

Autumn, 1936

AXIS

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY
ABSTRACT PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Editor: Myfanwy Evans

DRAWINGS

Portfolio of drawings

England's Climate

A few lines . . .

Juan Gris

Henry Moore

Santhal Paintings

"Cubism and Abstract

Art"



two shillings and sixpence

● AXIS No. 7
autumn
1936

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An exhibition of drawings, arranged by S. John Woods, is being held at the London Gallery, 28 Cork Street, W.1, from November 17th-28th. Many of the drawings reproduced in this number will be shown there.

AXIS

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ENGLISH STAINED GLASS. 13th century. Originally in Salisbury Cathedral, now in Grateley Church, Hampshire. (From copy by John Piper.)

England's Climate

by § Geoffrey Grigson and

¶ John Piper

Spirit, who lov'st Britannia's Isle
Round which the Fiends of Commerce smile...
(BLAKE.)

§ The yellow and red flame in Goya's "Bewitched" or the magpie on the roof of Piero della Francesca's "Nativity," or the silk colours on Gainsborough's portrait of Mrs. Lowndes-Stone—an isolation of geometric or ambiguous shapes, six colours, or six yards of a surface, matter much less now than any of these. I am neither for Dali nor against the shapes. The habit of repeating the same comment on life differs from the repeated expression of a feeling for life.

¶ Any Constable, any Blake, any Turner has something an abstract or a surrealist painting cannot have. Hence, partly, the artist's pique about them now, and his terror of the National Gallery. The point is fullness, completeness: the abstract qualities of all good painting together with the symbolism (at least) of life itself. To-day, both cannot go together. Abstraction and surrealism can choose, but they do not choose both. They can build, and be filled with an ambition for future life, but hardly can express a fullness of present life. Constructivism is building for the future—and so far an escape into the future. The Royal Academy, a hesitation in the past.

§ If it were desirable, one could explain the descent of European painting by filling a long wall with pictures in which were obvious the gradual decrease of their humanity and the increase of their backgrounds—say Giotto, Claude, Gainsborough, Constable, Cézanne, Mondrian. The human figures get smaller and smaller, the things seen by human eyes get larger and larger, till they crowd out the humans; the form of these things becomes articulated and more articulated until things,

like humans, at last disappear. At times individuality and psychopathology interrupt the descent, but also contradict the full humanity. Poussin's self-portrait, Rembrandt's self-portraits, even, are not selfish. Constable's "Hadleigh Castle" is much more of a self- and selfish portrait, so is Samuel Palmer's drawing of himself in the Ashmolean at Oxford. But "thought's dictation" and leaving Poussin out of his self-portrait are only varieties of the almost null. Salvator Rosa held in his hand in his self-portrait the words: "aut tace aut loquere meliora silentio."

¶ The human figure became silent in the last century. Cézanne also silenced the fruit-dish. He painted artificial flowers because real ones talked too much. When Picasso and Braque, Leger and Gris had finished with them, wine-glasses did not whisper even. Abstractionists arrived and looked right beyond the wine-glasses, and surrealists began to shout in the absolute stillness.

§ About the time Christopher Wood killed himself it was becoming finally clear that good painting (e.g., Mantegna and Manet were good painters) was for the time being impossible. You must be drugged by the importance to yourself of your own time if you allege that there is any good painting now. The last century was one of declining good. (Consider Poussin, Blake, Rosetti.) The "good" of Picasso is not an axiom. But keeping painting alive in however small a way that takes however small an amount of life into it is a decent process. Mannerism and eclecticism are the chief indecency, the chief treason. You may think we have written as though painting went along by itself: it has only run down the sharp slope into our less full, less reasonable, less innocent and—whatever great advantages we have—less

real existence. You can flagstone pictures down on to the top of an abnormal unrest of the individual soul, or you can just paint *with* your unrest. Between one war and another, it would be stupid to expect artists to be calmly expert in technique and excitedly expert in human realities.

¶ And, war apart, every artist has had to rediscover a technique, a means to paint, a means to become expert. Painting itself badly needs the professional now, while there is less public demand for him than ever: the amateur is the public's love. Public demand can create expert artists. It created the early religious artists, for instance: artists who carved and painted thousands of works in England. Their works were at once full, and popular. Picasso is the best twentieth-century example of an expert artist—a painter who has invented, by rediscovery and hard work, a complete professional equipment. Miró is discovering one also, and Héliou and a few others. Picasso has never denied the tradition of painting. He took no part in Dada, which guyed it. (Picabia's "Portrait of Rembrandt, portrait of Cézanne . . ." was an important expression of feelings, but should have died by now.) An absorption in the tradition, without an escape into it, is urgent at the moment. It should be used as an example, not as a drug.

Life grows out of a good sculptor's or painter's work. Read Constable's letters, or a poem of Blake's, or look at an early glass painting. Each "means" far more than itself alone. It "means" the life of the artist,—but beyond that, the life of his time. A Samuel Palmer of a barn at Shoreham, or a hillside, "means" Palmer's whole existence and surroundings, and it fixes the whole passion of his age. A Bewick woodcut, the same.

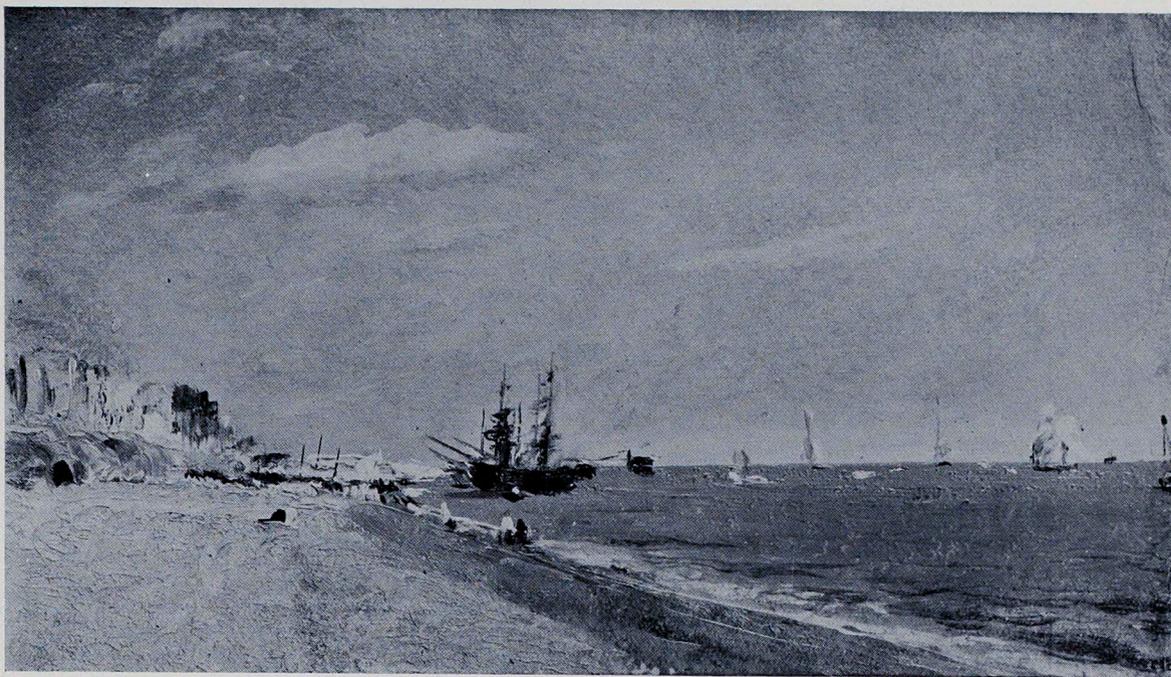
§ Or Fuseli: the tradition, not of painting only, but of literature, and the traditions of European society gather in him as in one of their last reservoirs in our country. He could understand at once Blake, Constable, Goethe, Milton, Dante, Shakespeare and the great painters behind him. The whole life which

Fuseli understood was smothered and forgotten in England before he had been dead thirty years. The life of Samuel Palmer, who took the traditions of painting, literature and society from Blake and Fuseli, and also acknowledged his environment into passion, is a tragic life suppressed under the massive weight of a new age. This weight forced him to be uncertain about the best pictures of his peculiar illumination, which he kept in a private portfolio, while he feebly attempted to earn enough money in something of the style of a Birket Foster. The ghost of the tradition went on in his friend Richmond, the popular painter of the faces of the nineteenth century. (How ironic that Richmond's son—see the interior of St. Paul's—should have been, called after Blake: Sir William Blake Richmond, R.A.) The substance of all the traditions broke up into scraps. There are scraps in the Pre-Raphaelites, scraps in Edward Lear, scraps in Lewis, scraps in a few of our painters now.

¶ Even an eclectic like Richard Wilson could include a far richer content in his pictures than can be included now. A Cotman drawing of a Norfolk church is a character drawing as well as an architectural comment. Turner's medium, or Girtin's, was a gay medium compared with ours—compared with any available for the expression of life in our time. Life need hardly enter the form then, for the form itself was rich with implications of it. It was still a buoyant life, though already partly weighted with the experience that tends to sink *our* expression in the form from the first, making it heavy and soggy, without wings or breath. Cotman, Wilson, Girtin, Turner—it is a sad list that can be made, from our point of view.

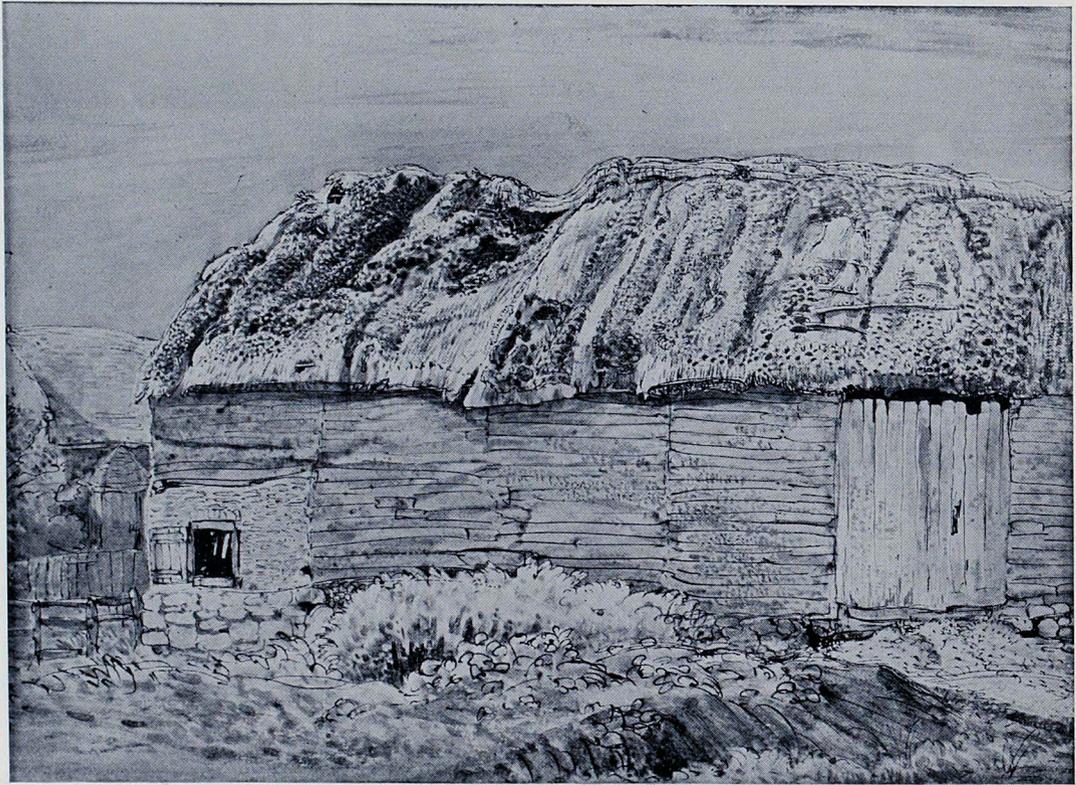
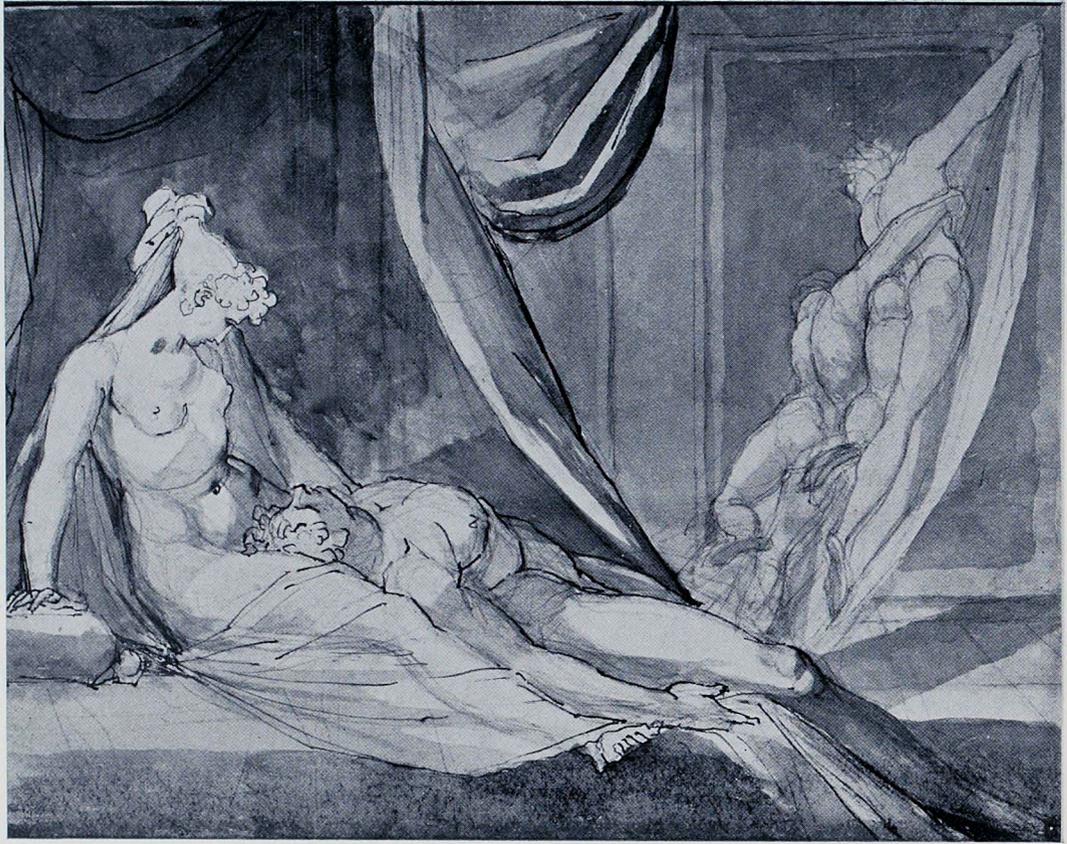
But there is life in painting enough. Here and there, and increasingly, it is re-born from the material—paint and canvas, wood and stone—instead of being sunk in it to be lost.

§ So the truth about looking at pictures is this: after looking at them *as art*, we went and left the galleries, we relied on ourselves, we believed in an opposition of life to art.



Above : *CONSTABLE, Brighton beach with Colliers. (Victoria and Albert Museum.)*

Below : *CHRISTOPHER WOOD, Leaving port. (Coll. Lord Berners. Photo courtesy Redfern Gallery.)*



Above : FUSELI, Drawing. (Victoria and Albert Museum.)

Below : SAMUEL PALMER, Barn at Shoreham. (Courtesy of Martin Hardie, Esq., and Victoria and Albert Museum.)

But our job is to feel history, to feel art and life. We must join history, and we must reject a passage of time :

“ . . . mit kleinen Schritten gehn die Uhren neben unserm eigentlichen Tag.”

There is no “past,” there are no pictures painted “in the past,” equally there is exclusive Fair Isle of the present. There is only a human instant, a *being*. “Now” is inclusive ; and in the Middle Ages most men did not know whether the year they were in was 1350 or 1351 or 1390. Accept so much, forget the year (though not the realities of the year) and paintings and writings simply become life, they can be felt thoroughly as life ; and “modern art” can safely walk out from the gay, white armour of its studio into

the galleries and begin to learn. It will not be running the eclectic or—facile pejorative—the “literary”—risk I do not think we can do much. It is too expensive to be individuals, i.e., to be private ; it is damnable to be public ; but our “past” is closing up, to allow the present to flush out again. The fiends are busy, desperate and fierce, but outside ourselves, we can at last allow our common humanity to rule us, or give us advice. Great art comes from great living ; great living comes from our common humanity promising or filling out or still defining a high social shape to which each peculiar person can decently relate himself. I believe that men may have to wait a hundred years before such a shape is renewed.

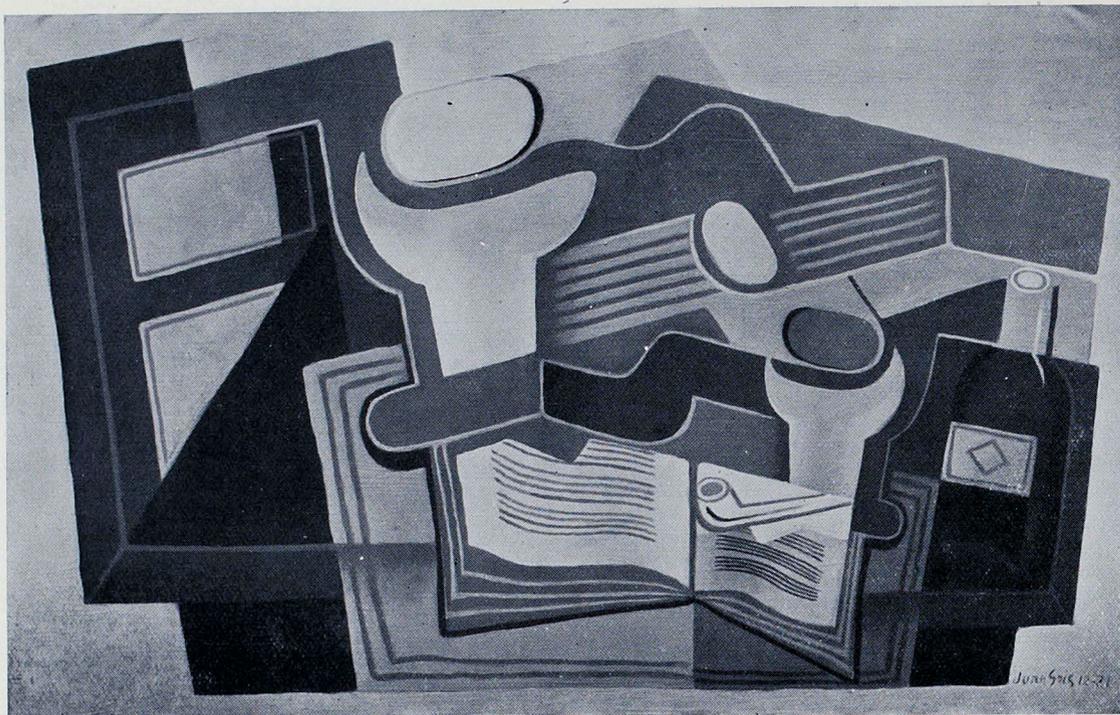
Juan Gris By Douglas Lord

Born : Madrid, 1887 Died : Paris : 1927

Amid all the salvos of praise and shouts of derision which have greeted Picasso, Braque, Cubism and abstract art generally, the work of Gris has passed almost unnoticed ; and yet his is perhaps the easiest work of all to accept. For Gris, though schooled in the growing Cubist movement, made of it, like Picasso and Braque, something essentially his own, but also something simpler and more direct.

Leaving the Ecole des Arts et Métiers at Madrid at the age of 19 he arrived in Paris in 1906. Here he lived in the same building as Picasso, by whose work he was not unnaturally influenced ; but even in the first pictures which he exhibited at the Indépendants in 1912, though based on geometric forms, there is less emphasis on the analytical element of Cubism which was then prevalent. In his “Portrait of Picasso” (1912), for instance, the forms are not only distinctly modelled but indeed the picture is composed with a greater approach to naturalism. It is, of course, true that he too

did not use much colour, but clarity of construction was his chief concern. Writing later of this period he said, “Justement par réaction contre les éléments fugitifs employés par les impressionistes dans leurs représentations, on eut envie de chercher dans les objets à représenter, des éléments moins instables. Et on choisit cette catégorie d'éléments qui restent dans l'esprit par la connaissance et qui ne se modifient pas toutes les heures.” For Gris was no cold logician : as a Spaniard his nature was both passionate and fanatical. But at the same time he was careful not to be carried away by sentiment and his compositions were always devoid of superfluous matter and of any sort of unnecessary ornament. Thus when, faced with the apparent contradiction of simulating objects which could themselves actually form part of the picture, he decided, like Picasso, to experiment with “collage” he found that though extraneous elements could satisfactorily be worked into the plastic organisation of a composition, they were at the same time out of place : in short, the “collages” were a



JUAN GRIS. *Still life*, 1921

disturbing factor because Cubism was a movement too profoundly humanist and too essentially plastic to suffer such distortion.

Accordingly Gris, whose knowledge of, and interest in, the tradition was profound, set to analysing the fundamentals of all great painting and to reconciling these with the new plastic vision—Cubism. For though he admitted that descriptive analysis, the method employed in the early Cubist pictures was a natural beginning for any new movement concerned afresh with nature, he reproached the early Cubism with being no more than “des rapports de compréhension du peintre avec les objets et presque jamais des rapports entre les objets eux-mêmes.”

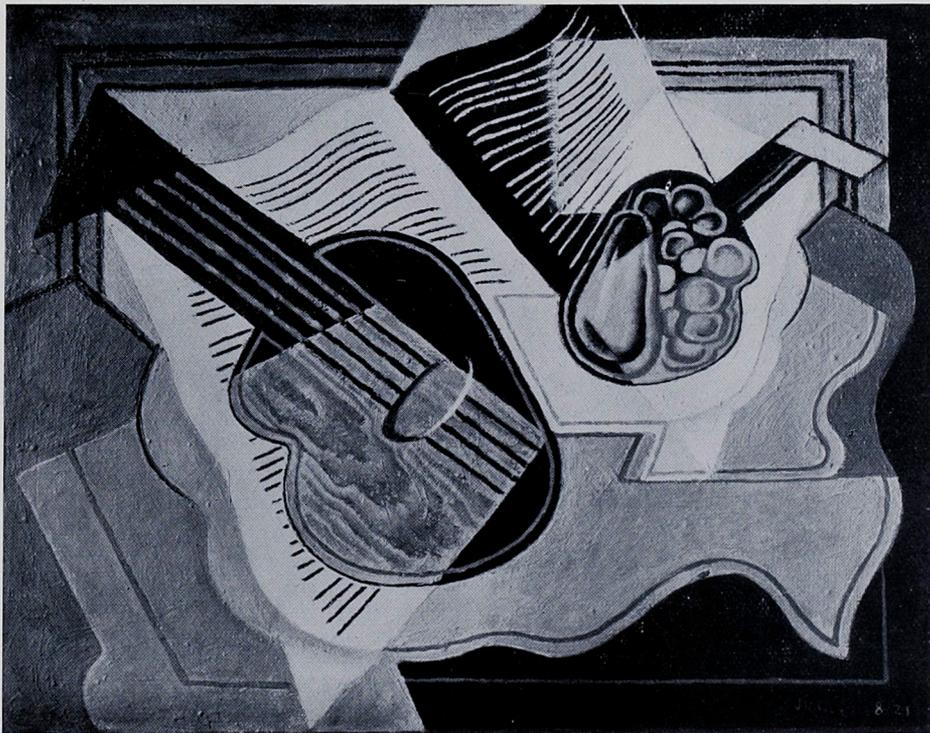
The problem before him he realised was the reduction of a three dimensional reality—nature—to terms of a two dimensional plane, the canvas, of which one must at all times feel the flatness. Thus he came to formulate the theory that “la seule technique picturale possible est une sorte d’architecture plate et colorée. . . . Toute architecture est une construction, mais toute construction n’est

pas de l’architecture. . . . Une architecture on ne peut pas la démonter en pièces dont chacune garde une autonomie ou une vie isolée. Un fragment d’architecture . . . n’a de l’existence que juste à la place où il doit se trouver. La construction n’est que l’imitation de l’architecture ; c’est l’architecture plate et colorée qui est la technique de la peinture et non la construction. C’est les rapports entre les formes et les couleurs qui les contiennent.” This was, of course, in essence a restatement of the Platonic theory : but Gris at once realised its insufficiency. For he saw that to put this into practice literally would result in a series of mere coloured patterns—in pictures divorced from all reality : and to him painting represented the means of expressing certain relationships between himself and the outside world. The artist’s problem lay in the reconciliation of abstract forms with the objects around him.

Thus Gris, examining the visual world, discovered that our vision is limited to certain elementary forms capable of infinite variation, the same form appearing in very different

objects. These elements he felt, with their independent existence, produce in us the sense of ordered construction in the external world: in other words, they are tectonic, and in concrete form they are objects. But it was the variation rather than the essential sameness which interested him most. The repetition of forms was not indispensable to his "architecture" but rather, by virtue of the ensuing familiarity, an enrichment. He used to refer to this as an effect of "rhyme." Thus not only was his formal problem solved but at the same time he realised that the objects themselves were given a sort of permanence, of universality. Now, for example, without altering the pre-established relationships of the coloured forms within his composition he could, without difficulty, turn a white form into a plate: a few parallel lines drawn across it and a sheet of music was there: some capital letters and it was a newspaper. In the "Still Life" (1920) we see the same oval form used to express the mouth of the flute, the mouth of the glass, the opening of the

bottle, the hole in the guitar and the bunch of grapes on the fruit dish. Again, for example, in the "Guitar and Fruit Dish" (1921) the form which on the left signifies the body of the guitar appears on the right to express the dish containing the pears and grapes; while the black form that appears as the handle of the guitar becomes on the right side the stalk of the bunch of grapes. His is not illusionist painting: forms are brought to life within the structure of the canvas. Gris is the mystic among modern painters: he is the painter with knowledge. "I cannot sit down before a bunch of flowers and paint them," he once said: that way lay no creation. His indeed was the very opposite of the method of Cézanne who, in front of a bottle had analysed it down until it became a cylinder: Gris worked on a cylinder and it became a bottle, a particular and individual bottle; from the general he worked towards the particular. For the peripheral realisation of the type was, to him, the greater humanisation, and the tectonic elements with which he worked were



JUAN GRIS.

*Guitar and
fruit dish,
1921*

a method of attaining the external world, of controlling it. Cézanne by analysis had reduced his "motifs" to architectural terms, but Gris, by synthesis, worked upwards to reality. With him creation came with the last brush-stroke, not with the first. By thus assuring the basic "architecture plate et colorée" he was able to create the sensation of space and at the same time respect the essential flatness of his canvas: for in his work the spatial relationships of the objects within the composition are suggested neither by perspective, nor by modelling, nor by dissection, but by juxtaposition of tones (though not by tonal modulation as in the manner of Cézanne) and by the overlaying of objects.

The achievement of Gris is the triumph of a single calculating vision, and in this respect his is a more limited achievement compared to that of say, Picasso, in whose work hazard has played a greater role. But

Gris' work, though perhaps more intellectual, is none the less essentially plastic. The reassertion of the autonomous unity of a work of art was the essence of Cubism and Gris was certainly one of its greatest exponents. Cubism has been more than an experiment, it has been a rejuvenation of painting and in this respect no one more than Gris has been responsible for maintaining the background of tradition. His sense of colour and design were so true, his form of expression so utterly pictorial, and his grasp on reality so much the basis of his work that he was never in danger of becoming a mere tasteful decorator. His early death was a great loss to painting and, although to-day he is still underestimated, he will, when the time comes for a full valuation of Cubism, be seen to have been one of the great artists of this era, and one of the great figures in the development of French painting, the tradition he so much respected.



JUAN GRIS.

Harlequin,
1921.

(Collection
Douglas Cooper,
Esq.)

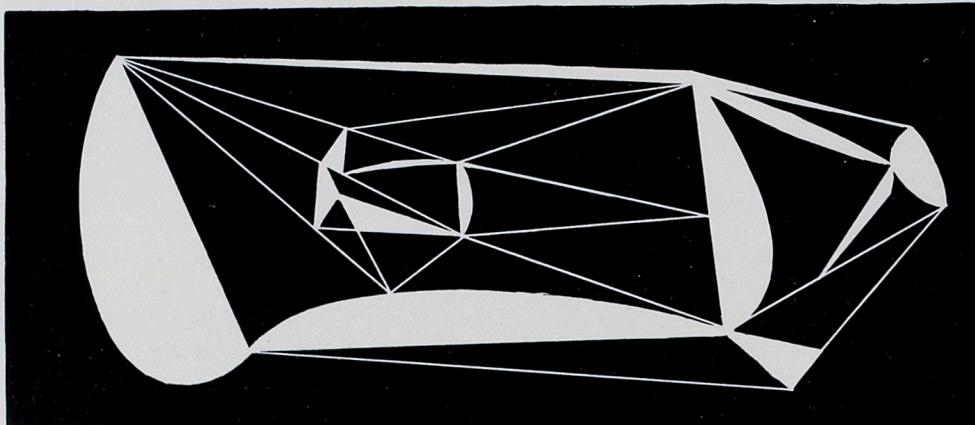
A Few Lines By Hugh Gordon Porteus

Starting from scratch, we might agree that drawing means line, that line implies statement. Statement of what? It is at this point that our private lines diverge. Euclidean straight line, abstract ideal, plots the shortest distance between two points. This is a line of the order of "the Tropic of Cancer"; it has no material existence. As soon as a line has existence, it becomes an act, therefore is privy to some "art of," is potentially Art. The tail of the lizard in the sand, the nose of the hound in the grass, the underground railway of the maggot in the wurzel, the pen travelling over the sheet: these are journeys, irrevocable statements of more or less involuntary itineraries, resultants of forces in space-time; lines of least resistance—allowing for all the factors in operation. Drawing begins at this point, with pen, ink and paper as primary factors, hand, eye and mind as secondary factors. Drawing means journeys of exploration or adventure between two points. The hand may be a Stanley, a sleep-walker, a sprinter, a tramp or a tram. The eye and the mind are the footbrake and the accelerator, and the uniformed guide who sometimes rambles, gets blotto, or falls asleep. From the observer's, that is the critical, viewpoint, drawing is always simply a graph, a line plotted in time against any other factors that entered into its existence. These factors are, for even the simplest operation, of great complexity. Shy Mabel making O's and 8's with her toe in the dust on the area steps, while she turns over the postman's proposal, is making a more personal signature than the lizard with its spinal spasms in the sand. A similar degree of complexity separates the gyrations of little dirty Dick's slate pencil from the magnificent linear romany rhetoric of Mr. Augustus John.

There are roughly four kinds of drawing, if you consider draughtsmanship from the point of view of the motives behind it. There is drawing as design: as chart or map of an

idea already perhaps half settled in the mind. Secondly there is descriptive drawing, drawing as translation of visual experience into line. Thirdly there is drawing as symbol, as accepted language. Finally there is drawing as manual dance, as calligraphy. And, of course, these motives may co-exist in the same work, help or hinder each other and cohabit in any formation with or without legitimate issue. But it is very important to decide what motive or motives lie behind a piece of drawing before deciding on its goodness or badness. The confusions and contradictions of criticism are due solely to neglect of this principle. It is irrelevant to speak of the "insensitive" draughtsmanship of a man who never set out to make more than a design, perhaps with mechanical instruments. And it is equally unfair to stigmatise a piece of rapid calligraphic line, an inch of handwriting, as "out of proportion." And so forth: so much should be obvious.

Until we have a common terminology, comprehensive and exact like that of the musician, and a public at least half as large and half as well-educated as the "musical" public, it is hardly worth discussing draughtsmanship at all. Technical differences in drawing, as fundamental as in music the distinction between F sharp and F flat, *lento* or *legato*, are neither noticed nor named in our western art criticism. Almost any literate Chinese can tell you whether a given stroke was written with a wrist or elbow-rest, or from the shoulder, and at what speed it was done. The literature of draughtsmanship and calligraphy is almost entirely hidden from the West because it is still in Chinese character. China and Japan have the whole subject neatly and exhaustively catalogued. Our own attempts to forge a critical apparatus are pitiable. Roger Fry's essay on *Some Modern Drawings* is about all there is: a clumsy and elementary beginning by just about the last



ARTHUR JACKSON. 1936

artist fitted to lay down laws on the subject. And you might as well tell people to read Ruskin to-day as Fry. Fry at least recognised the existence of *tempo*. But classification should begin from motive. The four motives I have mentioned give you four ideal, not necessary pure, types of drawing.

Descriptive drawing is, in the absolute, the kind that deserves most careful nursing; and it is in present danger of neglect. Neglect, from intellectual quarters, only hastens reaction, a new and more crass "back to Nature" movement, almatademism. The literalism of Dali is the routine pendulum answer to Cubism. "Nature," however, is still the best tutor of hand and, more important, eye. Little machine-age bursts of enthusiasm for abstraction, geometry, etc., are unlikely to *usurp* the illustrator and appearance-translator or -commentator entirely: a glance at any "Tradition" is enough to show that this is where the main stream flows. Fundamental and universal human appetencies are satisfied by this game. More than the sunset and the highland cattle are at stake when it is deserted. The camera cannot tell such interesting lies as the illustrator, the portrait- or landscape-painter. Every age and place gets the Rowlandson it deserves: Hogarth and Hokusai, though not absolute top-dogs, keep the blood of the world in healthy circulation. To-day we have only extremes: nothing of note between Klee (fancy), and the very very Low.

"Appearance"—drawing as symbol, as

an esperanto, the whole Græco-Roman tradition up to the putridity stage, Burlington House—though useful is dangerous. The Far Eastern system, less informal and complex, was more foolproof. And it did provide plastic and æsthetic standards, not scientific standards (e.g., anatomy perspective) as in the West. It grew out of the written character; and out of both grew calligraphy.

Calligraphy, drawing as manual dance, is the final flower of the draughtsman's tree. Outside the Orient, it is in an absurdly clumsy and elementary condition. I have hinted why elsewhere. It is not our pigeon at all. It coos and comes to the hand of Gypsies and Jews and a few Frenchmen with Moorish lacings of blood in their veins. Said British Blake: "We may be clever as pugilists, but as artists we are, and have long been, the contempt of the Continent. Gavelot once said to my master, Basire: 'de English may be very clever in deir own opinions, *but dey do not draw de draw.*'"

The destiny of the West, in art as in other things, is bound up with Design, something the East has never consciously explored beyond the pattern stage. In a time of flux and reaction it is particularly desirable to reassert the ascendancy of this movement towards conscious order. Drawing, "the hard, wiry, bounding line," is, of course, its chosen instrument.

Art criticism is much too exclusively in the hands of delicate connoisseurs able to do

nothing but register *quality*. "Quality" is, other things being equal, what ultimately matters. But other things are not equal, and some of them matter more immediately. To be a sort of hypersensitive ammeter requires neither intelligence nor common sense, and art criticism is at present much in need of both.

Where art is moving, how the pendulum of fashion is swinging, what is good or bad as doctrine—these are questions of some moment. It is more important to consider them than to come with tip-toe daintiness to a bit of swoon-worthy drawing and pronounce it ravishing. Questions of quality aside, the tendencies in drawing that should be nourished and encouraged to-day are represented by such people as Kauffer and William Roberts!—the hard plotters and plodders. The quality-tasting game is too easy. We all realise the exciting psychometric value of a bit of Picasso's telephone-pad scribble. Picasso is the most brilliant "pianist" of the West,

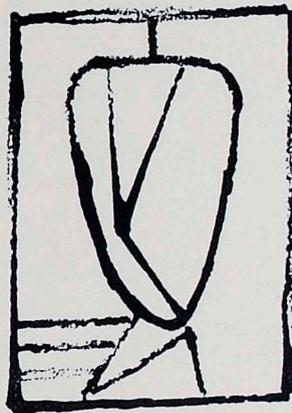
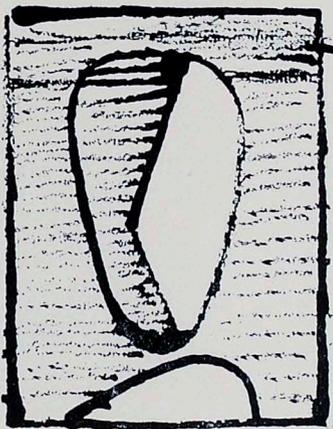
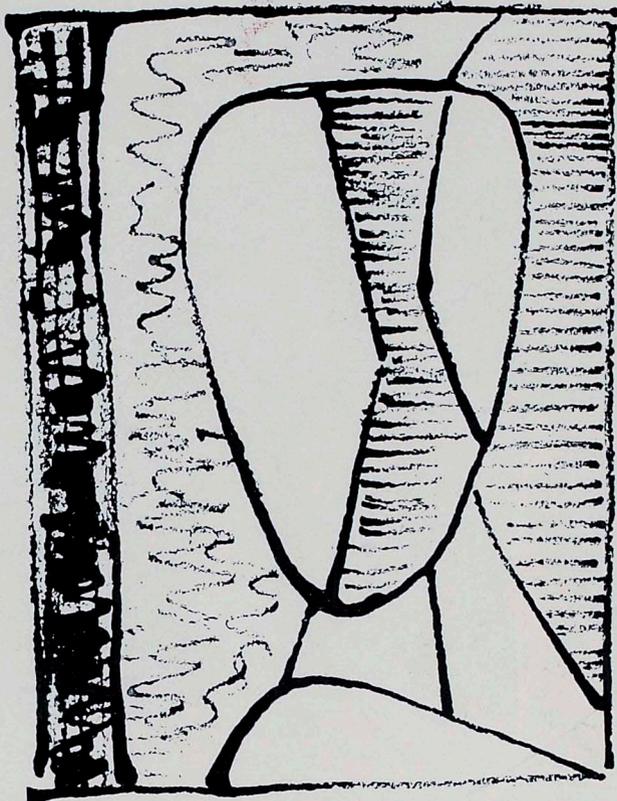
within the draughtsman's game. But Kandinsky is the more fertile inventor of possible forms, Klee the more adventurous explorer of linear possibilities, Héliou the best and most Bach-like engineer of plastic systems, Wyndham Lewis the only one to attempt a synthesis of formal complexes with visionary material. All these are great draughtsmen, not necessarily calligraphers but designers, with eye and hand working together to a valuable end, perfecting different parts of a tradition that had to be taken to pieces, cleaned and tested, and may be put together again in the near future. The function of *Axis* is to keep up the morale of those who support this general movement—Piper, Jackson, Holding, etc., are in overalls under the works—and to keep off the saboteurs. Round the corner Mr. John and Mr. Gill may be permitted to work in peace. We are also aware of Michaelangelo, Mu-Chi and Walt Disney. I am sorry that there is not room to mention everybody.



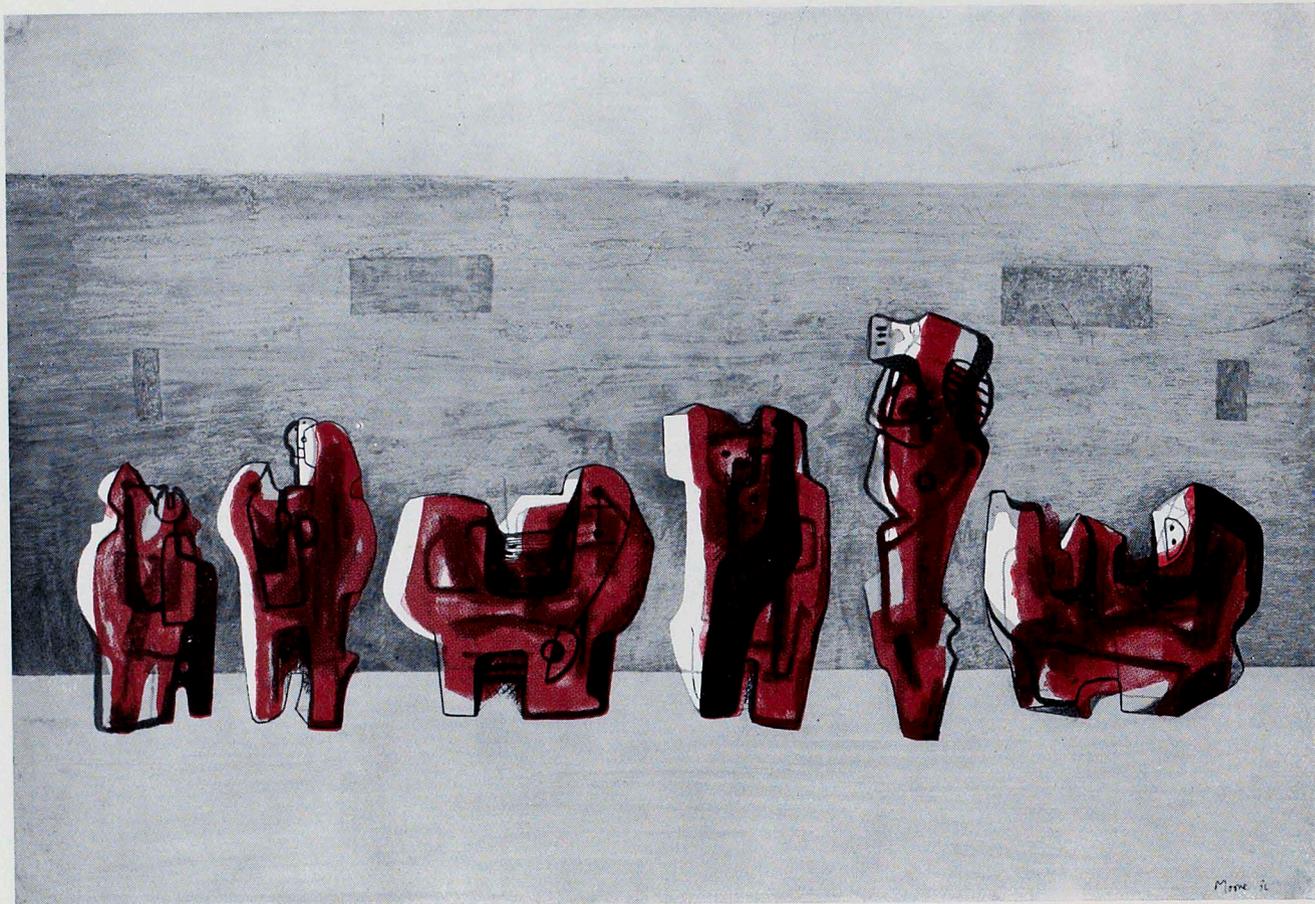
CERI RICHARDS. 1936



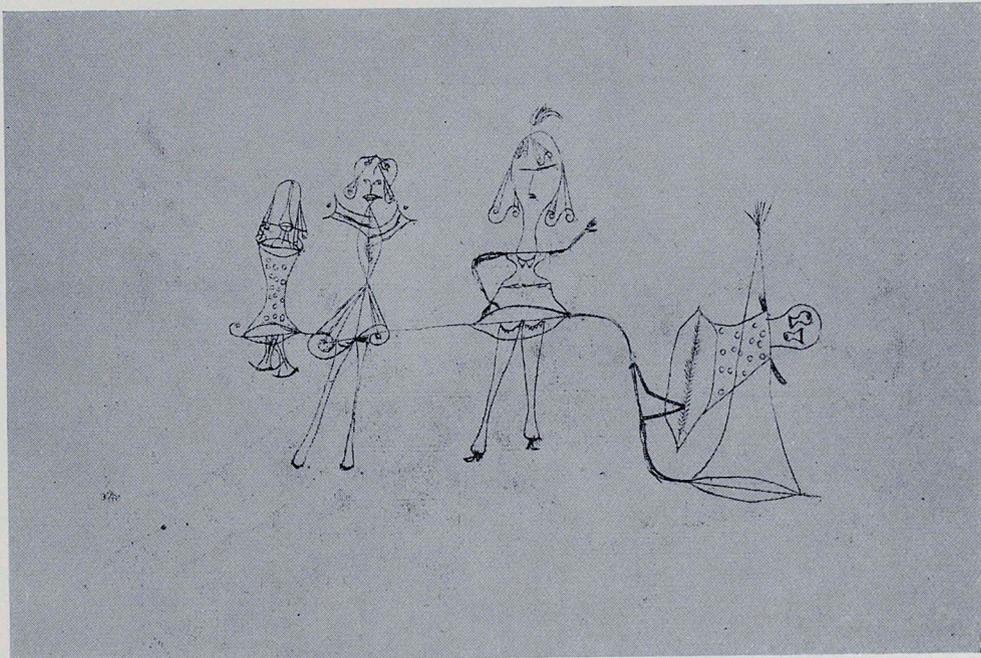
MATVYN WRIGHT. Gothic, 1936



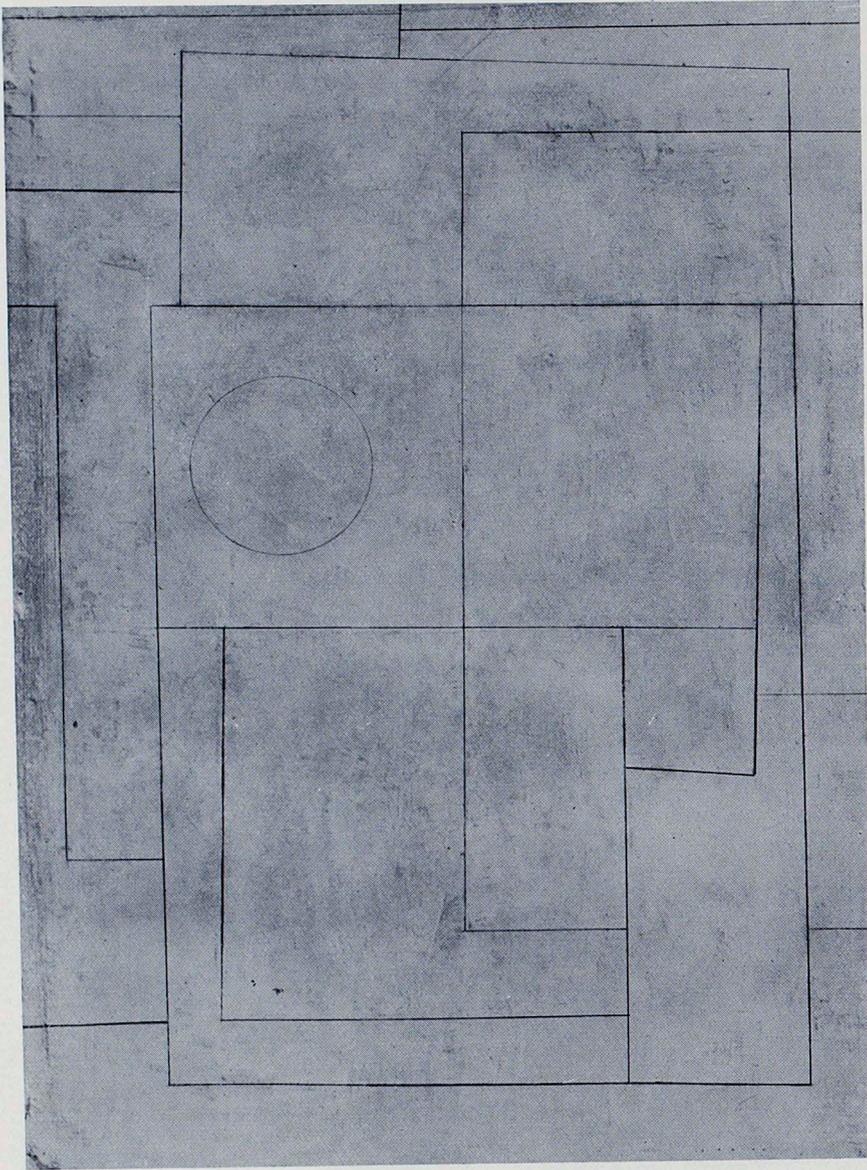
PAALLEN,
Project for a picture, 1936



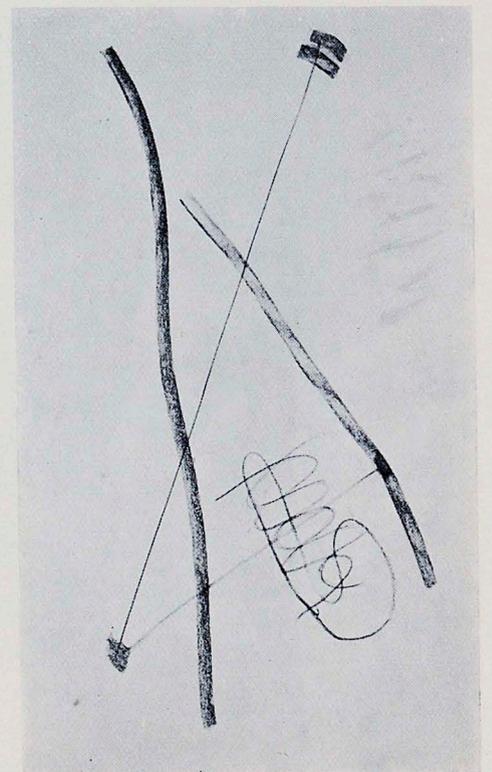
HENRY MOORE. *Drawing, 1936*



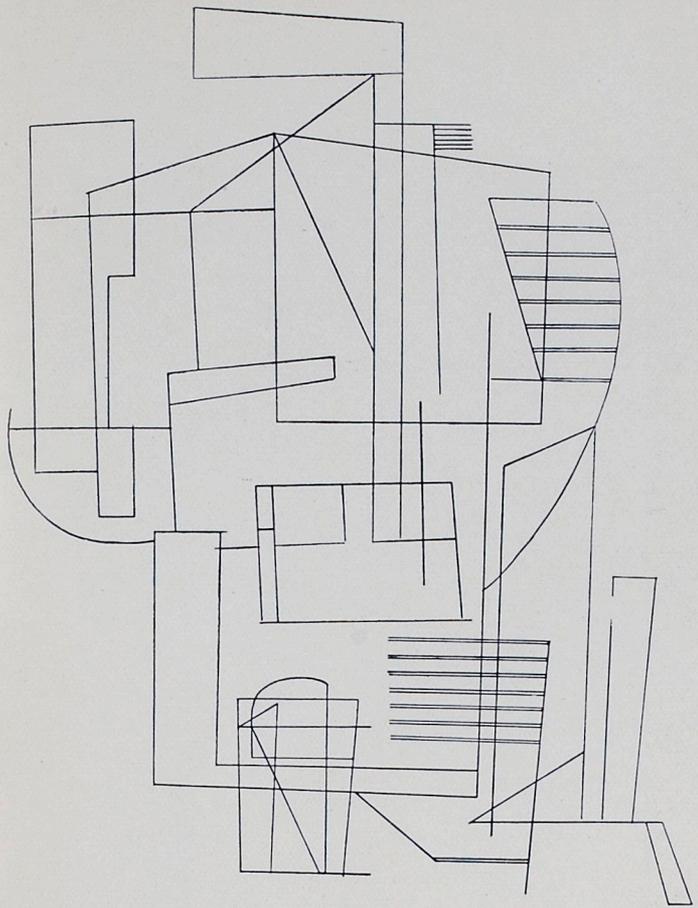
PAUL KLEE. Drawing



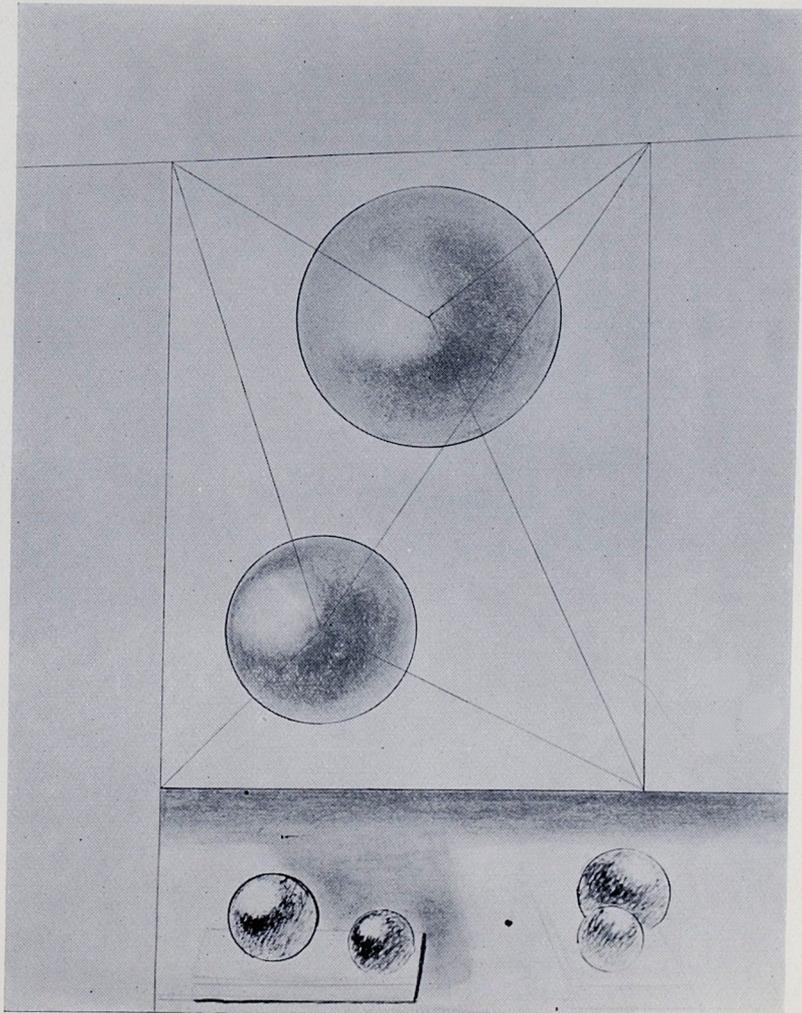
BEN NICHOLSON. 1936



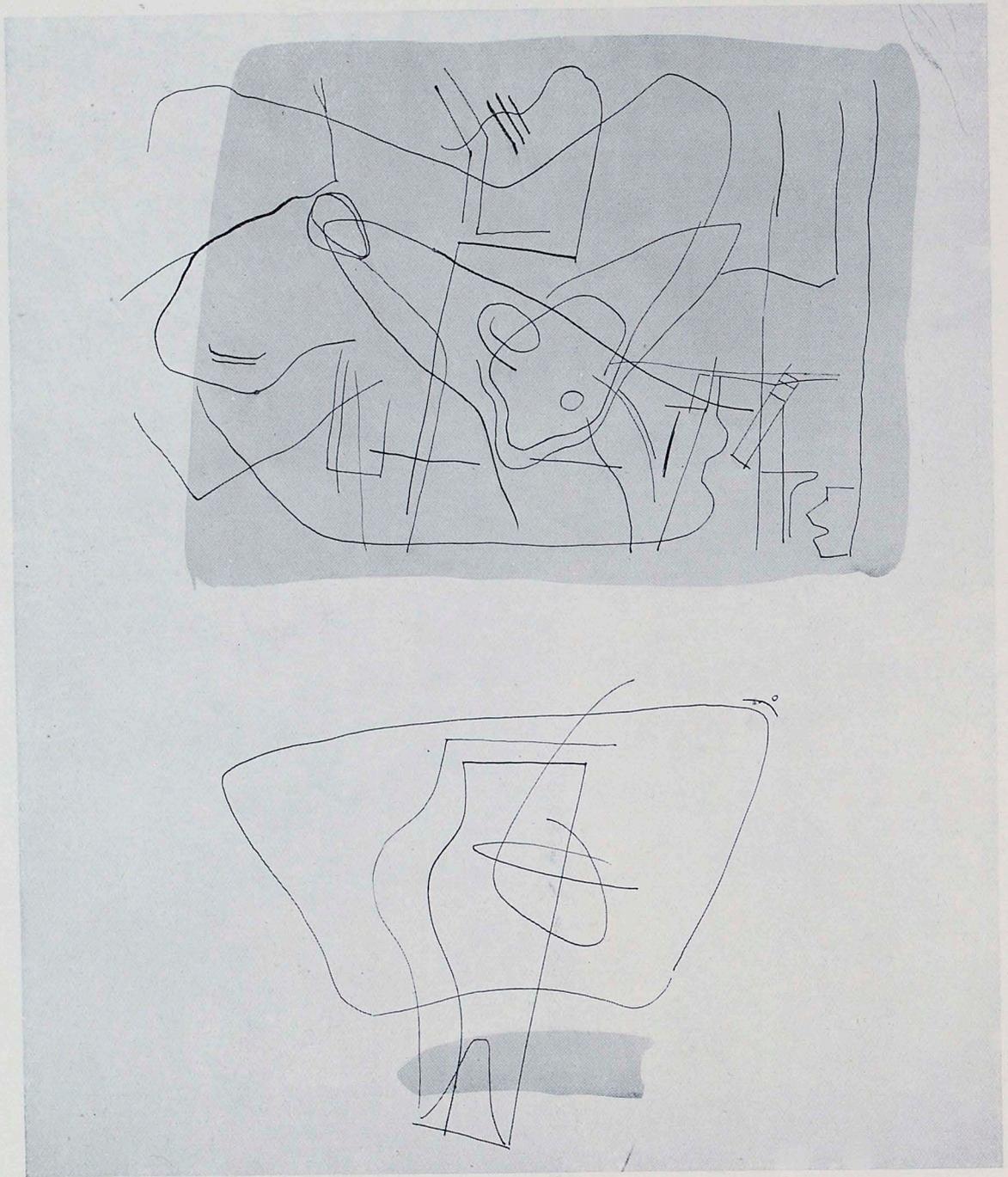
JOHN WOODS.
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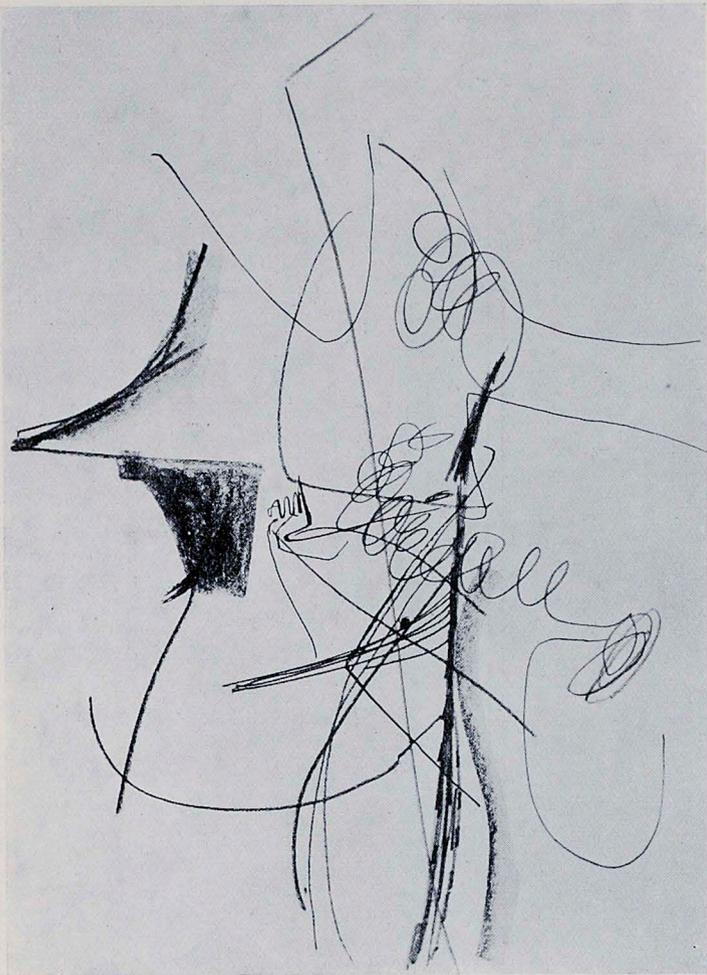
EILEEN HOLDING. 1936



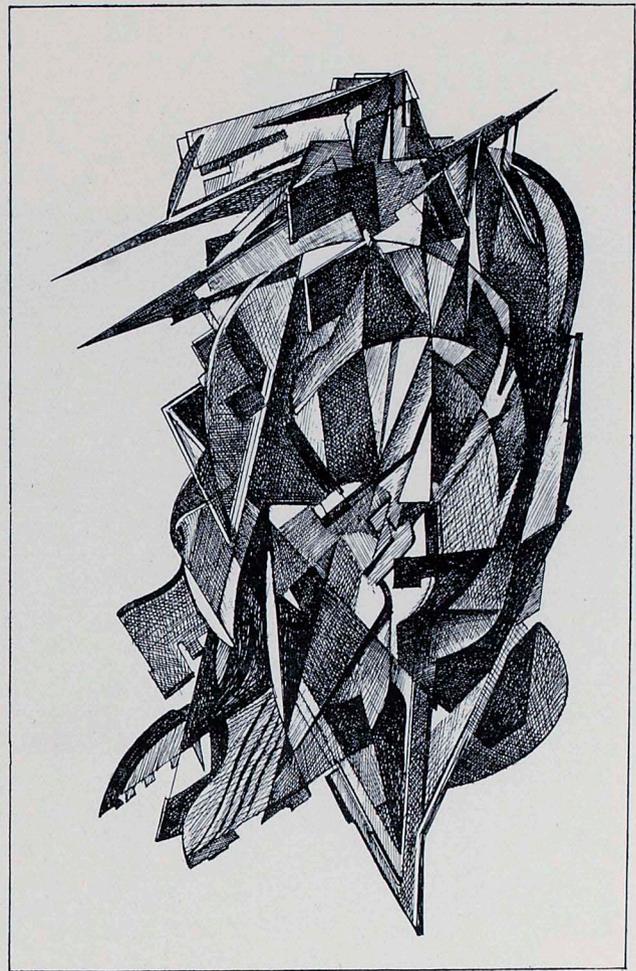
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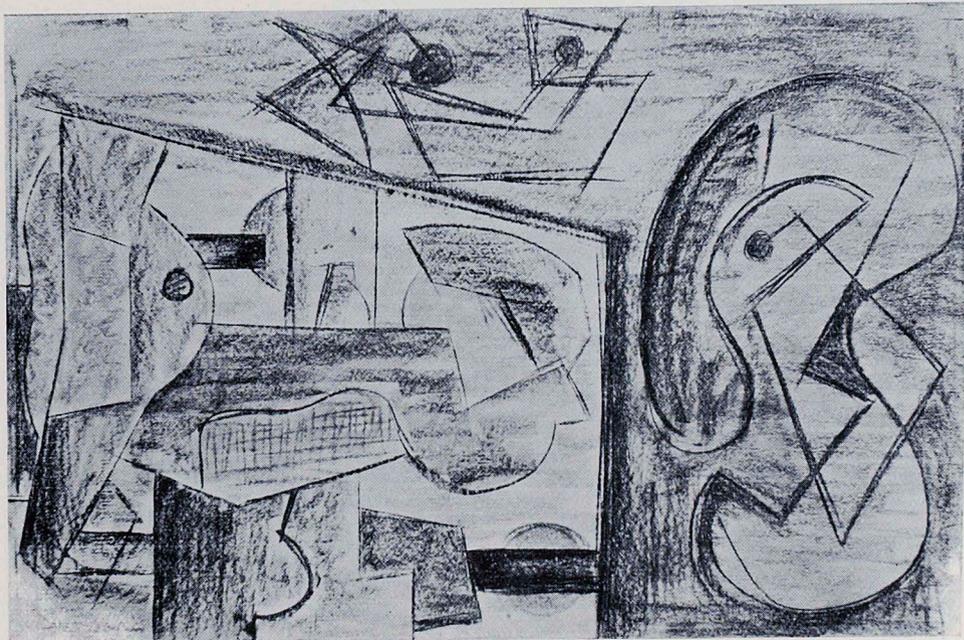
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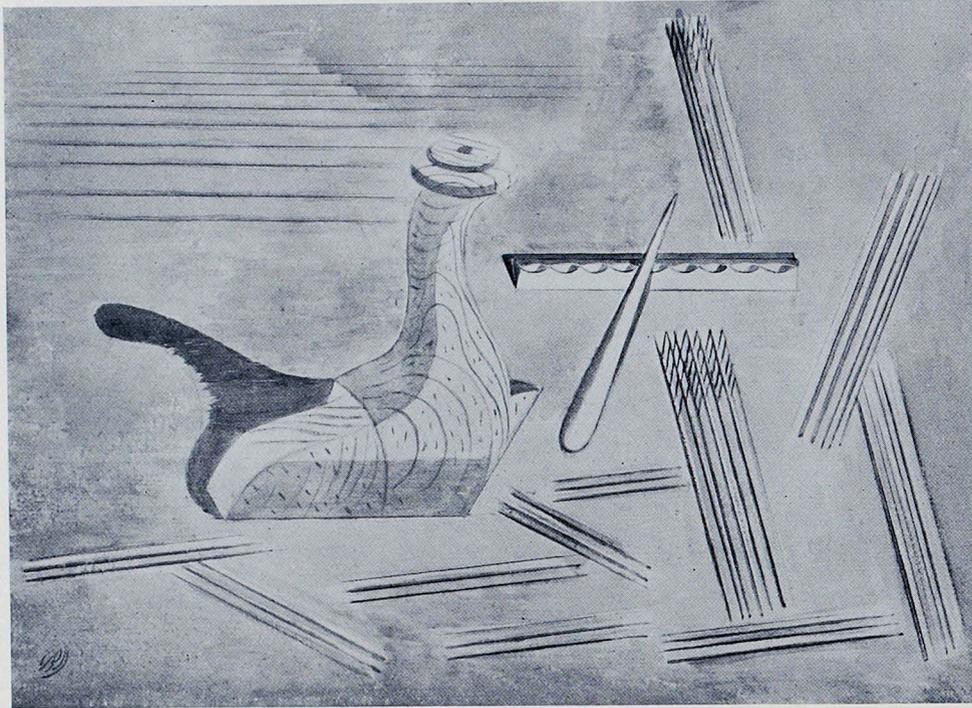
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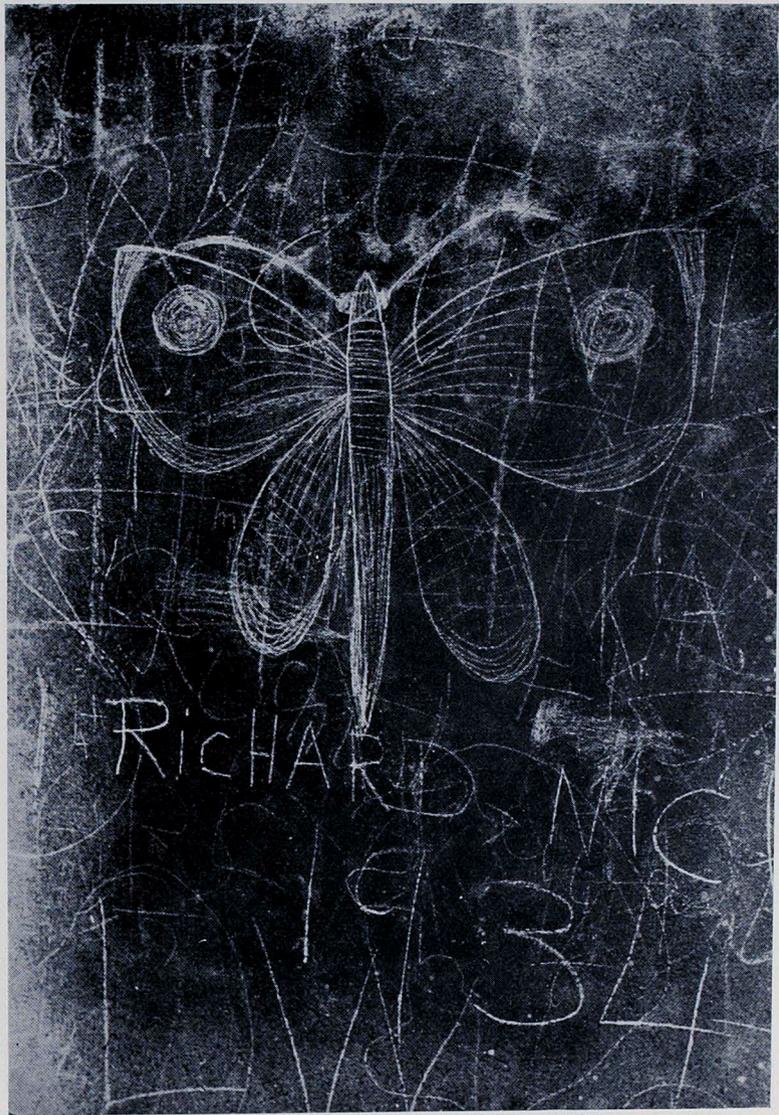
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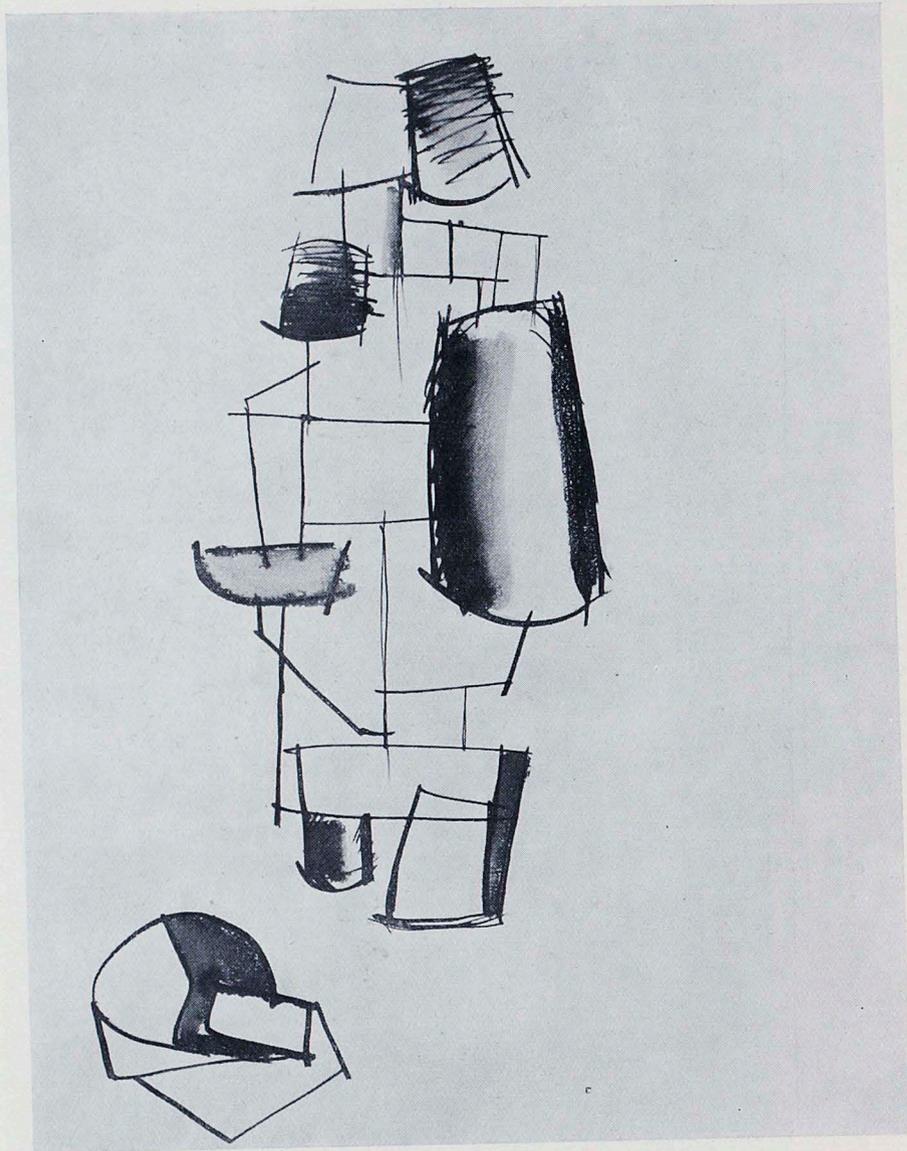
DOUGLAS GLASS. 1936



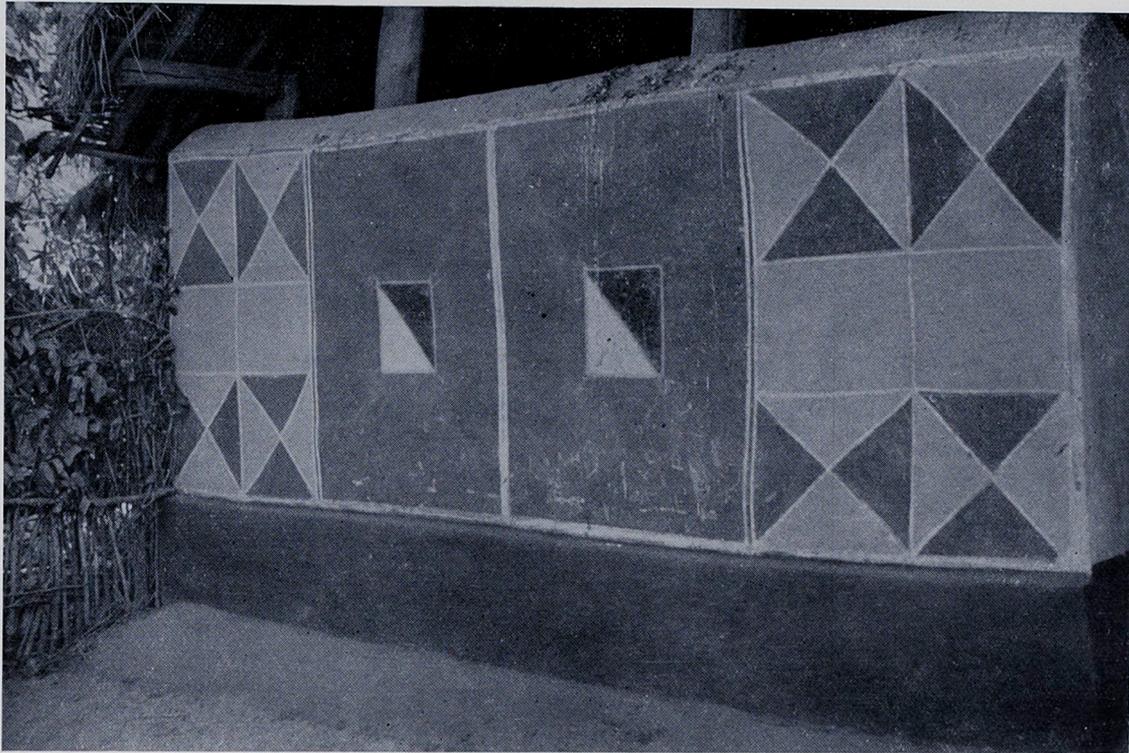
PAUL NASH. *Comment on Leda*



Drawing on cement wall of derelict tin mine, Botallack, Cornwall.



HELION. 1935



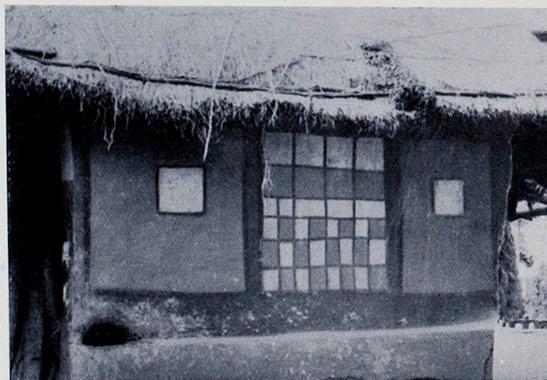
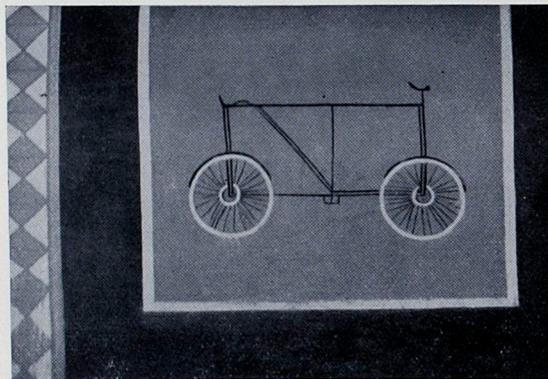
Santhal Painting *By W. G. and M. Archer*

Smooth brown walls brought to a sharp edge, a plaster surface of sun-dried mud stiffened with cow-dung, sharp rectangular courtyards, precise doorways, finally the geometric basis enhanced by wall paintings.

These houses and paintings are made by a section of the Santhals living in the Singhbhum district of Bihar. The houses are constructed for a strict utility but are plastered and painted every year to give them a finish, an exhilaration, which is much more than useful in intention. The paintings themselves are done by the women in terracotta and ochre, obtained from oxides in the soil, in black from burnt straw, and in white from rice; and are put on with an easy obviousness as if they were part of housekeeping. With their common style, the paintings form part of a tribal stock, developed by family sensibilities and matured by repetition. The process of their growth is similar to the formation of ballads and in the same way it has produced a regional style which tribal experience has sanctioned.

The necessity of these paintings in Santhal life—a life based on agriculture and with no margins, a bare “rice” culture—would prove, if any proof were needed, the “naturalness” of an abstract style. And from this, one might draw the corollary that the abstract movement in Europe is not a mere sophistication, a doctrinaire research. It is simply returning to a natural need.

It will be obvious that the character of the materials coupled with the meagre level of living means a certain coarseness, a certain lack of precision in the painting; just as the mud walls would appear coarse beside the new architecture. And this is both a technical and, in the last analysis, a cultural weakness. But, working through this coarseness, the paintings indicate a sensibility utterly non-literary—a vital interest in the relations of geometric forms—and a pleasure in their construction. Even when the material is an object from the natural world such as a woman, an elephant or a bicycle, the tribal



sensibility presses the forms into the standard geometric style. The woman becomes identical with a triangle and the bicycle as important as a circle. It is this pressure of sensibility, breaking through the coarseness, which gives the value.

As a style, the affinity of the purest paintings is with Mondrian—an identity of direction which minimises the difference of culture level. And as house paintings, they afford an Indian parallel on a village plane to Ben Nicholson's reliefs—"the best kind of painting to go with the new architecture" (Herbert Read).

Finally, as Indian art, they form part of a living tradition—a tradition which escaped the books of Havell, Brown, and Vincent Smith and is only now being recognised as in the centre of Indian sensibility. They are part of the body of "submerged" painting which for our generation will define Indian art.

Henry Moore

by S. John Woods

Exhibition: Leicester Galleries, October 31—November 21

"It is the natural beauty of proportion of the phallic consciousness, contrasted with the more studied or ecstatic proportion of the mental or spiritual consciousness we are accustomed to."

D. H. Lawrence meant the Cerveteri tombs but the passage applies with equal relevance to sculpture. Sculpture to-day has been forced into the place of a rather younger and less important sister of painting—a place which has caused its individuality to suffer and its specific qualities to dwindle from sight.

Sculpture is more primitive, in the purest sense, than painting; it is more solidly bound to earth and less capable of becoming sophisticated. Its materials, stone and wood, existed before man and existed *as sculpture*; its formal basis, the pebble fashioned by the sea, or the tree-trunk, are phallic and, subsequently, tactile. This phallic-tactile quality both marks the main difference between



HENRY MOORE. *Carving, 1936*

sculpture and painting and serves to show that sculpturally the advanced abstract position, where space values have superseded mass values (excellently analysed by Moholy-Nagy in *New Vision*) is a masquerade: a masquerade, that is to say, in so far as it claims the name of sculpture when it has, in fact, become something basically different. It is not the analysis of the progress which errs but the reference of that progress to one entity when in fact it is the transmutation of one entity into another, of sculpture, with all its natural, primitive, phallic-tactile attributes into space-construction which is unnatural, sophisticated and scientific.

But alongside the space-constructions of Moholy-Nagy, Gabo and others, sculpture continues; the animal has produced a mind but its body remains intact. We find it in Brancusi, Arp, Giacometti and Moore. The sculpture of all these is phallic-tactile, solidly based on nature and, in varying degrees, primitive. With an austere selection of means Brancusi has reached an awe-inspiring end. Taking a head, a bird, a fish he has made concrete the ideal, a personal ideal but perfect within chosen limits. Arp has made a similar but more complex selection and, playing on the motive of woman, has produced less tensions, less *perfection*, but more variety. Giacometti reaches out from his corner and pokes his thumb in the surrealist pie—but the plum is all his own.

And Moore? Moore is the primitive in the purest sense. But his primitiveness is neither the primitiveness of the savage nor of the *noble savage*; there is no museum dust or cobwebs nor is there false romanticising. His primitiveness is of the twentieth century but has no counterpart in contemporary art. Perhaps he is nearest to D. H. Lawrence. Neither of them bears the streamlined, chromium insignia of our age, neither of them bows to the intellect or to the machine, while both are essentially primitive. Lawrence's concern is with man and woman. Moore with woman but differently; for there is no man.

As, too, with Lawrence there is no violent change of direction in Moore's work over a period of years; there is little to be said about the 1936 carvings, now on exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, that would not apply to the "Mountains" of 1930; only the degree

of abstraction has altered—but is that so important?

Soon the relative unimportance of the word abstract will become clear. With the exception of constructivism no art is abstract in the pure meaning of the word. All so-called abstract pictures are based in some degree on nature or, more exactly, on the artist's selection of certain phenomena of nature. And the three most common selections—the still-life, the figure composition and the landscape—are still valid for abstract pictures.

The cubist movement was a still-life movement and, as abstract art was born from cubism, that too is mostly but by no means completely dominated by the still-life. Picasso painted guitars, fruit dishes, wine-bottles, and in his few abstract paintings these are still implicit; Ben Nicholson painted cups and saucers and in his white reliefs the mug without a handle, the circular top of a saucer, the white edge of a tablecloth are there, disintegrated and perhaps invisible; in Miró the derivation is direct and organic; in Hélicon bodies are suspended in space almost as a memorial to Poussin; in Piper the sea beats on rugged cliffs and surges round the smoothworn lighthouse walls. This century has not destroyed the still-life, the figure composition, the landscape, but freed them; the actual sphere of art has been very little altered, only the treatment has been widened and liberated.

And Moore is never far from woman. A breast or an eye focalises the mass of stone, gives it a superæsthetic value, stabs with surprise on its realisation and creates the perfect balance between truism and falsehood, fact and impossibility, which is art. Art never really alters; its materials alter, its purposes—the inessentials—but the stuff of which its value is made remains the same for Egypt, Mexico, mediæval England, Benin or Henry Moore, for 4,000 B.C. or for 1936. Basically there is only good art and bad art and the standards inevitably depend on the present; the past and the future are only important, in fact only exist in the present. New artists arise and new forms of art arise with each generation. And occasionally there is an artist like Henry Moore to show the essential constancy of art.

Review By J. M. Richards

CUBISM AND ABSTRACT ART. By Alfred H. Barr, Jun., New York: *The Museum of Modern Art*. \$3.00.

Mr. Alfred H. Barr, jun., the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, took the opportunity offered by the important exhibition of cubist and abstract art which was organised by the Museum in the early part of this year to produce, as the exhibition catalogue, something even more important than the exhibition itself: a fully illustrated survey, analytical and evolutionary, of cubist and abstract art—not excluding such extraneous movements as surrealism and futurism, which he has recognised to the extent that they contribute something of significance to the abstract art movement. His survey is taken, so far as that is possible to anyone who is working still in the midst of the activities he writes about, from the objective historical view-point.

Such a book was badly needed, and one can think of no authority more competent to compile it than Mr. Barr, with his wide knowledge and exacting scholarship. With its series of 223 illustrations, well reproduced in half-tone, it serves as a representative album, neatly classified, of many of the best and sufficient of the most typical achievements of the art periods it deals with. The fact that so representative a survey has been possible, with the addition in the book of only perhaps a dozen illustrations beyond those taken from the exhibition, is a tribute to the comprehensiveness of the latter, for which also Mr. Barr was largely responsible. However, it is with the book that we are here concerned.

The most notable characteristic of the book is that Mr. Barr is a scholar or historian rather than a critic: it is interesting that only at this moment should this period of art have reached the stage when it offers itself to the historian's attention. The excellence of Mr. Barr's book as art history does not mean that the definitive book on the same phases of art is not still to be awaited; but probably that will not be possible for some years to come, until the whole movement, or elaborate complex of movements and mutual reper-

cussions of styles and personalities, can clearly be seen in the perspective of the circumstances in which they grew.

Meanwhile, Mr. Barr's simpler academic method has produced a most valuable reference book, an indispensable catalogue of styles and movements. Unfortunately, however, this method, and Mr. Barr's arrangement of the book by sections ("synthetic cubism," "abstract expressionism in Germany," "abstract dadaism," etc.), is at the same time rather misleading. Few "movements" were recognisable as such in their time (futurism and Surrealism are exceptions) and even fewer artists would accept the fact of their contribution to an historical movement as adequate explanation of their work. Malieovich and Ozenfant are artists first, and respectively Suprematist and Purist afterwards. The impulses that stir an artist to produce art are not, as one might gather from Mr. Barr, rationalised intellectual processes, but are far more complicated processes; instinctive, social, emotional and (in some cases) political. A gigantic task, the studied penetration beyond the simple Art-for-Art's-Sake area of the subject within which Mr. Barr has been content to remain, will have to be undertaken one day in that definitive history that still remains to be written.

Mr. Barr has engaged himself in placing each artist in his right pigeon-hole, but he is apt to give the impression that by doing so he has done all that is necessary to explain the artist's existence. This is not to suggest that Mr. Barr himself imagines that the matter is no more profound than this. An historian must dissect and classify before he can arrive at any conclusions, but Mr. Barr performs this process skilfully before our eyes and then disappoints us by not putting that new life into his dissected corpse that his skill in dissection has justified us in expecting. The danger is not so much to Mr. Barr's fellow scholars, who will appreciate so comprehensive a reference catalogue, but to the mass of the interested public for whom to label is all too often to put into permanent cold storage.

It would have been interesting if Mr. Barr had seen his way to explore even further back than he has into the antecedents of abstract art. He begins his illustrations very logically

with Seurat and Cézanne but, except for a single brief reference to Piranesi and several to Leonardo da Vinci, goes back no earlier. The immediate pre-history of abstract art is well known, though, of course, Mr. Barr's recapitulation of it was essential to his story. But the abstract content of earlier art periods, the discoverable examples of formalism's early prototypes, comprise a subject some glance at which would have been very opportune. Perhaps the scope of the exhibition prevented him from attempting it even in an introduction.

In any case it is unfair to criticise an author for failing to do something he never set out to do. Mr. Barr's province has been the period of conscious production of the art types indicated in his title. But in one section, well within the boundaries of his province, he has left serious gaps. These are in the architectural section. Some treatment of architecture in the book was essential, so closely do the ideas and developments of painting and architecture inter-relate, and more closely than elsewhere in the periods under consideration—an example being the very important *Stijl* group in Holland, whose most important product, the work of the painter Mondrian, emerged under the leadership of the architect Doesburg. Mr. Barr, of course, has realised this and introduced and classified the architectural schools in the appropriate places (though in his notes about futurism, he fails, except in the annotated index at the end, to include Sant' Elia, probably the most influential innovator, barring Boccioni, the movement produced); but he introduces these schools or groups of architects as though they had blossomed instantaneously in full command of their modern functionalist and formalist idiom and in full release from the conventions of their academic predecessors. The architectural equivalents of Cézanne and Seurat—even of the cubists—are vital; of architecture, architecture being a useful rather than a fine art (if one may revive for a moment a generally misleading distinction), it is especially true that any individual phase is only an accelerated or particularised stage in a continuous process of technological evolution. Mr. Barr, while including certain modern architectural manifestations such as Corbusier's leading position

among the purists, the ascendance of Doesburg in the *Stijl* group and Gropius's work at the *Bauhaus*, fails even to mention the real pioneers of modern architecture, the great men, Adolf Loos, Otto Wagner, Behrens, Hoffmann and the rest, who, quite as much as Seurat and Cézanne, made modern art possible. It is no less unscientific to fasten arbitrarily on to Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Tatlin, than it would have been to have introduced abstract and cubist painting with the work of say, Léger, Kandinsky and Miro.

One more complaint: Mr. Barr comments in his introduction on the political circumstances in Germany and elsewhere that led to official disapproval of modern art in all its forms and drove a number of modern architects to England. "But Fascist Italy," he says, "and Conservative England, to complete the confusion, accepted modern architecture with enthusiasm."

If Mr. Barr only knew of the pertinacious obstruction with which what might be termed intellectual vested interests oppose the modern movement in this country, in what interminable compromise and diplomacy the modern architect has to concern himself, struggling against bye-laws, private prejudices and the taunt of *Kultur-Bolshevismus*—to say nothing of the out-of-date English building regulations that make the technical advances on which modern architecture has grown almost impossible to utilise—if he realised that for every modern building that is put up in this country half a dozen are abandoned (or at least abandoned as modern buildings) because of objections to their "left-wing" design, he would not have referred so glibly to England's architectural opportunity. Despairing architects only wish it were as he suggests. It is still true in the main, unfortunately, despite recent progress, that it is enlightened private persons ("cranks") who are the patrons of modern architecture and modern art to-day. The work of scholars such as Mr. Barr and of the Museum of Modern Art in making clear the universality of modern art and the part it plays in the complex of modern civilisation, is of undoubted value in creating a public understanding of art (my own strictures on Mr. Barr's pedagogic method apart) without which modern art cannot maintain its vitality.

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Unlike other enterprises of its kind, the London Gallery will exhibit only such works as come under the above general definition. Sales are of course important, but they will not be the first consideration. The gallery will exhibit only such works as are considered by its advisers to have definite significance for those interested in modern art.

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