

## William Baziotes

### FROM AN INTERVIEW

William Baziotes seeks, by dealing with poetic emotion, to awaken a response through his paintings which is outside the prosaic or banal experience of daily life. Good paintings always move people in this way. He started by painting landscapes and figures which became more and more abstract until direct contact with objects, as related to his subject matter, ceased altogether. Since he wanted more imaginative effects not hampered by anatomical meaning, he was led to distortion first and then to the elimination of objects. In nineteen-forty Baziotes faced a difficult period in his work. He was unable to complete a canvas, though he worked on one for a year. He finally took hold of himself, made hundreds of drawings and disciplined himself by using small canvases. Out of this came a decided change in his work and the beginning of his present direction, and since then his painting has been a continuous fight, with changes happening gradually.

Baziotes now works without sketches or previous preparation. He sets down a series of impressions on his canvas and works with them until they begin to crystallize and the canvas "begins to speak" to him. On a particular day he may set up a number of canvases that he is working on and see which he reacts to. This gives him a clue about what he is like that day and the other canvases are put aside until he feels closer to them. In this way his paintings gradually build up until the time when they take

on their own life and the shapes within the canvas achieve their own meanings as images.

While he is related to the group of non-representational painters, Baziotes points out that this group should not be called a school of painting since a school would consist of a leading painter and those who follow his influences. There is a wide diversity within this group and, while the artists learn from each other, each believes in his own rights as an individual.

"Reference to existing objects is not particularly helpful in contemporary painting," Baziotes says. Art passes through periods in which certain aspects predominate; at one time realism may be stressed, at another time religious painting will dominate. Today the painters tend to deal with subjective feelings. Thus art goes through continual changes and becomes manifest by different means at different times. There is nothing mystical in contemporary painting, to Baziotes. The present tendency of many artists to eliminate objects is in line with this tradition. By viewing painting from Cézanne to the present, we find a gradual development toward abstraction or toward what might more nearly be termed a broader view of content. There is then no break with tradition. Baziotes says, "but only the logical development of painting, which is in keeping with the times."

## ANALYSIS

The elimination of objects is in line with tradition, but rather than eliminating content, gives way to a more comprehensive conception of what content is.

The method of setting down a series of impressions on a canvas, without previous preparation, and then waiting for the canvas to "speak" to him, suggests an attempt on Baziotes's part to find his subject matter through giving direct attention to the subconscious, and allowing it to determine his subject.

## Mark Rothko

### FROM AN INTERVIEW

Mark Rothko began painting when he was twenty-four. Until that time he had not been interested in painting or in museums, although he had a sculptor friend whose problems he listened to but could not understand. As an interest in painting began to appear, he visited the museums but found that the paintings did not move him as he was moved by music. Yet he found that the feeling persisted that something akin to the emotional intensity of great music might be achieved in painting. He began to paint seriously, even studying with Max Weber for two months, but found that the figures he was using in his canvases were becoming more and more distorted. He finally decided that the conclusion of this distortion was to eliminate figures from his canvases altogether. There followed a period of interest in symbols and myths, which he dealt with as forms on the canvases tying them in with dark lines.

Rothko chose Mozart as an example of clarity of idea which continues through his compositions, clear in that there is not feeling of nostalgia or of reference to previous experience. Clarity then began to depend, to Rothko, on the elimination of anything in his work which might deal with association or remind one of previous attachments since any outside experience would interfere with complete involvement with the particular experience at hand.

Rothko stresses the fact that he desires to do paintings which achieve complete clarity of idea, in which there can be no doubt

as to intention. In the attempt to achieve this impact he strives to eliminate all negative factors, anything which might interfere with the newness of experience he feels to be important in creative activity. The figure, though distorted, still was tied to the past and had to be eliminated. Symbols could only be meaningful by association and interfered with clearness. And since space is a part of experience, his lines, which appeared to be floating in space, must go. Finally any reference to an illusion of space had to be eliminated.

With the elimination of those elements which hinder the attainment of clarity, Rothko enters a field of experience having little to do with the past or the nostalgic. Space as such is not considered, and even then, becomes an attempt to discover the manner in which this may be most adequately achieved. In that, he seeks a more comprehensive content. Rothko does not consider himself an abstract painter.

To work as Rothko does means to leave behind all familiar ground, to face the wilderness of ideas much as the early settler was faced with the wild of a new continent. Sometimes there is a longing for the homeland, a foothold, a place of security, and yet such security can only inhibit a transcendental experience.

## ANALYSIS

Rothko says that he is interested in content, and, since his paintings contain no recognizable objects, but rather depend on large areas of color, it is apparent that he does not consider the content of a painting to be dependent on objects.

The desire to eliminate nostalgic reference or any distraction, which might come through association by causing the observer to remember previous experiences, implies that emotional impact depends on lack of association.

Clarity of idea and emotional impact are dependent on content but not on association. Thus the color relationships become incidental to the nature of the picture image with which he is

occupied. The image is presented in terms of the total canvas, and Rothko desires to eliminate any distracting awareness of paint by applying his colors without texture. The impact of the work must be immediate, must “hit one in the belly,” and the painting be seen as a totality and a new experience. Mondrian wrote that he was interested in showing that which is the essence of nature, and the vertical and horizontal lines of his painting deal with those relationships as he saw them in nature. The image Rothko is after cannot be realized by this form of structural relationships, but structure itself only has meaning as that which makes a particular picture possible. Structure is not sought but is there, as it is in any work which is capable of moving us. A cubistic picture refers to the structure of existing objects and therefore, to Rothko, deals with association.

Since a painting cannot have emotional impact without content, Rothko feels that his content widens to cover a total experience. He wishes the observer not to find a portion of himself involved but to be totally involved to the exclusion of everything else. His painting exists. A painting may be as real if composed of forms having no references. To avoid the use of objects does not mean to avoid reality but to view reality in a different way.