

RITUAL AND MYTH:

NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE AND ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

W. JACKSON RUSHING

A number of incipient Abstract Expressionists of the New York School paid studious attention to Native American art in response to two interrelated trends in American intellectual life that gained strength throughout the 1930s and found full expression in the early 1940s. The confluence of these trends with the spiritual crisis created by the failure of modernism to generate social and political utopia, and heightened by the rise of fascism, instilled in the "myth-makers" of the American avant-garde a profound desire to transcend the particulars of history and search out universal values.¹ The first trend that fueled artistic interest in Indian art was the belief that the vitality and spirituality of Indian culture, as embodied in its art, could make a positive contribution to the America of the future. The second trend, more central to the present discussion, was the belief that primitive art was a reflection of a universal stage of primordial consciousness that still existed in the unconscious mind. The New York artists' awareness of Carl Gustav Jung's concept of a collective unconscious that includes early man's symbolic mode of thinking prompted their fascination with the mythic and ceremonial nature of primitive art. Because it had continued unbroken from ancient times up to the present, Indian art was perceived as being different from other prehistoric or primitive arts. A cultural continuum bridging the gap between primordial and

modern man, Native American art was seen as having special relevance for modern art and life.

Although there was never a scarcity of interest in Native American art in twentieth-century America, the early 1930s saw increased production of books, articles, and exhibitions about Indians and their art. Beginning with the *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts* at the Grand Central Galleries in New York in 1931, the awareness of Native American culture as a spiritual and aesthetic resource grew exponentially through the 1930s. By 1941 the idea had such validity in American artistic and intellectual life that when the Museum of Modern Art staged the now-legendary exhibition *Indian Art of the United States*, it was making concrete a set of values that were already within its audience's expectations. This popular exhibition - along with the fine permanent collections at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation; the American Museum of Natural History; and the Brooklyn Museum - provided New York painters such as Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Adolph Gottlieb with sources of imagery and ethnographic information that shaped their perceptions of the



I
House Screen of Chief Shakes,
Tlingit House Partition
 Wrangell Village, Alaska.
 c. 1840
 Cedar, native paint,
 human hair
 179 1/16 x 107 1/8 in.
 (437 x 274 cm)
 Courtesy of The Denver Art
 Museum, Colorado
 Collected at Wrangell in 199
 by Wolfgang Paalen

vitality and spiritual potential in **Native American art.**

Within the early New York School, painters who also functioned as **critics**, theorists, and **curators** contributed in these roles to the integration of Indian art into modernist painting. As critics and **provocateurs**, John D. Graham, Wolfgang Paalen, and Barnett Newman were important for stressing the spiritual quality inherent in Indian art. Essential to their theories and **criticism** of **Native American** and other primitive arts was an **understanding** of myth, totem, and ritual that relates to Jung's **ideas** and reveals these artists as the advocates of a new, transformed consciousness for **modern man.**

During the late **1930s** in America, Graham was perhaps the single most credible purveyor of the idea that atavistic myth and primitivism are an avenue to the unconscious mind and primordial past. His *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937) is replete with **ideas** and language similar to Jungian psychology. The book also **reflects** the tenor of the times in its revelation of a connoisseur's aesthetic and psychological, not purely ethnological, appreciation of primitive art. As Graham explained, "The purpose of art in *particular* is to reestablish a lost **contact** with the unconscious (actively by producing works of art), with the primordial

racial past and to keep and develop this contact in order to bring to the conscious mind the throbbing events of the unconscious mind."³ The reason for bringing events of the unconscious into the conscious mind is related to Jung's belief that the emergence of the **basic** elements of the unconscious, the primitive stages of civilization, into waking consciousness could help modern man meet his need for spiritual **transformation.**

In "Primitive Art and Picasso" (1937) Graham continued to emphasize the dichotomies between conscious and unconscious mind and between modern and primitive culture. He **explicitly** stated the therapeutic importance of probing the **unconscious**: "The **Eskimos** and the **North American** Indian masks with **features** shifted around or multiplied, and the Tlingit, Kwakiutl, and Haida carvings in ivory and wood of human beings and animals, these also satisfied their particular **totemism** and **exteriorized** their prohibitions (taboos) in order to understand them better and consequently to deal with them more **successfully.**"⁴ After examining the relationship of primitive art to evolution, psychology, and **plastic** form, Graham concluded: "The art of the primitive races has a highly evocative quality which allows it to bring to our conscious-

ness the clarities of the unconscious mind, stored with all the individual and collective wisdom of past generations and forms... An evocative art is the means and result of getting in touch with the powers of our unconscious."⁶

This **passage emphasizes** that primitive art, such as Eskimo masks and Northwest **Coast** carvings, has a powerful and purposive role to play in a spiritual transformation of modern experience through the merging of the conscious and unconscious mind. Such words may have encouraged Pollock, Gottlieb, and possibly **Pousette-Dart**, all of whom knew Graham well, to make painterly reference to the unconscious, as well as validating their **appreciation** of Indian art.

The interest in Northwest Coast art, however, was spread by the Austrian-born Surrealist Wolfgang Paalen more than Graham or anyone else, including Max **Ernst**. Paalen had studied with Hans Hofmann in Germany and had been **associated** with **André** Breton's circle in Paris. When he left Paris in May 1939, Paalen, like his fellow Surrealist Kurt Seligmann, went directly to the Pacific Northwest Coast, where he collected a number of masterpieces of Indian **art**,⁸ including the *House Screen of Chief Shakes*, **circa** 1840 (pl. 1). Paalen was more than a mere collector of

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primitive **art**; even anthropologists were impressed by his writings on the totemic underpinnings of Northwest Coast **art**.

Although he resided in Mexico, **Paalen** was frequently in New York in the early and **mid-1940s**. Beginning in the spring of **1942** Paalen published in Mexico the art **journal** *DYN*, which was distributed primarily in New York at the Gotham Book Mart, a regular **meeting** place for **artists**. In "Le Paysage **totémique**," published in three installments that year in *DYN*, he **effectively** conveyed the **complexity** and the mythological basis of Northwest Coast art. In December **1943** Paalen published a special double issue of *DYN*, the Amerindian Number (**pl. 2**). Besides Northwest Coast art, the Amerindian Number contained articles, illustrations, and book reviews dealing with a **variety** of Native **American** topics. In an editorial preface, sounding very much like Graham, Paalen announced, "An can reunite us with our prehistoric past and thus **only** certain carved and painted images enable us to grasp the memories of unfathomable ages."¹⁰ **Occidental** art had experienced an osmosis with Asia, Africa, and Oceania, and "**now** it has become possible to understand why a universal osmosis is necessary, why this is the moment to integrate the enormous trea-

sure of Amerindian forms into the consciousness of **modern** art.... To a science **already** universal but by **definition** incapable of doing justice to our emotional needs, there must be added as its complement, a universal art: these two will help in the shaping of the new, the indispensable world-consciousness. "¹¹

In "Totem Art," **Paalen's** essay in the issue, he wrote of the **magnificent** power of totem poles, counting **them** "among the greatest sculptural achievements of all times "¹² and observed, as did critics of *Indian Art of the United States*, "It is only in certain modern sculptures that one can find analogies to their surprising spatial conception. "¹³

Paalen's analysis of Northwest Coast sculpture reflected an interest in Jung: "Their great art ... was of an entirely collective purpose: an art for consummation and not individual possession." As early as **1945**, in *Form and Sense*, **Paalen** had shown an awareness of Jungian theory.¹⁴ As with Graham's Jungian conception of primitive art, Paalen understood

that it **was necessary** to consider **totemic** systems . . . as corresponding to a certain developmental stage of archaic mentality, the vestiges of which can

be found throughout mankind. For we can ascertain successive stages of **consciousness**: in order to pass from emotion to abstraction, man is obliged, in the **maturation** of each individual to pass through the ancestral stratification of thought, analogously to the evolutionary stages of the **species** that must be traversed in the **maternal** womb. And that is why we can find in everyone's childhood an attitude toward the world that is similar to that of the totemic mind.¹⁶

The third artist to play a major role in drawing attention to Indian art, Newman, met Paalen in **1940** when the latter exhibited at Julien Levy's gallery along with Gottlieb. Newman shared Paalen's interest in the art of the Northwest Coast. "He was aware of Paalen's and Ernst's interest in its totemic **aspects**."¹⁸ Newman shared Paalen's conviction that primitive art gave **modern** man a deeper sense of the primordial roots of the unconscious mind and that **understanding** and even **adapting** primitive art **values** would create a more universal art in the present. Therefore, the internal bisection of form in Newman's own work, such as *Onement I*, **1948**, his commitment to the validity of abstraction, and his **metaphysical ambitions** as a painter may be ascribed, at least in part, to the influence of **Indian**, and in **particular**, Northwest Coast art. But perhaps Newman's

2
Cover of the Amerindian
Number, *Dyn*, nos. 4-5
(December 1943).
with drawing of a killer whale
by Kwakiutl artist James
Speck



3
 RICHARD **POUSETTE-DART**
Night World, 1948
 Oil on canvas
 55 1/2 x 62 3/4 in.
 (141 x 159.4 cm)
 Location unknown

conviction that the ritual Dionysian purpose, the reference to myth, and the **abstract** form of Northwest Coast **art** could significantly shape the **direction** of avant-garde **art** in New York is more strongly revealed in his activities as a curator and critic of primitive and neoprimitive art from 1944 to 1947.

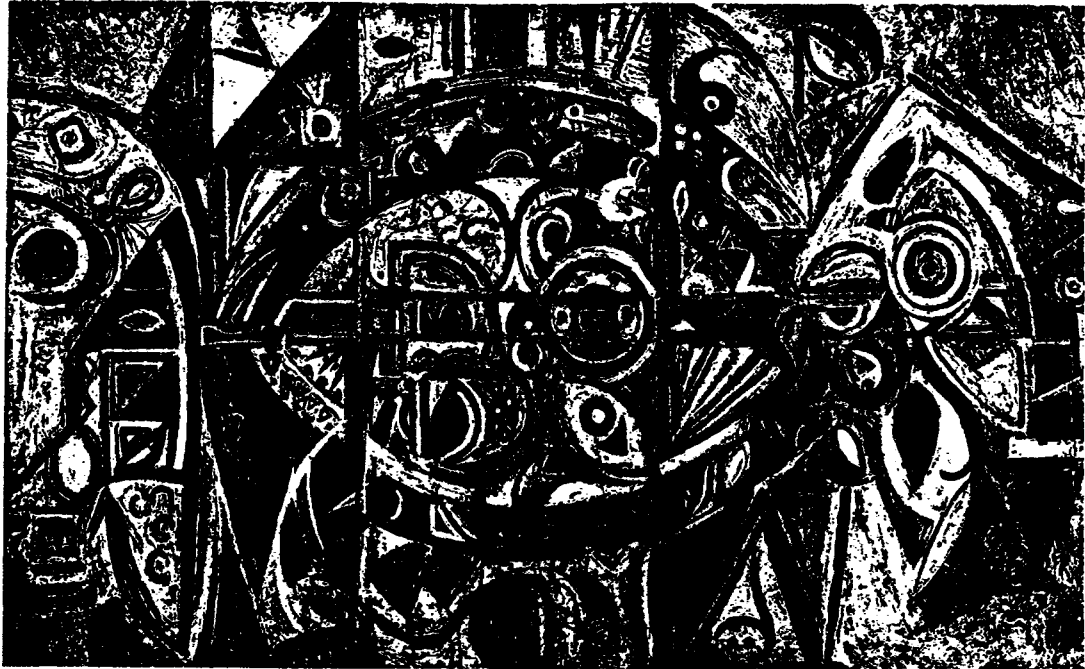
In 1944, with the **assistance** of the American Museum of Natural History, Newman organized the exhibition *Pre-Columbian Stone Sculpture* for the Wakefield Gallery in New York. Lenders to the exhibition included Graham and publisher Frank Crowninshield, whose collection of primitive art Graham helped assemble. In his brief **introductory** comments to the catalogue Newman insisted that pre-Columbian art be judged and appreciated as art "rather than works of history or ethnology [so] that we can grasp their inner significance."²⁰ For Newman the result of a new inter-American consciousness, based on an aesthetic appreciation of pre-Columbian art, would be the comprehension of "the spiritual aspirations of human beings" and the building of permanent bonds. Experiencing this art is a way, Newman wrote, of "transcending time and place to participate in the spiritual life of a forgotten people."²² But Newman believed that ancient American art is more than an avenue to the past, stating that

it has a "reciprocal power" that "illuminates the work of our time" and "gives meaning to the strivings of our artists."²³

In 1946 Newman organized the exhibition *Northwest Coast Indian Painting* for the Betty Parsons **Gallery**. He **was** once again assisted by the American Museum of Natural History, and Graham once again lent objects, as did **Ernst**. **One** of Pollock's closest New York **friends**, Fritz **Bultman**, recalled that this was a very popular exhibition, which Pollock **attended**.²⁴ Writing in the catalogue, Newman began with a polemic based on Wilhelm **Worringer's** theory of primitive abstractions and went on to **describe** the ritualistic paintings in the exhibition as "a valid tradition that is one of the richest of human expressions."²⁶ In explaining how these Indians "depicted their **mythological** gods and totemic monsters in abstract symbols, using organic shapes,"²⁷ Newman established the grounds for defending abstract **art**: "There is answer in these [Northwest Coast] works to all those who **assume** that **modern** abstract **art** is the esoteric exercise of a snobbish elite, for among these simple peoples, abstract art was the normal, well-understood, dominant tradition."²⁸ And, as in his comments on **pre-**

Columbian art, Newman stressed that an awareness of Northwest Coast **art** illuminates "the works of those of our modern American abstract artists who, working with the pure **plastic** language we call abstract, are infusing it with intellectual and emotional content, and who... are creating a living myth for us in our own time."

In January 1947 *The Ideographic Picture*, another Newman-organized exhibition, opened at the Betty **Parsons** Gallery. It featured some of the **artists**, including Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, **Clyfford** Still, and **Newman himself**, who were using a "pure plastic language" to create the "living myth of our own time." Newman's catalogue introduction **evoked** the image of a Kwakiutl **painter** whose abstract shapes were "directed by ritualistic will toward a metaphysical understanding."³⁰ The paintings exhibited were the modern American counterpart to the "primitive impulse."³¹ In explaining just what an ideographic **picture** might be, Newman quoted from the **Century** Dictionary: "Ideographic - a character, symbol or figure which suggests the idea of an object without expressing its name."



Although New York School **artists** Pousette-Dart, Gottlieb, and Pollock did not exhibit in *The Ideographic Picture*, they were indeed inventive and powerful **manipulators** of signs from the Native **American** past for the purpose of **creating** the myth of their own time. **Despite** dissimilar backgrounds and temperaments, these three painters **produced** a body of work in the **1940s** with many more common elements than they would ever have wanted to **admit**. No small **measure** of the commonality in these myth-oriented, neoprimitive canvases may be **attributed** to the artists' shared interest in and **experience** with Native **American** art. Pousette-Dart, **Gottlieb**, and Pollock all **created** works whose respective titles, imagery, and coarse surfaces evoke the **dark, totemic otherworld** of subterranean ritual: *Night World, 1948* (pl. 3); *Night Forms*, circa 1949-50; and *Night Sounds*, circa 1944 (pl. 24). Pousette-Dart recently alluded to such an evocation: "Many **times** I felt **as if I were** painting in a cave- perhaps we all felt that way, painting then in New York."³⁷ Likewise, all **three artists** made what are best **described as** telluric pictures - elemental signs, zoomorphs, and petroglyphs in stratified layers on seemingly primordial **surfaces** - the visual remembrances of archaic experience in the Americas.

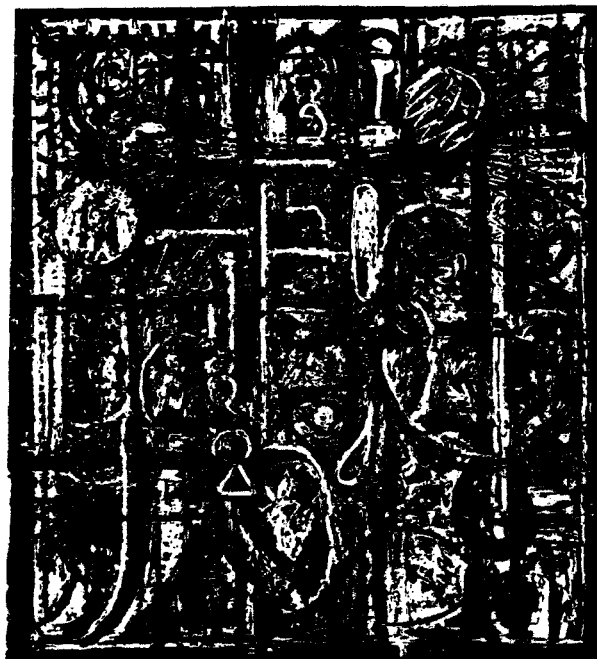
Although this essay ultimately focuses more extensively and intensively on Pollock's transformations of Indian art, this interest cannot be ignored in Pousette-Dart's and Gottlieb's paintings. Pousette-Dart's awareness of primitive arts, like Pollock's, dates from his youth. His father, noted painter, **lecturer**, and art critic Nathaniel Pousette-Dart, owned primitive Indian objects and books on the subject and supported his son's interest in it. (Indeed, Pousette-Dart **still** has in his home two pieces of Northwest Coast sculpture: one had previously hung in his father's studio and the other he had given to his father.³⁴) Later Pousette-Dart came to know more about Native **American** and other primitive arts from his frequent trips to the American Museum of Natural History **as** well as from books and various **exhibitions**.³⁵ Like Pollock and Gottlieb, Pousette-Dart was acquainted with Graham, whose personally **inscribed System and Dialectics of Art** he owned and from whom he purchased primitive **objects**.

Pousette-Dart's notebooks from the late **1930s** and early **1940s** show that he, too, noted the **distinction** between the conscious and unconscious mind: "Art is the result manifestation of the conscious mind reacting

upon a **submind** spirit-the **crystallization** resulting when they meet-unknown experience reacting upon known experience creating a superhuman mystic body."³⁶ He recently **reaffirmed** this belief, saying, "Every whole thing has to do with the conscious and the unconscious - the balance, the razor's edge between the two. My work is the spirituality of that edge."³⁷

A reappraisal of Pousette-Dart in the context of Native **American** traditions is timely, for he believes that his early work "had an inner vibration comparable to American Indian art . . . something that has never been perceived. I felt close to the spirit of Indian art. My work came from some spirit or force in America, not Europe."³⁸ *Desert, 1940* (pl. 4), with **its** masks, birdlike forms, and tight interplay on the surface of organic and geometric forms locked together with a dark linear grid, is highly reminiscent of the carved and painted Northwest Coast designs he saw at the American Museum of Natural History. More than forty years later he still felt moved by the Northwest Coast images he saw on "painted boards, tied together and painted with heavy black lines."³⁹ His painting's title, *Desert*, and its rough, earthy surface also suggest the Southwest. Thus it is instructive to note that Pousette-Dart felt **sympathetic** to the idea of

4
RICHARD POUSETTE-DART
Desert, 1940
 Oil on canvas
 43 x 72 in. (109.2 X 182.9 cm)
 The Museum of Modern Art,
 New York
 Given anonymously



3
RICHARD POUSETTE-DART
Palimpsest, 1944
 Oil on canvas
 49 1/2 x 43 in.
 (125.7 x 109.2 cm)
 Formerly collection Mrs.
 Maximilian Rose



6
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB
Pictograph-Symbol, 1942
 Oil on canvas
 54 x 40 in. (137.2 x 101.6 cm)
 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb
 Foundation, New York
 01979

Pousette-Dart's *Palimpsest*, 1944 (pl. 5), still looks as radically new and as much a modernist paradigm as it must have in 1944, but it is **nevertheless** a reflection of an ancient American tradition of painting and incising abstract images on the earth itself. The compelling **images** of Native American rock art are composite creations consisting of countless **layers** built up on the surface, **sometimes** over millennia. So too Pousette-Dart, as the word *palimpsest* suggests, **obscured** or partially erased earlier **versions** of the surface by "rewriting," inscribing new visual information on top of old. The title appealed to him because he "**liked** the idea of engraving over and over," an idea that simulated his own "process of evolving."⁴¹ Rock art, especially that found in **caves** and rock shelters, **has** often been linked to **shamanic** activity. This recalls Pousette-Dart's memory of "painting in a cave," and such paintings as *Night World* do

imply the dark realm of myth, memory, and dream that the shaman seeks to explore in his state of transformation. As Pousette-Dart himself described the **affinity** between that idea and the **function** of painting, "an artist is a transformer."⁴²

Gottlieb also explored the realms of the other both ancient and psychological, in his paintings. And like his **contemporaries**, he had intellectual and aesthetic justification for his belief in the value of Native American art. By his own recollection, for example, Gottlieb knew through his reading about Jung's idea of the **collective unconscious**.⁴³ From Graham he derived an understanding of the collective nature and spontaneous, unconscious expression of the primitive arts. The primitivism of his own Pictograph series, 1941-51, is a reflection of these **ideas**.⁴⁴ Graham gave Gottlieb a copy of *System and Dialectics of Art*, parts of which can be interpreted as instructions for making pictographs. **It was** at Graham's urging that Gottlieb began to collect primitive art in 1935. He expressed **great** interest in the Indian art that he saw at the Arizona **State** Museum during his stay in Tucson in 1937-38; he wrote of the weavings and ancient pottery on display, "I wouldn't trade all the shows of a month in New York for a

visit to the State Museum here."⁴⁴ He also came to know Indian art from his **visits** to New York museums with Newman. In particular he would have been familiar with the collection of **Indian** art at the Brooklyn Museum, which was close to his home and where he exhibited watercolors in various exhibitions between 1934 and 1944.⁴⁸ Gottlieb probably saw the Indian paintings and sculptures from Arizona and New Mexico exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 1940. **Given** his admiration for Indian art and his museum outings with Newman, it also seems likely that Gottlieb would have attended Indian Art *of the United States* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941. The exhibition included a full-scale **canvas** mural facsimile of the ancient pictographs found at **Barrier** Canyon in Utah.⁴⁹

Gottlieb's inclusion of Native American forms in his paintings was predicated on his belief that all primitive and archaic art had a spiritual content accessible to anyone familiar with the "global language of art," which functioned as the "**language** of the spirit."⁵⁰ He defended the use of primitive art as a model for contemporary art, saying that the "apparitions seen in a dream, or the recollections of our prehistoric past" were real and a

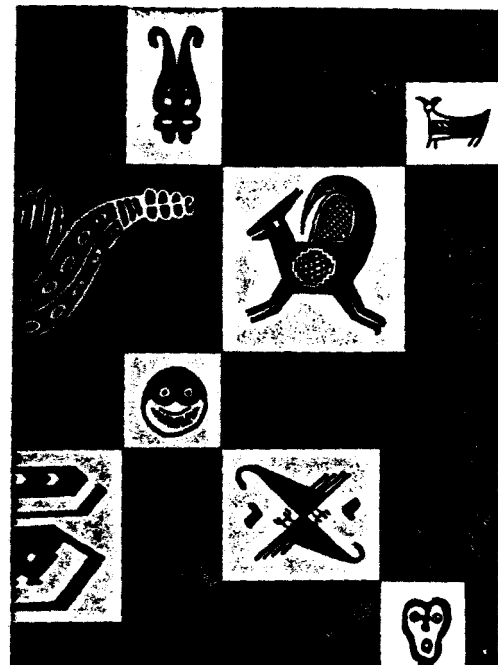


part of nature.⁵ This might well be the description of his own Pictograph series: apparitions seen during shamanic trances or mythical images from the collective prehistory, preserved in the primal stages of symbol and image making. Although Gottlieb's Pictographs do make reference to African, Oceanic, and other archaic arts, the significant impact of Native American art on his enigmatic and eclectic series of paintings is revealed by two critical facts. First, Gottlieb himself chose to call his series of neoprimitive paintings Pictographs. Second, he began them only after ancient pictures-on-the-earth from Barrier Canyon were reproduced at the Museum of Modern Art. Indeed, there is a provocative similarity between *Pictograph-Symbol*, 1942, and the illustration on the front endsheet of the 1941 catalogue *Indian Art of the United States* (pls. 6-7). Both might be described as having totemic masks, zoomorphs, and abstract forms, both geometric and organic, painted in a palette of earth tones and contained in rectangular compartments in a grid formation.

The influence of Southwest Indian art was apparent even before that of Northwest Coast

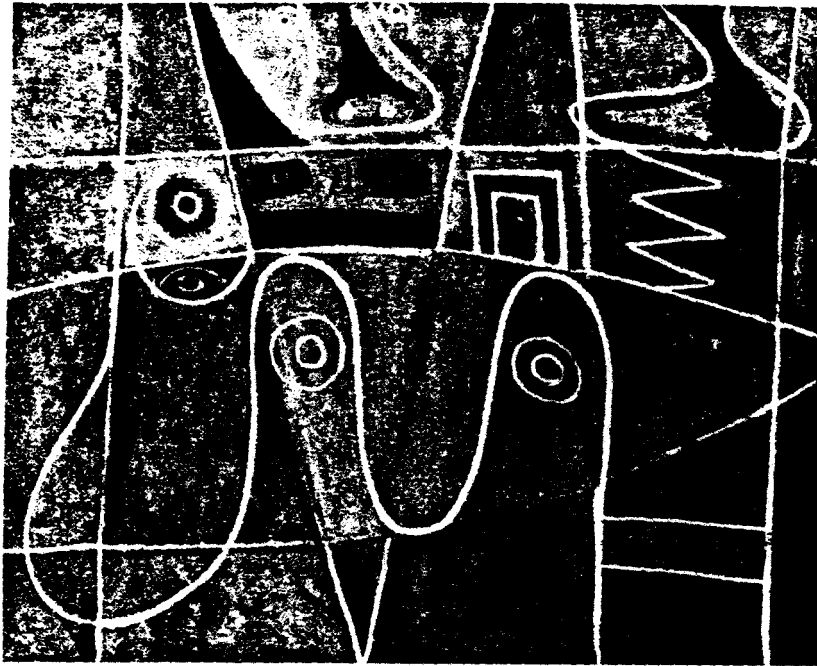
art in Gottlieb's Pictographs. The earth, clay, and mineral colors that came into his palette when he was still in Arizona, and that continued in many of the Pictographs, are reminiscent of the buffs, browns, tans, and rust colors of the Pueblo pottery on display at the Arizona State Museum. Likewise, Gottlieb adopted the rough surfaces of real pictographs, as well as noting how the Pueblo potter adjusted figurative and abstract images to an overall design on a flat surface. A number of these modern Pictographs, including *Evil Omen*, 1946, contain "site and path" motifs — concentric circles that straighten out into a line of travel — which are typical of Southwest rock art and pottery in general and specifically resemble the Barrier Canyon pictographs.

The structure of Gottlieb's Pictographs is no doubt related to Northwest Coast art, particularly the Chilkat (Tlingit) type blanket, as well as to other precedents in twentieth-century art. Gottlieb's purchase of one such blanket in 1942 postdates the beginning of his



Pictograph series, but from his museum visits he certainly would have known the Northwest Coast convention of bisecting animal forms and presenting these flat and seemingly abstract sections of the body in compartments.⁵ Some of the later Pictographs, such as *Night Forms*, do have a surface organization reminiscent of Gottlieb's Chilkat blanket. After the Newman-curated exhibition of Northwest Coast art in 1946, totemic imagery appeared more frequently in Gottlieb's

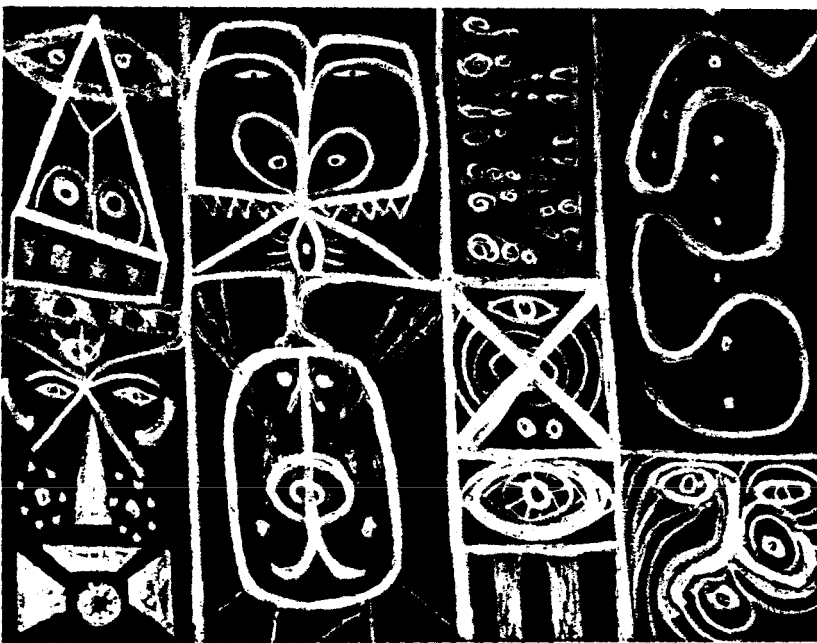
7
Inner front cover, Frederick
H. Douglas and Rent
c Harncourt,
Indian Art of the United States
(1941)



Pictographs and ensuing Unstill Lives. *Pendant Image*, 1946 (pl. 8), has as the lower part of its central image a pair of bear's ears, in turn animated with eyes. This is a typical convention of Northwest Coast painting and sculpture, seen for example in the *House Screen of Chief Shakes. Vigil*, 1948 (pl. 9), shares with a number of Gottlieb's paintings after 1946 a vertical format derived from carved totem poles. The two pole units left of center in *Vigil* feature mysterious hybrid animals that transform themselves into other totemic forms. This organic transformation of one pictorial unit into another is, again, a standard form of Northwest Coast art.⁵⁵

Gottlieb used this totem pole format for the iconic central form of *Ancestral Image*, 1949 (pl. 10), one of the early Unstill Lives. Besides the painting's obvious verticality, its title also points to totem poles, which are representations of ancestral, mythical clan progenitors. The description of totem poles in the catalogue *Indian Art of the United States* points out that "they either display family crests or relate family legends, and were erected as memorials to dead leaders." "The mask/face that Gottlieb placed atop the pole in *Ancestral Image* is nearly a direct quotation of a Northwest Coast mythic figure, Tsonoqua. A female ogre who devours children after luring them to the woods with her whistling, Tsonoqua is always shown with a puckered mouth, as is Gottlieb's figure. A mask of this type, from the permanent collection of the Museum of the American Indian, was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941 (pl. 11).⁵⁶

Many of Gottlieb's Pictographs have titles suggesting ritual and, by implication, transformation.⁵⁹ In 1947 he made explicit his own awareness of the need to redeem modern experience and the artist's function in that transformation: "The role of the artist, of course, has always been that of image-maker. Different times require different images. Today when our aspirations have been reduced to a desperate attempt to escape from evil ... our obsessive, subterranean and pictographic images are the expression of the



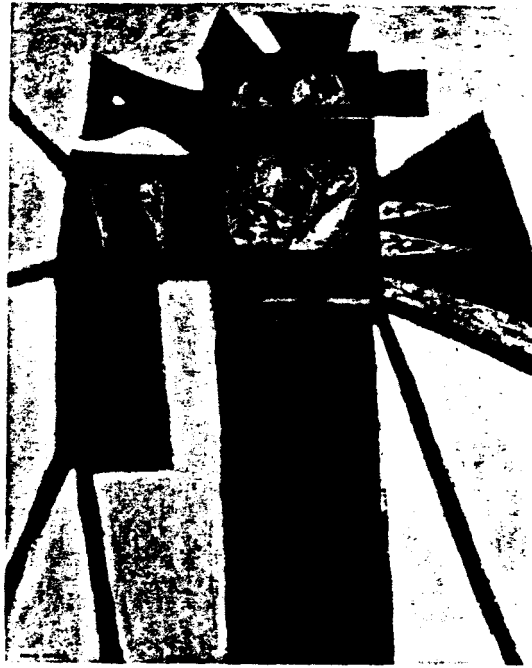
8
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB
Pendant Image, 1946
Oil on canvas
25 x 31 7/8 in. (63.5 x 81 cm)
Formerly Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, sold Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York, 23 October 1975, lot 303

9
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB
Vigil, 1948
Oil on canvas
36 x 48 in. (91.4 x 121.9 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York Purchase

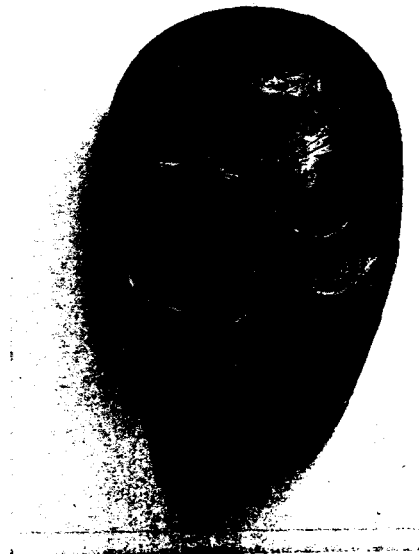
neurosis which is our reality."⁵⁷ In creating different images of a neurotic reality, Gottlieb **subjected** the primal imagery of Native Americans, the unconscious mind, to the **conscious** plastic order inherent to a **modern** painter. **Estranged** from their original context, the Indian motifs are transfigured and become more than mere references to **ancient** American art. They become revitalized and **take** on new meaning **as** components in paintings that attempt to redeem the darkness of the war **years** by bringing to the surface the **atavistic** roots of **modern experience**.

In contrast to **Gottlieb**, whose brief residence in Arizona **was** his **first** real break from an essentially urban experience, Pollock grew up in the **Western** states and his **interaction** with Native **American** art and culture began early in life. In **1923**, when Pollock was eleven, he, his brothers, and their friends explored the **Indian** ruins (cliff dwellings and mounds) north of their home **near Phoenix**.⁶ Pollock's youthful exploration of this site was not an isolated encounter with Indian culture, **as** his brother Sanford reported, "In all our experiences in the west, there was always an Indian around somewhere."⁶² Later in New York, Pollock **often** spoke to his friends **as** if he had **actually** witnessed Indian rituals as a **boy**.

Once in New York, Pollock enhanced his knowledge of Indian art and **culture**. Sometime between **1930** and **1935** he and his brother purchased twelve volumes of the **Annual Report of the Bureau of American** Indian sand painting. He likens the courage and the spirit of the sand painters and the **impermanence** of their materials to his own description of "the meaning of the artist" as one "who deals with the moment and eternity."⁴⁰ The surface and structure of **Symphony Number 1, The Transcendental**, **1944**, continues the investigation of Indian traditions, orchestrating them on a heroic scale.



10
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB
Ancestral Image, 1949
 Oil on canvas
 38 x 30 in. (96.5 x 76.2 cm)
 Destroyed by fire in 1953
 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb
 Foundation, New York
 C 1977



11
Tsonoqua Mask
 19th century
 Carved wood
 Height 10 in. (25.4 cm)
 Museum of the American
 Indian, Heye Foundation,
 New York



12

JACKSON POLLOCK
Bird, 1941

Oil and sand on canvas
27 1/2 x 24 in. (69.8 x 61 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York
Gift of Lee Krasner
in memory of Jackson Pollock

Ethnology [hereafter cited as *BAE Report*],⁶⁴ which feature detailed scholarly field reports on a variety of topics related to the ethnology and archaeology of Native Americans and are profusely illustrated with hundreds of reproductions, including color plates, of ancient and historic Indian art objects. In particular there are illustrations of ritual paraphernalia and rare documentary photographs of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Indian rituals. Over the years Pollock used these reports as a rich and authentic source of Indian imagery. He also read *DYN*,⁶⁵ and other titles in his library attest to his broad interest in mythology, anthropology, and the primitive art of Indian and other cultures.⁶⁶

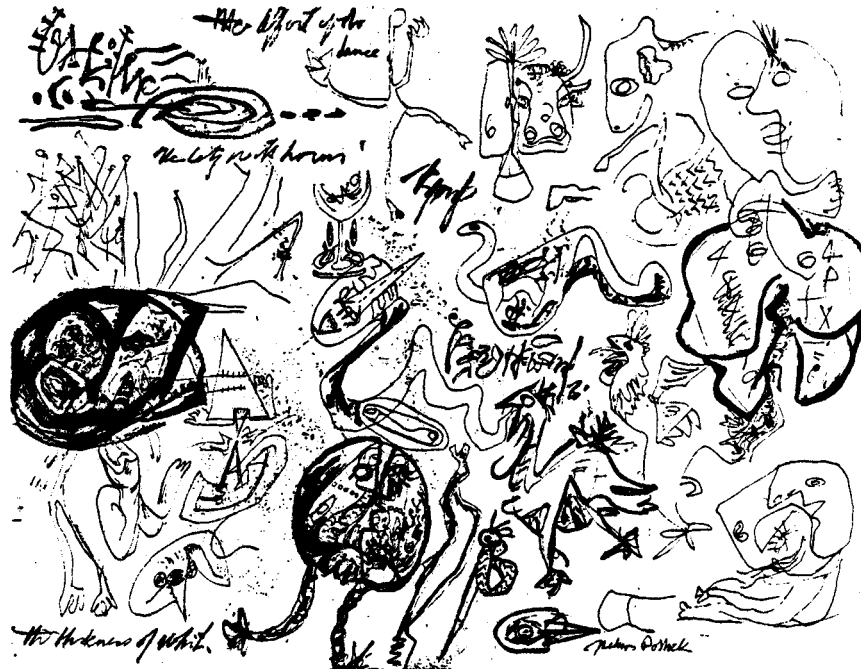
Textual materials on the Indian helped Pollock understand the Indian images he absorbed during museum visits in New York. Bultman reported that he and Pollock "went everywhere looking at Indian art" and that their outings took them more than once to the Museum of the American Indian and to the American Museum of Natural History, where they saw Northwest Coast art. Pollock's interest was not limited to the Southwest Indian art of his youth but rather "included the whole range of Indian arts in which he

found very positive images."⁶⁸ Pollock would also have learned about Northwest Coast art from the Amerindian Number of *DYN*, which published his painting *Moon Woman Cuts the Circle*. Pollock also saved an issue of the new journal *Iconograph* that dealt with Northwest Coast art and its influence on New York's painters of "Indian space."⁶⁹

Naturally, Pollock was one of the many members of the New York art community who attended *Indian Art of the United States*.⁷ Bultman recalls that the 1941 exhibition "generated a great deal of interest."⁷¹ When asked if there was a broad interest by artists in Indian art, he replied, "Everyone was aware of Indian art at that time."⁷² Dr. Violet Staub de Laszlo, then Pollock's Jungian psychotherapist, reported that the exhibition fascinated Pollock. After his extended visits, they discussed the sand paintings made at the museum by visiting Navajo artists,⁷³ and during analysis Pollock's comments revealed a "kind of shamanistic, primitive attitude toward [their] images."⁷⁴ As Bultman attests, Pollock was aware of the "whole shamanistic dream culture of Indians." Pollock was deeply

involved with Paalen's idea of passing through "emotion to abstraction," "ancestral stratifications," and "evolutionary stages of the species," and he may have met Paalen through their dealer Peggy Guggenheim or their mutual friend Robert Motherwell.

During this period Pollock also read the writings of Graham. Graham's "Primitive Art and Picasso" had impressed Pollock to the degree that he made a point of meeting him, probably in 1937. Indeed, Pollock still had a copy of that article and *System and Dialectics of Art* at the time of his death.⁷⁷ Graham's knowledge of the literature on Russian shamanism paralleled Pollock's awareness of Native American shamanic art.⁷⁸ They shared a "coinciding and reinforcing interest in primitivism and Indian art."⁷⁹ Because of Pollock's well-established and deep involvement with the art and ideas of Native Americans, his intellect and artistic sensibility were fertile ground for Graham's conclusions about primitive art and the unconscious mind. In his discussion of Eskimo masks and Northwest



Coast carvings Graham referred to primitive art as the result of immediate access to an unconscious mind that is both collective and ancient. Graham wrote, "Creative images are circumscribed by the ability to evoke the experiences of primordial past ... and the extent of one's consciousness." ⁸⁰ Pollock pointed out unequivocally the importance of these ideas in his own work: "The source of my painting is the unconscious." ⁸¹

According to Bultman, the direct, simplified nature of Graham's writings made him a friendly source of Jungian theory for Pollock. In addition, Bultman recalls, "Jung was available in the air, the absolute texts were not necessary, there was general talk among painters. ... Tony Smith also knew the Jungian material firsthand when he became a friend of Pollock. Smith was a walking encyclopedia of Jung, shamanism, magic in general, ritual, the unconscious. People were alive to this material [Jung, dreams, Indian shamanism] and hoped this material would become universally known and used."

Pollock was a logical participant in the wider American interest in Indian culture reflected in the enthusiasm for *Indian Art of the United*

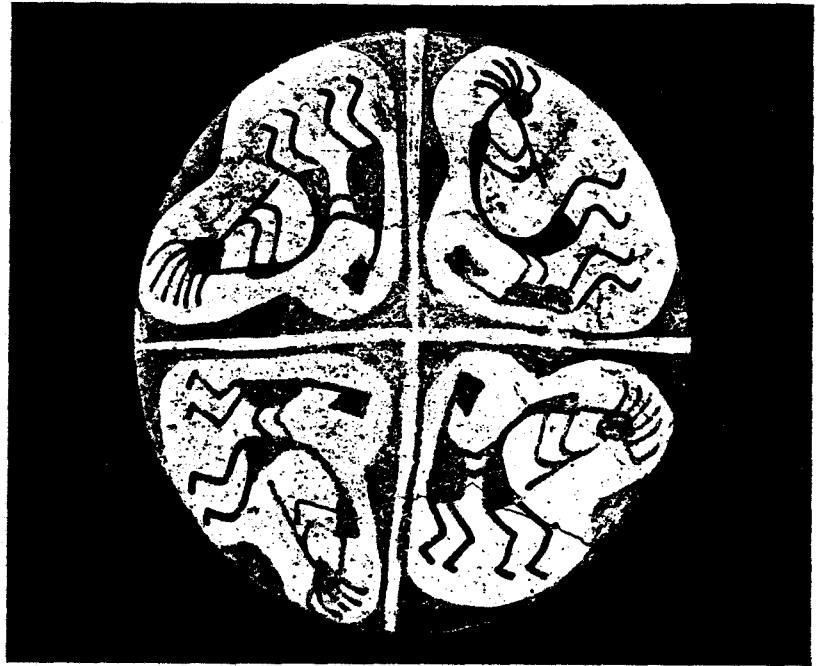
States. His personal and psychological motivations drew him to the formal power and mythic content of Indian art. In retrospect it seems only natural that Pollock, of all the New York artists interested in myth and primitivism, had the most intense and innovative response to the influence of Native American art. Careful scrutiny of selected works in Pollock's oeuvre reveals conclusively that between 1938 and 1950 (pls. 12-13) he borrowed with specificity and intent from particular works of Indian art known to him. The degree of similarity is so high as to disprove Pollock's assertion in 1944: "People find references to American Indian art and calligraphy in parts of my paintings. That wasn't intentional; probably was the result of early enthusiasms and memories." ⁸³

All of Pollock's varied incorporation and transfigurations of Indian art were informed

and sustained by a shamanic intent. In the first period of Pollock's artistic dialogue with Native American art, from 1938 to 1947, he experimented with the visual grammar and ancient motifs of Indians as a way of penetrating the unconscious mind. This painterly method of shamanic self-discovery was related to two Jungian principles widely known in the late 1930s and early 1940s: that myths are archetypal forms that codify basic human experiences ⁸⁴ and that "conscious and unconscious are interfused," therefore transformed by allowing the consciousness to be drawn into the realm of the symbolic image. ⁸⁵ In such paintings as *Guardians of the Secret*, 1943 (pl. 17), Pollock relied on Indian myths, symbols, totems, and masks associated with rituals. The Indian images themselves are quoted, distorted, transformed and always serve as a vehicle for Pollock's inimitable improvisations. In this period he often used an intentionally primitive, pictographic style of painting/drawing to refer to both archaic consciousness and the evolutionary stages of art.

13

JACKSON POLLOCK
Untitled, 1943
 Brush and pen and ink,
 colored pencil brushed with
 water on paper
 18 3/4 x 24 3/4 in.
 (47.6 x 62.9 cm)
 Lorna Poe Miller,
 Los Angeles



14
JACKSON POLLOCK
Pages from a Sketchbook,
 c. 1938
 Brush and ink on paper
 17 3/4 x 13 1/2 in.
 (44.8 x 35.2 cm)
 The Metropolitan Museum
 of Art, New York
 Gift of Lee Krasner Pollock,
 1982

15
Red-on-Buff Plate (Santa Cruz)
Hohokam, Southern
Arizona, c. 900
 Pottery
 Diameter 11 1/16 in. (29.3 cm)
 Excavated at Snaketown,
Arizona, 1934-35
 Collected **Arizona** State
 Museum, University of
 Arizona, Tucson

In the second period of Pollock's pictorial dialogue with Native **American** art, from 1947 to 1950, his overt use of Indian motifs gave way to an **emphasis** on art as a shamanic process for healing. Thus the drip paintings use the information about the self, which **Pollock** discovered by exploring the symbolic realm, by making the mythic/pictographic paintings in his earlier period. Pollock developed a personal art-a-healing-process **derived** in part from the concepts of Navajo sand painting, which he had witnessed at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941.

Perhaps the earliest examples of Indian influence in Pollock's work are the pictographic drawings in his sketchbooks from around 1938 (pl. 14). This kind of intentionally **primitive** drawing may **have** had its original impetus not in Surrealist automatism but in Pollock's knowledge of **pictographs**.⁸ For

example, *BAE Report 1* (188x) contained numerous images of Indian pictographs^{8 7} and its information about rock art ran parallel to Graham's **ideas** about primitive art: "The record of all human intercourse is perpetuated through the medium of symbols. BAE Director John Wesley Powell wrote, "Nature worship and ancestor worship are concomitant parts of the same religion, and belong to a status of culture highly **advanced** and characterized by the invention of pictographs... **These** pictographs exhibit the beginning of written language and the beginning of pictorial art."

Stressing the primacy of Indian pictographs in the development of Pollock's mythic pictures is not necessarily a denial of Surrealist **influence**. Pollock was cognizant that the unconscious was the source of imagery for both Surrealist and shamanic art but that the resources of the unconscious had not been fully **explored**. **What** Pollock found acceptable in Surrealism, **because** it mirrored his own conclusions, was not so, much a stylistic vocabulary but the idea of painting from the

unconscious. His loose, crude, linear language in these early drawings and mythic paintings is an **effort** to evoke an ancient, more authentic kind of automatic writing.

For Pollock pictographs were also significant as an organic, visual record of the development of consciousness from primordial times to the present. Rend d'Harmoncourt **described** the Barrier Canyon pictographs as a blend of past and present: "They are still made today in certain sections. In the Southwest ... Modern Navajo drawings in charcoal may be found on top of ancient Pueblo rock paintings.... It is usually impossible to date **rock** pictures, though they were obviously made over a long **period** of time."⁴² Rock art, with its "masterly treatment of flat spaces,"⁹¹ represents **superimposed layers** of artistic activity from different prehistoric and historic periods. The **stratification** of human cultural activity is an important idea in Jungian theory. Jung wrote, "Through the buried strata of the individual we come directly into possession of the living mind of ancient **culture**."³⁹ Pollock responded in 1941 by mixing sand and oil paints and painting *The Magic Mirror*, which has a faded and textured surface very much like the **replicas** of Barrier Canyon pictographs exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art that same year.



One of the objects seen by Pollock at *Indian Art of the United States*, a pottery bowl made by the prehistoric Hohokam culture of southern Arizona, circa 900 (pl. 15), inspired *Mural*, 1943 (pl. 16), which he painted for Peggy Guggenheim. Pollock was an ardent admirer of the figurative motifs found on ancient Southwestern pottery, and he no doubt recognized the painted figure on the Hohokam bowl as being the kachina (a supernatural Pueblo spirit) Kokopelli, a humpbacked flute player associated with fertility. According to Pueblo mythology, Kokopelli, because of his misshapen appearance, slyly seduces and impregnates young women without their knowledge.⁵ These women are usually shown clinging to Kokopelli's back as in the Hohokam bowl: "the figures are often repeated in long rows" and "the drawings are executed with a broad, free-flowing line."⁶ Likewise, Pollock created in *Mural* a rhythmic line of black, humpbacked flute players who dance from left to right with female figures clinging to their backs. Guggenheim herself noted, "The mural was more abstract than Pollock's previous work. It consisted of a continuous band of abstract figures in a rhythmic dance painted in blue and white and yellow, and over this black paint was splashed in

a drip fashion."⁷ The manner in which Pollock created *Mural* suggests a shaman's psychic preparation before a round of ritual activity. After weeks of brooding contemplatively in front of the blank canvas, "he began wildly splashing on paint and finished the whole thing in three hours."⁸ That Pollock, after finally beginning to paint, did not stop until the image was complete suggests that for him creating the image was a kind of ritual performance.

In 1943, in addition to painting other Indian-inspired works, Pollock continued to produce, in the style of *The Magic Mirror*, surface-oriented paintings covered with nonspecific stenographic marks, hieroglyphic slashings, numbers, and primitive symbols. For Pollock, like Gottlieb, pictographic elements must have represented archaic kinds of writing that signify the strata of consciousness and culture. Through the manipulation of primitive calligraphy, stick figures, zoomorphs, and totems, Pollock touched, as a shaman does, a world beyond ordinary perception.

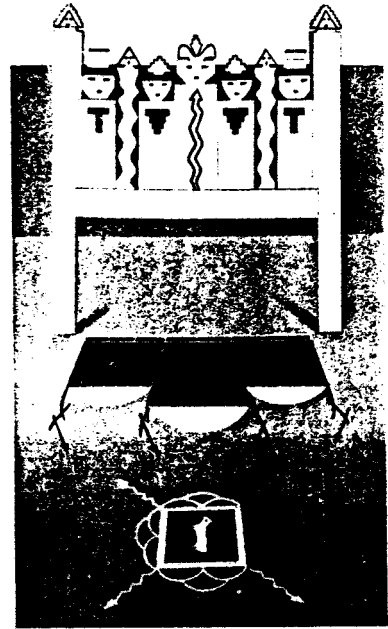
Prior to the drip paintings, *Guardians of the Secret* (pl. 17) is Pollock's most dramatic and successful visual statement about the shamanic potential of Indian art and the unconscious mind. At the heart of the image is a rectangular space filled with pictographic secrets.⁹ Here, in an agitated linear code, is the timeless seed of human ritual. Flanking and guarding the secrets are two totemic figures highly reminiscent of Northwest Coast pole sculpture. Pollock made a more overt reference to Northwest Coast art just to the left of the center at the top of the canvas. Outlined in white is the mask of the mythical Tsonoqua (seen in Gottlieb's *Ancestral Image*), which Pollock knew from visits to the Museum of the American Indian and *Indian Art of the United States*. This confirms the overriding sense that *Guardians of the Secret* is the painterly evocation of a ritual scene. D'Harnoncourt's description of the Northwest Coast tradition also supports this idea: "Beside the dark sea and forest there developed an art in which men, animals, and gods were inextricably mingled in strange, intricate carvings and paintings. Religion and mythology found their outlet in vast ceremonies in which fantastically masked figures enacted tense wild dramas."¹⁰

16
JACKSON POLLOCK
Mural, 1943
 Oil on canvas
 95 3/4 x 237/8 in.
 (243.2 x 603.2 cm)
 Museum of Art, University
 of Iowa, Iowa City
 Gift of Peggy Guggenheim.
 1948



17
JACKSON POLLOCK
Guardians of the Secret, 1943
Oil on canvas
48 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 75 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
(112.9 x 191.5 cm)
San Francisco Museum of
Modern Art
Albert M. Bender Collection.
Albert M. Bender
Bequest Fund
Purchase

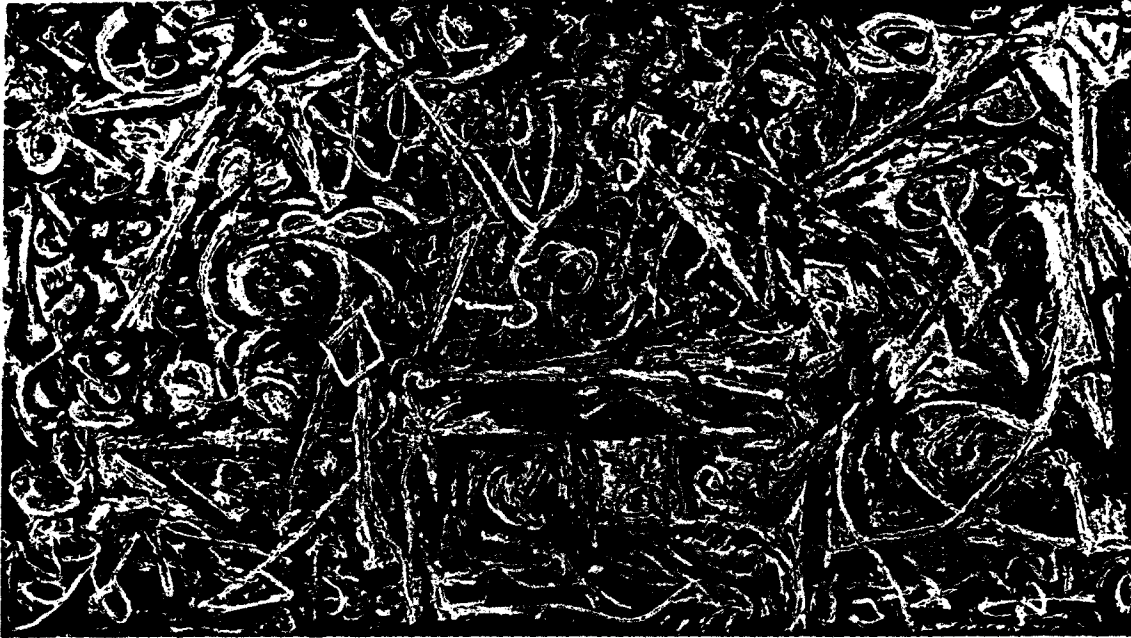
In its formal arrangement *Guardians of the Secret* refers to Southwest, not Northwest Coast, rituals. Immediately to the right of the Tsonoqua image Pollock placed a black **insect**. This curious creature, curled up in a fetal position, derives from the painted decoration on a Mimbres pottery bowl (pl. 18).¹⁰¹ The painting's three **flat**, horizontal registers of activity, hieratically framed by the totemic figures, suggests that it is a "picture-within-a-picture."¹⁰² The probable source of this device is a pair of illustrations accompanying an article on the Indians of Zia Pueblo in *BAE Report 11* (1894).¹⁰³ The first of these (pl. 19) shows the altar and sand painting of the Zia Snake Society. This image, like *Guardians of the Secret*, has its **two-dimensional** surface divided into flat, horizontal planes. Uppermost in the **picture** is a roughly rectangular wood altar, **which** is braced by two hieratic posts topped by totemic heads. Below the altar are two sand paintings, the lower of which shows an animal with sharply pointed **ears** framed in a rectangular space. Thus this illustration of a ceremonial setting has a compositional arrangement similar to *Guardians of the Secret*, is a picture of a (sand) picture, and depicts at the bottom an animal similar to the dog/wolf in the bottom register of Pollock's painting. The second illustration (pl. 20) shows the altar of the Knife Society **hieratically** flanked by two clan officials who are theurgists. Again, the two-dimensional surface is organized in flat, horizontal planes, and the central altar and fetishes are protected, braced by the two officials. This Zia custom, the report **explains**, is different from the Zuni, "some of (whose) altars have but one guardian."¹⁰⁴ Pollock's image may now be seen to indicate a pair of secret society guardians who protect a ritual painting made for healing purposes.



18
Pottery Bowl
Mimbres, Swarts Ruin, New
Mexico, c. 1200
The Taylor Museum,
Colorado Springs,
Colorado

19
Altar and Sandpainting of the
Snake Society at Zia Pueblo,
illustrated in *Annual Report of
the Bureau of American
Ethnology*
11 (1894)

20
Guardians of the Knife Society,
from *Annual Report of the
Bureau of American Ethnology*
11 (1894)



21
JACKSON POLLOCK
Night Mist, c. 1944
 Oil on canvas
 36 x 74 in. (91.4 x 188 cm)
 Norton Gallery and School of
 Art, West Palm Beach,
 Florida

The following year Pollock continued his exploration of **primitive** kinds of writing, **pictographic** elements, which indicate cultural, especially artistic, **evolution**. In *Night Mist*, circa 1944 (pl. a1), Pollock overlaid a hard, flat space with a **ritual frenzy** of rough and **fast** passages of paint. The surface was painted over with layers of symbols and forms, recalling cave walls or ritual chambers. Like Indian pictographs, each variety of mark or line, whether drawn, slashed, or inscribed in paint, is the record of a different and enduring age of image making on the pictorial surface. Paintings like this and *Guardians of the Secret* explored that point in cultural history when the **creation** of symbols was a ceremonial activity. Pollock produced other works in 1944 that show both continued interest in the writings of Graham and the expressive potential of mask forms.¹⁰ Graham's "Primitive Art and Picasso" was illustrated with an Eskimo mask (pl. 22) chosen to support his reference to Eskimo masks with the **facial** features rearranged. This article alerted Pollock specifically to the formal power of Indian art, attracting him to it in much the same way that **Picasso** felt drawn to the conceptual treatment of the human figure in African art, but Pol-

lock was already familiar with this tradition of masks. An Inuit mask of the same variety (pl. 2.3) illustrated an **article** on masks and aboriginal customs in *BAE Report 3* (1884), 'q' which Pollock had owned for at **least** two years before the **publication** of "Primitive Art and Picasso." This ceremonial mask has the eyes stacked one above the **other**, a twisted mouth curving up the side of the face, and knobs carved in relief to suggest teeth. Pollock's awareness of these Eskimo masks served as the **inspiration** for his painting *Night Sounds*, circa 1944 (pl. 24). Pollock distorted and exaggerated the mask even further so it **practically fills** the composition. Despite this accentuated elongation, the derivation of this image **from** Eskimo masks is still quite obvious.



12
Wooden Mask
 Eskimo, Yukon River region.
Alaska, c. 1900
 The University Museum,
 University of Pennsylvania,
 Philadelphia

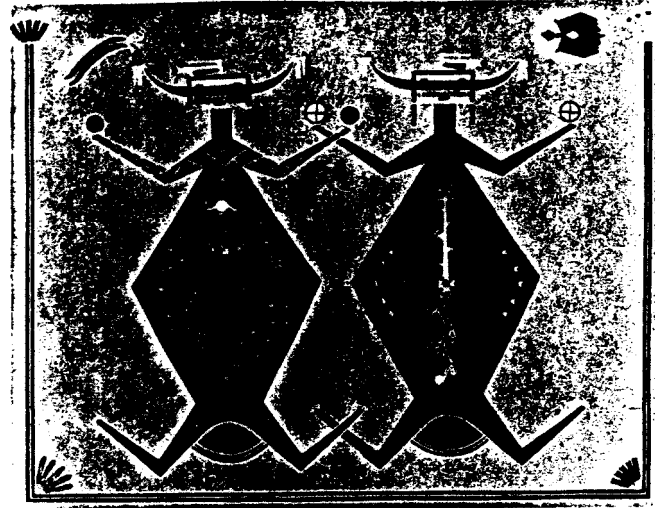
23
Wooden Mask. Inuit,
 illustrated in *Annual Report of*
 the *Bureau of American*
Ethnology 3 (1884)

24
JACKSON POLLOCK
Night Sounds, c. 1944
 Oil and pastel on paper
 43 x 46 in. (109.2 x 116.8 cm)
 Estate of Lee Krasner Pollock

35
JACKSON POLLOCK
Town Lesson 1, 1944
Oil on canvas
70 x 44 in. (177.8 x 111.8 cm)
Mr. and Mrs. Harry W.
Anderson



390
RUSHING



Like his *Totem Lesson 1, 1944* (pl. 25), Pollock's *Totem Lesson a, 1945* (pl. 26), once again makes reference to ritual transformation. The large, dark zoomorph in the center, with upraised arm and white pictographic writing on its body, is probably a painterly variation of the hard-edged Sky Father image in a Navajo sand painting illustrated in *Indian Art of the United States* (pl. 27).¹⁰⁶ In the Southwest, sand paintings are an integral part of elaborate ceremonies designed to cure illnesses by restoring the patient to wholeness and to harmony with nature. Both physical and psychic ailments are cured by the pictures, whose iconography and process of creation are known only by special medicine men, called *singers* among the Navajo. These *singers* generate flat, linear images by sprinkling colored sand or pulverized minerals in a freehand manner directly onto the buckskin canvas on the ground or onto the ground itself. The Indian artist squeezes the colored sands tightly between thumb and forefinger and releases them in a controlled stream, resulting in a "drawn" painting. Pollock, too, achieved "amazing control" in a seemingly free-wheeling process by using a basting syringe like a giant fountain pen.¹⁰⁹ The other similarities between the sand painter's

process and that used by Pollock are at once obvious. Just as the sand painter works strictly from memory, Pollock also worked without preliminary drawings, characterizing his paintings as "more immediate - more direct."¹¹⁰ The Navajo sand painting mentioned here measured eight by ten feet. This meant it "functioned between the easel and mural," which is how Pollock described the increased scale in his painting.¹¹¹

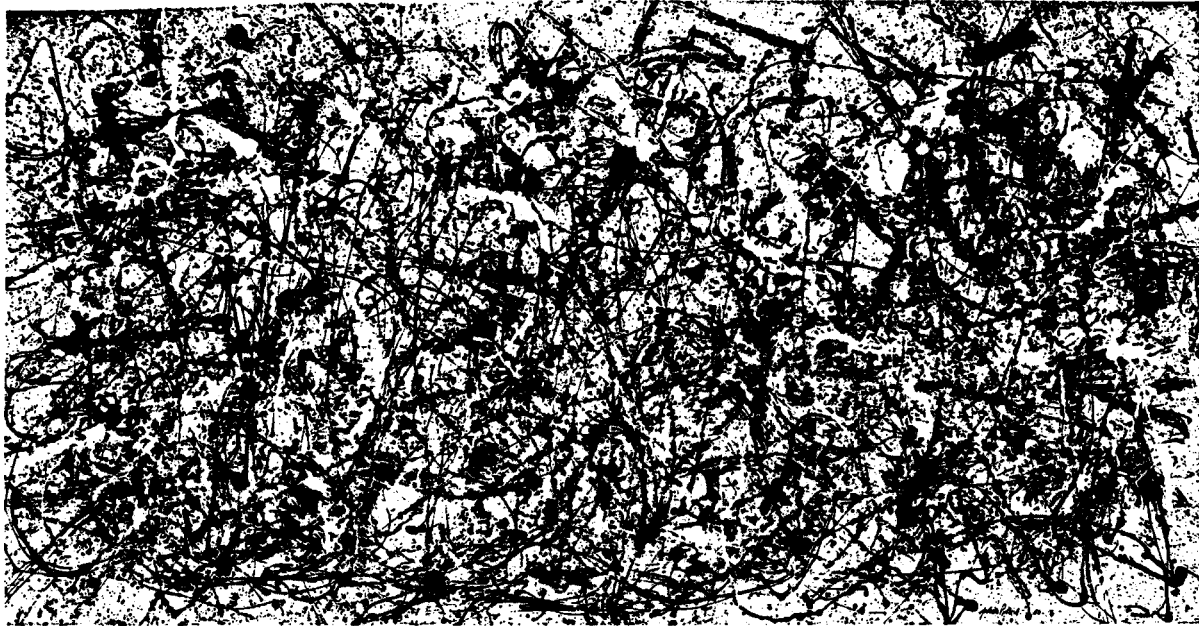
In the face of bouts with alcoholism and deep depression Pollock struggled, like the Indian patient, for self-integration. Perhaps this was the basis of his fascination with Indian sand paintings like those shown in *BAE Report 16* (1897)¹¹² and the ones made in New York in 1941 by Navajo singers. Because of Pollock's own search for wholeness and his obvious interest in sand paintings, his drip paintings, such as *Autumn Rhythm, 1950* (pl. 28), may be interpreted as ritual acts in which Pollock stands for the shaman who is his own patient. In 1947 Pollock made the following statement about his work: "My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work

from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.¹¹³ By being in the painting (pl. 29) Pollock became like the Navajo patient, the one sung over, who sits atop the sand painting, the focal point of the curing ceremony (pl. 30). The Navajo believe that contact with the numinous power of the image unifies the patient with nature by putting him in touch with mythic progenitors.¹¹⁴ As Pollock said, "When I am in my painting . . . I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. . . . When I lose contact with the painting the result is a mess. Otherwise there is a pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."¹¹⁵ Sand paintings also have lives of their own from sunrise to sunset, after which they are ritually destroyed. The Indian sand painter, too, must not lose "contact with the painting" and demonstrates great concentration; he is free to correct and adjust the composition so that, according to the Navajo, "all is in accord again."¹¹⁶ In both Pollock's and the singer's situation the process and the experience have as much importance as the image created.

26
JACKSON POLLOCK
Totem Lesson a, 1945
 Oil on canvas
 72 x 60 in. (182.9 x 152.4 cm)
 Estate of Lee Krasner Pollock

27
 Sand Painting
 Navajo, 20th century?
 Collection of the
 Wheelwright Museum, Santa
 Fe, New Mexico

apt
 RUSHING



28
JACKSON POLLOCK
Autumn Rhythm, 1950
 Oil on canvas
 105 x 207 in.
 (166.7 x 525.8 cm)
 The Metropolitan Museum
 of Art
 George A. Hearn Fund,
 1957

In 1947, the year the drip paintings emerged, Pollock said, "I have always been impressed with the **plastic** qualities of American Indian art, The Indians have the true painter's approach in their capacity to get hold of appropriate images, and in their **understanding** of what constitutes painterly subject matter. ... Their vision has the basic universality of all real art. ... There is a significant correlation between **Pollock's perception** of Indians as those who "get hold of appropriate images" and Graham's belief that exposure to the **unconscious** is a "journey to the primordial past for the purpose of bringing out some relevant information."¹¹⁵ The result of the first is a painterly subject matter and of the second, a spontaneous expression of the primal self; both are primary characteristics of the drip paintings. For Pollock immersion in the ancient imagery of Indians was a mode of access to the unconscious. He knew and valued the Indian concept of "discovering one's own image" through shamanic **experience**, and he and Bultman often discussed "magic and the shamanistic **cult** of traveling to **spirit** worlds."¹¹⁶ The world of the spirit is the ultimate nature of the self, and Pollock believed that nature as self was approachable through

dreams and visions, which yielded his **imagery**.² The gripping brilliance of *Guardians of the Secret* indicates that for Pollock coming to know the self was like standing at the heart of a **flame**. It is a painting that exudes the ecstasy of ceremony, and yet the **violent** energy of its surface and the elusive meaning of the pictographic secrets suggest that **realization** of the discovered self **was** an arduous task. The loosening up, the automatic quality of the linear movement in the drip paintings, **was** an attempt to reveal the intangible contents of the **unconscious** mind.

The abandonment of figuration and the sweeping poetic gesture in such works as *Autumn Rhythm* may again refer to Native **American** art. As stated in *BAE Report 1* (1881), "The reproduction of apparent gesture lines in the pictographs made by our Indians **has**, for obvious reasons, been most **frequent** in the attempt to convey those **subjective** ideas which were beyond the range of an artistic **skill limited** to the direct representation of objects."¹²¹

The move away from overt representation to convey subjective content is *Pollock's* "strongest point about Indian **culture**"¹¹⁷ and is illuminated by his legendary **reply** to Hans Hofmann, "I am nature."¹¹⁸ The strongest, most poignant fact of Indian life to Pollock

was that "people living close to nature found nature in themselves rather than nature as a motif."¹² It follows that if Pollock were going to paint from nature, the resulting image would be an **observation** of the self. Lee **Krasner's** comments on the "I am nature" statement support this idea: "It breaks once and for all the concept that was more or less present in the Cubist derived paintings, that one sits and observes nature that is out there. Rather it claims a oneness."¹²⁵

The drip paintings speak of a oneness, for Pollock must have felt they were the pictorial realization of his transformed consciousness. Elements of his unconscious mind had merged with his waking conscious, and the result was lengthy period of abstinence from drink (1947 to 1950), a sense of wholeness, and a marked **transformation** of his painting style. Typically, the drip paintings themselves are the merger of opposites: the image and pictorial ground become one, the gesture and image become one, drawing and kinds of writing become painting, and, finally, the work of art is the ritual process. In these paintings made between 1948 and 1950 Pollock sought unity between conscious decision and primitive instinct, and with the impetus of **Native American** art he found it.

While Pollock asserted a oneness with nature, Gottlieb spoke of "going forward to nature," and Pousette-Dart speaks of **believing** "in the **primal**" and "whole thinking." ¹²⁶ In their **search** for **holistic** experience these **painters** helped resolve the crisis of subject matter **common** to American artists in the **1940s** by **establishing** themes of universal relevance based on Native American traditions, images, and art processes. Through myth making, evocation of archaic surfaces, and transformation of indigenous **primitive** forms in a manner both **intuitive** and calculated, they incorporated ancient American art into a **modern Abstract** Expressionism. Each in his own way helped fulfill the prophecy so often heard in New York during the **1930s** and **1940s**, **particularly** in the **critical voices** of Newman, Graham, and Paalen, that Native American art and culture could be the **wellspring** for a **modern** art that portrayed the **collective experience**.



29
HANS NAMUTH, *Jackson Pollock
in Studio — Painting, 1951,*
photograph



30
Navajo mother holding
child and sitting on sand
painting

5. Mark Rothko first used the term *myth-maker* in 1946 in reference to the work of Clyfford Still, whose "pictorial conclusions" Rothko (amid allied to those of a "small band of Myth-Makers" then making an impression on the New York scene. See Mark Rothko, introduction to *Clyfford Still*, exh. cat. (New York: An of This Century, 1946).

2. A complete discussion of -- said numerous other issues relating to the present essay are contained in my master's thesis, "The Influence of American Indian Art on Jackson Pollock and the Early New York School" (University of Texas at Austin, 1984). It should be noted that working independently I have arrived at some conclusions similar to those expressed by J. Kirk Varnedoe in his essay, "Abstract Expressionism," in "Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 615-59. As my essay here demonstrates, however, the influence of Native American art on both the style and content of early Abstract Expressionism was much stranger than suggested by Varnedoe.

3. John D. Graham, *System and Dialectic of Art*, with critical introduction by Marcia Epstein Allentruck (1937; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 95.

4. For a discussion of the relevance of this aspect of Carl Gustav Jung for New York artists in the early 1940s, see Stephen Polcari, "The Intellectual Roots of Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko," *Arts* 54 (September 1979): 136.

S. John D. Graham, "Primitive Art and Picasso," *Magazine of Art* 30 (April 1937): 337.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Fritz Bultman, telephone conversation with author, 26 April 1984. For information on Max Ernst's (and the other Surrealists') preoccupation with Native American and Eskimo art, see Elizabeth Cowling "The Eskimos, the American Indians, and the Surrealists," *Art History*, (December 1978): 484-99.

8. Dore Ashton, *The New York School* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 525.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Wolfgang Iser, editorial, *DYN*, nos. 4-5 (December 1943): verso frontispiece.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Wolfgang Iser, "Totem Art," *DYN*, nos. 4-5 (December 1943): 17.

13. *Ibid.*, 13.

14. *Ibid.*, 18.

15. Ashton, *New York School*, 505.

16. Paalen, "Totem Art," 18.

17. Paalen, in fact, had given Barnett Newman an autographed copy of *Form and Sense*. See Barbara Reise, "Primitivism in the Writing of Barnett Newman: A Study in the Ideological Background of Abstract Expressionism" (Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1965), 26.

18. *Ibid.*

19. I am grateful to Irving Sandler for sharing with me hard-to-obtain primary source material relating to Newman's activities as a curator of primitive art.

20. Barnett Newman, introduction to *Pre-Columbian Stony Sculpture*, exh. cat. (New York: Wakefield Gallery, 1944), at. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. Bultman, interview with author.

25. Ashton, *New York School*, 132.

26. Barnett Newman, introduction to *Northwest Coast Indian Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1946).

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. Barnett Newman, introduction to *The Ideographic Picture*, exh. cat. (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1947).

31. *Ibid.*

32. Richard Pousette-Dart still feels due "there was a great difference between his work and his contemporaries" (Richard Pousette-Dart, telephone conversation with author, 16 March 1985).

33. *Ibid.*

34. Pousette-Dart, interview with author, Suffers, New York, 5 May 1985.

35. Gail Levin, "Richard Pousette-Dart's Emergence as an Abstract Expressionist," *Arts* 54 (March 1980): 125-26; confirmed by Pousette-Dart, telephone conversation with author.

36. Quoted in Levin, "Pousette-Dart's Emergence," 526. Levin writes that Pousette-Dart "dia grammated the polarity between the 'subconscious mind' and the

37. Pousette-Dart, telephone conversation with author.

31. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

43. Sae Adolph Gottlieb, interview with Dorothy Seckler, 1967, quoted in Mary Davis MacNaughton, "Adolph Gottlieb: His Life and Art," *Adolph Gottlieb. A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Arts Publisher in association with the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, 1981), 31.

44. It must also be remembered that Gottlieb studied with John Sloan at the Art Students League in 1920. For comments on Sloan's appreciation and patronage of Indian art (especially his involvement with the *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts* in New York in 1931), see Rushing, "Early New York School," 3-4, 10-10.4.

45. On John D. Graham's gift to Gottlieb, see MacNaughton, "Gottlieb," 20. Sanford Hirsch, telephone conversation with author, 3 April 1985. Special thanks are due Hirsch for his cooperation with my research.

46. MacNaughton, "Gottlieb," 30.

47. Quoted in Sanford Hirsch, "Adolph Gottlieb in Arizona: 1937-38" (unpublished manuscript, 1984), 13.

48. Hitch, interview with author.

49. This replica of Utah pictographs was made for the exhibition by Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists. The catalogue illustration was a photograph taken by Robert M. Jones, Utah Art Project, WPA; see Frederick H. Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 24.

50. Quoted in MacNaughton, "Gottlieb," 575.

55. Quoted in "The Ides of Art: The Attitudes of Ten Artists on Their Art and Contemporaneity," *Tiger's Eye* (December 1943): 43.

52. For modern influences on Gottlieb's grid, see MacNaughton, "Gottlieb," 32.

53. *Ibid.*, 38. MacNaughton notes there the influence of Chilkat blanket patterns and Haida totem pole forms on Gottlieb's early Pictographs. As she rightly observes, Haida poles were on display at both the Brooklyn Museum and in the exhibition *Indian Art of the United States*. Hirsch also reports

(interview with author) that "totems were prominently displayed at the Brooklyn Museum."

54. Varnedoe, "Abstract Expressionism," 632.

55. See, for example, the Haida carved pole exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1945 and illustrated in the catalogue (Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art*, 176).

56. According to Hirsch (interview with author), the earliest Unstill Lifer were Pictographs adapted or repainted "in order to isolate some massive, central form."

57. Quoted in Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art*, 176.

58. Although not reproduced in the catalogue, this Tsonoque mask was reproduced in *Art News* (39 (8 February 1941): 6, frontispiece) in conjunction with a review of the exhibition.

59. Such Gottlieb titles include *The Alchemist of Parcelus*, 1945; Oracle, 1947, *Sonnet*, 1947, and *Altar*, 1947.

60. Quoted in "Ides of Art," 43. For a discussion of Gottlieb in relation to Jung's *The Idea of Redemption in Alchemy*, see MacNaughton, "Gottlieb

61. See Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1967), 13; Elizabeth Langhorne, "A Jungian Interpretation of Jackson Pollock's Art through 1946" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1977), 109.

62. Quoted in Francis V. O'Connor, "The Genesis of Jackson Pollock: 1912-1943" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1963), 7.

63. Bultman, interview with author.

64. Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 4:192.

65. Bultman (interview with author) confirmed that Pollock read *DYN*.

66. For a complete burn of the contents of Pollock's library at the time of his death, see O'Connor and Thaw, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 4:587-99.

67. Bultman, interview with author

68. *Ibid.*

69. In addition to the early Abstract Expressionists, there were a number of young American painters in New York in the late 1940s (some of whom were associated with Kenneth Beaudoine's journal *Iconograph* and exhibited at his *Galerie Neuf* in the spring of 1946), including Will

Barnet, Peter Busa, Robert Barrell, Gertrude Barret, Sonia Sekula, and Oscar Collier, who experimented with forms inspired by Northwest Coast and Pueblo Indian art. See Ann Gibson, "Painting outside the Paradigm: Indian Space," *Arts* 57 (February 1958): 98-103.

70. Bultman, interview with author.

75. *Ibid.* Among the newspaper clippings Pollock saved was one from the Sunday *New York Times*, 19 January 1941. On this page were ten photographs of Indian masks to be shown at the Museum of Modern Art starting

January 22 in an exhibit of American Indian Art" (O'Connor and Thaw, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 4:199).

72. *Ibid.*

73. See Donald E. Gordon, "Pollock's Bird, or How Jung Did Not Offer Much Help in Myth-Making." *Arts* 68 (October 1980): 43, 58 n. 50.

74. Dr. Violet Staub de Laszlo quoted in Langhorne, "A Jungian Interpretation," p. n. 139.

75. Bultman, interview with author

76. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, 21. See also Irving Sandler, "John D. Graham: The Pauper as **Esthetician and Connoisseur**," *Artforum* 7 (October 1968): 32. Some sources place Pollock and Graham's first meeting as late as 1941. For information that may support the later date, see Gordon, "Pollock's Bird," 5a.
77. O'Connor and Thaw, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 4:897. Willem de Kooning recalled Pollock's unusual insistence that a borrowed Graham article be returned to him; see Ashton, *New York school*, 68. Pollock's biographer B. H. Friedman noted that Pollock admired "Primitive Art and Picasso" sufficiently to write Graham a letter; B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 50.
78. Bultman, interview with author.
79. Ibid.
80. Graham, *System and Dialectics*, 102-3.
81. Thus remark was part of & draft for Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities 1* (Winter 1947-48): 78.
82. Bultman, interview with author.
83. Jackson Pollock, "Jackson Pollock," *Arts and Architecture* 61 (February 1944): 14.
84. See Cad Gustav Jung, *The Integration of the Personality* (New York: Farrar & Rhinehart, 1939), 33.
85. Ibid., 91.
86. For a discussion of the possibility that Pollock saw pictographs on his camping trips in the Mojave Desert in 1934, see Rushing, "Early New York School," 43.
87. S-3. W. Powell, "On Limitations so Use of Some Anthropological Dace," *Bureau of American Ethnology Report* 1 (1881):371-75, 378 [hereafter BAE Report]. Likewise there were literally hundreds of Native American pictographs reproduced in "Picture Writing of the American Indians," BAE Report 10 (1889): 93; see especially pp. 37-129 and pl. 34.
88. Graham, *System and Dialectics*, 23.
89. Powell, "On Limitations," 73.
90. Bultman, interview with author.
91. See Robert Motherwell's comments quoted in William Rubin, "Notes on Masson and Pollock," *Arts* 34 (November 1959): 36.
92. Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art*, 97-98.
93. Ibid., 84.
94. Quoted in Polcari, "Roots," 126.
95. In addition to the information on Kokopelli in the exhibition catalogue *Indian Art of the United States* and in *BAE Report* 17, three articles on the erotic flute player appeared in the American *Anthropologist* in the late 1930s; see Rushing, "Early New York School," 48-50.
96. Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art*, 86.
97. Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century* (New York: Universe Books, 1946), 263.
98. Ibid. According to O'Connor, "Lee Krasner recalls that he [Pollock] would sit in front of the blank canvas for hours. Sometime in December of 1943 ... he suddenly locked himself in his studio and finished the painting in one day" (O'Connor and Thaw, *Cast-Lope Raisonné*, 1:94).
99. See Frank O'Hara, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Braziller, 1939), 20.
100. Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art*, 846.
101. Shown in the exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* and illustrated *ibid.*, 104.
102. In discussing this painting the term *picture-within-a picture* is used in William Rubin, "Pollock as Jungian Illustrator: The Limits of Psychological Criticism," *Art in America* 67 (December 1979): 88.
103. Matilda Cox Stevenson, "The Sin," *BAE Report* 11 (1894): pp. xiv, xv.
104. Ibid., 73.
105. Sandler noted that three Pollock paintings produced between 1938 and 1941 - *Masque Image, He'*, and *Birth* - incorporate Eskimo mask forms; see Smaller's rejoinder to Rubin, in William Rubin, "Mom on Rubin on Pollock," *Art in America* 68 (October 1980): 37.
106. Graham, "Primitive Art, 237.
107. See W. H. Dall, "On Masks Labrets, and Certain Aboriginal Customs, with an Inquiry into the Bearing of Their Geographical Distribution," *BAE Report* 3 (1884), pl. xxvii, fig. 70.
108. See Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art*, 29.
109. Lee Krasner, interview with B. H. Friedman, quoted in *Jackson Pollock: Black and White*, a b. cat. (New York: Marlborough Gallery, 1969), 10.
110. Jackson Pollock, interview with William Wright, 1931, quoted in O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, 8t.
111. Quoted *ibid.*, 39.
112. Jesse Walter Fewkes, "Tusayan Snake Ceremonies," *BAE Report* 16 (1897): pls. lxxii, lxxiii.
113. Pollock, "My Painting," 78.
114. Robert F. Spencer et al., *The Native Americans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 308-9. See also Clyde Kluckhohn and D. C. Leighton, "An Introduction to Navajo Chant Practice," in *American Anthropological Association Memoir* 52 (1946).
115. Pollock, "My Painting," 76.
116. Franc J. Newcomb and Gladys A. Reichard, *Sandpaintings of the Navajo Shooting Chant* (New York: Dover, 1937), 1a, 20, 24.
117. Pollock, "Jackson Pollock," 14.
118. Graham, "Primitive Art," 237.
119. Bultman, interview with author.
120. Bultman informed me of Pollock's interest in the relationship between magic, shamanism, and "the nature of self." Bultman's statement about the dream vision as a source of imagery for Pollock is quoted in Langhorne's rejoinder to Rubin, "More on Rubin," 63.
121. Garrick Mallory, "Sign Language among the North American Indians," *BAE Report* 1 (1881): 370.
122. Bultman, interview with author.
123. Quoted in O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, 26.
124. Bultman, interview with author.
125. Quoted in Bruce Glaser, "An Interview with Lee Krasner," *Arts* 4s (April 1967): 38.
126. Gottlieb, "Ides of Art," 50; Poussette-Dart, telephone conversation with author.

OVERLEAF
OSKAR FISCHINGER
From *Composition in Blue*,
1935
Courtesy Fischinger
Archive