

DOROTHEA TANNING

10 Recent Paintings
and a Biography

October 16-November 15, 1979

GIMPEL-WEITZENHOFFER GALLERY

1040 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK



DOROTHEA HER LIGHTS AND SHADOWS
(a scenario)

Galesburg, where nothing happens but the wallpaper.

A day of high wind. A regular hurricane that blew down one of the three poplars in front of our house. My mother was terrified. So I was born. The following perils were thus created:

1. The peril of angels and geniuses
2. The peril of flexible cruelties
3. The peril of the square root
4. The peril of joining the immortals
5. The peril of calm, the sepulchral hours of the day
6. The peril of the sea on the floor
7. The peril of white

Should everything be told, the whole truth? This is Galesburg, Illinois, my birthplace. This is my father's desk, my father from Sweden: Andreas Peter Georg Thaning was seventeen years old when he came to America. He never left. There are letters spread around on his desk and more letters in the pigeon-holes. We must not touch them, they are family letters. We must not touch anything on this desk. So we will never know much about his past. Mother says that he left a great family back there, with a beautiful house, stables, lands. Why should I care? For he can draw a horse so well you'd think it was ready to talk (Mother's words). And here is the pure truth about my father: he was horse-crazy. We see him there in the vestibule of that beautiful house in Skone, Sweden, his suitcase beside him. He is waiting to say goodbye to his father. (Had he not already lost his mother at the time?) But his father does not come down. Barricaded behind his pince-nez and his pretentions

(there is a photograph of the old codger actually wearing a monocle, can you imagine?) he repudiates the boy. And Andreas the renegade goes his way, never to return. In his blue eyes the reflexion of a vision: the Far West.

But the desk full of letters is in Illinois. How did my father wind up in this God-forsaken town, how could he prefer it to the beautiful house in Skone? Here is no sign of the far west nor of the horses he had dreamed of taming. Nothing but his marvelous way of drawing a horse, a wild horse with defiant eye, drawn on any old scrap of paper that came to hand.



D.T. second from left



The Truth about Comets, 1945

1. The peril of angels and geniuses

Snow is falling. We are out with our sleds which we hook onto the tailgates of heavy wagons. We all wear padded boots but there is one child, and that is me, whose feet are like two chunks of ice in their boots. Scene: the snow-covered lawn in front of our house. Lying on my back in the snow I raise my arms and slide them down in the cold white powder. When I get up I have left my print: an angel.

Evening. The whole family is seated under the lamp, around the library table. I am drawing an angel, all naked except for the wings which are feathered, a lady angel with round breasts and a sweet smile. My mother doesn't like my drawing. Lifting my eyes I see them all looking at me as if I were a stranger, the whole family. It's a good thing that I keep my other drawings upstairs, hidden in my toy drawer. They are not inspired by the picture (the only one) hanging on the wall of our dining room, a chromo-lithograph of a Boecklin. It is called *Heiliger Hain* and shows a procession of veiled figures gliding towards an altar in the forest. I detest this picture as much as I can detest anything. It is profoundly abhorrent to me and makes me think of Sunday mornings in our church and the sermons treating of hell and damnation; there, where I am obliged to sit mouse-quiet for an hour every week, listening to the detailed menaces of divine vengeance which God has reserved for us humans.

So whether the gaze is out on the flat landscape punctuated by neat boxy houses each locked in its rectangular island of grass, or in the dining room with the melancholy shrouds of *Heiliger Hain*, both views are insupportable and so I look inside of me. And lo! there are mountains a mile high with waterfalls like Rapunzel's hair. There is a forest so full of yellow eyes it gives off a sulphur glow. And into the grisaille of our nostalgia pour the wonderful colors of imagination. A way of lighting the labyrinth, of leading a life as extravagant as that of a Bavarian prince who, of course, is also a poet.

2. The peril of flexible cruelties

Mr. A. P. G. Tanning (he had swapped the 'h' for an 'n' in his name, believing it looked (sounded?) more American), a frail sort of D. H. Lawrence, without beard but with a will as big as God the Father. He loved us. "Promise me you'll always let me buy your shoes." He also loved sports. He wanted us—three girls, alas! no boys—to become swimming champs. We became three dainty ladies with backbones like spiderwebs. We played croquet. That is they did. My own hours were spent learning pieces to speak—elocution



they called it. Because Dorothea would be an actress, said Mother. She didn't know that being an actress means being an athlete: fit, tough, above all unemotional. If the sad poem makes you cry you are disqualified. (Lucky me.)

Our family had a friend, Carl Sandburg, who was my father's buddy in the Spanish-American war. His great friend the poet. Daddy showed him little Dorothea's sketches. "Oh no! Don't do that! Don't send her to art school. They'll spoil her talent." As a poet he was self-taught, wouldn't you know? At any rate, the utterance of these august words deprived the young artist of an early start. Later, after ripe reflection: no doubt it was for the best.

At sixteen I was employed: The Galesburg Public Library, my House of Joy. In that gray stone building flying the American flag I was forever corrupted by *Salammbô*, *The Red Lily*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Against The Grain*—oh, such delicious hymns to decadence, hidden in the stacks among thousands of other bewitching revelations.



Public Library, Galesburg, Illinois, 1930

Meanwhile 1928, it was, there began some years of college; an effort, possibly, to straighten the lines of the portrait, to calm the iridescent colors, to bring the delinquent clay into some acceptable shape. Was it a success? Did the student in neat cashmere and textbook aura learn to gossip under the elms of the campus and flirt with new boys?

Scene: the north room, my room. I am packing an enormous trunk. Into this trunk goes everything I own. The packing must be done discreetly, on the sly even, for my sisters could catch me in the act. Goodbye, Knox College. Goodbye, public library, where a mediocre employee can read undisturbed, Poe, Coleridge, Flaubert, Dowson (*Last night . . .*) the Brontes, Radcliffe, Walpole. . . . But why go on? I'm on my way. Two weeks later they are all reading my letter from Chicago: "And please send my trunk; it's all packed, in my room." Poor parents of children! What suffocation to realize it has not worked out as it should! My father will not win. He will not, finally, always buy my shoes. But he might have said, "I fled at seventeen. Why did you wait so long, Dorothea, to do the same?"

Why indeed? Had it something to do with the spiderweb back? Or had the bonds of sentiment, so silky sweet, become fibrous, more terrible to cut away? But also, and this is the reason that doubtless carried the most weight, the real reason that kept the trunk hidden in the closet instead of hoisting it onto the train, I was not ready to leave. Something had to be taken care of first. Those years of library and college furnished me with a sly weapon, the key to the banquet-hall, the feast of books, and the way to find them. Yes, it was in this seat of learning with its little greek-named clubs for prematurely aged ladies and gentlemen; that scene of my theatrical debut and farewell in the same play; that academic swamp where a perpetual battue was carried on in hopes of flushing out a distinguished alumnus—for there is no snob more snobbish than an academic snob—yes, it was there that I learned to read. It may have been a coincidence.

My father loved sports. He loved Hitler because of the sports. But then Hitler started killing people. And that is what killed my father. Shattered by deception, his heart stopped beating while Hitler was marching up the Champs Elysees. (Show funeral). Daddy! I looked at him in his best suit, lying in the white satin box like a piece of pale candy. He didn't look natural, simply, and that's what made me cry. (The real reason why people cry at funerals.) Mother was inconsolable. She also helped me inadvertently to lose my equilibrium. If you are lying in the grass watching a grasshopper silhouetted against a cloud, it's very simple: the grasshopper becomes the cloud and the cloud the grasshopper. They scramble into the elevated train in Chicago. The clacking of their wings wakens me. I who am sleeping there, and we are all glad to meet again, old friends that we are.



In Chicago—this is 1932—I meet my first eccentrics. They float across the screen to the sound of jazz and the tinkling of glasses containing icy drinks. The drinks are made of dubious alcohols, this being prohibition time. There are thousands of icy drinks and I feel more and more certain of an exceptional destiny. So much is waiting for me, I must hurry. (Floating forms, waving pillows and cage-bars. Pan in on keyhole and there is *Palaestra!*)



Palaestra, 1947

Other towns. New Orleans. 1935 I am painting in a big ugly room. Later, in San Francisco, 1936 I am painting in a small ugly room. In New York at last, all begins with a close-up of a cockroach (live, and beside it an entomological print.) He shudders, speaks in asides, and scurries under the bed, thus aping immeasurable depths. Is he the grasshopper from Galesburg?

3. The peril of the square root

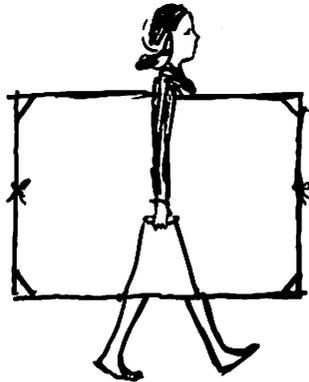
One is aghast at the sight of a wilting identity. It can't be revived by battle or even widowhood or will. Hurry! A flower is dying.

Is it interesting to starve in New York? Are stomach pains exalting? Just questions. A friend takes me in. Two hopefuls, we haunt galleries and museums; share our hamburgers, take Hindou dancing and read the Bhagavad-Gita. A flower is reviving in spite of sometimes hilarious employment, (sound of cymbals crashing and a redoubtable contralto voice). *Orpheus in the Underworld*. I am on stage at the Metropolitan Opera. Mother, informed, is in heaven. She doesn't know that her daughter comes to 'work' at 8:15 in the evening, puts on a sweaty gunny sack costume, finds her place marked by an X on the stage and waits. Curtain. Music. Mute, as are the other supers, I wave my arms for 10 minutes, go out, up the iron staircase, take off the gunny sack dress, and leave by the stage door where a little round man in felt hat and cigar hands two sad dollar bills to each of us, the valiant and talented supers.



Exoticism,
New York, 1942
(photo: *Time*)

July 1939, Paris, France. Gay Paris? A city paralysed by anxiety, almost empty, breathing painfully before the imminence of war. There is a permanent lump in my throat as I wander the beautiful streets. I have letters for artists, Tanguy, Max Ernst, Soutine, van Dongen. . . . But nobody's home. And soon the war is there like a train on time. And I go back to New York.



(Pan-zoom through a hole in the memory.) Ah! Saved! By the portfolio. We want to gain money honestly while waiting for our day. We know the insides of ad agencies, magazines, big store art departments. Soon they use our first names. (Steamy soft-focus on restaurant window, where brown lobsters are waving their little claws without hope.) Perspective-traveling down a blue street empty of people and dogs. But they can't be far: on the sound track a crowd roars and dogs bark. The noise grows as a near voice—man, woman, child?—chants and sobs by turns. A milky disc crosses the black screen, slow as the moon. The near voice waxes stronger, singing in Lorelei witchery:

Who, oh who could have dreamed that this spongy, tortuous-minded, other-worldly-obsessed woman would be so attentive to the planet? Is it possible that a mind so laden with forbidden fruit, so intoxicated with decadence, so haunted by fantasms, would turn before sleep came at night on feverish thoughts of warheads, ethnic strife, mass media, megalomaniac avant-gardistes with their shipwreck philosophies, chemical conflicts, the population explosion and the progressive desecration of the earth? The thoughts are womanly, therefore candid, turbulent. (Show close-up of turbulent thought.) Only the other night, just imagine, she lost a good hour of sleep trying to find a way to drop a big bomb on the Atrium. It has to be a suicide pilot. He swoops down and drops his load. Not content with the explosion (assuming he aims right) the intrepid pilot swings around and zooms in to spray the whole scene with a good dose of napalm and, looking down as he dips away, he sees tiny generals and aides of all kinds fleeing convulsively, their *bodies fused together like paste*. (Cut.)



Left to right:
Glad Nude with Paws, 1978;
Même les Jeunes Filles, 1965;
Lottery, 1967;
Sleeping Nude, 1953;
Tableau vivant, 1954;
The Philosophers, 1952;
Maternity III, 1966

(Close-up.) A dressing table littered with trinkets that the busy shopper has bought for presents but can't bring herself to give away. She can be seen in the mirror, her head sumptuously furnished with vain thoughts. Her lips move: "I cultivated fear for fun. I feigned timidity and modesty when in truth I felt bold and proud. I could cry at will, I developed crying muscles that are still there. Now I cry when I don't want to. I am permanently afraid, I am timid and sincerely modest. What was once a huge joke on those around me has become my scar, my bafflement."

(Traveling to medium-sized dog, smoking before the fire.) Dog: "Cruel disadvantage of the feminine biology, maybe." (Fireworks appear in the distance, growing until they fill the fireplace.)

Lady: "Possibly. If I had been a man, oh what I wouldn't have done! Just a few more whips of sheer physical energy, just a slight tilt away from the dreamy wish toward the bulldozer crunch that flattens everything and everyone in its path. I would have thrown off a thousand constraints, done things, said things, painted a thousand more pictures, made sculptures as high as the Empire State with inbuilt fountains to spit on its roof."

Dog: "Liar!" (He knocks out his pipe on her head, raising ugly welts.) "Besides, why paint a thousand pictures when two are enough? Or none at all, providing you've made some other amazing gesture, a gesture that only a little woman can make."

Lady: (Says nothing. She is so fond of dogs.)



4. The peril of joining the immortals

(Telephone rings. A voice answers but telephone still rings. Pan in on two babies in their crib. They are about 21 months old.)

Baby: "In my case it brings on the feeling of having an alarm clock in my loins. Although it has gone off it has failed to wake anybody up. What a rip-off! Everybody straining, hoping, plotting endlessly."

Baby no. 2: (fingering its tiny penis) "Yes, and multiplying. Why should humans continue, can you give me one plausible reason?"

Baby no. 1: (lispng) "To settle their differences."

The babies grow rapidly before the camera, like opening Disney flowers. They are soon adults. (Show them growing too fast for their nighties, which stretch and tear.) Scene



Hail, Delirium! 1979

changes dizzily. Montage. When the big babies jump out of their crib and land on the beach we see that they are male and female. They lie on the sand without joy. The man talks in clichés: “How patient are the destinies that await us!” or, “Man’s greatest strength is boredom.” As for the girl, she is crying. Her tears fall on the sand like drops of acid in a tidal wave. “My God, what am I going to do now?”

Her sobs are drowned out by The Magnolia Jazz Band playing: “Incredibly Ugly Hotel Rooms With People to Match,” a hit tune. (Five million records sold, not counting the tapes.) It is May 16th.

1940. I am lying on a high cement platform. It’s about the size of an inexpensive oriental rug. A ladder is there to climb down, way down to get back onto the planet. But, lying there, I know I’ll never make it. So I look up at the sky and am not in any hurry. Meanwhile, the day drowns without a single cry in its suicidal shadow.



She Paints Too, 1959

(Noise). A squeaking sound in the dark. It's the child-architect. They found him there in his little nightshirt, his little bare feet, sitting in the attic at an old drafting table. He was drawing feverishly. Piles of drawings—monumental, grandiose projects—lay on the floor around him. He looked so adorable, so frail, perched on his high stool. Only, you must know, the results weren't all that great. The work lacked cohesion. As architecture it was eccentric, pretentious, and sinned above all by its many gratuitous details (I'm sorry to have to say this) and to cap it all, contained neither doors nor windows. His daddy had exposed the little architect to 'the things of beauty'. As you expose litmus paper to the light. And the architecture buffs flocked and fought to put his fine hair in a curl.

Listen. Look behind the curtain of every great man and always, oh, almost always, there is this daddy or mom or maybe an uncle who started the whole thing early on. Yet it does happen *sometimes* that there is nobody, really nobody, and the entire adventure is undertaken without help. It is dreamed alone, an objective honed in total solitude.

Ah, in our countryside back there we had our man: Abraham Lincoln. And superb illustrations in the history books to prove everything. You saw him, the future president, a poor boy in rough garments. He was reading. You saw how he sat up whole nights in the chimney corner, the log burning fitfully to light the printed page. How sweetly he leans into the hearth, holding the book at an angle before his carved face—face stamped in copper, face on a penny!

No one else in that house could read. And he, a poor boy in tatters, became the president of the United States. He sat down at the right hand of the All-Powerful. Even though no one in the house could read as he could. (Dog is heard scratching on the cabin door.)

Dog: (being let in) "In my family everybody could read. We didn't need any bow-wow powerful. Everybody could read."

Abraham Lincoln: "So?"

Dog: "So that's all. Everybody knew *how* but nobody read."

(Camera dollies over to window.) A Baby Star from Hollywood climbs out of a sepia photo in a cloud of dust. Her milky flesh (overexposed?) bubbles out from the top of a strapless bra. She stares lasciviously at the Dog: "Nobody needs to read. Two together, moving slowly through space, can put the whole world out of countenance."

Dog ruminates his black thoughts. This time he is smoking hash. Did he hear the Baby Star? He says: "Me, I like to read. What I can't do is talk, so people say. But I have charisma and ambition. I have a sharp eye and a nose for fakes. I know a few things. For instance, I know that if you try to climb the sky you live as long as if you'd only tried to climb the stairs. Why are humans always searching for the truth? Personally, I am always looking for beautiful lies and all too often find stodgy truths."

He tosses away his joint, or what's left of it, and begins to bay: "Oh, let the evening explode! Oh, let the night give us her paw—to you first!"

The evening explodes in a burst of cobalt blue. The dog's maw enters into eruption and the smoke that pours out traces this question across the screen: "If your son became a cop would you hate him?" (Scene ends in a maddening collage of slamming doors and hypocritical words.)

5. The peril of calm, the sepulchral hours of the day

"The abiding question is not whether to go on painting but whether to go on living." These words are delivered by a depraved artist who has a scar over the left eyebrow, like everyone else. He tries to hide his depravity of which he is mortally ashamed and from which he suffers intensely without complaining. I answer him: "Me, I want to seduce by means of imperceptible passages from one reality to another. The spectator is caught (oops!) in a net from which he can extricate himself only by going through the whole picture till he comes to the exit. My dearest wish: to make a picture without any exit at all, either for me or for him."

But no one is listening. And my depraved artist, what has become of him? He has become a hero. Alone out there he faces the new order and I remember that between November 1950 and April 1951 I gnashed my teeth every night.



Evening in Salonika, 1965



6. The peril of the sea on the floor

The time has come, it's even imperative, to say a few words about the Great Conjecture. In a foreign land, though not all that foreign, a defiant man is sitting before a window that gives onto the sea. It's stifling hot, 'hot as a two-dollar pistol' thinks the defiant man. He gasps for breath, his tongue hangs out in spite of his almost total nudity (almost, because he is wearing shoes).

The wall on his right waves slightly as if breathing. A birdlike voice seems to call to him. He knows it's useless to answer but, the door being wide open, he goes out along the beach. He walks just at the edge of the water. At each step he leaves a shoe in the sand and when, farther along, he comes to a soft drink stand he hasn't any shoes on at all.

"What'll it be?" says the waiter behind the little bar. But the man hasn't got a cent. He is dying of thirst, he'd like a coke or just a glass of water. But you *pay* for water. The waiter, so pretty in his white vest, is severe. Implacable. He knows that the man before him has just passed six months floating carelessly on the waves. Six months during which they brought him food on a raft, attended to his daily needs just like in the hospital: brushed his teeth, stroked protective cream on his forehead, combed his hair. For *humanitarian* reasons.

Meanwhile, little gray debts were piling up like the mold that grows in the closets and makes the walls wave back and forth. Several journalists pressed around him at the bar, avid for futile words. But he didn't talk, he couldn't, his tongue was like fur. So as the dog happened along just then it was he who took over:

Dog: "In my opinion, the dog's role in painting is preponderant. His image, in close relation with that of the human being, is indispensable to the existence of a work of art. Without his ineffable presence a picture is but a somber spot without light, without mystery, without evidence, without memory, without fire, without density. Alas! The disappearance of the dog signals the collapse of that edifice known as modern art. Up to us to resuscitate it! (He is almost overexcited.) Up to us to paint him in all his glory! Masterpiece, disaster-piece—that's the shape of the future! (He hits the counter with his little fist.) Revolt, yes! Revolution, no! Us dogs are bled white! The tactile has replaced the cerebral. All is meaningless trepidation. And it's not over. We will grow weaker and weaker until the final breakdown. And the sorcerers' apprentices—because, believe me, they will *remain* apprentices—will throw away their lethal toys and cry like vietnamien babies in the smoking ashes of the holocaust." (He covers his eyes with his paw.) "My life is so full of tragic figures. Nevermore is my home."



Insomnias, 1956-57

The barman tears two buttons off his vest and drops them in a glass of water where they fizz. "Drink that", he orders. "You think too much. Me, I'm no thinker. I'm a looker. Thinking makes my head ache but looking wakes me up."

(Rumble of an approaching storm, becoming stronger, ending with a thunderclap.) The sea heaves in the glass. The dog carries it to his lips and drinks the storm, thus restoring silence. Then he says very softly:

"You can laugh at the past. You cannot laugh at the future. We must, at any cost, save the lives of our younger plants and planets. But they resist us because the verb always follows the hand, and there is no one around to help." (Fadeout in madness.)



7. The peril of white

The heavens fulfill our exigencies. The fidelity of the sun and the moon, for example, ah, *they* don't betray us. The extraordinary way the trees and mountains have of not changing their places, of not changing their minds. Good. We won't change ours either. Because, like the dog, we know a few things. We know that man is not up to his revolutions; he can win his revolution but he can't get anything out of it. It's his evolution that goes on. Will it advance faster in the millenium to come than in this one? We know a lot of other things (for example, about the myth of frequent ejaculation) too shattering to be revealed here.

A voice (off) hums during this tasteless discourse while a clever montage (what a director!) shows us that there are some happy people in this world and all of them are accordion players. Intoxicated by the din, they show their black and white fangs, gleaming with the determination inherent in happiness.

Screen turns rose then blue. A car in the shape of a horse arrives from left. The bartender jumps out (we saw him on the beach).

Bartender: "Papa! Mama! O tragic inequality! But I should have known. The painter told me, with his famous mocking smile: There is always a loser when you are two. Victor, victim . . ." (A long banner ripples out of the car. It reads: *You can say that again.*)

At this point the film pulls a blank. A succession of numbers passes across the screen, very fast, like roulette. Sound of machine-gun fire. 1942. New York, *Birthday*. I believed it, I believe it still.



Birthday, 1942
and preliminary sketch



Dreams that Money can Buy, film by Hans Richter, 1945

And the surrealists are in town. Alas, we have no sidewalk cafes for them. So they meet in our houses. Surrealist exhibitions, surrealist games (monitored by Andre Breton), a surrealist magazine. I play with them: a surrealist movie, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. That is Max pulling me out from under the bed. After the war they went back to where they came from, leaving the key on the door. Many others have used it since, but no one has brought in any new furniture.



Sedona, Arizona, 1946
We build our house.

1943, Max. We played chess in anticipation of our life. 1944, 45. Years so full, so fast. Sedona, Arizona 1946, 47, 48, Indian red, earth red, red of near stars. What do you paint in the desert? Interiors. And some with sudden joy. Where do they go? Into the trailer. Across the country to the city where they hope to find friends. Friends! The deadliest, the most decadent, useless, demoralizing, ignominious phenomenon of modern art is the ritual called *vernissage*.

Response (dry): "But you have to go through with it."



Interior with Sudden Joy, 1951



Sedona, Arizona, 1946-52
I must have dreamed it.

1950. Red gives way to pearl gray, the red is underneath. Behind the quai St. Michel breathe the years 1952 and 53 and 54. The most beautiful city in the world and it's mine. Its arrogance, its garbage, its waistline. The arrogance is cautionary. "Speak softly. Do not rock our secrets. If you must touch us don't probe. Our tunnels are locked, our byways lead nowhere, our torrents are dry and carbon-dioxide is our hard heart. A wing is never too small to fly but can disappear, not having felt the rush of air but only ruin."



Paris is mine, 1950

1955. Huismes, Indre et Loire. Mother Nature (always a she, an unnatural mother, can't you see her, tentacles waving in the void, her body dragging its track of slime; Mother Nature bringing down a billion wings she made as a joke) provides her idea of colors. They are too eager. The blues are too zealous, the greens tinge the mind, already bucolic. Visitors prate of the *lumiere*. It's a favorite subject when telling of their travels. What's there left to do but take refuge in the studio? There, with flowers in our eyes we paint (faint). *Midi et Demi*, *Le Mal Oublié*, *A La Derive*, *Nauffrage en Rose*. (Show a rose-colored shipwreck sinking among the tomatoes.)

(Green, color of the screen, color of the faces before the screen. Flight of black numbers on green, 1956, 57, 58, 59.)

We have made up our minds, we are inspired, love is everywhere. But we have not eaten and the weeds have grown out of all proportion. Voice: "It was after seeing the toad with his hands chewed off that I couldn't live in Huismes any more." So, 1964, Seillans. And there looms a great big X in nineteen sixTy-nine. Everything moving as usual toward dazzling completion—pictures get painted, sounds sound and the new house rises, feeding on



me. But in the studio sculptures rise too, out of wool and cloth and the sewing machine. After all, risks are for the taking. *The Hotel du Pavot*, *Cousins*, *Ouvre-Toi*, *Tragic Table*, *De Quel Amour*. (Door opening on Paris, 1970.) It is nine in the evening. In thousands of rooms across the city the soft lamps are on, there are assorted nuts on the cocktail tables, the free-form ashtrays are ineluctably filling with ashes, and people, glass in hand, are talking earnestly about everything. (Fade into pretention.)



Left to right: *Ouvre-Toi*, 1970;
Canapé en Temps de Pluie, 1974;
Don Juan's Breakfast, 1972;
De Quel Amour, 1970; *Emma*, 1970

April 1975. Something has gone wrong. There is no light in the studio, nothing moves and the colored jokes are stale. The disorder is grievous. 1976. (Is the heart condemned to break each day?) Still in the studio. Everything is there at the bottom of my crazy brain. Everything. But it's stone-heavy and will not rise. Most of the time it's all dark down there. You can stumble around for hours without joy. My mind is a cave and its treasures are hidden in boxes and trunks with lost or rusty keys. If you find the keys they don't fit the locks. Or if they fit they don't turn. Or if they open the lock the lid does not rise, the hinges are stiff. Even if, finally, the trunk is opened most of its contents are rotted or moldy from their long wait and aren't worth the trouble of dragging into the light.

We have to be so careful, even the salt isn't salty any more, and love is not lovelorn. Soon it will be vain to travel. Soon they'll have another bridge for everything that happened, with valises and dapper thieves to steal them; with first aid and a warning, like a sign on my eight-foot dog.

Tomorrow we win, and next year and next summer. Late reflexions ripen better than the first. Step up, everybody! No, closer. Read my list of names done away with by their naming. See my pictures over which princes (paupers) have no control. Look at the disciples sharpening their pink wits on the wrong people.

Having watched this a number of times I know that no name, no place, no cartographers, no deep sea singing, no orb in orbit, no single rose (although three dozen might win a two-hour lover, never a pal), no arctic floes or vulva fire can make me forget my knife—my palette knife, to be sure.

And while I have the chance, here or somewhere, O my Max, I kiss you on your beautiful eyes. There, it's said. Seven words. Maybe they'll get by unnoticed. Or if I can slip in another one: blue. Your beautiful blue eyes.

The trucks go by in the street outside without my help. The universe waits, listening for serenity as in listening for doom—with kindly patience. At last report the gates of hell have just closed.

D.T.
Translated from *XX^e Siecle*
Paris, September 1976