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**Subjectivity and Synchronicity
in Art
(American Art XVII - XX Centuries)**

by

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December 1988

**University Art Gallery
State University of New York
Binghamton, NY**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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thanks to the "ingenious" commission
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PREFACE

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PREFACE

Through this exhibit I would like to bring into focus the immense human bond existent in art, in this case American art, from the 17th to 20th centuries. The many attributions made or based on artists' works upon other artists is in many cases factual, and in others, though sometimes overlooked, the apparent "influences" or "accidental resemblances" are the fruit of the depth of the collective unconscious which also manifests itself in one of the highest expressions of the human nature. These causal connections are a synchronicity of the individual parts of a pattern constellated across time and space. It is centered around the way the Self contains the various contents of the psyche and manifests itself.

Every separate entity is a symbol of the pattern of the Universe as a whole, and in an artist, his expression is part of this pattern. It reflects itself in a continuum.¹ Thus, what sometimes seems either an influence or perhaps a coincidence is part of synchronistic phenomena directly proportional to the degree of subjectivity in art.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

The works in this exhibition are numbered in sequence of appearance, except for the center wall. In terms of dimension, height precedes width, in inches.

Not all the works discussed in the Introduction appear in the collection. Please refer to the listing of works and the plan of the gallery for the exact location.

INTRODUCTION

The spirit and character of a determined time and place produce characteristic traits independent of accidents of birth and early training. The same independent spirit that led the Puritans to New England gave them a taste for independent art and for hard likenesses, contrary to grace of line.

So often early American paintings were regarded as merely inferior renditions in the English manner! It is true that for instance, Robert Feke followed the English mezzotints in works like **Mrs. Charles Willing**, which was done after a mezzotint by John Faber after Joseph Highmore's **Queen Caroline** (1737), but yet Feke infused his paintings with elements not found in the early mezzotints. Feke's work has a greater unity of overall design. P. Lens' **William Sancroft** (1677) depicts an ascetic face, sharp eyes, thin lips - much more of a person than the somewhat crafty and smug man of affairs depicted in the English mezzotints. Could paintings like these be a prototype for the portraits of several New England painters seated in similar attitudes ..., painters like R. Earl and his followers up to the 19th Century? Or were their paintings their very own expression of their character and the world that surrounded them?

The creation of American painting was determined by the gradual emergence of a new culture in a new world. It is difficult to estimate how much the first creative impulse of a painter comes directly from preceding work and how much from nature. The characteristics of static realism, self-sufficiency and directness recurs like variations from one theme "scarcely heard at times because of the louder themes of English and European art, yet nevertheless, existent."

The art of the limner was based on the tracing of facts, "maps," recording of likenesses. The society then was pragmatic, working against socio-economic conditions, a society that had no use for activities of luxury. Thus, the portrait was a way of documenting the socio-spiritual status. The emphasis was on hard fact - on documentary observation, on psychological insight, and on social and political meaning. Consciously or unconsciously they were developing work that was significantly different from European parallels, a point of view isolated and understood as an American point of view.

The portrait of **Ann Pollard** (1721) insists on a strong realism and delicacy of modelling within a strong realism and delicacy of modelling within a very definite pattern. The question of influence of preceding work or the actual nature-recording expression sometimes isolated, but yet unified by other natural phenomena in the human collective unconscious, raises when we look back at the late 1690's, when we are challenged with an "accidental resemblance" in the portrait of **Rev. Thomas Thacher** with that of **Anne Pollard**. In contrast with the works by Byfield, **Anne Pollard** was most probably not influenced by Europe's tradition. The great English influence was popular during mid 18th Century, and according to Dunlap, one example is Gustavus Hesselius, who was supposedly a pupil of Kneller. His portrait of **Mary Het Smith** could confirm this, but then we find in the painting of **Mrs. Gustavus Hesselius** (1760) a pronounced strength of character, with less dependence in fashionable methods - it is truly American, realistic.

During the 18th Century we find in Copley's work the denial of complete and perfect order in the world. The individual exerts himself during an existential moment in his immediate space. Even though he was influenced by

the English school in painting, i.e., "the sitter's idea of himself - not as he was but as he ought to be," he while in America, rendered his subjects as accurately as possible, probing into his character, showing every feature, no matter how unflattering, a subordination of grace for the necessity of catching the likeness. There was absence of the beautiful in early American taste as well as lack of conscious planning.

This same approach is found in Gilbert Stuart's conviction of "finding out what nature is for myself." In **Mrs. Yates** we find that interruption of the moment, almost a challenge to flattery - a realistic style detached from any European influence. He broke with the 18th Century formula for portraiture, using his brush to catch the character of the person, the "indistinctness of unfocused vision" ... perhaps "resembling" some work by Velazquez?

In between the 18th and 19th Centuries the work of Thomas Sully with its "fluid brushwork" reflects intense subjectivity, a certain kind of romanticism with an inclination towards naturalism as seen in **The Student** (1839). This painting as well as a previous one, **Mrs. Katherine Matthews**, bring to mind Stuart's work in **Man in a Green Coat** or even **Mrs. Sarah Morton**. Toward the middle of the 19th Century expression varied from the keenly observed, spontaneous portraits to the withdrawal from the real world begun by W. Allston and progressed to the works of Arthur Davies, and later to Albert P. Ryder. The sad and lost figure of Allston's **A Spanish Girl** illustrates sensitivity to mood and mystery to the extent of leaving forms half-developed. This painting "echoes" in **Dreams** by A. Davies, who used design as an emotional stimulant and used the nude for purely emotional concepts. Davies accomplished, like Ryder, the expression of what suggests to an extent the depths of the human temperament.

A label attached to a wide range of work by artists from the 1880's to the first decade of the 20th Century is "Symbolism", which refers to a common attitude rather than a specific, formal style. The Symbolists worked within the most subjective tradition of Romanticism - the artist does not simply "see" but perceives significance behind appearances. Images of fantasy, dream and mystery were cultivated icons of the mind. Dreams were a major preoccupation as well as images of the dreaming figure. Davies emphasized the subjective state of mind:

"Art is nature seen through the prism of an emotion ... this emotion is ...spontaneous; [it] must be an addition to the previous existing realities. And it is not the way you string things together, either, but the feelings. These transitions of the emotion -- this flower of the consciousness is not ...to be felt under cool examination, but as in a sleep - a dream or an intoxication."²

Ryder evolved slowly out of his own mind by the trial and error method. His struggle suited his temperament. He struggled with his materials and dreams of an immaterial world. His scope was undefinable since the subject matter was always subordinated to a mood. Should we say that he was perhaps influenced by Odilon Redon? Or is it just "accidental resemblance"? This is intriguing when we compare Ryder's **Forest of Arden** or the **Grazing Horse** with Redon's **Le Chemin à Peyrelebadé**.

Almost all artists during the latter part of the 19th Century developed styles that reflected a psychic shift from specifics to generalities. Minor details of the visible reality are no longer replicated - reality is not the accumulation of facts but an idea of the idea. Modernism meant to the artist life, air, reality and sincerity - his/her identity, psychological and anthropological, is not just a result of heredity or the conscious influence

of other times and artists - but the interaction with different levels of reality, of personal relationships between the object or subject and its perception of it - the idea of the form being determined by emotional as well as rational considerations. Edward Hopper represents a transition from the sometimes impersonal art of American Modernism, the instinctive subjective acceptance of reality in its broadest sense, involving research among expressions of personal feeling and at the same time an intense effort to generalize those feelings. In Charles Burchfield we find a "resemblance" of Hopper's work, perhaps an unconscious variation? The search for the definition of a particular mood is found in Hopper's **House by the Railroad** and in Burchfield's **House of Mystery**. On his own work Hopper commented:

"It's probably a reflection of my own, if I may say, loneliness, I don't know. It could be the whole human condition."³

This psychological subtlety is further explained:

"Just to paint a representation or design is not hard, but to express a thought [feeling] in painting is. Thought is fluid. What you put on canvas is concrete, and it tends to direct the thought. The more you put on canvas, the more you lose control of the thought. I've never been able to paint what I set out to paint."⁴

In his view, "the great painters ...have attempted to force this unwilling medium of paint and canvas into a record of their emotions." For him painting was an intensely private experience, primarily a reflection of his own psyche:

"So much of every art is an expression of the subconscious that it seems to me most of all the important qualities are put there unconsciously, and little of importance by the conscious intellect."⁵

His work, thus, is a "highly emotional" translation of the common place, often infused with erotic connotations, aloneness or loneliness, loss or melancholy. Burchfield responded emotionally, also, to nature's stimuli rather than human interaction. His analysis of animate and inanimate objects was based on intuition rather than intellect, on experiencing the moment, rather than an abstract philosophical reasoning: instinct over intelligence. If again, we compare Burchfield's **Ice Glare** with Hopper's **East Wind over Weehawken**, we find the same kind of melancholy - Is it a conscious influence of one artist upon another? Or the genuine expression of a feeling common to the sensitivity of the human nature? In that balance between recording objects and feelings on the one hand, and creating patterns and managing colors on the other, the scales were tipped in the direction of the first.

America was revolutionized by the arrival of Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism at the Armory Show of 1913. Many institutionalized ideas died, e.g., the celebration of individual's sovereignty in portraits. There were new levels of reality expressed in the relationships between figure and ground, emotion and reason, space and time. Some artists were able to develop new levels of consciousness, among them A. Dove, G. O'Keeffe, M. Hartley and Scheeler.

One of the most sustained contributions of the perception of simple realities was made by Georgia O'Keeffe. She was a pioneer of abstract painting in America, out of her own necessity, notwithstanding the influences from Europe and the changing times during the I and II World Wars. Her development was independent, having few contacts with stylistic movements of her time. It has also been consistent, as the observation of physical objects conveyed deep feelings, even sexual feelings, of which Stieglitz, who placed

the highest value on an artist's personal perception, argued "that the erotic energy should be expressed in America, so as to shake the country free of its repressive Puritan heritage and to liberate its artists."

It was clear that O'Keeffe's skilled consciousness-altering cryptography, constantly enriched by her imagination, could confront the viewer's senses on a gut level, she disliked it when her symbols were intellectualized, because it dulled a painting's emotional impact. As she went along, she simplified her images to the extent that it often lost its resemblance to the reality of the initial object. "Nothing is less real than realism - details are confusing - it is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis that we get to the real meaning of things." In a conversation with Michael Gold, editor of New Masses (1930), and talking about class-issues she said, "Before I put a brush to canvas, I question, 'Is this mine? ...Is it influenced by some idea which I have acquired from some man?' ...I'm trying with all my skill to do a painting that is all of women, as well as all of me."⁶

Her solitary relationship in New Mexico with the desert, that vast space that she compared to the ocean, found expression in her great paintings of bones, "bones that cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert, even though is vast and empty and untouchable - and knows no kindness with all its beauty."

The underlying notion of synchronicity in art through this essay is capitulated on the occurrence of what apparently could seem an influence by O'Keeffe on the work of a young female artist during her first awakening incursion into the world of art eight years ago. At a point in time where there are ample ways of communication through books, the media, etc., this young artist had never seen O'Keeffe's work, yet her work has a striking resemblance. At the risk of sounding redundant, I choose to let the spectator

experience by him/herself this synchronicity in their paintings through expression, mood, subject matter, and perhaps even style, e.g., compare **An Orchid** with **Medussa**.

Artists, like alchemists, project part of their psyche into matter or inanimate objects. The object expands beyond the bound of its appearance by our knowledge that the thing is more than its exterior presents it to our eyes. The depth of the collective unconscious which allows a continuity or repetition (like the ripples made in calm water by the throwing of a stone), in patterns or events to emerge as confluences consists of a sense of "orderedness" that occurs in the Universe, regardless of causal connections, and beyond space and time. This must certainly prove true in the case of this young art student, Karen Clegg, who miles and time apart from O'Keeffe, found herself critiqued or compared to her for first time in a newspaper review after a collective show in 1979, in a small island of the Caribbean.

This is perhaps the same "coincidence" found in paintings of the early limners, with the English mezzotints, in Stuart and Sully, in Allston and Davies, in Ryder and Redon, in Hopper and Burchfield. Even though the artist is an instrument and spokesman of the spirit of his age, his/her work can be only partly understood in terms of his/her personal psychology within the context of a broader human psychology. Consciously or unconsciously the artist gives form to the nature and values of his time, which in turn form him. Nevertheless, it is quite interesting to note that the more in touch with his own self the artist is, the more alert to his own emotions, the more honest in his own search, and the more in tune with his psychology, the closer he/she gets to becoming part of the synchronous flow.

When this is comprehended, events that cannot otherwise be explained in what may be a logical manner, i.e., the influence of styles from other artists, they reveal their nature as synchronistic phenomena -- individual parts of a pattern of which the correspondences within the cosmos (microcosm and macrocosm) come together, across time, in a meaningful way.

"I speak to those who surrender
themselves gently to the secret
and mysterious laws of emotions
and the heart, without assistance
from sterile explanations..."

Odilon Redon

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themselves gently to the secret
and mysterious laws of emotions
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Odilon Redon

THE CATALOGUE

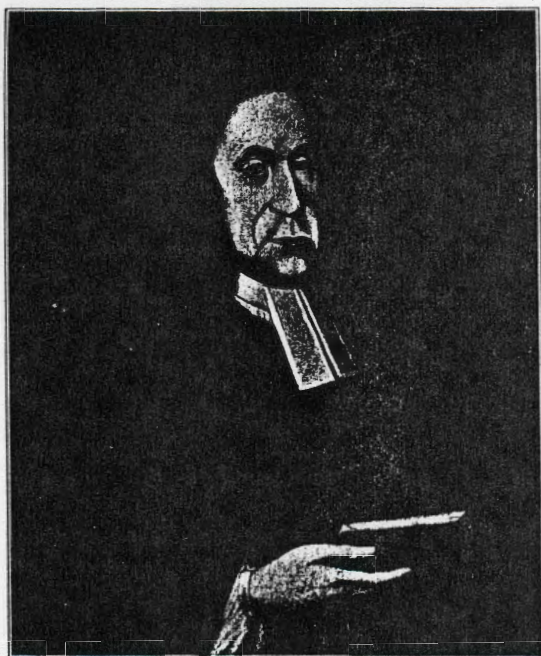


Anon. Anna Folger. 1711.
Oil on Canvas. 17 x 17.
Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.



<1>

Anon, **Anne Pollard** (ca. 1721)
Oil on Canvas, 18 x 24
Masachussets Historical Society, Boston



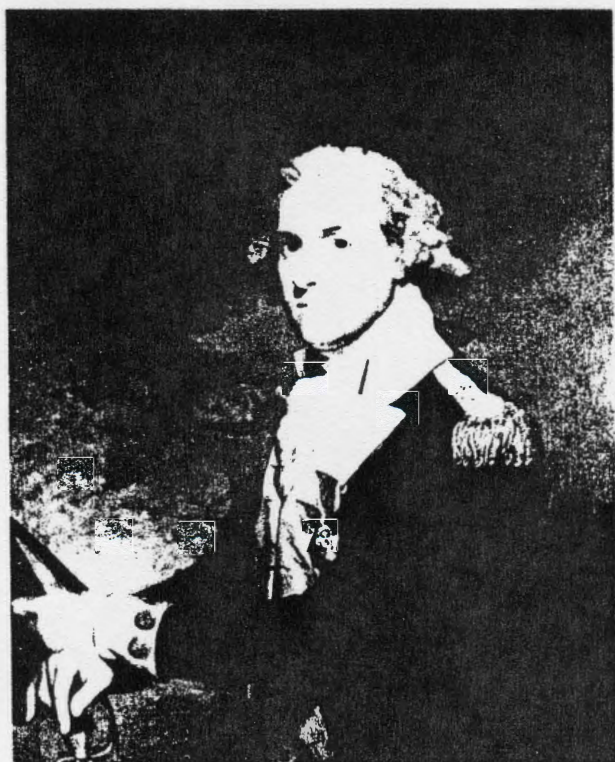
<2>

Anon, **Rev. Thomas Thacher** (ca. 1700)
Oil on Canvas, 17 x 30
Old North Church, Boston



<3>

Gilbert Stuart, **Man in a Green Coat** (1780)
Oil on Canvas, 28½ x 23½
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



<4>

Gilbert Stuart, **Matthew Clarkson** (1794)
Oil on Canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{1}{4}$
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



<5>

Thomas Sully, **The Student** (1839)
Oil on Canvas, $23\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



<6>

Thomas Sully, **Mrs. Katherine Matthews** (1812)
Oil on Canvas, 27-3/8 x 23 1/8
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



<7>

Washington Allston, *Spanish Girl* (1831)
Oil on Canvas, 30 x 25
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



<8>

Arthur Davies, **Dreams** (1909)
Oil on Canvas, 18 x 30
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



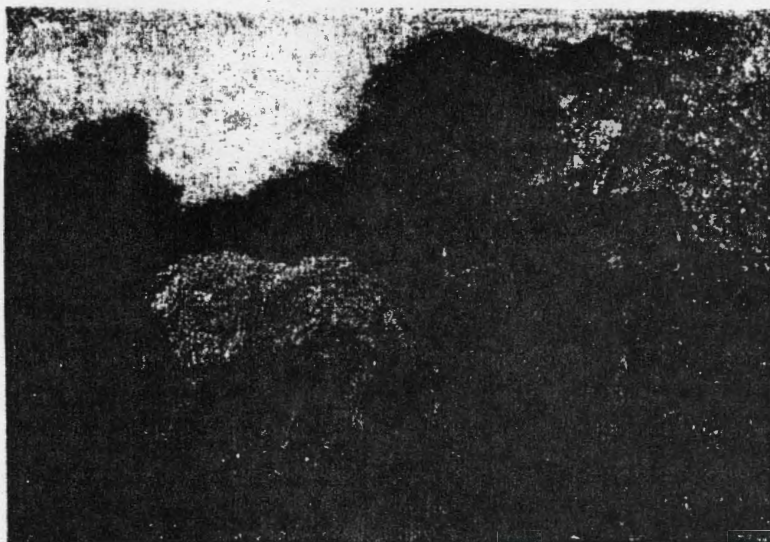
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Albert P. Ryder, **Forest of Arden** (1897)
Oil on Canvas, 19 x 15
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



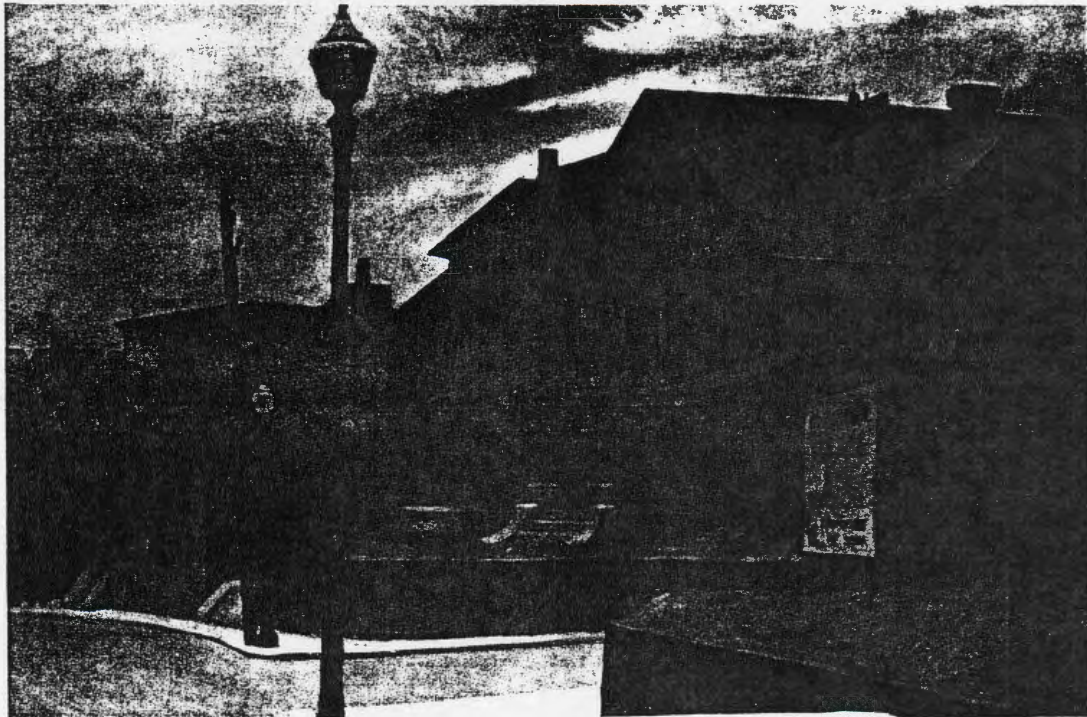
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Albert P. Ryder, **Flying Dutchman** (1891)
Oil on Canvas, 13 5/8 x 16 5/8
National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, DC



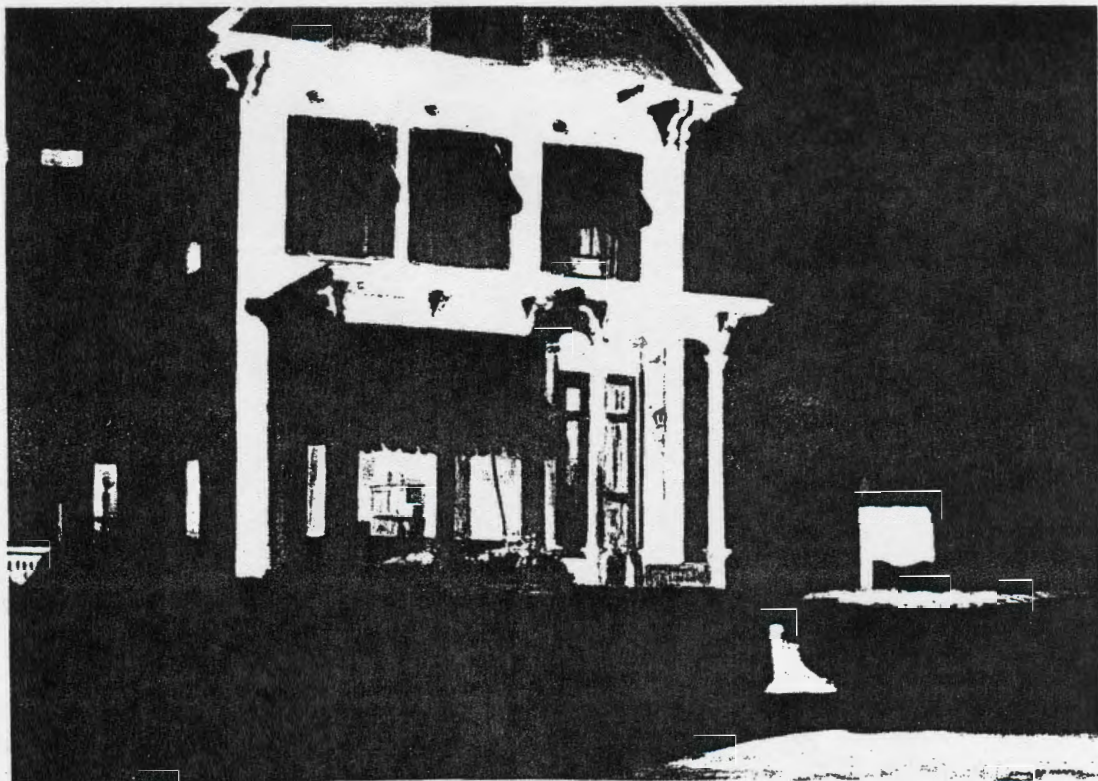
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Albert P. Ryder, **Grazing Horse** (1880)
Oil on Canvas, 12 x 14
Brooklyn Museum, NY



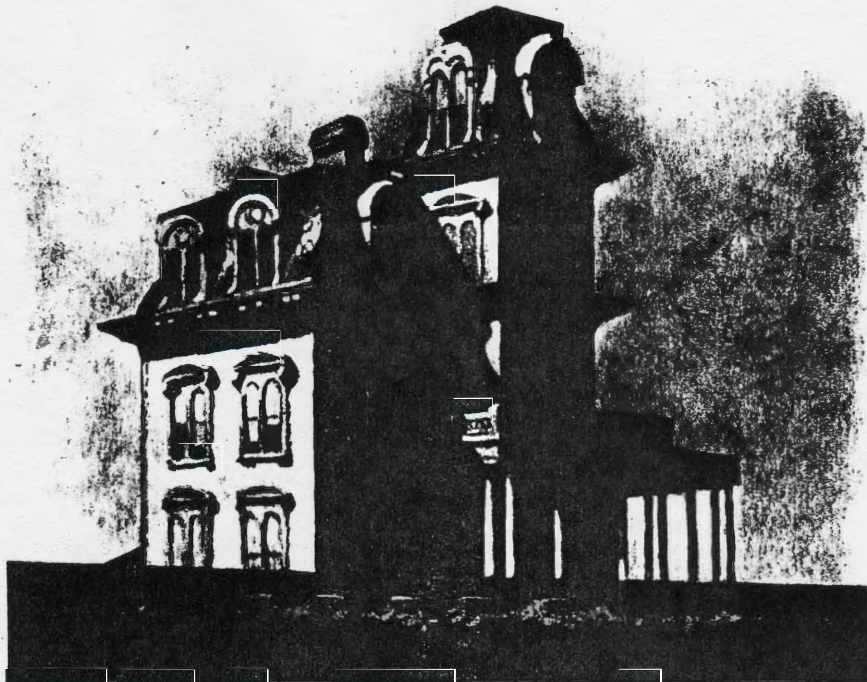
<12>

Edward Hopper, **East Wind Over Weehawken** (1934)
Oil on Canvas, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 50\frac{1}{4}$
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, PA



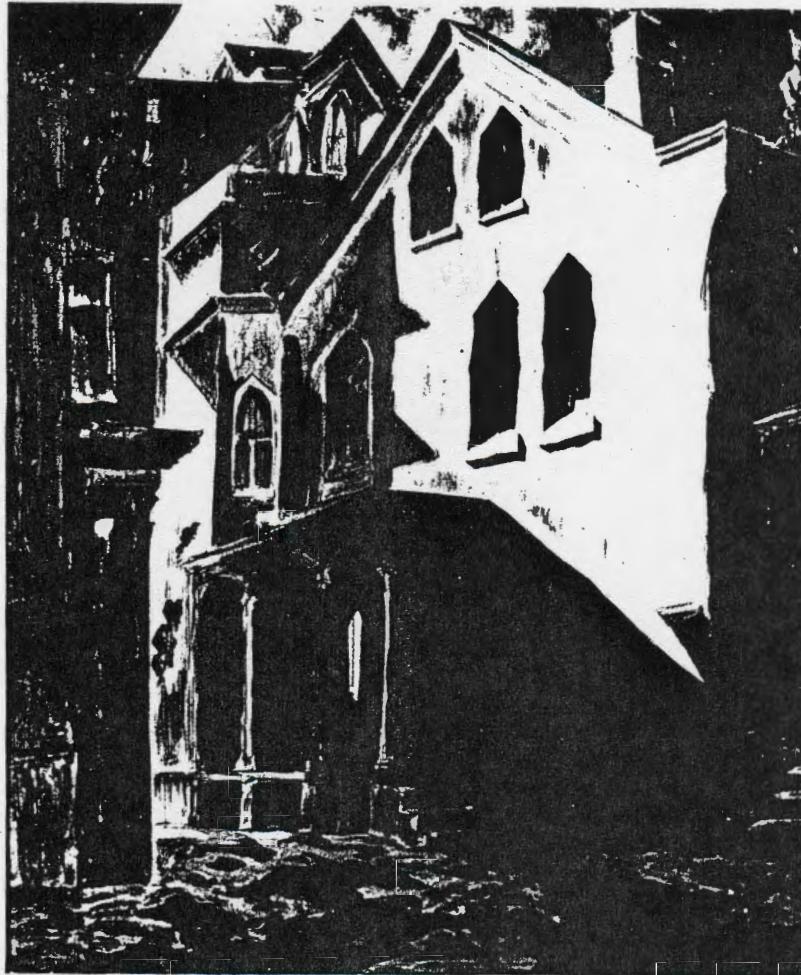
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Edward Hopper, **Room for Tourists** (1945)
Oil on Canvas, 30 x 40
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT



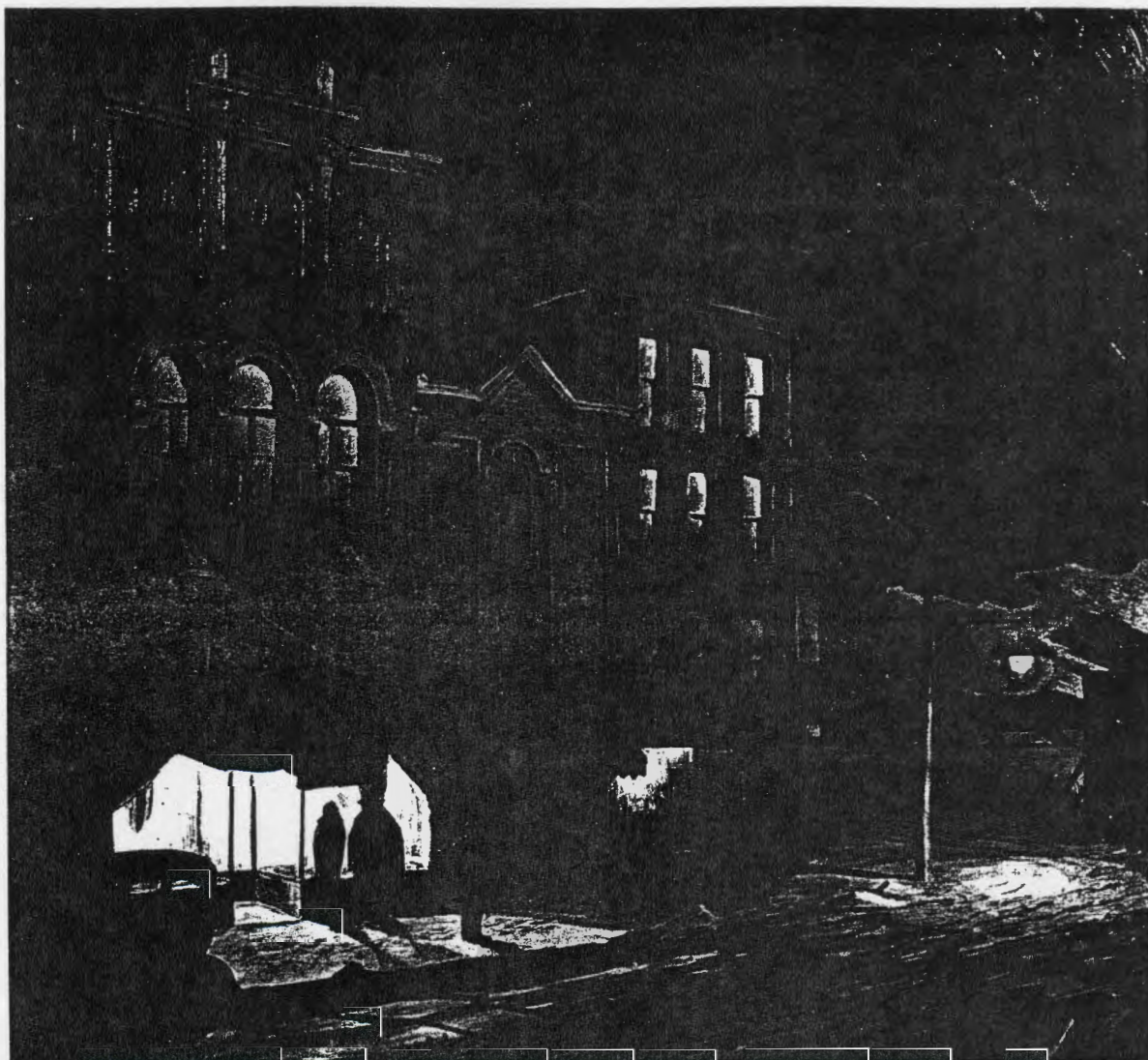
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Edward Hopper, **House by Railroad** (1925)
Oil on Canvas, 24 x 39
Museum of Modern Art, NY



<15>

Charles Burchfield, **House of Mystery** (1924)
Varnished Watercolor and Tempera, $29\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{1}{2}$
Art Institute of Chicago, IL



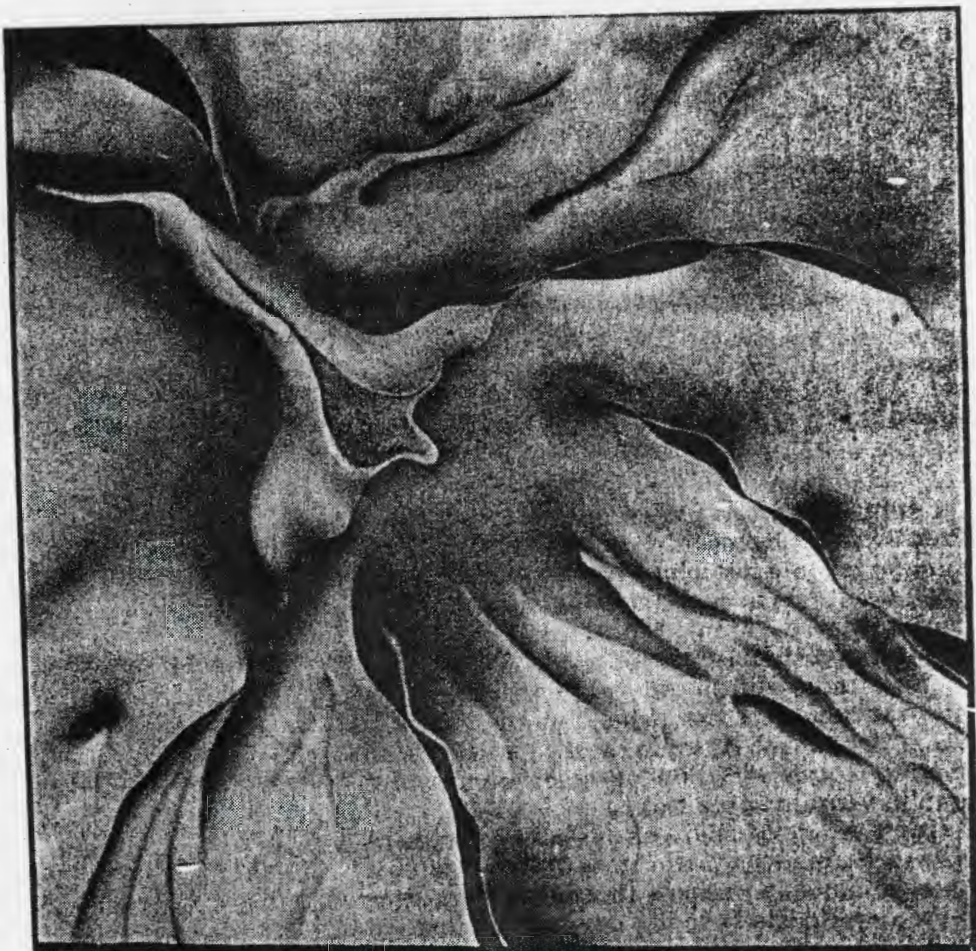
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Charles Burchfield, **Winter Twilight** (1927)
Oil on Composition Board, 27-3/4 x 30 1/2
Whitney Museum of American Art, NY



<17>

Charles Burchfield, **Ice Glare** (1933)
Watercolor on Mounted Paper, 30-3/4 x 24-3/4
Whitney Museum of American Art, NY



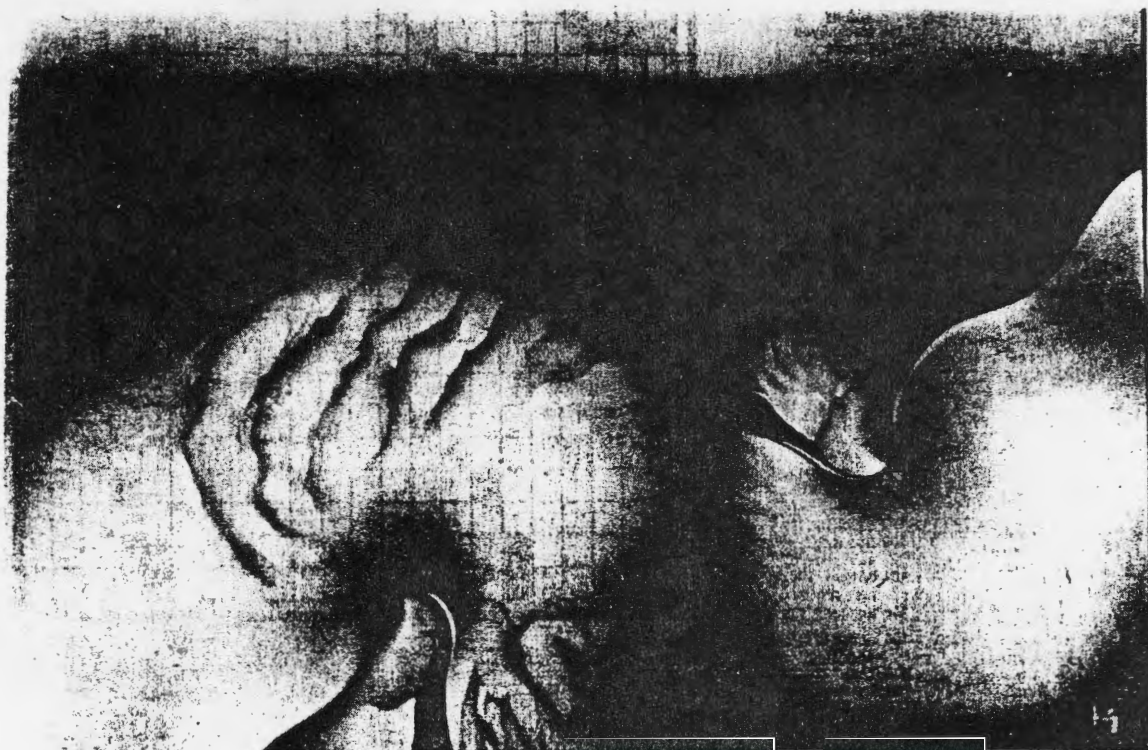
<18>

Karen Clegg, **Medussa** (1978)
Oil on Canvas, 36 x 36
Collection of N. Ciena, San Juan, PR



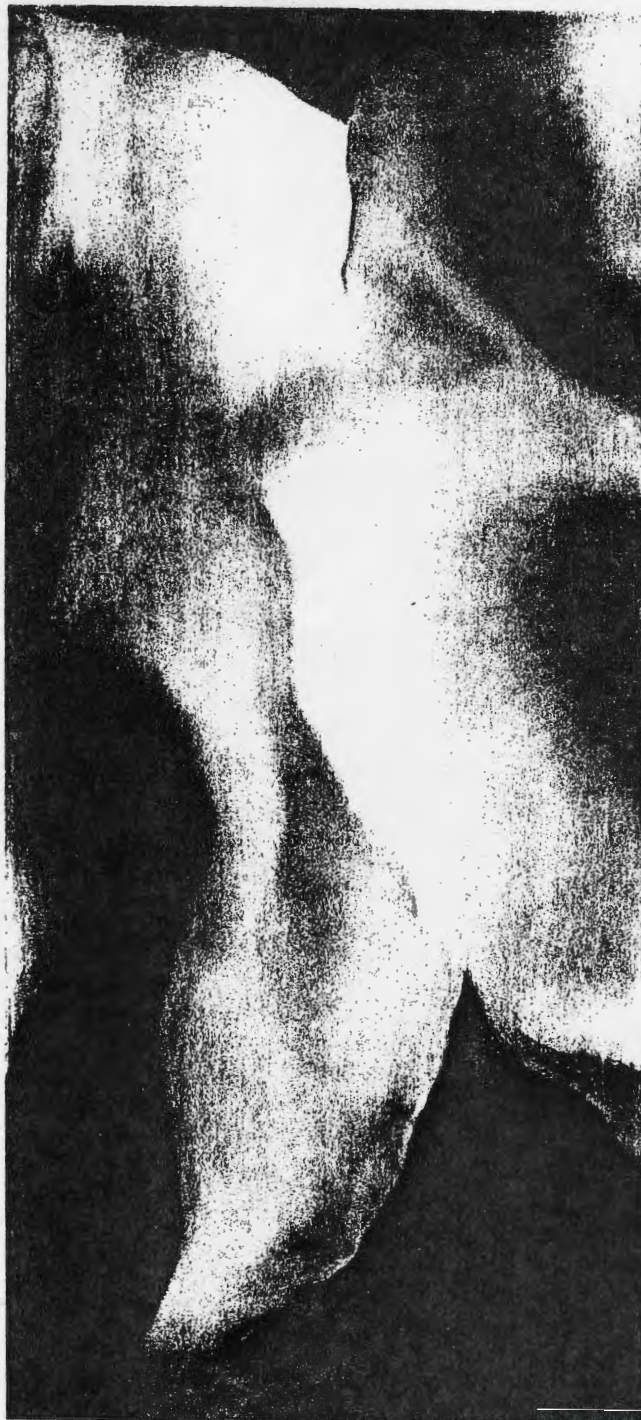
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Karen Clegg, **Algae** (1979)
Oil on Canvas, 40 x 30
Collection of S. Landrau, San Juan, PR



<20>

Karen Clegg, **Nautiluidea** (1980)
Oil on Canvas, 36 x 60
Collection of Dr. Rodriguez-Rosado, San Juan, PR



<21>

Georgia O'Keeffe, **Dark Iris No. 3** (1927)
Pastel on Paper, 20 x 9
Estate of G. O'Keeffe



<22>

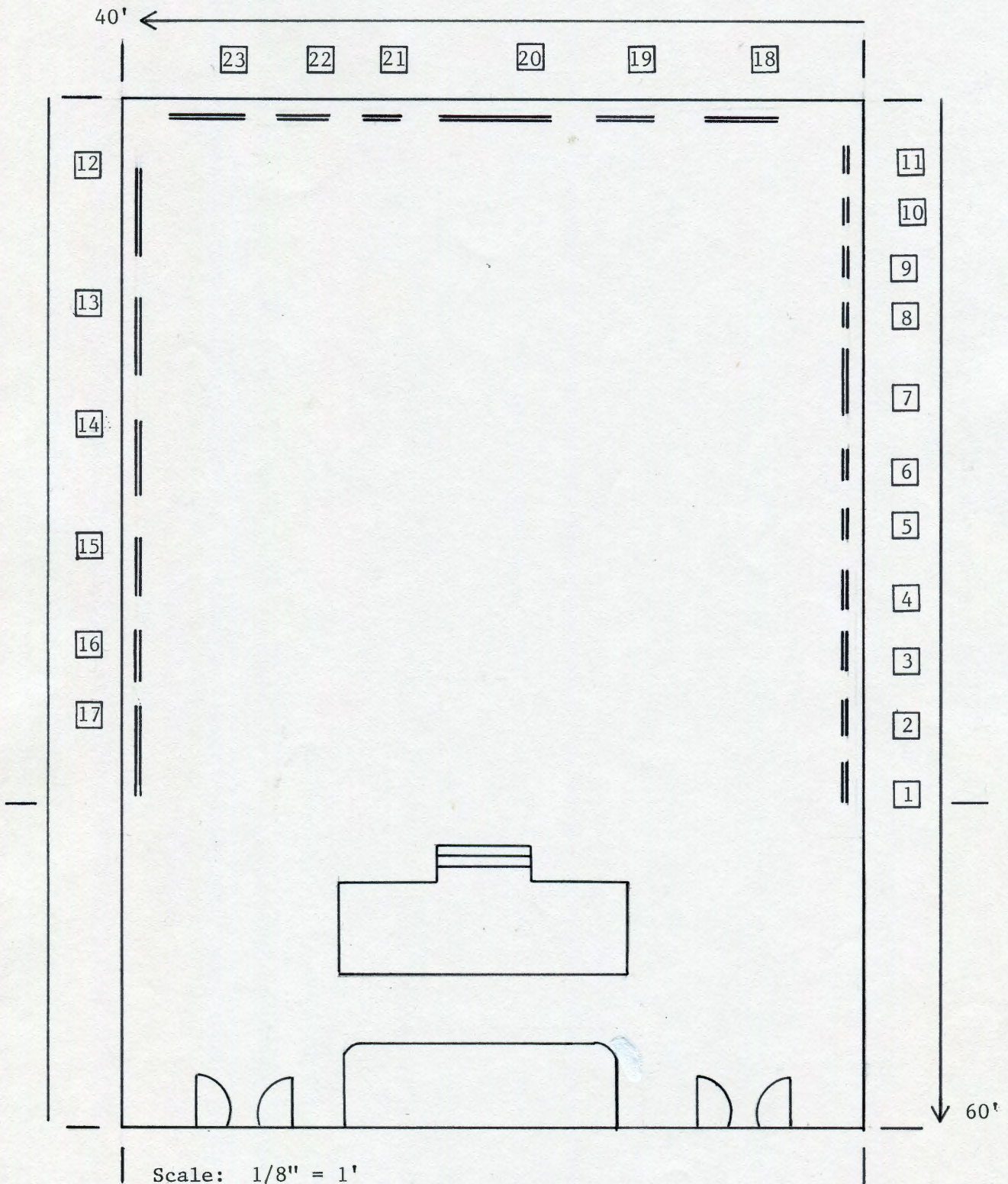
Georgia O'Keeffe, **An Orchid** (1941)
Oil on Canvas, $27\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$
Estate of G. O'Keeffe



<23>

Georgia O'Keeffe, **Red Hill and White Shell** (1938)
Oil on Canvas, 30 x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$
Private Collection, Houston, TX

PLAN OF THE GALLERY



FOOTNOTES

- 1 "The way the Self contains the various contents of the psyche is in a kind of "atmosphere," a state that is more than "psychological, an "aura" that sets up the feeling of the situation in a manner that is neither psychological, nor spatial, nor temporal. It involves something that can best be spoken of as a nonphysical "continuum". The patterns of events that then emerge appear as "confluences" that spread the framework of their pattern across a given moment in time." Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny, page 90.
- 2 The Artist and The Unicorn, page 36.
- 3 Hopper's Places, page 6.
- 4 Three Hundred Years of American Painting, page 298.
- 5 Edward Hopper, page 164.
- 6 Portrait of an Artist, page 190.

Form

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