

Summary

FILIP LIPINSKI (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan) / **Modernism's Traces: Critical Re-visions of the Mythology of Abstract Expressionism**

The text concerns ways in which artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol critically employed the signs for American modernist painting – Abstract Expressionism – in order to deconstruct and overcome it. Abstract Expressionism became an important element of American myth – under construction since nineteenth century – and the last grand myth providing America with the feeling of artistic and cultural identity. Referring to the conceptualisation of the myth by Roland Barthes, the author points the way the painterly trace – the brushstroke – became the mythic sign of direct expression, freedom, physical presence or masculinity exemplified by Jackson Pollock and resulted in a variety of generalisations concerning the varied practices of Abstract Expressionism. Since 1950s a brushstroke or loose stains of paint – traces as indexical signs of the work of painting – became rather a sign of a sign, quoted, repeated and displaced, a signifier of Abstract Expressionism as an already academicised visual-discursive formation.

The following part of the article consists of analyses of specific works of art, which progressively undermine the adherence of the painterly signifiers to their alledged signifieds. First, it briefly discusses Rauschenberg's *Bed*, and briefly *Erased de Kooning*, as examples of complex, often equivocal relationship of artists of the younger generation with their „great” predecessors, based, on the one hand, on the awareness of their debt to them – the inherited artistic language – and, on the other, the necessity to subvert it. Next, Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke* series testifies to the completed process of conventionalisation of painterly trace and painting as a sphere woven of quotations, always already mediated by other signs, images and forms of reproduction. Finally, Warhol in his *Oxidation paintings* literalised the performative, masculinity-oriented interpretations of Pollock's Action Painting (and Abstract Expressionism as a whole) and thus – through physical repetition and literalisation revealed the underlying mythological structure of such gestures.

The aim of these selected case-studies and analyses, which followed the “traces” of American Modernism, is not to specify boundaries between movements nor prove the passing of one movement in favour of the other, but to indicate an ongoing active role of Abstract Expressionism in the decades that followed its heyday in the elusive but legible form of a paternal system of signs to be re-vised – seen again, repeated and deconstructed through artistic practices.