

THIS ARTICLE is excerpted from a forthcoming book by April Kingsley, tentatively titled *1950: The Turning Point in American Art*, to be published by Simon and Schuster next year.

"Mid-century?" is the approximate moment when Abstract Expressionism, as a movement, coalesced in the minds of both its witnesses and practitioners. One of the major Abstract Expressionists, Hans Hofmann was also a teacher of genius who inspired a large number of students to become brilliant artists. His complicated personality is the subject of Kingsley's penetrating profile.



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This summer the Provincetown Art Association & Museum is presenting "The Provocative Years 1935—1945: Hans Hofmann and His School in Provincetown." The exhibition, curated by Lillian Orlowsky, is intended to show the effect that Hofmann's teachings had on his former pupils.

Hans Hofmann

Hans Hofmann

at mid-century

by April Kingsley

BORN IN 1880, a year before Picasso, Hans Hofmann had been "on the scene" in Paris with the great Spaniard in the crucial 10 years between 1904 and 1914. He moved to the U.S. in the early thirties, was showing with Motherwell, Still and Baziotes at Peggy Guggenheim's avant-garde gallery in the early forties, and was a model practitioner of the impulsive Abstract Expressionist way of handling paint by 1950. His work was marked by unrestrained gesture, brilliantly rich color, the incorporation of accident, and a boldness and vigor that seemed eminently American in its brash exuberance and energy. Even though he was 70 in 1950, a full generation older than even the eldest Abstract Expressionist, he painted like a young man. Experiencing America from the age of 50 on seemed to have given him a whole new lease on life.

Despite this, Hofmann's European roots were still holding firm. In 1949 he had been honored with a major exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, one that Picasso himself attended, making a rare public appearance to congratulate the now-American artist he'd known so long ago. In the photograph of the two of them in front of a recent Hofmann, Picasso seems to look at the camera with an odd air of gentle resignation, while the considerably taller and more robust Hofmann seems to fairly burst with contained energy, as though he were about to take his hands out of his pockets, roll up his sleeves, and set to work. That year the French art magazine *Derriere le Miroir* devoted an issue to Hofmann which contained "An Appreciation" by Tennessee

Fritz Bultman's). Williams praised Hofmann's "spiritual intuition" in the context of the painting space which demands obedience to the laws of physics. In fact, Hofmann's "first law of vision" was that in analyzing sight rationally "we must differentiate between the act of physical seeing and the act which makes seeing a spiritual experience."¹

It is significant that Tennessee Williams chose to reflect on the painter's scientific side, since Hofmann's beginnings were in that area as a young man right after high school. He was the son of a well-to-do government official in Central Bavaria who had married the daughter of a wealthy farmer and winemaker. As a young, musically-talented boy with "Goethe-like beauty," according to his friend Lillian Kiesler, Hofmann's golden voice charmed the elite of Germany all the way up to the Kaiser when he soloed with the boys' choir. "He was a myth, a legend in Germany," she relates.² At 16, his voice now changed and his school life over, he left his father's Munich home. Unable to support himself on dreams of being an artist, he went to work in the engineering department of the Bavarian Public Works. There he invented an electromagnetic comptometer (something like a calculator), the patent for which had to be signed by his mother because he was underage. When his father sent him the earnings on his invention via messenger who reportedly showered the gold coins onto his desk, he quickly put them to use in his study of art and in setting up housekeeping with 16 year of "An Art" Wolfegg.³ He lived th

normal life of the art student, except that he continued to invent things on the side. An 1889 shipwreck inspired him to create a submarine radar device to warn ships of underwater dangers. Two of his other inventions were a sensitizable light-bulb which could glow afterward without electricity and a portable food freezer for use on military maneuvers. He failed to complete the patenting processes, having become primarily preoccupied with art. But this scientific involvement could be said to extend throughout his lifetime as he strove to understand and explain the mechanics, physics and metaphysics of modern art. He always saw science as creative and creativity in art as having a scientific basis.

Munich had been attracting art students from many countries in Europe and the Americas for decades by the time Hofmann began attending some of its many art schools. The Munich Academy had undergone many interesting changes of direction important to developments in 19th century art, and there were a number of famous independent art schools to choose from as well. French Impressionism was just beginning to lighten the dark, old-master-brown realism that flourished in Munich, and Hofmann's early paintings reflect this



Herbert Matter

shift. Like everyone else in that city in the 1890s it seems, Hofmann studied with Anton Azbe, a Yugoslavian painter known for his small stature and his large capacity for wine, his lightning speed corrections of the students' work, his spirituality and his generosity. Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian painter who was 14 years older than Hofmann, but who had also just begun his art studies with Azbe, later wrote that Azbe taught many of his exceedingly numerous students at no charge, asking in return only that they "work as

hard as possible."⁴ It certainly seems possible that this lonely and mysterious, but kindly, teacher was an inspiration for Hofmann's lifelong commitment to art instruction, particularly of a very individualized sort. Azbe also repeatedly emphasized three things which Hofmann would later stress as well: the application of pure, unmixed color directly to the canvas, working with broad, sweeping lines, and the use of a spherical concept of rendering form in space.⁵ These were radical ideas around 1900, predating and in many ways anticipating Cubism, Expressionism, and other experimental attitudes toward making art in the 20th Century.

Kandinsky put these ideas to use much more rapidly than Hofmann—he published

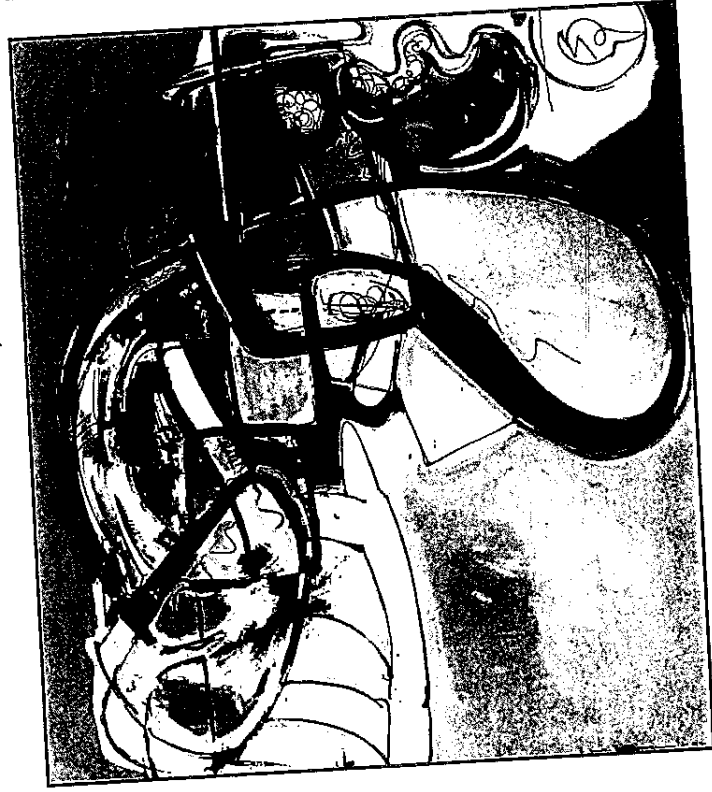
**"He was so emotional
when he worked,
I thought maybe
he'd lose his mind.
He was almost
out of control—as
though he could tear
down the Berlin Wall."**

On the *Spiritual in Art* in 1911—but the many parallels between his and Hofmann's codified esthetic positions undoubtedly resulted from their springing from the same source. Even their preference for the palette knife over the brush (Kandinsky in the early work, Hofmann in the later paintings) began with Azbe's encouragement to "paint freely." Despite their congruent student years, Hofmann doesn't seem to have made the acquaintance of Kandinsky at this time. Interestingly, Kandinsky was repelled by the nude models from which the students had to draw, and escaped as often as he could to the surrounding countryside to work. Hofmann, on the other hand, remained attached to the idea of drawing from the nude for most of his long life. Lillian Kiesler said Hofmann was a nineteenth century romantic for whom a woman undressing was a very sensuous experience. Perhaps the excitement of that moment of coming in visual contact with a nude female in the middle of a crowded classroom of clothed people never wore off for him.⁶

Schwabing, the quaint and affordable bohemian suburb of Munich where Hofmann and "Miz" lived, was full of painters, poets, musicians and dancers. Famous writers like Thomas Mann, Frank Wedekind and Rainer Maria Rilke (whose poetry would inspire more than one Hofmann painting in the future) walked its streets daily, but it seemed that everyone there was an artist in one way or another. Though not an artist, Miz developed her decorating panache, horticultural and culinary mastery and an all-around esthetic sense in this highly cultured environment. By the end of the century, Munich had become a major focal point of the Arts & Crafts movements and was witnessing the breakdown of the distinctions between "high" and "low" art.

Of all the great paintings available for study in Munich's museums, Hofmann fastened on Titian's *Christ Crowned with Thorns* in the Alte Pinakothek. It became his

with personal hope which sustained him through an over-extended pedagogical life. (He wasn't able to support himself on the sale of his paintings without the earnings from his art school until 1958 when he was 78 years old.) Perhaps even more important, however, is the painting's dynamic interplay of powerful forms moving energetically in and out of the shallow space of the steps on which Christ falls beneath his tormentor's blows. These rhythmic spatial thrusts and counterthrusts cannot have gone unnoticed by the man who defined painting



**"Ecstasy," 1947, oil on canvas
University Art Museum, University of
California, Berkeley**

in terms of "push and pull" and whose paintings never failed to demonstrate that concept: The Mystery of plastic creation is based on the dualism of the two dimensional and the three dimensional. Appearance is two dimensional. Reality is three dimensional. The essence of the picture plane is its two dimensionality [which] must be preserved . . . [but when] it reaches its final transformation in the completed picture, [it] must achieve a three dimensional effect, distinct from illusion, by means of the creative process.

Two dimensional expression can be creative only by the co-existence of positive and negative space. Space expands and contracts in the tensions and functions

inert thing. Space is alive; space is dynamic; space is imbued with movement expressed by the forces and counterforces; space vibrates and resounds with color, light and form in the rhythm of life. Movement is the expression of life. Movement develops from depth sensation. There are movements forward, out of space, both in form and in color.

Push and pull are expanding and contracting forces which are activated by carriers in visual motion. Planes are the most important carriers, lines and points less so. To create the phenomenon of *push and pull* on a flat surface, one has to understand that by nature the picture plane reacts automatically in the opposite direction to the stimulus received . . . *push* answers with *pull* and *pull* with *push*.⁷

A fortuitous introduction to a wealthy Munich collector, Phillip Freudenberg, led to sufficient financial support for Hans and Miz to live in Paris from 1904 to 1914, and to spend their summers vacationing in Germany. In Paris he quickly became aware of Cezanne, and this enabled him to see the role of color in the activation of pictorial space:

Cezanne understood color as a force of *push and pull*. In his pictures he created an enormous sense of volume, breathing, pulsating, expanding, contracting, through the use of color. Only very great painting becomes so plastically sensitive . . .⁸

Cezanne was all intuition, but the late Pointillist painter Georges Seurat was scientific, and thus his appeal for Hofmann was also strong. In fact, Hofmann became part-owner of Seurat's great final work, *Le Cirque*, from which he undoubtedly learned a great deal, not only about color, but also about the emotional effect of lines and forms.

On their very first day in Paris, Hans and Miz stepped into the center of the avant-garde art world when they happened to stop at the Cafe du Dome for a coffee on their way to lodgings in Montparnasse. At this cafe Hofmann subsequently met most of the roster of artists he would cite in praise of Paris's internationalism nearly 50 years later: Picasso, Braque, Delaunay, Matisse and Gris, Munch, Pascin, Carles and many of his own countrymen. Hofmann was a marginal figure in the loose group of artists around Picasso and Braque, "intellectual" followers of Cubism who were embroiled in endless discussions of current theories⁹ like the "fourth dimension" and Henri Bergson's concept of time, scientific developments by Einstein and Planck, the new "higher" mathematics and geometries (i.e. non-Euclidian and Non-dimensional), and metaphysical speculations. Of the

smaller epicenters within this so-called Puteaux group, named for the Parisian suburb where many of them had their studios, Hofmann was closest to the Robert and Sonya Delaunay circle. He and Robert collaborated on designs for Sonya's textiles while Miz worked by her side painting ties and scarves. Each "Cubist" developed differently, Cubism providing, as John Berger has pointed out, an "esthetic balance" rather than a style to imitate. Hofmann's propensity for science, however, led him to theorize more than to practice what he was hearing preached. Almost all of his early work was lost during the two world wars, but indications are that he was not by any means prolific during those years. Lillian Kiesler has suggested that his very low painting output while teaching was due more to psychological blocks than to lack of opportunity. The outbreak of war in 1914 caught him in Germany where he opened an art school the following year. The ideas he accumulated in Paris were codified and collated with previous concepts while he taught during the next fifteen years, but he remained committed to them for life. They are readily apparent in the following excerpt from a 1930 article he wrote during his first summer in this country:

All true productivity realizes itself simultaneously upon an artistic and scientific basis. With the acceptance of the Theory of Relativity by Einstein the fourth dimension has come into the realm of natural science. The first and second dimension include the world of appearance, the third holds reality within it, the fourth dimension is the realm of the spirit and imagination, of feeling and sensibility.

All cultural interests are, in their final analysis, filled with the urge to give content and substance to life. All profound content in life originates from the highest phenomenon of the soul; from intuition, and thereby is found the fourth dimension. Art is the expression of this dimension, realized through the other dimensions.¹⁰

Hofmann interpreted the fourth dimension somewhat differently from the core Cubists' diagrammatic re-presentation of reality and from the time/space Duchampian model, as well as from Delaunay's "simultaneity" and various Theosophical or Spiritualist approaches, though his ideas come closest to these. His esthetic philosophy suggests the Germanic concepts of spirit, or "geist," and "einfuhlung" which involved intuition or profound insight—ideas embodied in Wilhelm Worringer's fascinating 1908 study of the psychology of style *Abstraction and Empathy*. Worringer

self-enjoyment":

To enjoy aesthetically means to enjoy myself in a sensuous object diverse from myself, to empathise myself into it. What I empathise into is quite generally life. And life is energy, inner working, striving and accomplishing. In a word, life is activity.

By activity Worringer meant a willed expenditure of energy and the word had substantially the same import for Hofmann. After he moved here permanently in 1931 and began teaching at the Art Student's League in New York, Hofmann stopped using the words "fourth dimension" but he continued to talk about the role of empathy and spirit.

The process of creation is based upon two metaphysical factors: (1) upon the power to experience through the faculty of empathy, and (2) upon the spiritual interpretation of the expression-medium as a result of such

where he really didn't listen to anyone. (His brother had deafened him by poking a fork in his ear as a child, according to Lillian Kiesler. This brother later killed himself after the death of their father. The sister Hans adored became permanently insane at the outset of World War I. Her illness was the reason he was caught in Germany when war broke out.) Some of his students convinced Hofmann to come to America to teach at Berkeley in the summer of 1930, one of them literally accompanying him cross-country as an interpreter. At the League, and later in his own schools in New York and Provincetown, the class monitor would often re-explain what Hofman had said about the student's work after the critique was over. When Lee Krasner studied with him, she relied on monitor George McNeil to do this for her. This service was performed earlier in the thirties by Lillian

Kiesler and her friend, the painter Alice Hodges, both of whom helped him inside the school and befriended him out of it.

It is probably because of expediency that Hofmann developed his way of teaching by showing—making corrections directly on the students' drawings or diagramming alternate possibilities in the margins, tearing drawings up to rearrange the compositions, and attaching pieces of colored paper to the canvas surfaces with thumbtacks to try out different planar movements. Some students, like Krasner, were outraged by this, but most seemed to take it

in stride. He was a wild man when he painted, so such abruptness was natural to him.

Lillian Kiesler posed for him often and was one of the few people other than his wife allowed in his studio while he worked. She relates,

He was so emotional when he worked, in some ways I thought maybe he'd lose his mind. He was almost out of control—though he wasn't. He had that side—ferocious—as though he could tear down the Berlin Wall. I just couldn't believe the way he was slap-



powers. Concept and execution condition each other equally.¹¹

As in the case of Fritz Bultman, young people in America were drawn to Europe to study with Hofmann despite the language barrier. Hofmann's thick accent, the liberal admixture of French and German into his unorthodox English usage, and his unconscious habit of asking "Nicht wahr?"—Is it not so? (which he apparently pronounced "nikker")—after every assertion, were compounded by partial deafness since

and dashing—as though he was going to destroy the canvas.

This reason he preferred for many years to paint on wood instead of canvas.

Hofmann never let his students know what his work was like, fearing to influence them to “paint Hofmanns.” But in 1944 he agreed to an exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim’s gallery. This and many other career-oriented changes in his life, including the shift to canvas and to larger scale pictures, were the outcome of his wife, Miz, coming back into his life at this time. They had married in 1929, after 29 years of cohabitation, because he was going to America. She remained in Munich, running his school as best she could with other teachers until 1939 when Hofmann was finally persuaded, by Fritz Bultman and other people who were aware of the dangers looming there, to get her out of Nazi Germany. She was miraculously able to make passage on virtually the last boat to leave for America. By this time, after eight years of living independently, Hofmann had effectively replaced Miz with a number of women only too happy to keep this still vigorously handsome, tall, blond, blue-eyed, irishman god company, to help him with the school, to pose for him, run errands and generally function as quasi-wives. Besidesillian Kiesler and Alice Hodges, with whom he always celebrated Christmas and often spent weekends being driven around Upper New York State and New England looking for folk art and enjoying the scenery, Hofmann was closest to rich, aristocratic Helen Donnelly and to artist Mercedes Carles. She was the daughter of Arthur B. Carles, the American Fauvist Hofmann met in Paris, and whose colorism he had long admired.¹² Hans and his wife continued to live apart for five years after Miz’s arrival here. It was not until she nursed him through a serious hernia operation in 1944 that they again shared living quarters.

When Miz took charge of Hofmann’s career she catalogued the work in the studio, assigning dates as accurately as she could to paintings for which he could only vaguely remember the order of execution. She made contacts in the art world that were helpful to his career, entertained these people with great energy and charm, and made all the decisions concerning framing, exhibition and prices. She is credited by their friends with Hofmann’s ultimate shift to abstraction in the ’40s and for his use of canvas in order to work on a larger scale than wooden panels allowed. She undoubtedly selected the works for Hofmann’s very important

gallery, Art of This Century, in 1944. Some of his most radical previous work—small dripped and splattered organic abstractions on panel of 1939-44 which were deemed experimental—were left out of the show. This must have seemed wise at the time since Miz probably wanted Hans to put his best foot forward with works solidly based in the European Modernist tradition, but in retrospect it was unfortunate. Hofmann would have been credited with the initial Abstract Expressionist use of the drip technique if these wonderful little experimental paintings had been included.¹³ No one but Miz and perhaps a few of Hofmann’s closest friends even knew they existed. Neither Lee Krasner, his former student, nor her husband Jackson Pollock would have seen them since Hofmann was extremely reticent about showing his work to others.



“Young Woman with Kerchief,”
1940, oil on panel.
Collection: Helen McNeil Ashton

These works, *Spring*, 1940, *The Wind*, 1942, *Fantasia*, 1943, *Effervescence*, 1944, and finally *Cataclysm (Homage to Howard Puzel)*, 1945, prophesy the bursting, free-wheeling excitement of Hofmann’s late work. Miro and Kandinsky were his main sources of inspiration, since he was working, as the titles indicate, from a feeling for nature rather than out of his subconscious. He loved the early Kandinskys with their rich color and intense emotionalism, and he adored Miro, even though he hated the rest of Surrealism. (This

was epitomized for him by Dali.) He purchased works by Miro and also encouraged his students to do so as well. Many of his proteges acquired watercolors by the Spanish painter for a mere \$10 as a result. Picasso’s work of the ’20s and ’30s was a sustaining influence for him nearly as much as for the young American painters. In fact, many of Hofmann’s best paintings of the mid ’40s (like *Idolatress*, 1944, and *Bachannale*, 1946) have a great deal in common with Jackson Pollock’s of 1942-3 when Picasso’s influence on him was also at its height. The younger American’s ferocity and daring in these years surely had a strong effect on Hofmann. Hofmann’s color habits were probably ingrained very early on, in Munich and in Fauvist Paris, for they belong to that European Expressionist “tradition” of clashing reds and greens. The exuberance of

his color, its intensity and its daring reflect the full flowering of his gifts once planted on American soil. The sheer coloristic and painterly energy in his later work is virtually unmatched among American Abstract Expressionist paintings.

In the years 1945-47 Hofmann painted a number of vigorous color abstractions with titles like *Transfiguration*, *Ecstasy*, *Immolation* and *Resurrection*, which may have had something to do with his recent illness and recovery. The world had to wait another decade, however, for Hofmann to completely fulfill the promise of the vitality in this work and in his

earlier “experimental” paintings. When he did so the work is so full of joyful good spirits one is convinced he never suffered a bad day in his life. But the works in his 1950 show are not so buoyant. They represent a temporary retreat from the freedom of the mid ’40s on two separate fronts: to more traditional representation in the form of thickly, violently impastoed heads and figures; and in thinly-painted Cubist still-lives. Despite his various technical skills, at 70 years of age and with a heavy teaching load thanks to the great post-war influx of students on the G.I. Bill, he apparently chose to play it safe with subjects he could handle without strain.

This time in his life represented the high point of Hofmann's popularity as a teacher. There were many one-man art schools in New York, Provincetown and elsewhere, but Hofmann's was the most important and the most progressive. In Provincetown the Cubist Karl Knaths, also a German, was the other significant Modernist working in the '30s and '40s, but he did not teach. The writer Anton Myrer combined the two European-American painters for the artist-teacher character in a fictional portrayal of the life of an art student in Provincetown in his first novel, *Evil Under the Sun*. Published in 1951, after considerable editorial assistance from Myrer's friend, Weldon Kees, in the summer of '50, the book was based on what Myrer saw of artistic life in Provincetown the two previous summers he had spent there with his wife, the artist Judith Rothschild. She, Kees and Fritz Bultman had remained close to Hofmann, their former teacher. They knew—and Myrer conveyed in his character—what an enormous emotional toll the teaching part of Hofmann's life was taking on the art-making part, particularly at this time. When the self-important (and equally self-destructive) "hero" of the novel, Irish painter Mike Doyle, comes to see him one night in desperation about his work, "Hofmann" has to put aside his own worklife at a painfully critical moment to help him. Myrer's fictional teacher advises Doyle with Hofmann-like grace, making a strong pitch for the young artist to work very hard in his search for his own reality.

The fictional Mike Doyle paints big pictures — 10 x 15 feet and curling out on the floor. A kind of discontented Existential hero probably based on Jackson Pollock, he struggles constantly but loses out again and again to drink and to the dark, brutal forces in his psyche. *Evil Under the Sun* is chock-full of 1950 psycho-jargon about phallic symbols, paranoias, phobias, complexes and neuroses, words which each of the protagonists uses to bait the others in theatrically clashing dialogues. Doyle, for example, is described by a fellow art student as having "a Van Gogh complex with a *New Masses* inversion." The vicious banter never ceases, whether the setting be studio, beach or bayside deck. Male intellectual and artistic superiority is rampant in the book. It is linked to the idea of freedom—free sex (to the point of justifying rape), free genitality (one shouldn't be so ashamed of one's body that one closes bathroom doors), and freedom of action (no matter what the consequences for others). Some people are simply superior and deserve to have power over others, to

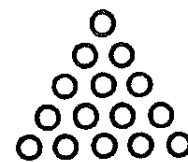
self-centeredness seem to be engendered by the constant self-analysis going on among the characters. Today it is next to impossible to believe that one person might berate another for hiding behind his neurotic inhibitions by asking, "How on earth are you ever going to transcend the Oedipus legacy unless you free your own psyche?" Yet, Myrer isn't likely to have made up the dialogue out of whole cloth. We've forgotten how drenched in Freud those days were. Most art students, and artists for that matter, read Freud's *Totem and Taboo* when it



"The Wind," 1942
oil, duco, gouache, india ink on poster board
University Art Museum
University of California, Berkeley

came out in 1950, but they were familiar with his early work and many were in analysis themselves. Pollock was for most of his life, and even Robert Motherwell semi-seriously considered making a choice between moving to Europe or entering analysis when he was disgusted with life in America just after the war.

Myrer's art students never get to see their master paint any more than Hofmann's real students did. Had they done so they would probably have been amazed at his wildness. Even when working from a painstakingly composed still-life—as he did for Elaine de Kooning's article in the February 1950 issue of *Art News* with Hans Burckhardt's camera clicking away all around him—Hofmann's way of working was fast and furious. "At



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know what I'm doing," he told Elaine; "a picture should be made with feeling." Citing his "prodigious nervous energy," the author wrote that, "working with astonishing speed, never sitting down, constantly in motion between his palette and his easel, applying his paint with broad, lunging gestures, Hofmann often finishes a painting in a few hours." Though he was dressed in blue overalls and workshirt for the camera, Hofmann usually painted with no clothes on, as if even they would be an impediment to his movements. "A picture must be finished in one sweep," he told Elaine, explaining that he never "patched up" a troublesome area but went over the entire composition anew. She believed that this process accounted for the "violent immediacy" of his pictures. At the end of every day, like fellow-European Willem de Kooning, he cleaned up all his brushes with soap and water and even scraped off his entire palette, usually a pane of glass. He told Elaine de Kooning he might use "a hundred tubes for one picture, or one tube for a hundred pictures; lots of medium or none at all," given the extreme differences in paint thickness he permitted himself. Sometimes, as he did while painting *Fruit Bowl: Transubstantiation No. 1* for this article, he limited his palette to a few colors (in this case red, white, blue and yellow), but usually he filled his palette with hues.

In this work much of the paint was soaked into gauze and rubbed onto the canvas once the "architecture" of the picture was established in thinly-brushed blue lines (the way Cezanne often began a painting, in fact). Brushes of all sizes might be used as well as sponges and gauze for rubbing, sticks and other gouging tools, and he often employed palette knives furiously to scrape and swirl and swipe the soft pigment around. Paint splattered all around him as he worked, dotting every surface.



"White House at Provincetown," 1947
oil on masonite
Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Albert Sperry

Reviewers of Hofmann's October 24--November 13 show at the Kootz Gallery noted the vigor of his work. "A firecracker sparkle in their explosive reds and blobs of mixed color," wrote one critic; "deep pigment is troweled, furrowed and smeared to produce an inside-a-crystal world of rich amorphous color," said another. However, the mix of styles and techniques, sizes and subject matter in his show disturbed the critics. "Mercurial as ever," wrote one, while another said the new work defied classification since each canvas creates an independent reality of its own. A thickly impastoed Expressionist head with barely recognizable features could be unsettling next to a highly abstract still-life of a glass table, its pigment lightly rubbed into the canvas, most of which had been left bare. Having the kind of stylistic breadth that could fool a casual viewer into mistaking his exhibition for a group show was probably Hofmann's major flaw. When in the mid '50s he finally gave up recognizable subject matter entirely, he substituted the contradictory play of hard-edged forms against loosely painted ones the former dialogue between the real world of objects and the painted reality. Mondrian's rectangles took the place of baskets and figures. But, even in the eight years of his life, when he loosed painterly gifts completely, he still contin-

to paint very differently from one canvas to the next. He responded to the spirit of the day, to its moods and his moods. About a year after Miz died in 1963, he married Renate Schmitz who inspired a series of the most joyful and ebullient paintings of his long life. Hard-edged rectangles cover one surface while in another only one or two of them float in a sea of pale, melding hues amid sprays of multi-colored spatter. "If I ever find a style, I'll stop painting," he once told his dealer, Sam Kootz. He did have a recognizable style, of course. One never mistakes his paintings for anyone else's. ■

1983).

10. Hofmann, "Art in America," *Art Digest*, August 1930, p.27.

11. "Excerpts...", p.59.

12. Hofmann dedicated one of his finest paintings, *Memorian in Aeternae*, 1962, to Carles, Gorky, Tomlin and Pollock—the deceased American artists he respected the most. Mercedes Carles developed into a fine painter and marvelous draughtsman, obviously inspired by Hofmann's style. She married photographer Herbert Matter.

13. Various non-ABEX artist created and exhibited "drip paintings" prior to Pollock, among them Janet Sobel and David Alfaro Siquieros, both of whom may well have inspired Pollock to try the technique. Many of the Surrealists who used automatist methods, including Miro, Masson, Ernst and Matta, influenced the young Americans to try it in the early forties. Pollock, Baziotes, Kamrowski, Motherwell and their wives even got together to work on a collaborative painting in the tradition of the "exquisite corpse" where each added to a previously done section they hadn't seen.

1. From Hofmann's *The Painter and His Problems*, a manual dedicated to painting, March 23, 1963, a typescript of which is in the author's library.

2. From conversations with the author in November 1989 by telephone and in Lillian Kiesler's Greenwich Village penthouse apartment.

3. Though his earliest biographer, Bartlett H. Hayes (the source for most of this information on Hofmann's early life) claims they were married at this time, all subsequent chroniclers give their wedding year as 1929. The following year Hofmann spent the summer in America and he moved here the year after that, so perhaps the imminent separation prompted the marriage.

4. Kandinsky, "Autobiography," *In Memory of Wassily Kandinsky*, exhibition catalogue, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, March 15–May 15, 1945, p. 65.

5. Peg Weiss, *Wassily Kandinsky: The Formative Munich Years (1896-1914) from Jugendstil to Abstraction*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1973, p.41.

6. Kandinsky reports women students were allowed in some of the private classes, but not all and not at the Academy. Students were allowed to bring their dogs to class until this time, and after they were banned some of the students wanted to "throw the wenches out" as well.

7. "Excerpts from the teaching of Hans Hofmann" in *Search for the Real and other Essays by Hans Hofmann*, edited by Sara T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), p. 59-68.

8. Ibid.

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