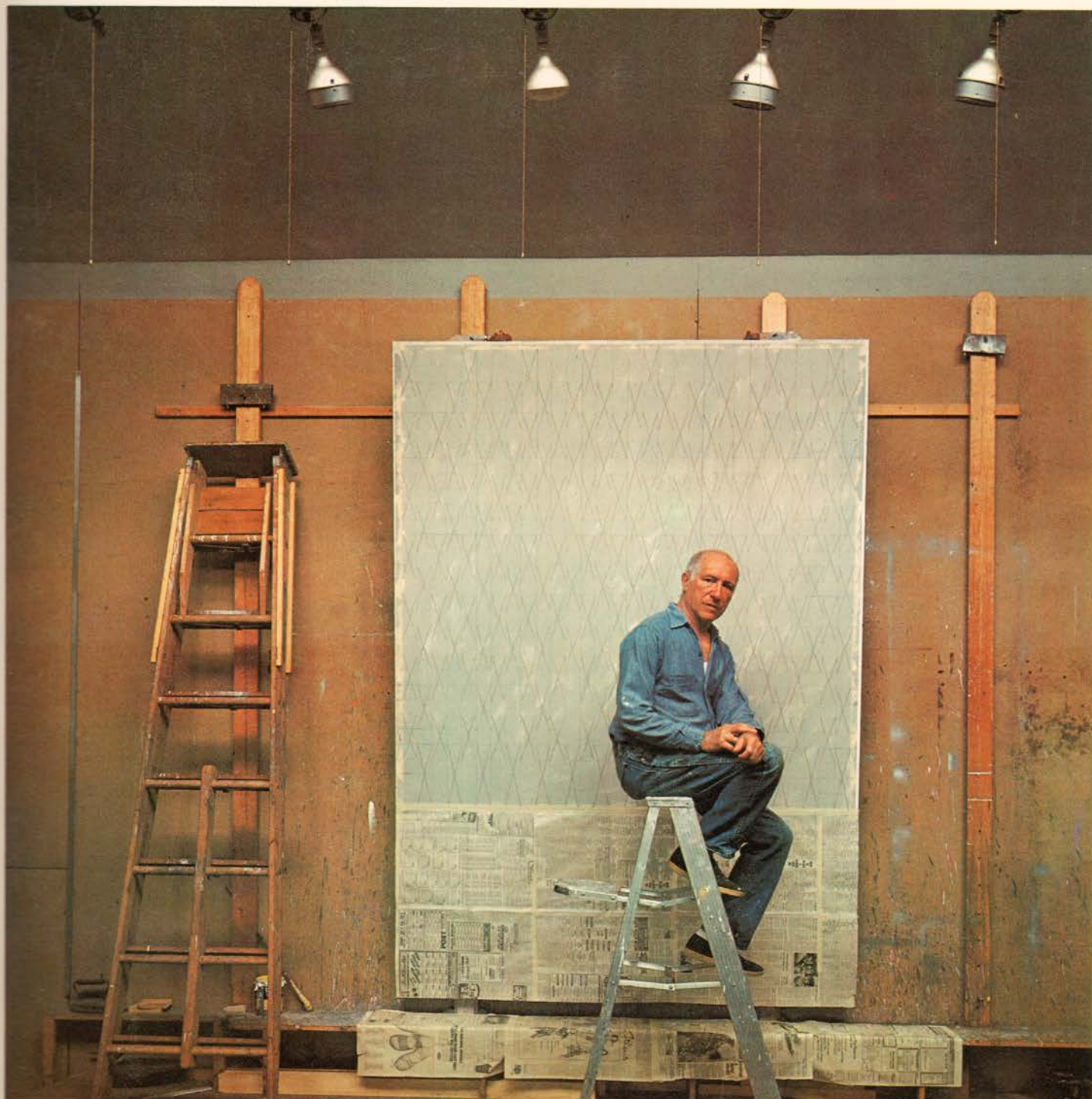


# Art in America

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Linda Nochlin: The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law  
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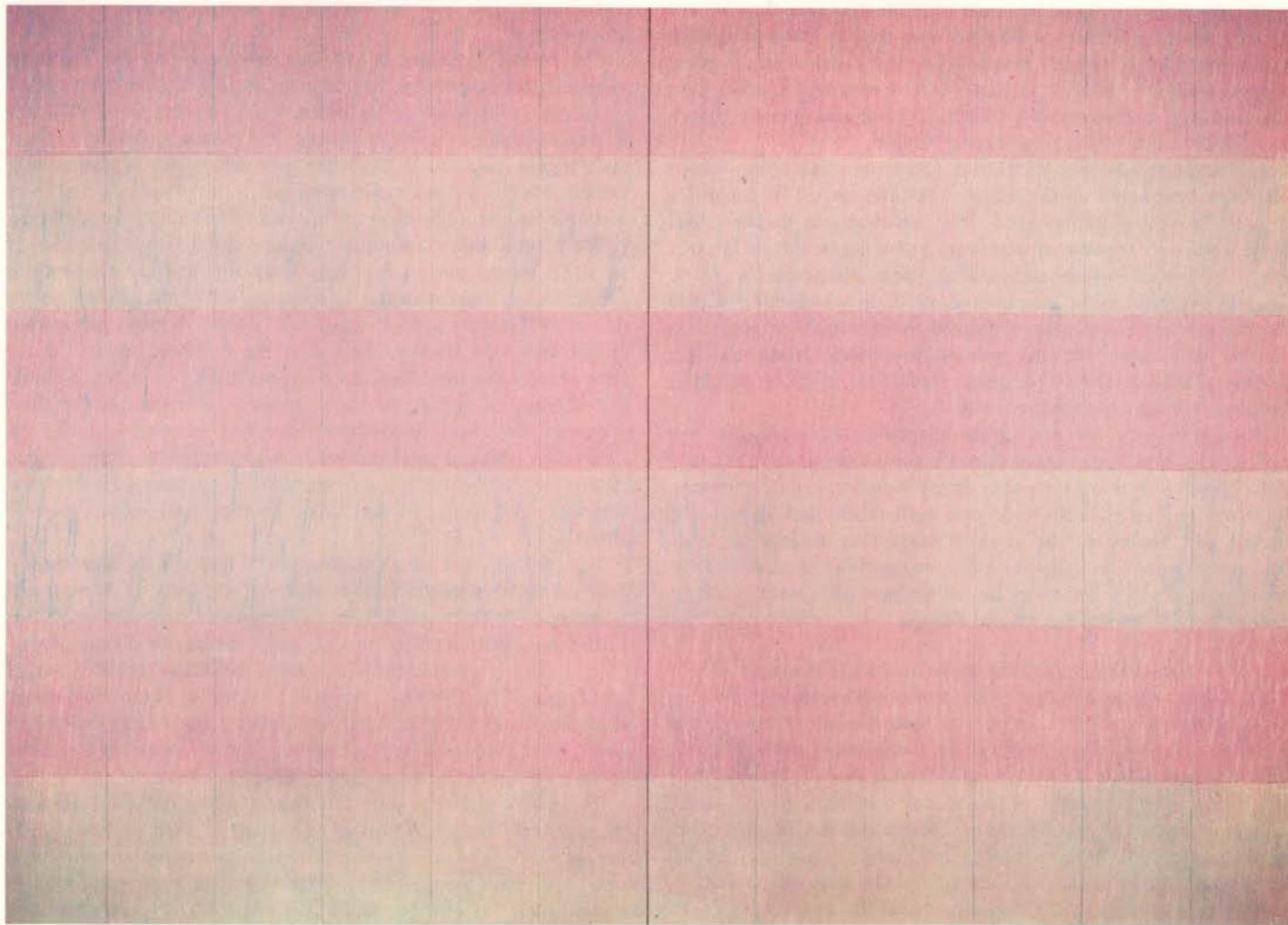


His hand moves like a dancer creating marks with the polish of calligraphy rather than drawing. Now his finesse is almost inhuman; it places a barrier between us and the ultimate intimacy his work promises. Draw close to it, attracted by its intricate surface, and you will be stopped by cool virtuosity just before possessing it.

KASHA LINVILLE GULA

# The Indian Summer of Jack Tworkov





Above: *Dptych I: o/c*, two panels, 85 x 90", 1971 (Nancy Hoffman Gallery).

Opposite: *R. A. on P. #8*: acrylic on paper, 29¾ x 22¼", 1972 (Nancy Hoffman Gallery).

Jack Tworikov is an extremely vital man, talkative only in bursts, always radiating energy. Although he has seen this century through, he does not seem to have aged beyond forty-five. He referred to himself disparagingly as an old man the other day, and our conversation turned to the prejudices American society holds toward older people. We can neither accept the idea that a man is still virile after fifty nor the possibility that he can still make a work of art filled with exuberance and fresh invention.

If we believe Richard Serra, who used to tell his students they would be washouts unless they made it before they were thirty, creative energies fly out the window after the third decade. This attitude is not only brutal to older artists but limiting to younger ones. It denies them the right to that slow evolution of a personal esthetic language that distinguishes the lives of pre-Cubist artists. By devaluing the virtues of experience and developed craftsmanship, it places a premium on the idea in art, overemphasizes the dramatic and closes off the possibility of growth.

Our devotion to the avant-garde in art is symptomatic of this misunderstanding of youth. Maybe it is a hangover from the enormous density of technical invention during this century. But avant-gardism also dominates contemporary art because it gives tremendous power to individual critics who have the clairvoyance to name and claim new movements. The system perpetuates itself. Artists who maintain a certain aloofness from the the critics, an unwillingness to play to them or with them, usually find that their reputations suffer. Once we adjust our critical vision of art in America and remove the distortions and omissions perpetuated by avant-gardism, we can begin to recognize mature artists' ability to continue producing significantly innovative work. Certainly Jack

Tworikov provides a superior example of the kind of omission that seriously hampers our perception of what has been and is being produced in this century.

This is not the place to reexcavate history to prove that many of Tworikov's paintings were as good as those of his contemporaries during the 1950s. There is a proper time for everything. Perhaps the energy of Tworikov's intellect, frustrated by the *tabula rasa* approach of Abstract Expressionism, needed an opportunity to exert itself before his art could reach full power. It has that opportunity now and has had since 1971.

At its best, Tworikov's is an art of measure. Among the pairs of poles it moves between are spontaneity and conscious forming, accident and structure. His evolution away from Abstract Expressionism during the 1960s was prompted by the desire to exercise more premeditated judgment toward the canvas. It was all right to greet a blank canvas as if born anew, totally naïve and ready for a new relationship; but after a while, spontaneity, losing itself in its constant exercise, became habit.

Although his desire for more structure was personal, it also reflected Jack's awareness of changing modes in art, of changing questions. In 1960, he was yearning toward the imposition of intellect again. Through his reading, which has always been far-ranging, he became increasingly interested in mathematics. Certain plane geometric concepts and techniques appeared to provide a means of ordering two-dimensional space more systematically. Tworikov began to experiment with dividing his canvases into geometrically induced sections, usually but not always generated by the dimensions of the canvas.

Besides grids, he found he could generate triangles, then rectangles by dividing the canvas diagonally as well as horizontally and vertically. Later, through brushstroke and tonal nuance, these shapes could be induced to yield rich formal and spatial play: interlocking, interpenetrating planes, overlapping planes, planes hanging between layers of glittering strokes.

Jack explored the possibilities of geometric structuring over at least five years until he developed a flexible syntax he could use at will. In some paintings after 1971, structure was no more than a spider's web supporting layers of pigment; in others, it took over the whole image, suppressing stroke to geometric form. Several monochromatic canvases of 1972, in which color is also suppressed, are completely mobilized by their interior geometry, so that their edges become part of the shapes drawn on their surfaces. Spatial illusion is never traditional in these paintings because it is derived geometrically.

These canvases are not simply diagrammatic, although they appear so at first. There is considerable formal complexity at work. At a distance of thirty feet, they imply weighty, rectilinear form; at fifteen feet, the planes slide past each other, fold in and out, appear and disappear, and at close range they breathe. Delicate nuances in stroke and ground allow suggestions of mist and fog to seep in. Forms dematerialize as surface takes over with the feel of velvet, animal fur or fine drizzle.

Geometry did not develop alone in Jack's painting. It was evolved in a dialogue with stroke—although Jack's brushwork is now so perfect it appears to have been done by a divine machine. It's not mechanical, but its flawlessness defies comprehension. Jack subverted the potential delicacy of his brush during the 1950s in the interest of emotional intensity. It was there, incognito, in his brashest paintings, but it did not become overt until around 1965. Jack practiced his gesture until by 1972 his hand moved like a dancer creating marks with the polish of choreography rather than drawing. Now his finesse is almost inhuman. It places a barrier between us and the ultimate intimacy his work promises. Draw close to it, attracted by its intricate

surface, and you will be stopped by cool virtuosity just before possessing it.

The formal harmony of his canvases may be the result of mathematical proportion, but their individual rhythm comes from variations in the touch of his brush. Each painting since 1971 has its unique stroke or series of strokes. His gesture is usually vertical and slightly diagonal to the right, but that is its only consistent feature. As he did with geometry and form, Tworikov has from a simple beginning worked out a varied vocabulary for surface.

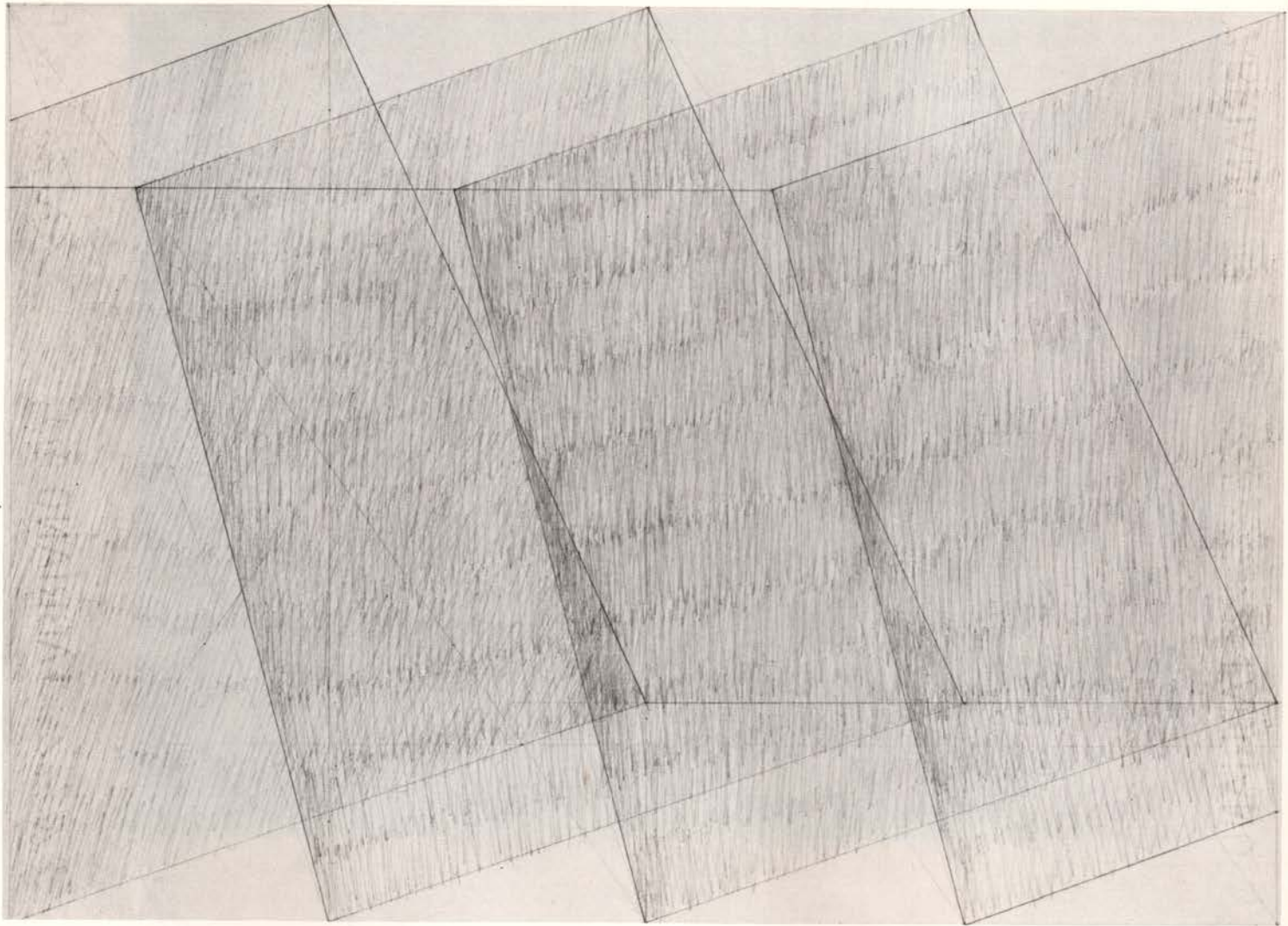
The hand's dance is felt most vividly in the simplistic canvases of 1972, where only a few horizontal and vertical divisions or a horizon line support stroke. In company with color, the evocative power of Tworikov's brush goes far beyond rhythm. Depending on the layers of strokes, their size, the distance between them, their opacity and hue, they can suggest sunlight on water, the drift and shudder of foliage or the anguished movement of the city. Although the tracks of his hand have this metaphoric ability, at times their physical presence dominates completely. Then you can almost feel the beat of paint being brushed on canvas. When their sensual quality is this strong, Jack's painting goes beyond Impressionism.

Jack has devised an oil-paint mixture that allows him translucence without bleed-through or blurring. He uses oil in a special lucite base. It dries quickly, is responsive to light and maintains distinctness when applied in successive layers. Its elastic consistency makes it possible for him to move his brush smoothly across the canvas. Like Pollock, he works skeins of paint. Sometimes he glazes without color, building a texture that is felt rather than seen. This colorless layer breaks up the action of light on the surface of a painting as if the paint were faceted.

Tworikov's paintings are creatures of light, not only the light they embody but the light they are seen in. Like Rothko's, they are recessive, glowing forth only after a long period of concentration. Sometime they go opaque and reject the viewer entirely. In natural light, they are nuanced and poetic, with gently receding and protruding forms; in artificial light, they can be hard and superficial. Sometimes they appear hybrid, suggesting spaces in

*Diptych II: o/c, each panel 76 x 76", 1972 (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum).*





R-PT-#1: pencil on paper, 13 x 18¼", 1973 (Nancy Hoffman Gallery).

the mind and outdoor spaces simultaneously.

None of these effects is immediate. Only Tworokov's less successful paintings are quickly apprehensible. The best are slow companions, giving a mauve mist, a fast patter of strokes, light absorbed, light generated, light reflected, depending on the hour of the day and your state of mind.

What is the subject matter of Tworokov's paintings? Is there subject matter or only points of departure for sensation? Do they aspire to religious intensity or are they worldly? I think the latter. There is something down-to-earth about Tworokov's approach that distinguishes him from Agnes Martin, Rothko or Reinhardt. He never seems as far removed. His work is too sensual, too filled with the flow of stroke and texture. You are always aware of Tworokov's presence as creator. The specificity of his paintings nails them to the present. They don't encourage private contemplation, but rather invite increasingly sensitive apprehension of the canvas itself. His work remains within the realm of physical experience—much more an impressionist characteristic than a metaphysical one.

In the past, Tworokov has used traditional subject matter: still life, the figure, landscape. His recent work moves back to nature, but does so indirectly, by suggesting subtle parts of our experience of nature. I had to go to nature to realize this. One evening at sunset I was watching a pond as the wind began to ripple the water, breaking up the rose and mauve light it reflected. The pattern and movement of the waves were suddenly like Jack's painting.

The beauty in his work is very like the impersonal beauty of nature. It is the product of a human hand, but one so skillful it makes marks as regular as waves on water.

Sometimes he is too much the master of his work. When his paintings fall short, as they sometimes do, it is because he has over-devised them. Or his virtuosity may cause them to suffer an excess of elegance. But Tworokov is already pushing against his skill, against the structures he has mastered. They are beginning to constrain him. He is changing his stroke, making it more complex, more fiercely energetic and multi-directional. He is breaking into his achieved integrity of surface, fracturing the space.

Jack's ability to keep going, to reexamine and change, makes him an appealing figure to many younger artists and critics. Like Resnick now and Hofmann before, he is acquiring a new following attracted by his present energy. Some artists have the ability to remain in time, to flow and change with it. Tworokov is one.

"As I approach seventy," he wrote in his notebooks in 1969, "I am fully aware of all that lies ahead for me. And I'll admit there are moments that press on me with holy terror. But what is sweet in life is now sweeter, with a sweetness that is truly ferocious. My longings keener, more obsessive, than ever they were in my youth. That my life is encompassed, that I cannot reach out for everything I desire, that my grasp is limited, that is inevitable to any life. Man's appetites are insatiable. But the appetite is the important thing, the longing, the desire, the reaching—that is truly what the dance is all about; and here and there some fulfillment for which the heart must offer up its hosannas."



## Notes on My Painting

*Walker*

In the studio I have the illusion of autonomy. I make sketches, drawings, plans and tack them on the wall. I consult preceding paintings and consider strategies for the next one. I make purely automatic drawings on scratch pads that take moments to do and make hundreds of them, saving a few, throwing most of them away. Out of these the seeds of paintings sometimes come. Some relate to what I'm doing, others are reserved as maybes. Maybe I get to them. Maybe not. I've also made whole series of paintings extending over a considerable period of time, several years, which I have mentally disowned or rolled up or confined to the warehouse. They turned out to be deviations, departures, searches which for whatever reason did not, after a while, win my adherence. Nevertheless, the experience enlarged my view of my painting.

In the end, the work which I have exhibited contains, I believe, an element of self-portrayal which for better or worse I can reconcile to myself without embarrassment. I would not be comfortable with a painting that was too aggressively stated or too sleek or too self-consciously simple, or too beautiful or too interesting. I am uncomfortable with extreme portrayals. I let reason examine disorder. A certain amount of censorship results which one could call form.

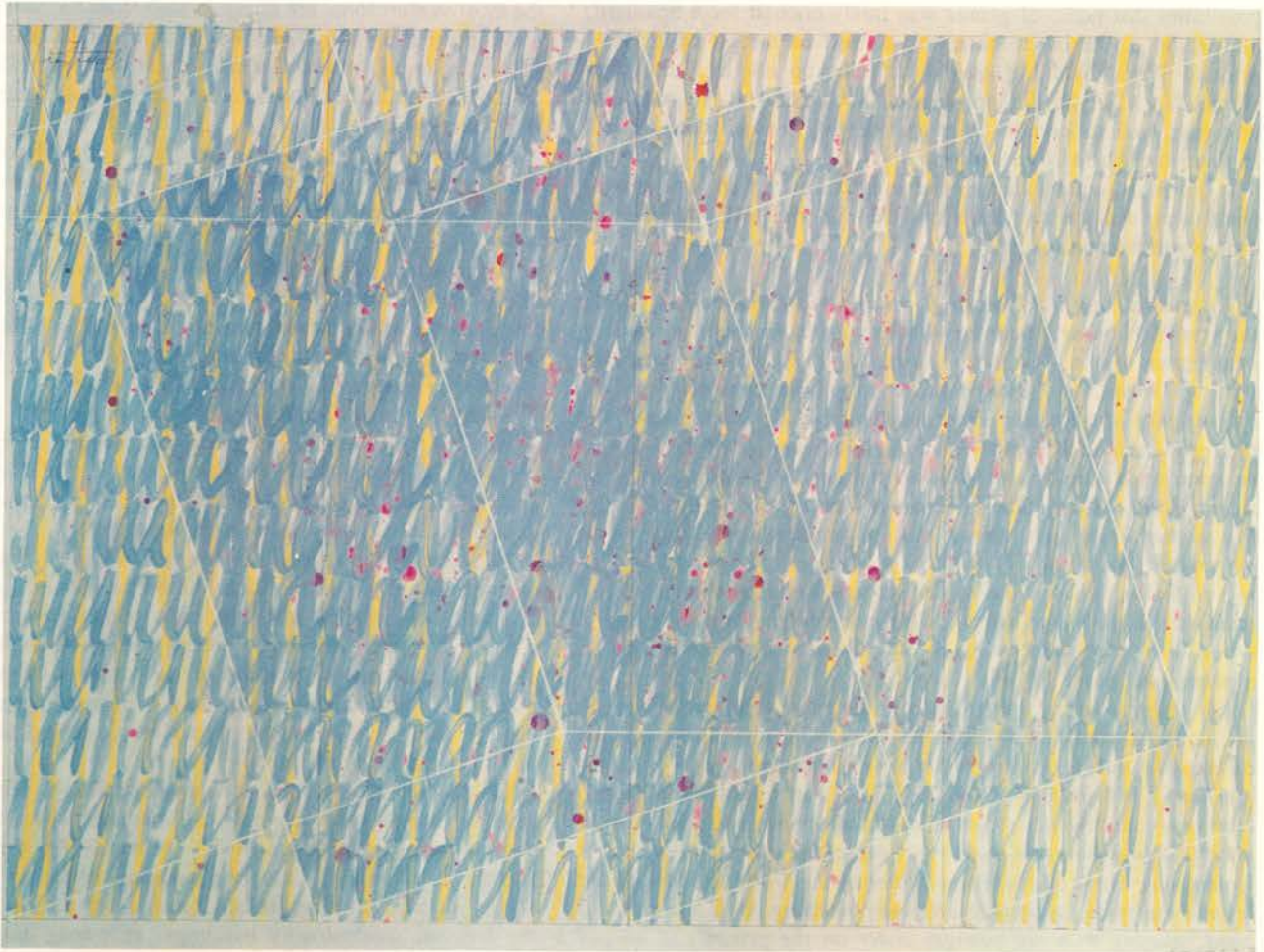
Nevertheless, I am not immune to pratfalls. And I pray that I will not come to regret this attempt at saying something about myself, as I have in the past.

I said that in the studio I have the illusion of autonomy. I mean

that when I am working I shut out as nearly as possible the influence of precedents. I guide myself by eye or by intuition, which is perhaps the same thing. It's not likely I would make a change in a painting just on theoretical grounds. The eye always asks, "Does it look right or does it look wrong?" It often takes some time for the eye to get used to something that was at first disturbing. What looked uncomfortable today may look all right in a day or two. The eye, too, is like a spy. It tries to answer the question always posed in a painting, not always answered, is it true or is it false. If you can live with it, it is probably true. The approval of others doesn't help if you can't.

What is the relation of reason to feeling? Reason chooses the ground where the play of feeling is set free. Reason simply says this ground, not that. Not everywhere, but here. It does not so much limit as it contains.

The eye implies the body. Certain types of brushing meet the mood, maybe the need, of the body the way certain kinds of motion meet the mood and need of a dancer. These brushings, these motions and their rhythms are, therefore, not always the same. They vary naturally. Within any given series under the dominance of a given theme, variation takes place in individual paintings attributable to purely ephemeral but recurring and characteristic moods. Color may show similar variations—subject to theme and modified by the mood of the moment. Always and everywhere there is the interplay between the projected theme and the play of the moment as paint is brushed on the surface.



R. A. on P. #3: acrylic on paper, 22¼ x 29¾", 1972 (Nancy Hoffman Gallery).

Opposite: R. A. on P. #2: acrylic on paper, 22¼ x 29¾", 1972 (Nancy Hoffman Gallery).

However, the painter does not live in the studio *only*. Not all the influences on his work originate there, obviously. Outside the studio the painter's autonomy encounters challenge and resistance. The forces that impinge on him are not in his control and these have incalculable effects on the conditions which envelop and shape his work. The consciousness which is his in the studio is immediately modified when he steps outside.

There he encounters the work of other painters which reinforces or detracts from his own; the galleries which will or will not show his work; the museum curators that include or exclude him from important shows; critics that praise, condemn or ignore; and finally the buyer and collector. Together, they make up the art world, the market and the politics of art. It would take enormous vanity to pretend that these forces do not affect a painter's development. Since undeniably they affect his chances of survival, how could it be otherwise? In a market-oriented culture they not only determine the rewards, they determine the range and profile of the audience with whom he can communicate. They constitute in effect a market like any other, casting its influence on the makeup of the artist and the product traded.

I do not believe ambition for fame and money is a factor in the genesis of an artist. Nor are they the prime targets even when the painter has entered the market. For the struggle for self-recognition, perhaps even more acutely, for self-formation, runs parallel to the making of every painting and is a life-long, never-ending struggle. But outside the painter's consciousness of himself, what

other evidence of recognition is there, and what other means of survival are there if not fame and money?

The painter who voluntarily chooses poverty and obscurity is surely a myth. I have never met the painter who, however successful, thought that he had received his full measure of rewards, who did not carry a heart full of grievances. (And if he concealed his hurt, his wife or widow generally did not.)

If I put some emphasis on this point, it is out of chagrin. The artist's personality has been grotesquely romanticized as his position from which to exert an influence on the social fabric of his time has declined. I do not speak, of course, of those artists who have the mass media at their command. While the romanticized image of the artist excludes such features as competition for riches, he may, nevertheless, exploit this image quite effectively in the marketplace.

The politics of art are not the only condition obtruding on the artist's autonomy. The period in which he lives is as much a condition of his development as time and place is for the development of every person. Where the artist differs from the average person is perhaps, one hopes, in his greater sensibility and sharper response to time and place. But it would be absurd to assign to the artist an autonomy free from time and place. He is always the product not only of his gifts, but of his period and more specifically of the nation and city in which he lives, regardless of whether he is a comfortable or alienated member. Consider the

possibility that personal genius was rarely enough for a Spaniard, a German, a Russian to enter the context of the art of his time prior to World War I if he did not take up life in Paris; after World War II if he did not live in New York. It suggests that at certain periods certain cities are viewing lenses of the world. In them the world is telescoped.

If one asked what is the true meaning of abstract art, one answer could very well be that Paris and New York gave birth to it in the twentieth century.

*I came to New York when I was twelve, a year or so before the first World War. Neither my father nor my mother were natives of the town where I was born. At that time Russia still ruled that part of Poland; my father's tailor shop was contracted to the officers corp of a Russian army regiment and the shop moved with the regiment from Russia to Poland. A widower with five children, he contracted a marriage with my mother, a childless divorced woman from a neighboring village. It was a frustrating marriage. My mother never quite forgot the ten years she was married to a man she loved but who could not give her a child. My father was to find his new wife a rather sad and unhappy woman whose main role in the house was to shield her children from my father's brood. In return, the hostility to their stepmother made our house a precarious place for me.*

*My father was an affectionate person and I sought to escape my mother's care-sodden concern by turning my childhood love on him. Nevertheless, I remember my childhood as alienated within my home. My father's shop, and home, was near the officers' club in a non-Jewish section. I don't remember being at ease in either the Jewish or non-Jewish sections of the town. The pleasures I remember are walks with my father in the woods and meadows around the town, swimming on sunny mornings in a clear placid pond, playing with my younger sister on the grounds of an old castle ruin reached through a breach in a wall bordering our yard.*

*The first years in New York I remember as the most painful in my life. Everything I loved in my childhood I missed in New York, everything that had been painful in my childhood grew to distressing proportions as my father's situation deteriorated in the new land, and as I had to face a new culture and adolescence at the same time. What saved me then was reading, as soon as I learned English, by providing me with the transition both to the new culture and to my adolescence. In the public library with the help of a loving and sympathetic woman librarian, a window opened on the world. I read everything within reach in English, French and Russian literature. I read all night at times and sat out my days in school listless and drowsy. By the time I was in my early twenties, I became an avid reader of contemporary poetry and prose: Pound, Elliot, Frost, Cummings, Moore, Dos Passos, Joyce and Proust.*

*As soon as I could, I moved out of my parent's house and found refuge in Greenwich Village. It was in the early twenties in the Village that I was to experience for the first time in my life something like a sense of community. It was also in the early twenties that I saw for the first time the paintings of Cézanne and Matisse, which became an important factor that led me out of college into art school.*

*But although I found a community in the Village, it was a community of alienated people—runaways from every part of America.*

*Yet New York was and remains as near as possible my home ground, since I can move around in Manhattan anywhere between Chinatown and Harlem and stop and be stopped by people I know or know me. I have many acquaintances and some friends at every level of society. I have also visited and spent extended periods of time in nearly every part of the country. Nevertheless, the feeling that I have been an alien in the world persists with me to this day.*

I must confess I'm not the most venturesome person. I suspect

the most venturesome are likely to start from the most secure home base. They court the alien. But I have known alienation all my life. It holds no romance for me. My striving is not for the far-off or far-out landscape, but for the identification and naturalization of a home ground.

My strivings as an artist are, then, in the direction of a continuing process, in spite of my age, of self-definition and toward the comprehension of the culture around me and my relation to it.

I am aware, within myself, of a large mound of dissatisfaction and even distrust of much of twentieth-century art and of much that passes for significant innovation now. I have few heroes and as I read twentieth-century art history and wander through the modern art museum, I am often full of doubts.

Today I see in Impressionism, in Monet and Pissarro, but especially in Cézanne, a rebirth of painting after nearly two centuries of decadence. The Fauves, especially Matisse, and the Cubists, especially Picasso of the 1911-13 period, carried the innovations of the Impressionists to new heights.

But after a century full of wars, it becomes apparent that art is more and more in the same limbo as religion—patronized to be sure, but expelled from the most critical centers of concern. Art which in the nineteenth century took up its exile in bohemia, exhibits two faces in reaction to the violent, vulgar world: one tragic in search of pure form, the other comic in search of new outrage. On the one hand Mondrian, on the other Dada, Surrealism and their multiple offshoots.

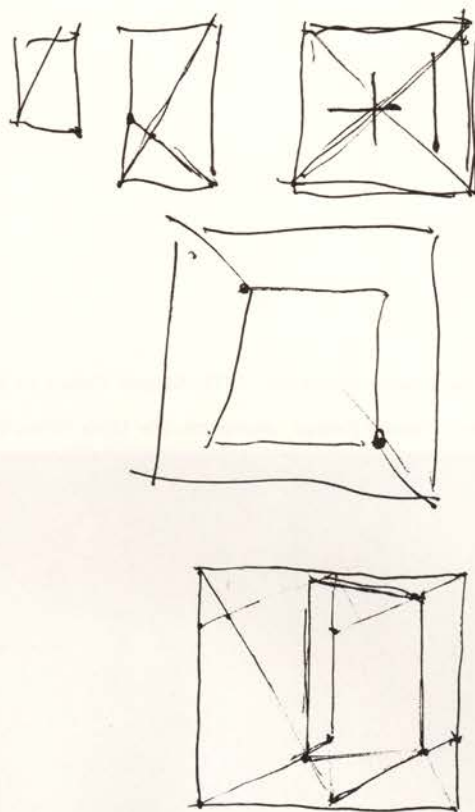
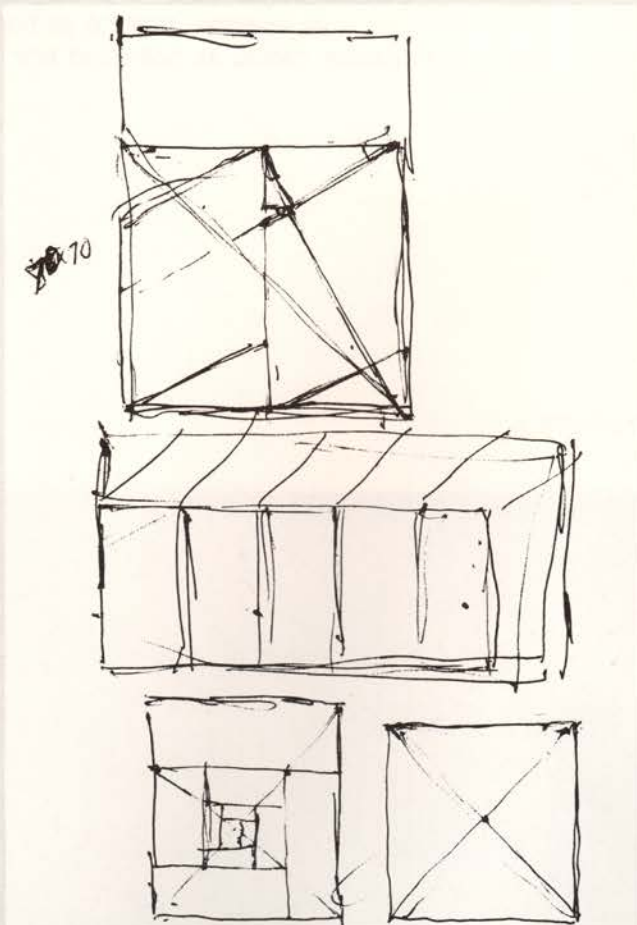
In America the confluence of these forces has produced a revolving dizziness of movements. These are represented by efforts to encroach on the mass media (primarily by the use of photography); attempts to integrate industrial materials and manufacturing methods into art objects; and rather pathetic strivings (in the face of hundred-story buildings, mile-long bridges, rocketry and space technology) at gigantism. Also pathetic, I think, is the leaning on science and more recently on linguistics to give art an aura of seriousness.

On the other hand, we have non-art and anti-art theater; instead of objects—presentations, happenings, heavy earthworks and light conceptual finger exercises—reaching some sort of high in so-called body art. All of these exhibiting the unhappiness on the Left with what is normally called painting and sculpture, an unhappiness that matches that which exists on the Right.

In the absence of a unifying believable central core to our civilization and culture the ruling middle class, which during the Dada period was the target of outrageous art, now preens itself as the patron and advocate of every outrage-as-innovation. It has co-opted bohemia and captured its style and established it as typically bourgeois. This might have been something to celebrate if one could ignore the TV and radio commercials or the general chaos wrought in our cities and countryside, the vulgarization of life and politics for which the same class is also to be held responsible.

To be sure, without bringing in art history and sociology one could trace the development of abstract painting by following the purely formal development step by step from Impressionism through Fauvism, through Cubism to Mondrian and the Abstract-Expressionist movement in New York after World War II. Nevertheless, I sense that a social-psychological element was all the same present in this development. It strikes me that this element was the vacuum left in Western art by the emptying out of the religious and mythical element which had provided the essential ground for a significant and believable subject matter. There was nothing in our century to take the place of a universally significant and believable subject matter. (Although Marxist artists thought there was, they could not develop a meaningful iconography—only banal clichés.) This led to the emptying out of the picture of all exterior reference, leaving it to the still and movie camera to record and comment. In a sense, the abstract painting, which most typically represents the iconography of the post-religious age,





Two preliminary sketches: pen and ink, each 6 x 4", 1973.

consciously or unconsciously expresses an element of despair which runs like a thread through our century and which is an ingredient in all serious abstract painting. I sense it in my own work as I do in Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko and, among the younger painters, Johns. In classic art there was a face-to-face dialogue between artist and patron. It was the patron that most often determined subject matter. In a market-oriented culture, this has become all but impossible. And if it were possible, it would be destructive to let the masters of the marketplace decide on subject. Better the empty canvas.

Because I find it difficult to talk about my own work directly, I've tried in this piece to talk around it, pointing obliquely to my work and attitudes. But I should add something about a change that crept into my work about 1965 and has developed in the paintings that I've made these last five or six years.

Post-World War II painting in New York moved against two repressive experiences—the rhetoric of social realism, preached especially by the artists and ideologues on the arts projects of the thirties, and the hegemony of Paris in modern art. The response was an art that stood against all formula, an art in which impulse, instinct and the automatic, as guides to interior reality, were to usurp all forms of intellectualizing. I cannot remember any period in my life that so went to my head as 1949. It marked the foundation of the Artist's Club in New York and heralded a decade of painting as fruitful and revolutionary as the Impressionism of 1870.

But by the end of the fifties, I felt that the automatic aspect of Abstract-Expressionist painting of the gestural variety, to which my painting was related, had reached a stage where its forms had become predictable and automatically repetitive. Besides, the exuberance which was a condition at the birth of this painting could

not be maintained without pretense forever.

At the end of the fifties, I began to look around for more disciplined and contemplative forms. Although I've had practically no training in any branch of mathematics and little or no competence in any field of it, in 1965 I began to study elementary geometry and some aspects of the number system. I became fascinated with the little I learned and found in some aspects of the geometry of a rectangle a new starting point for composing a painting. An example of the kind of naïve question that was a starting point for me is the following: given any rectangle, what line can I draw that is not arbitrary but is determined by the rectangle? I soon arrived at an elementary system of measurements implicit in the geometry of the rectangle which became the basis for simple images that I had deliberately given a somewhat illusionistic cast. From then on, all my paintings began with carefully worked out drawings and measurements that I could repeat at will. But the actual painting I left to varieties of spontaneous brushing. What I wanted was a simple structure dependent on drawing as a base on which the brushing, spontaneous and pulsating, gave a beat to the painting somewhat analogous to the beat in music. I wanted, and I hope I arrived at, a painting style in which planning does not exclude intuitive and sometimes random play.

Above all else, I distinguish between painting and pictures (between Cézanne and Picasso). Where I have to choose between them, I choose painting. If I have to choose between painting and ideas—I choose painting; between painting and every form of theater—I choose painting.

*This article is also scheduled for publication in Leonardo, International Journal of the Contemporary Artist.*