Contributor: Amy Winter

**DYN (1942 Mexico City - 1945 Mexico City)**

In Mexico City, at the height of World War II, the Viennese expatriate artist **Wolfgang Paalen** founded and edited DYN, an international art journal that distinguished him as a theorist and scholar of modern and ethnographic art. The journal was instrumental in the development of avant-garde art in Mexico and New York, particularly **Abstract Expressionism**. In DYN, Paalen published his own essays, criticism, and poetry, and collections of Native American Art, along with the contributions of Latin American artists such as Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Miguel Covarrubias, César Moro, Carlos Mérida, Martin Chambi, and Roberto Matta; European artists Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Marc Chagall, Gordon Onslow Ford and Alice Rahon; New York artists Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, David Smith and William Baziotes; Mexican anthropologists and ethnologists Alfonso Caso, Miguel Angel Fernandez, and Carlos Margain Araujo; and writers Valentine Penrose, Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin. The five issues of DYN published between 1942 and 1944 inspired artists and thinkers worldwide. In 1945, following Paalen’s one-man exhibitions in Mexico City and New York, Robert Motherwell edited *Form and Sense*, an anthology of the DYN essays.

DYN’s title was taken from the Greek *tó dynaton* (“the possible”) on which Paalen erected his own “Philosophy of the Possible.” The Philosophy of the Possible was a concept of potential reality that advocated a “new image” for art in the utopian tradition of modernism. It proposed a twentieth-century antidote to the ills of Western civilization in the paradigm of contemporary “new physics” or quantum physics. As a former Surrealist, Paalen was critical of the limitations of nineteenth-century rationalism, calling instead for a link between the rational mode of science and the emotional or intuitive mode of art. He advocated art as a cure for the sickness of science focusing on the complementarity rather than opposition of the two.

DYN was widely circulated and read in Latin America, the United States and Europe. Paalen’s theory, manifest in his artworks and elucidated in the essays and criticism he wrote for DYN, had three major currents: aesthetics, ethnology, and the sciences, drawing upon his early life and training in Central Europe, where the artistic, scientific, and political theories of Karl Marx, Frederick Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Werner Heisenberg, among others, altered the course of Western civilization. While these ideas had informed artistic theory and practice in the nineteenth century, Paalen’s synthesis differed by addressing the radical revisions to philosophy and science of the early twentieth century.

Paalen’s impressive collections of Native American Art were published and illustrated in the most famous issue of DYN—the ‘Amerindian’ number (nos. 4–5, 1943). The issue included articles and essays on current anthropology and archeology by Paalen (‘Totem Art’); and on new archeological ideas and discoveries by prominent anthropologists from the National Museum of Anthropology and History (INAH) such as Alfonso Caso, Miguel Angel Fernandez, and Carlos Margain Araujo. It was considered an important contribution to contemporary discourse and can be thought of as a catalyst in the reception of Native American art and culture in the Americas and abroad.

In the first issue (no. 1, 1942), his ‘Farewell to Surrealism’ and essay-manifesto ‘The New Image’ outlined a new direction for art and rallied American artists to a new set of “possibilities” encouraging them to transcend the School of Paris through experimentation and innovation. Subsequent issues included important essays such as ‘Art and Science’ (DYN 3, 1942) which argued for the need to bridge the two disciplines, ‘The Dialectical Gospel’ which revisited Marxist political philosophy, ‘Surprise and Inspiration’ (DYN 3, 1942) on automatism and the unconscious, and ‘On the Meaning of Cubism Today’ (DYN 6, 1944), on problems of space and representation in modern art.

Through DYN, Paalen played a decisive role in the genesis of Abstract Expressionism. From Motherwell’s *Mexican Sketchbooks* (1941), produced while working with Paalen in Mexico, to correspondences in the artworks and writings of Motherwell, Pollock, **Mark Rothko** and **Barnett Newman** beginning in 1942, Paalen’s imprint is clearly visible. In the last issue of DYN (no. 6, 1944), he lent the emerging group members such as Motherwell, Pollock, Smith and Baziotes unprecedented support by reproducing them in the same pages as European modern masters like Chagall and Moore.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING**

Wolfgang Paalen (1945), Robert Motherwell, ed. *Form and Sense*, New York: Wittenborn.

Snow, Charles Percy (2001) [1959] *The Two Cultures*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Kloyber, Christian, ed. (2000) *DYN, The Complete Reprint.* Vienna and New York: Springer*.*

Winter, Amy (2003) *Wolfgang Paalen, Artist and Theorist of the Avant-Garde.* Westport, CT and London: Praeger.

Deborah Rosenthal, ed. (2013) *Form and Sense*. New York: Arcade.

LIST OF WORKS

Cover, DYN 1 (1942).

Cover, DYN 4-5 (1943), “Amerindian Issue”.

Cover, DYN 6 (1944).