

Title: The British response to abstract expressionism of the USA c. 1950-1963

Authors: [Wang, Hui Ping](#)

Issue Date: 1996

Publisher: Newcastle University

Abstract: Abstract Expressionism was arguably the most important art movement after the Second World War and it has in many ways influenced all subsequent art movements in the West. This thesis investigates the presence of Abstract Expressionism in Britain and responses to it in the 1950s and early 1960s. Abstract Expressionism was presented to the British public through literature and exhibitions by individual Americans and by American institutions after 1947, but it was not until 1956 that Abstract Expressionist paintings became accessible in any quantity. While it was denounced by many, it won sympathies from two main groups of artists: firstly, established painters who were exploring the incorporation of abstract form with imagery from landscape and figure, and secondly, the younger generation of art students. The British constructivists were unaffected. For these established painters, Abstract Expressionism was more of a pure inspiration than a stylistic stereotype. A few of them experienced dramatic changes of style as a result, while others showed a very restricted interest in it. The real impact was on the young artists. Under the influence of the Independent Group, which helped in generating an awareness of a new urbanism in London, they treated Abstract Expressionism and its later development Post-Painterly Abstraction, as an authentic reflection of contemporary society. They were not only eager to contribute to it but also to embrace it as their own. At the end of the 1950s, the majority of critics had accepted current status of Abstract Expressionism. Its two major British critics, Patrick Heron and Lawrence Alloway, were activists on the contemporary art scene. Heron restricted his argument by what was essentially a combination of the painting qualities that Roger Fry had qualified and the idealism of the 1930s abstraction promoted by Herbert Read. Alloway, on the other hand, successfully exploited Abstract Expressionism to promote a new British-movement. His ideas, inspired by Abstract Expressionism as well as American consumerism, popular culture, science and technology, were embraced by young artists. British art was thus transformed in the 1960s, to a urbanism-inspired art, which came from the "real" world and was receptive to its influence, rather than retreating into landscape, a psychological inner world or the realms of artistic idealism.

Description: PhD Thesis

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/10443/461>

Appears in [School of Arts and Cultures](#)
Collections:

Files in This Item:

File	Description	Size	Format	
Wang96.pdf	Thesis	20.73 MB	Adobe PDF	View/Open
dSPACElicence.pdf	Licence	43.82 kB	Adobe PDF	View/Open

Show full item record



Items in DSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

Sturm, regarding German Abstract Expressionism flourished in the 1940s and 1950s, and the paintings were seen all over the world in travelling exhibitions and publications. By the 1960s, Minimalism and Pop Art had started replacing Abstract Expressionism as the dominant art movement. The new generation of artists had tired of the serious, grand ambitions of the Abstract Expressionists and their desire to portray transcendence and the sublime in art. Yet the legacy of Abstract Expressionism remains considerable. Take, for example, Frank Bowling, an artist who moved to New York in the mid-60s and was profoundly influenced by Jackson Pollock's art conveys the mindset of Abstract Expressionism. Pollock argued, "The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through". Pollock reveals the life of the painting through "actions," an energetic technique of dripping and pouring paint on a canvas that is placed directly on the floor. Pollock explained, "On the floor I am more at ease, I feel nearer, more a part of the painting... Since this way I can walk around in it... Work from the four sides and be literally 'in' the painting." This volume centers on the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950's, throughout the USA. It adds 80+ artists to the first tour d'force titled, New York School Abstract Expressionists: Artists Choice by Artists. Fortunately, many of the superb African American painters are represented. Ms. Herskovic mentions in her introduction that there were NO painters of African descent in the 9th Street show or any of the artist's annuals. Abstract Expressionism, broad movement in American painting that became a dominant trend in Western painting during the 1950s. The movement comprised many styles varying in both technique and quality of expression. Artists include Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler. Although it is the accepted designation, Abstract Expressionism is not an accurate description of the body of work created by these artists. Indeed, the movement comprised many different painterly styles varying in both technique and quality of expression. Despite this variety, Abstract Expressionist paintings share several broad characteristics.