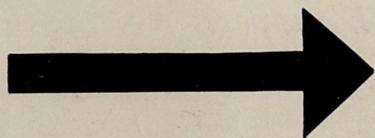


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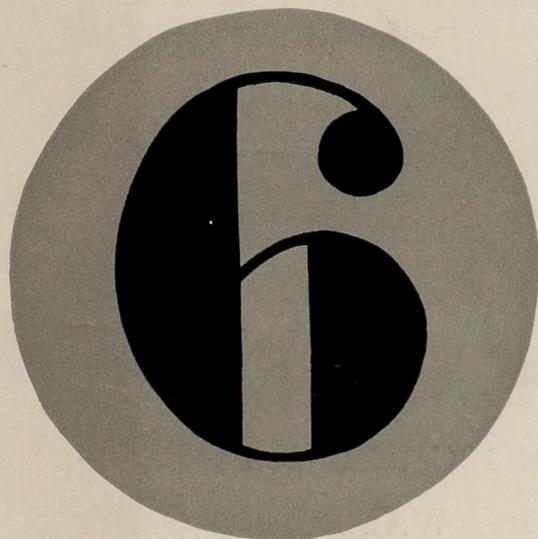
A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY  
"ABSTRACT" PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Editor: Myfanwy Evans

**ABSTRACTION?  
SURREALISM?**



**Order, Order!  
Time to forget ourselves  
Poussin, Seurat . . . .  
Picasso belongs where?  
Search for subjective form  
Moholy-Nagy  
Jean Hélion  
Young painters**



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Surrealist



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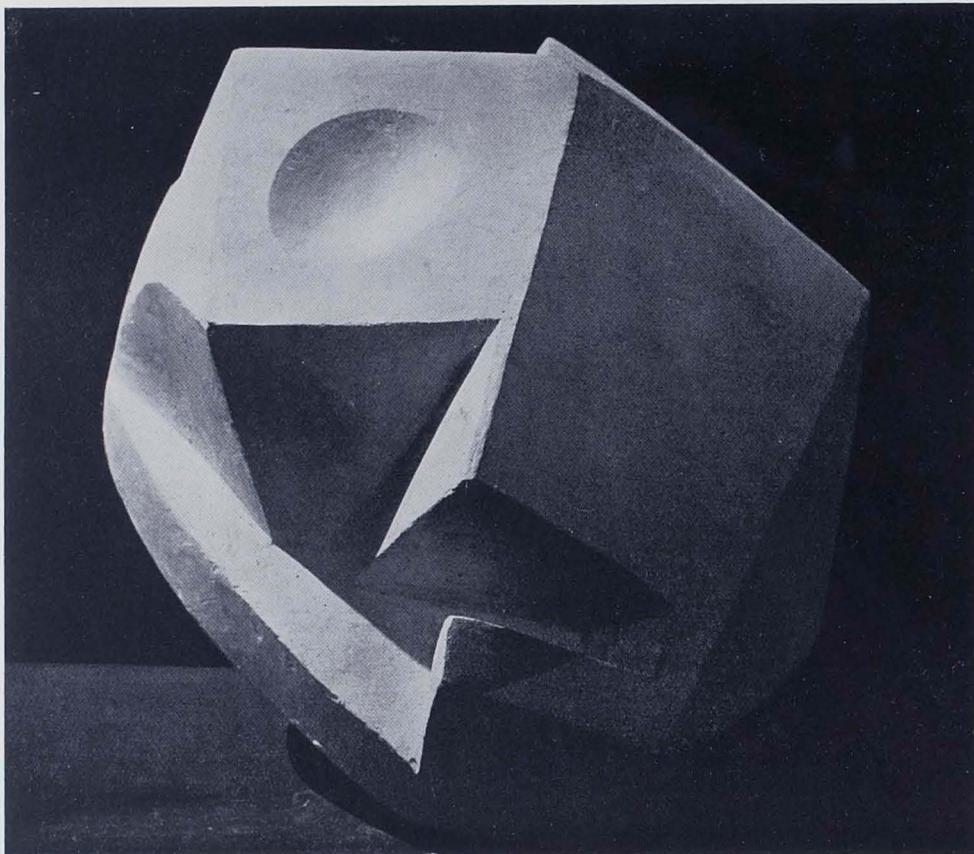
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(The Illustrations on pages 4, 6, 7, 9, 22, 23 and 24 are reproduced by courtesy of the Surrealist Exhibition organisers.)



GIACOMETTI

Head



**Order, order!** by Myfanwy Evans

There are many brightly coloured threads in modern art and each one is guaranteed to have a prize on the end of it. You pull the colour you like best. I have been invited to pull. Everyone knows which of two I shall choose; the white one because it is expected of me, or the black one out of sheer perversity—but I cut the black and white threads and walk off without any prizes.

I have refused perfection and progress on the one hand and eloquent revolution on the other. It is a gesture, but it is incomplete unless it is made towards something, and towards something that is not merely halfway between surrealist art and abstract art. The simple refusal to accept either one or the other is too bleak and unselective an action, just as the exclusive acceptance of either entails too dramatic a role. One immediately becomes both high-priest and devil incarnate.

(Already I have been offered a banner.) But consider examples of each. One is a dazzling white picture, and on it a clear and brilliant shape in a single colour, and perhaps a black line, exactly divided, beautifully executed. In the other a lion in man's clothing runs rapidly towards you through a mysterious dark landscape, his large sorrowful eyes gleaming with jubilation and apprehension—in his hand he holds a skull, behind there are gravestones. Next to the first is another of more sombre white, not made shining by the juxtaposition of colour, but delicately emphasised by the shadow of a cut-away line. By the second, half a woman appears in a grey landscape, the rocks are shaped like human entrails, on the ground winks a silver thimble.

To-day all these pictures involve one in more than æsthetic reaction, in more than

untroubled pleasure at their existence. They stand for different religions, for different living. And it is clear that all that is called abstract art, or surrealist art, cannot be included in these two nutshells. We have only to recall the Abstract-Concrete exhibition. Where does Miró belong? Moore? Calder? Héliou, even? And what about Gabo and Moholy-Nagy, apparently belonging clearly to the group first described? Are they really after the same thing? We are lost amongst individuals whose works protest at classification. A history of the "isms" of the twentieth century is a useful, even an essential work. It clarifies and sorts out on paper, but with such inexhaustible accuracy that the living picture comes to have no meaning at all within its class. In art facts, however impartially presented, can never be a substitute for a gradual comprehension, the personal shifting of understanding and emphasis, until things fall into some kind of order—perhaps merely a temporary order, but one of real vitality. (Just as a week of continuous electric light does not give the same impulse to value and revalue as the continuing change from night to day.)

But to return to the Abstract-Concrete show—and the one at Duncan Miller's, and the two mixed shows at Newcastle and Leicester (both with abstract sections), the Surrealist show now on, the Picasso show now on and the new art paper, *Telebor*—there is and has been during the past month or so a bewildering amount of data. But it has become increasingly clear to me that it is possible to make one or two distinctions, positive for *Axis now*—tentative for the *future*. The first is that both abstract and surrealist artists, or those claimed by both, can be divided into those who are primarily interested in the art of painting or the art of sculpture, and those to whom it is of secondary interest. That is to say, they use it as a means to an end which is not a painting or a sculpture end. The second is that even leaving aside the surrealist end for the moment those ends are not all the same. Amongst abstract artists there is something which definitely links Mondrian, Nicholson, Moholy-Nagy, Gabo, and Hepworth—and probably Domela and Erni (this is not an inclusive, merely a familiar, list). It is a streamline sense. A sense

of precision, light and clarity. In the end a movement towards some fixed goal. In the belief in and the desire for progress of one kind or another these artists are linked almost as one group—the "pure abstractionists." But again there seems a definite distinction. Moholy-Nagy and Gabo are after something more tangible. They are artists who are concerned with the possibilities of new materials and processes. They want to use and exploit all the inventions of the last fifty years. Gabo wants to build with space and to create a new art out of the finds of industry: an art which will express *public* needs by some other means than the bronze statue. Moholy-Nagy wants to build with light: to make light-displays controlled into formal beauty, but not by the formal standards of painting. His painting—he says in *Telebor*—is a makeshift, until he can find the capital and co-operation to create his new plastic art. He uses it as far as possible to clarify and explore these special ends, using metals instead of canvases as a background to the play of light and shadow. They are both artists of a new world, biding their time amongst old-fashioned standards; unable to undertake their work except in miniature, even for their own pleasure. Very different demands and beliefs from those of the painter. With the other, pure abstractionists it is different. Theirs is a spiritual, not a material, demand—they do not want scope and apparatus, they want Utopia, an embodied faith. There is in their whole attitude to painting and sculpture a passionate belief in the power for good of pure abstract work. Pure colours, clear, brilliant contrasts or the delicate clarity of one pale line against another, the absence of human and earthly associations, all mean to them a positive step to perfection—perhaps a piece of perfection itself. Not towards a brave new world where applied science baffles the spirit, but towards a world of light where the idea of goodness, progress and perfection is given validity through a communal life of the abstinence that means true liberty. Each step in painting or sculpture is not the solving of a personal problem, but one more piece of evidence in the new order.

Opposed to this, and shunned by it, is the lion still trotting through the surrealist night where "expression is more important than



PICASSO. *Painting*



MIRÓ. *Formes sur fond noir*, 1935

perfection" and the magic of association can "convey one a thousand miles, or back to one's childhood." (It must be made clear here that we are still discussing opposing religions, not opposing schools of painting.) The members of the surrealist group (and one is for ever making distinctions between professionals, candidates for the profession, and mere amateurs) believe in living the surrealist life in every moment of waking and sleeping. The manifestos are well known — they want to bridge the gulf between the waking-life and the dream-life, between the conscious and the unconscious, and to canalize the unknown forces of the mind. The various means: automatic writing, the wooing of instinctive action, and the cult of incongruity are well known, too. Their belief in all this is as sincere as the pure abstractionists' belief in simplicity, and in the end as narrow, but the latter believe that in narrowness is true liberty, and the surrealists believe their very field to be boundless.

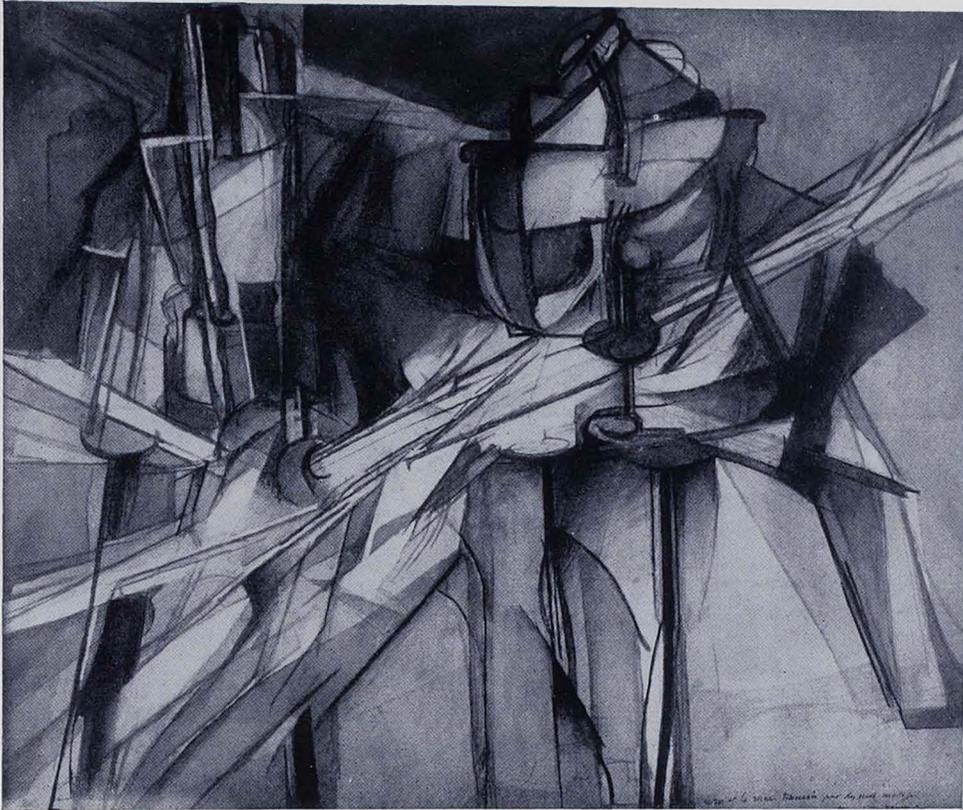
But the subconscious seems inevitably to get its own back, excursions into it always lead to the same succession of dreary shocks, and through the uncertain paths of the dream world the mind makes a beeline for its own preoccupations. These preoccupations seem always to be of the same nature. Everything is made a case and the case is always predictable. Surrealism to-day has lost the inspired uncalculated destruction of Dada, and has become analytic. It does not throw bombs—it uses a dissecting knife. It is only really interesting to the outsider when gone into with academic thoroughness as a true student of Freud. It is only really valuable as a movement to those who rigorously practise it. And the intensity of their belief makes it more worth while than the vogueish appreciation of the friends of surrealism.

Amateurs simply use it as an interminable winding and unwinding memory game—sausages remind me of ice-cream. The minotaur turns into a tame jackdaw whose wings are clipped. It can hop into the earth closet, but once there it blinks stupidly and refuses to budge.

The surrealists claim all those in the past or living to-day who have any *passion*, as being

surrealist in the particular manifestation of their passion, so that to-day surrealist is a catchword not only for any oddity but for any sign of intensity and guts in a work of art or piece of behaviour. This is a thing to fight against. It is one more label for the artist to contend with (given pseudo-validity by its application to great figures of the past). It can be added to abnormality and genius and the sacred reproach of eccentricity. But there is a more important objection than this: it very often implies a complete misconception of the artist concerned. To call Blake surrealist in any part of his work invalidates his whole life and work (from his own point of view if from no one else's), it is about as near the mark as it would be to call Stendhal surrealist. The surrealists are explorers of the mind; the creative counterparts of Freud. Blake was a builder; the unknown forces of his mind were as much part of him as the blood in his body, and flowed as evenly. They were as controllable as the nerves of his fingers as they wrote. He used the weight of them. They were already canalized.

The battle has been pitched between abstract painting and sculpture and surrealist painting and sculpture; but there it cannot flourish. It is a silly battle. There are too many painters who do not paint in the name of either (though they have been claimed by one of the two, or by both). Painters who were distinguished early in the article as primarily interested in painting. Their surrealism is incidental, their abstraction a sign of life, not sterility. When I look at Miró's work I am not swept into a labyrinthine description of subconscious urges, nor am I conveyed "a thousand miles or back to my childhood"—I am bound irresistibly to the present. It is this moment of existence that I am experiencing *here*. Picasso, Arp, Giacometti, Moore, Hélicon, Hartung, Piper, Jackson and Holding do not bear censures for either religion, they reserve the right to alter according to their inclination and nature, and not according to a group-programme. So I, when I admire the work of Ernst or of Nicholson, Hepworth or Mondrian, admire it for itself—not as an act of faith or as a commitment to a line of behaviour.



DUCHAMP. *Le Roi et la Reine traversés par des nus en vitesse*. 1912. (Duchamp twenty years ago posed in his work a good many of the problems which are being resolved to-day. His place as precursor and leader is admirably stated in "Cubism and Abstract Art," by Alfred Barr, of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which will be reviewed in the next number of "Axis.")

## **Poussin, Seurat and double rhythm**

By Jean Hélion (Paris, Dec., 1934), printed from the original English

A picture by Poussin is the maximum of a picture. Not a point of it that is not potential. Not an element that is not a degree of an infinitely supple progression running through the surface. Figures appear among trees as if they were born there for that purpose. They are brothers to the trees; their eyes are as transparent as the water near by. The trees are not humanized; they are not in the least deformed. They are trees as we meet them outside, but the order of their elements, the internal rhythm of each, the external rhythm of all, are such that the trees function. Function in

the meaning of talking or shining. And that talking function answers that of the figures.

The whole picture is loud with meaning. Unity of talk, diversity of forms. The talk runs through everything and comes from every point. A group of people are gathered. Some are up, a few sitting, one shows her back. They make a garland containing a space. This space is itself an entity, a definite figure, modulated, constructed, complete. Its shape is a degree of a scale constituted by all the other spaces to be found in the picture. Like the figures,



POUSSIN. Eliezer et Rebecca (Louvre)

some trees are high, some are low; one spreads its branches, one points to the sky.

In "Eliezer and Rebecca," on the top of a pilaster is a sphere. At the foot of Rebecca is a vase almost spheric. Hanging from a hand somewhere is another vase more lengthened. A girl is pouring the water from a fourth vase into a bigger one which realizes another degree of transformation of the original sphere, another attitude of vase, other dimensions, another opposition between height and width, between a mass and its surrounding space. One vase has a handle above, another a handle on the side, another two half handles, one each side. Eliezer wears a turban that is a supple vase, a further transformation of the original sphere; its outlining has a different tension, its mass a different poise. The heads of the women offer a new degree of circular formation more complicated, deepened, potentialized. Their bodies are built by undulations that are further variations of the same original sphere. The gestures evolve as echoes of it. Ellipses, strong but sensitive and supple ellipses, undulate through the group of people, the group of gestures, between them and outside. The colours function with them, marking degrees of those rhythmic ellipses; progressions of corresponding colours and counter progressions of opposed colours accelerate the speed of the movements in such a composition of ways that the movements thus equilibrated, from agitations are transformed into potentialities.

All the arms of the figures work together. Rebecca's arm goes down obliquely inside. Eliezer's goes up, less oblique, towards the other side. The woman on her right bears an arm on her waist, going very much down. Her neighbour has an arm down almost vertical, the other making a right angle with Eliezer's arm. On the left part of the picture, a bouquet of arms gathers around a vase. All those arms, considered without the bodies and other elements of the pictures, play a continuous part, describe the surface, designate its directions, its sides, indicate a circulation for the spectator's look. They dance, if this word can be understood, in all the space. Thus, designating directions, the feet function.

The draperies circulate over the bodies,

accelerating their rhythms or slowing them down, lengthening their capacity of looks, modulating it, dividing the masses in degrees, proposing again directions that constitute another organisation of the picture.

Behind, on the left, houses are high, with horizontal roofs; on the right a house, with another scale and a sloping roof. The big sky space is in the middle of the picture. Opposed to it, the small black space of the fountain at the right, and the smaller fall of air through the neck of the vases.

I could keep on describing the picture in all its oppositions; they are endless and measure the prodigious depth of the Poussins. One says that all of those are just variations to avoid annoying the spectator. This is their smallest function. The permanent variation is indeed the transformation of the terms along an immense progression that involves them all. Thus a current is running through the picture, carrying the spectator to all its points, everywhere gaining an acceleration, a new speed, a new quality. By a series of rebounds, the colour transforms itself. One red jumps over a blue to an orange. One brown jumps to red over a black, one green to purple over a long series of greys. The masses of trees undulate in colour in a slower way and this slowness is also a transformation of the fast modulation of the colours worn by the personages.

One finds everything in a Poussin: spots and all their echoes—there are personages circulating in the background of some pictures in order to carry the echo of a red or of a yellow—and large masses divided in little leaves, heavy masses of houses, transparent masses of water, and moving and differently transparent masses of sky. Lights and shadows work. The dark spots of the sky answer lights on the gowns of the figures. Every colour, as well as every form, receives and carries on the permanently self-renewing ellipse. Once your eye is on a spot, the gradation of its colour leads you to another element that takes you somewhere else, and you are due for a marvellous voyage that never passes the same way at the same point.

This is all the infinity that can be got in a picture. And this is also what the usually cheaply used word "unity" means.

In each picture the whole setting is renewed. In *Eliezer and Rebecca*, the figures stretch their garland horizontally and dominate. In *Orpheus* the picture is mostly space, small figures around a large lake and trees on each side. In the *Terrestrial Paradise*, a forest occupies the whole canvas and two small figures in the left centre, lock it. In *Ruth and Boas*, people are dispersed in a field, isolated, spotted on the edge of an endless lake of blond wheat. There are pictures without red, without coloured spots, almost without people. Then come crowds. There will be, in his last picture, people finishing their ellipse in the trees.

Along Poussin's life, within each picture and from one to another, the personages run through the surface; they occupy, they valorize every point. The personality of the picture, each time, is the resulting order of that course.

With Poussin, the painting had reached a completion. Since him, the scope and qualities of painting have regularly diminished, in conception as well as in fact, but the degrees of his plastic preoccupations constitute a scale that can measure works of all times and throw a light on the different terms of the modern evolution. It would be useful to follow the history since Poussin, painter by painter, country by country, and disentangle the bundle of the ways of transformation and decays. But this is an historian's job: as a painter, I will briefly consider a few well-known pictures and painters in the light shone by Poussin.

Looking at the *Sacre de Napoleon*, by David (Louvre), it is impossible to describe it the way I described *Eliezer and Rebecca*. People, in the *Sacre*, are gathered by force. Their arms, hands, heads, folds, objects, do not function together any more, or only very lightly, from the outside. They are piled. They are one by the other. Their relations are stiffened. Each figure talks a little song that is almost indifferent to the songs of the others. The unity is obtained by the colouration more than by the form. Legs, feet, offer directions that are not organized, lead nowhere, out of the picture. No more infinity of the space in the frame. The

background closes it; it looks like a tapestry. The gaze, on it, stagnates.

In the pictures by Delacroix, the personages once more try to occupy the space. They agitate themselves into it, but they do not master it. There is more movement in a quiet scene by Poussin than in *Sardana-pale* (Louvre). People dance, with Delacroix, they show they want to move, they describe the movement, but they do not realize the entire rhythm. Theirs is one sided. Everything is trying to help the movement, to push it, and thus weakens it. This produces strong parts that do not connect but float in holes. Spaces are not built, they are what is left, filled as they came, with strokes of colours describing something, realizing nothing. The whole does not function. The knowledge, the conception or the care of the total solidity are lost.

Ingres still knows how to run through a face, to read it, to attain its perfect unity; he does not go so far with the body, and when it is a question of establishing relations with the spaces, nothing works any more. The personage instals himself badly in front of the background. The splendid head of *Monsieur Bertin* (Louvre) crowns a back that floats, hesitates and shivers to meet the background. No continuity in the scale of depths. The bigger the picture, the worse it is. The *Triumph of Homer* is a series of portraits, each of them interesting, their gathering empty and soon ugly and unbearable.

The following artists, missing the vanishing totality, try to compensate by adding circumstantial details, describing more, insisting on expressions, and proportioning the means to the expression. They start discomposing the colours. They follow the effect. See *Turner*: the picture disappears behind the effect. Soon after him, the so-called tradition, what is left of it, is officially broken. Impressionism, under the appearance of a progress, is another form of decadence. The search for one quality, light, takes the first place, almost the only place. Where is Poussin, who was looking for all? The concept of totality is perfectly forgotten. Unity is attained through uniformity.

A clear landscape in which appear light colours, vaguely shaped, is at that time

better than the surrounding paintings of the darkened official schools. But so notoriously fragmental, insufficient, that Cézanne strongly reacts. Later, so will Seurat.

Cézanne appears to me as having caught the Impressionist's mist by handfuls and pressed it, to concentrate it. With him, the colour rakes back its intensity, its poise, its weight. The drawing, though fragmental, attains a solidity. Out of the mist, he once more gets elements, and organizes them, by degrees on his surface.

In his time, Seurat took a higher attitude. He belonged to the great thinking tradition coming from Uccello through Mantegna, Raphael and Poussin. He had the conception of monumentality, a total monumentality, plural, to be opposed to the local monumentality, that of an isolated object, or of a group of objects, distinctly focused.

Cézanne seemed to have the desire for such monumentality, but not the means yet. Cézanne painted fragments. He was deep enough to bring those fragments to the neighbourhood of totality by finding in them universal structure, a structure compatible with that of any other object and element, and by a continuous modulation of colour. This is one degree of the job that is also satisfied with Seurat, but he goes further. He reaches a totality of the general scheme, an independence from the world of spectators that makes me irresistibly think of the Poussins. (*The Bathers*, Tate Gallery). His shapes, besides playing their fragmental part in the picture, also play their own. Each has a continuity for itself, an individuality that makes it a being, that gives it the spiritual appearance of an egg. An egg, this form of total, self-contained, finished, perfect thing.

In Seurat's pictures, the line is continuous, while it is interrupted in Cézanne's. Parts in Cézanne's are part of the picture, which is good and just what the decadent painters preceding him did not know how to realize. But those parts rarely exist completely in themselves. See the landscapes. Often, thus helping the exterior totality of his pictures, he covers them with strokes raining obliquely; this is primary. With Seurat, objects are not united by exterior means. Their rhythm is double. One aspect of the rhythm is strung on the general gesture of the picture

and of all parts of it. The other aspect runs entirely through each individual part and completes it. The egg way for every part and the space way for the whole.

In Seurat, no spots of colours, no sudden variations within an element. His colour runs slowly and transforms itself progressively, in a way that does not produce interruptions, within the limits of the element. There is identification of form and colour. Each form contains a colour, this colour being allowed to go from dark to light within its harmonic range. Thus every part of a Seurat is a total picture in itself. It has been said so for Cézanne, but it is wrong. Every spot of a Cézanne shows organisation, exterior relations with the whole picture and a summary structure in itself, but does not achieve the egg aspect, the individuality, that splendid quality of the Poussins; perfection of the large and the small, infinity in both senses.

I think it is the supreme degree of composition to string the elements on a universal rhythm without tightening them, reducing them, blinding them. Thus are we strung on the rhythm of animal life, still keeping individual and apparently free of going.

Looking at the model for bits of forms to be added to bits of forms glance by glance, to produce the general drawing, our students are wasting time. To study a form, seeking how square or round it can be, what are the angles, does not lead very far. It ameliorates the drawing of the beginner in appearance, but cuts him forever from the reality: the continuity of the form. The same error was made by Cézanne. Led by some authentic preoccupations—and having found himself in difficulties it is no longer necessary to consider—Cézanne transformed his model in a series of "coups d'oeil" gazes, that soon made it like a harlequin garment. And all those little glanced-spots starting to have an interest of their own got the best of the human shape. Later and progressively, the culture of those partial elements caused the neglect of the shape, its fall, its corruption, its disappearance. The line is straight to cubism. The evolution could have been foreseen when Cézanne started. He had saved one part of the tradition and killed the rest.

At this point, Seurat's reaction appears clearer. He was sensible enough to reduce his taste or need of decomposition to that of colours, making spots so small that they did not take shape nor interfere with the general plastic structure; they did not impose themselves, they respected and even helped the knowledge of the shape, the continuity of line, the amplitude of the composition.

For this, Seurat may last longer than Cézanne. This is not diminishing Cézanne. He is authentic, the best of his period, having a true sensation of solidity, while, for instance, Manet had little more than a boldness that can have been a lack of care, and a speed of the brush that led him to simplification of shapes, masses of colours, that have been mistaken for a style but actually begin to look perfectly empty.

Anyway, it is due to Cézanne that, later, paintings were going to be made only of brush-strokes, spots, the theme being something that floats more or less around. Decomposition.

It is worthy of note that the seeking for greater realism has led painting to lose all reality. From the "sensation" of Cézanne, one has been to all sensations of any kind, mostly real, plastic, imaginary, and so on. Through painting in ruins, there are people following their true sensations wherever they lead, even to the asylum, through any amusing, surprising, poetic, morbid, sexual images they can produce or combine. But the destruction they carry soon annihilates them and rubs them out of the field of creation.

Opposite are left people who want to live and to whom the abstract word "clarity" means something important, even said alone, without the rhetoric "of what". The way Poussin, Raphael, Mantegna, Uccello, Cimabue, the Ancient Greeks, the Chaldeans were clear.

I am very conscious that I am here praising tradition. But to say so after having understood what Cézanne, Picasso, Mondrian did (to name only three clear stages), means more than if I talked of tradition without admiring their works. Poussin, through them, looks greater than ever and much clearer.

We are where we are. The evolution of painting, like nature, does not jump. Art has been brought to the abstract phase,

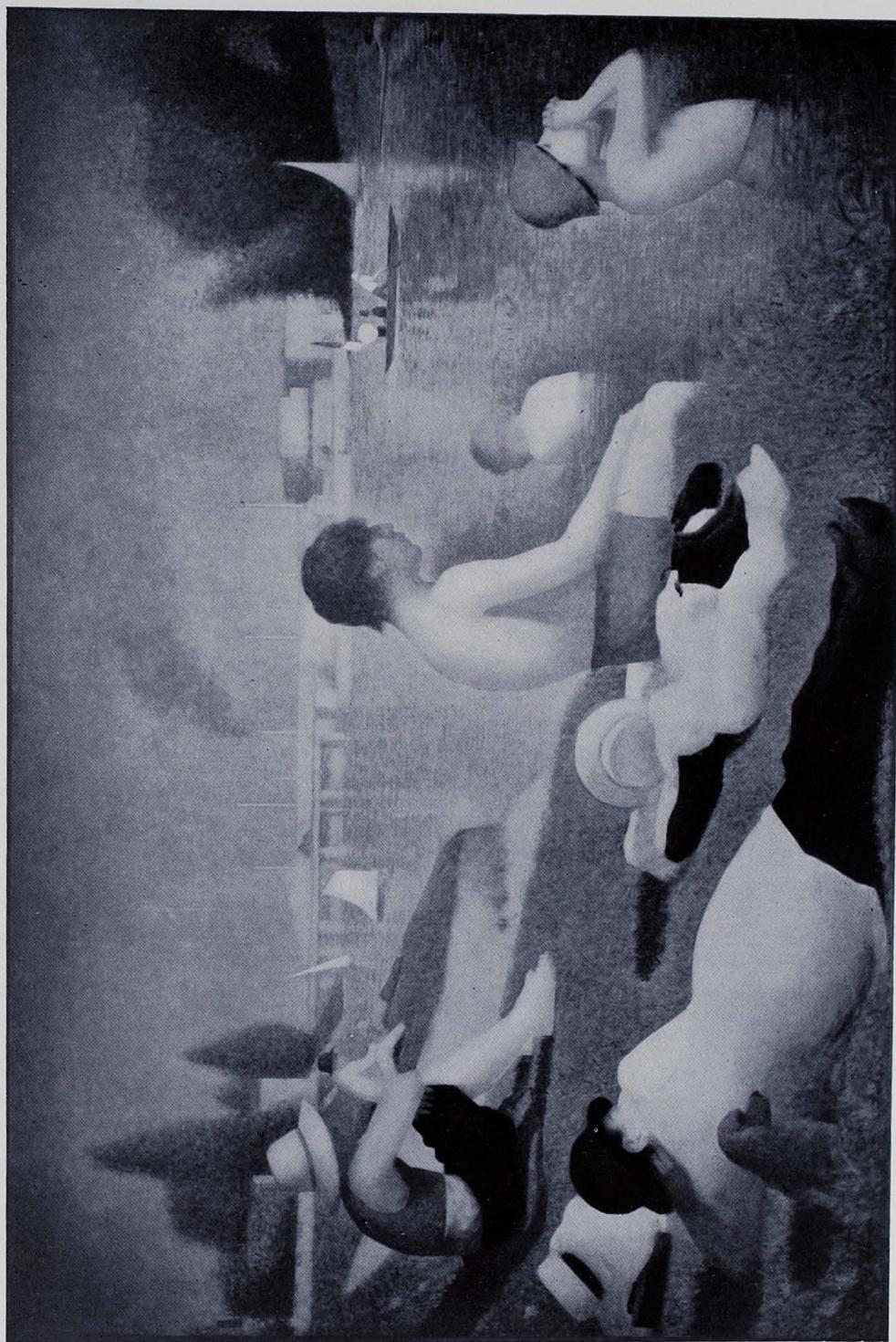
in the large meaning of this word. It is not our function to foresee what art will become, but to continue it. The only way is to develop, to augment, to enlarge it, from the interior, its and ours.

To ask more of it, to think it deeper.

Recently, the modern movements have often been too near-sighted. Looking for the relationship of the element to the whole, they did not respect or develop the element at all; they transformed it along the suggestion of the general rhythm, without feeling its resistency, without respecting or conceiving its individuality. The way to unity has been the reduction of the conception and even the emphasis upon the particularities of the execution. Thus many modern works have become one-sided.

There must be composition in two directions; the whole, the inside. The whole, the part. And each may also be organized in many ways.

The egg-structure constitutes an aspect of the double rhythm; unity, totality, continuity. But every part, like the whole, must be both compact, closed, and opened, like a tree. Second aspect. A tree, holding space, embracing it. The composition of those two opposed qualities produces a resulting force, the solidity of the painted element, its true and only reality. In the field of animal life, the human body offers an obvious illustration for this: in a man is always evident the image of the egg-foetus, but opposite, he has arms and legs and fingers, like branches of a tree, holding space, measuring it, working it as the hands of a magnet, peopling it with potentialities. The egg-head has a nose going outside, a mouth going inside, hair receiving vibrations, ears open to sounds, letting thus the exterior space come into the man. There is a continual trade between exterior and interior, without harming unity, on the contrary building it. It is the composition of the tree and the egg qualities that make man mobile, complete, personal, though permanently playing a part in the whole. Everything can be observed from that point of view. The egg itself is pregnant with a bird that will, in time, demolish it and oppose spacial flight to its massiveness.



SEURAT, *La Baignade* (Tate Gallery).

In nature, the form is the last degree. Form is produced by the relation between outside open space and inside closed space. In a picture, an element is real when it behaves like nature, when it coincides with its currents. The reality of the picture lies on the canvas, not at all in the origin of the theme or of its elements. The field of conception belongs to nature. This is why abstract is an imbecile word.

The reality is the life, the permanent transformation, multiplication, addition, modulation of the elements, their universality, their equilibrium.

The ideal of strict economy of the means, has been perfectly necessary to react against the exterior anarchy of the "fauvisme" and the interior anarchy of the "surrealism"; but keeping to the reducing diet also leads to disparition. To the idea of reduction it is time to oppose the idea of growth.

To grow his work, the painter has to develop his own expansive power, his inspiration, his creative spark. This concerns nobody but himself and cannot be discussed here. But the process of creation is bound to the process of realisation, of regulation. Whatever the inspiration and the theme, they have to grow within their possibilities of development, along structures that have to be present from the very beginning. Both are simultaneous and permanently react on each other. Facing the surface, all internal energies tended, the painter finds a form : this is one degree. Immediately born, the form has a personality, a parentage with a system of other possible forms, offers plastic suggestions and reacts on the conception of the painter. Second degree.

This is a double modelling, the generative and the receptive modelling of each form, constituting one more opposition, one more difference of potentialities, two poles between which the solidity of the painting is created as a magnetic current. The created form becomes creative. What is built, builds back the conception. A continuity between man and his work is started. Then, equilibrium takes on another importance.

But equilibrium is a word loaded with a limited meaning. Equilibrium usually carries the idea of equalities of masses and forces. Heavy masses balancing heavy masses, light

masses balancing light masses ; lines, lines ; strong colours, strong colours. We are far away from that.

When I know half a thing, the other half, identical, symmetric, is immediately evoked in my mind. No use wasting time to show it. Instead of the identical, second half, I am expecting another half that is one degree further. An arithmetical or a geometrical progression does not interest me. From any term, I can foresee its future. I want a progression whose development is accelerated, every term following a general order corresponding to the structure of a progression, but accelerated. I mean that this new progression always goes faster and elsewhere than foreseen. Each term is something added to the knowledge, instead of something expected.

I am not thinking of playing hide and seek with the spectator, in a puzzling picture, but to serve him a drink so rich that each swallow feeds a new part of him, delivers a new taste. That puts him in a new state from which, reading over the same picture, he will see it in a new way, more accelerated, going deeper in it and deeper in himself, opening in his mind more eyes, and more doors around.

What is on the right cannot be what is on the left. What is up is not like what is down. What actually exists cannot be like what will be next, or was a while ago. And time exists in a picture, that of penetrating it, and reading it in all senses defines a time that also goes in all senses, back and forth, up and down, far and near.

To go far, in his work, the painter has to go everywhere at once, as nature does. This miracle is possible in a picture, that the eyes face, contain, where all the world space is summed up, where all degrees are possible. All possibilities, there, are just a matter of conception.

Then, to equilibrate is to gather all elements, all groups of elements, all fragments of elements in such a position that there are never any symmetrical terms, that each term belongs to an accelerated progression. Whatever the order in which you penetrate and follow the picture, there is acceleration, continuity, infinity.

Parabola, the parabola defined by the line that a falling object traces on a turning around its axis cylinder, is too slow, too much one sided a line for me. Its future is in advance accomplished. I want an accelerated-in-all-points parabola.

This acceleration is the heart of the personality of each man, his identity, his power to life. It does not come from the strength he needs to keep his body living, but from the surplus of it; what can be transformed into spiritual life. It is the excess of appetite left to man after eating, that makes him different from a cow and the use he makes of it, different from a monkey. The desires growing beyond any satisfaction, the dreams beyond any possibilities. This power of acceleration is what makes a man try to add to the world that mysterious object that is a picture.

Equilibrium in its common meaning, the equality meaning, corresponds to the vegetable and animal world, where love is just made to impregnate the females, where trees keep growing quietly in height and width within the normal limits of their range.

The least figurative painter cannot go far without getting a permanent lesson from nature. The meaning of what we create is only expressed in that endless dictionary. This is the only constant, the only light clearing the significance of any picture. The chief point is to work within the meaning of nature instead of its appearance.

And nature is full of facts that are so clear, substantial, already so far transformed into ideas :

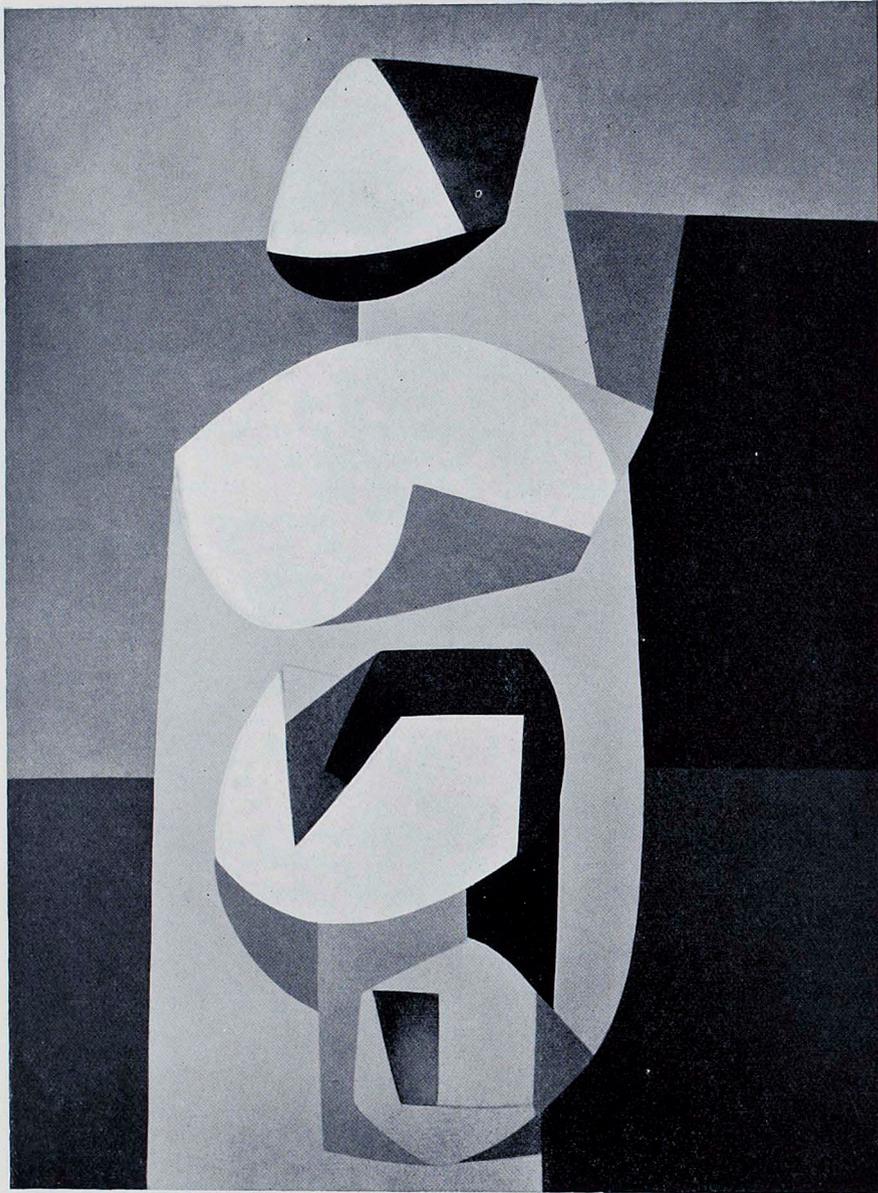
The tree, coming from a germ-point goes toward light, multiplies its directions into space, each of them into thousands of hands, and to catch, to hold, to receive space on an always larger surface, finally transforms them into flat leaves facing the sun.

Birds, going from one point to another and coming back, embracing space, measuring it, rhythmically dividing it and discovering a speed in its modulations.

Fishes, the more spatial beings, actually living in space. They stop at every point of it, have no limits to their progression. They know three-dimensions, refined angles, complex continuities. They move in all directions, without shocks. Birds just make long hops. Only fishes fly. They do not have to come down. They constitute spacial groups. Their body, in contact with the tangible liquid space in all points, receives its call, measures it, responds to it. When one fish moves, in a basin, all others are affected. One goes up, three go down, another describes circles, slowly.

The top meaning of equilibrium is probably "thinking." Equilibrium identifies in permanently renewed ways, ethic, plastic, everything the painter is capable of. The shape becomes thought. One cannot be parted from the other. The eye-mind of the painter goes over it all, in all directions, extricating, superposing rhythms, blowing through them, to find their longest way, their endless, their simplest, where all meet. When all elements, thus produced by many reasons, the black and the white reasons, many processes, oppositions, rhythms, waves, constitute a complex mass, controlled, solid, unified, totalized, the painter faces it and sees his complex-self in it, as in a multi-dimensioned mirror.

The whole mass of the painting shines like freshly cut copper, shines of its constitutional brilliance, that means blood running, life. Identity is reached between substance and thought. To work one is to work the other. The plastic error denounces the ethic error. Painting is a language.



HÉLION. *Painting, 1936*

## Time to forget ourselves by S John Woods

It is perhaps a sign of decadence when a part is taken for the whole it helps to form. It may arise from too intimate an awareness of the whole—it is, I suppose conceivable, that on contemplating one's navel for a long enough period one might forget all else and project the universe into one's navel crying "This is my all"—it may on the other hand arise from fear.

Since art left service and, enthroned in a studio, invested itself with a capital A, parts have flourished at the expense of the whole. The Impressionists regarded their navels, in this case the reactions to nature of their own eyes, and could see nothing else. It was the same with every movement since Impressionism, until at the present time, two navels divide the spectators into two: the abstract and the surrealist. The abstract artist reviles Clive Bell but nevertheless allows no element but significant form; the surrealist places the navel in the subconscious and refutes everything else, including significant form. Each group knows very definitely what it does *not* want; neither is completely sure what it does want. In both attitudes there seems to lie more than a hint of fear; fear to face up to things, fear to widen the vision in case the light might go out altogether.

This is apparent not only in these and other movements but in individual artists. The tendency during the whole of this century has been to select a scheme and never to venture beyond its precincts; Mondrian chooses rectangles and limits his colours to red, blue, yellow and grey; Nicholson chooses circles and rectangles and white or delicate shades of colour; from a different approach Chirico chooses horses, biscuits and the long shadows of late afternoon. The outstanding exception is Picasso who has moved his navel about, like a king of draughts, covering every side of the contemporary board and creating new sides.

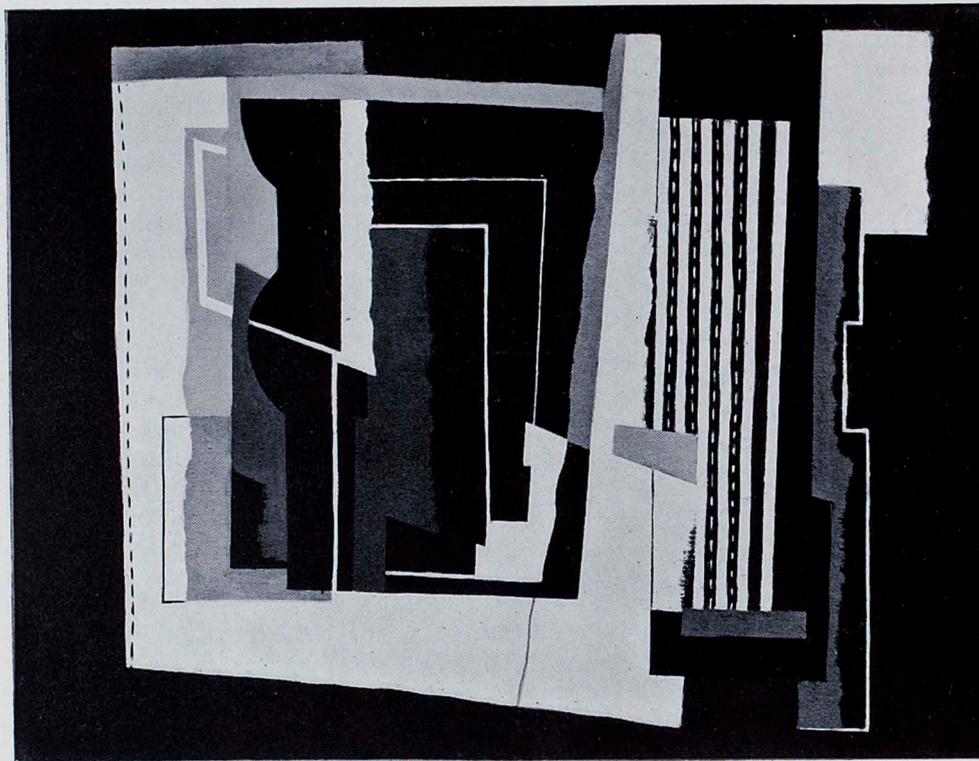
The most important movement this century, the Cubist, was perhaps the least limited,

the least frightened, but as a movement it contained a dichotomy between concrete objects and abstract shapes, which had to be removed. In removing it, the largeness of Cubism went and for some twenty years such artists as Malevich, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, the de Stijl group, Mondrian and Nicholson, to mention the leaders in different countries in successive periods, worked within greater limits than Cubism knew. Barr in "Cubist and Abstract Art" cites the theory of Dr. Schapiro concerning the iconography of Cubism, its interest in guitars, wineglasses and other symbols of the life of an "artist" which "suggest a concern with art instead of the world of life and may consequently be taken as a symbol of the modern artists' social maladjustment." The concern of the abstract artists mentioned above has been with light, as has been shown elsewhere. In connection with this it is interesting to note that Catlin, writing recently in the Sunday Times, mentioned the distinction between art "occupied with the inner contests of man's soul or with the deeper thrust of the social forces that pound into shape what he calls his purposes." I quote this because it seems at the same time to draw a distinction neatly and also to illustrate a distinction in itself something of a limit. Clearly great art combines the two elements: Piero della Francesca had not only a spiritual place but a social one; the Malevich to Nicholson line of abstract art is much more a sign of the social forces, of the new potentialities of light, space and precision let loose in the world by technics.

Now this is not a censure; it was very necessary for abstract art, in the beginning, to force itself on the world in a narrow jet of unmitigated strength; any new doctrine, to make itself felt, must contain a high percentage of dogma. But we have had our fill both of dogma and of doctrine. They have succeeded in their purpose. They have carried art from a limpid concern with the world of natural phenomena into a

PIPER

Painting, 1936



completely new world, unconcerned with natural phenomena and unconcerned with abstractions from organic forms. It has been pointed out again and again that every great work of art is to a degree an abstraction from natural phenomena—an argument which has been used to show that abstract art is the same as any other form of art. But the whole point of abstract art is that it does not abstract from anything, it deals with its own intrinsic elements. If, then, the dissatisfaction I have expressed with the one-sidedness of the simple geometric art of Malevich to Nicholson is a just one, does anything remain over and above organic abstraction? In the recent English International Exhibition of Abstract Art, Moore and Miró, and less immediately Giacometti, revealed themselves as artists dealing with organic abstractions and therefore, although artists ranking high among contemporaries, as out of place in a show of "abstract" art. Kandinsky was badly represented by pictures which were abstractions less organic than zoomorphic. His work as a whole is partic-

ularly personal (although the first completely abstract painter he has never produced a school) and he combines expressionistic qualities with a Russian feeling which seeps through all his paintings. Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, Gabo, Domela, Hepworth and Nicholson fall into the simple geometric class which I have already spoken of. What remains? Works by Erni, Hélión, Holding, Jackson, Piper. Erni, Holding and Jackson retain, at the moment, geometry but seem to be trying to expand its simplicity to admit of wider experience.

But it was the paintings of Hélión and Piper that I found of particular interest. Hélión is dissatisfied with pure abstract art: against the work of Poussin it stands no chance, he desires greater developments, his pictures must have a space in which his elements can move, develop, not only forwards and backwards and from side to side but round, spinning on their own axes or encircling each other, creating a unity in space and of space, chunks of space and chunks of non-space opposed. The one criticism I wish

to make is directed against the modelling. This does not seem completely successful; whether the fault lies in the modelling itself or in Hélión's use of it I do not know. He may resolve it and use it successfully or he may lose it in resolving it. We must wait to see. Predictions are impossible.

The other artist, John Piper, values paint before his label. In looking at Constable I feel "Here is a man who is painting" not "Here is a man who is painting landscapes." Not so with abstract artists. Simple geometrical abstract art, as Moholy-Nagy has convincingly shown in countless articles and his book 'New Vision' and as Nicholson has shown in his reliefs, is concerned rather with light than with paint. Piper has returned paint to abstract painting and in doing so has laid his finger on a crucial spot.

It is time we forgot Art and Abstract, time the 'movement' ceased and manifestos were burned, time we cut out beards, ceased to be artists and became men and painters. Art has chased out life and now life must come back if art is to remain. The Greek

view of man as body, mind and spirit remembered that the last existed in the first and could not, in this world at any rate, exist without it. To-day there is a tendency among artists to forget the body and remember only the spirit. The bed, the pub, the tube train, the lavatory and all, are a part of the contemporary man. If an artist is not first a man his art will never be great. I do not want a return to representational art, to pictures of the physical facts of life and our senses; I believe that abstract art can rise above these and possibly above even the art that transcended these in abstracting from them. But I do want to see artists *live*, being susceptible to change, forgetting doctrines, and all the æsthetic chattels and restrictions which clutter abstract art in England at the moment. Living implies change, something dynamic, something which breaks a rule if it is necessary and transcends rules in any case. Out of living comes a live art, something with guts, which doesn't give a damn for anybody and which may stand alongside the art of the great periods.

## **Surrealism and Abstraction – the search for subjective form** By J. and M. Thwaites

### **Objective and Subjective:**

"Scrutiny" reminded us lately that no relevant critique of surrealism has yet been made. Too many critics seem to be products of the Bell revelation. They know no god save Cézanne. Surrealist art is still being judged by the form-concept of a movement opposed to it, one which arrived at abstraction by opposite means.

Psychologically, it is clear that the impressionist painters were extravert. With their interest in light, in effects, the whole *plein-air-isme*, they were feeling themselves into the visual world. Their sensibility was governed and determined by the object. Cézanne pressed their research to the structure of the object itself. He found architectonic form again behind the impressionist curtain of light. In the meantime impressionist extraversion had done something else, as

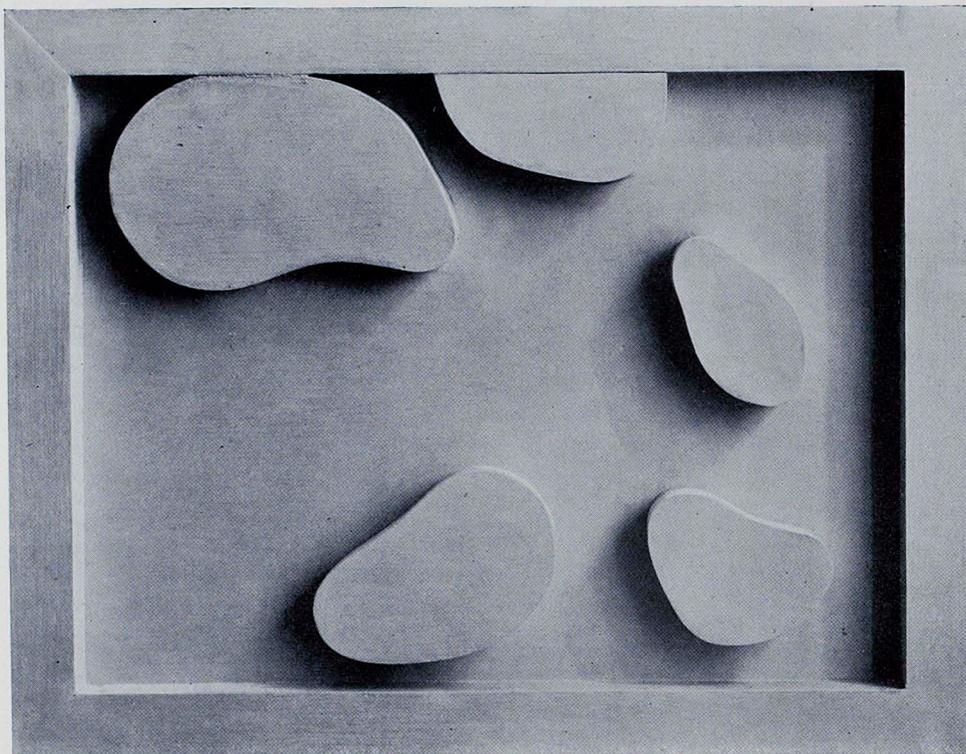
Herbert Read points out.<sup>1</sup> It had broken up the renaissance tradition of naturalism. For the first time, after Cézanne, modern art was at once architectural and non-naturalistic. Gleizes, Metzinger, Picasso and Braque were free to increase the selectiveness of their "new vision."<sup>2</sup> Representation disappears as they feel their way into the architecture of the visual world. So they reach the pre-renaissance and extra-European concept of abstract art.

This extraversion, after all, is not the basis of all European art. It does not apply, say, to baroque. In the Greco "view of Toledo" the relation of painter to object is *negative*. His subjective interest does not move towards the city, as a mass seen in light.

<sup>1</sup> *Art Now*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. plates pp. 48 to 51 of Ozenfant's *Foundations of Modern Art*.

ARP.  
Objets placés  
d'après les lois  
du hasard, 1933



It recedes to himself. Greco's world is at a remove from the visual one. The looping rhythms and livid colours are plastic equivalents for emotions, not for appearances. And now in the modern movement, as André Breton said recently

“L'art contraint depuis des siècles de ne s'écarter qu'à peine des sentiers battus du *moi* et du *super-moi* ne peut que se montrer avide d'explorer en tous sens les terres immenses et presque vierges du *soi*.”<sup>1</sup>

M. Breton insists that

“L'automatisme psychique—est-il bien indispensable d'y revenir—n'a jamais constitué pour le surréalisme une fin en soi et prétendre le contraire est faire acte de mauvaise foi.”

Yet he and his English admirers are part-responsible for the misconception. They are too interested in subject-matter. Thus they overvalue academicians like Chirico and illustrators like Dali because of their

psychic content. They deny evolution, simply picking out introvert artists of any period who have touched preconscious levels. For the same reason Herbert Read wishes that surrealism could be called something other than painting. All this is really to deny surrealism as plastic art. It ignores a contribution to plastic form which began over twenty years ago.

### Subjective Form:

The father of surrealism on the side of form is certainly Kandinsky. As a product of expressionism he painted the “cannon pictures.” There is a great deal of psychic automatism about these. But in them he evolved a rhythmic line a little analogous to Baroque. And after 1914 dream-representation disappeared and he turned to the development of the line. The line gave volume without mass. It let him develop his rhythms freely. Kandinsky has been accused of playing with forms he had never seen. In other words, of a negative relation to the outside world. As Wörringer points

<sup>1</sup> *Position Politique du Surréalisme (Position Politique de l'art d'aujourd'hui)*.



ERNST. *Loplop presente une jeune fille*, 1930

out, abstraction in primitive and Gothic art springs from just this negative relationship.

“Nur mit der Milderung des anfänglichen Dualismus Zwischen Mensch und Welt, wird der abstrakte Charakter der Linie allmählich abgeschwächt.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Form in Gothic.*

With the return to the *abstract line* art could make a fresh equivalent for the visual world. In these pictures of Kandinsky's, for the first time, there is *subjective abstract form*. That is to say freedom from the object.

Kandinsky failed to develop his discovery because he lost himself in its formal richness. His compositions straggle across the canvas in excited comment. Free to use a rhythmic line, he allowed it to become chaotic. Finally he threw it over altogether. All the same the contribution to the language of visual form begins here. The Cologne surrealists might admire, but not follow, Klee's isolated genius. From Kandinsky on the contrary they could learn. If one eliminates that part of Max Ernst's painting which is research, working for psychic material, it is the abstract line which remains.

In a cubist painting objects are dissected to show their formal analogies. Simultaneously the painter builds them into an architectural synthesis. Max Ernst, of course, draws his images from the life of the mind. He gives the formal analogies of each to the other by making each a part of the other. Not several objects showing the same form, but a rhythm of line suggesting many images. The line, that is, expresses in itself the subjective *ambiguity* of form. This gives a plastic equivalent for emotional states, without losing their quality and intensity. It allows play to the form-creating power of the subconscious. Ernst himself has hardly taken full advantage of this. He often seems over-precise or makes his symbols over-concrete. His forms then tend to be niggling, in the sea-shells for example or spongy as in the forest series. In other words they are plastic in surface but not in form.

With Miró subjective form becomes explicit. In recent years he has mastered the abstract line and uses it without constraint. Straggling composition and psychic automatism have gone with the “Dog Barking at the Moon.” These free linear forms have internal vitality, but they are parts of the whole linear rhythm of the picture. The device of crossing-points, binding in when the tension of the composition is not enough to hold it, is an extension of the abstract line. Miró's forms themselves, like those of Ernst, express many images. Animal



MASSON. *La Poursulte*, 1927

heads, human heads or breasts or limbs seem to bud out of them. But when no hint is given of the images implied, it is not missed. Ambiguity frees the associations of the eye and mind. With that comes the sense of freedom, the mood of gaiety for which Miró's painting is so well known.

Miró's confrère in this is Arp, who was so much earlier in his own field. Necessarily sculpture deals less in illusion than painting does. Mass and weight, space and volume are given. Line exists as contour only. On the other hand, the sculptor has a closer relation to his material than the painter. His mind and the stone evolve together. It is because Arp's introvert sculpture keeps this relation so closely that it penetrates the deeper quality of both. Not only are his

stones full of internal life, expressing it from the articulation of their mass as Miró's from that of his line: in a subtle way they suggest life as a whole. They have a sense of the recreation of growing things. This is ambiguity of a perfect, though perhaps a limited kind. Arp seems to touch the subconscious root of perception. His universality of form implies the visual world since human perception itself derives from that world. The introvert has turned so far from the object that he has found it again in his own deeper consciousness.

### Realism and Surréalism.

It is six or seven years back, before Miró entered his latest period, that André Masson was using the abstract line. He did so in a purely rhythmic way. Those lightly expanded or extended forms of his, which have the sense of being blown by the wind, conform to strong basic rhythms. They convey motion and emotion. His work was a sort of chart of feeling and movement. Now Masson wishes to be more explicit, to elucidate. Rightly or wrongly, he has gone back to realism. Yet, if one compares pictures of each period two things are obvious. The first is that the basic rhythm is the same in both. The second is that the realism to which Masson has returned is cubism.

This suggests a new relationship. Set Masson aside as a renegade if you wish. You will find it again in the work of Giacommetti. While he was making the subtle early plaques, Giacommetti built cubist figures for himself. Working with the subjective intuition of volume, he verified it by objective perception. And he perceived the object as cubist. Now after six or seven years he has again returned to the object. He is drawing from the model and his drawings are cubist. *Cubism is the realism on which surrealism is based.* This opens another door to subjective form. Instead of the semi-sterility of "abstraction-creation," post-cubism may lead inwards again.

In two dissimilar cases it has done so. That of Henry Moore is the less surprising. His earlier figures derive from cubism. Indeed they represent it better than cubist sculpture, which was a stone translation of

painters' ideas. But Moore has never been purely extravert. This sense of material caused these sculptures to take on much of his subjective state—even though his approach and Arp's were opposite. Their strangeness has nothing to do with cubism. So in the later work, by a sort of concentration, he has been able to force stylisation into ambiguity. Some of his work has the sense of human-animal life just as Arp's has that which is static and vegetable. Moore has arrived at surrealism by the back door.

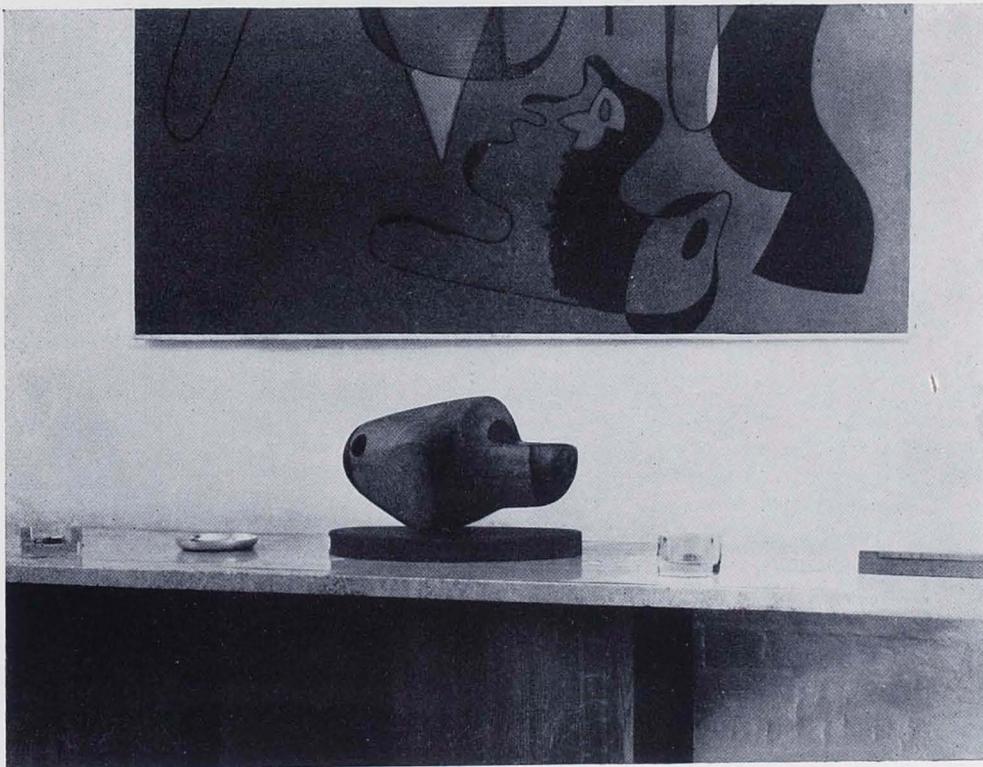
It is more surprising that Henri Laurens should have made this transition. His earlier work, from the days of the cubist group, was purely extravert. In his naturalistic figures of the twenties he was verifying cubist form. They are monumental and objective. Nevertheless at the end of the decade he moved towards abstraction in a different way. Take an early work. Here is the typical contrast: tiny head stylised, from cubism, with the serpentine body and spread-roll of the hips. It is ambiguous as an anthropomorphic figure by Max Ernst. In the smallest bronze of the period there

is a strangeness and mystery quite foreign to the early Laurens.

More cases of transition could be quoted. "L'art ne *peut* que se montrer avide d'explorer les terres immenses du soi." In the search for subjective form it seems we may be watching the birth of a materialist baroque. This might imply for art a humanistic transcendentalism, M. Breton's 'mythe collectif.'

"L'artiste, commence à . . . abdiquer la personnalité dont il était jusqu'alors si jaloux. Il est brusquement mis en possession de la clé d'un trésor, mais ce . . . trésor ne lui appartient pas . . . ce trésor n'est autre que le trésor collectif. . . . Dans ces conditions, n'est-ce peut être plus déjà de la création d'un mythe personnel qu'il s'agit en art, mais, avec le surréalisme, de la création d'un mythe collectif."

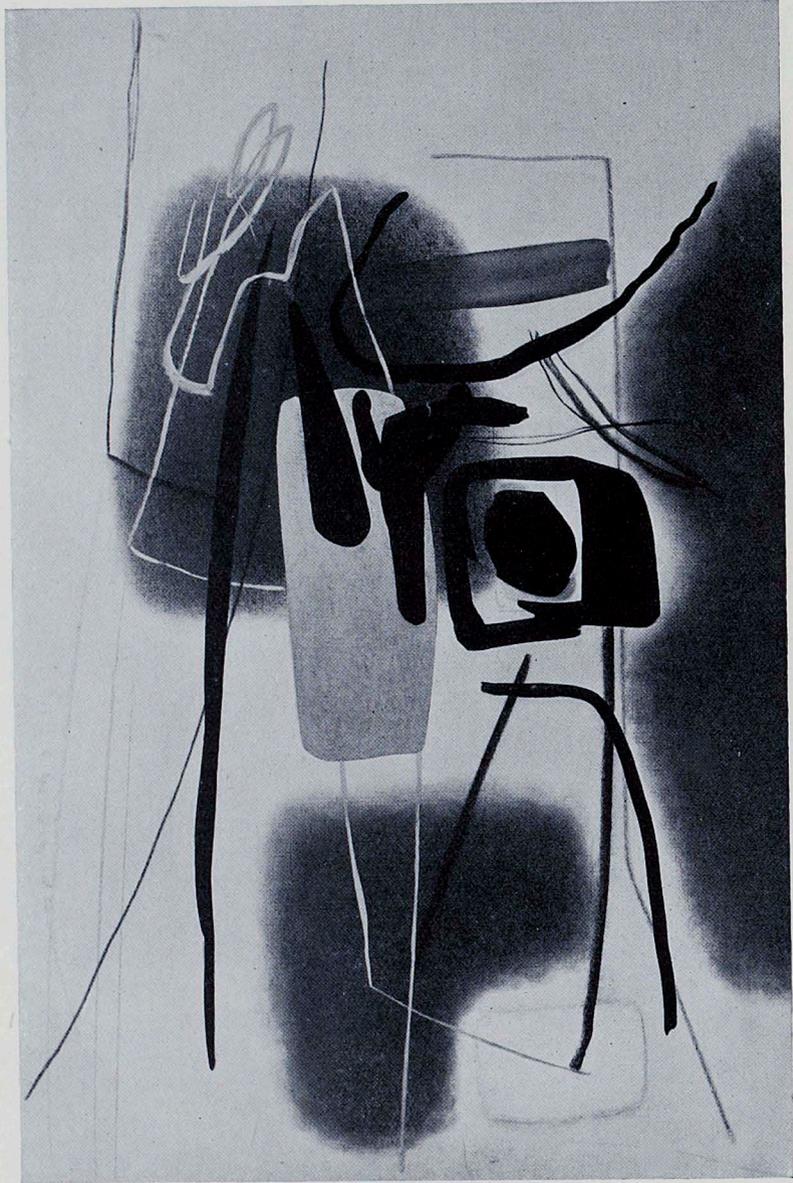
*In connection with this article, the writers' thanks are due especially to Mme. Georges Dutbuit and to M. Henri Kahnweiler.*



MOORE.  
Carving, 1936.

MIRÓ.  
Painting, 1935.

Exhibition at  
Duncan Miller's,  
April 1936



HARTUNG. *Painting, 1935*

## New work in Paris

by Herta Wescher (printed from the original English)

The abstract advance has been carried on in many directions. The intentions and aims of the various artists are very different.

Hans Hartung is urged forward by a strong need of exteriorisation, and he finds all possibilities in the activity of the line. He consciously follows neither rules of æsthetics nor laws of composition, but just notes down confessions of his mind, sometimes controlled and fixed later on. His instinctive feeling for form prevents his line-improvisations from going astray on the plane. His means of expression preponderantly are those of design, and among his pictures those produce the strongest effect, in which the interplay of the lines has been transferred as it were on to a coloured background. Sometimes this background has been prepared in the manner of old wood: a lengthy story, told in very soft colours (green, yellow, claret-coloured), is engraved. Sometimes a zig-zag line, interrupted by dots, runs over the canvas teeming with the question-marks of all-invigorating attempts. Sometimes a big splotch blocks the way of the curves: there is a pale green-gray one on a strong blue ground which drives out the movement to the side. Perhaps the finest picture of this series, painted about 1932, is a yellow picture with a dark almost transparent ellipse, over which blue lines run from left to right, from top to bottom, full of the charm of the old musical notation.

Hartung has begun at an early date with very expressive red chalk and charcoal drawings. In some the broad side of the chalk seems to have spread flowing ribbons over the plane, in others black pegs stand out in a square white field. He passes through a period of concentration on the object, but shakes it off again in the psychological moment. Impression of abstract pictures of the early days, such as Delaunay's in France, may have influenced him. His next attempt is the juxtaposition of form and colour—values in the distemper manner, until the

more passionate writing again gains the upper hand. Since then both stroke and curve have been growing and recently have entered a new forceful expression in big drawings. Lines come running from all sides, wind and unwind. Some accentuated parts are rubbed with the red pencil. This language becomes richer and richer and the dynamics of the two dimensions are developed to the utmost, at the same time mastered by a sensitive form-balance.

There is a certain relationship between his pictures and those of Walter Bodmer in their compositional building up. Here too we find a duplicity of background and textures of lines. But whereas in Hartung's case the superimposed drawings are fluid, in Bodmer's they are "constructions" of a very definitive form. Sometimes a colour-scale moves from the edge of the picture towards this nucleus of design, surrounds it, so that all, even the single concrete form, seems to be attracted by the magnetic force of the coloured background. In one picture a square of such luminous blue stands out of the scaffolding that one seems to be looking out through railings and crossing through strange spacial distances. The intrepidity of these constructions has overcome all laws of gravity so far that one is often tempted to look on the picture sideways or upside-down. Steps come out of nowhere, spirals land in colour-planes and parallel lines turn into scrolls. But in spite of this it is not arbitrary fantasia but the daring of the technician. Wheels, screws, propellers are hidden everywhere in these "visions" and it is not by chance that the first monster of constructive invention is dedicated "to the memory of Otto Lilienthal." The same idea of an aeroplane may once more be found in an aerial body floating in a warm copper-red ether, wherein it is possible to see metal elements and aerofoils as well as a bird's head and plumage. But even the artistic perfection of this picture is



BODMER. *Figure auf grips*

not yet the final solution for the artist. New attempts follow in which its reserve and distinction give way to a harder and colder opposition of materials. Actual and eternal shapes form new alliances and there is no telling where this curve of invention will lead to.

Hélión has set himself a more definitive and clear-cut task than most of these younger abstract painters, and consequently has obtained more solution. His problem—to combine cubes and planes constructively within

the frame—may seem somewhat limited as it is a predominantly formal one. But considered as a formal problem it is a most complicated and far-reaching one. By drawing in cubic shapes into the plane-construction, he sets an illusory two-dimensional surface side by side with a real one and thus overthrows our traditional conception of distance and leads to an absolute conversion of reality.

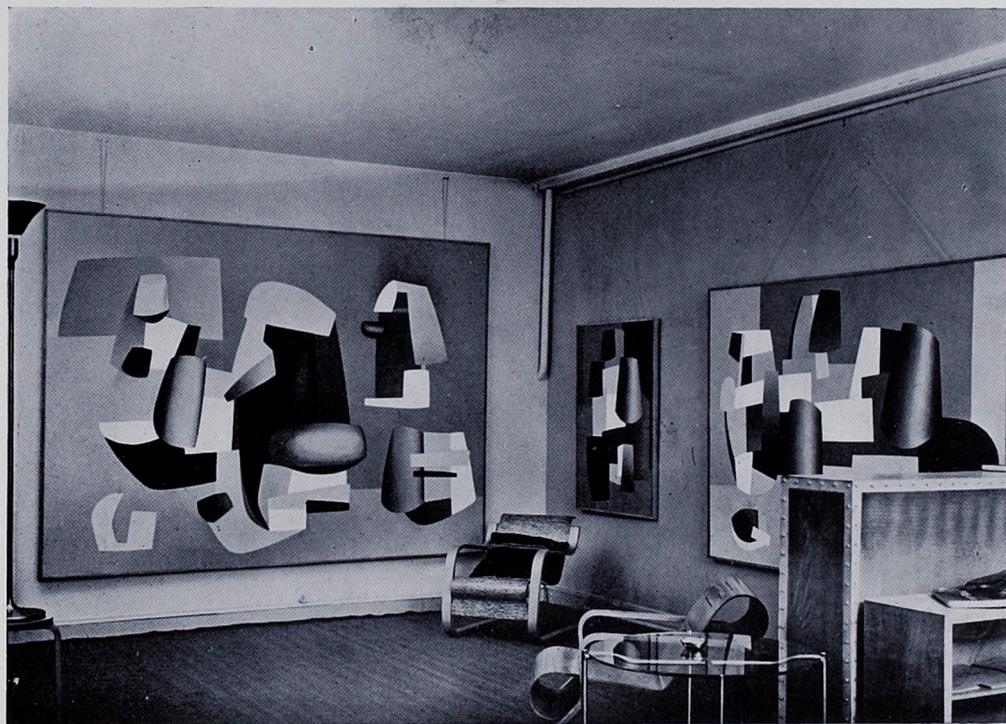
Hélión's production of 1935, seen at *Cahiers d'Art*, shows by what different means

this pictural harmony has been achieved. Pictures taller than they are wide contain first and foremost the blending of separate shapes to a coherent structure which can rest on the coordination of elements of equal value, though different in character, but also on subordination to a dominating form. A living unity can be achieved, bringing up dark shapes which in their turn seem to encircle the lighter ones. In the horizontal pictures elements exist side by side; different colours underline their separation, and add to the impression of form in movement or in rest. Complexes of closed and open forms may fight in the same work. It is as if they were fixed to a scale-beam on the canvas with green, red and yellow shapes (see the gouache in Axis IV), which answer one another diagonally. The most cosmically conceived picture is the biggest one, a canvas full of gaiety and brilliance; several accents in the centre,

a deep-grey round shape, something like the base of a column on the one side, cubes set parallel to one another in a sisterly group on the other. From all sides forms bound forward and re-bound at the contact. Small light shapes float away but a black prow beneath can not fail direction.

The tendency is no longer to obtain a harmonious balance between the different forms and colours as with Mondrian, but, on the contrary, to bring out the *complexity* of relationship, Hélion belongs to the younger generation precisely by the fact that he places lability in the place of stability, that is to say, that his work offers trial, question, instead of final solution. His art is not concerned with metaphysical origins, but with the organisation of the world's forces.

His pictures would show to their best advantage in a large hall of modern architecture, carried out as frescoes. There his concrete positive meaning would be evident.

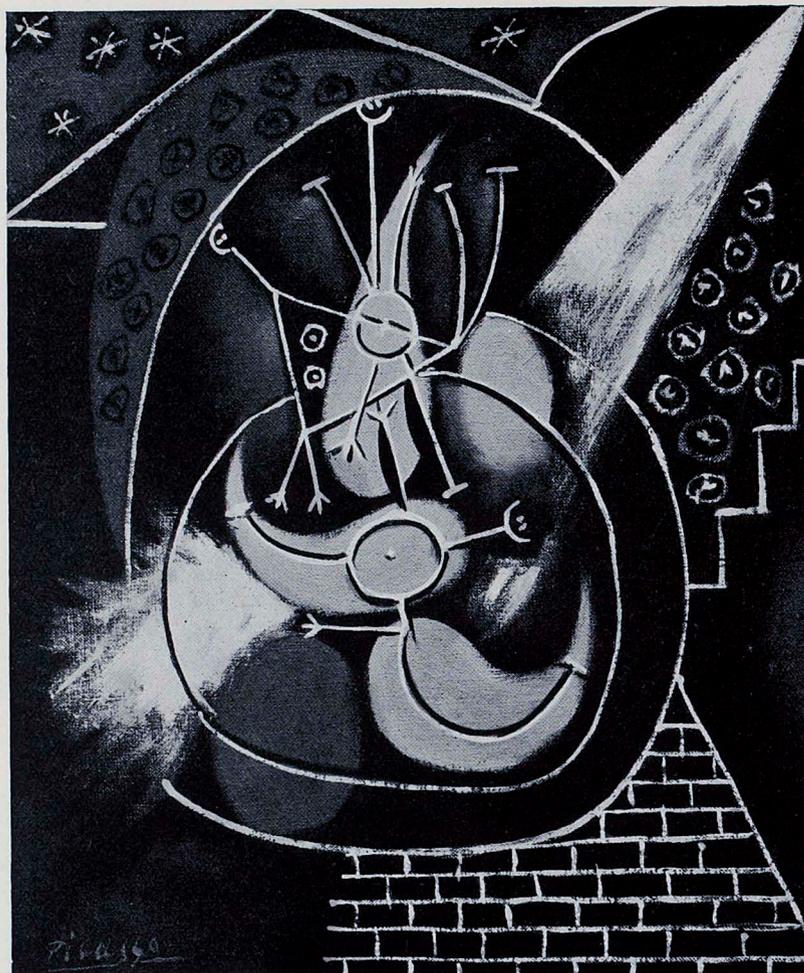


HÉLION exhibition. (Cahiers d'Art Gallery, February, 1936)

● NEW  
SHOWS

● NEW  
BOOKS

## **Picasso belongs where?**



Whether or not you think that Picasso as an artist has kept his head in the last few years, with the abstract-surrealist battles going on around him, you must agree that he has kept his heart. There are new works in the exhibition at Zwemmer's and in the *Cahiers d'Art* special number, as full at once of tenderness and vitality as ever. There are drawings with as much abandon, and as much grace and control in the abandon, as anything he has ever done—or anything that Fragonard ever did either, for that matter. The abandon is in

drawings and subjects alike. As a matter of fact, the subjects of the new ones are nearly all abandoned — abandoned women or abandoned bulls at bullfights. On account of this quality they take the breath away. But nowadays in front of a Picasso the breath does come back slowly, and one can consider him without panting.

Picasso is a bad member of a school, either as pupil or master. His development cannot be seen as a progress, or as any kind of movement except a series of hops, skips and

jumps, all executed with great mastery. As a leader, therefore, he is unsatisfactory—exasperating. Even as a cubist (nearest approach to “movement”-consciousness), he was a poor-quality schoolmaster. Several small fry were better, as leaders pure and simple. He is also a bad surrealist. Nowadays we tend to invent the school before we produce the painting. Abstraction has its purist ideals, its rigorous non-figurative tenets: Surrealism has its manifestos. The works, instead of creating them, are produced under the terms of them. The manifestos may get stretched and warped, but the artists are conscious of the rules, whether they play well or badly, whether they obey the rules or cheat. They no longer make them as they go along, except artists like Picasso—a shocking manifesto-follower. In his new pictures there is far too much conscious control, conscious stimulation by the object, conscious use of form and colour—conscious in origin and at every stage until its realisation in the picture—for the surrealists to claim him as anything but a *great-man* member of the group—a sort of Honorary Fellow. And the nearest to surrealism among the new works are the extras, the scraps. (“Soon we shall be shown Picasso’s shaving-papers, signed, dated and framed.”)

If Picasso is a bad surrealist, he is a worse abstractionist. About 1922, he was far nearer abstraction than he is to-day, and he is very far from subscribing to any pure-abstract doctrines—or to any other pure doctrines, as far as that goes. His place in contemporary painting is hard to judge. To painters, he is probably less important than he has ever been, as an influence. His passion has become more than ever personal and incommunicable—and occasionally a little hectic. Considering the complete *lack of development* in his work, in the Rubens or Renoir sense, the passion in some of the new paintings looks like the product of habit rather than experience. In spite of present enjoyment one is justified in hoping for a purer, a more experienced, a less immediate resolution in his paintings before his work is finished.

JOHN PIPER.

## Moholy-Nagy

*Moholy-Nagy*. “Telehor” 1-2, moholy-nagy (kalivoda. Frs. s. 12.).

This book reveals Moholy-Nagy as extraordinarily talented and versatile. Painting, writing, teaching, décor, films and photography have all been studied and explored by him and it is now possible, with the historical evidence afforded by the book and our knowledge of the man and his work since his stay in this country, to judge him on the aggregate.

However heterogeneous his work may appear, there is a very definite theme running through it, which is kept well to the fore whatever the variation. The theme is light. Light for Moholy-Nagy is the clay with which he builds; it may be painting-clay or photography-clay or word-clay; his building may house abstract form, constructions or surrealist penetrations into the sub-conscious, but always the structure is of light. The artist has seized on an element of prime social and plastic importance, realised that it stands at a premium in a world controlled by advanced technics and, by creating with it in different media, by extracting it where before it was but latent, and by discovering in it new forms, has expanded the scope of such arts as photography and has maintained in his work a true unity not immediately apparent.

Moholy-Nagy was among the pioneers of abstract art in Europe some fifteen years ago, but his approach to painting is, I feel, a predominantly intellectual one and this, coupled with an innate capability as a teacher, has tended to make his paintings didactic. In the articles in this book the question appears, either directly or between the lines, “Why paint?” The painter, Moholy-Nagy, is interested in light and space *per colour per paint per canvas*. He has used brush and paint because light is expensive and a laborious business. But in his mind he knows that it is with light he is building, and the result is, as I have said, didactic.

There is also a positive side to this quality. His capability as a teacher led him to one of his most important activities—as a professor at the Bauhaus. Here his researches concern-

ing the values of surfaces and textures, evolved from Picasso's experiments, were of great plastic and technical value as also were those concerning the tensile strengths of materials such as glass, vulcanite, etc., a direct technical application of the plastic explorations of the constructivists, Gabo and Pevsner.

But creatively Moholy-Nagy's greatest contribution has been with the camera. The camera can either stand in front of an object, open its lens and record on the film an image of the object—or it can create. Moholy-Nagy uses the camera to create. He may employ an object, but when he does it is as a means to creation and not as a fact to be recorded. In photographing a street with people walking along it, he will ascend to the heights of a building and record the airman's view; in photographing trees against the sky, the view of the worm is taken into consideration. In printing his photograph he may reverse the process and print negatively so that wonderful iridescences take the place of shadows and the whole is permeated by a glow. Or he may place objects on a sensitised paper and expose them to a light, near or far away, static or moving, discovering the most delicate nuances of light and shade. Whatever the means, the result is satisfying. With the camera, Moholy-Nagy has opened new worlds of vision. Literally. In his photographs the didactic qualities of his painting disappear. He deals directly with light. His theme exalts itself in triumphant harmony; his structure, his building becomes one with what it houses. There is no more the question "Why?", no more the consciousness or the discontent. Only the statement—alive and exciting.

S JOHN WOODS

*Seurat and the Evolution of "La Grande Jatte."*

DANIEL CATTON RICH. U.S.A. : University of Chicago Press. Great Britain and Ireland: Cambridge University Press. 13s. 6d.

This book, by the associate curator of the Art Institute of Chicago, is a remarkable piece of scholarship and research. Seurat did over seventy drawings and sketches for *La Grande Jatte* (now in the Chicago Art Institute). Mr. Rich has tracked down most of these, and illustrates many of them here. The book has a coloured reproduction of the picture, and a number of details of it are illustrated also. It is a most useful and enlightened piece of work about Seurat, an artist who has not been over-written or over-illustrated.

BOOKS RECEIVED

*The Painter's Eye.* By EDWIN GLASGOW. Faber & Faber. 6s.

*Colour Control.* By FRANK MORLEY FLETCHER. Faber & Faber. 6s.

*Renouveau Esthetique, No. 1.* (Organe d'actualité artistique, appearing eight times a year.) 7, Impasse du Rouet, Paris. 2 fr.

*Kroniek Kunst en Kultur, No. 6.* Amsterdam.

*Abstraction Création, No. 5.* (Ed. Vantongerloo.) 7, Impasse de Rouet, Paris. 20 fr.

*Paul Nelson. Study for a surgical hospital on the Suez Canal.* (Photos by Man Ray, plans and a long article by Héliou) Paul Nelson, 98, Bd. Auguste Blanqui, Paris.

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*AXIS is published quarterly. Subscription Rates: 10s. od. yearly. 5s. 4d. half-yearly. 2s. 8d. quarterly. (Post free.) Orders and enquiries should be sent to Myfamy Evans, Fawley Bottom Farm-house, near Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. Address for London distribution: 20, Jermyn Street, London, W.1. (Telephone: Regent 3416.)*

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