





WILLIAM BAZIOTES

A MEMORIAL EXHIBITION

THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK



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WILLIAM BAZIOTES died in 1963 and this exhibition commemorates his work. The tribute to Baziotes is conceived as one in which the artist is celebrated through his choicest works. These are drawn from the last fifteen years of a life marked by its distinct contribution to American painting.

The Baziotes Memorial Exhibition and this accompanying catalogue are presented by Lawrence Alloway, the Guggenheim Museum's Curator.

Thomas M. Messer, Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Mrs. William Baziotes for her advice in the selection of paintings and her kindness in drawing on her full memories of her husband and his work. I am grateful, too, for the sympathy with which they discussed their contacts with Baziotes, to Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Theodoros Stamos. Samuel Kootz kindly made his files available to me. Alice Hildreth worked closely with me on every aspect of the exhibition and catalogue, of which Carol Fuerstein was the editor.

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INTRODUCTION

The critical act of dividing an artist's work by terms like "early" and "late," "preliminary" and "mature", is always arbitrary. It divides, for the use of spectators, what was experienced continuously by the artist. Without denying the existence of unity, however, divisions of this kind have at least an interim usefulness. In the case of Baziotes, for example, there is a real difference between the early and the later work (as well as persistent, though sometimes screened, links). The years emphasized here, 1944 to 1962, constitute a period which differs more from the earlier work than it differs internally.

Referring, then, to this period of Baziotes' work, we can say that his typical forms are delicate presences, half flat, half translucent, suspended, as if in amber, at a distance from the spectator. Their contours, though highly atmospheric, are deliberately drawn, in a studied succession of short firm curves and blunt points. The surfaces of these usually whole forms are soft and furry, only partially differentiated from the dappled background. The forms, even when ominous, are neither ostentatiously dramatic nor strongly animated. Impressions of motion are checked by the fading of form into the background, or slowed by the deliberation with which Baziotes draws flowing and radiating lines that might imply motion. The effect is of the arrested movement of unclearly seen forms, somewhat like looking through a cut jewel or viewing the sea bed.

The standard verbal response to Baziotes' imagery has been almost exclusively marine: art critics have habitually represented the horizonless picture plane and the forms hovering within it in terms of an underwater spectacle. Such metaphors are congenial to many of Baziotes' images which resemble the blossoms of sea anemones, octopi-derivatives, and amoebic cells. In addition, a sufficient number of titles support this reading: Amazon, Aquatic, The Beach, Moby Dick, The Pond, The Sea, Waterform, and Waterflower are examples, and the artist is on record as believing that titles should be associative.1 (To the marine forms can be added radiating lines like antennae and extensions like elephant trunks. Tendrils and mouths constantly evoke equivalents in human experience of touching and sucking.) Baziotes is not the only recent American artist to use marine forms. In 1946-47 Gottlieb's pictographs carried. in addition to the archaic symbols, an increased number of organic forms evoking primitive or marine life. (In 1939, in fact, Gottlieb had painted a series of marine forms in boxes which included the skulls and eyeballs of fish, sponges, and seaweed.) Rothko (1945-46) and Stamos (1946-48) both took the sea bed and the seashore as a source of vital imagery. An unmistakable avowal of Rothko's marine interests is the title of a 1945 painting, Birth of Cephalopods, a class of Mollusca "characterized by a distinct head with 'arms' of tentacles attached to it; comprising Cuttle-fishes, the Nautilus, etc., and numerous fossil species"

(O.E.D.). Baziotes is unique in that the spatial organization of the whole painting implies a dense medium, like water, as well as evoking reminiscences of particular organisms. This kind of space becomes scenically expansive in 1952, developing after paintings of 1950 in which marine life is one term in an ambiguous image. Examples of this phase are *Dying Bird* and *Flight*, in which bird forms are generalized to the point at which they imply a seal or a slug.

Baudelaire's linking of liquid and crystalline structure indicates how it is possible for Baziotes to use marine imagery and, at the same time, freeze it:

Et, peintre fier de mon génie. Je savourais dans mon tableau L'enivrante monotonie Du metal, due marbre et de l'eau.²

Baziotes' color is as bland and shifting as light in topaz or opal, converting the motion of the sea to a Medusan calm. His art paradoxically evokes both the amniotic waters and the impassivity of the mineral world. Of Roman civilization Baziotes wrote: "Its decadence. satiety, and langour interested me. And I kept looking and returning to their wall paintings with their veiled melancholy and their elegant plasticity. I admired the way they used their geology in their art-the sense of mineral, clay, rock, marble, and stone."3 His own imagery is like a dream of pre-history compounded with reminiscences of objects from Pompeii or Tiffany's. A framed reproduction of The Flagellant and the Dancer, a detail from the Villa dei Misteri, still hangs in his apartment. A recurring image in his later paintings is a manypointed form, like a Victory's severed wing, which suggests antlers, not only in natural growth but as a bizarre objet d'art; and, in fact, there is an ornamental ink stand in the artist's studio incorporating a deer's horns. Nature and artifact, organism and fetish. are combined. His paintings after 1957 expand the mineral imagery stated in *Pompeii*, in terms of light in jewels. His concern with light leads him to paint, as a rule, in terms of pale color and a high tonal key. These effects of internal transparency and glowing refract, as it were, his biomorphism into more elliptical forms, as in Mist or White Bird. To the extent that dramatic movement is blocked in his work and color developed in close-valued nuance, Baziotes' work implies a connection with those American artists who reduced pictorial incident to a minimum and worked with large, simple color masses. On the other hand, Baziotes never simplified and expanded the area of his color to the scale of Still or Rothko, and he retained an essentially scenic conception of the picture space, within which a cast of distinct forms is displayed. In this respect Baziotes keeps contact with biomorphic art in New York in the 40s. as represented by Gorky, Stamos, and Rothko, all of whom, in their different ways, explored the resources of a primal landscape. In fact, biomorphism remained the crucial term of Baziotes' art.

In 1942-43 Motherwell and Baziotes felt an absorbing interest in automatism, propagandized by Matta, as a source of new forms and new truths in art. Baziotes' contacts with Surrealism at this time are essential to his subsequent development. In 1942 he exhibited in André Breton's First Papers of Surrealism at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion, and in 1944 held his first one man exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's "Art of This Century." which was a junction of expatriate European Surrealists and younger American artists (Motherwell and Pollock showed there). The transformation of Surrealist automatic techniques in America took various forms, but is fundamentally a change from graphic to full scale painterly procedures. To the Surrealists, speed was a way of getting the hand out of control, free of conscious guidance, and the results were interpreted as evidence of the unconscious mind. In American painting, on the other hand, speed was combined with responsiveness to the rapidly emerging

painting—so that the picture became a field of running decisions rather than a spontaneous confession. Pollock and Motherwell, in different ways, developed direct gesture and pictorial consistency on a large scale, while holding to the idea of speed. Baziotes, on the other hand, represents what might seem, if impulsive and athletic improvisation is taken as a canon, the paradox of slow automatism. His abundant drawings reveal no sudden forays, no finding of subjects through a tangle of roving lines. On the contrary, his line is straightforward and unbroken, coming up with new biomorphs and new conjunctions of known biomorphs, unanticipated but calm.

Automatic drawing is a natural begetter of biomorphs, charged with organic life but not descriptive of any single organism. Biomorphic forms enabled artists in the 40s to invent freely while avoiding non-objectivity. Their allusive though non-descriptive forms have a strong potential for erotic, pathetic, or aggressive meanings. Miró is central to all this, for he combined, more than any other artist connected with the Surrealists, a sense of clear, flat. coloristic painting,4 as well as of life-generating line. The way in which his sexual graffiti precipitate clear simple shapes into erotic life, demonstrates the combination of formal freedom and human content which is the mode's chief pleasure. Gorky, Motherwell, and Pollock all felt Miró's influence. Baziotes saw the simultaneous Miró and Dali exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941 and, though he was engaged by the spectacle of two forms of Spanish-ness, it was to Miró he gave his interest and admiration. Impressions of Miró's forms haunt his later paintings both in the flat curved creatures and in the radiating linear forms. Calder, another American who was fundamentally influenced by Miró, used Miró's vocabulary without the assumption of a metamorphic human life underlying the forms. Once the biological temperature is lowered, the decorative potential of the free forms becomes increasingly evident. Baziotes, however, was committed to biomorphism and its corollary, the ambiguity of the human subject.

André Masson's book Anatomy of My Universe, published in English in 1943. summarizes some of the assumptions of late Surrealism about art and nature which are relevant to American artists like Baziotes. "I admired the fraternity of the natural kingdoms" and "there is nothing inanimate in the world." Masson declared. Of one of his expository cosmological drawings, he wrote a description: "The Genius of the Species. Blason of the Darwinian epic. Totem of triumphant biology." Biomorphism is part of an exchange program between the human and the non-human. The contours of the human image are exceeded or invaded. so that vitality is not confined within the human skin but proliferates everywhere. Gorky's hybrid imagery, fully stated in 1943. for example, scrambles visceral, floral, and insect forms. The art of Baziotes certainly rests on a comparable sense of the explosion of life processes. Despite the identification of Baziotes' forms with non-human life, often of remote origin in time, sometimes monstrous, he asserts their kinship with ourselves, and not their estrangement or alien being.

In a letter to Alfred Barr,⁶ Baziotes discussed in detail transformed sources in his painting *Dwarf*, 1947. "I like dwarfs." Baziotes wrote. "and I believe this feeling of grotesqueness comes out in the figure." Baziotes' dwarf carried references to a photograph of an armless and legless veteran of World War I; "I used to draw him many times." Of the dwarf's eye and the teeth, Baziotes wrote: "I think these forms are inspired from having looked at the lizards and prehistoric animals." More specifically, he linked the mouth with "the grin of the crocodile which has a mixture of horror and humor." Finally he suggested that the outline of the dwarf "has the heaviness in places, and certain sags of the flesh and muscles. that we see in a heavy

mature woman" and the lower oval form, like an eye, he supposed, "is probably... a feminine sexual symbol." The curvilinear figures of the women Baziotes painted in 1940 certainly relate, in their interlocking curves and contracted limbs, to the configuration of *Dwarf*.

Within one image, Baziotes combines allusions to a mutilated man and to a woman, to a lizard and a crocodile. An oval form acts as an eye in one place and as a sexual symbol in another. These divergent references do not stay separated but, on the contrary, are ingratiatingly fused. The tact of the fusion is more like, say, the Vatican Hermaphrodite, then it is like a Surrealist drama of incongruities. (The image of the Hermaphrodite seems appropriate, incidentally, to the diffused and conflated identity of the forms in Baziotes' paintings.) Miró's signs, like Klee's, constantly reveal, as a process-record, the decisions of the artist as he worked. Baziotes, however, turns the pictographic immediacies of both artists into painterly renderings of subtle form. The concentric ovals for eyes, the loose spirals, the zig-zag teeth of Miró, or the animal heads and strata-like lines of Klee, though taken up by Baziotes, are melted into his own marine-mineral terms. The conversion of Surrealist techniques in the direction of organically unified imagery and, in Baziotes' case, in the direction of "beautiful painting," is characteristic of American art in the 40s. The meagre or mechanical techniques of Surrealist painting were replaced by sensuously rich and pictorially consistent forms. American painting of the late 40s and early 50s is not, as has been argued, simply larger and more vigorous than European art; the truth is that it is more complex, reaching points of highly organized formality without any sacrifice of the momentum of personal creativity.

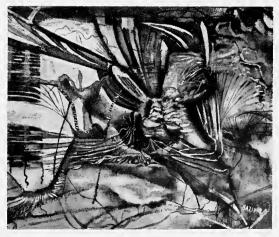
Surrealism, at the height of its influence, appropriated the fantastic art of the past with remarkable success. All fantastic art was filtered according to the standards of the movement. It was a brilliant reversal of the facts which are, of course, that Surrealism is, in part, an episode within the existing and continuing traditions of fantastic art. What Baziotes did. in fact, with biomorphism, is indicative of this situation. He went around the movement, behind it, to the original traditions of fantastic art. His slow automatism, prudent and sensitive, is closer to Paul Klee than it is to André Masson, for instance, and Klee's imagery belongs to the general traditions of fantastic art more than to Surrealism. The Surrealists, for all their exploration of fantasy, had a minimum interest in states of reverie, which were a traditional framework for the fantastic. from Petrarch and Dante on. Romantic sentiments associated with non-clinical dream states seemed soft to strictly Surrealist artists. However, the diplomacy of Baziotes' anxious musing is more like the mysteries of Odilon Redon than the Surrealists' drama of revelation or exhortation. The art of Redon and Baziotes implies a meditation on flora and fauna that change as a chrysallis changes, and not as a conjurer abruptly hides and alters things. In addition, the two artists share, either as a built-in and unnoticed assumption, or as a consciously held belief, the Darwinian idea of all life as an historical unity, from the amoeba to man. Without any prior intention of doing so, biomorphism continues the 19th century idea of evolutionary unity.

Two examples of existing traditions or periods before Surrealism are relevant here. One is the line of the Grotesque which, in the visual arts, is the ornamental style derived from late 15th century Roman excavations and of which Raphael's pillars in the Papal Loggia are the first modern statement. Here occurs the mingling of creatural life, the confusion of the familiar world order, that occurs in Surrealism, in Gorky, and, in another form, in Baziotes, Cyclops, for instance, despite its human outline and classical title, was derived from a rhinoceros in the Bronx Zoo. Baziotes regarded the rhino as a prehistoric survival and was fascinated that the creature, though so formidable, both heavy and fast, has almost no memory, and hence

is forgetful at the peak of rage. The rhino's eye being low in the head set the artist thinking of *Cyclops*. Thus, real human, mythical superhuman, and prehistoric elements are mixed, as in the Grotesque. The Art Nouveau also reveals many motives that 20th century fantasy has not dropped. It is in Art Nouveau, as in Redon earlier, that one finds a precedent for the use of half-beguiling, half-repulsive forms of primal and lower systems of life. "What can stir our vital emotions more strongly than the graceful, long, sinuous, linear tentacles of a jellyfish swaying in the water?" The author is Hermann Obrist, writing in the 1890s. Art Nouveau objects, in which poles of organic form and "artificiality" co-exist in a single work, offers a parallel to Baziotes' marine-mineral world.

Although this exhibition stresses the later work, the break between it and the earlier paintings is not the product of a sudden, revelatory flash. In retrospect, the earlier work shows the conditions out of which the later work developed. From 1939 Baziotes was engaged in a form of late cubist painting, expressionistic and linear. In 1940, his was a kind of protest cubism, in which social themes from the WPA period, preserving a Depression sourness, emerged as brutal and summary caricatures of seated women or nudes in a wide range of colors. At the same time, he painted scenes in which a Mexican-type iconography of forged iron and pulpy flesh, masquerading as Freudian therapy, was squeezed into a shallow space. All were executed fast, in duco or gouache. In 1941, a period of crisis in which his expressionistic cubism was subverted by the procedures of automatism, he painted not at all but drew continually. When he resumed painting, small motions of the brush dragged, wriggled, and flicked to describe bubbling chains of luxuriant detail flushed with infernal light, as in The Butterflies of Leonardo da Vinci (1942). The influence of Matta's Psychological Morphologies, drawings and paintings in which the body's cavities and a Miltonic cosmology were fused, is clear. These congested forms were relaxed in the following year with an increasingly calligraphic form, natural to automatism, as seen in the rippling and rhyming forms of The Balcony, 1943, Wright Ludington Collection.





Nude. 1940 Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York The Butterflies of Leonardo da Vinci. 1942

As with other artists who modified or abandoned cubism at this time, the grid of cubism appears, not with a formal purpose but as an emotional symbol of imprisonment or concealment. In 1944 the all-over grid is inhabited by emergent human and floral forms in muted color, anticipating the later work. Following this phase, however, Baziotes felt a need/decided to construct, stronger forms and his paintings became harder and simpler. The Web, 1946, typifies the new aim of monumentality. The few and simple forms of his later works undoubtedly stem, like an evolutionary tree, from this simplificatory decision. A transition occurs in Baziotes' art at this time which leads to his characteristic mature style. The compartmented structure of, for example, The Parachutists, 1944, is dissolved and the remaining forms become softer and more organic, their disposition in the canvas freer. This state can clearly be seen in paintings of 1947 which often echo the earlier forms but with a nocturnal moodiness of color and a sensuous ease of placing. Forms tend to touch in soft conjunctions or be linked in casual clusters, the general impression being more crowded than in later paintings. There is a new responsiveness to the evolving work of art with an unanticipated subject but one that, to quote the artist at this time, "must be caught and made real." 10

Baziotes pointed out, apropos of Dwarf, that though aware of some of the references at the time of working, others only became clear subsequently. The fact that he could, a couple of years after doing the painting, write analytically about it should not be taken to mean that the genesis of the picture corresponds to his retrospective order. On the contrary, Baziotes stressed that "what happens on the canvas is unpredictable and surprising to me."11 "Whereas certain people start with a recollection or an experience and paint that experience, to some of us the act of doing it becomes the experience; so that we are not quite clear why we are engaged on a particular work."12 "The artist feels like a gambler. He does something on the canvas and takes a chance in the hope that something important will be revealed."13 These quotations are a very clear indication of the sense, shared by Baziotes with other American artists of the time, of the primacy of the creative act, apart from any preplanning. The unique and unrepeatable experience of the artist working appears as Baziotes' criterion of art's value. "I think a painting is like any experience that happens in real life, and for me it can end. If that experience repeats itself, then I'm older and have a different attitude."14 He found confirmation of his sense of the working artist's solitude in a statement by Gene Tunney: "If there's any extreme form of individualism, it's ring fighting. You wage your own battle all by yourself. No partners, no comrades in there with you. Like dying, you fight alone."15 Thirty years earlier, at the YMCA gymnasium. a boxer named Bobby Ruttenberg had offered to train Baziotes as a professional fighter. His interest in boxing never slackened, so that this statement of Tunney's touched both his own street life, as one might call life out of the studio, as well as his experience as an artist, solitary and anxious before the canvas.

Whereas most of Baziotes' contemporaries paint directly. Baziotes scumbles, laying one color over another in soft, rather dry touches. The process is a slow one, and one that became increasingly protracted through the 1950's, until his output became only a few paintings a year. The artist's widow records that Baziotes' regimen, in his later years, was to draw in the morning and then paint, but "never before noon." He painted in gloves, to keep his hands warm because of a rheumatic tendency. However, it is clear from his phrases like "the act of doing it" and "takes a chance" that the tension of the creative act is no less great for a slow than for a fast painter. Baziotes' statements read more like the ideal type of Harold Rosenberg's Action Painter, than most artists' recorded opinions. Baziotes' references to gambling and the "act of doing it" anticipate Rosenberg's 1952 definition of Action Painting.

Baziotes is one of that generation of American painters who changed their contemporaries' ideas about art and, at the same time, met inherited standards of traditional art, without appearing to, and without an ambition to do so. This generation, born between 1903 and 1913, has already been depleted by unexpectedly early deaths: Gorky at the age of 43, Tomlin at the age of 53, Pollock at the age of 44. Kline at the age of 51, Louis at the age of 50, and, in 1963, Baziotes at the age of 50. At first, perhaps, their impact on the world was as a group or, at least, as a cluster of individuals identified with the United States. Now, however, the personal attitudes and unique characteristics of each artist are visible within the general experience of breakthrough and drastically modified tradition. It is hoped that Baziotes' personal identity is indicated in the present exhibition.

Lawrence Alloway

NOTES

- 1. Bibliography no. 9.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "Rêve Parisien". Les Fleurs du Mal, no. 112. Baziotes read Baudelaire and derived titles for paintings from his poems: Motherwell, an intimate friend of the artist in the early 40s, still admires Baudelaire immensely.
- Baziotes, William. In response to questionnaire regarding Pompeii, typescript, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 6, 1955.
- 4. For an American reaction to Miró that concentrates on the formal character of Miró, see Clement Greenberg's Joan Miró, Quadrangle Press. New York. 1948. Biomorphism is barely attended to, though a definition of the Grotesque is raised (pp. 40-44). For another emphasis see Robert Motherwell's "The Significance of Miró", Art News, vol. 58, no. 4, May 1959, pp. 32-33. 65-67 which stresses "Surrealist Automatism"...
- 5. Masson, André. Anatomy of My Universe, Curt Valentin, New York. 1943. unpaginated.
- 6. Baziotes, William. Letter to Alfred H. Barr, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, April 26, 1949.
- For a text (by Eleanor Kempner Freed and Ellen Sharp) which evocatively links Symbolist iconography to Klee and Baziotes see: "The Magical Worlds of Redon, Klee. Baziotes", Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, 1957.
- Kayser, Wolfgang. The Grotesque in Art and Literature, Indiana University Press. Bloomington, 1963.
- Obrist, Hermann. Neue Moglichkeiten in der bildenden Kunst, 1896-1900, Leipzig. 1903. Quoted in Schmutzler. Robert. Art Nouveau, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1964, p. 272.
- 10. Bibliography no. 3. This concern with subject, even if one did not know what subject, occurs in the artist's early statements (bibliography nos. 1, 2, 3) and is one of the basic differences between postwar abstract painting and earlier phases.
- 11. *Ibid*.
- 12. Bibliography no. 6.
- 13. *Ibid*.
- 14. Bibliography no. 9.
- 15. Quoted from artist's own transcription.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Paintings numbered 4, 9, 17, 22, 25, 31, 39, 43 will be shown only in New York and paintings numbered 20, 23, 37, 42 will be shown only outside New York.

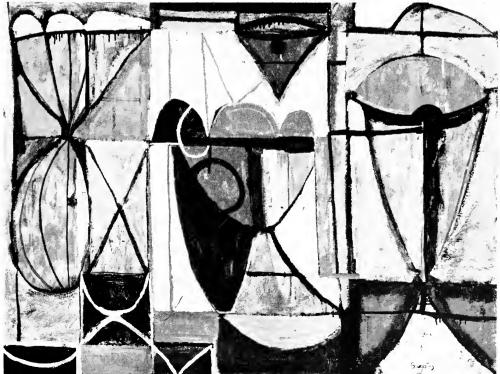
- 1. THE WINE GLASS. 1944. Oil on canvas, 26¼ x 20¼". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York.
- 2. THE PARACHUTISTS. 1944. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York.
- 3. THE WEB. 1946. Oil on canvas. 30 x 23". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes. New York.
- 4. NIGHT LANDSCAPE. 1947. Oil on canvas, 36 x 42". Collection Dr. and Mrs. Israel Rosen, Baltimore.
- NIGHT MIRROR. 1947. Oil on canvas, 49% x 595%".
 Collection Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie; Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, III.
- WATER FORM, 1947. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24". New York University Art Collection; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Norman Laskey.
- 7. NIGHT FORM. 1947. Oil on canvas, 47¾ x 36⅓". Collection Washington University, St. Louis.
- DWARF. 1947. Oil on canvas, 42 x 36½s".
 Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
 A. Conger Goodyear Fund.
- CYCLOPS, 1947. Oil on canvas, 48 x 40".
 Collection The Art Institute of Chicago.
 Walter M. Campana Memorial Prize.
- 10. THE MIRROR. 1948. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48". Collection William C. Janss, Thermal, California.
- MIRROR FIGURE. 1948. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24".
 Collection Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Washburn, New York.
- SLEEPWALKER. 1949. Oil on canvas, 41 x 23". Collection Earl Ludgin, Chicago.
- DYING BIRD. 1950. Oil on canvas, 24 x 20".
 Collection Mr. and Mrs. Roy R. Neuberger, New York.
- 14. FLIGHT, 1950. Oil on canvas. 20½ x 24½". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York,
- MOON ANIMAL, 1950, Oil on canvas, 42 x 3648".
 Collection Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign.
- THE MUMMY, 1950. Oil on canvas, 36% x 4178".
 Collection Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica.
- PHANTASM, 1951, Oil on canvas, 60 x 72".
 Collection Wright Ludington, Santa Barbara.
- SLEEP. 1952. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30".
 Collection Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans.

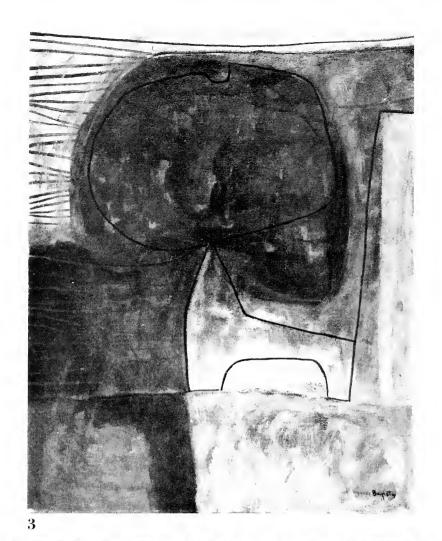
- THE FLESH EATERS. 1952. Oil on canvas, 60 x 715's".
 Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York.
- JUNGLE NIGHT. 1953. Oil on canvas, 72 x 36". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York.
- THE NET. 1953. Oil on canvas, 1978 x 40".
 Collection Mrs. William Baziotes. New York.
- PRIMEVAL LANDSCAPE. 1953.
 Oil on canvas, 62³4 x 74¹2".
 Collection Fleischer Art Memorial, Philadelphia.
- 23. FLAME. 1954. Oil on canvas. 41½ x 35¼". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York.
- THE BEACH. 1955. Oil on canvas. 36 x 48".
 Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 25. THE POND. 1955. Oil on canvas. 72 x 66". Collection Detroit Institute of Art.
- POMPEH. 1955. Oil on canvas. 60 x 48".
 Collection The Museum of Modern Art. New York. Mrs. Louise Smith Fund.
- AMAZON, 1956. Oil on canvas, 60 x 47³4".
 Collection Mrs. William Baziotes. New York.
- 28. MOON WORLD. 1956. Oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Collection Elaine Graham Rosenfeld, New York.
- MARIONETTES, 1956, Oil on canvas, 20 x 241's".
 Collection Mr. and Mrs. Albert A. List, New York,
- RED LANDSCAPE. 1956. Oil on canvas. 60 x 72".
 Collection Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Minneapolis.
- 31. FLIGHT. 1956. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60". Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum: Gift of Judge and Mrs. Samuel I. Rosenman.
- 32. GREEN NIGHT, 1957. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48". The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, New York,
- 33. MAMMOTH. 1957. Oil on canvas. 48 x 68". Lent by Arthur Tooth and Sons Ltd.. London.
- 34. AERIAL. 1957. Oil on canvas. 60 x 48". Collection Richard Brown Baker. New York.
- 35. WHITE BIRD, 1957, Oil on canvas, 60 x 48". Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.
- 36. MIST, 1957, Oil on canvas, 48 x 36". Collection Susan Morse Hilles, New Haven.

- 37. CARNIVAL. 1958. Oil on canvas. 36 x 50". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes. New York.
- 38. DUSK, 1958. Oil on canvas, 60% x 48½". Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
- 39. THE SEA. 1960, Oil on canvas. 60 x 72". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Morris Grossman, New York.
- AQUATIC. 1961. Oil on canvas. 66 x 7816".
 Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. New York.
- 41. SERPENTINE. 1961. Oil on canvas. 66 x 78". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes. New York.
- 42. DAWN, 1962, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50". Collection Mrs. William Baziotes, New York.
- OPALESCENT. 1962. Oil on canvas. 42½ x 50".
 Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

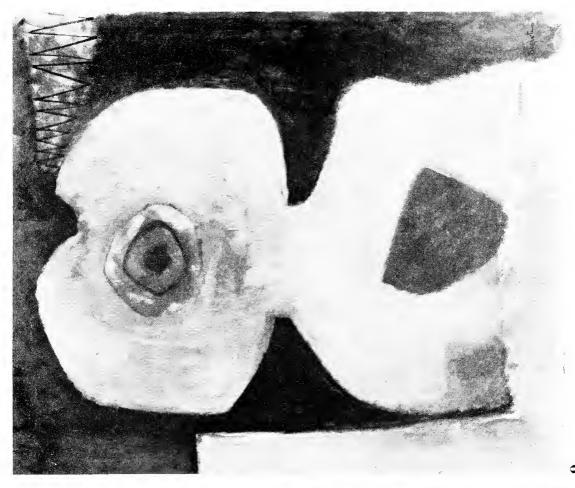


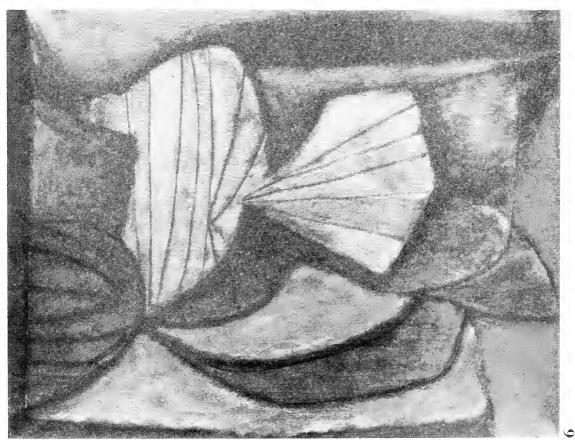


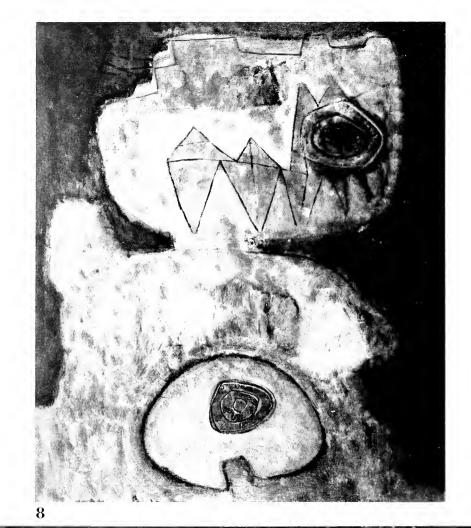


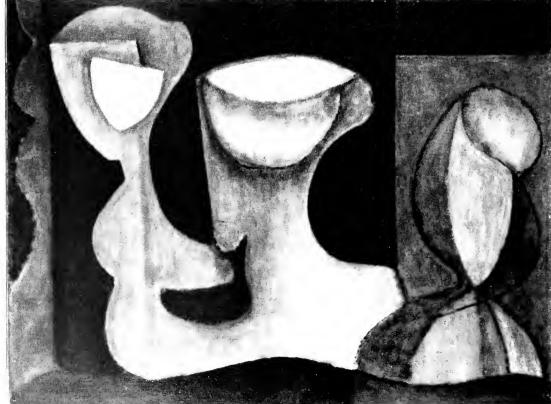


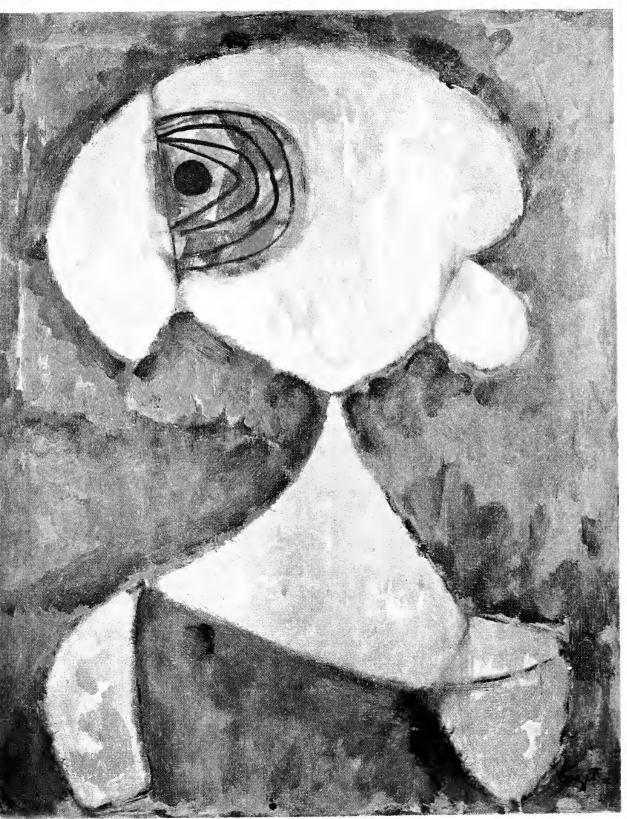


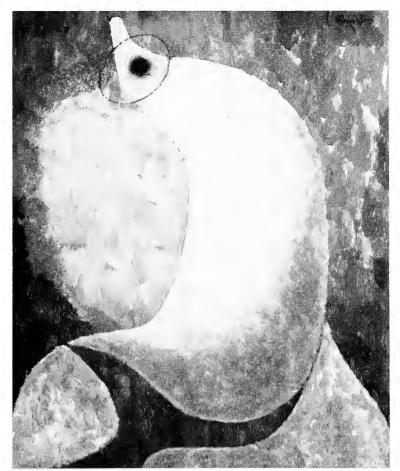


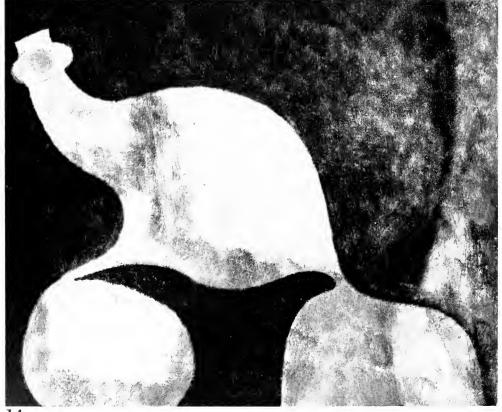


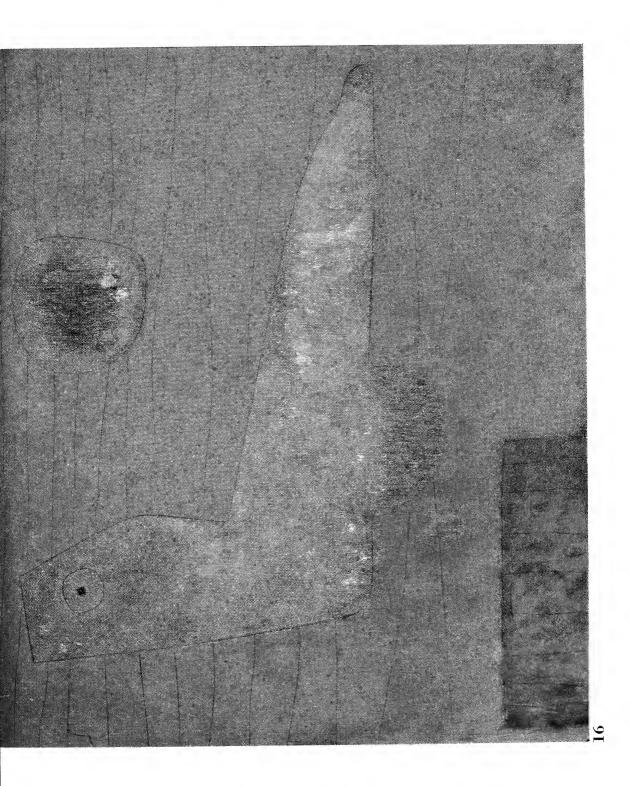


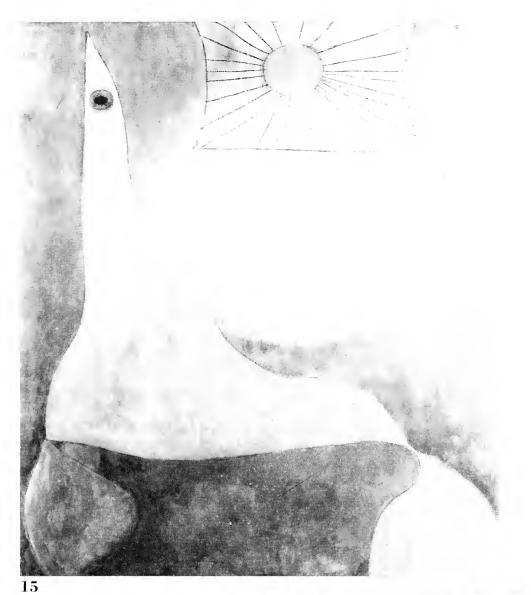


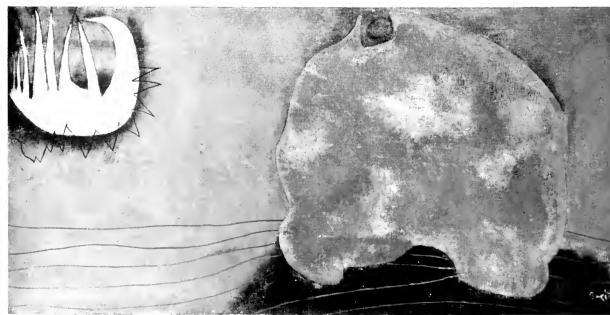


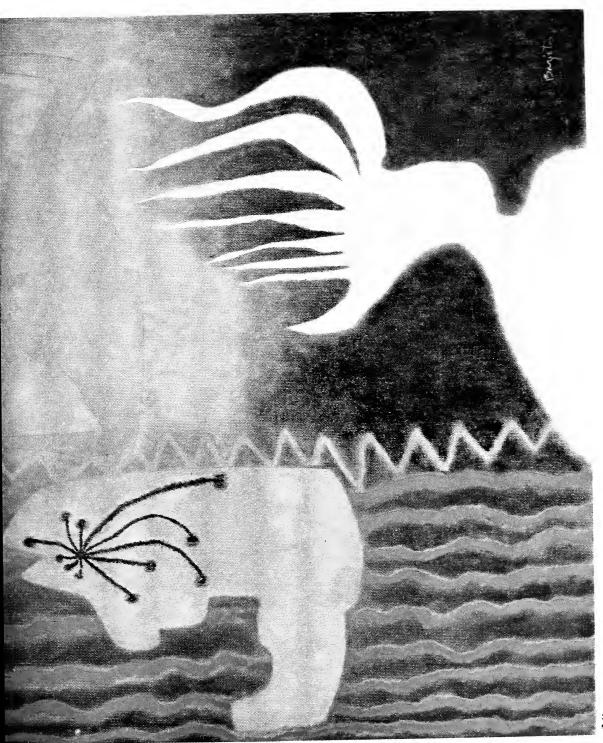


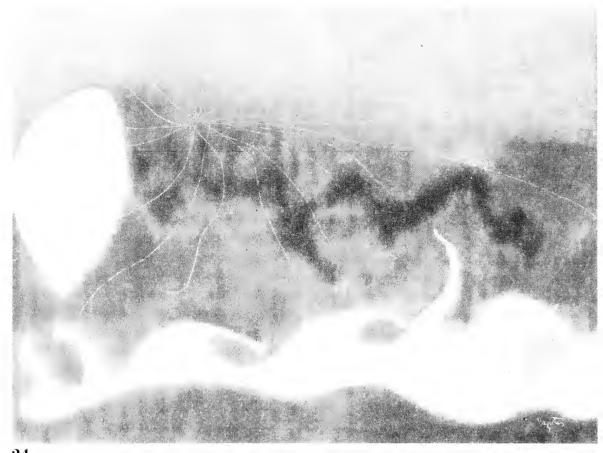


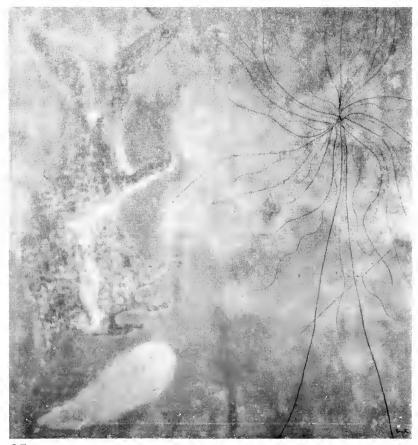




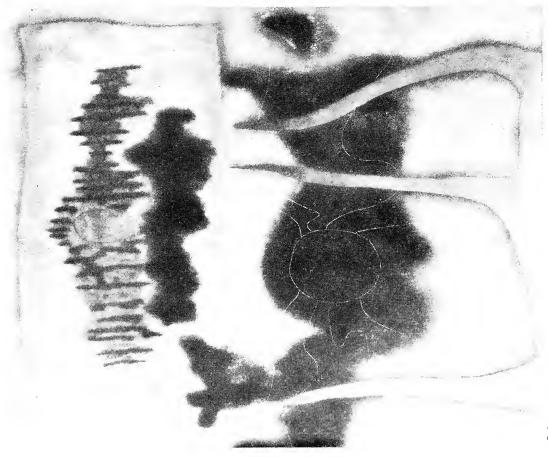






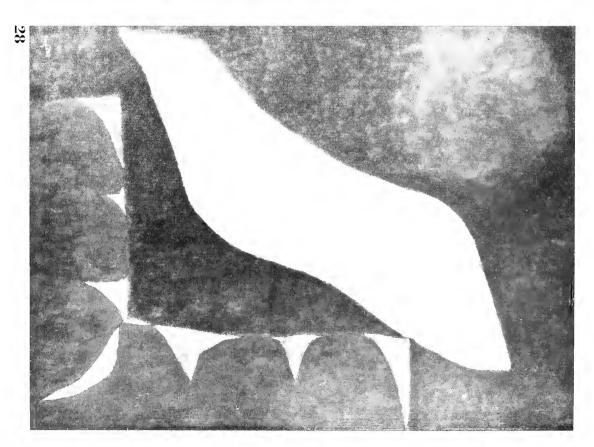


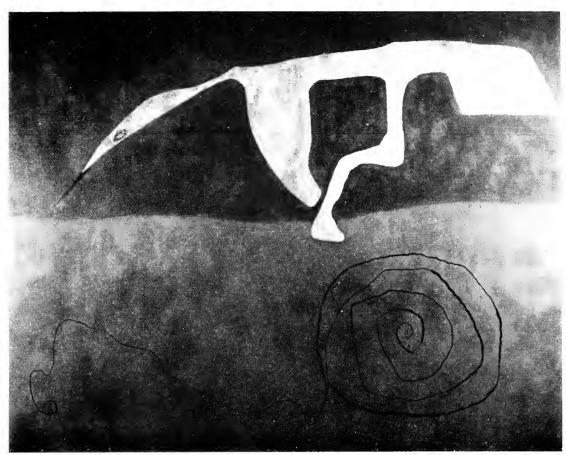




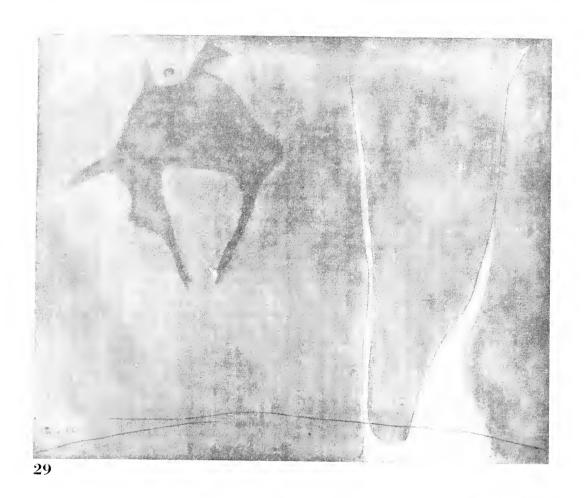


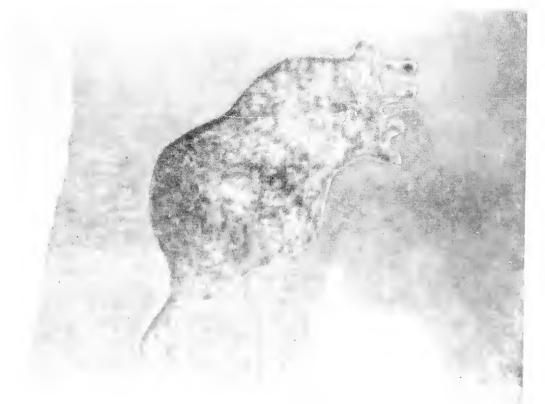


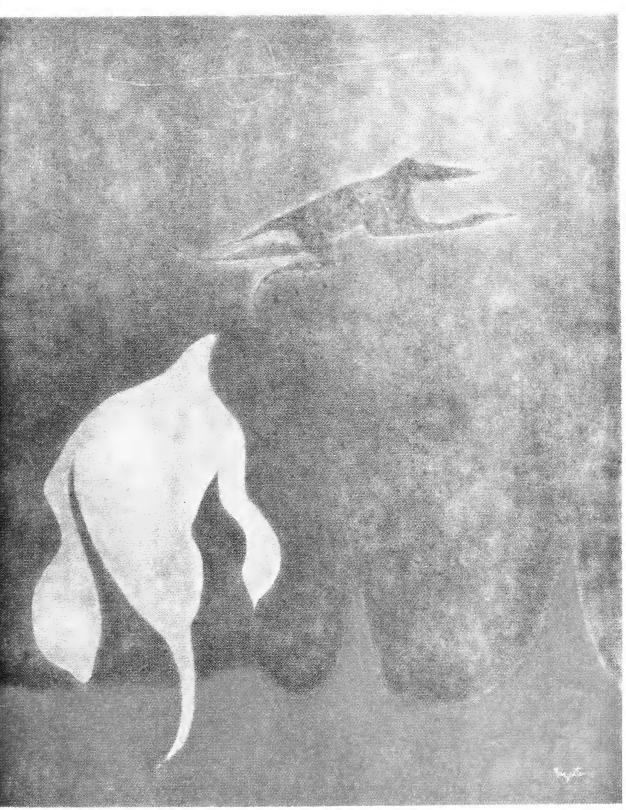


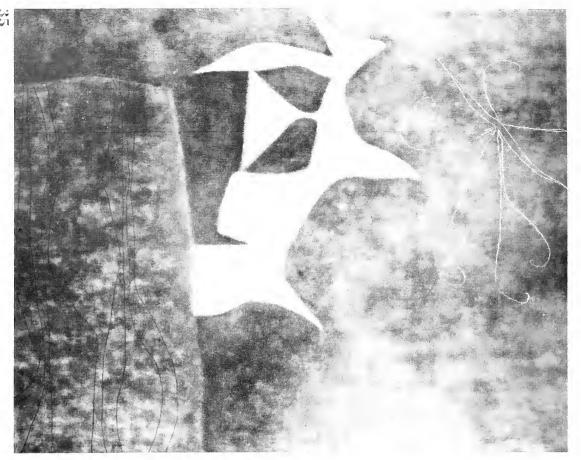


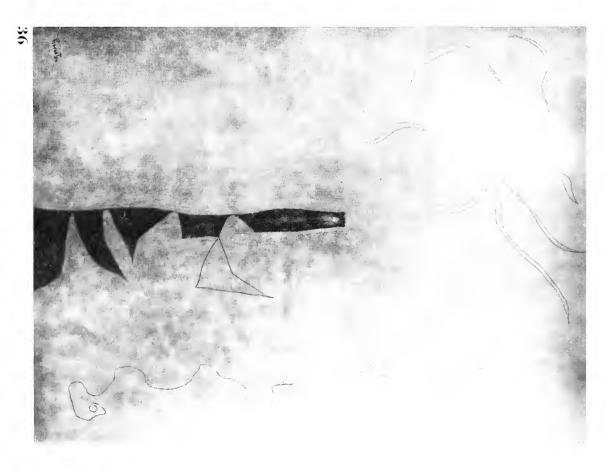


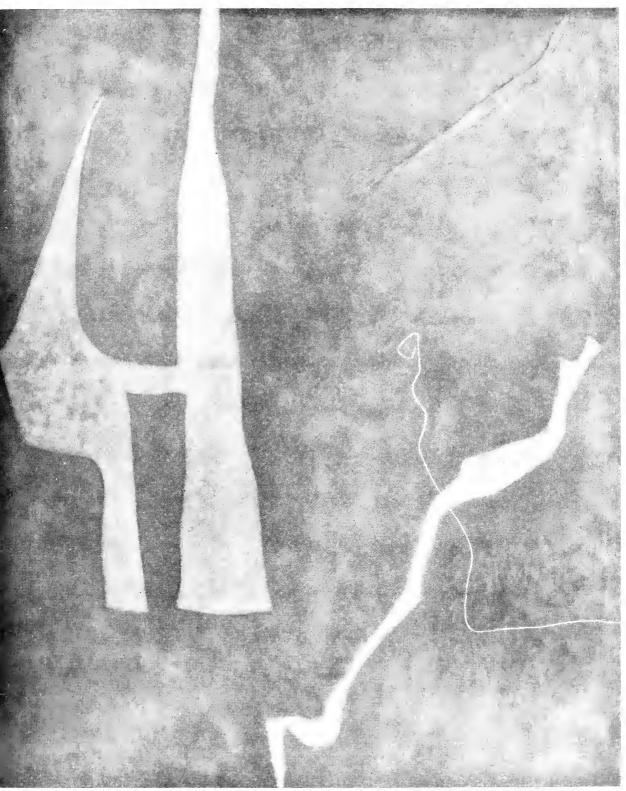






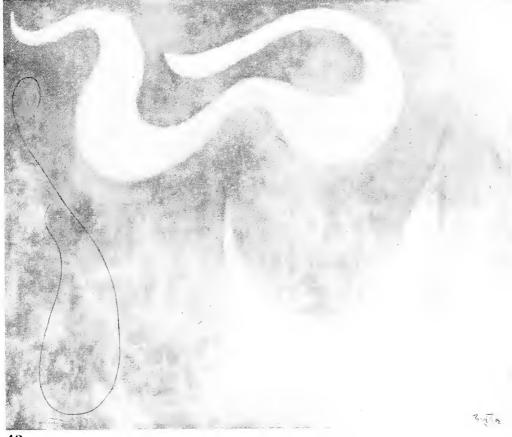












STATEMENTS BY THE ARTIST

There is always a subject in my mind that is more important than anything else. Sometimes I am aware of it, sometimes not. I keep working on my canvas until I think it is finished. The subject matter may be revealed to me in the middle of the work, or I may not recognize it until a long time afterward.

1944. Bibliography 1.

I cannot evolve any concrete theory about painting. What happens on the canvas is unpredictable and surprising to me. But I am able to speak of certain things that have occurred up to now in the course of my painting.

Today it's possible to paint one canvas with the calmness of an ancient Greek, and the next with the anxiety of a Van Gogh. Either of these emotions, and any in between, is valid to me.

There is no particular system I follow when I begin a painting. Each painting has its own way of evolving. One may start with a few color areas on the canvas; another with a myriad of lines; and perhaps another with a profusion of colors.

Each beginning suggests something. Once I sense the suggestion, I begin to paint intuitively. The suggestion then becomes a phantom that must be caught and made real. As I work, or when the painting is finished, the subject reveals itself.

As for the subject-matter in my painting, when I am observing something that may be the theme for a painting, it is very often an incidental thing in the background, elusive and unclear, that really stirred me, rather than the thing before me.

I work on many canvases at once. In the morning I line them up against the wall of my studio. Some speak: some do not. They are my mirrors. They tell me what I am like at the moment.

1947. Bibliography 3.

To the modern artist, the schism between himself and the public seems natural enough. There is often an audience to admire his work. Sometimes this audience is small. Sometimes it is large. And very often it does not exist at all. This breach between himself and the public is not, as so many think, a misfortune or a constant source of irritation. It can be a positive force to the artist in making him more aware of himself and the world. It is as natural and necessary for his advancement as the use of his eye and brain.

1949. Excerpt from Bibliography 5.

Whereas certain people start with a recollection or an experience and paint that experience, to some of us the act of doing it becomes the experience; so that we are not quite clear why we are engaged on a particular work. And because we are more interested in plastic matters than we are in a matter of words, one can begin a picture and carry it through and stop it and do nothing about the title at all. All pictures are full of association.

I think the reason we begin in a different way is that this particular time has gotten to a point where the artist feels like a gambler. He does something on the canvas and takes a chance in the hope that something important will be revealed.

1952. Excerpts from Bibliography 6.

Yes, I work regularly each day and keep fixed hours. I work well in the city and even better in the country—and by the country I mean a small city in America, with beautiful landscape nearby. I have never been to Europe.

I work on eight or 10 paintings at once; at the same time. I draw and make pastels and watercolors. It takes me from six months to a year to finish a painting. Do I work from nature? I am always observing it, but never work from it directly.

Music and literature do not inspire any of my works, but I do find brothers in those arts, and though many are dead, they keep me from feeling alone.

Inspiration comes to me unexpectedly, never by virtue of deliberate stimulation, never by sitting in a chair; it always happens in front of the easel.

What impressions, events, moods, set off a painting? Man—the tragi-comic in man. Man, the ape and evolution. The fear in man. Man's duality. Pierrot. The faces of the matadors. And landscape—the sadness of autumn. Winter as in Breughel's Hunting Scene. The feeling of love in spring. The night. The moon. And animals—the rhinoceros, a dangerous clown. The power of the fighting bulls of Spain. The age of the dinosaurs and great bird-lizards flying overhead. And finally, old photographs—people, interiors and scenes from the 19th century. Old houses of America. History of the Civil War and the bad men of the Old West.

Among the artists, old and modern, whom I particularly admire: Piero della Francesca, Titian, Rembrandt, Utamaro, Rubens, Velasquez, Goya, Fragonard, Ingres, Corot, Seurat, Renoir, Bonnard, Matisse and Miró.

Contact with other artists has always been of great importance to me. When the artists I know best used to meet ten or twelve years ago, the talk was mostly of ideas in painting. There was an unconscious collaboration between artists. Whether you agreed or disagreed was of no consequence. It was exciting and you were compelled to paint over your head. You had to stay on a high level or drown. If your painting was criticized adversely, you either imitated someone to give it importance, or you simply suffered and painted harder to make your feelings on canvas convincing.

At that time, Mondrian, Duchamp and Max Ernst were here. Later Miró came. It was wonderful to see how they conducted themselves as artists outside their studios, what their manners and attitudes were towards specific situations, how they lived, how they believed in and practiced their uniqueness, how they never spoke of ideas but only of the things they loved.

I remember Mondrian at a party, dancing the Lindy, on and on for hours and hours. Duchamp, and his kindness and interest towards young American painters. Max Ernst, describing in loving detail the snakedances of the Hopi Indians, Miró, unveiling the mural in his studio, watching for the reaction of the onlookers, walking rapidly and excitedly all over the place, upset and very nervous.

I do not feel alone. There is always unconscious collaboration among artists. The painter who imagines himself a Robinson Crusoe is either a primitive or a fool. The common goal is difficult to describe, but I do know it is not a certain universal subject matter. However, in the best practitioners of abstract painting, I sense the goal when I see the artist has had the courage to live in his time and in his own fashion. And when he has courage, there is *style* in his work. The subject matter in his work can be the tremors of an unstable world, or the joy of a summer day. Both are equally valid. Each artist must follow his own star.

The sense of an artistic community is important to my work. Yes, the galleries, museums, art magazines and critics are all very much concerned with modern art. There is controversy, conflicting opinion, and when this exists there is a strong sense of a living art.

Seeing your fellow artists destroys isolation. The good artists of my generation are, by this time, in kingdoms of their own making. When you meet them there is little point in discussing ideas or theories of painting. If someone should be foolish enough to expound on the meaning and intention of his work, the artists present meet all this with the polite disinterest that is shown towards people who go into long monologues about their children. What does happen when artists meet is that we are able to see more clearly the unfolding of character as time goes on.

1954. Bibliography 7.

The emphasis on flora, fauna and beings makes the exhibit a most intriguing and artistic one for it brings forth those strange memories and psychic feelings that mystify and fascinate all of us.

1957. Bibliography 10.

Suppose I deliberately look at the Hudson River at night—that is, the boats, the moving water, the buildings across the river, and the lights flickering. I go home with these impressions in my mind and start painting. Later on, however, during the painting, I might realize that what was just to the side of me, say a street lamp, a tree. a bench, and a man sitting there, attracted me more than anything else. I don't make any deliberate attempt to find subject matter. Certain things that go on around me make very strong impressions on me; impressions I might not be completely aware of at first.

You've been quoted as saying that you might not understand some of your paintings until three or four years after you painted them. How do you explain this?

Certain things in life are easily understood, like taking up a glass of milk and putting it to your mouth. That's a simple thing. Suppose, let's say, you suddenly decide that you want to move to California, and stay there. At the time you say, "Well, I'm tired of New York City; it's just making me depressed, and I want to leave!" No real thought was given as to why you want to leave; and it might not be until three or four years later that you are willing actually to admit to yourself the true reason. Perhaps you were too gregarious, or you were hurt in a personal affair; and so it is with a painting. This psychology often repeats itself during the making of a painting. Sometimes the meaning of a painting reveals itself very early, most of the time right at the end, and sometimes two or three years later. The reason for this is that the act of painting is such a personal thing that sometimes I'm too close to it to sense its real meaning.

How do you title your paintings?

In my titles I try to give a feeling of the meaning of the picture. For instance, a painting can have a mood to it, like the one I called "Flight" that was a hard painting to name. I was looking for some kind of meaning in the picture when, while painting, I had the feeling of an animal running through a fire in a jungle or forest. It's just running, not knowing where it's going. It is in flight.

I try not to make my titles too esoteric. The artist, Yves Tanguy, painted a picture representing a group of abstract forms on a desert and called it, "Papa, Here Comes Mama." That's a surrealist shock title; I am not at all interested in that. I try to keep my titles simple. Several years ago I painted a series of pictures with the word, "mirror," in the titles. "Mirror at Midnight." To me a mirror is something mysterious. It's evocative of strangeness and other-worldiness. In that way the titles are associative.

How does a Baziotes end?

Balzac had a theory that a painting can be painted over and over again. That isn't so with me. I think a painting is like any experience that happens in real life, and for me it can end. If that experience repeats itself, then I'm older and have a different attitude; and so the experience becomes new in some aspect. For instance, when I was nineteen years old I came to New York City and I saw, in the Metropolitan Museum, a Rembrandt self-portrait. I looked at it. It was an experience. I thought it was a wonderful painting, and I loved it. Ten years later I happened to see that painting again, and I almost cried under the same experience. My feelings had changed. 1 had lived more and seen more, and when I saw the Rembrandt again the experience was far more profound. My whole appreciation of Rembrandt had been opened. And so it is with a painting. I know when it's finished. It is then very remote from me. It is strange to me if I see it again.

You've been called an "Abstract Expressionist." Which do you consider more important in your painting, the abstractions or the expression?

My whole intention in painting is to make a thing poetical; but not poetical in a literary sense. I want something that evokes mood, a background, a stage set for certain characters that are playing certain parts. When I paint, I do not consider myself an abstractionist in the sense that I'm trying to create beautiful forms that fit together like a puzzle. The things in my painting are intended to strike something that is an emotional involvement—that has to do with the human personality and all the mysteries of life, not simply colors or abstract balances. To me, it's all reality.

c. 1956-57. Bibliography 9.

Is painting to be the leaves of a diary recording our daily experiences? Or are we to seek, like the ancient Greeks, the idea in the midst of turmoil and progress? Both ideas are valid, as long as they are well painted.

If I love the classic so much, then I want to be classic. Is this possible? Anything is possible today.

It is the mysterious that I love in painting. It is the stillness and the silence. I want my pictures to take effect very slowly, to obsess and to haunt.

I love the old masters, and grow closer to them every day. They are my conscience, and certain of them are my brothers.

1959. Excerpt from Bibliography 12.

The Mind Readers S.G. Sool H.T Bowden Doublete, alexander Mocedan Harold Lamb. Doubleday

The Tuning

Of theres any extreme form

of individualism, its ring

pighting. you work your own

bottle all by yourelf

No foatners, no contrades in

there with you. Like

dayne, you fight alone

so consider the offighter

as a spiritualist individualist,

a solitary soul in

travail

Copy of statement by Gene Tunney, in William Baziotes' handwriting, 1960 (with two book titles).

CHRONOLOGY

June 11, 1912	William Baziotes born Pittsburgh to Stella and Frank Baziotes.		
1913	Family moved to Reading, Pennsylvania.		
c. 1931-32	Worked for stained glass company in Reading. Met George Hildebeitel,		
	Leon Kasezmiercak, Walt Reinsel, who stimulated his interest in art.		
1933	Settled in New York.		
1933-36	Attended National Academy of Design, New York (Leon Kroll's painting class).		
1936-38	WPA Federal Art Project as teacher.		
1938-40	WPA Easel Painting Project.		
April 12, 1941	Married Ethel Copstein.		
1944	First one man exhibition in New York at Art of This Century.		
1946	First one man exhibition at Kootz Gallery (where he showed until 1958).		
1947	Walter M. Campana Memorial Purchase Prize, 38th Annual Exhibition,		
	Chicago Art Institute.		
1948	Founded with David Hare, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Mark		
	Rothko "Subjects of the Artist" School.		
1949-52	Taught painting at Brooklyn Museum Art School and New York University.		
1950-52	Taught at People's Art Center, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.		
1952-62	Taught painting at Hunter College, New York.		
c. 1955	Commenced spending each summer in Reading.		
June 6, 1963	Died at his residence in New York.		

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by Susan Tumarkin and Alice Hildreth

The bibliography is arranged as follows: 1. Statements by the artist; 2. Miscellany; 3. One man shows, each of which is followed by references to reviews; 4. Group shows after 1946, recorded without reviews, except in five cases. (The exceptions are of special interest: an early showing of U.S. art abroad; the Art Institute of Chicago exhibition at which Cyclops received an award: a group show at the Kootz Gallery with a significant catalogue; a controversy involving U.S. artists and the Metropolitan Museum; and an important group show at the Museum of Modern Art.) The material ranges widely, from personal statements by the artists, through a spectrum of art criticism, to newspaper stories and magazine features. Not all entries are of equal interest in the discussion of Baziotes' art but their total indicates a pattern of information distribution characteristic of the period.

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- 145. Modern American Paintings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Roy R. Neuberger, Kootz Gallery, New York, April 15-May 4, 1946.
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- 146. Building a Modern Collection, Kootz Gallery, New York, May 13-June 1, 1946. Catalogue Two paintings.
- 147. Second Annual Summer Exhibition of Contemporary Art, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, June 16-July 31, 1946.
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- 188. An Exhibition of Paintings under the Auspices of the War Assets Administration. Whitney Museum of American Art. New York. May 21-June 18, 1948. Catalogue One painting.
- 189. New Paintings to Know and Buy, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, May 25-July 11, 1948. Catalogue One painting.
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- 191. 24th Biennale Venezia, Venice, June 6-September 15, 1948. Catalogue Three paintings.
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- 207. Black or White, Kootz Gallery, New York, February 28-March 20, 1950.
 Catalogue with text by Robert Motherwell. One painting.
- 208. Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Watercolors, and Drawings, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, April 1-May 28, 1950. Catalogue One watercolor.
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- 234. Current Trends in British and American Painting, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York, December 3-31, 1950. Four paintings. Bulletin, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York, December 1950.
- 235. Seventeen Modern American Painters, Frank Perls Gallery, Beverly Hills, California, January 12-February 7, 1951.
 Catalogue with preface by Robert Motherwell.
- 236. One Hundred and Forty-Sixth Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture, The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, January 21-February 25, 1951. Catalogue with foreword by Joseph T. Fraser, Jr. One painting.
- 237. Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. January 23-March 25, 1951.
 Catalogue with text by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie. One
- painting. Illustration.

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 1951.
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- 240. 1951 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Watercolors, and Drawings, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 17-May 6, 1951. Catalogue One watercolor.
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- 242. The Intimate Media, Kootz Gallery, New York, May 8-June 2, 1951. Announcement.
- 243. New York Private Collections, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Summer 1951. Checklist One painting.
- 244. Resumé of the 1950-51 Season, Kootz Gallery, New York, June 4-29, 1951. Catalogue Three paintings. Illustration.
- 245. 40 American Painters, 1940-1950, The University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, July 4-August 30, 1951. Catalogue Two paintings, two illustrations.
- 246. Summer Souvenirs, Kootz Gallery, New York, September 10-29, 1951. Catalogue.

- 247. II Bienal de Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, October-December 1951. Catalogue Two paintings.
- 248. 1951 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 8, 1951-January 6, 1952.
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- 258. CHANIN, A. L. "The World of Art: Art Styles Clash and Clang in Show of 'Fifteen Americans'," The Compass, New York, April 13, 1952.
- 259. FITZSIMMONS, JAMES. "Fifteen More Questions Posed at the Modern Museum". Art Digest, New York, vol. 26, no. 15, May 1, 1952, p. 11. Illustration.
- 260. PEARSON, RALPH M. "Merit at the Modern", Art Digest, New York, vol. 26, no. 15, May 1, 1952, p. 25.
- 261. COATES, ROBERT M. "The Art Galleries: Seventeen Men". The New Yorker, New York, vol. 28, no. 11. May 3, 1952, p. 97.
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- 263. The 1952 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, October 16-December 14, 1952.
 Catalogue with foreword by Gordon Washburn. One painting.
- 264. 1952 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 6. 1952-January 4, 1953. Catalogue One painting.
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 Announcement.
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- 267. Exhibition Gottlieb, Motherwell, Baziotes, Hojmann, The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, January 14-February 3, 1953. Catalogue Eight paintings.

- 268. Modern Painting—Ways and Means, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, January 25-February 15, 1953. Catalogue Illustration.
- 269. Four Abstract Expressionists, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, February 15-March 15, 1953.

 Announcement.
- 270. Art in America, 20th Century, The Fine Arts Committee of the Great Neck Education Association, John Wanamakers, Great Neck, New York, March 1-14, 1953. Catalogue with foreword by A. L. Chanin. One painting.
- 270. Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, University of Illinois, Urbana. March 1-April 12, 1953. Catalogue with introduction by Rexford Newcomb and essay by Allen S. Weller. Illustration.
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- 273. 1953 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 15-December 6, 1953. Catalogue One painting. Illustration.
- 274. Group Show, Kootz Gallery, New York, December 1953.
- 275. Il Bienal de Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, December 13, 1953-February 1954. Catalogue Five paintings.
- 276. Third Annual Exhibition, Stable Gallery, New York, February 1954.
- 277. 1954 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Watercolors and Drawings, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 17-April 18, 1954.
- 278. Younger American Painters, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. May 12-July 25, 1954. Catalogue One painting. Illustration.
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- 280. Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, University of Illinois, Urbana, February 27-April 3, 1955. Catalogue One painting. Illustration.
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- 283. Group Show, Kootz Gallery, May 7-June 2, 1955.
- 284. The New Decade, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 11-August 7, 1955. Circulated to San Francisco Museum of Art, University of California at Los Angeles, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, City Art Museum of St. Louis.

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- 285. 55 Americans 55, Milwaukee Art Institute, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 9-October 23, 1955.

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- 286. The 1955 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, October 13-December 18, 1955. Catalogue One painting.
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- 288. Recent Acquisitions. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 30, 1955-February 22, 1956. Annotated checklist One painting.
- 289. Modern Art in the United States, Tate Gallery, London, January 5-February 12. 1956. From the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Catalogue Three paintings.

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- 293. The Magical Worlds of Redon, Klee, Baziotes. Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, January 24-February 17, 1957.
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- Incantations, Kootz Gallery, New York. February 4-March 2, 1957.
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- 321. A Century of American Art 1864-1964, organized by the Fine Art Committee of Long Island Arts Center, Adelphi University, Garden City, Long Island, New York, July 11-26, 1964.

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