



1 Jack Tworkov: *Homage to Stefan Wolpe*, 1960, diptych, 89 inches high.
Lent to the Whitney Museum show by the Michener Foundation, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pa.

By Louis Finkelstein

Tworikov: Radical pro

Scholarly, professional, but a radical explorer of the interior image, his influential Abstract-Expressionism is reviewed at the Whitney

Art movements continually have to be re-examined. The re-evaluation of Mannerism, the fairly recent resurgence of interest in Impressionism, my own discontent and that of a number of acquaintances with the received estimate of the nature and significance of Cubism are examples of this. Such revisions are the result of a changed capacity to view. We never wash our eyes in the same eyewash twice. Art movements themselves are but convenient abstract tools to enable us to apply critical conceptions to individual artists and specific works. The actual art objects remain aloof, inexhaustible to our inquiry, changeable to our formulations, never known. Likewise the concepts are re-shaped by a new unfolding of the particular.

Thus a double sort of investigation is posed by Tworikov's retrospective at the Whitney Museum [to May 3]: an investigation of Tworikov using the ideas of Abstract-Expressionism and an investigation of the ideas, using the particulars of his work and development. If it be argued that he never was the typical, the charismatic, the definitive Abstract-Expressionist, then it can be replied that nobody ever was; rather each one presented, according to his lights, ingredients which formed some imaginary object hovering between possibility and actuality.

Time's overthrow by time, the permanent revolution of the new, is a leading issue. For under its aegis the various newer art manifestations: returns to the figure, Neo-Dada, New Realism, cool art, would consign Abstract-Expressionism to the dustbin of history, converting it from a deliberate upset-

ting of the apple cart into the high art of museums. This seems in a measure to be taking place, although it does not signify the termination of many motives in A-E. Not too long ago we were told that Abstract-Expressionism was a conscious destruction of esthetic values and even of the idea of value itself; it was a symptom of, and a response to, a situation of crisis, both in the culture and in the individual, and that the separate works had no value save as the record of the artist's struggle. A-E was not art but experience overwhelming art. Either A-E was that, simply one contingent in a parade of queer freaks, marking the triumph of individualism and the death throes of a culture, or we will have to look at it as art. There is some suspicion that this is what its major figures always did (a few critics to the contrary) and that the hot-breath-of-history routine is only effective during the opening campaigns.

As a first approximation of some of the other-than-historical characterizations of A-E we should mention: passion, spontaneity, unfinishedness, a concern with inner turmoil, automatism and the blind immersion in process which would of itself illuminate the artist. It is, of course, with these themes that many of the subsequent developments have broken, preferring objectivity, smoothness, control, intent instead of process, a deadpan view of life rather than a suffering one. Yet these themes seem only ancillary, not essential to the real content of the movement. They could be found in many works, even typify the whole style of some artists, yet beneath them lurked some underlying notions which are ulti-



Jack Tworikov, photo Rudolph Burckhardt

2 *Green Landscape*, 1949, 36 inches high.
Baltimore Museum of Art



3 *House of the Sun*, 1952-53, 50 inches high.

4 *The Father*, 1954, 60 inches high.





5 *Land*, 1954, 56 inches high.
Collection Mrs. Robert P. Koenig, New York



6 *Games, 3*, 1956, 38½ inches high.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. David Prager

7 *Barrier Series, 4*, 1961, 2 panels, 94 inches high.
Castelli Gallery



Tworikov continued

mately more serviceable to indicate particular excellences.

Retrospectively these seem to be: 1. An insistence on the autonomy of the painting as itself—Franz Kline's "painted with paint" echoing Mallarmé's "art which is made of oils and colors." 2. The principle of correspondence, wherein every element of the picture is, through both identity and context, a metaphor, a vehicle of meaning derived from experience.

The two notions only seem antithetical. In fact each is contained in the other. The claim to autonomy leads neither to mere design nor to a cult of materials as in Constructivism. It is here that the whole question of formality has been misunderstood. "Formality," to the artist, does not mean a sterilized concern with an analyzable scheme, but rather an insistence that *all* the available metaphors, created as they are by interpenetrating qualifications of meaning (which equal the total structure), function and are admitted to function. "Formality" is not opposed to "Expressiveness." Works which appear "formal" in the cliché sense, i.e. unexpressive, are either weak or misunderstood. The contrary of "formal" is "literary," which signifies a delimited lifting of a possible meaning from its context to the exclusion and diminution of the actual whole meaning. "Literary" bears the same relation to "formal" that, in speaking about Symbolist poetry, a logical or exclusive meaning would have to real polyvalence. So that a Kline, for example, only partially means strife and conflict (as has been said) *on the way to painting*, which is all the living meaning.

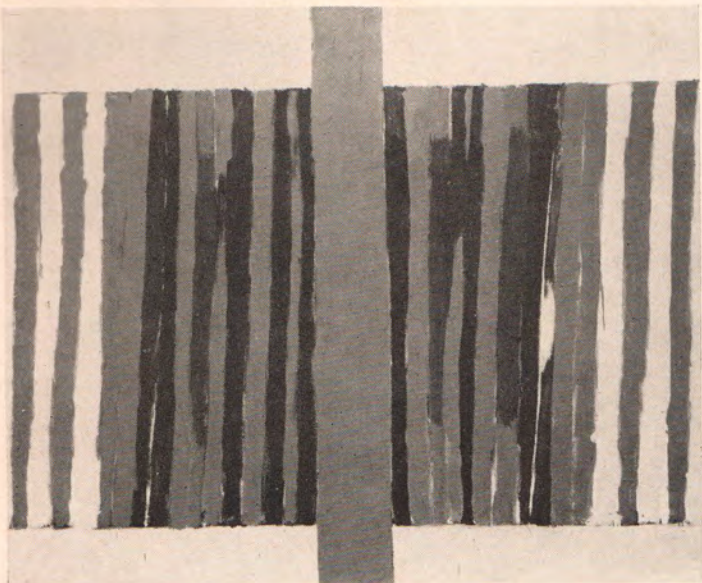
The Tworikov show is not a true retrospective since it only covers in any degree of depth the [Continued on page 52]



8 *West 23rd*, 1963, 60 inches high
Castelli Gallery



10 *ACD, 4*, 1962, charcoal on paper, 26 inches high.
Lent to the Whitney Museum show by Castelli Gallery



9 *Lane, RWB, 4*, 1963, 65 inches high.
Castelli Gallery

ties of Avery's style which are congenial to him and put them through certain changes. Where there is languor in the vision of Avery, Pace has given it his own sense of speed and muscles.

While it is obviously clear that Pace has introduced the outlines of the human figure into these new paintings, they are quite flat and therefore preserve in their lineaments an anonymity. This image of the anima comes alive more in the region of the hips and thighs than in the head. There is no meeting of eyes with this faceless maid.

Tworlov continued from page 34

last eleven years. These are, to be sure, the years of his mature production, but we are not given to see all the elements which went into getting there. Regrettably there are some gaps both in major achievements and interesting side issues. What the exhibition does show, however, is Tworlov's development through playing off the elements of meaning and wholeness and the gradual gathering together of an extremely personal artistic power. The bases of this power seem to be found through equipoise and ineloquence.

By equipoise I mean what some people might call equivocation. Some time ago I saw a caricature of Jack by a fellow painter. It was not very complimentary. Fellow painters are not invariably kind to one another. It showed him hesitant and equivocating among a host of evanescent possibilities. At first I thought of it as just an astringent dig, but eventually its accuracy became apparent to me in a deeper way—that his works are concerned with a balancing off of alternatives—which are indeed entertained in a searching, wondering, even sometimes obtuse way.

In all of his mature works and increasingly so in his later ones there are two voices, or many voices paired one against another, not the same balance, although some issues recur. An obvious one of these pairings would be between space and plane. Stated as between painting and object this becomes a little clearer. Sometimes, as in *Lane* [fig. 9], or in some of his almost all-over charcoal drawings he comes perilously close to making just an object. (He has one of the earliest Jasper Johns flags in his living room to remind him of this particular irony.) Pencil sketches in his studio have an alarming way of looking like paper on which graphite has been rubbed for some other purpose (like making noise, or heat). And yet the mark, the patent object, is a veil; it shows itself to be a veil. We look through, beyond, between the cracks, not because of an explicit construction but because poetically the mark assumes a reality in itself, as the word in Mallarmé, inviting meaning.

This equipoise of non-explicitness goes on in many elements of his work. We ask, when is a stroke not a stroke, a line not a line, a line a crack an edge a line? See for instance the central vertical charcoal line in the *West 23rd*, of 1963 [fig. 8]. Does it stand for the division between two canvases as in *Homage to Stefan Wolpe* [fig. 1] or is the division in *Wolpe* another kind of line? Why is the *Wolpe* division off center? Other divisions, other strokes, other shapes have the same kind of equivocality where the play upon space and surface going back to *Duo*, 3 of 1957 and *Day's End* is also a play on the tension between confrontation and delusion. Rothko would show us the heart of darkness whereas Tworlov shows us the heart of darkness or a brick wall. One of the most mysterious of these strange divisions occurs horizontally across the drawing *ACD*, 4 [fig. 10]. There with hardly any mark at all is a shelf in the space, a discontinuity in the midst of continuity.

Another equipoise is found in the meaning of his color [see Cover, fig. 1]. Generally his color is schematic and dry in keeping with his austerity. But sometimes through brushings, sometimes through vibration, the barest hint of vibration, it takes on a lush sensuous appeal. *Traverse* is soft and airy, *Duo* is shimmering, fleshy, atmospheric. *Wolpe* on the other hand is dry and granitic. The reds and blues of *Game* are lush, in *RWB*, dry and brilliant. *Script* is just in the middle. The green, a mediating (what Mondrian called "fugitive") color, is almost on the surface, but also in depth, inviting. Many of his works have overtones of Provincetown landscape. So he is also a nature painter not a nature painter.

The most tense dichotomy is between freedom and unfreedom, and he has been conscious of its irony. In spite of attempting to approach his canvas free of preconception, open to all suggestion, his work (as he has noted of others) continually assumes more typical characteristics. Much of the language of his work, the separate marks, appear spontaneous, as in Action Painting. But Action Painting was a portrayal of the artist's struggle, not the conscious creation of an object. With few exceptions, such as some of the studies for *House of the Sun* and *Morning*, his work is slowly built up with full awareness of the

Perhaps the dominant invocation in these paintings, too, is the pastoral one. These female creatures are fused with the garden plot. As images they are a cultivation of a new way, but they are also nostalgic for the background of another day.

They say you can't go home again. They say that while you can take the artist out of the country, you can't take the country out of the artist. Pace has planted some new seed and taken a good harvest. He will have other crops. Let us see how his garden grows.

art object and its demands for its own exclusive kind of existence. The source of any given stroke may be, as the Action Painter's, a kind of divine frenzy, but once it is made it becomes an art element with its own potentials to be explicated by its role within an orderly scheme. He speaks of "touching the canvas" as unleashing the unpredictable, that which draws upon unknown contents of the painter, where "life leaks into the picture." But on stepping back the mind takes over, conscious control utilizes the raw material of symbolization in a deliberate way. Someone once said that Tworlov simply stares a picture into completion by the tenacity with which he considers each increment. I cannot avoid comparing this with Philip Guston's account of painting his *White Painting*, during the course of which he never stepped back. For Tworlov, the component implicit in stepping back carries over a span of pictures and time, reviving themes and discovering new variations, eventually the cargo of reflection and unreflection becoming paradoxically the deepest access to the unconscious.

The interplay between conscious and unconscious (the way he uses the word "touching" has an overtone of a carnal violation of a mystery) marks an equipoise between enthusiasm (being taken by a god) and common sense, conceivably acting out the Hassidic notion that we fulfill God's wish for us by being ourselves through opposing Him. The demonic has always had a strong appeal for Tworlov, but he always steps back. Intellect and emotion *must* have a reciprocal action.

The idea of equipoise, of placing an issue where it hangs in delicate balance, reflects another Hassidic idea. In the writing of the name of God, the omission of the initial letter, *YOD*, which is a small lozenge-shaped dot, changes the word to mean the destruction of the universe. The true sense of being depends on seeing that it is by only such a speck that life is life, real is real. Eventually all Tworlov's compositions are dynamic counterbalances which are set in motion by minute means. I think that I have even seen the *YOD*, the quivering speck which divides the seen from the unseen, in at least two of his works, the charcoal drawing, *ACD*, 4 and the *Homage to Stefan Wolpe* [figs. 10, 1]. In each of these a small speck, located a little out from the center of the composition, seems to turn on all the energies of the picture, space, scale and movement.

Between consciousness and unconsciousness, freedom and unfreedom, painting is both pure and impure. Along with citing several Hassidic notions I would like to point out that this corresponds with the general Jewish idea of non-duality, the non-separation of body and spirit. This seems to be why Tworlov's paintings often look like Neo-Plastic ideas becoming fleshy. For Tworlov painting is intrinsically impure.

"Thus ever hung my fate . . . /Mongst things corruptible," describes for him that condition of human life which art portrays. He seeks freedom through acknowledging all the constraints and conditions which impinge on him.

This is nowhere more clearly seen than in his pursuit of ineloquence. As early as the *House of the Sun* series ["Tworlov Paints a Picture," ARTNEWS, May, '53], his tendency to diminish expressive effects when they became obtrusive in respect to the integrity of the canvas as a totality of metaphor was noted. This is the result of a fastidiousness opposed to what Harold Rosenberg has called "the baring of wounds." Not only is this damping out of inviting content a part of the process of each painting, but of his over-all development with respect to treatment of content. After a period of portraits, still-life and nature painting in the 1940s, his style blossomed out in the paintings with Greek and other mythological subjects. Their content consisted of universal ideas centered around symbols of generation—the sun disc, a wheel of figures, certain archetypal figures as the *Father* of 1954 [fig. 4]. Even these were ceremonialized with the narrative element minimized and the main movement being that of the observer towards the canvas. Somewhat later, symbolism, derived from the Old Testament, became buried, obscure, more the means of his focus on interiorization of the painting than interpretable by the

viewer. *House of Rocks*, for example, has a whole symbolic rationale based upon two intersecting biblical traditions. The archetypal subject gave way to the archetypal form. If it could be held to carry over any of its original content it could not be through logical specification but only through the wholeness of purely formal clues, working through the mechanism of psychological resonance on a principle of universal analogy. *Daybreak* shows the beginning of the squared format which limits the range of possible events, so that the choices that remain act with greater explicitness, thus making much of his subsequent work a study in theme and variations. The rectilinear organization of *Land* [fig. 5] hangs between formal construction and allusions to landscape. At the most recent portion of this development, *Variations* is a kind of Neo-Plastic color-game from which other motives cannot be ruled out.

Titles, too, become progressively less explanatory and function as either a disguise or a mere identification. When once the title *The Sirens in Voice* was misprinted "The Silence in Voice" that seemed to sum it up. *Thursday*, 1960, has a whole buried literature. *Wednesday* doesn't even mean Wednesday and *Lane* is not a lane but a person.

Why this cover-up? To keep the audience at bay, not through a deliberate flouting of the public, but because he feels that there is a very important thing to be communicated to the public by not enticing it to enter too easily into the picture. This is not obscurantism, but a judgment on the real difficulty of "I understand." The grounding of this circumspection is ethical as well as esthetic. He believes his art to be based upon an idea of democracy, something which, although it derives from a specific cultural context, is naturally accessible. His work requires no theoretical rationale. The experience of his paintings is so specifically that of the particular elements in each work that it repels the kind of programmatic exposition where (as seems to happen so often in contemporary criticism) one can ask, "Did you see the picture?" and receive back, "No, but I heard the argument."

The picture exists *en-soi* and *pour-soi*; it is a task to be undertaken without the props which other forms of discourse offer, and which would deflect sensibility which alone rules—the spontaneous and full gathering up into a moment of judgment of all that has gone before—neither rational nor irrational, but both.

Liberal democracy implies a free choice (but) in a universe that is

eventually rational. Although he is an intellectual, Tworikov suspects intellectualist appeals and the kind of cerebral formulation which would rule out a natural fecundity of awareness. Although his sensibilities and values are refined, he is no snob; neither is he a rebel, a radical, a person who differentiates himself from the social order and the world's work. Against the claim that art must be disruptive, violent, cynical, attacking, to match the breaking up of values, he poses that it must be whole to reflect the actual existence of an ethical order. His statement that, "the best morality is no morality at all," is a Tworikovian version of, "everybody talking about heaven ain't going there."

His art and his views are decidedly humanistic, in the best sense of democracy being the source of freedom, rejecting all manifestations of "aristocratic nihilism." This explains why his work, though refined, is not elegant; he would never choose the dandyish snap in preference to patient craft. If he were not a painter he would be a carpenter and a good one. He prides himself on being able to work well with his hands and has a kind of contempt for the painter who does not. When he makes his own stretchers they are invariably better joined than those he buys.

All of his attitudes add up to a thoroughgoing professionalism on many levels. *In fondo* he sees the task of the professional artist as a worthy one. More than anything else this is to tap the "subterranean river . . . of beliefs, dreams, aspirations" which has been rendered less available through organized religion in a secular society. He does not look over his shoulder at some past tradition of forming and feeling for this, but rather seeks to arrive at that depth of response in his time and context that the makers of a previous tradition reached in theirs. He is professional in his assumption that the evocative function of art rises from the good day's work of the conscientious craftsman. On the other hand, he does not use professionalism as a mask to hide behind, to evade the responsibility of the artist to participate in and transform life. Along with this sense of responsibility I think that there is no other artist of his generation who is more modest, more humble in the presence of the idea of the "great art of museums."

It was inevitable that Abstract-Expressionism should become professional, even though this term was anathema in its earlier days. As

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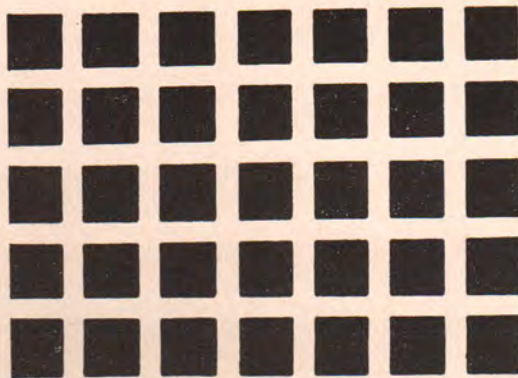
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time goes by the old pros stand out, the issues of *Sturm und Drang* appear less urgent and the paintings seem, or become, more interesting as paintings. All programs, all art-life games, all attacks are swallowed up by the art impulse; it is too strong. Contrariwise, and by way of equivocation and paradox, the detachment of cool art, discreet art, the left-over shreds of Constructivism do not eventually serve art because they are too consciously insulated from the penetrative forces of life. Crystal-ballwise Pop Art already reveals its kinship to high art and will increasingly so. The two elements which were indicated earlier, of autonomy and metaphor, no longer seem the exclusive property of Abstract-Expressionism, but by its force are projected backwards into the tradition of art. Perhaps the only way of differentiating A-E as the latest in a series is by the degree of access to unconscious levels of experience, in which respect it appears to be a kind of Surrealism but more whole.

Tworkov is not the only pro among his colleagues, but he may be the most consciously and conscientiously professional, the least reliant on other outs. If he is far from the most dramatic artist of his time, if his work has a certain withdrawn quality, a certain woodenness, he has played a part in setting forth that high level of aspiration and achievement which is the *sine qua non* of any significant movement. A young friend of mine remarked, "His art content is very high." In a scene (from which he is by no means departed) of conscious radicalism, great renunciations, frenetic invention, perhaps this is the only real radical position left.

Braque continued from page 31

In particular, I hope that the exhibition of the late works will prove that, far from declining at the end of his life, the artist made one of his most revolutionary discoveries: his "metamorphic" view of pictorial reality. This view has affinities with Zen. "You see, I have made a great discovery," Braque said to me in 1954, "I no longer believe in anything. Objects don't exist for me except insofar as a rapport exists between them or between them and myself. When one attains this harmony, one reaches a sort of intellectual non-existence—what I can only describe as a state of peace—which makes everything possible and right. Life then becomes a perpetual revelation." This is part of the message of Braque's last pictures.

Tchelitchew continued from page 38

destiny in the book of the human figure, yet Bérard was not, primarily, an anatomist. The Neo-Romantics, congealing around café tables more than on canvas and paper, went individual ways. From 1925 to 1933, Tchelitchew's native mercuriality looked as changeable as Picasso's. Against the latter's circus figures, his stripped acrobats were steeped in more varied moods, more spontaneous poses; his tattooed men, when not "strong men," offered themselves like roses in vases; he sought larger human burdens in circus accidents and arranged them like melodies; he addressed in eloquent silence the sleeping nude and placed figures dressed like Spahis in spaces where they sat or reclined as if hypnotized.

The dimension duly opened to Tchelitchew by the double and triple view in single figuration (a Cubist hallmark) gave him no pause; he reproduced selves in the human image as if it were a madrepore while the other Neo-Romantics, almost to a painting, held off [fig. 1]. Some portraits, as that of Natalie Paley in a hat, derive their charm from seeming to intimate this solemn capacity for self-reproduction [fig. 3]. Yet Tchelitchew did not rely for variety of feeling on this schematic device, as one may see from the wealth of feeling in his portraits of Edith Sitwell, one of which, a mask of wax modeled on a fragile wire frame, has the authority of a living presence [fig. 2]. How unrewarding it is to try to assess Tchelitchew's separate debts to Picasso, van Dongen, Gauguin, Chirico. From the first- and last-named he doubtless coaxed his *portraits nature-mortes*, but these are quite original in their zestful naïveté: mournfully wistful in their guise of being reclamations by an intensely child-like Isis of Osiris' make-believe vestiges and others' reconstructions [fig. 4].

This note of heroic preservation, of tacitly tragic reclamation, was to characterize Tchelitchew after his arrival in the United States in 1934, where it was to take on a certain robust optimism, an irony of pure illusion where nature was doubled and tripled in *trompe-l'œil*. In fact, Tchelitchew felt demonically fertile, had moods of black suspicion and inflamed rivalry in which society portraits and a universe of freaks simultaneously flowered. His theater work was interspersed with successive masterworks: the freak-populated, acrid