

DEALERS-EYE VIEW

Leading gallery directors give their views on trends in American Art

CHARLOTTE WILLARD

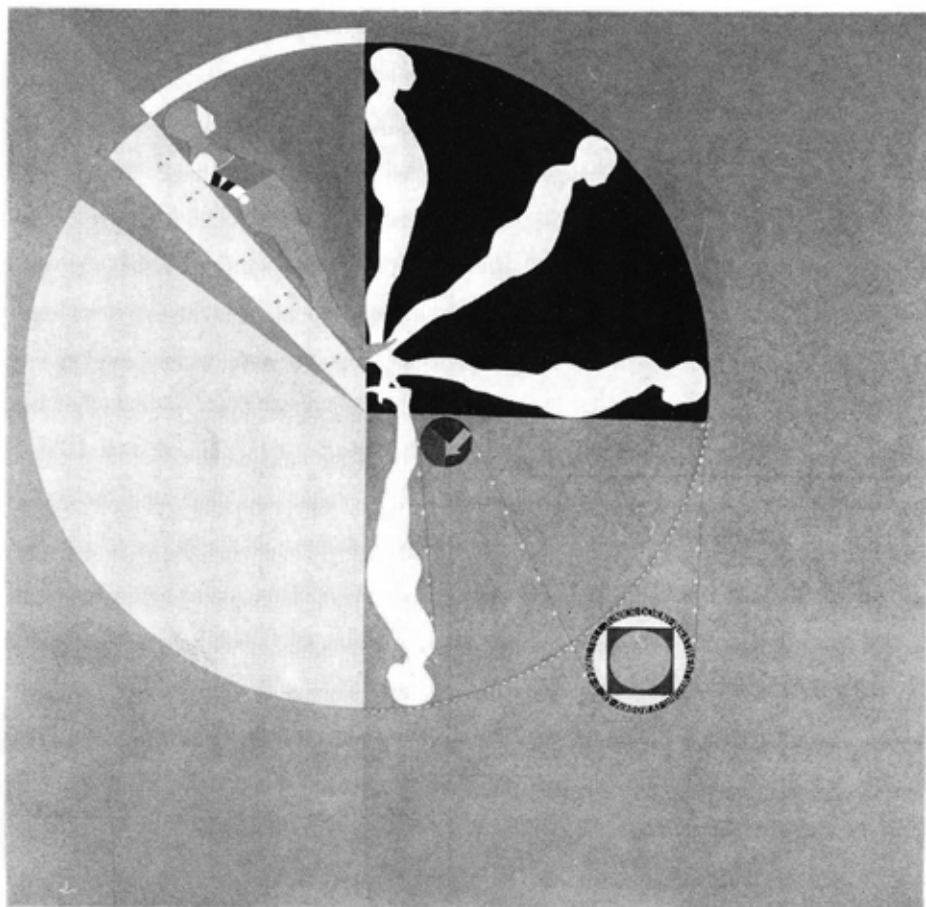
The "seeping stain" school, dazzle effects, pop art, symbolism, surrealism, precisionism, realism: these have been some of the strong currents turbulating the surface of art. What is happening in the depths? Is abstract expressionism through? What kind of figure image are we "returning to"? That of Boticelli or of Bacon? Will the painting

CHARLOTTE WILLARD, who writes for *Look* magazine, is a critic and lecturer on contemporary art.

that records the struggle between the artist and his materials spawn new titans? Does the wave of the future lie with the theoreticians of color and space? Will artists pursue further their voyages of pure inquiry into the realms of science that have become part of our everyday life? Will sculpture continue to be perishable, or even destroy itself—or are young artists reaching for permanence? To forecast the future of any activity as organically irrational as art is a form of

organized madness. We can perhaps analyze the Now and consider what forces are being set into motion that may produce the Then. Art trends, like everything else, are rooted in life.

There are several attitudes among art dealers in New York on the subject of Trends. Some believe in trends wholeheartedly. Others feel they should be noted but not be allowed to dim the evaluation of individual talents. Then there are those who don't believe in trends at all but put



Ernest Trova: Falling Man Series.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Diker, courtesy Pace Gallery.
Where pop art moves into surrealism.



Sheldon Machlin: Occulting Red, Bertha Schaefer Gallery.
An aspect of pop art that seems to be following the path of light.

their faith only in the personal statement of the artist.

There seems to be general agreement that abstract expressionism as a germinating force has come to an end though there are still some great paintings being produced in this idiom. It is also agreed that it has left its mark on almost every new art form from the neo-dada to the California school and the "monster" paintings of Francis Bacon and his descendants. All new movements seem to be related to abstract expressionism, or are reaction to it; here all agreement ends.

Among the two dozen trend watchers who contributed to this discussion are talented talent

scouts like Dick Bellamy of the Green Gallery, a relatively recent arrival on the scene, and such veteran directors as Eleanor Ward of the Stable, Leo Castelli, Sidney Janis, George Staempfli, Betty Parsons, and Martha Jackson. All of these, except Staempfli and Betty Parsons, have at various times shown pop artists who are the scandal or the delight of the art world depending on where you sit.

"Canned soups, movie queens"

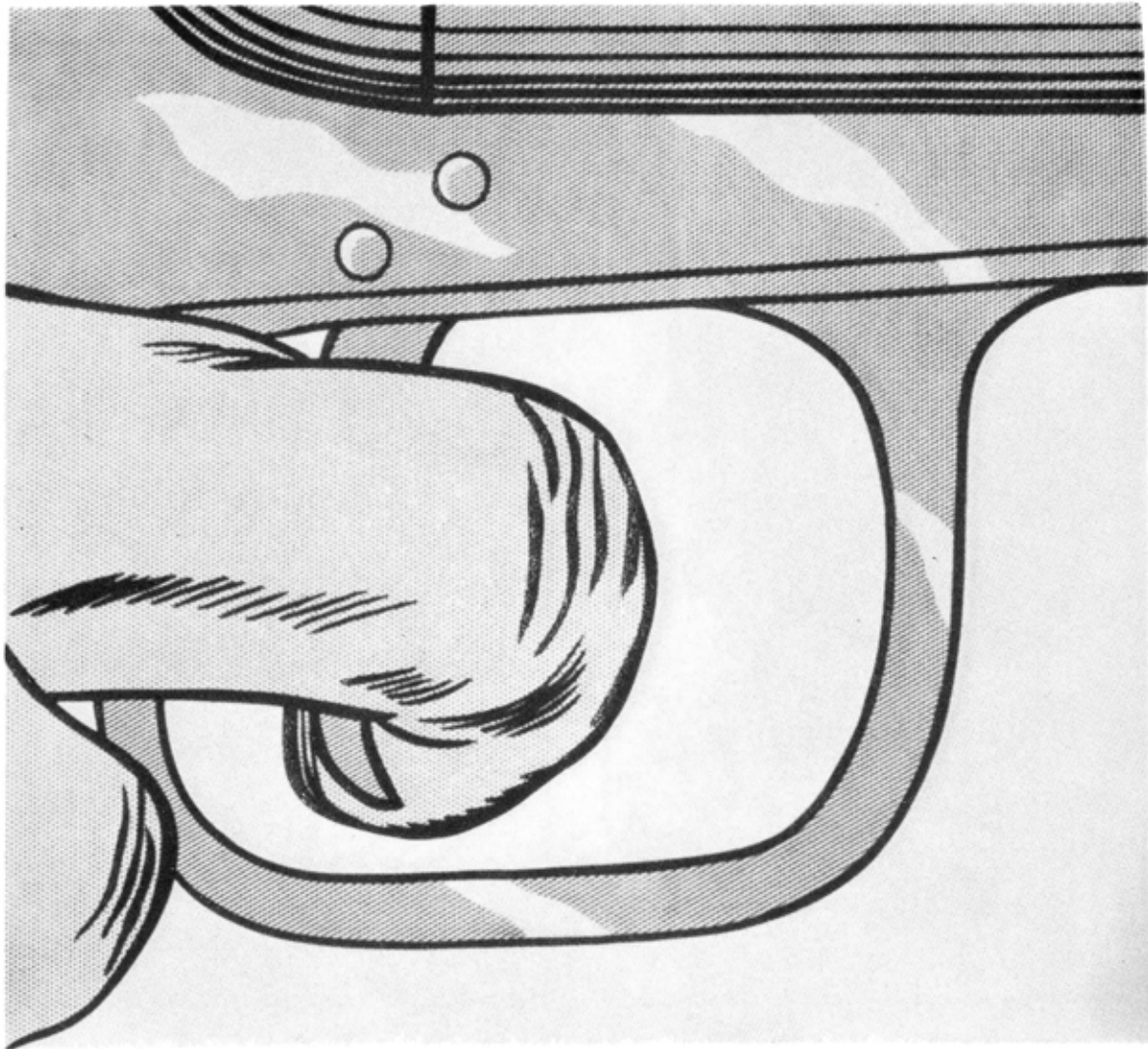
Pop art—or to give the movement its more formal title of "new realism"—refers, as we all know, to those paintings and sculptures which have as their subject (and they do have sub-

jects) the popular merchandise of our mass-produced computer civilization. These are canned soups, movie queens, front-page love and death, hamburgers, advertising signs, plus such refinements of our daily life as national symbols, fashion figures, plumbing fixtures and neckties.

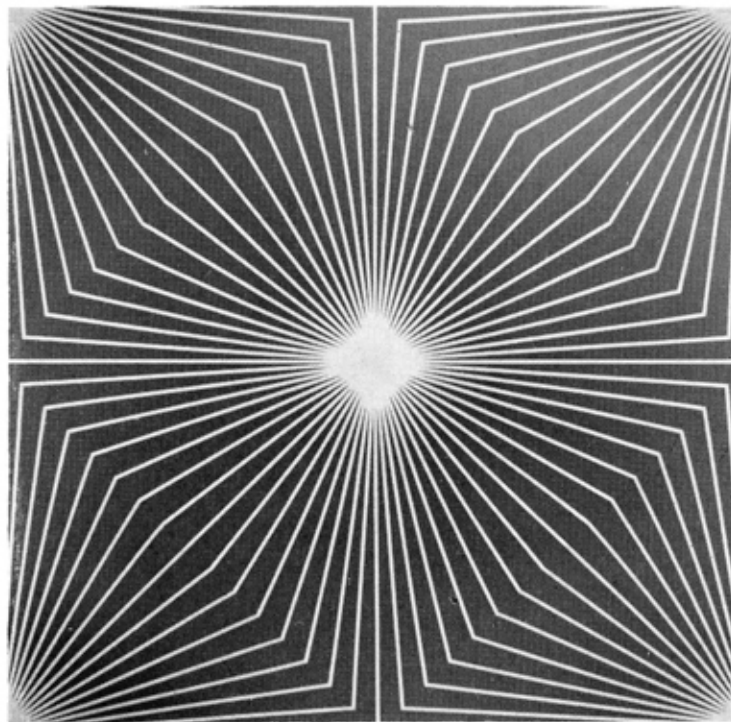
"The most creative work to be done since that of the great generation of abstract expressionists," says Sidney Janis, "is to be found among the new realists. These artists, although very young, are full of fresh and inventive ideas and are doing the most provocative work. While a great number of artists are engaged in this kind of imagery,

only a few really make it." Recently the Janis Gallery gave a full-scale show to the works of Dine, Rosenquist, Oldenburg and Segal.

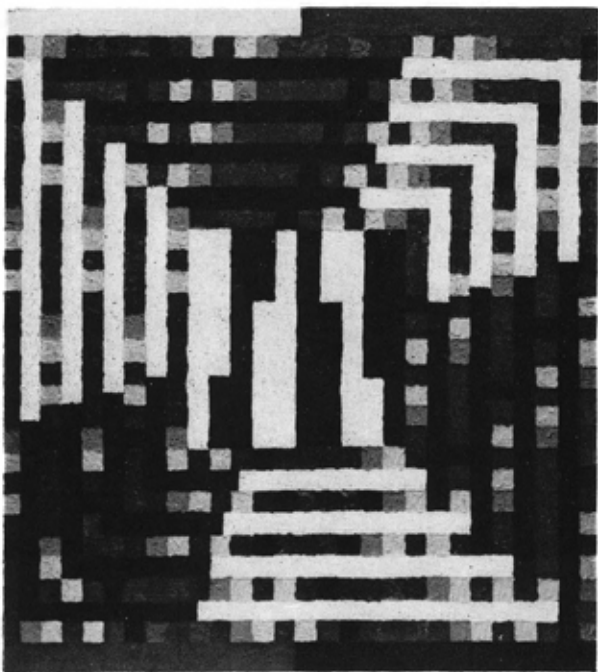
Of pop art, Dick Bellamy says: "It is concerned with no usual kind of passion or ornamentation of painting. It is a counter-esthetic to abstract expressionism. Basically depersonalized, anonymous, objective, it is opposed to the introspective private view of the world, the over-emotional premise of abstract expressionism. This movement was so total it gave the young artist nowhere to go but away. He was forced to make a different kind of visual representation out of his sensations."



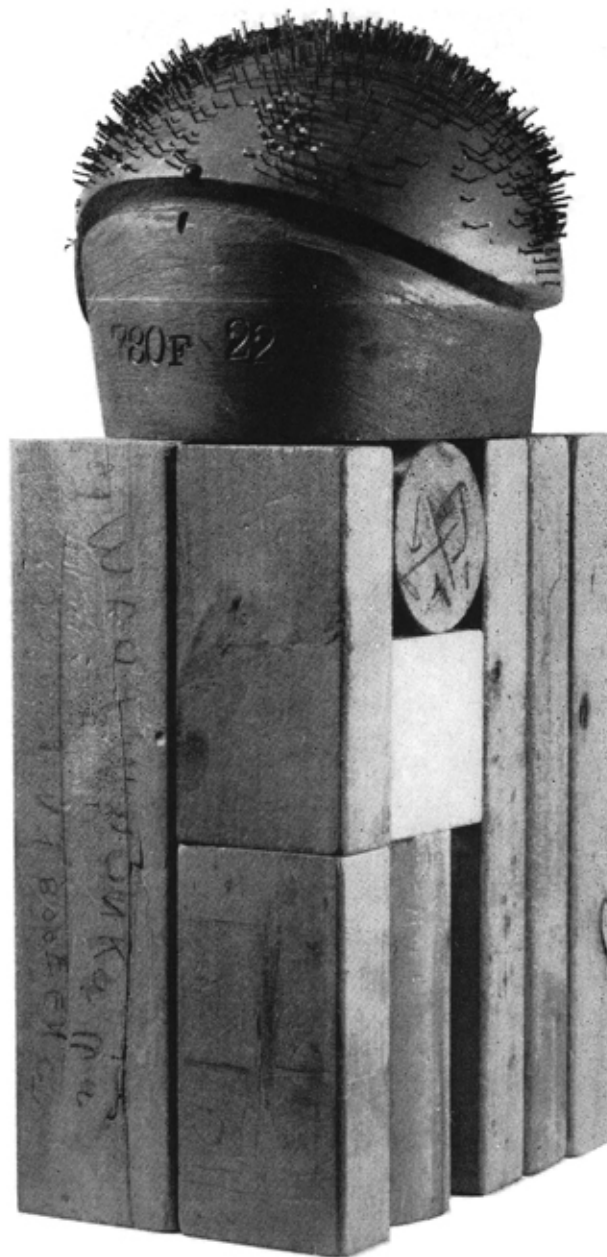
Roy Lichtenstein: Trigger, Leo Castelli Gallery.
The pop artist, revising realism with a new impact of scale.



Richard Anuszkiewicz: Inner and Center World, The Contemporaries.
The dazzle trend which introduces new visual experiences.



Alfred Jensen: *The Birth of the Triglyph*, Graham Gallery.
Collection of Jerome Goodman.
Geometry evolving toward pop.



Varujan Boghosian: *Orpheus*, Stable Gallery.
Surrealism with grim overtones in a wood sculpture.



Richard tum Suden; *Smiling Tapeworm*, Tibor de Nagy Gallery.
A new kind of figure painting—hard edge and brilliant flat color.

Robert Graham, director of the Graham Gallery, has found that, curiously enough, Alfred Jensen—whose geometric designs and deep interest in Greek architecture are a long ways removed from the eccentricities of pop art

—has been called “the pope” by pop artists. They admire his technical skill, draughtsmanship, free-wheeling color and impasto—and flock to the Jensen shows. He was named an Art in America “New Talent” artist in 1960.

Leo Castelli regards pop art as a re-introduction of the image and an outward view of the world. This he believes is reported with humor, irony, but represents no great gripe with the way things are. Eleanor Ward feels that while pop art is a reaction against abstract expressionism and marks the return to the object, one must not miss its surrealist overtones, a trend which Stankiewicz foreshadowed years ago.

A newcomer from Boston, Arnold Glimcher of the Pace Gallery, thinks that the surrealist overtones of pop art are already manifest in the work of such painters as Ernest Trova. Impersonal, detached, Trova has the anonymous brush of the pop artists and his figures are as un-human as theirs. But some mys-

terious dimension is added. His armless puppets with the will-less flaccid shapes of delayed adolescence, who are always falling downward, are in some curious way reminiscent of Leonardo's diagrammatic study of man . . . and somewhat horrifying.

Foreboding times?

There are more grim portents today than in the earlier wave of surrealism here and in Europe. There are no coy images now—no fur-lined teacups, no melting watches. The symbolism of pop art deals with the profound crises of our times. In effect pop art is at once patricide—a tradition with a long and respectable history—and a portrait of our time.

That part of the movement is a purely esthetic response to our

supermarket, industrial environment, is undoubtedly true. Dine, Jasper Johns, Oldenburg, Chamberlain, Thiebaud are a few of the names that come to mind. It is a wholly legitimate area of exploration. Why shouldn't a painter fall in love with a beer can or a display of lingerie, colorful smashed cars, or chocolate cream pies? Even a comforting nostalgia for soap dishes and chrome faucets is permissible. Such painters merely insist that we look at the thing itself—the object—as though we just zoomed in from Mars and had never in our most imaginative wild dreams seen a strawberry soda or a car dump.

Pop art serves to express a feeling we all have, the wish to reassure ourselves that we really exist. We cling to our overcoats, our saws, comics, pies, to retrieve us from oblivion, from the bomb—from scientific theories that prove we are waves of probability—from our own subconscious.

A pop artist said, "What you can see, touch, taste and smell has reality. The rest is intellectual, sticky sensibility."

A piece of sculpture which is a blue stool with a white glove on the seat, tells us that it is what it is, a product of our industrial machine, a thing, anonymous, without nuances of tone or refined details. It demonstrates Gertrude Stein's by-now cliché—a rose is a rose is a rose.

This brings us to an aspect of pop art where purely esthetic considerations are subservient to a message—intended or otherwise. This message in large measure is the meaninglessness of meaning: the replacement of the despair of Sartre with its implications of hope with Beckett's total negation and absurdity of hope; a blanket indictment of Western humanist philosophy.

Television, picture newspapers and magazines have made us front-row witnesses to the self-immolation of Buddhist monks,

OLD AND MODERN PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

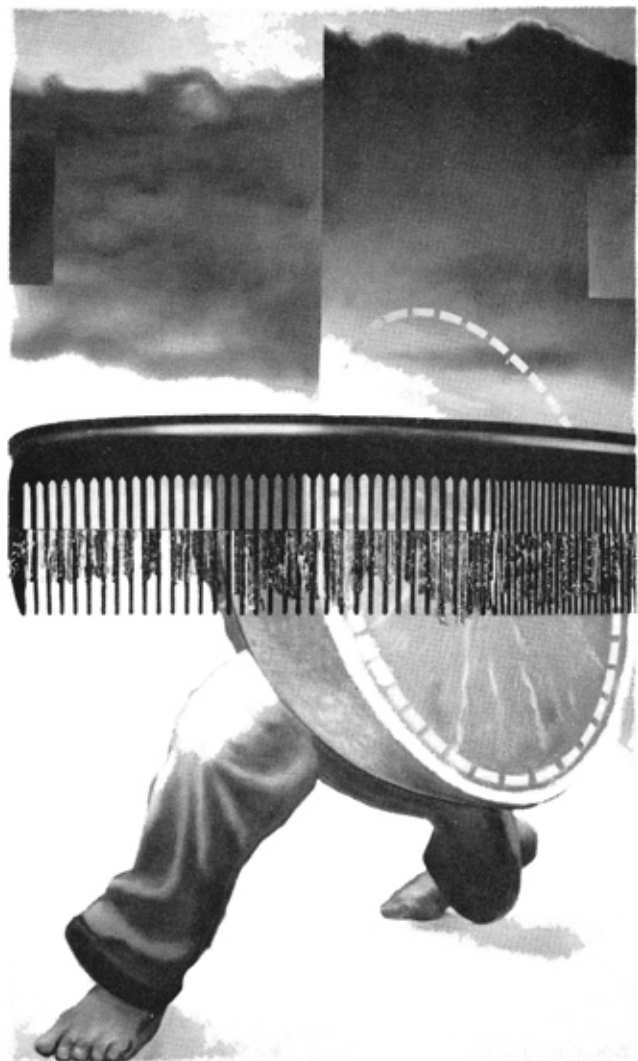


THOMAS MORAN "Sinbad & The ROC" 17¼" x 27¼"

M. R. SCHWEITZER

958 MADISON AVENUE LE 5-5430

Fine Art Appraisals



James Rosenquist: Early in the Morning.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull, courtesy Green Gallery.

Transcending its subject-matter, pop art merges with symbolism.

BORGENICHT GALLERY, INC.

1018 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK 21

AVERY	KAHN
BASKIN	KRAUSE
BOLOTOWSKY	LUGINBUHL
BURLIN	LUND
CORBETT	LYTLE
DE RIVERA	PETERDI
ERNST	ROTH
GORDIN	SANTOMASO
GUSSOW	WEINBERG
IPPOLITO	ZOGBAUM

on any white surface on which you may focus your eyes.

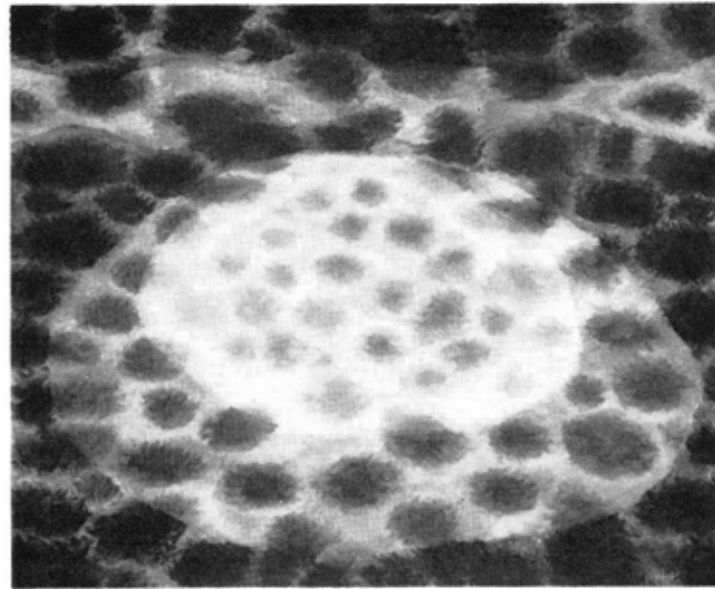
Anuszkiewicz, a student of Albers, is representative of the group. "The current emphasis on geometrical abstraction and optical experiments and their solutions can be more correctly seen, not as a 'return' to order but related to the demise of abstract expressionism," says Karl Lunde of *The Contemporaries*.

While somewhat reminiscent of visual perception tests, this body of work does produce sensitive visual experiences and prods us into new areas of awareness. Although he would probably shy away from identification with this effort, Ad Reinhardt in a sense belongs to this movement.

Though his mysterious canvases do not bedazzle our eyes, they do call upon our sluggish perceptions to discern the subtle nuances of the dark environment into which he draws us.

Precisionism and people

Still another reaction against abstract expressionism is the group of hard-edge painters. Prominent in this school, which has been strongly presented by Betty Parsons, are Leon Smith, Ellsworth Kelley, Alexander Liberman, Jack Youngerman. In the work of Smith particularly, one is confronted with the exploration of the relationships between the positive and the negative forms created by sharply-defined



Tadashi Sato: *Submerged Rocks #7*.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John Poteat, courtesy Willard Gallery.
Intuitively sensed metaphors of reality.

areas of color. The shifting and ambiguous shapes that emerge are like highly-charged magnetic fields whose forces are kept in precarious balance. It is this tenuous equilibrium that gives these paintings a compressed power and a dynamic sense of suspense.

Regarding other important trends, Betty Parsons had this to say: "I sense a definite movement toward a liberated visual world. Perhaps I might best characterize this period as involved with a sense of play. Pop art is another example of this spirit and so are the experiments with sound and movement. Another trend which is most pervasive is the expansion of techniques and media. This is particularly evident in sculpture, so long restricted in size and scope, which again seems to be returning to the monumental."

On the topic of the return to an interest in people as subject-matter, George Staempfli and Martha Jackson share the opinion that the figure is re-appearing, but it is a totally new figure. Certainly we are not returning to Renaissance or Greek ideas—nor even to Picasso's classic forms. The portrait of today's man has nothing to do with these concepts. For Staempfli, the people of Diebenkorn, Bischoff, Joan Brown and Manuel Neri, who owe much to abstract expressionism, represent the new vision of man. He considers pop art a transitional movement to a new kind of realism. "The pendulum

is swinging rather erratically these days and will work in the direction of this California group." For Mrs. Jackson the grotesques of Bob Thompson, the aborigines of Beauchamp, the calligraphic figures of Lester Johnson, like half-obliterated scrawls on public walls, come near to today's truths. Francis Bacon and his monster people she feels will also breed many descendants.

Sculpture in the lead

On the subject of sculpture, both George Staempfli and his associate, Philip Bruno, think that this art form is producing more notable work than painting, more exciting, more personal. They are confident that the work of the contemporary stonemason symbolizes a trend toward sculpture that is permanent, that is meant to survive. A solidifying process is taking place and even pop art is on the fringe of it. "If you do a bus driver in plaster, it won't be long before you cast him in bronze. Manuel Neri has recently begun to cast his marvelous plaster figures in aluminum. The process of gluing something together was a while ago considered as significant as the final product. A trend is toward emphasis on the work itself rather than on the dramatic gesture."

Everett Ellin of Marlborough-Gerson Gallery takes a neutral position on trends. He feels that there are today no large movements. There is a better possi-



Claes Oldenburg: *Flag Fragment*.
Collection of Robert Rublowsky, courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery.
Fresh and inventive ideas and provocative work.



Andrew Wyeth: *A Day at the Fair, Knoedler*.
The artist as individual genius in the realist tradition.



Joan Brown: Noel with Dog and Clouds, Staempfli Gallery.
The California vision of the figure in a setting.

bility than ever of a painter making his own niche with a purely personal style. He does not have to jump on any bandwagon. As for pop art, Mr. Ellin feels that it is an art dependent on commonplace subject-matter and that by choice the artist refuses to transcend his subject-matter. "Few painters can dislocate the common object to make a metaphysical statement—Johns and Rauchenberg being among the exceptions. Much pop art takes an object and changes its scale. Like a billboard, it packs tremendous wallop for about ten seconds but has no staying power. A picture has to stand the test of repetitive viewing."

About peripheral trends—Ellin believes that the concern with the surface evidenced by the permeating-stain way of painting is one trend of interest. He also believes that many young painters are interested in the field of pure scientific inquiry—new notions of space and of light. "Artists are working in the area of science because science has entered everyday life."

There still remains a group of

gallery directors who are firmly anti-trend. Of this group, John Myers of Tibor de Nagy, Coe Kerr of Knoedler and Marion Willard are forceful spokesmen.

Must there be a horserace?

"I'm against trends," said John Myers. "I don't believe in history. To me talent is the energy that carries conviction and it can appear anywhere at any time. I believe in allowing the psyche and the soul to receive the best influences whether it is from a Tintoretto, Red Grooms, or whatever. Cézanne is so great because he was able to put so much reality into one painting, *Mont St. Victoire*, for instance; it is incredible how many aspects of it he condensed to make a landscape into art. He put down the truth. I believe that art should expand our view of life and the world. I would like to see galleries avoid the horserace competitive thing. Why must there be a horserace?"

For Coe Kerr of Knoedler, no trend is as important as the work of such as Andrew Wyeth. His interest is the individual from

the point of view of quality only.

Marion Willard agrees with this point of view to a great extent. "The quiet growth that the creative process needs, today seems to be trampled under foot in the rush to be first and to be new. I'm interested in the personal, intimate, creative aspects of art as against the popularization and merchandising of art."

Unlike the Knoedler group the artists in Mrs. Willard's gallery seem to have an esthetic connection. Painters like Tadashi Sato, John Koenig, Mark Tobey, John Heliker, have in common an understated, serene expression, a Haiku sensibility. It is somewhat like the aerial essence of a Mozart concerto as opposed to the baroque blasts of a Wagnerian opera. Two of her sculptors, David Hayes and Philip McCracken, though concerned with different subjects and points of view, both work in what might be called intuitively-sensed metaphors of reality.

Pierre Matisse has a balanced view of trends—which in effect sums up much of this report: "What are the new directions? Who knows? Trends are something in the air. Some feel it sooner than others. Of course what is in the air does not always remain. There have always been oscillations in the art world. From fauves to cubists, futurists, surrealists, dadaists. All of them were right. At the time they appeared the art dealers were accused of going from this to that; of supporting fads and looking for shock effects.

"Trends are usually estab-

lished by a group of young artists who are very close to each other. After they crystallize their concepts there is a dispersal. The group becomes individuals, and the further they go in their self-searching the deeper and slower is their progress. Their work, however, establishes the character of their generation which always wants to say something of what the older generation has said but they want to say it differently. For example, Dubuffet cleared the decks for new expression.

"Today the emerging trend is neo-dada and pop art. It is a way to get out of the past, it is a shock treatment. The artists are opening windows to get breathing space. What they will do with it is another question. Méret Oppenheim created the fur-lined teacup and set the symbol for the dadaists. It had a tremendous shock value but nothing has come from this particular artist since.

"Artists always need opposition. They have to break down walls. A painter has to express himself with almost violent compulsion, like a man who is starved for a week, sees a piece of bread and grabs it.

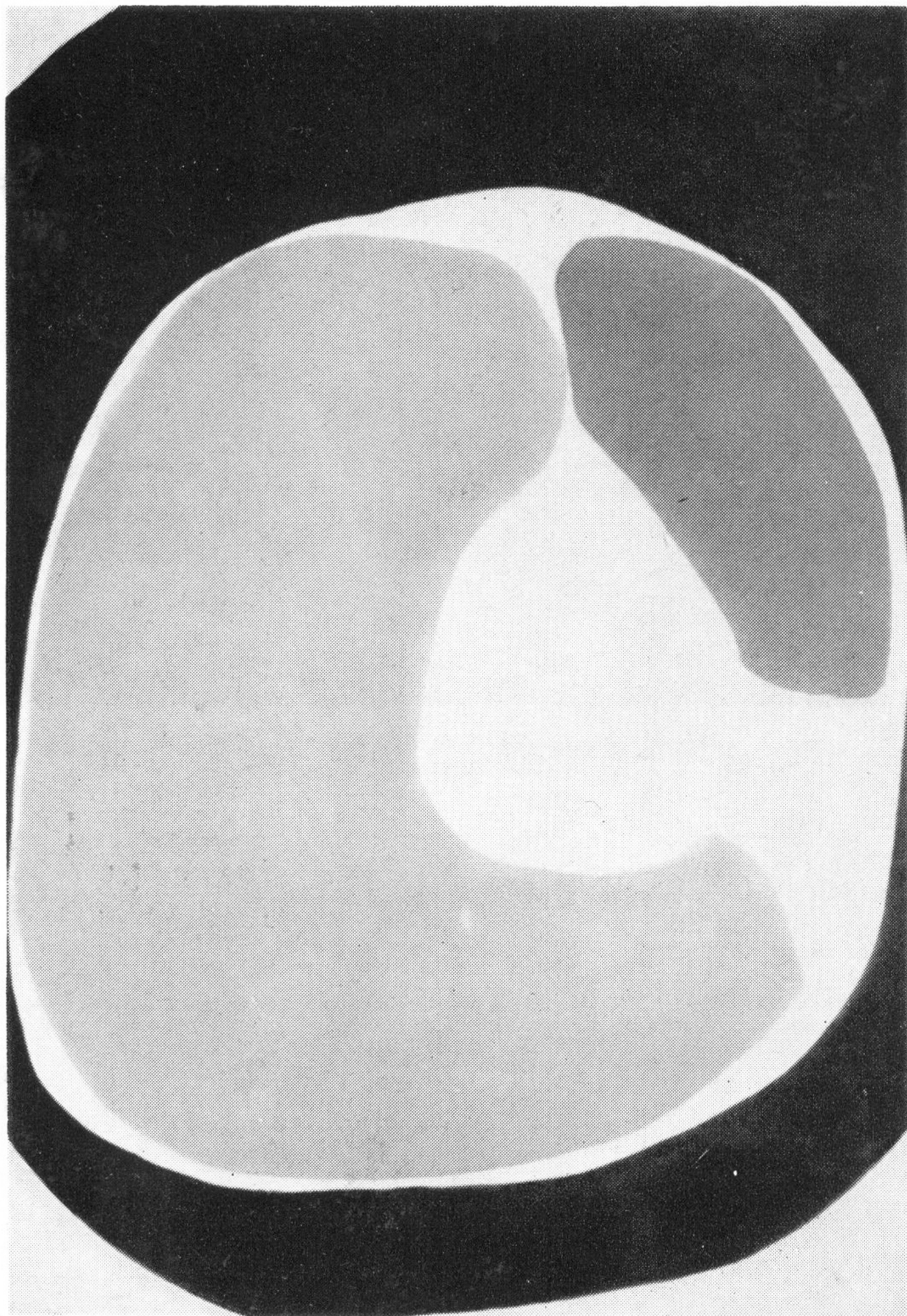
"When an artist has something to say, he does what he must do; a good artist cannot do differently. Giacometti says about his figures, 'Sometimes I try to make them fat, but they always end up thin.'

"What difference does it make if a trend goes to the right or to the left? It is disastrous only if it stagnates in the middle."



Red Grooms: Moonlight.

Collection of Edward Plunkett, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery.
Almost an art nouveau aspect of pop art and a very personal statement.



Jules Olitski: Golubchik Purple, Poindexter Gallery.

The "seeping stain" trend.



Bob Thompson: Spinning, Spinning, Turning, Directing.
Martha Jackson Gallery.

A variation of the "figure" to which we are "returning."

beaten Freedom riders, dismembered bodies on holiday highways, and conferences on "overkill" where people are referred to as personnel. Pop artists picking up such themes seem to say, "Buddy get used to this. This is how things are, how they really are." In the tradition of cool cats they don't want to admit any feelings because they don't know if they can stand it. That is why they depersonalize the human being until it looks like an object with replaceable parts, why much of their world is peopled with monsters and haunted with nightmares: why pop artists seem inevitably headed toward surrealism and symbolism.

While the artists claim social and personal detachment, their work contradicts them. When Indiana was asked to contribute a painting to the Bertrand Russell peace movement, he sent a sign reading, "Yield Brother." The pictures, constructions and sculpture of pop art have their own shattering language.

Knowledgeable trend watchers, however, emphasize other trends besides pop art—one particularly that developed side by

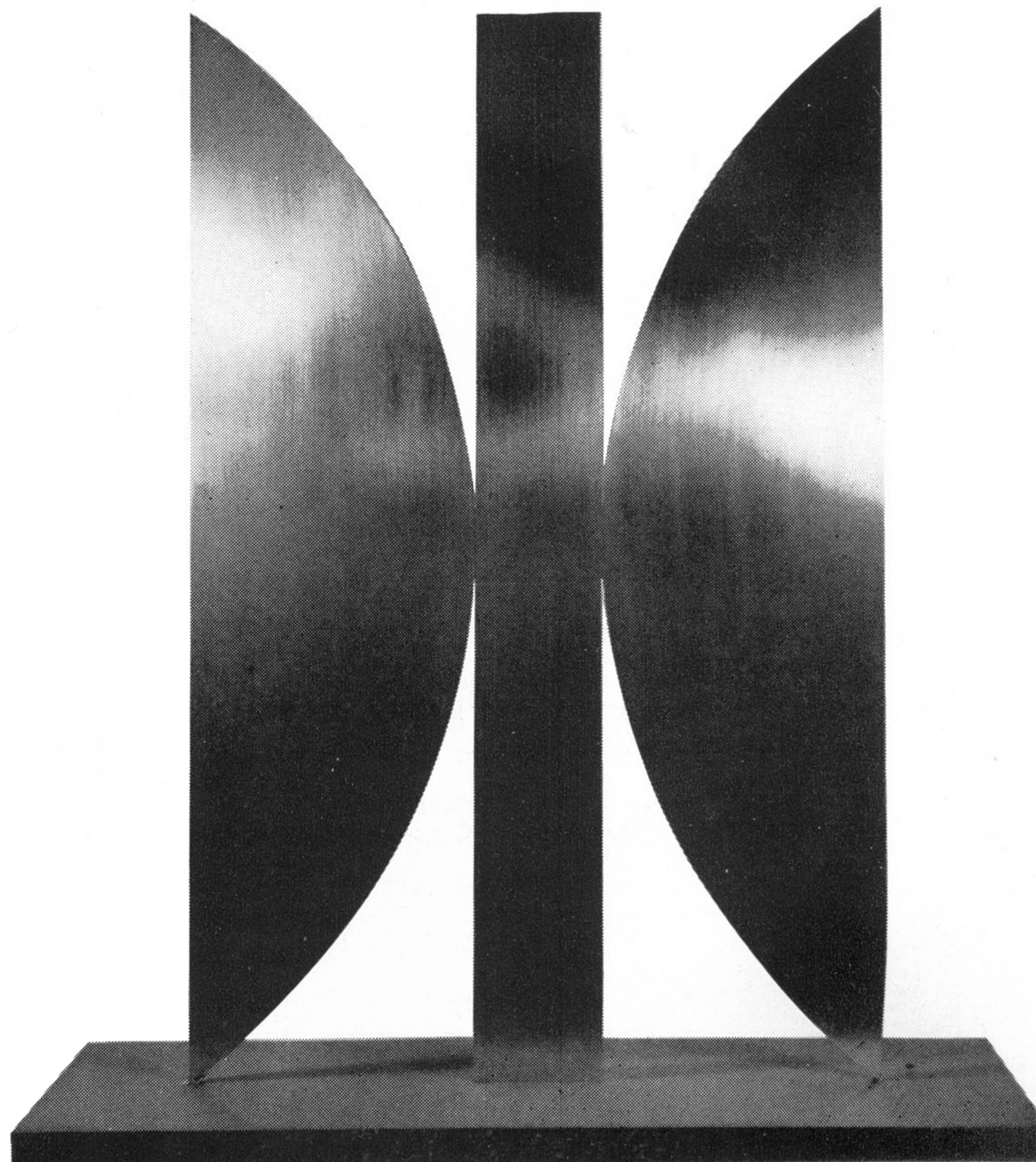
side with abstract expressionism, pioneered by artists like Albers and Rothko. Their involvement is and was with the nature of light and color relationships and their descendants are legion. The most important are a group of artists who apply thin paint to raw canvas and allow the colors to permeate it in such a way that their images seem to seep out of the canvas rather than to be painted on it. Motherwell and Frankenthaler have used this technique but have not made it their main statement. Such men as Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis and particularly Jules Olitski have. The diffused ephemeral quality of color achieved by this means has a feeling of still being in the process of becoming . . . as if the color, creeping like trickles of water on parched earth were still moving and taking shape before our eyes. The best of their work evokes a feeling of a floating radiance, misted and fleeting, palpitating with life. Artists like Dzubas as well as the radical geometric Stella are also related to this movement.

For Bertha Schaefer, the illumination achieved by color in

painting and light in sculpture is particularly significant. Sheldon Machlin, a young experimenter in this area, has used light to get added dimensions of force and form for his outer-space towers and robot masks. Sempere, a sculptor whose new work Miss Schaefer will show in April, offers us mysterious boxes with lights in front, back and inside, which can be alternated to change the focus and forms and bring an element of motion and changing color to his work.

Another offshoot of the Albers-Rothko complex are the painters who have gone far beyond the study of pure-color relationships and have invented the exciting dazzle effect.

Such paintings produce in the eye, color and form in movement. Through special color relationships, geometric patterns and spots the images of the paintings seem to dance before our eyes. These "dazzle" canvases also leave an after-image which appears, in complementary colors,



Alexander Liberman: Sigma II, Betty Parsons Gallery.

The hard-edge movement, translated into sculpture.