghika had his first solo exhibition. Xceron also knew Raynal, who wrote about his work in Zervos' Cahiers d'Art. It can safely be assumed that Xceron's introduction to the Galerie Percier where he exhibited in 1933, came from either Ghika, Raynal, or more likely, Zervos himself.

In fact, Zervos was a staunch supporter of most of the Hellenic Diaspora artists in Paris. He introduced Ghika, Tombros and Xceron to many French critics including Maurice Raynal. The latter wrote about Ghika and Xceron, who showed together in the Fourth Surindependents Exhibition on October

⁵Ibid. Illustration of Max Berger by Gounaro, appears next to Xceron's text.

16, 1931, the Sixth in October-November, 1933, and the 1934 Seventh Exhibition in October-November. Raynal's review of the 1933 show, extolled the quality of the new tendencies which he found to have great merit, in the works of the young artists.⁶

In a survey of his favorite artists, including Ghika, Zervos also wrote about Xceron's role in this show:

The first Xceron paintings contained rich texture and were drawn in color. Since then, Xceron under the influence of Picasso, gave to his drawing a very powerful stroke, rendering his line more undulant, less fixed than previously. Simultaneously, the color is thinned out and stripped of its strong chromatic values. Today Xceron proceeds to the equilibrium of his fundamental properties. In his latest canvases the color once more becomes rich and gemlike, the drawing fixed as in certain early works but much more linear than ever. The overall impression is infinitely more striking and more solid. The period of incubation appears to have definitely ended for Xceron.⁷

The unwavering line that Zervos mentions in reference to Xceron's early painting can be found in the works of 1928, such as Nature Morte (fig. 21). In this still life study after Cézanne, the outline of the objects is rendered in brown. The colors and texture are rich and sensuous. After further absorption of Picasso, Xceron's style, as seen

⁶Maurice Raynal, "La Jeunesse aux 'Surindependents'," L'Intransigeant, October 29, 1933. aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

⁷Christian Zervos, "Apropos du Salon des Surindependents," Cahiers d'Art, Vol 7, #8-10, 1932: 396-97. Author's translation provided here.

in Still Life No. 17, 1931 (fig. 22), became more confident in the use of line and vibrant color, with a more striking overall appearance.

Not only did Zervos include Xceron in his exhibition reviews but he also sponsored exhibitions under the auspices of his publication Cahiers d'Art in which he included his works. One such example was an synonymously titled show at the Hôtel Drouot in 1933 which included the works of well known masters Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne, Bellmer and Magritte but also the lesser known Ghika and Xceron.⁸ Other works for sale at this auction were by Arp, Braque, Giacometti, Gonzalez, Kandinsky, Matisse, and Miró.⁹

In fact, Zervos did much to enhance Xceron's image and helped to make him known as one of the Ecole de Paris artists. Calling attention to his style and its development, he acted much like a public relations agent for Xceron, and not just as his patron. One of the many Xceron exhibition reviews that Zervos, who also introduced Xceron to the

⁸Christian Zervos, "Cahiers d'Art Exhibition Auction," Hotel Drouot, Salle #6, April 12, 1933. aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

⁹aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294. Of the two Xceron's listed for sale by Zervos, one was Nature Morte, an oil on canvas, which was reproduced in the catalogue and carried the reference number Dim. 38 46. The second was not reproduced in the pamphlet, but was listed as Composition, an oil on canvas, Dim. 54 65.

Galerie de France,¹⁰ authored for his Cahiers d'Art, reads:

In the preceding issues of these Cahiers we have spoken of Xceron's art in relation to the Salon des Surindependants. The works that this artist is showing at the Galerie de France will be a surprise for those who are unaware of, or, who have partial knowledge of his work. It is certain that if Xceron succeeds in developing his work in the present style without other preoccupation than that of the plastic and poetic vision of his means, he will enrich the School of Paris's works very characteristically through his imagination which owes nothing to effort and by the inner feeling of plastic form which results in astonishing arabesques.¹¹

The review was accompanied by a reproduction of one of the works in the show, Violin No. 7, 1931. (fig. 23) A vertical composition confined to the neutrals--blacks, greys, tans and ochres--it combines round, rectangular, oval and "s" forms, suggestive of musical instruments or figural motifs in their contextual placement. The circular forms, for example, appear at the top, where a human head would normally appear. The strings are at once the waistline connecting the upper and lower torso, and a connective element between the top and bottom of a stringed musical instrument.

That the Galerie de France exhibition was seminal to

¹⁰This is probable because Zervos was not only one of the first people Xceron met in Paris, but, was also an influential Parisian critic. His periodical's reviews were coveted by the Parisian gallerists.

¹¹Christian Zervos, "Les Expositions," Cahiers d'Art, No. 9-10, 1931, Author's translation. aaa Files, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

Xceron's career can be seen not only by the profusion of reviews it garnered, but also, by the attendance of many art celebrities. Robbins, who worked with Xceron at the Guggenheim, later wrote of the artist's reaction to its reception. "Xceron was dazzled by the procession of notables who trooped through the gallery: Mondrian, Arp, Leger, van Doesburg, Masson, Héliou - almost every Paris painter of consequence, all painters about whom Xceron had written and all men whose work he had profoundly admired for years - came to see his paintings and went away impressed."¹² Some other reactions to the show, were recorded by Maurice Raynal in L'Intransigeant, Fanny Clar in Le Soir and André Salmon in the Gringoire.¹³

Tériade, the other Greek influential critic probably initiated Xceron's next one-man exhibition at the Galerie Percier. Indeed, both Zervos and Tériade helped through introductions and critiques to launch Xceron's career. This show of May 1933, was also reviewed by Christian Zervos for the Cahiers d'Art. For this essay, supplemented by three Xceron illustrations: Portrait No. 107, 1933 (fig. 24), The Card Player, 1932 (fig. 25), and Composition No. 36, 1932 (fig. 26), Zervos wrote: "Within a relatively short period Xceron has succeeded in developing his art into a

¹²Robbins, Jean Xceron, 14.

¹³These have been reproduced and are part of the archival scrapbooks of the Les Surindépendants, Grande Palais, Paris.

significant style. The exhibition of some of his most recent works at the Galerie Percier has proven that he has surpassed the work that he made four years ago."¹⁴ In this article, Zervos made special note of the fact that through his research into Picasso, Xceron found his very own style. He maintained that whereas the example of Picasso had destroyed the output of many less strong artists, "it appears to have consolidated and enriched that of Xceron."¹⁵

Xceron's notes include extensive lists of friends and acquaintances made throughout his life and who, in some way, left an imprint, if not on his art, then on his memory.¹⁶ Demetrius Galanis figures prominently in Xceron's notes, and is repeatedly mentioned. Having finished his studies in Athens, the multi-talented Galanis immigrated to Paris to further his career as an artist. By 1904 he was illustrating for the Paris periodicals, Assiete au Beurre, Le Sourire and Le Temoin.¹⁷ He exhibited with the Salon Nationale, and was a founder of the Salon D'Autumne, which had its first show in 1906. From 1925 to 1928 Demetrius Galanis taught art at

¹⁴Christian Zervos, "Les Expositions," Cahiers d'Art, vol. 8, nos. 5-6, 1933. aaa Files, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶SRGM, Xceron Files.

¹⁷Franticek Kupka may be the most well known of those who produced illustrations for the Assiete Aux Beurre. See exhibition catalogue Franticek Kupka 1871-1957. A Retrospective. (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1975): 308.

the Académie André Lhote. Ghika was among his students.¹⁸

During Xceron's stay, Galanis was a distinguished teacher of art at several academies including the André Lhote and the Ranson. He was also a respected member of the Franco-Hellenic community and Xceron's close friend. Being an art teacher, and older than Xceron by eight years, it was most likely his influence that inspired the younger man to begin teaching art. Announcements appeared in several publications about the inception of Xceron's private art classes. One of these appeared in the Chicago Tribune, and read as follows:

Jean Xceron, the American painter who is one of the leaders of what is known as the Ecole de Paris, has opened a private class in modern painting at his studio, 48 Rue de Passy. As Xceron is a painter of abstractions which show a sensitive feeling for color and a delightful freedom in the creation of new forms the new class offers much of interest to the student of contemporary paintings. [T]he class has as its aim the awakening and encouragement of art expression to afford students through analysis and personal criticism of their work, an opportunity for familiarizing themselves with the problems of plastic form ...¹⁹

Xceron must have enjoyed some measure of success as a teacher, for the records indicate that he taught privately for at least two years. His relationships with the Parisian

¹⁸Tony Spiteris, Tris Eones Neolinkys Technis: 1660-1967, (Athens: Ekdotikos Organismos Papyrus, 1979) Vol. 3: 55-56.

¹⁹Anon. The Chicago Tribune, European Edition, April 24, 1932.

Greek community, including Galanis, proved auspicious for Xceron.

Theodoros Dorros was another of the Greek Diaspora artist-intellectuals in Paris in the twenties and thirties. Dorros, who wrote and published a book of poems, subsequently classified Surrealist by Greek art critics,²⁰ was a friend and intellectual guide to Xceron. In 1936 Dorros, then Xceron's brother-in-law, wrote another text entitled Intelligence, also published in France. His poetry book is a compilation of ironic exercises about the futile endeavors of man to commemorate his own accomplishments. In poem after ironic poem, Dorros alluded to the ephemeral nature of life. His poetry pivoted on elusive metaphors, double entendres and puns. This clever self-critical quality was probably one reason Dorros was acknowledged as one of Greece's Surrealist literary progenitors. His own 1930 publication of poems, entitled Stou Glytomou to Hazi (roughly translated as The Futility of Being), contains an inscription on the inside facing page: "This Book is Not for Sale. It is Sent Gratis to Anyone Requesting it."²¹

²⁰Theodoros Dorros, Iridanos, No. 4. (February-March 1976).

²¹Ibid., Stou Glytomou to Hazi, (France: De Vaugirard, M.L. Motti, Dir. Impasse Ronsin, 1930).

Xceron's Personal and Group Affiliations

Among the many American colleagues who greeted Xceron upon his arrival was Abraham Rattner, who launched him into the Parisian publishing industry. As a result, he began writing art columns for the European editions of several American newspapers. Rattner introduced Xceron to B.J. Kospoth of the Chicago Tribune, encouraging him to write his art critiques, and to accept a job as art reviewer in 1929. Xceron wrote the "Who's Who Abroad" column for the European edition. On April 27, 1929 one such review was about Rattner, to whom he referred as Alvin, a member of the Ecole de Paris.²² Soon Xceron became a syndicated columnist for the Boston Evening Transcript, another newspaper owned by the Tribune Company of France.

Xceron's lifetime friendship with the Uruguayan artist Joachin Torres-Garcia, was important for several reasons, and, continued in Paris. Xceron reunited with Torres-Garcia who welcomed him to Paris in 1927, and, introduced him to the Spanish and Latin American art communities. In the late twenties Xceron would show with these artists at the Galerie Dalmau in Barcelona. Torres-Garcia also acquainted him with many international avant garde artists who met at his house

²²An umbrella term used to connote a broadly defined, and diverse modern stylistic variety in Paris based artists, who exhibited under the title Ecole de Paris.

during the formation of the Cercle et Carré, in 1930.

The bonds between Torres-Garcia and Xceron were never more evident than in the exhibition review that the latter wrote for the Torres-Garcia show at the Galerie Zak.²³

Xceron expressed his own beliefs, but they reflected the artistic spirit of Torres-Garcia as well:

The true creative artist knows thoroughly in advance what he has to paint. Without imitating natural forms, he expresses only what has an emotional interest and subjective value. He puts on canvas only those impressions which would give form to a new being. By designing and organizing every part of the picture as a living force, he creates a work of art.²⁴

Xceron wrote of Torres-Garcia's style and its development, noting that by 1916, when he came into contact with modern aesthetics and spirit, the artist's work manifested itself in dynamic planes and geometric forms. Xceron also noted the influence of Walt Whitman's philosophy on Torres-Garcia. Whitman also inspired Xceron in the teens and early twenties. The "prophet of dynamic America," as Xceron referred to Whitman, inspired the Latin artist to seek New York, the exciting dynamism of which he painted in his new style.²⁵ In a biographic account of the following years, Xceron wrote that Torres-Garcia moved to Florence

²³Jean Xceron, "Joachin-Torres Garcia," Chicago Tribune, European Edition, (6 April 1929): 4.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

after two years in New York, and in 1926 went to live in Paris.²⁶ There, the lives of Xceron and Torres-Garcia became enmeshed once again.

Prior to engaging in discussion of the Cercle et Carré group dynamics, it would be fruitful to glimpse several typical examples by artist-members Xceron and Torres-Garcia. In 1932 Xceron was working on his violin series which can be exemplified by a work entitled Violin No. 6E, 1932 (fig. 27). In this work he used stringed instruments, particularly violins, intertwined with geometric grids which, on the right sector, predominate over the violin forms. The limited palette of this work was confined to taupes, greys, blacks and neutrals. The sketchy grid patterns on the right side of the painting supercede any figuration in his later abstract canvases and, as used in this work, are prophetic.

Almost the same type of development can be seen in the work of Torres-Garcia, who, according to Nicolette Gast, "developed [in 1929] a method of composition that was to become his trademark. He introduced an irregular grid into his painting."²⁷ Gast noted that Torres-Garcia had used grid structures in 1917 for a short period, and had returned to them in 1929, perhaps due to the close proximity of Theo Van

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Nicolette Gast, "Torres-Garcia in Paris" in The Antagonistic Link: "Joaquin Torres-Garcia Theo van Doesburg," (Amsterdam: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1991): 72-73.

Doesburg.

Starting in 1929, Xceron noted that he "attended meetings in the studio of Torres-Garcia in the rue 3, Marcel Sembat, Porte de Montmartre. Many famous artists and poets met there for literary and artistic gatherings."²⁸ Xceron named Mondrian, Arp, Van Doesburg, Seuphor, Gonzalez, Vantongerloo, Daura, Queto, Charchoune, Brummer, Czaky and Graham as just a few of those attending the weekly meetings.

Xceron was referring to the organization of Cercle et Carré, whose inception Torres-Garcia had discussed with Van Doesburg. However, because of their divergent views on style, Torres-Garcia started with Michel Seuphor. Van Doesburg insisted on pure abstraction and preferred the word 'concrete' art to express it. Torres-Garcia abstracted from nature and found it very difficult to come to terms with Van Doesburg's pure constructivism. Van Doesburg forged ahead, however, and published the periodical, Art Concret, at the end of 1929. Concrete art, as Van Doesburg referred to this type of abstraction, would be devoid of any reference to nature or an intuitive approach and would eliminate any identifying factors present in the artist's brush stroke.

Torres-Garcia's and Seuphor's Cercle et Carré was larger and composed of a much more diverse membership than Van Doesburg's Art-Concret. Xceron's notes also state that

²⁸SRGM, Xceron Files.

the magazine, Cercle et Carré, was being published from Torres-Garcia's studio address, starting in 1930.²⁹

Michel Seuphor introduced Torres-Garcia to Mondrian, about whom he knew practically nothing. Seuphor initially agreed to a broader definition of styles including the Surrealist, the Dadaist and others, but, later reneged. On stylistic grounds, Torres-Garcia did not engage in dictating strict dogma, as had Van Doesburg for the Art Concret. Cercle et Carré's broad spectrum membership was noted by Zervos's publication, Cahiers d'Art, which mentioned the group in relation to their first exhibition in April, 1930: "The 'Cercle et Carré' group organized an exhibition at the Galerie 23 which has brought together works by ex-neoplasticists, ex-surrealists, ex-dadaists, abstract painters and pupils of Léger."³⁰

The same disagreement which had alienated Van Doesburg and Torres-Garcia broke up Seuphor and Torres-Garcia. Torres-Garcia wanted a broader-based definition, especially since he used nature as his starting point. Seuphor maintained his beliefs in a purely abstract, non-referential art. Torres-Garcia, for the sake of presenting a united front, agreed to go along with Seuphor's strictures for a

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Gast, "Torres Garcia in Paris" in The Antagonistic Link: Joachin Torres-Garcia Theo van Doesburg : 93.

while, and do away with figuration. For the third issue of their magazine, while Torres-Garcia was vacationing in Switzerland, Seuphor omitted all examples of art that were referential to the natural world, and ousted Torres-Garcia from Cercle et Carré altogether.³¹

The issues, debates and prejudices of the period and the group were reflected in Xceron's critiques in a series of essays for the Chicago Tribune's "Who's Who Abroad" column. During 1929 Xceron witnessed the events at the meetings of Cercle et Carré. According to Nicolette Gast, the break-up took place in December of 1929. Xceron's articles are dated from June 5, when he wrote about Héliou, who sided with Van Doesburg, to August 12, when he wrote of Mondrian, who sympathized with Torres-Garcia.

A certain number of personal biases toward both sides of Cercle et Carré are noted in Xceron's essays. In April, 1929, Xceron wrote an article on Theo Van Doesburg and his 'Elementarism' or 'Neo-Plasticism.' Xceron noted that Neo-Plasticism departed from previous examples of synthetic art, like that of Cubism and Cézanne, and started an "absolutely elementary art, plastically pure and as true as mathematics and architecture."³²

Xceron met Mondrian in the latter part of 1929 at

³¹Ibid: 94-95.

³²Jean Xceron, "Theo Van Doesburg," Chicago Tribune, European Edition. (April 28, 1929): 4.

Torres-Garcia's studio where the Cercle et Carré congregated. But, before these two artists met him, their information about De Stijl came largely from Van Doesburg. The art critic Nicolette Gast asserted that by 1929 "Van Doesburg had not mentioned Mondrian to Torres-Garcia, since this would make his own share in the De Stijl movement appear greater."³³ The error of Mondrian's omission by Van Doesburg, as a progenitor to the De Stijl, is reflected in an essay by Xceron: "This new art movement (Neo-Plasticism) had its beginnings in Holland in 1912 and was started by Theo Van Doesburg, the founder and publisher of The Style, a review of Painting, Sculpture, Literature, Music and Architecture."³⁴ Xceron was misinformed about the incipient stages of De Stijl, but later redressed his error in another essay for the Chicago Tribune column.³⁵

Earlier, however, Xceron was impressed enough by Van Doesburg's position that he may have experienced some discomfort when his two friends disagreed on the founding of this group. By 1930 Xceron was attempting to omit any obvious figuration, and was producing compositions exemplified by the Violin series. These canvases show grid-

³³Gast, "Torres Garcia in Paris" in Antagonistic Link, 92.

³⁴Jean Xceron, "Theo Van Doesburg" the Chicago Tribune, European Edition. 28 April 1929: 4

³⁵Jean Xceron, "Piet Mondrian," Chicago Tribune, European Edition, 12 August 1929, p. 4

like divisions on one side, while the other half alludes to rounded forms. Xceron's artistic dilemma, whether to omit figuration, reflected the conflict and debate that was being enacted by the ideological differences of Torres-Garcia and Van Doesburg. Xceron, like Torres-Garcia, appeared hesitant to leave all references to nature behind. Later, when he was painting his completely abstract works, Xceron's drawings and sketches often alluded to nature.

This peculiarity could also be attributed to his Classical heritage, and his familiarity with the ancient Greek principle of harmony. In searching for the timeless and universal, Xceron seemed to resolve the figuration/non-figuration conflict by choosing a middle course. His education was based on the ancient Greek philosophies, including the golden mean, and he lived his life in the same way--through moderation.

Xceron's philosophy espoused Platonic ideas of essentials, universals and ideal forms, expressed as geometric forms. This was in agreement with some of Torres-Garcia's beliefs, who would later write, "Plato calls these essences of things ideas, we might call them the archetype of things; they are like their original forms striving to raise them to perfection."³⁶ It is well-known that Torres-

³⁶Joaquin Torres-Garcia Recuperacion del objeto (Montevideo: 1952) p. 108; Quoted in Gast, "Torres Garcia in Paris", Antagonistic Link: Joaquin Torres-Garcia Theo Van Doesburg: 172

Garcia, as early as 1917, and Xceron, in his early education, read the Platonic dialogues in Phaedrus and the Symposium.

Torres-Garcia utilized the golden section which, according to Robbins, was due to his familiarity with Masonic and Rosicrucian mysticism. His use of it was flexible and non-formulaic, apparent in the metaphysical drawings of portraits, which "are deformed and the deformations are arrived at through the arbitrary use of the golden section proportions."³⁷

Robbins also stated that, for Torres-Garcia, the golden mean was equal to mathematical proportion, and referred to its ethical or Christian correlaries, and to the ruler, which could also symbolize the ladder. For Torres-Garcia, the golden mean and the measuring instruments of geometry, algebra and mathematics signified perfect harmony and unity.³⁸ This preference for the golden mean is apparent in Torres-Garcia and Xceron, who greatly admired Juan Gris, an exhibiting member of the earlier Golden Section Group.

Gris abhorred the use of symbols and embraced the use of metaphor. Through pictorial and poetic metaphor he wanted to suggest or evoke certain feelings, to produce lyrical effects. Maurice Raynal, who also wrote reviews of Xceron's

³⁷Robbins, Joachin Torres-Garcia, 29.

³⁸Ibid

works, characterized Gris as a metaphysician, because of his ability to transform through poetic metaphor. It is highly probable that Torres-Garcia knew of Gris's work from Picasso and J. Gonzalez, two other Spanish ex-patriots, if not from the gallery Dalmau in Barcelona.

Xceron's lifelong aversion to group membership may be understood by examining the debates and controversies of his group associations. As artists and people, Torres-Garcia, Michel Seuphor, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo and Mondrian influenced Xceron's style and his contextual history, evidenced in his own essays about them in the Chicago Tribune. At the end of 1929 Torres-Garcia met Michel Seuphor and realized his plans for the formation of the Cercle et Carré. Seuphor's own words recount the events: "I am tempted to smile when I recall that this series of groups and publications- Cercle et Carré, Abstraction-Création and Realités Nouvelles-all originated in a visit paid to me at Vanves in 1929 by the Uruguayan painter Torres-Garcia, which resulted in the founding of the Cercle et Carré."³⁹ Michel Seuphor was, however, prone to exaggeration, a trait that serves to temper his statement about his role in originating these groups.

In a letter to Torres-Garcia dated December 26, Van Doesburg wrote: "My dear Garcia, you must not forget that it

³⁹Michel Seuphor, Dictionary of Abstract Painting (New York: Paris Book Center Inc., 1958): 50.

was you who chose to forsake the collaboration with me-I wished for nothing more than to collaborate with you. We both had the idea of forming a group and working together with your friends Daura, Fernandez and several others."⁴⁰

Van Doesburg continued to tell Torres-Garcia that, under the circumstances, he saw no need for a group association unless it was based upon similar 'ideology and principles,' which the future group leaders did not share. In the same letter he advanced his belief about "the art of the future, that is to say art created scientifically, concrete art."⁴¹ In responding, Torres-Garcia was very hopeful that they could each go their own way, and continued his correspondence with Van Doesburg, asking for a quote for his review.

In January or February, 1930, Theo Van Doesburg sent a letter in response to a request by Torres-Garcia for his personal view of universal painting and its evolution in his oeuvre. He wrote: "What I call universal form is not an invention, but rather a return to an ancient method of construction according to immutable law."⁴² The break between the two became evident later in a letter from Torres-Garcia to Van Doesburg, when the first found out that

⁴⁰Theo Van Doesburg letter to Torres-Garcia, from Paris dated 26 December 1929, reproduced in "The Letters Theo Van Doesburg and Joachin Torres Garcia," The Antagonistic Link: Joachin Torres-Garcia Theo Van Doesburg: 36

⁴¹Ibid., 42.

⁴²Ibid., 42.

the latter had not been entirely forthcoming about the founding of Art Concret. Torres-Garcia ended his correspondence with Van Doesburg on a bad note: "I beg you to forget us completely. I will do the same with you."⁴³

Just as Van Doesburg saw fit to omit Mondrian's name and role in the formation of the De Stijl, Seuphor perpetrated the same type of error of omission, not only on Van Doesburg, but also on Torres-Garcia. The truth probably lies somewhere between the two, with credit for the idea and inception of Cercle et Carré belonging to all three artists.

Another artist member in the Cercle et Carré with whom Torres-Garcia was at ideological odds, was Georges Vantongerloo, whom he met in 1929 when they exhibited together in Art Abstrait.⁴⁴ After taking part in the De Stijl movement in Holland, Vantongerloo, who found its program too rigid, removed himself from its strictures and began adding more colors and building his forms out into space. Although Torres-Garcia theoretically espoused mathematical principles for art, he did not wish to apply them as dogmatically as Vantongerloo or Van Doesburg. This difference paved the way for the eventual separation of Torres-Garcia and Vantongerloo also.

Xceron, who met Vantongerloo through Torres-Garcia,

⁴³Ibid., 46.

⁴⁴Gast, "Torres-Garcia in Paris" in The Antagonistic Link, 96.

tried to preserve his decorum, and reported the Dutchman's art as one departing from tradition, and approaching a fresh vision of modernity. He characterized Vantongerloo's Neoplastic works as constructed of related volumes and wrote that these emanated "from the square inscribed and the square circumscribed within a circle. In all his research he discovered that in the pictorial and sculptural plastic art, geometry is the first manifestation of aesthetic unity."⁴⁵

Although Xceron was friendly with Torres-Garcia, Vantongerloo, the Arps, Van Doesburg, Mondrian and others, he tried to remain fair in his writings and relationships, while remaining true to himself. Objectivity was very difficult to maintain in times of crisis, so Xceron kept himself on the fringes of the various groups and activities, and, as a result, was often omitted altogether from documents. The following is but one such example.

Xceron's presence at the 1930 Galerie 23 Cercle et Carré exhibition, has been acknowledged neither by Michel Seuphor⁴⁶ nor by Gladys Fabre.⁴⁷ Xceron's omission seemed

⁴⁵Jean Xceron, "Georges Vantongerloo," Chicago Tribune, European Edition, 5 July 1929, 4.

⁴⁶Michel Seuphor, L'Art Abstrait 1918-1938, Vol.2, (Paris: Maeght Editeur, 1972): 60. Xceron does not appear on the list of attending members at this exhibition.

⁴⁷Gladys Fabre, Ed. Paris Arte Abstracto, Arte Concreto, Cercle et Carré 1930, (Valencia, Spain: Centro Julio Gonzalez IVAM and Generalitat Valenciana, 1990): 31. Xceron's absence is noted yet he is present in the group photo.

questionable, however, since some of his best friends were present: Torres-Garcia, Abraham Rattner, Germain Cuêto, Pierre Daura, Sophie Taeuber and Joseph Stella. Included in the Paris Arte Abstracto, Arte Concreto Cercle et Carré 1930 catalogue⁴⁸ (fig. 28) is a photograph of the exhibiting members in the Galerie 23 show. Xceron appears in the back row, third from the left. He is not identified in the accompanying caption. This type of inconsistency, probably Xceron's own fault, abounds in the historical documents. He simply did not want to be categorized or associated with any one particular tendency or group, thus aiding the mistaken facts perpetuated about him in the contemporary documents, and in subsequent histories.

Contrary to the previously mentioned lack of recognition, Hubert Juin who wrote the preface to the compilation of the Cercle et Carré periodicals acknowledged Xceron's membership.⁴⁹ Xceron is quoted in the second of three issues as saying: "True timeless, is that great art, which at all times is purely spiritual and whose plastic

⁴⁸Fabre, 31. I am most grateful to Ms. Fabre for allowing me to reproduce the photograph of the Galerie 23 opening. Her catalogue has also been most helpful as a reference to these Parisian artistic associations.

⁴⁹Hubert Juin, Cercle et Carré, 1930 as reprinted in Editions Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1977: 8

form relates to the spirit of its era."⁵⁰ The same issue carries articles by Mondrian, Freundlich, Vantongerloo and Seuphor. The issue is interspersed with wishes for the inauguration of the magazine, which included short quotations from artists on their ideologies. It is also illustrated by the works of Sophie Taeuber Arp, Cèsar Domela, Henri Staszewski and the poems of Michel Seuphor.

Having started with Torres-Garcia, who equated "the abstract idea with the symbol of the thing,"⁵¹ the Cercle et Carré group extended its boundaries with Seuphor's direction: "Torres-Garcia was forced out of Cercle et Carré by mid-October of 1930, having confided the direction of the magazine to Seuphor, and gone off to Switzerland for a long summer holiday near Ancona."⁵² Upon his return he found a newly reformed group with "Gabo and Arp [who] planned to unite both Constructivist and original Dada tendencies in a group that would be wide, pure and complex."⁵³

An outgrowth of the unresolved technical issues of Synthetic Cubism, a non-figurative tendency permeated the philosophies of a number of groups of independent artists

⁵⁰Jean Xceron "Statement", Cercle et Carré, Numero 2, (Paris: April 1930) p. 7; Cercle et Carré 1930, comp. Herbert Juin (Paris: Editions Jean Michel Place, 1977): unp.

⁵¹Robbins, Torres-Garcia : 23

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

working in Paris during the 1930s.⁵⁴ Two of these associations, Abstraction Création and Cercle et Carré, are pertinent to the development of Xceron's oeuvre, in terms of spiritual and formal decisions. In his later years, Xceron wrote: "the deeper meaning [beyond perceived appearances] lies in the painting itself as an expression of the artist. [This] is a result of an instinctive desire for the understanding of form... the relationship of the plastic elements."⁵⁵ This statement evinces a duality of the spiritual and the formal, which Xceron attempted to reconcile.

Xceron was among a number of artists concerned with this particular dichotomy. This dualistic aspect is reflected in Michel Seuphor's statement about the Cercle et Carré that "the circle and square of the title were the sky and the earth as symbolized by the ancient Oriental religions, they formed a kind of rudimentary alphabet by means of which everything could be expressed with the most limited means."⁵⁶ In essence, "they encompassed both the

⁵⁴Christopher Green, Cubism and Its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art 1916-28, (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1987.): 107

⁵⁵Jean Xceron, "Artist's Statement," Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, Exhibition catalogue. (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana, 1957). aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

⁵⁶Michel Seuphor, as cited in John Elderfield, Geometric Abstraction: 1926-1943, exhibition catalogue (Dallas: Walker Art Center, 7 October-19 November 1972) : 35

spiritual and the utilitarian connections of abstract art theory."⁵⁷ This dualist principle, which is the natural process of a search for harmony, appealed to Xceron, as evidenced in his statement which followed an essay by Mondrian in Cercle et Carré.

Xceron explained that "the truly eternal is that grand art in which purely spiritual and plastic concerns are coordinated, as manifestations of the spirit of the era."⁵⁸ The Cercle et Carré and the Abstraction Création groups were platforms for the development of abstraction, at the fringes of which Xceron could explore his own artistic evolution without becoming embroiled in their daily squabbles.

The Abstraction-Création group was started from the remains of the Cercle et Carré, and contained many of the same artists in its membership.⁵⁹ On February 15, 1931, while Seuphor was absent, Van Doesburg proposed the main tenet of the group, that of non-figurative or abstract art. He had learned from his experience with Torres-Garcia and Cercle et Carré, and with his own Art Concret that a broader base was necessary for the success of a group. He had also ascertained that it was imperative to define the statutes of the subsequent group on a much broader basis than he had in

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Jean Xceron, "Xceron" Cercle et Carré, No. 2, 6.

⁵⁹Fabre, 85.

his earlier failed attempt at the Art Concret. When Van Doesburg died in May 1931, he was replaced by Vantongerloo as vice-president of the group with Herbin as the president. Herbin and Xceron also had other exhibition venues in common such as the Les Surindependents and the Realités Nouvelles. Héliion, who had known Xceron through Torres-Garcia, with whom he shared a studio in Montmartre, became secretary and treasurer.

Xceron had exhibited at the gallery Dalmau in Barcelona with Héliion in 1928. He wrote about Héliion in a sympathetic vein and attributed the qualities of his art to personal character. He paraphrased the artist on his own work, noting that art in the future would become completely separated from nature in order to accord with the modern mechanical and industrial age. Xceron pointed out that Héliion's art expressed "pure form, like music and architecture,"⁶⁰ and utilized architectural and musical terms, like those with which he described Van Doesburg's Elementarist art style.

This preference for strict purity described by Xceron in the essay, and seen earlier in Van Doesburg, became a bone of contention between Héliion and Torres-Garcia. The latter insisted that art retain some kind of basis in nature, and Héliion maintained that art should be divorced from the 'objective' world. Héliion, who was introduced to

⁶⁰Jean Xceron, "Jean Héliion" Chicago Tribune, European Edition, 5 June 1929: 4

Van Doesburg by Torres-Garcia, would side with the Elementarist master, rather than with his Uruguayan friend. Whatever their art and ideological differences, Torres-Garcia and Hélión remained friends, and maintained an ongoing correspondence. Xceron also maintained his friendship with Hélión throughout the years in France, and later reunited with him in the United States.

The members of Abstraction-Création met at 44, Avenue Wagram in Paris, and planned to publish eight issues of a magazine and several books. Due to the impoverished state of the artists during this time of general economic crisis, this was not to be realized. According to Gladys Fabre, the crisis resulted in severe unemployment and the elimination of many vanguard galleries and patrons. She also noted the tendencies that became prevalent in the society whose membership was of an international character and numbered almost one hundred. In an effort to purify abstraction and arrive at a more austere aesthetic, she noted a tendency towards a more coherent composition with geometrical forms that presented sharp, precise contours.⁶¹

Whereas the strict use of the right plane was the favorite of Mondrian and the De Stijl, the curve would be seen more and more in the Abstraction-Création works of Hélión, Gorin, Kupka, Herbin, the Delaunays and Xceron. One

⁶¹Fabre, p. 385.

example of the style is Violin No. 7, 1931 (fig. 23), by Xceron, who showed with the Abstraction-Création in the 4th 6th and 7th exhibitions at the Salon des Surindépendants.

Xceron found it difficult to resolve the paradox of nature and art, and nowhere is this more evident than in his combined use of the rectilinear and the curved. He lingered in the Synthetic-Cubist state by alluding to rounded figurative elements, adding the grid as an over or underlay, which by 1929 was amalgamated, as seen in Violin No.7. This union of rectilinear and curvilinear forms is also to be found in the works of other members of this group: Albert Gleizes' Composition, 1932; Georges Valmier's La Mano, 1929; Jacques Villon's El Éspacio, 1932; Sonia Delaunay's Composition, 1938; and Franticek Kupka's Forma del Bermellon, 1931.⁶²

The members of this society espoused a synthesis of non-figurative art with an overriding ideologic concern for the creation of a better society. Though they published six of the eight editions they originally intended to produce, the group lasted until approximately 1937, when, due to the imminence of World War II and the rise of Fascism, the avant-garde took refuge in safer harbors, such as London and New York.

⁶²All of these works are reproduced in the Gladys Fabre Ed., Paris Arte Abstracto Arte Concreto Cercle et Carré 1930. Figures numbered in order of mention: 80, 82, 87, 78, 55.

Biomorphism

Xceron's formal development shows that in 1931, the year he met Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp, known for their Dada and biomorphic work, he was painting organic rounded forms with flexible signs, which could be read as the human figure or the musical instrument. This tendency persisted to an extent until 1934, and was most clear in his notebook series of drawings, gouaches and watercolors. Two works, both from 1933, Number 20 (fig. 29), a gouache and watercolor on cardboard, and Composition No. 97 (fig. 30), an ink wash on paper, are composed of biomorphic forms appearing freely superimposed upon a grid. The focal shapes are boomerang formations, a favorite of Jean Arp. Xceron was not only familiar with Arp, he also wrote about him, his wife Sophie-Taeuber, and their work.

In fact Xceron's biomorphic works have similarities with those of his friends, Sophie and Jean Arp. But, the latter two had begun their abstraction much earlier and belonged to the Zurich Dada group. Sophie-Taeuber collaborated with Theo Van Doesburg on the idea of a total work of art, the Café L'Aubette in Strasbourg, in which the rectilinear, right-angled direction of De Stijl had been reoriented by the use of diagonal lines. However, the primary colors used were in accord with earlier De Stijl tenets. The couple's works had become biomorphic and

abstract by the late teens or early twenties and incorporated the idea of chance which was also used by other Surrealists. Two Xceron works, are both from 1933, Number 73 (fig. 31), ink and crayon, and Number 62, (fig. 32) a pencil drawing which used line that travelled freely and culminated in loose figural doodling. In Xceron's work, the seemingly free-flowing forms that resulted suggest figures of couples, something like the 1925 dot and line drawings of Picasso, or the wire sculptures of Gargallo and the circus figures of Alexander Calder.

Xceron's Herald Tribune essay on Jean Arp reflected his respect for the artist: "Arp expresses his pictorial visions entirely in curves."⁶³ Xceron compared Arp's style to that of the Neo-Plasticists, whose work espoused the right angle and continued:

Forms in linear curves following the movement of the hand and objects in oblique shapes superimposed one upon the other and painted in a rather subconscious state of strong inner tension were the synthetic elements in creating the picture. The attainment of a higher stage in plastic form is marked in his latest period where only one object is used. To emphasize the essential is the object of this simple mode of expression in curved shapes of rhythmic lines.⁶⁴

Xceron's affinity to Arp is best exemplified by his works in the Galerie Pierre exhibition and in his use of the

⁶³Jean Xceron, "Hans Arp," Chicago Tribune, European Edition, 20 July 1929, 4.

⁶⁴Ibid.

amoeba shaped biomorphic designs throughout the late twenties and the early thirties. Arp was engaged by 1933 in the creation of his *concrétions humaines* (human concretions). Arp used the term concrete differently than Van Doesburg, for whom it meant an art having no reference to nature and totally of the mind. For Arp the term meant a style that was entrenched in natural processes, like coagulation, solidification, curdling and growth. Xceron's works and statements show a similar proclivity. "I begin a picture... with some kind of naturalistic form... And then I let it grow..."⁶⁵

Arp's concretions were sculptures in biomorphic forms and in varied materials, such as bronze or marble, made according to natural laws or processes. Rather than representing any particular natural form, Arp's biomorphs alluded to natural growth processes, such as would appear in natural rock formations or weathered tree stumps. Since his Dada period, Arp had been preoccupied with the ideas of metamorphosis and chance. In the thirties, according to Harriet Watts, he returned to this concern, which marked "a renewed preoccupation with organic growth and morphology."⁶⁶

⁶⁵Jean Xceron "Statement," aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

⁶⁶Harriet Watts, "Arp, Kandinsky, and the Legacy of Jakob Böhme," in The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985, Maurice Tuchman and Judi Freeman Eds. Los Angeles County Museum of Art catalogue, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986): 240.

Jean Xceron's drawings No. 20 and Composition No. 97, also have a lot in common with Max Ernst's line confluations, such as The Kiss⁶⁷ (fig. 33). When Xceron arrived, Paris was in the midst of a heated controversy among Ernst's closest supporters. This circle, composed of Xceron's supporters the critics Christian Zervos, Maurice Raynal and Jean Cassou, who were partial to Cubism, sought to either absorb or summarily dismiss the arising abstract and Surrealist developments. In fact, after an Ernst exhibition at the galerie Van Leer in 1927, Zervos published a short polemic note against Surrealism due to what he perceived as its inability to produce "true pictorial qualities."⁶⁸ Accompanying the 1927 Ernst exhibit at the galerie Van Leer was a catalogue entitled, Histoire Naturelle, published by Jeanne Bucher, with a preface by Jean Arp, who was close enough to Xceron to have familiarized him with Ernst's work and ideas. This inspiration is evident in Xceron's, Number 73, which contains several similarities to Ernst's The Kiss. The figures which suggest human forms, and the seemingly accidental quality of the overall design are just two. The frottage technique is also present, although Ernst's work is executed in oil on canvas, and Xceron's in ink and crayon.

⁶⁷Christopher Green, Cubism and its Enemies (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987): 107.

⁶⁸Christian Zervos, "Du Phénomène Surrealiste", Cahiers d'Art, 1928, pp. 113-114

In the outline areas, both look as if the support had been placed on a rough surface and rubbed with crayon to elicit a frottaged textural effect.

Xceron's affinity to Dada and Surrealism would result in his engagement with free-form drawing the rest of his life, particularly in his sketchbooks. In addition, he would develop other technical effects elicited by gouging, scraping, inscribing surfaces of wood, adding sand to his colors or making collages. This is a surprising discovery, made obvious only through research and study of the oeuvre.

Xceron's Portrait of Mademoiselle Mary Dorros, 1934 (fig. 34), a painting shown in the Galerie Pierre exhibition, was important to both Jean and his wife-to-be, who kept it in her personal collection almost until her death. It is a rectangular canvas which, except for part of a head and a hand, is largely abstract. The dark and drab colors of the left quadrant, or back part of the figure, can be related to his troubled past in the pursuit of his art. The bottom right portion, however, is in pink and cherry tones, and shows a lighter, more painterly approach. These happier coloristic choices could be seen as corollary to his imminent marriage in 1935. This canvas also exemplifies Xceron's relationship to Surrealism, filtered through Picasso and Arp.

Picasso, as the most admired painter of that period, was able to withstand outright categorization. Having

already established his position in the art world, he could indulge himself by working first in a Cubist, then in a Surrealist or in a Classical style. In 1925-26, while still developing aspects of his Cubism, Picasso adapted certain Surrealist qualities, such as the proclivity for subconscious discovery, and the automatist gesture. Just as Studio with Plaster Head, 1925, is most often used⁶⁹ to exemplify Picasso's familiarity with Surrealist tendencies, Portrait of Mlle Dorros can be used for Xceron.

Suggestion, which is also one of the characteristics of Surrealism, is present to a large extent in the works of the Violin series, in which forms can be read as heads or musical instruments, as well as the head of Mlle Dorros. Her figure evokes the dream environment in the soft conflated forms which overlap linear shapes. Allusion relayed through the use of sign was present in the Cubist works as well, but these lacked the feeling of the conflated images of dream.

Until the present time Xceron has been confined to a strictly geometric categorization, and seen in terms of his development in that style. Robbins noted the figurative allusion present in the works of the later years, but he saw this as a return to pre-abstract figuration. This soft figuration, more alluded to than anything substantially drawn, should be attributed to Xceron's proximity not only

⁶⁹Green, Cubism and Its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916-28, 107-108.

to Ernst, but also to Picasso and Arp, who were engaged in painting Surrealist works. Most important to Xceron were the Kandinsky biomorphic canvases, and those exhibited with the Abstraction-Création, containing abstract organic floating forms in playful lyrical configurations. Having been inspired by Kandinsky's style and writings since the 1913 New York Armory Exhibition, Xceron astutely followed the developments of this master.

The Zervos Collection Works

The Zervos collection Xcerons will be treated in this section because they, more than any other works, illustrate the stylistic tendencies discussed in the preceding section. These six works, dating from 1929 through 1934, are crucial to the artist's development, and are representative of Xceron's French period. They evince an important transition from linear Cubist to soft biomorphic vocabularies of the early thirties. The first three works are stylistically related, having a limited palette of grey/green and ochre tones, and at times combining analytic fragmentation with synthetic Cubist principles. Portrait No. 1, 1931 (fig. 35), presents a face depicted through a linear network of rectangular blocks of positive and negative space, which are suggested coloristically. The eyes are signified by black horizontal rectangular forms, and the mouth by an ochre red

one. Though displaced by the general topographic context, they are understood as mouth and eyes. The rectangular features are fragments which crisscross in horizontal and vertical formation, suggesting a Cubist grid. The throat and neck areas are passages, in which the brush stroke is evident. Though a solid configuration, this is meant to suggest a void, or floating space and light.

In the next work, Peinture No. 16, 1931 (fig. 36), Xceron depicted two figures, the left of which holds a musical instrument. The theme of figures and musical instruments is congruent with the late synthetic Cubist phase, in which the outline of the forms remain intact. Taking his cue from Picasso, the modern master closest to his heart, Xceron created his own amalgamation. Picasso continued to work in a Cubist style, albeit less committed, through 1929, but he increasingly experimented with Expressionist-Surrealist figurative modes. Xceron passed through a similar developmental cycle, which is evident in his Zervos works. The contextual junctions and influences which inspired this transition from hard-edged linearly-aligned Cubist approach to a biomorphic fluidity, much like Picasso's, are highlighted in Xceron's work.

Xceron could have met Picasso through one of several sources: Zervos, Tériade, Torres-Garcia or Julio Gonzalez. He was inspired by the Picasso drawings, especially of the late twenties period, which appeared in Zervos' Cahiers

d'Art. Picasso had been a central focus for Zervos ever since his inauguration of the publication in 1926. Picasso's work appeared regularly, including the 1928 issue which showed his first three dimensional sculptures since 1914, such as the biomorphic Bather (Metamorphosis I), which was based on the Cannes drawings of the previous summer.⁷⁰

According to the art historian William Rubin's chronology, at the beginning of 1928 Picasso completed The Studio, whose "linear scaffolding of simple geometric forms is echoed in drawings for wire sculpture he [made] later [that] year."⁷¹ This linear scaffolding is present in another of Xceron's Zervos Collection works, Trois Figures, 1932 (fig. 37). Trois Figures is a composition that, like Picasso's early analytic works, maintains a minimum coloristic variety of browns and grays. It has three forms overlaid upon a grid-like network which are suggestive, in pose and ambiance, of Picasso's Three Musicians, 1921.⁷² The head of the figure on the left in Trois Figures is a circular form with a wedge cutout in the top center, painted in strong black line.

This feature, related to Picasso's Study for Sculpture (fig. 38), The Studio and Painter and Model, (fig. 39)

⁷⁰William Rubin Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980): 253. Figure reproduced on p. 266.

⁷¹Ibid. Figure reproduced on p. 268.

⁷²Ibid. Figure reproduced on p. 230.

remains in Xceron's works throughout the thirties and forties. Xceron eventually created what I have entitled his "smiling face" out of this element, to be seen in many subsequent works, such as Composition No. 275, 1945 (fig. 40) and Composition No. 319, 1948 (fig. 41). These abstract works must be read contextually as circular signs connoting the artist's presence.

When compared to Picasso's ink drawing, Study for Sculpture, Xceron's Peinture No. 16, 1931, and Trois Figures, 1932 reveal a similar round head element. Picasso's sketch shows an abstracted figure with a circular form for a head, and three thin tubular extensions for body and arms upon a wedge-shaped base, which is shaded to appear as if receding into space. In the mid-top portion of the head form, an upward pointed arrow containing two eyes, one on top of the other appears, along with a mouth-like aperture on a vertical slant. The arrow is white, with the left wedge-like shape rendered in hatchwork to suggest shading, and the right in solid black.

The top of the head is not rounded, but rather has a chock missing, resulting in a V-shaped formation which is repeated in the adjoining sketch. This second figure is rendered totally through line, like Picasso's later wire sculptures, and is flat. The round configuration signifies a head, with eyes rendered conceptually, but correlative to the human physiognomy. Instead of the arrow feature in the

middle section, there is a negative rectangular space with a vertical slit for mouth and three tubes signifying body and legs, without a base. Uniting the entire top head portion and its features, three circles are drawn through the eyes and the absent chock-like character at the head's center. Picasso was once more essaying past lessons from the African masks and, having assimilated them, experimented with positive and negative spatial values for wire sculpture. He had already met Gonzalez in March, 1928, and was planning his Monument to Guillaume Apollinaire. Thus, next to the two larger figures of the artist allegory, and below the line drawing, appear two additional doodles, one lying on its side for the purpose of showing a wire figure in recession, and one upright, without legs or torso.

Xceron was familiar with Picasso's Painter and Model, but he had also seen the wire sculpture, Head, (fig. 42) and Wire Construction (fig. 43) reproduced in a 1929 Cahiers d'Art issue.⁷³ Throughout his life, Xceron's works held some affinity to Picasso's style, but his Peinture No. 16 and the Trois Figures betray his admiration for Picasso's stylistic genius. Not only does Xceron use a similar wedge shaped configuration in the area of his heads, but also an arachnid type linear pattern, out of which the forms are drawn.

The differences between Picasso and Xceron's works

⁷³Cahiers d'Art, Volume 4, No. 2-3, 1929.

include color use, which, in Picasso's Painter and Model, is strong, including the greens, lilac, red, yellow, white, black, and brown. Xceron used a limited, drab palette because he was more interested in exploiting spatial and light effects. However, both artists created spatial ambiguity. Xceron accomplished this through soft passages of color, present in the right figure of Peinture No. 16, which, as a result, appears to continue into the space of the left figure. In Painter and Model, Picasso created ambiguity through line in the area read as the painter's canvas, which recedes into space, only to revert back towards the viewer.

A meandering linear thread is seen in Xceron's Composition No. 36, 1932, and Peinture No. 35, 1932 (fig. 44), both included in the Zervos Collection, to produce combinations of still life and semi-figural scenes, in a vein similar to Picasso's The Milliner's Workshop or Painter and Model, 1926.

Peinture No. 35 found Xceron returning to some color and a bit of depth beyond the stage-like organization of the late twenties and early thirties works, such as the Violin series. The palette lightened considerably, including some greens and ochres, as well as a white ground and black lines. It is also one of the freest, loosest compositions, with references not only to Cubist structural elements, such as the grid on the section to the right, and violin form to

the center left, but also to figural associations, seen in the conflated nude on the right, and leaf forms on the top left quadrant of the canvas.

From the traditional thematic *accoutrements* of the still life idiom--such as fruitbowls, fruit, musical instruments, or score sheets, tables, chairs--Xceron borrowed a circular element and conflated it with the sign for a melon-like fruit and human head simultaneously. By placing this element upon a table, the viewer reads it as a fruit, due to its contextual organization, whereas, if examined closely, it becomes apparent that it is a head with features similar to the artist's Head in Picasso's aforementioned works.

Just as Xceron conflated people with musical instruments in his Violin series, creating a figure-ground ambiguity, he also painted composite figures, such as a fruit or human head. Although depicted in a different manner, the element of conflation in Picasso's work is evident in his Bather (Metamorphosis I) and Bather (Metamorphosis II), in which displacement of human parts occurs to a great extent.

Xceron's late 1920s and early 1930s drawings were also related to Picasso's wire sculptures. Such an example is Drawing, 1933 (fig. 45), an ink and crayon on paper which thematically relates to Picasso's 1926 Painter and Model in its loose flowing line and displacement of body

parts, an idea significant to the Surrealists and Freudian theory.

**Reappearance of the Right Angle On the Eve
of Xceron's Return to America**

By 1933, the economic, creative and political climate of Paris had deteriorated. Hans Heilmaier, in an article entitled "Art Which Does Not Follow Bread," voiced the concerns of many artists of that period. His essay was concerned with the alienation of the artist from his era and society, the indifference of the public to artistic production, and the loss of art patronage. He compared the thirties' climate to that of the past. "In Manet's time art collectors were as rare as they are now, in the days of sinking dollars and disappearing galleries. Painters and sculptors find themselves having to deal with these bitter facts. How are they supposed to exist? This is the perpetual question."⁷⁴ In addition to these problems, he referred to the artistic strictures experienced by the abstractionists as a result of the rise of Classical and Surrealist figurative tendencies.

The bravery of the young vanguard abstractionists, in

⁷⁴Hans Heilmaier, "Art Which Does Not Follow Bread", Neue Pariser Zeitung (Neuilly, France: November 4, 1933). aaa Files, Jean Xceron Files, Reel #D294.

the face of opposition, was noted by many critics, including Paul Fierrens. On October 29, 1933 he wrote an exhibition review of the Two Salons of the Porte de Versailles, entitled, "Les Surindependents" for Le Journal des Débats, in which he remarked: "The Surindependents continue to have courage. And talent much of it."⁷⁵ He continued to write about the work of several artists, including Xceron, whom he considered part of the abstract vanguard, along with S.W. Hayter, Manie Jelett and others. In comparison to these he wrote, "In certain aspects of his art, Xceron may still be attached to past precedent, however he is, less cold and less theoretical."⁷⁶ He referred here to Xceron's allusion to natural biomorphic forms, which can be read as organic.

By 1934 Xceron's work was purely abstract, but organic and biomorphic, like that of Arp, Kandinsky and Miró. Two works exhibited at the Galerie Pierre and published in Zervos' Cahiers d'Art are entitled, Peinture, 1932 (figs. 46A & B). Although these works are composed of rounded, oval free-forms, they do not evince any recognizable subject matter. Their background is softly attained through a series of overlays to produce a floating inner-lit space with curvilinear shapes upon it. Xceron's art ideology found resonance in that of Arp's, whose working process, although

⁷⁵Paul Fierrens, "Les Surindependents", Le Journal des Débats. October 29, 1933. aaa, Xceron Files, Reel #D 294.

⁷⁶Ibid.

seemingly accidental, was executed according to plan. Xceron's intuitive tendency is observed in his writings which make use of words such as 'instinctive,' 'natural,' 'intuitive':

In the making of a painting, I am not directed by any rule or theory how to paint or what to paint but rather by an instinctive desire for the understanding of form that makes art. I begin a picture, (for example Painting No. 388) with some kind of naturalistic form or perhaps a simple square and proceed until an orderly design in terms of color planes and masses is established. And then I let it grow, building it up chromatically by a continuous process of uninterrupted work, correction of mistakes and adjustments.⁷⁷

At the end of 1934 a small ink study (fig. 47A) prophetically evinces the turn Xceron's work would take. Within a vertical format Xceron drew an arachnid-like netting system on the upper half of the paper. On the bottom half are three configurations which can be read as tombstones, or figures, within a negative space surrounded by shaded areas. This seems to be a study in positive and negative spatial depiction. On the same page is another study (fig.47B) which seems to have been done in preparation of the larger piece, Peinture No.35, 1932, discussed above. This smaller study, also in ink, depicts several crosses in the top portion, separating the bottom portion by a comb-like piece in the middle right corner. This portion has four

⁷⁷Jean Xceron, "Statement," aaa, Xceron Files, Reel #D294.

vertical elements emerging from the ground, which can be read as Egyptian imperial standards.

Xceron's sketchbooks of 1934-35 foretold his evolution into rectilinear abstraction that can be seen in a Paris watercolor from 1935, Untitled (fig. 48). The complete synthesis and absorption of the organic by the geometric is seen in this horizontal format. It appears as if an open book. On the left page appear the positive forms; on the right, the negative designs, which have been partly rubbed off. But facile expectations are confounded. Instead of the expected rub-off designs, Xceron carefully used hatching strokes to fill in the imprinted images.

A slightly later gouache at the National Gallery of Athens, entitled Composition 220A, 1936 (fig. 49), contained the same type of forms. In this vertically oriented composition, several geometric forms are present, which, because of their contextual placement, can be read as figures. Another element which aligns them to the human figure is the eye motif, which is evident in the portion to the right of the center, as do the posterior and head cutout forms in the left.

Some watercolors which more clearly show the development of the figure into geometric signs appear in Xceron's 1934-35 sketchbooks. The 1934 Composition (fig. 50) shows a red circle, with four crisscrossed lines abutting it horizontally. Were it to be read vertically, it would appear

as a figure, because it also contains three small squares in the vicinity of the human mouth and eyes. However, Xceron did not mean for the viewer to read it as a figure because he signed it horizontally. This study also contains a series of geometric forms, some in green at the bottom right, a purple rectangle at center left, and others in black in the left corner.

The next watercolor of this series in the same sketchbook contains the circle previously seen as a human head, partially appearing on the right side, at the bottom of which are a series of multicolored squares. In front of this configuration is a grid created through ink and wash, overlaid with a yellow horizontal and blue vertical strip. At the very bottom appear two shapes reminiscent of boots or shoes which, together with the partial circle above them, and due to their vertical placement, can be interpreted as a walking figure.

There is a quality of playfulness and a lyricism present in the soft pinks, greens, greys and yellows of these works. The watercolor medium, an all-time favorite of Xceron's, is expertly applied to formulate a series of veils more conducive to his personality than the solidity attained in his oils, such as Composition 202, 1935 (fig. 51).

With the exception of a short visit home in 1935, Xceron remained in Paris until 1937. In addition to the financial problems that artists in Europe faced, they became

increasingly aware of the Fascist presence. With the closing down of the Bauhaus by Hitler in 1933, many avant-gardists began immigrating to France. By 1937 however, the Fascist menace increased and spread to France so that countless artists including Xceron, relocated to New York.

The Late New York Years: 1935-1945

Xceron made a temporary trip back to the United States in 1935; then, he returned home permanently in 1937. His initial visit was to prepare for the impending solo Garland Gallery exhibition. What he found was a country wrought with problems as the Depression took its toll. Due to the rise of Fascism, however, the European atmosphere was worse.

The Work Progress Administration Federal Art Project sought to alleviate the abominable conditions under which American artists worked by providing them with a stipend for government work. This body was partial to traditional and figurative modes of art. Consequently, abstractionists such as Xceron had few places to which they could turn for help.¹

Abstraction was seen as a decorative style which could not and did not express the sentiments of that tumultuous period. This attitude towards abstraction is clearly evident in the reviews of the 1936, Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Alfred Barr, Jr., the curator of painting, chose the works for this exhibit from European examples he saw on his trip there in 1927-28. Although viewed today as a ground breaking exhibition, the

¹Haskell, Burgoyne Diller, 39

critical response for the most part lacked enthusiasm and reveals the spirit of that time.²

The figurative style, with its descriptive and clearer method of reaching the public, was thought to be more appropriate. The popular styles of the thirties were Regionalism, American Scene painting, and the figurative mode of the American leftist artists, Ben Shahn or William Gropper. Through the efforts of Burgoyne Diller and other champions of the abstract--James Johnson Sweeney and Russel Parr, for example--the idiom later became more accepted, but not without initial difficulty.³

In his introductory essay for a 1930 exhibition catalogue, Alfred Barr Jr. discussed the variety of the Parisian avant-garde prior to Xceron's departure from Paris.

Among the artists working in Paris almost every nation is represented. There is no monolithic modernism but many different movements and tendencies. This does not imply a lack of order....contemporary art in Paris (or Berlin or New York) is merely so extraordinarily complex that it defies generalization.⁴

Barr listed the various styles seen in Paris: Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Surrealism. American artists were equally diverse. When Xceron returned to the United States

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Alfred Barr, Jr., Painting in Paris from American Collections (Museum of Modern Art, 1930) : 6.

in 1935, he brought with him recently painted canvases done in post-Cubist, as well as rectilinear and biomorphic abstract idioms.

The one important essay on Xceron, written by Daniel Robbins for his Guggenheim Retrospective, did not illustrate any works in this biomorphic vein.⁵ As a result recent scholars have not been familiarized with the biomorphic Xcerons.

During this period, he was employed by Hilla von Rebay at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, and produced an abstract mural for the WPA/FAP. His work was acquired by several major collections, and included in the 1939 World's Fair, as well as exhibitions abroad.

This period also witnessed Xceron's involvement in the American Abstract Artists group. A variety of artistic vocabularies and aesthetics resulted in many individual styles in the artists of this group. Because of Xceron's synthesized multiple references, his work defies categorization or confinement into a particular style. The term that would most accurately describe Xceron's art is "abstract," with further qualitative clarifications. His work can at times be discussed as abstract with a constructive tendency, as seen in the meeting of vertical and horizontal line in Peinture No. 239A, 1937 (fig. 52).

⁵Robbins, Jean Xceron.

The term must be carefully applied to Xceron's work, unique in its contribution to light effects created by softly nuanced luminous zones. The subtle interplay between softly hued and deeply colored rectangles in glowing space is reminiscent of Byzantine mosaics, Xceron's abiding interest.

The following detailed discussion of Xceron's 1935 Garland Gallery Exhibition is crucial to accurately placing this artist within his art context, as well as to highlighting his individual contribution to American abstraction. Because this show was well attended and influenced many American abstractionists, his work will be compared to some of their contemporary examples. One of the artists at this exhibition was Will Barnet whose warm and humble comments about Xceron have been preserved in an interview.⁶ When asked how Xceron should be viewed from the present art historical perspective, he answered: "Xceron should be venerated for the great figure he was, as an early pioneer of American abstraction and a great modernist."⁷

The Garland Exhibition and its Critical Reception

Records on the Garland Gallery are so incomplete that the names of the owners are unknown. The discovery of Max

⁶Will Barnet Interview with the author of May, 1997, New York.

⁷Ibid.

and Joseph Felshin, the proprietors of this gallery, was quite accidental.⁸ The paintings in the Felshin family collections have been invaluable in assessing the nature of Xceron's style exhibited at the Garland Gallery in 1935. Great admirers of Xceron's work, the Felshins were instrumental in promoting it in the mid-thirties. Max Felshin went so far as to write a poem about Xceron, which was included in his book of poetry, entitled Leaves of Life, an obvious reference to Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Felshin wrote:

Because of your brushes rhythmic moving over the canvass,/ I came to comprehend the meaning of that verse in Genesis/ "And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep"./ A single glance at your symphony in paint reveals to me all the abstract processes of creation;/ and impresses upon my mind/ the Heavenly harmony of the Universal spheres/ and their earthly counterpart in our modern mechanical age./ Prolonged contemplation of your art works, Xceron,/ brings a complete awareness of the hidden fullness of life's beautiful possibilities./ I am utterly glad, Jean,/ that I beheld and lived with your paintings.⁹

Information on the Garland Gallery is limited to several announcements of its opening. One such announcement

⁸After a wide search of the Felshins in the New York telephone directory, Hannah and Max's daughter, Elaine, who owns a Xceron painting, was located. Through Elaine, Joseph's son Roy, and other cousins were found. I am greatly indebted to this family who has been very cooperative in helping me reconstruct the important relationship between Xceron and the brothers Felshin.

⁹Max Felshin, "Xceron," Leaves of Life (New York: The Book Guild, 1936). Unp. Archive of Dr. Elaine Felshin, New York.

in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle informed the reader that it was inaugurated with the Xceron Exhibition:

This season has seen the birth of several new galleries, and we welcome into the fold this week the Garland Gallery located at 29 West 57th street, under the direction of Joseph S. Felshin. This is a gallery that holds forth promise of stimulating exhibitions, for Mr. Felshin is a keen enthusiast of the questing and experimenting type of art, with a sufficiently long and intimate connection with it to know the really vital from the imitative and routine productions. For the initial exhibition the gallery is given over to the paintings of a French abstractionist with the picturesque name of Xceron, who seems to have clicked with the illustrious Andre Salmon, Maurice Raynal and other Parisian critics.¹⁰

The writer expressed his reservations and advanced his own opinion on abstraction, which was not his favorite art style, nor was it the public's, he implied in an apologetic tone. "Yet," he continued, "I will say this: that there has been very little in abstract art, from Picasso down, that I have liked and this because of the brashness and severity of the color that has been generally employed: but Xceron's work is full of delicate pianissimos of color harmonies that are a delight to the eye."¹¹

The problems are multiple and revealing of the cultural biases of the writer and publisher. Xceron, whom he erroneously classified as a French abstractionist, also had a "picturesque" name because it did not announce its origin,

¹⁰Anon, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 31 March 1935. aaa, Xceron Files, Reel #D294.

¹¹Ibid.

as would Xirocostas. In focusing on the formal, coloristic aspects of Xceron's art, the reviewer betrayed the contemporary bias about abstraction as a decorative idiom. Its charm was seen in Xceron's 'delicate pianissimos'.¹²

Another column, written by Carlyle Burrows, betrayed prejudices through omission, inclusion and misconception.¹³ Clearly oblivious to the facts, and prejudicial in his assessment of Xceron, he wrote about the artist under the title "A Modern Frenchman."

The Garland Gallery opened last week at 29 West 57th Street, is holding a show of abstract paintings by Jean Xceron, a modern French painter, not previously known in this country. There are about thirty paintings and gouaches on display. In all of his paintings M. Xceron employs a liberal amount of fancy, weaving, varied and intricate patterns in vivid colors. The effect thus created, despite occasionally striking color juxtapositions, is slightly bewildering, and there is not sufficient originality about his work to attract a great deal of attention.¹⁴

Whereas the Brooklyn Daily Eagle reviewer found

¹²This was a time when even a large city such as New York could only boast of a small number of galleries. The New York page of the Sunday April 6, 1936 Art News Calendar of Exhibitions illustrates this point. Included in the one page of gallery openings were metropolitan and suburban museums. The Garland Xceron exhibit was among the few abstract shows announced.

¹³Carlyle Burrows "A Modern Frenchman," New York Herald Tribune, March 31, 1935. Unp.. aaa Files, Reel # D 294. Burrows, who favored traditional and Impressionist art, began his essay with the landscapist John Whorf, a Boston watercolorist, and Arthur Frank, a Philadelphian he called a figure Painter.

¹⁴Ibid.

Xceron's coloristic 'pianissimos' an original and refreshing change from the harshness of the colors in most recent modern canvases, Burrows arrived at the opposite conclusion. He did not even bother to learn the biographical facts about the artist. Not only did he mistakenly categorize him as a French artist, but he also stated that Xceron had never shown before in the United States.¹⁵

This statement implies that America did not know Xceron because he was French, and that he was not sufficiently known even in France for Americans to have heard of him. Of these outlined errors about the personal data of the artist on the part of the critics, some can be attributed to the climate of the art world, particularly as reported by the press. A quick survey of the art review pages from several contemporaneous publications indicate the mood of that time.

The art historian Milton Brown in writing about the period between the wars noted that although painting in America was not exclusively Regionalist or American Scene, that modern styles were at least temporarily obscured.¹⁶ The preferences of the contemporary public press also reflect this orientation when one examines the publications in which the Garland gallery reviews appeared. It has already been demonstrated by the Herald Tribune commentary that Burrows

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Brown, Hunter, Jacobus, American Art, 444.

preferred traditional art. Since the popular press generally caters to public opinion, he was, by extension, expressing the public's preference as well. A New York Post review was more informative, acknowledging that Xceron had shown previously in America.¹⁷

It is not an easy task to reconstruct the Garland Gallery Exhibition since all that is extant is a list of works by general titles.¹⁸ Some of these have been located and can be reproduced here; the others have been extrapolated from typical works of the period preceding the show. This assemblage is based largely upon the works in the Roy Felshin collection, which are the best documentation of this exhibition.

The first work noted was a biomorphic still life entitled, Peinture No. 30, 1932 (fig. 53), a tempera on canvas with added sand. This painting corresponds to work number 13 on the Garland list, which certainly combined the geometric and the biomorphic languages. The first can be seen in the rectilinear elements of the table edges. The latter in the organicity of the head positioned on its side upon the table surface. In Peinture No. 30, a horizontal decapitated head next to a martini glass appears to have

¹⁷Anon., New York Post, 6 April 1935. aaa, Xceron Files, Reel #D294

¹⁸Garland Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, Jean Xceron, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294.

fallen on the tabletop. It has bloodshot eyes and a full mouth of exposed dangerous teeth. This threatening aspect in Peinture No. 30 was shared by other early Surrealist works, such as Picasso's Woman Bather Seated, as well as Giacometti's Woman with Her Throat Cut, and Man Ray's Cadeaux sculptures. The technique used by Xceron, that of adding sand to the paint was not new, it had been employed by many other artists, most prominently by Picasso since the teens. Picasso's stylistic redirection from a late synthetic cubist to a Surrealist style was evident in such works as Artist and Model, 1928, and Studio with Plaster Head, 1925, which stood as examples for many artists in Europe and the United States. These compositions were typical of Picasso's late twenties and early thirties stylistic developments--the amalgamation of cubist and biomorphic elements. These elements: the addition of foreign materials, menace and chance, and the combined Cubist-biomorphic vocabulary, are also present in Xceron's work of this period.

Within the context of recreating the Garland Exhibition's images, what will become clear are Xceron's influences from Picasso's Surrealist style, and subsequently his own on the American avant garde. Xceron's role as disseminator of Picasso's, Kandinsky's or any number of avant garde European styles, will also be highlighted. To begin with, Picasso's imagery was widely reproduced in publications available to American artists including Cahiers

d'Art in which Xceron's also appeared. In order to show Picasso's pervasive direct and indirect impact (through other artists, Xceron in this case,) upon the American avant-garde, Xceron's contemporaneous works will be compared to those of Burgoyne Diller, and Arshile Gorky.

Xceron's canvases of that period, included late Synthetic-Cubist and biomorphic canvases, such as Peinture 1, and 2, 1932-34, (figs. 46 A & B) and La Musique, 1933 (fig. 54) shown in the Garland exhibition. Diller's Untitled, 1933 (fig. 55) can be compared to these Xceron paintings. Their similarities are discernible in both artist's use of free-form designs, combined with gridlike vertical and horizontal lines. Picasso's influence is most obviously present when comparing Diller's Untitled and Xceron's Peinture 1 and 2, to Picasso's Compotier de Pommes, 1924 (fig. 56). These compositions all contain biomorphic shapes, as well as the freely interacting forms, which are combined with a few linear elements. Diller had studied at the Art Students League with Jan Matulka who favored Picasso's work, and knew Xceron's Corcoran colleague Kimon Nikolaidis another influential teacher at that school. In the late thirties, Diller in his capacity as director at the WPA became better acquainted with Xceron when the latter painted the Riker's Island Chapel murals.

Arshile Gorky, also familiar with Xceron, was another artist who admired Picasso and utilized these elements in

his painting, as can be seen in his Image in Xhorkom, 1936 (fig. 57). As early as 1931, Xceron's paintings regularly appeared in Zervos' Cahiers d'Art, so it is possible that Gorky was also inspired by this artist. Gorky was admittedly taking inspiration from the reproductions in this publication. Two biomorphic Xcerons Peinture 1 and 2 (figs. 46 A & B) reproduced in Cahiers d'Art, were typical works Gorky would have seen in America. Gorky's works of this period have similarities to Xceron's in his combinations of biomorphic and rectilinear forms, as well as the use of the freely drawn boomerang element. But, whereas Gorky has been recognized for his early role in influencing the Abstract Expressionists, Xceron has been omitted from the group's histories.

Strategic Associations

When Xceron returned from Paris in 1935 he renewed old acquaintances in Washington, D.C. In March of 1936, Personages, 1933 (fig. 58), was given to the Museum of Modern Art by counselor Nicolas G. Lely of the Greek Legation in Washington, D.C. The correspondence between Alfred Barr, Jr., and Lely attests to the negotiation process. Barr responded to Lely that upon his suggestion, the committee had accepted the work for the museum's

collection.¹⁹ This gesture marked a watershed event for the artist, who had struggled to make his abstract works accepted in the United States where, with few exceptions, abstraction was disdained.

A revealing newspaper announcement of that period attests to Xceron's importance to the Washington, D.C. community, and highlights his accomplishments as an artist. The Washington Post essay notes Xceron's contributions both here and in Paris. After stating that he studied at the Corcoran in the teens, it posited that Xceron went to Paris, where he "rose to be recognized as leader in the new school of modern art."²⁰

The author continues: "An early work by Xceron is in the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington."²¹ The article describes Xceron's painting using musical analogies. "[H]e uses color as a composer uses sound."²² A reproduction of Xceron's painting of Councilor Lely appears next to the text, which reads:

¹⁹Barr to Xceron, March 1936 letter, aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

²⁰Anon. "Master of Color Welcomed Here by Art Colony," Washington Post, December 1, 1935, Unpaginated Essay in Corcoran School of Art Archives, Xceron Files and Records.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

In both the portrait of Mr. Lely, says Xceron, and the background the plastic elements are varied in manner. The picture is not in the least realistic. It is very rough in surface, this treatment giving character and likeness to the face. According to Xceron, in a portrait painting it is the fusion of subject matter with the plastic means that brings about the most perfect result.²³

Although Xceron did not choose Washington, D.C. as his new base, his relationship with Lely proved beneficial on many levels. The politician showed three Xceron paintings to Russel C. Parr, who offered him a job with the WPA/FAP in Washington, D.C. This body inaugurated in 1935, had been organized for the purposes of relieving the unemployment and poverty of the artists during the Depression.

In 1935 Parr wrote to Xceron offering him six months work on the WPA/FAP. He noted: "your paintings, (including Mr. Lely's portrait), have greatly aroused my admiration for your fresh, individual color and manner of expression."²⁴ In apprising Xceron of the advantages available to artists who undertook such employment with the WPA/FAP, he offered him \$79 monthly for 24 hours of work weekly in Washington, D.C.

This offer was rejected by Xceron who opted to return to Paris in 1936. Had Xceron accepted Parr's 1935 offer, he would have been one of the first artists to produce abstractions for the WPA/FAP. One of the reasons for

²³Ibid.

²⁴Parr to Xceron, 17 December 1935, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294.

Xceron's rejection may have been the constraint limiting him to working in the Washington, D.C. area. This was not a city well-disposed to abstraction. If New York, whose art center was wider and closer to European models, was still groping to understand it, then Washington must have been even less sympathetic.

The contemporary preference for figurative art capable of conveying a political agenda, was not an area of interest to Xceron thematically. Realist art of the thirties is exemplified by William Gropper's The Senate, 1935, Ben Shan's Dust Bowl Blues, 1936, and Dorothea Lange's A Family of Oakies, 1936. In these and other realist works of that period, social realism and regional styles expound on the agonies of the depression and expose the ills of capitalism. Xceron returned to Paris in 1936, but came back to America in 1937 with his wife, Mary Dorros. The reasons for their final return are not explicit. However, the rise of Fascism and the advent of war in Europe must have been primary concerns in the couple's decision. They had put down roots in France: Dorros owned a successful bridal veil firm and a vacation home in southern France. Xceron had started an art course taught from his studio.²⁵

²⁵aaa Xceron Files, Reel # D294. Documents show that the house was destroyed during a bombing raid. The Xcerons sought restitution after the second World War from the French government. Sources are unclear as to whether the Xcerons were successful in this pursuit.

When Xceron returned, his work was purchased by Albert Eugene Gallatin. One of the earliest collectors of abstract works, along with Katherine Dreier, the Arensbergs, and Stieglitz, Gallatin contributed a great deal to American art, and played a crucial role as a promoter of abstraction. It is likely that Gallatin met Xceron through his friend Héliion in Paris while he was there on one of his annual sojourns, but he did not purchase Xceron's work until 1937. Arnauld Pierre documented Héliion's advisory role to Gallatin, whose collection of abstract art was housed at the New York University Gallery Museum of Living Art.²⁶

Having started this collection in 1922 with one watercolor each by Cézanne and Picasso, by 1928 Gallatin had augmented the collection with works of the Ecole de Paris-Modigliani, Utrillo, Soutine and Rouault. During 1936-37, the years when the AAA was in the process of being founded, Gallatin added the work of several American artists, including Biederman, Shaw, Ferren, Morris, Turnbull, Greene and Xceron. Héliion was in New York around this time, and was probably the one who renewed Xceron's association with Gallatin, who purchased his painting.

Another powerful force who championed Xceron was James

²⁶Arnauld Pierre, "Les échanges entre l'Europe et les Etats-Unis dans les années trente: Héliion et Gallatin," in Sonderdruck aus: Künstlerischer Austausch, Akten des XXVIII, Thomas W. Gaehtgens, ed., Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte, Berlin: 15-20 Juli 1992: (Akademie Verlag: 1992): 341.

Johnson Sweeney with whom Xceron corresponded for many years. The tenor and content of their exchange reveals a warm friendship and many appointed meetings. Sweeney, who as a member of the Junior advisory committee of the Museum of Modern Art in 1936 made possible the acceptance of Xceron's Personages, in one letter asked Xceron for photographs requested by both Hans Arp and Zervos for their publications.²⁷

Sweeney, besides providing the artist with many valuable contacts, wrote an article for the Cahiers d'Art, concerning contemporary art in the United States, in which he included Xceron. He wrote: "A third young living American to immigrate in whose recent work is seen a personal adaptation of current European tendencies which have begun to assert themselves is *Jean Xceron*."²⁸

Already in the mid-thirties, as a result of these contacts, Xceron's works had entered such important collections as the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, D.C., Gallatin's New York University Museum of Living Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He had finally

²⁷Sweeney to Xceron, 4 February 1938, Xceron Files, aaa Reel # D294. "Thank you for your photographs which arrived this morning. I am sending two off at once to Hans Arp, as he requested, for possible reproduction in Plastique, the magazine edited by Taeuber-Arp and Domela. I am also sending two others to Zervos for the Cahiers d'Art. Looking forward to seeing you on Wednesday at 11:30, Yours very truly, J.J.S.."

²⁸James Johnson Sweeney, "L'art contemporain aux Etats Unis," Cahiers d'Art, vol. 13, nos. 1-2 (Paris 1938): 52.

attained a certain amount of prestige among his peers, and connoisseurs of art. As the next, Nierendorf exhibition will show, his success continued unimpeded to a greater or lesser extent until his death, but it never reached the level his talents and influence deserved. Some reasons for this have already been examined, others will become evident as his politics, and professional affiliations are scrutinized.

Rebay-Xceron-Nierendorf Exhibition-Guggenheim

The year 1938 proved crucial to the future of the artist. At the instigation of his supporter James Johnson Sweeney, Xceron was given a solo exhibition, which opened on April 13 at the Nierendorf Gallery in New York. Success was marked by multiple reviews in the New York Post, Herald Tribune, the New York Times, Art News and Art Digest.

This year was even more providential for his meeting with Hilla von Rebay, who saw his work at the Nierendorf and acquired examples for the Guggenheim Foundation. Xceron wrote to Rebay on Nierendorf stationary to invite her to see the show.²⁹ She responded through her secretary that she would try to make it if, he called to apprise her of his

²⁹Xceron to Rebay, 19 April 1938, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives, Hilla von Rebay Foundation Correspondence.

presence at the gallery.³⁰

After the show closed, the Nierendorf Gallery sent Rebay five Xcerons for approval. They were entitled Peinture Nos. 242, 214, 226, 217, and 230,³¹ oil on canvas paintings executed in a hard edge geometric style. As described by Robbins, Composition No. 242 (fig. 59) evinces a return by Xceron to the oil medium from an intense period of using gouaches. He noted the increasing use of watercolor and gouache by Xceron in 1935-36, which he attributed to the artist's growing interest in light which seemingly radiated from within the canvas.³²

The relationship between Xceron and Rebay was one of artist to patron, employee to employer, and friend to friend. Not only did Rebay purchase Xceron paintings for the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (later to be known as the Guggenheim Museum of Art), she also employed Xceron as its custodian of paintings. Rebay gave stipend fellowships to many abstract, or what she classified as 'non-objective,' artists of the modernist era, including Ibram Lassaw and Xceron.

Xceron's association with Rebay dates back to 1930, as

³⁰Rebay's assistant to Xceron, 12 January 1938. SRGM Archives, Hilla von Rebay Foundation Correspondence.

³¹Approval invoice, Nierendorf Galleries to Rebay, 2 May 1938, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294.

³²Robbins, Jean Xceron, 14-15

the extant correspondence reveals.³³ That year, Rebay was acting as Solomon R. Guggenheim's art adviser, and travelled to Paris in May to show her own work with the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery, prepare for Guggenheim's studio visits, and consult with artists about the collection.³⁴

It is quite possible that Moholy-Nagy, who helped Rebay with the hanging of her exhibition, or Mondrian, or even Léger, who were Xceron's close associates, introduced him to Rebay in 1930. By 1937 Rebay had been appointed curator of the new Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, and in 1939, when the the Museum of Non-objective Painting opened its doors, Rebay became its director.³⁵ The collection of this museum contained what Rebay termed 'non-objective painting,' which according to her, would lead away from the materialistic to the spiritual. From the start the collection included European abstract art but later, in the thirties, American abstraction as well.

Describing the window decoration of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting on its opening night, Lukach wrote: "After the museum opened, handsome rectilinear steel constructions by Ibram Lassaw were exhibited and later

³³The earliest extant correspondence between Rebay and Xceron is a \$100 receipt contained in the SRGM Archives, dated 27 April 1930.

³⁴Joan M. Lukach, Hilla Rebay: In Search of the Spirit in Art (New York: Geo Braziller, Inc., 1983): 64.

³⁵Ibid, xiii.

constructions by Winslow Anderson, Leo Russell and Jean Xceron were shown."³⁶ She explained further: "photos of the museum on fifty-fourth street show wooden geometric constructions in the window. Elsa N. Beckmann, whose husband, Hannes Beckmann, took the photos, said that these constructions were by Xceron."³⁷ Having established the existence of Xceron sculptures, it is puzzling to note their complete disappearance. Consequently, the author is obliged to hypothesize about their extinction.

One possible clue was offered by another American artist involved with the Guggenheim Museum and Rebay. Ibram Lassaw³⁸ pointed out that Rebay was opposed to the sculptural mode, with the exception of works by Moholy Nagy and Alexander Calder.³⁹ Lassaw in the thirties had been the recipient of a fellowship from Rebay, but when he approached her again for support to do constructions, he was refused due to, he thought, Rebay's dislike of sculpture. It is not unlikely that Xceron, knowing Rebay's preferences, chose not to antagonize her by specializing in sculpture. Moreover, he

³⁶Ibid., 157, ft. 38 p. 332.

³⁷Confirmed in a telephone interview between author and Lukach, in May 1997.

³⁸In an effort to resolve the present mysterious lack of Xceron constructions, the author had several conversations with the American artist Ibram Lassaw in Spring and Fall of 1996.

³⁹This preference of Rebay's was common knowledge and was confirmed by the Rebay correspondence in the SRGM Archives.

had already found his strongest means of expression in painting, while in 1935 he encouraged David Smith to concentrate on the sculptural mode. This event of major magnitude to Smith, shows that Xceron was aware that a choice was necessary in an artist's life.

Xceron's terrible economic state most likely weighed heavily in his decision. As Rebay's employee at the Guggenheim, Xceron, for the pre- and post-War years anyway, felt pressured to please his employers. Thus, he probably ceased making constructions, and may have destroyed the ones that already existed. As revealed in Rebay's attitude towards Lassaw's and Xceron's constructions in the early or late thirties, she did make exceptions, albeit arbitrary. Family members and friends have acknowledged the existence of Xceron sculptures, but none have been found to date.

Besides hypothesizing we are left with a couple of old photographic reproductions of Xceron sculpture. One of them is of the opening night museum window display, which when analyzed, shows a rectilinear method of construction and synthesized character, a sort of combination of parts that formulate a whole. Whether metal or wood, these works utilize 'constructive principles' evident in Tatlin's reliefs, Lissitzky's axonometric works, Gonzalez's sculptures, and the constructed reliefs of Picasso from as far back as the 1914 work, Guitar. The only other evidence of a Xceron sculpture is an installation photograph from

Xceron's Rose Fried solo exhibition which included at least one sculpture⁴⁰ (fig. 60).

The other picture depicts a bronze sculpture of freely curving humanoid forms in space supported by a spin-top element suggestive of the movement of a ballet dancer in space. Since no other data exists on this sculpture, a date would need to be assigned by estimate. Because the piece stood on a rectangular column situated between Multiform #303, 1947 and Form, 1960, it might represent the 50s period, if the show was hung chronologically. The works are catalogued chronologically, but the sculpture is not listed. Therefore, either this work had nothing to do with Xceron (which would be odd since this was his one-man exhibition) or, his sculpture did not represent a significant contribution and was excluded from the index. The latter hypothesis is more likely since the earlier sculptures, as well as the Fried bronze, no longer exist.

Although the Rebay-Xceron affiliation lasted until the artist's death in 1967, the association was not without its difficulties. In her capacity as director, Rebay employed Xceron as custodian of art at the Guggenheim, with the understanding that he could use a small area of the warehouse as a studio to paint in his free time. When her

⁴⁰Rose Fried, "Jean Xceron: A Selection of Paintings 1929-1962", April-May, 1962. There are no other extant records of Xceron sculptures in the aaa Xceron or Rose Fried Files.

demands upon his schedule became increasingly stressful, Xceron responded with a very humble letter, stating that he was working to finish enough canvases for an upcoming exhibition. He explained that he could not come to the museum every single day, and that the \$10 weekly salary he earned from the museum was not enough to support him.

He asked if the Foundation could extend him some credit against his works so that he could meet his deadline.⁴¹ One typical response of Rebay's, made through her secretary,⁴² attested to her capricious nature. The secretary reproached Xceron on the part of Rebay for not returning her call as promptly as she expected. Rebay had taken umbrage with the fact that Xceron called her back at noon and not at 9 A.M., and because her demands for more of his time could not be met. The note ends with the promise to retract any further future help to Xceron. This sort of exchange was repeated many times in the future, as was the one about finances.

The Guggenheim archives contain many receipts from Xceron acknowledging loans from the Baroness, each for amounts no larger than \$100. There are also receipts of his repayments, and small watercolors he sent her to show his

⁴¹Xceron to Rebay, 17 May 1941, SRGM Archives. Xceron must have been referring to the October-December 1941 Carnegie Institute exhibition, "Directions in American Painting," in which he showed.

⁴²Rebay to Xceron postcard, 19 June 1942, Hillan Rebay Foundation Archives, SRGM.

appreciation, and for occasions such as Christmas and her birthday. Xceron remained a staunch Rebay supporter, even later when her relationship with the Guggenheims had become tenuous. Rebay was a brilliant and prophetic figure who, as early as 1909, shared an interest in Theosophy with Hans Arp, who introduced her to Kandinsky, the Italian Futurists, the French Cubists, and some other German avant-garde artists.⁴³

Rebay supported Xceron's career by affording him many exhibition opportunities, acquiring his works, and employing him. Today the word "custodian" connotes a janitorial capacity, but in 1939 it may have been used in some other context as well. The contention of many contemporary sources about Xceron's abilities as guardian of the collection have shown that Rebay's trust was well placed in him. Personal accounts and correspondence prove that Xceron's role was much more complex and varied than customarily believed.

Robert Mates, Xceron's colleague at the Guggenheim, recalled one incident which attests to the value of Xceron's usefulness to Rebay:

At one time, Rebay planned a new exhibition of her works to open in January of that year. The exhibition contained several works done by her and she dated them all in that year. One art critic made note of this and wrote that Miss Rebay was quite prolific as an artist to paint so many works

⁴³Lukach, 17, 21. During Christmas of 1916 Arp sent Rebay two books, Der Blaue Reiter Almanac and Über das Geistige in der Kunst, by Kandinsky.

in the first month of the year. Her comment was that he should have known that an artist always signed and dated paintings in the year they were finished and she had painted the lot in the year before. The real truth was that Mr. Xceron assisted her by painting the backgrounds on all of her paintings and she only added the final surface art. She would line them up on easels and go from one to the other as an assembly line.⁴⁴

Apart from assisting Rebay in her personal life and creative process, to a large extent, Xceron was responsible for the well being of the Guggenheim collection from 1939-67. In fact, when Sweeney became director in 1952, the collection was housed at Manhattan Storage Warehouse. According to Mates, "Mr. Sweeney made Mr. Jean Xceron the Custodian of this space and all of the non Foundation items were cleared out."⁴⁵ Despite the heavy burden of responsibility assigned to Xceron at the Guggenheim, some people in the arts still think of him merely as a janitor.

Mates also recalled a humiliating experience perpetrated upon Xceron by Rebay which illustrates her mercurial temperament. It seems that as soon as Rebay walked into the museum she customarily sent various employees scurrying around on personal errands. At one particular moment when there was no one left to go to the butcher shop for her dog's chopped meat, Xceron volunteered, and upon his

⁴⁴Robert Mates, interview by author, unpublished excerpts from his current book, items # Mates-29, 4. Permission for a one time printing to author, 26 June 1998.

⁴⁵Ibid.

return presented her with the package. Rebay, who had been working with her secretary and become angered at something else, vented her anger at Xceron's interruption by throwing the parcel at him.

Mates continued: "Although Jean suffered great humiliation from this incident he took it. He felt he was without any other choice. He needed the museum."⁴⁶ Mates stated earlier that Xceron assisted Rebay with technical museum matters, including acting as a sounding board. In return, she allowed him to paint when museum business was quiet. She also exhibited his works at times, and convinced Mr. Guggenheim to purchase some for the collection.

According to Mates, after the chopped-meat incident the staff felt so bad for Xceron they advised him to leave Rebay's errands for them. Mates continued:

We were accustomed to duck when necessary. In the early years of 1948 to 1952, the Museum staff was a closely knit bunch. Bound together to preserve the Museum and what it stood for and all of us against the common enemy, "The Witch," Miss Hilla Rebay. When she was good, she was very good. When she was bad we opposed her as a unified group.⁴⁷

From interviews with numerous former Guggenheim employees and the archives, it has become clear that Xceron's usefulness to Rebay was also as conservator -

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

restorer.⁴⁸ When Xceron came to New York in 1920 he studied the collections of the major institutions, but also attended courses on art preservation at the Metropolitan Museum. The many notes to Xceron, in which Rebay asks him to alter paintings to suit her taste, reveal his additional role as conservator.⁴⁹ Xceron's advisory role at the museum is attested to by Paul Katz, a photographer at the Guggenheim who remembers that it was Xceron who advised Rebay to buy an early Malevich, which she had previously turned down as too realistic.⁵⁰ And in the early 40s, he encouraged Rebay to buy a Pollock.⁵¹ This is consistent with the 1942 period in which Xceron, besides working for the Guggenheim, was engaged in a war service project with Krasner and Pollock.

Due to his close, constant relationship with Rebay, Xceron was approached by many to act as liaison at the Guggenheim. In 1952 Duchamp, who had been charged with arranging the transfer of a Kandinsky by Katherine Dreier's Société Anonyme to the Guggenheim, wrote Xceron:

Could you come up to Milford with me on
Wednesday Oct. 29th- I want to show you a few more

⁴⁸Ongoing Telephone Conversations between author and Solomon R. Guggenheim Xceron colleagues Paul Katz, Ward Jackson and Robert Mates, 1995-1998.

⁴⁹Contained throughout the Hilla Rebay Foundation correspondence in notes to Xceron, SRGM Archives.

⁵⁰Xceron to Rebay, 21 August 1952, SRGM Archives.

⁵¹Conversation between author and Paul Katz, 17 September 1997.

works that might be offered to the Guggenheim foundation from Miss Dreier's estate____. . . .⁵²

The Duchamp-Xceron exchange hints at previous negotiations, perhaps pertaining to some other works about to be bought or transferred to the Guggenheim from Dreier's estate. Duchamp, with Xceron's help, had already moved some of Dreier's property to the Guggenheim.⁵³ But why did Duchamp approach Xceron and not Rebay who was a friend of Dreier's?

Several possibilities come to mind. First of all, Duchamp, as one of the advisers to Peggy Guggenheim with whom Rebay had an ongoing rivalry, would have been unsuitable by association in Rebay's view. Secondly, although Rebay and Dreier were friends, they disagreed over an incident concerning Frank Lloyd Wright and Duchamp.⁵⁴ The women's relationship was not greatly affected by this exchange and Rebay stayed friendly with Dreier. As far as Duchamp was concerned, however, it may have been easier for him to have a buffer in the form of Xceron, who could negotiate with Rebay as easily as Dreier had in her

⁵²Duchamp to Xceron, 22 September 1952. aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294, Frame 0282.

⁵³Xceron, Inter-Office Memorandum, 29 July 1952, SRGM Archives.

⁵⁴Lukach, 232-233.

lifetime.⁵⁵

Xceron also advised and provided Rebay with technical tools and painting supplies, as well as some difficult to locate art books. Such was a book on Mondrian by Seuphor. Xceron also apprised Rebay of the latest news on the Guggenheim press, a subject in which she was interested, even after her resignation. He notified her of the January issue of the Museum News, published by the American Association of Museums in Washington, D.C., dedicated to the Guggenheim. He volunteered to find and send her a copy because it was not sold in stores.⁵⁶

Thus, not only was Xceron a conservator, liaison and advisor, but also a friend to Rebay who, by 1958, had experienced a falling out with Harry Guggenheim, resulting in her resignation. The Rebay-Xceron correspondence continued up to 1967, when they both died a few months apart. The relationship had been a long and fruitful one for

⁵⁵Paul Katz, interview by author, telephone, April 1997. At the time of Xceron's death in 1967, Paul Katz, a photographer friend employed by the Guggenheim Museum, was helping Mary Xceron move Jean's work out of the warehouse. Katz confirmed the existence of a Duchamp Rotary Relief among Xceron's estate. This work was probably given to Xceron by Duchamp in appreciation for his role in expediting the Dreier matter.

⁵⁶Xceron to Rebay, 9 February 1960, SRGM Archives. And Xceron to Rebay, 18 May 1964, SRGM Archives: "I am sending you the sample matboard I promised you to try on your watercolors. ___ If you remember the last time I saw you, we talked about them how they should be framed ___ When you get the sample try one watercolor that will fit the edges exactly....."

both parties. Although they had their disagreements, they had mutual respect for each other's resourceful talents.

Xceron, Rebay, Kandinsky

Beginning with the 1913 Armory Exhibition, which included Kandinsky's Improvisation 27, bought by the American art collector Arthur Jerome Eddy, through Kandinsky's involvement with Katherine Dreier's Société Anonyme, to the actual meeting of the artists in Paris, Kandinsky was a portentous presence for the younger Xceron. When he finally returned home in 1937, Xceron's work appealed to and was bought by Rebay for the Guggenheim Museum, as Kandinsky's had been earlier.

Xceron and Rebay were both inspired by the work, written and painted, of Kandinsky. All three were further linked by their shared interest in spirituality. Rebay converted to Theosophy in 1909,⁵⁷ whereas Kandinsky was not a member of this association, nor were his interests in it dogmatic. Theosophic belief, as posited by one of its major proponents, Helena Blavatsky, held to the idea of collective responsibility: As one ascends the ladder of evolution, it is one's responsibility to make sure that others are aided

⁵⁷Lukach, 17.

in reaching the same level.⁵⁸ This type of salvationist philosophy was implicit in the avant-garde of the early century.

Kandinsky also studied Theosophy, and was familiar with Madame Blavatsky's teachings about synaesthetic color and musical analogies.⁵⁹ Xceron had read Über das Geistige in der Kunst during his Corcoran student days, as had most other American modernists, such as Dove, O'Keefe and Hartley. Katherine Dreier had been influenced by theosophist ideas in Über das Geistige in der Kunst and wrote her own book, Western Art and the New Era, in 1923. It is easy to see why Dreier and Rebay were friends and corresponded, since both believed in the spiritual as a basis for all art.⁶⁰ Since Xceron was close to Dreier's galaxy of artists--Torres-Garcia, Stella, Walkowitz and Duchamp--he would have known not only about her book, but also the latest news about Kandinsky.

Xceron had been spiritually minded since his early childhood when as a choirboy he often attended church

⁵⁸H.P. Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, 1877, Collected Writings (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1972).

⁵⁹For a detailed discussion on Kandinsky's influences from Theosophic doctrines see Rose Carol Washton Long, Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). See also Sixten Ringbom, The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting (Abo, Finland: Abo Akademi, 1970)

⁶⁰Lukach, 64.

services, and created icons. Religious themes were important to his early career. As a young student at the Corcoran he painted the Crucifixion No. 6, 1916 (fig. 4) At about the time he graduated from the Corcoran in 1919, he was continuing with this theme, painting Adam and Eve No. 9. (fig. 17) After completing his studies he spent several years supporting himself as an iconographer, making holy images for Greek Orthodox churches throughout the United States. His early interests in spirituality dovetailed with those learned later from Weber and Kandinsky.

Xceron met Max Weber in the early twenties in New York when he discovered their mutual interest in spiritual dimensions as seen in the depiction of space. In Weber's work, this proclivity appeared as fragmented, jarring forms within non-specific backgrounds, and in Xceron's, as transparent space. Weber's "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" is an essay in which he related aspects of Cubism to the infinite or fourth dimension.⁶¹ In this article Weber referred to thought as matter, an idea also present in Kandinsky's Über das Geistige in der Kunst.

In 1934 Xceron met Kandinsky in Paris, which must have meant a great deal to him because he noted the event in his

⁶¹Max Weber, "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View," Camera Work, No. 31 (July 1910), p. 25.

diary.⁶² By then the great master of the abstract idiom was world renowned, and his work was already owned by major collectors, including Guggenheim. Kandinsky formulated and taught color theory, abstract form, and analytical drawing courses at the Bauhaus between 1922-33. When the Bauhaus then in Berlin was closed by the Nazi government in 1933, Kandinsky moved to Paris.

Christian Zervos, the publisher of Cahiers d'Art, was one link between Xceron to Kandinsky. Xceron's first Parisian one man show was sponsored by Cahiers d'Art at Galerie de France in 1931, and from that period on he and his work were regularly featured in Zervos' periodical by the same name. Having met Kandinsky earlier in 1927, Zervos also sponsored this artist's one-man exhibition at the Galerie Zak in 1929. As an art critic-reviewer at the time, Xceron presumably attended this important event.⁶³

In 1930 Kandinsky participated in an exhibition of the Cercle et Carré, with which Xceron was associated. In May of 1934 Kandinsky again showed with the Cahiers d'Art, while Xceron had a one man exhibition with the Galerie Pierre in July. The close proximity of the two artists and the large network of mutual acquaintances would have made their meeting possible. Xceron's proclivity towards the spiritual,

⁶²SRGM Xceron Files.

⁶³Kristian Zervos Tetrada Tis Technis, Thanasis Niarchos, ed. (Athens: Kastanioty, 1990): 164-165.

as has also been seen in Kandinsky's oeuvre, is evident in the following Xceron statement which correlates to his idea of spirit or thought as a non-descriptive physical entity and, which is rendered by him as floating space. Xceron stated: "Painting is something more than the mere discussion of surfaces, color, lines, and planes. It is the harmonious development of mind and spirit in art forms from within the creative artist who is responsible to this inner vision that makes significant art and which cannot be explained in words."⁶⁴ By 1913, Kandinsky had already achieved this vision through the device of veiling which can be seen in works such as Painting with White Border.⁶⁵ That Xceron admired Kandinsky's work is reflected in his lifetime effort to acquire a floating space upon which softly veiled abstract forms float. Xceron's consummate skill in the depiction of light to create transparency, buoyancy, suspension or mystery is evident from his 1923 Landscape 36 (fig. 2) which was created with overlapping passages of color.

The recurring idea of musical analogies is germane to Rebay and Xceron and was posited in Kandinsky's writings. Kandinsky noted that the painter naturally seeks to apply

⁶⁴Xceron, aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

⁶⁵Reproduced in Thomas Messer, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Fifty Years of Collecting: An Anniversary Selection Painting by Modern Masters (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1987), p. 83.

the fundamental means of music to his own art.⁶⁶ He compared painting and music in relation to form:

.... music can achieve results which are beyond the reach of painting. But painting is ahead of music in several particulars. Music, for example has at its disposal duration of time; while painting can present to the spectator the whole content of its message at one moment.⁶⁷

A painter herself, Hilla von Rebay, in Non-Objectivity is the Realm of Spirit, 1939, offered her own take on 'non-objective' painting and musical analogies. "Like music these paintings are harmonious, beautiful, and restful."⁶⁸ Rebay's view of painting in relation to music was somewhat different than the symbolist belief that music is the most abstract of arts because of its direct impact on the listener. Her view was analogous to that of Kandinsky whom she paraphrased:

Paintings are timeless and quiet, consequently superior to music which is time-bound and noisy. As music cannot speak by itself the interpreter is inescapable. It is not only the music which people flock to hear but the interpreter as well. While music is at the mercy of the interpreter's conception, creative painting speaks for itself. It gets its final existence from the originator himself and speaks his original conception forever.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Wassily Kandinsky, "B: Painting," Concerning the Spiritual in Art (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1947; reprint, Roxbury, Mass: Halliday Lithograph Corp., 1955): 44.

⁶⁷Ibid., 44.

⁶⁸Hilla Rebay, "Introduction," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non Objective Paintings (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Non Objective Painting, 1939) 1.

⁶⁹Ibid., 1-2.

Xceron knew of the various positions on the subject of musical analogies and abstract art, but did not engage in polemics, as did Rebay. As with most of his pursuits, Xceron quietly worked at his art, making very few statements. One of these echoes Kandinsky's sentiments: "The difference between painting and music is that the one appeals to the eye and the other to the ear. Non-Objective painting is visual music."⁷⁰

Xceron's and Rebay's favorite composer was Bach, for the layered complexities of his contrapuntal fugues. The handful of living close associates who personally knew Xceron spoke of his love for the composer, especially of his The Mass in B minor which was his *summa* of vocals and sacred music combined. It is widely known that Rebay dreamt of a museum space in which the music of Bach would be played and abstract painting would be exhibited. Moreover, additional influences from Kandinsky to Xceron can be ascertained and, are reflected in their written statements. The first is about the point, and, the second about the relationship of art and science. In the subsequent continuation of his first book, Kandinsky wrote a second entitled Point to Line to Plane, in which according to him, he systematized his

⁷⁰Jean Xceron, "The Artist on His Work," no. 8 in series, Non-Objective Painting is Visual Music, Christian Science Monitor, November 1965.

previous, "imprecise theoretical reflections."⁷¹ In this work Kandinsky said "the point in an external and an internal sense, [is] the primordial element of painting...."⁷² Furthermore, he stated that "a work of art can consist ultimately of a point."⁷³

In a 1957 statement about his beliefs and working methods, Xceron evidenced knowledge of Kandinsky's text by stating: "Theoretically a work of art can consist of a single point placed on the canvas or a single line drawn in any part of a square area as long as the relationship of the plastic elements is presented."⁷⁴ Xceron also spoke of creating his art scientifically combined with the intuitive: "ordering and intuitive awareness of form in painting is, like music, a mathematical problem in its structural analysis, related proportion, unity and space."⁷⁵

In Point and Line to Plane, Kandinsky systematized his art theories and discussed the qualities of the point, which

⁷¹Vasily Kandinsky, Point to Line to Plane, as quoted in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, Kandinsky Complete Writings on Art, Volume Two (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982): 527-700.

⁷²Ibid., 547

⁷³Ibid., 550.

⁷⁴Jean Xceron statement, as quoted in University of Illinois Exhibition Catalogue, Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1957): 260.

⁷⁵Ibid., 260.

he analogized to sound. He wrote: "Like its size and its shape, the basic sound of the point is correspondingly variable."⁷⁶ There are elements in Xceron's art, like the spatial effects or the lyrical quality of his linear designs, as well as theoretical similarities, that show his debt to Kandinsky. But, his own synthesis and development of an individual style become clear when studying works such as Radar (fig. 1) with which he was said to have attempted the marriage of art to science.⁷⁷

Through its title Radar announces the concerns of the developed world during the post-war period. The perception of nuclear energy's capabilities to destroy the world gave rise to increasing concern for safety and a seeking for the positive aspects of science resulting from their practical applications. Some of these areas included the production of helicopters, jet powered aircraft, electronic digital computers, nuclear fission and radar. Xceron's painting Radar reflects the popular contemporaneous preoccupations and was commissioned by the University of Georgia in 1946. An 1948 article in Life magazine encapsulated the author's interpretation of Radar.⁷⁸ "The fascinating arrangement of

⁷⁶Kandinsky, Point and Line to Plane, reprinted in Lindsay and Vergo, Kandinsky Complete Writings on Art: 545

⁷⁷Anon., "A Non-Objective Painter Tries to Marry Science and Art on Canvas," Life vol. 24, no. 5, 2 February 1948. Unpaginated document, aaa, Xceron Files, Reel #D294.

⁷⁸Ibid.

squares, circles, bull's-eyes and crosshatches ... is an attempt to express radar, a scientific phenomenon ..."⁷⁹ The author paraphrased the artist, noting that although "his arrangement of forms, color and space must be a significant design... [they] in no way represent nature" and "tell no story," but that the composition should mean something to the artist and to the viewer. He continued:

Whatever his marriage of science and art may mean to laymen, Xceron has produced an interesting and pleasing pattern of form and color. But it may get him into trouble with scientists, who will accuse him of inaccuracy, and with fellow nonobjective painters, who will accuse him of heresy. To them, the painting is far too realistic for true nonobjectivity.⁸⁰

The author was not alluding to mimetic form with the word realistic, but rather was referring to the loaded significance behind the totally abstract forms.

Xceron and the American Abstract Artists Association

Existing records of Xceron's association with the AAA are spotty due to his irregular participation and dues payments. Ilya Bolotowsky records for posterity Xceron's hesitation to join any group: "Some people would join, and then get out, and then join in again, like Jean Xceron. He was never really sure if it was a good idea to be in a group

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

or out of a group and so he was in and out! But always very pleasant."⁸¹

Xceron's reluctance in the decision to join the AAA may have been partly due to his loyalty to Rebay, who in 1937 was cause for a public debate with the AAA in the pages of Art Front. In a public letter addressed to the editor, several AAA members expressed their joy at the Guggenheim Foundation's opening, and for those artists already in its collection, as well as for its role in promoting modern art for the enlightenment of the public. They also voiced their indignity at Rebay's 'ivory tower' aesthetics.⁸²

Signed by seven members of the AAA, the letter states: "It is our very definite belief that abstract art forms are not separated from life, but on the contrary are great realities, manifestations of a search into the world about one's self, having basis in living actuality, made by artists who walk the earth, who see colors (which are realities), squares (which are realities not some spiritual mystery), tactile surfaces, resistant materials, movement."⁸³

Xceron showed with the AAA yearly from 1940 to 1946,

⁸¹Susan Carol Larsen, "Going Abstract in the Thirties," Interview with Ilya Bolotowsky, Art in America, vol. 64, no. 5, September-October 1976, 75.

⁸²Ibram Lassaw, et al., Art Front, vol. 3, no. 7, October 1937.

⁸³Ibid.

skipping the 8th Annual Exhibition of 1944. His exhibition schedule with the AAA lapsed between 1947-53, a period in which he showed in other venues. Xceron was then exhibiting with the Carnegie Institute from 1941 to 1950, with the exception of 1945, and with the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors intermittently in the forties, with increasing regularity in the fifties. This exhibiting pattern reveals that Xceron feared being associated with any particular school or ideology, and was an "on and off" again member, as Bolotowsky put it.

This proclivity to independence was also linked to Xceron's Greek heritage, which was based on democratic individualism. It showed great strength and conviction in standing alone, but it could, and probably did, serve to undermine his own position in the art world. Xceron's association with the AAA must have served to somehow anchor him to a particular group, but by 1946, when the eight year hiatus with the AAA took place, he may have felt that he needed to recapture some of his earlier independent, international status.

The art historian Melinda A. Lorenz stated that in 1938 the AAA "made efforts to extend membership to a more international scope. A number of important European artists living in the United States accepted membership invitations, including Josef Albers, Fritz Glarner, HÉlion, Léger,

Mondrian, Moholy-Nagy, and Jean Xceron."⁸⁴

Xceron and Mondrian met in the late twenties through Torres-Garcia, who organized the group Cercle et Carré. The stylistic relationship between the Neo-Plasticist master and Xceron is one of similar origins rather than influence. The debt to Cubism cannot be denied by either artist. Both utilized it as a point of departure to develop their own style.

The elementarist, rectilinear, gridlike compositions of Mondrian, the Constructivist concern for spatial structural elements as seen in El Lissitsky's Prouns, and Bauhaus experimentation and social commitment, were joined to inspire works such as Xceron's Peinture # 239A (fig. 52). Between the years 1922 and 1933 the Bauhaus style became interwoven with Dutch De Stijl and Russian Constructivism to produce a synthesis.

There are biases which need to be addressed when reexamining the place of a thirties American abstract artist, be it Xceron, Burgoyne Diller or Bolotowsky. In the literature, whether about an individual artist or the group, the idea persists that American abstractionists were insufficiently original, derivative of European styles or Mondrianesque. This can be seen in reviews which utilize this terminology, and in the many comparative instances

⁸⁴Melinda Lorenz, George L.K. Morris: Artist and Critic, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982): 58.

provided about the affinities of gridlike forms. One example of this is Robbins' use of James Mellow's review in Arts magazine, in which Xceron is said to be using gridlike forms in a section of his painting, Violin No. 6E, 1932 (Fig. 27), and which was likened to works by Mondrian or Torres-Garcia.⁸⁵ This painting has been read by Robbins as a transitional work from Cubist form to abstraction.

Mondrian, who departed from the intent of the Cubists Picasso and Braque to maintain recognizable subject matter in their work, took his art to pure abstraction by 1915. Xceron did not develop a purely abstract idiom until the early thirties. Then Xceron departed from Neoplasticist dogma by steering clear of the primary colors red, yellow and blue. The strict rectilinear, gridlike forms of Mondrian are not used by Xceron either. Xceron used line playfully and interwove it with gradations of transparent color, creating multiple dimensions and floating forms, more like Malevich's or Kandinsky's, rather than Mondrian's more two-dimensional but spatially ambiguous areas.

With the 1931-32 compositions, Xceron lingered in organic or biomorphic rather than rectilinear abstraction as did Torres-Garcia or Mondrian. Although Xceron has been included in exhibitions on Neo-Plasticism, it must be remembered that he never formally adhered to its limited

⁸⁵Robbins, Jean Xceron, 14.

compositional or coloristic vocabulary.⁸⁶

The analysis necessary to place an artist's oeuvre within a given category requires that one first define the parameters of that sphere. Xceron, who throughout his life sought to resolve an ongoing conflict between art and nature, the organic and the plastic, and the biomorphic and the rectilinear, cannot be placed within the Neoplastic parameters so easily. Neo-Plasticism, as used here, contains a strict, formal vocabulary, and ideologically encompasses universal immutable laws.

The geometric vocabulary and universalist concerns of Neo-Plasticism accorded with Xceron's belief system and formal means. But, in his case, these were so variously used and combined with so many other systems that they were to be found rarely, if ever, in pure Neo-Plastic form. If the common use of the right angle is the main criterion by which to place an artist's work within the Neo-Plastic category, then Xceron's 1945 Composition 273 (fig. 61) or his Untitled, Mandolin Abstraction, 1932 (fig. 62), do not fit. The former work, owned by the Whitney Museum of American Art, has recently been used by Willers as an example of Neoplasticism in America, but clearly departs from this vein in that it utilizes circular forms, broken lines and

⁸⁶Karl Emil Willers, Between Mondrian and Minimalism: Neo-Plasticism in America (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991): 3.

multiple dimensional planes. Its palette is varied, and in contrast to the relatively smooth finishes of Neo-Plasticism, Xceron's Composition 273 evinces the presence of the artist's hand in the brush strokes.

The mere inclusion of Xceron in the group shows, The Sphere of Mondrian in 1957, and Between Mondrian and Minimalism: Neo-Plasticism in America in 1991, evidences the power of a label that refuses to die.⁸⁷ Although Xceron very rarely produced Neo-Plastic compositions, he was thought of as an artist who worked in a Mondrianesque style, and continues to be included with these groups. The inability of the writers and public to examine the total work of an individual artist fosters this attitude. Were one to examine his oeuvre instead of looking at isolated examples, one could avoid falling into this trap.

To be sure, there were some American abstract artist's compositions which were closer to Mondrian's, specifically in their use of strict grids and pure limited color combinations. Most, however, departed from this very strict purist objective and struck off in their own direction. Burgoyne Diller was one artist most seemingly related to Mondrian's aesthetic, who also used a limited palette and gridlike forms, but also made significant creative contributions. A Whitney Museum curator Barbara Haskell,

⁸⁷Ibid.

describes Diller's progress in the early thirties as one involving the amalgamation of Neoplasticist and Suprematist principles, and developing into the modifications which resulted in a style of his own.⁸⁸

Although Xceron was invited to join the AAA in 1938, and may have accepted at that time, the records do not reflect his membership until 1940 and then, sporadically up to 1965. Xceron first showed in the AAA's 4th Annual Exhibition, at the Galerie St. Etienne in New York. The small introduction written by George L.K. Morris in the catalogue asserted that the twenty-three artists included in the show had two major links. The first was their American heritage and the second their non-figurative stylistic approach. After discussing nineteenth century art as overly embellished, Morris concluded that the abstract artists had pared down painting "to its bones and thereby established foundations for a new beginning."⁸⁹

Xceron was represented in the show by two works, entitled Peinture No. 234, 1934, and Peinture No. 239A, 1937 (fig. 52) both oils on canvas, lent by J.B. Neumann, who was

⁸⁸Haskell, Burgoyne Diller, 49.

⁸⁹George L. K. Morris, American Abstract Art Assembled by Mr. Stephan Lion, Galerie St. Etienne, 22 May-12 June 1940, aaa, AAA Files.

listed in the catalogue as their owner.⁹⁰ The style of these works is geometric and rectilinear, as well as minimal in its pristine white background and restricted number of abstract elements. The right angle predominates in rectangularity, and varies in color value and weight. The 1937 Peinture No. 239A's rectangles are defined through the use of line, but their density is provided through the use of color. A good example is the horizontal rectangle in the upper right, which is painted white, and directly below, three smaller rectangular units, one vertical and two horizontal. This type of configuration, variously used throughout the canvas, creates a solid/void, heavy/light balance.

The whole of the composition is anchored around a vertical axial line, a parallel line of lighter density, and another of medium thickness, creating a left handed "L" pattern. Linear ambiguity is seen in the lower left, in which the line varying in thickness proceeds behind one element only to emerge on the other side of it thicker. Simple in its geometricity, complex in its finesse and beauty, it creates complex relationships.

The early history of the AAA group paralleled the

⁹⁰J.B. Neumann had been in partnership with Karl Nierendorf in a gallery venture while still in Berlin during the early twenties. Having come to New York as an art dealer and lecturer earlier than his partner, and having already owned Xcerons by 1939, Neumann was probably the one who introduced Xceron to Karl Nierendorf.

growth of abstraction in the late thirties in New York. It also reflected the position of the American abstractionist in general. After several fitful false starts, the AAA finally took shape and was officially named in January, 1937.⁹¹ The artists present at this meeting, which took place at Albert Swinden's studio, agreed on the title because it was broad enough to cover a variety of abstract styles, from the looser biomorphic to the geometric.

The AAA's focus was to promote abstraction and unite as a platform for exhibiting purposes. Its goal was to provide "a center for the exchange of ideas," and to give the artist an exhibition platform, at a minimum cost within a broadly based association, like that of the Abstraction Création.⁹² The AAA was unique in that it cut across socio-political lines and brought together loosely allied artists.

The AAA was familiar with the orientation of the Abstraction-Création through artists such as Alexander Calder and Xceron, and through its corresponding publication. Jean Xceron showed with the Paris group and and later joined the AAA, whereas Calder declined membership.

⁹¹Susan Carol Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists: A Documentary History," Archives of American Art Journal, vol. 14, no. 1 (1974): 2-7.

⁹²Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America 1927-1944, John R. Lane and Susan C. Larsen, eds. (Pittsburgh Museum of Art: The Carnegie Institute and Harry N. Abrams., Inc. Publishers, 1983-84): 36.

Alexander Calder, who had been in Paris since 1926 and was friendly with Xceron, returned semi-permanently to the United States in 1933. Calder's refusal to join the AAA confirmed his indifference to the politics of promoting American abstraction. However, he was an important presence on the American art scene and was familiar with the workings of the Abstraction-Création, having exhibited with this group in 1934 and 1935.

Harry Holtzman, an early member of the AAA, had gone to Paris to meet Mondrian in 1934, and was tremendously influenced by the De Stijl artist who showed with the Abstraction-Création between 1931-34. Holtzman witnessed the effectiveness of the Abstraction-Création and met Héliou, Gabo, Le Corbusier, Léger and the Americans John Ferren and Xceron. Around 1941 he became assistant director to Burgoyne Diller, who was then the WPA/FAP's director. The connections between Holtzman, Diller and Xceron were multiple, including the proclivity towards the various constructed principles in their works.

The influence of Abstraction-Création on the artists of the AAA can be seen if one compares Burgoyne Diller's Early Geometric (Second Theme) #255 (fig. 63) to Harry Holtzman's Untitled # 645 (fig. 64) and Xceron's Peinture No. 239A (fig. 52). All three paintings utilize the right angle, albeit in different configurations. Although they do not strictly adhere to Mondrian's primary color schemes, they

use a limited palette.

The compositions, all done around the same period, 1937-38, are built up of various planes in space at right angles, and show a varied concern for solidity of space. Holtzman and Diller limit their compositions to Mondrian's favored right angle, whereas Xceron displays a feeling for complexity of space and the curve. This is not evident in Xceron's white ground, but in the shading and color tones used in the rectangular forms and lines, which vary from very dark on one end and fade out at the other. The styles of Diller and Holtzman are directed towards Neo-Plasticism at this time, while Xceron's is indicative of the combined aesthetic, as learned in Paris from his association in the Abstraction-Création and the constructive Bauhaus aesthetic.

The first AAA exhibition at the Squibb Gallery, in 1937, had a geometric focus. The group acknowledged its debt to European art precedents and invited some artists of international stature to join.⁹³ Although some important artists, Calder for example, declined to join, membership increased as emigrés from Europe landed in the United States.

The texture of the AAA group was enriched by the ideas of immigrant artists seeking asylum from an unstable

⁹³Larsen recorded the development of the AAA, and documented its initialization.

European climate. When Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany in 1933, European artists started to trickle into the United States and left their imprint on the younger generation of Americans such as Ilya Bolotowsky. Among the great emigré modern art teachers and AAA members were Hans Hofmann and Joseph Albers who taught at the Black Mountain College where in 1947, Bolotowsky was also employed. Contrary to the optical experiments of Albers, Bolotowsky's interest lay in the plastic elements of the composition.

In 1938 the AAA published a yearbook to accompany its second exhibition at the American Fine Arts Society in New York. With this publication the AAA editors tried to counter the many public critiques leveled against the group.⁹⁴ The tenor of the writings by individual members was felt to be aggressive due to its defensive quality. The art historian Susan C. Larsen noted the sarcastic edge of Charles Shaw's essay, entitled "A Word to the Objector," in which Shaw rebutted the six most popular accusations at the AAA:⁹⁵ "that it was merely decorative, unpicturesque, frivolous, nonrepresentational, meaningless, and cold."⁹⁶ Shaw responded by saying that such critiques were made by those

⁹⁴Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists: A Documentary History 1936-1941," Archives of American Art Journal, 4.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

who failed to see not only abstract art, but any art.⁹⁷

The third annual AAA show took place at the Riverside Museum in March, 1939. The catalogue included an essay on the history of the group by George L.K. Morris. Although new members were joining the organization, I. Rice Perreira and Ad Rheinhardt among them, it was a difficult period for the AAA. According to Larsen, the elimination of painterly modes of expression and the espousal of hard-edged abstraction threatened the group's freedom of expression. Older members such as Vaclav Vytlacil, Byron Browne and Rosalind Bengelsdorf were particularly troublesome.⁹⁸ They felt that their association with a group that was becoming known for its geometric idiom might compromise their reputations.

The derogatory attitude towards American abstraction was evident in the press and in the lack of support by major art institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art. The Museum had continuously omitted current American abstract artists, except for Alexander Calder, from its exhibitions since its opening in 1929. Alfred Barr, Jr., explained that this was because of the museum's time constraints on their exhibition schedules. In its early years the Museum's focus was placed largely on established European painting and sculpture of the early 20th Century.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., 5.

AAA artists questioned the efficacy of the museum's platform as modern. Its members demonstrated on April 15, 1940, the opening day of a drawing and cartoon exhibit from the newspaper, PM. Ad Reinhardt, who had been a typographer, designed a pamphlet whose antique lettering alone could convey their message. The cover questioned the effectiveness of the museum's policies. It read, "How Modern is The Museum of Modern Art?" The fifty AAA members were dispersed by polite museum personnel, who after complimenting the leaflet's design, collected as many as possible for the museum's archives.⁹⁹

Xceron, who became a member of the AAA just as all of this ferment was going on, maintained a distanced position. His work had been part of the Museum of Modern Art's collection since 1936. Although he sympathized with the AAA's plight, he could not make any public display of his feelings. Even in Paris he had abstained from taking part as official member of a group, for fear of being identified by any one particular label.

Xceron's fear of being confined or pigeonholed into any particular category by critics and public was not unfounded. Until the present time members of the AAA are referred to as geometric artists, and have difficulty disassociating themselves from labels such as Mondrianesque,

⁹⁹Ibid., 6.

non-objective or concretionist. To American abstract artists of the thirties and forties, this stereotyping had negative connotations ranging from sterile to decorative, for abstraction.

To add to these constraints, due to his employment by Rebay at the Museum of Non-Objective Art, Xceron needed to either agree with her or abstain from any public comment. He opted for the latter, and although he showed with this society, he did not take part in the public battles of this or any other association.

The public and critical tendency to categorize in order to understand is best illustrated by the following example by Ad Reinhardt. In a depiction of a tree (fig. 65) with its roots labeled Cézanne and Seurat, a trunk labeled Braque, Matisse and Picasso, and branches with each leaf bearing a name of an American artist, Reinhardt poked fun at the popular lack of comprehension. Entitled "How to Look at Modern Art," the Reinhardt broadside was meant as a caustic commentary on the American public who lacked interest in and tried to pigeonhole modern art.

Reinhardt included Xceron on a leaf of the "pure (abstract)" section of his tree. To the right, heavy branches are about to break and fall into the cemetery below, its headstones bearing names such as Benton and Wood, Pepsi-Cola and Life. The directional copy written by Reinhardt instructed the viewer, or "the galleries-the art

world in a nutshell" on understanding modern art "where no demand is made on you."¹⁰⁰

Although the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, later known as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, helped many AAA artists, including Xceron, public opinion held that American abstract artists were not supported. The AAA's outcry for the marginalization of their work by the major institutions, continued into the forties.

According to Lukach, Edith Gregor Halpert of the Downtown Gallery wrote to Guggenheim and Rebay, objecting to what she perceived to be the lacking support from this institution for American abstractionists. She earned Rebay's swift reply in a letter signed by sixty American artists, including Xceron and Bolotowsky, who had received aid from Guggenheim. In addition, Lukach pointed out Halpert's bias in showing mainly figurative work and the commonly held belief that abstraction was thought of as foreign.¹⁰¹

The latter were serious charges at a time when America was at war with Fascist and Communist countries. Many artists scrambled to prove their allegiance to the United States, especially during the encroaching fifties, the years of McCarthyism. Many joined fund drives and organizations with democratic leanings.

¹⁰⁰Ad Reinhardt, Illustration of Tree of Art, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel D294.

¹⁰¹Lukach, 172-173.

These concerns are reflected in the coordinated catalogue statements to the Fifth Annual Exhibition which took place in February of 1941. Public opinion was all important to the group at this time, a fact which is illustrated by their great effort to clarify the group's orientation and differentiate "between aesthetic values and national values." They also defended their abstract expression from charges of foreign allegiances. "Aesthetic values do not change with latitude and longitude; the cultural significance of art does not change with geographic movements."¹⁰²

Xceron, whose name appears to the right of this statement, took part in the exhibition along with a variety of members, including Mondrian, Albers, Bolotowsky, Krasner, Lassaw, Holtzman and Holty. Other statements accompanying AAA exhibitions during the war period showed concern for freedom of expression. This catalogue essay discussed the constraints placed upon abstract art considered degenerate by Nazi and Stalinist Communists because of its universal, rather than its national character. It also sounded a warning note to those who might, as a result of the war effort's strictures, have seen it as frivolous, and found the need to place it in the service of politics.

¹⁰²American Abstract Artists 1936-58, aaa Files. Microfilm NY59-11.

Xceron and Politics

Xceron was often caught in contradictory and difficult circumstances, including the Rebay/AAA division and the artistic/political climate of the late thirties and forties. It could not have been easy for Xceron to work for Rebay, who insisted on the term 'non-objective' to refer to abstraction, because simultaneously in one way or another, he was involved with the AAA who fought its use. Rebay had mistakenly translated the German term *gegenstandlos*¹⁰³ and argued about its use with Kandinsky. Kandinsky continued to refer to his own works as abstract, while Rebay referred to them as non-objective.

Kandinsky's letter to Rebay shows their basic point of contention. He wrote: "In your terminology, "abstract" art operates with elements which have been "abstracted from some object. 'Non-Objective' art creates its own elements, without making use of any objects whatsoever."¹⁰⁴

To Rebay the word 'non-objective' evoked the cosmic and spiritual nature of the future, and she persisted in its use. Kandinsky continued to use the word 'abstract' to describe his own work. Xceron, in belonging to the AAA,

¹⁰³Rose Carol Washton-Long, "Non-Objective," The Guggenheim Museum A-Z, Nancy Spector, ed. (New York: Rizzoli, 1992): 200.

¹⁰⁴Kandinsky letter to Rebay dated 16 December 1936, as reproduced in Lukach, 98.

shared their belief that the word 'non-objective' was inadequate for expressing their socio-political views and involvement in the current issues.¹⁰⁵

However, due to his great need for the employment provided by Rebay, Xceron dared not express himself openly. Robert Mates, Xceron's co-worker from 1948-1965, attests to this: "Being given to outward expressions was not his nature."¹⁰⁶ Even though Xceron utilized the word non-objective to please his employer, it was evident that his sympathies lay with the AAA's sentiments. Karl Emil Willers, the curator of a recent Whitney exhibition, noted as a preamble in the catalogue's essay: "It is within this context of a perceived continuum between artistic forms and political ideals that Jean Xceron insisted that art 'is something more than the mere discussion of surfaces, lines, planes.'" Willers continued by interpreting Xceron's comments: "Suggesting that purely abstract forms can have a connection to non-formal issues, he [Xceron] implies an agenda for social change."¹⁰⁷

The AAA artists were of varied political partisanship including many with socialist leanings. Rebay held an anti-

¹⁰⁵Willers, Between Mondrian and Minimalism: Neo-Plasticism in America: 6.

¹⁰⁶Robert Mates to author, 26 June 1998, item Mates 29, 4.

¹⁰⁷Willers, Between Mondrian and Minimalism: Neo-Plasticism in America: 5.

leftist position. Xceron was very secretive about his politics while espousing liberal causes. In every extrinsic way he was a patriotic American involved in the WPA/FAP, the war relief drive and auctions, and the philanthropic efforts in raising money for the survival of democracy. His personal politics remain conjectural and are confined to oral reports rather than solid evidence.

The modernist critic Doré Ashton, in an interview about the artist with whom she was personally acquainted, maintained that since Zervos, who was a major Xceron supporter in Paris in the thirties, was a known communist, Xceron probably had leftist leanings as well.¹⁰⁸ Maria Couvaras, the wife of a Greek-American journalist and Xceron's friend, was of the same opinion as Ashton.

When Couvaras was asked about Xceron's politics, she said that he was a known democratic socialist who frequented the Spartakos Club in New York.¹⁰⁹ Dan Georgakas, a scholar whose specialty is Greek-American sociopolitical issues, mentioned the Spartakos Club of New York in an essay about Greek-American radicalism and its advocates. He posited that within its Greek American context, the club:

was destined to play a major role in the Communist movement launched in 1919. The Spartakos Club was

¹⁰⁸Author's interview with Doré Ashton. At Ashton's New York residence in Spring 1996.

¹⁰⁹Author's interview with Maria Couvaras. At Couvara's residence in Washington D.C., Spring 1996.

located in New York City's West Twenties, which put it adjacent to the fur district which was dominated by Greeks, and the vibrant Greek tavern scene of Eighth Avenue.¹¹⁰

This Greek-American canteen was known for the pro-communist tenor of its clientele and was named after the Spartacists.¹¹¹

The Spartakos Workers Club in New York's Chelsea district was attended by many Greek radical intellectuals, writers, blue collar workers and artists. Among its habitual artist clients of the twenties and thirties were Aristodemos Kaldis, Michael Lekakis, and Xceron. Kaldis was among the strike leaders/labor agitators who later quit politics to become an artist. Having become a Communist in the twenties, his sympathies lay with Trotsky.¹¹²

Xceron knew Theodoros Stamos through the Greek American community, and as Georgakas stated, he was another artist with radical political tendencies in the thirties. Stamos belonged to the John Reed Club, but like many other artists

¹¹⁰Dan Georgakas, "Greek American Radicalism: The Twentieth Century," Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora, vol 20, no. 1 (New York: Pella Publishing Co., Inc., 1994): 11.

¹¹¹Referring back to the historic roots of the term, Spartacus was a leader of a Roman slave revolt in 73-71 B.C. In the late teens the term Spartacists was used in Weimar, Germany for a political party led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. They called for a socialist revolution in Germany, which led to a series of uprisings resulting in their martyred deaths, ensuring them a place in Communist hagiography.

¹¹²According to Georgakas, Kaldis met Diego Rivera when he was working on the Rockefeller Center mural and thence gave twelve lectures at Carnegie Hall, advocating modern art.

in the late thirties, he broke with this sector due to the Hitler/Stalin Pact in 1937, when the party's orientation became Fascist to the extreme. Yet another figure in this relation to Xceron and radical politics of the Greek American artistic community, was the "critic Nicolas Calas who arrived in New York in 1940 and presented his anarcho-surrealistic perspectives in major art publications."¹¹³ Xceron noted the meeting of Calas, with whom he shared not only a Greek-American heritage, but the common link of Theodoros Dorros his brother-in-law. Dorros was, since the early twenties Xceron's intellectual guide who authored poetry and anarcho-Surrealist books.

Xceron's contributions to the democratic cause were the exhibitions for the relief of war torn Greece. The 1940 Art Auction for Aid to Greece¹¹⁴ and the 1943 Benefit of Greek War Relief were two such shows.¹¹⁵ Greece has been historically viewed as the progenitor of democracy upon whose model American political systems were established. Furthermore, during World War II and its aftermath, the revolution, Greece was seen as a theater of operations in which the fight for freedom from Communism took place. Showing allegiance to the democratic way of life was

¹¹³Georgakas, 25.

¹¹⁴Robbins, Jean Xceron, 54.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

commensurate to loyalty to one's own country. Consequently American relief aid to Greece, was substantial.

One conspicuous effort manifesting Xceron's loyalty to his adoptive country was his entry into the Artists for Victory, Inc. contest sponsored by Pepsi Cola. In October, 1945 Xceron was notified that his was one of 150 works chosen out of 3,000 entries in their second annual competition. Among the prestigious member societies of the exhibition were the American Academy in Rome, the National Academy of Design, the New York Society of Women Artists and the AAA. Its vice-presidents included such politically committed artists as William Gropper, the social realist who illustrated for the magazine The New Masses in the thirties.

The 150 works comprised an exhibition that opened in New York and was slated to tour the country. Arthur Crisp, the association's chairman, sent Xceron an invitation. Crisp implored Xceron to observe absolute confidentiality about the exhibition so that when the "Portrait of America's" information service announced it at its news conference, it would create a big splash.

Xceron as a peace loving democrat and loyal citizen supported many government-run War benefit drives. Documents in his files include thank you letters from the Seventh War Loan Drive benefit put on by the Treasury Department at the New School of Social Research in New York during the month

of June, 1945.¹¹⁶ This is probably where Xceron met some of his strongest supporters. Humbert J. Fugazy, District I director, invited Xceron to the opening night reception, thanked him for his generous contribution, and apprised him about some prestigious guests. Present were Mr. Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and James Johnson Sweeney, Director of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art and longtime Xceron supporter. He was probably recommended for the benefit by Sweeney or the AAA, which were both close to him.

Xceron's Public Service Projects

Xceron's personal history has its roots in Washington, D.C. when as a young man, he attended the Corcoran School of Art in the teens. Even in the twenties when living in New York he often returned to the capitol for family visits. The earliest documented government connections in Washington, D.C. date to 1935 when he became friends with Russel C. Parr, Regional Advisor of the Federal Art Project and WPA

¹¹⁶Robbins, Jean Xceron, 57.

Art Editor of the Index of American Design.

Parr did much to promote the artist's career and even offered him steady work on the project in 1935, but Xceron could not accept then, and he returned to Paris. Parr was instrumental in introducing Xceron to Duncan Phillips who included his work in his Washington, D.C. collection, and to Holger Cahill the national director of the New York WPA who showed Xceron's work in the 1939 World's Fair. Peinture No. 239A, 1938 was chosen for the American Art Today exhibition in the United States Pavilion, which opened on September 28.

Two mainstream concerns appear to color the viewpoint of Cahill in his catalogue essay written for this exhibition. The first, was that the art shown be reflective of a democratic way of life, and he attempted to convince the reader of this very fact. The second was that the arts be able to reach the public.¹¹⁷ Thus, Cahill stated that as a manifold demonstration of the arts, he believed the show could transform life and culture.

Furthermore, he wrote that "the Fair as a whole [was] a vast mosaic of our present-day culture which everywhere show[ed] the skill and talent of the artist... " The artist and his work, as viewed by Cahill, were "productive forces of modern civilization which is the New York World's Fair, of which the exhibition of American Art Today is an integral

¹¹⁷Holger Cahill, American Art Today, 28 September 1939, 19.

part."¹¹⁸ A lengthy review of the show by Donald J. Bear in Art Digest echoed Cahill's concerns, and highlighted the democratic selection jury system from 86 regions of the United States. In surveying the contents of the show, he focused on certain works for particular comment. About Xceron's Peinture No. 239A (fig. 64) he wrote: "There is a line of cadence as recurrent as the vibration of a note struck on a tuning fork in John Xceron's abstraction."¹¹⁹

The same issue printed additional reviews ranging in tenor from neutral to positive or pejorative commentary about the state of American art on the eve of the second world war.¹²⁰ Overall the show's public success was noted and it was chosen by the National Art Society to travel to institutions across the country from October, 1939 through the spring of 1940.

A letter to Xceron from Mildred Constantine, Director of Travelling Exhibitions of the Society, requested the loan of his composition for the proposed venues. In addition she expressed the reasons for its staging:

American Art Today at the World's Fair has created a great deal of interest nationally. Several institutions have indicated their interest in bringing parts of this exhibition to their cities

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Donald J. Bear, "American Art Today-New York World's Fair 1939," Art Digest, vol. 13 (New York: 1 June 1939): 20-25, fig. 33.

¹²⁰Art Digest, 1 June 1939, 26.

so that the public not visiting the Fair can see this outstanding cross section of the art of our country....¹²¹

Constantine also mentioned that much radio and newspaper publicity, as well as an illustrated catalogue, would accompany this part of the exhibition to which Xceron consented.

Besides exhibiting with American Art Today, another of Xceron's works Composition 241, 1937, was simultaneously shown at the Greek Pavilion of the World's Fair.¹²² Due to his importance to Greece as an early abstractionist, the cultural governmental arm supported Xceron on many levels. This has already been seen in relation to Washington, D.C. and Councilor Lely. In New York Xceron's political contact was Dimitrios A. Morettis, Commissioner from the Kingdom of Greece to the World's Fair.

Xceron enjoyed subsequent successes at World Fairs, including the Golden Gate Exposition of Contemporary American Painting at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco in 1939 in which he entered his Painting No. 242,

¹²¹Constantine to Xceron, 29 August 1939, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294.

¹²² Gale Darling letter to Mary Xceron, 6 November 1939, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294. This letter shows the intervention of Mary Dorros for the sale of this work to Gale Darling. Although the work has not been located, based upon stylistic similarities of works from the preceding and following periods, it would be safe to assume that it was a rectilinear composition with concern for spatial depiction, evident in the evolution of elements in atmosphere accomplished through gradations in color.

1937. This show was reviewed by G.L. Morley in the Art Digest in an essay entitled "San Francisco Presents One Man's Opinion of Living American Art."¹²³

Xceron's powerful nexus of political figures and friends, Lely, Parr, Sweeney, and Cahill, recommended him for the following project, in which he was employed by the WPA Art Program. He was hired to execute two mural panels for the Rikers Island Penitentiary's Christian Science Chapel, although not without initial rejection.

The first proposal had been submitted as a collaboration between Xceron and Balcomb Greene for the auditorium of the Rikers Island Chapel. Xceron was to execute the right panel, and Greene, the left panel on either side of the main stage area of the auditorium.¹²⁴ They were also mandated to provide a color sketch, a blue print with detail, and a statement of purpose which necessarily considered the multid denominational nature of the chapel.

The ensuing stylistic, thematic, and functional problems that the artists faced can be seen in their statements. About the multiple requirements on the usage of

¹²³G.L. Morley, "San Francisco Presents One Man's Opinion of Living American Art", Art Digest, vol. 13, no. 12, 15 March 1939, 27-32, 45-46.

¹²⁴Document, 9 April 1940, Archive of the Art Commission of the City of New York, City Hall Records. The artists estimated the cost for 272 square feet of canvas panels at a dollar a square foot.

this chapel Greene pointed to a solution: "The basic requirement was to produce a panel which would not in any way offend the religions which use this part of the auditorium. The orthodox Jewish religion and the Christian Science do not jointly permit of any representation. A restricted symbolism satisfactory to both could probably not be found... The effort was therefore to keep strictly to the non-objective."¹²⁵

The second concern preoccupying the artists was how to maintain overall uniformity in style for a shared space. The panels were meant for the proscenium of a large hall, an area equivalent to the apse of a church, or the stage area of a theatre. In addition, there were structural limitations with which they had to deal creatively. Each side of the shallow stage area had a door, above which the panels were to fit.

In a very sensitive and detailed statement, Greene enumerated the considerations made for the manufacture of the panel murals. He discussed the architectural considerations, highlighting the correspondences of his own and Xceron's styles. He stated that their work had a similar feeling and spatial approach, and that the overall color scheme was coordinated. He noted that they should utilize a vertically formatted design to come to terms with the doors

¹²⁵Balcomb Greene, 4 April 1940, Archive of the Art Commission of the City of New York, City Hall Records.

on either side.

Because the stage area was recessed and the panels two dimensional, any effort to articulate softness in the panels was to be executed "not by shading, but by the introduction of lines, boundary areas (or borders), and intermediate colors and tones. The effort has been to keep a certain individuality of style without providing too much contrast with the Xceron panel."¹²⁶ For whatever reason, Greene's proposal for a collaboration was rejected, whereas Xceron in 1941, was granted this job.¹²⁷

After his initial rejection, Xceron submitted another recommendation to the Subjects and Approvals Committee on May 15, before it could proceed to the Sponsor and Art Commission scrutiny in June.¹²⁸ It took many months of negotiations and bureaucratic correspondence before the preliminary approval was granted on March 11, 1941, by a committee composed of commissioners Cornwell, Delano and Halsey and the acting commissioner of the City of New York's Department of Corrections, Peter F. Amoroso.¹²⁹ The

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷According to Barbara Haskell, in her monograph Burgoyne Diller, this proposal was rejected by the rabbi due to the content of a swastika-like form in Greene's panel.

¹²⁸Basil Turchenco to Xceron, 8 May 1940, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294, Frame 0015.

¹²⁹Amoroso to Xceron, 24 March 1941, City of New York Art Commission Archive, New York City Hall.

preliminary approval was signed by Burgoyne Diller, the Assistant Project Supervisor, and by Audrey McMahon, Director. The final approval, dated June 8, 1942, assigned Howard Lee Irwin as the Unit Supervisor, and was signed by Burgoyne Diller as Director of the New York City Art Project.

Finally, between March of 1941 and June 1942, Diller was promoted to Director and could sign off on Xceron's project at Rikers Island. Diller, more than anyone else, promoted abstraction not as something rarefied in the sphere of the mystical as Hilla Rebay proposed, but rather as part and parcel of art's relationship to life, much like the earlier revolutionary Russian Constructivists. For the commission, Xceron was asked to provide a color sketch and detail, as well as a blueprint and photographs of the intended work (figs. 66 A, B, C). The space was variously referred to as the Assembly Room, Christian Science or Hebrew Chapel at Rikers Island Penitentiary. Xceron's proposal was for two panels: the left mural, measuring 16 feet 9 inches x 8 feet 5 1/2 inches, and the right one, measuring 16 feet 9 inches x 8 feet 7 1/2 inches, at a cost of a dollar per square foot. He commenced the work on April 16, 1941 and completed the murals on February 2, 1942 (fig. 66 C).

Xceron's presentation included a thesis statement proposing murals "non-figurative or non-objective in

conception, wherein all traces of reality are removed," and which would be "as abstract and as pure as architecture."¹³⁰ They would be composed:

Of predominantly rectangular shapes, squares, and vertical lines related to other invented elements. The unity of texture and design, the structural color, surface space and the integration of all plastic means to create absolute form, all would be so composed that the aesthetic sense would be continually aroused and satisfied by the inevitable succession of these relationships.¹³¹

Xceron stressed the harmonious relationships of the panels to the architectural integrity of the building design, and of the interior space. "Through this harmonious expression of plastic unit," Xceron continued, "the spiritual which we have in the world will be strongly stimulated and mystified."¹³² These spiritual proclivities were present in the artist and were in sympathy with Rebay's views. But Xceron's goal in this case, like Diller's, was to remove art from the ivory tower and place it at the service of life, as had the Russian Constructivists.

Hugh Tyler, Unit Supervisor of the Mural Painting Division, wrote Xceron that he had assigned as his assistant John Joslyn, who had helped Ilya Bolotowsky with his mural

¹³⁰WPA/FAP Papers, Riker's Island Penitentiary Project, Jean Xceron Painted Panels for the Unitarian Chapel, Art Commission of the City of New York Archives.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

for Welfare Island.¹³³ There is no other information refuting or confirming the involvement of Joslyn in the painting of these murals. The typical assistance given by helpers included taking care of the supplies, the mixing of colors, stretching of canvas, and/or laying in of color to large areas already drawn in by the main artist. Whether helped by Joslyn or done independently, the completed mural panels¹³⁴ were delivered by the Federal Works Agency Work Projects Administration Art Program, New York City WPA Art Project to the Jewish Chapel at Riker's Island Penitentiary in March, 1942.¹³⁵

Xceron's involvement with the WPA continued in 1942, when President Roosevelt turned it into the War Services Project. He worked with several other artists under Lee Krasner on the War Services Windows. The Krasner crew was composed of Ben Benn, Frank Greco, Ray Klein, Agostino, Ernest Truback, Jackson Pollock and Xceron.

In May 1942, Krasner accepted an assignment to work with the Higher Education Division of the City of New York Board

¹³³Tyler to Xceron, 9 June 1941, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294, Frame 0020.

¹³⁴A written and telephone request was made by the author to the New York City Department of Corrections to locate the murals. Thomas McCarthy of the Archives Division contacted the present warden of Riker's Island who promptly responded by checking the walls for any trace of the murals. Unfortunately they could not be located.

¹³⁵Herman Grasberg, receipt, 9 March 1942, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294, Frame 0024.

of Education.¹³⁶ This project consisted of twenty-one displays for the windows of department stores throughout the New York area. The purpose of these displays was to advertise the war training courses offered at Public New York City colleges. It was successfully completed based upon a congratulatory letter from Pearl Bernstein, the administrator of the Board of Higher Education, to Audrey McMahon, then the general supervisor of the City War Services Program:

As for the artists, I would like to mention each of them by name, for they patiently attempted to get hold of a vague idea and did materialize it. They went around the colleges with Mrs. Stewart and really got under their subject, as the designs and sketches they produced show. Miss Kay Klein, Mr. Xceron, Mr. Jackson Pollock, Mr. Frederick Hauck, Mr. Ben Benn, Mr. Agostino, Mr. Greco, Mr. Truback made a fine crew.¹³⁷

Krasner's approach to the conception of the project was to create the panels using a combination of photographic and collage media, with the help of the other artists and the Photographic Division. As described by Ellen G. Landau, based upon Krasner notes, she would first have a subject photographed, "then return to the studio and have her assistants enlarge, cut out, and montage the important

¹³⁶Ellen G. Landau and Jeffrey D. Grove, Lee Krasner: A Catalogue Raisonné (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995): 161-201.

¹³⁷Bernstein to McMahon, 1 October 1942, Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294, Frame 0022.

images."¹³⁸ Landau noted that a common event of the late thirties, early forties period was a gathering of large numbers of people for 'window night,' which included the "unveiling of a new installation."¹³⁹ For the War Services Windows, Krasner "had to coordinate her twenty one displays with a large photomural designed for the WPA by Herbert Bayer, a former teacher at the Bauhaus."¹⁴⁰

This mural was about the City College's specialties or disciplines, such as engineering or aeronautics, and was entitled, "The City College of New York 1874-1942." According to Landau, Krasner was in part inspired by the Bauhaus aesthetic of incorporating design and photographs. Xceron had experienced the Bauhaus aesthetic through the proximity of artists Moholy-Nagy, Kandinsky, Léger and others in Paris in the late twenties-early thirties, and used it in this mural collaboration.

Because these works were a collaboration, the individual contributions cannot be discerned. However, Landau identified the panel on cryptography by Benn, whose signature on the lower right is slightly perceptible in the photos. These works are not extant and are available only in documentary photos.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

Through letters such as Bernstein's, and Krasner's notations as posited by Landau, the process for the physical manifestation of each work or series on the same subject involved visiting the branches to see what was being offered in terms of courses. The subjects included topics such as ballistics, chemistry for explosives manufacture, cryptography, decoding, cartography, meteorology, optics, metallurgy, mechanical drawing and more.

Used for inspiration, these subjects would be represented or alluded to in the montages in the form of pictures combined with typography. If one were to hazard a guess as to the panels Xceron executed, one would choose Radio (fig. 67), if for no other reason than that in 1946 he painted Radar (fig. 1), which in abstract terms, alluded to sound wave impulses.

Radar was inspired partly from Xceron's work on this series, even if the imagery differed stylistically. Whereas the Radio montages utilized the representational or figurative mode along with typography, Radar was completely rendered in abstract forms or shapes upon a seemingly floating plane. The works have a common inspiration derived from science, and a concern for communication.

This chapter dealt with Xceron's 1935 Garland Gallery and 1938 Nierendorf exhibitions which were pivotal for the artist's recognition in the United States due to their successful reception and attendance by the future American

Abstract Expressionists. Xceron's strategic associations, with Parr and Sweeney for example, were relevant to his career especially in helping him attain government work.

Xceron's association with Kandinsky in Paris through Zervos, and as art correspondent for the European editions of the Chicago Tribune, reinforced his interest in this abstract master who, not only inspired him formally, but also in his views of painting's correspondences to music, and to science. This appreciation for the older artist was strengthened when in 1939 he worked for Hilla Rebay and the Museum of Non-Objective Painting whose collection contained many Kandinskys. Xceron's relationship with Rebay was like a Damoclean sword, or a Janus faced image, it had its good and bad aspects. It was, however, decisive for the oeuvre of the artist because she patronized his works, and helped to make his reputation by including him in many exhibitions.

Xceron's relationship to associations such as the AAA, the WPA/FAP and his personal political orientation were also included in this chapter and related to one another. This acceptance, by the AAA while he was simultaneously considered one of the French avant garde, illustrates this venue's flexible character. Like Xceron's, this group's early engagement with abstraction has still not been appreciably recognized. Not only did they serve as an exhibition venue for Xceron but the AAA enabled him to make valuable friendships, with members, such as Diller, while

renewing old ones, with Mondrian for example.

His liberal stance in politics allied him to art figures such as Smith, Lekakis, Stamos, Dorros, and Zervos. This position also stimulated his many entries into democratic benefits and drives which as a result, promoted his work. A measure of success which began during the thirties Paris years, and continued to develop into the forties in New York, will be seen to have a bearing on the subsequent period 1945-49, which will comprise the next chapter.

Chapter Four: 1945-1949

Xceron's contributions to American modernism, and specifically abstraction, were substantial. Through his personal style he inspired many American artists, most importantly Smith and Rothko. As an art critic for American newspapers abroad and home he transmitted information about the various personalities and styles of the European avant-garde. His works which frequently appeared in Christian Zervos' Cahiers d'Art, served as inspiration to many artists in America including Arshile Gorky. As a liaison to Hilla von Rebay and as guardian of the Guggenheim collection he acted as counsel to many of the American avant garde. Xceron was also Rebay's valuable adviser for many years, not to mention her painting partner. And yet, Xceron has remained virtually unrecognized for the past thirty years as has pre-second World War American modernism.

As I noted in my introduction, revisionist studies on American modernism, groups and artists have been written recently, but many more are necessary. The AAA is also being reconsidered, and Xceron as a member is being tied into this matrix. But, although he was crucial to a number of Abstract

Expressionists, his individual effect on them has not been treated. Susan Strickler, in discussing American abstraction of the thirties and forties, apprised the reader that one reason the AAA did not maintain a strong continuity through the forties, the Abstract Expressionist period, was due to its lack of stylistic cohesion. She also attributed the eclipsing of the AAA by the Abstract Expressionists to politically related reasons including the phasing out of the Federal Art Project. In addition, she noted that several artists had retired from membership because they felt the association had achieved its goal in making abstraction known to the American public.¹

Strickler's take on American abstraction is that it occurred in waves; thus AAA abstraction belonged to the second phase. Having become accepted by the mid-forties they lost their radical avant-garde status to the next wave, the Abstract Expressionists. This traditional reading has certain problems when applied to reputations such as Xceron's or Graham's, artists who created abstractions from the twenties or earlier. Such figures were progenitors or early links of American abstraction to thirties abstraction,

¹Susan Strickler and Elaine Gustafson, The Second Wave: American Abstraction of the 1930s and 1940s, exhibition catalogue, (Worcester, Mass: Worcester Art Museum, 1991): 21.

and thus closed the perceived gap in the literature, between first and second generation abstraction.

The contributions of Latin Americans to American modernism has been acknowledged, most prominently in all the writings about Torres-Garcia, Xceron's friend. But, as yet Xceron's impact on the Latin American artists has not been acknowledged. This thread dates back to the Paris years when the Madi group exhibited in Argentina and Paris, and reproduced Xceron's works in their magazine Arte Madi International. Xceron was among the first abstract artists to show in Brazil in the Salao de Maio of the early thirties. After seeing Xceron's reproductions Sandu Darrie, a Rumanian artist who studied in Paris and later moved to Cuba, became an exhibiting member of this group. Xceron's archives contain much correspondence with Darrie which clearly evidences the older master's impact on the latter's style and ideology.²

The reasons for Xceron's neglect have been mentioned elsewhere but need to be restated here within a different context. First, was his own stubborn refusal to be part of any group, or identified with any one style. As a result, Xceron who defies categorization, has no fixable identity nor can his style or persona, be identified strictly with

²Xceron Files, aaa, Reel #D294.

the AAA, or the Abstract Expressionists, nor with the Cercle et Carré or the Abstraction Création groups.

One crucial reason for his eclipse was the confusing press he received throughout his life that created a false image of the artist. It detracted from his importance and obscured his place in the history of any particular country. Not only are the historical documents multi-lingual and multi-cultural, but they are scattered across several continents. Xceron's triple alliance to Greece, the United States and France served to obfuscate his contributions, and to lessen his importance. When compared to artists such as William Baziotes or Theodoros Stamos, both born in the United States and of Greek ethnic background, whose oeuvre remains largely in America, this point is re-enforced. Despite Xceron's early presence in the United States as a child of 14 and his American education in the teens at the Corcoran, he is still viewed by many Americans as a Greek artist. In contrast, he is seen by the Greek Community as an American, of Greek heritage. By others yet, he was seen as a French artist. The resulting fragmentation of Xceron's identity is partly due to his inclusion in Franco-Greco-American art exhibition associations and press. Part of all and simultaneously of none, is a good descriptive term for the position of this underrated artist.

The following examples will disclose the variety of exhibiting venues, or press with which Xceron associated and which, due to their lack of homogeneity, mitigated Xceron's public image. Seen as a member of the Ecole de Paris, a broad term that did not reference any particular art style but covered the many modernist proclivities apparent in the Parisian avant-garde, Xceron was not written about as much as he deserved in the American literature of the thirties. The profusion of Parisian press reviews, however, attest to his accomplishments.

In December 1929 Xceron exhibited works done in a Synthetic Cubist style with other members of the so-called Ecole de Paris at the gallery Dalmau in Barcelona. Miró, Picasso, Maurice Raynal and Torres-Garcia already had a history with this avant-garde gallery.³ The show was reviewed by A. De Faigairolle who described Xceron's works as "resonant" and "reverberat[es]ing."⁴ One of his works was reproduced in the gallery Dalmau,⁵ leaflet, and was entitled

³Green, Cubism and its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916-1928: 66.

⁴A. De Faigairolle, L'Intransigeant, 6 December 1929. Scrapbook Archives of the Les Surindépendants, Grande Palais, Paris, France.

⁵Ecole de Paris, Galerie Dalmau, Barcelona, December 1929. The author was not permitted to copy the illustrations from this pamphlet at the IMEC Archives in Paris, due to its delicate condition.

Composition No. 14. The show was divided into categories of domestic, or Spanish, and foreign artists. Among the local artists listed were a number of Xceron's lifelong friends: Angel Planell, Pedro Daura, Emilio Grau Sala, Miguel Villa and Joachin Torres-Garcia.

The catalogue also listed many foreign artists including Jean and Sophie Arp, Theo Van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, Otto and Adya van Rees, Georges Vantongerloo, Jean Héliou, Otto Freundlich and Xceron. Examples of the type of work shown here included Van Doesburg's Elementarist Composition, a Torres-Garcia painting entitled Cave, which showed an outline of farm barns and geometric planes, and Xceron's Composition No. 14, an abstracted landscape with a large schematic female figure in the foreground.⁶

In 1930 Xceron was also included in a group of Greek artists working in Paris. As part of this circle he sent works to Athens for exhibition at the Zapeion in November and December of that year. The title of this show, Greek Artists in Paris, implied that Xceron was an artist of Greek origin and training.⁷

⁶The author was not allowed to copy this work from the catalogue in the Herbin Archives at IMEC, Paris, due to its fragile condition.

⁷Zapeion Collection, Greek Artists in Paris, (Athens: November-December, 1930), unpub., aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

Xceron was also included in a group of American artists in a show at the Galerie de la Renaissance in January and February of 1932. Abraham Rattner, John Graham, Walter Pach, Carl R. Holty and Frederick Kann also participated. Graham is listed with Xceron's address in the catalogue, and showed two works entitled, Peinture. Xceron exhibited three canvases under the same title, Composition.⁸

The corresponding catalogue essay by Chil Aronson "Les Artistes Americains de Paris," stated that the artists of this group were underappreciated heroes who worked hard researching their plastic means under conditions of loneliness and sacrifice, but who remained inadequately supported by the American public. He also noted a spirit of restlessness in young American artists of his day, and attributed it to a struggle to express the spirit of their era.⁹

A number of Americans exhibited with Les Surindependents and were written about in the January 18, 1932 issue of the New York Herald Tribune, by an anonymous reviewer. His writing reflects the struggle of American

⁸There are no available reproductions of these works. Knowledge of them is through the catalogue work list, see following footnote.

⁹Chil Aronson, "Les Artistes Americains de Paris," Artistes Americains Modernes de Paris (Paris: Editions Le Triangle, 1932): 18.

abstract artists in their effort to be accepted by the world market and critical communities. He noted that "rather than retrospective, imitative or excessively modern, the [Galerie de la Renaissance] showing is said to be merely a sincere and honest attempt of a selected group of artists to show that Americans in Paris have been and still are working hard and producing works representative of American art which deserves a place in the world art picture of today."¹⁰ The essay mentioned that three women artists, as well as some who had never shown before, were included. In addition, Abe Rattner, Xceron and Hilaire Hiler were mentioned as the better known artists in the show. The review betrays a concern both for the American artist and his place in the international arena.

Xceron probably did not have the critical distance to realize that his lack of a strong identity with any one artistic group, would undermine his contributions. It remains contingent upon the present to re-contextualize and make a place for this individual without necessitating a group identity. His individual contributions and their affect on David Smith among other American artists, will be seen in the following sections.

¹⁰Anon., New York Herald Tribune, European Edition, 18 January 1932. Scrapbook Archives of Les Surindependents, Grande Palais, Paris.

Xceron's Legacy to David Smith

Xceron's work was familiar to American artists at least since 1930 when it was reproduced in Zervos' Cahiers d'Art, and his syndicated reviews for the Chicago Tribune were widely available, but the most direct impact Xceron made was through his exhibitions. Seminal among these was the Garland Gallery show which was attended by many avant-garde Americans who later became Abstract Expressionists. William Baziotes, Will Barnett, Nassos Daphnes, Theodoros Stamos, and virtually every artist of consequence was present at this show. After seeing this exhibition David Smith later recalled a conversation with Xceron:

Remember May 1935 when we walked down 57th Street after your show at Garland Gallery, how you influenced me to concentrate on sculpture. I'm of course forever glad that you did, its more my energy, tho I make 200 color drawings a year and sometimes painting but by having my identity as a sculptor, I can paint and I thus know myself better. But I paint or draw as a sculptor, I have no split identity as I did in 1935. Forever thanks.¹¹

Another of Smith's notes to Xceron stated: "And again let me thank you for those early days, which were most important to my direction. Like our talk down 57 St in 1935,

¹¹Letter from David Smith to Jean Xceron. aaa. David Smith Papers. Correspondence of February 7, 1956.

after your show at Garland. Regards, David S."¹²

The skepticism with which historians and critics at times evaluate the objectivity of an artist's statement, is illustrated by the lack of critical literature about Xceron's formal influences on Smith. Although this may be the case here, however, it also appears that an earlier research error may have contributed to Xceron's absence from the Smith literature. Because these Smith letters had been mistakenly filed under both John Graham's and Jean Xceron's names, at the aaa, they led researchers astray.¹³

There are extraneous facts mentioned in the letters by Smith which inform us that the letters were to Xceron such as: the date and time of his Garland Gallery exhibition and the walk, after the show, down 57th Street, as well as the regards Smith asked Xceron to convey to his wife Mary. Since Graham was in Paris at the time of the Garland exhibition, he could not have been the one walking with Smith on 57th

¹²Letter from David Smith, aaa, Xceron Files, Correspondence, April 22, 1957.

¹³In the introduction to the show David Smith: Eight Early Works, Rosalind Krauss mistakenly attributed this influence to John Graham. "In a curious letter written late in his career to John Graham, David Smith thanks the older painter for having convinced him in the fall of 1935, to become a sculptor." This error was repeated by Krauss in a subsequent book, David Smith: Terminal Ironworks. Professor Krauss personally rescinded the error in an interview with the author of Spring 1993.

Street. Joan Pachner in her notes accompanying an article on Smith and Roszak, perceived the error and wrote:

Rosalind Krauss, Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith, Cambridge, Mass., 1971, p. 35 ft. 18, states that Smith thanked Graham for convincing him to become a sculptor. It seems, however, that this letter must be the one written to his former teacher and friend Jean Xceron, note dated February 7, 1956, printed in Garnet McCoy, David Smith New York. 1973, p.206.¹⁴

Other reasons for this error could have been due to the closeness and direct contact of Graham and Smith at Bolton Landing. Dorothy Dehner, Smith's first wife wrote the introduction to John Graham's System and Dialectics of Art. The Smiths spent time with Graham in Paris in 1935. Thus, it could have been an error of assumption due to the close proximity and ties of this trio.

Xceron's influences on the younger artist have been acknowledged by Smith himself and by Daniel Robbins who wrote an essay for Xceron's retrospective at the Guggenheim. As early as 1930 Graham and Matulka provided Smith with the Cahiers d'Art of Christian Zervos. Thus, Smith would have seen Xceron's works often illustrated in its pages, if he had not already seen his work personally which is likely

¹⁴Joan Pachner, "Theodore Roszak and David Smith: A Question of Balance," Arts, February 1984, p.114.

because the two had been friends since 1930.¹⁵ When Smith arrived in New York, Dorothy Dehner recommended that he study at the Art Students League with Jan Matulka. Smith's other teacher had been Kimon Nicolaidis who was Xceron's close associate and schoolmate.

The formal convergences between Xceron's and Smith's works are seen when comparing a Xceron Peinture reproduced in Cahiers d'Art #5-8 of 1934 and a Smith Untitled (Virgin Islands Map) (Fig. 68) dated 1933. Besides the horizontal format utilized by both artists in these works, the two paintings are similar compositionally. The loosely fanning circular forms lend asymmetrical weight to the right side. Comblike elements and ovals are also present as are negative areas encircling the vocabulary of similarly loose forms. Only the black and white reproductions of Xceron's Peinture 1 and 2, 1932-34 (figs. 46 A and B) in Cahiers d'Art were available, thus the colors cannot be compared.¹⁶ However, a comparison to Smith's palette of blue and ocher, could be seen in the early Xceron Adam and Eve No. 9, 1919, (fig. 17) and, in his 1929 Chartres No.#1E. (Fig. 10)

¹⁵ Cahiers d'Art, No. 9-10 (1931)., No. 5-6, No. 8-10, No. 9-10 with one illustration, (1932)., No. 1-2 with one illustration, No. 5-6 with three illustrations (1933)., No. 5-8 with two illustrations (1934)., No. 1-2 (1938)., No. 1-2 (1947).

¹⁶Present whereabouts of this work are unknown.

Another Xceron of 1932, an ink study, and his Composition 220A, 1936 (Fig. 49) as well as a study Untitled, (Fig. 48) of 1934-35, may have had some impact on Smith's Totemic images, specifically Smith's Untitled (Four Totemic Sculptures) (Fig. 69) 1956 and Untitled 1961 (Fig. 70) which both show a linear geometric approach as compared to the Xceron above listed works. Xceron's Composition 220A, 1936 is one of many works in this vein in which forms, geometrically ordered, suggest totems also found in the Smith Untitled (Four Totemic Sculptures), 1956. Totemism has long been regarded as a set of religious practices in "primitive" societies. Totemic images were utilized by the Abstract Expressionists to express the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious or primordial memory. Both Xceron and Smith had shown an interest in the expansion of the human consciousness. Smith as part of the Abstract Expressionist ethos often utilized Jungian symbols such as totems. Moreover, he also showed with the Willard Gallery whose director, Marian Willard and her friend Mary Mellon, were involved in the Bollingen Foundation lecture series which disseminated Jungian theory in America.¹⁷

At these lecture series, the thematic issues treated

¹⁷Stephen Polcari, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 45-47.

ranged from art, psychology, anthropology, to religion, alchemy and more. It was the intent of Mary Mellon to combine her interests in art "with her new concern with the expansion and evolution of human consciousness."¹⁸ Xceron whose Greek heritage included myth, heroic legend and spirituality, would have found the concepts of the Abstract Expressionists and those espoused by the Bollingen Foundation appealing. He had been back in the United States since 1935 and would have taken part in the issues of that period -- for example his supporter, James Johnson Sweeney was a Bollingen author with whom he corresponded regularly.

Both Smith and Xceron were working from the common source of Picasso and out of Synthetic Cubism, into Surrealism and were aware of the sculptural idiom of Julio Gonzalez. Besides featuring Xceron's illustrated works, the Cahiers d'Art showed the sculptures of Gonzalez.¹⁹ One issue of 1935 reviewed Gonzalez's Galerie Percier exhibition, including six full length reproductions which Smith would have seen.²⁰ Gonzalez's work is seminal to Smith's oeuvre which contained much formal similarity to the older master's welded forms. Smith learned about Gonzalez from Graham who

¹⁸Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁹Cahiers d'Art Vol. 10, No. 1-4, pp. 32-35.

²⁰Ibid.

gave him a Gonzalez sculpture in 1930, but also from his reproductions in the Cahiers d'Art, as well as from Xceron of whom he inquired about this master's working methods and personality.²¹

In the 1950's Smith undertook to write an article on Gonzalez and corresponded with Xceron, asking about Gonzalez's working methods and personality. Although, the information from Xceron did not reach him in time for the article's printing, the Smith letters to Xceron are important, in that they evince a previous ongoing discussion between the two about Gonzalez. In one communication Smith asked Xceron what Gonzalez's attendance and role within the Cercle et Carré had been, and whether Gonzalez was vocal or as secretive as the French press had described him.²²

Smith wanted to ascertain Gonzalez's personal preferences at these meetings, and he asked: "Did you drink wine, or eat at these meetings, or coffee or was it just art - did you go to cafes afterwards for wine or coffee - if so - did Gonzalez team off with anyone whom he liked

²¹Xceron Correspondence with David Smith. aaa Files, Reel #D294.

²²Jean Xceron Correspondence with David Smith, aaa Files, Reel # D294.

especially; did he talk painting or sculpture then;...."²³

Other questions followed: "Do you remember the year Gonzalez started work for Picasso (It must have been about 1928) And it was on the statue (iron) of Guillaume Apollinaire, now in Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Did Gonzalez ever mention it. Did you ever see it the statue at Apollinaire's tomb, I mean. If so tell me about it., subject, size etc."²⁴ Xceron had also provided Smith with Gonzalez's home address so that he could contact him directly.²⁵

Formal similarities are also present in the later Cubi or Zig sculptures of Smith which if compared to Xceron's early 1930's ink and watercolor studies have a strong relationship. Cubi XXVIII, 1965 (Fig. 71) when seen next to Xceron's Composition #148, 1932 (Fig. 72) a watercolor and ink on paper, evinces the use of rectangular, parallelogram, and half square forms which create the positive space in conjunction with negative space. By 1965 the two had been friends for more than twenty five years maintaining a regular correspondence and visits to each other.

Xceron's assistance to Smith when creating his Medals

²³Letter dated December 7, 1955 from David Smith to Xceron. Jean Xceron Files, aaa, Reel # D294.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid, "John you gave me Gonzalez's address as 40 Rue Friant (home)."

for Dishonor, was noted by Thomas B. Hess. Smith discussed their manufacture and inspiration in an interview with Hess. Certain of Smith's works from this series, including The Secret Letter, may be read as cryptograms. After Smith stated that his letter cryptograms were written in Greek because "'Greek' is something you don't understand..." he concluded with "(Jean Xceron wrote my Greek for me)." ²⁶

In addition to this very direct influence of the Greek lettering, there was a political sympathy between the two artists who were anti-war individuals. Smith, in making the Medals of Dishonor 1937-40, was actually protesting the political war machine. Xceron never served in any army, and always supported liberal causes, frequenting the socialist Spartacus Cafe in the twenties. It is also possible that during their many meetings, Xceron told Smith about his own welding methods as a child at his father's foundry in Greece. Xceron constructed welded sculptures from metal scraps found on the floor of his father's blacksmith's shop. Hess discussed Smith's use of found objects in his early works. ²⁷ David Smith signed many of his works ²⁸ with Greek

²⁶Thomas B. Hess "Interview with David Smith", Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, London, October 1964. Reproduced in Arts, February, 1960, pp. 32-35.

²⁷Ibid., 34

²⁸Ibid., 35.

alphabet initials and asked Xceron's advice about which antiquities to visit when on his trip to Greece.²⁹

**Xceron's Influence on, But Exclusion from,
Abstract Expressionism**

We have seen by the example of David Smith, often referred to as an Abstract Expressionist sculptor, that Xceron's works were known and admired by members of this cohort, and yet Xceron is omitted from this group's histories as well. There may have been some artificial prodding on the part of American critics to push the Abstract Expressionists into a neat category and simultaneously show them as heroic individuals, and for several reasons they may have been correct. Abstract Expressionism can be called a movement or school in that, enough of its artists shared similarities such as: a number of them had been friends, had worked on the WPA/FAP, hung out at 'The Club' socially, were associated with Betty Parsons Gallery or Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century, and drank at Cedar Tavern.

The Abstract Expressionists also shared an interest in thick impastoes, gesture, automatism, and similar art

²⁹Ibid., 32.

sources such as Surrealism even though they interpreted these concepts in individual distinct ways. Their philosophical or ideological bases were also congruent as they were interested in mythology, Freudian analysis and Jungian theory and their work in its monumental quality spoke of male energy and presence which has been likened by many specialists, to the grandeur of the expansive, rugged American landscape or even to cultural nationalism.³⁰

Until Abstract Expressionism, the history of American modernism tended to be one of individuals rather than cohesive schools, unlike European modernism with discussions of Cubism and Expressionism for instance. Artists who emerged as major talents such as O'Keeffe, Hartley, Davis, Weber, Stella, Demuth or Sheeler did not practice any one style consistently throughout their careers. Abstract Expressionism was a self-consciously constructed school which in a way is generational because almost none of the early abstractionists derived the benefits from the newfound acceptability of abstraction that took place with this group. The one prominent exception is Hofmann who while switching styles in his early career, by the late forties

³⁰Erika Doss, Benton, Pollock and the Politics of Modernism from Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), Introduction, and in reference to Benton's murals pp's 100-113.

became committed to the painterly richly impastoed surface and gestural style of Abstract Expressionism. Thus while the early modernists fought and suffered through the uncomfortable period until abstraction was accepted, the Abstract Expressionists came into public view with greater commercial possibilities whose benefits some were able to enjoy.

The following comments by Robbins echoed in numerous interviews, convey the impression of Xceron's temperament for his relatively unrecognized position: "No fanfare ever surrounded Xceron or his work. Temperamentally incapable of sensational behavior or active group participation, he could only continue to paint, even when the sudden explosion of a new kind of American abstract art began to command universal attention in the late 1940's and early 1950's."³¹ Xceron as an individual artist hesitant to join any group, and attached to the Rebay coterie, could not have joined her adversary's team even had he so desired. Peggy Guggenheim, with whom Rebay had been at odds, was the Guggenheim with whom the Abstract Expressionists associated.

Serge Guilbaut, a French-Canadian critic who scrutinized the socio-political aspects of Abstract Expressionism, proposed a view which may also be relevant to

³¹Robbins, Jean Xceron, p. 16.

Xceron's neglect. Guilbaut took a historical approach in revising the place of Abstract Expressionism, holding it up to socio-political scrutiny. He gave as reasons for the development of Abstract Expressionism: the de-Marxization of the American intellectuals, the decrease in political animosity toward Stalin, the increase in national spirit because of World War II, and the change in attitude on the part of the newly strengthened middle class.³² The results he proposed were due to Abstract Expressionism's basis in political centrism (being neither pro-Fascist or right nor Communist or left) and the liberated individual. Guilbaut also discussed the effect of the war on the emergence of an American avant-garde which he attributed to the shifting of art centers from Paris to New York.³³

At the time of Xceron's return to America from France, the Popular Front was so politically charged with the denial of communism that anything suggestive of foreign origin was rejected. With the Stalin/Hitler Pact, many American artists who had previously belonged to communist and socialist organizations, began to divorce themselves from this sector,

³²Serge Guilbaut *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), Chapter 3, pp. 101-165.

³³Ibid, Chapter 4, pp. 165-194.

or to reorient themselves towards Trotskyism, because of the stigma attached to communism as a form of Fascist politics. Xceron as an artist not only with a foreign name but also with French training may have experienced exclusion from Abstract Expressionism because he was not American enough.³⁴

How do we reconcile and contextually place artists such as Xceron and Reinhardt who were related to both the old guard which was the AAA, and to the new wave which was Abstract Expressionism? Xceron for many reasons including his dual ethnicity, foreign residency, and his École de Paris designation, was shortchanged by the American critical community. The fact that Xceron after his return to the United States simultaneously exhibited with the AAA, which in its stylistic variety included the work of artists as different as Mondrian's or Héliou's, and, with the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors which included in its membership Gottlieb and Rothko, only complicated his context. He worked for Hilla Rebay at the Museum of Non-

³⁴The gist of Guilbaut's argument, that Abstract Expressionism was an image created, packaged and promulgated by the post war political machine to use as propaganda in Europe for the purpose of illustrating American supremacy, has shortcomings. He alluded to a type of organizational conspiracy which just was not probable in post-war America. The reasons for the creation and rise of any artistic group are much more complex and multivalent than the ones proposed by Guilbaut.

Objective Painting, and at the same time was championed by James Johnson Sweeney who wrote critiques for the Partisan Review and was employed by Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery. Alfred Barr, Jr., and Samuel Kootz were figures associated with Xceron and the Museum of Modern Art in some way, the latter becoming the dealer and propagandist of the Abstract Expressionists. How do we untangle the various complex threads of Xceron's issues and affairs in order to come to a synthetic vision about his life and work? Perhaps by relating some of the artistic and contextual issues of that period to Xceron, we can clarify several of the above highlighted paradoxes.

Some contemporary issues discussed by the American avant-garde during the post-World War II period were mirrored in Xceron's writing as can be witnessed by his statements. About his feelings regarding past models Xceron stated: "Quality art remains forever. The Egyptian art and the Greek sculpture still shed their rays of glory."³⁵ Xceron clearly felt the way that most of the fathers of abstraction did about the timelessness of abstraction seeing it in universalist, salvationist and eternal terms.

In 1951, S. Carl Fracassini while working on his masters

³⁵S. Carl Fracassini, "The Dilemma of the 20th Century American Artists," M.F.A. Thesis, University of Iowa, 1951, 142-143.

thesis created a questionnaire which he sent to about one hundred artists of varied backgrounds "selecting them on the basis of a study of the current problems of the artist as indicated in his painting and his comments in magazines, catalogues, lectures, and conversation."³⁶ Fracassini stated: "It has been said that in order to create a new art form, the works of the past must be denied. Do you share this opinion?" Of the sixty four responses including Xceron's, the majority considered it foolhardy to deny the past. Xceron's answer was the following:

To deny the past in order to create new art forms is like striving to achieve freedom by force and devoting our feelings for expressing ourselves exclusively to any color combinations which would produce works of equal artistic value as ornamentation and decorative design.³⁷

Another common issue of interest to these artists was the one about "form" and "formlessness" in art and can be observed in the question posed to Xceron in a contemporary questionnaire. "Do you believe that the so-called glorification of shapelessness and formlessness in contemporary art is an inevitable reflection of our age?"³⁸ Xceron answered that art reflected the period in which it

³⁶Ibid., 142.

³⁷Ibid., 142-43

³⁸Ibid., 142-143.

was created and wrote:

This accidental grouping of different art elements, subconsciously put together in a haphazard emotional manner to create an overwhelming impression when looked on is an art expression of the same spirit that inspires some of the most modern painters today.³⁹

He was of course referring to the Abstract Expressionists and meant the word 'modern' in the most complimentary way.

Other intellectual issues fermenting in the context of post World War II America pertained to the creation of an American form of art. Up until that time Paris had led the way in world art developments and, according to Guilbaut, the transition to New York as the leader took place in "two steps: it moved first from nationalism to internationalism and then from internationalism to universalism."⁴⁰ As a result the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors rejected national art styles and by 1944 counted an international artist like Xceron as one of its members. However, the younger artists also needed to forge a unique setting for the development of their art. At the same time as projecting themselves as international, their self image was rendered as aggressively American. Art dealers Samuel Kootz and Sydney Janis, and the patron Peggy Guggenheim,

³⁹Ibid., 142-43

⁴⁰Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, 174.

were involved in helping to create this image for the younger men who became known as Abstract Expressionists.

In order to gain ascendancy over the Ecole de Paris and abstract art as shown by the AAA, the Abstract Expressionists needed to ally themselves with international avant-garde abstraction while simultaneously rejecting Parisian idioms publicly and thunderously. In the press, public statements, exhibitions, and through advertising done by their dealer Samuel Kootz, they distanced themselves from what they perceived as foreign art. Thus it could be concluded that, in denying European influence and rejecting Parisian sources and protocols, the Abstract Expressionists by extension renounced Xceron. But, Xceron in contrast, was also patronized by Samuel Kootz who included him in a show entitled New Frontiers of American Painting at the Hastings House in New York in 1943. In addition, during the post war period, Xceron was enjoying a measure of success having won acclaim not only in Paris, Athens, Brussels, Buenos Aires and Cuba but also in New York. His works had already entered the collections of the Modern, Whitney, Guggenheim Museums and the A.E.Gallatin, Zervos, and Phillips Collections, just to name a few of the most outstanding.

To follow the trajectory of Xceron's career in the forties would be to witness his rise in the American arena,

creating the paradox and question why did he fall into obscurity between his death and the present? Bernard S. Myers wrote his influential Modern Art in the Making published by McGraw Hill in 1950, in which Xceron was included, and the University of Georgia commissioned his work Radar in 1946. At this time Xceron's works were exhibited internationally and included in such prestigious exhibits as the Kunsthaus Zurich's Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kunstpflege in U.S.A., and in the Sydney Janis and Betty Parsons Galleries auction show entitled Artists for Neighborhood Art. In the fifties he was included by the Zabriskie, a gallery known for showing Abstract Expressionism, in a collage exhibition, and by Kootz in New Frontiers of American Painting. The question which begs asking here is why would galleries such as the Kootz, the Janis, the Zabriskie known for their preference for Abstract Expressionism also exhibit works by Xceron? What type of works was Xceron making at this time which appealed to this sector?

A widely published 1946 work owned by the Georgia Museum of Art was Radar, (fig. 1) created with lyrical playful lines, circles, and wedges floating in space, which shows that Xceron was creating works of a less rectilinear type than his late thirties canvases such as Painting No.

231, 1937. (fig. 73) An intermediary work such as the Guggenheim Museum's Untitled, 1943 (fig. 74) witnesses Xceron's struggle to come to terms with both the rectilinear and gestural strains within his art. In softly nuanced gradations of background color, diaphanous geometric formations are juxtaposed against a gestural splash at the lower right bounded by a square form and containing smaller squares. Given the nature of these gestural works, and his early influence on the Abstract Expressionists through his published biomorphic work in the Cahiers d'Art, it is not surprising to have found Xceron included in the contemporaneous exhibits along with the younger Abstract Expressionists. What is puzzling is that he has not been memorialized as one of them or as their predecessor.

Most critics have written about Abstract Expressionism as a noisy, American, gestural, more objective style,⁴¹ and as opposite to earlier abstraction. For the most part the general opinion is that because of these reasons Abstract Expressionism eclipsed the work of earlier abstract artists. The facts indicate that some of the Abstract Expressionists considered Xceron as a progenitor of American abstraction.

⁴¹John R. Lane, "The Meanings of Abstraction," Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America 1927-1944, John R. Lane Ed., (Pittsburg and New York: Museum of Art Carnegie Institute and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983-84), 14.

One need only look at David Smith's glowing letters to Xceron. That Xceron was esteemed by the Abstract Expressionists has been revealed not only by their statements, letters and interviews but also by their own admission in their style. What then has been the cause for his exclusion from the critical sector?

While still alive Xceron could promote his own art through his writings, exhibitions, and his powerful friends. Since their death and his, there have been very few acknowledgments of his contributions. Although the Guggenheim Museum of Art owns fourteen of his works they have hardly exhibited any since 1965, nor has the Museum of Modern Art. On the other hand, the Metropolitan Museum of Art most recently placed their Xceron Painting No. 260, 1942 (Fig. 75) on display, and the Newark Museum of Art has been exhibiting Xcerons. It may be that this will become a trend beginning a new era of recognition for the American artist of abstraction, Jean Xceron.

Although Xceron alternated between biomorphism and geometric abstraction in the thirties, by the 1940's he had developed a very personal style and allowed the evidence of his hand to show in the brushwork itself. However, his style was more planned, studied or controlled than that of Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock or William de

Kooning. His accent was on spatial effects created through the use of color and softly graduated nuanced lighting which alternately revealed and swallowed his forms.

The works Composition 275, 1945, (fig. 40) Watercolor No. 308, 1947 (fig. 76), and Composition No. 319, 1948 (fig. 41) all contain the qualities of Xceron's personal style. Rather than grids, the paintings contain diagonal hatchwork combined with vertical-horizontal lines and soft seemingly rubbed off areas such as the lower left of Composition No. 319 or the lower right and middle left areas of Composition No. 275. On the latter's upper right, are a series of vertical lines overlaid on several spatial topographies insinuated through the use of several softly smudged transparent colors. This hatching appears at places such as the lower center, and at others partially concealed as on the lower right where it adjoins the circular form. In the upper central portion of the canvas is a dark circular form upon a light colored area, whose right portion disappears under the series of hatchstrokes and vertical lines suggesting multiple spatial planes. Through several colors and their soft transparent smudging Xceron has created multiple planar topoi. One plane is suggested by the darker bottom center and upper left, another by the predominant pale blue of the overall composition, and another in the

right center by a darker blue.

In recapitulating Xceron's contributions to American abstraction, the most outstanding was his depiction of light which in its delicacy created a floating space seeming at times to swallow or to accentuate form. This quality manifested itself as early as 1923 in Landscape No. 36, (fig. 2) a Cézannist study, and continued into the early thirties violin series, exemplified by Violin No. 6E (fig. 27) and throughout the forties with Composition No. 269, (Fig. 77) to the fifties in Beyond White, (Fig. 78) up to the sixties the period of his death in Painting No. 430. (fig. 79). Even before the Cézanne studies in the late teens and early twenties, Xceron was interested in depicting floating space to signify the heavenly realm in his icons, through the use of color.

Xceron created his transparent realm, suggestive of multiple dimensions by subjecting his forms to a partial absorption, receding into a plane, or emerging out of it. His idiomatic use of light "radiated from the colors, clinging to the edges of form and imparting a certain ethereal quality."⁴² This particular identifying characteristic is also seen in the works of Mark Rothko.

Rothko was one artist whose interest lay in spatial

⁴²Robbins, Jean Xceron, 14.

ambiguity and whose presence at the Guggenheim warehouse was noted by Ward Jackson and Paul Katz.⁴³ Rothko could also have met Xceron at the Art Students League where he studied with Max Weber for a short period in 1925-26. Although Rothko's debt to Henri Matisse, Milton Avery or Max Weber⁴⁴ is far greater, there is some kinship to Xceron's work as well. Rothko's Multiform, 1948 (Fig. 80) and Xceron's Composition No. 285, 1945 (Fig. 81) evince the use of smudged areas to suggest multiple spatial planes. Were the linear elements omitted from the Xceron painting which utilized the browns, écrus and yellows, a rounded out rectangular element would appear as do one of the blocklike configurations within Rothko's Multiform.

Another worthwhile comparison which necessitates the hypothetical retraction of the linear network in Xceron's painting for the similarities to become more apparent, is between two works both entitled Multiform by the same artists. Xceron's Multiform 303, 1947, (Fig. 82) is articulated with grays, lilacs and blues with pink and

⁴³Paul Katz In conversation with the author, April 1997.

⁴⁴Diane Waldman, Mark Rothko, (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1978), 24. Waldman who wrote the catalogue accompanying the Rothko Retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1978, used his works Gethsemane and Primeval Landscape, both of 1945, to illustrate his stylistic debt to Weber's Cubist work.

yellow accents. Rothko's Multiform, 1948 utilizes mostly oranges, taupes, soft pink with accents in marine blue. What becomes apparent from the Xcerons is that the rectangular elements within the works contain graduated shading of the same color and in certain areas are apparently smudged. The two pink forms in the right middle portion of Xceron's Multiform 303 are very similar to the later forties' and fifties' Rothko color compositions. During the period 1935-36, Xceron's light source appears to have radiated out from the colors and seems to cleave onto the edges of his forms. By viewing Rothko's Yellow and Gold, 1956 (Fig. 83) next to Xceron's Composition No. 285, 1945 the kinship becomes even stronger due to the relationship of the golds which create floating expanses of color.

Conclusions

Rather than ebbing and flowing, American abstraction was continuous but at times differed morphologically. Taking on a geometric or an organic orientation its borders were so nebulous as to flow into one another. In the opening between the organicity of Dove who is considered a first generation abstractionist, and the geometricity of Diller who is placed within the second generation, lies Xceron who used both

vocabularies and worked in the period between first and second generation abstraction.

Rothko, Daphnes, Baziotes, Smith, Motherwell, Neumann and Reinhardt considered part of the New York School, as it was called by Harold Rosenberg, varied their artistic vocabularies as much as AAA artists Mondrian, Reinhardt or Héliou. Thus, it becomes necessary to examine individual works or at times oeuvres of artists and compare them for overall conformity.

The idea that the AAA, or Xceron, were eclipsed by the Abstract Expressionists, needs more examination. The Abstract Expressionists came into being after the Second World War, when they could benefit from the achievements of the earlier abstractionists. Their contributions and Xceron's to Abstract Expressionism need to be acknowledged. Also crucial, is the necessity for the recognition of Xceron's role as a link between first and second generation American abstractionists, and between American and European avant-garde artists.



fig. 1--Radar, 1946. Oil on canvas,
30x40", Georgia Museum of Art, The
University of Georgia.



fig. 2-- Landscape No. 36, 1923.
Watercolor and gouache, 19 x 15 1/2"
Maritza Zagoreos Collection

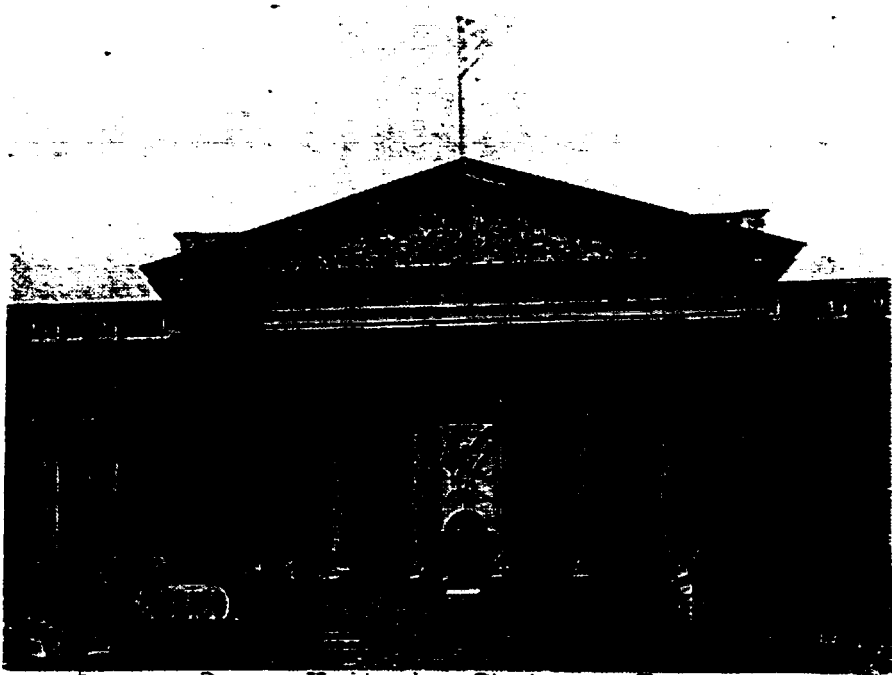


Fig. 3-- United States Treasury
Building, Banner by Xceron for
the Greek Independence Day
Pageant, Washington, D.C., SRGM
Xceron Files.

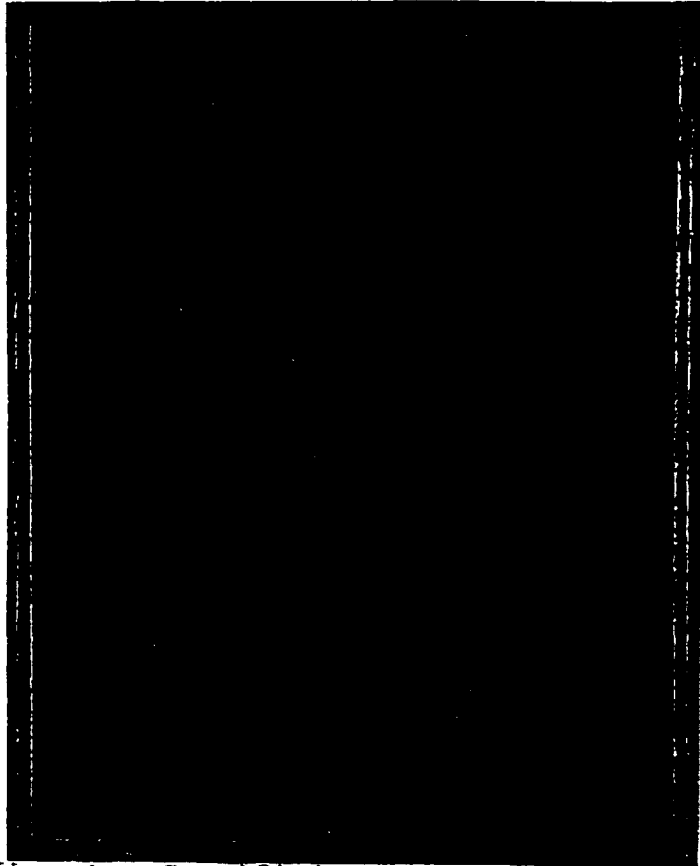


fig. 4-- Crucifixion No. 6, 1917. Oil on canvas, 11 1/2 x 9". Collection Maritza Zagoreos



fig. 5-- Icon 250A, Christ in Deisis,
1916. Tempera on board, 17 x 8".
Collection Maritza Zagoreos



fig. 6-- Peter Xirocostas, Sr., Metal
Objects, ca. 1900-1910. Metal and wood.
Variable dimensions. Vasily Xirocostas.



fig. 7-- Assorted Tools, 1900-1930,
Isary Town Hall. L to R: bow saw,
chisels, sledge hammer, hand hoe,
scythe, wedge, carpenter's plane,
auger, saw, sickles, file, hammer,
scale, planter's hoe, drill bit.



fig. 8-- The Museum of Non-Objective
Painting, Installation Photo of window
on opening night, 1939. Xceron
sculptures in windows.



fig. 9-- Isary Village from the Inn's balcony. Isary, Peloponnesus. Photo by author.

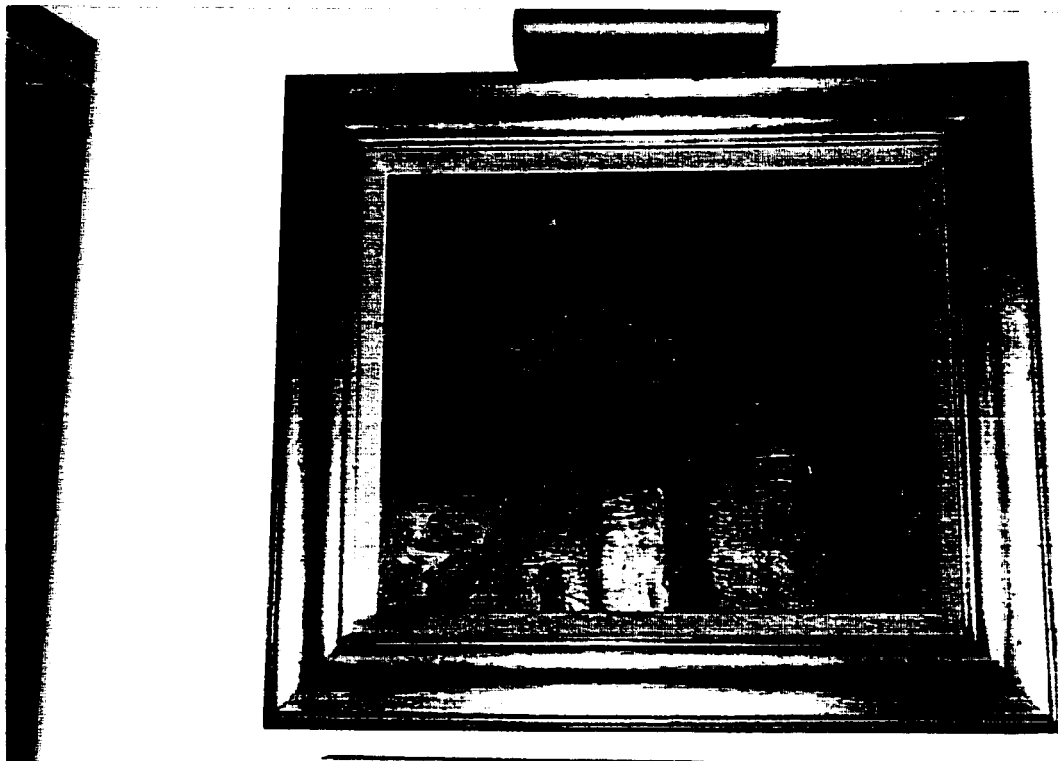


fig. 10-- Chartres, No. 1E, 1929. Oil
on board, 15 x 18". Collection Maritza
Zagoreos

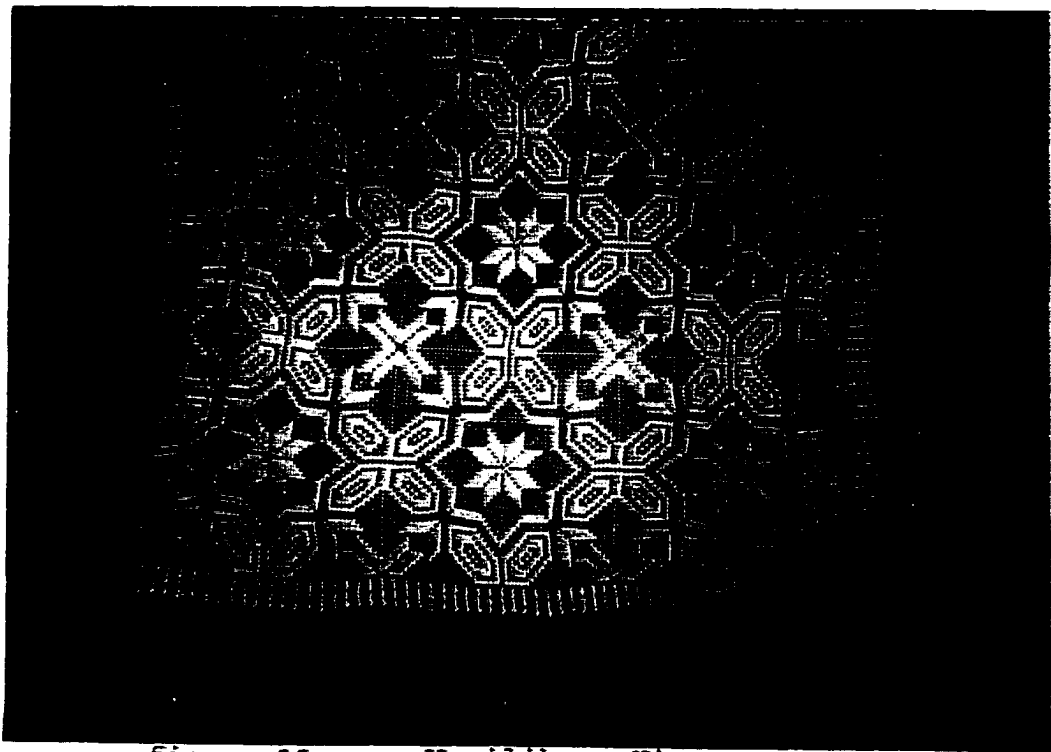


fig. 11a-- Vasiliky Xirocostas.,
Pattern, 1900. Xirocostas Family,
Isary, Peloponnesus, Greece.

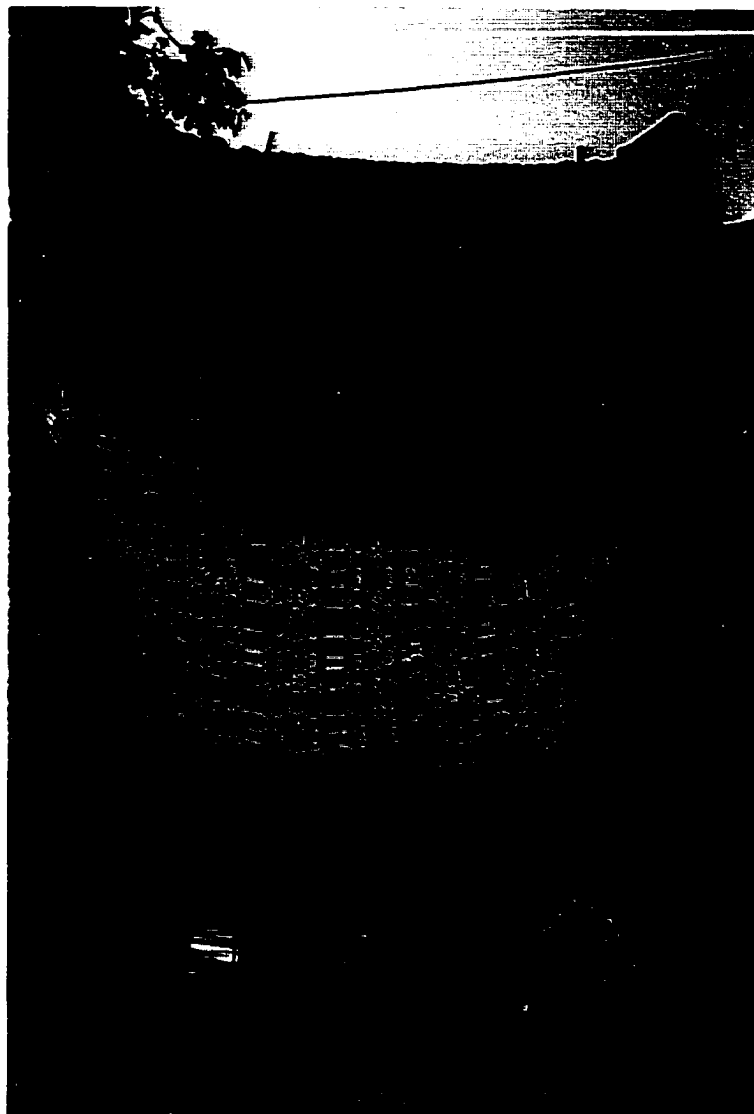


fig. 11b-- Vasiliky Xirocostas.
Handloomed Rug. Early 20th Century.
Xirocostas Family, Isary, Peloponnesus,
Greece.

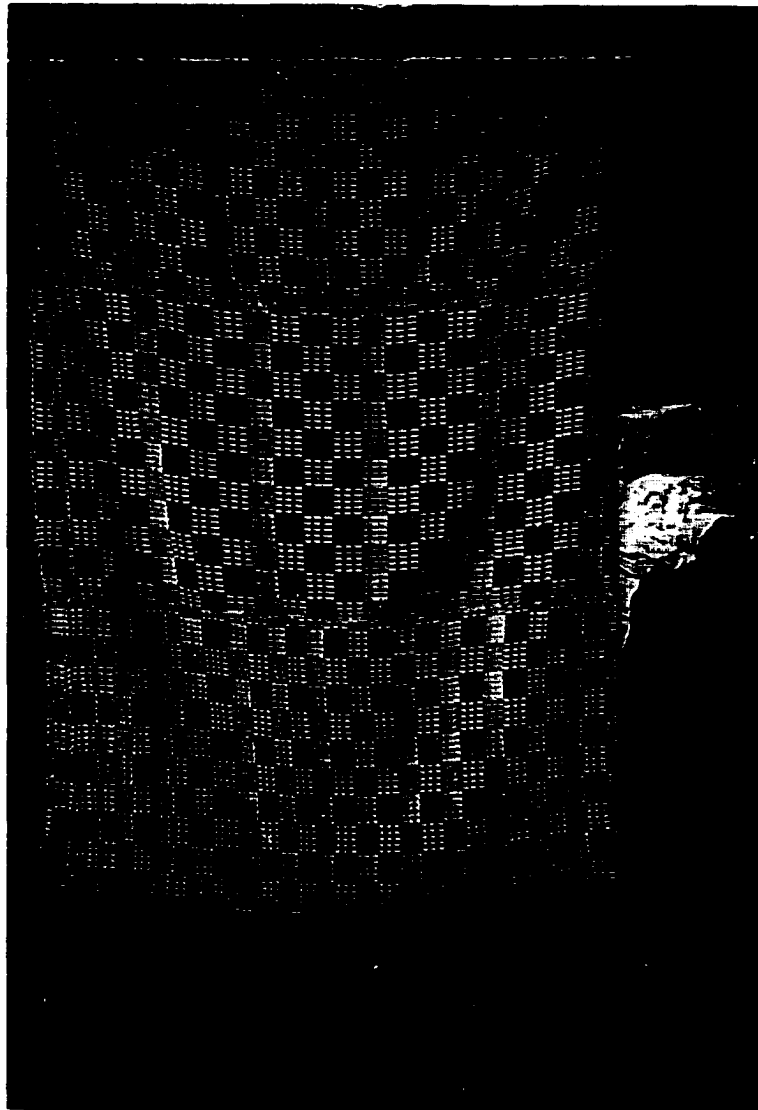


fig. 11c-- Vasiliky Xirocostas.
Handloomed household blankets. Early
20th Century. Xirocostas Family. Isary,
Peloponnesus, Greece.



Fig. 11d-- Xirocostas Women. Handloomed household blankets. Early 20th Century. Xirocostas Family, Isary, Peloponnesus, Greece.



Fig. 11e--Xirocostas Women. Handloomed wool satchel. Early 20th Century. Xirocostas Family. Isary, Peloponnesus, Greece.

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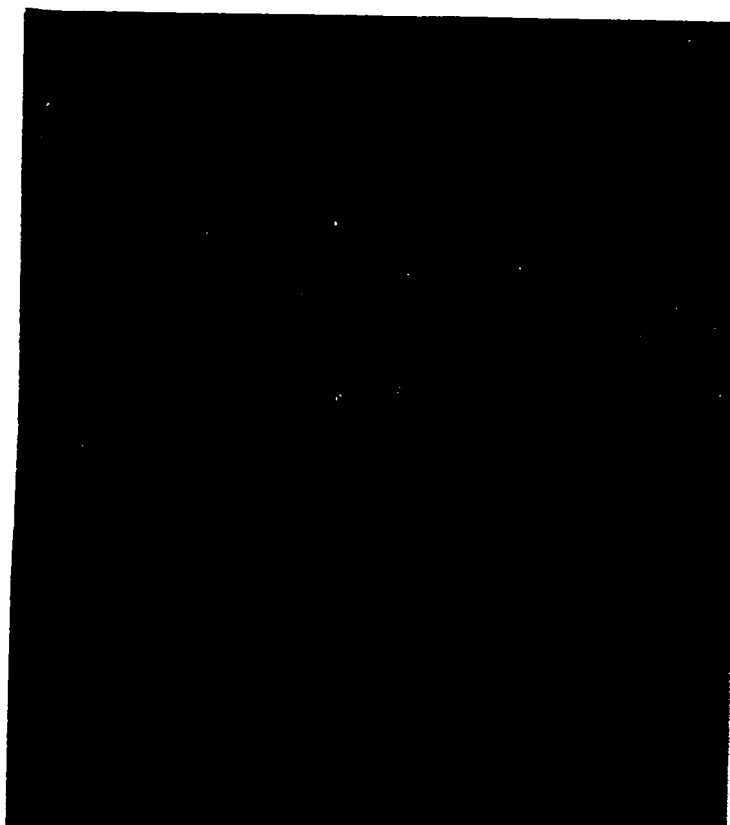


Fig. 11f-- Xirocostas Women. Handloomed cotton sheet. Early 20th Century. Xirocostas Family. Isary, Peloponnesus, Greece.

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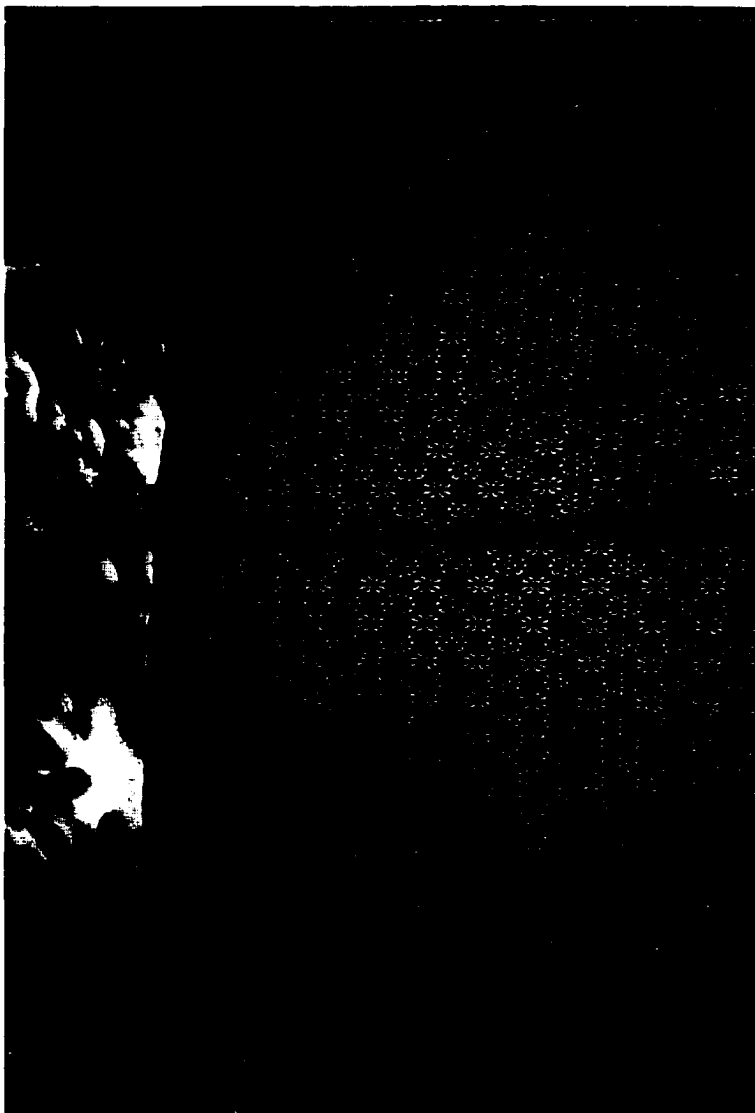


Fig. 11g-- Vasiliky Xirocostas.
Handloomed wool blanket. Early 20th
Century. Xirocostas Family. Isary,
Peloponnesus, Greece.



Fig. 11h-- Vasiliky Xirocostas.
Handloomed wool blanket. Early 20th
Century. Xirocostas Family. Isary,
Peloponnesus, Greece.



Fig. 12-- Apollo, 1914. Pencil on
paper. 24 x 18 1/2". Collection
Ms. Georgia Xeron

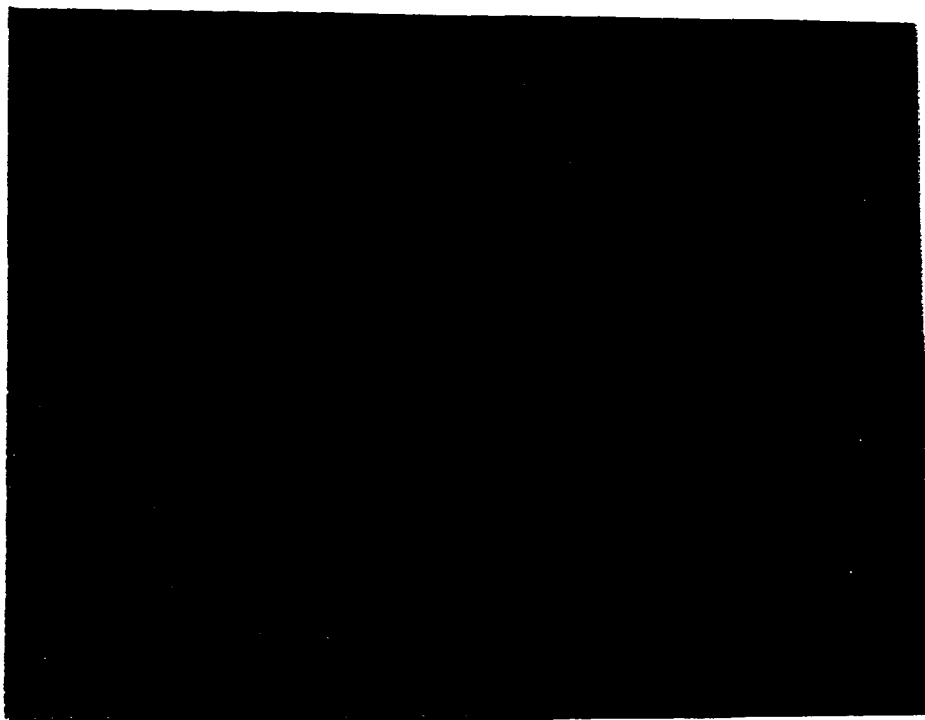


Fig. 13-- Gloucester Harbor, n.d.
Watercolor on paper. 14 x 18 1/2".
Collection Jeremy Salter.

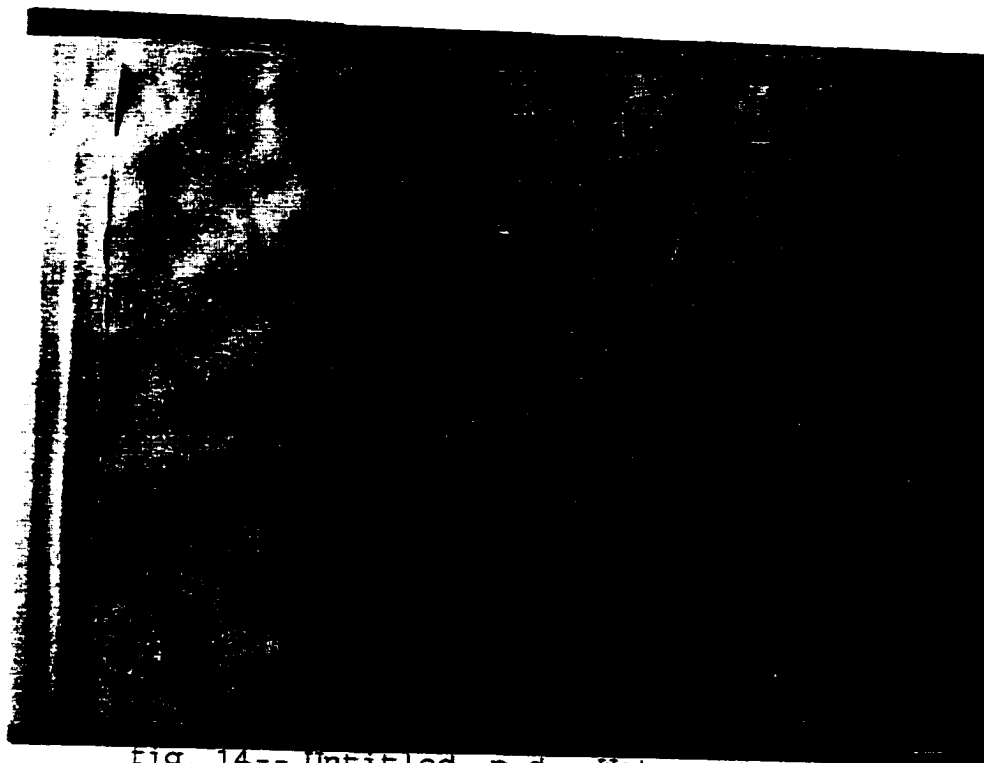


Fig. 14-- Untitled, n.d.. Watercolor on
paper. On verso of fig 13.
Collection Jeremy Salter.



Fig. 15-- A. P. Ryder, Moonlit Cove, 1880s. Oil on canvas, 14 1/8 x 17 1/8". The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.. Photo: N. Y. MMA, 1918. Rep. in W. I. Homer and L. Goodrich Albert Pinkham Ryder: Painter of Dreams. (N.Y.: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1989)

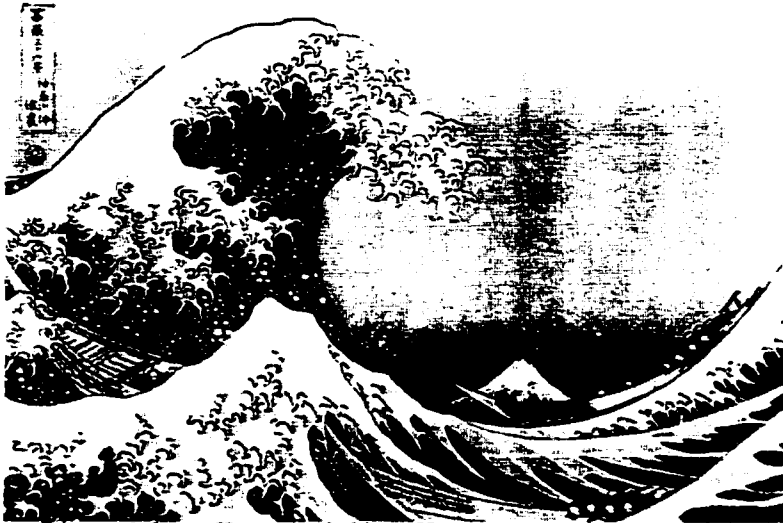


Fig. 16-- Katsushika Hokusai, The Great Wave off Kanagawa from 36 Views of Mt. Fuji, ca. 1825. N.Y. MMA, Rep. in Hugo Munsterberg, The Japanese Print: A Historical Guide, (N.Y., Tokyo: Weatherhill, 3rd print., 1988,) p. 188



fig. 17-- Adam and Eve No. 9, 1919. Oil
on canvas, 9 1/2 x 7 1/2". Collection
Maritza Zagoreos.

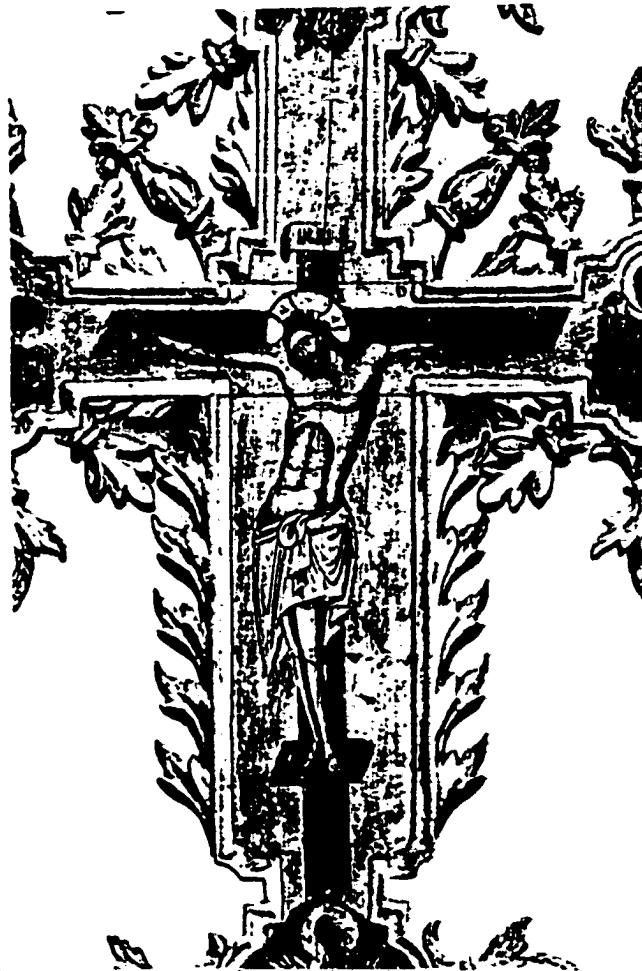


fig. 18-- Liturgical Cross. 17th
Century. Church of the Virgin Savior.
Rep. # 166, Cat. # 129, in Manolis
Hatzidakis, Eikones Tis Patmou.
(Athens: National Bank of Greece, 1977)

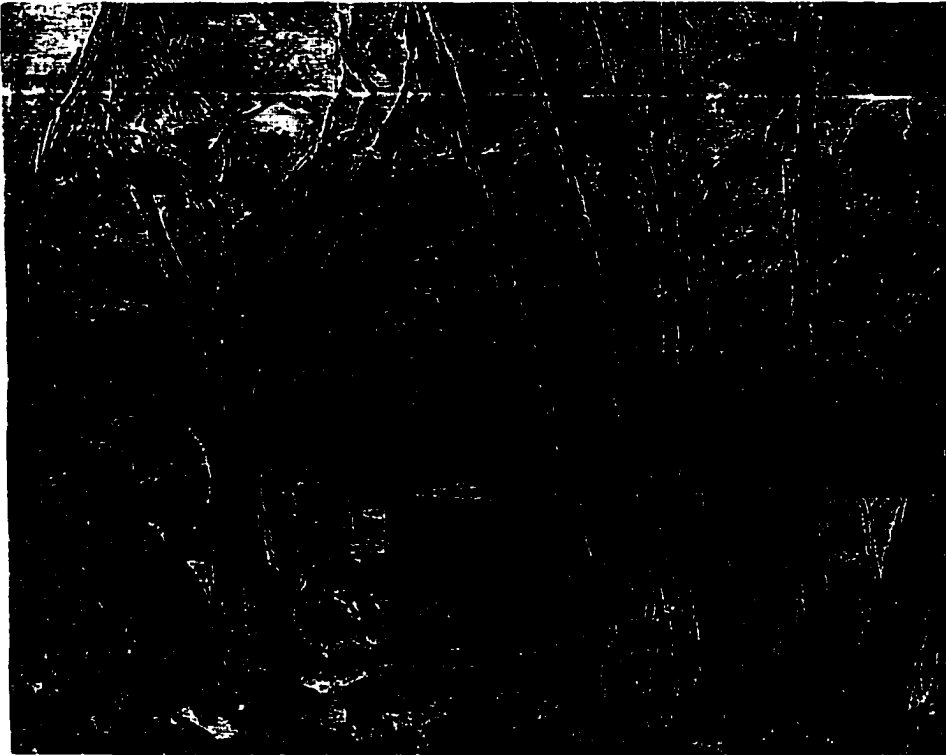


fig. 19-- Paul Cézanne Well and Grinding Wheel in the Forest of the Chateau Noir, ca. 1900. Oil on canvas. Rep. in Erle Loran, Cézanne's Composition, (Berkeley-London: U of California Press, 1985) p. 66

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fig. 20-- John Marin Off Cape Split, Maine, 1938. Oil on canvas, 22 1/2 x 28 1/8". N.Y. MMA. Rep. in Milton W. Brown, Sam Hunter et al., *American Art*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams., Inc., 1979) ill. 464, p. 436.



fig. 21-- Nature Morte, 1928. Oil on
canvas, 24 x 18". Collection
Maritza Zagoreos

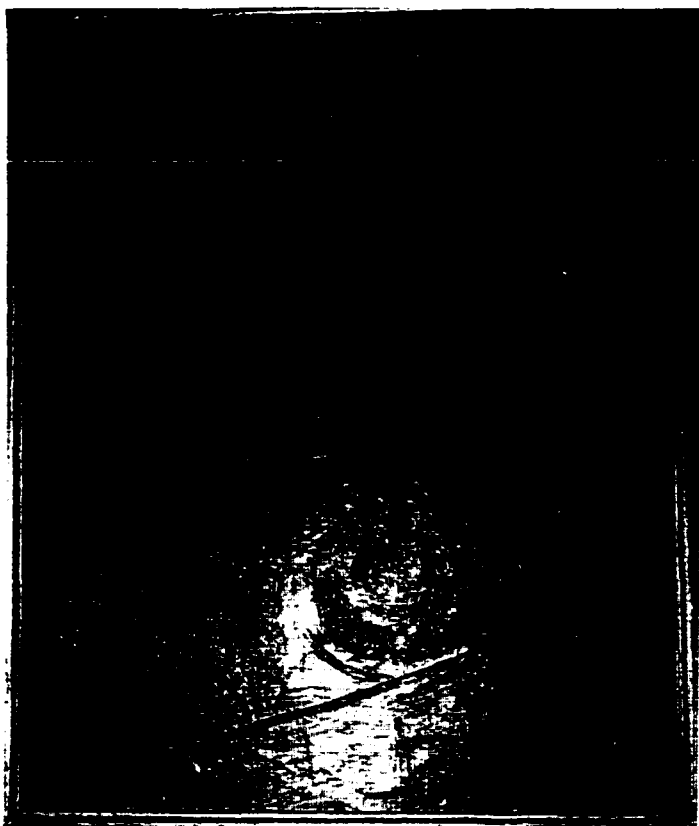


Fig. 22-- Still Life No. 17, 1931. Oil
on canvas, 16 x13". Collection
Maritza Zagoreos

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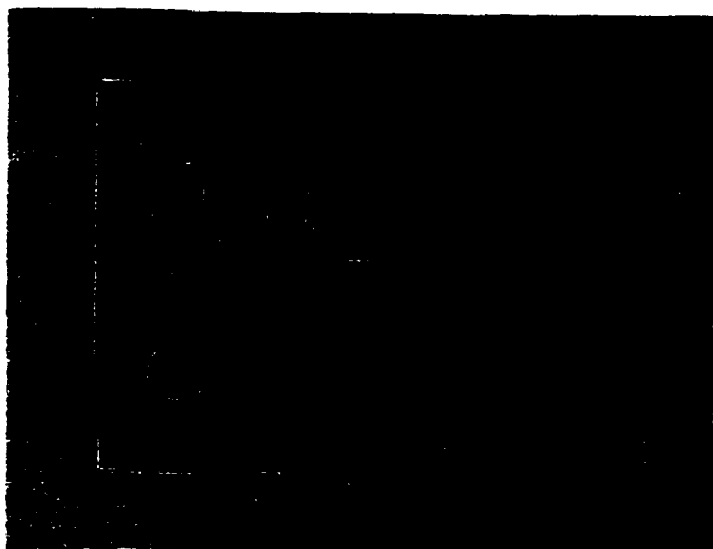


fig. 23-- Violin No. 7, 1931. Oil on
canvas, 27 1/2 x 22 3/4". Collection
Maritza Zagoreos

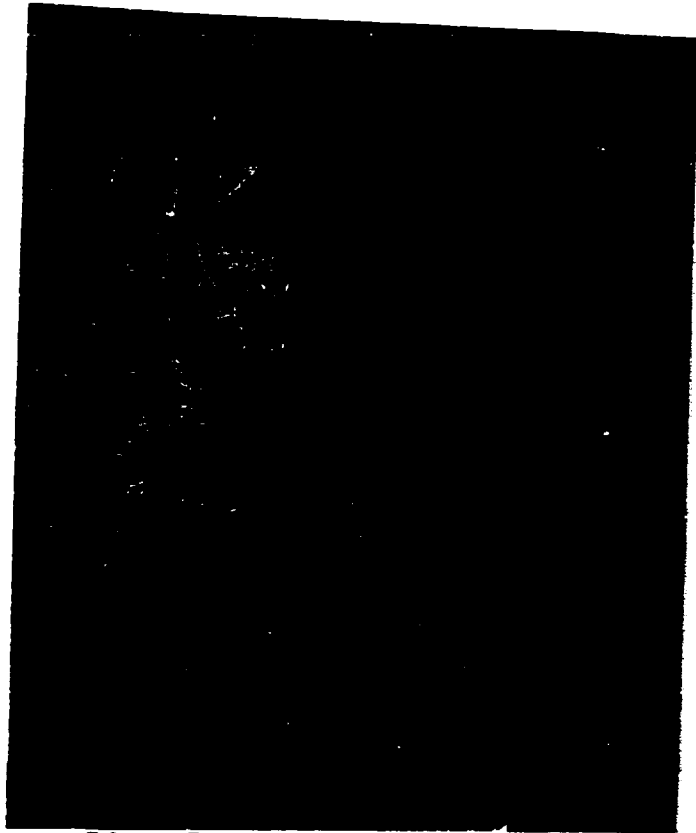


fig. 24-- Portrait No. 107, 1932-33.
Oil on board, 24 x 19 5/8". Collection
Maritza Zagoreos

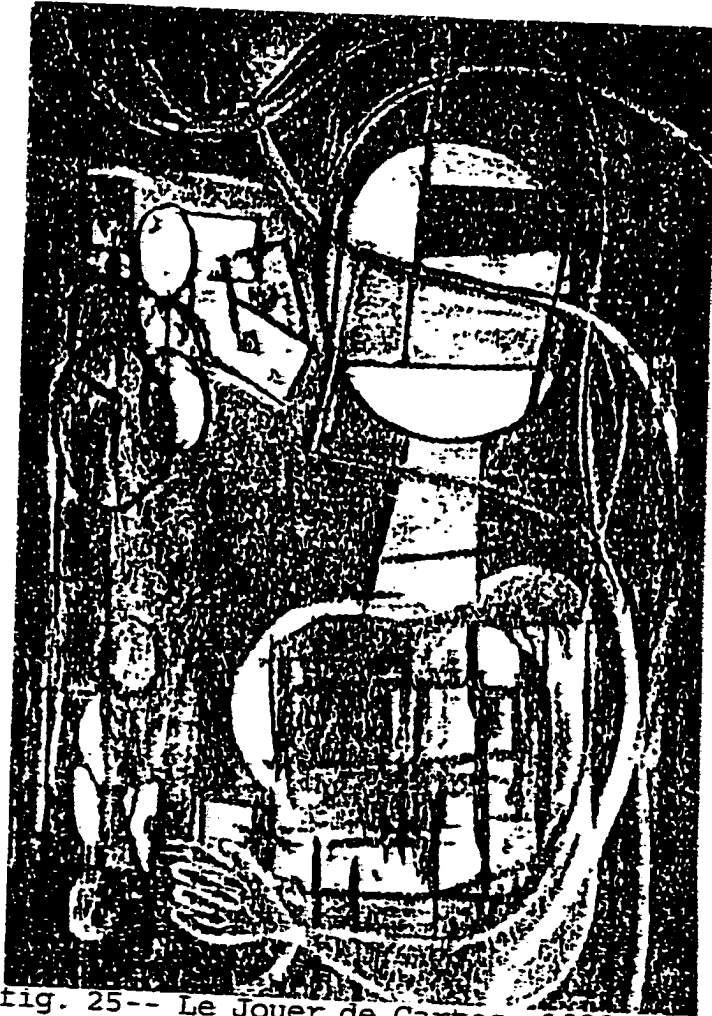


fig. 25-- Le Jouer de Cartes, 1933. Oil
on canvas, 25 5/8 x 36 1/4". Collection
Maritza Zagoreos

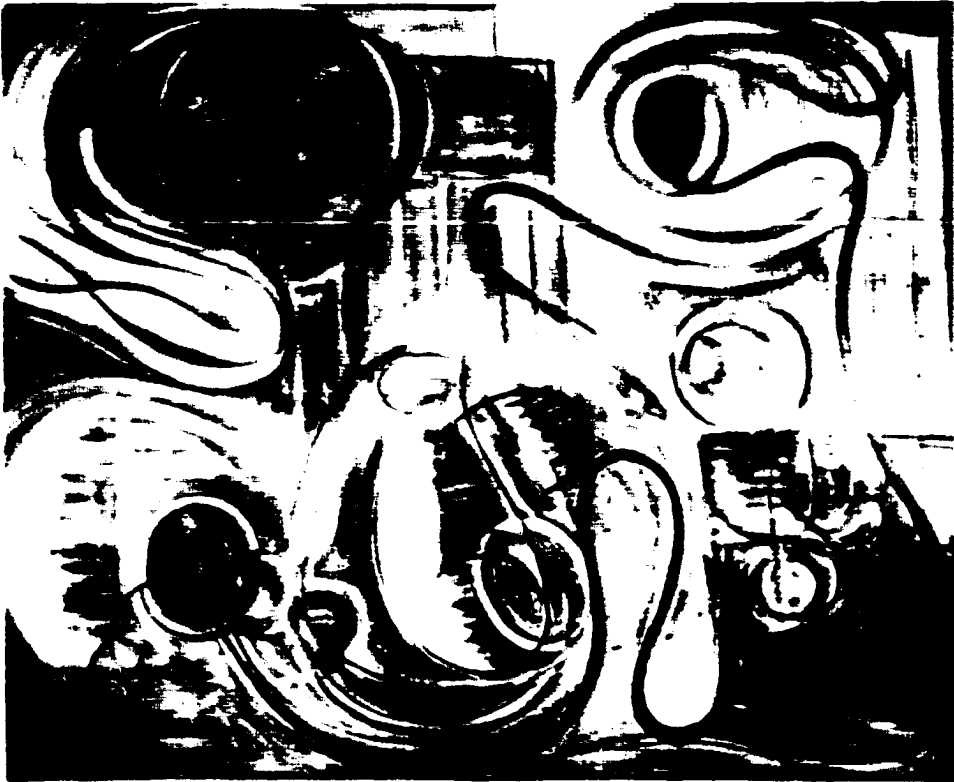


fig. 26-- Composition No. 36, 1932. Oil on linen with lead white primer, 31 7/8 x 39 3/16". Fondation Christian et Yvonne Zervos, Vézelay, France

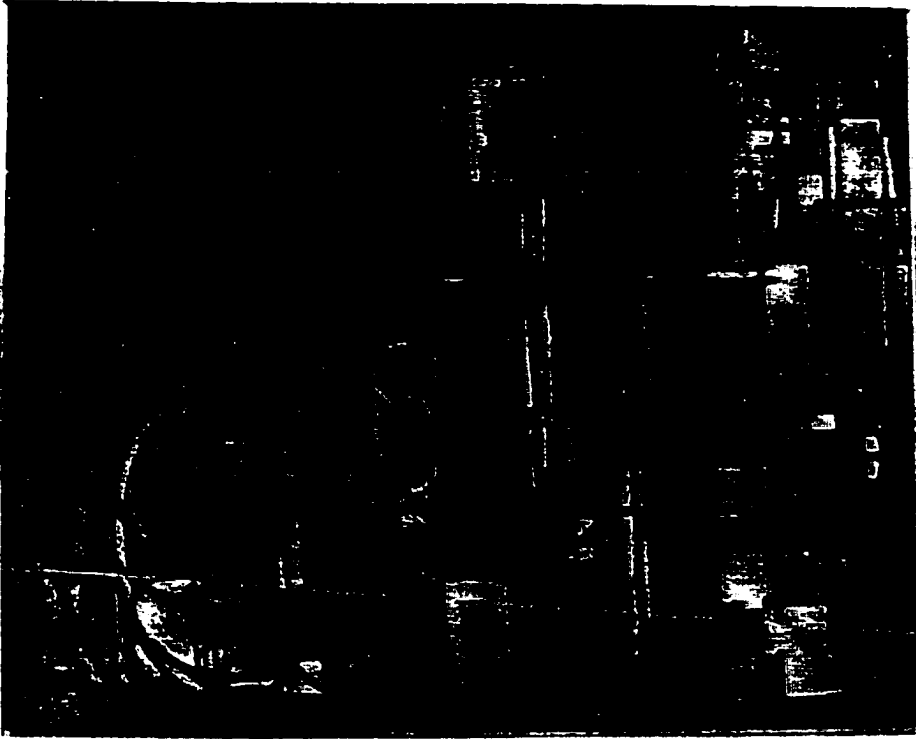


fig. 27-- Violin 6E, 1932. Oil on
canvas, 25 1/2 x 31 7/8". Collection
Ahmet Ertegun



fig. 28-- 1930 Galerie 23 Cercle et Carré Exhibition Group Photograph.
Reprinted Courtesy Gladys Fabre.
Xceron appears third from left.

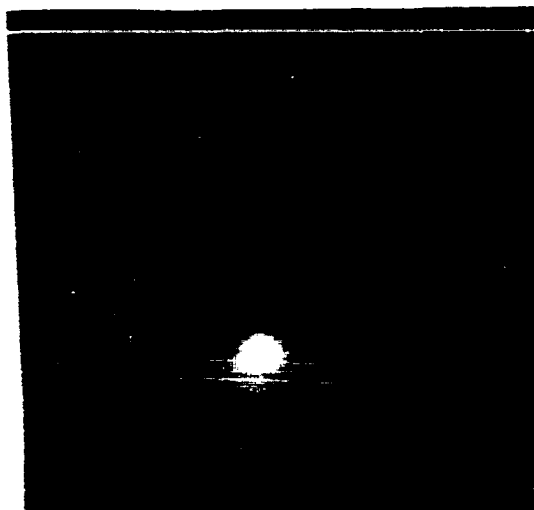


fig. 29-- Number 20, 1933. Gouache and
watercolor on cardboard. 7 1/4 x 5 ".
Andre Zarre Gallery

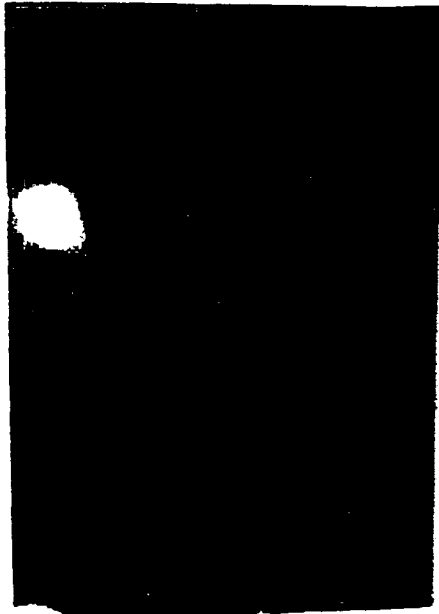


fig. 30-- Composition No. 97, 1933. Ink
and wash, 7 1/4 x 5".
Andre Zarre Gallery

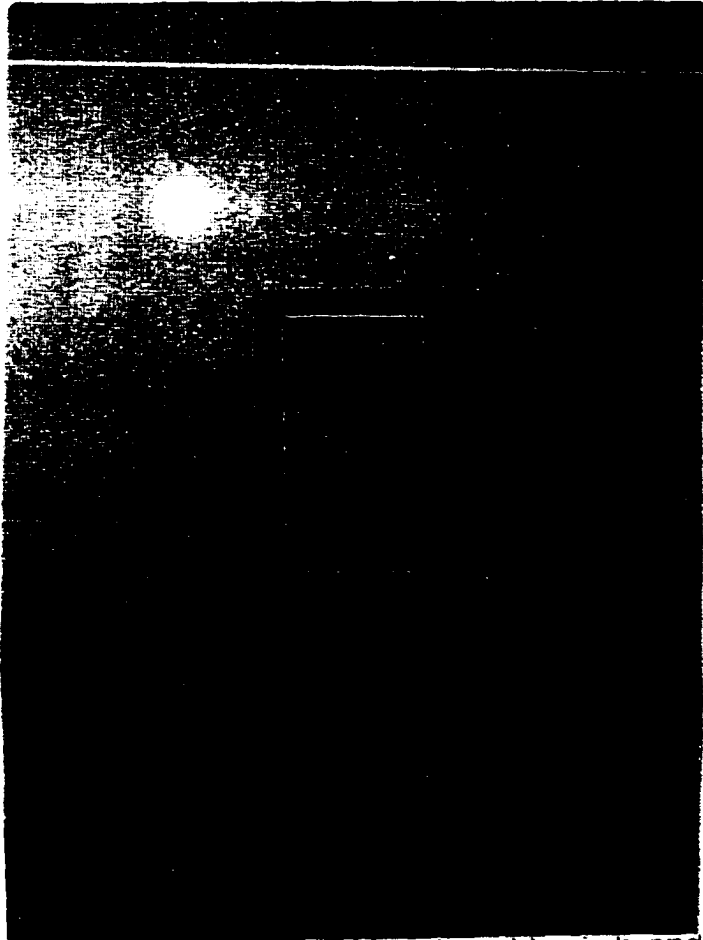


fig. 31-- No. 73, 1933. Pencil, ink and
crayon on paper, 3 1/2 x 2".
Collection Maritza Zagoreos



fig. 32-- No. 62, 1933. Pencil on
paper, 6 x 4".
Collection Maritza Zagoreos

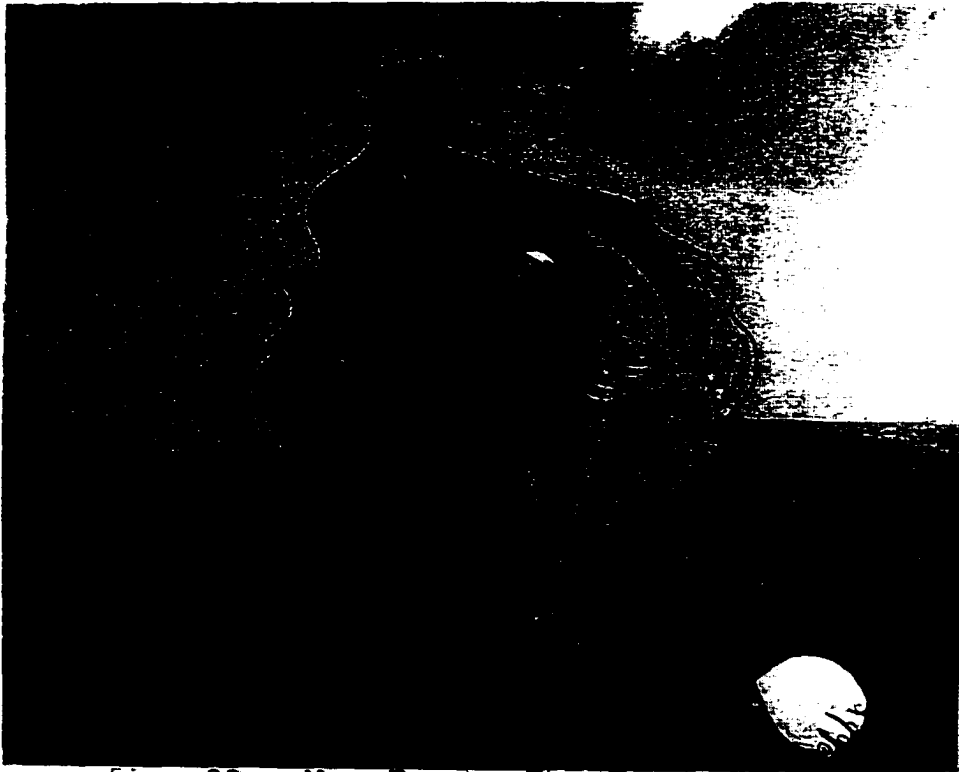


Fig. 33-- Max Ernst, The Kiss, 1927.
Oil on canvas, 50 3/8 x 63". Peggy
Guggenheim Collection, Venice; The
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.



fig. 34-- Portrait of Mlle Dorros 124,
1934. Oil on canvas, 32 x 23 1/2".
Collection Maritza Zagoreos

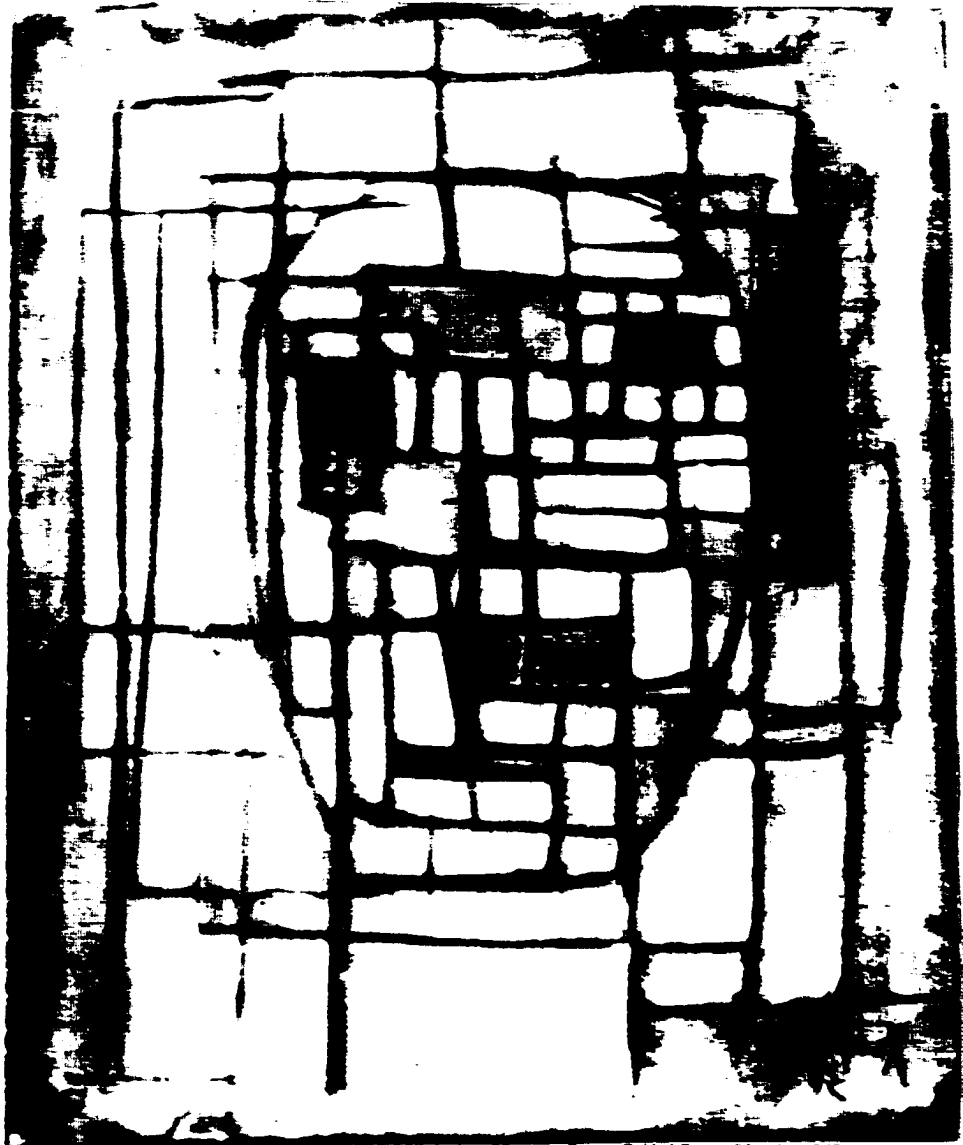


Fig. 35-- Portrait No. 1, 1931. Oil on
linen, 18 1/8 x 15". Fondation
Christian et Yvonne Zervos,
Vezélay, France

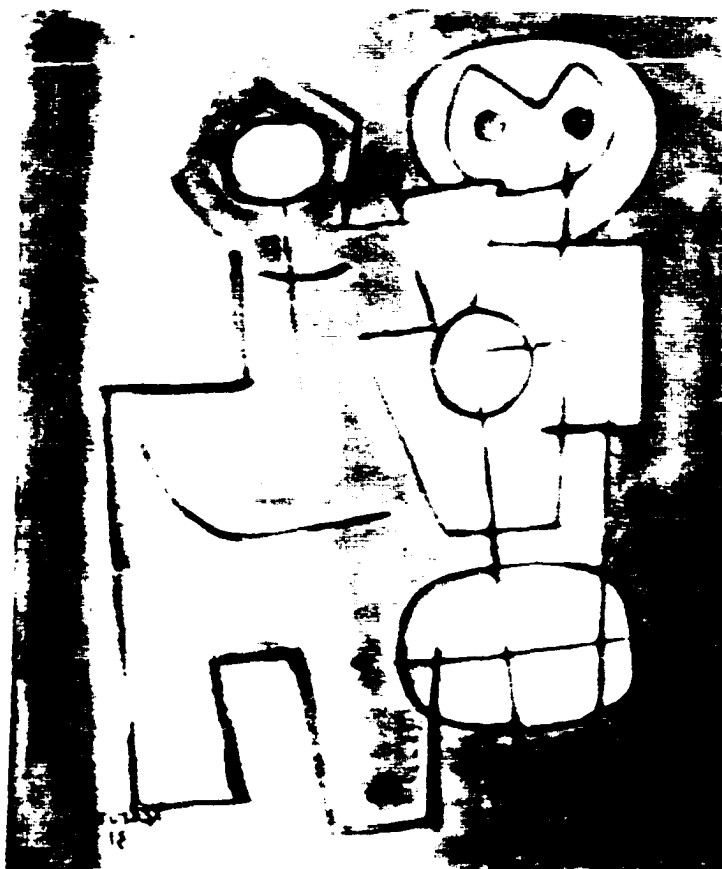


fig. 36-- Peinture No. 16, 1931. Oil on
linen, 18 1/8 x 15". Fondation
Christian et Yvonne Zervos,
Vezélay, France



fig. 37-- Trois Figures, No. 67, 1932.
Oil on fine woven cotton, 20 1/8 x 15.
Fondacion Christian et Yvonne Zervos,
Vezélay, France

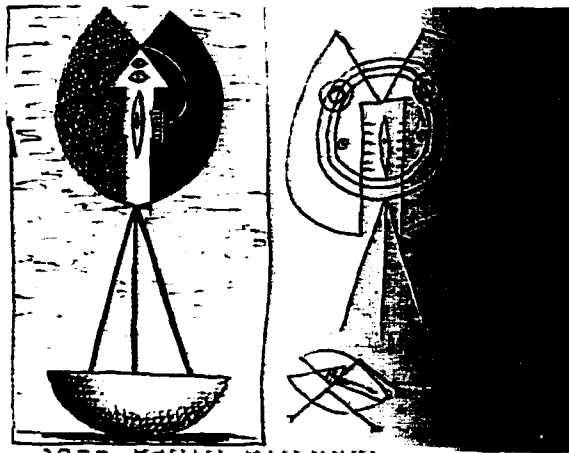


Fig. 36-- PABLO PICASSO,
Study for Sculpture, 1928.
Pen and Ink, 10 3/8 x 14".
Zervos VII, 140.

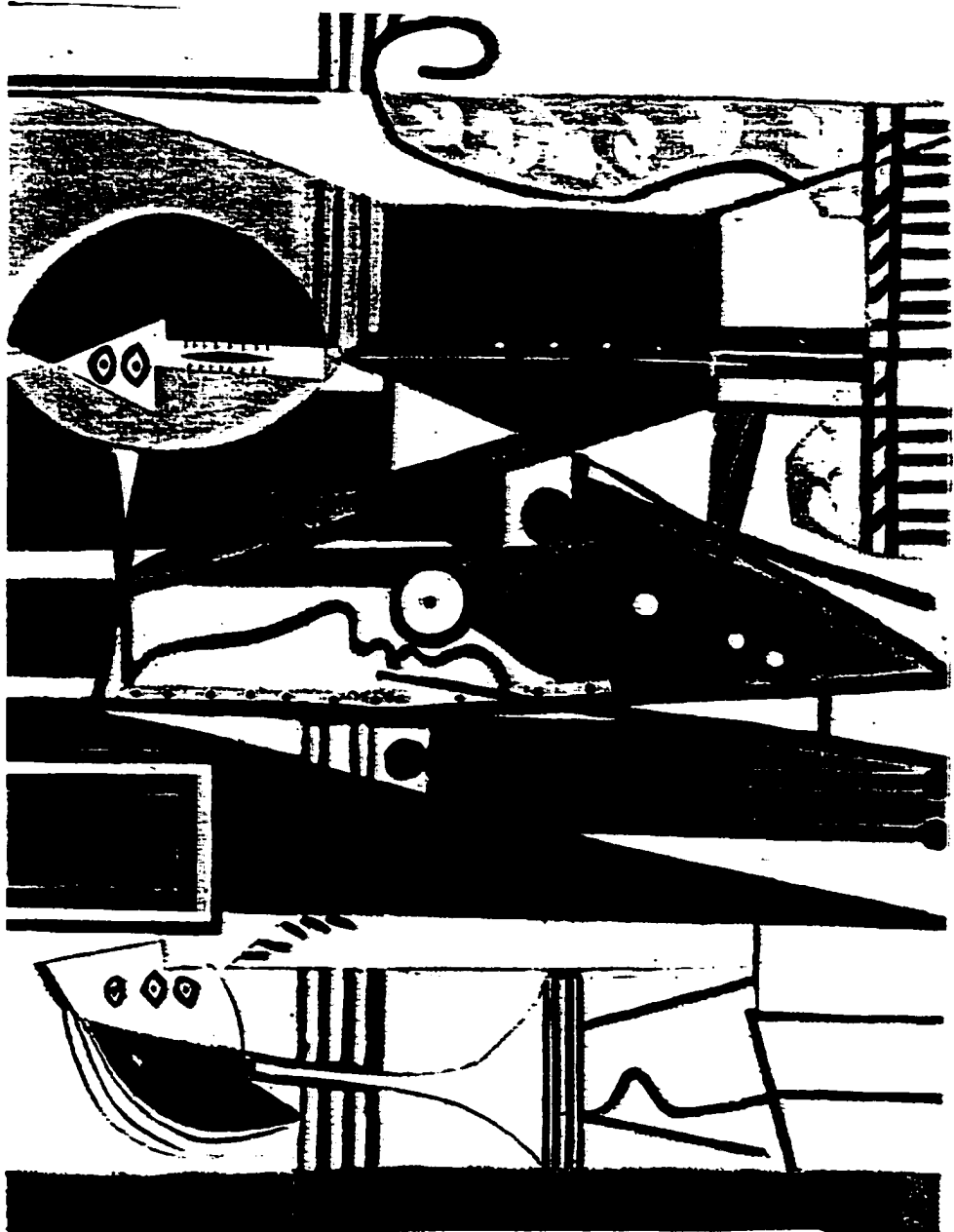


Fig. 39-- Pablo Picasso,
Painter and Model, 1928. Oil on canvas,
51 1/8 x 64 1/4".
Zervos VII, 143



Fig. 40-- COMPOSITION NO. 215, 1945.
Oil on canvas, 32 x 40". Collection
Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Miller,
The Chicago Art Institute

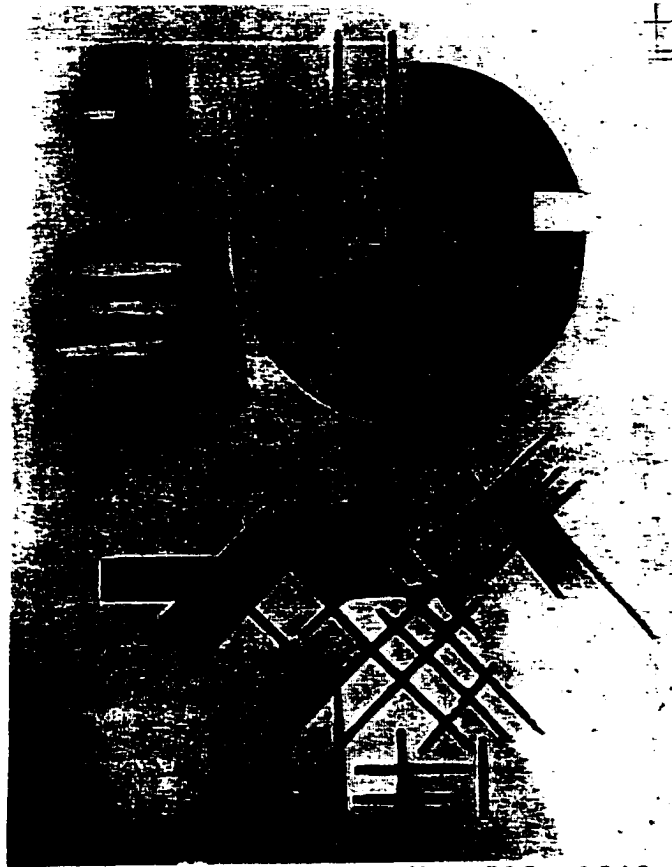


fig. 41-- Composition No. 319, 1948.
Oil on canvas, 42 x 34".
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

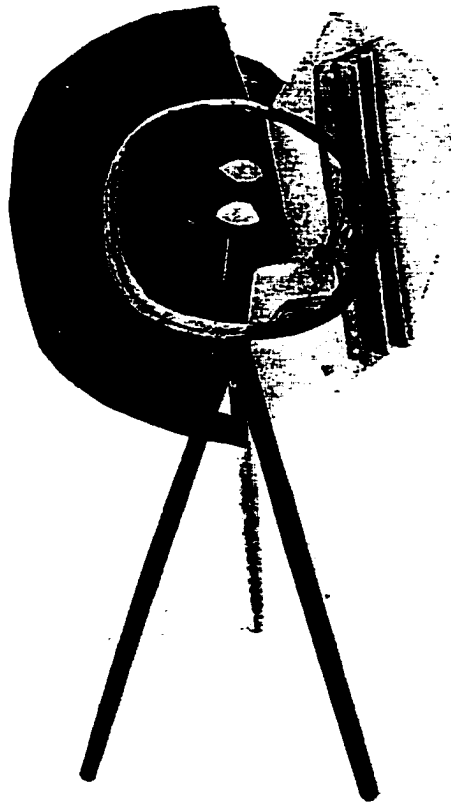


Fig. 42-- PABLO PICASSO, Head, 1928.
Painted Metal, 7 1/8 x 4 5/8 x 3".
Spies 66, Musée Picasso

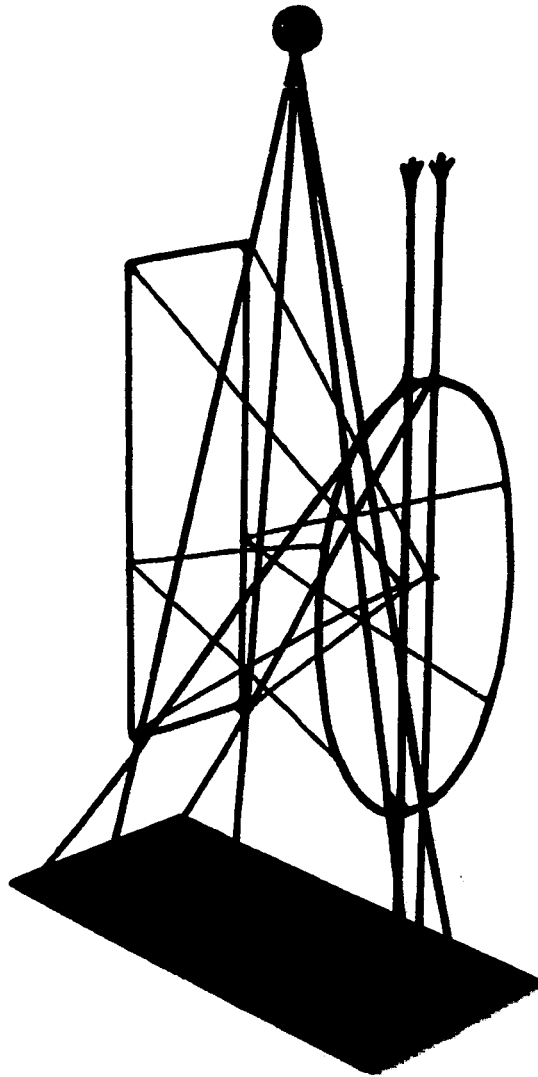


Fig. 43-- PABLO PICASSO,
Wire Construction, 1928. Metal wire, 15
x 7 3/4 x 3 7/8". Spies 71.
Musée Picasso



Fig. 44 -- Peinture No. 35, 1932. Oil on linen, 25 1/5 x 31 7/8". Fondation Christian et Yvonne Zervos, Vézelay, France

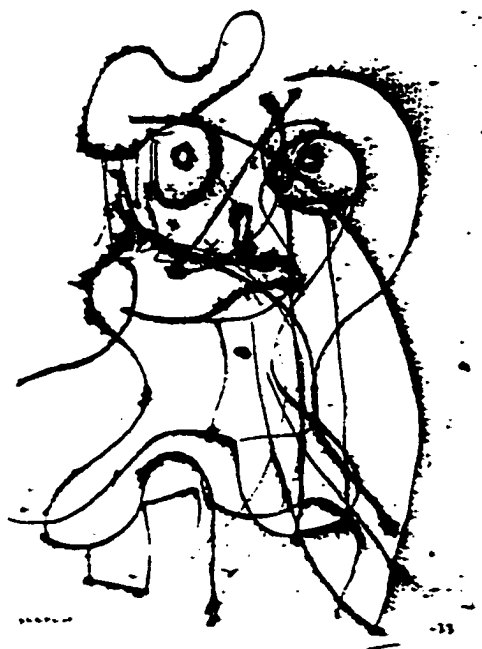


Fig. 45-- Drawing (Untitled), 1933. Ink
on paper, 6 3/4 x 4 3/4".
Andre Zarre Gallery

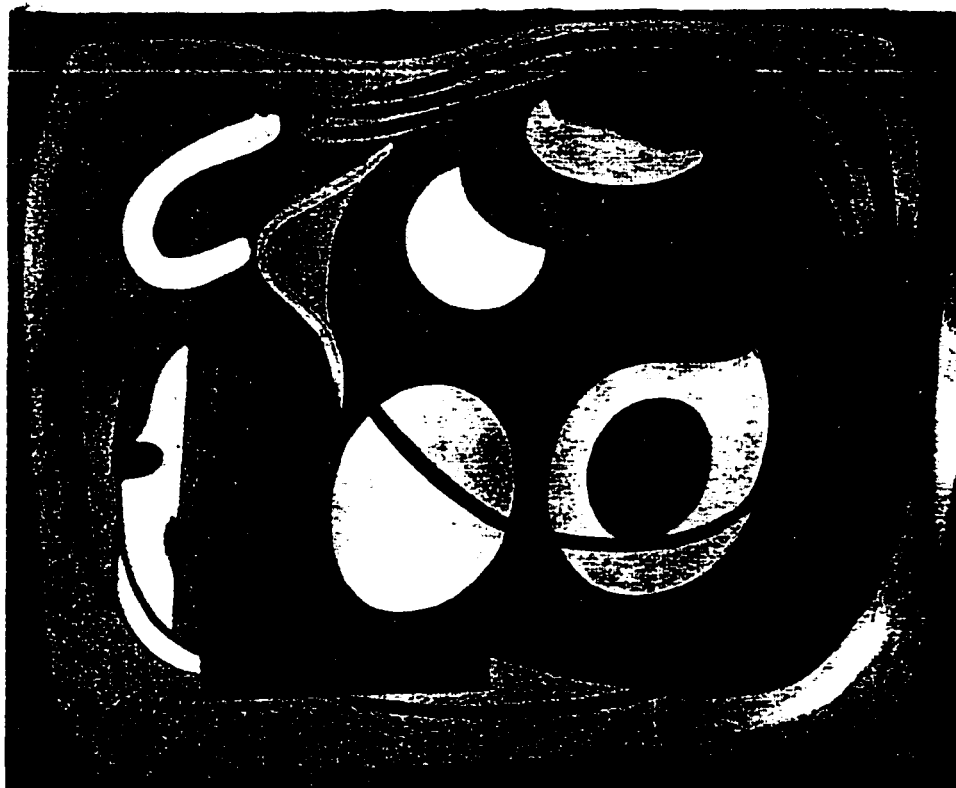


Fig. 46a-- Peinture, 1952-34. Oil on canvas. Reproduced in Cahiers d'Art, Vol 5-8. 1934, unpag.

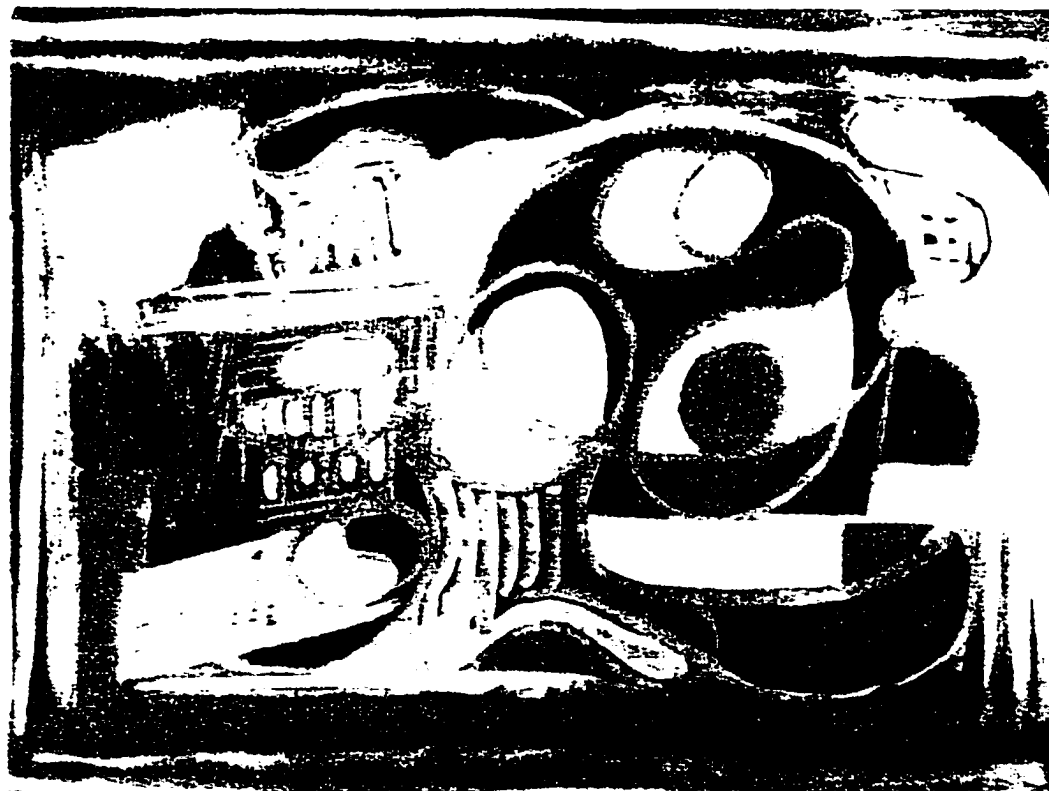


fig. 460-- Peinture, 1932-34. Oil on canvas. Reproduced in Cahiers d'Art, Vol 5-8, 1934, unpag.



figs. 4/a,b-- Ink Studies, 1932. Ink on
paper on 8 1/2 x 11" page.
Andre Zarre Gallery

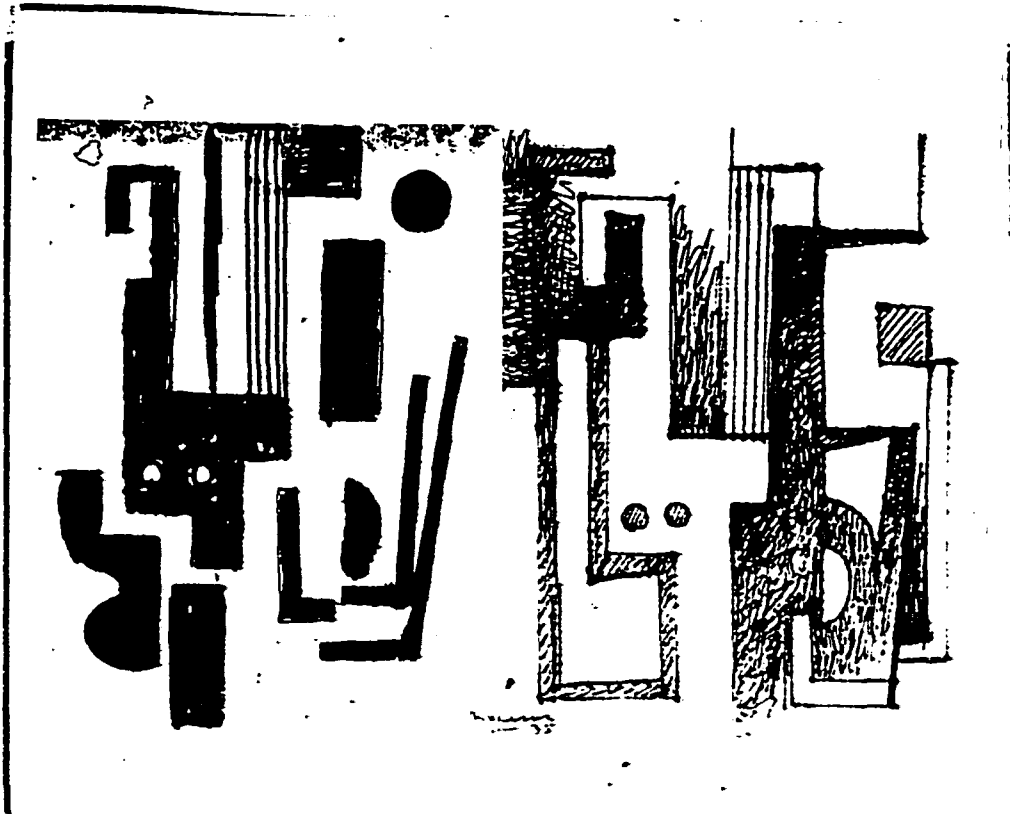


Fig. 48-- UNTITLED, 1935. ink and
watercolor on paper, 9 1/2 x 5 3/8".
Reproduced in aaa, Xceron files,
Reel # D 294

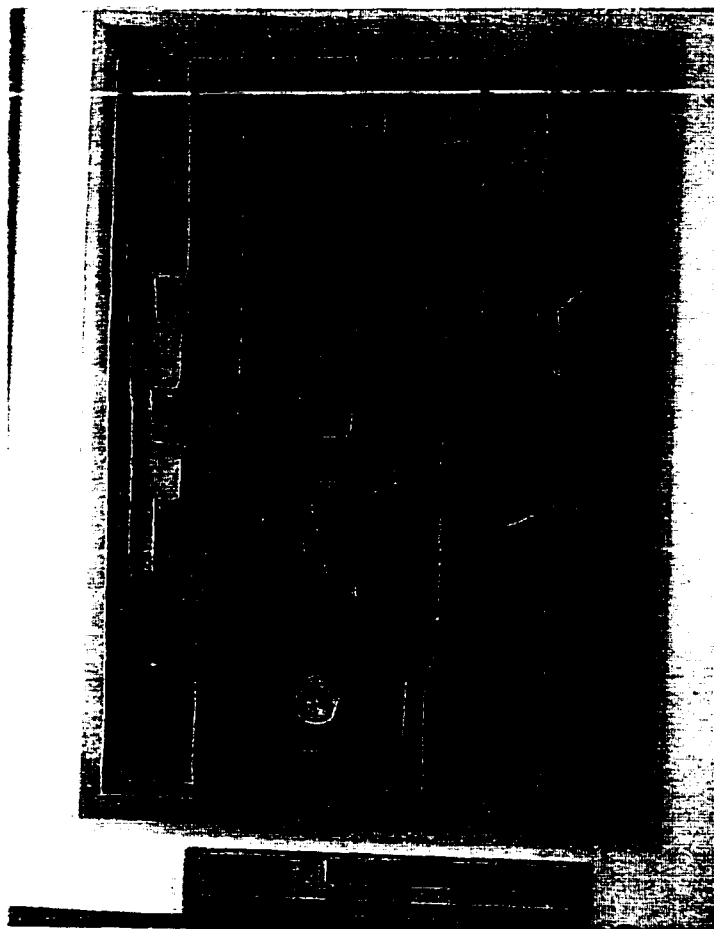


fig. 49-- Composition No. 220A, 1936.
Gouache, 29 1/8 x 21 5/8",
National Gallery of Art.
Athens, Greece

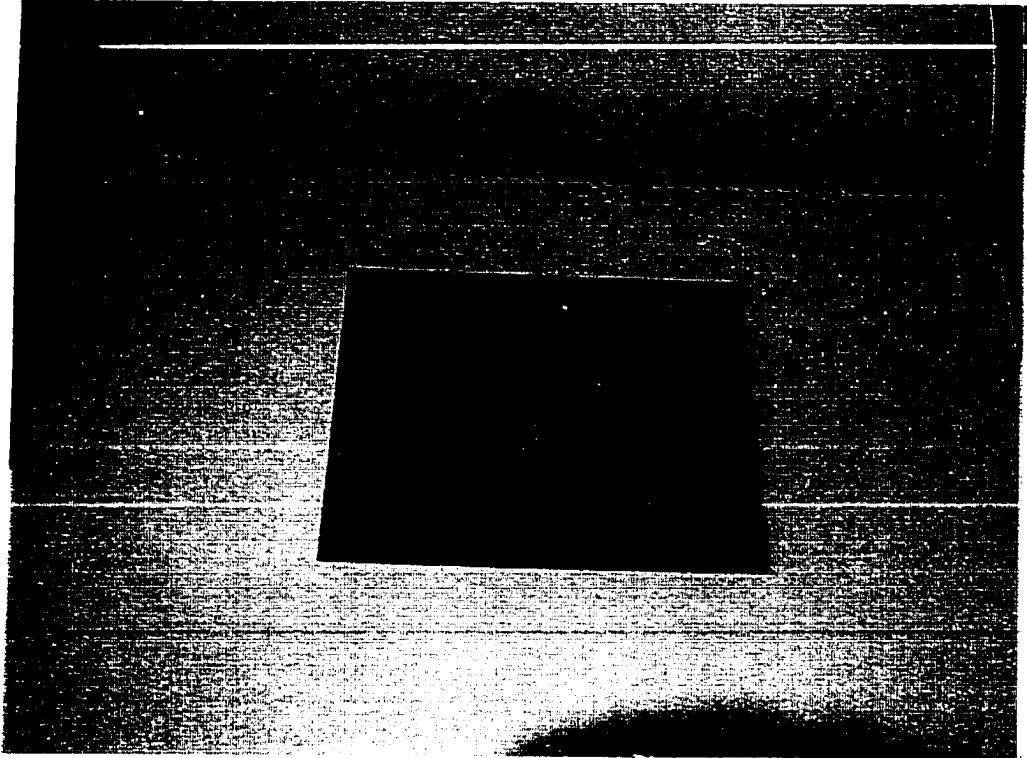


fig. 50-- Composition, 1934. Watercolor
in notebooks.
Andre Zarre Gallery.



fig. 51-- Composition No. 202, 1935.
Oil on board, 16 x 12".
Collection Ms. Georgia Xeron

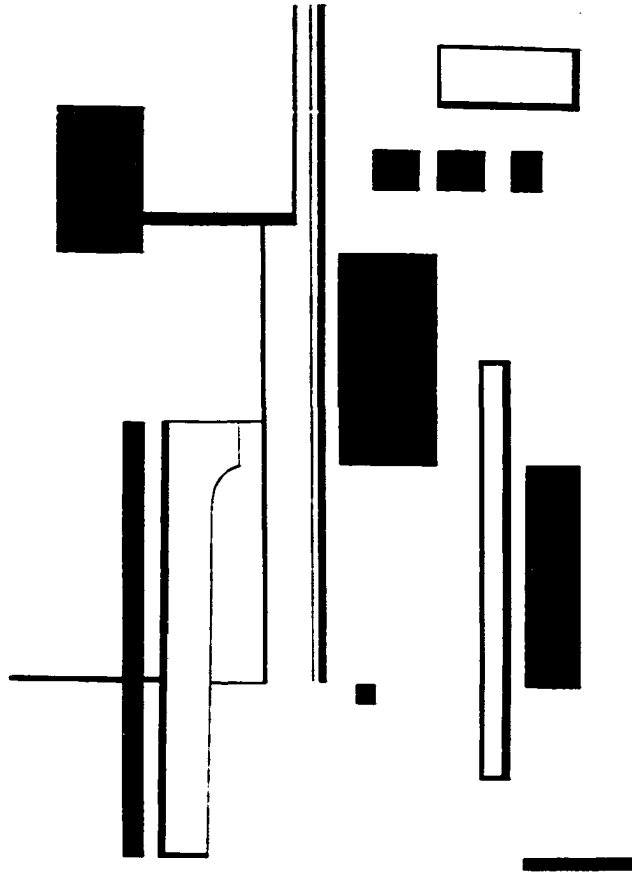


fig. 52-- Peinture No. 239A, 1937. Oil on canvas, 51 x 35". As reproduced in aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D 294.

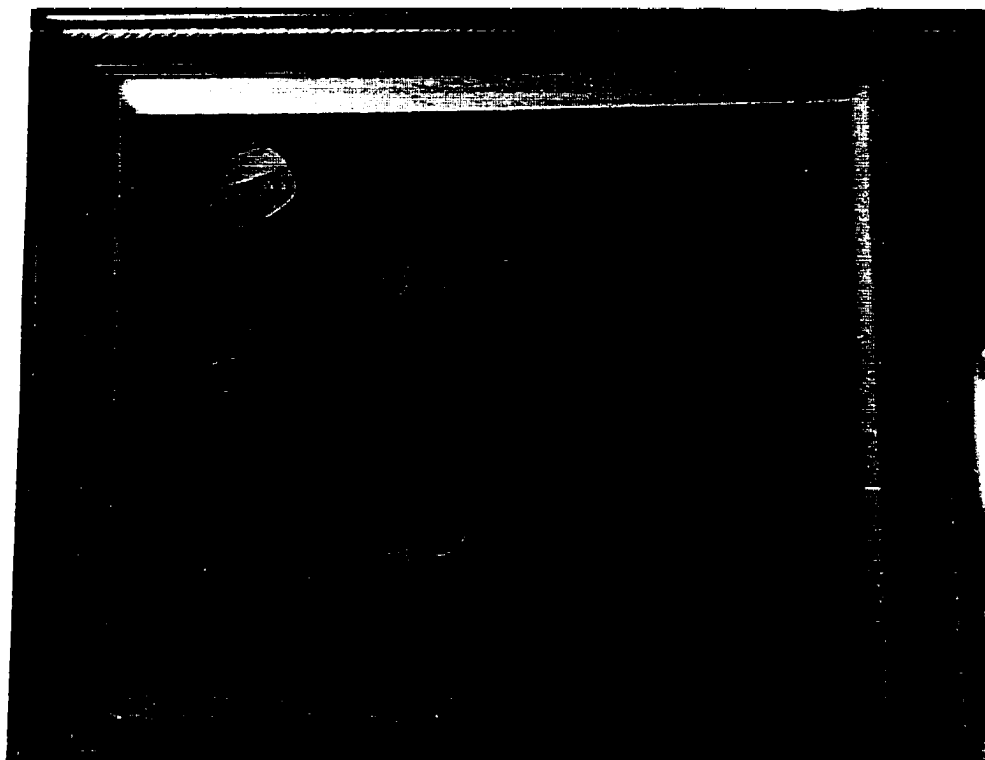


fig. 53--Peinture No. 30, 1932. Oil
tempera and sand on canvas, 24 x 20",
Collection Roy Felshin

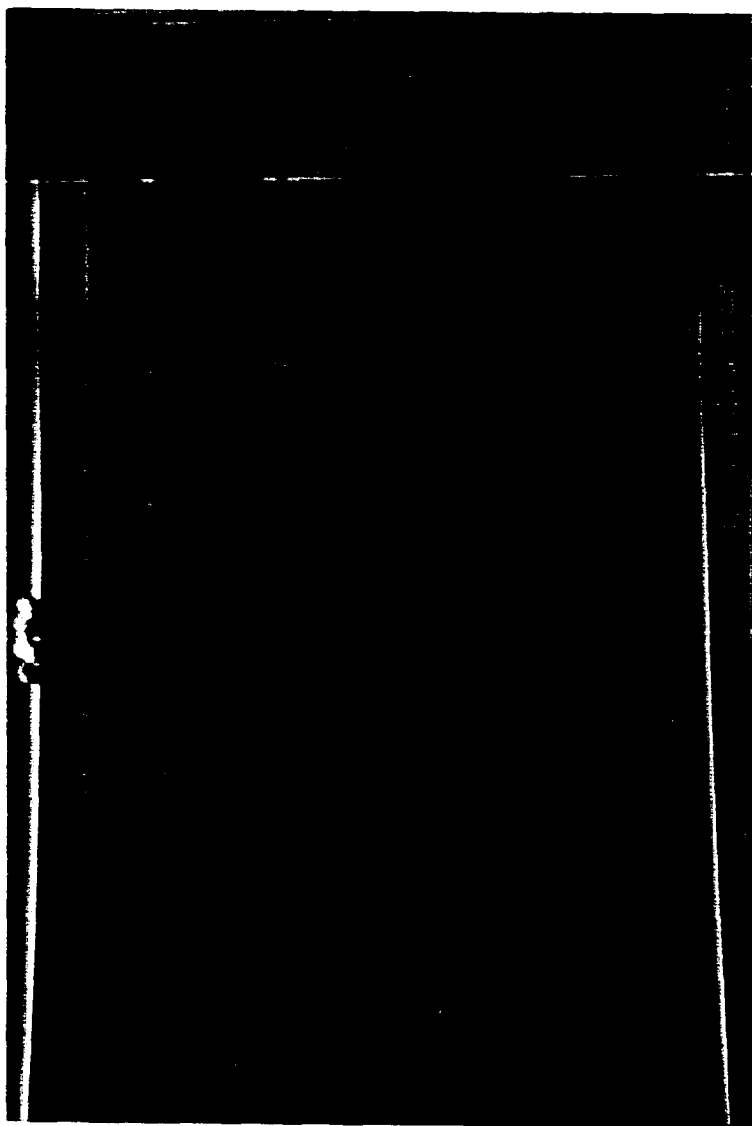


fig. 54-- La Musique, 1933. Oil tempera
and sand on canvas, 116 x 73",
Collection Roy Felshin

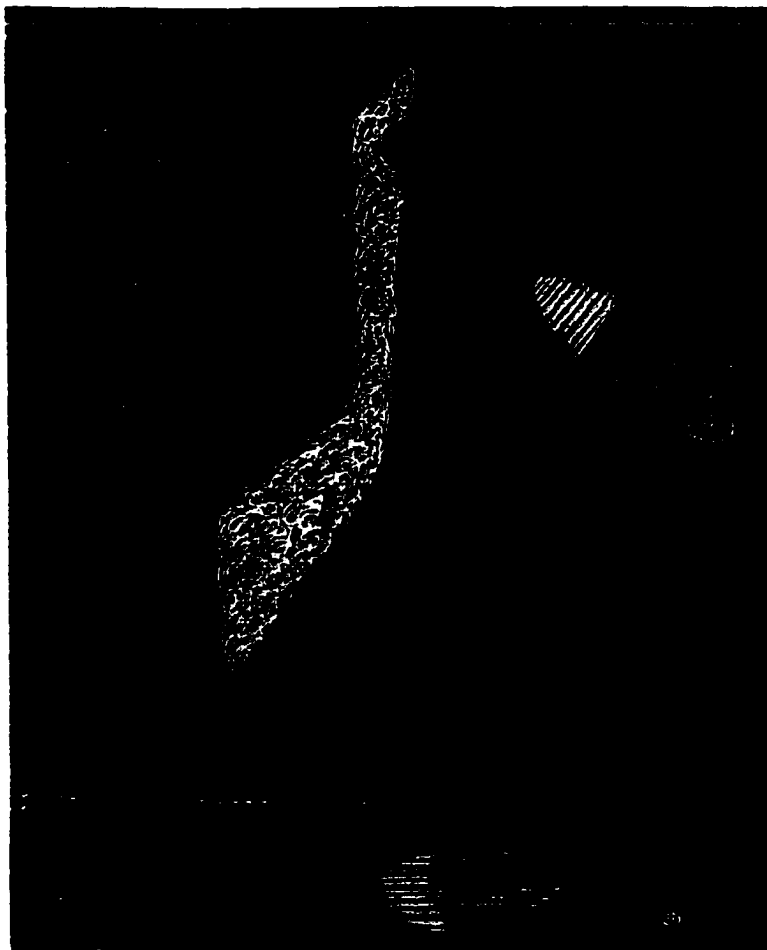


fig. 55-- Burgoyne Diller, Untitled,
ca. 1933. Ink and crayon on paper, 9
1/2 x 7 1/4". Meredith Long & Company,
Houston, Texas



fig. 56-- Pablo Picasso, Compotier des Pommes, 1924. As rep. in Cahiers d'Art, Vol 5 No. 6, 1930, p. 290.



fig. 57-- Ashile Gorky, Image of Xhorkom, ca. 1934-36. Oil on canvas, 33 x 43 1/2". Xavier Fourcade, Inc. New York. As rep. in Haskell's Burgoyne Diller, (N.Y.: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990) ill #59



fig. 58-- Personages, 1933. Oil on canvas, 19 1/2 x 16". Museum of Modern Art, New York. As rep. in aaa, Xceron Files, Reel # D294.

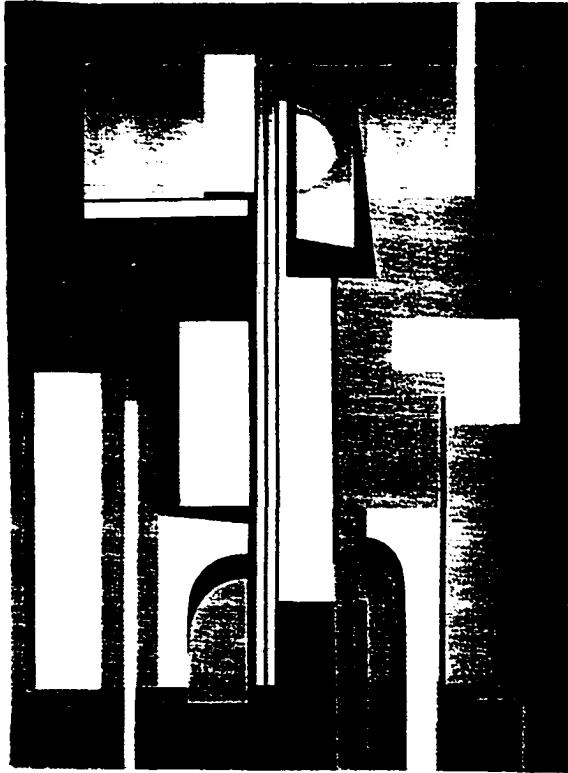


fig. 59-- Composition No. 242, 1937.
Oil on canvas, 45 7/8 x 31 7/8".
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum



fig. 60-- Rose Fried Gallery 1962
Xceron Exhibition Installation
Photograph. As rep. in Xceron Files,
aaa, Reel # D294

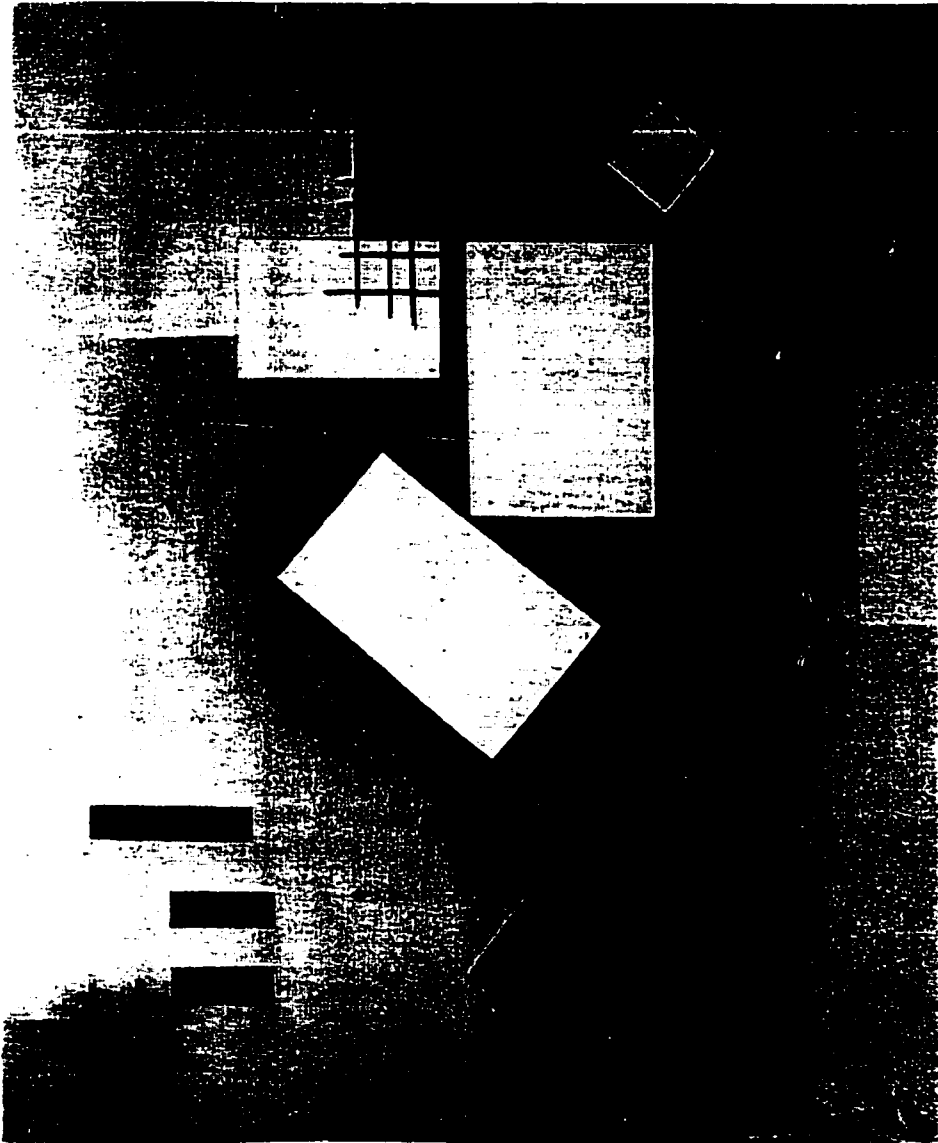


fig. 61-- Composition No. 273, 1945.
Oil on canvas, 40 x 32".
The Whitney Museum of American Art

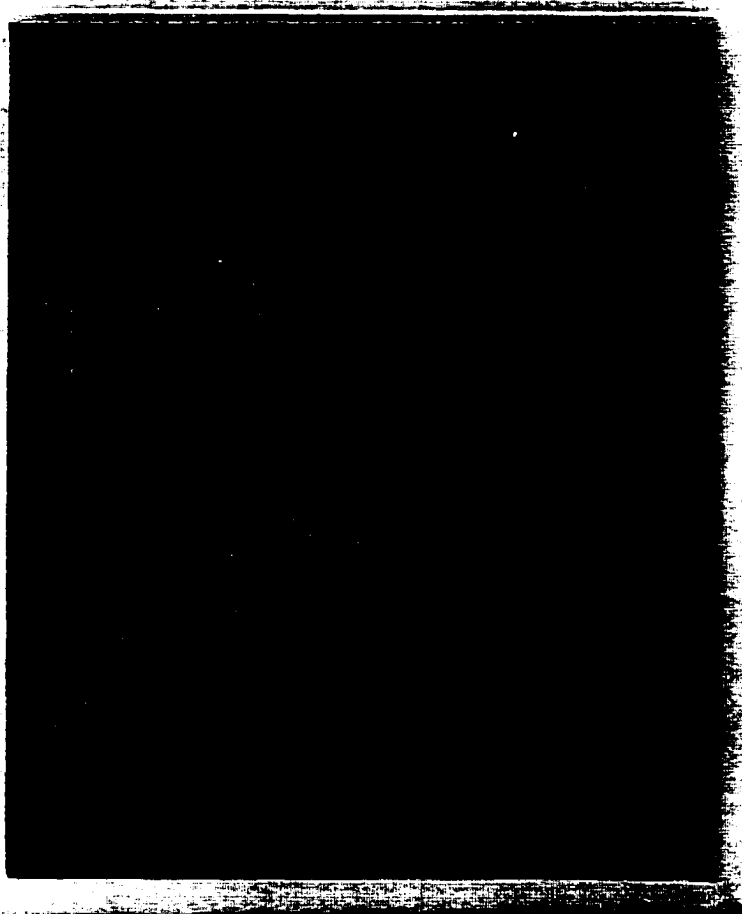


fig. 62-- Untitled (Mandolin
Abstraction), 1932. Oil on canvas,
18 1/4 x 15".
Dr. and Mrs. Lee and Beth Ehrenworth

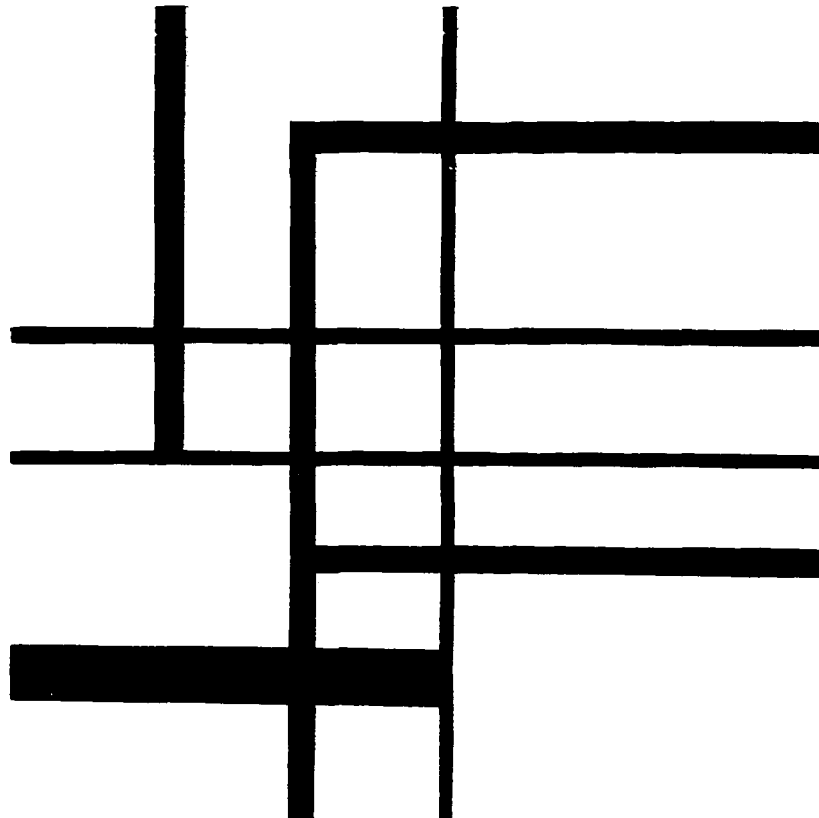


fig. 63-- Burgoyne Diller, Early Geometric, (Second Theme), No. 255, 1937. Mixed media on masonite, 24 x 24". Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

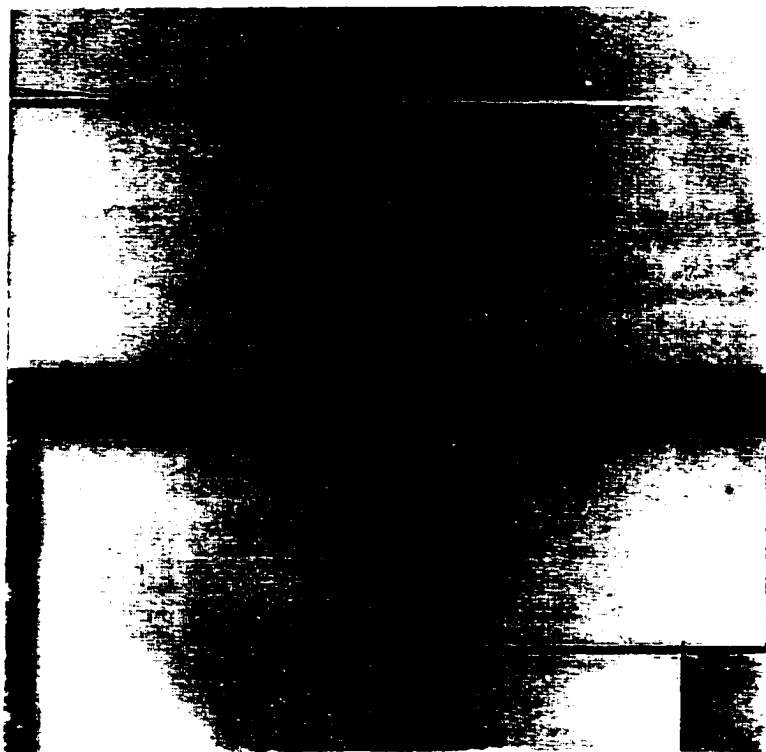


fig. 64-- Harry Holtzman, Untitled No. 645, n.d., pencil, crayon on paper.
8 1/8 x 7 7/8".
Courtesy Washburn Gallery

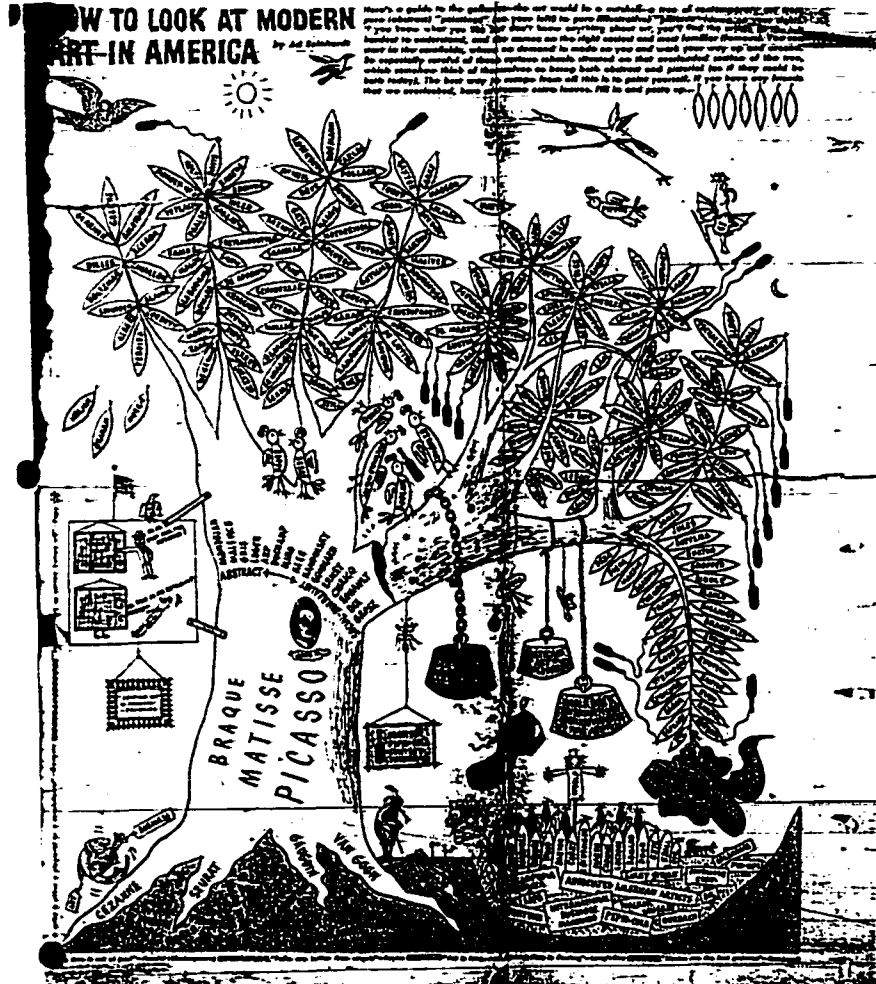


fig. 65-- Ad Reinhardt, "How to Look at Modern Art in America." As rep. in *aaa*, Xceron Files, Reel # D294

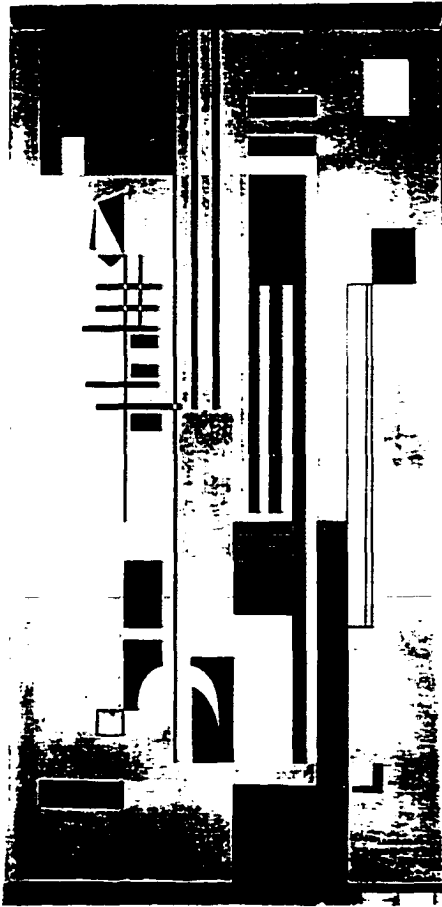


fig. 66a-- Abstraction in Relation to Surrounding Architecture, 1942. Oil on canvas. Unitarian Chapel, Riker's Isle Penitentiary, New York. Not extant. Left panel 6'9"x8'7 1/2" Archives of New York City Hall

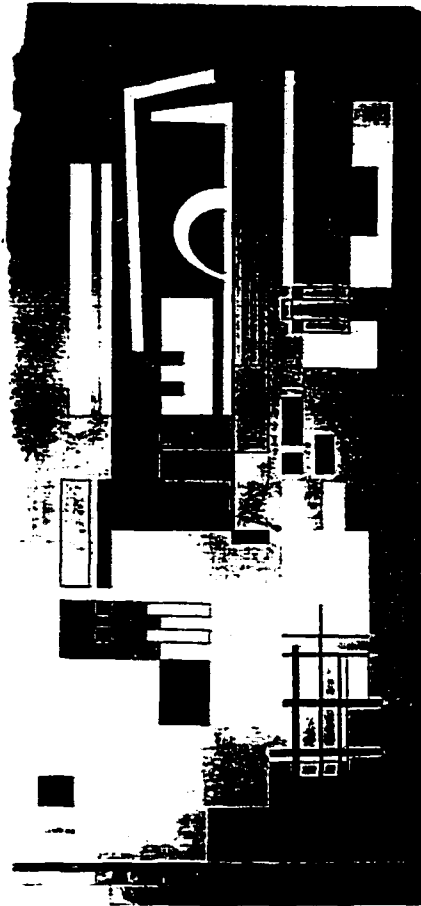


fig. 66b-- Abstraction in Relation to Surrounding Architecture, 1942. Oil on canvas. Unitarian Chapel, Riker's Isle Penitentiary, New York. Not extant. Right panel 16'9"x8' 7 1/2" Archives of New York City Hall

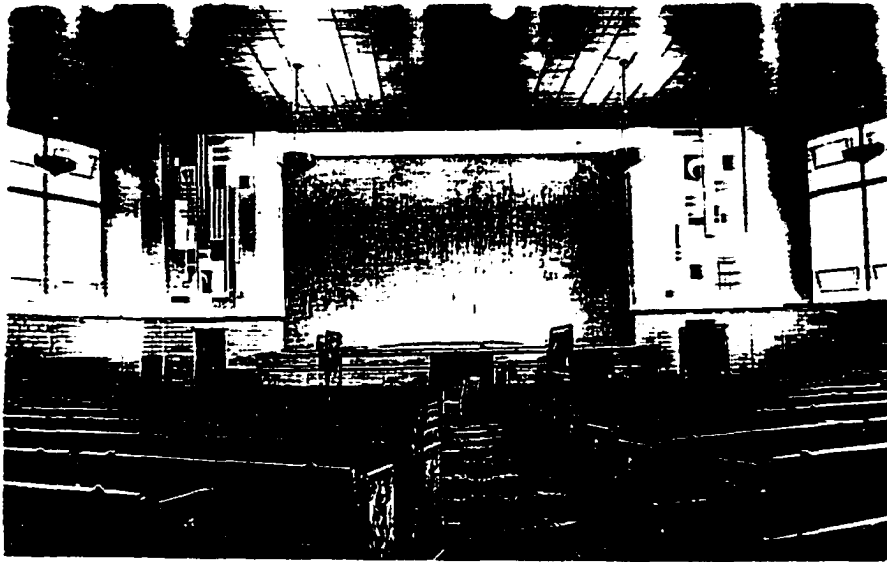


fig. 66c-- Abstraction in Relation to
Surrounding Architecture, 1942. Oil on
canvas. Unitarian Chapel, Riker's Isle
Penitentiary, New York. Not extant.
Installation Photograph, long view.
Archives of New York City Hall



fig. 67-- Lee Krasner, Radio, WPA
Krasner Project, c. 1942. Mixed media
collage. Landau's Krasner CR. 199.

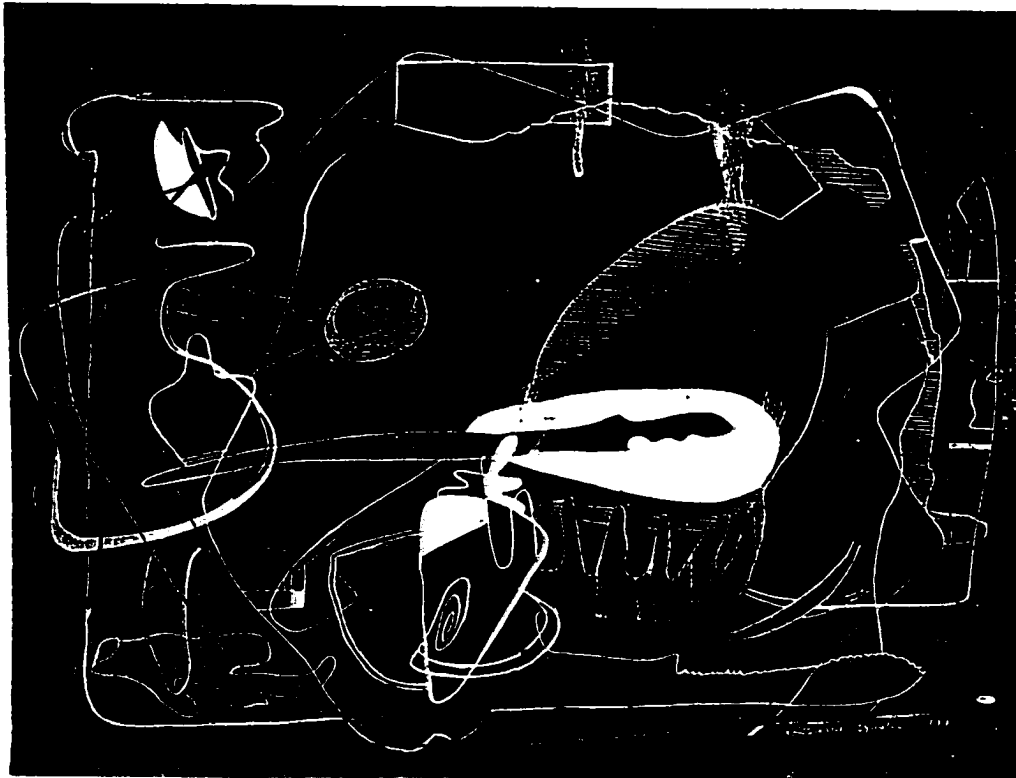


fig. 68-- David Smith, Untitled (Virgin Island Map), 1933. Gouache on paper, 17 7/8 x 24".
Candida and Rebecca Smith Estate
75.30.90

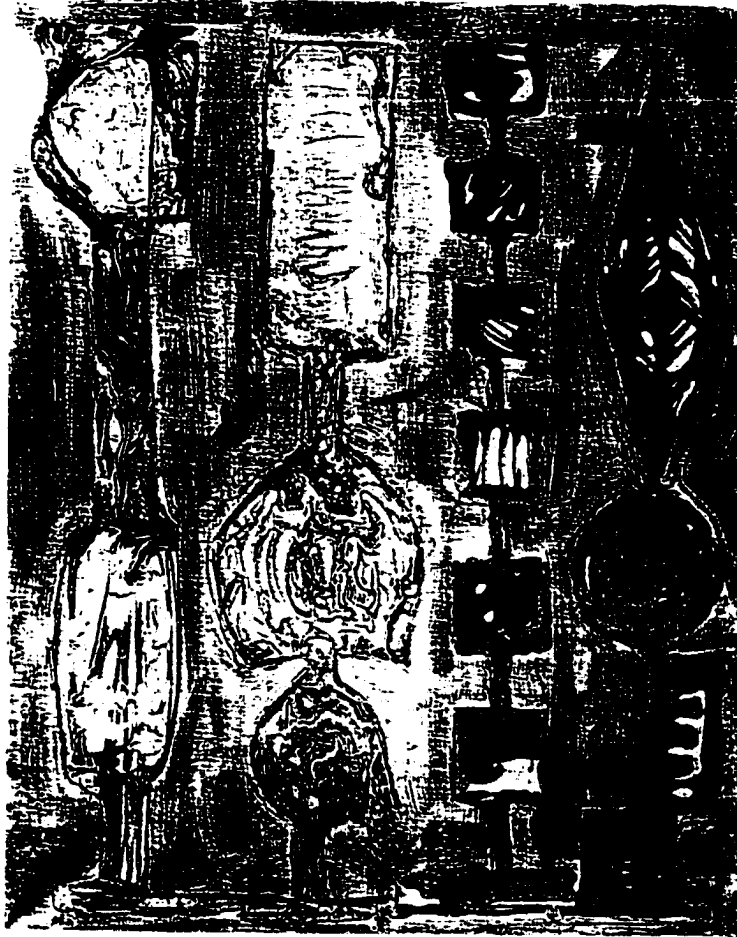


fig. 69-- David Smith, Untitled (four totemic sculptures), 1956. Oil on canvas, 14 x 11". Candida and Rebecca Smith Estate 75.56.15

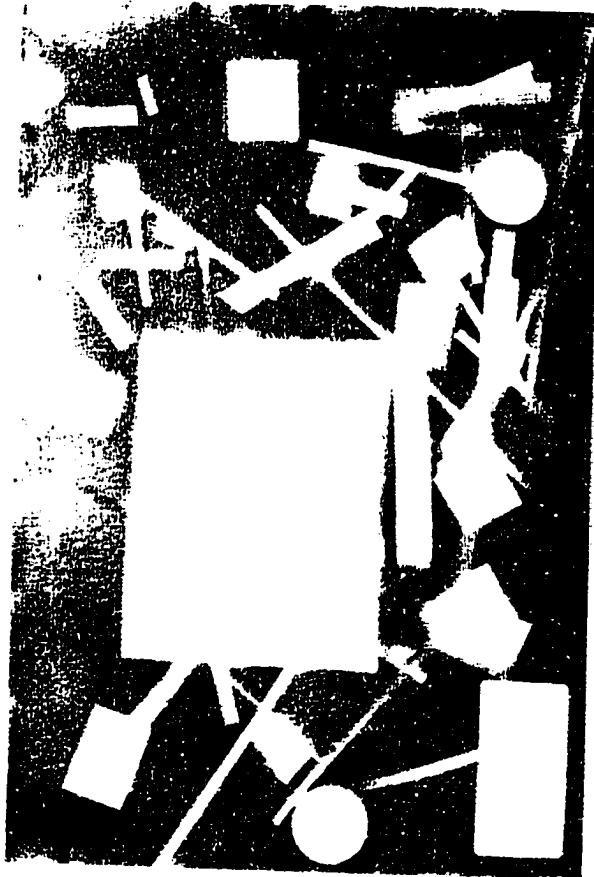


fig. 70-- David Smith, Untitled, 1961.
Paint on canvas

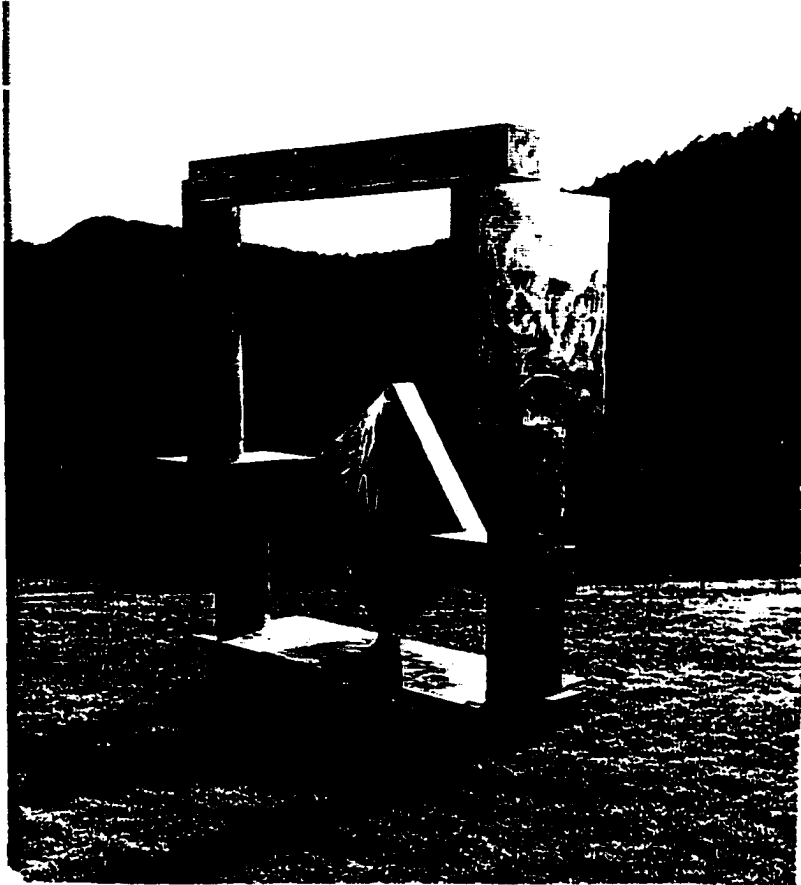


fig. 71-- David Smith, Cubi XXVII (Gate III), 1965. Stainless Steel, 109 x 112 1/8". Sid Richardson Foundation

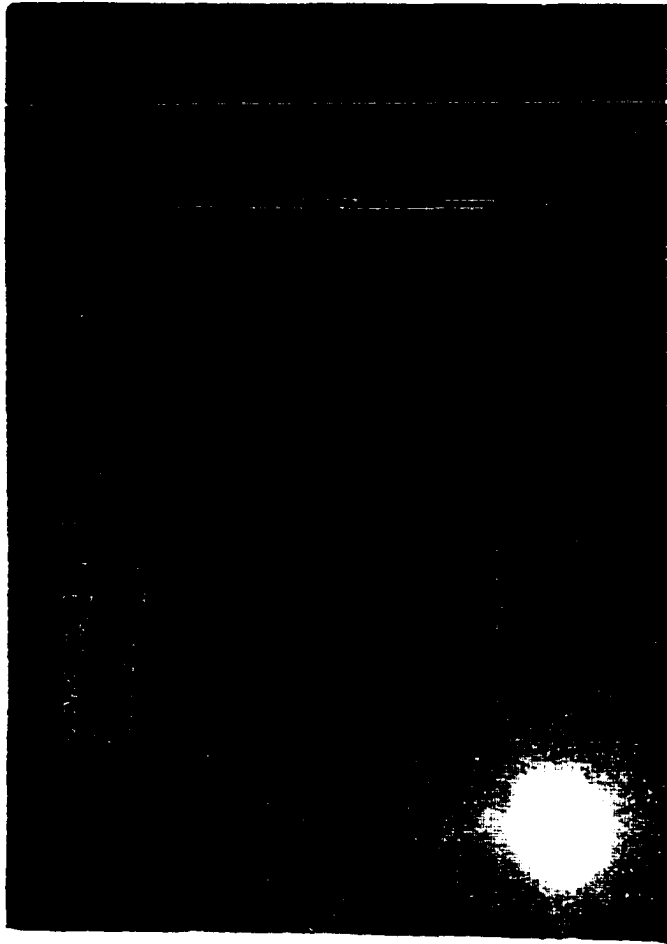


fig. 72-- No. 148, 1932. Watercolor,
ink on beige paper, 7 1/4 x 4 1/2".
Andre Zarre Gallery

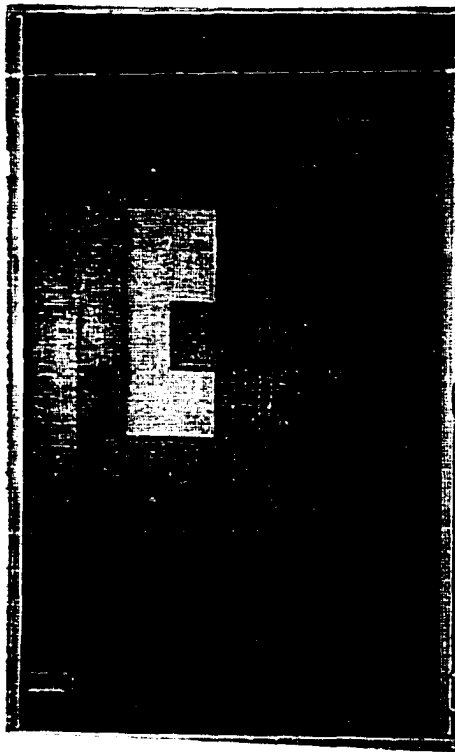


fig. 73-- Painting No. 231, 1937. Oil
on canvas, 12 1/4 x 7 1/2",
Collection Maritza Zagoreos



fig. 74-- Untitled, 1943. Watercolor on paper, 7 3/8 x 10 5/8". The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Hilla Rebay Foundation Collection

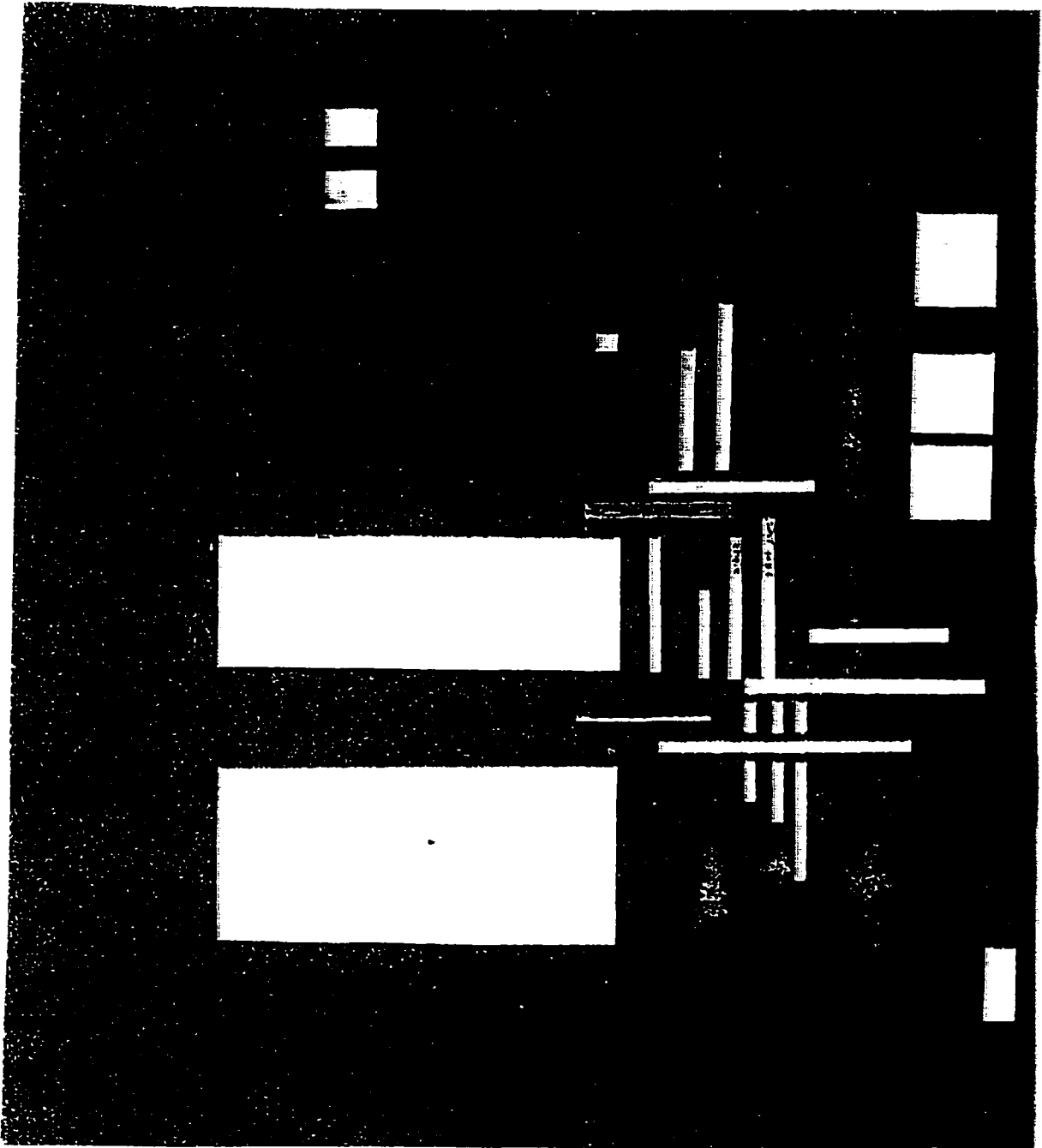


fig. 75-- Painting No. 260, 1942. Oil on masonite, 19 x 19". Gift of the American Abstract Artists, 1968, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



fig. 76-- Watercolor No. 308, 1947.
Watercolor on paper, 15 7/8 x 11
15/16". Collection Schwartz and Garson.

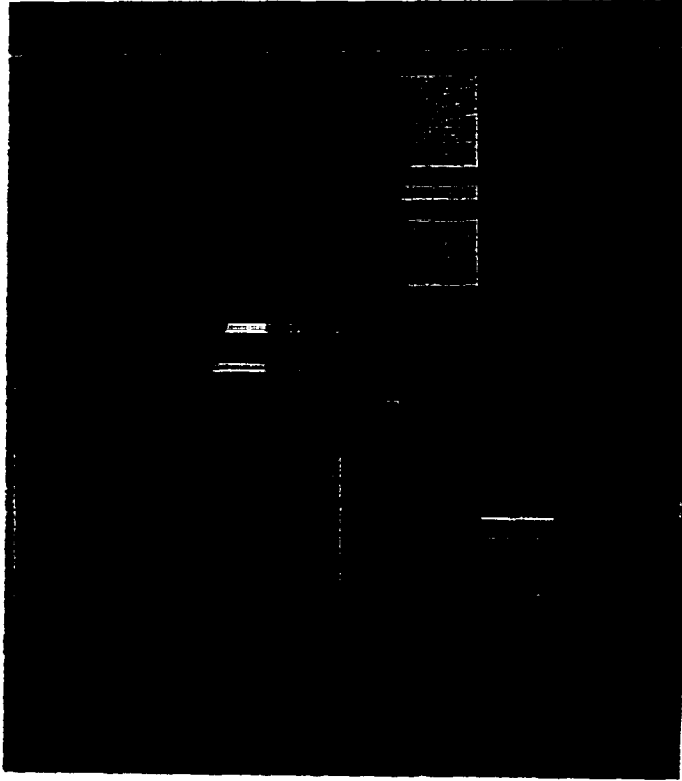


fig. 77-- Composition No. 269, 1944.
Oil on canvas, 51 x 45. Courtesy
Snyder Fine Art

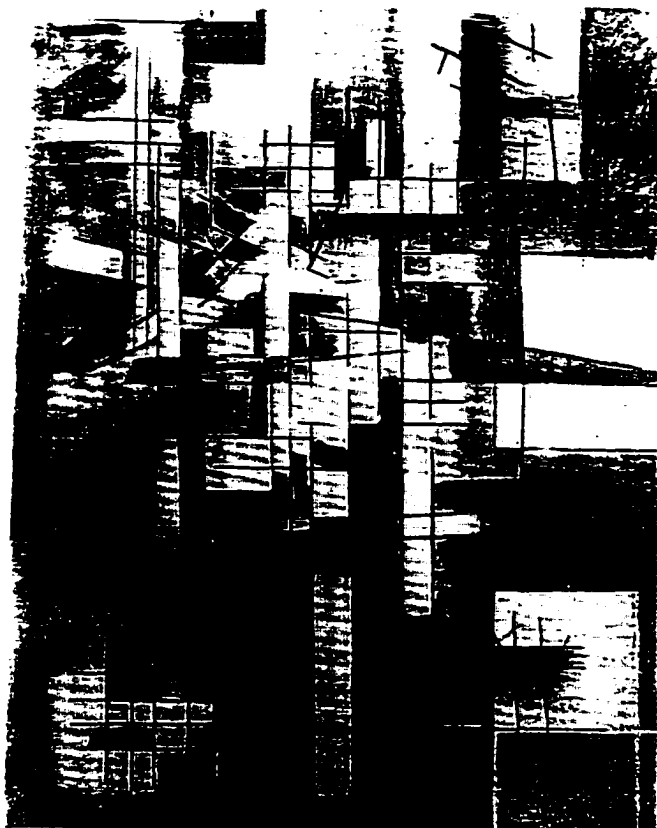


fig. 78-- Beyond White, 1950. Oil on canvas, 50 3/4 x 40 1/8". The Krannert Museum of Art, University of Illinois, Urbana



fig. 79-- Painting No. 430, 1960. Oil
on canvas, 40 x 51". Rose Fried
Gallery. As rep. in aaa, Xceron Files
Reel #D294

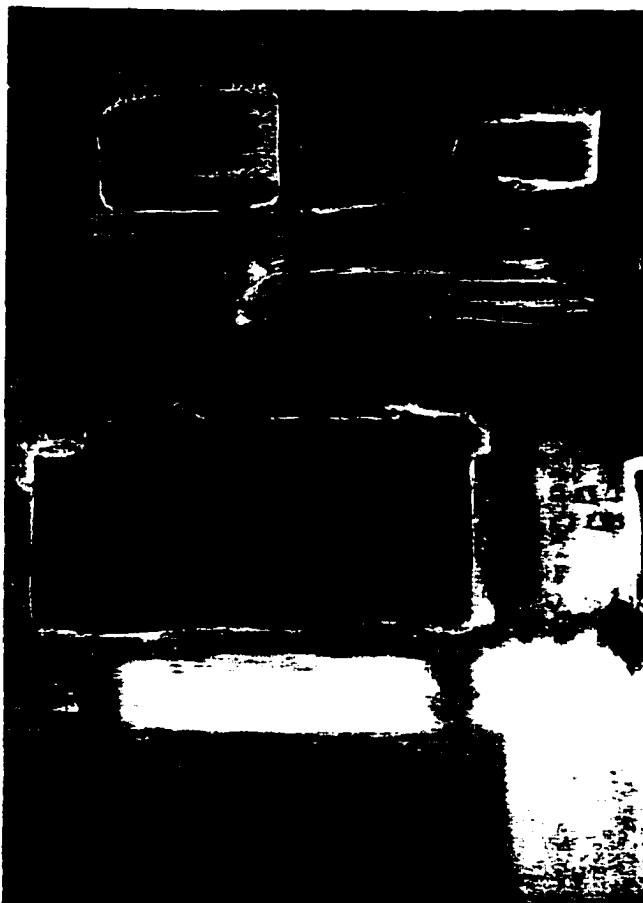


fig. 80-- Mark Rothko, Multiform, 1948.
Oil on canvas, 89 x 65".
Estate of Mark Rothko

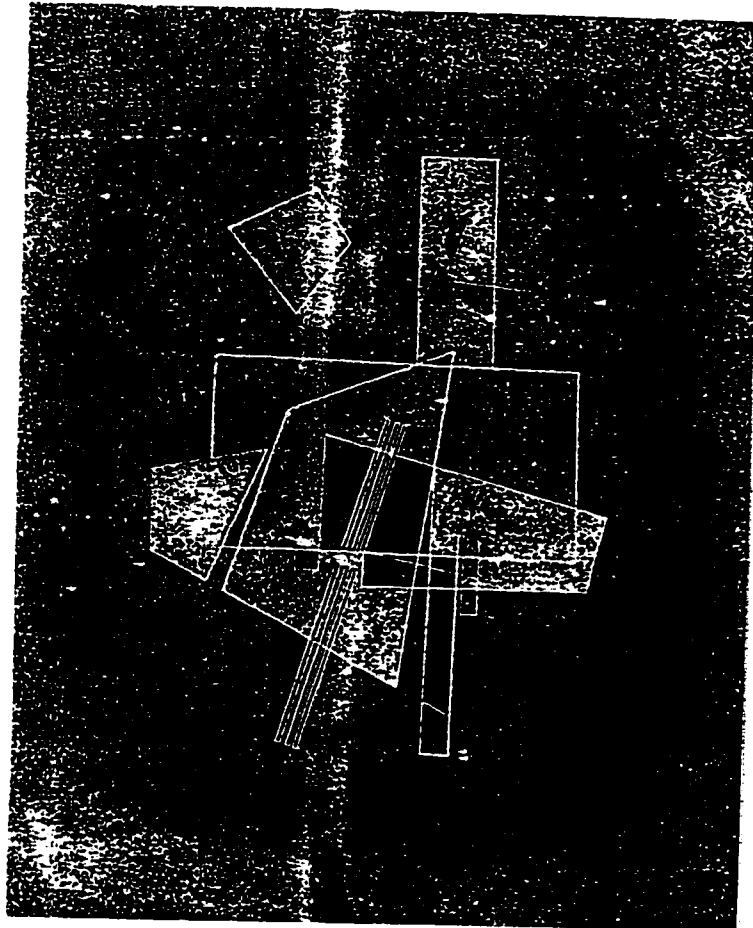


fig. 81-- Composition No. 285, 1945.
Gouache on paper, 21 1/2 x 17".
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

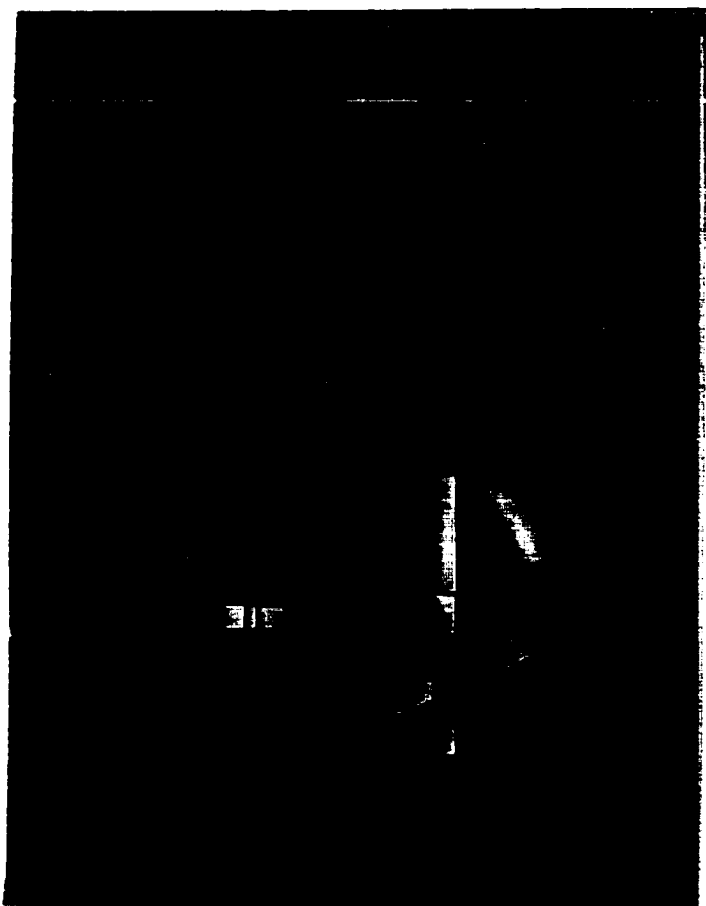


fig. 82-- Multiform 303, 1947. Oil on
canvas, 50 x 40".
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum



fig. 83-- Mark Rothko, Yellow and Gold,
1956. Oil on canvas, 67 1/8 x 62 3/4.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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- _____. "Tal-Coat." (June 15, 1929)
- _____. "Otto Van Rees." (June 23, 1929)

- _____. "Georges Vantongerloo." (July 5, 1929)
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