

Jackson Pollock

Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?

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Recently a formidably high-brow New York critic hailed the brooding, puzzled-looking man shown above as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become "the greatest American painter of the 20th Century." Others believe that Jackson Pollock produces nothing more than interesting, if inexplicable, decorations. Still others condemn his pictures as degenerate and find them as unpalatable as yesterday's macaroni. Even so, Pollock, at the age of 37, has burst forth as the shining new phenomenon of American art.

Pollock was virtually unknown in 1944. Now his paintings hang in five U.S. museums and 40 private collections. Exhibiting in New York last winter, he sold 12 out of 18 pictures. Moreover his work has stirred up a fuss in Italy, and this autumn he is slated for a one man show in avant-garde Paris, where he is fast becoming the most talked of and controversial U.S. painter. He has also won a following among his own neighbors in the village of Springs, N.Y., who amuse themselves by trying to decide what his paintings are about. His grocer bought one which he identifies for bewildered visiting salesmen as an aerial view of Siberia. For Pollock's own explanation of why he paints as he does, turn the page.

How Pollock Paints (with enamel, sand and a trowel)

Jackson Pollock was born in Cody, Wyo. He studied in New York under Realist Thomas Benton but soon gave this up in utter frustration and turned to his present style. When Pollock decides to start a painting, the first thing he does is to tack a large piece of canvas on the floor of his barn. "My painting does not come from the easel," he explains, writing in a small magazine called *Possibilities 1*. "I need the resistance of a hard surface." Working on the floor gives him room to scramble around the canvas, attacking it from the top, the bottom or the side (if his pictures can be said to have a top, a bottom or a side) as the mood suits him. In this way, "I can... literally be in the painting." He surrounds himself with quart cans of aluminum paint and many hues of ordinary household enamel. Then, starting anywhere on the canvas, he goes to work. Sometimes he dribbles the paint on with a brush (above). Sometimes he scrawls it on with a stick, scoops it with a trowel or even pours it on straight out of the can. In with it all he deliberately mixes sand (below), broken glass, nails, screws or other foreign matter lying around. Cigarette ashes and an occasional dead bee sometimes get in the picture inadvertently.

"When I am in my painting," says Pollock, "I'm not aware of what I'm doing." To find out what he has been doing he stops and contemplate the picture during what he calls his "get acquainted" period. Once in a while a life-like image appears in the painting by mistake. But Pollock cheerfully rubs it out because the picture must retain "a life of its own." Finally, after days of brooding and doodling, Pollock decides the painting is finished, a deduction few others are equipped to make.

