

Making a splash

D-evolution? Art becomes pure visceral painting

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Meet the artists: Paul Jackson Pollock

Meet the subject: “Number 31, 1950”

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D-evolution? Art becomes pure visceral painting (continued)



Number 31, 1950

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Meet the artist:

Paul Jackson Pollock

Asked by a fellow painter, “Do you paint nature?” Jackson replied, “I am nature.”

Meet the subject:

“Number 31, 1950”

“Pollock’s finest paintings ... reveal that his all-over line does not give rise to positive or negative areas: we are not made to feel that one part of the canvas demands to be read as figure, whether abstract or representational, against another part of the canvas read as ground. There is not inside or outside to Pollock’s line or the space through which it moves. ... Pollock has managed to free line not only from its function of representing objects in the world, but also from its task of describing or bounding shapes or figures, whether abstract or representational, on the surface of the canvas.”

—Pepe Karmel, Assistant Curator, *MOMA Catalog*, page 132, **Jackson Pollock: interviews, articles, and reviews - edited by Pepe Karmel, 1999**

see: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_226_300198614.pdf



Number 31, 1950 shown at Museum of Modern Art

Making a splash

D-evolution? Art becomes pure visceral painting (continued)



Number 17A

Making a splash

D-evolution? Art becomes pure visceral painting (continued)

The Artist:

Paul Jackson Pollock (1912 –1956) was an American painter; he is included in the Abstract Expressionist movement. The movement was compelled by philosophical reactions to the horror and atrocities of the Second World War. His extreme form of abstraction divided art critics into two camps: “some praised the immediacy of the creation, while others derided the random effects.” In 2016, Pollock’s painting titled “*Number 17A*” was sold privately for \$200 million American dollars.

Feminists cite Lee Krasner, artist wife of Pollock, as the major influence on his art. Krasner’s studies in modern art gave her the understanding and knowledge to guide Pollock’s perceptions of what contemporary art should be. Pollock considered Krasner the one critic he would trust.

Pollock’s most famous paintings come from his “drip period” between 1947 and 1950. He was an instant art celebrity following *Life* magazine’s August 8, 1949 issue that asked, “Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?”

Pollock did move on to other styles, all non-figural. One style initiated after 1951 called, ‘black pourings.’ His last works began to use color again and included some figurative elements. During this period, the demand for his work from collectors was great. Pollock struggled with alcoholism for most of his life. It is thought that his response to the pressure from collectors and galleries, and some personal artistic frustration, caused his alcoholism to deepen. Pollock died at the age of 44 in an alcohol-related single-car accident while he was driving.

Curious fact:

Pollock pointed to Native American sand painting of the southwestern United States as one of his inspirations for painting on canvas spread across the ground or on a floor.

More info-bites:

- As a young man, he studied under Thomas Hart Benton, a well-known American artist.
- Pollock challenged the Western tradition of using easel and brush.
- Pollock instructed viewers to “*Look passively and try to receive what the painting has to offer and not bring a subject matter or preconceived idea of what [you] are to be looking for.*”

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How he did it:

Drip by drip

Pollock used household paints in the cans, or manipulated and thrown with stiff brushes, sticks, and basting syringes. Pollock's full body, active technique of pouring, throwing and dripping paint, has been pointed out as the origin of the term '*Action Painting*.' He has been described as 'dancing' around a floor-mounted painting as he dashed paint to the surface, often with fierce concentration, the actions lasting 30 minutes or more at a time. Some artists of the time absorbed and emulated Pollock's emphasis on the process of creation rather than on the product.

Want to learn more?

Read: SPOTLIGHT | JACKSON POLLOCK – “If It’s So Easy, Why Don’t You Try It,” By Steven McElroy, Dec. 3, 2010, New York Times

Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/05/nyregion/05spotli.html>

See more on Thomas Hart Benton, Pollock's mentor:

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/thomas-hart-benton>

Visit YouTube and watch:

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: JP - Paintings have a life of their own (4 minutes)

Link: <https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/jackson-pollock-paintings-have-a-life-of-their-own/>

Museum of Modern Art (MOMA, New York City) Curator narrative on Jackson Pollock (5 minutes)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG45EoRh3Fo>

Metropolitan Museum of Art: #MetKids—Can Artists Break the Rules? (3 minutes)

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/metkids/metkids-qanda/can-artists-break-the-rules-jackson-pollock-autumn-rhythm>