

# Thoughts Out of Season

Occasional Reviews and Notes  
Of Mutual Interest  
Compiled by Tim Froward



Orange Outline  
By Franz Klein (1955)

## Abstract Expressionism

Modern art, like other things in modern life, is a revolt against the crushing aspects of the nineteenth century art. Modern art found ways to disagree with the past: one way was to get rid of false sentiments in painting. Prior painting had no expression of freedom. That modern painters were free – from former conventions as well - was the significance of the cubist revolution, and the abstract developments that followed it.

Substitute the word “free” for the word “abstract,” and you will be closer to the intent involved. The other revolution in modern art has been expressionism: thw effort to be truthful about human realities at any cost – in spirit, tough often not in means, dadaism and surrealism are part of the expressionist enterprise to be truthful.

Must painting and art be an historical enterprise? There is no art “in general,” only various arts of specific times and places. It is not be necessary to “set free” the art of a primitive peoples, say, in the art of a village in Africa, or, say, in Siena or during the Middle ages. In modern times, during the last century and a half, true art has been preceeded and still is surround by all kinds of false and corrupt art.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Terenzio (Ed.), *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124. Paraphrased from a talk given by Robert Motherwell to a gathering of the Association of Psychoanalysis at the New York Academy of Medicine in October 1959.

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[ . . . ]

“A critic’s taste is always based on the art of his day. What he has learned from past ages is useful in checking his ideas. He judges past art with the experience of the present, which makes present, and contains, the whole of the past. Therefore his aim, even if he studies the art of the past, is always to make suggestions for, to take a stand in relation to, contemporary artists.”<sup>2</sup>

[ . . . ]

In their respective lectures, Masson & Chagall tried to outline what might be considered the absolute constants of French art. Asserting the innate preference of the French for consistency over abundance, in line with the famous French “sense of measure” represented by Poussin and Seurat, Masson’s argument was, like Chagall’s a cautionary one.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lionello Venturi, *Art Criticism Now* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1941), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Benfey and Karen Remmler (Ed.), *Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College, 1942-1944* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 125.