

FERBER: For a sculptor to insist that a piece of sculpture rises out of his stream of consciousness is perhaps ridiculous because sculpture is so three-dimensional and hard. But I don't believe there is any great difference between one piece and another in the development and fulfillment of a particular esthetic idea which may permeate several works.

LASSAW: I would consider a work finished when I sense a "togetherness," a participation of all parts as in an organism. This does not mean that I entirely understand what I have created. To me, a work is at first, quite unknown. In time, more and more enters into consciousness. It would be better to consider a work of art as a process that is started by the artist. In that way of thinking, a sculpture or painting is never finished, but only begun. If successful, the work starts to live a life of its own, a work of art begins to work.

ERNST: My work consists of two separate stages of development. I consider a painting almost "finished" when I am half finished with it, when I have reached what seems to be the greatest measure of surprise. The rest of the action is disciplinary on my part. When I see that I am beginning to destroy the surprise—the basic element of that surprise—then it is time for me to stop.

POUSSETTE-DART: For me it is "finished" when it is inevitable within itself. But I don't think I can explain anything about my painting, just as I can't explain anything about a flower or a child. When is anything "beautiful" or finished? I can't discuss things about my paintings. The true thing I am after goes on and on and I never can completely grasp it.

LIPTON: I think that we require time and intimacy and aloneness.

BIALA: I never know when it is "finished." I only know there comes a time when I have to stop.

NEWMAN: I think the idea of a "finished" picture is a fiction.

I think a man spends his whole life-time painting one picture or working on one piece of sculpture. The question of stopping is really a decision of moral considerations. To what extent are you intoxicated by the actual act, so that you are beguiled by it? To what extent are you charmed by its inner life? And to what extent do you then really approach the intention or desire that is really outside of it. The decision is always made when the piece has something in it that you wanted.

HARE: A work is never finished, the energies involved in a particular work are merely transferred at a certain moment to the next work.

ROSENBERG: When it stops, why does it stop? While the hands do, the picture moves, having a life (objective, emotional and intellectual) of its own. When I can do no more on it, it is done.

STERNE: Painting is for me a problem of simultaneous understanding and explaining. I try to approach my subject uncluttered by esthetic prejudices. I put it on canvas in order to explain it to myself, yet the result should reveal something plus. As I work the thing takes life and fights back. There comes a moment when I can't continue. Then I stop until next time.

DE KOONING: I refrain from "finishing" it. I paint myself out of the picture, and when I have done that, I either throw it away or keep it. I am always in the picture somewhere. The amount of space I use I am always in, I seem to move around in it, and there seems to be a time when I lose sight of what I wanted to do, and then I am out of it. If the picture has a countenance, I keep it. If it hasn't, I throw it away. I am not really very much interested in the question.

BOURGEOIS: I think a work is "finished" when I have nothing to eliminate. I make constructions that are usually vertical; when I start them they are full of colors and are complicated in form. Every one of the complications goes and the color

becomes uniform and finally they become completely white and simple. When there is nothing else to take away, it is “finished.” Yet I am disgusted by simplicity. So I look for a larger form and look for another work—which goes through the same process of elimination.

GRIPPE: A work of art is never really “finished.” There is a feeling of trying to express the labyrinth of one’s mind—its feelings and emotions, and to fulfill one’s personality. Each work is trying to complete the expression of that personality. Whether it becomes profound, I don’t know; but I think the artist is very aware of himself in relation to the rest of the world.

REINHARDT: It has always been a problem for me—about “finishing” paintings. I am very conscious of ways of “finishing” a painting. Among modern artists there is a value placed upon “unfinished” work. Disturbances arise when you have to treat the work as a finished and complete object, so that the only time I think I “finish” a painting is when I have a dead-line. If you are going to present it as an “unfinished” object, how do you “finish” it?

LEWIS: I have stopped, I think, when I have arrived at a quality of mystery. I know this doesn’t describe it, but it is the best word I can use.

HOFMANN: To me a work is finished when all parts involved communicate themselves, so that they don’t need me.

MODERATOR MOTHERWELL: I dislike a picture that is too suave or too skillfully done. But, contrariwise, I also dislike a picture that looks too inept or blundering. I noticed in looking at the Carré exhibition of young French painters who are supposed to be close to this group, that in “finishing” a picture they assume traditional criteria to a much greater degree than we do. They have a real “finish” in that the picture is a real object, a beautifully made object. We are involved in “process” and what is a “finished” object is not so certain.

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HOFMANN: Yes, it seems to me all the time there is the question of heritage. It would seem that the difference between the young French painters and the young American painters is this: French pictures have a cultural heritage. The American painter of today approaches things without basis. The French approach things on the basis of cultural heritage—that one feels in all their work. It is a working towards a refinement and quality rather than working toward new experiences, and painting out these experiences that may finally become tradition. The French have it easier. They have it in the beginning.

DE KOONING: I am glad you brought up this point. It seems to me that in Europe every time something new needed to be done it was because of the traditional culture. Ours has been a striving to come to the same point that they had—not to be iconoclasts.

MODERATOR LIPPOLD: There are those here who feel that the things which they make are simply moments of a continuity and, therefore, in themselves, are not objects for their own sakes, but just moments in the continuity. Is there an irreconcilability in making an object in itself which, at the same time, reflects continuity? This, so far, has been spoken of as incompatible.

STERNE: But that means that you have decided already exactly what *is* “beautiful.” “Beauty” can’t be pursued directly.

GOTTLIEB: There is a general assumption that European—specifically French—painters have a heritage which enables them to have the benefits of tradition, and therefore they can produce a certain type of painting. It seems to me that in the last fifty years the whole meaning of painting has been made international. I think the Americans share that heritage just as much, and that if they deviate from tradition it is just as difficult for an American as for a Frenchman. It is a mistaken

assumption in some quarters that any departure from tradition stems from ignorance. I think that what Motherwell describes is the problem of knowing what tradition is, and being willing to reject it in part. This requires familiarity with his past. I think we have this familiarity and if we depart from tradition, it is out of knowledge, not innocence.

DE KOONING: I agree that tradition is part of the whole world now. The point that was brought up was that the French artists have some “touch” in making an object. They have a particular something that makes them look like a “finished” painting. They have a touch which I am glad not to have.

BAZIOTES: We are getting mixed up with the French tradition. In talking about the necessity to “finish” a thing, we then said American painters “finish” a thing that looks “unfinished,” and the French, they “finish” it. I have seen Matisses that were more “unfinished” and yet more “finished” than any American painter. Matisse was obviously in a terrific emotion at the time, and it was more “unfinished” than “finished.”