

By Douglas Crimp

Quartered and Drawn

Jack Tworkov, established Abstract-Expressionist since the early 1950s, emerges with a more controlled, disciplined style in exhibitions at French & Co. and the Whitney Museum

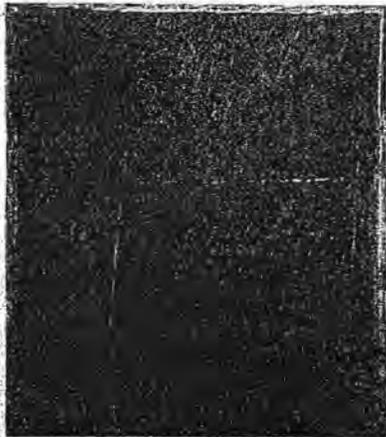
In the past five years Jack Tworkov has radically redirected his painting in order to extend the possibilities of certain attitudes inherent in his original Abstract-Expressionism. Although he has retained his characteristic painterly brushwork, he has put it in the context of a rigid, systematic format. Such a move is only conceivable in the light of 1960s painting. The ironic use of the Action Painting gesture by Johns and Rauschenberg (a loaded image which culminated in Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke* paintings of 1965-66), together with the early field painting of Newman and Rothko and the development of the stain technique, provided the impetus to a total rejection of overt autobiographical reference as a major concern of painting. It is wholly consistent with Tworkov's thoughtfulness and courage that his recent work should consist of such an expansion of his earlier approach to incorporate subsequent developments in New York painting. What seem to have been the only other viable alternatives—the isolation and consistency of, for example, Still, or the old-master style of de Kooning—are foreign to Tworkov's sensibility, which has allowed him direct and fruitful contact with such men as

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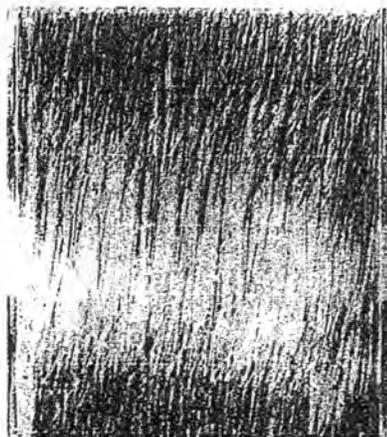
John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Johns and Rauschenberg, and with a generation of art students through his successful chairmanship of the Art Department at Yale.

The results of this process of reconciliation are two related series of paintings: *Crossfields*, painted in a palette limited essentially to pinks and greens, and the black, grey and white *Jags* and their offshoots. In these paintings Tworkov combines the directional brushing and dripping characteristic of his earlier work with a schematic shape or diagram which plots both the design and the image. He has narrowed the variability of his brushwork to create an all-over evenness, as opposed to the strokes-as-areas and brushed passages in his work of the '50s. (During the early '60s Tworkov experimented with the opposite concern in which broad, simple strokes or patches of color, isolated on a white ground often divided into a grid, related to one another as color areas only.) Although the uniformity of the painting seems to move toward the creation of a holistic image which the schematic drawing subverts, it also affirms the drawing itself by limiting shifts in tonality, or value in the grey paintings, to a conformity with the diagram. This sense of tension, precipitated by contradiction, is a continuation of the conflict between the spontaneity and restraint which has always been integral to Tworkov's art. But whereas before it was obscured by the impression of unconscious activity, to say nothing of the cant, it is now a directly confronted issue.

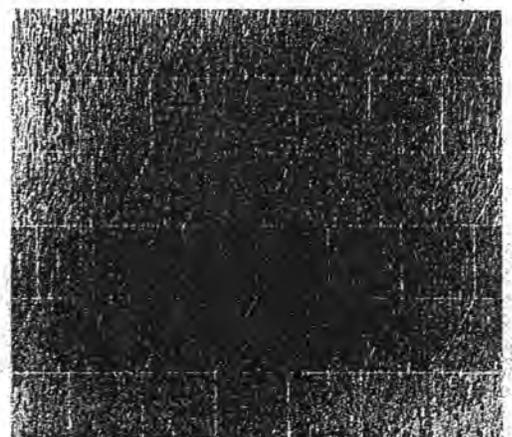
Discussing his new work, Tworkov has said, "I became interested in a certain kind of drawing...Some of the paintings became for me like an extension of drawing. I saw no great difference between drawing



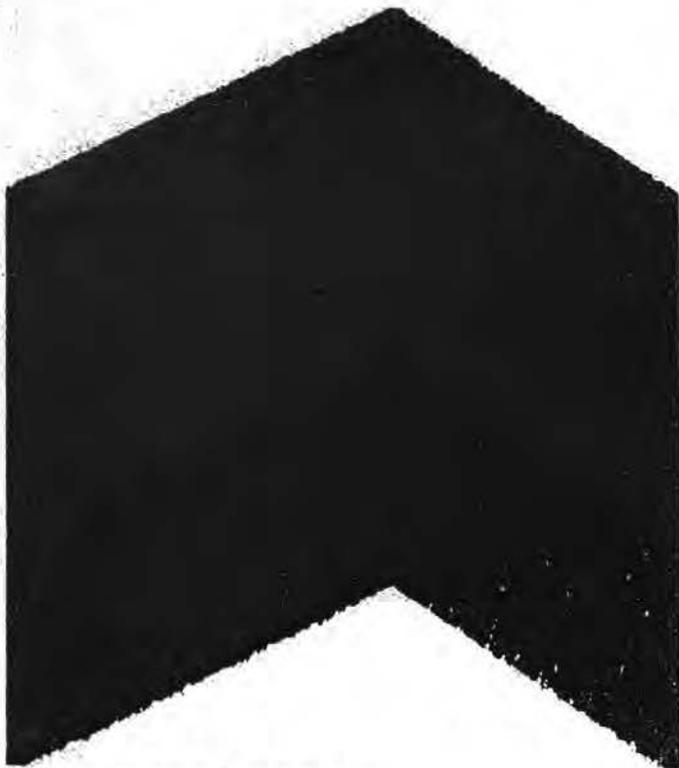
SSP, 8, 1967, 80 inches high.



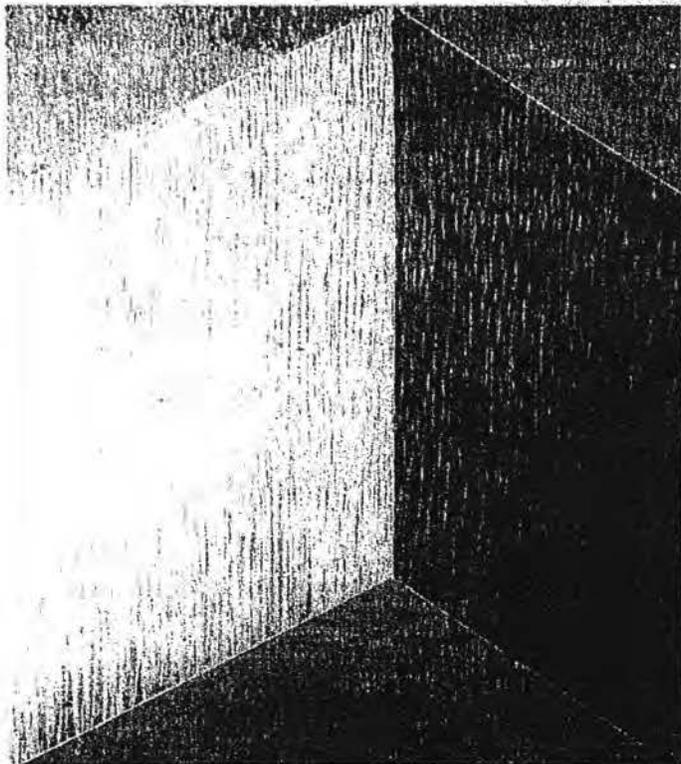
Crossfield, 1, 1968, 80 inches high.



Crossfield 4, 1970, 70 inches high.



Jack Tworkov: *Jag*, 1969, 80 inches high.



Jag 2, 1970, 80 inches high.

on a piece of paper and drawing on a canvas."¹ The kind of drawing referred to here had occupied Tworkov beginning around 1956 and is related to the kind Clement Greenberg had in mind when he wrote: "It was under the tutelage of Monet's later art that these same young Americans [probably Still, Pollock, et al.] began to reject sculptural drawing—'drawing-drawing' [de Kooning is the unquestioned master of this kind of drawing] ...and turn instead to 'area' drawing, 'anti-drawing' drawing."² Tworkov's "antidrawing" drawings consisted of an all-over pattern of directional strokes of charcoal. The individual lines built up into an only slightly uneven density to create a field-like surface. Certain paintings of the same period were constructed with the same evenness and density, but the introduction of contrasting color passages mitigated the field quality achieved in the drawings. Paintings like *Red Lake*, 1958, and *Height*, 1958-59, equivocate between Tworkov's Cubist-oriented work and the opposition to Cubism in the painting of Clyfford Still. Still had gone directly back to late Impressionism in order to arrive at his painting of chromatic zones, subverting the Cubist use of value contrasts. Tworkov, however, approached this "anti-Cubism" only in his drawings, where, limiting himself to the value aspect of color which he then evened out, he was able to make a drawing which was all surface. It was later suggested that in these drawings Tworkov "came perilously close to making just an object."³ Jasper Johns, who also took his lead from Impressionism, was doing just that at the time. (It hardly seems paradoxical now, as it once did, that Tworkov acquired one of Johns's earliest *Flag* paintings.)

In 1967 Tworkov returned to the all-over drawings in an effort to close in on them with color, rather than to *translate* them into color as he had attempted to do earlier. Since the charcoal drawings achieved their object-like character by destroying the value contrast which the medium itself had seemed to dictate, Tworkov began by limiting his color to one value, and moved further toward drawing

with paint by eliminating all but the most subtle chromatic distinctions. In the spare, enigmatic painting *SS P No. 8* Tworkov used two colors of similar value, both mixtures of raw sienna. The colors are applied with the same even stroke of the drawings; one, a dark yellowish pink, is applied as a "ground" (like the white of the paper), and the other, a muted green, relates to the charcoal "foreground" surface. This foreground area stops a few inches short of the edge of the canvas except at the bottom of the picture, but strokes of the same color extend into the border. This blending of the two colors in the border, as well as the penetration of the foreground by the ground color, results in an image which fights to move up to the surface plane. To increase the ambivalence implied by this resistance to a single field, Tworkov delineated with a thin white line both the frame within the frame and an approximately geometric shape, whose placement and drawing conform with the direction of the all-over strokes, within the contained area. The destruction of both value and hue distinctions had put Tworkov too close to a single field for his comfort; he needed to invent a device which would allow him to reinstate both without relinquishing his position against Cubist drawing. At the same time he wanted to steer clear of color used exclusively as hue in order to maintain his improvisational surface.

The first step was to re-examine the charcoal drawings and approach them from a different angle. By definition, charcoal drawing circumvents all but one aspect of color, that of value, precisely that aspect which '60s color painting wanted to get under control so that color could act exclusively as hue. The most obvious answer sidesteps the issue entirely: Tworkov limited himself to a literally non-chromatic palette of greys and has continued to do so in one series of paintings since then. At this point Tworkov also moved to a new medium—oil pigment mixed with a vehicle of lucite dissolved in turpentine—which would keep the brushstrokes distinct from one another in much the same way as the charcoal lines retained their

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was, in part, made into a two-dimensional painting, and, in the same part, it was painted in its three-dimensionality.

Ryman's early works are small drawings and paintings with flat, very late Cubist design. They are extremely delicate with edges and inventive in their internal shapes. Ryman never shared the Minimalist fear of losing oneself in monumental de Kooning-style fussing. He was enough at ease with his part in these works to use his signature as a compositional element. He wanted, first of all, to be there in the work, not to crystallize a perfect expression or a perfectly beautiful composition. There are two paintings from 1961 in which roughly ten horizontal elements are placed in a central column reaching from the upper to the lower edge. In the first of these he uses his signature as the repeated element; in the second he uses a white brushstroke. Soon after, he began to cover the entire surface with these brushstrokes. All references to language were permitted to depart. Language, which is conceptual, is likely to be fussy. Ryman can occupy his paintings more directly with an act prior to language, verbal or pictorial.

Ryman intends, fully, to paint. This intention—as it is realized—can be described as either a concept or an act sustained by feeling. However, it is so primary, so embedded in particular situations, that—such is Ryman's intensity—the Kantian distinction between feeling and concept doesn't appear. That distinction requires one to be isolated in the disinterestedness of the esthetic condition. But Ryman paints in a "space" prior to the languages which can enunciate disinterest. One is fully interested here; the perceptions have a special interest because these works return them to themselves illuminated. By avoiding the Kantian divisiveness, Ryman avoids the modernist abuse of Kantian esthetics, the subjugation of feeling to concept.

Ryman is not a modernist. He is, though, a modern. The fullness and ease of his intention, which shows in the openness and elegance of his work, is drawn from his modernity, his intense inhabitation of the modern "architecture." He continues to paint because his format, the fundamentally Cubist surface, keeps him in the urban space and light. There are current modes which would take him away from painting to reductionist sculpture, to Process and Information Art, and to conceptualism. But to embark in those directions, all of them leading at different speeds out of the present, would introduce divisiveness, and, ultimately, fussiness; he continues to paint in order to stay in the urban light of the present, and not to dissolve himself in its idealized future. His art is in the fullness and separateness of each of his acts. Fullness shows itself as specificity and includes a setting. Ryman's settings are the same rooms, in essence, which give him an intention prior, even, to his intention to paint, and that is his intention to inhabit without faltering.

Ryman intends high quality in his work, the unquantifiably positive version of his double negative "no fuss." His work succeeds in itself and in its setting, the ambiguous structure of the urban light. It illuminates itself in that light, the light in those forms, and so adds to them, reflexively, showing them to themselves and so much of our present to us.

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identity in the drawings. The quicker drying also resulted in a surface with the same faceted clarity of late Impressionism without limiting the brushstrokes to those small jabs of color. In 1967, Tworikov began the series of grey paintings in which bold geometric designs were defined by either shifts in over-all value from one area to another or by thin straight lines or both. At the same time he began the pink and green *Crossfields* in which the ruled lines forming grids were arbitrarily superimposed onto the surface. The grids have since been forced into a more definable relationship to the field of brushing, but still read as a superimposed image. With the carry over of

ideas from the grey paintings, including a similar type of design and the same drawing-like medium, Tworikov managed to re-introduce chromatic colors without implications of illusory space.

Tworikov arrived at the superimposed diagram as a means of controlling the surface without abandoning the autographical nature of his painting. It provides the all-over brushstroke surface with its pictorial conception without moving backward into nature (Impressionism) or forward into literalism (color-field painting). Tworikov saw it as the same conflict he had faced in the earlier work, in which automatism seemed to render a repetitious and uncontrolled handwriting: "The subconscious seems to produce more or less the same material all the time, does not seem to throw up terrifically new revelations...And therefore you really need a kind of unique process of the unconscious, unpremeditated search with the conscious use of the material which comes up. So I have deliberately turned toward planning, toward working from drawings."⁴ Tworikov here refers to an altogether different kind of drawing than those charcoal sketches which were the starting point for the painting-like drawing of *SSP No. 8*. These drawings are schemata, entirely conceptual in nature, like those which might be used by a painter for whom all choices and adjustments are made in the planning stages before the actual painting is executed. In a recent article on drawing it was suggested that the "two main currents carrying to the present [are] the Constructivist and Surrealist mentalities."⁵ The importance of facture in Tworikov's work quite obviously points to its linkage with the Surrealist mentality (automatism). However, the mechanical drawing in Tworikov's recent paintings is not only Constructivist by type but also by its use as image: "1. The subject is the image itself. 2. The image is not associative. 3. The image is premeditated and deliberate and precisely adjusted..." etc.⁶ These schemata are not employed by Tworikov as a means of removing himself from the process of painting (as schematic drawing was used by so many artists in the '60s), but rather as the image which holds his painterly surface on the canvas plane. It functions precisely as the image from nature did in late Impressionism, where a decorative surface was kept from reading as decoration but rather as a veil for the image. By following the Impressionist example and employing images derived from Constructivist esthetics, Tworikov has found a means for improvisational painting that does not equivocate between a need to liberate his painting from the illusionistic space of Cubism and a need to provide his surface with conceptual structure, while remaining wholly committed to abstract painting. That he has not sacrificed his passion for either painting or the present is all the more admirable at a time when painting has seemed to race toward its own death.

1. Phyllis Tuchman, "An Interview with Jack Tworikov," *Artforum*, vol. IX, no. 5, January 1971, p. 66.
2. Clement Greenberg, "The Later Monet," in *Art and Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1965, p. 45. (First published 1956, revised 1959, 1961.)
3. Louis Finkelstein, "Tworikov: Radical Pro," *A.n.*, Apr. '64, p. 52.
4. Phyllis Tuchman, op. cit., p. 63.
5. Peter Plagens, "The Possibilities of Drawing," *Artforum*, vol. VIII, no. 2, October 1969, p. 50.
6. George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, New York, Braziller, pp. 37-39.

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based the design of *Mlle. Fiocre in the Ballet from "La Source"* on Whistler's exactly contemporaneous *Symphony in White, No. 3*. Significantly, Degas' copy of the latter, or rather of the sketch of it that Whistler sent to their mutual friend Fantin-Latour about 1866, occurs in the same notebook as his compositional study for *Mlle. Fiocre*. It was also in this period, we recall, that Degas, whose contacts with England were in general much closer than they had