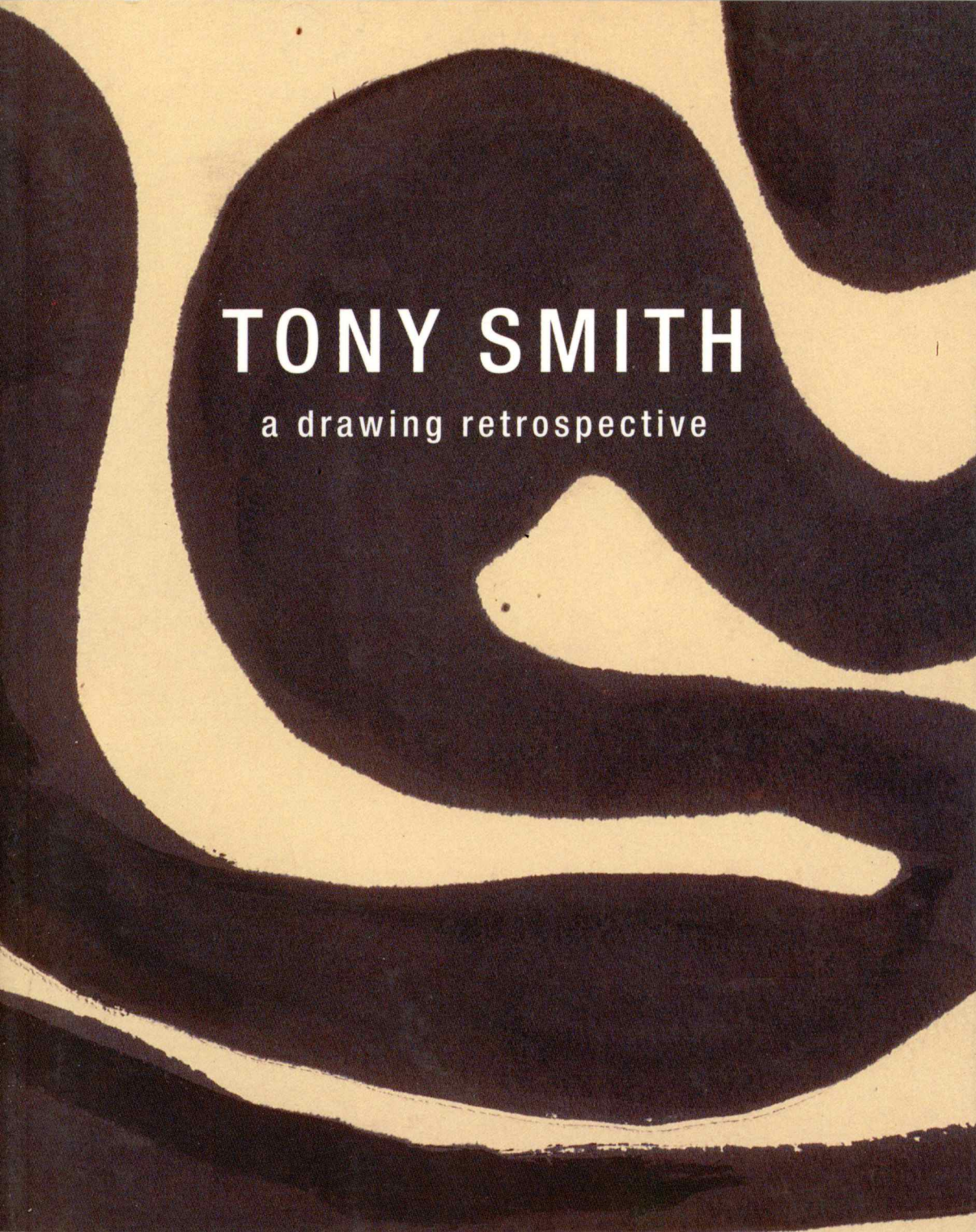


TONY SMITH

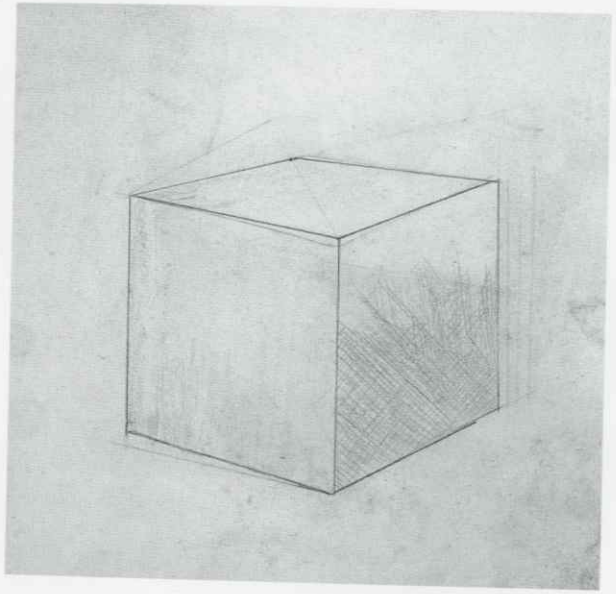
a drawing retrospective

TONY SMITH

a drawing retrospective

essays by KLAUS KERTESS and JOAN PACHNER

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY



Untitled, c.1961-64, graphite on paper, 5½ x 5¾ inches

PAGING FORM

Tony Smith's drawings almost always resonate with the diaristic intimacy and gleeful experimentation the medium of drawing should mostly be about. They are at once gentle, graceful, and fearless—and this from a sculptor first renowned for pioneering the hands-off look. Except for a small number of sheets relating to Smith's sculpture, these drawings have never been exhibited publicly before; they constitute a more-than-pleasant posthumous surprise.

Were it not for his standard human size, Tony Smith might well have been mistaken for a leprechaun. With his intensely impish gaze, he, like the folkloric Irish elf, seemed capable of revealing treasures, but only to those who might catch him. For a long time, few were given the chance. To many of us in the early 1960s, Smith had already become a legend before his sculpture was ever exhibited publicly. And he was rumored to be capable of reciting, by (and with) heart, long passages from *Finnegans Wake*. When his 1962 sculpture *Free Ride* was exhibited, at the entrance of New York's Jewish Museum, as part of the groundbreaking "Primary Structures" exhibition in 1966, it became the triumphal arch of the new center of the city's art scene, the Minimalist movement. Indeed, this structure—an abbreviated tripartite outline of a cube, joining a

horizontal right angle with a vertical one—shared a simple, self-evident geometric configuration and a nonhandmade neutrality of surface and form with the work of younger artists such as Donald Judd and, especially, Sol LeWitt. The implacable reductive specificity of these works was what earned them, or cursed them with, the label "Minimal."

But Smith was the peer and friend of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko; and his sculpture was only obliquely related to that of the younger "specific object" makers. Neither Smith nor the painter Agnes Martin, his peer, could successfully be annexed to this new movement. Just as Martin's ethereal washes made her grids measure a kind of Zen infinitude and beauty inimical to the more technological impersonality found in Judd and Robert Morris, so Smith's interest in organic forming (evident in works like *Cigarette*, *Moondog*, and *Smoke)* and a more humanistic geometry was also alien to these younger artists. His work had an internal measure that might occasionally be belied by its external form. Smith's seemingly Minimal *Die* (1962) is a six-foot cube embodying three-dimensionally the ideal figure inscribed by Leonardo da Vinci within a square (and a circle)—a highly unlikely model for most younger artists of the 1960s. Although Smith was an important influence on some of

these artists, as he would also shortly be on such as Richard Serra and Joel Shapiro, he was too protean ever to be part of a movement other than his own.

Smith started his art life as an architect, working for Frank Lloyd Wright from 1938 to 1939 and then on his own from 1940 into the 1960s. His acute understanding of human scale derived from his architectural practice, as did the industrial fabrication of his sculpture from models. In all his guises, Smith was a seeker of unifying order. The closely packed hexagons of honeycombs and the permutations of clusters of octahedrons and tetrahedrons that he was so entranced by became part of his intuition.

Smith's interest in the forms generated by an organic geometry is nowhere clearer than in his drawings, where his explorations were free of the more conclusive material demands of his architecture, painting, and sculpture. In virtually all but the sculptural studies or exercises, he treated the plane and shape of the paper support as a dynamic participant in the forming of the drawing. This forming always grows from one or more of the edges of the hosting support, and adjusts its configuration to the support's rectangularity. In the 1940s and 1950s, in his own way, Smith was already pioneering the use of the support as a generator of the image. Even though, in dealing with the paper

sheet he was dealing with the purely human invention of rectangularity, Smith's structuring was prone to the serendipitous vagaries of a consciousness fascinated by the ordering forces of botany and biology—a kind of making as molecular chain reaction that is very different from Frank Stella's in the seminal paintings that artist began at the end of the 1950s, using configurations that are considerably more rational in their deductions from the rectangular support.

The earliest (1940s) of these drawings of Smith's, in their sharpness of profile, flat organic stylization, and counterpointing of figure/ground relationships, seem to look quite directly to Henri Matisse's first, contemporaneous cutouts of 1943–44, as well as to his earlier mural *Dance* (1931), done for the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania. Smith's forms are less discrete and heraldic, and more abstract, than those of Matisse; and his composing is more allover and dynamically unstable. In these and the succeeding drawings, Smith is interested less in the final image than in the process underlying its creation. The lessons of Matisse are joined with those of Wright, Pollock, Newman, and Rothko—and with a continuously open sense of wonder.

The variegated referentiality of these drawings, of course, depends to some degree on the mindset of the viewer. One of a

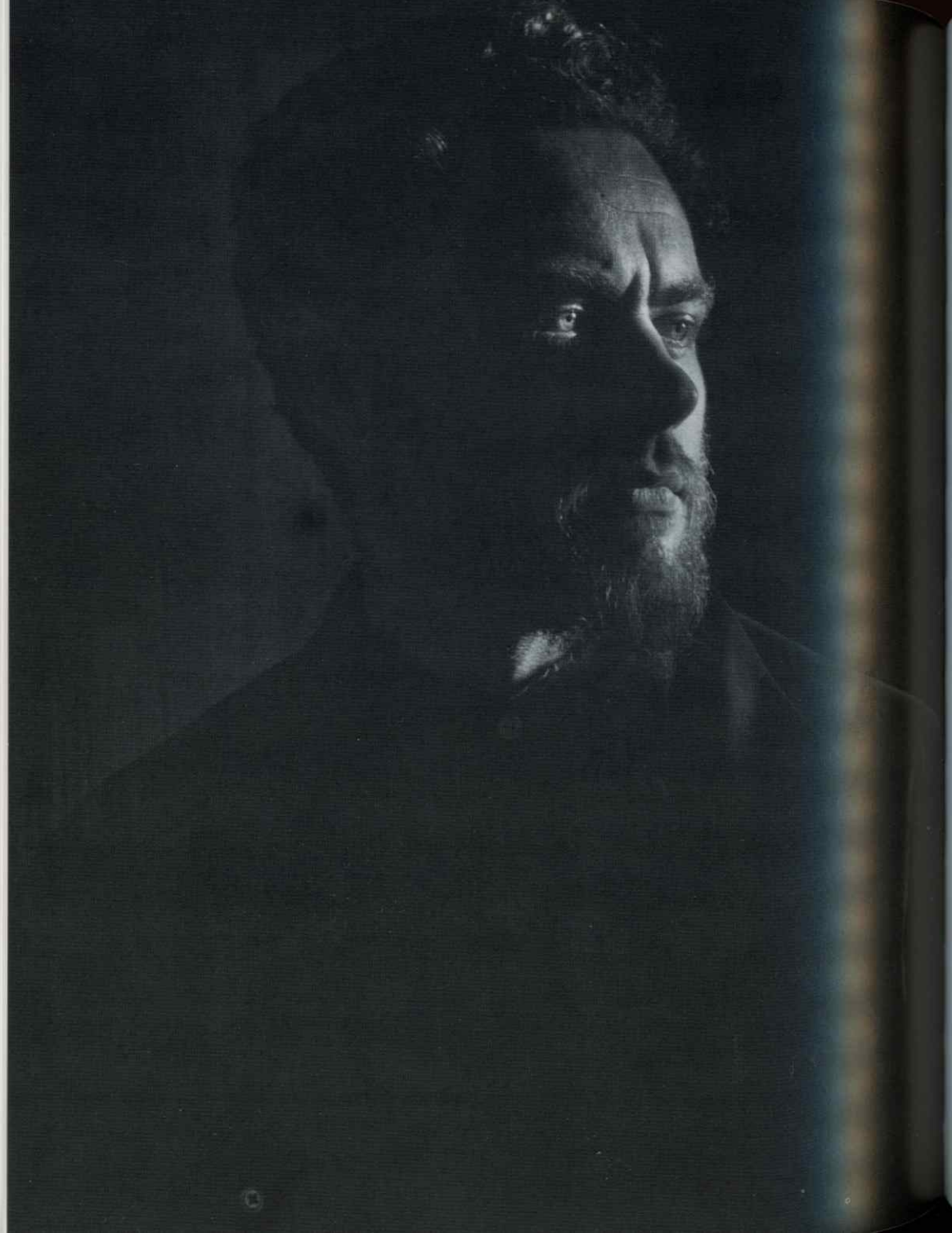
remarkable group of drawings done between 1953 and 1955, when Smith was accompanying his wife Jane on her singing engagements in Germany, reminds me of the errant and ragged patches that mark a variety of Japanese carp called *kohaku*; but this irregular patterning might equally have been inspired by the rippling reflections of leaves cast by the sun beaming through the branches of a tree—or by the shadows of some smaller plant swaying over Smith's paper. Elsewhere, plankton, a crush of water-lily pads, the color coding of maps, the maze of an anthill, or the additive organic geometricizing of Northwest Coast Native American art may (or may not) have propelled the voyage of the line into its imagined forming. Whatever the genus of these large (ca. 31-by-39-inch) drawings, the paper is always like a two-dimensional chrysalis encouraging some previously unseen metamorphosis. And always the scale is masterfully calibrated to make the image less a representation than an actual physical becoming.

Smith's organic hypothesizing embodies an open belief in and search for a kind of ordering that has become increasingly elusive or impossible for a younger generation to believe in, let alone find. His organisms are not neurotically eroticized, as are those of Carroll Dunham's drawings, which look back to Surrealism while

sharing in Smith's burrowing, linear way of composing. Nor are they the victims or generators of toxicity, as are so many of the organisms embodied in the sculpture of Smith's daughter Kiki. She, like the rest of us, lives in an age when all victories are Pyrrhic; and when the Cold War has not so much ended as moved inside the human body. Tony Smith's drawings unfold in a kind of Edenic amplitude and complex simplicity that grew out of his Modernist roots and are an enviable and profound part of our tradition.

KLAUS KERTESS

Untitled, c.1940, ink, crayon and collage on paper placemat, 9¼ x 14 inches



TONY SMITH'S DRAWINGS

It is at first difficult to reconcile one's knowledge of Tony Smith's modular black sculptures of the 1960s and 1970s with his sensual, often vibrantly colored works on paper from the 1940s and 1950s. We often forget that Smith was 48 years old when he began creating the geometric sculptures that made him famous. His mature sculpture emerged after a multifaceted thirty-year career in architecture, painting, and sculpture. Drawing, for Smith, was the common denominator of all these artistic media. His works on paper reveal the continuity of his imagery throughout his career, and his development from a method based on automatism to one concealing the spontaneous gesture behind a scaffolding of mathematically determined forms.

Born on September 23, 1912, Smith was the eldest son and the second of seven children in a close-knit, prominent, well-to-do Irish Catholic family living in the area of Newark and South Orange, New Jersey.[1] Afflicted with tuberculosis around the age of four, Smith spent his early childhood isolated in a one-room prefabricated house on the grounds of his family's property. He attended Fordham College, New York, in the spring of 1931, and Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., in 1931–32.

During the Depression, Smith was ineligible for the WPA projects that employed many artists. (Not only was his family too well off, his father was a regional director for the Public Works of Art Project.) Instead he ran a secondhand bookstore in Newark. By the time the bookstore folded, in 1933, Smith had decided he wanted to be a painter. Accordingly, in 1934–36, while working by day for the family waterworks business in East Orange as a toolmaker, draftsman, and purchasing agent, he studied by night at the Art Students League, New York, with European Modernists George Grosz and Vaclav Vytlacil and with the American George Bridgeman. Drawing was an integral part of the curriculum; it was a natural way for him to experiment, explore, and absorb a variety of visual languages, or styles.

In 1937, Smith decided to become an architect. If he did not want a career with the A. P. Smith Company, he had to be able to earn a living. Perhaps he saw architecture as a more realistic economic alternative to painting. It also seemed to present the possibility of combining his knowledge of engineering with his talents and interests in the creativity of fine art and design.

Smith was a member of the first class at Chicago's progressive New Bauhaus school, established in 1937 by László Moholy-Nagy; his teachers included Moholy-Nagy, Gyorgy Kepes, and Alexander Archipenko. But the school lasted only one academic year. By the fall

of 1938, Smith was working as a carpenter's helper and bricklayer at Frank Lloyd Wright's Suntop Home project in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. He eventually became clerk-of-the-works there, also doing construction estimates for Wright's Usonian houses and helping build the Armstrong home in Ogden Dunes, Indiana. At the beginning of 1939, however, Smith was abruptly called home, because his mother was ill.[2] This ended his apprenticeship to Wright and launched his career as an independent architect.[3]

From 1940 through the mid-1960s, Smith completed at least twenty building projects and envisioned many others. Between 1940 and 1945 he emulated Wright's forms and philosophical approach, but after the end of World War II he turned to the European models of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. Throughout his architectural career, drawing functioned as a counterpoint to his more practical pursuits. He often began his architectural designs with drawings of images he envisioned in a semiconscious state. While many of these designs, like the one titled *Fallen Star* (c. 1943), depicted visionary, unbuildable structures, he adapted other images, like the pentagon shape (p. 25),to the rational demands of building, investing his structures with a spiritual or cosmic element.[4]

In 1943, Smith met the actress and singer Jane Lawrence in New York; they were married that year in California, and lived in Hollywood

until the summer of 1945. In addition to various odd jobs, Smith designed a house based on a honeycomb plan for his new father-in-law, L. L. Brotherton, in Mount Vernon, Washington State (1944; p. 16). Following Wright's model, he transposed the close-packed hexagonal units, a model of efficiency in nature, to the world of man.[5]

While Smith was living on the West Coast, he wrote extensively, creating a large manuscript that features his search for evidence of recurrence, a cosmic order, harmony and rhythm in American culture—"the pattern of organic life, in America."[6] The foundation of his artistic and intellectual development, this visual diary includes extensive passages about the concept Smith called "generation," an idea that would remain central to his development.[7] He gave "generation" various interpretations, from the spiritual to the biological. While the word had no single visual correlative in Smith's work, it emerged there as a principle of modular repetition, like biological cells.[8]

In the summer of 1945, Smith left Hollywood for Provincetown, Massachusetts.[9] There he built a painting studio that he had designed for his friend Fritz Bultman. Smith already knew Hans Hofmann, Ann Ryan, and many others in the Provincetown community. Through the painter Buffie Johnson, he soon met Barnett and Annalee Newman; they became lifelong friends.

When the Smiths returned to New York in the fall, they began to meet other New York School painters, including Jackson Pollock[10] and Mark Rothko, as well as Clyfford Still, Theodore Stamos, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and the sculptor Herbert Ferber. Many of Smith's architectural commissions stemmed from this circle of friends.[11] An admiring contemporary and supporter, he hung their gallery shows (mostly at Betty Parsons) and often bought their paintings, even though he could barely afford them.[12] With Buffie Johnson, he also created a radio program that reviewed contemporary exhibitions and interviewed the artists.[13] With his knowledge of classical texts, contemporary literature, history, science, and philosophy, Smith acted as a kind of intellectual mentor to the Abstract Expressionist group. He particularly admired Newman, Rothko, Pollock, and Still, equating their work with Renaissance masters like Raphael. Smith felt that Newman, Rothko, Pollock, and Still had successfully transposed spiritual and universal feeling into contemporary abstract terms. It is not surprising, then, that Pollock was to paint the clerestory windows of a church Smith designed in 1950 (p. 24).[14] In 1953 he envisioned the stark white interior of another church plan to be decorated with fourteen abstract paintings, "symbolic in number and position of the Stations of the Cross," by either Newman, Rothko, Pollock, or Still.[15]

Smith and his Abstract Expressionist friends charted a parallel evolution through European Modernism; they were all profoundly affected by abstract Surrealism. Since the 1930s Smith had emulated the irregular, curvilinear, biomorphic shapes of Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso. His colorful, sinuous paintings on paper from 1946 evoke the work of both Miró and André Masson (p. 17). Other images of clearly outlined shapes were colored pink or black, or left as negative white shapes against a royal blue ground. These works, painted in tempera on gridded notebook paper, were clearly inspired primarily by Henri Matisse's cutouts, especially by his book *Jazz*, which was published in 1947, and a copy of which Smith owned (p. 18)[16]. During the same period he also produced a related group of similarly colored, abstract cut-paper collages (p. 19), as well as other tempera paintings (on lined paper) whose more eccentric shapes and offbeat color combinations suggest a somewhat darker emotional state.

Like many of Smith's drawings, these works are essentially paintings on paper; Smith saw painting not as an extension of our world but as a parallel universe. To avoid any sense that he was replicating the natural world, he filled his surfaces with flat shapes and colors; their resolute abstraction corresponds to his belief that painting should call attention to its two-dimensionality as a medium.[17] His goal was to avoid both naturalistic and decorative styles, to create

something "arranged in a configuration that is geometrically indicative of a higher order."[18]

Smith aspired to create "something intangible, something universal, something significant, something moving" from within his own psyche.[19] He often used automatic drawing to give physical expression to his inner self, merging his subconscious mind with his external, conscious life. He drew constantly and compulsively, making hundreds of small "scribble" drawings not only in sketchbooks but on envelopes, napkins, and tiny scraps of paper. He was constantly generating images and looking within them for seeds of future work.

At the same time, Smith felt that spontaneity itself was not enough, that "instinct or other automatic process is not creative. Reflex is not creative."[20] While he believed that all people have access to forms generated from the unconscious, it was the artist, he thought, who had the vision to mold those forms into meaningful compositions, "to make a subjective experience into an objective expression."[21] Thus Smith's long, meandering, "intestinal" black line (p. 20), pulsating with life, seems to have emerged from an automatic drawing, but he seems to have added elements around the composition's edges to contain and define this instinctive shape. An apparently spontaneous gesture is transformed into a work of art.

Certain formal aspects of Smith's art from the later 1940s are clearly indebted to the innovations of Abstract Expressionism. By 1948, his drawings were no longer isolated on the page, but used all the space available. These "allover" compositions, though they retained various focal points, often became very dense and graphically interlocked. His drawings also became increasingly populated by lines with a sense of inner life, echoing the sensibility of Pollock's dripped lines.

Around 1950, Smith began to vary his compositional approach: instead of working across the surface of the paper and then adding forms to the edge, he began to work from the edge toward the inside. Clear contours were replaced by more tremulous edges. Both of these changes emulated the manner of Still, then a close friend of Smith's.

At the same time, however, that Smith was engaged with the free-flowing imagery of Abstract Expressionism in his drawings and paintings, his architectural designs had already developed away from Wright's low, planar, horizontal, ground-hugging model to more vertical and cubic images descended from the model of Le Corbusier. In Smith's quest for symbolic metaphors about the universe and his search for spiritual harmony, the cube and its variants now seemed like the most potent symbol. He wrote in 1949,

"It is the clear realization of the cube in space which we cannot see, which informs and makes significant all that we do see."[22] A house that Smith designed for Orlando and Barbara Scoppettone in Irvington, New York, was originally conceived as a perfect cube. Curiously, a drawing for the structure from 1952 (p. 25) dates from a period when Smith probably knew he would have to modify this original Platonic concept: the one-bedroom house he had designed was too small to qualify its owners for an FHA loan. While Smith did eventually add a small guest room and bedroom closets to the design, they protruded out from the central cube. He chose to change the exterior profile rather than disturb the purified internal plan.

By the early 1950s, in any case, Smith had developed two seemingly contradictory manners—one physically, gesturally, and emotionally tied to Abstract Expressionism, the other more purified and emblematic, and defined by clean, geometric, Platonic conceptions. His future would depend on the reconciliation of these two strains.

From 1953 until 1955, Smith withdrew from the New York art world, going to live in Germany, where his wife was singing opera. They also traveled to France, Italy, and Spain. Though Smith was unemployed, these years were among his most productive: he read, thought, and wrote incessantly. Besides literature, he read all the

weekly magazines he could find at the Amerika Haus library in Nuremberg, as well as several German periodicals. Letters from friends kept him informed about developments in the United States, ranging from the disintegration of the first-generation New York School community to the McCarthy hearings.

Smith devoted much of his time in Germany to drawing and painting, and to a series of unrealized architectural projects. A group of expressionistic and impressively dramatic charcoals and pastels may have been done early in his stay abroad (pp. 30-41). The biomorphic irregular shapes, expressive surfaces, and generally allover compositions recall the work of Rothko and Still. In the charcoals, each mark registers in the viewer's eye like a brushstroke. The shapes and compositions range from compact to open, from smooth contours to jagged, nervous silhouettes; some neatly drawn images seem like maps of unknown territories. The large, sensual pastels add a new dimension and visual excitement. The close-value color combinations of some works—salmon, yellow, green, orange, brown, purple, and red—recall the palette of Milton Avery. In others, a black field is interrupted by jagged yellow, orange, and purple shapes intruding from the edges of the paper, evoking Still.

Other charcoals and pastels, on brown paper, reveal a new kind of allover composition based on a system of regular circular modules,

linked together like beads in a chain into a series of irregular shapes evenly dispersed across the composition, never touching or overlapping.[23] Formed on an abstract grid, these shapes nonetheless conjure up the teeming world visible under a microscope.

Two complementary negative and positive black and brown "linked-bead" drawings (pp. 36-37) have a complicated, family kind of relationship to each other, as well as a musical one, like a Bach fugue. They look strikingly similar, although their colors are reversed from one work to the other. Their internal scale is essentially the same, and they share certain shapes. Yet each retains its essential separateness. This series reaches its fullest expression in a colorful tapestry of circle-based shapes and forms densely packed into a shallow picture plane (pp. 30-31). Smith said that he used flat colors and hard-edge profiles in order "to get away from atmospheric painting,"[24] and the rhythmic modular framework focuses the viewer's attention on the picture surface. He was essentially attempting to regularize or systematize the allover style of the Abstract Expressionists, merging biomorphic abstraction with a systematically applied sense of order.

The beaded compositions are a prelude to the better-known "Louisenberg" works, a group of perhaps twenty-five paintings and numerous related drawings of various sizes and colors.[25] Each composition in this group, from the tiniest sketch to the largest

painting, was laid out on a grid; each square circumscribed a circle. Small working drawings done around 1954 in colored pencil (p. 27) show Smith pushing his linked-bead modules into regularized grids. The meandering line of the 1940s drawings reemerges here in a series of long continuous forms that intertwine like intestines. While the finished paintings of interlocked color planes are assertively hard-edged and two-dimensional, the small colored-pencil sketches feel relatively tactile and atmospheric, the elements more like small round spheres and less like flat circles.

By 1954, the grid had become a central aspect of all Smith's work, a visual expression of his belief in biological and cultural unity. "The grid, the module," he wrote, is "the basis of architectural order and freedom [as it] . . . unifies what is similar and emphasizes what is dissimilar." He also saw the grid as "the basis of human order"[26]—a symbol of a rational social order, of civilization in general, and of the United States in particular.[27]

Smith's grid and circle works represent his first mature reconciliation of intuitive form and rational structure, and mark the true beginning of his mature, module-based working method. Paradoxically, a more regularized system opened up a completely new set of aesthetic possibilities for him. These internally engendered compositions exemplify Smith's continued engagement with an idea

that he had begun to explore ten years earlier—the idea of generation.

In the spring of 1954, Smith—now the father of three-month-old Chiara (Kiki)—began a group of pastels and paintings that were on the whole more freely composed, fluid, and softer than the "Louisenberg" series. In these works—named the "Zabo" series, for Zabomitte, the area on the outskirts of Nuremberg where the couple were living in 1954–55—as in other works of the same period, Smith often stopped drawing the grid on the image surface and retained only the circular forms. In a series of black and white charcoal drawings from the summer of 1954, the cell-like beads metamorphose into a stack of irregularly shaped rounded forms, shaded by charcoal into massive elements that look like boulders (p. 28)[28]. The first in the series, dated July 19, feels oppressive. The irregular round shapes, defined by heavily drawn and redrawn contours, press against each other and against the edges of the paper like crowded bodies in an enclosed room. They exist at the other end of the spectrum from the evenly spaced and ordered circles of earlier works.

As Smith continued to rework the composition in a new drawing two days later, he made the image increasingly clear, brighter, and lighter. In subsequent drawings, the curved triangular negative spaces between the boulders are eliminated; separate shapes dissolve into

one another, creating new, irregularly shaped forms. It is as if the flat negative spaces, assuming a life of their own, have literally overtaken the volumetric masses. This series culminates in a strikingly taut, flattened composition in which the boulders have metamorphosed into shapes that feel like skin pulled, pushed, and compressed like silly putty into a shallow space (p. 29).

Interestingly, on the same day that he made two of these drawings—July 21, 1954—Smith created a similarly bold charcoal architectural rendering, resembling the boulder drawings in style and handling, but geometric (pp. 46-47). Titled *Glass House*, the image looks like a cube with framed indentations. While the title suggests transparency,[29] the drawing of the elevation contradicts that idea: it is curiously opaque, suggesting not lightness and translucence but the density of the cubic form. In retrospect, this volumetric drawing anticipates Smith's 1962 sculpture *Black Box* more than it resembles his contemporaneous work.

Returning to the United States on May 20, 1955, the Smiths moved directly to Tony's childhood home, at 66 Stanley Road in South Orange. They never again lived in New York. The late 1950s were a difficult period. Twins Seton and Beatrice were born shortly after they relocated. Jane took care of the three children, and Tony, suddenly, had to support a family of five.[30]

In 1955–56, he worked as an architectural draftsman in New York, but he apparently did not enjoy that position.[31] For the next four years, none of his architectural dreams were realized.[32] Meanwhile he returned to teaching, which he loved. His first position was teaching architectural, structural, and mechanical drafting at a technical school, the Delahanty Institute; he also taught architecture and three-dimensional design at Pratt Institute of Art, a job that overlapped with a full-time position at Bennington College, Vermont, that he began in the summer of 1958.[33] Perhaps it is not surprising that many of his drawings and paintings of this period attained an added level of emotive content, even an urgent sense of distress, reflecting the tensions in his personal life.

Smith created many drawings and paintings based on the modular system that he had devised in Germany.[34] Every so often, almost reflexively, it seems, he would make a small drawing based on those tangential circles; the grid became an invisible ordering principle. But now the palette was different, tending toward odd combinations of dark, off-color blues, dark greens, purples, blacks, and yellows, as opposed to the clear colors he had used in Germany. These intensely expressionistic paintings (p. 48) project a darker, more tormented mood than the "Louisenberg" paintings as a whole. Their despairing feeling is underscored by a small sketch dated July 4, 1958, and

captioned "malignant" (p. 49). Smith himself later described his "presences" as "black and probably malignant."[35] The biological world represented was no longer one of benign and optimistic growth but a dark, cancerous one, out of control.

Smith's life changed in the spring of 1961, when he was in a serious auto accident.[36] The sculptures he began to create during his convalescence established his international reputation. But drawing continued to be both a spontaneous creative outlet and a source of imagery. Smith repeatedly asserted that there were no drawings (except for factory working drawings) for his sculptures—that he worked out his ideas in his head and with modules.[37] In fact, however, especially in the early 1960s, he did numerous small-scale sketches, on napkins, paper towels, and small scraps of paper. He also made more-polished drawings for both executed and unrealized works.

Between 1961 and 1964, Smith explored the formal possibilities of the cube in drawings, paintings, and finished sculptures. He dissected it into its axial components, explored the possibilities of its edges, disassembled its planes, and punctured its volume (p. 8). Smith saw the cube not simply as an abstract form but as a nourishing shape that he could return to again and again. It offered him a way to take his designs "beyond pure utility."[38]

Smith often continued examining the possibilities of a particular form even after he had completed a piece. A drawing he captioned "For," and dated "6-1-64" (p. 65), for instance, derives from a 1962 design for the sculpture *Playground* (full scale mock-up 1966). This is one of a series of drawings that he envisioned to modify the proportions of *Playground*, making it more square, less elongated, more like a step or staircase—making it more like a building, and less ambiguous than its final form. This drawing captures Smith's thoughts in action as he considers various different proportional solutions. It becomes apparent that the work's deceptively simple form represents the culmination of a series of complex decisions.

Many of Smith's ideas on paper from the early 1960s did not make it into three dimensions. One example is a drawing captioned "Monster," dated March 20 and 21, 1962 (p. 60). In addition to the overcomplexity of the cubic form, Smith's own notation, "practically a hydrant," suggests that the image may be too literal in its allusions, too close in form to the fire hydrants on New York streets—which had been designed and manufactured earlier in this century by the A. P. Smith Manufacturing Company, Smith's family business.

Smith was often inspired by images that came to him in dreams or semiconscious states: "All my sculpture is on the edge of dreams. They come close to the unconscious in spite of their geometry. On

one level my work has clarity. On another it is chaotic and imagined." [39] In the same way as a Surrealist author might write down the details of a dream to find visual material for his narrative, Smith for decades created abstract drawings that he labeled "dream images." He continued to create automatic drawings, often developing extended series of black and white designs that would vary and evolve slightly from one image to the next (pp. 58-59). When Smith fell ill in the 1970s, he created more black and white ink images, including some with white forms hovering in a black space that have an eerie feel to them but are at the same time reminiscent of the joyous Matisse-like temperas from the late 1940s (p. 73).

A group of flat, colored, free-floating iconic images hovering against variously colored grounds, from around 1965, forms a counterpoint to the new plastic direction that Smith's work took at the same moment (pp. 66-67). The graphic image of *Marriage* (1961/65), for instance, transforms the work from an architectural gate to something more awkward and oddly anthropomorphic. A different zigzag form evokes the roof line of various architectural designs from the mid-1950s, while the spiral, a symbol of organic growth and dynamic equilibrium, had occupied a central place in Smith's work since the early 1940s. These are Smith's "dream images." In the context of his drawing, his sculptures seem to be less the end of a process than a part of the

flow of ideas. Smith drew often throughout his life, and he did not stop this visual thought process when he began to make sculpture. Drawing remained central to his work and was at the heart of his successful transition from architecture to sculpture.

Even in the early 1960s, Smith's expressionist roots were evident in his supposedly "Minimalist" sculpture. His geometric "presences" often appear to have an internal life pulsing within their regularized structures. Works like *Cigarette* (1961) and *Snake Is Out* (1962) are surely descendants of Smith's early, throbbing black and white line drawings. The interlocked volumes and negative spaces of his sculpture derive directly from the interlocked forms of his two-dimensional compositions.

In the same way that Smith combined and recombined circles to make new shapes in his 1950s drawings, he recycled modular elements of his 1960s sculptures to make new shapes. *Willy* (1962), for example, was made from "spare parts," clusters from *Snake Is Out* and several other pieces.[40] Sectors of *Willy* were used to create the form of *Gracehoper* (1962), and parts of that work were recycled to make *Stinger* (1967), *Source* (1967–68), and *Moses* (1968). According to Smith, individual elements may have been reused as much as twenty times.[41] The self-generating system embodied the idea of "generation"; he was procreating his own species.

Ultimately Smith's particular genius as a sculptor cannot be understood without reference to his drawings. The tension between impulsive method and rational elements that gives his geometric "presences" their buoyancy was evident in his two-dimensional work by the late 1940s. The next decade manifested his more determined efforts to harness the forces of nature by the symbol of rational order; by the 1960s, his Expressionist roots had been subsumed into his modular constructions. Drawing was central to Smith's ability to absorb his influences, work through aesthetic problems, and generate new imagery. His oscillation between freely composed and more ordered designs is clearly evident in the works on paper, as is his desire to mold these diametrically opposed manners into a new kind of unity. Smith emerges, then, as an artist spanning several generations—from the School of Paris to Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. He was uniquely able to form a profoundly personal synthesis of abstract, emotionally charged forms and geometric systems.

JOAN PACHNER

ENDNOTES

With the exception of the dated images, it is impossible to ascertain the precise course of Smith's development, which did not proceed according to a linear progression.

Special thanks to Jane Smith for her support, and for her contributions to the accuracy of this text; and to Sarah Auld and Jim Shepperd for their comments on a draft of this essay.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tony Smith was a third-generation descendant of an Irish family. His great-grandfather, Peter Anthony Smith (the same name as Smith's father and younger brother) had been a stonecutter. Peter Smith (Tony Smith's younger brother), interview with the author, 14 April 1991.
2. To the family's shock, Smith's father died first, after an unexpected, massive heart attack in December 1940. His mother died shortly thereafter, in March 1941.
3. In 1940 Smith went into practice with two friends he had met at the New Bauhaus, Ted van Fossen and Laurence Cuneo. This three-man partnership lasted from January 1940 until June 1941. Smith and van Fossen remained in business together (as Smith van Fossen) until January 1945. For the rest of his architectural career Smith was a solo practitioner, though he often worked with other, registered architects, since he was never a registered architect himself.
4. The pentagon was the basis for the design of the Olsen houses, Leete's Island, Connecticut (1951), while the hexagonal honeycomb module was the basis of unrealized designs for both a chapel for his friend Fritz Bultman (c. 1945) and a church (1951). For a discussion of the evolution of the honeycomb module in Smith's work, see the author's essay "Tony Smith: Architecture into Sculpture," *Tony Smith Skulpturen-Sculpture 1961–1969*, exhibition catalogue, (Münster and Mönchengladbach: Westfälisches Landesmuseum and Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach), 1988, pp. 48–71. In German and English.
5. Wright's first honeycomb plan was for the 1936 Hanna House on the campus of Stanford University, Palo Alto, California. But Smith sought to increase the sense of spatial flow both within the house and from inside to outside. Thus his module in the Brotherton house is twice the size of that used in Wright's Honeycomb house. See Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* 5 (December 1966):15.
6. This phrase appears on the first page of the 304-page manuscript.
7. The word "generation" was "given" to Smith in 1943 by his friend Jack Dudley, a writer. Smith, writing, dated 25 May 1945.
8. Smith's 1966 sculpture *Generation* refers directly to this concept.
9. Jane Smith had left Hollywood in 1944, returning to work in the theater in New York. Tony stayed on the West Coast at least another six months, but went north to Washington State to build the Brotherton house.
10. Smith first met Jackson Pollock in 1940, but did not get to know him well until 1948, when Pollock called Smith for advice on how to hang his show at the Betty Parsons Gallery.
11. In New York in 1947, Smith remodeled the ground-floor townhouse at 235 East 58th Street for Buffie Johnson; this resulted in the first publication of his work, "A Painter Remodels a Ground Floor," *Harpers Bazaar* 82 (April (1948):152–53. In 1950 he designed an ambitious complex for collector Fred Olsen in Leete's Island, Connecticut. He also designed Theodore Stamos's house in Greenport, Long Island (1951), and art dealer Betty Parsons' studio and guest house in Southold, Long Island (1959–61). The Parsons houses were published as "Imaginative Vacation Houses: Studio by the Sea" in *House and Garden* 131 (June 1967):87–89. Around 1963 Smith