

A number of recent New York exhibitions have raised the issue of collage—collage as medium, and as attitude. Both are key aspects of modern art, the latter having been formulated on the basis of the inescapable consequences of the former. Early twentieth century painters had to devise methods of handling the picture plane that would be "true" to the new age while carrying forth the advances made by the post-Impressionists' rejection of the consistent space of Impressionism and pre-Impressionism. They opted for the pluralistic picture plane space we recognize as that of Cubist collage and its successors. The seeds for these advances had, of course, already been planted by the dual perspective viewing angles of some Impressionist painting, and by earlier nineteenth century space flattening devices like Manet's non shadow-casting figures.

Collage is, by definition, a technique of forming a work of art by pasting on a single surface various materials not normally associated with each other, like newspaper clippings, theatre tickets, fragments of an envelope, etc. There are two special implications here: 1. that the materials carry specific evocative connotations or meanings instead of being plain pieces of paper; 2. that the medium is a species of painting that utilizes a single surface which permits multi-dimensional formal readings because overlapping is basic to the collage procedure. The result is a single surface with implied depth that is, at its best, so ambiguous as to be unchartable—a discontinuous space.

Assemblage is a sculptural technique of organizing a group of dissimilar, unrelated, often fragmentary or discarded objects into a unified whole. It manifests the three-dimensional spatial interplay of collage physically, literalizing it, and functions as a substitute for modeling or carving in relief. Both methods, collage and assemblage, juxtapose elements instead of working them smoothly and consistently across the surface with brush or chisel. They are based on an identical attitude which implies the formal and psychological co-existence of contradictory, or at least unconnected elements within a more or less rigorous framework. This co-existence operates on such a high ambiguity level that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the precise relationships between incorporated elements. The viewer's mental apparatus, his esthetic response to the work, must fill-in those relationships and establish the physical and emotional connections between the elements in order to understand the work of art. The connections between the eye and its cloudy sky corner in Magritte's *The False Mirror* are just as inexplicable and unchartable as the spatial relationships between the broad planes of color in Picasso's *Three Men*, but they can be intuited just as readily. I am referring here, of course, to collage as an attitude rather than as a technique. It was crucial to Surrealism and continues to inform much of the best twentieth century art from Matisse to Jasper Johns. Our daily life is a collage of disparate events, emotions, sights, and choices for which the founders of modern art found a perfect metaphor in collage.

Though he didn't invent collage, Kurt Schwitters is so closely identified with it that it almost seems he did. He approached the medium quite literally as a way to inject "life" into "art". Unlike most of his fellow Dadaists (except his friend Hans Arp) Schwitters had a positive attitude toward the life-enhancing role of art. He reacted against the nihilism and senselessness of World War I by stressing the importance of art's meaningfulness. He is quoted in Werner Schmalenbach's monograph to this effect when he says, "One can even convey joy with refuse, and this is what I did, nailing and gluing it together. I called it 'Merz', a prayer about the victorious end of the war, victorious as peace had been won in the end; everything had broken down in any case and new things had to be made out of the fragments."

Many of the works reproduced and discussed in Dr. Schmalenbach's book were included in the large and important Schwitters' retrospective exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery recently. It was a museum quality show. There were many of the large painted assemblage "machines" of the late teens in so much love today. It was rich in very early Expressionist portraits and landscapes, typical collages from every stage of his career, and, most interestingly, a number of his sculptures. Diversity was the paramount theme of the show, as it was of Schwitters as an artist. Most abstract artists develop idiosyncratic compositional devices that recur again and again to structure their works—a particular sort of curve, triangle, repeated slant or rectangle. This is not true of Schwitters. He covered the entire formal range of early twentieth century art using Cubist facets within oval shaped canvases, centrifugal Futurist structures, slashing diagonal Expressionist compositions, and rigid Constructivist rectilinearity with equal ease.

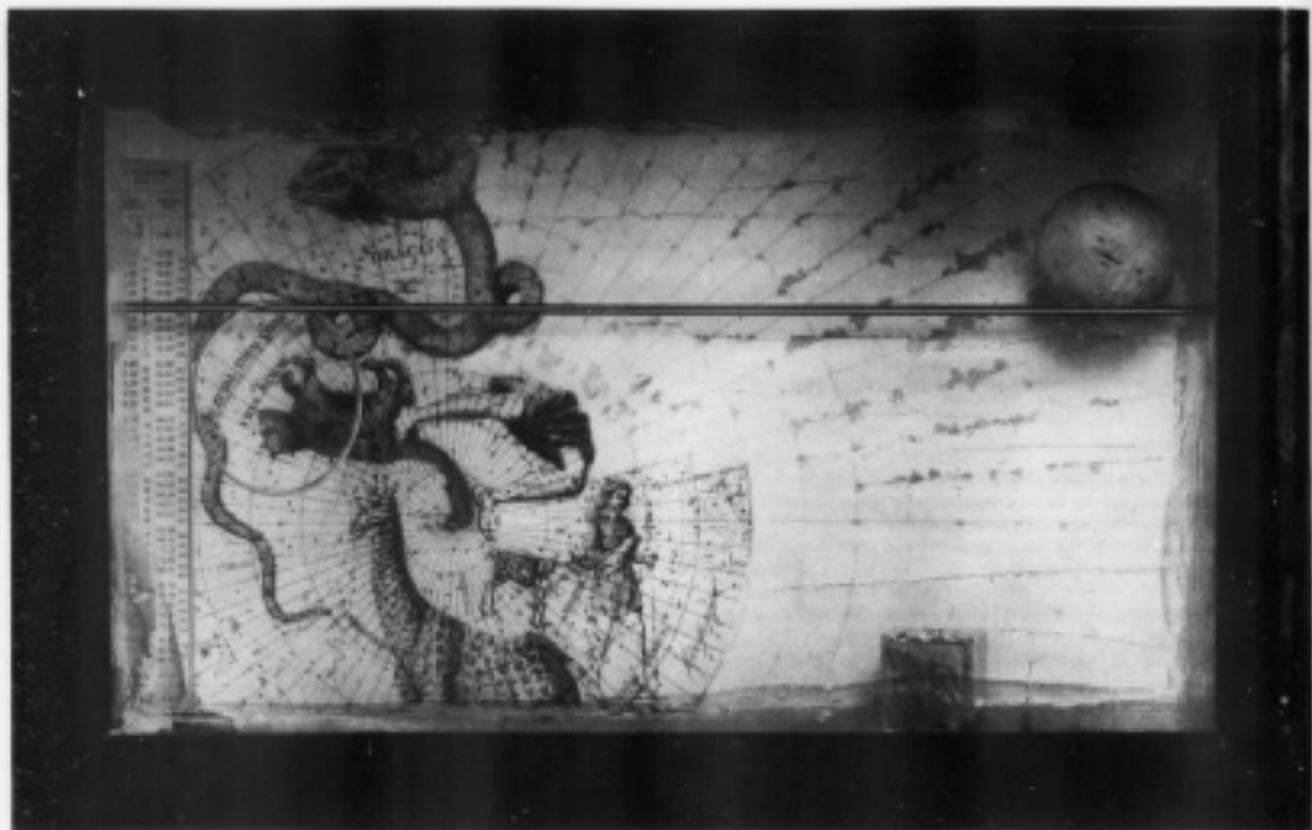


Schwitters, *Kaiser Head*, 1940-44. Reinforced plaster of Paris cast, 45.5 x 21.3 x 10.9 cm. Edition of 7. Marlborough

Except that he often favored the inclusion of circular forms, his compositional vocabulary gives us few clues about his eclectic pictorial thinking.

Schwitters was a story-teller at heart, and his visual art works can be seen as vehicles for abstract stories, tales as incomprehensible as his poetry made of meaningless sounds. Few of Schwitters' collages can be "read" (although William S. Rubin made a successful attempt to do so in his book, *Dada and Surrealism*). Instead, they evoke. Train tickets, bits of lace, calling cards, a nap or piece of cardboard from a box of candy mean little specifically, but can conjure up a whole host of associations and the flavor and ambience of an era. His sculpture, especially what he produced under the influence of his Constructivist friends after the early twenties, tended to be more abstract. Until now, we have had little exposure to it here, and it was one of the special rewards of the Marlborough show. His three major sculptural efforts, the *Merzbau*s, are known through photographs or description, but few people were aware that he carved and constructed a number of free-standing sculptures, both large and small. His son, Ernst Schwitters, supervised the fabrication of a number of the plaster casts and bronzes in the show. Their finish is probably smoother and less erratic than the artist's own results, at least that is what the haphazard roughness of the group of small original sculptures in wire, plaster and wood that were also included would indicate. The small, one is tempted to say exquisite, little sculptures "*für die Hand*" exude a quality of freshness that is remarkable considering their obvious derivation from the work of Arp. Larger pieces, like *Kaiser Head* recall neo-Plastic sculptures. Schwitters' eclecticism is as much in evidence in the sculptures as in the rest of his oeuvre, but he brings his own personal brand of quirkiness to bear on whatever stylistic formula he utilizes. The time worn aspect of the sculptures, their roundnesses, relates to his typical method of collaging used objects that show the results of human handling, while their sharp edges relate to his additive or constructivist attitude. In them, his two formal poles—expressionist chaos and constructivist stability—find a meeting place.

Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) might well be considered the American Schwitters. There are many similarities between the two artists, and the two Cornell exhibitions—a small group of excellent shadow boxes on loan from the artist at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and a large show of over 85 collages and constructions at the new Queens County Art and Cultural Center



Cornell, *Space Object Box*. Collection Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

in Flushing Meadow, New York—that were mounted before and after the Schwitters' exhibition provided marvelous opportunities for comparison. Before I get into some of the many similarities between these two artists it might be instructive to investigate one of the crucial differences between their positions on the meaning of the objects they incorporate in their works. I chose a particularly Cornell-like example by Schwitters for this reason. It is clear that

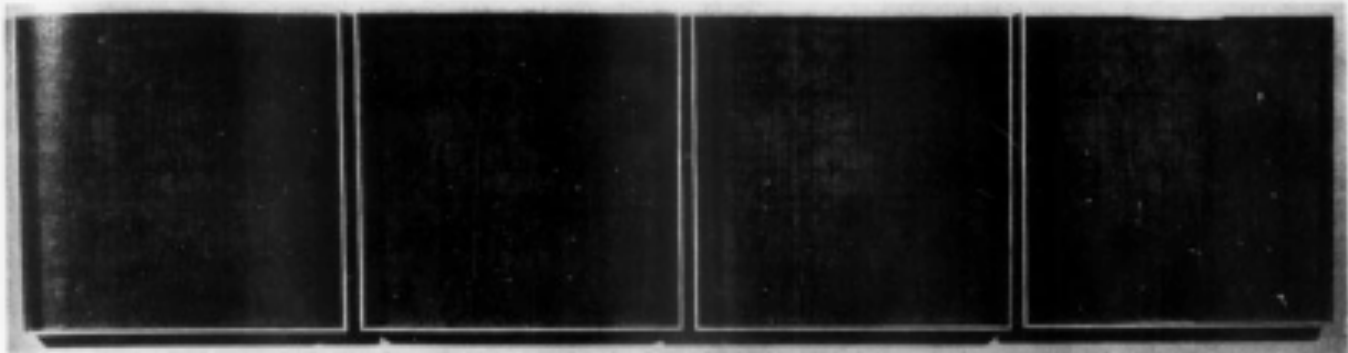
Schwitters, *Einmal Mezzell aus einer Tafel*, 1945–86. Mixed media, 14 1/2" x 11 1/2". Marlborough



with the exception of the tube of paint which is self-referential, Schwitters' stones, seashells and bits of detritus have no specific narrative implications. They relate to each other formally as positives and negatives of each other or by rhyming similar shapes. The handle at the left looks like it might belong to a paint-brush and the central shape in the background has a vaguely palette-like shape, but it could as easily be read as an island form set amid the waves of the sea surrounding it. The rough wood frame simply bounds the objects and relates to them textually.

Cornell, on the other hand, typically employs a shadow-box frame to imply a literal reading as a window through which we look into deep space. The glass front on the box serves to emphasize the preciousness of the objects it protects, as well as their narrative importance for the overall conception. (Cornell also frequently compartmentalizes the boxes which lends weight to their iconic quality, recalling portable Medieval altarpieces with their arcades and predella panels.) The stress is always on the object in a work by Cornell, no matter how carefully constructed and detailed its enclosure or encompassing composition. The opposite is true of Schwitters, who, despite the lack of a clear compositional system always emphasizes the overriding formal matrix of the work and minimizes the importance of the various parts comprising that matrix. One of his ways of doing so is to deliberately choose used, worn, and undistinguished materials. Cornell rarely does so, preferring to use specific, new, unique, important, even precious-seeming objects in his pieces. The objects have fairly consistent and readable connotations: in *Space Object Box*, for instance, the brass ring of the merry-go-round for getting your wish; the ball as a world or moon located in the heavens controlled by mystical forces; a child's block—like a doll's head or a clay pipe for blowing soap bubble which he often uses—as a symbol of childhood dreams; the spiral as an endlessly constant form like concentric circles, astrological charts, the radiating spokes of a bicycle wheel or a mirror mirroring another mirror. Cornell's brand of Surrealism was more tightly linked to that of the Surrealist poets than the painters. His boxes and collages are meant to be read metaphorically, like a poem. To this end he often incorporated quotations from the art of the past, universally understood children's playthings, references to astrology and comic signs.

Two final points of comparison between Schwitters and Cornell are worth mentioning here. The first concerns Cornell's use of the box, which he practically made into an art form in its own right single-handedly. Cornell uses the box sculpturally, as a place within which to place objects which will imply a deep space behind the front plane of glass. Schwitters' attitude is pictorial and two-



Michelle Stuart, *Luz Yermola*, 1972. Diazo print and drawing, strings, wood and plastic construction, 24" x 96". Rutgers University Gallery

dimensional. He uses the collage or assemblage surface as a place upon which to locate objects, the resultant spatial implications of which are manifold and ambiguous; some objects read as though they are in front of the surface, others behind it. Cornell was clever, though; he consistently framed his non-opening boxes with typical picture frames, often made of the ubiquitous wormy chestnut wood. This reasserted their pictorial nature, albeit somewhat deviously. It is paradoxical that Schwitters was the one who made sculpture and room-sized sculpture environments. Cornell stayed within the bounds of a shallow, layered space, whether that of collage or assemblage.

The second point of comparison is that both artists went through purifying periods under the influence of neo-plastically oriented artist friends. Cornell knew Mondrian when he lived in New York during the forties; beginning then and continuing through the fifties Cornell's work showed the influence of this rigorous abstractionist. In some works he expunged all traces of anecdotal or narrative incident, leaving only the formal framework, usually an austere white grid.

Perhaps it ought to be noted that Cornell had his first major one-man exhibition in 1939. It was his first show of mature work containing a large number of images and devices which were to recur in his work throughout the rest of his life. 1939 was also the year of the New York World's Fair, an event which was, and remains for the generations of people who attended it, unparalleled in splendor, futuristic fantasy, imagery and encyclopedic richness. Cornell could hardly have been unaffected by the fair's almost Surreal conglomeration of abruptly juxtaposed worlds. He lived only a few minutes away from the site, which is also the location of his current exhibition. The show was, incidentally, beautifully chosen and installed by the center's director, Claire Fisher. It wasn't a glamorous installation, like Henry Geldzahler's for the "New York School" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, but it provided a laud overview of this unique artist's oeuvre.

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Michelle Stuart, who had a one-woman show recently at Rutgers University in New Jersey, has often been compared to Joseph Cornell. Although this happened particularly during the period from 1965 to 1967 when she was placing plaster figures within small shadow-boxes, I think that connections with Cornell might be more appropriately made for her drawings of 1967-69 and her recent work. The emotional content of those earlier figural boxes was heavily weighted with psychological overtones concerning war, childbearing, fertility, death and destruction; Cornell was too much of a dreamer to be involved with such material.

Stuart's symbology parallels that of Cornell in the large drawings in pencil and watercolor. Astrological and geological map sections, mechanical and anatomical drawings (especially of the heart), hands, androgynous heads, flowers and rocks co-exist with mystical symbols, notations of plant and mineral structures, diagrams of obscure chemical processes and mathematical signs. The drawings, like Cornell's boxes, are loaded with Surrealist content and they are presented within geometrical frameworks, often a grid. Cornell, of course, literally juxtaposed his objects in a three-dimensional space while Miss Stuart did so conceptually on the two-dimensional plane of a sheet of paper.

In her recent work Miss Stuart has eschewed Surrealist wistfulness in favor of a new focus on constructivism. Beginning in 1970 Miss Stuart has concentrated on the surface of the moon giving ever larger percentages of the surfaces of her drawings over to topographical maps of locations on it. By 1973 the entire drawing was a topographically treated lunar surface. All the works in her Rutgers show included such drawings though their enclosures were varied. Stuart was a cartographer in California during and after her attendance at Chouinard, but that training only seemed to seep

back into her imagery when she turned to drawing in 1967. The topographical drawings, like Vija Celmins' drawings of waves, have an all-over unstressed quality wherein she maintains a delicate balance between convincing the viewer of the substantiality of the moon's surface through modelling, and assuring him or her of the flatness of the pictorial image. [The balance is so deliberate and tenuous that when either artist's work is viewed upside-down the image is distorted into a positive of its former negative self and loses all its flatness.]

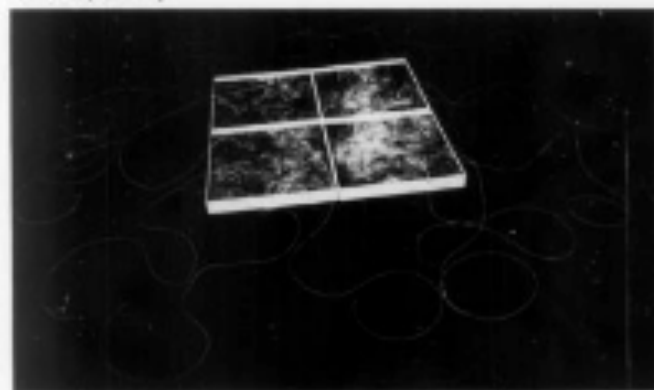
Since late 1971 Stuart has been combining media. She places the moon-drawings inside shallow plexiglass-fronted boxes, which are painted white, or within abstract architectural models or floor-bound sculptural units. Linear elements—red string "lifelines" or hollow plastic tubing emerge from her finely executed drawings to pass out into the viewer's space. They function (the way similarly curving lines did in her large drawings) as metaphorical equivalents for the moon's mysterious lines of force to the earth. These flexible lines provide an arbitrary touch of unexpected asymmetry within the tightly drawn grids of the drawings and the serial systemization of her multiple unit pieces.

Miss Stuart is a difficult artist to classify, either by medium or by expressive content. Her drawings are frontal, two-dimensional and pictorially oriented; they are set within relief constructions regulated by grid or serial systems. The craters and other surface detail of the moon seem loose and arbitrary within the rigidity of the cartographers grid lines which criss-cross the drawing surface while the reverse occurs with the boxes as groups. There the flexible strings play the aleatoric role. Other discrepancies abound. The exquisite detailing of the drawings contrasts with the forthright stability of the boxes that enclose them in scale as well as feeling. They seem to belong to two different worlds; and then there are the strings which belong to another. Yet they are all integral parts of a single expression which seems to be exceedingly difficult to pin down. Words come to mind—weightlessness, eons, endlessness, magnetic fields, telepathy, electricity, tide pools, oceans, space—but no specific image is evoked despite the specificity of her subject matter. The work operates poetically, providing leaps between object and idea, leaving you with impressions and sensations, not facts.

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Al Loving seems to be retrenching. Since the dramatic breakthrough he made last year from hard-edged geometric painting on stretched canvas to free-form massings of colored canvas and cloth, he has been tightening up his constructions. Where he spread last year's paintings wildly over wall, ceiling, and floor in a

Michelle Stuart, *From Division*, 1972. Mixed media, 10" x 10". Rutgers University Gallery



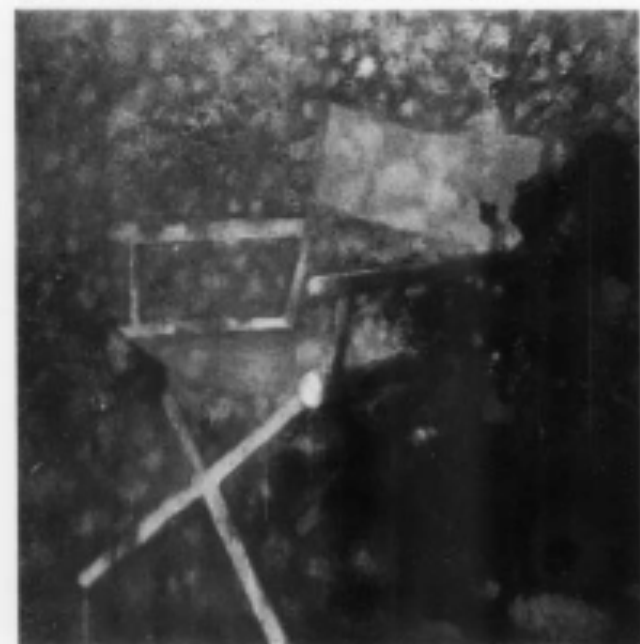


Alvin Loving. Installation view, Wilam Zierler Gallery



Isaac Witkin. *Samson*, 1972. Steel, 57" x 109" x 119". Robert Elson Gallery

Frombolati. *Chair and Gossamer*, 1972. Landmark Gallery

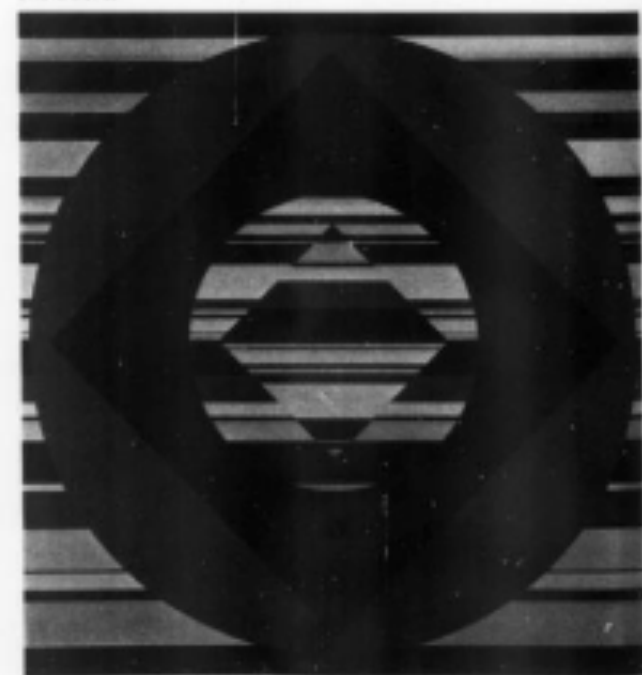


determined effort to literalize the overlapping of post-Cubist collage's multiple picture plane, this year's works are simplified, compact, and stately. They seem almost rigid in comparison. Fewer elements are left to hang loosely; most of the long rectangular pieces of dyed canvas have been firmly sewed to or on top of one another. The former profusion of types of material—from velvet to imitation leather—has been sacrificed in favor of traditional canvas for the most part. A new device, wrapping the cloth around a wooden dowel at the top which is then affixed to the ceiling, prevents an arbitrary installation. Last year Loving stressed the possibility of altering his configurations to fit their sites. Now, as long as they are located at approximately equal ceiling heights and distances from the wall, little on-the-spot adjustment of their forms is done.

The color range of Loving's dyed canvas is wide and warm. Deep reds, purples, greens, blues, oranges and browns predominate. His prior involvement with geometry seems to be reasserting itself in the new work, cancelling decorative or crafty associations and strengthening its architectonic quality. Despite their three-dimensional existence, there is no way to seriously question the pictorial authenticity of Loving's new pieces. They are clearly wall-referent, two-dimensional in conception and non-sculptural. Like the draped canvas sheets of Sam Gilliam and various other recent modes of painting on unstretched canvas, Loving's work has only eliminated the rectilinear framing edge. To compensate for this crucial lack he stresses the internal rectilinearity of his composition. He did this last year too, but this year he is fixing our awareness of this aspect of his work and its structural implications. The dyeing procedure results in textural richness that reads only as a form of painterliness, not as structural necessity. To lose sight of the drawing in a Loving, and to concentrate on this less important aspect would be to take the proverbial garden path to an understanding of his work. These are intelligent solutions Loving is making to an important problematic aspect of modernist multiple picture plane space, the space, that is, of post-Cubist collage painting.

Nancy Spero also does without the framing edge, but her "Codex Artaud" series at the A.L.R. Gallery relates to early Christian scroll paintings and papyrus manuscript forms. Generally about 2' high and from 8-15' long, they are collages of and on narrow strips of paper with gouache figurative elements and quotations from Artaud. A few were vertical, like oriental wall hangings, but the overall look of the show had a remarkably Egyptian cast. This was probably due, at least in part, to her use of dull gold pigment in the figural images, and the pictographic nature of her imagery as a whole. It is as though she has written graffiti in hieroglyphs, or revolutionary slogans on the walls of an ancient city in cuneiform lettering no one can decipher today. In fact, since the quotations from Artaud are presented in French and

Nancy Spero. *Codex Artaud*, 1966. Epoxy paint on paper on masonry, 48" x 48". Leo Castelli



only translated in the accompanying labels, many viewers probably did have a difficult time comprehending her "message". The figures themselves look like mummies despite their obviously modern physiognomies, disjointed or transmogrified bodies, and grotesque or obscene gesturing.

All of Spero's imagery is smallish in relation to the amount of white-space of the paper field left unoccupied. There is a film-like sense of close-up to some of the heads, while other parts of the work practically demand the use of binoculars. The effect is disorienting, incomplete, jarring; the disjunction being both formal and emotional. Powerful unsmiling visual material is scattered amid exasperatingly self-destructive, brutal and sadistic passages from Artaud. Even when she has chosen a relatively calm profound quotation, it is given the same disorderly typewritten presentation. This deliberately crude treatment of her material plays a crucial role in forestalling an appreciation of her work on the level of its surface beauty.

Spero forces an awareness of the cruelty of Artaud's words through the hysterical discordancy of her imagery. A symbiotic relationship between the two forms of communication is created which enhances the effectiveness of both. Prior to the Artaud series she was involved with making art that was explicitly anti-war. In this period, too, words and images worked in tandem to express profound emotions. There is no humor in Spero's work, except perhaps of a very black sort. She is in deadly earnest. There is no charming placement of words, no pure formal play using words as pictorial elements. Her vision, like Artaud's, is full of incomprehensibilities, exaggerations and incongruities. It is obscure and deeply moving.

The recent Jim Dine exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery marked a return to his former Pop style of assemblage painting. But "you can't go home again" as Thomas Wolfe said, and Dine's new work is a highly sophisticated reworking of old ideas unstained by any traces of struggle. Nearly all of the eleven paintings were monochromatic and loosely brushed, but no two received identical paint handling. A yellow one was dry brushed and scumbled, a brownish one was heavy with impasto and swirls of garish pigment; some canvases were covered with thin washes, others spattered, snowed upon or full of drips. He employed half the inventory of Abstract Expressionist painterly technique.

The single consistent aspect of the new paintings was that they were all hung with tools, brushes, gloves, string, palettes, or other stock in trade items to be found in a painter's studio. A number of the tools were fairly esoteric, though, and most looked as though they came straight from the hardware store. They referred to the painter's everyday world, but didn't look as though they had been a real part of it. In a few of the paintings the tool's hooks were numbered, and a few others included scrawled or scripted messages such as "Emma Bovary", "Jim Dine", "I love Sannie", or "willing paw".

One especially didactic work in five vertical sections, *The Art of Painting*, contained only one tool for each of four panels and the word "brush" in the middle of the central section. Each panel was painted grassy green at the bottom and bright sky blue at the top, breaking with the all-over norm established by the rest of the show. This landscape background didn't, however, function any better than the all-over abstraction in contrast with the physicality of the attached objects. Dine manages to achieve a remarkable degree of consistency, or lack of incongruity, in these combines despite the formal contradiction of two- and three-dimensional terms within each given work. This is due in part to the fact that pliers, palettes, and pencils seem quite natural in the painting context. There is no shock of the unexpected here of the sort implied by Lautréamont's famous line about a "chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table". The esthetics of post-Cubist collage, especially Dada and Surrealist collage or assemblage, demanded "a meeting of two distant realities on a plane foreign to them both", in the words of Max Ernst. Pop "combines" and the like were neo-Dadaist reactions to the "actness" of Abstract Expressionism and when Dine was one of its pioneers using painterly techniques in juxtaposition with objects it seemed much more shocking than it does now. We've gotten used to the idea; it's not news anymore. Dine's recent work has an air of facility and fusion, of easy adjustment and consolidation, that runs counter to the kind of stress and anxiety produced by the complexity we generally associate with twentieth century collage thinking. The paintings just don't look as though they were the products of a particularly tough process of decision making. The free fluidity and lack of idiosyncrasy that marks his paint handling seems as breezy as the arbitrary application of assorted objects to the canvas surface. One comes away with the impression that Dine's obsession is with the tools of his trade—a brush or a brushstroke—for their own sakes, not for

Jim Dine, *The Art of Painting*, 1972. Mixed media, 72" x 108". Sonnabend Gallery



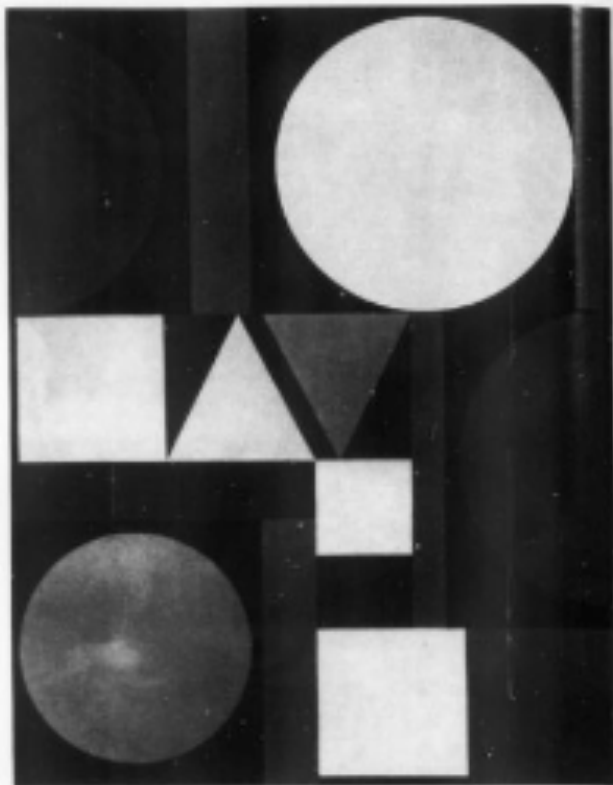
their formal values or for their usefulness as vehicles for the communication of meaning.

Auguste Herbin, 1882-1960, was also a precise Geometric Abstractionist noted for his hard edges, spatial and coloristic complexity, and his "collage attitude". All of these factors were probably part of the reason why this noted Frenchman's work found little acceptance in this country until the "cool" mid-sixties. Two exhibitions were recently mounted which made major strides toward filling in the many gaps in American understanding of Herbin's work: a show of gouaches and a few oils at the Robert Elkon Gallery, and a large group of late oils at the Galerie Denise René. The Elkon show includes work from 1917 through the fifties permitting a wider view of his career than the other show does, but the works are generally smaller and less significant.

Herbin worked within the bounds of Cubist composition, but stressing color, until the late teens when he moved into abstraction via his own version of Constructivism which had more in common with Juan Gris and Léger than with Mondrian. A typical work like the untitled gouache of April 1920 is full of elements echoing these artists' forms juxtaposed in a chaotic spatial setting that reminds me of Henry Hayden's *Tête Musicien*. Located within its curvilinear profusion (which seems to prefigure Art Deco) are elements which will constantly re-appear in his work for the rest of his life—triangles, circles and hemispheres, and rectilinear bands. His lifelong preference for bright planes of unmodulated color is emerging here too.

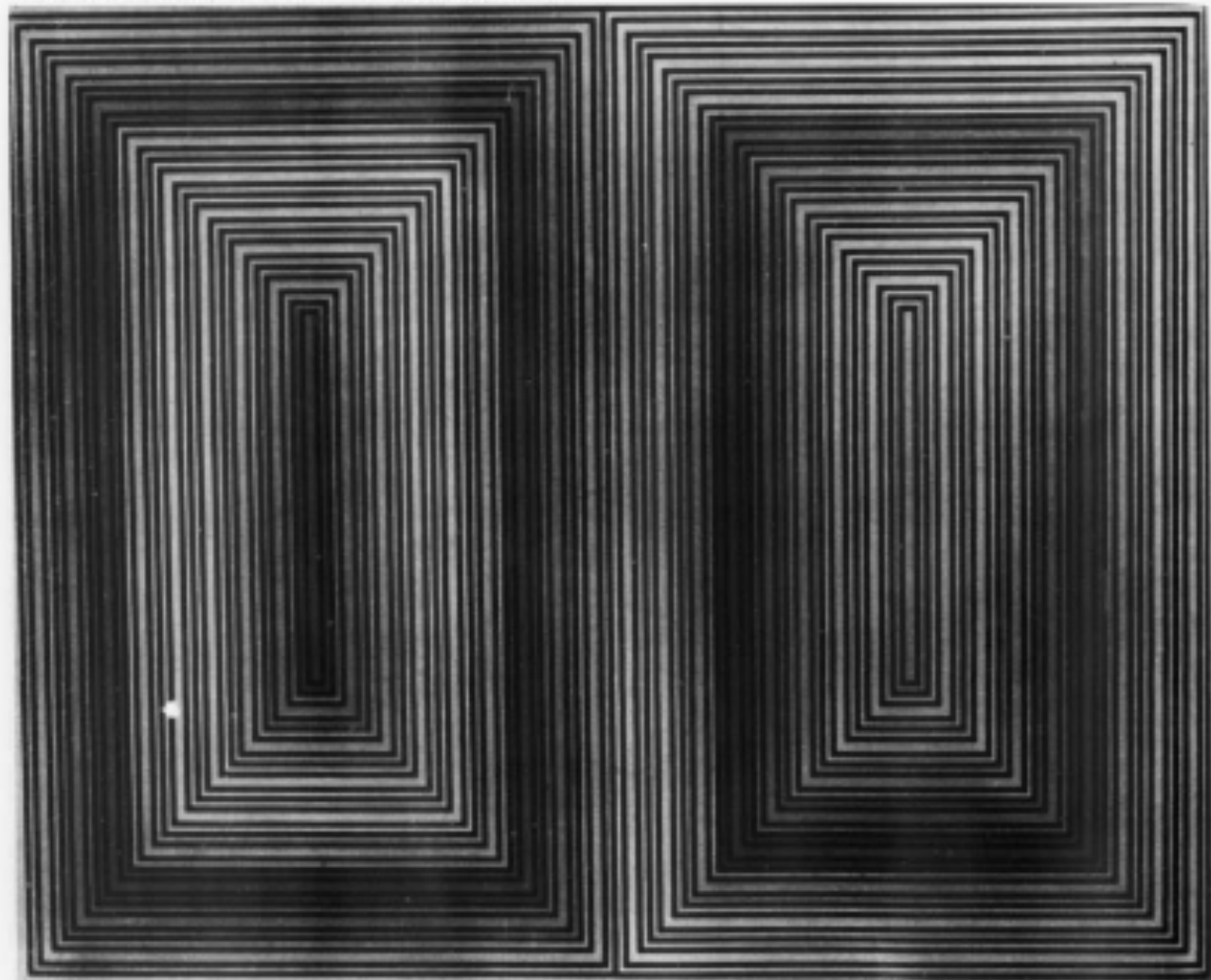
Herbin underwent a steady process of purifying and simplifying his vocabulary of forms during the thirties after he founded the Abstraction-Creation movement with Vassongieris. On the way he had codified them into a rigid system which he called his "Plastic Alphabet". This was a table of relationships between the 26 letters of the alphabet and the colors and musical notations he assigned them (e.g. U: Blue; hemispherical forms; sonority of sol, la). From that point on the titles of his paintings spelled out their formal (and musical) activity. He varied the amounts of color,

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Herbin. *Unité*, 1959. Oil/acrylic, 57 1/2" x 45". Galerie Denise René

Amakiewicz. *Double Gown*, 1973. Acrylic, 25" x 31". Sidney Janis Gallery



the numbers and kinds of shapes, and the relations between adjacent hues endlessly in the production of variations on a limited tone row, so to speak.

Though saturated hues generally predominate, black and white are almost always present in Herbin's oils in amounts that are significant enough to play an important role in the structure of his color. He used the primaries liberally, but frequently interspersed them with secondary and tertiary hues. He had a decided preference for pink and used it so often and with such strength one is almost forced to think of it as a primary hue.

Despite his elaborate system of abstract iconography, critical response to Herbin's work often accuses it of being decorative (which means, meaningless). It is unfortunate that the universality of geometric imagery, the architectonic force of hard-edges, their decisiveness, and the descriptive power of abstraction in relation to the world—in this case the world of manufactured products, machines, and urban life—is often forgotten. An artist like Mondrian, or Herbin, may spend his life evolving an esthetic position he intends as a quasi-moral philosophy only to be faced with an audience that has forgotten that forms bear intrinsic meanings. This has always been, and remains, one of the major stumbling blocks in the path of modern abstraction.

Practically everything I've just said about Herbin applies equally to Nassos Daphnis. His retrospective exhibition at the Leo Cassell Gallery included one work from each year between 1958 and 1972. It was all hard-edged abstraction, but a clear and steady evolution of the artist's personal style within that category was apparent. This is true despite the diversity of mediums employed by Daphnis during this period; there were 10 paintings, 3 sculptures, and 2 reliefs in the show. The work shares limited color range, severely restricted compositional structuring, seriousness, and fastidious craftsmanship. The earliest paintings are limited to only two or three colors, the reliefs and sculptures to one or two colors. Color stringencies tend to be accompanied by fine distinctions of shape and scale. In the later work more colors are used but the configurations are simpler and broader.

Daphnis, like Herbin, has his own theories and formulas concerning color and composition. It was his belief earlier that every color automatically occupied a specific location in space, given its amount of surface area, that would be universally read by all percipients of a painting. Thus, the wide blue vertical band in an early painting like 28-58 should be read as though it were located behind the two horizontal bands of red and black it crosses. In recent work, since the pivotal period of 30-65, of 1966, Daphnis has codified his color system into alternate shapes or bands of black, white, blue, red, yellow, and orange (and so other hues) which recur in a consistent order in most of his work. This color system operates particularly well for him since most of the recent work is modular. A given unit will produce many different configurations when multiplied in any direction. Each work is capable of infinite extension. This is one of the key links between Daphnis and Mondrian and one of the main reasons the paintings work so well as silk-screened multiples and in public places like the various city walls they grace.

From the earliest paintings and reliefs in the show (some of which in their purity make Barnett Newman or Ad Reinhardt seem to have more in common with Soutine than with Daphnis), through the machine-like finish of the elegant vertical plexiglass sculptures, to the recent modular works, Daphnis maintains a consistently high level of conceptual purity that seems idealistic. He "gives no quarter" except an occasional flicker at a crossing of planes or smallish detail. In general his broad planes of unmodulated color remain unrelieved even by optical effects.

Geometrical Abstractionists, like figural painters, use pre-given forms. The only artists who truly invent their own form worlds are the bio-morphic painters and sculptors like Gorky, Miró, or Arp. Formal innovation is restricted to the ways a Geometrical Abstractionist handles his forms, what he is able to make them mean to us. Daphnis' achievement lies in the purity, reserved assurance, and dignity he has brought to the style. The scale of his conceptions is such that he has imparted a new nobility and distinction to one of the main facets of twentieth century painting.

Isaac Witkin is, without a doubt, one of our best sculptors. His museum scale exhibition at the 141 Prince Street temporary extension of the Elkon Gallery proved that. The room held six enormous steel sculptures, one too many for the space, in fact. *Chickadee* should probably not have been allowed to occupy the center of the space since it made separate visual readings of the other five pieces extremely difficult. Each work was massive,

ambitious, and functioned fully in three dimensions; each could easily have determined the space by itself.

Witkin's work is heavy, rounded, but with sharp points, and chunky. He favors thick slabs of steel, large disks and crescents, arcs and triangles which he welds and bolts into intricate structures. He unifies the pieces coloristically and has worked out an elaborate system of weathering pigment into the rusting steel which gives it a marvellous patina. There is a strong quality of Baroque profusion in his work which brings Bernini to mind rather than Brancusi, despite their obviously modern, explicitly "collaged", look.

Many of Witkin's shapes echo those of David Smith (whom he held in high regard but never knew) but his scale is so much grander and more powerful that Smith's sculptures seem almost modest in comparison. There are ties, too, with the table-top, sprawled sculptures of Anthony Caro, with whom he studied at St. Martin's School of Art in England after he moved there from Johannesburg, South Africa. He later assisted Henry Moore, none of whose influence seems to be present in his work except perhaps for his super-human scale. The main thing that separates Witkin from his precursors, as well as from most of his contemporaries is his unique ability to fuse large solid forms and true three-dimensionality in complex multi-faceted sculptures. Though a few of the works seemed to have a sort of front—*Kaukasus* and *Chickadee* for instance—most of the others, like *Dixgaur* and *Sandax*, definitely did not. From any angle a new configuration emerged, but there was no diminution of one's perception of the shape of the whole piece in the process of seeing its parts. Sometimes his jagged, overlapping planes and sweeping curves seem too abundant to be readable, but time spent circling each piece rewards the viewer with a steadily expanding grasp of the multiplicitous formal relationships involved.

Witkin's sculptures cut huge chunks of air out of the ambient space with such aggressiveness that one tends to be intimidated by their vigor. All of his sculptures are "bigger than we are" and we feel their monumentality somatically. His accomplishment is truly impressive.

And now for the two exceptions to the collage theme of this letter. The first is Richard Anuszkiewicz who had a large show of two-part paintings at the Sidney Janis Gallery. Collage is discontinuous, but Anuszkiewicz does everything within his power to make his paintings smooth, seamless, and all of a piece. Concentric rectangles repeat the framing edge to the center of each painting. The ground color generally functions consistently throughout the painting to separate the bands of pigment applied on its surface. If the ground is a warm hue, warm hues tend to predominate in the painting. They are given gently repeated accents of a cool color to forestall a monochromatic appearance. Generally, if the ground is a dark tonality, the applied hues are lightly toned or vice-versa. The square within a square repeating the shape of the canvas is a standard abstract device. Albers made a habit of it, Mondrian used it, Stella applied it liberally, but for Anuszkiewicz it seems to be an obsession that approaches the religious. Like Albers he uses it as a vehicle for the exploration of color problems, but unlike Albers the results of his experiments rarely seem profound. The paintings end up seeming beautiful, finely-crafted, optically effective, but lacking vigor and esthetic necessity.

The surface consistency Anuszkiewicz maintains in all his abstractions is also present in the figurative work of Sideo Frombolotti. It is as though Frombolotti has managed to remain totally unaffected by all the main trends and principles of modernist painting. His work belongs to the era of Impressionism mentioned at the beginning of this letter; Monet is his inspiration, not Mondrian. His recent exhibition at the Landmark Gallery included two large triptychs on the subject of water lilies, one painting of a chair and one of a sailboat, plus three tall figural paintings. In each painting a single hue or chord of hues predominated, green, blue, yellow, or pink, and each was thickly encrusted with pigment.

Frombolotti is a uniquely independent figurative artist who has been creating in an acceptance vacuum all his life. He held firmly onto representation throughout his early years in New York during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, picking up painterly techniques and nothing else. He never swerved away from it thereafter, through Pop Art and the New Realism, Geometric or Lyrical Abstraction, or on into the present modish era of Photo-Realism. He works all day, every day, in a studio in New York during the winter and on Cape Cod in the summer. Though he always does drawings from life, whether landscapes or figures, he never paints from life, nor does he use his drawings as studies for his paintings. He is a marvelous draftsman, but no trace of line is left

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in his paintings. These forms seem to merge into existence from the surrounding atmosphere by an act of magic and to be caught in a moment of transition that precedes their dissolution back into the ambience from which they came. It is as though they have momentarily fought their way to the surface through the layers upon layers of paint that enshrouded them, but they might disappear any second.

Fromboluti has been painting since he was five, and had about as solid a grounding in the principles of academic painting as an artist could in this country. Abstract Expressionism enabled him to loosen up his paint handling as well as his forms. He began to abstract them, but never to the point of unrecognizability. During the fifties he developed the layering system of painting he still uses. It enables him to treat each passage of his brush across the canvas surface freshly, with a maximum of freedom from restraint, but then to cancel it with a new layer at will. Though he leaves no palimpsests, one has an unavoidable and disturbing sensation of seeing only the top layer of the finished painting, beneath which countless other paintings once existed. His shimmering, light-filled surfaces have an overall consistency of hue and facture which binds the field into a single plane which is like a screen of color.

There is a clear seasonal break in Fromboluti's imagery between figure paintings in the winter and landscapes in the summer. The figure paintings are interiors which seem to be of some sort of well lit nightclub, since the women in them are scantily dressed belly dancers. They are his most problematic paintings. The abstract, automatic looseness of his painterly approach to the figure fights against their specificity as human beings, which is emphasized. His most recent painting even includes a portrait head. All the figures are larger than life which helps to generalize them and remove them from the realm of the real, but they still remain too particular for the vagueness of their settings. They evoke numerous erotic fantasies and stand like mute witnesses to some mysterious event we can never hope to comprehend.

The water lilies occupy the other end of the formal spectrum, the chairs and sailboats the middle. The water lilies have a timeless presence which celebrates the spontaneity of nature with such painterly élan that one intuits, rather than sees, their shifting volumes and planar complexities. Subject matter and handling fuse perfectly here. They are non-specific plastic generalizations expressing an intense inner vision which has been thoroughly sublimated and absorbed into a mysterious ambience of radiant color.