

Updike Looks at Post-War American Art

I

Readers interested in the art of biography and post-war American art will prove the most appreciative audience of *Seek My Face*, a late Updike novel from 2002. The novel is essentially a 250-page chronicle of a day in the life of Hope Chafetz, formerly McCoy and Holloway, a 79-year-old woman famously married to stars of post-war American painting and a painter herself. Widowed from the first husband and divorced from the second, she is ultimately widowed from a third, a wealthy art collector name Chafetz, now dead for several years. Hope is spending an early spring day being interviewed by Kathryn, a very young art writer of some sort who has come into--that is to say, is disturbing, disrupting--Hope's quiet life in rural Vermont. Never mentioned but ever-present in the background of the story are Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, the first the epitome of Abstract Expressionism, the second of Pop. The two artists are the models for her fictitious husbands. (McCoy, it should be noted, was the original surname of Pollock's father's, who took on the name of his adoptive parents after he was orphaned at age five.) Other figures hovering in the background are Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, critics who began their careers in the 1940s as champions of the new American art that enabled New York to eclipse Paris as the center of the fine arts. France may have been home to Picasso and Giacometti, but New York was a base for Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko and other giants of that generation

Kathryn has come to Vermont to gather material for an article she is preparing for an "on-line" publication. Whether she is interested in Hope's artwork or her previous marriages is never

entirely clear to her subject, but Updike's distaste for his character is plain from the outset. The younger woman, in her expensive but uncomfortable boots and "eggplant-colored" nail polish, is described as "a nervously aggressive intruder" on the first page of the book, and hostile observations do not let up for the rest of the story. She is variously described as "prying," "self-serving," "invasive," "an awkward, relentless interrogator," and "a predator on the scent."

Updike is even offended by what he considers the modish spelling of her name, substituting a "y" for the usual "e." Wearing expensive but uncomfortable shoes, her teeth straightened by orthodontia, a young creature of beauty who takes great care with her diet, careful of undue amounts of salt, sugar or of any "unnatural" product--Hope at one moment feels obliged to offer her "a low-fat, gluten-free oatmeal cookie"--Kathryn remains coarse, intrusive, impertinent, not overly educated, producing predictable feminist comments and modern lit-crit platitudes while seeking to advance her unimportant "career" with an interview that resurrects time-worn "information" but shuns difficult issues of aesthetics and creation. The emphasis, in both her appearance and her thought, is on the externals.

Much of the interest of the novel in fact derives from the dynamics of the interaction between Hope and Kathryn, and the questions indirectly raised about the value of biography and the nature of its attendant research. Writers and artists always seem loath to concede that their personal histories shed light on their work. Invariably they play down the claim that a biographical approach is the key to their work, insisting instead that it is a product of the imagination. In his essay "On Literary Biography," Updike himself sounds distinctly ambivalent about the value of an artist's biography. He concedes that the factual details of a writer's life and the way it shapes his work "tells us something of the nature of artistic creation." But biographical research can also be extremely intrusive, and many of the stories and "facts"

presented to readers are speculative, fanciful or clearly derogatory. Jeffrey Meyers depicts F. Scott Fitzgerald as an nasty drunk, while Michael Sheldon goes so far as to make "veiled and hedged charges" that Graham Greene murdered and dismembered a woman in Brighton in 1930--"a sensationalist low point," according to Updike, "in literary biography." Memoirs of attachments and friendships--Claire Bloom and Philip Roth, Paul Theroux and V.S. Naipaul, Joyce Maynard and J.D. Salinger--often serve a malicious purpose. We readers ourselves are far from blameless because the publishing industry is catering to a taste that is far from innocent. "Insofar as we are consumers of such books, or reviewers of them," Updike writes, "we are collaborators in their creation."

Hence Hope's frequent unease in *Seek My Face* over whether she has the right to resurrect details of the private lives of her first husband, long dead, or her second, a victim of Alzheimer's, and whether she is even presenting an accurate account of her marriages. She is perhaps slanting the material to improve her own image or to elicit the favor of her interviewer, whom she essentially dislikes but also wishes to win over. It is true as well that more than four decades have passed since the violent death of her first husband. Countless writers have already mined her for information presumed to be useful, and much of the interview is simply an iteration of what she has said to others.

If anything has changed over the years, it is the greater willingness of an interviewer to seek intimate data; Kathryn turns out to be an avid consumer of sexual details. "It is strange how," Hope reflects to herself, contemplating another query, "in this shameless day and age, a breach of privacy gives the breacher more and more rights, as if a burglar should start moving the furniture around and loudly ridiculing the decor..." This is how Updike describes the

interviewer's spiritual condition, raising doubt in the process about her ability to interpret whatever Hope may share with her:

Kathryn's world is marvel-proof, pre-processed, all emotions analyzed and denigrated before they can blossom, chopped up into how-to books and television, everything reduced to electronic impulses, bits, information, information increasingly meaningless as brains shrink too small to gather it in, the processing all done outside the mind, the heart, by cool and noiseless machines...She has the sickliness of the city: the subways, the elevators, other people's breaths, forever running tired, New York people have colds all winter long...

What ultimately offends Updike is "the Lytton Strachey approach" to biography, which seeks to "ridicule and denigrate their subjects." Strachey was an ornament of Bloomsbury and the Edwardian era, intent on demolishing the monuments of Victorian England, and his goals were similar to those of Shaw, Joyce, Wells and other English writers. Updike does not appear to interpret this labor--or all of it, anyway--as the constructive overturning of dated values; it is simply derogatory. And there is yet another enemy. "In this art-wary age," he continues, in the same essay, "it is the photograph we trust over the painting, and the more awkward and unposed the photograph, the more trustworthy it appears." In an era that has little trust of the imagination, "unvarnished facts" are assumed to yield more truth than inventiveness, and the lower the better, apparently. Kathryn, in other words, is a debunker, an ignorant snoop and leveler seeking private, often salacious, information for the ephemeral products of the Internet.

II

"At a certain moment," wrote Harold Rosenberg, in a famous essay on "the American Action Painters" from 1952, "the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act--rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or 'express' an object, actual or imagined." He continued:

What was to go on the picture was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.

By the post-war era, over a thousand years of conventional painting and finally the invention of the camera had exhausted all of the possibilities of capturing external, observable reality.

"Convinced that there was nothing to paint," Rosenberg added in a later essay, the post-war artists, the Abstract Expressionists, "conceived an ingenious strategy" and "relied on the spontaneous activity of painting" to disclose a subject on its own. The subject of the canvas was "entirely a creation, in that it was brought into being by an act of painting." Some concurred in this description of art, others did not. Mark Rothko, who appeared to be faulted in Rosenberg's original piece in 1952, rejected the argument. Barnett Newman, once close to Rothko and well-acquainted with Rosenberg, seemed to agree. He told an interviewer in 1962 that

I am an intuitive painter, a direct painter. I have never worked from sketches, never "thought out" a painting. I start each painting as if I had never painted before. I present no dogma, no system, no demonstrations. I have no interest in the "finished" painting. I work only out of high passion.

That would seem explicit enough. But so would the remarks of Thomas Hess, a critic, a formidable presence in the art world and a one-time editor of *Art News*, where Rosenberg's essay originally appeared. "In theory," he remarked to Barbarlee Diamonstein, before his death in 1978,

the painter gets himself into a kind of creative state. He confronts a blank canvas. He is seized upon by certain spiritual, psychic forces, the painting comes out, and that's action painting. Then the thing happens again. Now the problem is, the paintings look exactly alike. It's funny that these creative forces and psychic energy should all be repeating themselves. I mean, there's something else at work. Quite obviously, there are styles at work, pictorial intelligence is at work, planning is at work...It's a matter of pictorial thought.

It is not clear from *Seek My Face* whether Updike agrees with Rosenberg's argument, and obviously no explicit opinion is required. What is apparent from a review he prepared of a 1998 Pollock retrospective in New York is that he considers at least one or two canvasses from Pollock's "drip" years of 1948-50 to be monumental. He simply allows Hope to cite Rosenberg's argument (without attribution); she tells her interviewer that "the idea that by letting accidents happen on the canvas you could let your subconscious speak was very appealing to Zack," Pollock's stand-in. But Lee Krasner, who was married to Pollock when he did his best-known work, seems to disagree. She told Diamonstein in an interview that "I hate the term action painting" because it does not really "define aesthetically" the Abstract Expressionist school.

No matter how the art work was conceived or executed, none of the critics or historians I have read seems to doubt that Ab Ex was a continuation of the tradition of high (as opposed to popular) culture and art, a tradition long associated with Europe. The approximate pedigree would be this: Peggy Guggenheim, who had gone to Europe in 1920 as a young woman, returned in middle age from Unoccupied France in 1941, a year after the Third Republic was overthrown by Germany. She was preceded and attended by the European stars of surrealism, including Andre Breton, Roberto Matta, Yves Tanguy, Andre Masson and Max Ernst, to whom she was briefly married. Soon after returning, she opened the Art of This Century on 57th Street, located at the center of the gallery world in New York in the middle decades of the last century; the gallery itself was designed by Fritz Kiesler, curving walls and all. The gallery (and other social venues) served as a meeting ground for the coming stars of Ab Ex and the pioneers of the surreal, and in conventional surveys of the time these encounters spread the conception of "automatic painting" that bore fruit in the years immediately before and after the war. Indeed,

Art of This Century proved the first gallery to offer one-man shows to Pollock, Motherwell, Rothko and others who later emerged as the pre-eminent names of post-war American art. "During its first year," writes James Breslin, in his biography of Mark Rothko, "Art of This Century had mainly shown European Surrealists. But after Guggenheim separated from Max Ernst and Howard Putzel replaced Duchamp as her adviser, the gallery turned to young Americans, beginning with Pollock's show in November of 1943." Herbert Forrest, a character from *Seek My Face*, in fact is modeled on Putzell, the California art dealer who introduced Guggenheim to Pollock's war-time productions; and the unidentified "Betty" of the novel is a reference to Betty Parsons, a New York heiress who embraced contemporary American painting after Guggenheim closed her gallery and returned to Europe in 1947. The Betty Parsons Gallery opened in late 1946, also on 57th Street, and in the period of 1947-51 became (in Breslin's words) "*the* vanguard gallery" in the U.S.

Updike presents what sounds like a factual and straightforward description of Zack McCoy's (i.e., Pollock's) move in 1945 to the Springs--in the novel called the Flats--a very small town near the eastern edge of Long Island, where he and Lee Krasner endured harsh poverty and severe winter weather in a minimally heated residence. The move seems to have been made when Krasner decided her husband could work more effectively if he was secluded from the noise, competitive pressure, and publicity of Greenwich Village.

Whatever their artistic talents might be, Updike's painters in the post-war era sound like pretentious windbags harboring grudges and envy, and although they are obliged to spend time together to avoid even worse isolation, their relations are not always delightful. "Mostly everybody was burrowing away in their own studio," Hope tells Kathryn, "jealous of everyone else's imagined successes." Breslin likewise rejects the claim that the original Ab Ex painters

bonded together in "rejection and poverty" in their early years, arguing that "the notion of an original closeness among these gifted, ambitious, and ego-strong painters amounts to a myth, one first spread by the artists themselves, nostalgically recalling a youthful feeling of community, forever lost." Hope paints a little during her decade or so in the Flats, but most of her energy goes into what people today would call marketing and networking, trying to drum up demand for her husband's artwork; Lee Krasner is said to have done the same for Pollock. In that review of the New York retrospective, Updike attributes Pollock's decline after 1950 to the intrusion of Hans Namuth--"that horrible German," in Hope's iterated description--who came out to the Springs to film Pollock at work when his "drip" technique became famous; indeed, the Namuth pictures and film helped *make* the style famous. But it had a pernicious effect as well. Updike quotes the late MoMA curator Kirk Varnedoe's claim in his catalogue of the show that Pollock, who often drank heavily, was apparently unnerved by the intrusion of the publicity machine and took his first drink in two years. "It was," says Updike, "a quick slide downward thereafter." Even the movie-watching public knows what happened next. Lee Krasner, like Hope, traveling in Europe, received a telegram informing her of the car accident in the summer of 1956, fatal for Pollock and one of his passengers. Kathryn, her interest stimulated by the event, asks to see this document; Hope lies and answers that it has long since been lost.

In neither the novel nor his art review does Updike report what happened next--the extraordinary run-up in the price of Pollock's paintings, engineered by his hard-bargaining widow. At the end of 1955 or in early 1956, Pollock's dealer, Sidney Janis--Parsons had been abandoned in 1952--offered the huge *Autumn Rhythm* canvas to the MoMA for \$8,000. Alfred Barr, the eminent director of the museum, was unable to afford the acquisition. Breslin describes the aftermath of the infamous crash:

Soon after Pollock's death, Barr called Janis and asked, "What about that picture?" Janis said he would have to confer with Lee Krasner, Pollock's widow. "When I got back to Alfred I told him Lee's price was \$30,000." "So shocked" was Barr that he never answered Janis's letter. "We sold *Autumn Rhythm* almost immediately to the Metropolitan Museum for \$30,000," Janis recalled.

It was the high tide of fifties prosperity and the Abstract Expressionists were "in." The art market had expanded, and the publicity mill, which Updike believes helped to undo Pollock, brought Abstract Expressionism into museums, prestigious galleries, and on to the walls of moneyed collectors who would have shunned the art ten years before. Widows of famous painters now themselves exercised considerable (and unexpected) authority. In a 1965 piece for *Esquire*, Rosenberg commented that widows now "control the entirety of her husband's unsold production," which enables her, he added, to set prices, withhold art from the market, assist or sabotage exhibitions, grant the rights to reproductions, and so forth. "Mrs. Jackson Pollock," as Rosenberg refers to Krasner, "is often credited with having almost single-handedly forced up prices for contemporary American art after the death of her husband."

In the novel, Hope's life after the death of her husband does not seem so eventful. She seeks a husband, *de rigueur* for the fifties, discontinues an affair with a married and unsuccessful painter that had begun when Zack McCoy was still alive, but seems to do little of significance. Art gatherings, which she continues to attend, are not the glittering occasions an outsider might imagine they are. Instead of animated discussions among painters, journalists, and gallery managers, she encounters "the smoky chatter of constantly renewed old acquaintance" and the "fug of stale envy and smothered grudge." "Men in fact were scared off," she tells Kathryn, describing her social condition. "I was too available, and hard-up, presumably." The interviewer asks Hope, pausing between her descriptions of her first and second marriages, if there is

something she wishes to add, anything that she has "left out." "Oh, we've left out nearly everything," Hope exclaims, indirectly pointing out the simplifications and reductiveness of this type of biographical research.

III

In June 1962, *Life* magazine, the bearer of news from the art world to the great public, announced that "Something New is Cooking" in American art, and indeed there was: it was springtime for Pop. This was a disturbing trend for proponents of Ab Ex, who understood that a new art was moving into the newspapers, into the galleries, and on to the walls of an expanding group of collectors. In *Seek My Face* Updike refers to them, with a hint of disapproval, as "the playful new American money," and "playful" sounds close to frivolous. Breslin reports that "One Sunday in the early 1960s, Andy Warhol was walking through Greenwich Village with his friend Ruth Kligman. They met Mark Rothko. Kligman said, 'Mark, this is Andy Warhol.' Rothko 'turned and walked away without a word.'"

After the movement had passed its apex, Claes Oldenburg, one of its best-known practitioners, said this about its intentions:

If I didn't think what I was doing had something to do with enlarging the boundaries of art, I wouldn't go on doing it...art which has slept so long in its gold crypts, in its glass graves, is asked to go for a swim, is given a cigarette, a bottle of beer, its hair rumpled, is given a shove and tripped, is taught to laugh, is given clothes of all kinds, goes for a ride on a bike, finds a girl in a cab and feels her up.

If the alcoholic Pollock is the model for Zack McCoy, the source for Hope's second husband, Guy Holloway, would seem to be the son of a Czech immigrant who became a coal

miner and a construction worker in Pittsburgh--"Andy" Warhol, forever identified by the public as the principal figure of Pop. The diminutive of the first name, suggesting a false intimacy with the public, is significant; the press never referred to Pollock as Jack or DeKooning as Bill. That other figure of Pop, who came from the world of commercial art like Warhol, had a friendly and accessible American name as well--Roy (Lichtenstein). Pop provoked strong reactions, and Updike's attitude is not entirely friendly. His review of a Pollock exhibit republished in *Still Looking* takes up nearly ten pages, but a look at a Warhol exhibit mounted a year after his death in 1987 produces little more than a page. There is evidently not too much to say about Campbell soup cans, Brillo Boxes, S & H green stamps, silkscreened images of Marilyn Monroe--or photographs of car accidents and electric chairs. Nevertheless, Updike does refer to the work as "magic," and observes, using the same description offered by Hope, that "a certain deadpan rapture lurked" in these productions.

A core dispute between the two generations involved the primacy of art over money and the difference between fabricating a work of art--painting--and collecting one. In his biography of Rothko, Breslin describes the difficulties the artist had in releasing his work into the world of unknown collectors, few of whom would have understood that "Rothko thought of himself not as a mere painter but as the messianic bearer of a new vision." Other painters of his generation might have said something similar about their own work; it seems inconceivable that a figure from Pop would. One day in the early sixties, Joan Kennedy Smith, sister of the president, came to Rothko's gallery and asked "if she could take home one or two pictures on approval, as if she were buying a dress." Rothko refused; his work had intrinsic value unrelated to its setting. When another wealthy collector brought back to his studio a canvas she had bought intending to

replace it with another, Rothko simply returned her money and brought the exchange to an end.

Breslin goes on:

Rothko's basic problem lay not just with particular collectors, but with collecting. Collectors...are consumers, not surrogate parents. What they *do* is purchase, possess, accumulate, and display luxury objects. Together, these objects, valued because of their uniqueness, become parts, are absorbed into a new whole...which, reflecting the buyer's taste, judgment, and wealth, fabricates a prestigious social identity, or *image*, for the collector. Rothko wished to induce, through painting, a diffused contemplative state of consciousness freed of objects altogether. But collecting emphasizes the possessive self, a self created through objects, carefully selected, beautifully arranged in a domestic interior, in order to externalize--or create--the subjective interior of the collector.

Quite unlike Rothko, Warhol was happy to treat his work as a "commodity," never making a secret of his desire to sell as much of it as possible. In the novel, Hope says approvingly that her second husband was "sane," and notes that Pop was "all about sanity, about modesty, about accepting the world as it was, flags and trash and ads and goopy hamburgers..." When she and the interviewer argue over collecting and ownership--Kathryn, the source of post-modern platitudes, says art "should not be owned, it should just *be*"--Hope replies, "Well, who is going to *pay* for it to be? What is the point of its being, if all it does is express the neuroses and grudges of the artist? Where is the *transaction*?" It is not clear how Updike is using the word. For most readers, it will simply refer to an exchange of cash for a painting. But for Rothko, it would have meant something larger and more significant. The labor and feeling that went into his art was a gift to a buyer who, moved by the same feelings that produced the canvas, parted with money. The "transaction" in this instance transcended money and engaged other, deeper values--which Warhol was happy "to expose" and ridicule. "With his wry, affectless acceptance of the commercial," write Breslin, "his innocent tone itself a provocation, Warhol was

commenting on the pretensions of a commercially successful generation which claimed spiritual aims and heroic inwardness for its art."

Hope's second husband in *Seek My Face* is as an unflappable figure who collects street rubbish as potential *objects d'art* and cultivates a breeziness that would seem to be a correlative of this kind of artist. Warhol has been quoted as saying, "If you want to know about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface....There's nothing behind it." And, "I like boring things. I like things to be exactly the same over and over again..." Whether that is an affectation intended to win over the art-buying public or a genuine aesthetic is unclear. "Their stuff," Hope tells Kathryn, referring to Guy's productions, "was deadpan and tricky, and when you asked them about it they would just shrug and act evasive...These new artists acted as if it was all a lark, as if life was a joke, and painting too, though they worked hard, on the sly." The Pop painters may also have known what would sell. Guy insists that Hope--unlike Krasner--is selling her first husband's canvasses at far too low a price, and Hope in turn recalls that despite his self-deprecation, Guy "was an absolute wizard at knowing what the market would bear." Pop is a manifestation, at least in part, of indifference and boredom, and calls for a cool, unflappable self-presentation. To conceal his near-baldness, Warhol wore a silver wig. During a book signing session once, according to Wayne Koestenbaum, a Warhol biographer, a woman ripped it off, and though the painter was mortified, he simply jerked the hood of coat over his head and continued as if nothing had happened.

Hope's marriage to Guy lasts seventeen years, from 1958 to 1975, and leaves her with three children. Warhol had his art and film studio at "the Factory" on Union Square, a name designed to suggest mass production, and Guy has an apparently similar site called "Holloway's Hospice." The name suggests for Guy a place of repose where art is going to be rescued, but

some of Updike's regard for Pop may be suggested by the idea that a hospice is where the terminally ill go to die. (In fact, one day before the assassination of Robert Kennedy in June 1968, a woman who had worked in Warhol's film productions walked into "the Factory" and shot Warhol and the art critic Mario Amaya, nearly killing the former.) In 1975, when Pop is no longer vanguard art, Holloway (hollow-way) divorces Hope, marries a horse trainer, and ultimately falls victim to Alzheimer's (which may be symbolically appropriate as the manifestation of an earlier, incipient deformity). "Please, darling, don't give me a headache," he responds, when Hope, well into middle age, protests the separation. "Your life will go on as before. You'll have the apartment and the children and plenty of money, you just won't see as much of me. You can start seeing other people." For the practitioners of Pop, emotional scenes are simply *infra dig*. "There was an irony now," says Hope, "that undercut everything."

In October 1962, six months after *Life* ran its story on Pop, the Sidney Janis Gallery opened a huge show that overflowed its gallery to the rooms of an adjacent, empty store. Called "The New Realists," it presented the stars of Pop in Europe and the U.S. to a public whose interest had been whetted by publicity. The show also marked the move (or intrusion) of a new art from downtown to an established, 57 Street gallery long identified with Ab Ex. Major figures from the fifties, including Motherwell, Rothko and Philip Guston, promptly resigned in protest from the Janis gallery, which they had turned to after abandoning Betty Parsons ten years before. The Janis gallery show, wrote Harold Rosenberg shortly afterward, "hit the New York art world with the force of an earthquake. Within a week, tremors had spread to art centers throughout the country." Rothko and company had turned to Janis in the first place because Parsons' talent for salesmanship fell short of her enthusiasm for the vanguard art of 1945. Janis was a dealer as well as an art lover, and he considered it natural to stimulate sales and interest with a new trend.

Warhol's reaction? "To be successful as an artist," he said "you have to have your works shown in a good gallery, for the same reason that, say, Dior never sold her originals from a counter in Woolworth's."

Rosenberg encouraged the insurgents in his review of the ground-breaking Janis exhibit. Efforts to attack Ab Ex in the 1950s, he wrote, amounted to little more than "ideological nagging." But by challenging the standards of a hitherto reigning style, the emergence of Pop had a stimulating effect. "The purging of art by works of art based on a different premise is, however, always vitalizing," he wrote. "Those artists, dealers and curators who functioned on the assumption that the look of Action Painting was sufficient to authenticate a canvas were put on notice...that any image, including Coca-Cola lettering on the numbers on a pinball machine, could be equally viable."

By the early 1970s, when Pop itself had passed into history, Rosenberg turned sharply critical. The familiar images--movie stars and household products--were an "art for the masses" even if Warhol hoped for an "elitist price tag." "His patrons," Rosenberg went on, "have been mass men with money who, in a momentous development, have overcome the traditional American deference toward Europe and its masterpieces." Replacing their collections of Rothko with the works of Andy and Roy, buyers of Pop showed they "had little taste for the enigmas and exhausting bouts with the experience of creation" supplied by the Abstract Expressionists.

Hope's third and presumably final marriage is to one Jerome Chafetz, a money manager and art collector that she met at a Holloway exhibit; the reader is told she "seduced" him away from his wife. He may have been the best husband of them all. He encouraged her painting, tried to have comfortable relations with her children, and, unlike her first two husbands, took Hope frequently to Europe. Advancing from late middle age to old age, she traveled more than

ever. They attend gallery shows, but by the mid-1970s, Hope and her husband have lost interest in "the every more diffuse and directionless art scene." Nine years into the marriage, he dies of heart and kidney failure. The journalist departs after eliciting these facts, or what passes for facts in such an interview, leaving Hope to reflect on what has been a fundamentally repugnant experience.

The companionship of other lonely widows and physicians are the characteristics of Hope's final years. The third marriage leaves her relatively bereft--though Chafetz had seemed to be rich, at his death he left her with taxes and unsuspected debts and law suits. At least Hope has enough self-awareness not to let the importunate "on-line" journalist seduce her into imagining she has a "major reputation," or is a "neglected woman artist" now coming into her own. She painted intermittently at best, had no great gallery openings or museum exhibits that are mentioned in the novel, and waits for the end in her comfortable but lonely rural retreat. The novel concludes with a masterful and moving recollection of a long-dead grandfather who was part of her childhood in the late 1920s; part of a "vanished world" where relatives spoke in the Quaker idiom, expressed themselves in elaborate sentences, and hid small coins to be unearthed by beloved grandchildren. The memory returns to Hope at the very end of the story because she has kept for several decades the "easy chair" the grandfather sat in while reading the paper--the same chair Kathryn occupied while harassing her host. Hope gives thought to reenacting the childhood memory of seeking hidden coins, but she is too bent with arthritis for the effort, and is in any case "afraid of finding nothing."

Works Cited

- Updike, John, *Seek My Face*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.
- _____, *Due Considerations*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999.
- _____, *Still Looking*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne, *Andy Warhol*, New York: Viking, 2001.
- Rosenberg, Harold, *Art on the Edge*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- _____, *The Anxious Object*, New York: Collier Books, 1966.
- Breslin, James, *Mark Rothko*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Crane, Diana, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde*, New York and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Ross, Clifford, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990.
- Diamonstein, Barbaralee, *Inside New York's Art World*, New York: Rizzoli, 1979.

© David Cohen 2010