

Artl@s Bulletin

Volume 3
Issue 1 *Peripheries*

Article 8

2014

To Drip or to Pop? The European Triumph of American Art

Catherine Dossin
Purdue University, cdossin@purdue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas>

 Part of the [American Art and Architecture Commons](#), and the [Contemporary Art Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dossin, Catherine. "To Drip or to Pop? The European Triumph of American Art." *Artl@s Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (2014): Article 8.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

To Drip or to Pop?

The European Triumph of American Art

Catherine Dossin*

Purdue University

Abstract

This paper considers the so-called triumph of American art from the perspective of what Western Europeans could actually see and know of American art at the time. Relying on a database of exhibitions, purchases, and publications of American art in Western Europe from 1945 to 1970 created in the framework of ARTL@S, it reconstructs the precise chain of events and circulations that marked the dissemination and reception of American art in Europe. It consequently draws a more refined and complex understanding of postwar artistic exchanges out of the entangled historical perspectives of the European peripheries, which challenges the retrospectively dominating position of American Abstract Expressionism.

Résumé

Cet article réexamine le prétendu « triomphe de l'art américain » après 1945, à partir de ce que les Européens pouvaient savoir sur la peinture américaine. Il s'appuie sur une base de données créée dans le cadre d'ARTL@S, qui recense les expositions, publications et achats d'art américain en Europe de l'Ouest (1945-1970). On y retrace les événements et les circulations qui marquèrent la réception de l'art américain en Europe. Partant du point de vue des périphéries européennes, et non du centre américain, l'étude offre une image plus exacte et complexe des échanges artistiques de l'après-guerre, qui remet en question la position rétrospectivement dominante de l'Expressionnisme Abstrait.

** Catherine Dossin is Associate Professor of Art History at Purdue University. Her first book, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s-1980s: A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds* (forthcoming with Ashgate), challenges the New York-centered official story of postwar Western art by highlighting the role played by the so-called peripheries, as well as economic and politic factors. She serves the vice-director of ARTL@S, for which she directs [The Triumph of American Art](#) project.*

In April 1964, when the retrospective exhibition *54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade* opened in London at the Tate Gallery, it caused quite a stir in the art world.¹ The French, in particular, felt completely betrayed. It was indeed difficult not to notice the sidelining of the Parisian artists, whose dim presence did not reflect the importance they had had for the past ten years. The painter Roger Bissière, who would represent France at the Venice Biennale that coming June, was absent. Jean Fautrier, a major postwar artist who had won the Biennale in 1960, was not included either. The Parisian contingent was reduced to a few uninteresting pieces by Hans Hartung, Serge Poliakoff, Pierre Soulages, Nicolas de Staël and Jean Dubuffet. The beneficiaries of this sidelining were the Americans, whose overwhelming representation seemed disproportionate to the School of Paris' supporters. Retrospectively then, *54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade* marked the first official acknowledgment of the so-called triumph of New York over Paris - a drift that was confirmed two months later in Venice when the American artist Robert Rauschenberg was awarded the International Painting Prize of the Biennale.

What most visitors of *54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade* failed to recognize was, within the American contingent, the relatively disproportionate place given to the young Pop artists, who outnumbered the more established Abstract Expressionists. There was indeed as many Lichtensteins as Rothkos, Johns as de Koonings, Rivers as Motherwells, and the six large Rauschenbergs overshadowed the small Pollock panel.² Herta Wescher, one of the few critics to comment on the neglect of American Abstract Expressionism, was outraged by Pollock's lackluster representation: "It is inadmissible that Pollock, who had the deepest influence on the new generation, be presented by no more than a narrow panel which is lost in the ensemble."³ At

54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade, Parisian Lyrical abstraction and American Abstract Expressionism were relegated to the background, while the new American realism triumphed. That June in Venice, something similar happened when the major award went to an American realist—not abstract—artist.

Reconsidering the Triumph of American Art from the Peripheries

Many articles and books have been written on the shift of the art world's center from Paris to New York, and it could seem pointless to reopen the discussion once more.⁴ However, one aspect of this story has remained relatively unquestioned—namely, the confusion between the triumph of American Abstract Expressionism and the triumph of New York over Paris in the grand narrative of postwar Western art. The former evokes the national success of Abstract Expressionism in the United States in the early 1950s, while the latter refers to the time in the early 1960s when New York replaced Paris as *the* place where Westerners went to see art. Still, as the official story goes, Abstract Expressionism triumphed over Parisian art sometime in the 1940s.⁵

This confusion can be traced back to accounts written after Rauschenberg's victory in Venice, including Thomas Hess's famous 1964 essay "Tale of Two Cities," which begins as follows: "We all know what happened to International School of Paris Painting at some time in between 1939 and 1945; it ceased to exist. We know how it happened; the evidence is plain in literally thousands of pictures by hundreds of very gifted, intelligent artists."⁶ Writing from an American perspective, Hess naturally confused the two triumphs. However, from the Western European

⁴ We can mention Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1985); Eric de Chassey, "Paris - New York: Rivalry and Denial," in *Paris: Capitale des Arts 1900-1968*, ed. Sarah Wilson (London: Royal Academy of Art, 2002), 344-51.

⁵ This confusion is best embodied in the title of Irving Sandler, *Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970). This book was quickly translated and made available in European countries, where it had a considerable impact, as described in Jean-Luc Chalumeau, "Le "triomphe" de l'expressionisme abstrait américain: Jackson Pollock," in *Lectures de l'art* (Paris: Editions du Chêne, 1991).

⁶ Thomas B. Hess, "A Tale of Two Cities," *Location*, Summer 1964, 37.

¹ Edward Wright and Robin Fior, *54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade* (London: The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1964).

² By then Rauschenberg was seen in Western Europe as part of the Pop art movement, see below for more explanation.

³ Herta Wescher, "Pauvre Ecole de Paris," *Cimaise*, Spring 1964, 63.

countries' perspective, Paris did not lose its appeal until about 1962,⁷ and the American art which triumphed on the Old Continent was not Abstract Expressionism but Pop art.

To confuse the triumph of Abstract Expressionism and the triumph of American art is problematic because it retrospectively nullifies the experience of all the Europeans who continued to look towards Paris in the 1950s, and invalidates their representations of those events. The other problem is that it assigns the American triumph to the greater artistic quality or cultural relevance of American art, and the shift in focus as the inevitable recognition of its superiority. Finally, it perpetuates the hierarchy of the center over the peripheries, and the enduring belief that an artistic center is where artistic value is produced, while peripheries merely import this value.

In this paper, my ambition is to shift the scope of traditional analysis and to approach the American triumph from the perspective of what Western Europeans could actually see and know of American art at the time, in order to reconstruct the precise chain of events and circulations that marked the dissemination and reception of American art in postwar Europe. To this end, I have been collecting data on exhibitions, purchases, and publications of American art in Western Europe from 1945 to 1970. This project, which uses tools and methods from ARTL@S, draws a more refined and complex understanding of postwar artistic exchanges out of the entangled historical perspectives of the Western European peripheries and challenges the retrospectively dominating position of the triumphal American center.⁸

The Dim Presence of American Abstract Expressionism in Western Europe, 1947-1957

Until the late 1950s, international exchanges were limited, especially between Europe and the United States, simply because exchanges were, technically speaking, difficult: transatlantic crossings were time-consuming; air transportation uncommon; phone communications expensive; postal service extremely slow; and transportation companies unreliable. Importing and exporting art required one to fill out mountains of paperwork, and pay heavy duty taxes. In this context, opportunities to see American art in Europe and to engage in a dialogue with American artists were rare.

Western Europeans' first occasion to see examples of American Abstract Expressionism came in 1948 with the presentation of Peggy Guggenheim's collection at the Venice Biennale. After spending the War in New York, Guggenheim settled in Venice with her collection, which consisted of prewar abstraction (Kandinsky, Malevich, Pevsner), Surrealism (Dali, Ernst, Tanguy), and recent American paintings (Motherwell, Pollock, Rothko). Rudolf Pallucchini, who was in charge of the Biennale, asked her to present it in the unoccupied Greek pavilion.⁹ As Guggenheim wrote in her memoirs, the show was a success, for visitors were eager to see works by great modern masters, whose works had been suppressed during the War. The importance of this exhibition in regards to Italian and European understanding of the new American painting, however, should not be overestimated. Hung at the end of the show, overshadowed by the Picassos, Brancusi, and Miró, they often went unnoticed.¹⁰ In 1949, the collection was presented in Florence and Milan but, as Guggenheim recalled, these shows were chaotic and not very successful. A year later,

⁹ On the events described in this section, see Peggy Guggenheim, *Confessions of an Art Addict* (Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1960), 120-24.

¹⁰ This aspect of the show was hardly discussed in the press. See for instance Egon Vietta, "Panorama der europäischen Moderne: Die XXIV Biennale in Venedig," *Die Zeit* (June 15, 1948), <http://www.zeit.de/1948/29/panorama-der-europaeischen-moderne>. Or Douglas Cooper, "24th Biennial Exhibition, Venice," *The Burlington Magazine* October, 1948. See also Adrian R. Duran, "Abstract Expressionism's Italian Reception: Questions of Influence," in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 142-43.

⁷ On the position of Paris in Western Europe and many other issues and questions discussed in this essay, see Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s-1980s: A Geopolitics of the Western Art Worlds* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), Forthcoming.

⁸ In the limited space of this essay, it is not possible to be exhaustive so much so that some important exhibitions and texts cannot be discussed. However, they were taken into account in the quantitative studies on which my argument is based.

during the Venice Biennale, where Pollock represented the United States along with Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and John Marin, she showed her Pollocks at the Museo Correr in Venice and then in Milan at the Galleria d'Arte del Naviglio.

To avoid paying large import duties on her collection, Guggenheim needed to send her collection abroad for a few months and re-import it to Italy. To oblige her, Willem Sandberg, the director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, organized an exhibition of her collection which started in Amsterdam in January 1951 before travelling to the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and the Kunsthalle in Zurich. However important and well received the exhibition might have been in regard to Europeans' knowledge of the historical avant-gardes that comprised most of the collection, its consequences on Europeans' appreciation of Pollock, Gorky or Mark Rothko could only be limited. As in Italy, the young Americans were represented through a few paintings, hung at the last room of the exhibition in a section devoted to recent international abstractions, and so generated little discussion. Typically, the critic of the Swiss newspaper, *Die Weltwoche*, for instance, discussed the works of Mondrian, Pevsner, Arp, Ernst, Miro, and their likes in great details, but only mentioned in passing the younger generation, without singling out any artists in particular and not even distinguishing between the Americans and the Europeans.¹¹ In the context of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection the artists we regard today as American Abstract Expressionists were presented as the youngsters of international abstraction and Surrealism. Their Americanness was not put forward such that European viewers would not have necessarily looked upon them as examples of American art.

Furthermore it is possible that the Pollocks were not displayed in Amsterdam. While Sandberg, a graphic designer by training with close ties with the Bauhaus, was eager to show Guggenheim's

¹¹ "Ausstellungen," *Die Weltwoche* (Zürich), April 27 1951.

modern masterpieces, especially her geometric abstractions, he had reservations against the young American and hesitated showing him, as their correspondence shows.¹² When Guggenheim offered a Pollock to the Stedelijk Museum to thank Sandberg for his help with the show, he was particularly hesitant. He wanted a Surrealist work, whereas Guggenheim wanted him to take a drip painting. In the end, she made him accept the drip *Reflections of the Big Dipper* (1947) by giving him the more surrealist *The Water Bull* (1946). Those were the first and for a long time the only Pollocks in a European public collection, and being in the collection did not necessarily imply that they were on view in the galleries of the Stedelijk from then on.

The subsumation of the Abstract Expressionists' national identity under international trends was not limited to their presentations within the Peggy Guggenheim Collection; it also happened in the exhibitions organized by Michel Tapié in the early 1950s, where they appeared as the American proponents of *Art Autre*. Thanks to his friend the French painter Georges Mathieu who was then working for a transatlantic shipping company, Tapié was able to travel to the United States, where he discovered Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, Hans Hofmann, and others. Bringing their works to France was unfortunately infeasible. In fall 1948 Mathieu had tried to do it for a show he organized at the Galerie Montparnasse but the American galleries he contacted were unwilling to send artworks to Europe, where they could be lost in transportation or during the lengthy custom procedures. Besides, there was very little prospect to sell American art in a Europe still struggling with material, economic, and cultural rebuilding. Mathieu had thus only been able to display a few unimpressive works on paper that could hardly provide visitors with a good understanding of the new American painting.¹³

¹² In conversation with Caroline Roodenburg-Schadd at the Symposium Holland/America at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede in February 2011. On Sandberg's collecting policy see Caroline Roodenburg-Schadd, *Expressie en ordening: Het verzamelbeleid van Willem Sandberg voor het Stedelijk Museum 1945-1962* (Amsterdam: NAI Publishers and Stedelijk Museum, 2004).

¹³ Georges Mathieu, *De la révolte à la renaissance: au-delà du Tachisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 61-62.

A solution came when Tapié met in Paris Alfonso Ossorio, an artist and a friend of Pollock. Ossorio owned several Pollocks and a few de Koonings that Tapié was able to borrow for an exhibition he organized in March 1951 at the Galerie Nina Dausset. *Véhémences Confrontées* featured Camille Bryen, Giuseppe Capogrossi, de Kooning, Hartung, Mathieu, Pollock, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Alfred Russell, and Wols. Since Ossorio did not own any Rothko, Motherwell, or Hofmann, these artists could not be included. Tapié described the show as: “a confrontation between works by individuals, who belong to absolutely disparate races, milieus, cultures, experiences,” but were engaged in what he called the *Informel* adventure.¹⁴ In the context of this exhibition, Pollock and de Kooning were not presented as the proponents of a new American painting but rather as part of a new international trend that broke free from all artistic convention and engaged in the unknown of art.

In March 1952, with some Pollocks Ossorio brought in his suitcases, Tapié organized a solo show of the artist at the Studio of the photographer Paul Facchetti, newly expanded into an art gallery. According to the guestbook, the exhibition was well-attended. Yet this document must be considered with caution since it was then common to sign a guestbook with famous names as a joke or self-fulfilling wish.¹⁵ Press review was scarce. In the *Lettres Françaises* Pierre Descargues briefly mentioned the show, presenting Pollock as the “atomiste de l’art moderne.”¹⁶ And only two paintings sold: one to a Milanese collector and one to a Swiss collector named Pollack.¹⁷ While the extent of the show’s impact can be debated, it is certain that here again Pollock was not presented as the champion of a new, distinct American movement, but rather as a leading figure of the international *Informel* trend. As Tapié’s text

emphatically proclaimed: “Jackson Pollock avec nous!” (Jackson Pollock with Us!).

Thanks to Peter Watson, a British collector and the principal benefactor of London’s Institute of Contemporary art, Tapié was able to organize a British edition of *Véhémences Confrontées* in 1953. *Opposing Forces* featured Sam Francis, Mathieu, Henri Michaux, Ossorio, Pollock, Riopelle, and Jaroslav Serpan. Pollock’s London debut almost did not happen for the three Pollocks arrived just after the opening.¹⁸ Robert Melville writing for *Architectural Review* was impressed by these drip paintings: “The whole heaving, undulating agglomerate makes a strangely restful image of human restlessness; it is a majestic turmoil, a breathing wall...”¹⁹ Other reviewers, however, did not share his enthusiasm. The critic of *The Times* was not convinced by what he saw as oversize “niggling doodles” and found rather simplistic the artists’ use of large canvases and original techniques. He concluded: “Mr. Tapié described Mr. Pollock’s work as ‘a bomb in the Paris art world.’ But it is not so easy as all that, and something more is required than the wish to oppose.”²⁰ As for the *Burlington Magazine*, it did not even bother reviewing this small, avant-garde show.

Presented as the juniors of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland, the Abstract Expressionists were presented in France and Great Britain as the American exponents of Tapié’s *Art Autre*. On other occasions, namely retrospectives of American Art sent by American museums to Europe, they were presented as one of the trends of contemporary American art. In summer 1950, the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam presented such a show in collaboration with the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. *Amerika Schildert* featured 127 paintings from John S. Copley and Thomas

¹⁴ Michel Tapié, *Véhémences Confrontées* (Paris: Galerie Nina Dausset, 1951), 4.

¹⁵ A practice with which Julie Verlaine who studied the Parisian galleries in those years was often confronted. Julie Verlaine, *Les galeries d’art contemporain à Paris: une histoire culturelle du marché de l’art, 1944-1970* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2012).

¹⁶ Pierre Descargues, “Paris Pollock,” *Lettres Françaises*, March 20, 1952.

¹⁷ Alfred Pacquement, “La première exposition de Jackson Pollock à Paris, Studio Paul Facchetti, mars 1962,” in Pontus Hulten, ed. *Paris-New York* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 536-41.

¹⁸ Frank G. Spicer, “Just What Was it that Made U.S. Art So Different, So Appealing?: Case Studies of the Critical Reception of American Avant-Garde Painting in London, 1950-1964” (Ph.D., Case Western Reserve University, 2009), 87.

¹⁹ Robert Melville, “Exhibitions,” *Architectural Review* (London) 113, no. 676 (April, 1953): 272.

²⁰ “Opposing Forces in Art: The Lure of Abstraction,” *The Times* (London), January 30 1953.

Cole to Marin and Georgia O’Keeffe. Ben Shahn, Morris Graves, Jack Levine, Jacob Lawrence, and Pollock were among the young artists selected to represent the American contemporary scene.

Pollock found himself in the same position within *Amerikanische Malerei, Werden und Gegenwart*. Organized by David Finley, director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington it took place at the Rathaus Schonberg in West Berlin in September 1951 during the *Berliner Festwochen*, an event intended as the West’s cultural showcase vis-à-vis Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the show offered Eastern visitors, an overview of American art from the eighteenth century to the present. The new generation was represented by Edward Hopper, Hyman Bloom, Shahn, Baziotes, Rothko, Pollock, and others.²¹ The exhibition was subsequently presented at Schloss Charlottenburg in West Berlin, at the Galerie des Amerika-Hauses in Munich, and at the Akademie der Bildenden Kunst in Vienna. The impact of this traveling exhibition on European knowledge of Abstract Expressionism could only be limited since these artists were not presented as a coherent group but rather as individual examples of contemporary American art. Besides, the show took place at the “margins” of Western Europe; in cities still grappling with the consequences of the War and facing the rising tension of the Cold War, where it received little to no press coverage.²²

A similar lack of unity and coherence characterized the first exhibitions organized by the International Program of Exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Selected by the MoMA curator Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *Twelve American Painters and Sculptors* toured Europe between 1952 and 1953.²³ It intentionally featured artists working in different styles, namely Ivan Albright, Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper, Ashile Gorky, Morris Graves, John Kane, John Marin, Jackson Pollock, Theodore

Rozsak, Ben Shahn, and David Smith, in order to showcase the diversity of the American art scene. As Ritchie explained: “So we did not attempt to establish an overview of the various trends of American painting and sculpture today, but to stress the individuality of each of those artists. This decision is justified by the diversity of American modern art and its individualistic character, as well as by the absence of any “official” art that could be said to dominate artistic practice.”²⁴ As McCarthyism was tearing the United States apart, the organizers wanted to convey to Western European audiences that there was no censorship or official style in their country. American artists were free to create artworks in any style they pleased, from Albright’s magical realism to Shahn’s social vision or Calder’s abstract mobiles.

In Paris, where the show debuted, the public was numerous and rather enthusiastic. According to the US Information Agency, it welcomed 8,500 visitors and, as such, was the most visited international show presented at the Musée national d’art moderne.²⁵ It was also largely discussed in the press: it was reviewed in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Combat*, *France-Soir*, and twice in the *Parisien libéré*.²⁶ In the specialized press, critiques were mixed. The sculptures of Calder and Smith garnered most praise, and among the painters Shahn and Davis were almost unanimously enjoyed. Pollock, on the other hand, was viewed skeptically.²⁷ The show traveled subsequently to Zurich, Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo, where it was also received with mixed feelings. While this show was important in acquainting Western Europeans with the diversity of American contemporary creation, it did little to establish Abstract Expressionism as a coherent and specific group in Western Europeans’ minds. Flanked by six Shahns and six Hoppers, the four

²¹ Joachim Tiburtius, ed. *Amerikanische Malerei: Werden und Gegenwart* (Berlin: s.n., 1951).

²² The show was not reviewed by *Die Zeit* or *Der Spiegel*, although they reported on the Berliner Festwochen.

²³ On this exhibition see Gay R. McDonald, “The Launching of American Art in Postwar France: Jean Cassou and the Musée National d’Art Moderne,” *American Art*, Spring 1999, 41-61.

²⁴ Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *12 peintres et sculpteurs américains* (Paris: Musée National d’Art Moderne, 1953), unpagéd.

²⁵ Helen M. Franc, “The Early Years of the International Program and Council,” in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad* (New York: Museum of Modern Art/ Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 118.

²⁶ Based on information provided by MoMA:

<http://research.moma.org/ipbib/IPexhibitions.htm>

²⁷ Léon Degand and Pierre Guéguen, “Artistes américains au Musée d’art moderne de Paris,” *Art d’aujourd’hui* 4, no. 5 (1953). George Besson, “Quelques aspects de l’infantilisme dans l’art américain,” *Les Lettres françaises*, no. 463 (April 30, 1953): 9.

Pollocks that belonged to different periods could hardly convey to visitors that they were in front of the leader of *the American avant-garde*.

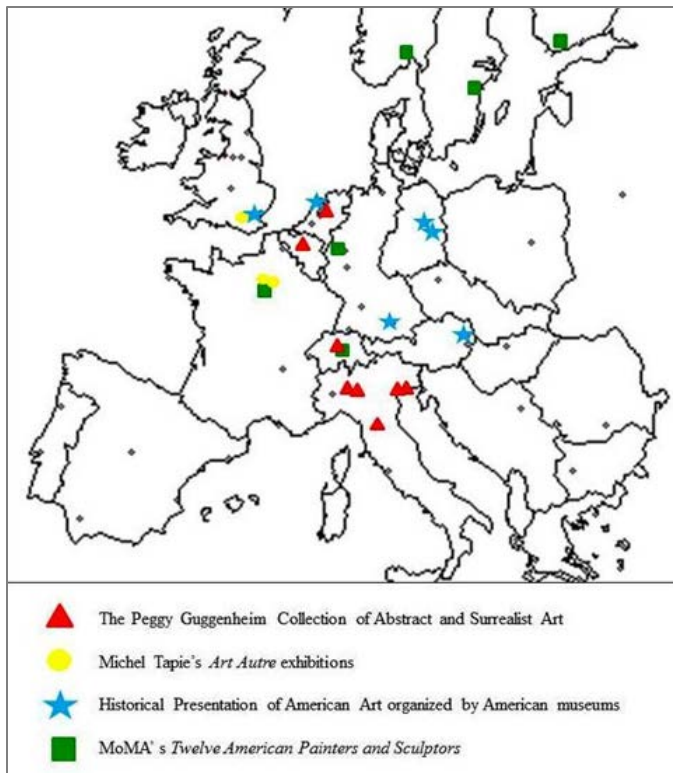


Figure 1
Context of Jackson Pollock's exhibitions in Western Europe, 1946-1953

A similar reception awaited the visitors of *Modern Art in the U.S.A.* which toured Europe between March 1955 and August 1956. Selected by Dorothy Miller and Alfred Barr for MoMA's International Program of Exhibition, it opened in Paris with sections on design, architecture, photography, and movies, which were not presented in Zurich, Barcelona, Frankfurt, London, The Hague, Vienna, Linz, and Belgrade where the show subsequently stopped. Even without these additional sections, *Modern Art in the U.S.A.* was diverse and ambitious: it gathered a hundred artists divided into founders of the modern movement, realist artists, romantic painters of the American scene, contemporary abstract painters, and self-taught primitives. While the show was a frank public success (in Paris, it attracted 14,130 visitors, in

London 4, 908,²⁸ in Vienna 8,749, and in Frankfurt more than 16,000²⁹), it was not the Abstract works which garnered most praise but the realist compositions of Hopper, Weyth, and Shahn. Painting like Shahn's *Welder* (1936) or Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning* (1930) were appreciated by the European public for their urban and industrial subject matters and almost cinematographic style, and perceived as truly American.³⁰ Considering that most Europeans' knowledge of American came from Hollywood movies and comic books, it made perfectly sense that the American scenes of these artists *looked* American to them. Among the abstractionists, Calder was also regarded as truly American owing to the mechanical quality of his sculptures, their inventiveness, and energetic rhythm.³¹ While Tobey was often regarded as the most important American abstract painter, Pollock puzzled. Critics mentioned him but rarely discussed his work in any depth. He was, it must be said, represented by two rather dissimilar paintings, *She-Wolf* (1943) and *Number 1A* (1948).³²

By 1957, Abstract Expressionism thus remained little known in Europe. As the Dutch curator Edy de Wilde explained: "Over here, in Europe, in the 1950s, we did hear about a 'New York School,' but we had never seen anything of it."³³

The Arrival of American Abstract Expressionism in Western Europe, 1957-1962

It was only in 1958 when the International Council at MoMA organized *The New American Painting*

²⁸ Jeremy Lewison, "Jackson Pollock and the Americanization of Europe," in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, ed. Pepe Karmel and Kirk Varnedoe (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 231; Spicer, "Just What Was it that Made U.S. Art So Different, So Appealing?" 115.

²⁹ Franc, "The Early Years of the International Program and Council," 127.

³⁰ See, for instance, Dennis L.A. Farr, "Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions" *The Burlington Magazine* 98, no. 635 (February, 1956): 60-63.

³¹ Basil Taylor, "American Art at the Tate: Abstract Expressionism and Other Recent Developments," *The Times (London)*, January 5 1956, 3. Despite its title, the article focuses on Calder, Hopper, Shahn, Tobey and Hartley, and only briefly mentions the Abstract Expressionists in the introduction.

³² See for instance J. Lusinchi, "Cinquantes ans de peinture aux Etats-Unis," *Cimaise*, Mai 1955, 10. For more on the European reception of Tobey see Catherine Dossin, "A Fascination with the Pacific: The Reception of West Coast American Art in Postwar Paris," *Tsinghua Arts* (Summer 2014): Forthcoming.

³³ Edy de Wilde, "Memories and Afterthoughts," in *60' - 80' Attitudes - Concepts - Images* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1982), 6.

(which went to Basel, Milan, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, and London) and the retrospective *Jackson Pollock, 1912–1956* (which traveled to Rome, Basel, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, London, and Paris) that Western Europeans had finally the opportunity to see American Abstract Expressionism (Fig. 2 and 3).



Figure 2
Cover of the French catalogue of the combined exhibitions *Jackson Pollock and The New American Painting* at the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris, 1959.

Unlike previous exhibitions, *The New American Painting* did not aim at presenting the entire range of American artistic production but instead focused on Abstract Expressionism. As Kenneth Rexroth explained to the readers of *Art News*: “This is the first chance most Europeans have had to see this aspect of American painting. Most other shows have taken in the whole range of contemporary and not so contemporary styles, from Grant Wood to Clifford Still, and so have been, to strangers certainly, confusing rather than informative.”³⁴

Responses to the show were mixed. While some critics like the reviewer of the *Burlington Magazine* Dennis Farr enjoyed what they saw as a “fresh strain” that was injecting “new blood and vitality” into the “older artistic heritage,”³⁵ most critics were unimpressed.

³⁴ Kenneth Rexroth, “Americans Seen Abroad,” *Art News*, Summer 1959, 30.

³⁵ Dennis Farr, “Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions,” *The Burlington Magazine* 101, no. 673 (April, 1959): 157.



Figure 3
Cover of the German catalogue of *The New American Painting* used at the Kunsthalle of Basel, and the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Berlin, 1958-1959.

One of the most common critiques addressed to the *New American Painting* was that it was actually neither new nor American. Not only, as European critics pointed out, were most of these “American” artists originally from Europe, but also—and maybe because of this—their works carried little of the American spirit; or more exactly of what Western Europeans imagined it to be. Summarizing this shared impression, Leonardo Borgese declared in the *Corriere della Serra*:

New American Painting. It isn't new and it isn't American... The painters presented in Milan all rehash similar techniques from the old European literary cafés. There is no real novelty though critics and art historians have tried to pump in content, significance, and philosophy. In these huge pictures, you find here and there a dash of insolent, effortless Expressionism, sterilized vacuous Surrealism, or futile, juvenile Picassoism... These recurrent official American exhibitions always leave us depressed. It's like the end of the civilized world. And yet we love the Americans and we trust them! When will they send us a real American exhibition?³⁶

Although he enjoyed what he saw far more than Borgese, Léon-Louis Sosset, the critic of the Belgian *Beaux-Arts*, likewise saw the roots of

³⁶ Leonardo Borgese, “*Candore e Conformismo della Nuova Pittura Americanana*,” *Corriere della Serra*, June 8 1958. Translated and quoted in “*The New American Painting – New York, 1959*,” in *Salon to Biennial - Exhibitions That Made Art History*, ed. Bruce Althuler (London: Phaidon, 2008), 389.

Abstract Expressionism in European art and so did not see it as particularly new or specifically American.³⁷ Reading the European press it is clear that the mood and style of the works on display were too melancholic and dramatic to fit Western Europeans' image of the powerful and young America. Georges Boudaille wondered in the *Lettres françaises*: "Where does this dramatic sensation of nightmare and stain come from? What do these disturbing spatters express? What? The painters who have the chance to live in the 'most overdeveloped' country of the world would thus not be happy?"³⁸ The critic of *La Libre Belgique* even warned his readers that they might "leave this encounter in a state of terrible dejection and of real anxiety as to the solidity of human reason on this planet in 1958."³⁹ Unable to match the Europeans' image of the United States and too similar to European Abstraction, American Abstract Expressionism struggled to please European visitors and critics.

As for the Pollock retrospective, it generated much curiosity. Very few Europeans had seen the solo-shows organized by Guggenheim and Tapie in Milan, Venice, and Paris in the late forties and early fifties. Most people had only seen two or four works from different periods. Summarizing the situation, Françoise Choay, writing for the Swiss magazine *L'Oeil*, explained: "Until now the work of Pollock had been exhibited in Europe in a fragmentary fashion that rose doubts."⁴⁰ Although the exhibition focused on the period between 1947 and 1953, and did not include works from the artist's early career, it was possible to "definitively place Pollock." Interestingly enough, Choay refers to Tobey to explain Pollock's work, considering that her readers were more familiar with the former. Whether they enjoyed what they saw or not, at least visitors had the impression to finally understand what Pollock was about.

³⁷ Léon-Louis Sossat, "De Pollock à Sam Francis: révélation de la nouvelle peinture américaine," *Beaux Arts (Brussels)*, December 5 1958, 1, 5.

³⁸ Georges Boudaille, "Inquiétantes Explosions: Nouvelle peinture américaine," *Les Lettres françaises*, January 22 1959, 11.

³⁹ L.D.H., "La Libre Belgique, December 12, 1958," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 221.

⁴⁰ Françoise Choay, "Jackson Pollock," *L'Oeil*, July-August 1958, 42.

As *The New American Painting* and Jackson Pollock toured Western Europe, *documenta II* opened in Kassel in July 1959. This second *documenta* was devoted to the artistic developments since 1945 and presented mini-retrospectives of four painters who had recently died: Wols, Willy Baumeister, de Staël, and Pollock. Aside from Pollock, several other American artists were represented in Kassel. 145 works, selected and sent free of charge by MoMA's International Council, impressed European visitors by their scale, and contributed greatly to Europeans' knowledge of, if not appreciation for, Abstract Expressionism. In the 1960s, the International Council organized retrospective exhibitions of Rothko, Kline and de Kooning which toured Europe, while other American museums and private companies sent their own shows and collections of American art.

In response, the European press started discussing American Abstract Expressionism in greater length. Until then mentions had been rare. The German newspaper, *Die Zeit*, for instance had first mentioned Pollock in 1952 in relation to Peggy Guggenheim describing him in passing as a "frivolous New York abstract artist."⁴¹ The next allusion to the artist came in 1956 in a discussion of the 1956 Venice Biennale. But only in July 1958 did *Die Zeit* devote an article to Pollock at the occasion of what was presented as the artist's first exhibition in Germany, thereby confirming the lack of impact of *Amerikanische Malerei, Werden und Gegenwart* in regard to Pollock's reception.⁴² *Die Zeit's* overlooking of Pollock did not result from the newspaper's general disregard for contemporary art. On the contrary, the German newspaper published articles on contemporary artists with great regularity: Wols (May 19, 1955), Hartung (November 19, 1956), Dubuffet (July 11, 1956), Maria Elena Viera da Silva (April 3, 1957), Poliakov (June 5, 1958), etc. The absence of Pollock resulted from both his lack of visibility and lack of appeal. The same was true for Rothko,

⁴¹ "Ostpavillons ohne Inhalt: Streiflichter von der Biennale der Bildenden Kunst in Venedig," *Die Zeit* (July 3, 1952), <http://www.zeit.de/1952/27/ostpavillons-ohne-inhalt>.

⁴² Gottfried Sello, "Wilde Träume eines Amerikaners: Jackson Pollock zum ersten Male in Deutschland ausgestellt," *Die Zeit* (July 25, 1958), <http://www.zeit.de/1958/30/Wilde-Traume-eines-Amerikaners>.

which was first discussed in 1963 in relation to the publication of Herbert Read’s *Geschichte der modernen Malerei* (February 22, 1963). To take another example, the Belgian art magazine *Quadrum* discussed American art on a few occasions in the 1950s, but it was not until 1960 that it published a long article penned by the American art historian Robert Goldwater on the New York School which retraced the work of the Abstract Expressionists since the 1930s.⁴³

If we consider the overall critical reception of Mark Rothko, a painter we regard today as a major proponent of postwar international art, we see that until 1956 he was hardly discussed in Western European publications. This only changed following the *New American Painting* and his traveling retrospective in 1961, which drew European attention to his work and resulted in a boom of articles (Fig. 4 and 5).⁴⁴

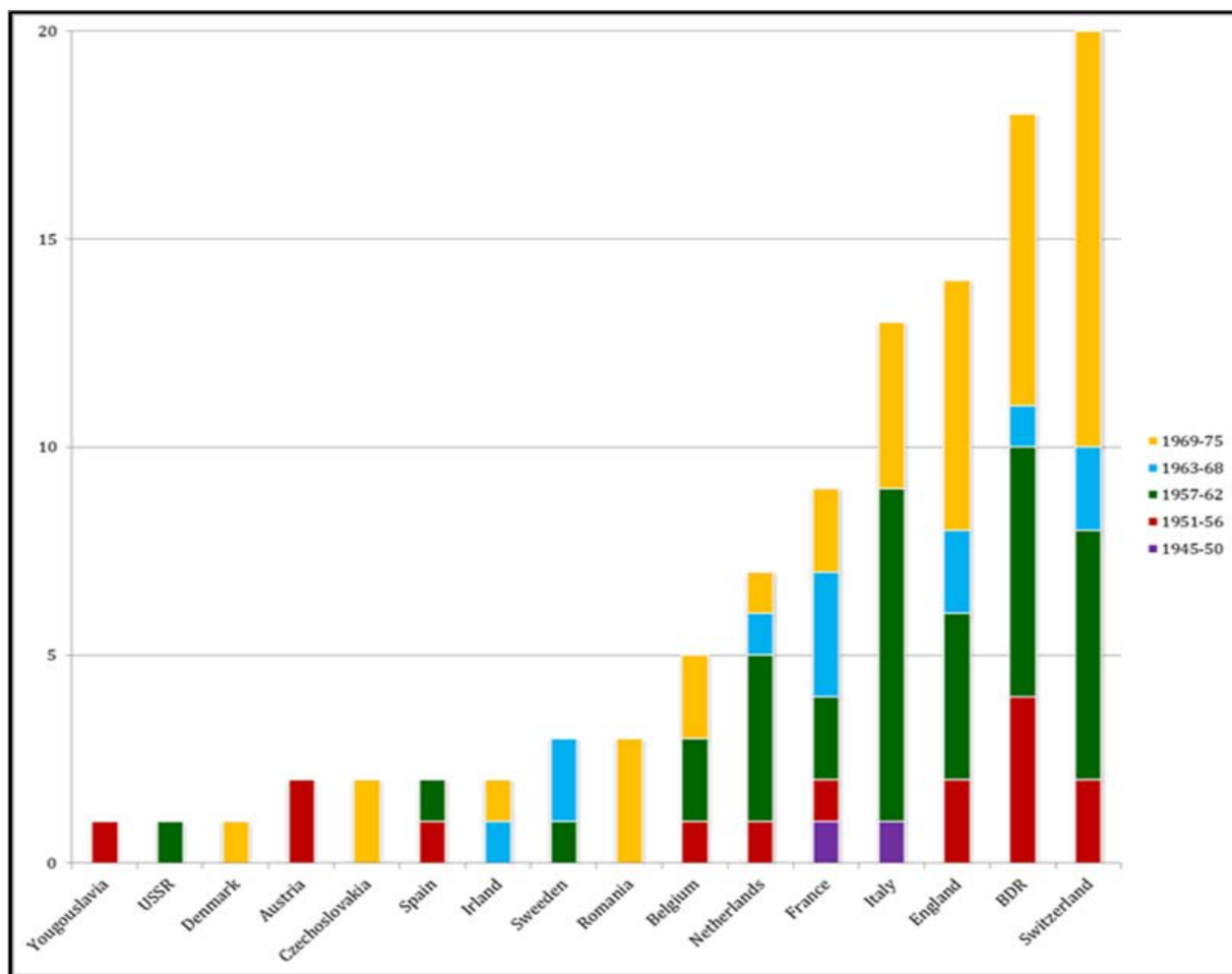


Figure 4
Number of exhibitions in which Mark Rothko participated in Western Europe

⁴³ Robert Goldwater, "Reflection on the New York School," *Quadrum* 8(1960): 17-35.

⁴⁴ On Rothko's European reception, see Catherine Dossin, "Mark Rothko, the Long Unsung Hero of American Art," in *Mark Rothko. Obrazy z National Gallery of Art w Waszyngtonie*, ed. Marek Bartelik (Warsaw: National Museum of Warsaw, 2013), 101-12.

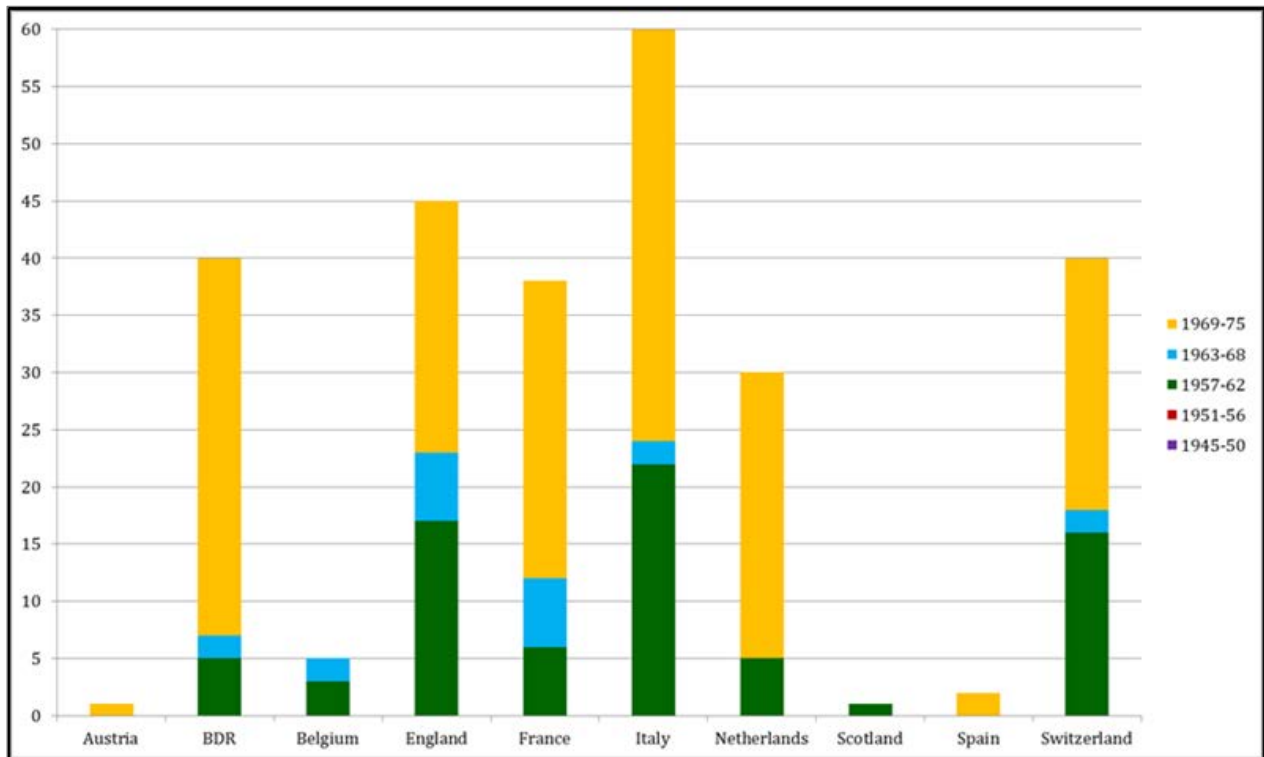


Figure 5
Number of articles in Western European publications discussing Rothko's work.

The increased visibility of Abstract Expressionists led Western European museums to acquire examples of their works (Fig. 6). Their emergence onto the European art scene was fortuitous: having fully recovered from the War and benefiting from the economic expansion of the 1950s, European countries and their museums could start collecting anew.

In 1959, Arnold Rüdlinger, director of the Basel Kunsthalle, was able to get funds to buy a Rothko, a Newman, a Kline, and a Still.⁴⁵ Following the success of the *New American Painting* and *Jackson Pollock* in London, the Tate Gallery also acquired Rothko's *Light Red Over Black* (1957) in 1959. In 1960 the Friends of the Tate presented the museum with Pollock's *Number 23* (1948) and in 1961 *Yellow Island* (1952).⁴⁶ That year, the director of the museum John Rothenstein founded the "American Friends of the Tate," a group of

American patrons, who pledged to acquire about fifty works of art in order to establish at the Tate "the first broadly representative Collection of American painting and sculpture on view outside the United States."⁴⁷ In 1961, the group offered a Tobey to the museum.

Some audacious collectors also started purchasing examples of American Abstract Expressionism. After seeing *Modern Art in the USA* in London in 1956, Ted Power a British collector of de Staël and Jean Dubuffet became interested in American art. With the help of the London dealers Peter Cochrone and David Gibbs, he built a solid American collection over the next few years. In 1956 he bought several works by Sam Francis and a Rothko. In January 1957, he bought Pollock's *Banners of Spring* (1946), and Still's *n°21* (1948). In August 1957, he bought a painting from de Kooning's *Woman* series (1955), two Rothkos and a Kline. In January 1958, he acquired another Still,

⁴⁵ On Rüdlinger's interest in American art, see Eberhard Kornfeld, "Rüdlings Reise nach New York 1957," in *Die Geschichte der Basler Kunstvereins und der Kunsthalle Basel, 1839-1988*, ed. Lukas Gloor (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 1989), 228-29.

⁴⁶ Information found on the website of the Tate Collection.

⁴⁷ "British Window for American Art: Friends of the Tate Group Formed," *The Times (London)*, March 11 1961.

two more Klines and two more Pollocks, including *Unformed Figure* (1953).⁴⁸ In March 1958, Power's collection was presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art. *Some Paintings from the E. J. Power Collection* provided Londoners the opportunity to see American examples along with more established European artists. During the *New American Painting*, Power discovered Newman, from whom he acquired *Eve* in 1960 and *White Fire* (1954) in March 1961.

The following year, Janis also sold him a Rothko. In 1958, during the Kline exhibition at La Tartaruga gallery of Milan, Panza bought four paintings, and during their Cy Twombly show he scooped up seven works. *The New American Painting*, which came to Milan in June 1958, was for Panza the occasion to see works he only knew through reproductions. In the following years, he bought more Klines and Rothkos, a Philip Guston and a Richard Diebenkorn.

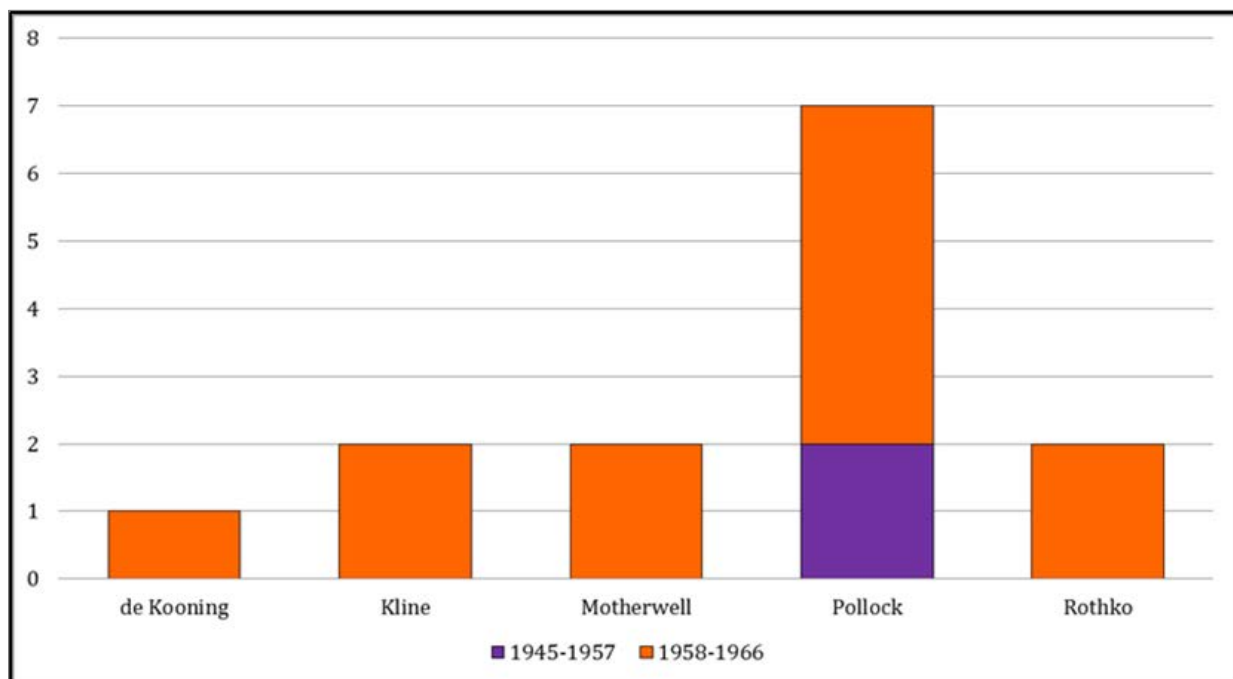


Figure 6
Number of art works acquired by Western European museums, 1945-1966
Based on data provided in Dieter Honish and Jens Christian Jensen, eds. *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis heute: Kunst der USA in europäischen Sammlungen* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1976).

The Italian Count Panza di Biumo was likewise an early collector of the new American painting. Long fascinated with the United States, Panza was able to visit it in 1954. He was deeply impressed by the vitality of the country and its skyscrapers that he regarded as the cathedrals of modern times. Abstract Expressionism would come to embody for him the energy and novelty of the United States. In 1956, he saw a Kline in an art magazine. Since nobody in Europe was selling his work, he wrote to the gallerist Sidney Janis in New York.

⁴⁸ See Jennifer Mundy, "The Challenge of Post-War Art: The Collection of Ted Power," in *Brancusi to Beuys: Works from the Ted Power Collection* (London: Tate Gallery, 1996).

In 1960, he travelled to New York to visit galleries, artists' studios, and private collections, including Ben Heller's.⁴⁹

Another important and early European collector of American art was Philippe Dotremont, an industrialist from Brussels. One of the best clients of the Parisian galleries, he amassed an impressive collection of the first and second generation of the School of Paris, which was exhibited in

⁴⁹ See Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, *Giuseppe Panza: Memories of a Collector*, trans. Michael Haggerty (New York: Abbeville Press, 2007). Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, "Interview Conducted by Christopher Knight April, 1985," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1985). Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, "Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 940004).

Amsterdam, Eindhoven, and New York in 1958.⁵⁰ In the mid-1950s, he discovered Francis and Tobey in Paris and started collecting them. Following the *New American Painting*, Dotremont acquired more American examples through Lawrence Rubin, an American dealer who ran a gallery in Paris.⁵¹ He bought three Pollocks—*Blue Inconscious* (1946), *Number 17* (1948), *Coulées noires* (1951)—, two Rothkos—*White Stripe* (1958) and *Number 16* (1960)—and de Kooning's *Surburb in Havana* (1958). When his collection was exhibited in Basel in 1961, it included works by Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, Motherwell, Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, and Joan Mitchell. The best represented artist of the show was Tobey with eight paintings. Asked what he liked about American art, Dotremont explained:

The Americans distinguish themselves through courage and dynamism. Free from the past and independent from schools and traditions they are able to grasp the evolution of current art directly. They turn to new problems and try to open new paths for painting, which they have managed to do on occasions convincingly.⁵²

By 1962, American Abstract Expressionism had finally arrived in Western Europe and was being established onto the official art world of European museums, magazines, and collectors. But this integration coincided with a shift within the Western European artistic landscape away from abstraction, which benefited a new generation of American artists.

The Integration of Neo-Dada on the Western European Art Scene, 1958-1964

Indeed, as Abstract Expressionism was arriving in Western Europe, a new generation of American artists headed by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg made its European debut, and

became part of the European artistic scene almost at the same time as *The New American Painting* and *Jackson Pollock* reached the Old Continent

In 1958, Johns was included in the American selection of the Venice Biennale the very year of his discovery by the dealer Leo Castelli, and a year before he was featured along with Rauschenberg in *Sixteen Americans*, MoMA's 1959 overview of contemporary American art. Even though he was overshadowed by Tobey and Rothko within the American pavilion, his work drew the attention of many Europeans, including that of the young critic Pierre Restany. Jean Larcade who, after living in the United States had decided to return to France and open a gallery in Paris, was also immediately convinced of Johns's importance. In January 1959 Larcade presented a solo-show of Jasper Johns in his newly opened Galerie Rive Droite with the help of Castelli. Tightly connected to the European art scene, to which he had belonged until the War, Castelli was indeed eager to introduce them in Western Europe to provide them international exposure, and did everything to facilitate their integration on the European scene. Unlike Pollock who never traveled to Europe, Johns came to Paris for his show accompanied with Rauschenberg, who was likewise starting to make an impact on the European art scene.

In 1959, Rauschenberg was included in several important European group shows: *documenta II*, the first Biennale de Paris (reserved for artists under 35), and the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris. This last exhibition in which Johns also participated was organized by André Breton and José Pierre, and took place at the galerie Cordier. The two Americans, invited through Marcel Duchamp who knew their work from New York certainly through John Cage, found themselves presented side by side with the historical international Dadaist and Surrealist avant-gardes, of which they appeared as the successors.⁵³

⁵⁰ Paul Fierens, ed. *Collectie Philippe Dotremont* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1954).

⁵¹ J.K. Geerlandt, "American art in Belgian collections," in *American Art in Belgium* (Bruxelles: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1977), 9-10.

⁵² A. Rudlinger, ed. *Moderne Malerei seit 1945 aus der Sammlung Dotremont* (Basel: Kunsthalle, 1961), nonpag.

⁵³ On this exhibition, see Clémence Bigel, "Le Pop'Art à Paris: une histoire de la réception critique des avant-gardes américaines entre 1959 et 1978" (M.A. Thesis, Université Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013).

In April 1961, Daniel Cordier gave Rauschenberg his first European solo-show. The exhibition was surprisingly successful considering that it took place during the so-called Putsch of the Generals in Algeria, which put France on the verge of civil war.⁵⁴ José Pierre discussed the exhibition in *Combat*, Michel Ragon in *Arts*, and Choay in *Art International*. In Paris, Rauschenberg and Johns connected with the European Nouveaux Réalistes, in particular Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint-Phalle. Together they participated in many events and exhibitions, including *Bewogen-Bewegung* (Stockholm, Amsterdam, Humlebæk, 1961), *Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York* (Paris, 1961), and *Dylaby* (Amsterdam, 1962).

By 1962, the two Americans, Rauschenberg in particular, had become active participants in the European art scene, so active that they had eclipsed the Abstract Expressionists as *the* American avant-garde. This had in fact started in 1959, when Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955; Fig. 7) caused scandal at the *documenta II*. Symptomatic of the way the different American generations were treated in Europe, the review published in *Der Spiegel* in July 1959, only mentioned Pollock in passing (it seems that it was the first mention of the artist in the journal), whereas it reproduced *Bed* even though it was not on display in Kassel. Sent by the International Council along with the 144 other American artworks, *Bed* puzzled the German organizers who decided to leave it in the crate. Not surprisingly the work became the object of all discussions; thereby it eclipsed in its absence Pollock's monumental drips.⁵⁵ To take another example of the way the Neo-Dadaists quickly eclipsed the Abstract Expressionists in Europeans' minds, in April 1959, when Dennis Farr reviewed the *New American Painting* for the *Burlington Magazine* he welcomed the "new blood and



Figure 7

Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955. Combine painting: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt and sheet on wood supports, 6' 3 1/4" x 31 1/2" x 8". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY Art © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York/NY

The work was exhibited in Paris in 1961 during the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*. It was also included in *4 Amerikanare: Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Stankiewicz*, a traveling show, which went from Stockholm to Amsterdam and Bern in 1962. It should have been on display at the *documenta II* in 1959.

⁵⁴ The putsch took place on April 23, 1961 and the exhibition opened on April 27. Engrossed in the political events, Daniel Cordier was hardly at the gallery before the opening. See: Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 189.

⁵⁵ "Documenta: Im Wolfspelz," *Der Spiegel*, July 29 1959, 50-53.

vitality” that de Kooning and Pollock, whom he was like so many Europeans discovering, were injecting into the older artistic heritage.⁵⁶ But a year later, when the journal published a survey of American contemporary painting, their novelty had been supplanted: Pollock, de Kooning, and Rothko were described as the “masters” and “old opponents,” while the Neo-Dadaists formed “the most difficult and aggressive” avant-garde.⁵⁷ The expressive abstractions of Pollock, de Kooning and Kline belonged to the postwar existential zeitgeist so much so that when they arrived in Europe between 1958 and 1959, they already belonged to the history of art.

The European visibility of Rauschenberg and Johns accelerated when Leo Castelli’s ex-wife Ileana Sonnabend opened a gallery in Paris with her husband Michael Sonnabend. The gallery brought to Europe the commercial techniques of American dealers, such as Janis and Castelli, and provided the artists it represented with a powerful support-system, which rested on a savvy use of publicity and an efficient network of sisters galleries. The Sonnabends were particularly active in promoting Rauschenberg, to whom they gave four solo-shows in two years. The first one, *Rauschenberg: Première exposition, oeuvres 1954-1961* which took place in February 1963 was a great success and convinced many collectors and museum directors of his importance. Pontus Hultén, the young director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and a friend of Tinguely and Saint-Phalle, for instance, decided after the show at Sonnabend’s to acquire the combine *Monogram* (1955-59). In 1963, he also bought a Johns and a sculpture of John Stankiewicz who was also associated with American Neo-Dada. Edy de Wilde, the new director Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, was also enthusiastic and decided to purchase *Charlene* (1954). As for Bryan Robertson, the director of Whitechapel in London, he decided to give Rauschenberg a show in his institution.⁵⁸ He even postponed a retrospective of

Kline in favor of the young artist. Robertson considered that Kline’s show sent by MoMA, like Rothko’s 1961 retrospective, should have taken place years earlier and thus could wait a few more months. It was far more urgent to show Rauschenberg while he was still current and relevant.⁵⁹

Robert Rauschenberg, paintings, drawings, and combines, 1949-1964 opened in London in February 1964. This ambitious exhibition, which featured forty combines and silkscreens along with the artist’s illustrations for Dante’s *Inferno*, was both a popular success, attracting a record numbers of visitors with a daily average of 1,876.⁶⁰ As a means of comparison, *Jackson Pollock, 1912–1956* had drawn an average of 439 visitors per day when it came to London.⁶¹ The success of Rauschenberg’s exhibition was all the more salient since at the same time Rothko had a show at the Marlborough Fine Art Gallery, which was completely eclipsed and attracted little attention.⁶² In contrast, Rauschenberg’s show was a critical success. British press described the exhibition as “the most exhilarating show to see in London” and Rauschenberg as “the most important artist America has produced since Jackson Pollock.”⁶³ MoMA’s International Council then circulated the Dante series through Europe as *Rauschenberg: Illustrations for Dante’s Inferno*.⁶⁴

But, by then, a new American style was storming Europe and swallowing up Rauschenberg and Johns, providing their works with a different context.

⁵⁶ Farr, “Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions,” 157.

⁵⁷ George Heard Hamilton, “Painting in Contemporary America,” *The Burlington Magazine* 102 no. 686 (May, 1960): 192-97.

⁵⁸ He had actually already mentioned the idea to Castelli and Rauschenberg in fall 1962 while he was in New York. Brandon Taylor, “The Rauschenberg Retrospective

in 1964,” in *The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review* (London Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2001), 71.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 71-75.

⁶⁰ Spicer, “Just What Was it that Made U.S. Art So Different, So Appealing?,” 260, footnote 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 251-54.

⁶³ On the response of the British press, see *ibid.*, 261-72.

⁶⁴ On this exhibition and the European reception of Rauschenberg, see Hiroko Ikegami, *The Great Migrant: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press 2010).

Pop Art Storms through Western Europe, 1963-1968

Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Jim Rosenquist and Tom Wesselmann appeared on the New York art scene in 1962 through a series of exhibitions orchestrated by Castelli and his colleague Ivan Karp, who discovered them, and placed them strategically in different galleries, whereby they created the impression that New York was taken by an irrepressible wave of realist paintings. The buzz it generated quickly reached Western Europe.

As early as March 1962, Europeans could thus learn about these artists through Max Kozloff's essay "Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarities," published in the Swiss magazine *Art International*, which was widely read in Europe or at least looked at by anyone interested in contemporary art.⁶⁵ Even if Kozloff disliked the works he discussed, his article and the illustrations Castelli graciously provided were crucial in introducing these new artists in Europe, especially Lichtenstein, whose *Emeralds* (1961), *Girl with Beach Ball* (1961), *Blam* (1962), and *The Kiss* (1962) visually dominated the article with their clean and graphic look. Additionally, *Girl with Beach Ball* was prominently featured at the beginning of the magazine in a half-page advertisement for the Castelli Gallery.

In May 1962 the Italian magazine *Metro* published an article about the realist wave that was hitting the United States and asked whether this was the end of abstract painting. The author, Bruno Alfieri, focused his discussion on Lichtenstein's "blowing up cartoons," and "huge canvases in blue, red or yellow," which were reproduced at the end of the essay on a two-page spread.⁶⁶ In October 1962, Lichtenstein appeared on the pages of the *Burlington Magazine*, which had first mentioned Pollock and Rothko in 1956. In October 1962, Dore Ashton introduced Lichtenstein to West Germans

in the monthly "Report from New York" which she wrote for the German art magazine *Das Kunstwerk*. She discussed an exhibition at the Mi Chou Gallery that was devoted to two periods of the Hudson River School, the 1860s and the 1960s. "But," as she noted, "their 1960 representative is only one man, Roy Lichtenstein, lately celebrated in the United States for his indifference to Art and Culture and his spellbinding fidelity to comic strips and billboards. As everyone addicted to the international art press knows by now, Lichtenstein makes large blow-ups of comic strip characters, together with balloons and text." Although Ashton did not really appreciate Lichtenstein's work, she conceded that, "its imperviousness made the show."⁶⁷

In January 1963, *Art International* featured two essays: Barbara Rose's "Dada Then and Now," which examined the current American art scene and Pierre Restany's "Le Nouveau Réalisme à la Conquête de New York," which commented on the *New Realists* show, which took place at Sidney Janis' and featured the European Nouveaux Réalistes and the new American Pop painters.⁶⁸ Without undermining the importance of their content, it is safe to assume that, for the international public, the illustrations generously provided by Castelli were more influential. Reproduced in black and white, the Pop paintings maintained their visual appeal thanks to their clean graphic qualities, while the *décollages* and assemblages of the Nouveaux Réalistes looked muddy or washed away. The German artist, Konrad Lueg-Fischer, who became a major art dealer in the 1960s, remembered his amazement when he came across the highly photogenic *Cleaning Woman*: "There I saw Pop art for the first time, this was a big experience for me, because it really talked to me. Above all, the works of Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg."⁶⁹

Castelli was particularly anxious to exhibit the new Pop artists in Europe because in New York the

⁶⁵ Max Kozloff, "Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarities," *Art International*, March 1962, 36.

⁶⁶ Bruno Alfieri, "USA: Verso la fine della pittura a stratta?," *Metro*, May 30 1962, 4-13.

⁶⁷ Dore Ashton, "Report from New York," *Das Kunstwerk*, October 1962, 27.

⁶⁸ Barbara Rose, "Dada Then and Now," *Art International* January 1963, 22-28; Pierre Restany, "Le Nouveau Réalisme à la Conquête de New York," *Art International* 7, no. 1 (January 1963): 29-36.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Stella Baum, "Konrad Fischer," *Kunstforum International* 104 (November-December, 1989): 278.

most enthusiastic reactions to their works had come from Europeans, including Duchamp, Dali, Count Panza, and Jean Leymarie.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Western European art scene was in crisis and searching for a new style to embrace. The so-called “crisis of abstraction” found its origins in a financial crisis. On May 28, 1962 the New York stock market crashed: in the largest drop since 1929, \$20,800,000,000 vanished on Wall Street.⁷¹ On June 12, the market dropped again, and an additional \$7.8 billion in value was “wiped out.”⁷² The repercussions were serious on the international art world. To cover their stock market losses, many investors who had been buying contemporary abstractions since the late fifties sold their collections. The market was soon flooded with abstract paintings, many of which did not find buyers. In July 1962 during an auction at Sotheby’s London, one painting by Miro and one by de Staël did not find buyers and so had to be withdrawn from the auction. Then, a rumor started circulating in Europe that American collectors were trying to get rid of their abstract works. Around the same time, MoMA, which had been the champion of abstract art, opened *Recent Painting USA: The Figure*, an exhibition of American figurative painting. Finally, the Guggenheim Museum in New York announced that they would auction off fifty paintings by Kandinsky. This caused quite a stir among Europeans, as it was interpreted as another rejection of abstraction.⁷³ Critics, curators, and collectors lost confidence and interest in the international abstraction to which Parisian (Lyrical, Tachist, Informal) Abstraction and American Abstract Expressionism was associated. They were looking for something else; something that would better reflect the zeitgeist of the new decade. In this context, Castelli and the Sonnabend brought the new American art to Europe.

⁷⁰ Leo Castelli, “Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973,” in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1969).

⁷¹ Burton Crane, “Stock Prices Dive in Sharpest Loss since 1929 Break,” *The New York Times*, May 29 1962, 1.

⁷² Richard Rutter, “Market Tumbles as Volumes Rises,” *The New York Times*, June 13 1961, 55.

⁷³ For more information on these events, see Michel Ragon, *Cinquante ans d’art vivant - Chronique vécue de la peinture et de la sculpture, 1950-2000* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 360-66. As well as the section “The Kennedy Slide and the Collapse of the Parisian Market” in Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art*.

In May 1963, the Sonnabend gallery organized *Pop art Américain*, a group show featuring Oldenburg, Warhol, Rosenquist, Wesselmann, Lee Bontecou, and John Chamberlain. This first show was followed by solo-shows of Lichtenstein in June and George Segal in the fall. The year ended with a group show, *Dessin Pop*. In 1964, the gallery continued to promote Pop art through solo-shows of Warhol, Rosenquist, Oldenburg, and so on. To make sure that their artists would be accepted and integrated on the local art scene, the Sonnabends commissioned Parisian critics to write the exhibition catalogues instead of translating American texts as the MoMA was doing with their European exhibitions. As a result, Ragon, Restany, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Alain Jouffroy, Otto Hahn, and other Europeans critics came to know these new American artists, write about them, and more importantly discuss their works from a European perspective that could be understood by the local public.⁷⁴

Europeans who saw Pop art at Sonnabends were generally enthusiastic and quickly promoted the new style to the rest of Europe. Hultén, who had supported the European Nouveaux Réalistes and American Neo-Dadaists, took a strong interest in the works of the Pop artists. He consequently organized *Amerikansk Pop Kunst*, which opened in Stockholm in February 1964 before traveling to the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam and Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk, Denmark. De Wilde had hesitated taking the show, but recognized that the style was historically important even though it did not fit his aesthetic sensibility.⁷⁵ *Amerikansk Pop Kunst*, which comprised works that the Sonnabends had brought to Europe, featured Dine, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, Segal, Warhol, and Wesselmann. As the catalogue indicates, some of these artworks were already in European collections: Lichtenstein’s *Meat* (1962), *Desk Calendar* (1962) and *Man with Folded*

⁷⁴ Michel Bourel, “Les galeries d’Ileana Sonnabend,” in “*Collection Sonnabend*” - 25 années de choix et d’activités d’Ileana et Michael Sonnabend (Bordeaux: Capc, Musée d’art contemporain, 1988).

⁷⁵ According to Jean Leering, de Wilde took the show when he heard that the Gemeetmuseum was organizing a Pop art show. Hayden Herrera, “Postwar American Art in Holland,” in *Views from Abroad - European Perspectives on American Art I*, ed. Rudolf Herman Fuchs (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 46.

Arm (1962) belonged to Count Panza; *Okay Hot-Shot, Okay!* (1963) to the Morone Collection in Turin, and his *Hot Dog* (1963) to René de Montaigu. Following the show, Hultén acquired a Dine, an Oldenburg, a Rosenquist, and a Segal for his museum; and in 1965, a Warhol and a Bontecou. De Wide followed suite: in 1964, he purchased a Dine and a Rosenquist,⁷⁶ and in 1966, he gave a solo-show to Rosenquist and in 1967 to Lichtenstein.

After visiting the Sonnabend gallery, the young Dutch curator Wim Beeren, decided to rethink completely the realist exhibition on which he was working to include the vision of these new American artists to the detriment of the British Pop, because “The Americans were clearer to me. They came from a different cultural landscape which was not my environment. It was fascinating and meaningful, not as a reportage about America – it was *Pop* art. So we all had to respond.”⁷⁷ The *Nieuwe Realisten* opened at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague in June 1964. This ambitious exhibition, which attempted to tally the most recent international artistic creation under the concept of new realism. When the exhibition opened at the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts in Vienna in September 1964, it was called *Pop, etc.*, thereby acknowledging the success of the new American style in Western Europe. The show was then presented at the Akademie der Künste in West Berlin as *Neue Realisten & Pop Art* in November 1964, before ending at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in February 1965 as *Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, etc.* (Fig. 8).⁷⁸

Alfred Schmela, a gallerist from Düsseldorf, also discovered American Pop art at Sonnabend’s and liked it so much he decided to join some collector friends who were going to New York. His wife remembered: “For three weeks we took a good look at Pop art, then we bought the first ‘German’

⁷⁶ Dieter Honish and Jens Christian Jensen, eds., *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis heute: Kunst der USA in europäischen Sammlungen* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1976).

⁷⁷ Quoted in Herrera, “Postwar American Art in Holland,” 38.

⁷⁸ On this traveling exhibition, see Catherine Dossin, “*Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, etc.* Comment Paris perdit le pouvoir de nommer les nouvelles tendances,” in *Le nom de l’art*, ed. Vanessa Theodoropoulou and Katia Schneller (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 49-62.

Lichtenstein at Castelli’s and invited Segal to exhibit with us in December.”⁷⁹ The Lichtenstein was sold to a West German collector, and the Sonnabends agreed to send the Segal exhibition to Düsseldorf. In 1963, Rudolf Zwirner, a young dealer from Cologne, also crossed the Atlantic to visit artists’ studios and buy Pop artworks: “In 1963 I went for the first time to the United States. I took a liking to Pop Art. That was my big adventure! Lichtenstein, Segal, Warhol, Jim Dine moved me very much, and I bought their works.”⁸⁰

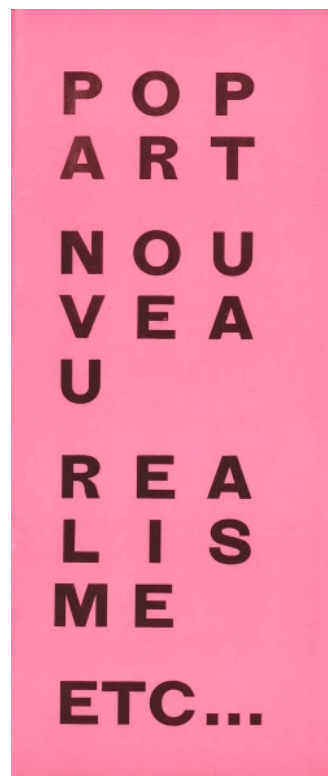


Figure 8
Cover of the Belgian catalogue of *Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, etc.*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1965.

Enzo Sperone, who then worked at the Gallery Galatea in Turin, was also introduced to Pop art through the Sonnabends. In June 1963, he came to the gallery and convinced Sonnabend to send him her Lichtenstein exhibition. Although Sonnabend was already in business relationships with Beatrice Monti from Milan and had sent works for a Pop art exhibition in April 1963, she decided to

⁷⁹ Stella Baum, “Ursula Schmela über Alfred Schmela,” *Kunstforum International* 104 (November-December, 1989): 232.

⁸⁰ Stella Baum, “Rudolf Zwirner,” *Kunstforum International* 104 (November-December, 1989): 240.

give Sperone the exclusivity over her artists in Italy.⁸¹ As a result, Sperone was able to open his own gallery in March 1964.⁸² In November 1964, he organized a solo-show of Rosenquist, and in June 1965 he presented *Pop: Dine, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Pistoletto, Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Warhol, Wesselmann*

Besides the numerous exhibitions devoted to either American Pop art or the new international realism between 1963 and 1964, the young Pop artist participated in large retrospective exhibitions such as *Documenta 4* (Kassel), *Figuratie Defiguratie* (Ghent), *Bilanz internationale Malerei seit 1950* (Basel), and *'54-'64 Painting and Sculpture of a Decade* (London). As mentioned in the introduction, '54-'64 gave the young American precedence over more established artists whose work had truly shaped the past decade. John Russell, writing for the *Sunday Times*, marveled at the position of the young Americans, noting that Pollock's narrow panel was dwarfed by the works surrounding it, and that Johns and Rauschenberg were "treated in the catalogue with a deference accorded to none of the Europeans in the show."⁸³ Anita Brookner, reviewing the show for *The Burlington* did not even mention Pollock, deemed de Kooning a bore, but devoted a large part of her article to the hotdogs, neckties, and maps of the Pop artists.⁸⁴

Obviously the greatest success of the new American art was the 1964 Venice Biennale, when Rauschenberg was awarded the International Painting Prize. This prize was indeed regarded as the triumph of Pop art. By then Rauschenberg and Johns, who in the late 1950s had been sometimes discussed as Neo-Dadaists, had been subsumed under the Pop umbrella, so through Rauschenberg, it was Pop art which triumphed in Venice. This shift from Neo-Dada and Pop art was all the easier since Rauschenberg had moved away from his

combine paintings to painted silkscreens. In the framework of Beeren's show he was put with Johns under the category "Pop art" along with Johns and Dine. Lichtenstein, Wesselmann, Warhol, etc. were presented as Pop Art: USA. In the show and its successive incarnations, Rauschenberg was represented with combine paintings and silkscreens, including *Retroactive II* (1963; Fig. 9) which was also presented at the Salon de Mai, while other silkscreens of the series were presented at *documenta III* and the Venice Biennale.



Figure 9
Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive II*, 1963. Oil, silkscreen, and ink on canvas. 80 x 60 in. (203.2 x 152.4 cm). Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, partial gift of Stefan T. Edlis and H. Gael Neeson, 1998.49. Art © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York/NY. Photo: Nathan Keay © Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

While *Bed* had been emblematic of the Rauschenberg Neo-Dadaist of the late 1950s in Europe, *Retroactive II* became the symbol of the Rauschenberg Pop of the early 1960s. The large

⁸¹ This led to a bitter exchange of letters between the two dealers. See Beatrice Monti, "Galleria dell'Ariete Records," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 980059).

⁸² Corinna Criticos, "La galerie Gian Enzo Sperone: Notes pour un historique," *Ligeria*, June-October 1998.

⁸³ John Russell, "The Best of Living Art," *The Sunday Times* (London), April 26 1964.

⁸⁴ Anita Brookner, "Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions: London," *The Burlington Magazine* 106, no. 735 (June 1964): 297-98.

painted silkscreen with its portrait of President Kennedy, reproduction of a detail of Rubens's *Venus at her Toilet*, and image of an astronaut, participated in the Pop aesthetic as manifested in Rosenquist's painting collage technique and Warhol's reproductive and repetitive approach.

The European Chronology of American Art

When reconstructing the arrival and dissemination of both American Abstract Expressionism and Pop art in Western Europe, it is obvious that the chronology was very different than within the United States and that this distorted chronology was adverse to the former (Fig. 10-13)

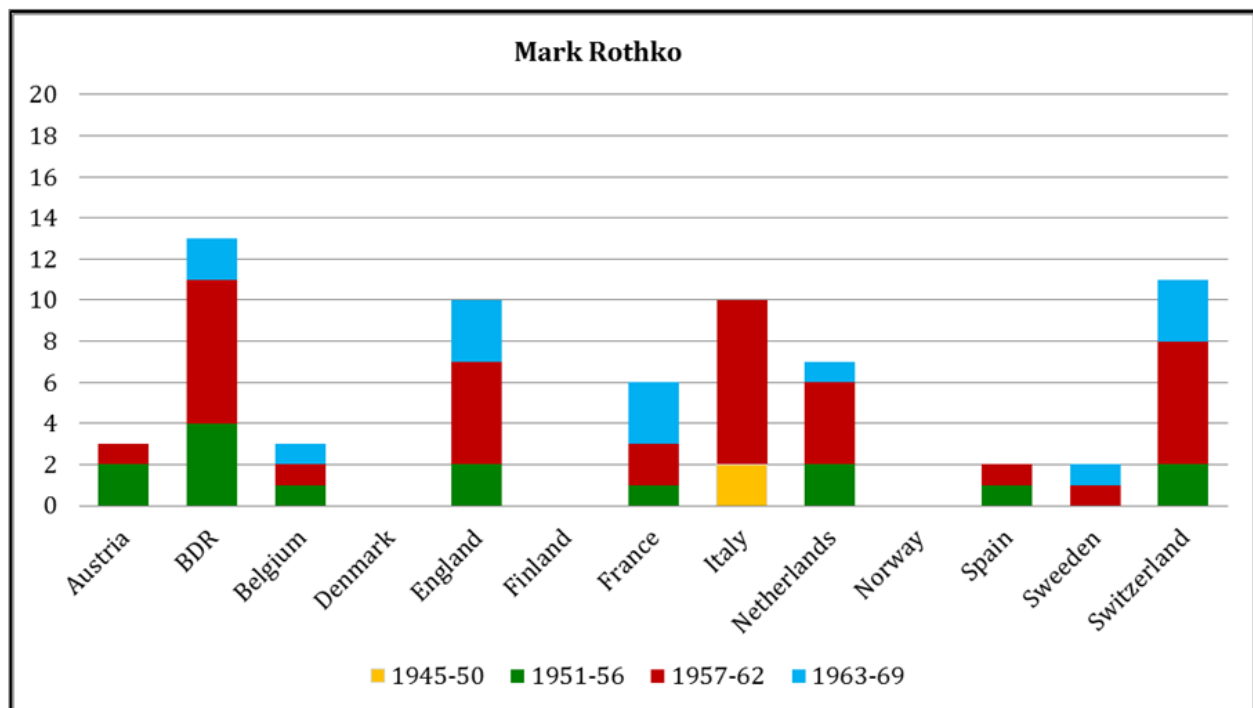
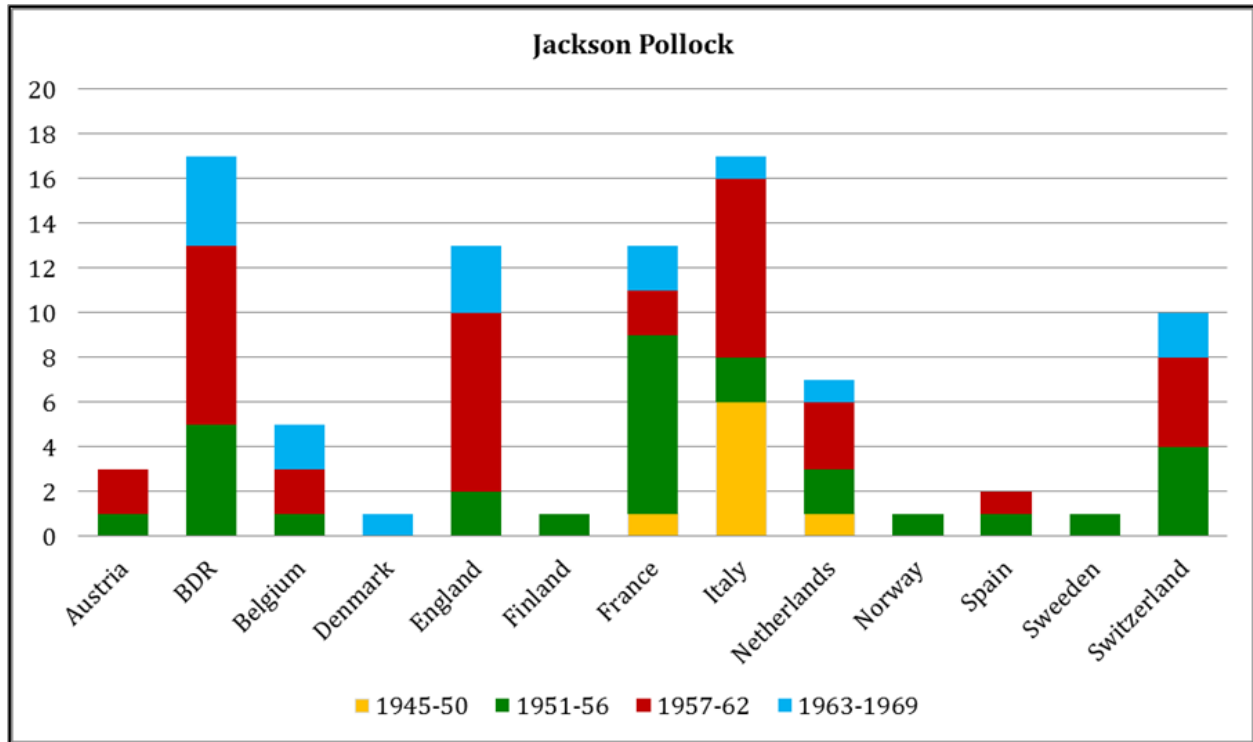
In many European cities, the two movements appeared almost at the same time, such that their inhabitants were introduced to them almost simultaneously. To take the example of Amsterdam, in the 1950s, as we said, the Stedelijk Museum hosted *Amerika Schildert* (June 1950) and *Surrealism + Abstractie-keuze uit de verzameling Peggy Guggenheim* (January 1951), which both featured just a few examples of American Abstract Expressionism, and consequently had little impact on its public and critical reception. Since Amsterdam was selected as a destination for neither *Twelve American Painters and Sculptors* nor *Modern Art in the USA*, it was only in 1958, when *Jackson Pollock* came in the summer followed by *The New American Painting* in the fall, that Abstract Expressionism became visible in the city. In contrast, Neo-Dada and Pop art arrived very quickly. In 1961, the same year of the Rothko retrospective, the Stedelijk presented *Bewogen Beweging* (1961), followed by *4 Amerikaner* (1962), and *Dylaby* (1962), which all showcased Rauschenberg and Johns. In 1963, the museum presented the Kline retrospective, followed in 1964 by Rauschenberg's and *Amerikansk Pop Kunst*. In 1966, both Rosenquist and Motherwell were given solo-shows at the museum. Even more striking: Lichtenstein's solo-show in 1967

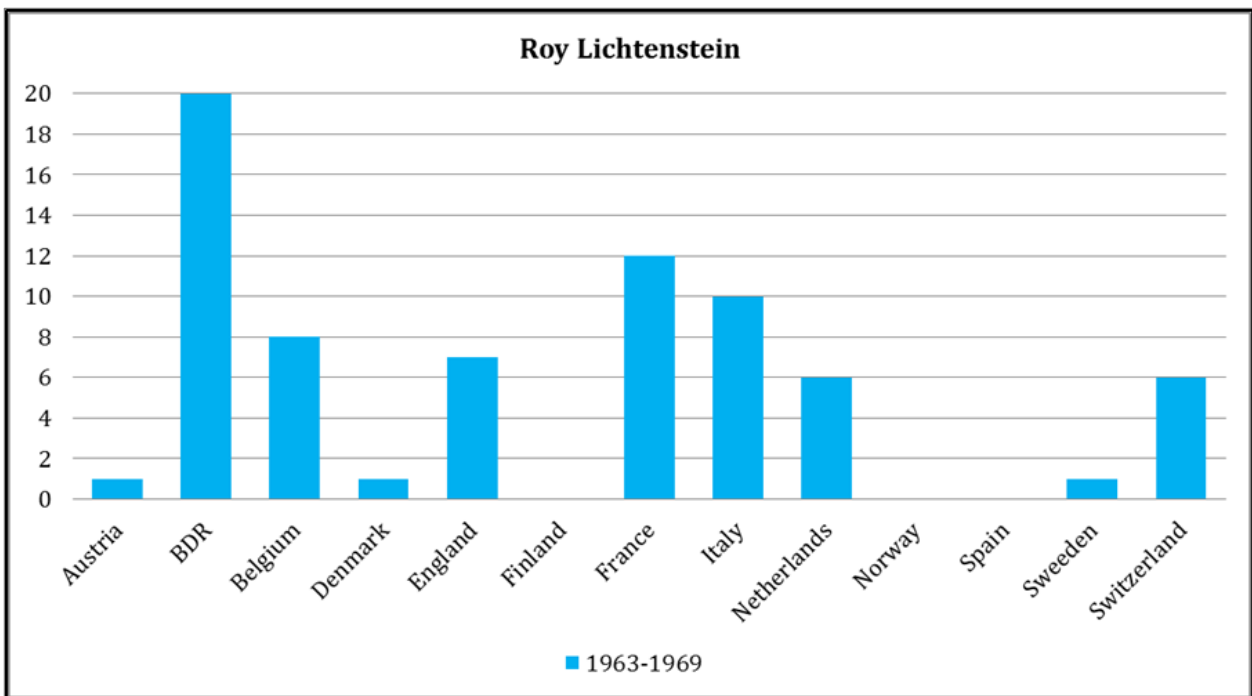
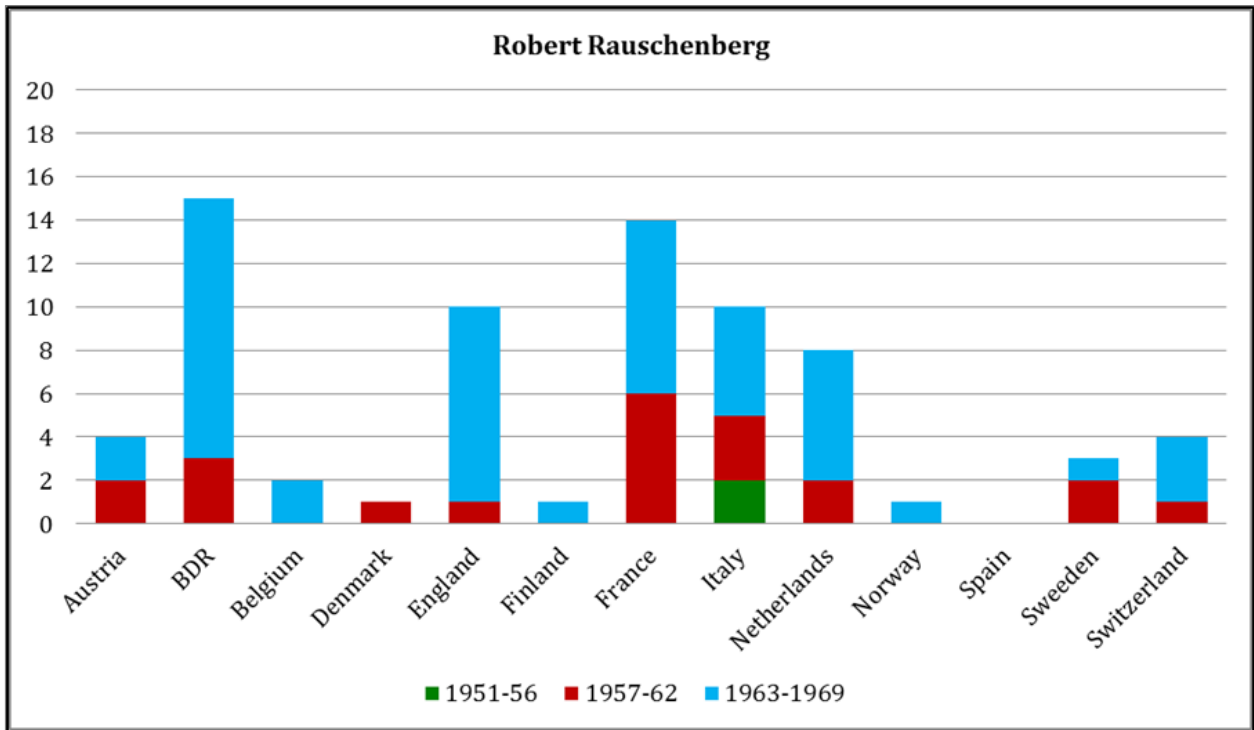
preceded de Kooning's by a year. In 1968, it was de Kooning's first solo-show in a European museum.

In Stockholm, the situation was worse: while the Moderna Museet showcased Rauschenberg as early as 1961, it did not have a show of Pollock's work until 1963. At the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Brussels, a retrospective of Gorky in 1965 took place between *Pop Art, Nouveau Realisme, Etc.* and Rauschenberg's *Illustrations of Dante's Inferno*. At Whitechapel, Kline's retrospective was framed by those of Rauschenberg's and Johns's. On the same schedule as the Stedelijk, the Tate Gallery gave Lichtenstein a solo-show, before giving one to de Kooning. In Cologne and Düsseldorf, Abstract Expressionism never arrived whereas Pop was quickly showcased in museums, galleries, and private collections.

European museums' purchases of American art followed the same disjointed chronology (Fig. 14). In 1961, the Friends of the Tate presented the museum with Johns's *0 through 9* (1961), at the same time as they gave the Pollock abovementioned. Only in 1967 did the Tate acquire another Abstract Expressionist painting—a Kline. The Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam which, as mentioned earlier, received two Pollocks from Peggy Guggenheim, did not acquire another American artwork before 1960, when it purchased a Bontecou. In 1964, the museum acquired a de Kooning, a Dine, and a Rosenquist, and in 1965 a Lichtenstein and a Rauschenberg. By 1968, the Dutch museum owned nine Pop artworks only only six Abstract Expressionist.⁸⁵ The Moderna Museet of Stockholm fared even worse when it came to American Abstract Expressionism: by 1968, the museum had twelve Pop works but only two Abstract Expressionist paintings.

⁸⁵ Joop M. Joosten, ed. *20 Years of Art Collecting: Acquisitions Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1963-1984* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1984).





Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13
Number of exhibitions in Western Europe by Country, 1945-1969

The collection included neither Rothko, nor de Kooning, nor Kline.⁸⁶ Until the 1970s, German museums had hardly any examples of Abstract Expressionism, while they were building the most impressive Pop collections. Only in 1972 did Cologne obtain its first Pollock. Munich and Berlin would have to wait a few more years to see Pollock and the ‘other masters’ of Abstract Expressionism on the walls of their museums.

Space that Won't Fail (1962), and Warhol's *Soup Can* (1964).⁸⁸

Most European collectors, especially in West Germany, never bought Abstract Expressionism; when they started collecting American art, they started directly with Pop art. Wolfgang Hahn, the painting conservator of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne and an avid collector, for example, sold his Picasso lithographs in order to

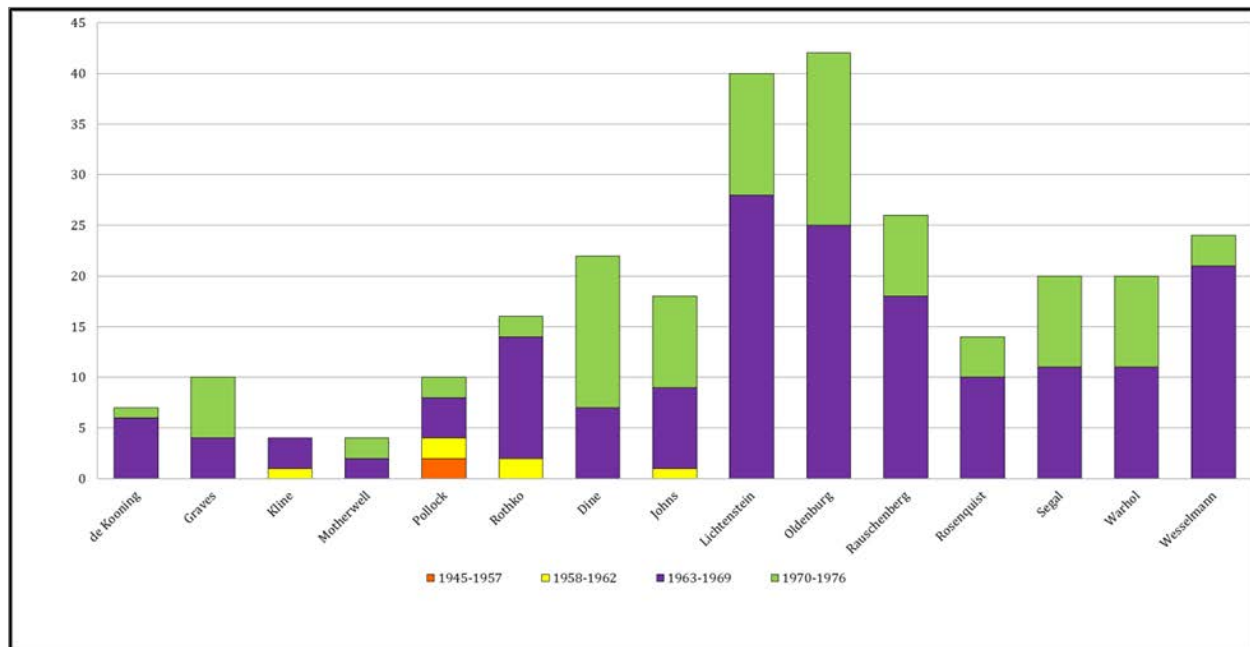


Figure 14

Number of artworks acquired by Western European museums, 1945-1976

Based on data provided in Dieter Honish and Jens Christian Jensen, eds. *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis heute: Kunst der USA in europäischen Sammlungen* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1976).

European collectors also often bought Abstract Expressionism and Pop art at the same time. During the 1962 Venice Biennale, Castelli and Sonnabend showed Panza photographs of the new Pop artists they were starting promoting, whom he liked very much. Back in New York that October he purchased works by Lichtenstein, Rosenquist and Oldenburg.⁸⁷ Ted Power also quickly switched to Pop art. Between 1964 and 1965, he acquired, among others, Oldenburg's *Counter and Plates with Potatoes and Ham* (1961), Lichtenstein's *Tex* (1962), *Wall Explosion II* (1965), Rosenquist's *The*

buy Pop art, quickly amassing an impressive collection.⁸⁹ Between 1963 and 1965 Siegfried Cremer, another German collector, also built an impressive pop art collection, which included many icons of the movement such as Warhol's *Liz* (1964). In 1965 Dr. Peter Ludwig, a German collector of medieval and modern art, acquired Wesselmann's *Landscape No. 2* (1964) while in New York. It was his first purchase of American

⁸⁶ Pontus Hulten, ed. *Katalogen: Catalogue of the Modern Museums Collection of Swedish and International 20th century art* (Stockholm Moderna Museet, 1976).

⁸⁷ Panza di Biumo, *Giuseppe Panza: Memories of a Collector*, 95, 101, 10-17. Panza di Biumo, "Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990," III, 166, 11.

⁸⁸ Mundy, "The Challenge of Post-War Art," 20.

⁸⁹ According to Rudolf Zwirner, Hahn was his first and best client: Bernd Polster, ed. *West Wind - Die Amerikanisierung Europas* (Cologne: Dumont, 1995), 115-16.

art, and the first work of what came to be regarded as the major American Pop art collection.⁹⁰

It goes without saying that economic factors played a major role in that particular chronology. By the early 1960s, postwar reconstruction was achieved in Western Europe and local economies were thriving. Accumulated resources could once more be spent on art and culture. By then, however, American Abstract Expressionism artworks were rare, expensive, and so generally beyond the reach of European museums and collectors. In fall 1956, Janis had offered Count Panza a large glass plate Pollock for \$4,000, but the Italian collector could not afford it. Instead he bought a Kline, whose works still sold for less than a thousand dollars.⁹¹ In the following years, his prices increased sharply: at the 1958 Carnegie International, *Siegfried* (103 x 81 inches, 1958) sold for \$5,000; at the 1961 Carnegie, *Contrada* (92 x 67 inches, 1960) went for \$12,000; and on October 13, 1965, *Initial* (100½ x 77½ inches, 1959) was auctioned for \$18,000 at Parke-Bernet in New York. The prices of the other Abstract Expressionists rose similarly rendering them unmarketable in Western Europe, where unfavorable exchange rates made them even more expensive. In contrast, Pop art was rather affordable, even for Europeans, and readily available, all the more since the Pop artists often worked in series and reproducible media.

The European Representation of American Art

Even though the sequence of events and financial considerations played a role in the prevalence of Pop art in Western Europe, the main reason for its European success was, I contend, its ability to embody both the sixties zeitgeist and European representation of what American art ought to be.

⁹⁰ On the reception of American Pop art in West Germany, see Catherine Dossin, "Pop begeistert: American Pop art and the German People," *American Art* 25, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 100-11.

⁹¹ See Panza di Biumo, *Giuseppe Panza: Memories of a Collector*. Panza di Biumo, "Interview Conducted by Christopher Knight April, 1985." Panza di Biumo, "Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990."

In contrast with Abstract Expressionism that had appeared to European viewers as neither new nor American, Pop art was radically new and boldly American. As the German collector Heinz Beck explained: "Rothko, Kline, sure, but it was still an artistic direction in the vein of the School of Paris and Tachism, so that Europeans could understand it to a certain extent. It did not, however, represent a radical breakthrough such as the one Pop Art came to initiate."⁹² Beck and other Europeans were indeed seduced by Pop art for its break with abstraction and engagement with contemporary life. As Hans Strelow explained: "Lichtenstein has drawn attention to the beauty of the comics, like the Romantics on that to landscape. Thereby he did not declare comic strips to be art, just as the Romantics did not declare nature to be art."⁹³ Dr. Peter Ludwig explained he enjoyed Pop art because it was as significant and timely as cubism had been in its time:

Cubism announced the demolition of the world, which became manifest in the Russian October Revolution and in the spiritual upheavals of Europe. Pop art equals Cubism in importance because for the first time in our century, it represents and acknowledges industrial society as an important reality. . . . My admiration for Pop art stems from the fact that it does stand up to the realities of this life and does not retreat from them.⁹⁴

Panza felt the same: he considered Rauschenberg's combines and collages made of discarded objects, the images of contemporary society. As for Lichtenstein's works, they were for him the modern version of Leonardo's mental drawings. He enjoyed Pop art because it reminded him of the way Italian Renaissance painting intellectually reconstructed the world—but the world they reconstructed was the world of today.⁹⁵

⁹² Quoted in J. Cladders, ed. *Pop Sammlung Beck* (Düsseldorf: Rheinland Verlag, 1970), 25.

⁹³ Hans Strelow, "Zu einer Roy Lichtenstein Ausstellung in Amsterdam," *Die Zeit* (November 11, 1967), <http://www.zeit.de/1967/47/Zu-einer-Roy-Lichtenstein-Ausstellung-in-Amsterdam>.

⁹⁴ Phyllis Tuchman, "Peter Ludwig: An obligation to inform," *Art News*, October 1976, 63.

⁹⁵ As he explained to an interviewer identified as K.B., who interviewed Count Panza on November 8, 1984. *The Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990*, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (940004, III, 166, 12). See also his explanations in a text titled "Why I collect American Art." Panza di Biumo, "Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990," III, 163, 13.

Of the Pop artists, Lichtenstein garnered most praise for he combined originality and tradition. In the text he wrote for the 1963 exhibition, Jouffroy described their destabilizing effect:

this total change of horizon to which Lichtenstein invites us, the cruelty and coolness with which he demands from us this cleaning of the eyes through which is the only means to renew the communication between painter and viewer, all this is literally shattering. To face a Lichtenstein painting is a true trial, in the initiatory meaning of the word.⁹⁶

Yet, despite his radical originality, Lichtenstein remained a painter whose oil on canvas displayed a high level of skill and technique. Because they preserved the artist's hand and craft, his paintings could still be recognized as works of art in the traditional sense.⁹⁷ It was also all the easier because Western Europeans saw his work as part of the long realist tradition. In the texts published in Europe in the early 1960s, American Pop art was commonly compared to nineteenth century realism and Lichtenstein to Gustave Courbet.⁹⁸ Writing for *Metro* in April 1963, Robert Rosenblum used this comparison to present him to the European public:

Lichtenstein's position may be compared to Courbet's. To the French master of the 1850s, both sides of the Ingres-Delacroix coin presented an artificial idealism of style and subject which he combatted not only by the intrusion of vulgar content – whether toiling workers or sweating whores – but also by the adaptation of vulgar style, particularly popular prints, images d'Épinal, whose stiff composition and childlike drawing offered an earthy antidote to the weakening stylistic of the Romantic and Neoclassic modes. In the same way, Lichtenstein embraces not only the content, but also the style, of popular imagery in mid-twentieth-century America as a means of invigorating the moribund

mannerisms of abstract painting. It is revealing that negative criticism of his art has generally been paraphrased in the same terms as negative criticism of Courbet's art – the subjects are considered too ridiculously ugly, the style to preposterously coarse for art.⁹⁹

By breaking free from the escapism of postwar abstraction and confronting comic book conventions and style, Lichtenstein was following Courbet's footsteps and offering viewers a true representation of the world in which they lived. For the Western Europeans, Lichtenstein was not just a modern Courbet; he was a modern American Courbet. The society his paintings described was the American world of the 1960s, and the texts that accompanied their European presentation stressed their Americanness.¹⁰⁰

Visiting *The New American Painting* in 1959, the critic of *Quadrant* F. C. Legrand had been disappointed because: "Country of technique, efficiency, hygiene, comfort, America invited us to expect from it a functional painting, in touch with architecture, imbued with social meaning. And now it gives us instead the image of an exaggerated individualism that it endures with anxious and muddled violence."¹⁰¹ Faced with the works of the Pop artists, Western Europeans saw a reflection of the United States, as they imagined it. They enjoyed the works of Lichtenstein, Wesselmann, Segal and others, because they matched what they knew of the United States through comic books, Hollywood movies, and *Life* Magazine. The strength of American Pop art had been to provide Western Europeans with an original yet traditional artistic rendering of the American way of life which fascinated them so much in the early sixties, and to which many could now aspire in this period of economic prosperity and social transformation.

⁹⁶ Alain Jouffroy, "Introduction," in *Lichtenstein 5 juin 1963* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1963), nonpagé.

⁹⁷ On this question see Michael Eric Lobel, "Image duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein and the emergence of Pop Art" (Ph.D., Yale University, 1999).

⁹⁸ Alfieri, "USA: Verso la fine della pittura a stratta?"; Robert Rosenblum, "La rivolta 'realista' Americana: Lichtenstein," *Metro* April 1963; Robert Rosenblum, *Roy Lichtenstein* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1963); Dana Adams Schmidt, "Lichtenstein 'Whaams' London With Retrospective at the Tate," *The New York Times*, January 28 1968; Pierre Restany, "Le raz de marée réaliste aux USA," *Domus* 1963.

⁹⁹ Rosenblum, "La rivolta 'realista' Americana: Lichtenstein," 39.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 38-45; Rosenblum, *Roy Lichtenstein*; Michael Sonnabend, *Roy Lichtenstein* (Turin: Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, 1963).

¹⁰¹ F. C. Legrand, "La nouvelle peinture américaine," *Quadrant*, no. 6 (1959): 174-75.