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Unlike others of her generation, Lee Krasner was committed to modern art from the very beginning of her career¹. As a young art student in the 1930s at a time when American artists leaned more toward Mexican and representational art than Cubism and abstraction, she studied the School of Paris and the work of De Chirico and Matisse. When she met Jackson Pollock in 1941, her work turned toward what would later be known as Abstract Expressionism, and it is as an Abstract Expressionist painter that she found her capacities as an artist. Krasner's work captures the turbulent questing and struggle for a mythic fecundity that is fundamental to Abstract Expressionism. She uniquely incorporated a Matissean decorativeness into that quest, resulting in a style of vitalistic coiling or spiraling - in other words, forms and themes of gestation and growth. Krasner's art is in the end an affirmative art turning Abstract Expressionist and Pollockian energy into a symbolic personal and historical efflorescence.

Krasner's art was among the last flowerings of the fertile complex of ideas, history, and culture that constitutes Abstract Expressionism. Beginning in the 1940s, Abstract Expressionism arose as the work of Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Jackson Pollock, and others, with a selected heritage of themes of American art and culture of the 1930s including: history as ritual, folktale, and legend; the evolution yet continuity of human endeavor over space and time, and the pattern of human experience as conflict and triumph. It confronted the latest and most cataclysmic episode in the continuing crisis of the West in the first half of the twentieth century, the Second World War, and produced the most powerful representation of the war's psycho-history of struggle and hope before its historically-engendered culture petered out and was replaced by the existential subjectivity of the New York School of the 1950s, with which it was initially confused.

To come to terms, absorb, and then transcend their violent history, American artists adopted modern art as a primary means of expression for the first time since Alfred Stieglitz's group adopted Fauvism and Cubism in the first decade of the twentieth century. Modern art became the chosen means for investigating and analyzing human experience in their apocalyptic time. Together with their study of the forms of modern art, particularly Surrealism, many of the artists directly or indirectly combined such elements as the depth psychology of Freud, the philosophies of culture and consciousness of Bergson and Nietzsche, and the transformative criticism of Herbert Read. To this combination they added interests that many American and English intellectuals shared: Jungian psychology, with its affirmative view of mytho-ritualist psychic life; the archetypal ritualistic, transformative process propounded by Joseph Campbell; T.S. Eliot's search for a revivalist spiritual tradition; and the interconnected dynamics of culture, language, and history found in James Joyce. From this matrix arose the Abstract Expressionist thought and culture through which Lee Krasner spoke.

Born in Brooklyn in 1908, Krasner studied in a variety of art schools, including Cooper Union (1927-29), the Art Students League, the National Academy of Design (1929-32), and Greenwich House (1933).² Impressed with the moderns, especially Matisse, after a visit to the newly opened Museum of Modern Art, her student work at this time is an attempt to combine modern art with conventional realism.³ From 1934 to 1943 she worked on federal projects, including the PWAP and WPA.

In the late 1930s Krasner studied with the German modernist Hans Hofmann — the only first-generation Abstract Expressionist to do so — who introduced her to his methods of rhythmic push-pull spatial tensions between two and three dimensions, which she combined with Matisse's Fauvist bare canvas and blocks of color. She continued to experiment with School of Paris modes, joining Hofmann's exuberance with Picasso's heavily outlined still lifes. She was impressed by *Guernica* when it was shown in America in the late 1930s, even following it to Boston, but she was also drawn to Mondrian, which resulted in her joining, in an unusual move for a future Abstract Expressionist, the geometric painters known as

the American Abstract Artists. (Ad Reinhardt was the only other member of the Abstract Expressionist generation to join a group criticized for the lack of human reference in its forms.)

By 1940 Krasner was both unusually savvy and practiced in modern idioms. That year she met John Graham, an expatriate Russian artist who played a role as mentor to the Abstract Expressionists, introducing them to the latest ideas of the School of Paris. Many of the Abstract Expressionists read his *Systems and Dialectics of Art* — Krasner said it deeply impressed her — as did his advocacy of Picasso, Freud, and Jung.⁴ Around this time she read Jung's *Integration of Personality* and liked his general ideas, not those on art. Later she said, "In a general sense, it was his universality that attracted me, the largeness of his concept, partly because of my very early interest in fairy tales and in the writings of Maeterlinck and Edgar Allan Poe."⁵ Like many Abstract Expressionists in the early 1940s, she also read Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine.⁶

It was through Graham that Krasner met Pollock. Graham had asked her to exhibit in the McMillen Gallery in January 1942, and Pollock's work was included in the show. She noticed he lived near her and went to visit him. When she met Pollock and saw his paintings' independence from the early modernism with which she was absorbed, her own work was thrown into disarray. Pollock's work caused her to break her exclusive allegiance to the School of Paris. She developed a personal and professional closeness to him, and they married in 1945. Her work of this time is still very Hofmannesque, consisting of still lifes and of vigorous biomorphic curving shapes, but it also reflects Pollock's fusion of the motif with the ground, as in his *Moon Woman Cuts the Circle* of 1943. She, however, rejected his fundamental interest in automatism,⁷ and although she was more acquainted with modern painting than he, she was prompted to rework her canvases so much so that they became what she called gray slabs. Few of these works survive. It was not until after 1946 that she could begin to emerge from Pollock's impact. By that time, she had absorbed Pollock's linear drawing with a paint tube and began to look for her own direction.

In a series entitled *Little Image*, of which *Continuum* of 1949 is an example, Krasner presents a refined version of Pollock's 1946 transitional paintings, such as *Eyes in the Heat* and *Shimmering Substance*. Krasner creates an interlocking web of lines and patches that achieves the all-overall design that is perhaps the most significant formal achievement of Pollock and Abstract Expressionist painting. The dense overlaying suggests the continual integration of pictorial elements in an endless expansion.

While impressive in form, however, *Continuum* is more impressive in its statement. Its continuous web of lines and color patches reveal Krasner's understanding of the fundamental stylistic theme of all-over painting — continuity, unity, and vitality. A "continuum" is one of the most fundamental ideas of American painting in the 1930s and 1940s, and especially of Abstract Expressionism. Krasner has put the word to the crucial image and form of Abstract Expressionism — dynamic motion — evident, for example, in the flowing, linear rhythms of Pollock, the slashing, non-stop brushwork of DeKooning, and the perpetual ebb and flow of Rothko.

The image of movement has shaped basic conceptions of Abstract Expressionism from the beginning. In the 1950s the dynamic brushwork was explained by Harold Rosenberg in his famous essay "American Action Painters" as existential action. Rosenberg trumpeted Abstract Expressionist imagery of motion as indicating an autobiographical act of self-creation and an expression of the artist's personality. The dynamic brushwork was codified as "gesture" in an existential void, as the embodiment of personal, creative anxiety, as action and process.

In the late 1950s and 1960s this concept was supplanted by one with a higher pedigree. Surrealist automatism became the preferred explanation. The influence of Surrealist techniques and form was recognized insofar as the techniques recast the Abstract Expressionists' dynamic motion (and "action painting") as representing the actual functioning of the unconscious. The dynamic

brushwork of Abstract Expressionism was now seen as manifesting personal, unconscious process.⁸

While there is some truth in these explanations, Abstract Expressionist dynamism arose out of much more complex ideas and sources than the pop existential anxiety of the 1950s or the search for connections with the modern painting tradition that dominated criticism in the 1960s. The continuum represents the interconnectedness and dynamic processes and patterns of history and myth. As a fundamental idea in American art and culture in the 1930s, the idea of a historical continuum shaped the decade's history painting. The continuum was indicated by the emphasis on development of American and world civilization projected in sequences and stages in the mural painting of the Federal Government's art projects such as the Treasury's Section of Painting and Sculpture and the Works Progress Administration. It was also used by Regionalist painters such as John Steuart Curry in his Topeka murals to represent the beginnings, struggles, and triumphs of American history. As a concept it organized history in a continuing sequence of human action, events, struggles, and achievements over space and time. The continuum symbolized the interconnected, ever-advancing process, if not progress, of human experience.

Partially Marxist in its origins — the concept suggested the Marxist notion of an overall pattern to history, a connection between the past and present, and the dynamic interaction of events — the continuum was broadly based on basic forms and ideas in art and culture of the 1930s.

Two of its ideas stand out. Human experience, culture, and history were thought to be organized into patterns. The anthropologist Ruth Benedict, whose *Patterns of Culture* was widely read, ascribed psychological patterns and configurations to individual cultures. She defined a nation's culture as a more or less consistent personality of thought and action, with manners and morals that "are moulded to one well-defined pattern."⁹ Thomas Hart Benton, the leading Regionalist painter and advocate of American culture as central, incorporated this concept into his painting. For him, an artist's subject matter reveals the psychologies and cultures of American life organized into a pattern.¹⁰ He defined culture as a sum of behavior patterns and as a complex of a living society.¹¹ In their famous rhythmic sequences from foreground to background and from the past to the present, his paintings represented the continuous patterns of American life. While his patterns were linear, others expressed a more complex cycle. Curry's Topeka murals for the Kansas State Capitol narrate a continuous sequence of events from pioneer beginnings, to conflict and strife (*Tragic Prelude*), to triumphant renewed vitality and strength (*Kansas Pastoral*). In many murals the dynamic and progressive process of culture, the individual, and society became a virtually mythic image and form.

To the concept of the continuum as history and pattern can be added a second idea: spiritual growth. As the art critic Sheldon Cheney wrote in his *Expressionism in Art* (1934), the idea of interconnected, expanding human experience was pervasive in the 1930s. Described as "Evolution, Tradition, Progress," Cheney conceived of historical advancement as spiritual expansion and change. He used organic metaphors:

Life is change, growth; institutions are passing means towards change; art and the spiritual life of which it is a part — expression and experience — are never more than an accompaniment of a stage attained by man along the way, geared to his comprehension, which is ever enlarging.¹²

Cheney and many Americans in the 1930s — for example, WPA and Section painters of multipanel histories — conceived of human experience in this way: as a continuous, unfolding narrative separated into stages or sequences indicating cultural and spiritual advance that unites past and present but points toward the future. Such an idea defined history as an organic process itself.

These ideas were modified in the 1940s by the new absorption of modern art. With the interest in Surrealism in the early 1940s, the dynamic continuum was transformed into multiple stages or periods of consciousness. In 1942 the editorial page of the American Surrealist magazine *VVV*, for example, recapitulated Cheney's

evolutionism in modernist terms; that is, in terms consistent with modern art as opposed to 1930s anti-modernism. In a discussion of the need for a new synthesis of inner and outer life for an emancipation of the spirit (and victory over the forces of destruction, that is, the Axis), the editorial by the American sculptor David Hare and the Surrealists Breton and Ernest noted that the evolution of the emancipation of consciousness would take place in "stages".¹³

Another figure further refined the concept for the 1940s. Many Abstract Expressionist artists, including Pollock, Gottlieb, Rothko, Tomlin, and David Smith, drew from the master of the literary continuum, James Joyce.¹⁴

Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* provided a dynamic mode of linkage of history, myth, culture, and interior and exterior life that was fundamental to many Abstract Expressionists, including Krasner. The method's dense, interwoven symbolism and interlocking of past and present time, history, biology, and culture offered a completeness and continuity that the Americans sought. *Ulysses* suggested a mode of recasting ancient traditions and mythic patterns in modern life, while in *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce, following Vico, divides history into a four-part cycle that is reflected in the stages of the book's journey. Each phase of history is characterized by particular forms of government and culture (not unlike multipanel mural cycles of the 1930s). A prehistoric theocratic period is governed by mythic gods, giants, and heroes. It is followed by an aristocratic and then democratic phase, and, after chaos, a return to the original phase of the cycle. Joyce set forth a sophisticated, episodic, yet holistic continuum as well as innumerable themes — the dialectic of opposites, cyclicity or "periodicity," fertility symbols and rebirths that interlock with the Abstract Expressionist concept of the continuum.

From this broad stream of ideas, Krasner has plucked the fundamental idea of Abstract Expressionist movement. History and culture, in other words, human experience over space and time are subsumed and implied in a pictorial realization of perpetual motion. The continuum is the basis of her work from this time onward.

So too is an overall concept of a dialecticism that has ups and downs. Gradually Krasner moved from her smaller picture of the late 1940s toward, in 1956 following Pollock's death, an unleashing of her version of the dynamic pattern of beginnings or birth, conflict, death, and rebirth found in most Abstract Expressionist art. Such a pattern is not only a recasting of the 1930s pattern of beginnings, struggle, and triumph but a merging of it with ideas from mythology, psychology, and ritual. Mythologists and anthropologists define the standard pattern of myth and ritual as consisting of a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Joseph Campbell's very influential *Hero with a Thousand Faces* of 1949 phrased the pattern as a setting forth, a journeying into conflict, and then a resurrection. Like her colleagues, Krasner clothed the mythological concept of the overall pattern of history in modern forms.

Krasner's *Birth* of 1956 and *Fecundity* of 1960, (comparable to Newman's *The Beginning* of 1946 and Pollock's *Birth* of 1938-41), established her basic mature vocabulary. Semi-abstract forms emerge from a maelstrom extending from top to bottom of the canvas. Round forms suggest the eyes (recalling Pollock's *Eyes in the Heat* and his work of the 1950s) of biomorphic beings that are as much energetic motion as anything else. Here dynamism itself leads to the idea of the birth of form and its consequences. *Fecundity* establishes the beginning of the cyclic pattern of existence she will play out throughout her career. While indebted to Pollock, Krasner's concept is more naturalistic, implying a foliate, gestating, biomorphic expansiveness rather than Pollock's linear energy or entwined imagery of the unconscious. Hers is an imagery of blooming (like other colleagues of the 1950s such as Seymour Lipton's "Bloom" and Bradley Walker Tomlin's "petal" or "blossom" series).

Celebration of 1959-60 takes the dynamism and its meanings quite literally. *Celebration* is among the first of Krasner's most intense format, the long, horizontal canvas. The exploding fecund forms are in appropriately high-pitched hues of red and green rather than the monochromatic, earth tones of *Fecundity*. Curvilinear shapes flow upwards and across the canvas. Suggestions of

heads, bodies, and maybe flowers appear at the bottom and top of these unfolding form-complexes, much as they did in the figures of such Pollock works as *Male and Female* and *Two*. *Celebration* as a form and as an idea is at the other end of the cycle from birth or *Fecundity*. In an Abstract Expressionist context celebrations evoke the ritual holidays and events at the end of an ordeal or the attainment of a goal. Hofmann's *Bacchanal* of 1946, which reflects his conversion to Abstract Expressionist culture, is a similar statement. Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the source for much Abstract Expressionist musing about society, mythology, ritual, and history records innumerable ritual "celebrations" affirming the fertility of the earth and tribe that are basic to human history. In ritual or myth, celebrations reconfirm life.

Fecundity and *Celebration*, then, mark the extreme points of Krasner's cyclic pattern. Her work can always be related to one or the other, or to the intermediate stage — strife and storm. *Cosmic Fragments* of 1962 and *Another Storm* of 1963, for example, mark off more points in the process.

Cosmic Fragments extends the pattern of human behavior to the cosmos, a move typical of Abstract Expressionist practice form Pollock's *Galaxy* of 1947 and Newman's *Galaxy* of 1949, to Gottlieb's *Equinox* of 1963. For Krasner as well as for her colleagues, the universe was no longer anthropocentric; humanity was a part of the larger picture of the universe as represented most frequently in myth and ritual process. Primitive folklore and mythology are replete with themes of celestial participation, and shamanism often includes spirits and gods of the cosmos, while the shaman himself takes magic flights to the heavens. Krasner's *Cosmic Fragments* presents the celestial realm as a mirror of the subterranean realm, the unconscious and the underworld so important to the Abstract Expressionist thought. It depicts what Campbell called the "vital" flow or cosmogonic round of births and dissolutions as a continuum of generative, mythic energies.¹⁵ The forms become increasingly abstract, seemingly dissolving into abstract swirls.

While the forms in *Cosmic Fragments* still suggest organic, perhaps coiling or floral energy, *Another Storm* employs more abstract shapes as the powerful biomorphism is replaced by criss-crossing, overlapping, broad and raw, red and white planes and strokes. Krasner eliminates the recognizable, natural forms and their curvilinearity but keeps their underlying forceful, aggressive power and dynamic power. Her idiom thus proves to be flexible in theme and form. *Another Storm* marks the intermediate point in Krasner's cycle of mythic process and pattern. In its large scale and intense, painterly turbulence, it is one of the more dramatic of Abstract Expressionist paintings.

Icarus of 1964 sees the resurfacing of her semirepresentational forms in specifically mythic context. As with most Abstract Expressionists, Krasner drew from many cultures for her themes. While much previous writing has concentrated on their interest in Native American art, the artists culled their concepts of myth and ritual process from all over the world and from different cultural periods — in other words, from all space and time. Krasner here uses the Greek myth of Icarus who flew too close to the sun, thus melting his wax and feather wings, and falling to death in the sea below. Scattered feathers marked where he fell. Krasner's painting of orange and lavender curvilinear forms recalls Icarus's scattered plumage as it echoes a myth of celestial danger, human hubris, and disaster.

Kufic of 1965 dispenses with multiple colors and consists only of yellow ochre curvilinear outlined forms. While the painting is fully consistent with her development, in an odd way it resembles the paintings of the French Surrealist Andre Masson, such as *Elk Attacked by Dogs* of 1945, whose work influenced Pollock in the early 1940s. The distillation of her forms to criss-crossing lines evoking drawing and calligraphic writing (*Kufic* is a form of Arabic script) also suggests a meeting of the visual with the verbal that had begun in her *Little Image* works and was shared by many of her colleagues.

An original contribution of the *Little Image* series of the late 1940s had been Krasner's development of metalanguage painting — that is, the concern with an elemental, archetypal, archaic visual and verbal image expressed in forms that suggested rows or mosaics of letters or script. This concept was fundamental to interwar and Abstract Expressionist art. Surrealism had sought to combine the visual and verbal, as in Miro's archaic cave painting and sign

and word canvases. Pollock's and Gottlieb's pictographs, such as the former's *Stenographic Figure* of 1942 and the latter's *Letter to a Friend* of 1948; DeKooning's *Zurich* of 1947; Tomlin's *Number 9 (In Praise of Gertrude Stein)* of 1950; Stamos's *World Tablet* and *Saga of Ancient Alphabets* of 1948; and David Smith's *Letter* of 1950 are attempts to fuse elemental and often archaic pictorial marks with graphic script. This tradition could also be found in Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound's Chinese ideograms, and Joyce's Indo-European puns and words. For these figures, the goal generally was to find the beginnings of human communication and communion and to make archaic and modern consciousness simultaneous through common graphic denominators. As Stanley Kunitz, the poet and Rothko's close friend, noted, "When you touch language, you touch the evolution of consciousness and the history of the tribe. You reach for . . . a common tool, and find to your surprise that it has a cuneiform inscription on the handle."¹⁶

The hieroglyphics in Krasner's *Little Image* works reflect her combination of Hebrew writing and fairy tales, and the archaic unconscious. Krasner's father often told her Russian fairy tales and stories, and she studied Hebrew manuscript illuminations and calligraphy. Such references to ancient writing run throughout her art before appearing in *Kufic*. Later she said of her interest in calligraphic painting: "I think it does suggest hieroglyphics of some sort. It is a preoccupation of mine from way back and every once in a while it comes into my work again. For instance, in my 1968 show at the Marlborough I have a painting called *Kufic*, an ancient form of Arabic writing."¹⁷ These forms well up from her unconscious memory. In this regard, Krasner may have felt at home with the idea of the artist as vessel, an idea that Pollock, Jung, and others shared. *Kufic* thus adds an Arabic reference to the anthology of world culture that informs Abstract Expressionism.

While reasserting the dialectic ends of the pattern, *Combat* of 1965 and *Gaea* of 1966 (the Greek Mother Earth figure that Newman also referred to in his *Gaea* of 1944-45) initiate Krasner's most adventurous period. Here she begins to concentrate her forms into "pods" of biomorphic seed and eye forms. She then dramatizes the forms with contrasting interstices of color. *Combat*, for example, consists of a labyrinthian swirl of Pollockian shapes in red and white against an orange "ground," while *Gaea* contrasts pink and white circles, ovals, and rounded, triangular, organic forms (the latter from Pollock's *Echo* [Number 25, 1951]) against darker, purple tones. With the organic forms — heads, birds, bodies — forming and reforming in a coiling whirlpool, *Gaea* embodies the charged action of Abstract Expression as the energy of growth. In these paintings then the continuum is used to suggest an interlocking, crisscrossing modern combat (originally World War II) that reenacts the cycle of conflict and rebirth. The continuum joins opposing ends and fulfills a basic need and social theme of the interwar period as defined by E.M. Forster in *Howard's End*: "Only connect."¹⁸ In plain terms, Krasner's art represents the continual and dualistic ups and downs or pluses and minuses of the journey of life, history, and myth.

Courtship of 1966 reveals an autobiographic element that had always underlined her work. The painting contains concentrated biomorphic forms that resemble cooing birds. The "birds" are both drawn and shaped by the orange ground. Krasner once said that her painting can be read as autobiographical if one tries,¹⁹ but it is a mistake to interpret her work so narrowly. She integrates personal references and elements of ritual pattern and process. Here the birds may evoke memories of herself and Pollock, but it surely points to another moment in the cycle of birth and death.

For all of their originality, these works are still too Pollockian, reflecting his vertical biomorphs of the mid-forties and his swirling figures of the fifties locked in their own maelstrom. Some of the works, like Pollock's, have been described as monstrous or ugly, but she rejects that label: "I wouldn't call it monstrous or underworld. You use the word *monstrous* as though it were relegated to a realm other than man. I would call it basic, insofar as I am drawing from sources that are basic."²⁰ The paintings may reflect the personal turbulence of her life after Pollock's death, but they hint as well at the unique, optimistic decorativeness and bright, sharply-edged color of Matissean cut-outs which flower in her work in the early 1970s and with which she overcomes Pollock and creates some of her best paintings.

Like most of her colleagues, Krasner made art that faces two ways — toward the basic and irreducible units of visual and verbal expression and toward the symbolic representation of primeval generation and fecundity. Hers is another form of their fusion of the modern and archaic, the elemental and archetypal, and the dynamic pattern of human history and hope that eventually "flow-ers" or bursts forth. Major works such as *Palingenesis* of 1971 brilliantly combine Hofmann's and Pollock's vitalist rhythm, Joyce-like scriptive elementaries, 1960s hard-edge field painting, her own subliminal glyphic writing (perhaps from memories of the Celtic manuscripts she loves), and Matisse's flat, floral color and Orientalist pattern.²¹ *Palingenesis*, *Majuscule* of 1971 and works such as *Mysteries* and *Rising Green*, both of 1972, are among the finest American painting in the 1970s. They attain a newly found serenity within the complex themes of Abstract Expressionism.

Palingenesis, for example, states the Abstract Expressionist recall of the past.²² Krasner had conveyed this concept in her continuous patterns of "consciousness" and in her allusions to cultures of other times and places. Such allusions were standard among the Abstract Expressionists; for example, Pollock and Still drew on Native American ritual as living traditions. Still even described his recall of Native American culture as exemplifying the conception of "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," a nineteenth-century biological and twentieth-century cultural theory in which the growth of an individual embryo or individual is said to repeat the elementary stages.²³ Freud, Jung, Read, and many other important figures of the time were recapitulationists. Others recalled the past in references to Greek, medieval, and other civilizations and arts. The Abstract Expressionist recasting of the past perhaps can be best understood in terms of the modern traditionalism of Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Sigfried Gideon, the great architecture critic. In his classic *Space, Time, and Architecture* of 1941, Gideon defined the concept of the past for many Americans at this time:

To plan we must know what has gone on in the past and feel what is coming in the future. This is not an invitation to prophecy but a demand for a universal outlook upon the world . . . What we see around us [World War II] is the reckoning that . . . shortsightedness has piled up . . . The demand for a closer contact with history is the natural outcome of this condition . . . in other words, to carry on our lives in a wider time-dimension. Present-day happenings are simply the most conspicuous sections of a continuum.²⁴

Krasner's *Palingenesis*, with its swirling continuum refers to an idea of biological and cultural recapitulation. According to Stephen Jay Gould, palingenesis was to the eighteenth century naturalist Charles Bonnet, the ontogenic unfolding of individuals already performed in the egg; for the nineteenth century biologist Ernst Haeckel, it was the "true repetition of past phylogenetic stages in ontogenetic stages of descendants."²⁵ It particularly refers to the end stage of ontogeny, the resurrection of each body at the end of time from a "germ of restitution" hidden within the egg. As an idea then, Krasner makes clear once again her commitment to Abstract Expressionist cyclic repetition, recreation, and reincarnation of the past and its forms in an image of dynamic motions. Indeed, she once said, "I am never free of the past. I have made it crystal clear that I believe the past is part of the present, which becomes part of the future. I believe in continuity."²⁶

Palingenesis evokes the idea of continuity with swirling, leaf-like forms that seem to break forth or unfurl. Certainly nothing specifically suggests a biological or cultural theory: there are just spiraling, green forms. It is only by relating the title theme to the form that one can grasp the underlying larger thesis to which it belongs. Krasner has joined botanical form and process of blossoming to her dynamism and now Matissean bright, flat color to anticipate the seventies later "decorative" and New Image painting which emphasized ornamental abstractions also derived from Matisse.

Rising Green further expands the idea of unfolding. Her standard theme of birth is now conceived as a straightforward blooming. The painting concentrates on two complex, monumental swirls as opposed to her earlier multitudes of smaller ones. The bright pure, green color without brushwork and curvilinear composition suggesting burgeoning leaflets, fronds, and palmettes create a formidable image of joyous, radiant energy and life force. Krasner has absorbed and now passed beyond her influences to produce an original fusion completely her own. This is her best work.

Even the gray *Mysteries* of 1972 despite its more neutral tone carries forth the harmonious vitality. As a topic, mysteries refers once again to Abstract Expressionist themes of the powers of secret ritual and ceremonies to which most of the artists alluded — Pollock in *Guardians of the Secret* of 1943, Still in his shamanistic magic flights and ascents to the sky, and Rothko in *Ceremonial* of 1945. For Krasner and her colleagues, anthropological ritual was at the center of experience and the overall form of human experience.

She began experimenting once again in the later 1970s, however. Krasner added a double meaning to her idea of incorporating the past in the present and future cycle. In works such as *Imperfect Indicative and Imperative* of 1976, she incorporated her own past — her youthful, charcoal figure drawings and their ghostly rubbings on other pieces of paper — into her new style of collages. She says this is a synthesis of her past in the present done in order to make a personal, stylistic continuum or "oneness" of memories and "ghosts" of the past.²⁷ These works seem to evoke architecture and the figure rather than the natural world and are more Cubist than Abstract Expressionist. With their flashing angular shapes, indeed, they evoke the Gothic while referring by title to the tenses of language — and human life. Krasner characterized her own long development in terms of the constant changes of the continuum:

My own image of my work is that I no sooner settle into something than a break occurs . . . but despite them I see that there's a consistency that holds out, but is hard to define. All my work keeps going like a pendulum; it seems to swing back to something I was involved with earlier . . . For me, I suppose that change is the only constant.²⁸

The gray collage form proved to be short lived as Krasner moved into Abstract Expressionist curvilinear dynamism once again in her last years. *Between Two Appearances* of 1981, among her last works, is a stylistic and thematic return to her roots — the all-over fields of swirling curvilinear and multiple natural forms seen in her work of the 1950s and 1960s. From simplicity and concentration she has moved back to complexity, spatial and thematic layering, and raw, emotional expression, the foundation of her work and that of her colleagues.

Krasner's art asserts the crucial elements of Abstract Expressionism. Whatever the phase, form, or date, her work, like her colleagues, remained primarily mythic and ritualistic. Despite critics' examination of her work in terms of the European modern tradition and despite the inclusion of personal allusion to her own life, Krasner's art draws on the themes, ideas, and approach to form begun in the 1940s. It is an approach that ties concepts such as history, myth, culture, and nature into an elastic but totalizing pattern and process. Her semifigurative and abstract work is mythic, and that is her and her colleagues' central contribution to modern art. While artists such as Cezanne, Matisse, and Picasso were revolutionary, much of their art and thought was devoted to modernizing their inherited stylistic tradition. Krasner modernized the pattern of mythic action and growth, finding a new image for it in the mid-twentieth century that represented a gestating, historical and human fullness both harsh and vibrant.

1. This essay contains excerpts from my forthcoming study, *Resurrection: Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*.
2. Interestingly, two years later, Jackson Pollock's brother, Sandy McCoy, became a student at Job Goodman's classes at Greenwich House. Goodman was a student of Pollock's teacher, Thomas Hart Benton. Pollock often visited McCoy at Greenwich House at that time. Fred Adler, a student in the Goodman class, personal communication, Fall, 1985. Pollock did some sketches for murals for Greenwich that are tentatively thought to be around 1933 but may date later.
3. For a discussion of Krasner's early work, see Ellen Landau, "Lee Krasner's Early Career, Part One: 'Pushing in Different Directions,'" *Arts Magazine* 56 (October 1981): 110-122.
4. *Ibid.*, 119.
5. Marcia Tucker, *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1973), 11.
6. Barbara Rose, *Lee Krasner* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983), 70.
7. *Ibid.*, 53.
8. See William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition: Part Four," *Artforum* 5 (May 1967): 28-33.
9. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: New American Library Mentor, 1934), 42, 16.
10. Benton, "Art and Nationalism," *The Modern Monthly* VIII (May 1934): 232-236, reprinted in Matthew Baigell, *A Thomas Hart Benton Miscellany* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1971), 51-55; Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 3rd ed., rev. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1968), 201.
11. Benton, interview, *Democrat* XIII (February 1943): 3-5, 20-24; reprinted in Baigell, *A Thomas Hart Benton Miscellany*, 101.
12. Sheldon Cheney, *Expressionism in Art* (New York: Liveright, 1934), 5-6.
13. In VVV I (June 1942): 1.
14. For example, in 1950 at the Abstract Expressionists' meeting place, The Club, the sculptors Herbert Ferber and Richard Lippold noted of their works: "There is a stream of consciousness out of which these things pop like waves, and fall back . . . There are those here who feel that the things which they make are simply moments of a continuity." See Robert Good-nough, ed., "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)," in Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn, Schulz, 1951), 11-12.
15. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Abacus Sphere, 1975), 229.
16. In *American Poetry Observed/Poets on Their Work*, ed. Joe Bellamy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 146.
17. In Cindy Nemser, "Lee Krasner," in *Conversations with 12 Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 90.
18. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford, 1975), 106.
19. In Nemser, "Lee Krasner," 100.
20. *Ibid.*, 98.
21. Tucker, *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings*, 16.
22. For a discussion of the Abstract Expressionist concept of the past, see Polcari, *Resurrection*. See also Stephen Polcari, "Mark Rothko: Environment, Heritage, Tradition," *Smithsonian Journal of American Art*, (Spring 1988).
23. See Polcari, *Resurrection*; also Stephen Polcari, "Intellectual Roots of Abstract Expressionism: Clyfford Still," *Art International* (May/June 1982), 18-35.
24. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 7.
25. Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/Belknap, 1977), 484.
26. In Ellen Landau, "Lee Krasner's Early Career, Part Two: The 1940s," *Arts Magazine* 56 (November 1981), 87.
27. Krasner in Nemser, "Lee Krasner," 95. For a discussion of ghosts as a form of the survival of the past and the search for oneness, see Polcari, *Resurrection* and Polcari, "Mark Rothko: Environment, Heritage, Tradition." For Krasner and her generation, the need to interrelate and "merge" the human with the other was often discussed. Krasner once said in a discussion of her scriptural image with its simultaneous allusions to the organic and the abstract: "As I see both scales, I need to merge these two into the ever-present. What they symbolize I have never stopped to decide. You might want to read it as matter and spirit and the need to merge against the need to separate." Nemser, "Lee Krasner," 90.
28. Tucker, *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings*, 8.

