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Abstract Expressionism as Self-Discovery: An Analysis of the
External and Internal Factors Involved in the Artist's
Performance through Jackson Pollock's Artworks.

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this dissertation is to analyze Jackson Pollock's artworks on the culmination of his career as a painter. The analysis is made on the basis of the external and internal factors involved within the artist's performance. Jackson Pollock is one of the most important pillars of Abstract Expressionism. This pictorial movement lays its foundations on the artists' need of self-expression and self-discovery as it was the previous concern of Romanticism. Abstract Expressionism emerged in the United States as a response to the end of World War II and spread worldwide during the Cold War.

Keywords: Abstract Expressionism, Jackson Pollock, painting, dripping technique, artist's performance.

El principal objetivo de este trabajo es analizar la obra de Jackson Pollock en su etapa culmen a través de los factores externos e internos que repercuten sobre la técnica del artista. Jackson Pollock es un pilar fundamental dentro del Expresionismo Abstracto. Este movimiento surge de la necesidad de expresión y autodescubrimiento del artista que retoma en sus obras la parte emotiva de un movimiento anterior, el Romanticismo. El Expresionismo Abstracto surgió en Estados Unidos como respuesta a las consecuencias de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y se extendió al resto de mundo durante la Guerra Fría.

Palabras clave: Expresionismo Abstracto, Jackson Pollock, pintura, técnica *dripping*, acción del artista.

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INTRODUCTION

When one thinks about art, it is not abstract art that comes to mind but mainly figurative art. However, the 20th century meant a radical shift in painting with the advent of the Avant-gardes. Almost one century later, I want to recall Abstract Expressionism as an attempt to introduce readers to this cataclysm that modern is art. Several names come to mind when thinking about Abstract Expressionist artists or other particular figures that had a determinant role in the development of this pictorial movement. It is important to note that to understand Abstract Expressionism; people must transcend the conventional rational approach to art and try to empathize with the artists' emotions and context of creation. In the following pages my objectives are first to sketch an overview focusing on the historical, cultural and political framework of Abstract Expressionism and analyzing theoretical and critical data of these fields. Then, I want to discuss the essentials of Abstract Expressionism and finally, go on with the analysis of Jackson Pollock's works of art. Jackson Pollock was the pioneer and one of the most remarkable Abstract Expressionist artists and he perfectly conveys the ideals of this movement. However, even though he had a very intense and motley career I will focus on a few of his works from the end of 1940s and from the very beginning of the 1950s.

Many scholars and art critics have theorized about Abstract Expressionism. Some of them approached this movement from the external to the artist scene through different perspectives. In the case of Andy Morris, for example, in "The Cultural Geographies of Abstract Expressionism: Painters, Critics, Dealers and the Production on an Atlantic Art" he discussed the emergence of Abstract Expressionism as a result of the economic support by the government and his development as a consequence of the historical juncture between Europe and the United States after World War II. Others associate the development of Abstract Expressionism with political interests regarding the promotion of the US as a free nation during the Cold War (Cockcroft 125). However, other critics would also approach Abstract Expressionism through means of the internal factors, i.e., the artist's desire of a radical change by the creation of a new artistic approach whose final aim is self-expression when letting their instincts act by themselves. Irving Sandler is the best example of the type

of approach to which I am referring. He contemplates the individuality of emotions, the importance of instincts or even the necessity of causing an emotional response in the onlooker (1996: 60-62). My dissertation aims to blend both the analysis of external factors as well as of internal elements as encompasses both the individual's need of expression and the society's need of control.

Therefore, the main aim of this project is to interrelate the internal and external factors involved within Jackson Pollock's career through the analysis of five of his works of art. For that purpose, the dissertation will be divided into two main parts. The first part will be the most theoretical. I will attempt to illustrate the historical, cultural and political context of Abstract Expressionism as well as its main characteristics regarding the artist's performance. The second part will consist of a more analytical approach to Pollock's career aiming at its highest point, the 1940s and very beginning of the 1950s. Special attention will be paid to the role of emotions as the central element in my argument due to the possibility of comparing Pollock's performance when painting with that of the Romantics. The final aim of this project will be to provide a better understanding and appreciation of both Pollock's works of art in particular and of Abstract Expressionism in general, so that people may empathize with the artist's stimuli of creation and may experience an emotional response too.

In order to cope with the purpose of this project, the methodology of this work will be based on three different steps. In terms of contextualization of Abstract Expressionism, I want to illustrate the importance of studying the historical, cultural and political framework together to fully understand the roots, success and dissolution of Abstract Expressionism. Then, I will sketch an overview illustrating the interdependences among the Abstract Expressionist historical, cultural and political context. The second step will consist of finding out the essential characteristics of Abstract Expressionism so the audience can take an active role when approaching this kind of art. Even though relationships with other critical texts will be also traced, through this section I will focus on Harold Rosenberg's 1952 essay "The American Action Painters" and Irving Sandler's *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (1996). Finally, within the third step I will analyze the evolution of Pollock's paintings on the basis of both the external and internal

factors involved within the artist's performance. The paintings I will analyze are: *Mural* (1943), *Alchemy* (1947), *One: Number 31, 1950* (1950), *Blue Poles: Number 11* (1952) and *Portrait and a Dream* (1953). This analysis will consist of four different stages: identification of the work of art, justification of Pollock's style, technical explanation of the composition and relation with other works of art.

In short, this dissertation is mainly based on an analytical approach towards Abstract Expressionism by means of Pollock's paintings in which all the previous aspects will be deeply explained along the paper and the results achieved will be collected and summarized in the conclusion.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

In this section, I want to explain the importance of studying the historical, cultural and political framework together to fully understand the roots of Abstract Expressionism, its success and disintegration. To deal with it, I will rely on Eva Cockcroft's article (1974). She defends the importance of examining the specifics of patronage and the ideological needs of the United States to fully comprehend the reason why the success of Abstract Expressionism is directly connected with a set of historical circumstances (1974:125). Therefore, my intention here is to explore the external historical, cultural and political factors that concern Abstract Expressionism and to demonstrate their interdependence.

1.1. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Although Abstract Expressionism must be considered as an artefact of the history of the United States in the aftermath of the Second World War (1939-1945), I will first go through the interwar period, i.e. the 1930s. As several historians and art critics such as David Anfam have demonstrated, in this period prior to the Second World War, the world had already suffered from several historical disasters such as the consequences of World War I (1914-1918) or to cite an instance from the US, the Great Depression which implied a deep sense of distress due to economical reasons. However, neither did they expect that their situation would worsen when World War II broke out, nor even that the traces of war would be so significant. In fact, in regards to Abstract Expressionism, "it was not politics that presented artists with overwhelming experiences but the real war, the Second World War" (Polcari 177). Therefore, World War II was the main assembler of an epic change simultaneously linked to the birth of Abstract Expressionism by 1945 when the war ended. The United States and the Soviet Union broke their alliance as they took different political roads that transformed them into superpowers. The world was divided into two main fronts: the democratic front led by the United States and the communist front led by the Soviet Union (Sandler 2008: 65). This extreme situation at the very beginning of the 1950s

would continue during the Cold War (1947-1991). For years, both the US and the Soviet Union fought to institute their governance model internationally. Although as Irving Sandler claimed the issue of election was simply of dualistic nature: either American Democracy or Communist Totalitarianism (2008: 65). In regards to the field of painting, most Abstract Expressionists would support the American's policy. "In contrast to their Russian counterparts, who were forced to paint in a clichéd Socialist Realist style" (Sandler 2008: 66), they were allowed to paint what they pleased freely. Unfortunately, this was only in theory, since as Sandler explained "the widespread fear of Communism generated an atmosphere of cultural repression" (65) in practice, as it will be explained later when approaching the political framework.

1.2. CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

Conceivably, the cultural scene is the most important pillar when elucidating the remarkability of Abstract Expressionism in the United States first, and then in the rest of the world. Thus, this section illustrates chronologically the cultural aspects that triggered the appearance, success and dissolution of Abstract Expressionism in the US and its interrelation with the historical and political scenes. It was after the Great Depression that most of the Abstract Expressionists' careers came into existence thanks to the Federal Art Project (Sandler 1986: 33-34). However, when recalling the 1930s and considering the field of painting, the artistic movement that prevailed was Regionalism, a realistic style depicting American rural scenes. Even though they departed, culturally, from an artistic style totally opposed to Abstract Expressionism, over time they would move towards a new direction. It was the time of intellectual experimentation in the United States. For instance, it was the time of the free jazz or the Beat Generation poetry and prose. Thus, artists' main objective was that of breaking with the traditional and conventional forms of art as the Avant-garde of the early twentieth century had already done in Europe. Moreover, that "Regionalist painting seemed too nostalgic and sentimental to suit an increasingly violent, urban, industrial and warlike era that was emerging with the 1940s" (Sylvester 397). Definitely, historical facts such as the World War II triggered this evolution from Regionalism to

Abstract Expressionism (Anfam 21). Another matter of special interest in regards to World War II was the immigration of European artists. The “Atlantic was considered as a network space of movement and connection” (Morris 421-422). The juncture between Europe and the US by the Atlantic has been approached as a source of influence among critics of Abstract Expressionism. They supported their theories on the fact that potential Abstract Expressionists headed the beginning of their careers towards the arts developed in European countries (Anfam 9), i.e., Avant-gardist art. As it was for instance the case of Abstract Expressionists such as Willem de Kooning or Mark Rothko. Therefore, the origins of Abstract Expressionist’s artists were not only a sample of artistic innovation that broke down with the tradition of the past, but also, they would simultaneously take their inspiration from what is labeled as an ‘universal art’ coming from Europe. A case in point took place in 1958, when The New American Painting exhibition arrived to Europe. Art critics indicated that despite being truly American, those paintings had been created on the basis of the European tradition (Sandler 2008: 72). However, people would not imagine that from those paintings it would arise one of the most important artistic movements of the twentieth century (Lewison 48) and what is more, that the US would take the leadership role of Paris as the world capital of art (Anfam 9). On the other hand, European cultural agents’ reaction was that of resistance and opposition. In spite of the devastations of the World War II, Parisians did not seem to be willing to accept New York as the new world artistic center (Lewison 51). This might shed some light upon the reason why the acknowledgement of Abstract Expressionism in Europe occurred long after and mainly by means of political mediations during the Cold War as will be illustrated in subsequent sections of this framework overview. Therefore, Abstract Expressionism would be defined as “a fresh, creative, and original movement that could show that the US was culturally up-to-date in competition with Paris” (Cockcroft 129). Abstract Expressionist artists’ situation shifted from hostility to exclusivity during the 1950s not only because they started to develop their own personal styles, but also because they had a great impact on the audience. In fact, it was around that moment when the most important Abstract Expressionist critics, –Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg– among others started to write articles about this new American art (Sandler 1986: 232-233).

Concerning theories or parameters, Abstract Expressionism is a very complex phenomenon since artists did not create any kind of manifesto. Everything we know nowadays is due to some artist's statements and the critics' own interpretations of the paintings. To cite an instance of that critical approach from the 1950s, I will focus on Harold Rosenberg's "The American Action Painters" (1952) and Clement Greenberg's "American-Type Painting" (1955). The former depicts the artist's performance as a representation of the artists' personal emotions in their individual quest for identity, while the latter is based on formalist ideas. Greenberg explained Abstract Expressionism in terms of stylistic issues that were over the subject matter. Nowadays, Abstract Expressionism "is seen as a continuous process with ruptures and changes since they differ from work to work, yet with consistency and coherence" (Polcari 175).

In regards to these cultural matters, the creation of new galleries and institutions had a great impact on Abstract Expressionism in terms of audience recognition. Gradually by the 1950s, museums became aware of the importance of Abstract Expressionism in the US. For instance, it was in 1952 that The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York included Abstract Expressionist paintings. Museums would be involved in the exhibition and collection not only of art of the past, but also of American contemporary art. Besides, it was also in 1952 that this museum inaugurated its International Program of Exhibitions introducing this artistic movement to Europe (Cockcroft 125). Other important galleries concerned with the promotion of Abstract Expressionism were those of Peggy Guggenheim – 'The Art of This Century Gallery' (1942)-, and Betty Parsons – 'The Betty Parsons Gallery' (1946), both considered by Susan Davidson as "the cradles of Abstract Expressionism" (84). Nevertheless, while some critics argue that these gallerists "must be recognized for their intuition and unwavering commitment when supporting [...] Abstract Expressionism" (Davidson 101). Others defend that "the links between cultural Cold War politics and the success of Abstract Expressionism are by no means coincidental" (Cockcroft 126). Indeed, the market of the main Abstract Expressionist painters showed a great activity by the 1950s (81). Eventually, as Ratcliff demonstrated, in the mid-1950s just after events and circumstances such as Pollock's death, Gorky's suicide, differences in the

level of commercial success, or the appearance of a new generation of Abstract Expressionists, there was a return to conception of art-as-an-object. This helped the rise of Pop Art. Therefore, from this cultural overview, it is possible to support Andy Morris' statement that says "art is the product of a network, and the elements that make up this network are: painters, critics, art dealers, governmental agencies and spaces such as galleries" (422).

1.3. POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

"There would not be a historical period in which art existed outside politics" (Sylvester 396), in this section I want to show the closeness of the relationship between the historical facts of the first half of the twentieth century in the United States and the current political issues. In this regard, I will illustrate the diversity of opinions within the US presidency which went from reluctance to disposition. The presidents of the period that I am discussing were Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945), Harry S. Truman (1945-1953) and Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961). Both Roosevelt and Truman belonged to the Democratic Party while Eisenhower was a Republican president. In that moment, Franklin D. Roosevelt had started with his presidency in 1933 and would have had to face a very critical period because of the Great Depression. Numerous bankruptcies and a very prominent unemployment rate made him take the decision of creating several projects grouped under the name of 'New Deal' (Anfam 71). In regards to the field of art, the unemployment rate was at 25% and to cut down this rate the Work Progress Administration (WPA) designed the Federal Art Project (FAP) that supported and promoted artists' works so they could live on what they made from their paintings (72). In contrast to Roosevelt, president Harry S. Truman (1945-1953) conceived Abstract Expressionism as "a Communist weapon that aimed to subvert the American way of life" (Sandler 2008: 66). Thus, the radical dualism between the Democracy and Communism transcended the limits of politics to influence the artistic sphere. As a response, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was created to control the cultural image of the United States in Europe. As concerns of this sense of distrust in Abstract Expressionism spread, senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1950-1956)

began a 'hunt' for those who might be sympathetic with Communism since it was believed that Communists were damaging proper 'American Art' (Sandler 2008). Fortunately, things turned around during the Cold War and during Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency. The US government chose to rely on Abstract Expressionist art. In other words, they approached Abstract Expressionism as a propagandistic tool for the governmental ideas as it concerns national identity. Thus, Eisenhower developed "a network of institutions and quasi-autonomous bodies that would form vital delegated roles in this European promotion" (Morris 427) of Abstract Expressionism. One of those institutions was the Central Intelligence Agency (1947). Its main goal was "to be showcased in the Cold War Europe as a vibrant, big and energetic country with values worthy of emulation" (Sylvester 393).

Abstract Expressionist politicization has been one of the most recurrent approaches to Abstract Expressionism by critics. In fact, they have developed several theories in regards to both the government and the artists themselves. The United States had emerged victorious and powerful from the war and artists were prepared to devote themselves to a new national art. All what they needed were galleries and museums promoting them (2008: 69). The government knew that "a museum can be a pivotal actor in high political moments of a country's diplomacy" (Sylvester 412). In this regard, Cockcroft highlights the leading role of the MoMA against Communist art. A clear example was MoMA's International Program which "sought to influence the foreign intellectual community and to present strong propaganda of the US as a 'free' society as opposed to the 'regimented' communist block" (129). However, she also wanted to state that this policy was viable due to the artists' depoliticization of art (132). Therefore, she depicted Abstract Expressionism as a government 'weapon' for their political interests. Conversely, on his writings, Irving Sandler considered that it was not a weapon of the Cold War since "it was only after American art had exhibited it at home and abroad that the State Department was willing to export it. They had not dare to before that" (2008: 72). In short, those who defended Abstract Expressionism development together with political interests claimed that it was a style that "average Americans did not like, and yet a style that has been termed

‘characteristically American’” (Sylvester 394), whereas others affirmed that it was a mere coincidence. Still, discrepancy among critics is also the case when considering the artists’ position. On the one hand, some critics believed that “the artist was identified as a free-floating activist, outside of any collective action group” (Jachec 20). In order to preserve freedom, artists must avoid supporting any political ideology (26). Alternatively, other critics defended that Abstract Expressionists who tried to separate their art from politics were, conversely, becoming a perfect political tool.

By exploring the historical, cultural and political framework of Abstract Expressionism, I have demonstrated that to understand this artistic phenomenon requires a very detailed research that goes beyond the limits of this project. However, it has been shown that Abstract Expressionism cannot be approached just considering the characteristics of its paintings but also the role of:

“critics, theorists, art publications, museums, the clandestine functions of the CIA, the need of artists, the convergence of all varieties of anti-Communism, the Cold War, the American sense of moral leadership and a new kind of American-born painting” (Sylvester 409)

In other words, Abstract Expressionism must be approached from its cultural, political and historical framework interdependences.

THE ESSENTIALS OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

As stated by Stephen Polcari, all these previous historical, cultural and political events such as the effects of the World War II, the Cold War, the conception of New York as the new artistic world center, the Federal Art Project, the International Project created by the MoMA or the emergence of new institutions regarding art like the USIA, belong to the ‘macro-historical’ perspective of Abstract Expressionism. However, he claims that it is also required to approach the ‘micro-historical’ sphere, i.e., the collection of individual experiences and modes of perception (178). Thus, to understand Abstract Expressionism, people must transcend rational issues and adopt an active role so that they may experience an emotional response and empathize with the artists’ stimuli when painting. In this section, I will contemplate the internal factors that concern Abstract Expressionism. It is my aim to find out the essential characteristics of Abstract Expressionism. To illustrate these ideas, I will be consistent with Harold Rosenberg’s 1952 essay “The American Action Painters” and Irving Sandler’s reading of Abstract Expressionism.

Abstract Expressionism, as any other artistic movement, is connected with the nature of human experiences. During the 1940s American artists would direct their attention to the European Avant-garde, basically Surrealism, as a way of expressing those emotions coming from the unconscious (Sandler 1996). Since, Avant-garde of the second half of the twentieth century was also a depoliticized art, Robert von Hallberg argues that artists were primarily interested in the expression of their feelings and emotions (16). This interest in the expression of the individual’s subjectivity relates them to Romanticism. Besides, critics believe that to fulfill that emotional impulse, these Avant-garde artists concentrate on the performance. At the same time, they broke with traditional conventions in art inviting their audiences to speculate about the meaning of their works of art rather than providing them with a stable meaning. Indeed, Abstract Expressionism did not start out a complete vacuum. These artists adopted some principles from the European Avant-garde as, for example, its performative nature, which came to be its defining characteristic.

Other characteristics were, the artists' ambition to go against both the conventions and the necessity for a wide recognition, as well as the 'Romantic-fashion' or individualistic approach to art since Avant-gardists just empathize on the association between the artist's feelings and emotions and its 'artistic persona' (von Hallberg 28). Moreover, since Sandler described European Avant-gardes as an "intellectual, disciplinant, objective and conscious" movement and Abstract Expressionism as "emotional, intuitive, spontaneous, unconscious and subjective" (1996: 113), it is viable to support that a new pictorial movement had emerged in the US. Besides, Abstract Expressionism is not a stylistically unified movement, as Sandler's theory of the multiple discovery explains (1996: 30), but a very intuitive pictorial movement that lacks of an illustrative manifesto explaining any principle or dogma. It is my purpose to provide a personal classification of what I consider the Abstract Expressionist pillars. This analysis will be supported by art critics and Abstract Expressionists' writings. These essentials of Abstract Expressionism will enable the audience to take an active role when approaching this pictorial movement.

2.1. ARTIST'S WILL OF INNOVATION

The first essential comprehends the artists' will of innovation and experimentation triggered by a non-conformist attitude. As it was explained, in the mid twentieth century, artists were experiencing what Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell labeled the 'crisis of a man'. This meant that the human nature was being changed by the forces of the humankind itself, since the political, social and cultural situation was beyond their control. The result was a sense of alienation that was in command among the future Abstract Expressionists who did not sympathize with the dominant artistic trends of the 1930s, i.e., Regionalism and Social Realism. In their attempt to transcend the art of the past, the Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko claimed that "the pictures must have their own reality, they are not mimicking the visually perceptible world around us" (Rothko 2004). As they remained reluctant to follow previous conventions, they would concentrate on their own values rather than on preconceived dogmas. The artist Robert Motherwell once said, they felt the necessity of expressing their feelings directly to an audience as if the act of painting

consisted in a means of inner reflection (Sandler 1996: 27). Thus, Abstract Expressionists developed a new pictorial language that would enable them to communicate their emotions. As an instance of that innovative will was the fact of painting on a monumental scale using large canvases and conspicuous gestural brushstrokes.

2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONS

The second essential concerns the significant role of emotions when performing their works of art. The majority of Abstract Expressionists began their careers as figurative painters, as it was the case of Jackson Pollock who studied with Thomas Hart Benton, or Motherwell whose formative art was based on the tradition of Charles Baudelaire or Eugène Delacroix (Sandler 1996). Over time, Abstract Expressionists thought that by working on a figurative tradition, they were excluding the human condition. Thus, they would show their preference for a human, personal and subjective artistic nature that would enable them to renounce to any limits regarding the emotional content. As Rosenberg affirmed “American action painting has to do with self-creation or self-definition or self-transcendence” (28). The act of painting emerged from the artist’s need of a search for emotion. For instance, according to the art critics such as David Anfam and Rothko himself, his works were instigated by the feelings of frustration, resentment and aggression (Anfam 84). Abstract Expressionists thought that the only way to give meaning to their works was what Rosenberg labels as *rôle*, i.e., “the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were in a living situation” (Rosenberg 29). Therefore, their desire of expansion beyond the conventions of the past together with the need for an inner stability when painting by focusing on the individual action is what really connects Abstract Expressionists with the Romantics. From this essential derives the technique of automatism that was meant to follow the artist’s emotional impulse. By means of automatism, Abstract Expressionists would respond to the emotions triggered by the notions of beauty and existence. They shifted from the sensual perception of the object to the subjective impression of the artist.

2.3. FREEDOM OF IMAGINATION

The process of painting together with the technique of automatism I have mentioned are subordinated to the third essential, the role of imagination. As Motherwell argued in his “Theory of the Psychic Automatism”, “the starting point of any creative endeavor is to capture and support the imagination” (Terenzio 6). Besides, in “Painters’ Objects”, Motherwell recalls that to overcome a rational thought and to fulfill the expression of human nature, painters need to access their own experiences (Terenzio 22-27). However, this will be feasible only by letting the imagination run freely. In fact, some scholars explain that the imagination is likened to a process of unlearning that would permit the artists become properly themselves (Lewison 2017). On the contrary, as imagination involves no premeditated conception when painting, among Abstract Expressionists there was no consensus about if their works were finished or not. Painters such as Pollock or Motherwell did not seem to feel uneasy. While the former usually went back to his paintings to redress them, the latter considered that the fact of not being able to make an absolute work of art triggered the desire to keep going.

2.4. SUBJECTIVITY

By 1952 Harold Rosenberg had already claimed that “in the American vanguard the ‘words’ belong no to the art but to the individual artists. What they think in common is represented only by what they do separately” (25). Thus, the subjective nature of Abstract Expressionism will be considered as its fourth essential. In fact, it is my contention that the focus on the individual helps Abstract Expressionism not to be submitted to any dogmatic manifesto. Each painter felt the necessity to develop his own significant characteristics while performing in a work of art since those distinguishing features came from his own identity. For instance, Rothko decided to paint his fears and passions (Sandler 1996: 198). As Rosenberg claimed, it is to the individual that the alienated artists should speak rather than to a wide audience (Lewison 55). Since by means of subjectivity “a painting is an act

inseparable from the biography of the artist”, there must be no distinction between art and life (Rosenberg 27-28). For this reason, consistently with Rosenberg’s ideals I understand the notion of subjectivity as a crucial distinguishing feature of Abstract Expressionism which simultaneously relates this movement to Romanticism. In practice, Abstract Expressionists created their works of art from their intrasubjective nature and personal experiences coexisting within their inner self (Sandler 1996: 238). As a consequence, the result was an accurate image of the artist’s identity. As Motherwell perfectly summarizes in his essay “The Modern Painter’s World”, “the painter’s only options were to turn to himself and express his own personality” (Terenzio 10). In this regard, the act of painting became a way of liberation due to the freedom that the individual artist felt when painting. A very appropriate illustration is Jackson Pollock’s *all-over* paintings which depict the artist’s immersion within himself.

JACKSON POLLOCK'S ARTWORKS: A SELF-DISCOVERY

Evidences in previous sections have demonstrated that artists of the mid-twentieth century had to deal with a set of consequences deriving from a devastated political, historical and cultural framework and, consequently, from their interior feeling of uneasiness. The New York School or Abstract Expressionism emerged as a result of these external and internal factors by responding accordingly to the artists' needs. For this reason, in this last section, I will deal with the development of the main objective of this dissertation. This is an analysis of Jackson Pollock's paintings on the basis of both the external and internal factors involved within the artist's performance. However, despite Pollock's career being infused by a number of issues related to the cultural, political and historical background of the 1940s and 1950s, I consider focusing on his visceral engagement with emotions a matter of special interest. Thus, that will be the leading concern of my analysis and it will be supported by the illustration of the previously extracted essentials of Abstract Expressionism.

As regards Pollock's career, he integrated numerous techniques and influences from his American roots –Mexican murals–, his tutor Thomas Hart Benton –figurative art–, or from the European Avant-garde movement –Surrealism– due to his relationships with some European immigrant artists from 'The Club', to arrive at his unique means of expression which is essentially based on subjectivity. As Pollock, himself once said: "Painting is a self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is" (Jachec 2011: 148). Pollock felt the necessity of communicating his experiences and emotions on a universal level, for this reason, he set aside formalistic standards to develop his abstract imagination (Harrison 127). There is no artistic continuity among Pollock's works of art since as he knew experiences are in constant change. Therefore, I will also illustrate his necessity of a continuous renewal by the analysis of quite distinguishable paintings: *Mural* (1943), *Alchemy* (1947), *One: Number 31, 1950* (1950), *Blue Poles: Number 11* (1952) and *Portrait and a Dream* (1953). The analysis will consist of four different stages. Firstly, I will provide an identification of the painting addressing different aspects such as its context

of creation, its current location or its dimensions. Secondly, I will justify Pollock's unique style from what the audience can see on the canvas. This section is of special interest since I will look for the four essentials explained in the previous section – “The Essentials of Abstract Expressionism”. Then, I will deal with the composition of the painting and the techniques used during the act of creation as a way of supporting the style justification. Finally, I will relate the painting that is being analyzed with other famous works by Jackson Pollock.

3.1. *MURAL* (1943)

By 1943 the Federal Art Project developed by F. D. Roosevelt and focused on Regionalism was becoming insufficient because of the artists' desire of individual experimentation. Moreover, during the 1940s artists were living in a war-plagued world, and they felt the necessity of expressing their feelings and emotions triggered by their traumatic experiences. In this regard, the Second World War would assemble an epic change within the field of art. American art would be no longer centered on American scenes, but it would increasingly turn to abstraction. As Jackson Pollock claimed “it seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of any past culture” (Jachec 2011: 137). Besides, the 1940s would be the moment when the majority of the painters would take Europe as a source of influence, they would focus their attention on the European Avant-garde, and more specifically on Surrealism. Surrealist premises of an art based on the expression of the emotions originated in the unconscious impressed them. This was the case of Jackson Pollock whose early works were clearly influenced by Surrealism. Thus, by 1943 he was at that stage between figurative paintings and his significant drip canvases of the 1950s. Peggy Guggenheim, who had inaugurated her own gallery “Art of This Century” in 1942, commissioned him the task of painting a mural for the vestibule of her apartment. The result of that commitment was an oil on canvas titled *Mural*. It is Pollock's biggest canvas, its dimensions are of eight by twenty feet-long. Nowadays, it is located at the University of Iowa Museum of Art, since 1951 when Peggy Guggenheim decided to donate it.

As concerns the justification of Pollock's style, I will rely on the four essentials of Abstract Expressionism. Pollock's *Mural* perfectly illustrates his need of evolving towards a more individualistic and subjective kind of art during the 1940s. This will of innovation and experimentation was provoked by a sense of alienation since he would no longer sympathize with the dominant artistic trends of the 1930s, Regionalism and Social Realism. Pollock as well as other Abstract Expressionists considered that the human nature had changed as a consequence the forces of humankind itself. Then, the result was of an emanating sense of non-conformism which is reflected on this canvas by the loss of figurative forms. By the abstractions on this painting, Pollock is also making evidence of his necessity of transcending rational issues and of moving away from a figurative representation. From this moment onwards, he would concentrate on inspiration which was supposed to come from the process of painting as a result of the artist's stimuli by the canvas. These needs when painting would require innovative techniques too, mainly because of his desire of going against the conventions of the past. Secondly, in connection with the important role of emotions in Abstract Expressionism, *Mural* shows Pollock's gradual depoliticization of art. The artist felt himself unable to manage the current external situation so he turned to his own feelings and emotions. Abstract Expressionists' desire of going against the past conventions would lead him to represent the subjective impression that reality had on himself, instead of the way in which he perceived that reality. As Pollock himself argued in "My Home Is in Springs...", "the method of my painting is the natural growth out of a need, I want to express my feelings rather than to illustrate them" (Jachec 2011: 128). This idea was also supported by Rosenberg when he described Abstract Expressionism as an art focused on the artists' act or performance. "The canvas began to appear as an arena in which to act. What was on the canvas was not a picture but an event" (Rosenberg 25). Therefore, as he was concerned with the idea that figurative art was excluding human condition, he would prefer a personal and subjective approach to art. The following essential within Pollock's works of arts is the role of imagination which must be the starting point of any artistic creation. Influenced by Surrealism, Pollock may have considered that to access experiences which are within the unconscious, the artist must adopt a performative nature letting the imagination run freely laying aside premeditated

conceptions. It requires a previous process of unlearning in which the artist forgets about the previously learnt to access his 'inner world' and discover his true self. The collection of abstract forms in *Mural* demonstrates that Pollock's concerns to forget about previous conventions. This conception of revealing his own truths hidden within his unconscious mind matches with the fourth essential of Abstract Expressionism, its subjective nature. Pollock would paint trying to please himself so his process of painting would be defined as a self-discovery. Then, *Mural* was the first painting where he really discovered and pleased himself as painter. As Harold Rosenberg states on "The American Action Painters", "he wants to construct his own reality: he wanted the canvas to be a world" (Rosenberg 30), being that world (*Mural*) the true image of his identity. Therefore, in regards to the emotional content of this artwork, *Mural* could be defined as an emotional, intuitive, subjective, spontaneous and unconscious-based masterpiece, as I am going to argue in the following technical analysis.

The complexity of Pollock's transitional style from the representation of reality to the expression of the artist's feelings and emotions would be translated into abstract forms, monumental scales, simplicity and flatness. Besides, as Pollock himself explained, the new techniques used in his abstract paintings must respond to his necessity of "motion and energy made visible" (Jachec 2011: 30). From these premises, *Mural* can be described as a potential Abstract Expressionist painting since despite the introduction of new techniques, there are still some traces of his figurative past present within the composition. On the one hand, Pollock introduces what is known as the 'all-over painting' technique which consists of the regular distribution of paint over the whole canvas avoiding the presence of a clear focal point. While applying this technique, the artist is immersed within himself focusing just on the mere act of painting and eliciting the flow of emotions. He will also base his technique on the gesture of painting which is plenty of automatic movements. The artist is offering more of himself while recording his experiences on the canvas. The line will be no longer used by Pollock for delimitating figures. In fact, black lines in *Mural* seem to break down some of the still-present figurative elements. Now each line corresponds to an impulse. Besides, when using brushstrokes full of pigment, Pollock creates several cross-sections and different layers. Finally, as for the colors that prevail, it is possible to highlight

its plainness. By these new techniques used in *Mural*, Pollock concludes that “painting today certainly seems very vibrant, very alive, very exciting” (Jachec 2011: 139). On the other hand, there are still some traces deriving from his previous iconic paintings. For instance, the fact of performing on a big scale may be an influence taken from his mentor, Thomas Hart Benton. It also displays a still-present struggle of the artist trying to control the composition. The result is that of a sense of dynamism when focusing on the processional organization of the brushstrokes. Thus, *Mural* can be described as an artwork that is out of preciousness but maintaining some aspects of Pollock’s previous works.

After having been a figurative painter under the influence of Thomas Hart Benton, *Going West* (1934), Pollock realized that he was excluding the human nature. Then, the 1940s meant Pollock’s awakening to abstract art as a consequence of self-exploration. Some of the most representative works of that decade of transition are: *The Flame* (1938), *Birth* (1941) and *The She-Wolf* (1943).

3.2. ALCHEMY (1947)

Although the 1940s were coming to an end, Jackson Pollock was about to find his own personal style that would lead him to the height of his career at the beginning of the 1950s. In the meantime, 1947 would be a year of great importance since it would be the turning point within Pollock’s career. In terms of external matters, by 1947 World War II had been brought to a conclusion and had had as a result the division of the world into two main blocks. One was the Democratic side led by the United States whereas the other one was the Communist side led by the Soviet Union. This explains that the United States main concern at the beginning of the Cold War was to go against everything that may be considered communist. However, Pollock’s attitude was of total opposition. It seems that he felt the necessity of going against what was labeled as ‘Nationalism’ in art. I think that it is due to the fact that the situation was turning unsustainable as well as because he preferred an individual art that he would separate drastically his arts from politics. Pollock made the decision of going a step beyond and becoming a man of action, i.e., he founded his paintings on automatist movements. *Alchemy* is a very good illustration of this issue. This

work of art was painted in 1947 during his last years under the patronage of Peggy Guggenheim who had promoted and supported him during the whole decade (Harrison 78). For this reason, it is possible to find it nowadays on the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. It is an enamel and oil on canvas that belongs to the beginning of his drip period. Finally, the title was assigned by a Pollock's neighbor who sought to compare Pollock's work here with that of an alchemist. Because both were able to make something admirable from something raw (Harrison 78) as it will be explained.

As regards Jackson Pollock's attitude by the end of the 1940s and to justify the creation of his own signature style, i.e., dripping, it is possible to compare him to the figure of the American hero (Sandler 126). The main aim of both was to look within themselves to find their authentic identity and express it following their instincts. Thus, I would define his 'dripping technique' as deliberate although not previously planned process that allows the artist to freely express his own emotions and whose result is no other than a collection of individual experiences. Pollock defined the technique and composition of *Alchemy* as the result of a method that would be later known as dripping or pouring, "this is a natural growth out of a need, and from a need the modern artist has found new ways of expressing" (Jachec 2011: 138). As seen in *Alchemy*, Pollock's stylistic evolution is directly linked with the first essential, the artist's desire of innovation. His main concern in this painting was coming into being by creating a new pictorial language and reacting against rationality. As Pollock claimed, "the modern artist is working with space and time, and expressing his feelings rather than illustrating it" (Jachec 2011: 138). Therefore, from 1947, Pollock's paintings were not properly a picture but an event (Rosenberg 25), since they expressed Pollock's own experiences while painting as a product of chance and automatism. In other words, when painting using his dripping technique, Pollock was demonstrating his own existence. Then, as regards the expression of emotions or the second essential, Pollock's new style consisted in looking into his inside world and using it as the main subject of his paintings. "The thing that interest me is that today painters do not have to go to the subject matter outside themselves. They work from within" Pollock affirmed (Jachec 2011: 137). He accessed his own experiences from his unconsciousness and by following his inner impulses he would design the content of his painting. Thus, by means of the dripping

technique seen as the result of an action painting, he could externalize those feelings that could not be expressed verbally. There were no limits regarding the expression of emotional content. As for essentiality of the role of imagination, Pollock's dripping was extremely liberating. Although *Alchemy* may seem chaotic due to the lack of preconceived ideas, I consider that it must be like this since the representation of his inner world is farther from reality than chaos itself. Then, when dripping, the role of subjectivity is the Abstract Expressionist essential that prevails. Dripping was an individual achievement triggered by the need of the artist's inner stability. The main aim of this innovative technique was to find a material representation of his thoughts and feelings by turning to himself. Therefore, *Alchemy* may be defined as the result of several explosions of feelings coming from the artist's experiences and freely displayed over the canvas. Eventually, that would be translated into lines, shapes and colors.

These "new ways" Pollock mentioned when he theorized on the dripping technique stand on two main premises: the lack of previous antecedents and the total implication in the painting process. In this regard, laying the canvas on the floor rather on an easel so he could use his entire body when painting, Pollock would perform the act of painting. He wanted to express his feelings not simply illustrate them and painting on these big canvases on the floor helped him manage that by making from painting a performance. This is better illustrated on short film "Pollock Painting" by Hans Namuth. Then, *Alchemy* is an example of his drip paintings of the late 1940s. It was painted horizontally and by dripping, splashing and splattering oil and industrial paint all-over the canvas he created a very complex thickness of lines with no clear focal point. These lines, if examined up close, show evidence of both a set of deep layers and pronounced angles. The implications of these spontaneous painterly masses are those of opposite rhythms and sensations. In other words, Pollock combined both light (yellow, red, white, etc.) and dark (blue, black, etc.) pure colors, as well as thick or thin curved, vertical and horizontal lines. Thus, I will define *Alchemy* here as the result of a very intense process that enabled Pollock to express his emotions just by focusing on the mere act of painting.

By 1947, Jackson Pollock had already laid the foundations of his own style. This successful turning point is supported by a wide collection of paintings created during that

year, such as: *Lucifer*, *Full Fathom Five*, *Watery Paths*, *Sea Change*, etc. By means of dripping, he would evolve to an even more direct, improvised and abstract painting on a big scale at the beginning of the 1950s.

3.3. ONE: NUMBER 31, 1950 (1950)

The beginning of the 1950s was flourishing within the field of art and more specifically when analyzing Jackson Pollock's career. From an external approach, the United States were becoming a worldwide superpower. Their consolidation as the Democratic front had reinforced their image of a model nation since the development of Abstract Expressionism. The fact of having free painters painting what they pleased would allow the government to take advantage of it. The US would turn into an artistic magnet taking the role of Paris as the world capital of art. However, out of these political concerns, Jackson Pollock, supported by his own drip technique, would focus on an autobiographical kind of art when facing reality. "Abstract art to me is nothing more than the expression of contemporary aims of the age we are living in" (Jachec 2011: 137). In fact, it was by the 1950s that his style would turn from hostility to exclusivity reaching the height point of his professional career. One of those pivotal works was *One: Number 31, 1950*, an oil and enamel on canvas which is one of his biggest artworks (eight by seventeen feet-long). Nowadays it belongs to the MoMA's collection in New York.

In order to approach Pollock's style in *One: Number 31, 1950*, I will focus on the existent relationship between the canvas and the artist, being the canvas the main artist's incitement to paint. As regards the four essentials, Pollock's will of innovation was compared to craftsmanship by Jachec (2011: 133). This may be explained by Pollock's habit of laying the canvas on the floor so he could offer more of himself to the painting as recording in the canvas each of his movements. By doing this, he is emphasizing just on the act of painting itself as the unique way of feeling release. It seems that each gesture and consequently each line stands for the response of an emotion. This proves the second essential. Besides, if we focus our attention on the fact that he was constantly moving himself around the canvas, we realize that Pollock took part of that painting not only

mentally but also physically. Then, the third essential dealing with the role of imagination in this painting can be compared to a kind of improvised or unconscious process. I think that Pollock here performs the role of a channel through which his emotions and feelings flowed to end on the canvas. It is as if he had a thought occupying his whole mind and he could liberate himself from it by means of performing from the unconscious. Because as he said once in 1950, "I hope I am communicating my emotion and my feeling about the world" (Jachec 2011: 138). Therefore, it is the artist's subjectivity that implies the connection between the canvas and the artist himself. This fourth essential illustrates how Pollock's internal needs guided him over the canvas while painting *One: Number 31, 1950*. Finally, as it is based on the artist's intuition and energetic movements, this work of art can be labeled as a spontaneous event rather than artificial process as it was conventional.

Pollock's dripping technique as well as Pollock himself had evolved by the 1950s. For this reason, when looking at the composition of *One: Number 31, 1950*, it is possible to recognize most of the movements performed by the artist during the process of painting. There is not only a deep structure covered with thousands of lines more or less alike, but it is also an illustration of Pollock's dramatic, energetic and passionate action. To support the first essential, there is not any hint of representation, just pure abstraction, which is illustrated by a wide variety of forms, textures, densities and rhythms. Firstly, several forms are reproduced by a dense web of fragile and delicate lines, puddles and spats of paint spread all-over the canvas. Then, textures are reached by means of mixing several kinds of paints, i.e., enamel, oil or even industrial paint, while densities are made visible thanks to the combination of different colors. In this case, somber colors such as white, blue, grey, brown or black among many others. All these elements are part of the technique Pollock used to create emotion in his paintings. Finally, the unconscious disposition of the lines conveys rhythm to the canvas. Therefore, *One: Number 31, 1950* is one of the most famous and complex surfaces painted at the very beginning of the 1950s.

Jackson Pollock's value of the new is illustrated not only in this painting but also in many others dating from 1950. This is for instance the case of paintings such as: *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30*, *Number 18*, *Number 32* or *Number 28*, among many others. The fact of using numbers in his titles is due to Pollock's interest on the pure act of painting and his

reaction against previous conventionalisms. Numbers deleted any trace of representation and emphasized the abstract nature of the paintings.

3.4. *BLUE POLES: NUMBER 11 (1952)*

As it has been explained in previous sections of this project, Abstract Expressionist cultural framework by 1952 is of special interest due to the leading role of museums. By the decade of 1950s, museums began to become aware of the importance of Abstract Expressionism in the US. For instance, it was in 1952 that The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York would start to include Abstract Expressionist paintings. Thus, Abstract Expressionist art had crossed the borders of being a matter of interest for gallery owners and painters themselves to arrive to a more select and peculiar community, museums. Its main mission was to promote not only the work of several Abstract Expressionists painters, but also to depict the US as a free country in opposition to the regimented Communist way of art. Pollock was one of those painters who would impress the European audiences because of his innovative technique. Although, by 1952 when working on *Blue Poles: Number 11*, Pollock's principles of painting on a monumental scale would be less and less recurrent, this is one of his supreme achievements. In fact, he was on an experimental stage within his career triggered by his necessity of expressing and depicting the anguish of his last days. Even though keeping his notion of painting beyond the aesthetics, he would introduce some unusual elements such as sand or little pieces of glass as it is the case of *Blue Poles: Number 11*. This work of art of 1952, as his previous works, was painted in a monumental scale and applying his already famous dripping technique. It is possible to appreciate a combination of oil, enamel and aluminum paint on the canvas. Nowadays, it is located at the National Gallery of Australia.

As a way of justifying the style of Pollock's *Blue Poles: Number 11*, I will focus my attention on the notion of the artist's absolute freedom during the process of creation. Besides, this idea of freedom is also connected with the previously commented idea of the image of the US as a nation, since it is inscribed in the *Declaration of Independence*. Thus,

when looking at this artwork, to state that it is plagued of free movements by the artist is a viable option. This might be due to Pollock's emphasis on his own values when painting and to his non-conformist attitude towards conventionalisms as it was explained on the first essential. Rosenberg would claim that during the 1930s, painters paint society, Regionalism. Then, by the 1940s, they painted art, European Avant-garde (Cubism). Finally, by the 1950s, painters just focused on the act of painting as a gesture of liberation (30). In this regard, I will define *Blues Poles: Number 11* simply as a work of art that Pollock just let to come out. It is only after the process of painting that Pollock seems to perceive what has being developed. It was about the way he got there and not about how he approached the result. This is probably the reason why Pollock stated that "when I'm in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about" (Jachec 2011: 127). Thus, by this freedom of movements he supports both the second and the fourth essential since Pollock was able to freely express his emotions of frustration and resentment which I consider that prevail in this painting as an expression of his introspective subjectivity. Another result when considering painting as a way of liberation is directly connected with the third essential, i.e., the process of unlearning by which he eliminates every convention as well as the barriers between the painting and the artist. The result will be an experimental and formally complex painting standing for a moral reconstruction as it is the case of *Blue Poles: Number 11*.

In general terms, *Blue Poles: Number 11* is an all-over composition resulting from Pollock's dripping technique. Besides, as it was Pollock's regulation, this canvas was painted horizontally. This is demonstrated by some pools, i.e., a group of lines emerging from large masses of paint, made mainly of black and yellow and spread all-over the whole composition. Thus, the sense of depth caused by the network of lines and the combination of colors are key points within this work of art since they seem to infuse Pollock's emotions. On the one hand, lines made of dripped paint are a clear illustration of Pollock's free movements because of its linear and curvy shapes from both a short and a long distance. As it was evidenced by Pollock himself in this quotation: "If I do not touch the surface I'm able to be more free" (Jachec 2011: 129). On the other hand, the energetic and vibrant colors used by Pollock in this work illustrate a collection of strands on black,

orange, light grey, yellow and white. This combination of colors creates a sense of depth as illustrated by several visible layers of paint. Nonetheless, *Blues Poles: Number 11* presents some peculiarities too. As revealed by the title of the composition, it seems that Pollock took some kind of poles to draw those dark-blue lines visible at the forefront. This was probably due to the introduction of new elements within his canvases by 1952. Eventually, I think that although those dark-blue lines may have been considered as a focal point, Pollock's combination of striking colors all-over the composition renders an overwhelming but well-adjusted finale.

Although Pollock's free will is present during his whole career as a drip painter, i.e., in the 1950s, it is in 1952 that he reached the climax. *Convergence: Number 10, 1952* is another example of it. However, I think that in *Blue Poles: Number 11* Pollock is going a step beyond introducing new techniques –the poles– and other unusual elements as explained above. It is also possible to think about the possibility of returning to a more dynamic style in regards to the repeated vertical lines. If so, it would be possible to compare it to his 1947 artwork *Mural*.

3. 5. PORTRAIT AND A DREAM (1953)

The United States were at the beginning of the Cold War in 1953 when there was a change within the political framework, D. D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) became the president of the US. This was of great importance regarding the field of art, i.e., Abstract Expressionism, since the main concern of the US was to defend their identity as a free nation by the promotion of this kind of art in Europe. To commit to this idea, some important institutions like the CIA would make Abstract Expressionism a propagandistic tool. Therefore, Abstract Expressionism was exalted and represented as the triumph of a free culture by means of conferences, exhibitions or even by publishing in important magazines of the time. Paradoxically or not, it would also be by 1953 that Jackson Pollock would take an unexpected turn regarding his own style by going back to a more figurative art. His work of art *Portrait and a Dream* is an example from 1953 when Pollock was living a critical moment due to his alcoholism. Besides, during these years of decline, he moved back to oil

on canvas as well as to a more dimensional-limited scale. *Portrait and a Dream* belongs to his black paintings and nowadays is at the Dallas Museum of Art.

In regards to the stylistic analysis of *Portrait and a Dream* by Jackson Pollock, the most revealing approach is that of the artist and the work of art being a single unit. Indeed, this is the message implied by the title of the painting. It seems to me that Pollock's will of innovation and experimentation together with what is explained in the first essential is still alive when comparing *Portrait and a Dream* with his previous works. Pollock has clearly turned to a new kind of drawing, although *Portrait and a Dream* still remains on the basis of total liberty and the expression of emotions, i.e., on the basis of subjectivity. Since, as explained in the second essential, abstract forms emerge from the necessity of expressing and communicating the mess inside the artist. I would define *Portrait and a Dream* as the result of an encounter between Pollock and those stimuli emanating from the canvas. Thus, his desire for self-examination may be a response to the traumatic experiences he was living through and it may trigger his quest for inner stability by means of painting, i.e., by the direct expression of his emotions. Nonetheless, it is my own conclusion that when approaching the essential of the role of imagination within this painting as a representation of his complex mind, Pollock may have considered that to move backwards to Surrealist premises was the best option. Both structures within the painting are samples of Pollock's subconscious flowing over the canvas. In fact, the portrait on the right may be quite faithfully comparative of a European Avant-garde painting. Furthermore, I assume that *Portrait and a Dream* is a portrait of Pollock himself. On the one hand, the abstractions in black on the left may be considered an attempt to represent his inner self while looking inwards as it was common in his paintings at the beginning of the 1950s. Whereas the portrait on the right may be considered as an external representation and it responds to an illustration of his Surrealist influence at the end of the 1940s. However, the fourth essential is present in both since they are based on Pollock's intuition and subjectivity. By painting *Portrait and a Dream*, Pollock wanted to close his stage as drip painter to open a new one on the basis of his 1940s paintings.

The technical aspects regarding this composition are supported by Jackson Pollock's value of the new. *Portrait and a Dream* is an innovative structure in two parts.

These parts may be connected in meaning because of the idea of an internal (left) and an external (right) portrait of himself, however, they are not formally connected. In terms of form, I think that he sought to represent here what he had been painting and what he was about to paint. Therefore, Pollock seemed to have abandoned his dripping technique with the intention of going back towards the thick brushstrokes. The structure on the left seems to have been created on the basis of automatism by some spiraling black lines although some traces of dripping are still present. Besides, it is also innovative and remarkable the fact of using one single color, black. In contrast with this semi-pouring technique used on the left, Pollock turns or evolves to a semi-figurative composition on the right. However, it is still Pollock's concern to disintegrate any human conception within his canvases. Thus, in this specific case, he used a palette of very rich colors such as red, yellow or black that move away from any faithful representation of reality.

By 1953, Pollock seemed to be exhausted of his dripping technique and together his innovative will, he would move away towards a different kind of art quite similar in appearance to the one of the late 1940s. Besides, as following with the comparison between Pollock's performance and that of the Romantics, I would compare this new stage to the gothic and dark side of Romanticism due to its black and mysterious elements. This idea is illustrated by other paintings from this year such as *Ocean Greyness*, *Greyed Rainbow*, *Four Opposites* or *Writing for Designers* among many others.

CONCLUSION

This last year dissertation provides an innovative approach towards Abstract Expressionism since its starting point differs from those of other art critics. From my readings, I noticed that when approaching Abstract Expressionism, they tend to focus just on the external factors involved or just on those factors concerning the artist individually. Thus, it has been my concern along this project to demonstrate that when approaching the artist's performance on a canvas both the external and internal spheres must coexist.

In the first section of this dissertation, the cultural, historical and political interdependences have been illustrated. Historical facts of the 1940s and 1950s such as the end of World War II or the beginning of the Cold War led to a cultural evolution in the United States where abstraction started to be considered as the universal language due to the influence of the European Avant-gardist artists' immigration. Similarly, historical facts such as the Cold War cannot be understood out of political ploys, i.e., out of the American and Soviet sense of political and moral leadership. These ploys would have a direct effect on the cultural development of the US. In fact, Abstract Expressionism understood as a cultural development would be considered by its presidents as an opportunity to make politics turning from reluctance during Truman's Democratic period to disposition during Eisenhower's presidency. Thus, in order to understand the context in which Abstract Expressionists worked in the mid-twentieth century the historical, political and cultural frameworks must be studied together.

In regards to the second theoretical part of the project and the internal factors involved within the artist's performance, four essentials have been drawn as the main pillars of Abstract Expressionist works of art. These four essentials are the artist's will of innovation, the leading role of emotions, the importance of letting the imagination run freely and the subjective nature of the composition. They cannot occur separately since, as it has been illustrated through Pollock's works of art, they are interrelated and form a single whole, the canvas. From these four essentials Abstract Expressionist paintings may be defined as the result of a pictorial process in which the artist and the work of art become a single unit, being this process triggered by the experiences of the individual. For Abstract

Expressionists, it did not matter how glorious the past traditions were, its sense of newness and experimentation manifests the lack of previous antecedents. In fact, this pictorial movement implied also a refinement within the viewer's mind. Abstract Expressionists paintings need active audiences willing to be immersed in the complexity of the artists' feelings and emotions. Finally, Abstract Expressionists' necessity of creating a new way of expression focusing on the emotions and feelings immersed within the individual proves its approximation to Romanticism.

In the last section of the dissertation, Jackson Pollock's artworks have been analyzed on the basis of the previous theoretical backgrounds, i.e., from both an external and internal point of view. However, from this analysis, it is possible to define Jackson Pollock as an artist who was constantly making himself since he was immersed on a sphere of continuous renewal. This individualism present in each of his paintings can be regarded as his main subject. For this reason, it is of extreme importance to state that any attempt of assigning meaning to each of Pollock's works –no matter the period– would not be more than mere speculations since Abstract Expressionist paintings do not provide any clue being so remote to make it readable. Finally, from Pollock's works we can appreciate how the artist recovers the Romantic ideas dealing with the expression of emotions triggered by the necessity of self-discovery.

In order to conclude with the dissertation, I will describe Abstract Expressionism as dual self-discovery. On the one hand, Abstract Expressionism not only implied the United States' discovery of a new way of expressing their national identity, but also the artists' inner self discovery due to an instinctive performance based on the impulse of emotions, at least it was the case of Jackson Pollock. Further research would be required in order to prove this affirmation when dealing with other famous Abstract Expressionists such as Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell or Willem De Kooning whose works and, consequently, their techniques considerably differ from those of Pollock.

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