

## 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
- 1<sup>st</sup> 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