

The New York School Poets and Visual Arts: The Poetry of John Ashbery and Frank

O'Hara

The poetry of the New York School poets is highly influenced by visual art; the poets, such as Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and John Schuyler, were affected mainly by Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, Cubism and Dada. The reason why visual art had such a strong effect on their poetry is that the painters of the New York School dominated the art world, they set the trends, and poets and musicians followed them. Also, visual art played a major role in the lives of the poets as many of them were art critics and they often collaborated with the artists. The thesis focuses on two of the New York School poets, O'Hara and Ashbery, as the influence of visual art in their poetry is most prominent in comparison to the other New York School poets.

O'Hara mainly uses the techniques of Abstract Expressionism and he is mostly interested in the art of Jackson Pollock. O'Hara's poems carry immediacy and they are based on the expression of the present moment. The focus on the present parallels with the techniques of action painting which channels the artist's self and emotions. The use of such techniques as the "push" and "pull" theory, and the work with the surface and perspective are displayed within experimenting with the forms of the poems and further underline the importance of the present moment. The thesis also analyses O'Hara's mock manifesto "Personism" in connection with O'Hara's notion of what abstraction in poetry means and how it is treated within O'Hara's poetry. The examples of collaboration between a painter and a poet are described in relation to poem-paintings; O'Hara and Norman Bluhm's poem-painting "Noël" is considered in relation to O'Hara's treatment of abstraction.

John Ashbery takes his inspiration from Surrealism and the metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico, although the traces of Abstract Expressionism are demonstrated in his poetry as well. Chirico's techniques can be found not only in Ashbery's work with time and space but also in the themes such as aging. Ashbery's method of collaging along with the influence of Abstract Expressionism is discussed in respect to the expression of the immediacy in his poetry. Ashbery's often used method of cataloguing is characteristic of Surrealism and its "putting in" and "leaving out"; the poet asks the reader to use his own experience when reading the poems. The mixing of high and low culture of Abstract Expressionism incorporated into Ashbery's poetry is examined in connection to Ashbery's humour in the poems.

The last part of the thesis is dedicated to ekphrasis, the most prominent use of visual art within the work of the poets, analysed in the close-reading of the poets' most ekphrastic poems, Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" and O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter" and "On Seeing Larry Rivers' *Washington Crossing the Delaware* at Museum of Modern Art." Ekphrasis in the poems further underlines the immediacy, the self and the importance of visual art in the work of the New York School poets.