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ART *Voice*



A New York Interview with

ADOLPH

American Triumph Unnoticed by Press,

By GORDON BROWN

PIONEER Abstract-Expressionist Adolph Gottlieb, his health greatly restored, is back from a four-week tour of Brazil, where he won the Grand Prix at the famous São Paulo Bienal. Gottlieb is the first American to have ever obtained this award, which supersedes even the First Prizes accorded to English painter Alan Davie and Italian sculptor Pomodoro. In the past, the Museum of Modern Art has always assumed responsibility for the American Section of the Bienal, although delegating to other institutions the task of carrying out the program. This time, the State Department took charge, allocating funds for shipping, installing and returning art works representing the United States. The State Department also paid for the expenses of our Commissioner and sent Adolph Gottlieb on a trip to Brazil, although no one knew, at the time, that Gottlieb was destined to win the Grand Prize.

Our Commissioner, Martin Friedman, Director of the Walker Art Center, performed three tasks: (1) He selected the artists who represented the United States. (2) He supervised the shipping and installation of the American Section. (3) He served on the international jury, which awarded the prizes.

Prize winner Gottlieb, my favorite Abstract-Expressionist painter, told me the story behind the principal American exhibit as follows: "Martin Friedman had organized a show of my works at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The exhibition was to move on to the Los Angeles County Museum, the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco and to other museums. When Friedman was appointed our Commissioner at São Paulo, he asked me whether he could transport my show at the Walker Art Center to Brazil. I found I couldn't do both the Bienal and the American travelling exhibition. There weren't enough pictures. Most of the works would have to be borrowed, and it is difficult to retain paintings for over a year when they belong to someone else. I had to make up my mind whether to show in Brazil or America. Even though I received such advice as 'Nobody will see your work in Brazil: you won't sell,' and despite the fact that my Walker Art Center exhibition was not planned for the Bienal, I decided I wanted to represent the United States in Brazil."

"How was your show planned?" I asked.

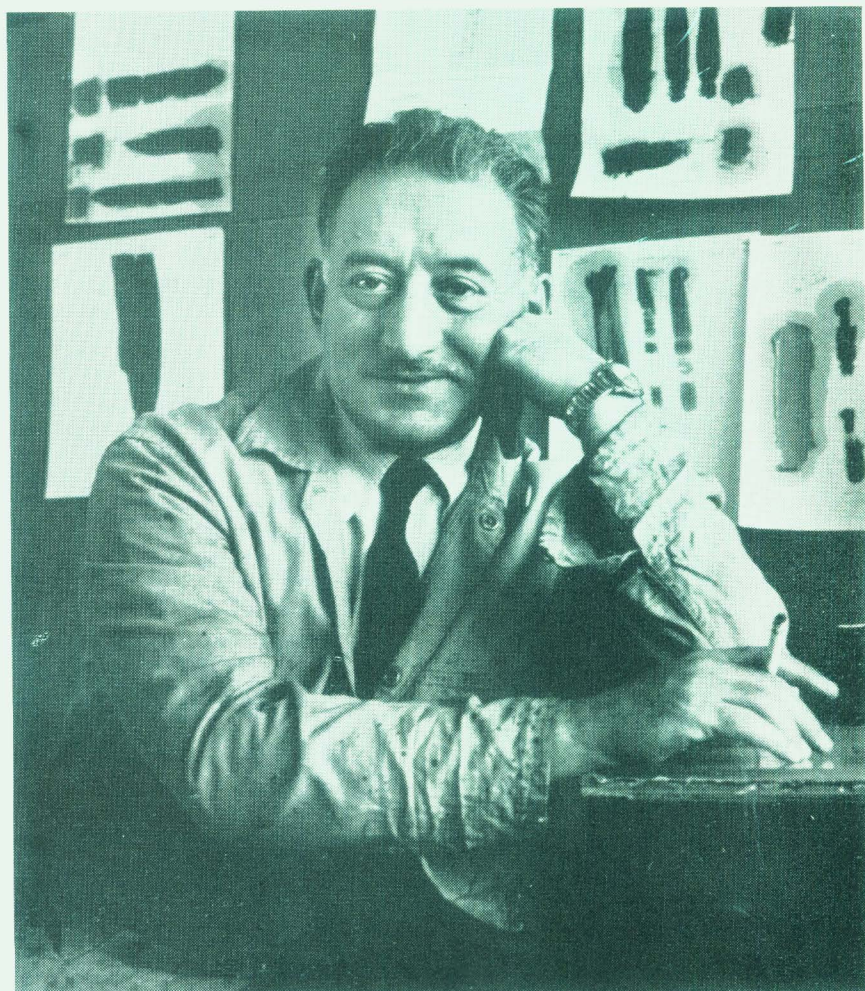
"It was strictly a museum type of show, consisting of forty-six paintings, surveying a period of ten or twelve years."

"Did you notice any anti-American reaction in South America because you, an American, carried off the highest prize?"

"On the contrary, the Brazilians were very pleased that an American won. It was the next best thing to a South American winning. The dozen daily newspapers of São Paulo and the numerous Brazilian magazines gave me full coverage. I noticed that one newsdealer displayed a two-page magazine reproduction of one of my paintings on his stand. In every city that I visited I was greeted by news photographers and had to hold press conferences. This enthusiastic reception continued throughout my four weeks stay in Brazil."

"I hope you had time to look over the Bienal," I remarked.

"The Bienal was so comprehensive that it took me several days to see it," Gottlieb said. "The



Photograph of ADOLPH GOTTLIEB by Marvin P. Lazarus.

exhibition gave a fine picture of world art, since fifty-six countries were represented. What I saw covered the foreign art you would see during a period of five years in New York City. The art in the show was influenced by either Europe or the United States, with our country very much in the lead."

"Would you say, Mr. Gottlieb, that the influence of Abstract-Expressionism, to single out one style, was predominant?"

"Yes."

"Were any Americans, beside yourself, represented at the Bienal?"

"Yes, the works of ten young sculptors from the United States, including Sugarman, Wines, Mallery and Segal, were exhibited."

"I imagine Segal's plaster cast of a woman in a real bath tub must have surprised the Brazilians."

"Yes, it did, but they were interested."

"Could you tell our readers what kind of a jury awarded the prizes?"

"The jury was composed of twenty-seven Commissioners from various countries. A juror had to be more than a politician; he had to be either an art critic, an art historian, a museum director or an artist. The jury was the largest in the history of the Bienal."

"It must have been very gratifying to you that the jury unanimously selected your work for the Grand Prix. What was the reaction in the United

States to your triumph?"

"On my tour of Brazil I noticed that the American press was not represented among the reporters. My winning of the Grand Prix went completely unnoticed in the United States."

"You mean that absolutely nothing was printed?"

"There were one or two short notices in magazines. 'The New York Times' carried one small paragraph about the award."

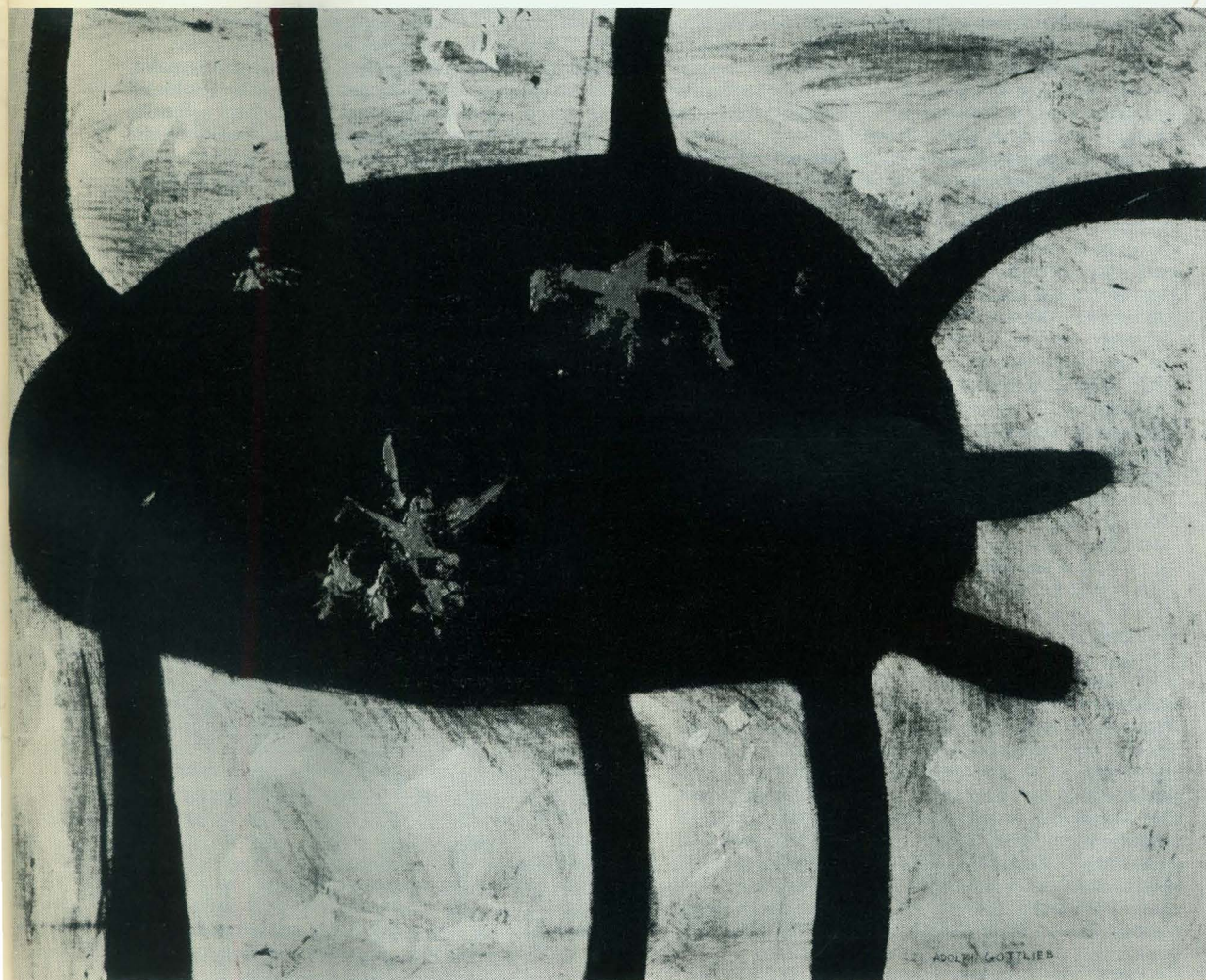
"If you had been a world champion skier you would have received two columns and a photograph, judging by to-day's paper," I replied. "Despite the dithyrambs that have been written about our increased interest in the arts, we seem to lack a sense of values. Things seem to be better in Brazil. Is the economic position of the artist better in Brazil than here?"

"It certainly is. The Brazilian artist enjoys a higher standard of living and he even has servants. A recognized artist can earn a living by selling his works, which is not the case here. The government gives him commissions for public buildings."

"Our own government has, at least, taken a step ahead," I said. "Your story reveals that the State Department has begun to organize and pay for advance guard exhibitions abroad and you, Mr. Gottlieb, have proved to be the very best cultural ambassador our country could have."

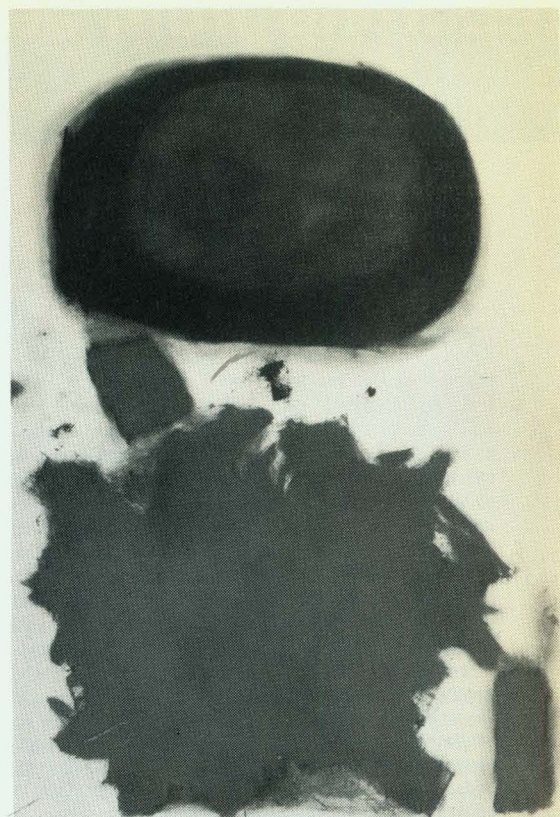
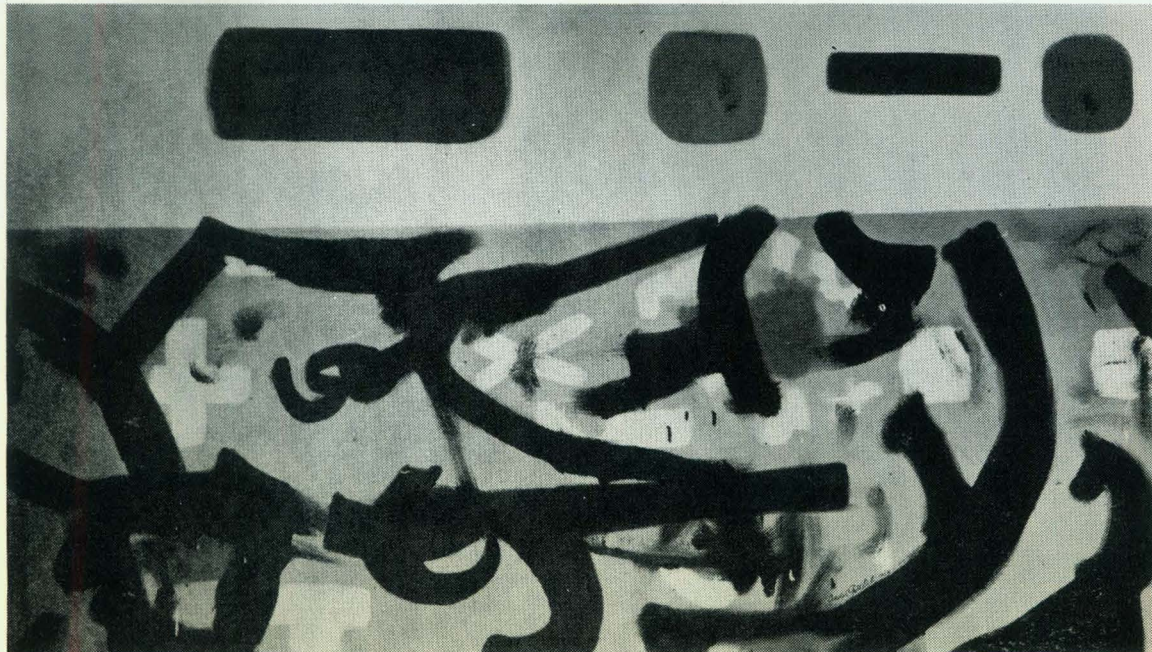
GOTTLLIEB

Radio or Television



"Animal Figure," 1951. Collection of Herbert Ferber.

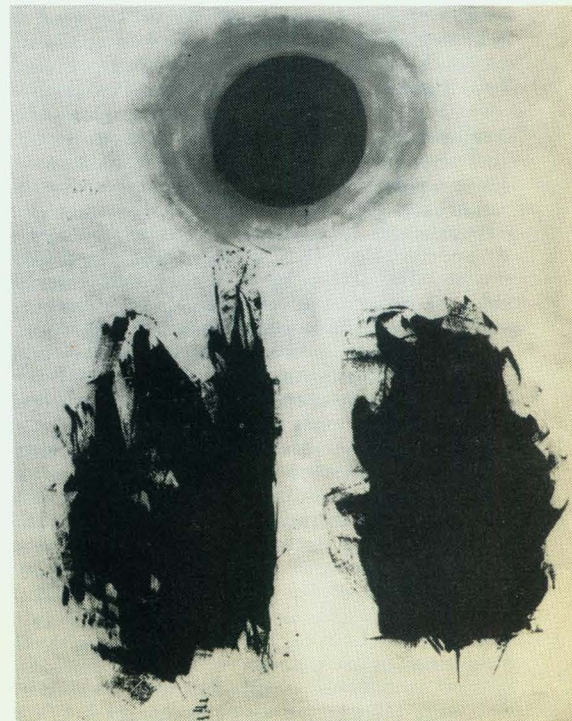
"Artist Inside Landscape," 1956. Collection of Martha Jackson.



"Ascent," 1958. Collection of Mrs. Adolph Gottlieb. Photograph by Ralph Burckhardt.



"Argosy," 1958. Collection of Mrs. Adolph Gottlieb. Photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt.



"Triad," 1959. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Lerner. Photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt.

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