

ARTS & LETTERS



*A Revolution
In Painting?*

"Signs of Passion: The New Expressionism" by Hilton Kramer, in *The New Criterion* (Nov. 1982), Foundation for Cultural Review, 460 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Neo-Expressionism is only one of many new styles that has swept the art world since the 1960s. Nevertheless, asserts Kramer, editor of the *New Criterion*, it signals a real change in the direction of art.

The previous major innovation in painting occurred during the early 1960s, when Andy Warhol's Pop art displaced the postwar Abstract Expressionism of such artists as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Warhol's focus on the "imagery of mass culture"—as in his famous painting of a Campbell's Soup can—set his work apart from the serious, nonrepresentational painting of his predecessors.

But Pop art and the movements that followed, notably Minimal art and Color-field painting, took the Abstract Expressionists' tendency towards a "cool," impersonal style to an extreme. "All evidence of subjective emotion," Kramer writes, "was suppressed in favor of clean surfaces and hard edges, of instant legibility, transparency, and order."

Ironically, the "cool" art movements of the 1960s and '70s flourished during a "hot" period of social turmoil, Kramer says, creating an "intolerable tension" between art and life. By the late 1970s, the Neo-Expressionists—Malcolm Morley, Julian Schnabel, Susan Rothenberg—were leading the forces of reaction.

Their paintings "swamped the eye with vivid images and tactile effects, relying more on instinct and imagination than on careful design,"

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Today's Neo-Expressionists trace their lineage to the Expressionist school of the early 20th century, exemplified by E. L. Kirchner's Der Theosoph (far left). An example of 1960s Pop art is Roy Lichtenstein's Girl With Ball. Mimmo Paladino's Porta is a Neo-Expressionist work.

Kramer writes. "The mystical, the erotic, and the hallucinatory were once again made welcome in painting." Not only did the new painters reinject emotion into art, they reversed a 100-year trend towards "depletion" and sparer images in painting.

The Neo-Expressionists are not the only painters who are breaking away from the art of the last two decades, Kramer notes. But their freshness and vigor are a sure sign that "cool" art is on the way out.

The Maestros Gather Dust

"The Conductor as Endangered Species" by Donal Henahan, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 28, 1982), 229 West 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Today's big-league orchestra conductors are often affluent superstars, but Henahan, a *New York Times* music critic, contends they have abandoned their most useful role—finding new music and presenting it to the public.

The first symphony orchestras were created in Europe during the late 18th century to serve new middle-class audiences that hungered for music previously heard only in the salons of aristocrats. Most conductors were also composers, natural promoters of their own music and that of their contemporaries. Hungary's Franz Liszt (1811–86), for example, performed not only his own compositions, but also those of Wagner and Berlioz. Maestros who did not compose linked their careers to favorite contemporaries who did: Pierre Monteux (1875–1964)