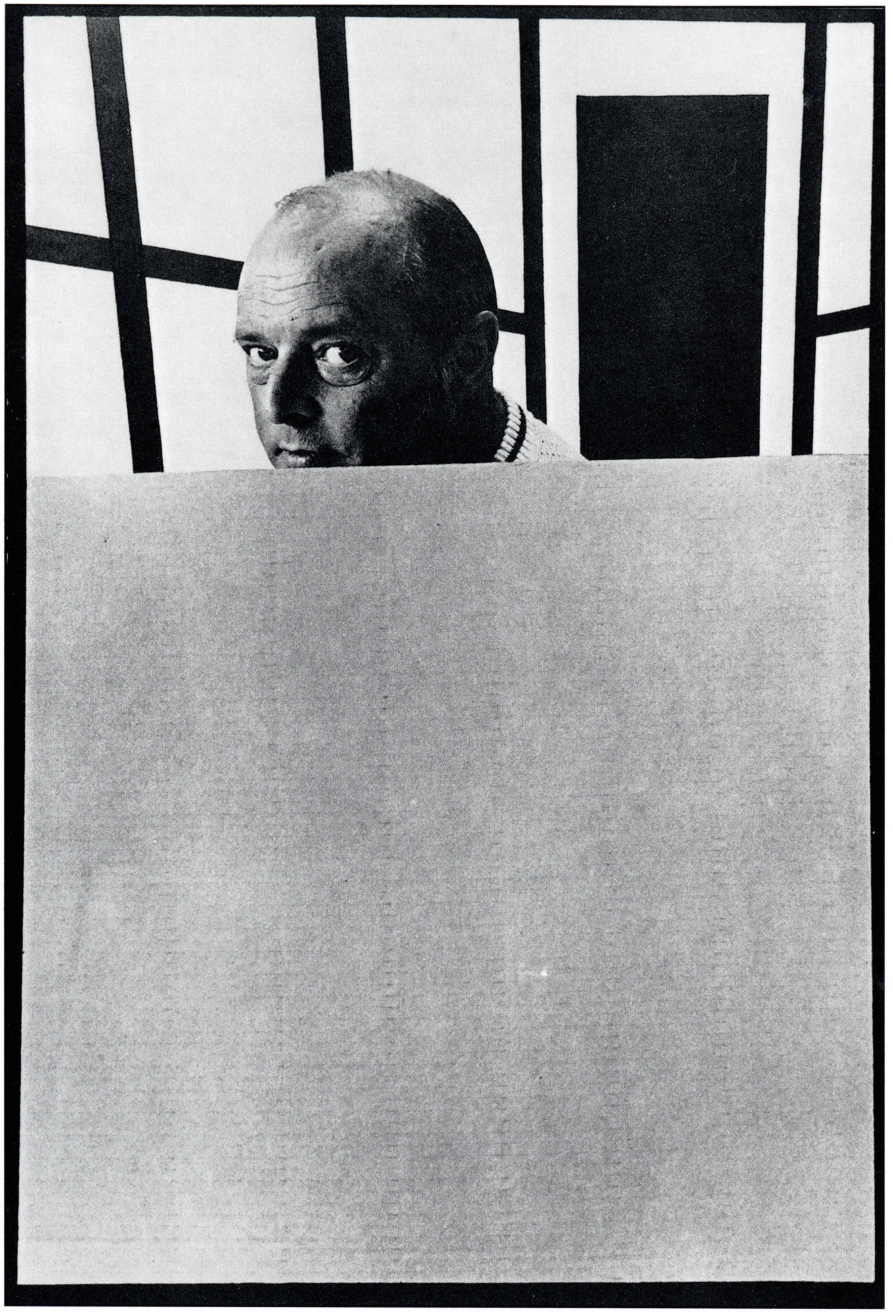
Cover: *Icarus 64,* 1964 (detail)
oil on canvas
The entire painting is shown in Figure 14

JIMMY ERNST
SHADOW TO LIGHT
PAINTINGS 1942–1982



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Exhibition Curated by
Stanley I Grand

Essays by
Donald Kuspit
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Jimmy Ernst: From Surrealist to Abstract Visionary

Donald Kuspit

> The pall of silence had been in place with such apparent finality that I feared what was hidden behind it.
>
> —Jimmy Ernst[1]

Jimmy Ernst called himself "a child of Dada and Surrealism," and paintings like *Surreal*, 1942 (Figure 2) and *Untitled (Blue Max)*, 1942 (Figure 3) make this abundantly clear—at the center of the latter is a portrait of the German Surrealist painter Max Ernst, Jimmy's father. But the adult Jimmy was much more than a Dadaist and Surrealist: in the silence of his abstract art—a far-from-tranquil silence—he recapitulated the transcendental experiences of his youth, and used them to new contemporary purpose, at once personal and social.

Once Jimmy realized that his "talent was . . . being held captive by Surrealist ghosts," he was able to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This was an artistic awareness—a search for something fresh and new, recognizing that Surrealism had become somewhat old and labored—but even more crucial, a personal one.[2] For the chief Surrealist ghost was Jimmy's famous father, from whom he had been more or less alienated since the age of two, when Max betrayed Jimmy's mother with Gala Éluard, later to become Gala Dali. How could Jimmy continue to live off the capital of his father's art and fame when he felt so ambivalent—to say the least—about Max, who had abandoned his mother? Max was notoriously cold, and Jimmy needed warmth, empathy, intimacy, and—above all—an identity of his own. It was the classic syndrome of the famous father and the son who "suffered . . . painful rejections" by him, ostensibly because his career was more important than any human relationship, but more deeply because he was emotionally defective—Max was a seriously "flawed, often hermetically cold human being," as Jimmy came to understand. The challenge of Jimmy's career—indeed, of his life—was to get beyond his father's influence,

1. Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), 249. All subsequent quotations are from this book, unless otherwise noted. *A Not-So-Still Life* is perhaps the greatest artist's autobiography of our time, both as social and artistic history and above all as a demonstration of what psychoanalysts call working-through. I am not exaggerating; I know of no other autobiography in which a modern artist shows such insight into his life and art and their relationship.

2. The decisive moment seemed to have been the 1942 Surrealist exhibition at the Marian Willard gallery in New York. It became clear to Jimmy—twenty-two at the time and himself showing in the exhibition—that Surrealism had "the unmistakable aura not of an alive movement but rather that of a closed circle of licensed practitioners."

persona, and reputation. Until he could do this, he would achieve nothing as either a person or an artist.

The solution to his problem came directly from his mother, and more broadly from all the women Max had used and "discarded at the brightest possible moment" of their relationship—ostensibly in fear that "the end result of emotional involvements was a detestable prison," but in fact out of narcissistic inability, rationalized as artistic superiority, to see beyond himself. Jimmy identified with these hurt, victimized women: "As a son I had experienced some of the terror that others, most particularly women, must have felt at the unexplained appearance of an impenetrable barrier that would freeze attempts to approach the inner person." He also identified with his mother's humanism, as he called it, and even more, with her saintliness—her ability to rise above her suffering and her unhappy situation to maintain hope and faith in life. (She fled Nazi Germany for Paris, but she died in Auschwitz.) Jimmy also found this quality in Marie-Berthe Aurenche (Max's second wife) and perhaps above all in Maja Aretz, the Catholic woman who cared for him after Max had left.

This spirituality also became associated with the churches and synagogues he attended as a child (on the principle that he would choose between Judaism—his mother's religion—and Catholicism—his father's—when he grew up). In particular, "Cologne's beautiful churches" impressed him with the "wonder of [their] stained glass windows and altarpieces by the Rhenish masters." These churches—representing security and community ("the symbolic Gothic spires of my childhood") came to Jimmy's rescue and saved him both from his father and from Surrealism. Suddenly, at the moment of crisis, "without any deliberate effort I found the content of my painting shifting toward a more pronounced Abstraction . . . certain totally nonfigurative passages on a canvas became strongly reminiscent of the Gothic church-architecture and stained-glass windows of my youth." In a sense, Jimmy experienced an emotional and artistic miracle—a regression in the service of both his ego and his art. With the help of a symbol and memory of transcendence, he moved beyond the "personal biomorphy [and] dependence on Freudian interpretation" demanded by Surrealism and left behind its generally "literary" character.

He did something more: although he achieved a "sense of 'immediacy' and 'action on the canvas,'" (the abstract expressionistic norms of the day), he did so on his own terms. His "linear energy-storms" were not simply gratuitous explosions of the unconscious—blind discharges given nominal "artistic" shape—but conscious expressions of the need and wish for transcendence and sublimation. He united expressionist rage—a response to danger and isolation—with faith in spiritual survival, whatever the emotional and social odds against him. Hope balanced helplessness, as he himself said. Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* was a beloved model—indeed, the one unequivocally great work of art for Jimmy. It juxtaposes, on the one hand, the dramatic, hyperexpressive image of the very physical Christ crucified and abandoned and, on the other, the equally dramatic, more subtly expressive image of the spiritually transfigured and resurrected Christ. Jimmy's problem was to translate Grünewald's vision into abstract terms—to liberate its basic spiritual meaning from its old-fashioned iconography. In short, Jimmy struggled to synthesize physical impulse and spiritual structure—implicitly Gothic (that is, aspirational)—in works that were essentially abstract altarpieces. He eventually succeeded, uniting expression and construction to new transcendental effect.

In terms of art history, he was ahead of his times, for according to modernist dictates, expression and construction are opposites that cannot be united. Nor should they be; each should be pursued to the limits of its own purity. In showing that they could and must converge—that they could form a viable hybrid, more esthetically and emotionally adventurous and complex than pure expression or pure construction—Jimmy was, however unwittingly, a postmodernist.

One of the most striking aspects of Jimmy's works is their increase in size over the years. This gradual change demonstrates in physical dimensions his development beyond his father's Surrealism to his own autonomous abstraction—autonomous even in terms of the prevailing American abstract expressionism, however abstract and expressionistic it also

expressionism, however abstract and expressionistic it also was. Max's pictures tend to be sub-easel in scale—more or less the size of pages in a book. In fact, his most famous works are books of collage images. Jimmy began his career following this model; *Surreal* (Figure 2) is twelve by sixteen inches, and *Untitled (Blue Max)* (Figure 3) is not much larger, twenty by twenty-four. There are some standard easel-size works from the 1940s—*Dallas Blues*, 1947 (Figure 7) is thirty-six by twenty-eight inches. But by the sixties, with such works as *Rimrock*, 1960 (Figure 12), which is fifty by sixty inches, and *Icarus 64*, 1964 (Figure 14), which is fifty by forty, Jimmy had begun making large works, confirming his independence from his father and confidence in his own ideas and ability. The large works also show his assimilation of an American sense of open, expansive space—in sharp contrast to the cramped, even claustrophobic, European space in his father's pictures. The contrast between the enclosed, impoverished space of *Surreal* and the broad space of infinitely extending figures in *Katchina White*, 1982 (Figure 25) makes the point succinctly.

The change in style brought with it a change in content—a shift from hand-me-down "surnaturalism," as it might be called, to a uniquely American content, which came to serve Jimmy's transcendental imagery as much as his early "religious" experience. *Mahogany Hall Stomp*, 1946 (Figure 6) and *Dallas Blues* (Figure 7) embody Jimmy's response to jazz—they are a kind of embodied jazz (as they are also transitional from Surrealism to abstraction)—and *Katchina White* reflects his experience of Native American ritual. For Jimmy, they were the most authentic, "native" aspects of America. More than that, he spontaneously identified with the blacks who created jazz and the Native Americans confined to their reservations in the West, for they were as socially outcast and rejected as he felt himself to be.

Shortly after he arrived in the United States, Jimmy had two experiences that proved particularly formative—one on the streets of New York, the other in the New Mexican desert. One day, at the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to Central Park, Jimmy witnessed the performance of "a spasm band of nine or so black youngsters." He became so fascinated with their jazz, that he joined the band as "collector of contributions, [which] seemed to astound the pedestrians." Black boys were supposed to work for white boys, not the other way around. One night one of the band members took him to Carnegie Hall to hear a jazz concert devoted to *Spirituals to Swing*. "I had the feeling of being an eavesdropper at a private event. More than a performance, each musician seemed to communicate far beyond instrument and voice." This became Jimmy's ambition: to make pictures as full of "subtle tonalities [and] deep empathy" as jazz and to emulate its method of improvisation and skat. In other words, to improvise visual skat—which is one way Jimmy understood abstraction.

The other formative component was also supplied by a musical event when he witnessed the annual Hopi Snake Dance. "The ceremony was performed by richly painted dancers who to the insistent rhythm of drums and an almost monotone chant moved in a contracting circle toward a pit in the center of the village's plaza from which each man pulled a pair of writhing rattlesnakes." It was a "Surrealist spectacle," as Jimmy said (that is, archaic in import), but it was also a fertility ritual—a rain dance intended to make the desert bloom—with profound social import. What made it especially moving for Jimmy was that it was "the expression of a people rather than of isolated artists, and yet each one of them was highly individual, as if calling out from one soul to another." This was crucial for Jimmy: William Baziotes—a surrogate father figure who was as emotionally good to Jimmy as Max was bad for him—had argued that "'meaningful art' . . . could occur only within groups who shared a totally common experience. Or in a time . . . when the artist's subject matter ran fairly parallel to a predominant belief." Jimmy was determined to make art that was meaningful in these terms—"great art [that] would be based on anonymity rather than personalities"—on shared beliefs and communal concerns, not the self-expression of isolated individualists (such as Max). Jazz was one kind of communal, spiritual art; the Snake Dance another. Jimmy's was to be a third, at once as personal as jazz and as social as the Snake Dance.

One final experience, even more personal and intimate

them the way myth predates history—informs the spiritual vision of his mature works. Ever since childhood, he had been "intrigued by bodies of water washing against reeds, grasses and trees."[3] More particularly, the sensation of being "in a lake, in a pond, very still water, with insects skating on the water," haunted him.[4] The patterns these insects made seemed improvised and abstract—a particularly intense, spontaneous form of skat. But the awareness of water had a highly personal meaning. As Jimmy writes in *A Not-So-Still-Life*, his earliest memory is of "my mother holding me in her arms, letting the mysterious water [she was standing in] cover my legs. Suddenly the mirrorlike surface ahead of me was broken." It was Max, rising from the depths. "He raised his arms to me, and Lou was lifting me toward him. I became aware of innumerable long-legged, water-skating insects on the glassy surface surrounding Max's body and I began to scream and struggled against being handed over. Max's face went dark and angry; he turned and swam away."

This emotionally complicated experience has been interpreted psychoanalytically by Gilbert Rose, a friend of Jimmy's.[5] For me, what is important about the event—in effect a screen memory—is Jimmy's acute awareness of physical detail, as well as his association of the water with his mother. His prescient rejection of Max adds a touch of instinctive aggression: aggressively articulated detail, as endlessly proliferating and as crystal clear as ripples, is exactly what we find in *Rimrock*, 1960 (Figure 12), which hovers on the border between natural observation and pure abstraction. The experience of the placid maternal water, shattered by his father's intrusive body, is transposed to stone, engraved as though for eternity—materialized in a substance as elemental, enduring, and basic to life as water. The *horror vacui* made evident compensates for his father's empty place—the emptiness he felt at his father's rejection and abandonment. (Why did Max swim away? Is it not supremely narcissistic to be offended that an infant does not want you to hold him?)

This same experience—the sense of a tranquil, fragile surface broken but not entirely shattered, and thus intact for all its "suffering," for the swarm of buglike details that disrupt its clarity and make it dangerous—appears in what is in effect the broken stained-glass-window look (stained glass being yet another kind of liquid surface) of such later grand, murallike works as *Oceania*, 1963 (Figure 13), which might be seen as Max's monstrous presence shattering the peace; *Homage to Edgar Varèse*, 1965 (Figure 15), honoring a visionary of musical improvisation; and *Only Yesterday*, 1968 (Figure 17), among other works. A highly detailed surface is "disturbed" by enormous fault lines—huge flaws—that nonetheless do not destroy. The silence of the scene—the intimacy with the mother—is broken by the noisy father, but it remains intact, however precariously. Even the row of shamanistic personages in *Katchina White*—Katchina dolls represent the religious figures in the sacred performances—seems to disrupt the surface, but not to undermine it. Perhaps the experience is embodied most obviously in *Sea of Grass (Black on Black)*, 1982 (Figure 27), one of a series in which Jimmy deals directly with the fascination water washing against grass held for him. Here apparently, its depressing aspect—the unhappy effect of Max's sudden presence in the water—is conveyed.

The idiosyncratic mixture of personal and transcendental experience that informs Jimmy's art, conceived as a sublimation of rejection and ostracization, is perhaps nowhere more evident than in *Icarus 64*, 1964 (Figure 14), one of many works devoted to the theme. *On Winter Nights (With Louis Simpson)*, 1982 (Figure 26) is another. The ambiguous figure of Icarus—half-flying, half-falling—is overlaid on what is essentially a poem about death. Icarus's feathers are as marvelously detailed as the shards of liquid glass and hold together with the same uncertainty. Jimmy was as obsessed by the story of

3. Unpublished statement, dated August 27, 1983.

4. Jimmy Ernst with Francine du Plessix, "The Artist Speaks: My Father, Max Ernst," *Art in America* (November/December1968): 54.

5. Gilbert Rose, *The Power of Form: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetic Form* (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, 1992, expanded edition), 102. Jimmy is the character called Bruno.

Icarus as he was by water. Indeed, water is significant here—Icarus fell from the sky into the sea, where he drowned. And the myth of Icarus is a classic story of the ambiguous relationship between father and son.

Jimmy had an unusual response to the story when he first heard it as a student in the Gymnasium in Germany. "Icarus' destruction was the result of not having obeyed his father's commands to avoid soaring so high the sun would melt the wax that held his wings together, or so low that moisture from the sea would make them heavy. I did not endear myself to the rigid tutors by agreeing that Icarus was indeed at fault, not for disobedience, but for having, in the first place, unquestionably trusted artificial wings fashioned by his father, Daedalus, whose genius had enabled him to entrap the monster Minotaur on Crete." As Jimmy remarked, "only Daedalus would live to tell the tale." The story is a father's view of what happened. In fact, Thomas Bulfinch offers another version of the story. Daedalus had a stepson, as it were, his sister's son Perdix, who was put under his

> charge to be taught the mechanical arts. He was an apt scholar and gave striking evidences of ingenuity. Walking on the seashore he picked up the spine of a fish. Imitating it, he took a piece of irony and notched it on the edge, and thus invented the *saw*. He put two pieces of iron together, connecting them at one end with a rivet, and sharpening the other ends, and made a pair of *compasses*. Daedalus was so envious of his nephew's performances that he took an opportunity, when they were together one day on a high tower, to push him off.[6]

In other words, Icarus did not fall to his death solely because of his own arrogance but because of his father's envy. Just as Daedalus "was so proud of his achievements that he could not bear the idea of a rival," as Bulfinch states, so Max was so proud of his achievements he could not bear the idea of a rival—even his own son. Where Daedalus literally killed his stepson—pushing him from the same high tower he and Icarus flew from—Max in effect "soul murdered" his (to use the psychoanalyst Leonard Shengold's terminology). But Jimmy survived by becoming angry: "A strange anger suddenly took possession of me. The ancient dilemma: Should a son make use of wings fashioned by his father? I bolted from the building and delivered myself of a tirade against all painting." He also ran to his mother for succor.

The flight of Icarus is as much a parable of ambition that overreached itself—that understood no limits—as it is of rebellion against the father. It is an archetype of the wish to transcend—to fly higher than the world and one's father—and the failure to do so. Jimmy's mature works combine images of successful and unsuccessful transcendence in a single abstract vision. Just as the water was broken and disturbed by the apparition of Max, so transcendence makes a broken, disturbed appearance in such works as *Across a Silent Bridge*, 1957, *Sentinel*, 1967, *Another Silence, Twice*, both 1972, and *Due North*, 1972–73 (Figures 11, 16, 20, 21, and 22), among many other works. The central, confrontational, emblematic, apparitional, abstract constructions that appear in these works—at once communal, Katchinalike figures and symbols of radical autonomy and individuality—are all versions of Icarus, at least in my opinion. The fate of Icarus haunted Jimmy, however unconsciously, all his life. Icarus was the obverse of Daedalus Max, and the question was whether to wear the Surrealist wings he fashioned or forge one's own.

After attempting to obediently wear his father's wings, and finding they were a bad fit and that he could no longer fly far with them in the different artistic atmosphere of America, Jimmy finally managed to forge his own ingenious artistic wings—indeed, to soar, truly transcend, with them. He did so ironically: by turning the figure of failure—the Icarus who wore his father's wings and got nowhere with them—into a symbol of successful selfhood. Indeed, there is a certain irony in *Due North*, which can be interpreted both as the shrine Daedalus built for his dead son and as Icarus's transfigured

6. Thomas Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable* (New York: Heritage, 1942), 162.

and resurrected figure. The same can be said for *Sentinel* and the other mysterious abstract figures that haunt Jimmy's pictures. Grünewald remains the consistent paradigm: the transformation of the crucified Christ into the resurrected Christ becomes the transformation of the falling Icarus into the rising hero. It is now a strong new Jimmy who emerges out of the silence of the past, as *Self-Portrait When Last Seen Out of the Past*, 1961, suggests (Figure 9 is an earlier study for this painting). He has become strong where he was wounded, as the sturdy, supporting structure of *Another Silence* and *Homage to Edgar Varèse* indicates: what were once fault lines—breaks in the surface—have become flying buttresses. In these and similar works, Jimmy has ingeniously created an indestructible cathedral of the self.

Jimmy Ernst and the Tradition of the Artist-Intellectual

Stanley I Grand

> We cannot accept the anti-humanist concept that culture is a mere servant or tool of political or social aims. The seeds of aesthetic and social aspirations of any people have always been anticipated, sensed and discovered by philosophers, poets and artists.
>
> —Jimmy Ernst[1]

In his remarkable memoir *A Not-So-Still Life*, Jimmy Ernst recounts his reaction on first seeing the Elder Pieter Bruegel's (c. 1525–1569) *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c. 1558, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels) at a Parisian exhibition. A youngster at the time, Jimmy found the painting and what it represented so upsetting that he stormed out of the exhibition hall. Yet despite this inauspicious encounter, in later years the Icarus legend became important in both Jimmy's painting [*Icarus 64*, Figure 14] and writing. Indeed, in many ways, the myth forms the autobiography's subtext since it poses the key question of Jimmy's growing up:"The ancient dilemma: Should a son make use of wings fashioned by his father?"[2]

Like Icarus, Jimmy was the son of a famous artist/artificer, the painter Max Ernst. Like the Icarus legend, *A Not-So-Still-Life* contains a flight to freedom. Unlike the myth, however, where the son falls to his death, here he manages to evade the tightening noose of National Socialism, while the father—whom the Nazis officially labeled a Degenerate Artist in 1937—barely manages to escape to America. Jimmy's mother Louise Straus-Ernst, on the other hand, died at Auschwitz. *A Not-So-Still-Life,* then, is a coming-of-age saga that is simultaneously part biography and part autobiography. It includes the artist's youth in Weimar, Germany, his flight from Europe, a new life in America, and the loss of his parents (the book begins and ends with a parent's death). Complete with cameo appearances by the leading European Modernists, it describes a personal odyssey through the labyrinth of twentieth-century art and politics. On another level it is a partial biography of the father as witnessed, frequently from afar, by the son. That the tone of the book is often dark is indicated by the evocative, poetic chapter titles: "An Echo Etched in Smoke," "A Cage of Nightmares," "The Luxury of Sadness," "Darkness Über Alles," or "Some Desperate Dances." In sum, the book is a modern parable, an allegory, a contemporary Pilgrim's Progress, and an eloquent *apologia pro vita sua*. As Diane Waldman observed: "In both his extraordinary autobiography . . . published shortly before his death, and in his last paintings, he indeed came to terms with both his life and his art."[3]

Although "extraordinary," the book is part of a long tradition of artists' writings, a tradition that Jimmy Ernst knew. While growing up in Germany he had had the benefit of a Gymnasium education. His mother, an art historian and

1. Jimmy Ernst, "A Letter to Artists of the Soviet Union," *Art Journal* 21, 2 (Winter, 1961–62): 68.

2. Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), 78.

3. Diane Waldman, "Introduction" in *Jimmy Ernst: A Survey, 1942–1983* (East Hampton, N.Y.: Guild Hall Museum, 1985), 9.

journalist, reared him in a home where both the written word and images were valued highly. Later, when Jimmy himself began to write, he consulted and quoted from Goldwater and Treves's *Artists on Art*.[4] In the catalogue that accompanied Jimmy's Retrospective at the Guild Hall Museum (1985), Frank Getlein stated that Jimmy was "arguably the most literate American artist of his generation."[5] (High regard indeed when one considers that this company included Robert Motherwell, Ad Reinhardt, and Barnett Newman.)

A Not-So-Still-Life adds to an extensive written heritage that stretches back to the Classical era. Although vast, this literature is not well known to non-specialists. Consequently, in order to appreciate fully Jimmy Ernst's contribution, a brief overview of the landscape would be helpful. (Since comprehensiveness cannot be attempted in a short essay, bear in mind that the following examples represent a personal, even idiosyncratic, selection from the Western tradition.)

This survey begins with the High Classical sculptor Polyclitus (active between c. 450 and 405 B.C.) who wrote a famous, but now lost, treatise on human proportion called the *Canon*. Somewhat later, during the Late Classical era, the minor sculptor Xenocrates of Sikyon (active first half of the third century B.C.) wrote a book that evaluated and criticized artists according to certain aesthetic criteria. Reflecting the refined taste exemplified by Lysippus' (active second half of the fourth century B.C.) new canon of proportion, Xenocrates praised Polyclitus for his employment of contrapposto but faulted him for the excessively monotonous heaviness of his figures. Although no longer extant, Xenocrates' text informed much of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. Not to be dependent on the astuteness of other critics, Apelles (active in the fourth century B.C.), the most famous painter of his day, wrote a treatise on his own art, which boasted that he knew when to remove his hand from the painting.

Despite the contributions from antiquity, the rich tradition of writing artists has its roots in the intellectual imperative forged during the *quattrocento* (the 1400s) in Italy, namely that the painter is an intellectual, not a craftsman, that creating art is a mental endeavor, and that the role of the artist is to advance the store of human knowledge. Thus, during the Renaissance as individuals and society became ever more complex and self-conscious, as Classical learning was rediscovered and absorbed, as urban based economies rapidly developed, and as thought became increasingly secularized; artists were no longer content to write studio manuals like Cennino Cennini's (c. 1370 to c. 1440) *Il Libro dell'Arte* (written c. 1400).

While seeking to differentiate themselves from craftsmen and become identified as humanists, artists were stigmatized by what they regarded as an unfortunate oversight: painting was not included among the Seven Liberal Arts. Typically divided into the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music theory) and the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), the liberal arts represented activities of the mind in contrast to those of the "vulgar" or manual arts. Worse, although poetry could boast of authoritative and ennobling ancient texts—Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars poetica*—no similar theoretical works existed for the art of painting. Nonetheless, since both Aristotle and Horace, the latter in a famous simile *Ut pictura poesis* ("as is painting so is poetry" or as it came to be understood "as is poetry so is painting"), had commented on certain correspondences between painting and poetry, art theoreticians came to equate the "sister" arts. Significantly, Cennini, without mentioning Horace, linked painting and poetry; and somewhat later, Leonardo stated flatly that painting is the superior art. The full development of the theoretical implications of *Ut pictura poesis*, however, was concurrent with the rise of art academies commencing at the end of the sixteenth century.

During the Renaissance, on the other hand, artists were often more concerned with advancing the scientific aspects of their art. No longer content merely to codify studio practices,

4. Jimmy Ernst, "Freedom of Expression in the Arts II," *Art Journal* 25, 1 (Fall 1965): 46, n.1. He quotes a letter from Courbet included in Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, *Artists on Art from the XIV to the XX Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1945).

5. Frank Getlein, "Jimmy Ernst in Retrospect," *Jimmy Ernst: A Survey, 1942–1983* (East Hampton, N.Y.: Guild Hall Museum, 1985), 12.

numerous artists engaged in studies that clearly belong within the *quadrivium*. Their interest in perspective is a case in point. Rediscovered by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), or at least first publicly demonstrated by him, the basic laws of linear or mathematical perspective captured the imagination of many of the foremost *quattrocento* artists. Paolo Uccello (1397–1475), according to Vasari, was so enamored with perspective, his "sweet mistress," that he refused his wife's entreaties to come to bed. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), a close friend of Brunelleschi's, made a detailed study of the subject. Piero della Francesca (c. 1410/20–1492), also of a theoretical bent, wrote *De prospectiva pingendi* as well as other works on mathematics and perspective (*Del abaco* and *Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus*). When his eyesight failed, Piero, one of the greatest of a great generation of painters, gave up his art and devoted himself to writing works that went beyond solving studio problems and into the realm of mathematical speculation. Another master of perspective, and one of the foremost painters of Baroque illusionistic ceilings (Sant' Ignazio, Rome is his masterpiece), Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709) published *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (2 vols., 1693 and 1700). This exceedingly influential study—it appeared in many editions and translations, including Chinese—disseminated widely the Roman convention of *quadratura* ceiling decoration in which illusionistically painted architectural elements appear as extensions of the actual architecture.

Artists during the Renaissance approached proportion as well from a humanistic point of view. Although artists like Lysippus had based their rules on a study of nature—Lysippus used to say that "whereas his predecessors had made men as they really were, he made them as they appeared to be" (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XXXIV, 65)—in the centuries following the demise of the Ancient world, art became less concerned with naturalistic proportions. By the Gothic era, authors such as the architect Villard d'Honnecourt (active in the thirteenth century) had reverted to a pre-classical aesthetic wherein proportions were determined schematically and ornamentally, often without any interest in the proportional relationships of the various parts of the body. Reflecting the Renaissance's new scientific approach, however, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) made a careful study of proportion that culminated in his *Underweyssung der Messung* (Treatise on Measurement, 1525) and the posthumous *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* (Four Books on Human Proportion, 1528).

By the end of the *quattrocento* , the position of the artist in society had changed dramatically, and Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)—engineer, inventor, painter, musician, anatomist, writer, fortifications expert, botanist, art theoretician, and hydrologist (this is the short list)—embodied the new ideal. No longer was a work of art valued primarily for its rich materials (Alberti urged artists to avoid using gold and precious stones on their paintings) or painstaking technique, but instead for its intellectual conception and learning. Thus when accused of wasting time by painting too slowly, Leonardo responded by saying that the time spent thinking is the most valuable. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the new status of the artist in Italy was epitomized in painter and courtier Raphael (1483–1520).

That Jimmy Ernst believed firmly in this conception of the artist as thinker is clear from his contribution to a symposium on "The Artist—Technician or Humanist?":

> The artist is not a mechanic of methods or of theories. In the physical construction of his work the tools of technique are subservient to the excitement of the inner eye. Inspiration must precede technical means. Without it the artist[']s activity consists of mere means only.[6]

After gaining acceptance in Italy, the new view of the artist as humanist gradually spread throughout the rest of Europe. In Spain, Francisco Pacheco (1564–1654), painter, writer, poet, and scholar, who was the dominant artistic personality in Seville, helped propagate the new conception of the artist. A great teacher whose best-known pupil, and subsequent son-in-law,

6. Jimmy Ernst, "The Artist—Technician or Humanist? One Artist's Answer," *Art Journal* 15, 1 (Fall 1955): 52.

was Velázquez, Pacheco wrote *El Arte de la Pintura* (1649). In addition to biographical information about Velázquez, El Greco and others, Pacheco made exceedingly detailed pronouncements on iconography: for example he insisted that artists depict four rather than three nails in Crucifixion scenes. Since he was an official censor for the Inquisition, his recommendations carried considerable weight. In England, despite the success of portrait painters Hans Holbein (1497–1543) and Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), whom Charles I knighted, a concerted effort to elevate the status of the artist was not made until the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768.[7] Between 1768 and 1790, until blindness forced his retirement, the Academy's first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) delivered fifteen lectures that define and codify the classic academic attitude. Published as the *Discourses*, Reynolds's lectures elucidate the principles of eighteenth-century aesthetics—the cult of the antique, the rational tradition, the pantheon of artists headed by Raphael—which sought to form a bulwark against the expansion of inchoate Romanticism. That James Boswell dedicated his famous *Life of Johnson* to Reynolds is indicative of the respect the painter inspired among the leading thinkers of his time. Nonetheless, considering the Academy's preference for History Painting, it is ironic that Reynolds's greatest success, both financially and aesthetically, came from his portraits.

The theoretical issues discussed in the *Discourses* are representative of artists' continuing and extensive interest in theory, a cursory study of which would require several volumes. The following examples illustrate only one theoretical stream, the Classic. In a famous letter to Baldassare Castiglione (1516), Raphael, echoing Zeuxis, described the creation of an ideal figure by employing the best attributes of several models. When the Milanese painter and writer Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600) went blind at age 33, he devoted himself to writing and subsequently published two enormously influential treatises on art: *Trattato dell' Arte de la Pittura, Scoltura, et Architettura* (1584, an English translation appeared in 1598) and *Idea del Tempio della Pittura* (1590). Further advancing the theoretical base of the Classical ideal, Nicolas Poussin (c. 1593–1665) developed a complex doctrine of Doric and Ionic modes based on an understanding of antique musical theory. Although Poussin's planned treatise on art never progressed beyond the research stage, his notes were published by Bellori in 1672 and, along with his letters, contributed to his immense influence. Poussin's greatest advocate was Charles Lebrun (1619–1690), who worked for Louis XIV. In 1662, the Sun King named him *Premier Peintre du roi*. The following year Lebrun became Director of the Académie and subsequently institutionalized Poussin's Classicism as the official French style. Indebted as well to Poussin, Lebrun's famous *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions . . .* (1698) systematized the rendering of emotional states. Long a standard reference work, Lebrun's opus codified, organized, and classified the rules of art reflecting the underlying belief that laws do indeed exist, can be discovered, and when properly applied will produce high quality art. Other important advocates of the Classic ideal include Anton Raffael Mengs (1728–1779), the leader of the Neoclassical school, who was once considered to be the finest living painter. His *Gedanken über die Schönheit hund den Geschmack in der Malerei* (Considerations on Beauty and Taste in Painting, 1762), which he dedicated to his friend Johann Joachim Winckelmann, was of great importance and widely disseminated. Finally, in response to the naturalistic surfaces employed by artists such as Rodin, Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921), an exponent of classicism both in his own sculpture and as the author of the widely read, and translated, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (1893; English edition, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, 1907) advocated the concept of "pure form."

Closely related to the view of the artist as a practitioner of the liberal rather than the vulgar arts—theory clearly falls within the realm of philosophy and rhetoric—was the Renaissance concept of fame. The radical nature of this concept becomes apparent when we consider the art created between

7. As a young man, Reynolds had read and been influenced by the portrait painter Jonathan Richardson's (1665–1745) *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715), which asserted the intellectual nature of painting.

A.D. 330, when Constantine moved the capital of the Roman empire to Byzantium, and the first stirrings of the Renaissance eight hundred years later. We are struck at the outset by the absence of artists' names. For the most part we have no idea who painted the illuminated manuscripts, set the glittering mosaics, or built the churches soaring ever higher. Their creators are cloaked in an opaque robe of anonymity. Occasionally, of course, a name pops up, but rarely more than that.

In the twelfth century, however, things began to change. Not only did the sculptor Wiligelmus (active c. 1100) introduce a new, more naturalistic figure style, which reflects some knowledge of Classical art, but his achievement was commemorated by an inscription carved into one of the reliefs on the facade of the Cathedral in the Northern Italian town of Modena.[8] Subsequently Giovanni Pisano (d. after 1314) carved a self-laudatory inscription into the pulpit of the Duomo at Siena wherein he boasts of surpassing his father, who had himself, in an earlier Sienese inscription, claimed to be the greatest sculptor. At the beginning of the 1300s, the *trecento*, Dante captured the increasing importance, and transitory nature, of fame:

> *In painting Cimabue thought indeed*
> *To hold the field; now Giotto has the cry,*
> *So that the fame of the other few now heed.*
> (*Purgatory* XI, 94–96, Binyon translation)

Not unexpectedly, and contemporaneous with the developing cult of fame is the rise of interest in self-portraiture: well-known examples include Ghiberti's on the Florentine Baptistery Doors and Alberti's, done in the manner of a Roman medal, which well reflects the era's lionization of and competition with the antique. (Both Alberti, as has been noted, and Ghiberti wrote important treatises.) Moreover, as artists turned to classic humanist texts such as Pliny's *Natural History*, they read of sculptors (Book XXXIV) and painters (Book XXXV) whose works had been lost but whose fame remained. They desired the same immortalization. After all, did not their artistic accomplishments compare favorably with those of Classical times?

One might call this new outlook a shift from Luke to Vasari, that is a shift from Lives of the Saints to Lives of the artists. One of the most famous artist-writers, Luke the Evangelist was a painter celebrated for his portrait(s) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, one of which, according to the faithful, is still visible in SS Annunciata, Florence. Patron saint of painters and protector of academies such as the *Accademia di S. Luca*, Rome (founded 1593), Luke appears as the subject of many paintings including Guercino's *Saint Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin* (1652, Nelson-Atkins Museum). The shift from hagiography to history is evident in the career of the miniaturist Matthew Paris (d. 1259): not only did he write and illustrate a *Life of Saint Alban* (Trinity College, Dublin, owns an autograph manuscript), but he also composed the *Historia Anglorum* (or *Historia Minor*), which chronicles events of the first half of the thirteenth century. Interestingly enough, the work contains a self-portrait.

The most influential chronicler, of course, is the important Mannerist painter Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574). Long before the era of professional biographers, artists themselves assumed the task of retelling the lives of predecessors and contemporaries. The classic example is Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (*Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani*, 1550; 2nd. ed. enlarged 1568). More than a series of biographical entries, the *Lives* argues that the great painters of Tuscany, commencing with Cimabue and Giotto, rescued art from the debased conventions of the post-Classical world by establishing their art on a close study of nature. He traces the progression from the pioneering artists of the *trecento*, through the achievements of Donatello, Masaccio, and other *quattrocento* artists, until his own day when Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael elevated art to perfection. The importance of Vasari's *Lives* cannot be overemphasized; not unexpectedly it spawned numerous imitators.

Now largely forgotten as a painter, and justifiably so, Carlo Ridolfi (1594–1658) wrote *Le Miraviglie dell'arte* (Marvels

8. A translation of the inscription reads "Among sculptors, your work shines forth, Wiligelmus. How greatly you are worthy of honors."

of the Painter's Art, 2 vols., 1648), which provides an alternative, Venetian perspective to Vasari's emphasis on the Central Italian and Roman Schools. Ridolfi also wrote a full biography of Tintoretto (1642). In *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti* (1642), Giovanni Baglione (1573–1644), another mediocre painter but important writer, described the lives of artists then active in Rome. Notable is his unequivocally expressed enmity for and detestation of Caravaggio, which represented (as will become clear) justice from poetry if not poetic justice. Other important biographers included Filippo Baldinucci (1624–1696) an artist from Florence, whose *Notizie de' professori del disegno* (1681–1728) covers artists from Cimabue to his contemporaries. He also wrote a biography (1682) of the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), which has long been the primary source for understanding the artist's life. Baldinucci's contemporary, the painter and antiquarian Carlo Malvasia (1616–1693), concentrated on the lives of the Carracci and their Bolognese followers in his *Felsina pittrice: vite dei pittori bolognesi* (Felsina [Bologna in Etruscan] Painters: Lives of the Bolognese Painters, 1678). Malvasia's pioneering handbook of Bolognese paintings (*Le Pitture di Bologna . . .*, 1686) was among the first such studies; he also wrote a full biography of Guido Reni.

The example of Vasari was not confined to Italy. Karel van Mander (1548–1606), the "Dutch Vasari" and erstwhile teacher of Frans Hals, included biographies of Netherlandish and German artists commencing with Jan van Eyck (d. 1441) in his *Het schilderboeck* (The Book of Painters, 1604) which also contains information on the Italians, mostly derived from Vasari, although Mander does add some original material, especially about artists working after Vasari's second edition appeared. The book also contains a long poem dealing with techniques, materials, and critical theoretical matters. Another forgotten painter, the "Spanish Vasari" Antonio Palomino y Velasco (1655–1726) chronicled the lives of his countrymen in his *Museo Pictórico y Escala Optica* (3 vols., 1715 and 1724). On this side of the Atlantic, the "American Vasari," William Dunlap (1766–1839) continued the tradition with *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (2 vols., 1834).

Other important "lives" by artists include Joachim von Sandrart's (1606–1688) *Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (German Academy of the Noble Arts of Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, 1675), Arnold Houbraken's (1660–1719) *De Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen* (The Great Theater of Netherlandish Painters, 3 vols., 1718–1721), and John Ruskin's (1819–1900) *Modern Painters* (5 vols., 1843–1860). Although von Sandrart was once highly regarded as a painter, he is now remembered primarily as the author of a treatise that combines a strong debt to Vasari with original material concerning the lives of German artists, information on art collections and iconography, as well as a most unusual feature, a chapter on Oriental Art. Arnold Houbraken remains an invaluable source of information on Netherlandish artists of the seventeenth century. Finally, John Ruskin, the premiere English art critic of his era and a prolific writer whose collected works total 39 volumes, was also a talented amateur watercolorist.

In addition to "lives" a number of artists, such as Ridolfi and Malvasia, have written more extensive biographies on a single subject, whom they frequently knew personally. For example, Ascanio Condivi (d. 1574) wrote a biography of his friend Michelangelo (1553) in rebuttal to certain claims made by Vasari in the first edition of the *Lives*. The *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1813–1815) by the uninspired academic history painter and portraitist James Northcote (1746–1831) remains the premiere contemporary source on Sir Joshua. Charles Robert Leslie (1794–1859), now forgotten as a painter, is remembered for his *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable* (1843), a biography of his close friend that remains a classic of the genre. Not all biographies are flattering however. Like Northcote, J. T. Smith (1766–1833) had served as an assistant to his subject, but unlike Northcote, Smith described his master as a tightwad, cheapskate, and miser in his harsh, brutal and unflattering *[Joseph] Nollekens and His Times* (1828).

Our own century provides numerous examples of artist-biographers. A painter who never emerged from the shadow of his more famous father, George Inness, Jr. (1854–1926) wrote

(Text continues on p. 41)

1 *The Elements*, 1942
oil on canvas
24 x 20

2 *Surreal*, 1942
oil on canvas
12 x 16

3 *Untitled (Blue Max)*, 1942
oil on canvas
20 x 24

4 *Untitled*, c. 1942–1943
oil on canvas
12 x 16

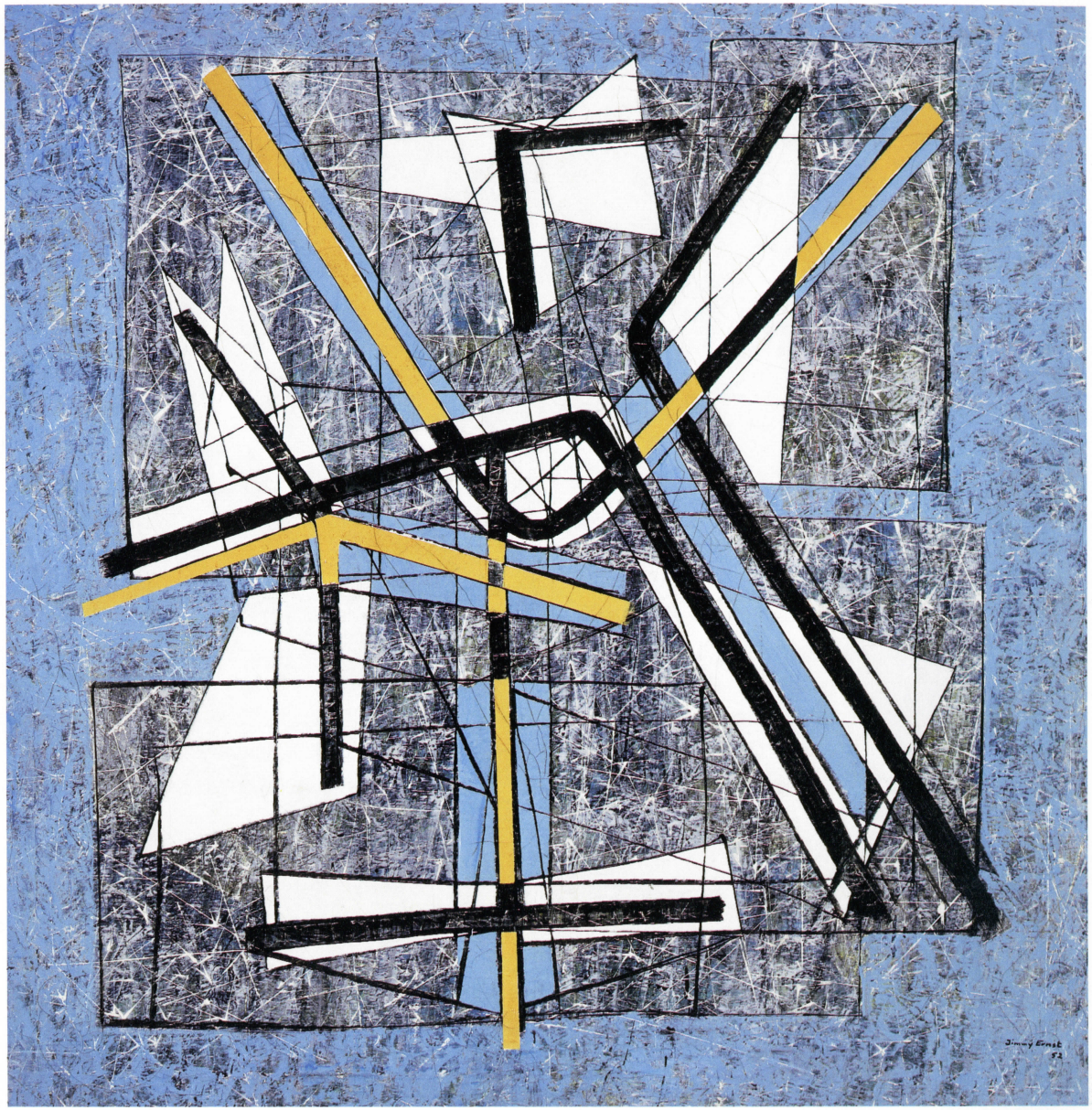
5 *Blues in Black and White*, 1946
oil on canvas
20 x 23

6 *Mahogany Hall Stomp*, 1946
oil on canvas
36 x 34 3/8

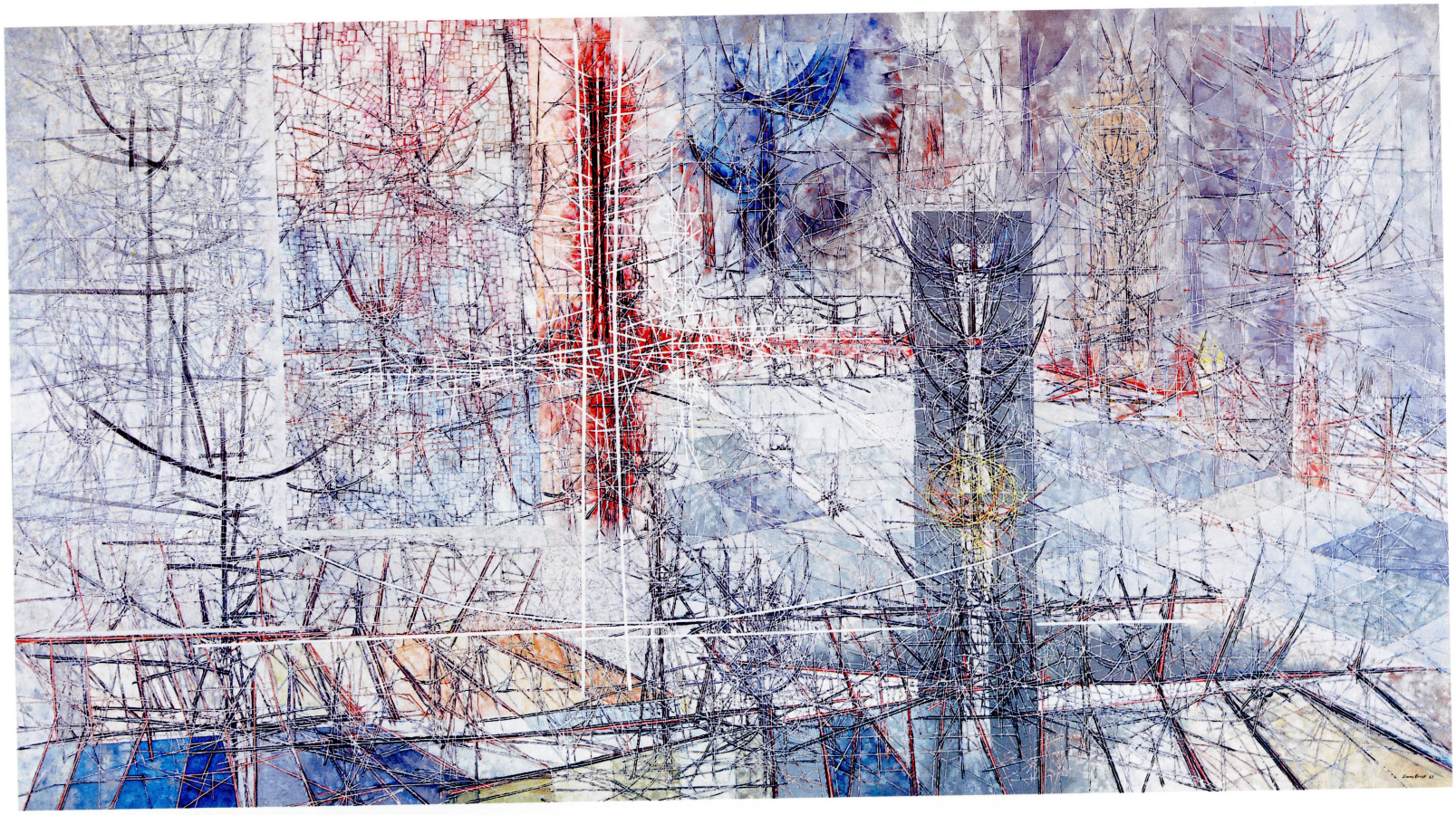
7 *Dallas Blues*, 1947
oil on canvas
36 x 28

8 *The Wake*, 1947
oil on canvas
30 x 36

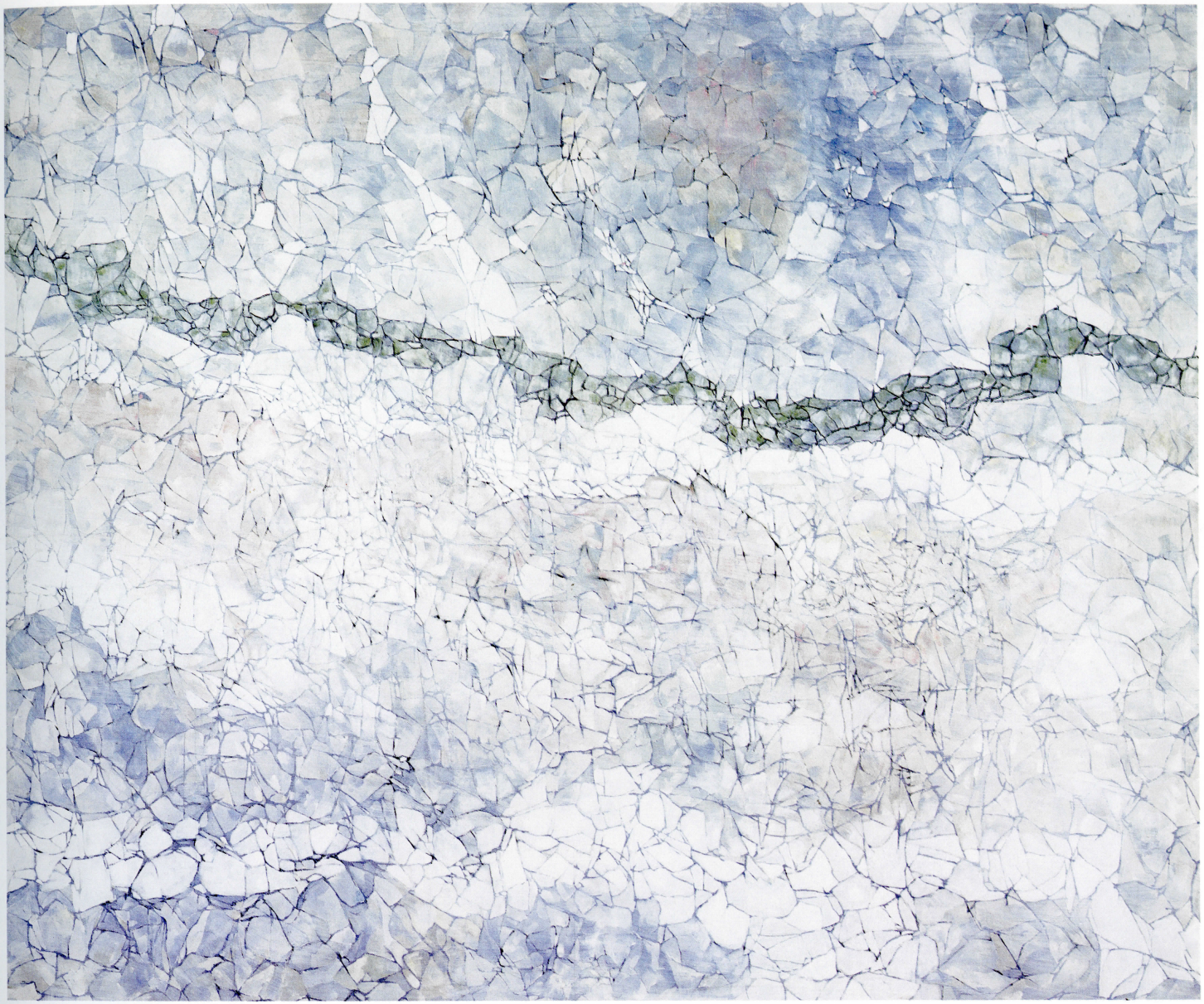
9 *Self-Portrait*, 1951
oil on canvas
24 x 20



10 *Animals and Mineral*, 1952
oil on canvas
43 x 43



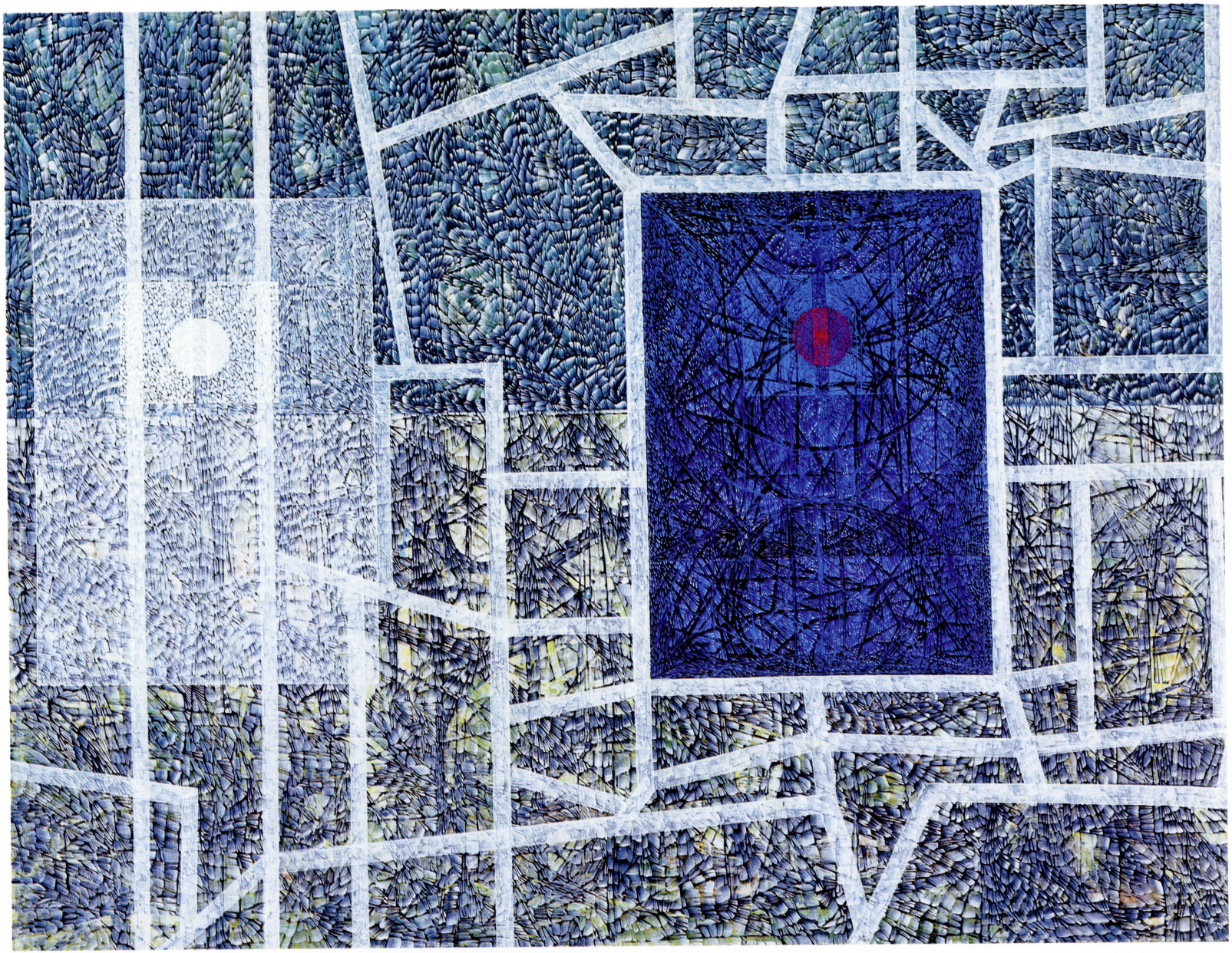
11 *Across a Silent Bridge*, 1957
oil on canvas
50 x 90



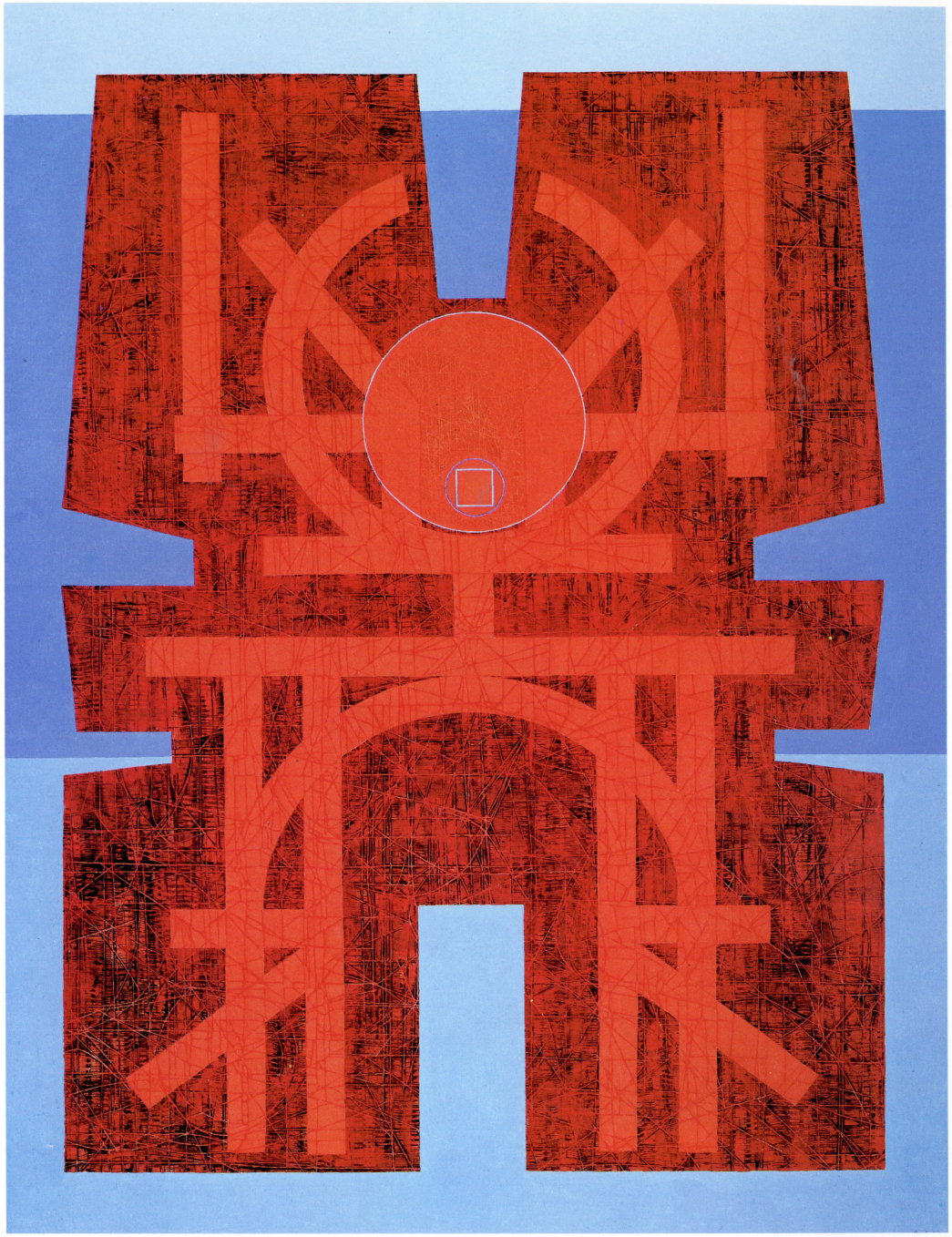
12 *Rimrock*, 1960
oil on canvas
50 x 60

13 *Oceania,* 1963
oil on canvas
43 x 38

14 *Icarus 64*, 1964
oil on canvas
50 x 40



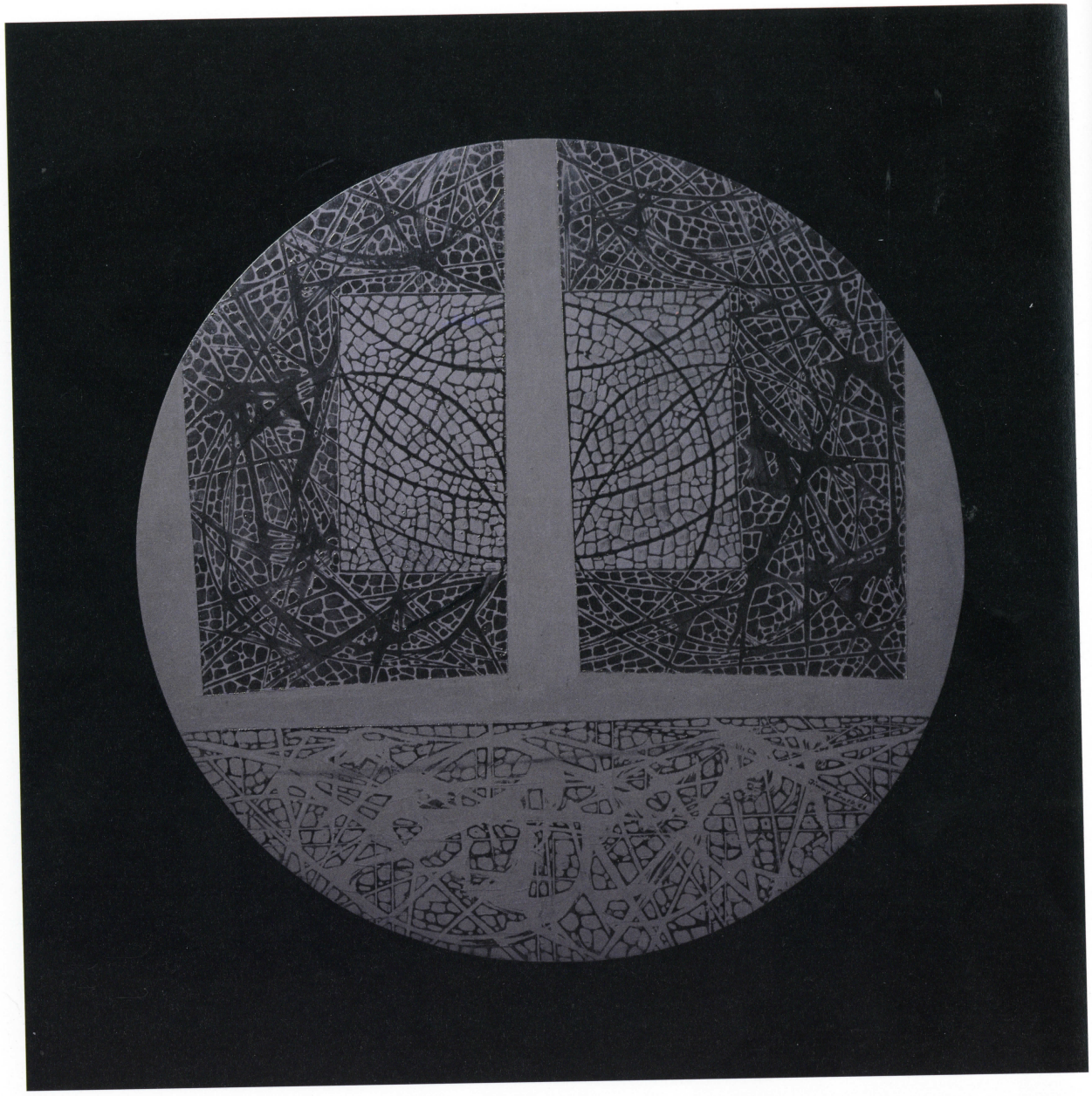
15 *Homage to Edgar Varèse*, 1965
oil on canvas
50 x 65½



16 *Sentinel*, 1967
oil on canvas
65 1/8 x 50

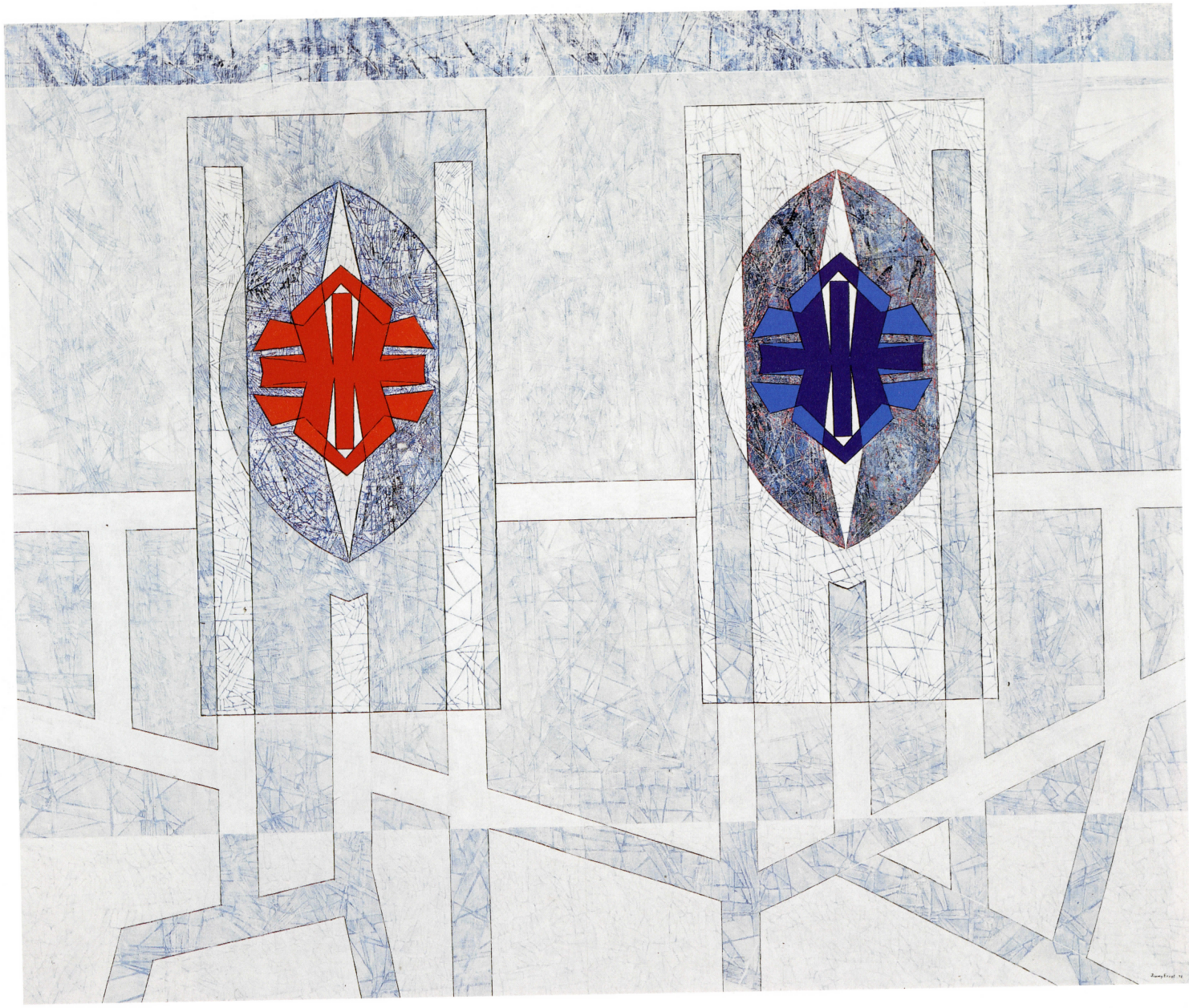
17 *Only Yesterday*, 1968
oil on canvas
60 x 50

18 *Nightscape IIIA*, 1969
oil on Plexiglass
21 x 21

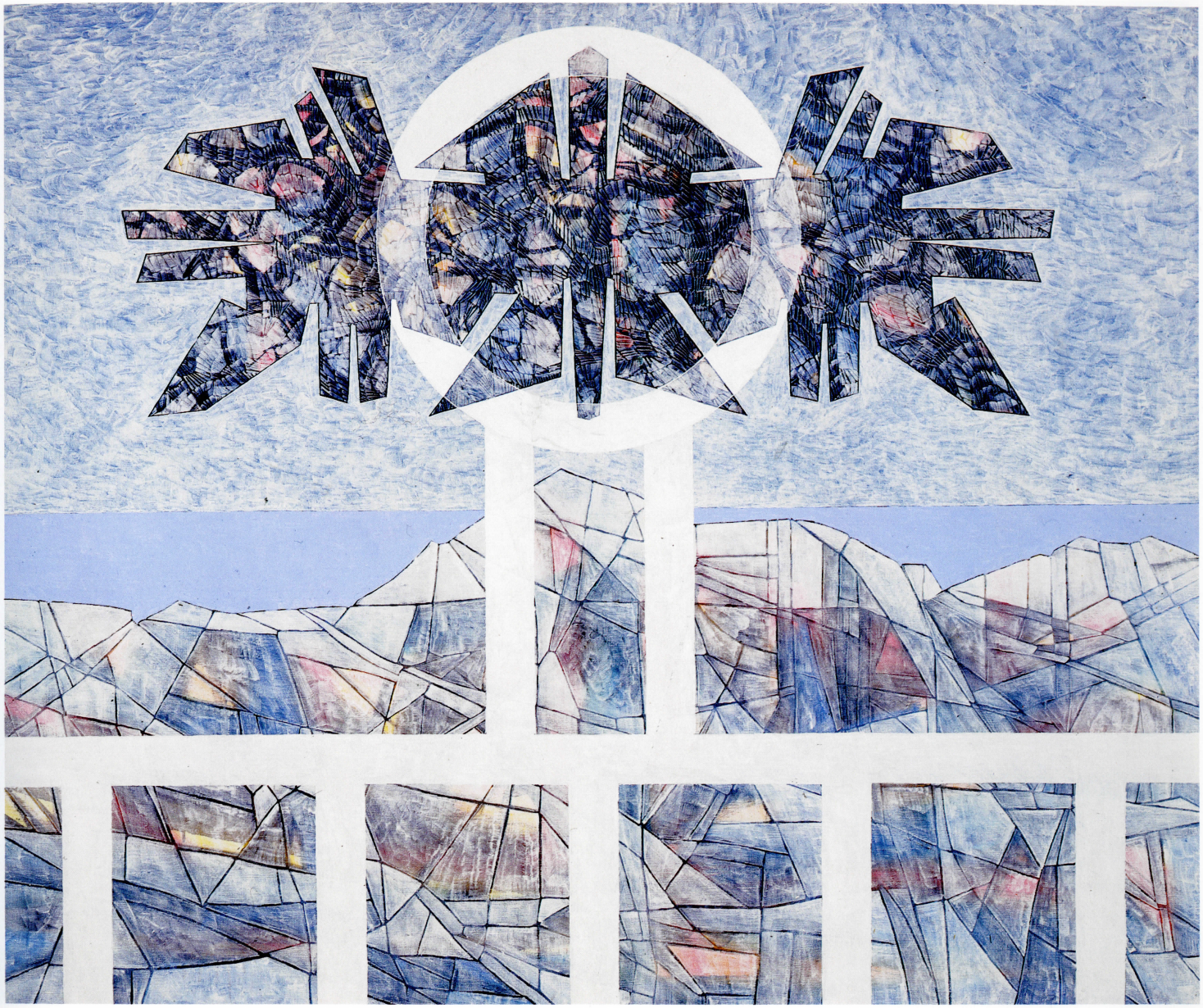


19 *Nightscape VI*, 1969
oil on Plexiglass
21 x 21

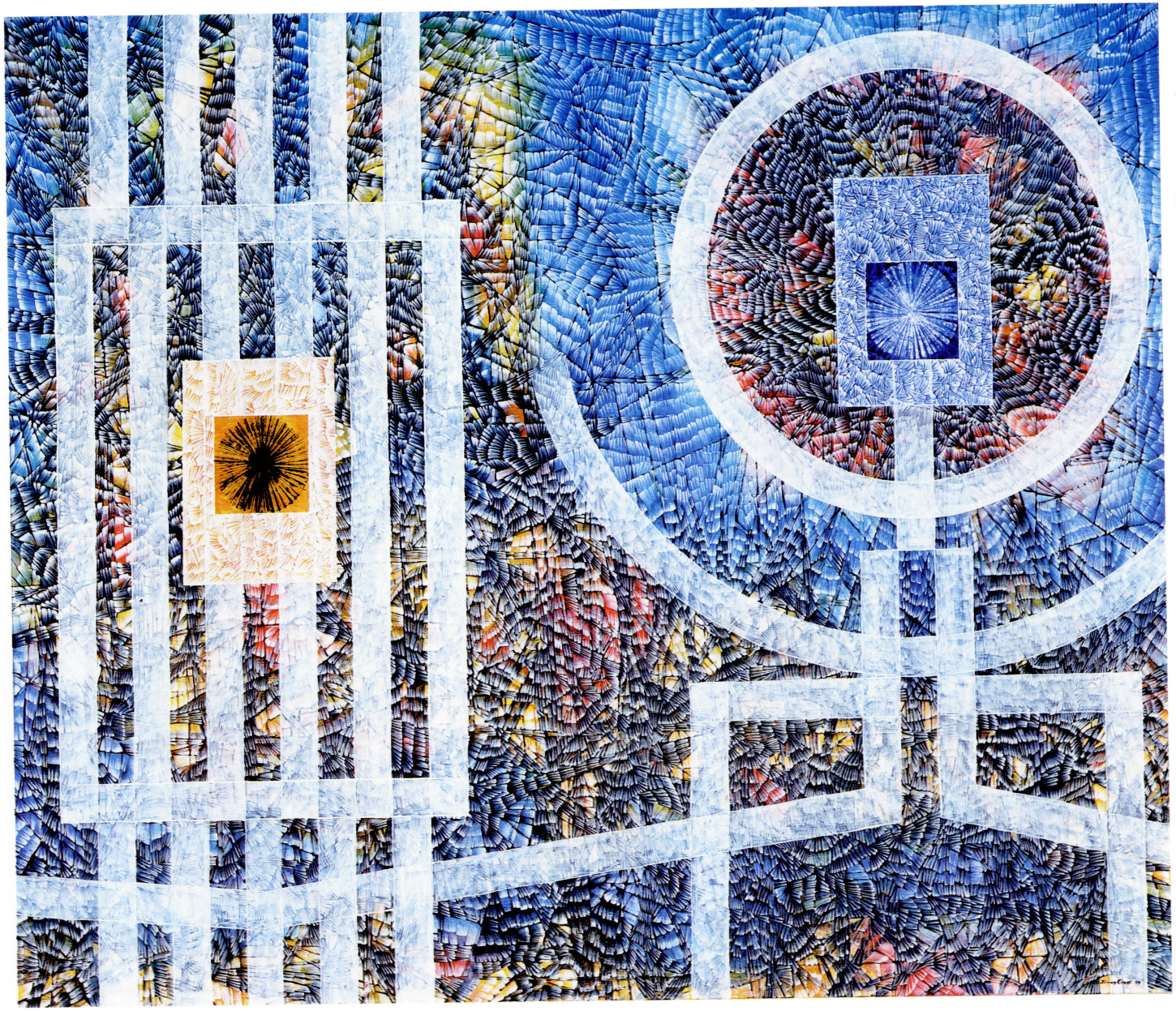
20 *Another Silence*, 1972
oil on canvas
72 x 120



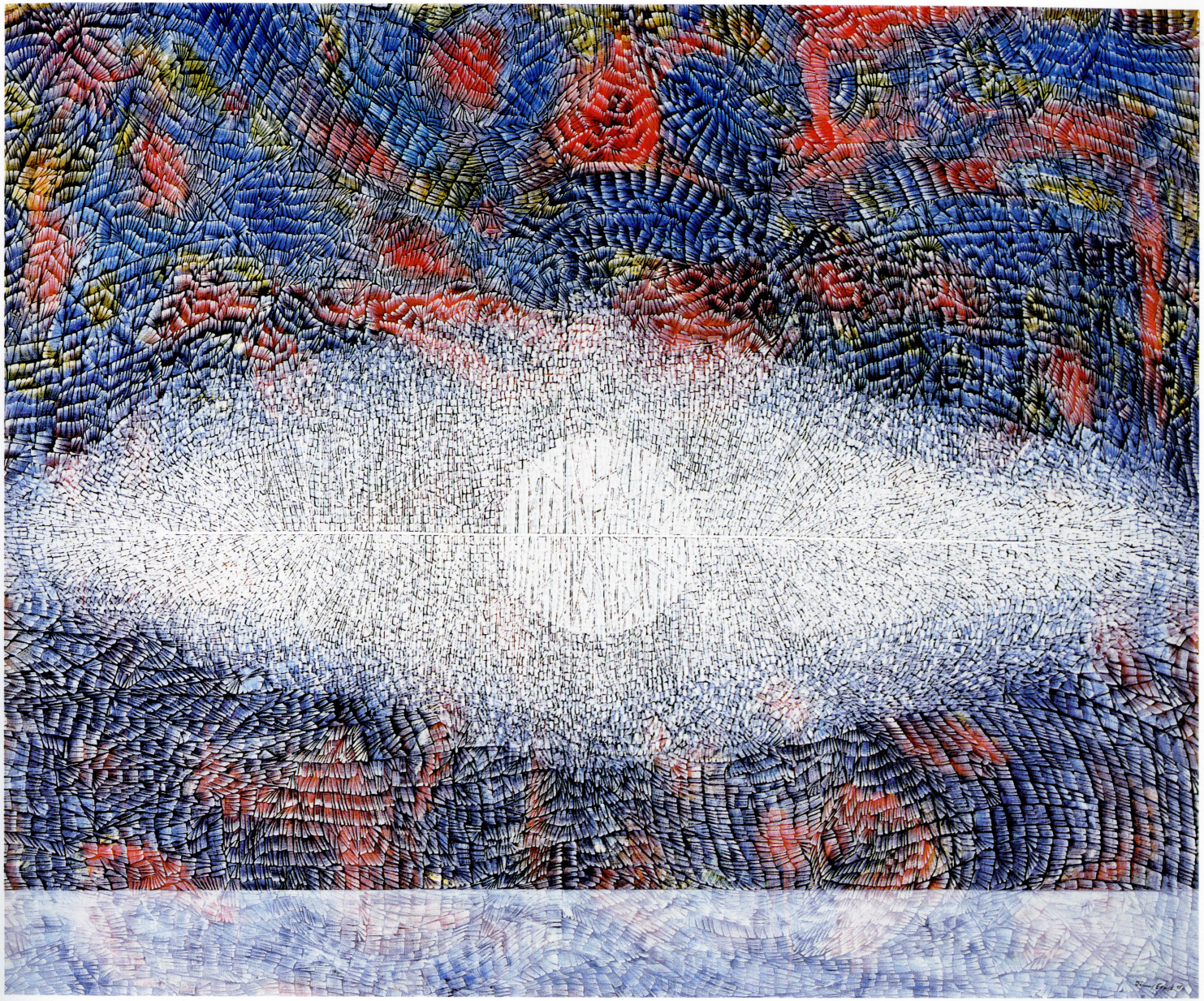
21 *Twice*, 1972
oil on canvas
50 x 60



22 *Due North*, 1972–73
oil on canvas
50 x 60

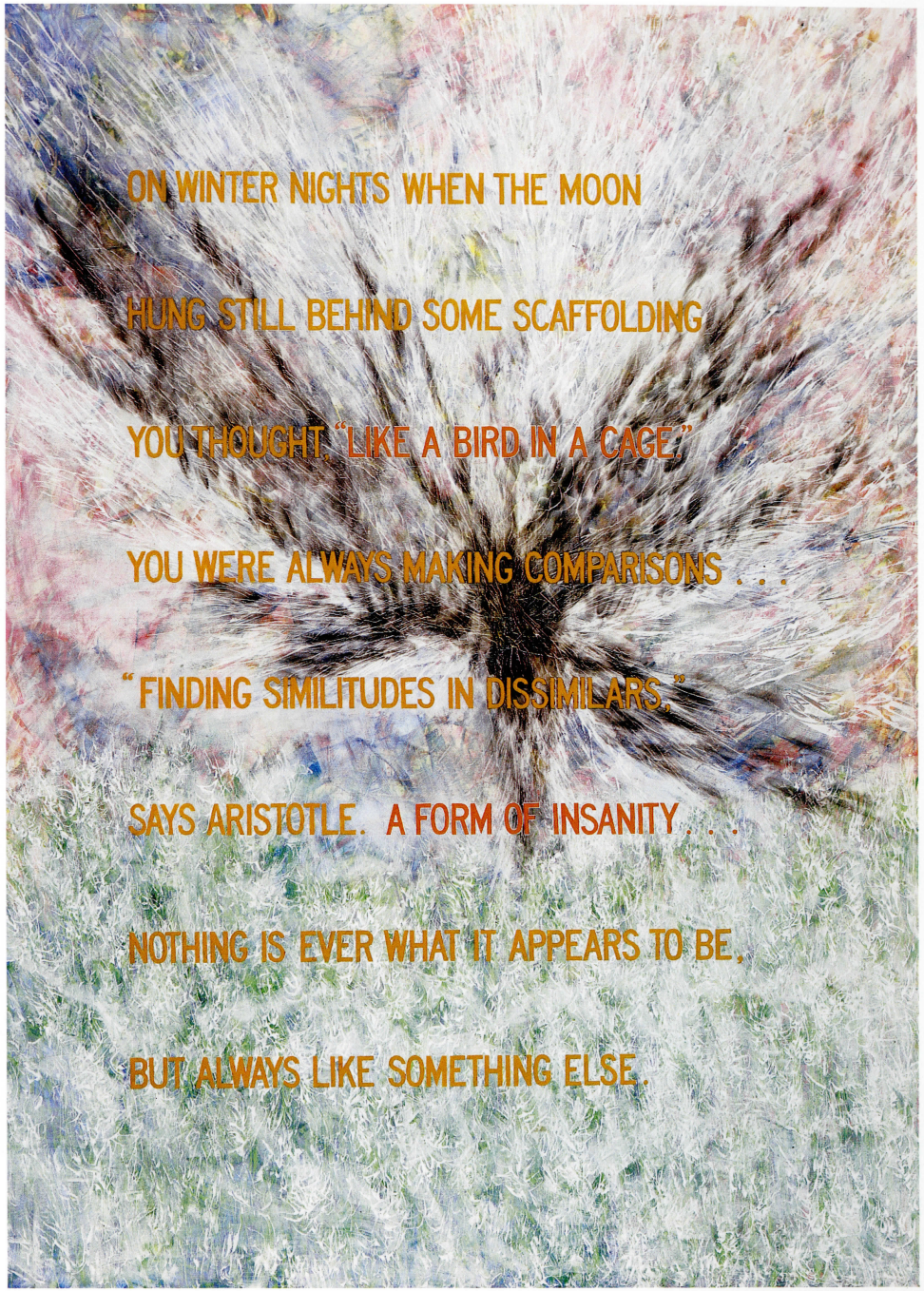


23 *Exile*, 1974
oil on canvas
50 x 60



24 *Mombasa,* 1975
oil on canvas
50 x 60

25 *Katchina White,* 1982
oil on canvas
50 x 60



26 *On Winter Nights (With Louis Simpson)*, 1982
oil and fumage on canvas
84 x 60

27 *Sea of Grass (Black on Black)*, 1982
oil on canvas
50 x 60

(Continued from p. 16)
a *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness* (1917). Slightly later, Guy Pène du Bois (1884–1958) wrote two biographies, *Ernest Lawson* (1932) and *Edward Hopper* (1931), that combined a personal knowledge of the subjects with a critical appraisal. Finally, we have the example of Roland Penrose (1900–1984), a painter best known for *Picasso: His Life and Work* (1958), which despite a veritable flood of ink on the artist, remains an important work.

Like Jimmy Ernst, artists have often felt the need to tell their own stories. Although only first published in 1728, Benvenuto Cellini's (1500–1571) autobiography is a notable example of autoapotheosis. After Cellini, what was a trickle became a torrent, especially in our own century. A partial sampling of titles includes Marc Chagall's (1887–1985) *Ma vie* (1931); Salvador Dalí's (1904–1989) colorful, vibrant, self-promoting, and hyperbolic autobiography *Comment on devient Dalí; les aveux inavouables de Salvador Dalí. Récit présenté par André Parinaud* (The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí as told to André Parinaud, 1973); the American sculptor Jo Davidson's (1883–1952) *Between Sittings: An Informal Autobiography of Jo Davidson* (1951); the wonderfully titled *Leda and the Goose* (1954) by Tristram Hillier (1905–1983); the unsurpassed, if not altogether objective, source on the movement, William Holman Hunt's (1827–1910) *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905); Augustus John's (1878–1961) *Chiaroscuro, Fragments of Autobiography* (1952) and *Finishing Touches* (1964); Guy Pène du Bois's (1884–1958) *Artists Say the Silliest Things* (1940); and Larry Rivers's (b. 1923) fun and somewhat risque memoir *What Did I Do?: The Unauthorized Autobiography* (1992, with Arnold Weinstein).

Less formal than autobiographies are journals, diaries, notebooks, and letters. A fascinating example is the diary that Jacopo Pontormo (1494–1557) kept between 1554 and 1556, in which he records the progress of his great fresco project for San Lozrenzo, Florence. What emerges is a portrait of a melancholic, self-absorbed hypochondriac. On the other hand, the *Journal* of Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), which he kept between 1822 and 1824 and from 1847 to 1863, reveals the great Romantic painter to be an equally perceptive observer and commentator on art, his own life, loves, and era. Justly famous are Camille Pissarro's (1830–1903) letters to his son Lucien (published in 1943, edited by John Rewald) and Vincent van Gogh's (1853–1890) to his brother Theo (first published by the painter Émile Bernard [1868–1941]).

The Renaissance conception of the artist-intellectual has frequently encouraged artists to write on subjects seemingly outside their main areas of interest. In this category one thinks of the English painter Paul Nash (1889–1946) who wrote a *Shell Guide to Dorset* (1936) or the vanguard experimental artist and personality Yves Klein (1928–1962) who composed a Judo text (1954), or the Swiss born Surrealist Kurt Seligmann (1900–1962) who, after immigrating to the United States, penned a thoughtful study entitled *The Mirror of Magic* (1948). An outstanding example is the great seventeenth-century painter of Amsterdam cityscapes, Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712), whose expertise in the area of firefighting was demonstrated in his *Brandspuitenboek* (Fire Engine Book, 1690).

Still others have created works of literature. Among the best-known are the sculptor-painter-architect Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) who also wrote beautiful and sensitive poems; the visionary, Romantic poet, and mystic William Blake (1757–1827) who combined illustrations and text in his *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793); and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. When his beloved wife died of a drug overdose, the bereaved Rossetti, a gifted poet, painter, and translator, placed the only complete manuscript of his poems in her coffin. (Subsequently, the poems were unearthed and published.) Adored in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the proto-Romantic artist (legend had it that he was a bandit), Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), when not painting wild, picturesque, and sublime landscapes, wrote poems. Other poets included Edgar Degas, whose *Huit Sonnets* (1946) appeared posthumously; Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931), whose verses from *The Prophet* (1923) have helped launch countless marriages; David Jones (1895–1974), author of the prizewinning *In Parenthesis* (1937), a massive experimental work that combines poetry and prose, which T. S. Eliot praised highly; and the minor Umbrian painter Giovanni Santi (d. 1494), father of Raphael, who wrote a verse history of

the Dukes of Urbino. Less decorous are the poems of Il Sodoma (1477–1549), which, according to Vasari, unabashedly glorified the pleasures that earned him his nickname. Art historians are uncertain if Caravaggio (1571–1610) actually wrote the insulting and satirical poems that led to his imprisonment after Giovanni Baglione, the target of the poems, filed a lawsuit for libel (1603).

The Expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), who began his career as a Jugendstil follower of Gustav Klimt, wrote several plays, including the satirical *Sphinx und Strohmann* (Sphinx and Strawman, 1909) and *Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer Hope of Women, 1909), a savage, misogynist, and brutal drama of lust and blood. More gentle are the plays of Everett Shinn (1876–1953), one of The Eight. Fiction writers include Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), the illustrator in the dark *fin-de-siècle* manner, who wrote the *Story of Venus and Tannhauser* (1907), for which he also provided erotic, if not downright pornographic, illustrations. Other novels include the caricaturist Max Beerbohm's (1872–1956) *Zuleika Dobson* (1911); and Salvador Dalí's (1904–1989) *Hidden Faces* (1944). Among the more bizarre novels is *Die andere Seite* (The Other Side, 1909) by Alfred Kubin (1877–1959), a member of Der Blaue Reiter group, who had dramatically, but unsuccessfully, tried to kill himself on his mother's grave.

The list of writing artists goes on and on. How can we overlook Jonathan Richardson (1665–1745), who with his painter son Jonathan the Younger (1694–1771), wrote *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings, and Pictures in Italy* (1722), which was carried and consulted by countless dilettanti and young noblemen as they made the Grand Tour of the continent? Or the acerbic bon vivant, James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), who sued Ruskin for libel and wrote the witty and mordant *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890)? Or Paul Gauguin's (1848–1903) *Noa Noa* (1897) about his life in Tahiti? And the literature of artists' art criticism has not even been scratched!

In sum, the tradition of writing artists is a vast landscape over which we have flown. From this vantage point, details are lost; but the broad panorama unfolds. Visible below are numerous cities with names like Theory or Biography or Poetry. Like the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the cities built fortifications against their rivals. Within the walls, sit many once magnificent edifices, now fallen into disrepair. Outside the walls, surrounded by impedimenta, commentators, scholars, and their followers encamp. Along the roads, solitary travellers make their way. Beyond the horizon, to the East, an unexplored tapestry unfolds.

Neither an isolated castle nor an urban tower, *A Not-So-Still-Life* resides in a small country village where the author is known. The story is intimate and personal. It is a testament, an affirmation, of the power of art and the spirit to overcome adversity. Jimmy's life was not easy: his father left when he was but a toddler. His mother was forced to flee and left him in the care of relatives who regarded him as an unhappy reminder of a failed marriage. Later, he himself desperately struggled to escape from what would become his government's "final solution." When he disembarked from the *S.S. Manhattan* in June 1938, a few weeks shy of his eighteenth birthday, Jimmy had few prospects in his new homeland. But after a succession of menial jobs, he finally landed a position—in the mail room—at the Museum of Modern Art. Here his father's spirit was unavoidable.

Throughout his youthful years, Jimmy had made a point of rejecting art—"Should a son make use of wings fashioned by his father?" Viewing Picasso's *Guernica*, however, knocked the seventeen-year-old's eyes open: "Here was the artist's elusive miracle. Conscious human knowledge becoming a rope ladder into dark solitude, there to find the blinding flash of ultimate reality, the lightning bolt called the moment of truth."[9]

Now, in the New World, Jimmy strapped on the wings but used them not to follow his father across the wine-dark sea but to pursue his own light. Although Jimmy's earliest works [Figures 1–4] reflect his father's vision, that vision was not his own and he promptly left it behind.

Since Classical times the parable of Icarus has often been retold. In the Medieval age, it was seen as a cautionary tale against flouting authority, hubris, and pursuing forbidden knowledge. Later, in the Renaissance, Icarus was seen as an allegory of the heroic, soaring human spirit that seeks new knowledge despite

9. Ernst, *A-Not-So-Still-Life*, p. 87.

the costs. In our own century, writers and artists have seen the tale through a Freudian glass, if not darkly then certainly Oedipally. For the Italian Lauro de Bosis, who wrote *Icarus* in 1927, the legend was more than symbolic; he literally became his subject: after dropping anti-fascist leaflets from a small plane over the city of Rome, he crashed to his death.

Although Jimmy Ernst initially saw the wings as a temptation, as a Siren call, he also saw them as a means of independence and freedom. But even more so, he understood them as symbolic of the fragility of civilization: the feathers can so easily come loose from the binding wax. When young Jimmy fled from Bruegel's *Icarus* into the arms of his mother, she reproved him for his tantrum and spoke sadly of the coming war, of the accidents of preservation, of those who burned books and pictures. Foreseeing her own death, Lou urged her son not to "miss loving something that had earned love."[10] *A Not-So-Still-Life* is a testament to that love.

10. Ibid., p. 79.

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Checklist of the Exhibition

1 *The Elements*, 1942
oil on canvas
24 x 20

2 *Surreal*, 1942
oil on canvas
12 x 16

3 *Untitled (Blue Max)*, 1942
oil on canvas
20 x 24

4 *Untitled*, c. 1942–1943
oil on canvas
12 x 16

5 *Blues in Black and White*, 1946
oil on canvas
20 x 23

6 *Mahogany Hall Stomp*, 1946
oil on canvas
36 x 34 3/8

7 *Dallas Blues*, 1947
oil on canvas
36 x 28

8 *The Wake*, 1947
oil on canvas
30 x 36

9 *Self-Portrait*, 1951
oil on canvas
24 x 20

10 *Animals and Mineral*, 1952
oil on canvas
43 x 43

11 *Across a Silent Bridge*, 1957
oil on canvas
50 x 90

12 *Rimrock*, 1960
oil on canvas
50 x 60

13 *Oceania*, 1963
oil on canvas
43 x 38

14 *Icarus 64*, 1964
oil on canvas
50 x 40

15 *Homage to Edgar Varèse*, 1965
oil on canvas
50 x 65 1/2

16 *Sentinel*, 1967
oil on canvas
65 1/8 x 50

17 *Only Yesterday*, 1968
oil on canvas
60 x 50

18 *Nightscape IIIA*, 1969
oil on Plexiglass
21 x 21

19 *Nightscape VI*, 1969
oil on Plexiglass
21 x 21

20 *Another Silence*, 1972
oil on canvas
72 x 120

21 *Twice*, 1972
oil on canvas
50 x 60

22 *Due North*, 1972-73
oil on canvas
50 x 60

23 *Exile*, 1974
oil on canvas
50 x 60

24 *Mombasa*, 1975
oil on canvas
50 x 60

25 *Katchina White*, 1982
oil on canvas
50 x 60

26 *On Winter Nights (With Louis Simpson)*, 1982
oil and fumage on canvas
84 x 60

27 *Sea of Grass (Black on Black)*, 1982
oil on canvas
50 x 60

Acknowledgments

This exhibition would not have been possible without the wholehearted participation and support of Dallas Ernst and The Rimrock Foundation Inc. I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Ernst for her advice, assistance, and hospitality, all of which she gave unsparingly.

We are very pleased that Donald Kuspit agreed to write the lead essay in this catalogue.

As Dr. Kuspit notes in his essay, Jimmy Ernst had a great love of jazz. Two other jazz lovers, Andrew J. Sordoni, III and Hank O'Neal, assisted in numerous ways to make this exhibition a reality.

A special debt is owed to Rebecca Foster and the Society for the Preservation of American Modernists (SPAM) for supporting this project with a generous grant. The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts also helped underwrite this exhibition.

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—S I G

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