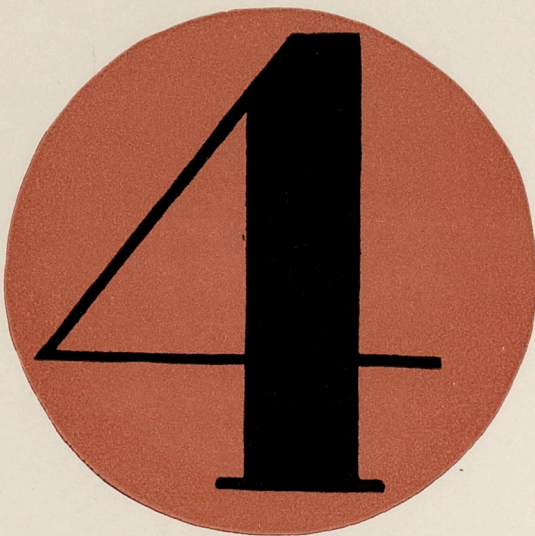


November 1935

AXIS

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY
"ABSTRACT" PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Editor: Myfanwy Evans



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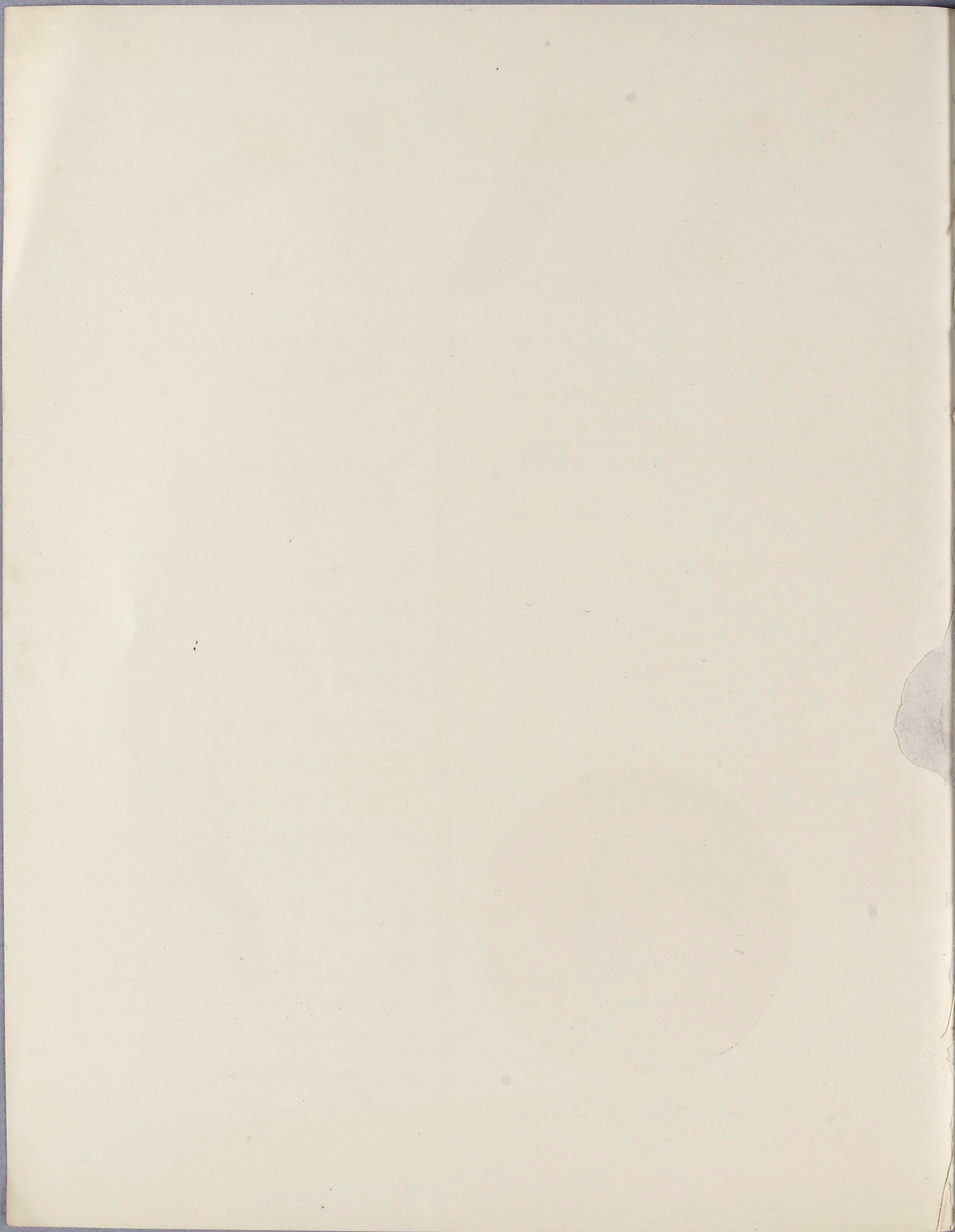
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CONTENTS

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<i>Mask, Vancouver Islands. (Collection Roland Penrose)</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	18
<i>Mask, Alaska. (Collection Ratton)</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	19
<i>Ben Nicholson. PAINTING. 1935</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20
<i>Arthur Jackson. PAINTING. 1935</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	22
<i>Barbara Hepworth. CARVING. 1935</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	22
<i>Winifred Dacre. GOUACHE. 1935</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	23
<i>Ivon Hitchens. PAINTING</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	23
<i>Henry Moore. DRAWING. 1935</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	25
<i>Picasso. ETCHING</i>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	29

Page

3

4

9

12

15

16

18

21

28

Page

ing 3

5

6

7

7

8

10

11

11

12

13

14

17

17

18

19

20

22

22

23

23

25

29



P 3

AXIS • No. 4 1935

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Jean Hélion</i>	HERBERT READ .. 3
<i>Hélion To-day : a personal comment</i>	MYFANWY EVANS .. 4
<i>The Gallery of Living Art</i>	GEORGE L. K. MORRIS .. 9
<i>John Piper, 1935</i>	HERTA WESCHER .. 12
<i>Piper and Abstract Possibilities</i>	HUGH GORDON PORTEUS 15
<i>A Coming International Exhibition</i>	 16
<i>Notes on the Ratton Exhibition, Paris</i>	ROLAND PENROSE .. 18
<i>London Shows</i>	{ J. M. RICHARDS .. } EILEEN HOLDING .. 21 and S. JOHN WOODS }
<i>New Books..</i>	 28

ILLUSTRATIONS

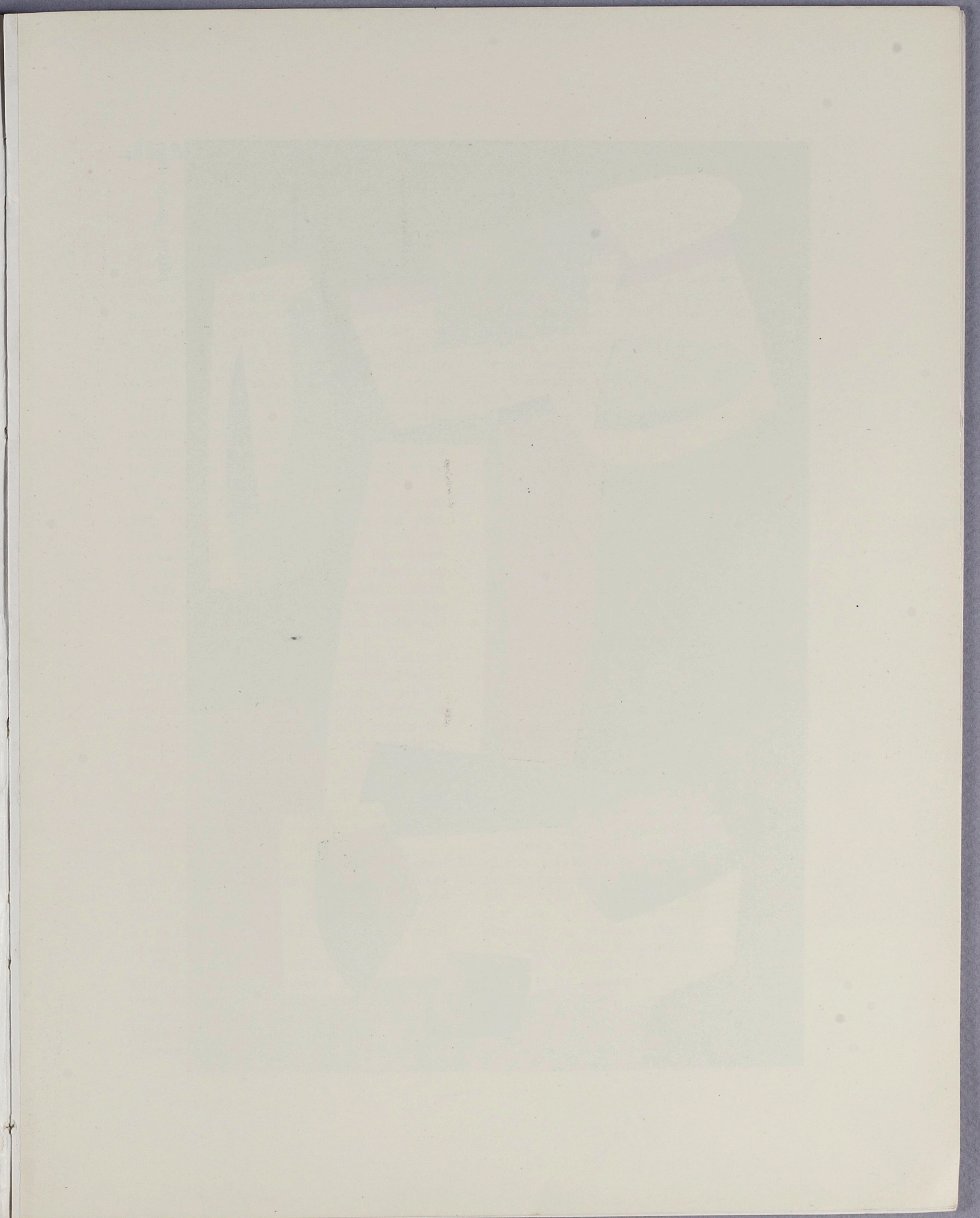
	Page
<i>Hélion. GOUACHE. 1935. (In colour)</i>	facing 3
<i>Hélion. PAINTING. 1935</i>	5
<i>Hélion. PAINTING. 1935. (Coll. Walter P. Chrysler)</i>	6
<i>Hélion. PAINTING. 1935</i>	7
<i>Hélion. PAINTING. 1935</i>	7
<i>Hélion. PAINTING. 1934. (Coll. Gallery of Living Art)..</i>	8
<i>Juan Gris. STILL LIFE. 1917. (Coll. Gallery of Living Art)</i>	10
<i>Paalen. PAINTING. 1934. (Gallery of Living Art)</i>	11
<i>Arp. CONFIGURATION. 1932. (Gallery of Living Art)</i>	11
<i>John Piper. DRAWING FOR PAINTING. 1935. (In Colour)..</i>	facing 12
<i>John Piper. CONSTRUCTION. 1934</i>	13
<i>John Piper. PAINTING. 1935</i>	14
<i>John Piper. PAINTING. 1935</i>	17
<i>John Piper. PAINTING. 1935</i>	17
<i>Mask, Vancouver Islands. (Collection Roland Penrose)</i>	18
<i>Mask, Alaska. (Collection Ratton)</i>	19
<i>Ben Nicholson. PAINTING. 1935</i>	20
<i>Arthur Jackson. PAINTING. 1935</i>	22
<i>Barbara Hepworth. CARVING. 1935..</i>	22
<i>Winifred Dacre. GOUACHE. 1935</i>	23
<i>Ivon Hitchens. PAINTING</i>	23
<i>Henry Moore. DRAWING. 1935</i>	25
<i>Picasso. ETCHING</i>	29



P 3

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HÉLION Gouache (1935)

JEAN HÉLION

It is commonly announced that Cubism is dead; and if by Cubism we mean that phase of modern painting which aimed at resolving the apparent surfaces of objects into a formal system of planes and angles, this is no doubt true. Art can never survive if it is limited to a formula: it must consistently develop and its continuity is, at least by analogy, organic.

But Cubism did not end in a formula: it grew into the wider movement of non-representative art which includes Cubism but which has become something profounder, something more fundamentally revolutionary. Cubism was a beginning and not an end—a revelation of unsuspected potentialities in an age of decadence and disintegration.

In the later stages of that development Jean Hélion has played a significant part. He is still a young painter, but from the beginning of his career his work has shown an intellectual coherence which makes him already seem one of the most mature leaders of the modern movement, in the direct line of descent from Cézanne, Seurat, Gris and Léger.

His particular preoccupation has been to carry Cubism from the static condition which was the inevitable result of its analytical approach to nature, forward to a dynamic condition, which condition still retains the essential features of the discoveries made by Picasso, Kandinsky, Gris and Léger.

Whilst retaining, that is to say, the intellectual clarity of abstract design, Hélion wishes to make that design once more an affair of movement, a dramatic action within a three-dimensional world.

To do this he has increased the complexity of his compositions, controlling more and more individual forms and specific colours within a unity of design, but never losing the clarity due to an intellectual control of that design.

The increase of individual forms has implied, *pari passu*, an increase in the organisation of colour harmony; hard scientific research into the possibilities of colour; realisation of these researches in the potentialities of composition.

Complexity is gained, but without any clogging of the vision. For the forms, once realised in relation to the colours and the pitch of the colours, must then *move*. They move, as colours, by the balance and ordered recession of their pitch: blue sinking, red rising, yellow spreading (process of halation); subtleties of shift and emphasis beyond verbal description.

With these elements, mass can be made to move, as it moves in baroque architecture. As baroque is to classical architecture (dynamic to static) so is Hélion to the classical cubism of Juan Gris. It is significant that Hélion is fascinated, among painters of the past, by Poussin.

Where will this development lead to? (We must ask such a question because Hélion is a painter in transition—not “finished,” established.) Hélion himself does not know, but he is not afraid of the future—he would, in fact, welcome a way back to social integration, to a functional art of some kind. But such a development cannot come about by a concession on the painter's part; it can only come through the inherent development of his strictly æsthetic ideals. It is for society to catch up with the artist—not vice-versa. And such has always been the rule. The great artists of the past never put a brake on their development so that “the people” could catch up. Art is conditioned by the highest intellectual understanding of a period; or is inferior and decadent. Even when art was most socialised and “integrated,” the actual business of patronage was still in the hands of an exclusive clique of connoisseurs—the higher ranks of the priesthood in the Middle Ages, for example. The people accepted the art that was imposed on them; we have absolutely no evidence that they understood it or appreciated it—especially no evidence that they appreciated from the æsthetic angle which is its title to be called art. Art is socially functional, but it has always functioned through the intellectual élite of any period. Any other view would compel us to reverse our values, and to exalt peasant art

above the art of the élite. Admittedly the élite themselves are a function of the sociobiological process of history. And admittedly the proletariat of to-day is the élite of to-morrow.

These general reflections are not remote from the art of Hélión, for we, the critics and apologists of the modern movement, are increasingly impelled to justify the social relevance of such art. Society to-day is disunited; there is no accepted mythology on which the artist can rely for a medium of communication. The élite, in this decaying stage of capitalism, feels insecure, is without intellectual confidence, and therefore aimlessly dilettante. We live, it is only too obvious, in an age of transition.

What can the artist do in such an age—an age of transition which is going to outlast his own lifetime? If he refuses to be a mere time-server, he can only withdraw upon himself, creating his own world, his own public—a happy few who will appreciate the æsthetic values which he embodies in his abstractions and phantasies. That choice, to an artist like Hélión, has seemed inevitable. In the present spiritual and economic condition of Europe, there is no other choice to make.

The values of this age, in so far as they are social values, are not spiritual values. They are values of wealth, comfort, amusement,

excitement, sexual stimulation, and what might be generically called *dope*—modes of escape from the horror of a materialistic world. There are no other values which can in any sense of the words be called both social and spiritual. There is no spiritual integrity in our life, and no artist of any worth will put his skill and sensibility at the service of any less worthy cause. An artist will serve either the light within him, or the light of humanity embodied in a superhuman conception of reality. But there is no superhuman conception of reality which is valid in the modern world, and therefore an artist like Hélión remains true to the only reality of which he has knowledge—the subjective reality of his own vision. With this vision he interprets the world and his art remains relatively limited and individual. But so long as the artist is honest, his vision will have more than a personal value. For we all, in our baffled way, are compelled to construct a personal vision, but few of us can find a mode of realising our intimations in an objective fashion. We rely, therefore, on those rare individuals whose sensibility is geared to materials—to colours, metals, stones, sounds and words—and who can by virtue of that faculty convert their visions into works of art: objects in which we may see the form, if not the substance, of reality.

HERBERT READ.

HÉLION TO-DAY: A Personal Comment

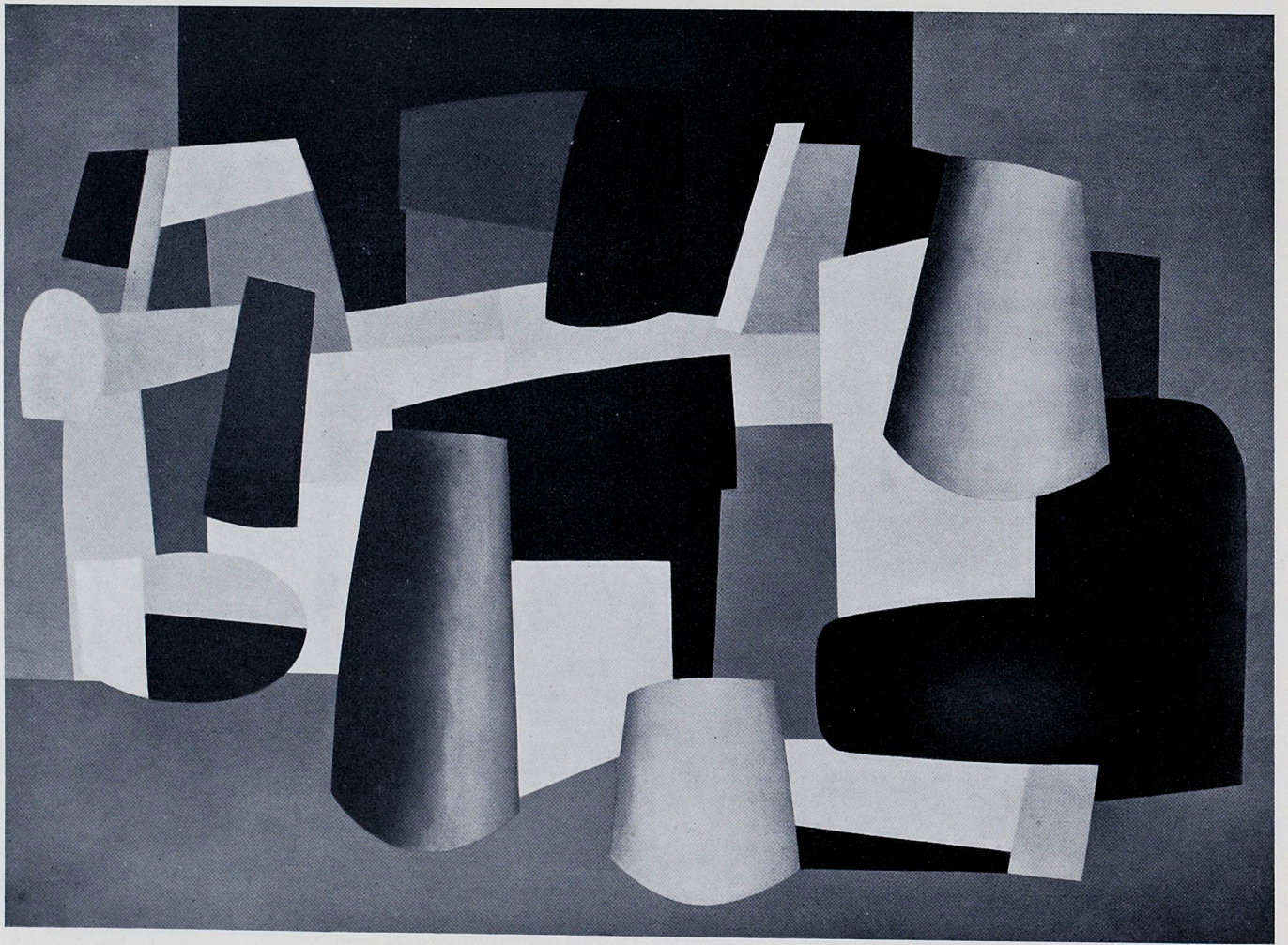
Hélión subdues his agitation into a classic contentment; his living complex reaction into a simple order and involution. He does not paint limbs and trees and clouds, but he tries to express the same inward and outward growth, the same static and moving attitudes with other elements—simple unrepresentational shapes, some flat and some modelled. His “abstract” painting is essentially organic, his massing and co-

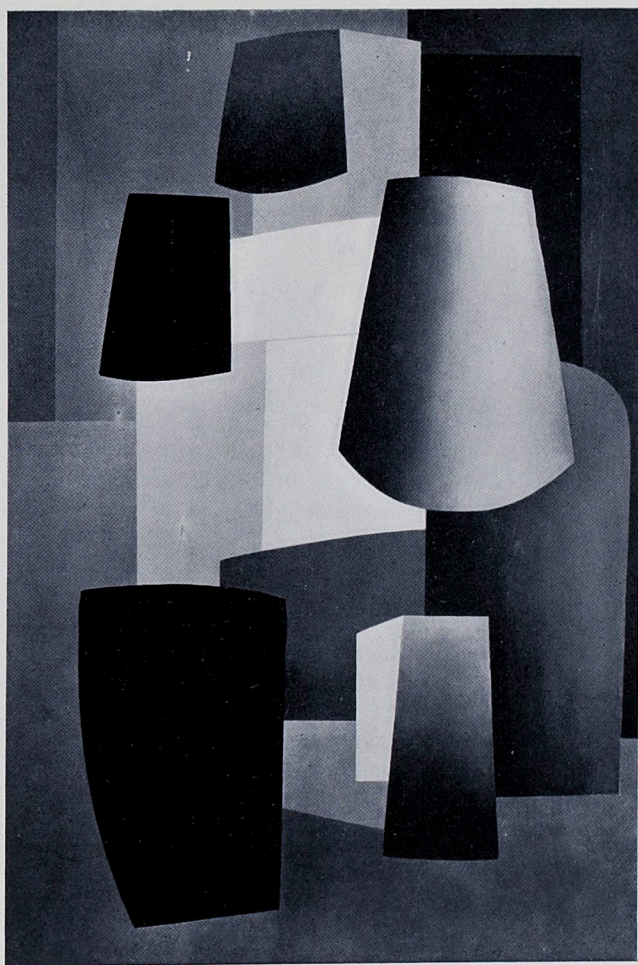
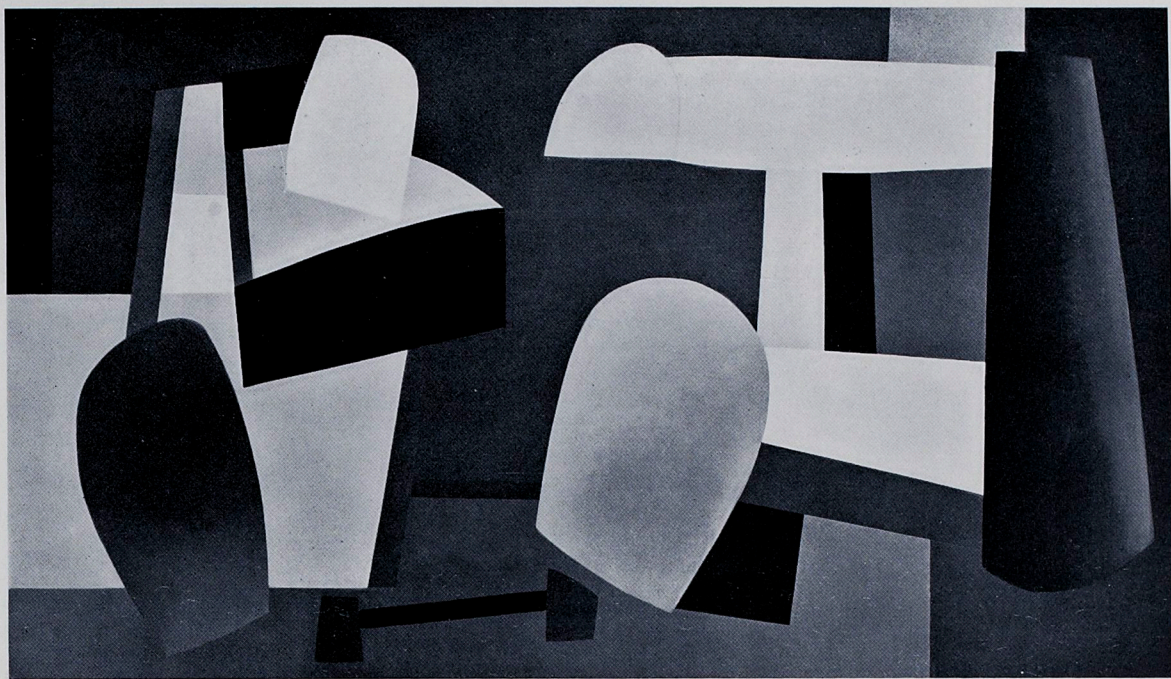
ordination of shapes is so living that it is not even a symbol for life—it is a piece of life.

An intense and rather uneasy consciousness of the immense complexity of life, an excited and apprehensive attitude to it as a whole, leaves Hélión all the more certain of his capacity to express his own share of it. And so he forces a point of rest in his pictures, aiming at the immediate serenity of a classical picture, which has within it an endless

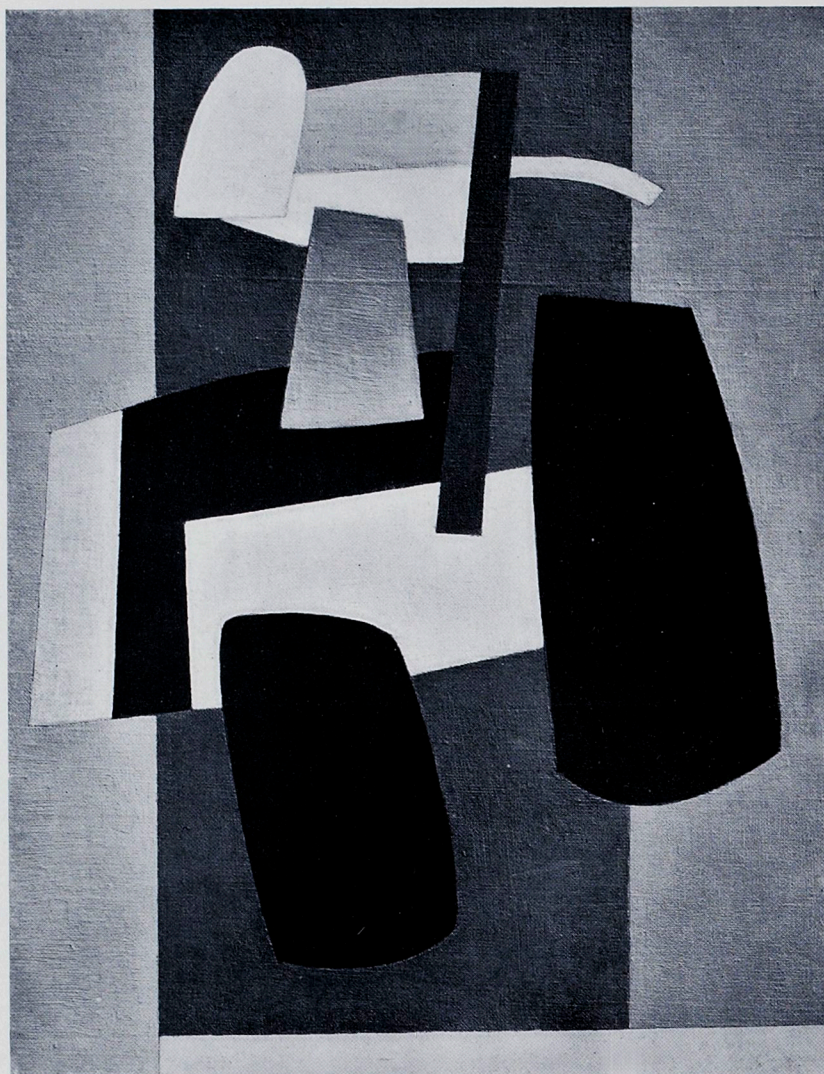


HÉLION. *Painting.* 1935.





HÉLION.
 Painting, 1935.
 (Coll. Walter P. Chrysler) (left).
 Painting, 1935 (above).
 Painting, 1935 (right).



HÉLION. *Painting, 1934.* (Gallery of Living Art.)

elaboration of moving related units. His shapes all have a smooth and placid outline but exist sharply or gently, violently or dully by their colour. They live by their auras. They move elliptically on the surface in almost every picture, and, just within the surface, move over and behind one another. They have no jagged and penetrating reactions, but work almost too roundly within the frame. This is not true of his drawing, which has a brilliance of clash and contrast that with an extreme sensibility of line combines to make all parts become one, instead of adding up to one.

There is a theoretical integrity in abstract painting to-day—upheld through a formal

rigidity of design, one simple shape against another, one direction opposed to another and a deliberate accentuation of contrasts for their own sakes—which is not Hélios's way. Extreme flexibility of design and muffled contrasts get him nearer to the double and instantaneous action of expansion and tension that he is after. It would not be true to say that he gets at this through a study of such painters as Poussin, Rubens, Seurat, but that he finds in analysing their work a corroboration and a sanction.

Hélios says in one of his articles : " There are on the one hand, those who turn desperately around nature without daring to enter, and, on the other hand, those who,

beyond the elementary cells, try to develop a language." And so Héliion tries to develop a classical language with contemporary elements. Not an identical, but a parallel language; one which has the same inclusive powers, and the same phoenix life, which dies and is born of itself.

Héliion's way of experience and intensification is through complexity of relations. He keeps his elements simple and relates them one to another across enormous or very small canvases, with a great many or very few colours. When you look at an Héliion you find many shapes built up into one movement—when you look at a Poussin, you see one movement which can be analysed into many shapes. Héliion's natural vision is the second way; his development and vision in life as it is lived to-day is the first way. It is the condition and limitation imposed by to-day's chaos. The penalty for painting alive instead of painting dead. In drawing the true bent of the artist works more or less at liberty, but in painting it has to tackle these conditions

and limitations. That is why I find something in Héliion's drawing which is not in his painting, but also why this very discrepancy is a matter for congratulation.

* * *

I call this article what I have, because I want to distinguish between self-commitment and dogma (a thing that no one else will do for me). I commit *myself* by stating my opinion as strongly as I can to-day. But by stating it for to-morrow or yesterday, by trying to make it an absolute criticism with an absolute interpretation, I also try to commit both Héliion and those who read the article and look at his pictures. It seems to me that in criticism to-day, something is needed which comes between dogmatic evaluation for all time and running commentary dictated by a mood. Criticism in which the price of effort is not permanence. And I should like to state dogmatically now that this is the principle aimed at in AXIS.

MYFANWY EVANS.

THE GALLERY OF LIVING ART New York University

The early years of the twentieth century left no metropolis without works of art; museums seemed to evolve along with hospitals and fire engines. The most ironical aspect of the development has been its hostility to art as a living force, for, although many cities can offer to the public examples of what past civilisations have produced, there is nowhere a strong connection between the public and the important works of our time. In Paris the connoisseur may dig up fine modern paintings from among a dealer's heaped-up pile of mediocrity, in London sometimes from a private collection, only in Germany and Switzerland do they appear in public museums, and there not often. New

York, at any rate, is alone in offering to the public a permanent collection devoted without concession or compromise to the significant art of the twentieth century.

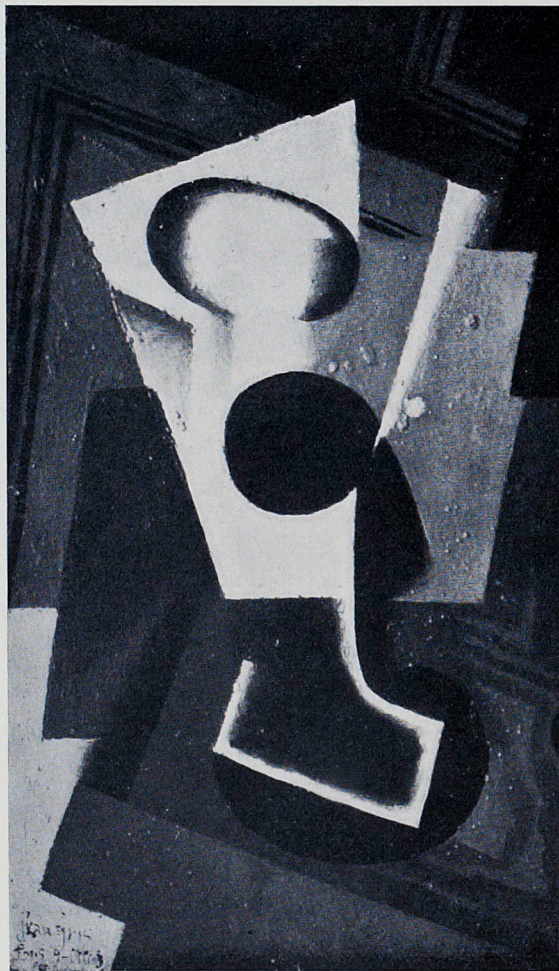
The history of the Gallery of Living Art is interesting in many respects. In the first place it demonstrates the inevitable channel through which taste and subtlety are driven on their course through the contemporary environment. The director has ostentatiously rejected the various devices with which a New York æsthetic organisation is customarily launched. For instance, he never talks over the radio, he serves no refreshments to visitors when a new acquisition is hung, in fact he indulges in none of those antics by

which the public is accustomed to being amused. He has merely hung up the pictures amid congenial and accessible surroundings and allowed them to speak for themselves; and from such presentation what is lost of social patronage and popular acclaim becomes compensated by the more lasting influence of uncompromising selection.

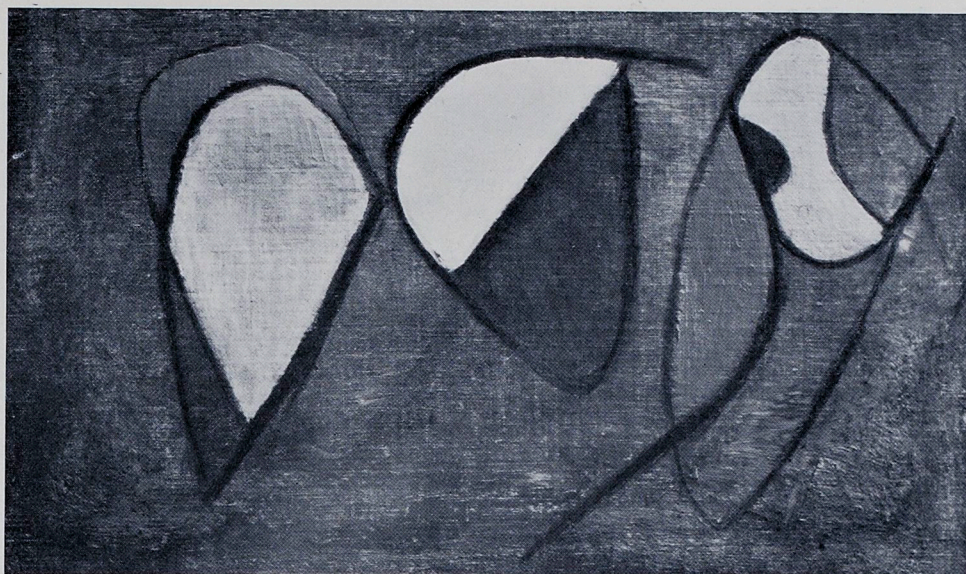
The history of the Gallery is further significant as a commentary on American taste throughout the last decade. It is styled a permanent collection; yet there are sections which have been in a considerable state of flux; and at the beginning a compromise could have been noted. One must recollect how ten years ago there were many American painters outside the popular pale, working to break the academic strangle-hold; their work, to be sure, was not comparable in quality with that which formed the nucleus of the Gallery, yet the struggle was for a worthy, not to say essential, cause, and nowhere could the public become acquainted with it. The Gallery of Living Art showed much of what this movement had to offer until the end of academic domination was at hand and society had made a place for the rebel artists. The director now, to enhance the quality of his gallery, could feel justified in making new room for replacements,—for pictures that would fit in with his originally inflexible programme. His purpose, which has so slowly crystallised, would show only those contemporary painters who have concentrated—each with his authentic and personal flavour—upon an internal sculptural expression; what we find now, therefore, is a collection built solidly upon the architectural platform that Cézanne and Seurat had constructed out of the ruins of the Renaissance. Two water-colours by Cézanne himself serve to commence the display,—examples chosen for their clarity of method as well as for a premeditated neglect of literary over-meanings; any one may plainly see for what the painter has been striving,—how he has broken up the object into planes of colour that fit into a tight structural fabric. Beyond hang Delaunay, Klee, de la Fresnaye, who strike off from Cézanne direct; and then the Cubists, who broke the object more and more for added movement—analytically, and not in the glances of their predecessors—until nothing is left but the bare bones of art. These painters,—Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger, have become sensitive to the pounding of

adjacent tonal planes and the heavy echoes of linear rhythms until art can make ready to enter the pure abstract. There are digressions into Matisse and other Fauve painters who have made contributions from another angle, and a few Americans, also, that have brought to the problem of spatial organisation a little of their native clarity. Last are found Mondrian and the younger constructivists,—Miró, Arp, Héliou,—and this is the section which is the one most swiftly growing. Confronted with a contemporary selection of such plastic strength and invention, the visitor may well wonder if so many years must elapse before this gallery will begin to restore an æsthetic eyesight to a public long blinded by the popular tide of illustration.

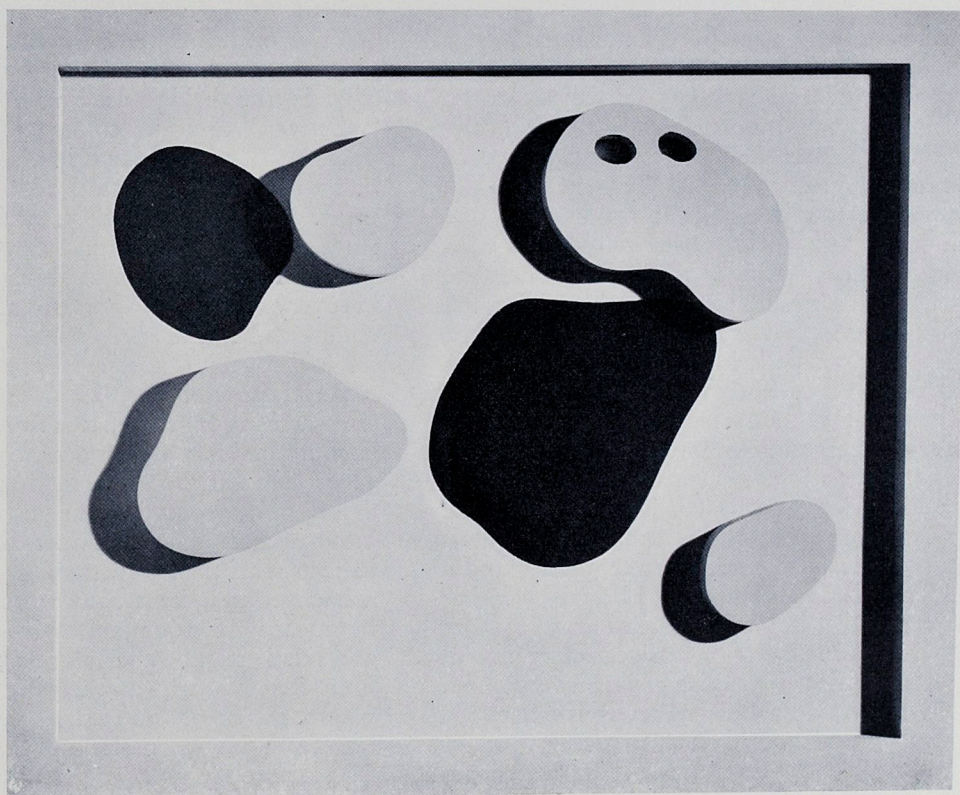
GEORGE L. K. MORRIS.



JUAN GRIS. *Still Life*, 1917. (Gallery of Living Art.)



PAALEN. *Painting*, 1934.



ARP. *Configuration*, 1932.

John Piper, 1935

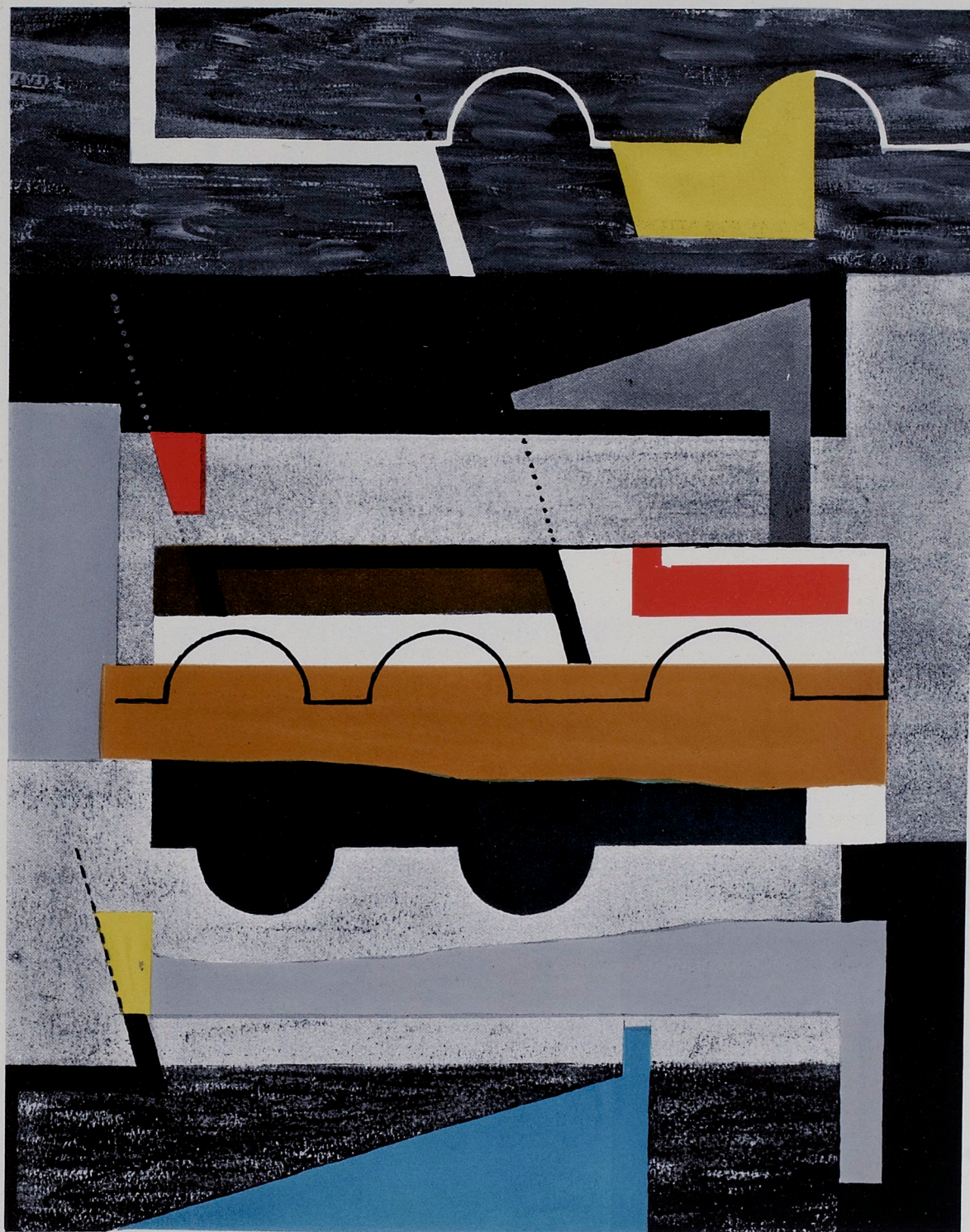
Straight lines, angles, rectangles, trapezes, semi-circles ; nothing but mathematical forms, and in the midst of all this one yielding outline. The number is neither unlimited nor arbitrary : there is a letter-case containing definitive letters of like form and normal shape for the foundation of the pictures on the one hand, and letters of a more specific and important type for the accents on the other. And it includes every variation and degree of graphic punctuation. Pick up two handfuls of this assortment and group them, and each result will bear its own peculiar expressive physiognomy.

The artist's object has ceased to be the putting together of planes so as to form a mosaic found by a law of harmony. The segments become, as it were, the wings which an impassioned stage-manager manipulates, waving them backwards and forwards, alternating light and darkness, leaving here a gap, there a perspective, or introducing a salient. He switches on every degree of light until every shape has its full existence and meaning. Among black, white and salt-grey there are colours interpolated like windows : yellow, red and brown, blue. It goes without saying that each plane has one colour only—but if for instance blue has been chosen, then various shades of blue are added and respond to each other from the different parts of the picture. There may be a dramatic constellation : a blade cuts into a juxtaposition of horizontal volumes, and as it leads out and upwards it gives the range of these perpendicular parallel forms their readable meaning. On the other side there is a loosening of this tension : the separate forms give each other space, horizontals grasp verticals to limit their tendency, and a golden axis is laid open. Little is wanting between this and the classical composition, in which the finally victorious chief accent asserts itself in the midst of impacts, coming from both sides, and the interplay between buoyancy and gravity, and half-way we have an almost lyrical interlude : small shapes forget what is to the left and to the right and halt timidly on the broad road.

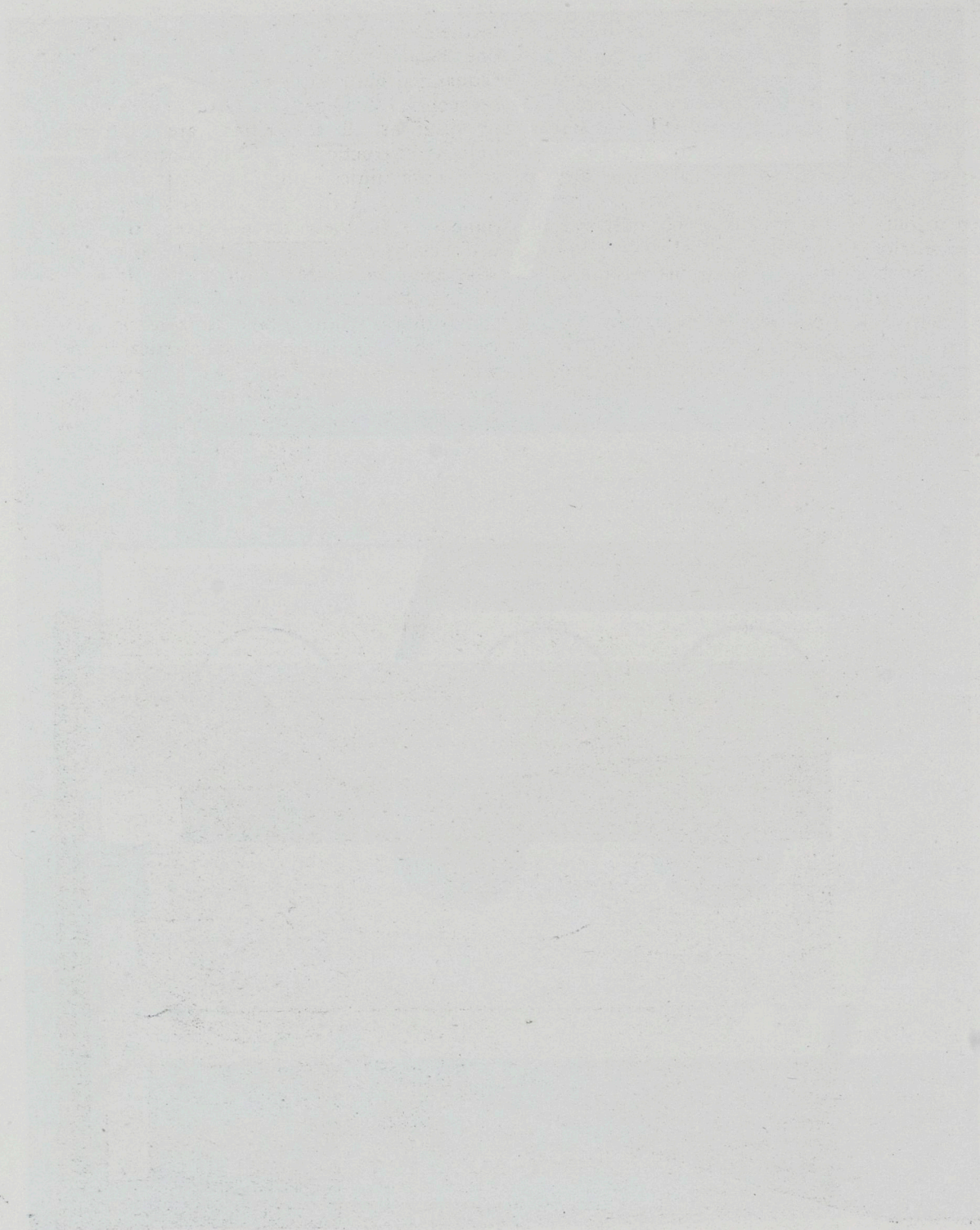
We learn from Piper's *collages* of an earlier date the same fact, that he is by no means only builder but also interpreter. These are coast pictures with rocks and marine animals between sea and clouds, from which a raw-cold English gloom emanates. On looking closer you see that chalk cliffs are scraps of newspaper, and what you see moving about in the water has been cut out of aquarium catalogues. But in this case these subjects, so dear to surrealism—starfish, seaweed, all sorts of creeping things are not rendered by using surrealism's magnifying glass, which tries to wrest from them the secrets of the other world. There is nothing in those agilely washed and pasted papers which speak of "form for its own sake." Just because no hieroglyphics clamour for deciphering, all detail is absorbed and immersed in a sombre ballad of the great ocean.

The only link between the one group of pictures and another is that of temperament. (But is the bridge leading from Picasso's "abstract" creations to his concrete ones any other?) Even to-day Piper's works cannot be strung up on a thread of logical development. Alive, active youthfulness jumps from one problem to another. It conceives a definitive idea and then seeks the realisation in every direction until the subject is encompassed and held.

In between times he stops to examine the material possibilities, as do all those who are searching for new paths in art. The result is construction ; development of the pictorial expressiveness, both internally and externally. Steely grey grows into metal, circular forms into plastic discs. Triple-dimension face to face with planes intensifies the echo. On a background, kept somewhat at a distance by means of rods and wire-netting, there are fixed round and angular, broken and unbroken forms, and direct and indirect ways, paths of questions and perplexities lead from the one to the other. This is where Piper can open great possibilities, if he is not content with emphasising consistency of material and its laws, but if, by means of



JOHN PIPER Drawing for Painting (1935)



materials, he makes processes speak and express, if material is overcome, by converting mere qualities into activities.

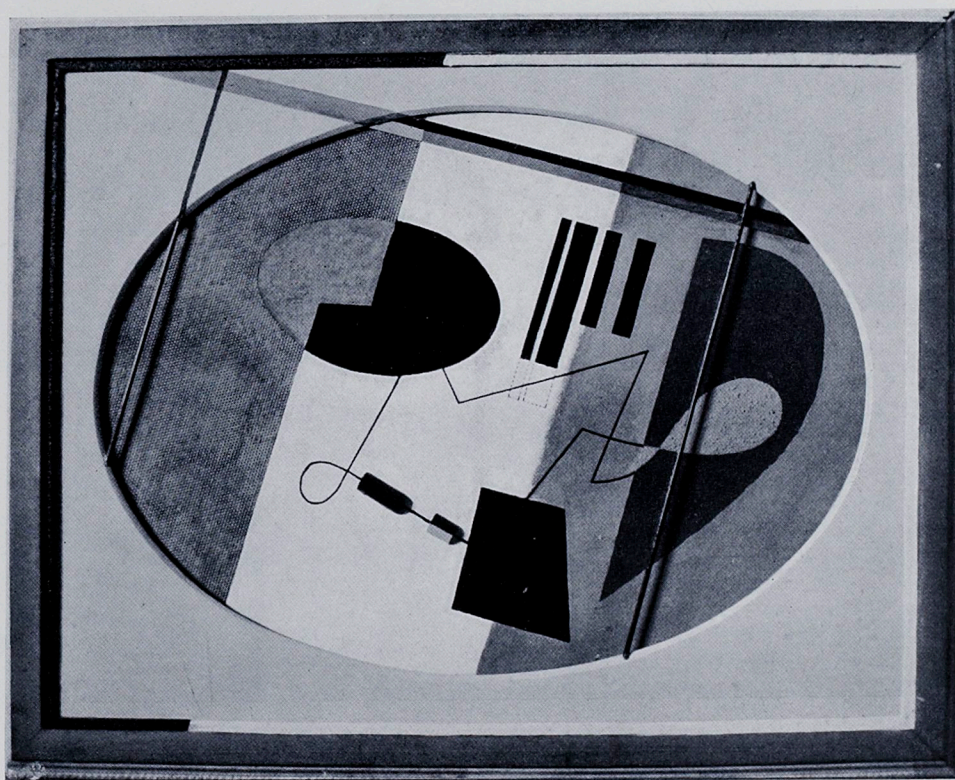
English art to-day is full of experiment, as it makes a decided advance into the domain of the abstract. It knows of Picasso's and Kandinsky's great strides into the absolute—it knows too that their call still remains unanswered to-day. It is only because a deaf ear was turned to this call, that after their discoveries one tendency after another tried to outstrip the previous one, only misinterpretation of their promises could allow of so much hollow æsthetic pretension in Western Europe.

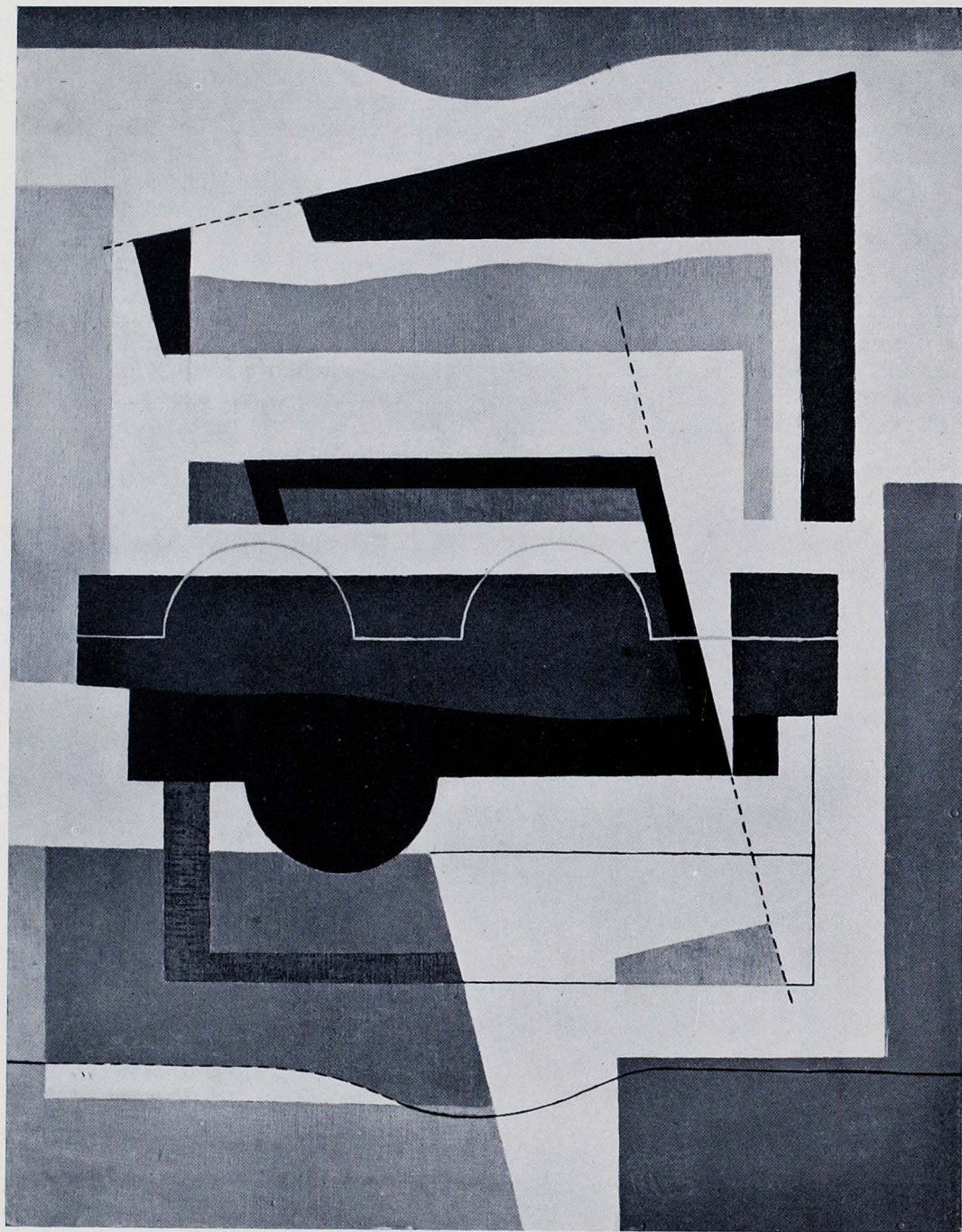
There is a great deal to be caught up, perhaps on the condition that the European art lesson must be learnt once more from to-day's point of view. English artists are looking at all sorts of things on the continent, both in the realm of the unreal and that of

the real, which are very close to one another in this period of no definitive outline. They have taken stock of Mondrian's slate-mathematics in all its consequence on the one hand. On the other they have got acquainted with Arp's creations sprung from sensuality, or Léger's constructions, which, in spite of all abstraction, are ultimately object-constructions. (The contrasting of such possibilities brings out what is Piper's very own.) They have not decided unanimously. All these things given, they can use them as bricks, and it remains to be seen what they will build with them. It is by shaking them up again and again that the stubbornness of the means of expression will yield, that the sacrosanct geometrical forms will be licked into shape, that a present-day generation will recognise to what new purpose their heritage can be turned.

HERTA WESCHER.

JOHN PIPER.
Construction,
1934.





JOHN PIPER. *Painting*, 1935.

Piper and Abstract Possibilities

About anything that is perfect in its kind there is little excuse for saying much. A piece of the northern seaboard, a stretch of mud-coloured November sky, a draught horse, a piece of cheese, may be perfect things of their kind, as much as any work of art. One registers pleasure, at discovering anything so characteristically itself, with a monosyllable or, if necessary, with a poem. There is nothing useful to say, except from some narrow specialist angle. John Piper's recent paintings are perfect of their kind. They give me a good deal of quiet pleasure, of a slightly more complex order. But I do not propose to write a poem about Piper's work. I should like instead to use it as a point of departure for some general remarks on "abstract" painting.

The strange activities in which we indulge to-day, in our civilised capacity, as highbrows, in galleries or between the exclusive covers of such organs as *Axis*, must be regarded as games only. So Piper is now, it is to be understood, only a counter in my critical game. He is a court card which I flourish and with which, if I use my wits, I may steal a trick. And Piper in turn is simply playing a game, with his sticky colour pots and draughtsman's implements.

If art is considered as a game, and that is a useful way of considering art, then it is of some importance to determine which of many games is in progress, and its rules. John Piper's is one of the "abstract" games, a game with generally accessible elements, but a highly personal performance, the novelty of which consists in pretending that the person, that is Piper, is not there. The game is pretending to play itself.

When the house-painter Braque first spread patches of paint and other materials on linoleum, with the pleasure that a child derives when its nurse allows it to spread its first piece of bread and jam, he stumbled on a game that required an intelligence like Picasso's to play well. Thereafter Picasso, Braque, Léger, Gris, between them devised the elastic rules of the game called vertical cubism. The canvas separates into vertical

strips, of assorted colours, suggesting the coming and going of invisible forms through intangible doors. This is the game that Piper is playing. He has, of course, modified the rules. The idea, roughly, is this. A few simple forms are assembled, not quite symmetrically but with geometrical synonyms and parallels. These forms create areas which are filled with colours; and a tension is produced between these colour-units which has to be resolved by the introduction of an arbitrary, non-geometrical, element, a "crazy" line. This is where the art comes in, transfiguring a flat decorative pattern into, ideally, a piece of personal magic. Piper is very skilful. Much intelligence and sensibility creep into his work, through the irrational crannies in his wall-machines; perhaps more intelligence than Ben Nicholson would permit to flow round his circles, which however wear their author's taste very prominently on the surface.

This game, whether played by Piper or Nicholson, or by Picasso, is an excellent one, as a game simply, or as a discipline. It has the advantage, considered as a gymnastic, that it allows the painter to attack each of his problems in succession, and to correct one by the other. Nicholson adds the element of recession to give him a more subtle control over the corrections. Piper has lately learned to utilise the discoveries of Nicholson and also, I suspect, of Héliou. At least his new works show a very interesting and considerable advance over some I saw a year or two ago.

Art that begins as a rigid game of this order is likely to have far more value than art that begins at the opposite end of the scale. For example, pictorially or (super-) realistically. But the job of the abstract painter, the composer of geometrical forms, should be to relax gradually the rigidity of his formal rules until his work admits, more and more, personal factors. The tidying, placing, polishing faculties are not in themselves enough. Too many more valuable elements are deliberately excluded, in this strict art. The human mind, so far as it

allows itself to function in a specifically human or natural way, hungers after other satisfactions, before these ascetic productions. So after acknowledging the perfection of Piper's work in its kind one might go on to criticise the kind.

A general objection could, I think, be levelled against what Mr. Grigson calls "puritan" painting. Painting is an art of comparatively rapid tempo, as compared with carving, say. The gesture of the hand is therefore an element that should be admitted into the chemistry of painting. In assembling mechanically determined plastic units the "puritan" painter is really working from an assumed absolute standpoint—he is pretending to an impersonality to which only a crystal, or some similar form of "life," has any right. I am speaking generally; and not particularly of Piper.

Piper's paintings, reproduced here, show

his attempts to escape from the mechanical trap. The results have a beauty, a purity, and an honesty which must compel admiration. Piper has made himself an absolute master of the game he plays. I should like to see him loosen the restrictions he still imposes on himself. I should like to see him explore the potentialities of linear rhythm, for example, as Wyndham Lewis has done.

Wyndham Lewis is a visionary, and a visionary must burst the bonds of any game. Piper's is the proper procedure for anyone not *born* a visionary. His work shows a steady progress out of decoration into magic, the magic that occurs in spite of "pure form," or over and above and between his still-too-purified forms. His recent works are therefore equally important as contemporary phenomena and as example—as programme.

HUGH GORDON PORTEUS.

A Coming International Exhibition

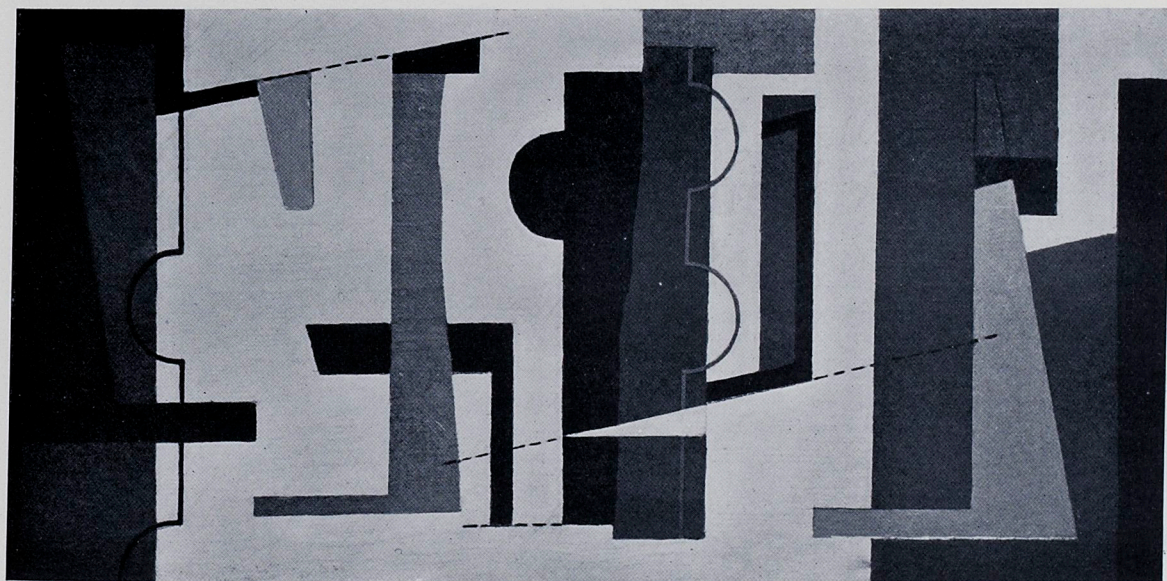
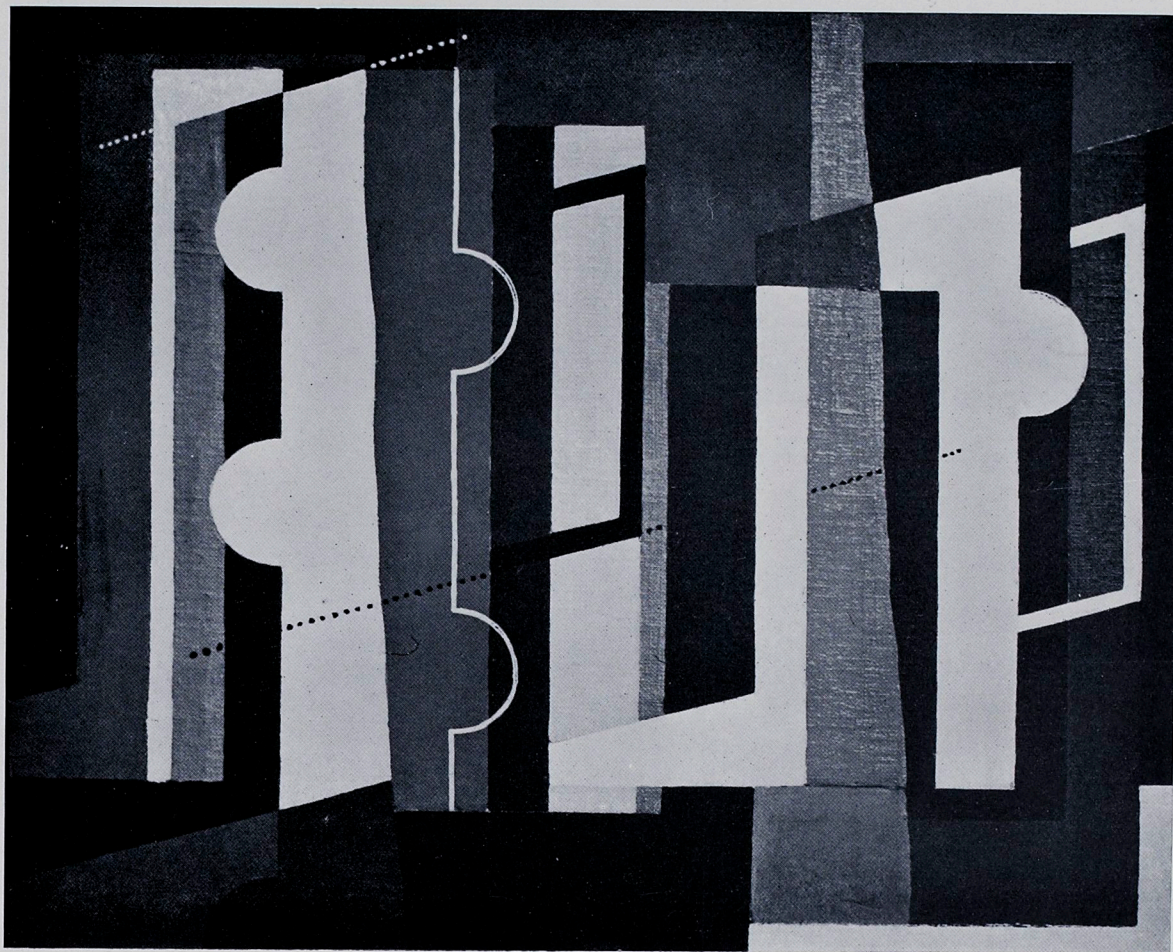
There has been a great deal of fuss about abstract painting and sculpture but very little has been seen, especially from abroad. The cubists, yes—Picasso, Gris, Braque—but apart from them a rare Miró, a Klee, or perhaps a Kandinsky, and that is all. And so there has been a great deal of theory and many false assumptions. People judge from reproductions, or from the one or two abstract paintings they have seen . . . once you leave nature there can be no variation, and so on. Then there is the group trap: love me love my dog. If you accept anything you must accept it all. But the point is not so much to change or suppress adverse criticism as to give it an opportunity to be founded on the actual work. The few recent English abstract shows there have been in London have led to violent expressions of opinion. Some already made have been revised, some only reinforced. But people are now at least conscious enough of the existence of abstract art to have, or wish to have, some sort of opinion about it.

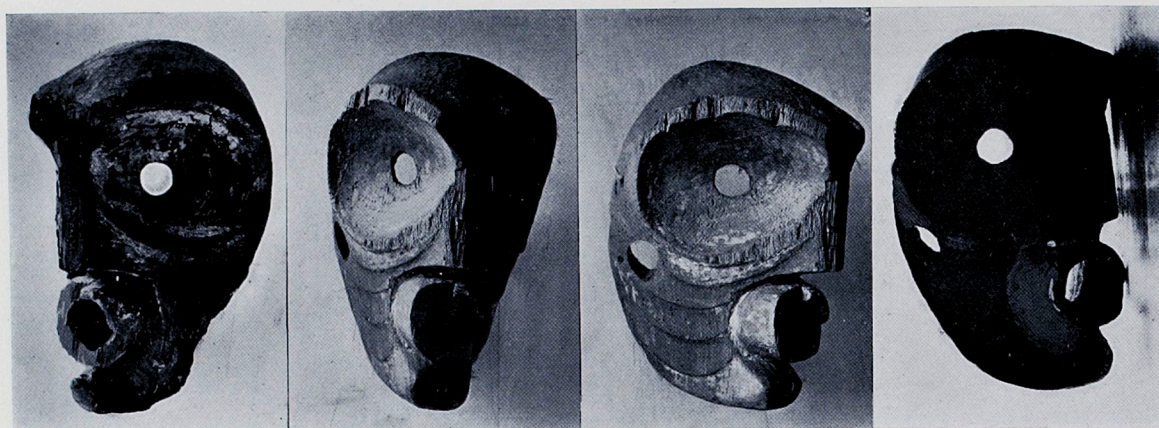
So this seems a particularly good moment

to organise an international show of abstract painting and sculpture. And that is being done by Mrs. Basil Gray. The idea at first was to collect one or two pictures from Paris and show them with some English ones to a few people in Oxford. But the thing, once begun, attracted great interest, and took on much larger proportions. The number of artists has grown considerably: it includes Arp, Calder, Erni, Giacometti, Héliou, Hepworth, Jackson, Kandinsky, Miró, Mondrian, Moore, Nicholson and Piper. Each painter is sending three works and each sculptor one or two. The things are being assembled with great care and should be really representative. The original decision to show it in Oxford is being kept to, but it will afterwards be shown in Cambridge and, it is hoped, in London. It would be a pity to send the work back before all those who want to see it have seen it. The first week will be sometime in January or early in February, but the date and place will be announced later.

M. E.

Opposite: JOHN PIPER. *Two Paintings, 1935.*





MASK, Vancouver Islands. (Coll. Roland Penrose.)

Notes on the Ratton Exhibition of North Western American Art, Paris

Each different art can evoke its native landscape and climate more or less vividly. We are familiar with the warm surfaces of negro sculpture, the terrifying paint and feathers of the Pacific and the elephantine exuberance of Asia. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that this admirable collection of strange long-beaked birds with malicious hungry eyes, of masks painted with cold grey greens and of ivory pieces representing birds and seals, comes from Alaska and the north-west coast of America, where the Arctic wind, pine forests and ice banks make a formidable background.

A series of masks evoke the perpetual torture inflicted by the climate and the answering grimace that it calls forth. Their mouths twisted into a smile on one side of the face lay bare rows of snarling teeth. Symmetry is only to be found in the exhibits from the more temperate parts, Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Many of the masks from this part impersonate birds and animals—bear-masks and the long-beaked

bird-masks that clack their bills and roll their eyes.

The wind, master of ceremonies, the cold grey northern gale is represented by whistling masks with round lips like the muzzle of a gun painted with dark red and black outlines.

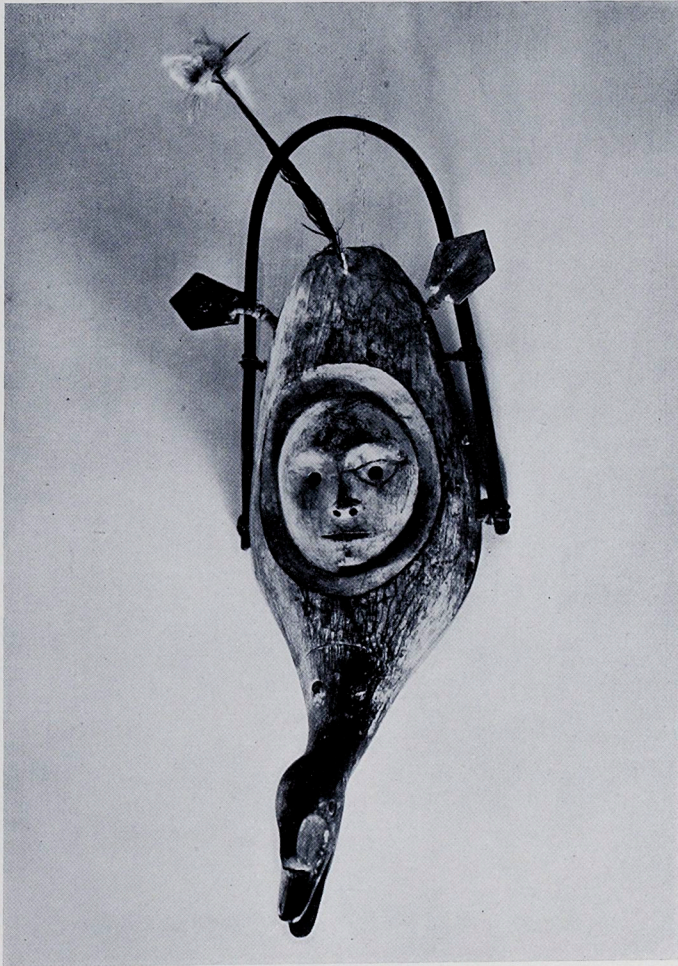
The use of ivory, however, calls for a different form of expression, each piece becomes a living creature in itself. Sea birds with smooth bodies and long necks like sprouting corn, their tiny heads alert, float together with the seals and other inhabitants of the ice-fields. It is easy to recognise that the people who produced such an art were fishermen, the forms themselves are those of the sea shore produced by wind and waves, their smoothness and simplicity have the streamline rhythm dictated by that great sculptor, the ocean.

The exhibits coming from the more northerly regions are the most individual and free from the influences of surrounding civilisations. They suggest a people pre-occupied by their hardships and the continual

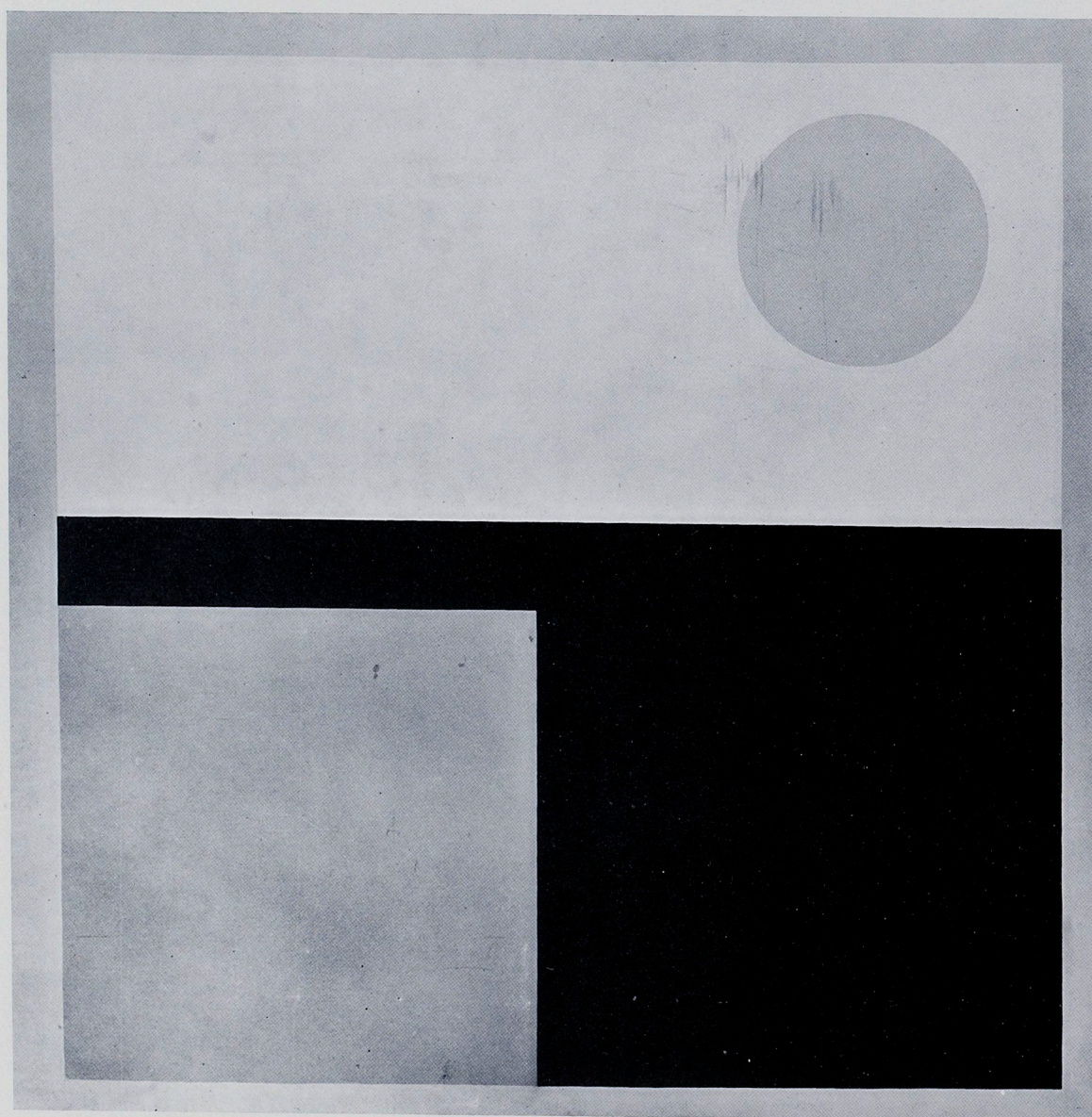
search for food. The ivory tusk becomes a necklace of wild fowl and there is a strange mask in the form of a white seal with a human head devouring a fish. It is a people who lives in the grip of the Arctic and whose colours are the white, grey-green and black of winter twilight. Red is rare and miraculous as their own blood. The Esquimo's masks are a mirror of his environment and also his own face inside out. They are made

of unpainted wood, their forms are of great simplicity combined with an intensity of expression which is at the same time comic and pathetic, their mouths on one side of the face seem to take shelter from the wind. The odds being so much against life, smile or snarl become half-hidden gestures of despair. All these are masterpieces of direct expression as well as having the qualities of form essential to a work of art.

ROLAND PENROSE.



MASK, Alaska. (Coll. Charles Ratton.)



LONDON SHOWS

Ben Nicholson at the Lefevre: 7 & 5 at Zwemmer's

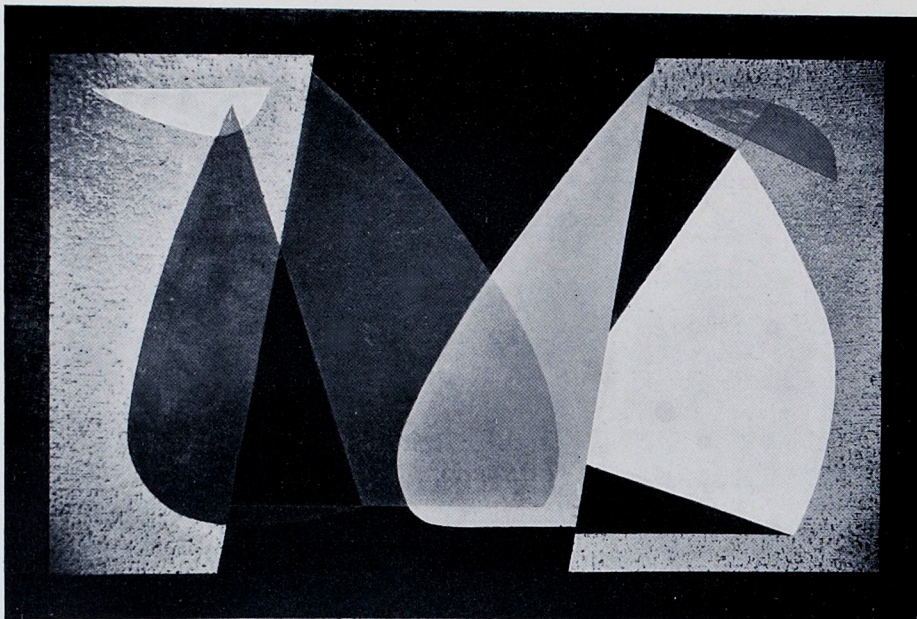
The room at the Lefevre Galleries in which Ben Nicholson's carved reliefs are hung has, round the ceiling, the customary cornice of its period: a series of recessed planes in white plaster, geometrical in character and carefully considered in their proportions to produce an agreeable effect of light and shade. Its juxtaposition with the artist's carved reliefs suggests an obvious comparison to the mind of the observant visitor; and, so far as appreciation of his art among the public is concerned—that is to say, appreciation beyond the circle of his fellow-painters—that comparison and all that it implies provides an example of one danger that threatens the present stage of Ben Nicholson's—and other artists'—abstract development.

The public, always searching for a label to apply—for a comforting explanation of what it does not understand, or does not wish to—will no doubt recognise in these carvings an affinity with the superficial appearances of modern architecture and, having thus satisfactorily disposed of them, will turn away from them with relief, and Ben Nicholson's latest work will be relegated for ever to the same class as the plaster cornice and the marble mantelpiece—spots of decorative relief work how charmingly in keeping with the modern interior. Ben Nicholson's reliefs *have* an affinity with modern architecture; that is a test of their vitality, as it is of the vitality of any art; purely through a community of feeling and a similar concern for formal significance: they are both manifestations of the same abstract aesthetic; but his reliefs are emphatically also carvings on their own account.

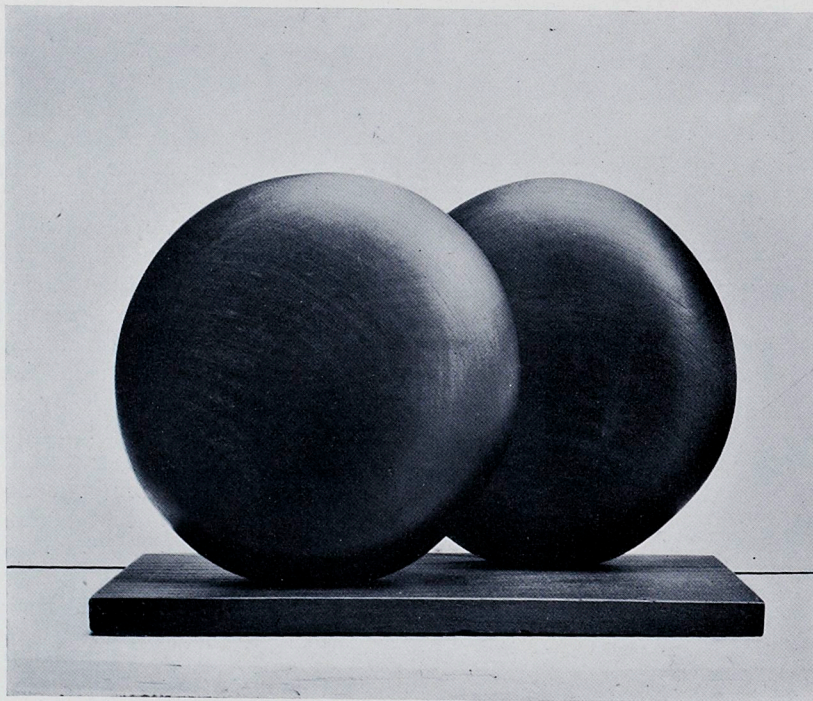
No doubt in time, when each, the architect and the painter, has reached some

kind of finality, the two can come together in synthesis, the one as complement to the other; but meanwhile, during this period of transition, the distinction made above is all-important. The architect has returned, inspired by Behrens and Corbusier, to the reality of his means and materials; the artist, Ben Nicholson, has returned in his present phase, inspired by Mondrian, to the reality of his, not the architect's, limitations: the rectangular frame, the panel, the personally-conducted tool. With these Ben Nicholson is exploring the potentialities of light on differentiated surfaces, and, as a necessary discipline on the road to absolute release from organic association, he has set himself additional limitations: the rectangle and the circle as his entire formal vocabulary; white and the play of light on white as his only colours.

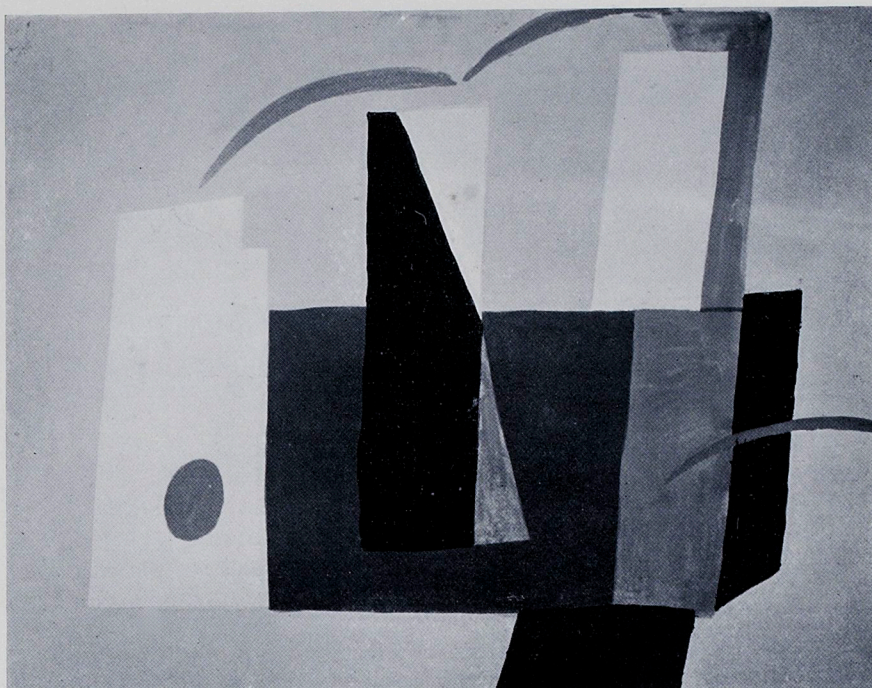
It is unfortunate that this particular advance on the part of the artist (for there is no doubt that a great advance has been made from the earlier exploitation of his own sensitivity to colours and surfaces) should expose him even more to this "decorative" misinterpretation—in many ways more insidious than mere abuse. It is not likely that Ben Nicholson will succumb to such an implied invitation to suicide; but we can now be said to possess a school of abstract artists, as the Seven and Five exhibition shows, of which Ben Nicholson is only the member of most experience, and this fundamental danger besets the whole of abstract art while in the process of establishing itself—danger of its formal significance becoming lost in its own decorative potentialities. That is the excuse for using Ben Nicholson's present purist phase as an apt illustration of a universal



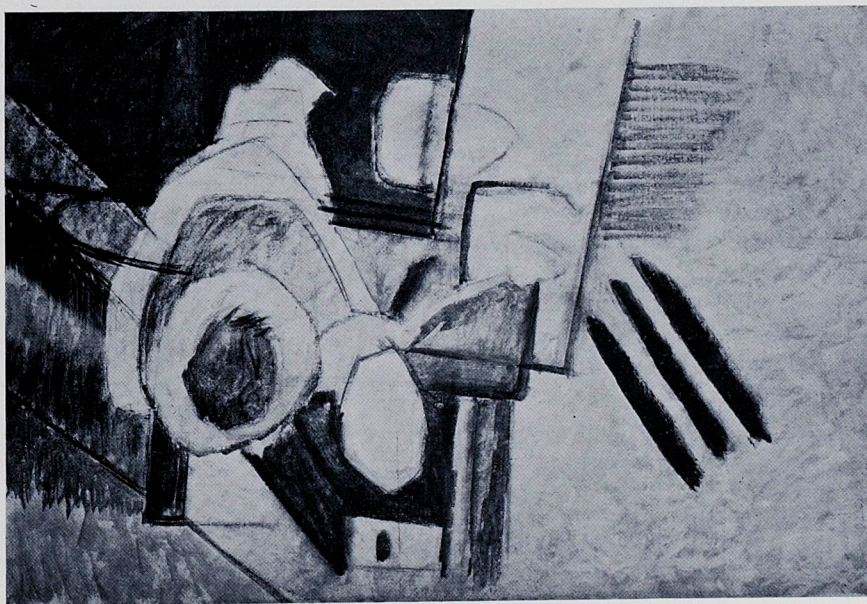
ARTHUR JACKSON. *Painting*, 1935.



BARBARA HEPWORTH. *Carving*, 1935.



WINIFRED DACRE. *Gouache*, 1935



IVON HITCHENS. *Painting*.

fact—and for labouring at length so obvious a point.

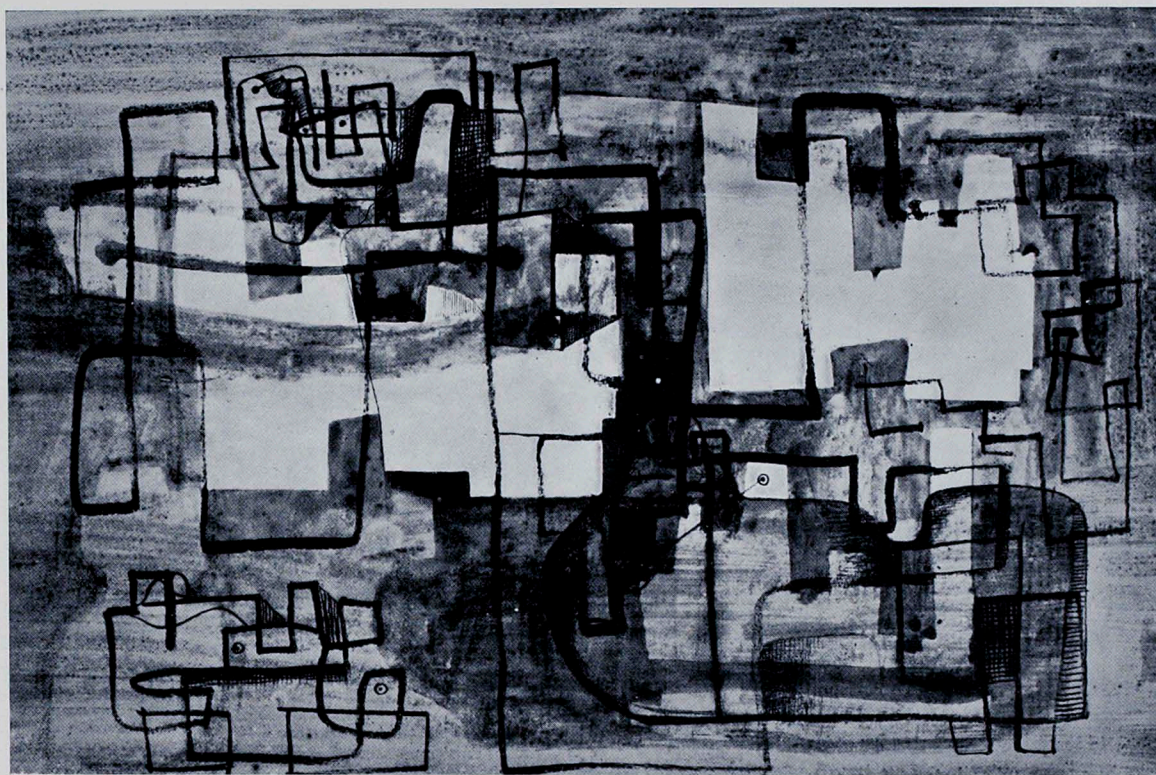
The tension, concentration, personal vision—call it what you will, that distinguishes creation from pattern-making is so fundamental that the two are different in kind, not in degree of achievement. If Ben Nicholson, to return again to the Lefevre to find an apt, though improbable illustration, were once to lose that vital concentration, to allow his abstractions to stray towards becoming a unit in architectural decoration, then no qualities of craftsmanship, no emphasis on the fact that each relief was carved by hand out of a single board (which, we are told, is the method adopted in preference to the obvious architectural-decorative one of built-up layers), no emphasis on the amount of satisfaction the artist obtained from the feat of execution would bring his work to life again. For these are matters for the artist and no-one else; what is important is the exploration that is going on: in the case of Ben Nicholson, at the moment, exploration with light on an engraved surface, perhaps next more exclusively with light, or with three dimensional form; in the case of others with other materials. Only the curiosity that maintains this exploration will allow abstract art to make its necessary contribution to the whole body of the contemporary aesthetic, such as the social responsibilities of the artist demand of him—responsibilities beyond the mere “self-expression” that flatters his own sensitivity.

For the former purpose a group of artists working all with the same intentions is essential, and the Seven and Five Society for the first time provides it. It may be said indeed to be the only group now exhibiting one consistent point of view. The quality of the exhibition is mixed, as it is bound to be with a number of members at different stages of development. The characteristics of abstract art, as well as those of Ben Nicholson's art, are already familiar to readers of this paper. There is no need for me to describe them. A few special observations on the abstract artist's position I have already made; these apply to other members if to Ben Nicholson particularly. It remains only to make a few notes on the actual works exhibited.

The sculpture first. It is small in quantity but of a high standard. Henry Moore's composition of grey-green eroded fragments is by far the most vital—perhaps the most vital thing in the exhibition; an elemental world on its own. He exhibits also two solitary carvings, one of which, a simple unsymmetrical concave form, has queer ethereal poise as well as a quite irresistible tactile attraction. Barbara Hepworth exhibits two pieces side by side; each a composition of convex shapes, but each obviously different in date. The earlier one is still organic in the derivation of its forms, as are Henry Moore's; the later one is not. A revealing contrast, but in this case, though the artist is following Ben Nicholson's successful lead, the necessary vitality does not seem to have survived the change. The later work appears empty compared with the earlier. Her third exhibit, in wood, is the most satisfactory of the three. Eileen Holding exhibits two constructions, which lack that accuracy of craftsmanship, simplicity and precision of finish that are essential if such objects are to have much meaning.

Among the painters Ben Nicholson has nine works. The inclusion here of some earlier work than appears at the Lefevre only emphasises that so far his move towards greater purity and simplicity has been entirely constructive. By contrast, John Piper's works, of which there are seven, seem exceedingly rich. Some, indeed, tend to be “busy,” but they have a fine assurance—a finality that can only be the result of a long process of concentration and digestion. Though his colour is good, Piper's single drawing is in many ways his most interesting work. In contrast again to Piper's exclusively geometrical vocabulary is a particularly sensitive and very calligraphic painting by Ivon Hitchens. One regrets there are not more. Arthur Jackson exhibits six paintings that owe much to Hélión superficially, but the thick inter-woven colours, though pleasing as colour, are at the opposite pole of integration to Hélión's sleek, metallic, separated forms. They are, perhaps, too pleasing as colour and pattern.

J. M. RICHARDS.



HENRY MOORE. *Drawing, 1935.*

Henry Moore: Zwemmer Gallery

The Exhibition of Henry Moore's drawings, 1934, 1935, that is being held at the Zwemmer Gallery, gives proof that ink, chalk and pencil can be used as a self-contained medium, and not merely as the adjunct of a more imposing material. The drawings are a vital and complete mode of expression, made by an artist who is a sculptor, not "sculptor's drawings" or "sculptor's hobby."

Variety of outlook in an artist usually implies a change of attitude in time, marked by the historians as "periods." This means practically, that he admits only one aspect of a theme at a time, which he develops exclusively. The drawings of Henry Moore in this show group themselves into, perhaps, three sections, but their diversity is utterly independent of date, so that there are not three unequal phases of the development of one

idea, but the manifestations of three simultaneous statements that are unified by being the complete parts of one statement.

The nigger-driving by a theory to death is a subtle form of self-destruction. It argues the subjection of the artist and his inevitable revolt. These drawings show the sensitive wisdom of rejecting intellectual mutilation, and a realisation of the necessity of keeping all the parts of activity alive. If Henry Moore were content to do different kinds of drawings, he might be renowned merely for versatility; his value is more than surface-deep. He has chosen to intensify his own reactions, to increase his own knowledge and capacities, rather than to deify a theory and become its votary.

One of the most satisfactory drawings in the show is No. 8. It is self-enclosed, and

the shape and colour forms are complete in this instance through the infinite number of variations they suggest from the starting point of themselves. No. 43, a particularly good figure drawing, leads one to the eternally disputable riddle, "which came first, the wall or the picture?" A life drawing has the least possible decorative function. If a wall is to be adorned, its own character must be enhanced by its adornment. There is just that intellectual, non-decorative quality about Henry Moore's drawings from life which beguiles one into accepting the wall as the most convenient easel. These life drawings are more than figure studies, they are formal studies. It is not for the arrangement of characterised limbs that the human figure interests the artist, but for the particular example of the universal facts of plastic relationships that it provides. It is partly to the direct observation of the external exposition of these facts, that Henry Moore owes the richness and accuracy of his inventive powers.

UTRILLO: LEFEVRE GALLERY

Utrillo at his best is to be seen at the Lefevre Galleries. He is a painter whose very sensitiveness is a handicap as well as an asset, for it is through his acute perception, dictated almost by a mood, that his painting attains individual life. When that fails him, he is reduced to a sort of hack impressionism—something that might have been achieved by a nameless Pissaro. Without that perception, almost a sixth sense, an exhibition of Utrillo's paintings would amount to no more than a collection of rather uninteresting comments on a very monotonous subject. But in this case, all the pictures seem to have been painted at a climax. Here he has taken the apparent shapes of the objects that form his subject, and has stated them simply but unphotographically; after that he has constructed a harmony of pictorial colour, and enlivened it by a rare intensification of characteristic colour. In No. 15, La Rue Marcadet, he has made a lovely composition, that pivots on a wedge of blue sky, cut into by alternated slabs of houses.

It is the artistry of shape and colour that is primarily arresting—the approach that puts the fact of painting before the inspira-

tion of the subject. But the formal appreciation is increased and sensitized by the dabs of shrimp pink, that are bricks, the slender, dark streaks, that are trees.

ROUAULT: MAYOR GALLERY

A clue to Rouault's outlook, and to the resolution of his work into a type, is provided by the immediate appearance of the walls at the Mayor Gallery, which are furnished rather than decorated by the pictures. Rouault has evaded more than painterly tradition; his work is unclassifiable in any of the schools that are the by-products of that tradition. His starting point has been the effect produced by the use of a particular kind of material, but he has reversed the process of personal slavery that the absorption in a method usually demands.

His apprenticeship to a stained glass worker is proclaimed clearly by his painting. But he has not frittered away his energy in copying the effect of one medium in another, less suitable, one. It is in the intense qualities and not in the gymnastic possibilities (and consequent limitations) of stained glass that Rouault has found his inspiration. If merit lies in outlook purely, the dogmatists may argue not as to where, in a scale of values, Rouault shall be placed, but whether, as an artist, he exists at all. But Rouault, although possibly theoretically non-existent, has survived, not through deliberate attitude, but through the fact of having been able to transmit the character of his inspiration.

EILEEN HOLDING.

EVERYMAN CINEMA: HAMPSTEAD

In the Foyer: Exhibition of English Abstract Art. Barbara Hepworth, Arthur Jackson, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, John Piper. Introductory pamphlet (illustrated) by S. John Woods.

Films: Two abstract films by the Fishinger brothers.

November 11th: "Song of Ceylon," "Klein Dorrit," with Anny Ondra.

November 18th: "Avalanche," with Leni Reifenstahl.

* * *

The new vitality which the twentieth

century saw imparted to art was evident not only in new methods but in experiments with new materials. Bus tickets, steel rods, cork, newspapers and silver foil are not, however, so very far removed from paint and wood, and the step from paint brush or chisel to camera and film has proved one that artists have been tardy in taking. The film has, nevertheless, great possibilities as a medium for abstract art: remove its dramatic significance and its use as a means of escape from everyday life by way of sex and revolvers, and there remains the major element of plastic art—visual form. Form in plastic art is an affair of lines, masses and colours, and on their significance in combination depends the value of the work; into their relationships is also read movement, but since this movement is expressed in static media its play is to some extent limited. Alexander Calder realised this and, in consequence, produced mobile constructions, but still greater freedom is possible through the use of film, in which not only is movement the most important element but its significance can be amplified by the use of sound.

Lines, masses, colours, movements and sounds—these are the materials which the creative artist now has at his disposal. A tentative examination of the possibilities has been made by Massine in ballet. With the film, however, complete freedom from representation is possible. Two German brothers named Fischinger have produced a series of films called "*Lichtertanz*" using abstract mobile designs, the movements of white lines and shapes on a black background having the pure effect of movement expressed by light and space. Len Lye has also explored the field, using colours in vivid and charming combinations. Otherwise the opportunities offered by the film as a medium for abstract art have yet to be grasped.

Two of the *Lichtertanz* films will be showing at the Everyman Cinema, Hampstead, during the fortnight November 11th–24th, in conjunction with an exhibition of English abstract art. Seeing the work of Barbara Hepworth, Arthur Jackson, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, John Piper and the Fischinger brothers together, proves a most interesting experience.

S. JOHN WOODS.

NEW BOOKS

Paul Cézanne. By GERSTLE MACK. Jonathan Cape. 25s.

An important book in many ways. Mr. Mack has done a great deal of research, has found a great deal of unpublished material, and has produced a full and well-documented volume of over four hundred pages. He comments very little, and does not criticize at all. He contents himself with recording, and records as much as possible. His attitude, of course, is suggested by what he chooses to record, but it is nowhere forced.

Some people have suggested since the publication of this volume that Vollard's biography has been superseded; and that Vollard created a half-imaginary portrait of the artist to fit in with a preconceived theory and to make a picturesque story. There is no new evidence to justify this. Cézanne's letters published here could all have been written by the subject of Vollard's portrait. In places they amplify the picture of him one imagines from reading Vollard (supplemented by Gasquet, Coquiot, etc.), but it is always an amplification, never a modification. Vollard *did* comment, very definitely, in his vital reconstruction of a vital personality, a reconstruction to which Mr. Mack owes a lot, and which he makes no attempt either to decry or to imitate.

Cézanne's letters, even when they are about everyday things, make thrilling reading, and needed to be published. With the whole portrait in mind one can relish his opinion on almost any subject. To pick some sentences from a letter at random, we find him writing from Talloires on the Lac d'Annecy in 1896: "This is a temperate zone. The height of the surrounding hills is considerable. The lake, which is narrowed here between two promontories, seems to lend itself to the drawing exercises of young Misses. It is always nature, of course, but rather as we have been taught to see it in the albums of young lady tourists."

The Cézanne-Zola correspondence (the considerable remains of it are published here) forms an important part of Mr. Mack's amplification of the portrait. Vollard was

vivid here: rather too vivid, Mr. Mack tacitly suggests. But as part of a dramatic, lively portrait Vollard's satire on Zola was justified. His whole book remains the classic on the subject, but Mr. Mack has done a useful and even necessary piece of work, and has done it constructively with a great deal of patience and skill.

The book is well produced, and the illustrations plentiful and good. There are forty-eight of them, divided between reproductions of Cézanne's pictures (including some little-known ones), and portraits of himself and his relations from contemporary photographs, and views of the Jas de Bouffan, his studio at Aix, etc. There is a bibliography, a chronological outline of Cézanne's life and a good index. The book is not dear and is a good one to possess, both for straightforward reading and for reference.

J. P.

World Beneath the Microscope. By W. WATSON-BAKER. The Studio. 5s.

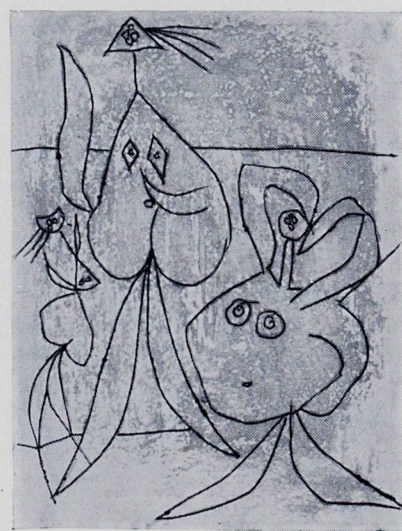
This is volume two of "The New Vision" series which is "devoted to the forms of to-day, and the fresh outlook with which, aided by the camera, we survey machines, the work of man, and nature." It consists of eighty very fine and well-reproduced photomicrographs of tiny plants, shells, animals and inorganic matter, preceded by a charming introduction by W. Gaunt, and an essay on apparatus by W. Watson-Baker. The only criticism one has to make is that the captions to the illustrations add nothing and are often pompous. This for instance, on the shell of a sea-urchin: "The modern sculptor must envy the massiveness of form, the grandeur of contour, of this small shell . . ." And this one, on sponge spicules: "Has the abstract painter of to-day achieved anything more interesting than this evolutionary design?" This is ungracious, since there is hardly a photograph in the book that has not been suggested, or at any rate sanctioned, by recent abstract painting or sculpture. It is amusing in fact to turn the pages and notice the artists suggested by the photographs: Klee (anchors and plates of Synapta), Ernst (a great many times), Miró (sponge spicules), Giacometti (chemical crystals), and so on.

J. P.

Twenty-three Engravings with an Essay. By ANATOLE JAKOVSKI. Ed. Orobitz & Co.

It is difficult to come to a conclusion about the difference between Anatole Jakovski and a *pukka* surrealist. He is a visionary with no weight of real experience and no capacity for it—only a capacity for imaginative denial and cancellation. All decisions are personified into opposing though sluggish forces, and he exists in a gently chaotic limbo. He makes everything approach him there. Houses are sucked down, books and pictures float in turbulent waters and artists grasp at straws. "Tout et nous-mêmes sont déterminés par le milieu actuel . . . nous voulons voir la vie telle quelle est." But he rushes headlong from it and dreams a dream of the nightmare of reality. So he is obsessed with darkness and death. He has no need for discrimination, any creative act assumes a mysterious and hopeless character for him—"parmi tout les étoiles nous préférons celles qui tombent." They become wandering lights without name or status, and finally disappear. When Jakovski writes without reference to actual works as he does in the essay introducing these engravings he gets lost in a chant of delighted despair. It is very readable and very alluring; he proselytises for a new religion which gives everything a preconceived poetic value through dissolution.

Many of the twenty-three engravings



chosen have only a value through his context—where their weakness is romanticised. A few have a double existence—his and theirs. Those of Calder, Giacometti, Héliou, Kandinsky, Léger, Magnelli, Nicholson, and Picasso all have a precision and directness of line which refuse to be absorbed and reduced into fantasy.

These engravings are really the *édition de luxe* of a smaller illustrated book of essays, which has not yet appeared, on all the artists *plus* Marcel Duchamp. In dealing directly with an artist's work Jakovski always has something both suggestive and illuminating to say, and this should be an interesting book.
M. E.

AXIS • 1936

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By CHARLES BURNEY, Mus.D., F.R.S.

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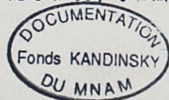
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