The dissertation of Daniel Haxall has been reviewed and approved* by the following:

Sarah K. Rich  
Associate Professor of Art History  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Leo G. Mazow  
Curator of American Art, Palmer Museum of Art  
Affiliate Associate Professor of Art History

Joyce Henri Robinson  
Curator, Palmer Museum of Art  
Affiliate Associate Professor of Art History

Adam Rome  
Associate Professor of History

Craig Zabel  
Associate Professor of Art History  
Head of the Department of Art History

* Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

In 1943, Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century gallery staged the first large-scale exhibition of collage in the United States. This show was notable for acquainting the New York School with the medium as its artists would go on to embrace collage, creating objects that ranged from small compositions of handmade paper to mural-sized works of torn and reassembled canvas. Despite the significance of this development, art historians consistently overlook collage during the era of Abstract Expressionism. This project examines four artists who based significant portions of their oeuvre on *papier collé* during this period (i.e. the late 1940s and early 1950s): Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Anne Ryan, and Esteban Vicente. Working primarily with fine art materials in an abstract manner, these artists challenged many of the characteristics that supposedly typified collage: its appropriative tactics, disjointed aesthetics, and abandonment of “high” culture. Although many of their contemporaries focused on the formal attributes of the cut and paste, Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente explored the semiotic potential and metaphoric implications of the medium. Their approach to collage overlapped in several ways—for example their nonobjective styles, autobiographical mapping of identity, political resonance, and preference for *papier collé*—yet a great variety defines their work. Anne Ryan juxtaposed traditional formats with recycled materials, eschewing the conventions of consumerism and femininity available in the postwar years. The hybrid nature of collage appealed to Esteban Vicente, a Spanish-American artist who mined the duality of his cultural inheritance for syncretic constructions. The critical language of the pastoral affords an opportunity to reconsider Lee Krasner’s work in collage because it features many rhetorical devices of the bucolic tradition, including irony and dialectics, in addition to the contingency,
naturalism, and escapist reverie that characterize the genre. And finally, Robert Motherwell executed an abstract tribute to composer John Cage on a large scale, conflating music with collage while testing notions of composition and historicism. Hardly the apolitical or clichéd medium that critics deemphasized at mid-century, collage offered unlimited possibilities in the era of Abstract Expressionism, ranging from the formal and the aesthetic to the social and the political.
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Fig. 5.1  William Pippin, Anne Ryan, ca. 1949. Photographic print, 26 x 21 cm. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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Fig. 5.33 *Persian No. 1*, from Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* [1856]. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1987.

Fig. 5.34 *Egyptian No. 6*, from Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* [1856]. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1987.


Fig. 5.37 Anne Ryan, *Number 540*, 1954. Collage, 14 x 44.4 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Fig. 5.38 Anne Ryan, *Number 524*, 1951. Collage: papers and fabrics on cardboard, 17 x 13 ⅞ cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.


Fig. 6.1  

Fig. 6.2  

Fig. 6.3  

Fig. 6.4  
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In the spring of 1943, Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century gallery—an important American venue for Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism—staged the first large-scale exhibition of Cubist and Surrealist collages in the United States.¹ A jury of Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian, James Johnson Sweeney, James Thrall Soby, Howard Putzel, and Guggenheim selected works by more than thirty-seven artists for this show. *Collage* featured the art of many well-established European and American modernists, including Jean Arp, Alexander Calder, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Juan Gris, Joan Miró, Francis Picabia, and Pablo Picasso (fig. 1.1).² This exhibition was also notable for acquainting the New York School with the medium, for three young American artists, Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, and William Baziotes, were also invited to contribute works to the show. Only a small number of modernist collages appeared in public collections in New York City at the time, perhaps as few as twenty, and the *Collage* exhibition granted artists their first opportunity to see many of these artists’ works.

¹ Art of This Century’s show was titled *Exhibition of Collage* and held April 16 – May 15. Although no catalogue was produced for this exhibit, a *New York Times* review noted that it was “composed of work submitted to and accepted by a jury composed of Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian, James Johnson Sweeney, James Thrall Soby, Howard Putzel and Miss Guggenheim.” Edward Alden Jewell, “Collections in New Homes,” *New York Times* (23 May 1943): X10. Peggy Guggenheim hosted a similar exhibition of collage in her London Gallery, the Guggenheim-Jeune in November 1938. This exhibit likewise featured Arp, Ernst, Gris, Picasso, Schwitters, and so forth. The exhibition checklist and announcement is reprinted in: Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985): 754.

² The announcement for the exhibition listed the following participants: Hans Arp, Herbert Bayer, William Baziotes, Benno, Bolotowsky, Georges Braque, Alexander Calder, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Jimmy Ernst, Max Ernst, Suzy Frelinghuyxen, A. E. Gallatin, Balcolm Greene, Juan Gris, George Grosz, David Hare, Suzy Hare, Gerome Kamarowski, Jacqueline Lamba, Henri Laurens, Gypsy Rose Lee, Mina Loy, Boris Margo, Joan Miró, George L. K. Morris, Irene Rice Pereira, Francis Picabia, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Andre Racz, Ad Reinhardt, Barbara Reis, Kurt Seligman, Hedda Sterne, and Laurence Vail. Robert Motherwell also exhibited in the show; however, he was omitted from the announcement.
beyond reproduction. Not only did this show help launch the careers of the aspiring modernists, but Motherwell recalled that this marked the first time he or Pollock worked in the collage medium. The technique became a lifelong interest for Motherwell, whereas Baziotes stopped working in the medium and Pollock only dabbled in it thereafter. In the following decades, other artists associated with Abstract Expressionism would embrace collage, creating objects that ranged from small compositions made with handmade papers to mural-sized works of torn and reassembled canvas.

Among the many artists who experimented with collage during the era of Abstract Expressionism, four artists based significant portions of their oeuvre on papier collé in the late 1940s and early 1950s: Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Anne Ryan, and Esteban Vicente. These artists not only shared a dedication to the medium and its capacities, but also worked in a predominantly abstract manner. Their work challenged many of the characteristics that supposedly typified collage, particularly its abandonment of “high” culture. Collage is often defined as the application of common materials, such as newsprint or photographic illustrations,
to a supporting ground. By employing remnants from mass culture, particularly those industrially produced, collagists often traverse the distinction between high art and popular culture. Early practitioners of collage were celebrated for destroying pictorial illusionism and embracing the quotidian, but these artists worked predominantly with fine arts materials, thereby “re-purifying” the medium. While this approach to *papier collé* may be considered reactionary in light of subsequent developments in modernist art, the Abstract Expressionists enlivened the discourse about collage by questioning the originality of the avant-garde and the attributes of the medium. Despite their preference for non-objective, abstract compositions, Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente found collage to be rich with semiotic potential and metaphoric implications, qualities that enabled them to map questions of gendered, nationalized, and artistic identity through *papier collé*. Their works attest to the diversity of aesthetic and conceptual approaches to collage that characterized the medium at mid-century.

With the exception of Motherwell, these artists’ contributions to the field have been greatly underestimated in art historical scholarship.\(^6\) Studies that examine the collages of the New York School often focus on canonical Abstract Expressionists, regardless of their involvement with the medium. As a result, Pollock and Motherwell figure prominently in

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surveys, whereas Krasner, Ryan, and Vicente remain marginal figures in histories of collage as well as Abstract Expressionism. No attempt has been made to deliver a comprehensive understanding of collage during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, and little effort has been made to account for the omission of these artists from studies of Abstract Expressionism and collage. By examining Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente individually as well as collectively, we attain a more complete view of collage at mid-century. This study explores what collage meant to these artists, questioning how they understood the medium and its capacities. Collage connected Abstract Expressionism to a wealth of ideologies, ranging from the formal and the aesthetic to the social and the political. The ramifications of this technique extend beyond experiments in composition because complex histories of identity, artistic production, and philosophic thought emerge from the *papier collé* of these artists. Ultimately, Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente diversified the medium at a time when many artists considered collage obsolete or merely an aside to painting. They not only grafted collage premises upon nonobjective techniques but also restored the political weight to an artistic medium that critics had deemphasized at mid-century.

On one level, these four artists worked comfortably within traditional definitions of collage, employing paper, canvas, and newsprint as materials for two-dimensional compositions. They did not pursue the radical implications of this technique like Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, artists who developed three-dimensional “assemblage” from the collage strategy of appropriation. While many thought that Rauschenberg’s “combines” had rendered *papier collé* obsolete according to notions of the avant-garde and originality, these earlier artists challenged several of the medium’s attributes through measures that can be considered both retrograde and
revolutionary. As defined by art historians, the significance of the medium lies in its fusion of artifice and reality because many examples of collage incorporate elements of everyday life into the matrix of artistic production. However, Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente often eschewed these remnants in favor of the purely artificial world of artistic production. Whereas newsprint, photographs, and the vernacular appeared in earlier Dada and Surrealist collages, the Abstract Expressionists employed shards of canvas and scraps of paper for their compositions, thereby confusing the significance of appropriation and representation characteristic of the medium.

As American artists experimented with collage at mid-century, many confronted the legacy of modernism’s masters. In the case of Anne Ryan, she first adopted the medium after viewing an exhibition of Kurt Schwitters in 1948. Her subsequent work in collage recalls several European models, especially Cubism, Dada, and the Arts and Crafts movement. Yet her conservatism, literal in how she recycled materials for her work, placed her at odds with the artistic trends and consumer culture of the 1950s. The tattered scraps of burlap and linen that appeared in Ryan’s collages clashed with the sleek refinement of tailfin automobiles, while her thrift store aesthetics dramatically opposed the “New Look” of postwar fashion. Ryan can be considered a pioneer of “femmage” because she challenged notions of femininity and domesticity by reclaiming the technique of collage for women. However, this model of early

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7 For example, Donald Judd argued that with his collages, “Rauschenberg is the most conservative of the best of his generation,” but he considered the three-dimensional assemblages to be “the strongest, newest, greatest and the other superlatives Cassius Clay thinks he is, even the beautifullest.” Donald Judd, “In the Galleries,” *Arts Magazine* (May/June 1963); reprinted in *Donald Judd Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005): 86.
9 Feminist art historians have “reclaimed” the medium of collage for women, asserting that its roots in quilting traditions and other domestic craft predate the modernist *papiers collés* of Picasso and Braque. See Patricia Mainardi, “Quilts: The Great American Art,” *Feminist Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 1, 18-23; Melissa Meyer
feminism remains reductive and overlooks the complexities of artistic identity in the context of the social and literary climate of the time. A published poet and writer, Ryan focused on the human experience and the materiality of *papier collé*, which connected her to Existentialist philosophies pervasive in the New York School. While many aspects of her art paralleled the project of Abstract Expressionism, Ryan’s collages departed from the mythical evocations and subjectivity of her New York School peers. Through collage, Ryan mapped notions of identity in the postwar era, particularly as she engaged the medium in exploring gender, society, and the history of art.

While Ryan contested modes of gender prevalent at mid-century, Esteban Vicente’s work in collage engaged questions of national identity, particularly those of his dual heritage. Born in Spain, Vicente moved to America in 1936 at age thirty-three, becoming a naturalized American citizen and living in New York for the remainder of his life. Despite leaving behind his homeland, Vicente’s connection to Spanish traditions has been well established, particularly his approach to painting. However, in asserting the Spanish origins of collage, a technique created by Spaniards Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris, he invoked his cultural inheritance. By emphasizing surface materialism and tactile physicality, Vicente positioned himself within a legacy of Spanish realism that included Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Zurbáran, and Francisco Goya. Additionally, nationalist politics aligned Vicente with Republican loyalists fighting Franco during the Spanish Civil War. He was intimately involved in the conflict, painting camouflage for the Republican cause while in Spain and serving as an ambassador for the Republic after his arrival in America. Robert Motherwell was among the members of the New York School who

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shared Vicente’s interest in this horrific battle with Fascism, as evident in his homage to the slain poet Federico Garcia Lorca in his *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*. Motherwell’s reference to the war incensed Vicente, prompting him to write a letter to *Art News* which chastised Motherwell for co-opting Spain and its tragedy when he had not yet visited the country. Motherwell replied with his own letter to *Art News* that suggested Vicente was jealous of his success.\(^\text{10}\) This heated public debate reveals how ownership was claimed over collage, Picasso, and the Spanish Civil War. Vicente’s commitment to his Spanish roots did not prevent him from exploring American life and culture and maintaining as active interest in the other side of his heritage as well. His abstract cityscapes of Manhattan and works composed of popular imagery coexist with collages exemplifying modernist ideals of action painting and flatness. Thus, a consideration of Vicente’s collages in relation to socio-political contexts and developments in both Spanish and American modernist art reveals the complexity of his hybrid compositions.

While the works of Ryan and Vicente remain relatively unknown, Robert Motherwell figures prominently in studies of Abstract Expressionism. Motherwell’s importance to the emergence of Abstract Expressionism has been attributed to his editorial role for the journal *Possibilities*, while his gestural canvases are often connected to the masculine bias prevalent among the New York School and its historians. With such machismo latent in his work, Motherwell’s relationship to the iconoclastic composer John Cage has puzzled scholars. Despite their divergent artistic positions in the mid-1950s, Motherwell and Cage traveled in the same circles early in their careers: both frequented the Cedar Bar, taught at Black Mountain College, and participated in the “Subjects of the Artist” school. Motherwell selected Cage to be music editor for *Possibilities*, and although only one issue of the journal was published, their

collaboration fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas. Art historians typically have focused on Cage’s later relationship with Robert Rauschenberg and subsequent rejection of Abstract Expressionism, yet this early dialogue with Motherwell shaped the art of both painter and composer. The roots of their partnership stem from collage, for both men embraced the medium and its implications. Motherwell’s collage *Blue with China Ink—Homage to John Cage* (1946) sheds further light on this friendship because the composition celebrates the pair’s shared interests, ranging from Zen Buddhism and Mallarméan poetics to chance operations and strategies of compositional structure. As evidenced by this interdisciplinary dialogue, the collage medium was not only relevant to the visual art of the Abstract Expressionists, but also central to the musical and aesthetic developments of the era.

In 1953, Lee Krasner began making collages by tearing up and rearranging her works and those executed by her husband, Jackson Pollock. These pieces have been variously interpreted as a symbolic attempt to “possess” Pollock as well as “pastoral and bucolic” reflections on nature’s cycles. While such interpretations might seem disconnected, the literary trope of the pastoral affords a new framework in which to reconsider Krasner’s collages, particularly their iconography, technique, and subject matter. A pastoral perspective elucidates the formal and symbolic complexity of her *papiers collés*, while synthesizing the diverse body of literature on the artist. Krasner’s pastoral vision ranged from the literal to the metaphoric, as she escaped to Long Island and found solace within her pieced-together compositions. Emphasizing materiality, revision, and contrast, Krasner’s collages established a mood akin to Virgilian shepherds with their evocations of nature and oppositional rhetoric. At the heart of Krasner’s pastoralism is

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collage, a medium she based on order and relativism. As such, the act of arranging collage elements became a pastoral endeavor unto itself, Krasner’s pursuit of psychological and compositional order.

Ultimately, these four artists produced a substantial body of collages that attempted to revitalize the medium in America at mid-century. While many of their contemporaries focused on the formal attributes of the cut-and-paste aesthetic, these collagists continued to pursue the semiotic and political potential of the medium, particularly because the origins of modernist collage stemmed from political revolution and social criticism. Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente each contested the formal complexities of the technique while imbuing it with a social relevance previously unnoticed by scholars, challenging the nature of collage through abstraction while re-politicizing its capacities. While their approach to collage overlapped in several ways—for example their nonobjective styles, autobiographical mapping of identity, political resonance, and preference for *papier collé*—a great variety defines their work. Hardly a static or clichéd medium, collage offered unlimited possibilities in the era of Abstract Expressionism, with many artists waging a “pasted-paper revolution” at mid-century.¹²

**Historiography of Abstract Expressionist Collage**

Although a swell of scholarship focused on Abstract Expressionism in the mid-1990s, research on New York School collages remains incomplete. Robert Motherwell appears in virtually every major survey of collage, yet rarely are the works of Lee Krasner, Anne Ryan, and Esteban Vicente discussed. Studies of the medium within the context of the New York School

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tend to focus on canonical Abstract Expressionists regardless of the amount of collages they actually produced. The most recent survey of collage, Brandon Taylor’s *Collage: The Making of Modern Art* (2004), is a case in point, devoting a chapter to Abstract Expressionism but omitting Vicente entirely. Anne Ryan makes a brief appearance for having inspired Lee Krasner, just as Motherwell is noted for his influence on Robert Rauschenberg’s adoption of the medium. Taylor, however, quickly glosses over the achievements of each artist in the process, and rather than elucidating collage in the era of Abstract Expressionism, he focuses on the relationship of American modernism to European precursors. While Pollock and Krasner garner critical attention, they are situated within the art historical context of Picasso’s *Three Dancers* (1925) and Matisse’s *Oceania, The Sky* (1946) rather than that of their American contemporaries.

The first art historical studies of collage were slightly more inclusive of the works of Ryan and Vicente because the canon had not yet become fully formulated. In his catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* (1961), William Seitz included Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente, reproducing one work by Ryan and Vicente each, and two collages, including a color plate, by Robert Motherwell. Although no commentary accompanies Vicente’s image, Seitz offered a highly gendered assessment of Anne Ryan’s collages. His one-line appraisal declares that “one is moved by the feminine delicacy with which the fragile and transparent materials of Anne Ryan are overlaid.” Krasner was omitted entirely from the volume and exhibition, while Motherwell garnered high praise as the artist “who brought about the resurgence of abstract art in the United States after 1945, [and] it is he who must be regarded as the leading exponent of the *papier collé*.” Although it featured the work of such New York

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15 Ibid., 97.
School artists as Willem De Kooning, this survey did not declare a uniquely Abstract Expressionist contribution to the field. Cubism, Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism were featured in separate chapters, whereas the collages of the New York School were relegated to a postscript about assemblage and its attitudes and issues.¹⁶

Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh’s study, Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques (1962), stands as the other early work that embraced nearly every artist working in the medium at the time.¹⁷ Published one year after the Assemblage exhibition, this volume also reproduced works by Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente. The book remains perhaps the most inclusive survey of the medium, particularly in the generous number of illustrations that represent the New York School, but the commentary on each artist is scant.¹⁸ In fashioning a comprehensive study of the medium, Janis and Blesh failed to establish a methodology framing contemporary developments in collage. Thus images were scattered throughout chapters organized on the basis of material or movement. Once again, Abstract Expressionism was not considered a cohesive tendency like Surrealism, Futurism, Dada, or Cubism. Rather than suggesting that the New York School was united by common themes or ideas, Janis and Blesh claimed that only references to technique or materials linked these artists. Furthermore, the text offers little insight into these artists’ methods and approaches, often including statements that downplay the significance of their work. For example, Janis and Blesh claim that Vicente used “papier collé as a ‘holiday from painting,’” suggesting that collage was somehow less important than painting in Vicente’s œuvre while serving as a more casual and relaxed mode of artistic production. They felt further

¹⁶ I am not suggesting that Abstract Expressionism was, in fact, a cohesive style or movement. Rather, I question how authors have, in organizing chapters by style or tendency, lumped together the works of the Surrealists and Cubists, but not those of the Abstract Expressionists, an act of inconsistency and often times, exclusion.
¹⁷ Harriet Janis (nee Grossman) was art dealer Sidney Janis’s wife.
¹⁸ Janis and Blesh included a single image by Lee Krasner, six collages by Robert Motherwell, two works by Anne Ryan, and two compositions by Esteban Vicente.
compelled to justify their inclusion of artists who might be perceived as amateurs, describing Anne Ryan as a “serious American artist...[with] a woman’s special feeling for textiles.”\(^{19}\) Despite their attempts to establish Ryan’s position within the canon of modern art, the authors situate her collages solely within gendered stereotypes of fabrics, while suggesting that collage offered Vicente a leisurely respite from the seriousness of painting. The revised edition of Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques \(^{(1967)}\) did little to redress these problems, instead the authors merely added two additional chapters on Pop, Op, and Process Art.

German critic Herta Wescher’s Collage \(^{(1968)}\) also relegates Abstract Expressionist collage to a concluding chapter on recent trends in the medium while structuring her study around movements ranging from Futurism to Constructivism. Much of this critical bias is understandable considering the author’s close proximity to the era of Abstract Expressionism; however, she omits Lee Krasner entirely while Anne Ryan appears in just one sentence: “Anne Ryan (1889-1954), for one, made subtle pattern cards from delicate, thin cloth or even tissue paper.”\(^{20}\) Wescher similarly reduces Vicente to a postscript, noting how “the Spanish-born New York artist...piles torn papers in mat tones and approximately geometric shapes into layers one above the other, using the brush here and there to insert among them a touch of one or two brighter colors.”\(^{21}\) Neither the work of Ryan nor Vicente is reproduced, but Motherwell receives four pages of text as well as color and black-and-white images, because, as Wescher notes, “Motherwell has devised new forms for collage, and his works occupy an important place in the Abstract Expressionist style that gave such a great impetus to American art in the immediate

\(^{19}\) Janis and Blesh, Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques, 171, 188.
\(^{20}\) Wescher, Collage, 307.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
postwar years.” Jackson Pollock is the other Abstract Expressionist included in Wescher’s study, and she reproduces his famous glass painting because of the appearance of wire, twine, and pebbles on its surface. She considers this work one of two “authentic collages” he produced, acknowledging his problematic relationship to papier collé.

Another German, artist Eddie Wolfram, reproduced the same work by Pollock, *Number 29, 1950*, in his *History of Collage* (1975). However, Wolfram lumps Abstract Expressionism into a chapter on postwar art, thus associating the New York School with the Brut Art of Jean Dubuffet, pop styling of Mimmo Rotella, and junk assemblages of John Chamberlain. The only Abstract Expressionists he discusses are Pollock, Motherwell, and William Baziotes, whereas Krasner, Ryan, and Vicente are overlooked. Wolfram relies heavily on Wescher in his appraisal of Pollock, with both art historians citing Pollock’s relief assemblage *Wooden Horse* (1948) and the scattering of nails, keys, buttons, and broken Coca-Cola bottles across his canvases as evidence of his collage aesthetic. He does acknowledge, however, that Pollock’s “concern for collage in fact remained peripheral, because for him the addition of extraneous elements, sand pitch and industrial paints, was essentially part of the vast store of mater [sic] to fertilize and gestate in the arena of the canvas.” Wolfram quoted a canonical source by Motherwell on collage and the democratization of art, cited Peggy Guggenheim’s show in introducing Abstract Expressionism to the medium, and then curiously shifted the discussion to Matisse’s cutouts and Art Informel. Ultimately, Abstract Expressionism receives just two pages of attention, largely

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22 Wescher, *Collage*, 302.
23 Wolfram’s language and examples repeat, nearly verbatim, Wescher’s earlier observations. Wolfram notes that “one can find caps off the tubes of colours along with nails, buttons, keys, coins, wire mesh, twine, pebbles and even bits from a broken Coca-Cola bottle,” while Wescher previously observed how Pollock “three all sorts of chance materials into his mass of color…the caps of his paint tubes, along with nails, buttons, keys, coins, and other oddments…a broken Coca-Cola bottle.” Wolfram, *History of Collage*, 141; Wescher, *Collage*, 300.
because Wolfram found the New York School’s preoccupation with collage to be a mere adjunct to action painting. He claimed:

The whole school of American action painters had a similar approach to material as Pollock: anything could go into the melting pot to create ruptured surfaces and marks; extraneous materials were never regarded as an alternative to paint, but rather as expedient and fused into it… It was really only Motherwell who, because of his literary predilections, consistently made use of collage, for example, letter-forms and industrial labels.25

Thus, Wolfram establishes two myths concerning the New York School’s engagement with papier collé. First, that these artists considered the medium little more than an extension of painting rather than a medium with its own unique properties. Second, that among the Abstract Expressionists, only Robert Motherwell pursued the technique in a manner related to Cubist and Dada forebears.

In art historian Diane Waldman’s more recent survey of collage, Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object (1992), the first fourteen pages of her chapter dedicated to Abstract Expressionism focus on Joseph Cornell and the influence of Surrealism on the New York School. Following a paragraph on Louise Nevelson’s sculptural/architectural assemblages, Waldman examines Robert Motherwell for six pages before discussing Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning for the remainder of the chapter. She credits Motherwell with developing a painterly approach to collage, fusing automatism with Surrealist and Cubist aesthetics. These collages, according to Waldman, “are both related to but independent of his paintings,” thereby distinguishing those who utilized quotidian elements for painting from conventional bricoleurs.26 Ryan and Vicente do not appear in as much as a footnote, while Krasner is cited only for a quotation explaining Pollock’s working methods. Pollock’s approach to materials was a far cry

26 Waldman, Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object, 222.
from Motherwell because, as Waldman notes, “these function within the process of painting rather than as a separate entity. Although Pollock, like Motherwell, was willing to incorporate real objects into his paintings, he was unwilling to acknowledge their identity as such. They functioned largely as a way of adding another dimension to the reality of the picture plane.”

Despite this acknowledgment, that Pollock’s allover canvases do not constitute collages in the proper sense, Waldman still reproduced four of Pollock’s works, emphasizing his work at the expense of other collagists. Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline receive due notice for the manner in which they fused gestural brushwork with cutouts from magazines and telephone books, but these compositions remained a relatively small portion of each artist’s oeuvre. Despite noting the formal innovations brought to the medium by the Abstract Expressionists, Waldman declared that collage “entered a new exciting phase with the development of assemblage,” relegating this body of work to experiments continuing the ethos of action painting.

Thus, histories of collage acknowledging the contributions of the Abstract Expressionists to the medium are selective in whom they admit to the group, and typically focus on the canon: Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and Joseph Cornell. As outlined above, Motherwell garnered great attention for his collages, thanks to his prolific output in the medium. Furthermore, due to his prominent role in the New York art scene, as both an artist and writer, Motherwell appears in virtually all of the major surveys of collage. Jackson Pollock surfaces in these compendia not because he worked regularly in the medium, but because he was the most famous Abstract Expressionist. Pollock’s collages are limited to a few works in which he tore

28 Ibid., 231.
29 Motherwell appears in every salient survey of collage. Typically his work is reproduced and his writings are often quoted in one form or another. Following Seitz’s recommendation, Motherwell certainly has been considered the leading American practitioner of collage following World War II.
and rearranged his drip paintings or scattered objects such as string, dirt, and cigarettes across his canvases. The inclusion of such materials in his allover paintings hardly fits the designation of *papier collé*, wherein disjointed surfaces are formulated through the application of diverse materials to the supporting ground. Pollock’s widow, Lee Krasner, produced numerous collages that reconstituted not only her own shredded works but those of her husband as well, yet Krasner rarely appeared in collage literature until recently. Joseph Cornell’s shadow boxes are more connected to Dada and Surrealism than Abstract Expressionism, but he is often associated with the New York School due to chronological and geographical considerations. Ultimately, in the rare occasion when Abstract Expressionist collage is approached by scholars, the focus remains on a few key figures, the “superstars” of Abstract Expressionism. According to these surveys of collage, the Abstract Expressionists merely translated their painterly concerns to a new medium. And though they contributed new aesthetics of abstraction and spontaneity to the field, scholars likened their work in collage to “holidays” or “preparatory studies.” Conrad Marca-Relli, a member of the New York School, acknowledged this phenomenon, noting, “at that time there was very little collage accepted as an art form…they didn’t want collage, they didn’t feel it was…painting.”

Marca-Relli’s suspicion was certainly reinforced by scholarship on Abstract Expressionism because art historians have privileged painting over other media, particularly collage. Irving Sandler’s pioneering *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract*...
Expressionism singled out painting as the medium through which Abstract Expressionism established its relevance. In drawing upon contemporary critics such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg to formulate this history, Sandler placed emphasis on approaches to painting, distinguishing between “gesture” and “color-field” painters. Featuring chapters on male painters, *The Triumph of American Painting* omits Krasner, Ryan, and Vicente altogether; however, Motherwell receives notice in a short chapter that focuses primarily on his painting series *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*. The insinuation is that collage did little to contribute to America’s cultural hegemony, a notion refuted by the emergence of Pop Art in the following decades.

Nevertheless, in his follow-up study, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*, Sandler included the medium of sculpture, dedicating chapters to assemblage and junk sculptures as well as Rauschenberg’s combines. Missing from his discussion of both painting and sculpture is collage, even though Sandler celebrated John Cage and Allan Kaprow for the rise of Happenings, performance-based art that had its roots in Kaprow’s collaged “Environments” and Cage’s musical assemblages. David Anfam’s more recent survey of Abstract Expressionism focuses on the cultural and socio-political roots behind the New York School. Despite including sections on David Smith’s sculptures and the photography of Aaron Siskind, collage makes a rare appearance only in the context of Motherwell’s oeuvre. Anfam dismissed the *papier collé* of Vicente and Marca-Relli as “traits” or “pastiche,” while Krasner’s

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34 See Sandler’s chapters, “The Duchamp-Cage Aesthetic,” and “Environments and Happenings,” where he notes how “the collages prompted Kaprow to extend his work into the actual environment... indeed detritus itself, because it was once part of the viewers’ ‘life,’ pointed the way to Environments by reducing the aesthetic distance that usually separates a work of art from its audience.” He likewise notes how Cage developed his aesthetics by focusing on the quotidian in a manner informed by collage. Ibid., 164-165, 199.
collages were discussed as a personal means of escaping the masculine bias prevalent in the art world.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, Stephen Polcari frames his study of Abstract Expressionism within modern experience, devoting chapters to the movement’s major painters and asserting that the art was, above all, a response to the postwar psychological condition.\textsuperscript{37} Motherwell’s collages are contextualized as a bridge between the School of Paris and Abstract Expressionism, while Krasner is discussed in a postscript that focuses on her paintings. Although many artists and critics celebrated collage-montage as the medium best-suited for engaging modernism, histories of Abstract Expressionism continue to privilege painting at the expense of \textit{papier collé}.

Anne Ryan and Esteban Vicente remain largely absent from studies of Abstract Expressionism, particularly in those works that approach the subject thematically or topically. Some collections, like Clifford Ross’s anthology \textit{Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics}, focus on written statements and interviews by canonical figures like Pollock and de Kooning.\textsuperscript{38} Michael Leja centers his study on the notion of subjectivity, in particular the myths of the primitive and modern man, to explore the work of Pollock, Rothko, Gottlieb, and Newman.\textsuperscript{39} While he deconstructs the semiotic potential of Pollock’s \textit{Cut Out} (1948-50), Leja neglects to pursue the implications of collage in his formulation of the Abstract Expressionist as mythmaker or modern man. Ann Gibson’s \textit{Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics} (1997), a seminal study that examined the biases involved in the construction of art history, seeks to redress the exclusion of minorities from discussions of the New York School. In so doing, Gibson discusses collagists such as Krasner and Ryan alongside artists such as Hedda Sterne and Beauford Delaney.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{36} Anfam, \textit{Abstract Expressionism}, 170-176.
\textsuperscript{40} Ann Eden Gibson, \textit{Abstract Expressionism Other Politics} (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997).
However, this focus on gendered and racial identities focuses on canon formation and does not isolate media, thus a comparative study of Abstract Expressionist collage remains necessary. Some of the most recent compilations of scholarship, such as Joan Marter’s *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context* (2007), remain fixed to painting and omit collage from the discourse, although collage did feature prominently in the catalogue for the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Abstract Expressionism: Works on Paper* (1992) show.\(^41\) This medium-based exhibition brought together drawings, collages, and other small-scale abstractions, featuring Motherwell and Ryan alongside Rothko, Pollock, and others.\(^42\) Unfortunately, Vicente and Krasner were omitted entirely, while drawings and preparatory studies greatly outnumbered collage in the number of reproductions and commentary included. If one were to base the history of Abstract Expressionist collage on current art historical scholarship, it might seem that collage was barely an afterthought at mid-century. While it remains true that painting was by far the most favored and privileged medium, collage was an integral part of many artists’ oeuvres. Since no effort has been made to fashion a comprehensive study of Abstract Expressionist collage, many of the ideas and attitudes shaping the reception and practice of the medium have been lost in the process.

**From Revolution to Put-Together: Collage in New York and the Critical Reception**

While art historians frequently exclude collage from their studies of Abstract Expressionism, a lively debate about the medium and its properties continued throughout the

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1940s and 1950s. Although Peggy Guggenheim’s show was successful as a professional endeavor—William Baziotes and Robert Motherwell each had works purchased—critics were not uniformly convinced of the quality of the work and the exhibition received mixed reviews. No catalogue accompanied the show yet the announcement for Collage indicated the broad scope of the survey, bringing together examples of Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism. By briefly examining the works included in this exhibition, we attain a better understanding of what types of collage were on view in America. Through Guggenheim’s show, the artists of the New York School has access to a diverse history of collage, potentially understanding the various ends to which it had been employed.

A detail of Laurence Vail’s Screen (1940, fig. 1.2) was featured on the printed announcement for the event, highlighting a passage of slanting buildings among crowds of people. This work, a three-paneled wooden screen covered with gouache and newspaper cutouts, stands on four legs; however, a photograph from ca. 1943 (fig. 1.3) reveals no such armature as the triptych, cropped at left, is flush with the ground. Vail affixed collaged elements throughout the composition, producing an allover patterning that would characterize Abstract Expressionism in the following years. Large areas of blue pigment and ocher tones adorn the triptych, and Vail drew upon emblems of industry and architecture, as well as the human form, to produce a dense collection of surreal juxtapositions.

Vail’s Screen certainly followed in the footsteps of Dada photomontage and the Art of This Century exhibition included seminal works by first-generation Dadaists, including George...

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43 Sadie May bought The Drugged Balloonist by Baziotes and The Joy of Living by Motherwell. Baziotes’s wife, Ethel, recalled: “It was a very dramatic sale. It mean a lot to Peggy. Many thought the whole thing was like a toy for her, but this was someone taking exhibition seriously.” Ethel Baziotes, as quoted in Jasper Sharp, “Serving the Future: The Exhibitions at Art of This Century 1942-1947,” in Susan Davidson and Philip Rylands, eds., Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection; Vienna: Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Foundation, 2004): 295. Guggenheim apparently purchased a collage herself, a lost work by André Racz.
Grosz’s *Remember Uncle August, the Unhappy Inventor* (1919, fig. 1.4). Grosz and many of his colleagues in Berlin insisted on labeling their compositions “photomontages” to distinguish their use of photographic elements from the *papier collé* of Picasso and Braque. As such, the Berliners reconstructed the bodily form from fragmented illustrations and photographs, evoking the trauma that afflicted Western Europe following World War I.\textsuperscript{44} The metaphor of corporeal mutilation, linked to the failure of modernity to improve society, led Dadaists like Grosz to embrace the strategies of collage. In the case of Grosz’s image, an assemblage of mismatched facial features, coupled with the appearance of a question mark atop Uncle August’s forehead, suggests the loss of reason among the body politic, a tragic figure Grosz originally dubbed, *A Victim of Society*. A razor blade projects from the figure’s neckline, while a Goodyear inner tube coils along his opposite shoulder, again suggesting the potential for dismemberment and prosthesis. In Grosz’s hands, the act of collage provided a powerful metaphor for bodily trauma in the wake of global conflict and widespread carnage, a departure from the *papier collé* of the earlier generation of Cubists who favored still-life compositions while complicating pictorial illusionism.

Max Ernst’s *The Hat Makes the Man* (1920, fig. 1.5) also appeared in the *Collage* exhibition as a loan from the Museum of Modern Art. This small composition features pencil, gouache, and ink in conjunction with printed images of men’s hats. Arranged in stacks, these photomontages appear vegetal in their branch-like extensions, while their verticality lends a phallic thrust to the imagery. Considering his familiarity with psychology and the theories of Sigmund Freud, the implications of representing such emblems of desire would have compelled the Dadaist. Ernst’s work often maintained an iconoclastic relationship to the institutions of art, and his embrace of collage was predicated upon the rejection of artistic conventions and

\textsuperscript{44} For more on the relationship of collage and photomontage to the events of World War I, see Brigid Doherty, “See: ‘We Are All Neurasthenics’! or, the Trauma of Dada Montage,” in *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Autumn 1997): 82-132.
materials. Like many collagists throughout the history of art, Ernst employed remnants from advertising and newspapers, materials that departed from standard hierarchies of genre, to remain connected to “low” culture. In addition, Ernst’s use of humor betrayed the seriousness of mission that characterized many artworks. Instead, his oeuvre was filled with puns and Freudian “jokework,” and *The Hat Makes the Man* proved no different with the stacks of hats critiquing bourgeois fashion and conformity. An inscription on the collage suggests further this dynamic: “seed-covered stacked-up man seedless waterformer (‘edelformer’) well-fitting nervous system also tightly fitted nerves! (the hat makes the man) (style is the tailor).” Masculine identity comes into question as Ernst’s “anthropomorphic eroticism” transformed the banal into the corporeal, and the mass-produced into the organic.

In reviewing “Collage,” an anonymous *Art News* writer noted that the show began with the origins of collage, the work of Picasso and Gris, and included the “delightful montages” of Max Ernst, before revealing “the gradual decline of the medium up to present day academic repetitions and decorative nonentities.” Howard Devree of the *New York Times* echoed this sentiment, considering the achievements of Gris and Picasso “great,” but lamenting that the exhibit “culminates in a collage (is it symbolic of the medium?) of burned matches. Perhaps one might say that many of the artists seem to have matriculated in the same or similar collages and to have been graduated without high honors in the field.” Devree found the technique hackneyed, a once lively medium exhausted by unoriginal copyists and amateurs. Allegations against the integrity of collage were levied by several critics at mid-century, including Jean

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45 For more on Ernst’s collages and jokework, see Charlotte Stokes, “Collage as Jokework: Freud’s Theories of Wit as the Foundation for the Collages of Max Ernst,” *Leonardo* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 199-204.
Connolly of *The Nation*.⁴⁹ While she found Guggenheim’s display “amusing,” Connolly wrote that collage “make[s] you feel you could have done them yourself; the trouble with *papier collés* is that you have to be Picasso.” The reviewer distinguished between these two approaches, defining *papier collé* as “bits of paper stuck on paintings” whereas collages are “entire pictures made of cut-out shapes.” She described works by Baziotes and Pollack [sic] as “nice,” but dismissed the exhibition, and medium as a whole, as uncomplicated.⁵⁰ Edward Alden Jewell, also of the *New York Times*, found the show uneven, praising a “small, delightful abstraction by Robert Motherwell,” while “much of the work is just thoroughgoing nonobjectivism, painfully derivative or quite original, as the case may be.”⁵¹ Thus, the originators of collage—Picasso, Braque, Gris, and Ernst—were celebrated by many critics, whereas their followers were dismissed as having contributed little to the medium’s development. Despite the manner in which many artists employed collage to agitate, both politically and artistically, American critics responded only to formal concerns. In doing so, they missed the manner in which visual and material disruptions politicized the medium. Picasso’s Cubist collages have been connected to the Balkan Wars and anarchism, particularly through his use of newspaper articles referring to war and political demonstrations, while his *papiers collés* also critiqued Symbolist aesthetics by embracing the mass media and language of journalism.⁵² Yet to American audiences, the formal implications of Cubism overshadowed the political content of these works. Furthermore, these reviews overlooked the anti-art tendencies of Dada, wherein collage offered an artistic approach

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⁴⁹ Connolly substituted for Clement Greenberg as art reviewer at *The Nation* while he served in the army.
apart from academic conventions and representation. By manipulating photographs and mass media imagery—or so this critical trajectory suggested—the Dadaists embraced amateurish aesthetics at odds with the highly refined modernism of their Cubist forebears.

Five years after Peggy Guggenheim’s collage show, the Museum of Modern Art launched an ambitious retrospective that helped institutionalize the technique. Featuring one hundred and two collages by thirty-two artists, the exhibition focused on Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism, bringing together the likes of Arp, Braque, Dalí, Duchamp, Gris, Grosz, Miró, Picasso, and Schwitters. Motherwell’s *Pancho Villa, Dead and Alive* (1943, fig. 1.6), a photomontage by Herbert Matter, and a paper collage by Ronnie Elliott represented Abstract Expressionism, while Arthur Dove and Joseph Cornell were the other Americans included.\(^53\)

While no catalogue was published in conjunction with the exhibition, a press release declared:

> Collage derived originally in 1912 from analytical Cubism, but in the course of 35 years has developed into popular and widespread use in billboards, posters and advertisements. It has been used by the proponents of such divergent movements as Cubism, Dada, Constructivism and Surrealism. Thus the exhibition presents a miniature history of two main currents in twentieth-century painting: the Cubist and abstract movements and the fantastic tradition of Dada and Surrealism.\(^54\)

The exhibition offered a veritable history of collage, from its origins in Cubism through Dada and Surrealism to the contemporary day, and played a crucial role in establishing the canonical works that would feature in subsequent histories of collage. Again, by revisiting a selection of the works included in this show, we gain a better understanding of what types of collage were

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\(^53\) The exhibition checklist for the exhibition is housed at the archives of the Museum of Modern Art. This list includes general biographic material on each artist as well as the specifications of each of the one hundred and two collages exhibited.

available to artists at mid-century, and we gain insight into how this medium may have been understood, formally as well as politically.

*Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912, fig. 1.7), widely celebrated as the first modernist collage, was one of over twenty works by Picasso included in the exhibition. This oval composition featured a synthetic cubist still life painted atop oilcloth stenciled with faux chair-caning. Although the surface of the work remained uniform and flat, Picasso heightened the illusory effect by “framing” the perimeter with rope, thereby signaling the surface texture suggested by the simulated chair-caning. The introduction of what appear to be “real” objects into the fabric of painting produce a jarring reminder of the fabricated nature of the work of art, a property of collage that many found revolutionary. Picasso would not pursue the implications of this work further for another few months, after which he began pasting newspaper fragments onto sketchbooks. In many of these collages, for example *Man with a Hat* (1912, fig. 1.8), another work exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art’s 1948 retrospective, Picasso set blue paper against newsprint to suggest the different tones of the figure’s face. He drew streamlined suggestions of the man’s visage, including eyes and nose, atop the collaged elements, complicating the viewer’s understanding of the work’s construction, particularly with layers of paper obscuring his markings and others seemingly lying beneath his lines. Some scholars argue that collaged element allowed Picasso to reintroduce color into his compositions, while others notice how many of his newspaper clippings refer to current events and, in the case *Man with a Hat*, fictional romances.55

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55 Christine Poggi has argued that, “for both Picasso and Braque, the invention of collage was also a means of introducing color into their works without allowing it to take on the emotional and representational function it had had in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century avant-garde painting.” Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992). Poggi also located “serialized romances” in Picasso’s cutouts. Christine Poggi, “Mallarmé, Picasso, and the Newspaper as
The semiotic density of collage extended beyond textual passages because many of the Cubists examined the nature of signs and representation. Both Picasso and Braque employed the paper cutout as a means of suggesting a musical instrument without representing its entirety. For example, in Braque’s *Guitar* (1913, fig. 1.9) and Picasso’s *Glass, Guitar, and Bottle* (1913, fig. 1.10), both of which were exhibited in New York in 1948, the artists stripped the object to its bare components, employing simple geometric shapes via paper cutouts to signify the referent. Both artists juxtaposed a few vertical lines drawn atop a circle to suggest the sound-hole and strings of the guitar. Braque sketched a rounded shape beneath this form to suggest the contours of the instrument, while Picasso repeatedly pasted curvilinear forms to the canvas to suggest the guitar’s frame. Picasso went one step further by simulating wood graining through drawings, allowing the viewer to understand the suggestion of the instrument through surface as well as shape. Likewise, Juan Gris often employed printed materials to suggest texture and the materials he hoped to represent. In *Breakfast* (1914, fig. 1.11), another work shown in 1948, he employed printed wallpaper to represent the wallpaper of his simulated interior. He also utilized faux wood grain paper to reference the table on which his breakfast still life rests. The word play that characterized later Dada works surfaces here with Gris excising a headline from *Le Journal* to spell his name, thereby allowing the newspaper caption to act as his signature. Thus, in the earliest Cubist collages the paper cutout could signal a variety of meanings: legible typeface spells out references, the shapes of the collaged elements suggest various forms, and the inclusion of disparate materials appeals to tactile sensations.

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While the Cubists have been celebrated primarily for their formal innovations, the photomontages of Dada agitated political authorities with their iconoclastic gestures. While fewer Dada works were included in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibit than Cubism and Surrealism, several seminal works displayed the derisive spirit of the movement. Some of the works exhibited at MOMA employed collage to critique the very production of art itself. Hans Arp’s *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* (1916-17, fig. 1.12) launched an attack against artistic practice by removing the artist from the act of creation. In this series of collages, Arp claimed to have dropped paper cutouts onto the floor and merely pasted them in accordance to gravity’s pull. While these paper shards are arranged in a structured, grid-like format, to Arp, the irregularity of torn paper and chance operations, coupled with a predefined ordering system, removed all vestiges of artistic agency. These collages, then, represented what Arp later defined as “a total surrender to the unconscious,” critiquing modern society’s overemphasis on rational thought and creativity.57

In dubbing their works “photomontages” to distinguish them from Picasso’s and Braque’s *papiers collés*, many Dadaists declared construction and the photographic element to be at the root of their art. In some of these photomontages, for example George Grosz’s *The Convict Heartfield...* (1920, fig. 1.13), photographic prints appear alongside painted or drawn forms. The collaged forms often startle viewers in their relation to, and dislocation from, that which is represented. In the foreground of *The Convict Heartfield...*, Grosz painted a man’s jacket, outlining the article of clothing in a dark contour and coloring his attire blue. Atop this garment he pasted several photographic cutouts of an identical blue fabric, setting these “realistic” components against the abstracted representations painted by hand. Similarly, he

pasted a photograph of architectural facades in the background to suggest a veristic setting for his figure, while he also pasted a print of a mechanical apparatus across Heartfield’s chest, rendering the engineer an object of his own design. This figure evokes the traumatized veteran following World War I with his mechanical outfit suggesting military medals as well as the prosthetics that were ubiquitous following the war. A grotesque self-portrait, Grosz’s photomontage has been related to neurasthenia, the failed revolution of the Communist Party, and the shortcomings of the Weimar Republic.58

Johannes Baader’s *The Author in His Home* (ca. 1920, fig. 1.14) similarly employs photographs to present the home as uncanny, familiar yet strange and unsettling, while identifying himself with Christ. The sacrilegious nature of such gestures recurred throughout the manifestoes and photomontages produced by the Dadaists well into the 1930s. John Heartfield created his *Peaceable Fish of Prey* (1937, fig. 1.15) after being included in the “degenerate” art exhibit sponsored by Hitler and the Nazi Party. This photomontage portrayed Hermann Göring, a high-ranking Luftwaffe officer and Reichstag official, as a predatory fish. Accompanying this hybrid creature is the statement: “I abhor collective security! I invite the little fishes to conclude individual bilateral pacts with me.” The photomontage proved prophetic as Germany invaded Sudetenland one year after its completion, and the Nazi periodical *Völkische Beobachter* reproduced *Peaceable Fish of Prey* to exemplify anti-German sentiments pervasive in Prague where Heartfield resided at the time.59

Many of these collages rendered the Dadaists fugitives as a result of their incendiary political statements; however, not all of the Dadaists created works critical of society. In many ways, Paul Citroen’s *Metropolis* (1923, fig. 1.16) typified the *Amerikanismus*, or love of

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American culture, that characterized modernist artworks from Central Europe. This photomontage, a composite cityscape of truncated facades and overlapping forms was exhibited at the Weimar Bauhaus, where it quickly became celebrated in avant-garde circles for its intricate weave of photographic images. Prior to its appearance in the 1948 collage retrospective, *Metropolis* appeared in a variety of contemporary journals and treatises on photography and architecture. Believing that modern architecture and urbanism merited celebration, Citroen spoke of “elevating” his photographic cutouts to the transcendent status of high art. With over two hundred images interwoven in the composition, the density of architectural forms produced a dazzling effect that led to its popularity and widespread reproduction.

The Museum of Modern Art also included several examples of the Surrealist movement that had emerged following Dada. Recalling Arp and seizing upon the contemporary interest in the unconscious, numerous games and activities facilitated Surrealist artists’ circumvention of rational artistic practice. While many of these techniques were literary, such as the chain poem, the exquisite corpse brought collage into the realm of automatism. The example exhibited at, and purchased by, the museum was produced by André Breton, Max Morise, Jeannette Tanguy, Pierre Naville, Benjamin Péret, Jacques Prévert, and Yves Tanguy (fig. 1.17). These artists constructed the exquisite corpse by pasting materials to the supporting ground individually, folding over the paper, and then passing the collage along to the next artist who would add to the creation without seeing the previously pasted imagery. The checklist of the 1948 exhibition explained the process as, “experiments in collective picture-making, done in section, the paper


61 Ibid., 47-49; Doherty, “Trauma of Dada Montage,” 102-118.
being covered after each addition and passed to the next participant so that he does not see what has already been done.”\textsuperscript{62} This endeavor embraced chance through each artist’s “blind” approach to the work, thereby divorcing their finished product from conscious representation. As Breton later claimed, the exquisite corpse “raised anthropomorphism to its highest pitch [and] constituted the desperate negation of the futile formula of imitation of physical characteristics” that plagued art.\textsuperscript{63} Indeed, the collage exhibited in New York featured an inverted umbrella serving as the figure’s head, a trunk denoting the torso, stacked pots and pans in place of the thighs, and columnar forms denoting the lower legs. The figure becomes highly irrational yet ripe with implications, particularly because the objects used to fabricate the humanoid offer various interpretive potentialities. However, scholars have noted how the exquisite corpse “paradoxically required a high degree of procedural rationality in which folds demarcated spaces for ‘head,’ ‘body,’ and ‘legs,’ and where the materials were agreed beforehand and could not be varied.”\textsuperscript{64} Despite this contradiction, Surrealists like Breton attempted to produce collages rooted in an automatist and liberated approach modeled after the unconscious.

The work of the most infamous Surrealist, Salvador Dalí, similarly engaged in the problematic nature of representing the unconscious. For Dalí and many of the Surrealists, dreams offered a subject matter rooted in desire and the far reaches of the psyche. He endeavored to represent his dreams, but rather than embracing automatism and other devices that allegedly allowed artists to connect to irrationality, Dalí painted his recollections in a precise linear style reminiscent of academic realism. He employed collaged elements sparingly in works like

\textsuperscript{64} Taylor, \textit{Collage: The Making of Modern Art}, 69.
Illumined Pleasures (1929, fig. 1.18), the sole example of his art at the Museum of Modern Art show, and frequently these pasted cutouts appear indistinguishable from painted passages. In this composition, Dalí applied prints to boxes that render them distinct from the dreamscape in both material reality and suggestion through framing. Other collaged elements include photographic forms that fuse nearly seamlessly with his illogical assortment of creatures and personages. Characteristically enigmatic, this collage includes floating lion heads, acts of violence, disembodied faces, and long cast shadows set within an eerily lit sky. Dalí hardly revolutionized the medium, but his use of collage helped to heighten the irrational juxtapositions that appeared throughout works like Illumined Pleasures.

Perhaps the most notable American Surrealist was Joseph Cornell. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s he produced a series of small paper collages as well as the shadow boxes for which he is best known. Cornell’s sole artwork in the Museum of Modern Art exhibition was his Medici Slot Machine (1942, fig. 1.19), a construction featuring numerous reproductions of Sofonisba Anguissola’s portrait of Piero de Medici alongside toy jacks, a compass, maps of the Palatine Hill in Rome, a clock spring, and other reproductions of Renaissance-era artworks. The seemingly incongruous objects brought together in Cornell’s assemblages evoke curiosity cabinets through the mysterious and esoteric collection of objects he excavated for his art. At once alchemical and literary, the Medici Slot Machine and similar works conjured positive, albeit mystified, reviews from critics. Howard Devree wrote of Cornell’s 1939 show at Julien Levy’s Gallery:

For the more exotically minded Julien Levy has set aside the studio room of his gallery for a display of surrealistic objects by Joseph Cornell. Here you may obtain a whirling eyeball under a bell jar, or a book which is a box in which things slide and kaleidoscope, or a wide variety of mobiles. In a foreword Parker Tyler says Mr. Cornell “cathedralizes the thought too silly to mention and returns lost articles of the imagination,” which seems to leave the next move up to Gertrude Stein.66

Cornell is often associated with the New York School because he was contemporaries and friends with many of the Abstract Expressionists, but his use of figuration, photomontage, and bizarre juxtapositions aligned him aesthetically to the Surrealists. His symbolic imagery was often rooted in references to history and the natural sciences, while his assembled constructions linked the appropriative strategies of Duchamp and Rauschenberg.

The Museum of Modern Art collage retrospective firmly established the canon of collage with many of these works becoming representative of the medium in subsequent histories. In addition to standardizing seminal works and artists, MOMA largely determined the theoretical framework through which collage was understood. As curator of the show, Margaret Miller declared that the significance of collage stemmed from its fusion of artifice and realism.

Collage cannot be defined adequately as merely a technique of cutting and pasting, for its significance lies not in its technical eccentricity but in its relevance to two basic questions which have been raised by twentieth-century art: the nature of reality and the nature of painting itself. Collage has been the means through which the artist incorporates reality in the picture without imitating it.67

This exhibition forced many critics to reconsider the history of collage, and, again, many reviewers celebrated the Cubists for their originality. Thomas Hess echoed Miller’s sentiment, declaring that the introduction of physical objects, such as newspaper fragments, into the

artificial world of the canvas revolutionized notions of representation. Not all critics agreed that this synthesis of reality with artifice was good. Howard Devree’s review for the *New York Times* suggested that the best days of collage were over. He believed that contemporary artists (of the 1930s and 1940s) used the medium to undermine conventions of art, shocking viewers with wordplay or “doodling.” Newer works were “of lesser value” than the innovations of Picasso and Braque, as “much of it seems trivial, arbitrary, primarily sensational in aim.”

That Hess and Devree suggested collage might be dated or a fad infuriated Clement Greenberg, a key advocate of the Abstract Expressionists and collage in general. He stated that the general public lacked the refinement and “enlightenment” necessary to recognize the importance of the Museum of Modern Art’s collage show as well as the medium. The significance Greenberg attached to collage deviated slightly from the model accepted by Miller and Hess. Rather than focusing on the fusion of artifice and reality, Greenberg argued that collage was revolutionary in asserting the flatness of the picture plane.

Cubism brought about the destruction of the illusionist means and effects that had characterized Western painting since the fifteenth century. The fictive depths of the picture were drained, and its action was brought forward and identified with the immediate, physical surface of the canvas, board, or paper. By pasting a piece of newspaper lettering to the canvas one called attention to the physical reality of the work of art and made that reality the same as the art...Painting was no longer a matter of fictive projection or description, and the picture became indissolubly one with the pigment, the texture, and the flat surface that constituted it as an object.

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Greenberg, then, was less interested in how elements from real life replaced artistic renderings. Instead, he was fascinated with how collage enabled artists to break free from illusionistic depth, thereby asserting the flatness of the two-dimensional surface. The critic felt that the acceptance of painting’s inherent flatness forever changed the goal of the artist, because throughout the history of Western art, painters attempted to replicate three-dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. Tracing the development of flatness from Manet through Cubism, Greenberg stressed the need for each artistic medium to declare its inherent qualities. For example, sculpture exists in three-dimensions, and Greenberg felt that the effects of volume and depth were its unique characteristics. Collage, on the other hand, “always emphasized the identity of the picture as a flat and more or less abstract pattern rather than as a representation; and it is as a flat pattern that the cubist *papier collé* makes itself primarily felt and enjoyed.”\(^{72}\) Unlike Miller, who praised collage for replacing artifice with reality as a means of depiction, Greenberg championed collage for stressing its status as a two-dimensional object.

Greenberg rehashed his ideas ten years later in an essay titled “The Pasted-Paper Revolution,” which applauded collage because its “surface was now *explicitly* instead of implicitly indicated as a tangible but transparent plane.”\(^{73}\) Greenberg’s insistence on flatness would be challenged by the development of three-dimensional “assemblage” in the 1950s. William Seitz employed the term assemblage to unify artworks that were “predominantly *assembled* rather than painted, drawn, modeled, or carved…their constituent elements are preformed natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials.”\(^{74}\) Rather than sharing two-dimensional flatness or aesthetics of synthesis, the

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\(^{72}\) Greenberg, Review of the Exhibition “Collage,” 261.


collage/assemblage medium became defined through acts of construction because its two-dimensional materials were replaced by taxidermic specimens and crushed automobile parts. However, rather than declaring \textit{papier collé} dead, Thomas Hess praised the New York School for saving collage from the “commonplace” and “cliché.”

And how the torn piece of paper to be pasted…became repurified with all its impurities by the New York artists; it came back into painting through another door as a cool shape-making element—contemplative, introspective, with an aristocratic distance—in works by Motherwell, Vicente, Mallary—as it had, independently and magnificently, in Matisse’s great cut-outs.\footnote{Thomas Hess, “Collage as an Historical Method,” \textit{Art News} 60 no. 7 (November 1961): 71.}

Hess asserted that artists like Motherwell and Vicente sanctified collage by employing canvas and handmade papers, rather than remnants from advertising, journalism, or urban detritus, in their compositions. The Abstract Expressionist collage diverged from Cubism and Dada by rejecting found objects and instead used fine arts materials as collage elements, thereby returning the medium to the lofty realm of “high art” by supposedly removing the referent from the equation. Likewise, New York School artists eschewed the three-dimensionality of “assemblage,” in favor of dialogues with flatness and action painting, thereby connecting to, while contrasting with, trajectories of modernist art.

Barnett Newman, one of these Abstract Expressionists, vehemently disagreed about the nature of collage and its relationship to materials and beauty. In his essay “The Sublime is Now,” published in the December 1948 issue of \textit{Tiger’s Eye} shortly after MOMA’s exhibition of collage, Newman claimed that as modern art became entangled in the values of beauty, it struggled to locate new experiences predicated upon something other than aesthetics. Whereas Newman claimed to be “reasserting man’s desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions,” he found Impressionist painters of modern life to be
“glorifying their own way of living.” Rather than transcending representation and the ideal of beauty, these artists grafted historical aesthetic values onto modern life, achieving neither universality nor absolutism in the process. Newman, and many of his Abstract Expressionist brethren, sought freedom from “memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth…that have been the devices of Western European painting.” Collage, as a technique consisting of quotidian materials, failed to meet Newman’s criteria for the sublime because the medium merely revisits the nature of beauty. He claimed, “The cubists, by their dada gestures of substituting a sheet of newspaper and sandpaper for both the velvet surface of the Renaissance and the impressionists, made a similar transfer of values instead of creating new vision, and succeeded only in elevating the sheet of paper.” Rather than transcending the materiality of the paper cutout, these collagists presented new ideas about aesthetics and illusionism. If a new experience had been generated by pasting newsprint to canvas, Newman argued that the banality of the object turned inward towards the values of society.

Another major apologist for Abstract Expressionism, Harold Rosenberg, continued this line of critique by decrying the medium as a “decisive upheaval” in art history. In a review of Herta Wescher’s Collage for The New Yorker, Rosenberg considered collage a “kind of adversary” within modernist art because it rendered painting and sculpture “superfluous” by reproducing painterly effects in “alien materials.” This criticism was primarily directed at the

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77 Ibid., 173.
78 Ibid., 172.
works of Rauschenberg and Johns, because he considered their assemblages an “assault on Action painting.”

Clearly trying to protect the Abstract Expressionist movement he championed, Rosenberg placed primacy on the act of painting explained one of his biggest problems with collage, its relative ease and parodic nature.

There is inherent element of mockery in collage: the put-together is like a painting, but without the effort of painting or the need to know how to paint. Its materials, besides being inexpensive, have the air of having been picked up by chance, so the collage seems to say to the spectator, “See how easy it is to make a work of art.”

Rosenberg valued the artist, equating him to Melville’s Ishmael, a pioneer disseminating art and society in the wake of global war. That collage could be “practiced in the kindergarten, by housewives making their own home decorations” reduced art to the commonplace and craft.

Rosenberg had no tolerance for the decorative or lighthearted, declaring that “the test of any of the new paintings is its seriousness—and the test of its seriousness is the degree to which the act on the canvas is an extension of the artist’s total effort to make over his experience.”

Rosenberg believed that “advanced” painting, such as Abstract Expressionism, was a revolution led by the privileged artist who revealed, in visual terms, the “metaphysics of things.” With its casual manner and ease of execution, collage rendered art too prosaic for such a grandiose notion of artistic creation.

Rosenberg further criticized collage as the harbinger of such anti-art movements as Dada and Assemblage. The strategy of appropriation that characterized the medium rendered

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80 Rosenberg, “Philosophy of Put-Togethers,” 63-64.
81 Ibid.
83 Rosenberg, “Philosophy of Put-Togethers,” 59.
85 Ibid., 28.
representation obsolete because, as Rosenberg noted, there would be no need to depict a bottle rack if the actual object could be displayed instead. The refinement and tradition of art history was cancelled by the derisory spirit of collage and its inclusion of “chicken wire, broken bottles, and soiled wrappings.” Ultimately, Rosenberg rued the “mingling of object and image in collage, of given fact and conscious artifice” because it accepted the illusory. To Rosenberg, such an act was unnecessary because action painting already destroyed the distinction between art and life. Collage did not need to fuse the pictorial and the physical because he believed that Abstract Expressionism is of the “same metaphysical substance as the artist’s existence.” The act of painting was an event in the biography of the artist, and the canvas was a record of this experience. Ultimately, Rosenberg believed that painting chronicled the artist’s reality, whereas collage problematized experience by parodying artistic practice through the inclusion of irrelevant junk and matter. He found the cut-and-paste process to be less immediate than painting, since the selection and applications of material presents a second level of intercession between the artists and his experience.

Thus, two collage retrospectives in the 1940s, as well as many smaller shows in the following years, led critics to define and redefine the manner in which collage was understood. A variety of opinions about collage emerged ranging from the laudatory to the cynical. What is remarkable about the critical reception of both exhibitions, however, is the apolitical commentary that appeared in print. Rarely did reviewers acknowledge the revolutionary roots and political nature of the medium as practiced throughout the twentieth century. Greenberg and others discussed collage primarily in formal terms, neglecting the agitating approach of the Dadaists and others. Only Rosenberg commented on the derisory spirit of collage, but again, his

86 Rosenberg, “Philosophy of Put-Togethers,” 64
primary concern was the medium’s anti-art tendencies. Scant reference was made to Picasso’s inclusion of politically charged newspaper clippings, nor did critics note how Grosz and Heartfield found themselves jailed and fined for their antimilitaristic satires of the Weimar Republic and Third Reich. Although critics heralded the significance of appropriation for modes of representation as established by these artists, they failed to situate their artworks within the political climates that fostered them.

This critical neglect might be explained as part of a broader de-Marxization of the American avant-garde that occurred in the 1930s and 1940s. While many of the artists associated with the New York School participated in nascent forms of Communism, and many were employed by the socialized art programs of the New Deal, disillusionment emerged among artists and writers following the rise of Fascism and fall of the Spanish Republic. Political figures like Stalin exposed the failures of Communism, leading journals like Partisan Review, which had once been labeled Communist propaganda, to reorient its political affiliations. Artists and critics began seeking an avant-garde divorced from ideology, favoring instead the independence and freedom to pursue art and culture. As World War II established America as a global force and cemented democracy as a powerful alternative to Communism, artists formerly affiliated with Trotsky became increasingly apolitical. Shunning nationalism in favor of “universal” values, many of these artists rejected the notion of art as a tool for educating the masses and turned towards individuality. This climate helps to explain why collage and its implications remained largely absent from American criticism of the time.

Critics may also have missed the radical thrust of montage because the medium had not fully resonated with American artists in the early twentieth century. While some artists, notably

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Arthur Dove, produced collages reminiscent of his Dada peers, little interest in the techniques of montage existed prior to World War II.\textsuperscript{89} For one, few modernist collages featured in the collections of public museums and galleries, thus exposure to the technique as practiced by Picasso and others remained minimal. Furthermore, as Sally Stein has argued, the privileged position of documentary photography in America rendered photomontage anathema.\textsuperscript{90} She has asserted that the reverence for straight photography fostered unwillingness among photographers to splice their images into collaged compositions. In addition, Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, and others championed photography as the most appropriate and effective means of capturing the modern experience, thus the effects of montage seemed largely unnecessary since they were somehow less natural than photographic prints. For example, Lewis Mumford divorced montage from photography altogether, stating that “the various kinds of \textit{montage} photography, they are in reality not photography at all but a kind of painting, in which the photograph is used—as patches of textiles are used in crazy-quilts—to form a mosaic. Whatever value the montage may have derives from the painting rather than the camera.”\textsuperscript{91} In addition, photomontage had roots in European modernism, and to many American artists, this technique bastardized photography. Collage seemed to be the material of anti-art anarchists such as the Dadaists, while it also had links to Soviet propaganda and Socialism, particularly as practiced by the Constructivists and members of the Bauhaus.

Although compelling, such an argument oversimplifies the causes for collage’s relative lack of popularity in the United States prior to 1950, particularly because many artists associated with Abstract Expressionism studied collage and created montages for the Works Progress

\textsuperscript{89} Joseph Stella and John Covert were two of the exceptions.


Administration (see chapter four). Many American artists initially were drawn to the ideals of Socialism, and some of these artists would not have objected if montage had been equated with such forms of propaganda. However, collage may have become neglected because photomontage techniques had been employed for advertisements throughout the 1940s. The abundance of commercial spreads, selling everything from typewriters and refrigerators to advertising agencies themselves, employed techniques that restabilized the collaged image while borrowing from the medium’s graphic nature. Thus, it was not uncommon to see detectives climbing a man’s face while inspecting the quality of his razor, but such montages did not replicate the jarring juxtapositions of Surrealism or Dada. Instead, advertisers sanitized photomontage, utilizing its design components while stripping it of its former political weight. Thus, by the time many of the Abstract Expressionists reached artistic maturity, collage had become an advertising tool or remnant of mass-centered social programs.

To restore the relevance of the medium, the Abstract Expressionists employed the cut-and-paste aesthetic to purely abstract works, reflecting another plausible cause for America’s resistance to photomontage. During the postwar era, Abstract Expressionism became celebrated internationally with abstraction becoming the aesthetic trend most coveted by the art world. With its appropriation of photographic imagery and everyday elements, collage often seemed too rooted in representation and seemingly at odds with abstract aesthetics. However, when Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente turned to papier collé, they divorced themselves from photomontage completely by working abstractly and removing referents. Thus, it can be argued that these artists “re-purified” the medium by removing the quotidian and rethinking the formal significance of collage in terms of composition and pictorial structure. Furthermore, these artists

resisted the de-politicization of collage that occurred through critics and advertisers. Their use of cut-and-paste techniques transcended the formal with these artists mining the signifying rhetoric of collage. From Krasner’s attempts to fashion pastoral harmony from discordant aesthetics and Motherwell’s search for artistic lineage, to Ryan’s conservative ethos and Vicente’s mapping of hybrid cultural traditions, these artists explored the semiotic potential of collage. This potential included the political, particularly as their experiences abroad and with the WPA would have rendered such implications manifest.

**Depoliticizing the Cutout: Collage and Abstract Expressionism**

While the exhibition of collage at Art of This Century featured the work of the Cubists, Dadaists, and other European modernists, the show also included several younger American artists. Those associated with Abstract Expressionism were certainly familiar with the history of collage, and Peggy Guggenheim’s invitation to participate marked the first time Baziotes, Motherwell, and Pollock worked in the medium as professional artists. Motherwell and Pollock decided to work together at Pollock’s studio because, as Motherwell recalled:

Pollock and I were scared of collage yet wanted to be in such a beautiful show. We spent a long afternoon in his studio and made one or two collages. He had no particular feel for collage, but I remember being surprised at the violence of his attack on the material.\(^93\)

This violence included “pasting, tearing, and pouring paint. He burned the edges of the paper and even spit on them.”\(^94\) Motherwell, on the other hand, applied a bit more delicacy, employing rice

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\(^{93}\) Motherwell, quoted in Potter, *To a Violent Grave*, 71.

\(^{94}\) Motherwell, quoted in Mattison, *Robert Motherwell: The Formative Years*, 78.
paper, oil, ink, and a glass button for his first collage. For Motherwell, this experiment proved to be a revelation, and he dedicated significant portions of his oeuvre to collage throughout the remainder of his prolific career. Pollock and Baziotes did not find in collage the same qualities and instead returned to painting as their primary means of execution. Although many artists associated with Abstract Expressionism worked in collage, few dedicated significant portions of their oeuvre to the medium. Some considered collage to be a preparatory exercise or adjunct to painting, whereas others dabbled in the technique only to abandon it altogether. Many artists worked in a figural manner or borrowed heavily from Surrealism. Thus, Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente remain unique in their nonobjective approach to *papier collé*, while their philosophical concerns further distance them from their colleagues experimenting with collage.

Perhaps due to his notoriety and esteemed position within the avant-garde, Jackson Pollock appears in virtually every study of collage despite barely working in the medium. While many of his works included unconventional materials, such as cigarette butts and string, Pollock’s manner of execution stands apart from that of many practitioners of collage. In the catalogue raisonné of the artist, Francis O’Connor and Eugene Thaw identify twenty works of Pollock’s oeuvre as collage.

In distinguishing these collages from Pollock’s other mixed-media works, we have excluded works on irregular sheets mounted on paper or cardboard and major paintings incorporating collage techniques. We have included only those pieces in which the artist integrates two or more layers of material into works which are composite in nature, unified in style, and distinct from his other pictorial methods.

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95 While one of Motherwell’s first two collages has since been lost, a record of his other early work remains via photographic reproduction. Mattison wrote that Pollock “contributed” the glass button to this collage, however Motherwell never used three-dimensional objects for his collages afterwards, as they disrupted the flatness of the picture plane. Ibid.

O’Connor and Thaw point to the problem that too often arises in assessing Pollock’s work: how to consider the accumulation of materials in his allover paintings. The authors refuse to consider his large-scale canvases collage because the collaged element often remains an addendum to painting. In many cases, the inclusion of paint skeins, dirt and soil, and wire mesh become lost among drips and splatters, serving the same pictorial purpose as his brushwork by appearing no different from it. But several examples remain wherein Pollock employed “two or more layers of material,” a method of working commensurate with the appropriative strategies and varying surfaces of collage. For example, many art historians identify ‘Number 29, 1950 (fig. 1.20) as a collage because Pollock scattered steel mesh, string, pebbles, and pigment across a glass surface. This work certainly bears multiple layers of debris and painterly gestures, despite the fact that its overall effect seems related to his mature paintings.

In some of Pollock’s cut-outs, allover drip paintings that feature the application of an appropriated object, collage reground his work in modes of representation. As Michael Fried has argued, the collaged element, for example, a wooden outline of a horse in Wooden Horse: ‘Number 10A (1948, fig. 1.21), restored figuration without undermining his gestural approach to abstraction. The contour of the horse’s neck and head added a physical likeness to an otherwise nonrepresentational work. Thus, collage offered Pollock a means of reconnecting with the figure while continuing to explore his drip method. This became most obvious in Cut-Out (ca. 1948-50, fig. 1.22), where the artist excised the shape of a person and removed it, leaving a blind spot in the canvas that evoked the human form. Similarly in Out of the Web (1949, fig. 1.23), as Fried has contended, Pollock “solved the problem of how to combine figurative line—the line of

97 O’Connor and Thaw, Jackson Pollock, 97.
98 Pollock created this work on glass to accommodate Hans Namuth’s famous film of 1950 in which the photographer taped Pollock from beneath the glass as he worked.
traditional drawing—"with opticality" by cutting away from his painted surface, exposing the bare Masonite backing that supported the composition. This cutout, in Fried’s conception, did not declare the physicality of the layered surface, instead he considered it a moment of optical malfunction where eyesight becomes ruptured. While Pollock does approach the idea of cut and paste in novel ways, and occasionally appropriated found objects such as hobby horses, his experiments related to the problems he faced as a painter more than the medium of collage.

In his contribution to the Guggenheim show, *The Drugged Balloonist* (1943, fig. 1.24), William Baziotes alluded overtly to Surrealist traditions, employing collage to achieve startling juxtapositions. Situating a photograph of a foreshortened motorboat propeller adjacent to images of butterfly wings, the artist conflated the mechanical with the natural. Leaves and insects appear via color reproduction, while images of celestial objects and stop-action photography suggest motion and metamorphosis. Smudges and frottage highlight the surface texture of the piece, while the inclusion of an image of melting ice further elucidates the tactility and perceived three-dimensionality of Baziotes’s collage. Baziotes exhibited his work alongside the New York School, and his automatist brushwork and primordial evocations certainly aligned him with the mythmaking ethos that characterized much of Abstract Expressionism during the 1940s. However, his biomorphic forms often suggested fantastical creatures, and the influence of Surrealists such as Miró, Masson, and Matta remaining strong in his work. In this regard, *The Drugged Balloonist* is not very different from the scope of his paintings. Rather, the manner in which he achieved his Surrealist effects, collage, proved the difference. The title of the work certainly seems apropos as the hallucinatory combination of forms conjures a drug-induced experience. Despite the aesthetic and semiotic potential explored by the artist, he apparently

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found the medium lacking because he never fully returned to it after this experiment.\textsuperscript{100} On the strength of his collage, Baziotes was invited to exhibit at Art of This Century’s “Spring Salon for Young Artists,” after which he showed in numerous exhibitions of Surrealist art. Stylistically, Baziotes fit awkwardly within Abstract Expressionism, and despite the role his early collage played in establishing his professional career—\textit{The Drugged Balloonist} was purchased while on view at the “Collage” exhibition and subsequently entered the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art—he remained committed to painting as his medium.

Baziotes had produced a purposefully Surrealist collage, drawing upon an aesthetic approach to remain in step with certain expectations about the medium. This derivation strayed from the disjointed aesthetics and appropriative strategies informing much of Willem de Kooning’s art. Despite working primarily as a painter, de Kooning was influenced by collage as early as the mid-1940s, as the artist employed dark outlines to encapsulate colors within his compositions. The segmentation of such forms often read as paper cutouts, an effect produced by his refusal to blend shapes or colors. In his essay for the Museum of Modern Art’s 1968 de Kooning retrospective, Thomas Hess astutely noted that:

\begin{quote}
In de Kooning’s works of 1945-46, shapes do not meet or overlap or rest apart as planes; rather there is a leap from shape to shape; the “passages” look technically “impossible.” This is a concept which comes from collages, where the eye moves from one material to another in similar impossible bounds. De Kooning often paints “jumps” by putting a drawing into a work-in-progress, sometimes painting over part of it and then removing it, using it as a mask or template, sometimes leaving it in the picture.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

For example, in *Backdrop for Labyrinth* (1946, fig. 1.25), de Kooning filled the composition with biomorphic shapes amongst a rectilinear armature. Rarely do these shapes overlap; instead they seem to occupy the same space of the picture plane. Rather than producing a perspectival effect, wherein forms illusionistically recede or project from the painting, the artist heeded Clement Greenberg’s advice in asserting the flatness of the painting surface. The clearly contained shapes of color, for example the yellow biomorphic forms and reddish rectangles, never blend together as each pigment remains isolated within its border.

Ironically, in one of de Kooning’s earliest collages, *Two Women on a Wharf* (1949, fig. 1.26), the fragmentation of forms and segregation of colors has been replaced by muddied hues and gestural brushwork. The collaged elements remain nearly indistinguishable from other areas of expressive brushstrokes. These cutouts become apparent only through the stark line emerging from the cut edges of paper. De Kooning’s collage does not utilize elements from everyday life such as newsprint; instead the collaged element remains a surface to be painted no different than the supporting ground. However, like conventional collage, de Kooning rearranged his work to unsettle the viewer and challenge logic. In *Two Women on a Wharf*, his animated brushwork comes to an abrupt halt at the edge of the cutout, halting the sweeping lines and vivid colors of the artist. The continuity of painterly flow becomes thwarted by this new configuration, creating tensions in surface and design.

In *Collage* (1950, fig. 1.27), de Kooning challenged the illusionism that characterized the Cubist collage of Picasso and Braque. In this small, horizontally aligned composition, de

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102 De Kooning created this work as a backdrop for Marie Marchowsky’s dance, *Labyrinth*, which was performed in April of 1946. He was paid $50 for the commission and reportedly based the final design on an earlier painting. The biomorphic forms represented “the four angels at the gates of Paradise” and “Judgment Day,” and was enlarged to a size of sixteen feet, ten inches by seventeen feet. Milton Resnick helped de Kooning complete the backdrop with store-bought paint that cost $5. Sally Yard, *Willem de Kooning* (New York: Rizzoli, 1997): 30.
Kooning used metal thumbtacks to fasten his cut papers, thus highlighting the adhesive component of collage. This work, a meta-collage, refers to the reconstitution and fusion that define the medium itself. Rather than using glue or some other adhesive to covertly affix the paper shards, de Kooning reveals the premise at work in his image-making. This rare acknowledgment of the workings of collage exemplifies Clement Greenberg’s insistence that art retreat inward to the unique properties of its specific medium. And not only did de Kooning specify the process of collage by leaving his thumbtacks exposed, he also underscored the flatness of the picture plane by reminding viewers that the objects lay across a flat surface. No element of depth exists with the tack asserting the existence of a solid plane supporting the accumulation of paper cutouts and painterly gestures.¹⁰³

Likewise, in *Untitled* (1951), the artist challenged sensory expectations by acknowledging the act of collage while simultaneously attempting to mask it. In this work, de Kooning covered a broad, horizontal expanse of ocher parchment with a variety of black gestural markings and various cream and yellow brushstrokes. On the left side of the composition, he taped an irregular, biomorphic paper cutout that initially seems indistinguishable from the pictorial field. De Kooning retraced much of his black cursive script on top of the collaged paper, suggesting the continuity of surface. However, several of his lines come to an abrupt end at the border of pasted paper, underscoring the assembled nature of the piece. Furthermore, de Kooning left visible a small piece of masking tape at the lower left corner of the composition, drawing attention to the disjuncture of surfaces and affixation of paper. Through these means, he implicitly declared this work to be collaged.

¹⁰³ Of *Collage*, Thomas Hess wrote: “An assembly of sliced pieces of paintings thumb-tacked together in 1950 is the prototype of the technique of collage-painting that has been very widely adapted, first in America, now internationally.” Hess, *Willem de Kooning*, 47.
The split between surface and visual perception became most pronounced in de Kooning’s fabled Woman series, works that featured paper cutouts from magazines alongside the artist’s trademark gestural brushwork. Collage not only provided a means for exploring contradiction and disjuncture, it afforded an opportunity for returning to figuration during an era obsessed with abstraction. Thus, collage served as a startup point, enabling de Kooning to ground his imagery in something concrete. In Woman (1950, fig. 1.28), he appropriated an advertisement for Camel cigarettes, affixing the image of a model’s mouth to his energetic composition. As de Kooning explained, at this time he embraced the paper cutout because it reaffirmed representation.

I cut out a lot of mouths. First of all, I thought everything ought to have a mouth. Maybe it was like a pun. Maybe it’s sexual. But whatever it is, I used to cut out a lot of mouths and then I painted those figures and then I put the mouth more or less where it was supposed to be. It always turned out to be very beautiful and it helped me immensely to have this real thing. I don’t know why I did it with the mouth. Maybe the grin—it’s rather like the Mesopotamian idols, they always stand up straight, looking to the sky with this smile, like they just were astonished about the forces of nature you feel, not about problems they had with one another. That I was very conscious of—the smile was something to hang onto.\(^\text{104}\)

This remnant, an image of the body, offered an ironic foundation for dissolving the human form. On the one hand, it spoke to popular culture and the surfeit of advertising imagery in the media. As Robert Storr laments, “De Kooning’s flirtation with the tabloid Muse who emerged from the sea of his exquisite gestures demonstrated that in the modern era automatism is as likely to conjure up a fleshy screen idol as a spare Jungian archetype.”\(^\text{105}\) While taken from popular

\(^{104}\) De Kooning, as quoted in, David Sylvester, “Content is a glimpse…” in Location 1 (Spring 1963): 47.

culture, in this case an advertisement on the back cover of a 1949 issue of *Time* magazine, (fig. 1.29) the archetypal imaging of female remains, albeit updated.

Conversely, art historian Richard Shiff has focused on the sexualized components of de Kooning’s collaged mouths. In addition to punning, these photographic smiles highlight the differences between the “natural and real” and “imaginary.” In de Kooning’s case, the imaginary becomes wedded to desire, becoming “sexual in the preexistent cultural signification or have been eroticized by the painter’s immediate cut and touch.”\(^\text{106}\) The model’s “T-zone” functioned as a site of desire while appearing in magazine advertisements, an element heightened by the artist’s own fetishizing of the smile through collage. By selecting the lips and then removing them from the magazine ad, the artist preserved them as object. In addition, he created effigies around this feature, constructing images around this privileged, and thus fetishized, entity. The act of selection and preservation typical of collage signifies possession, wherein desire governs the imaginary assertion of control.

In other representations of women, de Kooning abandoned the collaged mouth in favor of piecing together several drawings of the female form. For example, in *Woman* (1952, fig. 1.30), the artist combined two images, the first a view of the model’s head and shoulders, the second consisting of her torso and legs. A discernible edge separates the woman and her abstracted anatomical features fail to line up rationally. De Kooning’s *Woman* recalls the “exquisite corpse” of Surrealism, wherein several artists collaborated on figure drawings without consciously knowing which elements of the sketch preceded their own work. These images often featured startling juxtapositions because new forms emerged at the point in which a new artist assumed control. As Thomas Hess noted, de Kooning’s collages achieved a similar effect, particularly as

he “animated” the figure by substituting body parts from preexisting drawings. Hess described de Kooning’s method rather succinctly:

Step 1) do a drawing; Step 2) tear it in two! Combine it with another drawing, its back to front. Tear another drawing on top of it. Perhaps a form will come from which it will be possible to go on to other forms. In this sense, de Kooning is a painter with an immense memory; he works with continuity; his method is a continuous smashing of all his continuities.

Accordingly, this “off-balance” quality succeeds because de Kooning remained somewhat true to anatomical correctness despite his composite approach to the figure. By mimicking some of the conventions of figure drawing—such as the proper allotment of eyes, legs, and breasts—while undermining others—such as the continuity of form—“off-balance is heightened; probabilities increase; the painter makes ambiguity into actuality.”

Collage, then, for de Kooning was a point of departure, a device for grounding or situating his imagery. The pasted object, in this case a mouth, provided an aspect of representation without forcing de Kooning to adopt it himself. His composition could evolve from the human form while concurrently negating or obscuring such figuration. The painter was thus free to embrace abstraction, replicating human forms, albeit ones immersed in painterly gestures. Therefore, the collaged mouth was not only referential, but enabled process by serving as the structural foundation for improvised gesturality. The collaged photograph often becomes lost amidst de Kooning’s markings, magnifying how far removed his style of painting stood from verisimilitude, intensifying the schism between mimesis and abstraction.

In some of de Kooning’s other works from the mid-1950s he borrowed from papier collé by including remnants of newspaper in his paintings. Rather than cutting out these elements and

pasting them to his compositions, the artist transferred the newsprint by pressing it into the painted ground and then peeling away the newsprint. A reverse image of the printed ink remained, allowing de Kooning to embed his paintings with headlines, advertisements, and other commercial imagery.\textsuperscript{110} Gotham News (1955, fig. 1.31) and Easter Monday (1955-56, fig. 1.32) remain the most commonly cited examples of this practice, and these works are often interpreted by scholars as musings on the urban experience, particularly because they evoke “dirt and waste” and the “grime” of the city.\textsuperscript{111} While these newspaper transfers were not assembled or glued together as literal collages, their aesthetic effects and semiotic potential were rooted in the collage medium. Diane Waldman has succinctly summarized this as “the collaging of disparate and discrete shapes and a montage-like technique of overlays that resulted in abrupt shifts in scale and a perceptible, if shallow, illusion of space.”\textsuperscript{112} Additionally, as in conventional collage, de Kooning here incorporated references to the vernacular and quotidian within the fictive world of artifice. These disjunctures extended beyond pictorial surface because the mnemonic came into question while the artist included passages from art history and referred to contemporary popular culture.\textsuperscript{113} Gaps-in-time, de Kooning reportedly reworked Gotham News during the course of a calendar year, as well as perspectival dissociations, thwart the continuity that

\textsuperscript{110} Thomas Hess reported that this discovery was accidental: “In order to slow the drying of paint in such pictures as Attic and Gotham News, de Kooning placed sheets of newspaper over the surface, peeling them off the next day. They left offset images of columns of type and advertisements in the paint and, where de Kooning did not rework, he let the ghostly images remain.” Hess, Willem de Kooning, 76.

\textsuperscript{111} Diane Waldman claimed that “Gotham News and Easter Monday are clearly urban landscapes; in these paintings one can experience the city, its dynamic buildings, its light, its grime.” Diane Waldman, Willem de Kooning (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988): 105.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Brian O’Doherty employed words like “fragmentary” and “discontinuities” to describe de Kooning’s process and the split between “remembering (keeping something from the past) and forgetting (painting over it).” Brian O’Doherty, “Willem de Kooning: Fragmentary Notes Towards a Figure,” Art International 12 (20 December 1968): 25.
supposedly bound the gestural revelations of “action painting.” In addition to the dissociations and fragmentation of collage, *Easter Monday* featured the word play and double entendre that dated to Picasso and the Dadaists. These artists included newspaper captions that referred to political events and contemporary affairs, and in a similar manner de Kooning employed newsprint to include, furtively, content. As Kirsten Hoving Powell has argued in her iconographic reading of *Easter Monday*, de Kooning’s newspaper transfers made numerous references to Christian subject matter, in particular the Resurrection and themes related to Easter. Collage, then, offered him a means to bridge, and possibly parody, the schism between the subjectivity of Abstract Expressionism and former models of reference.

Collage also provided de Kooning with a metaphorical means for mapping modern life. Judith Zilczer has described his work from the mid-1950s as “urban expressionism,” noting that he “combined the active paint surfaces and expressive gesture of Soutine with the disjunctive textures of collage to evoke the ‘Byzantine space’ of the metropolis.” Collage provided both an aesthetic means for representing the disjunctures of city living and an avenue for representing the urban environment. This “antiheroic vision of the postwar city” employed detritus and other vulgar means to challenge the grand modernist utopia celebrated in the early twentieth century. Instead, as Zilczer has claimed, “De Kooning located the essence of metropolis in its teeming life

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114 Harold Rosenberg described action painting as an event that often resulted in an epiphany of sorts for the artist as he struggled towards self-expression. In this way, de Kooning’s lengthy process, as well as the span of time alluded to by the artist, preclude this romanticized “moment” of artistic breakthrough. Rosenberg, “American Action Painters,” 22.


and irrational violence and in the clutter of peeling billboards or the scattered refuse of city streets.”

One of the major collagists of the postwar period, Conrad Marca-Relli, also a member of the New York School, has been omitted from this study for a variety of reasons. While Marca-Relli devoted his career to the medium, producing grand, gestural works of reassembled canvas and paper, his style at mid-century differs greatly from that of Krasner, Motherwell, Ryan, and Vicente. Marca-Relli’s work underwent several transformations throughout his lengthy career. In the early 1950s, he produced haunting cityscapes that evoked Surrealism and Giorgio De Chirico, a result of his frequent travels to Italy and interest in architecture. In 1953, Marca-Relli was in Mexico awaiting the arrival of his art supplies and turned his attention to that which was available, paper. Tearing and pasting, the artist reassembled this shredded pulp into compositions of varying shapes and textures. A seemingly temporary solution begat a lifelong obsession as Marca-Relli reoriented his work from painting to collage. Gradually, the figure captured most of his attention as in Seated Figure (1953-54, fig. 1.33) and Sleeping Figure (1953-54, fig. 1.34); however, his forms often suggested abstracted mannequins rather than real models. Dubbed “mechanamos” by the artist, reclining and seated figures appeared throughout his reconstituted canvases in the mid-1950s. The choice in collage materials, canvas itself, proved unique as did

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119 Marca-Relli frequently referred to the figures in his collages as “manikins” or “mechanamos.” Conrad Marca-Relli, interview by Dorothy Seckler, 10 June 1965, Conrad Marca-Relli Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
the enormous scale in which he worked. Marca-Relli eschewed newsprint and the contingent object of everyday life; instead he appropriated fine art materials for collage, repositioning canvas shards with enamel paint. This novel technique resulted in such mural-sized canvases as *The Battle* (1956, fig. 1.35), his abstract response to Paolo Uccello’s *Battle of San Romano* (ca. 1455). While Marca-Relli certainly deserves more scholarly attention, particularly for his work in the 1960s that employed vinyl and a variety of mass-produced materials, his work of the 1950s remains too figural and art historical for consideration in this study.

Hedda Sterne, a Romanian émigré and the only female member of the “Irascible” group immortalized by Nina Leen in *Life Magazine*, created collages early in her career but abandoned the technique by the early-1940s as her work evolved from Surrealist machinations to geometric abstractions. Sterne first produced collaged images in the late 1930s, exhibiting these *papiers arrachés et interprétés* in 1938. For these works, she borrowed heavily from Arp’s *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* (1916-17) by dropping paper cutouts onto a backdrop before staring at the results to produce an image. Unlike Arp, however, she would produce drawings on the paper shards based on her associations. For example, in *Katsonarock (Portrait of V.X.)* (1941, fig. 1.36), Sterne envisioned the forms as felid, turning what had been blank paper fragments into detailed drawings of cats. Free association and chance had been the hallmark of Dada and Surrealism, and this influence resurfaced in a body of collages she exhibited in New York, first in 1942 at the *First Papers of Surrealism*, and then at Art of This Century in Peggy Guggenheim’s *Exhibition of Collage* and *Exhibition of 31 Women* (both 1943). In these compositions, Sterne favored unsettling and irrational juxtapositions over the automatist

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120 Most of Sterne’s early work was lost during World War II as the artist fled to America in 1941. Sarah Eckhardt reports that Sterne likened her process to “watching clouds,” particularly as she favored light-colored cutouts pasted to dark backgrounds. Sarah L. Eckhardt, “Consistent Inconsistency: Hedda Sterne’s Philosophy of Flux,” in *Uninterrupted Flux: Hedda Sterne* (Urbana-Champaign: Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, 2006): 5.
devices of her earlier works on paper. In one such collage, she positioned a photograph of a
giraffe atop an elevated snapshot of a city street, making the animal seem gargantuan in size as it
looms over the town below (fig. 1.37). Another collage features two silhouetted figures with
“Make this a White Christmas” emblazoned across their torsos while two elegantly dressed
women towered above an industrial landscape (fig. 1.38). Still another features human forms,
including a hand with bracelets and eye, fused with photographs of hair or twine (fig. 1.39). One
of these works may contain a reference to the Nazi party as Sterne superimposed a little girl atop
a photograph of a public bonfire or spectacle, placing a burning hand above the girl’s head (fig.
1.40). However, by 1942, Sterne focuses her energies on her Romanian heritage, producing
nostalgic images of Bucharest. She would go on to change styles numerous times, creating
machine-like abstractions alongside portraits, geometric abstractions as well as organic ink
drawings. Despite the range of her work throughout the remainder of the twentieth century,
Sterne scarcely returned to collage, making a name for herself as a painter, draftsman, and
printmaker rather than collagist.

In many of Franz Kline’s collages from the late 1940s through the 1950s, the technique
enabled him to highlight fragmentation and hard edges. Works like Untitled (c. 1948, fig. 1.41)
juxtapose painterly, organic brushwork with the linearity of cut paper edges, heightening the
gesturality that produced such compositions. Harry Gaugh has labeled Kline’s approach to
collage, “piecemeal geometry,” indicating the manner in which disparate objects are fused
together on the picture’s surface. The invocation of “piecemeal geometry” suggests quilting
traditions, and Kline’s works certainly draw attention to synthesis and the boundaries delineating

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121 Eckhardt made this connection, noting how “the child reaches her hands out toward a fire (perhaps a reference to
a Nazi demonstration).” Ibid., 15.
the separate cutouts. However, the artist diverged from quilting in the irregularity of his collage
elements as well as his attempts to mask or disguise them. *Untitled*, for example, bears none of
the rectilinear segments that often characterize quilts. Furthermore, the edges of his cutouts
occasionally were painted over, making it difficult to fully trace those parts of the composition
that are pasted onto the supporting ground. Like many of the Abstract Expressionists, Kline
seems to have considered the collaged component analogous to the application of paint. The
complex layering of pigment and paper cutout occurred in intervals and it remains difficult to
clearly discern the exact process by which the work was made. At times papers were pasted atop
the painted surface, while in other instances these collage elements were painted over and
obscured Kline’s artistic starting point.

By the 1950s, like many of his New York School brethren, Kline approached collage
merely as a preparatory measure for his larger oil paintings. The aesthetic potential of the
medium enabled Kline to solve some of the formal problems confronting abstract artists at mid-
century, namely compositional strategy. By cutting and pasting objects in the preliminary
collages, Kline was able to experiment with his layouts, as he could arrange and rearrange the
collaged forms more easily than if executed in paint. As such, collage granted the artist freedom
and flexibility as he developed his mature abstractions. For example, in *Green Oblique* (1956,
fig. 1.42), a study for his *De Medici* (fig. 1.43) of the same year, Kline laid green rectangles
vertically across a black and white supporting, pasting a white square to the top right corner of
the composition. In the subsequent painting, executed on a far larger scale—Kline’s preparatory
collages were often smaller than two feet across whereas his canvases often measured ten feet in
width—these shapes reappear, albeit as gestural brushwork in the same hue and location as the
paper cutouts. Not only did Kline replicate the two green “oblique” verticals in paint, but his
white collaged square resurfaces as blank, white space. Thus, the collaged study enabled Kline to concretize spatial and coloristic elements without having to repaint or remove pigment from the finished canvas. Kline continued this process into the 1960s, employing jagged paper cutouts to inspire the hard angles and heavy brushwork of *Andrus* (1961, figs. 1.44-1.45).

Kline’s collages were often much smaller than his completed canvases and despite their small scale, he utilized the medium to experiment in composition, brushwork, and materials. He produced a series of collages in the early-1950s that employed the pages from a telephone book as the supporting ground and collage elements. In these works, he variously applied oil and tempera to the papered surface, sampling the gestures and calligraphic lines that would become his trademark. In some instances Kline used one page from the telephone book as his background while in others, such as *Untitled II* (ca. 1952, fig. 1.46), he cut apart these pages and pasted them together to challenge the regularity that characteristic the book’s layout. The artist thereby upset geometric rigidity or consistency, juxtaposing the shifts and fractures of collage with his brushwork that frequently halted or changed direction. In this way, Kline adopted one of collage’s primary achievements, displacing the continuity of pictorial illusionism that characterized art since the Renaissance.

Other members of the New York School borrowed the appropriative tactics of collage and applied them to three-dimensional assemblages. Despite working closely with artists like Jackson Pollock and Jean Dubuffet while producing allover compositions with thick impasto in the early-1950s, Alfonso Ossorio became known primarily for his mixed-media assemblages of the 1960s. While these synthetic works mark a point of departure from the gestural canvases of Pollock and others, Ossorio’s fusion of shells, plastic trinkets, and wooden artifacts developed logically from his experimentation with collage and surface texture. As early as 1950, Ossorio
produced *Baby with Attentive Family* (1950, fig. 1.47), a vertical abstraction covered with ink, watercolor, and paper cutouts. A variety of painterly gestures pervade the picture plane, as Ossorio alternated thin black lines with crayon scribbles and sweeping brushstrokes. He proceeded to add slender biomorphic forms cut from pre-painted paper to the work, collage elements that remain difficult to locate amidst the busyness of Ossorio’s abstract doodling. While the collaged areas would not become the focal point of Ossorio’s mature work, he gradually increased the number of external elements to his compositions, lodging them into his thickly impastoed paintings of the late-1950s. As Ossorio explained, this maneuver—the inclusion of objects in his compositions—emerged naturally as he experimented with surface materialism.

It happened very naturally in terms of my work. Right after doing the church and the series of rather complex wax and watercolors I had a sort of hard-edge period in oil. Then there was a period of paintings of contrasting texture with areas in an impasto white lead and oil – white lead with the pigment in it. Then slowly objects started to get imbedded into the impasto until I had to make a choice whether I would give up doing this or use a medium that was more suitable. I chose the natural thing which was plastic. To hold together heterogeneous objects on that scale you need a complex molecule such as a plastic molecule, a man-made product that was discovered simply because there were new problems to be met. And then of course both the possibilities and the troubles are endless because you are not dealing with a trusted art medium but with industrial problems. However, I have a strong suspicion that what human beings make human beings preserve. There’s nothing inherently self-destructive in these plastics. \(^{123}\)

Ossorio noted how the pasting of objects into his pigment emphasized texture, enabling him to achieve contrast in consistency and surface. These collaged canvases marked only one stage in the artist’s progression, particularly as he embraced wax as a means of embedding plastic objects into mixed media assemblages. Ossorio dubbed these combines “congregations,” underscoring their constructed nature while situating his oeuvre within a lifelong exploration of Catholicism.

\(^{123}\) Alfonso Ossorio, interview with Forrest Selvig, November 19, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Ossorio hoped the “unexpected juxtapositions” of his collages and “congregations” would evoke the awe and splendor of religious experience. This focus on spirituality veers dramatically from the intentions behind the cut-and-paste aesthetic, yet Ossorio’s recognition of the medium’s complexity as a signifying system aligns him with Dada and the Surrealists. Nonetheless, Ossorio’s bricolage of the 1950s and 1960s paralleled the Junk assemblages of Jess and Arman more than the *papier collé* of the New York School.

Despite the protestations levied by Rosenberg and others against collage, virtually every artist associated with Abstract Expressionism, with the exception of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, experimented in collage. While photomontage had been rejected by photographers and embraced by commercial advertisers, several artists made the collage medium the primary focus of their work, rooting their cut-and-paste aesthetics in abstraction. Unique for their nonobjective approaches and preference for fine arts materials, these artists reconsidered the possibilities of collage in terms of scale, surface, and semiotic potential. Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Anne Ryan, and Esteban Vicente continued the “pasted paper revolution” in New York at mid-century, and the “put-together” would have its day.

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CHAPTER 2: BLUE WITH CHINA INK:
ROBERT MOTHERWELL, JOHN CAGE, AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF COLLAGE

In 1949, John Cage was invited to speak at the Artists Club in New York City, an interdisciplinary arts project led by Robert Motherwell that became a driving force behind Abstract Expressionism.\(^{125}\) The composer responded with his infamous “Lecture on Nothing.” Organized around repetition and read to a rhythm based on four measures per line and twelve units per section, the lecture mimicked Cage’s musical scores in time and structure through its repetitiveness, simple durational scheme, and aversion to syntax. Discussing precisely what its title suggested, nothing, Cage asserted, “What we re-quire / is silence.”\(^{126}\) Such silence appeared throughout the speech in the form of lengthy pauses, as he followed his unconventional rhythmic scheme to a maddening end. He replied to the audience’s questions with “one of six previously prepared answers regardless of the question asked.”\(^{127}\) Throughout the program, Cage reiterated, “I have nothing to say / and I am saying it.”\(^{128}\) He further explained, “As the talk goes on / we are getting / nowhere.”\(^{129}\) Exasperated by the cadence and lack of content in Cage’s presentation,

\(^{125}\) In 1948, William Baziotes, David Hare, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman created “The Subject of the Artist” school at 35 East Eighth Street. Motherwell planned lectures that took place on Fridays and featured leading artists, composers, and intellectuals. Despite the economic problems that forced the school to close the following year, lectures continued at the loft, dubbed Studio 35. Also known as the “Club,” this group of artists featured over sixty members by 1950. Practically every artist associated with Abstract Expressionism joined with the exception of Jackson Pollock and Clyfford Still.


\(^{127}\) John Cage, foreword, Silence (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): ix. Cage rationalized this strategy by suggesting that “a discussion is nothing more than an entertainment.” These predetermined answers were: “1. That is a very good question. I should not want to spoil it with an answer. 2. My head wants to ache. 3. Had you heard Marya Freund last April in Palermo singing Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, I doubt whether you would ask that question. 4. According to the Farmers’ Almanac this is False Spring. 5. Please repeat the question… And again… And again… 6. I have no more answers.” John Cage, “Afternote to Lecture on Nothing,” in Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 126.


\(^{129}\) Ibid., 121.
artist Jeanne Reynal interrupted the performance by storming out of the room while shouting, “John, I dearly love you, but I can’t bear another minute.”\textsuperscript{130}

Caroline Jones has argued that Cage’s presentation rejected the doctrines of the New York School, effectively “finishing” the subjectivity of Abstract Expressionism by replacing the artists’ ego with nothing. Believing that the “Lecture on Nothing” vanquished the “natural, heroic sublime” of Abstract Expressionism, Jones is one of many scholars to suggest that Cage undermined the grand aspirations of the New York School.\textsuperscript{131} For example, Irving Sandler has contended that Cage “launched a major assault on the existentialist influence on the visual art” as characterized by Abstract Expressionism.\textsuperscript{132} In addition, David Bernstein has considered Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” an “inflammatory jab aimed at the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism.”\textsuperscript{133} Considering Cage’s dissenting stance towards Abstract Expressionism, it might be surprising that in 1946, three years before the “Lecture on Nothing,” Robert Motherwell honored the composer with his collage \textit{Blue with China Ink: Homage to John Cage} (fig. 2.1). After all, with his monumental, gestural canvases, Motherwell personified the myth that Cage attempted to explode, that of the male artistic genius.\textsuperscript{134}

Cage has often been cast as an iconoclast, a Neo-Dadaist who, after patterning himself after Marcel Duchamp, partnered with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns to disrupt the aggrandizing rhetoric upholding Abstract Expressionism. On the other hand, Robert Motherwell has been considered the personification of the masculine bias characterizing much of the New

\textsuperscript{130}Cage, foreword, ix.
\textsuperscript{134}Jones, “Finishing School,” 642-643.
York School, particularly because his canonical *Spanish Elegies* symbolically evoked the prized *cojones* of Spanish bullfights through abstracted phallic forms (fig. 2.2).\textsuperscript{135} Indeed, by advocating nothingness and inaction in his “Lecture on Nothing,” Cage refused the heroic creative act, replacing the masculine subjectivity of Abstract Expressionism with a “technologically mediated selflessness.”\textsuperscript{136} Why, then, would Motherwell create a work of art honoring his opponent, the man whose “Lecture on Nothing” negated his Abstract Expressionist values? After all, Motherwell previously commemorated only those individuals he considered historically important, including Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa and French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé.\textsuperscript{137} Motherwell considered an homage “a thanks, an identification,” but by focusing on Cage’s divergence from Abstract Expressionism, art historians have yet to fully consider why Motherwell identified with Cage in the first place.\textsuperscript{138}

Motherwell and Cage have been perceived as adversaries because of the aesthetic and philosophical differences they developed as mature artists in the 1950s, yet scholars have overlooked the collaboration of Motherwell and Cage on projects like the Artists Club and the journal *Possibilities*. Previous research has neglected the brief period in the late 1940s when they were quite close, both professionally and personally. In highlighting the areas in which their mature work diverged, art historians such as Jones have situated the pair as an “odd couple,” all

\textsuperscript{135} In one of the earliest discussions of Motherwell’s *Elegies*, E.C. Goosen wrote: “The huge ovarian forms hang in heavy precariousness between broad male uprights; or perhaps it is the phallus and *cojones* of the sacrificial bull hung on the whitewashed wall.” E.C. Goosen, “Robert Motherwell and the Seriousness of Subject,” *Art International* 3, no. 1-2 (1959): 34. Emphasis original to the article.

\textsuperscript{136} Jones, “Finishing School,” 642.

\textsuperscript{137} The other individuals Motherwell had commemorated with artworks at this time were: Pancho Villa, Stéphane Mallarmé, Federico García Lorca, and James Joyce.

but forgetting Motherwell’s collaged tribute. It can be argued that in the mid-1940s, Cage’s work and interests placed him squarely within the aesthetic and theoretical bases of Abstract Expressionism; he had not yet met Rauschenberg nor divorced himself from the credo of the New York School. Instead, Motherwell and Cage shared many interests as they developed their careers, and Blue with China Ink remains a record of this friendship, offering clues to Motherwell’s admiration for Cage. Yet this collage also chronicles Motherwell’s misreading of Cage’s artistic intentions, and the two had a falling out just a few years after the composition was completed. It seems that Motherwell’s abstract tribute was based on the person he hoped Cage would be: a Dadaist composer aligned with Motherwell’s ideals of modernism. Thus, a comparison of their work at this time sheds light on what brought them together, while anticipating how their art and music would diverge. The similarities and contrasts in their aesthetic approaches also reveal how Motherwell misinterpreted Cage and why he considered the iconoclastic musician a kindred spirit at all. Thus, Blue with China Ink affords an opportunity to rethink Motherwell and Cage’s relationship and the formative years of the New York School.

Few letters remain that chronicle the relationship between Motherwell and Cage; however, Motherwell described the circumstances of their meeting in an interview with Ann Gibson:

[Cage] started out in Seattle. We encountered each other in New York, and being from similar backgrounds, there was a rapport. I gave him a picture. For a while I went around with a girl who lived, as did Cage, in Cooper Village—they shared

\[139\] Van Hook, “Robert Motherwell’s Mallarmé’s Swan,” 104. Blue with China Ink has received very little critical attention amongst art historians. Robert Mattison briefly lists the work among Motherwell’s collages that “herald the forceful figuration and painting style which would dominate his art in 1947 and 1948.” He continues to describe the work as “an abstracted studio scene,” and dedicates only two paragraphs of formal analysis to the composition. Mattison also erroneously reproduced the collage upside down, perhaps contributing to his figural interpretation. Robert Saltonstall Mattison, Robert Motherwell: The Formative Years (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986): 145-147. Helen Westgeest also reproduced Blue with China Ink to exemplify Motherwell’s interest in Zen, but like Mattison, only discusses the work in a brief paragraph. Helen Westgeest, Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art Between East and West (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1998): 61.
the same landing and often left the door open between the two apartments. He’d invite me in for a cup of tea.  

Their similar background was California since both men hailed from the West Coast, and Jones has speculated that Motherwell and Cage came together because of “their position as highly articulate intellectuals.” Yet beyond the coincidences of their upbringing, the two shared an interest in Zen Buddhism and literary figures such as James Joyce and Stéphane Mallarmé, while as artists they challenged conventions of form and structure. Uninterested in the politics of the artist, Motherwell and Cage promoted the role of chance in the creative act. Central to their congruities was collage, with each artist embracing its philosophy, aesthetics, and methods. The medium of collage thus served an appropriate means for Motherwell’s tribute, and both painter and composer have been considered pioneers in applying the technique to their respective media.

Motherwell’s collage stands 40 inches by 30 inches and is vertically oriented. A pale blue ground supports cutouts in ocher and white, with most of these forms appearing rectilinear in nature. The dominant figure on the right of the collage is irregularly shaped and elongated. Motherwell outlined this ochre mass with charcoal, accentuating the contours of its supporting ground with a cream-colored pigment. To the left of this figure stands an upright rectangle in white. Charcoal or pencil outlines create a square in the lower half, while these marks bisect the upper panel, culminating in a horizontal line and three-pronged fork that continues into the upper rectangle. An ochre band divides the central, vertical zone; and each half possesses an irregular but circular spot of China ink: the lower register in blue, and the upper zone in yellow and red. The same red ink appears in a horizontal band at the lower left of the composition, a shape that is again outlined in thin charcoal or pencil lines. A hint of perspective emerges from these lines, as

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they diverge diagonally to left, creating the effect of a schematic box or platform on which the aforementioned shapes rest. The top third of the collage features a band of dark blue paper that is partially obscured by an ochre square on the right and two rectangles on the left. Here, Motherwell has allowed the ink to absorb into the Japanese rice paper, generating the effects of staining or Rorschach ink blots. To the extreme upper left stands the red outline of a vertical rectangle, spanning an ochre and dark blue mass, while directly to the right appears a smudge of black ink on white paper.

**Asian Sources**

For his tribute to Cage, Motherwell employed Japanese rice paper and China ink, fitting selections considering that both were interested in Zen Buddhism. Many intellectuals shared an affinity for Asian art and philosophy because, as James Brooks suggested, Zen offered an ideological thread binding the otherwise disparate artists known as the New York School:

> Zen came in pretty strong to the Club and a good many members were very receptive to it because it emphasized the pure confrontation of things rather than intellectualization. I don’t think The Club was ever anti-intellectual at all but there was the deep felt need to confront things in a purer way without bias, or as innocently as could be done… there was the necessity to be conscious of it, or to make a real attempt to see things or to experience them simply. So Zen did take quite a hold, or rather we had a great many talks about it. A great many people were interested in it. I certainly was at the time. There was a general feeling that we couldn't quite do it, that we were too Western. Some people thought it was silly, but I think it was taken pretty seriously at the time. 142

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Ruth Fuller Everett, a student of Zen Buddhism who worked on behalf of the First Zen Institute in New York during the 1940s and 1950s, remarked that “ultra-modern painting, music, dance, and poetry are acclaimed as expressions of Zen. Zen is invoked to substantiate the validity of the latest theories in psychology, psychotherapy, semantics, free-thinking, and what-have-you. It is the magic password at smart cocktail parties and bohemian get-togethers alike.”143 Zen’s appeal in postwar America stemmed from its affirmative philosophy, particularly as Cold War anxiety reached a fever pitch, and its status as a “full-blown New York fad” linked Motherwell, Cage, and a generation of artists and writers.144

Inspired by Zenga, the Zen tradition of calligraphy and painting, Motherwell created many works throughout his career that featured thin washes of ink applied in an automatic manner. Some of these paintings conflated art with the samurai tradition, such as his Samurai series of 1974 (fig. 2.3-2.4), while others referred directly to master calligraphers, including Shem the Pen Man of 1972.145 Motherwell romanticized the Zen calligrapher and Samurai as heroic individuals who acquired esoteric knowledge and skills. Cage, on the other hand, pursued the meditative component of Zen, one of many divergent views these artists had about the same

143 Rick Fields, How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America, 3 ed. (Boston and London: Shambala, 1992): 205. Everett had married Sokei-an Sasaki, a Zen master who led the First Zen Institute, which was founded in 1930, until his death in 1945.

144 Helen Westgeest similarly argued that “for the New York artists, who felt rather desperate about life, the acceptance of uncertainty as something natural (which Cage claims to have learnt from Zen philosophy), and the positive focus of Zen’s outlook on life, were undoubtedly interesting subjects for discussion.” Westgeest, Zen in the Fifties, 59. For more on the influence of Zen Buddhism and other Asian philosophies on postwar American art, see Gail Gelburd and Geri De Paoli, The Transparent Thread: Asian Philosophy in Recent American Art (Hempstead: Hofstra University Museum; Annandale-on-Hudson, Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College, 1990). Patterson described Zen as a “full-blown New York fad.” David W. Patterson, “Cage and Asia: History and Sources,” in The Cambridge Companion to John Cage, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 53.

145 Barbara Rose has suggested that “much of the art of calligraphy appealed to the Abstract Expressionists: the notion that it could only be properly practiced by adepts, that it was an elite form difficult to master, that it was initially done by aristocratic scholar-monks who had turned their backs on the material world. To this ideal, they added their own romanticized vision of the artist as samurai.” Barbara Rose, “Japanese Calligraphy and American Abstract Expressionism,” in Words in Motion: Modern Japanese Calligraphy (Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress; Tokyo: The Yomiuri Shimbun, 1984): 39.
subjects or shared interests. Motherwell’s knowledge of Asian art has been well documented and he owned many books on the subject, including *Chinese Calligraphers and Their Art* by Ch’en Chih-mai and *Zen Painting* by Yasuichi Awakawa.\(^{146}\) Motherwell developed this interest during the mid-1940s while in San Francisco, often deriving his automatic gestures from the processes of the Zen masters. Zenga calligraphers underwent meditative states while working, ostensibly achieving an authentic experience free from illusion that Motherwell craved.

For Motherwell and the Zen artist, composition provided a means for achieving transcendence and harmony, with balance remaining constant through the work of art.\(^{147}\) This balance, in the guise of formal symmetry, served as a metaphor for the individual achieving a harmonious oneness with spirit. To Motherwell and other artists and writers of the postwar era, the concepts of Zen, transcendence, and the unconscious became conflated as these individuals fused elements for Buddhism, Surrealist automatism, and Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis into an ethos privileging detachment from the ego, material reality, and other forms of limited consciousness.\(^{148}\) Although drawn to the action and gesturality of calligraphy, Motherwell most coveted the self-revelatory and meditative state attained in the process. In 1950, he wrote:

…that rejection of the lies and falsifications of modern Christian, Feudal aristocratic, and bourgeois society, of the property-loving world that the Renaissance tradition expressed, has led us, like many other modern artists, to affinities with the art of other cultures: Egypt and the ancient Mediterranean, Africa, the South Seas, and above all the Orient.\(^{149}\)

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\(^{147}\) Addiss, “Provincial Dualism: Robert Motherwell and Zen,” 72-73.

\(^{148}\) As Robert Hobbs has likewise argued in his study of *Possibilities* that the term “transcendence” was employed frequently during this era, as mythology, magic, intuition, and the unconscious or subconscious world were of interest to artists and intellectuals at this time. Hobbs, “Re-review: *Possibilities,*” 98.

\(^{149}\) Robert Motherwell, “The New York School,” reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, eds. Dore Ashton and Joan Banach (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007): 96. “The New York School” was an essay Motherwell presented at the Mid-Western Conference for the College Art Association in Louisville, Kentucky, October 27, 1950. This was the first time that Motherwell publicly used the designation, “The New York School,” to discuss the art of his contemporaries.
The “Orient” represented a means to escape western Capitalism and its trappings, and as Motherwell stated, Asian cultures stood “above all” in providing the artist with a model apart from base materialism. Barbara Rose has argued that the interest in non-Western cultures during the postwar years “can be attributed to the avant-garde search for spiritual values in a materialistic age.”\footnote{Barbara Rose, “Japanese Calligraphy and American Abstract Expressionism,” 38.} Many members of the New York School rejected the “decadence” of European culture, favoring instead the asceticism and profundity of calligraphic gestures common to Zen artistry.

This appropriation of Eastern thinking was not only philosophical, instead many artists, notably Motherwell, aped “Oriental” styles and techniques as a means of tapping into the non-Western approach. Thus, the automatic brushwork of *Blue with China Ink* might be understood as Motherwell’s attempt to mimic the spirit of the Zen master. In fact, the celebration of exalted figures via calligraphic portraits was common among Zenga artists. Hakuin Ekaku’s famous ink drawing of *Daruma* (Edo period, 18\textsuperscript{th} century, fig. 2.5), the monk who introduced Zen to China, may have been on Motherwell’s mind when he produced several tributes to individuals he considered important, thus providing a historical and Zen-inspired precedent for his homage to Cage. In addition, the abstract inkblots of red, ocher, and blue resemble the Ensō, or spiritual circle, of *Sumi-e* ink paintings, while the juxtaposition of black ink on the white rectangle along the top of the collage signals the black-and-white palette of Zen calligraphy (fig. 2.6).\footnote{Helen Westgeest has also connected *Blue with China Ink* with the Shō and *Sumi-e* traditions. Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties*, 61.} Motherwell himself acknowledged “an affinity between certain Oriental—especially Japanese Zen—painting and some of my own work… the obvious reduction of color, the predominance of
black and white, and the importance of gesture.”152 Motherwell approached works like *Blue with China Ink* sparsely, employing a limited number of colors and forms for his collages. Zen drawings often possess a minimal amount of adornment, highlighting the interaction of ink and paper by eschewing superfluous elements. When comparing *Blue with China Ink* with other contemporary collages by Motherwell, such as *The Joy of Living* (1943, fig. 2.7) and *View from a High Tower* (1944, fig. 2.8), it becomes apparent that this work remains less densely constructed and more lyrical in the colors and gestures used. Although the prominent blues and ochers diverge from the severe black of Zenga, the limited range of hues and designs may have struck Motherwell as formally reductive in the spirit of Zen.

Motherwell’s selection of imported materials, Japanese rice paper and China ink, coupled with Zenga-inspired formal elements, composed his tribute to Cage because he considered the composer to be a kindred spirit in his fascination with Buddhism. Cage studied Zen, and like Motherwell developed his artistic theories in response to its precepts. Although both men employed Zen as an aesthetic and philosophic means, the end result of their Buddhist appropriations varied considerably. Cage first encountered Zen in 1936 while attending a lecture by Nancy Wilson Ross at the Cornish School in Seattle on “Dada and Zen Buddhism,” and became friends with Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, both of whom visited Buddhist sites domestically and abroad.153 In addition, he found inspiration in the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy, particularly *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934), a work that

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153 While teaching in England from 1931-33, Tobey met Arthur Waley, who published *Zen Buddhism and Its Relation to Art* in 1922. Tobey would travel to Shanghai in 1934, studying calligraphy with Chinese artist Teng Juei while staying in a Buddhist monastery near Kyoto for a month later that year. Tobey was close friends with Cage and Graves in Seattle, and Zen Buddhism was a common interest amongst them. Graves traveled to Japan in 1928, painted with Japanese materials, and frequented a Buddhist temple in Seattle. In New York, Graves and Tobey exhibited with a “striking number of Zen-oriented artists” at the Marian Willard Gallery in the early 1940s. Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties*, 46-51.
synthesized Indian and Chinese theories with medieval European mysticism, while he also studied *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the teachings of an Indian mystic. Through an agreement with Geeta Sarabhai, who had studied Hindustani music, Cage taught Sarabhai the theories of his mentor, Arnold Schoenberg, while Sarabhai taught Cage about Indian music. These sources informed a number of his writings from the mid-1940s to early-1950s, including his 1946 essay “The East in the West,” a survey of “Oriental” music and its “non-thematic, non-harmonic, non-motival” elements. Cage later cited numerous canonical Buddhist and Taoist texts in his own writings, including Huang Po’s *Doctrine of Universal Mind*, the writings of Kwang-tse, and critical works on Japanese literature like Reginald Horace Blyth’s *Haiku* and Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics. However, it was Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, a Japanese expatriate and scholar of Zen Buddhism, who most influenced Cage’s understanding of East Asian philosophies.

Suzuki came to New York in 1950 and lectured at Columbia University soon thereafter. Cage attended many of Suzuki’s lectures at Columbia and claimed him as one of his most important teachers, the other being the composer Schoenberg. While the degree to which Suzuki informed Cage’s work remains debated, Cage immersed himself in Eastern thought during this time. Lao-Tse’s *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching* were frequently mentioned texts, and the idea of “accomplishing nothing” in Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” seems to have been informed by

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156 Patterson notes that the details surrounding Cage and Suzuki’s lectures remain vague. Cage’s memory of the lectures often contradicted historical accuracy, though witnesses attested to his attendance at Suzuki’s talks. Suzuki rarely appeared in Cage’s writings beyond the odd anecdote, and Patterson admits “it is tremendously difficult to gauge the proper weight Suzuki is to be afforded in Cage’s aesthetic development.” Patterson, “Cage and Asia,” 53-57.
Huang Po’s *Doctrine of Universal Mind*. Cage often referenced this ninth-century text, borrowing Huang Po’s rhetoric and structure. For example, in his essay “Experimental Music: Doctrine” (1955), Cage copied the master-student dialogue and its salient points, in particular nothingness as the root of enlightenment. Cage also employed the parables of Kwang-tse to question reality and states of being, and came to believe that the self-naughted state advocated by Zen Buddhism could be achieved through music. In writing about a concert he attended in 1948, Cage explained:

We were simply transported. I think the answer to this riddle is simply that when the music was composed the composers were at one with themselves. The performers became disinterested to the point that they became unselfconscious, and a few listeners in those brief moments of listening forgot themselves, enraptured, and so gained themselves. It is these moments of completeness that music can give, providing one can concentrate one’s mind on it, that is, give one’s self in return to the music, that are such deep pleasure, and that is why we love the art.

Cage’s language and ideals reflected his Zen background, with him celebrating the composers for being “at one with themselves” and detaching from ego. To attain this transcendent experience himself, Cage freed sounds from their conventional positions, granting their existence on the basis of other Buddhist principles, “unimpededness and interpenetration.”

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157 Patterson demonstrates that Cage lifted the “rhetorical motif of ‘accomplishing nothing’” directly from Huang Po’s writings, which Cage read while at Black Mountain College in 1952. Patterson, “Cage and Asia,” 55-56.

158 Ibid.


Rather than mimicking what he considered the European tradition of cause and effect, Cage embraced an “Oriental thinking” wherein one identifies with the “here and now.”\(^\text{162}\) Cage based this notion on Suzuki’s teachings and, in his lecture “Composition as Process,” explained that “unimpededness is seeing that in all of space each thing and each human being is at the center and furthermore that each one being at the center is the most honored one of all.”\(^\text{163}\) Additionally:

Interpenetration means that each one of these most honored ones of all is moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time or what the space...in fact each and every other thing in all of time and space is related to each and every other thing in all of time and space.\(^\text{164}\)

On the basis of these premises, Cage wrote music that valued its constituent parts and remained unimpeded in its capacity to relate to other components. Rather than imposing false limits on sounds, such as those of time or pitch or other compositional means, he embraced the free associations of our natural auricular experiences, replicating the daily accumulation of noise and music.

The relation of Zen to collage remains problematic because the Zenga master deployed painterly gestures at odds with the appropriative strategies and cut-and-paste aesthetic that characterizes the medium. Cage’s concept of “interpenetration” establishes a potential link between collage and Zen because the notion of interrelatedness largely determines the semiotic potential of collage. For example, Donald Kuspit has argued that the medium of collage is contingent upon the relative, where “relational factors are crucial...On them, as the formal

\(^{162}\) Cage, “Composition as Process,” 46.  
\(^{163}\) Ibid.  
\(^{164}\) Ibid., 46-47.
confirmation of transposition, depends the success of the collage.”\textsuperscript{165} Indeed, as Wendy Holmes points out, collage elements are “samples of alien stuffs or things,” and as such, “dependent upon the semiotic system it falls within” for meaning.\textsuperscript{166} New contexts or relationships thus carry the potential to alter the sample’s semiotic value, signaling the interrelatedness of material referents. Cage’s act of reformulating and rearranging sounds can be understood as paralleling this relational aspect of collage as well as Zen. The “unimpededness and interpenetration” of Zen Buddhism, that is the privileging of a whole composed if parts, provided Cage with a spiritual framework for adopting and applying these principles as a composer. Although Motherwell and Cage engaged in Asian philosophies, their means of achieving its goals were rooted in the methods, structures, and relativism of collage.

**Pioneers of Collage**

That Motherwell commemorated Cage with a collage is hardly surprising since both men revolutionized the medium: Motherwell by translating the technique to an Abstract Expressionist idiom and Cage for applying collage’s strategy of appropriation to musical composition.\textsuperscript{167} Motherwell first experimented with the technique at Peggy Guggenheim’s request in 1943, when she invited Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and William Baziotes to create collages for an

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Motherwell and Pollock decided to work together at Pollock’s studio because, as Motherwell recalled:

Pollock and I were scared of collage yet wanted to be in such a beautiful show. We spent a long afternoon in his studio and made one or two collages. He had no particular feel for collage, but I remember being surprised at the violence of his attack on the material.

This violence included “pasting, tearing, and pouring paint. He burned the edges of the paper and even spit on them.” Motherwell, on the other hand, applied a bit more delicacy, employing rice paper, oil, ink, and a glass bead for his first collage. He discovered that collage granted his automatic gestures increased flexibility, for he could easily rearrange forms in accordance with his gestural brushwork. In fact, many artists of the New York School appreciated how paper cutouts could be moved around a composition more freely than painted elements, particularly because collagists like Esteban Vicente often tacked their materials to determine their position before permanently affixing them to the supporting ground. Encouraged by this development, as well as the positive review he received in the *New York Times*, Motherwell focused on collage throughout the remainder of his life.

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168 Motherwell recounted that Peggy Guggenheim included the three as “interesting young artists. The Surrealists were always interested in the young ones, believing there is a particular quality they have, such as Rimbaud and the early de Chirico.” Robert Motherwell, as quoted in Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1985): 71.


171 While one of Motherwell’s first two collages has since been lost, a record of his other early work remains via photographic reproduction. Mattison wrote that Pollock “contributed” the glass button to this collage, however Motherwell never used three-dimensional objects for his collages afterwards, as they disrupted the flatness of the picture plane. Ibid.

172 For more on Vicente’s approach to collage, see Elaine de Kooning, “Vicente Paints a Collage,” *Art News* 52 (September 1953): 38-41, 51-52.

173 Edward Alden Jewell wrote that “one of the best of paintings is a small, delightful abstraction by Robert Motherwell.” Although a collage, Jewell praised Motherwell’s work as a painting, perhaps because of the unconventional materials Motherwell used, including the aforementioned rice paper and ink. Edward Alden Jewell, “Local Shows,” *New York Times* (23 May 1943): X10.
love for the first time,” and he described papier collé as the “greatest of our discoveries.”

Motherwell would work in various scales and materials throughout his prolific career, applying the principles of automatism to reassembled pieces of canvas and paper. His large-scale canvases also bore evidence of a collage aesthetic through their large floating shapes and clearly articulated borders, indicating the degree to which the medium and its capacities resonated with the artist.

A number of writers and other composers have found collage to be one of the most useful metaphors for describing Cage’s work because he reconstituted noise, silence, and a range of musical genres into “collaged” compositions. For example, Calvin Tomkins has considered Cage’s *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* (1952), “a collage of recorded sounds,” while David Revill also has characterized the score as “a collage of fragments re-corded on to tape.” However, Cage’s musical compositions differed from Motherwell’s papier collé, with Cage employing the appropriations and quotidian objects of collage whereas Motherwell frequently created his works from expensive fine art materials, such as the imported papers and ink of *Blue with China Ink*. While Motherwell deployed papier collé in accordance with a strong aesthetic rooted in the history of art, Cage appeared headed towards a non-musical form of musical experience. As such, Virgil Thomson has argued that “Cage’s own music over the last thirty years, though not entirely free of interrelated pitches, has nevertheless followed a straighter line in its evolution

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175 Brandon Taylor suggested that “Motherwell’s big oval-and-rectangle paintings of the next decade have their origin here [collage], in the way that simple materials subjected to informal placing and tearing establish formats of potentially enormous scale, most often with human resonances.” Brandon Taylor, *Collage: The Making of Modern Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004): 105.

toward an art of collage based on non-musical sounds than that of any other artist of his time.”

Cage’s first percussion performance in New York City was held at the Museum of Modern Art in February of 1943 (fig. 2.9-2.10). A Life magazine review noted how Cage and his ensemble:

Whacked gongs, cymbals, gourds, bells, sheets of metal, ox bells, Chinese dishes, tin cans, auto brake drums, the jawbone of an ass and other objects. Sometimes instead of hitting, they rattled or rubbed. The audience, which was very high-brow, listened intently without seeming to be disturbed at the noisy results.

According to the reviewer, the adoption of quotidian materials for instruments revealed “the beauty in everyday modern life,” an objective that led Cage to create compositions such as Amores (1943, fig. 2.11-2.12). In this concerto, Cage blended tom-toms, Chinese wood blocks, rattles, and the prepared piano into a unified score. This music embodied a collage ethos through the jarring, disjointed sounds and use of common elements. Cage encouraged listeners to discover art in the commonplace, and in Living Room Music (1940), his musicians played household objects, including furniture and architectural elements. His score explained:

Any household objects or architectural elements may be used as instruments, e.g. 1st player: magazines, newspaper or cardboard; 2nd player: table or other wooden furniture; 3rd player: largish books; 4th players: floor, wall, door or wooden frame of window.

While the instrumentation of the piece could vary, Cage outlined a variation in pitch wherein the first musicians use their fingers to “play” their instruments while the fourth performer employs

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178 “Percussion Concert,” Life 14, no. 11 (15 March 1943).
his or her fist. The four-part composition included sharps rather than flats in a sixteen-note arrangement structured on seven by seven measures.\textsuperscript{180}

Cage also embraced the quotidian by assembling instruments from everyday materials. He first began creating the prepared piano in 1940 by attaching various objects to the strings of a conventional piano, achieving unconventional percussive effects in the process.\textsuperscript{181} Throughout the 1940s, he made collages of the piano, adding common elements to its fabric yet maintaining its harmony, or lack thereof, in performance. As Branden Joseph has argued, the prepared piano directly borrowed from precedents in collage: “In much the same way that collage and montage directly incorporated bits of everyday life such as newspaper clippings and ticket stubs, Cage’s early percussion music appropriated noises from urban existence and technological production: struck percussion and machine-made sounds.”\textsuperscript{182} Not only did he produce unusual sounds by manipulating instruments, he also welcomed noise and audience participation—and interruption—into his arrangements. Akin to the collage artist incorporating remnants of everyday life such as newsprint and advertisements into their compositions, Cage embraced the sonic material of daily experiences. He held that the act of listening would sanctify noises, elevating them to the status typically reserved for music. “Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The

\textsuperscript{180} For more on the piece, including the influence of Erik Satie’s \textit{Furniture Music} and Gertrude Stein, see Revill, \textit{The Roaring Silence}, 73.
\textsuperscript{181} Cage derived the prepared piano from Henry Cowell, who had played the inside of the piano by plucking or strumming the strings, even using a “darning egg, moving it lengthwise along the strings while trilling.” Based upon this precedent, as well as Cowell’s urging, Cage began manipulating the strings of the piano, taking a step further than Cowell, who had never altered the physical makeup of the instrument in his experimental music. Revill, \textit{The Roaring Silence}, 69-70; John Cage, \textit{Empty Words} (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979): 7-8; Henry Cowell, “Current Chronicle,” \textit{MQ} 38 (1952): 54.
sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain.”

It was this early collage-based aesthetic that led Cage to write 4’33” in 1952, his trademark composition that embraced silence as much as it did the responses of the audience as they shifted in their seats, coughed, or whispered to each other, wondering all the while if anything would happen next.

The incorporation of elements from the external world into high art placed Cage at odds with many artists who valued the creativity and subjectivity of the artist. As Harold Rosenberg pointed out in his critique of collage, the medium required no specific training or skill, and seemed to suggest that anyone could create art from any material. A devotee of collage, Cage debated Willem de Kooning about the unique properties of the technique, as the composer recounted:

I was with de Kooning once in a restaurant. He said, “If I put a frame around these breadcrumbs, that isn’t art.” And what I’m saying is that it is. He was saying that it wasn’t, because he connects art with his activity – he connects with himself as an artist, whereas I would want art to slip out of us into the world in which we live.

Whereas Cage appreciated the quotidian, de Kooning associated art with a specific type of practice or work. Cage clarified his divergence from de Kooning’s aesthetics, stating that although he recognized the beauty of de Kooning’s abstracted women, he found the artist’s subjectivity overwhelming. Cage “wanted them [Abstract Expressionist paintings] to change my

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184 First performed at Black Mountain College in 1952, 4’33” referred to the four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence that comprised Cage’s composition. Piano virtuoso David Tudor “performed” the piece, which consisted of his opening the piano box, counting out the determined interval of silence, closing the piano box, and walking off stage. Cage himself admitted that his ode to nothing drew heavily upon Robert Rauschenberg’s White Paintings, “To whom it may concern: the white paintings came first; my silent piece came later.” John Cage, Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 98.
way of seeing, not my way of feeling… I don’t want to spend my life being pushed around by a bunch of artists.”

Instead, he celebrated works by de Kooning that included the transfer of newsprint into the surface of the canvas, because these allover works forced a variegated approach to viewership as one experiences the diversity of images.

Although he never went so far as to frame breadcrumbs, Robert Motherwell also appropriated everyday materials for his collages, including cigarette wrappers, postcards, and newspaper clippings. He noted:

Instead of having to fuss with drawing things and re-working and changing them, you pick up objects that are in the room and simply place them in a picture—or take them out—whatever you like. Collage is both placing and ellipsis... For a painter as abstract as myself, the collages offer a way of incorporating bits of the everyday world into pictures.

Motherwell claimed that collage granted him the ability to include common objects as his media, but these articles also allowed him to be suggestive and elliptic in representation. These items declared their status as objects while calling attention to that which had been omitted in the process of collage, depiction. In fact, the medium has often been celebrated for incorporating indices of an actual object that render its representation superfluous. For example, by pasting the label of a liquor bottle to his collage *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (1912, fig. 2.13), Picasso found it unnecessary to portray the object bottle naturalistically since the collage element signified its presence. In Motherwell’s case, he often employed materials that were autobiographical, such as wrappers from his favorite cigarettes and brand of ink, musical scores by composers he admired, and pages from books he read (figs. 2.14-2.15). Collage not only served a diaristic purpose, but

188 Ibid., 176.
these allusions could be rendered with traditional forms of representation. Remains of packaging and books rendered the effects of a still life without being rooted in traditional modes of verism. With collage, an artist like Motherwell could replicate his audience’s common visual experiences while undermining a tradition of representation that characterized the art of painting. He acknowledged this quality of the medium in an article for *Design* magazine (1946).

The sensation of physically operating on the world is very strong in the medium of the papier collé or collage, in which various kinds of paper are pasted to the canvas. One cuts and chooses and shifts and pastes, and sometimes tears off and begins again. In any case, shaping and arranging such a relational structure obliterates the need, and often the awareness of representation.  

As a composer Cage would not be concerned with the idea of representation per se, but Motherwell composed his canvases to attain certain feelings, with the act of placement superseding such pictorial elements as illusionism. But unlike Cage who embraced the quotidian to blur the distinction between art and reality, Motherwell used these objects to create what he considered “odd relations” that would offer a diversity of reference and “more dimension” for the work of art. These collages often featured witty puns on Motherwell’s artistic processes, such as *The Tearingness of Collaging* (1957, fig. 2.16), or reflections on mass media spectacles and war, as exemplified by *View from a High Tower* (1944) or *The Joy of Living* (1943). In many instances, including *Blue with China Ink*, Motherwell utilized expensive fine art materials

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191 Motherwell, as quoted in Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism*, 34.
192 Motherwell commented that, “*The Tearingness of Collaging* is, like many of my titles, a play on words. It refers not only to angry tearing of a collage that seemed to me in its prior state too hard-edged and formal, but also it emphasizes that part of my contribution to the art of collage, the torn rather than the sharp or cut-out edge.” Quote reproduced in Arnason, *Robert Motherwell*, plate 96. Gregory Gilbert has argued that Motherwell “may have also been drawn to the technique [collage] for its historical and provocative use within the modernist movement for directly signifying contemporaneous social and political meaning in art.” Gregory Gilbert, “Robert Motherwell’s World War Two Collages: Signifying War as Topical Spectacle in Abstract Expressionist Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (2004): 311-337.
rather than found objects, distinguishing him from artists like Cage who championed the beauty of everyday life.

In testing the limits of art, Cage did not assume the anarchic position of practitioners of collage such as the Dadaists. Whereas Dada fragmentation became a means to negate traditional aesthetics, Cage embraced unity and wholeness. He was not content to simply introduce new and unsettling sounds; instead Cage corralled them into an organic unity. The various components of *Amores* were arranged by movement so that the prepared piano opened and concluded the score, while various percussive intervals filled the remaining stanzas during set times. The amalgamation of disparate entities into a unified scheme connected Cage to collage because of this relativism. Cage, the composer, arranged his scores of various materials in a manner akin to Motherwell, the artist, arranging bits of canvas. But that which furthered meaning for both men was the manner in which they were combined or fabricated. Cage achieved jarring sonic effects by blending a piano solo with the percussive noise of tom-toms and wood blocks, and he employed these counterpoints expressively during the 1940s. Motherwell similarly exploited abstract sensibilities to contest the primacy of appearance, fusing disparate types of materials towards expressive ends.

One principle underlying both men’s use of collage was chance. Cage and Motherwell both came of age during the heyday of Surrealism, and its emphasis on automatism affected generations of artists. Motherwell acknowledged this influence, writing how “Pollock, Baziotes, myself and our wives made ‘automatic’ poems together.” He further claimed that their

experimentation with automatism “marks the real beginnings of ‘Abstract Expressionism.’”\textsuperscript{195}

The fusion of free association or psychic automatism with Cubist structure provided Motherwell and other members of the New York School their modus operandi:

The cubist idea of what a picture is was accepted, plastically; but the conventional subject was to be replaced by an automatically invented subject matter. My position to this day remains essentially the same. For the first time I had an active principle for painting, specifically designed to explore unknown possibilities.\textsuperscript{196}

Automatism garnered the most flexibility for the Abstract Expressionists because the question of subject matter could continually evolve and expand. According to this model, rather than adopting a pre-ordained subject, Motherwell randomly scribbled on a piece of paper the forms that would appear on his collages or larger canvases.\textsuperscript{197} Driven by theories of chance, he conceded that his manner of execution was fueled by trial-and-error, “I begin a painting with a series of mistakes. The painting comes out of the correction of mistakes by feeling. I begin with shapes and colors which are not related internally nor to the external world; I work without images.”\textsuperscript{198} In collages like \textit{Blue with China Ink}, Motherwell initiated an unplanned event, in this case the bleeding of ink onto paper, as a point of departure for his subsequent compositional choices. Considering these pictures to contain “layers of consciousness,” Motherwell employed the “secondary or accidental” in order to transcend subjectivity into the unknown.\textsuperscript{199}

These unplanned results would seem to parallel Cage’s music, with the composer also embracing novelty and invention, introducing random and unplanned noises into his compositions. David Bernstein has argued that Cage learned the importance of chance from his

\textsuperscript{197} Carmean, “Elegies to the Spanish Republic,” 95-96.
\textsuperscript{199} Motherwell, Statement in \textit{Motherwell}, 43.
teacher, Arnold Schoenberg.\textsuperscript{200} In \textit{Music of Changes} (1951), for example, Cage arranged thirty-two sounds and silences into a twelve-tone chart. Musicians were free to create tones, noises, or remain silent, and the musical score could be read horizontally or vertically and provided only dodecaphonic parameters rather than specific tempos or notes. In earlier compositions, such as \textit{Amores} (1943), Cage included detailed instructions for preparing the piano, but despite these guidelines, the composer granted musicians leeway in achieving the desired sounds, noting that the application of materials to the piano could be determined according to experimentation.

Yet both Cage and Motherwell encountered a major contradiction in asserting the primacy of chance because it often required a pre-determined structure to organize or delineate such randomness. In a 1942 press release, Cage admitted that he played the role of composer rather than anarchist unleashing random noises upon the audience.

Cage describes his work as the organization of sound. The source of his music lies not in primitive percussion music, but in the contemporary city sounds which are so integral a part of life today. He believes that through organization these sounds lose their nerve-wracking character and become the materials for a highly dramatic and expressive art form.\textsuperscript{201}

Speaking about himself in the third person, Cage stressed the value of organization, arguing that common noises would “lose their nerve-wracking character” if arranged properly. He had not yet fully embraced aleatory music, remaining devoted to subjective expression and ordered methods at the time Motherwell completed \textit{Blue with China Ink}. While his scores featured unconventional

\textsuperscript{200} Cage claimed to have taken “all” of Schoenberg’s courses at USC and UCLA in the 1930s. The actual courses that Cage attended have been the subject of much debate. Michael Hicks believed that Cage studied analysis, composition and harmony with Schoenberg, while archival sources suggest that he also studied counterpoint. See Michael Hicks, “John Cage’s Studies with Arnold Schoenberg,” \textit{American Music} 8, no.2 (Summer 1990): 125-40; David Bernstein, “John Cage, Arnold Schoenberg, and the Musical Idea,” in \textit{John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention, 1933-1950}, ed. David W. Patterson (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

instrumentations, Cage’s work of the 1940s was predicated upon standard notational parameters. In *Amores*, woodblocks, rattles, and tom-toms were granted improvisatory freedom; however, each instrument was allotted ten sections of ten 4/4 bars within its respective movement. This collage of seemingly random sounds was actually organized in accordance to a rigid and programmed method. Likewise, *Music of Changes* used a chart for selecting sounds as each one of twelve preset tones had to be performed before repetition was allowed. As David Bernstein and others have noted, “the fact that Cage employed chance operations in his music did not mean that he completely gave up compositional control.”\textsuperscript{202} Cage conceded this notion:

> If you use, as I do chance operations, you don’t have control except in the way of designing the question which you ask. That you can control. I mean you can decide to ask certain questions and not others. But if you use chance operations, you have no control over the answers, except the limits within which they operate.\textsuperscript{203}

This paradox reappeared in virtually every innovation by Cage because the random percussive effects of his prepared piano were achieved through carefully measured preparations, including charts and grids.\textsuperscript{204}

Motherwell also encountered this problem, juxtaposing automatism with compositional control, in his belief that the “relative cannot exist without some point of support.”\textsuperscript{205} To many artists following Cezanne, Picasso, and Braque, this support was Cubism. Motherwell acknowledged that Cezanne’s “pictorial structure…gives off his feeling,” because of the manner in which organization responds to the external world.\textsuperscript{206} Critics such as Clement Greenberg noted

\textsuperscript{205} Motherwell, “Statement,” 43.
\textsuperscript{206} Motherwell, “Beyond the Aesthetic,” 37.
how “the grafting of painterliness onto a cubist structure was one of the great accomplishments of the abstract expressionists.”

Motherwell’s homage to Cage proved no different and Motherwell aligned it according to the horizontal/vertical axis that characterized Picasso’s and Braque’s Cubist collages. For example, in *Man with a Hat* (1912), a work exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1948, Picasso arranged newspaper clippings in a rigid set of right angles. The drawn contours of the figure’s shoulders and head offer the only curvilinear passages that deviate from an otherwise axial composition. Likewise, in *Guitar and Sheet Music* (1912, fig. 2.17), Picasso used only a few diagonal lines in a *papier collé* filled with perpendicular interstices and geometric regularity. Despite the appearance of a few rounded forms suggestive of a guitar, the piling of forms evokes stacks of objects more than overlapping planes. In *Blue with China Ink*, paper cutouts grid off zones of pigment while dark outlines further delineate the structure informing Motherwell’s composition. The outlines serve to encapsulate colors, confining them by shape, while simultaneously framing irregular ink blots and biomorphic forms within rectilinear perimeters. As such, the biomorphic figure on the right contains the only elements to stray from the network of right angles comprising this collage.

When considering *Blue with China Ink*, it is important to note that no pictorial element overwhelms the other. Motherwell privileged neither the irregular, accidental ink blot nor the geometric, hand-painted ocher squares. An element of sameness pervades the collage, wherein Motherwell’s various markings coexist rather than claim currency over the other. He levels the playing field and favors neither regularity nor automatism, neither the accidental nor the planned.

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208 My reading of *Blue with China Ink* is indebted to Rosalind Krauss’s analysis of Rauschenberg’s combines, particularly as she argues that the material density and transfer of Rauschenberg’s collage elements into the pictorial surface serves to level rather than transform such materials. In this way, “each image is given the same level of density as object, one is struck not by their multivalence as signs, but rather by their sameness as things.” Rosalind Krauss, “Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image,” *Artforum* 13, no. 4 (December 1974): 40.
Instead, Motherwell juxtaposed these collage elements in a manner that balanced the improvised and structured. As such, the artist would seem at odds with Cage’s later efforts to grant indeterminacy complete freedom, but again, Cage had not yet reached that stage in his music and his compositions contemporary with Blue with China Ink remained integrated works. As such, he sought compositional integrity and hoped that the common sounds he employed would “lose their nerve-wracking character” in becoming the fabric of his music.209

As both Cage and Motherwell experimented with chance operations, they ran into the same contradiction facing Hans Arp. Arp created several collages by dropping torn bits of paper onto the supporting ground and affixing them based on the results of gravity. However, his Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance (1916-18), a work exhibited in New York in the 1940s, appears axially aligned, a regularity at odds with the premise supposedly governing his work. What distinguished Arp and Cage from Motherwell was how they employed chance and the grid to remove the hand of the artist, thereby undermining the subjectivity of the individual.210 While Motherwell sought the effects of automatism, he never fully relinquished aesthetic control. Cage employed compositional charts and, years later, computer generated programs, to mediate his influence over his unplanned musical notations. Although Cage had not yet reached that point in his compositions at the time, his use of the grid seemed more related to Arp’s anti-aesthetic than Motherwell’s Cubist hangover.

A structural device shared by Motherwell and Cage was repetition, with both working in series and repeating certain themes and elements to further organize their compositions. For example, in his Spanish Elegies, Motherwell’s juxtaposition of verticals and ovoids mimicked

Lorca’s “At Five in the Afternoon,” the poem that inspired the initial “elegy.” Lorca repeated the refrain, “at five in the afternoon,” thirty times in fifty-two lines, and Motherwell arranged recurring vertical thrusts and ovular shapes across the canvas to achieve a similar dramatic crescendo.211 From the Spanish Elegies and Lyric Suite to the Open and Night Music series, Motherwell repeated motifs throughout his career, returning to the same subject or theme again and again. Søren Kierkegaard’s Repetition inspired Motherwell, and the work provided a philosophical framework through which he understood “obsession and self-repeating.”212 While repetition posed the risk of redundancy, Kierkegaard explained knowledge and recognition could emerge from the cognitive activity associated with seriality.213 Ultimately, as Mary Ann Caws has argued, Motherwell “still believed in the extraordinary values of accumulation and insistence.”214

Cage’s early compositions also drew heavily on the principles of repetition and seriality, as his teacher Schoenberg suggested that “tones cohere through repetition.” Schoenberg believed that variation prevented the potential monotony of repetition, but Cage rejected such variety in early works like Metamorphosis (1938, for piano) and Quartet (1935, for percussion), in which he isolated rhythmic patterns throughout a series of ostinatos.215 Furthermore, his reliance on the twelve-tone structures championed by Schoenberg enabled Cage to substitute a premeditated

214 Caws, Robert Motherwell: What Art Holds, 3.
repeating process for the “composer’s autonomous control over the work.” Ultimately, both Cage and Motherwell realized that repetition and structure paradoxically provided a basis through which chance and spontaneity could be achieved.

The Void, Mythmaking, and Abstract Expressionism

As mentioned earlier, Cage delivered his legendary “Lecture on Nothing” at the Artists Club in New York City in 1949. To many, this defiant speech paralleled Robert Rauschenberg’s erasure of a drawing by Willem de Kooning in 1953. By destroying the gestural marks that characterized the New York School and its emphasis upon the artist’s subjectivity, Rauschenberg and Cage purportedly vanquished the “natural, heroic sublime of the abstract expressionist painters,” destabilizing the claims of artists like Robert Motherwell. However, art historians like Caroline Jones have overlooked Motherwell’s belief that the “heroic sublime” was achieved through silence. Like Cage, Motherwell remained uninterested in individualized expressions of the artist; instead, he argued that “painting becomes Sublime when the artist transcends his personal anguish, when he projects in the midst of a shrieking world an expression of living and its end that is silent and ordered.” The sublime that Motherwell described was not social or political, rather it was an experience predicated on nothingness. He recognized the potency of absence, especially in the creative act. “Any painter knows that empty space is his most powerful

218 Motherwell, “Beyond the Aesthetic,” 53.
artistic weapon, if he can animate it. The void need not be terrifying."\textsuperscript{219} His suggestion that emptiness could be animated differed with the premise behind Sartre’s \textit{Being and Nothingness} (1943), since Motherwell asserted the existence of the artist whereas Sartre granted only the abyss. Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” and subsequent composition 4’33’’ appeared to parallel Sartre in their articulation of absence, yet they developed from the same structure and preparation that characterized Motherwell’s insistence upon action. In addition, Cage’s celebration of silence and nothingness did not necessarily mean that he advocated art as a complete negation of being. In 4’33’’, the musician performed no music, drawing the audience’s attention to silence but also to the ambient noise of the auditorium. Rauschenberg’s white paintings inspired this score, but the composer argued that artistic voids limited experience. For example, he celebrated Newman’s \textit{Stations of the Cross} but wished he “included a fifteenth station, which would not leave us in the void.” Rather, the conclusion he desired included the satisfaction of a pleasurable smile.\textsuperscript{220}

Furthermore, if we interpret the circular blots of \textit{Blue with China Ink} as \textit{ensō}, they could be seen as participating in this dialogue on silence and nothingness. In Buddhism, circles such as the \textit{ensō} represent the void as well as enlightenment.\textsuperscript{221} For many Zen masters, open circular forms denote emptiness since nothing exists at their center, yet rings paradoxically suggest completion through containment.\textsuperscript{222} The infinite nature of the circle serves as a tool of meditation.


\textsuperscript{220} Cage said, “I can use those \textit{Stations of the Cross} by Newman perfectly well, although I think I could use them better had he included a fifteenth station, which would not leave us in the void, but which would bring us back to the image that comes at the end of the ten ox-herding pictures in the second version of Zen Buddhism, namely, the fat man returning to the village bearing gifts with a big smile on his face. Now this smile is largely missing from Abstract Expressionism.” Sandler, “Interview with Cage,” 176.


\textsuperscript{222} Addiss, \textit{The Art of Zen}, 73.
for Buddhist monks because in contemplating the *ensō*, “the mind reaches the fullness and emptiness symbolized by the circle.”

Stephen Addiss has argued that Zen artists could not convey emptiness through a simple, blank expanse of paper, because the Buddhist master would claim that the bare page is “not empty enough.”

Motherwell understood this premise, writing in 1950 that “a fresh white canvas is a void, as is the poet’s sheet of blank white paper.” He acknowledged how his “concept…of the metaphysical void” was “analogous to the Oriental conception of the absolute void: that you start with empty space, and that the subject is that which animates the great space, the void.”

While confronting the abyss, Motherwell juxtaposed absence with presence, attempting to record these “inner tensions” through formal means. Motherwell did not deny emptiness in his engagement with the void; instead he predicated his works on a Zen-like convergence of contradictory terms. For example, Motherwell embraced black and white in his oeuvre because they represented, among other things, the absence and presence of color. In reflecting on his *Spanish Elegies* later in life, Motherwell claimed that in addition to evoking life and death, white “contains all colors…black is technically the absence of color.”

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224 Ibid., 208, note 20.
226 Motherwell, in Flam, *Motherwell*, 16.
concern with nothingness. *Blue with China Ink* proves no different as Motherwell set large rectangular zones of white pigment against black ink blots and outlines. While this collage featured many objects, Motherwell later restricted his paintings to a few black brushstrokes splashed across white paper, perhaps indicating how he came to “discover that the void is beautiful in itself.” Ultimately, *Blue with China Ink* appeared prescient in foreshadowing Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” by articulating vacancy and rejecting representation. All that remained was an abstraction, as Motherwell once claimed, “my picture represents nothing.”

Although Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” challenged many of the precepts on which Abstract Expressionism was ostensibly based, Motherwell remained in a unique position to comprehend the historical precedence behind Cage’s actions. In preparing his anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Motherwell acquired an exhaustive understanding of Dada and its ramifications for artistic expression. In compiling his volume, Motherwell approached his project with a seriousness that perhaps belied the premises behind Dada itself. He worked on *The Dada Painters and Poets* for six years beginning in 1945, which culminated in the anthology’s publication in 1951. This endeavor certainly tested Motherwell’s editorial commitment, but it also provided him with numerous occasions to question the validity of art in the twentieth century. He became intimately familiar with various Dada attacks on artistic form and expression, and he compiled an academic collection of contentious, anarchistic writings.

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229 Motherwell, in Flam, *Motherwell*, 16.
231 According to conversations with Motherwell, Terenzio reports that “complicating and delaying publication was an eleventh-hour squabble among old-time Dadaists over a manifesto written especially for the edition, requiring diplomacy and pragmatic solutions from Motherwell.” Terenzio, *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 89-90. Dore Ashton also commended Motherwell for his “notable courage in the face of the explosive squabbling among the necessary participants. This editorial courage was demonstrated on many occasions, most especially..."
Motherwell included selections from Hugo Ball’s *Flight from Time*, an account of the “sound poems” Ball read at the Cabaret Voltaire. For these legendary performances, Ball dressed himself in painted cardboard and recited “verse without words,” nonsensical verbiage that rejected conventions of language.²³² Motherwell, then, would have found Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing” akin to Ball’s renunciation of poetry, and *Blue with China Ink* perhaps indicates Motherwell’s estimation that Cage was heir to Dadaist iconoclasm.²³³ He told Max Kozloff that *The Dada Painters and Poets* “did…provide the next rationale” for the younger generation of artists that included Cage, Rauschenberg, and Johns, alluding to the ironic role Motherwell played in establishing the intellectual basis for Neo-Dada attacks on Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s and 1960s.²³⁴

Cage’s compositions from the 1940s evoked a Dada sensibility in their percussive effects and quotidian instrumentations, but as Virgil Thomson argued in a 1945 review:

> Cage’s music is not Oriental at all. His work attaches itself, in fact, to two different traditions of Western modernism. One is the percussive experiments begun by Marinetti’s Futurist noisemakers and continued in the music of Edgard Varèse, Henry Cowell, and George Antheil, all of which, though made in full

when he refused a poorly written submission by the powerful art critic Clement Greenberg—a step that was certainly not to his advantage as an exhibiting artist.” Ashton, *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 12.


²³³ Many have suggested that Cage continued in the spirit of Marcel Duchamp with his irreverent wit and challenges to notions of authorship. Irving Sandler posited the existence of a “Duchamp-Cage aesthetic,” an alternative to “the gestural aesthetics that dominated fifties painting” based upon a fusion of art and life. Sandler, *The New York School*, 163-173. Sandler’s notion, however, was not historically accurate because Cage and Duchamp did not fully come together until the mid-1960s. While Cage met Duchamp in 1941-42, and Duchamp’s work would have influenced many of Cage’s innovations, they never spent much time together until 1965-66. Cage admired Duchamp greatly and studied chess with the elder Dadaist. However, efforts to locate a shared aesthetic in the 1950s neglect many of the differences between the two. Duchamp told Cage, “your chance is not the same as my chance,” and the two diverged in their ideas about the unconscious and sensory perception. For a concise summary of their relationship, see Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 213-215.


The source for many of Cage’s achievements lay in Dada sound poetry and the Futurist embrace of technology; however, despite these sources, Thomson located a “sophistication” and “expressivity” that distinguished Cage from Schoenberg and his contemporaries. While Cage employed “augmentation, diminution, inversion [and] fragmentation” for his scores, Thomson contended that “these procedures do not take over a piece and become its subject, or game.”\footnote{Ibid., 72.} Instead, “he writes music for expressive purposes… His work represents, in consequence, not only the most advanced methods now in use anywhere, but original expression of the very highest poetic quality.”\footnote{Ibid.} This expressionism was rooted in Cage’s personal troubles. For example, in 1944 he wrote “The Perilous Night,” a suite about “the loneliness and terror that come to one when loves becomes unhappy.”\footnote{Calvin Tomkins, “Profiles: Figure in an Imaginary Landscape,” \textit{The New Yorker} (28 November 1964): 86. Reprinted in Tomkins, \textit{The Bride and the Bachelors}, 97.} His marriage to Xenia was crumbling—they would separate and divorce in the following year—and the composer lamented that his emotional score failed to resonate with his audiences: “I had poured a great deal of emotion into the piece, and obviously I wasn’t communicating this at all.”\footnote{Ibid., 86.} Because of his mental state, Cage sought help from a therapist, but after his first session, he turned to his music and Asian philosophy, “which took the place of psychoanalysis.”\footnote{John Cage, quoted in Patterson, “Cage and Asia,” 49. Cage recalled, “it must have been around 1945. I was disturbed… some friends advised me to see an analyst.” Revill, \textit{The Roaring Silence}, 87. He further explained, “When I went to the analyst for a kind of preliminary meeting, he said, ‘I’ll be able to fix you so that you’ll write much more music than you do now.’ I said, ‘Good heavens! I already write too much, it seems to me.’ That promise of his put me off.” Cage, \textit{Silence}, 127.}
While Cage would become renowned for his irreverent rejection of such expressivity—particularly the heroicized masculine variety as represented by Abstract Expressionism—his music from the early- to mid-1940s was characterized by an intensely internalized subjectivity. In fact, Cage’s work and interests at this time placed him squarely within the New York School. He socialized with many of the Abstract Expressionists and formed relationships with numerous Dadaists as well. Max Ernst’s friendship would prove particularly important as he invited Cage to leave Chicago and stay at the apartment he shared with Peggy Guggenheim in New York.

Once there, Cage met the vanguard of modern culture: Andre Breton, Piet Mondrian, and Virgil Thomson among others. Awestruck by those he encountered, Cage recounted, “I was just flabbergasted by the whole situation. Somebody famous was dropping in every two minutes, it seemed.”

Cage stayed with Ernst and Guggenheim for about two weeks and he was set to perform at the opening of Guggenheim’s Art of This Century gallery. However, this arrangement fell apart when Guggenheim discovered Cage had agreed to perform at the Museum of Modern Art, one of her gallery’s competitors. He originally sought this venue because “the musical ideas I was developing seemed more related to modern painting than to anything else.”

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241 Cage explained: “When Xenia and I came to New York from Chicago, we arrived in the bus station with about twenty-five cents. We were expecting to stay for a while with Peggy Guggenheim and Max Ernst. Max Ernst had met us in Chicago and had said, ‘Whenever you come to New York, come and stay with us. We have a big house on the East River.’ I went to the phone booth in the bus station, put in a nickel, and dialed. Max Ernst answered. He didn’t recognize my voice. Finally he said, ‘Are you thirsty?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Well, come over tomorrow for cocktails.’ I went back to Xenia and told her what happened. She said, ‘Call him back. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose.’ I did. He said, ‘Oh! It’s you. We’ve been waiting for you for weeks. Your room’s ready. Come right over.’” Cage, *Silence*, 12.

242 Tomkins, “Figure in an Imaginary Landscape,” 83.

243 Cage told Tomkins that, “when Peggy learned that I was arranging to have a concert at the Modern Museum the following winter, she was furious. She cancelled the concert at her gallery, and refused to pay for the transportation of my percussion instruments from Chicago, which she had agreed to do earlier. Worse still, she let us understand that our living in her house was not a permanent arrangement, as we had been inclined to think it was.” Tomkins, “Figure in an Imaginary Landscape,” 83-84.

244 Ibid.
Cage told Irving Sandler that Abstract Expressionism in particular appealed to him because the art of the New York School challenged his “way of seeing” the world.\textsuperscript{245} In developing a musical ethos centered on the experience of noise and other aural impressions, he learned a great deal about sensory phenomena from contemplating the canvases of his peers.

What you have… in the case of much Abstract Expressionism, is a surface that in no sense has a center of interest, so that it is truly distinguished from most art, Occidental and Oriental, that we know. The individual is able to look at first one part and then another, and insofar as he can, to experience the whole. But the whole is such a whole that it doesn’t look as if the frame frames it. It looks as if that sort of thing could have continued beyond the frame. It is, in other words, if we were not speaking of painting, but speaking of music, a work that has no beginning, middle, or ending, nor any center of interest—we come back now to about art. So, this makes it clear that the experience of art is essentially not an objective experience, but rather a subjective experience.\textsuperscript{246}

Cage most appreciated two aspects of the Abstract Expressionist canvas. First, the allover compositional strategy of his peers meant that viewers were confronted with an expansive and multifaceted surface. The singular viewpoint created through Renaissance models of perspectival representation limited one’s optical experience, but the Abstract Expressionists privileged the entirety of the picture plane. Second, the expansiveness of this surface not only leads one’s eye across the painting, it suggested its continuance, and many New York School artists abandoned proper frames and allowed their gestural markings to remain visible on the stretcher bars at the side of the work. Cage cared little about the artist’s subjectivity in creating the work, but he deeply valued the transformative power of art in altering his modes of perception.\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{245} Sandler, Interview with Cage, 177.
\textsuperscript{246} Kostelanetz, \textit{Conversing with Cage}, 175.
\textsuperscript{247} Of the New York School, Cage commented that “I never agreed with their intentions, if I know what they are, and I’m not really clear that I do know what they are.” Regardless of the subject, Cage confessed to enjoying the work of de Kooning, Reinhardt, and Newman in particular. Pollock’s painting, on the other hand, he found inferior to that of Tobey. Ibid., 175-177.
Cage credited Mark Tobey for introducing him to Abstract Expressionism. He first met the painter in Seattle in 1939 and often told the story of walking through the city with Tobey, an experience that would take hours because Tobey “was constantly stopping and pointing out things to see, opening my eyes in other words.”  

Cage also recalled that Tobey asked his art students “to draw with their noses and toes pressed against a wall” to challenge their accustomed way of seeing. After leaving an exhibition of Tobey’s work at the Willard Gallery in 1944, he “noticed that the experience of looking at the pavement was the same as the experience of looking at the Tobey… the aesthetic experience was just as high.” 

Cage not only purchased one of Tobey’s canvases, *Crystallization* (1944, fig. 2.18), from this show, but he based much of his own aesthetic on Tobey’s appreciation of the commonplace. He developed his musical scores from the compositional strategies and quotidian aspects of Abstract Expressionism, and this movement helped concretize Cage’s penchant for the experiential. Motherwell also celebrated the human response to material reality, calling for “a revolution in the sense of increased consciousness, of consciousness of the possibilities inherent in experiencing.” 

Cage, however, stressed the beauty of everyday phenomena, whereas Motherwell emphasized “novelty, invention, the disturbing, the strange” as a means to heighten one’s experience. 

In addition to allover aesthetics and the interrelatedness of art and life, Cage’s pre-1950 work corresponded to early Abstract Expressionism in its penchant for mythmaking and

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250 Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 175.
252 Ibid.
primitivism. After Cage was asked to leave Peggy Guggenheim’s apartment, he stayed with dancer Jean Erdman and her husband, Joseph Campbell, during the summer of 1942. In lieu of rent, Cage composed music for Erdman to perform in collaboration with Merce Cunningham.²⁵⁴ *Forever and Sunsmell* and *Credo in Us* resulted from his stay with Erdman and Campbell, and Erdman recalled that Cage and Campbell urged them to stage their own productions independent of Martha Graham’s dance company.²⁵⁵ Campbell’s work on mythology influenced several of Cage’s scores, including *The Perilous Night* (1943-44), which Cage titled after an Irish folktale he read in one of Campbell’s anthologies.²⁵⁶ He cited another of Campbell’s projects in his essay, “Forerunners of Modern Music,” claiming that self-knowledge could be attained through the self-denial and selflessness described in ancient mythology.²⁵⁷ Cage’s score *Totem Ancestor* (1942) tapped into Native American rituals, an interest of many Abstract Expressionists. This music was created for a Cunningham solo that, according to the dancer, referred to “some kind of primitive figure” and drew upon Cunningham’s knowledge of Northwest Indigenous dance.²⁵⁸ *Totem Ancestor* featured a piano prepared with eight screws or bolts, including two with weather stripping, and one with a loose nut. Marked by simple melodies and rhythms, this score included a singular accompaniment with limited tones evocative of Native American rhythms.²⁵⁹ Cage

²⁵³ Michael Leja has established that the Abstract Expressionist interest in myth, primitivism, and the unconscious paralleled a broader discourse on Modern Man. Thus, the reinvestigation of self that supposedly characterized the Abstract Expressionist canvas also occurred within the sphere of popular culture, such as film, mass media, and academe. See Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).


²⁵⁵ Erdman recalled: “It was John Cage’s idea that we do a concert together. He and my husband [Joseph Campbell] were eager to have us get out from under Martha’s thumb… So at their prodding we started.” David Vaughan, *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years*, ed. Melissa Harris (New York: Aperture, 1997): 26-27.


²⁵⁸ Vaughan, *Merce Cunningham*, 27. Joyce Wike, an anthropology student, dancer, and one of Cage’s percussion musicians, introduced Cunningham to Northwest American Indians. In addition to performing Native American trances at the Cornish School, she took Cunningham to a reservation to attend a ritual ceremony. For more, see Vaughan, *Merce Cunningham*, 19-20.

also maintained an interest in Navajo sand painting, which linked him with Jackson Pollock among others. In his lecture, “Indian Sand Painting or The Picture that is Valid for One Day,” delivered at The Artists Club in 1949, Cage argued that the impermanence of Native American sand painting heightened an audience’s experience of the art because it afforded an element of insecurity typically neglected in Western traditions.260 This embrace of what Cage called “art for the now-moment” led him to favor an elementary naiveté devoid of culture. To this end, he quoted Paul Klee in a footnote, “I want to be as though new-born, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing about Europe.”261 Thus, like many Abstract Expressionists, Cage not only romanticized Native American and non-Western phenomenology but implicitly rejected European positivism.

Possibilities and Collage

In 1947, the year after he completed Blue with China Ink, Robert Motherwell co-founded the avant-garde journal Possibilities with Harold Rosenberg. Approached by the publishers Wittenborn and Schultz to edit the new magazine, Motherwell compiled contributions from an impressive array of artists and intellectuals.262 This interdisciplinary endeavor featured reproductions of works by Jackson Pollock, David Smith, and William Baziotes alongside essays

260 This lecture was subsequently published as “Forerunners of Modern Music” in The Tiger’s Eye of March 1949. See Cage, Silence, 65, n. 10.
262 Motherwell told Robert Hobbs that Possibilities was discontinued after Schultz was killed in a plane crash. “If Motherwell’s memory serves him correctly the periodical was dispensed with after Schultz, one of the publishers with Wittenborn, died in a plane crash. The publisher’s widow was unwilling to undergo unnecessary financial risks, and the entire enterprise was abandoned.” Robert C. Hobbs, “Re-review: Possibilities,” Art Criticism 1, no. 2 (1979): 103. Motherwell worked for Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc. before and after Possibilities, serving as director of their Documents of Modern Art series. The volumes he edited during this time, the late 1940s, included: The Cubist Painters (Aesthetic Meditations) by Guillaume Apollinaire, Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art by Piet Mondrian, The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist by László Moholy-Nagy, Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular by Wassily Kandinsky, On My Way by Jean (Hans) Arp, Beyond Painting by Max Ernst, and The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology.
on Edgar Allan Poe, *Hamlet*, mythology, and Dada. Despite the magazine’s short-lived history, art historical scholarship has stressed the importance of *Possibilities* in the emergence of the New York School. Yve-Alain Bois has written that “the publication of *Possibilities* in New York marks the coalescence of Abstract Expressionism as a movement.”263 Ann Gibson has suggested that “*Possibilities* occupies a pivotal position in the periodical literature of Abstract Expressionism,” and Robert Hobbs has identified *Possibilities* as “the only periodical associated with the Abstract Expressionists during their formative years.”264 With *Possibilities*, Motherwell hoped to promote modernism while creating a forum that synthesized the arts without regard to genre or media. Motherwell remembered that he “felt badly then...about the isolation of the various arts from each other in New York, and suggested that as well as art there be literature, music, and architecture in the journal.”265 *Possibilities* became a means to overcome artistic fragmentation, for Motherwell told Ann Gibson,

> I had always been frustrated that New Yorkers could read, but couldn’t see or hear [original art in most periodicals] and thought that there should be magazines like the old *transition* and so on. My basic point of view, my entire adult life, has been that modernism is a general aesthetic of which any one of the arts is a subdivision. And that all of the magazines in that sense were doing everything upside down, simply taking one of the subdivisions and treating it autonomously, as though it weren’t connected with the other arts.266

Although only one issue was published, Motherwell enlisted Rosenberg to oversee literature, John Cage music, and Pierre Chareau architecture.267

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267 Pierre Chareau also designed a Quonset hut for Motherwell in Long Island in 1946. Motherwell lived and worked there from 1947-50. A second issue of *Possibilities* was initially planned in 1947. Motherwell had begun compiling
In his contribution to the journal, Cage provided background material on contemporary music, preparing an extensive survey of musical scores written by Ben Weber, Virgil Thomson, Edgard Varèse, and Alexei Haieff. The biographies Cage wrote on each composer added an encyclopedic quality to the publication, and Motherwell told Robert Hobbs he was “surprised” by Cage’s “careful research,” instead he expected “something more Dadaist” than Cage’s comprehensive study. When Motherwell questioned Cage about his detailed lists, which included information such as genre, publisher, timing, date of first performance, and instrumentation, Cage reportedly replied that no one had conducted such a study of composers, and it “was very much needed.”

Cage further contributed to Possibilities by supplying a question for an interview with Varèse, asking him: “I never tire of hearing of the music of the future. Would you, who more than others have sensuously dreamed of it, say what may it be, beyond the indication of your own work, as your imagination conceives it?” While Cage’s interest in avant-garde music is apparent from this question, it does little to elucidate his aesthetic position at the time. However, the question he submitted to Alexei Haieff revealed the rebellious spirit for which Cage would become known:


not? In what position? Are there any preliminary actions? Do you like to do something else (e.g. smoke, eat, receive friends, drink) at the same time?²⁷⁰

Haieff’s rebuttal was simply, “I am trying like hell to find out.”²⁷¹ In questioning the desired locale, climate, or environment for a work’s reception, Cage went beyond establishing the proper setting for experiencing a piece of music. Instead, he alluded to the type of *gesamtkunstwerk* that would dominate his oeuvre. Rather than isolating musical composition, and his study of it, to harmonic structures and rhythms, Cage sought its relation to the external world. Cage wondered what occurred before or after the creation or performance of the score. What was the sensual and physical response? What objects were employed by the composer and/or musicians? Cage would explore these ideas in his own music, challenging the limits of, and boundaries between, art and reality. His collaged compositions revolutionized music by incorporating everyday noise and audience participation into the fabric of the performance. Indeterminacy played a vital role in the experience of Cage’s work, and he drew from a variety sources just as *Possibilities* gathered together unrelated artworks and critical notions.

Featuring everything from Delacroix to Rothko (figs. 2.19-2.20), the random anthologizing of *Possibilities* suggested an avoidance of philosophical dogma, and the journal has been described as having a “lack of programmatic intent” and “openness of inquiry.”²⁷² Hobbs has considered the title of the periodical an “appropriately chosen term: it conveys the idea of open-endedness, and the need for resolution through action.”²⁷³ While noting that “more than a little naivete” marked the creation of such a freeform magazine, Hobbs has acknowledged that the unplanned nature and inherent risk-taking of the endeavor lent it a refreshing vitality. He

²⁷⁰ *Possibilities: Edgard Varèse and Alexi Haieff Questioned by 8 Composers,* 100.
²⁷¹ Ibid.
²⁷³ Ibid., 98.
has stated the apparent disorder of *Possibilities* activated the reader through its unorthodox manner. Confronted with a variety of sources—Jackson Pollock’s *The Key*, Andrea Caffi’s essay “On Mythology,” photographs of Oscar Niemeyer’s church in Brazil, excerpts from Edgar Allan Poe’s *Marginalia*—the reader was forced to construct order and meaning from disparate, and seemingly incongruous, ideas.

This varied and interdisciplinary approach certainly was intentional. In their introduction, Motherwell and Rosenberg declared that artists and writers should be “open” while expressing their “own experience.” Having discarded the notion of preplanned results, the editors cited a quotation by Juan Gris: “you are lost the instant you know what the result will be.”

Spontaneity and innovation were valued, but the editors wanted to avoid creating a dogmatic expression of it. As Motherwell recalled, “what we tried to do in *Possibilities*…was not theoretical; we wanted to present the evidence: very factual descriptions presenting the thing—without theory.”

Rosenberg had not yet written his canonical essay, “The American Action Painters,” and it seems that he and Motherwell sought distance from critics like Clement Greenberg, who had become synonymous with their methodologies. In Greenberg’s case, formalist theory became his calling card, and journals like *Partisan Review* were known for their politics. In fact, Parker Tyler criticized *Possibilities* because he felt it lacked the political punch of *Partisan Review* and its socialist leanings. The editors of *Possibilities* carefully distinguished between the artistic and political act, writing that “political commitment in our

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275 Motherwell, as quoted in Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism*, 34.
times means logically—no art, no literature.”277 Rather than succumbing to the “political trap,” as Motherwell and Rosenberg called it, Possibilities asserted that artists should remain free from restraints, be they theoretical or political. This mindset informed many of the contributions to the magazine; as William Baziotes wrote, “I cannot evolve any concrete theory about painting. What happens on the canvas is unpredictable and surprising to me…There is no particular system.”278

This anti-political and anti-formulaic approach invoked a Dada spirit, a lack of cohesion that Parker Tyler criticized in his review of Possibilities. Tyler believed that “the most logical function of the little magazine would be the organized effort to establish a new group within the acknowledged domain of the arts.”279 But the “experimental character” of Possibilities eschewed the very idea of an artistic “movement,” as well as the relationship of art and politics. As such, Tyler maintained that:

One misses a pervasive atmosphere in Possibilities that must exist to convince a reader that a magazine is present à l’avant-garde. What is there in common between the simple technical documentation of the music and architecture departments and the highly speculative esthetics of Mr. Rosenberg’s essay on Hamlet; what in common between Paul Goodman’s myth-fabulous, highly subjective conte and Lino Novás Calvo’s realistic, second-rate short story; what in common between the polemical ethics of Lionel Abel’s poetic play and the naïve flatness of Jackson Pollock’s My Painting (right or wrong) document? I don’t for a moment deny the value of each department in its way, but it is all too much like a public exhibition, with a booth devoted to the latest thing in each art. Above all, in no recent arrival in the little magazine field is there any directional energy, any organization of ideas, any real novelty, any group inspiration.280

Tyler’s critique suggests that without direction, or lacking a specific thrust, the notion of the avant-garde proves hollow. It was not enough to simply present new ideas about form or

277 Motherwell and Rosenberg, Preface to Possibilities, 1.
meaning; rather, it was the objective that granted currency to such originality. Otherwise, Tyler lamented, questions of meaning were replaced by aesthetic trends or fashions.

The golden tradition of the advance guard is simply this: Wishing to transform the whole domain of the arts, it addresses itself primarily to the artist, the producer, not to the audience, the consumer. Therefore, it must inveigh, propagandize, defy; it must be favoritist; it must be full of internal combustion. Otherwise it is simply luxury merchandise in esthetics.  

Without reaching a broader public, Tyler felt that projects like Possibilities would achieve nothing, since no progress or change would occur as long as art remained esoteric.

Parker Tyler’s review has been reinterpreted by Ann Gibson to suggest how Possibilities actually reflected Robert Motherwell’s aesthetic and philosophic concerns at the time. The format and editorial strategy adopted by Motherwell, Cage, and others can best be described as collage. Gibson has stated that the non-linear approach of Possibilities produced a “collage-like effect,” as ideological judgment yielded to description and presentation. Motherwell developed this editorial process from John Dewey’s Art as Experience, a work that resonated with the artist. Dewey suggested that analysis indicated a step beyond experience, and Motherwell preferred to present the initial experience to his readers without judgment. Rather than promoting certain artists or writers through critical appraisals, the editors of Possibilities privileged the act of documentation, although Gibson has pointed out that the act of description can itself indicate a judgment, particularly in consideration of what the editors decide to include. Motherwell confessed that his “philosophy is to let everyone be what they are. This is different from the philosophy of New Yorkers. They tend to want to impose everything, rather than letting

282 Motherwell has said: “I realize that I was full of Dewey during the forties, and he remains one of the really significant, subconscious forces in my art today.” Mattison, Robert Motherwell: The Formative Years, 6. For more on the impact of Dewey on Motherwell’s art and writings, see Gregory Gilbert, “The Alternate Aesthetic: Robert Motherwell’s Early Collages and the Formative Years of Abstract Expressionism” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1998).
everyone be themselves with no imposition of their private opinions about it.” This all-inclusive embrace of modernist visual art, literature, architecture, and music was Motherwell’s objective, to present “the thing—without theory.”

Collage served as the framework for achieving such formlessness. The appropriative strategies and disjointed effects of collage supplied Motherwell with a “concrete” means of producing the unexpected juxtapositions and heightened experiences he desired from *Possibilities*. This philosophy developed, in part, because of his admiration for John Cage. Motherwell described Cage’s written materials as “almost the kind I might have written in the sense that they’re essentially collage technique—quotes from all kinds of things—odd relations; you try to get much more dimension, more points of reference than straight narrative could.” Such “odd relations” not only challenged logic, thereby freeing the artist from intellectual constraints, but according to Surrealist dictum, they enhanced experience. In a letter to William Carlos Williams, written to convince the poet to collaborate on the journal *VVV*, Motherwell stated that through automatism, the Surrealists presented “a solution to those problems of how to free the imagination in concrete terms.” By placing emphasis on “novelty, invention, the disturbing, the strange,” the artist could achieve a “revolution in the sense of increased consciousness, of consciousness of the possibilities inherent in experiencing.” Automatism and collage offered Motherwell avenues for exploring the disturbing and the strange, not only as an editor and visual artist, but as a writer, too. Stephanie Terenzio has described Motherwell’s essays as having an “indirect presentation through a verbal collage—a construction that would

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284 Ibid., 34.
285 Ibid.
286 Motherwell, Letter to William Carlos Williams, 17. Note: the italics were Motherwell’s, as he stressed the possibility for other solutions.
287 Ibid., 18.
become his literary ‘style.’”

In articles like “The Modern Painter’s World,” Motherwell assimilated various sources into his text. Quotes from Plato, Spinoza, and Freud accompanied analyses on Picasso, Mondrian, and Joyce, and the aesthetics and strategies of collage extended to all manner of Motherwell’s output, whether artistic or literary. Ann Gibson has argued that for Possibilities to remain true to its objectives, no strategy other than collage could be employed. “Possibilities, then, purposefully sacrificed the cohesiveness offered by a single philosophy, a single medium, or consistent organization in favor of the ‘possibilities’ lurking in the unexpected conjunction of dissimilar elements.”

Motherwell also employed his collage editorial style for The Dada Painters and Poets, another collaborative project with Cage, who contributed a statement about composer Erik Satie to the volume. Motherwell apparently struggled to compile the sources for his anthology, so in order to organize his introductory essay he abandoned the typewriter for handwritten notes on sketching paper. Motherwell dedicated one sheet of paper to each idea or quotation that he wanted to include. While this process was laborious and expensive—the drawing pads he employed apparently were high quality—it enabled Motherwell to arrange and rearrange his text like a collage. He recounted this story to Stephanie Terenzio:

My creative and critical sense are all bound up and dependent upon seeing everything at once. I basically have a spatial and not a temporal sense. Therefore, my inspiration—which may sound absurd—was to pin these sheets upon the forty-foot wall of my painting studio, and then to begin moving them around like a collage. It was only then that I began to hit it exactly because, although I couldn’t read them from a distance, I could remember the particular passages from the way they looked. In this manner, I could keep everything in my mind—

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290 Gibson, Issues in Abstract Expressionism, 36.
what I said, what I hadn’t said—and rearrange the sequence and order until it call came to life.  

The preface, compiled through collage tactics, thus eschewed traditional syntax and conventions of narrative or sequencing. Motherwell borrowed from Dada aesthetics to produce similar effects, and in this way, positioned himself as a modernist by dismissing conventions of representation and mimesis.

As a medium, collage has the potential to undermine syntax because, as David Antin has claimed, the principle of collage asserts “the dramatic juxtaposition of disparate materials without commitment to explicit syntactical relations between elements.” History and psychoanalysis, according to this model, stand “in direct conflict with the collage principle” by attempting to impose “linear narratives with a clearly articulated plot” onto forms that lack such compositional and notational logic. Theodor Adorno recognized this characteristic in the poetry of Hölderlin because his parataxis “evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax” by linking elements serially rather than hypotaxically. Rather than embracing the “synthetic unity” of conventional sequencing, Hölderlin, and for that matter Motherwell, produced disturbances and caesurae in language that privilege formal considerations. Adorno found that parataxis “gives form its primacy over content,” a modernist sensibility that garnered Motherwell, Cage, and many within the New York School critical acclaim. The collage principles that Cage employed for music, and Motherwell the visual arts, not only privileged the quotidian and indeterminate, they also subordinated syntax through the disjunctures of

relativism. Motherwell argued that collage was a “relational” medium wherein representation becomes irrelevant as “one cuts and chooses and shifts and pastes, and sometimes tears off and begins again.”295 To Motherwell, that which directed such relations was not narrative or representation, but form and aesthetics. He arranged collages like *Blue with China Ink* in accordance with formal considerations apart from the syntactical. In a similar vein, his work as an editor rejected linear syntax, an approach to taxis not entirely dissimilar from Cage. David Nicholls, for example, has argued that Cage maintained “a childlike need to question basic syntax” by embracing raw sound, inventing new instruments—in particular the prepared piano and other junk instruments—and devising “square-root form” scores based on the *I Ching* or simple durations.296 Indeed, his reputation as a composer developed through his rejection of musical conventions, including instrumentation and durational schema.

**The Poetics of Collage: From Joyce to Mallarmé**

The rhetoric of parataxis that characterized the work of Motherwell and Cage was developed in part through their admiration for James Joyce. These two collagists drew on many of the same literary sources in formulating their aesthetic goals, and their shared interest in writers like Joyce and Stéphane Mallarmé probably contributed to the formation of their friendship in the 1940s. Joyce cast a large shadow over literary and artistic circles throughout the twentieth century, and his reputation among the Abstract Expressionists was firmly established. For Americans, the writings of Joyce served as “sacred texts,” and James Brooks remembered

that “a writer who influenced most of us…was James Joyce.” Indeed, Jackson Pollock, Philip Guston, Barnett Newman, Jack Tworkov, Ad Reinhardt, Tony Smith, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and Robert Motherwell numbered among Joyce’s disciples. He was one of Pollock’s favorite authors while David Smith named his dog “Finnegan’s Wake,” declaring that he had no need to study Symbolist aesthetics or Surrealist dictates because he had read Joyce. When discussing his lifelong homages to Ulysses and Finnegan’s Wake, Motherwell stated matter-of-factly that “Joyce is permanently on my mind.”

Motherwell first encountered Joyce at age twenty while in Paris in 1935. He purchased Ulysses from a street vendor along the Seine and read the novel throughout his “Grand Tour” of Europe. Motherwell’s interest in Joyce remained constant throughout his life, as the artist claimed:

I dip into Ulysses the way one might look through the Bible… I have about ten copies in all the places I normally am: near my bed, or in the studio, in the living room. In the back room there are Finnegan’s Wake and Ulysses and the Portrait.

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299 Lee Krasner told Francis O’Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw that Joyce “was one of Pollock’s favorite authors,” and his library included two copies of Ulysses, Finnegans Wake, and Stephen Hero. Francis V. O’Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works, vol. 4 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978): 193. Motherwell recounted how “in those days I was full of French Symbolist aesthetics, of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and of André Breton, of the possibilities of representing reality indirectly but passionately in one’s medium. I can still see David saying, with his characteristic bluntness and inalterable sense of his own identity, ‘I don’t need them. I’ve read James Joyce!’ He was right, all of it is in Ulysses, and I looked at him with a sudden intellectual respect that has not diminished as my affection for him has continually grown.” Frank O’Hara, Robert Motherwell (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1965): 56.


301 “The Artist Interviewed by David Hayman,” 283-284. Motherwell explained that his father “had in the back of his mind for years that we should do the gentlemanly thing and make the Grand Tour. Neither of us had ever been to Europe. We finally did go, crossing the American continent from San Francisco by train, then taking a steamship to Le Havre.” Accompanied by Motherwell’s younger sister, they traveled throughout France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, England, and Scotland.
From time to time I'll just pick one up, read a dozen pages or so and feel perfectly happy.  

Motherwell collected an extensive library on Joyce, becoming friends with noted Joyce scholars Nathan Halper and David Hayman. He also organized an exhibition, Robert Motherwell: Tribute to James Joyce, in conjunction with Halper’s conference, the “International Joyce Society Symposium,” held in Provincetown, Massachusetts in 1983. Motherwell remembered the show as “specifically ‘Joycean’…it turned out to be one of my favorite exhibitions.” This tribute was made up of more than twenty images that Motherwell completed in honor of Joyce during the course of forty years. Many of these works were published as The Dedalus Sketchbooks in 1988, and the following year his etchings accompanied a new edition of Ulysses. Motherwell further revealed his admiration for Joyce by renaming his foundation the “Dedalus Foundation” after the character Stephen Dedalus in 1990.

304 Robert Motherwell: Tribute to James Joyce and Halper’s symposium were both held in Provincetown, Massachusetts in 1982-83, where Motherwell and Halper each maintained residences. The two had originally met in the 1950s through Motherwell’s dealer, Samuel Kootz. Halper and John Cuddihy took over Kootz’s satellite gallery in Provincetown, leading to a long friendship with Motherwell. Motherwell delivered a eulogy for Halper when he died shortly after the symposium ended in 1983. See Robert Motherwell, “A Collage for Nathan Halper in Nine Parts,” in The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell, edited by Stephanie Terenzio (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999): 266-269.
Motherwell’s earliest work that referred to Joyce was *Ulysses* (1947, fig. 2.21), an oil painting on cardboard mounted to the side of a wooden crate. Featuring dark blacks, grays, and browns interspersed with white markings, Motherwell’s *Ulysses* resembles a schematic stick figure. An ovular form set within an inverse triangle evokes the Cyclops, Odysseus’ mythical foe in Homer’s *Odyssey* and one of the sources for Joyce’s exploration of daily life in Dublin. Heavy, textured brushwork constructs Motherwell’s pyramidal forms and monochromatic background, appropriate allusions to Joyce’s literary style. Motherwell himself noted that, as opposed to the “fine and subtle” designs he had created for the French poet Marcelin Pleynet, “with Joyce I often did the opposite. I used heavy, almost coarse and brutal lines.”

David Hayman has suggested that Motherwell’s technique mimicked Joyce’s text, “after all *Ulysses* is heavy with implication, thick textured, immensely varied in both form and content.”

Furthermore, Motherwell’s use of the triangular, delta shape borrowed directly from *Finnegans Wake*, with Joyce using it to refer to his character Anna Livia Plurabelle, the wife of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker.

Motherwell was careful to claim Joyce only as an inspiration, declaring that his uses of Joycean subjects “are not illustrative. No true Modernist artist, as I use the word, is a narrative artist, a storyteller…I do not illustrate Joyce.” The New York School disavowed themselves from illustration because they did not want their work to be dismissed as decoration. Instead, Motherwell considered Joyce a “prophet” who reinforced his aesthetic mission.

A writer like Joyce can make me just want to paint… I found *Ulysses* at a time when I was searching for the key to a vaguely perceived modernist aesthetic that I

308 Ibid.
310 Motherwell, as quoted in *The Dedalus Sketchbooks*, n.p.
knew I had to make my own. Joyce served my purposes then and now. If you have taken on the adventure of modernism as I have—and the history of it—there have to be a few prophets to help you when you get discouraged. You go back to them for reinforcement.\(^{311}\)

Motherwell legitimized his artistic methods through his references to important modernists via tributes or homages. One of these methods was collage, because he understood Joyce to be “forging the thing out of heaps of words.”\(^{312}\) Like a collagist assembling pictorial compositions from cutouts and scraps of material, Joyce fused disparate forms of language, such as slang and onomatopoeia, with snippets from fictional newspapers into collaged prose.\(^{313}\) Motherwell specifically equated Joyce with collage in his “non-linear” technique and materiality. In preparatory notes for his lecture at the Joyce Symposium in Provincetown, Motherwell listed “collage technique (non-linear)” under “materiality / historical references” in his outline.\(^{314}\)

Joyce further embodied a collage ethos through his embrace of the quotidian. For example, *Ulysses* chronicles a trivial day in the life of ordinary Dubliners Leopold and Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. As James Brooks noted in a discussion about Joyce’s influence on the New York School, the author’s “non-narrative style” and “strange juxtaposition of things and unexpectedness was pretty much what we were after at that time. That was in the air.”\(^{315}\) Ibram Lassaw, another member of the New York School, concurred, describing Joyce’s writings in language reminiscent of Abstract Expressionist painting. “There is this overall feeling in Joyce’s

\(^{311}\) Motherwell, as quoted in “Interview with David Hayman,” 285.

\(^{312}\) Ibid.


\(^{315}\) James Brooks, quoted in Crosman and Miller, “Speaking of Tomlin,” 114.
work… a continuum… everything is in focus. Everything is important.” Critics located a similar aesthetic in the art of Motherwell and his contemporaries, particularly in their adoption of allover compositions that disavowed conventional ordering systems.

Joycean references recur in Motherwell’s oeuvre because, more than any other figure, Joyce represented modern art to Motherwell. Whether creating collages or editing journals, Motherwell remained one of the most prolific advocates for modern art in America. He often invoked Joyce as the paradigm of this sensibility, declaring him on the “cutting edge of modernism” for understanding how to employ a modernist language. For Motherwell, this language was rooted in free association and automatism, devices that enabled the artist or writer to escape the trappings of narrative or representation. Free from these constraints, Motherwell considered the modernist artist to be on an “adventure,” exploring the aesthetics of experience.

The process of painting …is conceived of as an adventure, without preconceived ideas on the part of persons of intelligence, sensibility, and passion. Fidelity to what occurs between oneself and the canvas, no matter how unexpected, becomes central. The specific appearance of these canvases depends not only on what the painters do, but what they refuse to do. The major decisions in the process of painting are on the grounds of truth, not taste… no true artist ends with the style he expected to have when he began, any more than anyone’s life unrolls in the particular manner that one expected when young; that it is only by giving oneself up completely to the painting medium that one finds oneself and one’s own style.

Scholars also have linked Joyce with openness, an element that activates readers through his use of multiplicity and complexity, whether in narrative flow or language. Umberto Eco and Robert

316 Ibram Lassaw, quoted in quoted in Crosman and Miller, “Speaking of Tomlin,” 114.
McAlmon among others have noted the various ways in which semiotic openness permeates Joyce’s poetics, particularly in his use of linguistic puns, symbolic ambiguity, and portmanteau.\(^{319}\) In her study of Motherwell’s literary sources, Mary Ann Caws suggests his indebtedness to this philosophy of receptivity.

Like the Surrealist readiness to chance, the Joycean attitude is one of absolute openness to what happens. Everything remains to be discovered, newly with each human, about human vice and worth. Motherwell took this kind of quest more seriously than many artists, and more personally than most.\(^{320}\)

Motherwell privileged the idea of openness, favoring *Possibilities* for the name of his journal and creating more than one hundred paintings with the title “open.” He first exhibited his *Open* series (fig. 2.22) at the Marlborough Gallery in New York in 1969, featuring works made up of an acrylic ground with a charcoal outline delineating a rectangle with no top.\(^{321}\) As many critics have suggested, “the effect of the rectangle within a rectangle…is that of a window within the plane of a blank or textured colored wall—but a window that opens on nothing but itself.”\(^{322}\)

To accompany a monograph of his work, Motherwell noted how “in the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* there are eighty-two entries under the word ‘open.’ For me those entries are one of the most beautiful poems in modern English, filled with all kinds of associations, all kinds of examples.”\(^{323}\)


\(^{321}\) Motherwell’s created the rectangular form by accident. After applying a preparatory coat of yellow ochre to a large canvas, he leaned a small canvas against it and discovered the juxtaposition of the forms appealed to his aesthetic sensibilities. He drew an outline around the smaller canvas with charcoal and, upon reorienting the canvas so that the rectangle hovered from above, considered the work complete. Arnason, *Robert Motherwell*, 71.

\(^{322}\) Arnason, *Robert Motherwell*, 71.

\(^{323}\) Motherwell, quoted in Arnason, *Robert Motherwell*, fig. 189.
John Cage also maintained a lifelong relationship with Joyce’s writings, having first purchased a copy of *Finnegan’s Wake* in 1939 while in Seattle. He had read parts of *Work in Progress* as it was published serially but admitted to never fully reading *Finnegans Wake* at that time. He did return to Joyce’s novel as a source for his music three years later:

In 1942 Janet Fairbanks asked me for a song, I browsed in the *Wake* looking for a lyrical passage. The one I chose begins page 556. I changed the paragraph so that it became two and read as follows:

“Night by silentsailing night, Isobel, wildwood’s eyes and primarose hair, quietly, all the woods so wild, in mauves of moss and daphnedews, how all so still she lay, neath of the whitethorn, child of tree, like some losthappy leaf, like blowing flower stilled, as fain would she anon, for soon again ‘twill be, win me, woo me, wed me, ah weary me! Deeply, now evencalm lay sleeping.

“Night, Isobel, sister Isobel, Saintette Isobelle, Madame Isa Veuve La Belle.”

Cage wrote *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* based on this passage. Written for soprano, this composition also included a piano solo that required the pianist to strike the lid of the instrument with fingers and knuckles. In the same year, Cage titled a piano piece *In the Name of the Holocaust* after *Finnegan’s Wake*, Joyce’s reference to the Catholic refrain “in the name of the Holy Ghost.” He noted, “I remember looking in later years several times for other lyrical passages in the *Wake*. But I never settled on one as the text for another song.” While Cage never directly borrowed text from Joyce again, he created the score *Roaratorio* (1979) by reading through *Finnegan’s Wake* and listing all of the sounds mentioned in it. This led to a massive compilation of four to five thousand tape-recorded sounds, which Cage fused with traditional Irish music. Insisting on the authenticity of these sounds by having them recorded in

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their native locales, Cage enlisted the help of radio stations from across the world. Although forced to arbitrarily limit the number of sounds because of time constraints, Cage created a musical collage of the text, a work that he hoped would “act to introduce people to the pleasures of *Finnegan’s Wake* as poetry and chaos.”

In the 1970s, Cage began his project *Writing Through Finnegan’s Wake*, a series of mesostics that utilized Joyce’s name and that of his characters as the base for his typographical poems. This project led Cage to read literary criticism on Joyce and he became “stuck in the wake…full of curiosity about all of it,” developing his poems as a means to question the structure of Joyce’s language. Cage appreciated how Joyce had created new words but was disappointed that he “kept the old structures,” since he believed that “syntax is the arrangement of the army…[and] became devoted to nonsyntactical ‘demilitarized’ language.” With *Writing Through Finnegan’s Wake*, Cage set out to revise Joyce’s work, simultaneously celebrating and cannibalizing his canonical text. In this manner, Joyce served as a ready-made of sorts, an article to be edited and reconfigured within collaged compositions. Indeed, as Klein has argued, “by divorcing Joyce’s word from his intentions, Joyce’s language becomes Cage’s new work. By dismembering Joyce’s text, Cage also ‘remembers’ it through music…an act of creative ventriloquism involved in artistic appropriation.” Likewise, Motherwell did not want to merely illustrate Joyce’s text; instead he engaged Joyce’s literature in an act of homage similar to Cage. Both Motherwell and Cage “dismember” Joyce, acknowledging his influence while creating something original from its remains. In this manner, Cage’s practice of “reading” Joyce

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329 Ibid., 133.
mimicked that of Motherwell. Both approached Joyce’s writings randomly, that is, each would revisit works like *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake* by pulling the volume from its shelf and opening to a random page for perusal. Neither artist nor composer approached Joyce’s writings as narratives; instead they invited atemporal readings wherein plotlines became irrelevant. Passages were sought for their lyrical quality or modernist form. This approach to reading Joyce further undermined the few remaining syntactical structures that bound his novels together. Joyce’s literary style contested conventional syntax through his juxtaposition of onomatopoeia and mise-en-scène texts such as newspaper headlines. His non-linear, collage-like narratives further complicated taxis through the density of his stream-of-consciousness technique and use of acronyms.

While Joyce was ubiquitous in the libraries of New York School artists, Motherwell and Cage shared a slightly more arcane interest in the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Motherwell’s reverence for Mallarmé was indicated by his collage *Mallarmé’s Swan* (1942-44, fig. 2.23), an homage that predated *Blue with China Ink* and further suggests Motherwell’s high estimation of Cage by placing him along literary figures such as Joyce and Mallarmé. *Mallarmé’s Swan* parallels *Blue with China Ink* in its materials, composition, and palette as well as its salutatory nature. Both collages contain large amounts of blue and ocher, stand vertically aligned, and exhibit charcoal outlining and irregular ink stains. *Mallarmé’s Swan* features alternating stripes of ocher and blue set against several circular or ovoid shapes, while an axe-like shape occupies the central, uppermost zone of the collage. The inkblots dominate the lower segment of the work, standing in sharp contrast to the linearity of the background stripes. Contrasts characterize the work as Motherwell juxtaposed lines with curves, charcoal outlines with paper cutouts, and automatist ink stains with geometric regularity.
Motherwell “discovered” Mallarmé while in Paris in 1938 as a graduate student at Harvard. His travels were to center around a study of Delacroix, but Motherwell wound up at the University of Grenoble studying Mallarmé and Symbolism instead.\textsuperscript{331} Mallarmé resonated with Motherwell because he, like Joyce, clarified the project of modernism, a project difficult to realize in America:

Forty years ago I was trying to find out about a certain kind of modernist vision and it so happens that, among other people, some Symbolist poets came closest to expressing it… In the 1930s, it was almost impossible to find out in English, in America, modern art’s deepest concerns, theoretically and culturally. I mean, you could see reproductions, and by the 1940s the Museum of Modern Art had the best collection in the world of modern art. You could go and look at it, but to find out what was on these guys’ minds apart from the technical considerations, which were obvious, it was almost impossible.\textsuperscript{332}

Motherwell explained that Mallarmé’s notion of “indirect correspondences” offered him a “working idea” of modernism in the arts.\textsuperscript{333}

What better definition of modern art is there than Mallarmé’s “the expression of the mysterious aspects of existence, through human language brought back to its essential rhythm; in this way it endows our sojourn with authenticity and constitutes the only spiritual task” or (1864) “for I am inventing a language that must necessarily spring from a very new poetics: to paint, not the thing, but the effect that it produces.”\textsuperscript{334}

Mallarmé provided the framework that allowed Motherwell to abandon representation and embrace abstraction because Mallarmé’s modernist language attempted to capture a symbolic essence rather than replicating a likeness. Motherwell considered mimesis a “dull and tedious

system of describing the ‘objects’ of the world,” instead calling for “a protest against naturalistic descriptiveness.” He sought new means of expression and located them within the writings of Mallarmé, who employed devices, such as indirection and allusion, to generate evocative poetic metaphors. Motherwell ultimately celebrated abstraction because, for him, it enabled artists to escape the tedium of representation and repressiveness of history.

Motherwell quoted Mallarmé frequently throughout his life and incorporated Marcel Raymond’s survey of French modernist poetry, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, into the Documents of Modern Art series he edited for Wittenborn and Schultz. He acknowledged that, among the Abstract Expressionists, “the influence of the ‘Symbolist’ aesthetic is a proposition that is perhaps impossible to demonstrate, and if it represents a truth… I am sure, many members of the New York School are unaware.” Mallarmé’s influence on Robert Motherwell cannot be overstated, however, for he considered Mallarmé’s Swan “one of my best early works as a picture, and one of the surest expressions of my personality then, i.e. of anything I believed in, with the innocence with which I believed it.” According to Motherwell’s self-reportage, the collage served as a manifesto of sorts, indicating his artistic mission. His belief in Symbolist values is evident as well in his use of particular colors and forms that suggest the poet. Bailey van Hook has suggested that Motherwell’s use of yellow represented freedom for the painter, a

337 Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, The Documents of Modern Art, no. 10 (New York: Wittenborn and Schultz, 1949). In additional to Motherwell’s “Preliminary Notice,” Harold Rosenberg wrote the introduction, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler contributed an essay on Mallarmé, and Bernard Karpel provided a bibliography.
reference to Mallarmé’s quest for poetic freedom. Accordingly, Motherwell’s use of blue in
the collage refers to Mallarmé’s poem “L’Azur” and the poet’s search for purity and the
eternal.

Motherwell had originally named his collage *Mallarmé’s Dream* to refer to Mallarmé’s
use of the words *la rêve* to suggest distance from reality as well as eternal nothingness. Joseph
Cornell erroneously remembered the title as *Mallarmé’s Swan*, which referred to Mallarmé’s
1885 “Sonnet,” a poem about a swan frozen in ice. Motherwell preferred Cornell’s evocation
and changed the title accordingly. His willingness to alter the title stemmed from Mallarmé’s
theory of “indirect correspondences,” wherein connections and allusions become generated
through experience. Rather than determining an absolute viewpoint or interpretive meaning, the
artwork or poem activates the audience in granting authority beyond the author’s associations.
Yet as Antje Quast has claimed, Mallarmé’s poetics were hardly arbitrary; instead the artist
retained authorship by providing a “perceptual framework” that directs interpretation.

Hence, Motherwell established this “framework” through his titles because, despite naming his pictures

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340 Van Hook, 105. Motherwell frequently associated colors with particular feelings and emotions, Natalie Edgar
summarized some of these associations succinctly: “In a usage which he has made public, black stands for death or
anxiety, white for life or éclat, yellow for freedom, orange for happiness.” Natalie Edgar, “The Satisfactions of
(1911-12), reprinted in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* (Boston:
De Capo Press, 1994). Motherwell also employed blue based upon his expressive needs, writing: “Apropos the term
‘Motherwell blue’: I use, in fact, many blues in various tones, and if there is a blue that I might call mine, it is
simply a blue that feels warm, something that cannot be accounted for chemically or technically, but only as a state
University Press, 1965); 51-54.
344 In the caption accompanying *Mallarmé’s Swan* for his retrospective at the Smith College Museum of Art (1963),
Motherwell wrote: “I originally called it ‘Mallarmé’s Dream;’ Joseph Cornell misremembered the title: I agreed, so I
changed it. Modern painting is rooted in the French ‘Symbolist’ esthetic, knowingly or not; this particular picture,
‘Mallarmé’s Swan’ is an homage, a thanks, an identification that perhaps I feel less strongly now.” Motherwell,
Smith College, n.p.
345 Quast, “Mallarmé topoi in the work of Robert Motherwell,” 317.
after the fact via “indirect correspondences,” they generated the context governing interpretation. In this way, Mallarmé’s Swan might evoke a specific poem, yet the allusions evoking Mallarmé remain intact despite the rejection of the title Mallarmé’s Dream. Motherwell’s collages, specifically Mallarmé’s Swan and Blue with China Ink, thus operate differently from the collages of Picasso or Braque. Whereas the Cubists employed quotidian materials such as newspaper or wallpaper to represent everyday reality, Motherwell’s collages remain “symbolic” in the French literary sense, employing formal elements to relate expressiveness. It is true that Motherwell employed common objects for his collages, but in his early works from the mid-1940s the artist struggled to reconcile abstraction with expression.

In addition to providing Motherwell with a model for Symbolic suggestion, Mallarmé’s poetry also inspired Motherwell’s artistic processes, particularly his adoption of chance operations. Haunted by the notion of indeterminacy and its ramifications for human existence, Mallarmé hoped that structured systems would govern the accidental. However, in “Un Coup de Dés,” the poet lamented that “a throw of the dice will never abolish chance.” Motherwell likewise engaged chance, incorporating automatic gestures, doodling, and irregular inkblots into collages like Mallarmé’s Swan and Blue with China Ink. Motherwell explained that these puddles served as a “start-up strategy” for his compositions.346 “I usually begin a picture with a ‘doodle,’ or with a liquid puddle like a Rorschach image (but not pressed together), or with a line and a dot, or a piece of paper dropped at random on what will be a collage.”347 The accidental

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346 Robert Saltonstall Mattison used the term “start-up strategy” to described Motherwell’s process. “Mallarmé’s Swan contains an area where, as a start-up strategy, Motherwell painted automatically according to Surrealist precepts. Thinned oil paint in black, yellow, and red was poured on the surface in puddles and allowed to accidentally run together, as seen in the lower center of the collage. (Only the vertical, pink piece of paper is below these pools of paint and thus preceded them.)” Mattison, 113.

staining and flow of pigment symbolically acknowledges Mallarmé’s aleatory poetics, again signaling his impact on Motherwell’s career.

Not only did Mallarmé provide a concept of modernism for Motherwell to explore, but his poetry concretized, in literary terms, the relevance of collage to this process. Mallarmé employed words like collage elements, freely arranging them in accordance to the desired effect. Meaning stemmed not only from representation or description, instead signification could be enacted through relativism. Motherwell wrote that “sometimes I have an imaginary picture in mind of the poet Mallarmé in his study late at night—changing, blotting, transferring each word and its relations with such care.” Collage appealed to Motherwell because of its relativism, and he noted how the medium allowed artists to continually adjust and alter the composition, an abstract process granted only by rejecting mimesis.

John Cage also drew upon Mallarmé in formulating his aesthetic philosophies, developing aleatory compositions through his understanding of Mallarmé’s throw of the dice. In fact, Cage invoked Mallarmé to clarify his disagreement with French composer Pierre Boulez over the role of chance or indeterminacy in Cage’s works.

[Boulez] rejected outright any acceptance of the idea of chance. That wasn’t a part of his views. Later came Mallarmé’s posthumous Book, which could have brought us together again, since in the end Mallarmé too

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348 L. Bailey Van Hook has likewise argued that “Motherwell recognized that the effect the collage produced was analogous to effects suggested by Mallarmé’s poetics.” Van Hook, 104.
350 Motherwell, “Beyond the Aesthetic,” 37.
351 Cage met Boulez while in Paris on a Guggenheim Foundation grant in 1949. The two composers developed a close, professional relationship wherein Cage hosted Boulez in New York and promoted performances of the Frenchman’s work. Boulez formulated his theories on serialism while corresponding with Cage, although Cage’s more favorable critical reception in America eventually led to a theoretical rift between the two. In 1957, Boulez wrote an essay, “Aléa,” that criticized Cage’s use of chance operations for his music and essentially severed ties between the two. For more on their relationship and conflicting notions of seriality and chance methods, see Jonathan Scott Lee, “Mimésis and Beyond: Mallarmé, Boulez, and Cage,” in Writings about John Cage, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996): 180-212.
accorded primacy to chance. In fact, Boulez in turn threw himself into chance operations. But for him, chance served as a pretext for inventing the term *aleatory*. I believe he established its present musical definition. Well, he used that word only to describe appropriate and correct chance operations, as opposed to those which seemed to him inappropriate or incorrect—mine!\(^{352}\)

Cage further elucidated the difference between Boulez’s “aleatory” music and his own “inappropriate” variant.

…the chance of contemporary physics, tables of random numbers, corresponds to an *equal* distribution of events. The chance to which I resort, that of chance operations, is different. It presupposes an *unequal* distribution of elements. That is the contribution of the Chinese *Book of Chances*, the *I Ching*, or the astronomical maps I used for *Atlas Eclipticalis*. I never achieve the physical object that interests the statistician.\(^{353}\)

For Cage, the key to employing chance was to acknowledge and accept a certain amount of unpredictability. He achieved this by “unequally” employing his compositional tools and devices; that is, Cage eventually would take chance operations to a step beyond seriality. Where composers like Boulez granted improvisatory freedom to musicians performing his musical scores, the element of chance was reduced by the rigid system of serialism that governed their ability to play particular notes. For example, in the twelve-tone system pioneered by Schoenberg, musical notes could be played in any order and were thus interchangeable, but musicians were free to repeat phrasing only upon performing the previous eleven elements. Even Mallarmé’s “throw of the dice” limited the amount of possible outcomes because results remain contingent on the number of sides to each die. Indeterminacy, then, only served as the pretext for Boulez’s music, whereas in Cage’s work of the 1950s and 1960s, chance became the text outright. What


\(^{353}\) Ibid., 180-181.
Mallarmé, and for that matter Boulez, found so problematic about indeterminacy was how chance operations often removed the artist from the equation. In his essay “Crisis in Poetry,” Mallarmé noted:

If the poem is to be pure, the poet’s voice must be stilled and the initiative taken by the words themselves, which will be set in motion as they meet unequally in collision. And in an exchange of gleams they will flame out like some glittering swath of fire sweeping over previous stones, and thus replace the audible breathing in lyric poetry of old—replace the poet’s own personal and passionate control of verse.  

The “crisis in poetry,” as Mallarmé saw it, stemmed from the displacement of authorial control that occurred through “pure” poetic formalism and aleatory processes. Cage eventually grew to relish such indeterminacy, employing a variety of statistical operations that decisively removed the artist’s ego and subjectivity from the equation. However, at the time Motherwell made Blue with China Ink, Cage was still working within the parameters of serial and atonal composition.

Like Mallarmé, Motherwell struggled to accept the loss of artistic agency. He held that art needed to remain free from societal constraints and pressures, such as politics or capital, and considered formal innovations the key to artistic openness. But ultimately he lamented that “this formalism has led to an intolerable weakening of the artist’s ego.”

Motherwell clung to the concept of the ego because he considered it a fusion of the external and internal worlds. As artists rejected mimesis, he believed they had no choice but to delve inward.

…there are increased demands on the individual’s own ego for the content of experience. We say that the individual withdraws into himself. Rather, he must draw from himself. If the external world does not provide experience’s content, the ego must. The ego can draw from itself in two ways: the ego can be the subject of its own expression, in which case the painter’s personality is the

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principal meaning expressed; otherwise the ego can socialize itself—i.e., become mature and objectified—through formalization.\textsuperscript{356}

The socialization of the ego led Motherwell to espouse “rejecting the values of middle-class society” in favor of “the aesthetic and other eternal values like chance, love, and logic.”\textsuperscript{357} He understood that the language of the “eternal,” “pure,” and “objective” seemed at odds with expression, but the techniques of modernism, such as free association, enabled form and ego to come together. He considered the collage medium to be particularly well suited to this endeavor because of its interpersonal yet allusive potency. Collage offered Motherwell a way to “possess” formal objects, such as consumer labels, while serving as “a kind of private diary—a privately coded diary, not made with an actual autobiographical intention, but one that functions in an associative way for me.”\textsuperscript{358} The medium itself centers around citation, as its referents maintain an identity beyond the work of art, thus privileging reference at the expense of mimesis or representation.\textsuperscript{359}

This notion returns to Mallarmé, because if we adopt Motherwell’s understanding of Mallarmé’s Symbolist poetics to \textit{Blue with China Ink}, the formal characteristics of the collage can be seen as alluding to his relationship with Cage. As suggested earlier, Motherwell’s use of China ink and Japanese rice paper refer to their shared interest in Asian philosophy and culture, and Motherwell’s automatic processes and selection of pigments similarly evoke the composer he wished to honor. Motherwell claimed “how crucial was the fact that I grew up mainly in prewar California… I grew up in a landscape… [where] the colors are local, intense and clear,

\begin{footnotes}{356}Motherwell, “The Modern Painter’s World,” 32.  
\textsuperscript{357}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{358}Motherwell, in Flam. \textit{Motherwell}, 18.  
\end{footnotes}
edges are sharp, shadows are black… The hills of California are ocher half the year.”

Motherwell’s association of dark shadows and ocher hills with California perhaps accounts for the charcoal outlines and abundance of ocher in *Blue with China Ink*. As such, these elements could be seen as relating to Cage and their common California roots, their upbringing suggested through formal means. Likewise, the irregular inkblots that Motherwell generated via accidental puddles and stains parallel Cage’s use of chance operations, another symbolic nod to Motherwell’s subject. The tendency to interpret abstract works figuratively might account for Robert Mattison’s description of the work as “an abstracted studio scene.”

Mattison erroneously reproduced the collage upside down; however, this mistake accounts for his description because once inverted, the biomorphic ocher form resembles an upright human, and the antenna-like structure could evoke an artist’s easel or conductor’s podium. Furthermore, this schematized composer bears a striking resemblance to Cage’s silhouetted visage, as he was renowned for his flat-top spiky hair and pale complexion, and the work’s vertical orientation indeed mimics that of portraiture. Motherwell often titled his works after they were completed and upon observing an “indirect correspondence,” he would label them accordingly. Something obviously resonated within Motherwell that prompted him to subtitle the collage “Homage to John Cage,” so perhaps these formal and technical congruities generated such a symbolic association.

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“An Absurd Premise”

Perhaps Motherwell admired Cage because of his interest in music, as evidenced by the numerous works he dedicated to composers and musical themes. For example, from 1974-75, he literally made collages of music by tearing up sheet music and reconstituting it into works like *Bust of Stravinsky* (1975) and *Collage with German Music and Canvas* (1974). By employing sheet music as collage elements, Motherwell added an aural element to his visual art. The artist achieved this sonic component in two ways: first, by alluding to music, via titles or the appearance of actual musical scores; and second, through representing music, by including musical notes and bars. These works cleverly played on the notion of composition, since composition referred both to Motherwell’s organization of forms as well as the subject of the collages, the musical score. These scores remained somewhat illegible to the artist for he confessed, “I don’t read music. I look at printed music as calligraphy, as beautiful details.”

Much like *Blue with China Ink*, the selection of materials was based on formal considerations rather than explicit content, with Motherwell employing collage for its citational nature. While the bulk of his homages to music were completed in this medium, some of his calligraphic ink works, such as the *Lyric Suite* of 1965, evoked musical composition through their titles as well.

Considering his estimation of music, it remains plausible that Motherwell was initially attracted to Cage because of his gifts as a composer. Cage achieved a level of recognition that surpassed Motherwell at the time he created *Blue with China Ink*. By 1946, Cage had already appeared in *Life* magazine and acquired notoriety for revolutionizing modern music. *New Yorker* music critic Calvin Tomkins wrote that Cage’s work “quickly made him the mostly widely

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discussed young composer of the avant-garde,” and by 1963 Peter Yates declared him “the most influential living composer today.” Thus, Motherwell bolstered his modernist credentials by associating with the up-and-coming Cage. Despite their collaborations and common interests, Motherwell and Cage eventually parted ways. Cage became close with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, and as several art historians have suggested, their antithetical stance toward Abstract Expressionism may have strained Cage’s relationship with Motherwell. Jonathan Katz has surmised that Motherwell’s homophobia caused the split since Cage was gay, and as such, deviated from the societal norms promoted within the New York School:

For a closeted gay man, however, not only was the abstract expressionist premium on self-expression anathema, but so was its too-anxious rehearsal of a performative machismo. The abstract expressionist agreement with dominant cultural attitudes regarding sexuality and gender—including the general assumption of masculine privilege premised in part on the exclusion of women and gay men—made the painters’ alliance with Cage tenuous.

Composer Morton Feldman recalled that this bias played a direct role in destroying the relationship between Motherwell and Cage.

I became quite close to Motherwell. I think that they may have had some kind of intellectual or artistic falling out. John never talked about Motherwell…Although everybody cared greatly for him [Cage], and they weren’t overly critical, I would say there was a homosexual bias…not only against him, but against the younger people who began to associate with him: Rauschenberg and Jasper [Johns], and Cy Twombly. I would say there was a homosexual bias.

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This homophobia may have been the impetus behind the younger generation’s rejection of Abstract Expressionist tenets, and it certainly could have damaged a friendship. Motherwell’s writings often touted a heterosexual masculinity, as exemplified by his 1959 essay on Joan Miró:

His greatness as a man lies in true sexual liberation and true heterosexuality; he has no guilt, no shame, no fear of sex; nothing sexual is repressed or described circumspectly—penises are as big as clubs, or as small as peanuts, teeth are hack-saw blades, fangs, bones, milk, breasts are round and big, small and pear-shaped, absent, double, quadrupled, mountainous and lavish, hanging or flying, full or empty, vaginas exist in every size and shape in profusion, and hair!—hair is everywhere, pubic hair, underarm hair, hair on nipples, hair around the mouth, hair on the head, on the chin, in the ears…hairs wanting to be caressed, erect with kisses, dancing with ecstasy…Miró’s torsos are mainly simplified shapes, covered with openings and protuberances—no creatures ever had so many openings to get into, or so many organs with which to do it. It is a coupling art, an art of couples…

Motherwell hailed Miró for his “true heterosexuality,” implying that the “art of couples” remained a union between male and female. Compelled to honor Miró’s “greatness,” Motherwell employed much of the same biased rhetoric that equated Abstract Expressionism with a masculine, heterosexual subjectivity.

When referring to gay artists, however, Motherwell often employed pejorative language. For example, in August of 1965, he wrote Frank O’Hara a letter featuring many unrelated and random thoughts about modernist art. Hoping to help O’Hara work through writer’s block, Motherwell’s stream-of-consciousness writings were intended to inspire O’Hara’s essay for the Museum of Modern Art’s retrospective exhibition scheduled to open later that year. Written and compiled in one morning, Motherwell’s collage of thoughts and sentiments includes the peculiar statement: “Whenever I hear talk about homosexuals, I remember that Proust’s book is that

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greatest epic poem of the century. (Along with Joyce’s *Ulysses.*)”367 Motherwell almost seems compelled to acknowledge the greatness of a gay novelist as a rebuttal to claims that homosexuals could not produce great art. Was he responding to the attitudes of the time or his own prejudices? Why would Proust serve as antidote to “talk about homosexuals”? Later in his letter to O’Hara, Motherwell declared, “To feel like a man. What is better”?368

Motherwell also wrote a statement on Bradley Walker Tomlin for the Whitney Museum of American Art’s 1957 retrospective exhibition in which he employed a variety of sexually charged metaphors. Calling Tomlin a “dandy and dilettante,” Motherwell chronicled how Tomlin “loved” Philip Guston, Jackson Pollock, and him, while he “simply ignored our wives.”369 In a later interview, Motherwell commented that “it’s almost as though he [Tomlin] were the kind of woman who was ideal when there was a strong husband and very much at sea without a strong man present…it was essentially the man that gave him conviction.”370 The most profound relationships in Tomlin’s life, both personally and professionally, had been with men, but many understood that Motherwell’s remarks not only “outed” Tomlin, but devalued his work in an era when alternative lifestyles were scorned. Barnett Newman replied to Motherwell’s statements with an irate letter to the Whitney’s director, John Baur:

…Mr. Robert Motherwell in particular now joins his university colleagues in spreading slander against his fellow artist…As a friend and colleague of Tomlin, I was appalled at the untruth, smear, and slander practiced by Motherwell against him. For the sake of the record, I know Tomlin to have been a serious, devoted,

368 Ibid., 151.
and completely dedicated artist. I know and have the letters from him to prove that he was not only not a “dilettante” but extremely antagonistic to all forms of dilletantism. As regards “dandy,” the fact that Tomlin looked [good] in his clothes did not make him a dandy and should not make Motherwell resentful. What sort of nouveau-riche soul is it that [makes] the occasion of a show of work of a friend and colleague the occasion for quarrelling over who has the better tailor?\footnote{Barnett Newman, letter to John I. H. Baur, \textit{Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews}, ed. John P. O’Neill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990): 208.}

Motherwell’s comments, and Newman’s desperate attempt to disavow himself and Tomlin from any form of “dandyism,” indicate what was at stake when one’s identity was questioned in postwar America. For a generation of artists that valued creative genius, anything less than a masculine subjectivity was considered wanting. Ann Gibson has argued that, during the McCarthy era, “the identity of a painter determined, to a great extent, the meaning of the painting.”\footnote{Ann Gibson, “Lesbian Identity and the Politics of Representation in Betty Parsons’s Gallery,” \textit{Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History}, ed. Whitney Davis (New York and London: Norwood, Adelaide, Haworth, 1994): 250-251.} Thus, the projection of a subversive identity hindered success in the art market. Many gay individuals, such as Betty Parsons, remained closeted during the Cold War because as Parsons noted, “they hate you if you are different; everyone hates you and they will destroy you. I had seen enough of that. I didn’t want to be destroyed.”\footnote{Parsons, quoted in Ibid., 256.} In this repressive climate, Motherwell’s comments not only disparaged homosexuality but carried the potential to destroy one’s career, and as Cage explored and reoriented his sexuality, Motherwell’s attitudes and writings could have torn the friends apart.

Beyond their divergent attitudes towards sexuality, artistic differences further caused a rift between Motherwell and Cage as their art reached maturity in the decades following \textit{Blue with China Ink}. Motherwell continued his work for the Documents of Modern Art series and achieved acclaim for his \textit{Spanish Elegies} and gestural canvases. Cage, on the other hand,
continued to explore chance operations through his relationship with Robert Rauschenberg, an artist he collaborated with at Black Mountain College. While discussing Cage’s music of the 1950s and 1960s, Motherwell insulted the composer in an interview with Calvin Tomkins, who was writing a profile on Cage for *The New Yorker*. Tomkins noted how, unlike Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and other composers who employed a limited indeterminacy for their scores, Cage “favors abandoning all vestiges of control and turning the entire composition over to chance.” Tomkins suggested that this removal of the artist’s subjectivity seemed like “pure heresy” to Cage’s “old friends.” Motherwell is then quoted as saying, “John is just spitting in people’s faces now. It’s a kind of compulsion, this pushing an absurd premise to its logical conclusion. He’s just not in the real world anymore.” Despite employing chance in his own work, Motherwell only used it as a “start-up strategy.” He never accepted the destruction of the artist’s ego and found Cage’s embrace of indeterminacy “absurd.”

Apparently horrified that Tomkins published only his criticism of Cage, Motherwell wrote a letter to Cage the day after *The New Yorker* appeared, apologizing for his denigration.

I feel very badly about the quotation attributed to me in “The New Yorker,” which doesn’t represent at all my considered opinion, which was given to the interviewer over a period of 2 hours. They promised to show me any direct quote, and of course I would have vetoed any such sentence. I will take what steps I can. Meanwhile, my profound regret at the publication of such a canard: I am sick that it appeared.

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374 While Cage’s time at Black Mountain College corresponded with Rauschenberg, he never overlapped with Motherwell. Cage was in residence there during the summer sessions of 1948, 1952, and 1955 while Motherwell taught during the summers of 1945 and 1951. Rauschenberg was a painting student at Black Mountain where he and Cage immediately became close friends and collaborators. For an overview of the college, see Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1987).
375 Tomkins, “Profiles: Figure in an Imaginary Landscape,” 66.
376 Ibid.
Believing that his remarks were taken out of context, Motherwell claimed not to have intended his criticism. This letter was returned to Motherwell because he lacked Cage’s correct mailing address. Upon learning his whereabouts, he sent a second letter to the composer, including the original.

The enclosed was returned to me & now I have your new address. After I wrote, I had my lawyers contact The New Yorker, which holds the position that even if Tompkins [sic.] agreed to show me any direct quote beforehand, they will not honor it—i.e., the agreement. I am neither a music critic or a psychologist, which makes the remark stupid, & what is more enraging is that all this follows a very considerable eulogy on my part of you. I will ask Tompkins [sic.] to withdraw the remark from any reprinting, but don’t know what he will do. I still find the whole thing incredible, as though I walked into a booby-trap, & have no words to express how distressed, apologetic, and outraged I feel.\(^{378}\)

Motherwell remained disgusted that his comments were not published in the context of his “very considerable eulogy” praising Cage’s work. Despite feeling duped by the interviewer, he never pursued legal action against The New Yorker, although Tomkins did omit Motherwell’s comments from The Bride and the Bachelors, an expanded and revised version of his essay on Cage’s music.

Cage replied to Motherwell in February of 1965, remaining graciously cordial despite Motherwell’s critical slight:

Thank you for your letters. I appreciate your feelings and am sorry that what happened happened. However, just as I have confidence in what I do, I find—rare as our encounters have been but over, now, considerable years—I have confidence in what you do. In other words, your work, your activities, and the few conversations we have had stand out for me and I am grateful. I don’t know what comfort this may give you. But I myself have become impervious to print. I don’t care at all about what people say about me and my work whether it takes the form of vilification or eulogy. I am interested when the writing is “good” (readable)

and when it makes me use my faculties. For the most part writing is nothing but opinions and mistakes and not worth the trouble of putting on one’s glasses. I mean writing about something.\footnote{John Cage, letter to Robert Motherwell, February 4, 1965. Robert Motherwell Archives / Dedalus Foundation, New York, NY}

Cage noted Motherwell’s presence in the formative years of his career and thanked him for their collaborations. In his response, he considered criticism nearly inconsequential since most of it centered on superficialities. Cage only concerned himself with “writing about something,” perhaps dismissing Motherwell’s criticism as nothing of consequence.

Despite their eventual falling out, Motherwell was drawn to Cage in the 1940s because he considered the composer a “kindred spirit” in his quest for a modernist sensibility. Dore Ashton has written that Motherwell “craved” a “brotherhood” of like-minded artists, including Picasso and Braque as well as Wallace Stevens and Franz Kafka\footnote{Dore Ashton, Introduction, The Writings of Robert Motherwell, ed. Dore Ashton with Joan Banach (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2007): 11.} These comrades not only featured Mallarmé and Joyce, but also a younger generation of artists including Cage, Rauschenberg, and Johns. Despite their differences in lifestyle and artistic subjectivity, Motherwell did not entirely discredit the activities of his younger peers. In fact, in 1988 Motherwell wrote a letter to the American Academy of Arts and Letters nominating Johns for induction\footnote{Members of the Academy could elect new members and Motherwell’s letter was originally handwritten on drafting paper before appearing in typescript form. The original draft was first published in Joan Banach, Robert Motherwell: A Painter’s Album (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1996): 36-37; and subsequently reproduced in The Writings of Robert Motherwell, ed. Dore Ashton with Joan Banach (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2007): 351.}. While this nomination came forty years after Blue with China Ink, Motherwell listed Johns among a pantheon of modernists including Marcel Duchamp and Samuel Beckett. Considering him a part of an artistic trajectory dating from Dada and Cubism to the New York School, Motherwell acknowledged Johns’ skill in the “technique of collaging, puns and thefts, irony and deadpan
representation, encaustic painting with wax and every kind of printmaking.” He further called him “a virtuoso” and “master of the New York School,” concluding his homage by stating how, “the contradictions and accomplishments of an extraordinary person are to be cherished and honored.” Throughout his writings, Motherwell revealed an admiration for Johns, naming him one of the “brilliant” new wave of Abstract Expressionists in the 1960s. While he considered Johns’ attempts to reconcile Pop Art with modernist painting a “contradiction,” Motherwell consistently advocated the work of artists who maintained a Dada sensibility.

The American Academy of Arts and Letters also inducted John Cage along with Johns and Mary McCarthy in 1988. A relationship that had been formed on the strength of the artists’ commitment to the avant-garde concluded with them celebrated as part of the canon. Although they never collaborated in the same manner as they did in the 1940s, Motherwell and Cage occupy pivotal positions in the emergence of the New York School. Blue with China Ink, then, remains a record of the brief period in which Motherwell and Cage were quite close, sharing many interests and developing a modernist collage aesthetic rooted in Zen, Dada, and Joycean openness. The possibilities of collage remained open in the following decades, with each exploring its ramifications in art and music; but as Cage replaced the artist’s subjectivity with silence and nothingness, Blue with China Ink lost its subject.

382 The Writings of Robert Motherwell, 351. 
383 Ibid. 
386 John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Mary McCarthy were officially named to the American Academy Arts and Letters on December 2, 1988.
CHAPTER 3:

ESTEBAN VICENTE, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND THE BORDERS OF COLLAGE

During the summer of 1949, Esteban Vicente taught at the University of California at Berkeley. Frustrated by being away from his New York studio and unable to work, he turned his attention to the only material readily available, newspaper.\(^{387}\) Tearing and pasting, the artist reassembled shredded newsprint into his very first collages. What began as a temporary diversion became a lifelong endeavor, with Vicente working in collage for the remaining fifty-two years of his life. While he never quit painting, Vicente devoted equal time to collage, creating works that combined the Abstract Expressionist idiom with papier collé.

As the New York School’s only Spanish member, Esteban Vicente and his national character have been much romanticized. Argentine writer Marcos-Ricardo Barnatán described Vicente as possessing “the nobility of the Spanish nobleman in the court of North American abstract expressionism, the Sevillian light of Velázquez in the midst of the impulsive strokes of Action Painting.”\(^{388}\) Ellen Russotto, the artist’s former archivist, also likened Vicente’s work to “the ‘incredible light’ of the Spanish plain; the power and solidity of the Pyrenees; the traditions of the Prado.”\(^{389}\) Although unique among the Abstract Expressionists for his Spanish roots, he was hardly alone in his immigrant status. Despite being hailed as the triumph of American painting, the New York School included many émigrés from across the globe: Willem de Kooning from Holland, Arshile Gorky from Armenia, Hans Hofmann from Germany, Matta

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\(^{387}\) From 1947-49, Vicente lived and worked at 138 Second Avenue in New York. In 1950, he moved his studio to 88 East Tenth Street, a space he shared with Willem de Kooning.


Echaurren from Chile, and Vicente from Spain. This focus on Vicente’s Spanish background dominates the scholarship on the artist; however, it overlooks the other side of his life and art, namely the American component. Vicente fled to the United States during the Spanish Civil War and lived in New York City for the remainder of his life. Officially naturalized as an American in 1940, he became a prominent member of the New York School in the 1950s. Of Spanish birth and American citizenship, Vicente drew upon the traditions of his dual identity through the medium of collage, investigating the boundaries of selfhood while piecing together abstract works that synthesized various sources. These syncretic artworks were constructed on the same foundation as his transnational inheritance, and Vicente’s hybrid compositions illuminate the pluralism of his artistic and personal heritage.

**Spanish Roots and New York Beginnings**

Born near Segovia, Spain, in 1903, Esteban Vicente was the third child of a military officer and amateur artist. The Vicente children were raised in Madrid, receiving a Jesuit education while frequenting the Prado on weekends. Demonstrating his artistic talents as a teenager, Esteban dropped out of military school to attend the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. There he studied sculpture, receiving a classical background in anatomy, modeling, life drawing, perspective, and art history. Frustrated by the limitations of sculpture, Vicente eventually turned

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to painting, creating Post-Impressionist genre scenes and landscapes during the 1920s. He associated with a group of poets known as the Generation of 1927 and later moved to Paris and Barcelona in the hopes of furthering his career. While in Paris during the early 1930s, Vicente exhibited in the Salon des Surindépendants and visited Picasso in his studio, receiving encouragement from the famous modernist, who had seen Vicente’s work in reproduction.

Early oil paintings like *Landscape, Ibiza, Spain* (1935, fig. 3.1) reveal Vicente’s affinity for the geography and terrain of the Iberian Peninsula, while his gouaches depict some of Spain’s cultural icons, such as the matador and flamenco singer (fig. 3.2-3.3). Primarily genre scenes and landscapes, his work from the 1920s and 1930s maintains a sketch-like immediacy in its unfinished forms and loose brushwork. In the majority of the scenes, the palette remains soft, and (when working in oil) a fair amount of impasto accentuates Vicente’s fluid gestures.

After returning to Spain in 1936, Vicente found himself stranded in Madrid at the onset of the Spanish Civil War. Hostilities erupted precisely when Vicente began to establish himself as an artist, destroying the community of artists and writers that had supported him. Vicente believed strongly in the Republic and opposed General Franco’s ascent to power. He enlisted to

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391 Vicente told Elaine de Kooning that “plaster and clay seemed dead when I felt the appeal of color… I always made the heads too small, anyway.” Elaine de Kooning, “Vicente Paints a Collage,” *Art News* 52 (September 1953): 40.
392 Vicente congregated with a group of artists and students who opposed the conservative and academic climate pervasive during the 1920s in Madrid. His colleagues included the poets Juan Ramón Jiménez, Ramón Gómez e la Serna, Rafael Alberti, Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Vicente Aleixandre, Luis Cernuda, and Federico García Lorca, the film director Luis Buñuel, and painters Juan Bonafé, Francisco Bores, Wladislaw Jahl, James Gilbert, and Salvador Dalí (however in numerous interviews, Vicente stated that he was not close to Dalí during their time at the Academy). For more on Vicente’s early days, see Juan Manuel Bonet, *Esteban Vicente y sus Contemporáneos, 1918-1936* (Segovia: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, 2003).
393 Elizabeth Frank wrote: “one day Vicente summoned up his courage and went to visit Picasso in the rue la Boétie. He ended up spending the entire afternoon. Much to Vicente’s astonishment, Picasso knew his name, having seen the reproduction in Ortega y Gasset’s *Revista de Occidente* of the semi-abstract painting from Vicente’s 1928 show at the Ateneo de Madrid.” Elizabeth Frank, *Esteban Vicente* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1995): 16.
394 While Vicente was active with the poets known as the Generation of 1927, he did not hold his first exhibition of paintings until 1928 at the Ateneo de Madrid. He showed at the Salon des Surindépendants twice in Paris and had four solo shows in Barcelona from 1931-34.
fight and painted camouflage on military vehicles for the Republican army while waiting to join his brothers at the frontlines. Believing Vicente could better help their cause from America, the Loyalists urged him to go abroad since they lacked enough munitions to properly arm their volunteer militia.\textsuperscript{395} Having recently married an American citizen he immigrated to New York City, where he juggled his professional ambitions with his Republican responsibilities. He served as Vice Consul for the Republic of Spain during the war and worked as a Spanish-language announcer for Voice of America during World War II.

Vicente held his first American exhibit at the Kleemann Galleries in New York in 1937. Very little art from this show remains since Vicente destroyed the bulk of his oeuvre prior to 1950; however, two reproductions survive from the subsequent catalogue and review. In these works, \textit{Laundress} (1937, fig. 3.4) and \textit{Catalina and Her Grandmother} (1936, fig. 3.5), the lighthearted whimsy of the earlier sketches assumed a new gravity and seriousness. The subject matter of Vicente’s Kleemann show remained predominantly Spanish, with one reviewer noting the “sober dress,” “peasant stolidity,” and “low-keyed…earth colors” of the show’s oil paintings.\textsuperscript{396}

Vicente’s work earned him both positive reviews and commissions for portraits, yet he remained unsatisfied with the direction of his art. He simultaneously experienced several crises in his personal life, including the death of his daughter Mercedes in 1943 and divorce from his wife soon thereafter. With the exception of two shows in Puerto Rico, he refused to exhibit his work from 1941 through 1950. Vicente believed that he “was getting away from the problem of

\textsuperscript{395} Vicente told Phyllis Tuchman: “I felt my duty would be to stay and do that [fight]. But they told me you wouldn’t because everybody was ready to fight but they had no armaments, nothing to fight with. So then finally they said it was better if you go. So I left. And later on here, the government asked me to represent them in Philadelphia… I was the vice consul.” Phyllis Tuchman, Interview with Esteban Vicente, 6 April 1982, Esteban Vicente Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

painting,” particularly as he increasingly earned his livelihood painting portraits. “I wanted to go back and solve certain problems,” he explained, not showing again until Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg selected *In Pink and Gray* (1950, fig. 3.6) for the Talent 1950 exhibit at the Samuel Kootz Gallery.³⁹⁷ This exhibit featured “unknown or little known young artists of promise,” including Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Franz Kline, and Larry Rivers.³⁹⁸ During his sabbatical, Vicente reinvented himself as an abstract artist, undoubtedly influenced by the circle of artists he befriended in New York. He shared a studio with Willem de Kooning at 88 East 10th Street, formed friendships with Harold Rosenberg and Thomas B. Hess, and exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art and Peridot Gallery.³⁹⁹ Throughout the 1950s, Vicente played an active role in the development of the New York School, particularly as a voting member of The Club. While his work shared many traits with the emergent Abstract Expressionism, it was his collages that distinguished him from many of his peers, with Vicente pioneered what critics dubbed “action collage” in reference to his compositions of torn and reassembled paper.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ Irving Sandler, “A Tape-Recorded Interview with Esteban Vicente at His Home in East Hampton, August 26, 1968,” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 16.
“Paintings with Paper”

Although some critics dismissed collage as an unsophisticated form of decorative craft, Vicente considered the technique “another mode of painting rather than a separate limited and confined media.” He told Irving Sandler that he “resented” being classified solely as a collage artist because he opposed the creation of a hierarchy within the artistic media. In many ways, Vicente’s aesthetic approach remained the same regardless if painted or collaged. In both cases, the artist built up the pictorial surface with strata of hues or forms. In a compilation of notes on painting, he advised, “better to start laying the paint very thin and build up,” a statement that could equally describe his approach to pasted papers. With his training in sculpture at the Royal Academy, Vicente appreciated the additive nature of collage, particularly as layered surfaces became “a special space representing a two dimensional reality.” The accumulation of these materials established the two-dimensionality of the picture plane through the suggestion of a uniform supporting ground while paradoxically becoming a relief sculpture through nuanced and tiered surfaces. In fact, one of Harold Rosenberg’s critiques of collage stemmed from the illusory nature of its reproductions. According to Rosenberg, photographic reproductions of collage fail to duplicate the multifaceted surfaces and accumulation of materials that occur in the medium. These spatial relationships and angled forms led Elaine de Kooning to speak of

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402 Sandler asked Vicente if “you a little bit resent your collages,” to which Vicente replied, “I don’t resent the collages but I resent the fact that I have been classified. That I resent. Collage to me is part of my work and I don’t think actually there is any difference except the media… the thing I resent is the fact that the tendency always has been everywhere to classify people. John Marin, a man who was a very good artist and painted in watercolor and in oil. He was known as a watercolorist… And that happened to Chagall, too… So this has been a disease in our times, and probably in other times, too, to classify people.” Sandler, “Interview with Vicente,” 38.
Vicente’s collages as “panoramas” that “swoop off into deep perspectives.” Rather than the “frozen moment” or “close-up fragmentation” characteristic of Cubist and Dada *papier collé*, Vicente’s scale seemed large and rooted in landscape traditions. Such associations were conjured through the architectonic quality of Vicente’s geometric assemblages. For example, in *Number 12* (1956, fig. 3.7), rectilinear pieces of white and charcoal-colored paper form the basis of the composition. Despite the relatively small size of the work—it measures sixteen inches by twenty inches)—the collage projects a solidity and massiveness because these paper cutouts appear monolithic in their arrangement and surface integrity. Clustered together densely at the center while dispersing in concentration as the eye moves out to the corners, the parchment resembles a compact cityscape or abstracted still life. The mimetic quality of Vicente’s collages, insofar as they evoke landscape or architecture, becomes heightened in those instances in which the artist employed color. The muted earth tones of *Untitled* (1956, fig. 3.8) suggest the topography of a rural town with its brown, olive, and ochre pigment. Irving Sandler among others connected these formal properties with his “boyhood impression…of the landscape around Segovia.” Thus, Sandler described Vicente’s palette as “both psychological and geographic.”

Vicente denied fundamental differences between painting and collage, asserting that “my collages are paintings with paper.” As such, he approached paper cutouts as colors, arranging them as he would brushstrokes or zones of color. Vicente transferred the gestures of his painterly brushwork to collage in two ways. First, he hand-painted the paper he wished to use as collage elements. Rarely employing pre-colored construction paper, Vicente instead preferred those made in his studio. In fact, he avoided using colors in their manufactured state and insisted on

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mixing the hues himself. Second, he cut or tore papers in a way that evoked brushstrokes. Some of his collages featured rips, tattered edges, and peeling layers, while others contained sharp-edged geometric shapes produced through the precision of scissors or knives. As Elaine de Kooning pointed out, the linearity of these shapes “remained textural or tonal, like that of brush strokes, not sculptural, as in drawing.” Indeed, Vicente’s forms often remain unmodeled, highlighting the surface flatness of the paper cutouts.

The painterly yet architectonic qualities of Vicente’s collages had much to do with the aesthetics surrounding this particular moment in history. The artist’s unique handling of the medium developed through a variety of channels, including the formalism that upheld Abstract Expressionism. Vicente noted that “collage has to change its aspects all the time depending on the time and artist,” thus claiming that the medium bears traces of its cultural milieu. As artists increasingly privileged gesture and abstraction during the late 1940s and 1950s, Vicente believed it inevitable that collage would parallel these trends in painting and sculpture. To work in a Dada vein seemed retrograde to Vicente, and he avowed, “I will never do a collage the way Schwitters did, using different materials. I don’t like the idea. Because to me that isn’t related to painting. It becomes more like an object. I don’t want that.” According to Vicente, Schwitters employed collage as an object for non-artistic, or social, ends, whereas he hoped to balance the formal with the political. Many artists, from Picasso and Schwitters to Hannah Höch and George Grosz, employed collage for political objectives because the medium carried the capacity to unsettle pictorial and perceptual conventions. Vicente believed that artists should “be committed morally

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408 De Kooning disputed this assertion, stating: “He [Vicente] claims he never uses a pigment straight from the tube, but his reds and yellows often flare up with an intensity that seems improbable in a mixed color.” De Kooning, “Vicente Paints a Collage,” 51.
410 Ibid.
to be something in terms of politics… an artist has a social responsibility… as a citizen.”

He drew a distinction between this moral obligation and politicking because he did not “believe in an art that is used for purposes other than to express oneself, what one believes is human or universal. I don’t think that art should be a vehicle for propaganda of any kind.” Vicente suggested that art should express a broad political ideology, and for an artist who experienced the repression of Fascism in Spain, freedom and justice were of particular, yet universal, relevance. Although he did not employ newspaper headlines as collage elements to protest the Balkan Wars as Picasso had done, Vicente remained committed to political and moral ideals that he aligned with his aesthetic sensibility.

Vicente’s search for universal values and political investment corresponded with his New York School peers. Many of his collages also exhibited the Abstract Expressionist ethos that privileged spontaneity and improvisation. While the technical properties of the medium somewhat limited the scale in which Vicente worked, his collages often exceeded the size of earlier Cubist and Dada works. Picasso, Schwitters, and Höch rarely executed compositions larger than an average sheet of paper, yet many of Vicente’s pasted abstractions stood more than two feet tall, and some, like Collage Number 6: The Embellished Surface (1952, fig. 3.9) were over six feet in height. In addition to the large scale of these works, Vicente’s collages

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411 Sandler, “Interview with Vicente,” 65.
412 Ibid.
414 Vicente claimed that many artists in The Club were politically apathetic, but Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, and he were “interested in politics.” Sandler, “Interview with Vicente,” 65.
415 Vicente noted that “one of the most important differences [between oil painting and collage] (beside the materials) is that the nature of collage requires certain consideration in relation to size. Painting can be heroic; collage on the contrary, has to retain its original quality of intimacy.” Vicente, “Statement,” 41.
416 Collage Number 6: The Embellished Surface measures 76” x 56.” Barbara Rose claimed that Vicente’s Spanish roots meant that his work diverged from the New York School in a variety of ways. “His European commitment to
featured many of the gestures that led Rosenberg to coin the phrase “Action Painting.” In Vicente’s case, effects of “Action” were generated through torn paper edges because he often “prefers the evasive, fuzzy edges produced by tearing.” 417 Having observed Vicente’s methods, Elaine de Kooning noted that “he now uses scissors only occasionally to get slivers of color to wedge between the larger, vaguer forms, or to trim torn edges to a more precise line.” 418 She further commented how Vicente pinned his paper to the supporting ground before affixing them with paste, thus allowing the artist to continuously adjust and alter his composition. 419 This immediacy appealed to the Spanish expatriate, and he commented that collage maintained a plasticity lacking in painting.

It’s quicker—it’s more—how should I say—experimental in a sense. In that you can play around with forms and color and reach certain discoveries in a much easier way—not easy but less painful, because when you paint in oil you have to make your material. In collage the material is given, is there already. 420

Not only did collage prove remarkably flexible, but Vicente believed that “the range of collage possibilities is unlimited.” 421
A Tradition of Spanish Modernism

By adopting collage, Vicente aligned himself with a tradition of Spanish modernism that included fellow countrymen Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris. Historians have long credited Picasso with inventing the collage medium because it allowed him to problematize figure-ground relationships while blurring the boundaries between artifice and reality. Picasso’s achievements revolutionized representation by incorporating elements from the everyday world, such as wallpaper, sheet music, and newsprint, into the picture plane, thereby conflating the everyday with the artistic. To many, including Gertrude Stein, the “materialism of action and abstraction” in Picasso’s work contained a decidedly Spanish character, with his emphasis on surface and realism typical of Spanish art.\(^\text{422}\) Vicente praised Picasso and Gris for continuing this Spanish legacy, and believed that collage was, in essence, a realist art through its inherent physicality and material presence. This realism, according to Vicente, was the Spanish artist’s by birthright, as he noted in a review of Gris’s 1958 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art:

Gris took [Cubism] to express a Realism that was his by his cultural background and tradition. Realism runs through all manifestations of art in Spain. In and through the work of…Cervantes, Velázquez, Goya, as in and through that of Picasso, is found a concept of profound reality: the reality that springs from the play of the intellectual faculties and a sense for the material aspect of the world, a sense that is the core of their artistic expression. And in painting it is essential, it is elemental, to have this sense of the material aspect of the world.\(^\text{423}\)

\(^{422}\) Stein’s writings on Picasso were loaded with cultural assumptions. She compared Spaniards to Americans, claiming: “they are abstract and cruel. They are not brutal they are cruel. They have no close contact with the earth such as most Europeans have. Their materialism is not the materialism of existence, of possession, it is the materialism of action and abstraction. And so cubism is Spanish.” Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (New York: Vintage Books, 1960): 91

Paralleling Stein’s nativisit determinism, Vicente believed that an “austerity and sobriety”
connected Gris to Zurbarán. This “asceticism” and “intimacy” was generated through the
artists’ use of white and preference for still life rather than landscape. Vicente argued that
Spanish artists embraced the subjectivity of the mind rather than the objective response to nature,
thus emphasizing the manner in which the intellect operates and understands phenomena.
Considering perception more important than detachment, Vicente found the mysticism of St.
Teresa akin to the fantasies of Don Quixote, and the nightmares of Goya similar to the
naturalism of Velázquez.

Vicente admired the “realism” of Picasso and Gris, and he attempted to adopt these same
values as a collagist. His compositions privileged surface, and his tattered edges, textured papers,
and gestural brush marks stressed the tangible qualities of the collage medium. In Collage
Number 3 (1953, fig. 3.10), Vicente calls our attention to the tactility of the composition through
a variety of indexical signifiers. The frayed edges of torn paper reveal the density of the
parchment, while the surface unity of the pulp disintegrates at the textured and rough-hewn
borders. At the center of the collage lie several heavily wrinkled shards of blue and ocher paper,
remnants that again assert the physicality of the materials. In their weathered and damaged state,
these surfaces invite viewers to recognize an element of touch that was often forgotten when
formalist criticism celebrated opticality in the 1950s and 1960s. These collage elements also

424 Vicente, “Gris: Reality Cubed,” 32.
425 Ibid., 32-33.
426 Elaine de Kooning noted how the collage medium was known for tactility, writing: “More recently and
elocuently, collage has been defined by John Myers, the hyperactive young New York dealer, as a ‘feelie.’” De
427 Richard Shiff acknowledged this aspect of the collage medium in his essay on Picasso’s Ace of Clubs, writing:
“Collage itself, so dependent on cuts, is very much an art of touch and hand that encourages its viewer to attend to
the most ordinary gestures and physical occurrences. The interpreter is required both to see and to think, not in the
conventional pictorial ways, but through the experience of touch. Collage diverges from conventional painting and
signify the presence of the artist because they remain traces of his activity, whether crumpling, tearing, or rearranging the paper. Through these properties, Vicente positioned himself as heir to a tradition of Spanish collage as well as to a legacy of Spanish “realism” that spanned centuries. Antonio Bonet Correa has contended that Vicente’s collages appealed to the sense of touch in a manner akin to the work of Velázquez, with both artists emphasizing the outward appearance of specific objects. Vicente’s compositions feature the pulp and grain of various papers, evoking comparison to Velázquez, who underscored the surfaces of ceramic and fabric in paintings like *The Water Carrier of Seville* (ca. 1619, fig. 3.11). For collages like *Gray, Brown and Black* (1962, fig. 3.12), Vicente used handmade and imported papers, parchment with texture, and despite painting over some of these elements, he allowed these granular surfaces to maintain their integrity.

Vicente’s focus on materiality also rivals the austere, yet rich, surfaces of Francisco de Zurbarán, and both artists share an interest in tonal contrasts and meditative states. Many of Vicente’s collages remain spare in the amount of elements in these compositions. In *Untitled* (1961, fig. 3.13), a limited number of paper cutouts stretch across the horizontal supporting ground. Many of these shapes stand independently of one another with minimal overlapping. The palette remains subdued, composed of olive, gray, and charcoal, while a polygonal expanse of white paper runs the length of the composition’s lower third. The appearance of this horizontal band evokes a table top, and the arrangement of shapes above resembles a simplified still life. Zurbarán’s *Still Life with Jugs* (1658-84, fig. 3.14) seems a likely formal precedent with its wide breadth, careful spacing of vessels, muted colors, and representation of various surfaces.

Solemnity pervades both works, generating the Spanish “austerity and sobriety” that Vicente
drawing through a use of the hand that divorces the artist’s touch from its traditional references to vision.” Richard Shiff, “Picasso’s Touch: Collage, Papier collé, Ace of Clubs,” *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (1990): 38-47.
celebrated. This Spanish still-life tradition continued in the work of Juan Gris, and his Glasses, Newspaper, Wine Bottle (1913, fig. 3.15) connects Vicente’s abstractions with Zurbarán’s baroque mimesis. The Cubist conception of space certainly impacted Vicente, and the recurring element of restraint, both in the palette and number of objects represented, seems to have inspired the young modernist. In addition, Gris’s textured paper, modeled forms, and fractured collaging illuminates the variety of surfaces combined in this one work. This interest in tactility further links Vicente to the textured papier collé of Gris and Picasso because his Cubist predecessors often incorporated the veining of faux wood into their collages.428

Velázquez, Zurbarán, and Gris ranked among Vicente’s heroes, and by associating with them, Vicente strengthened his artistic credentials. He claimed that a historical continuity linked the cultural traditions of Spain, stating:

No painting is completely separated from the others that came before or come after…The artist has to be part of something. Art belongs in a traditional line that reaches back and will go on forever.429

The construction of such a trajectory is not uncommon, particularly in relation to the staging of national identities. In his study of the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson has argued that “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”430 According to Anderson, such conceptions of community are “imagined,” because as Ernest Gellner asserts, “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”431 It is not surprising that Vicente established his “imagined community” of Spanish artists at a time when he was exiled and the sovereignty of Spain remained in question. During

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428 For more on this connection, see Antonio Bonet Correa, Zurbarán, Juan Gris, Esteban Vicente: A Spanish Tradition of Modernity, trans. Selma Margaretten (Segovia: Museo de Art Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, 2003).
429 Esteban Vicente, “Painting Should Be Poor,” Location 1, no. 2 (Summer 1964): 72.
Spain’s tumultuous transition into modernity, many artists and intellectuals looked for commonalities that would support the ideal of a unified state. In an effort to overcome the fragmentary nature of the nation’s political and cultural history, some Spanish citizens espoused the notion of “Hispanismo.” Since the Spanish Civil War, scholars have been careful to distinguish between Hispanidad and Hispanismo, and in one of the earliest studies on the subject, Bailey Diffie explained the differences in 1943:

Pan-Hispanism, usually known to the Spaniards as Hispanismo, has long existed. Its primary objective has been the restoration of some degree of the unity lost when the Hispanic-American nations became free. Hispanidad, a term popularized after 1931, is the particular type of Hispanismo advocated by the Falange Española.  

Whereas advocates of Hispanidad grafted Fascism onto Spain’s traditional Catholic ideology, Hispanismo remained liberal in scope, advocating tolerant Catholicism, public education, cultural progress, and democratic ideals. However, as some scholars have noted, hispanismo presupposed a Spanish identity rooted in Castilian nationalism since the Castilian kings had united Spain and its colonies, thus Basque and Catalan separatists emerged in response to the potential homogenization of Spanish culture.

Adherents of “Hispanismo” hoped that a shared religion, language, and culture would unite not only Basque, Catalan, and Castilian factions, but also the nation’s former colonies. Vicente supported this pan-Iberian ideal and was influenced by the Society of Iberian Artists, an avant-garde salon based in Madrid during the period 1925-35, in arguing that certain tendencies,

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like “realism,” linked generations of Spanish artists. While Vicente did not exhibit with the Society, he remained friends with many of its members, and he certainly was aware of their attempts to codify a national Spanish identity in the arts. As national identities were defined and expanded following the wars of the first half of the twentieth century, many believed that Spain’s historicism was a unique phenomenon. For example, in his essay for the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition New Spanish Painting and Sculpture (1960), Frank O’Hara claimed:

The Spanish expatriates themselves, looking backwards, seem always to have clung to their identification with the Spanish people…If the motto of American art in recent years can be said to be ‘Make it new,’ for the Spanish it is ‘Make it over.’ For the authentic heir of a great past the problem is what to do with it…Past and present are still raw material.

Though history tells us that Spanish identity—like any identity—is ever in flux, O’Hara located a common heritage within Spanish art. Vicente confirmed this notion, tapping into the tradition and legacy of the past while attempting to formulate a cohesive Spanish sensibility. With their fusion of paper cutouts, gestural markings, and various materials, his collages can serve as metaphors for a predetermined history of Spain. After all, the nation itself exists as a type of collage, its national character comprised of differing cultures and regions: Basque, Castilian, Catalan, Roman, and Muslim.

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435 Although Vicente did not participate in the Exposición de Artistas Ibéricos, an avant-garde salon based in Madrid from 1925-1935, Juan Manuel Bonet and Antonio Bonet Correa have both argued that Vicente “would not have been out of place there” and “must have recalled” his exposure to the group. See Juan Manuel Bonet, “Esteban Vicente in his First Landscape,” in Esteban Vicente: Pinturas y Collages 1925-1985 (Madrid: Fundacion Banco Exterior, 1987): 55; Antonio Bonet Correa, “Modernity and Tradition in Esteban Vicente,” in Zurbarán, Juan Gris, Esteban Vicente: A Spanish Tradition of Modernity, trans. Selma Margaretten (Segovia: Museo de Art Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, 2003): 23.


While the hybrid nature of Vicente’s compositions alludes to the heterogeneity of Spanish culture, scholars have located additional Spanish traits in his work. In relating his work to Picasso, Gris, and other Spanish masters, critics and art historians have employed a language rife with essentializing stereotypes and romantic notions of Spanishness, largely fabricating the identity they affixed to Vicente. For example, Elizabeth Frank has argued that Vicente’s “preference for a limited number of [four to five] colors” was “very Spanish,” while his “intimate, human scale” and unadorned simplicity were “quintessentially Spanish.”438 Antonio Bonet Correa has also found that Vicente’s “classicism spirit reveals his adherence to a specific Spanish tradition of understanding art.”439 Vicente himself declared his culture “Spanish forever,” and continuously asserted his connection to Spanish traditions of “realism” and collage. This lineage served to bolster the artist’s uniqueness in America as much as it legitimized his modernist credentials, and to certain degree, Vicente himself participated in constructing his Spanish identity as much as critics and art historians.

In Defense of Spain

The question of Spanish identity became of paramount interest across the globe as a civil war ravaged the nation in the 1930s. In 1936, General Francisco Franco launched a military coup against the Republic of Spain, sparking horrific violence that killed more than 700,000 people.440

438 Frank, Esteban Vicente, 40; Frank, “The Prado Revisited,” 92.
To many, this war represented a conflict between Fascist and Socialist ideals, conservative beliefs and modern thinking, religious doctrine and secular collectivism. While embroiled in war, the Spanish Republic made the surprising decision to participate in the 1937 World’s Fair held in Paris, an initiative to raise awareness of, and sympathy for, the plight of the nation. An impressive list of artists contributed to the Spanish pavilion, but the most celebrated aspects of the Republic’s contribution were two paintings by Picasso and Miró, *Guernica* and *The Reaper* (both 1937).

Picasso’s *Guernica* (fig. 3.16) became the most famous work of art pertaining to the war, particularly as it seemed to fully awaken the political sensibility of the famous modernist. Republican officials had invited Picasso to contribute a work to their pavilion in January of 1937 because the artist opposed the war and Franco’s ascent to power. While Picasso originally planned a neutral painting of the artist in his studio, news of the bombing of the Basque village of Guernica on April 26, 1937 by the German Luftwaffe forced him to change his course. Basing his ideas on photographs and descriptions of the destruction that appeared in the press, Picasso created a monochromatic mural that registered his outcry at the death of 1,600 civilians. In this painting, Picasso employed Cubist forms to suggest the devastation of the village, while his use of grisaille-inspired tones served to highlight the gravity of the tragedy while acknowledging the role of the press in reporting the atrocity. Picasso drew on Spanish imagery for the painting, notably the bull and matador, to specify the locale of his scene. He juxtaposed fractured forms

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441 The fair’s proper title, translated, was the International Exhibition of Art and Technology in Modern Life, and it was held in Paris during the summer of 1937. For more on the Spanish Pavilion, see Josefina Alix, *Pabellón Español: Exposición Internacional de París, 1937* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura / Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1987); Catherine Blanton Freedberg, *The Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World’s Fair* (New York: Garland, 1986).

442 Alexander Calder, Julio González, and Alberto Sánchez contributed works to the exhibit.

443 Simon Schama has recently argued that the bombing of Guernica served to stir Picasso out of formalist, Cubist preoccupations with his lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter. Simon Schama, *The Power of Art* (New York: Ecco, 2006).

Picasso’s \textit{Guernica} was accompanied by Julio González’s sculptures of the \textit{Montserrat} (1936-39, fig. 3.17) and Miró’s \textit{The Reaper} (fig. 3.18) in the pavilion. Several of González’s sculptures rivaled Picasso’s mural in depicting a maternal figure screaming in horror at the events of the Spanish Civil War. The title referred to the mountain range that became an emblem of Catalan identity, while the standing figure that appeared outside the exposition held a scythe and child in her arms. González employed iron for several of these statues, hoping to reclaim the material and render it as an affirmative medium rather than tool of warfare and destruction.\footnote{445 For more on González, see Josephine Withers, \textit{Julio González: Sculpture in Iron} (New York: New York University Press, 1978); Margit Rowell, \textit{Julio González: A Retrospective} (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum 1983); Magdalena Dabrowski, “González: Montserrat and the Symbolism of the Civil War,” in William H. Robins, Jordi Falgás, and Carmen Belen Lord, \textit{Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dali} (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006): 468-473.} Also known as \textit{Catalan Peasant in Revolt, The Reaper} featured biomorphic forms suggestive of an abstracted peasant. This figure held a scythe in one hand, a symbol of the Socialist politics of the Republic, while wearing the \textit{barettina}, a small beret that identifies the figure as a peasant from Catalonia. This work has since been lost, but as William Robinson has argued, rather than projecting the image of suffering or victimhood as in Picasso’s mural, Miró has represented the defiant Catalan who fights to preserve the republic.\footnote{446 William H. Robinson, “Miró’s \textit{Aidez L’Espagne},” in William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgás, and Carmen Belen Lord, \textit{Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dali} (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006): 431-434.}

While the Spanish Pavilion is most remembered for the contributions of artists like Picasso, González, and Miró, it also featured exhibitions on Spanish culture and life, as well as a
Josep Renau designed mural-sized photomontages on the social services offered by the Republic, including healthcare, education, social security, agriculture, and industry. The objectives of the exposition were summarized by Luis Araquistáin, ambassador of the Spanish Republic at the time:

It seems that some have found it strange that in the midst of a war, the Spanish Republic could find the time and the disposition to be present at this exhibition of Culture and Work. It is precisely this that distinguishes it from the rebellious armed minority that has neither time nor talent for anything but the destruction of life and human values. For Republican Spain, the war is only an accident, a transitory evil that has been thrust upon it, but which does not in any way keep it from continuing to create material and spiritual works. It is precisely this that it wishes to live, for which it’s fighting: to be free in intellectual creation, social justice, and material prosperity. For this reason, it must triumph. Our pavilion will be the best example of its historic continuity, and the best justification for it. We shall see that the Spanish people must win, because, like Minerva, they possess all weapons: the weapons of Liberty, Culture, and Work.

The broader ideological significance of the Spanish Civil War became hotly contested in the United States, particularly as events such as the Paris World’s Fair publicized the war and its toll. In fact, Vicente became embroiled in a very public feud with Robert Motherwell about his references to the Republic, indicating the gravity of the war as well as Vicente’s claims to ownership of the Spanish cause. He found himself in the middle of a contentious debate about

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447 Featuring the collection of the Museu d’Art de Catalunya in Barcelona, this show of medieval art was organized to protect the works from damage during the war. Initially staged in April 1937 at the Jeu de Pame, the exhibit was transferred to the World’s Fair. A catalog, Catalan Art from the Ninth to the Fifteenth Centuries, was published in several languages which included writings by Christian Zervos, Ferran Soldevila, Josep M. Gudiol, and Roland Penrose. The Catalan government also organized a display for the General Press pavilion as well as a fabrics exhibition for the International Pavilion.

the merits of socialism and democracy, and his political affiliation potentially endangered Vicente because of Franco’s repressive policies and McCarthy’s purge of potential Communists. Vicente’s Republican Spain was not without advocates, and as Helen Langa has demonstrated, numerous organizations and unions championed the Loyalists. Drawing upon previous experiences in the Works Progress Administration and Federal Arts Project, many American artists facilitated relief programs and propaganda campaigns for the Republic and its exiles.\footnote{449} The Artists’ Union, for example, campaigned to send two ambulances to Spain, while thirty-five members of the union served during the war in various capacities, including Paul Block, who was killed in Spain in 1937.\footnote{450} Exhibitions, such as those organized by the American Artists Congress, raised funds for refugees from the war. These shows included “To Aid Democracy in Spain,” which opened in October 1936, and “In Defense of World Democracy: Dedicated to the Peoples of Spain and China,” held in December 1937. The organization also co-sponsored the transport of Picasso’s \textit{Guernica} to New York following its successful showing at the Paris World’s Fair of 1937.\footnote{451} Posters and prints, published in journals like the \textit{New Masses}, further protested the war, while documentary photographs in \textit{Life} magazine and the \textit{New York Times} brought images of the war’s devastation into American homes.\footnote{452}

\footnote{450}Ibid., 105.
\footnote{451}Ibid., 106. Picasso refused to exhibit \textit{Guernica} in Spain while Franco ruled and instead sent the work to New York, where it was held by the Museum of Modern Art until eventually returned to Spain. The work was initially exhibited as part of a fundraiser for refugee aid held at the Valentine Gallery. The $0.50 cent admission fee went to the Spanish Refugee Relief Fund. For an announcement of \textit{Guernica}’s arrival in New York, see Edward Alden Jewell, “Picasso’s Mural on Bombing Hung,” \textit{New York Times} (May 4, 1939): 26.
\footnote{452}Juan Salas, “Images at War: Photographs of the Spanish Civil War in New York City,” in \textit{Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War}, ed. Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernandez (New York: Museum of the City of New York and New York University Press, 2007): 120-129. Literary societies also protested the Spanish Civil War with various publications. For example, the League of American Writers published, \textit{…and Spain Sings} (1937), a collection of Republican poems translated by leading writers such as William Carlos Williams and Stanley Kunitz. \textit{Salud!} (1938) was another anthology of writings, featuring firsthand accounts of Spain during the war. These efforts
Not all New Yorkers shared in supporting the Spanish Republic. Despite being
democratically elected, the Republic launched many socialized programs and had an antagonistic
relationship with the Catholic Church that led some to reject its governance. Led by Patrick
Scanlan, editor of Brooklyn’s leading Catholic newspaper, *The Tablet*, numerous ecclesiastical
groups condemned the Loyalists as “pagan” and “villainous.”

With its link to the Soviet Union and Labor Party, the Republic of Spain became a target of Congressman Martin Dies’ anti-
Communist subcommittee by 1938. While the onset of World War II temporarily quelled Dies’ inquiry, Republican supporters were a focus of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) throughout the 1940s. In 1942, Archibald MacLeish noted that “any
association with Loyalist Spain is given as a basis of suspicion of loyalty to the United States,”
and in 1950, eleven members of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee were jailed for

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continued into the 1950s, as Alvah Bessie compiled *The Heart of Spain* (1952). For more on these literary efforts,
see Alan Wald, “New York Novelists and Poets Respond to the Spanish Civil War,” in *Facing Fascism: New York
and the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernandez (New York: Museum of the City of New

453 *Tablet*, August 15, 1936; *Tablet*, August 17, 1932. For more on the Catholic response to the Spanish Civil War in
America, see Robert M. Darrow, “Catholic Political Power: A Study of the Activities of the American Catholic
Church on Behalf of Franco During the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University,
1953); Patrick J. McNamara, “A Study of the Editorial Policy of the Brooklyn Tablet Under Patrick F. Scanlan,
1917-1968” (M.A. thesis, St. John’s University, 1994); Patrick J. McNamara, “Pro-Franco Sentiment and Activity in
New York City,” in *Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Peter N. Carroll and James D.
“American Catholic Dissenters and the Spanish Civil War,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 53 (January 1968): 540-
543; J. David Valaik, “In the Days Before Ecumenism: American Catholics, Anti-Semitism, and the Spanish Civil

454 In 1940 the FBI searched the Manhattan headquarters of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for proof
of their Communist allegiances, and Lincoln Brigade veterans were subpoenaed to testify before Congress. The
Abraham Lincoln Brigade was comprised of American volunteers, largely from the New York area, who fought for
the Republic of Spain. Thomas noted that nearly 10 percent of the Lincoln Brigade were Jewish, enlisting to fight
because of Hitler’s threat to Jewish culture. Thomas also pointed to the idealism of the American volunteers, as
many of them were young students. Thomas, 577-578.

455 Steven H. Jaffe, “Legacies of the Spanish Civil War in New York,” in *Facing Fascism: New York and the
Spanish Civil War*, ed. Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernandez (New York: Museum of the City of New York and
refusing to submit documentation of their activities to HUAC.\textsuperscript{456} The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was officially declared “subversive” by the United States government in 1946, a federal designation that remained in place until 1973.\textsuperscript{457} Catholic groups continued to support Franco’s regime, and William F. Buckley’s \textit{National Review} criticized the Republic well into the 1970s.

Vicente’s position as Vice Consul of the Republic of Spain placed him in the center of this ideological schism, yet Iberian culture was appropriated by artists and writers across the world following the Spanish Civil War. Some embraced Spanish subjects to register their disapproval of Franco’s regime, while others criticized the United States for refusing to intervene on behalf of the Spanish Republic. Many Anglophone writers enlisted to serve in the campaign, leading to its nickname as a “poets’ war.” For example, George Orwell volunteered to fight against the Nationalists, serving in the \textit{Partido de Unification Marxista} (POUM, or Workers Party of the Marxist Unification), an anti-Stalinist, pro-Communist brigade based in Barcelona. Seriously wounded during the conflict, Orwell returned home to England and wrote \textit{Homage to Catalonia} (1938) about his experiences. Among the American contingent, Ernest Hemingway traveled to Spain in 1937 to cover the war for the North American Newspaper Alliance, basing his pro-Republican novel, \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls} (1940), on his time in Spain. Reports of the brutalities committed by both Nationalists and Republicans prompted heated debates among the New York intelligentsia about the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway and John Dos Passos were perhaps the most high profile writers who clashed over their allegiances.\textsuperscript{458} Initially a proponent

\textsuperscript{456} Jaffe, “Legacies of the Spanish Civil War in New York,” 176-177. The Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee was created to aid refugees from the Spanish Civil War who were scattered throughout France and North Africa. \textsuperscript{457} Thomas writes that: “after the war, in the era of McCarthy, any connection with the Spanish cause came to be regarded as subversive. The Abraham Lincoln Battalion itself was declared so in 1946…that body of veterans continued to be persecuted until the 1960s in a way which brought the liberal state into disrepute.” Thomas, 928. \textsuperscript{458} Just as estimates concerning the total casualties of the Spanish Civil War vary greatly, so too do figures pertaining to politically motivated executions. Thomas estimates that “murders or executions behind the lines
of the Loyalist cause, Dos Passos became disenchanted with the Republic after traveling with Hemingway to work on the film *The Spanish Earth*. In Spain, Dos Passos learned of the execution of José Robles Pazos, a former friend who had been accused of treason by the Communist Party. Hemingway’s “indifference” towards Robles’ death destroyed his friendship with Dos Passos, one of many accusations levied against Republican supporters.


Underlying his sociological inquiry remained a desire to understand the war and its aftermath.

> The fate of Spain had hurt me, had haunted me; I had never been able to stifle a hunger to understand what had happened there and why. Yet I had no wish to resuscitate mocking recollections while roaming a land whose free men had been shut in concentration camps, or exiled, or slain. An uneasy question kept floating in my mind: How did one live after the death of the hope for freedom?

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460 Steven Jaffe notes that “such conflicts continued to embitter New York’s literary life long after the war ended… The feud between sometime Communist Lillian Hellman and former Trotskyite Mary McCarthy began at a 1940 dinner party at Sarah Lawrence College, where Hellman ridiculed Dos Passos’s having ‘sold out’ on Spain because he didn’t like Spanish food, and McCarthy replied that Dos Passos’s true motivation was the Communist execution of the POUM leader Andrés Nin.” Jaffe further explains that, “a furor involving Hellman, McCarthy, James T. Farrell, and Dwight MacDonald also erupted in New York in the late ‘50s over Hellman’s joining the board of the Spanish Refugee Aid Committee.” Jaffe, “Legacies of the Spanish Civil War in New York,” 175, 182 n. 4.

461 Richard Wright, *Pagan Spain* (1957; New York: Harper Collins, 1995, 2008): 4. Wright had been a member of the Communist party who openly supported the Republic, writing: “Speaking as a Negro Communist writer, I am wholeheartedly and militantly pro-Loyalist and for the national freedom of the people of Spain. I believe that conditions for the Loyalist victory depend upon the retention and extension of all democratic institutions by the people of Spain. In my opinion, a Loyalist victory over Franco and his German and Italian allies means that Spain will have at last shaken off feudalism and will have taken her place in the Democratic Front of nations…” *Writers Take Sides: Letters about the War in Spain from 419 American Writers* (New York: League of American Writers, 1938); repr. in Faith Berry, Introduction to the Harper Perennial Edition, Richard Wright, *Pagan Spain* (1957; New York: Harper Collins, 1995, 2008): xiv. While *Pagan Spain* discussed life under Franco, Wright focused more on religiosity in Spain than the politics of the Spanish Civil War. He had written a section on Republican exiles but removed that material because his original manuscript ran too long.
The portrait he painted of Spain was not optimistic, with Wright chronicling the poverty and intense religiosity of the nation. From his descriptions of gypsies to the impassioned bullfight, Wright chronicled the remnants of socialization that survived the war, although curiously missing from his narrative was the political realities of the Spanish Civil War. Wright apparently dropped sections he had written about Republican refugees and exiles from the final draft, and he shied away from trying to explain the motives of the war. At times, his support of the Loyalists becomes apparent through his skeptical reading of Falangist propaganda, which indoctrinated the young into believing that separatist movements were a false Spain, but overall the travelogue focused on the aftermath of the war and Spanish culture. Redressing such historical shortcomings, British scholar Hugh Thomas published his epic, The Spanish Civil War, in 1961. With the interest the Spanish Civil War aroused in the previous decades, this history was published in several languages and reprinted numerous times. Originally banned by the Franco regime, Thomas later noted that a Spanish publishing house in Paris smuggled copies of the Spanish language edition into Spain.

With these types of literary and academic works, the Spanish Civil War remained a part of the public consciousness, and these attempts to locate native Spanish tendencies led Vicente to criticize those who would capitalize on the era’s fascination with Spain, most notably Robert Motherwell. Motherwell began his Elegies to the Spanish Republic series in 1948 and created more than hundred and fifty artworks dedicated to the fallen Republic. Initially an ink drawing

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463 Wright, Pagan Spain, 277-279. In this section, Wright received a copy of “Carmen’s political catechism,” a lesson for pre-teenage girls that instructed them the “poetic” truths of the Falange, or middle-class Fascist party.
465 For more on Motherwell’s Spanish Elegies, see E.C. Goosen, “Robert Motherwell and the Seriousness of Subject,” Art International 3 (1959): 33-38, 51; Robert C. Hobbs, “Motherwell’s Concern with Death in Painting:
created to accompany a poem by Harold Rosenberg (fig. 3.19), the black-and-white format of the
Elegies became a tribute to Lorca and his poem “Llanto Por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías.”\[466\] The
resulting work, *At Five in the Afternoon* (1948-49, fig. 3.20) honored the Spanish poet, who was
murdered during the Civil War and provided a stark metaphor for what Motherwell called, “a
Spanish sense of death.”\[467\] He soon changed the series’ name, preferring *Elegies to the Spanish
Republic* because museum goers mistakenly believed *At Five in the Afternoon* had “something to
do with cocktails.”\[468\] Instead, he wanted to make it abundantly clear that his paintings
commemorated “the death of Spain.”\[469\] Franco’s military coup occurred when Motherwell was
still an undergraduate at Stanford University, and according to the artist, “The Spanish Civil War
was even more to my generation than Viet Nam [sic.] was to be thirty years later to its

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An Investigation of his Elegies to the Spanish Republic, Including an Examination of his Philosophical and
Methodological Considerations” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1975); E.A. Carmean, Jr.,
Carmean, Jr., “Robert Motherwell: The Elegies to the Spanish Republic,” in *American Art at Mid-Century: The
Subjects of the Artist*, ed. E.A. Carmean, Jr. and Eliza E. Rathbone with Thomas B. Hess (Washington, D.C.:

\[466\] Lorca wrote *Llanto Por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* in 1934 after the famous matador was gored in a bullfight and
died. The poem repeats the refrain, “At Five in the Afternoon,” from which Motherwell developed the title of his
painting. Lorca himself was executed in 1936 by Franco’s troops outside of Granada; therefore Motherwell’s work
is often interpreted as lamenting Lorca’s death, as well as that of the matador. Rather than commemorating the
Spanish Republic, Motherwell created the first of the *Spanish Elegies* to accompany Rosenberg’s poem, “A Bird for
Every Bird” for the second issue of *Possibilities*, which was never published. After rediscovering his drawing a year
later, in 1949, he based *At Five in the Afternoon* and the subsequent *Elegies* on the previous sketch.

\[467\] Motherwell, quoted in: Carmean, “Robert Motherwell: The Elegies to the Spanish Republic,” 98. Motherwell
was possibly referring to Lorca’s lecture, “Play and Theory of the Duende,” delivered in Buenos Aires in 1933, in
which Lorca wrote: “Everywhere else, death is an end. Death comes, and they draw the curtains. Not in Spain. In
Spain they open them… A dead man in Spain is more alive as a dead man than anyplace in the world… Spain is the
only country where death is a national spectacle, the only one where death sound long trumpet blasts at the coming

\[468\] Motherwell noted that, “one reason I changed the name of the series as a whole to ‘Elegy to the Spanish
Republic’ was that someone occasionally would come up to me and say ‘I saw a most marvelous picture by you—
what was the name? Something to do with cocktails.’” *Robert Motherwell* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Smith

\[469\] Barbaralee Diamonstein, “An Interview with Robert Motherwell,” *Inside New York’s Art World* (New York:
Rizzoli, 1979): 244.
The Elegies to the Spanish Republic became Motherwell’s signature work and earned the artist renown with their monumental scale and seriousness of subject.

Although Motherwell’s heroic canvases became synonymous with the Spanish Civil War in America, many contemporaries made the war their subject as well. O. Louis Guglielmi, an Italian-American “Social Surrealist,” created Surrealist dreamscapes to draw attention to the bloody conflict, including Mental Geography (1938, fig. 3.21), which depicted the Brooklyn Bridge buckling under an aerial assault. According to the artist, this work was: “painted during the Spanish Civil War, I pictured the destruction after an air raid; the towers bomb-pocked, the cables a mass of twisted debris. I meant to say that an era had ended and that the rivers of Spain flowed to the Atlantic and mixed with our waters as well.”

Howard Devree wrote positively about the work, called it a “striking personal report” and filled “with conviction.” In revisiting the “Magic Realism” of Guglielmi in the 1980s, Grace Glueck observed how Mental Geography, “a view of the Brooklyn Bridge in ruins, is an ‘it could happen here’ attack on war and Fascism, particularly the Spanish Civil War.” The anxiety and fears produced by the war echoed throughout the painting, indicating the relevance of Spain’s civil war in the consciousness of many Americans.

David Smith also borrowed from Surrealism in creating fifteen Medals for Dishonor (1937-40, fig. 3.22) denouncing the rise of fascism in Spain. Featuring irrational juxtapositions

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470 Diamonstein, “Interview with Motherwell,” 244.
and based on Ancient Greek coins and Sumerian cylinder seals, these medals depicted the
hypocrisies and horrors of war and totalitarianism. Smith not only criticized the Fascists, but
those institutions complicit in the decadence and destruction of modern life: the clergy,
diplomats, the “free” press, scientists, etc. He exhibited the medals at the Willard Gallery in New
York in November 1940, and wrote provocative statements to accompany each work.475

This exhibition was one of many that identified with the tragic nature of the Spanish Civil
War. In 1946, Romare Bearden presented a series of paintings based on Federico García Lorca’s
Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb, and William Baziotes among others. Bearden’s work, which
included abstracted, Cubistic renderings of horses, matadors, and charging bulls, was criticized
as derivative of Picasso. Lorca’s poem, as well as the image of the screaming horse Picasso
immortalized in *Guernica*, had become emblematic of the Spanish Civil War, and reviewers
condemned Bearden for appropriating this material.

Bearden has taken at second-hand the tragedy of Lorca and the horror of Picasso
and transformed them into exercises in design. Bearden should be reminded that
although it is a common and valid practice to borrow from one’s artistic heritage,
it is the element of personal experience which transforms that borrowing into

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475 For example, the statement for medal nine, “Bombing Civilian Populations,” reads: “The Stuka storks fly high
and drop eggs. The statue has been blown apart revealing a thirteenth-century concept of a Caesarean. The baby is
on the bomb—the bomb is in the highchair—the earth is torn and cracked—the buildings are shattered.” Statements
144-150; Jeremy Lewison, “David Smith and the Medals for Dishonor,” in *David Smith: Medals for Dishonor 1937-
1940* (Leeds: Henry Moore Center for the Study of Sculpture; Leeds City Art Galleries, 1991): 8-24; Paula

476 For more on Bearden’s relationship with Lorca and his exhibit at the Kootz Gallery, see Ruth Fine, *The Art of
something original and important. Until he gives us more of himself he will be creating pleasant but second-rate merchandise for the current art market.477

The artist met Lorca in 1929-30, yet observers chided Bearden’s images for borrowing too heavily from Spanish traditions that were not considered his own.478 By 1939, any allusion to bullfights or Lorca was regarded as commentary on the Spanish Civil War, and the implication of this review was that a “young Negro painter” had no business commenting on the war or following Picasso’s modernist lead. However, this critical slight was not levied against Robert Motherwell, an artist probably inspired by Bearden’s show since he also worked with the Kootz Gallery. Perhaps what distinguished Motherwell’s abstractions from Bearden’s figural work was the style each adopted for the cause. Whereas Motherwell supposedly employed Lorca’s work to embody the universal values sought by the New York School, and in so doing produced nonobjective works unique in their aesthetic appearance, Bearden’s references to bullfights bore too striking a resemblance to Picasso and Goya.

By the 1960s, Vicente’s interest in establishing his Spanish character evolved into a protective posture. Fed up with these romanticized depictions of Spain following the Civil War, including Wright’s description of “pagan Spain” and Dalí’s sensationalized “premonition” of war, Vicente publicly criticized Robert Motherwell for appropriating the Spanish Civil War as the subject of his Elegies to the Spanish Republic. By aligning himself with the Loyalists,


478 Howard Devree did write favorably of Bearden’s show, calling him “talented,” and finding that “Bearden has captured through his brilliant semi-abstract use of colors the brutal, fatalistic, hectic spirit of the arena. Most successful are those which capture a certain biblical majesty… Especially in water-colors he achieves something of the brilliance and brittleness of stained glass. There is increasing clarity in his designs.” Howard Devree, “Work By Europeans, Americans,” New York Times (31 March 1946): 54.
Motherwell adroitly strengthened his modernist credentials, and by capitalizing on this connection, he stood to gain critical attention. As Barbara Rose noted:

Adopting the cause of Republican Spain as iconography had advantages: it identified you [with] the left wing Partisan Review group who ruled New York high culture; it linked you to Ernest Hemingway, icon of macho man; and of course it reminded you of Picasso, even if it did not make you Picasso.  

While there were many disadvantages in commenting on the war, particularly for an African-American artist like Bearden, in Motherwell’s case, the war became his trademark. His Spanish Elegies have been variously interpreted, both iconographically and formally. In one of the earliest discussions of the series, E.C. Goosen wrote, “The huge ovarian forms hang in heavy precariousness between broad male uprights; or perhaps it is the phallus and cojones of the sacrificial bull hung on the whitewashed wall.” In his dissertation on the Elegies, Robert Hobbs drew upon the imagery of genitalia to suggest that these forms recall “fruit hanging on a branch” as well as the letter “M” of Motherwell’s signature. Numerous art historians have also proposed the architectonic quality of the Elegies, likening them to monolithic doorframes. But despite these varied readings, the Elegies consistently have been considered “Spanish” in their appearance. Frank O’Hara compared Motherwell to Hemingway, and suggested that the duende, or soul of Spain, permeates his work: “The ‘duende’ which speaks to us in Motherwell’s paintings is the same Andalusian daemon Lorca celebrates, that ‘obscure power which can speak through every form of human art.’ It is no specific pictorial art which has been of influence here,

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480 Goosen, 34. Emphasis original to the article.
481 Hobbs, 238-239.
but rather the spirit of the ‘cante jondo’ and the bull ring, as in the finest pages of that other
North American ‘aficionado’ of things Spanish, Ernest Hemingway.”

Jack Flam further claimed that Motherwell evoked the “stark flat light” and “black garb” of Spanish villages and their inhabitants.

Dore Ashton remarked that “when Motherwell used color, it was the color of Spain—the color of the sand of the bull ring and the blacks of the bull and the houses of Andalusia,” and Goosen noted how “often an area of ochre, the dry Spanish earth, seeps into the picture.”

Motherwell himself claimed that the works were “done in the flat clear Mediterranean mode of sensuality, but ‘Spanish’ because they are austere.”

Motherwell’s appropriation of the Civil War and Spanish culture incensed Vicente, leading him to write a scathing letter to Art News in 1963. Written in response to a favorable review of Motherwell’s 1962 show at the Sidney Janis Gallery, Vicente’s letter suggested that Motherwell trivialized the Spanish Civil War by mimicking a “Spanish” palette of yellow ochre, black, and white, thereby conflating the tragic conflict with formal elements. Vicente questioned how an American with no previous exposure to Spanish culture could co-opt it for his art, suggesting that Motherwell was motivated only by professional considerations. He further noted that Motherwell had never even visited Spain prior to completing his Elegies.

Mr. Motherwell indicated that his titles reflect an involvement beyond aesthetics in the issue. Somehow, Mr. Motherwell wishes to be identified with the Spanish Civil War…But the shock came when I read Mr. Motherwell’s statement about his first visit to Spain. “…I never got to Spain until 1958…and then I discovered the Madrid plateau is yellow ochre, black and white!”

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486 Motherwell, Robert Motherwell, unpaged.
Is this the reaction of a man who is trying to establish his profound involvement with a tragedy that affected a whole country and the entire world? A tragedy of injustice that shocked humanity! What can this possibly mean?\(^{488}\)

Motherwell replied with an equally acerbic letter to *Art News*, suggesting that Vicente’s “voice of... bile” was based upon his “jealousy” of Motherwell’s success.\(^{489}\) In his rebuttal, Motherwell questioned the politics of identity, wondering: “Did Picasso have to be a German to paint *The Charnel House*, or Mondrian an American Negro to paint *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, etc.?"\(^{490}\)

He claimed that his *Spanish Elegies* were not “political,” but his “private insistence that a terrible death happened that should not be forgot [sic.]…”\(^{491}\) The first draft of Motherwell’s letter, which Thomas Hess asked him to edit and shorten, included even more incendiary comments. He asked, “what kind of possessive chauvinism is Vicente involved in?”\(^{492}\) He further denied that he formalized the war in Spain, instead claiming that his works remained symbolic rather than culturally specific.

Supposing my elegies had been mainly in yellow ochre and, 10 years after beginning them, I first saw the Madrid landscape, and that it was yellow ochre: would this matching of my picture and the landscape detract from their symbolic seriousness? How tortured can reasoning be? Spanish Jesuits would be ashamed of it.\(^{493}\)

\(^{488}\) Vicente, “Editor’s letters,” 6.


\(^{490}\) Ibid.

\(^{491}\) Ibid.

\(^{492}\) Robert Motherwell, unpublished letter to *Art News*, 19 January 1963. Robert Motherwell Archives, Dedalus Foundation, New York, NY. The file in the Motherwell archives contains a copy of Vicente’s letter, which Motherwell scribbled notes on in the margins: “bait… also Matchstore landscape… Charnel house… Can only a Spaniard.” He obliged Hess and sent along an amended form of the letter which was published in *Art News*. His completed draft included the following note: “In reply about the two problems; (one), I am sorry you find the answer to Vicente too long. You printed much longer letters, the Newman-Panofsky correspondence, awhile back, but I am enclosing a shorter version, which (I hope you will inform me) will be printed as is.” Robert Motherwell, letter to Thomas Hess, 23 January 1963. Robert Motherwell Archives, Dedalus Foundation, New York, NY. Motherwell, it seems, felt greatly slandered by Vicente, and his correspondence with Hess indicates the severe tone that runs throughout both drafts of his response.

\(^{493}\) Ibid. Emphasis original to the letter.
Motherwell further questioned the Spanish machismo of Vicente, concluding this unpublished version by declaring, “No, Vicente, you do not, as you pretend, speak with the voice of an ‘hombre,’ but with bile.”

Motherwell failed to recognize that Vicente was not upset with an American for creating a response to the Spanish Civil War *per se*; rather, he noted that the conflict in Spain “affected…the entire world.” He condemned Motherwell for capitalizing on the war without getting involved on a personal level. As Vicente explained:

Now Franco was in power and there were people in the jails, people being persecuted by fascism. The only thing Motherwell has to say about Spain, as he must have seen the plateau of Castile, is that it’s yellow ochre, black and white… I wrote him a letter. I said, “This is disgusting. What are you doing? This is an insult.” He didn’t answer me. My letter appeared in *Art News*. It took him a few months to answer, and finally he writes, “Trust me, Vicente is envious of me.” I could not answer such a low thing. So that was the end of that.

In an interview from 1991, Vicente reiterated that “Motherwell never understood the tragedy of the Spanish people, there, under Franco. It’s fascism and nothing else.” This lack of understanding led Vicente to become embroiled in disputes with other friends because of their political affiliations. Besides Motherwell, Vicente’s long relationship with Joseph Stella ended because Stella supported Mussolini, and Vicente was unwilling to accept Fascism in any form.

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494 Motherwell, unpublished letter to *Art News*, n.pag.
495 Vicente, “Editor’s letters,” 6.
496 Rose, “Interview of Esteban Vicente,” 264.
497 Vicente explained that, despite the urging of his peers, he never replied to Motherwell’s retort. “[Motherwell’s letter] is a self-portrait of him…So that’s Motherwell. And the other painters wanted me to answer. I said, ‘Please, no, he’s there, I am here, no way.’” Elizabeth Frank, “A Conversation with Esteban Vicente,” *Esteban Vicente: A Forty Year Survey* (East Hampton, NY: Guild Hall Museum, 1992): unpaged.
498 In an interview with Irving Sandler, Vicente explained, “He [Stella] was a very nice man. The only thing is that at that time… I had some problem with him because he was very much involved with Mussolini.” Irving Sandler, Interview with Esteban Vicente, 26 August 1968, Esteban Vicente Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Vicente further demonstrated his Republican devotion by participating in exhibitions for Spanish Refugee Aid (SRA), an organization founded by Nancy Macdonald in 1953 to support the nearly 450,000 Spaniards displaced by war. These exiles, many of them women and children, relocated to southern France, Latin America, and the U.S.S.R., seeking political asylum from Franco’s rule. In 1960, Spanish Refugee Aid hosted a fundraising exhibition, “Homage to Albert Camus,” at the Stuttman Gallery in New York City. Camus and his wife, Francine, were founding members of SRA, Camus’s mother was Spanish, and he was close friends with many Republican officials. An impressive array of painters and sculptors donated their work to the exhibition, including Alexander Calder, Helen Frankenthaler, Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Louis Nevelson, Hedda Sterne, and Esteban Vicente. In reviewing the show, Dore Ashton of the New York Times wrote, “rarely have so many painters and sculptors joined forces for a cause… it is heartening to see that in almost every case, the artists have given their best.” Ashton’s commentary indicates how the Spanish Civil War continued to resonate with American artists more than twenty years after it ended; a testament to the profound impact of this event.

Vicente continued to support Spanish Refugee Aid, and in 1972 converted a collage, Untitled (1970, fig. 3.25), into a limited edition print for SRA. The collage and subsequent

499 Macdonald’s book notes the 130,000 Spanish émigrés living in France when she founded Spanish Refugee Aid, with another 530,000 “immigrant workers” also in France. Nancy Macdonald, Homage to the Spanish Exiles: Voices from the Spanish Civil War (New York Human Sciences Press, 1987): 25. Yet like so many of the details surrounding the Spanish Civil War, the exact figures of those seeking political asylum remain unclear. Thomas claims that at least 400,000 Catalonians had fled Spain during the war years proper, suggesting that as many as 50,000 Spaniards fled to South America with at least 7,000 Spanish Communists and children relocating to Russia. The story of the Spanish refugee does not end with the Spanish Civil War, however, as 350,000 Spaniards remained in France at the onset of World War II, with approximately 10,000 dying in Nazi concentration camps and 25,000 dying while fighting for the French and Russian armies. Thomas, 894-896, 922-923.

500 Camus also received the Order of Liberation from the Spanish Republic in February of 1949, and in August of that year he wrote an appeal on behalf of Republican refugees for the Solidaridad Obrera. Camus gave several lectures on behalf of the Spanish Republic throughout the early 1950s, culminating in his efforts on behalf of SRA. Macdonald, 132-133.

silkscreen, *Spanish Refugee Aid* (1972, fig. 3.26), bear resemblances to Miró’s anti-Nationalist poster, *Aidez L’Espagne* (1937, fig. 3.27). Exiled in Paris as the war broke out, Miró produced numerous works in support of the Republic. *Aidez L’Espagne* featured a figure in profile with raised fist, the Communist salute that became an anti-fascist gesture during the war in Spain. Vicente’s *Untitled* evokes the profiled head of Miró’s figure including a black circle denoting the eye orbital, and both collage and lithograph contain a red, curving shape suggestive of the “clenched” or “lifted” fist. The red that occupies this upturned elbow is one of the primary colors of the Republican flag, perhaps indicating Vicente’s support of those exiled by Franco’s rule.

Although abstracted, the likeness of the biomorphic forms to Miró’s print remains an appropriate allusion considering the purpose of Spanish Refugee Aid. Although the Spanish Civil War effectively ended when Franco’s forces occupied the last Republican strongholds in 1939, the abundance of exhibitions, memorials, writings, and other fundraisers dedicated to the war and its refugees continued in New York well into the 1960s. The political ramifications of the war also remained because McCarthyism persecuted those affiliated with the Republic and its socialist ideology. Thus, Vicente’s comment that “this tragedy still continues,” reflects not only the plight of the Spanish people under Franco, but also the repression experienced by many in America.

**Collage, War, and the Politics of Abstraction**

Vicente was personally haunted by the war and its aftermath, yet the degree to which it informed his art remains unclear because he destroyed much of his work prior to 1950. He rarely represented the Spanish Civil War directly in painting or collage, demonstrating an...
unwillingness to exploit the tragic revolution. In addition, it may have been too difficult for him
to employ the war as subject matter since he lost many friends and his home to the war.
Furthermore, Vicente embraced Abstract Expressionism during the late 1940s, complicating
efforts to discern an overt political agenda in his art. However, despite the scarcity of artworks
referring directly to the Spanish Civil War, many of Vicente’s collages exhibit traces of the
artist’s wartime experience. For example, in *Black, Grey and Green* (1961, fig. 3.28), a
militaristic palette of green and dark tones, coupled with curvilinear zones of unmodulated color,
imitates the camouflage Vicente painted for Republican forces outside of Madrid in 1936.
*Number One* (1952, fig. 3.29) also contains the monochromatic hues and ovular jigsaw shapes
reminiscent of military concealment techniques. Barbara Rose similarly has observed that “the
interlocking leaf and foliage shapes typical of camouflage seem [to] recall Vicente’s painting and
collages done in his mature years in America.”

Many of Vicente’s works do not comment directly on militarism or the conflict in Spain,
yet the visual culture surrounding the Spanish Civil War served as formal precedents for
Vicente’s oeuvre. As we have seen, the influence of Miró’s *Aidez L’Espagne* appears in the
biomorphic forms and bright colors of Vicente’s *Spanish Refugee Aid* (1972); it recurs as well in
*Collage with Yellow, Blue and Orange* (1963, fig. 3.30) and *Blue Field* (1965, fig. 3.31). While
the aesthetics of the war resonated with Vicente, particularly in the form of posters and
camouflage, his weathered and tattered compositions also evoke the hardship endured by
Spaniards during the war years. It may be beneficial to consider his work through a
psychological lens, with his shattered forms suggesting the Spanish experience of so much
violence and upheaval. Scholars have noted the manner in which the medium of collage can

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“induce trauma,” by presenting the “composite image of a figure whose parts do not match.”

Brigid Doherty has argued that Dada montage consciously identified with and projected the disembodied neuroses of war, while Gregory Gilbert has claimed that in Motherwell’s work, the “expressive signifying properties associated with abstract Surrealist collage methods [serve] as a means of encoding the disruptive political violence and traumatic bodily image resulting from World War Two.”

As noted in chapter one, collage continuously served as a rejoinder to war. From Picasso’s veiled references to the Balkan Wars to Dada’s critiques of World War I and the emergence of Fascism, the medium historically related to, and protested, armed conflict.

Through such a framework, Vicente’s collages evoke the clashing ideologies and horrific bloodshed that ripped apart Spain during the Civil War. The frenetic scribbles and torn edges of *Number 7* (1950, fig. 3.32) recall the violence and aggression of the military campaign, while the layered surfaces and gestural paint application of Vicente’s collages conjure wounds and the bandages of soldiers. The reference to militarism becomes apparent with the inclusion of a photograph of a uniformed man raising his hand in a salute. Behind this official stands a rank of soldiers, their berets juxtaposed with the formal hat of the officer. This passage is a rare instance of photomontage appearing in Vicente’s work. Typically he employed fine art paper and few figurative components for his work, but the disruption of military ceremony by the tangled network of paper cutouts and gestural markings offsets any aggrandizement of the uniformed officer. The world supported by armies and warfare appears off-kilter in this collage, as the regularity of marching infantrymen tilts to one side and the composition affords no stable terrain to ground these individuals.

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The metaphoric potency of “cut-and-paste” aesthetics rendered collage and photomontage popular media for negotiating the “spectacularization of violence” ubiquitous in the mass media throughout the twentieth century. While Vicente did not create photomontages challenging the utopian modernity of photography as did Karel Teige, a Czechoslovakian artist active during the Nazi occupation of the 1940s, his collages often elicit a similar effect. Teige dismembered the human form, particularly the female body, in order to critique the Bauhaus and German cultural authority, whereas Vicente evoked the fragmentation resulting from exile and civil war. Although he rarely employed mimesis for this endeavor, an aesthetic of destruction and reconstruction pervades his collages from the early 1950s. Works like Untitled (1953, fig. 3.33) and Number 4 (1949, fig. 3.34) resemble the accumulation of debris throughout Spain, where mortar rounds and bullet shells reduced much of the nation’s landscape to rubble. Vicente’s recycled and worn scraps of paper replicate the devastation of Madrid, mimicking the scattered remains of buildings as photographed by Robert Capa (fig. 3.35-3.37). These collages lack a compositional center and the dispersal of collage elements suggests the destabilization wrought by the Civil War. Within this context, works like Untitled can be considered allusions for the de-centered people of Spain wherein Vicente’s all-over patterning allegorizes the trauma of upheaval. Indeed, dislocation remains one of the primary attributes of the collage medium, and for an artist like Vicente, the connotations of the “cut-and-paste” artwork would have resonated on many levels.

Often times evocative of the geography and architecture of Spain, Vicente’s collages can suggest the trauma of war but also reveal the artist’s attempts to claim ownership of his native

land. By artistically reconstructing the history of Spain, he imaginatively takes possession of a site undermined by dictatorship and romanticized typecasting. Scholars often interpret Vicente’s work through his temperament and political activism, making sense of his abstractions by locating a projected similitude of mimesis. For example, Irving Sandler has recently argued that Vicente’s cutouts call to mind the topography of Europe:

The images in a number [of] Vicente’s early Gesture Paintings resemble maps of Europe. It may not have been conscious on Vicente’s part, but it is clear to me. The role that Spain plays in this image is also significant as in some pictures Vicente scrawls it out. This may have been his response to Franco’s Spain.507

Sandler’s commentary further demonstrates the manner in which Vicente’s identity informs the critical reception of his work, an influence that yields both compelling and overwrought interpretive possibilities. For example, Vicente’s compositions, with their emphasis on connections and borders, might indicate his attempt to understand Spain’s position in relation to modern Europe. After all, the geography of Spain affected much of Vicente’s work, and his childhood experiences in Castile strongly influenced his art and character. He often noted the significance of his cultural roots, and while he never claimed the province of Castile as the specific source of his art, many art historians connect the two. A recent photo essay by Ellen Russotto on Vicente’s life and background drew comparisons between the architecture of Segovia and the artist’s work, particularly as the “patched walls” of polychrome stone and multifaceted facades of medieval streets parallel Vicente’s pasted papers (fig. 3.38-3.40). Likewise, Sandler has argued that Vicente developed his “psychological” palette and approach toward coloring because of his upbringing in Segovia.508 Vicente’s emphasis on origins and

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507 Sandler, Esteban Vicente: The Aristocratic Eye, 5, note 16.
508 Sandler commented, “The colors Vicente preferred throughout his long career were the issue of his subjective experience… When I visited Segovia—with its omnipresent views of the arid Castilian plain—it occurred to me that
vernacular domesticity might be natural responses for a refugee who witnessed his homeland ravaged by civil war.

Vicente also created artworks that overtly celebrated Spain and its cultural legacy. Having painted gouaches of flamenco singers and matadors during his formative years, he returned to the subject of the bullfight in a 1962 collage, *Untitled (Toro y Torero)* (fig. 3.41). At first, this unfinished work appears abstract, with large areas of black and gray ink applied beneath ocher pigment and paper cutouts in pink and red. But upon further inspection, the backside of a bull is discernible to the left of the composition, complete with hind legs and hooves. The brightly colored collage elements appear to outline the flamboyant costume of the matador to the right as he engages the beast in the ring. The central zone of ocher suggests the hide of the animal, while its angular profile evokes the reared head of a charging bull. While not clearly articulated like the hindquarters, solid dark outlines convey the haunches and muscular strength of the bovine. Depictions of the bullfight recur in the history of Spanish art, and considering Vicente’s academic training in Madrid, he may have sought company with Francisco Goya and others who immortalized the sport.⁵⁰⁹ Regardless of his art historical pedigree, Vicente would have understood the nationalistic significance of the bullfight as an emblem of Spanish identity.

Vicente was unique in experiencing the physical and psychological effects of the Spanish Civil War because unlike other artists who followed the tragic events from afar, he actually

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the colors of the landscape constituted Vicente’s essential palette. There were the same dry tans, browns, ochers, and yellows of the sun-beaten earth and the occasional farm; the off-yellows, at times tinged with muted pinks, of the dust-ridden atmosphere; the darker browns and umbers of plowed fields; the off-green hedges and bushes spotted here and there; and the off-blues and grays of the darkish shadows cast by of the spare flora and low hills and ridges.” Sandler, *Esteban Vicente: The Aristocratic Eye*, 11.

⁵⁰⁹ Andrew Schulz recently argued that Goya’s *Tauromaquia*, a series of prints from 1815 depicting the bullfight, attempted to establish a collective Spanish national identity. See Andrew Schulz, “Moors and the Bullfight: History and National Identity in Goya’s *Tauromaquia,*** in *Art Bulletin* 90, no. 2 (June 2008): 195-217.
participated in the conflict while in Madrid.\textsuperscript{510} The artist felt morally obliged to defend his homeland from misappropriations such as Motherwell’s \textit{Spanish Elegies} because the Spanish Civil War was far too personal an event to take lightly. In addition to Vicente’s service in painting camouflage for the Republican army, his three brothers fought against Franco and his father was wrongfully jailed under suspicion of fascist leanings.\textsuperscript{511} Many of his friends and colleagues, such as Lorca, perished as a result of Franco’s regime, while Vicente’s brother, Eduardo, concretized these experiences in visual terms by painting genre scenes during the war.\textsuperscript{512} These oils depicted the destruction of Madrid and its outlying areas as well as the difficult conditions facing the combatants. Four of Eduardo’s paintings, including \textit{Barrio Bombardeado}, \textit{Camión de Milicianos}, and \textit{Milicianos de Guardia} (all 1937, fig. 3.42-3.44) appeared in the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris, demonstrating willingness on the part of the Republic to acknowledge the war and celebrate the strength of its army. Interestingly, these paintings are dark and do not shy away from the harsh realities of the military campaign. Rather than idealizing the war, Eduardo approached the battlefront with a journalistic verism. He depicted soldiers smoking and huddled under blankets, while the landscape he envisaged was one of destruction, with beds, chairs, and other domestic elements strewn about rubble-filled streets. In addition to the World’s Fair, Eduardo’s images appeared in journals like \textit{El Mono Azul} and illustrated books like \textit{Acero de Madrid} by José Herrera Petere. Esteban’s

\textsuperscript{510} Motherwell lived in California and toured Europe while Picasso and Miró were in Paris during the war years.

\textsuperscript{511} Natacha Seseña wrote: “the Spanish Civil War caused a split in Vicente’s family, as in so many others. He returned from Paris to Madrid, where his father was still an employee of the Bank of Spain. Being a religious man of conservative values, he was accused of being a fascist, arrested and imprisoned, Esteban’s three brothers all fought against Franco, and advised Esteban to leave the country.” Natacha Seseña, “Observing Nature,” in \textit{Esteban Vicente: Obras de 1950 a 1998}, ed. Marta Gonzalez (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1998): 272.

\textsuperscript{512} For more on Eduardo Vicente, see Gerardo Diego, \textit{La Pintura de Eduardo Vicente} (Torrelavega: Biblioteca Jose Maria de Pereda, 1949); Rafael Flórez, \textit{Eduardo Vicente} (Madrid: Dirección General del Patrimonio Artístico y Cultural, 1975); Ricardo Gullón, \textit{Eduardo Vicente} (Reinosa: Ayuntamiento de Reinosa, 1955); Natacha Seseña, \textit{Eduardo Vicente} (Madrid: Museo Municipal de Madrid, 1999).
knowledge of these works is impossible to know, but he did receive the opportunity to visit with his brother and view his art in 1950 when Eduardo held a show at the New York Circulating Library of Painting.\textsuperscript{513} While the paintings Eduardo showed in America were peaceful genre scenes, the immense impact of the war on Esteban and his family cannot be overstated.

In his letter to \textit{Art News}, Esteban Vicente noted that the tragedy of the Civil War would continue as long as Franco remained in power, which was until the dictator died in 1975. Two days following Franco’s death, Don Juan Carlos was crowned King of Spain, effectively ending Nationalist rule. Vicente paid homage to this momentous occasion with \textit{Untitled (Spanish Flag)} (1975, fig. 3.45). In this collage, Vicente superimposed the Republican flag above a mountainous landscape reminiscent of Castile, replicating the flag’s tricolor layout.\textsuperscript{514} The purple, yellow, and red Republican standard symbolically flies high atop the land, and the mountains where Republican soldiers fled for safety herald the end of fascism. Like Picasso, Vicente refused to exhibit in Spain as long as despotism reigned, and with the restoration of liberty to Spain, Vicente revealed his nationalistic pride through collage. Vicente apparently considered this work very important, as he converted the collage into a lithograph, \textit{Salud! (Spanish Flag)} (ca. 1975-76, fig. 3.46), which, along with \textit{Spanish Refugee Aid}, remains rare instances of Vicente reworking his previous compositions into prints. On both occasions, the Spanish Civil War was Vicente’s

\textsuperscript{513} Reviewers stressed the idyllic nature of Eduardo’s work. Ruthven Todd wrote, “There is a kind of wistful, pallid charm about his studies of small people and cheerful donkeys. Madrid appears not as a place where battles once raged, but rather a quiet lonely city where people go about their business in a melancholy dream.” Ruthven Todd, “Reviews and Previews: Eduardo Vicente,” \textit{Art News} 49 (May 1950): 54. Marynell Sharp also noted that “Eduardo Vicente’s [sic.] Spain is the one some of us dreamed of once; a land of tranquility, grace, and timelessness flavored by mysticism and poetry. Gently and poignantly he realizes sleepy nostalgic villages and unbelievable landscapes untouched by tourists or strife… There is no strident projection, no involvement with detail or political overtones… only a lyrical translation of the basic character of his country and people.” Marynell Sharp, “57th Street in Review: Spain at Peace,” \textit{The Art Digest} 24, no. 14 (15 April 1950): 22, 24.

\textsuperscript{514} In \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls}, Pilar teases Robert Jordan about his sense of humor, saying, “I could make jokes about a flag. Any flag… The old flag of yellow and gold we called pus and blood. The flag of the Republic with the purple added we call blood, pus and permanganate. It is a joke.” Ernest Hemingway, \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls} (New York: Scribner, 1940): 66.
subject, again indicating the profound impact of the event on Vicente since he did not produce a
great number of prints.

While Untitled (Spanish Flag) is remarkable for its overt imagery, the work also hints at
Vicente’s reasons for eschewing politically-charged statements. Despite living safely as an
expatriate in New York, Vicente rarely commented directly on the Nationalist Party until Franco
was no longer in power. Vicente’s aesthetic interests certainly would have contributed to his
seemingly apolitical abstractions, but ambiguity was also a means of avoiding persecution under
totalitarian rule. One Spanish author has noted that “the repression [artists] suffered as
punishment for that dissent was always severe and sometimes ferocious.”\textsuperscript{515} In fact, the
Generation of 1927, the group of poets whom Vicente befriended as a young artist in Madrid,
“had been murdered (Federico García Lorca), were about to die in jail (Miguel Hernández) or
had fled (Rafael Alberti, Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas).”\textsuperscript{516} Despite having escaped to the United
States and its democratic climate, Vicente’s family and friends remained in Spain, and the artist
may have feared jeopardizing their wellbeing by commenting on the war and its aftermath.
Considering his well-established Republican allegiances—and Franco’s execution of between
30,000 and 150,000 of his dissenters—Vicente may have been careful to avoid the dictator’s
wrath.\textsuperscript{517} As it was, Vicente’s parents, like countless Spaniards, faced extreme poverty following
the war, eventually succumbing to malnutrition and illness.\textsuperscript{518} In this context, the vocabulary of

\textsuperscript{516} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{517} The number of Republicans executed by Franco’s Nationalist party varies greatly, as Gabriele Ranzato notes, “a
calculation of the number of death sentences carried out until the early 1950s varies from the 28,000 estimated by
the Francoist historian, Salas Larrazabal, and the 150,000 indicated by the pro-Republican, Tamanes.” Gabriele
\textsuperscript{518} As Frank notes, “During the war Vicente lived in constant anxiety about his parents and sisters, who had
remained in Madrid… Unable to get enough food, Vicente’s parents lived out the war on broth of potato peels,
nearly starving, and suffering malnutrition and illness that hastened their deaths not long after the war ended.”
Frank, \textit{Esteban Vicente}, 18.
Abstract Expressionism could be interpreted as an escape, a strategy for remaining out of harm’s way. While this approach could be confused with detachment or indifference—for example T.S. Eliot was criticized during the 1930s for failing to produce poetry critical of the situation in Spain—a retreat into formalism was not necessarily apolitical. In Eliot’s case, scholars argue that his detachment “constitutes both an aesthetic and a political strategy, a genuine and legitimate form of social involvement.” As such, innovations in the realm of culture could promote “changes in other fields of production.”

Conversely, direct engagement with politics cast doubt upon one’s modernist persuasion, particularly because the project of modernism supposedly included artistic autonomy. Unlike Eliot, W.H. Auden eschewed formal experimentation to comment on the war, a shift apparent in his poem “Spain” (1937). Auden received the opposite criticism from Eliot and was harangued for abrogating his poetic mission. Vicente faced this conundrum, particularly as an artist so intimately involved with the Republican side. He had committed himself as a modern artist, but his allegiances might be questioned for his pursuit of the artistic. However, abstraction was not entirely apolitical following the Spanish Civil War; instead, it served a subtle means of protesting Franco’s reign because nonrepresentational art rejected the state-sponsored Neoclassicism and Social Realism of the National Movement. For example, Ignacio Zuolaga utilized the rhetorical devices of royal portraiture for his painting of a triumphant Franco standing atop the Castilian plain (fig. 3.47). Likewise, a 1940 equestrian portrait by Fernando Alvarez de Sotomayor depicted El Generalissimo on horseback in the Alcázar of Toledo (fig.

In both cases, the artists employed neoclassical styles and veristic techniques to elevate Franco to the lofty status of past kings and emperors. Thus, Vicente’s abstract modernism might be considered a rejection of these vainglorious traditions and its propagandistic mimesis.

While Vicente’s adoption of abstraction was fueled primarily by aesthetic and artistic choices, numerous contemporary critics noted the political ramifications and inherent symbolism of abstraction. In 1958-59, the Museum of Modern Art staged a traveling exhibition, The New American Painting, which featured the work of Vicente’s peers, including Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock. Alfred Barr’s essay for the catalogue discussed this brand of American art in terms of “individualism” and “freedom.”

They defiantly reject the conventional values of the society which surrounds them, but they are not politically engaged even though their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude.

The rhetoric of the Cold War resonated throughout the “New American Painting” show, wherein abstract art suggested an “undogmatic” ideology.

Likewise, Meyer Schapiro’s 1957 essay, “The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art,” employed terms such as “liberty” and “freedom” to explain contemporary art. Schapiro divorced himself from the formalism of Clement Greenberg in asserting that New York School abstraction was “related to a broader and deeper reaction to basic elements of common experience.” For Schapiro, the spontaneity of Abstract Expressionism was rooted in individuality and freedom, qualities corresponding to “important emerging values of the social and political life of that

524 Ibid., 10.
525 Ibid., 13.
period.” Connecting artistic “emancipation” to Marxist tenets, such as the union of labor and spirit, Schapiro’s essay emerged from the socialist ideals on which the Spanish Republic was based. Abstraction thereby emerged as a response to authoritarianism, enabling the critical mindset and expressive freedom necessary for society to thrive:

If the painter cannot celebrate many current values, it may be that these values are not worth celebrating. In the absence of ideal values stimulating to his imagination, the artist must cultivate his own garden as the only secure field in the violence and uncertainties of our time. By maintaining his loyalty to the value of art—to responsible creative work, the search for perfection, the sensitiveness to quality—the artist is one of the most moral and idealistic of beings, although his influence on practical affairs may seem very small. Painting by its impressive example of inner freedom and inventiveness and by its fidelity to artistic goals, which include the mastery of the formless and accidental, helps to maintain the critical spirit and the ideals of creativeness, sincerity and self-reliance, which are indispensable to the life of our culture.  

Schapiro ultimately believed that “abstraction implies then a criticism,” because the painterly rejection of established modes of representation suggests an ideological stance. Vicente was probably aware of the art historian’s views on abstract art, as both supported Spanish Refugee Aid and Schapiro “discovered” Vicente by inviting him to exhibit in the “Talent 1950” show at the Kootz Gallery. Thus if we adopt Schapiro’s model, Vicente’s abstract canvases and collages could imply a criticism of the values promoted by Franco.

Following the Spanish Civil War, many audiences equated one’s artistic style with one’s political inclination. Salvador Dalí applied his “paranoiac-critical” method to comment on the war in paintings such as *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War* (1936, fig. 3.49) and *Autumn Cannibalism* (1936-37, fig. 3.50) that evoked the horrific destruction of flesh that accompanied the militaristic uprising. However, Dali’s return to Catholicism,

classicism, and Spanish tradition aroused suspicions of Fascist leanings. Since the Catholic Church remained ardent in its support of Franco’s rule, many critics connected the representational verism of Salvador Dalí to his renewed faith in Catholicism, thereby aligning his art and politics with Nationalistic Fascism.\textsuperscript{527} Surrealists like André Breton and Nicolas Calas disavowed themselves from the conservative values of Dalí, suggesting that his academic classicism was “counter-revolutionary” and rooted in racist opinions.\textsuperscript{528} Works like The Enigma of Hitler (ca. 1939, fig. 3.51) did little to dispel the association of Dali’s work with Fascist ideals, particularly as artists attempted to distance themselves from the propagandized social realism of Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler. With the fall of democratic socialism, as epitomized by the Spanish Republic, many believed that representational art had lost its relevance. Abstraction now bore the mantra of modernity, exhibiting the traits of freedom and independence heralded by Barr and Schapiro as well as Breton, Diego Rivera, and Leon Trotsky.\textsuperscript{529}

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\textsuperscript{528} Nicolas Calas, “Anti-Surrealist Dalí: I Say his Flies are Ersatz,” View 1 (June 1941): 1, 3. Breton attacked Dalí, writing that “Dali said...that all the present trouble in the world is racial in origin, and that the best solution, agreed on by all the white races, is to reduce all the dark races to slavery.” André Breton, “Des tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste,” Minotaure (12 May 1939), as translated in Ian Gibson, The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí (London: Faber and Faber, 1997; New York: Norton, 1998): 387, 396. As Lubar notes, “with the specter of fascism casting its shadow over Europe, the signing of the German/Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, which demoralized the Left, and the world on the verge of war, there was little room to indulge Dalí’s fantasies.” Lubar, 24.

The repression of Franco’s reign gradually subsided in the years leading to the dictator’s death.530 Produced after Franco died, Vicente’s collage and print series, Daylight (1975, fig. 3.52-3.53), suggested the dawning of freedom in Spain, the title Daylight being a metaphor for the promise of a new day. Both works featured a charcoal horizon line below a rectilinear U-shape colored yellow. Set within this frame is an orange rectangle evocative of the rising sun and daybreak. This new beginning extended to Vicente’s art, as he experienced a renaissance of sorts following the demise of the Nationalist state.531 After nearly fifty years in America, the artist finally returned to Spain, coming home to visit his family in the 1980s. Soon thereafter, numerous exhibits reacquainted the Spanish public with Vicente’s work, as he had refused to exhibit in Spain as long as a despot ruled. He was presented the Gold Medal of Honor in the Arts by King Juan Carlos at the Prado in 1991, the same museum he visited with his father as a child.532 These experiences fueled a burst of artistic activity, and Vicente created numerous works that were brilliantly colored and Spanish in theme. For example, he completed a series of oils in honor of the northern province of Cantabria (Cantabrian Series: Divertimento; Melody; Silver Blue; all 1982, fig. 3.54-3.56), and paid homage to the landscape surrounding Madrid with Castile (1989, fig. 3.57). Other paintings celebrated Spain’s cultural legacy, such as Goyescas (1983, fig. 3.58), the title of an opera written by Enrique Granados in the early twentieth century to commemorate Francisco de Goya, while Zarzuela (1982, fig. 3.59) referred to a genre of musical theater first performed in the courts of Madrid during the seventeenth century. Vicente

530 For example, Sasha Pack recently argued that tourism played a crucial role in reorienting the policies of, and opinions on, Franco’s Spain. Sasha D. Pack, Tourism and Dictatorship: Europe’s Peaceful Invasion of Franco’s Spain (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).
531 Elizabeth Frank commented that, “the death of Franco in 1975 was a reawakening not only for Spain but for Vicente as well.” Frank, Esteban Vicente, 99.
left the majority of his collages untitled, but following his sojourn to Spain he completed his *Primavera Series* in 1985. Evoking springtime, the title of this suite suggests rebirth, another allusion to the reawakening of post-Franco Spain. Vicente named one of the *Primavera* collages, *Cadiz*, after the province and city in southern Spain, while *Jaca* refers to the northeastern city that formerly served as the capital of Aragon. *Triana*, also in the *Primavera Series*, might refer to the neighborhood of Seville where Flamenco was allegedly invented, while *Sur* (fig. 3.60) evokes the arid climate of southern Spain with its abundance of ocher and yellow. Although these abstract collages might not “represent” particular aspects of Spain or its culture, Vicente’s interest in connecting his work to his native land intensified following Franco’s death.

**The National Identity of Collage**

Vicente told Irving Sandler that he objected to the *Spanish Elegies* “in political terms, not in artistic terms,” but his feud with Motherwell emerged from a variety of artistic differences in addition Motherwell’s appropriation of the Spanish Civil War.\(^{533}\) Despite the affinities of their milieu—the men were neighbors, exhibited together in group shows, and participated in the Artists Club—they approached the Abstract Expressionist collage from divergent positions.\(^{534}\) In New York, Vicente played the role of the Spanish master, arguing for the continuity of cultural influence while expounding his Spanish artistic values. Motherwell, on the other hand, mimicked the School of Paris, fashioning himself after the French modernists he so greatly admired. Motherwell’s art was rooted in Surrealism, Dada, and French Symbolism, whereas Vicente

\(^{533}\) Sandler, “Interview with Vicente,” 68.

\(^{534}\) For example, Vicente and Motherwell both exhibited in the *9th Street Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture* (1951) and *Second Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture at the Stable Gallery* (1953).
predicated his work upon Cubism and the severity of Zurbarán and Velázquez. Despite working abstractly in the same medium, the two epitomized vastly different approaches to their craft. Ultimately, the national identity of collage became contested as Vicente and Motherwell sought their place within the canon of modern art.

Vicente found Motherwell’s adoption of the Spanish Civil War part of a larger attempt to project his European inheritance. Perplexed by Motherwell’s personae, Vicente referred to him as “queer man,” recounting how “at the beginning he told me once himself that his great desire was to be European.” He also recalled that Motherwell “wanted to meet with me all the time because he wanted to be European. He didn’t want to be American, he wanted to be European.” Considering him “pretentious,” Vicente further explained that Motherwell “had been all his life claiming that he was the man with a kind of intellectual background.” This “intellectual background” was steeped in European art and philosophy, drawing heavily from Surrealism. Motherwell’s role as editor for Possibilities and the Documents of Modern Art series established him as an important intermediary between the New York School and various European émigrés living in New York as the result of World War II. He emerged as one of the primary apologists of modern art, immersing himself in the artistic theories espoused by the European contingent. The formal approach that most resonated with Motherwell was automatism, a Surrealist technique he called “a plastic weapon with which to invent new forms” and “one of the twentieth century’s greatest formal inventions.”

536 Barbara Rose, “Interview of Esteban Vicente by Barbara Rose,” 264.
Vicente, on the other hand, denied the primacy of automatism. In his essay, “Painting Should Be Poor,” he avowed, “Art is based on order. I am against automatism and all that nonsense. Automatism is like nature, or, if we relate it to ideas, is what people often mistakenly think of as freedom.” Considering his personal history and interaction with first generation Surrealists like Ernst and Miró, Vicente understood the theoretical basis for automatist techniques. However, he cared deeply about crafting his art and refused to yield to the impulses of the unconscious. By distancing himself from automatism, Vicente did not reject the aesthetics of improvisation; instead he believed that a true artist maintained control of even the most spontaneous inventions. He claimed that spontaneity could be achieved by maintaining control to the point where the artist loses his “sense of consciousness.” Vicente favored collage because of its flexibility, particularly because it granted him such control, allowing the artist to easily rearrange forms in accordance with the desired aesthetic effects. His collages were not created indeterminately like Jean Arp’s Collage Created According to the Laws of Chance, wherein Arp scattered papers scraps onto the picture plane and pasted them depending upon where they fell. Nor did he apply Motherwell’s accidental drips and stains as startup strategies for pieced-together arrangements. Instead, he created his collages by continually working and reworking his compositions. Created over the course of several weeks rather than impulsively in one sitting, works like Untitled (1953) exhibit the spontaneity and indexical markings characteristic of automatism. In fact, many scholars of Abstract Expressionism have noted

539 Esteban Vicente, “Painting Should Be Poor,” Location 1, no. 2 (Summer 1964): 70.
540 Vicente met Miró in Barcelona, visiting the Catalan artist in his studio in the early 1930s, while he met Max Ernst in Paris in 1931.
541 Sandler, “Interview with Vicente,” 42.
542 Elaine de Kooning reported on the process of creating Untitled (1953): “…the torn bits of paper were first pinned over a charcoal drawing indicating the large directions of the picture. More papers were then added, some removed, and new colors introduced with oils and pastel. Finally, after about three weeks’ work, Vicente was satisfied with the collage and pasted it up in permanent form on board.” De Kooning, “Vicente Paints a Collage,” 41.
that, despite appearing improvised and based on chance, the work of artists like Pollock was actually carefully crafted, and Vicente proved no different.\textsuperscript{543} Despite his perceived “crudeness” and lack of refined finish, Vicente painstakingly rearranged and reworked his collages, proving that appearance and process did not always correspond in the New York School.

Like many of the Abstract Expressionists, Vicente asserted his control because to relinquish such power indicated an artist with poor command of his craft. Although he acknowledged that the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism privileged crudity and vulgarity over refined beauty, Vicente refused to undermine the authority of the artist.\textsuperscript{544} While part of his critique of automatism stemmed from a disregard for Freudian theory and the notion of the unconscious, he also preferred austerity to showiness. In a 1958 essay on Juan Gris, Vicente renounced “decorative” or calligraphic lines for “destroying the dramatic quietness” of Gris’s Cubist compositions.\textsuperscript{545} Motherwell’s emphasis on the calligraphic and gestural thus placed him at odds with Vicente’s sober “Spanish” sensibility. He declared that “painting has to be austere and somehow poor—poor in terms of means. I don’t like luxurious painting… By ‘poor’ I mean restrained, spare, meager. I am very anti-Baroque.”\textsuperscript{546} Motherwell, on the other hand, struggled to reconcile expressionism with formalism, producing works that some art historians criticized as “barbaric,” while simultaneously creating “elegant, sensitive constructions.”\textsuperscript{547} Comprised of


\textsuperscript{544} For more on Vicente’s ideas about beauty and vulgarity, see page 49.

\textsuperscript{545} Vicente, “Gris: Reality Cubed,” 31.

\textsuperscript{546} Vicente, “Painting Should Be Poor,” 70.

\textsuperscript{547} H.H. Arnason, \textit{Robert Motherwell} (New York: Abrams, 1975): 24. Bradford Collins proposed this duality, wherein Motherwell’s expressive mural-sized canvases and formalist aesthetic collages “may now be seen as alternative strategies for dealing with a single dilemma: how to make art in an age characterized by the categorical failure of the public at large to understand an artistic community alienated from popular culture.” Bradford R.
Asian-derived calligraphy and materials like sheet music and cigar wrappers, Motherwell’s *papier collé* often included the word play of Dada, a far cry from Vicente’s decision to “avoid brush strokes because they can become superficial and somehow fanciful.” Furthermore, Vicente dismissed the violence and drama that characterized the Baroque, aspects of Motherwell’s work that critics found problematic. For example, Clement Greenberg disparaged Motherwell’s 1946 exhibition at the Kootz Gallery as:

> …an instance in which the baroque spirit of the times and something very unbaroque clash. In concept Motherwell is on the side of violence, disquiet—but his temperament seems to lack the force and sensuousness to carry that concept, while the means he takes from Picasso and Mondrian are treated too hygienically. \(^{549}\)

Greenberg’s review corresponded with Vicente’s chief complaint about Abstract Expressionism: the same gestures that disrupted control and order, while supposedly indicating action and aggression, could become superfluous and trite.

Ultimately, these conflicting approaches to collage were predicated upon national identities. Motherwell worked in a model informed by French aesthetics, while Vicente understood the “realism” of the medium to be inherently Spanish. Although many of the Spanish originators of collage, notably Picasso and Gris, spent considerable time in Paris, Vicente’s critique of Motherwell revealed his Spanish bias. As we have seen, Vicente believed the medium to have originated from a material reality native to Spain. From a predilection for surface tactility to the sober austerity of the muted Cubist palette, Vicente asserted the cultural heritage of collage. Conversely, Motherwell developed his collage aesthetics through a French-derived

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\(^{548}\) Ibid., 71.

fusion of Symbolism and Dada. His “put-togethers” employed the double entendre of the Dadaists, and he often named his compositions after completion, locating an “indirect correspondence” between his image and its symbolic referent. Whereas Vicente typically created his compositions from imported papers and other art materials rather than found objects, Motherwell incorporated newspapers, sheet music, topographic maps, and other everyday materials into his abstractions. This distinction aligned Vicente with the simplicity of his Spanish predecessors, while Motherwell’s witty allusions were predicated upon the literary collages of Mallarmé.

In addition to their differences of opinion concerning the cultural origins of collage, Vicente and Motherwell jockeyed for position as originator of the “action collage.” Art historians have established a trajectory of modern art on the basis of formal innovation, and the invention of the Abstract Expressionist collage has been debated among artists and critics alike. Motherwell claimed that his “contribution to the art of collage” was “the torn rather than the sharp or cut-out edge.” While Vicente never made such claims, several scholars consider him the father of painterly collage. Barbara Rose has suggested, “If there is such a thing as the ‘action collage’, then Vicente invented it,” while Juan Manuel Bonet has described Number 4 (1952) and Number 6 (The Embellished Surface) (1952) as “action collage” because of how “chaos rules, tumult and syncopated rhythms are superimposed.” Elaine de Kooning further noted that Vicente’s pieced-together compositions “are uncharacteristically fluid and animated” whereas conventional collages “are in most cases stills.” She described these works as “another instance of the mysterious conversion described by Harold Rosenberg in his article on the

552 De Kooning, “Vicente Paints a Collage,” 38. Emphasis original to the article.
American ‘Action Painters,’” in which the artist experiences inner revelations while engaging their respective medium. Accordingly, artistic decisions emerge spontaneously rather than premeditatedly, and de Kooning’s invocation of Rosenberg linked Vicente’s processes with the appearance of his collaged abstractions. The affinities between Motherwell and Vicente’s collages, particularly in their gestural tears and brushstrokes, established them as potential adversaries; a rivalry Motherwell perceived when he accused Vicente of being “jealous” of his success. Critics like Dore Ashton have singled out Motherwell and Vicente as the preeminent collagists of the day. As she noted in a 1959 review:

The work of two master collage-makers, Esteban Vicente and Robert Motherwell is strikingly classic when compared with the wilder fancies of such artists as Bruce Connor and Bruce Gilchrist. Both Motherwell and Vicente use collage with conscious precision, carefully controlling the compositional effects of added planes and never giving away to the gratuitous by-play of strange materials.

Ashton has observed how neither artist employed quotidian elements simply for sensational ends; instead their formal approaches to composition distinguished them from their peers. In an age that celebrated originality, Motherwell understood the importance of claiming innovation, haughtily declaring, “my contribution to the art of collage [is] the torn rather than the sharp or cut-out edge.” Thus not only was the national identity of collage contested, but ownership of “action collage” became disputed as their positions in the avant-garde became codified.

556 Motherwell, as quoted in Arnason, Robert Motherwell, plate 96.
Esteban Vicente was curiously missing from the *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* exhibit held in 1960 at the Museum of Modern Art, even though it featured the work of his peers and contemporaries. What accounts for his absence, especially considering Vicente’s defense of Spanish culture and desire to remain a part of its tradition? Vicente was overlooked because since leaving Spain, he had established himself as an integral part of the New York School, and as such, was associated with American modernism. In fact, Vicente became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1940 and remained in New York until he died in 2001. He rarely returned to his birthplace, and as Francisco Plaza notes, Vicente “was practically unheard of” in Spain until recently. Vicente’s involvement with the New York School established the artist as a member of the American avant-garde. He participated in many seminal Abstract Expressionist exhibits, eventually considering himself an American. When asked to participate in a compendium of contemporary Spanish painting, Vicente declined, stating that he “identified with this country [the United States] and I don’t want to be also identified with Europe because it is not so. I feel here is my home. I am a part of the American scene.”

Vicente was drawn to New York because it offered an opportunity for continued growth and exploration as an artist. While the Spanish Civil War complicated his decision to leave, Vicente had planned on going to America before hostilities broke out. He considered New York

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558 For a list of these exhibits, see note 12.

559 Vicente, interview by Sandler, 67.
“the center” of the art world, and was drawn to the “vitality” of American painting. Describing European art as decorative and “empty,” Vicente sought a balance between the beautiful and “primitive.” He admired how “you find the refinement in Pollock…through some kind of crudeness…and you find it in de Kooning too.” According to Vicente, French artists like Fautrier and Dubuffet were too raw, lacking the insight and skill of their American contemporaries, while others, like Braque and Redon, favored beauty and delicacy at the expense of action. In America, he found:

a terrific vitality…that is not in Europe anymore. I mean Europe is so weak. The only thing that still exists in Europe is literature. But not painting. The painting of Europe is completely weak and senseless.

This type of nationalistic rhetoric dominates histories of Abstract Expressionism, and by reiterating these opinions about America’s newfound postwar cultural supremacy, Vicente legitimized his adoption of abstraction.

Vicente exhibited little in America until 1950, but his involvement with the New York School energized him. His oeuvre shifted from landscapes and genre scenes to abstract collages and canvases, and having reinvented himself as an artist, Vicente’s new style exemplified numerous characteristics of Abstract Expressionism. For example, in works like Untitled (1956) and Untitled (ca. 1956, fig. 3.61), the interplay of horizontals and verticals, as well as contrasting reds, blues, and earth tones, epitomize the “push and pull” of Hans Hofmann. Although an

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560 When asked why he moved to Paris, Vicente replied: “For painting, that was the center, Paris. Then the center became New York…” Vicente, interview by Rose, 260.
561 Vicente, interview by Sandler, 31.
562 Ibid.
563 Ibid.
émigré like Vicente, Hofmann taught many of the New York School the salient points of abstract painting, serving as a bridge between European modernism and America’s emerging Abstract Expressionism. Many, including Frank Stella, hailed Hofmann for his profound impact on American art, as he influenced artists as disparate as Pollock, Rauschenberg, and Stella. In his canonical essay, “‘American-Type’ Painting,” Clement Greenberg suggested that the emergence of the New York School would not have happened “without the small but relatively sophisticated audience for adventurous art provided by the students of Hans Hofmann.” Vicente visited Hofmann’s school “once or twice,” and the two shared a preference for cubist structure and chromatic hues. Hofmann stressed the importance of juxtapositions, particularly as planes meet to form lines, or what he considered, “the smallest painting-plane.” This sentiment describes many of Hofmann’s geometric abstractions from 1950, for example Push and Pull II and The Studio, wherein distinct edges frame zones of brightly colored oils, clearly delineating each distinct element of the composition. While created solely through paint, the effect parallels the enclosed systems of Vicente’s collages. In Untitled (1956) and Untitled (1957), each paper cutout maintains its integrity, as forms overlap rather than blend. Both Hofmann and Vicente

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568 Elizabeth Frank summarized other affinities between Vicente and Hofmann: “Both came relatively late to the United States, knew the art of the museums intimately, had spent time in Paris (admittedly at very different times and among very different people), where they saw firsthand work by numerous modern masters, and later went on to distinguish themselves as teachers as well as painters.” Frank, Esteban Vicente, 22.

stressed lines as the space where forms intersect, constructing their art on axial schema to underscore this attribute. Hofmann’s influence ran two ways, and Elizabeth Frank has argued that Vicente’s work from the early 1950s, particularly Number 3 (1953, fig. 3.62), features “a bold multilayered map of bright color squares anticipating Hofmann’s layered rectangular compositions of the mid-to-late fifties.”

While Hofmann’s “push and pull” became an important concept for the burgeoning New York School, Vicente’s work from the 1950s bears other traits of what became known as Abstract Expressionism. Although he rejected the label “Action Painting” as developed by Harold Rosenberg, Vicente’s collages evoked the spontaneity and aggression that Rosenberg celebrated. Number 7 (1950), for example, epitomized Rosenberg’s declaration that artists “extinguish” the object by rejecting mimesis in favor of “gesturing with materials.” According to this dictum, “what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event,” a revelatory activity “inseparable from the biography of the artist.” Thus, preparatory sketches served no function, as Rosenberg urged artists to dispense with anything prohibiting action, including form, composition, and color. In Number 7, Vicente subordinated such aesthetic considerations, stressing artistic process and the act of creation through his indexical markings. His seemingly haphazard arrangement of thin strips of paper and energetic pencil scribbles comprise all-over compositions akin to the drips of Jackson Pollock. These collage elements spill over the supporting ground, lending the arrangement a sense of immediacy. Vicente’s assertion that his

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570 Frank, Esteban Vicente, 40.
571 Vicente disputed Rosenberg’s claims on several levels. He said, “painting is not that way [Action Painting]. To me painting has to be done…with your mind as clear as possible and put way any aspects of violence, of action; on the contrary to be in control all the time until you lose your sense of consciousness.” Vicente further objected to Rosenberg’s claim that “Action Painting” enacted a “revolution,” because he did not believe that Abstract Expressionism overthrew or destroyed the history of art. Instead, he considered his peers to be “finding” new ideas rather than destroying old ones. Sandler, “Interview with Vicente,” 42.
573 Ibid., 25.
collages were “paintings with paper” is exemplified by this work, as the long, slender newspaper cutouts are virtually indistinguishable from his angular and jagged charcoal lines. The dense network of interstices makes it difficult to ascertain the order in which these elements were applied to the supporting ground. This labyrinth of charcoal lines and yellowed newsprint produces a dizzying effect, particularly as forms simultaneously overlap and undercut others.

In addition to featuring many of the aesthetic traits of Rosenberg’s Abstract Expressionism, Vicente’s collages fulfill Clement Greenberg’s formalist criteria for American modernism. Greenberg propelled Abstract Expressionism to the forefront of the avant-garde by establishing the artistic values inherent to each respective medium. He implored artists to explore the specific properties of each medium because looking inward to artistic attributes offered a means to avoid the corrupting influence of Capitalism, as the marketplace produced kitsch, a lowbrow diversion for the masses doing little to uphold culture. As such, he claimed that two-dimensionality distinguished painting from sculpture, and by asserting the flatness of the picture plane, artists could remain avant-garde. For Greenberg, collage was an important development in the history of art because the layering of cut-and-paste materials viscerally established the two-dimensional nature of the art object. Although collage projected outwards from the supporting ground, Greenberg celebrated the medium for moving away from the illusionistic recession that characterized linear perspective. In a review of the exhibition Collage, held in 1948 at the Museum of Modern Art, he noted:

The next step in the denial of illusion was to lift the extraneous elements above the surface of the picture and secure the effects of depths and volume by bringing this or that part of the picture physically close to the eye, as in bas-relief.\(^{574}\)

Likewise, David Joselit has employed the term “reverse-depth” to describe the directional shift occurring in the picture plane of a collage, an effect pervasive throughout Vicente’s oeuvre as he pasted paper atop paper.575

Vicente further encapsulated Greenberg’s ideals through his use of squared cutouts. By the mid-1950s, he moved from gestural abstraction to controlled, block-like creations. These works project solidity through their rectilinear shape and surface integrity. In collages like Number 12 (1956), he constructs his papier collé like a mason arranging stone, except rather than erecting a flat wall, Vicente built a “bas-relief” of parchment. Overlapping black and white squares cohere at the center while the number of collage elements dissipates at the periphery. This massing of forms in the middle and not the edges adds further volume to the piece, producing the effect of facades along a street. While Greenberg would avoid such allusions to the external world, he celebrated works for their “tautness of feeling.” Accordingly, “tautness of feeling, not ‘depth,’ characterizes what is strongest in post-Cubist art. The taking up of slack, the flattening out of convexities and concavities.”576 While he framed this “tautness” within the artist’s psychological state, claiming the necessity of emotional distance, Greenberg’s preference for pictorial flatness remains evident in his writings. Vicente achieved this “tautness of feeling” by flattening out convexities and concavities, particularly as he moved to rectilinear collage elements. These squared papers are extended across the supporting ground, stretched tight without indication of slack or curvature. In addition to heralding the flatness of the picture plane, Vicente’s controlled compositional strategy suggests the “certainty” and detachment that Greenberg desired.

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Vicente’s *Number 3* (1953) further exemplifies many aspects of “American-type painting” as enumerated by Greenberg. The vertically aligned collage maintains the diacritical nature and pictorial flatness so desired by the eminent critic. First, Vicente eschewed any element of illusionism or mimesis, filling his composition with various abstract cutouts and brushstrokes. The absence of a horizon line or discernible figurative elements eliminates representation. Instead, the accumulation of multicolored paper and painterly markings suggests an opaque supporting ground, one to which these shards of parchment and viscous pigment have been affixed. This self-referential meta-collage is about art-making, both through Greenberg’s model of flatness as well as the red cutout which is inscribed “department of art” and “paintings, prints, drawings.” The typescript seems to have originated in a notice for an exhibition, and as such it claims an elevated position distinct from the world of kitsch. In appropriating found objects like newsprint and chair caning, artists like Picasso and Miró bridged the gap between high and low culture, but in *Number 3*, Vicente employed fine art papers instead of the quotidian, aligning his work with the seriousness of the avant-garde.

While many aspects of Vicente’s art coincided with Greenberg’s modernist vision, in other ways his collages frustrated the model of pictorial flatness that dominated American art criticism in the postwar period. Several of Vicente’s collages, particularly his later compositions, denied the two-dimensional schema characteristic of “American-Type Painting” by confusing the perceptual order of the collaged surface. For example, in *Untitled* (1970), the “black eye” of the profiled cephalic form appears to be a dot on top of the white paper cutout. But this dark, contrasting parchment actually lies beneath the white element, and the “black eye” appears because Vicente cut a circular shape from the top layer. By peeling away layers to reveal the existence of other materials, he lays bare the “bas-relief” quality of collage celebrated by
Greenberg. But this maneuver also frustrates Greenberg’s assertion that illusionistic perspective has been reversed particularly as these cutaways indicate a range of surfaces beneath the outermost strata. In other late works, such as Untitled (1985, fig. 3.63) and Untitled (1990, fig. 3.64), Vicente cut away the areas where collage elements were to be placed, thus challenging the expectation that these paper cutouts would lie on top of the supporting ground. Instead, the cutouts rest flush with its background, suggesting a unity of flatness despite the dé-collaged preparations of the artist. At first, this uniform surface might appeal to Greenberg for its “tautness of feeling” and pictorial flatness, but the screening effect produced by undercutting, as well as Vicente’s use of translucent papers, suggests the depth of multiple surfaces running parallel to the picture plane. Although shallow, the space of collages like Untitled (1985) undermines the “reverse-depth” effect of the papier collé. Christine Poggi has noticed the paradoxical nature of Greenberg’s claim that painterly flatness is attained through the layered surfaces of collage, arguing that “if flatness must be ‘depicted’ and ‘re-created,’ however, it is no longer one of the given properties of a medium. The immediate perceptible presence of flatness itself turns out to be founded on illusion.”

While Greenberg’s attempt to determine the essence of collage via pictorial surfaces proved contradictory, other scholars have attempted to enumerate the properties of the medium that distinguish it from other artistic forms. In her essay, “In the Name of Picasso,” Rosalind Krauss has argued that collage, like any linguistic system, signifies through absence. In exploring the relationship between a signifier and signified, Krauss characterized the sign as “substitute,

proxy, stand-in, for an absent referent.”\footnote{578} Offering Picasso’s cubist work as her example, Krauss has claimed that Picasso’s f-shaped violin sound holes signify the presence of the musical instrument while concurrently suggesting the flattened, and therefore absent, depth of the picture plane.\footnote{579} Furthermore, this interplay of the sign-absence opposition occurs within the pictorial field. The obfuscation of the picture plane that results in collage, both from the cubist manipulation of depth and the layering of collage elements, renders the master plane absent, and therefore the center of a signifying system.\footnote{580} Vicente complicates this concept considerably through his refusal to render the pictorial field absent. In many instances, Vicente does indeed obscure the background field by literally covering it with paper cutouts, but in many works, such as \textit{Untitled} (1985), the artist confuses figure-ground relationships by undercutting what appeared to be the collage’s support, revealing a different background altogether. In addition to his cutaway technique, Vicente’s use of transparent papers challenges Krauss’s assertion that collage signified via absence. For example, in \textit{Untitled} (1960, fig. 3.65), he used gauze-like, translucent papers that disclose the underlying shapes and pigments. By juxtaposing opacity with visibility, or concealment with revelation, Vicente rendered neither the master plane nor other collage elements absent; rather the whitish, transparent paper firmly establishes the existence of other materials in Vicente’s paper assemblage.

This double layer of pictorial space, one in which the surface is simultaneously negated and reasserted, is what lends uniqueness to the medium of collage. Its diacritical nature has lead Krauss to suggest that “collage thus effects the representation of representation.”\footnote{581} Or, as

\footnote{579} Ibid.
\footnote{580} Ibid., 37.
\footnote{581} Ibid. 200
Wendy Holmes has stated in her critique of Krauss, “the master term of collage is collage.” One of Vicente’s earliest extant collages, Untitled (1950, fig. 3.66), maintains this self-referential aspect. Here, Vicente affixed many of his collage elements with transparent tape, but the smudges of newsprint and yellowing of dated paper renders the tape clearly visible. As such, the work declares its values, acknowledging the constructed nature of the put-together. This collage is also rare among Vicente’s mature oeuvre in its figural evocation. While hardly overt, the form of a schematic person is discernible, including an oval cephalic figure, a black, elbow-shaped cutout, and slender shards of newsprint suggestive of other appendages. Considering Vicente’s relationship with Willem de Kooning, he may be responding to the latter’s celebrated Woman series which he began in the 1940s and continued through his mature work of the 1950s. Both artists were originally from Europe and worked within more-established cultural traditions than their American counterparts. Perhaps Vicente attempted to reconcile de Kooning’s figuration with his own abstract inclinations in Untitled.

De Kooning’s influence is also noticeable in Untitled (1953, fig. 3.67), a brightly colored collage reminiscent of the fleshy pink palette for which the Dutch-American artist became known. In addition to reds and pinks, Vicente’s collage bears the gestural markings that would become de Kooning’s trademark. Brushstrokes of gray interact with charcoal rubbings and torn paper edges to produce a dramatic sense of action seemingly at odds with the light palette. The allover patterning and V-shaped angularity of the work anticipates de Kooning’s Gotham News (1955), a painting that employed bold lines to contain his intersecting shapes and colors. Number 5 (1952, fig. 3.68) also suggests Vicente’s engagement with de Kooning’s influence, particularly as thick dark outlines are set against pale pinks and blues. Vicente’s brushstrokes contain traces

of several pigments at once, a feature that would become known as de Kooning’s “Tenth Street Touch” among his many followers.

Vicente’s desire to be considered part of the American scene originated from his personal connections to the New York School as well as his belief in the ascendancy of American art. But his refusal to participate in shows like New Spanish Painting and Sculpture may also stem from the state of modern art in Spain following the civil war. As noted earlier, Franco’s government employed academic realism as a propaganda tool throughout the 1940s, and Vicente’s adoption of abstraction certainly distanced him from such idealized rhetoric. Yet by the 1950s, the Spanish government began to promote abstract art in international exhibitions like the Venice Biennale as a means to overcome the cultural isolation that followed the war. Some artists, like Antoni Tàpies, withdrew their work from such shows because they objected to Franco’s rule and would not allow their art to be a part of any initiative falsely promoting a modern, liberal spirit in Spain.583 Instead, the expressionistic gestures of Tàpies’ Tachisme (fig. 3.69) responded to the brutalities of the Spanish Civil War, as the Catalan employed abstraction “to liberate people who were oppressed by the political situation.”584 Other artists, however, refused to make the professional sacrifice of Tàpies and participated in these state-sponsored traveling shows, including Rafael Canogar, Luis Feito, Manolo Millares, Antonio Saura, Manolo Rivera, Jorge Oteiza, Eduardo Chillida, and Manuel Viola. Although Franco’s government overlooked the

manner in which the Spanish avant-garde often critiqued his regime, France, the United States, and Great Britain were flooded with exhibitions of Spanish art after 1959.\textsuperscript{585}

While critics of the “New Spanish School” noted that these artists had remained somewhat provincial and did not constitute an original movement as strong as Abstract Expressionism, they celebrated the artists for their Spanish character. Naturally, the model of “Spanishness” employed by reviewers was predicated upon romanticized notions of life in Spain. In the \textit{New York Times}, John Canaday wrote: “The Spanish are, generally speaking, a sober lot, given to subdued color as opposed to the competitive stridency of most abstract painting today. Tawny and rusty tones, with grays and blacks, are the basis of their palette.”\textsuperscript{586} A critic for \textit{The Times} of London, also found “a more distinctively ‘Spanish’ quality” among these artists, claiming that “in these two strains, one meditative, the other dramatic, Spanish painting looks as though it may be able to preserve its national character amidst the featureless sameness of so much of the international abstract mode.”\textsuperscript{587} Two years later, another \textit{Times} review commented that “critics have repeatedly commented on how typically ‘Spanish’ their work is and how logically it relates, in its innermost spirit, to the great Spanish tradition of the past.” The reviewer enumerated this “spirit” as:

Its main characteristic is a combination of, sometimes an alternation between, violent drama and subdued, almost melancholy, contemplation. Colour is sombrely austere, using a good deal of black but more often the colors of parched earth, deep shadow, or sulphurous fire. When they are brighter, it is often as though a harsh sun had bleached them faint and soft. Textural treatment also

inclines to harshness, the harshness one feels of the land—it is sandy, wiry, or metallic, supplementing the basically tonal treatment of colour.\textsuperscript{588}

While some critics commended the Spanish artists for their abstractions, Natalie Edgar of \textit{Art News} blasted the exhibits on artistic and political grounds. First, she dismissed the “negligible” significance of these artists, claiming their work to nothing but “stylish” and derivative. “Their preoccupation with surfaces and materials tastefully disguises a lack of pictorial concept.” She further lamented, “virtuosity has replaced expression and idea in the new Spanish school.”\textsuperscript{589} Edgar’s unwillingness to accept the authenticity of the expressionistic gestures by artists like Canogar and Saura originated in the political situation of Spain. She stated, “Postwar Spanish painting is not an avant-garde movement at all, but rather a provincial aberration. Remember that it is limited by the conditions of dictatorship; the free environment necessary for a genuine avant-garde movement is missing.” Edgar found it “impossible” for their expressionism to be anything but “ineffectual” because “their efforts for open self-expression are shunted into a cultural idea of Spanish Nationalism.” Ultimately, Edgar declared, “the new Spanish movement is a local propaganda asset… Just as there is no freedom in this society, there is no expressive power in these paintings, for repression is a habit.”\textsuperscript{590}

Perhaps anticipating such criticism, Vicente’s disinclination to be considered a part of the “New Spanish School” becomes somewhat understandable. For one, he would have objected to the thought that his art in any way suggested the liberality of Franco’s regime. He certainly would not have wanted his work co-opted for any Nationalist programs, particularly efforts to cover up the repression of artistic liberty. Second, as a first generation member of the New York School, Vicente hoped to avoid any claim that his art lacked innovation or quality. While

\textsuperscript{589} Natalie Edgar, “Is There a New Spanish School?” \textit{Art News} 59, no. 5 (September 1960): 45, 56.
\textsuperscript{590} Ibid., 44-45.
English-language reviews of the “New Spanish School” noted the “professionalism” and technical proficiency of these artists, they ultimately refused to label them “originators.” By immigrating to New York and immersing himself in the New York scene, Vicente positioned himself among the vanguard of American painting. As such, he was a generation, if not more, older than this new wave of Spanish artists, and he developed his art through firsthand experiences with the likes of Picasso, Miró, Pollock, and de Kooning. His life and career spanned the twentieth century, while most of the “New Spanish School” were barely children when the Spanish Civil War erupted. Interestingly, Vicente willingly participated in exhibits of Spanish art that placed him within the trajectory of Spanish modernism he valued. Vicente contributed to an exhibition held at Barnard College in 1952 to create a scholarship for Spanish art students, but his peers in this show included Picasso, Dalí, Miró, and Gris, as well as fellow expatriates Jose de Creeft and Jose Guerrero. Selective about the Spanish legacy he attached himself to, Vicente invoked his inheritance as he saw fit.

Furthermore, Vicente hardly epitomized the crude expressionism of Tachisme, or Art Informel, for which Tàpies and others were known. Earlier, Vicente criticized Fautrier and Dubuffet for lacking skill in their vulgar works of the 1940s, and such claims had been made

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592 Most members of the “New Spanish School” were born in the mid-1920s if not later. Rafael Canogar was born in 1934, Monolo Millares in 1926, Antonio Saura in 1930, and Antoni Tàpies in 1923. Born in 1903, Vicente was twenty to thirty years older than these artists. Many of the exhibits of the late-1950s and early-1960s did feature artists of Vicente’s generation, however they did not seem to receive the same critical attention as the younger generation.
593 This exhibit was juried by James Johnson Sweeney and architect Jose Luis Sert and included other Spanish expatriates living in New York: Juan Junyer, Julio de Diego, Luis Quintanilla, and Esteban Frances. Drawings by Federico García-Lorca were also included. While no catalogue of the show has been located, an announcement of the fundraiser appeared in the New York Times. “Barnard to Exhibit Spanish Paintings,” New York Times (21 December 1952): 34.
against the “New Spanish School.”594 Vicente’s assertion that artists remain in control of their materials and sensibility diverged too far from the “Informalists” for a collective aesthetic among Spanish modernists to emerge. The gestural painting of post-war Europe, as exemplified by Tàpies, featured a base materialism at odds with Vicente’s papiers collés of imported and handmade papers.595 While both Tàpies and Vicente borrowed from the appropriative strategies of collage, Tàpies employed far more soiled materials, such as fabrics, straw, and sand, to evoke graffiti and stains (tache literally translates to stain or blot).596 Although some of Vicente’s collages feature torn and weathered newsprint early in his career, by the mid-1950s he had employed largely fine arts materials for his collages. As such, his aesthetic approach differed considerably from the younger generation of Spanish artists who relished in what Vicente might consider a vulgar form of décollage in which surfaces appear to peel away or fall apart. Whereas Vicente urged artists to build up the surface of a composition, whether painted or pasted, Tàpies and his peers replicated the destruction and erosion of such facades.

Finally, Vicente may also have resisted the labeling of his art as “Spanish” because of the tendency among critics to locate national affinities amongst artists of a shared background. As it was, reviews of Vicente’s work were replete with generalized claims of his Spanish character, and after exhibiting in New York for many years, he probably wished to remain distant from any stylish fad that included essentializing congruities. The stereotypes that fueled reviews of the “New Spanish School,” wherein these artists were celebrated for their “austerity” and “meditative drama,” perhaps led Vicente to criticize Motherwell so harshly for making similar

594 Natalie Edgar dismissed the “violent expressionism” of the “New Spanish School” as “self-involved, without pictorial idea, and without expressive power… the ‘how’ of the painting—the materials, the technique, the esthetic components that the artist uses—never constitute a coherency.” Edgar, “Is There a New Spanish School,” 56.
claims about Spanish character. Despite arguing for a continuity of Spanish influence in his art, the influence of American Abstract Expressionism made its mark.

**Vicente and Americana**

Vicente’s attraction to America was not limited to its art; American culture in general fascinated the Spanish expatriate. This interest was never more evident than in his collages *Labels* (1956, fig. 3.70) and *Untitled* (1956, fig. 3.71), works that employed packages from consumer goods as collage elements. Large enough in scale to accommodate the labels, these collages feature cutouts of each product’s brand name scattered among other papers and materials. For example, in *Labels*, rather than including the entire package of Thomas’ Protein Bread, Vicente carefully incised around the logo, utilizing only that aspect of the product. With the exception of Colgate’s Laundry Soap, Johnson’s Kitchen Wax, and Diamond Matches, the other collage elements were taken from foodstuffs: Campbell’s Tomato Soup, Borden’s Milk, Domino Cane Sugar, Kraft Parmesan Cheese, and so forth. However, these labels were not the only papers Vicente used for his composition; he juxtaposed the consumer goods with other types of handmade and imported paper as well. Some of these were painted blue, tan, or brown, while the artist also utilized transparent wax paper for the work. This interplay of opacity and translucence confuses figure-ground relationships, particularly as Vicente layered overlapping forms and markings in a manner that already obscured the supporting ground. Constructed axially like his other works from the 1950s, *Labels* and *Untitled* reveal Vicente’s attraction to consumer culture and popular imagery. Wanda Corn has employed the term *américanisme* to describe how many European émigrés were fascinated with the novelties of modern America: its
technological achievements, energetic pace, and arresting visual culture. Following suit in *Untitled*, Vicente immortalized Lionel trains, Old Quaker Bourbon, and Girl’s Scout Cookies, all distinctly American products. Employing mass-produced labels in the same manner as Japanese paper and other fine art materials, Vicente elevated these brand names to the status of high art, but despite this apparent celebration of consumerism, these two collages epitomize Greenberg’s formalist vision. While Greenberg urged artists to retreat from Capitalism into the “purity” of artistic formalism, Vicente’s labels unequivocally declare the flatness of the picture plane. Rather than rendering these consumer goods as one would encounter in a market setting, he presents viewers only their decompressed remains. The Campbell’s Soup wrapper is not rounded as it wraps around the can it identifies, instead Vicente peels the label and lays it flush against the canvas. Likewise, he refuses any indication of the three-dimensional packaging in which Domino Sugar or Diamond Matches appeared. These cartons were cut apart and reduced to a visual formula, with the only suggestion of their boxed origins emerging from Vicente’s use of cardboard-like browns and predilection for geometric regularity.

Vicente used brand names for only two other collages, both of which were created for *The Paris Review* (fig. 3.72-3.73). Founded in Paris in 1953 by George Plimpton, Harold Humes, and Peter Matthiessen, *The Paris Review* sought to “emphasize creative work—fiction and poetry—not to the exclusion of criticism, but with the aim in mind of merely removing criticism from the dominating place it holds in most literary magazines.” Rather than promoting the theories of dogmatic critics like Greenberg, the journal provided a forum in which writers could discuss their work themselves. In addition to literature, *The Paris Review* included the visual

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arts, reproducing the work of leading artists like Vicente. His compositions, *Paris Review I* (1965) and *Paris Review II* (1965) were no different from his other works of that period except for the inclusion of the heading, “The Paris Review.” Otherwise they feature the same massing of rectilinear shapes and bright colors of Vicente’s style in the 1960s. *Paris Review II* was transferred into a limited edition lithograph sold by the journal to “to encourage works in the print medium while publicizing *The Paris Review* and providing financial support for the magazine.”

In addition to Vicente, artists like Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, Conrad Marca-Relli, and Andy Warhol contributed to the print series, a project that positioned him among the American intelligentsia.

Vicente also demonstrated an affinity for the American landscape in his collages. Like his friends and peers, Vicente vacationed on Long Island, and in 1964 he purchased a farmhouse in Bridgehampton. There he established a studio, continuing to work during the summer while tending to his large flower garden. Vicente’s neighbors included de Kooning and Lee Krasner, and like these artists, he created many compositions that drew their inspiration from nature. Elizabeth Frank has argued that works like *Bridgehampton* (1965, fig. 3.74-3.75), “must surely reflect his acute observation of light as it flows through and surrounds flowers at different times of day, in different kinds of weather and different…seasons.”

Large amounts of olive and mustard comprise the work and the dark cutout in the top left calls to mind the barn and adjacent shed on the Vicente property in Long Island. The inclusion of an orange vertical suggests a door into the barn, while the other yellow, white, and green shapes suggest the massing of flowers and other vegetation in his garden. Another late collage, *Springs* (1983) was titled for Vicente’s bucolic getaway. This spare piece features only a few paper cutouts on linen canvas. Off-white

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599 http://www.theparisreview.com/printseries.php
600 Frank, *Esteban Vicente*, 71.
paper dominates the background as several ovular shapes in blue, green, and brown dot the composition. Like *Bridgehampton*, *Springs* does not represent a landscape per se, but pays homage to his pastoral retreat.

Throughout the 1960s, Vicente created a variety of works that celebrated American locales and artistic traditions. In honor of his 1963 exhibit at St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland, Vicente created the collage *Annapolis* (1962, fig. 3.76). This horizontally aligned work evokes a landscape through its orientation and earth-tones. His use of burnt sienna, orange, and umber suggests the cobblestone streets of the colonial city, while his juxtaposition of white paper cutouts with earthy hues resembles the mortar of brick construction. The large, ovular area of white also recalls the statehouse in Annapolis, its white dome a landmark visible throughout the town. From 1968-69, Vicente served as artist-in-residence at the Honolulu Academy of Fine Arts and produced several collages based upon the geography of his new setting. *Kala Hale, Hawaii* (1969) features a brilliant blue evocative of the Pacific Ocean, while a mauve expanse stretches across the top third of the composition. Two light, off-white shapes float on the blue sea in the center of the work, which stands over four feet tall in a vertical alignment reminiscent of a window. If *Kala Hale* suggests an ocean view, *Kalani, Hawaii* (1969) and *For Harriet, Honolulu, April 6* (1968) conjure topographic maps of the island chain. Both collages contain large, circular forms resembling the shape of the islands in aerial views. These works also juxtapose deep blues with yellows and variations of lilac or rose. The gentle centrifugal flow of the two collages further suggest flowers in bloom as they unfurl in the morning light, as Vicente delighted in the effects of nature.

Having lived the majority of his life in New York, Vicente also found stimulus from the city, so his interest in construction and assembly perhaps is not surprising. Architectonic collages
like *Manhattan* (1973, fig. 3.77) presented a fragmented and cubist view of the urban experience, as its grid-like composition and rectilinear forms suggested New York’s skyline or city blocks. These works demonstrate how Vicente did not merely appropriate Abstract Expressionist devices for his collages. Instead, he was interested in many aspects of American culture, from its advertising and consumerism to its landscape tradition and urban lifestyle. And when asked if he considered himself an American or a Spanish painter, Vicente replied, “I’m an American painter because I came to live in this country when I was young...”

**Hybridity and Collage**

Vicente described himself as an American because he reached artistic maturity while living in America and found himself a part of the New York School. Yet he also clung to his Spanish roots, asserting his connection to the land of his birth. Vicente’s art exhibits aspects of this duality, particularly in their fusion of realism and abstraction, control and gesture, materialism and opticality. Considering Vicente’s collages as hybrids sheds light on the objectives and implications of his transnational syncretism. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has proposed that “hybridity” offers a discursive means to liberate critical theory.  

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defined the hybrid as “*neither the One nor the Other but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both.”\(^603\) This approach or mindset presupposes negotiation as the basis of any critique. Whereas poststructuralists like Derrida employed the concept of *différance* to frame the articulation of knowledge, Bhabha believed such binary thinking excludes or negates the object of analysis. By favoring no aspect of the binary, the hybrid allows one to occupy multiple positions, privileging neither viewpoint nor ideology in the process. Bhabha’s discussion of the hybrid illuminates Vicente’s work for several reasons. First, he claimed that the hybrid denies essentialism “because there is no given community or body of the people whose inherent, radical historicity emits the right signs.”\(^604\) While Vicente frequently positioned himself in relation to Spanish and American cultural traditions, he grew intolerant of the essentializing rhetoric of artists like Motherwell who appropriated such traditions for their work. Motherwell’s conflation of Spain with formal attributes, such as specific colors or aesthetic sensibilities, enraged Vicente because this reductive lens overlooked the political situation and tragedy of the Spanish Civil War. Bhabha argued that hybridity stresses historicity by refusing the teleological. Rather than unitary narratives iterative of a singular ideology, the hybrid stresses community and interrelatedness. Bhabha is most interested in hybridity for its potential to be counter-hegemonic because of the manner in which it resists the alterity of polarization, thereby undermining the strategies of containment preventing the Other to enter the realm of discourse.\(^605\) As an exiled member of a nation ruled by what he considered an illegitimate government, Vicente sought an expansive, liberated dialogue, one achieved through the hybridity of his collages.


\(^604\) Ibid., 2387.

\(^605\) Ibid., 2387-2391.
The “in-between” denied other unitary objectives, political and otherwise. Thus, Vicente’s embrace of abstraction might be considered his attempt to break free from limiting practices such as mimesis. Vicente replaced the singularity espoused by representation with a pluralism of means and methods. In formal terms, his hybrid collages featured a variety of Spanish and American elements, but as objects, they also traversed a range of aesthetic properties. Vicente balanced modernist flatness with sculptural construction in his compositions, particularly as he piled paper atop paper, ironically asserting the two-dimensionality of the picture plane while covering it in layers. Likewise, his collages featured a plurality of processes and indices. He juxtaposed control and order with spontaneity and improvisation, structuring his works according to Cubist axially while applying gestural brushwork and torn papers to each collage. The multifaceted surfaces of these works contained a variety of materials, including handmade and imported papers as well as consumer labels, affixed with a range of adhesives, glue, tape, and “foxpaste.” Through collage, Vicente also explored centuries of art history, aligning his work with the traditions of Velázquez and Zurbarán while associating with the modernism of Hofmann and de Kooning. The properties of collage rendered it most appropriate for Vicente’s investigation of past and present, modern and traditional, Spain and America.

Several scholars claim that the very concept of hybridity is problematic because it suggests the existence of a “pure” or stable identity, itself a fallacy.\footnote{See Anthony Easthope, “Bhabha, Hybridity, and Identity,” \textit{Textual Practice} 12, no. 2 (1998): 341-348; John Hutchison and Anthony D. Smith, Introduction, \textit{Ethnicity}, eds. Hutchison and Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Alan Sinfield, “Disapora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and the Ethnicity Model,” \textit{Textual Practice} 10, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 217-293.} While theorists have established the relative nature of identity, it is important to remember that Vicente came of age in an era when Spanish intellectuals were attempting to affix a “pure” Spanishness to the nation’s
Furthermore, Vicente arrived in New York just as America solidified its position as a military, economic, and cultural power. As the Cold War reached a fever pitch, the values of America were espoused in a variety of endeavors including the production of art. The concept of national identity may not be static or stable, but Vicente’s experiences with his native and adopted homes were intertwined within a range of jingoistic rhetoric. For an artist negotiating the parameters of cultural identity, collage enabled Vicente to highlight interstices and borders. Assimilation into pictorial unity occurs in his work, yet the integrity of constituent parts overlap rather than fuse, thus preserving the elements of difference that manifest coherent signification. As such, the collages signal their status as hybrids because of the manner in which assemblage and juxtaposition is articulated.

Esteban Vicente’s art mimicked his life, with both embodying fusion and reconstitution. The medium of collage, with its overlapping forms and composite nature, appealed to the Spanish-American because it enabled him to traverse the boundaries of a complex and diverse selfhood. The surface realism and limited palette of his easel-sized compositions indicated a Spanish preference for austerity and simplicity. Conversely, his abstract collages embodied the ideals of “Action Painting,” “push and pull,” and pictorial flatness, all hallmarks of the American avant-garde. Collage allowed Vicente to negotiate the borders of this dual heritage and synthesis becomes an appropriate metaphor for his hybrid identity. Vicente’s collages featured clearly delineated borders and their individual elements retaining their integrity. However, these parts also construct a whole, and their interrelationships define the medium itself because, as scholars

607 Historian Stanley Payne summarized this sentiment rather succinctly: “Spanish patriots have prided themselves on the fact that Spain was one of the first nations in Europe to achieve political unity. They devoutly believe that Ferdinand and Isabella created the first ‘nation’ in Europe. To them, as well as to many non-Spaniards, Spain seems an entity unique in Europe, with a distinct psychology and value system. The traditional xenophobia of Spaniards and their emotional resentment of the outer world—the ‘otherness’ of Spain in the twentieth century—make it difficult to conceive of the Spanish as anything other than a narrowly personalistic or nationalistic group.” Stanley G. Payne, “Spanish Nationalism in the Twentieth Century,” The Review of Politics 26, no. 3 (July 1964): 403.
have argued, the significance of collage stems from its relational aspect. Understanding this, Vicente emphasized boundaries and fragmentation, and yet he combined constituent parts into singular arrangements. Ultimately, the artist’s nationalistic understandings resembled his pieced-together collages; as he declared, “I’m an American painter...yet my culture is Spanish forever.”

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609 Vicente, interview by Rose, 259.
CHAPTER 4: LEE KRASNER’S PASTORAL VISION:  
COLLAGE AND THE NATURE OF ORDER

In a 1946 review for *The Nation*, Clement Greenberg declared: “what characterizes painting in the line Manet to Mondrian…is its pastoral mood.” Greenberg defined this sentiment in a traditional manner, describing the pastoral as “the preoccupation with nature at rest, human beings at leisure, and art in movement.” He further contended that two essential characteristics marked the pastoral in modernist art: “the first a dissatisfaction with the moods prevailing in society’s centers of activity; the second, a conviction of the stability of society in one’s own time.” For Greenberg, the pastoral involved a retreat from civilization as well as the marketplace of capitalism, a flight ironically achieved under the protection of society. This refuge, or shelter, generates a “feeling of pastoral security” for the artist, an affectation the critic considered crucial for the existence of the avant-garde. Greenberg’s pastoralism reaffirmed the principles of the avant-garde he established in his seminal essay, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” wherein the avant-garde simultaneously rejects bourgeois society while locating new forms to express it. He believed that, in the modern age, avant-garde art should turn inward to its own standards and self-preservation, concurrently negating and confirming the bourgeois. The critic deemed surrealism and neo-romanticism “falsely pastoral” in recycling previous artistic styles, whereas “genuinely pastoral art never turns to the past; it simply rejects one present in favor of

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another—and without escapism.” He continued: “Even today one must look still to avant-garde pastoral art to see revealed the most permanent features of our society’s crisis.”

In his review, Greenberg lamented that the pastoral spirit “is mistaken for the ‘classical,’” denouncing artists like David Smith and Robert Motherwell for moving towards the baroque. He believed that Smith and Motherwell abandoned “pastoral tranquility” for “extravagance, disorder, and agitation.” He criticized Smith for surrendering the “control” and “simple trajectory of line” that characterized his early work, while Motherwell’s visual “effects” lacked “organic relation” to the artist. Rather than “force and sensuousness,” Motherwell merely provided a “hygienic” sampling of Picasso and Mondrian. Perhaps it was this idea of the pastoral—emphasizing control, simplicity, sensuousness, and organicism—that led Greenberg to praise Lee Krasner’s 1955 exhibit of collages at the Stable Gallery. He called it “one of the great events of the decade” and a “major addition to the American art scene of that era.” While other art historians have located naturalistic traits within Krasner’s oeuvre, only Bryan Robertson has described her art specifically as “pastoral and bucolic.” Robertson employed the word

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613 Ibid., 54.
614 Ibid.
615 Bryan Robertson recorded that, “In 1955 Lee Krasner held an exhibition of collages in New York which Clement Greenberg has described as a major addition to the American art scene of that era.” Bryan Robertson, Preface to Lee Krasner: Paintings, Drawings and Collages (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1965): 4. Robertson later wrote, “In a long conversation that I once had with Clement Greenberg in the early sixties, he told me that the exhibition of Krasner’s collages at the Stable Gallery in 1955 was in his view one of the great events of the decade”; see his “Krasner’s Collages,” Lee Krasner Collages (New York: Robert Miller Gallery, 1986): n.p. Greenberg never wrote directly about Krasner or her work, but he mentioned her briefly as “competently” practicing late cubism as well as being influenced by Willem de Kooning. See his “New York Painting Only Yesterday,” in Art News (Summer 1957); reprinted in John O’Brian, ed., Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 4, Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993): 24. Greenberg also noted Krasner’s role in the life of her husband, Jackson Pollock, recognizing her importance during his formative years; “even before their marriage her eye and judgment had become important to his art, and continued to remain so.” Clement Greenberg, “Jackson Pollock,” Evergreen Review 1, no. 3 (1957); reprinted in ibid, 45. Greenberg also wrote; “in my opinion he [Pollock] saw more in art and knew more of it than did almost anybody (with the exception of his wife, the painter Leonore Krasner) who talked to him about it.” Greenberg, “Jackson Pollock: ‘Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision,’” Vogue (1 April 1967); reprinted in ibid., 249.
“pastoral” to refer to Krasner’s “preoccupation with nature,” yet his review intimates the manner in which Krasner’s art, particularly her collages, can be considered pastoral in their iconography, methods, and sensibility.

The pastoral has traditionally defined a type of poetry, dating to Theocritus and Virgil in the third to first century B.C.E., concerned with the activity of shepherds, including leisure, animal husbandry, and lyric competition. However, since the modern era, literary and art critics have employed certain aspects of the pastoral, such as its oppositional strategy or emphasis on repose, to bestow new meanings upon this formerly archaic term. As such, it has been reinterpreted by some who attribute the importance of the genre to its modesty and simple means, while others find significance within related oppositions, such as the contrast between simple and complex, or urban and rural.617 At the heart of these revisions lies a distinction between the pastoral as a genre, based upon formal qualities, and as a mood or perspective of the world.618 These elements come together in Krasner’s collages because they feature many rhetorical devices of the pastoral tradition, including irony and dialectics, in addition to the contingency, naturalism, and escapist reverie that characterize the genre.

**Learning from the Masters: Krasner’s Early Collages**

Krasner’s first foray into collage came as a student in Hans Hofmann’s studio. As noted in chapter three, Hofmann emigrated from Europe where he had been a part of the artistic

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vanguard, frequenting the cafés of Paris and congregating with Picasso, Braque, and Matisse. After exhibiting with the New Secession in Berlin and establishing an art school in Munich, Hofmann settled in New York in 1932. The Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts opened in 1933, and in 1937, Krasner enrolled. She studied at the National Academy of Design in the late 1920s, but it was under Hofmann’s tutelage that Krasner developed as a modernist. Having loosely experimented with Surrealism in the early 1930s, she embraced Hofmann’s post-Cubist aesthetics. A progression of still life drawings from 1938-39 reveals her study of color and form as she experimented with pictorial space and the human figure in a manner reminiscent of Futurism as well as Cubism. She later admitted that she never fully comprehended the importance of Cubism until working with Hofmann: “I’d say the real impact of Cubism was after I started to work with Hofmann, who was one of the leading exponents in terms of explaining it in this country.”

Krasner’s first collages developed as lessons in Hofmann’s school, where pieces of colored paper were pasted onto compositions marking areas in need of reworking. Infamous for directly marking his students’ work, Hofmann employed these cutouts to demonstrate pictorial structure and color contrast.

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619 For more on Hofmann, see James Yohe, ed. Hans Hofmann (New York: Rizzoli, 2002).
620 Donald Kuspit described these early sketches as “Cubo-Futurism” to describe the fractured forms and dynamic movement of the respective movements. Donald Kuspit, “Lee Krasner at Pace,” Art in America 65 (November 1977): 136.
621 Dorothy Seckler, Interview with Lee Krasner, November 2, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 5 (Hereafter, AAA).
622 Barbara Rose argued that “collage…permitted Krasner to find a way out of an impasse that had been troubling her for some years, a problem exacerbated by the division between color and line studies in the Hofmann school. That was the problem of how to create shapes without separating line from color, or simply using color to fill in contour in the manner of academic art.” Rose, Lee Krasner: A Retrospective, 75.
Krasner, this series of collages from 1939 reveals her attempts to work through organizational issues as she embraced abstraction. At this time, Krasner did not approach collage as a medium unto itself, rather its flexibility appealed to the artist as a preparatory exercise. Like Vicente, Krasner appreciated how collaged elements could be rearranged more easily than painted forms, and in two versions of *Red, White, Blue, Yellow, Black* (both 1939, fig. 4.1-4.2), she recycled older works by cutting them apart and pasting them to her paintings. This practice of recycling her work became common in the 1950s, and it reveals both the thriftiness and uncertainty of the artist during her formative years. The paper cutout offered Krasner a means to visualize the containment of color with geometric shapes enclosing various hues. In these works, colors are seldom blended; instead she granted each its autonomy. As such, Krasner juxtaposed yellow triangles with red rectangles and blue polygons with black lines. While one edition of *Red, White, Blue, Yellow, Black* remains unfinished—she did not fill in each colored shape completely—both works feature a white ground on which Krasner arranged various shapes and cutouts. These elements were placed to complement one another, as rectangular shapes in the corners bookend the composition, while the primaries remain axially balanced despite Krasner’s asymmetrical approach.

Scholars have noted how the palette of these compositions derived from Mondrian, another figure who exerted a considerable influence on Krasner. Although she did not meet Mondrian until the year after these works were completed, Hofmann lectured frequently on the artist, calling him “the architect of modern painting.” His impact is apparent in Krasner’s use of primary colors and geometric regularity, while she also completed a series of Neo-Plasticist designs borrowed directly from Mondrian. In 1940, Krasner joined the American Abstract Artists

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(AAA), a group of artists dedicated to abstraction which Mondrian himself joined when he immigrated to America later that year. Krasner recalled dancing with Mondrian as well as accompanying him to AAA exhibits: “I loved jazz and he loved jazz, so I saw him several times and we went dancing like crazy.”⁶²⁵ He also supported her work, urging Krasner to honor her own “inner rhythm” after seeing one of her paintings at an AAA show.⁶²⁶

Picasso also profoundly influenced Krasner in the late 1930s, particularly when his celebrated *Guernica* was displayed in New York following the Spanish Civil War. Krasner remembered him as “one of my heroes in painting,” and spoke of the immediate impact of *Guernica.* “Picasso’s *Guernica* floored me. When I first saw it at the Dudensing Gallery, I rushed out, walked about the block three times before coming back to look at it. And then later I used to go to the Modern every day to see it.”⁶²⁷ What may be her first extant collage, *Abstract Human Figure* (1938, fig. 4.3), indicates the effect of Picasso on Krasner. A variety of fractured forms and colorful cutouts suggest an abstracted human form. Biomorphic shapes evoke various appendages, particularly as a shape resembling a hand appears to the right-center of the vertically aligned composition. Suggestive of a portrait in its format, this work borrows from Picasso’s Cubist lead in its composite view. In addition to suggesting a seated figure, complete with arms, elongated neck, and sprawling legs, a shape in the center of the collage resembles a large human nose in profile. By superimposing these bodily forms, Krasner reconstructs the visage in manner reminiscent of *Guernica*, albeit in a far less politicized manner. In her catalog raisonné on the artist, Ellen Landau further connected this collage to *Guernica*, noting the “way in which

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Krasner disintegrated and exploded the body,” particularly as “the large oval sitting on a sock-shaped ‘neck’ in the center of Krasner’s painting looks like a reverse reflection of Picasso’s horse.”

In 1941, Krasner again returned to collage as a means for solving compositional problems in her painting. Her collage Untitled (Gouache No. 1) (fig. 4.4) outlines a proposed mural for Radio Station WNYC. On behalf of the WPA/FAP, and under the supervision of artist Burgoyne Diller, WNYC accepted proposals to decorate its lobby and studios with abstract art. Although never completed once the onset of World War II exhausted WPA funds, Krasner’s design was selected for Studio A. The finished product was to feature overlapping geometric shapes in primary colors, again indicating her debt to Mondrian. While the black outlines and bright primary hues evoked Neo-Plasticism, Krasner’s overlapping forms and constructivist composition suggested her familiarity with the Bauhaus and European modernism. The preliminary collage helped Krasner organize the composition, and she arranged the trapezoidal cutouts differently in subsequent drawings. Thus, collage remained a “mockup” for Krasner in the late-1930s and early-1940s, allowing her an ease of correction while planning larger, painted works.

Krasner next returned to collage in 1942 while employed by the federal government. In that year, President Roosevelt converted the Works Progress Administration into the War Services Project, and Krasner was one of many artists who found themselves creating propaganda to help boost the morale of the American public. Window displays were one of the

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628 Landau, Catalogue Raisonné, 55.
629 Stuart Davis, Byron Browne, and John von Wicht were selected to adorn other studios in WNYC’s offices on the twenty-fifth floor of the Municipal Office Building in Manhattan. Louis Schanker was selected to decorate the lobby while Louis Ferstadt was to provide a mural for the station director’s office. The works of Davis, Browne, and Wicht were completed, while those by Schanker and Ferstadt, like Krasner, had been approved but not finished when WPA funds were exhausted. For more on the project, see Greta Berman, “Abstractions for Public Spaces, 1935-1943,” Arts Magazine 56, no. 10 (June 1982): 81-86; Landau, Catalogue Raisonné, 76.
most popular forms of visual culture in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and Krasner was enlisted to create murals for New York City department stores advertising the wartime curricula of local colleges. Working in conjunction with the Higher Education Division of the New York City Board of Education, Krasner was granted access to various war-training courses. While researching her project, she attended a class on explosives taught by Professor Burtell at City College, noting how various objects of study could be employed for her assignment. Realizing that photography offered the best means of depicting the various scientific and engineering lessons she observed, Krasner and her assistants elected to create photomontages for each subject, including chemistry of explosives, cryptography, mechanical drawing, metallurgy, optics, radio, and spherical trigonometry. The artists who worked with Krasner on this project included Ben Benn, Ray Klein, Jean Xceron, Frederick Hauck, Agostino, Frank Greco, Ernest Truback, and Jackson Pollock. The resulting collaboration was well received, and Krasner received praise from her supervisors and a member of the Board of Education wrote to the War Services Program commending her efforts.

While these works have been lost and their dimensions remain unknown, record of the War Services Windows exists via photographs. The twenty-one surviving images are rectangular in shape and oriented to a horizontal axis. These works fused drawings, photographs, maps, typography, and a variety of technical illustrations. Nearly all of the collages were framed by paper bands running along the perimeter. Often this framing device served to create the illusion

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631 Landau notes that: “On October 11, 1942, Pearl Bernstein of the Board of Education wrote to Audrey McMahon of the War Services Program praising the efforts of Krasner and ‘her fine crew.’” The letter further stated: “I know something of the difficulties she encountered in coordinating all of the work in spite of academic and other temperaments. The fact that all of those who worked on the displays still seemed happy about them is not the least of things to Miss Krasner’s credit, it seems to me.” Reproduced in Landau, Catalogue Raisonné, 94.
of depth, and since the lower horizontal register appeared wider than the other strips of paper, it created a perspectival space akin to a room or diorama. Montages like Mechanical Drawing (fig. 4.5-4.6) represented a receding plane covered with paper as a hand with compass formed a circle across its surface. In other images, such as Optics, the illusion of three-dimensional space is suggested by the inclusion of an upright soldier, with the horizon and sky looming in the distance.

In the only art historical discussion of these works, Ellen Landau has observed that Krasner and her team were inspired by the history of the collage medium because she would have seen collages by her Surrealist and Dada predecessors in reproduction.  

Likewise, Krasner was familiar with the montages of Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein.  

Krasner’s collaged window displays contained many of the ironic juxtapositions that typify the medium of collage. Although these images adopted visual codes for logic by representing measuring devices, graphs and charts, and other scientific apparatuses, the War Services Windows paradoxically contained many unsettling, surreal aspects. The preponderance of fighter jets, tanks, and bombs evoked explosions and destruction, and these mechanisms of war threaten the accompanying images of students and class lessons. In Optics (fig. 4.7-4.8), for example, three young women dance in front of a neoclassical building on the left side of the composition. With their long skirts blowing in the wind and surrounded by greenery, these maidens could herald either peacetime or victory. Yet their leisurely gestures clash with the airplane bomber looming overhead, a startling reminder that this pastoral scene is threatened by war. Likewise, in Chemistry of Explosives (fig.

632 While Krasner may have seen the 1943 exhibit of collage at Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century, she wrote to Robert Mattison that she had “no recollections” of the show. Furthermore, the War Services project predates the “Collage” exhibition. Lee Krasner to Robert Mattison, 28 June 1979, Krasner Papers, AAA.

633 Landau, Catalogue Raisonné, 94.
4.9), canons and explosions are juxtaposed with traditional college architecture and classroom genre scenes.

Furthermore, abstract scribbles often appear along the paper framing the perimeter of the compositions. In two representations of *Mechanical Drawing*, for example, t-squares, compasses, and drafting triangles are flanked by vertical panels of gestural markings. This ironic juxtaposition of automatic doodling with mechanical drawing evokes the nonsensical and contradictory effects of many Surrealist and Dada collages, indicating the playful potential of the medium. Krasner’s two versions of *Mechanical Drawing* operate in the same manner as works like Max Ernst’s *Oedipus Rex*, wherein the interchange of visual ambiguities produces puns and other forms of jokework.  

Likewise, in her two illustrations of *Cryptography* (fig. 4.10-4.11), Krasner depicts groups of men and women actively involved in code-breaking alongside various charts that indicate the correspondence between certain letters, numbers, and symbols. Yet these codes remain unknowable to the viewer, and interspersed across the compositions are a variety of unreadable letters. Forming neither discernible words nor legible ciphers this script thwarts translation while simultaneously representing the act of cryptography. This lettering remains both the riddle to be solved and the solution’s own representation. The abstract segments to the right of *Cryptography* further complicate these collages with a variety of double entendres emerging from their inclusion. Painterly dots, calligraphic scribbles, and curvilinear shapes stand opposite graphs and axes, leaving the viewer to question whether these abstract components are codes to break or merely patterns decorating the edges of the window display. But with the

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634 In her study of Max Ernst, Charlotte Stokes examined the importance of Sigmund Freud in the emergence of many Surrealist ideals, particularly his theories on humor. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud chronicled the role of condensation, misdirection, and juxtaposition in the creation of jokes, properties that Stokes located in the collages of Ernst. Charlotte Stokes, “Collage as Jokework: Freud’s Theories of Wit as the Foundation for the Collages of Max Ernst,” *Leonardo* 15, no. 3 (1982); repr. in Katherine Hoffman, ed., *Collage Critical Views* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1989).
perspective implied by the orthogonal lines of *Cryptography*, these segments suggest abstract paintings lining the walls of the collage’s fictive space, perhaps joking that modern art itself required cryptographic analysis.

Although Krasner’s early experiments with collage and photomontage might not appear pastoral in iconography or mood—indeed her mature collages of the 1950s more appropriately fit this designation—recent theories of the pastoral might frame her War Services work within the conceptual domain of pastoral security. The appearances of airplanes and zeppelins in these murals could be interpreted as emblems of flight, a means of escape or relocation. While the classical idylls of Virgil and Theocritus made no such reference to travel, movement and human and animal agency do figure in pastoral. In addition, modern re-conceptions of the pastoral often frame these narratives within escapist reverie. The military presence in these photomontages could be seen as providing a peaceful refuge from violence and unrest, as security often characterizes the bucolic retreat. As Michel Foucault argued in his discussion of pastoral power, the pastor provides for, and looks after, his flock, ensuring its health and well-being. By a similar token, these students of trigonometry, optics, and metallurgy can be considered analogous to the herd, with the armed forces serving as an updated variant of the shepherd.

Considering the objective of the wartime colleges, the preservation of American autonomy and democracy, these images seem illustrative of Foucault’s claim that the pastoral “is a form of power whose ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation… it is individualizing… [and] linked with a production of truth—the truth of the individual himself.”

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636 Ibid., 783.
relationships akin to a secularized pastorate. And by carefully following the instructions of their teachers, these students mimic act of following depicted throughout the bucolic tradition.

Springs and the Pastoral Retreat

While Krasner experimented with collage and photomontage early in her career, after moving away from New York City her work changed dramatically as she embraced nature, abstraction, and her pastoral surroundings. The countryside provided a pastoral retreat for many of the Irascibles, and in 1945, Krasner and Pollock moved to Springs, a small community of fishermen and farmers on Long Island’s eastern tip. Through an arrangement with Peggy Guggenheim, they purchased an old farm, including a small house and barn that was later converted into a studio (fig. 4.12-4.14). Isolated and one mile from the nearest country store, the artists’ home initially lacked amenities such as central heat and indoor plumbing. This rural setting liberated the couple from crowded bars, intrusive family members, and pushy gallerists, precisely the outcome Krasner desired. She later recalled that their new setting “allowed Jackson to work. He needed the peace and quiet of country life. It enabled him to work.” But the move to Long Island not only impacted Pollock, and Krasner admitted that “moving there meant far

637 The farmhouse and surrounding land cost $5,000, but it was available for a down payment of $2,000. Krasner convinced Peggy Guggenheim to loan them money for the purchase by deducting $50 per month from Pollock’s $300 stipend (which Guggenheim paid Pollock for his annual artistic output).
638 Lee Krasner, in Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, “Who was Jackson Pollock?” in Art in America 55, no. 3 (May-June 1967): 48-51; reprinted in Pepe Karmel, ed., Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999): 33. Marcia Brennan has recently argued that moving to The Springs not only inspired and helped Pollock concentrate on painting, but it had a crucial role in establishing the public’s perception of his work. The proliferation of photographs illustrating Pollock and Krasner’s pastoral domesticity, particularly those by Hans Namuth and Wilfred Zogbaum, served to “stabilize” Pollock’s image. As Brennan observed, these images portrayed Pollock neither as a reckless bachelor incapable of leading a settled life nor as the man in a gray flannel suit. Instead, Pollock became mythologized for blending the radical with the bourgeois, an icon of the “creative nonconformist.” Marcia Brennan, “Pollock and Krasner: Touching and Transcending the Boundaries of Abstract Expressionism,” in Modernism’s Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-Painterly Abstraction (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004): 104.
more to me than I thought at the time… Together we cooked, canned, gardened; it was all a beautiful new experience.”  

Barbara Rose, an art historian who spent considerable time with Krasner late in the artist’s life, later noted that “life in The Springs had been a refuge from the storm that was Pollock’s essential subject matter,” a pastoral retreat in the most literal sense.  

Not only did Springs afford relief from the turmoil of life with Pollock, but it allowed Krasner to reconnect to memories of her youth. Despite being raised in Brooklyn, she recounted how her neighborhood remained rural despite its proximity to New York City:

Where I lived there were beautiful flowers. I loved it. A back yard with irises. My fleurs-de-lis—my favorite flower. And wild daisies. Bridal veil. And lilac. And roses on the fences, and in all the back yards. I would walk to school through the lots filed with buttercups. There was a farm with a pail and cows. Smells. Warm milk in the bucket. I hated the taste but for Mother and the family it was a treat. So I would go through the fields to get there. Or we would walk over a little wooden bridge… An oak in our front yard. Next door, where Cissy and Mabel lived, a chestnut. I loved that chestnut, especially when it was in bloom… That is what it was like. Rural. Not a city. To say East New York now is to mean the biggest slum area. But my early recollections of it are different. Not until I went to Washington Irving High School in Manhattan, on the subway, did I have contact with a “city.”

Through Springs, Krasner was able to return to the simple life she knew as a child, with Long Island offering a nostalgic reconstruction of domestic harmony.

Literary scholars have defined the pastoral as a simple, Arcadian existence, considering it a metaphor for “an ordered and happier past set against the disturbance and disorder of the present.” The life Krasner and Pollock built in Springs enacted this pastoral in its idyllic

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641 Krasner, as quoted in Munro, *Originals*, 103.
simplicity and connection with nature; in fact, the artists planted a garden for sustenance and bought a goat for milking.\textsuperscript{643} Although simplicity and repose are necessary components of the pastoral tradition, critics have suggested that the idyllic mode was born of frustration. Jeremy Strick has explained that despite “celebrating harmony and simple fulfillment, pastoral is generated by alienation and dissatisfaction. The ideal world of pastoral finds the real world wanting.”\textsuperscript{644} Indeed, historians and classicists have noted how Virgil’s \textit{Eclogues} responded to the strife facing Rome after Julius Caesar’s murder, providing an imagined escape from civil war while subtly protesting the confiscation and redistribution of land that occurred under Octavian.\textsuperscript{645}

While Krasner’s art matched the mood and origins of the genre, they emerged as responses to personal crises, with the artist working through professional and personal anxiety in collage. For many years following the War Services Project she focused on painting, returning to collage only after destroying some of the works she disliked (fig. 4.15-4.16). Disappointed by her show at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951 and unhappy with Pollock’s increased drinking and emotional decline, Krasner found solace by annihilating and reconstructing what she considered failed compositions, explaining:

My studio was hung with a series of black and white drawings I had done. I hated them and started to pull them off the wall and tear them and throw them on the floor and pretty soon the whole floor was covered with them. Then another morning I walked in and saw a lot of things there that began to interest me. I began picking up torn pieces of my own drawings and re-gluing them. Then I


\textsuperscript{644}Jeremy Strick, “Notes on Some Instances of Irony in Modern Pastoral,” in Hunt, ed. \textit{The Pastoral Landscape}, 199.

\textsuperscript{645}Guy Lee, “Introduction,” to Virgil, \textit{The Eclogues}, trans. Guy Lee (New York: Penguin, 1984): 19. Judith Haber has also noted how Virgil “is now confronting us with the loss of home and all that it represents. The Roman poet clearly views his own era not only as more limited than that of his model [Theocritus], but also as more turbulent and unsettled.” Haber, \textit{Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction}, 36-37.
started cutting up some of my oil paintings. I got something going there and I start
pulling out a lot of raw canvas and slashing it as well. That’s how I started my
collaging and the tail end of it was the collaging of the paintings in the Betty
Parsons show. I showed these collages in ’55 at the Stable Gallery.646

Unlike generations of collagists who employed photographic elements and found objects for
their work, Krasner cannibalized her own art and reemployed it as the base of her pieced-
together artworks. Thus, she not only dealt with her discontent as an artist, but also, as Ellen
Landau has suggested, with her relationship with Pollock. In works like Black and White Collage
(1953, fig. 4.17), Untitled (Vertical Sounds) (1953-54, fig. 4.18), and her Forest series (1954-55,
fig. 4.19-4.21), she tore apart and incorporated remnants of his work into these montaged
abstractions as well, and by fusing her art with that of her husband, she attained an intimacy
previously lacking in their relationship.647 Thus, Krasner’s collages served as a substitute for
emotional detachment, and like the pastoral, emerged from discontent. The medium provided a
means to channel “disappointment and desire into ‘imaginative possession,’” with Krasner
achieving self-validation through the act of collage.648 The therapeutic value of these
compositions certainly aligns Krasner’s work with the harmony, repose, and nostalgia of the
pastoral. The idea of refuge or rescue looms large in this tradition, with artistic expression
providing an idyllic release from trouble. Krasner’s pastoral vision included numerous metaphors
for escape, for the image of flight recurred in her collages, particularly in the bird references and

646 Lee Krasner, quoted in Cindy Nemser, Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists (New York: Charles
Scribner’s Sons, 1975): 93-94.
vol.18, no. 2 (Fall 1997/ Winter 1998): 27-30. Landau noted that “according to the original owner, Carol Braider,
[Black and White Collage] was a Christmas gift from Krasner and Pollock in 1954. When they gave it to her, they
told her that the pieces of drawn paper, which Krasner collaged, were from works by Pollock which he had torn up.”
Landau, Catalogue Raisonné, 131.
648 Ibid. Robert Hobbs has also suggested that collage was a “way to deal with her frustration regarding Pollock’s
drinking through alternate destructive and reconstructive acts.” Robert Hobbs, Lee Krasner (New York: Independent
winged shapes of *Bald Eagle* (1955, fig. 4.22) and *Bird Talk* (1955, fig. 4.23), and the preponderance of airplanes, zeppelins, and pigeons in her War Services Windows.

Landau’s psychoanalytic interpretation overlooks another significant loss that occurred in 1944. As Joan Marter recently argued in a collection of essays on Krasner, “the death of her father and its devastating impact on her psyche has been insufficiently acknowledged as another source of her inability to complete a work at that time.” Not only did she find it difficult to work following her father’s passing, the event led her to change her mind about marrying Pollock. While she previously resisted wedlock, she “abruptly changed her mind,” and the couple exchanged vows at New York’s Marble Collegiate Church in October of 1945. By revising her work, thus ruminating upon the course of her life and career, Krasner’s art parallels the reflection of the pastoral. A powerful component of the pastoral song derives from the elegy. Theocritus’ first *Idyll* is a requiem for Daphnis, the shepherd son of Hermes who composed pastoral poetry before being killed for his infidelity. Virgil revisited the lament for Daphnis in *Eclogue V*; however, his verse concludes with hope for the rebirth or apotheosis of the slain poet. While Krasner’s collages might not serve as funerary homages to her father, nor were they created solely from marital discord, they often contain haunting elements concomitant with nostalgic longing. In *Lame Shadow* (1955, fig. 4.24), for example, the specter of the past is suggested not only by the title, but also through the large black paper cutouts covering her

651 Roger Sales argued that reflection and requiem were two of five essential traits comprising the pastoral. These “famous five Rs [are]: refuge, reflection, rescue, requiem and reconstruction.” Roger Sales, *English Literature in History: 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg: Hutchinson, 1983): 15-16.
previous geometric canvas. While some of her other compositions evoke a sense of aggression and violence through the proliferation of torn and shredded canvas, *Lame Shadow* seems melancholic by comparison. It is true that Krasner recycled one of her paintings from the 1951 Parsons show for the supporting ground of *Lame Shadow*—the vertical stripes remain visible beneath the collaged elements—but far less destruction marks this work. Rather than completely covering or destroying this “failed” painting, Krasner allows much of it to remain, indicating her desire to return to it in some capacity. The foreboding black paper cutouts signal the death of Krasner’s work from the early 1950s while simultaneously revisiting it.

Krasner’s collages further acknowledge loss and represent discord through methods analogous with the pastoral. Classicists continue to assert how the pastoral rhetorically operates through the “unity of opposites,” including “continuity / discontinuity, of small and great.” As Erwin Panofsky noted:

> In Virgil’s ideal Arcady human suffering and superhumanly perfect surroundings create a dissonance. This dissonance, once felt, had to be resolved, and it was resolved in that vespertinal mixture of sadness and tranquility which is perhaps Virgil’s most personal contribution to poetry.

In order to construct this resolution, the pastoral poet must, to some degree, “articulate discontinuity,” an attribute recurrent throughout Krasner’s collages. The dissonance Panofsky described appears in both color and handling, with Krasner employing bold hues and expressionistic gestures to create her work. The deep red of *Desert Moon* (1955, fig. 4.25) and fluorescent pink in *Bald Eagle* (1955) jar viewers with their intensity, while the accumulation of energetic brushwork, tear marks, and paint drips evoke a sense of discord. Yet the success of

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these works, and their affinities with the formal properties of the pastoral, stems from Krasner’s ability to fuse such discordant elements. She carefully established a compositional system framing the gestural, while she balanced hues and shapes in complementary configurations. The black verticals of *Desert Moon* defuse the intensity of the red ground, while several angular paper cutouts interrupt the severity of the black pigment. Circular zones of pink further offset the linearity of Krasner’s contained shapes, offering a pictorial structure that, while not always harmonious, remains balanced.

Contrasts and oppositions characterized the pastoral from the outset of Virgil’s *Bucolics* as the bard noted, “So I used to compare great things with small.”⁶⁵⁶ In fact, John Van Sickle has chronicled the “dialectical methodology in the Virgilian tradition,” noting how works such as the *Eclogues* employed contradiction as a rhetorical device.⁶⁵⁷ The relationship of irony to the dialectics of the pastoral remains a contested subject among classicists. To some, the “pastoral might be described as a cover in an age of irony,” since irony would destroy the romantic idylls of this literary trope.⁶⁵⁸ Acknowledging inherent contradictions would thereby alter the genre’s escapist and bucolic mood; however, numerous critics have argued that the pastoral tradition is rife with such qualities.⁶⁵⁹ Judith Haber, for example, has located “a fundamental self-contradictoriness within the genre,” having found its “presence, continuity, and consolation…”

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related to [and] dependent on absence, discontinuity, and loss.” Ultimately, Haber and others have asserted that heroism recurs throughout Theocritus’s *Idylls*, creating a dialectic between “heroic” and “bucolic” best considered “ironic.”

The dialectical methodology of Virgil’s initial pastoral poetry led many critics to claim the dialectic as one of the pastoral’s primary formal attributes. For example, David Halperin has stated that the “pastoral achieves significance by oppositions,” distinctions not limited to country and city, and functions instead as an allegorical trope wherein variances of scale, form, and identity can be contrasted. Krasner similarly engaged in dialectics with her collages, fusing formal dichotomies into complex compositions. In works like *Blue Level* (1955, fig. 4.26), the artist arranged organic shapes against measured rectangles, challenging geometric linearity with ovular cutouts. She also juxtaposed the texture of frayed burlap with large zones of flat, opaque coloring, signaling differences in surface and material. In *Shooting Gold* (1955, fig. 4.27), Krasner explored tonal contrasts, positioning pinks and whites against black brushmarks and cutouts, while in her canonical *Bald Eagle* (1955), she balanced bright with dark and line with color, fusing Pollock’s linear drawings with colorful forms inspired by the decoupage of Matisse. *Untitled* (1954, fig. 4.28) features the interplay of latticework with automatist dripping, as Krasner again contrasted variations of light and dark, line and color, structure and improvisation.

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She considered these contrasts “healthy,” stating: “you need the dichotomy—artist/museum, individual/society—for the individual to be able to breathe.”

**The Nature of Order**

Many of Krasner’s collages evoke the respite tendered by the natural world, and like Virgilian shepherds singing the praises of their bucolic surroundings, Krasner found repose within the sensations of nature. In *Image on Green (Jungle)* (fig. 4.29) and *Milkweed* (both 1955, fig. 4.30), botanic forms appear among Krasner’s cutouts and painterly gestures, while various shades of green, white, and red suggest foliage. The combination of vivid palette and organic line imbues the works with a natural rhythm. Krasner acknowledged that in these collages she drew inspiration from nature’s forms and sensations, commenting: “I don’t feel like I do anything that isn’t related in some way, like to what’s known as the word nature… I can’t conceive of anything that doesn’t have this kind of organic, rudimentary form… My work is founded in this prescribed thing called nature.”

Krasner titled numerous collages after natural elements, indicating the associations she hoped her work would evoke. For instance, three collages from 1954-55 bear the title *Forest*, linking the verticality of the compositions’ format with trees. In these works, a multitude of paper shards and brushstrokes suggest dense vegetation. The application of cream-colored paper and dark oil pigment onto a supporting ground of pressed wood heighten the forestry connection,

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as the materials self-reference parchment and its natural origins. The surface materialism, with its torn paper edges and layering of objects, further conjures the bark of a tree, particularly as it peels away from the trunk. This correlation becomes most apparent in *Forest* (1954-55), as the smaller number of collage elements accentuates the slivers of paper laid atop a rich brown pigment. These ribbons of cream and ocher suggest birch and other wood skins, while the brown remains an iconic symbol for the color of tree trunks.

Krasner continued to explore her interest in nature’s surfaces with several other collages from 1954-55, particularly *Shattered Light* (fig. 4.31) and *Collage*. In *Shattered Light*, a large, horizontally aligned collage, countless paper cutouts cover a variety of gestural markings in white and black. Many of these brushstrokes are circular in shape, while others proceed at diagonal angles that guide the eye across the allover composition. The interplay of small paper cutouts with the pigment, particularly the interaction of creams and light browns with whites and hints of blue and red, suggestive the elaborate designs of butterfly wings. Various spots and wing-like shapes evoke Batesian mimicry, yet rather than mimicking other, more dangerous species as a defense mechanism, Krasner’s collage appropriates the design of nature to attract the eye. The title of *Shattered Light* ironically connotes the source of attraction for moths at night, light, and the work contains several concentric circles reminiscent of light refraction. While this connection might appear farfetched since Krasner was hardly a lepidopterist, she created an oil painting in the mid-1950s titled *Butterfly Weed* (ca. 1957-81, fig. 4.32) after the plant on which monarch butterflies lay their eggs. Although abstracted, this work bears numerous similarities to the appearance of the plant, as green and white stalk-like verticals culminate in circular buds. This flowering plant is found throughout the United States, and with Krasner’s experience
tending to her gardens in Springs, it remains plausible that her surroundings inspired many of her compositions.

The butterfly weed is part of the *asclepias*, or milkweed family, the name of another collage by Krasner from 1955. Like the painting *Butterfly Weed, Milkweed* was created from a previous composition, in this case the remains of Krasner’s *Number 12* (1951), a work exhibited at the Parsons show. Milkweed further parallels *Butterfly Weed* in its vertical orientation and slender, foliate forms. Olives and yellows suggest the greenery of the plant while three orange paper cutouts in the top third of the collage call to mind the orange flowers that bud on the milkweed plant. *Shattered Light* and *Milkweed* were not the only works Krasner created that paid homage to nature and its design. *Collage* (1955, fig. 4.33) suggests the camouflaging of a different species, namely felids. In this composition, Krasner arranged handmade Howell papers on which she and Pollock variously dripped and blotted dark pigment. By covering the ocher and light orange pulp with such markings, the collage assumes the appearance of cheetah or leopard skin. The similarity with fur is heightened by the texture of Howell’s parchment, papers he made from cloth and damask in accordance to centuries-old papermaking techniques.

With *Bald Eagle* (1955), Krasner evoked the natural world in both title and form. Previous scholarship has stressed the manner in which Krasner employed Pollock’s work for this collage, as she destroyed one of his drawings and distributed the remnants across her brightly colored composition. Pollock’s fragmentary sketch featured black ink on white canvas, and it stands in sharp contrast to Krasner’s use of orange, pink, and purple cutouts. Robert Hobbs has considered these hues in relation to Willem de Kooning, surmising that Krasner addressed her

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666 Landau, *Catalog Raisonné*, 149.
667 Krasner learned of Douglass Howell through the artist Anne Ryan. The two became friends after they showed together at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951, where Ryan exhibited collages made of Howell’s handmade papers. Soon thereafter, Krasner and Pollock visited the papermaker to purchase his wares. See chapter 5.
husband’s chief rival and adversary with this work. Hobbs maintained that *Bald Eagle* brought these artists’ traits together, the drip of Pollock and the contoured, overlapping forms of de Kooning, in an ambiguous homage to each.⁶⁶⁸ Ellen Landau, on the other hand, has asserted that Krasner’s appropriation of Pollock’s work enabled her to negotiate the complex conditions of their relationship.⁶⁶⁹ Hobbs and Landau have focused on formal influences and psychological content, yet the cutout forms certainly evoke birds through their sweeping curves and diagonal forms. A preponderance of wing-like shapes composes the collage, a reference reinforced by the title.

The bald eagle was a loaded symbol and Krasner would have been well aware of its importance in American history. This native North American species became synonymous with the nascent United States of America and was declared the national emblem in 1782. While Benjamin Franklin was famously critical of the selection of Bald Eagle as the national bird, other Presidents throughout American history equated the eagle with democracy and fortitude. While Krasner probably did not associate her abstract collage with such patriotic notions, she would have been familiar with its recurrence in American art history. From Gilbert Stuart’s portraits of George Washington to the landscapes of Albert Bierstadt, the bald eagle served as a symbol of democratic leadership while signifying American freedom. But by the 1950s, the Bald Eagle had become a contested species. Populations of the bird became threatened by development and changes in the environment, leading to its eventual designation as an endangered species. Citing a waning habitat and decrease in prey, governmental officials established the Bald Eagle Protection Act in 1940, making it illegal to harm, kill, or possess a bald eagle. In the following year, a joint initiative by the National Audubon Society and Feather Industries of America

agreed to halt the usage of plumage from eagles and egrets, siding with conservationists who feared that decorative uses of feathers further threatened these birds.\textsuperscript{670} Unfortunately, such efforts did not entirely solve the plight of the Bald Eagle, as the widespread use of DDT in the 1940s caused populations of the bird to continue plummeting.\textsuperscript{671} To combat this decline, numerous governmental legislations were passed in the following decades, protecting the bird immortalized in Krasner’s collage.\textsuperscript{672} While this work bears no such politicking, the title and angular forms of the collage suggest the eagle in flight, and when considering Krasner’s relationship with environmental agencies in the following decades, the work may have resulted from her awareness of the ecological movement.

Krasner’s fascination with nature not only coincided with her new surroundings in rural Long Island; it also paralleled a renewed interest in the environment as a whole. Although many trace the birth of ecology to Rachel Carson’s \textit{Silent Spring} of 1962, its roots stemmed from a variety of earlier factors. Naturalists and conservationists extolled the virtue and bounty of the American wilderness from the nation’s very beginning. From Emerson and Thoreau to John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt, reverence for nature continually reappeared in American intellectual discourses, and the era following World War II proved no different. Conservationist Aldo Leopold’s \textit{A Sand County Almanac} was published a year after his death in 1948. Leopold’s influential work not only affected governmental policy through his work at the U.S. Forest Service, but also university curricula, as he became a noted professor in wildlife management at

\textsuperscript{671} One of the pesticide’s chemical bi-products, DDE, weakened the integrity of eagle shells, resulting in fewer eaglet maturations. The Bald Eagle population reached its lowest point in 1963, as scientists counted only 417 nesting pairs of the bird in 1963. Mark Peterson, “Service Seeks Comments to Remove Bald Eagle from Endangered Species Act Protections,” \textit{Audubon Minnesota} (Spring 2006): 1, 10.
\textsuperscript{672} With a governmental ban of DDT in 1972, and increased protection of the Bald Eagle through the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the Bald Eagle made an incredible return to health. Numbers of the eagle reached 20,000 by the late 1990s, and the status of the bird was downgraded from “endangered” to “threatened” in 1995. Ibid.
the University of Wisconsin. Rachel Carson’s oceanographic studies, *Under the Sea-Wind* (1941) and *The Sea Around Us* (1951), had been hugely successful, with *The Sea Around Us* winning the National Book Award (1952) and topping the *New York Times* Bestseller List.

As historian Adam Rome recently has argued, this burgeoning ecological movement emerged partially in response to the growth of suburbia in the postwar years. The American countryside was being transformed into mass-produced suburbs and by moving to Springs, Krasner and Pollock were part of a growing number of Americans who left the urban world for single-family dwellings. But Krasner and Pollock were rare in moving to an old farm rather than one of the fifteen million new homes constructed during the 1950s alone. Many of these suburban houses featured the latest modern amenities, such as washing machines, refrigerators, and televisions. They also occupied larger lots than urban dwellings as Americans sought a yard to complete their vision of the American dream. Marked by such phenomena as lawn maintenance, outdoor barbeques, and swimming pools, suburbs exploded during the postwar years as middle-class Americans domesticated nature. Nowhere was this more evident than Long Island, home to a thriving community of mass-housing named Levittown, designed for veterans of World War II. Governmental assistance enabled Americans to buy homes here with as little as a five percent down payment. But while many Americans flocked to the suburbs for the space and lifestyle they offered, Krasner and Pollock favored a more traditional pastoral existence. As we have seen, the couple gardened, milked goats, restored their barn and

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674 In 1947, William Levitt began constructing Levittown on Long Island, a suburb of 17,400 homes affordably priced around $10,000 depending upon the style (Cape Cod, Colonial, or Ranch). New eight-inch television sets and Brandix washers were just some of the appliances included to entice prospective owners. The single-family home soon became the norm since communities could be constructed quickly and efficiently through Levitt’s distribution of labor. Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen On TV* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994): 153.
farmhouse, and enjoyed the solitude of country life. Despite the overdevelopment that was occurring further west on Long Island, Springs remained a veritable idyll.

Due in part to the overdevelopment of formerly wild lands for these suburbs, concerns about the environment reached a crescendo. Rome has suggested that mass-housing led to many initiatives aimed at saving the nation’s open space. Campaigns were launched throughout the 1950s to protect natural habitats, and in 1958, several prominent Long Islanders, including a curator at the American Museum of Natural History, launched a lawsuit against the government because its use of DDT threatened local ecosystems. A year later, William Whyte warned Americans to:

Take a last look. Some summer’s morning drive past the golf club on the edge of town, turn off onto a backroad and go for a short trip through the open countryside. Look well at the meadows, the wooded draws, the stands of pines, the creeks and streams, and fix them in your memory. If the American standard of living goes up another notch, this is about the last chance you will have.

Heeding this call, Krasner became involved with organizations dedicated to the preservation of Springs and the surrounding land. She worked with the East Hampton Conservation Advisory Council and received an Honorary Membership from the Board of Governors of the Nature Conservancy. Along with establishing the Pollock-Krasner house as a historic building, the East Hampton Council fought to retain the pastoral character of The Springs, an area the board

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676 Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 120.
679 The award states: “In recognition and with appreciation of outstanding generosity and dedication to the goal of preserving America’s natural world and the rich variety of life it shelters.” The commission’s report hoped to make “possible for a community to grow and prosper while scarcely disturbing the natural environment.” Report to the East Hampton Conservation Advisory Council by the Civic Association of the Springs, September 16, 1968. Certificate of award and commission report contained in Lee Krasner Papers, AAA.
described as “woodlands, open agricultural fields, grazing lands, wetlands, and harbors.” The whole of Long Island and its waterways encountered problems with pollution throughout the 1940s and 1950s, perhaps motivating Krasner’s activism and natural evocations.

In addition to inspiring Krasner’s imagery, nature also provided many artists a structural tool during the heyday of abstraction. As Clement Greenberg suggested in “The Role of Nature in Modern Painting,” the logic of nature informed modernist art beginning with Cézanne and Cubism. By “describing and analyzing” the natural world in a “simplified way,” he wrote, artists discovered the internal structure of the picture plane. Greenberg was not alone in connecting nature and abstract art during the 1950s. Frank O’Hara suggested that Abstract Expressionism employed nature to achieve compositional order, and while curating the Whitney Museum of American Art’s “Nature in Abstraction” show, John Baur claimed that the New York School’s emphasis on materiality and medium drew upon the sensations of the natural world.

Being well-schooled in the methods of Hans Hofmann, who famously instructed artists to “work from nature,” Krasner would have been well aware of these discourses surrounding nature as a compositional device. While her contemporaries suggested how the natural world informed the order and sensuousness of modernist painting, her work also drew upon its cycles and rhythms. Krasner worked in cycles throughout her career, recalling the evolution of the seasons in her serial approach to art, and by recycling previous works for her collages, she further evoked

680 Lee Krasner Papers, AAA.
phases of regeneration. “If I’m going back on myself,” she noted, “I’d like to think it’s a form of
growth.”684 In commenting upon her Solstice series of collages (ca. 1979-81), Krasner told John
Bernard Myers:

I was thinking about the seasons and the ways they change. In particular, I was
musing about the equinox, equinoctial transformations, the first day of spring, the
beginning of autumn…the year is divided into cycles, four seasons, and the cycles
recur over and over—endlessly…I change, my work changes—but both remain
within cycles that are peculiar to me.685

Krasner’s collages not only recall botanic forms and seasonal renewal, but her compositions
engage landscape and architectural traditions rooted in the pastoral. By laying large strips of
paper and burlap on canvas, and setting them against the abstract verticals of the background,
Krasner’s cutouts dominate the visual field. Pictorial depth becomes flattened through the allover
patterning and absence of a horizon line. Her collages, with their organic forms, evoke plant
growth or repousoir devices set against oblique architectural backdrops. Landscape vistas are
blocked from view, both by the foreground shapes and compressed background, suggesting the
compact and intimate space of a grotto or grove. Akin to the collages, the grotto or grove
traditionally juxtaposes the organic with structure, and the interplay of monument and vegetation
has been considered pastoral for its contrasting elements and escapist reverie.686 The geometric
backgrounds of *Milkweed* and *Shooting Gold* call to mind the fresco cycles of Roman villas (fig.
4.34), as they similarly feature shallow space, colored panels, frame-like verticals, and
superimposed plant forms. The landscapes she evokes are not vast, expansive panoramas, or

684 Barbara Novak, *Lee Krasner: Recent Work* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1981); quote reproduced in Landau,
*Catalogue Raisonné*, 146.
685 John Bernard Myers, “Naming Pictures: Conversations between Lee Krasner and John Bernard Myers,” in
686 Bettina Bergmann, “Exploring the Grove: Pastoral Space on Roman Walls,” and Alfred Frazer, “The Roman
Villa and the Pastoral Ideal,” both in Hunt, ed., *The Pastoral Landscape*, 21-48, and 49-62, respectively.
Barnett Newman-like evocations of the sublime, but suggest the intimacy of the cultivated landscape.

Whereas Krasner’s evocations of nature suggested a harmonious, pastoral state, those depicting urban life reveal a different experience. In *The City* (1953, fig. 4.35), Krasner layered angular strips of black paper over discordant red dribbles and squares. Exposed paper edges suggest the tearing of parchment, while the scattering of collage elements undermines Krasner’s Cubist grid. Elongated scraps of black and white verticals further mimic décollage, simulating voids ripped from the composition’s surface. Art historians have often connected the implied violence of these works to a critique of the urban experience. For instance, Hobbs has considered *The City* “an apocalyptic work with exploding forms,” wherein “the overlapping rectangles…seem illogical, suggesting a toppled system of order. Black forms look like giant malignant stalks, reiterating the image of the city as an asphalt jungle.”\(^{687}\) Landau also has written how the “hectic quality of Manhattan life is projected” in this collage.\(^{688}\) Likewise, in *City Verticals* (1953, fig. 4.36), the urban experience lacks a center. Forms reminiscent of skyscrapers encompass the pictorial surface, and the underlying latticework becomes obscured by an assortment of colored paper. Krasner struggled to negotiate the city, a difficulty she shared with her husband. In letters of the same period to Alfonso Ossorio, Pollock wrote that “NYC is brutal” and “terribly depressing – and nearly impossible.”\(^{689}\) Around 1944, Krasner wrote to Mercedes Matter, who had recently relocated to Santa Monica, California, telling her friend how envious she was of their escape from Manhattan.

Your shack sounds wonderful and I really wish I was there—however don’t start getting ideas—I just don’t like the sound of California—but the waves and the

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689 Jackson Pollock, Letters to Alfonso Ossorio (January 1952), Alfonso Ossorio Papers, AAA

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aloneness that kind of aloneness, seems wonderful—the fact that you can think about painting again and be away from the hysteria of the city—all that I envy.  

The following year, Krasner and Pollock moved to Long Island, preferring the peace and simplicity of their rural retreat. She reminisced how, “With Jackson there was quiet—solitude. Just to sit and look at the landscape. An inner quietness. After dinner, to sit on the back porch and look at the light. No need for talking. For any kind of communication.”

**Pastoral Escapism: Role Play and the Contingency of Identity**

The peace and quiet Krasner and Pollock found on Fireplace Road soon unraveled as Pollock grappled with sobriety and marital fidelity. Professionally, Krasner fared no better, and as previously mentioned, she returned to collage after destroying works from her show at Betty Parsons Gallery. Reviews criticized this 1951 exhibit of paintings as derivative, a critical slight that recurred throughout her career as Krasner struggled to attain recognition as an Abstract Expressionist. In 1951, Stuart Preston described her work as “the Mondrian formula worked out with feminine acuteness,” while over thirty years later, Arthur Danto wrote in *The Nation* that: “Krasner is more interesting as a case than as a painter. It is difficult to respond to her save as a shadow of artists greater than her—her teacher, Hans Hofmann, her husband, Jackson Pollock, and her luminous contemporaries of the New York School.” Although he tried to distance himself from the chauvinistic tendencies that had reduced female artists to the periphery of art history, Danto continued to be “struck by how little would be left of Krasner’s work if one could

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succeed in driving all the shadows away: those of Matisse, Hofmann, Mondrian, de Kooning, the Cubists and the rest.” While similar formal precedents might be established for other artists, including Pollock, Krasner was criticized for lacking a “recurr"uent touch” or “the pictorial equivalent of voice.” Instead, Danto found “only the shadows of other selves, the echo of other voices… a series of surrenders to artistic personalities stronger than her own… Even though huge and bold, Krasner’s work has something of the art school exercise about it.”

Indeed, many of Krasner’s collages contain clearly discernible formal precedents. As noted previously, her earliest experiments with *papier collé* recall Picasso, Mondrian, and Hofmann. By the 1950s, the influence of these masters still remained noticeable. In *Black and White* (1953, fig. 4.37), a biomorphic form comprised of circular paper cutouts flanks several rectilinear panels. The schematic stick-figure suggests the female body through its vertical massing, and its position “facing” the window-like shapes to the left parallels Picasso’s *Girl Before a Mirror* (1932), a work that influenced many of Krasner’s peers, including Robert Motherwell. Krasner’s work in collage also found precedent in the decoupage of Henri Matisse. Krasner recalled how firsthand exposure to Matisse allowed his work to truly resonate. She frequented the Museum of Modern Art after it opened in 1929, and she later viewed Matisse’s work in New York at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1949. Krasner admitted to being “hit very hard by this first live contact with the Paris School…Picasso, Matisse…mostly Matisse.” The contoured line and paper cutouts of Matisse certainly influenced Krasner’s adoption of the medium as well as her interest in curvilinear lines and flat shapes. The floral

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695 Ibid.
designs and vivid colors of Matisse recur in works like *Bald Eagle, Bird Talk*, and *Image on Green (Jungle)*, while the juxtaposition of a rectilinear background with arabesque cutout further links *Shooting Gold* and *Stretched Yellow* (1955, fig. 4.38) to the famous modernist.\(^698\)

In the past decade, feminist art historians have reexamined Krasner, attempting to correct the chauvinistic tendencies that dominated the postwar art world. In restoring agency to Krasner’s artistic decisions, Anne Wagner has elucidated “the myth of L.K.,” wherein the artist strategically resisted the gendering of her work to combat sexist biases. By employing androgynous signatures and refusing to show with other women, Krasner hoped to avoid the stigma of a gendered, and therefore imitative, identity.\(^699\) This struggle to escape the limits of her sex was compounded by Krasner’s marriage to Pollock, America’s leading painter at mid-century. Reinterpreting Krasner’s *Little Images* (1947–49, fig. 4.39) as gestures of control and structure, Wagner has considered them a means of establishing her unique subjectivity, an attempt that ultimately placed her at odds with the qualities that made Pollock a star: spontaneity and risk.\(^700\) Rather than viewing Krasner’s dilemma as a predicament, Griselda Pollock has considered Krasner’s proximity to Pollock a gamble and part of her effort to engage the masters of modern art on their own terms. Griselda Pollock has employed the anthropological concept of “deep play” to describe Krasner’s quest for recognition. Instead of dismissing her as unoriginal, Pollock invoked the “cockfight” to establish Krasner’s competition with the avant-garde, one


“rooted in knowing and precisely calibrated maneuvers within a field of reference, deference, and difference.”

The play initiated through Krasner’s engagement with the masters of modern art parallels the pastoral in its openness and contingency. Indeed, the pastoral domain often includes the “creation of imaginative space,” where characters, both fictive and authorial, find a “useful disguise.” The escapism proffered by the pastoral is not limited to an idyllic, rural setting; instead, “the pastoral space is the perfect locale for those who believe themselves to be in flight from a more sober and proscriptive (though no less imaginative) space, be it a nation, a fatherland, or even one’s own interpellated identity.” Collage created the space where Krasner could enact various roles and identities, particularly as it enabled her to reference and appropriate the art of Matisse, Picasso, and Pollock. The medium itself seemed best suited for mapping the contingency of identity since the semiotic potency of collage remains conditional and relative. Motherwell hailed the technique as “relational,” while art historians assert that the collage element signifies through its situational position. This relativist flux distinguished Krasner’s collages from the signature styles of her Abstract Expressionist peers, while her embrace of destabilization and role play produced an openness best defined as pastoral. As Hobbs recently


705 Robert Hobbs argued that “Krasner’s construction of her otherness was an ongoing process that is remarkable for its lack of closure. In her work she forges a number of constructed selves that she considered likely candidates for an ultimately indeterminable and hypothetical ‘real’ self. Relying on the insistent open-endedness of existentialism, Krasner’s constructed image of herself in her art is always exceeded by a superfluity of new choices necessitating
has noted, this refusal to essentialize her identity, both as a woman or artist, meant that Krasner inevitably positioned herself on the margins of the artistic mainstream.\textsuperscript{706} The multiple selves Krasner crafted throughout her long and varied career meant that, according to Hobbs, she maintained possibilities otherwise discredited in era seeking stable, normalized identities. While this location outside of the norm led to a lack of critical acclaim, it further aligned her with the shepherds immortalized by Theocritus and Virgil. Leo Marx has identified the pastoral herdsman as a “liminal, or threshold figure,” mediating the borderland between such opposed realms as nature and culture.\textsuperscript{707} The truly personal aspect of Virgil’s poetry, according to some classicists, is the speaker’s awareness of his “situation, power, and limitations,” ones bound to his position in life.\textsuperscript{708} As an equally marginal or liminal figure, Krasner can be said to have negotiated the dichotomies of nature and culture in her art. While her husband rose to international prominence on the strength of his perceived connection with “nature,” Krasner found her work criticized as a sanitized or domesticated (read pastoral) variant of his explosive expressionism. Yet, her collages juxtaposed the gestural with restraint, combining botanic imagery and natural rhythms with a well-cultured understanding of modernist painting. Thus, the pastoral might offer a means of reconsidering Krasner’s work, because when interpreted through the role play and contingency of the pastoral, the discursive properties of her collages become ambitiously dialogic instead of merely derivative.

As Paul Alpers astutely has noted, the pastoral often is mistaken for a “simple idyllicism” wherein individuals seek a fantastical escape without further reflection. However, Alpers


\textsuperscript{707} Marx, “Does Pastoralism Have a Future?,” 212.

persuasively has contended that the literary mode entails a “sophisticated” attempt to “come to terms with reality,” thus “the great pastoral poets are directly concerned with the extent to which song that gives present pleasures can confront and, if not transform and celebrate, then accept and reconcile man to the stresses and realities of his situation.”

At the root of the pastoral endeavor stands the contingent self, an individual yearning to overcome the limitations of his or her experience. In Virgilian tradition, pastoral shepherds engage in lyric competition, singing of projected fantasies and conquests while attempting to usurp authority, by way of poetic prowess among their humble peers. In a similar manner, Krasner’s collages bear evidence of her contingent self, particularly as an art student acknowledging her neophyte status while seeking mastery of her craft. In this way, the lessons of Hofmann’s “push and pull,” Matisse’s decoupage, and Bauhaus constructivism might be considered Krasner’s pastoral role play, as she, like Virgil’s shepherds, projected her talents. Rather than merely aping the masters, hers was a conscious effort to rival her heroes. Furthermore, like the humble herdsman, she remained acutely aware of her position in relationship to Pollock’s legacy and the trajectory of modern art. It was one thing to be a woman artist during the heyday of Abstract Expressionist, and it was another to be married to the movement’s biggest star. “I was not the average woman married to the average painter,” Krasner noted. “I was married to Jackson Pollock.”

While many literary critics adopt a strict definition of the genre—Leo Marx famously declared, “no shepherd, no pastoral,”—others consider the pastoral a metaphor for escapism, contingency, naturalism, and dialectics. The protagonist of early pastoral poetry, particularly

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that of Theocritus and Virgil, was the herdsman, and through his meager lot in society, notions of simplicity and modesty have become associated with the genre. Despite the low social standing of the Virgilian shepherd, ambition and status figured prominently in classical pastorals. Krasner’s desire to master the mechanics of modern art aligns her with the herdsmen of Theocritus and Virgil, particularly because formal proficiency signaled critical success. In the *Idylls* of Theocritus, often considered the origin of pastoral poetry, Simichidas challenges Lycidas to a singing match, acknowledging that his skills, great as they might be, do not match those of the previous generation.

I too am a sounding reed of the Muses, and call by all
An excellent poet—though Zeus knows, I’m no gull!
I am not, in my own conceit, a match as yet
For the noble Samian Sicelidas, nor Philetas.
I should rival their song as a frog vies with cicadas!\(^{712}\)

Likewise, in *The Eclogues*, Virgil’s shepherd-poets try to achieve the skill and renown of their peers and predecessors. For example, in *Eclogue IX*, Lycidas laments that his skill in poetry remains below the standard of his illustrious forebears, Varius and Cinna.

…I too am a poet; I too have my songs; the shepherds
Even call me bard, but I do not believe them.
As yet I cannot rival Varius or Cinna,
But gabble like a gander among articulate swans.\(^{713}\)

In the monologue comprising *Eclogue IV*, Virgil prays for a long life that will enable him to sing the praises of Augustus and Octavia. With the experience of age and “spirit,” he brags that

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“Linus will not defeat me in song, nor Thracian Orpheus.”714 Virgil further claimed that his artistic gifts would reach divine proportions, “if Pan too challenged me, with Arcady as judge, / Pan too, with Arcady as judge, would own defeat.”715 While Krasner never went so far as to proclaim herself on par with Picasso or Mondrian, her work reveals her attempts to master the language of their art. Only after becoming comfortable with the ideas of abstraction did Krasner embrace the naturalism typically considered pastoral. Thus, through the conventions of pastoral poetry, Krasner’s Hofmann-era collages might be interpreted as her attempt to equal her heroes, learning from their example while practicing and perfecting her craft.

In Krasner’s attempts to establish herself as an artist, she frequently revisited her previous artworks only to destroy them and reuse the remains in collages. As we have seen, these recycled compositions suggest the cycles of nature while reflecting the contingency of identity as she worked through a variety of styles and media. However, Krasner’s willingness to cannibalize her own art, cutting and tearing it apart, reenacts the pastoral dynamic between herdsman and flock. Michel Foucault’s essay “The Subject and Power” again provides a useful model for understanding the shepherd’s position in relation to his herd. While Foucault was primarily interested in how ecclesiastical institutions dominated Western concepts of ethics, he outlined the ways in which “pastoral power” diverged from sovereign power, thereby establishing “the state as a modern matrix of individualization or a new form of pastoral power.”716 In Foucault’s conception, this brand of governing differed from former ruling systems because the pastor’s primary objective is to tend to his flock. In the religious context, the pastor aims to “assure individual salvation in the next world,” but secularly, the pastoral figure not only commands and

716 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 783.
leads, but “must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock.” Krasner’s readiness to sacrifice her preexisting paintings and drawings for the creation and preservation of a new body of work loosely relates to Foucault’s model of sacrifice, wherein Krasner embodies the pastoral by willfully surrendering aspects of her art to allow the existence of a new body of work. Foucault’s essay further relates to Krasner’s collages because he points out how the herdsman not only provides for the flock as a whole but maintains an awareness of, and cares for, each individual member. As the shepherd turned collagist, Krasner tends to the individual collaged elements—rearranging, painting, cutting, and so forth—while creating a whole from the constituent parts.

New York School Pastorals

Although the bucolic tradition may seem historically distant from Krasner’s milieu, the idea of the pastoral surfaced quite frequently within the New York School. Beyond Greenberg’s essay, pastoral imagery and references recurred in the work of numerous writers and painters, most notably Willem de Kooning. After spending summers on Long Island throughout the 1950s, de Kooning followed the lead of Krasner and Pollock by relocating to this bucolic location in 1963. His new home and studio in Springs offered respite from the hustle and bustle of New York City as well as the demands placed on de Kooning as the new leader of Abstraction Expressionism following Pollock’s death in 1956. Rather than the political and social turmoil enveloping America during the 1960s, de Kooning’s new homestead offered trees, the ocean, and an abundance of natural light. A wall of glass thirty feet tall spanned one end of his new studio.

717 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 783.
and the artist gleefully described the effect this had on his work, “I wanted to get back to a feeling of light in painting… I wanted to get back in touch with nature… I was always very much interested in water.”

De Kooning commented that he felt “freer” away from the city, and he wanted to “look at the trees” surrounding his property. “Actually, I’ve fallen in love with nature,” he explained, “it would be very hard for me now to paint any other place but here.”

That de Kooning inhabited a real pastoral setting characterizes literary critic Peter Marinelli’s idea that, as opposed to the imagined classical pastoral, the modern variant was located in the “ordinary country landscape of the modern world” and provided modernity a taste of the simple life.

Enraptured by the light and sea of northeastern Long Island, de Kooning turned his focus away from women and urban scenes in the 1960s. Instead, he completed stunning landscapes like *Pastorale* (1963, fig. 4.39) and *Rose-Fingered Dawn at Louse Point* (1963, fig. 4.40). In *Pastorale*, he covered the large landscape in broad expanses of bright colors, with various yellows, light browns, and white providing a glimpse of a pale blue and greenish background. Although abstracted, this work bears none of the aggression critics located in his paintings of women. Instead, as one scholar has aptly suggested, “it was a farewell to New York, evoking so clearly a city-man’s joy in fresh air, sun, wide-open spaces and sea.”

The title further bears witness to the artist’s disposition in Long Island, and he clearly understood the historicity

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719 Ibid., 8.
suggested by such a title. “I feel myself more in tradition,” he acknowledged, “I have this point of reference that I have to do something about.”

This interest in tradition guided de Kooning on his first trip abroad since immigrating to the United States in 1926. He traveled to Venice in 1958 and viewed the works of Giorgione and Titian (fig. 4.41). The following year, he went to Rome, again studying classical nudes. The Venetian Renaissance and its prototypical pastorals of nudes in idyllic settings prompted de Kooning’s return to the female form. Woman, Sag Harbor (1964, fig. 4.42), for example, depicts a female nude outdoors in accordance with this tradition. Although working abstractly, the artist employed flesh tones to render the essential details of the female anatomy. De Kooning painted the figure’s smile in brightly keyed reds evocative of lipstick, while the surrounding zones of yellow and olive pigment assumed the lightness of his other Long Island landscapes. He created Woman, Sag Harbor on a wooden door, originally planning it as part of an unrealized triptych. Another contemporary canvas, Two Figures in a Landscape (1967, fig. 4.43), evokes the human form through fleshy pinks, while lush scenery and a bright sun are suggested by various greens and yellows. De Kooning’s Long Island, like Krasner’s, offered a pastoral setting and escape from modern life, and he adopted the appropriate subject matter to reflect the mood offered by such a locale.

In addition to de Kooning, Arshile Gorky gave several works titles referencing pastoral sensibilities. While de Kooning’s stylized women evoked the reclining nudes of Venetian Renaissance idylls, Gorky’s automatist landscapes represented idyllic gardens that reconnected his family and restored peace in the wake of the Armenian genocide of the early twentieth century. Gorky painted numerous portraits of his mother, mourning her death, which occurred

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723 De Kooning, quoted in Cooke, “De Kooning and the Pastoral,” 89.
while his family fled Turkish armies. His celebrated Garden in Sochi (ca. 1943, fig. 4.44) was based on memories of his father’s garden in Khorkom, a nostalgic longing for the innocence and simplicity of childhood. These psychological pastorals became explicit in his works Hugging Good Hope Road II (Pastoral) (1945, fig. 4.45) and Pastoral (1947). Abstract landscapes, these pastoral scenes feature loose biomorphic lines and abstracted treelike shapes. Light greens and yellows occupy Gorky’s compositions, invoking an air of freedom in technique analogous to bucolic freedom. That Gorky hoped to escape his tragic Armenian inheritance was further indicated by his adoption of the pseudonym “Arshile Gorky.” Born Vosdanink Adoian, Gorky changed his name and invented a Russian heritage, engaging in the role play and identity formation of the pastoral.724

While Gorky painted surreal gardens, many of the Abstract Expressionists engaged the sublime in monumental canvases, yet their invocation of this landscape tradition was not entirely predicated on a vast wilderness. While critics associated Pollock’s scale with the seemingly limitless American landscape, the artists themselves advocated the leisure and peaceful repose of the pastoral. In the December 1948 issue of Tiger’s Eye, a variety of artists and critics responded to the question, “What Is Sublime in Art?”725 For his contribution, Robert Motherwell wrote that “painting becomes Sublime when the artist transcends his personal anguish, when he projects in the midst of a shrieking world an expression of living and its end that is silent and ordered.”726


725 Nicholas Calas, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, John Stephan, and Kurt Seligmann contributed essays to the issue. See Tiger’s Eye 1, no. 6 (15 December 1948).

726 Motherwell claimed: “When all these things were published, Barney [Barnett Newman], who was not a generous man, embraced me, saying, ‘You’re the one who’s right.’ I remember it vividly since it was so unlike him. Today,
This definition of the sublime bears many similarities to the pastoral in its avoidance of chaos and embrace of an orderly life. As noted in chapter two, Motherwell explored metaphysical voids and order in his art, aspects that fused an awe-inspiring sublime with restraint and control, a pastoral dialectic in form and sensation.

Perhaps the silence and ordered sublime that Motherwell described referred to the art of Mark Rothko. Like the escapist release of the pastoral, Rothko did not want to confine his viewer within his compositions; rather he attempted to liberate form from the parameters of space. “In our inheritance we have space, a box in which things are going on. In my work there is no box; I do not work with space. There is a form without the box, and possibly a more convincing kind of form.”

Rothko’s unique canvas alignment, one that troubled conventional landscape and portrait formats, embraced pictorial tradition while rejecting spatial illusionism, thus achieving the unity of flatness that Clement Greenberg sought in his avant-garde pastoralism. Through the balance of symmetry and large expanses of uniform color, canvases like Number 10 (1950, fig. 4.46) embody Rothko’s declaration, with Newman and Adolph Gottlieb, that “we favor the simple expression of the complex thought. We are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth.”

Not only did Rothko’s art feature the metaphoric formalism espoused by Greenberg, but his assertion of simplicity starkly echoes the modesty and ease of the pastoral.


The use of the term pastoral for describing Rothko’s works becomes more appropriate when considering the artist’s knowledge of Classical art and literature. As a high school student, Rothko read Greek tragedy and mythology, subjects that informed the titles of such paintings as Antigone (1939-40, fig. 4.47). Rothko could quote Herodotus from memory, and his interest in antiquity led him abroad, where he visited the villas of Pompeii. Art historians have noted the connection between Rothko’s mature works and the murals of Boscoreale and Boscotrecase, indeed they bear a remarkable similarity in their vertical arrangement filled with “rectilinear panels of opaque color.” The artist himself understood these connections as he dubbed his paintings “facades,” stating that he painted “Greek temples” throughout his career. Rothko’s inspiration, Roman villas, has been linked with the pastoral for the escape and reverie they enabled, and while the atmosphere of Rothko’s art is more often described as one of silence rather than reverie, the spirituality of repose that Number 10 embodies connects it to pastoral traditions and Roman villas. Through large fields of unmodulated tones, Rothko alluded to Classical structures as well as the natural landscape, creating a pastoral release from the modern condition that critics commonly described in terms of relaxation.

Similarly, the work of Bradley Walker Tomlin offered respite in its naturalistic reverie and formalist aesthetics. After becoming associated with the New York School, his art dramatically shifted from post-Cubist requiems of World War II to nonrepresentational

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732 For the connection between the Roman villa and the pastoral, see Bergman, “Exploring the Grove: Pastoral Space on Roman Walls,” 21-48; Frazer, “The Roman Villa and the Pastoral Ideal,” 49-62.
evocations of botanic forms. Tomlin responded to the great loss of life caused by global conflict, noting that *To the Sea* (1942, fig. 4.48) was “painted during the period throughout which the toll of sinkings of Atlantic shipping had been particularly heavy, and I have endeavored to put down on canvas some of the thoughts which I had at the time.” Tomlin centered the grisaille canvas on an axial grid covered with various haunting shapes: a marble figurehead, a darkly colored wreath, the wing of a seagull or “graveyard angel,” swallows or bombers flying over buildings in the distance, and the backside of a classical torso with severed arm. All these forms reflect Tomlin’s elegiac mood in contemplating the effects of war. *Burial* (1943) continued this melancholic aura as a classical head wearing laurel wreath is juxtaposed with “canopic jars” and other abstract shapes.

But as Tomlin became involved with the Irascible group and created more purely abstract work, the disposition of his art lightened and its overt symbolism waned. Adolph Gottlieb and Tomlin began corresponding in 1941, and Tomlin frequented the venues of the New York School soon thereafter. During this time, Tomlin completed his “Petal Paintings,” large scale canvases that presented a close-up view of pointillist foliage. Monet’s *Water Lilies* were displayed at the artist’s 1950 retrospective, and many artists, including Tomlin, considered him an important source for Abstract Expressionist following this exhibit. Works like *Number 8* 

(Blossoms) (1952, fig. 4.49) contain lighter colors and less aggressive imagery than some of Tomlin’s earlier works. Here the artist has seemingly painted a repoussoir tree that blocks any indication of landscape in the distance. Rather than somber reflections of war, Tomlin focused on flowering trees and the tightly controlled application of bright colors. Many of Tomlin’s contemporaries noted the pastoral mood of these paintings, one of harmony and repose. One critic likened the “petal paintings” to Japanese cherry blossom trees, while another reflected how, “one sits back and watches their subtle contrapuntal rhythms, their shifting squares and bands of cool color, and gradually, as the paintings sink into the wall, one’s mind sinks in on itself.” Abstraction thus provided Tomlin a pastoral avenue through which to focus on the formal qualities of painting, as well as a means of escape from thoughts about the costly price of war.

The bucolic tradition also persisted in literature. For example, in the 1954 issue of *Folder*, John Ashbery published “A Pastoral,” an erotic poem filled with allusions to corrals and glades, herds and melodies. Frank O’Hara’s poetry also has been considered pastoral for its escapist mindset and ambiguous subjectivity. Timothy Gray has argued that, despite living and working far from the countryside, these New York School poets “promoted the idea of an urban pastoral, a cosmopolitan bohemian retreat from which they sought to resist the dictates of cold

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739 See Timothy Gray, “Review: Process and Plurality in New York’s Urban Pastoral,” *Contemporary Literature* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 367. Gray also suggested that, in the poetry of Gary Snyder and O’Hara, “the city (like the pastoral) is a place of escape, and that the pastoral (like the city) is a space wherein artificial role-playing reigns. To put it more succinctly, both the ‘urban’ and the ‘pastoral’ mark zones where subjectivity is always in play and hence subject to newly ambiguous possibilities that allow one to escape from deleterious proscriptions. The city is, in fact, one of the best sites for the pastoral, since it contains a wealth of offerings available for those who want to change their roles, abandon a fixed identity, or otherwise disguise themselves.” Gray, “Semiotic Shepherds,” 525. Jed Pearl also has written, “one of the finest passages in Frank O’Hara’s poetry is about the preparations for a pastoral getaway, albeit nothing more than the train ride out to Long Island for the weekend.” Jed Pearl, *New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005): 254.
war conformity while developing a literature in tune with the more progressive elements of European modernism.” Gray further notes how they drew from rustic encounters in formulating modern variants of the pastoral. Ashbery, O’Hara, and James Schuyler were either raised or lived on farms, and their “nostalgia for a rural past” informed much of their poetry.

Pastoral imagery and ideals recurred in theatrical performances in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s as well. Several of the Ballet Society’s productions at the Ziegfeld Theatre evoked pastoral naturalism, including Paul Bowles’ *Pastorela* (1941, performed January 13, 1947) and *The Seasons*, with music by John Cage, choreography by Merce Cunningham, and set/costume design by Isamu Noguchi (performed May 18, 1947). John Cage returned to the pastoral in 1951-52, writing *Two Pastorales* that featured stripped-down instrumentations to evoke simplicity and modesty. The first of Cage’s pastorals served as music for a dance by Merle Marsicano, *Idyll*, which he performed at the YMCA on Lexington Avenue and 92nd Street in November of 1951. Cage’s musical collages employed humble materials and required “less virtuosity from the performer,” embracing the simple life amidst the hectic city.

The pastoral mood of the New York School perhaps stemmed from the political climate pervasive in America following World War II. While America emerged victorious in the war and

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740 Gray has claimed that, “even in its simplest invocations, the urban pastoral subgenre suggests a complex reversal of ordinary lines of flight. In traditional pastoral, stressed-out city dwellers leave the city for rural climes, usually with the hope of recovering a peaceful sense of leisure (*otium*) and brotherhood destroyed by the encroachment of civilization. In contemporary urban pastoral, by contrast, the big city functions as a playground for rural folk who believe the simple life of the countryside to be a little too simple, and sometimes downright restrictive. Putting on the disguise crucial to the workings of pastoral plots, urban émigrés from the hinterlands thus mimic the shepherds who appear in traditional pastoral literature, playing the roles denied them back home in an attempt to realize their lyric gifts and locate their true selves.” Gray, “Process and Plurality in New York’s Urban Pastoral,” 363-67.


742 Jed Pearl has claimed that “Cunningham’s dance helped to define a new kind of American pastoral sophistication… an experiment, a look inward, a search for the self—a psychological pastoral.” Pearl, *New Art City*, 253.


successfully transitioned from a wartime economy into a consumer-based model, the postwar era was also marked by the anxiety and paranoia of the Cold War. From the emergence of atomic weaponry to the creation of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and repressive politics of McCarthyism, the 1950s was marked by fear and pessimism. Two members of the New York School, Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, commented that the Abstract Expressionists explored the art of non-Western and archaic cultures out of a need to reconnect with the primal forces that modern society lacked:

If we profess a kinship to the art of primitive men, it is because the feelings they expressed have a particular pertinence today. In times of violence, personal predilections for niceties of color and form seem irrelevant. All primitive expression reveals the constant awareness of powerful forces, the immediate presence of terror and fear, a recognition and acceptance of the brutality of the natural world as well as the eternal insecurity of life.

“Primitive” art thus served as a means of reestablishing a vital link with life, and as Gottlieb also explained, abstract art developed as a critical response to the human condition during the Cold War era.

Today when our aspirations have been reduced to a desperate attempt to escape from evil, and times are out of joint, our obsessive, subterranean and pictographic images are the expression of the neurosis which is our reality. To my mind certain so-called abstraction is no abstraction at all. On the contrary, it is the realism of our time.

Thus, the pastoral sensibility that pervaded the New York School can be understood as an attempt to locate peace and harmony while artists struggled to grasp the realities of the time. As

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Gottlieb suggested, abstraction afforded a pastoral retreat of sorts, one in which artists could withdraw from figuration while focusing on pictorial order. By disengaging from politics directly, these artists found solace in their compositions, and by celebrating nature, they connected to nature in a mood informed by the elegiac lyricism of Virgilian herdsmen.

From Modesty of Means to Sensual Experience: The Pastoral Collage

In his book Some Versions of Pastoral (1935), William Empson, a literary critic widely read among the New York School, described the “pastoral process” as “putting the complex into the simple.” The tranquil lifestyle of The Springs embodied Empson’s notion, a concept many critics have applied to further connect the pastoral to modernist art. Thomas Crow has questioned whether artistic genres, such as the pastoral, remained intact following modernism’s assault upon the hierarchy of subject matter. Like Greenberg, Crow has defined modern pastoralism through simplicity, claiming that the common and vernacular elements of the pastoral challenged

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the heroism of epic poetry. Thus, Crow has located the pastoral within the Cubism of Picasso and Braque because these artists integrated everyday objects with “high art.” Krasner and the Abstract Expressionists, on the other hand, failed to meet Crow’s criteria because of their heroic ambition and grand aspirations. Instead, he linked artists like Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Marcel Duchamp to the pastoral because of their efforts to incorporate childishness and popular culture into the parameters of the elite.751 However, the modesty of authorial presence that Crow attached to the pastoral was hardly a trope employed by Virgil’s shepherds as they contested the merits of their songs in idyllic pastures. For example, in Theocritus’s *Idylls*, Simichidas longs to attain the skill of the great poets, Asclepiades and Philetas, and in Virgil’s seventh Eclogue, Corydon vanquishes Thyrsis in an epic singing match.752 Ambition marked the pastoral from the very beginning, and Crow’s focus on genre overlooks the manner in which New York School artists like Lee Krasner engaged in literal, and metaphoric, pastoral processes.

Furthermore, the artists known as Abstract Expressionists did not entirely eschew modesty and humble means while working in collage. In fact, Harold Rosenberg’s primary criticism of the medium stemmed from its inherent simplicity. Considering collage “a decisive upheaval in [art] history” and an “adversary” within modern art, Rosenberg wrote:

> There is an element of mockery in collage: the put-together is like a painting, but without the effort of painting or the need to know how to paint. Its materials, besides being inexpensive, have the air of having been picked up by chance, so the collage seems to say to the spectator, “See how easy it is to make a work of art.”

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Although Krasner employed unique objects for her collages, favoring canvas and preexisting artworks over newspaper or other quotidian materials, her manner of execution conveyed the ease and simplicity that characterize many definitions of the pastoral. Rosenberg would have found Krasner’s use of scissors an example of the minimal effort required for collage, while Hobbs has associated Krasner the collagist with domestic craft, likening her frugality and thriftiness to quilting traditions. In an interview with Dorothy Seckler, Krasner acknowledged how collage offered a lighter approach to artistic practice. When asked about Blue Level and Desert Moon, Krasner explained that with these works she was “having fun.” Seckler replied, “You feel very free and easy,” to which Krasner confirmed, “Yes. Opened up.” Many of Krasner’s peers worked in collage because of the pleasure and freedom tendered by the medium. Robert Motherwell stated, “I do feel more joyful with collage, less austere. A form of play. Which painting, in general, is not.” Esteban Vicente also wrote that “the range of collage possibilities is unlimited…Painting can be heroic; collage, on the contrary, has to retain its original quality of intimacy…In collage I find a valuable serenity.” Vicente further likened the layering of collage materials to gardening, claiming that collage provided a new reality and the “highest level of satisfaction.” The language that Vicente, Motherwell, and Krasner employed while describing collage invoked many aspects of the pastoral: leisure, simplicity, and fun.

And though Greenberg hailed the “revolutionary” qualities of collage, namely in its assertion of

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755 Seckler, Interview with Lee Krasner, AAA, 33.
758 Ibid. Vicente wrote, “There is the white paper inviting me to unload my vision, my feelings, to find a new plastics reality. Like the gardening of the earth the surface gets richer and more sensuous; the limited area becomes intimate, luminous, an entity, and for moments it seems that the highest level of satisfaction will be attained.”
the picture plane’s inherent flatness, his pastoral vision favored artists who “conceived of pleasure… in luscious color, rich surfaces, [and] decoratively inflected design.”

Sensual experience and pleasurable response are often considered key remnants of the pastoral that continued into modernity. In questioning the future of pastoralism, Leo Marx has hypothesized that new versions of the pastoral will include “a preference… for the satisfactions of immediate, personal experience rather than for the triumphs of… ‘the aspiring mind.’”

Krasner’s collages, with their frayed burlap and brilliant colors, privileged tactile and optical sensations, embracing the materialism that Marx and Greenberg regarded as bucolic. This pastoral vision informed much of Krasner’s work, and her oppositional strategy, emphasis on repose, and evocations of nature established a mood akin to Virgilian shepherds. By emphasizing materiality, revision, and contrast, Krasner connected to rhetorical devices rooted in antiquity, yet the contingency and relativism of her collages were grounded securely within the modern. A medium based upon order and interrelatedness, collage served as a means for mapping Krasner’s alienation as an artist and wife. Ultimately, the act of arranging collage elements became a pastoral endeavor unto itself, Krasner’s pursuit of psychological and compositional order.

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761 Marx, “Does Pastoralism Have a Future?”, 223.
The opinionated Anne Ryan (fig. 5.1) scribbled down these thoughts about housekeeping in one of her journals: “housework = endless mechanical stupidities. At least one-fourth of one’s life is spent keeping dirt at a distance.”

That Ryan rejected the tedious drudgery of domesticity is hardly surprising since she embraced a life that was anything but conventional. Ryan bristled at the roles typically available to women at mid-century, establishing a successful career as an artist and writer. Known primarily for her prints and collages, Ryan had the distinction of holding four solo exhibitions at the Betty Parsons Gallery, the premier venue of Abstract Expressionism, during the early 1950s. Her small collages contained the handmade paper of Douglass Howell, tattered scraps of burlap and linen, and masonry-like “blocks” of parchment. Cognizant of the masculine bias dominating the art world of the 1950s, Ryan signed her works “A. Ryan,” omitting her first name to remain gender-neutral and avoid the stigma of the feminine. Yet critics labeled these collages “delicate” and “elegant,” as opposed to “strong” and “powerful,” gendered associations that precluded Ryan from attaining the privileged status of “action” painter. Her choice of medium further distanced Ryan from Abstract Expressionist tendencies with her collages appearing too precious and derivative of Cubism, and seeming retrograde in comparison to Pollock’s daring abstractions or Newman’s musings on the sublime.

Despite receiving the admiration of her New York School colleagues, Anne Ryan remains largely forgotten by historians of art. Much of this neglect stems from a failure to recognize the social relevance of Ryan’s art, with few scholars attempting to situate her collages

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762 Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, November 6, 1941. Anne Ryan Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
within a socio-political context. In fact, one of the more detailed studies on Ryan, written eight years ago, declared that the artist’s work was devoid of “social, political or philosophical message.” The scholarship that does exist on Ryan consists of a few short exhibition catalogues and biographical articles written by her friends and colleagues. Since no monograph in the proper sense has been written on Ryan, much of her legacy has been shaped by her daughter, Elizabeth McFadden, who published a brief biographical memoir of Ryan following her death in 1956. Despite the dearth of scholarship on Ryan, an extensive body of works and writings remains, affording an opportunity to revisit her work and position the artist within her milieu. The nature of her recycled compositions puts Ryan at odds with several artistic and social conventions of 1950s America, suggesting the political weight behind the acts of thrifting and collage.

Ryan began her career in the arts as a writer, publishing a volume of poetry in 1925 and several short stories in the early 1950s. Ryan also printed essays based on her travels to

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766 Elizabeth Eaton McFadden, “Anne Ryan,” The Saint Elizabeth Alumna (Spring 1965): 206; for a more expansive draft that informed the previous publication, see Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
Europe in the Catholic literary journal *Commonweal*, and after living abroad in Mallorca from 1931-33, she moved to Greenwich Village where she turned her attention to the visual arts. At the urging of friends and neighbors like Giorgio Cavallon, Tony Smith, and Hans Hofmann, Ryan began painting around 1937-38. In an early untitled drawing (*Abstract Drawing No. 1*, undated, fig. 5.2), the influence of these artists appears in Ryan’s automatist scribbling and loose application of pigment. Several geometric shapes, triangles, squares, and ovals, are set against an assortment of charcoal lines, evoking the naiveté many modernists sought in the art of children, “primitive” societies, and the mentally challenged. While some elements appear childlike in execution, particularly the suggestion of a schematic house comprised of yellow walls and triangular roof, a looser approach to drawing distinguishes this work from the brut art of Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier, and Paul Klee. Ryan completed this abstract sketch on handmade paper, demonstrating a preference for fine materials that would characterize her later collage work. In addition, the cheerful color selections and grain of the parchment generate a decorative scheme seemingly at odds with her nonsensical doodles and scribbles.

Ryan’s exposure to modernist tendencies resurfaced in the early *Still Life: Cubist Table Top* *Still-Life with Glass and Pitcher* (1942, fig. 5.3). In this painting of a table-top still-life, the traditional subject of many Cubist works, Ryan juxtaposed patterned placemats and napkins, setting pinstripes against polka dots and broader striped designs. Despite the influence of Cubism, Ryan’s painting exhibits few fractured forms and remains more legible than the analytic canvases of Picasso and Braque. More simplified than planar, a goblet and pitcher stands perched

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768 Windham, “Ryan and her Collages,” 77.
atop a rounded table, while the orthogonal lines of the surrounding wallpaper defines a polygonal rather than flattened space. A gold cross appears emblazoned across the pitcher, which, coupled with the goblet, suggests Ryan’s Catholic roots, grounding the composition in traditions beyond the history of art.

In 1941, she began making prints with Stanley William Hayter at his Atelier 17, a gathering place of the European and American avant-garde. After meeting Max Ernst, Andre Masson, Marc Chagall, and Jacques Lipchitz at Hayter’s studio, she further explored the ideas of automatism and chance. Her woodcuts, including *Orpheus* (1947, fig. 5.4), demonstrate the influence of Hayter, an artist known for his Surrealist theories and innovative printmaking techniques. Ryan worked with the printmaker throughout the 1940s, and he certainly influenced the spontaneous burin lines, loose inking techniques, and biomorphic forms of *Orpheus*. The mythical subject matter and automatist execution placed this work squarely within the artistic norm of the avant-garde, as many Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists embraced mythology and “primitive” societies as a means of tapping into archetypal experiences following World War II. *Figures in a Yellow Room* (1945-49, fig. 5.5), a woodcut, further illustrates Ryan’s exposure to the New York School, with her automatist lines and angled anthropomorphic forms recalling similar figures painted by William Baziotes and Adolph Gottlieb. Thus, Ryan’s aesthetic approach and subject matter aligned her with several trends pervasive throughout Abstract Expressionist circles.

However, after attending a Kurt Schwitters exhibition in 1948, Ryan abandoned print media and focused on collage until her death in 1954. Elizabeth McFadden recalled that her

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mother was so inspired by the Schwitters retrospective that she raced home and made her first collages that very day.

Mother went from one collage to another in a passion of delight. She knew instantly and completely that she had found her métier. And she was practically exalted. She had a great capacity for joy but I never saw her so consumed by it… We went home and before she put water on for supper, she was at her work table making collages. During the following weeks she visited the Fried Gallery a couple of times and we saw it together the day it closed, taking tea at Rumpelmayer’s on 58th Street. Of course, she put several cubes of hard sugar in her pocket: their wrappers showed up in collages.  

Ryan dedicated the remaining six years of her life to collage, creating hundreds of small works on paper. The early works are deeply indebted to Schwitters, while the later ones contained trademark Ryan motifs: handmade Howell papers, tattered scraps of burlap and linen, and masonry-like quality of joined “blocks” of collage elements. She gathered countless materials for her works, developing a repertoire of oval formats, Cubist grids, and allover patterning. Ryan employed handmade papers and scraps of textiles for her collages, selecting elements for their unique hue, shape, or texture. These constituents were typically worn and recycled, suggesting that Ryan valued even the most minute and threadbare material. McFadden recalled her mother appropriating old dish towels, believing that these elements of detritus could be transformed during the process of collage.  

Ryan’s works were greatly admired by her Abstract Expressionist peers, for Richard Pousette-Dart they possessed “the touch and the breath of the true beauty and poetry.”  

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770 Letter from Elizabeth McFadden to the Assistant Director of the Montclair Art Museum, Robert Koenig, 7 February 1979; repr. in Walker Art Center: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection (New York: Rizzoli; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1990): 447.
771 McFadden, “Anne Ryan,” 2.
772 Richard Pousette-Dart, undated letter to Miss McFadden, Anne Ryan Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Pousette-Dart wrote this letter to thank Elizabeth McFadden for bequeathing several of 271
Theodoros Stamos wrote that he coveted them but could never acquire one. Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Tony Smith suggested Ryan work in a larger format, believing that she possessed great potential. She assumed a prominent position within the New York School, exhibiting at Betty Parsons Gallery four times, while partaking in group exhibitions alongside Pollock, de Kooning, Krasner, Motherwell, and others at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Ninth Street Gallery. Despite her professional accolades and achievements, Ryan remains largely absent from studies of Abstract Expressionism. Ann Gibson has argued that many artists like Ryan were forgotten because they did not fit the standard of Abstract Expressionism: white, heterosexual, heroic, and universal.

In fact, Gibson is the only New York School scholar to discuss Ryan in more than a side note, while Irving Sandler, David Anfam, Michael Leja, Stephen Polcari and others fail to mention Anne Ryan. Curiously, artists like Joseph Cornell frequently appear in studies of Abstract Expressionism, suggesting the potential diversity of the New York School. However, the art of minorities and so-called secondary media, such as collage, has until recently gone unnoticed in Ryan’s collages to her friends following her death. Pousette-Dart wrote: “I was overwhelmed and deeply touched when Betty told me you had left a picture of Ann’s for me—what a lovely one it is and how very thoughtful and generous of you to do this. Needless to say I shall treasure it. As you must know, I liked your mother immensely and her work has the touch and the breath of the true beauty and poetry for me as well as for so many others.” Theodoros Stamos, letter to Mrs. McFadden, 9 May 1955, Anne Ryan Papers, Archives of American Art. Stamos also thanked Ryan’s daughter for her gift: “Today Betty Parsons gave me a package with one of your mother’s collages. God it’s beautiful! How can I thank you? Betty knew all these years how I admired them and couldn’t get one for myself, and now!!”

Elizabeth McFadden, unpublished biography of Anne Ryan, reproduced in Carter, “Material Witness,” 182. McFadden writes how Barnett Newman and Tony Smith visited her mother on a “mission of persuasion.” The encounter cited “Rothko’s appreciation of [Ryan’s] latest show and his respect for the work it entailed. The force of these factors had so impressed Rothko, in fact, that it led him to ponder her future in art…” Newman and Smith hoped she would work on a more “sublime” scale as they told her “it was Rothko’s considered opinion…that she should work in a larger format and that she should give up some of the variety in her in favor of an instantly recognizable style.”

Gibson, Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics.
histories of Abstract Expressionism. Not only does Ryan remain marginalized in the recent history of art, but the criticism on her written at mid-century, though positive, was highly gendered. Words such as “magical” and “elegant” described her work, pejorative connotations that relegated her art to the feminine and decorative. These terms also laid the groundwork for removing her from discourses on Abstract Expressionism, but a reconsideration of Anne Ryan within the contexts of her artistic contemporaries and postwar America grants a more complete understanding of her work in collage. In addition to the gendered biases of the art world, her work and career attest to the hierarchical positions of certain materials, subjectivities, and sensory experiences within the American scene.

Materials and Process in the Era of Abstract Expressionism

In many ways, Ryan’s omission from histories of Abstract Expressionism is understandable. After all, her intimate papiers collés seem unrelated to the large-scale, emotionally charged canvases of Pollock or de Kooning. Even their approach to materials diverged, as Pollock employed vast quantities of canvas and enamel paint for his enormous compositions while Ryan conserved anything, and everything, that could be used for her work. The huge rolls of canvas required by Pollock to complete his mural-sized abstractions dwarf Ryan’s intimate collages, which were often no larger than an average piece of paper. Unwilling to squander resources, Ryan harshly rebuked Barnett Newman for suggesting she work on a larger scale, instead she preferred the texture and color of her small works to Newman’s

776 Conrad Marca-Relli described Ryan’s work as “very delicate and very beautiful but they were again very small. The interest was closer to Schwitters I would think.” Conrad Marca-Relli, interview by Dorothy Seckler, 10 June 1965, Conrad Marca-Relli Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
“intellectual painting standards” as she called them. For her collages, Ryan selected objects bearing fine craftsmanship and historical legacies. She employed Japanese rice papers and parchments made by Douglass Howell for her work, often stressing the texture and pulp of these items by leaving their surfaces unpainted and exposed. Ryan considered Howell’s papers “works of art in themselves” because he studied Renaissance techniques of papermaking in Florence, and replicated these painstaking processes by hand. Pollock, on the other hand, became known for the opposite, utilizing consumer house paints and industrial enamels for his drip paintings. While Pollock’s house paints could be purchased relatively inexpensively, the artists associated with Abstract Expressionism believed these materials would stand the test of time. James Coddington, conservator for the Museum of Modern Art, has suggested that “the understanding at the time with those paints was that they were indeed very durable… many of these artists went to nitrocellulose and other enamel paints—because they were convinced that the paints were in fact durable. They want their works to last.” Ryan probably hoped her works would maintain their permanence as well, but she also appropriated materials with the potential for, or symbolic of, decay. For example, in Number 6: Rumpelmayer (ca. 1948, fig. 5.6) and Number 495 (1951, 777 Anne Ryan to Betty Parsons, Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
778 Donald Windham remembered that “Howell, who then lived in the Village, had studied in Florence, learning the 15th- and 16th-century Italian methods of making fine papers. His soft, pebblegrained sheets, she said, were works of art in themselves. She furnished him with scraps of old white linen napkins and colored linen cloths, which he used in his work, and she delighted in describing the ‘miracle’ that took place in his attic and basement where he made the papers in what she called ‘washing machines.’” Windham, “Anne Ryan and her Collages,” 78. Howell would eventually move to Levittown, New York, ironically replicating centuries’ old techniques in mass-produced housing. Cotter writes that: “Because the paper was expensive, Ryan stretched what she bought by cutting it up and distributing it among several collages, using cheaper material for her supports (photographic paper donated by a friend in the case of the dark-ground collages). She also occasionally got discounts by supplying Howell with cotton and linen scraps. In the last few years of her life, when she was selling her work through Betty Parsons, she could afford the luxury of using whole sheets of Howell paper as grounds for the collages.” Cotter, note 8.
780 James Coddington, as interviewed by Anna Hammond, “Jackson Pollock: ‘No Chaos, Damn It,’” in http://www.moma.org/collection/conservation/pollock/interview1.html. This interview was conducted before Coddington’s essay of the same name was published to relay his findings publicly.
fig. 5.7), she employed sugar packets and stained, weathered fabrics for her *papiers collés*. Crumpled papers and thready fabrics appear throughout her collages, suggesting a contingency and impermanence distant from the vast abstractions of Pollock or Newman. Ryan treasured every possible scrap of Howell’s expensive papers, and her ethos of reconstitution recalls war- and depression-era rationing, marking a divergence from her peers who employed vast quantities of materials to produce their heroic canvases. Furthermore, Ryan’s thrifty bricolage differed from artists like Pollock, who purchased his art supplies from the local hardware store or other industrial manufacturers.  

The materials and subject matter of her work, ranging from secondhand lace and silk to tweed and expensive parchment, elevated craft to the realm of fine art, sources that distinguish Ryan from other Abstract Expressionists experimenting with collage. For example, de Kooning, Motherwell, and Vicente considered the technique an extension of painting, with collage another means for exploring painterly gestures. As noted in chapter three, Vicente and Motherwell vied for recognition as innovators of the “action collage,” a competition rooted in Harold Rosenberg’s celebration of artistic process. Motherwell declared his “contribution to the art of collage…the torn rather than the sharp or cut-out edge,” espousing the merits of violent interactions with the medium.  

Elaine de Kooning made similar claims for Vicente, describing his pieced-together compositions as “uncharacteristically fluid and animated,” whereas conventional collages “are in most cases *stills.*” Many of Ryan’s *papiers collés* exhibit similar indexical markings, with rough paper edges, irregular tears, and crumpled forms suggesting a dynamic interaction with materials. However, her aesthetic approach diverged from her peers, particularly as these

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781 Pollock reportedly used sailboat canvas for his work since it was cheaper and he could buy large expanses and quantities of the canvas, thus enabling him to work on the scale he preferred.
783 De Kooning, “Vicente Paints a Collage,” 38. Emphasis original to the article.
passages of gestural automatism were arranged within carefully constructed grids and oval shapes.

In *Collage 141* (1951, fig. 5.8), for example, Ryan employed two cutouts of black paper with light yellow paint dripped on them. Unlike Pollock’s energetic splatters, these sections seem to be casual accidents, the residue of a few drops of pigment spilled over the side of a paint can. More regular in their circular shape than Pollock’s threaded webs, these drops of paint remained small components of a larger, controlled composition. Ryan subdued any potential for pictorial dissonance by framing her drips and spills within a gridded format. This geometric regularity was achieved in the axial positioning of the collage elements; few diagonals challenge the organizational structure while the oval shape framing her collage further suppressed the gestural. A similar approach is seen in the rectangular *Collage 283* (1952, fig. 5.9). Composed of rectilinear components, three passages of bright pink and black painterly gestures appear among vivid red and orange paper and fabric. In these three sections, traces of brushwork suggest painterly movement through their directional thrust and fluid appearance. Yet again, axial structures partition off painterly citations, as Ryan acknowledges the act of painting but contains segments of single hues. Unlike Pollock’s energetic labyrinths of splashed paint, *Collage 141* and *Collage 283* remained ordered and controlled.\(^7\) Ryan’s attempts to reign in these painterly gestures might be considered a response to Pollock’s work as well as the critical responses upholding it. In a review of a 1949 exhibition, “Artist: Man and Wife,” at the Sidney Janis

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\(^7\)Despite the popular mythology surrounding Pollock and his painting style, many critics and art historians have located compositional order and balance within his allover canvases. Clement Greenberg recalled that “his execution was often very careful and deliberate…Like so many other things about him, the unconventionality of his procedure has been exaggerated.” Clement Greenberg, “The Jackson Pollock Market Soars,” *The New York Times Magazine* (16 April 1971); repr. in O’Brien, ed., *Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, 112. In Greenberg’s estimation, what distinguished Pollock from Motherwell and Smith was “his ability to create a genuinely violent and extravagant art without losing stylistic control.” Clement Greenberg, “Review of Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists, Jacques Lipchitz, and Jackson Pollock,” *The Nation* (13 April 1946); repr. in O’Brien *Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, 75.
Gallery, *Art News* reported: “There is also a tendency among some of these wives to ‘tidy up’ their husbands’ styles. Lee Krasner (Mrs. Jackson Pollock) takes her husband’s paints and enamels and changes his unrestrained, sweeping lines into neat little squares and triangles.”

By fragmenting and recontextualizing paint drippings and energetic brushwork evocative of Pollock and de Kooning, Ryan potentially rewrote this prejudice. Hardly content to sanitize these “action” painters, she reinterpreted the gestural through acts of cutting, framing, and appropriation.

Ryan’s art is not entirely devoid of automatism; however, her approach to chance operations remained modeled on spontaneity rather than gestural violence. In *Number 25* (undated, ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.10), a variety of charcoal and gouache markings appear beneath a layer of translucent fibers. Dark crayon lines intersect near the center of the composition, and though obscured by several pasted fabrics, it is possible to trace these lines through the left portion of the collage. Several red brush marks dominate the crisscrossed charcoal drawing, as the impasto of the reddish-pink hues renders the brushstrokes visible. A third passage of painterly activity appears in the lowest segment of the work, an area marked by Ryan’s black watercolor doodling. The application of the gouache thins out in areas, while other parts of the abstraction are painted over in shades of rose. Several black dots were blotted onto the paper as well, and *Number 25* appears atypical of Ryan’s œuvre because of the number of painterly gestures she included in the collage. Several papers and fabric swatches were pasted atop her drawings, yet despite these automatist devices, her work never verges on the violent or chaotic. It was these qualities that led critics to frame her work within gendered language, and the

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appearance of restraint and control were invariably considered domesticated and feminized aspects of Abstract Expressionism at mid-century.

Other collagists within the New York School applied automatism and aleatory procedures for their works, and many of them sought an energy rooted in destructive impulses. As discussed above, Motherwell embraced torn paper, and he titled a work after this process, The Tearingness of Collaging (1957, fig. 2.17). Rough edges of ripped parchment accompany several abstract scribbles, and Motherwell also excised the top layer of a piece of cardboard, laying bare its corrugated construction. By stripping away as well as building up, this work recalls décollage in its shredded layers of material. Ryan shied away from such demonstrative gesturality, avoiding the aesthetics of violence that many critics ascribed to Abstract Expressionism. In fact, she initially declined to submit a manuscript to Folder magazine because she felt her work was unrelated to that of her peers. A letter from Daisy Foldan, Folder’s editor, relayed Ryan’s sentiments on the matter: “Grace Hartigan has told us that your reaction to FOLDER indicated that you thought much of the work was very violent and that therefore, your own would not be in keeping with the general tone.” Folder had published poetry by John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, and Kenneth Koch, and reproduced prints by Grace Hartigan and Alfred Leslie. Ryan changed her mind and published a story titled “She was Divorced” in the literary journal in 1954, but her initial reluctance stemmed from an unwillingness to have her writings or collage appear out of context. She considered her abstractions rooted in the spontaneity of automatism, and despite her appropriation of soiled and discarded objects, she made it clear that her work was far removed from the violence and intensity of “action painting.”

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786 Clement Greenberg, however, wrote that: “In concept Motherwell is on the side of violence, disquiet—but his temperament seems to lack the force and sensuousness to carry the concept.” Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions,” 54.
In a few of her collages, notably *Number 329* (undated, fig. 5.11), Ryan eschewed the regularity of construction that defines much of her oeuvre. Although she favored an axiomatic format and rectilinear shapes, several biomorphic shapes and irregular lines distinguish *Number 329*. On the right side of the composition, Ryan set a large black cutout atop an ochre form, with their shared hourglass contours establishing a dynamic of concavity and projection analogous to the severity of their color contrasts. These curvilinear shapes recall the biomorphic forms Ryan employed in her prints, particularly *Figures in a Yellow Room* (1945-49). In this woodcut, the color palette of yellow, rose, and white, coupled with the shadowed effect of placing black masses in relation to white amorphous figures, starkly echoes *Number 329*. In the collage, however, Ryan dispensed of horizon lines and instead pasted forms in a vertical configuration suggesting aerial suspension. These long, floating forms are attenuated, replicating the stripes that appear as a pattern in the fabric on the left side of the composition.

Ryan typically valued the integrity of the various materials with which she worked, and rarely allowed indexical brushwork to enter her compositions. Rather than over-painting the surface of her collages, Ryan let her elements’ hues remain, treating each scrap of paper as a found object. Effects of color and surface guided her selections, and Ryan’s compositional choices included the interplay of texture. For example, *Number 514, Blue Collage* (1954, fig. 5.12) emphasizes touch by juxtaposing the surface of blue paper with a poem she wrote about the medium itself. Invoking optical, tactile, and sonic sensations, “Blue Collage” urges the viewer/reader to “touch, see, hear / This edge of blue, / This turn of color, / Blue not captured by the eyes / But felt…” Claudine Armand has appropriately described this intertwining of the “linguistic and the iconographic” as creating a “*mise en abîme* of pictorial language,” wherein
the roughhewn edges and hues of the collage are simultaneously described and represented.  

Ann Gibson has suggested that with such devices, Ryan “elevated touch to the level of privilege accorded by critics like Clement Greenberg only to opticality.” Indeed, Ryan’s daughter recalled that “when something in the house got old, acquired by wear a ‘feel,’ and to the usual person was ready for the trash can, we would say, ‘Now it’s getting to the collage stage.’”

The tactile properties and surface realism of collage have led many critics to debate the properties of the medium and its ramifications for visual art. Louis Aragon, a member of both Dada and Surrealism, wrote an essay on the materialism of collage for a major retrospective held at the Galerie Goemans in Paris in 1930. This essay, “Challenge to Painting,” raised many questions about the future of painting after collage purportedly obliterated representation. Aragon suggested that Duchamp’s defacement of the Mona Lisa, as well as Francis Picabia’s mechanistic portraits, emerged from the appropriative strategies of collage and served to deemphasize artistic technique and skill. He believed that, the ideals of collage became so imprinted on artists’ psyches that, “every author of collages, without exception, also paints paintings which are only reproductions of discoveries made with scissors and paste.” Aragon distinguished between two types of collagists, those employing the collaged element in lieu of representation because of its form or appearance, and those utilizing an object because of its material. As such, Aragon found collage to be leading artists beyond painting into a realm in which the base materials symbolize and represent a material reality of existence. What distinguishes Aragon’s view of collage from other Surrealist thinkers, most notably André

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788 Armand, Anne Ryan: Collages, 59.
Breton, is that this relationship serves to fuse art with the corporeal rather than the unreal or unconscious.\textsuperscript{792} Aragon located this preference for the tactile and quotidian in Picasso’s work, particularly because he played the role of bricoleur. As Aragon recalled:

He had a crisis, two years ago, a real collage crisis: I heard him complain then, because all the people who came to visit him and saw him bring alive old bits of net and cardboard, threads and corrugated iron, rags gathered from the rubbish, thought to do him a favor and brought him remnants of magnificent materials to make into paintings. He didn’t want them, he wanted the real offal of human life, something poor, dirty, despised.\textsuperscript{793}

Picasso did not want to transform detritus into aestheticized objects, nor did he hope to employ precious materials for his art. Instead, according to Aragon, he sought connection to the low, unvalued, and discarded.

The relationship between art and commodity, which features so prominently in collage, has interested critics and gallerists like John Bernard Myers, who have questioned the directional current that leads materials from high to low and vice versa. In 1951, he organized an exhibition, “Four Hundred Years of Lace,” for the Tibor de Nagy Gallery on the basis of that very question. He recalled:

In early 1950 while browsing in George Wittenborn’s Fifty-Seventh Street bookstore I came across an extended essay by Henri Focillon presenting a theory of forms in art. It caused me to wonder if such forms began as folk expressions among the lower classes, and if they then move upward to the aristocracy and the privileged classes? Or was it the other way around? Does, for instance, a simple

\textsuperscript{792} Claudia Mesch applied the theories of Aragon and Walter Benjamin in analyzing Wolf Vostell’s décollage performances in the late 1950s and 1960s. Mesch argued that a theological conversion or transcendence was located within collage practices by Aragon and Benjamin, a theologically based redemption rooted in the aesthetics of destruction and detritus. In Vostell’s case, Mesch argues that the mnemonic emphasis of his dérives were primarily commemorative rather than transformative. Claudia Mesch, “Vostell’s Ruins: Dé-Collage and the Mnemotechnic Space of the Postwar City,” \textit{Art History} 23, no. 1 (March 2000): 88-115.

\textsuperscript{793} Aragon, “Challenge to Painting,” 49.
Scottish reel eventually become a formal saraband in the Spanish court? I began to wonder where designs originate, how aesthetic forms evolve. 

In the show, Myers questioned the distinction between value and craft, exhibiting expensive lace alongside a sign that instructed visitors to “PLEASE TOUCH.” The craftsmanship of these objects impressed many, including Jackson Pollock. Myers noted with great pride how “Jackson Pollock came twice and took great pleasure in the notion of art anonyme; the rhythms of swirl and crosshatch, even the highly conventionalized images of French eighteenth-century lace, with its peacocks, pheasants, roses, waterfalls, grottoes, pagodas, ruins and costumed personages, delighted him.”

Objects were hung from the ceiling and walls of the gallery in “cascades” by Alfred Leslie, and some suggested that lace makers look to Pollock for inspiration for patterns. While sales of the show lagged, Myers recalled that artisanal traditions could be “vindicated” through such exhibitions, indicating the distinction between fine art and the utilitarian decorative arts, but optimistic that the abstract beauty of such materials would be appreciated.

Myers was close with Ryan, and considering their friendship, she probably attended the lace exhibition, perhaps accounting for her similar investigation into commodity and value through collage. Ryan’s interest in fabrics and textiles certainly would have been piqued by the show, and the historical legacies of the show’s objects recall her embrace of thrift stores and handmade papers.

This focus upon the haptic distanced Ryan from her New York School brethren because Barnett Newman believed that “when you got involved with real materials, like thick paint, velvet, sandpaper, flesh, you got blinded with a desire to exist within the reality of physical sensations; rather than evoking the sublime, you got involved with beauty. You got

795 Myers, Tracking the Marvelous, 131.
796 Ibid., 129-132.
Ryan recognized that her interest in materiality challenged the philosophies of Newman and others. She wrote to Betty Parsons, “I found out last evening that the painting standards of Mr. Newman are only intellectual which make them intolerant of mine. The pleasure of texture in color, plus simplicity and delicacy, are in my painting as well as in the collage and I was foolish to expect a different reaction than I got.” While many of Ryan’s peers, including Newman, described their works in terms of aesthetic philosophies, for example notions of the sublime and Existentialism, the critical discourse surrounding Abstract Expressionism focused on the formal properties of the work of art. Clement Greenberg developed a strain of formalism predicated upon artistic purity and opticality, espousing the virtues of two-dimensionality and arguing that pictorial flatness defines the medium of painting. Ryan’s emphasis on physical experiences beyond the optical, namely touch, positioned her outside the norms promoted by the influential critic of her day, thereby framing her work within less exalted values while placing her at odds with her colleagues.

The discrepancy in scale between the Abstract Expressionist canvas and Ryan’s collages further pushed Ryan to the periphery, yet her works were no less powerful in their evocation of place. Critics have failed to connect Ryan’s compositions to the geography of urban life despite their textual clues. In Number 495 (1951), the words “New York City” and “Paris” appear, metropolises suggested by the faded stamps and eroded typeface appearing next to crumpled and torn paper. This conflation of the urban with detritus recurs throughout Ryan’s work, and though hardly explicit in politicizing such a connection, the collage evokes an urban experience predicated upon time lapse and decay. Her writings often indicate a reverence for the simple life;

798 Anne Ryan to Betty Parsons, Anne Ryan Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
799 See Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”; Greenberg” Towards a Newer Laocooon.”
Ryan’s daughter wrote that the artist’s “favorite places in the world were New York where she could hear the hum of traffic and a country hamlet in Majorca, Spain, where the solemn movement of the centuries sounded through the silence.”

In an essay written about a small town in Mallorca, Ryan suggested that life was better away from the city, noting how the inhabitants are “content, life is much easier here, much simpler, more leisured.” Many of Ryan’s works possess the harmony and oppositions that William Empson and David Halperin would locate within the pastoral tradition, and the geometric simplicity and subdued palette of collages like *Number 524* (1951, fig. 5.13) certainly embody restraint and repose.

Simultaneously embracing and rejecting the city and its matter, Ryan revealed the complexities of the collage medium because its manner of composition often contradicted its materials. Ryan set the Cubist grid, a device denoting an underlying system of order and control, against remnants of disorder such as secondhand fabric and other bits of waste.

Ryan developed her use of recycled materials for her collages in part out of admiration for Kurt Schwitters (fig. 5.14). As we have seen, she first began working in the medium because she had seen his retrospective at the Rose Fried Gallery in January of 1948. Schwitters died just as the show opened, rendering it all the more relevant. Ryan revisited the exhibition several times, and many formal congruities link the two artists. Schwitters employed elements of detritus for his art, dubbing his creations “*Merz*” to describe his “new manner of working from the principle of using any material.”

These materials included newspapers, cork, leather, metal, coins, cigarettes, and so forth. The designation Schwitters bestowed upon his collages, “*merz,*”

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800 McFadden, “Anne Ryan,” 3.
evoked various terms pertaining to the body as well as commerce, with “kommerz” (commerce), “Schmerz” (pain), and “merde” (shit) all deriving from or mimicking the phonetic construction of “merz.” Art historians have considered his work within two contexts: “between bodily waste and the detritus of a new exchange economy and media culture.” Rather than employing collaged elements to contest pictorial structure and illusionism, Schwitters mined remnants of consumerism as well as scatological remains of human activity, going so far as to appropriate hair, fingernails, and a used brassiere for his infamous Merzbau, an architectural collage Schwitters created in the 1920s.

Like Schwitters, Ryan salvaged materials for her work. Shoe boxes crammed with remnants of weathered cloth and paper filled Ryan’s workspace, and her art reclaimed and reused debris that was typically discarded. But the refuse Ryan incorporated into her collages was very different than Schwitters’ Merz or the junk assemblages of Robert Rauschenberg and Bruce Conner. John Ashbery noted that Ryan’s work “does seem a kind of anticipation of the interest in junk and matière of the mid-‘50s,” but he also acknowledged that her supplies “appear to be the disjecta membra of a genteel New York lady’s wastebasket.” Ryan certainly predicted strategies of appropriation that would be adopted by Rauschenberg and Conner, but her scraps of fine paper suggested quite different experiences than Rauschenberg’s soiled mattress, Conner’s used nylons, or Schwitters’ discarded Merz. Rather than garbage, Ryan’s collage materials evoked the remains of a cultured and sophisticated world. In Number 79 (1951, fig. 5.15), the Italian words “palazzo,” “teatro,” and “piazza” appear alongside crumpled papers,

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suggesting architectural achievement as well as foreign travel. Likewise, *Number 6: Rumpelmayer* (1948) chronicles bourgeois leisure, telling the story of an afternoon tea Ryan enjoyed with her daughter at the elegant Rumpelmayer café in the St. Moritz Hotel. Ryan incorporated sugar wrappers and napkins from that outing into her collage, leaving the words “coffee,” “The St. Moritz,” and “Rumpelmayer” visible. These mementos further signify the topography of New York because the address listed for the St. Moritz, Central Park South, indicated its prominent location.

Additionally, language plays a crucial role in the work of Ryan. Although she usually eschewed the word play and double entendre of Surrealist and Dada collage, Ryan still allowed remnants of written language to enter her art. Oddly, the poet did not typically title her works, opting instead for the universal and ambiguous numbered labeling system that characterized much of Abstract Expressionism. But the words “coffee,” “The St. Moritz,” “counter,” and “Rumpelmayer” of *Number 6: Rumpelmayer* are not simply urban detritus; rather they symbolize the geography of New York City through the appearance of its address, 50 Central Park South, and references to coffee shops. Likewise, this work maintains an autobiographical component, as Ryan took these wrappers from the St. Moritz after sharing an afternoon tea with her daughter. Her use of text not only signaled specific locations, it also represented auditory language. Armand has observed that “acoustic qualities” emerge from *Number 6: Rumpelmayer*, since “we also hear ‘rumple,’ a word particularly appropriate to numerous collages in which deliberately crumpled paper is used for textural effect.”

The recurring postmarked papers and stamps in Ryan’s collages often refer to specific locales, most notably New York City and Paris. In addition to *Number 495, Number 212* (ca. 1949–50),

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806 Elizabeth McFadden to Robert Koenig, 10 February 1979, Anne Ryan Papers, Archives of American Art.
1948-54, fig. 5.16) and Number 237 (ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.17) each contain printed postal marks. In
Number 212, the entirety of a three cent U.S. Postage stamp appears with the words “PAID” and
“PR METER 59466” appearing in the upper right corner of the composition. Ryan has cropped
around the perforation on two sides, leaving only a faint and printed trace of the familiar edging
that often signifies stamps. The placement of the stamp in the upper right corner replicates that of
functional postage; however, the mark is rotated ninety degrees on its side to avoid any
confusion that this small collage is shippable. Towards the center of the composition, the words
“NEW YORK 14” remain visible despite their close cropping, and their location in the papier
collé similarly imitates the conventional address zone of letters and correspondence. Otherwise, a
multitude of blue and pink papers and fabrics distracts viewers from the postcard-like format of
the work, and no return address establishes the origins of the sender. In Number 237, Ryan has
incorporated a fragment of a mailed envelope, complete with blue stamp and inked postmarking
that reveals the date of 15 January 1949. She has omitted addresses for the recipient or sender,
allowing viewers to piece together only the locale of the post office. The collage itself is rather
spare, with Ryan employing only a few rectilinear paper cutouts, some of which feature
unreadable typeface fragments, as well as some string and a swatch of fabric. A small tack is
visible towards the top right of the composition, as is a small piece of adhesive tape, rare
acknowledgements of Ryan’s assembled processes. This work also remains an anomaly in that
she numbered the work directly on the front of the composition. While she signed virtually every
collage she made, Ryan scarcely titled her works directly on the face of the image. By featuring
stamps, these three collages establish specific geographic locations while suggesting
communication, exchange, and transit.
Ryan’s word play evokes not only location but sometimes color as well. In *Collage 706: Red Collage No. III* (1954, fig. 5.18), Ryan worked with a cardboard box stenciled *Sunkist* for the orange producer. She then covered it with varying hues of orange and red, allowing the consumer name to suggest its product, and in the process, the color orange. These examples are rare because Ryan typically used paper and fabrics that bore no lettering, but her inclusion of textual elements further distinguishes her from her Abstract Expressionist peers. While the properties of the collage medium certainly account for this difference, Ryan did approach language distinctively. As noted above, Ryan printed a poem atop one of her *papiers collés* in *Number 514, Blue Collage*, and despite obscuring and fragmenting typographic captions, she often included remnants large enough to render them legible. These collages approach the written language far differently from her peers. For example, Bradley Walker Tomlin’s and Adolph Gottlieb’s works have been linked with pictographs, with their schematic abstractions akin to prehistoric forms of representation and language. Likewise, Lee Krasner’s “Little Images” have been described in terms of Hebrew tradition, her tightly composed calligraphic markings inspired by her Jewish upbringing. Robert Motherwell frequently painted French words and expressions across his compositions, while Jackson Pollock’s drips and splatters have been likened to preliterate doodling and underdeveloped syntax. The clarity of Ryan’s typeface and clever word play diverges from these abstracted and primal forms of language. Ryan’s constructions certainly accommodated the linguistic, juxtaposing verbal clues with paper cutouts to evoke time and place. Her use of language is one of many elements that differentiate her work from prototypical Abstract Expressionism. In an era that privileged gesturality,


crudeness, and heroic scale, Ryan sought a sophisticated aesthetic rooted in experience and autobiography. Hers was a conscious turn towards historical materials and processes, and she valued the handmade and discarded, resisting the trends that valorized her peers and canonized their work.

**Femmage and the Existential Subjectivity**

The critical response that removed Ryan from discussions of Abstract Expressionism was largely rooted in the gendering of her work. Critics and art historians have lumped her materials, aesthetics, and even temperament into stereotypes of women, and in many ways this subjectivity clashed with the machismo permeating the New York School. However, Ryan consciously rejected the efforts of her Abstract Expressionist peers to push her art towards the avant-garde mainstream. Rather than developing a “signature” style or expanding the format of her work, she remained comfortable with *papier collé*. Her refusal to yield to her contemporaries is perhaps not surprising considering that she maintained progressive attitudes toward women’s rights. In 1923, she legally separated from her husband, a bold move by an Irish Catholic during an era in which divorce was uncommon.810 The female heroine became the focus of her short stories, and though often tragic, Ryan’s women remained independent despite social constraints and pressures. Such individualism typified Ryan herself, and she possessed the confidence to reject

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810 Ryan’s divorce from her husband resulted from his mental decline. The two were separated in 1923 as he was institutionalized for psychological problems. A letter from the New Jersey State Hospital indicated his condition, noting that: “he continues to be very delusional with many ideas of persecution directed toward various members of the family. He also complains of hearing imaginary voices which call him various bad names and accuse him of immoral acts. He is very quiet and cooperative to care. Mr. McFadden will probably have to remain in this institution for some time in the future.” Letter from Marcus A. Curry, M.D. to Anne Ryan McFadden, 20 September 1939. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
Tony Smith and Barnett Newman’s suggestions for her art.\(^{811}\) She typically signed her collages “A. Ryan” to remain gender-neutral and avoid the stigma of the feminine, while her pieced-together compositions brought together histories of quilting and “women’s work” with the Cubist collage of high modernism. Ryan practiced “femmage” nearly thirty years before Miriam Schapiro coined the term to reclaim the medium of collage for women. Ryan’s determination to succeed in the male-dominated New York art world inspired generations of female artists. Joan Mitchell remembered that her “great hope was to be, if I worked very hard, an Ann [sic] Ryan. Why? Look—she was a lady painter I admired. How many are there? I mean, women couldn’t paint—and women didn’t paint.”\(^{812}\) In his recent survey of collage, Brandon Taylor has credited Ryan with influencing Lee Krasner’s decision to work in collage, noting that Krasner adopted the medium and used Ryan’s trademark Howell papers only after seeing her 1951 show at the Betty Parsons Gallery.\(^{813}\)

In an era dominated by masculine sensibilities, Ryan projected a strong model of feminist artistic achievement. While Ryan did not employ her art and writing to proselytize younger colleagues like Mitchell or Krasner, the writings of her contemporary Simone de Beauvoir provide a useful lens through which to consider Ryan’s emergent feminism. Beauvoir published her pioneering book, *The Second Sex*, in 1949, a work that helps clarify Ryan’s subjectivity and critical approach to gender.\(^{814}\) This essay claimed that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a

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\(^{811}\) Tony Smith and Barnett Newman visited Anne Ryan’s studio “to suggest a course of action for her future. It was Rothko’s considered opinion, Tony said, that she should work in a larger format and that she should give up some of the variety in her work in favor of an instantly recognizable style. But Tony got no further. Speaking to him in a voice louder and sharper than he had ever heard her use, she demanded, ‘Just who do you think you are?’” McFadden, unpublished biography of Anne Ryan, reproduced in Cotter, 182.


\(^{814}\) *The Second Sex* was first published in France in 1949. The first English edition appeared in 1953.
woman,” an idea connecting socialization to the fashioning of identity.\footnote{Simone de Beauvoir, \textit{The Second Sex}, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989): 267.} She suggested that women played the role of “Other,” the counterpart to the essential (i.e. the male), in society. To overcome the oppression that resulted from this paradigm, Beauvoir maintained that women needed to construct a culture of their own, achieving the economic independence and intellectual freedom espoused decades earlier by Virginia Woolf. One method of achieving this goal was to embrace autobiography, thereby documenting the story of women, \textit{by} women and \textit{for} women. Beauvoir herself pursued this endeavor, writing several volumes of her experiences in which she reclaimed female subjectivity through her use of first-person pronouns. Rooted in past experience, autobiography incorporates “everyday” events into its fabric, a method analogous to Ryan’s collages, wherein the artist reformulated common objects from her personal, daily experiences into her compositions. Whereas authors like Beauvoir often chronicled common experiences in fashioning the memoir, collagists like Ryan appropriated quotidian objects for their compositions. The mnemonic value of certain materials or experiences constitutes a great deal of the signifying potency of autobiography because the personalized subjectivity reflects upon the past.

Ryan also paralleled Beauvoir’s model by adopting autobiography in many of her stories and poems. In “She was Divorced,” a story about a divorced woman in her fifties renting her house to start life anew, Ryan drew heavily from her own life; she also separated from her husband and began working in collage in her fifties.\footnote{Anne Ryan, “She Was Divorced,” \textit{Folder 1}, no. 2 (1954): unpaginated.} One cannot help but consider this story within the context of her life, for Ryan wrote:

\begin{quote}
She was divorced. The bitterness, the dim expectancy that he might return, the strange want of him had passed. Months had passed. When she woke now the disgust of life, the uselessness, the great fear she felt lessened and she grew
\end{quote}
calmer… She must endure it, put up with it, and struggle into some kind of quiet. She had no interest left, no children, no youth, only the deep hidden prison of her mind to wander in.817

Nearly confessional, the narrative includes the divorcée packing up her Victorian house as she relocates to a city. Ryan described the process almost like the creation of a collage, for she linked the severing of familial ties to “scissors…for it cut at last what bound them together.” As the protagonist packed away her possessions, Ryan described it “like tearing up in little pieces the whole order of the rooms. What furniture she left looked different, spread out, worn and even tawdry and the pleasant fullness of life was gone and all the familiar comfort.”818 The cutting, tearing, and repositioning could equally describe her artistic practices; as her collages similarly bear indices of the artist’s touch and record her life by containing remnants from her daily experiences. But, Ryan not only recovered the feminine voice through the autobiographical components of her collages and stories, she also challenged expectations of womanhood. The Second Sex argued that passivity characterized women, and traditions such as motherhood stripped the female of her independence (especially during an era in which contraception and abortion were not available).819 Ryan challenged this idea of the “true woman” by divorcing her husband, leaving her children in boarding school while she pursued her career, and establishing an independent income and lifestyle distant from the suburban norm.

Beauvoir’s notion of the “Other” also corresponds to the relativism of collage because the position of the “Other” in regards to subjectivity is analogous to the interplay and juxtaposition of collage materials. The relational dependency of the “Other” stems from Beauvoir’s concept of the “situation,” the individual’s engagement with life beyond freedom (i.e. circumstances

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817 Ryan, “She Was Divorced,” n.pag.
818 Ibid.
without choice, such as birth, death, and other elements of life that humans cannot, and do not, choose). Through life’s accidents, Beauvoir believed that women could fall victim to self-sacrifice, existing solely for the sake of others. Ryan’s stories often embodied this matrix as her heroines grapple with freedom and responsibility, often defining themselves by how they negotiated with archetypal figures such as the father and husband. For example, in “The Darkest Leaf,” Ryan’s protagonist, Jessie, must choose between her lover and father: one offers love and companionship (but not the marriage she desires), while family history and obligation mark the other. Ryan set this tale within a rural locale, employing the seasons as metaphors for the alienation and weight of Jessie’s decision. The cold winter, marked by mountain breezes and barren fields, established the passage of time for the paternal farmer, John Wilton, whereas summer nights conjured memories of her lover, Jim Morrison. In these narratives, seasonal growth evokes mood while establishing place, heightening the tension and anxiety of Ryan’s characters.

Another story, “Ludvica,” chronicled the helplessness of a soon-to-be-fired servant, capturing the uncertainty of a woman whose fate lay in another’s hands. Mrs. Glemby, the mistress of Ludvica, likewise wrestled with the decision, deferring to her husband’s demands but unable to act with conviction. Ryan described the Glemby daughters, children who in their appearance and mannerisms represented the stages of female development. She set the manners and social pressures of Mrs. Glemby against the “boisterous” gaiety of unfettered children, crafting a brief glimpse into the socialized development of women. In stories such as these, Ryan thrust her heroines into dilemmas based on societal and personal expectations, and the

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circumstances surrounding their relationships dictated their independence, or lack thereof. Beauvoir similarly examined the ambiguity of human experience, particularly those resulting from her theories of the “Other” and “situation,” inevitably opposing freedom to control. This struggle reflected Beauvoir’s existential background, and Ryan tapped into this vein as her writings expressed fear and despair, while ultimately accepting death.

While Ryan continued to write poetry and short stories, she directed the bulk of her creative energies toward collage during the last few years of her life. Collage granted Ryan a subjectivity and freedom missing from the conventions of narrative and poetic meter. In some regards, her collages may be considered similar to her literary output. As in her short stories, Ryan explored limits and contradictions in collage, setting oval formats and framed backgrounds against weathered materials and chance arrangements. Many of the objects she employed for these collages, namely fabrics and textiles, have been cast as feminine materials, a potential link with her exploration of female subjectivities in literature. But ultimately, her nonobjective assemblages allowed for suggestion and implication, appealing to memory through simultaneous tactile and optical sensations. The mood of these works occasionally coincided, for example, in collages containing elements that would wear and unravel, a material authenticity that, according to Beauvoir, lent value to any experience or act. But the mnemonic capacities of collage also allowed Ryan to transcend the nostalgic, as she reveled in the currency of materials vis-à-vis fine arts traditions.

Beauvoir’s writings shed light on Ryan’s investigation of feminine subjectivities and the autobiographical, and her engagement with Existentialism proves useful in reconsidering the
aesthetics of Ryan’s collages. The influence of Existentialism on Abstract Expressionism has been well charted by art historians, and some of Ryan’s collages reflect this mindset. She considered herself ill-fated, and many of her works on paper relate to Existential ideas. For example, the threadbare materials of Number 530 (undated, ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.19) suggest decay as the surface seems to be eroding. The overlay of white parchment is riddled with holes and abrasions, and it appears to disintegrate in a denial of permanence and existence. Far darker tones, blacks and grays, comprise Number 3 (ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.20), in which Ryan applied what appears to be a spiral-bound notebook to the picture’s surface. Featuring a black cover, this journal contains the image of a Gothic tower and house with cloudlike forms behind them. Pointed arches and verticality distinguish the structure, yet the empty arcade and lack of human elements project an eerie sensation. The juxtaposition of the empty townscape with ominous clouds recalls Giorgio de Chirico’s melancholic piazzas and street scenes. To the right of this tableau, Ryan laid thread and slender paper shards atop black parchment, their white hues contrasting starkly with the severe background. At times rigid, the strings evoke barren tree limbs or skeletal projections, while in the top left corner she left another black cutout bare, allowing it to remain dark and devoid of decorative overlays. A heavily charcoaled drawing spans the top right quadrant of the composition, while a muted application of umber crayon occupies the lower left corner. Black typescript is printed below the notebook, spelling out: “‘La Legende d’… gel,’ designed b…Leonard…” A triangular white collage element contains the letters “NA,” and bits of other letters were cropped from the caption. Ryan pasted her collage

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823 Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre were lovers for more than twenty years, and the couple would be instrumental in the development of Existentialism.
824 Ryan wrote in one of her journals that “Hofmann told Fritz that I probably would be remembered when they are all forgotten! It cannot be for me, my luck was always bad and late. Not in this life.” Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, November 6, 1938. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
atop a neutral supporting ground which she subsequently pasted onto brown and beige paper, framing the work several times over.

Bearing many references to war, Ryan’s collage *Number 8* (ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.21) matches closely this Existential mood and, when considered in the context of her writings, also recalls the anxiety pervasive in America during and after World War II. This work is a rarity in Ryan’s œuvre because of its photomontage elements and representational character. The artist has structured rectilinear handmade papers in her familiar axial format, and a few rough edges are the only components that diverge from the geometric regularity pervasive throughout the collage. Ryan has included several references to the military, including the photograph of a squadron of airplane bombers at upper left. Five such aircraft, flying in the formation, dominate the triangular cutout, while a white grid bisects the photograph, suggesting the crosshairs of targeting devices. To the right of this image is a mechanical drawing of machinery or weaponry, a reference to engineering relatable to the bombers looming above. Atop this printed sketch, Ryan has pasted a headline with the letters “NAL OF DE” remaining visible. In the context of these militaristic montages, the “DE” perhaps suggests “defense” agencies, while the “NAL” could evoke words such as “national.” A larger letter “R” also appears in the lower left section of the collage; however, no caption seems to have accompanied this carefully outlined character. A subdued palette characterizes the work, by way of muted grays, browns, and blacks. Two yellow crayon scribbles offer the only contrast in an otherwise monochromatic composition.

In her journals, Ryan chronicled her response to World War II, and although *Number 8* was created several years after the war ended, her writings provide clues to the imagery and mood of the work. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor factored prominently in her diary, in which she wrote: “Turned the radio on and war spilled out. Japan has gone mad. The great army
and navy air stations are rumbling with messages calling all reserves. The watching stations are manned for air attacks over the city. Every day must be held stiff against disaster.”

This entry includes the specific time she wrote, 2:35 p.m., a testament to the resonance of this event. The next day, she commented: “Awful Day. In the Pacific thousands dead. We are at war… Roosevelt speaks. All planes grounded. Cold anger. The Congress meets. ‘The nation will always remember the method of the attack.’ President asks for declaration only against Japan.”

Ryan made reference to the war throughout her journal, telling of farewell parties for troops, friends in their uniforms, and her constant state of anxiety. On January 14, 1942, she commented that “the war is like a distant music,” while a week later she wrote about the departure of troops and her dread about the escalating conditions:

It is not what you like best now, it is the stark reality of the hours as they come. Three hundred thousand pitted against McArthur now. John’s glibness does not console me, nor a walk through the Square past the sunny place & trees – the very large shadow always falls. Thomas, from his window in the 16 floor downtown saw the two ships Queen Mary and Elizabeth go out with troops, and four destroyers with planes fastened to their decks, never been done before. Time is short – may they get there in time.

Throughout February, Ryan wrote about various military campaigns, how each battle seemed “more terrible than the last” and “Normandy is burning.” In addition to references to World War II, Ryan’s journals include numerous newspapers articles about the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that interested her greatly since she lived in Mallorca for two years while trying to establish her writing career. An unpublished poem from 1942, “War,” further reveals Ryan’s response to the global military campaign:

825 Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, December 7, 1941. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
826 Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, December 8, 1941. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
827 Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, January 14, 1942. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
828 Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, January 21, 1942. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
829 Anne Ryan, Journal Entry, February 7, 1942. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.
In the years / In the night / What is left? / Used many times over / Are the 
thoughts of childhood / And the resolves of full years. / This flood 
sweeping the world, / Harnessing every current in its / rush of bright blood 
/ Sickens the thoughts, Turns the thoughts stale. / A level time has come, 
brutal / and heavy, / No matter what the season / The gaze is always 
lowered / For fear of meeting other eyes.  

The deeply personal and troubled accounts of war running throughout her diaries and poetry 
resurface in the somber yet foreboding nature of Number 8. 

Although Ryan should not be considered an Existentialist in the proper sense, she was 
familiar with some of the philosophers associated with the movement. While in Mallorca, she 
proposed writing a feature article, including interviews, on Spanish theorist Miguel de Unamuno 
for Commonweal. The journal declined, largely because Unamuno had been critical of Franco’s 
relationship with the Catholic Church, Ryan maintained a strong interest in his work. Her own 
relationship with Catholicism remained complex and possibly surfaced in her art. Collage 413 
(1951, fig. 5.22) is typical of Ryan in its grid-like manner, threadbare edges, and imprecise lines, 
the only components to diverge from the right-angled interstices filling the paper ground. A 
central band of vertical cutouts bisects the otherwise horizontally arranged, collaged layers, thus 
generating a cruciform image. The cross-like shape becomes further pronounced by the 
appearance of two solid and uniform squares in the top third of the composition. These cubic 
shapes frame the cruciform arms against stacks of smaller materials in the lower passages of the 
composition. 

While Christian evocations remain exceedingly rare in her papiers collés, Ryan had made 
Catholicism a central part of her early writings. She wrote a history of Father Junipero Serra, and 

830 Anne Ryan, “War,” April 1942, unpublished. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA. 
831 John-Paul Sartre wrote an essay on Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti in 1948, one of the most specific links 
between artists and Existential philosophy, however scholars have connected Abstract Expressionism to 
Existentialism as a response to World War II. See Polcari, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience.
while seeking information from his family identified herself by saying, “I am a Catholic, and am anxious to bring out the spiritual heroism of Serra’s character.”\(^{832}\) She also wrote to her daughter that she intended to “start a novel there—a short Catholic novel.”\(^{833}\) Ryan wrote essays based on her experiences in Mallorca, penning “Mass at Palma,” about the Gothic cathedral of La Seu and the ceremonial ritual of the Eucharist. She marveled at the solemnity and humility of the service and commented that “without any music the recessional; and this lack seems curiously correct, for what sound could equal the last silence of a symphony or the last silence of a miracle? There remains only a chancel filled with incense, a grey, melting air with figures, and the figures no more.”\(^{834}\) A similar quiet pervades *Collage 413*, as light, muted colors and humble shapes compose the cross-like image without baroque drama or dogmatic bombast. Her essay on Palma’s religious life includes descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells of Catholic prayer. Ryan notes the colors and textures of stained glass and stone columns, describing the solemnity of the structure as generating a “Presence.” While diminutive in scale, *Collage 413* features a similar material presence and balance, and her religious background perhaps explains why she included Gothic forms in *Untitled 3* (ca. 1948-54). Indeed, references to, and reverence for, cathedral construction surfaced throughout Ryan’s literary and artistic work. From evocations of masonry and roughhewn stonework, to poetic musings on cathedrals and Catholic ritual, Ryan’s work investigated existence through the lens of Catholicism and Existentialism.

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\(^{832}\) Anne Ryan, letter to Rev. Francis Torrens, 29 August 1929. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.

\(^{833}\) Anne Ryan, letter to Elizabeth McFadden, undated [circa 1932]. Anne Ryan Papers, AAA.

\(^{834}\) Ryan, “Mass at Palma,” 521.
Resisting Consumerism: Collage in the Age of Novelty and Obsolescence

Anne Ryan explored collage during a time in American history characterized by mass production and capitalist excess. Within this context, her work assumed the potential for rejecting Populuxe culture, with her thrifty habits at odds with the planned obsolescence of postwar consumerism. As America moved into the 1950s, the affluence that followed World War II led to “one of history’s great shopping sprees.” Thomas Hine has dubbed this period “populuxe,” blending the words popular, luxury, and deluxe to describe the “flamboyant decorative style” of “pastel colors and futuristic contours” that adorned everyday objects like automobiles and appliances. Advertisers encouraged postwar America to embrace the new, as exemplified by an advertisement for the 1954 Packard Clipper (fig. 5.23), which reproduced the word “new” ten times. Likewise, the “colorama glamour” of the Cycla-matic Frigidaire (fig. 5.24) made “all ordinary refrigerators seem old-fashioned.” This emphasis on creating and purchasing new and better products found advocates such as designer George Nelson, whose 1956 essay for Industrial Design declared: “obsolescence as a process is wealth-producing, not wasteful. It leads to constant renewal of the industrial establishment at higher and higher levels…We have learned how to handle obsolescence as a prodigious tool for social betterment…what we need is more obsolescence, not less.” Many scholars have attributed America’s wealth and status as a super-power to its postwar consumerism; yet during this age of

836 Hine, Foreword.
prosperity, planned obsolescence, and materialism, Ryan explored the old and discarded.\textsuperscript{838} Recycling bits of fabric and shards of newsprint for her work, Ryan adopted an aesthetic based on gritty texture rather than sleek refinement or aerodynamic forms. She did not throw away materials, but rather used elements with potential for decay, such as napkins and wrappers from foodstuffs, for her work. The artist’s jagged, tattered edges contrast sharply with the curvilinear and parabolic forms dominating the popular culture of the 1950s.\textsuperscript{839} For example, in \textit{Number 159} (1948, fig. 5.25), Ryan combined the textures of handmade paper with threads of various fabrics while the edges of the parchment are torn and textile fibers pulled apart. The frayed material is juxtaposed with the word “time,” suggesting duration and temporality. Whereas much postwar advertising and design promoted novelty, Ryan’s work evoked the passing of time and decomposition.

Some of Ryan’s collages explicitly reference the past, such as \textit{Untitled No. 36} (ca. 1948, fig. 5.26), which features a time-dated scrap of paper establishing the age of her materials. Among an axially aligned assortment of blue and white papers and fabrics appears a blue cutout with the word “DATE” stenciled across it. The digits “12-7-34” are handwritten across an underlined blank, suggesting that this passage came from an application or biographical form. Considering that Ryan completed this collage sometime after 1948, one could assume that this paper had been in her possession for at least fourteen years before the artist appropriated it for collage. While it remains impossible to know how long Ryan collected her materials, this work indicates how she mined the objects of her past for her \textit{papiers collés}. This work further evokes historicism through the frayed edges of the fabric, with the dangling fibers suggestive of


decomposition and weathering. The texture and tattered edges of these materials form an interesting dialogue with the precise hard edges of the cut paper, an opposition in surface and material integrity that accentuates the diversity of elements in Ryan’s collages.

Though economic considerations certainly contributed to Ryan’s recycling habits, Wayne Koestenbaum has suggested that an element of make-believe is at work in thrifting. While scounging secondhand shops and flea markets, Ryan fashioned her identity as that of the bohemian, forging a Victorian persona at odds with the trends and conventions of modern femininity. Her predilection for thrift stores contested Christian Dior’s “New Look,” a fashion craze following its introduction in 1947. Rather than adopting this ideal of womanhood, typified by the skintight hourglass shape, “poodle” haircut, and color pink, Ryan purchased secondhand Victorian attire or made it herself. Women such as Mamie Eisenhower embraced Dior’s designs to appear “stylish, forever young, wholesomely … and girlishly sexy,” yet Ryan preferred brocade, loose drapery, and other outdated, and decidedly matronly, fashions. Ryan was remembered as possessing a stately demeanor by her friends, and assumed the role of matriarch in dealing with artists many years her junior. She was known for having a “firm character” and “intensity,” being “easily pleased and…disappointed,” and referring to the younger artists of the New York School as “kids.” Yet despite the proud pose captured in William Pippin’s photograph, Ryan lived an existence that was anything but regal. She rented a cold-water apartment in Greenwich Village, operated a restaurant, and frequented secondhand stores in search of this Victorian attire. A friend remembered that “she made her own clothes,

842 Marling, 19.
even the shoes she wore in the house, and dressed in a style which belonged vaguely to some past period.”

As Bradford Collins has argued, appearance was very important to the Abstract Expressionists hoping to be taken seriously by the general public. Barnett Newman urged his fellow “Irascibles” to dress “like bankers” for Nina Leen’s famous *Life* magazine photograph. Irving Sandler has agreed that the Abstract Expressionists “did resemble businessmen more than bohemians,” but also has argued that “they did not dress up for the *Life* portrait; that was how they generally appeared in public…they did not want to be taken for Greenwich Village bohemians who lived the life of art without creating much of it.” Ryan, on the other hand, eschewed professional or designer attire and embraced a Victorian eclecticism. Though economic necessity certainly contributed to her thrifting, there was a creative element at work in her bricolage. The act of searching out various fabrics to suit her artistic aims and personal manner allowed Ryan to select the identity she wished to fashion. Susan Porter Benson has reexamined secondhand clothing in the interwar period of American history, tracing the stigma of thrift store fashions, particularly those from charitable organizations such as the Red Cross or Salvation Army. As Benson has argued, these goods could be rehabilitated through skillful alterations, thus an accomplished tailor might update the fashions or replace worn areas of fabric. As such, the originality and resourcefulness of many women arose from a necessity predicated by social acceptance. Ryan seems to have engaged in a similar process of makeover,

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reinventing herself in a guise her friends would call the “Victorian lady.” Rather than the suburban housewife, a role she played in the 1910s, Ryan assumed the aristocratic posture of a bygone era, employing elegance in a manner reminiscent of nineteenth-century dandyism.

Ryan’s collages, with their frayed and weathered fabrics, certainly contested the patterned couture of the 1950s, lacking the stylized organicism and crisp linearity featured in the well-known outfits of Jean Patou (1956) or wallpaper of John Line (1951). While an interest in textiles dominated her oeuvre, the shabby cloth Ryan employed as collage materials opposed the fashion industry, even while referring to it. For example, in Number 2 (ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.27), the word “alterations” appears in the lower right corner of the composition, and such a label suggests a tailor’s shop. Yet rather than exhibiting the proficiency of a seamstress, Ryan completed her collage with dirty charcoal marks, torn card stock, and random bits of yarn. Number 2 denies the precision required for tailoring, rejecting the neatly hemmed lines of Covenant (1949) or Vir Heroicus Sublimis (1950-51) by Barnett Newman, himself a former tailor.

As Lesley Jackson has argued, Abstract Expressionism profoundly influenced the popular design of the 1950s, with the drips and splatters of Jackson Pollock appropriated into patterns for wallpaper and apparel. In a section on Pollock Sources of Design: Pattern and Texture (1956), designer J.A. Wedd argued that “abstraction has…brought contemporary artists into the field of decoration.” Streamlined adaptations of Pollock’s canvases appeared in Marchington’s “Dot Dash” dress (1954, fig. 5.28) and Harold Cohen’s “Vineyard” fabric (1959, fig. 5.29), examples

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848 Holland Cotter noted that “Ryan didn’t want any more children, and her ambitions to be a writer made her an unwilling suburban housewife; she preferred to spend her time in Manhattan bookstores and cafés rather than in Newark.” Holland Cotter, “Material Witness,” Art in America 77 (November 1989): 178
of how designers were content to reproduce the New York School’s allover compositions, albeit
in a sanitized and playful way. 851 Ryan, on the other hand, focused upon an aesthetic of detritus
and waste, and as such, her tattered linens and sharp angles opposed the clean lines and bright
patterns of the 1950s. Number 319 (1949, fig. 5.30) elucidates this notion, with scraps of mesh
and parchment occupying the picture plane and refuse achieving the privileged status of high art
material. The bits of dark netting evoke women’s stockings, yet their fragmentary state suggests
neither high fashion nor the elegance desired by such accoutrements.

Material and Texture: The Roots of Design

While Ryan’s collages resist the trends of modern design ubiquitous at mid-century, her
work recalls numerous developments in the history of design, namely the Arts and Crafts
Movement and Bauhaus. Like John Ruskin and William Morris, she placed emphasis on the
handmade, especially expensive Howell papers, and wore second-hand clothes. While the Arts
and Crafts Movement favored vernacular traditions in opposition to the perceived inhumanity of
the industrialized world, Ryan valued the haptic and craftsmanship, a kinship with Ruskin and
Morris predicated upon distance from mass production. Aesthetically, her work has much in
common with Owen Jones’ samples of fabrics, and she stressed materials in a manner
reminiscent of William Morris. In 1856, Jones published The Grammar of Ornament, a pattern
book of designs from different time periods throughout the history of the world. 852 Each color
plate of the book featured rows of different samples, with these patterns epitomizing good design

852 Owen Jones’ The Grammar of Ornament has been republished on numerous occasions. A recent reissue is: Owen
on the basis of proportion, clarity of form, texture, color, and so forth. With their gridded accumulations of different designs and implied textures, these plates anticipate Ryan’s axially aligned collages of different fabrics and papers. For example, in *Number 100* (ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.31), she employed green- and brown-checked textiles, heavier dark brown and gray weaves, and stone-colored linens, setting their configurations against handmade papers and printed cardstock. Likewise, a comparison of *Number 466* (ca. 1948-54, fig. 5.32) with Jones’ examples of Persian and Egyptian ornament (fig. 5.33-5.34) reveals congruities in the formal oppositions of patterns and colors, wherein the cutout distinguishes each sample while drawing attention to their uniqueness. Jones argued that the best designs for wall decorations remained relatively flat to honor the architectural nature of walled spaces, and he preferred two-dimensional designs of repetitive patterns for adorning interiors with color and texture. The decorative effect of Jones’ designs outweighed symbolic content, and he considered repose a necessary component to decorative strategies. While Ryan’s collages remain subtle in their use of patterns, the juxtaposition of materials and colors produces a similar scheme of harmony, as she employed muted tones to avoid optical dissonance.

Despite seeking flattened designs, Jones claimed that texture played a crucial role in selecting and producing patterns, another link with Ryan who favored the tactility of the collage medium. Her preference for the haptic conflicted with the values espoused by commercial designers and American consumers at mid-century. In his guidebook of 1940, *Industrial Design*, Harold Von Doren espoused the virtues of industrial finishes and argued that texture was best employed in service of color. With experience designing for Air King radios and Maytag

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washing machines, he insisted that designers should “take as strong a stand as possible” against faux graining, but ultimately lamented how,

the public seems to love nothing so much as a good imitation. So we have metal grained like wood, plastics imitating onyx and mahogany, wood treated to look like marble. Some of these processes have reached an extraordinary degree of perfection. Automobile dashboards are grained to look like curly birch, mahogany, or walnut by a process that reproduces the actual grain with photographic minuteness. With metal lacquers and a special gun, surfaces can be made to look like hammered silver or aluminum. One company makes boxes of gumwood, then grains them to look like primavera or Macassar ebony.854

Indeed, the high gloss, artificial surfaces of mid-century could not be further from Ryan’s woven fabrics, grainy paper pulps, and threadbare linens. And even though Van Doren contested simulated textures, his designs celebrated streamlining and smooth contours, as evidenced by his designs for Sno-Plane sleds, American National bicycles, and Enterprise Manufacturing meat grinders (figs. 5.35-5.36).

The surfaces of Ryan’s collages often evoke the joints of stone facades, and her devotion to materials further relates to nineteenth century artistic theory. While in Spain, Ryan wrote two articles, “Two Churches with Carvings” and “Mass at Palma,” extolling the beauty and virtue of the Gothic because she was amazed at the timeless monumentality of these stone structures.855 In “Two Churches with Carvings,” she wrote:

The original church has been embellished. The primary colors are accented. The effect is pure painting. Against the light walls the arches of the windows are outlined with a band of thistle-blue five inches wide giving a certain purity and serenity as though each were open to an arc of summer sky. There is no stained glass; the frosted panes are tipped on branches and the dying year. Inside the altar rail is a mass of color. Even the floor of the sanctuary has been given its coat of

great squares, black and white—a bizarre simplicity… There is something homely in this, earthy and simple.\textsuperscript{856}

In “Mass at Palma,” Ryan similarly described historical styles, noting how in the cathedral of La Seu, “the beginning of Gothic decadence is here, the beginning of the loss of those vivid and contorted medieval gestures.”\textsuperscript{857} But this “Gothic decadence” evoked transcendence, and she described the awe-inspiring effects of the architectural space:

One is prepared for height. Fourteen slender grey columns rise into clouds of colored air; only the apse and one chapel have any low lighting, yet the single and triumphant windows higher up, no matter how dark the day, seem always to look out on their own vivid sunsets or to be wondrously filled with green wings or pale lakes, jasper or maize, or indigo or agate. The progressive and increasing gloom produce, as had always been produced in great temples, a feeling of littleness and helplessness—the very feeling which is sought in order more fully to rely upon a Presence.\textsuperscript{858}

Ryan’s interest in the spiritual qualities of stained glass and stone masonry recalls John Ruskin, who wrote \textit{The Stones of Venice} in celebration of Gothic craftsmanship, but it also pervaded her collages, which Ashbery appropriately described as “walls of roughhewn squares or oblongs.”\textsuperscript{859} This description certainly seems apt when considering \textit{Number 540} (1954, fig. 5.37), a horizontally aligned collage that evokes stone construction in its appearance. Ryan’s regularly-shaped rectilinear papers, minimal overlapping, and careful joinery suggest a parapet. \textit{Number 524} (1951, fig. 5.38) similarly resembles masonry construction because each paper cutout retains its rectilinear shape, and the lack of overlapping forms suggests a stacking of blocks and fitted assembly.

\textsuperscript{856} Ryan, “Two Churches with Carvings,” 17.
\textsuperscript{857} Ryan, “Mass at Palma,” 521.
\textsuperscript{858} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{859} Ashbery, “A Place for Everything,” 74.
In addition to the ideals and aesthetics of the Arts Crafts Movement, Ryan’s collages recall a more modern approach to materials and texture, that of the Bauhaus. With Arts and Crafts and the German Werkbund serving as its model, the Bauhaus was founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany to reform art education and bring together the elements of design, including architecture, sculpture, the decorative arts, painting, and so forth. The curriculum of the Bauhaus centered on an introductory course that taught students form and materials, before proceeding to the concepts of color, composition, representation, and tools. A major component of the basic course was “material and texture,” in which the physical properties and surfaces of objects were explored, ranging from wood and metals to textiles and glass. The Bauhaus stressed touch because many students studied the production of furniture and domestic goods, but hapticity also enabled students to understand the “essence” of their materials, a trait crucial to painting and graphic representation. First-year students were instructed to connect with the feel of textures. Johannes Itten, an instructor at the Bauhaus, recalled:

At the Bauhaus I had long chromatic rows of real materials made for the tactile judging of different textures. The students had to feel these textures with their fingertips, their eyes closed. After a short time the sense of touch improved to an amazing degree. I then had the students make texture montages of contrasting materials. The effect of these fantastic creations was entirely novel at that time. In solving these problems the students developed a real designing fever. They began to rummage through the drawers of thrifty grandmothers, their kitchens and cellars; they ransacked the workshops of craftsmen and the rubbish heaps of factories and building sites. A whole new world was discovered: lumber and wood shavings, steel wool, wires, strings, polished wood, and sheep’s wool, feathers, glass, and tin foil, grids and weaves of all kinds, leather, furs, and shiny cans.

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This description of the Bauhaus curriculum could easily describe Ryan’s practice as a collagist, because she also played the role of bricoleur in seeking out materials for their tactile properties and decorative potential.

While Ryan may not have connected her work to such curricula, she certainly had been familiar with these types of artistic lessons. Hans Hofmann visited her studio regularly and advised Ryan during her conversion to painting and collage. His own teaching methods paralleled Itten in stressing materials and textures similarly. In fact, Itten’s chapter on surface included a reproduction of a Hofmann collage from 1921, a work closely related to Ryan’s *papiers collés*. In *Materialkomposition* (1921, fig. 5.39), Hofmann pasted an array of objects to the supporting ground, including feathers, a button, threadbare fabrics, string, printed cloth, cork, a sewing needle, and handmade papers.\(^{861}\) Whereas Ryan’s collages appear largely vertical in alignment, Hofmann’s composition extends horizontally while he laid forms across the surface without overlapping or obscuring them. Perhaps intended solely as a teaching exercise, *Materialkomposition* would have been familiar to American artists conceptually, and Hofmann’s philosophies of spatial “push and pull,” geometric abstraction, and materiality all characterize this work.

Ryan’s collages also recall the projects of Bauhaus students throughout the 1920s. Many would arrange their materials axially, allowing the weaves and patterns of textiles to abut palpable objects. A montage by L. Müller (1933, fig. 5.40) anticipates Ryan’s collages in its vertical orientation and strong gridded format. Cutouts of architectural prints intersect with

\(^{861}\) This work may no longer be extant as a catalogue raisonné of Hofmann’s work is being compiled and many of his early works no longer exist. Since the black-and-white reproduction seems to be the only remaining record of the collage, it remains nearly impossible to determine all the materials he used and if some might be trompe l’oeil painted forms rather than collaged. Itten included a caption for this work, explaining: “Textures are clearly characterized as a material composition and balanced harmoniously.” Itten, *Design and Form*, 49.
patterned papers, with simulated masonry offsetting woodcut prints and photographic snapshots. Hard edges delineate Müller’s materials, distinguishing this work from Ryan who often favored softer edges, particularly because she juxtaposed many loosely woven textiles and other threadbare fabrics. While Ryan approached collage as a fine art rather than commercial design, her formal approach paralleled many of the design strategies of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As such, the tactility of her recycled compositions stood at odds with the mass production and sleek aesthetics of contemporary designers. Instead, her work harkened to past celebrations of materials, handmade processes, and personal histories, stressing preservation during an age of obsolescence and novelty.

In her poem “Lines to a Young Painter,” published in the literary journal *Voices* in 1944, Ryan reflected upon the inheritance of the artist.

The eye, the folded and prismatic eye is there; / For more with sight than any other sense / Is death put off / And daily greeted jocosely. / The yellow sun at Arles / In one roused glance / Poured ocher the ocher wall and stayed yellow / Because the eye records, blesses, is warm, sharp and fervent. / Color is yours and the wit of color. / The unknown layer on the palette / Plus the far whirligig of cities of waste / Which you shall meet / Spins into the distance. / And that stretch of poverty which you shall perform, / Singly, like another Saint Francis, / Shall be the cobalt and carmine pointing from a small stiff brush. / There cannot be told how to put down a memory in curves or paint, / The wheat growing close to the edge of the white sea, / Fragile, holding its own kernel of death / Amid fragrant storms / Is permanent, only under your hand.\(^\text{862}\)

In these lines, Ryan considered the pleasure of vision and sensual experience, connecting immediate sensations to the enduring legacy of the work of art. While such moments might be transient, she wrote that the permanence of the painting holds death at bay and lives beyond the course of the creator’s life. In this poem, Ryan also considered memory and the role of artist in

rendering it “permanent.” This emphasis on memory is perhaps what drew Ryan to the collage medium, with its conservative nature appealing to a woman deeply invested in history, process, and materials. The mnemonic work of her collages distinguished Ryan from her Abstract Expressionist peers, as she traced autobiographical experiences and framed the haptic alongside the optical. These autobiographical elements also connected Ryan to strategies employed by early feminists to fashion female subjectivity, while simultaneously challenging the critical biases upholding Abstract Expressionism as mid-century. In Ryan’s hands, collage allowed her to negotiate postwar expectations of gender, consumerism, and avant-garde artistic production, and throughout her *papiers collés*, Ryan retained the experiential, fashioning compositions of materials laden with memory.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

According to the popular mythology surrounding the invention of collage, Georges Braque spied faux wood grain wallpaper in an Avignon shop window in September of 1912. Immediately realizing the potential of this material, Braque purchased the paper and used it as the backdrop of *Fruitdish and Glass* (1912, fig. 6.1), considered by some to be the first modernist *papier collé*.\(^{863}\) What is remarkable about this story is how frequently it has been retold, but with different characters. The revelatory “discovery” of collage has become a staple of histories of the medium, as art historians often recount the moment when artists first stumbled upon it. For example, Robert Motherwell was invited to participate in Peggy Guggenheim’s collage exhibition. Having never before worked in the medium, Motherwell became enthralled with its capacities and devoted his career to *papier collé*, likening his first experiments in collage to “making beautiful love for the first time.”\(^{864}\) Esteban Vicente found himself in California without his studio or painting supplies. By tearing apart newspapers, he discovered collage, and like Motherwell, based a significant portion of his oeuvre on what had been a surrogate for painting. Anne Ryan visited the Kurt Schwitters retrospective at the Rose Fried Gallery in 1948. She became so engrossed in the medium that she raced home and made her first collages that very night. After revisiting the exhibition several times, Ryan spent the final six years of her life collaging together various papers and fabrics. Frustrated by the path of her painting career, Lee Krasner ripped apart her paintings and drawings in a fit of rage. Upon returning to her trashed studio, she discovered something compelling in the juxtaposition of cut and torn abstractions. Krasner returned to the medium frequently throughout her career, considering it a part of her

\(^{863}\) Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting*, 3.

\(^{864}\) Quote reproduced in *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century*, eds. Susan Davidson and Philip Rylands (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection; Vienna: Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, 2004), 295.
artistic growth. These tales of discovery recur throughout the history of collage, a curious maneuver by art historians because it implies that artists had not considered the merits of collage beforehand. Despite the rich tradition of the medium, one that includes the Cubism of Picasso and Braque, the derisory spirit of Dadaists like Hannah Höch and John Heartfield, and the Surrealist vision of Max Ernst and Salvador Dalí, scholars have found it necessary to explain what compelled an artist to work in collage in the first place. A bias runs throughout scholarship on modernist art, wherein collage is frequently considered a subsidiary of painting and not worthy of serious attention. Critics such as Harold Rosenberg did little to help the cause, as he attacked the “put-together” as amateurish and an “upheaval” in the history of art.\textsuperscript{865}

The dismissal of collage as amateurish reached its peak by 1954, as Dorothy Seckler published an essay in \textit{Art News} celebrating the medium as a craft. This article appeared in “Amateur Standing,” a series published throughout the 1950s by different authors on aspects of artistic practice. The various columnists instructed readers in topics ranging from collage and portraiture to selecting an art teacher. Seckler appealed to readers to “try a collage,” writing that “pasting a picture instead of painting one can be a pleasant and instructive change of pace, stimulating the imagination and training the eye to see shape and color.”\textsuperscript{866} Although she acknowledged the history of \textit{papier collé} and cited Picasso and Braque as inventors of the technique, Seckler claimed that “making a collage involves taste and inventiveness without requiring drawing skill.” She further noted how one’s personality invariably results in the colors and compositions pieced together, asserting that the collage process involves “transforming the raw material of everyday reality into your own vision.” While she offered some practical advice for collagists, warning artists to “avoid centering anything at first, since this will give a static

\textsuperscript{865} Rosenberg, “Philosophy of Put-Togethers,” 63-64.
feeling that discourages the free play of shape,” Seckler often imposed directives rooted in her preferences for Cubist aesthetics. For example, she advised readers that a “plaid arrangement,” or gridded composition, offered the strongest framework for pasting objects to the supporting ground because “it is best not to paste down your pieces at the first happy accident of color combination.” Instead, she instructed her audience to play with shaped associations and irregular borders, because uniformity in edges and surfaces would deny the medium’s primary attributes. Throughout the column, Seckler employed terms like “fun” and “humorous fantasy,” appealing to amateurs with a language rooted in simplicity and leisure. She concluded by suggesting different uses for the collage, “it can be framed…or varnished and used as part of a decorative unit, perhaps for a tray or table top.”

Like many critics at mid-century, Seckler failed to acknowledge the revolutionary roots of the medium, nor did she mention its relevance to the art of her contemporaries. Instead, she celebrated collage as a respite from painting. Not only a fun activity for amateurs, collage served as a preparatory measure for painting in Seckler’s estimation, as she informed painters that dabbling in the medium could teach them color and shape relationships applicable to their painted compositions.

The legacy of collage became further problematic with the advent of Minimalism, as artists such as Frank Stella conspired to close the door on collage and its position of importance within formalist art criticism. In 1959, Frank Stella created two works with printed asbestos tape, *The First Post-Cubist Collage* (fig. 6.2) and *The Last Cubist Collage.* He applied the tape to a board backing, producing diamond shapes that featured a “solid line, unbroken line.”

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868 *The Last Cubist Collage* is currently lost.
geometric linearity of the work aligns it with Stella’s famous stripe paintings. Rather than painting such bands, he generated stripes by unrolling tape across the surface of his composition. No other elements were collaged, however the application of industrially printed asbestos tape certainly recalls Braque’s appropriation of printed wallpaper. The Minimalist geometry of Stella further references Cubism; however his repeated forms bear little of the fractured imaging characteristic of Cubist representation. As Caroline Jones has argued, Stella’s gesture was filled with “cockiness” and “sheer hubris,” establishing the “power of the artist’s voice in art history, its preemptive authorial power to construct meaning by naming the art object, claiming stylistic priority and placing itself vocally in the contested narrative of modern art.”870 Indeed, by declaring his works “the last cubist collage” and “the first post-cubist collage,” Stella simultaneously declared Cubism dead while establishing his work as the beginning of a new legacy and trajectory.

Donald Judd continued the Minimalist assault on collage in a review he wrote on Robert Rauschenberg in 1963. While discussing Rauschenberg’s paintings and collages, he claimed, “Rauschenberg’s work is as much conservative as it is radical. He is the most conservative of the best of his generation.”871 While he does not explicitly say what makes Rauschenberg so conservative, he suggested that Rauschenberg retained the compositional order and techniques of Cubism in his “combines.”

Rauschenberg is almost the only major artist using the traditional European structure in a way that both retains its quality and is credible and strong. The composition, both the basic schemes and the small parts, is a direct continuation

of rationalist European composition. The color, and the brushwork in another way, is also traditional.\textsuperscript{872}

While he considered the technique and format of the combines to be outdated, Judd wrote that Rauschenberg’s “reliefs and the free-standing pieces are the strongest, newest, greatest and the other superlatives Cassius Clay thinks he is, even the beautifullest.”\textsuperscript{873} Judd found Rebus (1955, fig. 6.3) to be “the weakest example of this type of composition,” largely because of its cruciform arrangement, collaged surface, and historicism. On the contrary, the three-dimensional assemblages were thought by Judd to be Rauschenberg’s strongest: “\textit{First Landing Jump} (1961, fig. 6.4) is one of several powerful examples. It and the goat, the eagle and the chicken, all combines, are Rauschenberg’s best work.”\textsuperscript{874} The rejection of pictorial flatness excited Judd because, like Stella’s \textit{Post-Cubist Collage}, it interrupted the formalist trajectory of the history of art. As such, Judd located unique values, like modesty, within Rauschenberg’s daring assemblages:

\textit{First Landing Jump} has a tire sitting on the floor, slightly overlapping the canvas. A black and white striped barrier runs through the tire… Despite all this, the tire is outside the canvas—which makes the primary shape of the composition a free silhouette—which is radical. The use of materials and their color, such as the black and white of the tire and the lampshade, is also fairly new. Color gained so is extremely different from painted color. It is more objective and, especially important to Rauschenberg’s work, it is casual. This casualness or modesty is one of Rauschenberg’s most interesting qualities.\textsuperscript{875}

Ultimately, Donald Judd considered \textit{papier collé} reactionary because it reinforced the strategies and devices of easel painting. Framed within a particular space, collage seemed outmoded.

\textsuperscript{872} Judd, “In the Galleries,” 86.
\textsuperscript{873} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{874} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{875} Ibid.
alongside the more “radical” art of assemblage, as it introduced found colors and challenged the authority of pictorial flatness.

The relevance of assemblage became concretized with the Museum of Modern Art’s 1961 exhibit, “The Art of Assemblage.” Revisiting the premises behind their 1948 retrospective of collage, the Museum of Modern Art restructured its history to include three-dimensional objects and constructions. As such, the prominence of the exhibit, and the gesture of linking Rauschenberg and Chamberlain to Picasso and Braque, bestowed a new authority to the found object. William Seitz, curator of the exhibit, established two criteria for the artworks included in this retrospective:

Save for a few calculated examples, the physical characteristics that these collages, objects, and constructions have in common can be stated simply:
1. They are predominantly assembled rather than painted, drawn, modeled, or carved.
2. Entirely or in part, their constituent elements are preformed natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials.876

By this definition, Seitz established a trajectory of appropriation that “began [with] the development of collage, [and] also initiated three-dimensional assemblage.”877 In the process, he inadvertently categorized papier collé as a precursor of future innovations, thereby institutionalizing a different conceptual approach to the medium that rendered collage obsolete.

While collage never fully died in the 1960s—Romare Bearden and the Independent Group stand out for continuing its legacy—the medium’s capacity for originality and high-minded modernism had been lost as assemblage and installation art carried the day. Critics and artists continued to celebrate the appropriative tactics and disjointed aesthetics of collage, but they grafted these atop the realism of three-dimensional objects. As such, the assembled work

seemingly existed beyond the objectified frame. The nonobjective *papier collé* of Abstract Expressionism, though diverse and semiotically complex, quickly lost its place in the art world as the trajectory of modernist invention ran its course. Ironically, the pasted-paper revolution led critics and artists to redefine collage, and in so doing, generated a dialogue about the medium’s attributes that led to its decline.
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Conclusion


VITA – DANIEL L. HAXALL

Education
Ph.D.  Art History, The Pennsylvania State University, August 2009
M.A.  Art History, The Pennsylvania State University, August 2000
B.A.  Art and Art History, Villanova University, May 1998

Teaching Experience
2008-Present  Assistant Professor, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
2007-2008  Visiting Assistant Professor, The University at Buffalo, SUNY
Spring 2007  Lecturer, The University at Buffalo, SUNY
2002-2005  Instructor, The Pennsylvania State University

Publications
―‘This tragedy still continues’: Esteban Vicente, the New York School, and the Spanish Civil War,‖

Awards and Fellowships
Spring 2007  Predoctoral Fellowship, Smithsonian American Art Museum
Fall 2006  Department of Art History Dissertation Fellowship, The Pennsylvania State University
Summer 2006  Graduate Student Summer Residency, Institute for the Arts and Humanities
Spring 2006  Creative Achievement Award, The Pennsylvania State University
Spring 2006  Waddell Biggart Graduate Fellowship, The Pennsylvania State University
Spring 2005  Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award, The Pennsylvania State University
2000-2001  Harry and Beverly Mandil Endowed Internship, Smithsonian Museum of American Art

Selected Presentations and Lectures
“Clement Greenberg’s Pastoral Mood: The New York School and the Bucolic Tradition”
Harvard University, April 3-4, 2009
“Blue with China Ink: Robert Motherwell, John Cage, and the Possibilities of Collage”
University of Maryland and National Gallery of Art, March 28-29, 2008
“Lee Krasner’s Pastoral Vision: Collage and the Nature of Order”
Pollock-Krasner Foundation and Stony Brook University, April 12-13, 2007
“‘This tragedy still continues’: Esteban Vicente, Robert Motherwell, and the Spanish Civil War”
University of Iowa, March 2-3, 2007
“The Politics of Thrifting: Anne Ryan, Consumerism, and the Gendering of Collage”
Philadelphia Museum of Art, March 24-25, 2006
“Esteban Vicente, National Identity and the Borders of Collage”
Concordia University, March 17-18, 2006
“Rethinking Abstract Expressionism: The Pastoral Vision of the New York School”
Queen’s University, January 30, 2004
“In Praise of Gertrude Stein: Bradley Walker Tomlin and the Construction of an Abstract Identity”
University of Kansas, March 8, 2003