

DRAWING 2: PART 3 - Project 2 - "Research Point"

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Drawing 2: Investigating Drawing

Part 3: Physicality & gesture

Project 2: Experiments with mark making

Research point:

The Abstract Expressionists' use of gesture was caught up with notions of authenticity and even of purity of intent. The influential critic Clement Greenberg wrote in his article 'Avant Garde and Kitsch' in 1939 about the good artist painting 'cause' and the bad artist painting 'effect'. He also talks about what he describes as 'the inflections of the personal' becoming a legitimate subject. For example, the artist Jackson Pollock talked about wanting to paint from his emotions, not to illustrate them. What's your response to these comments?

You can find out more about Jackson Pollock by watching this video, an influential contemporary film made by Hans Namuth:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cgBvpjwOGo>

Arguably, Pollock is best known for the paintings initiated by pouring or dripping paint onto the canvas rather than applying it directly. The next project asks you to experiment with drawing 'at one remove' by using an object to make marks.

"A form of abstract art and expressionism which allows the subconscious to explore itself. It is freed from the portrayal of everyday subject matter." In: Januszczak, W. (1997) **Techniques of the great masters of art**. New York: Chartwell Books Inc., p.542 (Glossary).

"Be in the painting"; Express feelings rather than illustrate them"; Painting has a life of its own - I let it live"; "Whiplash energy & calm". [Jackson Pollock - Hans Namuth film].

Abstract Expressionism Links:

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-expressionism>
- https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/hd_abex.htm
- https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/abstract-expressionism
- <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/abstract-expressionism.htm>
- <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/abstract-expressionism-beyond-the-image>

Abstract Art Links:

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-art>
- <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/abstract-art.htm>
- <https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-inspiration/what-is-abstract-art/>

Jackson Pollock documentary: E.W.R. Many, directed by Kim Evans, narrated by Melvin Bragg. 50.48m, 534.3Mb. Available at: <https://youtu.be/fwUxQrDGqw> [Accessed: 12 June 2018].

<https://stuartbrownleeoca.wordpress.com/category/coursework/part5/different-ways-to-apply-paint/>

Pollock's radical paintings and dramatic persona helped draw attention to the broader group of Abstract Expressionists, including [Willem de Kooning](#), Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and [Mark Rothko](#). Available at: <https://www.jackson-pollock.org> [Accessed: 12 June 2018].

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-gorky-arshile.htm> [Accessed: 13 June 2018].

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-motherwell-robert.htm> [Accessed: 13 June 2018].

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-newman-barnett.htm> [Accessed: 13 June 2018].

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Text sources:

Chilvers, I. (2009) *The Oxford dictionary of art and artists (Oxford paperback reference)*. 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press.

"The dominant movement in American painting in the late 1940's and 1950's, characterised by a desire to convey powerful emotions through the sensuous qualities of paint, often on canvases of huge size." [ibid. p.4].

"... there are certain qualities that are basic to most Abstract Expressionist painting: the preference for working on a large scale; the emphasis placed on on surface qualities, so the flatness of the canvas is stressed; the adoption of an all-over type of treatment, in which the whole area of the picture is regarded as equally important; the glorification of the act of painting itself; the conviction that abstract painting could convey significant meaning and should not be viewed in formalist terms alone; and a belief in the absolute individuality of the artist..." [ibid. p.4].

"Alongside de Kooning, Pollock, and Rothko, the painters who are considered central to Abstract Expressionism include Gorky, Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, Motherwell, Newman, and Still." [ibid. p.4].

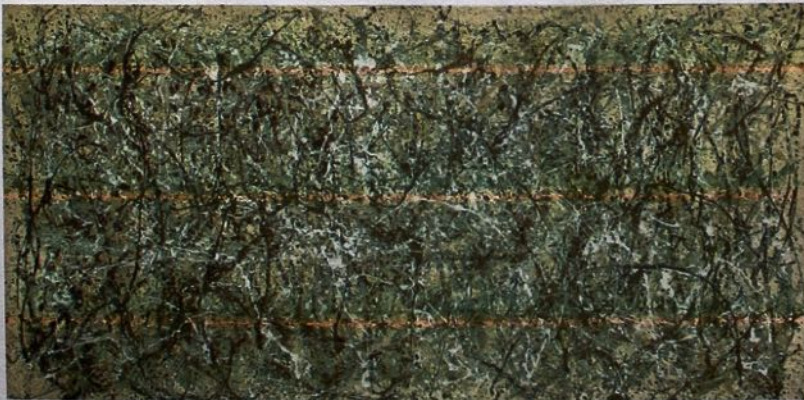
Collings, M. (2000) *This is modern art*. London: Seven Dials.



Hans Namuth - Pollock painting, 1950. [ibid. p.45].

"I don't paint Nature, I am Nature". [ibid. p.44].

"Another time he compared his method of working on the floor, working on all sides of the painting at once, to American Indian ritual sand paintings. Pollock's high point as an artist is considered to be the three-year period between 1947 and 1950 when he painted drip paintings. Before that he had painted unremarkable, generalised abstract paintings. Influenced by Picasso, Surrealism, Mexican murals and psychoanalysis, they are not particularly bad but not particularly adventurous or distinctive either". [ibid. p.45].



Jackson Pollock (1950) *One (Number 31)*. [ibid. p.46].

"Backing off and looking at the whole thing, you get an impression of absolute visual rightness but a rightness that can't be pinned down. There seems to be a high element of chance. But chance itself isn't the content because that would be banal, just as drips aren't the subject. The content is the expression, the intensity of the sensation, the authenticity of the feeling." [ibid. p.46].

Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) **Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism**. London: Thames & Hudson.

Abstract Expressionist artists – what did they have in common? "... a longing for what could be called the autographic gesture, the inimitable, signature-like dribble of

paint that would translate private feelings and emotions directly onto the material field of the canvas – without the mediation of any figurative content." [ibid. p.348].

"... the quintessential 'American-type painting'..." (Clement Greenberg). [ibid. p.348].

"When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about ... Painting has a life of its own..." [ibid. p.350].



Jackson Pollock (1951) **Number 14, 1951**. [Enamel on canvas]. In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) **Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism**. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 356.

"In 1951 he began to make black-and-white paintings with, as he put it, 'some of my early images coming through', meaning that he returned to the figurative mode of his artistic beginnings in the thirties and early forties: a mixture of Mexican mural painting (Diego Rivera) and the American Regionalist style of his teacher, Thomas Hart Benton." [see below] [ibid. p. 356].



Jackson Pollock (c.1943) **Moon woman cuts the circle**. [Oil on canvas]. In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) **Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism**. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 357.

Imagery derived "... from his acquaintance with Jungian analysis". [ibid. p. 350].

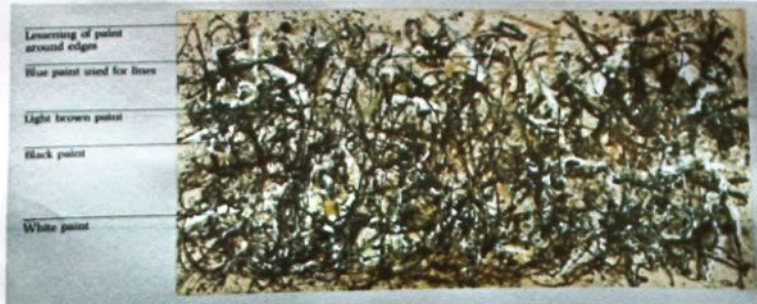
(3)



Jackson Pollock (1947) **Full fathom five**. [Oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, coins, cigarettes, etc.] In: Januszczak, W. (1997) **Techniques of the great masters of art**. New York: Chartwell Books Inc., p.461.

An experimental early drip piece. Not all the canvas has been covered by pouring paint ... "Unlike some later drip pieces such as *Autumn Rhythm (1950)*, *Full Fathom Five* is densely worked and multi-coloured and, even at the peripheries, often in Pollock the sites of slacker activity, there is scarcely a glimpse of the unprimed surface." [ibid. p.461].

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Jackson Pollock (1950) *Autumn rhythm*. [Oil and enamel on canvas]. In: Januszczak, W. (1997) *Techniques of the great masters of art*. New York: Chartwell Books Inc., p.465.

"Pollock worked from all sides of an unprimed canvas and emphasised each part of the painting equally but differently. Varying marks were made according to different methods of paint application. At what is now the top edge, the black and brown paint was thrown on the canvas and splattered on impact, but the marks are also clearly directional. Along the lower edge the blacks and browns were allowed to run off a stick or brush and are more flowing, undulating and curvilinear. In some places, the paint was applied so thickly as to form pools which, in drying, formed skins in rippled surfaces. The skin which formed on the surface of open cans of paint was often either flung or carefully dropped on to the canvas." [ibid. p.465].

"Concerning the prodigious control which Pollock exercised over his paintings, a friend stated that he had 'an amazing ability to quicken a line by thinning it, to slow it by flooding, to elaborate the simplest of elements – the line'." [ibid. p.466].

From: <https://stuartbrownleeoca.wordpress.com/category/coursework/part5/different-ways-to-apply-paint/>

In looking at the work of Jackson Pollock I came across references to the work of Janet Sobel who, according to one reviewer, could be seen as the 'grandmother of drip painting'. Haber's Art Reviews. Available at: <http://www.haberarts.com/sobel.htm> [Accessed: 28 October 2014], and certainly seems to have an impact on Pollock's own work. In Sobel's work "...paint moves freely, one colour flowing into the next. Her work really does have that all-over fabric one thinks only Pollock achieved. And yet it has an intimacy all her own."



Janet Sobel, "Untitled", (1946-1948), Oil and enamel on canvas. Image source: <http://www.carearts.org/teachers/image-bank/u-z1/untitled-janet-sobel.html>

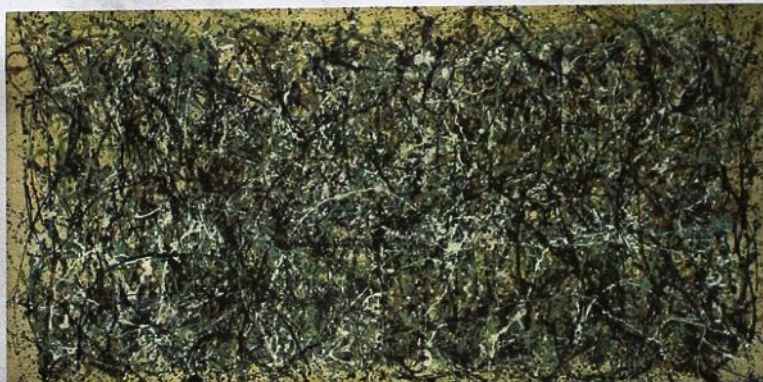
Her subjects can be seen to vary between abstraction and people, as can be seen in "The burning bush", with 'line-ups' of faces almost breaking through the overall abstraction:

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Janet Sobel, "The burning bush", (1944), Oil on canvas. Image source: <http://collections.lacma.org/node/215636>

Jackson Pollock's own work also challenged traditional ways of easel painting by using different medium such as synthetic resin-based paints, laying the canvas on the floor, painting large by using hardened brushes, sticks, basting syringes for applying paint – spontaneous splattering, smearing and dripping:



Jackson Pollock, "Number 31", (1950), Oil and enamel paint on canvas. (click image to enlarge) Image source: <http://www.jackson-pollock.org/one-number31.jsp>

Using colour and form in a non-representational manner, 'Abstract Expressionism', and Pollock's 'Action Painting' put an emphasis on the act of painting as opposed to the end product as a 'work of art'. The American art critic, Harold Rosenberg, first named the style 'Action Painting' in a 1952 essay "The American Action Painters", in which he observed that the the canvas was not an object in itself, but rather "...an arena in which to act".

Jackson himself is quoted as stating: "My painting does not come from the easel. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides, and literally be in the painting."

What's more, his 'action paintings' have often been associated with the improvisational performances of jazz musicians.
<https://www.boundless.com/art-history/textbooks/boundless-art-history-textbook/europe-and-america-1900-1950-36/abstract-expressionism-230/jackson-pollack-and-action-painting-821-3536/>

[November 2014]

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"What is most important is that the practical activity by which we live is not satisfying: we cannot give it full loyalty, and its rewards do not compensate enough for the frustrations and emptiness that arise from the lack of spontaneity and personal identifications in work: the individual is deformed by it, only rarely does it permit him to grow.

The object of art is, therefore, more passionately than ever before, the occasion of spontaneity or intense feeling. The painting symbolizes an individual who realizes freedom and deep engagement of the self within his work. It is addressed to others who will cherish it, if it gives them joy, and who will recognize in it an irreplaceable quality and will be attentive to every mark of the maker's imagination and feeling.

The consciousness of the personal and spontaneous in the painting and sculpture stimulates the artist to invent devices of handling, processing, surfacing, which confer to the utmost degree the aspect of the freely made. Hence the great importance of the mark, the stroke, the brush, the drip, the quality of the substance of the paint itself, and the surface of the canvas as a texture and field of operation—all signs of the artist's active presence. The work of art is an ordered world of its own kind in which we are aware, at every point, of its becoming.

*All these qualities of painting may be regarded as a means of affirming the individual in opposition to the contrary qualities of the ordinary experience of working and doing." Meyer Schapiro (1957) **The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art: The vital role that painting and sculpture play in modern culture.** Available at: <http://www.artnews.com/2007/11/01/top-ten-artnews-stories-a-modernist-manifesto/> [Accessed: 18 June 2018].*

*"The Russian painter Malevich, the founder of "Suprematism," has described his new art in revealing terms. "By Suprematism I mean the supremacy of pure feeling or sensation in the pictorial arts. . . . In the year 1913 in my desperate struggle to free art from the ballast of the objective world I fled to the form of the Square and exhibited a picture which was nothing more or less than a black square upon a white ground. . . . It was no empty square which I had exhibited but rather the experience of objectlessness". In: Meyer Shapiro (1978) **Modern art, 19th and 20th centuries: selected papers.** New York: George Braziller, Inc., p.202.*

*"Where Picasso paints cause, Repin paints effect. Repin predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art. Repin, or kitsch, is synthetic art." From 'Avant Garde and Kitsch (1939)' - In: Clement Greenberg (1961) **Art and culture: critical essays.** Boston: Beacon Press, p.15. Available at: <http://sites.uci.edu/form/files/2015/01/Greenberg-Clement-Avant-Garde-and-Kitsch-copy.pdf> [Accessed: 18 June 2018].*

"Only with the Renaissance do the inflections of the personal become legitimate, still to be kept, however, within the limits of the simply and universally recognizable. And only with Rembrandt do "lonely" artists begin to appear, lonely in their art." [ibid. p.17].

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Other Abstract Expressionist Painters:



Arshile Gorky (1944) ***How my mother's embroidered apron unfolds in my life.*** [Oil on canvas]. In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) ***Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism.*** London: Thames & Hudson, p. 296.

"... the canvas as a field of prodigious excitement..." [ibid. p.296].

"... exuberant gesturality, including multiple run-offs of paint..." [ibid. p.296].

Gorky "...had learned from Picasso (dissociation of form and contour), Miró (biomorphic figures), Kandinsky (saturated colour), Matisse (transparency of the paint layer, which allows for an active role of the underlayers), Matta (sci-fi landscape, amoebic decor), and even Duchamp... Until his suicide in 1948, he produced at top speed works that could only be called Surrealist ... but which Pollock, Newman, and other Abstract Expressionist painters immediately regarded as the seed of their own movement." [ibid. p.296].



Willem de Kooning (1948-9) ***Untitled.*** [Enamel and oil on paper on composition board]. In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) ***Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism.*** London: Thames & Hudson, p. 351.

White on black canvas - a "...recognisable trademark style – almost like the artist's own logo – filling the whole canvas". [ibid. p.351].

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Robert Motherwell (1949) **At five in the afternoon**. [Casein on board].
In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) **Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism**. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 352.

"... scumbling contours and paint runoffs". [ibid. p.352]. The title taken from a elegy by Federico Garcia Lorca lamenting the death of a bullfighter.



Mark Rothko (1949) **Number 3/No. 13 (Magenta, Black, Green on orange)**. [oil on canvas]. In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) **Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism**. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 353.

horizontal partitions on vertical canvas. *"I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers ... Neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance ... It is at the moment of completion that in a flash of recognition, they are seen to have the quantity and function which was intended". [ibid. p.350].*

*"Rothko is bracketed as a leading exponent of Abstract Expressionism. His calm, meditative works, however, show less concern with the gestural qualities of Abstract Expressionism than with the retinal effects of colour-field painting; less interest in exploring abstract notions of colour and form than in generating emotion in the viewer." In: Collings, M. (2000) **This is modern art**. London: Seven Dials, p.166.*

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Barnett Newman (1948) **Onement I**. [Oil on canvas and oil on masking tape on canvas]. In: Foster, H., Krauss, R.E. and Bois, Y.-A. (2004) **Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism**. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 362.

A red-maroon vertical field symmetrically bisected by a narrow 'zip'. Newman used the term 'zip' preferring it to 'band' "...as it connoted activity rather than a motionless state of being". [ibid. p.362].

"The device would become the trademark of all his work to come. With it, he suspended a painting's traditional opposition of figure and ground and created an enveloping experience of color in which the viewer herself, physically and emotionally, is invoked by the zip - gestured to as a being filled with the original spark of life..." Available at: <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-newman-barnett.htm> [Accessed: 18 June 2018].



Mark Tobey (1949) **Universal field**. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. [Tempera and pastel on cardboard]. Available at: <https://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/859> [Accessed: 18 June 2018].

This is an example of Tobey's powerful way of 'white writing' painting style "...which concentrates on a few expressional means. His style of 'gesturalism' evolved in complementary contrast to the emotive action paintings of Pollock and others." In: Januszczak, W. (1997) **Techniques of the great masters of art**. New York: Chartwell Books Inc., p.441.



Franz Kline (1950) ***Clock face***. [Oil paint on canvas] In:
Januszczak, W. (1997) ***Techniques of the great masters
of art***. New York: Chartwell Books Inc., pp.446-447.

"By the late 1940's and early 1950's, [Kline's] abstraction evolved into a gesturalist freedom of paint handling and brushstroke, as well as a certain eastern quality of calligraphy. ... Clock Face ... is a canvas of tremendous boldness with its strong black strokes against a white background. Kline reduced his palette to black and white, and this, combined with his dramatic and enormous brushstrokes, conveyed a sense of the alienation and violence characteristic of the contemporary American city." [ibid. p.447].

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