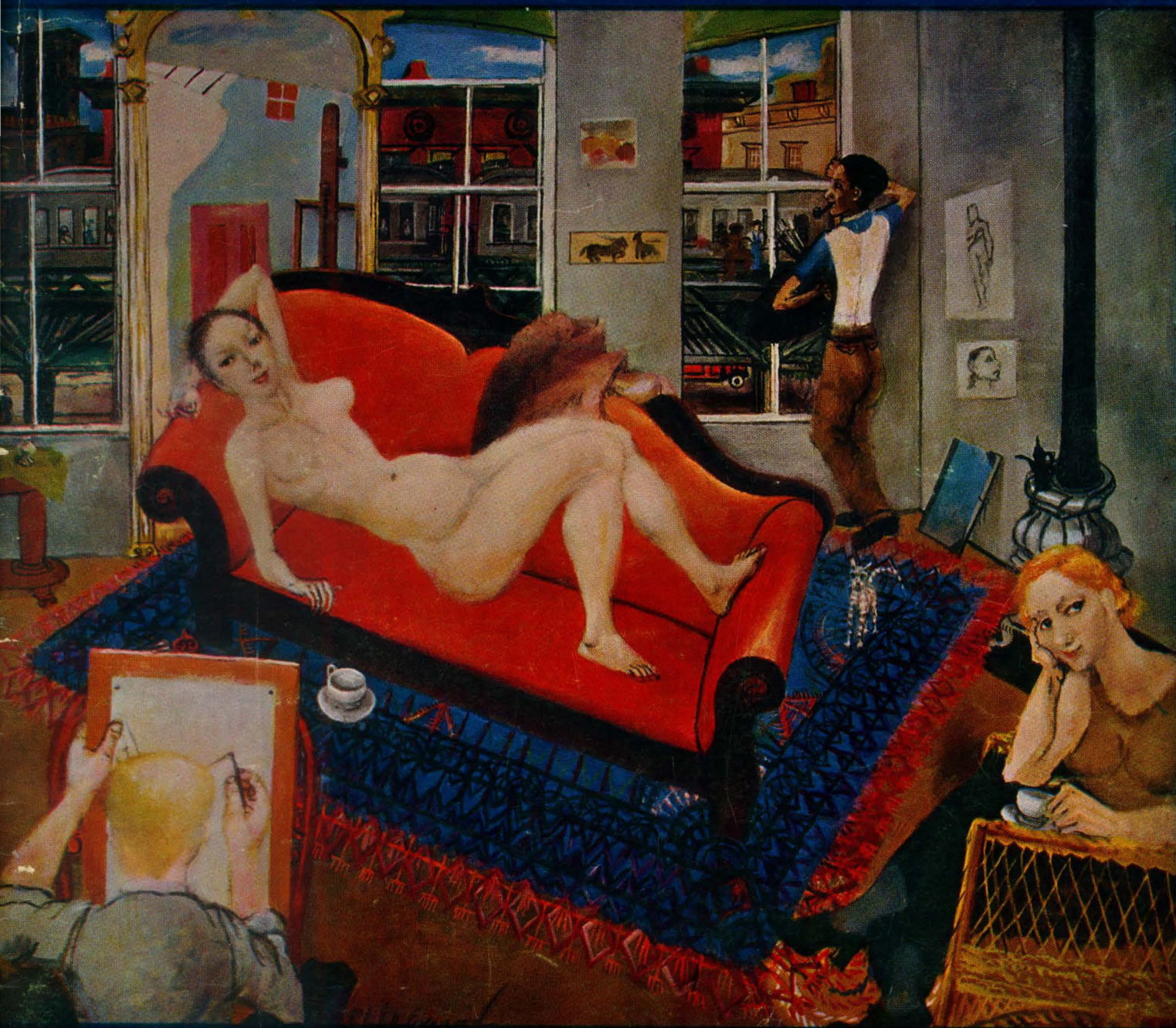


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ART *Voices*

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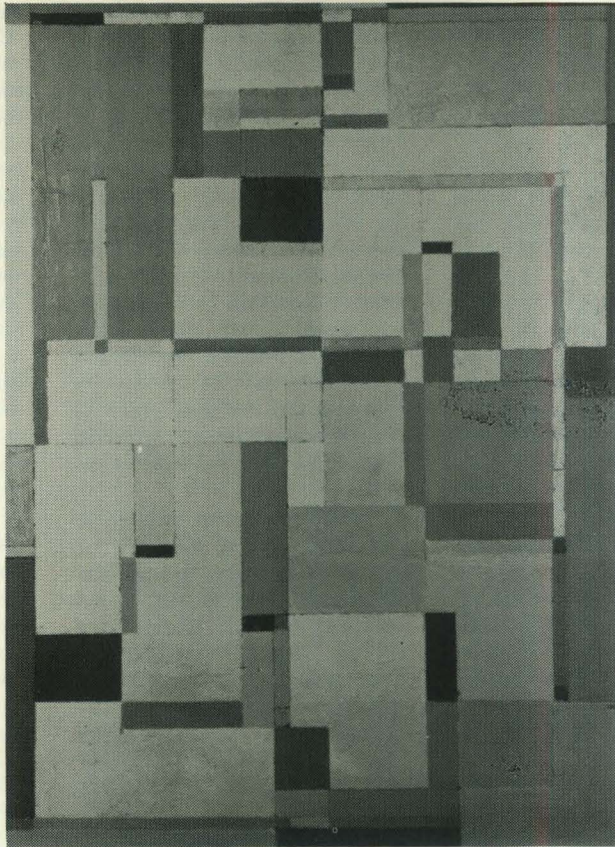
"Nude By the El" (oil on canvas), by PHILIP EVERGOOD.

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Expressionism is based on instinct. "Twosome" (oil) by FRITZ BULTMAN. Courtesy of the Tibor De Nagy Gallery.



Purist art suggests geometry. "Interchangeable Forms" (oil) by MICHAEL LOEW. Courtesy of the Stable Gallery.

Does Geometry Inspire Artists?

AS Henri Focillon once said, some painters find rejuvenation in the abandonment of logic, in the expression of brute instinct and in the passive acceptance of whatever may flow up from life. Focillon added that the object of such painters was to find new forms. There is another way to find new forms, with results that are just as surprising as when instinct, accident or the outpourings of the subconscious are relied upon. I refer to the use of mathematics and geometry in order to obtain fine designs in the fine and applied arts. Mondrian, himself, used the geometrical principle of the Golden Section, despite what Abstract-Expressionists may say to the contrary. This is definitely proved by Charles Bouleau in his brilliant new book, *THE PAINTER'S SECRET GEOMETRY*, with a preface by Jacques Villon (Harcourt, Brace and World, \$12). Bouleau analyzes Mondrian's "Composition with Two Lines" in the Amsterdam Municipal Museum. The paucity of detail in the picture makes the proof of the Golden Section certain, since it must be confessed that some geometrical analyses fail to make their point because the pictures are so crowded with detail that some forms are bound to coincide with the directional lines arbitrarily imposed upon them.

There is no trace of such foolery in the present book, which is scientifically objective. For example, when speaking of a Rouault, which obviously con-

forms compositionally to a centrally placed circle, Bouleau points out that Rouault and Matisse had the habit of redoing the same picture many times. This being the case, they could have merely arrived at a geometrical result, rather than started with a geometrical plan.

Bouleau, himself, is an Abstract-Purist painter. He belongs to a school that is opposed, at least stylistically, to the intuitive painters of the unconscious, who express their own reality rather than the completely depersonalized reality of the absolute.

Bouleau's book, which is based upon analyses of painters of the past, contains some surprises. Renaissance artists were more interested in following musical proportions, following certain remarks of Plato, than in geometry, which was "old stuff." Geometry was the preoccupation of Medieval artists.

Frederic Taubes, in *A GUIDE TO TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PAINTING METHODS* (Viking, \$6.75), also analyzes old and modern masters. Taubes' chapter on composition is weak. He devotes only one or two paragraphs to great styles of painting, such as the Medieval or Renaissance. Moreover, in the paragraphs treating of the Baroque, he really discusses style, not composition. Taubes excels in such matters as painting media, types of brushes, underpainting, overpainting, supports and gesso grounds.

By GORDON BROWN

One of the bothersome aspects of the old techniques of painting, so ably described by Taubes, is that artists are obliged to wait until their underpainting is dry before they are able to continue with glazes. Even when following the modern technique, there is a great need for rapidly drying paints in order to permit quick retouches. For this reason, hundreds of artists have begun painting with the acrylics. The various methods of working with modern media are described by competent artists in Bernard Chae's *ARTISTS AT WORK* (Am. Century, \$4.50; Hill and Wang, \$1.95).

John Lynch explains another contemporary technique in *HOW TO MAKE A COLLAGE* (Viking Press). He sketches in a history of the collage, illustrated by the works of the best artists in the field, and gives useful pointers on composition.

Artists who have not made a mobile will wonder why they have never taken up this kind of work after reading Lynch's *HOW TO MAKE A MOBILE* (Viking, \$3.50). The author makes it all seem delightfully simple. Lynch follows Calder's technique until the last chapter, when he introduces some new ideas.

I also came across a very practical book by Hugh Laidman. The title is self-explanatory: *HOW TO MAKE ABSTRACT PAINTINGS* (Viking, \$6.50). Laidman tells how to cut out interesting portions of your large paintings in order to make superior-looking small paintings and how to print with paper shapes. Finally, he tells us how to doodle successfully—as if we did not know already!

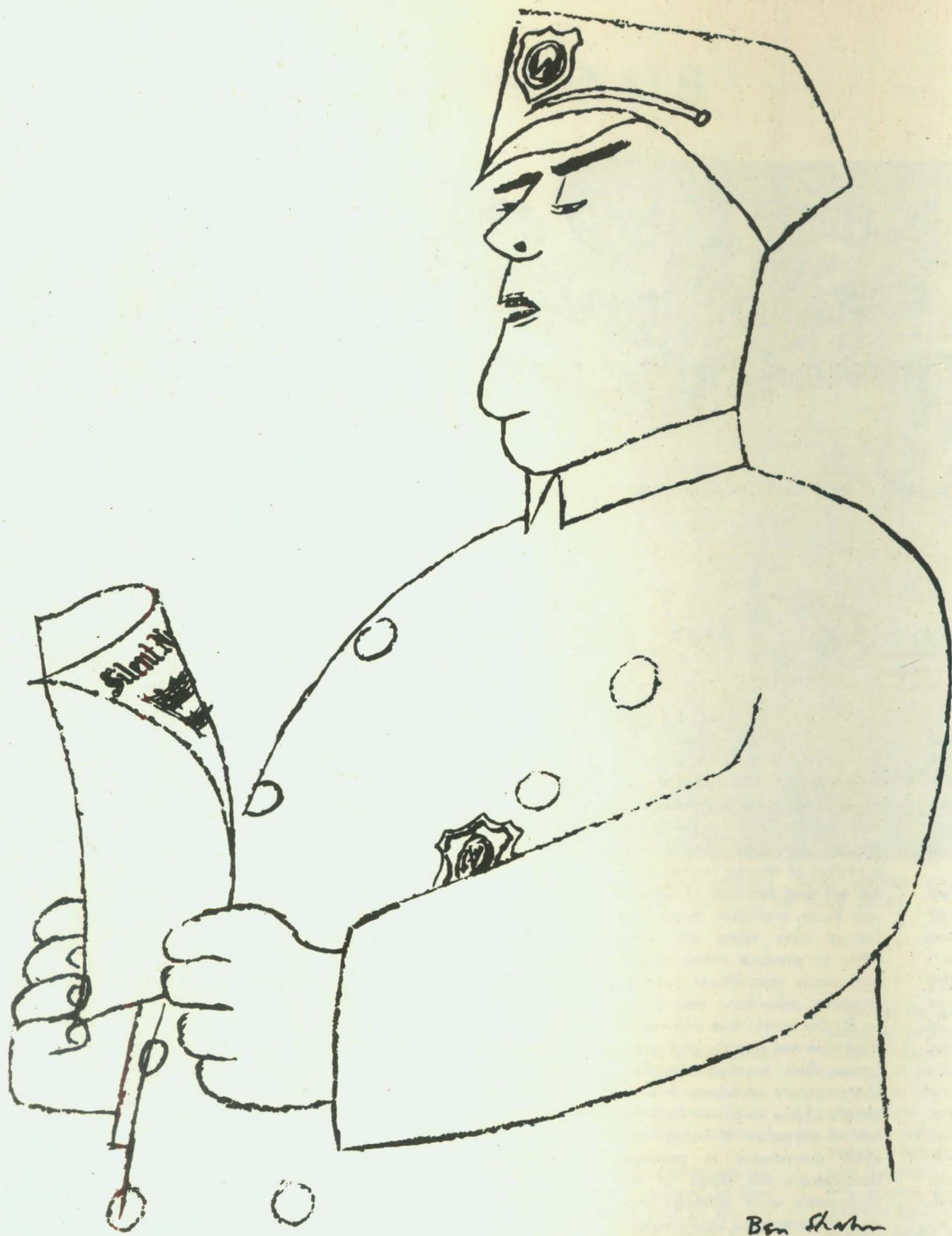


Illustration from the new book **Love and Joy About Letters** by Ben Shahn, published by Grossman Publishers.

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Fig. 29—Strange shapes. "Flight to Spain" (oil), by BOB THOMPSON. Martha Jackson Gallery.