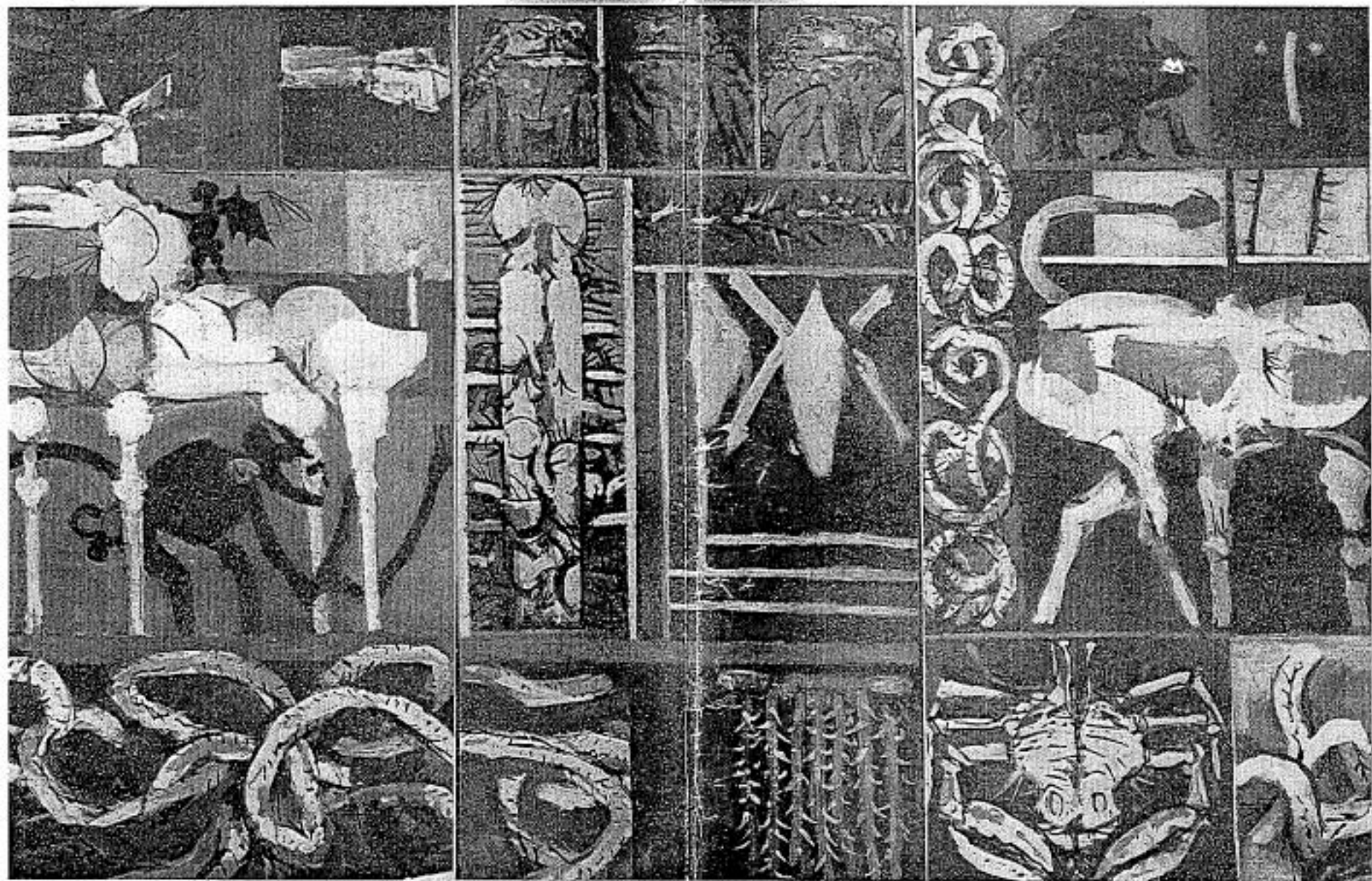


# IRVING KRIESBERG



The Jewish Museum New York, N.Y.

OCTOBER 24 — DECEMBER 17, 1961

at

## **The Jewish Museum**

of

**The Jewish Theological Seminary of America**

92nd Street and Fifth Avenue, New York 28, N. Y.

MUSEUM HOURS:

SUNDAY, 11—6; MONDAY TO THURSDAY, 1—5

CLOSED FRIDAY AND SATURDAY

### **"PASTORAL" (1954)**

ANIMATED FILM BY IRVING KRIESBERG

BLACK AND WHITE, 22 MINUTES

MUSIC BY DOUGLAS TOWNSEND

Shown through the courtesy of Film Images, Inc., New York

Daily at 2:30 and 4:30 P.M. Auditorium, second floor

JM Exhibition 1961  
Section:

IRVING KRIESBERG, born and educated in Chicago, has been presented to the public in several one-man gallery shows and museum exhibitions. His paintings can be found in an impressive number of American museums and renowned private collections. To present the full scope of his work extending over fifteen years in a comprehensive show is the objective of this exhibit.

It would not do justice to the artist to find in this array of paintings nothing but the obvious transition from the representational to the abstract, as if the show simply demonstrated the gradual disappearance of the object. It is more revealing to observe how Kriesberg, even in his early work transforms the canvas into an energetic field of tensions and stresses. His portraits are mainly based on the strong color contrast of red and green.

IN HIS formative years, Kriesberg was exposed to the art of the contemporary Mexican muralists. Biblical and social themes entered his work, but he soon found that the subject matter had become for him only a pretext for the release of inner impulses of a purely visual nature. Thus, the distinction between representation and abstraction turns out to be rather immaterial. The painting which was inspired by the biblical scene of Jacob wrestling with the angel does not depict any special moment of that nocturnal encounter; instead, it envelops the protagonists in a whirlwind of rotating, twisting and writhing movements so that the eye cannot rest on any detail of limbs, wings, and bodies.

FROM HERE it is only one step to the actually turning circular paintings which mark a special phase in the artist's development. (The pictures are mounted in such a way that they perform three revolutions a minute.) The rotary disc fascinates him because it defies gravity, and makes possible the emancipation of the figure from spatial fetters and fixed relationships, whereby a leg can become an arm. This visual interchange manifests itself

also in Kriesberg's static paintings, as frequently evidenced in his treatment of dancing figures.

THE DANCERS have pictorial competitors who play a highly conspicuous role in his iconographic household: animals, which at times become more direct carriers of his artistic expression than his human figures. Closer to nature, the animal exists without a mask, and when Kriesberg confronts it with man, it looks as if the latter loses some of his substance. The representation of birds, usually against a light background, occurs time and again in Kriesberg's work, symbolizing freedom from gravity.

THE ANIMATED FILM was an early love and this desire coupled with a medieval attitude of mystery and hierarchy resulted in his film "Pastoral", completed in 1954.

MEANWHILE, as his art progresses, his paintings become a unique combination of the simultaneous and the successive. His polyptichs, which first appear in 1956, are not intended to emulate movies. They are paintings based solely on pictorial composition, elevated into a realm in which the various parts constantly change their interplay of line and color in the transmutations of the reversible panels. Sometimes full of color-energies, sometimes content with the use of black and white, they reveal the forces of contrast, the dramatic conflict of forms, the interaction of pictorial elements, united in a cosmos, an order of their own.

RECENTLY, the forms in Kriesberg's polyptichs have become smaller and are woven together rhythmically, almost like a tapestry, subdivided in three, sometimes four panels which in their rich color texture are like flowerbeds, a delight to the eye. With these the colorist Kriesberg has opened another chapter, the chamber music of his art which makes the look to his further development promising indeed.

*Stephen S. Kayser*



IN THE reversible panels which we must also turn by hand, the intercombinations force us more into the action. We believe we effect some part of the art's outcome. A dialogue of sorts between ourselves, the work, and the artist begins. A hint of the random at first is sensed, as though nearly any set of relationships were equivalent to any other. We read them from left to right, right to left, from inside out or outside in. A four-part work can be seen in sixteen re-arrangements. Memory cannot easily account for the connectives by which they are united and differentiated.

PROLONGED involvement with the works dispels this initial loss of the feeling of order and an almost classical structure reveals itself slowly, each part interlocked with another. But this involvement must take place frantically with each viewing. I do not believe we are familiar enough with the new conventions of seeing which Kriesberg is helping to develop, to retain for long the threads which compose these works. Each confrontation therefore is a little strange.

ACTUALLY pleasure may be derived from this fact: the panels contain at once a note of sustained obscurity which challenges, and an emergent clarity which satisfies. Possibly these pieces are Kriesberg's most advanced and fullest statement of his basic interests. The processes of change and growth are literal and unavoidable. We are compelled to engage them with our bodies and our eyes. A blue is charted from one panel to another, present in the half-occluded straightened leg of a woman, an emblematic circle, a sliding scumble of images and markings which could be a hundred things, ending for a moment in a large horizontal path cutting across three of the fields. It is a royal blue, a muddied blue, a greenish blue, a baby blue, an undertone over which lies its logical complement: orange. In following these developments we shift not only eye levels but our bodies as well. We step back to see and then move forward to reverse the panels into different groupings. What remains from before, now takes up a new set of pathways, and the changes become more complex. As a poet may increase the tension of his composition and thus the drama of his subject matter, by stretching the distance of his rhyme from two lines to ten, so Kriesberg employs the empty gaps between the panels and the time it takes to find the recurrence of a given image or color note on their various sides. Themes only rarely line up from field to field, or proceed in a simple linear progression; this would be easy and would surely kill for him and for us the joy of constant struggle and discovery.

THUS while it is possible to discern a larger and simpler order in all of his works, this hardly ends the challenge. For example, Kriesberg appears to be interested in two broad areas: a fantasy with a certain group of images, and an abstract, nearly architectural organization of colored forms playing with or against one another. These are seen separately, proceed side by side, or are combined in one work (in the later work the joining is especially evident).

FOR THE ARTIST these are equivalents. A so-called abstract shape is as potent in meaning as the image of a snake. They derive from each other. But for the observer such ties are less apparent and whatever simple classifications we make hardly substitute for the difficulties and surprises before the actual works. Kriesberg's method builds in enough of the random and discoordinated to keep it strange for some time to come. At the core, it is founded on the idea of relationships, of course, but relationships metamorphosed endlessly into sometimes hard-to-detect and distant cousins.

THE TASK of reading these unusual paintings is formidable but it is worth it. Irving Kriesberg has pushed the boundaries of his art farther than most artists. He has increased the possibilities for us all.

Allen Kaprow

Catalogue no. 15



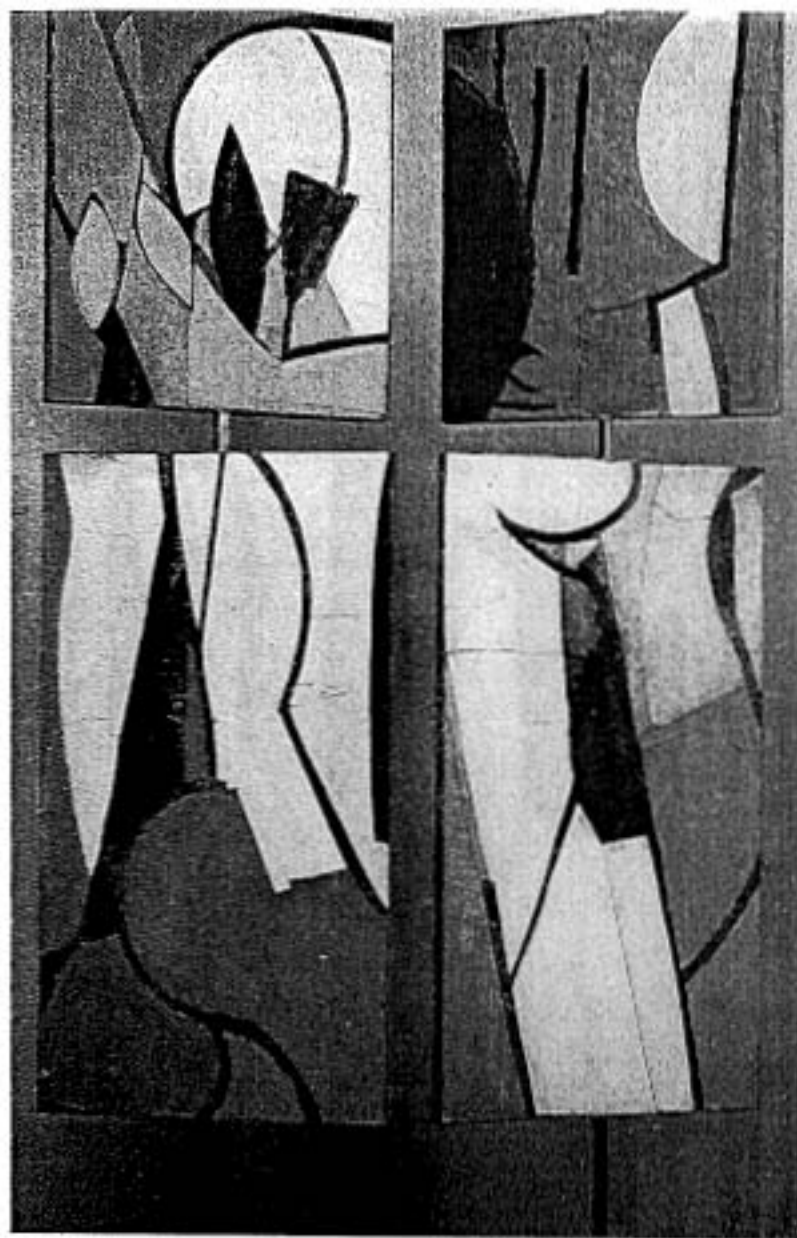
# CATALOGUE

- |    |  |                        |         |      |
|----|--|------------------------|---------|------|
| 1  | ABRAHAM AND ISAAC  | Oil                    | 30 x 24 | 1945 |
| 2  | ABRAHAM'S OFFERING   | Oil                    | 48 x 36 | 1945 |
| 3  | CAIN   | Oil                    | 32 x 38 | 1945 |
| 4  | *JACOB'S STRUGGLE  | Oil                    | 60 x 45 | 1946 |
| 5  | WOMAN  | Revolving disc Oil     |         | 1947 |
| 6  | THE CART   | Oil                    | 32 x 38 | 1948 |
| 7  | SELF PORTRAIT  | Oil                    | 28 x 36 | 1948 |
| 8  | THE DANCE  | Tempera                | 36 x 48 | 1949 |
| 9  | FIGURE   | Revolving disc Tempera |         | 1949 |
| 10 | CARTS  | Tempera                | 40 x 36 | 1949 |
| 11 | DANCER WITH DOGS   | Tempera                | 22 x 18 | 1949 |
| 12 | MORNING RITUAL   | Tempera                | 20 x 14 | 1950 |
| 13 | DANCER BEFORE THE SHEEP  | Tempera                | 40 x 48 | 1950 |
| 14 | BIRDS  | Tempera                | 56 x 48 | 1951 |
| 15 | *YELLOW SHEEP  | Tempera                | 54 x 48 | 1951 |
|    | Collection Esch Museum, Brandeis University,<br>Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard J. Teis |                        |         |      |
| 16 | RED SHEEP  | Tempera                | 48 x 40 | 1951 |
|    | Collection of the Museum of Modern Art<br>Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Kestor           |                        |         |      |

Dimensions in inches, height preceding width  
\* Means illustrated

- |    |  |                             |         |      |
|----|--|-----------------------------|---------|------|
| 17 | NIGHT SHEPHERD   | Tempera                     | 38 x 32 | 1952 |
|    | Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Morris Cohen,<br>Buffalo, New York                  |                             |         |      |
| 18 | BIRDS ALIGHTING  | Tempera                     | 38 x 34 | 1952 |
|    | Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Kasie,<br>Detroit, Michigan                 |                             |         |      |
| 19 | SELF PORTRAIT  | Oil                         | 30 x 24 | 1953 |
|    | Collection of Mr. Martin Widdfield,<br>Glen Cove, New York                     |                             |         |      |
| 20 | NEW BABY   | Tempera                     | 16 x 20 | 1953 |
| 21 | AT THE SEASHORE  | Oil                         | 52 x 42 | 1953 |
| 22 | *THE STREET  | Oil                         | 50 x 44 | 1954 |
| 23 | A DOG CAME INTO VIEW   | Oil                         | 75 x 50 | 1954 |
| 24 | THE PINK FROCK   | Oil                         | 41 x 34 | 1955 |
| 25 | FIRST GRADE  | Oil                         | 38 x 30 | 1955 |
|    | Collection of Mr. Vincent Price<br>Los Angeles, California                     |                             |         |      |
| 26 | *STREET FACES  | Oil                         | 18 x 50 | 1955 |
|    | Collection The Baltimore Museum of Art<br>(Gift of Mr. William A. Dickey, Jr.) |                             |         |      |
| 27 | BIRD OF THE AFTERMATH  | Oil                         | 26 x 22 | 1956 |
|    | Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Thorpe<br>Evanston, Illinois                    |                             |         |      |
| 28 | LOVERS XIV   | Reversible, oil and collage | 60 high | 1956 |
| 29 | *LOVERS XI   | Reversible, oil and collage | 60 high | 1956 |
| 30 | LOVERS XIII  | Reversible, oil and collage | 60 high | 1956 |

Dimensions in inches, height preceding width  
\* Means illustrated



Catalogue no. 39

## CATALOGUE

- 45 SOUNDS  
Triptych Oil on canvas 50 x 75 1959
- 46 \*CHRYSA LIS  
Reversible quadriptych  
Oil on canvas 52 x 84 1960
- 47 \*SAUL  
Triptych Oil on canvas 71 x 126 1960-61
- 48 SEASONS  
Triptych Oil on canvas 52 x 100 1961
- 49 THE FIRST TURTLE  
Gouache on paper 24 x 28 1961
- 50 BIRD ENTHRONED  
Gouache on paper 24 x 28 1961
- 51 ORANGE BIRDS FLYING  
Gouache on paper 16 x 34 1961
- 52 THE BLUE LION  
Gouache on paper 24 x 28 1961  
*Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Leroy S. Levine*
- 53 GREAT MOTHER SNAKE  
Gouache on paper 24 x 28 1961
- 54 DOG AND SNAKE  
Gouache on paper 14 x 17 1961
- 55 \*LITTLE WHITE SNAKE  
Gouache on canvas 24 x 28 1961
- 56 STORYBOARD  
Reversible Triptych  
Gouache on canvas 40 x 60 1961
- 57 STORYBOARD  
30 Drawings  
Pen and ink 14 x 17 each May 1961

Dimensions in inches, height preceding width  
\* Means illustrated

31	THE WOMAN	Reversible, oil and collage	36 high	1957
		Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Leroy Levine, Great Neck, New York		
32	PLANTS	Reversible triptych	Oil 36 x 36	1957
33	WOODS	Reversible quadriptych	Oil 60 x 65	1957
34	PORTRAIT IRENA		Oil 26 x 20	1957
35	LOUIS		Oil 26 x 20	1957
		Collection of Louis Krosberg, Chicago, Illinois		
36	MATERNAL IMAGES	Reversible quadriptych	Oil 52 x 63	1958
37	PORTRAIT DR. LEROY LAVINE		Oil 28 x 21	1959
		Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Leroy Levine, Great Neck, New York		
38	PORTRAIT JACQUES LIPCHITZ		Oil 30 x 24	1959
		Collection of Yula Lipchitz, Hastings-on-the-Hudson, New York		
39	MATERNAL IMAGES	Quadriptych	Oil 56 x 72	1959
40	MATERNAL TRIPTYCH		Oil 18 x 40	1959
41	THE CAVE	Triptych	Oil 54 x 65	1959
42	PENETRATION OF THE BLACK	Triptych	Oil 56 x 97	1960
43	RUSH OF THE CAT	Triptych	Oil 56 x 100	1960
44	TRUMPETS	Triptych	Oil 55 x 86	1960

Dimensions in inches, height preceding width  
 \* Means illustrated

