JACKSON POLLOCK
JACKSON POLLOCK

A Centennial Exhibition

ESSAYS BY
Charles Stuckey and Stephanie Buhmann

JASON McCOY GALLERY
NEW YORK
Over the years, I have been fortunate to work extensively with the oeuvre of my uncle Jackson Pollock. He and his art have always been a part of my life; there were paintings by both Jack and Lee on the walls of my childhood home.

My uncle died when I was eight years old, but I came to know my aunt especially well after the death of my father in 1963. Through Lee, I had the opportunity to look at Pollock in depth and to absorb her unfltering belief in his unique gift.

It was through Lee that I first met Gene Thaw and with their support was able to offer The Key to the Chicago Art Institute, as well as Totem Lesson II to the Australian National Gallery.

After Lee’s death in 1984, I appraised the Pollock Estate and represented The Pollock-Krasner Foundation for several years. Since then, I have presented a range of Jackson Pollock exhibitions at my own gallery. In addition, I have been privileged to work with many museums, scholars, and private collectors worldwide. I miss especially Walter Hopps, William S. Lieberman, Peter Marzio, Robert Rosenblum, William Rubin, Kirk Varnedoe, and Barry Walker.

In 2012, 100 years after Pollock’s birth, I am proud and happy to gather here a few works by Pollock, to have them speak for themselves.

This exhibition is only possible because of the generous support of family, friends, mentors, and lenders. In this group I would like to include Clare and Eugene V. Thaw, Francis V. O’Connor, Anna Tobin D’Ambrosio and Mary E. Murray of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute and Ann Temkin of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

I also would like to thank Charles Struckey and Stephanie Buhmann for their considered essays, as well as my nephew, Stephen M. Cadwalader, without whose support this and so many projects would not exist.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this effort to my family, especially to my wife Lisbeth Rasmussen McCoy, my children Sanford, Jackson, Samantha Clare, and Charles McCoy, to my parents Sanford and Arloie McCoy, my sister Karen McCoy Cadwalader, my aunt Sylvia Winter Pollock, my cousin Francesca McCoy Pollock, and finally my aunt Lee Krasner.

— Jason McCoy

A hundred years after his birth, Jackson Pollock’s achievement as a painter and draftsman remains at the epicenter of American art history. Before he died driving drunk at age forty-four, the charismatic Pollock already belonged to the handful of virtuoso American visionaries with recognition worldwide: Whistler, Tiffany, Wright, Welles. Considering his disturbed psychology, no one in the group had ever been a less likely candidate to receive such recognition. Pollock’s troubled life unfolded against the grim backdrop of a World War, a Depression and another World War. That he ever fulfilled himself as an artist is something of a miracle, unthinkable without rather selfless support from his painter wife, Lee Krasner, from the great art philanthropist, Peggy Guggenheim, and from such remarkable artist colleagues as Barnett Newman—all enlisted to his cause by the van Gogh-like intensity of his work.

I became obsessed with Pollock as an art history student in the 1960s, bolstered by the revealing articles and exhibition catalogues of Michael Fried, Francis V. O’Connor and C. L. Wysuph. Eventually, in a vain effort to obtain tenure as a university professor, in 1977 I published an essay devoted to the scope of Pollock’s work in *Art in America*. It was in the early 1980s when I settled in New York as a free-lance scholar that my mentor, Robert Rosenblum and his wife Jane Kaplowitz introduced me to their friend, Jason McCoy, Pollock’s nephew. And it was to Jason that I turned in 1987 when I became the curator of twentieth-century art at the Art Institute of Chicago, just at a moment when Jason was offering the most important work on the art market: Pollock’s *The Key*, 1946, the first work he painted on the floor. With this transaction on behalf of the museum I began an ongoing conversation with Jason about Pollock. During the last year he shared his excitement about organizing this centennial exhibition with a slight emphasis on Pollock masterpieces that have passed through his gallery, understandably enough. Finally, he asked me to write a few words for this catalogue.

Within days of announcing the acquisition of *The Key* in 1987, out of the blue I received the first of many long Pollock telephone calls from the legendary director of the Menil Collection in Houston, Walter Hopps, who had just acquired another early Pollock masterpiece, *The Magic Mirror*, 1941. Although Hopps never realized the project, he was already determined to stage an exhibition of Pollock’s works before 1947, to his mind every bit as great and important as the overall abstract linear webs that made Pollock a household name almost as soon as he began to paint them in 1947. With their haunting graffiti-like details as indications of initiation, coupling and birth, for Hopps these works raised the curtain on Pollock’s inner vision of unconditional mysteries, forces pulsing ritualistically like currents throughout bodily and earthly existence. Although his art seems to be beyond any explanation, given Pollock’s graphic genius it was hard for Hopps to take either his eyes or his mind away from the intensely rhythmic visual poetry expressed in Pollock’s art from first to last.

Aside from sharing Hopps’s passion, nothing has helped me put the impact of Pollock’s art into perspective, so to speak, than the anecdote included in the memoirs of his girlfriend, Ruth Kligman about Pollock taking her to see a performance of *Waiting for Godot* in the spring of 1956. When the artist began to cry uncontrollably during the performance, he indicated that Kligman should stay seated while he left the theater to regain control of himself. But she followed him outside, assuming that he would be able to tell her the play’s outcome since he had already seen it once before. Pollock could not say however. He confessed that when he first went to the play he had broken down at the same place, forcing him to leave. I have seen the play and read the script many times hoping to recognize what might have triggered Pollock’s reaction, but still have no idea. Even so, Pollock’s response to Beckett haunts my reaction to his own works. Looking at his paintings and drawings I experience a sort of vertigo, aware of something momentous, but no less aware of my own inconsolable incomprehension. I can only imagine that young people unfamiliar with Pollock originals yet will need to leave and come back to this exquisite group of his works again and again, unable to see Pollock through to the end any more than they could understand Melville or nuclear energy.
Pollock: Signs & Symbols Allover
by Stephanie Buhmann

In his 100th birth year, Jackson Pollock not only remains one of the paramount figures in the annals of art history, but his profile keeps rising as well. Though always considered against the backdrop of American art and Abstract Expressionism, his legacy is no longer confined to this frame; Pollock's importance in the context of his time and its major art movements is equaled by his increasing impact on many younger and international generations of artists.

However, it is still a mere fraction of Pollock's oeuvre that makes up his reputation. His poured abstract paintings of the late 1940s are his best-known achievement. Among the myriad of articles, monographs and biographies written in the past seven decades on Pollock, only a few (Frank O'Hara included) have focused on clarifying a general misconception: that Pollock, at the height of his maturity, exclusively became and remained an abstract artist.

A generalized development arch, which could be described as a transition from regionalist to semi-abstract Surrealist to Abstract Expressionist, for example, does not accurately describe Pollock's versatile and continuously inquisitive nature. The truth is that not unlike Paul Klee (whom Pollock admired) or Gerhard Richter, Pollock went back and forth between abstract and more referential compositions throughout his career. His lifelong devotion to experimentation with diverse subjects, techniques and materials made for a complex search. It also made for a vast visual vocabulary.

Pollock himself distrusted clearly delineated definitions and labels. As late as eight weeks before his death on August 11, 1956, he stated as much. When interviewed by Selden Rodman, he explained: "I don't care for 'Abstract Expressionism' and it's certainly not 'nonobjective', and not 'non-representational' either. I'm very representational some of the time, and a little all of the time. But when you're painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge."1 Years later, his widow Lee Krasner remembered: "I saw his paintings evolve. Many of them, many of the most abstract, began with more or less recognizable imagery-heads, parts of the body, fantastic creatures. Once I asked Jackson why he didn’t stop the painting when a given image was exposed. He said, 'I choose to veil the imagery.'"2

But how to describe this imagery, from which Pollock culled repeatedly and which he veiled, possibly covered in some of his abstract works? In the span of his career, beginning in the early 1930s and culminating in the mid-1950s, he drew inspiration from various sources; some were rooted in his background, others in the riches of culture and philosophy. On most of them, Pollock focused in concentrated bursts.

Many of Pollock's earliest works reflect his passion for the American West. It was the landscape of his childhood and youth, one he had gotten to know during his family's frequent moves around Arizona and California, as well as later, while traveling with his brothers. His love for nature was complemented by a keen interest in the Mexican Muralists José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera, which he shared with his two older brothers Charles and Sanford. In addition, there was a sincere appreciation for the art of the American Indians and by the mid-1930s, the strong aesthetic influence of Albert Pinkham Ryder and his teacher and mentor Thomas Hart Benton. Every summer between 1931 and 1937, for example, the Pollock brothers visited Benton and his wife Rita in their house on Martha’s Vineyard, leading to a series of paintings that include Seascape (CR 30),3 (Menemsha Harbor) (CR 24) and Menemsha Pond (CR 25). Though stylistically, these vivid landscapes are still steeped in Benton and Ryder, they already capture a sense of urgency and restlessness that also characterizes Pollock's most mature works.

In 1939, Pollock began Jungian psychoanalysis under Dr. Joseph Henderson. During his treatment, he created among others a body of 69 drawings, visual notations rather than finished compositions, which offer an encyclopedic overview of imagery. It involves fragmented humanoid shapes, animals and monsters. Though associative, the presented subjects remain indistinguishable. They are born out of what Jung termed (and Pollock believed in) the “personal unconscious”, a personal reservoir of experiences that is unique to each individual. The two paintings Circle (CR 64) and (Orange Head) (CR 68) fall into this period. Ancient myths and Native American Indian legends might have sparked their content, which nevertheless remains fog-like and non-committal. In the case
of Orange Head, the central shape evokes shamanistic African or Native American Indian masks, as well as Picasso’s portraits of the time. The overall sensibility of emotional turmoil also relates to the half-human, half-grotesque portraits of a very different artist, Francis Bacon (1909–1992). The collage The Mask (scr 24) also embraces a figurative presence. Here, a helmet-like shape made of fabric, originally a pattern for two sides of the head of a rag doll, is contrasted with an array of fine and loosely rendered creatures. Harvested from a personal mythology, they only emerge fractionally. Their meaning is not symbolic, as that would imply conscious intent. Only their pictorial presence on paper is concrete.

Pollock’s explorative journey of the unconscious was intensified through the Surrealist practice of automatic writing and drawing. Through Robert Motherwell, Pollock was introduced to Peggy Guggenheim. Her Art of this Century gallery was not only home to many European Surrealists, but it would also become the venue of Pollock’s first solo show in November 1943. Motherwell further invited Pollock to join a group led by Roberto Matta, which was dedicated to exploring Surrealist techniques and for about two months met regularly. Whereas Jung’s theories and automatism provided Pollock with a method to access the imagery rooted in his unconscious, he found stylistic inspiration and the level of intensity he was striving for, in the works of Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró. The unparalleled vehemence of raw emotions in Picasso’s Guernica (1937), which captured the horrors of war in a language both utterly moving and clear, captivated Pollock to the extent that he completed several Equine paintings in 1944. In contrast, Miró’s influence is especially traceable in another group of paintings, also from 1944, including Night Ceremony (cr 106), Night Mist (cr 104), The Night Dancer (cr 105), and Night Sounds (cr 111). Manifesting as meditations on nocturnal landscapes and the mysteries they can behold, these works evoke Miró particularly in regards to palette and treatment of form. Like Guernica, Pollock had been able to study Miró’s work at the Museum of Modern Art, where a retrospective was held from 1941 to 1942. In Night Sounds, a crescent moon dramatically illuminates the surrounding darkness. The composition is flat, resembling a chalkboard rather than a night sky, onto which ominous symbols foreshadowing the loose notations of a Jean-Michel Basquiat have been drawn in pastel. Krasner recalled that the moon was a topic, which she and Pollock discussed often. It is a theme rich in polarities. The contrast between light and dark, concrete and dissolving imagery, can serve as a metaphor for nature’s tidal rhythms of clarity and mystery.

In 1945, Krasner and Pollock moved from Greenwich Village closer to nature, settling near the Atlantic Ocean in Springs on Long Island. At first, Pollock had painted in the house, but by late 1947 an outside barn was cleared and converted into his studio. Painted in 1947, [Composition with Black Pouring] (cr 170) foreshadows two of Pollock’s most distinguished bodies of work: his “classical” abstractions of 1949–50, as well as his black-and-white paintings of 1951–52. This composition can either be read abstractly, when focusing solely on the overall sense of rhythmic movement, or concretely. Upon close inspection, the black line drawing, which seems to float above the vivid silvery background, takes on the outline of a figure. This dichotomy, which is based on the interplay of distinct paint layers, would become heightened in the black-and-white paintings.

It was in his new studio that Pollock began to increasingly experiment with his materials. He tilted cans, used wooden sticks, brushes and even turkey basters to paint more freely. Occasionally, he added sand and glass for texture. Canvases were laid directly on the floor and, as Hans Namuth’s photographs and film of Pollock at work (1950–51) reveal, he began to draw in space, motioning in the air above the paintings’ surface. This technique allowed for an unusual time lapse between the act of painting and its manifestation on canvas. Pollock thought thoroughly about technique. In 1949, he listed some of the desired attributes on a scrap piece of paper: “total control—denial of the accident—states of order—organic intensity—energy and motion made visible—memories arrested in space, human needs and motives—acceptance.” A year later, in an interview with William Wright, he clarified: “My opinion is that new needs need new techniques. And the modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements. It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own technique.”

Pollock’s pouring technique has frequently been linked to jazz. In an interview with Barbara Rose, Krasner recalled how Pollock “would sometimes listen four or five consecutive days and nights to New Orleans jazz until I would go crazy. The house would be rocking and rolling with it.” In jazz as much as in Pollock’s work, improvisation is a key component, but it is never arbitrary. It follows a sense of structure. The same is true for nature and its seasons, which may vary in length and intensity from year to year, but which will follow each other reliably. In Springs, the natural landscape and the close
experience of its seasonal changes must certainly have effected Pollock and enhanced his understanding of nature’s rhythms. When describing works, such as *Number 23, 1949* (CR 235) or *[Composition with Red Strokes]* (CR 268), terms usually associated with musical notations easily apply. Their dynamic visual organization seems symphonic and might evoke “crescendos” for example, or when studying the infinitely entwined linear work, a “legato”. Each of these paintings measures a certain temperature, an emotional temperament and energetic moment. Compositions can appear feverish, almost blazing, as well as elegantly restrained. Stylistically, they remain in a fugue-state; they are part composition and part pure improvisation.

Most of these works from 1949–50 are defined by a lack of descriptive contours. They are not confined by the edges of the support, be it paper, masonite, or canvas. If imagery exists, it is veiled, covered up, or dissolved in line itself. However, Pollock never succumbed to the accidental. In the end, he always sought control. “When I am in my painting, I am not aware of what I’m doing,” Pollock stated in 1947. “It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.”

Some of Pollock’s best known abstract work of that period, including *One* (CR 283) and *Autumn Rhythm* (CR 297), were exhibited at Betty Parsons’ gallery in 1950. In 1951, Pollock returned to associations of the figure, consciously addressing the confines of the picture plane. It speaks for his searching nature that instead of repeating himself, he pursued a new path by pouring black enamel directly onto raw cotton duck canvas. Capturing a sense of immediacy usually associated with drawing, these black-and-white paintings of 1951 and 1952 navigate between abstraction and figuration. In *[Black and White Painting II]* (CR 330), for example, a figure can be seen upside down. That is, a full-moon-shaped “head” on the lower right of the composition is the only clear figurative reference. “I’ve had a period of drawing on canvas in black—with some of my early images coming thru—think the non-objectivists will find them disturbing—and the kids who think it simple to splash a Pollock out”, wrote Pollock to his friends Alfonso Ossorio and Ted Dragon.

Pollock’s note addresses the most stingng criticism of the time, that his abstract paintings were easy. Though the sophistication of Pollock’s oeuvre is not in question today, the danger of a generalized understanding of the same remains. The acknowledgment of its obvious complexity would challenge the clean-cut categorization in most art history books. As we look at Pollock in the centennial year of his birth, one is certain: there still is plenty to discover. Rather than dividing Pollock’s oeuvre into series and chronological chapters, more scholars might focus on the identification of continuous themes. Pollock never set out to tell a cohesive story or to travel linearly. Instead, he fully committed to the freedom of expression; he visited, revisited, sought, discovered and embarked anew in cyclical or tidal motions. Today, the sincerity of his quest continues to resonate truthfully and because of that, Pollock continues to inspire.
1 Stone Head
2 Self–Portrait
4 Orange Head
5 Drawing with Two Signatures
Carved Bone
8. *The Mask*
Composition with Pouring I
Composition with Black Pouring
Number 23, 1949
Composition with Red Strokes
Untitled
21  Untitled
PLATE 1
“Stone Head"
Stone
4\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 3 x 2\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches (10.8 x 7.6 x 7 cm)
c. 1930–33
Catalogue Raisonné Number 1042
Collection of Jason McCoy, New York

PLATE 2
(Self–Portrait)
Oil on gesso ground on canvas, mounted on composition board
7\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 5\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches (18.4 x 13.3 cm)
c. 1930–33
Catalogue Raisonné Number 9
Courtesy of Washburn Gallery, New York and The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc.

PLATE 3
Seascape
Oil on canvas
12 x 16 inches (30.4 x 40.6 cm)
1934
Catalogue Raisonné Number 30
Peters Family Art Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico

PLATE 4
(Orange Head)
Oil on canvas
18\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 15\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches (47.6 x 40 cm)
c. 1938–41
Catalogue Raisonné Number 68
Private Collection

PLATE 5*

[Drawing with Two Signatures]
Gouache and pen and ink on paper
22\(\frac{3}{8}\) x 23\(\frac{7}{8}\) inches (57.2 x 58.5 cm)
c. 1941
Supplement Number One Catalogue Raisonné Number 15
Private Collection, Houston, Texas

PLATE 6

Untitled
Ink and watercolor on paper
15\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 12 inches (40 x 30.5 cm)
c. 1946
Catalogue Raisonné Number 1006
Private Collection

PLATE 7*

[Carved Bone]
Bone
6\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 3 inches (15.9 x 7.6 cm)
c. 1940–43
Supplement Number One Catalogue Raisonné Number 29
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gift of Louisa Stude Sarofim in memory of Alice Pratt Brown

PLATE 8

“The Mask”
Gouache, oil, pen and black ink, and collage of fabric pattern on paper
29\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 21\(\frac{7}{8}\) inches (75.9 x 55.6 cm)
c. 1943
Supplement Number One Catalogue Raisonné Number 24
Private Collection, Houston, Texas

PLATE 9*

Untitled
Brush, pen, black and color ink on paper
18\(\frac{7}{8}\) x 24\(\frac{7}{8}\) inches (46.8 x 62.1 cm)
1944

PLATE 10

Night Sounds
Oil and pastel on canvas
43 x 46 inches (109.2 x 116.8 cm)
c. 1944
Catalogue Raisonné Number 111
Private Collection

PLATE 11*

[Composition with Pouring I]
Oil on canvas
35\(\frac{3}{8}\) x 44\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches (90.8 x 113.6 cm)
c. 1943
Catalogue Raisonné Number 92
Private Collection

PLATE 12*

The Key
Accabonac Creek Series
Oil on canvas
59 x 84 inches (149.8 x 213.3 cm)
c. 1946
Catalogue Raisonné Number 156
The Art Institute of Chicago. Through prior gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Morris
PLATE 13

**Constellation**
Accabonac Creek Series
Oil on canvas
21 1/2 x 18 inches (54.6 x 45.7 cm)
1946
Catalogue Raisonné Number 154
Private Collection

PLATE 14

_[Composition with Black Pouring]_
Oil and enamel on canvas, mounted on compositional board
17 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches (43.8 x 23.5 cm)
c. 1947
Catalogue Raisonné Number 170
Collection of Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu

PLATE 15

**Number 34, 1949**
Oil on paper board backed with Masonite
22 x 30 1/2 inches (55.8 x 77.4 cm)
1949
Catalogue Raisonné Number 235
Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York

PLATE 16

**Number 23, 1949**
Oil and enamel on canvas mounted on composition board
26 1/2 x 12 1/8 inches (67.3 x 30.7 cm)
1949
Catalogue Raisonné Number 223
Collection of Clare and Eugene V. Thaw

PLATE 17*

_[Composition with Red Strokes]_
Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas
36 1/2 x 25 1/2 inches (93 x 65.1 cm)
1950
Catalogue Raisonné Number 268
Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth

PLATE 18

_[Black and White Painting II]_
Oil on canvas
34 1/2 x 30 1/8 inches (87.6 x 77.8 cm)
c. 1951
Catalogue Raisonné Number 330
Private Collection

PLATE 19

**Untitled**
Sepia ink on rice paper
24 1/4 x 39 1/8 inches (63.2 x 99.4 cm)
1951
Catalogue Raisonné Number 811
Collection of Shelley D. and Gilbert W. Harrison

PLATE 20*

**Untitled**
Wire dipped in plaster and spattered with paint
3 inches high
c. 1949
Catalogue Raisonné Number 1049
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gift of Louisa Stude Sarofim in memory of Alice Pratt Brown

PLATE 21

**Untitled**
Oil, enamel, and pebbles on board
21 3/4 x 29 1/2 inches (55.3 x 75 cm)
c. 1951
Catalogue Raisonné Number 1038
Private Collection

PLATE 22

**Number 7, 1951**
Ink on rice paper
28 x 42 inches (71.1 x 106.7 cm)
1951
Catalogue Raisonné Number 815
Collection of Thomas H. Lee and Ann Tenenbaum

PLATE 23*

**Untitled**
Colored inks on rice paper
24 1/4 x 34 inches (61.6 x 86.3 cm)
1951
Catalogue Raisonné Number 825
Collection of Barbaralee Diamondstein and Carl Spielvogel

_[Western Scene]_
Oil and crayon on wooden lid of a cigar box
6 1/2 x 9 1/8 inches (16.5 x 23.8 cm)
c. 1930–33
Catalogue Raisonné Number 1

_(Circle)_
Oil on composition board
12 3/8 x 12 inches (32.2 x 30.5 cm)
c. 1938–41
Catalogue Raisonné Number 64

* not in exhibition
This publication accompanies the exhibition:

Jackson Pollock: A Centennial Exhibition

Jason McCoy, Inc.
41 East 57th Street
New York, NY 10022
T: 212-319-1996  F: 212-319-4799
info@jasonmccoyinc.com  www.jasonmccoyinc.com
November 5–December 14, 2012

Catalogue © 2012 by Jason McCoy, Inc.

Pollock: The Key, Jason McCoy and Me © by Charles Stuckey

Pollock: Signs & Symbols Allover © by Stephanie Buhmann

Photographs of works of art reproduced in this catalogue have been provided by the owners or custodians of the works and are protected by copyright in the United States of America and elsewhere and may not be reproduced in any form without express permission of the copyright owners. The following photographic credits appear at the request of the artist’s representatives and/or the owners of individual works.

Courtesy Jason McCoy, Inc.
Photographs by Beth Phillips and Kevin Noble
E.V. Thaw & Co.
Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York
©The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc. / Artist’s Rights Society [ARS], New York
The Art Institute of Chicago
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
The Munson-William-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica

Catalogue design: Lawrence Sunden, Inc.

Printing: The Studley Press