AAA *See* ALLIED ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION; AMERICAN ABSTRACT ARTISTS.

Aalto, Alvar (1898–1976) Finnish architect, designer, sculptor, and painter. Aalto is principally renowned as one of the greatest architects and furniture designers of the 20th century, but he was also an abstract sculptor of some distinction. His outstanding work in this field is his memorial (1960) for the Battle of Suomussalmi, a leaning bronze pillar on a stone pedestal set up in the arctic wastes of the battlefield (a Finnish victory against the Soviet Union in 1939–40).

Aaltonen, Wäinö (1894–1966) Finnish sculptor, born at Marttila, near Turku, the son of a village tailor. He became deaf in childhood and took up art as a way of overcoming his disability, studying painting at the School of Drawing of the Turku Art Association, 1910–15, and then turning to sculpture. Following the period in which Finland declared itself independent from Russia, endured civil war, and established itself as a republic (1917–19), Aaltonen made a name for himself as a sculptor of war memorials, and by 1927, when he had a large exhibition in Stockholm, he was regarded as an embodiment of the Finnish national character and way of life. His most typical works are tributes to national heroes such as the monument to the runner Paavo Nurmi (1925, the best-known cast is outside the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki) and the bust of the composer Sibelius (1928, various casts exist). In addition to bronze he worked in stone (particularly granite) and various other materials, including glass. His style was heroic and basically naturalistic, although sometimes touched with *Cubist stylizations.

Abakanowicz, Magdalena (1930–) Polish abstract sculptor, the pioneer and leading exponent of sculpture made from woven fabrics. She was born in Felenty into an aristocratic family and studied at the Academy in Warsaw, 1950–55. Initially she worked in conventional media in painting and sculpture, but from 1960 (the year of her first one-woman show at the Galerie Kordegarda, Warsaw) she concentrated on textiles, using hessian and rope (in some works she has also incorporated wood). Sometimes she obtained her raw materials by visiting Poland's Baltic harbours and collecting old ropes, which she then unravelled and dyed. At first she made reliefs, but soon moved on to large three-dimensional works. In 1962 she first exhibited in the West (at the International Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne) and thereafter her work appeared regularly outside Poland in both solo and group shows, winning her an international reputation, accompanied by numerous awards, including a gold medal at the São Paulo *Bienal in 1965. In the same year she began teaching at the School of Art in Poznań, and in 1974–90 she was a professor there. She writes of her work: 'My intention was to extend the possibilities of man's contact with a work of art through touch and by being surrounded by it. I have looked to those slowly growing irregular forms for an antidote against the brilliance and speed of contemporary technology. I wanted to impose a slower rhythm on the environment as a contrast to the immediacy and speed of our urban surroundings.' Examples of her work are in several Polish collections, notably the Museum of Textiles at Łódź, and in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. *See also* FIBRE ART.

Abate, Alberto *See* PITTURA COLTA.

Abbal, André *See* DIRECT CARVING.

Abbott, Berenice (1898–1991) American photographer, born in Springfield, Ohio. In about 1920 she went to New York, where she met *Dadaists including Marcel *Duchamp and *Man Ray. In 1921, she moved to Paris, where, knowing nothing of photography, she became assistant in Man Ray's studio. She

eventually set up a successful portrait practice of her own and photographed many of the leading figures in intellectual life, including James Joyce. She also met Eugène *Atget and was fascinated by his evocative street scenes. It was Abbott who was responsible for ensuring that his work was preserved after his death. In 1929 she returned to New York, inspired by the fascination of the Parisian avant-garde with the city of skyscrapers, and set about recording the rapid transformations of the city. From 1935 onwards her work was funded by the Works Progress Administration (*see* FEDERAL ART PROJECT). The results were published in 1939 as *Changing New York*. Introducing the book, the critic Audrey McMahon wrote that Berenice Abbott hates 'everything that is sentimental, devious or tricky' and described the work as 'straight photography'. Examination of the photographs today hardly bears out the image of simple neutral craft at work. Abbott's camera produces dramatic perspectives of the skyscrapers from above and below; the old and the new are put in pointed contrast to each other. Susan Platt (*Art Journal*, vol. 58, no. 2, 1999) has argued that political comment was intended. She notes that the left-wing *American Artists' Congress displayed an Abbott photograph, *Gunsmith and Police Headquarters*, framed and angled so that the gun pointed directly at the Police Station.

abjection *See* KRISTEVA, JULIE.

Abrahams, Ivor (1935–) British sculptor and printmaker, born in Wigan. He studied at *St Martin's School of Art and the Central School of Art, London, and made his reputation with colourful sculptures of hedges and garden walls. The imagery was taken from popular gardening magazines and 'prescriptions for the nouveau [sic] bourgeoisie' published in the 19th century on how to organize house and garden. He used fibreglass and flock, the latter to evoke the texture of greenery. In 1973 he said, 'I was able to think of shapes that would, in fact, only come to life when they were treated with this sort of skin or fibre.' He has also applied flock to his prints, again to simulate texture. The results both in sculpture and print have a quality of the uncanny.

Further Reading: S. Raikes, *By Leafy Ways* (2008)

Abramović, Marina (1946–) Serbian *Performance and *Body artist. Born in Belgrade, she moved to Amsterdam and now lives and works in New York. Her performances have taken to an extreme danger, physical ordeal and confrontation with the audience. 'If you're really afraid of an idea—that's the kind of idea I like', she told an audience at Tate Modern. When she was young her parents tried to have her sent to a mental institution because of her performance work. In *Rhythm O* (1974), performed in Naples, she stood surrounded by various objects including a gun, a scalpel and a rose. The visitors were allowed to use these on her in any way they chose. When one spectator finally held a loaded gun to her head there was a fight and the performance was terminated. Far less physically dangerous but still highly provocative was *Impondrabilia* (1977). She and her partner and collaborator Ulay stood naked on either side of a door. The public had to pass between them, touching their bodies in order to enter the exhibition. Some of her later work has reflected directly on the wars in her home country. At the 1997 Venice *Biennale, in an installation called *Baltic Baroque*, she sat in a white dress on top of a heap of cow bones, scrubbing them clean while singing folk songs. She began the process as a kind of 'rejuvenating ritual', but as the performance proceeded Abramović became increasingly distraught. As RoseLee Goldberg reported, 'Weeping and exhausted, Abramović created an unforgettable image of grief for our times.'

Absalon *See* ENVIRONMENT ART.

abstract art Art that does not depict recognizable scenes or objects. Much decorative art can thus be described as abstract, but in normal usage the term refers to works of painting and sculpture which make little or no reference to the visual world. Abstract art in this sense was born and achieved its distinctive identity in the decade 1910–20 and is often regarded as the most important development of early 20th-century art. It has evolved into many different types, but certain basic tendencies are recognizable. In 1936 Alfred H. *Barr, 'at the risk of grave oversimplification', divided abstraction into two main currents: the first (represented by Kasimir *Malevich) he described as 'intellectual, structural, architectonic, geometrical, rectilinear and classical in its austerity and dependence upon logic and calculation'; the second (exemplified by Wassily *Kandinsky) he described as 'intuitional or emotional rather

than intellectual; organic or *biomorphic rather than geometrical in its forms; curvilinear rather than rectilinear, decorative rather than structural, and romantic rather than classical in its exaltation of the mystical, the spontaneous and the irrational' (*Cubism and Abstract Art*). There are problems with Barr's distinction. The use of geometric forms may be determined as much by intuition as calculation and an apparently spontaneous expression may be highly premeditated. Taking account of practice since Barr was writing, it is possible to identify several strands in abstract art: (i) the reduction of natural appearances to radically simplified forms, as in the sculpture of Constantin *Brancusi (one meaning of the verb 'abstract' is to summarize or concentrate); (ii) the construction of works of art from non-representational basic forms (often simple geometric shapes), as in Ben *Nicholson's reliefs, or more curvilinear elements as in the work of Jean *Arp and the later Kandinsky; (iii) gestural expression, as in the *Action Painting of Jackson *Pollock; (iv) the interest in the visual or physical qualities of material or process, as in texture painters such as *Tàpies or *Minimalists such as Robert *Ryman or Marthe *Wéry; (v) an art dependent upon the power of pure colour, as in the final work of *Matisse, the *Colour Field paintings of Mark *Rothko, or the *Post-Painterly Abstraction of Morris *Louis or Kenneth *Noland; (vi) art, usually painting, which suggests light, space, and atmosphere without referring to any specific object (what Clement *Greenberg called 'homeless representation'), as practised especially by Parisian painters in the 1950s such as Jean *Bazaine. Some artists and critics dislike the term 'abstract' (Arp, for example, hated it, insisting on the word *'Concrete') but the alternatives they prefer, such as non-figurative, non-representational, and *Non-Objective, although perhaps more precise, are often cumbersome.

The basic premise of abstract art—that formal qualities can be thought of as having a value independent of visual likeness—existed long before the 20th century. Ultimately the idea can be traced back to Plato, who in his dialogue *Philebus* (*c.*350 BC) puts the following words into Socrates' mouth: 'I do not mean by beauty of form such beauty as that of animals and pictures . . . but understand me to mean straight lines and circles, and the plane or solid figures which are formed out of them by turning-lathes and rulers and measures of angles; for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful, like other things, but eternally and absolutely beautiful.' This statement has been cited by advocates of abstract art such as Alfred Barr, but is really applicable only to the geometric variety. A more exact basis for 20th-century theory and practice can be found in the 19th century. In 1846 Charles Baudelaire (*see* MODERNISM) wrote that 'painting is interesting only in virtue of line and colour'. In 1896 the philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952) proposed 'a new abstract art, an art that should deal with colours as music does with sound'. Painters such as J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851) and Claude *Monet pressed their representation of light effects almost to the point where the object dissolves.

Many of the leading painters of the late 19th century—notably the *Symbolists—stressed the expressive properties of colour, line, and shape rather than their representative function. In 1890—in a much quoted remark—Maurice *Denis said: 'Remember that a picture—before being a war horse or a nude woman or an anecdote—is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.' James McNeill *Whistler gave his paintings musical titles, a practice continued by some early 20th-century painters, notably František *Kupka and Kandinsky, as they approached total abstraction. At the same time, the flat linear plant forms typical of *Art Nouveau were sometimes only a short step away from abstraction, as in a painting such as *Composition* (*c.*1902; Stadtmuseum, Munich) by Hans Schmithals (1878–1964). The major avant-garde movements of the first decade of the 20th century—notably *Cubism, *Expressionism, and *Fauvism—further emphasized that a painting was first and foremost a two-dimensional object.

So in the early years of the 20th century abstract art seemed a logical path forward to some artists, and it developed more or less simultaneously in various countries. Kandinsky is often cited as the first person to paint an abstract picture, but no single artist can in fact be singled out for the distinction. A work by Kandinsky once known as *First Abstract Watercolour* (Pompidou Centre, Paris) is signed and dated 1910, but it is now accepted that it is later and was inscribed by Kandinsky some years after its execution. This kind of problem arises not only with Kandinsky: several early abstract artists were keen to stress the primacy of their ideas and were not above backdating works (see, for example,

RAYONISM). However, by 1913 Kandinsky was making paintings which appear to most spectators as entirely abstract—although careful analysis reveals residual figurative imagery. Other candidates for 'first abstract painter' have been put forward with various degrees of plausibility, including Francis *Picabia and Arthur *Dove. The problem is one of definition as much as documentation. Sometimes there were close links with developments in the decorative arts, as with Duncan *Grant and Vanessa *Bell in England or Sonia *Delaunay in France. Kupka, Robert *Delaunay, and Giacomo *Balla all came close to abstraction with cosmic subjects. Mechanistic imagery, as with the *Futurists and Fernand *Léger, by taking the artist from the natural world, was also a force in the direction of total abstraction. In fact the important issue is not really who painted the first abstract painting. Instead, it is more useful to concentrate on when, how, and why artists achieved a coherent practice of abstraction, which could be developed across a series of works, and set up the potential for a practice that could be developed by other artists. In this respect the crucial year was 1915. It was then that in Russia Malevich exhibited his *Suprematist paintings and Vladimir *Tatlin his first abstract constructions. In the same year Piet *Mondrian painted his *Pier and Ocean*, an important influence on the Dutch De *Stijl group founded two years later. Early abstraction was not just a matter of a new style but a search for a way to express a new vision of the world. Kandinsky and Mondrian shared an almost mystical attitude towards art. Although their paintings are at virtually opposite poles of abstraction—Kandinsky's free-flowing and emotional, Mondrian's rigorously geometrical—both artists were influenced by theosophy, an ancient philosophical system that became a modern cult with the foundation of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. Theosophists believe that the universe is essentially spiritual in nature; their idea that a deep harmony underlies the apparent chaos of the world had strong appeal to artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian, who thought that their paintings could help bring about a spiritual revival in the materialistic West. They thought that abstract art could penetrate external appearances to reveal a greater truth beneath. Mondrian believed that his art of clarity and balance would lead to a society in which life would be governed by a universal visual harmony.

Among the other pioneers of abstract art who were influenced by mystical ideas were Malevich, who tried to paint the 'supreme reality', and Theo van *Doesburg, Mondrian's principal colleague in De Stijl. Van Doesburg was extremely active in promoting the group's ideas, and in the period between the two world wars its severely geometrical style was one of the most influential currents in abstraction, together with the technologically orientated *Constructivism (they came together in the *Bauhaus). A characteristic of thinking about abstraction in the interwar years was that there was a close connection between the forms of abstract art and those of modern design and architecture. This was argued in Herbert *Read's *Art and Industry* (1934) and in the New York *Museum of Modern Art exhibition 'Machine Art' (1934), curated by the architect and historian Philip Johnson.

Paris was the main centre of abstract art at this time, partly because it attracted so many refugee artists from Germany and Russia, where abstract art was banned in the 1930s under Hitler and Stalin. There was also a strong abstract element in *Surrealism, which was born in Paris. When Surrealist artists, most notably Joan *Miró and André *Masson, came closest to abstraction, it was generally the result of the application of *automatism. The spontaneous processes tended to work against the ideal geometric forms of other abstractionists of the time. The first exhibition devoted solely to abstract art was held in Paris by the *Cercle et Carré group in 1930. Its successor, the *Abstraction-Création association, founded in 1931, brought together a large number of abstract artists of various types and provided a focus for their activities. In general, however, figurative art was dominant in the interwar period and abstract art won little public acceptance. It was very much a minority taste in Britain and the USA, for example, in spite of such outstanding individual contributions as the sculptures of Alexander *Calder and Barbara *Hepworth, and the efforts of groups such as *Unit One (founded in 1933) and *American Abstract Artists (founded in 1936).

After the Second World War abstract art achieved wider acceptance and entered a new phase. With the burgeoning of *Abstract Expressionism in the USA and its European equivalent *Art Informel, expressive values were being emphasized above order and geometry. By about 1960 abstract art was not only widely accepted but on the verge of becoming the dominant

orthodoxy in Western art. It no longer seemed to need philosophical justification of the kind given by Kandinsky and Mondrian (although several of the Abstract Expressionists were equally high-minded in approach). However, abstraction was sometimes still invested with a moral and political dimension as an embodiment of Western freedom of thought, as opposed to the totalitarianism that had banned avant-garde art in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia (*see* DEGENERATE ART and SOCIALIST REALISM). In France in 1945 the Louvre curator Germain Bazin (1901–90) argued that collaborators with the occupation among artists came only from the *Fauves and the realists because 'abstraction is a position of liberty, which engages man completely and will admit to no pact with power'. It is significant that many of the Abstract Expressionists were influenced by European Surrealists who had fled to New York during the Second World War to escape the fear of repression. In the USA, support for abstract art could be regarded almost as a form of patriotism—Clement *Greenberg used the term 'American-Type Painting' as an alternative to Abstract Expressionism, and one of the standard books on the movement (Irving Sandler's *Abstract Expressionism*, 1970) is subtitled *The Triumph of American Painting*. However, especially during the height of anti-Communist feeling in the early 1950s, there were also influential voices such as that of senator George Dondero who agitated against it on the grounds that it was politically subversive.

Later abstract art often reacted against the emotional fervour of Abstract Expressionism and cultivated a 'cool' aesthetic which it shared with aspects of *Pop art. New forms of abstraction included *Post-Painterly Abstraction and *Minimal art, both of which flourished in the 1960s. These frequently jettisoned as unnecessary baggage the spiritual or social basis for abstraction. As Frank *Stella put it, 'My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there' (B. Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and *Judd', *Art News,* September 1966). The *appropriation of *ready-made images and signs in the work of artists such as Jasper *Johns and Andy *Warhol started to make the issue of abstraction versus figuration a secondary one. A painter like Richard *Diebenkorn or a sculptor like David *Smith could move between abstract and figurative modes without it seeming to be a major issue for artist or spectator.

Some exponents and supporters of abstract art have argued that it can reach the same heights as the greatest art of the past, and indeed go beyond it, by virtue of a kind of universal language based on colour and form. Kandinsky, for example, wrote that 'The impact of the acute angle of a triangle on a circle produces an effect no less powerful than the finger of God touching the finger of Adam in Michelangelo's *Creation*' (*Cahiers d'art*, 1931). The general charge against abstract art, sometimes but by no means always, coming from left-wing supporters of *Socialist or *Social Realism, has been that it lacks a certain 'human content'. For instance in 1935 Kenneth *Clark, hardly a figure generally identified with the political left, accused abstract painters of contracting 'spiritual beri-beri'. A further criticism is that abstract art provides insufficient challenge to the artist, who is no longer required to juggle the contradictory demands of representation and design. In 1958 E. H. *Gombrich, for whom the psychology of representation was central, wrote: 'when I seriously compare my reaction to the best "abstract" canvas with some work of great music that has meant something to me, it fades into the sphere of the merely decorative.' A more persuasive basis for a critique might come from the practice of Pablo *Picasso, who never, apart from a few small drawings, made a totally abstract work.

In recent years the greatest challenge to abstraction has come not from artistic conservatives but from developments in theory. The dominant issue has no longer been abstraction against figuration but the status of the art object (*see* CONCEPTUAL ART). Because of the impact on art theory of semiology (*see* BARTHES, ROLAND), the idea that form and colour can have some kind of 'intrinsic' value or 'universal meaning', apart from language and culture, seems far less plausible. The 'neutrality' of the formal values of abstract art is no longer taken for granted. For Peter *Halley, geometry is a metaphor, not for some underlying order, but for coercion and confinement. Looking today at the work of a Kandinsky, a Malevich, a Mondrian, perhaps even a Pollock, the spectator might well be moved as if by the expression of some lost religious faith.

Further Reading: B. Fer, *On Abstract Art* (1997)

E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (1963). The case for the prosecution is eloquently put.

Tate Gallery, *Towards a New Art: Essays on the Background to Abstract Art* (1980)

Abstract Classicism *See* HARD-EDGE PAINTING.

Abstract Expressionism The dominant movement in American modern art, principally painting, in the late 1940s and the 1950s, characterized by large scale and *gestural handling. It was the first major development in American art to achieve international status and influence, and it is often reckoned the most significant art movement anywhere since the Second World War. Certainly, more than any other movement, it was responsible for the replacement of Paris by New York as the world capital of modern art. Leading figures included Jackson *Pollock, Willem *de Kooning, Mark *Rothko, Barnett *Newman, Robert *Motherwell, Clyfford *Still, Adolph *Gottlieb, Franz *Kline, and Philip *Guston.

The phrase 'Abstract Expressionism' had originally been used in 1919 to describe certain paintings by Wassily *Kandinsky, and it was used in the same way by Alfred H. *Barr in 1929. In the context of modern American painting it was first used by the *New Yorker* art critic Robert Coates (1897–1973) in 1946 and it had become part of the standard critical vocabulary by the early 1950s. The painters embraced by the term worked mainly in New York and there were various ties of friendship and loose groupings among them, but they shared a similarity of outlook rather than of style—an outlook characterized by a spirit of revolt against tradition and a belief in spontaneous freedom of expression. The stylistic roots of Abstract Expressionism are complex, but despite its name it owed more to *Surrealism—with its stress on *automatism and intuition—than to *Expressionism. A direct source of inspiration came from the European Surrealists who took refuge in the USA during the Second World War. The work of Arshile *Gorky, who was strongly supported by André *Breton, is often regarded as the essential link between Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. Also important in this context was *Matta, who promoted what Meyer *Schapiro called the 'idea of the canvas as a field of prodigious excitement, unloosed energies'. The war also brought Peggy *Guggenheim back to America, and during its brief lifetime (1942–7) her Art of This Century gallery was the main showcase for Abstract Expressionism during its formative period.

The work of the Abstract Expressionists varied greatly and was sometimes neither abstract (de Kooning's *Woman* series) nor Expressionist (Rothko). It ranges from the explosive energy of Pollock's *Action Painting to the serene contemplativeness of Rothko's *Colour Field Painting. Even within these two polarities, however, there are certain qualities that are basic to most Abstract Expressionist painting: the preference for working on a huge scale; the emphasis placed on surface qualities so that the flatness of the canvas is stressed; the adoption of an *all-over type of treatment, in which the whole area of the picture is regarded as equally important. Quite apart from these visual technical characteristics, there was a certain unity of fundamental attitudes: the glorification of the act of painting itself; the conviction that abstract painting could convey significant meaning and should not be viewed in *formalist terms alone; and a belief in the absolute individuality of the artist (for which reason most of the Abstract Expressionists disliked being labelled with an 'ism', preferring *New York School as a group designation).

Almost without exception, the artists who created Abstract Expressionism were born between 1900 and 1915 and most of them struggled during their early careers, which coincided with the Depression. Apart from Motherwell, the major artists began as figurative painters, but generally moved towards abstraction in the late 1930s or early 1940s. The idea that these artists were beginning to create a new movement took shape in about 1943, and in 1945 Peggy Guggenheim mounted an exhibition called 'A Problem for Critics', almost as a challenge for someone to come up with a name for this movement. By 1948, when de Kooning had his first one-man show and Pollock first exhibited his drip paintings, it was approaching maturity. Initially the new way of painting was found perplexing or outlandish by many people, but during the 1950s the movement became an enormous critical and financial success. The influential writers Clement *Greenberg and Harold *Rosenberg suggested opposing interpretations of the movement. Greenberg emphasized its role in the formal and technical development of *Modernism, while Rosenberg took the view that the 'action painter' (*see* ACTION PAINTING) was involved in a kind of existentialist affirmation of human freedom.

Abstract Expressionism had passed its peak by 1960 and a reaction had taken place in the form of the cooler aesthetic of *Pop art and

*Post-Painterly Abstraction, but several of the major figures continued productively after this and a younger generation of artists carried on the Abstract Expressionist torch. Sculptors as well as painters were influenced by Abstract Expressionism, the leading figures including David *Smith, Ibram *Lassaw, Seymour *Lipton, and Theodore *Roszak. Some commentators, such as Eva Cockcroft in her article 'Abstract Expressionism, a Weapon of the Cold War' (*Artforum* June 1974), have argued for links between the international success of the movement and Cold War politics. The painter could be presented so as to exemplify American freedom as against the restrictions of the Communist world with its state directives for *Socialist Realism. Therefore the organization of an international tour for 'The New American Painting' in 1958 to 1959, by the International Programme of the New York *Museum of Modern Art, had a decided political dimension. Alfred H Barr's catalogue introduction said that the artists 'defiantly reject the conventional values of the society which surrounds them but they are not politically engagés'. In fact the personal political allegiances of the Abstract Expressionists varied enormously: the group included an anarchist (Newman) and a right-wing supporter of Senator McCarthy (Still), while the one-time Trotskyite Clement Greenberg described, with a measure of regret, Jackson Pollock as a 'god dam Stalinist'.

The early impact of Abstract Expressionism, at least for its admirers, was well put by the British painter and critic Andrew Forge (1923–2002). In 1974 he recalled how 'it seemed to me that painting had made a totally new definition of freedom. The structures I was looking at owed nothing, or so it seemed, to the closed, self-consistent notions of composition and pictorial syntax that my experience up to then had taught me to regard as mandatory' (Ashton). Although the movement was in decline by the end of the 1950s its legacy can be seen in most important American art of the following two decades, for instance in the preoccupation with overwhelming the spectator through scale.

Further Reading: Anfam (1990)
D. Ashton, *American Art Since 1945* (1982)
T. J. Clark, 'In Defence of Abstract Expressionism', *October*, no. 69 (summer 1994)
F. Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After* (2000)
Sandler (1970)
D. and C. Shapiro (eds.), *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (1990)

Abstract Impressionism A term coined by Elaine *de Kooning to describe paintings that resemble certain late *Impressionist pictures (notably those of *Monet) in their brushwork but have no representative content: 'Retaining the quiet uniform pattern of strokes that spread over the canvas without climax or emphasis, these followers keep the Impressionist manner of looking at a scene but leave out the scene.' In 1956 the critic Louis Finkelstein applied the term to Philip *Guston's paintings to distinguish them from the more exuberant type of *Abstract Expressionism known as *Action Painting, and in 1958 Lawrence *Alloway used the term as the title of an exhibition he organized in London; the artists represented included Bernard and Harold *Cohen, Sam *Francis, Patrick *Heron, and Nicolas de *Staël. The term has also been applied to various French abstract painters of the same period, for example *Bazaine and *Manessier.

abstraction 'In the fine arts, the practice or state of freedom from representational qualities; a work of art with these characteristics' (*OED*). Some critics prefer to restrict the term to those types of *abstract art that have their starting-point in the external world—in other words, those in which the image is 'abstracted' or distilled from the appearance of some real object or scene. Usually, however, the term is used as a convenient synonym for abstract art as a whole.

Abstraction-Création An association of abstract painters and sculptors formed in Paris in February 1931 in succession to the short-lived *Cercle et Carré group, whose mailing list the new association took over. The prime movers behind Abstraction-Création were Jean *Hélion, Auguste *Herbin, and Georges *Vantongerloo, who all practised the type of abstract art in which works are constructed from completely non-representational, usually geometrical, elements, rather than derived from natural appearances. Although geometrical abstraction was especially well represented in the association, it was open to abstract artists of all persuasions and the membership at one time rose to as many as 400. Artists of numerous nationalities joined, among them *Arp, *Gabo, *Kandinsky, *Lissitzky, *Mondrian, and *Pevsner. Many members had left the totalitarian regimes in Nazi

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Germany and Stalinist Russia, where avant-garde art was outlawed, and their presence in Paris helped to make it the most important centre for abstract art in the 1930s. Also included in the membership were artists who were never permanently resident in Paris, such as Barbara *Hepworth and Ben *Nicholson. The association operated by arranging group exhibitions and by publishing an illustrated annual entitled *Abstraction-Création: Art non-figuratif*, which appeared from 1932 to 1936, with different editors for each issue.

Abstraction Lyrique *See* LYRICAL ABSTRACTION.

Abstract Sublime A term coined *c.*1960 by the American art historian Robert Rosenblum (1927–2006) to characterize the feelings of vastness and solitude suggested by certain *Abstract Expressionist paintings, for example those of *Newman, *Rothko, and *Still. Newman had earlier used the word 'sublime' in connection with his own work ('The Sublime is Now', *Tiger's Eye*, December 1948). Rosenblum first used the term 'Abstract Sublime' in print as the title of an article in the February 1961 issue of **Art News*, and two years later Lawrence *Alloway coined the term 'American Sublime' to describe the same quality ('The American Sublime', *Living Arts*, June 1963). Rosenblum developed his ideas at book length in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (1975), in which he related Abstract Expressionism to a wider western tradition of the Romantic landscape. In 1994 David *Sylvester referred to the 'cosmic grandeur' of Newman, the 'cosmic energy' of *Pollock, and the 'cosmic pathos' of Rothko.

Abts, Tomma (1967–) German painter, born in Kiel. She moved to London in 1995 and has established a considerable reputation with a distinctive form of abstract painting. She uses a consistent format, always working on vertical canvases of 48 × 38 cm. The scale and vertical alignment tend to confront the spectator in the manner of a portrait. The titles of the paintings are all taken from a dictionary of regional German names, so enhancing the sense of a human presence. As the critic Jan Verwoert points out, unlike the travels into outer space and the future offered by early abstract painters such as El *Lissitzky, Abts' work takes abstraction 'down from heaven'. Although her paintings appear precise in their execution, they are the result, not of exact preplanning, but of a gradual process of adaptation and accretion. This sometimes results in quasi-illusionistic effects of space or light and shade, occasionally in close approximations of actual objects. The layers of accretions of thin paint recording the changes to the picture are just visible in relief. Abts was awarded the *Turner Prize in 2006.

- Tomma Abts in conversation with Jan Verwoert, Turner Prize artist's talk, Tate website.

académie A French term for a private art school, several of which flourished in Paris in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Entry to the official École des *Beaux-Arts was difficult (almost impossible for foreigners, who from 1884 had to take a vicious examination in French), and teaching there was conservative, so private art schools, with their more liberal regimes, were often frequented by progressive young artists. Three académies are particularly important in this context.

The **Académie Carrière** was opened in 1890 by Eugène Carrière (1849–1906), a painter of portraits, religious pictures, and—his speciality—scenes of motherhood. His characteristic style was misty, monochromatic, and vaguely *Symbolist. *Rodin was a great admirer of his work. There was no regular teaching at the school, though Carrière visited it once a week. It was here that *Matisse met *Derain and *Puy, thus expanding the nucleus of the future *Fauves.

The **Académie Julian** was founded in 1873 by Rodolphe Julian (1839–1907), whose work as a painter is now forgotten. The school had no entrance requirements, it was open from 8 am to nightfall, and it was soon the most popular establishment of its type. Julian opened several branches throughout Paris, one of them for women artists, and by the 1880s the student population was about 600. Although the Académie Julian became famous for the unruly behaviour of its students, it was regarded as a stepping-stone to the École des Beaux-Arts (Julian had astutely engaged teachers from the École as visiting professors). Among the French artists who studied there were *Bonnard, *Denis, *Matisse, *Vallotton, and *Vuillard. The list of distinguished foreign artists who studied there is very long.

The **Académie Ranson** was founded in 1908 by Paul Ranson (1864–1909), who had

studied at the Académie Julian. After Ranson's early death, his wife Marie-France took over as director, and his friends Denis and *Sérusier were among the teachers. Among later teachers at the school the most important was Roger *Bissière, who in the 1930s influenced many young painters in the direction of expressive abstraction: his pupils included *Le Moal, *Manessier, and *Vieira da Silva. The Académie Ranson remained a popular training centre for foreign artists up to and after the Second World War.

Further Reading: J. Milner, *The Studios of Paris* (1988)

Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris. *See* BOURDELLE, ÉMILE-ANTOINE.

Académie de l'Art Moderne (later **Académie de l'Art Contemporain),** Paris. *See* LÉGER, FERNAND.

Académie Montparnasse, Paris. *See* LHOTE, ANDRÉ.

Accardi, Carla (1924–) Italian painter and installation artist, a founder member of the *Forma Uno group in Rome in 1947. After the group dissolved in 1951 she went through a period of self-doubt but started painting again in 1953. Her early painting resembled automatic script on a monochrome ground in the manner of *Tobey's 'white writing', but she later moved away from this kind of *Art Informel to more deliberately planned compositions. This was in line with the tenets of the *Continuità group, which she joined in 1960. In 1965 she began painting on a transparent plastic called sicofoil, which at first she mounted on canvas but later mounted on wooden stretchers so that both support and the wall beneath would be visible. Subsequently she made the sicofoil into free-standing rolls. This use of the material was extended into installation in *Orange Environment* (1966–8), in which a painting on the wall is brought together with objects such as a bed, a tent, and a parasol, all in sicofoil with orange squiggles. Her work has been associated with *feminist artists in America, such as Joyce *Kozloff, who were concerned with *Pattern and Decoration, although she had little contact with activities on the other side of the Atlantic. She has stated that 'the artistic message is intrinsic to art itself, and its form when properly expressed is independent of the life of the artist'.

Further Reading: J.-P. Criqui, 'Carla Accardi', *Artforum International* (April 2002)

Acconci, Vito (1940–) American *Body and *Performance artist, born in New York. His background was not in the visual arts but in literature. In the 1960s he wrote poetry and his earliest performances were an extension of this practice. Rather than writing a poem about 'following', he enacted *Following Piece* (1969), in which he followed random passers-by until they went into a building. He sought a way to make such acts more public, but this underlined their introspective nature. In *Telling Secrets* (1971) he stood in a dark deserted shed on the Hudson River in the small hours of the morning whispering to late-night visitors secrets about himself 'which could have been totally detrimental to me if publicly revealed'. *Seedbed* (1971), probably his best-known work, had Acconci lying invisible under a ramp in the Sonnabend Gallery, New York. While there, he masturbated to fantasies concerning the unseen visitors above him. Acconci was influenced by the theories of the psychologist Kurt Lewin about the 'power fields' radiated by each individual. The audience became part of the physical space in which he moved. Although Acconci's activities are aligned to Performance and Body art, this idea of the engagement of the viewer with the work also brings him close to the preoccupations of some of the *Minimalist art of the period. Acconci stopped performing in 1974. In later years he has worked as an experimental architect.

Ackermann, Franz (1963–) German painter and installation artist, born in Neumarkt St Veit. He makes large semi-abstract works on the theme of travel and tourism. Sometimes these incorporate actual travel posters, as in his installation piece *Bologna* (2000). Sometimes there is simply a suggestion of fragments of buildings or landscape caught up in a great vortex. The critic Marco Meneguzzo has described the effect as 'a feeling of something slipping and sliding by, as if someone were looking out a train window, trying to scrutinize not so much the passing urban landscape as the very feeling of both absence and uniformity' (*Artforum International*, April 2001).

Ackling, Roger (1947–) British artist. Born in Isleworth, London, he lives and works in Norfolk. He graduated from *St Martin's School of Art in the late 1960s, at the time of

questioning about the nature of sculpture. His practice has some affinity with that of Richard *Long, in that it involves an active engagement with nature. Ackling makes works by using the effects of the sun through a magnifying glass to burn series of dots, which become lines on pieces of found wood.

acrylic A modern synthetic paint, made with a resin derived from acrylic acid, that combines some of the properties of oils and watercolour. It was the first new painting medium in centuries and has become a serious rival to oil paint. Acrylics are a refined version of paints developed for industrial use and can be applied to almost any surface with a variety of tools (brush, *airbrush, knife, sponge, and so on) to create effects ranging from thin washes to rich impasto and with a matt or gloss finish. Various additions can be used to modify the appearance. Most acrylic paints are water-based, although some are oil compatible, using turpentine as a thinner. Thinly applied paint dries in a matter of minutes, thickly applied paint in hours—much quicker than oils. Colours, which include fluorescent and metallic tints, are characteristically clear and intense. Acrylic paint first became available to artists in the 1940s in the USA and certain American painters discovered that it offered them advantages over oils. Colour stain painters (*see* COLOUR FIELD PAINTING) such as Helen *Frankenthaler and Morris *Louis, for example, found that they could thin the paint so that it flowed over the canvas yet still retained its full brilliance of colour. David *Hockney took up acrylic during his first visit to Los Angeles in 1963; he had earlier tried and rejected the medium, but American-manufactured acrylic was at this time far superior to that available in Britain, and he felt that the flat, bold colours helped him to capture the strong Californian light. Hockney used acrylic almost exclusively for his paintings until 1972, when he returned to oils because he had come to regard their slowness in drying as an advantage: 'you can work for days and keep altering it as well; you can scrape it off if you don't like it. Once acrylic is down you can't get it off.' In spite of these differences in properties, the finished appearance of an acrylic painting is sometimes more or less indistinguishable from an oil, and some artists (for example Richard *Estes) have often combined the two techniques in the same painting. In addition to being versatile, acrylics are less susceptible to heat and damp than traditional media, but since the 1990s some doubts have been expressed about their permanence.

Action *See* AKTION.

Action Painting A type of dynamic, impulsive painting, practised by certain *Abstract Expressionists, in which the artist applies paint with energetic *gestural movements—sometimes by dribbling or splashing—and with no preconceived idea of what the picture will look like. Sometimes the term has been used loosely as a synonym for Abstract Expressionism, but this usage is misleading, as Action Painting represents only one aspect of the movement. The term was coined by the critic Harold *Rosenberg in an article entitled 'The American Action Painters' in **Art News* in December 1952. Rosenberg saw Action Painting as a means of giving free expression to the artist's instinctive creative forces and he regarded the act of painting itself as more significant than the finished work: 'At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.' Although the term 'Action Painting' soon became established, many critics were unconvinced by Rosenberg's idea of the canvas being 'not a picture but an event': Mary McCarthy, for example, wrote that 'you cannot hang an event on a wall, only a picture'.

Rosenberg's article did not mention individual painters and was not illustrated, but the artist who is associated above all with Action Painting is Jackson *Pollock, who vividly described how he felt when working on a canvas laid on the floor: 'I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting . . . When I am *in* my painting, I am not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.' However, in a statement made to a less sympathetic audience (the listeners to a radio interview), Pollock was anxious to allay the suspicions of those who viewed his work as without skill by playing down the role of chance. 'When I am painting I have a general notion as