

PAINTER-PHILOSOPHER Mark Tobey sits meditatively beneath his art (*left*) and panels of Chinese writing which influenced it.

Mystic Painters

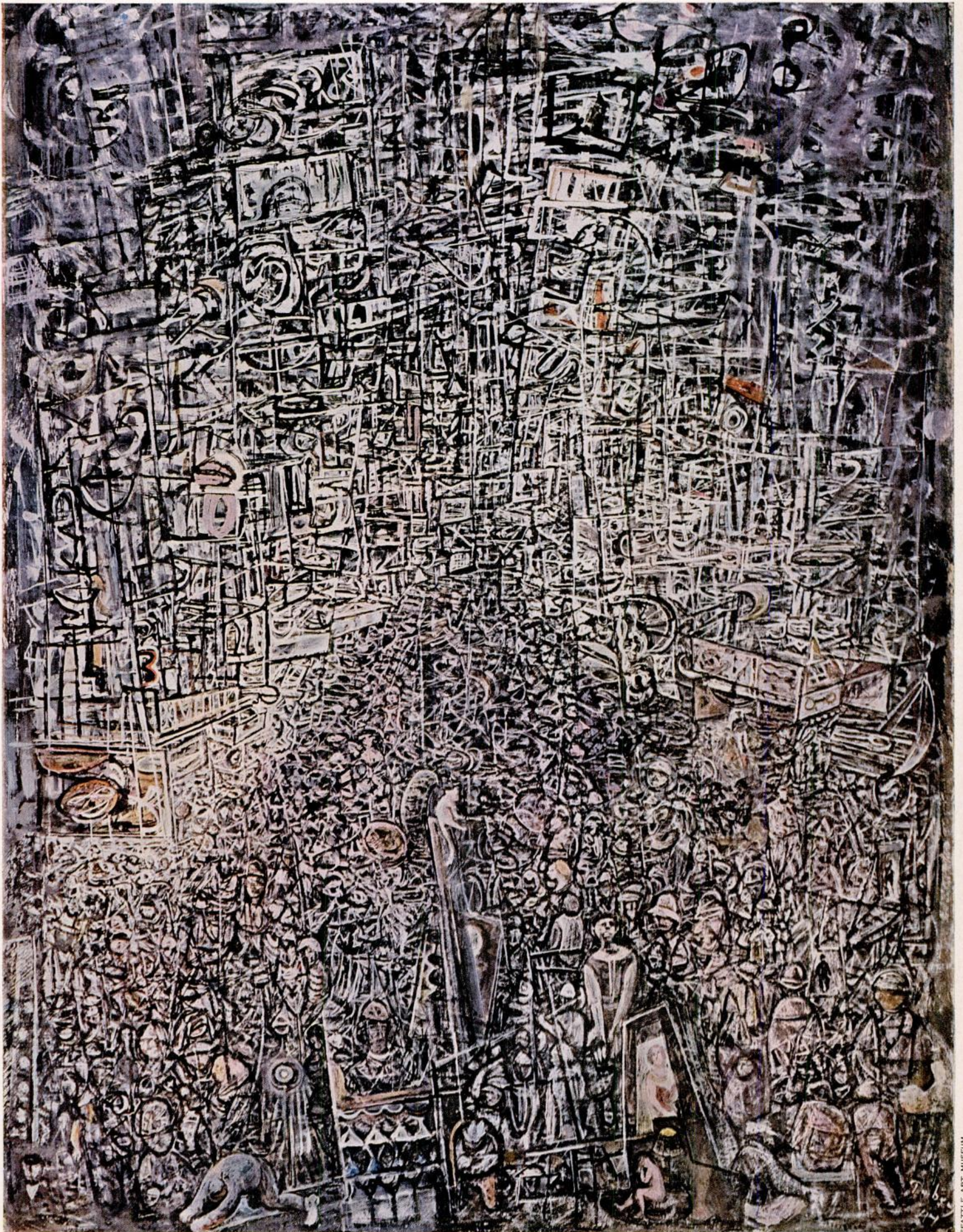
of the Northwest

THEY TRANSLATE REALITY INTO SYMBOLIC AND DISTINCTIVE ART

For more than a decade a remarkable art of shimmering lines and symbolic forms has been coming out of the northwest corner of the U.S., stirring up storms of irritation and enthusiasm in the galleries of New York, London and the Continent. Produced by a variety of artists living around Seattle, the paintings range in style from realistic to nonobjective. Yet they have one characteristic in common: they embody a mystical feeling toward life and the universe. This mystical approach stems partly from the artists' awareness of the overwhelming forces of nature which surround them, partly from the influence of the Orient whose cultures have seeped into the communities that line the U.S. Pacific Coast. The painters of Seattle have merged these influences, creating an art that without being a limited "regional art" is distinctive of the Northwest.

Pioneer and dean of Seattle artists is 62-year-old Mark Tobey (*above*), a native of Wisconsin who got his start as an illustrator

for mail-order catalogs. For a while Tobey lived in New York, earning a comfortable living sketching society portraits. Then abruptly in 1922 he struck out for the West, wound up in Seattle where he settled down to paint and teach. But before long he was on the move again, first to England, then Persia and the Near East, finally China. There, while studying the subtle linear art and refined calligraphy of the Chinese, he began to visualize nature in a new way. "When I looked at a tree, it became a flame of rhythmic lines bursting out of the ground." Back in Seattle, Tobey developed his now-famous "white-writing" paintings, city impressions (*opposite page*), visions of nature and symbolic images (*above*), conceived in the soft, grayish tones of the Seattle landscape and conveyed by vibrating networks of lines "to express the rhythm of life." These paintings had a decisive effect on Seattle's leading younger artists (*pp. 86-89*) who, inspired by Tobey, have moved off into their own mystical realms.



SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

ELECTRIC NIGHT is Tobey's conception of Seattle in wartime when mobbed streets and cluttered signs seemed to create frenzied network of lines and lights.

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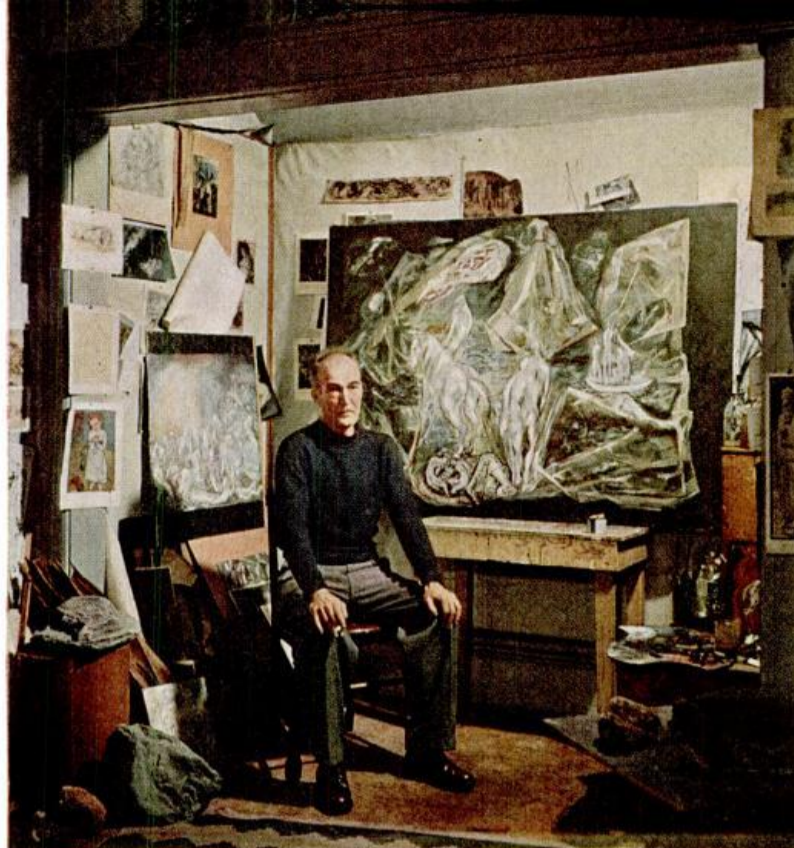
THE SEARCH portrays Callahan's favorite theme of man's quest for freedom, symbolized by rider who has escaped from stony molds confining his fellow men.

MAYNARD WALKER GALLERY

KENNETH CALLAHAN

He searches for his art symbols in stones

For most of his 46 years Kenneth Callahan (*right, in his studio*) has lived within sight of the Cascade mountains near Seattle, and their craggy contours and somber tones have dominated his art. As a student he traveled to Europe, later worked on a boat plying between San Francisco and Hawaii, but in between he always returned to Seattle. It was not, however, until he became a fire lookout during the war, stationed in a fog-shrouded post on a mountaintop, that he began to sense the symbolic aspects of the natural forces that surrounded him. The turbulent clouds suggested the unending struggle of humanity, while the rocky slabs below symbolized the social bonds and customs imprisoning men. These themes Callahan has since incorporated into all his work (*opposite page*). Seeking material for his stark landscapes, he roams the mountains with his 16-year-old son, making sketches of their jagged profiles and collecting rocks, which he lugs home to his studio for closer study. This fall, after 16 years as curator of paintings at the Seattle Art Museum, Callahan is retiring to devote his full time to his symbolic rock-bound art.



DEPOSITION OF THE MINER is Anderson's reworking in modern terms of traditional theme of Christ's descent from the Cross.



GUY ANDERSON

He derives human images from driftwood

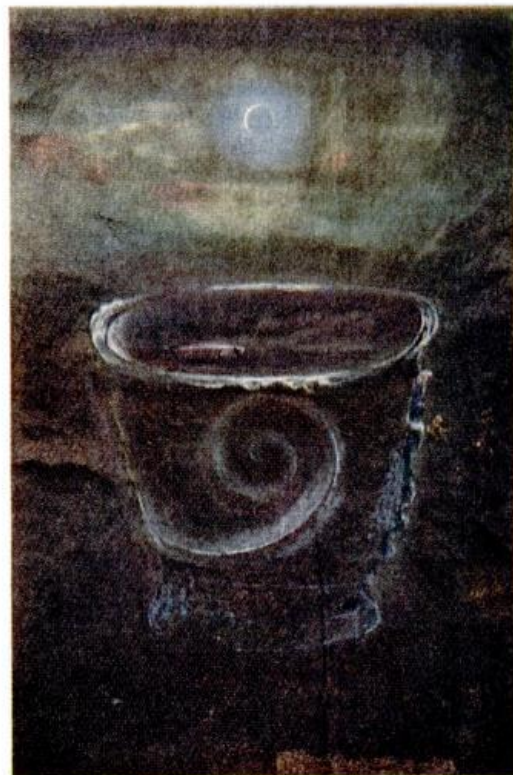
Guy Anderson's introduction to art came at the age of 6 when his schoolteacher in Edmonds, a suburb of Seattle, showed him some Japanese prints. This first encounter with Asian art was followed up by continuous visits to Seattle's Chinatown and art museum, whose Oriental and classical collections had a decisive influence on the young student. In the 1930s Anderson found a new source of inspiration in the driftwood he came upon in his hikes along the Washington beaches. Carrying the knotted, undulating forms home, he mounted them as ornaments for his walls and shelves. Before long friends and outsiders asked to buy his nature sculpture and Anderson launched into a busy though temporary trade of mounting and selling driftwood. When he returned to painting, the gray, weathered tones and flowing, twisted lines of the driftwood appeared everywhere in his work, even in human scenes like the mine tragedy at the left. Today Anderson, a bachelor of 46, still fills his studio with stones, boughs and flowers which serve to suggest colors and imageries for his paintings.

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PREENING SPARROW portrays innocent bird perched on eaglelike monster about to devour it.

COLLINS-MOFFATT COLLECTION



CHARLES LAUGHTON COLLECTION

HAN BRONZE is Graves's vision of a 2,000-year-old Chinese urn, glowing with an unworldly light.

MORRIS GRAVES

He creates images of inner eye

Best known and least seen of all the Seattle painters is Morris Graves, a 43-year-old bearded recluse who lives alone in a cinder-block house in the wooded outskirts of the city. He has been in the forefront of Northwest art ever since 1933 when, at the age of 23, he won a top prize at the Seattle Art Museum. Several years later he was introduced to New York in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art during which 45 of his paintings were sold. Such successes, which have continued ever since, have been financially gratifying but otherwise annoying to Graves, who worships privacy and once quashed an interview with the comment, "Vision grows on the meadows of obscurity."

Graves's vision, which is often obscure, has sprung like Mark Tobey's from the Orient. As a young man, he made three visits to China where he studied its art and its preoccupation with the inner, mystical meanings of the world. Back home in the Northwest woods, he began to re-create the images of nature which surrounded him—birds, fish, snakes, trees—cast in the luminous lines and colors of Oriental art to suggest the shimmering mystery of their spiritual life. These paintings, along with another series he has done on ancient Chinese ceremonial vessels, are what Graves calls "visions of the inner eye." When he is not creating them, he devotes himself to his forest hideaway, potting gnarled, dwarfed trees, pushing huge rocks into strange formations, tending his flock of exotic fowl or merely sitting, contemplating new visions of the inner eye.

