

Action Painting

as abstract expressionism

This type of art is characterized in all its forms by emotions and actions taking precedence over clarity of portrayal, representationalism and compliance with rules. The emphasis is on the individual form of expression. The paintings, which do not have either a message or a subject, challenge observers to use the power of their own imaginations. Emotion and spontaneity take center stage in this style of art.

Any painting technique where color can be applied to a surface can be used - using sticks, spatulas, cans or buckets with holes in them etc.

Generally speaking, there are two schools of this kind of painting:

America (Action Painting):

A style of art which was widespread in the 1950s and 1960s. The most famous artist to work in this genre was probably Jackson Pollock (1912 - 1956). He referred to his method as action painting. Action painters were concerned with the type and quality of the paint and the possibilities of expression which they offered. Jackson Pollock placed his large canvases on the floor. He then let paint drip and run over them using brushes, cans with holes drilled in them and other containers. Sometimes, he even threw paint directly onto the canvas.

Color field painting, where colored areas (often monochrome) with a meditative character are created, can also be attributed to action painting.

The best known figures in the action painting movement in America were:

- Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)
- Mark Rothko (1903–1970)
- Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)
- **Alfons Schilling (1934-2013) – my teacher**
- Franz Kline (1910–1962)
- William Baziotes (1912–1963)
- Robert Motherwell (1915–1991)
- Sam Francis (1923–1994)

Europe Informal (German school) or tachism (French school):

Tachism and informal styles are often conflated and are considered the European “version” of US American abstract expressionism, which developed during the 1940s quite separately to the European art style and emerged with the style variations action painting and color field painting.

These paintings do not have any pictorial narrative: they are rooted in the emotions. In art history, this approach is referred to as “informal”. The common denominator of the “informal” painting school is the lack of rules for artistic composition. Instead of portraying subjects in a realistic way, the artist concentrates on the paint, the canvas and the materiality. This physical action and the spontaneous gestures and the traces they leave in the painting can be compared to a jazz musician improvising.

What Americans refer to as “action painting” or abstract expressionism became part of the international language of art in the whole of the Western world after World War II. After fascism made realism obsolete, the artistic language of abstraction became popular in the whole of the West between the late 1930s and 1964, when pop art blossomed.

Famous figures of the informal school in Germany were:

- Peter Brüning (1929–1970)
- Karl Otto Götz (* 1914)
- Emil Schumacher (1912–1999)

Famous figures of the tachism movement in France were:

- Wols (1913–1951)
- Jean Fautrier (1898–1964)
- Hans Hartung (1904–1989)
- Georges Mathieu (1921–2012)

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