

20

Postwar European Art

If the American artists discussed in the previous chapter were coming to terms with the traumatic aftershocks of the war, their European counterparts had experienced those events at closer range. The deep sense of despair and disillusionment as well as the moral crisis of the postwar years had profound implications for their art. On a practical and professional level, too, the European art scene had been permanently reshaped by the war.

Revaluations and Violations: Figurative Art in France

The School of Paris in the postwar years hosted the continuing activity of the older established artists such as Picasso and Matisse, who, for the most part, lived and worked outside of the artistic mainstream in Paris. Returning from the United States were Léger, Chagall, Ernst, Masson, Picabia, Héliou, and others, including Duchamp, who, after 1945, commuted between Paris and New York. With Giacometti and Dubuffet, figuration received a new impetus in the years immediately following World War II. The debate between figuration and abstraction, which had first emerged in the early twentieth century, continued to resurface throughout the postwar decades, transcending national boundaries.

Picasso

When World War II came to a close in 1945, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) was living in Paris, internationally recognized as the preeminent artist of the twentieth century and the subject of regular exhibitions around the globe. For the next eight or nine years he continued his involvement with a young painter named Françoise Gilot, who, after leaving him, published an account of their life together that enraged the artist. In the mid-fifties Picasso settled in the south of France with Jacqueline Roque and followed his own pursuits, relatively unaffected by the radical new developments in contemporary art in Europe and the United States. By the end of the decade he was



20.1 Pablo Picasso, *The Charnel House*, Paris 1944–45; dated 1945. Oil and charcoal on canvas, 6'6½" × 8'2½" (2 × 2.5 m). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

seventy-eight years old and had outlived Matisse and many of his oldest friends.

Picasso, who had joined the Communist Party in 1944, summed up his feelings about the war in *The Charnel House* (fig. 20.1), 1944–45, a painting that, like *Guernica* (see fig. 15.46), consists of a *grisaille* palette of black, white, and gray. A tabletop still life, rendered in a late Cubist style and left as an open line drawing, indicates a domestic setting. Beneath it, the twisting, anguished forms of a family massacred in their home could be the twentieth-century echo of Daumier's *Rue Transnonain* (see fig. 2.15).

A theme that had preoccupied Picasso throughout his career, but especially during his later years, was that of the artist as voyeur. Painted toward the end of his relationship with Gilot, *The Shadow* of 1953 (fig. 20.2) is one of two compositions Picasso made showing his own shadow cast before the image of a nude woman sleeping on a bed. While the rectangular shape that frames the artist suggests

a doorway, it also mimics the shape of a canvas and implies a fictive, painted, and strangely distant presence of the woman. Besides painting, the ever-prolific Picasso also explored the media of ceramics, prints, and sculpture during his last years. The head of the playful *Baboon and Young* (fig. 20.3), a bronze from 1951, was cast using two toy automobiles that belonged to Picasso's son, Claude, and the whole figure was derived from this chance resemblance.

During these years, Picasso engaged in an extended dialogue with several great artists of the past, including Velázquez, Courbet, Manet, and Delacroix, through his own variations on their best-known works. In the several versions he made of Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*, a painting he knew in the Louvre, Picasso may have been paying tribute not only to France's leading Romantic painter, but also to Matisse. The latter, famous for his Orientalist themes and languid odalisques, had died a few months before Picasso embarked on this sumptuously colored and highly subjective interpretation of Delacroix's masterpiece (fig. 20.4). Picasso envisioned his own imminent death in the *Self-Portrait* (fig. 20.5), 1972, made less than a year before he died aged ninety-one. His stubble-covered, emaciated skull, with its bluish cast and hypnotically staring eyes, is a harrowingly probing self-image. Modernist critics frequently saw Picasso's late paintings, with their discordant fusions of different stylistic idioms and ways of handling paint, as a falling-off from his earlier achievements.



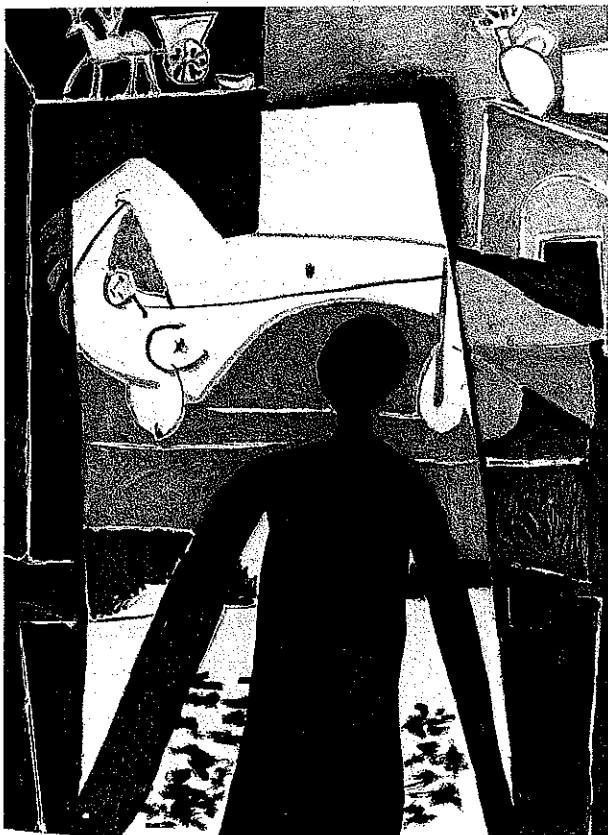
20.3 Pablo Picasso, *Baboon and Young*, 1951 (cast 1955). Bronze, after found objects, 21 × 13¼ × 20¾ (53.3 × 33.3 × 52.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Postmodern critics, by contrast, compelled by the artist's fragmented and eclectic oeuvre, have hailed it as an important phase in the artist's career.

Giacometti

Alberto Giacometti (1901–66) was Surrealism's most important sculptor (see chapter 15). In 1934, however, he broke with the Surrealists, convinced that his abstracted constructions were carrying him too far from the world of actuality. He returned to a study of the figure, working from the model, with the intent of rendering the object and the space that contained it exactly as he saw them. In 1939 he decided to make a new start:

I began to work from memory. ... But wanting to create from memory what I had seen, to my terror the sculptures became smaller and smaller, they had a likeness only when they were small, yet their dimensions revolted me, and tirelessly I began again, only to end several months later at the same point. A large figure seemed to me false and a small one equally unbearable, and then often they became so tiny that with one touch of my knife they disappeared into dust. But head and figures seemed to me to have a bit of truth only when small. All this changed a little in 1945 through drawing. This led me to want to make larger figures, but then to my surprise, they achieved a likeness only when tall and slender.



20.2 Pablo Picasso, *The Shadow*, December 29, 1953. Oil and charcoal on canvas, 49½ × 38" (125.7 × 96.5 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris.



20.4 Pablo Picasso, *Women of Algiers, after Delacroix*, February 11, 1955. Oil on canvas, 45 × 57½" (114.3 × 146.1 cm). Collection Mrs. Victor Ganz, New York.



When Giacometti returned to Paris from Switzerland after the war, his long struggle, during which he finished few works, was reaching resolution. The 1947 *Head of a Man on a Rod* (fig. 20.6) presents a human head, tilted back with mouth agape and impaled on a metal rod. The violence and sense of anguish in the head, which seems to utter a silent scream, is related to the artist's earlier Surrealist works (see fig. 15.56), but the peculiar format may have been aided by his recollection of a painted human skull from New Ireland (in the western Pacific Ocean) that he had seen displayed on a rod in an ethnographic museum in Basel, Switzerland. Typical of the artist's post-war sculpture, the surface retains all the bumps and gouges formed by his hand in the original wet plaster, thus resembling both a horrible laceration of the flesh and a rugged, rocky landscape.

20.5 Pablo Picasso, *Self-Portrait*, June 30, 1972. Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 25¼ × 20" (65.4 × 50.8 cm). Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo.

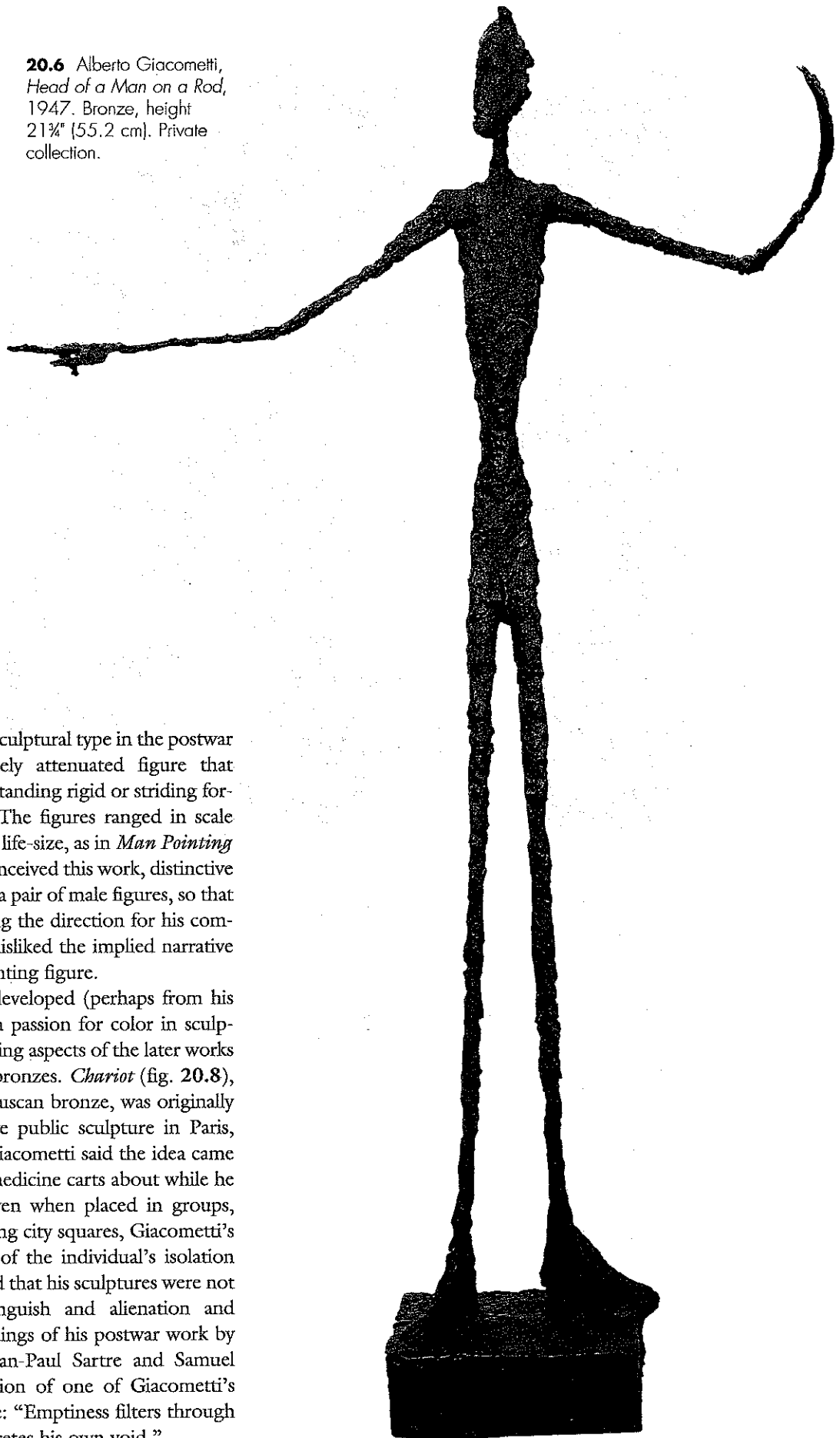


20.6 Alberto Giacometti, *Head of a Man on a Rod*, 1947. Bronze, height 21¾" (55.2 cm). Private collection.

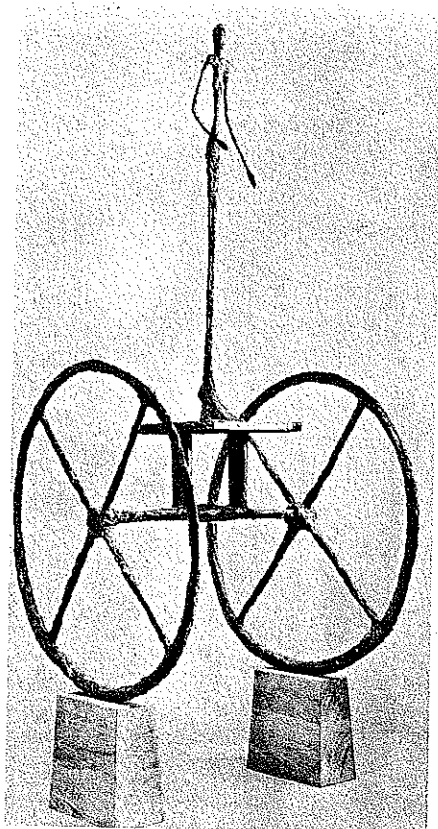
Giacometti's characteristic sculptural type in the postwar period was the tall, extremely attenuated figure that appeared singly or in groups, standing rigid or striding forward like an Egyptian deity. The figures ranged in scale from a few inches high to fully life-size, as in *Man Pointing* (fig. 20.7). Giacometti first conceived this work, distinctive for its active gesture, as half of a pair of male figures, so that the man seemed to be pointing the direction for his companion. The artist may have disliked the implied narrative and decided to isolate the pointing figure.

Early on Giacometti had developed (perhaps from his studies of ancient sculpture) a passion for color in sculpture, and one of the most striking aspects of the later works is the patinas he used on his bronzes. *Chariot* (fig. 20.8), which suggests an ancient Etruscan bronze, was originally designed as a commemorative public sculpture in Paris, but was ultimately rejected. Giacometti said the idea came from watching nurses wheel medicine carts about while he was hospitalized in 1938. Even when placed in groups, such as in environments evoking city squares, Giacometti's figures still maintain a sense of the individual's isolation (fig. 20.9). Giacometti insisted that his sculptures were not embodiments of modern anguish and alienation and rejected the Existentialist readings of his postwar work by such illustrious figures as Jean-Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett. Yet Sartre's description of one of Giacometti's sculptures seems very apt here: "Emptiness filters through everywhere, each creature secretes his own void."

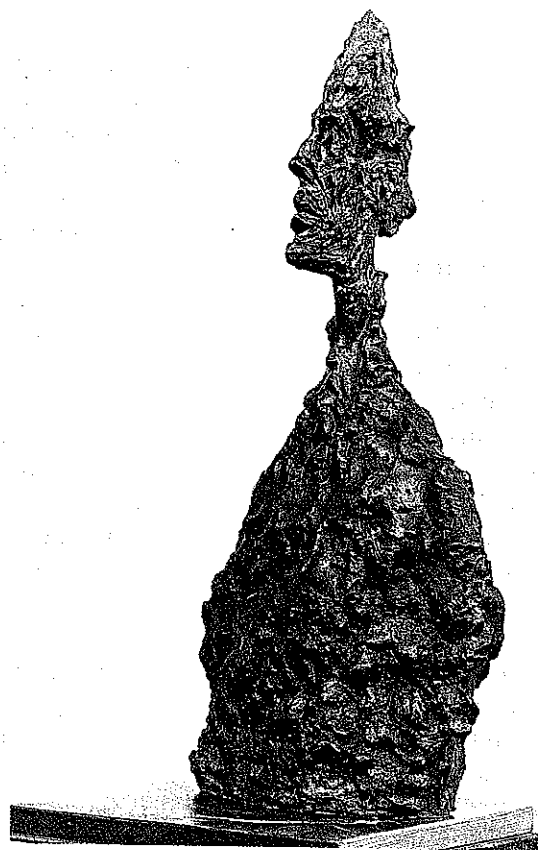
Giacometti's favorite models continued to be his brother Diego, his mother, and his wife, Annette. Diego is



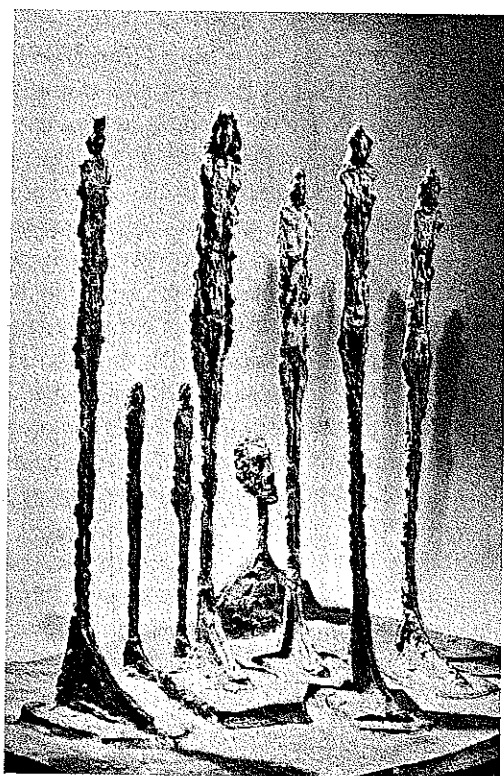
20.7 Alberto Giacometti, *Man Pointing*, 1947. Bronze, height 70½" (179.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



20.8 Alberto Giacometti, *Chariot*, 1950. Bronze, 57 × 26 × 26½" (144.8 × 65.8 × 66.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



20.10 Alberto Giacometti, *Bust of Diego*, 1955. Bronze, 22¼ × 12¼ × 5¾" (56.5 × 31 × 15 cm). Fondation Alberto Giacometti, Kunsthau, Zürich, Switzerland.



20.9 Alberto Giacometti, *The Forest (Composition with Seven Figures and One Head)*, 1950. Painted bronze, 22 × 24 × 19¼" (55.9 × 61 × 48.9 cm). The Reader's Digest Collection.



20.11 Alberto Giacometti, *The Artist's Mother*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 35¾ × 24" (89.9 × 61 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

the subject of dozens of sculptures and paintings, ranging from relatively representational works to corrugated, pitted masks. In the mid-fifties Giacometti made several busts of Diego (fig. 20.10) that present a slice of a head so thin that the frontal view is practically nonexistent. As the critic David Sylvester has written, "There is virtually no transition between front view and side view."

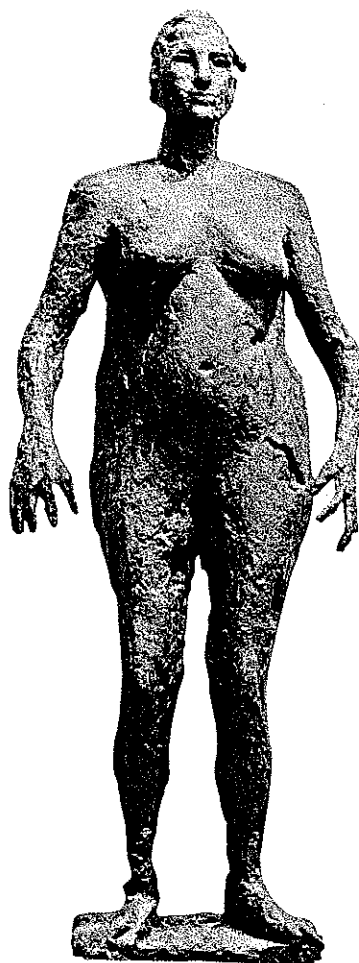
From the forties Giacometti also drew and painted with furious energy. He sought to pin down space, which could only be suggested in the sculptures. Like the sculptures, every painting was a result of constant working and reworking. In their subordination of color and emphasis on the action of line, the paintings have the appearance of drawings or even engravings. In *The Artist's Mother* (fig. 20.11), the figure is almost completely assimilated into the network of linear details of the conventional living room.

Richier and César

Germaine Richier (1904–59) received her training from two sculptors who had studied with Rodin: Louis-Jacques Guiges and Bourdelle (see fig. 6.14). Her earliest surviving sculptures of the late thirties and early forties are sensitive portrait heads in the Rodin tradition. But the macabre quality of her mature works, fully formulated in *Praying Mantis* (fig. 20.12), is uniquely her own. This strangely



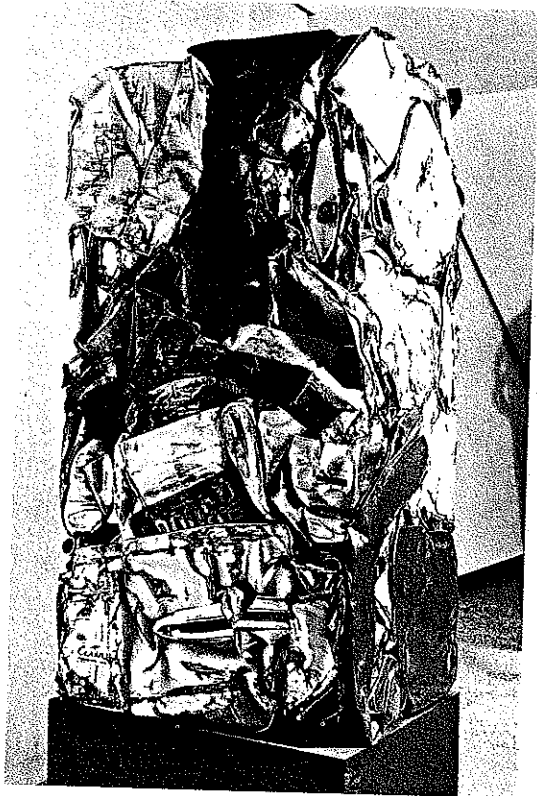
20.12 Germaine Richier, *Praying Mantis*, 1949. Bronze, height 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (120 cm). Middelheim Sculpture Museum, Antwerp.



20.13 Germaine Richier, *The Hurricane*, 1948–49. Bronze, height 70 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (178.1 cm). Private collection.

humanoid creature resembles a seated figure while maintaining all the predatory traits of a threatening insect. Produced around the same time, *The Hurricane* (fig. 20.13) is characteristic of Richier's race of brutish beings. This is a monstrous figure, powerful as a gorilla, with pitted, torn, and lacerated flesh, which in a curious way is both threatening and pitiful. Richier experimented with the bronze technique, using paper-thin plaster models, into the surface of which she pressed every sort of organic object. Sometimes she placed her figures in front of a frame, the background of which is either worked in relief or, in some larger works, painted by a friend such as da Silva (see fig. 20.28). There are relations in her encrusted surfaces both to Giacometti's postwar sculpture, which was being formulated at exactly the same time (see fig. 20.7), and to Dubuffet's contemporary figure paintings (see fig. 20.17).

Whereas Richier stretched the possible limits of bronze casting, César Baldaccini, known as César (1921–98), created comparable effects from the assemblage of old iron scraps and machine fragments. His work developed independently of trends in the United States but paralleled that of certain American sculptors, notably John Chamberlain (see fig. 19.47). In his constructions, César tended toward abstraction but often returned to the figure. (Paradoxically the figure is also implicit in many of the abstract works.) His 1958 *Nude* is a pair of legs with lower torso, eroded

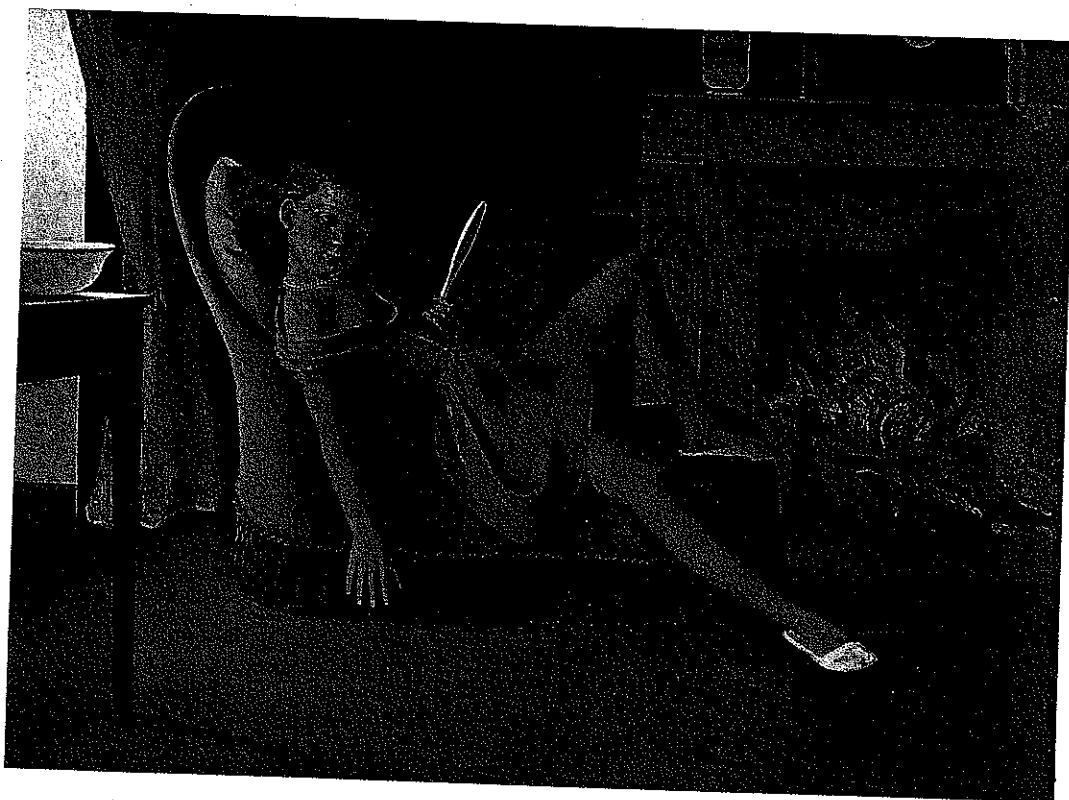


20.14 César, *The Yellow Buick*, 1961. Compressed automobile, 59½ × 30¾ × 24¾" (151.1 × 78.1 × 63.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

and made more horrible by the sense of life that remain. During the late fifties and early sixties (and with variants in new materials into the nineties) he made what he called "compressions"—assemblages of automobile bodies crushed under great pressure and then pressed into massive blocks of varicolored materials, as they are in auto junk yards when the metal is processed for reuse (fig. 20.14). By this point in his career, César was associated with New Realism in France (see chapter 21).

Balthus

A notoriously reclusive painter closely allied to Giacometti since the early thirties was Balthasar Klossowski, Count de Rola, known by his childhood nickname Balthus (1908–2001). He was born into a distinguished Polish family and raised in Paris, Geneva, and Berlin. His father was a painter and an art historian; his mother was also a painter; and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke was a close family friend. Balthus settled in the French capital in 1924. He copied the old masters in the Louvre but did not undergo any formal artistic training. Although he exhibited in 1934 at the Galerie Pierre, a Parisian gallery associated with the Surrealists, and was intrigued by the sexual implications of dreams, Balthus was not seduced by the Surrealist love of the irrational. From the thirties onward, he painted figures in enigmatic narrative compositions, especially semiaware pubescent girls, whom he placed in situations of riveting mystery, ambiguous eroticism, and a light that transfixes time (fig. 20.15). The atmosphere of these lavishly



20.15 Balthus, *Les Beaux Jours (The Golden Days)*, 1944–46. Oil on canvas, 4'10¼" × 6'6¼" (1.48 × 2 m). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



20.16 Jean Dubuffet, *View of Paris: The Life of Pleasure*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 35 × 45¾" (88.9 × 116.2 cm). Private collection.

brushed paintings seems all the more charged for being contained within an architectonic structure as classically calm and balanced as those of Piero della Francesca and Poussin (see figs. 1.3, 1.10). The result is an eerie sense of the anxiety and decadence that haunted postwar Europe.

Dubuffet

After a brief period of study at the Académie Julian in 1918, which he found uncongenial, Jean Dubuffet (1901–85) continued to draw and paint privately, but much of his time was taken up with music, the study of languages, experimental theater, and puppetry. He had his first one-man exhibition at the Galerie René Drouin in Paris in 1944, when he was forty-three years old. Of singular importance to the artist was discovering Dr. Hans Prinzhorn's book, *Bildnerlei der Geisteskranken* (*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*). Here Dubuffet found a brutal power of expression that seemed to him much more valid than the art of the museums or even the most experimental new art. The art of the mentally ill and of children became the models on which he built his approach. He admired Paul Klee, who had also used as sources works by people with no formal artistic training.

After 1944, Dubuffet became an exceptionally prolific painter and concurrently carried on an impressive program of writing on, cataloguing, and publishing his own work. The first of the new paintings, close in spirit to Klee, were panoramic views of Paris and Parisians: the buses, the Métro, the shops, and the backstreets (fig. 20.16). The colors are bright and lively; the people drawn in a childlike manner; and the space composed as in primitive or archaic painting. "Remember," Dubuffet wrote, "that there is only one way to paint well, while there are a thousand ways to paint badly: they are what I'm curious about;

it's from them that I expect something new, that I hope for revelations."

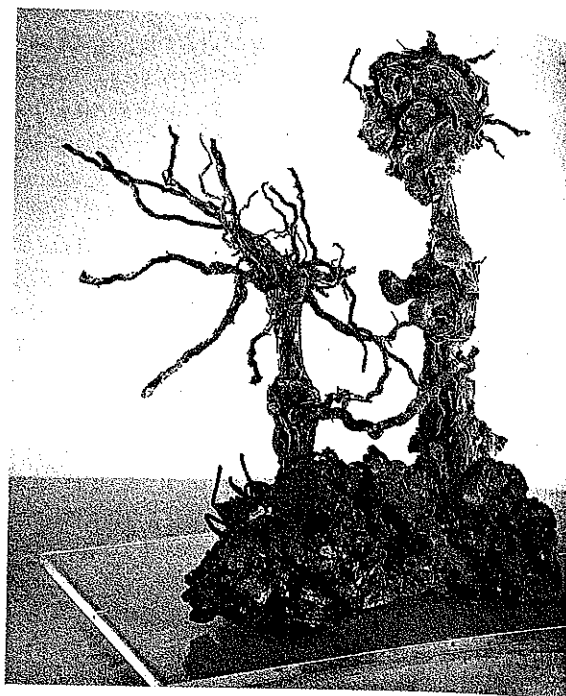
In the late forties, Dubuffet made a series of caricatural portraits of the writers, intellectuals, and artists who were his friends. Typically subversive, his likenesses (for they do evoke a likeness despite their childlike rendering and wild deformation) defy all conventions of the portraiture genre. In *Dhotel velu aux dents jaunes* (*Dhotel Hairy with Yellow Teeth*) (fig. 20.17) he gave the subject a comically



20.17 Jean Dubuffet, *Dhotel velu aux dents jaunes* (*Dhotel Hairy with Yellow Teeth*), 1947. Mixed media on canvas, 45¾ × 35" (116.2 × 88.9 cm). Collection Morton G. Neumann Family, Chicago.

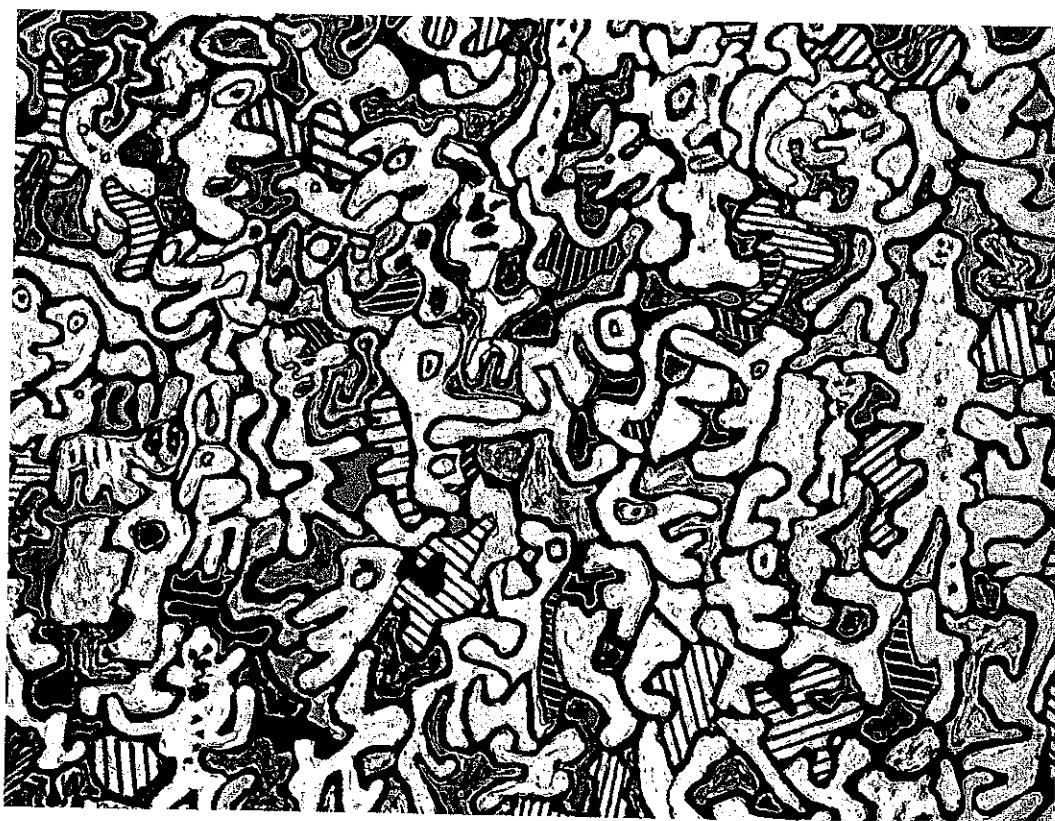
huge head inscribed with highly unflattering features and placed it atop a body the shape of a flattened watermelon. In his *Corps de Dame* (*Woman's Body*) series, the female body is presented frontally and two-dimensionally, as if run over by a cement roller. Dubuffet rejected out of hand the Western tradition of the nude, and his paintings are an assault on "normal" standards of beauty. He observed that women's bodies had "long been associated (for Occidentals) with a very specious notion of beauty (inherited from Greeks and cultivated by the magazine covers); now it pleases me to protest against this aesthetic, which I find miserable and most depressing. Surely I aim for a beauty, but not that one."

Dubuffet had explored the variations of graffiti images and the textural effects of Paris walls with their generations of superimposed posters. The scratched, mutilated surface, built up in combinations of paint, paper, and sand, particularly appealed to him. Dubuffet's characteristic technique, what he called "*haute pâte*," was based on a thick ground made of sand, earth, fixatives, and other elements into which the pigment was mixed. Figures were incised into this ground, accidental effects were embraced, and the whole—scratched and scarred—worked in every way to give the picture a tangible, powerful materiality. Dubuffet also made pictures out of leaves, tinfoil, or butterfly wings, and his sculptures could be formed of slag, driftwood, sponges, or other found materials. In one of his most ingenious inventions, *L'Âme du Morvan* (*The Soul of Morvan*) (fig.



20.18 Jean Dubuffet, *L'Âme du Morvan* (*The Soul of Morvan*), May 1954. Grape wood and vines mounted on slag base, with tar, rope, wire, twine, nails, and staples, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (46.7 x 39.1 x 32.4 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

20.18), he managed to coax a strange little figure, who stands before a bush on a base of slag, out of found grape vines (Morvan is a wine-producing district in France).



20.19 Jean Dubuffet, *Virtual Virtue*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 50 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (95.9 x 129.2 cm). Sammlung Ernst Beyeler, Basel.

One of Dubuffet's main sources of inspiration was the great collection he began in 1945 of *art brut* or "raw art." Numbering thousands of works in all media, the collection, today in the Collection de L'Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland, contained the art of the mentally disturbed, the "primitive," and the "naive"—"anyone," Dubuffet said, "who has never learned to draw." To him these works had an authenticity, an originality, a passion, even a frenzy, that were utterly lacking in the works of professional artists.

It was Dubuffet's habit to work on a single theme or a few related themes for an extended period. In the fifties he turned to landscape imagery, but his landscapes are hardly conventional views of nature. Rather, they are representations of the soil, of the earth itself, like close-up views of geologic formations, barren of any vegetation. His works through the fifties were predominantly in close-keyed browns, dull ochers, and blacks, verging toward monochrome and, in a series called *Texturologies*, complete abstraction.

In 1962 Dubuffet embarked on a vast cycle of paintings and, eventually, sculptures, to which he gave the invented name "*L'Hourloupe*" (he liked the sound of the word) and on which he worked for the next twelve years. During a telephone conversation, Dubuffet doodled some curving, biomorphic cells in red ink that he filled in with blue parallel lines. These shapes became the formal vocabulary or the "sinuous graphisms" of the *hourloupe* language.



20.20 Jean Dubuffet, *Group of Four Trees*, 1972. Epoxy paint on polyurethane over metal structure, 38 × 40 × 34' (11.6 × 12.2 × 10.4 m). The Chase Manhattan Bank, New York.

From this modest beginning the artist developed a vast repertoire of allover paintings, some on a scale transcending anything he had done previously. Semiautomatic and self-contained, the *hourloupe* forms flow and change like amoebae and are filled with suggestions of living organisms, even at times of human figures. In *Virtual Virtue* (fig. 20.19) dozens of heads and little figures are embedded in the undulating lines of an *hourloupe* matrix. With no sense of illusionistic space, they tumble and float freely in what becomes a teeming maze of *hourloupe* creatures.

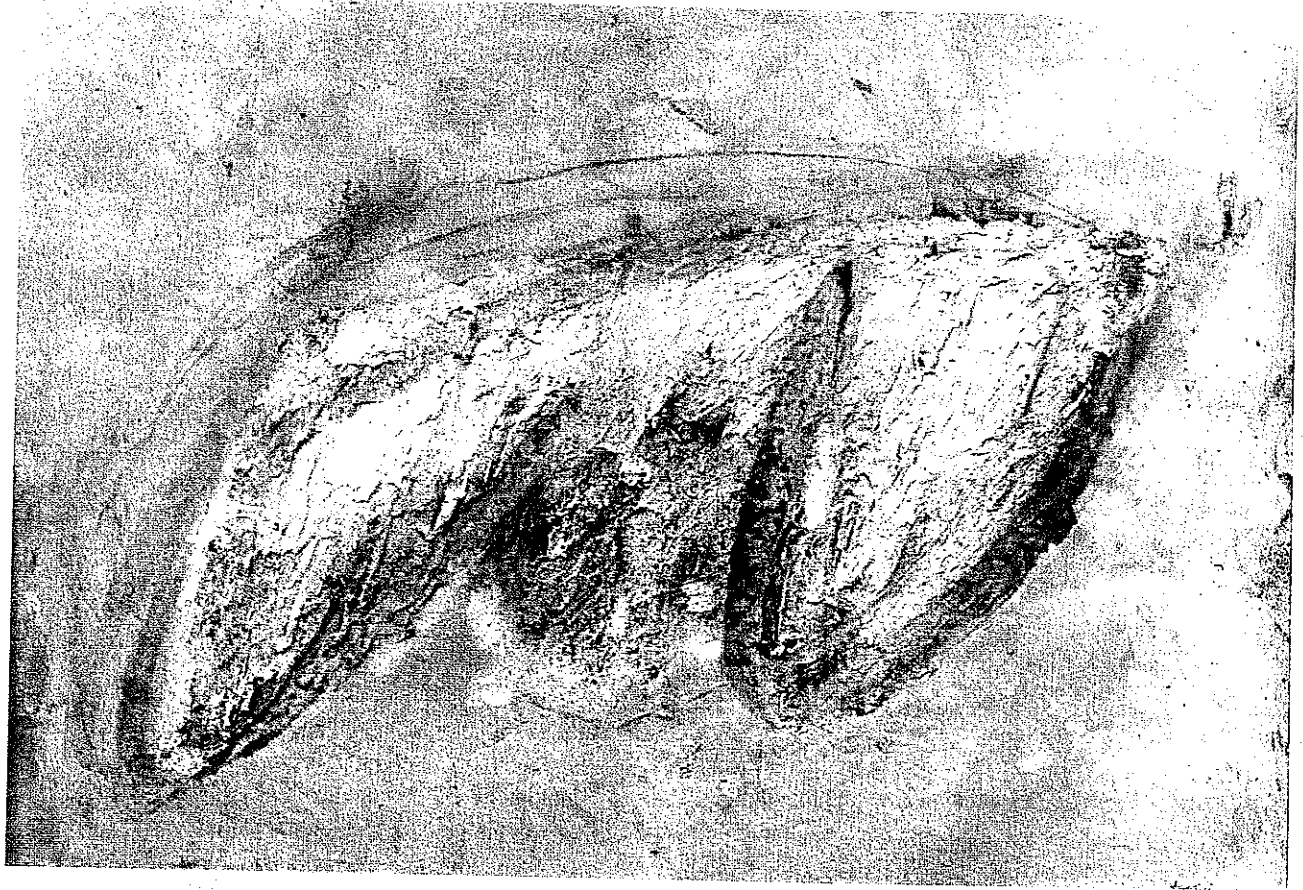
In 1966 Dubuffet extended the *hourloupe* vocabulary into the realm of sculpture, eventually stripping away the classic *hourloupe* red and blue and composing simply in black and white. At first the sculptures were relatively small-scale, but Dubuffet adapted his technique to outdoor monumental sculpture, sometimes on an environmental scale (fig. 20.20). Beyond his marvelous corpus of painting and sculpture, Dubuffet has left a body of writings filled with humor and keen observations that apply not only to his work but to art in a larger, universal sense. "What I expect from any work of art," he wrote, "is that it surprises me, that it violates my customary valuations of things and offers me other, unexpected ones."

A Different Art: Abstraction in France

The emergence of postwar French abstraction coincided in time, if not in forms, with the origins of Abstract Expressionism in the United States (see chapter 19). Although artists on both sides of the Atlantic developed their highly individual styles independently of one another, there was a shared sense of the need to reject geometric abstraction and to create a spontaneous art that was guided by emotion and intuition rather than by rational systems of composition. *Art Informel* (literally "formless art") is a term devised in 1950 by the French critic Michel Tapié to describe this new type of expression. He coined another term, *Art Autre*—"another art," or "a different art," the essence of which is creation with neither desire for, nor preconceptions of, control, geometric or otherwise. *Tachisme* (from the French word *tache*, meaning the use of the "blot," the "stain," the "spot," or the "drip"), yet another term coined in the fifties by another French critic, refers specifically to European versions of gestural painting.

Fautrier, Van Velde, Hartung, and Soulages

Jean Fautrier (1898–1964) was one of the leading pioneers of *Art Informel*. After painting representationally through the twenties and thirties, he produced a moving series of small paintings on paper during World War II that he called *Hostages*. Incited by war atrocities that he had witnessed firsthand, the *Hostage* paintings were built-up masses of paint centralized on a neutral ground that resembled decayed human heads served on platters. These were followed by a series called *Naked Torsos*, whose shapes,



20.21 Jean Fautrier, *Nude*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 35 × 57½" (88.9 × 146.1 cm). Collection de Montaignu, Paris.

albeit abbreviated and abstracted, emerge from a heavy paste of clay, paint, glue, and other materials that are built up in a thick relief. *Nude* (fig. 20.21), 1960, was made the year Fautrier won the grand prize at the prestigious Venice Biennale. "No art form," the artist said, "can produce emotion if it does not mix in a part of reality."

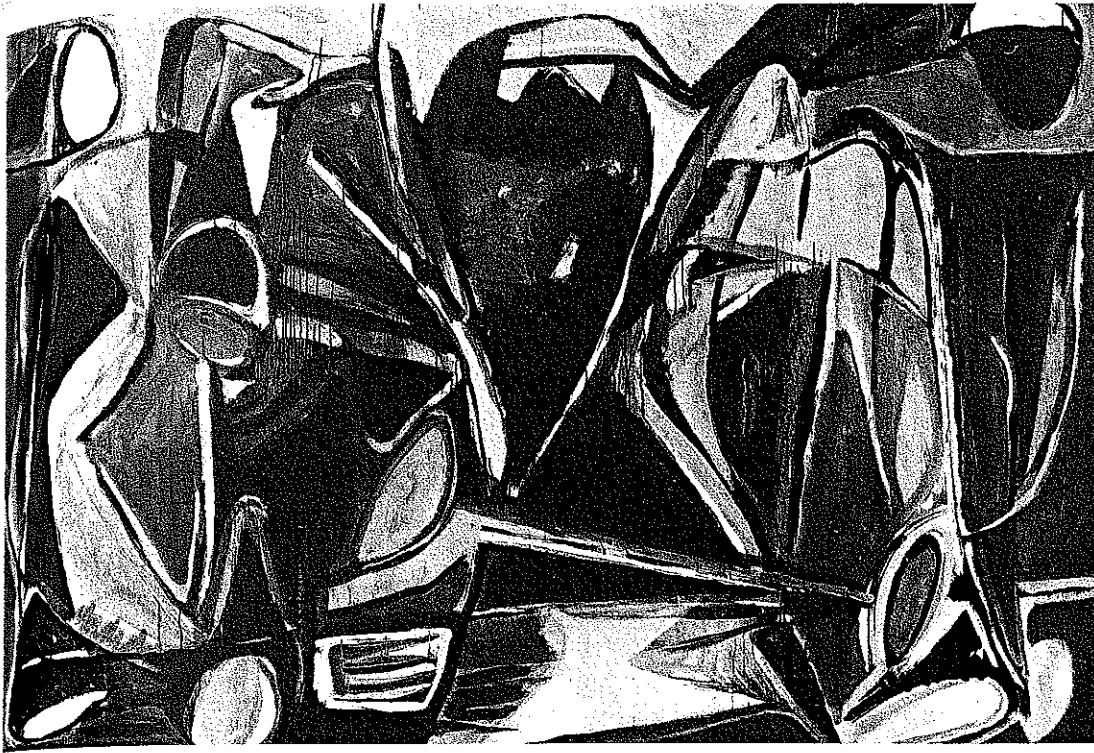
Though Dutch by birth, **Bram van Velde** (1895–1981) spent most of his professional life in France, where, after World War II, he became especially close to Samuel Beckett, who wrote about his work. His paintings exhibit a remarkable consistency from the late forties until the end of his career. They tend to be composed around loosely delineated triangular, round, and ovoid forms that are situated in all-over compositions and accentuated with patterns of dripping paint, as in his *Painting* of 1954 (fig. 20.22). Though he developed his art without knowledge of American action painting, Van Velde was the European artist closest to aspects of his fellow Hollander, Willem de Kooning, who was one of the few Americans to exhibit any interest in Van Velde's art when it was first shown in New York in 1948.

Hans Hartung (1904–89) fled Nazi oppression in his native Germany in the early thirties and settled in Paris, via Spain, in 1935. He experimented with free abstract drawings and watercolors as early as 1922, well before his

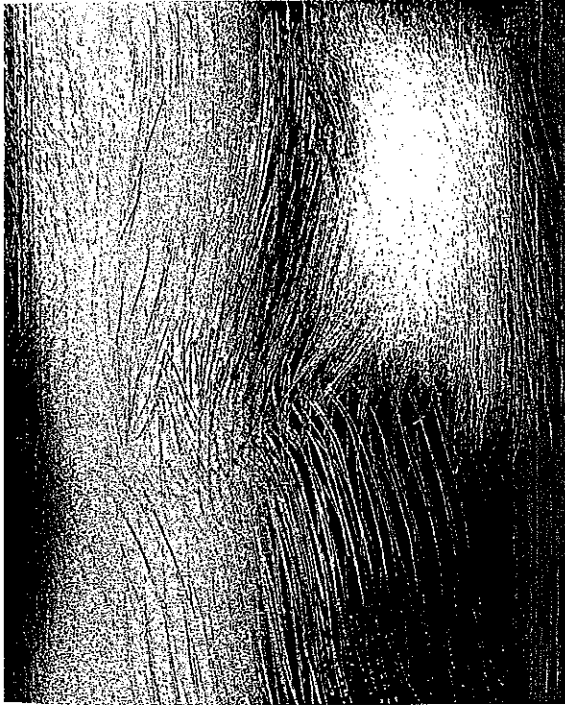
exact contemporary, de Kooning, was formulating his Abstract Expressionist mode in America (see chapter 19). Hartung's brittle, linear style owes something to the work of Kandinsky, whom he met in 1925. During the thirties he explored abstract Surrealism as derived from Miró and Masson, but always with an emphasis on the spontaneous, gestural stroke. He also produced Surrealist collages as well as constructed sculpture in the tradition of his father-in-law, Julio González (see figs. 15.53, 15.54).

In the late forties, Hartung developed his mature style of brisk graphic structures, usually networks of bold black slashes played against delicate, luminous washes of color. His improvisational marks, combined with his statement in 1951 that he "acted on the canvas" out of a desire to record the trace of his personal gesture, allied him in the minds of some with action painting. In the sixties he tended to scratch into fresh paint with various instruments to achieve finely textured surfaces, in which light and shadow play over one another in shimmering chiaroscuro effects (fig. 20.23).

Pierre Soulages (b. 1919) first came to Paris in 1938 but did not settle there until 1946, whereupon he arrived at what was to become his signature style by crafting assertive abstract structures based on studies of tree forms. The architectural sense and the closely keyed color range



20.22 Bram van Velde, *Painting*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 4'3" × 6'5" (1.3 × 2 m). Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



20.23 Hans Hartung, *Untitled T, 1963-H26*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 39 3/4 × 31 1/8" (100 × 81 cm). Private collection.

that characterize his abstract style (fig. 20.24)—with its sense of physical, massive structure in which the blacks stand forth like powerful presences—may have been inspired originally by the dolmens (prehistoric stone monuments made of several large stones forming two upright posts supporting a lintel) found in his native Auvergne, as it certainly was by the Romanesque sculpture of the area.



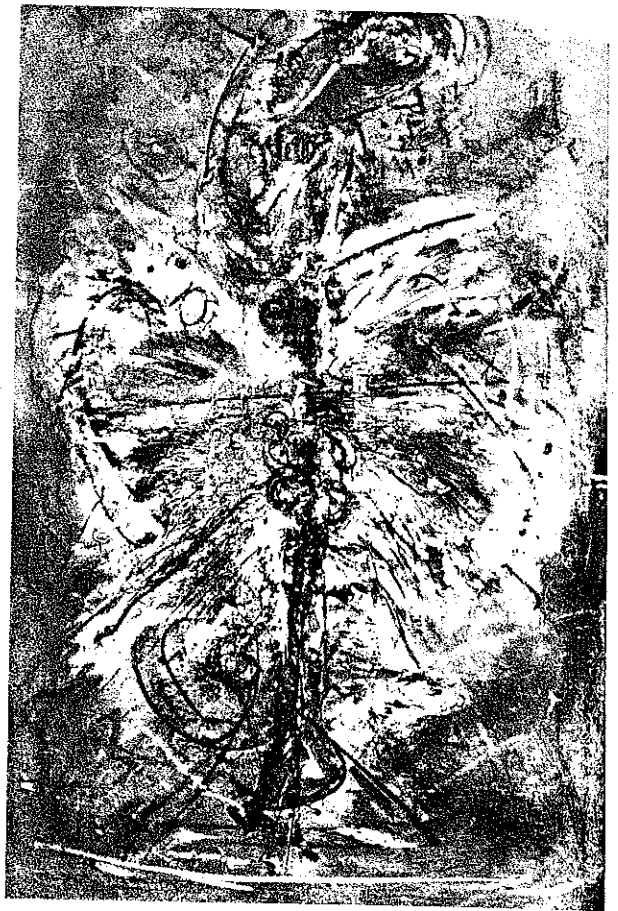
20.24 Pierre Soulages, *Painting*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 6'4 3/8" × 4'3 1/8" (1.9 × 1.3 m). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Soulages consistently maintained a subdued palette, feeling that "the more limited the means, the stronger the expression." His great sweeping lines or color areas are usually black or of a dark color. Heavy in impasto, they were applied with a palette knife or large, housepainter's brushes. Soulages thus achieved an art of power and elegance, notable not only in his forms but in the penetrating, encompassing light that unifies his paintings.

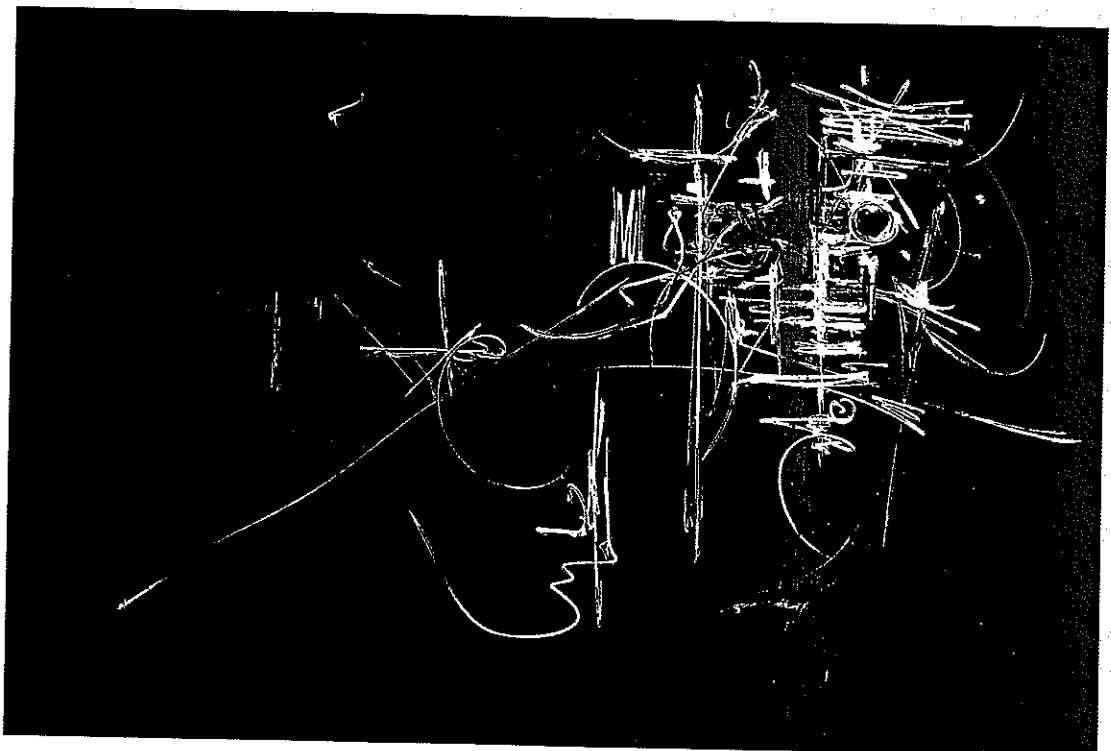
Wols, Mathieu, Riopelle, and Vieira da Silva

Berlin-born Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze, known by his pseudonym Wols (1913–51), was raised in Dresden, where he soon excelled at many things, including music and photography. Interested primarily in drawing and painting, however, the precocious Wols moved to Paris in 1932 at the age of nineteen. There he briefly met members of the international Surrealist circle such as Arp and Giacometti. For part of the war he was, like other expatriate Germans, interned by the French. While detained, he made bizarre watercolors and drawings of hybrid creatures that somewhat resemble Surrealist "exquisite corpse" drawings (see fig. 15.1).

Following the war, Wols developed an abstract style with some analogies to that of Fautrier. In such works as *Bird*, 1949, he built up his paint in a heavy central mass that was shot through with flashes of intense colors and automatic lines and dribbles (fig. 20.25). Wols's abstractions create the impact of magnified biological specimens—he had been interested in biology and anthropology from an early



20.25 Wols, *Bird*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 36¼ × 25½" (92.1 × 64.5 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston.



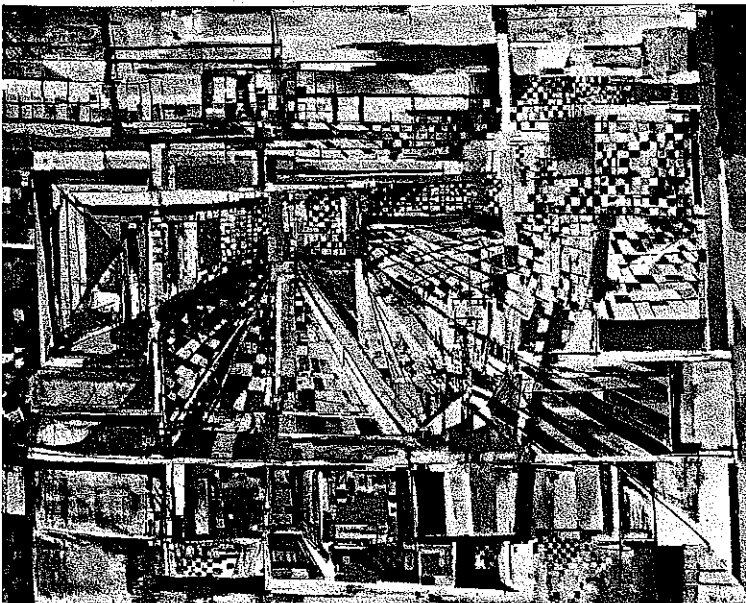
20.26 Georges Mathieu, *Painting*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 6'6" × 9'10" (2 × 3 m). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



20.27 Jean-Paul Riopelle, *Blue Knight*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 3'8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 6'4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.1 \times 1.9 m). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

age—or encrusted, half-healed wounds. Wols never fully recovered from his war-induced traumas. He drank heavily and died at the age of thirty-eight.

After World War II, Georges Mathieu (b. 1921) developed a calligraphic style that owes something to Hartung. His calligraphy (fig. 20.26), however, consists of sweeping patterns of lines squeezed directly from the tube in slashing, impulsive gestures. To him, speed of execution was essential for intuitive spontaneity. Typically, Mathieu turned to elaborate titles taken from battles or other events of French history, reflecting his insistence that he was a traditional history painter working in an abstract means. In love with spectacle, performance, and self-promotion, he occasionally painted before an audience, dressed in armor and attacking the canvas as though he were the hero Roland and the canvas were the enemy Saracen from the medieval French romance *The Song of Roland*. Despite such exhibitionism, Mathieu became an artist of substantial abilities in the fifties, and one of the leading European exponents of *Art Informel*.



20.28 Maria Elena Vieira da Silva, *The Invisible Stroller*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 52 \times 66" (132.1 \times 167.6 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Born and educated in Montreal, Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) settled in Paris in 1947. He soon became part of the circle around the dealer Pierre Loeb (a leading supporter of Surrealism in the thirties) that included Mathieu and Vieira da Silva. Between 1955 and 1979, he was the companion of the second-generation American Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell (see fig. 22.3). The individual mode he achieved in the fifties, for example in *Blue Knight*, 1953 (fig. 20.27), is essentially a kind of controlled chance, an intricate, all-over mosaic of small, regular daubs of jewellike color, applied directly from tubes, shaped with palette knives, and held together by directional lines of force.

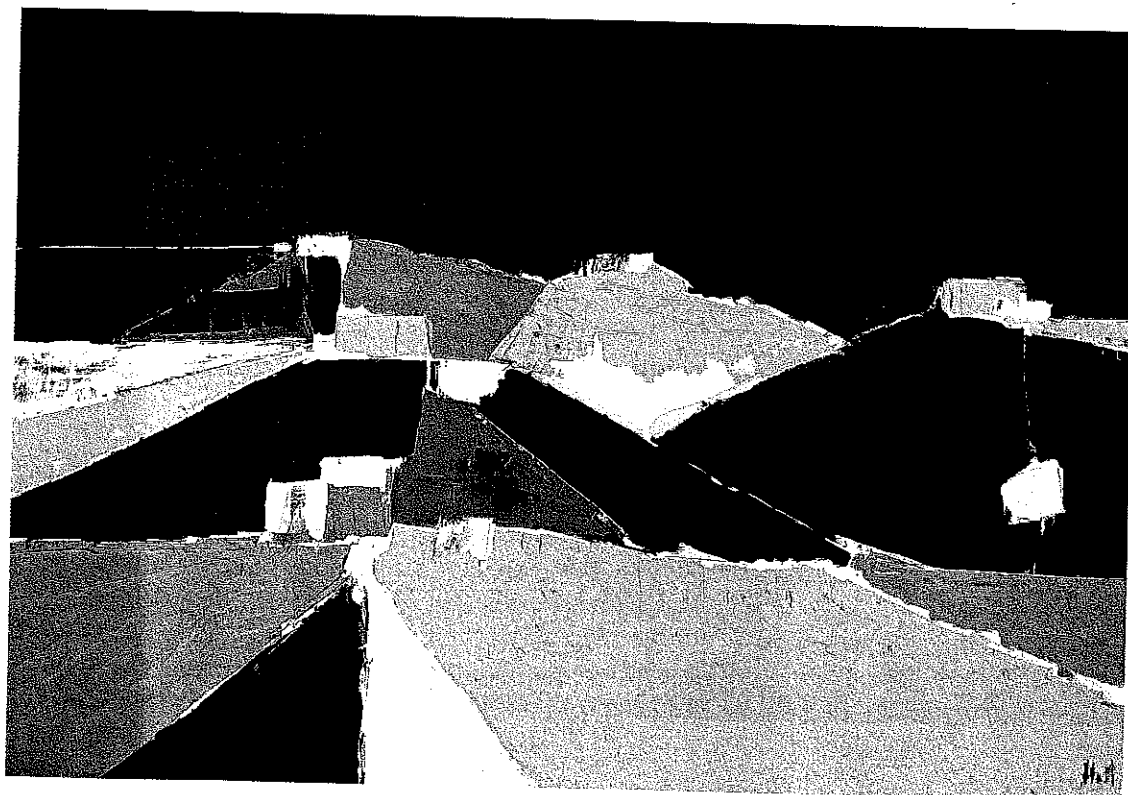
A Parisian artist difficult to classify but one of great sensitivity was Lisbon-born Maria Elena Vieira da Silva (1908–92). By the forties she was preoccupied with the interaction of perspective and nonperspective space in paintings based on architectural views of the city or deep interior spaces. By 1950 these views became abstract, grid-based compositions. *The Invisible Stroller* (fig. 20.28) is related to Picasso's Synthetic Cubist paintings of the twenties in its fluctuations of Renaissance perspective and the Cubist grid. From this point forward da Silva gradually flattened the perspective while retaining a rigid, rectangular, architectural structure. The view of the city, seen from eye level, eventually became the view from an airplane—as one rises higher and higher, details begin to blur and colors melt into general tonalities.



De Staël

Nicolas de Staël (1914–55) was an independently minded painter who did not wish to be associated with his contemporary abstractionists in France, seeing himself more as the heir to his friend Braque, as well as Matisse. De Staël was born an aristocrat in prerevolutionary Russia; grew up in Belgium, where he attended the Royal Academy of Fine Arts; and moved to Paris in 1938. In the forties he was painting abstractly, but as his work developed, he became more and more concerned with the problem of nature versus abstraction. De Staël seems to have been increasingly desirous of asserting the subject while maintaining abstract form. “A painting,” he said, “should be both abstract and figurative: abstract to the extent that it is a flat surface, figurative to the extent that it is a representation of space.” He began to use palette knives in 1949, building up his abstract compositions with thick, loosely rectangular patches of paint that he scraped into the desired form with a knife (fig. 20.29). In 1953 he traveled to Sicily and was struck by the intense quality of light. He made landscapes in brilliant hues (fig. 20.30)—in this example reds, oranges, and yellows—in which the forms are simplified to large planes of flat color accented by a few contrasting color spots. In the last year of his life he began painting even more literal scenes of boats, birds, and oceans, in thin, pale colors. In 1955 de Staël, who had achieved a considerable reputation on both sides of the Atlantic, apparently reached an impasse in his work and jumped to his death from the terrace of his studio.

20.29 Nicolas de Staël, *Untitled*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 63 × 29" (160 × 73.7 cm). Private collection.



20.30 Nicolas de Staël, *Agrigente*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 34¾ × 50½" (88.3 × 128.3 cm). The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

"Pure Creation": Concrete Art

In 1930 Theo van Doesburg coined the word "concrete" as a substitute for "nonobjective" in its specific application to the geometric abstractions of de Stijl (see chapter 17). This was followed in 1931 by the Abstraction-Création group in Paris, which, during the thirties, sought to advance the principles of pure abstraction and of Mondrian's Neoplasticism. The concept of Concrete art was revived in 1947 in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, as the gallery of Denise René became an international center for the propagation of Concrete art. Among the leaders outside of France was Josef Albers, who went to the United States in 1933 and whose influence there helped the spread of geometric abstraction (see chapter 17). He exhibited regularly with the American Abstract Artists (AAA) group as well as with Abstraction-Création in Paris. Many aspects of postwar Constructivism, Color Field painting, Systemic painting, and Op art stem from the international tradition of de Stijl and Concrete art.

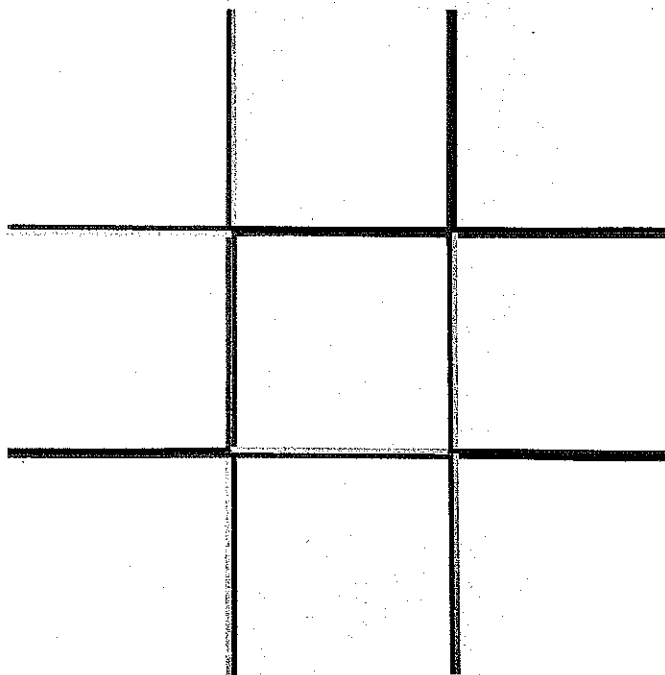
Bill and Lohse

Important for the spread of Concrete art in Europe were developments in Switzerland, particularly in the work of Max Bill (1908–94) and Richard Paul Lohse. Though he was making nonobjective art by the late twenties, Bill first began applying the term "concrete" to his work in 1936. He defined it as follows: "Concrete painting eliminates all naturalistic representation; it avails itself exclusively of the fundamental elements of painting, the color and form of the surface. Its essence is, then, the complete emancipation of every natural model; pure Creation."

Bill studied at the Dessau Bauhaus between 1927 and 1929 when Josef Albers was teaching there. Subsequently, he developed into one of the most prolific and varied exponents of Bauhaus ideas as a painter, sculptor, architect, graphic and industrial designer, and writer. He was associated with Abstraction-Création in Paris and organized



20.31 Max Bill, *Endless Ribbon from a Ring I*, 1947–49, executed 1960. Gilded copper on crystalline base, $14\frac{1}{2} \times 27 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ " ($36.8 \times 68.6 \times 19.1$ cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

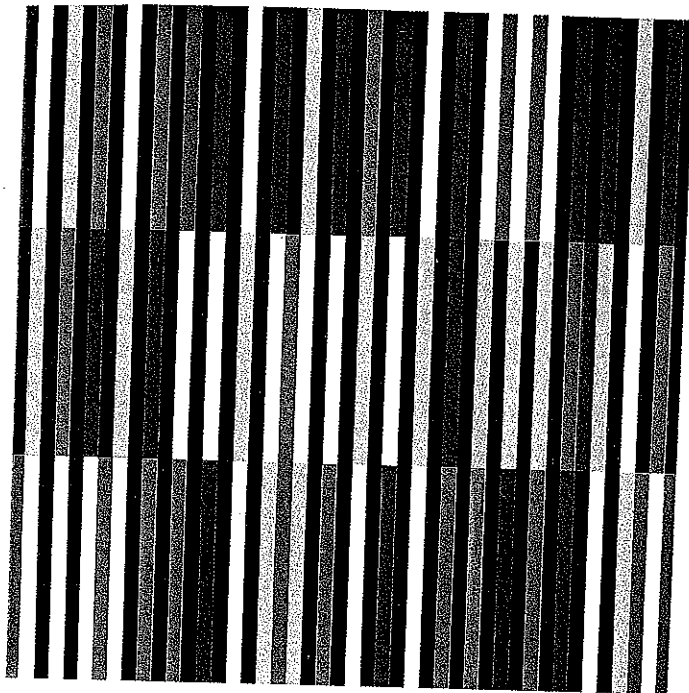


20.32 Max Bill, *Nine Fields Divided by Means of Two Colors*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 47×47 " (119.4×119.4 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

exhibitions of Concrete art in Switzerland. Bill insisted that painting and sculpture have always had mathematical bases, whether arrived at consciously or unconsciously. In the forms of Concrete art he found rationalism, clarity, and harmony—qualities symbolic of certain universal ideas.

In sculpture, the form that intrigued Bill the most and on which he played many variations is the endless helix or spiral (fig. 20.31). The metal ribbon form turns back upon itself with no beginning and no end and is, therefore, in a constant state of movement and transformation. In his paintings, Bill, like Albers, systematically experimented with color, particularly the interaction of colors upon one another (fig. 20.32). Much as his square and diamond-shaped paintings owe to the example of Mondrian, Bill's pristine forms and regular grids have more to do with geometry than they do with Mondrian's intuitive and painterly approach to picture making, situating his work in the context of so-called Hard-Edge painting in the sixties (see chapter 22).

Like Bill, Richard Paul Lohse (1902–88) made mathematics the basis of his painting. He sought the simplest possible unit, such as a small color-square. Using not more than five color hues but a great range of color values, Lohse built his units into larger and larger complexes through a mathematically precise distribution of hues and values in exact and intellectually predetermined relationships (fig. 20.33). This resulted in a composition or color structure that spreads laterally and uniformly, with no single focus, to the edges of the canvas, with the implication and the potential of spreading to infinity beyond the edges. Despite the rigidity of Lohse's system, the subtlety and richness



20.33 Richard Paul Lohse, *Serial Element Concentrated in Rhythmic Groups*, 1949–56. Oil on canvas, 35½ × 35½" [90 × 90 cm]. Private collection.

of his colors and the shimmering quality deriving from their infinitely varied relationships give his works a lyrical, poetic feeling. His art is important as a prototype for Op art (see fig. 22.28).

Postwar Juxtapositions: Figuration and Abstraction in Italy and Spain

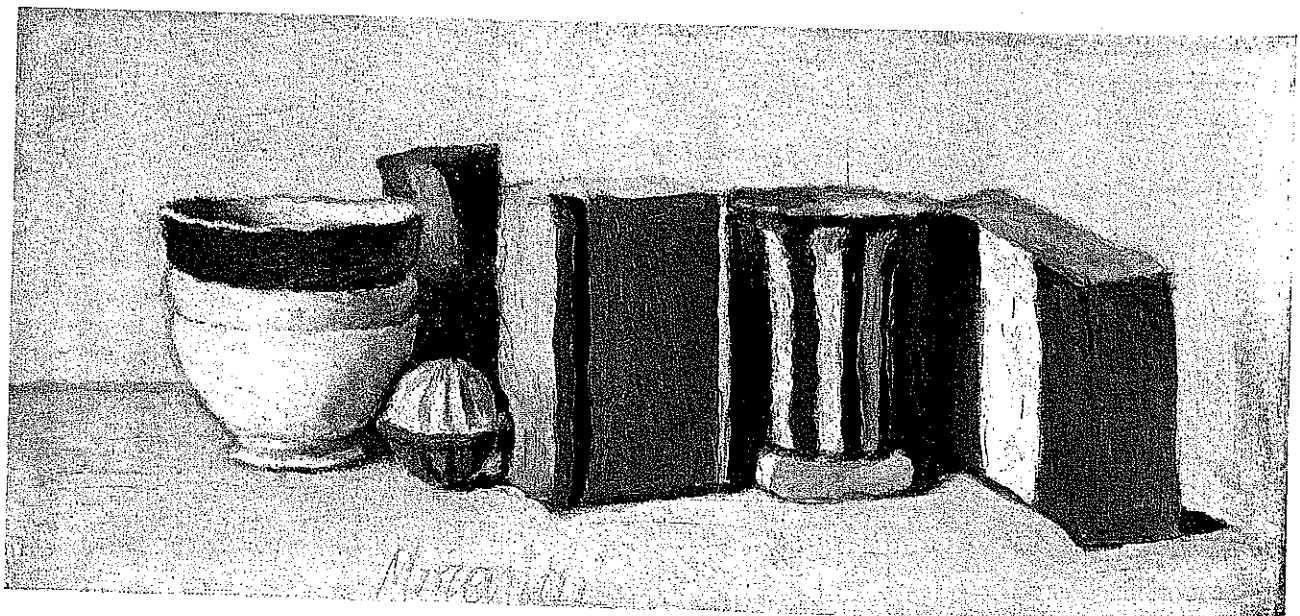
In post-fascist Italy, art underwent a period of intense debate in major urban centers, such as Milan, Bologna, and Rome, with artistic concerns rarely divorced from political ones. A strong realist movement existed, particularly

among communist artists who wielded painting as a political weapon. But alternatives arose among young artists who proposed radical abstraction as an antidote to Italy's time-honored classical tradition. In the late fifties various forms of *Art Informel* spread throughout the country, supplanting more Cubist-based forms of abstraction. Despite the Italian proclivity for forming groups and issuing manifestos, *Art Informel* was never a uniform movement in that country, and figuration, particularly in sculpture, remained a viable artistic force.

In Spain during the postwar decades under the dictatorship of General Franco, abstraction was a powerful metaphorical dimension in the work of painter Antoni Tàpies and sculptor Eduardo Chillida.

Morandi

An artist who seemed to exist outside of the political and artistic fray was **Giorgio Morandi** (1890–1964), who emerged as the leading figurative painter in Italy in the years after the war. Despite his forays into landscape and, occasionally, figure painting, Morandi's primary subject throughout his long career was still life. At odds with much of the large-scale, highly emotive, and abstract art being produced after the war, this artist's quiet and modestly scaled still lifes drew as much upon Italian Renaissance traditions as contemporary developments. Old enough to have been exposed to Futurism (though his work was never truly Futurist), Morandi was included in the First Free Futurist Exhibition in Rome in 1914. In 1918–19, after discovering the works of Carrà and de Chirico, he made enigmatic still lifes that allied him with the Metaphysical School. Morandi lived quietly in his native Bologna, teaching, painting, and traveling only rarely. It was not until after World War II that he was acknowledged as Italy's leading living painter. The unremarkable elements of his postwar



20.34 Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1951. Oil on canvas; 8½ × 19½" [22.5 × 50 cm]. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.



20.35 Marino Marini, *Horse and Rider*, 1952–53. Bronze, height 6'10" (2.1 m). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

became for Marini a symbol for suffering and disillusioned humanity. His horse, with elongated, widely stretched legs and upthrust head (fig. 20.35), screams in agony, in a manner that recalls Picasso's *Guernica* (see fig. 15.46). The rider, with outflung stumps for arms, falls back in a violent gesture of despair. "My equestrian figures," the artist said, "are symbols of the anguish that I feel when I survey contemporary events. Little by little, my horses become more restless, their riders less and less able to control them." By 1952, when he won the grand prize for sculpture at the Venice Biennale, Marini was recognized internationally as one of Europe's most prominent sculptors.

Giacomo Manzù (1908–91) was influenced by Medardo Rosso (see fig. 6.15), but his real love was the sculpture of the Italian Renaissance. In 1939, deeply affected by the spread of fascism and the threat of war, he made a series of relief sculptures around the subject of the Crucifixion that was his not-so-veiled antifascist statement.

The *Cardinal* series, begun in 1938 but represented here by a version from 1954 (fig. 20.36), took a conventional subject and creates from it a mood of withdrawal and mystery. At the same time, Manzù utilized the heavy robes for a simple and monumental sculptural volume. In the Renaissance tradition, Manzù carried out a number of religious commissions, notably the bronze door panels for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and for Salzburg Cathedral.

still lifes (fig. 20.34)—bottles, jars, and boxes—are typically massed together against a neutral ground to form a kind of miniature architecture, with an emphasis on abstract organization and subdued, closely valued tones. There is a meditative, serialized aspect to the artist's work, for he often cast similar arrangements in slightly altered light conditions. Morandi's still lifes, in which humble objects are reduced to their essence, continue the tradition of the great French eighteenth-century still-life painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and provided an important example to younger realist painters, notably the American Wayne Thiebaud (see fig. 21.53).

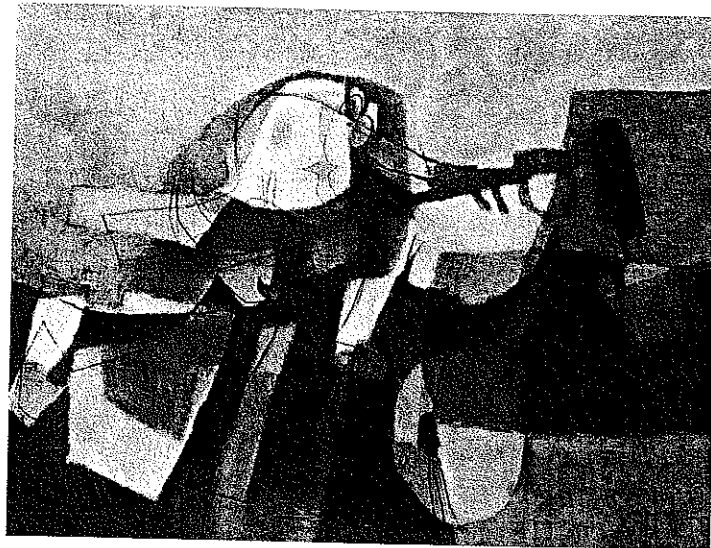
Marini and Manzù

The Italian contribution in postwar figuration came chiefly in sculpture, especially in the work of Marino Marini (1901–80) and Giacomo Manzù. The sculpture of Marini, a native of Tuscany, was deeply rooted in history. For Italians, he said, "the art of the past is part and parcel of our daily life in the present." Besides ancient Roman and Etruscan art, he was interested in the sculpture of Archaic Greece and Tang dynasty China. He also traveled widely and was knowledgeable about modernist developments in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Marini was a mature artist by the thirties, already experimenting with his favorite themes, including the horse and rider. During the war, the equestrian subject, traditionally employed to commemorate noblemen or celebrate war heroes in city squares,



20.36 Giacomo Manzù, *Large Standing Cardinal*, 1954. Bronze, height 66½" (168.9 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

20.37 Afro, *For an Anniversary*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 4'11" × 6'6½" (1.5 × 2 m). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

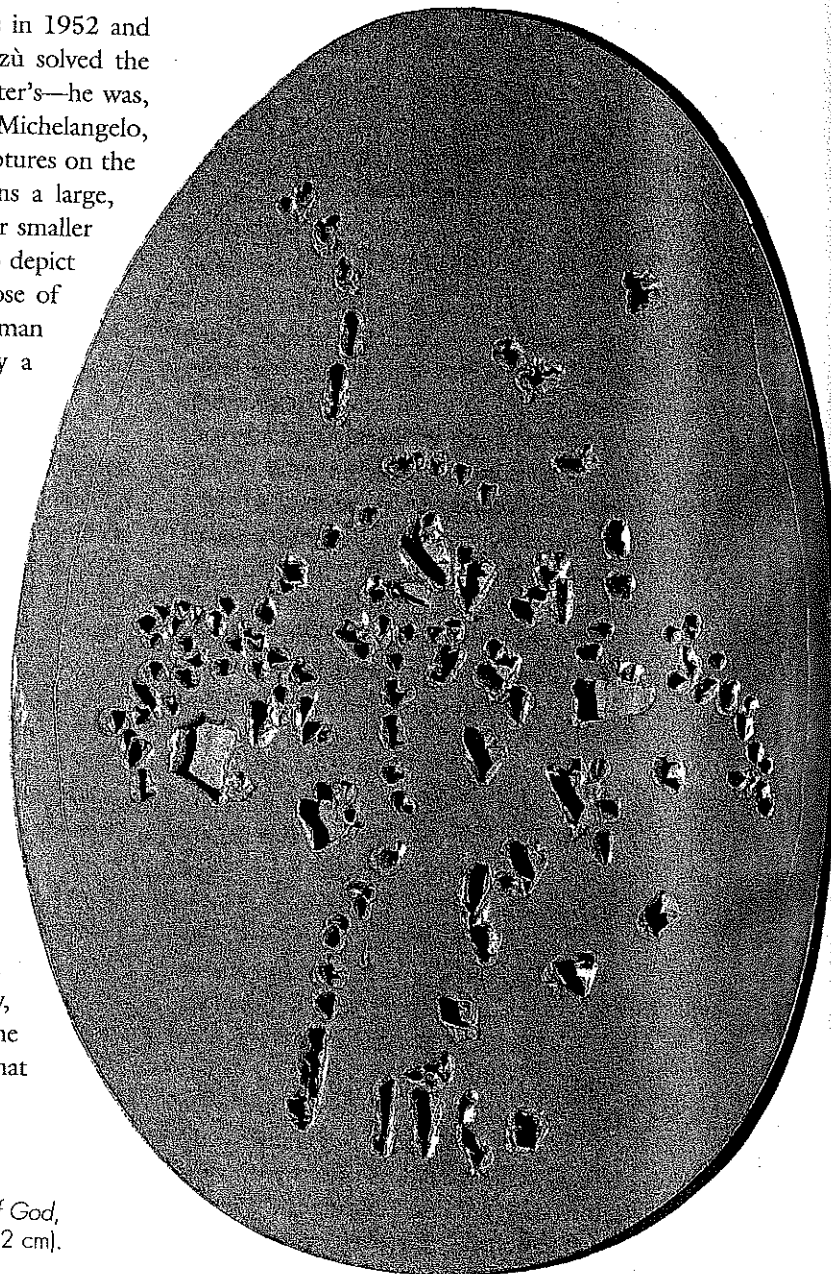


He received the commission for St. Peter's in 1952 and the doors were consecrated in 1964. Manzù solved the daunting task of designing doors for St. Peter's—he was, after all, entering the realm of Bramante, Michelangelo, and Bernini—with a series of low-relief sculptures on the general theme of death. Each door contains a large, vertical panel on a biblical theme above four smaller ones. In these lower panels Manzù chose to depict not the deaths of Christian martyrs but those of common people. In *Death by Violence II*, a man succumbs to a tortuous death observed by a compassionate female onlooker.

Afro

Italian *Art Informel* found an advocate in Afro (1912–76), as Afro Basaldella is generally known, though his work was never as radical as that of Lucio Fontana or Alberto Burri (see below). His work was central to the Italian *Astratto-Concreto* (Abstract-Concrete) movement at mid-century, led by the influential Italian critic Lionello Venturi. During the fifties, Afro created an atmospheric world of light and shadows, with subdued, harmonious colors and shapes that are in a constant state of metamorphosis (fig. 20.37). Of Italian postwar painters, Afro was closest to his American contemporaries, having lived in the United States in 1950 and admired the work of Gorky, Kline, and de Kooning. His later work of the sixties took on a painterly appearance close to that of these gestural painters.

20.38 Lucio Fontana, *Spatial Concept: The End of God*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 70 × 48½" (177.8 × 123.2 cm). Gallerie dell'Ariete, Milan.

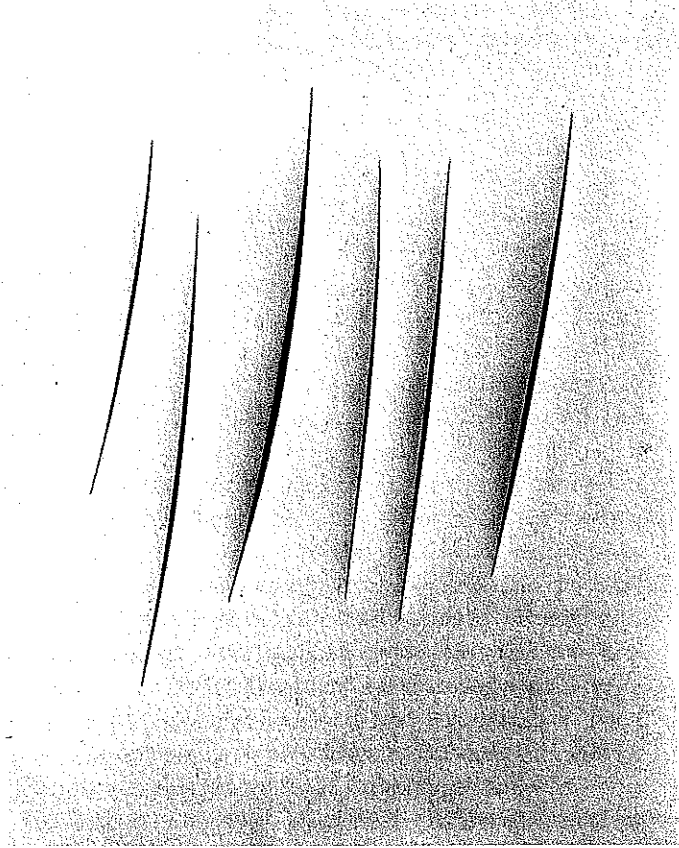


Fontana

Among abstract artists in Italy in the years after the war, **Lucio Fontana** (1899–1968) was the leading exemplar. Born in Argentina and trained as a sculptor in Italy, he was producing abstract sculpture by the early thirties (though he also continued to work figuratively into the fifties). He joined the Paris-based Abstraction-Création group in 1935, the same year he signed the First Manifesto of Italian Abstract Artists. During World War II he returned to Argentina, where he published the *White Manifesto*, outlining his idea of a dynamic new art for a new age made with such modern materials as neon light and television—media whose potential would not be tapped again for art until the sixties and seventies. The *White Manifesto*, modeled in many ways on Futurist prototypes, anticipated the theory of what would be known as *Spazialismo* or Spatialism (laid out in five more manifestos between 1947 and 1952), a concept that rejected the illusionistic or “virtual” space of traditional easel painting in favor of the free development of color and form in literal space. The Spatialist program was designed to emancipate art from past preconceptions, to create an art that would “transcend the area of the canvas, or the volume of the statue, to assume further dimensions and become ... an integral part of architecture, transmitted into the surrounding space and using discoveries in science and technology.”

Fontana also became a pioneer of environments in 1949 when he used free forms and black light to create vast Spatialist surrounds, experiments followed in the fifties by designs made in collaboration with the architect Luciano Baldessari. In his desire to break down categories of painting, sculpture, and even architecture, Fontana described his works as *Concetti Spaziale* (CS), or “Spatial Concepts,” thus inaugurating Conceptualism, a style that would not actually take hold in Western art until the seventies.

Beginning in 1949, Fontana perforated the canvas with *buchi* (holes) in abstract but not haphazard patterns, thereby breaking through the picture plane that had been the point of departure for painting throughout much of its history. In 1963 he made a series of egg-shaped canvases called *Spatial Concept: The End of God* (fig. 20.38), in which holes are torn in a brightly painted canvas to reveal another colored canvas below, all resembling a strange, extraterrestrial landscape. During the fifties he experimented with matter, as did his fellow countrymen Afro and Alberto Burri, building up his penetrated surfaces with heavy paint, paste, canvas fragments, or pieces of glass. It was in 1958 that, feeling he was complicating and embellishing the works too much, Fontana slashed a spoiled canvas. He realized that with this simple act, he could achieve the integration of surface with depth that he had been seeking. These monochrome, lacerated canvases, called *Tagli* (slashes) (fig. 20.39) were subtitled *Attese*, which translates as “expectations,” and are the works for which he is best known. Although Fontana’s abstract art was tied to the general trends of *Art Informel*, instead of making a



20.39 Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale (Attese)*, c. 1960. Oil on canvas, 36 × 28¾" (91.4 × 73 cm). Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany.

positive gesture that adds medium to the painted surface, his incisions in a sense remove medium and transform the normally taut and inviolable surface of the canvas into a soft, malleable form that opens to a mysteriously dark interior. For Fontana, the gesture was less about creating a record of the individual artist’s emotion—as with Mathieu or de Kooning—than it was an exploration of the physical properties of a work of art and the emotions that those properties evoke. Shortly after he made his first *Tagli*, Fontana applied his Spatial Concepts to bronze sculptures (as he already had to ceramics), creating roughly textured, rounded forms that are sliced and punctured.

Burri

Alberto Burri (1915–95) was a doctor in the Italian army in North Africa when he was captured by the British. Later he was turned over to the Americans, who interned him as a prisoner of war in Texas. During this confinement, Burri began drawing and painting. Abandoning medicine after his release, he continued his creative activities free of formal artistic training, and developed a style indebted at first to Mondrian and Miró. Burri eventually evolved a method with a strong emphasis on texture and materiality, incorporating thick paint, pastes, and tar into his paintings. He received his first exhibition in a Roman gallery in 1947 and

20.40 Alberto Burri, *Composition*, 1953. Oil, gold paint, and glue on canvas and burlap, 34 × 39 3/4" (86.4 × 100 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

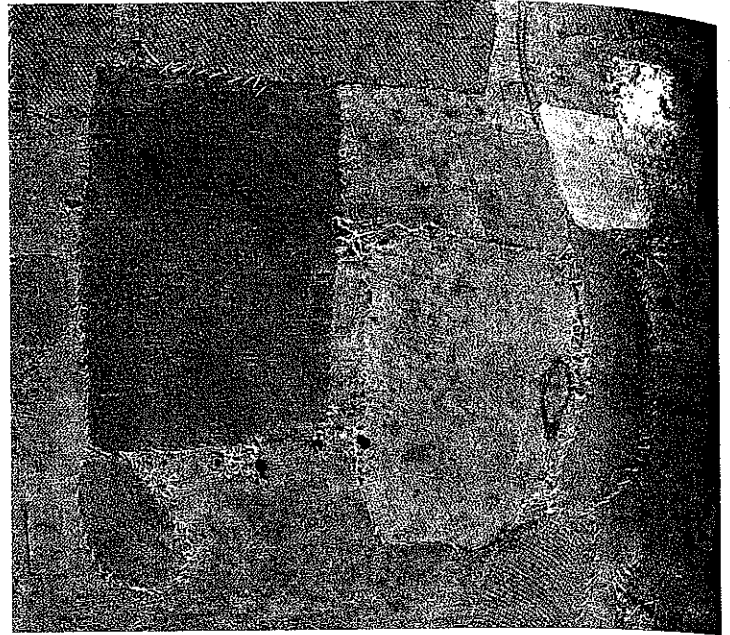
in 1950 began to make *Sacchi* (fig. 20.40), paintings made of old sacks roughly sewn together and heavily splashed with paint. The results were often reminiscent of bloodstained bandages, torn and scarred—devastating commentaries on war's death and destruction. They have been related to Schwitters's collages (see fig. 13.30), but their impact is much more brutal. For a period in the mid-fifties Burri burned designs on thin wood panels like those used in orange crates. In them, as in the earlier works, there is a strange juxtaposition: on the one hand, the ephemeral material coupled with a sense of destruction and disintegration (the material sometimes disintegrates visibly when moved from place to place); on the other hand, the elegance and control with which the artist arranges his elements. Burri also worked in metal and plastics, melting and re-forming these media with a blowtorch to achieve results of vivid coloristic beauty combined with effects of disease and decay. His influence has been strong, particularly on the young Robert Rauschenberg (see fig. 21.10), who visited his studio in 1953.

Tàpies

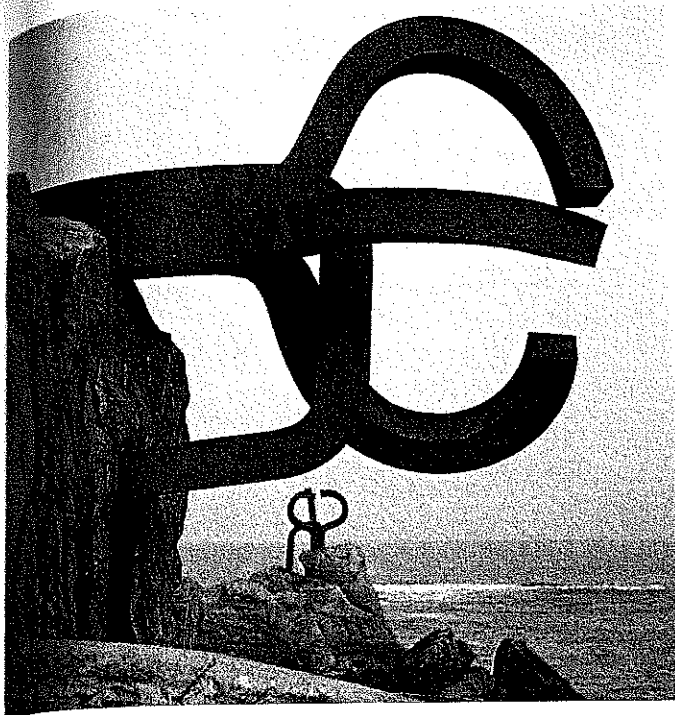
Coming of age following the devastation of the Spanish Civil War and in the wake of the great twentieth-century Spanish painters—Picasso, Miró, Dalí—Antoni Tàpies (b. 1923) emerged as an important artist in Spain after World War II. By the early sixties his reputation had spread well beyond Spain's borders and was bolstered by important exhibitions in Europe and the United States. Tàpies was a native of Barcelona, a gifted draftsman, and a man of broad erudition who drew from many sources for his art,



20.41 Antoni Tàpies, *Painting Collage*, 1964. Mixed media on canvas, 14 × 22" (35.6 × 55.9 cm). Galleria Toninelli, Rome.



including Catalan mysticism and Zen Buddhism. His early paintings, which incorporate collage and depict fantastic subjects, are highly reminiscent of Klee and Miró. Then in the mid-fifties, profound changes took place in his outlook and his art. "Suddenly, as if I had passed through the looking-glass," he wrote, "a whole new perspective opened up before me, as if to tell the innermost secret of things. A whole new geography lit my way from one surprise to the next." He began to make abstract compositions distinctive for their emphasis on thick, rough textures (fig. 20.41). He built up the surfaces of his paintings in a variety of ways, with combinations of paint, varnish, sand, and powdered marble, to create an effect of textured relief. His colors are generally subdued but rich, with surfaces worked in many ways—punctured, incised, or modeled in relief. These highly tactile surfaces became analogous to walls for the artist into which he crudely scratched lines or onto which he applied other materials. As such, they were metaphors for the struggles and sufferings of the artist and his fellow Spaniards during the war years, which he said, "seemed to inscribe themselves on the walls around me" (*tàpies* in fact means "walls" in Spanish). Like many of his contemporaries, Tàpies has used "poor" materials—weathered wood, rope, burlap, cardboard, and found objects—to create crusty, battered surfaces expressive of his deeply spiritual, antimaterialistic values.



20.42 Eduardo Chillida (architect: Luis Peña Ganchegui; engineer: José María Elósegui), *Combs of the Wind*, 1977. Iron, each of three pieces 7 × 6 × 6' (21.3 × 1.8 × 1.8m). Donostia Bay, San Sebastián, Spain.

Chillida

Originally trained as an architect, the Spanish artist **Eduardo Chillida** (1924–2002) turned to sculpture in his early twenties. Though he carved work in wood and stone, Chillida worked predominantly in iron, drawing upon the long blacksmithing tradition in his native Basque country. His earlier works are complex, interlocking configurations that can suggest the old tools from which they were forged. Later he forged massive, monumental bars in powerful architectural abstractions with extremely subtle relations among the massive, tilted rectangular shapes. His works on a monumental scale include a well-known sculpture for his hometown of San Sebastián called *Combs of the Wind*. At a place where Chillida spent much of his childhood, iron forms resembling massive pincers are dramatically sited on the beach and embedded into the living rock (fig. 20.42).

“Forget It and Start Again”: The CoBrA Artists and Hundertwasser

In the postwar Netherlands—in the very home of Mondrian and de Stijl—a desire for expressionistic liberation from the constraints of anything rational, geometric, or Constructivist became particularly urgent. Inspired by the Danish painter Asger Jorn, three Dutch artists—Karel Appel, Cornelis Corneille, and George Constant—established the Experimental Group in 1948. They sought new forms of elemental expression, as much opposed to Mondrian and de Stijl as to the Academy. Through contacts with similar groups in Copenhagen and Brussels, this

association evolved into the international group CoBrA (standing for Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam), led by Jorn and the Belgian poet Christian Dotremont. Most of the painters associated with the CoBrA group employed some sort of subject or figuration, often informed by their interests in the art of the untutored—what Dubuffet called *art brut*. The most important unifying principles among these divergent artists was their doctrine of complete freedom of abstract expressive forms; their emphasis on brush gesture; and their rejection of rationalism and geometric abstraction. In the words of one artist, “The gallery had become a temple dedicated to the right angle and the straight line.” In this, they were allied to Dubuffet and Fautrier in France, for both of whom the artists of CoBrA had great respect, although the latter’s means of expression were generally more violent, colorful, and dynamic. CoBrA, which lasted as a united movement from 1948 to 1951, was a critical artistic phenomenon for its internationalism. It also infused tremendous energy into abstract painting when an exhausted Europe was just emerging from the war.

Jorn

The Dane **Asger Jorn** (1914–73) represents the most extreme reaction against Concrete art’s principles of order and harmony. Jorn spent several formative years in Paris,



20.43 Asger Jorn, *The Enigma of Frozen Water*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 63¼ × 51¼" (162 × 130 cm). Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

where he received disciplined training at Léger's academy. Important for his future development was his exposure to the biomorphic Surrealism of Arp and Masson (see figs. 15.3, 15.18), memories of which remained a constant theme in his art. Like the American Abstract Expressionists, who learned from similar Surrealist examples, Jorn was interested in mythic subject matter, which he drew from specifically Nordic folkloric traditions.

Jorn produced paintings that could be an illustration of Ruskin's famous epithet concerning Whistler—a pot of paint flung in the face of the public. Yet Jorn's art still has its roots in figuration. Using largely undiluted primary colors with blacks, whites, and greens, Jorn smeared, slashed, and dripped the paint in a seemingly uncontrolled frenzy. Yet the control, established in large, swinging, linear movements, and asymmetrically balanced color-shapes, remains sufficient to bring a degree of order out of chaos while not diminishing the explosive fury of the abstract expression (fig. 20.43).

Appel

Karel Appel (b. 1921) consistently painted figures and portraits with heavy impasto and brilliant color, as in his 1956 portrait of Willem Sandberg, who was then director of Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, which specializes in

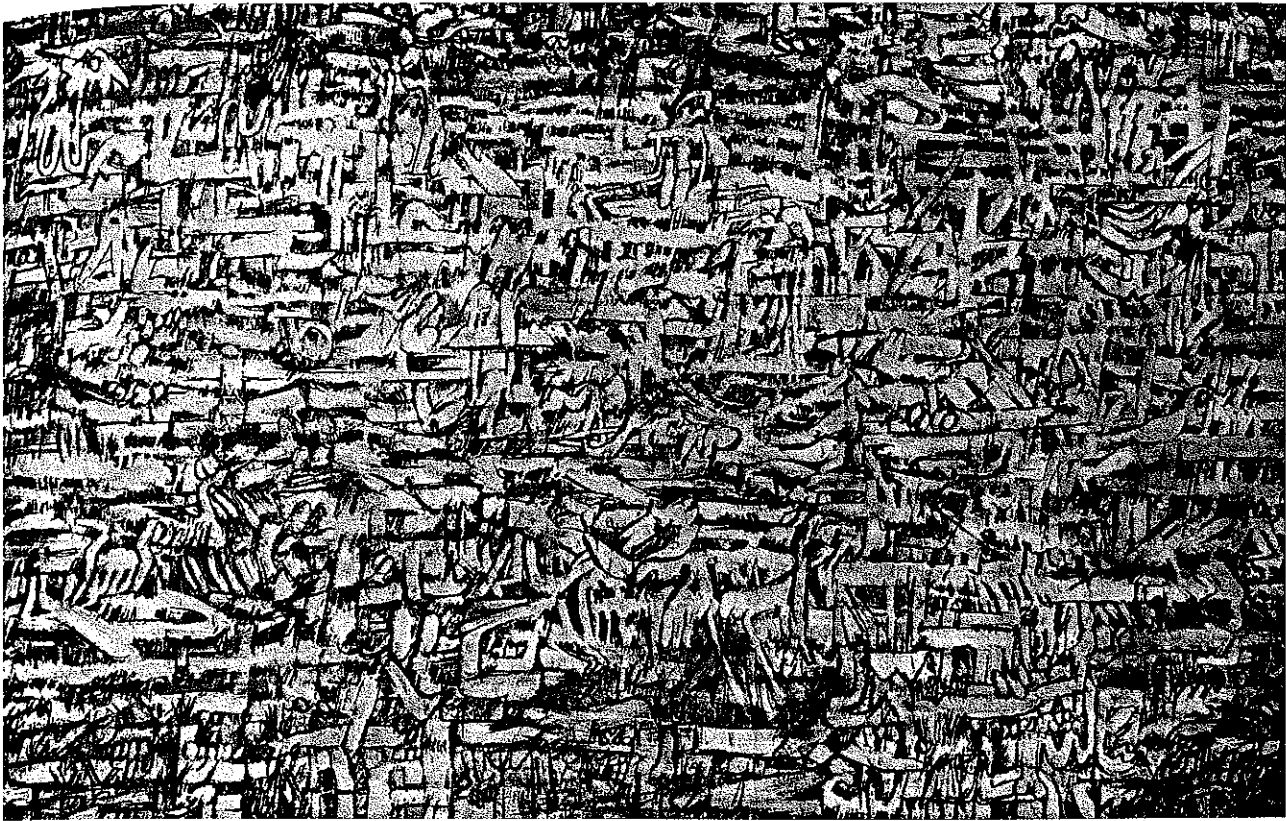
modern art. Sandberg was a heroic figure to young artists in Holland both for his support of experimental art—he championed CoBrA against intensely negative public sentiment—and for his efforts to save Dutch Jews from deportation by the Nazis during the war. Appel, like Dubuffet, whose work he first saw in 1947 during a trip to Paris, was drawn to the intuitive and the spontaneous, especially in the art of children, and he achieved a wonderful childlike quality in his own work (fig. 20.44). He was also inspired by Van Gogh, Matisse, Schwitters, and Picasso. "You have to learn it all," he said, "then forget it and start again like a child. This is the inner evolution." Appel established a certain control over this process through his representation of an explicit face or figure.

Alechinsky

The Belgian Pierre Alechinsky (b. 1927) was a latecomer to the CoBrA group. When he first encountered their paintings at a 1949 exhibition in Brussels, he detected in them "a total opposition to the calculations of cold abstraction, the sordid or 'optimistic' speculations of socialist realism, and to all forms of division between free thought and the action of painting freely." By comparison with Appel or Jorn, particularly in his earlier works of the fifties, Alechinsky produced an allover structure of tightly interwoven elements



20.44 Karel Appel, *Angry Landscape*, 1967. Oil on canvas, 4'3¼" × 6'4¼" (1.3 m × 1.9 m). Private collection.



20.45 Pierre Alechinsky, *Ant Hill*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 4'11½" × 7'9¾" (1.5 × 2.4 m). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

with a sense of order deriving from microcosmic organisms (fig. 20.45). His later works, on the other hand, have a curvilinear morphology that stems partly from Belgian Art Nouveau as well as from the artist's automatist practices.

Hundertwasser

An artist who continued the traditions of Austrian Art Nouveau and Expressionism was the Viennese Friedrich Stowasser, or **Hundertwasser** (1928–2000). Impossible to classify through allegiance to any particular artistic group or cause, Hundertwasser traveled extensively, living at different times in France, Italy, and Austria. Though he arrived in Paris at the dawn of *Art Informel*, he developed a style directly at odds with it, preferring instead to forge a visual language based on specific forms, ones derived largely from the Austrians Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele (see figs. 5.5, 8.26). His early work carries strong overtones of Paul Klee, and he shared Klee's interest in art produced by children. The most distinctive feature of Hundertwasser's art is its jewellike color, as in the self-portrait shown here (fig. 20.46), a brilliant pastiche of Art Nouveau decoration.



20.46 Hundertwasser, *House which was born in Stockholm, died in Paris, and myself mourning it*, 1965. Mixed media, 32 × 23¾" (81.3 × 60.1 cm). Private collection.



20.47 Francis Bacon, *Painting*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 6'6" × 4'4" (2 × 1.32 m). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figures in the Landscape: British Painting and Sculpture

In British art after the war a strong emphasis on the figure reasserted itself, even in the work of an artist such as Barbara Hepworth, who in the thirties had aligned herself with European abstraction. (Giacometti had similarly moved from Surrealist sculpture to an art centered on the human figure.) For Hepworth as for Henry Moore, the relationship between the figure, or sculpture, and its surroundings was of crucial importance. Both artists paid close attention to the siting of their works in rural or urban settings so as to achieve an effect of presenceful, often serene, poise. In the paintings of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud, by contrast, the human subjects inhabit comfortless spaces that highlight their vulnerability.

Bacon

Irish-born Francis Bacon (1909–92) was a figurative painter of disquieting subject matter. After the war, Bacon achieved international stature on a par with that of Giacometti and Dubuffet. A wholly self-taught artist, Bacon left his native Dublin as a teenager, traveling in Europe and settling eventually in London. He painted grim, violent, and grotesquely distorted imagery in the most seductive painterly style, producing what one writer described as “a terrible beauty.” Bacon’s devotion to the monstrous has been variously interpreted as a reaction to the plight of the world, or as a nihilistic or existential attitude toward life’s meaninglessness.

In *Painting* (fig. 20.47), 1946 (he destroyed most of his prewar work), Bacon created a horrific montage of images that, according to his explanation, emerged by accident. The artist said:

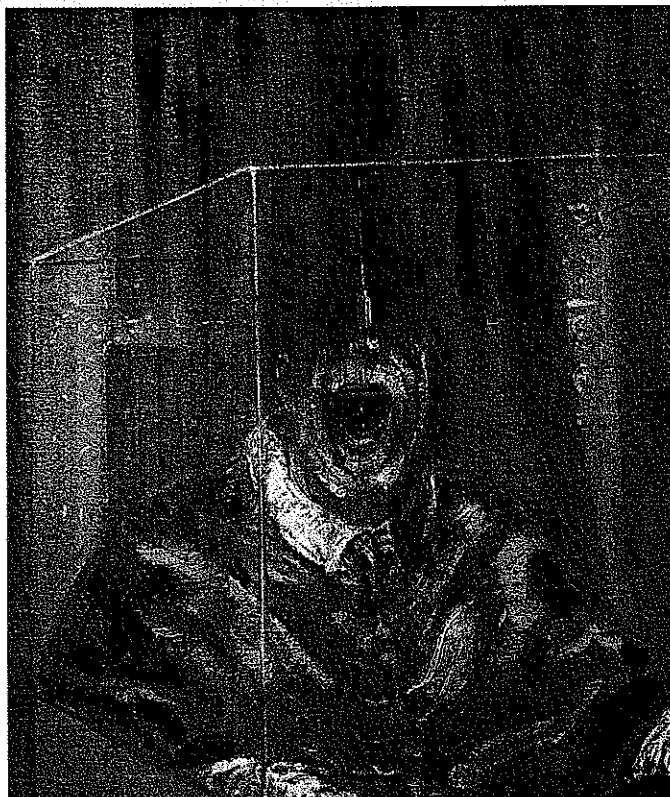
I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field, but suddenly the lines that I’d drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another.

From the deep shadows, cast by an umbrella, emerges the lower half of a head with a hideously grimacing mouth topped by a bloody moustache. The figure, whose torso virtually disappears into long strokes of paint, is enclosed within a round tubular structure (related to the artist’s own earlier furniture designs); hunks of meat seem to be skewered on it. The sense of formal disjunction compounds the imagery’s disturbing effect. At the figure’s feet is what appears to be a decorative Oriental carpet, as though this creature, who wears a yellow corsage, is sitting for a conventional formal portrait. Presiding over the entire scene is a gigantic beef carcass, strung up like a crucifixion beneath a grotesquely incongruous festoon of decorative swags. Some have detected in the figure a resemblance to despots of the day, such as Mussolini. Although *Painting* was made

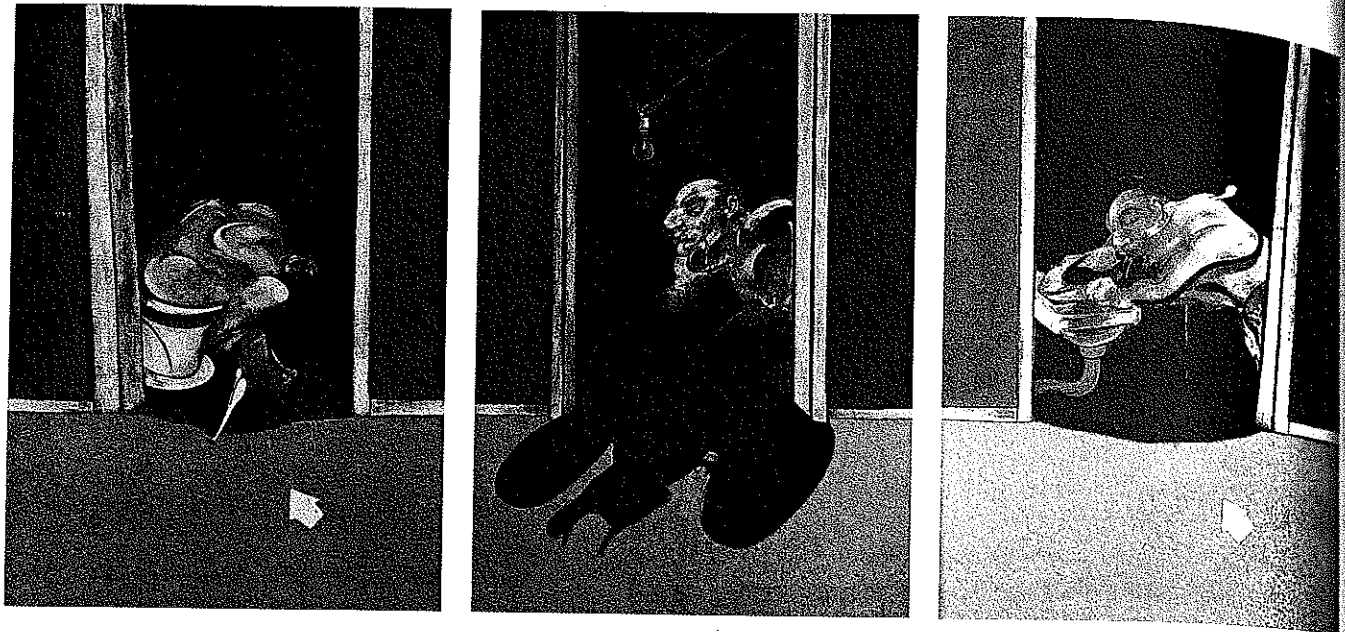
just after the war, it transcends any particular association to become a terrifying and universal depiction of ruthless, predatory power.

Bacon’s sense of tradition extended from Giotto to Rembrandt and Van Gogh. He used paintings of the past as the basis of his works but transformed them through his own inward vision and torment. Beginning in 1949 he made a series of paintings after Velázquez’s *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* in the Doria Pamphili Gallery in Rome (which Bacon knew only through reproductions). In these works, the subject is usually shown seated in a large, unified surrounding space. The figure is blurred as though seen through a veil, while the perspective lines delineate a glass box within which the figure is trapped. *Head VI* (fig. 20.48) is the first of these papal images and the last of a series of six heads that Bacon made in 1948–49. Typically, the pope’s mouth is wide open, as if uttering a horrendous scream. The artist, who said he wanted to “make the best painting of the human cry,” conflated the papal image with a famous still from the Russian film *The Battleship Potemkin*, 1925, directed by Sergei Eisenstein. The still is a closeup of a panic-stricken, screaming nanny who has been shot in the eye, her pince-nez shattered as she loses her grip on the baby stroller in her care. The exact meaning of the Pope series is deliberately obscured by the artist, but there is no question of the horrifying impact and beauty of the painting.

Bacon’s subject was almost exclusively the human face or figure—especially the male nude, which he portrayed in states of extreme, sometimes convulsive effort. Like Max



20.48 Francis Bacon, *Head VI*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (93.2 × 76.5 cm). Arts Council Collection, London.



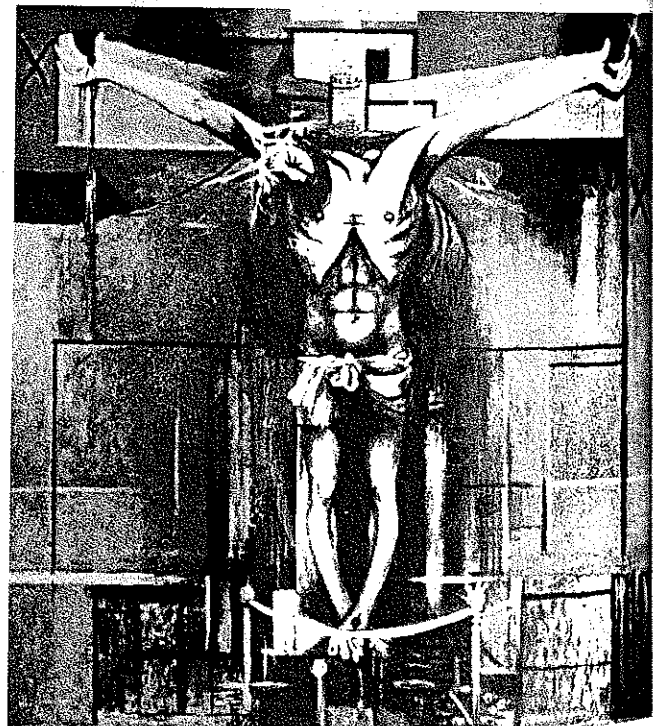
20.49 Francis Bacon, *Triptych—May–June 1973*, 1973. Oil on canvas, each panel 6'6" × 4'10" (1.9 × 1.5 m). Private collection.

Beckmann (see fig. 13.42), he frequently made triptychs, a format he had employed for scenes related to human suffering. In *Triptych—May–June 1973* (fig. 20.49), Bacon created a harrowing yet touching posthumous portrait of his close friend, George Dyer, during a fatal illness. In three separate images, cinematic in their sense of movement and sequential action, Dyer's ghostly white figure is seen through darkened doorways. In the central canvas, where Dyer lurches toward the sink, the blackness spills out onto the floor as an ominous shadow. This is life at its most fundamental, when the human protagonist is stripped of all pretense and decorum.

Sutherland

The English artist **Graham Sutherland** (1903–80), Bacon's contemporary, also explored agonized expressions of human suffering. During the twenties he made visionary, meticulously representational, landscapes of rural England, mostly in etching, that reveal his passion for the works of the nineteenth-century English painter Samuel Palmer. In the mid-thirties his work became increasingly abstract and imaginative, partly as a result of his discovery of Surrealism. He made paintings based on forms found in nature—rocks, roots, or trees—that were divorced from their landscape context and, in the artist's words, "redefined the mind's eye in a new life and a new mould." He eventually transformed these found forms into monstrous figures that suggest some of Picasso's Expressionist–Surrealist work of the thirties. The war years, when he worked as an official war artist, led to a certain reversion in the representation of devastated, bombed-out buildings and industrial scenes. By the end of World War II, Sutherland had arrived at his characteristically jagged, thistlelike totems, frequently based quite literally on plant

forms but transformed into menacing beasts or chimeras. A commission for the painting of a Crucifixion in St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, led him back to Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece (see fig. 1.7). In Grünewald's torn, lacerated figures he found a natural affinity (fig. 20.50). Along with his expressionist works, he carried on a successful career as a portraitist, painting many of the great figures of his time in literal but penetrating interpretations.



20.50 Graham Sutherland, *Crucifixion*, 1946. Oil on hardboard, 8' × 7'6" (2.4 × 2.3 m). Church of St. Matthew, Northampton, England.

Freud

An important European heir to the tradition of truth to visual fact is the Berlin-born British artist **Lucian Freud** (b. 1922), the grandson of the pioneering psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Freud, whose Jewish family left Berlin for England when Hitler came to power in 1933, showed an aptitude for drawing at a young age and was producing remarkably accomplished work by the time he reached his early twenties. His uncompromising devotion to the physical presence of the sitter is such that the resulting portrait, realized with an obsessive command of line and texture, can seem the product of a clinically cold and analytical mind (fig. 20.51). Still, in their very “nakedness,” models whom the artist has revealed in excruciatingly close-up detail confront the viewer with an unmistakable presence. Not since Germany’s *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting of the twenties was the human figure examined with such an unflinching eye and such tight, linear precision. In the late fifties, Freud’s paint handling began to loosen, although the empiricism of his gaze was undiminished. Many of his works are nudes—friends and family, never professional models—who assume strange and revealing poses, whose bodies are far from idealized, and whose unidealized flesh is tinged with blood and swollen with the muscle and fat that lie beneath the surface. Throughout his career, Freud made close-up portraits—one of the best is a 1952 portrait of Bacon (stolen from an exhibition in 1988)—and he

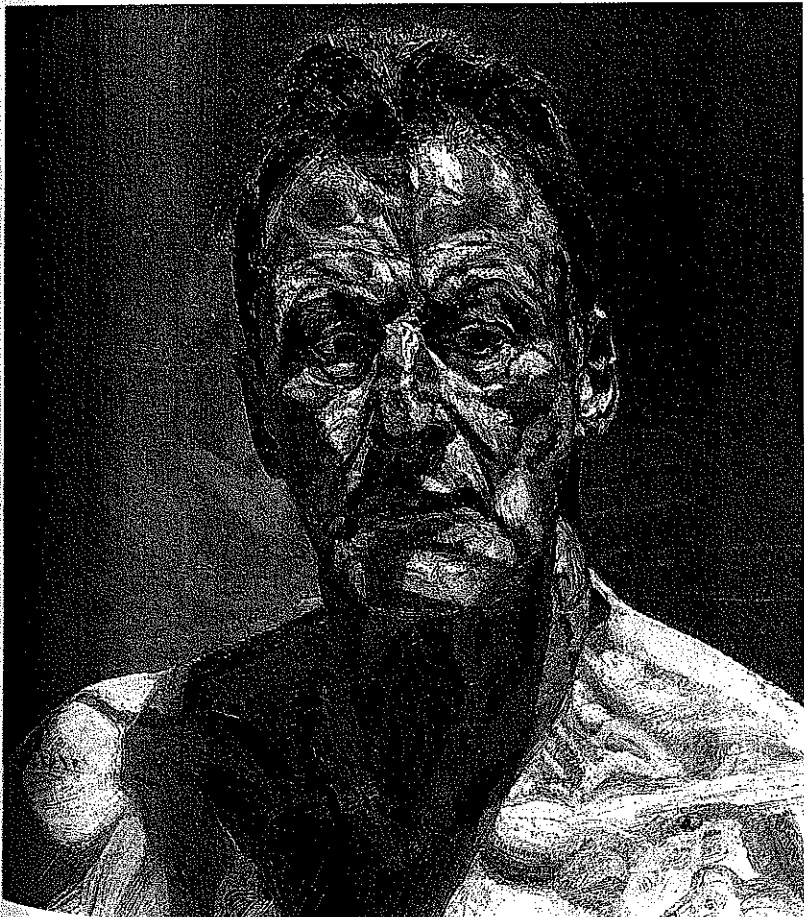


20.51 Lucian Freud, *Girl with White Dog*, 1951–52. Oil on canvas, 30 × 40" (76.2 × 101.6 cm). Tate Gallery, London.

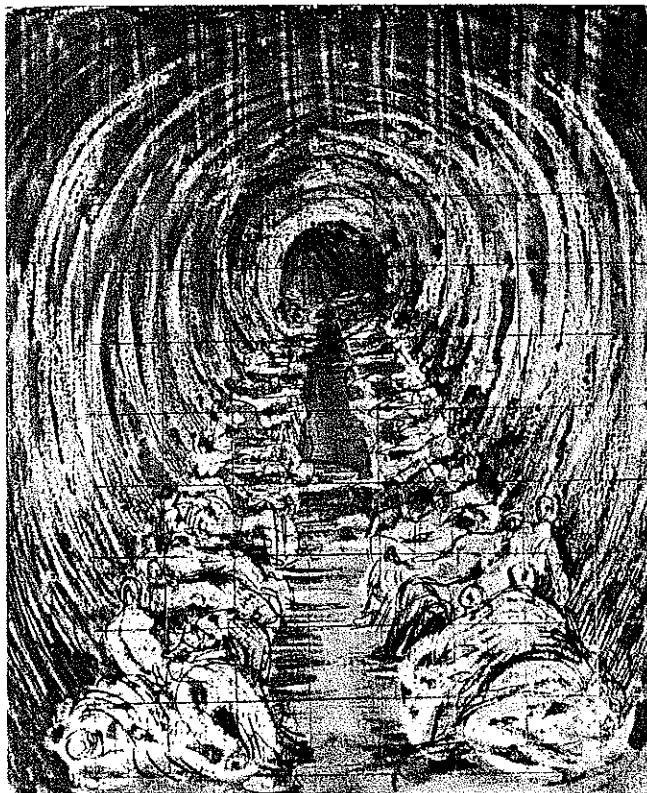
has also turned his unsparing gaze on himself. In his self-portrait from 1985 (fig. 20.52), skin becomes a harsh terrain of myriad hues, with deep pink crevices and thick white highlights. When experiencing a painting by Freud “in the flesh,” one is aware of pigment, yet never loses the sense of depicted flesh as a living, mutable substance that painfully documents, in the words of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, “the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.”

Moore

Stylistically and temperamentally, **Henry Moore** (1896–1986), like Hepworth, contemplated the human condition in calmer philosophical terms than such contemporaries as Bacon and Dubuffet. While faithful to his origins in abstraction, he continued to work in a biomorphic mode, even at its most reductive, on the brink of evoking the human presence. During World War II he made thousands of drawings of the underground air-raid shelters in London (fig. 20.53). As huge numbers of people sought refuge from German bombs in the tunnels of the London Underground, Moore was able to study reclining figures and figural groups that gave him many ideas for sculpture. During and after the war he continued to develop his theme of recumbent figures composed as an intricate arrangement of interpenetrating solids and voids (see fig. 17.34). The early fifties also brought forth new experiments in more naturalistic, albeit attenuated figures, such as

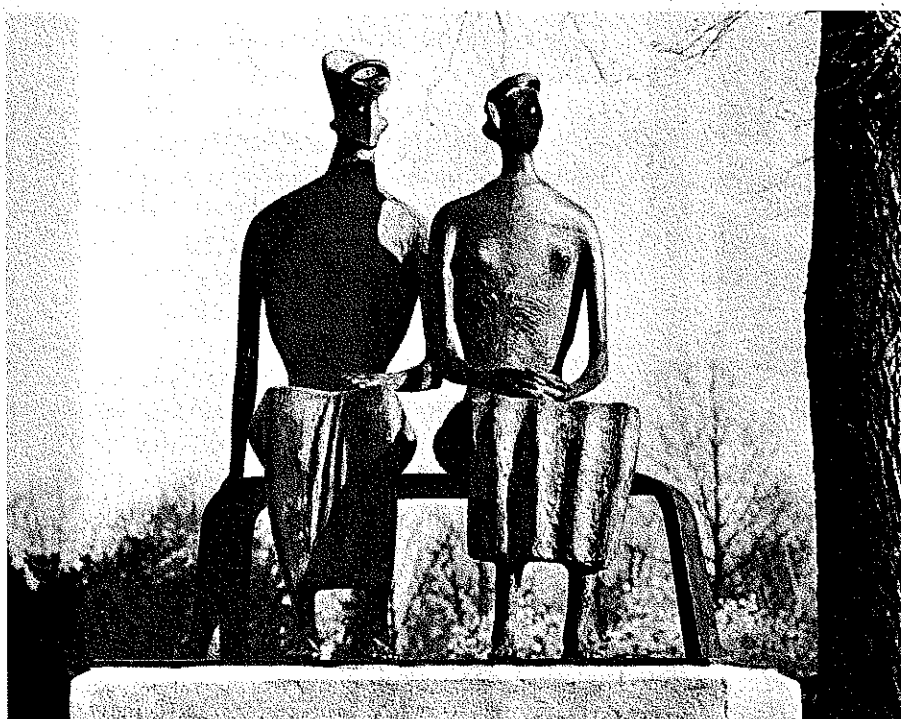


20.52 Lucian Freud, *Reflection (Self-Portrait)*, 1983–85. Oil on canvas, 22½ × 20½" (56.2 × 51.2 cm). Private collection.



20.53 Henry Moore, *Study for Tube Shelter Perspective*, 1940–41. Pencil, wax crayon, colored crayon, watercolor wash, pen and ink, 10½ × 6½" (26.4 × 16.5 cm). Collection Mrs. Henry Moore, England.

King and Queen (fig. 20.54). First inspired by an ancient Egyptian sculpture of a royal couple, Moore's king and queen have masks for faces and flattened-out, leaflike bodies, yet maintain a sense of regal dignity. They have nothing to do with "present-day Kings and Queens," Moore said, but with the "archaic or primitive idea of a King."



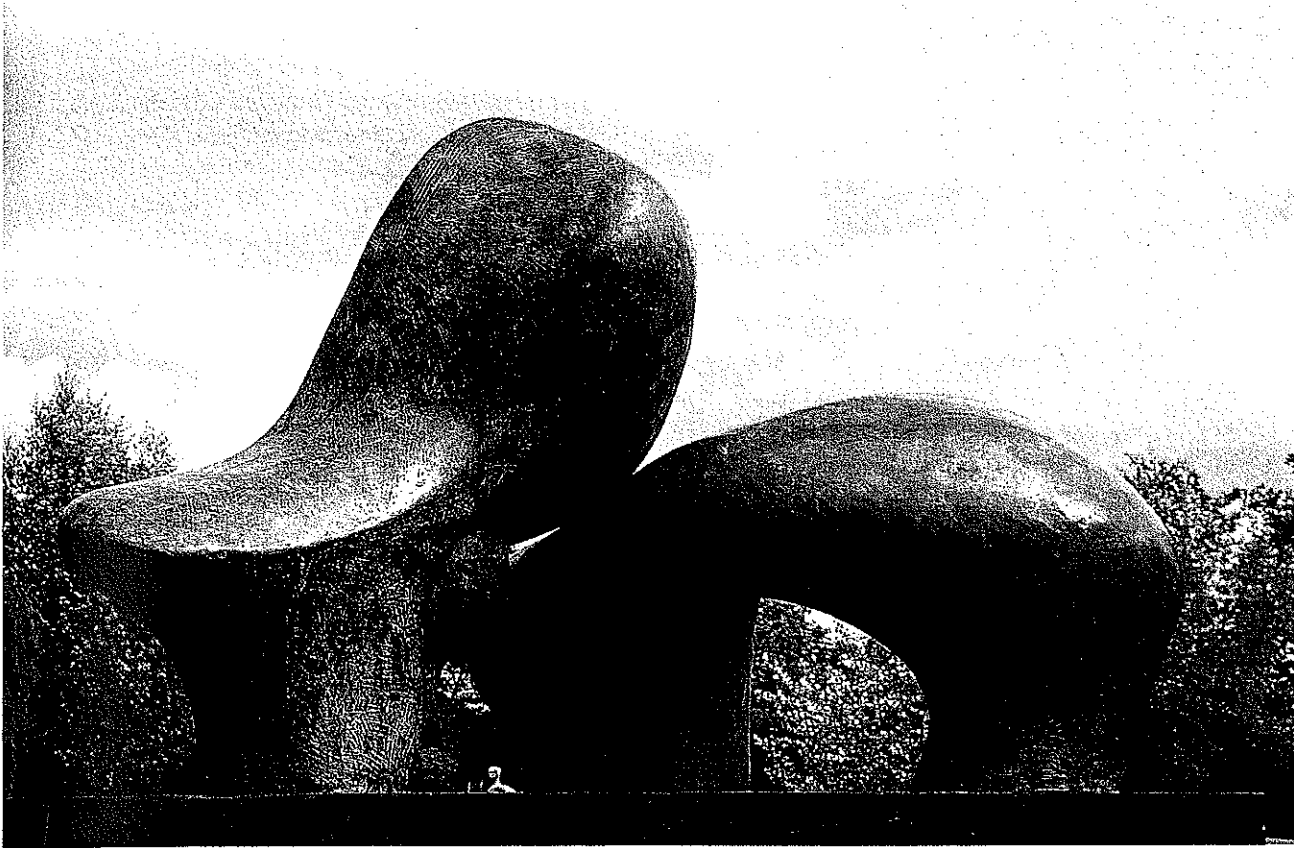
20.54 Henry Moore, *King and Queen*, 1952–53. Bronze, height 63½" (161.3 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

After midcentury, Moore received many international commissions for architectural sculpture. His works can be found on university and museum grounds and other public sites across America and Europe. Generally, these late works are dependent to some degree on Moore's earlier concepts of reclining or standing figures. Most of these works are executed in bronze, which is given a range of effects—from the most jagged and rocky to the most finished and biomorphic. In 1972 Moore made a large bronze titled *Sheep Piece*, here shown in the form of a bronze working model (fig. 20.55), which he installed in the meadows behind his studio in the English countryside. The sheep on his property (which he loved to sketch) liked to rub themselves against the sculpture or rest in its shadows. Because of the interaction of the two bronze elements in *Sheep Piece* and their soft, organic contours, the work has been related to mating animals, but a sexual dimension is implied, not explicit.

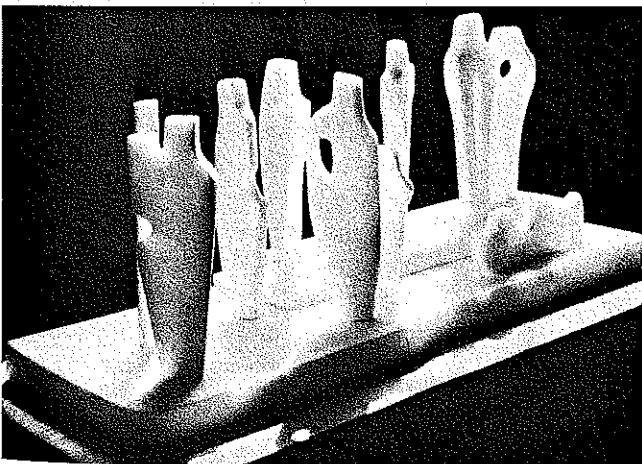
Hepworth

During the fifties **Barbara Hepworth** (1903–75) discovered a promising new direction through a series of so-called *Groups* in white marble (fig. 20.56), small in scale and magical in their impact. She was inspired to make them after watching people stroll through Piazza San Marco during a 1950 trip to Venice, where her work was featured at the Biennale. The *Groups* were related to her early compositions and to her continuing interest in ancient art, specifically the Cycladic art of prehistoric Greece. In modern terms they recall both Giacometti's groups of walking figures and the biomorphs that inhabit Tanguy's Surrealist landscapes (see fig. 15.20). Much of Hepworth's sculpture of the fifties was a direct response to the landscape—the

rocks, caves, cliffs, and sea—surrounding her home in Cornwall, along with the monumental Neolithic stone menhirs that populate the landscape. She preferred carving in wood or stone to modeling in clay and continued to work with wood and stone on both small and large scales after the war. After 1960 Hepworth received a number of commissions that permitted her to compose on a monumental scale, often in bronze. She was at her most abstract with works such as *Squares with Two Circles* (*Monolith*) (fig. 20.57). Its pierced, rectangular forms relate to the geometry of Ben Nicholson's reliefs (see fig. 17.32), but the large circular openings recruit the surrounding environment as an active participant in our perception of the work.

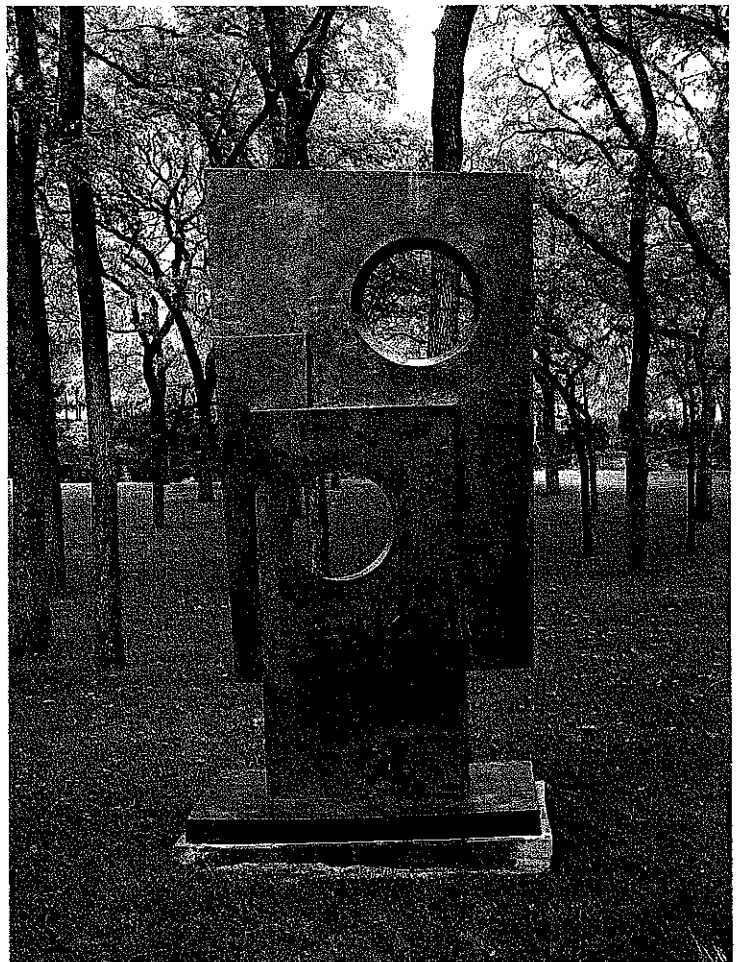


20.55 Henry Moore, *Working model for Sheep Piece*, 1971. Bronze, length 56" (142 cm). The Henry Moore Foundation.



20.56 Barbara Hepworth, *Group III (Evocation)*, 1952. Marble, height 9" (23 cm). Private collection.

20.57 Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*, 1963 (cast 1964). Bronze, 10'4" × 5'5" × 2'6" (3.2 × 1.7 × .8 m). Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Dallas.



Marvels of Daily Life: European Photographers

Almost every imaginable facet of twentieth-century life was captured by photography, to the extent that the nature—and limits—of the photographic medium came to shape people's responses to visual experience. Although experimental photographers after the war explored photography's immense potential to combine different ways of seeing, as in Siskind's "Abstract-Expressionist" close-ups of wall surfaces or Callahan's botanically precise yet Miróesque *Weed* (see figs. 19.60, 19.62), it was still some years before photography became a generally accepted art medium on a par with painting, printmaking, or drawing. Among the European photographers who produced memorable images of life in the immediate postwar period, Robert Doisneau in France and Josef Sudek in Czechoslovakia both revealed, in highly distinct and individual ways, a poetry in austere or ordinary settings. As Europe came to terms with the devastation of World War II, Swiss photographer Werner Bischof crossed the continent recording "the face of human suffering" in its many incarnations from France to Romania and Greece.

Something of Dubuffet's serious whimsy was shared by Robert Doisneau (1912–94), who, like Brassai (see fig. 15.64), roamed the streets of Paris seeking and finding what he called "the unimaginable image" within "the marvels of daily life." Having discovered that nothing is more bizarre or amusing than the banal, Doisneau managed to brighten a

depressed, existential age with his witty, but never snide photographic commentary on the foibles, misadventures, and daily pursuits of the human—and particularly Parisian—race. In 1949 he made a series of photographs in the shop of an antique dealer in the city (fig. 20.58), capturing the varied responses of passersby to a provocative painting of a nude hanging in the window.

Among photographers in Central Europe, the Czech Josef Sudek (1896–1976) was a leading practitioner. Called the "Poet of Prague," Sudek, who lost an arm while serving in World War I, established a successful photographic business in that city in the twenties and at first made photographs in a Romantic, Pictorialist style. Once German troops occupied Prague in 1939, Sudek retreated into his studio, focusing his camera on whatever caught his eye through the window of his studio. He continued his habit of photographing still lifes on his studio windowsill or views into the garden or the city streets into the fifties (fig. 20.59). Sudek said:

I believe that photography loves banal objects. I am sure you know the fairy tales of Andersen: when the children go to bed, the objects come to life, toys, for example. I like to tell stories about the life of inanimate objects, to relate something mysterious: the seventh side of a dice.



20.58 Robert Doisneau, From the series *The Sideways Glance*, 1949. Gelatin-silver print.



20.59 Josef Sudek, *The Window of My Studio*, 1954.
Gelatin-silver print.

After studying photography at Zurich's School of Applied Arts, **Werner Bischof** (1916–54) worked as an advertising photographer while also producing beautifully lit images of natural forms and the human figure. From 1942, as a contributor to the cultural magazine *Du*, he turned more toward socially aware photojournalism. When war ended in 1945, Bischof left neutral Switzerland to document the effects of six years of conflict across Europe.

Images such as the ruined Reichstag (German parliament) building in Berlin, rising out of a shattered city in which people scavenge for firewood or clear rubble with their bare hands, speak eloquently of human resilience and the struggle to create a new beginning. Bischof's desolate cityscapes (fig. 20.60) contrast with Doisneau's urban whimsy and Sudek's reclusive lyricism but nevertheless find a poetry in the unconscious poise of his human subjects amid this destruction. His photographs of children—including those orphaned and displaced by war—are especially moving documents of this period.

Bischof's photographic record of European cities in the late forties makes it graphically clear that, whatever larger shifts in the cultural landscape were taking place, these historic centers of Western culture were in no state to match the vitality and confidence of the American art scene at this time. After working on assignments in India, Japan, and Indochina (Vietnam) for Magnum photographic agency, whose founding members included Capa and Cartier-Bresson, Bischof traveled to New York in 1954. Eight months later, photographing in South America, he died in an automobile accident in the Andes.



20.60 Werner Bischof, *Cologne*, 1946.