

JAMES JOYCE AND THE FIRST GENERATION NEW YORK SCHOOL

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Daedalus for a generation of New York School painters, James Joyce created the wings for a generation and the labyrinth of ideas which has held obsessive fascination for subsequent artists.

Fig. 1. Jackson Pollock, Full Fathom Five, 1947. Oil on canvas, 50-7/8 x 30-1/8". Museum of Modern Art, New York.



The artists of the first generation New York School, most of whom are known collectively as Abstract Expressionists, were as a group generally well-read or well-informed and in touch with the literary currents of their time. Non-fiction works by Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, and James Frazer combined on their reading lists with the writings of Baudelaire, the French Symbolist poets (especially Rimbaud), Herman Melville, André Breton and García Lorca, among others. Although scholars have examined the connections between this group of artists and literature rather carefully, except in the case of David Smith there has been relatively little mention of James Joyce.¹ This is surprising since Joyce is considered by many to be one of the greatest writers of fiction in the twentieth century, and a number of first generation New York School artists have acknowledged their interest in him. For example, James Brooks, speaking of his friend Bradley Walker Tomlin, said, "I think a writer who influenced most of us, and I think him pretty strongly, certainly one who influenced me more than any painter, was James Joyce."² Others of this generation who have indicated admiration for Joyce include Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Philip Guston, Barnett Newman, Jack Tworkov, Ad Reinhardt, and Tony Smith.

A number of characteristics of his writing appealed to American artists of the 1940s and '50s, but initially, it was Joyce's "stream of consciousness" technique that attracted them. Joyce's method of directly conveying his characters' unedited interior thoughts, begun in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and expanded in *Ulysses*, provided another literary equivalent of the visual automatism they were struggling to develop. In Robert Motherwell's case, his appreciation of Joyce preceded his preoccupation with the "automatic writing" of the Surrealists. His conviction that a modern artist must be experimental was in part formed by his reading and intense discussion of *Ulysses* while a student at Stanford University in the mid-1930s.³ The implications of Joyce's writing must have further crystallized for Motherwell when he discovered Surrealist writing and art in the early '40s.

Motherwell's involvement with Joyce has been recognized in the literature by his choice of a title for *The Homely Protestant* of 1948. He has described how this title was selected:

I could not find a title for possibly my single most important "figure" painting. Then I remembered a Surrealist custom, viz, to take a favorite book and place one's finger at random in it. In either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* (I forget which), my finger rested on the words "the homely protestant. . . ."⁴

For the record, the title is located in a list of abusive phrases on page 71 of *Finnegans Wake*.⁵ Motherwell's interest in Joyce continues to this day. It has been reported that he still "regularly dips back into *Ulysses*,"⁶ and in recent years titles of a number of works, for example, *The River Liffey*, *Stephen's Iron Crown*, *Stephen's Gate* and *Bloom in Dublin*, carry Joycean references. Although the titles were assigned after the works were completed (that is, Joyce was not consciously on his mind while he was working), the choice of titles underscores Motherwell's perception, which he shared with a number of others of his generation, that Joyce's writing was relevant to the art they were creating.⁷

That the "simulated" automatism of Joyce's "stream of consciousness" writing ("simulated" because Joyce's prose actually is very carefully constructed) influenced artists is evidenced by Barnett Newman's activities in the mid-1940s. According to Thomas B. Hess, "he started to write fiction, influenced by Joyce's *Ulysses*, automatic writing, getting it down as fast as he could."⁸ At the same time, Newman was creating a series of rapidly executed drawings and watercolors, no doubt influenced by the biomorphic marine imagery and automatist techniques of Surrealism, but equally as Joycean in spirit. The equation between automatism and aquatic imagery, which in Surrealism pertains to the preconscious or subconscious mind, is characteristic of Joyce's thinking as well.

Several of the most extended "stream of consciousness" monologues in *Ulysses* occur in Chapters III and XIII, in settings at

the seashore. Chapter III, the "Proteus" episode, in particular, is a model for the merger of vividly fluid marine imagery and free associational thought. At the opening of this chapter we find these lines:

Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaswain and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs.⁹

The sea, which yields from its depths unexpected objects and signs, is easily recognized as analogous to the mind. Joyce was familiar with Freud's theories, incorporated them in his writings, and consequently, his works have encouraged a significant amount of Freudian interpretation.¹⁰

In one strikingly visual passage towards the end of Chapter III we read the following description:

Under the upswelling tide he saw the writhing weeds lift languidly and sway reluctant arms, hissing up their petticoats, in whispering water swaying and upturning coy silver fronds . . . (U, 49:35-37).

Not only does this sound like a possible description of a poured painting by Jackson Pollock, but in Joyce's next paragraph we find the source for the title of one of Pollock's breakthrough pictures of 1947, the silver, green-blue, and white *Full Fathom Five* (Fig. 1). Although there is no minimizing the difficulties associated with attaching importance to titles in Abstract-Expressionist works, especially in Pollock's case, Pollock did admire Joyce's writings, and the literary context in which the title of *Full Fathom Five* is found may have iconographical significance for the painting.

Lee Krasner has recalled that Joyce was one of Pollock's favorite authors.¹¹ His library contained *Stephen Hero*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*.¹² Betty Parsons, Pollock's early dealer, remembered that "he often talked about Joyce."¹³ His neighbor in East Hampton, the artist Alfonso Ossorio, observed that Pollock "read *Finnegans Wake*, and you felt that he was in tune with the idea that one word could mean many things. . . . He loved the Joyce recordings of his collected works, the music of Joyce's voice."¹⁴ Some who knew him, Fritz Bullman and B. H. Friedman, for example, feel that although Pollock was attracted to Joyce, he probably did not read deeply into the works. More likely, they believe, his occasional perusals of Joyce were greatly supplemented by the recordings and by friends such as Tony Smith, who as early as the '40s was known to quote large chunks of Joyce by heart.¹⁵

The title for *Full Fathom Five* is located in a passage which speaks of "a loose drift of rubble," quite befitting a painting that has embedded in its surface pebbles, nails, tacks, buttons, keys, coins, matches, and other debris:

Five fathoms out there. Full fathom five thy father lies. At one he said. Found drowned. High water at Dublin bar. Driving before it a loose drift of rubble, fanshoals of fishes, silly shells. A corpse rising saltwhite from the undertow, bobbing landward, a pace a pace a porpoise. There he is. Hook it quick. Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor. We have him. Easy now (U, 50:4-10)

The poured paintings of 1947 were given titles after they were completed in picture-naming sessions with Pollock, Lee Krasner, and their neighbors in East Hampton, Ralph Manheim and his wife. It is generally agreed that most of the titles were supplied by Manheim. However, as B. H. Friedman has pointed out, Pollock had final approval of the titles, and they clearly convey a sense of his artistic ambitions and concerns.¹⁶

Could the passages which so aptly describe the color, movement, and "drift of rubble" in *Full Fathom Five* also provide a clue to its content? Citing Lee Krasner that Pollock once told her, "I choose to veil the imagery," Charles F. Stuckey finds in Pollock's poured paintings "images hidden or 'veiled' from sight by his webs. . . ."¹⁷ He notes, "The titles Pollock chose for some of his non-representational canvases refer to spooky presences embedded in or hidden behind angled, nearly impervious barriers. . . ."¹⁸ In the case of *Full Fathom Five* Stuckey could not have been more correct, although the source for the title was apparently unknown to him. It is provocative to consider the possibility that Pollock's title, whether initially his or not, provides evidence of hidden imagery, in this instance represented by a corpse "sunk though he be beneath the watery floor."

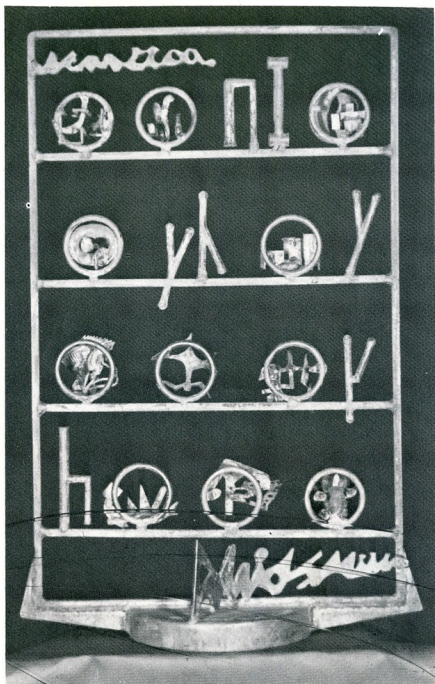


Fig. 2. David Smith, *The Letter*, 1950. Welded steel, 37-5/8 x 22-7/8 x 9 1/4". Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

Alfonso Ossorio has commented on Pollock's interest in *Finnegans Wake*, and it is with this great book, first published in 1939, that the artist's work is most instructively compared. One Joyce critic, Clive Hart, has called *Finnegans Wake* "the most outstanding example of what can be done with objet trouvé collage in literature."¹⁹ He sees Joyce's method as "strikingly similar" to twentieth-century painting techniques: "Bits and pieces are picked up and incorporated into the texture with little modification, while the precise nature of each individual fragment is not always of great importance."²⁰ Borrowing a term from Claude Lévi-Strauss, Margot Norris describes Joyce's "practice of using bits and pieces of heterogeneous materials without regard to their specific function" as "bricolage."²¹ The parallel is obvious with Pollock's amalgamation of materials in *Full Fathom Five*, allowing an assortment of foreign objects to retain their individuality, but a great deal of Pollock's work can be understood in terms of "bricolage."²²

As in the case of *Finnegans Wake*, which has been described as "essentially visual . . . [t]here never was a book more cluttered with visual symbols."²³ Pollock's pre-1947 paintings are dense with signs and symbols. Both writer and painter create complex

worlds that evoke a sense of endless symbolic interplay. Pollock, as Ossorio noted, appreciated Joyce's use of portmanteau words, the conjoining of semantically dissimilar words to suggest multiple and contradictory meanings. These constructions provide a literary analogue to the artist's symbol-making tendencies. Pollock also must have been drawn to Joyce's use of words as material, which gave them an apparent quality of abstraction and autonomy. In a formal sense, a number of pre-1947 paintings, like Joyce's text, read as "parts placed side by side without transition, parts in a variety of rhythms, shapes and tones."²³ Pollock's friend, James Brooks, observed that:

Joyce had a non-narrative style. What you were reading was right there. You're not waiting for something to come. I hated to leave a paragraph because I didn't need to go anywhere else. But his irreverence, his strange juxtaposition of things and unexpectedness was pretty much what we were after at that time. That was in the air.²⁴

The "substitutionality of parts" and the "variability and uncertainty of structural and thematic elements" are features common to Joyce's book and Pollock's pre-1947 paintings. In both "meanings are dislocated—hidden in unexpected places, multiplied and split, given over to ambiguity, plurality, and uncertainty. . . ."²⁵ The element of unpredictability created by fluid symbolism and continually shifting relationships in *Finnegans*

Wake and Pollock's earlier paintings is finally heightened and transformed by the artist's adoption of a radical automatist technique in the poured paintings of 1947-1952.

Margot Norris sees *Finnegans Wake* as "a decentralized universe" in which "The formal elements of the work . . . are not anchored to a single point of reference, that is, they do not refer back to a center."²⁶ Simply put, this is what modern painters call all-over composition, a concept with which Pollock is inseparably linked. Clement Greenberg, Pollock's critical champion in the '40s, noted in a 1948 essay that Joyce provides a literary parallel for "all-over" painting.²⁷ James Brooks observed that in *Finnegans Wake*, "The plot wasn't the important thing. You are not getting from one place to another. But the whole book was spread out over an enormous expanse."²⁸ It is conceivable that Pollock related this aspect of Joyce to his own work.

Aside from any influence Joyce may have had on Pollock, the fundamental similarities between these men had profound significance for twentieth-century literature and art. For both, the making of art, the process of creation rather than the result, was the meaningful part of the effort. As is frequently said about their respective endeavors, "everything is in a constant state of becoming."²⁹ Most importantly, in exploring the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind, they developed new languages which undermined traditional notions of artistic structure.³⁰ Like the letter in *Finnegans Wake*, the book's principal "expanding symbol [which] quickly comes to stand for the book itself,"³¹ Pollock's painting:

. . . is not a misefectual whyacinthinous riot of blots and blurs and bars and balls and hoops and wriggles and juxtaposed jottings linked by spurts of speed: it only looks as like it. . . (FW, 118:28-30).

David Smith frequently alluded to Joyce's writing and its relevance to contemporary art, and a number of his comments have been recorded in the literature. In 1965, Robert Motherwell offered this recollection of Smith:

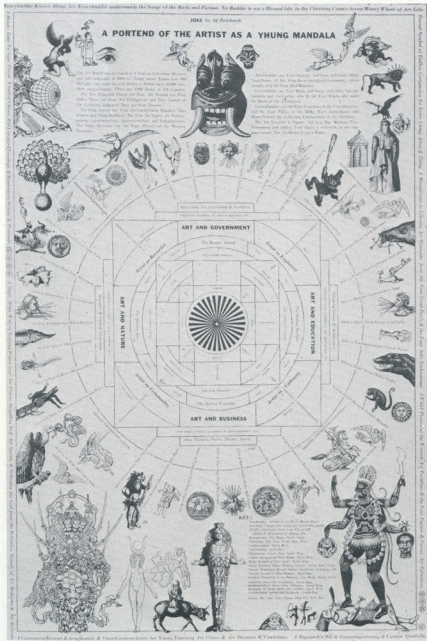
I have known David Smith for twenty years, ever since that afternoon we met by prearrangement (but unknown to each other) during the 1940s. . . . In those days I was full of French Symbolist aesthetics, of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and of André Breton, of the possibilities of representing reality indirectly but passionately in one's medium. I can still see David saying, with his characteristic bluntness and inalterable sense of his own identity, "I don't need them. I've read James Joyce!" He was right, all of it is in *Ulysses*, and I looked at him with a sudden intellectual respect that has not yet diminished as my affection for him has continually grown.³²

Smith, who had a dog named Finnegan,³³ recommended "the study of Joyce's work, such as *Finnegans Wake*, wherein the use of words and relationships function much as in the process of the creative artist's mind."³⁴ Stanley Meltzoff reported in a 1946 essay, "One of the sculptor's main influences was the appearance of 'Work in Progress' in TRANSITION [sic]."³⁵ He compared Smith's "sculptural use of metamorphosing objects" to Joyce's "literary use of the pun," and observed that certain of his works "are as complicated as parts of 'Finnegans Wake' and as complete as a departure. . . ."³⁶

Although a number of Smith's pieces have been compared to Joyce's writing, only *The Letter* of 1950 can be directly related to the author's work (Fig. 2). Referring to this sculpture, Smith told Thomas Hess, "That relates the Little Red Hen that scratched in Joyce . . . the Little Red Hen that scratched the letter up."³⁷ The letter, as previously noted, is the central symbol in *Finnegans Wake*, "a sprawling and somewhat formless motif-complex which . . . recurs in literally hundreds of places in more or less fragmentary form."³⁸ It is evident that Smith strongly identified with the writer and his symbol. He observed, "I'm always scratching up letters and that's one of the nice things about Joyce. There's a part of Joyce in me all my life."³⁹

Rosalind Krauss sees *The Letter* as an assimilation of Joyce's symbol by reference to Adolph Gottlieb's pictorial structure in the "Pictograph" paintings.⁴⁰ Be that as it may, I find that the content and structure of *The Letter* reflect a very direct response to Joyce's text. It is true that there are numerous fragmentary references to the letter throughout *Finnegans Wake*, but it is quoted and described at some length in Chapter

Fig. 3. Ad Reinhardt, A Portend of the Artist as a Yhung Mandala, 1956. (First published in *Art News*, May 1956, pp. 36-37.)



V where a number of descriptions are compellingly visual. Smith's sculpture, which in Krauss' words, "reads like a set of secret glyphs for which the viewer has no key,"⁴¹ not only conveys the inscrutability of Joyce's discussion of the letter, but can be seen as a rather faithful representation of the writer's images:

... ruled barriers, along which the traced words run, march, halt, walk, stumble at doubtful points, stumble up again in comparative safety ... with lines of letters slithering up and loads of latters slattering down ... (FW, 114:7-9, 17-18).

Or again, in Joyce's description of the letter previously quoted in connection with Pollock—"a misfeetual whyacinthinous riot of blots and blurs and bars and balls and hoops"—we find a possible source for Smith's Ys ("whyacinthinous"), Os ("balls and hoops"), and the lines ("bars") that Joyce earlier called "ruled barriers."⁴²

Joyce's letter, comprised of letters, came from litter scratched up by the hen in a dump. Joyce informs us, "if you are abcdminded ... what curios of signs in this "allaphbed" (FW, 18:17-18), and he asks, "will this kiribis pouch filled with litterish fragments lurk dormant in the pouch. ...?" (FW, 66:25-26). Smith, who could not have failed to see the dump, or "allaphbed," as a symbol of the unconscious mind, said, "I don't differentiate between writing and drawing, not since I read that part of Joyce."⁴³ However, *The Letter*, and *17 h's* and *24 Greek Y's* of the same year, can quite literally be seen to have come from an "allaphbed" since the steel letters that Smith used were part of an assortment of junk metal he bought from a hardware dealer.⁴⁴ Like Joyce and Pollock, Smith was one of the great "bricoleurs" of the century, making "bricolage" out of a personalized, fragmented symbolism and bits and scraps of material.

Joyce the "bricoleur" is displayed in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. His earlier novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although containing some elements of the later works, propounds an aesthetic antithetical to the concept of bricolage. In Chapter V, Stephen Dedalus advocates what "amounts to a theory of impersonality and autonomy, ... a theory of art for art's sake ... [a] static contemplative art."⁴⁵ Joyce had an audience for these ideas also. In a 1953 article Thomas Hess noted that "[A]d Reinhardt enjoys the phrasing of Joyce—young Stephen's trinity of wholeness, radiance and harmony ..."⁴⁶ On another occasion, Hess observed that many of Reinhardt's illustrated art satires were strongly influenced by Joyce's later writings.⁴⁷ An obvious example is found in the title of one of the better-known art jokes, "A Portend of the Artist as a Yhung Mandala," where the author's early title is conjoined with the punning word play of *Finnegans Wake* (Fig. 3). It is worthy of note that Hess recorded Reinhardt's appreciation of Stephen Dedalus' aesthetics at the time the artist's work was evolving from relational compositions emphasizing shape, value, and color contrasts to the monochromatic pictures that culminated in the "Black Paintings" (Fig. 4). I do not mean to infer a crucial connection between Joyce and Reinhardt, only that this aspect of the writer's work may have had some influence on Reinhardt's thinking, or at the least reinforced it.

In a discussion with a friend, young Stephen translates Aquinas' "*Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritas, consonantia, claritas*" as "Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony and radiance" (AP, 248: 18-21), and then explains his theory of art at length:

... the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbound and selfcontained ... You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas* (AP, 249:5-10).

... immediate perception is followed by the analysis of apprehension. Having first felt that it is *one* thing you feel now that it is a *thing*. You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts and their sum, harmonious. That is *consonantia* (AP, 249:16-21).

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure. ... (AP, 250:12-17).

The process of perception that Joyce has Stephen describe



Fig. 4. Ad Reinhardt, Abstract Painting, Black, 1960-66. Oil on canvas, 60 x 60". Private Collection.

matches the experience of many viewers of Reinhardt's "Black Paintings." The writer who has best described the gradual recognition of structure in Reinhardt's later works is Lucy Lippard. She has written:

On entering a room with one or more black paintings, one has a first impression of only the most general nature. One sees a black square hanging on the wall ... After a period of looking at the dull glow, one begins to perceive the non-blackness ... the extremely muted colors begin to emerge, and with them, but lagging a little, comes the trisection [of the surface].⁴⁸

Lippard has given us, without making the association, an excellent description of Stephen's *integritas* and *consonantia*. But what of *claritas*, radiance? Once again, Lippard writes:

Reinhardt's development from around 1949 to 1960 traces the process of draining color from light, so that in the last works, light practically replaced color ... Black, white and gray are called achromatic colors though black is caused by a complete absorption of color. A high degree of light absorbance is not the same as total absence of light. The light has been taken in rather than rejected, the opaque surfaces have paradoxically become transparent containers of light.⁴⁹

Sidney Tillim observed the same phenomenon, stating that "Darkness in Reinhardt's painting is a form of light, not illumination of chiaroscuro but an aspect of form—which might be called total light."⁵⁰ Reinhardt intentionally created this effect, thinning his paint and superimposing layer upon layer of color to get "not colored light" as Reinhardt wrote to Sam Hunter, "but color that gives off light."⁵¹

Not only do Reinhardt's "Black Paintings" provide a visual demonstration of Stephen Dedalus' wholeness, harmony and radiance, but Joyce and Reinhardt agree on the subject of the artist's presence in a work of art. Joyce has Stephen say, "The personality of the artist ... finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself ... remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence" (AP, 252:15-23). Reinhardt's opinion of artists expressing themselves is well known, but on one occasion he said simply, "The less an

artist obtrudes himself in his painting, the purer and clearer his aims."⁵²

Tony Smith was perhaps the biggest fan of Joyce's writings. Although he came into prominence as a sculptor in the 1960s, he was a friend and colleague in the '40s of Newman, Rothko, Pollock, and other artists of the first generation New York School. Irish, with a Jesuit education, and an artist, Tony Smith strongly identified with Joyce.⁵³ He was always ready to quote Joyce, and frequently related his work to the writer's. He once cited *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as one source of his interest in mazes.⁵⁴ Although Stephen's family name is similar to that of Daedalus, the mythological maze-maker, *Ulysses* and especially *Finnegans Wake* would seem to offer more obvious examples of labyrinthine structures. At one point Smith speculated on inflatable sculpture which he related to Surrealism, topology, and to the writings of Joyce.⁵⁵ He was interested in all of Joyce's major works, and seems to have assimilated them in his sculpture.

In some instances, Smith's work provides a three-dimensional exposition of Stephen's ideas. A piece such as *Amaryllis* of 1965, for example, initially appears to consist of simple forms quickly grasped. However, it can not be understood from a single vantage point. Made of two truncated prisms, the sculpture's appearance and impact change with each viewpoint. Smith, with a down-to-earth illustration, succinctly paraphrases Stephen's discussion of wholeness, harmony, and radiance:

I'm interested in the inscrutability and the mysteriousness of the thing. Something obvious on the face of it . . . is of no further interest. A Bennington earthenware jar, for instance, has subtlety of color, largeness of form, a general suggestion of substance . . . It continues to nourish us time and time again. We can't see it in a second, we continue to read it.⁵⁶

Smith's *Wandering Rocks* (1967) derives its name from the "phantom" chapter heading of Chapter X in *Ulysses* (Fig. 5). Any serious reader of Joyce, of which Smith was one, knows that he assigned to each episode of his novel a heading based on a Homeric reference, and these titles are employed in discussions of *Ulysses* in the Joyce literature. Since there are no wandering rocks in Homer's *Odyssey*, except by allusion, the title of Smith's sculpture is undoubtedly Joycean, as is the spirit of the work. In Chapter X, an assortment of Dubliners, named and described, come into contact, pass each other, and continue their

perambulations around the city. They are, as William York Tindall says, "connected with others, but arbitrarily and by temporal coincidence alone." He observes that "human elements, like parts of fractured atoms, collide, part, go separate ways. . . Related by time and place, they lack vital relationship."⁵⁷ So it is with Smith's sculpture. Each of the five pieces is different and individually named (Smohawk, Crocus, Slide, Shaft, and Dud), yet as six-sided prisms they share a familial relationship. Viewed from numerous vantage points, with the possibility, encouraged by the sculptor, of each installation being different, Smith's sculpture communicates those elements of unpredictability, simultaneity, connectedness and disconnectedness that Joyce examined in "The Wandering Rocks" episode.

The title of Smith's *Gracehopper* (1962-72) is an explicit reference to Joyce's fable of the "Ondt and Gracehopper" in Chapter XIII of *Finnegans Wake* (Fig. 6). According to Joyce:

The Gracehopper was always jiggling ajoin, hoppy on akkant of his joycity, (he had a partner pair of findlestills to supplant him), or if not, he was always making ungraceful overtures. . . . He would of curse melliciously, by his fore feelthers, flexors, contractors, depressors, and extensors, lamely. . . . (FW, 414:22-24, 29-31).⁵⁸

Smith's looming, lumbering sculpture is aptly named after Joyce's Gracehopper. The question is, did he have the creature in mind when he was making the piece, or for that matter, was he consciously thinking of the chapter in *Ulysses* when he was working on *Wandering Rocks*? In Smith's case, a man whose thinking was pervaded by Joyce, who committed extensive portions of Joyce to memory, and who frequently related his work to Joyce's writing, it is almost a chicken-or-egg question. It is safe to say that his sculpture reflects a significant involvement with Joyce's images and ideas.

Tony Smith frequently put sculpture together like Joyce wrote prose. For instance, *Willy* (1962) is made up of parts from several sculptures, and *P.N.* (1969) is a piece of a model from another work enlarged and turned upside down.⁵⁹ This way of working is not uncommon in twentieth-century art, but with Smith the comparison to Joyce seems inescapable. He is related to the other "bricoleurs" of his generation, who, to one degree or another, absorbed and reconstituted Joyce's methods in the creation of expressive visual objects.

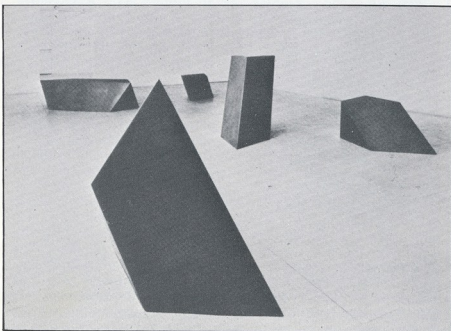
A number of artists undoubtedly identified with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Echoes of Stephen Dedalus can be discerned in the pronouncements of members of the first generation New York School. Motherwell's statement in the '50s that the aim of Abstract Expressionism "was to forge a whole new language of painting,"⁶⁰ as Phil Patton has noted, is reminiscent of Stephen's desire to forge "the uncreated conscience of my race." Stephen's view of the artist as "a priest of the eternal imagination, transmusing the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life" (AP, 260:1-3), finds a counterpart in Motherwell's claim that "abstract art is a form of mysticism . . . one's effort to wed oneself to the universe, to unify oneself through union."⁶¹ The polemical nature of Ad Reinhardt's various writings has more than a little suggestion of Stephen's confident aesthetic discourse. As Nathan Halper, a Joyce scholar and one-time art dealer, sees it, Joyce, because of the life he led and the radical explorations he made, became "a sort of patron saint" of avant-garde artists in the '40s and '50s.⁶² Certainly, for these painters and sculptors Joyce stood as a convincing example, a symbol, in fact, of the modern artist, his work and vision.

An abbreviated version of this essay similarly titled was presented as a paper in the Second Annual Symposium on Contemporary Art, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City, April 30, 1982.

1. Joyce's name has been invoked every so often in discussions of Abstract Expressionism, but usually as simple comparison, not in terms of concrete relationships. Thomas B. Hess spoke of "the Joycean addition of ambiguity employed by De Kooning. . . ." "Is Abstraction Un-American?" *Art News*, vol. XLIX, no. 10, February, 1951, p. 41; Ethel K. Schwabacher saw Gorky's "composite structures" developing "in the direction of James Joyce's elaborate analogies." *Archibald Gorky*, New York, 1957, p. 126; and Karen Wilken, "Adolph Gottlieb: The Pictographs," *Art International*, vol. XXIV, December, 1977, p. 28, observed that the literary equivalent of Gottlieb's pictographic images "would be the portmanteau word coinages of James Joyce, with their superimposed layers of meaning. . . ." but in the cases of all three there is little evidence of a special interest in Joyce. . . .

2. Christopher B. Crossman and Nancy E. Miller, "Speaking of Tmolim," *Art*

Fig. 5. Tony Smith, *Wandering Rocks*, 1967. Vapor-blasted stainless steel. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.



Journal, Winter 1979/80, vol. XXIX/2, p. 114; from an interview with Brooks and Brad Lassaw, Easton, New York, September, 1975.

3. H.H. Arnason, "On Robert Motherwell and his Early Work," *Art International*, vol. XI, January 20, 1966, p. 19.

4. H.H. Arnason, *Robert Motherwell*, New York, 1977, p. 103.

5. My page and all references are to *The Viking Press* editions of *Finnegans Wake*, first published in New York in 1939, which henceforth, as a citation in the text, will be referred to as FW.

6. Phil Patton, "Robert Motherwell: The Mellowing of an Angry Young Man," *Art News*, vol. 81, no. 3, March, 1962, 76.

7. This perception is demonstrated by the invitation to Nathan Halper, author of several articles on Joyce in the late '40s and early '50s, and later an art dealer, to march 10 days at the Club, the artists' club that was first established in 1949 at 58 East 84th Street, and which then moved to various addresses in the '50s. In a March 10, 1982 letter to the author, Halper recalled: "Early in the '50s, I was not as yet involved in the art world; but living in the Village, I would meet some of the painters. When they found that I had published a few articles on Joyce, I was asked to give a talk about him to the Club. Not about Joyce and painting or sculpture—but Joyce in general. It was felt that he was relevant." Joyce was also the subject of a seminar held during "Forum '49," an exhibition in Provincetown, Massachusetts in the summer of 1949 that included the work of Pollock, Bazilio, Rothko, Tomlin and Poussette-Dart, among others.

8. Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1971, p. 43. The artist's *Ulysses*, 1962, according to Hess (p. 82), "probably is Newman imitating his hero James Joyce, one of his first heroes."

9. I am using the Random House, 1961 edition of *Ulysses*, p. 37, lines 2-4. Henceforth, as a citation in the text, this work will be referred to as U.

10. Doré Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*, New York, 1972, p. 13. "Literary enthusiasts were active in their favorite writers and with Freudian theories. James Joyce, for instance, was immediately perceived to be a stream-of-consciousness exemplar of Freud's speculations... Already in the bohemian circles of the immediate postwar period Freud was as potent a subject as cubism, Ezra Pound, and Joyce's *Ulysses* (then being published in installments in *The Little Review*)." .

11. Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock, A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Work*, New Haven and London, p. 183-IV.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Francine Du Plessix and Cleve Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock?" *Art in America*, vol. 55, no. 3, May-June, 1967, p. 55. Betty Parsons' interview was given to B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, New York, 1972, pp. 181-182.

14. Du Plessix and Gray, p. 58.

15. Conversation with Fritz Bultman and B. H. Friedman, February 27, 1982 in New York City. Bultman and Friedman also mentioned Weldon Kees, the poet-painter, one of the "irascible Eighteen," as a great transmitter and enthusiast of Joyce in the 40s and early 50s.

16. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock*, . . . p. 120. Lee Krasser has stated that some of the titles were Pollock's, although she can not recall which ones. See Judith Wolfe, "Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock's Imagery," *Artforum*, vol. XI, no. 3, November, 1972, pp. 72, 73 note 41.

17. Charles F. Stucky, "Another Side of Jackson Pollock," *Art in America*, vol. 65, no. 6, November-December, 1977, pp. 84, 86.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

19. Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake*, Evanston, Illinois, 1962, p. 240.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35. Critics of Joyce on a number of occasions have compared his writing to the visual arts. Frank Budgen, a painter, friend of Joyce's, and one of his earliest critics in James Joyce and *Ulysses* (London, 1933; New York, 1960) (reprint of 1934 edition), pp. 91-92, writes that Joyce's method of internal monologue "is more like impressionist painting. The shadows are full of colour; the whole is built up out of nuances instead of being constructed in broad masses; there is seen as immersed in a luminous fluid; colour supplies the modelling; and the total effect is arrived at through a countless number of small touches. A more recent critic, William York Tindal, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*, New York, 1959, p. 238, says, "To proceed from *Ulysses* to *Finnegans Wake* is like proceeding from a picture by Cezanne to a recent abstraction. In the absence of identifiable surface, we must make what we can of biots, blurs, and scratches, patiently awaiting the emergence of an order which, though there maybe, is not immediately visible."

21. Norris, *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake*, Baltimore and London, 1974, p. 130.

22. Hart, p. 37.

23. Tindal, p. 37. Norris, p. 131, associates the habit of mind that produces "biots" with the "impiling of voluminous notebooks. She reports that Joyce's notebooks were "crammed with list upon list of apparently unrelated words, phrases, snatches of thought, and bits of data." Pollock, too, filled numerous notebooks, particularly in the '30s, and made countless sketches.

24. Crossman and Miller, p. 114. One of the syllabic combinations that Brooks puts together to create titles for his paintings has a Joycean flavor.

25. Norris, p. 127.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

27. Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Painting," *Art and Culture*, Boston, 1961, p. 157. Reprinted from an essay in *Partisan Review*, April, 1948. Greenberg also mentions Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and Dylan Thomas as other figures in literature.

28. Crossman and Miller, p. 114.

29. See Hart, pp. 50-51, for a discussion of process in Joyce.

30. Joyce's and Pollock's works constitute an attack on the traditional concept of structure. Norris, p. 121. In discussing Joyce, she writes "This attack was not isolated, but belonged to an 'event' or 'rupture' in the history of the concept of structure, which, according to philosopher Jacques Derrida, took place in the history of thought sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. . . The rupture . . . results in the idea of a structure in which presence is not so much absent as unlocatable."

31. Hart, p. 200.

32. Frank O'Hara, *Robert Motherwell*, Museum of Modern Art, 1965, p. 56; excerpt from Robert Motherwell, "A Major American Sculptor," David Smith, *Vogue*, February 1, 1965.

33. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p. 159. Note 16. Jackson Pollock had a dog named Ahab in appreciation of Herman Melville. The best way to keep the best names of names derived from literary sources suggests the amusing possibility of a study of pet names among artists as an index of their cultural interests.

34. Brett McCoy, *David Smith*, New York, Washington, 1973, p. 64. From a talk titled "What I Believe About the Teaching of Sculpture," Midwestern University Art Conference, Louisville, Kentucky, October 27, 1950.

35. Stanley Meltzoff, "David Smith and Social Surrealism," *Magazine of Art*, vol.

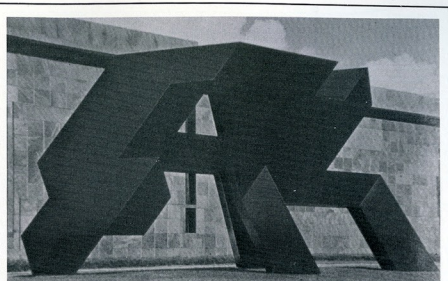


Fig. 6. Tony Smith, *Gracehoper*, 1962-72. Steel, 23 x 24 x 46". The Detroit Institute of Arts.

39, no. 3, March, 1946, p. 100. Portions of *Work in Progress*, the working drafts for *Finnegans Wake*, appeared in seventeen issues of the journal *transition* between 1927 and 1938.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

37. McCoy, p. 180. Reprinted from Thomas B. Hess, "The Secret Letter," *David Smith*, exhibition catalogue, Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York, 1964.

38. Hart, p. 182.

39. McCoy, p. 180.

40. Krauss, p. 136, note 16.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

42. Edward Fry, *David Smith*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1969, p. 62, offers the following interpretation of *The Letter*: "The imagery in the words of his sculptural letter includes the schematic interior of a house, a running man, and a hermit crab and Smith's reply, couched in Joycean verbal-visual puns, was thus the question of why or why did he ever leave Ohio."

43. McCoy, from Hess' "The Secret Letter," p. 185.

44. Krauss, pp. 136, 139.

45. Tindal, pp. 95-96. I will be quoting *The Modern Library*, Random House, 1928 edition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; henceforth, as a citation in the text, it will be referred to as AP.

46. Thomas B. Hess, "Reinhardt: The Position and Perils of Purity," *Art News*, vol. 52, no. 8, December, 1953, p. 59. Hess adds that for Reinhardt, "even this verges toward the soul and essences of Celtic hokum." In a telephone conversation of March 27, 1982, Rita Reinhardt confirmed that her husband had read and enjoyed Joyce, and she vaguely recalled discussions about Joyce, who she noted, was the subject of conversations among many artists and intellectuals in the '40s and '50s. She also said that had Hess been inaccurate in his writing, Reinhardt would have corrected any misrepresentations in print.

47. Thomas B. Hess, "The Art Comix of Aid Reinhardt," *Artforum*, vol. XII, no. 8, April, 1974, p. 47. Hess wrote, "The twin heroes of this effort [the art satires] . . . were Joyce and Beckett. The spirit of the former presides over Reinhardt's lust for cataloguing and naming everything in the world. . . . You hear Joyce in the tropes, oxymorons, onomatopoeia and alliterations, in the lilt of the language, in the dirty jokes, plays on names, scholarly, almost pedantic references."

48. Lucy R. Lippard, "Aid Reinhardt: One Work," *Art in America*, vol. 62, no. 6, November-December, 1974, pp. 96-97.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

50. Sidney Tillim, "Aid Reinhardt," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 33, no. 5, February, 1959, p. 54.

51. Letter to Sam Hunter, Summer, 1966, cited in Margit Rowell, *Aid Reinhardt and Color*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1980, p. 21.

52. Aid Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy," *Art News*, vol. 56, no. 3, May, 1957, p. 38.

53. Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "A special attraction to Joyce was described to me by Fritz Bultman in a conversation on July 16, 1981 in Provincetown, Massachusetts. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, of course, is largely involved with the Jesuit education of an aspiring artist."

54. Letter to Tony Smith, October, 1975, in "Janet Kardon Interviews Some Modern Artist-makers," *Art International*, vol. XXIV, 4, April-May, 1976, p. 65.

55. Lucy R. Lippard, "Diversity in Unity: Recent Geometricizing Styles," *Art Since Mid-Century: The New Internationalism*, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1971, p. 247.

56. Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 4, December, 1966, p. 18.

57. Tindal, p. 180.

58. Eleanor Green, "The Morphology of Tony Smith's Work," *Artforum*, vol. XII, no. 8, April, 1974, pp. 55-56, quotes a section of this passage and parts of others (4-8, 13, 26, 30) in relation to *Gracehoper* and briefly discusses the connection between Joyce and Smith.

59. Lucy R. Lippard, "Interview with Tony Smith," *Tony Smith: Recent Sculpture*, exhibition catalogue, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1971, pp. 9, 19.

60. Patton, p. 75.

61. Robert Motherwell, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, vol. 18, no. 3, Spring, 1951, pp. 12-13.

62. Letter to the author, March 10, 1982. Halper feels that perhaps "Motherwell and Tony Smith were the only ones to do more than make an obligatory dip into the waters" of Joyce, but his perspective is that of a Joyce scholar.