

Pollock's Venice Presence

Sixty-one years have passed since Jackson Pollock's work first appeared in Venice: featured in the XXVth (1950) Biennale and shown with Peggy Guggenheim's collection at the Museo Correr; yet his impact on contemporary artists is evident in the current show, which runs till November. Pollock "followed his canvases to Italy," wrote Time, wrongly, since he stayed at home in Springs; and it quoted the Italian critic Bruno Alfieri out of context, making his praise, "Chaos, Damn It!" seem blame, which provoked the distressed Pollock to tell his friend and East Hampton neighbor Jeffrey Potter, "It's not just me they're after, but taking me as a symbol sure works. What they want is to stop modern art."

Often struggling both financially and personally, Pollock could hardly imagine the respect his work would come to command, though after his death in 1956, his artist widow, Lee Krasner, did foresee and work for his international recognition still manifest in Venice.

As Pollock's dealer, Peggy Guggenheim gave him his fourth solo show at her New York gallery, Art of This Century, in early 1947, before closing it and moving to Venice. Although she donated to museums much of the work he gave her in return for financial support, a fine selection remains at the Venice museum she founded, now connected to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York. Housed in Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, an unfinished 18th-century Grand Canal mansion, her collection remains on view where she lived and where I, then a young graduate student in art history, went to interview

her about Pollock exactly 40 years ago.

Rather than reminisce about Pollock, she took me on a tour in her private gondola, one of the last in Venice; yet it was and remains thrilling to see the pictures she chose to keep, including "The Moon Woman" (1942), "Two" (1943-45), "Croaking Movement" (1946), "Eyes in the Heat" (1946), "Circumcision" (1946), "Enchanted Forest" (1947), and "Alchemy" (1947), along with her matchless collection of early modernist masterpieces from Picasso and Kandinsky to Surrealists like Miro, Dali, and Tanguy.

For me, Peggy's personal stamp makes seeing these works more compelling: the earrings that Tanguy painted for her and the fantastic headboard designed for her by Alexander Calder in 1945 — made of silver since other metals were in short supply during the war. The extravagance caught the attention of both Krasner and Pollock.

Guggenheim's arrival in Venice attracted interest from Italian artists, among the first a Venetian painter, Emilio Vedova (1919-2006), whose work she also purchased. Like Pollock, Vedova also participated in the 1950 Biennale, but being on the scene he could take immediate advantage of the international exposure. Vedova was quick to take cues from Pollock in making his own version of Abstract Expressionism, which can be seen at the newly opened Fondazione Vedova, in a space restored by Renzo Piano (architect also of the Morgan Library extension) in the Magazzino del Sale on the Zattere at Dorsoduro 46, walking distance from Guggenheim's museum.

Though European critics distinguish Vedova's work from Pollock's, both were affected by leftist politics and were moved by Picasso's "Guernica," the monumental black-and-white painting of 1937, depicting the Nazis' bombing of this Basque town on market day in April 1937 so as to spread terror during the Spanish Civil War. "Guernica," which Pollock, Krasner, and many others saw exhibited in New York in May 1939, gave its name to a manifesto that Vedova and other Italian artists co-signed in 1946 — "Beyond Guernica," proclaiming their intention to engage with reality without being naturalistic. But by 1952, Vedova joined with even more avant-garde artists and pursued non-figurative directions closer to Pollock's brand of Abstract Expressionism.

Vedova's current Venice show features an installation of large black-and-white gestural paintings stacked on the floor, leaning against one another, which bring to mind the black-and-white photographs of Pollock's studio by Hans Namuth.

Not far away from Vedova's site, a show called "Future Pass," in the Abbazia di San Gregorio, announces "over 100 artists, both Asian and non," curated from an Asian perspective. The organizers intended to feature "the viewing

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Relay

Louder Than Words Zach Zunis

As I was walking up to the stage at the Heritage Park Amphitheater in Simpsonville, S.C., a few weeks ago, the butterflies started to make some noise in my stomach due to what was about to happen. The singer I play with, Janiva Magness, and I were about to go on right before Buddy Guy and B.B. King — the two bluesmen who have had the greatest influence on my guitar playing since I was a kid.

The denim-covered "B.B. King Live at Cook County Jail" album was one of my very first records ever and Buddy Guy and Junior Wells's "It's My Life, Baby" continues to inspire me. I consider these two records the best urban blues records of all time.

The hot and humid South Carolina sun was shining down on the stage, making the sweat pour even more, as we wear suits for every show. As I introduced Janiva, I mentioned that the last time these two were onstage together, B.B. was presenting her with the B.B. King Entertain-

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Gail Levin, who has a house in Bridgehampton, is the author of "Lee Krasner: A Biography," which came out in March. She will give the annual Pollock-Krasner lecture, "Lee Krasner: The East Hampton Years," at Guild Hall on July 17 and speak on Krasner on Aug. 12 in the Fridays at Five series at the Hampton Library in Bridgehampton.



Peggy Guggenheim and Gail Levin in Venice in June 1971.

Guestwords

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habits of our digital age, especially our relationship to the computer screen.”

An analogy with Pollock’s drip paintings came to mind with a large canvas, “Han Yun,” by the artist Hong Ling, born in 1955 in Beijing, where he teaches oil painting in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He employs the technique of overlapping ink from Chinese painting and responds to nature and the landscape, the latter reminiscent of Pollock’s Accabonac Creek series. Hong Ling’s picture looks very flat, without much texture, as if he had silk-screened a Pollock drip painting from a reproduction found on the Internet. While he has flattened out the surface, the resemblance to Pollock’s drip painting is so strong that it reads as an obvious homage.

Pollock’s influence again surfaced at the Palazzo Contarini degli Scignini featuring “Venice in Venice,” a lively anthology of artists from the 1960s who worked and work in a district on the Westside of Los Angeles, called Venice. Charles Arnoldi’s sculpture “TV” from 1971 is minimal art, made of a few tree branches, yet its surface is covered with enamel paint in drips like Pollock’s. Arnoldi himself decided that he could become an artist only after viewing work by Pollock and de Kooning on a trip to New York during the 1960s, a chance encounter that prompted him to go to art school and ultimately resulted in this sly homage.

From Venice, I traveled north to Udine in the Friuli region. After viewing the local pride, Tiepolo paintings of the 18th century, I decided to visit the Galleria d’Arte Moderna, where I discovered a collection given by American

artists in solidarity after Udine suffered a devastating earthquake in 1976. Although the art was meant for sale to raise money for quake relief, the town decided that the art was too precious as a cultural heritage and kept it together for the museum. (Compare this to the politicians who want to sell off the Pollock mural that Peggy Guggenheim donated to the University of Iowa!) East Hampton is well represented with a fine canvas by Willem de Kooning as well as works by Elaine de Kooning, Ibram Lassaw, Tino Nivola, and Lee Krasner.

Krasner gave one of the drawings that she had made working from a life model in Hans Hofmann's school in 1939. In the mid-1970s when she made the donation, she was cutting up a number of these old drawings to collage on canvases featured in her 1977 New York show called "Eleven Ways to Use the Words to See." To my knowledge, this drawing, marked as "Collection Unknown" in the complete catalog of Krasner's work, is the only example of her art in a public collection in Italy.