

In the last decade New York has become the world's leading art center, an estimate abetted by a certain amount of chauvinism, a twin to Paris; judged by less exclusive standards or, considered casually, the city has become at least one of several such capitals. This has pleased the abstract artists whose work is responsible for the development, as well as the critics, curators, and dealers who admire their work. The conservative artists and their adherents, instrumental in producing the bleak state of publicized American art in the 1930s and 1940s, regard it all as a rank, unpleasant, and temporary growth. It is somewhat weedy, as such quick luxuriance often is, but the superior quality of the new painting and the high proportion of good artists are undeniable. American art had been provincial; it is now international and at the leading edge of invention.

The large quantity of material — over two hundred galleries and several thousand artists, a number variable according to where the professional line is drawn — is often confusing to those concerned closely with it and is thoroughly unmanageable to persons newly interested. This article is intended as a guide, necessarily brief and fragmentary and certainly partial, to the many thousands of paintings and sculptures and less classifiable objects to be seen in New York. The museums all have important collections so the works to be mentioned have been chosen for personal reasons. Quality is a personal reason but many neglected pieces also possess it. In contrast the discussion of contemporary artists and their galleries is meant to be evaluative.

There are many causes for the achievements of the group customarily, if inaccurately, called the New York School or the Abstract Expressionists. One of these is that many superlative paintings from the European tradition had accumulated at the Metropolitan and Frick museums during the decades when wealthy Americans chose to import the past. While artists cannot use very much from earlier periods the examples

of the capacities of art are necessary. To the extent possible the abstract artists acquired structural elements from the old and renowned painters. There are stories of Arshile Gorky sketching before the Metropolitan's paintings, especially from Poussin's *The Abduction of the Sabine Women*. Willem de Kooning obviously learned from Ingres, perhaps from his portrait of the Comtesse d'Haussonville in the Frick, which was painted in the early 1840s and is one of Ingres's best works and one of the best paintings in New York. The two collections have been a school for many artists and subsequently a cause for educated rebellion.

The various sections of the Metropolitan Museum comprise a comprehensive display of the world's art. Among others there are departments of Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Asian, Middle Eastern, European, and American art. In addition to this, there are constant special exhibitions, such as the one this autumn of some two hundred and fifty scrolls, sheets of calligraphy, vases, and bronzes from the Chinese Palace Museum's collection. Familiarity with the Metropolitan requires several years' attendance. The best an infrequent visitor can do is to run through the museum, choose his pieces, look at them fully, and ignore the rest. By way of recommendation the room in which several Goyas hang should be visited and also the one which contains six or seven El Grecos. Among the Goyas is the one of the besieged city on a rock in which the dire and grimy tones of the rock and the assailants' fires are bluntly placed before a clear cobalt-blue sky. El Greco is represented by *View of Toledo*, *Cardinal Fernando Niño de Guevara*, an *Adoration of the Shepherds*, and other perfect paintings. A few years ago a room was provided for recent American abstract art. Jackson Pollock's large "drip" painting *Autumn Rhythm* is by several points the best work but there are also good paintings by de Kooning, Brooks, Albers, and Marca-Relli. A painting by Baziotes is mediocre, which is often the case, and one by Kline is poor, which does not often happen.

The exceedingly impressive Frick Collection is small enough to be seen in a few hours. The books, furniture, courtyard, and varied rooms provide a more congenial setting for the paintings, most intended for such surroundings, than would the bleak rooms of the usual museum. There are more first-class works than can be listed easily. In part, the living hall contains Bellini's well-known landscape of *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, Titian's *Man in a Red Cap*, El Greco's *St. Jerome*, and Holbein's *Sir Thomas More. The Education of the Virgin* by Georges de La Tour hangs in a nearby corridor. Two of the four Goyas are excellent, the large, dark, and powerful painting of three men at work over a forge, supposed, by rumor, to have been painted in a day or so and the small portrait of El Conde de Teba. The latter, showing just the head and shoulders, is primarily only four colors – black, the flesh color, and the viridian green and white of the jacket. A half-length portrait by Goya in the Metropolitan is similarly restrained and blunt, or is perhaps more so, since it is black, white, and the flesh color. The largest hall at the Frick, in addition to *The Forge*, contains several famous Rembrandts, two Veroneses, a Turner, several Halses, and a Velázquez. There is also a panel of a standing saint in a convoluted, alizarin-crimson cloak by Piero della Francesca, little of whose work is in the United States, due to being mainly in fresco and to being unpopular in the heyday of importation.

A little frequented museum, that of the Hispanic Society, has not the high caliber or numbers of the previous museums. It is worth seeing, however. It has a few possible Goyas and El Grecos. There are many of Goya's etchings and some of his wash drawings. The museum's main interest is that it has enough furniture, accoutrements, and maps from the Spanish exploration to portray the centuries between El Greco and Goya. Secondly it has enough second-rate art to do the same for the art of that period. Almost everyone reduces art history to its masterpieces. The present suffers because its observers

do not understand how art develops and because its critics naively expect all present art to be as perfect as the past's apparently was. The past suffers because many good but limited artists are forgotten, or their work destroyed, and because an understanding of the sequence of developments cannot be gained without considering secondary artists; they made fatal mistakes which closed certain avenues, or they made discoveries which they were unable to complete, but which succeeding and stronger artists were able to perfect.

The Brooklyn Museum holds important watercolor and print annuals and has a good permanent collection. The American Museum of Natural History has much primitive art. The art of the Haida, Tlingit, and Kwakiutl Indians of the Pacific Northwest is extraordinary. Some of the finest pieces in the Pre-Columbian section are the dark red and black embroidered mantles from the Paracas Necropolis in Peru. The Museum of Primitive Art also has a fine collection of Pre-Columbian art and also one of African art. The Morgan Library exhibits portions of its large collections of Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, historical documents, printed books (including the recently acquired Gutenberg Bible), drawings, paintings, and graphic work, notably Rembrandt's etchings. Occasionally an exhibition is supplemented by items borrowed from other sources. Unlike the brief mention of these museums the Whitney is passed by quickly out of displeasure. Although much good American art has been shown there its small proportion of the whole makes its appearance seem accidental; for years the Whitney has presented an inferior view of American art.

It is The Museum of Modern Art which has shown the power and the quality of American art. The museum has been uncertain and its prestige has prompted too many unwarranted successes, but this has been outweighed by several exhibitions which have defined advances in American art. Often in exhibitions of several artists each one is given a room

to himself. The paintings of Guston and Kline so exhibited in the 1956 show *Twelve Americans* were very impressive and made the importance of the two artists unquestionable. The several rooms given to Rothko's work last year were similarly awesome. The show was important for proving the logic of Rothko's style and its capacity for development. His work has improved every year, unlike that of some of his colleagues. A memorable exhibition of one of the older artists was the large one of Jean Arp's sculpture in 1958. The museum, of course, has an outstanding permanent collection.

When the Guggenheim Museum opened a couple of years ago nearly everyone concerned with painting deplored Wright's design. It is true that most of the paintings appear weak seen across the open space and between the wide, slanted concrete spirals. Also the works are projected from the wall on rods, which makes them seem thin. Wright, just as mistakenly, wished the paintings to lean against the wall. The problem is that the building is more advanced than the paintings, which are abstract enough, certainly, but which also have vestiges of recessive space. Cézanne's *The Clockmaker* looks the worst, being the earliest, which is hardly its true standing. The large rough sculptures by Brancusi on the ground floor look the best. The building itself is great. Looking up inside one sees enough to understand that the outer walls expand; unavoidably one sees that the inner bands converge. Thus the basic structure is of a cone reversed within a cone, neither seen completely.

In the 1940s there were twenty or thirty galleries, most of which were located around Fifty-Seventh Street. Many of these still exist, although several have moved to the new area around Madison Avenue in the seventies. The wealthy galleries of Old Masters, Impressionists, and expensive European Moderns were then and are now Duveen, Knoedler, Rosenberg, and Wildenstein; the latter is noted for its large shows of the renowned – Cézanne, Goya, Rembrandt. American and second-rank European art was sold by the Rehn,

Downtown, Kraushaar, Seligmann, Schaefer, Milch, and Durlacher galleries, all of which remain. Many of the members of these galleries have lost their preeminence to the new artists. A very few, such as Stuart Davis at the Downtown, continue near the top.

Since the late 1940s the number of galleries has expanded to over two hundred. Although some of the new galleries handle other types of art most exhibit the new forms of abstract painting, either with or without perspicacity. The first and most obvious division of the ranks is into the uptown and downtown galleries. The distinction is both geographic and economic. Membership in the uptown galleries assures the artist of anywhere from a schoolteacher's salary to a vice president's income and a definite professional standing. Membership in the galleries on Tenth Street and in those in the Village grants nothing. The importance of the cooperatives of Tenth Street lies in their providing a community and a starting point for young artists. Most of the members of the galleries uptown were once in these small galleries. Many have come from the Tanager Gallery, now nearly ten years old. Others have come from the newer Brata, Camino, and Area galleries. Many of the older artists still live and work in the neighborhood, still frequent the bleak Cedar Tavern, and attend meetings of the Artists' Club. Rothko's studio is nearby on the Bowery in the gym of the former YMCA. James Brooks, too, has a studio in the building, and stores his paintings in the stalls of the men's room. Tenth Street is being surrounded by new apartments and its dirty, sagging, hundred-year-old buildings will go, but for the time being it keeps some of the aura of the poor and obscure days of de Kooning, Rothko, Kline, Pollock, Gorky, and the others.

The majority of the original participants in the New York School are shown uptown in the Janis Gallery: de Kooning, Kline, Motherwell, Gottlieb, and Guston. Gorky and Pollock exhibited there while they were alive and the gallery

continues to show their work. Josef Albers is also a member, and a number of major European artists, such as Léger and Arp, are represented. This roster makes the gallery a salient one in New York. Sidney Janis opened the gallery in the early 1950s and gathered the group of painters from Charles Egan's gallery and from that of Betty Parsons, both of whom provided early support for the Abstract Expressionists. Janis is on his way to becoming another Duveen. Egan has recently reopened his gallery and Betty Parsons, located across the hall from Janis, continues to show many good painters, often the younger ones. One of the best shows last year at Parsons was that of Ad Reinhardt, a contemporary of the Abstract Expressionists, who very stubbornly continued to paint in a geometric style regardless of the Expressionist victory. The paintings appeared nearly black on first sight and then slowly disclosed a few rectangles of close-valued but very distinct dark brown, dark red, or dark gray. A geometric style of greater scale and space is that of a younger Parsons member, Ellsworth Kelly. He is one of the best of the painters in their thirties, as is another artist in the same gallery, Jack Youngerman.

There are a dozen or so galleries like Parsons having one or two top artists, several secondary ones, and a few mediocre ones. The older of these are the Borgenicht, Poindexter, Kootz, Stable, and Jackson galleries. The latter three have especially spacious and opulent premises. With the exception of the Poindexter and the Stable, which are entirely American, these have a majority of American artists and a sizable minority of reputable European and Japanese ones, enough of whom live in New York or visit it to give the city the customary international attitude of a major art center. In the Matisse and Perls galleries European art exceeds American. The list of the Martha Jackson Gallery may be given as typical. Two are not well known; the rest are. The four best artists have international reputations. Louise Nevelson, an American, assembles wooden parts of furniture, pieces of balustrades, scrap lumber, boxes,

and other odds and ends into units or walls which she paints black, white, or, less successfully, gold. Antoni Tàpies is Spanish and is known for somber, heavy paintings of solidified sand, laconically and casually inscribed or marked. Karel Appel's work is expressionistic, less abstract than the American version, given to an imagery suggestive of that of children's art. He is Dutch. Sam Francis is American. At one time he created a translucent wall in each of his paintings built of small, thin washes. Now his style is more open, more like that of the generalized notion of the New York School. Going down a notch, Paul Jenkins, another American, works even more fluidly than Francis, creating large forms from sweeping washes of paint. Frank Lobdell, one of the less well known artists, a Californian, sets powerful, obscure, animal-like images in an expanse of black or brown paint. Going down again, Al Leslie uses a free, de Kooning-like style within a framework of broad horizontal or vertical strokes. This approaches academic abstraction: dropping several notches, another member, Michael Goldberg, is identical with it. His paintings involve broad flaccid strokes on a dark ground. Walasse Ting, the other obscure member, compromises the splashed paint of current abstraction with the characteristics of the spontaneous and sketchy Zen art of the Orient. John Hultberg received great acclaim several years ago for paintings of fragmented landscape and quickly receding perspective. This was not an exceptional idea in the first place and he has since exhausted it. The last mediocre painter in the gallery is Larry Rivers, once notorious for giving up abstraction, which he did not understand anyway, for a weak piecemeal realism. Either way his work is poor. Leslie, Goldberg, Rivers, and Hultberg are Americans and are in their late thirties, as are Jenkins and Francis.

Of the newer galleries the Howard Wise, opened two years ago, is notable for the level of its artists and for its spacious interior, designed by Philip Johnson. The painters are young and old New York School artists of the second rank. Although

the gallery has no first-rank members it also has only one inferior one. A gallery across Fifty-Seventh Street from the Wise, the Green Gallery, beginning its second year, is interesting because of its wide presentation of unknown but inventive young painters and sculptors. It is something of an uptown Tenth Street gallery.

The Castelli Gallery, which is several years old, has built a considerable reputation by exhibiting many of the best and most experimental of the younger artists, most of whom are interested in developments diverging from Abstract Expressionism. Several of the artists have invented elements which might be considered an advance beyond the earlier abstraction; Frank Stella, for example, has made something new of geometric painting, made it more concrete and increased its scale.

This catalogue is hardly complete but should serve as an outline to the art world of New York.

This article is a commissioned report and not art criticism.
– Donald Judd