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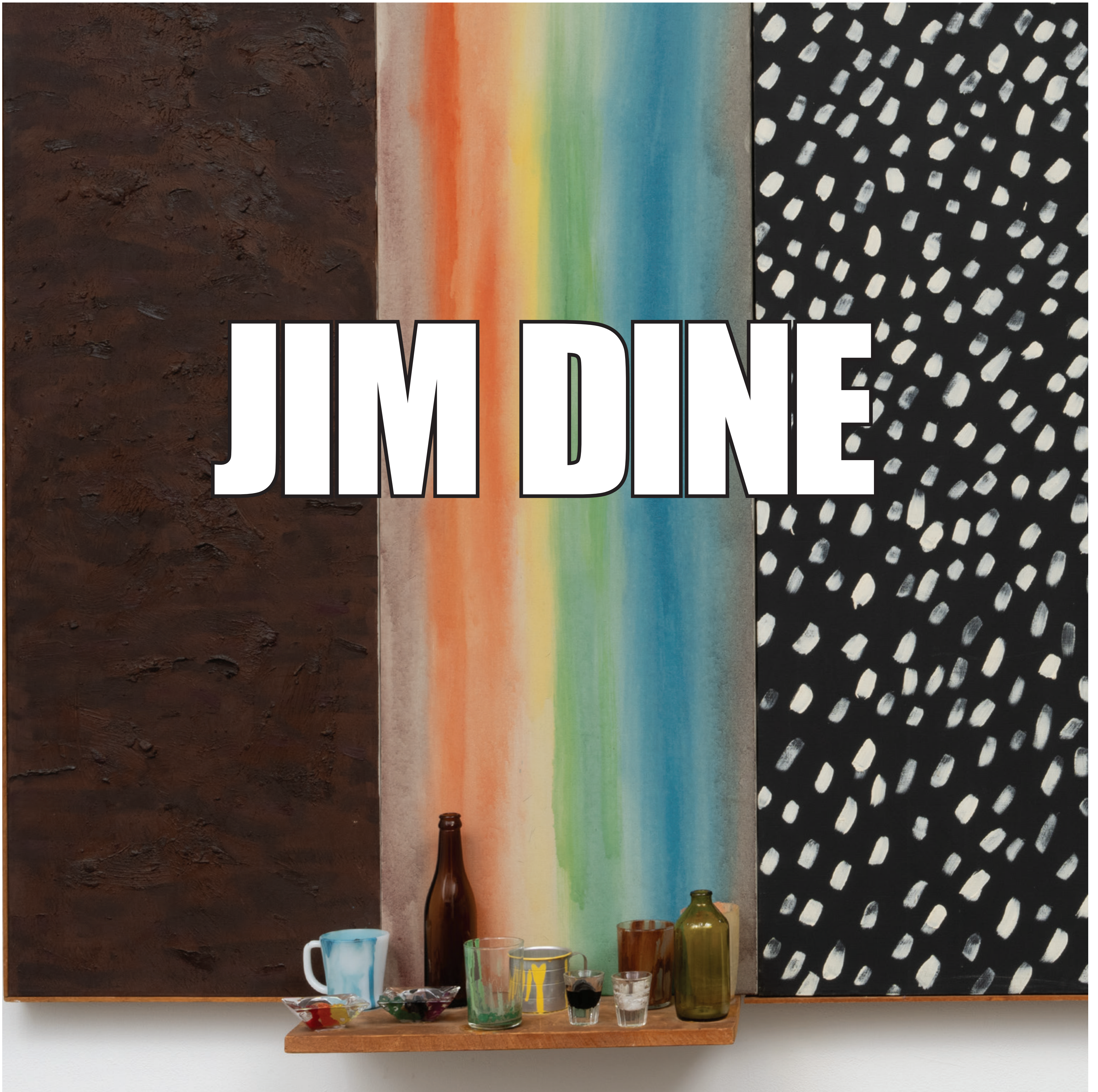

The Studio (Landscape Painting) (detail), 1963. ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society

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JIM DINE: THE ’60s

Arne Glimcher

In the late fifties, what appeared to be a revolution of comic and cosmic proportion occurred in the New York art world and titillated the press. The search for the sublime in abstraction had already produced the Abstract Expressionist masterpieces by Rothko, Pollock, Newman, de Kooning, and others. These postwar artists overcame, replaced, and tucked the School of Paris into history. Abstract Expressionism was about to suffer the same fate by the Pop generation, as the search for the sublime was somewhat out of reach of the interest of the common man and the media. Along came the Pop artists who reinvented the sublime as product placement. Everyday objects became signs and signifiers of art. It was a lot easier to have a cocktail conversation about Warhol’s soup cans than it was about Pollock’s paintings. Mark Rothko joked to me one day about the banality of Pop art just as Picasso reportedly did about Pollock. Legend has it that in a visit with a New York museum curator who was praising the work of Pollock, Picasso picked up the ink-stained blotter from his desk, pointed to it, and said, “Pollock.” We were about to experience a sea change in chatter from, “My kid could do that!” to, “If that is art, my pantry is full of it.”

It was 1958, a climate in which easel painting was once again declared dead, when Jim Dine came from Ohio to New York and to nearly instant stardom. In 1960, Dine had his first show in the newly vital downtown scene at Judson Church. He found the materials for the exhibition wheeling a baby carriage through the streets of Lower Manhattan in a snowstorm, collecting detritus out of which he would assemble an environment entitled “The House.” Simultaneously, his friend Claes Oldenburg was working on an installation entitled “The Street.” Though most of the cardboard pieces from Oldenburg’s “Street” remain intact in the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, only a few objects of Dine’s have survived from “The House.” *Bedspring* (1960), one of the most radical object/paintings of the period now in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum, is one of the exceptions. These are among the most significant artifacts of the first performances or happenings in American art. Dine, along with Claes Oldenburg, Robert Whitman, Alan Kaprow, and Carolee Schneemann, continues to be the most influential sources for today’s performance artists who permeate the contemporary scene.

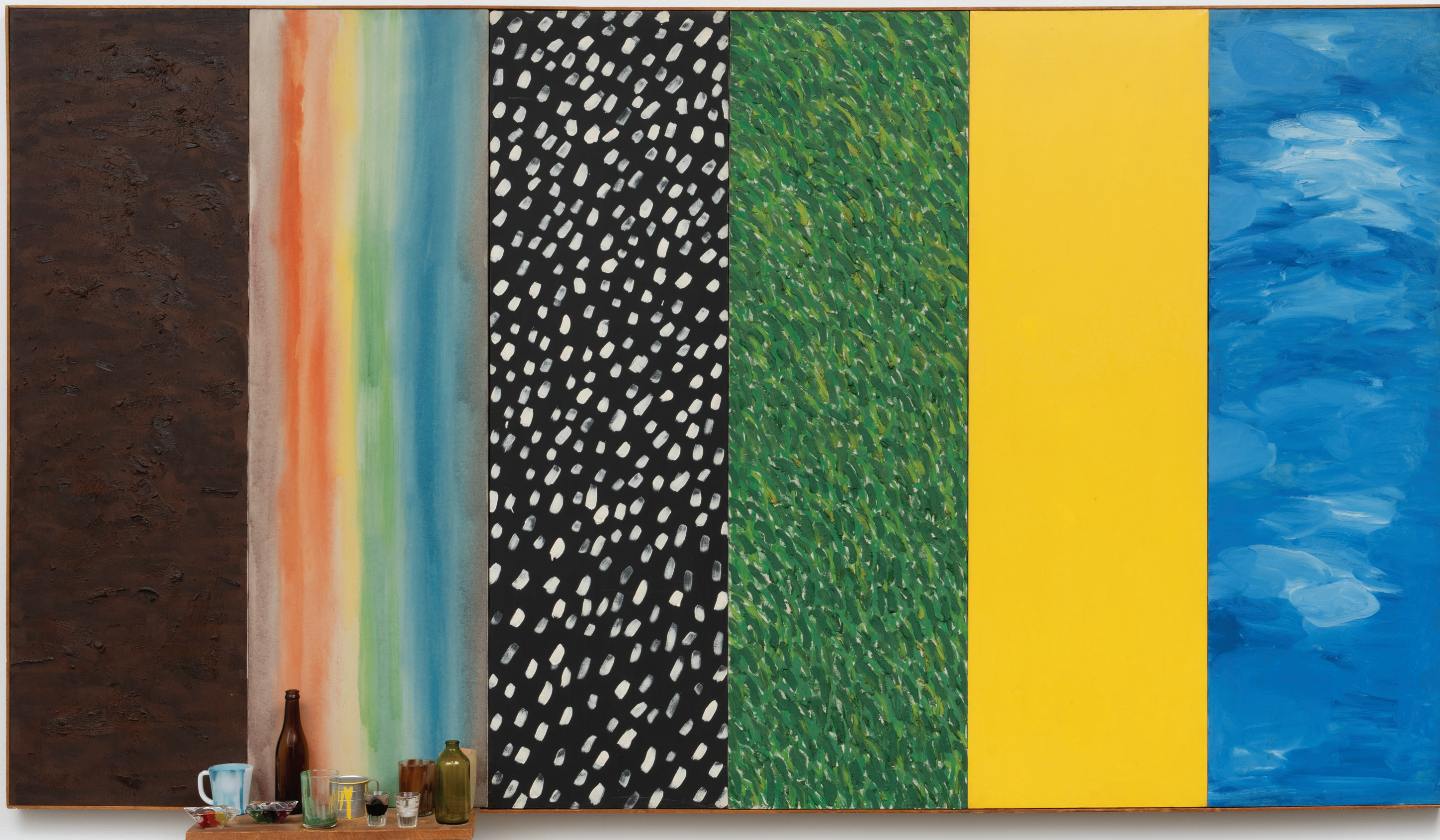
With theatrical panache, the exhibition functioned as a backdrop for his happening “The House.” On a huge sheet of paper strung behind a table filled with paintbrushes and cans of paint, he painted the words “I love what I’m doing,” which remains his credo today. He consumed the paint—drank it, poured it over his head, and crashed through the paper in a symbolic act of going back into the painting. For Dine, painting was hardly dead: what his art said was art and life are not separate. Art is a language that we can learn and understand, and that language is not impenetrable.

In many ways Bob Rauschenberg set the stage by giving permission to many subsequent artists, though none more than Dine, to consider “new media, new forms”—a phrase which would become the title of an important exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery in 1960. Rauschenberg filled his paintings with souvenirs, fragments, and scraps of life from which viewers build their own narrative. For Dine, instead of using mementos to bring the viewer into the painting, the viewer in essence becomes part of the painting. In his fifteen-foot-long painting *Four Rooms* (1962), Dine combined a series of panels, each indicating an activity that takes place in individual rooms of a home. In front of the living room section, he placed an actual easy chair in front of the painting. "Come sit down, you are a part of the painting—this painting is a part of you,” is what it says to us. Like the proverbial tree falling in the forest, does this painting even exist without the viewer’s participation? In *Black Child’s Room* (1962)—he is not referring to race, only to the color—Dine painted a canvas black and covered it with a pattern of grey stars, like wallpaper one might find in a nursery. He tucked a rainbow, a memento of childhood, in an unsuspecting corner of the composition. Then he took one of his children’s bureaus painted with black impasto brushstrokes and pushed it up against the canvas panel. He engages the space and emphasizes the inseparability of art and life. In another work, *Two Palettes in Black with Stovepipe (The Dream)* (1963), he attached a stove pipe to a silver aluminum panel which hung on one wall and connected it to a painting of a palette on the opposite wall. The entire room and anything that happens in it is the painting/sculpture/performance. Fragmented neckties in the painting *Tie Parts* (1961) are embedded in grey paint like a mosquito trapped in amber presented in a natural history museum. Dine’s work brought a blunt and radical confrontation between object and viewer to the vocabulary of art.

Jim Dine never abandoned historical achievements and techniques but rather employed them in new ways, bending them to suit his meaning. Unlike other artists of his generation (Lichtenstein, who denied surface, and Warhol, who even further distanced himself from the canvas by printing his paintings) Dine was never at war with previous generations or modalities. He said, “I don’t believe that there is a sharp break, or that Pop art is replacing Abstract Expressionism. Pop is only one facet of my work. I tie myself to Abstract Expressionism like fathers to sons.” And so, with the painterliness of the Abstract Expressionists, he has produced a body of work employing both common and highly personal symbols invested simultaneously with new and familiar meaning that have become part of the visual vocabulary of our time.

In the early 1962 at the fledgling Pace Gallery on 125 Newbury Street in Boston, I presented Jim Dine’s contemporary paintings in one of the first group shows of Pop art, entitled “Stock Up for the Holidays.” Coming full circle, I am especially honored to present the exhibition “Jim Dine: The 60s” at 125 Newbury in Tribeca, New York City.

Tie Parts, 1961. Oil on canvas with tie. 70" × 60". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



The Studio (Landscape Painting), 1963. Oil on canvas with wooden shelf and painted glass, tin, ceramic and wood. 61" × 108½" × 10¾". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Jane, 1969. Acrylic on canvas with objects. 8' 8" × 78". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

JIM DINE: THE HAPPENINGS

Milly Glimcher

The years 1958 to 1963 saw the birth of the Happenings movement in New York. The progenitors of this artistic practice incorporating movement and duration were Jim Dine, Simone Forti, Red Grooms, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Carolee Schneeman and Robert Whitman. Their performances/Happenings included material things—paint, cloth, paper, trash, clothes, Christmas lights, plastic sheets, newspapers, sounds, projections, movies, even food—but the most important and ephemeral ingredient was the originality of their creators. The Happenings disappeared after they were performed, and only those who saw them really understood the experience. They became legend and now exist as part of the mythology of the time.

In fact, the performance works known as Happenings should be considered part of a worldwide reexamination of culture and society in the decade following the end of World War II. During the 1950s, the deprivation and scarcity of the war years was morphing into abundance, self-confidence, and economic security. Yet, always present was the possibility of annihilation because of nuclear weapons and the advent of the Cold War. Although the generation that had fought the war still held the reins, those who had been adolescents at the time were now in their twenties and beginning a search for a new cultural and political point of view.

Artists in the United States and around the world were expanding national traditions and integrating movement and duration into their visual cultures. In the 50s, in Tokyo the Gutai group led the way; in Paris, Georges Mathieu inaugurated the practice of painting as performance, and later, Yves Klein dragged paint-covered nude models across canvases laid on the floor, always in front of audiences.

Even as these innovative movements were burgeoning around the world, the towering figures of Abstract Expressionism—in their struggle to find meaningful subjects for their paintings after the devastation of the war—successfully turned to existential personal expression and a yearning for the sublime, thus bringing leadership of the international art world to New York, usurping the dominance of Europe and especially Paris. By the mid 50s, however, many younger artists believed that those subjects were no longer relevant to the optimism of the new post-war period. In all media—visual arts, literature, poetry, theater, music—artists sought to connect with life as they were living it, and to find the means to make their world resonate in their work: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and John Cage.

The leading spaces in New York for the presentation of the earliest Happenings/performances during the 1959–1960 season was downtown at the Judson Church, and the Reuben Gallery run by Anita Reuben in an unheated third floor loft at 61 Fourth Avenue. To inaugurate the 1960–61 season, the Reuben Gallery moved from its loft to a ground floor storefront at 44 East Third Street, just off Second Avenue. The artists decided each of them would have the space for a month to develop, rehearse, and perform an event, usually over several nights. The first was Jim Dine's *Car Crash*, his only performance that included a cast: Pat Oldenburg, Marcus Ratliff and Judy Tersch, but Dine was the main character—the car. His theatrical events were all about personal expression: "They were like paintings, I wouldn't have let anyone paint on my paintings. I couldn't trust them to do it. It was like a rhythm you have in a dream yourself." In this case, he had a clear vision of what he wanted, and the cast needed only one hour of rehearsal on each of three nights to be ready.

The walls were lined with shelves holding rolls of felt, linoleum, and cork left behind by the previous tenant, and Dine chose to leave them as a backdrop. White paint was splattered and dripped on the walls, even the floor was white. Forty or fifty folding chairs filled the floor space, leaving a U-shaped aisle through the audience. Lights and silver, white and red crosses—like those on an ambulance or hospital—were hung from the ceiling. In the small lobby a group of paintings and drawings were exhibited related to the performance.

After the audience entered, the lights went out. Honking and street noises were heard and Dine entered wearing a raincoat and rubber hat that had been sprayed silver, topped by a golf cap with two small flashlights attached. His face was silver with black lines and red lips; the lights remained off. Tersch and Ratliff entered, also with two flashlight each; he wore a dress, she wore men's clothing. Each wore a papiér-mâche mask with holes for eyes and mouth; they swept their "headlights" over the audience, and every time the lights grazed Dine he would grunt and moan, as if in great distress; then he left the performance space. With the background noise rising, the two "cars" wove through the audience until they turned off their lights and exited. The house lights came on; Dine reentered without his headlights hat and moved back and forth honking. Pat Oldenburg, who had been standing quietly on a ladder—her long white dress hung to the ground, so she appeared eight feet tall—began to speak random car-related poetry written by Dine. The car and traffic noises continued and then changed to a car starting, shifting into gear, speeding up, and skidding out of control, with the sound level increasing all the while.

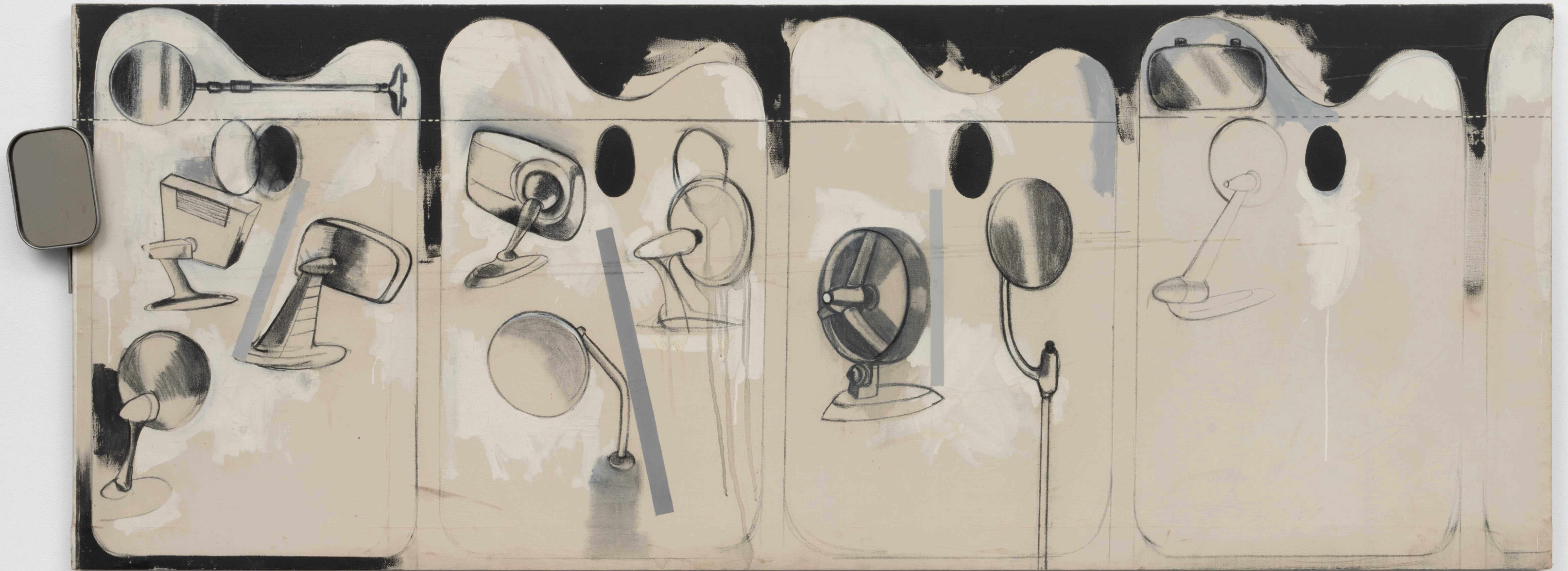
Suddenly, silence. Dine moved to a blackboard, above which was a clothes wringer. He unrolled paper towels with the word "help" written again and again. Dine began drawing anthropomorphized cars on the blackboard, cars that were sketched in such haste and agony that the chalk kept breaking, forcing him to continually start the drawings over. His face was contorted in pain, and he grunted and made other sounds. The cast members joined him, creating more and more noise. Eventually Dine stopped drawing and abruptly walked out the front door; the noise continued for a short time and then stopped. It took a few moments for the audience to realize that the theater piece was over.

For years, a legend grew that *Car Crash* was provoked by a real accident that Dine experienced. In his 1999 exhibition at the Guggenheim, he explained the true circumstances that in fact involved two car crashes. In July 1959, on the way to his uncle's cabin in Kentucky, Dine was involved in an accident; about a month later, driving to Cleveland with his wife Nancy and son Jeremiah, he had a second car crash. These events inspired paintings and drawings that were related to the theater piece, but the piece itself was primarily about the inability to communicate pain and distress through language. It must have been extremely moving to observe someone in such pain, especially capable of expressing his passion with the audience in a direct and immediate way. Each of Dine's earlier theater pieces had been compact and intense, revealing a strongly held personal emotion. His "theater" was about *himself*, a catharsis or self-revelation. Dine explained to the author:

> It was a way for me to be an actor. I was really interested in acting and expressing myself through acting, and at the same time it was a precursor to my poetry. It included of course the visual. It was all about visual. But in fact, it's not the way I would have done it if it wasn't a performance. If it had just been visual, I paint much better than that. Even then I painted much better than that. This was more literary, even though there were not many words except in *Car Crash*. It was related to me exposing my dreams probably, and much more to do with poetry. They were poetic events I thought . . .

With the exception of *Car Crash* that had a cast, Dine's early participation with the founding group of Happenings artists took the form of **one-man** performances such as *The House* at the Judson Church in 1959, *Vaudeville Collage* at the Reuben Gallery in 1960, and *The Shining Bed* in December 1960, following *Car Crash*. All shared his incorporation of physical *stuff*; mostly trash that he collected on the street or found serendipitously in the new Reuben Gallery. Materiality and objects taken from daily life became interwoven with his art practice in the 60s and even beyond. In this exhibition of paintings from the 1960s Dine continues his practice of attaching actual objects from daily life directly on to the canvas, often familiar and even intimate objects, objects meant to be handled, worn, or used such as tools that became so important in his later paintings and sculptures. In this way, these personal objects help him create works that are uniquely his, that intimately reflect his history and inner life.

Most of this text is taken from by book, *Happenings*, 2012



4¼ Palettes with Mirrors, 1963. Oil, charcoal and mirror on canvas. 35½" × 93". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Things in Their Natural Setting (First Version), 1973. Acrylic on canvas with objects. 71⅝" × 59⅞" × 16". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The Hammer Doorway, 1965. Cast aluminum. 78" × 40¼" × 7¼". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Large Boot Lying Down, 1965. Cast aluminum, cushion and painted wood base. 22¼" × 40¾" × 15". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

JIM DINE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE NEW ART

Alan Solomon

Art International, October 1964

The recent hubbub about pop art has produced a regrettable distortion of the real nature of this new art. Pop has enjoyed a *succès de scandale* because of the strangeness of its images, and it has been misinterpreted as an art of protest and a reflection of discontent in the modern world. A series of exhibitions in Europe during the past twelve months, first in London and Stockholm, and then in Copenhagen, Amsterdam, The Hague, and elsewhere, has only succeeded in extending the confusion abroad, since European critics have consistently misunderstood the work. The American exhibition at the Venice Biennale has been described in the European press as an invasion of Pop, and Rauschenberg, the International Prize winner, has been crowned King of Pop Art, despite the fact that none of the artists in the exhibition regards himself, or should be regarded, as a Pop Artist.

The confusion, as I have pointed out before, begins with the term itself, imported into America by its inventor, Lawrence Alloway, who used it to describe an earlier British phenomenon which has some, but only some, elements in common with the new American art. These parallels, as the name itself implies, have to do with the use of images from the popular and commercial culture. The Americans who use such motifs include, among the original innovators, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Rosenquist, Wesselmann, and perhaps one or two others. However, all of the members of this group have certain additional characteristics, just as important as their images, and informing their choice of such "distasteful" subjects.

The style of each of these painters depends in one way or another on a kind of neutral or mechanical execution, derived from comic strips, billboards, photomechanical techniques, or whatever. While each of them had individual stylistic characteristics, this approach to the execution of the painting eliminates the traditional issue of handling, and imposes a certain detachment and impersonality on their art. Their attitude is what we would call nowadays "cool," and they actually tell us very little about themselves, their real personal feelings, and their attitude toward the situation in the painting. Instead of protesting, or satirizing, they are telling us that anything goes, and that the mystery of art does not depend on *any* imaginable preconception. This openness, so much a determinant in the attitude of the new American generation, comes not from indifference, but from a desire for a new esthetic and a new morality. Such a point of view is absolutely incomprehensible to Europeans, except for a few who have had some taste of contemporary American life. Oriented toward Cartesian rationalism by a long and rich tradition, the ambiguity of attitude and the apparent absence of familiar disciplines (there is, of course, a new discipline) annoy and distract them. These qualities are more compatible with the northern mentality, and it is perhaps no accident that the exhibitions mentioned at the beginning all took place in northern cities; however, northern Europeans too still try to relate the new American art to accustomed values.

Other artists of the new generation, operating in reponse to the same spirit of openness and freedom of inquiry, have also turned to the contemporary environment for their material, but their preoccupations center on objects and images from the modern world and the potential behavior of these, rather than on "found" modes of representation of objects detached from behavior.

For these artists, particularly Dine and Oldenburg, among the original group (Rauschenberg and Johns, the precursors of all the artists mentioned here, anticipate the various attitudes, and are excluded from the present discussion), the response to objects in the world is intensely personal, and they are deeply involved in communicating their private feelings through their art. Their styles depend upon expressive means to communicate these feelings, and in fact they hark back, like Rauschenberg and Johns, to the abstract expressionists in their modes of execution, unlike the first group, who have repudiated the older concern with animated surface and active execution.

The familiar world of reality is a secret and mysterious place for an artist like Jim Dine (much of what is said here also applies to Oldenburg), and the objects and images which people it operate on strange and unrevealed levels, beyond our ordinary comprehension. This point of view also determines the ambiguous flavor of the work of the Pop Artists, but in their "coolness" they do not go beyond the point of confronting us with the bizarre or the enigmatic concealed in banality; they leave us to our own resources, since they do not disclose their own.

Unlike the others, Dine sees objects symbolically, not in a conventional or historical sense, but in a new way which is psychologically tuned. Familiar forms become vehicles of anxiety or of sexual feelings, for example, and he systematically explores the unconscious pressures generated by objects. In this sense he has been conditioned by Freud, not as a student of psychoanalytical theory, but as an exponent of that modern temperament which has been touched in certain ways by the complexities of modern existence and which has acquired new insight into the patterns of human response. His symbolism resembles Freud's in that it is based on transformation, formal analogy, and association with human forms and conditions, but it remains an intuitive vocabulary, derived through the special quality of the artist's eye and mind. Objects acquire a new power and intensity for him; things become organic, or more specifically, anthropomorphic, with a potential of action and behavior which lifts them out of their familiar inert and passive identity. I have pointed out before that "happenings," to which Dine and Oldenburg were probably the most important early contributors, not only involved the audience more directly than conventional theater, but also gave to objects, which always played an important part in these events, a new importance, with the result, actually, that objects often became members of the cast, as important as the human actors.

Apart from the new behavior of objects, the work of Dine echoes an intense commitment to life, its process, to human feeling as the measure of experience, and to art as its vehicle. In one of his "happenings," *The Smiling Workman*, of 1959, Dine appeared as a painter, the happy craftsman of the title, before a large surface on which he began to paint from three buckets of color with extravagant gestures, splashing and slopping the pigment on the "canvas." In an enormous outburst of enthusiasm he printed on his "picture," "I like what I'm doing," picked up the bucket of red paint, and, as the audience gasped, poured it over himself (actually it was tomato juice), and then jumped through the paper on which his "picture" was painted.

In another happening called *Vaudeville*, 1960, in a set decorated with fresh vegetables, Dine did a kind of comic turn, extravagantly made up and dressed in the straw hat and striped shirt of the old vaudevillian. The girl in the piece was a cardboard cutout, lifesize, which he wore on one arm. This time a bucket of paint was poured down the back of the set, and an uncanny *esprit* pervaded the whole occasion. It is difficult to evoke in such a description the intensity of the audience's response, which was electrifying. Dine on stage had a charismatic effect which depended on the intensity of his projection of himself and the activities he was involved in.

Most important, however, and this is the key to the impact made by the "happenings," we were individually confronted by situations which seemed very personal, so that we always felt like *voyeurs*. The problems raised by unaccustomed confrontations of objects and actions were always unpredictable and psychologically disquieting. We were always afraid of what might happen next; yet the happening remained in a certain sense tactful and decorous, never becoming painfully explicit or embarrassing. The point was that we were threatened emotionally and esthetically in a direct and unavoidable way. We went because we were compelled to, and we stayed, one might say, because it felt so good when it was over and the tension had been dispelled.

Dine gave up "happenings" before they began to be fashionable and widely imitated. He did so because he felt that they took him away from his central involvements as a painter, but at the same time they had clarified several critical issues which already preoccupied him in his paintings of the year or so preceding. One of these was the question of the function of the work of art as psychological catharsis, not in a specifically subjective sense, but in terms of what is common and general in all of our responses to art. In this regard, painting has always involved an exploration of attitudes for Dine, and each new work moves farther along this path. As a result, his most recent pictures always raise new difficulties and seem totally unacceptable at first.

The other issues in his paintings result in one way or another from this initial preoccupation. Every picture mocks our preconceptions about beauty, acceptability, taste, the laws of painting, propriety, or whatever. His pictures might be called ugly, but only with respect to existing ideas about the opposition of beauty and ugliness. He is commited to psychological truth, not to ugliness, and he lifts a great variety of tabus which we have only begun to understand in recent times. The confrontation with our intimate thoughts and feelings, with the things we really "enjoy" deep within us but have always prudishly regarded as unacceptable (in the face of our secret pleasure in such things), brings up conflicts which are rather difficult for most of us to face, burdened as we are with conventional inhibitions. These complexities not only have to do with the variety and richness of sexual feelings, but also with "messiness," disagreeable textures or objects, and a general notion that some kinds of feelings about such things are "bad" or "wrong." On every plane, Dine forces us into the uneasy position of worrying about the way we have spent our lives in contention between our natural impulses and "what mother taught us was right." I cannot avoid the assertion that our response to Dine's art depends on the manner in which we have personally resolved these conflicts. One either hates his work, or derives an unconscionable pleasure from it; we find it simply impossible to be indifferent to his paintings, since their probing strikes so deep. The thrill of comprehension or the shudder of distaste disjoint our emotional composure to such a degree that many earlier involvements with subject matter in art seem superficial, arbitrary, and often dishonest.

To all of this Dine brings a sense of humor and of irony which moderates the insistence of his probing and allows it to be tolerable. Otherwise, the psychodramatic aspect of his work would render it egocentric and bathetic, a kind of permissive self-indulgence. In other words, he sees these fundamental human problems with a certain objectivity; his detachment, operating at the same time as his commitment, raises the issues to a more general level. In this respect, his art deals not only with human feelings but with painting itself; his exploration also embraces an ironical examination of the resources and the attitudes of the painter. He intimates that a facile acceptance of given ideas about painting dissembles as much as easy assumptions about experience. His drawing and his execution seem clumsy and inept because he cultivates an expressive awkwardness and a naive vision. (This places a terrible burden on the knowing viewer who recognizes a "bad" painting when he sees one.)

Only in his most personal drawings, those he does for his children, for example, does he display his natural skill. Dine's handling varies enormously from picture to picture and often within the same painting, ranging from a juicy curvilinear impasto which painfully reveals the bombastic overindulgence of van Gogh's expressionism to excruciatingly delicate wishy washes of color which become almost obscene in their attenuation. Some of his most beautiful (please remember how relative these words must be!) passages result from the offhand slap-dash introduction of apparent accidents which he calculatedly exploits, as a kind of pervading messiness, not as "found" effects of inherent beauty in the way that some of his predeces-

sors used them, but set deliberately in opposition to the idea of refinement, whether it results from accident or design. It must be understood how antithetical suave strokes and elegant textures are to his way of thinking about surfaces. And as if his clumsy, impulsive, erratic marks were not enough, he often presses unpleasant stamped textures of metal, cardboard or wood into thick wet paint, or uses them as stencils, as in the *Four Rooms*, or the *Red Bathroom*, or else uses unpleasant metal or cloth surfaces as sources of texture. In other words, he purposely avoids the conventional and accepted ways of producing beautiful surfaces in search of new, more complex sources of interest which depend on visual or tactile irritation—on effects which open up a new vocabulary of response for the viewer. The discomfort stirred by these irritants inevitably results in kinds of response which suggest a scatological preoccupation on the part of the artist; I have explained earlier why we are affected in this way by such experiences.

Dine's colors usually raise the same problem, since most of the time they are quite disagreeable and "tasteless," nasty browns, outrageous pinks, sickly greens and blues, or cold metallic silvers. In our annoyance at his unpleasantness, we might easily reject his colors, like his textures, because art "should be pleasing," but to reject them leaves unanswered some very important questions about our conscious or unconscious choices in such matters, particularly when so many of us choose precisely these colors for our kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms, or institutional spaces. Dine simply wants to know why; for that matter an even more important unanswered question remains, about why we perhaps feel the need to escape from reality into art, into "pleasant" or "beautiful" colors and textures. We might well ask whether this involves some kind of evasion, and if so why it is necessary.

The earlier work by Dine tended to be more conventional in execution, simpler, with a single image. It was the concept or the image which was new and unfamiliar, and from the beginning, the choice of color and objects. As I remarked earlier, all of his work is based on autobiographical considerations, and his pictures should always be regarded as projections of himself, and vice versa. For example, his own clothes somehow continually get into his pictures, from an early tattered green corduroy suit splashed with paint, through *Shoe and Hat*, the various Tie and Coat paintings and *An Animal* (made from a bearskin coat he acquired that winter) of 1961, and the recent self-portraits in a red bathrobe, the *White Suit*, etc.

Shoe and Hat, like most of his earlier pieces, are seen with a poignant crudeness, a calculated naiveté of vision, which forces our attention on the character of the object, usually isolated in a field. The effect becomes bizarre and strangely intense, so that we see the objects with an unfamiliar wonder, as a child might see new things. Dine often incorporated the titles into these paintings, as in the case of *Shoe, An Animal, Hair*, etc., and the lettering reveals the same kind of awkward crudeness. The word becomes as important as the objects in several cases; the graphic symbol for the object somehow becomes another of its attributes which additionally alters the ambiguity imposed by the formal intensification.

This kind of attitude reminds us, of course, of Jasper Johns and his similar use of isolated objects, with which he often included words, usually the title of the picture (*Tango, Tennyson, Device Circle*, etc.). Without a doubt, Johns was an important source for Dine, as he was for all of the other members of Dine's generation; it was he who first brought up the original problems about objects and their behavior. Even though Dine's early work obviously demonstrates his obligation to Johns, his attitude from the beginning was different and he has moved along another path, as I will explain in a moment. There has been a certain tendency to consider Dine a follower of Johns, and to cite the similarity of pieces like Dine's *Shovel* to pieces like *Fool's House* by Johns, including the presence of the single hanging object (a shovel in one case, a broom in the other), and the writing on the painting, with arrows pointing to objects. I have pointed out before that Johns, Rauschenberg, and Dine all saw a good deal of one another in 1961–62, that there was much discussion of ideas of mutual interest, and that the influence exerted was by no means all in the direction of Dine. Granting Dine's obligation to Johns and Rauschenberg (whose *Charlene*, of 1954, with its flashing light and movable parasol, set the *original* precedent for all these ideas), the fact remains that the suspended objects and written labels with arrows in Dine's *Shovel* and *Job No.1* predate Johns' *Fool's House*.

The aloofness and commanding imperturbability of Johns' paintings make his objects function ambiguously because their passivity and inertness calls into question his reasons for attaching so much importance to them. Dine, on the other hand, from the very beginning imposed a fierce intensity on his objects, in contrast to Johns' coolness; for him objects make terrible demands, equivocal, and full of overtones of suggestive sentiment. Things for Dine assume a new kind of identity, they acquire human attributes, personality of sorts; they become agents of human interplay, of anguish, of sexuality, of threatened violence, and most of all, they become the instruments of a pervasive irony. The hardware and tools with which he has continued to be obsessed since they first appeared in his work in 1962 have perhaps been the most crucial objects for him. ("I use only new things that are familiar, such as hammers, pliers, etc., so that there will be no confusion about the mystery the viewer brings to the picture. I am also able to milk the urge to be quiet (sometimes pure) in this manner, since a hammer with a blond handle and a silver head needs very little (nothing) to be a pretty thing. I also love the anonymity of tools because they cross more visual boundaries in their real state than all the various forms of romance around us.")

Most of his paintings up to that point had functioned in a specific way, as kinds of icons. The simplicity and the central placement of the image, as well as the concentration on static forms, gave these pictures a contemplative quality, which, however, in each case usually projected a strong sexual image, by deliberate intention, according to a private symbolism derived from associations with the shapes and characters of the forms. *Hat* of 1961, is a good example of this kind of painting.

However, in a painting like *Job No.1*, from somewhat later, 1962, the iconic monumentality gives way to a kinetic complexity which is new in his work, and which really has to do with a new kind of factual literalism. The painting becomes directly involved in a series of actions, its existence in fact depending on these actions, the tools for which are at hand, together with the written instructions: "After you're through painting the walls paint this board black and white." There are no symbolic overtones here. Rather, that irony of which I have spoken repeatedly comes to bear upon the idea of the painting. One of the key motifs in Dine is the elaboration of the painting in unconventional ways, so that it might become a job, part of the artist's life (with the tracks of his motions on the canvas), still incomplete since we have not carried out the instructions. He constantly confounds the identity of the picture: It may become part of our space, like *Vise*, 1962, part of our environment, like *Four Rooms*, 1962, with an armchair on which gallerygoers never know whether to sit or not, or part of our landscape, like *Lawnmower*, 1962. The fact that the summery landscape of *Lawnmower* bleeds out onto the mower, or that the paint of one panel covers the armchair in *Four Rooms*, or that the texture of the chair appears on the panel, all have to do with Dine's wry reflections on the mutability of the conditions of painting in relation to reality.

In his more recent work, objects which come within a certain distance of the canvas run the risk of being magnetically drawn into it, or at least leaving their mark upon it in some way. Lately, Dine's paintings have been full of shadows or ghosts, beginning with the silhouettes of arms in *Job No.1* and including the shadows of the hatchet in *Hatchet with Two Palettes*, 1963, and the illusionistic cloth in *My Long Island Studio*, 1963, which replaces a real paint rag hung there at some point: a whole series from 1962 with plumbing leaves a trail of painted water droplets or rays of light on the surface. Dine's restless exploration in these later paintings tends to remove him from the iconic symbolic preoccupations of which I spoke earlier. Yet his habit of finding analogs persists: the sexual meaning of *Vise* is clear enough, once it has been pointed out. A certain overtone of violence in it becomes explosive in *Hatchet with Two Palettes*; at the same time, however, this last picture also contains a clearly personal image, the palette, which Dine compulsively repeated through a whole series of paintings in 1963–64.

One of these, *A 1935 Palette* has that central emblematic character which I remarked as a feature of his earlier work, and which continues to recur at frequent moments. At the same time, this picture might be taken as a literal rendering of a palette, with oleaginous smears of thick pigment on its surface. Yet the date in the title happens to be the year of Dine's birth, and he obviously has something more complex going here. The palette shape also appears in a series of self-portraits, paintings about himself like the *Red Self Portrait*, 1963. The flavor of the palette changes constantly in its suggestive overtones, now becoming oppressive, now erotically female. Above all, it reminds us without exception that Dine's paintings are always about painting, no matter what else they may be concerned with.

The huge *My Long Island Studio* in a way typifies this preoccupation with the facts of painting. Essentially it is a gigantic color chart, that is, a replica of one of those color cards with chips of the most popular (!) shades. However, in contrast with the unyielding rigidity of the scheme of such a card, the squares of color are unevenly painted, hastily and intensively worked, so that the effect becomes curiously inert. This flat, passive regularity has been complicated in a number of ways. At the left another color chart has been superimposed, altering the original plane, the original scheme, the relation to the margin, etc. At the right a transparent palette fills the whole panel, creating further spatial ambiguity. These confusions have nothing to do with familiar cubist manipulations of form and space. Rather, they produce a discontinuity of meaning which confounds all the issues of spatial coherence, formal unity, temporal relationships, and once again, the rockbottom issue of identity, of the identity of the things in the painting, as well as the painting itself. The picture contains an inventory of different manners of handling. The fussy flatness of the color squares contrasts with passages of impasto, scumbling, transparent washes, drips, and shadings. The way of making a painting constantly intrudes, so that the illusionism of the rag, so smugly settled in space over the apparent surface, cannot overcome the denial of illusion he forces on us by leaving the lines with which the squares were ruled, or the computations of dimensions on the left margin, or the reality of the paint-dipped sticks on the right edge, which compromises the illusionism of the rag.

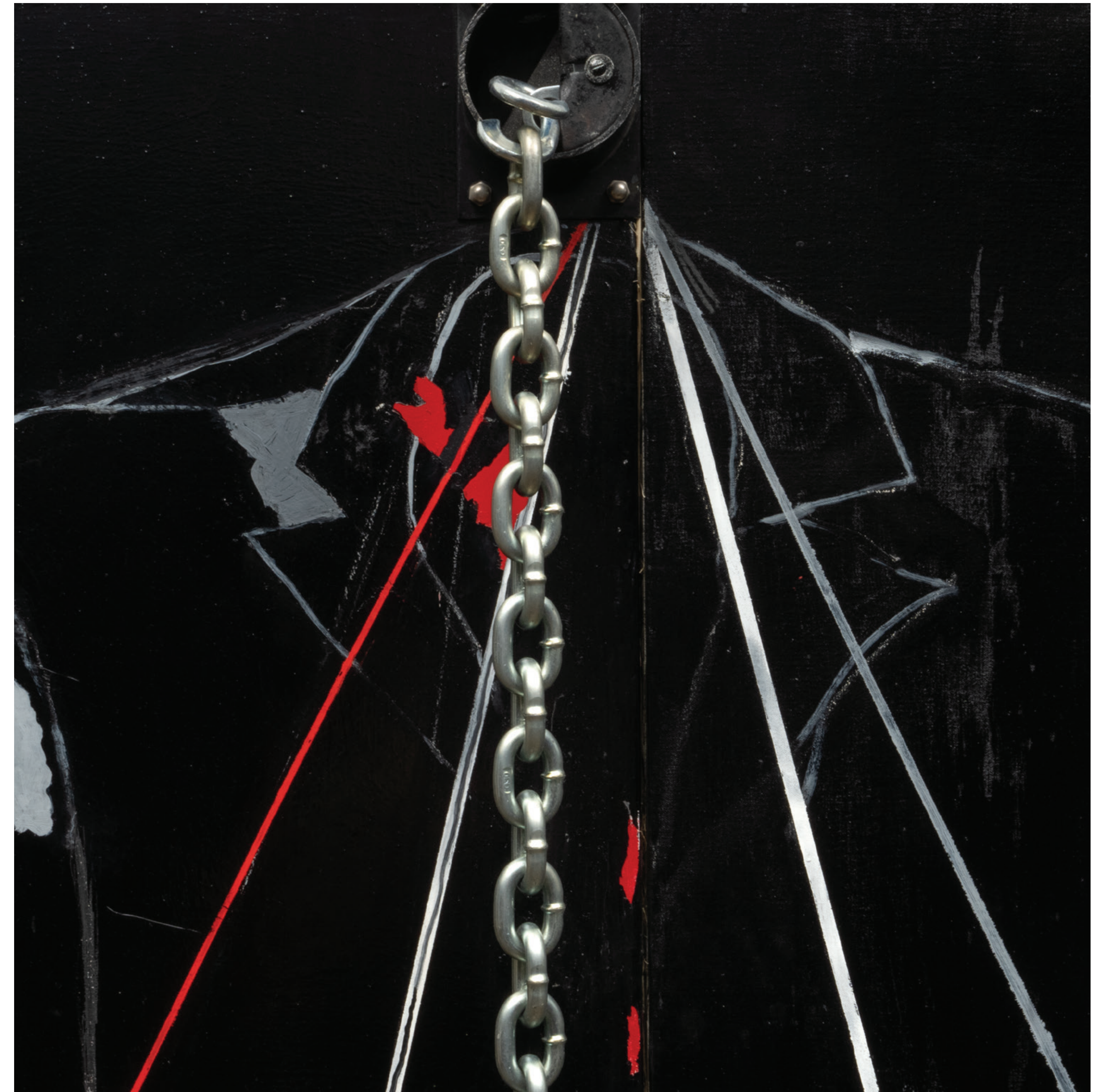
I find an extraordinary boldness, and a real virtuosity, in the way Dine trifles with conventional principles of "good" design, "coherent" organization, "consistent" handling, "plastic" space, etc., not because these manipulations are permissively destructive, but because they challenge our attitudes so effectively. They do this not in a polemical way, but simply because he brings through such practices an extraordinary new sense of mystery to the painting, and a new sense of ambiguity.

He is one of the most interesting exponents of this new ambiguity, which is so much a part of the contemporary spirit. The evocative indeterminacy of his work depends on two things, his obsessive impulse toward reiteration and variation, and a distinctly polar ambivalence. He unequivocally acknowledges that oscillation between attraction and repulsion, which he tends to think about in terms already familiar here: "I have always gone from one pole to the other of scatology . . . too clean . . . too dirty; this compulsion, along with the fear that the paintings may go away, are the reasons for making the things I do, probably." Or again, "I like the idea of making things that look like they are useful, i.e., *Job No.1*. This invites some to touch and others not to want to. Always the two poles of scatology. The frustrating thing is that they'd better not . . . but that sometimes I'd like them to." At one exhibition opening, another artist literally accepted the implicit injunction in *Hatchet with Two Palettes*, and chopped three or four holes in the canvas.

The special psychological openness of Dine's art springs first from a kind of creative generosity which verges on prodigality, both in the performance and in his feeling about the beholder. Thus, he is drawn to invite the destruction of his pieces, on the one hand, and on the other, he speaks of those who "run scared at the hint of favors, as they know nothing anyway, and hence one wants to make objects of objects to give to any eye (the generosity of big ideas is the frightening thing). This is what upsets them."

His openness leaves him anywhere in the world to go, unlike some of his contemporaries. Paradoxically, his work has been closed to many people, simply because it is so intimately tied to the new sensibility; in this sense his paintings are more demanding than anyone else's. Since we are still somewhat remote from a common level of awareness of these issues, what is enduring and meaningful generally in the new art, and specifically in the work of Jim Dine, will take a little while to be understood.

Car Crash, 1959–60. Oil and mixed media on burlap. 60" × 64". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Isometric Self-Portrait, 1964. Oil on canvas with chain and wood object. 72" × 87¼". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The Blonde Girls, 1960. Oil, charcoal and rope on canvas. 6' 6" × 8' 4". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

WELCOME HOME LOVEBIRDS

"WELCOME HOME LOVEBIRDS" said the sign above my nose.
"KEEP OUT OF DARK ROOMS" said the girl who takes money.
"BREATHE WHILE YOU LEARN" said the liar on the edge.
"KEEP HEAVEN CLEAN" said the hostess making rolls.
"MARCH WITH TRIBAL FOOLISHNESS" said jojo once or twice.
"BANG AWAY AT LULU" said the sad artist's moustache.
"KEEP UP THE TONE AND MEET THE MORNING" said a pair of young hair.
"REACH OUT AND FEEL MY NAILS" said an ancient odalisque type.
"GET YOUR TEETH OFF MY SOFA" said the mild grenadier.
"PUT YOUR MIND IN MY PALM" said the billboard painted yellow.
"EAST IS AS BEAST IS" said the ever spitting dog.
"SEX IS JUST THE RAIN" said the black flapping hillbilly pants.
"A SHIEK IS IN THE OVEN" said the marbled winter road.
"WATCH YOUR FEET, MR FEET" said the teeny tiny professional.
"BASEBALLS MAKE THE BEST" said the magnificent twin girls.
"LET'S LOCK OUT THE ROPE SWING" said the jolly old St Nicholas.
"THAT FAMOUS ACTOR AND HIS HELPFUL HANDLE" said the maid with the roses.
"SEE THE MAYPOLE" said the nostril.
"BLOOD IS MY GAME" said the eligible flag stripe.
"THE FEAST OF STEPHEN IS OPEN SEASON" said the port of no recall.
"WISH YOU WERE A PLEASANT ASYLUM" said the ruby green truck driver.
"PAINT ME LIKE A PINTO BEAN" said the jealous brace of blue.
"GAS ER UP" said my brown sugar red shoelaced son.
"ENOUGH IS OLD CIGARETTE BUTTS" said me.

MY NOSE GOES VIBRATING DOWN THE STREET

1. My nose goes vibrating down the street
   the signal rings in my hand
   my vibrator knows
   I start running
   backwards
   let me

2. Birches and spruce
   coffee and eggs
   boys and wives

3. shit man its like
   living on easy
   street

—Jim Dine

Five Silver Ties, 1962. Oil, aluminum paint and neckties on canvas. 43½" × 24". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

ACTS OF TRANSFIGURATION

Oliver Shultz

This exhibition assembles a selection of early works, dating from 1959 to the early 1970s, which together reflect Jim Dine's profound and probing exploration of the poetic force of everyday things. Paying homage to the longtime friendship between the artist and Arne Glimcher, who presented numerous exhibitions of Dine's work at Pace beginning in 1976, the show celebrates the eclecticism and adventurousness of the artist's early experimentations. Through paintings, sculptures, and works on paper, *Jim Dine: The Sixties* traces key themes in the arc of Dine's development over a fifteen-year period.

The exhibition begins with Dine's seminal painting *Car Crash* (1959–60), which shares a title with the Happening that he produced in 1960 at the Reuben Gallery in New York. A tenebrous, heavily worked surface of black pigment on burlap radiates with somber intensity, memorializing two car accidents the artist experienced in quick succession during the summer of 1959—pivotal and traumatic events that would shadow his work during this period. The shape of a crudely scrawled cross, which would become a prominent motif in Dine's iconography, repeats across the painting's surface. Halfway between gesture and symbol, the cross recurs in other works from this series, suggesting at once a roadside memorial and a more universal succor.

This sense of duality cuts across all the works in the exhibition. The daily accoutrement of the artist's studio—hammers, boots, palettes, color charts, and so on—exude a sense transfiguration. Often blurring the lines between painting and sculpture, Dine's depictions of these ordinary implements marry illusion and reality. Freighted with outsized psychological import, his tools speak to themes of artistic labor and making, to the environment of the studio, and to the workaday practice of being an artist while also conveying something more mysterious: a glimpse of the poetic possibility that lies latent in even the most mundane enterprise.

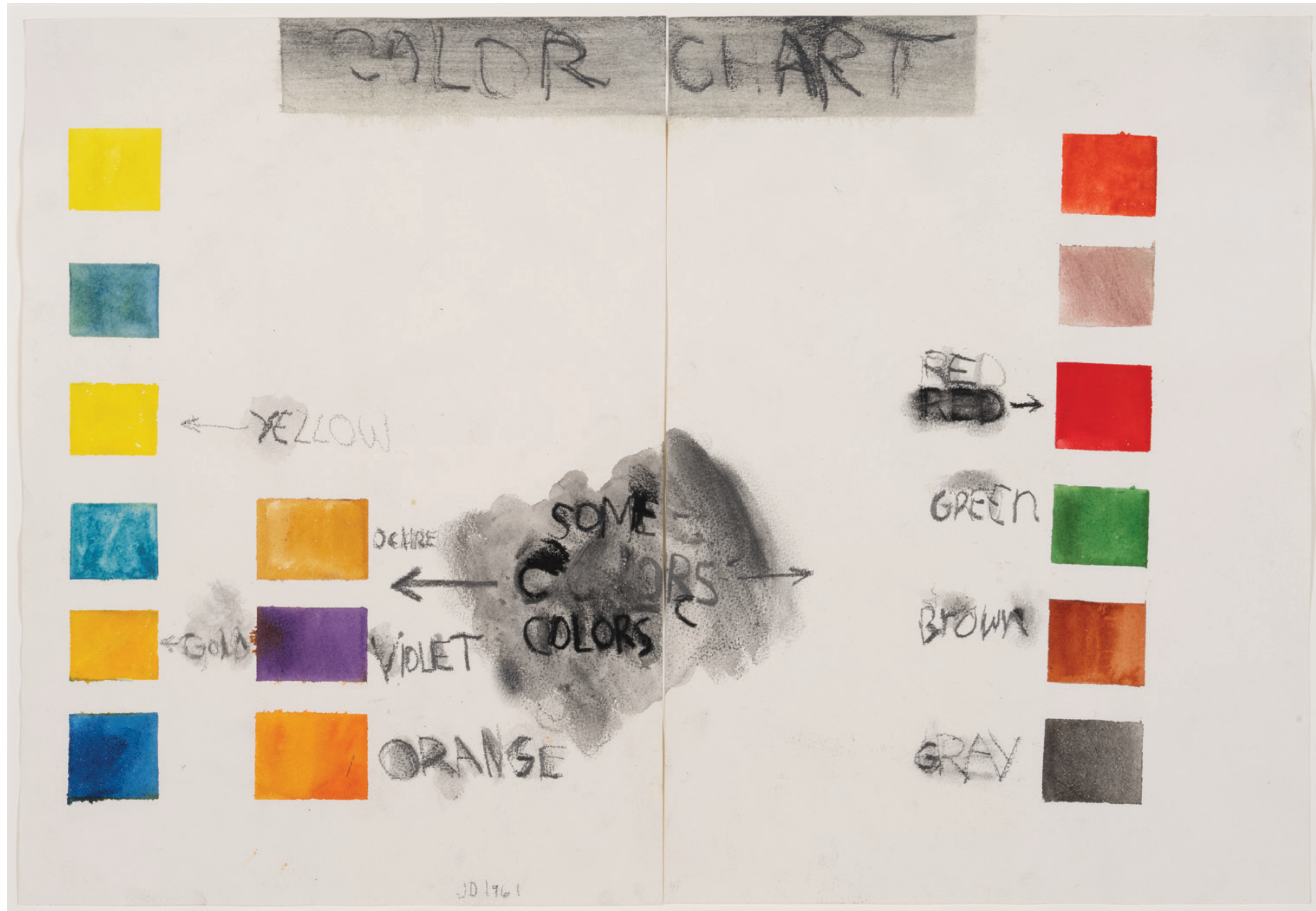
In Dine's paintings, expressionist intensity collides with deadpan literalism. *In The Studio (Landscape Painting)* (1963), Dine meditates on the nature of representation, juxtaposing a literal "still life" of found objects with a pictorial montage of abstract expressionist idioms, offering wry commentary on the history of medium and its relationship to lived reality. T*hings in Their Natural Setting (First Version)* (1973), made a decade later, conveys an equally arch sensibility. An all-over field of abstract and gestural brushwork in shades of green becomes a "support" for real tools—screwdrivers, a mallet, a brush, a trowel—which are physically affixed to the painting's surface by wires. These readymade objects dangle freely from the canvas, embodying a lighthearted yet dead-serious play between truth and illusion, objecthood and materiality, tensions that exist at the heart of the artist's practice.

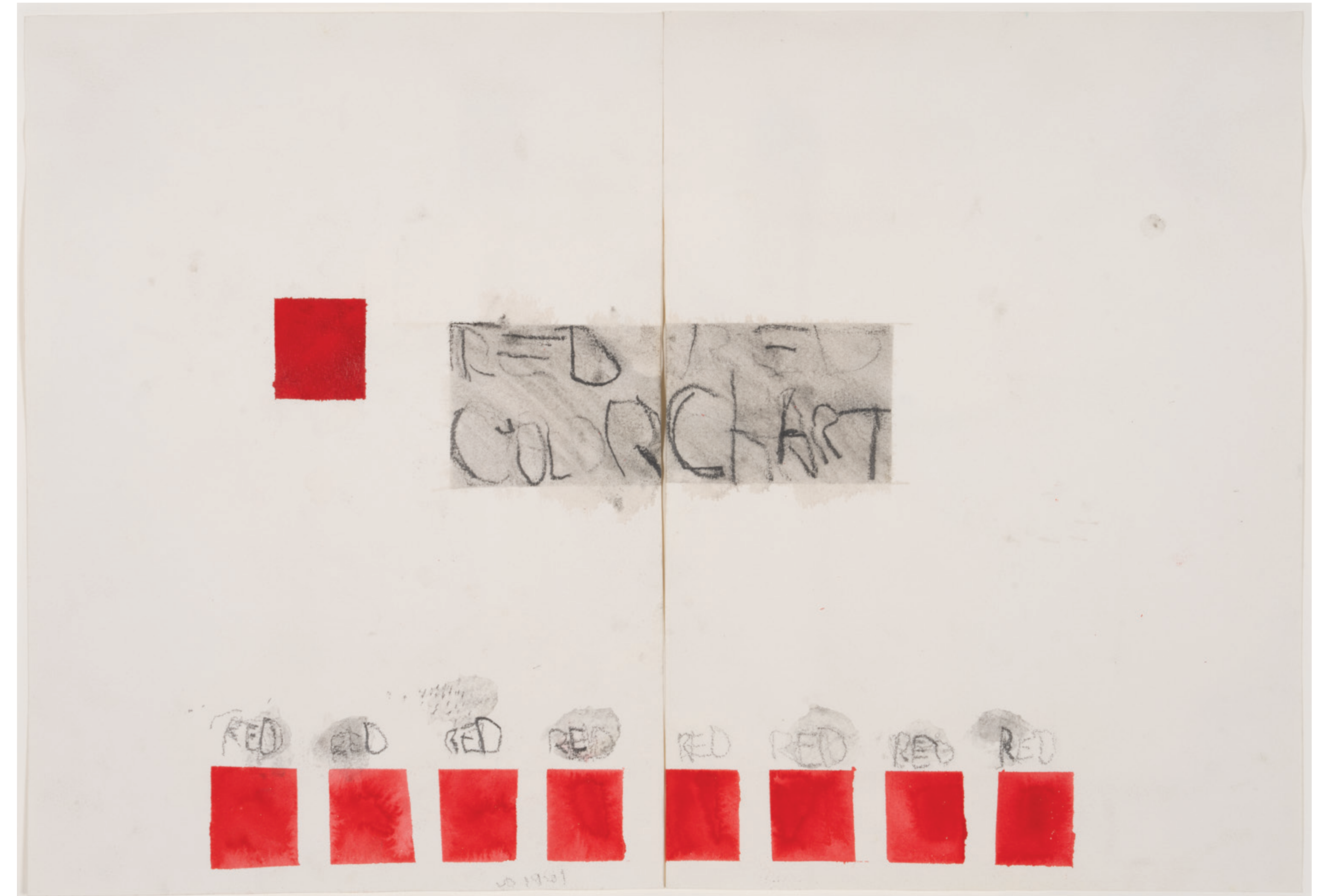
Across the exhibition, Dine's imagery is always dialectical—the humble and the ordinary spill over with grandeur and grace. Sanctifying the artifacts of daily life with a sense of radical presence, as if they were Greek icons, Dine's tools and adornments seem redolent of a collective unconscious. Yet they remain indelibly tied to the specificities of the artist's own biography—to a traumatic memory of a car crash, or to his time spent working in a hardware store as a young man in Cincinnati, Ohio. All these objects infuse ordinary thingness with the imprimatur of the metaphysical.

For Dine, making is an act of transfiguration. Virtuosic sculptures depicting hard industrial objects miraculously take on the suppleness of flesh, while the soft contours of the fabric neckties in the artist's paintings somehow assume statue-like solidity. An old leather boot resting on its side has the alluring corpulence of a reclining Venus. Neckties flash with menacingly metallic edges. A pair of upright hammers are elongated in a suggestively organic poise, forming an architecture of ingress or retreat. Elsewhere, the outlines of painters' palettes become windows into a landscape littered with car mirrors and electric fans, reflectors, and conductors for consciousness in the ever-flowing, over-flowing circuits of the attention economy.

Throughout the works in the exhibition, Dine infiltrates and disrupts the ordinary flow of things. With the confidence of a latter-day Old Master, he orchestrates a sense of subtle crescendo, celebrating the triumph of nature through the glories of facture. His painterly and sculptural investments are rooted in his early experimentations in performance and poetry. Much like fellow artists of the period, including Claes Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras, and Robert Whitman—Dine's co-conspirators in the Happenings—he embraced Dadaist sensibilities and pushed them to their most radical conclusions. As the paintings and sculptures in this exhibition attest, Dine's work from this period helped fundamentally reshape the contours of what art could be.

TOTAL MODNESS (THE BIG FLOPPY COLLAR BY GERALD MC CANN), 1965. Charcoal and objects on canvas. 60" × 48". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York





Color Charts, 1961. Watercolor and graphite on paper. 13½" × 9¾". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Four Rooms, 1962. Oil on canvas with objects. 72" × 15' × 50". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

WALKING MEMORY

A Conversation with
Jim Dine, Clare Bell, and Germano Celant

CLARE BELL:

I remember reading once that you said "to paint was a compulsion." Did that compulsion go all the way back to your childhood?

JIM DINE:

I painted since I was two years old. I've always painted. It's what saved me. It was my way of speaking through the black times.

GERMANO CELANT:

What kind of painting did you do as a child? Nature studies? Still lifes?

JD: I was not making childish paintings. I was trying to depict nature or to depict still life, or in the third grade when we were studying China, I remember trying my best to make a watercolor of a Chinese man in a blue suit, a worker's suit; and trying so hard to draw it right. And it was always a struggle, a struggle to get my hands to work, and I am left- handed. In those days, you know, we had penmanship classes, and I smeared my writing every single time because my hand would drag across the page. Because that's the way a left-handed person writes.

JD: She was my muse.

CB: Did you ever draw her?

JD: No. My mother was the woman who lit the flame. My grandma was my mother; my mother was my lover. It was like that. It was a complicated, confused childhood.

CB: Where were your grandparents from?

JD: My father's parents were from Lithuania. My mother's father was from Poland, and her mother was Hungarian. She wasn't from Hungary-her mother was. She was actually born in Richmond, Virginia, but she was a woman of Europe, a peasant farm woman.

GC: Did they show you images of the past? Their country? Did they bring with them memories of those places?

JD: That's all we ever spoke about. We only spoke about memories.

CB: Had your grandparents lost family in the Holocaust?

JD: No, we all came over before the war. My grandfather came at the end of the nineteenth century, as an indentured man to a cousin, who brought him over, and then he owed him for years.

CB: What kind of jobs did you have growing up?

"...THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT HOW PLUMBING IS DONE, WHAT PLUMBING IS ABOUT."

CB: As a child would you try to render a mirror image?

JD: I was trying to achieve a relationship between my eyes and my hand. And it wasn't working. It took me a long time. It was like weight lifting. I had to practice.

GC: Besides grammar school, where were you drawing? Were you going to some special place?

JD: It was always in my house and when I was eleven, I went to the art museum in our town, and studied with a man who was a Mexican-American veteran of the Second World War and wanted to be an artist. He taught at the Art Academy. His name was Carlos Cervantes.

CB: Did your parents encourage your art studies?

JD: My mother was a "culture vulture" and had a lot of ambition for me, and she thought it was great. My father, on the other hand, never thought much about my interest in art and let me go to the museum simply because he thought it brought some kind of social prestige to our family.

GC: So your mother was your point of cultural reference?

JD: When I was in high school, I worked at construction in the summer time building houses. I watched carpenters a lot. I had always watched plumbers particularly. You know, there is something about how plumbing is done, what plumbing is about. The bowels, the underground of things. To be a plumber now is to be rather clean. You use plastic pipe. It's put together with glue, it's no problem. It's cut easily. To be a plumber when I was growing up you had to be somebody. In the first place, you are lifting pipes. You're lifting a sewer pipe that was cast iron. We called it "soil pipe." And every summer at my uncle's store, working there, I had to lift those things off trucks. It was really, really tough work. Then, being a plumber was tough work, because to put that together, a piece of pipe together, there was a male and female end, you put that male end to the female, and then you packed it like a tooth cavity with oakum, which is hemp soaked in tar, and you packed that around it and then they melted the lead and poured the lead and sealed it. To have been a plumber meant digging in shit all the time. It smelled terrible. I mean, to be around plumbers, they always stunk like shit, and my father, because he worked in a tool store, we all knew how to do this, but the toilet would get stuffed up or the drain would get stuffed up, my father would bring out the snake, shove it down there and bring up crap from the thing. It was disgusting, but this all had

something to do with how art is made. The same way my grandma put together meals in some sort of intuitive way. It was the same thing. It was this putting together of things.

GC: So do you think that your work is about memory too?

JD: My work is totally about memory. And my memory is very good. I mean I have a very vague memory of everything. There were times when I could remember everything that ever happened to me. And I can't anymore, but I relish my memory, I cherish my memory. My memory is my vast vault of experience.

CB: It's not a selective memory?

JD: No. Absolutely not. I don't want to control it. It's all there.

GC: It's life memory, which is why I feel your work is so aligned with European ideologies. Your subject matter is difficult, because memories are something you don't want to remove.

JD: They want to remove them in America.

GC: That is why I feel your acceptance in Europe is stronger in some ways, because our goal as Europeans is memory, and you always bring your bag of memory full on your back. And that I understand, and also why you so adamantly refused being labeled a Pop artist. It was offensive.

JD: It had no romance. For me it was just what it was. I need the romance.

GC: You needed the flexibility of time and history.

CB: Materials, patterns, and textures, which were so clearly important to your early work, are imbued with an air of domesticity as opposed to a laconic manufactured quality. What was it about the house or home itself that inspired you?

JD: We lived in houses with basements. I was always in the basement, going through the old paint cans, using the old paint—and just stirring the old paint turned me on! It was some connection between shit and food and paint. As a child, it had to be like that.

GC: Would you paint on any surface?

JD: I painted sometimes on the basement concrete wall, or I'd paint on a paint stirrer, or I'd make designs. I didn't know the word "collage." I'd make designs. My aunt has a painting that I made in high school after I had discovered Nicolas de Stael. I loved de Stael because he was a romantic figure and I loved the way he put the paint on so thick. It looked to me like modern art. Eventually, when I left home, and ran away from the evil stepmother and went to live with my grandma, I worked in her basement and painted on anything I could find. I knew a rich girl I went to high school with, who I liked and she liked me, and she took me to her grandma's huge mansion in Cincinnati, and we went to the basement and there I saw her grandmother's canvases. So, I took away a lot of canvases of very bad paintings of people, and I painted over them.

CB: So the basement operated as something secret and liberating as well as abject and furtive?

JD: It's been in my dreams all my life. My whole unconscious is depicted as a house, and the basement is where it takes place, and then you go upstairs.

GC: What kind of formal art training did you have after high school?

JD: I was untrainable. I went to the University of Cincinnati just because I didn't want to go into the army, and I hated it. There were no art classes there to speak of. Then I found out that I could go to Ohio University, which also had few art classes, but you could get a degree in it. It was very cheap—eighty-five dollars a semester. I had no money, but my grandma could pay that for me, and I worked in the summer. But I never went to classes. All I did was paint at Ohio University, and they were frightened of me. They never had anybody like that, because mostly everybody wanted to be an art teacher.

CB: Where did you paint at college?

JD: My apartment or in the school. The school had rooms, but they were hardly used, and I painted like crazy all the time. And I got through it. I cheated, and got through college.

CB: Did you receive any formal instruction?

JD: There were instructors, but they treated me like an equal. Some were threatened by me, some were excited by me. But I was nineteen years old, and they were thirty-five and sixty. I just painted.

CB: In 1955 you enrolled for one semester at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Why did you want to go to Boston?

JD: When I graduated from high school I gave myself a present. I bought a book called *Modern Prints and Drawings* by Paul Sachs, who was at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. I still have that book. And I thought, well Boston must be the place to go, so I went to the Museum School for a semester. It was horrible. It was like the army—rigorous, old-fashioned, academic training that I didn't want. What made me different from other artists—not that every artist isn't different—but what set me apart is that my subject matter was myself.

CB: Had the figure played an important role in your work prior to your coming to New York?

JD: Well, I was fairly glib with my hands—that is, I could draw a self-portrait of myself and make it look like myself, which in New York seemed terribly radical and no one wanted to do it, because it wasn't so *au courant*. After the year I spent in Patchogue teaching school, which was 1958-59, I would come into the city three or four times a week, a two-hour ride each way at night after teaching school, and talk and drink with Claes [Oldenburg] and Red Grooms and see Lester Johnson. The art of Lester Johnson was really important to me. His paintings were so beautiful. It was like pulling out of the canvas, out of oil paint, out of material, out of sand, out of shit, out of tar—pulling it out, pulling out an image. Out of somewhere else rather than out of France, or rather than out of Rothko. That kind of refinement.

CB: Were you involved with the unconscious?

JD: Well, I didn't know it, but of course I was. I have pretty good access to my unconscious—that's the way I was born, and painting for me has helped me undemonize myself. So, you could say it's cathartic what I do. But fortunately, I am a conscious enough person to have not just been a lunatic, and I've tried to elevate my desire to work to what I call art.

CB: Did you feel that Abstract Expressionism gave you, on some level, permission to work with the unconscious?

JD: I felt I always had access.

GC: So it's very primitive.

JD: I am not a heavily defensed person. I have an access to my childhood that many people are jealous of. I can access childhood very easily. I don't mean just memory. I mean feeling. And I am very much in the head of the child—not that I am childish, but in the sense that I remember and that my childhood stayed with me. When I started to toddle around and look at the world, I started to catalogue and accumulate in my mind experiences and sensations. I remember when I was maybe three years old, sitting with my mother's emery boards and taking a pencil and making a whole emery board black. I wear down the pencil for no reason other than the physical thing of making the emery board black. Then, I get the idea. I realize the sensuality of graphite. I touch it, and it's beautiful. Graphite is silvery, and I use it for makeup. And I put on a mustache and a beard, and I start to literally paint. The same with my mother's makeup. I was always in my mother's places—in the closet, under her bed, in her bathroom—playing with stuff. I was painting. I was experiencing changing something.

CB : Are the faces you painted early in your career an attempt to confront the demons of your childhood?

JD: The faces were generic faces. They were me. They were me getting the emotion out of me. I began them the summer after I taught school in Patchogue when I used to come in to New York City all the time and see Red Grooms, and I was being introduced to people from the Hansa Gallery, which I didn't feel very comfortable with, but I was sort of affected by. Like Lester Johnson, and things Claes and I talked about. And then I went down to Kentucky, where my uncle had a little cabin on a lake in the midst of tobacco fields. And Nancy and I had a little boy, who was just a baby then. We went down to Kentucky, because we had no money, but it was a cheap place to live, and we stayed down there and I took watercolors and crayons and whatever, and I just started to draw faces. And every day I drew faces . And the whole summer I'd make a face a day, or two faces a day, and the more faces I made, the happier I was. There were so many of them. And then I started to make paintings down there. And by the end of the summer that's what I had, and I left a lot of them there. I brought back some of the drawings and showed them at the Reuben Gallery, in the back room. They were all pinned up, maybe thirty of them, and Dick Tyler took wine at an opening and threw it all over half of them, and I hit him. It was an incredible scene.

GC: To me, the faces represent an osmosis between the personal and the idea of repetition, the personal being a representation of yourself and repetition the idea of a copy. Your work is thus both an integration and association of many levels of perception. Tell us about the idea of the mask and the theatrical elements of your early work. Did you know about Bertolt Brecht and the Living Theater?

JD: I always thought of myself as an actor/artist, and I could've always been that, except I am not very good at interpreting others' work. I don't get any pleasure from that particularly, although I have appeared as an actor at times, besides the Happenings. And I've enjoyed that, and I could still be an actor today. I enjoy that! I enjoy looking at actors, watching actors. I don't enjoy the theater particularly, but I enjoy the craft of what one can do.

CB: Were you involved in acting prior to 1960 when you first performed at Judson?

JD: I did a little bit in high school, but more than that I made my own theater in my head and it had to do with all sorts of things. It had to do with growing up with a grandfather who was highly amusing for us kids. He was obviously a brute, and an abuser of a lot of things. But he was great fun as a grandfather. And it was theatrical. My mother was totally theatrical. Everything was a mass-drama, and it was very sad, because she said she was going to die, and she did die. You know, she said she was going to get the cancer, and she got the cancer. But it was done in such a flowery, theatrical way, and I was part of the team, part of the show that was going on. And also my experience with God, and in the synagogue. And the dichotomy of that—where I came from these people who were first-generation Americans, who wanted to leave their Orthodox Judaism behind. So we went to this Reform Temple, which was like Episcopal Church, but even less devout, more like Protestants. And all it did for me was make me feel two ways. My mother was ashamed of being Jewish, and on the other hand, my grandfather cried in the synagogue. I come from a strong God; a Jew comes from a strong, cruel God—Yahweh. And every night, I thought he was going to strike me down if I didn't say my prayers. My grandma told me, "You got to say your prayers, or he is going to punish you." And there is a lot of theater in that. The only time I ever enjoyed going to the synagogue was when there was a lot of music and they brought out the Torah, and everybody paraded around with these beautiful objects. I got into that. Otherwise, it was a nightmare for me. And of course, in the end, it was a nightmare because as a twelve-year-old, I had to stand up for the memorial service after my mother died, and that was an embarrassment to me, and I didn't know how to behave. All this informed me as a performer.

GC: So, your acting comes from inside. There is a process of your inside becoming a gesture, an action, or a visual element.

JD: Taking an unconscious thought and bringing it to consciousness.

GC: And that's why the mask is the second skin of your face, which comes out of performing as a jester or an actor.

JD: I think it's like a miracle. One of the things I like about Jesus is that Jesus's existence makes God conscious. It's the first time we talk about God as man, God in man. I relate to it so much. It didn't seem absurd to me, but rather a great moment.

CB: Because it made something that seemed abstract into something tangible?

JD: Yes, making something tangible.

CB: So that's why you liked the part of the service when they brought out the Torah.

JD: You got to see something. I love an object! I am obsessed with objects—I mean every object. I spent my whole life playing with objects. I was two years old, playing with every tool, every object I found. My grandmother's sewing kit, the basket of thread with every different color. My father's condoms; in those days, Ramses and Trojans came in packages that had beautiful drawings. Playing cards, the backs of playing cards. The beautiful ivory tiles used in the Chinese game of Mah-Jongg, which are like dominoes but with Chinese marks on them instead of dots. My mother's sense of decor in the house.

CB: Does *The Checkerboard* come out of your interest in games like this?

JD: The checkerboard doesn't come from my thing with games, it comes from what red and black look like together. I've always loved red and black, and it's a very basic pattern.

CB: Was it specifically the grid that interested you, or the notion of pattern in general?

JD: The grid, that's partly it. I like the square thing, but for instance, in Scottish tartans, which I am a big student of, there is one called Rob Roy. So it goes back to the eighteenth century and probably even before. I've been interested in tartan all my life. It thrills me.

GC: I noticed that the imagery in *Altar for Jeremiah* is much more complicated than the first face paintings.

JD: But it's also very ordered, in an altar kind of way.

CB: In fact, the overall shape of the piece is reminiscent of a crucifix.

JD: I always loved a central image. And although *Altar for Jeremiah* is quite sophisticated in technique, the imagery is more like primitive painting than something out of Abstract Expressionism. There is this huge penis in plaster, and some of the objects are found Halloween masks. All of us were fascinated with just about everything in the city, even with someone ejaculating on the subway. It was like collecting an experience in this underworld. We were collecting another experience of someone making their mark a different way, of someone being crazy, of walking down the street looking just like everyone else and then being able to do this to make themselves individuals. It was like lifting up a rock and discovering all these worms. It was really great!

CB: Was Halloween an inspiration to your work?

JD: Halloween in Ohio, when I was a child in the late 1930s, scared the shit out of me. And my mother and father were embarrassed by me crying when kids in costumes came to our house on Halloween. It's the frightening masks of pumpkins for heads, it's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," it's the headless rider, and it's also listening to adventure serials on the radio and being scared. I still love looking at masks and things. Puppets, masks—all that interests me.

CB: Does chance play a role in any of these works?

JD: When I heard Kaprow and John Cage talking about chance, I thought to myself, "What? This is like reinventing the wheel. An artist does that every day!" When Whistler put down a brushstroke, was it chance? Since you have the opportunity to remove it after it's done. We're free men. But, it's always been there for artists. Chance! You find things in the ether.

GC: It was just a theory about chance.

JD: Yeah, but they loved the theory. It was like a dogma.

GC: I see a connection with the altar, the penis, and the notion of dress in *Green Suit*.

JD: There was a toy when I was a kid called Bill Ding. It fascinated me. It was all the same guy, made out of wood, but he was in different colors, with a suit and a tie on. And you could put him on top of each other like an acrobat. It was endless fun to do for kids. And I thought about this toy while I was making *Green Suit* at the time of *The House*. I just took that suit, I ripped it up, I shredded the legs, because the seat was all worn out and so were the knees. I shredded that to sort of make it hang in a certain way, and then it seemed to me the most natural thing to do was take some of these things and tie it into a penis. I don't know why, but that's what artists do. That's called inventing.

GC: Yeah, but you transformed it in a certain way that imbues it with a female connotation.

JD: I've always been comfortable with the woman in me. Always comfortable. As a child I often wondered what it meant to be both. I really always felt that. I've never in my life, quite honestly, felt an attraction to men sexually. But that has nothing to do with feeling male and female.

CB: Were you always interested in the idea of drag and masquerade?

JD: I've always been fascinated with how one dresses. One puts on what one owns. The possibilities of a different variety of things, not unlike color charts. Back then when you went to Brooks Brothers, they never had men's suits on hangers. They had them lying on tables, all over the store, one on top of the other, and next to each other. The subtlety of the fabric was so fascinating. I would go on my lunch hour from teaching just to look at the fabric. I still go to fabric stores wherever I am to look at material. Because there is something about material—first, that somebody made it, and also that it has a different quality, like humans.

GC: There are so many different definitions of dress now. Looking back, this element of your work has nothing to do with fashion; it has to do with identity.

JD: Exactly. I used dress as a hedge against social fear. If one had a lot of clothes, one was more armored against the world.

GC: Meaning you could change your identity.

JD: Yes, absolutely. And you didn't need to expose your nude self

GC: But Joseph Beuys said that if you stayed always the same, it was better, because your identity stays fixed and recognizable. He created the felt suit to keep fashion immobile; you saw dress as just the opposite.

CB: And there is an ambivalence in your work between exposing yourself and using dress as a kind of armor.

JD: Yes, but I am not walking around with my fly open. That's the luxury of being an artist. You don't have to.

GC: Do you think that at the time your idea was to restrict the territory of your compositions in the way that clothing outlines the perimeters of the body? Certainly the previous generation, artists like Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning, aimed at enlarging the scope of their actions as artists. They wanted to talk about the war, they wanted to break through to the outside. And your generation was trying to deal with the territories of dress, houses, shops, as icons of self.

JD: Don't forget that the Abstract Expressionists were landscape painters, and we were not. We were internalized. And if there was a landscape, I carried it on my back. It's my landscape. It's the landscape inside me. That's what I am interested in.

GC: In *Green Suit* the object becomes your body and it is a moment of leaving traces. Why such a fascination with making a stamp?

Green Suit, 1959. Corduroy suit, corrugated cardboard, wire, and oil paint.
65¾" × 28¾". ©2023 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

JD: It's like a dog who pees on things. I am always moved by how a dog leaves traces. It claims it. "See, that's mine. I was here!" In the 1980s I went to see an unfinished Palladian villa called La Serasina outside of Venice, in a town called Noventa. It's now been bought, but it's never been finished. It's been lived in; it was never electrified, there was never water in it, but people had lived in it. They were peasants. It came with peasants, can you imagine! I went up into the attic, and on the eaves there was graffiti from that time until now. There was graffiti from builders, Palladio's builders. There was fascist graffiti from Nazi soldiers who stayed there on the way out, retreating. It was so moving to me that humans had touched something and wanted to leave their mark.

CB: You've told us about being frightened by many things when you were a child, but you seemed to have faced up to those childhood fears as an artist working at this time.

JD: Exactly. I had no fears as an artist. I had fears as a human. I was very aware of how distant and unrelated I was to everyone else. That I was something else, something quite unto myself. I felt it was a fact of nature that I am different from everyone else. Not as an artist, but as a human. We probably all know that we are all different, but I am speaking about it in an interpersonal way. I found it difficult to relate to anyone.

CB: Your work constantly went back and forth between using the real and then the illusion. You have the real suit, and then in a number of your paintings later on, you actually have the illusion of the suit. Why the jump? Are they two very different things, the real and the illusion?

JD: It's the question of what's real. For me, my sense of reality sometimes is one thing and sometimes it's the other. It's like an emotion. How in touch am I with how I really feel or how in touch am I with what reality is, what's going on with my sense of reality? That interests me always. Also, what looks best. Remember, I am a visual artist.

GC: How did you go from the idea of painting or objects to building *The House*? Of course, the phallus and the *Green Suit* itself is a protrusion, but could you talk about the physical leap from painting to constructing an environment?

JD: Well, the Judson had a lot of crap in storage from the theater, like stage flats. And Claes and I were going out all the time onto the street at night, and pulling in junk. Going out in the snow. And we were pulling in stuff we found on the street, just to use. I was teaching school, he was working in the library at Cooper, we didn't have any money. I was living uptown on First Avenue and was coming down at night, and he was meeting me, and we buy a little beer, and we get a little high, then we go out on the street and we pick up all this stuff. We go back in, and we talk and we build. We drink, and that's what we did. That was the process. I built this like I built anything. I built *The House* like I built a painting. It just happened to have more things.

CB: How did it evolve into the idea of a show?

JD: We thought that slot at Judson was ours. It was probably Claes's idea, because that's the way he thinks. Theoretically. He probably said, "You do the house. I'll do the outside, you do the inside, because that's the way you are."

GC: How did it come to life?

JD: I was given an area. This was a great thing to have happened to an artist like me. An artist like me—I didn't have a studio. I was painting in my living room, which wasn't even a living room. I just turned it into my studio, and we lived in the kitchen, and in between was this railroad flat; we slept in one little cubicle and my kid slept in the other, which would've been where the living room was. It looked just like *The House*, and that's where I made *Bedspring* and all that stuff.

GC: And did you know about Schwitters at the time?

JD: Certainly, I knew about the *Merzbau*. And I loved Schwitters. But I didn't think of this as the *Merzbau*. When I think of Schwitters, I think of Cubism. The House was a depiction of my inner life of chaos

CB: Is *The House* the first time you began to incorporate writing into your work?

JD: I always had writing. I used it all the time in my painting then.

CB: Do you remember when you first seized on the idea of merging the spaces of theater with the act of painting?

JD: I was born that way. I had already spent my late teenage years and my early twenties in Ohio in school acting the same way. Going to a building as the year ended and spring came to Ohio, going to an abandoned house in the country, and just drawing on the walls, and jumping off the roof, and getting drunk and making something part of the whole thing. Making it all part of life.

GC: Did you have specific influences from TV or the movies?

JD: In my family, TV didn't come until I was about fifteen, about 1950–51. But I hate TV. Movies for me are the thing. And I always preferred black-and-white movies. Because of my generation, and also because of who I am, I never took a movie any other way but like that it was real—that I had a real experience. But during the early '60s, when I was having a breakdown and unable to leave the house, I didn't go to movies. I didn't do anything. I couldn't sit in a movie without going nuts. So, I was watching television all the time. I looked at everything. Through the day, I watched everything. Actually, Bob Whitman and I used to speak about it, too. Because we had little children, we watched children's TV in the late '50s, early '6os, and that said something about the kind of performances we made. There was a kind of repetition to little children that both of us used, an obsessiveness that both of us used.

CB: Would you model your performances on specific ideas you got from these programs?

JD: We would refer to Captain Kangaroo. Whitman and I referred to him a lot. We listened to his way of speaking and the way the characters spoke. It put the performances out of the realm of literal theater by these characters for children speaking to them in this odd way, which wasn't naturalistic. We were able to look at that as a kind of performance, too. Plus also, I don't think I've ever said this before, and it would be hard to write about, but George Segal's son Geoffrey is autistic, and I knew him as a young boy, when he was maybe ten or eleven. And he would watch those programs. I was always drawn to kids who did not fit in. Even when I was a kid, I was fascinated by children who had deformities that were not fixed, like they are today. There was a kid I went to school with who had two thumbs. Today, you wouldn't allow two thumbs. They would take one off at birth and that would be that. This kid had two thumbs, and he kept his bus money between the two thumbs. And I thought this was like art—it was another kind of sculpture. And the same with Geoffrey Segal. He and I had conversations at picnics I went to at Kaprow's with Segal and Whitman and Claes and everybody. Geoffrey Segal and I would stand there laughing about these children's programs, because we were both involved in watching them on TV. Because he couldn't stop repeating himself in his autism, he kept calling out, "Mr. Green Jeans." And he would say, "Hello, Mr. Green Jeans! Hello, Mr. Green Jeans! Hello, Mr. Green Jeans!" and I took it totally seriously, as though it was a form of narrative and a form of conversation. So that's what I was looking at.

GC: So you think that this kind of coming together of Kaprow, Oldenburg, Dick Higgins, Richard Tyler, etc. was strategic in a certain way because it reinforced what you were already thinking. You know, we are totally different, but in the end, you need the impact of not only yourself, because at the end you believe in yourself, but you need energy around you.

JD: And you need validation. Friends give it to you. Red Grooms couldn't be more of a different artist, but when I saw him perform *The Burning Building* it confirmed my idea of *The Smiling Workman*, and Claes was interested in doing similar kinds of work. And even Kaprow, who was an artist of no interest to me whatsoever except that I liked his paintings. I liked his paintings in the mid-'5os, which I saw in reproduction in Ohio. Kaprow had something, because he wasn't really a painter. He was more of a theoretician. The art he made was kind of primitive in a way, untutored. But I had no interest in *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. But to meet somebody like Bob Whitman was a trip! Every year Whitman made one painting. He just made it. It was his thing to do once a year, to make a painting. He had Rauschenbergs on the wall. He bought Rauschenbergs, and he was making this mad stuff. I thought, What's going on here?

GC: What strikes me about this period in your work is the very short time that you were doing the performances.

JD: You mean the duration of each performance? Or the short period of time over which I did them?

GC: Both. But, as distinct works they feel more like a gesture. Not as a gesture as a poly-gesture, but it's more as in life. You say a phrase and you leave. It's again very personal. It's not a long story, it is something happening in real time. How do you see this idea of time now, today?

JD: You mean, why did I do that then?

GC: Yeah.

JD: Because I couldn't sustain the passion any longer. It was like the male orgasm versus foreplay.

GC: So, no plateau. Just ups and downs.

JD: Right. It was the power of an object, of a single, central image. It was one thing. I made an object. In this case it was a play, whatever it was. This performance. But it was within a certain time, and it kept the power. Otherwise, like you say, you have ups and downs. Now you have to remember that Bob Whitman and me, Lucas Samaras, Marcus Ratliff, almost everybody around us were of the same age, except for Claes, who was older. He was a formed, sophisticated, European man with all sorts of irony and all sorts of references. References and fine schooling. He'd gone to Yale. Everything Claes took in about America, he took it in as an outsider. He's not an American. Now as Americans, we're all from somewhere else, but in his case, he matured with these parents who were diplomats, and he was a gentleman. Whereas I came from Europeans, but we lived an American experience in the Midwest and aspired to that, and then of course, I always aspired to Europe in another way. So, Whitman and all of us, we did something that was like television, like early television, or like the movies. We were not doing Molière.

GC: The kinds of performances you were engaged in were more akin to advertising—a thirty-second sales pitch.

JD: It was like driving on a highway, and you saw a billboard and you went by it. Or like the Burma Shave signs.

CB: Did you rehearse any of the performances?

JD: I rehearsed mainly with myself, because I was mainly in them alone. I rehearsed the technical parts with somebody else to put the tape-recorder on, and those sort of things. In *Car Crash*, I rehearsed, but I already had it in my mind what was going to happen, and I told people what to do, and they did it. It was not hard. It was not complicated.

CB: Was it scripted?

JD: It was scripted in terms for myself. I was the one who carried the power of it anyway. It was my acting, even in *Car Crash*. The others were neutral figures that were like objects in a landscape, Patty Oldenburg, and Mark, and Judy Tersch. They were objects for me, but I was the living force. It was like making a drawing.

CB: Were you conscious of the audience when you performed? Did you play to their emotions?

JD: Well, they weren't improvisation. I responded to the audience's response, and the audience always responded.The audience was there looking for a thrill. As people go to the theater. You want to be entertained. And this particular audience, which was mainly a crowd of our peers, even though they were sometimes much, much older, were ripe to be amused and to be titillated, and to be informed in some way.

CB: Would you interject humor where you may not have thought about having it before?

JD: No. I never even thought they were funny, but everybody laughed all the time.

GC: From nervousness?

JD: From being embarrassed. They laughed like crazy. Personal things make humans nervous.

GC: Were you interested in the idea of shamanist? The silver paint on your head in the performance of *Car Crash* evokes the idea. Of course in Europe, Beuys was combining fat, felt, and copper in his works. Did you know about Zen theory?

JD: We knew about it.

GC: Because of Cage? And not only Cage . . .

JD: Not just Cage, but there was "Zen in the Art of Archery." I knew about that in the '50s.

CB: Did you know much about existentialism?

JD: I never quite understood it. As a student I read Camus, but I read it as a story, not as a manifesto.

GC: Did you have any knowledge about Fontana and the Gutai Group?

JD: The only knowledge I had of the Gutai group was when we first came to New York, there was talk of them among the Abstract Expressionists, and Martha Jackson might have shown them or maybe they had a festival of kites or something like that. Fontana I saw because Martha Jackson showed Fontana, but I never really responded to it. I thought it was mannered, very handsome, and chic.

GC: Very formalistic.

JD: It was so elegant, and it was my idea of what Italy was like. I didn't know. I'd never been to Italy.

CB: Did you feel that in order for your audience to really understand your work they really had to understand you as the author?

JD: No, if they get the work, they understand me better, but they don't have to get me. You don't have to know me to get the work. There is a universal quality to it. I know this, because I know how people respond to the work, both bad and good. I never get a neutral response. It's always a response. I always get kissed or fucked, or I get stabbed in the back.

GC: The difference with the other so-called Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol was that their works were so detached. They didn't talk about themselves. Andy was the extreme of unexpressiveness, of what is supposedly "objective."

JD: I am everybody's nightmare. A provocateur.

Jim Dine

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