



Jack Tworok in his New York studio.
(Staff Photo by Debbie Forman)

Provincetown-New York artist celebrates his recent work in Guggenheim Museum show

Looking at art through eyes of Jack Tworok

By DEBBIE FORMAN
Capestyle Editor

NEW YORK — Although the serene quality of his abstract paintings speaks of an insular artist quietly pondering aesthetic questions, Jack Tworok is not an ivory-tower painter. He expresses a strong social consciousness and is not content with the present state of the arts because he sees the artist in today's society as alienated with little sense of pride in his country.

From the vantage point of an artist with a national reputation, Tworok, at 81, has had the first-hand experience to compare the climate for the arts today with the post-World War II period, which he describes as "euphoric."

It was during this time that the Abstract Expressionist movement, of which Tworok was a part, took center stage. Essentially an American movement, Abstract Expressionism won for this country a dominant position in the art world. The world art center moved from Paris to New York.

The Abstract Expressionist movement had all the energy and dynamism that characterized America in the post-war period. There was a feeling that "the world was getting better," Tworok says. "It looked as if there was going to be peace in the world."

"There was a moment after the last war when I really felt the democratization of the country was going through. I felt benefited by it and I thought it was good for the country, good for the people and that it set a good example for the world."

"It would be terrific if today there was this feeling on the part of intellectuals, of writers, of poets that there was something that they could serve and that they could be devoted to, and that this could unconsciously influence their art. But I don't see it. Instead, there's a kind of individualism, of not belonging, a sense of alienation where the artists are

alienated from the society in which they live."

Tworok sighs and then continues. "This is not a good condition for the arts. I think it would be better for the arts if the intellectuals, if the writers, if the artists, if the poets could feel a sense of pride in the country — to feel with it, instead of feeling antagonized."

"And I think, unconsciously, this is reflected in the arts — an art which is driven into itself, isolated, alienated, uncommunicative, on the one hand, and on the other hand, exploitive, just attention-getting, career-making."

Tworok seems removed from this struggle as he sits in his New York City apartment enjoying the warm sunlight entering through the open slats of venetian blinds. He is looking forward to a distinction only a few American artists achieve: an exhibit of his work opens April 6 at this city's prestigious showplace of modern art, the Guggenheim Museum.

Tworok is a short, compact man with a fringe of white hair that catches the morning light. He is framed by a veritable garden of plants that stand in front of the wall of windows. He is a quiet, modest man who speaks slowly, carefully considering his words. His speech has slight traces of his native Poland.

The New York Provincetown artist spends more than half the year in his Provincetown home, where he does most of his work. He likes to work during the day, and he has much better light in Provincetown than in his West 22nd Street New York apartment. Tworok built his Provincetown studio for the best light, and life is quieter there, the days longer, the weather more amenable. He says he has more social obligations in the city, but he still tries to paint every day. But, "if things intervene, they intervene," he adds matter-of-factly.

Tworok was born in Poland in 1900 and emigrated to this country in 1913. He grew up in New York City, attended Columbia College from 1920-23 and studied art in Provincetown from 1923-1925 and at the Art Students League in New York in 1925 and 1926.

He says it took him a long time "to become ambitious about art," and he had his work first shown in a group exhibit in 1928. In 1944, he had a one-man show at the Baltimore Museum of Art and in 1964, a show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. He was chairman of the art department at Yale University from 1963 to 1969 and in 1964, had a major retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. In the '70s, he had one-man exhibitions in museums and galleries in the United States and abroad. His work is in the major museums and his New York gallery is the Nancy Hoffman Gallery in Soho.

During the period of his association with the Abstract Expressionists, Tworok's painting had the free-styled gestural intensity characteristic of that movement. But in the mid-'60s, Tworok's work took a sharp departure from this style and became more structured, more refined. The Guggenheim show, which runs until June 20, will exhibit his work from the last 15 years and will present a different picture from the one displayed at the Whitney Museum's 1964 retrospective.

During the '60s, Tworok felt the need to introduce more form into his work. He began reacting to the lack of structure in Abstract Expressionism, to its "unreasonable, nihilistic attitude."

"I didn't want a painting that was so personal. I wanted a painting that had elements outside of myself. By introducing geometry, I introduced an element that was universal, that was not just part of myself."

In Tworok's New York studio he is working on a mural-sized painting. He works from small sketches and the process is long and arduous. What is there this day is just the begin-



Jack Tworok's "Romans IX," an oil on canvas 7 feet high, painted in 1981.

ning — wide vertical bands of pink, yellow and gray.

"In the end," he says, "the only way I can choose a form is if it seems to appeal to my eye." He struggles to find the right phrases. "The word that I've often used to describe what I'd call a good aesthetic is the word 'justness' — which means no unnecessary exaggeration, a rightness, a relationship... the way things relate themselves to a rectangle."

"If you're sensitive to that, it becomes a kind of standard of justness that you can apply to a piece of furniture, that you can apply to the way a house is decorated, or to what people wear or even to how people speak. Some people speak simply, directly, some people ornament their speech.

"The field of action, a thing can be just or it can be crazy — felt or not felt — realized or not realized."

He is very thoughtful now as he uncrosses his arms and places one hand along the side of his face. He seems a warm, gentle man, dressed comfortably in jeans and a brown and gray plaid shirt, white socks and slippers. When he turns his face to the right and looks up, at a certain angle, there is a suggestion of Picasso. He has been told he looks like Picasso but says he can't see the resemblance.

Beauty is the result of so many elements that go into a painting," he continues. "Strictly speaking, Cezanne didn't make beautiful paintings, he made true paintings. By comparison, other painters have made beautiful paintings but not true paintings."

"A true painting, like Cezanne's, stays with you a long time. So there's beauty, but it's a different kind of beauty. It's a beauty that comes out of the components, of the different things that go into a painting. It's not a thing you strive for in itself. Cezanne didn't try to make a beautiful painting. He tried to make what he thought was a true painting. He didn't mix a color because it was a beautiful color; he mixed a color because it was the right color. Beauty is not something you can aim for. It is the result of all sorts of things that happen in a painting."

"Ideally, the artist ought to work out of his own life, out of his own perceptions, out of his own feelings." But he adds, inevitably an artist will sometimes paint — often unconsciously — "under the pressure of the period in which he lives."

Tworok is quick to add that every artist hopes to attract attention, wants to sell his work and "needs a certain amount of feedback in order to stay an artist."

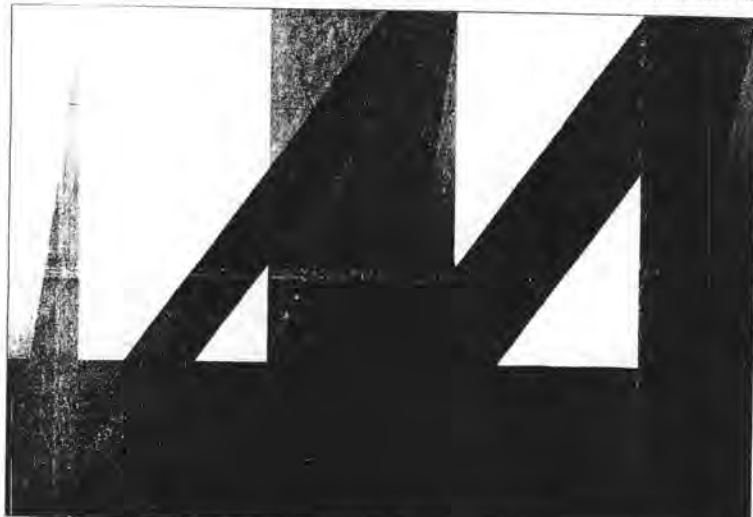
But, he says, if an artist gears his work only for the marketplace, then clearly, he's "selling out."

"And there's a great deal of that in art, a great deal of art which is purely attention-seizing, purely name-making."

"There is also that in art, very often, a deliberate effort to invent without any strong inner pressure except to invent. To me, that is the least important aspect of modern art, even though it sometimes leads to good things."

"It's very strange in art, a great deal of prestige is given to the originators of something. But sometimes what follows from them is more important than what the original impulse was."

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Tworok's 7-foot-long oil, "The Ens," was completed in 1980.

... Tworkov at Guggenheim

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Tworkov first came to Provincetown in 1923. In 1935 he stopped coming to the Cape tip because, "We thought it was ruined." He laughs robustly because he remembers how bucolic the town was then compared to today.

In 1954 he returned to Provincetown and in 1958 he and his wife Wally built a house in the West End. He says he's "very much distressed at the tourists in the summertime and the emphasis the town puts on tourism."

"Tourism is just creeping and eating up the town, and I think ultimately it

will ruin the town because already the town has a terrible reputation.

"When the town lived from its fishing industry, it was a more interesting town, a more genuine town," he says. "The fortunate thing is the national park which preserves the beaches and the woods around Provincetown. In a five-minute walk from where I am, I'm in the same Provincetown I've known all my life."

"The town is beautiful when you can see it."

Tworkov has been associated with the Fine Arts Work Center since its establishment in 1968. By 1960, he says, the artists'

community in Provincetown was disappearing. The center brought young artists back into the town and revived winter activity. He hopes that the center will eventually restore Provincetown as an artists' colony.

But, he adds hesitatingly, "Strangely enough, I don't think the town is as aware of the art center as it should be, although it probably brings more income in than any other organization. It isn't something the townspeople are interested in."

"I like what the Provincetown Art Association has been doing in the last few years under Annabelle Hebert (the director). She's done a fine job in promoting better shows. Still, the art association could do a lot more in bringing a much larger representation of art into the town — more important shows beyond local character — if they had the money."

"It would be wonderful if the museum could acquire an important collection of artists who had contact with Provincetown."

He bemoans the fact that the town shows so little interest in these art organizations, and says "the art association could do a great deal more if it had the resources."

Tworkov enjoys painting in Provincetown although he's not sure how much its environment influences his work. "I love the dunes when I walk," he says, but because he is not a realistic painter, he can't determine if the town has a direct effect on his painting.

"Conscious influences are not nearly as important as the unconscious ones," he says.

"As an abstract painter, you're continually involved in ideas that are quite aside from the things that you see. It's a kind of mental and emotional process that goes on that is quite regardless of what you see. So I can't really say whether the paintings I paint in Provincetown are any different from the paintings I paint in New York."

"A lot of the things I paint are evolving over a long period of time, quite regardless of where I was. I paint in my head almost as much as I paint in actuality. I can be in bed sometimes, and before I fall asleep, I literally go over in my mind just exactly how I mix the colors, how I approach the paint — which comes first, which comes second — so that, amazingly, sometimes I go over my painting in my head a hundred times before I even touch the canvas."

Explaining the geometry that structures his work, Tworkov says that it is an element traditional in art and that it sets a kind of limit for him.

But, he adds, instinct is still involved in the painting process "because after you make the grid, there's infinite choices. And very often you come upon things which you never, never would have come upon by sheer instinct, without the suggestions of the grid."

"The original grid from which you work is like the sea from which you fish, and what comes up is often almost by accident. So that it doesn't eliminate randomness; it doesn't eliminate choice. But it puts some kind of form on what you do."

Tworkov explains further by pointing to a reproduction of one of his paintings in a catalog. He says he picks out the shapes that the grid suggests, but which are limited by the diagonals that he draws within the grid. His feathered stroke softens the formality in his paintings, breathes a light into the canvas.

Looking back over recent art history, Tworkov considers Cubism as the foundation for abstract painting. Paul Cezanne has had an enormous influence on Tworkov and he admires Piet Mondrian, but doubts if he was influenced by his work. "Mondrian's paintings are like an icon for modern times, just as the religious paintings were an icon for the medieval period."

Although he has turned away from his Abstract Expressionist style, Tworkov does not deny the influence this movement had on his work.

"It was the only time in my life when I was a member of a group drawn together by aesthetic ideas, and at the same time we were also close friends."

Tworkov's work represents a range of abstract art from his early free-moving gestural work full of spontaneity and energy to his most recent style of controlled, structured and meditative painting. During the period of transition when he was introducing more formality into his work, he says, in order to search out form he reduced his paintings to a few elements as possible and limited the use of color.

His gray paintings helped him to clarify his direction. Then when he had more confidence in his new direction, he began introducing color, partly, he admits, because the public liked his more colorful work.

"There's a way of using color for its own sake, for its pleasure. I always tend to color for structure. I never went in for ingratiating color. I do not mean to say that color is not to be enjoyed. Whether I make color because it grows out of the need of the painting or whether I make color to attract the eye, to attract the spectator — those are two different things."

Tworkov voices a strong interest in politics and he is not happy about the current state of the art. "I think it's depressing," he says.

Comparing the present to the period after World War II, he says: "That America fought on the side of the Soviet Union and there was this possibility of coexistence between American democracy and socialism had a kind of euphoric effect on the people. And for the first time, many people who were left wing became comfortable with American democracy, even became patriotic. There was a certain amount of chauvinism connected with this. I look back with regret on the cold war because it really ended that period of hope."

He pauses. "Since the beginning of the Nixon administration, I think there's been a constant downgrade. I think the situation has become horrible. I'm scared as hell."

"Since Roosevelt, the main trend in America was

to establish some reforms that would be some kind of protection against the most exploitive elements in the country, to provide some protection for the poor and the wronged in this country. And Reagan is simply tearing it all down. And when he speaks of New Federalism, he reminds me of the country before the Civil War."

Tworkov has said that, "Every art, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a facet of the period in which it is produced, is influenced by the period, and therefore ultimately reflects the period."

He's not sure whether abstract art reflects contemporary times. "I think in the future people will see it much more clearly than we can see it now. I doubt very much if the Impressionist painters were at all aware of the fact that they were celebrating the triumph of the middle class."

Are any of Tworkov's political and social feelings reflected in his work?

"I wish they were. But I'm so bound in now by my work, it's hard for me to express social and political concerns in it. If this does exist then I'm not aware of it, as I'm sure the Impressionists weren't aware of the social comment in their work."

"I'm getting pretty old. It's difficult for me to change. If I could look forward to a long period of work, and if I could know how, if I could introduce social comment into my work without sacrificing what I believe as art, I would gladly do it."

He recently joined a group of artists who are collecting money to place an ad voicing their opposition to nuclear armament. He gets a lot of mail from "anti-administration organizations, and, whenever I can, I send small contributions to every one of them."

"But I can't very much express it (his social and political concerns) in my work unless I took to writing on my canvases, which is a possibility — it's something I've considered for a long time."

Exhibit revives Landseer's art

LONDON (AP) — Crowds of mourners lined the streets of London for the funeral of Sir Edwin Landseer, one of Queen Victoria's favorite artists, at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1873.

But after his death, the popularity he had enjoyed for his sentimental and sometimes noble paintings of animals waned.

One of his most famous works, "The Monarch of the Glen," showing a stag with mountains in the background, remains such a symbol of Victorian stolidity that entertainers still get laughs just by mentioning the title 131 years after it was painted.

Now, after decades of neglect and ridicule, the artist who died insane is being celebrated with a major exhibition at the Tate Gallery of 158 paintings and drawings that could herald a reappraisal.

But it was American admirers who launched the revival of the artist who designed the four bronze lions that lie at the foot of Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, one of London's most famous landmarks.

The exhibition was first seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art last October.

Richard Ormond, an English art historian who helped organize the Tate exhibition and wrote most of the catalog, said the Landseer revival had occurred first in the United States because "Americans are more outward looking and not so conservative. They're prepared to look at forgotten figures."

Joseph Rishel, curator of pre-1900 painting at the Philadelphia museum, in London for the exhibition, noted: "We got 75,000 visitors in 10 weeks, a very satisfying public response, a very good attendance."

He sees the resurrection of Landseer as "reconsideration of the wonderful riches of 19th-century painting, sculpture, decorative arts and photography. It's a historical phenomenon."

"We're at a distance great enough and with the perspective to enjoy these things. Landseer was extremely popular in his day and then his reputation declined. It takes an exhibition like this to see if we're right or wrong."

Landseer's engravings of his animal paintings sold in hundreds of thousands and these and aristocratic commissions made him rich.

Born in London in 1803, he fell in love with the Scottish highlands at 21 and painted them, their people and their animals romantically for the rest of his life. His interest in hunting looks morbid now.

Birds are brought down by guns and hawks and eagles, deer and stags are savaged by dogs, an otter is speared, an exhausted fox bares its fangs and prepares for hideous death. Blood dribbles on the grass and reddens the snow.

Landseer painted portraits of dogs, as lovingly as other artists painted children. Victoria loved his pictures and her great-granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II, has loaned 26 to the exhibition.

"Landseer has been described as a Victorian sentimentalist, the epitome of the popular artist seeling out to debased taste," Ormond said.

"But he belongs to the great tradition of European sporting art. He created stories to kindle emotion in the spectator. He had a wonderful technique and a violent visual imagination. He did have a morbid side — he was no oddity nor an eccentric, but a mainstream romantic painter."

Screening session planned

ORLEANS — A voluntary screening session for 3- and 4-year-old children with suspected special needs will be held from 10 a.m. to noon April 14 at Orleans Elementary School.

Special needs may include difficulties with speech and language, physical disability, motor disability, developmental lag, or other suspected problems.

This annual screening is in accordance with the Massachusetts special education law under the regulations of Chapter 766. Members of the screening team will include Sarah Jane Frantz, school counselor; Pamela Campbell, special needs teacher; Patricia Ashwell, physical education teacher; Ann Phillips, school nurse; Gail Decker, speech therapist.

There will be an orientation meeting at 10 a.m. April 7 at the school to review with interested parents the pertinent information related to the screening.

Further information may be obtained by contacting the school principal at 255-0380, or the director of special needs, at 349-6600. Parents may register for the screening by contacting Anne Galney, school secretary.