

10th ST.

Main street of the Art World



Al Leslie, carrying one of his paintings down Tenth Street to a gallery, gets only passing attention from pedestrians, for New York's Tenth Street is to the twentieth century what Paris was to the nineteenth: the art center of the world. The Tanager Gallery (right) was the first of the co-operatives on Tenth Street

Abstract expressionism flourishes in studios, galleries and hangouts of Greenwich Village's East Side





At one time or another in the past hundred years (to set an arbitrary date), fashion and art have collided in Rome, in Florence, and in Paris. In the last-named city, art has become so much an extension of the place that it has jumped about from Montmartre to Montparnasse to St.-Germain-des-Prés—the trick being that when fashion catches up with art, the advance guard snatches up art and flees, leaving fashion and the remnants of a new academy of painting.

Until that time, though, an art center can be said to reign. Artists from all over the world will seek ideas as well as refuge there; teachers and students will converge; new galleries and new art dealers will lend their names to art history; manifestoes will emerge; the critics and the public, outraged, will assail the "new art" with derision, and undoubtedly someone will proclaim: "I don't know very much about art but I do know what I like." Then, imperceptibly, wealthy art patrons and young, not-so-wealthy art lovers will begin to collect the new art, proclaiming and establishing its leaders; prices will rise (probably after the artist is dead); slowly, if reluctantly, the critics and the public will convert, affirming that yes a new mental image *has been realized in pigment*, accepting on faith where knowledge and taste seem uncertain; and overnight an establishment, an academy of the "right" new art, will come into existence.

We are somewhat in the midst of this process now.

The "new art" today travels under a variety of passports and names . . . abstract expressionism, action painting, The New York School of Painting. But perhaps its most surprising feature is that it is centered not in Florence, Athens or Paris, but in New York City, on Tenth Street in the lower East Side.

Tenth Street itself was a natural "discovery" for the older artists living in New York City. It offered the three essentials of life: space, light, and a reasonably inexpensive rent. For the younger painters—from universities, from Europe, from the Army—Tenth Street became an image: where the new ideas were, where the new, exciting painting was being done; and, of course, where living was cheap.

Besides, it provided a community for an artist. There were the private teachers like Hans Hoffman who seemed to epitomize an idea and a method of abstract expressionism; there was the artist's club, that informal meeting place "for artists only," where, on Friday evenings, the older figures—Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning—and the neophytes would gather and talk about contemporary art, its ideology and its problems. There were the cooperative galleries . . . owned by the painters themselves . . . and offering, in the words of the Tanager Gallery, ". . . to provide opportunity to artists whose work warrants exhibition and might otherwise not be seen . . . it gives the young painter and sculptor a predominantly professional audience; he is assured of critical attention, and very often, exhibition in other galleries." Naturally, there was the local pub, the Cedar Tavern, where, if you weren't going to paint or work, at least you could meet and talk with other artists. And, ultimately, there was Jackson Pollack (who died in an automobile accident in 1956), the "father" of action painting, who moved away from art and the creation of mental images through color and line, to focus on the very act of painting, of creating images, directly, immediately, spontaneously.

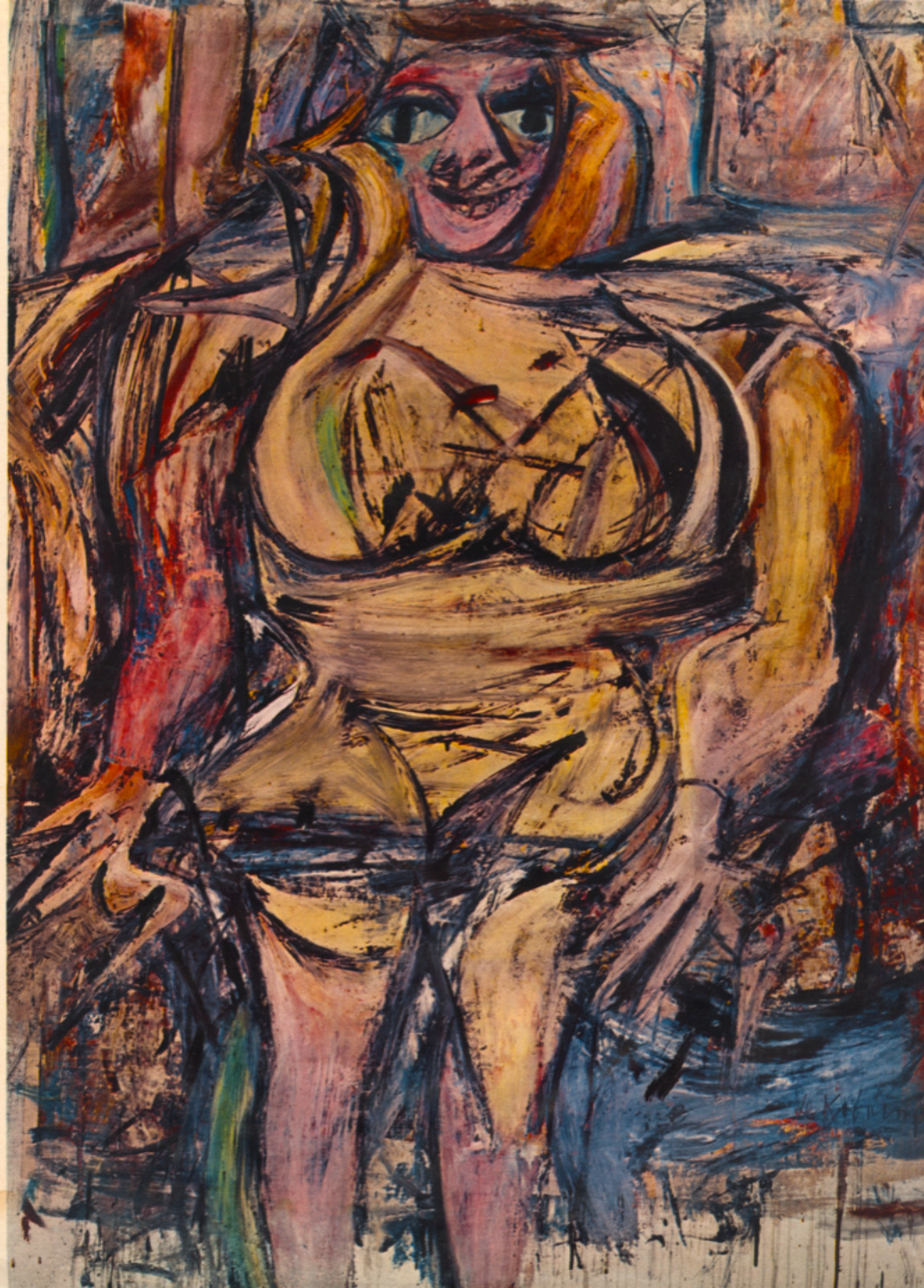
The impact of such a concerted movement is not surprising. Where painters and sculptors live together in a close, structured community, where they form their own galleries, criticize one another's paintings, where approbation and judgment come from contemporary artists instead of critics and the public, where social position itself is determined not by how much money you've earned from your painting or where you've studied, but rather in terms of just how good an artist (abstract) you are, the level of technical competence increases along with a preoccupation with the formal qualities of art.

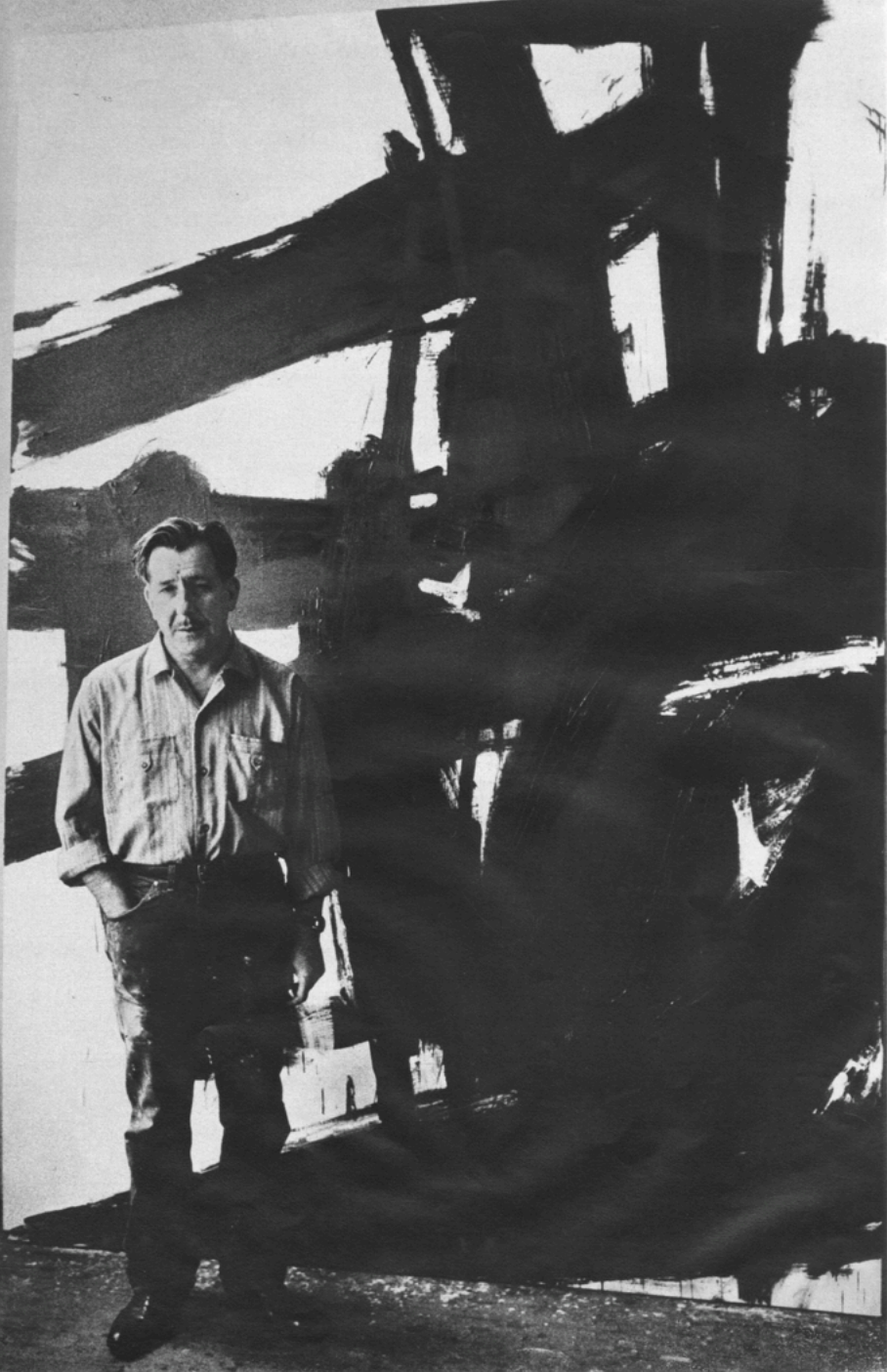
The result today is a school of abstract painting which has moved farther and farther away from a concern with recognizable images and which, as it has developed, has begun to acquire a non-professional following, solidifying (almost) into an academy.

We can tick off the indices on the chart: the prices for contemporary abstract art have risen, the critics and the public have embraced the new abstraction (on faith if not experience), and the latest forecast is that fashion, that insidious corrupter, is in the process of expropriation. Until it does so successfully, Tenth Street is secure as the new Western art center. But what the new image will contain, and where the new advance guard will flee (space, light and rentals being what they are today) once fashion takes over, is a question that has infinite answers. By the time it is raised and answered, though, Tenth Street will be the staid, conservative art academy. —G.L.

◀ Cedar Tavern: here artists quaff beer, swap studios, and dispense art news

A canvas by Willem de Kooning, one of the street's leading action painters ▶





Tenth Street's most eloquent painter: Franz Kline stands before a recent canvas. The lighted window (opposite) shows a more quiet view of the Tanager Gallery. It is one of those Tenth Street galleries (between Third and Fourth Avenues) which are less

than seven years old. The others are Area Gallery, Camino Gallery, March Gallery, Brata Gallery, Phoenix Gallery, Cedra Gallery, Grimaud Galerie, and Fleischman Gallery. Others in the immediate vicinity are: James Gallery, Nonagan Gallery and the Image Gallery

