



Albert Irvin

and Abstract
Expressionism

RWA


*Sansom &
Company*

Curated by Stewart Geddes PRWA

First published in 2018 by Sansom and Company, a publishing imprint of Redcliffe Press Ltd, 81g Pembroke Road, Bristol BS8 3EA

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ISBN: 978-1-911408-29-1

British Library
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Catalogue edited by Nathalie Levi

Designed by Christopher Binding
binding-associates.com

Printed and bound by Cambrian Press Ltd

Set in Avenir and Freight Sans

'Albert Irvin and Abstract Expressionism' is an original exhibition conceived and curated by Stewart Geddes PRWA

The exhibition has been made possible as a result of the Government Indemnity Scheme

The RWA would like to thank HM Government for providing Government Indemnity and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity

Published on the occasion of
'Albert Irvin and Abstract Expressionism'

Royal West of England Academy
Bristol BS8 1PX

8 December 2018 – 3 March 2019

Exhibition presented in association with the University of Gloucestershire, School of Art and Design



Exhibition sponsored by Bishop Fleming



Cover image: Albert Irvin *Almada*, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 304.8 cm

RWA Collection. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the Estates of Albert and Betty Irvin and allocated to the Royal West of England Academy, 2018. Photography by Colin White. Photo © RWA
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Back cover photo: Betty Irvin

Frontispiece: Albert Irvin in his studio, in front of a life-sized reproduction of Ruskin's engraving of J.M.W. Turner
Photo © Anne-Katrin Purkiss

Frontispiece: *Untitled 3*, c.mid-1970s (detail) acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305 cm

Courtesy of The Albert Irvin Estate
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Foreword

Angus Pryor

Head of School, Art & Design
University of Gloucestershire

The University of Gloucestershire is proud to be the RWA's Academic Partner in presenting the UK's first major retrospective exhibition of the acclaimed abstract painter Albert Irvin RA, RWA (Hon), OBE.

The exhibition is shown alongside a 60th anniversary celebration of the 1959 Tate exhibition 'The New American Painting', which was essential in cementing his convictions about painterly abstraction.

As well as being a prolific painter and printmaker, Irvin was a dedicated and inspiring lecturer, first at Hornsey and then Goldsmiths College of Art, and later as visiting lecturer throughout Britain and beyond. The vital blend of unfettered creativity, nurtured through studio time, with the sharing of ideas and inspiration through teaching has long been the life-blood of many artists and educational institutions alike, and remains essential to this day.

This is exemplified by the exhibition's curator, Stewart Geddes, who combines being RWA President and an eminent artist with educational roles, including as Lecturer at the University of Gloucestershire, School of Art and Design.

The exhibition incorporates comprehensive representation from The Albert Irvin Estate alongside a number of significant loans from Tate, including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and Barnett Newman. It also encompasses rarely seen works by Grace Hartigan and Jack Tworkov on loan from the USA.

We are hugely indebted to all the lenders to this exhibition, and in particular to Irvin's family, especially his

daughters Celia and Priscilla, who have been unstinting in their support. This publication is enriched by Mel Gooding's perceptive preface and Stewart's interview with Basil Beattie, each of whom was most generous in giving their time to the project, and has been brought to fruition thanks to designer Christopher Binding and publishers Sansom and Company.

We are also grateful to Sir Nicholas Serota, who has given enthusiastic assistance at all stages of the exhibition's development, through to opening the show on 7 December 2018. Finally, we thank the exhibition sponsors, Bishop Fleming Chartered Accountants.

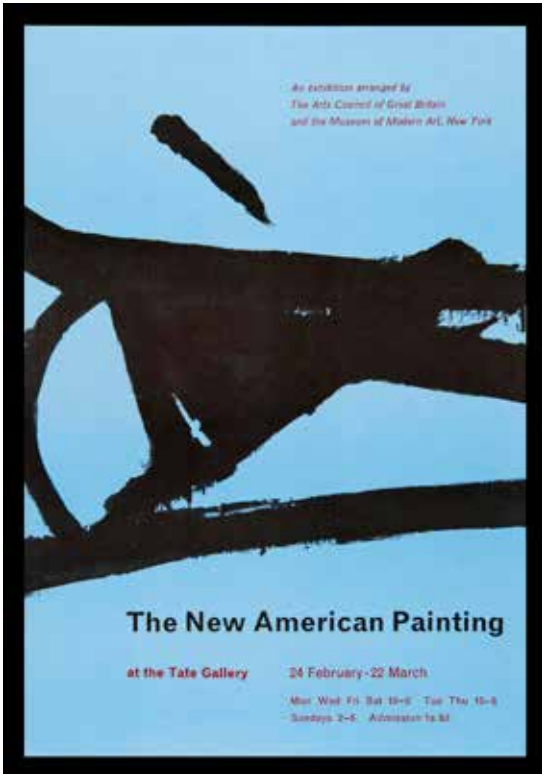
Preface

Mel Gooding

‘Venturesomeness is only one of the ethical values respected by modern painters. There are many others, integrity, sensuality, knowingness, passion, sensitivity, dedication, sincerity, and so on which taken altogether represent the ethical background of judgement in relation to any given work of modern art.’ (Robert Motherwell: statement in the catalogue to ‘The New American Painting’, 1959)

Every generation of artists has its own great stroke of luck. Sometimes it is a matter of patronage, an historical moment of great enthusiasm, available wealth and plentiful commissions; sometimes it is an extraordinary event, a revolutionary upheaval that may, perhaps briefly, inspire a generation with a new sense of unprecedented possibilities; sometimes it is the activating presence in the world of an outstanding artistic genius (or two, or more); or it may be a group of remarkable artists, together in the same place, collaborating, conspiring, competing. Whatever, there is a sudden new challenge to rise to, an excitement in the air, a new way of working: creativity is contagious. For many of the younger British artists, coming into their vocation during the mid- to late-1950s, the reports of a new school of diverse American abstract artists, mostly active in New York, were confirmed in the explosively influential revelations of two exhibitions at the Tate.

The first, in 1956, was encountered in the final gallery of an otherwise unremarkable survey of Modern Art in the United States: ‘I was instantly elated by the size, energy, originality and inventive daring of many of the paintings,’



Poster for ‘The New American Painting’ exhibition held at Tate 24 February – 22 March 1959

Artwork featured is *Accent Grave* 1955 by Franz Kline

wrote Patrick Heron. 'Their creative emptiness represented a radical discovery... as did their flatness, or rather, their spatial shallowness.' Heron was writing for an American audience; the London critics were almost unanimously hostile. But then Heron was himself an artist; moreover, one on the very brink of 'going abstract'. Although he had cogent criticisms to make – those of one devoted to the great French painters ('...there was an absence of relish in *matière* as an end in itself... they were so direct in the execution of the idea that their paint gestures had an over-dry immaculateness... There is always, however, a lack of resonance in their colour, etc.') – he was clearly caught up in the excitement of the first exposure to young British artists of American abstraction.

It was only one room, but it was enough. The handful of British artists (William Scott and Alan Davie foremost among them) who had been aware of what was happening in New York were joined by a new cohort of young artists, who realised at once that there were infinitely diverse ways of making abstract art. (Abstract Expressionism is not a style: it is a label.) The second great exhibition at the Tate, 'The New American Painting' in 1959, was even more influential: it was more extensive; it was more comprehensive. Significantly, it included Barnett Newman (absent from the 1956 show), as well as many other painters virtually unknown here. Its catalogue was a kind of manifesto, including as it did artists' statements that gave voice to dynamic and visionary ideas of what art could do. It confirmed for a generation that there were new freedoms, new and exciting extensions to what had been so unimaginatively taught and prescribed in the academies. It was indeed the great stroke of luck the post-war generation needed.

All was changed, changed utterly. It was not simply a matter of changing the scale of painting, of heralding the end of easel painting (I exaggerate), though that was a

major liberation. It was also, and above all, that the 'content' or 'subject' of a painting could be its own formal structure, its shapes and colours and their disposition over the canvas surface; it was that 'space' in a painting could be lateral as well as – or instead of – recessive; that a painting was part of the world, not merely a picture of some aspect of it. It brought confidence and sophistication into the international discourses of contemporary art; it shattered limitations, and made all things expressive seem possible.

Above all it brought pure joy and unfettered critical experiment into painting. Vision, technique, scale; emptiness and fullness; being and knowing; love and doubt: Bert Irvin was one of the lucky ones.

Moving Through 1960
Oil on canvas, 127 x 152.4 (detail)
Private collection



Girl With Short Hair c.1948
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50



Landscape in Clapham c.1950
Oil on board, 39 x 32





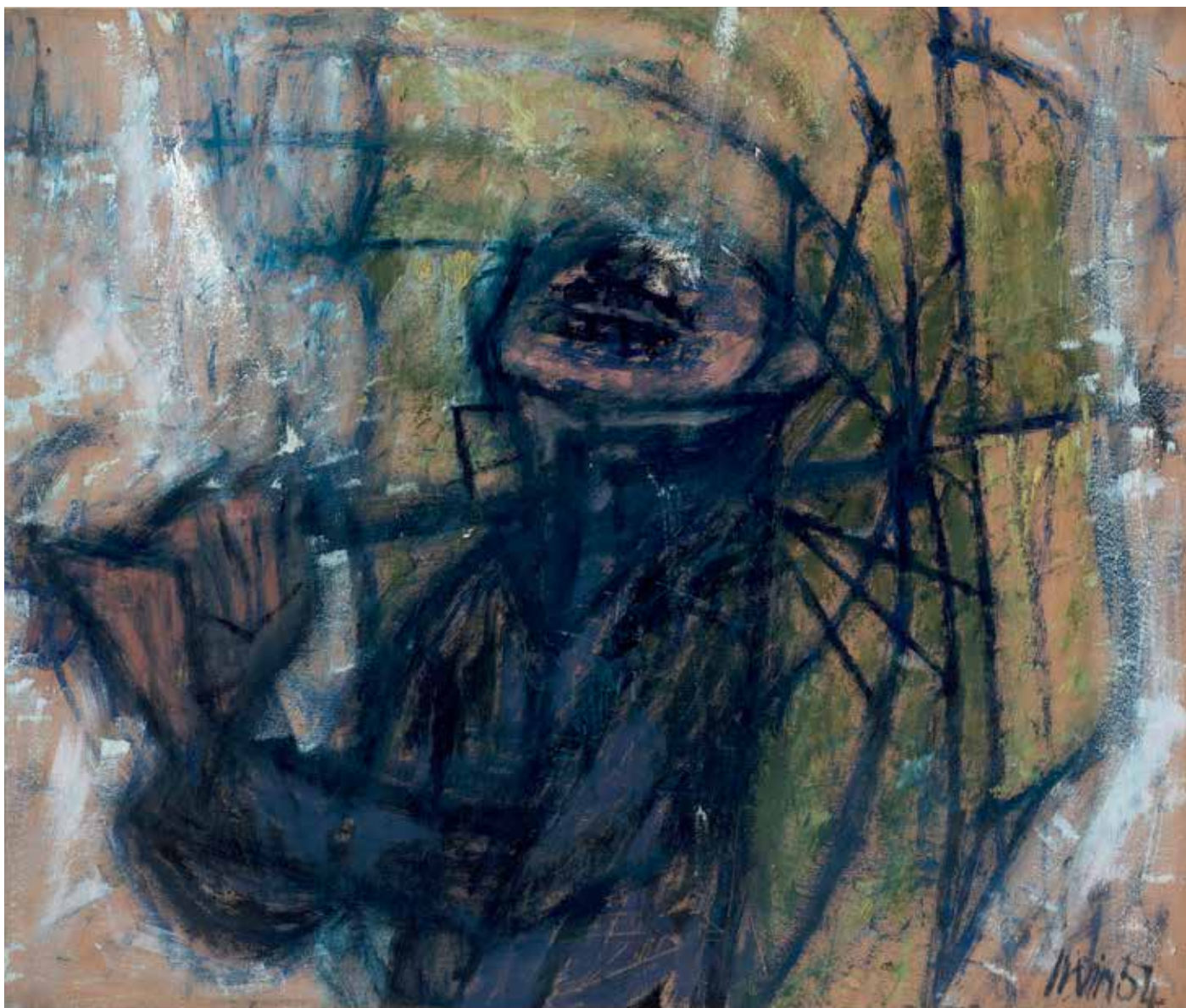
Neighbours 1950
Oil on hardboard, 61 x 71
(detail left)



Chicken in a Box 2 c.1952
Oil on hardboard, 61 x 91



The Steel Rays of the Rain 1954
Oil on canvas, 51 x 61





Hands on Piano Keys 1 c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 33 x 216

Hands on Piano Keys 2 c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 33 x 216





Fallen Child in Corridor c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 122 x 77

Priscilla in a Chair c.1955
Oil on hardboard, 153 x 92



Cellist c.1957
Oil on hardboard, 122 x 92



Town 1959
Oil on hardboard, 51 x 127





Moment of Impact c.1959 (left)
Oil on hardboard, 152 x 122

Sky Image c.1960
Oil on hardboard, 126 x 126



Sky c.1960
Oil on hardboard, 122 x 183
Private collection



Untitled 4 c.1965
Oil on canvas, 48 x 31

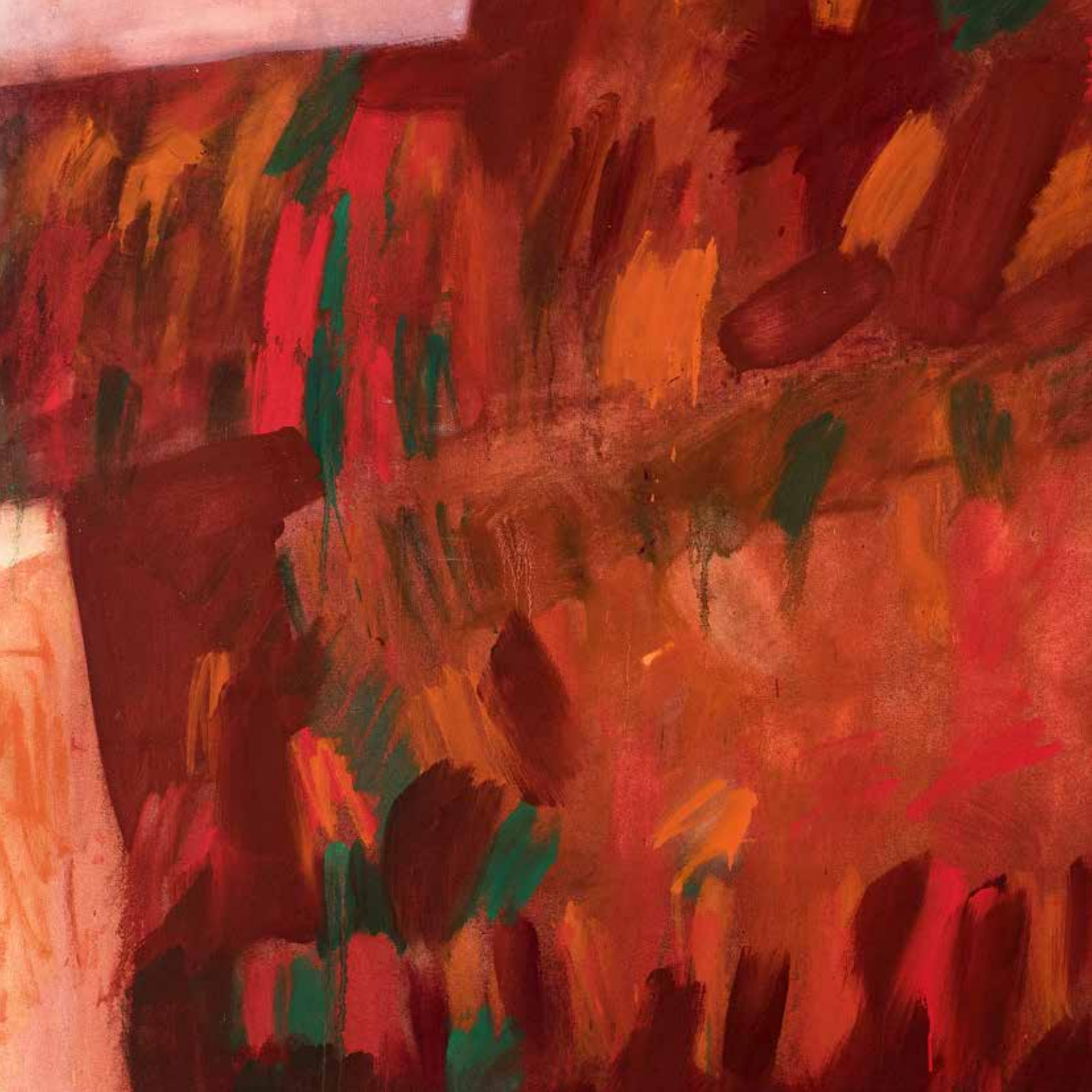




Black Moves 1964
Oil on canvas, 127 x 76.5
Whitford Fine Art, London

Into Black 1966 (right)
Oil on canvas, 203 x 178





Nexus 1966
Oil on canvas, 203 x 180
(detail left)





Untitled 2 c.1966 (left)

Oil on canvas, 152 x 127



Untitled 1968

Oil on canvas, 17.78 x 14.3

Collection of Jason Andrew and Norman
Jabaut, Brooklyn (Gift of Estate of Jack
Tworkov)





Untitled 5 c.1970 (left)
Oil on canvas, 203 x 177

Untitled 6 c.1975
Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 203







Untitled 3 c.mid-1970s
Acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305

Kestrel 1981

Acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305

Private collection





Almada 1985

Acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 304.8

RWA Collection







Northcote 1989 (left)

Acrylic on canvas, 304.8 x 304.8

Goldsmiths, University of London

Rosetta 2012

Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9

RWA Collection



Bert and Betty c.2005
Acrylic on panel, 22 x 17



Northcote 1989 (detail)



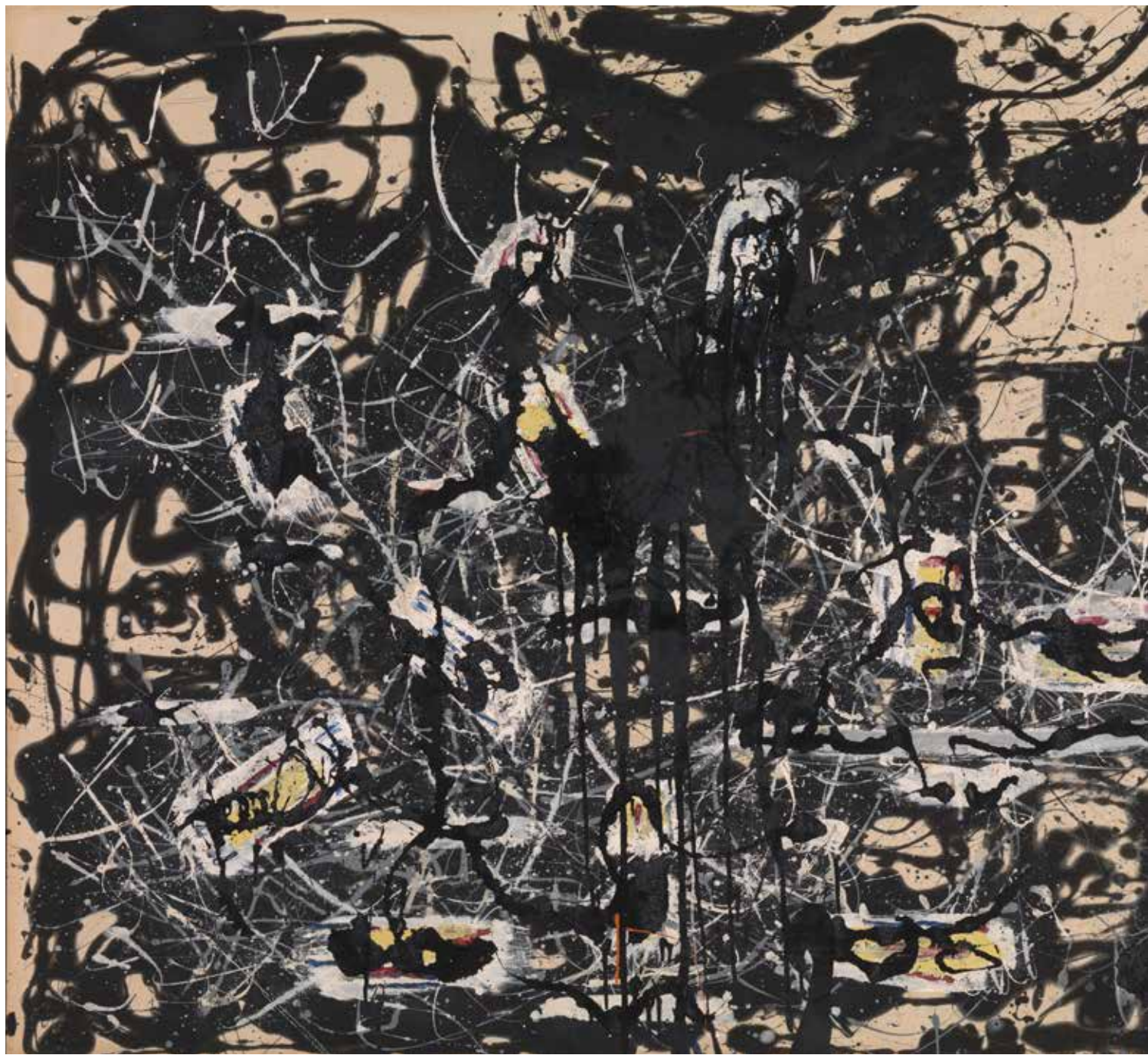
Barnett Newman

Adam 1951, 1952

Oil on canvas, 242.9 x 202.9

Tate: purchased 1968







Jackson Pollock
Yellow Islands 1952

Oil on canvas, 143.5 x 185.4

Tate: Presented by the Friends of the
Tate Gallery (purchased out of funds
provided by Mr and Mrs H.J. Heinz II
and H.J. Heinz Co. Ltd) 1961

Grace Hartigan
**Study for Montauk
Highway** 1957

Collage on paper, 56 x 71

ACA Galleries, New York



Willem de Kooning

The Visit 1966-7

Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9

Tate: purchased 1969



Jack Tworkov

Cradle 1956

oil on canvas, 183.5 x 163.2

Collection of the Gertrude D. Davis Trust,
courtesy of The Estate of Jack Tworkov,
New York





Sam Francis (left)

Painting 1957

Watercolour on paper
62.9 x 48.6

Tate: purchased 1957

Robert Motherwell

Ulysses 1947

Oil on cardboard
on wood, 85.7 x 71.1

Tate: acquired by
purchase and gift from
the Daedalus Foundation
1996





John Bratby

The Toilet 1955

Oil on hardboard, 117.1 x 87.2

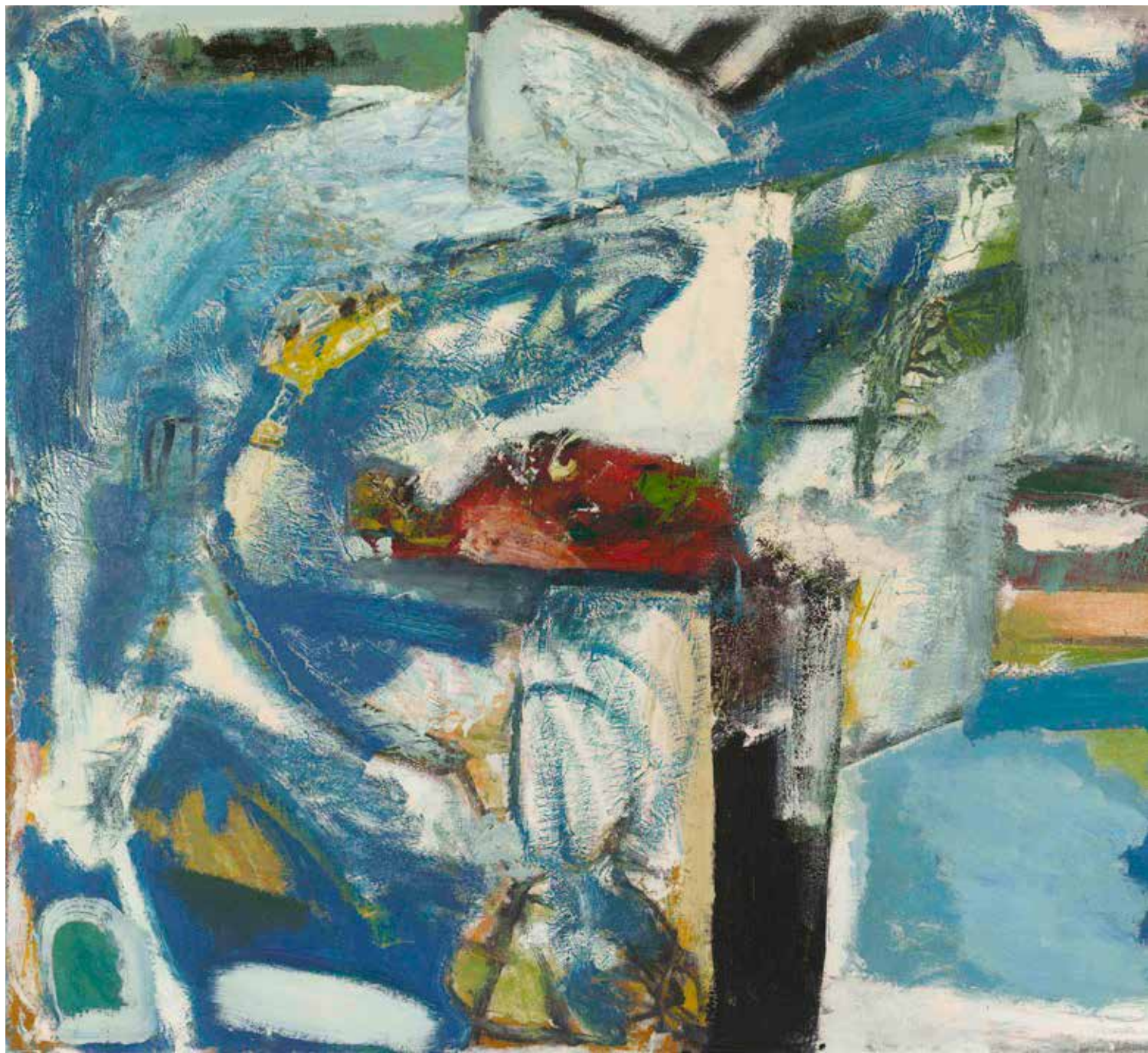
Tate: purchased 1993

Peter Coker
Table and Chair 1955

Oil paint and sand on
fibreboard, 152.4 x 121.9

Tate: purchased 1981







Peter Lanyon
St Ives Bay 1957

Oil on Masonite, 122 x 183

By permission of
Mr and Mrs R.J. Salter



Basil Beattie (left)
When First is Last and Last is First 1999

Oil and wax on canvas, 213 x 198

The artist and Hales Gallery, London

John Hoyland
Ivanhoe 16.3.80 1980

Acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 166.4

The John Hoyland Estate
and Pace Gallery





Gillian Ayres

Ace 1984

Oil on canvas

246 x 117

The Estate of Gillian Ayres

Sandra Blow (right)

Flange 2005

Acrylic and collage on
canvas, 183 x 183

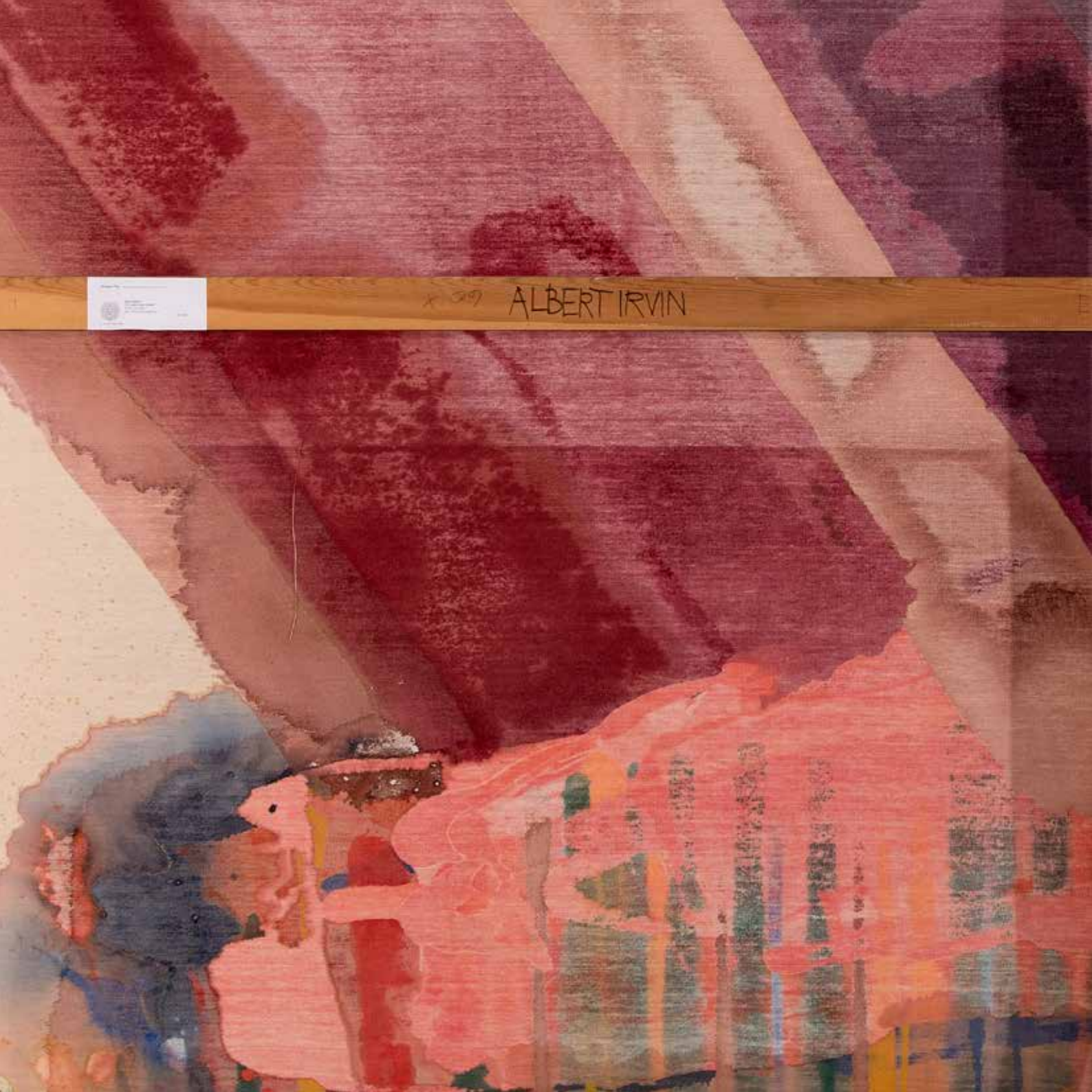
The Sandra Blow Estate
Partnership





X 99

ALBERT IRVIN



Paint Under the Fingernails

Stewart Geddes PRWA

Many years after he'd seen the 1959 exhibition, 'The New American Painting', Albert Irvin would say he couldn't conceive of an equivalent experience for an artist today.¹

The Tate exhibition was the last in a series during the 1950s that explored the new art emerging from across the Atlantic. The previous year had seen the Jackson Pollock solo exhibition at Bryan Robertson's Whitechapel Gallery, and in 1956, the hugely significant but wider Tate survey, 'Modern Art in the United States', in which the final room was occupied by the Abstract Expressionists. But 'The New American Painting' was the first time they had been brought together and presented to the British public en masse.²

Curated by Dorothy C. Miller under the aegis of MoMA New York's International Program, the show travelled to eight European cities and played a significant role in shifting attention from Paris to New York as the centre for 'advanced tendencies' in the visual arts.³ Interestingly, evidence has since emerged suggesting the exhibition was part of an arm's length, CIA sponsored, Cold War tool – an expression of the freedoms one could experience in the West.

Irvin later recalled being struck by how different the work of each artist was, which led him to consider the possibilities of a visual language of his own.⁴ However, it was the scale and gestural bravado of the works that impacted on Irvin immediately, and convinced him he must fundamentally rethink his art.

Irvin's encounter with Abstract Expressionism was part of a wider process of change. It coincided with a period when he was doubting his personal and spikey form of social realist



Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez
Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Blue Dress 1659

Oil on canvas, 127 x 107

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

painting (*The Steel Rays of the Rain*, p.15, and *Fallen Child in Corridor*, p.18) – a mixture of Francis Bacon and Kitchen Sink influences – and was beginning to contemplate the possibilities of abstraction. Crucially, through his close friend and supporter Nancy Wynne-Jones, he was introduced to St Ives painter Peter Lanyon.⁵

Lanyon, who originated from Cornwall, was only four years older than Irvin, but early involvement with the British avant-garde via his wartime ‘tutors’ Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, had led to radical advances in his work. To Irvin, being in the orbit of a seriously regarded artist at this critical phase became essential to his own development.

During family holidays in Cornwall, Irvin was able to extend his conversations with Lanyon and the wider St Ives School. Soon this was augmented with a lecturing post at Goldsmiths College, where an atmosphere of lively debate was generated amongst staff including Basil Beattie, Harry and Elma Thubron, Kenneth Martin, Andrew Forge, and later, John Bellany, Jon Thompson and Michael Craig-Martin.⁶ Significantly, Irvin was told by Forge, the Head of Fine Art, that he must not teach more than three days per week. Irvin recollected, ‘He insisted I had more time each week in the studio – four days – and importantly, paint under my fingernails’.⁶

A period of intense experimentation and exploration followed from this time and throughout the 1960s. Irvin entered the decade with a form of abstraction reminiscent of the ‘teachers’ who inspired it, but exited teetering on the edge of his own mature language.

The early 1960s works often adopt an analogous palette of reds, and contrast thick, broad patches of paint with fragile, meandering lines; sometimes yellow, sometimes black (*Sky Image*, p.23, and *Moving Through*, p.9). The colouration anticipates Irvin’s later luminous palette, but the encrusted paint surface is closer to contemporary St Ives painting. Surprisingly perhaps, Irvin then abandoned rich reds in favour of black (*Into Black*, p.27).

Looking to reconcile varied, large slabs of black with smaller zones of saturated colour, these works show Irvin exploring balance through asymmetry and disparity. They also reveal his reflections on historical art, and appropriating its lessons into his practice. In relation to the black paintings it's known that Irvin was thinking about Velázquez's *Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Blue Dress* (1659), where he was fascinated by the contrast in scale of the monumental infant princess' dress, and her tiny fingers resting on the edge of her voluminous skirts.⁷

Irvin was first alerted to a deeper reading of art and the role it could play in his own work when he met the progressive art collector Reverend Walter Hussey of St Matthew's in Northampton. Having been evacuated there from London during the war, Irvin soon enrolled at Northampton School of Art. Through winning a religious subject painting prize, the young artist was introduced to Hussey and his significant collection of Modern British art, including works by Jacob Epstein, Matthew Smith, Stanley Spencer and Graham Sutherland.⁸ Exposure to this and the conversations between them were an important formative experience for Irvin.

Later, when he was called up to join the Royal Air Force, the contrast between the daily danger of sorties over occupied France, and the civilizing experience of looking at art, became profoundly affecting. Art's 'rationing' – when one painting a month was brought back to the National Gallery from safe exile in a slate mine in Manod, Wales – only added to Irvin's appetite. He talked of 'devouring' his monthly supply when on leave.

The black paintings show Irvin beginning to use thin veils of paint for the first sustained period, but the shapes are essentially an outline filled in. Soon this gave way to the paint's fluid consistency leading the process, and a more negotiated arrival at form. Irvin's great friend and fellow painter Basil Beattie remembers the fumes from the vast quantities of turpentine Irvin was using to thin oil paint

(see 'Several Other Gears', p.70, and *When First is Last, and Last is First*, p.58).

A brief phase of vaporous, rotund forms in 1966 (*Nexus*, p.29, and *Untitled 2*, p.30), where the paint can be seen spraying down and across the canvas, was replaced with vertical and diagonal dagger-shapes, and his palette noticeably heightening once more (*Untitled 5*, p.32). These works have a broadly egalitarian disposition of elements, where the extreme major/minor distribution of forms present in the black paintings, has been set to one side.

Toward the end of the 1960s Irvin left his home-based studio, and began making much larger paintings. He first joined the newly founded cooperative group SPACE in their large Thames-side warehouse at St Katharine Docks and then, in 1971, he moved to an old Jewish School in Stepney Green, East London, where he remained for the rest of his life. Soon after relocating, Irvin tried acrylic paint for the first time.⁹

It's hard to overstate the significance of the change in medium for Irvin. Working on his large canvasses both vertically (against the wall), and laid flat (just off the floor), he took to acrylic's properties immediately. Working horizontally stopped the inevitable run-off of water-thinned paint from top to bottom, and by placing the canvas stretcher on large cans, he was able to reduce the drying time of the saturated surface by exposing the back of the canvas as well as the front.

Irvin began constructing painting tools, including improvised squeegees made from card with which he pushed the paint across the surface in parallel, diagonal bars (*Untitled 3*, p.34, and *Untitled 6*, p.33). He used the diagonal gesture in tension with the horizontal and vertical edges of the canvas to deliver a vivid dynamism, resonating with the urban environment in which the works were made. The organisation of these paintings often allude to musical composition as Irvin partitioned the canvas into three 'movements': a major dynamic of diagonal stripes,

running into a minor resisting counter-movement, and resolving itself in narrow fingers of colour, reminiscent of the black paintings. This period of painting represents the first mature phase in which the artist has located a truly personal voice. His confidence is palpable, and the rich and luminous palette typically associated with Irvin takes off.

In order to establish the primary colour mood of a painting, Irvin began by ‘sully’ing an already damp, bare canvas with a stain of acrylic. Into this he would then cast ‘chains’ of light tints (*Kestrel*, p.36).

Retrospectively, Irvin recognised the effect as reminiscent of the flack trails he witnessed coming up to greet his Bristol Beaufighter during the War. Although he wasn’t looking to mimic the seen experience, he talked of these early experiences as significant. Similarly, he remembered leaving a blacked-out Britain by ship for flight training in Canada, and the mesmerizing image of the sparkling city lights of Halifax on the Nova Scotian coast. These unusually positive recollections from a time of mortal danger perhaps demonstrate Irvin’s predisposition to a celebratory psyche? It was tested at times, but he always came back to it. Irvin also speculated that the skills he developed as a flight navigator – of plotting a journey through three-dimensional space on the flat surface of a map – as central to the later abstract painter’s conceptual framework.

As the 1970s progressed Irvin’s use of squeegees moderated and he increasingly reverted to the brush once more, particularly house decorator’s brushes (*Kestrel*, p.36 and *Almada*, p.38). He became re-attracted to the nuance of pressure, speed and direction that a brush could deliver. Later, the standard decorator’s brush was replaced with a multi-ferrule hearth brush – a brush used to clean fire grates. Irvin observed that the separate ferrules offered a more recognisable brush mark on the large scale (*Northcote*, p.40).

The brushed mark was a core communicative element

for Irvin. It acted as a signifier of the presence of the artist and the decision-making taking place. Irvin talked in matter-of-fact terms of marks accruing, ‘like entries in a diary’.¹⁰ But, he noted, ‘they carry import too. They’re like pockets of experience’.¹¹ In relation to this he highlighted the central importance of the autographic mark, and why he didn’t use a studio assistant, because, ‘It’s important that the mark on the canvas is the mark I’ve made’.¹²

Irvin’s colour ‘architecture’ now looked to coordinate an analogous palette – colours from the same zone of the colour wheel – punctuated with smaller proportions of complimentary colour – colours from opposite sides of the colour wheel. This reconciliation of opposites was a repeated tactic of Irvin’s, and the forms the colour took up were often characterised by an interplay of differences: straight with curved; the horizontal with crisscrossed. Over time, new forms were identified and became embedded in his visual vocabulary.¹³ Irvin’s combination of oppositional forces even spilled into the creative act itself, and he often quoted the pianist Alfred Brendel’s maxim for creativity as ‘a combination of strategy and ecstasy’.¹⁴

Over several decades until 1980, Irvin received regular, if moderate, acknowledgement for his work. He exhibited on several occasions in Germany as well as widely in Britain, and was granted two Arts Council bursaries. On one consequent trip to the United States in 1968, he met with Robert Rauschenberg, as well as early protagonists Jack Tworikov and Grace Hartigan.¹⁵ However, Irvin came to wider public attention after selection by artist-curator John Hoyland (*Ivanhoe* 16.3.80, p.59), for the 1980 Hayward Annual Exhibition, in which a room was dedicated to his work. One important outcome was the offer of representation by Peter Lanyon’s art dealer, Gimpel Fils. Soon after, Irvin felt able to give up his regular teaching post at Goldsmiths College, although he continued to travel around the country as a popular visiting tutor at several art schools.

Throughout his long career as painter/teacher, Irvin



Joseph Mallord William Turner
Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – the Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis exhibited 1843

Oil on canvas, 78.7 x 78.7

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856



Francis Bacon
Figure in a Landscape 1945

Oil on canvas, 144.8 x 128.3

Tate: purchased 1950

strongly advocated the contribution of visual intelligence. He considered Britain a nation prejudiced toward the cultural primacy of the written word. As part of his evidence he cited the annual celebration of Shakespeare's birthday on St George's Day, and the near total ignoring of Turner's birthday the same day. By way of a small rebalancing act – although he always insisted there was no intended denigration to Shakespeare – Irvin gathered a group of artist friends for a celebratory dinner in Turner's honour, at the St Katharine Docks studios on St George's Day 1969. The dinner became an annual event and continues to this day.

When Irvin exited the doors of the Tate at some point in early 1959, he was changed by an experience of the eyes and brain in tandem, and a resolve to embrace abstraction was irrevocably established. After years of exploration, a visual opulence emerged to stand as testament to his belief in the essential and enriching power of the visual arts. Irvin was not blind to the darker side of human capabilities – not least through his wartime experiences – but ultimately, he found ally in Matisse's principle of an art of '...the joyousness of springtime, which never lets anyone suspect the labours it has cost...'”¹⁶

1. Interview with the author. Geddes, S., 'Stewart Geddes in Conversation with Bert Irvin', *Turps Banana Magazine*, Issue 13.
2. The exhibition opened on 24 February 1959, and closed on 22 March. London was the second European venue for the exhibition, having previously been shown in Paris. The earlier 'Modern Art in the United States' of 1956, was a much wider survey of contemporary American art, and the Abstract Expressionists were present only in a single, final room. Nonetheless it was a much anticipated and highly influential exposure of the Abstract Expressionists to the British public. The Royal Academy's 2016 exhibition 'Abstract Expressionism' has been the only exhibition dedicated to the Abstract Expressionists artists in this country since 1959.
3. Dorothy Canning Miller (1904–2003) has been described as one of the most influential curators of the twentieth century. Trained at MoMA New York, she became curator of the museum's collection, and was one of very few women to hold such an important curatorial role at that time.

The phrase 'advanced tendencies' was used to describe, what in contemporary terminology would be 'cutting edge'. An example of documentation where the term can be found is: https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/2342/releases/MOMA_1958_0025.pdf
4. Interview with the author. Geddes, S., 'Stewart Geddes in Conversation with Bert Irvin', *Turps Banana Magazine*, Issue 13.
5. Nancy Wynne-Jones was a significant figure in the St Ives art community when she turned her home into studios for artists and writers during the 1950s and 60s. Previously she had lived and studied in London, where she met Irvin, before enrolling at the St Ives School of Painting where she painted under the guidance of abstract painter Peter Lanyon.
6. Geddes, S., 'Stewart Geddes in Conversation with Bert Irvin', *Turps Banana Magazine*, Issue 13.
7. Moorhouse, P., *Life to Painting*, Lund Humphries, London. Over a period of two years, Irvin and Paul Moorhouse talked extensively about the developments in Irvin's art in preparation for the monograph.
8. Through his extensive record collection, Hussey also introduced the young Irvin to classical music, and helped develop a passion in him that was second only to painting.
9. The St Katherine Docks' studio was run by SPACE, an organisation founded by Peter Sedgley and Bridget Riley to locate and develop studio spaces for artists. SPACE continues to this day.
10. Interview with the author. Geddes, S., 'Stewart Geddes in Conversation with Bert Irvin', *Turps Banana Magazine*, Issue 13.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Typical of this was the relatively late identification of the quatrefoil form. Irvin liked the mixture of its presence on the grandeur of the Doges' Palace in Venice, and its prosaic ubiquity in pubs. Geddes, S., 'Stewart Geddes in Conversation with Bert Irvin', *Turps Banana Magazine*, Issue 13.
14. Ibid.
15. Irvin met with both artists whilst in the United States in 1968. Irvin requested his friend Basil Beattie send over several of his canvasses from London, so he could discuss his work with Tworikov whilst in New York. Jack Tworikov and Grace Hartigan were both in the original 'The New American Painting' exhibition. Hartigan was the only woman included.
16. Flam, Jack D., *Matisse on Art*, Phaidon, Oxford. From a letter written in Vence, dated 14 February 1948, to art historian and curator Henry Clifford, in relation to Matisse's pending retrospective exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art of the same year.



Several Other Gears

An Interview with Basil Beattie

Basil Beattie (B) Stewart Geddes (S)

S: When did you first meet Bert Irvin? Was it at Goldsmiths College, around 1962?

B: Yes it would have been about then. He'd been teaching at Spencer Park Comprehensive School and Wandsworth Prison. Bert had already been a student at Goldsmiths, where he'd studied along with Bridget Riley and Mary Quant. But when he came to teach, it was well on its way to being a different course.

S: How would you describe the course back in the early 60s?

B: It was fairly traditional. It was still separated into the Painting School and the Sculpture School, and there was also the Embroidery and Textile School, and none of the students mixed.

S: Not even the sculptors and the painters?

B: Well, no, it was very odd. They pretty much kept to themselves. We were in the Goldsmiths main building and some old properties opposite, where the library is now. There was Rob Brazil doing Foundation work with students in the main building, and Bill Tucker and I were in what they used to call the 'Jam Factory', which was opposite. There were also other buildings; workshop-type buildings that the sculptors used. It was rather good actually. Once or twice I was asked to do a tutorial with a sculptor [laughs].

S: So there was no Head of Fine Art as such?

B: No, there was a Head of Painting and a Head of Sculpture, and then a Head of Embroidery and Textiles.

S: Did you seek out teaching as a means of surviving after finishing as a student at the RA?

B: Yes, I nearly took up a teaching post closer to home at Sunderland Art School. The previous Head there, Harry Thubron, had really put it on the map, and around that time nine Sunderland students from the same year got post-grad places at the Royal College. It was unheard of. I remember *Picture Post* magazine did a feature on it. But before I took up the offer I heard I had an interview and got offered two days a week at Goldsmiths, and decided to go there instead. Compared to the regions, London was a much busier centre for cultural events – exhibitions in particular – and as I was a lad from the North East, this was very attractive.

S: What was so extraordinary about Harry Thubron? I've heard you and Bert talk about him a lot. I think Bert described him as having, 'the wayward logic of genius'.¹

B: Harry was very aware of what was going on. He was aware of the changes in art schools and changes in practice. He was innovative in every way he taught really. I think it was at Scarborough that Harry organised influential summer schools. I went to one of these, but at a private girls' school near St Albans. Along with Harry there were one or two teachers from Leeds where he was working by then. Alan Green, a sort of Constructivist, was one of them; a former student of Harry's, I think. I went on this course which took place in

huge outbuildings, and in one there was sand on the floor, and the students were in a huge circle. I think there were two models, and Harry was saying to the models 'Move around, move around'. Now, because I had done National Service in the army, and then went to a very primitive art school in Hartlepool, I hadn't learnt anything about 'Basic Design', and I was curious about it.² Getting the models to move around – it doesn't sound that adventurous now – broke up the kind of expectancy that went on in the life room; of sitting down and making work that takes a lot of time.

Schwitters was an important artist for Harry, but also Matisse. He'd do Matisse-like prints. But when he was doing his constructions, they'd turn out to be more like Schwitters.

S: Had you known of Bert before Goldsmiths?

B: No, I hadn't. We met a year or so after I arrived there. From the start it was obvious that we had the same heroes – we were both interested in the Americans for example.

S: Who also taught at Goldsmiths then?

B: There was Kenneth Martin. Ken was one that Patrick Millard, the Principal, who hadn't been in the position at Goldsmiths for very long, brought in. Millard had come from the Regent Street Polytechnic, and I think the old guard at Goldsmiths resented him somehow, probably because he introduced new ideas and people. There was 'Bobby-Jones' who was Head of Sculpture – he did the sculpture of Churchill in Parliament Square – and Paul de Monchaux, also a sculptor, who is Cathy de Monchaux's dad. And Betty Swanwick, the painter-illustrator.

Later on, the painting and sculpture schools were merged, and Andrew Forge was made Head of Fine Art. Then came Jon Thompson who restructured things into six groupings of staff and students that were idea and issue led. Actually Jon brought in Harry Thubron and Harry's wife Elma to teach. Damien Hirst had a rapport with Harry, particularly in relation to Schwitters.

S: At the time you met Bert what did you think of his painting?

B: There were references to things being done in St Ives, and he wasn't using the brightest colours in the paint box then; that came a bit later. Perhaps he wasn't being quite so optimistic as he was later on – I am joking. He'd had one or two shows at the New Arts Centre in London, and, you know, I liked those paintings. I still do.

S: Talking earlier of your shared heroes, the Americans for example, what do you remember of the show, 'The New American Painting'? Were you still a student at the RA at the time?

B: Yes, it must have been right on the point when I was about to leave. It affected everybody... even people who weren't interested in art. It had a ripple effect for so many artists and art schools. I remember Tworokov and Grace Hartigan, as well as Pollock and de Kooning and the like. There was so much variety amongst them. But what struck me was the energy, the kind of confidence that all the works seemed to express. I've thought about it a lot since; and I think the overall feeling was that one was looking at a new form of realism.

S: What do you mean by that?

B: Well, the reality of the image; the power and purpose of the image, and I don't mean an abstraction from something seen. But in their works there was a kind of physicality to the image that was very much to do with focusing on the object you were making.

S: Do you think that reflection and understanding came later?

B: Yeah, I think so. I don't think I would have put it like that at the time, but there was an energy, a powerful dynamic that was exciting. And yet they were all very different from each other.

S: Bert commented on that too. He said one of the things that struck him at the time was that de Kooning was very different to Newman, and Newman was very different to Pollock etc.

B: I think de Kooning was rather jealous of Pollock at one point; and Pollock was a crazy man. One wonders if one would have liked to have known him [laughs]. But nevertheless, I think the qualities that he achieved were recognised by the others. De Kooning in particular was very enamoured. And it was a very short time after he knew Pollock that de Kooning burst forth.

S: Bert talked about de Kooning being important to him, because, ironically, he had a vestige of figuration and it was that which showed him a 'way in'.

B: Yes, I think that was what happened. De Kooning's shapes can be read as 'body', although they weren't abstracted from a body. They're sensuous, done with a sign writer's brushes with long bristles – you could flick them. If you look at the drawing of some of the curves it could only be done by that gesture. Those paintings came out of Cubism, they're 'cubic' in terms of space.

S: It's interesting you should mention Cubism because of course abstraction was not a new thing when the Americans arrived. European Modernism was forty plus years old. So what was particular about the American work – was it to do with the scale and gestural confidence of their painting?

B: The scale was something very important. Much larger than what we'd call easel painting. It's a form of mural painting, and no doubt the Federal Arts Project, that several of them had been on, played a role in this.³ A lot of them certainly got to know each other through it.

S: What was the experience like for you, a student at the RA schools, to see a show like that? Something was building wasn't it? Just the previous year Pollock had a solo show at the Whitechapel Gallery, and before that there had been the first Tate show – 'Modern Art in the United States' – with one room of Abstract Expressionists. How did this all contrast with what you were experiencing at the RA?

B: Well, as students we were always invited to send in work

to the Summer Exhibition – I can't remember if I got anything in [laughs] – but I know John Hoyland, who was in the year above me at the Academy, had his rejected because there were no figures in his painting. He was kind of Rothko-esque.

S: And was it right he was told he wouldn't get his RA diploma, unless he submitted some life drawings from the first year or something?

B: I heard that, yes.

It was around that time I got prospectuses from all the London colleges to see if anybody did a 'Basic Design' course. I'd heard interesting things about it, but I didn't know what it meant. There was only one evening class at the Central School and I mentioned it to John.

S: Who was running it?

B: Bill Turnbull. William Turnbull. So we used to go along, and I remember Turnbull would read *Space* magazines in the corner while taking the evening class. He'd have a model, and I think he'd say something like 'Make it look as though it's new and not something that's been dug up'. Privately, I've always thought his work looks like it has been dug up [laughs].

But it really worked for John. He was motoring by then, and soon after the Academy he got a show at Marlborough's New London Gallery.

S: Coming back to 'The New American Painting', were all things American very attractive at that time? We were only recently out of rationing, and for Bert having been in the RAF during the war, perhaps his memory of the swagger and confidence of the American airmen and soldiers was part of a wider cultural attraction that these works seemed to represent?

B: I can't quite remember that, but of course for Bert there was a feeling that the war had taken valuable time, and consequently he became prolific.

Clyfford Still

1951-T No. 3 1951

Oil on canvas, 238.8 x 208.3

Museum of Modern Art
(MoMA), New York. Blanchette
Hooker Rockefeller Fund
Acc. no.: 277.1954

Included in 'The New American
Painting' at Tate, 1959



S: Yes it struck me whilst in his studio and looking through the older paintings, how hard he worked from the earliest period. He was making a lot of work, and using a lot of oil paint, which was an expensive medium.

B: Yes. I remember going to a diploma show – as they were then – at Chelsea, in the late 60s, and I met Peter Sedgley. I mentioned I was looking for a studio. And he said: ‘Well, why don’t you come to our meeting? We are going to meet down the road next week.’ And it was when he was with Bridget Riley and they were the two great motivators behind ‘SPACE’ and ‘AIR’. ‘AIR’ was for Artist Index Registry, which of course, if computers had been around then would have been fantastic. And ‘SPACE’ looked to provide studio space for artists.⁴ Before the big building boom, the Pool of London was full of empty warehouses.

So around this time I said to Bert: ‘Are you interested in a studio?’ And initially he said: ‘No, I’ve got the studio at home. After a day’s work when I’m going to bed, I can go and have another look and do a bit more’. Later on when Bert had taken a studio, I overheard him talking to someone at a party and they said to him, ‘Bert, I hear you’ve taken a studio. I thought you liked working at home?’ And Bert replied, ‘Well you know how it is. When you’ve got a studio at home and you’re off to bed you think I’ll just pop in here and do a bit more. So you pick up your brush and start f***** it up. You can’t do that when you’ve got a studio somewhere else’.

Anyway, we were talking with the council about an old building down Borough High Road, part of which had been Marshalsea’s Prison, mentioned in Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*. Unfortunately, that didn’t come off, but meanwhile Peter and Bridget had been negotiating for St Katharine Docks, next to Tower Bridge, which is almost surrounded by water and was fantastic. Various boats had traded across the world from there. So we moved in, and although London was on the way out as a port, I remember seeing dockworkers in The China

Ship pub, up that cobbled street outside the gates. And Bert did move in, to the middle floor I think.

S: Did he get a commission for some big paintings or something, and needed a larger space?

B: He may have done. He certainly wanted to work bigger by then, and I remember he used to have big drums of turps to thin the paint because he was still working in oils. But even in the large space of the warehouse the fumes and smell was so strong. Good job he didn’t smoke, it could have gone up [laughs]!

And then acrylic came along and it was just what he was looking for.

S: Were you both using acrylic paint toward the end of your time at St Katharine Docks?

B: Lots of us began using it, but ironically Bert started using it later. We were given stock from Rowney when they first started making the stuff, and we did this exhibition at the Royal Academy called ‘Big Paintings for Public Places’. I think it may have been a publicity thing on Rowney’s part, and I remember they gave us big plastic jars of acrylic paint – a whole litre of each colour! It wasn’t particularly good stuff but it was just what we needed at the time. Actually, I only threw some of those jars away a few years ago [laughs].

S: How long were you all at St Katharine Docks as a group?

B: I think it couldn’t have been more than three years – a very short time. We had to leave. And then some of us took over the old Jewish School in Stepney Green in around ’70 or ’71, and I had a studio next to Bert.

S: Those last turps-stained oil paintings of Bert’s that he did at the beginning of your time at Stepney Green, they were painted upright weren’t they? They weren’t done horizontally as he worked later, correct? I notice the paint runs down the surface.

B: Yes, that’s right. But then he started using acrylic paint, and

of course he took to it like a duck to water! And it's where his work really began to change in size and imagery. If you look at the history of painting, a lot of art changed because of the paint changing. You could make paintings in a way that you couldn't before. It can be a great release. It certainly was for me and Bert at the time.

S: Like the development of the paint tube for the Impressionists. So what made you go back to oil?

B: Ah, that's a good question. I think I took hold of a brush to draw into the picture again.

Acrylic is brilliant for making stained paintings. But when you apply it thickly, it's more like what it is – plastic. It has a quality of inertness. But when oil paint is thick, somehow it doesn't look inert or dead. And I began to draw thickly.

S: But Bert's paintings don't look dead do they?

B: No. They're not thick though.

S: They are almost in the watercolour tradition, but on a vast scale?

B: That's right. There was one point when he said he'd never use white.

S: Like a watercolourist...

B: Yes.

S: But going back a little... around the time of seeing the American shows, Bert had another significant encounter when he got to know Peter Lanyon.

B: Yes, I think it was before we met, during Lanyon's 'gliding' period. Did you see the exhibition at the Courtauld Institute recently, of some of those gliding inspired works of Lanyon's? I thought they were exceptional. Through the material of paint I recognised the experience of flight. They brilliantly evoked the exhilaration of flying through space, through clouds and glimpses of land below, swooping.

Lanyon and Bert had that mutual interest in flying and must have talked at least briefly about it – of course, Lanyon's experience was different from Bert's in that he wasn't being shot at.

S: Yes. Bert talked about the parallels between his later painting and his wartime experience as a flight navigator – the process of describing a body moving through space, on the flat surface of maps and charts.

B: Yes, he'd refer to the connection of flying and his role as navigator. He obviously didn't want you to imagine his painting as through the eyes of a bird looking down on the ground. Of course navigation can relate to moving through a city too. Bert followed that through when he went away to a new place and would often pick up a title for a painting; perhaps a local name, of a street perhaps, or road.

At one point at Goldsmiths, Bert took his students into the city. He took them down into the Tube and then up the highest building above ground. He wanted to put them into different spatial experiences. Just as in normal behaviour – you go upstairs, you go downstairs. And that led to thinking about Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard spoke about the space in drawers and wardrobes, and attics and cellars, and the way it affects the emotions. It wasn't just a physical thing. It could affect your attitude towards all kind of things.

S: He also talked about the analogy of the journey of a brush across the surface of a canvas, and a journey through an urban landscape space.

B: That comes from Pollock and de Kooning. Pollock particularly – he wanted it to be a trace of where he'd been.

S: I'd like to talk about the relationship between artists and pubs. They were important weren't they, in terms of artists gathering and throwing ideas around, as well as having a good time?

B: Absolutely. Well, there was Finches on the Fulham Road.



Mark Rothko
**The Black and the
White** 1956

Oil on canvas, 238.76 x 136.53

Fogg Art Museum, Harvard Art
Museums, USA / Gift of Ruth and
Frank Stanton

Included in 'The New American
Painting' at Tate, 1959

That was a good artists' pub. And the Queens Elm near Chelsea Arts Club was well known; I think at one point there was a writer who owned it. Not being a member of the Club I remember going to the Queens Elm. At the time the Chelsea Arts Club was closely associated with the Royal Academy – and I didn't want anything to do with that [laughs].

S: Wasn't it you who told me that when you were a student at the Royal Academy there was a prize for the best painting of a woman in evening wear with no sleeves?

B: No it was, 'A lady in her evening wear showing arms and hands'. Henry Rushbury, an engraver, was the Keeper, and for me the Academy and its surrounding streets was the art world! Cork Street and Bond Street were three minutes away, as was the ICA in Dover Street. The only time we had to make a pilgrimage was when we went to the Tate or the Whitechapel Gallery. The Serpentine didn't exist, the Camden Arts Centre didn't exist, and so it was a very small world.

S: Was the ICA quite a challenging institution?

B: Yes, it was great. It was where Lawrence Alloway was based, and Bill – William Turnbull. He and Alloway were close. Alloway was terrific. It was a very small space, but I remember seeing a significant Morris Louis exhibition there. The Cohen brothers were active then too. I remember at one evening event, one of them sat in the front row while the other stood at the back, and they both flew questions at the panel. As students at the RA we could go straight from the studios – three minutes and we were there!

S: Could we talk about Betty, Bert's wife? That was a very important relationship wasn't it?

B: Yes she was terrific. There were times when Bert would be away, in some distant part, and she would turn up at a Private View. But not in the role of deputising for him... she didn't have to go there as Bert's wife; she wasn't Mrs Irvin in that sense. She was Betty. And everybody in the art world knew and liked her.

S: I think that's a very nice observation, Basil.

B: I'm sure I'm not inventing this, but I have a recollection of Bert telling me that in the early days he was hoping to show some work in an exhibition, and he and Betty loaded up some kind of barrow on wheels with paintings and pushed it over London Bridge to the gallery together, because of course they never had a car! And before all that, in her own right, she went to Clapham Art School...

S: ...which, along with all the other London art schools, was evacuated to Northampton in the war, and is where they met.

B: Yes. It was a great relationship, and ah, you know... toward the end; when they were both in St George's hospital in Tooting at the same time... that was extraordinary... he was downstairs, and she was upstairs, and they'd have dinner together [chuckles].

S: You and Bert were very close friends, weren't you? What was it you liked about each other?

B: I used to pick him up in my car to drive over to Goldsmiths together, and before we got out of Gorst Road where he lived, he'd have told me his latest joke. It was often a Max Miller joke. What annoyed me no end was I always thought, 'I must remember that', but I never could remember the bloody thing. The thing is, all that day you would hear him telling the same joke to everybody else.

But it was painting really; our chemistry was through painting. I didn't find him moody at all, or anything like that. And I don't think there are any black clouds in his paintings. By that I mean, I don't think there is any angst in his paintings.

S: Yeah, they are very celebratory paintings.

B: Yeah, and I think once he'd identified that, in his head it became much clearer.

S: Oh, that's interesting – you think it took Bert a while to find that, and be confident about it?

B: Well, I think it grew from when he was looking at St Ives painting.

A lot of abstract paintings are made through looking at things, and the artist can be torn in terms of loyalty to the original – the issue of a painting originating from, for example, a landscape, but not looking like it in a direct way. In the end I don't think Bert was interested in that kind of thing, although he may have moved in that direction early on.

I remember a *Life* magazine article in which a reproduction of a Rothko was placed against a photograph of a sunset, and a Franz Kline was next to a photo of the girders of an iron bridge at twilight. In effect they were saying, if you know where to look, you'll find this stuff that these artists are interested in. It got under my skin.

When I saw the Rothkos at the Whitechapel they didn't make me think of sunsets. Rothko made visible human things, the human experience: living, being human, feeling. It wasn't to do with mimicking the visual world, nor a straightforward abstraction from a visual origin; it was philosophical thought.⁵

And so with Bert, I think the spirit of the painting he wanted to make eventually became clearer, and somehow he identified the idea of making an image that was joyous and optimistic. And the use of bright, high-key colour began to be more prominent as time went on.

S: Some time ago I spoke with Bert's dear friend Terry Frost, and Terry told me he'd been at a reunion of men held at Stalag 383 prisoner of war camp. Apparently everyone was talking about how terrible the conditions were; how they were perpetually hungry, and how cold it was. Terry said 'I have absolutely no recollection of that at all'. He said: 'All I remember is being stood by the perimeter fence, looking across no man's land to a forest, and seeing the fresh green leaves on the spring trees, and thinking – that's the most vivid green I have ever seen in my life!' And Bert was like that. I don't think he chose to be like that, he just was, and eventually he came to accept it.

B: Yes, I think that's right.

He was asked to visit a lot of different art schools around the country, and I think the general impression for students was of an enthusiast. Someone who would try and engage with their ideas and guide them towards themselves.

S: I had that. I had a tutorial with Bert at Bristol, as a first year, and he basically told me, 'You've got to make it more so. What you're doing is valid, but you're being a bit inhibited about it.'

B: Well that's a very good criticism really. There must be several other gears! [laughs].

S: I think that was it – several other gears!

1. Geddes, S., Stewart Geddes in Conversation with Bert Irvin, *Turps Banana Magazine*, Issue 13.
2. A radically new form of art education that revolutionised art school training throughout Britain from the 1950s.
3. Federal Arts Project/Public Works of Art Project was part of the Works Progress Administration developed by Franklin Roosevelt to alleviate difficulties arising from the Great Depression. Artists – including several that later became 'Abstract Expressionists' – were employed by Federal Government to paint murals for hospitals, schools, post offices, community centres, and other government buildings. Many of these were in the Social Realist form espousing the virtues of community and the 'American Way' despite the difficulties, but some abstract murals were also executed.
4. 'SPACE' – Space Provision Artistic, Cultural and Educational – remains one of the main organisers of artists' spaces in London.
5. Mark Rothko solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, 1961.

Albert Irvin, 1995. Photography by Jorge Lewinski



Chronology

1922

Albert Irvin born in Bermondsey, south London. As a young boy Irvin moved to Highbury, north London and grew up there during the time of Herbert Chapman's great Arsenal team. He became a lifelong fan.

1940-41

Attends Northampton School of Art. Meets fellow art student Betty Nicolson whom he would later marry. Their relationship was central in the development of Irvin's career. Later, Irvin would often refer to Betty as his 'sine qua non'.

1941-46

Served in the Royal Air Force.



Left to right: Priscilla, Bert, Celia, Betty

1946-50

Student at Goldsmiths College, School of Art.

1947

Marries Betty Nicolson at Wandsworth Town Hall Registry Office.

1949

Daughter Priscilla born.

1956

Exhibition at the Tate, 'Modern Art in the United States', proves a turning point.

1957

Meets artist Peter Lanyon through Nancy Wynne-Jones (right).



1959

Visits 'The New American Painting' exhibition at the Tate.

Daughter Celia born.

Teaching at Spencer Park Comprehensive School, Wandsworth, and evening classes at Wandsworth Prison.

1960

First exhibition at 57 Gallery, Edinburgh. First non-UK exhibition at the Galerie im Griechenbeisl, Vienna, Austria.

1962-83

Teaching at Goldsmiths College, School of Art.

1965

Elected member of the London Group.

1966

Starts to make works that are in a predominantly black palette.

1968

Moves into St Katherine Docks studio administered by SPACE.

Receives an Arts Council Award to visit USA.

1971

Moves to Stepney Green studio in East London.

1972

50th birthday.

Moves from oils to acrylic.

1975

Receives an Arts Council Major Award. Begins short-lived foray into lithography.



Reverse of *Into Black* 1966



Albert Irvin, 1995. Photography by Jorge Lewinski

1980

Selected by John Hoyland for the Hayward Annual Exhibition. This significantly extends the public's awareness of Irvin's work, and leads to representation by Gimpel Fils.

Begins partnership with printmakers Advanced Graphics for the release of his first screenprint, *Tooley*.

1983

Appears in BBC2 television film *A Feeling for Paint: Four Artists and their Materials*, directed by Anne James.

Receives the Gulbenkian Award for Printmaking.

1990

Participates in BBC Radio 3, *Third Ear* interview with Joan Bakewell.

1993

Design for Diversions Dance Company.

1994

Appears in BBC2 television *Off the Wall: The Byker Show*.

1995

Exhibition at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin. Duran Duran plays at opening to huge media attention.

Works between studios in London and Dublin.

1998

Elected Royal Academician.

First performance of *Holyrood* a composition by Barry Guy, based on work by Irvin.

Lund Humphries publish *Albert Irvin: Life to Painting*, by Paul Moorhouse.

1999

Elected Honorary member of Royal West of England Academy.

Curated Tim Mara exhibition for Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

2000

Turner Lecture: *Colour into Action*, Royal College of Art, London.

Artsworld Film, *Albert Irvin: Artist at Work*.

2001

BBC Radio 3 *Private Passions* – interview with Michael Berkeley.

2002

Receives Honorary Fellowship from Goldsmiths College of Art.

2010

Lund Humphries publish *Albert Irvin: The Complete Prints*, by Mary Rose Beaumont.

Critics Circle Artist of the Year.

2012

Made Honorary Fellow, Plymouth College of Art.

2013

Awarded OBE for services to the Visual Arts.

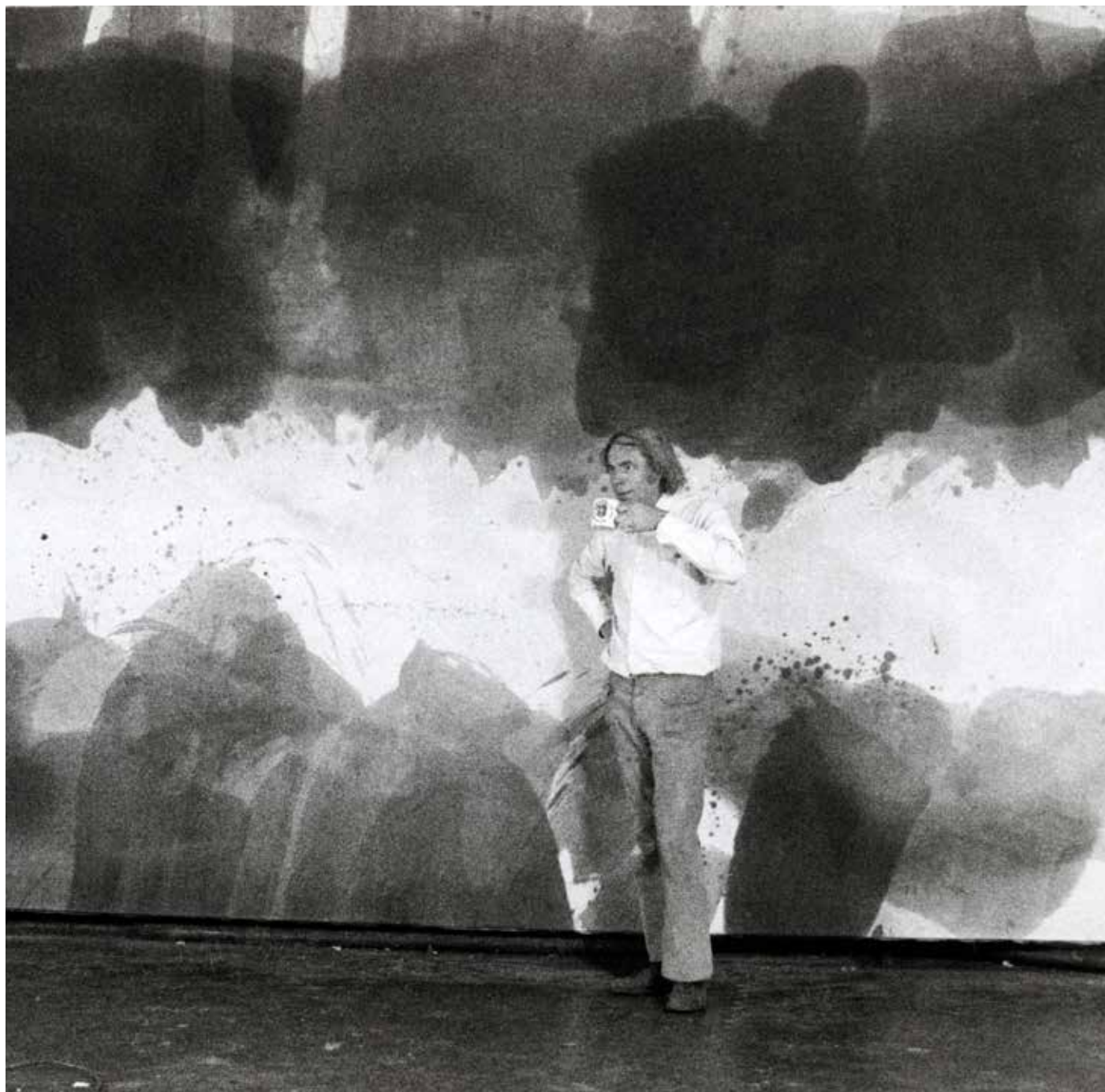
London Group Centenary Exhibition.

2015

Dies 26 March at St George's Hospital, Tooting. Betty Irvin dies six months later on 20 September at the same hospital.



Archival photos courtesy The Albert Irvin Estate



Selected solo exhibitions since 1980

- 1980 Acme Gallery, London
Bede Gallery, Jarrow
- 1981 Manchester Polytechnic Gallery
- 1982 Gimpel Fils, London
Goldsmiths College Gallery, London
- 1983 Third Eye Centre Gallery, Glasgow
Aberdeen Art Gallery
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham
- 1984 Gimpel Fils, London
'Demarcation', Edinburgh Festival
Jersey Arts Council Gallery
- 1985 Coventry Gallery, Sydney
Butler Gallery, Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny
Arcade Gallery, Harrogate
- 1986 Gimpel Fils, London
Hendriks Gallery, Dublin
- 1987 Carine Campo Gallery, Antwerp
- 1988 Gimpel and Weitzenhoffer Gallery, New York
- 1989 Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh
Carine Campo Gallery, Antwerp
- 1990 Serpentine Gallery, London
Gimpel Fils, London
Spacex Gallery, Exeter
Oriël and Chapter Galleries, Cardiff
Castlefield Gallery, Manchester
Gallery Monochrome, Brussels
- 1991 Playhouse Gallery, Harlow
Peter Scott Gallery, Lancaster University
Flowers East, London
- 1992 Galeria Punto, Valencia
Chelmsford Cathedral Festival
Oxford Gallery
Galerie Klaus Lüpke, Frankfurt
Gimpel Fils, London
Wolf at the Door, Penzance
- 1993 Campo Vlaamse Kaai, Antwerp
Bodilly Gallery, Cambridge
Flowers East, London
Design for Diversions Dance Company
- 1994 Powell Moya Partnership, London
Gimpel Fils, London
Wassermann Galerie, Munich
Chapter Gallery, Cardiff
Woodlands Art Gallery, London
- 1995 Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin
Original Print Gallery, Dublin
- 1996 Millfield School, Somerset
Oriël Theatre, Clwyd
- 1996-7 Gimpel Fils, London
- 1997 Galerie Stühler, Berlin
Galerie Wassermann, Berlin
- 1998 Abbaye Saint-André, Centre d'Art
Contemporain, Meymac
Dean Clough Gallery, Halifax
'Works on Paper' – touring German museums
Gimpel Fils, London, celebrating the launch of *Albert Irvin – Life to Painting*, monograph, publisher Lund Humphries, London
- 1999 Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
Orion Art Gallery, Brussels
- 2000 'Prints and Paintings 1980–2000', Advanced Graphics, London
- 2001 'Paintings and Prints 1991–2001', West Cork Arts Centre, Skibbereen
- 2002 'Four Score', Gimpel Fils, London
'Malerei', Galerie Stühler, Berlin
'Prints', Advanced Graphics, London
- 2003 'Albert Irvin: Paintings and Prints', Storey Gallery, Lancaster
'Albert Irvin: Recent Paintings', Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin
- 2004-5 'Midsummer', Gimpel Fils, London
- 2005-6 'New Editions and Monoprints', Advanced Graphics, London
- 2006 'New Works', Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin
- 2007-8 'Urban Journey', Gimpel Fils, London
- 2008 'Albert Irvin', Manton Wing staircase display, Tate Britain, London
'Albert Irvin: Recent Paintings', Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin
'Recent Prints', Advanced Graphics, London
'Albert Irvin: A Retrospective', Kings Place, London
'Albert Irvin: Six Paintings', Kings Place Foyer, London
- 2009 'Albert Irvin: A Retrospective', University Gallery and Baring Wing, University of Northumbria, Newcastle
'Albert Irvin: Peintures Recentes', Galerie Gimpel & Muller, Paris
- 2010 'New Work', Gimpel Fils, London
'Print Retrospective', Advanced Graphics, London/ Kings Place, London
'Tabard: Albert Irvin', Churchill College, Cambridge
- 2011 'Print Retrospective', University Gallery and Baring Wing, University of Northumbria, Newcastle
'Inextinguishable', Gimpel Fils, London
'Albert Irvin RA: From Holyrood to Stratford', Sir Hugh Casson Room, Royal Academy, London
- 2012 'Albert Irvin', Borris House, Barrow River Arts Festival, Ireland
'Albert Irvin: 90th Year Celebration Paintings and Prints', Bohun Gallery, Henley-on-Thames
'Albert Irvin at 90: a survey exhibition', Clifford Chance, London
'Fidelio', Gimpel Fils, London
- 2013 'Albert Irvin: Crosstown', Advanced Graphics, London
'The Complete Prints', Atkinson Gallery, Millfield School, Somerset
- 2017 'Albert Irvin: Early Works 1950–1970', Whitford Fine Art, London

Plates and images

Works by Albert Irvin

Unless otherwise stated all works
Courtesy of The Albert Irvin Estate
Photography by Justin Piperger
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Dimensions in cm, height before width

Moving Through 1960

Oil on canvas, 127 x 152.4 [p.9]
Private collection. Photo courtesy
of Gimpel Fils

Girl With Short Hair c.1948

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 [p.10]

Landscape in Clapham c.1950

Oil on board, 39 x 32 [p.11]

Neighbours 1950

Oil on hardboard, 61 x 71 [p.12/13]

Chicken in a Box 2 c.1952

Oil on hardboard, 61 x 91 [p.14]

The Steel Rays of the Rain 1954

Oil on canvas, 51 x 61 [p.15]

Hands on Piano Keys 1 c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 33 x 216 [p.16/17]

Hands on Piano Keys 2 c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 33 x 216 [p.16/17]

Fallen Child in Corridor c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 122 x 77 [p.18]

Priscilla in a Chair c.1955

Oil on hardboard, 153 x 92 [p.19]

Cellist c.1957

Oil on hardboard, 122 x 92 [p.20]

Town 1959

Oil on hardboard, 51 x 127 [p.21]

Moment of Impact c.1959

Oil on hardboard, 152 x 122 [p.22]

Sky Image c.1960

Oil on hardboard, 126 x 126 [p.23]

Sky c.1960

Oil on hardboard, 122 x 183 [p.24]
Private collection. Photo courtesy of
Whitford Fine Art, London. Photography
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Untitled 4 c.1965

Oil on canvas, 48 x 31 [p.25]

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The Albert Irvin Estate and Whitford
Fine Art, London. Photography by
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Oil on canvas, 152 x 127 [p.30]

Untitled 1968

Oil on canvas, 17.78 x 14.3 [p.31]
Collection of Jason Andrew and Norman
Jabaut, Brooklyn (Gift of Estate of
Jack Tworokov)

Untitled 5 c.1970

Oil on canvas, 203 x 177 [p.32]

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Untitled 3 c.mid-1970s

Acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305 [p.34]

Kestrel 1981

Acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305
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Private collection

Almada 1985

Acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 304.8 [p.38]
RWA Collection. Accepted by HM Government
in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estates of
Albert and Betty Irvin and allocated to the Royal
West of England Academy, 2018. Photography by
Colin White.

Northcote 1989

Acrylic on canvas, 304.8 x 304.8
[p.40/detail p.43]
Courtesy of Goldsmiths, University of London.
Accepted by HM Government in lieu of
Inheritance Tax from the estates of Albert and
Betty Irvin and allocated to Goldsmiths College,
University of London, 2018.

Rosetta 2012

Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9 [p.41]
RWA Collection. Accepted by HM Government
in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estates of
Albert and Betty Irvin and allocated to the Royal
West of England Academy, 2018. Photography by
Colin White.

Bert and Betty c.2005

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Photographs

Anne-Katrin Purkiss (b. 1959) Albert Irvin in
his studio, in front of a life-sized reproduction
of Ruskin's engraving of J.M.W. Turner
[frontispiece] Photo © Anne-Katrin Purkiss

Jorge Lewinski (1921-2008) Albert Irvin, 1995
[p.79/81] Private Collection © The Lewinski
Archive at Chatsworth / Bridgeman Images

Betty Irvin (1922-2015) Bert drinking tea [p.82]
Courtesy of The Albert Irvin Estate

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Franz Kline* (1910–1962) Poster for 'The New American Painting' exhibition at the Tate, 22 February – 24 March 1959 [p.7]
Artwork featured is *Accent Grave*, 1955, by Franz Kline. Poster © Tate. Image © Tate, London 2018. © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018

Barnett Newman (1905–1970) *Adam* 1951–1952
Oil on canvas, 242.9 x 202.9 [p.45]
Tate: purchased 1968. Image © Tate, London 2018. © The Barnett Newman Foundation, New York / DACS, London 2018

Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) *Yellow Islands* 1952
Oil on canvas, 143.5 x 185.4 [p.46]
Tate: presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery (purchased out of funds provided by Mr and Mrs H.J. Heinz II and H.J. Heinz Co. Ltd) 1961. Image © Tate, London 2018. © The Pollock-Krasner Foundation ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018

Grace Hartigan (1922–2008)
Study for Montauk Highway 1957
Collage on paper, 56 x 71 [p.48]
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Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) *The Visit* 1966–7
Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9 [p.49]
Tate: purchased 1969. Image © Tate, London 2018. © The Willem de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and DACS, London 2018

Jack Tworkov (1900–1982) *Cradle* 1956
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Collection of the Gertrude D. Davis Trust, courtesy of The Estate of Jack Tworkov, New York © Estate of Jack Tworkov/VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018

Sam Francis (1923–1994) *Painting* 1957
Watercolour on paper, 62.9 x 48.6 [p.52]
Tate: purchased 1957. Image © Tate, London 2018. © Sam Francis Foundation, California / DACS 2018

Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) *Ulysses* 1947
Oil on cardboard on wood, 85.7 x 71.1 [p.53]
Tate: acquired by purchase and gift from the Dedalus Foundation 1996. Image © Tate, London 2018. © Dedalus Foundation, Inc. / VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018

John Bratby RA (1928–1992) *The Toilet*, 1955
Oil on hardboard, 117.1 x 87.2 [p.54]
Tate: purchased 1993. Image © Tate, London 2018. © Julian Hartnoll / Bridgeman Images

Peter Coker RA (1926–2004) *Table and Chair* 1955. Oil paint and sand on fibreboard, 152.4 x 121.9 [p.55]
Tate: purchased 1981. Image © Tate, London 2018. © Tate

Peter Lanyon (1918–1964) *St Ives Bay* 1957
Oil on Masonite, 122 x 183 [p.56]
By permission of Mr and Mrs R.J. Salter
© Estate of Peter Lanyon. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018

Basil Beattie RA RWA (Hon) (b.1935)
When First is Last and Last is First 1999
Oil and wax on canvas, 213 x 198 [p.58]
Courtesy the artist and Hales Gallery. © Basil Beattie. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018

John Hoyland RA (1934–2011) *Ivanhoe* 163.80 1980. Acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 166.4 [p.59]
The John Hoyland Estate and Pace Gallery. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018

Gillian Ayres (1930–2018) *Ace* 1984, oil on canvas, 246 x 117 [p.60]
The Estate of Gillian Ayres. Photography by Prudence Cuming Associates

Sandra Blow (1925–2006) *Flange* 2005
Acrylic and collage on canvas, 183 x 183 [p.61]
© The Sandra Blow Estate Partnership.
All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2018.
Photo: Simon Cook

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez* (1599–1660) *Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Blue Dress* 1659. Oil on canvas, 127 x 107 [p.64]
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria / Bridgeman Images

Francis Bacon* (1909–1992) *Figure in a Landscape* 1945. Oil on canvas, 144.8 x 128.3 [p.67]
Tate: purchased 1950. Image © Tate, London 2018. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018

Joseph Mallord William Turner RA* (1775–1851) *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – the Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis* exhibited 1843
Oil on canvas, 78.7 x 78.7 [p.67]
Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856. Image © Tate, London 2018

Clyfford Still* (1904–1980) *1951-T No 3* 1951
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Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund. Acc. no.: 277.1954 © City & County of Denver, Courtesy Clyfford Still Museum / DACS 2018. Digital image © 2018 The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence

Mark Rothko* (1903–1970) *The Black and the White* 1956. Oil on canvas, 238.76 x 136.53 [p.76]
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard Art Museums, USA / Gift of Ruth and Frank Stanton / Bridgeman Images © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko ARS, NY and DACS, London

* Not included in exhibition

List of exhibited works

Works by Albert Irvin

Courtesy of The Albert Irvin Estate unless otherwise noted

Dimensions in cm, height before width

Girl with Short Hair c.1948

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50

Portrait of Audrey 1948

Oil on canvas, 40 x 46

Landscape in Clapham c.1950

Oil on board, 39 x 32

Neighbours 1950

Oil on hardboard, 61 x 71

Chicken in a Box 2 c.1952

Oil on hardboard, 61 x 91

The Steel Rays of the Rain 1954

Oil on canvas, 51 x 61

Hands on Piano Keys 1 c.1955

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Oil on canvas, 127 x 152.4

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Sky Image c.1960

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Untitled 1968

Oil on canvas, 17.78 x 14.3

Collection of Jason Andrew and Norman Jabaut, Brooklyn (Gift of Estate of Jack Tworokv)

Untitled 7 c.1969

Oil on canvas, 21 x 32

Untitled 5 c.1970

Oil on canvas, 203 x 177

Untitled 8 c.1971

Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 26

Untitled 3 c.mid-1970s

Acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305

Untitled 6 c.1975

Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 203

Kestrel 1981

Acrylic on canvas, 213 x 305

Private collection

Almada 1985

Acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 304.8

RWA Collection. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estates of Albert and Betty Irvin and allocated to the Royal West of England Academy, 2018

Northcote 1989

Acrylic on canvas, 304.8 x 304.8

Goldsmiths, University of London. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estates of Albert and Betty Irvin and allocated to Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2018

Greenwich III 1991

Screenprint, 76 x 105

Edition of 90 plus proofs

Advanced Graphics London

Hillyard Series 10 1991

Gouache on paper, 29 x 38

Gimpel Fils

Octavia 1992

Screenprint, 74 x 94

Edition of 225 plus proofs

Advanced Graphics London

Thurloe Series IX 1998

Gouache on paper, 28 x 38

Gimpel Fils

Sa Lorenzo Series II 2000

Gouache on paper, 23.5 x 33

Gimpel Fils

Bert and Betty c.2005

Acrylic on panel, 22 x 17

Rosetta 2012

Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9

RWA Collection. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estates of Albert and Betty Irvin and allocated to the Royal West of England Academy, 2018

Artscribe

Original copy of first edition of magazine with artwork by Irvin, 1976. Private collection

Works by other artists

Gillian Ayres *Ace* 1984

Oil on canvas, 246 x 117

The Estate of Gillian Ayres

Derek Balmer *White Tree* 1964

Oil on board, 91.5 x 71

Private collection

Basil Beattie *When First is Last and Last is First*

1999. Oil and wax on canvas, 213 x 198

Courtesy of the artist and Hales Gallery, London

Sandra Blow *Flange* 2005

Acrylic and collage on canvas, 183 x 183

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John Bratby *The Toilet* 1955

Oil on hardboard, 117.1 x 87.2

Tate: purchased 1993

Peter Coker *Table and Chair* 1955

Oil paint and sand on fibreboard, 152.4 x 121.9

Tate: purchased 1981

John Eaves *Brown and Ochre Divisions* 1962

Oil on canvas, 74 x 130

Courtesy of the artist

John Eaves *Strange Arrangement* 2011

Carborundum and acrylic (edition of 5), 65 x 86

Courtesy of the artist

Sam Francis *Painting* 1957

Watercolour on paper, 62.9 x 48.6

Tate: purchased 1957

Stewart Geddes *Fotismeno* 2018

Acrylic on panel, 60 x 90

Courtesy of the artist

Stewart Geddes *Aetos* 2018

Acrylic on panel, 60 x 90

Courtesy of the artist

Adolph Gottlieb *Labyrinth No 2*. 1950

Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 121.9

Tate: purchased 1980

Grace Hartigan *Study for Montauk Highway*

1957. Collage on paper, 56 x 71

ACA Galleries, New York

John Hoyland *Ivanhoe* 16.3.80 1980

Acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 166.4

The John Hoyland Estate and Pace Gallery

Willem de Kooning *The Visit* 1966–7

Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9

Tate: purchased 1969

Willem de Kooning *Women Singing II* 1966

Oil on paper on canvas, 91.4 x 61

Tate: presented by the artist through the

American Federation of Arts 1970

Peter Lanyon *St Ives Bay* 1957

Oil on Masonite, 122 x 183

By permission of Mr and Mrs R.J. Salter

Edward Middleditch *Flowers, Chairs and*

Bedsprings 1956. Oil on hardboard, 112.7 x 175

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the

Helena and Kenneth Levy Bequest 1991

Robert Motherwell *Ulysses* 1947

Oil on cardboard on wood, 85.7 x 71.1

Tate: acquired by purchase and gift from the

Dedalus Foundation 1996

Barnett Newman *Adam* 1951, 1952

Oil on canvas, 242.9 x 202.9

Tate: purchased 1968

Jackson Pollock *Yellow Islands* 1952

Oil on canvas, 143.5 x 185.4

Tate: presented by the Friends of the Tate

Gallery (purchased out of funds provided by

Mr and Mrs H.J. Heinz II and H.J. Heinz Co.

Ltd) 1961

Sandra Porter *Untitled (after Rothko +*

Reinhardt) 1980. Oil on paper, 122 x 61

Courtesy of the artist

Sandra Porter *Study for Aequitas V* 2017

Oil on canvas, 23 x 35

Courtesy of the artist

Jack Tworlov, *Cradle* 1956

Oil on canvas, 183.5 x 163.2

Collection of the Gertrude D. Davis Trust,

courtesy of The Estate of Jack Tworlov,

New York

Contributors

Basil Beattie RA RWA (Hon) is a painter and former lecturer in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Born in Hartlepool, he studied at Hartlepool College of Art from 1950 to 1955, before going on to the Royal Academy Schools. Beattie's current painting inhabits an area between abstraction and figuration, and features architectural motifs such as stairs and tunnels, lending both a psychological and spatial complexity. He was made a Royal Academician in 2006 and an honorary Royal West of England Academician in 2018.

Stewart Geddes PRWA is a painter and President of the Royal West of England Academy. He studied Fine Art at Bristol Polytechnic during the early 1980s and at the Royal College of Art. Recent exhibitions include the Atkinson Gallery, Millfield School (solo), and the British Council exhibition 'Britain in Mexico', Metro Palenco, Mexico City. Formerly Head of Painting at Cardiff School of Art and Design, he is currently a lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Gloucestershire.

Mel Gooding is an art historian, critic and curator. He has written numerous books and articles on contemporary art, particularly abstract painting, as well as several important monographs on post-war British artists including John Hoyland, Patrick Heron, Bruce McLean, Will Alsop and Ceri Richards. He has contributed extensively to *Arts Review*, *Flash Art* and *Art Monthly*, and has taught throughout the UK including The Slade, Wimbledon College of Art and Edinburgh College of Art.

Acknowledgements

The Royal West of England Academy (RWA) would like to begin by thanking the exhibition's curator and essayist Stewart Geddes PRWA.

We are indebted to our academic partners the University of Gloucestershire, School of Art and Design, namely Angus Pryor – Head of School, Art & Design.

Our thanks to Sir Nicholas Serota for opening the exhibition and for his invaluable advice and support.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the support of our generous sponsors Bishop Fleming.

We are immensely grateful to The Albert Irvin Estate and Irvin's daughters Priscilla Hashmi and Celia Irvin for their endless support and efforts, without which this exhibition would never have been realised. Our gratitude also goes to Robert Few, Bert's son-in-law, for all sorts of support and effort.

We are also grateful to Gimpel Fils, Albert Irvin's gallery and the many lenders, public and private, who agreed to loan artwork to the exhibition including ACA Galleries, New York, Advanced Graphics, London, Jason Andrew and Norman Jabaut, The Estate of Gillian Ayres, Basil Beattie, Simon Davenport, John Eaves, Stewart Geddes, The Collection of the Gertrude D. Davis Trust, Goldsmiths College, University of London, Hales Gallery, The Estate of John Hoyland (Beverley Heath-Hoyland), John Pontin, Sandra Porter, Mr and Mrs R. J. Salter, Tate, The Estate of Jack Tworokov, and Whitford Fine Art.

The project has been characterised by generous contributions by all kinds of people, who immediately, on learning of the project helped in any way they could, indicating the regard and affection in which Albert Irvin – Bert – is held. They include; Jason Andrew of the Tworokov Estate; Derek Balmer PPRWA; Sandra Blow's nephew David Blow; Chris Stephens, formerly Tate Curator and now Director at Holbourne Museum, Bath for his crucial early support for the project; for their immediate enthusiastic support and loan – Simon and Yasmin Le Bon and Nick and Frances Noble; Professor Richard Noble of Goldsmiths College, London for making *Northcote* available and notably to all the trustees, staff and members of the Tate loans committee.

Our thanks also go to Bill O'Reilly of Freedman Fine Art for his assistance researching international loans and to the British Council and ICOM UK for awarding a travel grant to the USA during the exhibition's development.

This publication has been enriched by contributions from Basil Beattie, Mel Gooding and Angus Pryor, Head of School of Art and Design at the University of Gloucestershire. We are also grateful to the many lenders and copyright holders who have allowed us to reproduce images of their work and Justin Piperger and Colin White for their photography of Albert Irvin's works, and are of course indebted to Sansom and Co., for their ongoing support, in particular the guidance of John Sansom and Clara Hudson, and for Christopher Binding's thoughtful design.

Finally we would like to thank the staff at the RWA, in particular Holly Bain, Kate Foster, Jess Kirkby, Nathalie Levi, Jacqueline Pucher and Georgina Thomas. We would also like to thank former staff member Gemma Brace for her work on the exhibition in its early stages.

This exhibition has been made possible as a result of the Government Indemnity Scheme. The RWA would like to thank HM Government for providing Government Indemnity and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.



Photo: The Albert Irvin Estate