

WASHBURN

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ART IN REVIEW

Jackson Pollock 'The Picasso Influence'

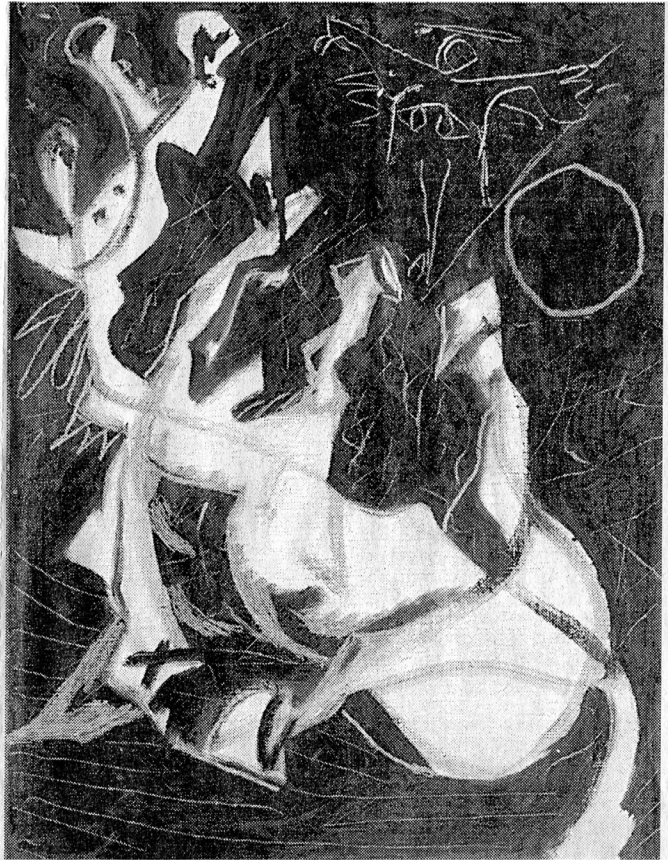
Washburn
20 East 57th Street
Manhattan
Through Dec. 30

This dense little show could just about hold down one of the side galleries in the early part of the landmark Jackson Pollock retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. It contains more than 20 drawings and small paintings, most of them from the artist's estate and previously unexhibited. Pollock produced them in the four or five years after he saw Picasso's "Guernica," shown in the United States for the first time at the Valentine Dudensing Gallery in 1939. That year also brought "Picasso: 40 Years of His Art" at the Modern.

The show reflects an intensely felt confrontation, in which Pollock was stirred but not shaken. Whether in small clustered doodles or single images, Picasso's motifs — screaming horses, bulls, toreadors — are ubiquitous. But equally present is Pollock's nervous, searching line, defining shapes and also moving out on its own. It explores the surface with automatist coils and scribbles, or with straight, arrowlike vectors, like those that crisscross a flattened fusion of a bull, a toreador and maybe a horse in a drawing in brown ink.

In addition, materials are subject to continual experimentation. An up-turned horse is nearly bare canvas, its struggling form defined negatively by a purplish black that covers the rest of the surface and creates moonstruck darkness in the process. Pollock seems to have lavished special attention on a small semi-abstract drawing of a woman in which ink lines and patches of careful color suggest an avant-garde coloring book. Broad, heavy strokes of ink delicately stippled with tiny points of white further animate the image, whose distortions are reminiscent of those prominent in Picasso's late portraits.

Additional prescience is visible in a spare, blue-ink drawing featuring the ornate form of a bristling double head: a bull and screaming human whose teeth and bladelikey tongue are straight out of the mouth of the cen-



Joan T. Washburn Gallery

tral horse in "Guernica." It is grouped with two simpler, smoother headlike shapes with scattered features, a strange, abbreviated motif that Jasper Johns later borrowed from Picasso, too, using it in several paintings during the late 80's and early 90's.

One of the most intriguing works is a cramped image of a curvaceous, pale-skinned female figure, which suggests Marie-Thérèse Walter but gives her a "Guernica"-like tension. Head thrown back, she writhes more than dreams. Here, line is asserted by two overlapping polygons, one black, one red, that form a kind of star, reiterate the salient points of the composition and point toward the canvas's four edges, as if Pollock were checking to be sure that the painting's entire surface had been taken into account.

ROBERTA SMITH