“. . . one part life and nine parts the other thing”: Painters and the Stage

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The primary research for writing about any artist is the artist’s art. (John Murrell)

Visual art and theatre

Plays that bring acts of artistic creation onto the stage are frequently shadowed by a palpable sense of absence; the work of art itself is invoked, described, and discussed without in fact being *there*. In the western theatrical tradition of the last two centuries, the challenges of artistic endeavor have mostly been reconstructed by means of a quasi-biographical centering on the artist, who becomes the focal point of the plot or the performance. This preferential concern with the aesthetic and societal dilemmas of the author, which transfers the protocols of the *Künstlerroman* to a format described as “artist’s drama” (*Künstlerdrama*),[1] has been re-examined in a significant number of contemporary theatrical productions which bring visual arts (specifically painting) to the stage and are primarily concerned with the dramatic representation of the art object itself. This impulse seems to reflect some dissatisfaction with the limitations of the traditional format of the artist’s drama, which attempts to understand what Rosy Saikia and Krishna Barua describe as “aesthetic representation of mind” (124), in terms of the concrete episodes of a life story. If, as the character of Georgia O’Keeffe in John Murrell’s play *The Faraway Nearby* comments, “art is one part life and nine parts the other thing” (12), a fictionalized exploration of an artist’s biography may be too limited a strategy to make sense of that “other thing” which gives reality to the creative imagination.

Bringing visual art to the stage may mobilize a wide variety of techniques that have always been available to theatre, which, as W. J. T. Mitchell points out, is a form of “mixed art,” where words and images confront and complement each other (90). In some plays, paintings find themselves on stage through verbal gestures of recreation, as Csilla Bertha highlights in her discussion of contemporary Irish plays. In Frank McGuiness’s *Innocence* (1996), for example, Caravaggio’s paintings are recreated through words that invoke known images, through objects recognized by the audience as recurring elements in his work, while other times the scene reverts into a *tableau vivant* that temporarily mimics a particular painting (Bertha 355). This latter strategy of vivification of image through an embodied presence on stage that complements the ekphrastic exercise recalls

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a practice that, as Rosemary Barrow discusses, was ubiquitous on British late-Victorian popular stages (219) and which was reinvented in the enactment of Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* in Stephen Sondheim's musical *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984).[3]

In other plays, the staged presence of the artwork does not require the presence of the author and is more autonomous of verbalized clues, as Elizabeth Drumm points out in her discussion of the theatrical life of Picasso's *Guernica*. In Jerónimo López Mozo's 1969 *Guernica: Un Happening*, for example, the painting is made present on the stage without any reference to its creator when the actors enter at the beginning of the performance carrying fragments of *Guernica*. From these they attempt to reconstruct the painting on a blank wall as if it were a puzzle, eventually explaining what the human and animal shapes they are carrying were doing on the day of the attack, thus contextualizing and humanizing the forms with fictionalized stories (Drumm 440).

It is important to recognize how this capacity to "paint" in theatre with words, objects, or images depends on shared codes and clues between audience, playwrights and directors—the images have to be stored somewhere in the audience's memory in order to be prompted and recalled. In many ways, this is also the case of traditional *Künstlerdramas*, which enact dilemmas of particular artists and are based on expectations of common knowledge. It is assumed, for example, that the biographical specificities of a recorded life are not totally unknown, even when the plays suggest new interpretations of what is already known. The viewer is also expected to be familiar with the prevalent prototypical paradigm of the artist as the "beautiful soul" outsider, foregoing lengthy dramatic reconstruction of the dynamics of the dilemmas of art vs. life, integrity vs. commodification, vision vs. philistinism.

This collective knowledge also generates a number of constraints when writing about acts of artistic creation that invoke a historical reality transposed into the fictional domain. The artist was there, his or her work is public, and both have a presence that can be revisited, reinterpreted, but not freely subverted. The specific, condensed language of theatre invites dramatic strategies that shorten the cycle of the examination of the artist's existence, locating the conflict between the essence of the self under examination and the pragmatics of social existence in moments of tension where the binary oppositions become particularly acute; but the whole life is there and expected to give access to what it can never fully explain.[4]

In contrast, writing about an imaginary artist would presumably give the playwright, with no recorded life to revisit or re-examine but seeking to conceive a new existence, a greater freedom to imagine the tensions and

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exhilarations of the act of creation. But this also generates new problems for the representation of the art object on stage; playwrights may not be able to rely on its "presence" in the mind of the audience and have to devise strategies that will allow the creation of art objects from nothing more than completely open possibilities. Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* (1990), for example, imagines the conflict between the Venetian authorities and Galactia, an imagined female painter, over the depiction of the Battle of Lepanto she had been commissioned to produce. Here the content of her work, which will eventually lead to her imprisonment, can neither be seen or remembered by the audience. It is mostly constructed by discourse, as she describes painting the battle's dead and dying rather than the glorification of the Venetian military, but also, indirectly, by the presence of specific characters—*The Sketchbook*, who performs the role of commentator, and a model, a battle veteran whose body is a map of the physical brutality that the audience is told Galactia is painting.

The discussion that follows will examine two plays about twentieth-century American painters, Mark Rothko in John Logan's *Red* (2009) and Georgia O'Keeffe in John Murrell's *The Faraway Nearby* (1996), analyzing how they expand the tropes of the *Künstlerdrama* by staging art and its creation and by dramatizing the connection between life, moment, and form.

I think of my pictures as dramas

Mark Rothko famously claimed in an article published in 1947, when he still saw himself as part of an abstractionist circle, that he viewed his paintings "as dramas where the shapes . . . are the performers . . . able to move dramatically without embarrassment and to execute gestures without shame," beginning as "an unknown adventure in an unknown place" (572). He also consistently argued against explanation of the "miraculous" and autonomous nature of paintings: "Pictures must be miraculous," he proposed, and as surprising for the artist as for everyone else who would later see them: "as soon as one is completed, the intimacy between the creation and the creator is ended" (572).

Such statements, establishing parallels between visuality on stage and on canvas and pointing towards a kind of organic independence of the artistic object,[5] invite a theatrical language that moves beyond traditional biographical or psycho-biographical modes.[6] An artist who always resisted interpretative tropes, and who claimed that in painting "all ideas and plans that existed in the mind were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur" (Rothko 572), would have been grossly betrayed by dramatic strategies based on formulaic renditions of the divided artistic self.

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In *Red*, first performed in London in 2009,[7] John Logan chose to revisit a well-known moment in Rothko's career—his acceptance of a commission in 1958 to provide 600 square feet of paintings to "decorate" the Four Seasons restaurant in the Mies van de Rohe-designed Seagram Building in New York and his later decision to denounce the contract and return the down payment even after he had already prepared some forty murals from which he had intended to make a final selection. The play touches upon other themes, too, such as the conflicting continuum in art. Rothko accepts that his generation of painters "destroyed Cubism" (18) but is ill-prepared for the fact that Pop Art is about to kill Abstract Expressionism and its legacy, although recognizing that "the child must banish the father . . . respect him, but kill him" (52). He is also no stranger to the conflict in every painter between passion and control, but these minor themes only serve as the background to establish what Rothko feels about his art, since this is the key to the Seagram incident.

The episode interpreted variously by art historians, is well known, so the play accepts that the viewer is familiar with the sequence of events. As very often the case with dramas that draw implicitly on historical or biographical records, part of the viewer's gratification lies in the fact that s/he knows more than the characters on stage. In a discussion on the pleasures of theatre, George Rodosthenous identifies this "advantage" of the viewers as "intellectual voyeurism" (7), and in *Red* this is activated whenever they are privy to discussions about the murals knowing that in the end they will not be sold to the Seagram building.[8] The same assumed knowledge is activated when, in scene 1, Rothko refers to the idea of creating a place where a number of his murals could be intimately shared with viewers as a "chapel," an obvious allusion to the future Rothko Chapel,[9] or when, in scene 5, his assistant mistakes the red paint covering his arms for blood, in a clear allusion to his future suicide in 1970. In terms of plot construction, the most consequential result of this knowledge, besides the viewer's pleasure it engenders, lies in the shift of the play's conflict from the anticipation of what will happen to the puzzling foundations of Rothko's seemingly contradictory decisions.

The play's sole location is Rothko's Bowery studio. There are two characters, Rothko himself and Ken, a young would-be painter whom he hires as his assistant, but the murals being prepared are the dominating presence. The stage directions call for their specific "being" on stage: "representations of some of Rothko's magnificent Seagram Mural paintings are staked and displayed around the room," and a pulley system should be in operation to lower and raise several paintings simultaneously; the murals are also to be repositioned throughout the play "with a different arrangement for each

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scene" (7). They are also unseen but made to be there, as the fourth wall functions as a canvas hanging in front of the audience visible only to the characters who discuss it in the very first scene, thus creating a reality for the viewer. Later on in the play, in scene 3, a painting actually occurs on stage as both Rothko and Ken mix colors and prime a six-foot white canvas with a dark plum coat. This detailed, coordinated choreography, enacted against a sonic piece described in the stage directions as "spirited classical music" (36), invokes both dance and the intense physicality and elation of the act of painting on such a scale.

Thus the play carefully orchestrates a game of presence and absence whereby the audience sees and does not see. This is particularly striking in the opening scene of the play when Rothko, looking directly at the audience, studies an imaginary completed mural that only exists by being constructed by his gesture—standing in front of the fourth wall, examining what only he can see—and by the text when he asks his assistant, "what do you see?" (9), followed by instructions that attach a palpable reality to the unseen:

> Wait. Stand closer. You've got to get close. Let it pulsate. Let it work on you. Closer. Too close. There. Let it spread out. Let it wrap its arms around you; let it *embrace* you, filling even your peripheral vision so nothing else exists or will ever exist. Let the picture do its work—But work with it. Meet it halfway for God's sake! Lean forward, lean into it. Engage with it . . . Now, what do you see? (9)

When, after being pressed to "be specific," to be "exact" but "sensitive," and to be "kind," Ken's unsatisfactory reply is that what he sees is "red" (10), the play opens a gap, a space of loss that forces viewers to desire the act of seeing the denied image and asks them to imagine what they would have seen if they had been given the privilege of looking at it. This sense of loss persists even when viewers actually see the act of painting—the paint is real, the color of the canvas changes, the physical stain is palpable—but they know what has been enacted on stage is but the priming of a canvas, and that this base layer is meant to be acted upon later, away from the audience's eyes. What these scenes also do is give a palpable reality to Rothko's sense of the intimacy between painting and viewer and demonstrate the terms of his understanding of the autonomous identity of the works created.

In the play, one of the functions of Ken, the young assistant, is to offer the viewer the most obvious explanation for the acceptance of a commission from a representative of corporate power, activating the traditional trope of the artist versus society dynamic by which his gesture

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could be interpreted as a demonstration of art being corrupted by money. This hypothesis is invoked, only to be dismissed sarcastically by Rothko and also, eventually, by the audience. The biographical Rothko, with his well-documented left-leaning rebellious history, was not a starving artist when the commission was offered and accepted. He may have been rattled when *Fortune Magazine* declared in 1955 that to buy work by de Kooning, Rothko, and Pollock was a good investment likely to yield a large profit in the future (qtd. in Frascina 128), but his sense of self-worth could take it all with irony. The play endows him with a sense of satirical self-reflection; the fact that his work has become a commodity is satirized by his response to an episode he shares with Ken: he heard someone ask, "I wonder who owns all the Rothkos? Just like that I am a noun. A Rothko," something that belongs "over the fireplace in the penthouse" (35). When discussing Jackson Pollock's possible suicide at the height of his fame and financial security, he can also jokingly claim that success had killed him and that "artists should starve. Except me" (33), only to soberly pinpoint that the tragedy of his old friend, the "real Bohemian," the "anti-Rothko," "everyone's romantic idea of what an artist should be" (34), was creative stasis and despair. "He grew tired of his form," he explains. "He grew tired of himself. He lost faith in his viewers. . . . He no longer believed there were any real human beings out there to look at pictures" (33).

Having alluded to and dismissed the interpretative trope of the artist selling out his integrity, which most viewers were expected to have unconsciously activated to make sense of the decision to accept the commission to paint for an upscale restaurant with aesthetic pretensions,[10] the play proposes alternative groundings for the decision. First, Rothko explains, there is the question of space, and what he saw as the unique opportunity to show his art in conditions of visual dominance: "Imagine," he asks Ken, "a frieze all around the room, a continuous narrative filling the walls, one to another, each a new chapter, the story unfolding, look and they are there, inescapable and inexorable, like doom" (16).

Rothko was famously adverse to both showing and selling his work. James Breslin's biography of the painter describes how ambivalent and anxious he always was before an exhibition, feeling ill, "completely torn apart, physically as well as mentally," so much so that in the seven years immediately before the Seagram commission he had only agreed to two individual shows (373). This much is shared with Ken and the audience in terms that illuminate the quality of quasi-personhood he attaches to his paintings:

> I do get depressed when I think of people going to see my pictures. If they're going to be unkind. . . . Selling a picture is like sending a blind child into a

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> room full of razor blades. It's going to get hurt and it's never been hurt before, it does not know what hurt is. (55)

In the Seagram Room, he thinks "they will be less vulnerable somehow" because they will not be alone: "They are in a series, they'll always have each other for companionship and protection . . . and most important they are going into a *place* created just for them. A place of reflection and safety" (56).

The fact that the inadequacy of this "sacred place" (56)—which is, as Ken points out, no more than "a fancy restaurant in a big high rise owned by a rich corporation," a "temple of consumption" for "the super-rich" (57)—does not unduly disturb Rothko stems from his absolute trust in the power of his images to "transcend the setting" so that by "working together, moving in rhythm, whispering to each other, they will create a *place*" and not be diminished by its function (59). He has a model in mind, one which he had seen in Italy in Michelangelo's Medici Library in Florence, where a claustrophobic illusion had been achieved by "creating false doors and windows all the way up the walls, rectangles in rich reds and browns," making "the viewer feel trapped in a room where all doors and windows are bricked up" (58). His project to turn the restaurant into that kind of image-dominated "temple" is, therefore, predicated on overpowering the space with the strength of his gigantic murals, using a palette of dark red and brown tones to invoke architectural forms—columns, doors, windows, and walls.

This dramatized rationale may be too simplified. John Fisher, the editor of *Harper's Magazine*, who was a personal friend, would later describe a creeping sense of unease and doubt about the plan privately expressed by the painter. The project, Rothko confided, was not something he wanted to repeat, adding, somewhat unconvincingly, that he had "accepted this assignment with malicious intentions," hoping "to paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room" (160). This pre-planned intention is never mentioned in the play. Instead, the accumulated loss of faith in the capacity of his work to overwhelm the function of the space, which leads to his cancelling the contract, is compressed into one single moment when Rothko actually experiences the living restaurant by having dinner there. Struck by the smugness and arrogance of the place, Rothko tells Ken: "you go in and you feel underdressed, feel fat, feel too goddamn Jewish." The food is pretentious, the chatter is disgusting "and everyone is clever and everyone's laughing and everyone is investing in this or that" (62). The incongruity between what he saw and heard and the temple of contemplation he has envisaged becomes insurmountable: "And in

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that place," he muses, "there—will live my paintings for all time." "I wonder," he asks, "Do you think they will ever forgive me?" (63).

The implied answer is no, as they are not just canvas and paint, nor are they him, but a miraculous expression of the "something" that was inside his mind but is now outside, autonomous, but still needing his protection, needing to be saved from a space they will not dominate but where they will be dominated. That much he tells the Seagram owner over the phone when cancelling the contract: ". . . anyone who eats that kind of food for that kind of money in that kind of joint will never look at a painting of mine. I'm sending the money back and I'm keeping the pictures. No offence" (63-64).

It might be argued that *Red* does not establish any significant distance from the more traditional tropes of the *Künstlerdrama*—after all, the play stages a conflict that divides an artist. Nevertheless, the format's conventional terms are reworked, primarily by centering the conflict on the relationship of the artist with his work rather than on the construction of the artistic self and by pushing biographical details into the background and foregrounding the physical and emotional presence of the thing created.

That's not life . . . that's art

The Faraway Nearby, by the Canadian playwright Murrell, first staged in 1994, uses a very different plot strategy, focusing not on a single moment or decision but on a long process that spans decades. It dramatizes Georgia O'Keeffe's last years in the two New Mexico locations where she found much aesthetic stimulation—the Ghost Ranch, a temporary residence she had painted in 1937 (*The House I Live in*) before she acquired it, and the nearby adobe house in the village of Abiquiu, where she lived and created her "White Place" and "Black Place" paintings. Moving away from the tropes of the struggling artist finding her way to maturity (which would have invited a reflection on her early career and her much-studied relationship with Alfred Stieglitz), the play enacts an intimate portrait of her later years. It maps out a process centered on her relation to place and self that leads from proud and contented aloneness to loneliness and companionship with her young assistant, Juan Hamilton, who worked for her for thirteen years when her near blindness had made painting and autonomous living virtually impossible.

Her art, which she once claimed aspired "to be like music that makes holes in the sky" (qtd. in Hammond 311), is immediately invoked by the title of the play (her famous 1937 painting) and is made present both by oblique discourse and by memorialized and enacted visits to the canyons of the "Black Place," which inspired so much of her later work. The recreation of that space, which she revisits in a number of scenes, is, according to the stage directions,

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to be an effect of light and shadow, allowing a subtle change in the setting, which also has to represent her two (or just a generic mixture of her two) New Mexico homes and patios. Besides visiting the Navajo canyons and hills of the "Black Place," she also revisits her acts of painting discursively, recalling loading up the car with "brushes and paint and canvas" and testing herself "against the relentless blackness" (23), staring at what she once described as "the hulking gray shape of the hills" that "looked like 'a mile of elephants'" (qtd. in "Georgia O'Keeffe" 54). In that space, she explains, her painting changed, as she abandoned the "red and green and white and adobe and violet" of previous works to respond to the need to represent "the relentless blackness" (23), an obvious reference to her prolific sequence of paint, pastel and pencil works inspired by the "Black Place." But, unlike Rothko's murals in *Red*, O'Keeffe's art is never seen but is constructed only by allusion and memory, serving a play that presents itself, according to its author, as a "poetic meditation" (4).

The painter, whom the play first introduces when she is 61 and leaves at 98 in the year of her death, is alone on stage much of the time. Sometimes she is talking to an unknown and unseen character (presumably the photographer implied in the act of posing in scene one), but mostly to herself, positioning the audience in the role of involuntary interloper in her musings and memories while making them participate, to use Rodosthenous's taxonomy, in an act of "emotional voyeurism" by seeing a character deprived of all layers of protection, emotionally exposed as if really alone, a contact very different in texture from monologues that have an audience directly in mind (7). The structure of the play foregrounds the dynamics of this intimacy between character and audience predicated on her dominating presence on stage: its three parts are entitled *Alone (1948-1973)*, *Days with Juan (1973-1984)*, and *Alone (1984-1986).*

This detailed time delimitation might suggest an overdependence on biographical information, but this expectation is complicated by two factors. The first is the reliance on a photographic archive in the structure of the play. As Barbara Buhler points out, "no artist has been photographed from the beginning to the end of a career as frequently and consistently as Georgia O'Keeffe" (1). Stieglitz alone took about 350 photos of her over a period of twenty years as part of a project that aimed at the composition of what the painter herself considered a kind of imagetic diary (qtd. in Buhler 1),[11] and after his death she continued to pose for such famous contemporaries as Ansel Adams, Philippe Halsman, and Dan Budnick until her nineties.

This photographic corpus is self-consciously used to shape particular scenes of the play, replacing, in a way, the presence of her own creations. The

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first glimpse the audience has of the painter mirrors one of her famous photographs published in *Life Magazine* (Danly 23). The stage directions explicitly describe her pose as "sitting almost exactly as in the 1948 photograph by Philippe Halsman, on a low stone step, both legs stretched out to her left, her right arm draped proprietarily over the nose of a huge cow skull" (11), and the text reinforces this connection by having O'Keeffe address an invisible (and possibly imaginary) "you" taking "the damned thing" (11). Later on, two scenes invoke, if less explicitly, other less well-known photographs. In scene 3 of part 2 (entitled "Morning at Home"), a gesture of intimacy with Juan is reconstructed out of a 1975 photograph by Dan Budnick (*O'Keeffe and Juan Hamilton* rpt. in Lisle 514). At her instigation, Hamilton had moved in and set up a kiln to work on his pottery (which Georgia, no longer able to paint, is keen to master). The scene reconstructs the moment, frozen by the photograph, when she half-playfully interrupts his work to attempt to comb his long unruly hair. In the economy of the play, this gesture signals her acceptance that having been "the least helpless woman in the world for ninety years" (77), she has opened herself to the presence of someone who irreverently "introduces himself as 'my friend' and not 'my assistant'" (39) and who may have something to teach her.[12] Later in the play, in the first scene of part 2 ("Afternoon at Home"), O'Keeffe is seen on the roof of her Ghost Ranch home, where she has been lying down, recalling another photograph (*On the Roof*) taken in 1967 in exactly the same location by John Loengard.

The ubiquitous references to photography, for which O'Keeffe frequently posed as a model, also open a site for reflection about the relationship between life and art so decisively problematized by her claim that art is "one part life and nine parts the other thing" (12). In the opening scene, when she is posing for that imaginary shot based on the real one, she insists that its invisible author should not "try to make me look 'life-like'" claiming that "in the right hands" a photograph may turn out to be "more than a tool to pry memory open" (12). But when that happens, she claims, what is created is neither life nor its imitation: it becomes art, that other thing "beyond, behind, beneath, inside" (12). That other thing we call life, she explains, is "only a surface, a thin skin, a handy package of flesh used to contain and protect the insides. It's when those insides come out and parade in the changing light, unashamed to be caught out of their skins—then you have something like art" 12). Art, she further tells the audience, is the photograph Stieglitz took of her one cold day in Lake George, in which her face is unseen, just "my breasts, my hands. A bit of neck, a bit of belly. Like this: my hands arriving suddenly in the photograph like worried birds, to shelter the breasts" (14). Missing a recognizable face, "always more mask than meaning" (15), that image represents that "other thing" which cannot be captured by the

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likeness of a still or a recorded life-story. The fact that the images that both the character and the playwright constantly invoke in the play are not her own creations is a gesture of distancing that by focusing on O'Keeffe the model rather than O'Keeffe the creator can be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to invite audiences to think about art independently from the artist.

This skepticism about the irreducibility of the connection between art and the recorded life of the artist is admitted by Murrell, who argued that "the primary research source of writing about an artist is that artist's art" and claimed to have "intentionally avoided interviews with those who knew O'Keeffe," wanting to weave not a biographically accurate portrait but "to imagine her as a fresh creation, a work intact and newborn, rather than an inevitably random and piecemeal collection of reminiscences and impressions" (Murrell, "Interview" 4).

Murrell's statement maps out the contours of the challenges latent in the exercise of writing about the creation of visual art for the theatre—how to balance the distrust of the over-determined biographical impulse to give centre-stage to the art itself, how to use the tension between words and image to give presence to what can be remembered, recalled, but which cannot really be seen in all its texture and density in a dramatic performance, how to lift the weight of what is known to imagine an artist as "a fresh creation."

Discussing the motivation behind what he identifies as a historically unprecedented number of contemporary plays about artists, Meyer-Dinkgräfe points to a personalized authorship drive that he identifies as a self-referral impulse, a need "to reflect on the nature of art and the implications of being an artist" (94), which is, in a way, a research into the self of each author. He quotes Athol Fuggard's account in the program notes of *The Road to Mecca* of his decision to create in this play an artist running out of creative inspiration as coinciding "with a need in me that I hadn't recognized, a curiosity about the genesis, nature and consequence of creative energy, my own" (qtd. in Meyer-Dinkgräfe 94).

While this impulse to write about yourself at the same time as writing about others, whether artists or not, may distance the contemporary artist-plays from the earlier models directly influenced by the tradition inherited and adapted from the formulas of the *Künstlerroman*, this may not be as significant a shift from older models as the tendency the two plays discussed here foreground—discontentment with the dramatized dominance of the artist as a biographically established fact and the search for mechanisms of performative representation of the visual art in and by itself.

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Notes

[1] Some critics have proposed more specific terms that reflect the intrinsic differences in the creation of literary and visual art. Alan Corkill, for example, drawing on the insights of Rotermund, proposes the separate categories of poet-drama, painter drama, and musician drama, and uses the term *Malerdrama* (painter drama) in his discussion of the representation of artists in the work of German dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann (1069 n. 1).

[2] Drumm also discuses Fernando Arrabal's 1959 *Guernica: Desastres de la Guerra (Un quadro)* "Guernica: Disasters of the War (A Painting)."

[3] In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, contemporary works of European painting that evoked classical motifs, including some which had only recently been shown at the Royal Academy, were regularly staged, especially at the Palace Theatre in London (Barrow 220-21).

[4] This hypothesis that life is the key to understanding art may explain the interest in plays that examine the biographies of artists in the last forty years. Mayer-Dinkgräfe has identified about three hundred artist bio-plays written in English in the years between 1978 and 2004, encompassing all forms of artistry, in contrast with the much smaller number of similar dramas written between 1900 and 1978 (*Biographical Plays* vii).

[5] Rothko had a personal connection with the world of theatre. In 1924, when he was already taking classes at the Art Student League in New York, he returned for a few months to Portland, where he worked with the actress and acting teacher Josephine Dillon (Cohen-Solal 248).

[6] Ursula Canton adopts this term, first introduced by Richard H. Palmer, to designate historical drama with a primary emphasis on the psychological dilemmas of the main character, such as John Osborne's 1961 play *Luther: A Play* (6).

[7] The London production directed by Michael Grandage and staged at the Donmar Warehouse with Alfred Molina as Rothko and Eddie Redmayne as Ken, his assistant, moved to New York the following year, where it was performed at the John Golden Theater. It won the Tony Award for best play in 2010. The play opened again in London in the spring of 2018.

[8] Nine of these murals were offered by Rothko to the Tate Gallery in London, a second grouping is in the Kawamura Memorial Museum in Japan, and the rest are divided between the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the private collections of Rothko's descendants (Baal-Teshuva 63).

[9] The Rothko Chapel, purpose-built for his art in Houston and attached to the Menil Collection, was inaugurated in 1971 after the painter's death. It showed fourteen panels under the precise light specifications he had so carefully planned.

[10] The restaurant also featured the curtains designed in 1919 by Picasso for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, tapestries by Miró, sculptures by Richard Lippold, and paintings by Stuart Davis. In the main dining room, Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*, on loan from a private collection, occupied one of the walls while waiting for the Rothkos (Cohen-Solal 157-58).

[11] Some of his early photographs, especially those where O'Keeffe is depicted in the nude or partially clothed beside her art, were first shown at the Anderson Galleries in New York in 1921 and are considered to have been paramount to the construction of her public persona as "a sexually liberated modern woman" (Buhler Lynes 2-3).

[12] The relationship with Hamilton has been differently interpreted, but most biographers of O'Keeffe (Robinson and Lisle, for instance) point out that there was genuine friendship on both sides as well as mutual benefit, particularly in terms of her support for his budding career in an art form dismissed at the time as merely decorative. O'Keeffe left him

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most of her estate after her death in a codicil to her will, which was contested by her family and eventually settled out of court.

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