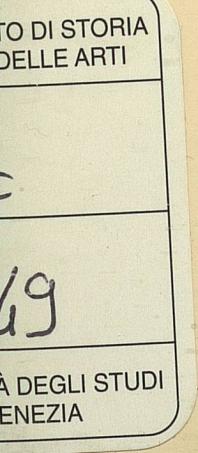


# Lee Gatch





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MAY 17 - JUNE 18, 1960

World House Galleries 987 Madison Avenue New York



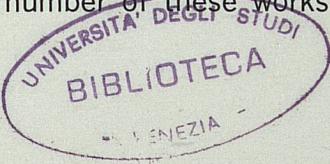
## LEE GATCH

### RECENT PAINTINGS

There exists in painting in the United States today—and it is becoming true on a worldwide basis—a single great vortex, which has drawn all manner of painters into its whorls, and in which art is synonymous with surface activity. Some of the characteristics of this prevalent mode in art are instability, strong tactile appeal, disregard for permanence, vigor of execution and a motion-charged end product. Standing well beyond the reach of this centripetal current, yet fully cognizant of it, are those isolated painters who have struggled singly toward artistic maturity, whose stature is the result of independent evolution and exacting, self-imposed demands. Among those painters who have eschewed ready-made answers and collective solutions is Lee Gatch, who is distinguished today precisely because he has refused to capitulate to fads and has maintained over many years a selfcharted course in the direction of greater penetration and its ever more succinct and perfect transmission. Fastidious craftsmanship, aversion to the obvious, reverence for nature and respect for the validity of personal vision, and an insistence on austerity or the avoidance of the superfluous in his thoroughly realized compositions—these are some of the prized and distinctive qualities of Gatch's work.

The present exhibition, consisting of paintings completed in the last two years, typifies in its range of themes the breadth of his comprehensive vision. While the canvases relate to one another stylistically or refer to themes which have occupied the painter in the past, each is autonomous, both in its subject and in the formal treatment which the artist has found appropriate to the subject. Thus the near at hand and commonplace subjects, such as farm animals in a field, or the single tree which becomes akin to a personage, or a group of bicycle riders on a hilly road, are juxtaposed with the exotic and poetic images of the **Peacock Tapestry** or **The Lover**, with the make-believe world of the circus or carnival, and with references to Christian and classical symbology. Taken as a whole, these works form a compendium of the concerns of a perceptive and reflective being, at once responsive to his immediate environment, yet also the recipient of the inherited symbology which links mankind with the ages. Transferred to canvas through clearly articulated, simplified shapes, strikingly arranged, in a tranquil range of subdued yet glowing colors, these diverse themes become a unified presentation of the artist's point of view, a view which comprehends far-reaching interrelationships and acknowledges both the joy and the mystery in the aspects of experience chosen for depiction.

A recent innovation which appears often in this exhibition is the incorporation of canvas collage into the fabric, as it were, of the painting itself. Pieces of canvas are painted or stained and cut into shapes conforming to the pattern of the painting, and affixed to the canvas in such a way that they play an integral role in the composition as well as restating or emphasizing the material surface of the painting. A number of these works are called



tapestries, and the effect is indeed tapestry-like, for the whole painting becomes a complex interweaving of paint and canvas which asserts the unity of image and material and negates the possibility of illusionistic space. The device is well suited to Gatch's planar rendering of space which disregards volumes and illusionary distances in favor of overlapping planes. The flat collage pieces are capable of standing for planes within the painting while leaving inviolate the two-dimensional character of the canvas surface.

The paintings of Lee Gatch are not assertive; they do not call attention to their means or insist on their message—even the subject sometimes eludes the initial glance and one first notes a pleasing and provocative arrangement of shapes. As the subject makes itself gradually apparent, one becomes aware of the whole intricate involvement of theme and forms and aware, too, of the countless subtleties and small improvisations which give these paintings their sustaining power. For, unlike so many canvases which fail to live up to the force of their initial impact, these reticent canvases have the capacity to hold the interest indefinitely and to grow in significance as one penetrates their intricacies. This is the result of the careful, disciplined planning as well as of the meticulous execution which keep Gatch's output very limited, but at the same time give rise to the near-perfection and sense of completeness which distinguish each work.

One of the most serenely pastoral of the recent canvases, **Green Goat Tapestry** (reproduced in color) typifies in its color and compositional detail the fastidious care which the artist lavishes on the simplest of subjects, itself indicative of his attitude toward life in all its manifestations. The head and neck of the goat project in silhouette from the lower left edge of the canvas, occupying the foreground plane of the painting and linked to the opposite edge by a looping line, suggesting a tether, which encircles the animal's head like a halo and forms a smaller circle on the far right. In the center, somewhat distant, is a field with farm buildings which blend into the landscape of which they are but a feature. Portions of both distant and foreground planes are inlaid with canvas patches which give a unity of surface to the whole and provide a rhythmic alternation between the immateriality of thin washes of paint and the tangibility of the collage; here as elsewhere, the neatly fitting pieces are interlarded with thick glossy paint which serves as mortar, filling the interstices between the delicately frayed edges. The slanting inner rectangle, almost always used by Gatch as a spatial device and as a delimiting enclosure for the kernel of a painting, is made up in this canvas of fluctuating greys and greens, and is defined partly by drawn line and in part through color alternation, while its base is cut off by the painting's edge. The plane given by this rectangle overlaps the foreground and encompasses the middle distance, linking animal and field; the fact that it continues off the bottom of the canvas heightens the spatial ambiguity and further flattens the composition. Although the color is restrained, the use of transparent washes, the softly glowing yellow-white background, and the small strategic areas of orange flood the painting with a diffuse luminosity set off by sharp black accents. Numerous subtleties of composition, variations in the nature of edges, contrasts between

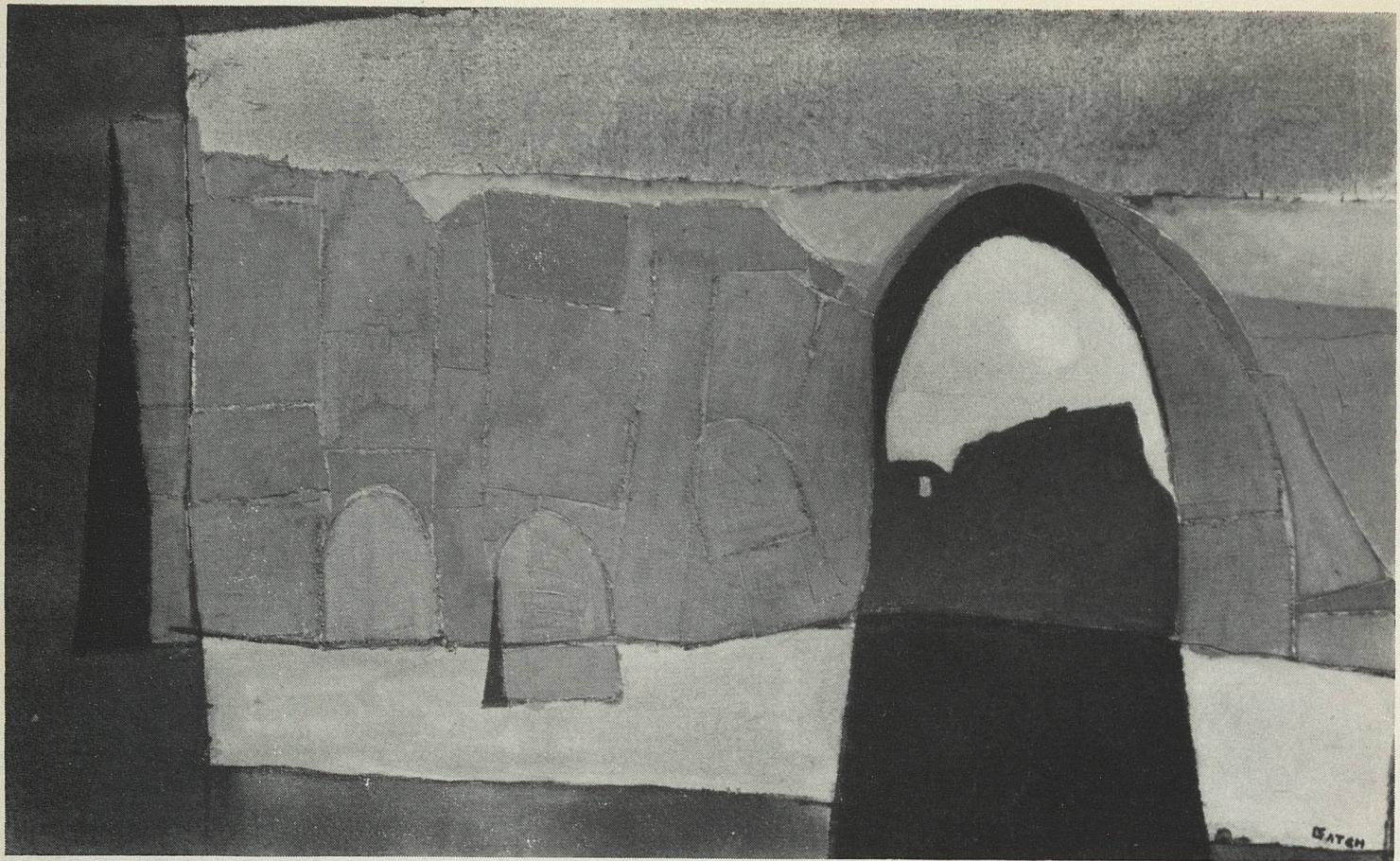
opaque and transparent, between line and shape, and the gently posed riddles on spatial relationships or the interchangeability of substance and void, constantly engage the observer and make the process of discovery an absorbing one.

Illustrative of a very different aspect of Gatch's work, **Leda** with its shrouded mysteries and pale illumination offers a striking contrast to the bucolic **Goat Tapestry**. Two great dark blocks or planes, set askew, and only briefly contiguous, enclose the shapes of figure and bird. The very pale yellow circle around the grey-plumaged swan repeats the orb of the moon in the upper left, endowing the bird with a celestial aura, while the truncated, earthly figure is by contrast partially surrounded by a black shadow. The physicality of the figure, gliding down a path of light, is made more pronounced by the dark brown canvas patches which form her mantle, while the swan, less material and more figmentary, is brushed in tenuous grey strokes. Again in this canvas the lucid shapes are invented, not borrowed, and the composition is newly conceived, not the repetition of a formula. The effect is one of suspension, of the fleeting moment which has been transfixed for eternity.

Each of these works is a fresh adventure, a challenge and a delight, and one learns to approach them in a spirit of anticipation. One of the most provocative canvases of this exhibition and certainly one of the most striking in terms of composition is **Kissing the Moon**, a contemporary variation on the Winslow Homer work, a painting fraught with tantalizing complexities. Partaking of a wholly different mood is **The Lover**, a poignant work whose spare and simple forms are eloquently descriptive of a poetic yearning. Further contrasts are offered by **The Beech** whose serenity is established by its dominant circular form and undulant lines and whose whole character suggests sturdiness and sheltering strength, or by the gravitations of **The Acrobats**, or the infinitely various repetitions of a basic unit seen in **Tapestry to a Square**. The reserve of these paintings is ultimately one of their most ingratiating qualities; the artist knows that the greater value is placed on the treasures that are less accessible and that the art which reveals itself more slowly gives the more enduring pleasure. In this exhibition the magnificent maturity of Lee Gatch as an artist is more assuredly manifest than ever.

April 1960

By Martica Sawin

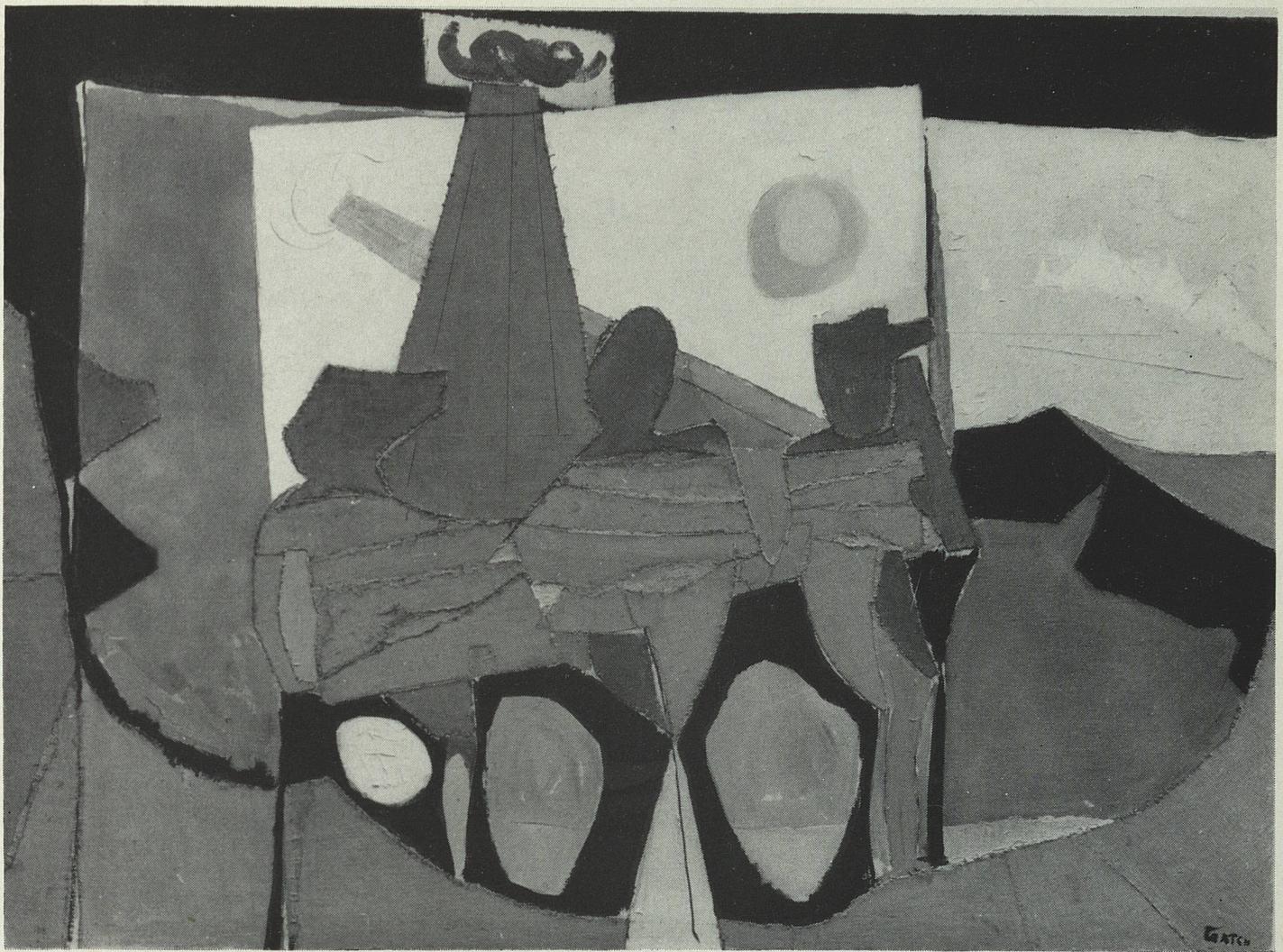


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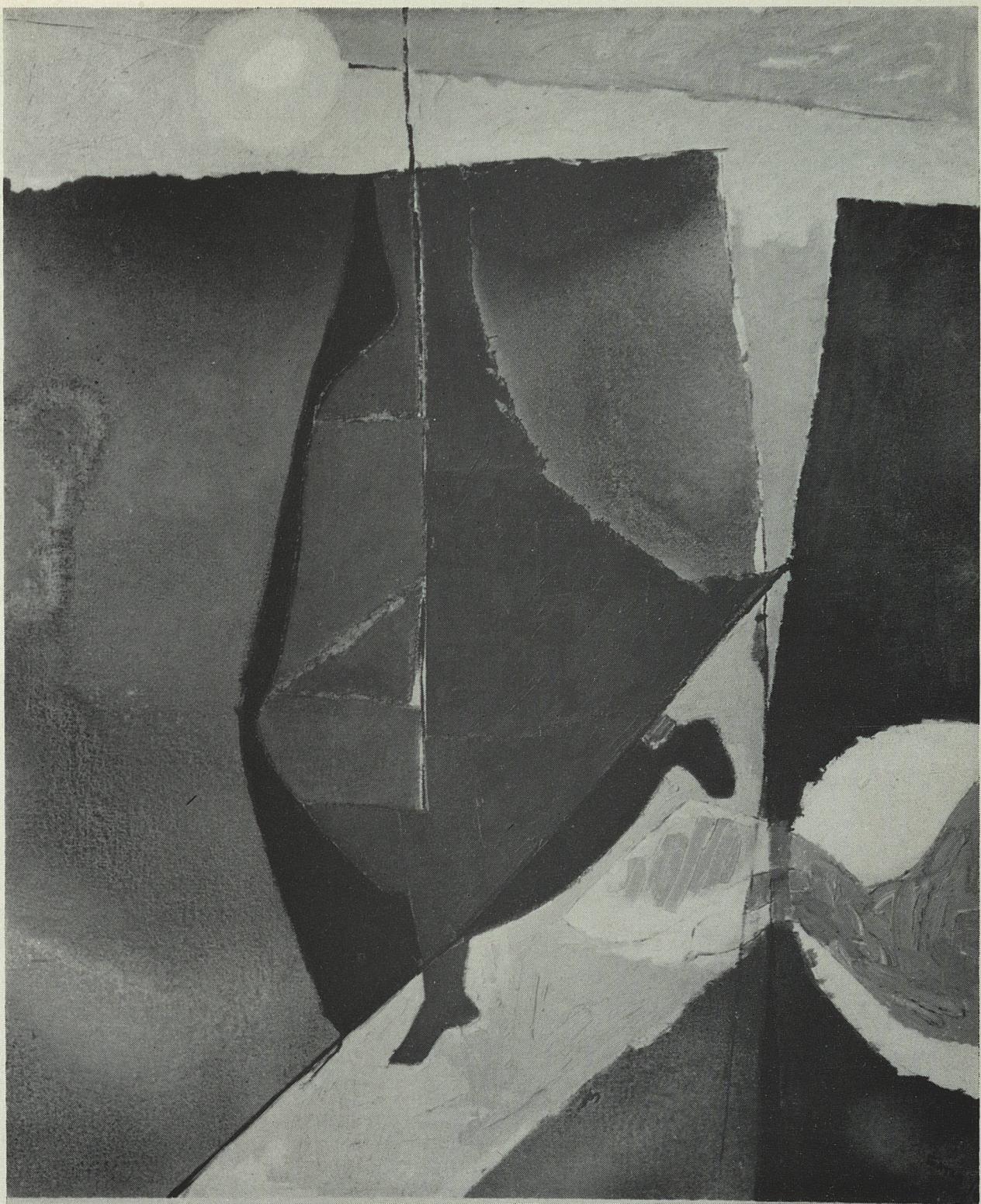


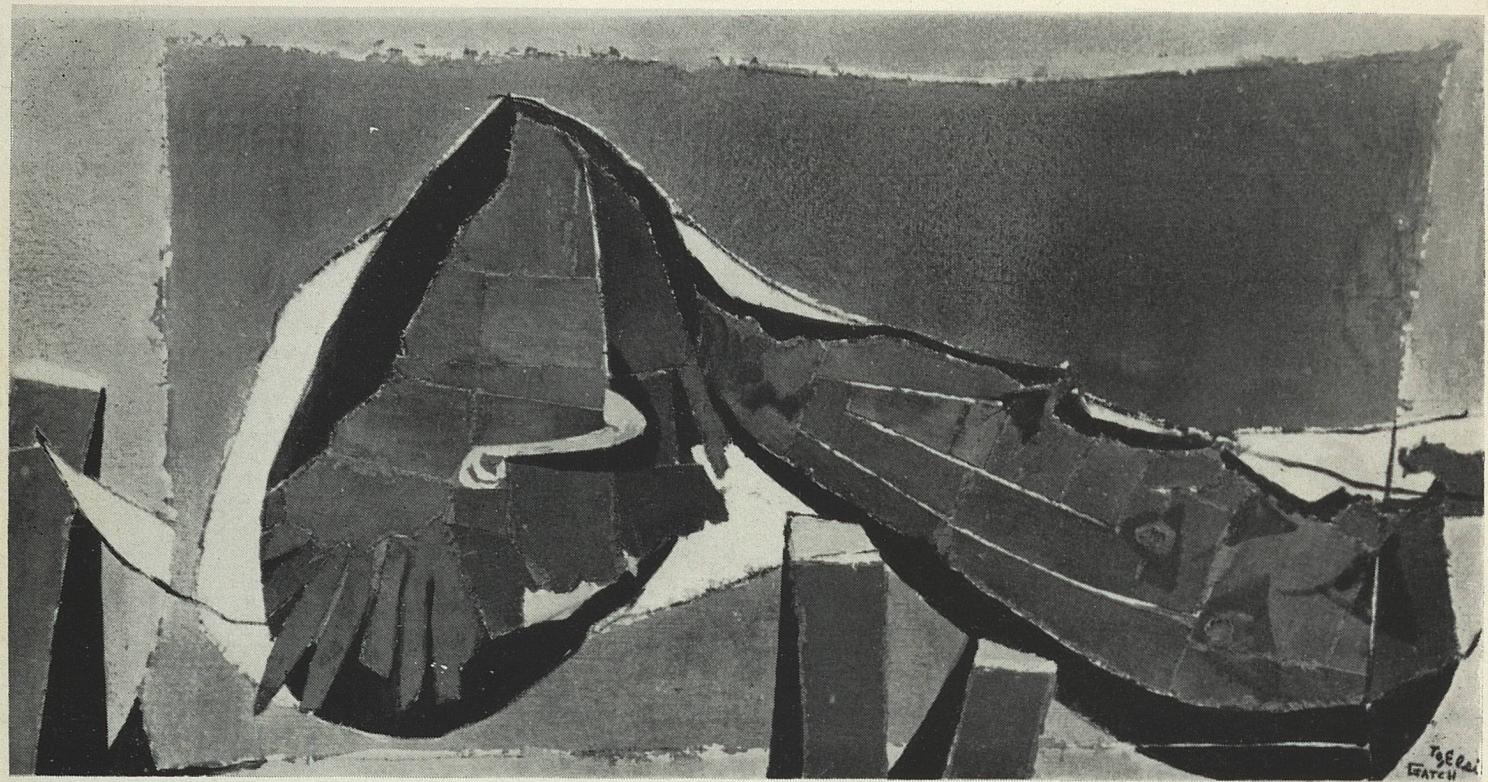


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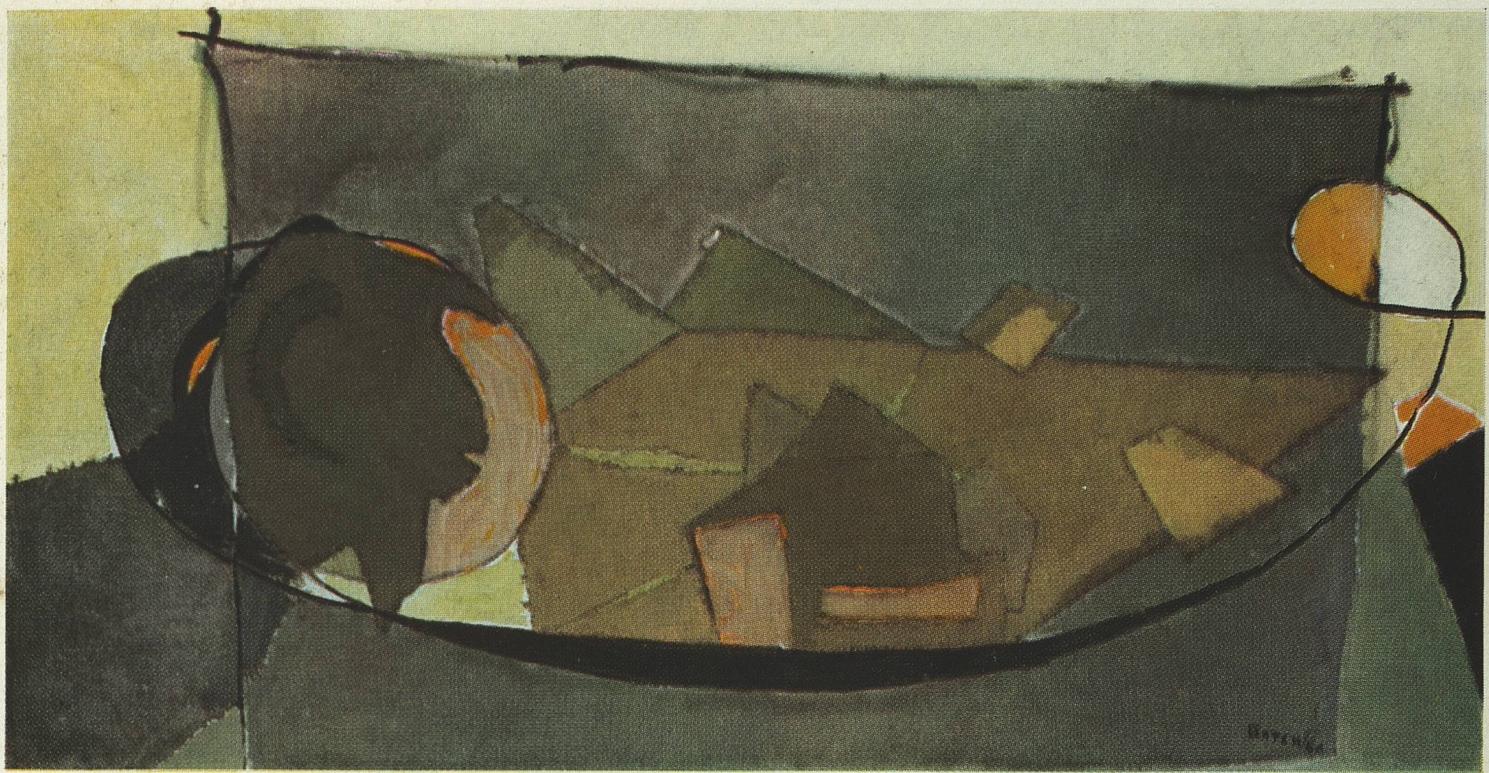




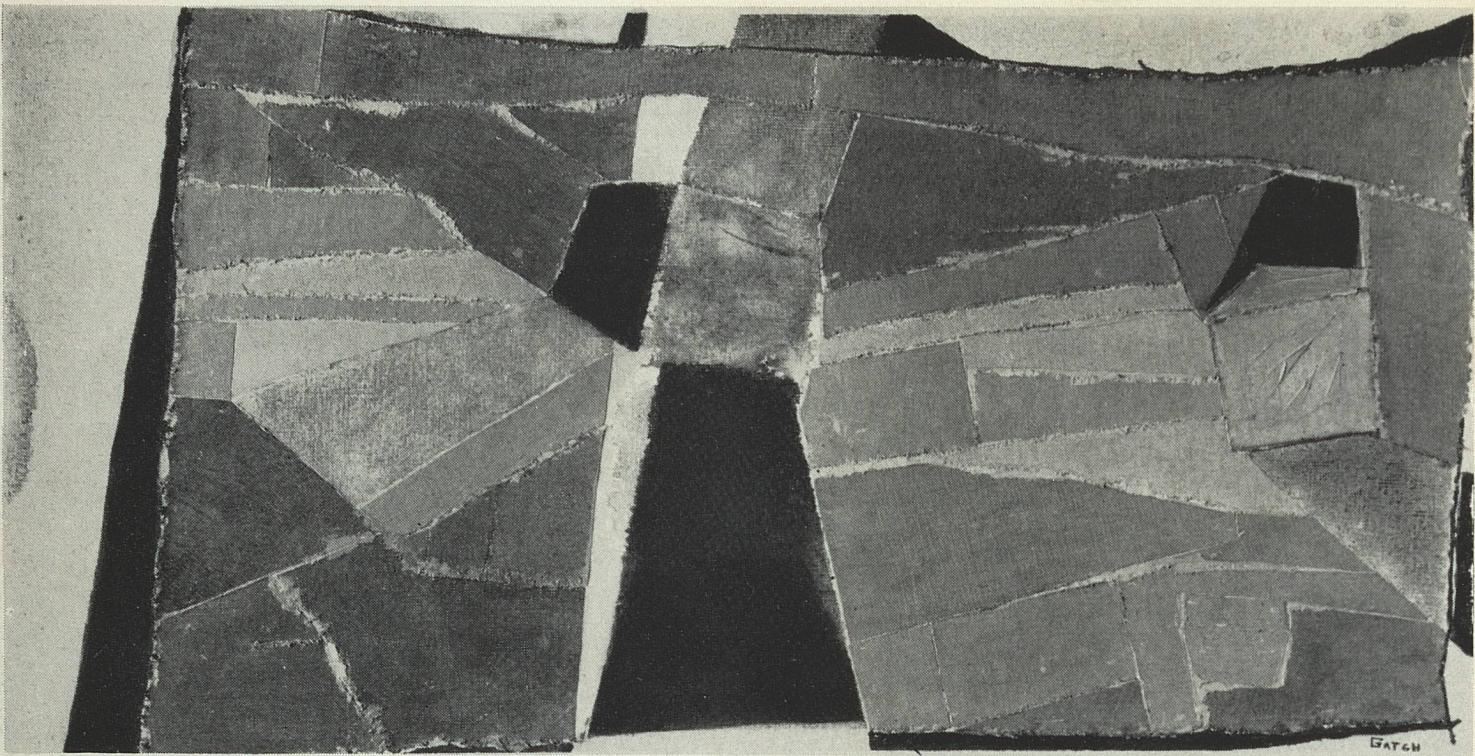




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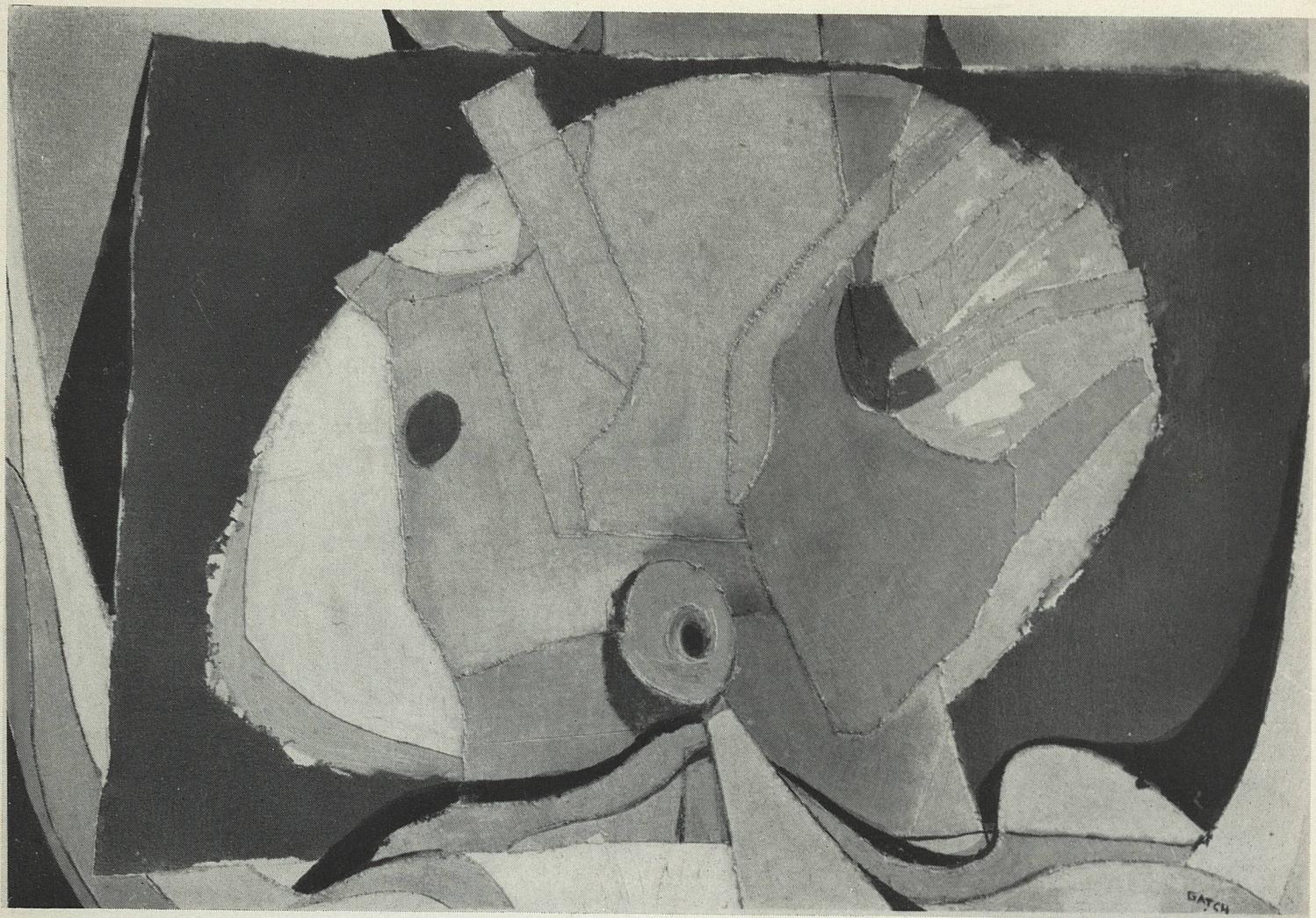


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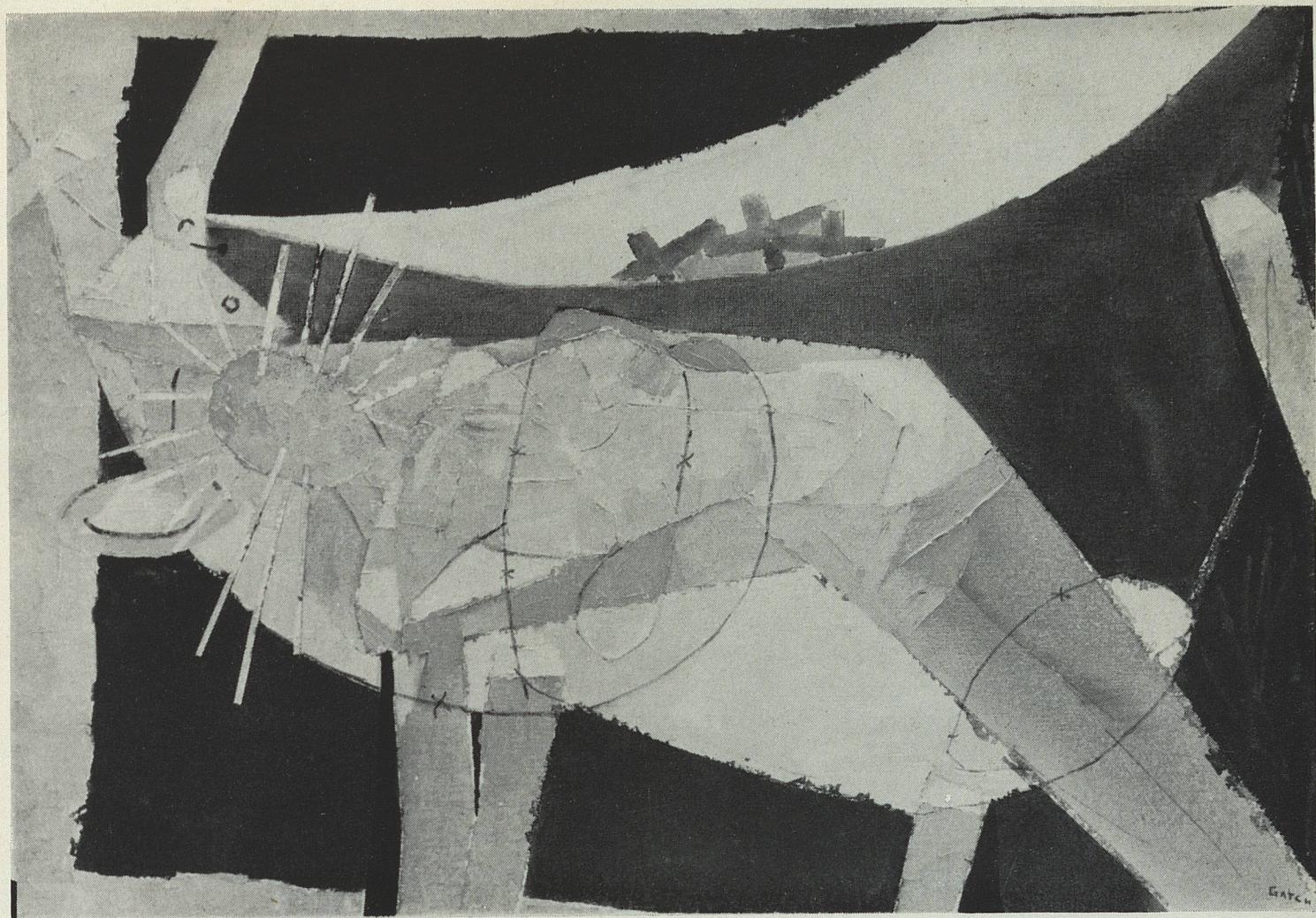




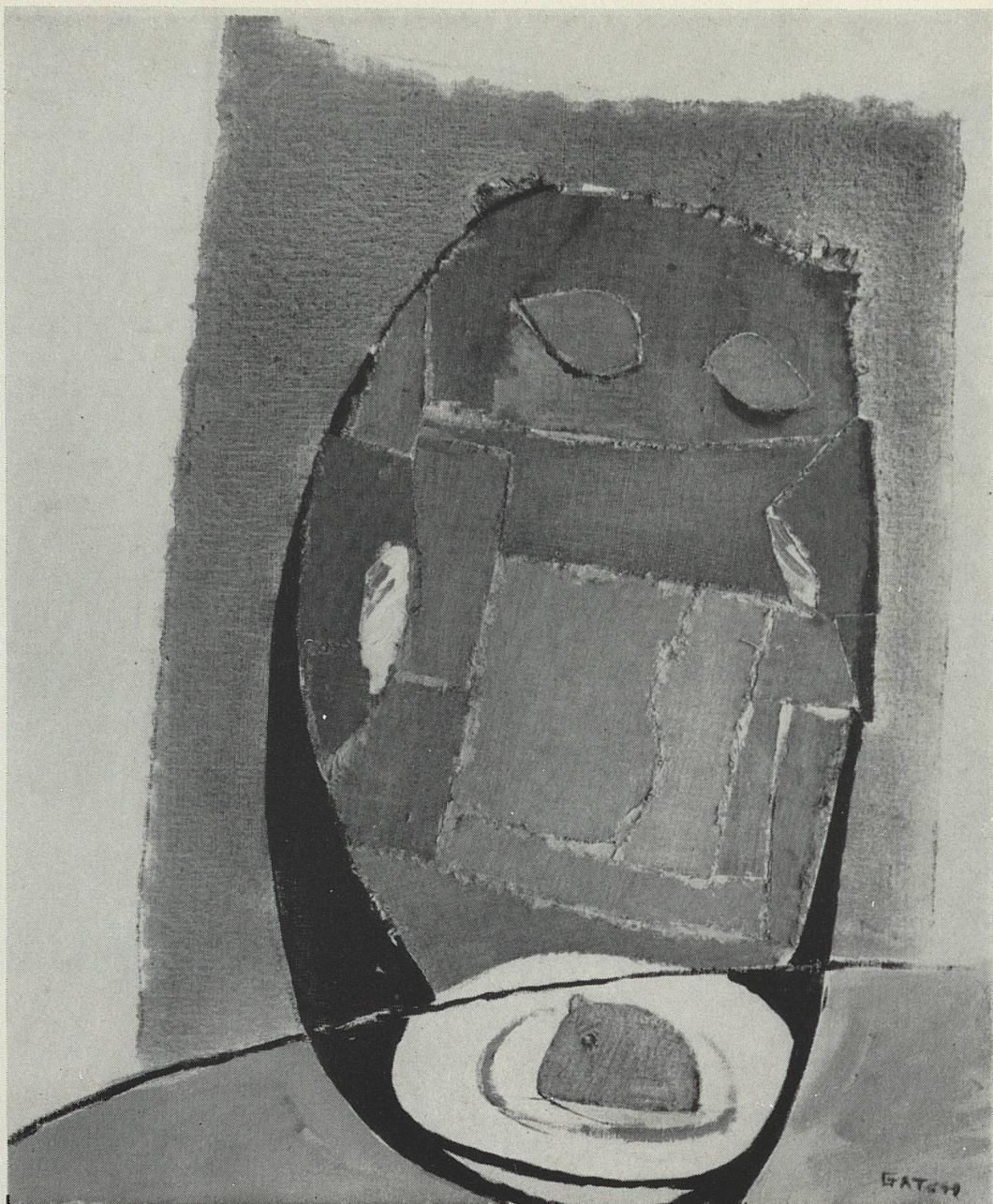
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## CATALOGUE

- 1 BOVINE TAPESTRY 1958  
oil on canvas  
19 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 35 $\frac{5}{8}$
- 2 THE CYCLISTS 1958  
oil on canvas  
25 x 30  
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Irving Levick, Buffalo, N.Y.
- 3 PIETA 1958  
oil on canvas  
34 x 49 $\frac{3}{4}$   
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. William P. Wood, Haverford, Pa.
- 4 WINTER WILLOWS 1958  
oil on canvas  
33 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 49 $\frac{1}{2}$   
Lent by Miss Barbara F. Babcock, New York, N.Y.
- 5 ARCH OF SILENCE 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
23 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 39 $\frac{3}{4}$   
Lent by Mr. Joseph H. Hirshhorn, New York, N.Y.
- 6 THE BEECH 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
33 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 49 $\frac{3}{4}$
- 7 THE HEDGE 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
20 x 39 $\frac{3}{4}$   
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Phillip A. Bruno, New York, N.Y.
- 8 KISSING THE MOON 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
36 x 49 $\frac{3}{4}$
- 9 THE LOVER 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
44 x 36
- 10 PEACOCK TAPESTRY 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
19 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 29 $\frac{3}{4}$

11 TABLE OWL 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
24 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20 $\frac{3}{4}$

12 TAPESTRY TO A SQUARE 1959  
oil and collage on canvas  
19 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 39 $\frac{3}{4}$

13 LEDA 1959-60  
oil and collage on canvas  
43 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 36

14 THE ACROBATS 1960  
oil and collage on canvas  
43 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 35 $\frac{1}{2}$

15 ARCHAIC TREE 1960  
oil and collage on canvas  
48 x 32

16 GREEN GOAT TAPESTRY 1960  
oil and collage on canvas  
19 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 37 $\frac{3}{4}$

All dimensions are in inches  
Height precedes width

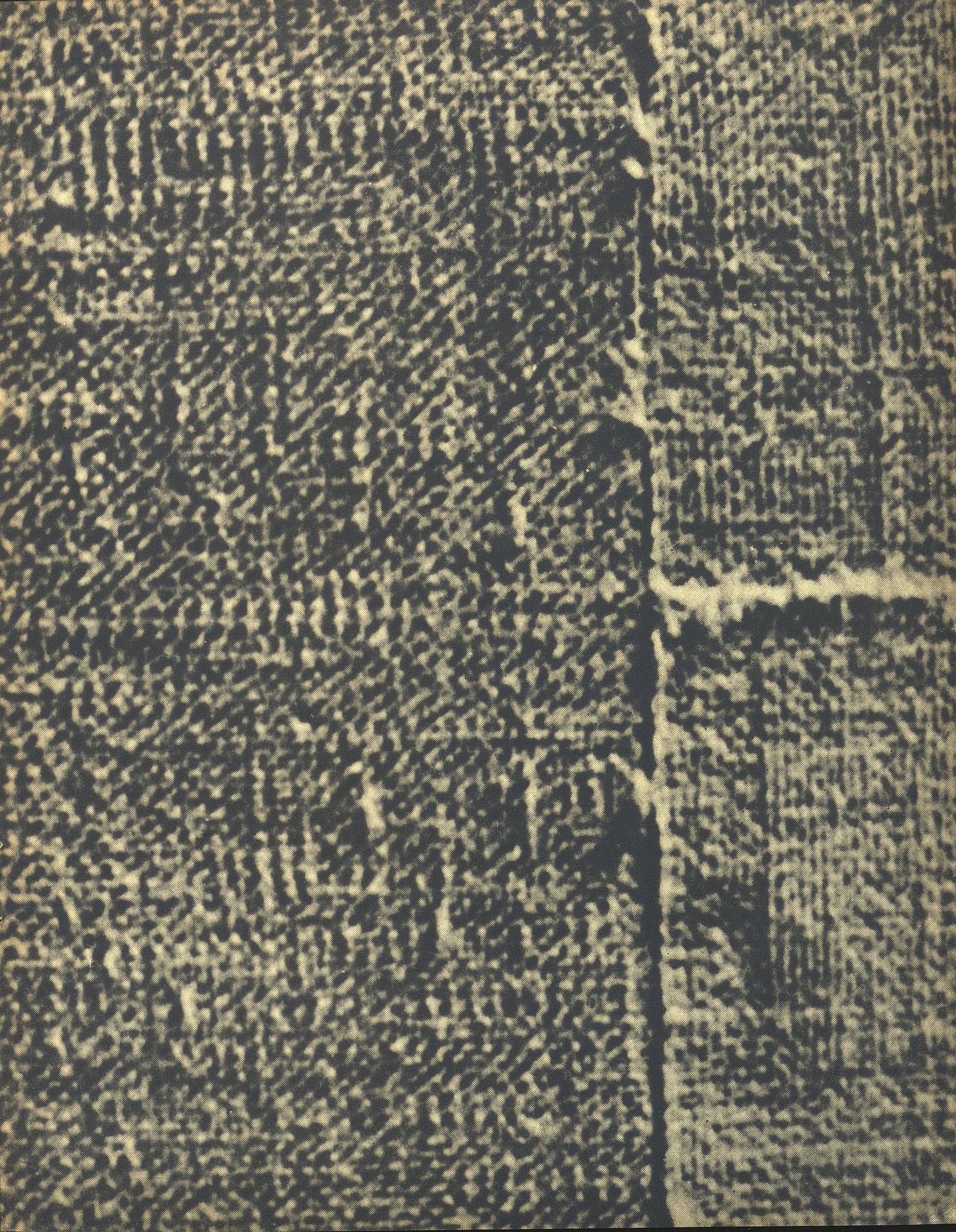
We gratefully acknowledge the generous loans made by the following collectors — Miss Barbara F. Babcock, Mr. and Mrs. Phillip A. Bruno, Mr. Joseph H. Hirshhorn, Mr. and Mrs. Irving Levick, and Mr. and Mrs. William P. Wood.





design and typography by Stella Yang

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