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AN EXAMINATION OF THE APPROACH TO
THE OBJECT AND ITS SURFACE:

America: Abstract Expressionism in the
Mid-twentieth Century and Trompe-l'oeil in the
Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Jean Marilyn by Sandstedt

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B.F.A., University of Nebraska, 1955

Fine Arts

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Thesis directed by Instructor Don Weygandt.

This Thesis for the M.F.A. degree by

Jean Marilyn Sandstedt

has been approved for the

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An examination of the approach to the object and its surface uses as examples two forms of art which in surface appearance are the antithesis of one another, Abstract Expressionism and Trompe-l'oeil. Abstract Expressionism is a contemporary art movement, a virile movement, which is little understood by the general public. Trompe-l'oeil is an art form which has always appealed to the public. The "New York School" is used as an example of American Abstract Expressionism and William Harnett is used as the example of American Trompe-l'oeil. The difference in time between the two (a difference of approximately fifty years) is actually small when one considers the whole of art. Since Harnett no artist working with Trompe-l'oeil has contributed anything of significance to this painting form. The roots for Abstract Expressionism lie in Europe in the period in which Harnett was working in Europe (1878-1885). Considering the painting of the "New York School" and Harnett, in the light of the concept of the object and its surface, is a means of re-examining by comparison and contrast some of the basic principles of painting and the superficial differences in these two forms of painting. By using two forms

of art which in appearance are very different it has been possible to avoid certain similarities which in art forms more closely related have been taken as absolutes, the danger of the "academy." Also it has been possible to take a point of view toward these art forms which is new in its approach.

This abstract of about 250 words is approved as to form and content. I recommend its publication.

Signed Don L. Weygandt
Instructor in charge of dissertation

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in the art of today painting is placed by the average person in generally one of two categories; the abstract or realistic. In popular usage realistic art is that art in which the subject of the painting and the objects within the painting are easily identified with natural objects. Into the category of abstract is put all art in which the subject and objects cannot be easily identified. The point at which a painting is called abstract or realistic is constantly in flux and varies from person to person, depending on the person's imagination and knowledge of art. For the purposes of study the distinction between abstract and realistic, though relative, is made. At the extremes of the polarity of abstract and realistic art are abstract expressionism and trompe-l'oeil. Abstract expressionism is a term applied to contemporary art which makes use of abstract forms to express sensations of feeling or emotion. Trompe-l'oeil is a French term applied to the visual arts which by a depiction moving beyond the photographic displays objects as naturalistically as possible. The term

literally means "to fool the eye." While the camera records exactly in two-dimensions on a two-dimensional surface what it sees from a single point of view with a single

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America: Abstract Expressionism in the objects as he wills usually getting a much larger area in sharp focus than can be achieved with the camera. The Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries painter has enhanced the ambiguity of his objects, height-

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literally means "to fool the eye." While the camera records exactly in two-dimensions on a two-dimensional surface what it sees from a single point of view with a single focus the painter in trompe-l'oeil is at liberty to change his objects, his point of view, and vary the focus upon the objects as he wills usually getting a much larger area in sharp focus than can be achieved with the camera. The painter can enhance the tangibility of his objects, heightening the colors, bringing out the three-dimensional quality of an object more clearly through his use of light and shade (which he has more control over than does the photographer), using built-up surface textures (the photograph is smooth or of even surface texture), and arranging and changing the sizes, shapes, and/or placing of objects. The average person does not understand how two forms of painting, abstract expressionism and trompe-l'oeil, can appear visually so different and both be considered "art." In this paper examples are taken of these two categories, abstract expressionism and trompe-l'oeil, in America and by a discussion of the approach to the object and its surface point out the similarities and differences between the two.

For the abstract expressionists in America, I am using the "New York School." "New York School" is a loose label given to a direction of abstract painting which began in New York City during World War II and received wide publicity following the war. Some of the artists who have been included in this group are: Robert Motherwell,

Some of them like Frederick Peto moved out of trompe-l'oeil Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, William Baziotes, James Brooks, Ad Reinhardt, William de Kooning, Hans Hoffman, and Jimmy Ernst. All of these men, with the exception of Gorky,¹ took part in the "Artist's Sessions at Studio 35" in 1950 as recorded by Motherwell in Modern Artists in America.² This was one of the acts on their part which has caused them to be labeled as a "school."

Other acts were the original forming of "Studio 35" by Motherwell in 1945; the forming of the "Club" in 1949; and the 9th Street Show in 1951. In the discussion of the "New York School" paintings in this paper I am not concerned with the subject and meaning of the paintings but with the paintings as objects.

Trompe-l'oeil in America is exemplified by William Harnett, one of a group of painters active in the period of 1870 to 1900 which have been called the "Philadelphia School of Still-life."³ Some of the other painters placed in this group are: Frederick Peto, John Haberle, J. D. Chalfant, George W. Platt, Richard Labarre Goodwin, John F. Francis, George Cope, and Alexander Pope. Not all the members of this group were interested like Harnett in the trompe-l'oeil.

1. Gorky died in 1948.

2. Motherwell, Robert (Ed.). Modern Artists in America, No. I., Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, 1947.

3. Richardson, E. P., Painting in America, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1956, p. 321.

1. Art News Annual, Vol. XXIII, No. 11, 1954, p. 127.

2. Ibid., p. 154-155.

3. Ibid., p. 138.

Some of them like Frederick Peto moved out of trompe-l'oeil into a more atmospheric handling of light producing a highly realistic art but not a work of trompe-l'oeil. Among those interested in trompe-l'oeil Harnett was outstanding. He attained an artistic expression that was lacking in the paintings of many of the other members of the group through the use of a skillful technic applied to trompe-l'oeil.² in the early 1800's directly influenced Harnett. Historically trompe-l'oeil is an ancient art. The beginnings of optical illusion can be attributed to the Greeks if accounts are true concerning Zeuxis' painting of grapes which appeared so real that the birds flew down to peck at them. The widest use of trompe-l'oeil has been its use in Roman, Renaissance, and Baroque architecture to make a small room appear larger or a large room appear even more huge by penetrating the wall through the use of illusionistic painting. The architectural illusion was a "functional deception." In Roman wall paintings in the House of the Gladiators at Pompeii¹ and such Renaissance paintings as Botticelli's "Saint Augustine"² and Petrus Christus' "The Nativity"³ still-life objects were used as trompe-l'oeil to give the painting a greater illusion of reality. The still-life or "nature morte" is more adaptable to trompe-l'oeil because of its static or stopped-action quality.

1. Clerici, Fabrizio, "The Grand Illusion," Art News Annual Vol. XXIII., No. 11, 1954, p. 127.
 2. Ibid., p. 154-155.
 3. Ibid., p. 138.

while a figure does not lend itself to a realistic illusion when the action is stopped as it is in painting. Caravaggio in Italy and Zurbaran in Spain were two of the first artists to devote attention to the still-life as a subject independent of the figure and attain the first complete trompe-l'oeil paintings. Their followers, the Dutch still-life painters in the seventeenth century¹ and in America, Raphaelle Peale² in the early 1800's directly influenced Harnett in his still-life and trompe-l'oeil painting. Harnett's paintings fall into two basic types; still-life on a table and still-life on a wall. In the painting "Music and Literature"³ (see figure 1) Harnett has placed upon a table a pyramid of books; two flutes; two sheets of music, one rolled and one unrolled; an open book with marker; a candlestick with candle; and an inkwell with a quill pen in it. Harnett did not take an accidental group of objects for his still-life. Each object was consciously selected for its shape, color, and texture with a careful consideration of how this object was going to work within the composition as a whole. The table in "Music and Literature" is placed so that it is parallel to the surface of the painting and to the wall behind it. A balance in the composition. Besides the contrast of hori-

1. Some of these were Van Hulsdonek, Bosschaert, Van of Huysum, and Claesz.
2. "Still-life" by Raphaelle Peale, *Frankenstein*, Alfred. After the Hunt, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953, plate 22 and "After the Bath" by Peale, Richardson, Op. Cit., p. 191.
3. *Frankenstein*, Op. Cit., Plate 37.

diamond is formed by the pyramid of books and the unrolled sheet of music placed diagonally over the edge of the table to form a reverse triangle and complete the diamond. The pyramid of books is three-dimensional versus the two-dimensional diamond form into which it works. Though there is a use of three-dimensional forms Harnett does not stress deep space nor do his forms penetrate the background wall. The pages of the open book at the base of the pyramid of books are fanned out accenting the diagonals of the pictorial composition formed by the two flutes at left and the rolled music and quill pen at right. There are diagonals also in the angling of the books in the pyramid besides the diagonals formed by the edges of the central diamond shape. The diagonal movements of the composition are stabilized, contrasted to, and played against the strong horizontal of the front and back edges of the table and the vertical of the candlestick. These horizontals and single major vertical are strengthened with smaller horizontal and vertical movements in the placement and arrangement of the books. The whole is so carefully composed that even the unfolding of the bottom corner of the unrolled sheet of music would destroy the feeling of complete rightness and balance in the composition. Besides the contrast of horizontals, verticals, and diagonals there is a contrast of textures; the crispness of a piece of paper to the limp satin bookmark, the polished metal of the candlestick to the rough crockery of the ink well, the contrast of ivory

to wood, and all these contrasted to the worn leather of book bindings. Harnett's composition is definitely not an accidental arrangement. He had consciously selected and organized his materials. In observing a painting in one of Harnett's wall still-lives, his ten by eight foot painting of "After the Hunt"¹ (see figure 2), the still-life objects are placed against the flat surface of a wooden door. Again one finds the careful balance between horizontal and vertical stabilizers and diagonals, with the addition of circular movements in the French horn coils, the hat and horseshoe above it, and in the scrolls of the door hinge. Here too is the contrast in texture with fur, feather, felt, polished metal, rusted metal, leather, wood, and horn, and binocular parallax is reduced and the illusion of reality. Harnett was interested in the object and its surface. For Harnett the idea of the object was the natural object as it appeared to the eye. In order to reproduce this perceived object upon the painted surface in the most realistic manner it was necessary to reproduce the actual textures of the surface of the objects. The technique of handling of the paint was subordinated to the object and the natural surface of the object was emphasized. Technique becomes reproduction of the surface of the perceived object.

In Harnett's paintings space is reduced to a shallow plane in order to emphasize the reality of the objects. The

1. Ibid., frontispiece.

binocular phenomena underlying the use of shallow space are explained in the theories of binocular accommodation and binocular parallax. In binocular accommodation the eyes adjust for the depth in actuality. In observing a painting the eyes focus only on a single plane, that of the picture surface. Any depth, which is achieved, is achieved through psychological associations. By making the suggested depth of a picture shallow the changes necessary for the eye are slight and the illusion of reality is heightened. In binocular parallax the relationship of objects is constantly changing as one moves from side to side toward or away from the object. In a painting the relationship of objects to one another is fixed. If the depth is reduced to that of a shallow plane binocular parallax is reduced and the illusion of reality is heightened. Harnett's most deceptive paintings are those in which the picture plane lies as close as possible to the picture surface, as in "Shinplaster."¹ In this painting the depth of the picture is only the thickness of a single piece of paper money. In "After the Hunt" and "Music and Literature" the space, although deeper, is the most shallow amount possible in which to compose the objects. In this way Harnett also set a limit on his foreground.

In the wall painting Harnett obviously stops the eye from going back into space by setting up a solid background

1. Ibid., plate 56.

1. Ibid., plate 38.

wall. Two devices for stopping the eye are used by Harnett in his table top still-lives. In "A Study Table"¹ Harnett has used a wall as part of the background. The rest of the background is a grey-green atmospheric plane, the conventional sign for empty space, which while suggesting space, is in actuality a flat plane stopping the eye as effectually as the wall. In a table top painting Harnett always placed the table parallel to the picture plane. If he placed the table diagonally to the picture plane the eye would be led into the picture space. Even when Harnett used a diagonal movement such as in the unrolled sheet of music in "Music and Literature" (see figure 1) it was placed or bent so that the movement is not a diagonal into space but a diagonal parallel to the picture surface. Harnett confined most of the movement to the picture plane. He never allowed a movement to lead the eye back of this plane though he would often use a diagonal leading out from the picture plane. Harnett built out of the picture plane, not into it. Also Harnett made a clear distinction between an object and its background. It is always clear to the observer that these objects have been applied to the wall; thus Harnett maintained the solidity of his wall.

By his use of a shallow plane and building out from the picture plane Harnett deliberately connected the actual room

the surface of the canvas by building up the layers of

1. Ibid., plate 56.

1. Ibid., 7-19.

space with the imaginary picture space; thus the space of the picture became as "real" as the space of the room.

I have already stressed that Harnett was interested in perceived objects and their specific contrasting textures. He forces one into a greater awareness of the textures and creates a greater illusion of reality by use of contrasting texture. Harnett's interest in texture is best shown in the microscopic detail he went into in order to reproduce natural texture. In paintings which Harnett signed as if the signature were carved in wood "Often one can see in them how the point of the 'knife' dug a little deeper as it turned a corner, and how, occasionally, the 'knife' slipped out of its intended groove."¹ An example of the importance of texture over replica of the object is seen in his handling of newspaper print. Harnett, as far as is known, never reproduced newspaper print so it could be read but made it by using a series of black verticals through which he scratched with the end of his brush handle. The resulting texture reads to the eye as type yet the actual letters or words cannot be discerned. Strangely enough Harnett's texture appears more real than the exact replica used by other trompe-l'oeil painters. Often Harnett used the device of building up the texture of an object with his paint; that is, making a nail head actually stand out from the surface of the canvas by building up the layers of

2. Now in the Mildred Anna Williams Collection, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco.

1. Ibid., p. 19.

pigment and glaze. Also where the texture is rough, he reproduced the actual tactile surface with the paint so it would feel to touch as to eye. The use of building the texture up from the surface is also a device to retain the shallowness of the picture depth by building out of the picture plane rather than building back into the picture plane. This building up of paint together with the careful shading and placing of shadows (so that one feels he could measure exactly where the objects are in relationship to one another on the surface and in space) is probably what has made the painting "After the Hunt"¹ (see figure 2) so successful as trompe-l'oeil. At Theodore Stewart's restaurant in New York, "After the Hunt"² was displayed with special lighting, which, falling across the surface of the painting, made the surface textures cast shadows which were indistinguishable from the painted shadows. The effect was so perfect that customers would place bets as to whether it was a painting or real objects nailed upon the wall. None of the viewers, however, seemed to notice that the marlin spike, essential to the composition, was floating in mid-air (see figure 2). The addition of a support would have destroyed Harnett's composition by spoiling the simplicity and balance within the painting. Harnett filled

Harnett reduces all the objects to their abstract forms

1. Ibid., frontispiece. Ideal Cubist composition (see ...)
2. Now in the Mildred Anna Williams Collection, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco.

every area of the picture surface with texture, yet his paintings are not over-textured. If one were to remove one small textured area such as rust spot from a painting it would be as destructive to the composition as the removal of a necessary diagonal. This is one of the means Harnett uses for emphasizing both positive and negative space.

These textures are not always rough. Harnett contrasted smooth textures such as polished metal to rough textures such as crockery. *1st's Card Rack*²² produces the grid com-

position. Harnett's selection of color was as exact as his selection of texture. His paintings are composed through color and texture as well as shapes. The colors he used were the natural colors of the objects. However, he would often heighten the color of an object in order to force the eye to see something more "real." By using the natural color of an object it is necessary for Harnett to consider in his selection of objects those objects whose color would produce a color unity throughout the painting. *ted in*

pain In composing his paintings Harnett paid close attention to the shape of the objects he used and to the negative space around them. He was interested in the abstract shape of an object and composed the objects conscious of the two-dimensional surface of the painting. If one takes a Harnett and reduces all the objects to their abstract forms one has a perfect Analytical Cubist composition (see

figures 1 and 2). From Harnett's sketches for "The Old Cupboard Door"¹ it is seen how Harnett has selected his objects for their abstract shapes while at the same time jotting down notes of their color and texture; all these being of equal importance to his composition. Though Harnett's paintings have had no influence on twentieth century abstract painting it is interesting to note that as well as predating the Cubist composition Harnett in his painting "The Artist's Card Rack"² produces the grid composition of Mondrian through the use of cloth strips placed in an abstract pattern on a flat surface. However, Harnett used his cloth strips as a support for other objects and as a means of uniting these objects. Mondrian's grid is the painting itself, while Harnett's grid is a compositional means.

By looking at Harnett's paintings one finds that the idea of the object was the natural object and the surface was the natural surface of the object as depicted in paint. The surface of the painting and the surface of the object are one and the same. In the "New York School" the surface of the painting and the surface of the object are also one and the same, but as the idea of the object is

1. Frankenstein, Op. Cit., plate 80.

2. Ibid., plate 46.

1. Ibid., plate 46.

2. Ibid., plate 46.

3. Ibid., plate 46.

different from Harnett's idea of the object so the surface becomes different in order to be consistent with the object.

The paintings of the American Abstract Expressionists in the "New York School" are exemplified by Motherwell's "The Poet,"¹ Gorky's "The Betrothal II,"² and Jackson Pollock's "Number 5 (1950)."³

Motherwell's "The Poet" is painting and collage combined. He has taken pieces of butcher paper painted rusty orange and pasted them upon the canvas with the edges overlapping but still visible. In some areas, such as the central area, the edges are accented by a rim of black paint. In places he has heightened the orange color with the addition of a brighter orange paint. In the upper left corner Motherwell has placed a light blue-green area. The blue-green is also in the vertical and horizontal accents in the center of the canvas and in the vertical brush stroke extending almost the length of the right side of the painting. Behind this vertical is a brown paper rectangle with irregular edges. The blue-green vertical is balanced on the left with a white rectangle from the left edge of which has been cut a semicircle. The rectilinear quality of this shape is accented by a brown rectangle within the white rectangle. Along the central vertical axis of the painting

changes are often accented by the use of a black line worked

1. Hess, Thomas B., Abstract Painting, Viking Press, New York, 1951, plate G.
2. Ibid., plate A. In the center and to the left is a
3. Ibid., plate D.

large shape, derived from animal form, of light ochre into

are two horizontally placed ovals. The larger oval is almost resting upon the lower edge of the canvas. The smaller oval rests directly above the larger one and is connected to it by a series of dark lines. Shooting upward and to the left of the small oval are two shapes like bursting rays in dark brown and dull blue-green.

Motherwell's "The Poet" is a careful composition based on circular and rectilinear shapes. In the composition one senses the forces between the elements. The addition or subtraction of one single element would destroy the rightness of the composition. In his color scheme he has used simple complementary colors, blue and orange, with subtle variations. His texture is also subtle, but an interest in texture is definitely felt in his use of smooth paper, sharp edges, torn edges, brushed paint, and paint which has been scratched through.

Gorky's painting "The Betrothal II" is like Motherwell's collage in that it is a composition of rectilinear and circular shapes. However, Gorky's shapes have been derived from human organs and floral forms such as the stamen and pistil. Gorky's background for these shapes is an ochre paint brushed over a dark surface creating a painted texture upon which and from which the shapes emerge. Gorky's shapes are often accented by the use of a black line worked around the edges and into the shapes bringing out forms within these shapes. In the center and to the left is a large shape, derived from animal form, of light ochre into

which has been worked smaller organic shapes of purple, blue, and red. Above these two major shapes hover smaller organic shapes of white, light ochre, blue, yellow, and black in a horizontal band. Gorky's composition is more organic than Motherwell's; that is, Gorky's paintings are organized in a natural pattern using curves and irregularities, being based on growth. Motherwell's organization is classical relying more on a geometric arrangement.

Jackson Pollock's "Number 5 (1950)" is a typical example of his drip paintings. "Number 5" is a mass of swirling black paint into which has been worked, by dripping and spattering, yellow and white irregular curving shapes. From beneath the swirls of black, yellow, and white, and interwoven with it, are smaller areas of dull greens, greys, dull pinks, and tans. Compositionally the painting is held together by a gridwork of interweaving curves and layers of thick paint. Pollock's texture interest is obviously an interest in paint as it drips or is flung from a stick or brush. He has allowed it to become very thick in some places by building it up layer on layer and in other places he has left the paint in a single thin layer.

The "New York School" as an art movement began during the latter part of World War II and immediately following the war. It reached its height around 1950 with the

"Artist's Sessions in Studio 35"¹ published as a manifesto. Historically the "New York School" is a development borrowing from all the modern art movements since the Impressionists. Its composition is based on the discoveries of the Cubists and Mondrian; its color is that of the Post Impressionists and the Fauves; and its expression that of the German Expressionists. Its forms owe much to all the preceding movements and to such men interested in abstract forms as a means of expression, as Kandinsky, the Constructivists, the Purists, the Dadaists, and the Cubists. Its theories have been based on the theories of the Surrealists. To this the "New York School" added its own individuality and personalities to create an art form, historically sound, yet different from all the preceding forms.

The "New York School" is interested in the created object and its surface. The object is the painting as a whole. Since the object is the painting, the surface of the painting is emphasized to create a greater sense of the painting as a painting. Therefore the purpose of the painting becomes the actual technic of applying paint to the painting surface with meaning.

The painters of the "New York School" use a shallow space, or an atmospheric space similar to the space in oriental paintings which gives the sensation of space without actually breaking the two-dimensional plane of the

1. Motherwell, Op. Cit.

picture. Their paintings are wall-like in concept as well as in size. Motherwell's "Wall Painting III"¹ is a good example of this. In concept the "New York School" paintings are a flat surface upon which forms and paint have been placed. Their forms often merge with the wall. On the whole the painters tend to build out from the surface of the painting rather than back into the picture plane. Often they use a line which gives the sensation of wandering in and out of space. An equal emphasis is placed on positive and negative space. The picture plane has become the picture surface. In these ways the imaginary picture space is connected with the actual space of the room making the space of the picture as "real" as the room space.

Since the picture plane of the painting is the surface technic of the application of paint, their interest in texture lies in the discovery of the properties of paint and how best to express these properties with meaning. The texture is a texture created by the artist. Jackson Pollock's experiments with dripping paint upon a surface are examples of this. The texture is that of dripped paint. The contrast in texture comes through allowing the paint to fall in slow pools and flipping or stretching it taut, plus the addition of sand and other foreign matter.

1. Pousette-Dart, Nathaniel, American Painting Today, the Hastings House, New York, 1956, p. 40.

An equal emphasis is placed on all areas of the picture plane.

The "New York School" uses color as expression and also as it is related to their approach to the object and its surface. The color is the actual surface effect of color; a direct red rather than an atmospheric red; a red created by the artist, not dictated by the perceived object. The color is color for its own sake, as texture is texture for its own sake, in order to retain and emphasize the painting as the created object; the emphasis being on the surface technic.

The forms of the "New York School" are abstract shapes. These shapes are created by the artist. They may have been derived from a perceived object but have been molded into the artist's own created shapes. No shapes are as important as the form of the painting as a whole. All shapes are subordinated to the idea of the painting as object. The shapes are two-dimensional in order to retain the flat surface.

Compositionally the "New York School" painters compose within a shallow plane never allowing a movement to penetrate or project far into or from the picture plane. Yet, these movements create a sensation of movement in and out (a sensation of space in flux). The composition is based upon a horizontal and vertical grid through which and against which movement plays. There is a careful selection of shapes and careful consideration for the placement of the shapes in relation to one another and to the picture plane. An equal emphasis is placed on all areas of the picture plane.

By comparing and contrasting Harnett and the "New York School" one sees that both were interested in the object and its surface. Harnett was interested in the perceived object and its surface. The "New York School" is interested in the created object and its surface. In order to accent the perceived object Harnett accented the natural surface and subordinated his technic to the natural portrayal of the actual surface texture of the perceived object. In order to accent the created object the "New York School" painters paint the painting, as a creative act, by emphasizing the surface of the object. For the "New York School" the technic is the actual technic of painting the painting as an object.

In the handling of space both Harnett and the "New York School" place emphasis on a shallow space. Their paintings are composed within the framework of a grid. They both are interested in surface texture and color, and place emphasis upon the individual shapes within the painting. Harnett places equal emphasis upon each shape while the "New York School" subordinates all shapes to the form of the painting as a whole. Harnett and the "New York School" are interested in the incidental and capitalize upon it. Harnett is interested in the scratch in wood or the rust on a nail. The "New York School" is interested in the drip of paint or the scratch of a brush handle. In their composition they both are working with surface texture, flat shapes, and color within a shallow plane. They

work out from the picture plane rather than back into it. Their space is confined. They are interested in retaining the flatness of the wall. While the shapes of the "New York School" paintings often merge with the wall, Harnett always keeps his shapes free from the wall maintaining the difference between the wall and the objects and always making clear to the observer where an object is in space in relation to the wall. Both place equal emphasis on negative and positive space in the composition.

An interesting parallel between Harnett and the "New York School" is found in the collage. Harnett finds an object beautiful in itself and translates it in paint upon the canvas. The "New York School painter making a collage takes the actual object and pastes it directly upon the painting surface. By placing a sheet of glass over a "New York School" collage one achieves the same effect as found in a wall painting by Harnett such as his "Shinplaster."¹ Moving outside of the "New York School" and American painting, the collages of Kurt Schwitters, such as "Rubbish Picture"² only differ from Harnett's wall paintings in that he placed the actual object on the surface while Harnett painted it on the surface.

Another common interest between Harnett and the "New York School" is in the wall painting, a result of their

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1. Frankenstein, *Op. Cit.*, plate 38.
 2. Moholy-Nagy, L. *The New Vision*, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1938, figure 54.

interest in shallow space. The "New York School" has placed emphasis on the wall painting over the easel painting. There are two factors which in contemporary thought distinguish the wall painting from the easel painting. These are: the large size of the canvas and the treatment of the painting as a flat plane or wall upon which forms have been placed (a building out from the picture plane). The easel painting is relatively small in size and its concept is that of a window (a building back into space). In the paintings of the "New York School" the size is obviously that of a wall painting and the concept that of the wall. In the wall painting the spectator exists within the same plane as the painting, seeing the wall as an object. "By connecting the space of the picture with the space of the room in which the picture hangs, the space of the picture is as 'real' as the space of the room--the two flow together."¹ In the easel painting the spectator is excluded from the painting. The spectator and the painting are not in the same plane. Part of the concept of framing of contemporary paintings is concerned with the including of the spectator. The small frame on contemporary paintings is more a means of defining the area rather than a means of separating the spectator from the picture as is done by a wide and/or ornate frame. The large frame is

1. MacAgy, Jermaine, "Fooling the Eye," Art News, Vol. 48 June 1949, p. 32.

like a window which separates the spectator from the image by a transparent wall. Baroque paintings, both mural and easel, were unique in history in the breaking of this transparent wall between the spectator and the image, in the attempt to involve the spectator. But in the breaking of the picture plane and deep recession into space the Baroque artist penetrated the wall, which in contemporary eyes is a violation of the truth to the material; that is, a violation of the flatness of the wall as wall. The "New York School" painters attempt to involve the spectator without the actual destruction of the wall as such. All elements such as space, texture, color, and shapes are on the wall and are the wall. Harnett in his paintings, large or small, has basically been interested in the wall. Many of his paintings are of walls or doors upon which have been hung or placed various objects. He has tried to dissolve the depth of the canvas by placing emphasis on the objects as perceived objects. Therefore the area seen in a Harnett painting becomes the surface area and not the image seen through a window. He also experimented with the large canvas or mural size canvas in the eight by ten foot canvas of "After the Hunt."

For the painting of the "New York School" and Harnett it can be said, "The feelings of awe and absolute rightness which the spectator senses do not come from any recognition of the moral caliber or fidelity to historically

ascertainable conditions but from the fact that these forms and this paint are one and the same, from every point of view."¹

In this paper I have attempted to point out to the reader that though these two forms of painting, Abstract Expressionism and Trompe-l'oeil, are in appearance very different there are fundamentals common to both forms. One of the elements of art which has always been of great interest to students of art and art history has been the variety of forms which painting can take within the limits of its medium. The principal connecting links throughout history seem to be those of expression, order, and unity; and within these there is infinite variety. It is the unity between form, expression, and technic (the idea of the object and its surface) which produces the feeling of complete rightness within a painting. It is the changing of art through the imagination and individuality of the artist which makes painting "live" and great art always appear "fresh."

1. Hess, Op. Cit. p. 15.











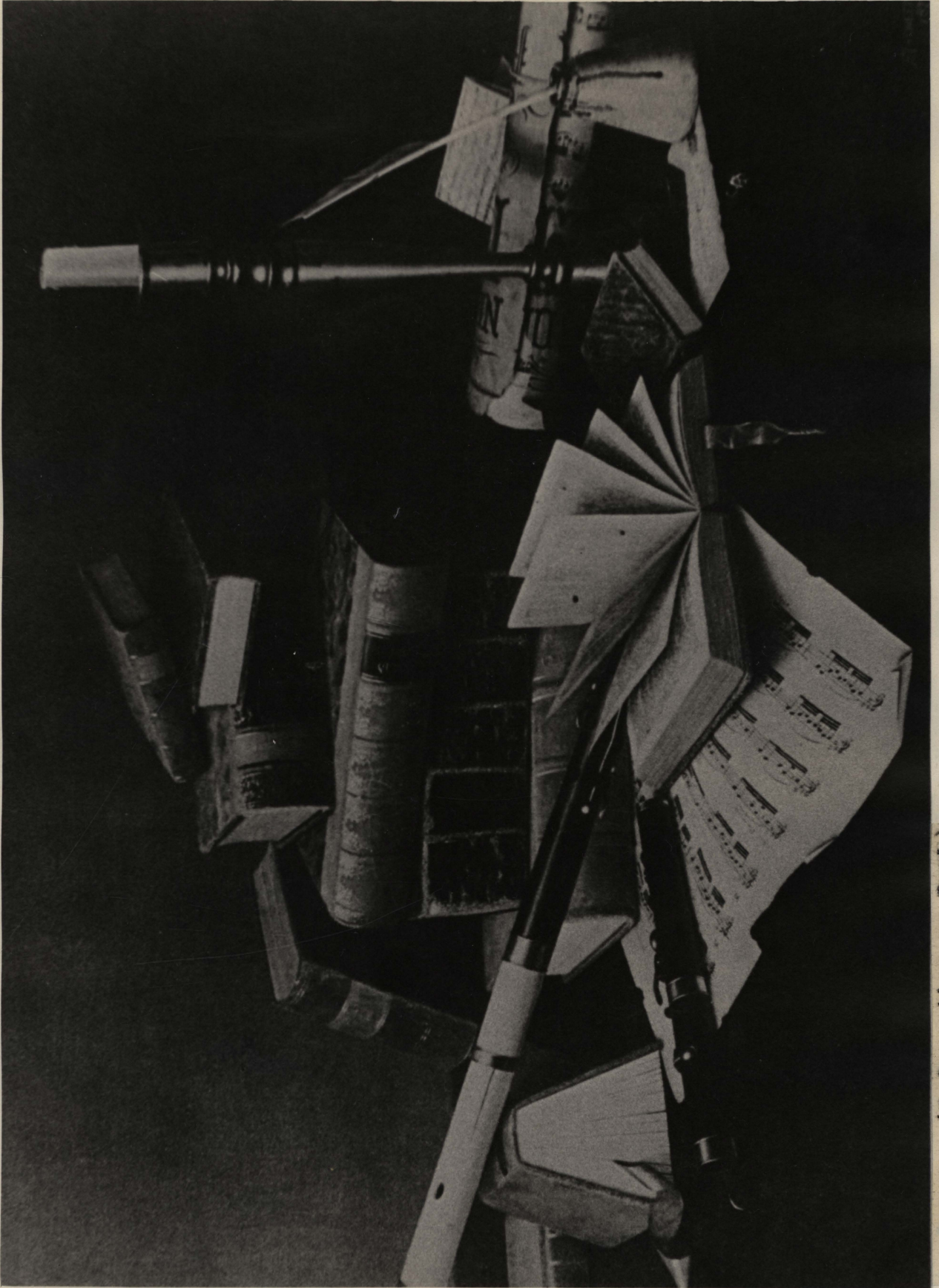


FIGURE I. (Information on Back)

FIGURE II. (Information on Back)



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