

"Energy and motion made visible - memories arrested in space" was Pollock's simple but revealing note that paraphrases the 1947-50 works and behind it stretches a tradition of seizing the transient that had flourished especially well in America. Edward Muybridge's famous images of frozen motion provided one early version of it from the 1880s and when the poet Hart Crane wrote in 1923 about Steglitz's photographs, he might have been describing No. 14, 1948 or the Modern's One (No. 31, 1950).

Speed is at the bottom of it all, the hundredth of a second caught so precisely that the motion continued from the picture indefinitely: the moment made eternal

he might

those linear maelstroms also contain something from Pollock's slightly naive understanding of the modern eye as epitomized by "the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio" (1950) in short, instantaneity and speeding words.

No it is trivial to say that the spirit of the 1945 photograph of the skater tracing her movements in luminous lines adumbrates Pollock since he was far from aloof towards an American popular culture of the 1930s and 1940s - think of its design aesthetic - that equated modernity with directness, dynamism, transparency and great sweeping lines.

Sensitive as ever, on the other hand, to the mechanics of fine art, he probably realized too that Kramer's style by 1946 was more prescient than this in one notable respect. From Mondrian's plus-and-minus compositions she had learnt to splinter her rhythms into fragmentary touches spread with almost equal emphasis over a series entitled Little Images that began with such pictures as Noon (1947

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This "all-over" structure makes the little Images hypnotic in their own right and, given Pollock's collaboration with Kressner in 1947 on two mosaic tables that contained shards of numerous objects and substances, her audacity must be acknowledged behind the atomized quality that he attained

The consequences of Pollock's new methods were vast, his account of them in Possibilities lucid:

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. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc... because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.

To be in the work - approaching the canvas on the floor from all four sides - Pollock had to increase its size until N. 1A, 1948 met what he had envisaged in 1946 as a midway point between the easel picture and the mural. The "big picture" was in vogue then anyway: MOMA mounted an exhibition on this theme in 1947 (which included Pollock's 1943 mural) and Still in particular was already exploring the large format as a quarter of immediacy. Historically the mural has epic connotations whereas one convention of the easel work is an intimacy engendered by the artist's touch or standpoint.

The finest 1947-50 pictures retain both. Their deep technique enabled Pollock to expand his graphic talents to a magnitude that no pencil point, charcoal, etching needle or even brush-head could encompass.

This is part of its indexical excitement, a kinaesthesia where the paint skins endlessly switch course and kinetic strength so that the mind's eye telescopes back and forth from the vivid surfaces to relative features.

Pollock's emphasis on bodily gesture has spawned various theories and myths ranging from Rosenberg's "The American Action Painter"

essay (1952), which portrayed someone gripped by an almost mindless spontaneity, to recent claims that he was enacting a therapeutic ritual in the manner of a Navajo shaman. The truth is closer to hand. It was by then commonplace in New York artistic circles, as Matte recalled, to assume that direct gesturing was more powerful than verbal expression. Similar premises underlay both CRAIGSON's dance and the "method school of acting" that developed from around 1947 onwards.

Behind this extends a romantic assumption (immortalized in Yeats's line "how can we know the dancer from the dance?") according to which art that is truly physical has an organic life beyond words.

Secondly, the drip technique answered a need by co-ordinating thought, action, drawing and painting into a single process.

Pollock's unusual abstinence from alcohol during 1947-50 signalled this state of integration whose corollary was the disappearance of the figurative or archetypal imagery that he had otherwise never quite abandoned.

What happened to it remains debatable. Some initial drip paintings retain traces of that earlier feeble "life" under an altered guise. Thus "Full Fathom Five" (1947) adds emblems from the realm of normal experience - nails, buttons, cigarettes - embedded in its sea-green well. Thereafter "life" gravitates mostly to the webbed labyrinths themselves, though other types of signification occur such as the handprints that mark the apex of the upper reaches of No. 1A, 1948 and Lavender Part. Like the figural areas Pollock cut from the massonite ground of Out of the Web (1949), a composition perhaps otherwise headed for failure, this sudden emergence of recognizable phantasms in an abstract matrix is uncanny, as if further messages resided under the engulfing strands. They probably do not, yet the relentless layering does imply unfathomed mysteries or at least "pressures" lurking underneath the superstructure. So much here encourages a leap of imagination.