



“Angels, Demons, and Savages: Pollock, Ossorio, Dubuffet” Explores the Cross-Cultural Dialogue

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by Pat Rogers

DISPATCH - JULY 20, 2013 (4:30 p.m.)

WATER MILL, NY-

The Parrish Art Museum unveils a major exhibition exploring the cross-cultural artistic dialogue between Jackson Pollock, Alfonso Ossorio and Jean Dubuffet. “Angels, Demons, and Savages: Pollock, Ossorio, Dubuffet” is the first to explore the relationship between the American Abstract Expressionism painter, the Philippines-born artist and art patron, and the French painter and sculptor.

The exhibition opens on July 21 and continues through Oct 27. It is co-presented by the Parrish Art Museum and The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. The exhibition was on view at The Phillips Collection from Feb. 9 through May 12, 2013. It was organized by Klaus Ottmann, currently Phillips curator at large, and Phillips Director Dorothy Kozinski. Ottmann leads a tour on July 21 to help open the exhibition at the Parrish Art Museum.

“Angels, Demons, and Savages: Pollock, Ossorio, Dubuffet” points a lens to the years between 1948 to 1952—the period of time when the art world’s center of gravity was shifting from Europe to the United States. The exhibition includes over 50 paintings and works on paper. It also reunites a number of works by Pollock and Dubuffet that were dispersed from Ossorio’s former collection after his death in 1990, according to The Parrish.

Alfonso Ossorio is the central figure in the exhibition.

Heir to a vast Philippine sugar fortune and educated in England and the United States, Ossorio began exhibiting in New York City in 1941. In 1949, Gallerist Betty Parsons introduced Ossorio to Pollock and Lee Krasner in 1949. After forming friendships with Pollock and Dubuffet and acquiring their work, Ossorio visited Pollock and Krasner in Springs and spent the summer in East Hampton, NY.



“Reforming Figure” by Alfonso Ossorio,

1952. Ink, wax, and watercolor on paper, 60 x 38 inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Ossorio Foundation, 2008. Courtesy Parrish Art Museum.

Ossorio traveled to Paris a year later, at Pollock's suggestion, to meet Dubuffet. Ossorio spent a year in Paris, during which he and Dubuffet became close. After returning to the United States, Ossorio purchased The Creeks, a large estate on Georgica Pond in East Hampton, where he lived until his death. The Creeks became a cultural hub where friends such as Pollock, Dubuffet, Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, and Costantino Nivola gathered, as well as the home of Ossorio's art collection and gardens.

Dubuffet followed Ossorio to the U.S. in October 1951. Ossorio tried to bring Pollock and Dubuffet together at a dinner at the Pollock house in Springs, but Pollock never appeared for the occasion, and the two artists never met, despite their interest in each others work, according to the Parrish.



“Couple and Progeny” by Alfonso Ossorio, 1951. Ink, wax, watercolor, and cut paper mounted on black paper, 30 x 22 inches. Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y. Gift of Edward F. Dragon. Courtesy Parrish Art Museum.

As artists, Pollock, Ossorio, and Dubuffet sought to create a different pictorial language through innovative use of materials and techniques, like so many artists of their time, according to The Parrish. While each was classically trained, all three moved away from traditional easel painting to develop such techniques as dripping, pouring, rubbing, and throwing their materials onto paper, canvas, and hardboard panels placed on horizontal surfaces.

Ottmann summed up the connection between Pollock, Ossorio and Dubuffet this way:

“One thing that really created a strong affinity among these three artists was that all three were extremely interested in process and materiality and were very experimental. Pollock is well-known for having pioneered new techniques, working with materials that until then had never been used in art. Dubuffet similarly used anything—even dirt from the street; he was extremely interested in raw material and in process. Ossorio did the same, and he continued to do it even in his late work.”

Of the three artists, Ossorio is the least visible in art history texts.

“He was a multicultural artist who synthesized Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Art Brut with his Hispanic and Asian roots,” said Ottmann.

In the late 1940s, Ossorio developed wax-resist technique, building up a rich visual vocabulary in layers of wax, black ink, water-based paintings, and other drawing materials. Dubuffet praised Ossorio’s “rich and complicated grammar.” While Ossorio learned from Pollock how the medium itself could become the image and from Dubuffet how a consciously intended image could be abstracted to its most primitive essentials, his work, though highly expressive, stopped short of absolute abstraction.

Pollock is most strongly associated with his drip paintings, which culminated in his exhibition at Betty Parsons in the fall of 1950. In 1950 and 1951, Pollock worked, at times, in Ossorio’s studio in Greenwich Village, where he was surrounded by Ossorio’s paintings.

It was during this period that Pollock abandoned his iconic abstract drip paintings and produced the Black Pourings, a series of “drawings” on unprimed cotton duck using mostly black industrial paint. Recently, eminent Pollock scholars that includes Helen Harrison, director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, and Francis O’Connor, coauthor of the Pollock catalogue raisonné, have considered Ossorio’s role in the evolution of Pollock’s art—specifically the figurative Black Pourings, according to the Parrish.



**“Number 7” by Jackson Pollock, 1952, 1952.
Enamel and oil on canvas, 53 1/8 x 40 inches.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Purchase, Emilio Azcarraga Gift, in honor of
William S. Lieberman, 1987.2013 © The
Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Parrish Art
Museum.**



**“Untitled” by Jackson Pollock, 1951. Ink on
Japanese paper, 17-1/2 x 22 inches. Parrish Art
Museum, Water Mill, N.Y. Gift of Edward F. Dragon
in Memory of Alfonso Ossorio, 1993.3. 2013 © The
Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York. Courtesy Parrish Art Museum.**

Dubuffet was not embraced by French critics and curators during the 1940s. His use of unconventional materials as sand, asphalt, gravel, and household paints and his interest in art brut (known now as outsider art) were controversial in France. But after Clement Greenberg wrote positively about his work, Dubuffet became the most visible and talked-about French artist in New York.



**“Corps de dame jaspe” by Jean Dubuffet.
Courtesy Parrish Art Museum.**

In 1949, Dubuffet cofounded the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, a collection of 1,200 works by 100 artists working outside the prevailing culture.

“The author of this art draws all...from within themselves, and not from the clichés of classical art or the latest art trends,” Dubuffet said.



**“Paysage au Chien” by Jean Dubuffet. Courtesy
Parrish Art Museum.**

When the Compagnie was dissolved, Dubuffet persuaded Ossorio to install the Art Brut collection at The Creeks. While the collection remained there until 1962, most of the American artists who saw it, including Pollock and Clyfford Still, were unimpressed.

“Angels, Demons, and Savages: Pollock, Ossorio, Dubuffet” is co-organized by the Parrish Art Museum and The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanying the exhibition was co-published by The Phillips Collection and Yale University Press. The catalogue also includes the first English translation of Dubuffet's major essay on Ossorio and an in-depth study of the materials and techniques used in the works of the three artists, prepared collaboratively by Phillips Head of Conservation Elizabeth Steele and Paper Conservator Sylvia Albro with independent conservator Chantal Bernicky and Philadelphia Museum of Art conservator Scott Homolka.

The catalogue also features essays by Ottmann and Alicia Longwell, the Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Chief Curator, Art and Education at the Parrish Art Museum.

BASIC FACTS: “Angels, Demons, and Savages: Pollock, Ossorio, Dubuffet” opens on July 21

and remains on view through Oct 27, 2013. An exhibition tour by Klaus Ottmann will be held on July 21 at 11:15 a.m. A Parrish Art Museum Members Reception will be held for this exhibition and “Michelle Stuart: Drawn from Nature” on July 27, 2013 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Reservations are required for both events.

“Michelle Stuart: Drawn from Nature” also opens on July 21 and remains on view through Oct 27, 2013.

The Parrish Art Museum is located at 279 Montauk Highway Water Mill, NY 11976.
www.parrishart.org.

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