

Lecture Notes

Syllabus 3/21/05 – EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION AND NY ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

I. EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION:



- **01_The Palace at 4 AM – 1932 – Alberto Giacometti**
EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION
 - Positioned between Surrealism and European Interwar Abstraction often associated with a movement known as EXISTENTIALISM
 - Went to flea markets in Paris and pick up museum quality artifacts. Fascinated by pre-Columbian artifacts (game equipment/ball and paddle). Mayan? Aztec?
 - Sm. Tabletop sculpture. Skeleton, hanging glass, bird in cage. Woman on L = queen.
 - This is a dreamscape or a nightmare which is what fixes him with Surrealists.
 - Excommunicated by surrealists c/o he started using models.
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- **02_Head of a Man on a Rod – 1947 – Alberto Giacometti**
EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION
 - Saw Easter Island exhibition of skulls on posts.
 - Head based on skulls. Attempted here to make painterly approach working away at the surface to try to achieve the essence of “human” quality



- **03_Man Pointing – 1947 – Alberto Giacometti**
EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION
 - Giacometti most known for seemingly endless series of emaciated stick figures in eroded-looking, heavily worked, gouged metal
 - He’s scraping away constantly to try to find this humanity. Always frustrated trying to work and rework
 - Asked Sartres (famous existentialist writer) in 1945 to write catalogue essay about his art.
 - **EXISTENTIALISM**: Every man deals with his own existence and must die alone
 - philosophy that before birth you are nothing. Blank slate.

- As you go thru life you form or write who you are.
- At the end it's over. No life after death.
- Deals with man's existence: all men are alone and create own lives.



• **04_ Composition with Seven Figures & One Head – 1950 –**

Alberto Giacometti

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- You can see why Existentialist label attached to Giacometti
 - Number of figures existing lonely in a crowd
- **Strangely, Giacometti insisted he was NOT an Existentialist!**



05_Reclining Figure – 1939 – Henry Moore

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- Independent sculptor – British – went to Royal Academy and received his education more through attending many museums – saw many styles.
- Influenced by preColumbian art, Matisse and contemporary art and sculpture
- Important: truth to the nature of materials.
 - Reclining figure is Elm wood
- Ecclectic artist.
- Characterization of his sculptures:
 - Distillation of form down to basic essentials
 - Influence of cubist sculpture



• **06_Wave – 1943-4 – Barbara Hepworth**

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- Influenced by Giacometti and Moore
- Truth to materials
- Expression thru simple elemental forms drawn from nature
- Works in variety of media
- Wood painted blue inside



- **07_Painting – 1946 – Francis Bacon**

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- Bacon son of Brit. Gov't official living in Ireland
- Could be considered Existential as well
- Painting is partly autobiographical, & partly referring to things that struck him:
 - Messy, homosexual, drinker
 - Fascinated by raw meat
 - Studied interior design; cage seat based on his own furniture design
 - Anatomical forms / bones
 - Face under umbrella w blood from eyes based on Eisentein film where nurse is shot in the eye
- Painting of Pope Innocent X painting by Velasquez served as one of the figural references/models for this painting



- **07A_Pope Innocent X – 1650 - Velasquez**



- **08_Tryptich May-June – 1973 – Francis Bacon**

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- Bacon's partner, George Dyer, was critically ill and Bacon cared for him. This triptych shows him being sick in the bathroom.



- **09_Girl in a Dark Dress –1951 – Lucien Freud**

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- Defiantly figurative painter
- Close-up figurative paintings suggest simple realism but disturbingly revealing and evocative
- Vulnerable, personal
- Lucien is nephew of Sigmund Freud
- Work important as precursor to the return of figuration



- **10_View of Paris Life of Pleasure – 1944 – Jean Dubuffet**

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- L'ART BRUT – strong/rough/loud/heavy – course, rough approach getting to something more primitively human
- TACHISME – roughness/courseness of the approach
- Sources Dubuffet turned to:
 - Art of the insane
 - Kid's art
- Flat areas of color, flat/abstract view, direct honest approach, hierarchical arrangement



- **11_D'Hotel Hairy with Yellow Teeth – 1947 – Jean Dubuffet**

EUROPEAN INTER-WAR ABSTRACTION

- Dubuffet started mixing sand, plaster, sticks to give it earthy, rough, primitive feel and scraped away at it.
- Materials and rawness of materials and making of objects most influential on artists to come.

II. ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

The name we use to apply to the art of group of NY artists in 40 and 50s

- With rise of Fascism in Europe in 1933 there was an influx of European modernist artists to London and NY and became part of NY art scene by 1940.
- An equally large group of young Americans came to NY to study avant garde art



- **12_The Gate – 1960 – Hans Hofman**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Hofman came to NY in 30s after being successful teacher in Europe
- Didn't "make it" as an abstract artist til he was in his 60s (in the 1960s)
- Not influenced by Mondrian
- Influenced by Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky.
- Used lots of drips and splashes. Did whole series on hand.

- Read Chipp re: his colors. Push/pull color important, brushwork and gesture combined to become a tension.
- Art is becoming about the formal properties of art. This will be indicative of Rosenberg.



• **13_The Live is the Cocks Comb – 1944 – Arshile Gorky**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- See influence of surrealism in this one.
- Influenced by Miro, Kandinsky
- Armenian – family taken to refugee camps. Mother died while he survived and came to NY to reunite with father who had previously gone ahead to America.
- Influence of automatism – automatic drawing
- Free flowing application of color
- Abstract images embedded:
 - on L= flowers in father’s garden in Turkey
 - on lower R=drawing like Armenian plow
 - eggs etc. in keeping with surrealism



• **14_Agony – 1948 – Arshile Gorky**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Studio burned, father died, neck injury, committed suicide



• **15_16_Jackson Pollack, Action Painter –**

Harold Rosenberg

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Article in Life showing Pollack performing Drip Painting

- Most well known 1950s artist
- ACTION PAINTER, NY School, abstract expressionist
- Born Wyoming. Moved 12 times by age 12. Expelled from LA Technical High school. Followed big brother Charles to NY
- 1st job painted with Mexican painter on murals during 30s with WPA projects.



• **17_Going West – 1934-5 – Jackson Pollack**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Influence of Benton (see below)
- Pollack studied with Benton



○ **18_ Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley – 1934 –
Thomas Hart Benton**

- Benton went to Europe to study avant garde art and hated it
- Rather he adored Sistine ceiling
- exaggerated musculature like figures from Sistine ceiling,
- Benton has 3 men singing ballad of tragic tale, focus on rural America
- Left is portrait of student Jackson Pollack



• **19_ Number 1 - 1948 – Jackson Pollack**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- First major drip painting
- It's about the artist's gesture with paint
- Took unprimed canvas (c/o cheap) and used house paint.
- Stepped on canvas on floor to be a part of it
- Like Navajo sand painting in that it's a ritual practice and the act of painting is the most important part
- See hand prints! Hands say "I made this" with emphatic gesture.
- No preconceived plan. Pollack thinks through the paint. Viewer gets lost in space tho it's emphatically flat. Clement Greenberg got excited about this "optical space"



• **20_ Lavendar Mist Number 1 – 1950 – Jackson Pollack**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Major influence – Albert Pinkham Rider mixed stuff in his oils to get goopy, dark mysterious experimental images



- **21_Harold Rosenberg #3 – 1956 – Elaine deKooning**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Interesting time when Critics begin to influence how artists paint. Critics and artists are friends and hang out together. Rosenberg, Greenberg came to Pollack home



- **22_Woman I – 1950-52 – Willem de Kooning**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Pollack's colleague in gesture abstract circle
- Born in Holland. Spent time at Black Mountain. Wife also an artist who took a backseat to him.
- First of his most famous series.
- Inspirations/sources:
 - Female figure as icon of beauty has long tradition in art so he decided not to try to copy that but to make it different
 - Sex symbols – ie. Marilyn Monroe – 50s pop icon
 - Fertility goddess – Venus of Willendorf
- No canvas on the floor; on easel
- House paint and brushes
- Large emphatic brush strokes



- **23_Gotham News – 1955-6 – Willem de Kooning**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Abstract urban landscape of busy NY City
- Record of brush stroke and gesture more important than anything else



- **24_Mahoning – 1956 – Franz Kline**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Grew up in Pennsylvania – tall trees and RR bridges
- Also Influenced mainly by Chinese calligraphy

- Very expressive tension between black and white paint and gestures
- Huge painting



- **25_Polar Stampede – 1960 – Lee Krasner**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Wife of Pollack who subordinated career to Pollack
- Finally got back to painting on her own after Pollack's death
- Adapting Pollack's technique of splashing and throwing paint
- Title descriptive of images



- **26_Imperative – 1976 – Lee Krasner**

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

- Named series after parts of speech suggesting they are “signs” speaking directly to you
- Took canvases when student of Hofman and cut them up into hard, sharp triangle shapes and collaged them back together in the 70s.
- She's still producing work and exhibiting in NY doing more painting than collage