

# ***Pictorial Representation and Abstract Pictures***

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I would like to show that abstract pictures could play a central role in an explanation of what pictorial representation is and how it works. I criticize accounts that link pictorial representation to the evocation of a sense of depth in the viewer. I argue that there is a version of the resemblance view of pictorial representation which allows for claiming that abstract pictures are pictorial representations, with considerable explanatory advantages.

Since the publication of Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1961) — a highly influential work in and beyond the history of art — accounts of what it means to pictorially represent have flourished in analytical aesthetics. It can be said that much philosophical interest in pictorial representation is grounded in the fact that the traditional view, an abstraction from a varieties of accounts that I shall call “the simple resemblance view”, is quite controversial, a fact that Gombrich was the first to point out. According to the simple resemblance view pictures represent by means of visually resembling their subjects. Moreover, resemblance is relative to aspects of the depicted subjects and it comes in degrees. However, when we try to pinpoint which aspects and what degree of resemblance are necessary to say that a certain picture represents a certain subject we easily realize that a variety of pictures may represent the same subject in many different ways and that we would not know how exactly to establish which picture most resembles its subject. The idea that a picture resembles its subject, if not necessarily wrong, seems to be at least too vague for making sense of pictorial representation.

Many criticisms have been addressed to the simple resemblance view since the publication of Gombrich's seminal work, if only because of the

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puzzlement that arises from the fact that, no matter the philosophical theory we endorse, we still seem to have strong intuitions about the fact that figurative pictures resemble the objects they depict. And what about non-figurative pictures? We certainly do not have analogous intuitions of resemblance concerning the content of non-figurative or “abstract” pictures. This might lead one to assume that pictorial representation is equal to figurative representation and to exclude abstract pictures from the domain of pictorial representation. However, there are borderline cases, where the same picture can be considered both figurative and abstract: analytical cubism provides a variety of examples. How are we supposed to consider, say, Picasso’s portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1910), a picture that deliberately challenges our ability to recognize its subject and that is not at all intuitively visually similar to the man it portrays? An inspection of the literature on pictorial representation shows that some philosophers — most noticeably Richard Wollheim — have linked pictorial representation to the presence of depth in the pictorial scene, no matter the fact that we can or cannot say that a picture depicts certain objects and that it resembles them.

In this paper I would like to show that abstract pictures could come first in an explanation of how pictorial representation works. More precisely, I shall argue that there is a non-simple version of the resemblance view which allows for understanding abstract pictures as pictorial representations, with considerable explanatory advantage. The paper is organized in three sections. First, I will address some criticisms against the view that makes the representational character of pictures, and especially of abstract pictures, depend on the presence of depth. Second, I will show how a new kind of resemblance account can be applied to abstract pictures. Third, I will argue for some explanatory advantages of this resemblance account of abstract pictures.

## **I.**

In *Painting as an Art* (1989) Richard Wollheim argues that pictorial representation is always connected to a visual phenomenon, seeing-in, that

happens in presence of a variety of objects, such as clouds, paintings, walls<sup>1</sup>. Seeing-in has a special phenomenology: “When seeing-in occurs, two things happen: I am visually aware of the surface I look at, and I discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind something else” (48). The “something”, which is discerned, is the representational object of pictorial representation: for there to be pictorial experience such an object (i) must be perceived while paying simultaneous attention to the pictorial surface and (ii) must be collocated in a spatial dimension as a consequence of the experience of discerning “something standing out in front of, or...receding behind something else”. This definition has interesting consequences for non-figurative pictures, as the following passage shows:

Abstract art, as we have it, tends to be an art that is at once representational and abstract. Most abstract paintings display images: or, to put it another way, the experience that we are required to have in front of them is certainly one that involves attention to the marked surface but it is also one that involves an awareness of depth. In imposing the second demand as well as the first, abstract paintings reveal themselves to be representational, and it is at this point irrelevant that we can seldom put into adequate words just what they represent (62).

With reference to the two passages I have mentioned, Wollheim’s argument can be summed up as follows:

- (P1): for a picture to be a pictorial representation, the experience it elicits in a standard observer must include a sense of depth, which has to occur while the observer is looking at the marked surface of the picture;
- (P2) when we experience depth in a picture we see something standing out in front of something else or receding behind something else;
- (P3): several non-figurative pictures elicit such an experience of depth in the viewers who focus their attention on the pictorial surface;
- (C): it follows that those non-figurative pictures meet the requirements for pictorial representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Wollheim (1987, chap. 2).

(PI) expresses Wollheim's claim that representational character is an aspect of pictures we discover by means of "thematization" (this is Wollheim's term) of the pictorial surface (20-25). According to Wollheim, thematizing the pictorial surface consists in attending to it while being guided by the goal of acquiring content or meaning. This way we establish a form of contact with the picture's maker, because we, so to speak, set ourselves on the traces of his intentions of communicating a given content *through* the picture. Recognition of figures is just one of the ways in which thematization may occur: for instance, we can also thematize concepts, or material aspects of a painting. The last two cases are more apt to describe what might happen with certain abstract pictures. We might grasp an artist's intention to represent some concept through, say, a geometrical abstract picture, or to represent some concept by making the viewer focus his attention on the material character of the painting. In all those cases, Wollheim argues, for us to thematize a certain pictorial surface it is essential that we have a specific experience of depth while looking at the picture: i.e. the experience of seeing an element of the picture emerging from the pictorial surface or receding behind it.

According to Wollheim, then, the distinction between figurative and abstract pictures does not correspond to the distinction between representational and non-representational pictures, because there is an aspect of our experience of real objects, events, or scenes, i.e. a certain experience of depth, that is also part of our experience of certain, although not all, abstract pictures. The fact that an image triggers an experience of depth — consisting in seeing something emerging from or receding behind its pictorial surface — is then Wollheim's criterion for an image to be a pictorial representation. Let us call it the "emergence/recession criterion". Wollheim brings two examples to illustrate his point: on the one hand Hans Hoffmann's *Pompeii* (1959) on the other hand Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1948). The first painting can be seen as an agglomerate of overlapping rectangles and is therefore said to be an abstract picture that triggers an experience of depth. The second painting presents a thin line that sharply cuts in two what would otherwise look like a single monochrome surface. This is said to be an abstract picture

that does not trigger an experience of depth<sup>2</sup>.

Wollheim's account presents a general problem: as Jerrold Levinson and John Hyman have pointed out, it is difficult to understand what it means to have access to the painter's intentions by means of looking at the picture that the painter has produced<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, we might reject (C) claiming that (P1) is false. I shall not pursue this strategy here and shall limit my analysis to the considerations Wollheim dedicates to abstract pictures. It might be, after all, that they illuminate a relevant aspect of those images, and that the validity of them does not entirely depend on (P1). A different theory of pictorial experience — let us call it (P1a) - might be addressed, while maintaining that what is crucial for such an experience is that a sense of depth is arisen in the viewer by the picture, in the specific way described in premise (P2). This way C could be derived by (P1a), (P2) and (P3).

The trouble is that, as John Hyman has observed, (P2) does not describe an experience that necessarily has to take place when we are aware that a picture represents certain objects<sup>4</sup>. For example, in the case of a stick-drawing of a human figure on an otherwise blank sheet of paper, we have a figure that is not shown in depth and a ground that is not the background of the depicted scene, since it does not contribute to the content of the picture. The ground, in fact, is certainly part of the surface of the picture *qua* object, but there are no clues that prompt us to consider it as part of the depictive content of the picture. If the stick-figure is painted on a ground, but without a background, then it is not represented as if it were occupying a three-dimensional space. Therefore we have a representational picture that does not arise a sense of depth in the viewer thanks to an emergence/recession dynamics. Given that there are representational pictures that do not arise an experience of depth, then, Wollheim's emergence/recession criterion is not successful in discriminating between pictures that are representational and pictures that are not. We cannot use the emergence/recession criterion to argue that those abstract pictures which do not arise a sense of depth are not pictorial representations.

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<sup>2</sup> Wollheim (1987, p. 62).

<sup>3</sup> See Levinson (1998, pp. 231-32); Hyman (2006, pp. 137-138).

<sup>4</sup> Hyman (2006, p.134).

There is at least another example that allows for an objection against Wollheim's view. We can think of a painting that shows only the surface of a wall and a shadow projected on it. If the wall is not shown in depth and there is no other element on it suggesting depth, we have a picture of a three-dimensional object, even if the picture does not attribute any three-dimensional property to it. Therefore, we do not seem to be authorized to claim that the picture puts any emergence/recession dynamics into play, but at the same time we are happy to say that this is the pictorial representation of a wall with a shadow projected on it.

To sum up, we have seen that tying pictorial representation to the presence of the emergence/recession dynamics is not a good strategy, because there are pictorial representations that do not make use of this dynamics. It follows that we cannot exclude certain abstract pictures from the realm of pictorial representation on the ground that they lack an emergence/recession aspect. I claim, then, that Wollheim's view on abstract pictures is not satisfactory.

Part of Wollheim's proposal is that the emergence/recession dynamics is triggered by the ability to discriminate the foreground from the background of a given picture. We have just seen some objections this hypothesis has to face. One might argue, however, that if the ability to distinguish background from foreground in the depicted scene does not provide a criterion for pictorial representation, the ability to distinguish between the ground of the picture and the depictive content of the picture, conveyed by the marks traced on the ground, could do the job. Clement Greenberg seems to be holding this view in the following passage from *Modernist Painting* (1960):

Modernist painting in its latest phase [...] has abandoned in principle [...] the representation of the kind of space that recognisable, three-dimensional objects can inhabit [...] [However, t]he first mark made on a surface destroys its virtual flatness and the configuration of a Mondrian still suggests a kind of illusion of a third dimension. Only now it is a strictly pictorial, strictly optical third dimension.<sup>5</sup>

It seems to me that Greenberg here is describing Mondrian's grid paintings in terms of what I have called the ground/depictive content distinc-

<sup>5</sup> Greenberg (1986/1993, vol. 4, pp. 85-93).

tion. If those paintings do not present a foreground/background dialectic which suggests a fictional three-dimensional space and/or arises in the viewer an experience of depth, they nevertheless cannot be said to be completely flat, because we can still distinguish a number of marks on their surface.

What is interesting to me is also that Greenberg does not seem to think that a figure/ground distinction can be traced in all abstract paintings. He famously regards Newman's, Rothko's, and Pollock's large-scale paintings as manifesting a "decentralized", "polyphonic" character, that does not allow for tracing any kind of distinction within the pictorial surface, not even a distinction between picture ground and depictive content<sup>6</sup>. Those paintings, then, are said to go beyond the realm of pictorial representation, and to bravely run the risk of trespassing a hypothetical boundary dividing the realm of pictorial representation from the realm of simple decoration, while managing not to — as it were — collapse and become mere decorations.

I do not think Greenberg's considerations on the figure/ground distinction provide a good reason to claim that whereas Mondrian's grids are pictorial representations Pollock's huge drip paintings are not. As I have said before, the distinction between a picture's depictive content and its ground is a distinction between an aspect of the picture *qua* three-dimensional object and an aspect of the picture *qua* image. Whereas the ground belongs to the picture *qua* object, the depicted content is the content of the image. Therefore, it is not correct to claim that in certain cases we cannot distinguish between the ground of the picture and its depicted content, because we can always describe a picture as an object that has a flat side on which we see certain marks and/or colours, that is as having a side that works as a ground for an image, no matter the kind and quality of the marks and/or colours that are visible on such ground. It follows then that not even the ground/depictive content distinction succeeds in providing an argument for claiming that certain abstract images cannot be pictorial representations.

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<sup>6</sup> Greenberg (1986/1993, vol. 2, pp. 221-5).

**II.**

The resemblance theory of pictorial representation has been re-discovered by authors such as Malcom Budd, Robert Hopkins, Catherine Abell, and John Hyman, who try to overcome the difficulties encountered by the simple resemblance view while maintaining that it makes sense to say that pictures resemble their subjects in at least some basic aspect<sup>7</sup>. None of these authors is specifically concerned with non-figurative pictures, and Catherine Abell explicitly states that non-figurative pictures are not to be considered pictorial representations<sup>8</sup>. I believe, however, that Hyman's account can offer solid ground in order to re-think not only of the resemblance theory of pictorial representation but also of the status of non-figurative pictures as representations.

In *The Objective Eye* (2006) Hyman argues that the fact that we may identify certain similarities between a picture and its subject needs to be separated from the idea that those are objective similarities between the picture and the subject it depicts. He also argues that there are indeed objective resemblances between a picture and what it depicts, although they often do not correspond to the similarities we identify between the picture and its subject.

More precisely, Hyman argues that the marks on a picture's surface always resemble aspects of objects in the world in three objective respects, that he calls *occlusion shape*, *occlusion size*, and *aperture colour*<sup>9</sup>. What is

<sup>7</sup> Budd (1993); Hopkins (1998); Hyman (2006); Abell (2009).

<sup>8</sup> Abell (2009, p.183).

<sup>9</sup> Be S the subject of a picture and P the portion of the picture that represents S. In a pictorial representation the form of P is identical with the *occlusion shape* of S, and it is the shape S would project on the two-dimensional pictorial surface from a certain point in the space. The occlusion shape is relative to the point S is imagined to be projected from (the point of view of the implicit, internal viewer of the picture), but it is not relative to the point of view of any specific external viewer. It is therefore a geometrical, and not a psychological notion, and it concerns both real objects and internal subjects of pictures. Be S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> two distinct parts of the subject of a given picture and P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> the portions of the picture that represent respectively S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub>. In a pictorial representation, the *relative occlusion size* of S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> must be identical with the relative occlusion size of P<sub>1</sub> e di P<sub>2</sub>. The relative occlusion size is given by the measure in which one of two objects collocated at a certain distance from an observer occludes the view of the other, in relation to the point of view of the implicit viewer. Given that it is a function of

crucial about objective resemblances is that they determine the set of objects a given picture can be said to pictorially represent: the same picture can pictorially represent a variety of objects, because many objects have similar occlusion shape, occlusion size, and aperture colour. However, the fact that, while looking at certain pictures, we can say that they represent specific subjects can seldom be explained by means of basic resemblances only, while it often has to involve reference to conventions and techniques that painters adopt in different cultures and at different times. Objective resemblance properties are properties that connect a picture to a number of objects, and it is not possible to reach a more fine-grained understanding of pictorial representation in terms of resemblance properties.

Of course the fact that a two-dimensional marked and coloured surface basically resembles a number of objects in occlusion shape and size and aperture colour is not a sufficient condition for pictorial representation and it is not sufficient to explain how pictorial representation works. We need to have good reasons for considering a two-dimensional surface a representation, and this is a requirement that is conceptually prior to an understanding of the surface as a *pictorial* representation. Moreover, if we want to understand how pictorial representations works, we often have to take into account the “tricks” painters have devised in order to suggest resemblance to the represented subject beyond the level of basic objective resemblance aspects. Hyman provides several examples to clarify this point, and a particularly striking one is Velasquez’ *Las Hilanderas* (1657). In

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the relative distance of the two objects from the internal observer, relative occlusion size is a geometrical and not a psychological notion. Finally, we can distinguish between *aperture colour* and *surface colour* in a picture. In standard conditions, when we look at a monochromatic portion of a picture (MP), while we tend to say that it has a certain colour (say, a yellow square in Vermeer’s *View of Delft*) it is often true that the portion is actually the result of a variety of colours accurately put together and blended by the light in the environment where the picture is collocated. In my example, yellow is the surface colour of MP. The aperture colour of MP can more easily be observed in non-standard conditions, with the help of a reduction screen, a device that prevents the viewer from seeing the changes ambient light imposes to the colours on the surface of an image. Through a reduction screen we can see that our yellow is actually a fine-grained mix of several areas all painted in slightly different colours. A picture objectively resembles its basic representational subject in aperture colour, while it does not need resembling it in surface colour. See Hyman (2006, chap. 5).

this painting we see a spinning wheel and “the shimmering highlights on [its] spoke float in the space within its rim” (203) to a fantastic naturalistic effect. In order to point out Velasquez’ great rendition of the movement of the wheel we say that the depicted spinning wheel resembles a real one. However, there is nothing on the surface of the painting that is moving, which, instead, is what happens to a real spinning wheel while it is being used. What we see is a pictorial artifice, a convention that we are happy to consider realistic and find more compelling than alternative renditions of the same subject. This, though, does not rule out the fact that the depicted wheel resembles a wheel in basic resemblance aspects and that if basic resemblances to a wheel were missing *Las Hilanderas* could not pictorially represent a wheel.

From all this it should be clear that Hyman does not explain basic resemblance in terms of a two-place relation between a picture and a particular object (or an object of a certain kind). For every pictorial representation there is a heterogeneous set of objects that can be represented by the picture: “a theory of depiction... purports to define the relationship between the visible object depicted and the marks and colors on a picture’s surface and not the relationship between these marks and colors and the person, object, place, or event, if any, that is portrayed” (71). Hyman illustrates his view with a variety of examples taken from art history. He concentrates on figurative art in order to show how we can distinguish between objective resemblances and effective pictorial artifices and conventions. I would like to broaden the explanatory realm of Hyman’s proposal, extending his considerations to abstract pictures. I believe the basic resemblance account allows for conceiving of abstract pictures as of pictorial representations, without the limits imposed by proposals such as Wollheim’s and Greenberg’s.

I shall illustrate my idea with an example. I claim that a non-figurative picture like Newman’s *Abraham* (1949) *pictorially represents* something (although not Abraham himself) because it basically resembles objects in the visual world in respects that are relevant for pictorial representation to obtain. This leaves untouched the fact that we do not have intuitions about it being a representation of Abraham, while it is likely that we would have such intuitions if *Abraham* were an (appropriate) figurative representation of Abraham. It seems to me that, from the standpoint of the view

I have sketched, figurative representation and symbolic, metaphoric, or synaesthetic representation (all examples of forms of representation that might be displayed by non-figurative pictures) can be understood as different ways of putting into play the few basic objective resemblances that a picture can share with the objects of visual experience. In a nutshell, *Abraham* is a pictorial representation, but it is not a pictorial representation of Abraham, although the fact that it is a pictorial representation is relevant to understand why it is a non-pictorial representation of Abraham.

An objection that may be raised against my proposal is that we might end up labelling as ‘picture’ every two-dimensional surface, which merely appears to be covered in one or more colours or marked with certain lines. However, the objection is misleading in so far as it does not take into account the fact that basic resemblance features are not said to be sufficient conditions for there to be pictorial representation, but only necessary ones. The crucial fact for pictorial representation to occur is that it is an intentional phenomenon that takes place within a certain culture.

For instance, in the case of *Abraham*, basic resemblance properties are relevant to elucidate the content of the picture, as it can be inferred from critical analyses of the work, such as Yves-Alain Bois’ essay on the painting<sup>10</sup>. Bois explains that Newman was keen on stressing the unique character of *Abraham*, the first painting to be painted totally and only in black, (which, however, is not a uniform black monochrome). Bois also elucidates how the sheer blackness of the painting relates to the title. Namely, there is a tragic character to the colour black that evokes tragic figures such as Abraham. Moreover, Abraham was the first patriarch, and the first black painting is the progenitor of a new generation of paintings. Finally, Abraham is portrayed in the Bible as the first iconoclast, so the title puts in relation the content of the picture to the gesture of the painter who has renounced to figuration. On the basis of these elements, we are certain allowed to say that *Abraham* is a representation. The black painting is meant to evoke certain aspects of the biblical figure of Abraham. But do we have any elements to claim that *Abraham* is a *pictorial representation*? After all, *Abraham* could be a black two-dimensional surface that is used to represent Abraham in a non-pictorial way. *Abraham*, however,

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<sup>10</sup> Bois (2004).

is not just a two-dimensional surface, but it is a *painting*. It is a painting because it was Barnett Newman's will that it belonged to the history of painting, as it is revealed by the stress the painter put on it being the first black painting. The concept of pictorial representation does not need to be conceptually prior to the concept of painting. Pictorial representation explains how painting works, but painting is a cultural category that refers to certain practices, and there is no doubt that Newman's *Abraham* is to be collocated in the realm of the practice of painting. This, however, does not imply that for there to be a painting it suffices to establish that a certain two-dimensional surface represents something and that it relates to the painterly tradition. On the contrary, there have to be visual aspects of a pictorial surface about which it makes sense to say that they relate to the painterly tradition in a way that makes us understand the reason why we say that the surface (non-pictorially or pictorially) represents what it represents.

### **III.**

I shall illustrate the explanatory value of my proposal with two more examples. First, I believe that my view provides a good conceptual apparatus to understand pictorial series that start with recognizable subjects and end with totally abstract images, such as the famous series of trees by Piet Mondrian.

Some abstract pictures have a visual subject, some not. Namely, there are abstract pictures that not only present basic visual resemblances to a certain set of heterogeneous objects, but also are such that it makes sense to say that by means of basically resembling such objects they allude to a certain object or kind of objects which is part of the heterogeneous set. This is what normally happens in the case of figurative representation; according to my theory, however, it is also true of some abstract pictures. The difference between the two cases is that whereas for figurative representation it is necessary that the subject is identified in order to have an appropriate understanding of the picture, in the case of an abstract picture it is interesting that the subject remains, so to speak, in disguise. This can be observed in cycles of paintings of the same subject that, departing from

figurative representation, progressively reach more and more abstract levels of representation.

A famous example is Mondrian's so called "tree series" (1908/1914). In the case of the pictures where we easily see trees, we are able to do that because we distinguish the marks and colours making up the trees from the marks making up their surroundings (i.e. the marks depicting other elements in the depicted scene). In the case of the pictures where we do not see any tree, there are conflicting elements among the marks and colours on the pictorial surfaces which prevent us from isolating tree figures from other elements in the pictorial scene. In both cases we can distinguish marks and colours from the surface of the picture *as such*. One might be tempted to argue that while in the first example we would describe the pictorial content in terms of similarity with a specific object (i.e. a tree), in the second this cannot be the case. I think this is not a correct understanding. In the first case we think we are seeing certain objective similarities between the picture and its subject (i.e. the tree), while it might be that we are just reacting to some pictorial "trick" and that we are not paying much attention to the basic respects in which the picture actually resembles a tree. In the second case we get things right when we say that the picture has properties of resemblance to a tree (we can see certain marks as alluding to the intricacies of branches and leaves, for example), and also to other objects that share those properties with a tree. According to my proposal, in both cases it is true that the pictures basically pictorially represent those objects and scenes that are characterized by certain outline shapes, aperture colours, and relative occlusion sizes. That we say that the first picture has an identifiable visual subject, i.e. a tree, while the second picture does not have it (although it may have, for instance, an identifiable metaphoric or symbolic subject), depends on the way pictorial conventions, traditions, and the psychology of vision co-operate to allow us to easily see a tree while looking at the picture, so that for us it is more natural to describe the picture as a tree picture, rather than as a picture that presents such and such marks and colours on its surface. With this example I hope to have shown that my account allows for a more nuanced understanding of Mondrian's progressive approach to abstraction with exquisitely analytical tools.

The second example concerns the overlap of painting and decoration. According to Greenberg and, more generally, to proponents of a mod-

ernist approach to the arts, tracing the boundary between painting and decoration is crucial for an understanding of pictorial art. In other words, the moment pictorial arts starts being decorative it loses its status of art that is genuinely pictorial. I would like to defend an alternative view, a view that, as I shall try to explain, is nevertheless based on some of Greenberg's considerations on the distinction between the foreground of a picture and its ground that I have examined above. I believe that, despite not being useful to the identification of a criterion for pictorial representation, the idea of distinguishing between ground and depictive content can illuminate an aspect that is typical of pictorial representation. I shall illustrate this with an example concerning the distinction between a pictorial representation and a decorative pattern.

Pollock's drip paintings famously provided the set for a fashion photo shoot published in an issue of *Vogue* in the early 50s, where models wearing beautiful gowns are shown with the drip-paintings behind them<sup>11</sup>. It has been debated by art critics if the *Vogue* issue marked the definitive surrender of abstract painting to decoration<sup>12</sup>. According to my proposal, this is at the same time true and false. While, when we look at the *Vogue* pictures, we are required to regard Pollock's paintings as decorations, we are asked to consider them as paintings when they, for example, hang on the wall of a museum's gallery. In the first case, it is not interesting that we focus on the fact that Pollock's paintings are three-dimensional objects with a side that works as a ground for an image. What is interesting is that we appreciate the interplay between the pattern in the background of the photograph and the beautiful model in the foreground. In the second case, when the picture is presented in a context that requires it to be looked at as a picture, it makes sense to concentrate on Pollock's ability in suppressing any clue that might suggest the representation of a three-dimensional space, a representation that it is very easy to realize in a picture. Whereas in the *Vogue* issue Pollock's paintings are to be regarded as an element of the furniture of the photographic set, when they are displayed in a museum they are to be regarded as objects interesting in themselves because — among other things — they play with the limits of what can be done

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<sup>11</sup> Clark (1990).

<sup>12</sup> *Vogue*, March 1, 1951.

with a pictorial representation.

To sum up, in this paper I have argued that we do not have successful arguments to tie the concept of pictorial representation to images that evoke a sense of depth and that a resemblance theory of pictorial representation does not necessarily exclude abstract pictures from the domain of pictorial representation. I have also tried to show how an understanding of abstract images as pictorial representations might cast light on certain episodes in painterly abstraction.

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