

JACKSON POLLOCK Guggenheim Application (1947)

I intend to paint large movable pictures which will function between the easel and mural. I have set a precedent in this genre in a large painting for Miss Peggy Guggenheim which was installed in her house and was later shown in the "Large Scale Painting" show at the Museum of Modern Art. It is at present at Yale University.

I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural. I believe the time is not yet ripe for a full transition from easel to mural. The pictures I contemplate painting would constitute a halfway state, an attempt to point out the direction of the future, without arriving there completely.

Interview with William Wright (1950)

WILLIAM WRIGHT: Mr. Pollock, in your opinion, what is the meaning of modern art?

JACKSON POLLOCK: Modern art to me is nothing more than the expression of contemporary aims of the age that we're living in.

ww: Did the classical artists have any means of expressing their age?

jp: Yes, they did it very well. All cultures have had means and techniques of expressing their immediate aims—the Chinese, the Renaissance, all cultures. The thing that interests me is that today painters do not have to go to a subject matter outside of themselves. Most modern painters work from a different source. They work from within.

ww: Would you say that the modern artist has more or less isolated the quality which made the classical works of art valuable, that he's isolated it and uses it in a purer form?

jp: Ah—the good ones have, yes.

ww: Mr. Pollock, there's been a good deal of controversy and a great many comments have been made regarding your method of painting. Is there something you'd like to tell us about that?

jp: My opinion is that new needs need new techniques. And the modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements. It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own technique.

ww: Which would also mean that the layman and the critic would have to develop their ability to interpret the new techniques.

jp: Yes—that always somehow follows. I mean, the strangeness will wear off and I think we will discover the deeper meanings in modern art.

\* Jackson Pollock, excerpt from application for Solomon R. Guggenheim Fellowship (1947), quoted in Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, eds., *Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné 4* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 238.

\*\* Jackson Pollock, excerpts from an interview with William Wright (1958), in Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, eds., *Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné 4* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 248–51. This interview was conducted for a radio program by Wright, Pollock's neighbor in East Hampton. It was broadcast only one time on radio station WERI, Westerly, Rhode Island, in 1951.



*Jackson Pollock painting Number 32, Springs, Long Island, 1950.*

ww: I suppose every time you are approached by a layman they ask you how they should look at a Pollock painting, or any other modern painting—what they look for—how do they learn to appreciate modern art?

JP: I think they should not look for, but look passively—and try to receive what the painting has to offer and not bring a subject matter or preconceived idea of what they are to be looking for.

ww: Would it be true to say that the artist is painting from the unconscious, and the—  
canvas must act as the unconscious of the person who views it?

jp: Most of the paint I use is a liquid, flowing kind of paint. The brushes I use are used  
more as sticks rather than brushes—the brush doesn't touch the surface of the canvas, it's  
just above.

ww: Would it be possible for you to explain the advantage of using a stick with paint—  
liquid paint rather than a brush on canvas?

jp: Well, I'm able to be more free and to have greater freedom and move about the  
canvas, with greater ease.

ww: Well, isn't it more difficult to control than a brush? I mean, isn't there more a  
possibility of getting too much paint or splattering or any number of things? Using a brush,  
you put the paint right where you want it and you know exactly what it's going to look  
like.

jp: No, I don't think so . . . with experience—it seems to be possible to control the  
flow of the paint, to a great extent, and I don't use—I don't use the accident—'cause I  
deny the accident.

ww: I believe it was Freud who said there's no such thing as an accident. Is that what  
you mean?

jp: I suppose that's generally what I mean.

ww: Then, you don't actually have a preconceived image of a canvas in your mind?

jp: Well, not exactly—no—because it hasn't been created, you see. Something new—  
it's quite different from working, say, from a still life where you set up objects and work di-  
rectly from them. I do have a general notion of what I'm about and what the results will be.

ww: That does away, entirely, with all preliminary sketches?

jp: Yes, I approach painting in the same sense as one approaches drawing: that is, it's  
direct. I don't work from drawings, I don't make sketches and drawings and color sketches  
into a final painting. Painting, I think, today—the more immediate, the more direct—the  
greater the possibilities of making a direct—of making a statement. . . .

ww: Well, now, Mr. Pollock, would you care to comment on modern painting as a  
whole? What is your feeling about your contemporaries?

jp: Well, painting today certainly seems very vibrant, very alive, very exciting. Five or  
six of my contemporaries around New York are doing very vital work, and the direction  
that painting seems to be taking.

#### BARNETT NEWMAN The Plasmic Image (1943–45)

The subject matter of creation is chaos. The present feeling seems to be that  
the artist is concerned with form, color and spatial arrangement. This objective approach  
to art reduces it to a kind of ornament. The whole attitude of abstract painting, for ex-  
ample, has been such that it has reduced painting to an ornamental art whereby the picture

\* Barnett Newman, excerpts from "The Plasmic Image" (1943–45), pt. 1 of Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman*  
(New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 22–24.