

Navigating a Constantly Shifting Terrain: Yves Tanguy and Surrealism

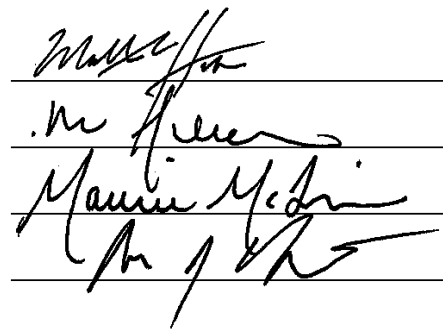
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The image shows four handwritten signatures on a background of horizontal lines. From top to bottom, the signatures are: 1. Jonathan Stuhlman, 2. an illegible signature, 3. Maurice Y. L. L., and 4. an illegible signature.

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Abstract:

Yves Tanguy (1900-1955) was one of the first visual artists to join the Surrealist movement and was considered one of its core members for the majority of his career. He was also a close friend and longtime favorite of the movement's leader, André Breton. Yet since his death, there has been surprisingly little written about his work that either adds to our understanding of *why* he remained in favor for so long and *how* he was able to do so. The aura of impenetrability that his paintings project, along with his consistent silence about them and a paucity of primary documents, has done much to limit the ways in which scholars, critics, and the public have been able (or willing) to engage with his work. As a result, Tanguy has been shuffled to the edges of recent developments in the critical discourse about Surrealism.

This dissertation argues against the narrow, limited ways in which Tanguy's art has been discussed most frequently in the past. Such interpretations, even those penned for exhibition catalogues and monographs supporting his work, have tended to be broad, diffuse, and biographically- and chronologically-driven rather than engaged with the works of art themselves and a critical analysis of the context in which they were created. This paper seeks to re-engage Tanguy's art with the historical debates about some of the core issues that defined Surrealism, particularly those concerning proper technical approaches, subject matter, and paths of artistic development for its members, and to do so through theoretical mechanisms utilized by recent scholars to produce rich analyses of the work of Tanguy's colleagues.

Each of this dissertation's three chapters is organized around an issue that was central to Surrealist ideology but that has not yet been discussed in depth in relation to its impact on Tanguy's artistic practice and career. Each chapter will address a significant set of tensions at play in Surrealism and will explore how they influenced Tanguy's mature work. Of particular importance to this project are the relationships between: figuration and abstraction (addressed in chapter 1); automatism and dream illusionism (explored in chapter 2); and artistic development and stagnation (discussed in chapter 3). These issues were central to the Surrealism's development during Tanguy's lifetime and have had an important role in shaping current writing on the movement (and his work) to this day. I will argue that with careful formal analysis, a sensitive consideration of social, political and biographical contexts, and the use of a variety of interpretive tools, his paintings can be understood as a rich and complex works of art that bear witness to Tanguy's active engagement with the ideas that shaped the cultural landscape of his era.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Hester and Byron Stuhlman, my wife
Megan, and my sons Justin and Finnian.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the culmination of an interest in Tanguy's work that began after encountering his painting *Fear* at the Whitney Museum of American Art when I was six or seven years old. I would not have seen that painting had not my parents, Byron and Hester Stuhlman, encouraged my interest in the arts from an early age. I hope that now, as a parent myself, I can emulate the unwavering support that they have shown me throughout my life in my own interactions with my children.

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Introduction

Yves Tanguy's paintings do not offer themselves up to easy interpretation. The aura of impenetrability that they project, along with the artist's consistent silence about them and a paucity of primary documents, has done much to limit the ways in which scholars, critics, and the public have been able (or willing) to engage with his work. As a result, his paintings have been shuffled to the edges of recent developments in the critical discourse about Surrealism. Populated with an astonishing variety of biomorphic forms, Tanguy's fantastic landscapes have nonetheless staked out a unique terrain for themselves in the fields of Surrealist and modern art. Take, for example, *Dame à l'absence* of 1942 (fig. 1). It is representative of Tanguy's work of the early 1940s (the period immediately following his arrival in America), in which a large, meticulously-depicted, multi-part form dominates the foreground of a horizonless landscape, throughout which are scattered various other smaller and equally mysterious forms. Despite their ambiguous morphology and the enigmatic relationships between them, each of these forms is painted with great attention to detail and endowed with a distinct sense of sculptural solidity, giving them a powerful presence not typically associated with such abstract forms.

How can one begin to interpret such a painting? If following the direction typically prescribed by André Breton, the Surrealist leader who was Tanguy's earliest and most consistent advocate, one might conclude that poetic metaphors are the best (and only) method. Such an approach mirrored what Breton perceived to be the most salient features of Tanguy's paintings—their impenetrability, their link to the world of the artist's

subconscious, and their ability to suggest rather than to tell or merely illustrate. Since Tanguy's death, however, paintings like *Dame à l'absence* typically have been interpreted as being part of a repetitious, hermetic oeuvre that showed few signs of internal development after the first few years of the artist's career. Their subject matter is usually explained as little more than a quirky product of the artist's inner world, while his technique and compositional sensibility are most often dismissed as retrograde and academic. Each of these factors has done much to limit new avenues of interpretation of his work.

This dissertation will argue against the narrow, limited ways in which Tanguy's art has most frequently been discussed in the past. Such interpretations, even those penned for exhibition catalogues and monographs, have tended to be broad, diffuse, and biographically- and chronologically-driven rather than engaged with the works of art themselves and a critical analysis of the context in which they were created. In the following chapters I will strive to re-engage Tanguy's art with the historical debates about some of the core issues that defined Surrealism, including those concerning proper technical approaches, subject matter, and paths of artistic development for its members.

One of the dangers of not looking beyond the interpretations that have resulted from Tanguy's reticence and Breton's parrying is that one tends to fall back upon simply rehashing what biographical facts are known about the artist and what has previously been written about his work rather than offering new analyses of his paintings and

drawings. Likewise, there have been few efforts to question the ways in which Breton (and, tacitly, Tanguy) have shaped the discourse about his art, or why they might have sought to do so. It is, I believe, crucial to consider Tanguy as an active participant in Surrealist debates and deeply engaged with the movement's key issues over an extended period of time, for he was one of the earliest artists associated with the movement, one of the closest to its leader, and one of its most steadfast members over its tumultuous history—all of this despite his frequent marginalization in current literature on the movement. He was, I will argue, more keenly aware of the debates that shaped the Surrealist movement than he is typically given credit for, and his work more layered, more complex, and more responsive to these issues than previously has been acknowledged.

Methodology and Historical Context

One strategy often employed by art historians seeking to achieve a deeper understanding of their subjects is to conceive of artistic movements as being shaped dichotomously, arguing that both artists and works of art can be efficiently categorized as either “a” or “b,” (for example, when it comes to Surrealism, either “automatist” or “dream illusionist”); these categories then tend to be considered mutually exclusive.¹ While such organizing principles helped inform early Surrealist scholarship and were often derived from internal debates within Surrealist and modernist movements and literature, recent studies have suggested not only that there can be alternative interpretations that transcend

¹ This approach is typified by William Rubin's *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968).

the limits of these dichotomies but also that we need to examine how and why they emerged to begin with.² This type of approach can help stimulate new analyses of individual artworks as well as how we conceive of an artist's oeuvre or even the Modernist field as a whole. My project is generally aligned with this method of inquiry and thus will neither avoid the difficult issues at play in Tanguy's paintings nor seek to force a single, narrow reading of various aspects of his complex oeuvre. Instead, it will examine how the tensions, shifts, and discontinuities evident in his work can be interpreted as indices of the dualities and contradictions that define the era of art history in which he was active, as well as how our current understanding of the artist and his work has been limited by the ways in which they have been discussed previously.

Recent literature on Tanguy, particularly scholarship published since his 1983 retrospective (prior to which the posthumous writing on the artist consisted largely of two small, single-essay exhibition catalogues: one published in 1955 by the Museum of Modern Art and the other in 1974 by Acquavella Galleries) has begun to examine his art in new ways, considering elements ranging from its relation to Celtic mythology, his engagement with drawing and printmaking, his experiences in America, and literary parallels in his art.³ These essays often suggest fascinating questions for future research.

² Such Post-Structuralist approaches are most visible in such important books as Rosalind Krauss's *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1985) and *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985); Yve-Alain Bois' *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993) and, more recently, Briony Fer's *On Abstract Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and David Lomas's *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, and Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

³ See Susan Nessen, "Yves Tanguy's Otherworld: Reflections on a Celtic Past and a Surrealist Sensibility," *Arts Magazine* 62, 5 (January 1988), 22-27; Beate Wolf, "Genesis of a New World: The Graphic Art of Yves Tanguy," in Karin von Maur, ed., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2001),

However, many of the major publications on the artist, from the important foundational work to recent monographs, tend to be chronologically-oriented and devoted to filling in biographical and certain contextual facts rather than organized around specific problems and broader issues that play out across his oeuvre.⁴ Additionally, most extant literature tends to accept Tanguy's work as adhering to one pole or the other in regard to various Surrealist dichotomies rather than as in flux or as perhaps embracing or calling into question aspects of both sides of a particular issue. Thus, one of the aims of this dissertation is to argue for a richer and more complex understanding of Tanguy's art by probing it from a number of angles rather than simply through the lens of biography or hermetic chronological development; by not seeing it as a static or monolithic body of work but rather on that was responsive and constantly evolving.⁵

Impetus for Change

In analyzing the points of intersection between Tanguy's oeuvre and the issues at play within the Surrealist movement and art of the modern era in general, I will consider work that Tanguy produced in a wide range of media over the course of his entire mature

135-174; Susan Davidson, "A Breton in Connecticut," in von Maur, *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 175-198; and Marianne Kesting, "Creation, Transformation, and the End of the World: Literary Parallels to the Work of Yves Tanguy," in Katharina Schmidt, ed., *Yves Tanguy* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1983). The 1983 and 2001 books were both published to accompany retrospectives of the artist's work. Together their essays constitute the most diverse number approaches to Tanguy's work published to date.

⁴ Major monographs include: James Thrall Soby, *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955); Patrick Waldberg, *Yves Tanguy* (Brussels: Andre de Rache, 1977); Katharina Schmidt et al, *Yves Tanguy* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1983); and Karin von Maur et al. *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001). The catalog raisonné of Tanguy's work (Kay Sage et al., *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Pierre Matisse, 1963) contained no new writing on Tanguy.

⁵ It is precisely this approach that Rosalind Krauss argues against in "In the Name of Picasso", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), which contends that works of art must be engaged and understood on formal and contextual levels as well as biographical.

career (approximately 1928-1955). Many of the discussions, however, will turn subtly around two critical moments within the history of the Surrealist movement when the artist, too, would have been particularly susceptible to change and influence: 1928-30 and 1939-1942, for it was the shifts that took place during these two spans of time that set the course for his work created in the subsequent decades. A brief look at the events of 1928 and 1939 will help to clarify why these years were so critical for Tanguy and his Surrealist peers.⁶ In 1928, Tanguy reached the first major turning point in his artistic career. He had recently had his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste (1927), André Breton had just published a significant essay on him in *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, and he had also moved out of his chaotic Surrealist bachelor apartment and in with his new wife, Jeanette Ducroq, which gave him more time to focus on his art.⁷ During this period, the Surrealist group as a whole was experiencing a burst of creative and intellectual activity. René Magritte and Salvador Dalí (whose precise styles, at least, were similar to Tanguy's, if not their subject matter) had recently entered Breton's circle, while an important group show was being assembled at the Galerie Sacre du Printemps featuring the work of Tanguy and his colleagues Max Ernst, Giorgio De Chirco, André Masson, and Joan Miró. Additionally, throughout this period Breton was busy revising his ideas about what defined Surrealist painting, preaching against those who had sold out, and rallying his followers around his views on politics and on artistic inspiration and

⁶ For the most complete biography of Tanguy's life to date, see Karin von Maur et al, *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 211-229. For a basic history of the Surrealist movement, see Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (revised and reprinted, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) or Gerard Durozoi, *Histoire du mouvement surréaliste* (Paris, 1997)

⁷ See André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

how such creations might be most faithfully achieved; ideas that would culminate in the publication of a number of collected essays (including one on Tanguy) titled *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in 1928. Finally it was at this time that George Bataille began to emerge as a spirited opponent to Breton's ideas, causing productive dissention within the group.⁸

All of these events affected Tanguy and the work he was producing, for he had been deeply involved with the movement for almost three years and was an active participant in its meetings, activities, and internal debates. In the midst of the events listed above, virtually every aspect of Surrealism came under intense scrutiny from its members and its critics alike. Particularly important topics included what kinds of form and content were appropriate for Surrealist art (the focus of Chapter 1), debates over technique, particularly automatism versus dream illusionism (the focus of Chapter 2) and questions about what factors should determine the development of an artist's oeuvre and what sort of path a proper Surrealist's career should follow (the focus of Chapter 3). Tanguy's own struggles with these issues can be seen in the ways that he arrived at what is commonly accepted as the advent of his "mature" oeuvre sometime between 1927 and 1929 and in the ways in which his work developed from that point forward. Despite the visual evidence of his internal debate over what shape his work and career would take, such issues have yet to be accounted for or explored in depth in the extant literature on the artist.

⁸ For an in-depth discussion of Bataille's influence, see Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993) and Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989).

The next critical juncture occurred in 1939, at the midpoint of Tanguy's career and at the beginning of its American phase. Around this time, Tanguy began a relationship with his future wife, American artist Kay Sage. That summer the pair had joined Breton and a number of other Surrealists for a particularly stimulating retreat at the Chateau de Chemillieu on Lake Bourget in western France.⁹ When World War II broke out that fall, Tanguy left France to join Sage in America, where he would remain until the end of his life.¹⁰ Despite his original intentions he would return to France just once, in 1953. Within weeks of his arrival in New York, Tanguy was given a solo exhibition (December 12–30) by Pierre Matisse, whose stable he would soon join and who would represent him almost exclusively for the remainder of his career.¹¹ This year also marked the beginning of a particularly trying time for the Surrealists, for while Paris had long been their base of operations, they were now scattered across the globe, with a number concentrated, like Tanguy, in the area around New York city.¹²

With the group's structure thus radically altered, Breton sought to maintain control, calling for his artists to remain true to their inner visions not to be distracted by external

⁹ The chateau was owned by Gertrude Stein. Tanguy went there with Breton, Roberto Matta Echaurren, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Esteban Frances, and Jacqueline and Aube Breton.

¹⁰ France declared war on Germany, along with Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, on September 3; America proclaimed neutrality on September 5.

¹¹ For information on Matisse, see John Russell, *Matisse: Father and Son* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999) and Charles E. Pierce, Jr. et al, *Pierre Matisse and His Artists* (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 2002).

¹² See Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995) and Stephanie Barron et al., *Exiles and Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997). For information on Tanguy in America, see Susan Davidson, "A Breton in Connecticut," in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism, 175-197*; Judith Suther, *A House of Her Own: Kay Sage, Solitary Surrealist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); and Jonathan Stuhlman, *Double Solitaire: Kay Sage's Influence on Yves Tanguy's Art, 1939-1955* (unpublished MA thesis, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1998).

pressures of fashion, popularity and the market. In his essay “Les tendances plus récentes de surréalisme” (1939), he identified automatism as having re-emerged as the dominant form of visual practice. He then went on to praise Tanguy as the artist most influential on the new group of Surrealists, contrasting him sharply with Salvador Dalí, whom he dismissed for his “pathological desire to please” and his oeuvre’s “profound and absolute monotony.”¹³ Even a cursory glance at Breton’s writing makes it clear that many of the movement’s internal debates had not yet been resolved, and were now entangled with the added issues of exile and the Surrealists’ new American environment and artistic milieu. It was also around this time that his art began to enter a larger critical discourse that focused not only on his work but on the way in which it had developed, the way in which it related to that of his Surrealist peers, and its impact on a new generation of American artists.

True to his new role as an artistic leader, I will argue, Tanguy continued to make changes in his art after arriving in America (perhaps to avoid Dalí’s “absolute monotony”), revisiting ideas about both figuration and artistic growth, reflecting the Surrealist’s ideals of exploration and creativity.¹⁴ His paintings from this period that reveal these changes will be discussed in the first three chapters along with his earlier work. Although Tanguy had been involved in both group and solo exhibitions in the US before moving there

¹³ See André Breton, “The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting,” in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Icon Editions, 1972), 145-150. Breton cites Wolfgang Paalen, Oscar Dominguez, Roberto Matta Echaurren, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Victor Brauner, and Kurt Seligmann as this next generation.

¹⁴ Tanguy, of course, would have known that Breton’s criticism of Dali was based as much on his personal dislike for the Spaniard as it was on the quality of his work. Nevertheless, Tanguy would have wanted to avoid any comparison with Dali, particularly because their work shared certain formal similarities.

permanently, his identity as a *French* Surrealist remained intact. However, after 1939, Tanguy must be considered as much a member of the American avant-garde community as a foreigner—a topic that bears further examination, although it is beyond the scope of the present study. Not only would his influence be felt in the US through his growing visibility due to an increase exhibitions and reviews, but also through the network developing among French and American contemporary artists and the impact that the work of Tanguy and his colleagues was having upon an emerging group of Americans. The issues that these artists grappled with included not only the role of automatism and figuration but also repetition and growth. Thus, some of the ideas that were at play in the American criticism of the period will be important to consider when analyzing Tanguy's work from the 1940s and 50s.

Chapter Summaries

The dissertation is divided into three chapters, each of which is organized around an issue that was central to Surrealist ideology but that has not yet been discussed in depth in relation to its impact on Tanguy's artistic practice and career. While specific paintings and photographs will often serve as inspirations for these analyses, the discussions that evolve from the questions that they raise will often touch upon not only what the paintings themselves can tell us about the issues at stake in their creation, but also how these issues helped shape their creation as well. Each chapter will address a significant set of tensions at play in Surrealism and will explore how they influenced Tanguy's mature work. Of particular importance to my project are the relationships between:

figuration and abstraction; automatism and dream illusionism; and artistic development and stagnation. These issues were some of the most important and central to the Surrealist movement's development during Tanguy's lifetime and have had an important role in shaping current writing on Surrealism (and his work) to this day. I will argue that with careful formal analysis, a sensitive consideration of social, political and biographical contexts, and the use of a variety of interpretive tools, a painting like *Dame à l'absence* can be understood as a rich and complex work of art that bears witness to Tanguy's engagement with the ideas that shaped the art of his era.

The first chapter of the dissertation will focus on a central but rarely-discussed aspect of Tanguy's art: its engagement with figuration and its corresponding repression of the human form, which is commonly accepted as having disappeared from his paintings around 1928.¹⁵ Rarely do Tanguy's scholars and critics attempt to account for this seeming disappearance (what, ultimately, I will call repression); instead, most of their writing reflects traditional Surrealist dogma by citing Tanguy's adherence to Surrealist principles of picturing one's inner world rather than external reality.¹⁶ His paintings lack easily recognizable anchors in the rational world, and thus appear to have eluded

¹⁵ It should be noted that in her essay in *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, Karin von Maur does refer to the human form in Tanguy's mature paintings, but the thread is never picked up in any detail. Rather, such descriptions seem to take their place alongside other interpretations of the way in which Tanguy's forms seem to resemble objects from the everyday world. See pages 61-2, where forms in a series of paintings are variously discussed as resembling a man-in-the-moon, a starfish, an airplane, a windwheel [windmill], embracing lovers, and a beetle.

¹⁶ The prime example of this is Gordon Onslow Ford's *Yves Tanguy and Automatism* (Inverness: Bishop Pine Press, 1983).

conventional methods of description.¹⁷ It is precisely their complex relationship with figuration that makes these paintings so difficult to talk or write about, and it is this relationship that must be reassessed in order to come to a fuller understanding of how they function. A second reason that this aspect of Tanguy's art is especially problematic is due to a fear that linking these paintings back to the rational world would somehow either rob them of their power as truly Surrealist objects or misinterpret Tanguy's intentions. However, it is precisely this fine line between the known and the unknown which gives these forms their power. Clues found in drawings, titles and inscriptions will help guide this discussion. Rather than avoiding a discussion of the existing figurative or symbolic elements in Tanguy's art, or ignoring them altogether (a repression akin, perhaps, to Tanguy's own), I seek to enrich the typical distinctions between form and content, abstraction and representation, in a way similar to that of the paintings themselves. Only then can the complex issues bound up in Tanguy's unruly forms be truly appreciated.

The second chapter will explore an issue closely related to that discussed in the first: the place of drawing in Tanguy's oeuvre, particularly its existence beneath the surfaces of many of his paintings. The presence of these underdrawings has been ignored, overlooked, or even denied until the present study, by both Tanguy and those who wrote about his work, because of their insistence on his engagement with the Surrealist concept

¹⁷ It seems to be this lack of a literal depiction of the human form that has kept Tanguy's art out of much of the current Surrealist literature, which tends to turn around more literal references human form. See, for example, Jennifer Mundy, et al., *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), in which Tanguy is virtually absent.

of automatism and its emphasis on spontaneity. Thus, the discussion of the role of drawing in Tanguy's art will open out onto a consideration of broader issues central to Surrealism, particularly the movement's internal debate over the validity of automatism versus dream illusionism. This chapter will survey both the changing view of what automatism, is and how its meaning has been shaped, what it meant to the Surrealists, as well as how it has been interpreted by scholars during discussions over which side of the fence (automatist or dream illusionist) Tanguy's paintings should be situated on. Additionally, Tanguy's rare commentary on the matter will be considered, as well as his place among the Surrealists at the same critical time that he was integrating drawing into his paintings, 1930-31. Sections of the discussion will also draw upon recent scholarship on the issues of automatism and drawing, particularly the work of Briony Fer, Roger Cardinal and David Lomas.¹⁸

After having analyzed some of the critical binaries of Surrealist visual practice (representation / abstraction; automatism / dream illusionism; and drawing / painting) and the ways in which Tanguy dealt with them in his art in the first two chapters, the third chapter will explore the concept of signature style and the doors that this idea opens onto the dichotomy of artistic development versus stagnation and questions of authorship, repetition and seriality. These issues were critical not only for Tanguy himself, but are also key to discussions of Surrealism and Modernism in general. Tanguy's role in

¹⁸ In particular, Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Roger Cardinal, "André Masson and Automatic Drawing," in Silvano Levy, ed. *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality* (Keele: Staffordshire University Press, 1996); and David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism and Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

shaping the trajectory of the development of his style and subject matter while navigating the internal politics of Surrealism will be of particular concern, as will his choice to work within a relatively tight stylistic range over the course of his career. Tanguy is often faulted by critics for this narrowness of artistic range (as opposed to artists like Pablo Picasso or Max Ernst); such negative analyses of this choice will be discussed as emerging from critical prejudices about what makes a “great” modern artist. To address these issues, writings from the 1920s, particularly those of André Breton, will be considered alongside more recent discussions of authorship, seriality, and signature style as they apply to more general concepts of art production in the twentieth century by Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, and Rosalind Krauss.¹⁹

¹⁹ In particular, Rosalind Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985); Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); and Jean Baudrillard, “Gesture and Signature: Semiurgy in Contemporary Art,” in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (Saint Louis: Telos Press, 1981).

Chapter 1: Figuratively Speaking: The Persistence of the Human Form

*The furniture that you see here, said our host, is alive; all will start moving about at the slightest sign . . . You see this table, these chandeliers, these armchairs are only composed of groups of girls artistically arranged.*¹

There are numerous extant photographs of Yves Tanguy, ranging from informal snapshots taken during vacations with friends to more formal portraits taken by his colleagues. Many capture the unique blend of spontaneity and seriousness that characterized his personality. While a handful of these images show the artist at work in his studio, none link him to his art in quite the same way as one made by the American photographer George Platt Lynes around 1942 (fig. 2).² In it, Tanguy peers out at the viewer, seemingly from within one of his paintings. In fact, Tanguy's double—his photographic double, that is—is itself framed by yet another double, for Lynes has set the artist, his face half obscured, between mirror images of the central form found in his painting *Dame à l'absence* (see fig. 1), which was completed the same year that the photograph was made.

The structure of the image suggests that Tanguy and his paintings were one: that there were no boundaries between the real world in which he lived and the *surreal* one that he painted. The form upon his canvas appears to flow out of the left side of the his head, an

¹ Marquis de Sade (cited in and translated by) Thomas Singer, "In the Manner of Duchamp, 1942-1947: The Years of the Mirrored Return," *Art Bulletin* LXXXVI, no. 2 (June 2004), 350; this quote was also cited by the Surrealists in *The First Papers of Surrealism* (New York: Coordinating Council of the French Relief Societies, 1942), unpag.

² This appears to have been part of a series by Lynes, as there are a number of similar images. For others, see the photographs in André Cariou, et al., *Yves Tanguy: L'univers surréaliste* (Paris and Quimper: Somogy éditions d'art and Le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper, 2007), 168; 173.

effect enhanced by the way in which the left side of his face is obscured by the cloudlike background of the painting but his body on that side is visible from the neck down. Such a structure suggests that the artist's subject matter had a direct connection with the innermost workings of his psyche and that he was intimately linked to his art on an emotional and intellectual level. Tanguy's surprising presence in his own painting (whose title ironically suggests a missing protagonist rather than a present figure) also opens up another avenue of interpretation that can be applied not only to *Dame à l'absence*, but, I will argue, to the artist's entire oeuvre.

The form framing Tanguy's visage is, in fact, one of many anthropomorphic forms to appear in his mature body of work. Seeing the artist flanked on either side by this "figure" heightens the effect of its anthropomorphism (suggested by its shape and proportions, as well as its relationship to similarly shaped and proportioned forms found elsewhere in the composition) and suggests the question of whether the human figure as a subject might play a more significant role in Tanguy's art than typically has been acknowledged. Previous writings on the artist's work—ranging from exhibition reviews no more than two or three paragraphs long to essays totaling dozens of pages—have at best touched on this concept in passing, occasionally referring to his forms in terms that suggest the body or its parts or possibly its abstracted presence. For the most part, however, these authors have not accurately captured the importance, or even, as I will argue, the *centrality*, of the human figure (and its transformation) to his art. Many of his paintings, in fact, contain imagery that through its proportions, scale, and interactions,

implicitly suggests such a reading, albeit one that also requires the viewer to process such subject matter through the lens of the transformations and filters of the subconscious; such issues were among those debated by Tanguy's Surrealist colleagues as they shaped the direction of their movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the unique way in which he dealt with their attendant tensions has not been explored in any great depth or detail until the present study.

The debate about what constituted appropriate subject matter for Surrealist art and exactly what form such subject matter should take ran throughout the movement's history, beginning with the rise of its visual component in the mid-1920s and resurfacing frequently throughout the 1930s and 1940s.³ The emergence of such questions can be linked to those who sought power within the group and control over the direction of its evolution. It was almost always André Breton, the group's leader, whose passionate rhetoric steered the debate on this topic, particularly between the mid-1920s and the early 1930s. During this period, as the movement's focus broadened to include the literary *and* the visual arts, the form and content that have come to define its visual component were likewise undergoing intense development, debate, and rapid evolution. As he fought to maintain his status as the movement's leader, Breton actively put himself in a position to choose its members and define its theoretical parameters.⁴ One of the constants in both

³ In fact, the first challenge to a visual form of Surrealism, Max Morise's "Les yeux enchantés," appeared in the inaugural issue of its own periodical, *La Révolution surréaliste*, on December 1, 1924, less than three months after Breton had published *Le Manifeste du surréalisme* independently.

⁴ Breton was constantly engaged in all three of these areas, accepting and excommunicating "members" of the movement, looking to its antecedents (see his *Manifeste du surréalisme*, where he lists poets and artists who laid the foundations for the movement, as well as *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, which will be examined in detail late in this chapter), and defining what it should be (again, see both of his *Manifestes du*

Breton's writing about the art produced by movement's participants and their forbearers was the importance of role played by the human figure, as well as the critical need for its transformation.

This chapter focuses on the impact that such rhetoric had upon Yves Tanguy's art. Specifically, it will examine how such debates influenced his choice of subject matter and the way in which he chose to depict the human form in his work. Representations of the body in Surrealist art range widely in their appearance but generally draw upon its shape, contour, and proportions and thus trigger all of the references and implications tied to the choice of such subject matter. These human protagonists were often called "personages" by the Surrealists: they were abstracted, painterly equivalents for the human figure. As has been sometimes suggested but never explored as fully as necessary, references to the body did not disappear from Tanguy's work with the advent of the mature portion of his oeuvre; instead they underwent a series of transformations and abstractions, in concert with the movement's philosophical convictions, and remained an important part of his artistic vocabulary.

While the debate about exactly *how* Surrealist art should be made will be discussed in the next chapter, here I will focus on the *content* of Tanguy's art, the context that shaped the way in which he depicted his subject matter, and the ways in which discussions of his work during and after his lifetime have dealt with its content. This will entail examining

surréalisme (1924 and 1929) and such later articles as *Qu'est que c'est le surréalisme?* (1934) and *Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism in the Plastic Arts* (1942).

exactly what it was that he chose to paint, if and how his treatment of this subject matter changed over the course of his career (particularly in the late 1920s, a period of great unrest in the movement), how the results of these changes have been described in the past, and, finally, suggesting a new way in which to understand one important aspect of his subject matter. In particular, this chapter will explore how Tanguy dealt with the subject of the human figure throughout his career. A significant portion will be devoted to the context in which Tanguy was working during the second half of the 1920s: the point at which, it has often been argued, the human figure literally “disappeared” from his art. To the contrary, I will argue that it actually persisted in his compositions, albeit transformed, for the duration of his career. These years were crucial ones for Tanguy as well as an important period for publications of the rhetoric of its leader, Breton, and a particularly active moment in the constantly shifting dynamics of the group itself. Two key themes are central to this discussion: the role of the image of the human figure as a vehicle for Surrealist thought and the concept of transformation as a defining feature of the vast majority of Surrealist art, including Tanguy’s.

Early Development: The Body in Focus

Tanguy’s earliest canvases are hesitant explorations of various modern styles, which often feature a de Chirico-esque use of perspective, as in *Rue de la Santé*, (1924, fig. 3), or a post-Cubist fracturing of pictorial space, as found in *Le Testament de Jacques Prévert*, (1925, fig. 4). In such paintings, traditional perspective is warped or done away with entirely, yet the imagery retained a fairly close relationship to the artist’s chosen

subjects. *Rue de la Santé*, for example, is painted (and titled) clearly enough to provide an accurate description of the place that it depicts: the Parisian street running parallel to the Prison de la Santé. It features the prison's long, dark, windowless wall; a pharmacy with its iconic globes of red and blue fluid in the window; and the miscellaneous billboards, cars, streetlamps, and pedestrians that collectively suggest a rather traditional urban space. Despite the sharply tilted picture plane, all of the compositional elements remain recognizable and easily identifiable. The street, which dominates the central portion of the canvas, is wide and open, and the entire composition is reminiscent of Giorgio de Chirico's empty squares, which are also frequently framed by dramatically elongated walls or arcades rendered in a similarly dramatic skewed perspective.

By 1925, Tanguy had become familiar with the basic tenets of Surrealism and had begun to meet the members of the group.⁵ As he did, he began to fragment his pictorial spaces to an even greater degree, suggesting his growing familiarity with recent art and perhaps

⁵ The most recent literature on Tanguy, such as von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, suggests that he became familiar with *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1925, soon after it began publication. This was followed by his introduction to the poets Benjamin Péret and Robert Desnos, as well as the painter André Masson. He is thought to have seen the first exhibition of Surrealist painting, *La Peinture surréaliste*, in November 1925: an exhibition that included work by Jean Arp, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Paul Klee, André Masson, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, and Pierre Roy. Tanguy and his roommate and benefactor Marcel Duhamel subsequently met Breton in December 1925. It should be noted that although most accounts place Tanguy's earliest efforts as an artist around 1922, the family archives contain paintings and drawings completed when he was a teenager: a fact that is not surprising, since he was likely exposed to the Parisian art world in grade school when he became friends with Pierre Matisse, his future dealer and son of artist Henri Matisse. See Schalhorn, in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 211-16; information about Tanguy's early artistic efforts was communicated to the author by Louis Reyes-Tanguy, the artist's great nephew, during a series of discussions in Paris in late October and early November of 2003. By the mid-1920s Tanguy had tried (and been fired from) a number of jobs and had fallen prey to the lure of the bohemian lifestyle of an artist. By all accounts, he would rather have gone to a café to drink and carouse with his friends than go to a job and work.

with modernist collage as well.⁶ *Le Testament de Jacques Prévert* of that year, although painted, resembles a collage in its pictorial structure. In this early work, Tanguy did away with any remaining suggestion of traditional perspective and as a result, images of an extraordinarily diverse nature jostle for space. For the most part, each element of the composition remains legible: one can easily make out a number of human figures (including at least three nude women), as well as schoolbooks, a tin of tobacco, an alligator, an oil lamp, an elephant, a ship in a bottle. Each of these is locked into a swirling composition imagined (or perhaps dreamed) by the figure in the lower right of the composition, presumably Tanguy's roommate, Jacques Prévert, himself. While the human subjects of the painting are sometimes whimsically distorted—such as the man in the green suit with white lapels in the lower central part of the composition, whose neck and head grow mysteriously out of his right shoulder and who wears a red hat perched at an angle upon his left shoulder—or simplified, they are all still depicted in a fairly representational fashion.

As Tanguy became more confident in his abilities, his willingness to take creative liberties with his subject matter and compositions increased accordingly. Indeed, his progress was so dramatic that just two years after he had begun working in earnest he was given his first solo exhibition, “Yves Tanguy et objets d’Amerique,” at the Galerie Surréaliste in May 1927 (a show organized by Roland Tual but which would not have

⁶ It is fairly similar, at least compositionally and conceptually, to André Masson's painting *The Card Trick* (1923, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

been possible without the significant support of Breton).⁷ By this point, Tanguy had started to move away from strictly representational depictions of his subjects and had begun to experiment with various means of abstracting the human form. In some cases, the bodies in his paintings from 1926 and 1927 are reduced to fragments, as seen in the iconic, vertically-oriented arm found in *Le main dans les nuages* (1927, fig. 5) or the free-floating hands in *L'Extinction des lumières inutiles* (1927, fig. 6). Paralleling such experiments with fragmenting the body were works in which Tanguy chose to dematerialize and simplify the human form. Between 1925 and 1927 he streamlined the way in which he depicted the body, often outlining it with a few quick, undulating brushstrokes, as seen in *Deuxième message II* (1927, fig. 7) and numerous other paintings from these years.

As the 1920s came to a close Tanguy continued to search for ways to invigorate his artistic practice. As a result, the settings of his paintings became increasingly enigmatic and the subjects that populated them correspondingly abstract. Many scholars have noted this tendency as they traced the chronological development of Tanguy's art, most recently and most extensively Karin von Maur (who often suggested fascinating parallels to and potential influences upon his work).⁸ It is not my intention to re-trace their findings here. Rather, I will suggest that there is an alternative to the traditional interpretations of the subject matter of Tanguy's mature work (typically designated as his

⁷ Breton had opened the Galerie Surréaliste in March of 1926 to present the art being produced by the new members of his group. See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farras, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 259.

⁸ See von Maur, "Yves Tanguy or 'The Certainty of the Never-Seen,'" in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 11-133.

paintings completed from the late 1920s forward): a way of understanding these paintings that acknowledges Tanguy's deep engagement with the human form via the Surrealist rubric of transformation rather than one that favors a reading of his work as only tangentially referencing the figure or as having abandoned it entirely.⁹

Even before he devoted himself to a career in the field, the human figure was a central element of Tanguy's art. It can be found in early works on paper depicting his sister, his fellow soldiers in Africa, and himself.¹⁰ Indeed, one of the paintings that inspired him to follow his chosen path, Giorgio de Chirico's *The Child's Brain* (1914, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), features one of the artist's most realistically painted human figures. The subject's pale, stocky torso occupies a significant portion of the compositional space, differentiating it from the majority of de Chirico's human protagonists, who were typically depicted as either miniscule, featureless forms, dwarfed by the architecture surrounding them, or replaced by surrogates in the guise of mannequins or statues.¹¹ This fascination with de Chirico's paintings that featured prominent figural protagonists continued throughout Tanguy's life and is reflected in one of the paintings by de Chirico that he and his wife Kay Sage owned: *Torment of the Poet* (1914, Yale University Art

⁹ For example, in the catalogue for the first significant retrospective of Tanguy's work since his death, Robert Lebel writes that "At this time [ca. the 1930s], he was the only painter who irrevocably eliminated any known sign or conventional symbols from his oeuvre without becoming a slave to the new abstraction." See Robert Lebel, "Die beschwörende Formenwelt Yves Tanguys," in Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 36. This and all translations of text from this book hereafter, are by Byron Stuhlman.

¹⁰ *Portrait of Emilie Tanguy*, ca. 1923, crayon and gouache on paper, collection of R.L. Quillivic; *North African Infantry Corps*, ca. 1922, watercolor on paper, collection of R.L. Quillivic; and *Self-Portrait*, 1925, watercolor on paper, collection of Jacqueline Matisse Monier.

¹¹ For example, see *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, 1913-14, oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York; *The Disquieting Muses*, 1917, oil on canvas, The Gianni Mattioli Foundation, Milan; *The Two Sisters*, oil on canvas, 1915, National Gallery of Scotland; or *The Uncertainty of the Poet*, oil on canvas, 1913, National Gallery of Scotland.

Gallery). It is not insignificant that Breton, too, thought very highly of *The Child's Brain*, and, in fact, had acquired it for his collection sometime around 1919.¹²

With Tanguy's early penchant for paintings featuring prominent human protagonists in mind, I will argue that from the beginning of his career to its end, his art consistently featured the human figure as one of its central motifs. This is not to say that every painting by the artist contains easily discernable references to the human body but rather that after approximately 1928 such references did not disappear, as much of the available literature on the artist would lead us to believe, whether by directly stating this concept or by sidestepping the question of how one might identify Tanguy's subject matter almost entirely. When Tanguy's oeuvre is considered holistically it can be argued that the human form appeared throughout in his work, albeit having undergone a series of visual transformations, for his entire career. The human body and, by extension, its relationship to whatever "world" is around it, was at the core of Tanguy's artistic practice, much more so than discussions of his work containing isolated references to bones, ameobas, or the occasional form that might, in passing, resemble a human protagonist, lead us to believe.

In order to complete the argument that Tanguy continued to draw upon the motif of the human form in his paintings after the late 1920s, other sections of this chapter will consider the historical context in which their supposed "disappearance" occurred, explore the reasons why Tanguy may have been compelled to transform the content of his

¹² Breton acquired the painting around 1919. See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 1995), 168-69.

paintings in order to continue to reference the human form, and examine the ample visual evidence points to the continual presence of human figures in his art, beginning with an analysis of his drawings and using them as a bridge to his paintings. This method that will be crucial to the following chapter as well, for many of the “keys” to Tanguy’s paintings reside in his drawings, or in the very act of drawing itself, an idea that will be developed further in subsequent chapters.

Such a discussion must necessarily address broader issues with which the Surrealists were engaged—namely the debate between figuration and abstraction (or perhaps, more specifically, between representational and non-representational art).¹³ The side of this debate upon which Tanguy fell is of critical importance for an accurate reading of his art. In fact, it would have been highly unusual for him to diverge from accepted Surrealist practice on this issue, for to do so would have made him the *only* Surrealist to have abandoned entirely the human form. Therefore I will explore both the reasons why it would have been highly unusual for him to have abandoned this subject and why such a reading of his work might perhaps have posed problems for his peers and critics. This discussion will be based upon an examination of period literature on the topic, more recent scholarship on Surrealism and on Tanguy, and a number of the artist’s paintings and drawings from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. Paralleling these discussions will be

¹³ This is an extremely broad issue and certainly beyond the scope of this chapter. It is sufficient to say that Surrealism was firmly positioned against the formal legacy of Cubism (the emergence of Purism, the School of Paris artists, etc. . .) and that subject matter was almost always of greater importance to the Surrealists than issues of artistic style. This enabled Breton to embrace both artists who frequently shifted styles (such as Ernst or Picasso) and a diverse group of artists whose work lacked any sense of visual cohesion; for example there is a great disparity between the “look” of a painting by Magritte and by Masson, despite the fact that both were members of the group concurrently.

an exploration of the reasons that Tanguy may have felt the need to “veil” the human figure to such a degree that his forms often seem to resist such a reading.

The Surrealist Context: Figuration and Transformation in the 1920s

The way in which Tanguy’s imagery developed as a result of the debates among the Surrealists as to the proper direction their art should take was critical to his ability to sustain his close relationship with the group, particularly Breton. Because of his sensitivity to this relationship he was able to maintain not only his circle of friends but also a consistent level of emotional, financial, and social stability.¹⁴ Unlike most of the other members of the group, Tanguy did not have a career as a professional artist or a network of peers or supporters before joining—therefore his relationship with the group and its leaders was characterized by a unique kind of bond. Tanguy has long been identified as one of André Breton’s most loyal followers. It has been written that Breton both “championed and dominated him, feeding him ideas from the over-heated doctrinaire fantasy factory at surrealist GHQ [grand headquarters].”¹⁵ Tanguy is said to have called the man who was just four years his elder, “Papa.”¹⁶ René Le Bihan writes that “nothing is more astonishing than the intense friendship that linked them [Tanguy and Breton], for a quarter of a century, in the midst of disputes and exclusions; each one

¹⁴ Tanguy had an extraordinarily long run as an “official” member of the Surrealist group, which extended from his first participation in the group’s activities in 1925 until a series of spats with Breton in the 1940s eventually led to the dissolution of their friendship by the early 1950s. See Andréas Schalhorn, “Yves Tanguy 1900-55: A Chronicle of His Life and Work,” in Karin von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* (Ostfildern Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 211-29, for the most accurate chronology of Tanguy’s life to date. See also “Biographie” in Katharina Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1982), 262-74.

¹⁵ Stuart Preston, “Paris, Beaubourg, Yves Tanguy,” *Burlington Magazine* (September 1982), 575.

¹⁶ See Matthew Josephson, *Life Among the Surrealists* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, & Winston, 1962), 226.

found in the other a partner in their investigations.”¹⁷ And Peggy Guggenheim, who knew Tanguy (and many of his colleagues) personally, characterized him as one of Breton’s “disciples.”¹⁸ Tanguy clearly felt a strong connection to Breton from the moment that the two met in late 1925, a bond exemplified by their shared interest in de Chirico’s art. From that point forward, Tanguy’s loyalty to the leader of the Surrealist revolution rarely wavered. He was at Breton’s side during many of the movement’s controversies, signed a large number of its various manifestos and public declarations, and even chose to stand by Breton when his close friend, Jacques Prévert, whom he had known for a much longer time and with whom he had lived with for five years (three of them at the infamous Surrealist gathering place, 54 rue du chateau), came into conflict with Breton and was excommunicated in 1929.¹⁹

Breton, in turn, lavished praise and the support of a close friend and mentor upon Tanguy, helping him secure his first solo exhibition in 1927, including him in many of the subsequent exhibitions of the movement’s artists, reproducing his drawings and paintings in Surrealist journals and books, and writing a number of laudatory essays

¹⁷ See René Le Bihan, “Yves Tanguy ou la révélation de l’insaisissable,” in René le Bihan et al., *Yves Tanguy* (Paris: Galerie Malingue, 2002), 5. Translation by the author.

¹⁸ Peggy Guggenheim, *Confessions of an Art Addict* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1960), 60.

¹⁹ See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 314. Tanguy was among those who, with Breton, stormed a formal dinner at a new nightclub opened by the recently ex-communicated Robert Desnos on Valentine’s Day, 1930. His signature is found on many Surrealist writings, including “Hands Off Love” (1929); “A Statement of Support for the Second Manifesto” (1930); “Fire” (1931); “Murderous Humanitarianism” (1932); “Mobilization Against War Is Not Peace!” (1933); “The Planet Without a Visa” (1934); and “Freedom is a Vietnamese Word” (1947).

about him throughout his career.²⁰ At various points, Breton praised him as “a man who surrenders to nothing but the absolutely pure,” wrote that when one considered “the work of painters recently come to the fore, it is clear that of all modern influences, Tanguy’s is a determining factor in their work,” and even responded to the question “What is Surrealism” with the reply: “It is the appearance of Yves Tanguy, crowned with the great emerald green bird of paradise.”²¹ Even more than a decade after Tanguy joined the Surrealists, Breton wrote that the artist’s “star [was] constantly rising,” because he was “ideally integrated and intact.”²² Such a statement suggests both that Tanguy’s art continued to resonate with the group’s ideas and that, as an artist who was ‘fully integrated,’ Tanguy had been able to meet one of the group’s primary goals of breaking down the boundaries between an artist’s internal and external lives without compromise. In fact, Tanguy likely can claim the title of being the member of the movement to have had the longest run as an “official” Surrealist—more than 20 years—before his falling out with Breton in the late 1940s. Even this late break in their relations was not too serious, for, writing to Tanguy’s sister Emilie soon after the artist’s death, Breton mourned, “I loved him passionately.”²³

²⁰ The first reproduction of his work appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* Deuxième année, no. 7 (15 June 1926), where an untitled painting (now known as *L’Anneau d’invisibilité*, 1926) can be found on page 11. His first solo exhibition, “Yves Tanguy et objets d’Amérique,” took place at the Galerie Surréaliste from May 26–June 15, 1927. After publishing his first essay on Tanguy in the small exhibition brochure for the Galerie Surréaliste exhibition (which was later incorporated into *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*), Breton mentioned Tanguy in most of his important texts from the 1930s and 1940s.

²¹ The first citation is from “Le Surréalisme et la peinture,” found in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, intr. Mark Pollizotti and trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), 46; the second citation is from “Des Tendances plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste” written by Breton in 1939 and reprinted in André Breton, *Yves Tanguy*, trans. Bravig Imbs (New York: Pierre Matisse, 1946), unpag., and the third quote is from André Breton, “Le Dialogue en 1934,” *Documents* 34 (June 1934), 24–25.

²² Cited in Breton, “Des tendances plus récentes de la surréalisme” in Breton, *Yves Tanguy*, unpag.

²³ Breton to Emilie Tanguy, early 1955. This letter is in the possession of Louis Reyes-Tanguy and was examined with Mr. Reyes-Tanguy by the author in late October and early November, 2003.

Considering Breton's longstanding support of Tanguy, his powerful position as leader of the Surrealist group, the close friendship that the two men shared (a friendship that was sustained during many episodes of emotional and economic hardship in both men's lives) and the important role that the Surrealist group came play for Tanguy at a critical moment in his life, it is difficult to imagine that Tanguy, despite his rebelliousness against social and artistic conventions, would have diverged significantly from the general course of Surrealist art as prescribed by Breton. With this in mind, it is critical to note that *every other Surrealist artist*, from Max Ernst and André Masson to those more loosely associated with the movement, such as Joan Miró or Jean Arp, *consistently* drew upon the human form for inspiration and regularly included it—whether whole, in part, or transformed or abstracted to varying degrees—in their paintings, sculptures, and works on paper. Even when the forms depicted in of one of these works might appear to have departed significantly from their figural sources, interpretation of the given piece is almost always brought back to reference the human form by means of its title. Tanguy, like his peers, did not depart from such patterns of depiction. Such a statement is not meant to suggest that he slavishly followed the group in every way, but rather that, as longstanding core member of the group his work had more things in common with that of his peers than has been recognized in the past.

In order to begin sorting out the complex set of reasons why Tanguy's use of the human figure as one of his primary motifs persisted into the mature portion of his career, it is

necessary to pay special attention to Breton's writings. Breton published a number of extremely important texts during the mid- and late-1920s, a key period in both Tanguy's artistic development and in the development of the movement as a whole. These included the *Manifeste du surréalisme* and *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, as well as the *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, which took a more politically and personally aggressive stance than its artistically- and historically-oriented predecessor. These essays were printed in the movement's primary mouthpiece, the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* (hereafter cited as *LRS*), which was published between 1924 and 1929. An examination of each of these writings, and of the accompanying artistic content of *LRS*, will begin to guide us towards the possibility of reconsidering the role of the human form in Tanguy's art.

The *Manifeste du surréalisme* and the first issues of *LRS* grounded Tanguy's introduction to the Surrealist movement and outlined some of its primary themes and key participants. Much of Tanguy's early artistic development occurred during an era of intense change, conflict, and growth for the movement. During these years, Breton's writings both affirmed the path that Tanguy had followed to date and helped guide his future artistic development. By the end of the decade, a number of new artists had entered into Surrealism's ranks and the earlier place of pride the Breton had given to those who practiced automatism had now been replaced by a preference for a new mode of painting that has come to be labeled dream illusionism. One constant, despite changes in the preferred method of facture and the aesthetics of the resulting works of art was the use of the human form as a subject by artists aligned with both the former and the latter

approaches. While the first and second manifestos of Surrealism were certainly important to Tanguy's development as an artist—the concepts laid out in the former helped to shape the direction that he took in his early paintings and those in the latter reiterated these ideas and fleshed out similar ones—it was, I believe, Breton's specific engagement with painting in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* and the art that was chosen to surround its installments in *LRS* that had the most significant influence upon Tanguy's use of the human figure. Consequently, these essays and the context in which they were published will receive the majority of attention in this section.

First, however, let us briefly consider Breton's original *Manifeste*, for although he did not make the direction that the visual component of Surrealism should take one of the primary themes of the essay, it is still one of the most revealing places to begin tracing the broader ideas that helped shape Tanguy's introduction to the movement and his early development as a serious artist. For it was in the *Manifeste* that Breton laid out the movement's historical foundations and put into play a number of the themes that would define its direction in the coming years. Perhaps the key point in Breton's *Manifeste*, one that was a cornerstone of Surrealist thought, was that escaping the tyranny of logic and to allow the imagination free rein was of *utmost* importance.

Early in the *Manifeste*, Breton railed against the tedium of traditional literature and what he felt were its overly literal descriptions that stripped away any imaginative or

subjective investment on the part of the reader.²⁴ We can infer that this concept was perceived to be general enough to cover not only the literary arts but the visual arts as well, for Breton returned to very similar ideas just a few years later in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. He went on to celebrate the world of dreams, reversing traditional beliefs by elevating the status of this realm above that of reality. He lauded the dream world as one in which anything was possible, arguing that only in the resolution of the states of dreaming and of reality could one find “a kind of absolute reality, a surreality.”²⁵

In his description of characters and objects that are suggestive of this “surreality,” Breton cited a number of hybrid or fantastic beings that relate to the kinds of transformations, combinations, and apparitions that one finds both in the work of recently-established Surrealists like Max Ernst and André Masson, as well as in the work that Tanguy would start to produce soon after joining the group.²⁶ These included Lewis’s character Matilda, who he described as “the most moving creation that one can credit to . . . [the] figurative fashion in literature. She is less a character than a continual temptation,” the various other ghosts that populate Lewis’s prose, the modern mannequin (a key motif of de Chirico’s paintings), his [Breton’s] own dream of a man cut in two by a window, and, finally, the monstrous “Elephants with the heads of women” which lie in wait once one has crossed over into the “dangerous territory” of Surrealism.²⁷ Breton ended his essay with the

²⁴ See André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, *André Breton: Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 7-10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶ Breton, in fact, named Ernst and Masson in the first manifesto as already being part of his group. See *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15, 16, 21-22, and 40. “Matilda” likely refers to one of the characters in “The Monk,” a Gothic novel published in 1796 by Matthew Gregory Lewis.

theme of transformation, a concept that Tanguy would take to heart as he began his journey as an artist and to which he returned with renewed vigor at the end of the 1920s, when he completely subsumed the figure into his recently developed vocabulary of biomorphic forms: his own unique approach to transformation. Breton's closing paragraph echoed those at the beginning of his essay, stating the importance of "complete nonconformism" and describing a summer in which "roses are blue," "wood is of glass," and the earth has become a ghost world.²⁸

While Breton's *Manifeste* is typically cited as one of his most important writings (and rightly so, for it is the place in which he first defined the movement that would from that point on irrevocably bear his stamp), his next extended essay, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* is of even greater significance for the purposes of this chapter, for it provides us with a lens through which to view Tanguy's artistic development, as it appears to have had a particularly significant impact upon his perception of the importance of the human figure as a subject. Although the entire essay was not published as a unified whole until 1928, Breton debuted its first section in the fourth issue of *LRS* (the number in which he assumed editorial control), which was released in July 1925, just as Tanguy was becoming familiar with the movement and was starting to paint in earnest, but still more than four months before he first met Breton. The ideas outlined in these first published sections, which began to appear in print as Tanguy was becoming increasingly involved with the movement, were crucial to his conception of what constituted an acceptable form and subject matter for a properly "Surrealist" painting, particularly as he had no formal

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

training and thus fewer preconceived notions about such topics than most of his colleagues. The appearance of each successive section of the essay over the next two years further shaped his ideas about making art, although now as an official member of the group, and the concepts discussed therein parallel exactly his transformation of the human figure in his work.

Breton began writing *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* shortly after the publication of the *Manifeste du surréalisme*. Why, one might wonder, did he feel the need to continue to pursue the question of what Surrealism was? The answer lies in the challenges to the very existence of visual component to the movement based on the guidelines laid out in the *Manifesto*. In particular, the acceptance of practice of automatism—the method of drawing or painting in which the artist attempted to circumvent or avoid their conscious influence over the final product—had come under fire soon after the *Manifesto* was published.²⁹ As the movement gained popularity and adherents, Breton began to realize that the true manifestation of his ideas could take place both in literature and in the visual arts and that what was most important to the visual component was that its various manifestations were created in the spirit of the movement's ideals. Technique, Breton eventually concluded, was less important than the results produced *by* that particular technique, in particular the ruptures, shocks, and transformations that such works of art—regardless of how they were created—represented.

²⁹ This issue is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

The first challenge to the existence of a visual counterpart to Surrealism came in *LRS*'s third issue, in an essay by Pierre Naville. Breton did not take such provocation lightly. In fact, it was certainly not a coincidence that he took over full editorial control of the publication and introduced the first portion of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in the issue following the one containing Naville's essay. As Mark Polizotti succinctly summarized Breton's ideas in the introduction to a new edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*,

‘Surrealism and Painting’ shows to full advantage Breton’s talent, not only as a critic but also as a polemicist and a promoter. In the *Manifesto*, he had already noted that when an automatic (unconscious) phrase occurred to him, it was often accompanied by a visual image. . . . [In ‘Surrealism and Painting,’ he asked:] What makes a work of art ‘surrealist’? In painting, as in poetry, the answer lies not in its particular technique, but in its ability to externalize a ‘*purely interior model*.’ It is the artist’s inner vision that intrigues Breton, the ability to make him see that ‘which is not visible,’ rather than the skill with which the line or color is applied to canvas. . . . In other words, a work of art or writing, in order to be surrealist, must explore a mental space outside of the field of normal awareness, in a place where consciousness and unconsciousness, the possible and the impossible, become one.³⁰

Breton began *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in the spirit of his *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, crying out for a new and revolutionary kind of painting, way of seeing, and way of life that is both entirely personal and entirely at odds with convention. He wrote that he did not believe the act of fixing visual images, i.e., painting or drawing, (which led to the formation of a new visual language) to be of any less importance or of any greater artifice, historically or conceptually, than that of fixing verbal language, i.e., writing poetry. In fact, he argued, visual descriptions of one’s interior world had an even

³⁰ Mark Polizotti, “Introduction: André Breton and Painting,” in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, xviii-xix. While Breton’s use of the terms “a few lines” and “a few blobs of color” sound as if he is voicing his support for abstract painting (as opposed to the insistence on the importance of the figure that I am stressing in Tanguy’s art), he is speaking out against the use of representational detail rather than on a course of pure abstraction.

greater power of attraction than those that were written, for “a few lines, a few blobs of colour hold me in their thrall as nothing else can do.”³¹ More important to Breton than a literal depiction of the world (a goal that was seen, until just decades before Breton was writing, as painting’s ultimate aim) were the artist’s efforts to transform that world through the vehicle of subconscious thought.³² Two sentences from the essay substantiate this: first, Breton asked, “what does it matter to me whether trees are green, whether a piano is at this moment ‘nearer’ to me than a carriage, whether a ball is cylindrical or round,” and second, he stated that “it makes no difference whether there remains a perceptible difference between things which are evoked and things which are present, since I dismiss these things out of hand at every moment of my life.”³³ What Breton sought, and what the artists who followed him thus strove to deliver, was an entirely new model of artistic production, for he believed that “genius has nothing to gain by following these beaten tracks,” (perhaps an ironic stance, given that he was proposing a new path and was willing to dismiss those who did not follow it).³⁴

Such radical ideas had a strong impact upon Tanguy, who was, at the very moment that they were being published, struggling to find new ways to disengage his paintings from literal representations of the world. Before proceeding, it is important to note that Breton was not calling for total abstraction to the point of the elimination of all recognizable

³¹ Breton, “Surrealism and Painting” in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 2.

³² Evidence of this is seen in this opening section, where Breton writes: “The very narrow concept of imitation which art has been given as its aim is at the roots of the grave misunderstanding that has managed to perpetuate itself right up to the modern era.” *Ibid.*, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

subject matter. He did not wish to prohibit the artist from depicting imagery drawn from the real world but rather to suggest an alternative to the reliance upon the replication of literal appearances and the use of standard relationships between the viewer and the subject and between various subjects themselves. This statement was followed by yet another that echoed concepts that he had put forth in the *Manifesto*, but which now had been tweaked to apply specifically to the visual arts. Breton wrote that,

to make the magic power of figuration with which some people are endowed serve the purpose of preserving and reinforcing what would exist without them anyway, is to make wretched use of that power. In fact it constitutes an unthinkable abdication. . . . In order to respond to the necessity, upon which all serious minds now agree, for a total revision of real values, the plastic work of art will either refer to a *purely internal model* or will cease to exist.³⁵

Again, it is important to note that here, although Breton was arguing against figuration when used in the service of imitation, he was not arguing against references to the human form or to other elements drawn from the external world *per se*, for it was of critical importance that viewers were able to comprehend *what* was undergoing a transformation in order to feel the full impact *of* that transformation.

By the end of the first installment of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton had traced the new way of seeing that he was advocating back to the advent of Cubism, and in particular, to Picasso. In doing so, he provided a historical framework for the Surrealist mode of vision by linking it to an established artistic movement. However, his celebration of Picasso was less driven by visual theory or aesthetic pleasure than it was

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

by the impact of cubism as a revolutionary way of seeing the world and breaking away from the confines of strict imitation. Picasso, he wrote, had been following the “correct path” for 15 years—a journey that Breton illustrated with three of Picasso’s paintings: *Étudiant* of 1913, *Écolière* from 1920, and *Arlequin* from 1924. It is worth noting that Picasso’s three paintings were the sole images that Breton selected to illustrate the first installment of his essay and that each features prominently an abstracted but still clearly recognizable human protagonist as its subject matter. One of the strengths of Picasso’s work, according to Breton, was the artist’s ability to make a clean and open break with the “treacherous nature of tangible entities” and more specifically the “facile connotations of their everyday appearance.”³⁶

In the second and third installments of his essay, Breton repeatedly sought to clarify and amplify his earlier statements about the duty of the Surrealist artist and what constituted appropriate subjects for his followers. “Painters,” he wrote, “share the responsibility with all others to whose formidable lot it has fallen to make full sense of their particular means of expression *to prevent the domination by the symbol of the thing signified* [author’s emphasis].”³⁷ In other words, Breton believed that the Surrealists should work to transform, even to destroy, clear links between the subject of their painting and that subject’s appearance and meaning in the real world. For the purposes of this chapter, this meant that if Tanguy’s aim was propose a new model for the way in which we understand human impulses, desires, and interactions then he had to move beyond mere appearances and traditional means of representing these things. Such a statement dovetailed perfectly

³⁶ Breton, “Surrealism and Painting,” in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

both with Breton's belief in the importance of the transformation and transcendence of reality to a work of art and with Tanguy's experiments with a variety of ways to disrupt the human form in his work. Breton took Georges Braque to task, arguing that he was dangerously close to falling back upon more literal depictions of reality despite the steps that he had taken in his earlier work to reconfigure our perception of reality.

The final section of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* that was published in *LRS* dealt briefly with André Derain before moving on to artists more typically associated with the Surrealists, including Max Ernst, Man Ray, and André Masson, who Tanguy would have, by this point, considered his colleagues. In his discussion of Ernst, Breton celebrated the artist's ability to re-arrange elements from the everyday world into a new reality, a quality that he had discussed as a key element of Surrealist art in previously published writings. He characterized Ernst as a kind of god, with the ability to create order from chaos:

When Max Ernst arrived on the scene . . . he brought along with him the unrestorable fragments of the labyrinth. It was a sort of jigsaw puzzle of creation: the pieces were all incredibly separated from each other, and since they no longer experienced any mutual magnetization they were seeking to discover new affinities for themselves. . . . [Ernst's] enterprise consisted of nothing less than to reassemble these disparate objects according to an order which, while differing from their normal order, did not seem on the whole to do them any violence; to avoid all preconceived designs as far as possible; and . . . to assert *by means of the image* other relationships than those generally or, indeed, provisionally established between human being on the one hand and, on the other, things considered as accepted facts.³⁸

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-26.

When this section of the essay was published in October 1927 Tanguy had just recently held his first one-man exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste (May 26 – June 15, 1927). His subsequent paintings demonstrated that Breton's writings and the work being produced by his new Surrealist colleagues had begun to serve as both inspiration for new ideas and confirmation of his artistic evolution. For by the end of 1927 Tanguy had begun to explore radical new territory in his paintings—perhaps seeking to avoid repeating himself, as Breton has just recently chastised de Chirico for doing in *LRS*.³⁹ In many of Tanguy's subsequent works, the human figure was transformed into a new kind of hybrid being, with a much less stable identity than Max Ernst's totemic substitute, the birdlike “Lop-lop.”

Breton celebrated this type of disregard for conventional rules and means of depiction not only in Ernst's work, but in Masson's as well, writing that

[In Masson's world] no rules exist, and examples are simply life-savers answering the appeals of rules making vain attempts to exist. Pigeon flies! Fish flies! Arrow flies! Arrow flies against pigeon flies! Fish flies (certain fish). Fish also does not fly! Apple rises and falls! Jet of water supports egg that neither rises nor falls. Woman cherishes man who loves woman who fears man.⁴⁰

He also celebrated the hybrid nature of Masson's artistic creations: a quality that became increasingly important to Tanguy as he began to move away from literal depictions of his subject matter at precisely this time.⁴¹ The kinds of irrational, fantastic transformations

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴¹ Breton cited Poe: “*The pure Imagination chooses, from either Beauty or Deformity, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; the compound as a general rule.*” *Ibid.*, 35.

and actions that Breton listed as being possible in Masson's pictures ("the stormy colour will change hues as it pleases. The balls of fire, dreamed up like a billiard ball, will play their usual pranks on various landings of the house. One of them will worm its way inside a cupboard drawer without any assistance, as surely as we imagine our secrets to be closely guarded. Another of them will change the canary's cage into a lampshade, so that the light may scurry away like a spider") are quite similar to the types of descriptions that one might use when discussing Tanguy's canvases.⁴² Such language could also apply to the results produced by one of the group's favorite games at that time: the collective experiment known as the exquisite corpse—a game which Tanguy is known to have played on numerous occasions.

Although the final published version of *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* contained a fifth section, with new essays about Miró, Tanguy, and Arp, these portions of the essay were never printed in *LRS*. The text on Tanguy, however, did appear separately beforehand, as the introductory essay for the catalogue of his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste. In it, Breton described what he felt to be one of the central principles of both Tanguy's art and of Surrealism in general: their shared ability to reveal the psychic space between two disparate entities. Such a space is described as one in which boundaries are blurred; in which "to recognize (or not to recognize) means everything. Between what I do recognize and what I do not recognize there stands myself. . . . In what I like there is that which I like to recognize and that which I do not like to recognize. It is, I believe, the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35-36.

concept of this very intense relationship that has always inspired surrealism . . .”⁴³

Breton, however, noted that he was not able to predict the future union of the known and the unknown in Tanguy’s art, for he went on to write that the power of Tanguy’s paintings lay in their contrast of the two rather than their union of them:

Tanguy is far from opposed to including in a painting any of these more or less ‘direct’ elements, since they perform the necessary function of revealing the occult value of other elements. No doubt he considers these ‘direct’ elements valid as a standard of comparison . . . this contact, which remains precious to him, permits him to venture as far as he wishes and to bring back to us, from the unknown, images that are just as concrete as those that we take for granted as being known.⁴⁴

Here, Breton seems to have been suggesting that clearly recognizable elements derived from the real world—often the human body, whether fragmented and whole—were necessary to set off the more fantastic aspects of Tanguy’s paintings, which gained their suggestive power from the disparity between the two rather than the transformation or hybridization of the former.

At this point, Masson, whose career was at a slightly more advanced stage than Tanguy’s, was still drawing upon with automatism as a technique. Yet, as he did, was continuing to include recognizable fragments of forms drawn from the natural world. Ernst, who arguably was even better established, was combining body parts (among other elements), be they painted or collaged, to form new hybrid beings. In his paintings from 1927 and 1928 Tanguy continued to reference human form, distilling it to a simple symbolic outline or breaking it up into disparate parts. In some instances it was used to set off the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

other, more abstract forms in his paintings, its easily recognizable shapes and proportions heightening their strangeness. At this point, the biomorphic forms in Tanguy's art can also be classified in a different category than those found in the work of an artist such as Tanguy's colleague Jean Arp. Arp often created tension in his art not through juxtapositions of his forms with other, more recognizable ones, but rather through the relationships between the shapes in his painted constructions and often through their relationship to the work's title. Additionally, Arp was working with what one might call a more sophisticated set of modernist principles at this point, often blending painting, sculpture, and collage and composing these elements in a manner that eschewed conventional means of replicating the perception of three dimensions on a two dimensional field like perspective and shading.

These characteristics are all found in a work such as *Woman*, of 1927 (fig. 8). At first glance, *Woman* appears to be a relatively abstract collage of carved and painted biomorphic forms set within a wooden frame. However, with the guidance provided by the title and the fact that the contours of these forms are still legible enough to be linked to the title with relative ease, the viewer is led to interpret these forms as representing parts of the female body: lips at the top of the composition, the outline of pendulous breasts at its center, and a hole representing a vagina at the bottom. The relationship of these painted wooden forms to the human figure is both heightened and complicated by the fact that Arp has affixed them onto a painted shape that resembles a head more than

the more traditional hourglass shape of the human body, it is difficult to pick out these references without the aid of a title.⁴⁵

Masson, on the other hand, relied upon slightly more legible references to the human figure in many of the automatist paintings and drawings he produced in the 1920s.

L'Armure (1925, fig. 9), for example, which was reproduced in the fourth number of *LRS*, features an abstracted woman's torso as the central element of its composition. The navel is strongly defined near the midpoint of the canvas, centered amidst two swirling arms, a darkened pubic area, and a pointed breast. In the same issue, a number of other works suggested a wide variety of ways in which to abstract the human figure—from the simplified, playful geometric forms of Miró's *Le Chausseur* to the use of the language of African art seen in Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* (1907).

Breton laid out the Surrealist programme not only in the texts he published in the pages of *LRS* but in the images that he chose to include there as well. An examination of the imagery of the journal—the movement's primary mouthpiece—reveals the constant presence of the human form as a central motif of Surrealist art, whether in painted, drawn, or photographic form. In first three numbers of *LRS*, Masson's drawings appeared repeatedly. Although they were likely included for their demonstration of the possibilities of the technique of automatic drawing, taken as a whole they represented not an easily

⁴⁵ This method of rearranging the elements of the body in order to create uncanny new combinations and possibilities was perhaps of greater interest to an artist such as René Magritte, whose *Le Viol* (1934, Menil Collection) functions in a similar manner, with the elements of the body displaced and relocated.

recognizable, unified presentation of the human form, but rather a vision of the body torn asunder and reduced to a series of undulating shapes and fragments.

In Masson's art, hands, breasts, buttocks, and hair flowed freely, sometimes organized according to natural logic, others arranged somewhat haphazardly, but almost always contained within a kind of continuous bodily outline rather than as simply a free-floating or boundless group of markings distributed evenly across the picture space. This occurred in many drawings, including those found in *LRS* no. 1, pp. 14, 27; no 2, p. 15; no. 3, pp. 10, 14, 18, 23, 24; and no 4, p. 22. Even before meeting Breton, then, Tanguy was able to discern the motifs with which the group preferred its artists to engage and thus would have been cognizant of the ways in which its core members depicted them via its primary publication. As an aspiring artist—especially one who, like his peers, had a tendency to rebel against society's accepted norms—Tanguy was receptive to the basic elements that appeared repeatedly in the group's publications and, as his paintings from this period demonstrate, he paid particular attention to the works illustrated in both the issues that appeared after he had joined the group and to those which illustrated Breton's essays.

The fourth issue of *LRS* was also the one in which Breton assumed full editorial control of the journal. Under his guidance it featured fewer drawings and photographs and more paintings than its predecessors.⁴⁶ It also included the first installment of "Le Surréalisme

⁴⁶ The lead essay of this number was Breton's, titled "Pourquoi je prends la direction de la Révolution Surréaliste." The number included 1 mediumistic drawing, two paintings by Miró, one painting/assemblage and one painting by Ernst, five paintings by Picasso, one painting by Pierre Roy, one

et la peinture.” Of the illustrations in this important issue, 13 out of 18 featured the human figure, each transformed to varying degrees. The most abstract of these were Miró’s *Le Chasseur* and *Maternité*, both of which bore titles that encouraged the viewer to investigate them for figurative content. From these, and from the images that he chose to illustrate the first section of his essay (the three figural Picassos, noted above), Breton’s preferences were clear: the human form was to be a central element of Surrealist art and there should be no limits to the kinds of transformations it could and should undergo in the hands (and imagination) of the artist.

The first official mention of Tanguy as part of the group appeared in an advertisement in the June 15, 1926, issue of *LRS* (it was in this issue that the first illustrations of his work were published as well) where his name is part of an acrostic made out of the letters of the word “Surréaliste” in the advertisement for the Galerie Surréaliste (which was run by Breton). His first published painting, *L’Anneau d’invisibilité* (1926, fig. 10), appeared amidst poems by the established Surrealist poet Robert Desnos, on page 11. It featured two prominent human figures. One, formed of delicate looping graphic doodles, reclines in the sky with a blank face and billowing hair (which suggest that it is a self portrait—see the period photo of Tanguy, ca. 1926, fig. 11). The other, a smaller, collaged figure, dances in the air upon the tips of the larger one’s fingers.

drawing by de Chirico, one painting and two photographs by Man Ray, one anonymous photograph, and one painting by Masson (12 paintings, two drawings, and three photographs).

Tanguy's second published painting, *Animaux perdus* (1926), appeared in *LRS*'s next issue. It, too, prominently featured the human figure, this time in the guise of a fantastic pied piper whose face is obscured by an inverted fish and who gestures toward a group of collaged animals that includes a horse, a lion, a snake, and a bird. Even the first drawing that Tanguy published in *LRS*, although a somewhat belated attempt at automatism à la Masson, did not eliminate the human form entirely, retaining a fragment of the body: downward-pointing finger. As if to reinforce the presence of the finger, the drawing was placed directly opposite a closely-cropped photograph of the hands of two figures engaged in a game of billiards.

By the time that Breton had prepared the full, standalone text of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* for publication in early 1928, Tanguy's place as one of the movement's core artists was secure.⁴⁷ He had already held his first solo exhibition and was becoming increasingly involved with the group, as evidenced by the continued appearance of his artwork in the pages of *LRS* and his recent collaboration with one of the group's leading poets, Benjamin Peret.⁴⁸ At this point, however, Surrealism had reached a critical moment in its history and was beginning to experience growing pains. Breton had, over the course of the past two years, sought to defend and re-define Surrealism's visual component, which resulted in his embrace of an increasingly wide range of artists and artistic practices. He had also assumed control of the movement's periodical, worked to give his friends exhibitions at the Galerie Surréaliste and become increasingly involved

⁴⁷ An advertisement for it appeared on the back cover of the March 15, 1928 issue (no. 11) of *LRS*.

⁴⁸ He illustrated Peret's book of poetry *Dormir, dormir dans les pierres* (Paris, 1927).

with politics, which would lead to one of the movement's largest rifts the following year. Surrealism's visibility, not only the radar of the Parisian art world but across Europe, had lead to increasing numbers of artists seeking to join in its revolutionary attack on conformity and artistic norms. One of these artists in particular, Salvador Dalí, not only influenced the course of Surrealist art but was at least partially responsible for the direction in which Tanguy's art developed as well.

Dream Illusionism, Dalí, and the “Disappearance” of the Figure, 1929-30

Tanguy stuck by Breton during the tempestuous close of the 1920s. In the final year of the decade the last issue of *LRS* was published. In it, Breton unveiled his third major text with implications for the Surrealist movement: the *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (*SMS*), whose content was far more political than either the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* or *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. In the *SMS*, Breton angrily attacked a number of the movement's former allies for wide reasons ranging from their political beliefs to their willingness to disagree with his views.⁴⁹ The provocation received an immediate and vigorous response, led by Robert Desnos, which included a broadside entitled *A Corpse* and a series counter-attacks directed at Breton. The last straw, as far as Breton was concerned, was when Desnos opened a nightclub in Montparnasse in early 1930 called the Bar Maldorer, an obvious jab at Breton's hero Count Lautréamont, author of the much-loved-by-the-Surrealists “Les Chants de Maldorer.” Tanguy numbered among

⁴⁹ It is, perhaps, fitting that Breton chose to use an aggressive image of lightning striking a tree for the cover of this, the final issue of *LRS*.

Breton's faithful, who, at their leader's urging, stormed and vandalized the nightclub soon after its opening, chanting: "We are the guests of Count Lautréamont!"⁵⁰

One significant result of the publication of the *SMS*, at least for Tanguy, was the estrangement between Breton and André Masson. Masson had been a frequent contributor to *LRS*, as well as one of the movement's earliest-recognized and most consistently-praised artists, along with Arp, Miró, and, of course, Ernst. His imagery at the end of the 1920s was some of the most abstract that he would ever produce, and while this may have played some part in Breton's growing dislike of his work, Masson had also erred (in Breton's eyes) in his response to a questionnaire that Breton had distributed early in 1929, in which he indicated his support of (and illustrations in) a new avant-garde journal that began appearing in April of that year, *Documents*, as well as for having had the audacity to question his place in what he called Breton's "careless" hierarchy of artists in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. He was taken to task for all of this in the *Second Manifesto*.⁵¹ To see an artist who had long been in Breton's favor and who was one of the very few visual artists who seemed to have been able to capitalize on the Surrealist principle of automatism must have given Tanguy pause, as he had, until recently, emulated Masson's style of automatic drawing if not his more established colleague's general approach to abstracting his subjects.

⁵⁰ Polizotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 337-38.

⁵¹ See André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 133-34.

The unrest among both current and former supporters of the movement was evident not only in the attacks leveled by Breton in the *SMS* and the counter-attack of *A Corpse* but also in the departure of over 20 of Breton's followers in 1929.⁵² The loss of so many members can be interpreted as Breton's enforcement of a statement he had made over five years earlier in the first manifesto: "Surrealism does not allow those who devote themselves to it to forsake it whenever they like."⁵³ The penalty, made clear to so many former members of the group, was excommunication. Even though a number of the group's key members had met this fate, Breton had been busy courting new recruits as well, most importantly to Tanguy, René Magritte and Salvador Dalí. These additions, among others, added a new breed of visual artists to the ranks of the movement. Just as the *SMS* and the purging of the ranks that ensued can be interpreted as the end of Surrealism's first period, the arrival of these new members was a signal that Breton intended to open its next decade with renewed vigor, particularly in the visual arts.

The final issue of *LRS* provided ample evidence of this turn of events, for it contained both the provocative *SMS* and numerous advertisements for or illustrations of work by Dalí and Magritte. Indeed, the tone was set just after a few turns of the page, with a full-spread advertisement for the Galerie Goemans' inventory of "peintres surrealistes," who were listed as: Arp / Chirico / Dalí / Ernst / Magritte / Miró / Picabia / Picasso / Tanguy. This was the first time that Dalí's name had appeared as a member of the group, although two of his paintings had been reproduced in Georges Bataille's splinter group periodical *Documents* three months earlier. Not only were Dalí and Magritte's names now included

⁵² See Polizotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 327.

⁵³ See Breton "Manifesto of Surrealism" in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 35.

along with Tanguy's as a part of the group, but their impact was felt in the subsequent pages of that very issue.

Immediately following the conclusion of the *SMS* was large illustration of Dalí's *Les Accomodations des Désirs*. Images of two more paintings by Dalí were included in the issue: an untitled one on page 20 and *Les Plaisirs Illuminés* on page 29. A portion of the screenplay for "Un Chien Andalou," the scandalous movie produced by Dalí and Louis Bunuel that had just recently been greeted with great approval by the Surrealists, was included on pages 34-37, followed by a small illustration of one of Tanguy's most abstract paintings to date, *Tes bougies bougent*. Finally, a fourth Dalí painting, *L'Inspiration*, was reproduced on page 64. Thus, in a single issue, Dalí was granted almost half as many reproductions as it had taken Tanguy three years to compile. Magritte, too, made his presence known with his witty picture-and-caption piece titled "Les mots et les images," which sprawled over almost two full pages.

The sudden arrival and immediate impact of these two new artists is noteworthy. While both were quickly granted the title of "Surrealist," their work *looked* radically different from anything that the movement had yet embraced; their detail-oriented style was eventually dubbed "dream illusionism" and their acceptance signaled a new openness in Breton's taste. The influx of new ideas and new energy at a troubled time provided a welcome distraction from the movement's recent tempestuous period, yet Tanguy certainly would not have appreciated the share of Breton's attention (and of the market)

that Magritte and Dalí had begun to command. Of the two, Dalí is most often discussed in relation to Tanguy and many writers have noted similarities between their work. Some even go so far as to credit Tanguy with influencing the way in which Dalí structured his early landscapes and incorporated biomorphic forms into his compositions.⁵⁴

Transformation was of supreme importance to Dalí, just as it was to Tanguy. It was, in fact, the way in which Tanguy would ultimately separate himself from this hot new Surrealist commodity.

But the subjects upon which each artist focused, the methods through which they transformed these subjects, and ultimately, their artistic goals, were all radically different. Like Tanguy, Dalí's conversion to Surrealism was swift, but unlike his French counterpart Dalí had years of academic training and exhibition experience behind him when he joined the group. Although there is no record of Tanguy's reaction to Dalí's entrance onto the scene, it was likely a thought-provoking, if not troubling, time for him. Not only did Dalí's provocative paintings garner a great deal of attention (as is evidenced by his sudden inclusion and prominent placement in the final issue of *LRS*), but the barren landscapes and the biomorphic forms that populated his earliest Surrealist canvases were fairly obviously influenced by those found in Tanguy's. Many years later, Tanguy made his disdain for the Spaniard clear when he chastised young artists who believed that by changing their style—à la Picasso or Dalí—they were saying something

⁵⁴ See, for example, J.H. Matthews, *Eight Painters: The Surrealist Context* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 4; 67; José Pierre in Schmidt, *Yves Tanguy*, 53; and Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 45; 55.

new.⁵⁵ Additionally, some of Tanguy's colleagues had already begun to collect Dalí's work even before his first one-man exhibition in Paris in November, 1929.⁵⁶ A number of the motifs and settings found in Dalí's paintings between 1927 and 1929 recall those found in Tanguy's work at that point in time, from attempts to blur the boundary between land and sky (seen in the background of *Apparatus and Hand*, 1927, fig. 12) to the use of detached body parts (particularly hands, also seen in *Apparatus and Hand*) to the increasing presence of amorphous forms that bear little more than a passing resemblance to the human body (as in *Baigneuses*, ca. 1928, fig. 13). Dalí, however, did not pursue these directions after the end of the 1920s, for his interest lay *not* in the transformation of the human figure into a new, hybrid, kind of abstract form, but rather in breaking the body down and reducing it to a highly symbolic organism riddled with and distorted by base desires and responsive only to impulses and repressed thoughts.⁵⁷

By the end of the 1920s, despite the growing difference in Dalí's and Tanguy's art (in particular, the latter's increasingly abstracted forms) Tanguy's still had more in common, at least visually, with Dalí's than with that of any other Surrealist. Each consistently painted landscapes. Each used abstracted biomorphic forms to some degree—although Tanguy more so than Dalí—and each aimed for and achieved a high degree of pictorial illusionism in his work, seeking to convince their viewers of the reality of the subject

⁵⁵ "I believe . . . that young artists who think they are saying something new by changing their style or type of paintings—as Dalí and Picasso have done—are monkeys." Yves Tanguy, "Tanguy Flavor," [letter to the editor] *Time* (20 September 1954).

⁵⁶ Paul Eluard already owned *Apparatus and Hand*, 1927, before it was included in the Goemans Gallery exhibition in November of 1929. See Dawn Ades et al., *Dalí's Optical Illusions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 68.

⁵⁷ See Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) and Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications in association with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2004).

matter presented upon their canvases. While other Surrealists, such as Arp and Ernst, experimented with a wide range of media and techniques, including combinations of painting, drawing, collage, assemblage, and sculpture, Tanguy and Dalí both limited themselves primarily to painting and drawing at this point in their careers. Conceptually and thematically, however, their paintings had little in common, as each artist sought to provoke his audience in quite different ways. Both depended upon the transformation of the human form to do so, but while Dalí subjected the body to grotesque distortions and mutilations, Tanguy preferred to metaphorically “veil” the figure, as Breton later described it, shifting the way in which he represented it from a literal outline to an abstracted, ghostly presence, one that was often present but radically simplified and abstracted.

It is important to note that from the end of the 1920s, when his first mature paintings appeared, until the 1940s, during his difficult transition to life in America, Tanguy was working in an environment in which his colleagues—from Dalí and Masson to Magritte and Miró—focused on the human form almost exclusively in their work. As mentioned above, even when at their most abstract, Miró and Arp retained such references. The associations are even clearer in Ernst’s hybrid man-beasts and man-birds, Picasso’s monumental bathers, Dalí’s decrepit odes to the grotesque, and Masson’s shattered women and monstrous war mongers. The later Surrealist adherent Hans Bellmer famously used dolls as human surrogates in his drawings and photographs; Magritte frequently populated his canvases with mysterious human protagonists engaged in

enigmatic symbolic narratives; his countryman Delvaux did the same, although in a more refined, classicizing manner. Man Ray photographed a wide variety of female models throughout his career, in images ranging from striking portraits to abstracted slices of curvaceous flesh. As a core member of a group that, despite its members' differences on many other fronts, displayed a remarkably consistent approach to this topic, it would have been an extremely dangerous career move for Tanguy to have stepped outside of this set of informal boundaries. Considering the work being produced by his colleagues, as well as Breton's published views on the topic, to have departed too far from recognizable subject matter would seem to have put Tanguy's paintings at risk of becoming merely empty abstractions. To have eliminated the human form entirely from his work would have separated Tanguy decisively from his peers.

Transformation, not obliteration, was the key and Tanguy was savvy enough to realize that not only did his paintings have to walk the line *between* figuration and abstraction but that in order to achieve maximum levels of "surreality" it was essential that the human form remain a central motif of his work. To have completely abandoned such subject matter would have almost certainly pushed Tanguy and his art outside the orbit of Breton's acceptance. Instead, as Breton himself hinted in the title for his 1942 essay on the artist, Tanguy chose to veil the human figure—thereby radically transforming it—rather than abandon it altogether.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ André Breton, "What Tanguy Veils and Reveals," originally published in *View* 2, no. 2 (May 1942), 4-7; reprinted in André Breton, *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1946).

In Search of a Subject: Interpretations of Tanguy's Art

Although such instances are rare, a handful of previous writers have discussed the transformation of the human form as one of Tanguy's primary subjects, although briefly, in most cases. It should come as no surprise that Breton, Tanguy's earliest most consistent supporters, was the one of the few to have identified this quality in his work, although, being Breton, he expressed himself in poetic rather than literal terms. In his essay on the artist published in *Yves Tanguy* (1946), he described the forms in Tanguy's paintings as bearing some relation to Faust's mysterious "mothers:" beings who "escape time and place."⁵⁹ Breton wrote that Tanguy was "the first [artist] to have actually seen into the realm of the Mothers. The Mothers—those matrices and molds in which not only our most ancient vertebrate ancestor . . . assured its posterity to us, but in which anything else can be instantly metamorphosed into anything else."⁶⁰ Breton went on to identify (correctly, I believe) the defining characteristic of Tanguy's work as the transformation of the commonplace into something unknowable. Indeed, Tanguy's paintings had the rare (and, to the Surrealists, the highly prized) quality of being able to shatter identity, to break down objects not only by disrupting their exterior appearances but by transforming their internal logic and meaning in the process. It was this metamorphosis—this attempt to transcend literal, perceptible appearances—that dictated their appearance in his paintings. His subjects were therefore both entirely novel and completely unified rather

⁵⁹ Breton, "What Tanguy Veils and Revels," in Breton, *Yves Tanguy*, 81. Even the title of this essay hints at a hidden subject in Tanguy's painting—perhaps one that is "revealed" to those who know how to interpret them correctly. The reference is to a section of the second part of Johann von Wolfgang Goethe's epic tragedy *Faust*, in which the protagonist (Faust) is introduced to the concept of the "Mothers"—formless, primordial beings who reside in a timeless netherworld—by Mephistopheles.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

than a forced composite of extant forms or a distillation or simplification of external appearances.

Perhaps referring to both the unified nature of Tanguy's forms as well as to interpretations that might seek to draw attention away from the relationship between these forms and their roots in the natural world, Breton "cut short any equivocation" by stating that we are not "in the abstract" with these forms, but rather at "*the very heart of the concrete* [author's emphasis]," and that, in fact, Tanguy's intent should be "distinguished from that of preceding painters in that to express life, his starting point is not the insensitive bark of a tree, but its heart, from which sapwood rings spring forth."⁶¹ In the same essay Breton used the concept of transformation to link the inner (mental or subconscious) landscape to Tanguy's forms, describing both as seeming to be constantly in flux and as made up not of "simple, independent, easily recognizable objects but of indistinct markings which melt one into the other."⁶²

Breton suggested links between the human body and the forms in Tanguy's paintings not only by comparing them to the archetypal "Mothers" but additionally, in his section on Tanguy in the slightly earlier *Genèse et perspective artistique du surréalisme* of 1941, by describing them as "object-beings." Such interpretations were absent in his earlier essays about the artist despite the fact that, at this early point in his career, Tanguy was dealing with the human form in a more literal manner.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 82.

Many writers were less willing to ascribe such human qualities to or to seek human subjects in Tanguy's forms than Breton. In one of the earliest published surveys of Surrealism, James Thrall Soby described the forms found in Tanguy's paintings as merely "lyric dream-shapes which writhe and twist with an amusing lack of logic."⁶³ Ascribing a kind of formal elegance to them—and certainly a lifelike quality, Soby does not go so far as to link these qualities to the human figure or see in them any characteristics that would have furthered such a reading. In his brief paragraph about the artist and his work, written for the brochure accompanying Tanguy's first solo exhibition in America in 1935, visionary dealer Howard Putzel avoided interpreting or even commenting on the forms in his paintings, describing them with the blanket term "suggestive images."⁶⁴ Arthur Millier, reviewing Putzel's exhibition, wrote off Tanguy's forms as mere "bones and chicken livers," scraps of a body—likely not even a human one—that appeared to be trying to make the best of their "discouraging" surroundings."⁶⁵ Rather than engaging with them as holistic entities, Millier instead diminished them to little more than animated fragments living organisms. Continuing in this vein, the reviewer J.W.L. called the artist's forms "tropical fish," "delicate bones of frog's legs," and "a dachshund" in 1939; James Johnson Sweeney described them the next year as "curious unrecognizable fungi of the nightmind," while an anonymous reviewer wrote in

⁶³ James Thrall Soby, *After Picasso* (Hartford: Edwin Valentine Mitchell and New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), 104.

⁶⁴ Howard Putzel, *Yves Tanguy: First Exhibition in America* (Los Angeles: Stanley Rose Gallery, November 25 – December 7, 1935), unpaginated exhibition brochure.

⁶⁵ Arthur Millier, "Bones, Livers," *The Art Digest* (15 December 1935), 14.

1946 of Tanguy's "wriggling amoebas."⁶⁶ Even in 1955, in the catalogue for the artist's posthumous retrospective, James Thrall Soby offered little in the way of interpretation when it comes to Tanguy's forms. While he acknowledged the presence of human figures in Tanguy's early paintings from the mid-1920s, he quickly went on to describe the forms in paintings from the late 1920s as having simply "congealed into hard kernels, shaped like puffed grains of cereal," those from the 1930s as simply "enigmatic beacons," and thereafter as just "forms" or "objects."⁶⁷ Each of these approaches to Tanguy's subject matter is certainly descriptive, yet none goes so far as to identify any consistent patterns in Tanguy's subject matter, or, in particular, to pin down the human figure as one of his primary interests.

The type of interpretations outlined in the preceding paragraph, in which Tanguy's forms are linked to various elements from the natural world or simply labeled as eccentric biomorphic shapes, represent one of the two basic approaches that have been taken to describe Tanguy's imagery. The other is exemplified by Georges Hugnet in his article for the *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, where he describes Tanguy's "universe" as a place where "nothing can be recognized in anything;" or by the reviewer with the initials R.F. [probably Rosamund Frost], who, in 1942, called Tanguy's shapes simply "non-

⁶⁶ J.W.L. [James W. Lane], "Plastic sans Symbols: Yves Tanguy," *Art News* 38, no. 11 (December 16, 1939), 12; James Johnson Sweeney, *Yves Tanguy: Paintings, Gouaches, Drawings* (Chicago: The Arts Club of Chicago, February 2-27, 1940), unpag.; anonymous reviewer, "Yves Tanguy," *Art News* (November 1946).

⁶⁷ James Thrall Soby, *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 14-18.

representational.”⁶⁸ This tactic is one that was also promoted by Breton from time to time, who wrote coyly in 1939 that the artist’s paintings “have only yielded their charm: we shall have to wait a while for them to yield their secret, a secret that is . . . well guarded.” His mysterious forms, the Surrealist leader continued, “still await interpretation” and are like “the words of a language which we cannot yet hear.”⁶⁹ Breton reveled in the mysteriousness and suggestiveness of the forms in Tanguy’s art, yet suggested that they were then—and might remain for some time, impenetrable and uninterpretable. James Thrall Soby, who by 1949 was very familiar with Tanguy’s art, also declined to interpret them, writing that over the past twenty years, the artist’s subject matter was simply “not readily identifiable.”⁷⁰ Emily Genauer, reviewing Tanguy’s posthumous retrospective in 1955, continued the critical refusal to interpret his forms, writing that Tanguy painted “isolated and unidentifiable shapes casting long shadows. . . . As he matured, the shapes, although still unidentifiable, lost their early toy-like pettiness and took on sculptural solidity.”⁷¹ Genauer seems to have preferred to simply accept Tanguy’s forms as fascinating, yet ultimately beyond identification or even interpretation.

In his essay for the publication accompanying Tanguy’s first retrospective in the United States since his posthumous exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955, a show at Acquavella Galleries in 1974, John Ashbery took the work of these previous writers one

⁶⁸ Georges Hugnet, “In the Light of Surrealism,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 4, no. 2-3 (November-December 1936), 22.; R.F. [probably Rosamund Frost], “Tanguy: Surrealism’s Purist,” *Art News* (May 15-31, 1942), 21.

⁶⁹ André Breton, “Des Tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste,” *Minotaure*, 3rd series, no. 12-13 (May 1939).

⁷⁰ James Thrall Soby, “Inland in the Subconscious: Yves Tanguy,” *Magazine of Art* 42, no. 1 (January 1949), 3.

⁷¹ Emily Genauer, “Tanguy, Chirico Seen at the Modern Museum,” *New York Times* (11 September 1955).

step further. In fact, Ashberry opened his essay by stating that “one hesitates to discuss [Tanguy’s] work at all. Nor do the paintings themselves invite description or analysis,” an approach that seems to seek the easy way out rather than a deeper engagement with Tanguy’s work.⁷² Tanguy, Ashberry opined, belonged to a class of artists who “would like to believe that their work renders criticism superfluous,” and whose forms are amongst those which, “in Hazlitt’s famous phrase, ‘defy calculation of comparison, and can be defined only by themselves.’”⁷³ Continuing in this vein—and apparently not willing to take on the subtle challenge laid down by his earlier terminology of “*would like to believe*”—Ashberry then wrote that “the inbred, interlocking shapes [in *My Life, White and Black* (1945)] . . . defy any attempt to interpret them.”⁷⁴

In the catalogue for the next major Tanguy exhibition, held in 1982, two essayists initially appeared ready to tackle the challenge posed by Tanguy’s subject matter. Robert Lebel, in his essay, wrote that, among his colleagues, Tanguy “was the only painter who irrevocably eliminated any known sign of conventional symbols from his oeuvre without becoming a slave to the new abstraction. He shows an alternative universe of a more compelling organic and constructed reality, the entrance to which appears, nevertheless, to be closed to us.”⁷⁵ Other than this, despite promising readers [via the title of his essay] that he would be discussing the “enchanted world of Tanguy’s shapes,” Lebel offered little further insight into how one might go about identifying the forms in Tanguy’s work

⁷² John Ashberry, “Tanguy—The Geometer of Dreams,” *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1974), unpag.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, unpag.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, unpag.

⁷⁵ See Robert Lebel, “Die beschwörende Formenwelt Yves Tanguys,” in Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 36.

and certainly did not offer an interpretation of the forms as having much to do with the human body beyond calling some of the shapes in Tanguy's paintings from the 1950s "tall phallic silhouettes."⁷⁶

The essay by Lebel's co-author, Reinhold Hohl, entitled "Tanguy and Surrealist Figuration" seems primed to offer a broad discussion of Tanguy's forms that analyzes their relationship to recognizable elements in the natural world vis a vis Surrealist ideas. In fact, in much of his essay Hohl does discuss various links between Tanguy's work and that of his peers (Arp, in particular) and his predecessors (especially a painting of Lot and his Daughters at the Louvre), focusing in some cases on a few specific paintings and the various ways that each treated the human figure. But he also he spent a prolonged amount of time retracing Tanguy's artistic development, exploring the relationship between Tanguy's paintings of 1926-27 and an early interpretation of one of them by Jung (who wrote about a painting that he owned by the artist as the equivalent of a Rorschach test in which one is forced to rely on a subjective response because ties have been cut with objective worldly resemblances, and thus as filled with archetypal forms and even UFOs).

Hohl notes that in some cases Tanguy's paintings might be reworkings of traditional paintings, citing Tanguy's friend Antonin Artaud's belief that it was inspired by a painting of Lot and his Daughters owned by the Louvre.⁷⁷ Hohl hints throughout about

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-68.

the presence of abstracted human forms in Tanguy's art, not only by linking their compositions to paintings featuring specific narratives, but also through the language that he uses to describe Tanguy's paintings, for example, noticing "characters" in "landscapes" and writing about Tanguy's biomorphs as "individuals alone or in groups" and which "come across like the unfortunate humans from Sodom in flight or turned into pillars of salt, or like the group of Lot and his daughters now turned into a stone monument."⁷⁸ The remainder of the essay is devoted to Tanguy's few sculptural objects and the relationship of the forms in his paintings to sculptural objects by other Surrealists, particularly Arp.⁷⁹ However, despite the fact that Arp's sculptures, by virtue of their titles and statements by the artist himself consistently relate back to specific objects in the natural world and often to the human figure, whether whole or fragmented, Hohl offers no such reading of Tanguy's forms.

Elizabeth McCausland was one of the first American critics to posit a link between the forms in Tanguy's paintings and the human body. Reviewing Tanguy's exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1939, she noted his "inanimate objects or *dissecta membra* of human forms" and "bloodless arms and legs" that have "never lived with human organs, functions, sensations." She went on, however, to state that "these bloodless arms and legs have not suffered the agony of dismemberment, because they have never lived with human organs, functions, sensations . . . these are parched, severe fossils of futility."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁹ For connections between the artists' work, Hohl cites Stephanie Poley, "Hans Arp: Die Formensprache im Plastische Werk (Stuttgart, 1955).

⁸⁰ Elizabeth McCausland, "Work of Yves Tanguy," *Parnassus* 11, no. 8 (December 1939), 25.

She therefore also implied that although the forms seen in Tanguy's paintings might relate to the human body in an abstract way, the primary subjects were not themselves meant to be interpreted as corporeal.

In a similar vein, José Pierre, without expanding or elaborating upon the description, consistently referred to Tanguy's forms as "object beings" in his essay in the catalogue accompanying the 1982 exhibition of the artist's work.⁸¹ Indeed, Pierre, wrote that, even almost thirty years after the artist's death, "the problem of interpretation remains. If we are unwilling to be content with a few suitable designations (such as pebbles, skeletons, and menhirs) that spare us further interpretation, the problem is as far from a solution today as it was in the year 1939, when Breton, himself, said that he 'was convinced that the elements of Tanguy's painting which defy interpretation and are consequently hard to keep in mind, will become clearly understood in relation to the future development of the mind.'"⁸²

The critic Margaret Breuning made two interesting observations that suggest that she, too saw some figural references in Tanguy's paintings. In a review of his 1945 exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, she first wrote that, "many of his forms suggest Chirico's work."⁸³ The only types of *forms* in Tanguy's paintings that can easily be linked to those in de Chirico's paintings, particularly those included in his 1945 Matisse exhibition, were ones that might relate to de Chirico's mannequins—especially the towering ones

⁸¹ See José Pierre, "Der surrealistische Maler par excellence," in Schmidt et al, *Yves Tanguy*, 42-61.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸³ Margaret Bruening, "Surrealist Disillusion of Yves Tanguy," *The Art Digest* (May 15, 1945), 9.

composed of multiple parts, found in paintings like *The Disquieting Muses* (1917, fig.14), *Hector and Andromache* (1917), or *The Torment of the Poet* (which Tanguy and Sage owned). Additionally, Bruening went on to describe monumental, head-shaped conglomeration of forms in Tanguy's *Ma Vie, Blanche et Noire* (1945, fig. 15) as "reminiscent of those in some of Picasso's bony structures."⁸⁴ All of the "bony structures" in Picasso's work to which Breuning could possibly be referring (one thinks immediately of his forms in his paintings completed between the late 1920s and early 1930s) are directly tied to and have been consistently interpreted as abstractions of the human form. They appear in such paintings as *Abstraction, with Cloudy Blue Sky* (1930, fig. 16) and *Seated Bather* (1930). Finally, although John Ashbery argued against interpreting the forms in Tanguy's paintings in general, as discussed above, he did occasionally describe them in figural terms that suggested their relationship with the human body in his 1974 essay. For example, he wrote of a "flesh mass" in *Twice*; of a "smaller figure" in *Slowly toward the North* (1942), and of "parahuman beings" in *The Hunted Sky* (1951).⁸⁵

One of the most apt terms used to describe Tanguy's subjects appears to have been first introduced into the literature about him in 1950, when Thomas B. Hess referred to them "personages" in a review in *Art News*.⁸⁶ The term is picked up again a decade later when the reviewer S.T. [Sidney Tillim] wrote that it was "interesting to observe how much an artist like Noguchi [who a.) stubbornly denied being influenced by Tanguy and b.) whose

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁵ Ashbery, "Tanguy—The Geometer of Dreams," unpag.

⁸⁶ See T.B.H. [Thomas B. Hess], "Yves Tanguy," *Art News* (April 1950), 43.

work has *consistently* been read as relating to the human figure] borrowed from Tanguy's surrealistically-charged primitivism which presented rock-form 'personages' . . . in infinite landscapes."⁸⁷ More than two decades after he first reviewed Tanguy's work, Hess described his forms again as "personages" in a review of Tanguy's exhibition at Acquavella Galleries.⁸⁸ Here he insightfully noted that in Tanguy's American paintings, "there is usually a male, with a mast or lance, appropriately stiff, and a female, with suitably furnished interior emptiness. The subject matter became increasingly personal, even autobiographical: a man and a woman huddled together in a menacing landscape."⁸⁹

A similar type of interpretation can be found in an entry for one of the artist's drawings in the collection catalogue produced by the Princeton University Art Museum, published within two years of Hess's review of the Acquavella show. Its author, writing about a drawing from 1949, notes that although "it is dangerous to attempt to label or define Tanguy's images since they were subconsciously conceived by the artist to be subjectively perceived by the viewer . . . one interpretation may help to trigger further responses on the part of subsequent spectators who enter this personal realm." By noting the "danger" of assigning meaning to Tanguy's subject matter, yet proceeding to do so in the service of "triggering further responses" from the viewer the author of the entry has cleverly sidestepped the argument that Tanguy's images should not be questioned because of their poetic link to the subconscious: the line of defense softly used to deflect

⁸⁷ S.T. [Sidney Tillim], "Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy," *Arts* (January 1960), 49. For interpretations of Noguchi's work, see, for example, Amy Lyford, "Noguchi, Sculptural Abstraction, and the Politics of Japanese American Internment," *Art Bulletin* LXXXV, no. 1 (March 2003), 137-51.

⁸⁸ Thomas B. Hess, "It's a Small World," *New York* (2 December 1974), 80.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

more penetrating analyses of Tanguy's work. This accomplished, the author (identified by the initials H.D.) goes on to argue—in a description that parallels Hess's—that “one might see the skeletal elements on the right as roughly massed into two vertical forms that may be a male and female pair. The male is the bulkier form on the right, while his female counterpart is identified by the abstracted breasts of the television-screen-like crayon passage on her chest. This noble couple appear to combine their efforts in tentatively thrusting a long straight element towards the ominous black box that has invaded their territory. It is an apprehensive, inquisitive gesture.”⁹⁰

While Hess's suggestion that that Tanguy's paintings have become “autobiographical” is certainly one that merits future consideration, his interpretation—as well as that of the author from the Princeton University collection catalogue—of certain forms in the artist's oeuvre as having human attributes and thus potentially identifiable as “personages,” is, I believe, entirely accurate. Such thinking leads us in the proper direction for interpreting many of the forms in Tanguy's paintings as relating to the human figure, on occasion, perhaps, as reality-based illustrations of specific people, but more often as generalized visions of the body transformed, morphed, indeed, merely *suggested*.

Finding the Figure: From Paper to Canvas

The theme of the unification of the world of man and the world of nature runs throughout Surrealist art, from Meret Oppenheim's famous fur-lined teacup (uniting a natural

⁹⁰ Peter J. Morrin, ed. and David W. Steadman, intr., *Nineteenth and Twentieth Century French Drawings from the Art Museum, Princeton University, an Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 86.

material, fur, with a man-made utilitarian object, a teacup) to André Masson's drawings and paintings that intermingle female bodies with birds and fish to Max Ernst's composite surrogate figure "Lop-Lop," which combines a human form with an avian one. The drive towards unification of disparate entities and the interest in dissolving mental and physical boundaries in order to create a provocative new order falls in line with Breton's passionate and oft-quoted statement from the *SMS*: "Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point."⁹¹ Breton, even more succinctly, is also known to have frequently quoted a statement by Marx as one of his favorites: "Transform the world."⁹² Tanguy, as a new member of the group and as an artist with few professional connections (or career choices, for that matter) outside of it in the mid-1920s, appears to have done all that he could to steer his paintings in the theoretical direction so clearly indicated by his mentor.

But the real evidence, outside of the overwhelming contextual support for Tanguy's continued use of the human form as the subject of many of his paintings, (found in Breton's writings and in the work of the artists that he endorsed), must come from Tanguy's work itself. One of the first places in which Tanguy's interest in the transformation of the human form can be traced is in his drawings. Although best known

⁹¹ André Breton, "Second Manifeste du Surréalisme," *La Révolution Surréaliste* no. 12 (15 December 1929), 1.

⁹² See Pollizotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 319.

for his paintings, Tanguy drew avidly throughout his career. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the act of drawing was, in fact, an integral part of his creative process when making a painting.⁹³ It is no coincidence that the style the artist used in his drawings—most often delineating his forms with a single, uninterrupted line—is also characteristic of the forms in his paintings, making his works on paper an appropriate point of departure. At virtually every turn during the twenty-five year period that defines his mature body of work, drawings that feature clear references to the human form—whether whole or in parts—can be found. Once one knows to look for the “clues” in the drawings, teasing out figural references in Tanguy’s paintings becomes a much easier task; a task that will conclude this chapter.

It is possible to trace Tanguy’s fascination with the transformation of the human figure into forms of his own invention, which he then situated in fantastic landscapes, to the opening years of his career. An early example of this tendency can be seen in an untitled drawing from 1926 (fig. 17). Here, the central focus of the composition is a plateau set in the middle ground of a mountainous landscape. The initial impression of this form as a geological feature quickly shifts, however, upon closer examination. What seems at first glance at to be simply an odd-looking protrusion on its right hand side turns out to be a head, complete with eyes, hair, and an indication of a small upturned nose. Once we recognize these features, the reading of the form as a mere rocky plateau is confounded and it begins to take on simultaneous references to both a prostrate figure and a coffin, or

⁹³ The most recent study of Tanguy’s graphic work is Beate Wolf, “Genesis of a New World: The Graphic Art of Yves Tanguy,” in von Maur et al, *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 135-73.

perhaps some sort of hybrid of the two. In many other drawings by Tanguy from 1926 and 1927, ghostly figures and detached body parts float amidst suggestions of landscapes and apparently spontaneous (or automatic) graphic markings. Hands, one of the most expressive parts of the body, as well as the part that perhaps lends itself most easily to biomorphic transformation, recur with great frequency in both drawings and paintings (see fig. 5, for example, for a painting featuring a detached hand, and fig. 18 for an untitled drawing featuring one as well).⁹⁴

Tanguy experimented with a variety of two-dimensional media (including painting, drawing, and collage) between 1926 and 1928, searching for his own voice and mapping out his own formal vocabulary. Some of his drawings from this period reflect his exploration of automatic processes while others feature carefully composed renderings of objects and figures. Occasionally the drawings relate closely to paintings, but for the most part, shared motifs and a sense of free experimentation are the characteristics that unite his work in both mediums rather than a sketch-to-final product relationship. A drawing from 1926 (fig. 19) reveals that even at this formative point in his career Tanguy was actively engaged with the problem of how to depict the human figure in way that was properly aligned with Breton's ideas about the importance of transformation. It features variations on a sketchily outlined humanoid figure, which also appears in paintings from 1926 and 1927. It is easily recognizable because of the linear markings emanating from

⁹⁴ See also the hand-colored etching that Tanguy produced as plate 2 for Benjamin Péret's book *Dormir, Dormir dans les pierres* (Paris 1927). Reproduced in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 148. Here, additional emphasis is placed on the pile of hands in the foreground through the artist's decision to paint them shades of red and pink.

either side of its head. In the drawing one of these forms emerges from the ground, to the right of a hand-like formation and a conical tower, while another floats upside-down in the upper right hand area of the composition. The simplified form on the lower left lacks the arms and legs of its two companions but emits lines from one side of its “head” in a fashion similar to those of its peers. There is a close relationship between these forms and the two figures in the painting *Et Voilà!* from the following year (see fig. 20), which also are delineated in the shape of a splayed human figure and which also feature lines emanating from their heads.⁹⁵

The full force of Tanguy’s ability to imaginatively transform the human figure is on display in *Composition érotique* from 1928 (fig. 21). In this distinctive drawing, a deformed seated figure is the sole subject. While it still bears a tangential relationship to a human figure, it has been radically altered, with a phallic nose whose hanging testicles form a kind of vertical mouth, and an equally phallic left foot. Although the figure also bears a single emaciated breast and a heeled shoe on its right foot, it is difficult to determine either its sex or its purpose as it sits propped up by its arm staring into the distance. It should also be noted that by this point in time Tanguy frequently participated in the Surrealist game of “exquisite corpse,” which by the very nature and concept of its process encouraged him to think not only a figural manner but one in which unexpected combinations and transformations were expected and encouraged.

⁹⁵ One can speculate that these lines are the graphic symbol for some sort of sensory experience—perhaps sight or hearing. These markings appear intermittently throughout Tanguy’s oeuvre, and evolve into what are sometimes called “lines of force” (a term borrowed from Italian futurism) by some scholars.

As Tanguy began to move away from clearly recognizable depictions of the human figure and into the much longer portion of his career during which it purportedly disappeared, it is his drawings that can help us begin to tell a different story.⁹⁶ In a series from 1928—the very moment when the figure as a subject was supposed to be disappearing from Tanguy’s paintings—references to it are clear, if not arguably the dominant focus. These drawings, which were given by Tanguy to his friend Jean Aply, reflect the style in which he was painting at the time. The drawings are somewhat atypical for Tanguy, for they do include rudimentary attempts at modeling, as well as a variety of marks, not just the flowing lines of uniform width that typify the majority of his work in this medium. However, what is most important to note for the purpose of this chapter is that three of the four drawings contain clear references to the human body, ranging from isolated fragments to fully-realized abstractions of it in its entirety.

In one (fig. 22), an ovoid form dominates the composition. Although at first glance it has the appearance of a rock, or perhaps some sort of jellyfish with trailing tendrils, a closer glance reveals an eye and an eyebrow in its upper central region, giving the impression of a floating head seen in profile. The tendrils are reminiscent of either long hair or a mustache, depending on which way one interprets the “head” to be facing, while the small shape to its right can be read as a detached set of lips. In two of the other drawings, Tanguy also included abstracted figures that relate to the types found in his paintings of

⁹⁶ “Disappearance of the subject” as described by Karin von Maur, citing Peter Bürger, *Das Verschwinden des Subjekts. Eine Geschichte der Subjektivität von Montaigne bis Barthes*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1998) in “Yves Tanguy or ‘The Certainty of the Never Seen,’” in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 50 and 132, and fn. 55.

the period.⁹⁷ In the second (fig. 23), the form is filled with vein-like lines (picked out in red and blue, which links it to the figure in his painting *Le Phare* of that year), while in a third (fig. 24), the figure is delineated with a simple outline, with the head and shoulders being the most prominent features. The body is simplified and abstracted but still recognizable due to its proportions and contours: a characteristic that persists throughout Tanguy's oeuvre.

Moving into the 1930s (and transitioning through one of Surrealism's periods of greatest upheaval) Tanguy's interest in abstracting the human body continued and deepened.

Tanguy, in one of his rare published texts (which took the form of captioned drawings), now labeled its remains as simply "objects." The piece in question, *Poids et Couleurs*, was published in 1931 in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, the group's follow-up periodical to *La Révolution surréaliste*, which ran from 1930-33 (fig. 25). In this cleverly illustrated text, which was one of a series of pieces by artists investigating the Surrealist object, Tanguy sketched out six forms, each of which was described by a short caption.⁹⁸

The first of the five objects is described as partly a hand and partly an object that can held by a hand. The second form bears a single finger, complete with nail, and the third seems to be a hand as well, although one with three deformed fingers (with nails—as described

⁹⁷ The flag-like forms on vertical sticks, in particular, relate to paintings such as *Title Unknown* (Matisse 41) from 1927 and *Title Unknown* from 1928 (Matisse 68). The form filled with veins can be linked to the clear outline of a human figure in *La Phare* from 1926 (Matisse 11).

⁹⁸ Other articles focusing on this subject in this issue (no. 3, December 1931) included Salvador Dalí's "Objets surréalistes," Alberto Giacometti's "Objets mobiles et muets," and André Breton's "L'objet fantôme."

by Tanguy), one nub, and a detached finger (with a nail) to its right. The fourth form bears some relation to earlier humanoid forms that populate various paintings and drawings by the artist, with a tassel of “hair” protruding from its rounded head, and a seated posture, similar to that of the form in the erotic composition of 1928. Although the fifth object hardly looks animate, Tanguy describes it as having “hair” on its top. Tanguy also describes what each object is “made” of and the decidedly non-flesh-and-bone adjectives and ingredients (transparent, pearly celluloid; painted plaster; a ball of lead; mercury; molded cotton; soft wax imitating flesh; and chalk) hint at the transformations and combinations of which his imagination was capable. Tanguy’s descriptions also provide a rare clue as to how one might begin to interpret both the forms in his paintings and the substances of which they are composed.

A second contribution to a Surrealist publication during the 1930s, this one for the periodical *Documents*, reveals the artist’s continued interest in transformation and deformation of the human figure as a unified whole rather than a fragmented entity. “En marge des mots croisés” appeared in *Documents* 34, no 1, from June of 1934 (fig. 26). It consisted of Tanguy’s appropriation of three dictionary pages upon which he drew freely and inventively, taking as his point of departure the heads of famous historical figures. On the first page of these humorous mutations, one of these figures sprouts stilt-like legs with hairy kneecaps; another turns into a mermaid, complete with breasts; and a third is elongated, given a pair of feet with amputated toes, and appears to be walking the fourth, who has been transformed into a hairy doglike creature. With the exception of the figure on the upper right hand side of the second page, who squeezes the head of the man below

him, the changes on the second page are less drastic. But on the third page, one figure is given deformed hands and feet, another seems to be growing out of a plant-like stalk and the one on the lower left of the page has lost the lower half of his body and pushes himself along on a small cart. Stretched, truncated, or otherwise deformed, the human body is constantly at the bidding of Tanguy's fertile imagination. His use of the body as a starting point for the imaginative transformations that take place in "En marge des mots croisés" suggests that it might be fruitful to venture deeper into the decade to investigate whether or not he continued to draw upon it as a source of inspiration.

On the basis of the way in which Tanguy incorporated the human figure into his drawings in his contribution to the special issue of *Documents* it is possible to interpret two untitled drawings from 1934 and 1935 as continuations of this theme (figs. 27 and 28). Both feature clusters of forms on plateaus, one of which is anchored to the ground while the other floats freely in the air. Both also appear to include two forms with proportions and characteristics roughly equivalent to those of the human figure. In the earlier drawing, one can go so far as to call the figure on the left "male," on account of its division at the "waist" and the separation of its "legs" below, and the figure on the right, which seems to be wearing a stylized dress and is defined by a buxom hourglass figure, "female." In the later drawing, the level of transformation is greater, but one can make out a birdlike head with a blank eye socket and a suggestion of two stubby arms that define the smaller figure on the right. On the left, there is a suggestion of a set of legs shaped like an inverted "U", topped by a two-piece torso with a head (also featuring an eye socket)

perched above. As is the case with the relationship between earlier drawings and paintings, these forms are echoed in Tanguy's oils of the period, although in his works on paper, especially from this point on, the forms tend to be more singular and individually-defined rather than placed in groups or scattered across a foreground space.

While it may seem that the interpretation of the two drawings in the preceding paragraph pushes boundaries of what one might be willing to label "human" or "figural," an analysis of three works on paper (all of which include some form of collage, making them quite rare in Tanguy's oeuvre) from the late 1930s will help to solidify my claims that the motif persisted during this decade before moving on to discuss works from the 1940s. One of the most unique things about these three works is the fact that interpretation of each of them is aided by known titles (also a rarity among Tanguy's works on paper)—*Le Marchand de sable* (1937); *Petit personnage familier* (1938); and *Portrait of P.G. [Peggy Guggenheim]* (1938) (figs. 29-31)—each of which suggests that the drawing it accompanies will feature a single figure. Such titles function here as they do in the work of Tanguy's peers, especially that of Arp and Masson. In each case, the title serves adds a (much needed) level of clarity as the viewer strives decipher the painting's abstracted subject matter.

Le Marchand de sable, which was formerly owned by André Breton, is a collage of cardboard and feathers mounted to a plaster backing. The eponymous "sandman" is the

sole element of the composition.⁹⁹ Vertically oriented, like a standing human figure (and with a rough texture that seems to refer to the “sand” of its title), it has a distinct head with a lighter band suggesting a furrowed brow, (from either side of which sprout the linear bursts that appeared first accompanying figures in Tanguy’s oeuvre in 1926), a thin neck, and a broader torso beneath. A tangle of shapes in this midsection suggests bent arms. Below is a rippling form that resembles a skirt, which floats above two dainty feet.

Petit personnage familier, executed the following year is a freestanding collage or miniature paper sculpture. Like the form in *Le Marchand de Sable*, this “personage” is vertically oriented; it appears to represent two figures (or even possibly three): one to the right, another, smaller one to the upper left, and an animal-like shape on the lower left. The figure on the right appears to have a head, complete with hollow eye socket, a torso with a painted suggestion of a breast and one arm extended to the left and the other hanging down to the right. This torso sits atop an undulating skirt-like form, replete with ripples similar to those found in *Le Marchand de Sable*. One might speculate that this “personage” is one who had recently become “familiar” with Tanguy in a very intimate way: Peggy Guggenheim; their intimate “familiarity” may well be suggested by the figure’s rather prominently-placed breast.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ The title of the piece also suggests its various layers of potential meaning. We can interpret the reference as being not only to the fictional character that brings us our dreams, but also to the short story by E.T.A. Hoffman, which was the basis for one of Sigmund Freud’s well-known analyses.

¹⁰⁰ Not only had Guggenheim given Tanguy a rare solo exhibition at her new gallery, Guggenheim Jeune, that year, but that two had apparently also had a brief affair. See, for example, Anton Gill, *Art Lover: A Biography of Peggy Guggenheim* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 197-203.

Another side of Guggenheim may be suggested by the more clearly titled *Portrait of P.G.* from the same year: a line drawing that incorporates a collaged feather. Again, Tanguy has oriented his personage vertically, with a head topped by ovoid eye stalks, perched above a bulbous nose (Guggenheim's was well-known) and the suggestion of a mouth with holes rather than teeth.¹⁰¹ This monstrous "head" sits above a curvy torso that tops a somewhat more restrained pleated "skirt." Guggenheim herself remembered that the drawing was likely a portrait of her, writing that "Tanguy came to visit me in our country house in Sussex and did lovely drawings. One of them so much resembled me that I made him give it to me. It had a little feather in place of a tail, and eyes that looked like the china eyes of a doll when its head was broken and you can see inside."¹⁰²

Three more works on paper, dating from 1942-43, bear similarities to the three collages from 1937-38 and indicate that Tanguy continued to mine the human figure for subject matter after his arrival in America in November 1939. Two of the three are titled: *Le Grand nacre au seuil de la nuit* ("The Great pearly being at the threshold of the night") and *La Grande mue* ("The Great transformation"); while the third is untitled but known to have been executed for the cover of *Minotaur* magazine (figs. 32-34). The titles of the first two and the context for the third again point towards clear figural interpretations. One can pick out the "great pearly being" easily on the left of the composition of the first drawing, with a large "head" and wild hair (the suggestion of a prominent breast indicates

¹⁰¹ Another drawing featuring a bulbous "nose" (like Guggenheim's own, which was well-known) was executed in 1938, and bears the inscription "Petersfield"—the town where Peggy lived in a cottage called "Yew Tree." See Gill, *Art Lover*, 158.

¹⁰² Guggenheim, *Confessions*, 58.

a female figure, despite the masculine derivation of the name), which leans back to play a fantastic harp. The title of the second drawing hints at the process inherent in its realization: mutation, transformation, change. The central form is the most recognizably figural element in the composition, with three core parts that seem to represent a head, torso, and legs. A fourth piece on the lower left appears to be the lower half of a leg, kicking back spiritedly, while a cross-piece just above the figure's "waist" may stand in for its arms. The "arm" to the viewer's right appears to clutch a form that resembles an inverted umbrella, perhaps a reference to one of the most famous Surrealist "mutations"—the one produced by the union of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table. The most representational of the three is the design for the cover of *Minotaure*, although an issue featuring this drawing was never produced. The "minotaur" is easy to discern, a caped figure with prominent horns, a wide-open eye and full lips. It soars through the air, appearing to carry off a small flesh colored being underneath at its side and another clutched in its right hand. While the components that make up the minotaur have less to do with those in Tanguy's paintings than those in most of the other works previously discussed, the gouache does clearly reveal his continued interest in depicting and transforming the human form, as well as his continued involvement with both Surrealist projects and ideas—the investigation of myths, for example, was a popular topic of discussion among the group at this time—while in America.

Tanguy continued to use this single-figure motif, although less frequently, in his drawings from the mid- and late-1940s. It appears in both an untitled drawing from 1943 and in his 1945 cover for the book *Poems for Painters* by Charles Henri Ford (figs. 35,

36). After 1945, however, Tanguy's drawings often feature double- (or even triple-) rather than single-personage compositions. The earliest drawing featuring this motif—typically two isolated forms against an otherwise empty space—appears in 1944 (fig. 37), and is followed by at least one example from 1945 with three figures (perhaps suggesting parental beings with a small “child” between them, fig. 38), three from 1947 (one of the three: fig. 39), one from 1949 (fig. 40—titled, probably posthumously, *Yves Tanguy et Kay Sage dans leur studio*), one from ca. 1952 (fig. 41) and a final drawing from 1953 (fig. 42).¹⁰³

It is not surprising that Tanguy turned to creating double-figure compositions at a time when he and his new wife Kay Sage had just moved from New York into the Connecticut countryside and were thus spending increasing amounts of time as a couple in the comparative isolation of the small town of Woodbury. (In one of the drawings, figure 37, the two figures are connected by linked, outstretched arms, while in a second, figure 40, the couple referenced in the title is easily discernable, each figure situated before a blank canvas.) Compounding the physical isolation of Woodbury was the fact that Tanguy spoke little English and thus relied on his partner in ways that he had not had to in France or even in New York when he saw his compatriots more regularly. Finally, by the mid-1940s many of Tanguy's friends that had come to America during World War II had

¹⁰³ The reading of the drawing from ca. 1953 as referencing two humanoid forms was suggested to the author by Pavel Zoubok. This reading was obscured by the recent presentation of the drawing in a horizontal rather than a vertical format. However, Mr. Zoubok informed the author in a telephone conversation of April 2004 that the drawing was originally hinged in a way that indicated an original orientation rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise from the way in which it was reproduced on page 90 of the 2002 Galerie Malingue exhibition catalogue. When oriented horizontally, two distinct “humanoid” forms become readily apparent.

returned to Europe.¹⁰⁴ As will be discussed shortly, he included similar pairs of figures in his paintings from this period as well.

The final drawing from 1953 contains one of the most clearly legible depictions of the human form of the entire series. On the left, a female figure (again, identified by the hourglass shape and skirt-like lower half) reaches towards the (male) figure on the right, holding a black triangular shape in front of her. The figure on the right reaches forward, as if to take the shape (or is it a void?) from her. The emotional states of these figures are hard to read: both have stiff, vertical postures. The figure on the left has its “head” tilted slightly back, with a slight suggestion of a smile indicated by an upturned “lip.” The figure on the right seems to lean a little bit forward, humbly receiving the black shape offered by its partner.

During the mid-1940s, Tanguy also embarked on a series of gouaches that revealed his continued interest in the human form. One way in which these gouaches can be understood, due to the nature of their medium, is as a link between the artist’s drawings and paintings. While, like a drawing, a gouache is typically executed on paper, like a painting, it is created with a brush rather than a pencil or a pen. Because it is made with opaque watercolor paint it also possesses some of the fluid qualities of an oil. But it is also important to note that like a drawing, a gouache is very difficult to change once the

¹⁰⁴ The appearance of compositions featuring two prominent “personages” dates to a series of paintings from 1942. See the author’s MA thesis *Double Solitaire: Kay Sage’s Influence on Yves Tanguy’s Art* (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1998) and essay in Jonathan Stuhlman and Stephen Robeson Miller, *Double Solitaire: The Surreal Worlds of Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy* (Katonah, NY and Charlotte, NC: The Katonah Museum of Art and The Mint Museum, 2011), for further discussion of these paintings.

mark has been made: the medium dries quickly, and there is little room for error. Thus, a gouache can be considered a sort of intermediary medium. Two of the works discussed above—the sketch for the cover of *Minotaure* and *La Grande mue*, were both executed in gouache, as were a series of paintings completed between 1943 and 1947 that help connect the subjects of Tanguy’s works on paper to his oils on canvas.

These latter gouaches from the mid-1940s exist in both single- and double-personage examples, similar to the artist’s drawings from the period. One of the earliest was completed in 1943 and features an abstracted female form on the right (identified by the slight breast-like protrusions on its torso and the “skirt” above its splayed legs) and a more abstracted male form on the left, which features the remnants of the graphic bursts of energy of Tanguy’s 1926-27 male figures emanating from the right side of its “head” (fig. 43). The interpretation of the lower part of the former form’s body as a skirt is supported by a more emphatic use of a similar kind of “skirt” in a gouache from 1946 simply titled *La Jupe* (fig. 44). Many of Tanguy’s gouaches feature a single personage, isolated against a field of decalcomania, and are untitled.¹⁰⁵ However, a few examples featuring titles are known and in almost every case, the title points toward a figural interpretation.

The first of these (after *La Grande mue*) is titled *Les Causeurs* (1945, fig. 45). It features two distinct personages, as the plural title suggests, presented against a dark field. Both

¹⁰⁵ A popular automatic Surrealist technique, in which the support is pressed against a surface covered in wet paint, and the pulled away, leaving a random field of paint over which Tanguy then painted his forms.

forms are rendered quite abstractly, but the title, along with their vertical orientation and the head-, arm-, and leg-like protrusions, combine to promote a figurative interpretation of the forms. A year later, Tanguy painted a slightly more identifiable “personage,” which he called *La Grue des sables* (a title that has been alternately interpreted as “The Prostitute of the Sands” and “Sandpiper,” fig. 46). Here, the figure strides forward atop two solid looking legs, its top half covered by a shirt-shaped form which sprouts two pointy arms and which is topped by a rippling head. It seems to be supporting a smaller, abstracted form on its shoulder, which stands on two thin legs and sits upon its bearer’s head. While the narrative is somewhat enigmatic, the title of the piece and the structure of the form(s) both point to a figural interpretation. One final gouache from 1947 rounds out the argument for such readings of certain works in this medium: *Elle fut douce* (fig. 47).¹⁰⁶ Here, the two personages again float against a field of decalcomania, the more feminine looking of the two—the “She” of the title’s “She was sweet”—is found on the right, executed in tones of pink and yellow and supporting a sort of sail or shawl behind her. A thin “male” figure on the left is connected to its partner visually by a section of white pigment between the two forms as well as by a small “arm” that reaches towards its companion, a gestural detail found in a number of Tanguy’s multi-personage compositions that links them to a narrative tradition and adds weight to the interpretation of them as rooted in the human figure.

¹⁰⁶ Another gouache bearing a similar title and featuring a similar form from this period is *La Dame de onze heures* (1947).

Following the evidence provided by both the contours and proportions of Tanguy's forms and the titles of his works on paper that the abstracted human form is one of the primary subjects of Tanguy's art, it is a logical step to look for its continued presence in his paintings as well. And indeed, with some frequency from the late 1920s onward, one can find in Tanguy's oeuvre both titles of paintings and forms within paintings that relate closely to those seen in the works on paper discussed above.

Before beginning to examine Tanguy's paintings, however, it is important to deal with the issue of how literally to take not only the titles of the paintings, but even the degree to which one can argue that any form in Tanguy's art relates to the human figure. As far as titles are concerned one must, I believe, interpret them in the poetic spirit of Surrealism. In Tanguy's case they function in a manner similar to those used by an artist like Jean Arp, although Tanguy's are often less literal. They are suggestions, or perhaps it is better call them *suggestive*; they serve as signposts or markers, but the specific writing upon these guides to the subconscious is often difficult to interpret. It is really the *direction* in which they point us, the very openness of their meaning, *not* their literal meaning, which is the key to understanding their relationship to Tanguy's paintings. The same holds true when seeking the human figure amidst Tanguy's forms. Ultimately what I wish to suggest is not that one can pick out realistically depicted figures in all of Tanguy's mature paintings, but rather that there are certain forms in a significant number of these works that refer directly to, or at minimum, suggest, the human figure, because of their proportions and their general composition. The importance of the role played by this

subject, and the consistency with which it appeared across Tanguy's oeuvre, has been consistently overlooked to date. Its presence, and, moreover, the ways in which it has been manipulated, can be interpreted as the artist's desire to participate in the group's engagement with the concept of transformation and the unexpected surprises produced by the reconciliation of real and subconscious imagery as well as an emphasis on the narrative function of art that the interaction of such protagonists suggests.

As discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter, there are a number of Tanguy's paintings from 1925-27 in which painted or collaged figures that one may call unequivocally "human" are readily apparent. Often, the titles of such paintings support or enhance this interpretation, i.e., *Le Testament de Jacques Prevert* (1925), *Les Forains* (The Carnival Men, 1926), or *La Fille aux cheveux rouges* (The Girl with Red Hair, 1926). Even a brief examination of Tanguy's paintings from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s reveals that the artist consistently titled his paintings with language containing clear figural references, suggesting at least a poetic relationship between the titles and the forms therein. In the 1930s one finds *Les Mots de terre (l'homme)* (Clods of Earth [The Man], 1930), *Les Nouveaux nomades* (The New Nomads, 1934), and *Luc le bonimenteur* (Luc the Barker, 1936); in the 1940s Tanguy introduces his viewers to *Le Témoin* (The Witness, 1940); *Les Cinq étrangers* (The Five Strangers, 1941), *Dame à l'absence* (Lady in Waiting or Absent Lady, 1942), and *Le Pourvoyeur* (The Provider, 1945); and in the 1950s the viewer encounters *Les Transparents* (The Transparent Ones, 1951) and *Les Saltimbanques* (The Tumblers, 1954). In addition to these distinctly named "characters,"

there are other sorts of references to two-person interactions, such as *Je Vous Attends* (I Await You, 1934) and *Je ne vois qu'elle* (I Do Not See Anyone but Her, 1951).

Such titles alone would certainly lead a viewer to search for the named subject in the corresponding paintings, but the final proof must come in the forms found in both these and other, often untitled, works. While it is possible to interpret Tanguy's gouaches—many of which, as we have seen, are figural in nature—as a link between his drawings and his oils, there is another work, a oil and collage from 1934-35, that may serve as an even better pathway to a figural interpretation of Tanguy's forms (fig. 48). In this untitled work, a photograph of a female figure (possibly the wife of Tony Bouillet, who acquired it directly from the artist) has been incorporated into one of Tanguy's signature horizonless landscapes. She reclines on the right hand side of the composition, cradled in the “arms” of a painted form behind her. By freely and seamlessly melding this reclining figure into his composition, Tanguy created one of his most literal depictions of a collision between the exterior world, as represented by the photograph, and the interior world, into which the photograph has been inserted, opening the door for similar readings of subsequent paintings.

In fact, even in canvases from the early 1930s, remnants of the wraiths that populated works from 1926-27 can be found. The most obvious of these appears in an untitled oil from 1931, in the form of the composition's tallest figure, which is located just to the right of the composition's center (fig. 49). With its ghostly body, topped by a suggestion

of a head and two waving “arms,” this being leans slightly towards the ovoid form at the center of the composition, which pulses with a sort of energy made visible by the soft white bands that surround it. To the left is a smaller transparent form, whose contour suggests a figure bent forward, either leaning on the darker grey form beneath it, or perhaps pushing it over the small hillock that lies between it and the larger form to the right. Also noteworthy are the faint lines that stream down from the snakelike form floating in the orange sky, which draw all three aforementioned elements together visually. The large form can be compared directly to similar beings in earlier paintings by Tanguy, such as like *Finissez ce que j’ai commence* (1927, fig. 50, in which one finds similar forms on the upper left; emerging from the bottom of a cone-like shape on the lower left, and scattered upon the mountainous form on the upper right) or *Second Message II* (1927, see fig. 7, where three such figures are found, the most prominent of which is inverted in the foreground, with wavy hair flowing from its head). While in the earlier paintings these wraithlike figures seem to be disconnected from each other, scattered at random across the composition, in later paintings there are often distinct relationships set up between the protagonists through the use of linear connections, similarities in color, shape and pattern, and gestures and proximity to one another.

While not all of Tanguy’s paintings executed between 1929 and 1939 contained direct references to the human body, his use of this motif continued throughout those years, sometimes manifesting itself more legibly than others. In many cases it is simply the curvaceous, biomorphic nature of his ever-expanding artistic vocabulary that suggests

such an interpretation. In others, the proportions of the shapes, often read in conjunction with the painting's title, lead the viewer to draw such conclusions. *Les Amoureux* (The Lovers, 1929, fig. 51) is such a painting. Its title suggests that somewhere within its composition one will find two or more lovers. And this might well be the case, for in the lower right portion of the composition one finds what could be the amorous lovers described in the title, hovering in a horizontal embrace. It is even possible to interpret the top form, with its pair of pendulous breasts, as female, and the bottom form, with a slight phallic protrusion penetrating the outline of the form above it, as male. A third form that may be interpreted as vaguely humanoid can be found in the lower left of the composition. It "looks," perhaps, towards the couple to its right—an orientation suggested by a suggestion of buttocks to the left and a phallic extension to the right.¹⁰⁷

Even in his series of "poured landscape" paintings from 1930-31, which have been historically interpreted as a turning point in his work (an idea that will be further explored in the following chapter), Tanguy continued to include forms that referred to the figures found in earlier paintings and drawings. In *Légendes ni figures* of 1930 (fig. 52), for example, on the left-hand side of the main plateau one finds a bluish humanoid shape that fluctuates between independence and being absorbed into the ground upon which it rests. In this way, it is similar to the coffin/human form in Tanguy's 1926 drawing, discussed above (see fig. 17). Another link is provided in a drawing from 1930, which is dominated by a similar topography. Surmounting one of the plateaus sit two abstracted figures with

¹⁰⁷ It is interesting to note that at precisely this time, the Surrealists were "investigating" sexual questions in a series of recorded conversations that were transcribed in the pages of the final issue of *LRS*. Tanguy did participate in these discussions, but was easily (and not surprisingly) the most reticent of the group.

lines bursting from both sides of their “heads,” linking them directly to the more recognizable human forms in paintings from three years earlier. Finally, while *L’Armoire de Protée* (1931, fig. 53) is filled with numerous severely cropped phallic forms, it may also harbor suggestions of more fully human figures in its foreground as well. This painting was owned by André Breton until his death, and it is easy to imagine that he admired it for the way in which the shapes, particularly the one in the center of the foreground, hovered between abstraction and representation, never fully embracing either. The uncertainty—even, perhaps, the anxiety—that such transformations or hybrid states suggest dovetailed neatly with Breton’s ideas about the key themes of Surrealist painting discussed above.

One indication of Tanguy’s continued interest in such ideas in the early 1930s can be found in his painting *Les Mottes de terre (L’Homme)* of 1930 (fig. 54). The title suggests a dual reading of the forms in the painting, particularly the large conglomeration in the center of the composition, and, perhaps, encourages viewers to remember that we are, in the end, little more than “clods of earth” ourselves. This painting is one of the rare mature works by the artist in which previous scholars have discerned clear figural references. Karin von Maur identified the central form as “a kind of homunculus with a long neck, a luxuriant mustache (possibly an allusion to Dalí’s celebrated growth), and a wing on the left. . . . An equally pronounced shadow emanating from the grotesque man in the center forms a female figure with arms outspread like wings.” This grouping, she continues, may relate to “Genesis, to the creation of Adam and Eve, in which the shadowy female

figure personifies Eve being born of Adam's rib." She also calls the form in the foreground "a dwarfish gnome."¹⁰⁸ While the Adam and Eve reference may be plausible insofar as God is said to have formed Adam from dust, von Maur is correct, I think, in her more generalized suggestion that the central figure "can be compared with alchemistic transmutation: the transformation of raw materials not into gold, but into an artificial being."¹⁰⁹

One can often detect forms with distinct "heads" and "arms" in Tanguy's paintings from the 1930s, including *Entre l'herbe et le vent* (1934, fig. 55) and *Hérédité des caractères acquis* (1936, fig. 56). Although the forms in *Jour de lenteur* (1937, fig. 57) are certainly suggestive of a fantastic steed (on the lower left) and an abstracted figure (to the right), one need not go so far as von Maur does in setting the scene up as a "grotesque satire on Wild West movies," complete with the male figure having a "grim demeanor" and "arms crossed in a cowboy stance."¹¹⁰ The largest form on the lower right of *Le Questionnant* (fig. 58) might also be interpreted as referencing the human form. Like the figures in paintings from the late 1920s, such as *Et Voila! (The Evening Before)* (1927, see fig. 20), this form, too, emits the now-familiar linear bursts from its head. This head rests atop a thin torso topped by stumpy arms, which itself sits upon a bulky set of hips and legs. One might also identify the two central forms in the small oil *Fragile* (1936, fig. 59) as references to the human body, particularly the one on the left, which has a clear

¹⁰⁸ Karin Von Maur, "Yves Tanguy or 'The Certainty of the Never-Seen,'" in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 71.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

suggestion of a head, arms, and legs. Composite “personages” like these, which begin to appear in Tanguy’s paintings of the mid to late 1930s, relate directly to his use of such forms in drawings from the same era, as discussed above, in which the bodies are comprised of carefully stacked and interwoven shapes.

Likewise, if one looks to the 1940s, the decade during which Tanguy settled in America, the complexity of his forms—and often the complexity of the way in which they interact with each other—increases apace with that of those found in his drawings. Although, as noted above, he had been creating drawings in which a single form, or occasionally a pair of them, dominates the composition (or are the only element in the composition entirely) since the late 1930s, it was not until the early 1940s that his paintings began to move in this direction as well. Prior to this date, the forms rarely rise to more than half the height of the entire composition, and therefore do not dominate it convincingly. Paintings such as *En Lieu oblique* (1941, fig. 60), which features two of these humanoid forms (each of which seems to bear an enigmatic, stick-like instrument)—one in the center of the composition and one to the right—thus represent an important turning point in Tanguy’s oeuvre.

In 1942, Tanguy embarked on a short series of distinctive (and, for him, rather large-scale) paintings in which one or two personages dominate vertically-oriented canvases that have been mostly emptied of most other extraneous forms, forcing the viewer to pay greater attention to the remaining biomorphs. On the right of *L’eau nue* (1942, fig. 61) is

a form whose bottom half is comprised of a flowing “skirt,” similar to the ones found in the earlier drawings *Petit personnage familier* and *Portrait P.G.* (both 1938, see figs. 30, 31), and the later cover drawing for Anna Balakian’s *Literary Origins of Surrealism* (1947, fig. 62). The large form on the right hand side of *La Longue pluie* (fig. 63) of the same year has a roughly human contour, and is topped by an ovoid “head.” The “head” of the form on the right of *Vers le nord lentement*, also from 1942 (fig. 64), is triangular, like that found on the figure in the drawing *Le Grand Nacre* (see fig. 32), but the personage in this painting has a long “arm” extending down to the left from its shoulder, and sits upon a small set of contrapposto legs. While in a number of the paintings in this series from this period single biomorphs loom alone, dominating the composition, other contemporaneous works contain a pair of protagonists and thus open up more complex types of relationships.

One of the most convincing appearances of personages in this series can be found in *Dame à l’absence* (1942, see fig. 1). Here, two forms with roughly human proportions and contours, set off by bold black and white stripes, have been placed in the fore- and middle ground of the composition. The latter emits the familiar lines from its “head,” but here, the lines emanating from the right side connect it visually to its larger counterpart in the foreground. While these forms do not have arms and legs like many of Tanguy’s other personages—with the exception of a single “arm” extending from the right hand side of the one in the foreground—their curvaceous outlines suggest hips, shoulders, and heads, and the “lines of force” (or perhaps “lines of communication” would be more

appropriate here) help solidify the interpretation that the two beings are not only aware of each other's presence, but also directly connected to one another. The contour of these striped personages is similar to that of the central form of Tanguy's drawing from the same year, *La grande mue* (see fig. 33). One additional personage can be made out in *Dame à l'absence*; it resides at the very bottom of the composition, and its figural interpretation is suggested by its large "breast" on its left, bulging forth below a slender neck and rounded head. A more prominent "head" is found atop the massive personage in *Par les oiseaux, par feu, et non par verre*, from the following year (fig. 65). Here, it is possible to make out two forms, one in front of the other. The more distant one is tall and slender; the one that is situated closer to the picture plane is shorter and broad shouldered but it, too, is topped by an ovoid "head." But their proximity to each other and the way in which the larger form seems to shelter its companion, with whom it is also subtly interwoven and interconnected, in a protective fashion suggests a deeper psychological connection between them.

These types of forms, simplified, distorted, and transformed, yet still containing fairly clear references to the contours, proportions, and parts of the human body, continued to appear in Tanguy's paintings for the remainder of his career.¹¹¹ They are found, for

¹¹¹ Sage had begun to feature large-scale protagonists that resembled wrapped human figures in her work around 1940s. Ironically, when Tanguy began to increase the scale of similar protagonists in his work Sage eliminated them from hers, likely in an effort to distance herself from her husband as she sought her own artistic vocabulary. The turning point for Sage seems to have come after completing her painting *Midnight Street* (1944), in which these wrapped forms appear on the left hand side of the composition, while on the right, in the distance, Sage introduced what would become her signature motif: architectural scaffolding. Tanguy's painting *La ne finit pas encore le mouvement*, completed the following year, mimics the composition of Sage's painting. On the left, its two personages (or possibly more, if one interprets the smaller forms as personages as well) are huddled close together against the menacing spikes of the gridded

example, on the right hand side of *Le Prodiges* (1943, fig. 66) and *Distances* (1944, fig. 67), on the left of both *La ne finit pas encore le mouvement* (1945, fig. 68), where there are, again two of them (which relate to pairs of forms found in many drawings from 1947 as well as some of the single-personage drawings of the late 1930s), and *Mains et Gants* (1946, fig. 69), in which the “head,” may even be interpreted as seen in profile, due to the slightest suggestion of a protruding “nose” on its right hand side. While by the end of the 1940s Tanguy was producing fewer paintings per year than he had earlier in his career, and had also begun to use more jagged and geometric architectonic forms in his work, one can still occasionally detect subjects in some of these paintings (and drawings as well) that can be plausibly understood as references to the figure. One might interpret the two hillocks in *Le ciel traqué* (1951, fig. 70) as a pair of heads and shoulders, for example, and the title *Les Saltimbanques* for a painting from 1954 (fig. 71) could also lead us to read the form closest to the picture plane on the right hand side of the composition as bearing a large spherical “head” as well, one that tops a diminutive body.¹¹²

Conclusion

When one examines the historical and artistic context in which Tanguy’s oeuvre developed, the rhetoric of the leader of the group that had supported and nurtured his career from its inception, and the visual evidence found in both his drawings and his

scaffolding that point aggressively toward them. Tanguy’s paintings from this period often featured “aggressive” imagery, a fact that gains added weight when one considers that they were painted at or just after the height of a war that decimated the artist’s homeland.

¹¹² My reading of *Le Ciel traqué* echoes that of Katharina Schmidt in her essay in Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 22.

paintings, it becomes clear that the forms in many of his paintings should be read as “personages”: abstracted echoes of the human figure that are legible enough to suggest their sources but that are simultaneously transformed to such a degree that they are mysterious and provocative. Put simply, Tanguy, contrary to much of the literature about his work, was engaged actively with the human body as an important, if not *central* subject of his work, throughout his entire career. The majority of those who have written about Tanguy’s work have chosen to follow the path taken most recently by René Le Bihan, who (rather vaguely) located the power of Tanguy’s work in its mystery and by doing so suggested subtly that one need not attempt a more penetrating reading of its subject matter, fearing that to follow this path might rob the work of its power. In the introduction to the most recent retrospective of Tanguy’s art (appropriately titled “Yves Tanguy or the revelation of the elusive [or imperceptible],” Le Bihan writes: “his oeuvre is nothing but an enigma; to interpret it is to raise pure speculation. . . . In a few months [after joining the Surrealists] references to reality were erased, to the profit of an indefinite space, of invented forms. . . . [to attempt to them is] pure speculation because nothing is recognizable from now on.”¹¹³

Such arguments are limiting, if not misleading, and also tend to distance Tanguy from the group that was central to his artistic identity. By actively and consistently drawing upon the principle of transformation, which was a key part of Surrealist theory from moment of

¹¹³ Le Bihan, “Yves Tanguy ou la révélation de l’insaisissable,” *Yves Tanguy*, 5-6. Translation by the author. Later in the essay, Le Bihan continues to press this point, arguing that “One must distrust today’s interpretations that link certain paintings to New York or fascism or to the war in the Pacific, after having formerly associated those from Paris with the theories of Marx or Freud, finding in them the menace of Hitler.”

the movement's origin, Tanguy successfully pushed his subject matter beyond mere representation, transforming the human figure into a remarkable new hybrid kind of personage, one that retains certain characteristics of the human figure but that looked, functioned and often interacted with its surroundings quite differently from those by previous artists or even those in the work of Tanguy's colleagues. However, the human form was not the only thing that Tanguy "veiled" in his paintings, for as I have begun to suggest in this chapter, the act of drawing was integral to his entire body of work rather than as a strictly separate enterprise. Just as reinterpreting Tanguy's forms in terms of their relationship to the human figure allowed us to see the Surrealist principle of transformation at work in a new, subtle way, a careful reading of the role that drawing plays in his paintings will help to shed new light on not only Tanguy's work, but on the internal Surrealist debate between automatism and dream illusionism.

Chapter 2: Tracing the Unconscious? The Place of Drawing in Tanguy's Oeuvre

The element of surprise in the creation of a work of art is, to me, the most important factor—surprise to the artist himself as well as to others. . . . The painting develops before my eyes, unfolding its surprises as it progresses. It is this which gives me the sense of complete liberty, and for this reason I am incapable of forming a plan or making a sketch beforehand.¹

There is nothing more revealing in a painter's work than his drawings. They tell about the keenness of his perception and the intensity of his inner vision.²

This chapter revolves around a simple yet radical idea: that drawing lies at the heart (both literally and figuratively) of Yves Tanguy's entire mature oeuvre, particularly his *Painted* oeuvre. While the exact number of stand-alone drawings produced by Tanguy over the course of his career remains to be tabulated, the figure easily numbers in the hundreds and may perhaps even come close to matching his tally of approximately 500 extant paintings.³ Tanguy's graphic works bookend his career: some of his earliest known artistic efforts are drawings from his teenage years and his early twenties (it is not insignificant that he gained early attention in the Parisian artworld for the latter of these: the imaginative doodles that he created while drinking at cafés) and he was still actively turning out both independent drawings and those created as illustrations for books the year before his death.⁴ But while it was through his drawings that Tanguy was first

¹ One of Tanguy's replies to a series of questions in "Symposium: The Creative Process," *Art Digest* 28, 4 (January 15, 1954), 15.

² Kurt Seligmann, "A Letter about Drawing," cited in Stephan E. Hauser, "Kurt Seligmann as Draftsman," *Drawing*, XVI, 6 (March-April 1995), 121.

³ The catalogue raisonné published in 1963 includes 463 paintings and gouaches; many more have come to light since then.

⁴ A pencil drawing of 1917-18 is extant, as are a number of "exquisite corpses" from 1925 done with André Masson and an unidentified participant. There are also several surviving drawings from 1926. In 1954 Tanguy completed illustrations for Benjamin Peret's *Les rouilles encages / Les couilles enragés* (Paris, 1954) and Jean Laude's *Le Grand passage* (Paris, 1954). See Kay Sage-Tanguy et al., *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1962), 17 and Karin von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy* (Ostfildern-Ruit:

discovered as an artist, it was, unquestionably, through his paintings that his reputation was made and it is these paintings for which he remains best known today.

The radical nature of the claim that drawing lies at the heart of Tanguy's mature painted oeuvre stems from the fact that virtually all of the extant scholarship on the artist keeps these two media at arm's length. This separation was encouraged by Tanguy himself, in large part because of another duality that was central to the movement: the debate about the relationship between and legitimacy of automatism and dream illusionism, an issue that had been a source of conflict since the late 1920s and a debate which, at its core, turned on the issue of the authenticity of a given work's direct, unmediated connection to its creator's subconscious.⁵ It turns out that the relationship between painting and drawing in Tanguy's work can be tied to the way in which his work has been interpreted in regard to its stance vis à vis automatism and dream illusionism. Based on careful observation of a number of his works executed across his career, a portrait of Tanguy as a more complex, nuanced, and innovative artist than one might be led to believe by the extant literature begins to emerge. He should, I believe, be recognized as an artist who was well aware of the divisions between these two methods of working and the aesthetics

Hatje Cantz, 2001), 137, 144-45, 246. As James Thrall Soby wrote in the catalog for Tanguy's 1955 MoMA retrospective: "Tanguy had begun to make sketches [in 1923] on scraps of paper and on the tablecloths and napkins of the Montparnasse cafés. These sketches attracted the attention of Maurice Vlaminck, . . . and at this point Tanguy thought of becoming an artist." James Thrall Soby, *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 11.

⁵ The only writing to date that suggests that these two acts—drawing and painting—are intimately linked in Tanguy's art is Sidney Simon's perceptive essay written for the Minneapolis Institute of Arts' bulletin. See Sidney Simon, "Through Birds, Through Fire, But Not Through Glass," *Bulletin of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* (1976-77), 22-31.

typically associated with them and acknowledge for his ability to navigate them skillfully.

We can begin to question the validity of the separation between painting and drawing in Tanguy's oeuvre, however, by considering a single, unfinished gouache executed in the mid-1940s (fig. 72). This unique work stands out as an anomaly among the hundreds of paintings, gouaches, and watercolors that surround it in the 1963 catalogue raisonné of his work. It is the only unfinished piece to have been included in the catalogue (or that is known to exist), yet it is likely precisely because of its incompleteness that it has escaped significant notice or study until now.⁶ It was created sometime in the mid- to late-1940s and is distinguished neither by its scale nor by its complexity. In fact, an argument might be made that it should not have been included in the catalogue raisonné at all due to its incomplete state. Ultimately, however, it may prove to be one of the most important works in Tanguy's oeuvre *because* of this incompleteness and because of what this incompleteness can reveal about Tanguy's working methods, for it contains a clearly visible skeleton of underdrawing that the artist did not, for reasons unknown today, finish painting over. The presence of this layer of underdrawing in a work from the 1940s suggests that it might be worthwhile to re-examine Tanguy's oeuvre to see if there is any evidence of a similar approach utilized in other examples of his work. If, in fact, this is the case, it suggests that it would be instructive to examine the relationship between

⁶ The only loan exhibition in which it has been included since its donation to the Museum of Modern Art from Kay Sage's estate in 1963 was the Newport Harbor Art Museum's "The Interpretive Link: Abstract Surrealism into Abstract Expressionism" (1986); although it was illustrated in the catalogue for that exhibition on page 188, it was not discussed in the text.

Tanguy's drawings and paintings more closely and, perhaps, to explore how and why that the two are intimately linked as well as to ask why this relationship has been continuously repressed by both the artist himself and by those who have written about his work during and after his lifetime.

Not only can a better understanding of the way in which Tanguy created his paintings—hinted at by this unique work—provide a clearer picture of his artistic practice, but it can also help to explain both how his art has come to be interpreted in the ways that it has and why such interpretations are often either divergent or contradictory. This single work can thus serve as an informative lens through which to re-examine both the overlooked but critical relationship between drawing and painting in Tanguy's oeuvre and, more broadly, the ways in which this relationship reflects his reaction to the conflict between ideas about the role of automatism and dream illusionism within the Surrealist movement. Of equal importance will be a consideration of the way in which these ideas entered into narratives about the movement while it was still developing, once it had been established, and even as it became historicized, and how the acceptance of them has affected—and obscured—an accurate understanding of Tanguy's oeuvre and place within it. And finally, the new interpretation suggested by these findings should be analyzed within the context of other revisionist approaches to the work of Tanguy's peers, effectively recasting his place within the movement and giving us a new appreciation for the true complexity of his oeuvre and the sophisticated way in which he navigated the movement's internal politics in order to maintain his position as one of its key members.

Thus, rather than arguing for the importance of Tanguy's drawings as independent objects (an approach that has been taken in the past and whose shortcomings will be discussed), the purpose of this chapter is, instead, to focus on the critical role that they played in the process of creating his paintings.

Even a cursory glance at literature on the artist reveals a tension between drawing and painting (although the literature is skewed largely towards painting)—a tension that hints at broader issues located at the very heart of Surrealist theory and visual practice. An examination of the relationship between drawing and painting in Tanguy's art can, in fact, be seen as representative of a broader historical conflict between automatism and dream illusionism: the "twin poles" of Surrealist visual practice. It should be noted that in many instances there is certainly not a direct 1:1 relationship between drawing and automatism and painting and dream illusionism, rather, in the case of Tanguy's work, his drawings tend to skew as being interpreted vis a vis the former and his paintings the latter. Typically these two approaches are considered radically different means of making a work of art that produce different results. They represent entirely different methods of execution and fundamentally different intentions; thus their visual manifestations are typically interpreted as being correspondingly divergent.

One might broadly define the look a work of art created through automatic techniques as "loose;" a looseness of facture that might in some instances translate into a kind of visual fluidity and in others into a kind of rough-hewn intensity. In either case the intention was

to signal an intimate connection to the artist's unconscious. The expression of this connection often took the form of flowing lines or quick, sketchy marks.⁷ André Masson's paintings and drawings—particularly those executed in the mid- to late-1920s—are often held up as examples of this pole of Surrealist practice. A dream illusionist work of art, on the other hand, might best be described as “tight,” packed with carefully-painted and precisely-rendered details à la Salvador Dalí or René Magritte, whose paintings suggested hand painted dream “photographs.” Since the late-1920s these two approaches have been considered to represent poles at opposite ends of the field of Surrealist visual practice. Historically, at least until the final decades of the twentieth century, many of the group's artists were typically lumped at one end of the spectrum or the other with, perhaps, the exception of Max Ernst, whose multiplicity of methods and techniques left his status open for debate. What is fascinating about Tanguy's work, when considered in this light, is it has been claimed by advocates for both sides of the issue (claims that will be discussed in depth below), a contradiction that is rarely discussed in the extant literature on the artist but one that suggests that his relationship to this issue is more complicated than previously acknowledged and is thus one that is ripe for further investigation; or, perhaps, that the bi-polar construct used to categorize Tanguy and his peers should be reconsidered.

This uncertainty exists, I believe, precisely *because* his work cannot be pigeonholed in one camp or the other. Instead, it combines elements of each “pole.” However, because of

⁷ See Clark V. Polling, “Concept and Practice of Surrealist Drawing,” in Clark V. Polling et al., *Surrealist Vision and Technique* (Atlanta: Emory University, 1996), 6-29.

the divisive nature of the dual techniques that he employed: freely drawn sub-layers that suggest automatism and carefully-painted, highly detailed surfaces meant to suggest a physically and psychically *present* object, one that could or might actually exist due to the convincing fashion in which it has been rendered, that relate to dream illusionism, Tanguy sought to conceal his use of both techniques despite the fact that the former actually was intimately informed by the latter, thereby complicating this dichotomy. A thorough discussion of the unfinished painting noted above will make it clear that Tanguy worked in a manner that was vastly different from that described in the literature about his work. Next, I will consider how the most recent writing to focus on Tanguy's "graphic" work has, too, overlooked the important—indeed *critical*—link that exists between his drawings and his paintings. Such interpretations, it turns out, were in large part driven by the artist's own rare (and, perhaps, misleading) statements about this topic and by his comments about his "African" series of paintings from the early 1930s, which highlight the historical (yet not entirely accurate or necessary) division between automatism and dream illusionism within the Surrealist movement.

Following the lead of recent scholars, I will then argue that one can use the type of evidence provided by this unfinished drawing to undercut these divisions and thereby revise both our understanding of Tanguy's work as well as of one of the core ways in which the Surrealist movement has been traditionally understood. After briefly discussing how these divisions emerged, both in Tanguy's work and in the historiography of the movement, I will discuss a number of other instances across the entirety of the artist's

oeuvre in which underdrawings are clearly visible in order to establish that the example of the unfinished gouache was not an isolated one but rather evidence of a sustained method of artistic production. The final section of this chapter will link this new view of Tanguy's practice with both recent general revisionist approaches to our understanding of Surrealism as well as to specific discussions of the role of drawing and automatism in the work of Tanguy's peers Miró and Masson, arguing that there are multiple ways to understand both his reasons for working in this manner and his attempts to conceal it from the public.

Evidence, and the Historical Role of Drawing

The first order of business should be to carefully examine the unfinished gouache described above (see fig 72) and to attempt to come to an understanding of exactly *how* it was created. Does a free-flowing drawing, suggesting automatism, indeed lie at its heart? The work in question, which has been dated to approximately 1945, is relatively modest in scale, at 18 x 12 inches. It appears to consist of a ink applied through the method of decalcomania (a Surrealist technique in which a wash of ink is applied to a surface and then a sheet of paper is pressed against it and peeled away, leaving a random, mottled surface), a line drawing executed in ink, and layers of gouache paint.⁸

⁸ The author studied this drawing in person in the Museum of Modern Art's off-site storage facility in January 2008. MoMA currently dates the object as circa 1945. The conclusions drawn from this study were corroborated by the Museum's conservator for works on paper, Scott Gerson in an email message to the author on February 22, 2008. Mr. Gerson also suggests the possibility that Tanguy could have first applied the layer of decalcomania, then done the ink drawing, and then applied a layer of white gouache which was then heightened. But in both cases, it should be emphasized, the ultimate realization of the upper layers of the forms would have been guided by an underlayer of ink drawing.

A careful examination of this work shows that the sequence of events that led to its present state appears to have been as follows: first, the layer of decalcomania was applied, with the heaviest (and thus darkest) portions of ink residing in the upper portions of the sheet and the lightest sections at the bottom. After this, Tanguy appears to have blocked out a rough area composed of a thin layer of white gouache—basically an arena in which to stage his line drawing, which was executed in black ink. This sequence of initial events is corroborated by the fact that in a number of places Tanguy appears to have worked wet-on-wet, resulting in passages in which the lines of ink have bled into the white gouache surrounding them. The ink drawing is unquestionably the scaffolding upon which the next layer of paint was hung, for the next step in the evolution of the piece appears to have been another application of a thin layer of white gouache in the area of the central vertical form, which begins to establish its structural solidity but which also masks that underdrawing that supplied its formal structure. Finally, Tanguy had begun to work some color into the composition, as evidenced by a layer of pinkish-red in the top portion of the central form; the small ovals of the ovoid form on the lower right of its base; and portions of the vertical form to its right. This small, unfinished gouache, then, provides crucial evidence of the fact that the structures of forms that ultimately populated Tanguy's paintings were determined by a layer of drawing concealed beneath their surfaces.

The evidence of this complex, layered, multi-step approach confirms some aspects of the only other published description of Tanguy's painting process. This description was

recorded by Gordon Onslow Ford, who recalled the way in which Tanguy created his paintings as one of successive applications of layers over multiple days:

The first day: The canvas was usually covered with wide horizontal or undulating strokes of light and dark tones. They were left as they were or blended sometimes with additional colour. In this way the ground (the Mother Matter) of Planet Yves was formed. . . . The ground now had an air of expectancy, that invited attention.

The second day: The paint was allowed to dry, and the ground became pregnant.

The third day (and additional days if needed): The Planet was stippled with light and dark vapours. When the time was ripe, Beings were born. It was not known where one would appear, or what form it would take, until it appeared.⁹

Ford also stated, however, just before this narrative, that “Tanguy never drew on the canvas before starting to paint, except for the short period of *les coulees* [sic] and in some of his last paintings. He painted directly on the canvas.”¹⁰ It is tempting to accept Onslow Ford’s statement at face value, for he preceded these remarks by disclosing that he had observed Tanguy painting in his cramped studio in Paris in 1939. But it is also important to understand that the essay in which this description appears was published more than forty years later, by which point the conventional wisdom about Tanguy (supported by statements by the artists himself) held that he had painted spontaneously, with no preconceived ideas about the forms that populated his canvases. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this statement contradicts the physical evidence provided by a work like the unfinished gouache described above and by countless other paintings in Tanguy’s oeuvre, a number of which will be discussed below. Is it possible that Tanguy

⁹ Gordon Onslow-Ford, *Yves Tanguy and Automatism* (Inverness, CA: Bishop Pine Press, 1982), 16.

¹⁰ Onslow-Ford, *Yves Tanguy and Automatism*, 15.

did, in fact, create some of his compositions in the drawing-free manner described by Onslow Ford? Certainly—to rebut such a statement would have to involve a careful examination of every painting in Tanguy’s oeuvre. But the fact remains that to characterize his oeuvre in broad strokes in this manner is, at a minimum, misleading when numerous paintings by the artist contain evidence to the contrary.

Other than Onslow Ford’s description of Tanguy’s creative process, there is little in the extant literature that focuses closely on the creative sequence through which Tanguy made his paintings or that acknowledges the integral relationship between drawing and painting in his art, let alone that considers how evidence of such a relationship might affect our understanding of it. Paralleling this silence, there has also been little discussion of the way in which Tanguy’s choice of media influenced the ways in which his art was interpreted/categorized as being either “automatist” or “dream illusionist.” In fact, it was not until the publication of the catalogue accompanying Tanguy’s 2001 retrospective that one could find a substantial essay devoted entirely to his graphic art: Beate Wolf’s “Genesis of a New World: The Graphic Art of Yves Tanguy.”¹¹ Even here, Wolf dedicates less space to Tanguy’s drawings than one might hope, (given their sheer number and the paucity of prior literature about them), concentrating instead on creating a context (primarily a literary one) in which his drawings might be considered. She also discusses his prints and analyzes the texts that his drawings sometimes accompanied,

¹¹ In von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*. It should be noted here that Wolfgang Wittrock did publish an important catalogue raisonné of Tanguy’s prints in 1979: Wolfgang Wittrock and Stanley William Hayter, *Yves Tanguy: Das Druckgraphische Werk* (Dusseldorf: Wolfgang Wittrock Gallery, 1976), but this catalogue was focused on Tanguy’s printed and editioned work rather than his unique drawings, which are the primary focus of this discussion.

focusing less often on the works themselves and even more infrequently on their relationship to his paintings.¹² This is not to say that the consideration of the broader context in which Tanguy's drawings functioned is unimportant, but simply to note that Wolf's essay leaves open for exploration further avenues of inquiry in regard to Tanguy's drawings; one of the most important of these is to determine exactly how they relate to his paintings.¹³

Like many others who have written about Tanguy, Wolf seems to have taken the artist's rare statements about the separation of the two media in his work at face value, arguing in the introduction to her essay that the artist must have regarded his drawings as autonomous entities because none of them were done as sketches or studies for future oil paintings.¹⁴ This divisive treatment, which might at first seem to liberate Tanguy's drawings from the role of mere sketches and thereby elevate their status to that of independent works of art, is instead rather problematic, for it also denies the close, integral relationship that actually exists between the two media in his work. And, indeed, the characterization of that relationship as an "independent" one is largely accurate, for

¹² Wolf actually treats all works on paper as "graphic," so her discussion includes gouaches, prints, decalcomanias as well.

¹³ One might also take some time to explore the ways in which the elements in his drawings related to each other, as well as to those in his paintings. Independent scholar Stephen Miller, for example has noticed that Tanguy carried similar forms over between two drawings executed in the mid-1930s, and the possibility that such relationships between forms might be found to link other drawings—or even drawings and paintings—is a fascinating one. Stephen Miller, in correspondence with the author, (author's personal papers), fall 2009.

¹⁴ "Compared to his oil paintings, Tanguy's works on paper assume particular significance in both qualitative and quantitative terms. . . . [His] technical diversification bears witness to his love of experimentation and his devotion to the graphic medium, but it also shows that he regarded these works, none of which were done as preliminary studies for oil paintings, as autonomous works of art." Wolf, "Genesis of a New World," in von Maur, et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 135.

there is only one instance in which one of Tanguy's works on paper appears to have been a traditional sort of "sketch" for a larger canvas.¹⁵

It should be noted, however, that throughout his entire career Tanguy's drawings did closely parallel his paintings, both thematically and conceptually. With the exception of the gouache and painting noted above, however, no direct correlations between specific forms in his drawings and those in his paintings have yet been established, even though it is clear that he was working on similar ideas in both media. For example, both paintings and drawings from the mid-1920s mix symbols like hands and conical peaks (see fig. 5); by the mid-1940s the biomorphic forms in both are often more attenuated and are formed of broader planes than those from previous decades (see fig. 1); and by the early 1950s numerous smaller forms frequently are unified or cluster around larger ones in both media (see fig. 70). Through her well-intentioned yet potentially misleading insistence on maintaining the division between Tanguy's drawings and paintings, Wolf followed and strengthened a line of thought that extends back well into Tanguy's lifetime, one that appears to have emerged as an attempt to preserve a reading of Tanguy's art as spontaneous (and thus derived from automatic processes and authentically Surrealist).

But before examining the historical development of this division, it will be valuable to consider briefly some of the ways in which drawings themselves (meaning those

¹⁵ In fact, he is known to have done at least one study—or at the very least a work on paper that is closely related to a larger oil painting. See the gouache *Feu Volant* (1951, fig. 73) that sold at Christie's, London on February 7, 2005, lot 72, which is very closely related to the painting owned by the Tate Gallery, London: *Les Transparents* (1951, fig. 74).

independent works typically created on paper using pencil or pen as their primary medium, rather than pastels, prints and other such graphic works), as a general category of artistic practice, have been thought about traditionally, both *in relation to* and *as independent of* oil paintings, particularly in the modern era. Historically, drawings have typically been interpreted as preparatory works, objects created to capture an impression or a detail, an arena in which to work out a basic composition or to refine a smaller element of a subsequent, more complex and fully-realized piece. This relationship existed well before Tanguy entered the art world yet it was also one whose demise might be considered one of the central principles of the birth of modern art.

By the mid-19th century, advances in painting materials (such as the availability of oil paints in portable tubes) and ideas about how and where one could—or should—create a painting had given rise to the popularity of paintings that were executed “en plein air” rather than completed in the studio based on earlier on-site sketches. Even with the emergence of the Barbizon school and, subsequently, the Impressionists, whose artists utilized this approach, traditional methods of working and training persisted. In fact, it was at precisely this time (during the second half of the nineteenth century) that the French academic system of fine art instruction was in high demand, particularly from foreign students. In this system, drawing played a fundamental role. Barbara Weinberg, for example, has noted the under French academic method, which “ultimately became a model for worldwide emulation,” the first challenge faced by an aspiring painter who had

been accepted into the *École des Beaux-Arts* was “daily two-hour sessions spent drawing from antique casts and from a nude live model.”¹⁶

The process was the same at private ateliers as well; Weinberg notes that American artist Robert Vonnoh, for example, transferred the French system to his own classroom in Boston in the 1880s, where “students were expected to have adequate preparation in drawing before being admitted to [his] painting class. Even after acceptance, ‘they are then made to apply themselves severely to drawing from the life head with charcoal on charcoal paper, and often on canvas, until a standard of excellence has been attained that warrants their taking up color.’”¹⁷ By the end of the 19th century, however, the impact of Impressionism and its subsequent offshoots had gained traction, reducing the dominance of academic procedures and privileging the immediacy of paint applied directly to the canvas. By the time of the Surrealists, however, one could argue that drawing had regained its some of its importance and might even have leapfrogged painting in the Surrealists’ own hierarchy of media due to the perceived directness of its link to unconscious thought that was so prized by the group’s members.¹⁸

¹⁶ See H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 13; 14. Weinberg goes on to describe the various changes to the system during the nineteenth century; despite these various changes, however, drawing appears to have remained the at core of the academic experience and to have always preceded painting.

¹⁷ Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris*, 243.

¹⁸ Clark V. Polling notes the importance of Dada (a movement with which many of the Surrealists were involved)—and before it Cubism—in breaking historical approaches to drawing. See Clark V. Polling, “The Concept and Practice of Surrealist Drawing,” 6-7; 8-9. Although certainly one of the few extensive considerations of Surrealist drawings, Polling’s essay focuses more on the thematics and iconography of Surrealist drawing as well as on the relationship of various artist’s work to Surrealist theories, than upon the relationship of Surrealist drawing to Surrealist painting *per se*. It is somewhat surprising that Tanguy receives almost no mention in this essay despite his importance to the group and the importance of drawing to his oeuvre. There is, in fact, very little literature on Surrealism—whether on the movement itself or on its members—that explores the relationship between Surrealist drawing and painting. The studies that one

For the Surrealists, then, drawings—especially those created by chance rather than as an academic exercise in semblance and precision—and works of art created through other “lesser” techniques, such as collage, assumed a pride of place typically reserved for oil paintings in other artistic movements. Tanguy, lacking traditional academic training, was in a unique position to appreciate importance of both drawing and painting and, thus, to have not been as affected by the historical baggage that each carried. This may well be the reason that, as noted above, the iconography of his drawings and his paintings was so closely linked over the course of his career. Yet, on the other hand, his denial of the role of drawings in the creation of his paintings might also be interpreted as his awareness of the perception that such a relationship might smack of academicism, a negative trait amongst the groups practitioners and a label that that he, as an untrained artist, was in a unique position to sidestep. Additionally, because drawing had become so important to the Surrealists at an early point in the movement’s history, it seems logical that it would have played a more important role in the creation of oils than it would have in other modern movements—that, for the group’s members, a sketch upon a canvas might have had a deeper meaning than a mere scaled-up or more convincingly-rendered version of an earlier idea; for them it had the *potential* to represent a moment of direct connection to the artist’s unconscious that would lose its spark if dealt with otherwise.

does find—such as Polling’s catalogue essay or Stephan E. Hauser’s article “Kurt Seligmann as Draftsman [in *Drawing* XVI, 6 (March-April 1995), 121-26.] tend to concentrate exclusively on the techniques and subject matter of the Surrealist’s graphic work. Essays such as David Lomas’ chapter on Joan Miro in his book *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, and Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), which does extensively (re)consider the relationship between Miro’s drawings and paintings and which is discussed in depth later in this chapter, are rare and therefore important. While it is certainly beyond the scope of this writing to delve into the issue in any great depth, it should be noted that the topic seems ripe for further exploration.

For Tanguy, there appears to have been little difference between the style and content of drawings executed as independent works of art and underdrawings like the one found in the unfinished gouache from the 1940s. In both instances, uninterrupted, free flowing lines define both forms and the space around them (although one might argue that there is often a greater spatial ambiguity in these drawings, due to the elimination of shading, and color, and often texture and a background). The kind of highly detailed, “fleshed out” forms that populate Tanguy’s oils and gouaches almost never appear in his independent drawings. However, these forms’ general contours and the way in which they are constructed did parallel closely the painted forms that ultimately resulted from the underdrawings upon his canvases.

One can conclude from these observations that the concept of creating drawings as sketches for subsequent paintings simply did not make sense for Tanguy and that he put as much care into the drawings that served as skeletons for the forms on his canvases as for those that remained “bare” upon paper. For Tanguy, common knowledge of the existence of such “skeletons” underneath the painted surfaces of his canvases would have been a threat to the freedom that his work was often celebrated for evoking. Thus, while an unfettered line drawing on paper could call to mind this freedom, as could a series of forms seemingly conjured from the depths of the artist’s subconscious painted upon a canvas, the idea that these painted forms might have been first sketched out beforehand

was one to be avoided (and even denied) at all costs in order to maintain the “authenticity” of the vision of their creator.

Bait Is Laid . . . and Taken

In fact, the artist himself had a strong hand in directing the discussion of the role that drawing played in his work. In what, upon close inspection, appears to be a rather a calculated manner he lead those interested in (and writing about) the topic to conclude that his paintings and drawings were wholly independent entities. His comments to James Thrall Soby on the issue, recorded in the essay written by Soby in the catalogue for Tanguy’s first posthumous retrospective in 1955, suggest that Tanguy wanted it to be believed that not only were there no underdrawings present in his mature paintings but that the very act of sketching out his forms in advance would be in conflict with his artistic standards as a Surrealist and would undercut the meaning and integrity of his entire oeuvre. In his essay, Soby singled out as unique within Tanguy’s oeuvre the half-dozen or so paintings that the artist completed upon his return from a trip to Africa in 1930. He described these paintings as “isolated within” Tanguy’s oeuvre, noting that they “differed sharply from previous and subsequent paintings” on account of the clarity of their forms, their “fluted tablelands,” “jigsaw bastions,” and “vigorously incised contours.”¹⁹ Soby went on to justify his assessment of the uniqueness of this series by noting that these were the only paintings in Tanguy’s oeuvre that “were sketched on the canvas before being painted”—backing this claim up by relating that Tanguy had told

¹⁹ James Thrall Soby, *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 16.

him personally that upon his return from Africa he had “*felt the need of discipline in drawing and in a more fixed placing of forms* [author’s emphasis].”²⁰

By openly admitting to Soby that he had sketched out on his canvas the forms for only a small (distinctive) fraction of his overall output, the canny Tanguy was able to make the case that because these paintings looked quite different from the majority of his other work they were the *only* ones to have been created in this manner. And, indeed, these paintings do incorporate features not found elsewhere in his oeuvre. The rocky plateaus that dominate the compositions of paintings such as *L’Armoire de Protée* (1931) and *Palais Promontoire* (1931, fig. 75) have no parallels in his later work, although the biomorphic forms found within these landscapes are similar to those in both preceding and subsequent paintings.²¹ By making such an argument, which dovetailed beautifully with the high value that the Surrealists traditionally placed upon automatism and subconscious inspiration (and, perhaps, a certain *lack* of discipline), he was thus able to preserve the notion that his forms had been painted automatically. Such an interpretation was seconded by Soby, who cited other statements by the artist such as that he did not like working in this way because surprises were his “pleasure in painting” and that his primary interest was in the fluid, spontaneous way in which one form suggested the next as he worked.²²

²⁰ Soby, *Yves Tanguy*, 17.

²¹ One can find the return of similar plateaus occasionally in Tanguy’s paintings and drawings of the 1930s, but they are typically singular formations rather than dominant and multiple within a single work. See, for example, *Le Fond de la tour* (1933, Private Collection, reproduced in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 76 CR# 131) and *Luc le bonimenteur* (1936, Private Collection, CR# 175)

²² *Ibid*, 17. Although Soby did not cite the sources for Tanguy’s quotes, they were taken from Tanguy’s responses to a questionnaire circulated to several artists by *Art Digest* Art a year earlier. See “Symposium:

Rather than taking Tanguy's statement at face value, as Soby appears to have done, and thus accepting the artist's "African" paintings as an anomaly in his oeuvre, I would suggest they might more accurately be interpreted as a turning point. It appears that as he worked his way through this new approach to crafting his paintings, moving away from the experiments with other, freer, more obvious forms of automatism (via both rough, sketchily painted and drawn marks and undulating drawings) that had characterized his early work, Tanguy learned to *incorporate* the type of fluid automatism suggested by his drawings into the very structure of his carefully painted biomorphic forms paintings rather than eliminating them altogether. Perhaps one of the reasons that Tanguy actively played down and obfuscated this method of working was that he feared it would undermine his critical tie to automatism by linking his work to a more academic tradition and manner of working. Because of his (deliberately) misleading statements about this moment in his career, the actual *integration* of media that occurred in Tanguy's artistic process has been obscured and has gone unnoticed. Instead of looking at the paintings first and then drawing their conclusions, scholars appear to have followed Tanguy's lead and accepted his statement about the "African" series and about the presence (of lack thereof) of underdrawings in general at face value without carefully looking at his subsequent work to see if such claims are, indeed, valid. This blind acceptance effectively maintained the artificial division between the aesthetics associated with various forms of

The Creative Process," *Art Digest* 28, 4 (January 15, 1954), 15. Tanguy, in typical surrealist fashion, did not answer the thirteen questions directly, but instead gave a statement about his creative process that included the following comments: "The element of *surprise* in the creation of a work of art is, to me, the most important factor—surprise to the artist himself as well as to others. '*La surprise doit être recherchée pour elle-même inconditionnellement.*' (André Breton, '*L'Amour fou.*'). The painting develops before my eyes, unfolding its surprises as it progresses. It is this which gives me the sense of complete liberty, and for this reason I am incapable of forming a plan or making a sketch beforehand."

automatism and those that characterize dream illusionism, both within Tanguy's oeuvre and the Surrealist movement in general.

José Pierre, writing in the catalogue for Tanguy's 1982 retrospective, offered an interesting alternative to a full division of these concepts, at least in the case of Tanguy's oeuvre. Pierre proposed that a division between the artist's paintings and drawings emerged around the time of the "African" works, and that henceforth one could interpret Tanguy's *paintings* as dream illusionist and while his *drawings* maintained the artist's ties to automatism. First, Pierre noted the change that occurred between Tanguy's earlier work and his "African" paintings, writing that "Tanguy was deeply affected by the powerful strength of the high plateaus in the Atlas Mountains and their bare rock masses, swept smooth by sandstorms," and thus that his technique for these paintings constituted a "total reversal" of his previous approach, as these works were "sketched out before he paint[ed] them, something which stands in absolute contradiction to the rule followed since 1926."²³ Pierre, too, however, argued that these paintings were the only ones to have been drawn out beforehand, stating that they have "no successors" and then citing Tanguy's statement about the pleasure that he took from experiencing "surprise in painting" and his inability to derive such pleasure from works drawn out beforehand on the canvas.²⁴ At this point that Pierre noted a split in the painted and graphic work, writing that "if the painting in these [the "African"] pictures in comparison to the earlier ones is no longer 'automatic, the drawings—to the contrary—have now become so and in

²³ See José Pierre, "The Surrealist Painter par Excellence" in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 51.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 52.

fact the graphic work of Tanguy from now on developed wonderfully according to laws that have nothing to do with the laws of painting.”²⁵

Pierre’s observation is fascinating, for it positions Tanguy as an artist simultaneously working in two modes typically considered too be mutually exclusive, while also linking each mode to a distinct medium. The way in which Pierre has begun to question the tendency to pigeonhole an artist as working exclusively in one arena or the other aligns him broadly with approaches taken by more recent scholars, such as Briony Fer, who have suggested that it is possible for an artist who is typically regarded as residing closest to one “pole” of interpretation to actually work in a mode that links him or her closely to the pole at the opposite end of the spectrum, or for both modes to exist in single works of art.²⁶ But before considering the implications of such an interpretation it is important to understand exactly how conventional views of the twin “poles” of Surrealist practice—automatism and dream illusionism—were formed, for Tanguy spent at least the first half of his career working closely alongside those who were shaping this debate or being held up as examples of one pole or the other.

Surrealism and Automatism: Uncomfortable Bedfellows?

Because of his close relationship with Breton and many of the other early members of the Surrealist movement, a re-evaluation of the relationship between drawing and painting in Tanguy’s work has much broader implications for our understanding of his oeuvre than a

²⁵ *Ibid*, 52.

²⁶ See Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

mere reappraisal of his technical approach to creating a work of art. Due to the ties that were forged between certain artistic practices and certain branches of Surrealist thought early in the movement's history, a reconsideration of the role that these media played in Tanguy's art necessitates a new evaluation of the way in which his art related to these concepts. First, however, a brief survey of the way in which the two have been connected historically will be helpful before considering alternative relationships.

One of the primary goals of Surrealism was to revolutionize the world through the integration of the subconscious realm with the conscious one. Initially, automatism was celebrated as the ideal technique for achieving this goal.²⁷ Its importance was based largely on the idea that through the use of automatic techniques (whether for the creation of poetry or, later, visual art), an artist could tap into his or her subconscious thoughts in a relatively unmediated manner. Automatism thus became inextricably bound up with the movement's goal of offering an alternative to standard ways of interpreting the rational world via academic/traditional modes of artmaking that Breton and his followers had been rebelling against since their involvement with the Dada movement in the 1910s.

Tanguy's affiliation with the Surrealist movement began at the apex of the group's interest in automatism as well as at the precise moment that the group was engaged in an intense internal debate over how (or even if) its principles might be translated from the literary to the visual arts. Central to this debate about the viability of automatic practices

²⁷ See André Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism," in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

was their perceived degree of transparency; that is, exactly how truly unmediated (and thus how truly authentic as indicators of the practitioner's subconscious thoughts) such techniques could be. Some extremists, like Pierre Naville, believed that "No one can ignore that there is no such thing as *surrealist painting* [by which he appears to have meant visual art in general.]. Neither the line of a pencil given over to chance gestures, nor an image retracing the forms of a dream, nor imaginative fantasies, it is well understood, can be qualified as such."²⁸

On the other side of the issue was Breton, who ultimately embraced a wide variety of automatic practices as he sought to keep the movement fresh and vital and as he sought to increase its influence and control over it. At the earliest point in these debates, around 1925, Breton and the majority of his followers were content to accept drawing as a valid medium for automatic practices. Painting, with its encumbering choices of brushes, canvas sizes, colors, and glazes, was perceived to be too "slow" a medium to allow for the direct translation of automatic thought.²⁹ Drawing, while still not perfect, was considered to be a more acceptable channel for the pure, unfiltered recording of one's subconscious thoughts—there were less "distractions" to get in the way—only pen or pencil and paper. (Yet, it should be noted, many of its artists, including Ernst, Masson, Miro, and Tanguy, did also incorporate various forms of automatism into the painted

²⁸ Pierre Naville, "Beaux Arts," *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 3 (15 April 1925), 27 [reprinted in *La Révolution surréaliste: Collection complete* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1975)]. Translation by the author.

²⁹ Roger Cardinal suggests this, see Roger Cardinal, "André Masson and Automatic Drawing," in Silvano Levy et al., *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1996), 81. Krauss touches upon it as well, see Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," in Rosalind Krauss et al., *L'Amour fou*.

portions of their oeuvres as well.) The movement's acceptance of drawing is reinforced by the frequency with which drawings were reproduced in its mouthpiece: *La Révolution Surréaliste*. In the periodical's first issue alone one could find drawings by de Chirico (2), Ernst (3), Masson (2); Naville (surprisingly, given the views that he would publish on the topic just two issues later); and Desnos: a remarkably diverse selection of artists and simultaneously a selection that privileged individual vision over a collective group aesthetic.

In his article "Les Yeux enchantées," which appeared in the premiere issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, Max Morise argued—possibly provoking Naville's subsequent response two issues later—that the time had come to find a visual counterpart to automatic writing.³⁰ However, he believed that the work of artists such as Giorgio de Chirico, who was still, at that moment, one of Breton's "stars," was too lucid—too premeditated and calculated—to function as a representation of such unmediated ideas. One might argue that Morise thus laid the foundation for the perception of there being two distinct (and mutually exclusive) "poles" of Surrealist visual practice, setting up a dichotomy between a precise style of painting like de Chirico's and a looser, more "automatic" style of working à la André Masson (as opposed to Naville, who lumped them all together).

Indeed, Morise found Masson to be one of the very few artists whose work demonstrated the appropriate "speed" and was also suggestive enough (but not too easily interpreted) to

³⁰ Max Morise, "Les Yeux Enchantés," *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 1 (November 1924), 26-27.

function on this level. Many of Tanguy's early Surrealist drawings are quite similar to those executed by Masson during the same period: they contain a variety of marks, sometimes coalescing into simple shapes suggesting fish, hands, or heads, sometimes leaning towards more abstracted imagery. The combination of similar types of forms and motifs in both artists' work, as Beate Wolf writes, performed adequately enough to be considered "Surrealist" by serving as acceptable "springboards for the mind."³¹

In the Surrealist milieu during the mid-1920s the technique that was used to create a work of art, along with the artist's intentions and the clarity of the relationship between their vision and their artistic output counted for as much (if not more than) the way in which their work measured up to the aesthetic standards of the time. Judging a work of art on aesthetic and technical criteria alone did not fall in line with Breton's ideas about what constituted Surrealism; what was more important to him was that art should express interior qualities and processes rather than simply mimicking those that were commonly accepted or that conformed to popular tastes and standards. Because new visual artists (working in increasingly diverse styles and using a broad range of techniques) were consistently entering the movement's orbit during the second half of the 1920s, Breton felt it necessary to constantly re-examine his position on painting throughout the latter part of decade; many of his thoughts were compiled by 1928 into a series of essays ultimately published as "Surrealism and Painting." This treatise not only summarized and

³¹ See Beate Wolfe, "Genesis of a New World: The Graphic Art of Yves Tanguy," in Karin Von Maur, et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 146.

expanded upon Breton's current views on the topic but also provided in-depth analyses of artists whom he considered critical to this area of Surrealist practice at the moment.³²

One of the most striking things about this essay is its blend of flexibility in regard to the techniques used by Surrealist artists and its insistence that Surrealist painting proper should be conditioned to a great extent by the intentions of the creator and ultimately valued for its ability to provoke feelings of shock or surprise in the viewer. It is here that Breton again referred to painting as a window (an image that he had also used in the First Manifesto of Surrealism, but in a different manner: to describe a phrase and an accompanying image that had appeared in his mind of a man bisected *by* a window) but his emphasis now lay not on what the window itself was doing, but rather “what it *looks out* on, in other words, whether, from where I am standing, there is a ‘beautiful view,’ and nothing appeals to me so much as a vista stretching away before me and *out of sight*.”³³ He thus shifted the way in which a window might function—from a mere component found within a provocative image, kind of prop in a surprising, dreamlike situation intended to provoke a surprised reaction, to a metaphor for the work of art itself, and its to offer a view onto a new kind of reality. Breton continued by arguing that the primary problem with the majority of popularly-accepted art was its aim to imitate aspects of the rational, everyday world; he then offered the well-known proclamation that “the work of art will either refer to a *purely internal model* (a shift in what the “window”

³² In the sections of “Surrealism and Painting” originally published in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Breton discusses Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Francis Picabia, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Man Ray, and André Masson. In the subsequent publication of the essay as a separate publication, he also included sections on Joan Miró, Yves Tanguy, and Hans Arp.

³³ Breton, “Surrealism and Painting,” 2-3.

“looks out on,” from the real world to a vista that stretches “out of sight;” i.e., derived from the artist’s unconscious) or will cease to exist.”³⁴ Seemingly attempting to temper earlier divisive arguments over the technique most appropriate to Surrealist practice, he then wrote that it is most important for painters to “make full use of their particular means of expression [a means left purposefully vague] to prevent the domination by the symbol of the thing signified.”³⁵ In other words, the means were only as important as the ends that they facilitate or produce, and those ends themselves functioned best when their meanings were as open as possible, as divorced from the viewers’ everyday understanding of them as possible.

It seems, however, that despite Breton’s attempts to locate the power of Surrealism in the shocks and surprises that it registered in its viewers (whether through the dissociation of the artist’s subjects from their commonly-accepted interpretations via unexpected combinations, new techniques of depicting them, or both) rather than in the means through which its art was produced or the ultimate aesthetic of the final product, the divisions that had already been created a few years earlier (or at least their conceptual underpinnings) remained in place. Even those who wrote about Surrealism during the heyday of the movement were never quite willing to assimilate it as a whole into the modernist trajectory, and most often strove to categorize and organize its artists, neatly dividing them into “automatists” and “dream illusionists.” For example, Julien Levy, in his 1936 book *Surrealism*—one of the first substantial texts on the movement—

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

reinforces such distinctions by placing Pierre Roy and Giorgio De Chirico on one side of the equation (dream illusionism) and Joan Miró and Hans Arp on the other (automatist), calling them “precise opposites.”³⁶ James Johnson Sweeney, in his short introduction to Tanguy’s exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1940, wrote, along similar lines, that “there are two broad types of Surrealist painters: the illustrator of dreams [the dream illusionist] and the dreamer in paint [the automatist].”³⁷ Finally, Breton himself acknowledged the polarization that had occurred, writing in 1941 that “Automatism, inherited from the mediums, has remained one of Surrealism’s two great directions. . . . The other road available to Surrealism to reach its objective [is] the stabilizing of dream images in the kind of still-life deception known as *trompe l’oeil*.”³⁸

This split, initially identified by those closely involved with the movement, was later codified by curators and scholars as it became assimilated into the history of twentieth-century art. One of the most important and influential examples of this urge to create neat, bi-polar categories of artistic practice can be seen in William Rubin’s catalog for the Museum of Modern Art’s massive “Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage” exhibition, which took place in 1968. This exhibition and its accompanying catalog expanded upon Alfred Barr’s groundbreaking show at the same venue three decades earlier, “Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism,” which exposed the American public to the movement early

³⁶ See Julien Levy, *Surrealism* (New York: Black Sun Press, 1936; reprint, New York: DaCapo Press, 1995), 22.

³⁷ James Johnson Sweeney, *Yves Tanguy: Paintings, Gouaches Drawings* (Chicago: Arts Club of Chicago, 1940), unpag.

³⁸ André Breton, *Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism* reprinted in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* intr. Mark Pollizotti, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), 68-70.

on but whose catalogue offered little in the way of categorization or interpretation. In his attempt to sort out and historicize Surrealism not long after its demise, Rubin fell back upon long-established divisions, writing that:

as Surrealism emerged in its heroic period—between the first (1924) and the second (1929) manifestoes—it bipolarized stylistically in accord with the two Freudian essentials of its definition. Automatism (the draftsmanly counterpart of verbal free association) led to the “abstract” Surrealism of Miró and Masson, who worked improvisationally with primary biomorphic shapes in a shallow, Cubist-derived space. The “fixing of dream-inspired images influenced the more academic illusionism of Magritte, Tanguy, and Dalí. . . . The styles of all Surrealist painters are situated on the continuum defined by these two poles.³⁹

One of the fascinating things about Rubin’s analysis is that it allowed him to break the movement down into simple, easy-to-digest categories, in order to begin assimilating it into a more traditional kind of art history: one with a linear progression from one idea to the next.⁴⁰ He is one of a number of art historians to place Tanguy firmly in the “dream illusionist” camp, based on the final appearance of his paintings rather than on an understanding of the processes underpinning their creation.

Indeed, at a casual glance, the most dominant visual aspects of Tanguy’s paintings seem to correspond with this assessment. Even during the period that might be described as the most formally adventurous and stylistically diverse of his career, the mid-1920s, the first two published writings on Tanguy, each by a close friend (one by Robert Desnos and one by André Breton), discuss his work in a way that emphasizes its illusionistic qualities and its dream-world subject matter rather than the way in which the techniques used by the

³⁹ William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 64.

⁴⁰ A good strategy, perhaps, for introducing the movement to a broad museum audience, but one that unfortunately obscures or oversimplifies the true complexity of each artists’ work—certainly Tanguy’s.

artist revealed his attempts to engage with automatism. Desnos's article on Surrealism, which appeared in the Parisian periodical *Cahiers d'art* in October, 1926, is the first known published writing on Tanguy.⁴¹ In it, Desnos uses highly descriptive language when discussing the "worlds" found in the "domain" of Tanguy's paintings, including phrases such as "currents of air in haunted castles," "strange forms in clouds," and "abandoned cemeteries in which eternal women of the sun will dance precisely at midnight."⁴² In this domain, Tanguy (a sorcerer) is said to willingly "close his eyes" to "lose himself in the distractions of the forest." The world depicted within his canvases, poetically described, is that of dreams, and is recognizable as such because of the strangeness of his imagery—imagery that would not function properly were it not clearly recognizable and thus lent itself for comparison to the rational world.

Less than a year later, Tanguy was granted his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste. Breton wrote the introductory text for the small publication accompanying the show, which has come to be known more for the haphazard way in which its contents were titled than for the way that the artist was discussed by Breton in the text.⁴³ Despite the fact that it was precisely at this time that Tanguy was most deeply and most obviously engaged with automatism—both in his drawings and his paintings—Breton, like Desnos, chose to devote most of his essay to poetic descriptions of the imagery found in Tanguy's paintings (which he called "borderlands of pure form"); impassioned defenses of the

⁴¹ Robert Desnos, "Surréalisme," *Cahiers d'art* 1,8 (October 1926), 210-213.

⁴² Desnos, "Surrealism," 212.

⁴³ It was for this show that Tanguy and Breton famously were supposed to have chosen the titles for the works by paging through a book on psychology. Both Soby in 1954 (p. 15) and von Maur in 2000 (p. 29) note this.

authenticity of Tanguy's vision (his "refusal to make any concession[s]"); and strong condemnations of those who might seek to interpret the subject matter of paintings in a literal manner. He closes by noting that the true "subject" of Tanguy's paintings is not the representation of the physical world (hence their "purity"—their existence untainted, in his view, by untidy links to objects from the conscious realm) but rather the "occult meanings" set off by Tanguy's forms and the "immense suspicion that surrounds everything" in a "mental world" of "obscure and superb metamorphoses."⁴⁴ Nowhere are the technical processes used by Tanguy to *create* these remarkable paintings discussed; the focus is entirely upon the way in which the imagery of Tanguy's art distinguishes itself from the exterior, rational world (a case made perhaps too forcefully, as discussed in the previous chapter)—a somewhat surprising fact considering the issues being debated by the movement's members at the time, not to mention the variety of inventive technical approaches that Tanguy was incorporating into his early paintings

In the mid-1920s Tanguy had begun to paint in earnest; many of these canvases are characterized by surprisingly inventive combinations of non-traditional techniques and materials. *Title Unknown* (1926, fig. 76), for example, features thread sewn onto that canvas that forms a tree reminiscent of the forms found in the paintings of Paul Klée, as well as collaged elements and hundreds of undulating sgraffito "waves". *Le Phare*, also completed in 1926, incorporates a number of collaged elements, including matchsticks, paper, and wood, while textural effects were created by rapid stamping and blotting of the

⁴⁴ André Breton, "Yves Tanguy" in *Yves Tanguy & Objets d'Amérique* (Paris, Galerie Surréaliste, 1927), np.

white paint in the foreground while it was still wet; some of these blottings have been reapplied in the sky, giving the appearance of falling snow. These various experiments with collaged elements and liberating techniques were not unique to Tanguy's oeuvre, for they can be found in the work of other artists affiliated with the Surrealists at the time, including Max Ernst and Francis Picabia. It is perhaps surprising that Tanguy's use of them was overlooked by both Breton and Desnos in their essays.⁴⁵

Gestural paint application also played an important part in Tanguy's canvases of 1926 and 1927: the first two years of his affiliation with the Surrealists and a period during which he actively was experimenting with ways in which to create drawings using automatic techniques. This painterly approach is suggestive of the freedom associated with automatism and, along with a shared iconographic programme of body parts and plantlike forms, its experimental nature links the canvases of this period securely to the automatic drawings that the artist was producing concurrently. It is prevalent in paintings like *Sans Titre (La Géante, L'Echelle)* of 1926 (fig. 77), where flowing, liquid strokes have been used to describe the large figure's wild black hair and sgraffito scratches and blotting also reappear to play a prominent role in further describing the figure's hair and in creating a white mist that threatens to envelop the scene from below.⁴⁶ *Vite! Vite!* (fig. 78), of the same year, is a veritable catalogue of automatic gestures; its panoramic, aggressively horizontal surface swarms with rapidly delineated animal, vegetal, and

⁴⁵ See von Maur in Yves Tanguy and Surrealism, p. 23, for specific works by these artists that relate to Tanguy's.

⁴⁶ It might also be noted that the giantess's blank face, upon close examination, contains a roughly-delineated female torso—a motif famously used by René Magritte eight years later in his painting *Le Viol*.

humanoid forms which are surrounded by thick swirls of black and white paint. Tanguy continued to use these techniques for the next year or so; they are prevalent in paintings such as *Et Voilà*, *L'Orage*, and *On Sonne* of 1927 and can still be found, albeit relegated to describing the flowing landscape rather than the figures that populate it, in paintings from 1928, such as *Les Profondeurs tacites*; *Le Jardin somber*; and *Viel Horizon*.

By the end of the decade, Tanguy had arrived at what has come to be known as his mature style. Only lingering vestiges of the kinds of rough-hewn painterly automatism that characterized his earlier works can be found in his canvases from this point forward. *L'Inspiration* (1929, fig. 79) is a typical example of one of these early mature works. It includes a number of precisely-delineated biomorphic forms, two of which are echoed by eerie shadow-like doubles. These forms are modeled with carefully blended brushstrokes and they sit upon a relatively smooth ground and against a similarly featureless sky. Only a the handful of wispy white swirls that adorn the largest form and the vaporous grey mist surrounding its counterpart—composed of wavy linear markings—in the sky above, might be characterized as slightly automatic or spontaneous in nature.

At this point Tanguy's drawings, too, had changed substantially, in ways that paralleled the developments in his paintings. In both instances, the forms had become fluid and graceful, as they were often composed of sweeping, unbroken lines and relatively few right angles, straight lines, or geometric forms. The impatient hatchings, staccato (or occasionally broad, flowing) brushwork, and simplified yet recognizable symbolic

subjects had all but vanished. During the late 1920s “dream illusionist” or “dream landscape” paintings were becoming increasingly popular; soon this tightly-painted style was practiced by the majority of the movement’s better-known adherents: Dalí, Magritte, Delvaux . . . and, apparently, Tanguy. Such paintings were a significant conceptual and stylistic departure from the artists’ earlier works which were realized through more obviously automatic techniques, of the type that had been the movement’s primary vehicle less than a decade earlier. Such art was intended to shock and astound the viewer in the same way that dreams do, revealing the world of the subconscious through depictions of unexpected combinations and mutations of the everyday world rather than by allowing the hand free rein, guided by the relaxation of conscious thought. Thus, both the technical processes that Tanguy used to create his paintings and their dominant aesthetic mirrored the rise and fall of each approach’s (automatism’s and dream illusionism’s) popularity during the course of the movement’s early history. If we accept the vast majority of the narratives of the development of Tanguy’s oeuvre, which, as we have seen, were carefully guided by the artist himself, it comes as no surprise that the moment at which he transitioned from painting canvases featuring automatic techniques to painting those in the “dream illusionist” style—also the moment at which he worked to create the perception that he had severed the ties between drawing and painting—was approximately the same moment that the momentum shifted from the former approach to the latter.

While the unfinished gouache from the mid-1940s discussed above provides clear evidence of the unity of media, technique, and subject matter found in Tanguy's art, this fluidity between traditional boundaries in his work has heretofore gone unnoticed and unacknowledged in the literature on the artist. Despite the fact that through his technical proficiency Tanguy was able to render his subject matter with precision and clarity, leading many art historians to align his oeuvre with the "dream illusionist" pole of the spectrum of Surrealist practice, it was a common argument among Tanguy's supporters that he, in fact, painted automatically. How could this be? The reasoning behind this claim is twofold. First, it was believed that Tanguy's paintings emerged with little or no conscious thought arresting the flow of his ideas, which moved unchecked from his subconscious to the canvas. Second, the nature of the resulting imagery was so foreign to the known world, it was argued, that it could only be classified as coming directly from the depths of the artist's subconscious, representing a kind of unfiltered primal matter. As James Johnson Sweeney described it in his short introduction to Tanguy's exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1940, Tanguy was a more "dreamer in paint" than an "illustrator of dreams."⁴⁷ Examples of this type logic also appear in writing on Tanguy by Marcel Jean (1959) and Gordon Onslow Ford (1983), both of whom knew the artist well and who were closely linked to the Surrealist group.

In his *History of Surrealist Painting*, Marcel Jean reports that early in Tanguy's career, the artist

⁴⁷ James Johnson Sweeney, *Yves Tanguy: Paintings, Gouaches, Drawings* (exhibition brochure, Arts Club of Chicago, February 2-27, 1940).

abandoned anecdote and began to interiorize his vision. He adapted the lessons of automatism with a growing mastery, in the sense that he allowed his painting to grow like a plant and to bloom slowly until the point of perfection was reached. . . . it is just such art, so instinctive and yet so assured, so naïve in the most authentic sense of the word, that lends itself most directly to reflection. . . . Tanguy's infallible reflexes have accompanied the development of reality to the very summit where everything is well-wrought and perfect.⁴⁸

Such prose attempts to situate the reader's understanding of Tanguy's art in the context of automatism, not so much in terms of how the final product looked but rather through an account of the mental process that lay behind its creation and metaphoric references linking automatism to organic growth and development. Descriptions like these fell in line with Breton's ideas in *Surrealism and Painting*, but run counter to William Rubin's more aesthetically-driven categorizations in the later survey, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, discussed above. Even after the publication of Rubin's work, Gordon Onslow Ford continued to discuss Tanguy's art in terms similar to those of Jean.

Onslow Ford's poetically-written *Yves Tanguy and Automatism*, published in 1982, described Tanguy's world as "Planet Yves," and detailed its creation almost in biblical terms, casting Tanguy as both Creator and first man. Onslow-Ford argued that "Tanguy was the first painter, amongst the surrealists, whose mature paintings came into being in the present moment from beginning to end, stroke by stroke, and stage by stage. From this point of view, Tanguy's paintings were closer to the spirit of automatism than any

⁴⁸ Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 167-68; 173.

that had appeared before.”⁴⁹ The author made his views on the issue explicit from the moment that one picked up his book by titling it *Yves Tanguy and Automatism*. By describing the paintings as “coming into being in the present moment,” (but don’t all paintings to some degree—no matter how much planning occurs before their execution?), Onslow-Ford seems to be suggesting that when Tanguy was working he was directly channeling images from his subconscious, impervious to both the outside world and his own conscious thoughts.

Paralleling ideas like Onslow Ford’s and Jean’s are those of other Tanguy scholars, who have argued that his paintings can be interpreted as “automatic” because he appeared not to have sketched them out or planned their compositional structure before he began to paint. Such rhetoric tends to be supported by two rare statements by Tanguy about the subject, one made in private and the other in public. Both turn around Tanguy’s “African” series from the early 1930s. As noted above, Tanguy had confided to James Thrall Soby that for this group of paintings (and, by implication, for this group of paintings *alone*) he had sketched out the compositions beforehand. This seems to justify their distinctiveness in his oeuvre, but it may also be interpreted as a turning point: a moment when Tanguy learned how to incorporate his drawings into his paintings rather than eliminating them altogether, as is commonly accepted. Thus Soby wrote that “A principle reason for the stylistic change was that the African pictures, unlike all the others in Tanguy’s oeuvre, were sketched on the canvas before being painted.”⁵⁰ In the final

⁴⁹ Gordon Onslow Ford, *Yves Tanguy and Automatism* (Inverness, CA: Bishop Pine Press, 1982), 4.

⁵⁰ Soby, *Yves Tanguy*, 17.

year of his life Tanguy responded to a questionnaire in *Art Digest*. In a typically Surrealist fashion, he did not answer the thirteen questions sequentially but instead simply submitted a statement about his artistic practices and beliefs. His comments reinforced Sweeney's earlier description of his work as being generated rather automatically: as "dreaming in paint." He wrote that "the element of *surprise* in the creation of a work of art" was, to him, "the most important factor—surprise to the artist himself, as well as to others." Furthering his claim for the automatically-generated nature of his forms he continued, "The painting develops before my eyes, unfolding its surprises as it progresses."⁵¹ By phrasing his statement in this way, he implied that he had little conscious control over the direction in which one of his paintings evolved. The reader is meant to infer that Tanguy was just as surprised as his viewers by the results of his use of automatism; that the images simply "unfolded" before him. The artist assumed the role of a conduit, of a medium. In seeking to deny the role of drawing in his art (elsewhere in the statement, he also noted that he was "incapable" of "forming a plan or making a sketch beforehand"), Tanguy, I believe, sought to avoid accusations of inauthenticity (or of academicism, of painting over a pre-determined matrix) and—even at this relatively late date in his career—to remain in favor with the core group of his supporters and, perhaps, to stake out a firm position for himself amongst his colleagues as the movement entered into history.

Subsequent scholars appear to have accepted these explanations at face value. In a 1974 essay, John Ashbery wrote that after Tanguy's North African trip, "for the first and last

⁵¹ Yves Tanguy, "The Creative Process," *Art Digest* 28, no. 8 (15 January 1954), 14.

time in his career he drew directly on the canvas before beginning to paint. . . . with the abandonment of this method, so far removed from the theoretical automatism of Surrealism, Tanguy entered the final mature phase of his work.”⁵² Roland Penrose noted in 1983 that “after his short trip to Tunisia in 1930 Tanguy attempted to sketch his compositions on the easel before painting, but he very quickly gave up this manner of working because he perceived it as a limitation on his free fantasy.”⁵³ In the same catalog as Penrose’s essay, José Pierre wrote that because they were drawn before they were painted, Tanguy’s six “African” paintings were a significant departure from the pure psychic automatism that Breton sought. As noted above, Pierre went on to describe a split in Tanguy’s paintings and drawings at this point, arguing that the drawings should be considered the automatically-generated portion of Tanguy’s oeuvre while his paintings were are no longer so, having entered the realm of dream illusionism.⁵⁴ While I think that Pierre is correct in seeing a strong vein of automatism continuing in Tanguy’s drawings, it is precisely the same kind of drawing that exists independently as a work on paper that also lies beneath the surfaces of many of the artist’s paintings as well.

A number of those who have written about Tanguy, including Jean and Onslow-Ford, sought to parry the accusations of conscious intervention often leveled at “dream illusionist” painters like Dalí by pushing interpretations of his work towards automatism. They did so by emphasizing the supposed directness with which he is channeled his forms from his subconscious. Others, such as Rubin, Levy, and Roland Penrose have

⁵² John Ashbery, *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1974), unpag.

⁵³ Roland Penrose, “Yves Tanguy,” in Schmidt, et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 28-29.

⁵⁴ See José Pierre, “The Surrealist Painter Par Excellence,” in Schmidt et al. *Yves Tanguy*, 51-52.

labeled him simply as a dream illusionist, arguing that the technique with which he executed his paintings, as well as their ultimate aesthetic, were their most dominant qualities, overriding any claim that they might have to being produced by automatic processes. In any case, Tanguy's paintings were never as purposefully provocative as those of Dalí, and he was never accused of "selling out"—of shocking for the sake of shock (or the sake of sales) like de Chirico and Dalí.⁵⁵ It was likely in large part because of this restraint that he was able to maintain his good standing in the group. Equally important to this balancing act was Tanguy's sensitivity to the pitfalls associated with both automatism and dream illusionism, and his canny ability to keep both approaches in play simultaneously. During the period that Breton was revising his position concerning the supremacy of automatism as the premiere Surrealist method for artmaking (1927-1929) and moving towards a tentative embrace of certain kinds of dream illusionism, Tanguy was in the process of reorienting his work in a parallel direction. In fact, it was at this exact point in time that his automatism moved away from painterly flourishes that animated his compositions and his drawings literally went "underground," becoming buried beneath the surface of his paintings. Whether Breton and later writers were aware of it or cared to acknowledge it, Tanguy's paintings were slipping around traditional limitations, troubling a clear reading of which side of the fence they were on.

The paintings that Tanguy executed during the mature portion of his career were created through a series of artistic processes that differentiated him from his colleagues; an

⁵⁵ See Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 12-19, on de Chirico; and in "The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting", in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 146-47, on Dalí.

approach that drew upon an understanding of automatism as a technical approach as well as a factor in his paintings' ultimate aesthetic. In his work, then, the former is present in the freely executed underdrawings that are hidden beneath the surface of his paintings while the latter is suggested by the fact that these forms' appearance is so strange and essentially *complete* (in the sense that each appears to be its own fully formed and independent organic entity) that they could only have appeared on the canvas by having been channeled directly from the artist's subconscious. But it was, ironically, also the technical precision with which these forms were rendered, as well as the way that Tanguy situated them within his compositions, that allowed a number of those writing about them to claim them for dream illusionism rather than automatism.

Although Tanguy is most often categorized as a dream illusionist due to the meticulous nature of his mature technique, his paintings trouble this description, or perhaps render the category less stable, for our dreams are populated by recognizable people, places and things, made mysterious through subconscious substitutions engaged in fantastic, unexpected or taboo narratives and interactions, not by kinds of suggestive biomorphic forms that populate Tanguy's paintings. It is, perhaps, the very uniqueness of his forms that might be interpreted as infusing these paintings with an undercurrent of spontaneity that has been detected by those such as Jean and Onslow-Ford. It is not difficult to imagine that *because* of their unique qualities, the only way that such forms could be created was by a hand acting in response to unconscious directives, no matter how finely-wrought they appear. But on the contrary, close inspection reveals that one of the primary

reasons that these forms possess this fluidity and spontaneity may well be precisely because they were drawn freely upon the canvas before being painted.

It is this hidden underlayer—composed of fluidly rendered drawings upon the surface of a prepared canvas—that gives Tanguy’s forms their power and makes them so hard to categorize and interpret. The underdrawings might be said to function as these forms’ unconscious: a veiled yet essential part of their identity that is enhanced by their exterior fluidity and convincing execution (much as their “reality” is heightened or “proven” by their accompanying shadows). Few, if any, of the artists affiliated with the group combined elements of automatism and dream illusionism in a similar fashion. Miro’s paintings in this vein come close, for the artist sometimes utilized strong graphic elements, whether in the form of outlines or independent markings, in his work. During the American phase of Tanguy’s career Arshille Gorky also developed a unique style that blended graphic and painterly forms more openly and freely than any of his peers. Yet drawing and painting shared equal billing in much of Gorky’s work. Thus, while a combination of pure painterly freedom and precise, linear clarity was not necessarily unique to Tanguy’s oeuvre, the way in which he deployed these elements was, as was his purposeful and repeated denial of their existence. Unlike these colleagues, Tanguy kept the graphic elements of his work under wraps. But once one realizes that these important skeletal elements exist, the hard-edged clarity of Tanguy’s forms makes all the more sense.

Further Evidence

Guided by the evidence supplied by Tanguy's unfinished gouache, a strong argument can be made that in Tanguy's art two of the key approaches used by the Surrealists, described by everyone from Breton to Rubin, do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive and that the artists associated with the Surrealist movement did not have to make a definitive choice to align themselves with one pole or the other. Further, one can make the argument that in Tanguy's work, as, perhaps, in that of Miro, Ernst, or Masson, to name but a few, elements of both automatism and dream illusionism have been combined to produce a specific result. It thus proves a difficult task to place his paintings along the spectrum as it has been conceived historically. Despite how obvious the skeletal drawing in Tanguy's gouache is; despite the fact that it has been illustrated twice in publications since the artist's death; and despite the fact that it has been in a public collection since 1963 and has been included in at least one significant exhibition since then, this fundamental feature of his artistic practice has heretofore either gone unnoticed or has been purposefully ignored by scholars and curators intent on keeping historical categories intact or promoting Tanguy as having belonged to one school of Surrealist practice or the other.

There are, in fact, skeletal underdrawings present in paintings from every decade of Tanguy's mature career, ranging from works executed in the early 1930s to those completed in the final years of his career in the mid-1950s. In *Promontory Palace* from 1930, for example (see fig. 75), one of the so-called "African" paintings in which Tanguy admitted to having drawn upon the canvas before beginning to paint, one can still see

graphic marks at the edges of many of the forms and undulations scattered throughout the composition.⁵⁶ But, according to Tanguy, this should not be a surprise, for it is among the series of works that he claimed were the only ones to have been created in this way.

However, one can find remnants of underdrawing at the edges of forms in many other canvases from later in the decade—and subsequent decades—when Tanguy had supposedly given up this way of working.

In *Le Questionnant*, painted in 1937 (see fig. 58), it is possible to make out sections of underdrawing at the top of the tallest form on the right; in the large canvas *L'ennui et la tranquillité*, executed the following year (fig. 80), linear outlines appear in a number of places: on edges of the grey conical form (on the right hand side of the cluster of forms in the center left of the middle ground) and of the triangular, half-star-shaped form to the left of the conical one; in numerous places in the pile of forms just below the aforementioned group; and finally some underdrawings also show through on the edges of the large form in the foreground. Although both Tanguy and those who have written about his work from the 1930s have tended to isolate the “African” paintings within his oeuvre because they supposedly differ from the artist’s other mature paintings in terms of

⁵⁶ The pre-painting preparations for this small “series” of African pictures is often cited in literature on the artist—most recently in Karin von Maur’s essay “Yves Tanguy or ‘The Certainty of the Never-Seen,’” in von Maur et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 65. The bulk of the observations regarding the existence of underdrawings in the paintings discussed in the remainder of this paragraph were made by the author while viewing the exhibition *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, in July 2001, with the exception of *L'ennui et la tranquillité*, which was studied by the author at Galerie Malingue in Paris in November 2003; and *My Life, White and Black*, which was studied by the author at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the fall of 2004. Further scientific tests, such as infrared reflectography, would reveal the full extent of such underdrawings, although the author does not currently know of the existence of such photography for any of Tanguy’s paintings and must, therefore, rely on the direct visual evidence discussed in this chapter.

their facture and their aesthetic, the differences between these paintings and those from the subsequent portion of his career are found not so much in the character of the forms themselves but rather in the environments in which these forms are situated. The flowing plateaus that appear in the “African” canvases are arguably their most unique characteristic. In these “African” paintings the forms themselves are still biomorphic in nature; they remain relatively abstract, rendered in the artist’s now-familiar combination of curves and angles accompanied by convincing shadows and modulated colors that, together, create a strong sense of three-dimensionality. Along with the plateaus upon which these forms are arrayed, the second characteristic that distinguishes the African paintings from subsequent ones is the fact that rather than being scattered across a misty ground and an undefined sky, and rather than being presented in clusters and groups, the forms found there are typically presented in isolation from one another.

Tanguy’s practice of sketching out his forms upon the prepared ground of his canvas continued into his years in America as well. In *Divisibilité infinie*, completed in 1942 (fig. 81), clear evidence of underdrawing can be seen defining the edges of the comma-shaped orange and white form, found atop the slender shaft in the upper third of the large construction on the right-hand side of the composition. In *My Life, White and Black* (see fig. 15), finished two years later, one can see the layer of underdrawings at the edges of virtually all of the lighter forms in the painting. *Fear* from 1949 (see fig. 82), also reveals evidence of a preparatory layer of drawing throughout the composition, especially, again, at the edges of the lighter forms. The edges of the white shapes in *Unlimited Sequences*

(1951, fig. 83) reveal both pencil lines and a series of incised lines. Finally, even Tanguy's final major painting, *Multiplication of the Arcs* of 1954 (fig. 84) contains numerous passages scattered throughout the dense composition in which one can still make out the preparatory drawings that delineate the forms painted over them.

In each of these cases, the underdrawings do not appear to be isolated fragments or even quickly sketched in bits meant to suggest a basic placement of forms, but rather part of a larger, more cohesively organized design. As noted above, the drawings tend to emerge where the paint layer is lightest or at the edges of forms; they do not appear to be marks made after the fact to heighten the outline of a form but instead they sit beneath the uppermost layers of paint (on top of the base layer of the "landscape" in which they are situated), occasionally emerging from behind the paint that defines the forms if it has not been brought out entirely to their limit. Free-flowing underdrawings indicating a fully mapped out composition of forms would be consistent with both Tanguy's known body of independent graphic works, which has been characterized throughout his career by flowing, unbroken lines that suggest the "speed" of automatic drawing and an economy of means. Both of these qualities are apparent in the unfinished gouache from the mid-1940s. The combination of the characteristics that defines Tanguy's graphic work, along with the evidence revealed in the unfinished gouache and the visible marks in many of his paintings, suggest that all of the forms in the artist's mature oils were sketched out before being painted over, although conclusive evidence that entire sequences of forms were pre-drawn upon the canvas before being painted over could only be definitively

confirmed by infrared photographs, which would be a logical next step to take if such resources were available. In the absence of such photographs, however, the evidence visible to the naked eye, coupled with what is known about Tanguy's independent drawings and his unfinished gouache, make a strong case for the present argument.

If we accept that underdrawings are present beneath the surface of many—if not all—of Tanguy's mature paintings, and that their presence complicates the way in which drawing and painting in his work must thus be interpreted (not as separate, diametrically opposed concepts but rather, as carefully layered, co-existent elements working together in a systematic fashion), then it is indeed possible to explain why the few previous scholars who have discussed these issues when analyzing Tanguy's art have arrived at conflicting conclusions about its ties to automatism and dream illusionism. By reconsidering the way in which his paintings were created, and this the way in which they subtly engaged both of these approaches, one can argue that Tanguy was a more sophisticated and more complex artist than has been previously acknowledged. His work, in fact, slyly challenges the traditional separation of media and conceptual approaches associated with Surrealism.

A Context for Re-evaluation

Acknowledging the presence of underdrawings and the crucial role that they play in energizing Tanguy's mature paintings is, in itself, an important step towards revising our understanding of his work and its place within the Surrealist movement. The discussion

of these skeletal devices is an important part of the story, for not only do they allow us a more complex view of both Tanguy's position within the movement and the way in which he cannily reacted to changes in its rhetoric at a critical juncture in his career, but they also allow his work to play a more significant role in recent discourses about this rhetoric and the way that it has been historicized. Tanguy has been the most conspicuously absent (or at least only minimally present or discussed only in passing) of the group's core members in recent literature on the movement. His absence is, I would argue, due to a false perception about the simplicity and narrowness of his oeuvre; in particular the perception that his work did not engage with the human form (an idea challenged in the first chapter of this project) and the perception that his paintings were created in a simple, straightforward manner. Tanguy's unique approach to the automatism/dream illusionism conflict not only highlights the originality and inventiveness of his approach but adds another dimension to this complex debate. In order to begin considering how the presence of underdrawings in Tanguy's work can position it within the current dialogue about the validity of the historically conditioned reflex to see automatism and dream illusionism as diametrically opposed, it is informative to consider how questions about these divisions arose in the first place.

The early writings of Rosalind Krauss, which emerged little more than a decade after Rubin's exhibition, discussed earlier in this chapter, and just before Tanguy's 1983 retrospective (the first major museum-generated project on the artist since his 1955 retrospective at MoMA), signal the arrival of a new generation of scholars of modern art in search of new approaches to such historically-accepted divisions—or, in Krauss's case,

scholars who sought to subvert them entirely. Krauss's provocative essay, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism" led this charge by neatly sidestepping the decades-old debate about which medium was the "proper" one for Surrealist automatism—and, to a greater extent, the question of whether the dream illusionism/automatism was a valid binary—by simply suggesting that photography could, instead, be considered the truest form of Surrealist art.⁵⁷ In making this surprising claim, she cited not only examples of photography endorsed and published by Breton, but returned to the debate's origins in the pages of *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1926, dissecting the arguments of both Breton and Pierre Naville and thereby charting the course for one direction from which later scholars have often approached the issue.

While Krauss's essay opened up for debate the issue of what constituted the type of Surrealist practice that lay closest to the movement's philosophical core, her findings might be interpreted to be equally as polarizing as the original discussion, for now photography stood at one end of the spectrum, while painting and drawing were lumped together at the other. One might note briefly that Max Morise's article, to which Naville was responding in 1926, as well as Breton's later attempts to address the issue, were both left out of Krauss's discussion entirely. Thus, in seeking to reframe the debate about the truest form of Surrealist artistic practice, Krauss looked selectively at the arguments of

⁵⁷ See Rosalind Krauss et al., *L'Amour fou: photography & surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), esp. p.115: "The more important fact is that in a few of these photographs [that were published in early Surrealist periodicals] surrealism achieved some of its supreme images – images of far greater power than most of what was done in the remorselessly labored paintings and drawings that came increasingly to establish the identity of Breton's concept of 'surrealism and painting.'"

the day, picking and choosing which parts of the original debate were most useful to her rather than considering the issue holistically.

Although early revisionist ideas about the “proper” form of Surrealist art are important to review in order to provide a context for our re-assessment of both Tanguy’s approach and its impact on our understanding of Surrealist practices, my primary interest is not so much whether painting and drawing should or should not be considered the most important or most authentic Surrealist technique for achieving the movement’s goals (nor whether automatism or dream illusionism was more central to its mission), but rather to look beyond these polarizing questions in order to ask *how* the movement’s artists, particularly Tanguy, dealt with the approaches and techniques available to them as well as how these decisions have entered and have been framed within the historical discourse. For it seems clear that Tanguy, who was at the heart of the movement both spirit and in practice for the vast majority of his career and the movement’s duration, did not gravitate towards either automatism or dream illusionism entirely, but instead approached them in entirely unique manner that has to this point gone ignored or been deliberately obscured during attempts to situate his art on one side of the issue or the other.⁵⁸ Tanguy’s solution to this “problem”—combining both approaches in his paintings—reveals the fluidity of these concepts and also the fact that he was willing to engage them in a way that differed from the approaches taken by his closest colleagues, such as Masson, Miro, or Ernst.

⁵⁸ As discussed above, this happens in a great deal of Tanguy literature, from Soby’s *Yves Tanguy* in 1955 to many of the essays in Katharina Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1983).

Attempting to force his work towards one reading or the other is both illogical and unnecessary, for the two coexist in his paintings.

Thus, in a manner unlike any of his peers, Tanguy *combined* both the free flowing linearity of automatic drawing and the highly detailed precision of dream illusionism in his art, harnessing upon the energy of the former to activate the latter and creating a situation in which one was dependent upon the other (whether this was immediately evident or not) to generate each painting's ultimate aesthetic impact. Such combinations were not hidden in paintings by some of his colleagues. Paintings by Max Ernst, like *The Horde*, 1927 (fig.85), for example, were created through the automatic technique of frottage and subsequent selective overpainting, a process that heightened images suggested by the initial act of frottage.⁵⁹ A counterexample, which represents the use of a single, automatic technique, would be a drawing like Masson's *Dessin Automatique* (1925/26, fig. 86), in which flowing graphic marks move toward the point of legibility but never become entirely descriptive.⁶⁰ In Tanguy's work combinations like those found in Ernst's are not as obvious, but become apparent only upon close inspection. Perhaps the reason that Tanguy played down the presence of the complex technical approaches that were used in the creation of his paintings was that what mattered more for him was to be truthful to his own inner vision (a stance advocated repeatedly by Breton as being more important than facture), rather than pursuing a particular technique to its extreme, or

⁵⁹ See Walter Hopps, "Ernst at Surrealism's Dawn," in William A. Camfield et al., *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 157-59 for a discussion of this aspect of Ernst's career. *The Horde* is in the collection of The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

⁶⁰ *Dessin Automatique*, 1925/26, India ink on paper, collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

to the exclusion of others that could also generate various desired effects.⁶¹ When it comes to Tanguy's mature paintings, a discussion based solely upon technique, style, or content will turn out to be inaccurate and misleading, thereby discounting a key aspect of their originality and diminishing their richness.

If we are to reconceptualize Tanguy's artistic practice and examine the way in which it blurred the boundaries between the commonly accepted "polar" constructs of automatism and dream illusionism it will be useful to consider some of the theoretical models that have emerged over the past few decades that have posed similar questions. Such models, grounded in the line of inquiry set in motion by scholars like Rosalind Krauss, have often been applied to key Surrealist artists as well as to the organizing principles of the movement. Yet Tanguy and his work have been entirely absent from such analyses and discussions to date. With this in mind, I will consider three examples of such work, each of which utilizes a slightly different approach to its subject but which, when considered as a group, can provide a rich context for the new understanding of Tanguy's art and his role within the movement that I am proposing.

While Krauss subverted the traditional dichotomies of Surrealism—for example, by offering photography as a key mode of practice rather than accepting the older dichotomies of art/literature or drawing/painting—in recent years Briony Fer, Roger Cardinal and David Lomas, have each sought new ways to approach these structures. The

⁶¹ See André Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

essays by these scholars that I will consider are of particular interest to the subject of this chapter, for not only do they offer alternatives to standard dichotomies, but each, additionally, does this via a reconsideration of automatism. Both Cardinal's essay on André Masson's drawings and Fer's chapter on Jean Arp in her book *On Abstract Art* operate in similar ways: each takes a prevalent view about a particular aspect of artistic practice during the modern era and turns it on its head by arguing that qualities that are commonly accepted to be in opposition can potentially coexist in the work of a single artist or even within a single work of art.⁶² Lomas, in his chapter on Miró's painting *Birth of the World* in his book *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (2000), overturns the commonly-accepted notion that the painting was created via automatic processes. While Cardinal and Lomas draw upon a small body of one artist's work (or a single work by an artist) to question a broad category of Surrealist practice, Fer begins by tackling a large idea (the lineage of abstraction) and finding specific examples within a certain artist's work that undercut or complicate commonly accepted histories of that work's contribution to the narrative of modern art. Collectively, these authors' writings can help to provide a context for the present discussion of Tanguy's hidden drawings.

The broadest point of entry to these new ideas about automatism can be found in Briony Fer's book *On Abstract Art*. Here, Fer argues that many of the concepts that previously have been thought to define the key movements or artists of the modern era have been

⁶²Roger Cardinal's essay, "André Masson and Automatic Drawing," is found in Levy et al., *Surrealist Visuality*, 79-93.

structured as bi-polar systems. While, as she writes, it might be easiest to conceive of artists and movements this way because it gives one a specific range or spectrum within which an idea can be easily defined by the ways in which it differs from an opposing one (purity versus baseness, or order versus chaos, for example), this approach often oversimplifies and obscures a richer and perhaps more accurate understanding of an idea or an artist's work. "The canon," Fer states, "seeks to impose a continuity upon a great modernist tradition."⁶³ "Rather than seek to secure the work within the boundaries of purely formal categories, structurally designed to render a tradition homogeneous," Fer states that her goal is to find breaks in this structure: "points of rupture . . . in the logical circuitry of the modernist imagination."⁶⁴ She closes her introduction, in fact, with Clement Greenberg's surprising response to Michel Seuphor's assertion that Mondrian's work existed exclusively in the realm of intellect and mathematical reason. Greenberg, rather surprisingly (for he had his own reasons for dismissing the Dutch painter) suggested that Mondrian's approach to his art during the mature era of his career might be linked to intuition and the world of dreams as much as to intellectual rigor and geometric precision.⁶⁵ Fer's subversive approach to complicating the divisions that have come to define much of the art of the Twentieth Century offers a fascinating lens through which to view Tanguy's apparent combination of two of the pillars of Surrealist practice, automatism and dream illusionism, while also providing clues as to why this fact has been overlooked for so long.

⁶³ Fer, *On Abstract Art*, 4-5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 6; Greenberg quote from Clement Greenberg, "Review of *Piet Mondrian: Life and Work* by Michel Seuphor (1957)" in John O'Brien, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism* vol. 4 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 12.

While Fer's book does not focus exclusively on Surrealism, her discussion of various kinds of abstraction does include the work of some Surrealist artists and, of greater interest here, it functions in a similar way to Cardinal's and Lomas's rhetoric by posing similar types of questions. Fer argues that traditional histories of modernist art frequently have been constructed as bi-polar systems. At one end resides the highly formalist work of artists like Mondrian, Lissitzky, Malevich (academic, geometric abstraction), while at the other one finds artists like Masson and others (particularly Surrealists) who were in George Bataille's circle and whose work was decisively and deliberately *unstructured* and *unregulated*. She writes that

rather than preserve this opposition between an ideal form of the modern and its darker side, my interest is in the impossibility of keeping those twin poles apart for long. . . . I argue that there is a deviant principle at work on the site of the [modernist] canon itself. That is to say, whilst the canon seeks to impose a continuity upon a great modernist tradition, I seek to explore the discontinuities entailed in their diverse practices.⁶⁶

In other words, Fer seeks heterogeneity within traditions and bodies of work typically considered homogeneous. In the third chapter of her book, for example, Fer discusses Jean Arp's oeuvre, noting that that while the artist is typically celebrated for his precise renderings of biomorphic forms, there is, in fact, an equally interesting group of "messier" elements residing in other bodies of work by the artist—such as his torn paper pieces—that link him to alternative theories of Surrealism.⁶⁷ By considering the full range of an artist's output, Fer is able to subvert the prevalent notion that his work participated strictly in a modernist agenda that tends towards simplicity and clarity. *Both*

⁶⁶ Fer, *On Abstract Art*, 4-5.

⁶⁷ See *Ibid*, 55-76.

portions of his oeuvre relate to Surrealism, Fer argues; there is not a simple either/or choice that can capture the breadth of his artistic interests and production. Arp embraced order *and* chaos, precision *and* chance; growth *and* entropy: all characteristics traditionally held at arm's length from each other and each of which has a distinct place at an opposing end of the Breton/Bataille axis of Surrealist practice.

If we follow Fer's example, it is not impossible to view Tanguy as an artist in whose work one could find both drawing *and* painting; automatism *and* dream illusionism; spontaneity *and* calculation. Indeed, if one looks closely at the work of many artists affiliated with the movement one can find a corresponding range of interpretations and descriptors at play. With Fer's breadth of vision in mind as a possible context in which to interpret the union of opposites that activates Tanguy's paintings, it will also be useful to shift our focus slightly to examine the issue, discussed above, of the perceived "wholeness"—the unbroken link—between unconscious thought and the creative process in Tanguy's work. Roger Cardinal found a new way to look at similar issues of authenticity in the work of André Masson and his approach to these issues parallels the way that I would like to frame a new understanding of them in Tanguy's oeuvre.

Cardinal's primary focus is upon the question of how we have come to define Masson's drawings as exemplary of Surrealist automatism. One of the broader implications of his essay, however, is that we should not only question how automatism has come to be "located" in Masson's work, but also how it has come to be defined within the Surrealist

movement in general. Cardinal begins by looking at Masson's work through the historical lens of Max Morise's article "Les Yeux Enchantées," which, as noted above, questioned the feasibility of automatism as a viable practice for visual artists at precisely the moment that "automatic" drawings by Masson (and soon, Tanguy) were appearing in the pages of the same journal. As his essay unfolds, Cardinal slowly challenges the notion that automatic drawings (and Masson's drawings in particular) could be understood as entirely unmediated, i.e., realized through a sort of purely-channeled technique that is completely independent from conscious intervention. More radically, he cites Masson's own descriptions of how an automatist drawing develops from random marks into fragmentary symbols.⁶⁸ What is surprising about Cardinal's use of Masson's own writings about automatism to undermine interpretations of his work as purely unmediated works of art is that one would expect the artist to be the staunchest defender of his own methods and purity—much as Tanguy carefully guided similar discussions about the directness of his own work. Perhaps, with the passage of time (more than 35 years had passed between the time that Masson penned the drawings and wrote the talk), Masson felt it less necessary to align himself precisely with the aims of the movement, which had since largely disintegrated, and thus more willing to acknowledge the ways in which his art may or may not have fallen in line with its ideals.

According to Masson, the artist must instinctively know when to stop drawing. He argued that the moment is ripe when the forms on the page are suggestive but not entirely

⁶⁸ In particular, Cardinal refers to a lecture that Masson gave in 1961, in which he "articulated for the first time his own recipe for automatic drawing." Cardinal, André Masson and Automatic Drawing," 83. Masson's lecture was included in André Masson, *Le Rebelle du surréalisme. Écrits* (Paris, 1976).

resolved: “Once the image has appeared, it is time to stop. This image is no more than a vestige, a trace, a piece of wreckage.”⁶⁹ Thus, Cardinal argues, the “automatic drawing that Masson has in mind is simultaneously abstract (a sample of ‘mere scribbling’ in its uneven swirl of lines) and also representational (a sample of ‘doodling’) in so far as those lines cohere (though only just) as a perceptible visual reference.”⁷⁰ Instead of pushing Masson’s drawings from one extreme to the other (i.e., from automatism to dream illusionism), Cardinal argues that they in fact blur boundaries between both abstraction and representation and automatism and dream illusionism.

Additionally, Cardinal concludes that because Masson’s drawings cohere as a series because they contain a specific iconographic vocabulary that is repeated from one work to the next and that, therefore, in the end they fall short of the spontaneity and selflessness deemed crucial to purely automatist practice. Any automatist art, according to Cardinal, must contain some level of conscious mediation in order to be at all legible and to thus function effectively and to suggest the disruptions of the rational world so crucial to Surrealism: a solution that Masson seems to have accepted as well, since much of his work from 1926 onward was characterized by, as Cardinal describes it, “an impulsiveness offset by conscious artistic control.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Cardinal, citing Masson, in “André Masson and Automatic Drawing,” 84.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 84.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 88. Carolyn Lanchner has also noted, in much simpler terms (“without going into the ‘Neville crisis’ of 1925, in her words), that “we may . . . recognize that Masson’s art—like Miró’s or Ernst’s—was not produced in the absence of aesthetic preoccupation.” See Carolyn Lanchner, “André Masson: Origins and Development” in Carolyn Lanchner and William Rubin, *André Masson* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 107. Lanchner, however, does not discuss or dwell upon the conflict between Masson’s technique and his subject matter after noting this, focusing almost entirely upon the introduction of various classes of subjects into his work in the second half of the 1920s.

In Masson's work from the second half of the 1920s, this balance is fairly obvious. In both his drawings and paintings there is a visible tension between free flowing lines and forms that simultaneously cohere and dissolve; both style and content are consistent across media. Fish and undersea forms can be found in both the lower half of the drawing *Furious Suns* (1925, fig. 87) and the mixed-media painting *Battle of the Fishes* (1926, fig. 88); both works share similar treatments of space and form, despite the differences in their media. Masson was also not afraid to experiment with ways to reconcile the freedom of automatic drawing with the perceived limitations of applying such techniques to painting on a canvas. While mixed-media creations such as *Battle of the Fishes* contain multiple attempts at automatic "freedom"—from the pouring of the adhesive for the sand to the act of sprinkling the sand itself to the use of drawing on the surface of the canvas alongside oil paint—other paintings from later in Masson's career tap into the same free-flowing linearity as his drawings. This can be seen in works ranging from *Children of the Isles* from 1926 to *Ariadne's Thread*, completed more than a decade later in 1938, to a painting such as *Elk Attacked by Dogs* from 1945 (figs. 89-91). In each of these works, Masson brought the elements that activate the tension between automatic processes and recognizable subject matter to the surface of his art.

He may have felt the freedom to do so in large part because by the end of the 1920s he was less dependant on the Surrealist group for his sense of identity and for the nourishment of his career\ and thus less beholden to Breton's opinion about his work.

Masson had a unique ability to drift in and out of favor with the group. For some periods of time he was in Breton's good graces; during others he was excommunicated.⁷² But I would argue that it was precisely because he did not feel the constant need to win Breton's approval that he was able to work as he did, particularly when it came to his solution to the problem of how to balance automatic techniques and coherent subject matter in his art. Tanguy never had that luxury, for although he certainly earned his reputation as a rebel when it came to his demeanor and personal life, when it came to his art he tended to toe the line, at least as far as the relationship of his paintings to current Surrealist dogma was concerned. And yet he did, as we have discovered, find a way to incorporate the hidden element of drawing into his paintings. But as we have also seen, it is clear from both his public statements and from the writing about his work by those closest to him that he wished this aspect of his work to remain undetected and undiscussed. Thus, while one could argue that while the same rich interplay of unconscious abandon and conscious control plays a primary role in both Tanguy and Masson's work, this interplay manifests itself quite differently in each case. Masson sought unity through their integration; Tanguy concealed one beneath the other.

While Fer's introduction and chapter about Jean Arp's oeuvre sets the stage for a re-evaluation of bi-polar constructs of modern art, and Cardinal's essay on André Masson proposes a new means of evaluating that artist's relationship with automatism, the approach that David Lomas utilizes in the first section of the first chapter of his book *The*

⁷² See the chronology in Lanchner and Rubin, *André Masson*, 211-24 for a full description of the fluctuations in Masson's relationship with the group. See also the fourth chapter of this writing for a discussion of Masson's contracts with dealers during the 1920s and 30s.

Haunted Self is even more tightly-focused, yet still germane to the discussion. Here, he takes a single painting by Joan Miró (*Birth of the World*, 1925, fig. 92) as his subject and traces it back to its source (indeed, the very “birth” of this particular “world”) in a set of drawings in one of the artist’s notebooks.

This may not seem, on the surface, to be a terribly remarkable discovery but what is significant about it is that by emphasizing this relationship, Lomas undermined the long-held notion about that particular painting (and one seemingly inspired by and confirmed by its seemingly casual means of execution): that it was created via purely “automatic” means. In fact, as Lomas argues, Miró arrived at the painting’s ultimate composition and iconography not by chance but rather through a carefully manipulated set of drawings which were developed in a series prior to the production of the painting, and its true link to the unconscious lies in the artist’s act of tracing and re-tracing these sources.⁷³ Thus, Miró’s artistic process is revealed to be almost the opposite of that which I am proposing for Tanguy, for Lomas is arguing that *Birth of the World*, despite appearing to have been executed spontaneously through automatic means, was in fact developed via a fairly rational, linear process.

To begin his discussion, Lomas suggests that there is a pre-existing set of graphic sources or models for *Birth of the World* (such as fig. 93), in which Miró worked out a specific set of compositional elements and subject matter for the painting. What makes this a

⁷³ See David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 10.

radical proposal is that, until this point, the painting was discussed as having been created exclusively through automatic means, and such claims were even linked to statements by the artist about how he had painted under the effects of hallucinations caused by starvation.⁷⁴ While there are differences between the general style of Miró's paintings and those by Tanguy, there are enough parallels between the processes through which they were created to make it important to discuss them briefly here, for Lomas concludes that Miró's work is more complex and multi-layered than typically thought: the same general interpretation that I am suggesting is that case with Tanguy's.

Underpinning the origins of *Birth of the World*, Lomas argues, are a set of drawings that, themselves, bear traces of the processes of unconscious thought. These drawings, which were published for the first time in 1976, created problems for existing interpretations of a painting that—on account of both its title and its painterly style—had been assumed to be the product, itself, of automatism. But a painting created through automatic processes, even, as the artist had suggested, through visions caused by starvation, cannot truly function in this way if, indeed, there are a series of sketches that led to its creation. The presence of these drawings forces us to reconsider our understanding of the painting to which they relate, as does the presence of drawings beneath the surface of Tanguy's paintings. Only after working through the schematics that animate *Birth of the World* through a complex process of tracing and re-tracing, Lomas argues, did Miró arrive at the ultimate iconographic language and compositional structure of the painting. One could

⁷⁴ Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 12, citing Miró, reprinted in Margit Rowell, ed., *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 209.

also suggest that the techniques Miró used in the painting: a combination of washes, splotches, and sketchy lines, were carefully selected to mimic the qualities he had mapped out in the drawings and to therefore suggest that the painting had been created through automatic processes. Such a premium had been placed upon automatism that direct representations of unconscious thought that artists would apparently go to great lengths to create the illusion of its presence.

It is also interesting to note that Miró suppressed these drawings for almost 50 years—much as Tanguy endeavored, during his lifetime, to deflect attention from his own underdrawings.⁷⁵ Neither artist appears to have wanted to spoil the illusion that he had carefully worked to create; neither wanted to reveal the true “source” of his paintings and to thereby detract from the interpretations that linked them to one of the guiding principles of Surrealism. While, for Lomas, this new way of looking at *Birth of the World* was partially a means to an end (for it allowed him to address ideas about the layered act of tracing and the way in which these layers might be linked to language and linguistics . . . a transition that set up the second part of his chapter) his analysis of the sources for the painting and the issues that the repression of these sources highlight three things that are pertinent to this chapter: 1.) the importance of the link between automatism and drawing (via tracing); 2.) the impact that repressing the drawings can have upon the interpretation of a painting; and 3.) the possibility that a painting once considered “automatic” solely

⁷⁵ This repression is not insignificant. As Lomas writes, “Virtually the entire pictorial output of Miró in the years 1924/27 had its origin in these notebooks. Their blanket suppression by the artist, his willingness to consign them to oblivion for a period of more than forty years, and tacit encouragement of the erroneous accounts that proliferated in their absence, raises a host of questions.” See Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 20.

unto itself may have deeper, graphic, layers of automatism that underpin it. As Lomas' arguments concerning Miró's painting suggest, it is possible for multiple layers of artistic processes—which may be more or less clearly linked to automatic procedures at different stages—to factor into the creation of a work of art that somehow suggests certain qualities that may be considered “automatic.”

Collectively, the three writings discussed above help to provide a new context that for the reinterpretation of Tanguy's engagement with automatism that I am proposing in this chapter. Thus, while Cardinal's essay helps to show that Tanguy's art does not have to (or cannot) be pigeonholed as simply automatist or dream illusionist, Fer's line of inquiry opens up the possibility of actually finding one trait residing *within* the other and, finally, Lomas's reappraisal of the “automatic” qualities Miró's painting *Birth of the World*, vis à vis the notebooks that the artist traced and re-traced to create it and the artist's long refusal to acknowledge such sources, suggests that the qualities of a painting that may seem to appear most straightforward may, in fact, be the result of a hidden set of processes that might possibly undo their supposed “truthfulness.” Innovative analyses like these are thus particularly good methodological matches for an examination of the role of drawing in Tanguy's art, as well as for providing a lens through which to re-examine the categorical tug-of-war that runs throughout the literature on his work.

Possibilities

While it is certainly important to consider how a new understanding of Tanguy's working methods allows his work to be repositioned within a more current dialogue on Surrealist (and modern) art, it also opens up other avenues of exploration as well. The focus of this chapter has been threefold: to identify the presence of a skeletal layer of automatic drawing beneath the surface of Tanguy's oils (and to therefore understand more fully the complexity of his artistic practice); to explore how this act of concealment related to shifting trends and ideologies within his peer group; and to examine how and why this aspect of his work has been overlooked in past studies of his art. The evidence of underdrawing is clear in many of Tanguy's canvases upon close inspection and, in particular, the evidence of this provided by his unfinished gouache from the mid-1940s is incontrovertible. Yet once we have identified drawing as being integral to Tanguy's practice—indeed, as being a driving force that animates his forms and give structure to his compositions—what else might be done with this information? How is it useful beyond simply providing a clearer picture of Tanguy's art and its sometimes complex relationship with Surrealist dogma?

Certainly this new information about Tanguy's art, particularly the manner in which the presence of these drawings comes into conflict with the way the artist clearly wished his work to be understood, makes the issue one that is ripe for further analysis. When we begin to consider the presence of a "hidden" layer in Tanguy's art, especially one that he himself denied existed after the early 1930s, many paths of interpretation and analysis—

of both the man and his art—present themselves. One of the most fascinating of these is the potential to read the hidden layers of Tanguy’s paintings as paralleling some of Freud’s theories about dreams.⁷⁶ This is not to suggest that these underdrawings depict, literally, certain scenarios or incidents found in Tanguy’s dreams, or that such a line of interpretation should be followed in an attempt to “decode” such drawings, but rather that Freud’s approach to the understanding of how dreams function might provide another level of insight into the process through which Tanguy created his paintings. Indeed, his method of layering painted forms upon the hidden framework of his skeletal drawings might well be interpreted as analogous to the relationship between the latent and manifest content of dreams, as described by Freud his seminal essay “On Dreams.”⁷⁷

These two elements are activated subconsciously through a revisionary (and self-protective) process that Freud called “the dream work”: literally “the work which

⁷⁶ There are historical links between Freud and the Surrealists, as well as more recent uses of Freud’s work in literature on the Surrealists. As Gérard Durozoi notes in his recent history of the movement, Ernst and Breton were familiar with Freud’s work by the early 1920s; (23; 27); he was praised in the first Surrealist manifesto; and the Surrealists themselves used his texts as a foil for their own activities, as seen in the special issue of *Variétés* that they organized in 1929, which paired his writings on humor with two examples of Surrealist games. See Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23; 27; 178-81. David Lomas also summarizes the relationship between Surrealism and Freud in the introduction to *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity*, 1-8. Scholars have used this approach to examine the presence of “layering” in the work of Tanguy’s colleagues. Lomas, for example, uses his analysis of Miró’s layers of tracing during the production of the drawings for *Birth of the World* as a lead-in to a discussion of the links between the act of tracing and the function of memory, as discussed by Freud and further as a window onto the concept of selfhood, as interpreted by Derrida. See Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 19-21. Rosalind Krauss, too, has used the concept of “overpainting”: a term that she uses to describe Max Ernst’s works in which he selectively painted on top of pre-printed media such as scientific catalogues, as a conceptual pathway to a discussion of Freud’s “Note on the Mystic Writing Pad” as a metaphor for the layering of experience found in Ernst’s overpaintings. Krauss eventually transitions this discussion into a broader one of Ernst’s identification with various tropes found in Freud’s work. See Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1998), 53-72.

⁷⁷ See Sigmund Freud, “On Dreams,” reprinted in Peter Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 148.

transforms the latent dream into the manifest one.”⁷⁸ Freud describes the dream work as a mental operation that “covers” a dream’s latent content, to which it may be tangentially related through three processes: condensation, displacement, and the transformation of thoughts into visual images.⁷⁹ Thus, Tanguy’s hidden layer of underdrawings might be interpreted as the latent content of his paintings; the painted layer on the surface as their manifest content. Further strengthening this interpretation, the skeletal structure of Tanguy’s underdrawings could also be linked to Freud’s description of the latent content of dreams as resembling a “disordered heap of disconnected fragments.”⁸⁰ Although they are fluid and continuous rather than fragmented and disordered, Tanguy’s drawings often create a kind of momentary confusion when viewed, as it is frequently difficult to determine positive and negative spaces because of the way in which the forms are drawn. However, each completed painting, its carefully-crafted surface replete with now-distinct forms that have been painstakingly colored, shaded, and textured, could be argued to relate to the manifest content of the dream, which Freud describes as “beautifully polished and provided with a surface.”

If we are to carry this comparison between the layers of Tanguy’s paintings and the layers of Freud’s dream work further, the question might shift to how the layering of Tanguy’s paintings relates to the three forms of action that Freud believed the dream

⁷⁸ See Sigmund Freud, “Lecture IX: The Dream-Work,” in Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, tr. and ed., James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966), 170.

⁷⁹ See Freud, “Lecture IX,” 170-83. The layers of Tanguy’s paintings seem to relate to the process of the dream work more than to that of secondary revision, since the painted “skins” stretched across his forms appear to follow their structures fairly closely rather than altering or elaborating upon them.

⁸⁰ See Sigmund Freud, “On Dreams,” in Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader*, 162.

work to perform: condensation, displacement, and transformation; or, even, how it relates to Freud's discussion of the interplay of the primary and secondary processes (put simply, relationship between the id's urges and the resulting action of the ego to temper these urges). In each case the relationship between Freud's concept and Tanguy's paintings must be understood as existing as conceptual parallels rather than literal illustrations. But the fact that one can map such a relationship at all should not be dismissed and is worth investigating further.

The first of the dream actions (condensation), Freud wrote, suggests that the manifest content of the dream (for our purposes, the uppermost layer of the paintings: the "skin" of the forms) is always lesser in content or complexity than the latent content.⁸¹ While this might seem, at first, counterintuitive, as there is certainly a greater level of detail present in Tanguy's painted forms than in his drawn ones, it is possible to suggest that it takes more work to sort out the positive and negative spaces in his drawings precisely *because* there is less detail to guide the eye, potentially making looking at the drawings a richer, more thought provoking experience. One might even argue that a series of photographs taken of Tanguy and his paintings during his lifetime, in which his visage blurs into the large forms in one of his paintings from the mid-1940s, (see fig. 2, for example) mimic's Freud's description of one kind of condensation: "The outcome of this superimposing of

⁸¹ "... we understand that the manifest dream has a smaller content than the latent one, and is thus an abbreviated translation of it. See Freud, "Lecture XI: The Dream Work" in Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures*, 171.

separate elements that have been condensed together is as a rule a blurred and vague image, like what happens if you take several photographs on the same plate.”⁸²

As for the second of the three actions, displacement, it might be argued that by painting over the more clearly “legible” skeletal drawings—particularly those frameworks that, by a clearer rendering of their component “parts” might be more easily interpreted as figures than when these parts are painted over—Tanguy has shifted the “psychical accent”, as Freud puts it, “from [one] important element on to another . . . so that the dream appears differently centered and strange;” or, as he describes it in the following sentence, “replacing something by an allusion to it.”⁸³ Freud even offers a theory that explains why it might have been in Tanguy’s best interest (whether conscious or not) to “cover” the existence of the underdrawings, both physically, with paint, and verbally, in discussions of his work. “The dream censorship,” Freud wrote, “only gains its end *if it succeeds in making it impossible to find the path back from the allusion to the genuine thing* [author’s emphasis added].”⁸⁴

Finally, we should consider the concept of transformation, which Freud writes “consists of transforming thoughts into visual images.”⁸⁵ Technically, of course, both Tanguy’s underdrawings and their overpainted surfaces are visual images, and both have been interpreted consistently as having derived from his unconscious thoughts. But if we

⁸² *Ibid*, 172.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 174.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 174.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 175.

return to the original debates about which method of artmaking was most closely connected to the unconscious discussed above, drawing, particularly in the way that Tanguy approached it, was the one that seemed most acceptable medium and technique to the group because of it held the fewest possibilities for conscious intervention, thus linking it more directly to pure thought than the more complicated act of painting. Thus, as Tanguy painted over his underdrawings he was literally “transforming thoughts” (or the form of art believed to be most closely linked *to* thought) into a more consciously constructed visual image.

One might also take the evidence of the artist’s hidden underdrawings and their link to the concept of automatism as a way to re-examine Tanguy’s relationship to the young artists that came to know his work, particularly after his arrival in the United States. The idea that such a relationship might exist, put forth even without an acknowledgment of the existence of the underdrawings identified in this chapter, was first suggested by John Ashbery in 1974. Ashbery found the legacy of automatism present not in the artist’s drawings, but rather in the strangeness of the forms that populate his paintings. These forms, he argued, were made possible not because of the underdrawings animated them, but rather because of Tanguy’s willingness to act as a kind of medium or channel for his subconscious thoughts while painting. Tanguy, he argued, literally *became* a physical manifestation of his subconscious self when he painted, an openness famously described by the poet Arthur Rimbaud: “je est un autre.”⁸⁶ Although Tanguy’s tight, detailed style,

⁸⁶ Rimbaud, cited in Ashbery, “The Geometer of Dreams,” in *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1974), unpag.

at least on the surface, does little to link him to the bold gestures (whether painted or drawn) and spontaneous brush- or drip-work of the Abstract Expressionists, Ashbery nevertheless writes that he played the “Poussin” of the inner landscape to their “Turner.”⁸⁷

Knowing what we now do about Tanguy’s working methods, the idea of discussing the automatic qualities of his work can be given even greater consideration than it was in Ashbery’s day. At least two of the critics who reviewed the exhibition that Ashbery’s essay was written to accompany took his bait—for it was still a fairly audacious thing, at the time, to link Abstract Expressionism to Surrealism, particularly the type of dream illusionism practiced by Tanguy (as opposed to the automatism of someone like Masson or Miro). Robert Pincus-Witten, writing for *Artforum*, argued that Tanguy’s work was not important and was too slavishly tied to traditional, academic renderings of imagery and compositional strategies.⁸⁸ He continued that, despite the fact that the intent of Acquavella Galleries exhibition appeared to have been to show how independent and advanced Tanguy was, in the end, his tightly controlled illusionism actually had the opposite effect, making it difficult to see beyond the way in which he presented his subject matter and thus to consider the process through which it was created.

Not surprisingly, Pincus-Witten argued that Tanguy’s work was most interesting in the 1920s, because during the first years of his career he appeared to have struck a balance

⁸⁷ See Ashbery, “The Geometer of Dreams,” in *Yves Tanguy*, unpag.

⁸⁸ See Robert Pincus-Witten, “Yves Tanguy, Acquavella Galleries,” *Artforum* (February 1975), 57-58.

between “gestural automatism” and “cold illustration.” The paintings completed after the early 1930s appeared to the author to lack this tension and this freedom, which he argued were so crucial to Surrealism. While Pincus-Witten did acknowledge that Tanguy’s art may have impacted some of the American artists experimenting with Surrealism, he called this branch of Surrealism “trivial,” stating that it was exposed as such once the Abstract Expressionist artists (who Tanguy, in his eyes, did not influence) had reinvigorated automatism in their work.

Writing for the *New York Times*, Hilton Kramer took Ashbery’s bait as well: he actually began his essay by posing the question of whether Tanguy’s work can support Ashbery’s claim.⁸⁹ Kramer, however, concluded that over time, Tanguy’s work lost its aura of authenticity and became instead “a warehouse of discarded period props.” Like Pincus-Witten, he did not notice the evidence of the underlying drawings that animate Tanguy’s forms, and appears to have simply decided that the artist’s work was tied too closely to the academic tradition and therefore too conservative to have had much of an impact on artists such as the Abstract Expressionists and their peers. He concluded that Tanguy’s art did little to rise above what he called “salon” modernism—a kind of retrograde academicism. If one were to restructure Ashbery’s theorem according to Kramer, then, Tanguy would be aligned with Alexander Cabanel or William Adolphe Bouguereau, and Pollock with Edgar Degas or Claude Monet.

⁸⁹ See Hilton Kramer, “Unspecified Disasters,” *New York Times* (24 November 1974), 155.

In the end, the knowledge that Tanguy often sketched out his forms upon his canvases before painting them does little to change their ultimate effect on the viewer. But it does help to explain, perhaps, from whence some of the energy and spontaneity of his forms derives. Nicolas Calas noted in his 1946 article “Magic Icons” that “in a recent exhibition of the work of the late Mondrian the painting that attracted the most attention was an unfinished one still bearing the traces of the elaborate means employed by the artist to obtain that degree of abstraction which he aimed at.” It was, Calas wrote, “as if the scaffolding held more interest than the building itself,” like a crowd wanting to know how a magician does his tricks.⁹⁰ Calas argued that this kind of enquiry, one that dismisses the fascination with the physical characteristics of a painting and the supposition that such characteristics bear a significant amount of its meaning, was the kind that could bear the most fruit. Yet he stated that he prefers paintings, like Tanguy’s, which he believed render such considerations null because they are compositions “of diverse elements that are integrated into a new whole and it is the intensity achieved through integration and the syncretic force that account for [their] magnetic effect.”⁹¹

Rather than simplifying and explaining away the power of Tanguy’s art, I believe that coming to a fuller understanding of his methods does exactly the opposite: it renders his work more complex and multi-layered, substituting one perceived form of directness (forms painted spontaneously upon a canvas) to another (forms drawn spontaneously upon a canvas) while adding the fact that Tanguy then chose to “flesh out” these

⁹⁰ Nicolas Calas, “Magic Icons,” *Horizon Articles on Art* 1 (November 1946), 304.

⁹¹ Calas, “Magic Icons,” 306.

skeletons as guided, again, by his subconscious. It is now certain that contrary to his testimony, Tanguy did not abandon the lessons that he had learned during the heyday of automatism's popularity; nor did he move "beyond" them; rather, he integrated them into his artistic practice, and continued to do so until the end of his life: a fact that has the potential to enrich our ultimate understanding of his inspirations, the context in which he worked, the way in which his work is linked to that of his Surrealist peers, and its ultimate impact upon American art as well.

Chapter 3: The Value of Consistency / The Compulsion to Repeat

Watching as the artist's pictographic style of the twenties solidifies in the early thirties into the characteristic style with which he stayed . . . I find myself bored. Tanguy's world seems so limited—far more so than the everyday world.¹

I believe . . . that young artists who think they are saying something new by changing their style or type of painting—as Dalí and Picasso have done—are monkeys.²

In her pointed critique of Tanguy's mature body of work cited above, published as part of her review of the artist's 1974 retrospective at Acquavella Galleries in New York, critic Phyllis Derfner argued that because Tanguy worked in the same style for the majority of his career that the world depicted in his art (and the style in which it was depicted) was limited and therefore boring. Derfner's assessment represents a type of criticism that had been directed at the artist and his work since the 1940s. The Acquavella show was the first major exhibition of Tanguy's art since his memorial retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955.³ It therefore represented a fresh opportunity for art historians and the general public to re-evaluate his place within the Surrealist movement as well as within the broader context of twentieth-century art.

The two decades that separated Tanguy's death from the Acquavella show saw the rise and fall of arguably the most important movements in the history of American Art: Abstract Expressionism. And with Abstract Expressionism came an attendant set of critical standards that were, on one hand, the culmination of nearly a century's worth of

¹ Phyllis Derfner, "New York Art Letter," *Art International* (January 1975).

² Yves Tanguy, "Tanguy Flavor [Letter to the editor]," *Time* LXIV, 12 (20 September 1954).

³ In fact, the Acquavella retrospective was slightly larger than MoMA's: the Acquavella show included 53 works; the MoMA exhibition included 51.

ideas about the evolution of modern art and that, on the other, were applied to not only the artists of the Abstract Expressionist movement but to most other progressive artists of the period. Thus, Derfner's critique of Tanguy and his oeuvre might be considered indicative of a broader historical moment in art criticism and of how ideas about artistic progression had played out during the middle decades of the century; she was certainly not the only one to make negative comments about this aspect of his work.

In the following chapter, the value and accuracy of such interpretations will be contextualized and challenged, for it can be argued that, on one hand, Tanguy's oeuvre evolved to a greater degree than such critiques suggest, and, on the other, that such interpretations themselves should be considered as part of a particular mindset that placed an overly negative value on artistic consistency. If we can generalize and accept that, compared to that of many of his colleagues, Tanguy's art can be characterized as somewhat homogeneous, then perhaps it might be worthwhile to consider whether this characteristic might have been a more conscious decision than previously recognized and that this choice might well have served a specific purpose. Thus, by shifting our understanding of the slow evolution of Tanguy's work and the historical context in which it occurred and by understanding the genesis of the body of critical thought regarding this topic during the twentieth century, we can begin to re-examine our understanding of Tanguy's work and its place not only within the Surrealist movement but within the history of twentieth century art as well.

Derfner was not alone in her criticism of Tanguy for the “solidification” of his style and the perceived “sameness” of his mature oeuvre. In fact, critics reviewing earlier exhibitions of Tanguy’s work as well as those who wrote about his subsequent retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in 1982 would make similar assessments of his oeuvre and art historical importance that centered upon this very issue. Because of the persistence of this type of critique and the effect that it has had upon Tanguy’s posthumous reputation, and because it was an issue about which the artist, in one of his rare public statements (cited above) was willing to take a firm stance, it seems a compelling one to investigate more thoroughly.⁴

In fact, change was a concept that lay at the very heart of Surrealism. Change, in the form of revolution (on a small scale, artistic, on a larger scale, social and cultural) was its *raison d’être*, its means of achieving its goals. Thus it might seem surprising that one of its core members would be accused of creating “boring” and “limited” art. Such accusations raise a number of questions: Looking objectively, how homogenous *was* Tanguy’s oeuvre? If the Surrealists emphasized change, how did this concept manifest itself in the work created by one of its core artists? How does the arc of Tanguy’s artistic development compare to that of his peers? What gave rise to the negative values attached to artists whose oeuvres appeared homogenous; was such criticism widespread; and did

⁴ It should be noted that the source of this quote was a letter to the editor in which Tanguy sought to clarify that he was misunderstood in an earlier article in which it seemed that he was calling Picasso and Dali monkeys rather than the young artists. (He was originally quoted as saying: “You may think painting is to show something new, but no: Picasso and Dali do that, and they are monkeys.” Even in the article on Tanguy from which the original quote was taken, however, one of the sub-headings read “The Same Old Desert,” while the following brief article charged that “his art has changed hardly at all over 29 years” and that his paintings were “practically interchangeable.” See “Séance in Connecticut,” *Time* LXIV, 9 (August 30, 1954), 58.

alternative points of view emerge that might allow us to reconsider Tanguy's oeuvre?

And, finally, if Tanguy did indeed adhere to a strict set of conceptual and aesthetic standards, why did he do so and what were the potential benefits?

To answer the first of these questions we might return to the Acquavella exhibition and to Derfner's conclusions about its contents, for it is important to ask whether the exhibition that Derfner was reviewing offered a balanced and complete overview of Tanguy's career, since her sweeping conclusions suggest that it did. The Acquavella exhibition, it turns out, did offer a fairly broad retrospective of Tanguy's oeuvre. Of the 53 works in the show, 10 were from the 1920s, 11 from the 1930s, 23 from the 1940s (overall, the most productive decade of his career), and 9 from the 1950s.⁵ What appear to have been absent from this survey were his drawings and his gouaches, which constitute a small but significant part of his oeuvre, and examples of his infrequent experiments with sculpture and printmaking. Nevertheless, the Acquavella show can be considered to have provided a fairly comprehensive survey of Tanguy's art.

If we accept that the show was representative of each decade of Tanguy's career then we can move on to assess whether the works from the early 1930s through the 1950s demonstrate, as Derfner suggests, a "characteristic style" in which Tanguy "stayed." For the sake of our argument, let us compare three major works—one from each decade of his "mature" career—that were included in the show: *I am Waiting for You* (1934);

⁵ It is important to note here that Tanguy only painted for five years in both the 1920s (he began painting seriously in 1925) and the 1950s (he died in 1955).

Through Birds, through Fire, but not through Glass (1943); and *The Hunted Sky* (1951).

Each is fairly large in relation to most paintings in Tanguy's oeuvre, thereby suggesting that each should be considered a major work: the first is 28 x 45 inches; the second 40 x 35 inches; and the third 39 x 32 inches. In terms of their format, *I am Waiting for You* is somewhat atypical, being horizontally oriented (the vast majority of Tanguy's works are vertically-oriented), but its forms, composition, and palette are otherwise all representative of the decade in which it was created.

I am Waiting for You (fig. 93) features a composition divided roughly into two equal parts: a spare, light-filled upper half and a lower half that is populated by dozens of rounded biomorphic forms. Atmospheric effects in the form of wispy white cloudlike wraiths link these two realms on the left hand side of the composition. The forms are all relatively small in scale: the largest of them, a grey rocklike mass in the center of the foreground, takes only approximately five percent of the entire compositional space; all of the forms combined take up perhaps as little as fifteen percent. Although in some instances the forms are locked together or support one another (such as in the group in the lower left), the majority of these forms in the painting stand on their own. Despite features shared by the forms (relative scale, similar textures, lack of hard edges or angles) they demonstrate a fair amount variety as well: they range in color from pink, orange, and red to grey, black, and white and while some are thin and elongated others are full and plump.

If one compares *I am Waiting for You* to a typical painting from the 1940s, such as *Through Birds, Through Fire, but Not Through Glass* (see fig. 65), there are both similarities and differences. *Through Birds . . .*, too, features a composition divided roughly into two halves: a yellowish-green “sky” and a grayish-blue “ground.” It, too, is populated by enigmatic biomorphic forms which are, for the most part, rounded and similarly textured. Like the palette of *I am Waiting for You*, that of *Through Birds* is fairly limited; its dominant tones of muted grey are relieved occasionally by concentrated areas of red, yellow, and orange. However, the first and most obvious difference from *I am Waiting for You* is found in the scale of the forms and in how that shift in scale effects our perception of their proximity to the viewer. Here they are larger, dominating the foreground of the composition. Also, in *I am Waiting for You* these diminutive forms were predominantly scattered across the lower half of the composition, while in *Through Birds . . .* they have been built up into a central mass, perhaps suggesting two “figures,” one standing slightly before the other, which take up nearly one third of the entire composition. Additionally, while the majority of forms in the later painting are still rounded, some have also been elongated into straight, thin tubes (particularly in the center of the composition); others, on the lower left of the composition, have sprouted sharp spikes; and there is even a small box-like form on the lower right whose four angled corners and crisp edges are a striking contrast to the rounded edges that surround the others.

Finally, let us consider a work from the 1950s, *The Hunted Sky* (see fig 70). In this late painting, the “sky” to “ground” ratio has shifted, with the suggestion of a horizon lowered to approximately one quarter of the way up the picture plane rather than half way, as seen in the two earlier examples. Here the “sky” is white with streaks of blue and the “ground” is a rolling terrain of wispy whites and dark burnt umbers. Again, the majority of the forms in the painting remain biomorphic and rounded, although a number of flat, plate-like ones have been introduced as well. Almost all of the forms are described in smoky shades of gray, with the exception of approximately ten plate-like forms, which are white, unmodulated, and often have sharply-angled edges, features that place them in direct contrast to the forms around them. The artist’s experimentation with constructing larger forms out of smaller ones continued into the 1950s, with the simple structures of the forms in *Through Birds* . . . eventually transitioning toward complex masses like those found in *The Hunted Sky* (the forms comprising the two central masses in the former work number fewer than two dozen; those making up the two foreground masses in the latter number in the hundreds). While the forms in *The Hunted Sky* do not take up as large a proportion of the compositional space as the ones in *Through Birds* (here, the number is probably closer to twenty percent than thirty three), and the pieces of which they are composed are significantly smaller, their lower edges are implied to extend beyond the lower edges of the picture frame, making their implied presence in the perceptual realm of the viewer just as strong.

So what can be learned from this quick exercise? Were Derfner's charges of sameness and limitation valid? It all depends on one's perspective. It is certainly difficult to argue that Tanguy was a restless experimenter like his peers Max Ernst, Joan Miró, or Pablo Picasso. One simply does not find in Tanguy's oeuvre numerous shifts in technique or subject matter, even to the degree found in the work of another of his peers whose range arguably was narrower than the three artists just listed, such as André Masson or Salvador Dalí. These comparisons will be fleshed out later in this chapter, for they are informative when considering the importance of change and artistic development in the context of the Surrealist movement. However, it is fairly obvious that while Tanguy worked within a fairly limited set of formal parameters and with a narrow range of subject matter, he did, in fact, make a number of changes in his work over the course of his mature career. His was a process of slow, cautious formal development, not sudden, seismic shifts in style of subject matter.

These findings, considered in the light of Derfner's review, might lead us first to ask if such changes have gone unnoticed or if one might, perhaps, be able to discern two distinct "camps" of interpretation when it comes to this aspect of Tanguy's work: those who, like Derfner, drew upon the dominant framework of modernist development and who thus wrote it off as repetitive, boring, and unimaginative, and others who might perhaps recognize its slow evolution and find meaning and positive values in such a path. Again we find ourselves faced with a dichotomy, one, it turns out, that was in play at both

the beginning and the conclusion of Tanguy's career: the opposing forces of change and stasis.

While it may be surprising that critics and art historians have not addressed the way in which Tanguy navigated the dichotomies discussed in the previous two chapters, the subject of his consistency—both in terms of his style and his subject matter—has been discussed, particularly in the reviews and catalogue essays that emerged late in his career and after his death, when he had an established exhibition history and when opportunities arose for viewers to see objects from different periods of his career displayed simultaneously. Observations about Tanguy's consistency have played an important part in shaping our current understanding of his work and his place within the Surrealist movement, and more broadly within the context of 20th century art. For the most part his steadfast adherence to his own unique style and subject matter appear to have harmed rather than helped his posthumous reputation, as suggested by Derfner's analysis.

Ideas about the importance of stylistic change were critical to not only the discourse about mid-twentieth century modernism but to the early history of Surrealism as well; that is, to the environment in which Tanguy found his way to artistic maturity. The ways in which Tanguy responded to this issue and the effect that it had on the development of his career, particularly when considered in the context of the Surrealist movement, are somewhat surprising, for it turns out that he navigated this dichotomy as skillfully as he had the others that animated and divided the group. While Tanguy's place vis à vis his

Surrealist peers is certainly of interest to this study, it will be equally as important to begin to seek alternatives to the rhetoric that has predominantly shaped his posthumous reputation, in order to fully re-evaluate (and re-value) the choices that Tanguy made during his lifetime.

As the above-cited posthumous writing on Tanguy makes clear, his apparent formal consistency and unchanging subject matter were major factors in how his work and career have been judged since his death. It will, therefore, be important to consider three things in relation to such criticism: how competing ideas about such issues informed his development as a Surrealist; how these ideas played out in the broader context of mid-century (primarily American) modernist criticism; and, finally, how the direction that Tanguy chose to pursue relates to other concepts such as authorship and signature style that came to offer new pathways for the interpretation of his art. By analyzing the qualities that were important to both Surrealist practice and to the criticism of the era in which Tanguy's posthumous reputation was formed and by placing alternative views to the traditionally-accepted trajectory of modernism alongside the work of those who have, in fact, noted a slow yet steady evolution in Tanguy's work, we can come to a better understanding of why his art has been assigned its current place in art history and can, perhaps, re-evaluate this place as well.

First, however, it will be important to clarify one of the key terms that I will be putting into play and the context in which I will be considering it. Many scholars who have

sought alternative approaches to the art of the modern era—from Rosalind Krauss to Jean Baudrillard to Briony Fer—have written, from various angles, about the apparent conflict between repetition and originality. At first glance, Tanguy might seem an unlikely candidate to be included in such discussions, for his “repetitions” do not align precisely with the type of work that is often their focus. He did not paint in a serial nature: there is nothing in his oeuvre like Monet’s variations on grain stacks or cathedral facades. His work did not parallel that of later artists concerned with mass production and “commercial” repetition either, such as Andy Warhol or Donald Judd. Thus, while one cannot (and should not) argue that Tanguy’s art can be interpreted strictly according to discussions of repetition in its purest, most serial sense, the issues raised by such analyses can provide a much better frame of reference from which to begin to interpret the overall *consistency* and *homogeneity* of his work, particularly when compared to the work of the vast majority of his colleagues, than the one celebrating progress and change that typically has defined the criteria by which art of the modern era is assessed.

The Modern and Surrealist Contexts

Both of the preceding two chapters focused on aspects of Tanguy’s paintings (the transformation of the figure and the presence of underdrawings) that have heretofore gone unnoticed or misinterpreted in previous studies of his work. If these were isolated incidents or confined to brief phases of his oeuvre such oversights might be understandable. However both of these elements were present throughout almost the entirety of the mature phase of his career, from the late 1920s until his death in 1955.

Recognizing the consistency of certain aspects of Tanguy's art leads us to a discussion of a third key issue that was critical to the way in which we have come to understand and interpret his work; one that, like his engagement with the binaries of figuration/abstraction and automatism/dream illusionism, finds him again positioned between two lightning-rod concepts for both Surrealism and, more broadly, modernism: development and stasis. The two dominant views about the development of Tanguy's oeuvre—the first, noted above, that it was disappointingly homogenous and the second, which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, that it demonstrates a slow yet steady evolution—correspond surprisingly closely to a relatively little-discussed dichotomy within Surrealism: its seemingly paradoxical emphasis on a steadfast fidelity to one's own inner vision, to the exclusion of all external influences, on one hand, but a desire for a revolution in the way that art was made and the way in which it affected those who viewed it on the other.

As discussed in the previous two chapters in reference to other types of dichotomies that the artists involved with the movement had to navigate, most Surrealists tended to adhere to one pole or another when it came to such divisive issues. In the case of this chapter's topic, one might even argue that an artist could conceivably play to both poles of the dichotomy by simultaneously striking out against tradition and by seeking a range of ways in which to do so. Like his solutions to the problems presented by two of the movement's other polarizing issues, however, Tanguy's apparent approach to this potential catch-22 was again rather unique compared to those of his colleagues. After a

short period of experimentation (approximately 1924-1927) he settled upon a set of formal and conceptual parameters that delineated his own unique artistic territory and thereafter worked within these boundaries with an extraordinary degree of consistency, probing them on occasion but rarely attempting to radically exceed them. Thus, although he did occasionally experiment with sculpture or investigate new techniques, such as decalcomania, he never integrated such experiments consistently into his oeuvre or returned to them in any sort of sustained way across the arc of his career. Oil on canvas was without question the dominant medium in his oeuvre and is the medium upon which most posthumous assessments of his career have been (and should be) based.

While it might be possible to argue that the changes Tanguy *did* integrate into his oeuvre between the late 1920s and the mid-1950s represented significant conceptual shifts (i.e., the way in which he rescaled his forms and pushed them towards the picture plane in the early 1940s), a comparison to the changes that occurred in the work of a handful of his fellow Surrealists will make clear two important things. The first is that the changes that occurred in Tanguy's work were relatively subtle compared to those made by the majority of his peers. The second is that by focusing exclusively on these changes *within* his oeuvre one overlooks a number of important broader issues that, in the end, can tell us more about Tanguy and his work than an analysis the way in which these relatively small details evolved over his career. Put simply, it is undeniable that Tanguy's oeuvre did show some degree of change or overall development between the late 1920s and his death in 1955. However, when compared to the output of virtually all of his Surrealist

colleagues over a similar period it is equally clear that Tanguy was by far the most consistent (and, perhaps, conservative) painter, in terms of both style and subject matter, of the group.

Tanguy's decision to work within such narrow parameters during the mature phase of his career can be linked to the shift in taste within the Surrealist movement from a preference for painting created through automatic methods to those that were more carefully rendered, and have come to be labeled "dream-illusionist." This shift in taste occurred at approximately the same time that Tanguy found his mature style: between the years 1928 and 1930. Tanguy's reaction to this shift should be considered within the context of his place within the movement, but his homogeneity should also be analyzed within the context of the Freudian concepts of doubling and repetition—concepts with which the Surrealists were quite familiar by the end of the 1920s.⁶ It is, perhaps, somewhat surprising that Tanguy worked as he did and was still allowed to remain one of the group's most prominent members. For although the Surrealists prided themselves on their rebellion against traditional ideas about art, their views initially aligned with a decades-old stance against repetition and its implied association with the marketplace; prejudices that extended back at least two generations into the Impressionist era.

⁶ As Breton noted in the first manifesto of Surrealism, by 1924 he was very familiar with Freud's theories and methods of examination and had even had "some slight occasion to use [them] on some of my patients during the war." See Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, trans., *André Breton: Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 22.

As Simon Kelly has noted in a recent essay on the topic of repetition in 19th century French painting, one can differentiate between two principle motivations for an artist to have created similar versions of a particular motif: repetition as rehearsal and repetition as a marketing tactic.⁷ In the former instance, an artist revisits a subject over time in order to refine a particular idea or to explore a particular subject in depth. Using Jean-Francois Millet's images of a laborer sowing wheat as an example of this kind of repetition, Kelly describes how Millet returned to this subject over more than three decades, making changes in everything from the size of the painting itself to its composition, perspective, color, and brushwork.⁸ In the latter kind of repetition, an artist makes a number of copies of an original, singular "source" work in order to accommodate a demand in the marketplace. To illustrate this example, Kelly discusses how Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot would often create smaller versions ("reductions") of large-scale canvases that had been successful at annual Salon exhibitions—often making alterations to the original composition at the request of the patron.⁹

Later in the 19th century, as new movements like Impressionism upped the ante by placing a premium on artistic innovation, negative views of the latter type of repetition described by Kelly—repetition in response to the demands of the marketplace—flourished. At this time, criticism of repetition, or even of the idea of working in a closely related series, began to come from within the Impressionist movement itself. Charles

⁷ See Simon Kelly, "Strategies of Repetition: Millet / Corot," in Eik Khang ed., *The Repeating Image: Multiples in French Painting from David to Matisse* (Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum, 2007), 53-81.

⁸ See Kelly, "Strategies of Repetition," 54-58.

⁹ *Ibid*, 59-64. Creating new versions of an extant work in response to the marketplace was not a phenomenon isolated to Corot: Kelly goes on to discuss instances in which Millet did this as well.

Stuckey, examining how this issue played out amongst the members of the group, noted that despite the fact that its many members had exhibited “series” of works on paper for decades it was only when Monet, in particular, began to display related groups of fully-realized oils on canvas (perceived as a more “singular” medium than printmaking and a more “final” medium than quick sketches in pastel or chalk) that this became an issue.¹⁰

This practice—of creating closely-related series of paintings—most often led to criticism that Monet had sacrificed his creativity to the demands of the market. Stuckey cites a letter from Camille Pissarro to his son Lucien regarding this issue, in which he laments the practice as one of the “terrible effects of success,” as evidence of such criticism.¹¹ But even more germane to our discussion of Tanguy, however, is Pissarro’s admission just a few months later that he, too, had begun to work in this way. Beyond the perception of having “sold out,” Pissarro seems initially to have feared that working in this manner would be boring—the very critique leveled at Tanguy eight decades later by reviewer Phyllis Derfner—but soon came to realize the rewards that subtle changes in pictorial variables could provide.¹² One of the most influential critics of the era, Félix Fénéon, also viewed working in this manner in a negative light. Stuckey noted that in a review of a Sisley exhibition in 1888, Fénéon “complained that Sisley . . . tended to paint the same

¹⁰ See Charles Stuckey, “The Predications and Implications of Monet’s Series,” in Khang, ed., *The Repeating Image*, 83-125. In particular, in regard to medium dictating critical reaction, see, for example Baudelaire’s 1859 review of Boudin’s sky study pastels, cited in on page 95 of Stuckey’s essay, in which Baudelaire wrote that Boudin had “no pretension to consider these notes as pictures.”

¹¹ See Pissarro, cited in Stuckey, “The Predications and Implications of Monet’s Series,” in *Ibid*, 85.

¹² “I was afraid that repetition of the same motif would be tiring . . . but the effects are so varied that everything is completely transformed.” Pissarro writing to his son Lucien, 26 December 1891, cited in *Ibid*, 85.

unattractive view of the Loing River, twenty times over in recent years.”¹³ Just one year later, Fénéon disagreed with critics who praised Monet for his series paintings, arguing that working in this fashion resulted in monotony rather than a subtle diversity.¹⁴

Here, perhaps, we should pause to acknowledge that while the dialogue about repetition in the modern era frequently linked it to the marketplace—from Pissarro’s remarks about Monet to the fact that when Renoir exhibited multiple versions of *Young Girls at the Piano* at the same venue in 1892, one of which had recently been acquired by the State of France, it prompted an anonymous essayist to publish an article about the artist with the subheading “La conscience du peintre”—such instances deal almost exclusively with artists working in groups of paintings of limited numbers. Whether it might be as many as a few dozen paintings of wheatstacks by Monet or a handful of versions of girls at a piano by Renoir, these discreet series constitute discreet meditations on a specific subject in each artist’s oeuvre before they moved on to address another subject. As “repetitious” as such groups or series might be, they are certainly of a much more limited nature—both in content and in scope—than the body of work that Tanguy produced during his two and a half decade-long mature career. The precedent had been set, however, and the stereotype long-formed, when the Surrealist movement was born in the early 1920s.

Considering the Surrealists’ reputation for rebelling against everything that French art and culture had come to stand for, it is important to ask exactly what the group’s views

¹³ Fénéon, cited in *Ibid*, 118.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 118.

were on the issue of artistic progression and repetition. It might seem logical that the Surrealists' stance on these issues would parallel their oft-expressed desire for change via revolution: to overthrow to norm, to rebel against every aspect of the artworld—from the traditional tastes of the bourgeois to what they viewed as the misguided advances of various other modern movements, such as Purism, or the Cercle et Carré group. Out with old ideas, old styles, old techniques; out with the corrupting influence of the marketplace. Or, as Breton wrote in 1934: Surrealism was “a movement undergoing a constant process of becoming . . . a continuous sequence of acts which, propelling the doer to more or less distant points, forces him for each fresh start to return to the same starting line. . . . *In 1934, more than ever, surrealism owes it to itself to defend the postulate of the necessity of change* [author's emphasis].”¹⁵ But when it came to the issue of repetition versus progression, perhaps their position wasn't as clear as Breton's fiery rhetoric might suggest, for it seems that he accepted both artists who continually “progressed” or tried new things, such as Picasso, Miró, or Ernst and those who did not make frequent radical changes, such as Magritte, Masson, or Tanguy.

During the first five years of his career (which coincided with the heyday of Breton's endorsement of automatism) Tanguy embraced the concepts of rebellion and progression as he searched for his voice as a painter. He tried and rejected numerous styles and technical processes during this period, working in first a vaguely expressionist style; then a cubist-influenced one . . . and eventually incorporating automatic techniques and

¹⁵ Breton, “What is Surrealism,” (a lecture given on June 1, 1934), in Franklin Rosemont, tr. and ed., *André Breton: What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings* (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 118.

collage into his arsenal. Finally, however, as his subject matter became less and less tightly moored to representational imagery Tanguy reverted almost exclusively to the more traditional medium of oil on canvas; a shift paralleled by his embrace of the dream illusionist style. During the mature phase of his career, then, Tanguy's subversion of tradition—and his niche within the movement—derived in great measure from his choice of subject matter rather than from his use of novel styles or techniques.

The timing of Tanguy's shift from technical and formal experimentation to a relatively homogeneous output paralleled Breton's gradual acceptance of dream illusionism as an alternative to automatism. Automatist techniques were the first means through which Breton encouraged his followers to tap their unconscious in order to question reality and how reality was typically represented. Although Breton first endorsed the use of such techniques to create Surrealist poetry, he left the door open to painters in the *Manifeste du surréalisme*, writing that “psychic automatism in its pure state” should be expressed through writing or “*in any other manner*” and that by “*means yet to be determined*” we will “succeed in recording the contents of dreams in their entirety [author's emphasis].”¹⁶

Tanguy's early Surrealist paintings, those produced between 1925 and 1927, reflect both his specific interest in exploring a variety of automatic techniques and his general willingness to find new ways of seeing the world. As he integrated himself into the group he often looked to artists favored by the Surrealists—de Chirico, Ernst, and Miró are obvious examples that have been frequently discussed in the literature—for ways in

¹⁶ See Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism,” in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 26.

which to create an uncanny reality of unconscious images made visible.¹⁷ The various techniques that Tanguy sampled as he sought to realize Breton's concept of Surrealism as a "complete state of distraction" include scratching into the surfaces of his paintings, combining images in a collage-like manner, affixing objects to the canvas, outlining his images with sewn thread, and filling areas of his compositions with energetic doodles of brushwork.¹⁸ By utilizing such a broad range of techniques, Tanguy seems to have been attempting to work both *from* a position of irrationality in order to disassociate his paintings from reality and *towards* paintings which represented this rupture and which sought to stimulate the experience of such a rupture in their viewers' minds. However, Tanguy's rapid shifts in style and technique in the mid-1920s, when automatism was at the apex of its influence, were replaced late in the decade by a body of graphic work (both in the form of independent drawings and underdrawings for paintings) in the following decades that on one hand formed a cohesive stylistic "set" but on the other corresponded closely with earlier ideas about automatism as a free flowing source of inspiration—in other words, literal tracings of unconscious thought.¹⁹

¹⁷ For the most thorough examination of these sources to date, see Karin von Maur, "Yves Tanguy or 'The Certainty of the Never Seen': Transitions in His Painterly Oeuvre in Karin von Maur, ed., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 11-133.

¹⁸ See Breton, in the final paragraph of the "Manifesto of Surrealism" in Seaver and Lane, trans., *André Breton: Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 47.

¹⁹ José Pierre comes at this issue from a slightly different angle in his essay "The Surrealist Painter par Excellence," in Katarina Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1982), 56. Because Pierre is not taking Tanguy's graphic work into account, and is not aware of the drawings lurking beneath the surface of Tanguy's paintings, he aligns Tanguy, superficially, with de Chirico as an artist whose automatism he terms "latent" versus "manifest." While Pierre's intent is to establish an alternative to a dichotomous view of automatism, his generalized view of Tanguy's oeuvre misses the subtleties of its relationship to concurrent Surrealist theory: "The painting of Tanguy is by its form as a whole little suited to serve the public or the critic as an example of automatism in painting. . . . This misunderstanding seems to me to lie above all in the failure to distinguish between 'manifest automatism'—in Masson or Pollock—and 'latent automatism'—in de Chirico and Tanguy. In actual fact we cannot allow negligence in execution or rejection of any concern for that automatism, for it is neither a technical nor an aesthetic

While Breton found automatism to be an acceptable pathway to the unconscious during the movement's early years, he soon came to believe that it had become too easy, too readily adaptable as a style (forsaking its true use as a vehicle for Surrealism) and thereby voiding its true revolutionary intent and, at the same time, its significant *content*. By the late 1920s he had begun to de-emphasize automatic drawing as the primary means of visually expressing subconscious thought and had begun to embrace the work of artists like Magritte and Dalí (while continuing to support Tanguy as well), who depicted dreamlike, irrational worlds in a consistently representational, illusionistic manner, reality could be ruptured in many different ways. Thus, as Breton's rhetoric and taste shifted in the late 1920s, so did Tanguy's technique and style. Although during this period Tanguy de-emphasized the literal representation of the human figure, choosing to abstract and minimize its importance (as opposed to the newcomers to the group like Magritte and Dalí whose work was extremely dependent on its subjects' legibility), he did adopt the hard-edged, detail-oriented approach of realist painting that had come into vogue along with them. By doing so, he maintained his place in the group and avoided excommunication: a fate that had befallen the devoted automatist Masson in 1929.²⁰

matter, but a spiritual one. Automatism is a method of meditation which must be judged not by its means but by its goals." [I thank Byron Stuhlman for his assistance with the translation of this and other texts from this book.]

²⁰ Masson had begun to distance himself from the group in 1928; Breton formally expelled him in the Second Manifesto of Surrealism in December, 1929. See the chronology in William Rubin and Caroline Lanchner, *André Masson* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 213-14.

A painting like *Mama, Papa is Wounded* (1927, fig. 95) which is composed almost entirely of biomorphic forms strewn across a steeply-tilting plain, signals an early shift towards this new style and subject matter. Shadows reinforce the illusionistic solidity and reality of its abstracted forms, and the only element left visible that relates to Tanguy's early automatist principles is the cloudlike swirl on the right-hand side of the picture. Tanguy would continue to incorporate similar atmospheric effects in his art until around 1929, after which they make only sporadic appearances.

By the end of the 1920s Tanguy had settled upon what we have come to know as his signature style. After surviving the early years of his association with the Surrealists and repeatedly affirming his allegiance to Breton (by taking his side during internal rifts, or by signing many of his declarations and manifestos), Tanguy's place in the group's pecking order was firmly established.²¹ He certainly needed this security, for his life as an artist was not one that produced great economic stability, particularly during the 1930s. It was logical, then, for Tanguy to have continued to work in the style that he had developed just as Dalí, Magritte, and the dream illusionism that they practiced came into vogue: he knew it to be acceptable, at least to movement's most important figure.

With this in mind, it will be informative to consider briefly how Tanguy's overall consistency in his use of his newfound style situates him in relation to his peers, for it will reveal, on one hand, just how distinctive his approach actually was and, on the other,

²¹ As noted in fn. 19 in chapter 1, his signature can be found on many Surrealist manifestos and statements authored or sponsored by Breton.

how by abstracting his subject matter and veiling the figurative aspects of his work he was able to maintain this signature style without being criticized (at least from within the group) for losing his inspiration or selling out to the market. Tanguy's fellow Surrealists worked in a variety of styles and with a wide range of subject matter over their careers—heterogeneity virtually defined the movement. A number of the its most respected artists, from its celebrated precursor (and sometime fellow traveler) Pablo Picasso to other early key members such as Max Ernst and Joan Miró, were, in fact, celebrated for their constant innovation and for not allowing themselves to become too comfortable with a given style or technique.

Early in the history of the movement—indeed at the very moment that Tanguy was entering its orbit—Breton praised Picasso at length in the *Manifeste du surréalisme*. Picasso was undeniably an artist whose oeuvre was constantly in flux, from his early “rose” and “blue” periods, to the various phases of cubism that first attracted Breton's attention and admiration, to his classical and biomorphic figures of the 1920s and 30s, to his fragmented and violently distorted imagery of the 1930s and beyond, he was constantly in search of new subjects and new means of depicting them, never settling down for long. His is the model of genius and progress upon which most theories of what marked a “good” or “meaningful” career trajectory in the modern era were based.

One might place Ernst and Miró, who were more closely involved with the Surrealists and thus closer to Tanguy, in the category of “restless innovators” as well. Ernst ranged

freely between media, style and subject matter. In the 1920s alone, his output included everything from collaged “novels” to drawings and paintings employing a variety of automatic techniques to more straightforwardly rendered scenes of composite imagery and dreamlike scenarios. These tendencies continued into the latter portion of his career, as did his increasing interest in sculpture. Needless to say, such a consistently wide spectrum of subjects, styles, and techniques simply does not exist in Tanguy’s mature oeuvre. The balance is skewed decisively towards oils on canvas. But even if we discard Ernst’s graphic and sculptural work and focus only on his oils, differences between the variability of his oeuvre and that of Tanguy remain.

If we look at a representative painting of Ernst’s from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s—as we did for Tanguy earlier in this chapter—Ernst’s greater range quickly becomes apparent. Let us consider, for the sake of argument, *Garden Airplane Trap* (1935-6); *Vox Angelica* (1943); and *The Cry of the Sea Gull* (1953)—each of which was included in Ernst’s recent major retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.²² This version of *Garden Airplane Trap* (fig. 96, and, indeed, most of the paintings in this small series) depicts a mysterious compartmentalized landscape with a high horizon line. The viewer is presented with a half-dozen or so groups of forms comprised of jewel-toned plant-like constructions and elongated white leaf-like shapes that rest limply within these flatly-painted compartments. The flatness of the tilted ground and the rigid structures of the walls that divide the compartments suggest the hand of man; they contrast with the

²² See Wener Spies and Sabine Rewald, *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005).

exuberant whorls and elegant curves of their contents. Although Ernst was certainly not averse to using his well-developed array of automatic techniques during the 1930s, these paintings appear to have been done without them—or at least with a very minimal amount (it is difficult to discern exactly how the wispy “foliage” was created—the paint appears to have been lightly blotted in some areas). Rather, Ernst has relied upon his own deft and varied touch with the paintbrush to realize these abstracted, suggestive compositions.

In *Vox Angelica*, painted almost a decade later (1943, fig. 97), Ernst has cleverly summarized his artistic range. This large canvas is divided into four primary quadrants that are then subdivided further, resulting in a total of fifty-one separate “pictures” that make up the overall composition.²³ A number of these compartments—typically the smaller ones—are completely non-objective, featuring either flat colors or streaks of color that fade into each other. Others appear to have been created with a variant of the artist’s *grattage* technique, in which an object is scraped across the surface of the still-wet paint, resulting in an effect that mimics the grain of wood. In some panels, such as the largest one in the lower left quadrant, Ernst appears to have incorporated the *frottage* technique, placing an object under the surface of the canvas and then painting over it, capturing its texture. He then added another layer by placing objects, such as drafting triangle and a leaf, over these textured areas and painted around them with black. Ernst also used the technique of *decalcomania* in certain panels to suggest the textures of the

²³ The number of panels might conceivably relate to Ernst’s age—he was 51 in 1942 and had thus just ended his fifty-first year of life in 1943.

natural world—an approach found in many of his paintings from the 1920s onward. Finally, he also included a single panel, found on the left-hand side of the upper right quadrant, which features one of his most recently-developed techniques: oscillation, in which paint dripped from a hole in a can swung by the artist. Against this backdrop of automatic techniques and purposeful choices, Ernst also used repeated motifs—particularly the scissor-like form of a compass or calipers—and the occasional representational image: a snake twined around a tree in two of the center panels, one of which is accompanied by a nude woman; birds in two of the panels in the lower right quadrant; and constellations in two of the panel in the upper right quadrant. By including so many different approaches in a single, large painting, Ernst appears to have created in *Vox Angelica* a summation of his motifs and techniques: a testament to the diversity of his artistic practice.²⁴ It should be noted, too, that for the sake of argument, I have only considered Ernst's painted output from the same three decades as the three paintings by Tanguy discussed above, thus leaving out Ernst's graphic work—particularly his collages and graphic novels—and his sculptural work, both of which played a more significant role in his oeuvre than in Tanguy's.

Ernst continued to explore new techniques and new styles in the 1950s. Paintings such as *The Cry of the Sea Gull* from 1953 (fig. 98) reveal on one hand a new simplicity and on the other a new means of layering his imagery. Here, a blue form—possibly a stenciled artist's palette, is anchored with a red dot in the center of the thumb hole. The shape

²⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the symbolism of *Vox Angelica*, see Werner Spies, "Max Ernst in America," in Spies and Rewald, *Max Ernst*, 69-77.

suggests a simplified head turned to the right with a red “eye” and an open “mouth.” Below this form—possibly the eponymous seagull—is a single, sweeping line that suggests the motion of water or a rolling hill. The only other element in the painting is a web of feathery white marks, which appear to have been created with a palette knife, that blanket the entire composition. With *The Cry of the Seagull*, then, Ernst has created a richly suggestive composition, quite large in scale (38 ¼ x 51 3/8 inches) with an economy of means, finding a novel way to return to one of his staple subjects: the bird.

Although Ernst and Tanguy both participated in the Surrealist quest to transcribe their subconscious visions in their work, Ernst seems to have believed that one should be a restless innovator in order to follow this path most faithfully. He stated in 1967, for example, that “A painter may know what he doesn’t want. But woe be to him if he desires to know what he wants. A painter is lost if he finds himself. Max Ernst considers his sole virtue to be that he has not managed to find himself.”²⁵ Ernst scholar Werner Spies summarized Ernst’s views on the matter by stating that for the artist, what mattered was participating in a critical, creative process, not achieving a recognizable style.²⁶ And in the landmark book *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, William Rubin praised Ernst’s oeuvre for its complexity and its multifaceted character: “In the extraordinary range of his styles and techniques [Ernst] is to Dada and Surrealism what Picasso is to twentieth-century art as a whole.”²⁷ Yet while Tanguy would certainly have agreed with

²⁵ Ernst, cited in Wener Spies, “Nightmare and Deliverance,” in Spies and Rewald, *Max Ernst*, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 6

²⁷ See William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 93.

Ernst that being a Surrealist was, indeed, about precisely this type of quest to realize his inner visions and to create the kinds of shocks and ruptures prized by his colleagues, his paintings make clear that did not agree with Ernst, who was a close friend, that constant change, whether stylistic, technical, or in subject matter, were necessary in order to manifest some sort of authenticity in their work.

Just as Tanguy was criticized in the post-war era for his lack of experimentation and development, Ernst was praised for his inventiveness. In the second sentence of his Director's Foreword to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2005 retrospective of Ernst's work, Philippe de Montibello went right to this issue, stating that "few twentieth-century artists have played a role as decisive as Ernst's in the invention of modern techniques and styles."²⁸ Later in the same catalogue, Ernst scholar Werner Spies agreed, writing that when we encounter "Ernst's work, we soon realize that it is impossible to categorize his extremely diverse oeuvre in terms of style." Spies did find a unifying theme—collage—that can be traced across Ernst's oeuvre, but even this thread did not lend it any real consistency, for "Ernst took inspiration from the bewildering glut of available image in reproduction"—images from the 19th and 20th centuries; images from high and low culture; from texts and technical manuals . . . and used the aesthetic of collage to activate his work, often cobbling together, superimposing, and layering different techniques, styles, and means of representation in a single work of art."²⁹

²⁸ Philippe de Montibello, "Director's Foreword" in Spies and Rewald, *Max Ernst*, vii.

²⁹ Spies, "Nightmare and Deliverance" in *Ibid*, 3.

Such praise was not limited to recent assessments of the artist; indeed, it is a continuation of a trend that emerged during the artist's lifetime. In his review of Ernst's 1961 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, John Richardson began by celebrating Ernst for being a "protean artist . . . a technical and stylistic innovator, an ingenious manipulator of paint, an original, if limited sculptor, and—most important of all—a great modern Romantic."³⁰ Richardson concluded his assessment of Ernst by arguing that his work was strongest when linked most closely with Surrealism and its ideals—even to the point of rebelling against its leader: "despite his lack of orthodoxy, Ernst was the beau ideal of a Surrealist painter, strong and independent enough, if necessary, to defy the dogmatic edicts of André Breton and his collaborators, and yet intelligent enough to profit from them"—a compliment, one might imagine, with which Richardson would not have blessed Tanguy.³¹

As the above-cited texts make clear, Ernst was consistently praised for his desire to find new and varied means of expression. Even the brief comparison of their work from the 1930s-1950s reveals that Tanguy's and Ernst's oeuvres followed remarkably different trajectories, yet both artists were also considered core members of the group. With this in mind, one might argue that they represented opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to how the issue of how innovation and consistency were valued by the Surrealists. What seems to have linked them together, however, was the perception (as delineated in the writings by Breton, in particular, on both artists) that both men were remaining true to

³⁰ John Richardson, "Max Ernst: artist or painter?," *ARTnews* 60, 2 (April 1961), 43.

³¹ Richardson, *Ibid*, 56.

their own inner drive to create and were not beholden to the styles or approaches favored by artists outside of their circle.

What remains to be seen, however, when it comes to the Surrealist context, is whether Tanguy was alone in the overall consistency of his mature oeuvre or if we might find a relatively equal distribution of artists along this spectrum of consistency and change.

Until recently, one might have been tempted to align another early associate of the group, Joan Miró, more closely with Tanguy than with Ernst on this issue.³² Like Tanguy, Miró has come to be known for a distinctive style frequently populated with simplified, abstracted biomorphic figures defined by wiry outlines and flat planes of color. And a large portion of his oeuvre does indeed conform to this description. But as a recent catalog examining Miró's work from 1927-1937 has made clear, the Spaniard set out to systematically challenge notions of style and artistic facture during the first decade of his professional career.

“Miró the Assassin,” is the title of the introductory essay in this catalog: a title that was drawn from Denys Chevalier's conversation with Miró in 1962 in which the artist stated that in the paintings from this decades' worth of work he had set out to perform “anti-painting . . . a revolt against a state of mind and traditional painting techniques . . . an

³² Unlike Tanguy, Miró never officially “joined” the group. He moved in their circles when he first came to Paris in the mid-1920s but had a falling out with Breton in 1925 over his participation in the Ballets Russes. In fact, he set out to specifically “attack” painting soon thereafter, fueled, in part, by his anger towards Breton. Nevertheless, his art has consistently been linked to the Surrealist movement and Breton devoted a section to him in the published version of *Surrealism and Painting*. See Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 116-18.

attempt to express myself through new materials . . . and a refusal to make ‘pretty’ things [that] pushed me to make the most sordid and incongruous things possible.”³³ While Miró went on to state that he stopped working in this way in the mid-1930s because he came to believe that it was “morally unjustifiable,” the trajectory of his oeuvre between 1927 and 1937 resembles the sudden shifts and radical experimentation of Ernst’s path much more than the smooth, almost linear development of Tanguy’s.³⁴

In fact, the divergent paths that Miró and Tanguy took when it came to their artistic strategies might be said to reveal not only the strength of Breton’s call to his followers to reject the conscious world and to plumb the depths of their subconscious as they worked, but also to demonstrate just how accommodating—how accepting—Breton was of disparate methods for achieving this goal as long as he felt that the artist was working honestly and passionately. Despite the fact that Breton and Miró had a significant falling-out in 1926, Breton praised him effusively in *Surrealism and Painting*, published just two years later, calling him possibly “the most Surrealist of us all” and stating that “on his own ground, Miró is invincible. No one else has the same ability to bring together the incompatible, and to disrupt calmly what we do not dare even hope to see disrupted.”³⁵ Ironically, it was precisely while Miró was working to “destroy everything that exists in painting,” that Tanguy was laboring to hone his technical skills and to create a two-dimensional representation of his inner world.

³³ See Anne Umland “Miró the Assassin,” in Anne Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 1-2, for a discussion of this conversation.

³⁴ Miró was associated with both Breton and Bataille at various times in the 1920s and 1930s.

³⁵ See Breton, “Surrealism and Painting” in Pollizotti, *Surrealism and Painting*, 36-40

Tanguy's consistency was as critical to his success as Miro's (and Ernst's) systematic exploration of ways to challenge the status quo. One could argue that Tanguy's world effectively became more "real" each time that he painted it; each time that he found new members in his families of forms; each time that he found new relationships between them. But while Tanguy was patiently and insistently mapping out this world in the late 1920s and 1930s (albeit within a fairly narrowest of stylistic and technical—and thus aesthetic—parameters), Miró was aggressively breaking down such boundaries. Despite all of Miró's attempts to "assassinate" painting, however—whether by using text or amorphous forms as his sole subject matter (1927); by affixing materials from rope to feathers to sandpaper to the canvas (1928); by grotesquely spoofing old master paintings (1928-29); by working with wood and found objects to create collages and objects (1930-31); or by using collages as a starting point for paintings (1933). The irony is that when one looks broadly across his entire oeuvre, in the end, he used a remarkably consistent formal vocabulary to depict the human figure: a vocabulary that he developed in pictures from the mid-1920s such as *The Harlequin's Carnival* and that he continued to deploy consistently over the next four decades. Despite detours with ropes, torn paper, and even bone affixed to his support, Miró quite often, and quite consistently, included simplified, biomorphic forms in his art throughout his career. These forms are defined by their clean, undulating outlines, their clear colors (often limited to primaries and secondaries), and the unstable ground that they occupy between figuration and abstraction. Yet the human form is rarely as hidden or abstracted in Miró's work to as great a degree as it is in

Tanguy's. Miro's figures may be elongated, distorted, and simplified, yet they also remain legible, discernible after some scrutiny, and thus stylistically recognizable as distinctly his own.

Despite the marked differences in their subject matter, the two Surrealists whose oeuvres appear to have most closely paralleled the trajectory of Tanguy's were Salvador Dalí and René Magritte. For the majority of their careers, both of these artists painted in the same dream-illusionist style that might be said to characterized the surface aesthetic of Tanguy's mature oeuvre (although this aesthetic, as noted in the previous chapter, was underpinned by a different sort of technique), and, like Tanguy, both also tended to situate their subjects in a landscape-based setting. There were, however, significant differences between these artists' work and Tanguy's. The clearest of these being that while, like Tanguy, both Dalí and Magritte painted scenes that appear to derive from the world of dreams or the subconscious, neither of them worked with the same type of abstracted biomorphic subject matter that dominated Tanguy's oeuvre. In most paintings by both Dalí and Magritte, the subject matter may be transformed from its everyday appearance, whether by distortion or by being depicted in surprising settings or unexpected combinations with other objects, but it is always recognizable. It is such juxtapositions of the familiar and the strange that drove both artists' work and reputations.

In one of Dalí's most famous paintings, for example, *The Persistence of Memory* (fig. 99), it is easy to pick out each of the major individual components of the subject matter: clocks, tree branches, a face, ants, rocky cliffs, etc. And it is also easy to identify the elements that make this painting "strange"; that make it seem to have sprung from of the world of dreams rather than the world of reality: the distorted appearance of the face; the liquidity of the clocks, the congregation of the ants and so on. In fact, it is precisely these distortions and unexpected combinations that drive the painting's "surreal" qualities, mimicking the action of dreams and thereby spawning further associative meanings. The same holds true in characteristic paintings by Magritte, such as *Time Transfixed* (fig. 100). Here, too, it is possible to easily identify and label each of the painting's components: a steam engine; a mantle; a clock; candlesticks; and a mirror. But the painting's power is again generated by the way in which these elements have been removed from their expected environments, distorted, and incongruously combined. The steam engine, which one would expect to be much larger in size than its surroundings, is reduced to the scale of a toy and has been placed neither upon rails nor outdoors, but rather emerging from the heart of the fireplace.

Such distortions, transformations, and surprising juxtapositions, painted in a realist style, characterized the art of both Magritte and Dalí for almost the entirety of their careers. In fact, one might convincingly argue that both artists' oeuvres were equally as static as Tanguy's: each consistently produced variations of their chosen subject matter (reconfigured like puppets on a stage) within a fairly narrow stylistic range for decades.

Suzi Gablik noted this characteristic in regard to Magritte in the first chapter of her book on the artist, writing that he “tended to work back and forth through a small range of variants at different times, elaborating on certain key ideas, most of which are present in a germinal state from 1935 onward [he painted into the 1960s]. . . any stylistic alterations which do exist are marginal and secondary developments.”³⁶

The primary difference then, between the work of Tanguy and that of Magritte and Dalí was that the latter two artists chose to retain representational—if altered or reconfigured—subject matter. This representational “hook” allowed Magritte’s and Dalí’s subjects to be more easily grasped by viewers and critics alike who could then, with varying amounts of effort, “decode,” them. Thus the challenge for these artists was to continuously provide their audience with new visual puzzles and clues to the hidden or multiple meanings contained in their imagery. Because Magritte and Dalí benefited from the variation in their subject matter—which seemed more diverse because it was more legible than that of Tanguy—they were less susceptible to the type of criticism that increasingly came to plague Tanguy, whose chosen subject matter, despite undergoing a similar number of transformations over his career, was more difficult to interpret (and this interpreted as more singular) because it lacked clear links to objective reality. To put it another way, Tanguy’s biomorphic forms appear to have been taken as little more than slowly changing props on a stage, lacking real meaning other than the basic function of their strangeness, rather than actors and actresses engaged in a meaningful or coherent narrative (a tradition that, within Surrealism, at least derived from the mannequins,

³⁶ See Suzi Gablik, *Magritte* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992 [originally published in 1970], 14-15.

diminutive figures, and rotating cast of subject matter found in the work of an artist like de Chirico).

By 1934, more than five years after the dream illusionism of Magritte and Dalí had taken its place alongside automatism as an accepted Surrealist “style,” Breton sought to defend his embrace of the stylistic heterogeneity of the artists associated with the movement. In explaining that “original” Surrealists such as Eluard, Ernst, Péret, and Man Ray were still as vital as its newer adherents, Breton noted that “if there have occurred differences on some points, it was essentially within the rhythmic scope of the integral whole.”³⁷ Breton thus appears to have been willing to accept a wide range of artistic practices into the movement, as long as the artist was utterly devoted to the movement’s basic conceptual principle: the unification of the interior and exterior realms.³⁸ Guided by this rhetoric, Breton could count as Surrealists an artist like Ernst, who tirelessly experimented with *new* ways to bridge these two realities *and* artists like Dalí or Tanguy who were perceived to have dedicated themselves to “revealing” their interior world by transcribing it onto canvas over an extended period of time. That Tanguy’s style and approach did not change significantly over time did not count against him; on the contrary it reinforced his dedication to his vision—each painting completed becoming another testament to the authenticity of this vision.

³⁷ Breton, “What is Surrealism,” in Franklin Rosemont, tr. and ed., *André Breton: What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings* (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 119.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

Less than a decade later, exiled in New York and musing on the movement's current state, Breton declared to Charles Henri Ford what had ended with Surrealism was: "the illusion of independence . . . of the work of art," which reveals itself in *egocentrism*; brings with it *indifferentism*; and is generally ratified by *stagnation* [when an artist] "swiftly exhausts his individual resources, [and] is capable only of sapless variations on a threadbare theme."³⁹ A work of art, then, to be truly Surrealist, had to be intimately and honestly linked to its creator—anything less rang hollow. Growth and deep engagement with one's artistic practice and inspiration continued to be essential characteristics of a Surrealist artist. Breton clearly had Dalí in mind with this critique: he actually goes on to call out "Avida Dollars [a sarcastic anagram of Dali's name] in New York, hunting sensational publicity."

But could Breton's tripartite censure be applied equally to Tanguy? Certainly the third part, in particular, could objectively describe the direction that his mature oeuvre had taken. What likely kept him from being judged alongside Dalí, at least for the time being, was that he seemed to be acting acceptably in regard to the first two criteria. He did not appear to have succumbed to "egocentrism," defined by Breton as "overestimating one's gifts and scorning the group-oriented nature of the movement" (for he still participated in group exhibitions and activities) or *indifferentism*, which is similarly defined as holding oneself "above the melée" and displaying an "Olympian attitude." Additionally, the first two qualities were fairly subjective and difficult to qualify—who was to decide, for

³⁹ Breton, interviewed by Charles Henri Ford in *View* no. 7-8 (October–November 1941). Reprinted in *Ibid.*, 203.

example, if one was ‘overestimating one’s gifts’ or not playing nicely with one’s peers? By using such subjective criteria Breton slyly kept control of the reins. Thus, even though Tanguy had been working in the same style and within rather narrow formal parameters for a decade and a half, he was granted the distinction of being one of the Surrealists who remained faithful to Baudelaire’s call to “plunge into the depths of the abyss . . . into the heart of the unknown / To seek the new.”⁴⁰ And he was therefore granted a pass on charges of churning out “sapless variations on a threadbare theme.”

Even more poignantly, two years earlier, in his essay titled “The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting,” Breton had, in the space of a single paragraph, dismissed Dalí’s work as “being eroded by profound and absolute monotony” and praised Tanguy, whose style and subject matter was arguably equally as consistent as Dalí’s, as a still-rising star whose work possessed “perfect honesty and integrity” and was ‘congenitally incapable of any form of compromise.’⁴¹ The same year, in an article about André Masson, Breton likewise condemned artists who “are content to exploit a single vein. . . . It is time to react against the idea of art as an inexhaustible *ribbon* at so much a foot. . . . which revolve remorselessly around the same objects, the same effects . . . a taste for taking risks is undeniably the principle motivating factor capable of urging mankind forward along the path of the unknown.”⁴² Such damning criticism—likely, again, aimed at Dalí,

⁴⁰ Baudelaire, quoted in *Ibid*, 204.

⁴¹ Breton, “The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting,” 1939, reprinted in Pollizotti, *Surrealism and Painting*, 147.

⁴² Breton, “André Masson”, 1939, reprinted in Pollizotti, *Surrealism and Painting*, 152.

could easily apply to Tanguy; yet Tanguy was never subjected to Breton's condescension for following his chosen path because Breton still believed in his "honesty and integrity."

Thus it appears that Breton, still acting as spokesperson for the movement as it shifted its base to America, tried to play it both ways on the issue of change versus stagnation.

Rather than wholeheartedly embracing change for change's sake, or as a series of linear steps towards a logical goal, he celebrated exploration, development, and transcending boundaries. Yet he also embraced those artists perceived remained true to their inner vision, which might or might not be linked to a particularly consistent style across a given artist's career. Tanguy was able to maintain his good standing with Breton, in part, because despite the fact that he was arguably the most conservative member of the group when it came to his utilization of a consistent style, content, and technique, the originality of his initial "discovery" of his inner world and his fidelity thereafter to his artistic vision apparently trumped stylistic and conceptual development.

Yet when one considers just *how* close Tanguy remained to his chosen style and subject matter over the course of more than twenty five years, his choice to do so—a choice that certainly distinguished him from his peers—might be interpreted as less of a choice and more of an expression of a subconscious desire for stability. Indeed, one might argue that Tanguy's dedication to his signature style and highly personal subject matter was as much a *compulsion* as a choice. Despite the term's traditionally negative connotations, for Tanguy it may have been a successful strategy in the long run, for it preserved his place in the movement and in its hierarchy. Additionally, his steadfast adherence to his

style and subject matter may also be interpreted not as a lack of creativity but rather as tied to the drive to mastery, as suggested in some of Freud's writings and those by various post-Freudian theorists.⁴³ This idea was, in fact, suggested by a reviewer of Tanguy's 1943 exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, who noted Tanguy's drive towards perfecting his technique and the way in which his repetitions allowed him to delve "deeper and more skillfully into the realm of fantasy."⁴⁴

Freudian psychology has been tied to Surrealist art from the moment of the movement's inception, and with good reason: it emerged in roughly the same historical era, spoke to many of the same concerns, fears, and desires as Surrealist art and theory, and Freud himself was oft cited and frequently read by the Surrealists themselves.⁴⁵ On two levels, one could interpret Tanguy's lack of artistic development as symptomatic of the compulsion to repeat: a phenomenon first addressed by Freud in his *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* of 1914, and later expanded upon in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

⁴³ See the entry for "Instinct to Master (or for Mastery)" in J. LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), 218-19; see also the parts of the entry for the compulsion to repeat in the same publication (p. 80) for further ideas about the connection between these two ideas.

⁴⁴ H.B., "Calder & Tanguy," *The Art Digest* (1 June 1943).

⁴⁵ He was cited numerous times in *La Révolution surréaliste*, for example (in issues IX-X; XI, and XII—see "Index des noms cités" in *La Révolution surréaliste: Collection complète* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1975), II. Gérard Durozoi notes that even by 1920, Ernst had read Freud "fairly seriously" and that Breton and his friends were also by this point familiar with his work; Breton paid a disappointing visit to Freud in Vienna in 1921. See Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 23; 27. See also Werner Spies, "Ernst and Freud" in William A. Camfield, et al., *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 27-28.

On one hand, it might be argued that Tanguy's repetitions represented his attempts to master the seemingly impossible task that Surrealism set before its artists: the challenge to represent visually something that is essentially unknowable and fleeting: the world of dreams and the unconscious. As Freud wrote in regard to this idea: "a thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unladen ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken."⁴⁶ On the other hand, while his insistence on adhering to his artistic vision may certainly have permitted Tanguy the luxury of a fuller and more penetrating exploration of his inner world, on a more basic level it may also have represented his inability to move beyond the various conflicting ideas within the Surrealist movement—in particular, those noted in the previous two chapters (figuration versus abstraction and automatism versus dream illusionism) and the conflict between integration into the art market and maintaining one's independence, an issue that could make for an interesting study as well. Thus, because of the particular set of circumstances involved with being a Surrealist painter in the 1920s as well as the inherent difficulties of using the unconscious as subject matter, Tanguy's repetitions can be interpreted as a function of his psychological makeup as well—as representing his drive to professional (and, perhaps, psychological) survival, in fact. To change this style would mean risking excommunication, and it was fairly clear that outside of the Surrealist circle, Tanguy's paintings had no context at least in France.⁴⁷ For Tanguy, a signature style had come to

⁴⁶ For an excellent summary of the compulsion to repeat, see Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 78-80. Freud is quoted on page 79.

⁴⁷ In fact, he was possibly better known—or at least more visible to critics and to the public—in America, having shown in 1935 at the Stanley Rose Gallery in Los Angeles, and in 1936 at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Julien Levy Gallery, New York, and the Howard Putzel Gallery in Hollywood.

mean security in a movement that seemed to be constantly evolving and he would, therefore, continue to “work through” this style for the rest of his career.

Tradition Versus Originality and Their Role in Mid-century Criticism

If Breton was willing to withhold a negative assessment of Tanguy’s stylistic homogeneity in order to praise his fidelity to his personal vision, aesthetic, and desire to gaining a deeper understanding of his chosen subject matter, critics outside of the movement were less likely to be so kind. A discussion of Tanguy’s consistency and the effect that it has had upon his posthumous reputation would be only partially complete if considered only in the context of Surrealism, for as the Surrealists began to exhibit their work outside of Paris in the 1930s, they entered into an increasingly international field; Breton became just one of many voices. Ultimately, as the balance of power shifted from Paris to New York in the 1940s (mirroring the relocation of many of the Surrealists, including Tanguy, during the second World War), it was American criticism that created the context in which the consistency of Tanguy’s oeuvre came to be most negatively, most vocally, and most publicly judged. The most dominant voices of the era—that of Clement Greenberg, and, to a lesser extent, that of Harold Rosenberg—placed great emphasis on an artist’s originality, on one hand, and on how this originality manifested itself over that artist’s career on the other. Although neither Greenburg nor Rosenberg reviewed one of Tanguy’s solo exhibitions, the impact of their ideas can be sensed in the reviews generated by Tanguy’s three major posthumous exhibitions in the 20th century in 1955, 1974, and 1982.

Even before Tanguy's death in 1955, the perception that his oeuvre was homogeneous had become a problematic issue in reviews of his exhibitions. During the fifteen years that Tanguy spent in America, many critics and curators came to know his work quite well. There are even instances—particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s—when certain reviewers felt comfortable enough with their knowledge of Tanguy's oeuvre to pass judgment on it as a whole. However, Surrealism, by and large, was still relatively unfamiliar and challenging for the broader American public—and even many American artists and critics—during these years. This may explain why there are some reviews in which Tanguy was praised for his originality—for the new path that he had blazed—and others in which he was cited as being *unoriginal* for the perception that he never progressed or developed. One noteworthy example of the former line of thought can be found in the criteria cited by James Johnson Sweeney (1900-1986) when selecting the prizewinners for the 1950 biennial of contemporary art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Despite his praise of Tanguy's work, however, the criteria that underpinned Sweeney's decisions appear to have paralleled those that shaped the views of critics who did not look upon his work as favorably.

Sweeney, the juror for the VMFA's 1950 biennial, had worked at the Museum of Modern Art during the previous two decades, briefly serving as the director of the department of painting and sculpture from 1945-46. During the preceding decade MoMA had become one of the first American museums to exhibit Surrealist art (including the

groundbreaking *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* in 1936) and to acquire important examples of Tanguy's work.⁴⁸ Sweeney was thus both well versed in Surrealist art and, as a high-ranking professional in the field, familiar with the latest trends in art criticism. In his statement about his choices for the biennial's prize-winning selections he emphasized that he valued artists whose work demonstrated both a knowledge *of* and a break *from* tradition. These dual conditions, he argued, were essential characteristics for the best contemporary art.

"Today's painters," Sweeney claimed (referring to, one can assume from the context, today's *best* or most *successful* painters), "respect art from the past and from abroad, but they no longer imitate. They try to produce something from it that will carry a fresh accent, a fresh way of organizing line, color and space suggestions as well as emotional stimuli."⁴⁹ We can assume, then, that the two paintings chosen by Sweeney for the show's top honor, the John Barton Payne medal—Yves Tanguy's *From Pale Hands to Weary Skies* and Stuart Davis's *Little Giant Still Life* (figs. 101, 102)—would demonstrate these particular characteristics.⁵⁰ What is surprising is that Sweeney's model for what "today's artists" should be seems to describe those who carry on and re-energize

⁴⁸ Sweeney also worked on exhibitions such as *African Negro Art* and *Cubism and Abstract Art*; he was at the museum during exhibitions of the work of Picasso (1939-40); Klee (1941); Miró (1941-42); Dalí (1941-42); Calder (1943-44). For more on Sweeney and his years at MoMA, see The James Johnson Sweeney Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives. By the end of Sweeney's tenure, MoMA owned two major oils by Tanguy: *Mama, Papa is Wounded!* and *Extinction of Useless Lights* and a number of works on paper

⁴⁹ Sweeney, quoted in the *Richmond News-Leader* (May 6, 1950), 5.

⁵⁰ Sweeney would also have been familiar with Davis's work, as the artist had been given a solo exhibition at MoMA in 1945-46, during Sweeney's brief tenure as Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

long-established traditions rather than those who are striking out in new directions altogether without a basis in or a knowledge of historical precedents.

By selecting Yves Tanguy's *From Pale Hands to Weary Skies* as one of the Payne medal winners, Sweeney implicitly linked Tanguy to other progressive artists whose work gave art from the past an "update" or a "fresh" twist. The remainder of Sweeney's statement about his choices included two facts about Tanguy that seem to be at odds, especially considering the art historical moment in which he was speaking (that being, as the stars of artists like Pollock were on the rise and at the precise moment in which critics like Clement Greenberg were beginning to formulate ideas that dominated how modern art was discussed for at least the next quarter-century).⁵¹ First, Sweeney wrote that Tanguy was "as careful with qualities of color, balance, and light as are painters in the old tradition," and second, that "born in France, Tanguy began painting in his mid-20s without formal instruction." Thus, we can see both a means through which Tanguy can be linked to a past artistic tradition (albeit one that placed him outside of the post-cubist narrative soon endorsed by Greenberg) and through which his originality might manifest itself untouched by external influences—the notion that he lacked formal instruction, aligning him with the Modernist myth of the "visionary" artist—an idea celebrated in particular by the Surrealists because, on one hand, it devalued academic training and, on the other, because it suggested a closer relationship between artist, technique, and subject matter.

⁵¹ Just the previous year, *Life* magazine had asked "Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" over a two page spread of the artists and his work. See *Life* (8 August 1949), 42-43.

Many of those writing about mid-century American modern art seemed concerned defining, categorizing and even simply naming the emergent movement; the urge to find commonalities among the new generation of artists emerging in the 1940s and 50s was strong.⁵² For the many who aligned themselves with a standard Greenbergian narrative, pride of place was given to artistic styles and movements that fit more easily into a clear, linear trajectory from Impressionism to Cézanne, and then from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism, and, eventually Color Field painting.⁵³ By mentioning the fact that Tanguy had no background in art, Sweeney invoked the stereotype of the untrained artist—the folk artist, even, who, unfettered by the chains of tradition and academia was able to produce a new kind of art untainted by academic traditions, and who thus became a prototype for the ideal modern artist.⁵⁴ Sweeney was only able to shoehorn Tanguy into both parts of the narrative by emphasizing the way in which his technical skills—his paint handling and his use of light—linked him to the old masters. In doing so, he

⁵² See, for example, Howard Putzel's statement "Classification is extraneous to art. Most labels attached to paintings are unenlightening. Talent's the thing. 'Isms' are literature. Nevertheless, a large part of the public that look at contemporary art demands classification." in Howard Putzel, "A Problem for Critics," 1945, reprinted in Ellen Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 152. Putzel, David Porter, etc., seem to have wanted to define new movements as being characterized by a quest for a new, often personal, pictorial language. Formal progression was less important than expressiveness (which may or may not be linked to such progression).

⁵³ Even in the mid-1940s Greenberg considered Surrealism—at least in its most regular forms—as too calculated, as not focused enough on the importance of formal progress. For example, he criticized Arshile Gorky in his review of the artist's first solo exhibition with Julien Levy as having "taken the easy way out—corrupted, perhaps, by the worldly success of the Surrealists." Greenberg wrote of being disappointed with Gorky because he had returned to the biomorphism of the Surrealists (Matta in particular) and had stepped outside of "the convention within which the main current more or less of high painting since Seurat and Cézanne has flowed." See Clement Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Arshile Gorky," *The Nation* (24 March 1940) reprinted in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume II: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 13-14.

⁵⁴ See Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," 157 for a further discussion of this aspect of modernism.

succeeded in inserting Tanguy into a historical narrative but not necessarily into the narrative of modernist *progression*. Additionally, Sweeney's criteria for "quality" are almost so broad as to be meaningless, particularly if one considers how vastly different Tanguy's work was from that of the other winner who also fit Sweeney's profile, Stuart Davis.⁵⁵

Despite his success at the VMFA Biennial, many key elements of Tanguy's art, particularly his aesthetic (he worked as Sweeney described it, in the "old tradition") and his perceived lack of artistic development over the course of his career all put Tanguy at odds with the values held that were gaining importance at the time. For Tanguy, Breton, and their colleagues, reducing painting to its inherent and simplest conditions, increasing its scale to approach architectural monumentality, or finding a new symbolic language were of little interest. As early in his career as 1941—the very moment that the Surrealists were most "present," both literally and figuratively, in America—Greenberg was placing artistic growth and formal exploration, along with the qualities of monumentality and reduction to the essential elements of one's chosen medium, at a premium. He skewered Fernand Léger in a review that year, writing that "for a long time [Léger] seems to have done nothing but repeat himself under various disguises. *By force of repetition, Léger's painting has become facile and empty, a matter almost of formula*

⁵⁵ It is somewhat ironic that Davis and Tanguy were chosen as winners, for Davis apparently detested Surrealism, which, as Michael Taylor noted, he dismissed as a "cut-rate novelty import." See Michael Taylor, *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective* (New Haven and London: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2010), 130.

[author's emphasis]."⁵⁶ Repetition, or a lack of desire to question and push formal and conceptual boundaries, Greenberg felt, could be ascribed to “a narrowness of intention”—a problem that, when paired with the conventions of academic painting techniques to which works like Tanguy’s adhered, rendered such work irrelevant, overly-calculated to shock, and incapable of reconfiguring the visual field a new and meaningful way.⁵⁷

In addition to his emphasis on formal progression, Greenberg generally was not interested in the type of subject matter that appealed to the Surrealists. He felt that their art was too personal, on one hand and that they did not take it certain aspects of it seriously enough—i.e., they did not engage fully enough with its unique *formal* qualities as a subject and a self-sustaining arena of creative activity—on the other. As he noted in his early essay “Towards a Newer Laocöon,” the chief concern of painting should be precisely the *opposite* of acting as a window onto the unknown (contradicting a point that Breton had repeatedly argued). Instead, Greenberg contended, artists should focus on their genre’s “progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane’s denial of efforts to ‘hole through’ it for realistic perspectival space. . . . But most important of all,” he concluded, in the most advanced contemporary art, “the picture plane itself grows shallower and shallower, flattening out and pressing together the fictive planes of depth until they meet as one upon the real and

⁵⁶ Greenberg, review for *The Nation* (19 April 1941) cited in O’Brian, ed., *Perceptions and Judgments*, 64.

⁵⁷ In his essay on Surrealism, printed in *The Nation* on August 12 and 19, 1944, Greenberg discusses why he feels art such as Tanguy’s and Dalí’s is tied to academicism, and why he feels that they have chosen such a path. See *Ibid.*, 228-29.

material plane which is the actual surface of the canvas.”⁵⁸ The “orthodox” Surrealists, Greenberg argued (singling out Miró, Klee, and Arp specifically as existing *outside* of the orthodox group), had “reacted against abstract purity [of the cubists] and turned back to a confusion of literature with painting.”⁵⁹ In striving to “preserve the identifiable image at all costs” and to “produce a strong illusion of [the image’s] possible existence in the world of real appearances,” artists like Tanguy or Dalí had, according to Greenberg, inadvertently achieved “the same result that the nineteenth-century academic artists sought.”⁶⁰ What was more important? In the mid-1940s, to work on solving the pressing problems of the day; to be precise, the problems of painting. Thus, at least in 1945, Greenberg did not disguise his respect for Hans Hoffman, who asserted “that painting exists first of all in its medium and must there resolve itself before going on to do anything else.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” (originally published in *Partisan Review*, July-August 1945) in John O’Brien, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume I: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 34-35. Breton twice discussed the importance of the “window” metaphor, although his emphasis was that Surrealism had to revolutionize what was seen through this window rather than on discarding it entirely. He had first discussed the idea of a painting as a window in the *Manifeste du surréalisme*, writing that one night as he was falling asleep an image came to him of “a man cut in two by a window” [the window representing, then, a bridge between the conscious and unconscious world as well as the picture plane of a painting]; he returned to this a few years later in *Surrealism and Painting*, writing that he “found it impossible to consider a picture as anything but a window” and that his primary interest was to discover “what it looks out upon.” See Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” in Seaver and Lane, trans., *André Breton: Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 21-22. See also J.H. Mathews, *Eight Painters: The Surrealist Context* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 71.

⁵⁹ Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” in *Ibid*, 36. Greenberg later lists Ernst, Tanguy, Roy, Magritte, and Dalí as adherents to this “orthodox” tradition and Miró, Arp, Masson, Picasso, and Klee as examples of artists who have, in his view, used Surrealist methods, such as automatism, to advance the modernist cause. See Greenberg, “Surrealist Painting” (originally published in *The Nation* 19 August 1945) in *Ibid*, 227.

⁶⁰ Greenberg, “Surrealist Painting,” in *Ibid*, 228.

⁶¹ Greenberg, “Review of an Exhibition of Hans Hoffman and a Reconsideration of Mondrian’s Theories,” (originally published in *The Nation* (21 April 1945) reprinted in O’Brien, ed., *Arrogant Purpose*, 18.

Likewise, Greenberg's assessment of Masson is of interest here, for while he (correctly or not—this is certainly debatable) placed Masson alongside Miró and Arp as an artist who was more concerned with technical and formal properties than subject matter, he never fully endorsed Masson either. In fact, in 1942, he labeled Masson's art a grand "failure," noting that "in spite of himself [and in spite of being a Surrealist]," he has "absorbed enough cubism . . . never to lose sight of the direction in which pictorial art of our times must go in order to be great."⁶² The artists that Greenberg came to champion—those whom he felt had achieved artistic "greatness" where Masson had failed, such as Miró, Pollock and a number of subsequent color field painters—had turned their backs on explicit narrative content and instead endeavored to reduce painting to its most essential elements. For Greenberg, this development followed a relatively linear historic and stylistic path—as he put it, American artists participating in this new direction were fortunate to have been able to "digest" the movements that preceded them.⁶³ Any artists who did not follow this path or seek formal innovations that would further its course were considered inconsequential and irrelevant. As he summed it up in the concluding paragraphs of "Surrealist Painting," new subject matter on its own was simply not enough: progression in both content *and* form were necessary; great art involved not only "new things to be seen" but "a new way of seeing . . . a "fundamental change in the conventions of painting" as well.⁶⁴

⁶² Clement Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of André Masson," in *Ibid*, 99.

⁶³ Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," *Partisan Review* (Spring 1955) reprinted in Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism* 200.

⁶⁴ Greenberg, "Surrealist Painting," in *Ibid*, 230.

Harold Rosenberg (Greenberg's chief rival in the 1950s), also placed a premium upon innovation, although he found greater value in the personal, expressive qualities of a painting (and the way in which it reflected its existence as an arena in which the artist had 'acted') than in formal advances for their own sake. In his classic essay "The American Action Painters" Rosenberg voiced his support for those artists who worked to make a clean break with their artistic pasts; "The big moment came when it was decided to paint. . . . Just *To Paint*. The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation from Value— political, aesthetic, moral." The adoption of such personal gestures as a unique artistic language Rosenberg called a "conversion."⁶⁵ Rosenberg valued progress, evolution, but for him it did not necessarily have to be linear. When writing about DeKooning in the 1960s, for example, he argued that "the artist did not have to follow a logic of progress, for example from Cubism to Mondrian, to . . .? He could move ahead by going backward from the present into the past and exploring the resources of art at any point in time that appealed to him."⁶⁶ Even twenty years after the publication of "The American Action Painters," Rosenberg maintained this view. In a review of Masson's 1976 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, for example, he began by noting that Masson had been recognized as a significant artist with a well-established reputation for half a century, but then proceeds to chastise the curators for having given Masson a full retrospective, arguing that on one hand, the exhibition itself "lacks stylistic coherence" and on the other that because Masson shifted from style to style throughout his career, "the art public has

⁶⁵ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* (December 1952), reprinted in Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 192-93.

⁶⁶ Harold Rosenberg, "De Kooning: "Painting is a Way," in in Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 113.

no clear image of what ‘a Masson’ looks like, in the sense that it recognizes a Miró, a Giacometti, a Dalí.”⁶⁷ “The effect of the show,” Rosenberg continued, “is to throw the viewer into a state of aesthetic bewilderment.”⁶⁸ As he wrote over a decade earlier when discussing how this direct, critical linkage of artist to work of art might play out, he wrote,

one of the lessons learned from the vanguard Europeans by the American artists in the forties was that a work of art need consist of nothing more than an inscription of the artist’s identity. . . . as long as the total effect is that of the unique signature. Robert Motherwell, one of the quickest to grasp this point of the Paris school, was able, within two or three years after he had begun to paint, to exhibit ‘Motherwells’ that distinguished themselves from the masses of canvases by unknown artists.⁶⁹

Based on these statements, it appears that Rosenberg had come to value artists who were able to maintain certain qualities that were consistently recognizable as uniquely their own rather than jumping from one idea to the next. Such qualities were most desirable when they came into being as the result of a deeply-felt “encounter” between artist, paint, and canvas.⁷⁰ In addition to this personal cohesiveness—what one might call a signature style—Rosenberg also emphasized innovation. He noted that both curators of the exhibition, Caroline Lanchner and William Rubin, were apparently aware of extant

⁶⁷ Harold Rosenberg, “Mediumistic Artist” (originally published in *The New Yorker*, 16 August 1976); reprinted in Harold Rosenberg, *Art and Other Serious Matters* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 81.

⁶⁸ Rosenberg, “Mediumistic Artist,” in Rosenberg, *Art and Other Serious Matters*, 82.

⁶⁹ Harold Rosenberg, “Arshile Gorky: Art and Identity,” in Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object*, 101.

⁷⁰ As he wrote in “The American Action Painters,” “The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.” Reprinted in Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 190. While the unpremeditated aspect of this encounter seems close to the Surrealist idea of automatism, Rosenberg’s focus on the visual evidence of the artist’s struggle or engagement with his materials as the most important “subject” of the painting differentiates his approach from the Surrealist emphasis on the shock that such imagery could produce and the way in which it referred back to the artist’s hidden desires and interior life.

criticism of Masson for his frequent stylistic shifts but that their reaction to such criticism was to attempt to find an underlying conceptual unity in his work—a unity driven by an underlying artistic philosophy and a unique personality—that superseded stylistic concerns. Rosenberg summed up what he perceived to be the problem of exhibiting Masson's work in a retrospective format with a statement that also summarized the persistence of modernist ideas well into the final quarter of the Twentieth Century: the chronological, monographic format, he complained, "is poorly suited to artists who do not evince either a steady evolution or a dramatic transition from one mode to another. Why present a survey of a lifetime of creations that fail to illuminate one another or to deepen a common idea or vision." The whole," he concluded, after praising the curators for a well-researched catalogue, "is less than some of its parts."⁷¹ This tongue-in-cheek conclusion suggests that he had come to value coherence as much as evidence of a deeply-felt expressive encounter acted out by the artist upon his or her canvas.

While tracing what he perceived to be the high points of Masson's career, Rosenberg identified the artist's sand-and-glue paintings of the late 1920s as a series with great potential. However, he noted, "having discovered that automatism tends to decline into repetition (as it did in also in the case of Pollock), Masson brought the series to a close after some twenty pieces."⁷² Here, Rosenberg not-so-subtly called out artists like Pollock who had found a novel approach but were unwilling to give it up and continue to explore. As will be discussed momentarily, this issue came to be a common one in critiques of

⁷¹ Rosenberg, "Mediumistic Artist," in Rosenberg, *Art and Other Serious Matters*, 83-84.

⁷² *Ibid*, 87-88.

Pollock's development and Rosenberg, despite not having a strongly positive impression of Masson's oeuvre as a whole, clearly praises him for recognizing this pitfall and avoiding it, as he had De Kooning a few years earlier for recognizing that after painting *Excavation* he had to make a "new move," which resulted in his more personally-involved "Women" series.⁷³ Rosenberg happily noted that William Rubin shared his view of Masson's decisions in regard to this issue, and described the curator's similar conclusions as "highest praise of both the artist's insight and of his integrity."⁷⁴

Thus, For Rosenberg, a sustained programme of experimentation (each session before the canvas would necessarily elicit a novel kind of struggle—and such encounters would necessarily evolve just as the artist himself evolved) was much more favorable than erratic (if provocative) stylistic and technical shifts. In fact, he questioned the succession of movements following Abstract Expressionism in the 1960s for precisely this quality.

After giving Pop Art the derisive title 'Gagart,' he writes that

art in our time, characterized by continuous experiment, belongs to the alarming realm of thought and action which since the Renaissance has elevated novelty as a value inseparable from its deepest aims. Pivotal terms in modern art are 'experiment,' 'pioneer,' 'transformation,' 'avant-garde' – terms which formal criticism cannot do without but which originate not in the vocabularies of form but in those of the New World of science and exploration.⁷⁵

Innovation, Rosenfeld believed, should come from within, albeit tempered by a working knowledge of the formal history of one's craft. So strong was his belief in this quality

⁷³ Rosenberg, "De Kooning: "Painting is a Way," in Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object*, 118.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 89.

⁷⁵ Harold Rosenberg, "Time and Values," in Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object*, 234.

that he was able to overlook the fact that despite the ultimate aesthetic effect of his canvases, which suggested the “in-the-moment” interaction that he so prized, an artist like Arshile Gorky was, in fact, carefully working out many elements of his compositions in sketches and studies beforehand.⁷⁶

Therefore he could conclude that the “special importance” of an Ernst retrospective in 1975 lay in the fact that, despite working in numerous styles, “the selection of paintings, collages, and sculptures succeeds in communicating the continual disorientation to which, in the Surrealist view, the modern consciousness is obliged to subject itself.” Such an approach allowed him to also simultaneously embrace an artist as different from Ernst as Willem de Kooning, whom he had praised years earlier as “the outstanding painter . . . since the 1930s” for creating canvases that were never simply “illustrative of a concept” and for the “philosophical substructure of his art,” which was defined by his “stubborn refusal to submit to any external discipline or to adopt a contrived identity.”⁷⁷

Greenberg and, to a slightly lesser extent, Rosenberg, were arguably the most influential critics of contemporary art in the mid-twentieth century and their ideas about what constituted quality and significance in avant-garde painting dominated the era in which Tanguy’s posthumous reputation was being formed (roughly the 1950s-1970s).⁷⁸ As

⁷⁶ See Michael Taylor, *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective*, 131-32.

⁷⁷ On Ernst: Harold Rosenberg, “Evidences of Surreality” (originally published in *The New Yorker*, 14 April 1975); reprinted in Rosenberg, *Art and Other Serious Matters*, 63; on de Kooning, “Willem de Kooning” (originally published as the Introduction to *Willem de Kooning* (New York: Abrams, 1973); reprinted in *Ibid.*, 148-49.

⁷⁸ As Karen Wilkin recently noted, “In 1941 Greenberg began to review art exhibitions, producing, over the next three decades, a body of perceptive, forthright essays that established him as quite possibly the most

noted in the reviews cited above, Greenberg viewed the “orthodox” Surrealists as too firmly anchored to nineteenth century techniques and ideas about the role of subject matter to have had a significant impact on the direction of the most important forms of modern art. Both Greenberg and Rosenberg valued artists who aspired to push the boundaries of art in new directions (although Greenberg argued for a series of perhaps subtle formal advances and Rosenberg for a more profound break with formal advances in favor of personal expression).⁷⁹ Perhaps because Breton and his followers often rejected many of the formal “advances” that Greenberg considered to be essential elements of the progression of modern art, he was further compelled to write off the movement and its artists as a quirky, retrograde offshoot of the trajectory of modernism.

Greenberg’s standards, which were absorbed by a larger community of critics and scholars of his era, were thus incompatible with those of Surrealism, and in particular

significant art critic of the twentieth century, certainly its most celebrated and disputed. A generation of younger critics and art historians . . . were profoundly affected by his example. . . . anyone seriously interested in the history of modern art must take his work into account.” See Karen Wilkin, “Clement Greenberg: A Critical Eye,” in Karen Wilkin and Bruce Guenther, *Clement Greenberg: A Critic’s Collection* (Portland, OR: Portland Art Museum and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 15. Michael Leja, too, noted their central place in the history of postwar art, writing that they were the Abstract Expressionist’s “most famous and compelling spokespersons.” See Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 4. See also the recent catalogue accompanying an exhibition exploring their legacy: Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning and American Art, 1940-1976* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2008). Some critics in the 1960s, such as Robert Rosenblum, focused on the effects of the scale of the work being produced by the current generation of artists; Rosenblum argued for the connection between such monumental canvasses and the concept of the sublime. It is difficult to insert Tanguy’s easel-scale paintings (and those produced by the vast majority of the Surrealists) into such a narrative. See Rosenblum, “The Abstract Sublime,” reprinted in Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 239-244.

⁷⁹ As Deborah Bricker Balken has noted, Rosenberg “had long argued that with the occupation of Paris by the Germans in 1940, the ‘laboratory of the twentieth century had been shut down.’ As a result, he contended, a new set of critical terms was needed to acknowledge this rupture, a language that would convey that history had ceased to be progressive, that the continuation of Modernism no longer existed.” See Balken, “Harold Rosenberg and the American Action Painters in Kleeblatt, et. al., *Action Abstraction*, 206-07.

Surrealists whom he perceived to operate in the realm of dream illusionism. He wanted the artists he championed to strive for three qualities in their work: boldness (meaning the willingness to paint new things *and* to do so in new ways), breadth, and monumentality: qualities that did not align themselves with the work of most Surrealists, and in particular, Tanguy, whose only promise, according to Greenberg, lay in his drawings.⁸⁰ Such ideals and ambitions were simply not aligned with Surrealism's goals—one might say, tongue only partially in cheek, that their navel-gazing was more personal. The Surrealists' emphasis lay more on the subjective qualities than objective ones: the connection between the artist and his subject matter was, in the end, of greatest value; the means through which the artist arrived at the final product was of ultimately of lesser importance (thus the movement's ability to eventually encompass artists whose work was as aesthetically diverse as that of Tanguy, Masson, and Ernst).

With these ideas in mind, one important question that emerges when examining the critical reception of Tanguy's art after his death is how perceptions about his artistic development and mature style situated him within a broader narrative of modernism (as opposed to the narrower one of Surrealism, in which his status as a central figure was already assured for posterity). On one hand, Tanguy's biography and artistic development seem to align him with what Rosalind Krauss has called the modernist "parable of

⁸⁰ See John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume II: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 6 and O'Brien, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume I*, 231.

absolute self-creation.”⁸¹ Indeed, it is this aspect of Tanguy’s artistic training (or lack thereof) that James Johnson Sweeney seemed to have valued, in part, when selecting Tanguy as one of the medalists in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts biennial.⁸² However, the technical precision and traditional—even academic—style and technique that Tanguy utilized in his mature paintings cut against the stereotypical view of how an untrained artist’s work should look while simultaneously making it difficult to insert him into the standard modernist trajectory that flows from cubism through abstract expressionism, or even a more plausible line of modernist development à la Surrealist automatism.

Tanguy’s consistent utilization of traditional methods of pictorial representation troubles a reading of his art as fully revolutionary. For while the forms he paints are certainly abstract in the sense that they have no direct correlation to objects in the rational world, for the most part they still adhere to the physical limitations of world as we know it: they have the illusion of volume, mass, solidity; they are textured; they cast shadows. In fact, they could literally be “made” in three dimensions: Tanguy himself hinted at this possibility occasionally during the course of his career by creating sculptural forms that related to his paintings. An excellent example of this is a small piece fittingly titled *The Certainty of the Never-seen* (fig. 103), which combines a custom artist-made frame, three dimensional objects—seemingly three-dimensional representations of the forms

⁸¹ See Rosalind Krauss, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1986), 157.

⁸² In a parallel manner, Allan Kaprow relates, when discussing Jackson Pollock, that the artist was “amazingly childlike, capable of becoming involved in the stuff of his art as a group of concrete facts seen for the first time. There is . . . a certain blindness, a mute belief in everything he does, even up to the end.” See Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Art News* (October 1958); reprinted in Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 186.

presented in two dimensions behind them—situated upon a shallow “stage” in front of the painting, and a typical painting from the 1930s. Reinhold Hohl summarized the way in which these seemingly contradictory characteristics, the subjective and the objective, meet in the work of artists like Tanguy, whom he calls “figurative Surrealists”:

These . . . pictures are not abstract compositions on the surface of the picture, but depictions of objects in an imaginary pictorial space (present only to the painter). With the means of traditional landscapes with figures—that is, horizon, perspectives of every kind, lighting, modeling, silhouette and cast shadow, events in nature and figures engaged in action—figurative surrealism portrays an inventive, unidentifiable world of shapes as if it were the real world that we experience. In part, the laws of nature apply in that world—the force of gravity, the play of light, the casting of shadow, the reduction in scale of bodies depicted at a greater distance—and in part these are altered by a modification of the laws in that world which do not apply in our world—in something of the same way that on the moon physical conditions prevail which are different from those on earth. ‘Events’ are certainly not lacking, nor is the ‘personal.’⁸³

Greenberg, too, identified this quality in the work of Tanguy and some of his peers, condemning it as “a new and interesting kind of pictorial literature, but . . . more literature or document than painting or art. . . . [these paintings’] ‘content’ is conceivable, and too much so, in other terms than those of paint.”⁸⁴ In the end, dream illusionist painting, subjected to the modernist critique, did not break away from traditional figurative or landscape painting aggressively enough to be considered as having any great value, nor did it focus exclusively enough on the properties inherent to the plastic arts.

On this count (the choice of subject matter and how it is presented—not the ultimate assessment of such choices) one cannot necessarily disagree with Greenberg. Tanguy’s

⁸³ Reinhold Hohl, “Tanguy and Surrealist Figuration,” in Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 69.

⁸⁴ See Clement Greenberg, “Surrealist Painting,” reprinted in O’Brian, ed., *Perceptions and Judgments*, 231.

ties to the past, to a long artistic tradition, in fact, stretching back to the Renaissance, can be cemented if one makes the unlikely comparison between his work and that of an American landscape painter like Sanford Gifford, or even a genre painter like Tanguy's compatriot Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Were Tanguy's attempts to make the two-dimensional space of the picture plane resemble a three-dimensional place—treating the canvas like a diorama or a stage set upon which an endless cast of characters could be rearranged and recomposed—so different from the working method of an artist one or two centuries earlier? Where Gifford might move a tree here, a rock there, or substitute a log cabin for a teepee from painting to painting (figs. 104), or Greuze might recombine figures to create new interactions or to tell a new story, Tanguy would likewise move his forms forward or back in pictorial space, or change their shapes or the relationships between them. Although the ends are quite unlike, the means and the underlying concept are startlingly similar. The difference is that because artists such as Gifford, Greuze, and many others working in a more legibly figurative tradition were able to more obviously change the narrative content of their work by reconfiguring the subjects within their compositions, they were much less frequently accused of stagnation or repetition—this is even the case with Tanguy's colleagues such as Dalí or Magritte,

With this in mind, it is not surprising that Tanguy would be drawn to the work of not only Surrealist favorites, such as the eccentric early Netherlandish century painter Hieronymus Bosch, but to that of more traditional artists as well. Robert Lebel, for example, writes of encountering Tanguy at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1943, where he was “sunk

into the observation of a Dutch still life . . . His intense observation suggested to me that he recognized in the precise execution of the picture his own melancholy precision; and I still remember very well how he was amazed at the ‘ability to make the lifeless vibrant.’”⁸⁵ Indeed, Tanguy’s interest in this type of work is not all that surprising, considering that he had spent much of his career engaged in a similar pursuit: making the invisible convincingly visible. However, with the exception of his success at the VMFA biennial, such strong ties to the past—no matter how important the work may have been from an art-historical standpoint—did not generally work in Tanguy’s favor in the critical environment in which his work was received and judged later in his life and for decades after his death. Compounding the problem of Tanguy’s preference for this approach to painting was his steadfast dedication to working in this manner and the perception that he had ignored the kinds of formal advances made not only by younger American artists but even by many of his own peers as well. Greenberg’s emphasis on artistic progression, particularly formal progression, and his dismissal of repetition as “death” can be argued to have led—at least indirectly—to numerous negative judgments of Tanguy’s career by those outside of his immediate circle in the three decades following his death. Thus one of the most consistent criticisms of his work was its sameness, its lack of evolution, its repetition. That repetition was undesirable, and that a failure to demonstrate some sort of progress was damning, became evident even in critiques of Abstract Expressionism during its heyday. In the late 1950s, Allan Kaprow asked: “Was it not perfectly clear that modern art in general was slipping? Either it had become dull and repetitious as the ‘advanced’ style, or large numbers of formerly committed contemporary painters were

⁸⁵ Robert Lebel, “The Enchanted World of Tanguy’s Shapes,” in Schmidt et al., *Yves Tanguy*, 39.

defecting to earlier forms. . . . [even by 1958], the act of painting, the new space, the personal mark that builds its own form and meaning, the endless tangle, the great scale, the new materials are by now clichés of college art departments.”⁸⁶

By the 1940s, some critics had become familiar enough with Tanguy’s oeuvre to take note of the subtle shifts and changes that had occurred in it—even since his arrival in the United States. In 1943, a reviewer who was apparently already somewhat familiar with Tanguy’s earlier work concluded that in his recent paintings he had chosen to keep “on perfecting his individual technique,” which allowed him to delve “deeper and more skillfully into the realm of fantasy.” Additionally, in these new works, the review continued, Tanguy’s “clarity of tone and color and realistic third-dimensional emphasis are developed to an ever greater extent.”⁸⁷ In 1946, Charles Offin reached a similar conclusion when previewing Tanguy’s small retrospective at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, stating that the show “underline[d] the artist’s sustained resourcefulness in evolving subtle variations in the content of his mechanistic dream world.”⁸⁸ However, not all of those who reviewed this exhibition praised such measured refinement. An unsigned review of the same exhibition appeared in *ARTnews*. In it can be found the seeds of later criticism of Tanguy’s lack of development. Here, his landscapes are described as having become “familiar” and his oeuvre as “fairly homogenous”: hardly praise for an artist central to a movement for which two of the chief objectives were surprise and shock.

⁸⁶ Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *ARTnews* (October 1958), 24-26; 55-57; reprinted in Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, 182-183.

⁸⁷ H.B., “Calder & Tanguy,” *The Art Digest* (June 1, 1943), np.

⁸⁸ Charles Z. Offin, “Gallery Previews in New York,” *Pictures on Exhibit* 9, 1 (October 1946), 16.

While there is nothing further to suggest that these characteristics carried negative connotations, the terms were now on the table. Five years later, David Sylvester (who, ironically, was one of Magritte's biggest supporters) took a slightly more disparaging view of the consistency of Tanguy's oeuvre. He wrote that he found the artist's paintings to be "exceedingly repetitive" and then proceeded to dismiss all of Tanguy's recent work, stating that "like most artists who repeat themselves, his earlier works are his best."⁸⁹

Thus, by the time of his death in 1955, it is not surprising to discover that Tanguy's obituary in the *New York Herald-Tribune* described him as the Surrealist who had painted "the same desert, strewn with the same rubble, *over and over again* [author's emphasis]."⁹⁰ Later that year, reviewing Tanguy's memorial exhibition at MoMA, Roger Coates wrote that "by the early and middle thirties, he [Tanguy] had settled into his *permanent* manner [author's emphasis]; both his color and his proficiency in the medium had improved enormously, too," but he concluded that Tanguy was, in the end, "too restricted in subject matter and treatment" to have been a "major artist."⁹¹ Even then, at the height of the popularity and influence of Abstract Expressionist movement and its attendant critical terms, there were still two schools of thought on this issue, for Emily Genauer wrote that contemporary artists might have something to learn from Tanguy, that they might find in his deep perspectives an alternative to the fashionable concept of

⁸⁹ Derfner, "New York Art Letter"; Roger M. Coates, "The Art Galleries: Tanguy and de Chirico," *New Yorker* (24 September, 1955), 159; David Sylvester, "London Gallery: Yves Tanguy," *Art News and Review* (3 June 1950), 5-6.

⁹⁰ "Yves Tanguy," *New York Herald-Tribune* (January 16, 1955); page number unknown; from microfilm of the artist's file from the New York Public Library at the Ryerson & Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.

⁹¹ Roger Coates, "The Art Galleries: Tanguy and de Chirico," *New Yorker* (24 September 1955), 157.

this inviolability of the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. Studying Tanguy's retrospective carefully, she chides others who do not, arguing that "did not each picture reveal steady growth he might easily have been called repetitious."⁹²

A certain level of ambivalence about this issue can be detected in Dennis Farr's review of the catalogue raisonné of Tanguy's work, published eight years after the artist's death in 1963. Farr easily connects Tanguy's later works of the 1940s to those executed at the beginning of his career in the 1920s, noting that the 1920s paintings "directly foreshadow[ed] those twenty years later." Because of this, Farr wrote, Tanguy "was much less inventive than either Max Ernst or Paul Klee in so far that his range of subject [*sic*] was strictly limited . . . the basic formula remained little changed."⁹³ Slightly less than a decade later, the critic Thomas Hess characterized the "tenacity" with which Tanguy stuck to his "cast of characters" as "compulsive" when reviewing a retrospective at Acquavella Galleries, but withheld judgment on this tendency other than the vaguely negative associations that he conjured up by using the term "compulsive."⁹⁴ Other critics of the show were less vague. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Phyllis Derfner declared herself "bored" as she watched "the artist's pictographic style of the twenties solidif[y] in the early thirties into the characteristic style with which he stayed (modifying

⁹² Emily Genauer, "Tanguy, Chirico Seen At the Modern Museum," *New York Times* (11 September 1955).

⁹³ Dennis Farr, "Yves Tanguy (Kate [*sic*] Sage Tanguy)," *The Burlington Magazine* CVIII, 755 (February 1966), 98-99.

⁹⁴ Thomas Hess, "It's A Small World," *New York* (2 December 1974), 80.

only his palette until the end of his career in the fifties).” “Tanguy’s world,” she concluded, “seems so limited—far more so than the everyday world.”⁹⁵

Hilton Kramer came to a similar conclusion in his review of the Acquavella show: “One thing is certain,” he wrote,

Tanguy’s art is consistent—and consistently the same—to an extraordinary degree. . . . His work consists of variations on a single theme. . . . An image of immense, unbounded space is occupied by scattered accretions or constructions of forms more or less biomorphic in character and yet denoting no very specific identity beyond their abstract and slightly threatening sculptural presence. That is the basic image on which Tanguy built the entire production of his maturity.⁹⁶

So far so good, we might think . . . descriptive, but not particularly judgmental . . . until the lengthy review with Kramer’s withering assessment that because Tanguy restricted himself to these mere “variations,” he displayed “the singleness and purpose of a very small mind.”⁹⁷ Once again, a premium had been placed upon artistic genius and stylistic development. The fact that Kramer is still arguing that artistic progression should be linked to intelligence reveals the staying power of the Greenbergian narrative of modernism. Content—and the slow, penetrating development of that content (as references to the figure grew in scale and were cast in new types of relationships to each other), as in Tanguy’s work—was perceived to be of much less value in this narrative than more obvious (and, perhaps, more rapid) formal development.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Phyllis Diefner, “New York Letter,” *Art International* (January 1975).

⁹⁶ Hilton Kramer, “Unspecified Disasters,” *New York Times* (27 November, 1974).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ In his book on postmodernism, Howard Risatti explicitly links Kramer to the Greenberg, in particular when it comes to the way in which both privilege formal content and aesthetic experience over subject matter. See Howard Risatti, ed., *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 5-6.

Alternative Views: Authorship, Signature Style, and a Different Kind of Progression

Beginning roughly around the time of Hilton Kramer's review of Tanguy's 1974 retrospective, historically negative opinions about repetition and a perceived lack of "progress" were beginning to be challenged by a new generation of art historians.⁹⁹ Two of these revisionist views will be useful in the context of the present study of how issues of repetition and artistic progression have influenced critical opinion (and thus our understanding) of Tanguy's art. Based on some of these new ideas, the concept of repetition might be seen as linked to the function of authorship and to an artist's development of a recognizable (and marketable) "signature style." Additionally, it may also be useful to consider the theories of those who have focused on the question of *why* repetition and formal consistency have been assigned negative values and who have, therefore, offered alternative assessments—even to the point of suggesting a re-evaluation of artists who have been assigned places of importance in the modernist canon. These two alternatives to the traditionally-accepted narrative of modernist progression have the potential to reshape how we have come to view Tanguy's oeuvre and its place in the canon, particularly when considered alongside the writings of those supporters of the artist who have endeavored to identify a slow but steady development over the course of his career. Perhaps if the discussion is shifted from the analysis of advances in formal qualities to the way in which consistency might work in an artist's

⁹⁹ Many of those who specifically challenged Kramer did so from the position of a Marxist emphasis on subject matter and on art's role within society, in particular Benjamin Buchloh, Donald Kuspit, and Lucy Lippard. See Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives*, 72-77.

favor in direct relationship to the marketplace different values might have been placed on works of art and artist's oeuvres.

It was, in fact, during the period between Tanguy's 1974 and 1982 retrospectives that the call for this re-examination of modernist hierarchies emerged, especially in the work of scholars such as Rosalind Krauss and Jean Baudrillard. Of particular significance to this chapter are the ways in which Krauss questioned the relative value of repetition and what constitutes "originality," making these issues key ones with which to begin. Until the present study, Krauss's ideas have had little impact on the interpretations and assessments of Tanguy's work produced during the final decades of the twentieth century (although she has written about many of his colleagues), despite their potential to change the way that we have come to understand it.

Krauss was among the first writers to directly challenge the established dominance of the Greenbergian narrative of modern art. She advocated for a new way of thinking about the function of a painting that challenged the approach and values supported by these modernist critics, for whom, she wrote, "the putative opacity of the pictorial field must be maintained as a fundamental concept."¹⁰⁰ Adhering to this concept, Krauss argued, enabled ideas of authenticity, uniqueness and originality to enter into the critical discourse. Such ideas were, in turn, based on the possibility that the pictorial sign is self-referential, that it is "non-representational" and "non-transparent." To the contrary, she suggested that "every signifier is itself the transparent signified of an already-given

¹⁰⁰ See Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 161.

decision to carve it out as the vehicle of a sign, and thus, there is no opacity, only transparency that opens into reduplication,” a form of repetition that modernism has sought to repress.¹⁰¹ With this passage, Krauss sought to arrest the powerful, historically-engrained tendency to favor progress and originality dead in its tracks, and by doing so sought to make space in the discourse for alternate readings of artists typically celebrated in the modernist narrative (such as Monet, Rodin and Pollock) while simultaneously allowing for a reconsideration of the work of other artists typically marginalized by this narrative, like Tanguy.¹⁰² By shifting the emphasis from the importance of art as a site of constant evolution (whose purpose is to reduce painting to its essential characteristics) to an understanding of it as a field rich with multiplicity by looking at it through the new lens[es] provided by Krauss, it may be possible to “redeem” Tanguy, making his decision to work within such a narrow set of boundaries seem less limiting and perhaps more in harmony with the era in which he worked.

Considered from Krauss’s perspective, the quest for the new, and even the quest for a kind of artistic practice that provided transparent evidence of a personal engagement with its creation—so often manifested via a purported “spontaneity”—soon became reduced to a carefully contrived sign itself, underpinned by deception (intentional or unconscious).

This could be seen, she argued in “The Originality of the Avant-Garde,” in the grounds of

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁰² Citing recent studies of Monet’s work, for example, Krauss argues that while his flickering brushwork was long interpreted as spontaneous (i.e., “original” and “authentic”) this aesthetic was, in fact, “faked”: that is, it was often the product of a layer of thin washes of color placed on top of a thicker layer of quickly applied brushstrokes below. For this Krauss, in *Ibid.*, 167, cites Robert Herbert, “Method and Meaning in Monet,” *Art in America* 67, 5 (September 1979), 90-108.

Monet's canvases, carefully prepared en masse to look like rapidly laid down paint, or in Rodin's figural groups, composed of copies of or variations upon the same figure but arranged to *look* like many different ones. Tanguy finds his place in this lineage as well, for as discussed in the previous chapter, Tanguy, too worked in a carefully choreographed fashion, first preparing the background, then drawing in the forms, then painting over his drawings with the end-product masquerading as a spontaneous recording of an unconscious landscape—as an *alla prima* sketch of the unseen.

As Krauss collapsed the space between the traditionally opposed concepts of originality and repetition she also sought to understand why originality had become so widely celebrated as one of the primary qualities of modernist art, as exemplified by Michael Fried's interpretation of Pollock as among the greatest American artists because of his "refusal to repeat himself." She wrote that this conception of artistic mastery as the rejection of self-imitation in fact rings "oddly hollow . . . amidst the actual practice of modernist art."¹⁰³ It also helps to provide a context for both Tony Smith's challenge to Pollock in 1951: "Well, what you did was great, Jackson, but what are you going to do next? What is the development?" as well as Pollock's own frustration with his perception that Picasso had him beaten at every turn: "Goddamn it, that guy has done everything. There's nothing left."¹⁰⁴ Tanguy's critics often based their denunciations of his lack of development along lines of thought similar to these. The artist himself refused to be led down the path blazed by such colleagues as Dalí and Picasso, as noted above, chastising

¹⁰³ Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 255.

¹⁰⁴ Pollock, cited in Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 255; 302.

young artists who felt the need to continually tinker with their approach, writing in a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine the year before his death: “I believe . . . that young artists who think they are saying something new by changing their style or type of painting—as Dalí and Picasso have done—are monkeys.”¹⁰⁵ If he did not have Pollock specifically in mind with such a statement, it was certainly aimed at artists of Pollock’s generation who might be tempted to diverge from their personal convictions and to confuse change with progression or faithfulness to an inner vision.

For many of those who valued the formal qualities of a painting less than its subject matter, originality was tied as much to an artistic quest for self-knowledge as it was to the graphic means through which this journey was realized. Indeed, the idea that a work of art was a highly personal product of its creator’s inner life was perhaps the *core* concept of Surrealism. With this in mind, it is not a stretch to imagine that the movement’s emphasis on the individual (even if that individual is seen as acting as a representative of a larger, universal, unconscious) would lead to the creation of group of artists each of whose oeuvres were each characterized by highly personal, highly distinctive styles as unmistakable and as strongly linked to them as their own handwriting. Thus, if we begin to think more broadly about the critical terms that emerged after Tanguy’s death and the ways in which they shaped how his oeuvre has come to be perceived, we might explore how the trajectory of his oeuvre relates to ideas about authorship and “signature style” and how these ideas are linked to those of change and repetition.

¹⁰⁵ Yves Tanguy, “Tanguy Flavor [Letter to the editor],” *Time* (20 September 1954).

The concept of the “signature style,” particularly as it relates to Abstract Expressionism, is rooted in the modernist discussion of what constitutes an “author” and the corresponding notion of a work’s “authorship”: a question initially raised in this context by Roland Barthes in 1968. It is this particular relationship—between artist and work—that Barthes addressed in “The Death of the Author,” in which he wrote that “the author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as . . . it discovered the prestige of the individual.”¹⁰⁶ A little more than a decade later, Michel Foucault explored the concept further, arguing that “the function of an author is to serve as a means of differentiating texts from one another, defining their form and characterizing their mode of existence. [The author’s] name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts.”¹⁰⁷ Barthes saw this author-centric way of thinking as the culmination of a capitalist ideology “which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author” because we are inclined to seek the author to explain the work—each is dependent upon the other. Thus, this author-centric model can be seen as the culmination of capitalist ideology in the creative realm, in that it provides a kind of recognizable brand that differentiates one “product” from the next.

Authorship is a concept that links a body of work together; the very concept of the author, in this sense, approaches a level of unity with the work that it represents that the two become intertwined in a mutually-dependent way. And while Barthes’ project was

¹⁰⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in Stephen Heath, trans., *Roland Barthes: Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, 142-43).

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author,” in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 123.

centered on the possibility of the removal or disappearance of the author as the preeminent feature of creative endeavors *after* a modern times, his definition of the “modern” author and the function of establishing authorship can help our understanding of the forces that shaped Tanguy’s posthumous criticism because this concept was intimately linked to ideas about originality and the creation of a signature style.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the way in which an artist becomes intimately and inseparably linked to his work—as described by Rosenberg’s concept of a painting replacing its creator (I’ve bought an “x,” not a painting by “x”) seems to approach the concept of Surrealist automatism (an approach which, as noted in the previous chapter activated and underpinned Tanguy’s paintings). Yet there is a difference in this line of thought that shifts the focus of the relationship from one that favors a “pure” artistic experience too one that has more to do with a practical, market-based function.

Baudrillard’s essay “Gesture and Signature: Semiurgy in Contemporary Art” proposed that an artist’s development of his or her signature style was one of the defining features of the modern era. When considered alongside Krauss’s re-valuation of the terms of modernity, Baudrillard’s ideas about the function of signature styles suggests an alternative to the Greenbergian condemnations of artists like Tanguy who decided to mine a narrow set of formal parameters rather than to continually seek new styles,

¹⁰⁸ Barthes ultimately looks to the disappearance of the author as the turning point in a new era of creative activity. An artist such as Andy Warhol might exemplify this era—an artist whose works no longer depended on their creator for their ultimate meaning and whose aesthetic is trumped by the ideas underpinning their creation and by their cultural references. Such works—a mass-produced silkscreen of a soup can or a movie starlet—might be perceived as ultimately more “democratic” than a canvas by Tanguy that derives solely from the individual artist’s unconscious.

techniques, and subjects.¹⁰⁹ For Baudrillard, a signature (and, subsequently, a signature *style*) introduces an artist's oeuvre as distinctly his or her own, thereby acting as an agent of difference and causing the artist's oeuvre to be recognized and evaluated within (and against) a broader system of signs *and*, when viewed in the context of other works by the artist, integrating a specific work of art into the artist's oeuvre.¹¹⁰ Thus, Baudrillard argued, by means of its signature one painting can both be separated from others (not by the artist) and joined to many, and, when aligned with other "like" works by the artist, can make its way into culture as a self-contained unit, a coherent oeuvre.

The importance of the artist's signature style, and of its differentiating and unifying functions, emerged and gained increasing importance in the 19th century, paralleling the rise of criticism of repetition and the increasing importance of originality and progression. Baudrillard, for example, argued that a defining characteristic of the first "modern" works of art is that they are legible first in terms of their relationship to other paintings by the same artist, rather than in relation to the rest of the world. Compare, for example, the way in which two Tanguy's from the mid-1940s share more in common than one of these paintings and one by his colleague and fellow biomorphic Surrealist

¹⁰⁹ See Jean Baudrillard, "Gesture and Signature: Semiurgy in Contemporary Art," in Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. and intr. Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO; Telos Press, 1981), 102-111.

¹¹⁰ If we take this idea literally (Baudrillard later slants the idea of an artist's "signature" more towards the specific, distinctive style in which he or she works), it is important to note that Tanguy's carefully signed and dated the vast majority of his paintings—a practice increasingly at odds with the tendencies of many of his modernist peers. Unlike other modernists such as Georgia O'Keeffe or Jackson Pollock, Tanguy always signed his paintings on the recto, apparently less concerned with their interference with the canvas's aesthetic character than he was with noting that it was by *him* and had been painted at a particular point in time. While it was not *uncommon* for modern artists to sign their names on the recto of their paintings, it was increasingly *less* common—or at least called into question—as the twentieth century unfolded.

Joan Miro from a similar date, fig. 105) Following this line of thought, for Baudrillard, modernism is tied to the rise of the single artist, whose reputation is staked to critical and public recognition of their particular style, more than the development of a unique style or emphasis on originality. Because of this, he suggested, the value of the work of art is inextricably linked to its creator and it therefore becomes the modern artist's essential task to preserve his or her signature style. Accordingly, "any contemporary oeuvre is constituted as a declension of objects . . . its meaning being thus tied down to succession and repetition."¹¹¹ The evolution of Tanguy's oeuvre—particularly as described by his supporters in the 1970s and 1980s—is a perfect example of a "declension" of subjects or even a "declension" of style: that is, a group of related objects in which one evolves from yet remains closely related to the form of its predecessors.

Thus, as Tanguy turned out one work after another in his "signature" style, from Baudrillard's point of view, he played God in his painted world, for his paintings "no longer combine with one another in order to revive the model in its likeness (the world and its order) by means of their contiguity. They are only able to follow one another in

¹¹¹ Baudrillard, *Gesture and Signature*, 104. Baudrillard goes on to note that "*it is precisely because the series has become the constitutive dimension of the modern oeuvre that the inauthenticity of one of the elements of the series becomes catastrophic.*" *Ibid*, 105. This threat can come from many directions, ranging from a purposeful forgery to an inadvertent mistake. One such "threat" to Tanguy's oeuvre occurred because of spurious signature. Someone had attempted to insert this "unauthorized" painting into Tanguy's oeuvre in 1963 (and, not uncoincidentally, precisely two months after Kay Sage had committed suicide) when a painting bearing Tanguy's signature appeared at auction at Sotheby Parke-Bernet. Yet it was withdrawn from the sale precisely because it was *not* by Tanguy (and, upon close inspection of the illustration in the catalogue, it is fairly obvious that it lacks Tanguy's technical prowess, among other things. In fact, as Pavel Zoubok kindly informed the author—the painting in question was actually by a young second generation Surrealist by the name of Stella Snead who was experimenting with a style and subject matter similar to Tanguy's at the time and who had not signed her canvas. Thus, the danger posed by a forgery, a fake, or even an honest mis-assessment to an "authentic" canvas lies in the fact that it potentially "throws suspicion" on all other legitimate works in the series. *Ibid*, 105 and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, "Modern Paintings and Drawings" (March 27, 1963), lot 50.

order then to refer, by virtue of their difference and their discontinuity in time, to a quite different model, to the *subject-creator himself* in his unlikeness and his repeated absence.”¹¹² But although Tanguy, as he created paintings that resembled each other more than they did the natural world or the work of another artist, seems to fall in line with Baudrillard’s model for a modern artist, we might ask if viewing his oeuvre through this lens is troubled by the traditional technique he used to depict this non-objective world. From Baudrillard’s point of view, Tanguy’s autonomy as an artist would not be as evident as Pollock’s, Gorky’s or even Masson’s, because of his paintings’ lack of “the literality of the gestural elaboration of creation—spots, lines, [and] dribbles.”¹¹³ Similarly, for Barthes, Tanguy’s work would fall into the category of [passé] modernity rather than that [more innovative] phase which comes next because of both its continued insistence on description, and particularly because of its source within the artist’s subconscious and thus its dependence on the artist to unlock its meaning.¹¹⁴

The defining factor of modernism for Baudrillard had less to do with style or vision—or even capitalism—than the rise of the individual artist who was keenly aware of the effects of chances within his or her oeuvre and the relationship of this oeuvre to not only those of other artists but to the market pace as well. It is too simplistic, he argued, to believe that only the conditions of the market link an artist to “his mannerism and cadence of production. . . . In fact, *it is precisely because the series has become the constitutive dimension of the modern oeuvre that the inauthenticity of one of the elements*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 104

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 106

¹¹⁴ See Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 145; 147.

of the series becomes catastrophic. . . . The work is no longer rooted in God (in the objective order of the world) but in the series itself. The essential task then is to preserve the authenticity of the sign [author's emphasis]."¹¹⁵ Put simply: modern works of art are more closely tied to their creator than they are to the objective world, and the artist's chief concern is to protect and maintain this link.

Baudrillard's introduction of and emphasis upon the literal nature of the autonomous function of the artist's gesture, which suggests a corresponding rejection of the potential for a more descriptive mode of painting to be a viable form of modernity, recall the tension within Surrealism between the two possible poles of Surrealist artistic practice: automatism and dream illusionism. It is, perhaps, somewhat ironic that dream illusionism came to be the accepted, if not the dominant mode of Surrealist practice by the early 1930s, for it was automatism, and the individual freedom for which it allowed and that it represented, that eventually became the model for the dominant mode of modern art by mid-century: abstract expressionism. The trap, however, of automatic, gestural drawing itself becoming a generic style (and thus losing its "authorial" power) is one that is difficult to avoid, for both the artist who works in this vein and for the critic who writes about such work and praises its "originality." Accordingly, Baudrillard recognized the struggle between the authenticity implicit in automatist practices and the necessity of "regrasping reality."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Baudrillard, "Gesture and Signature," 105.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

For Tanguy, the sign of authenticity was not only the *élan vital* of his hidden underdrawings that gave the final forms in his pictures their feeling of spontaneity and freshness but also the fact that because his amorphous forms often have no easily recognizable links to the external world they are therefore recognized as entirely the product of his inner world. If, then, we can consider Tanguy's signs of "authenticity" as not only the gestural drawings that underlie his painted forms, but also the forms themselves as a sign relating back to the artist and his "objective significations" as the remaining elements of his paintings that hark back to traditional representational art, then it is easy to see why critics often had trouble with his work, even if they were not fully aware of these dual concepts that drove it, but were merely reacting to their combined effect (or, perhaps, to the way in which one acts to mask the other) and consistent use. This may explain a fascinating discrepancy that recurs in reviews of Tanguy's work: some writers find energy, motion and action in his paintings; others find a "frozen" or motionless world.¹¹⁷

Tanguy's lack of response to such criticism, as well as his refusal to offer easy answers to such questions or to provide any concrete guidance to those seeking to interpret his work is a testament to his stubbornness but also to his artistic vision and the ultimate power of

¹¹⁷ Rosamund Frost, for example, found both, describing Tanguy's forms in the 1940s as having "acquired motion" and as characterized by an "amoeba-like expansion," yet the world in which these forms were situated gave the sense of being a "vacuum filled with life." See R.F [Rosamund Frost], "Tanguy: Surrealism's Purist," *ArtNews* (May 15-31, 1942), 21. Or, as Jo Gibbs described it four years later, Tanguy's pictorial world was "an incredibly calm kingdom of vast distances, without sound or air." See Jo Gibbs, "The Path into Tanguy's Private World," *Art Digest* (November 15, 1946), np. Later in the decade, James Thrall Soby described the development from form to form within Tanguy's compositions as a "chain reaction" and as "bundled firecrackers." James Thrall Soby, "Inland in the Subconscious," *Magazine of Art* 42, 1 (January 1949), 5.

Surrealist art at it strongest. It is also a sign that such writers were simply missing the point. Repetition = emphasis—a fact noted by Krauss—and by his insistence on painting the same mysterious subjects in the same style, Tanguy was literally *insisting* on the authenticity of his artistic vision.¹¹⁸

During his lifetime, Tanguy was generally praised (especially from within the Surrealist group) for the uniqueness—and thus the authenticity—of his personal vision and for his dedication to this vision: qualities that were at the core of the group’s values and that were critical to his maintenance of his position as one of its central members. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, during the second half of his career his work entered a more international context in which often artist tended to be judged by their formal progression. In this environment he was increasingly subjected to the ideas of modernist critics outside of the Surrealist movement for whom such qualities were paramount. Because of this shift, his oeuvre began to be criticized for its sameness, for its repetition, and for its perceived lack of evolution—in the end (perhaps ironically), for its *unoriginality*. Such thinking logically sets up a fairly clear dichotomy between artists who participated in such progression—either with a single conceptual or stylistic

¹¹⁸ Krauss, in discussing this point, cites Claude Levi-Strauss’s theories about repetition’s importance to linguistic development. Per Levi-Strauss, “reduplication indicates intent on the part of the speaker; it endows the second syllable with a function different from that which would have been performed by the first separately, or in the form of a potentially limitless series of identical sounds /papapapa/ produced by mere babbling. Therefore the second /pa/ is not a repetition of the first, nor has it the same signification. It is a sign that, like itself, the first /pa/ too was a sign, and that as a pair they fall into the category of signifiers, not of things signified.” From Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. J. and D. Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 339-40; cited in Krauss, “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,” in Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 110. Krauss thus concludes that “repetition is this the indicator that the ‘wild sounds’ of babbling have been made deliberate, intentional; and that what they intend is meaning.” *Ibid.*, 109-110.

contribution or, more rarely, with a career's-worth of them—and artists who either worked outside of this model or who were not able to demonstrate a clear and significant evolution within their oeuvre. Tanguy appears to fit both of the profiles on the negative side of this equation, for he neither experimented with automatism long enough to have broken new ground with it nor pushed his use of abstraction far enough to have made a significant formal “advance” in that area; additionally, he did not make a career out of experimentation with new styles, techniques, or subject matter (as did such artists as Picasso, Ernst, or Miró). A handful of other (more partisan) writers, however—most often those writing for catalogues accompanying exhibitions of Tanguy's work, but occasionally reviewers and critics as well—have taken a slightly more positive view of this aspect of Tanguy's oeuvre. Most frequently these writers describe Tanguy's style and subject matter as having evolved slowly, consistently, and even deliberately over time.

Thomas Hess, who, as noted above, used the term “compulsive” when describing Tanguy's steadfast adherence to his chosen aesthetic when reviewing the artist's exhibition at Acquavella Galleries in the 1974, took a balanced approach when reviewing Tanguy's 1950 exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. In doing so he located Tanguy's work as tied to the core tenets of Surrealism, as a purveyor of painted dream poetry, but as one who—perhaps unaware—also had begun to pay more attention to the formal qualities of his work, as reflected in what Hess observed as “an increasing preoccupation with texture; with color used as an optical . . . weapon; and with three-dimensional

arrangements pulled up flat on the surface.”¹¹⁹ After praising the pared-down, abstractly-rendered spaces of Tanguy’s drawings, which, too, are refined to their most basic formal elements, Hess, concluded that Tanguy’s work, on its own terms (which now appear to partake, to some degree, of the terms of high modernism), is a “complete success.”¹²⁰

While Hess was one of the few critics to attempt to insert Tanguy’s work into the emergent narrative of modern art based on the development of its formal qualities alone, numerous critics in the 1940s and early 1950s noted Tanguy’s consistency, usually in relatively neutral descriptions. One of the first writers to praise the artist for his steadfast adherence to his own style and aesthetic was James Thrall Soby. Soby, who had come to know Tanguy quite well in the 1940s, organized Tanguy’s first posthumous retrospective in 1955—the heart of the period in which progression and development were perhaps most celebrated in art criticism—and penned the accompanying essay, which was based on an earlier article that he had written for the *Magazine of Art* in 1949.

In the opening paragraph of his essay, Soby wrote enthusiastically that Tanguy “abhorred stylistic change for its own sake,” and noted the artist’s irritation with “painters who felt obliged to evolve a new approach every few years, as a means of freshening their own and the public’s interest in their work.”¹²¹ For both Tanguy and Soby, the idea of change for its own sake—or even worse, for the market’s sake—was one that was morally bankrupt and that went against the intensely personal integrity that Surrealism demanded

¹¹⁹ T.B.H. [Thomas B. Hess], “Yves Tanguy”, *ARTNews* (April 1950), 43.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²¹ James Thrall Soby, “Yves Tanguy,” in *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 9.

from its members. In direct opposition to those who found Tanguy's consistency a negative quality, Soby concluded his opening paragraph by arguing that Tanguy's "life work is integral to an extraordinary degree, *its discipline a strengthening rather than a constricting force* [author's emphasis]." ¹²²

Two decades later, John Ashbery, writing in the catalogue for the exhibition that elicited Derfner's negative review, also praised Tanguy for these qualities. He noted that after finding his mature style in the late 1920s, which was characterized by incorporating increasingly subtle ways of "confusing the viewer's sense of perspective" and "mingling earth and sky . . . solid and intangible," Tanguy "entered the final mature phase of his work which was to develop slowly and methodically until his death." ¹²³ Ashbery goes on to note that as his career unfolded, Tanguy's forms become increasingly varied, his compositions more complex, and his colors more intense. He argued that this subtle evolution continued into the 1950s—the final years of Tanguy's career—a five year span during Tanguy "questioned, dissected, and parceled out" the forms from his work in the previous decade. Ashbery is certainly not suggesting that Tanguy's work underwent radical shifts in technique and aesthetic during this time, but he is clearly appreciative of the ways in which Tanguy sought to invigorate his art and the richness and depth that the artist was able to extract from his chosen subject matter. Because his measure of artistic merit was not calculated solely by an artist's ability to continually progress or develop a succession of radical new styles, but rather by the ways in which Tanguy was able to

¹²² Soby, "Yves Tanguy," 9.

¹²³ John Ashbery, "Tanguy – The Geometer of Dreams," in *Yves Tanguy* (New York: Acquavella Galleries, Inc., 1974), np.

evoke the spirit of the movement to which he was intimately linked, Ashbery found no fault in either Tanguy's decision to work within relatively narrow technical and stylistic parameters or the slow, measured progression of his oeuvre.

By drawing attention to and then praising Tanguy's willingness to slowly develop his chosen style rather than to introduce radical shifts in this style via dramatic changes in technique or subject matter, both Soby and Ashbery cast the artist's choices in a positive light. In doing so, they suggested a narrative that offers an alternative to the negative opinions penned by many of their peers—negative opinions that adhered closely to the mainstream models of artistic success that were driven by popular formalist concerns of the time and ideas about the trajectory that the oeuvre of an important modern artist should follow. If we can examine the issue through the lens provided by such writers as Soby or Ashbery, whose texts bookend the zenith of high modernist rhetoric, and expand upon the direction offered by their work by placing it in the context of broader post-modernist art historical theory, then I believe that it will be possible to conclude that Tanguy was neither an uninventive artist, nor a minor one, but rather a deeply-engaged creative spirit who followed an alternate but equally valid path to artistic success.

Conclusion

In an age where artistic innovation was at a premium and new ideas and movements were emerging rapidly on a global scale, Tanguy's perceived lack of artistic development was a sticking point with critics and art historians. Such criticism was launched within the

context of what Rosalind Krauss has called the modern era's "discourse of originality" and has had a long and damaging impact on Tanguy's posthumous reputation. However, if we reconsider the trajectory of Tanguy's oeuvre using a variety of critical means now available, ranging from the Rosalind Krauss's questioning of the integrity of the concept of originality as applied to the way in which various aspects of modern art have come to be valued and Jean Baudrillard's ideas about the value of establishing a signature style (via Barthes' notion of the function of authorship) to those writers who have noted that his oeuvre *did*, in fact, have a trajectory, albeit a slow, narrow one, we can recognize that there are alternatives to the discourse of originality that dominated the period in which Tanguy's posthumous reputation took shape. And by examining Tanguy's work as a part of a broader art historical moment, in which repetition and stasis had already garnered a negative reputation by the time that he began to paint, we can begin to understand *how* the emphasis on originality and progression came to dominate the era in which Tanguy worked and can thus begin to understand more about why Tanguy's art frequently came to be written about in negative terms. Thus, if we approach Tanguy's oeuvre from this novel angle it is possible to begin re-assessing his place both among the Surrealists and within the hierarchy of twentieth-century art.

Reconsidering Tanguy's art in this way requires that the values assigned to long-held binaries about this issue: i.e., repetition and consistency=stagnation=negative / innovation and development=progress=positive, be re-thought. By re-assessing these qualities and questioning *why* they have come to be valued in this way, we can begin to consider the

possibility that the exploration of a single concept within a narrow stylistic range might be an acceptable—even a positive—thing to have done. Indeed, Tanguy’s consistency—his decision *not* to have actively sought new styles or subject matter—may well have had a number of positive effects: once he and his work had been accepted within the group, this choice helped (along with his careful maintenance of his friendship with Breton) to *keep* him in the group; it also established a distinctive signature style for his paintings, giving them instant recognizability as “Tanguys” for both critics and potential buyers. In fact, the longer and more consistently that Tanguy worked in this manner, the more closely he linked himself to his work, its content, and its style, and thereby solidified his affiliation with both the Surrealists and his potential market. It makes sense that the defining features and basic characteristics of one’s subconscious landscape would not change radically over time but rather offer a relatively consistent worldview. One might even argue that the more similar such visions are, the more “authentic” and convincing they become.

While Soby, Ashbery, et al., sought alternatives to negative critiques of the homogeneity of Tanguy’s oeuvre by looking for evidence of change or development in his art (perhaps attempting to redeem his reputation by finding in his oeuvre the particular conditions thought necessary to re-categorize him and to ratchet him upward in the pantheon of “great” modern artists), I would argue that it can be equally as productive to acknowledge Tanguy’s overall consistency, to pay attention to the similarities that exist between his paintings, and to seek out the conditions that underpin their facture, as it is to search for the differences between them or to identify some sort of slow development over time. For

the fact that such remarkable similarities between his paintings do exist—extending from the beginning of his career in 1926 until its conclusion in 1955—can tell us much, not only about the way in which Tanguy’s oeuvre cut against or fell in stride with established artistic traditions and changing ideas about modernity and progress, but also about the prejudices that existed during his lifetime about what avant-garde art should be and how an artist’s career should develop. In fact, Tanguy’s decision to work in this manner may have had a positive long-term effect on his career precisely because it fulfilled the economic function of establishing his definitive authorship of his oeuvre: it created his “signature style” and allowed him to stake out his own niche in the marketplace—another overlooked aspect of his career in which he distinguished himself from his peers.

Conclusion

Based on the arguments of the previous three chapters, it is possible, I believe, to arrive at a more nuanced, more complex, and more accurate understanding of Tanguy and his work. Surveying the vast majority of the current literature on the artist yields an overly simplistic understanding of his art, one that neither fully addresses its subject matter and its technical qualities nor fully appreciates the artist's sensitive response to the key theoretical issues of his era and his canny grasp of the skills that it took to successfully navigate the ever-changing demands of the Surrealist movement. Thus, it might make sense to pause and conclude the present study with a question in order to gauge its success, or at least to see whether we might be able to see Tanguy's art and place within art history in a new light based on its findings. How, we might ask, can we now better understand a painting like the one that started our discussion, *Dame à l'absence* (figure 1) based on the findings of this study?

Certainly it is an appropriate painting for this purpose, one that should be considered as both an important and broadly representative example of Tanguy's work. It was completed during the mature period of the artist's oeuvre, approximately two years after his arrival in America, during a period of stability and steady artistic production. In terms of its formal qualities, it is closely related to his other work of the time – as part of a loose “series” that featured forms that were larger-scale, more prominent, and more complex than those found in previous work (and that were often dominated by one or two forms that were significantly larger than the rest), and a renewed interest in the use of

vibrant color. It was among Tanguy's larger canvases, and during his lifetime was owned by people well versed in his work: his dealer, Pierre Matisse, and his colleague and friend, Marcel Duchamp. It was included in the 1942 "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition organized by Duchamp; Matisse's 1943 pairing of Tanguy's and Calder's work; Matisse's 1946 mini-retrospective (as owned by a "Private Collection"); and William Copley's Tanguy exhibition in Beverley Hills in 1948, where it was featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue. It was also reproduced as the frontispiece of André Breton's 1946 monograph on Tanguy, which was designed by Duchamp and published by Matisse.¹²⁴ More recently, it was included in the artist's 1982 retrospective (Baden-Baden, Paris, New York) and 2001 retrospective (Stuttgart and Houston), for which it was also reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalogue.

Although *Dame à l'absence* was included in many major exhibitions and catalogues focusing on Tanguy, remarkably little has been written about it. If one were to extrapolate a general understanding of the painting from what previously has been written about Tanguy's work from this period, it would be interpreted as a strong example of the artist's ability to render the landscape and inhabitants of his subconscious in a distinctive, tightly-painted style that featured mysterious biomorphic forms rendered in clear, vibrant colors. It would be seen as consistent with his mature body of work, and noted for the way in which it aligned with his paintings from this period featured forms that had grown in scale and complexity. It might be criticized for being so similar to his other work, or it

¹²⁴ Susan Davidson also notes that the critic Emily Genauer featured the painting in her *Best of Art Book* that year. See Davidson, "A Breton in Connecticut," in Von Maur, et al., *Yves Tanguy* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 188 and fn. 7444

might also be praised for its demonstration of the artist's fidelity to his inner vision. In one of the rare cases where *Dame à l'absence* was discussed, Tanguy's colleague Gordon Onslow Ford noted that in paintings such as this,

(t)he Beings of Planet Yves moved towards the foreground into close-up views. They became occupied with themselves. Here and there they took on brighter colours, arms were shared, and they conversed by extensions of themselves. There were probes into the beyond with antennae, receivers and transmitters; new lines of communication became visible. This was a time of adjustment, experimentation and search, an attempt to form a society of Beings. There were brief backward glances at ghosts of the past (*Dame à l'Absence* and a sketch for the cover of *Minotaure*). The Beings became overdeveloped, and sometimes seemed to encroach on the vital space needed by a neighbor. The surfaces of the Beings in places became troubled with furrows (*rides*) and perhaps encumbered by coverups. It could not continue in this way."¹²⁵

Onslow Ford's poetic description of the development of Tanguy's "beings," as presented in paintings like *Dame à l'absence*, endows these forms with a certain personality while simultaneously noting that the way in which they are being presented has changed over time. Writing nearly two decades later, Karin von Maur also assigned to the forms in the painting a certain degree of anthropomorphism, describing the form in the foreground as a "formal symbiosis of male and female sexual characteristics" and the black and white striped forms as "dolls."¹²⁶

The approach taken to understanding Tanguy's work put forth in the present study adds significantly to these findings by considering a combination of the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which Tanguy's work was produced, received, and interpreted and

¹²⁵ Gordon Onslow Ford, *Yves Tanguy and Automatism* (Inverness, CA: Bishop Pine Press, 1982), 21.

¹²⁶ Karin Von Maur, "Yves Tanguy or 'The Certainty of the Never-Seen'." in Von Maur, et al., *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism*, 102.

by paying careful attention to certain technical and formal qualities of his paintings that have often been overlooked in the past. If we look to the findings of the first chapter, for example, we might interpret *Dame à l'absence* as containing forms that suggest three distinct “figures”: a large grey one with vertical striations in the foreground; a medium-sized one with broad horizontal black and white stripes just in front of it; and a similar, smaller form in the distant middle-ground towards the left hand side of the composition. Each of these forms approximates the contours of the human figure, being vertically oriented and featuring distinct “heads,” “shoulders,” “waists,” and “hips,” and in the case of the largest, perhaps a large breast-like protrusion to the viewer’s left. This interpretation is supported not only by the contours of the forms themselves, but by the extended analysis of Tanguy’s graphic and painted work supplied in this chapter, as well as the titles of many such works, which holds true in this example as well.

These characteristics, seen through the lenses of the artist’s previous work, the importance of the role of the human figure in Surrealist art, and the value that the Surrealists placed on transformation, permits us to form an interpretation of the scene if we also consider what is known of Tanguy’s biography at the time that this painting was executed. The combination of these different elements must certainly be understood to provide a stronger and more accurate interpretation of this work than was previously possible. With all of this in mind, *Dame à l'absence* (which translates roughly as “Absent Lady” or “Lady in Waiting”) is one of the works in Tanguy’s oeuvre that would seem to provide a clear link to his own biography. The title, combined with the two striped forms

in the painting, if read as figures per our understanding of the continuation of this motif in his work, might be interpreted as his new wife Sage and his former wife, Jeanette, the latter “absent” or “in absentia” as she remained in France, recently formally divorced from Tanguy yet still supported financially by him and Sage. If we interpret Sage as the dominant figure in the foreground (seeing as it appears to feature a rather prominent breast-like form), sheltering the striped figure that could represent Tanguy – and thus the two striped figures as “French” – as separate from Jeanette in the distance, Tanguy would seem to have one arm extended, with an object like a divining pendant pointing straight down to the land upon which he stands, while the figure in the distance sends out lines of communication that do not connect with those separated from it. While certainly not every painting that bears traces of the human figure can (or should) be interpreted as directly relevant to the artist’s personal situation, when the possibility of reading the forms in his paintings as linked to the figure allows for a wide range of readings to evolve, whether as generally relating to the human situation; touching on issues of the artist’s immediate times; or even, as possibly in the case of *Dame à l’absence*, particularly when considered in light of its title, relating directly to the artist’s own life and relationships.

If we continue to interpret the *Dame à l’absence* based on the findings of the second and third chapters, we recognize the painting as representing Tanguy’s unique approach to the issues of which technical approaches were most appropriate to Surrealism and of how a Surrealist artist might create a distinctive style in which to work. The forms in *Dame à*

l'absence possess a characteristic seen in many of Tanguy's best paintings: they are at once solidly-rendered and believable, while also demonstrating a unique kind of spontaneity, almost indescribable *élan vital*. As understood through the dominant modes of Surrealist production, these qualities might be seen as aligning with dream illusionism and automatism. Yet it is rare for an artist associated with the movement to have been able to capture both of these qualities simultaneously in his or her work. Tanguy was able to do so through the process of drawing out his forms with a fluid, often unbroken line prior to painting them in – something that he went to great lengths to hide in his rare statements about his work, yet something that is evident both in unfinished examples of his art and upon close inspection of the paintings themselves. In *Dame à l'absence*, evidence of these outlines can be seen in particular around the upper portion and right hand edges of the tallest form in the foreground, linking the painting to other examples of his work not only from this period but from throughout the mature portion of his career.

When considered in relation to many of the other paintings in his oeuvre, *Dame à l'absence* can be seen as both part of a slow evolution and as a continuation of a deep fascination with the potentiality of biomorphic abstraction. On one hand, Tanguy had been working with types of forms similar to those found in this painting since the later 1920s. On the other, it was not until the early 1940s that he began to increase the scale of these forms relative to the proportions of his canvases and the other forms in the paintings. Thus as we enter the 1940s and what one might call the “American” phase of his career, in which his paintings entered into the art market in a more focused way than

they ever had before (due to his new relationship with the Pierre Matisse Gallery), we find Tanguy in the process of both extending his dedication to what had become his signature style yet also working to keep it current and fresh by pushing it in new directions. By doing so he maintained a niche for himself in the marketplace while also signaling to his current and potential patrons that he was neither stagnating nor capitulating to the latest trends.

By analyzing a painting like *Dame à l'absence* in this way – and, by extension, the other works in Tanguy's oeuvre – we can develop a fuller, more accurate picture of him as an artist who was actively engaged in negotiating the ever-changing tastes and tactics of the movement to which he had dedicated himself at the beginning of his career. He was tied to Surrealism and to its leader, Breton, in a way that no other member was. It was, therefore, critical for him to navigate its constant shifts with elegance and grace; to fly under the radar yet to remain true to both himself and to the movement's central tenets. He did so through his canny integration of the human figure into his paintings; his cunning layering of automatic drawing and dream illusionist painting, and his desire to establish his own distinct style, linked firmly to his subconscious world, yet able to change and adapt just as he did in response to the ever changing world in which he lived.

It is my hope that these new approaches to understanding Tanguy and his work will serve as a strong point of departure for future scholarship and a corrective to the rather narrow views of the past. By considering Tanguy's art through a variety of lenses provided by

recent scholarship on Surrealism and modern art, we can begin to reach a richer and, I believe, a more accurate understanding of both the man and his work. As new archival material is discovered and becomes available, (particularly his correspondence with his family members and André Breton), we will learn more about Tanguy's perspectives on his art and his relationship with the other artists involved with the Surrealist movement. If one were to continue analyzing Tanguy's work utilizing the approach taken in the preceding chapters, there are a variety of topics worth investigating. Certainly there were other debates amongst the Surrealists that played out in Tanguy's work and in the decisions that he made regarding it. The relationship between artist and market is an obvious one; national identity is another. The role of women in the movement and their often complex status as muse, partner, and colleague is a third. Regardless of the topic under discussion, it is imperative that we maintain a view Tanguy as being responsive *to* and engaged *with* the critical ideas and issues that were in play at different moments in his career. I am confident that this approach will result in a fuller and more accurate understanding of Tanguy, his work, and the important place that they hold within the history of twentieth century art will emerge, repositioning him as an influential, central figure within the Surrealist movement.

Figures

Figure 1. Yves Tanguy, *Dame à l'absence*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 115 x 89.5 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Dusseldorf.



Figure 2. George Platt Lynes, *Portrait of Yves Tanguy*, 1942. 23 x 19 cm. Galerie Les Yeux Fertiles, Paris.



Figure 3. Yves Tanguy, *Rue de la Santé*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 50.2 x 61.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 4. Yves Tanguy, *Le Testament de Jacques Prevert*, 1925. Oil on panel, 41.9 x 48.2 cm. Private collection.



Figure 6. Yves Tanguy, *L'Extinction des lumières inutiles*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 65.4 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



7. Yves Tanguy, *Deuxième message II*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 8. Jean Arp, *Woman*, 1927. Painted wood relief, 136 x 100 x 3.8 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 9. André Masson, *L'Armure*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 80.6 x 54 cm. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

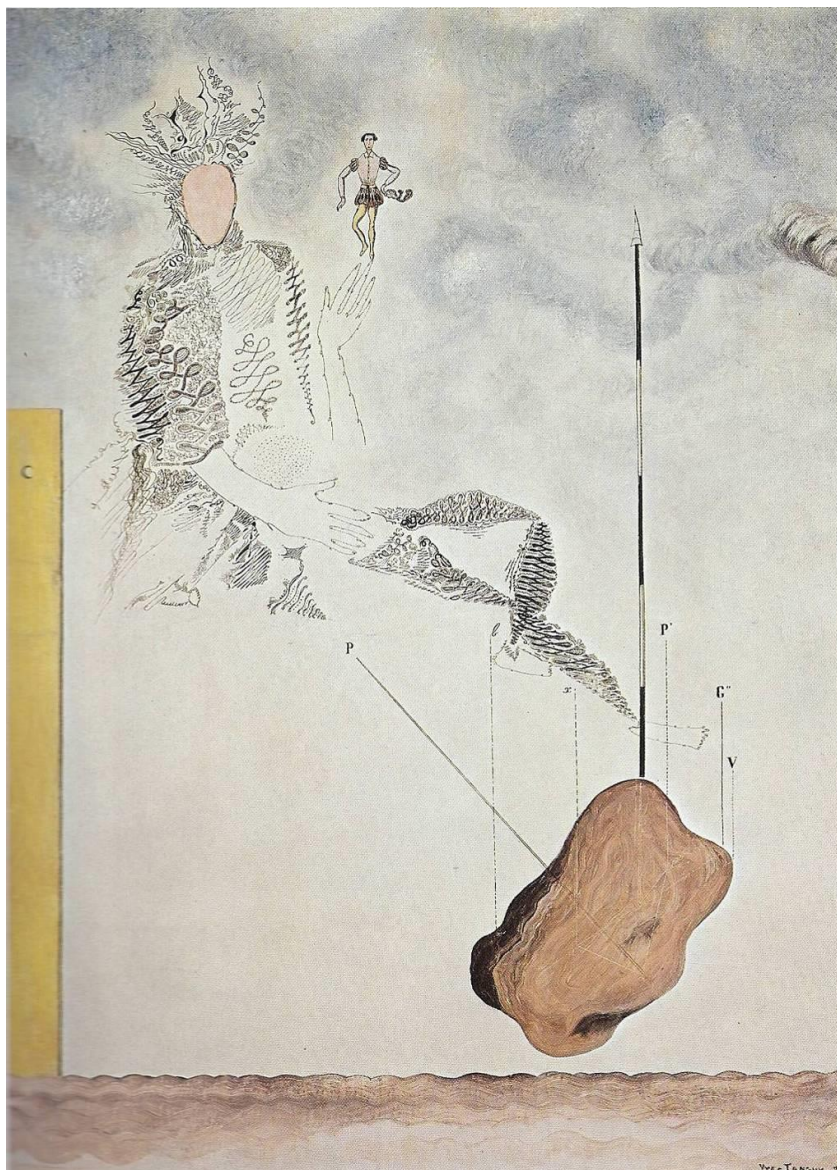


Figure 10. Yves Tanguy, *L'Anneau d'invisibilité*, 1926. Oil, pen, and collage on canvas, 99 x 72 cm. Private Collection.

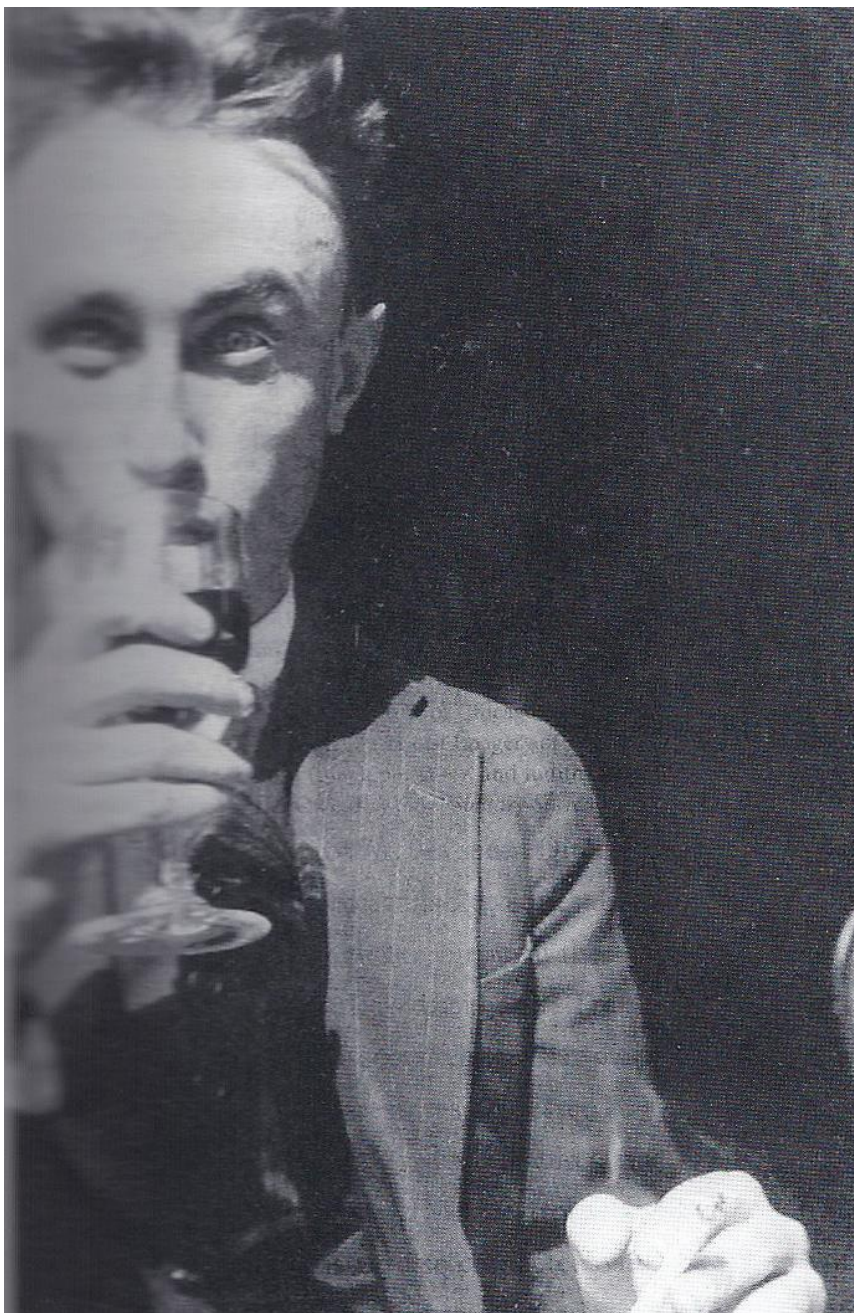


Figure 11. Marcel Duhamel, *Yves Tanguy*. circa 1926. 8 x 5.4 cm. Wolfgang Wittrock, Berlin.



12. Salvador Dalí, *Apparatus and Hand*, 1927. Oil on panel, 62.2 x 47.6 cm. Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg.

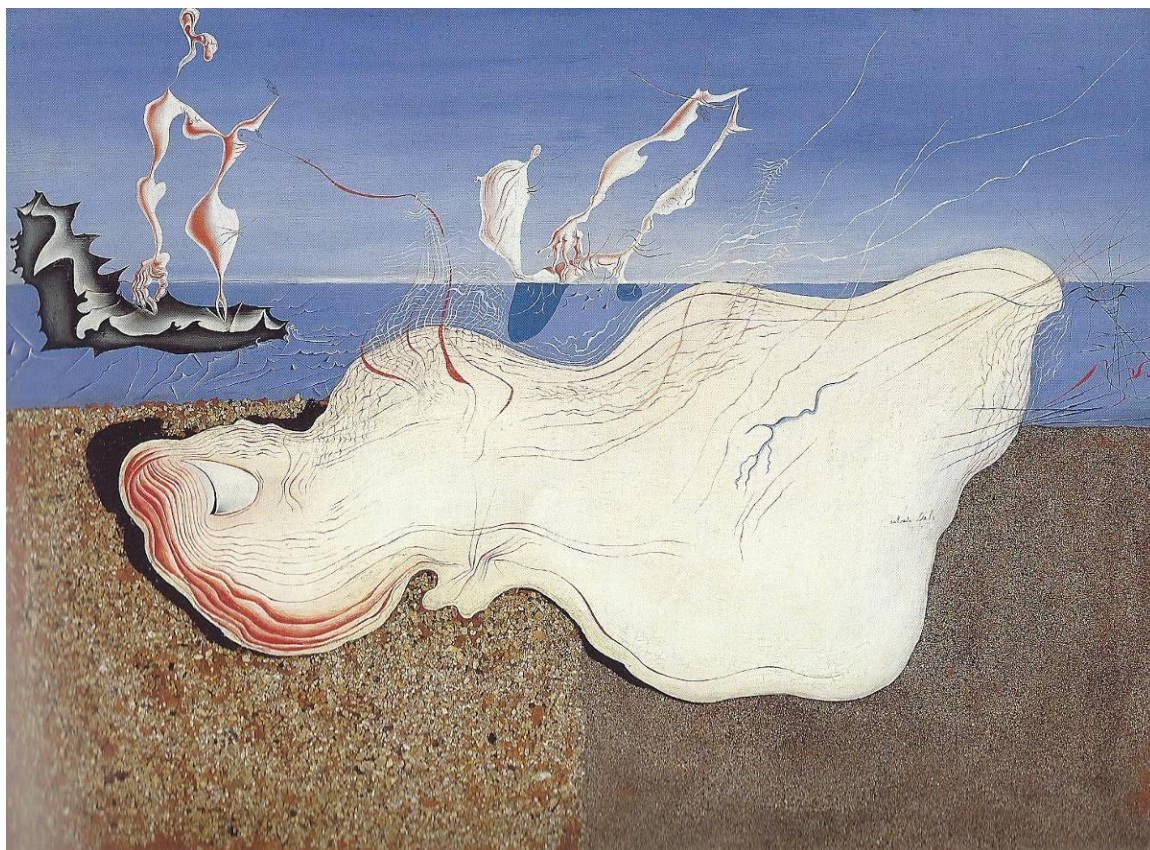


Figure 13. Salvador Dalí, *Baigneuse*, 1928. Oil on canvas. Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg.



Figure 14. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 97.2 x 66 cm. Gianni Mattioli Collection, Milan.

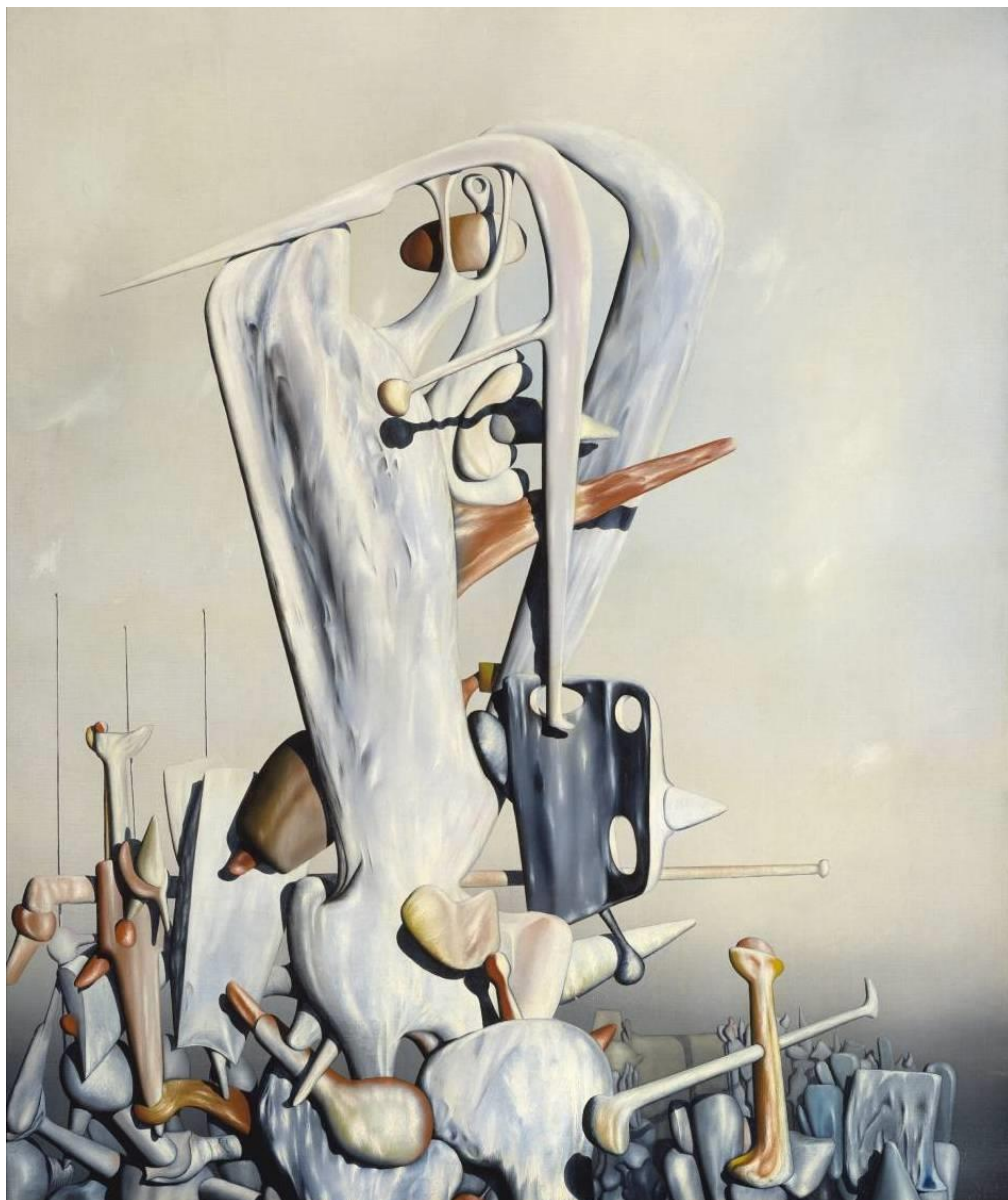


Figure 15. Yves Tanguy, *Ma Vie, blanche et noire*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 75.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

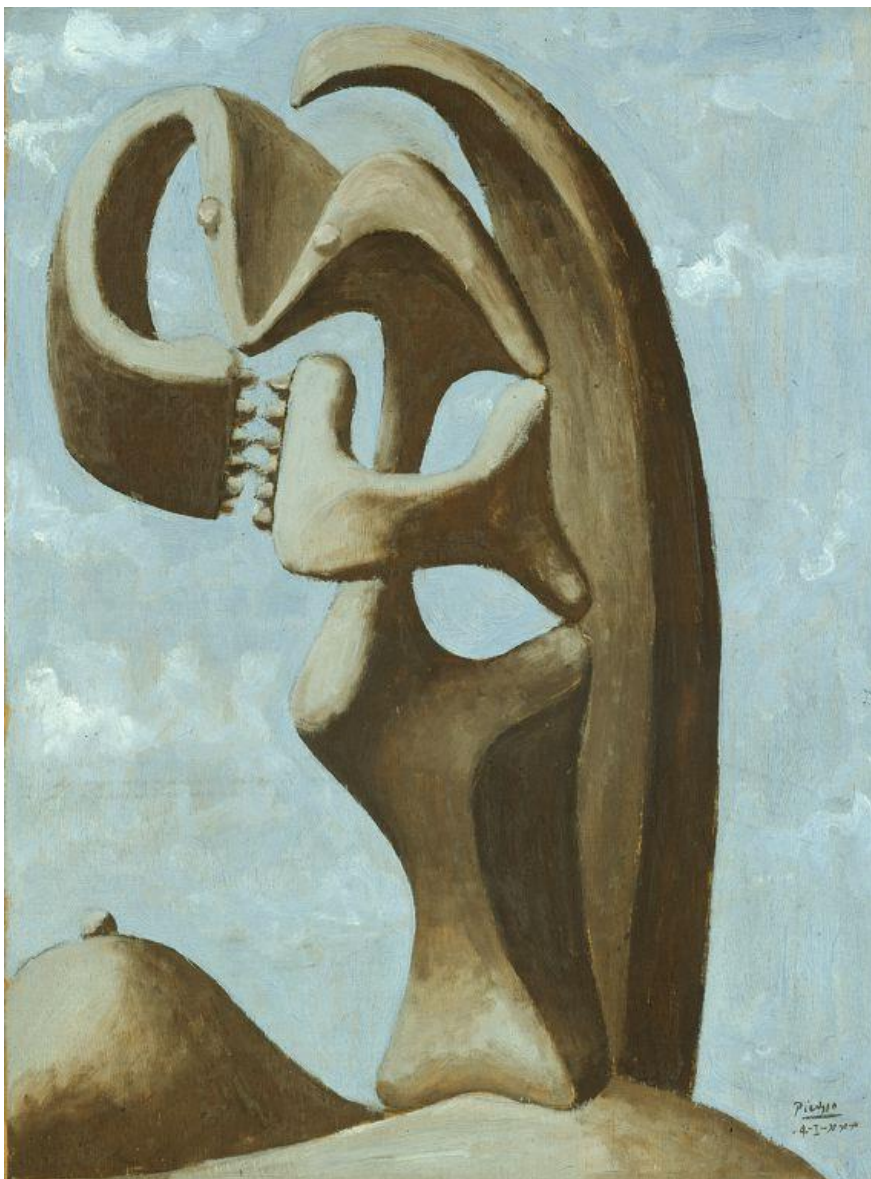


Figure 16. Pablo Picasso, *Abstraction, Background with Blue Cloudy Sky*, 1930. Oil on panel, 66 x 49.2 cm. Art Institute of Chicago.

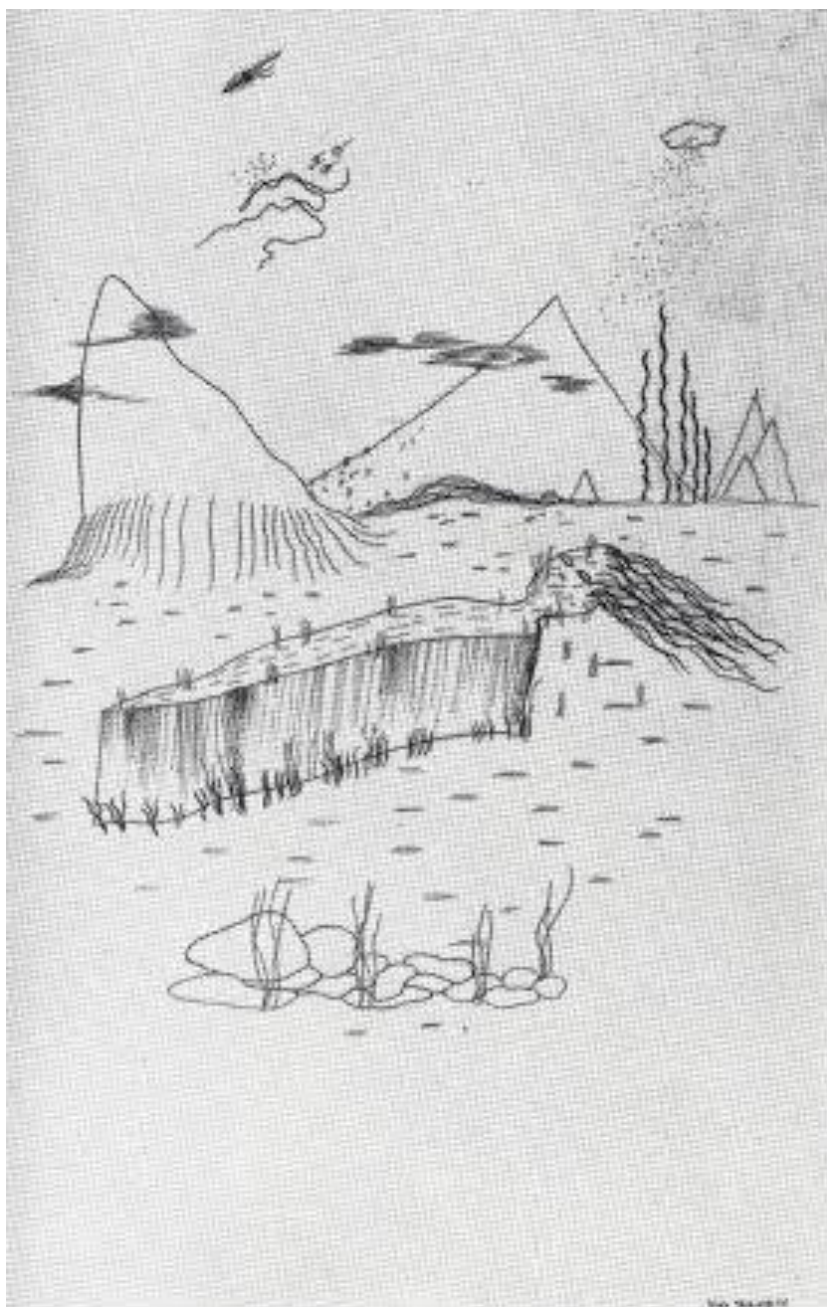


Figure 17. Yves Tanguy. *Sans Titre*, 1926. Pen and ink on paper, 31.1 x 18.1 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 18. Yves Tanguy, *Sans Titre*, 1926. Pen and ink on paper. 33.1 x 25.7 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 19. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled*, 1926. Ink on paper, 29.9 x 21 cm. R.L. Quillivic Collection, Point Croix, Bretagne.



Figure 20. Yves Tanguy, *Et Voilà!*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 65.3 x 54.3 cm. Menil Collection, Houston.

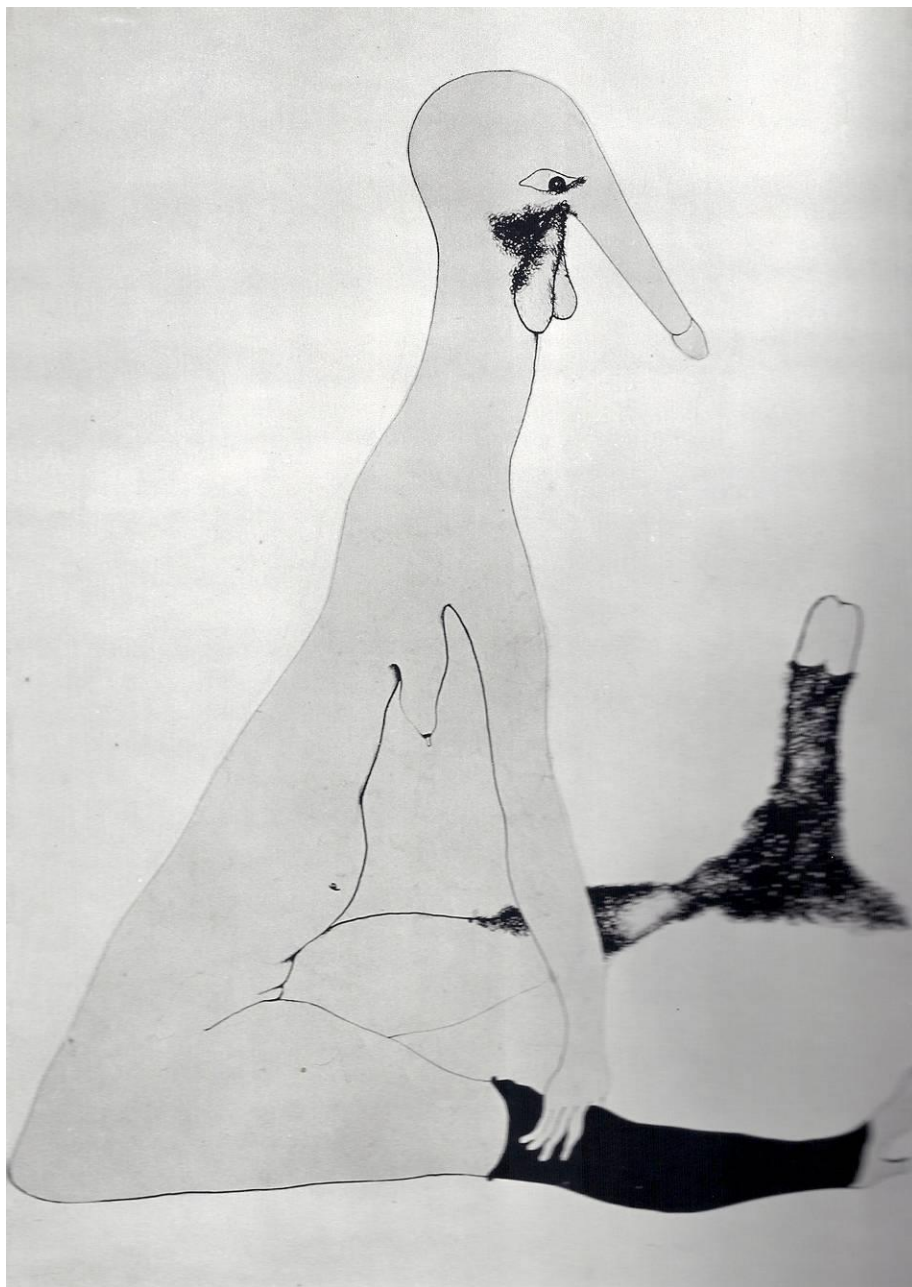


Figure 21. Yves Tanguy, *Composition érotique*, 1928. Private Collection.

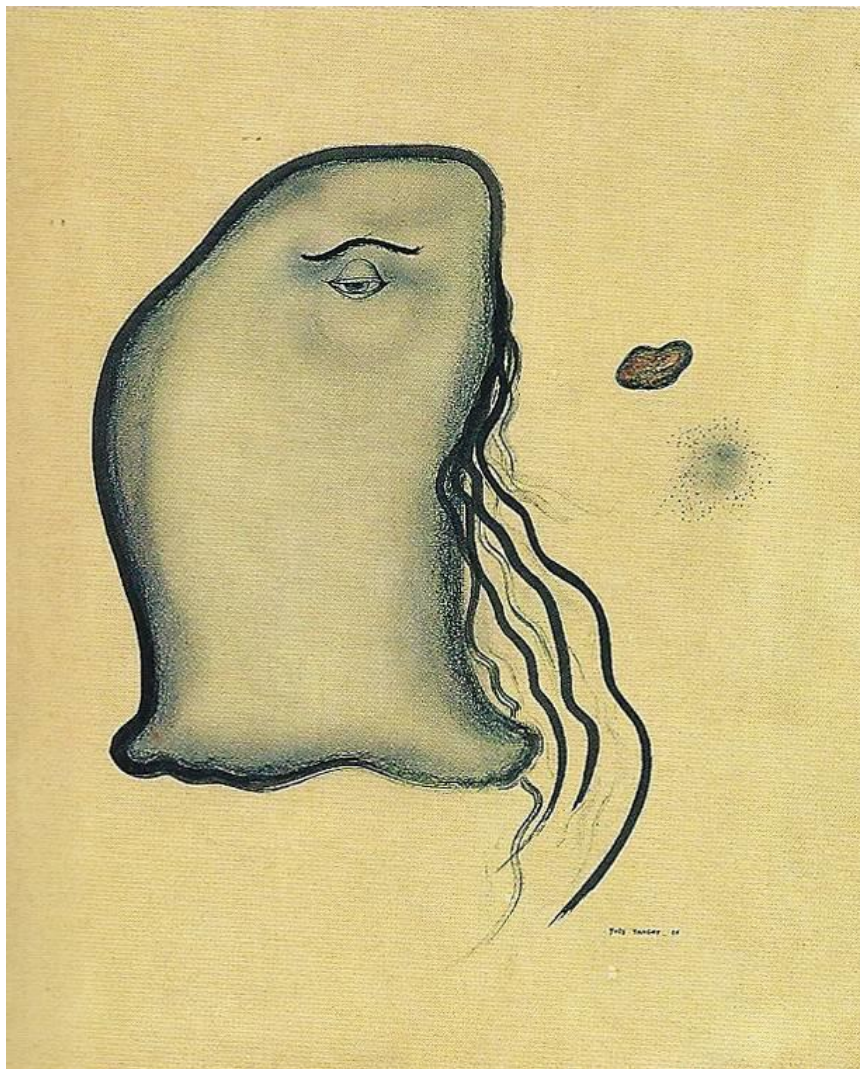


Figure 22. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled (Drawing for Jean Ably)*, 1928. Pen, ink, and watercolor on card, 39.5 x 32.5 cm. Private Collection.

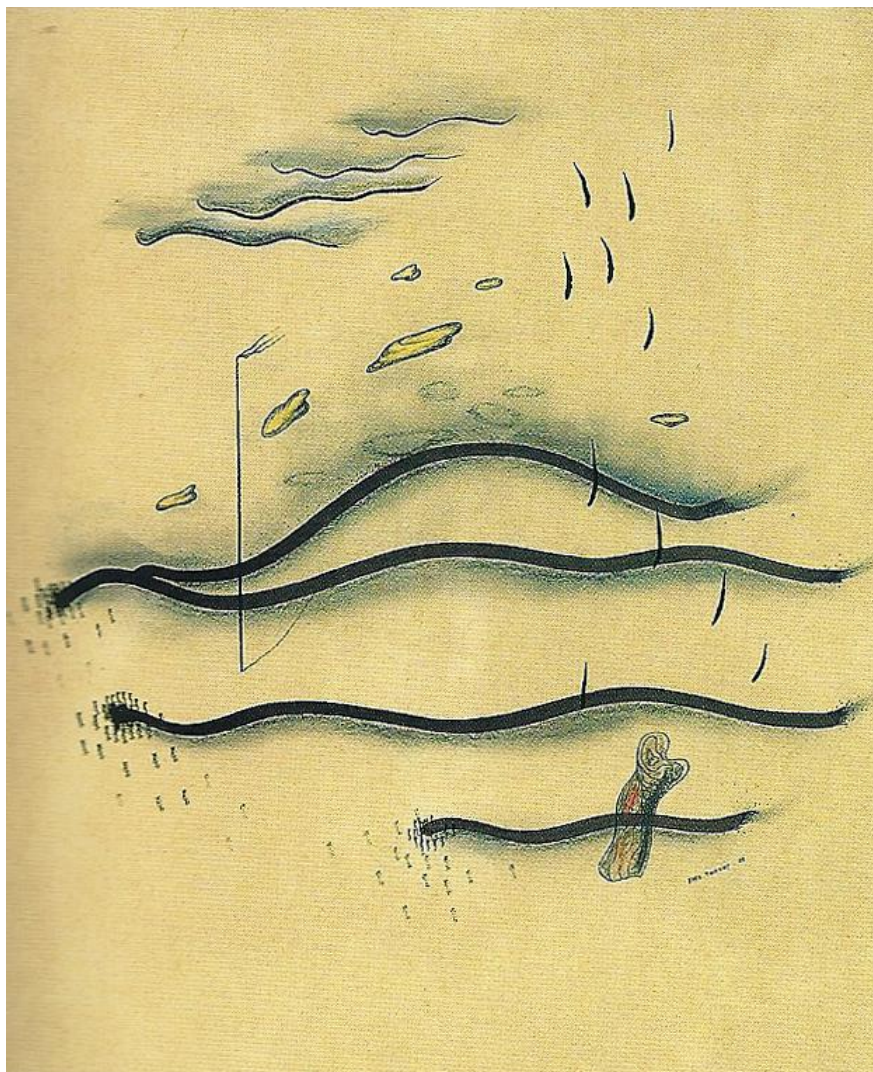
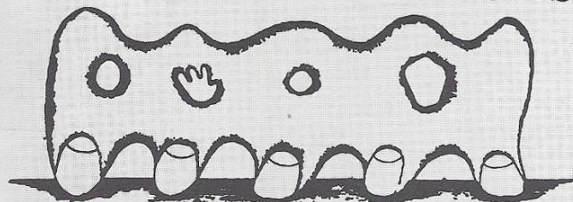


Figure 23. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled (Drawing for Jean Aply)*, 1928. Pen, ink, and watercolor on card, 39.5 x 32.5. Private Collection.

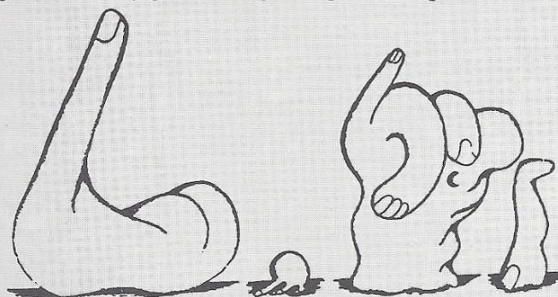


Figure 24. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled (Drawing for Jean Aply)*, 1928. Pen, ink, and watercolor on card, 39.5 x 32.5. Private Collection.

POIDS ET COULEURS

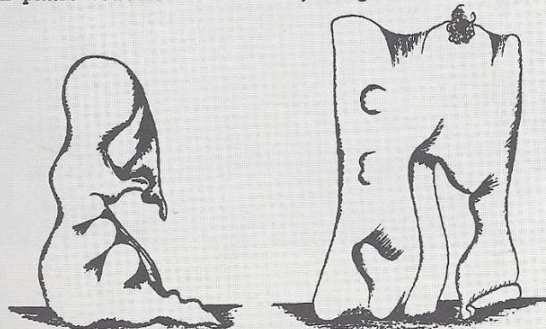


L'objet ci-dessus, de la grandeur de la main et comme s'il était pétri par elle, est en peluche rose. Les cinq terminaisons du bas qui se replient sur l'objet sont en celluloid transparent et nacré. Les quatre trous dans le corps de l'objet permettent d'y passer les quatre grands doigts de la main.



▼ Dans l'ensemble ci-dessus, l'objet de gauche est en plâtre peint de couleur zinzoline et l'ongle rose. Il est lesté dans le bas par une boule de plomb qui, permettant des oscillations, le ramène toujours à la même position.

Le très petit objet du milieu, plein de mercure, est recouvert de paille tressée rouge vif afin de paraître extrêmement léger. Le gros objet de droite est en coton moulé vert pâle, les ongles en celluloid rose. Le dernier objet de droite est en plâtre couvert d'encre noire, l'ongle est rose.



L'objet de gauche est en cire molle imitation chair. L'appendice du haut est flottant et d'une couleur plus brune. Les trois formes arrondies du centre sont en matière dure, d'un blanc mat.

L'objet de droite est en craie bleu ciel. Dans le haut, des poils. Cet objet doit servir à écrire sur un tableau noir. Il sera usé par la base, pour qu'il ne finisse par subsister que la touffe de poils du haut.

YVES TANGUY.

Figure 25. Yves Tanguy, "Poids et Couleurs," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* no. 3 (December 1931), 21.

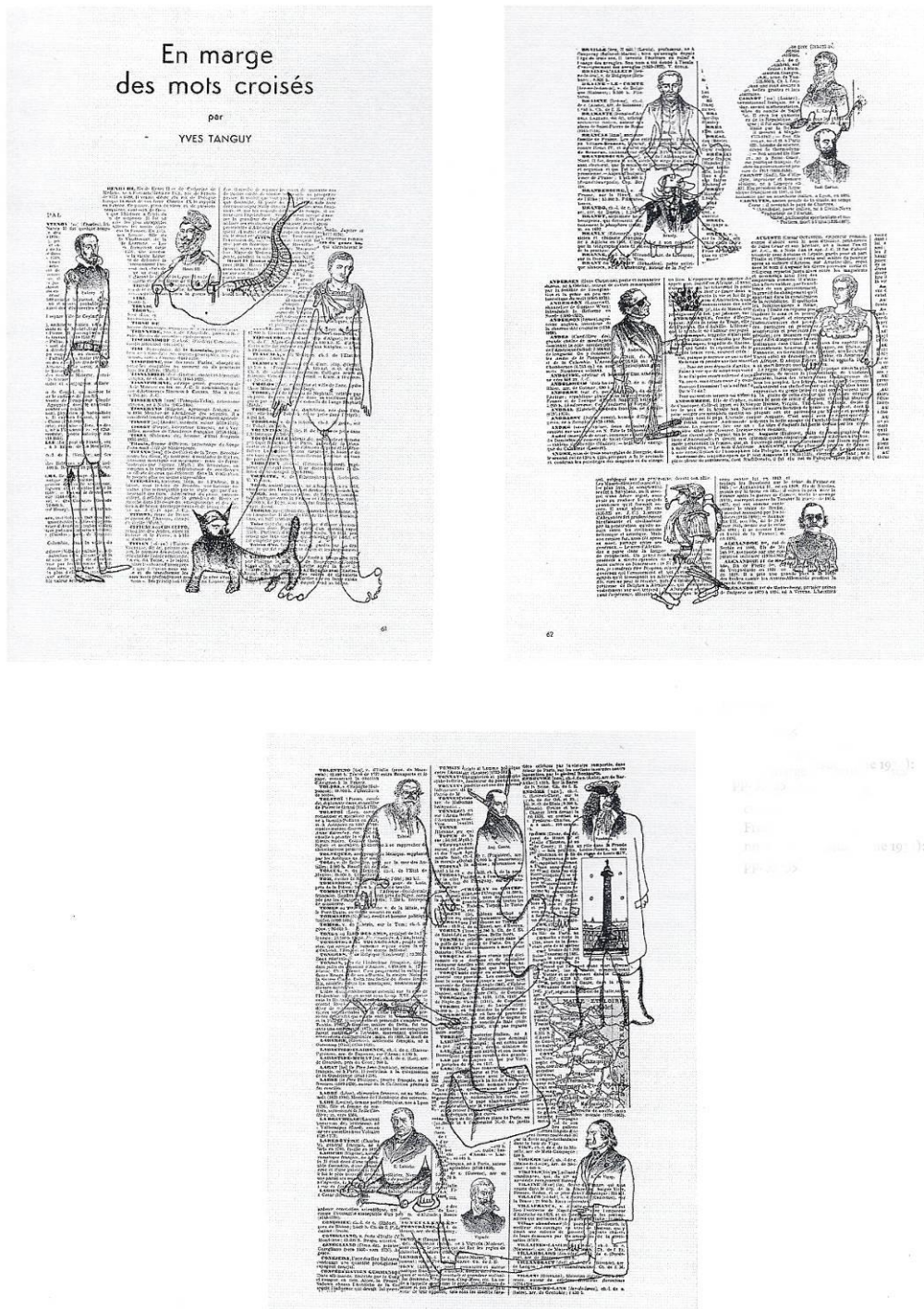


Figure 26. Yves Tanguy, "En marges des mots croisés," *Documents* 34, no 1 (June 1934), 33-35.



Figure 27. Yves Tanguy, *Sans titre*, 1934. Ink on paper. Private Collection, Paris.

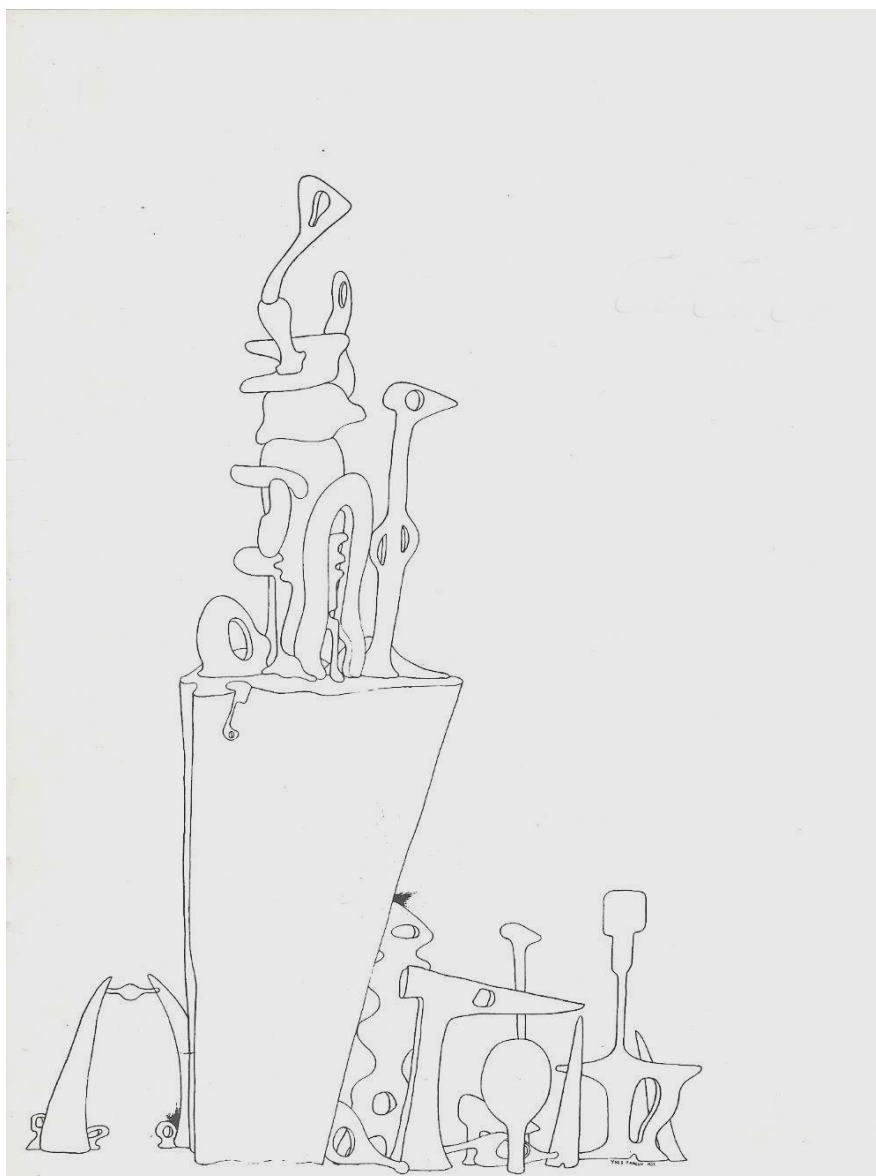


Figure 28. Yves Tanguy, *Sans Titre*, 1935. Ink on paper. Private Collection.

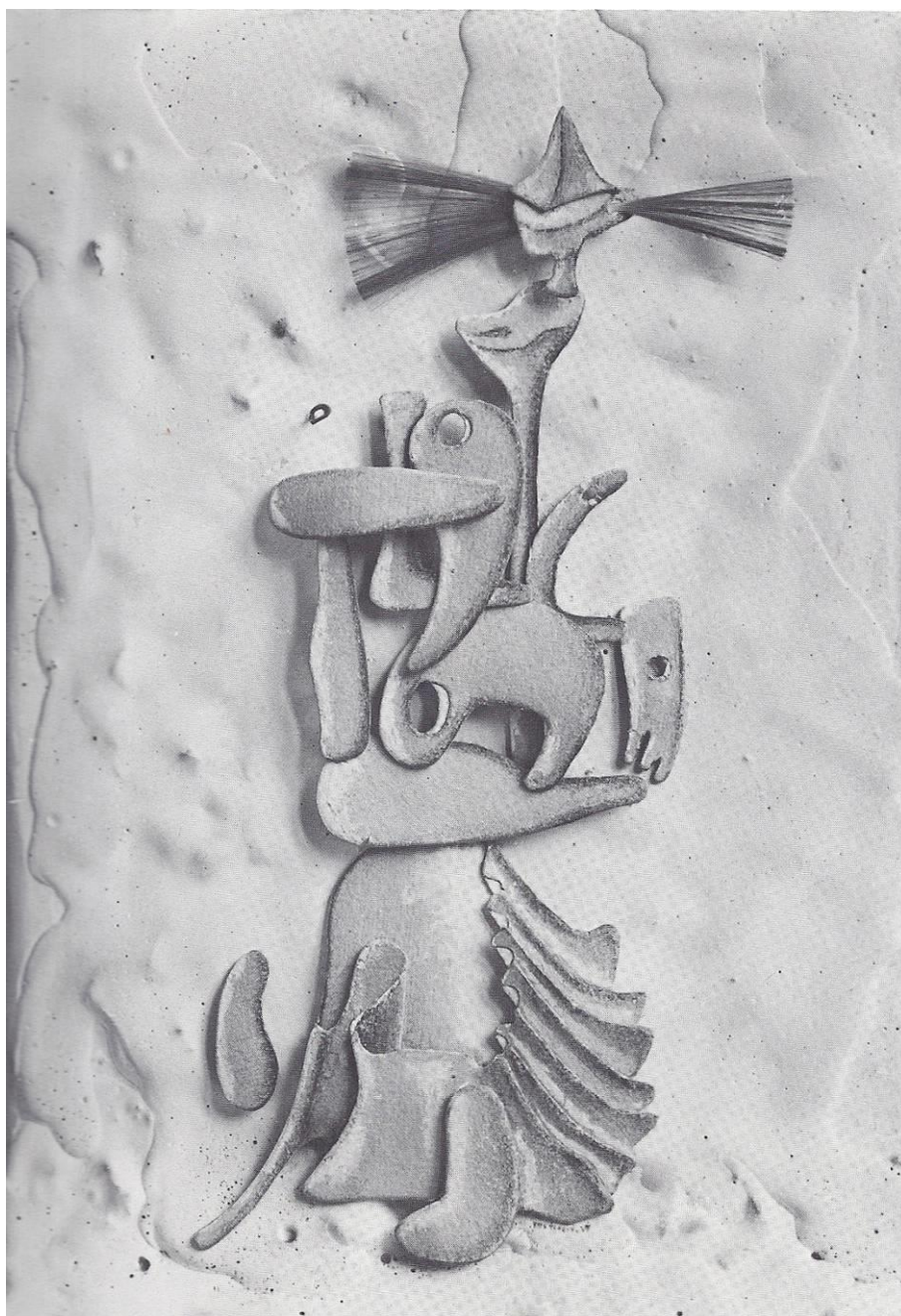


Figure 29. Yves Tanguy, *Le Marchand de sable*, 1937. Plaster, cardboard, bristles, 29.8 x 21 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 30. Yves Tanguy, *Petit personnage familier*, 1938. Paper, pencil, and crayon, 23.4 x 14.5 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 31. Yves Tanguy, *Portrait of P.G.*, 1938. Pencil and collaged feather on paper, 54.5 x 18.2 cm. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

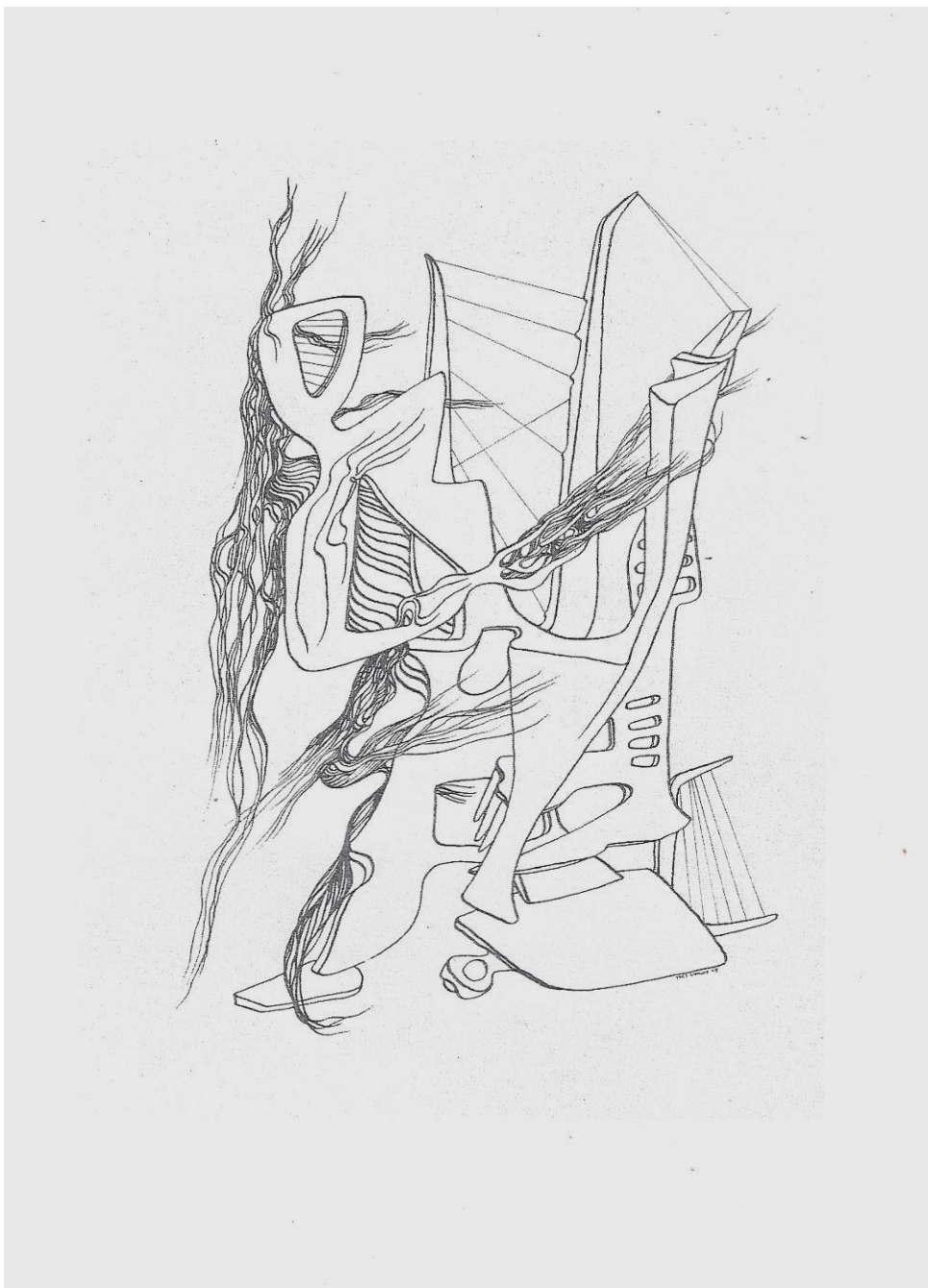


Figure 32. Yves Tanguy, *Le Grand nacre au seuil de la nuit*, 1942. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 33. Yves Tanguy, *La Grande mue*, 1942. Gouache, pencil, and collage on paper, 29.1 x 21.9 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 34. *Le Minotaure*, 1943. Gouache and collage on paper, 50.4 x 40 cm. Joan Miró Foundation, Barcelona.



Figure 35. Yves Tanguy, *Sans Titre*, 1943. Ink on paper, 38.1 x 30.5 cm. Private Collection.

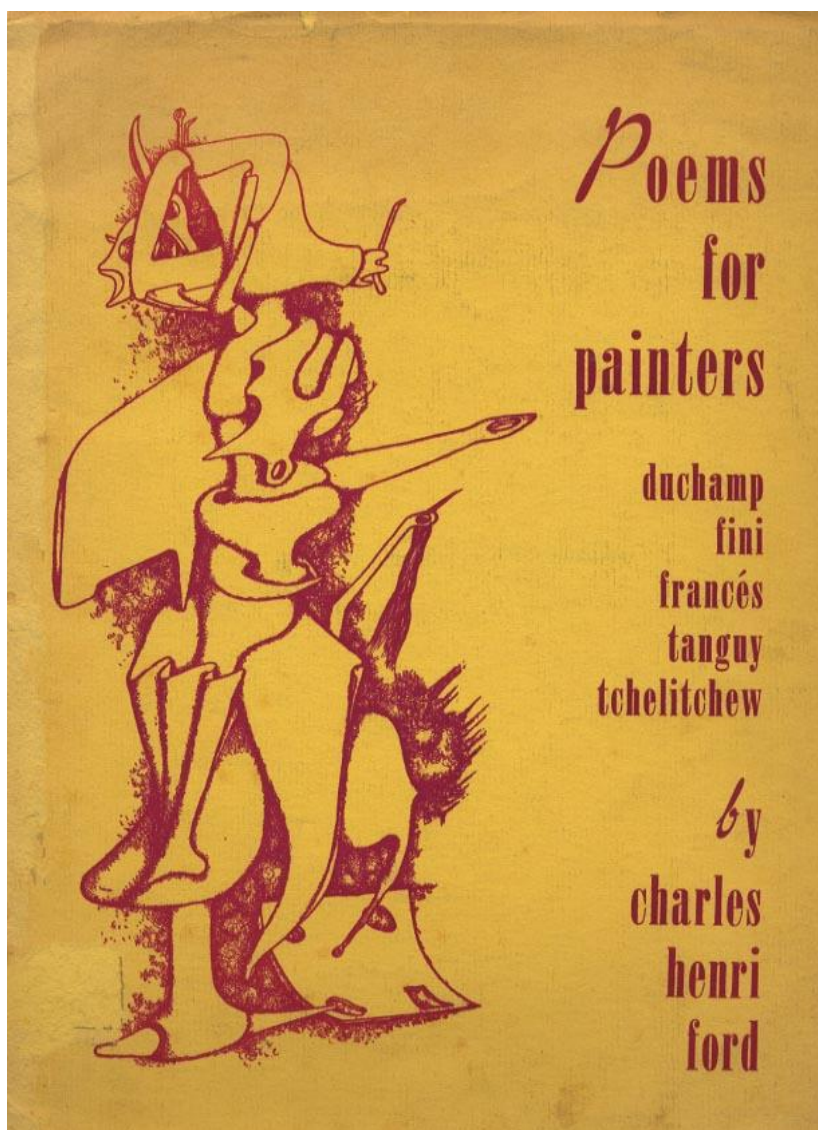


Figure 36. Yves Tanguy, cover for Charles Heri Ford, *Poems for Painters*, 1945.



Figure 37. Yves Tanguy, *Sans Titre*, 1944. Ink on paper, 30 x 22.5 cm. Private Collection, Turin.

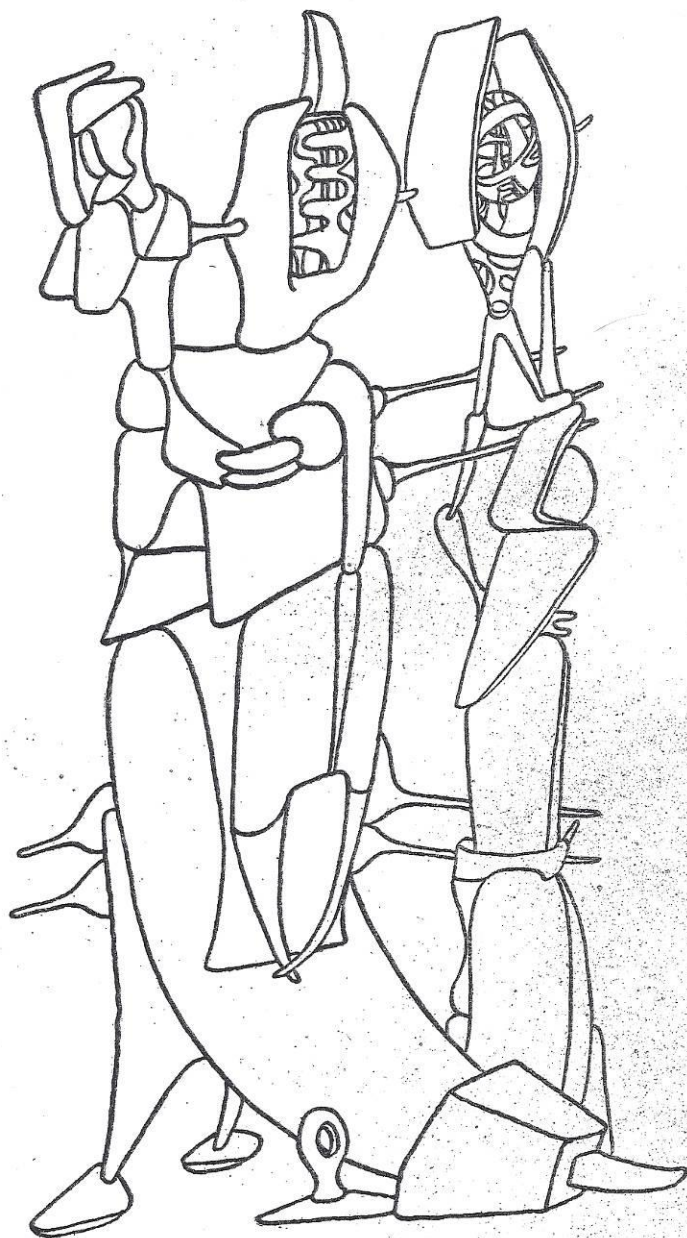


Figure 38. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled*, circa 1945. Ink on paper. Private Collection.

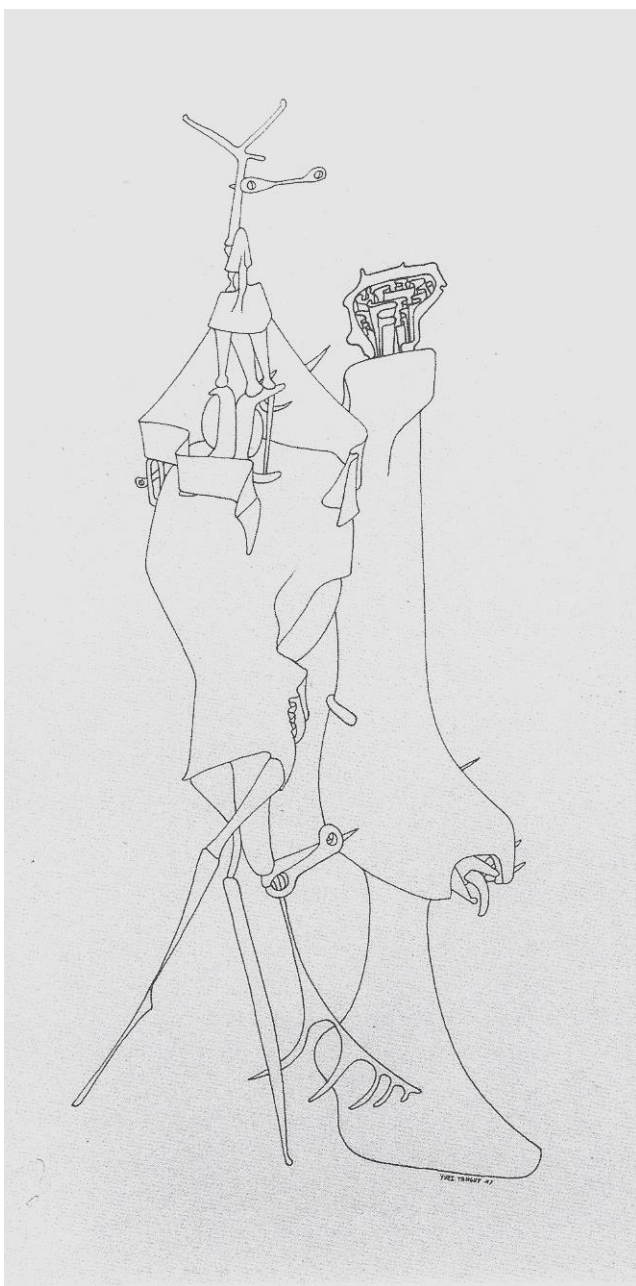


Figure 39. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled*, 1947. Ink on paper. Private Collection.

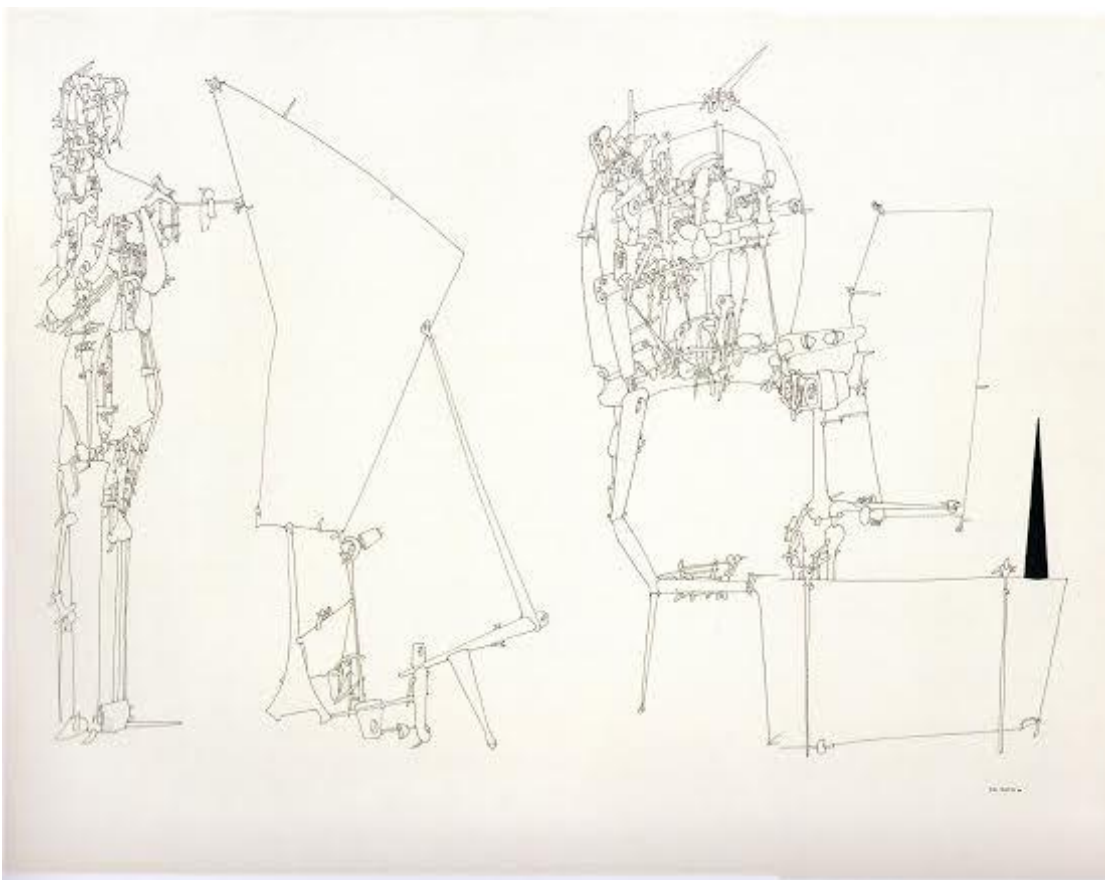


Figure 40. Yves Tanguy. *Untitled (Yves Tanguy et Kay Sage dans leur studio)*, 1949. Pen and ink on paper, 54.6 x 69.8 cm. Private Collection.

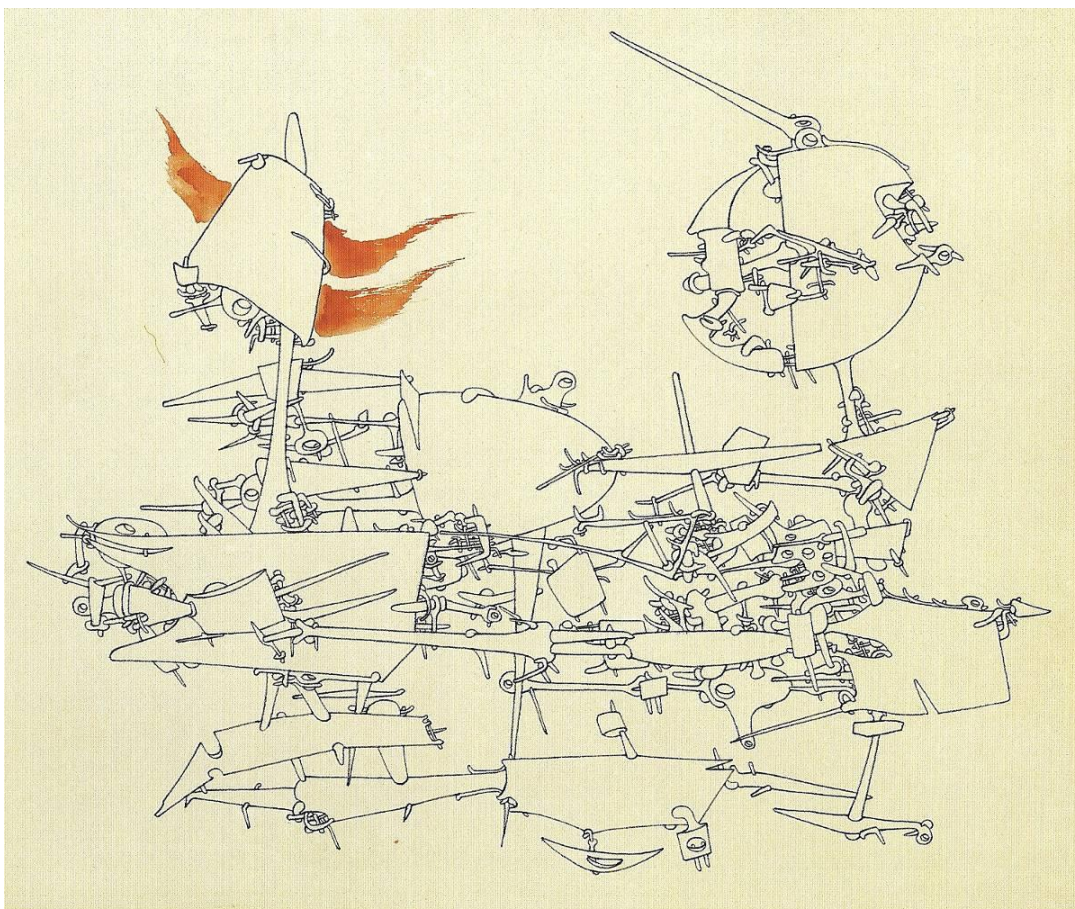


Figure 41. Yves Tanguy, *Sans Titre*, 1952. Ink and watercolor on paper, 44 x 40.3 cm. Private Collection.

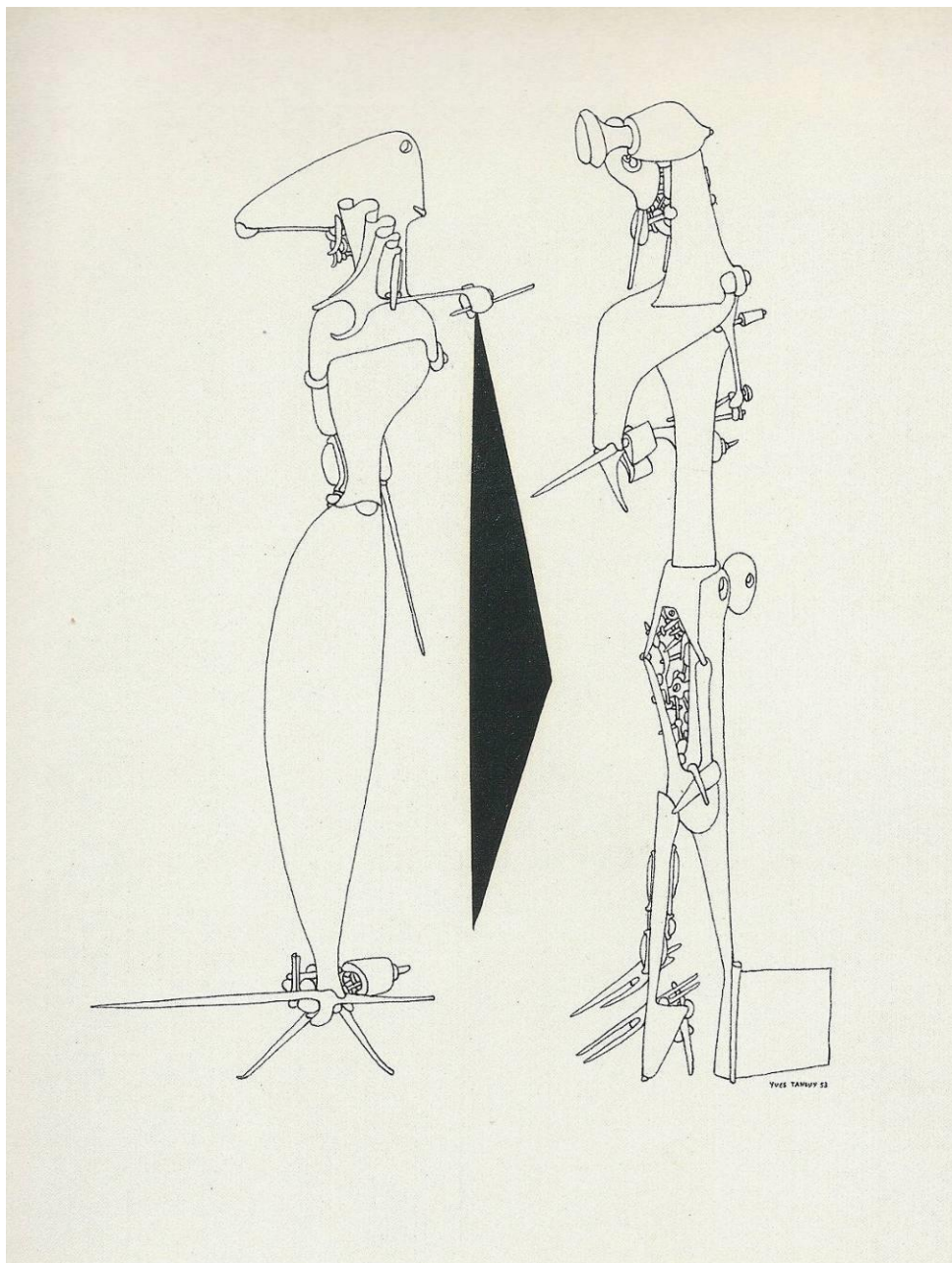


Figure 42. Yves Tanguy. *Sans Titre (Couple)*, 1953. Ink and collage on paper, 35.3 x 28 cm. Private Collection.

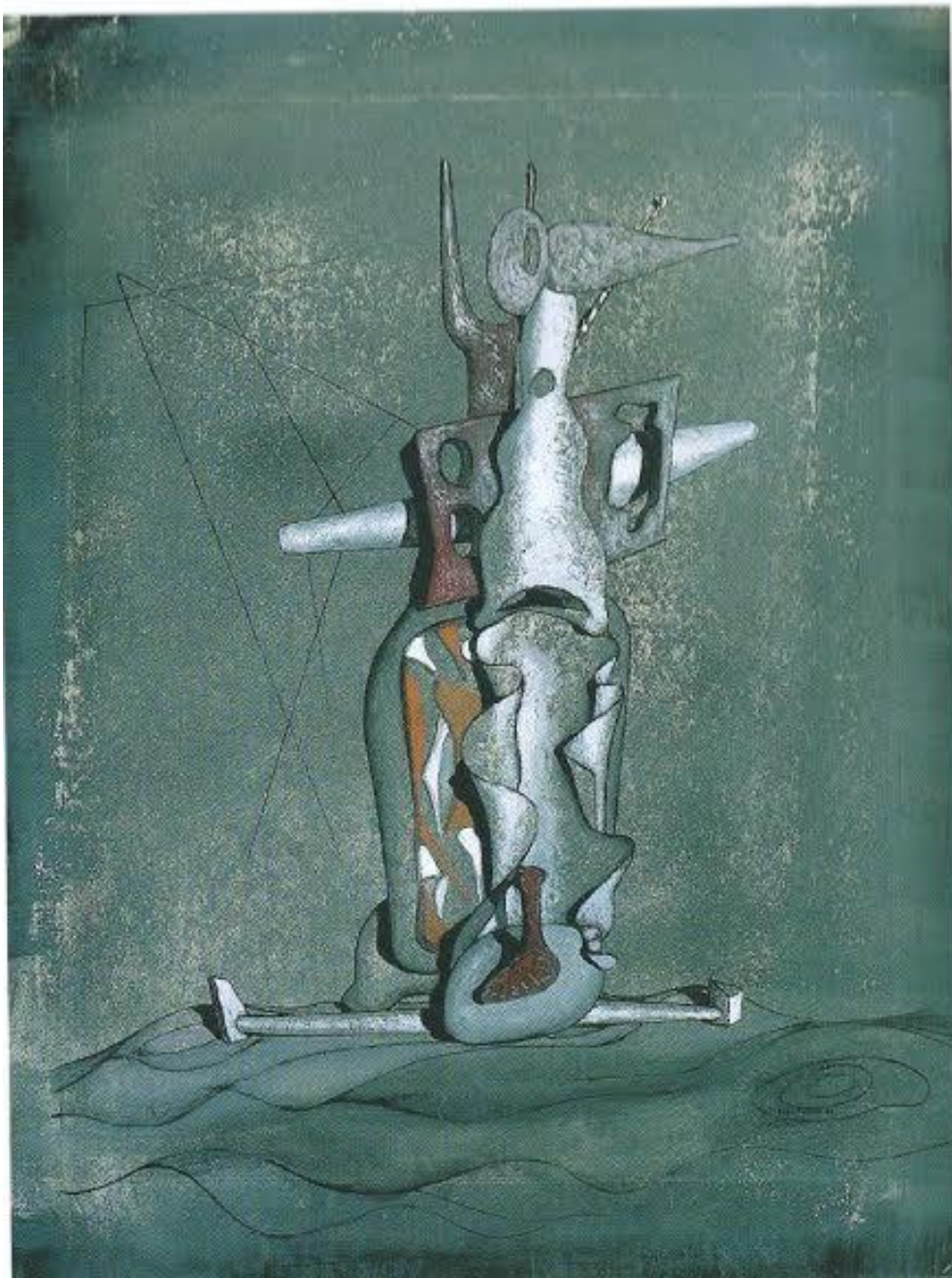


Figure 43. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled*, 1943. Gouache on paper, 34 x 26.5 cm. Private Collection, courtesy Galerie Natalie Serousi, Paris.



Figure 44. Yves Tanguy, *La Jupe*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 28.2 x 24 cm. Private Collection.

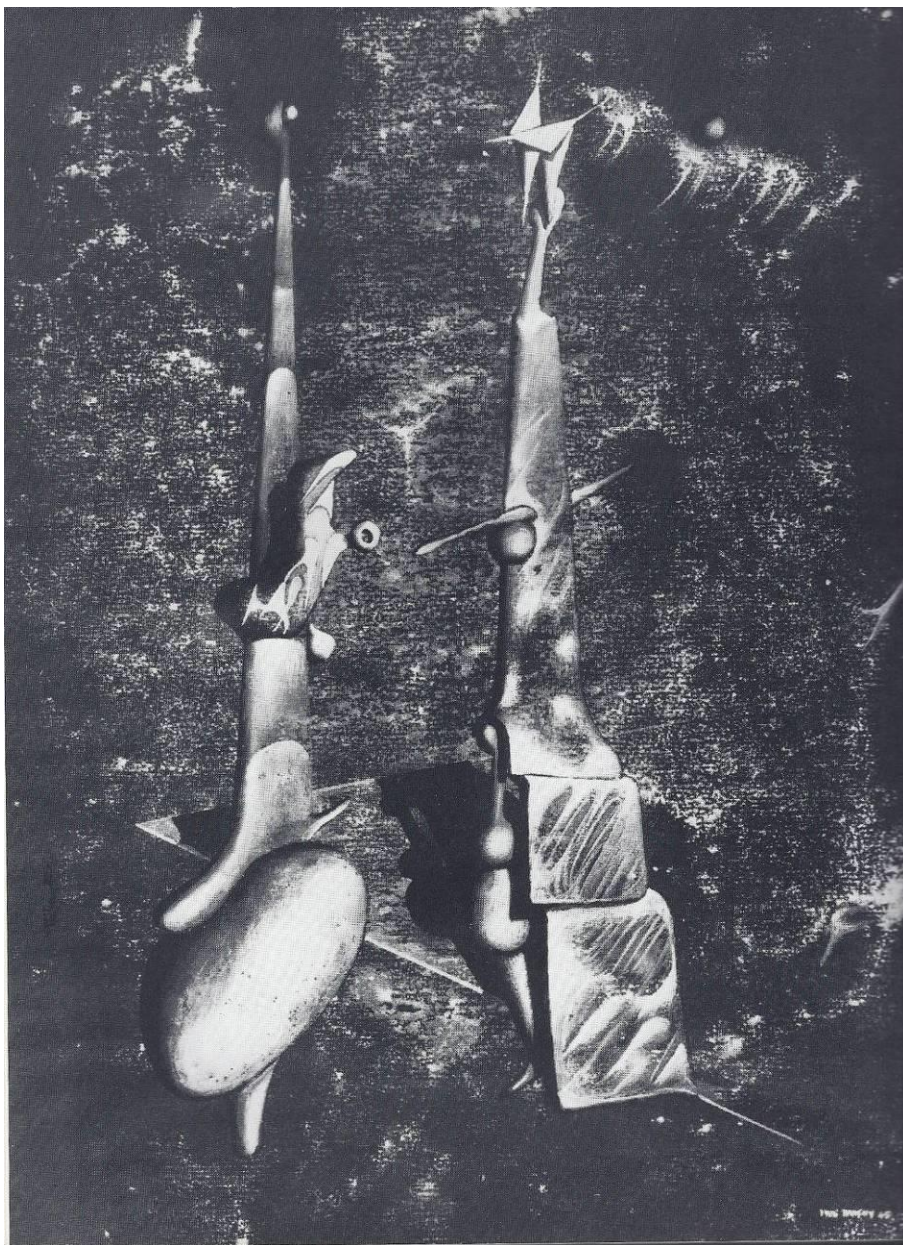


Figure 45. Yves Tanguy, *Les Causeurs*, 1945. Gouache on paper, 36 x 28 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 46. Yves Tanguy, *La Grue des sables*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 47.3 x 31.8 cm. Private Collection.

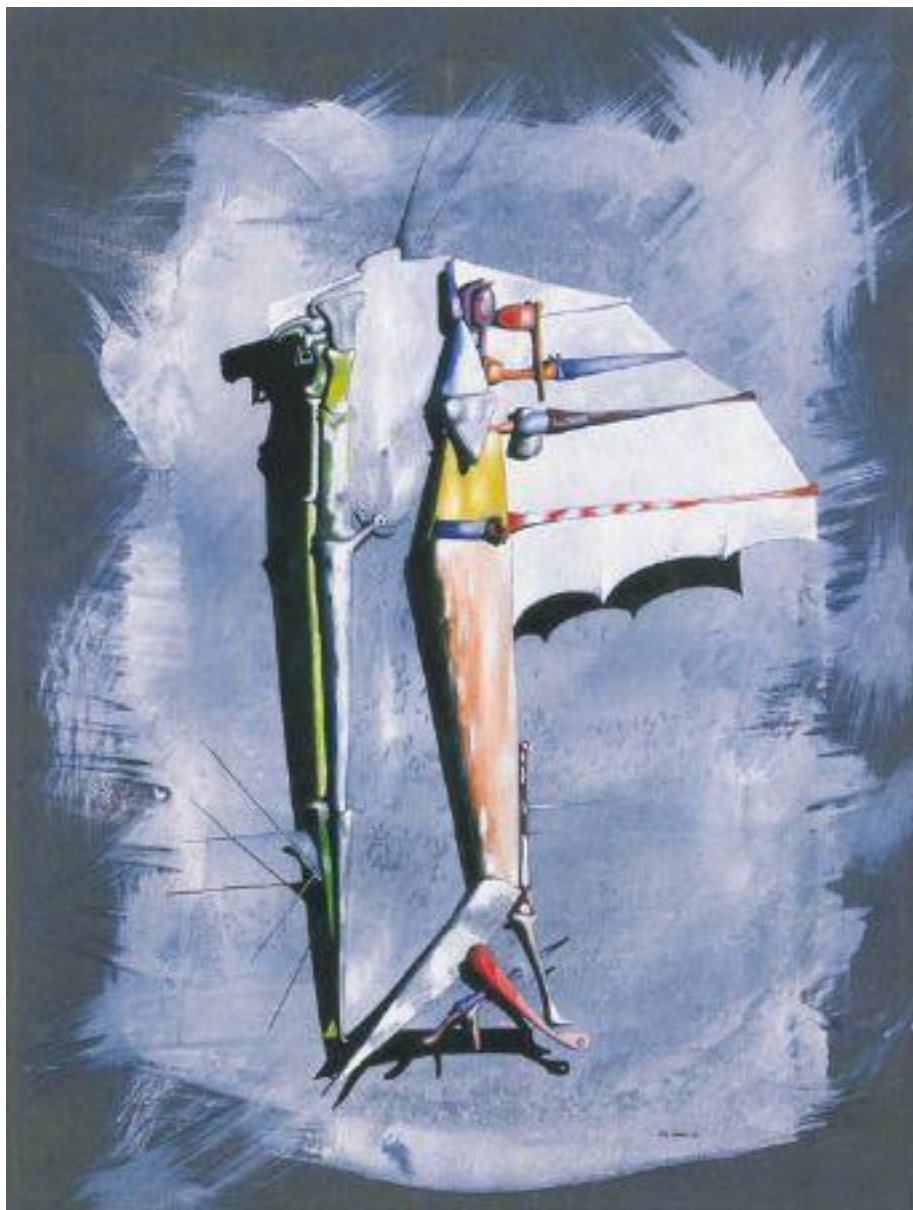


Figure 47. Yves Tanguy, *Elle fut douce*, 1947. Gouache on paper, 62.7 x 47.5 cm. Private Collection.

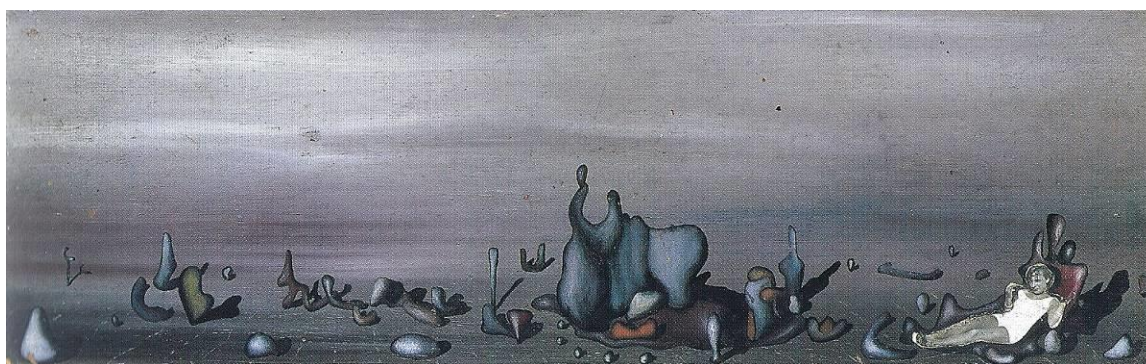


Figure 48. Yves Tanguy. *Untitled*, 1934-35. Oil and collage on panel, 6.5 x 20 cm. Private Collection.

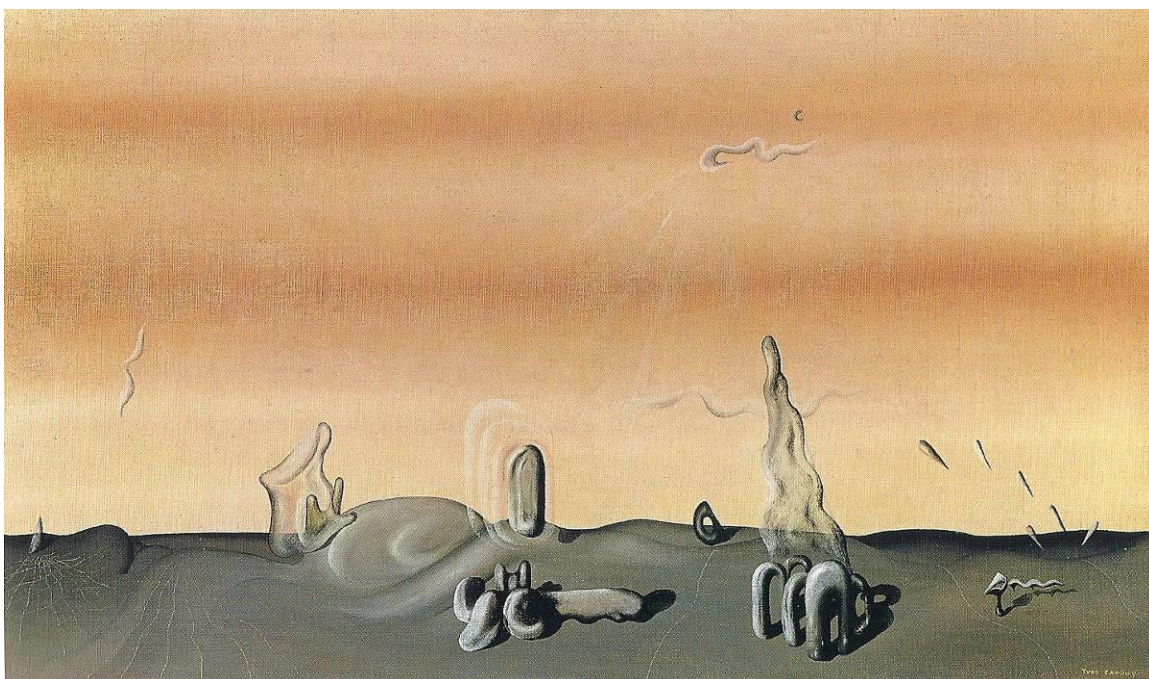


Figure 49. Yves Tanguy, *Untitled (Les Derniers...?)*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 33 x 55 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 49. Yves Tanguy, *Finissez ce que j'ai commence*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Jacqueline Matisse-Monnier, New York.

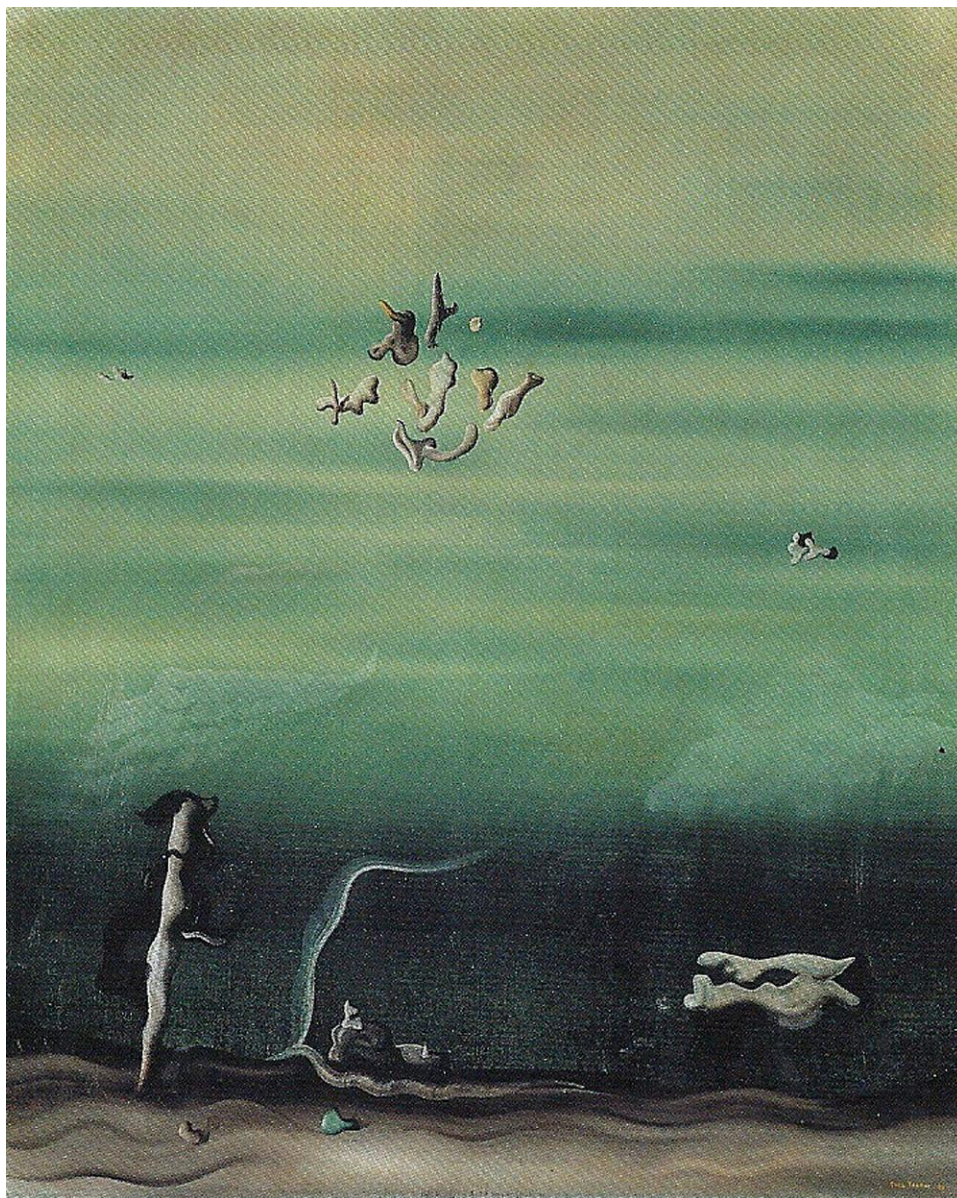


Figure 51. Yves Tanguy, *Les Amoureux*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Museum Folkwang, Essen.



Figure 52. Yves Tanguy. *Legendes ni figures*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 65 cm. Menil Collection, Houston.



Figure 53. Yves Tanguy, *L'Armoire de Protée*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 61 x 50cm. Private Collection.



Figure 54. Yves Tanguy, *Les Mottes de terre*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Private Collection.

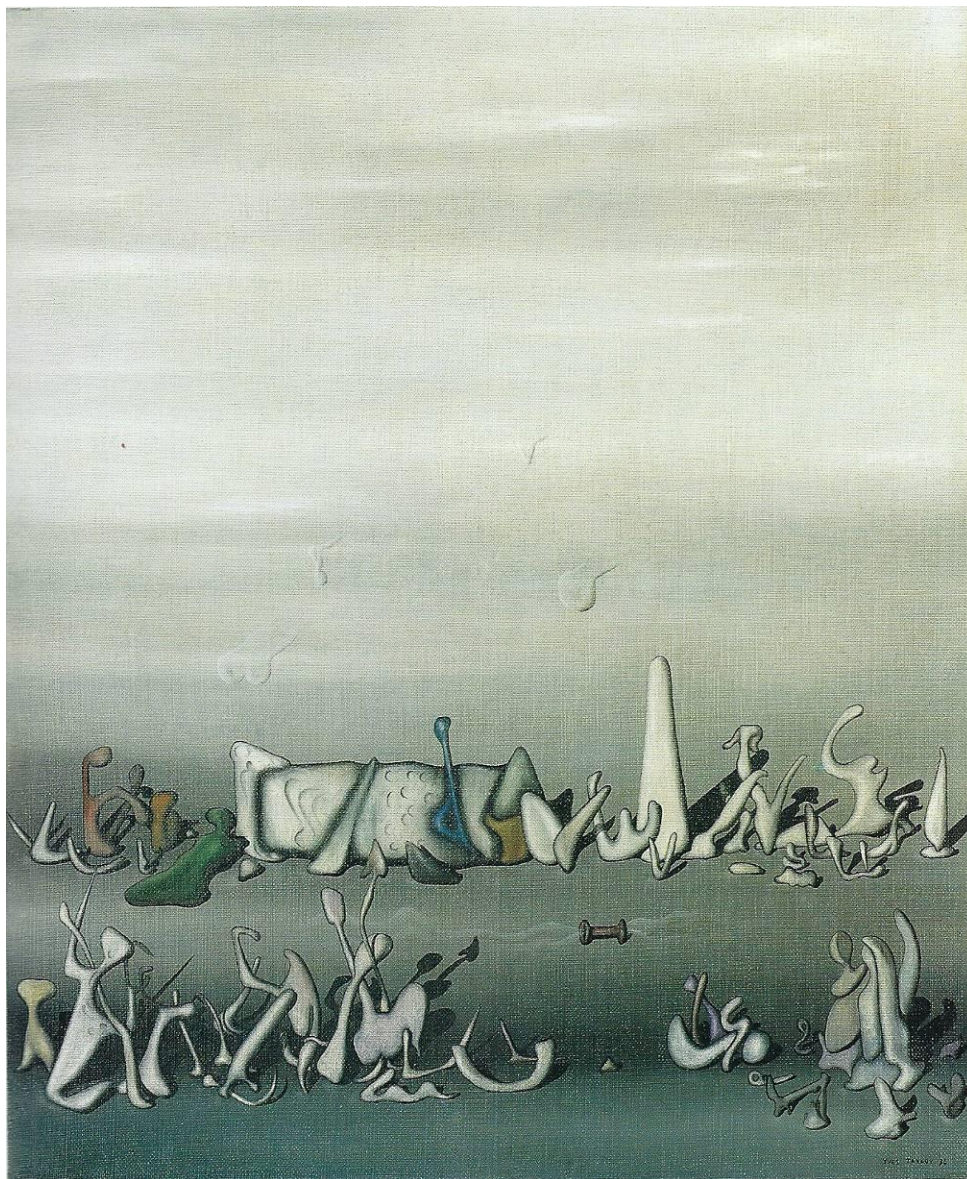


Figure 55. Yves Tanguy, *Entre l'herbe et le vent*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 46 x 34 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 56. Yves Tanguy. *Héritage des caractères acquis*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 41 x 33 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.



Figure 57. Yves Tanguy, *Jour de lenteur*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 58. Yves Tanguy, *Le Questionnant*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 60 x 80.5 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

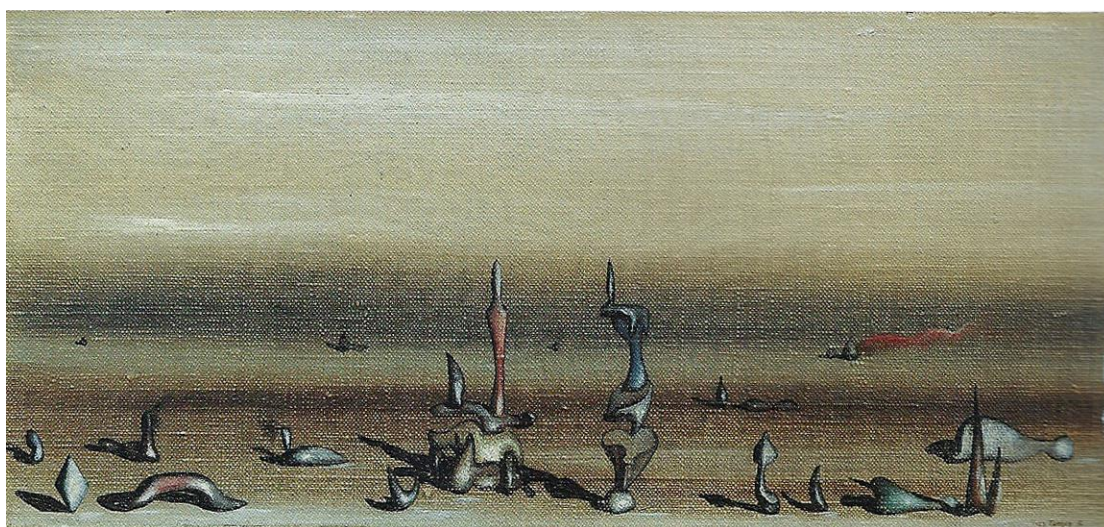


Figure 59. Yves Tanguy, *Fragile*, 1936. Oil on canvasboard, 9.1 x 21 cm. Wolfgang Wittrock Kunsthandel, Düsseldorf.



Figure 60. Yves Tanguy. *En Lieu oblique*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 43 x 71.4 cm. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.



Figure 61. Yves Tanguy, *L'Eau nue*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 91.1 x 71.1 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

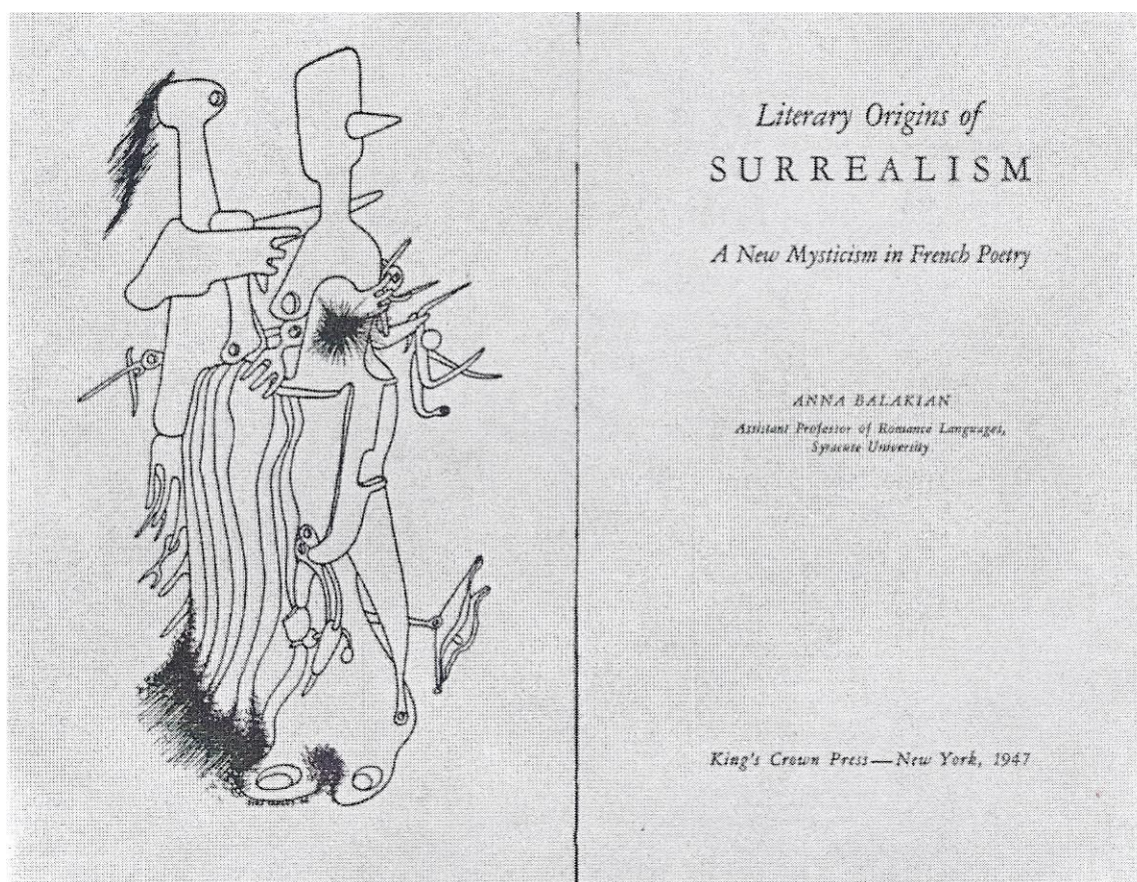


Figure 62. Yves Tanguy, cover for Anna Balakian, *Literary Origins of Surrealism*, 1947.



Figure 63. Yves Tanguy, *La Longue pluie*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 99.1 x 55.9 cm. Honolulu Academy of Arts.



Figure 64. Yves Tanguy, *Vers le nord lentement*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 106.7 x 91.4 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 65. Yves Tanguy, *Par Oiseaux, par feu, mais non par verre*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 122.6 x 110.5 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Arts)



Figure 66. Yves Tanguy, *Le Prodiges*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 28.2 x 22.9 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 67. Yves Tanguy, *Distances*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 25.4 x 20.6 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 68. Yves Tanguy, *La ne finit pas encore le mouvement*, 1945. Oil on canvas, 71 x 55.5 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

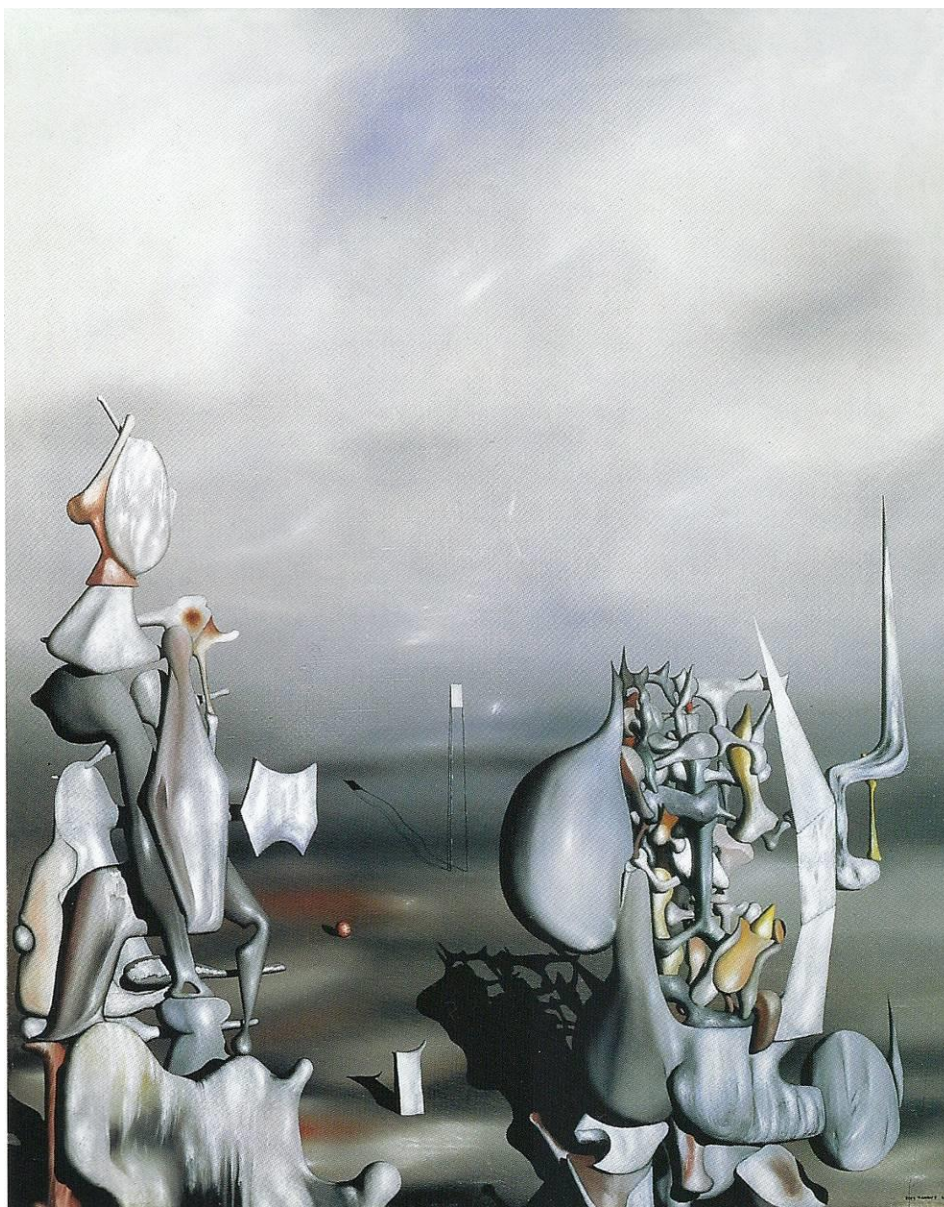


Figure 69. Yves Tanguy, *Mains et gants*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 92 x 71 cm. Musée d'art Moderne de Saint-Etienne/



Figure 70. Yves Tanguy, *Le Ciel traqué*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 99 x 81.9 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.



Figure 71. Yves Tanguy, *Les Saltimbanques*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 33 cm. Richard L. Feigen, New York.



Figure 72. Yves Tanguy, unfinished gouache, mid 1940s. Gouache and ink on paper, 44.2 x 30.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 73. Yves Tanguy, *Feu Volant*, 1951. Gouache, pastel, and pen and ink on paper, 42.8 x 32.4 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 74. Yves Tanguy, *Les Transparents*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 81 x 73.5 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

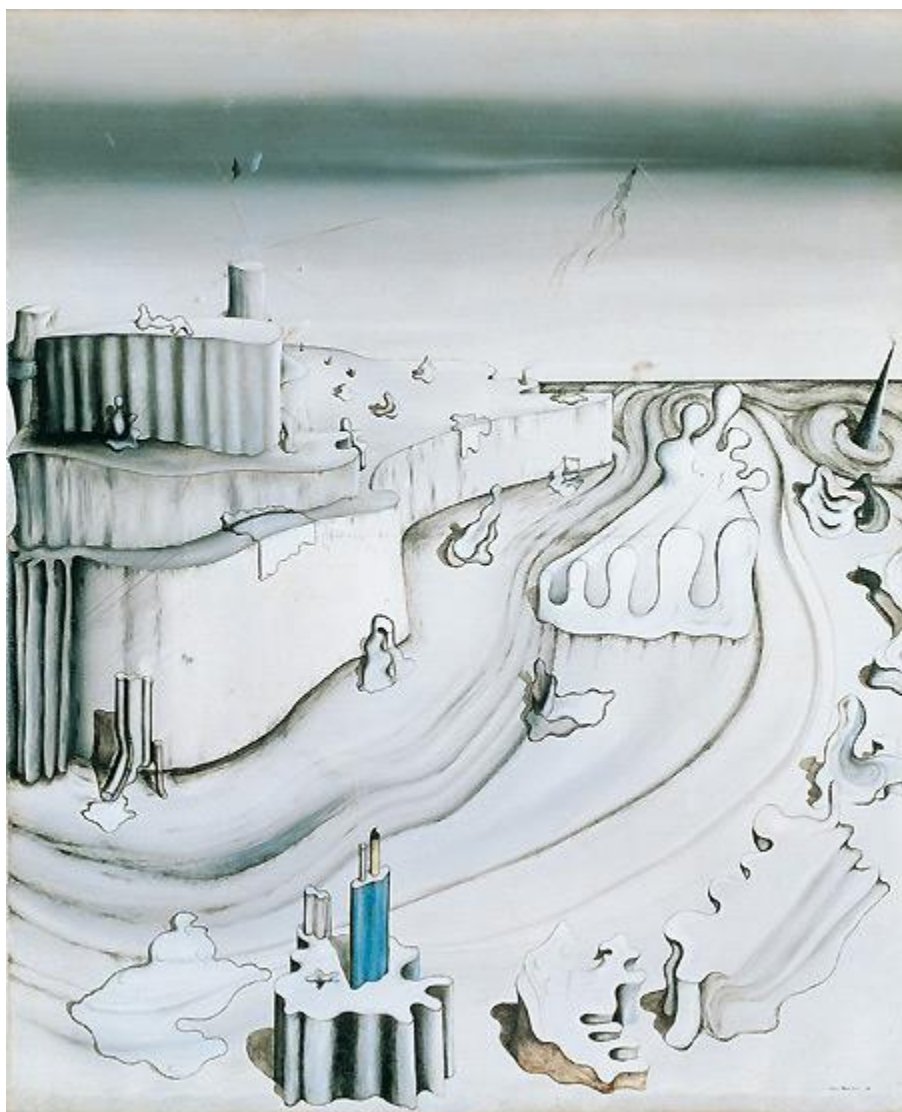


Figure 75. Yves Tanguy, *Palais Promontoire*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

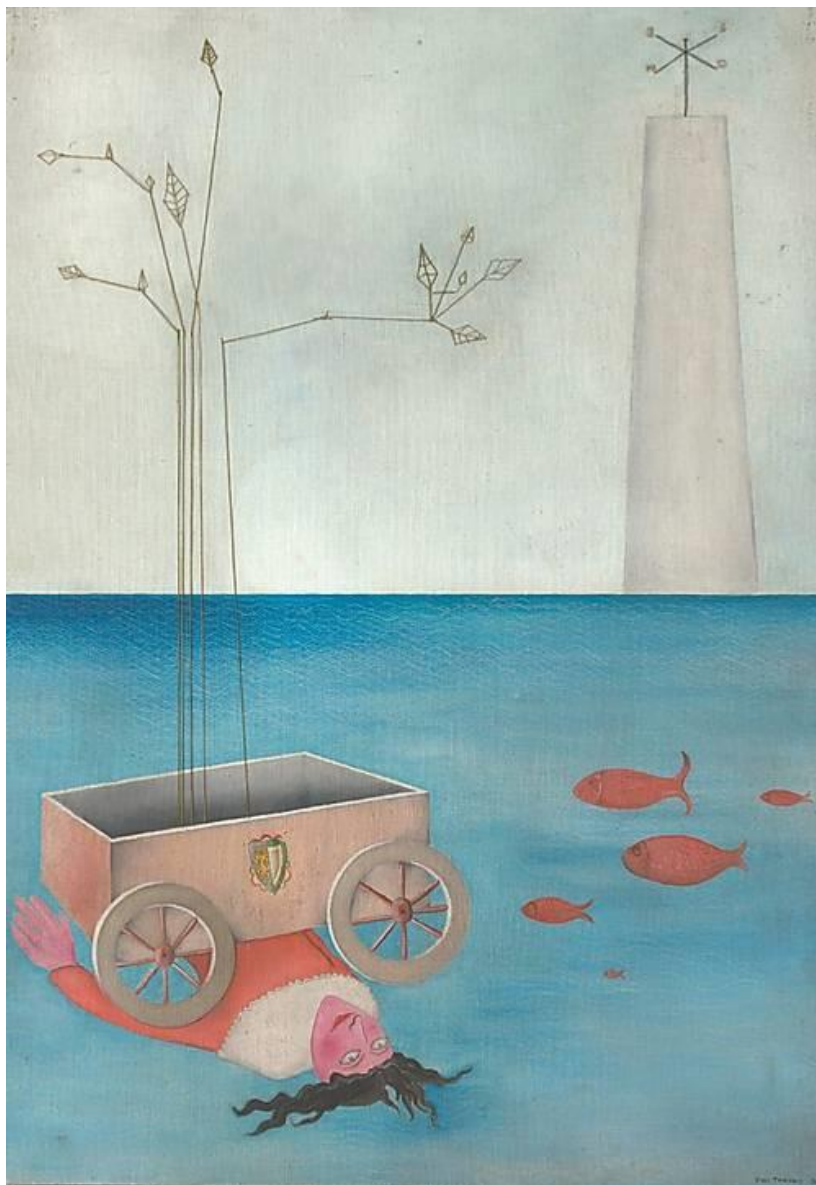


Figure 76. Yves Tanguy, *Titre Inconnu*, 1926. Oil, collage, and thread on canvas, 92 x 65 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 77. Yves Tanguy, *Sans Titre (La Géante, L'Echelle)*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 78. Yves Tanguy, *Vite! Vite!*, 1926. Oil on wood, 16.6 x 99.7 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

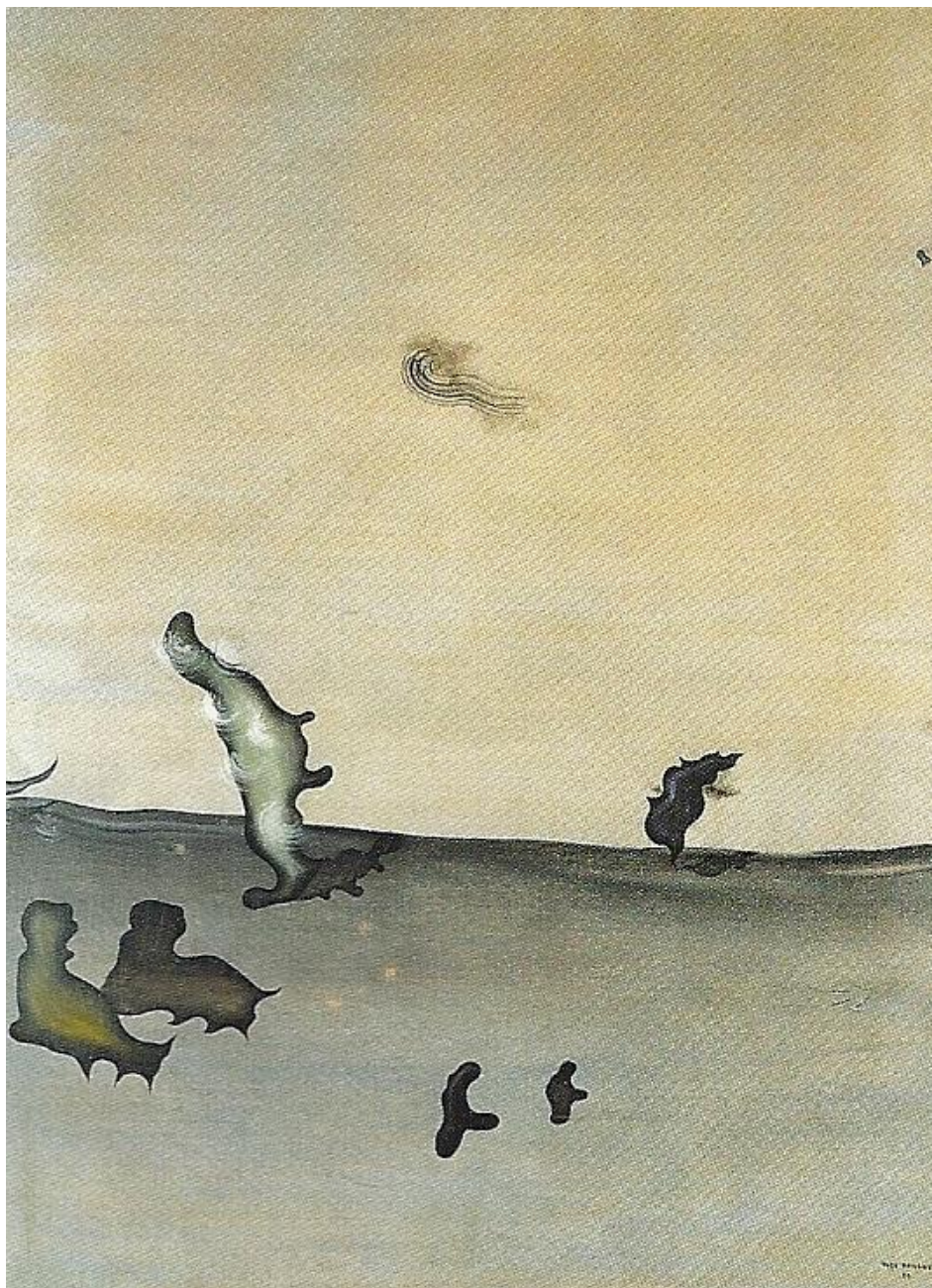


Figure 79. Yves Tanguy, *L'Inspiration*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 97.2 cm. Musée des Beaux Arts de Rennes.



Figure 80. Yves Tanguy, *L'Ennui et la tranquillité*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 142 x 102 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 81. Yves Tanguy, *Divisibilité infinie*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 88.9 cm. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.



Figure 82. Yves Tanguy. *La Peur*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 153 x 102 cm. \Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.



Figure 83. Yves Tanguy, *Suites illimitées*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 99.2 x 81.8 cm. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.



Figure 84. Yves Tanguy, *Multiplication des arcs*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 152.4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 85. Max Ernst, *The Horde*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm. Wurth Collectin, Künzelsau, Germany.



Figure 86. André Masson, *Dessin Automatique*, 1925/26. Ink on paper, 31.5 x 24.5 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 87. André Masson, *Furious Suns*, 1925. Ink on paper, 42.2 x 31.8 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 88. André Masson, *Battle of the Fishes*, 1926. Sand, gesso, oil, pencil, and charcoal on canvas, 36.2 x 73 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 89. André Masson, *Children of the Isles*, 1926. Private Collection.



Figure 90. André Masson, *Ariadne's Thread*, 1938. Private Collection.



Figure 91. André Masson, *Elk Attached by Dogs*, 1945. Oil on canvas, 51.1 x 63.8 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.



Figure 92. Joan Miró, *Birth of the World*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 250.8 x 200 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

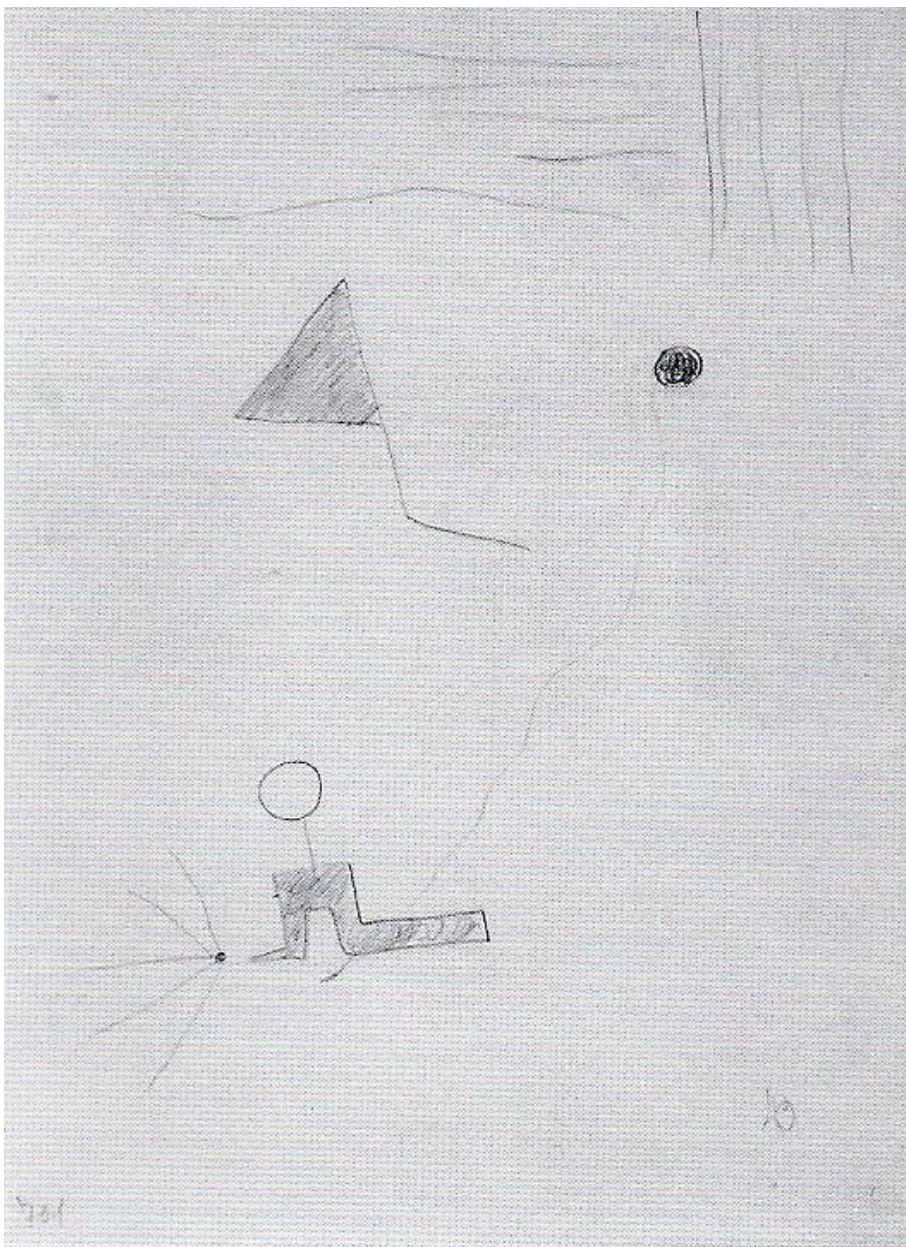


Figure 93. Joan Miró, drawing for *Birth of the World*, 1925. Pencil on paper. Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.



Figure 94. Yves Tanguy, *Je Vous attends*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 72.4 x 114.3 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

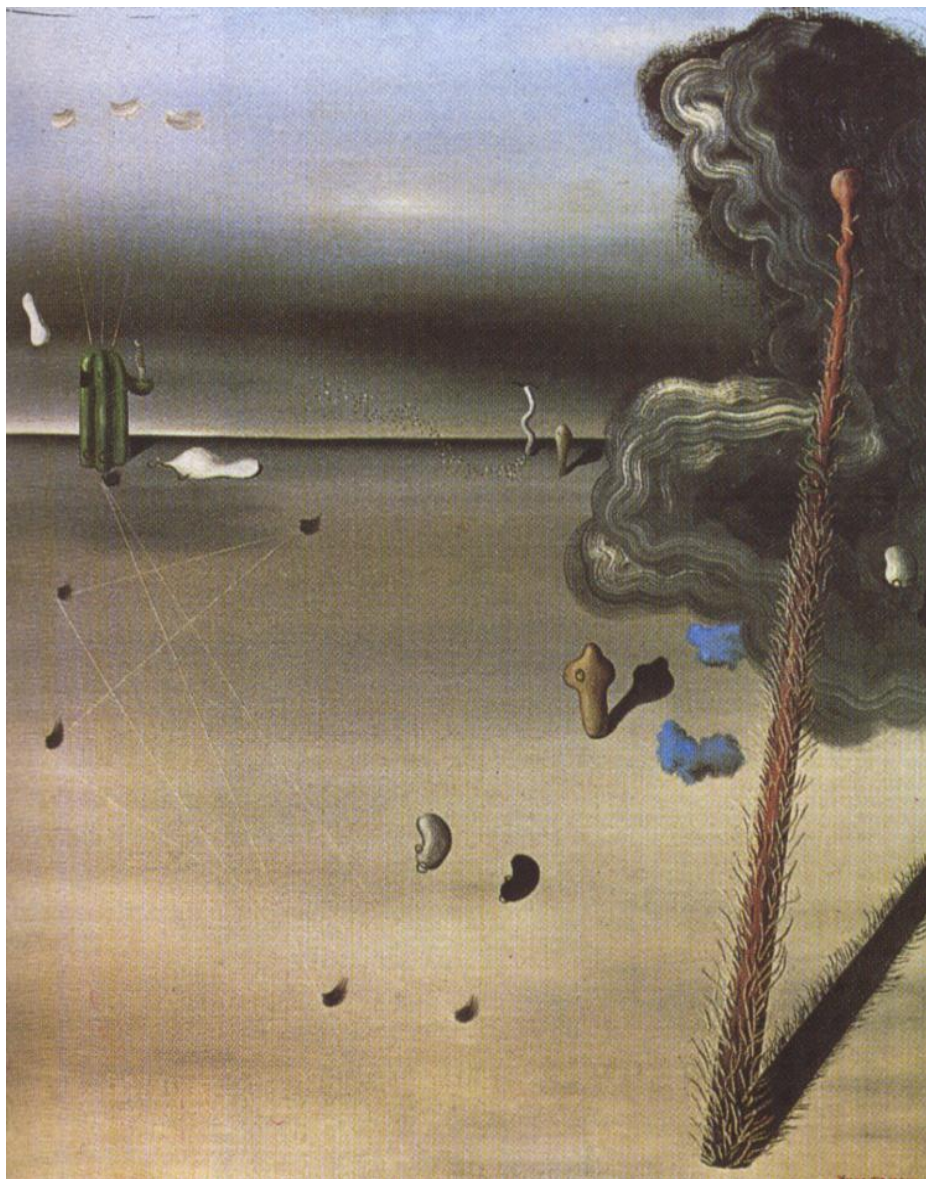


Figure 95. Yves Tanguy, *Maman, Papa est blessé*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 73 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 96. Max Ernst, *Garden Airplane Trap*, 1935-36. Oil on canvas, 58.4 x 73 cm. Art Institute of Chicago.

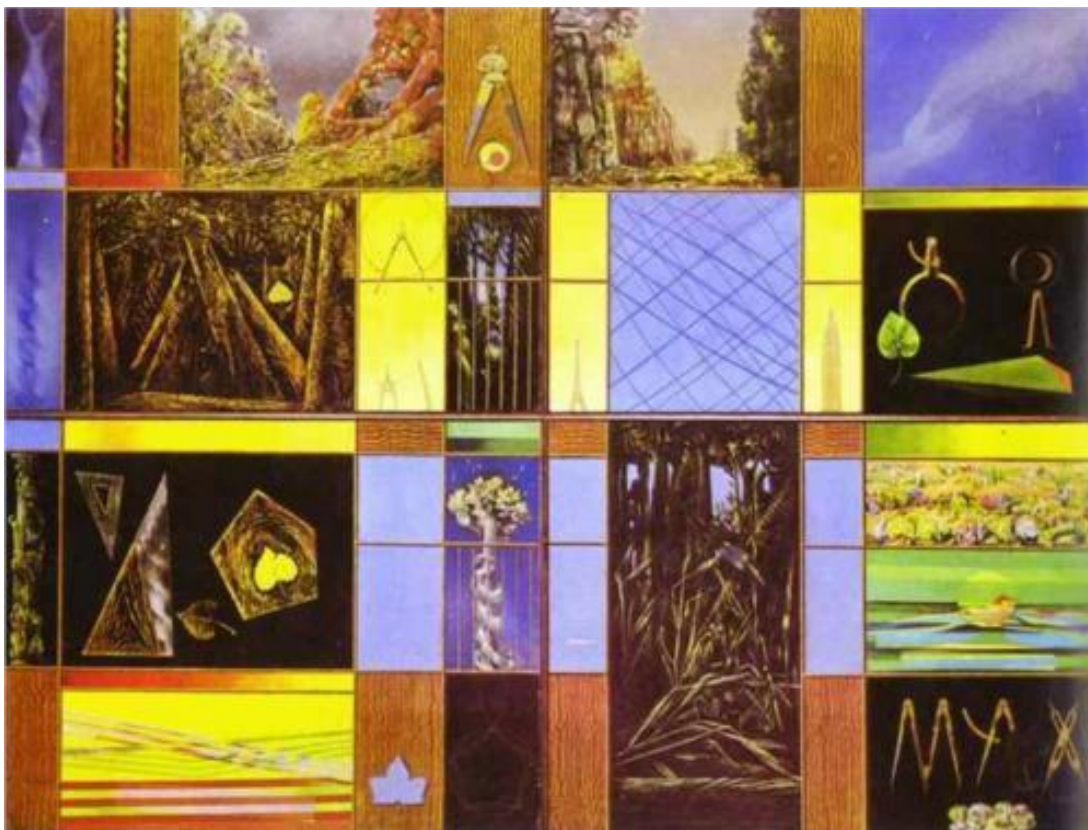


Figure 97. Max Ernst, *Vox Angelica*, 1945. Oil on canvas, 152 x 205 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 98. Max Ernst, *The Cry of the Sea Gull*, 1953. Oil on canvas. Menil Collection, Houston.



Figure 99. Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 24.1 x 33 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 100. René Magritte, *Time Transfixed*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 147 x 98.7 cm. Art Institute of Chicago.

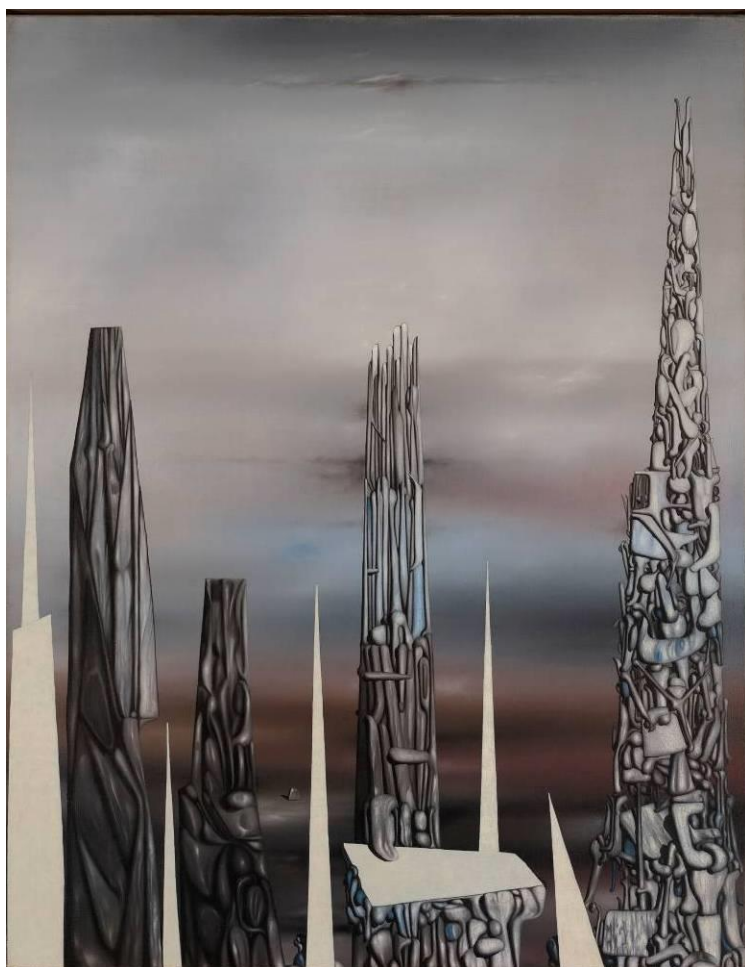


Figure 101. Yves Tanguy, *From Pale Hands to Weary Skies*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 92 x 71.4 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.



Figure 102. Stuart Davis, *Little Giant Still Life*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 83.8 x 109.2 cm. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.



Figure 103. Yves Tanguy, *La Certitude de jamais vu*, 1933. Oil on canvas with carved wood frame and objects, 22.2 x 27.9 x 7.6 cm. Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 104. Sanford Gifford, *Indian Summer in the White Mountains*, 1862, The Mint Museum, Charlotte. [top]

Sanford Gifford, *Indian Summer*, 1861, sold at Christie's, NY, 2 December 1998, lot 64. [bottom]



Yves Tanguy, *Il vient*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Private Collection.



Yves Tanguy, *L'Inspiration*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm. Musée des Beaux Arts, Rennes.



Joan Miró, *Portrait of Mrs. Mills in 1950, 1929*. Oil on canvas, 116.7 x 89.6 cm. Museum of Modern Art, NY.



Yves Tanguy, *Il vient*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Private Collection.

Figure 105.

Works Cited

During the course of research for this dissertation, the author was fortunate to have been able to access the following archival collections, in addition to the works cited below.

Archives of American Art, Washington DC (The Stephen Robeson Miller and Flora Miller Whitney papers)

The Art Institute of Chicago (Ryerson-Burnham Library artist files)

The Bibliothèque Litteraire Jacques Doucet

The Centre Georges Pompidou (artist files at the Musée National d'art modern)

The Getty Research Institute (the James Thrall Soby, Gloria Herrera, Yves Poupard-Lieussou, E.L.T. Messns, and Enrico Donati papers, correspondence, and collections)

The Morgan Library, New York (The Pierre Matisse Gallery archives)

A portion of the Tanguy family archives, courtesy of Louis Reyes-Tanguy, France.

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